

Something for Sondra

by

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2016

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## **CHARACTERS**

**SONDRA TUBBEN:** Late forties/early fifties. A "fun mom" who has her limits, and when she reaches them, you do not want to be around her. Suffers from ALS over the course of the play.

**JANEY TUBBEN:** Sondra's daughter, late teens. Fiercely intelligent (she intends to attend Harvard), but can hold a grudge like nobody's business.

**BRIAN:** Janey's friend from high school marching band, late teens. Compassionate, passionate, yet an underachiever, especially compared to Janey.

## **TIME/PLACE**

The play takes place in the living room of Sondra Tubben's house. The action spans October 2013 to November 2016.

ACT ONE

1

Scene 1

1

It is October of 2013.

A living room with a couch, a loveseat, and a coffee table downstage center. There are little tables with lamps on them next to the couch and loveseat. Stage Right, there is an archway leading to the kitchen, which is also the entrance to the house from outside. Upstage there is a staircase leading upstairs and a window looking onto the outside world. Stage Left has bookshelves filled with books, books, books, like a cozy miniature library.

The entire feel should emanate HOME, in all its warmth, charm, and welcoming.

When the lights come up, we hear the kitchen door close offstage. We hear JANEY, 17, begin speaking, then she comes into the living room. BRIAN, 18, follows immediately behind her. They carry backpacks and instrument cases from band practice.

JANEY

So I explain to her how it's completely unfair that she's making us write this paper in the middle of band season, and she's like, "Well maybe you should get your priorities straight". So I told her how I don't get home until five o'clock and have homework for a *million* other classes, and she's like, "Well that's a toughie. Figure it out." And like, not even my mom is sympathetic. I tell her stuff like this, and she just says, "Well tough shit, you should do your homework." She can be such a *bitch* sometimes. I'm just like... How am I supposed to deal with all of this? I'm so stressed out, it's like not even funny.

BRIAN

Well I think it's hysterical.

JANEY hits him, playfully.

(CONTINUED)

JANEY

You're such a jerk.

BRIAN

Usually you make me feel like I'm slacking, but then you tell me something like that, and I'm like, thank God I'm only in academic classes.

JANEY

Ugh, I wish I was in academic classes. Why did I have to be such a smart person?

BRIAN

Because you're going to Harvard, and only smart people go to Harvard.

JANEY

I haven't even applied there yet.

BRIAN

But you're going to. And you're going to get in. And you're going to go off and do amazing things while I'm here ringing up groceries for dissatisfied housewives.

JANEY

Oh please, you're gonna do great things too.

BRIAN

Like...?

JANEY

Like... *not* ring up groceries for dissatisfied housewives!

BRIAN

Thanks. That's reassuring.

JANEY

It's like I see Harvard at the end of the line, and I know it'll be worth it, but it's just so hard!

BRIAN

(Mocking JANEY:)

I want to get into an Ivy League school, but it's *so hard!*

BRIAN laughs. JANEY rolls her eyes and playfully hits him.

JANEY

Jerk!

BRIAN

Hey, I'm just saying that's like the best problem to have right now. Although honestly, I think you could benefit from getting laid.

(CONTINUED)

JANEY

Brian! I don't even have time!

BRIAN

Yes you do. It's just managing your time. Just carve in one hour for AP History, one hour for Advanced Calc, one hour for coitus, then one hour for-

JANEY

I get the picture. And sex isn't the answer. What if I get pregnant?

BRIAN

Uh, condoms? The pill? Doesn't Sondra have you on the pill?

JANEY

Well yeah, but-

BRIAN

Then you just go up to one of the somewhat inevitable virgins in your Honors class, say "I want to take you, and not to the library".

JANEY

You'd actually be surprised how much some of the guys in my classes get. Vincent Fonderello? Rachel nicknamed him "Vincent Fondle-rello" because he's apparently really good with his hands.

We hear the kitchen door open  
offstage.

BRIAN

Oh, I wish I could experience that. You girls get all the good sex.

SONDRA, JANEY's mother, calls from  
offstage.

SONDRA

What about sex?

SONDRA enters from the kitchen in a  
coat and carrying her purse.

JANEY

Hi mom.

BRIAN

Hi Sondra!

SONDRA

Hey, kids. What's this I hear about sex?

JANEY

Nothing, mom-

BRIAN

We were just talking about how people want sex, and how they should make the time to have it.

SONDRA smiles, and plays along.

SONDRA

Are you two old enough to be having this conversation?

JANEY

Uh, we've gone through puberty, we've gone through sex ed, I think we're old enough to-

BRIAN

Oh! Wait, I need an adult! My little innocent ears have been ruined by dirty sex talk! I need to eat ice cream to freeze my brain and then watch Disney movies to go back to my previously innocent state of mind! Janey, you're too much of an adult for me!

JANEY

Shut up. You're as dirty-minded as they come.

SONDRA

Speaking of dirty-minded, Brian, do you have the book?

BRIAN

Oh! Yes! Thanks for reminding me.

BRIAN pulls a book out of his backpack.

I thought it was absolutely wonderful.

SONDRA

Good!

BRIAN hands the book back to SONDRA.

BRIAN

I mean, you think about the story, and it could totally be trash if written today, but considering how Flaubert wrote it-

SONDRA

It was beautiful, wasn't it?

JANEY

Oh, "Madame Bovary"? Brian couldn't put it down all week. He missed a cue during band practice because he was reading the book instead of looking at his music.

BRIAN

Timmers confiscated it. Which was balls, because it was at the part where she first starts making out with Leon.

JANEY

You shouldn't have been reading during practice, though.

BRIAN

He was such a dick about it, though. He was like, "Just because you can read English doesn't mean you can read music." I wanted to take my trumpet and just wonk him in the face with it.

SONDRA

He sounds like someone who doesn't appreciate good literature.

JANEY

Or, he's just someone who wants his band to succeed.

SONDRA

Well in any case, I'm glad you liked it, Brian.

BRIAN

Yeah, me too.

SONDRA

If only my life could've had as much passion as Emma's did...

JANEY

...she kills herself at the end of the book, mom.

SONDRA

Exactly. Passion.

JANEY

And you had *how* many boyfriends at Brown?

SONDRA

Oh, those were one night stands. I'm talking *love, passion, romance*. Dare I say it, *sex*.

BRIAN

Sounds trashy.

SONDRA

Yes, my college life was like a less glamorous Jacqueline Susann novel.

BRIAN

Who's Jacqueline Susann?

SONDRA

...I'm sorry, did I just hear those words come out of your mouth? Who's Jacqueline Susann?

BRIAN

...I think so.

SONDRA

Who's Jacqueline Su- Hold on.

SONDRA goes to her bookshelf, but trips on her way there. She catches herself before she falls.

JANEY

Mom!

BRIAN

You alright, Sondra?

SONDRA

Yeah, fine. Just... stepped on it weirdly. Alright! Here we go.

SONDRA pulls out a copy of "Valley of the Dolls". One of three copies she owns.

SONDRA

Anyone who uses the word "trashy" in their lexicon *has* to know who Jacqueline Susann is. This woman was the *mistress*, no, the *master*, because women can be masters too, of trashy novels.

SONDRA gives BRIAN the book. He looks at it.

BRIAN

"Valley of the Dolls".

JANEY

Oh God. Mom made me read that book when I was fourteen. I was scarred for life.



SONDRA

Oh, please, I read this book for the first time when I was *thirteen*.

BRIAN

I've definitely heard of this.

SONDRA

Yes, it's one of those books everyone in your generation has heard of and none of you have ever read. I don't know why. It's got sex, glam, show business, cattiness, what more could you ask for?

JANEY

Good writing.

SONDRA

(To JANEY:)

The writing in this book is good enough. It's readable, which I know isn't a virtue to you literary cognoscenti.

JANEY

It's not "literary cognoscenti," it's just, that's not the kind of book I'd like to spend my time reading.

SONDRA

That's because you're a hardass.

JANEY

It's not being a hardass, it's-

BRIAN knows exactly where this is going, having been over for many similar incidents.

BRIAN

Well it sounds right up my alley.

SONDRA

When you finish reading it, make Janey reread it-

JANEY

Please don't.

SONDRA

-then come over so I can make you dinner and we can all have a Raunchy Book Club Discussion about it.

BRIAN

Sounds great!

(CONTINUED)

SONDRA

It's a long book, but trust me, it *flies*.

BRIAN

I'm a fast reader.

JANEY

He finished "Madame Bovary" in six days.

SONDRA

Good. I'll reread it too, actually. This is one of three copies I have. Just let me know whenever you're done with it, so we can have our discussion.

BRIAN

Sounds great. And thanks again for "Madame Bovary".

SONDRA

Don't mention it. Seriously, any book you want to borrow in this library, take it. *Mi library es su library*.

BRIAN

Great. Thank you so much.

BRIAN's cell phone rings. He rolls his eyes, then answers.

Hi, dad. No, I'm at Janey's. Yeah, we came by after band practice and... I don't know. I could come home now, if you'd like... I forgot... Yeah, I forgot to text you. Sorry.

BRIAN rolls his eyes. His dad is going on a rant. This goes on for a minute.

SONDRA

...how does he have time to breathe?

JANEY shushes SONDRA. BRIAN speaks again.

BRIAN

Yes, I'm coming home now. I'll be there in ten minutes. OK. OK. O... Yes, dad. Bye. Bye.

BRIAN hangs up the phone.

Well, dad thought I was all but abducted, so I'm going to go home and prove to him that I am alive.

JANEY

You need a ride?

BRIAN

Nah, I can walk. It's a nice day outside.

JANEY

OK. Text me when you're home so I know you're home safe.

BRIAN

You got it. Bye, Janey. Bye, Sondra.

SONDRA/JANEY

Bye!

BRIAN exits, leaving JANEY and  
SONDRA alone. The mood of the room  
suddenly becomes grim, quiet.

SONDRA

Why'd you have to shush me like that?

JANEY

Brian was talking with his dad. You were being rude.

SONDRA

I was just making a side comment. I don't think Brian could  
even hear me. I doubt his dad could have.

JANEY

Well he might have.

SONDRA

OK, I'm sorry for making a comment you thought was snide.

JANEY

I didn't say it was snide, I-

SONDRA

You said I was rude, I know, I'm sorry I mixed up those  
words. Give me a break, Janey. Please.

Pause.

JANEY

I'm sorry...

Pause.

I know you had a long day.

SONDRA

Yeah, I did.

JANEY

So... What's the verdict?

*Pause. SONDRA sits on the loveseat.  
Puts her face in her palm.*

SONDRA  
It's official. ALS.

JANEY  
...oh no.

SONDRA  
Yep...

*Pause.*  
You know, I hoped my last years would be identified with the letters M.I.L.F., but I guess you can't have everything.

JANEY  
M.I.L.F.?

SONDRA  
...Mother I'd like to... Seriously, you don't know what that means?

JANEY  
That's not the point, mom.

SONDRA  
Oh come on, Janey. Don't be such a hardass.

JANEY  
Don't call me a hardass. You already did that once today.

*Pause.*

SONDRA  
I'm sorry.

*Pause.*

SONDRA  
Could you do me a favor?

JANEY  
Sure.

SONDRA  
Please don't tell your friends. Not yet.

JANEY  
What about Brian?

*Pause.*

SONDRA

I'll tell him. I'd rather he hear it from me.

JANEY

He's over like all the time. I think I should at least-

SONDRA

I'd rather. He hear it. From me.

Pause.

JANEY

...OK.

Pause.

SONDRA

You know, Ransfield has a good law school, and it's only thirty minutes away. And with your grades, you could probably get a good scholarship, maybe even a full ride there.

JANEY

Mom, you know I'm applying there too. Among others.

SONDRA

I know. But tuition at Harvard is more than \$40,000 for a year alone. You're going to need some pretty good financial aid. And with the medical bills I'm gonna get-

JANEY

I'm working on it, mom. I've been applying for scholarships and grants since August.

SONDRA

And then, you do know Harvard might not happen, right? I mean, it'll be great if you get in, but-

JANEY

Don't you want me to go, mom?

SONDRA

I want you to do what makes you happy.

JANEY

And going to Harvard will make me happy.

SONDRA

But it might not happen. This disease I have, though. It's happening.

I know, mom. But-

Shit...

It won't...

Mom...

Are you just gonna stand there-

What do you want me to-

Help me! Help me get this-

OK, what can I-

You can help me straighten my fingers.

How?

Just help me!

I don't even know what that means!

IT MEANS HELP ME!!!

JANEY

SONDRA

SONDRA looks at her left hand. Her ring and pinky fingers are curled. She tries to straighten it out, but can't.

SONDRA

JANEY

SONDRA

JANEY

SONDRA

JANEY

SONDRA

JANEY

SONDRA

JANEY

SONDRA

SONDRA slaps JANEY with her curled hand. A long moment. SONDRA's fingers are still curled. JANEY holds her hand to her cheek, where her mother just slapped her. They look away from each other.

JANEY grabs her backpack and instrument case and starts for the stairs.

(CONTINUED)

SONDRA  
Janey-

JANEY  
Don't say you're sorry again-

SONDRA  
Janey, please-

But JANEY is already up the stairs.  
SONDRA goes to the stairs, and  
yells up them:

SONDRA  
I'm sorry, Janey! I'm sorry!

A door slam from upstairs. Left  
alone, SONDRA lies her head on the  
banister. She picks her head up,  
and goes to the bookshelf. She  
picks up a copy of "Valley of the  
Dolls" with her right hand, sits on  
the loveseat, and starts to read  
it. Her fingers on her left hand  
are still curled.

From upstairs, we hear JANEY  
practicing the flute.

2

Scene 2

2

The next Friday, eleven days after  
the previous scene. BRIAN sits on  
the couch. SONDRA sits on the love  
seat. The table contains two plates  
that have been cleaned of their  
dinner (chicken marsala).

SONDRA  
You know what I've always loved? The lesbian subplot. I was  
kind of hoping there would be more of that, but since it was  
the sixties-

BRIAN  
Oh yeah. If being gay was such a big deal then, I can only  
imagine what the reaction would be if more was written about  
it.

SONDRA  
A part of me was wondering if Jennifer went with that other  
girl, would her life have been better? I mean, not socially,  
obviously, but emotionally.

(CONTINUED)

BRIAN

I don't think so. her dreams of stardom would have probably gone unfulfilled, so...

SONDRA

So she wound up with a man-child with Huntington's. I mean, she could've had anyone, really. She just chose the wrong ones.

BRIAN

Poor Jennifer North...

SONDRA

Poor Sharon Tate. She played Jennifer in the film version, and was killed by Charles Manson's gang when she was eight months pregnant.

BRIAN

...damn.

SONDRA

You know, Jennifer's suicide was kind of like an odd foreshadowing, what would eventually happen to Sharon in real life.

BRIAN

Except she didn't actually kill herself.

SONDRA

I know, but it's still sad...

Pause.

BRIAN

OK, this conversation just got morbid. Let's talk about other things we liked in the book.

SONDRA

Yes. I liked the parts when Mel went down on Neely.

BRIAN

Oh, me too.

SONDRA

Didn't even need a description. Just the implication, Neely going "Yeah Mel, right there..."

BRIAN

I mean, the symbolism was pretty neat, actually. Like, the fact that she lets him taste her, but not actually let him inside of her. Really exemplifies their whole relationship.

Kitchen door opens and closes  
offstage.

(CONTINUED)



SONDRA

I never thought of it that way. I just thought it was hot.

JANEY enters carrying a book bag.  
She starts for the stairs.

JANEY

Hello, people-

SONDRA calls to JANEY, stopping  
her.

SONDRA

Janey! We're doing Raunchy Book Club. Join us!

JANEY

Can't talk. Still have some homework to do, then practice  
the flute-

SONDRA

Didn't you go to Lexi's to specifically do homework?

JANEY

No, I went over to do our History project. Now is when I  
need to do homework.

SONDRA

It's Friday night. Take a load off.

JANEY

Can't. I have a Human Behavior paper to write, a Calculus  
worksheet, and five chapters of "Moby Dick" to read.

SONDRA

Ugh. I hated that book.

BRIAN

Anyone else think the title sounds like a benign STD? Like,  
*moby dick*.

SONDRA laughs. JANEY laughs too, in  
spite of herself.

JANEY

Yes, I agree with you there.

SONDRA

Seriously, Janey, there's some leftover chicken marsala from  
dinner. Grab a plate!

JANEY exits into the kitchen to get  
some food.

(CONTINUED)

JANEY

I'll definitely take some. But I'd like to get this homework done now.

SONDRA

Boo, you're a buzzkill.

JANEY

How do you even know that word?

SONDRA

I worked with a bunch of twenty-somethings.

JANEY

OK. But Harvard's not going to like me if I slack off.

SONDRA

I always say though, you could work until your ass falls down the Grand Canyon-

JANEY reenters with the food.

JANEY

And Harvard still could not accept you. I know, but I need to at least try.

SONDRA

They're gonna want a girl who knows how to have fun.

JANEY

I doubt the Harvard admissions committee looks for someone who knows how to have "fun".

SONDRA

I mean the students. They're not gonna just want books and nerd-stuff. They're gonna want...

In a low, guttural, warning-like voice:

Sex.

BRIAN gasps in mock-horror.

BRIAN

It's that word again! No!

JANEY

How would you know, mom? You didn't go to Harvard.

SONDRA

I went to Brown, which, like Harvard, is an Ivy League school, and if *those* boys were any indication-

JANEY

Oh God, please don't talk about how you were "Scarlet Sondra" again.

BRIAN

"Scarlet Sondra"?

SONDRA

That was the nickname they had for me.

BRIAN

...how?

SONDRA

I don't kiss and tell.

JANEY

A lot of mom's college friends were shocked when she married my dad.

SONDRA

Yes, no one thought the wonderful and worldly Scarlet Sondra would fall for a security guard.

SONDRA looks at JANEY.

Who went to Ransfield, too...

BRIAN

I love how you two just casually throw out fancy school names. Like Harvard, Brown... You smart people, you...

SONDRA

Oh you're smart. There's no one I would rather discuss raunchy literature with.

JANEY

Yeah, Brian. You're so smart. You just never applied yourself in school.

BRIAN

Never really saw a reason to. Somehow, I don't think my future will rely on whether I know the difference between literal and lateral equations.

JANEY

It's literally just how you look at it.

SONDRA and BRIAN stare at JANEY.

That was bad. That, I take it, is my exit cue. Enjoy the rest of your trash talk.

(CONTINUED)

SONDRA  
Oh, we will!

BRIAN  
I'll see you at practice tomorrow.

JANEY  
Yeah. See you tomorrow, Brian!

JANEY exits. SONDRA looks at BRIAN.

SONDRA  
Saturday morning band practice?

BRIAN  
Yep. It's intense.

SONDRA  
Sounds it...

BRIAN picks up the empty plates.

BRIAN  
I'll take these into the kitchen.

SONDRA  
Thank you, Brian.

BRIAN takes the plates into the kitchen. SONDRA looks into the kitchen, smiling after BRIAN. She then looks upstairs, and sighs.

A few seconds later, BRIAN comes out without them.

BRIAN  
Thank you again for lending me your copy of "Valley of the Dolls".

SONDRA  
Oh, it's your copy now.

BRIAN  
...you sure?

SONDRA  
Oh yeah. I have three of them...

BRIAN  
Thank you. That means a lot.

SONDRA  
Don't mention it.

BRIAN's cell phone rings. He looks  
at his phone.

BRIAN  
It's dad, sorry.

BRIAN answers.  
Hey. I'm at Janey's. Yes I did, I told you I was going over  
her place... I never... Dad, when I say I'm going out, it  
usually means I'm going out... Yeah, I know I have band  
practice and work tomorrow. I'm leaving really soon... Dad,  
I just said... Dad, I just turned 18, you're talking to me  
like I'm in middle school again. No, we talked about this-  
now that I'm 18, I don't have a curfew anymore. Ugh. Fine.  
I'll come home now. See you in a few... Whatever.

BRIAN hangs up.  
I have to go home now. My dad can't remember that I don't  
have a curfew anymore.

SONDRA  
He's right, you know. You need to be in bed by nine o'clock,  
all your teeth brushed, all your hair brushed-

BRIAN  
Oh my God....

SONDRA  
I only say it because I love you.

BRIAN  
Aw. I love you too.

BRIAN and SONDRA hug.

SONDRA  
Have a good night, Brian.

BRIAN  
You too, Sondra.

SONDRA  
Text me when you're home so I know you're home safe.

BRIAN  
I will.

BRIAN calls up the stairs.  
NIGHT JANEY!

JANEY calls from offstage.

JANEY

Night Brian!

BRIAN exits with his copy of "Valley of the Dolls".

SONDRA smiles after Brian. We hear JANEY practicing the flute upstairs.

SONDRA gets up to put her own copy of the book back on the shelf, but she struggles to get a grip on it. Her fingers are curled again. She tries to get the book on the shelf, but only manages to drop it on the ground.

SONDRA swears under her breath, then tries to lift the book off the ground with her other hand. However, she keeps dropping it. SONDRA curses under her breath. Lights dim.

3

Scene 3

3

Two months later. We are now in December. BRIAN, JANEY and SONDRA are in the living room, finishing up their dinner.

BRIAN

What do you actually do with the chicken, Sondra?

SONDRA

Crock-pots are a wonderful thing.

BRIAN

It's so tender.

SONDRA

I know!

JANEY

My grammy used to make this. It's actually an old Tubben recipe.

SONDRA

It's called Chicken a la Tubben! Rice, lentils, bell peppers, and the smallest touch of paprika for a little spice.

(CONTINUED)

BRIAN

Thank you for the infomercial.

Pause. Eating.

Also. Thanks again for lending me *Lolita*,.

SONDRA

Oh, isn't it so beautiful and stomach-wrenching at the same time?

BRIAN

Yes! Honestly, it's like the most beautiful train wreck I've ever read.

JANEY

I completely agree. When I read it, I didn't know whether to be disgusted or dazzled by it.

SONDRA

I read it behind my mother's back. She had a copy tucked away in the back of the spice cupboard, and every night after she went to sleep, I'd sneak it out and read one chapter a night. I was twelve at the time, so my rebellious phase was just starting.

BRIAN

My dad would never let me read it. He doesn't like that kind of stuff.

SONDRA

What kind of stuff? The love an old man has for a prepubescent female? I'd think he'd relate to that, being a single dad.

JANEY

Mom!

BRIAN

He's a bit of a prude. And just a bit overprotective. I mean it's just us after my mom left, but still.

JANEY

Maybe he's just more concerned about you.

SONDRA

Or he just needs a friend with benefits.

BRIAN

He has a girlfriend, actually. She's alright, but dad and I don't really see eye to eye on many things. When I came out to him, he didn't speak to me for two days. He's better about it now, but still... He pretty much just does his thing, and I do mine.

(CONTINUED)

Pause.

SONDRA

And *this* week, on Lifetime...

BRIAN

Yeah, basically.

JANEY

Didn't your dad go to Brown, Brian?

BRIAN

He did. Graduated in 1985.

SONDRA

That's the year I dropped out!

JANEY

Maybe you two knew each other.

SONDRA

Do you have a picture of your dad on your phone, Brian?

BRIAN

I'm sure I do, somewhere...

BRIAN takes out his phone and looks through his photos. He shows her one. She looks at it, and shakes her head.

SONDRA

Nope, don't recognize him. And honestly, he's not that cute.

JANEY

Mom!

SONDRA

What?

BRIAN

No, I agree with Sondra on that one.

JANEY

He's your dad, you're not supposed to think he's cute.

BRIAN

I can think he's handsome. But I don't.

Change of topic.

Why'd you drop out of Brown, Sondra?

(CONTINUED)



SONDRA

Had to take care of my mother. She had ALS.

BRIAN

Oh, sorry to hear that...

SONDRA

(Pointed at JANEY.)

So I got my degree at Ransfield. And I turned out fine.

JANEY

I'm just starting to work on my Harvard application. I'm so nervous!

SONDRA

Ransfield has a pretty good law school, I heard...

JANEY

At this point, Ransfield's my safety school, so...

BRIAN

Dad would love for me to go to Brown or Yale, but he knows I don't have the grades to get into either one. Plus they're so expensive, so...

SONDRA

Well there are always grants and scholarships you could apply for. Janey's applying for some as we speak.

JANEY

Yeah. I've found a lot online.

BRIAN

Thanks, Janey, but even so, I'm not sure if I like the idea of moving.

SONDRA

You'd rather stay home with your dad who doesn't like raunchy books?

BRIAN

No, I mean I want to move out. Eventually. But I don't know if I want to go to college for that.

SONDRA

You don't have to go far. Ransfield is only thirty minutes away.

BRIAN

I just don't know what I'd get out of it, though. Like, I don't know what I'd do in college. I don't want to be one of those people who pays a lot of money to take different courses and find out they're not good at any of them, you know?

(CONTINUED)

JANEY

What about music education? You could be a music teacher. Or English, since you like reading so much.

BRIAN

I mean I guess...

SONDRA

Hm. Well college is really what you put into it. That tends to reflect more what you do after you graduate, I've noticed.

JANEY

Mom's right. She majored in English, but she's a dentists' receptionist and office manager.

SONDRA

Uh, I also read! And journal.

BRIAN

Oh gosh, wouldn't I love to see *that* journal...

SONDRA

It's private, under lock and key. Just like my hopes and dreams of being a famous Bohemian writer with many lovers and brilliant words flooding out of me like a tropical monsoon...

JANEY

No offense, mom, but I'm not sure I want to see your journals.

SONDRA

That's alright, Janey. I wouldn't want you to read them either.

JANEY

I'd honestly be scared to read it, with all the things you probably say about me.

SONDRA

Nah, I don't say anything bad about you. Just some of your friends. Like that crack whore Rachel.

JANEY

Mom!

SONDRA

What? She always comes here talking about how she wants to have sex with her drug dealer.

BRIAN  
That's not entirely inaccurate.

JANEY  
It's still not nice to say.

SONDRA  
I'm not being nice, I'm just being honest.

JANEY  
OK...

SONDRA  
Full disclosure, Brian, you're the most normal of Janey's friends.

BRIAN  
Really...?

SONDRA  
Why the skepticism?

BRIAN  
I don't know. Just haven't had any of my friend's parents tell me that.

SONDRA  
Well they should. You're a good kid, Brian. I told you, there's no one I would rather discuss raunchy books with. Speaking of which, let me lend you another book.

BRIAN  
OK.

JANEY  
You alright going-

SONDRA  
I'm fine, Janey.

SONDRA goes up the stairs and exits. It's a bit more of a struggle for her to climb stairs, but she does her best not to show it.

BRIAN and JANEY quiet their voices for the following conversation.

BRIAN  
Hey um... Is your mom OK?

JANEY  
What do you mean?

BRIAN  
I kinda noticed her fingers doing something weird...

JANEY  
Yeah they sometimes do that...

BRIAN  
Does she have something or...?

Pause. JANEY can't hide the truth from BRIAN any longer.

JANEY  
...OK you can't tell her you know what I'm about to tell you.

BRIAN  
OK...

JANEY  
She asked me not to tell anyone, but I don't know why she hasn't told you yet.

BRIAN  
What?

JANEY  
Mom has ALS.

BRIAN  
Oh no...

JANEY  
We found out back in October. The doctor has given her three to five years to live. Right now she's kind of losing control of her hands, soon she won't be able to use her feet so she won't be able to walk, and soon she'll be in a wheelchair, and won't be able to use any muscle in her body.

BRIAN  
Wow...

JANEY  
I know.

Pause.

BRIAN  
...is there anything I can do, or...?

JANEY

You wanna figure out a way to pay for it all? Mom's health insurance from her old job is gonna help a little bit, but for the treatment she's gonna need, she's gonna require a lot of doctor's visits, full-time care, maybe even some equipment that needs to be installed in the house... It's just too much. And then me wanting to go to Harvard...

Pause.

BRIAN

Is that what you're more concerned about?

JANEY

...would it be bad if I said yes?

SONDRA comes down the stairs with another trashy book.

SONDRA

Here you go. "Tropic of Cancer". Read it and love it.

BRIAN

Thanks Sondra.

SONDRA

Now this I *really* want back.

BRIAN

You'll have it back soon.

SONDRA's fingers curl. She tries to straighten them out, but can't.  
BRIAN notices.

BRIAN

Sondra...

SONDRA

My hand's been doing this lately... nothing to worry about.

BRIAN

...uh huh...

SONDRA

So that book. It was my favorite book before I-

SONDRA starts to laugh suddenly.  
Perhaps a bit inappropriately.

JANEY

What's so funny?

(CONTINUED)

SONDRA

Nothing, nothing. I don't know why...

SONDRA begins to laugh. At first, it's a small chuckle. Then it builds. And builds. And builds. To the point of inappropriateness.

JANEY

...mom? Mom, why do you think this is funny?

SONDRA

I don't- I don't think it's-

But she can't stop laughing. She continues laughing.

JANEY

Mom? MOM!?

The lights dim.

4

Scene 4

4

Three weeks later. We are now in January 2014. JANEY and BRIAN at a laptop. Whatever they have watched has just finished.

JANEY

I hope people don't think this is a scam.

BRIAN

I mean, it'll probably only be seen by her friends and family anyway, so...

JANEY

Has mom seen this yet?

BRIAN

Not yet. I was going to show it to her tonight, if she's OK.

JANEY

She should be. She's just resting upstairs.

Pause.

BRIAN

So... You gonna share it?

JANEY

The video?

(CONTINUED)

Yeah. BRIAN

...I think so. JANEY

...you think so? BRIAN

I'm just really busy. JANEY

With what? Band season's over. BRIAN

JANEY  
I mean with school, and this Harvard application... I'd rather get it in sooner than later, you know? Plus I'm a slave to the Grayson High School Honors Society and Advanced Placement classes.

BRIAN  
And soon you're gonna be a slave to Harvard.

JANEY  
Hopefully... speaking of which, could you read my Harvard essay for me? Mr. Edison wants us to hand them in tomorrow.

BRIAN  
Sure.

JANEY takes the laptop and opens up her document with it. BRIAN takes a look at it.

BRIAN  
"Unusual circumstances in your life". Hmm...

Long pause as BRIAN overlooks it.

BRIAN  
Well, you definitely talk about unusual circumstances.

JANEY  
Yeah? What else?

BRIAN  
Um... It flows well, I guess? Not sure how helpful that is... I'm good at reading trashy literature, but not evaluating legit academic stuff.

JANEY

It's not academic. It's me talking about my mom. And how her ALS has given my life an unusual circumstance. Which I know sounds horrible, but...

BRIAN

Uh huh... I mean, like I said, it's an unusual circumstance, which is the prompt, so... It was good.

JANEY

Can you give anything specific that you liked about it?

BRIAN

Um... I like how you described her as "brave, loving, and endlessly sassy, perhaps more so because of her disease". I think that'll get their attention.

JANEY

I hope so too. So there's nothing I should really fix, or...?

BRIAN

Nothing I can see here. Are you gonna show it to your mom?

JANEY

After Mr. Edison looks at it, probably.

BRIAN

I see... Well, I'm sure he'll tear it to pieces with the best of love.

JANEY

We'll see.

JANEY closes the laptop. She lies her head against BRIAN's shoulder.

JANEY

Thank you, Brian.

BRIAN

It was just reading an essay.

JANEY

No, I mean... Thank you. For everything you're doing. You've been such a great help to us.

BRIAN

No problem. Anything for you guys.

SONDRA enters from upstairs with a cane. She has a drop foot brace on her right foot.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)



BRIAN (cont'd)

Here she is!

SONDRA

Yes, walking down the red carpet in sweatpants with a cane.

BRIAN

You all rested?

SONDRA

For the next thirty minutes, I should be...

JANEY

That'll be just enough time for dinner, which I was just going to check on. You guys need anything? Water? Bread?

SONDRA sits next to BRIAN.

BRIAN

Water would be nice.

JANEY

You want anything, mom?

SONDRA

I'm good.

BRIAN

Thanks, Janey.

JANEY goes back into the kitchen.

BRIAN

I wanna show you something, Sondra.

BRIAN pulls up the laptop and opens it. He presses a button, then we hear BRIAN's voice from the computer.

BRIAN

Hello, everyone. My name is Brian Miller. I am a senior at Grayson High School. For those who don't know, my best friend Janey Tubben's mom, Sondra, who's basically like a mother to me, was diagnosed with ALS three months ago. Sondra is a loving mother, a wonderful friend, and a fantastic cook. Although she has been struck with a terrible disease, she goes through it with a smile and love for both myself and her daughter. Being struck with this terrible disease is a huge burden, both emotionally and financially. As such, the Tubbens will have to make a lot of sacrifices in order to survive this storm together. I've set up a GoFundMe called "Something for Sondra" for all our friends,

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

BRIAN (cont'd)

family, and anyone who wants to donate towards Sondra's battle with ALS. The money would be going to medical costs and technology to make Sondra's everyday life easier. You can also donate to the ALS Association. For those who don't know, ALS stands for Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis and is the gradual loss of muscle control over your whole body. Life expectancy can be as long as ten years, or as brief as three. I've posted a link to donate money for ALS research in the description below, where you can also get more information on ALS. I've also provided the link to the GoFundMe for those who are so inclined. For those of you who know and love Sondra, please share this video and link on Facebook, Tumblr, Twitter, whichever social media outlet you prefer, and join me in the fight against ALS.

The video ends.

BRIAN

So yeah. That's the GoFundMe video for "Something for Sondra".

SONDRA

That's very sweet of you, son.

BRIAN

Son? That's a new one.

SONDRA

Well you basically are like the son I never had.

BRIAN

Please, you have a Harvard-bound daughter. Some parents would kill their own children for that chance. Oh! That reminds me.

SONDRA

Yeah?

BRIAN

I was telling Janey this earlier. I've been thinking what you said a few weeks ago about going to college, and I'm thinking of applying somewhere.

SONDRA

Ooh! Where?

BRIAN

Tolson.

SONDRA

Oh... community?

(CONTINUED)

BRIAN

Yeah... What, you don't like community?

SONDRA

No, it's fine, but... You don't want to go to Ransfield? Or somewhere maybe out of state?

BRIAN

The thing is, I don't really know what I want to do yet. And I don't want to spend too exorbitant an amount of money. So I figured Tolson might be the best place to figure out what I want to do, then maybe transfer once I've done that.

SONDRA

Sounds reasonable enough. Maybe you'll join Janey at Harvard.

BRIAN

I doubt I'd transfer *there*. I'm just a regular gay slacker.

SONDRA

That's not being fair to yourself. You're not Janey. Or me. Or Barack Obama. You're a smart, caring, and intelligent person. It doesn't matter what kind of degree you have, or what school you go to. As long as you keep being the kind, loving person you are, it doesn't matter.

BRIAN

But you don't think people would look at my resume and say, "Oh he only has an Associate's from Community College"?

SONDRA

Not necessarily. Back when we were interviewing for my replacement, we hired someone with an Associate's because she was the best candidate we had. So you never know.

JANEY enters with plates of pasta.

JANEY

Dinner's ready.

JANEY sets their plates down on the living room table.

BRIAN

Thanks Janey.

JANEY

No problem.

JANEY returns to the kitchen to get her own plate. As she returns, SONDRA tries to pick up her fork, but has trouble doing so.

(CONTINUED)

Hey mom- JANEY

I got it. SONDRA

Let me- JANEY

I got it! SONDRA

No you don't- JANEY

Don't say I don't got this! SONDRA

You're going to drop your fork- JANEY

I'm not! SONDRA

Just let me give you a few- JANEY

DON'T TOUCH ME! JUST LET ME... SONDRA

A moment. JANEY takes her plate and goes into the kitchen. BRIAN stays with SONDRA, who continues trying to pick up the fork.

Shit... why can't I... SHIT!!!

BRIAN takes SONDRA's hands.

You're OK, Sondra... You're fine. You're OK. Here, let me... BRIAN

BRIAN holds up the fork of spaghetti to SONDRA's mouth. She eats it. JANEY reenters and watches BRIAN feeding SONDRA for a long, long moment.

5

Scene 5

5

Two months later. March. Evening.  
JANEY and SONDRA in the living  
room. SONDRA sits in the loveseat.

JANEY

You and Brian have any special plans for tonight?

SONDRA

Not really. Just watching some TV and talking.

JANEY

That sounds like fun.

SONDRA

What are you and Lexi doing tonight?

JANEY

Movies.

SONDRA

Oh. What are you gonna see?

JANEY

Don't know yet. We're gonna see what's playing when we get  
there.

SONDRA

As long as you're home at a reasonable time...

JANEY

Mom, I'm 18 now.

SONDRA

I know, but...

JANEY looks out the window.

JANEY

Brian said he'd get out of work at seven. It's seven  
fifteen.

SONDRA

What does it matter? You don't even know what you're going  
to see yet.

JANEY

I know, but I said I'd meet Lexi at seven thirty.

SONDRA

The movie theater is ten minutes away. You'll be fine.

(CONTINUED)

Pause.

SONDRA

I can't wait to hear all about whatever movie you see.

JANEY

Yeah, I'm sure it'll be fun...

Pause.

SONDRA

Janey, I'm sorry I've been-

JANEY

Don't, mom.

SONDRA

Let me apologize. I'm sorry about my outbursts the last few months.

JANEY

I know you are.

SONDRA

I just wanted you to hear me say it.

JANEY

I've been hearing you're sorry ever since dad died. I don't need you to repeat it.

SONDRA

Why would you bring that-

JANEY

Please, I don't want to have this conversation. Not when I'm right about to go out.

Long pause. We then hear a car outside.

JANEY

Here he is.

SONDRA

Good...

BRIAN enters.

BRIAN

Hey Janey. Hey Sondra.

SONDRA  
Hi Brian!

BRIAN  
Janey-

JANEY  
Hey, Brian. I'm sorry I can't talk, I told Lexi I'd be there five minutes ago-

BRIAN  
Actually, I wanted to talk to you-

JANEY  
Can it wait?

BRIAN  
It'll take a few seconds-

JANEY  
We'll talk when I get home, OK?

BRIAN  
OK. Fine.

JANEY  
Thank you so much for watching mom. I owe you big time.

BRIAN  
No problem. Have fun with Lexi.

JANEY  
I will. Bye, Brian.

JANEY leaves. SONDRA and BRIAN are alone. BRIAN sits next to SONDRA. Silence.

BRIAN  
So... what do you wanna do tonight? I can read to you. Or we can watch TV. Or we can just talk, whatever you'd like.

SONDRA  
Let's talk. I haven't seen you in a few weeks, Brian.

BRIAN  
Yeah, work's been crazy.

SONDRA  
Has it?

BRIAN

Yeah... How are you feeling, Sondra?

SONDRA

Pensive.

BRIAN

How so?

SONDRA

Thinking, I hope I'm still hot and sexy after this ALS is through with me.

BRIAN bursts out laughing.

BRIAN

You don't need to fear that. You're still a pretty lady.

SONDRA

Thank you, thank you.

BRIAN

How've the doctors been?

SONDRA

Oh you know, they're doctors. Always asking me how I feel, like they expect to hear I'm doing great. None of them are even cute.

BRIAN

Well... If it makes you feel any better, the GoFundMe is doing really well.

SONDRA

Yes, I saw that.

BRIAN

Some of my co-workers chipped in. And some of my teachers, and Lexi's parents, even my dad gave a little money. Not sure how much it's gonna help you, but at least it'll be something, right?

SONDRA

Maybe by the time you raise enough money, a cure will be found!

BRIAN

Hey, you never know.

Pause.



BRIAN

Oh! Did I tell you I got a scholarship?

SONDRA

You did? Oh, that's wonderful!

BRIAN

Yeah! It's only a few hundred dollars, but...

SONDRA

That'll still cover some books.

BRIAN

Yeah...

Pause.

SONDRA

Are you excited?

BRIAN

Yeah. But nervous, too. Like, I was the new kid when I moved here for middle school, now I'm gonna be the new kid all over again.

SONDRA

You and hundreds of other kids.

BRIAN

But what if I don't like them? Or they don't like me?

SONDRA

You can't worry whether you'll like them or not. Just focus on being friends with them. As I always say to Janey, life without friends is like sex without lube. You can still do it, but it's rather dry and rough.

BRIAN bursts out laughing.

BRIAN

Oh, Sondra...

Pause.

I'm never gonna...

BRIAN stops himself.

SONDRA

You're never gonna what?

BRIAN

...never gonna... forget you. After you... Sorry.

SONDRA

Brian. I know I'm gonna die. You don't have to avoid saying it.

BRIAN

I know. I just wasn't sure if I should, or...

SONDRA

It's fine, all fine.

Pause.

BRIAN

Why don't I turn on the TV-

SONDRA

You know what I've realized? Everyone fears dying because of the reputation they might leave behind. They don't want people to speak ill of them when they do, and when they find out they have a death sentence, they realize they only have so much time to rectify anything wrong. I've done my best with Janey, even though we've... had our issues in the past.

BRIAN

You don't have to tell me if you don't-

SONDRA

I never wanted to have her. She knows this. I wanted to abort her. Paul and I were already married, but I didn't want to have kids. But Paul was insistent on having her. He always wanted to have kids, he was just that kind of guy. He just had this capacity that I didn't... But anyway. I had her, and for something I didn't want, she was... gorgeous. Really. I looked into her eyes, and saw myself looking back at me, which was both wonderful and terrifying. Nothing I would've experienced not having kids at all. And as she grew up, me, her, and Paul became... a happy family. Paul and Janey were very close. He'd buy her bagels for breakfast, take her out to lunch on school days, read her bedtime stories... He was even going to take her to see "Phantom of the Opera" for her tenth birthday. I was never good at any of that stuff. I was better working my receptionist job. But I was jealous, that they had all that. I wrote about all this in my journals, and since I had gotten it out of my system, it never got in the way of Paul and I's marriage. Or our family. But... Paul worked the night shift as a security guard, and one night, he got shot by a robber, and... And suddenly, all I had was Janey, my job, and my journals. I would write in my journals every night, but then I...

SONDRA massages her hand.

(CONTINUED)

BRIAN

Um... You wanna watch TV, or...?

SONDRA

I think it's great you're going to college, Brian. I know you're nervous, but seriously, if you need anything, I'm here.

BRIAN

...thanks, Sondra.

Pause.

SONDRA

...what?

BRIAN

Nothing.

SONDRA

What is it?

BRIAN

...it's not something I can't figure out.

SONDRA

Is it the tuition?

BRIAN

...

SONDRA

Brian?

BRIAN

You want some water or...?

SONDRA

You need money to pay your tuition.

BRIAN

No. Not at all. That's not...

SONDRA

Brian.

BRIAN

It's not due for another few months. I can save some money working at Shop Rite.

SONDRA

What about your dad? Can't he help you out?

(CONTINUED)

BRIAN

He's kinda between jobs right now, so I don't want to put that other burden on him.

SONDRA

Still, you shouldn't have to worry about it...

BRIAN

It's my problem to worry about. I'll figure it out.

Long pause. Then:

SONDRA

Tell you what. The GoFundMe truly meant a lot to me. But I still get annuities from Paul's life insurance. It's not as if I don't have an income. And I've still got my health insurance to help out.

BRIAN

...are you saying that-

SONDRA

You raised the money for me, so I presume the money is mine to do with as I please. I want to give it to you.

BRIAN

Sondra. You mean well. But I can't let you give me money to go to college. I'll take out a loan. It might take me a little while to pay it off, but-

SONDRA

Education is worth many things, but it's not worth going into debt for. Interest adds up like crazy until eventually your interest costs more than the payment itself.

BRIAN

I'll still be working at Shop Rite while I go to Tolson. I'll have some money. And maybe I'll get a better job after I graduate. I can pay it off.

SONDRA

Maybe... But if I-

BRIAN

I'm feeling really awkward about this, so can we drop it? I'll turn on the TV and we can just watch something. OK?

BRIAN turns the TV on. After a few moments of TV watching, SONDRA gets up and goes to a drawer.

What are you doing?  
BRIAN

SONDRA takes out a check and a pen.  
She writes on the check.  
Sondra. Don't!

SONDRA finishes writing the check  
and holds it out to BRIAN.  
I told you, I'm not gonna-

SONDRA  
Here's what we're gonna do. You're gonna take this check  
from me- it's about the same amount that's in the GoFundMe-  
and you're going to use it for college. On two conditions.

BRIAN  
No-

SONDRA  
*Please* let me talk. The first condition is you're *not* going  
to tell Janey we had this discussion. OK?

BRIAN  
Even if I was going to take the money, I would never.

SONDRA  
The second condition is that if for any reason you decide to  
drop out of Tolson, I expect this money to be paid back to  
me in full. No exceptions. OK?

BRIAN looks at the check.  
For one thing, you can say thank you.

BRIAN  
Thank you, but-

SONDRA  
You've done so much for me. Let me do the same for you.  
Please, Brian.

A long moment as BRIAN looks at the  
check. Realizing that SONDRA is not  
going to relent, BRIAN takes the  
check. He folds it and puts it in  
his pocket. SONDRA smiles.

SONDRA  
Enjoy college. And remember- we're not telling Janey.

BRIAN nods. Pause. SONDRA yawns.  
All this philanthropy has made me exhausted. I'm gonna take  
a nap, if you don't mind...

BRIAN

No. Not at all. Let me know if I can get you anything.

SONDRA

Mmm...

SONDRA drops off to sleep. BRIAN watches her, then turns to the TV.

6

Scene 6

6

Later that night. SONDRA is offstage, asleep. BRIAN reads a book by lamplight. JANEY enters. They speak in hushed tones as not to wake SONDRA.

JANEY

Hey.

BRIAN

Hey. How was the movie?

JANEY

It was good... Mom asleep?

BRIAN

Yeah. I put her to bed about fifteen minutes ago.

JANEY

She give you any problems tonight?

BRIAN

Not at all.

JANEY

Good.

BRIAN

So what I wanted to talk to you about earlier.

JANEY

Yes. I shared your video on Facebook.

BRIAN

Certainly took you long enough.

JANEY

I'm sorry. I don't need to tell you how busy I've been.

BRIAN

No you don't. But I'd like an explanation about what you wrote when you posted the video. Or rather, what you didn't.

(CONTINUED)

JANEY

I posted the video, Brian. What more do you want?

BRIAN

I at least expected you to say *something*. Even if it's just "Please donate to this GoFundMe."

JANEY

I don't... I come home from the one night I can actually go out and have fun, and you bombard me with this.

BRIAN

Well sorry to put a little damper on your fun night, but I'm kind of starting to get the sense that you don't care. About your mom.

JANEY

Of course I care-

BRIAN

What's gonna happen when you go to college? When we go to college?

JANEY

You're going to Tolson, and I'll be home on some weekends. And we can hire a part-time nurse. The GoFundMe page has enough for that, doesn't it?

BRIAN

I mean, yes, we'll hire a nurse, but what if it doesn't work out?

JANEY

Then we'll hire another one.

BRIAN

And what if that one- Why couldn't you say *something*!?

JANEY

Because she doesn't want me to go to Harvard.

BRIAN

...seriously?

JANEY

She wants me to stay here, and be her little caretaker, and have no life of my own-

BRIAN

You'll have your life. You have so much of it left. She only has a few years.

(CONTINUED)

JANEY

A few years out of *my life*, at a time when *I'm* supposed to be growing and learning-

BRIAN

Oh, I see. You don't want to stay around because your mom getting sick isn't convenient for you. It doesn't fit into your Ivy League schedule. It doesn't-

JANEY

It doesn't exactly appeal to me to miss out on all the opportunities that my education, my *actual* education, would give me, to take care of someone who's been physically and verbally abusive to me.

BRIAN

Wait, so she's abusive now?

JANEY

...I never told you. Because you were so close with her. But when dad died. When we found out... she said things, told me things that no mother, no *person* should ever say to their child. That I... I... I'm sorry. I can't repeat them without breaking down. And she keeps apologizing for it, but I don't believe it. I never believe it. I spent years wondering why my dad was the one who had to die. I just... When we found out mom had ALS, she hit me because I didn't know how to help her. And then she tried to apologize again. As if that made everything OK. And if I have to take care of her, I have to hear her apologize to me, then attack me when I don't know what to do... I can't do it. I can't. I don't have it in me.

Pause.

I'm sorry. You probably think she's a monster, and you don't want to help her again, which leaves me to help her, unless we spend God knows how much to hire a nurse, and...

JANEY sits on the couch. She breaks down and cries from the pressure.

If I don't get into Harvard, and I get into Ransfield, I don't know if I can... Or what if I don't even get into Ransfield? What if...

BRIAN goes to the couch and comforts JANEY.

BRIAN

It's OK, Janey. It's OK. Sh...

We hear SONDRRA offstage.

(CONTINUED)



SONDRA  
Janey? Brian? Everything OK?

BRIAN goes to the stairs.

BRIAN  
Everything's alright, Sondra. Janey just got back home. We were talking.

SONDRA  
I hear crying. Is she OK?

BRIAN  
Yeah. She just saw a really sad movie.

SONDRA  
OK...

Silence. JANEY and BRIAN face each other.

BRIAN  
I'm gonna go now. I have to work early tomorrow.

JANEY  
OK.

BRIAN heads toward the kitchen.

BRIAN  
Thank you for telling me. About Sondra. I could tell you really needed to talk to someone about that.

JANEY  
Yeah...

BRIAN  
But at least she apologizes to you. So she knows she's done something wrong.

JANEY  
It doesn't excuse anything, though.

Pause. BRIAN feels the check in his pocket. Maybe he puts his hand in his pocket to take it out. But he doesn't do anything.

BRIAN  
Right. Well... Have a good night.

Night.

JANEY

BRIAN exits, leaving JANEY alone on the couch. She looks up the stairs, where her mother is.

7

Scene 7

7

One week later. We are now towards the end of March. SONDRA sits on the loveseat, her cane next to her. We hear JANEY enter offstage.

Mom!?

JANEY

In here...

SONDRA

JANEY enters with the mail. The dominant item is a large envelope from Harvard. JANEY holds it up.

Harvard got back to me.

JANEY

SONDRA looks at the envelope.

They must have a lot to say...

SONDRA

You know what this means, don't you?

JANEY

...that they sent you a huge envelope?

SONDRA

No. Mr. Edison was saying that when a school accepts you, they usually send you a large packet like this.

JANEY

May I have the rest of the mail?

SONDRA

Oh. Sure. Sorry mom.

JANEY

JANEY rushes the mail over to SONDRA. SONDRA looks through it.

(CONTINUED)

JANEY then opens the envelope and pulls a letter out. She scans it, and scans it. A smile creeps across her face- this is a double victory for her.

JANEY

I got in.

SONDRA

Now it's official.

JANEY

And... they're giving me a full ride.

SONDRA

...congratulations.

JANEY

This means I can go. I can go to Harvard, mom!

SONDRA

Good for you.

JANEY

And like, I can actually *afford* to go there! I mean, paying for housing will be something. I'll have to get a job, but I'm sure I could work it out. Brian does it.

SONDRA

Have you heard back from Ransfield yet?

Pause.

JANEY

...how can you ask that?

SONDRA

I'm just wondering.

JANEY

No. I haven't. But mom, I got into *Harvard*.

SONDRA

I know, but-

JANEY

And I mean, Harvard vs. Ransfield? There's no comparison there.

SONDRA

What's wrong with Ransfield?

(CONTINUED)

JANEY

It's a state school. I got into *Harvard*. I can't just go from Harvard to state school. Especially not when Harvard's giving me-

SONDRA

A full ride, yeah yeah, I know. But what about books? And housing? And utilities? How are you gonna deal with those?

JANEY

I'll get a job.

SONDRA

And when you come home on the weekends. You'll need gas money.

JANEY

What if I don't want to come home?

Extra long pause.

SONDRA

Don't take that tone with me...

JANEY

The least you could've done was congratulate me on getting into-

SONDRA

I said congratu-

JANEY

But you didn't mean it!

SONDRA

I did!

SONDRA holds up the mail.

But when I got doctor's bills bombarding me-

JANEY

That gives you the right to make it about you!?

SONDRA

I'm not trying to make it about me-

JANEY

Oh, that's hilarious. *Hilarious*.

SONDRA

I had to drop out of Brown to take care of my mom.

(CONTINUED)

JANEY

I applied to Ransfield because you wanted me to!

SONDRA

That's not the same thing! I'm gonna need you around-

JANEY

What about Brian?

SONDRA

Brian's not my child.

JANEY

You want him to be, though.

SONDRA

But he isn't. You're my actual child, and not having you around would be-

JANEY

Stop- just stop trying to guilt me. You always do this, mom, and I never know what to do.

SONDRA

You do, though.

JANEY

I do, yes- I'm going to Harvard. Whether you like it or not, Harvard's going to be a thing. In my life. And I'm not gonna give it up because you couldn't help getting sick.

Boom. Regret is immediate.

I'm sorry, mom. Mom, I'm sorry. I didn't-

SONDRA

You know, Brian would never say something like that. Brian actually cares about me.

JANEY

Brian's not going to Harvard, though.

SONDRA

If he was, he'd come back every weekend to see me.

JANEY

You don't know that.

SONDRA

But I do. Because this entire year, he's been a much better son to me than you've been a daughter.

(CONTINUED)

JANEY

OK.

SONDRA

He listens to me, he talks to me-

JANEY

Stop it-

SONDRA

He doesn't talk back to me, he doesn't tell me he's going to leave me!

JANEY

SHUT UP!

Pause.

I don't want you to compare me to Brian EVER again! I know that you like him better than me- don't deny it, you do- but I'm trying! I'm really trying, I have tried, and I've done the best I could, under the circumstances. I studied, I kept my grades up, I was involved in school- All of that has paid off. And I'm not going to throw it all away for a mother who, I don't care *what* disease she has, has been physically and verbally-

SONDRA grabs her cane and struggles to get up.

SONDRA

You know, you tell me I'm a bad mother-

JANEY

When I was nine, you blamed me for something I had *nothing* to do with-

SONDRA

I've been inflicted with a bad daughter, who doesn't acknowledge *anything* I've done for her!

JANEY

Like what!?

SONDRA

I didn't abort you, for one thing.

JANEY

Woop de fucking doo. You want a cookie or some-

SONDRA

I can't take this... I can't take your obnoxious voice. I can't...

(CONTINUED)

SONDRA, with her cane, stumbles to the bookshelf. JANEY tries to stop her, but SONDRA pushes JANEY out of the way, making her fall to the floor.

JANEY

Mom!

SONDRA begins throwing books all over the room.

Mom, stop it! Mommy...!

SONDRA continues throwing books. At some point during the next speech, BRIAN enters the room and watches.

SONDRA

GET THE FUCK OUT OF HERE, YOU BITCH! YOU MAKE ME FEEL LIKE THE WORST PERSON EVER, AND I AM SO SICK OF THAT SHIT! YOU DON'T EVEN CONSIDER ALL THE JOBS I'VE WORKED, THE PLAY DATES I'VE ARRANGED, THE BAND RECITALS I ATTENDED WHEN I WOULD RATHER HAVE SLIT MY FUCKING WRISTS!!!

JANEY

MOM!

SONDRA

YOU EVER THINK ABOUT ANY OF THAT!? NO, BECAUSE YOU'RE SELF-CENTERED!

JANEY

MOMMY, PLEASE STOP THIS!

SONDRA

I CAN'T STOP IT! I DON'T WANT TO STOP IT! I... I...

BRIAN

Sondra?

SONDRA drops her cane and falls to the floor. BRIAN goes forward, but JANEY stops him. She looks at her mother. She takes a tiny step forward. Then another. Then another. Until she touches SONDRA. She embraces her. SONDRA begins to cry. JANEY continues patting SONDRA on the shoulder, gently.

SONDRA

I wish Brian had been my child instead of you.

SONDRA and JANEY release one another. SONDRA lies in the fetal position and begins to cry. JANEY, fed up, storms out of the room and up the stairs. BRIAN watches SONDRA.

BRIAN

Sondra? Sondra. You shouldn't say things like that.

SONDRA

I know. I just... I...

BRIAN

I know. But still.

Pause. BRIAN helps SONDRA get to the couch.

SONDRA

Can you... can you read me *Madame Bovary*?

Pause.

BRIAN

Sure.

BRIAN takes "Madame Bovary" off the shelf and begins reading it to SONDRA.

BRIAN

"We were in class when the head-master came in, followed by a 'new fellow,' not wearing the school uniform, and a school servant carrying a large desk. Those who had been asleep woke up, and every one rose as if just surprised at his work.

The head-master made a sign to us to sit down. Then, turning to the class-master, he said to him in a low voice-

"Monsieur Roger, here is a pupil whom I recommend to your care; he'll be in the second. If his work and conduct are satisfactory, he will go into one of the upper classes, as becomes his age."

During the above, JANEY comes out with a suitcase. She watches them. When SONDRA has fallen asleep, BRIAN closes the book and goes to the apron of the stage with JANEY.



8

Scene 8

8

Five months later. August. JANEY and BRIAN on the apron of the stage. They are talking on their cell phones. In the living room, SONDRA still lies on the couch.

BRIAN

So. The day's finally here.

JANEY

Yep.

BRIAN

How're you feeling?

JANEY

Good. Lexi's parents said they would send me care packages, so...

BRIAN

...It was good of them to let you stay with them.

Pause.

JANEY

Thank you, for all your-

BRIAN

Sondra's been asking for you all summer.

Pause.

JANEY

Tell her I said goodbye.

BRIAN

I think you should tell her yourself.

JANEY

I don't think she'd like that.

BRIAN

Don't think she'd like it, or don't think you'd like it?

JANEY

Both. I mean... It wouldn't be pleasant for either of us.

BRIAN

It's just "goodbye."

(CONTINUED)

JANEY

It wouldn't change anything. She doesn't need me to say goodbye to her.

BRIAN

Yes she does.

JANEY

And I don't need to see her ever again.

BRIAN

But-

JANEY

I have a five hour drive ahead of me, Brian, I really can't-

BRIAN

Yes you can.

JANEY

You can tell her goodbye for me. She'd prefer it coming from you.

BRIAN

I don't think so.

JANEY

And I don't need her to apologize to me. Again.

Pause.

BRIAN

You think she didn't apologize to you all those times without a reason?

Pause.

BRIAN

Just... she's leaving too. And I get that you don't really care about that. But she'll care. Just, think about her for a second. You're about to go off to Harvard, where you'll have four years to think about you. But what if she dies? And you never said goodbye? You may not think about it now, but in the future... As a friend to both of you, I don't want either of you to have regret about the other. Don't be the bitch she said you were.

Long pause as JANEY considers.

BRIAN

Just... let her say whatever she needs to. You don't have to accept any apologies. Just say goodbye.

(CONTINUED)

Long pause. JANEY nods. The two of them put their cell phones down, then go into the living room together.

SONDRA sees JANEY and lifts herself from the couch. She is much deteriorated since we last saw her—she has a harder time getting her words out. JANEY approaches her. They stare at each other for a long time.

SONDRA

Jane...

SONDRA then begins to mumble.

Iiiiiimmm... so-so-so-

She's trying to say "I'm sorry," but it's near impossible for her to speak. Eventually, though, she gets it out.

...so-so-sorry. I'm. Soorryyy. F-f-f-org-g-give me?

Long, long pause. JANEY and SONDRA look at each other. SONDRA tries to reach out to JANEY, but can't hold her hand up.

JANEY, in spite of herself, is near tears.

After a moment:

JANEY

...goodbye.

JANEY runs out of the living room.

BRIAN

Janey!

BRIAN goes after JANEY, but she's out of the house. He watches from the living room as offstage JANEY starts her car and pulls out of the driveway. Long pause after the sound of JANEY's car has faded in the distance. BRIAN turns to SONDRA. He approaches SONDRA on the couch. She shivers with tears and a barely mobile mouth.

(CONTINUED)

SONDRA

N-n-no one... n-n-no ooone...

SONDRA begins to drool.

BRIAN

Here, let me...

BRIAN gets a napkin from the kitchen and cleans SONDRA's drool. SONDRA still mumbles.

SONDRA

N-n-n-no one...

BRIAN

Shh. It's OK, Sondra.

SONDRA

B-b-but-t n-no... no one'll...

BRIAN

It's OK.

SONDRA

No one'll c-c-care.

BRIAN

I care.

SONDRA

B-b-but who else'll-

BRIAN

People will care, Sondra.

SONDRA

Will youuu m-make peopl' c-care, Brian?

Pause.

BRIAN

...I'll make sure they do. Now let's get you upstairs. I'll tuck you into bed. And I can read some more of "Madame Bovary" to you. OK? Let's go now... Let's go...

BRIAN picks SONDRA up off the couch. It is an arduous process, but he manages to get her on her feet and semi-drag her up the stairs and off the stage.

Lights on the book-strewn room, then...

(CONTINUED)

Lights fade.

**END OF ACT ONE**

ACT TWO

1

Scene 1

1

The living room is in darkness. We hear SONDRA crying. A lamp in the living room then turns on, and we see SONDRA lying on the couch, crying desperately.

From offstage, we hear a nine-year old JANEY (the same actress who plays JANEY for the rest of the play).

JANEY

...mommy?

We see JANEY at the top of the staircase. She watches SONDRA cry.

SONDRA

Don't... don't come down here, Janey.

JANEY

...mommy. What happened?

JANEY walks down the stairs.

SONDRA

I told you, Janey, don't come down here! Can't you leave me alone!?

JANEY

Where's daddy?

SONDRA

I'm warning you!

JANEY reaches the bottom of the stairs. SONDRA stands up and faces her.

JANEY

...what were those flashing lights?

SONDRA

Didn't you see their colors?

JANEY

Uh...

(CONTINUED)

SONDRA  
What were their colors!?

JANEY  
...blue and red?

SONDRA  
And what has blue and red lights?

JANEY  
Police cars.

SONDRA  
Aren't you observant.

JANEY  
...what were the police here for?

SONDRA  
They had news for us.

JANEY  
What news?

SONDRA  
...your father. He was working, and then a robber came in  
and...

SONDRA buries her face in her  
hands. JANEY is terrified.

JANEY  
...mommy? Is daddy coming home from work?

SONDRA  
...no.

Pause. SONDRA cries.

JANEY  
...does that mean daddy's dead?

SONDRA  
WHAT DO YOU THINK IT MEANS, YOU STUPID, STUPID-

JANEY  
Mommy-

SONDRA  
And before you ask another one of your stupid questions:  
He's not buying you bagels anymore, and he's not taking you  
out for lunch anymore, and he's not telling you your bedtime  
stories anymore. And he's not taking you to see "Phantom of  
the Opera" for your tenth birthday.

JANEY  
...never?

SONDRA  
Never!

JANEY begins to cry.

SONDRA  
Stop it. Don't cry. Don't you *dare* cry!

JANEY  
Mommy...

SONDRA slaps JANEY.

SONDRA  
WHAT DID I SAY!? DON'T! CRY!

JANEY  
Mommy!!!

SONDRA  
Don't "mommy" me. I'm not in the mood for that shit.

JANEY, shaking, holds her arms up  
for a hug.

SONDRA  
No. I'm not hugging you. You don't deserve it. Because it's  
*your* fault daddy died.

JANEY  
No!

SONDRA  
Yes! *He's* the one who wanted you. Not me.

JANEY  
Mommy!

SONDRA  
And because he had to earn a living to take you out to  
lunch. To buy you those books. And buy you those bagels.  
Because you just *had* to have all of those things!

JANEY  
Mommy...!

SONDRA  
What did I say!? Don't "mommy" me!

(CONTINUED)



JANEY

I'm sorry!

SONDRA

You want to be sorry!? Go to your room, and never come out!

JANEY's cries increase in volume.

JANEY

I'M SORRY!!!

SONDRA

You *really* want to be sorry!? Be someone else's child. I wish ANYONE was my child except you! Because another child wouldn't have been so selfish and need so much that my husband wouldn't have had to die *earning* it for her!

JANEY cries reach into a scream, and she runs up the stairs. SONDRA then melts into tears too, and she screams:

SONDRA

Janey? I'm sorry! I'M SORRY, JANEY! I'M SORRY!

We hear JANEY offstage.

JANEY

NO YOU'RE NOT!

SONDRA

I AM, JANEY, I-

JANEY

YOU'RE NOT! YOU'RE NOT! YOU'RE NOT!

SONDRA

I AM, I am, I am... I...

SONDRA's face begins to tighten and distort. Her hands curl, then go limp. Her mouth gapes slightly open. She transitions back to the sick Sondra we left at the end of Act One, except she's deteriorated even further.

SONDRA moves to a wheelchair by the loveseat. There are wires that connect with a laptop. This is her primary mode of communication now.

It is August 2015, one year after the events of the first act.

(CONTINUED)

The kitchen door closes offstage.  
BRIAN enters.

BRIAN

Good afternoon, Sondra! How was the nurse today?

BRIAN looks at the laptop.

Good, good. I'm glad you two are getting along.

BRIAN looks at the laptop and  
laughs.

I'm sure she does, Sondra.

How's the UniversalReader working for you?

BRIAN looks at the laptop. He  
laughs.

Well it'll keep you occupied, at least. I mean, what's life today without the internet, right? And it makes communication so much easier.

You know what people are doing? Remember the Ice Bucket Challenge from last August? They're doing it again this year. I did it too! Here, let me show you...

BRIAN types into the laptop and  
pulls up the video of him doing the  
Ice Bucket Challenge.

We hear BRIAN's voice from the  
laptop:

BRIAN

Hi, my name is Brian Miller, and I am participating in the Ice Bucket Challenge. For those who don't know, my best friend Sondra Tubben was diagnosed with ALS about two years ago. I've set up a GoFundMe called "Something for Sondra" that allows you to donate money specifically to help her pay for medical bills and treatments. For the Ice Bucket Challenge, though, you have to donate either \$100 to the ALS Association or dump a bucket of cold water on your head. I nominate Janey Tubben, Sondra's daughter, for this challenge. Alright, here goes..."

We hear BRIAN pouring a bucket of  
water on his head and screaming.

The video ends.

Pretty cool. More like freezing, but...

BRIAN looks to SONDRA for a  
response. She tries to smile.

Now. What shall we do? Shall we watch TV? Or shall we continue "The Count of Love"?

BRIAN looks at the computer.  
Sounds good. Let me just get it from the bookshelf...

BRIAN gets the book from the bookshelf. He turns it to the page he left off on, and sits on the couch. He begins to read to SONDRA.

BRIAN  
"She walked into the room of multiple bodies and voices, some pleasant and some rash. She looked for him around the room, but didn't find him. Suddenly, Sheila bounced up to her, and quickly relayed that he wasn't there- that he had been delayed in something, and wouldn't know when he would be there."

BRIAN looks at the laptop. He nods.

BRIAN  
Oh, OK. Sure.

BRIAN flips forward through the book's pages and finds the passage he wants.  
"He kissed her passionately on the neck, like no one ever had before. She felt the gradual erection of his nipples, and felt her nipples perking up herself. He led her to the bed, where he tore off her dress, undid her corset, and kissed her sumptuous breasts with the melody of his mouth."

Time passes.

BRIAN gets up and speaks into his phone.

BRIAN  
Hey Janey! I hope Harvard is treating you well. I was wondering if you were planning to come home for Thanksgiving, since you couldn't last year. It would really be great to have you down here. I know you have a full course load, but still. And if you need gas money, we can definitely help out with that. Because it would be nice if you came down here. So... Call me back. Bye.

BRIAN hangs up.

Time passes.

BRIAN and SONDRA watching TV. BRIAN laughs hysterically and looks at SONDRA. She doesn't move.

Time passes.

BRIAN gets up and speaks into his phone.

BRIAN

Hey Janey, thanks for getting back to me. Congratulations about getting the internship! I know you really wanted it. I'm guessing this means you won't be home for the summer, but if you ever need a vacation from there, you can always come down here. I know we'd like to see you. Alright. Good luck with the internship. Bye.

Time passes.

BRIAN and SONDRA.

BRIAN

So... I got a new job. Trader Joe's. Bye bye Shop Rite. Finally. Trader Joe's is really good at working around my Tolson schedule. They seem like nice people...

BRIAN looks at the laptop.

Thank you.

Time passes.

BRIAN on his phone.

BRIAN

Hey Janey, it's Brian. The doctors say it could be any day now. Call me back when you get a chance. Bye.

BRIAN hangs up. Time passes. It is now November 2016.

BRIAN holds SONDRA's hand. He tries to hold back tears. At this point, she is at death's door.

BRIAN

So... It's a gorgeous autumn day. I don't know what you want to do today. You've read pretty much every book in this library. I can make you something. Not sure if you're hungry. Are you hungry?

BRIAN looks at the laptop.

Gotcha. Well. We can sit here. And I can talk. And just blab about my life. Would you like that?

BRIAN looks at the laptop.

OK. We can talk... Well, um... school's been going alright, I guess. Classes are good, people are nice. Not much to really say about it. It's been that way the last two years now. Not sure when I'll be graduating. Hopefully it'll be

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

BRIAN (cont'd)

soon, but you know, still trying to figure out the plan after. Maybe transfer to another college, I don't know. I thought I'd know what I want to study by now, and I still don't have a clue. I could do nursing, or something. But that probably involves more school than I feel like. You think I could make a good nurse?

BRIAN looks at the computer. BRIAN chuckles.

I mean, it would be a challenge, dealing with other patients, but...

Pause.

You know, for Christmas. Janey told me she might come home this year. You know I tried getting her home last year, but stuff happened... Then she got that internship this past summer with that law firm up in Boston... She's got a lot going for her. Always has. She'll do great things, I think. In spite of what happened between you two, I think-

Pause. BRIAN looks at the laptop.

Sorry. Won't bring her up again...

BRIAN looks at the laptop.

Sure, anything.

BRIAN looks at the laptop.

Yeah?

BRIAN looks at the laptop.

...I don't know if I could do that...

BRIAN looks at the laptop.

I mean, I could post them online, but I don't know if I could...

...

...

...have you thought about this, or...?

...

...

...what about Janey?

...

...

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

BRIAN (cont'd)

...can I see them?

...

...

...

BRIAN looks at the computer for a little while.

"Sondra Tubben is leaving the building..." Ha. That's a good one...

Pause. BRIAN reads for a little while. As he's doing so, SONDRA closes her eyes.

Wow. You know you could've been something, Sondra. I mean, you still could be, if...

BRIAN looks at SONDRA.

...Sondra?

BRIAN takes SONDRA's hand. It is limp. He checks for a pulse. Nothing. He stands up, picks up his phone, calls a number, and says, holding back tears as hard as he can:

BRIAN

Hi Janey. I don't even know if you're getting my messages at this point. But I just thought you'd want to know your mom died.

He tries to think of something else to say, but hangs up the phone instead. He then crawls onto the couch, shrinks into the fetal position, and weeps.

SONDRA opens her eyes. She looks around her and smiles. She is calm, serene, no longer in pain. She is the Sondra we knew earlier in the play.

SONDRA gets up, goes to the bookshelf, picks up "Madame Bovary" with no problem. She goes to the staircase. She opens the book, starts reading it, and walks up the stairs.

2

Scene 2

2

Early afternoon. It is one week after the previous scene. BRIAN is asleep on the couch. We hear the sound of a car coming into the driveway outside. The front door opens and closes offstage. JANEY enters. She's cut her hair, styled it to make it look a bit more "professional". She wears black jeans and a light jacket. She sees BRIAN on the couch.

JANEY

Hey, Brian.

BRIAN lifts his head, his face red, puffy and bleary-eyed. He looks at JANEY for a few seconds.

BRIAN

Hi Janey.

They look at each other.

JANEY

It's good to see you again.

BRIAN

Yeah... I almost didn't recognize you. You look... Good.

JANEY

Thank you.

BRIAN

Sure... I'm glad you could come down.

JANEY

I said I would.

Pause.

JANEY

So Sondra's at the funeral home, I'm guessing?

BRIAN

Spencer's Funeral Home.

JANEY

Oh... It must've been stressful, planning it.

(CONTINUED)

BRIAN  
It was.

JANEY  
How many people are coming?

BRIAN  
Around fifty, I think.

JANEY  
That's a good number.

BRIAN  
Yeah. All her old co-workers are coming, her cousins, other relatives I didn't even know she had...

JANEY  
Or that I had.

BRIAN  
Yeah...

Pause.

BRIAN  
I'm working on a speech for her. I haven't written it all down yet, but I'm gonna quote Sondra from one of her journals.

JANEY  
You looked in her journals?

BRIAN  
She gave me permission to, right before she died. I was going through them, and found something I think really... Let me pull it up...

BRIAN opens the laptop and opens it to Sondra's journal.  
Thanks to the UniversalReader, Sondra was able to record her thoughts when she couldn't verbalize them. So she was still able to journal on this laptop. Here, listen to this:

"In a lot of ways, I feel like I should have had a better life than I actually did. But there are some things I just can't regret. Like being a mother to a daughter who, at the end of the day, is beautiful." And it goes on...

Pause. BRIAN tears up, but is able to restrain himself.  
There's actually a lot of good stuff in here. And then there are the others.

(CONTINUED)



Others?  
JANEY

BRIAN  
Yeah. She had tons of actual journals. I've been going through them since she died last week. Some of them are from when she was thirteen. You can only imagine what a thirteen year old Sondra was like...

JANEY  
I see...

BRIAN  
You should definitely look at them sometime if you get a chance.

JANEY  
I don't... know if I would...

BRIAN  
Know if you would what?

JANEY  
Know if I'd... be able to.

BRIAN  
Alright.

Pause.

BRIAN  
Are you going to say something at the funeral?

JANEY  
I... haven't thought about it.

BRIAN  
Oh...

Pause.

JANEY  
What?

BRIAN  
Nothing.

JANEY  
You sound disappointed.

BRIAN  
Well...

JANEY

You wanted me to come down here for the funeral, I came down here for the funeral. What more do you want from me?

BRIAN

I just don't think you should have to think about writing a speech for your *mom's* funeral.

JANEY

You of all people should know that I can't just up and write a speech for her.

BRIAN

It doesn't have to be an essay for Harvard.

JANEY

Maybe if I think of something I feel I should say-

BRIAN

I've had a lot of your relatives asking me where you were the last two years. Why you haven't done the Ice Bucket challenge. Why you didn't come down for holidays. They're gonna want an explanation from you. Do you know how awkward it was having to explain to them that you weren't coming home?

JANEY

They all knew I was at Harvard.

BRIAN

But they were still wondering. Even if you don't think you owe it to your mom, you owe it to them, Janey. And me.

JANEY

I can't believe you'd put all this pressure on me. I didn't come here for this.

BRIAN

Well what did you think you came here for?

JANEY

I wanted to see how you were doing.

BRIAN

How do you *think* I'm doing?

JANEY

...OK.

BRIAN

...you don't even have to say much. Just a few sentences.

Pause.

JANEY

Alright. I'll say something. After you do. If that'll make you and everyone else happy. And it won't be anything bad about her, or my relationship with her. OK?

BRIAN

Thank you.

Pause.

JANEY

I'm gonna head over to Lexi's now. I'm spending the night there.

BRIAN

Great.

JANEY

I'll see you tomorrow.

BRIAN

Yep.

Pause. JANEY goes to leave, then stops:

JANEY

Brian.

BRIAN

What?

JANEY

Thank you. For taking care of my mom. It meant a lot to me.

BRIAN

I know.

A moment, then JANEY exits.

3

Scene 3

3

Music brings us into the funeral.

The set doesn't change. We just see BRIAN in a black suit addressing a crowd.

BRIAN

Sometimes, you meet people and they just have an impact on you forever. For me, that person was Sondra Tubben. We say about a lot of people that they look at life and laugh in the face of its adversity. Well with Sondra, she actually

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

BRIAN (cont'd)

did that. Anyone who ever knew her was well-acquainted with her sharp sense of humor. This was a woman who had no filter. When the ALS began really taking over, she said, "I hope I'm still hot and sexy after this ALS is through with me."

She certainly knew no barriers. And we will always love her, and carry on her spirit. Once again, I thank you all for your support, and for being here today. It means a lot to me, and I know it meant a lot to Sondra to have you all there for her. In lieu of flowers, please make a donation to the "Something for Sondra" GoFundMe to help defray the funeral costs, or make a donation to the ALS Association. I'm going to close with one last thing Sondra wrote shortly before she passed:

"In a lot of ways, I feel like I should have had a better life than I actually did. But there are some things I just can't regret. Like being a mother to a daughter who, at the end of the day, is beautiful. A lot of us strive to be beautiful when, really, we just need to let go. That's when the beauty of life comes, when we have no control. I've gradually lost control over my life the last three years, but getting to spend those with people who love and care about me makes me feel like I have something to live for. I can only hope that those I lived for will continue to live for other things. For other people. That's what life is."

Would anyone else like to say a few words about Sondra?

BRIAN looks for JANEY. But he doesn't see her.

Thank you for coming, everyone.

Music.

4

Scene 4

4

Back in the living room. BRIAN sits on the couch. A moment. We hear the door offstage, then JANEY enters.

BRIAN doesn't look at her. Long silence.

JANEY

I uh...

BRIAN

Don't.

Pause.

(CONTINUED)

JANEY

I just wanted to say... I'm sorry I didn't...

BRIAN

You said you were going to say something at the funeral.

JANEY

I know.

BRIAN

You didn't even show up. When you expressly said you came down here for the funeral, you didn't show up. I don't even know what to say to you.

JANEY

I couldn't face everyone there. I know you said everyone would want an explanation, but what could I say to them? That I didn't come down to see my dying mom because I had papers to write?

BRIAN

You wouldn't have been dishonest.

JANEY

And I tried writing a speech. Really. But I couldn't. I just... didn't have it in me. Besides, I'm sure whatever speech you gave was more heartfelt than anything I would've come up with.

BRIAN

Fuck you, Janey.

JANEY

OK, that was uncalled for!

BRIAN

No, it wasn't. You were worried what you would say to everyone when they'd ask why you weren't around. You don't have a right to worry about that. I did *everything* for her. I read books to her. I helped her go to the bathroom. I watched TV with her. I raised fucking money for her. I dropped out of *Tolson* to take care of her.

JANEY

...you dropped out?

BRIAN

Yeah. I did.

JANEY

You didn't tell me.

(CONTINUED)

BRIAN

Considering your sporadic contact, I didn't really have a chance to.

JANEY

I was busy at school-

BRIAN

Oh I know. That was always your excuse. Every time I'd called you asking if you were gonna come home for Thanksgiving or Christmas, it was always "Sorry, can't, school". Only when Sondra *died* did you decide it would be convenient for you to come down here. And then you didn't even show up to the fucking funeral! I sent you, what, five texts asking where you were? And you didn't answer.

JANEY

You wanted me to say goodbye to her two years ago, and I did. There was nothing else that needed to be said.

BRIAN

Yes there was.

JANEY

What, that I forgive her? I didn't. And I still don't. And you want to make such a big deal out of dropping out of Tolson. Well it's not exactly *Harvard*. Harvard requires, you know, actual *work* and *dedication*. And I barely got any help from her, financial or otherwise.

BRIAN

We sent you \$100.00 for your birthdays.

JANEY

Which is basically jack shit if you're paying for housing, books, gas-

BRIAN

We would've given you gas money to come down here.

JANEY

And not to mention my course load- I don't expect you to understand any of this, Brian, since you dropped out. Which really, was an insult to my mom, considering how much she wanted you to go.

BRIAN

Well Trader Joe's was tiring me out, but I needed the money from there. And I wanted to make sure Sondra was OK every night.

(CONTINUED)

JANEY

You didn't have to do that. You had a nurse, didn't you?

BRIAN

Yeah. And she was great. But I didn't want to abandon Sondra. So I weighed my options, and dropping out of Tolson seemed like the best choice. I mean, Sondra meant well to...

Pause.

JANEY

Meant well to what?

BRIAN

To want me to go.

JANEY

You stopped in the middle of that sentence.

BRIAN

So?

JANEY

So, she meant well to... what?

BRIAN

I just said.

JANEY

No you didn't. She meant well to...?

BRIAN

It's nothing.

JANEY

No. It's not nothing.

BRIAN

I wasn't supposed to tell-

JANEY

Uh, you probably weren't, but I definitely want to know now that you've said something.

BRIAN

Sondra just... really wanted me to go to college.

JANEY

OK. I don't see why that has to be such a big deal. Unless she paid for you to go, or...

JANEY realizes the truth. She looks at BRIAN, tries to process what she's just realized. Then:

(CONTINUED)

JANEY

OK. I just need to ask a few questions. When did this happen?

BRIAN

Some time during... spring of senior year?

JANEY

Was it before I got into Harvard?

BRIAN

Yeah.

JANEY

Were you already accepted to Tolson?

BRIAN

I was.

JANEY

Were you definitely planning to go?

BRIAN

Yes.

JANEY

And she gave you money so you could go.

BRIAN

Yes.

JANEY

How did she have that money? Unless she gave you the... Wait a second. Did the "Something for Sondra" money go to...

Pause.

Wow. OK.

BRIAN

She didn't give me all the money. And she gave it to me on the conditions that I don't drop out, and that I...

JANEY

Yeah?

BRIAN

Don't tell you.

Long pause. JANEY shakes her head.

JANEY

Wow. I'm really glad I didn't go to her funeral now. The fact that she gave you money to go to college, and always

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)



JANEY (cont'd)

told me Harvard might not be possible... And then you stealing from us.

BRIAN

I didn't steal, she gave me-

JANEY

She gave money I could've used to you, but you *squandered* it, or in simpler words, you *wasted* it.

BRIAN

I know what squandered means, I'm not-

JANEY

And then to not even *tell me*- I can't believe this. I can't believe you. Fuck you, Brian!

BRIAN

I had someone who actually *needed* me. Tolson Community College did not need me. It has plenty of other students to feed off of.

JANEY

Did Sondra at least know you dropped out?

BRIAN

...

JANEY

...you fucking asshole. You *used* her!

BRIAN

Oh give me a fucking break, Janey. You wrote your *Harvard Admissions Essay* about Sondra and her oh-so-courageous struggle with ALS and how she was still "brave, loving, and endlessly sassy, perhaps more so because of her disease".

JANEY

That has *nothing* to do with-

BRIAN

You're saying you wanted her to pay your way to Harvard? Well she already fucking did. And you know what? Great. Since Harvard meant everything to you. Taking care of Sondra meant more to me than school. She obviously meant *nothing* to you.

JANEY

Maybe I didn't care. I... don't care. And I'm not sorry about it. And I don't have to be. Which is a great feeling. What sucks, though, is that you took what she gave you, which she should've given to me, and threw it away.

(CONTINUED)

BRIAN

I'm gonna make it up to her, though.

JANEY

How?

BRIAN

By publishing her journals.

JANEY

...what?

BRIAN

Give me a second.

BRIAN goes upstairs. JANEY shakes her head. BRIAN then returns downstairs with a large pile of journals. He puts them on the table. He then opens SONDRAS laptop.

Before she died, Sondra asked me to publish her journals. Both what she wrote on the computer, and what's in her actual journals, so we get a full picture of who she was. Mother, student, daughter, wife... Of course I'm not gonna put *all* of it in there, otherwise we'd have a million page book. But I need, and want, your permission to do this. Obviously, I won't put anything *really* negative about you in there-

JANEY

Well that's a relief.

BRIAN

Although it won't ignore the fact that you went away to Harvard.

JANEY

...what do you mean?

BRIAN

There's a passage in here... Let me look it up...

BRIAN searches the computer to pull up the quote.

JANEY

You don't need to- Brian, just tell me the gist. What did she say?

BRIAN

She said...

BRIAN has pulled up the quote. He reads directly from the laptop.

"Brian was on the phone with Janey today. Yet again. I hope they're doing well. I hope Janey is doing well at Harvard. She's wanted it all her life. Good for her. I don't blame her for not wanting to come down for Christmas. In fact, I understand completely. It hurts that I understand it so. I wish I didn't understand, so that I could escape into blissful ignorance. But that's not possible."

Pause. JANEY lets the passage register.

That's honestly the worst thing about you I would put in there.

Pause. Then:

JANEY

OK.

BRIAN

...OK?

JANEY

If you publish those journals, then... I want to tell my side.

BRIAN raises an eyebrow.

BRIAN

Your side?

JANEY

If you're going to glorify Sondra as some would-be writer whose disease-ridden body got the best of her, and whose heartless daughter abandoned her for Harvard, then I want to tell about everything I went through with her. *Everything*. I think this is a fair compromise. We both get to tell who Sondra was. Deal?

Pause.

BRIAN

No.

JANEY

Why not?

BRIAN

That's not what she wanted.

JANEY

If that wasn't what she wanted, then she shouldn't have-

BRIAN

I'm not going to let you portray her as a monster.

JANEY

I just want people to know the truth.

BRIAN

You want them to know *your* truth. Which is different from my truth. One of my best friends just died, Janey. Someone who basically gave me a home away from home. Someone who did me one of the biggest favors of my life, regardless of how it turned out for me. I don't think anyone can blame me for wanting to share who she was. Why don't you read some more of them? Then decide if you want to continue with your anti-Sondra crusade.

*Pause. Standstill. JANEY then picks up one of the journals from the table and turns to a page in it.*

SONDRA enters at the top of the stairs and recites the following as JANEY reads.

SONDRA

May 30th, 2011. I want to write a musical about a man who's married to a woman, but performs in drag at night. Not just a play, but a musical. Of course I have all the musical talent of a llama, but for all I know it could be the next "Book of Mormon."

JANEY smiles. JANEY picks up another journal.

October 5th, 2012. I met a wonderful young man named Brian. Janey brought him over from school today. He apparently likes raunchy novels. As a fan of raunchy literature myself, I have a feeling we are going to get along. Janey prefers to read more "literary stuff". I liked her better when she preferred trash. We were closer, then..."

JANEY closes the journal. She picks up another one.

November 19th, 2010. Today is the anniversary of many things. For one, it is Paul's death. I still think of when we met in line at Burger King, of all places, how he made me laugh... How handsome and charming he was. He made going into a Burger King the highlight of my day. If only he didn't get shot, what kind of father he would've been to..."

JANEY closes her eyes, holding back tears. She continues.

(CONTINUED)

"...Janey. Today is also the anniversary of the terrible thing I said to Janey. I can never apologize enough to her. But I can't take it back. And I'm not sorry I said it. I'm only sorry it hurt her as much as it did. If she were a stronger person, she would have forgiven me by now, but as she is-

JANEY slams the journal shut. Long pause between her and BRIAN. She tightens her grip on the journal, and begins to tear it apart. BRIAN rushes to her.

BRIAN

Janey!

BRIAN tries to take the other journals to protect them, but JANEY knocks them out of his hands. Scattered on the floor, JANEY begins to tear them up. BRIAN tries to salvage them, but JANEY keeps knocking him off.

JANEY's fury should resemble that of SONDRA when she threw the books off the bookshelf.

Finally, JANEY takes SONDRA's laptop and smashes it on the floor.

Long, long pause. Both JANEY and BRIAN look at the mess.

BRIAN shakes his head.

BRIAN

Sondra was right. You are a bitch.

Pause.

JANEY

*I'm* the bitch? You saw her tell me she wished you were her child instead of me, Brian. And you just stood there. And did nothing about it. Why didn't you say anything!?

BRIAN

It's not my fault Sondra wanted me around more than you.

Long pause.

You're jealous because my... I mean, *your* mom liked me better than you. And you felt oh-so-alone because the parent who actually *liked* you got shot. I'm sure if he lived, he

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

BRIAN (cont'd)  
 would've called you a bitch too. He's probably grateful he died now.

Pause. JANEY, wounded perhaps beyond repair, stiffly walks towards the kitchen.

JANEY  
 ...I'm going to Lexi's. Then I'm leaving in the morning. And I don't want to speak to you ever again.

JANEY begins to exit. BRIAN stops her with:

BRIAN  
 Can't you think of one, at least one positive memory of her?

Long pause. JANEY doesn't respond. She leaves the room. We hear the entrance door closing in the kitchen. We hear JANEY's car revving up.

BRIAN sits on the couch in the fetal position. Lights down.

5

Scene 5

5

Later. Three in the morning.

We hear a car pulling into the driveway. Then the front door in the kitchen closing.

The kitchen light turns on. We can make out BRIAN lying on the couch, snoring gently.

JANEY enters the living room. She hasn't slept at all tonight.

She comes into the living room. We hear footsteps upstairs.

SONDRA comes down, having just showered, dressed in a nice shirt and jeans. She smiles at JANEY.

SONDRA  
 Good morning, daughter.

(CONTINUED)

JANEY

...it's three in the morning.

SONDRA

It's a beautiful day, isn't it?

JANEY

...mom.

SONDRA

A beautiful day for a beautiful birthday of a beautiful daughter.

JANEY

...

SONDRA goes to hug JANEY.

SONDRA

Happy tenth birthday, Janey!

JANEY

...thank you.

SONDRA

I have a *wonderful* day planned for you today!

JANEY

...it's Wednesday.

SONDRA

So what?

JANEY

You have work, I have school...

SONDRA

Pshaw, neither of us has missed a day of school or work all year. And what better occasion to bypass the drudgery of societal expectations than your birthday?

JANEY

...

SONDRA

You could at least say something. I'm letting you not go to school, for crying out loud!

JANEY

I have a test today-

(CONTINUED)

SONDRA

I spoke to Ms. Fankles. She said you can take your test tomorrow. Today, however, we have a super-awesome-fun day planned. And if we don't get on the road now, we'll be late for it!

JANEY

What do you have planned?

SONDRA

It is Wednesday...

JANEY

...so?

SONDRA

It's matinee day...

SONDRA pulls out a pair of tickets.

SONDRA

Ta da!

JANEY

Are those tickets to "Phantom of the Opera"!??

SONDRA

Yes! But first! We'll be stopping to pick up bagels for breakfast. And then we'll drive into the city, have lunch, see the show, and then I'm making chicken a la Tubben for you, Lexi and Rachel!

JANEY

Daddy said he was going to take me to see "Phantom."

Awkward pause. How to cheer JANEY up, SONDRA wonders?

SONDRA

Yeah well... It's going to be a great day anyway! Just imagine. The two of us romping and strutting around New York City like a couple of hot fashion models.

SONDRA "struts" around the room like a really bad fashion model. In spite of herself, JANEY giggles.

Doesn't that sound fun?

JANEY

I guess...

SONDRA sighs.

(CONTINUED)



SONDRA

Janey. I know you're still hurt, about what I said. And I don't blame you. And I hope that one day you can forgive me. But... just know that I lost him too. And I miss him too. Every day. And now that he's gone, I'll be doing this on my own. And honestly, I barely know what I'm doing. So whatever you're scared of, I promise you, I am just as scared as you are. But...

SONDRA takes JANEY's hand in hers. We can power through this together. Yeah? We are Tubben women, and Tubben women never let anything get in the way of each other. Right?

JANEY

OK...

SONDRA

...tell you what. We can visit dad, after the show. Would you like that?

JANEY nods.

SONDRA

OK. We can do that. Now. Come on. Go get ready. We have quite a time ahead of us! Don't we?

JANEY

Yes we do...

JANEY goes upstairs. SONDRA smiles after her. She then goes to BRIAN, lying on the couch, and strokes his hair.

SONDRA

Thank you, son.

BRIAN wakes up and sees SONDRA. He shoots upwards.

BRIAN

Sondra!?

SONDRA exits. BRIAN looks after her, then goes back to sleep.

6

Scene 6

6

The next morning. BRIAN is still lying on the couch. JANEY enters with a brown bag of bagels. She puts them down on the living room table. She exits into the kitchen, gets some plates, butter and cream cheese, then sets them on the table. She puts a bagel on a plate for BRIAN, then gets one for herself. As she sits in the loveseat, BRIAN stirs and awakens.

BRIAN

Those for me?

JANEY

For us, yeah.

BRIAN lifts himself up.

JANEY

I have butter and cream cheese too.

BRIAN

Thanks.

BRIAN opens the butter, takes the butter knife, spreads it on the bagel, and begins to eat it. The two eat in silence for a while.

JANEY

I've missed Jersey bagels. They're not as good in Massachusetts.

Silence. They continue eating.

BRIAN

How was Lexi's?

JANEY

I couldn't sleep. So I came back home.

Pause.

JANEY

I thought of a good memory. Of mom.

BRIAN

Yeah?

(CONTINUED)

JANEY

Yeah. For my tenth birthday. It was a Wednesday. About a month after my dad died. She allowed me to skip school so we could go out for breakfast, go into the city, see "Phantom of the Opera" like my dad was supposed to... Then she had a bunch of my friends over for dinner.

BRIAN

Nice.

JANEY

Yeah...

Pause. Eating.

BRIAN

I think I saw her last night. She just said, "Thank you, son," then disappeared.

JANEY

Hm...

They continue eating.

BRIAN

I'm so sorry, Janey. For everything I said last night.

Long pause.

JANEY

It's OK. With you. I don't know if it'll ever be OK with her, but it's OK with you.

BRIAN

I understand.

They continue eating.

BRIAN

When do you have to go back to Harvard?

JANEY

I was gonna leave after breakfast.

BRIAN

Oh...

JANEY

Yeah.

Pause.

(CONTINUED)

BRIAN  
You think you'll um...

JANEY  
...what?

BRIAN  
Get ALS? I mean, I know ALS isn't usually genetic, but your  
mom and grandma had it...

JANEY  
...I don't know.

For a moment, JANEY's face drains  
of color. She looks terrified.

JANEY  
Who would take care of me. If I did...

BRIAN  
Hm...

JANEY  
You did a really good job taking care of mom.

BRIAN  
Not sure I can do as good a job for anyone else.

JANEY  
I see...

Silence. Then JANEY and BRIAN  
continue eating.

JANEY  
You have work today?

BRIAN  
Not til tomorrow.

JANEY  
Ah...

Pause.

JANEY  
I don't mean this to sound insensitive... But now that  
Sondra is gone, you should go back to Tolson.

BRIAN  
I could...

JANEY

No. She gave you money and you promised her.

BRIAN

I know, but... I have no idea what I want to do. And I already took courses to try and figure that out.

JANEY

Maybe now that you don't have to worry about Sondra, it'll make it easier to focus.

BRIAN

Yeah...

JANEY

You can't work at Trader Joe's forever.

BRIAN

Maybe I could. Or maybe I could get a job somewhere else. I don't know.

Pause. Eating.

BRIAN

...you ever wonder what your life is gonna mean after the one thing that has meaning goes away?

JANEY

Yeah. But you find new meanings. You know?

BRIAN

True...

JANEY

And maybe you'll find it at Tolson. Or Ransfield.

BRIAN

You're right. I'll look into it, then.

JANEY

Good.

Pause. They have both finished their bagels by now. Pause.

JANEY

I'm sorry too.

BRIAN

...I know.

JANEY

It's just... You'll never know my mom like I did.

BRIAN

And you'll never know her like I did. So we're even.

JANEY

Yup.

The two look straight out.

BRIAN

She really could be a great person. At times.

JANEY

And she could be a bitch. At times.

Pause.

BRIAN

I like that we can be honest about this now. I mean it sucks she had to die, but...

JANEY

Yeah. I like that too.

Pause.

JANEY

You could write your own book about her.

BRIAN

...you'd let me do that?

JANEY

I'd have to approve it, but...

BRIAN

What, "The Life and Times of Scarlet Sondra"?

JANEY laughs.

JANEY

Exactly.

They look at each other, smile.

JANEY

Be right back.

BRIAN

OK...

JANEY runs upstairs. She comes downstairs carrying her old flute case.

JANEY

I knew this was still here!

BRIAN

Oh, the good ol' band days...

JANEY

I wanted to take this to Harvard with me, but I forgot it.

JANEY takes the flute parts out of its case and puts them together.

BRIAN

Sometimes I wish I didn't give up the trumpet.

JANEY

You could still take it up again.

BRIAN

Yeah well...

JANEY

Do me a favor.

BRIAN

OK.

JANEY

I want to play something for mom.

BRIAN

OK...

JANEY

But could you film it and put it online?

BRIAN

Sure, definitely.

BRIAN takes his cell phone out. He holds the phone up.

Ready whenever you are.

JANEY

OK. Just a heads up, this is gonna be, like, completely improvised, so...

BRIAN

That's OK. And...

BRIAN presses the "Record" button.

We're filming.

JANEY

Hey. So... this is something for Sondra. My mom.

JANEY begins to play the flute. And play. And play. A random assortment of notes that actually sound very pretty together. She plays like this for a minute or two. The actress is free to improvise this.

JANEY nods when she's ready for BRIAN to stop filming. He does.

BRIAN

Perfect.

JANEY

Could you send it to me too?

BRIAN

Sure.

BRIAN does.

BRIAN and JANEY smile at one another. After a moment, BRIAN's cell phone rings. He looks at it.

BRIAN

It's dad.

BRIAN answers.

Hey, dad... I'm holding up... Yeah, it was. It was great that so many people came... Yeah, she would've been... Yeah, I am... Why, do you want me to come home, or...? Yeah, I guess it would... I kinda don't even remember the last time I... Yeah, it is...

Pause.

Yes. I would like to come home... Alright. I'll be there soon. Bye. Love you.

BRIAN hangs up.

BRIAN

I should really get home. Like, my actual home.

(CONTINUED)



JANEY

That would be a good idea.

Pause. BRIAN gets up from the couch.

BRIAN

What are we gonna do with this house?

JANEY

Sell it, I guess.

BRIAN

Maybe have a garage sale. See how many of these books we can get rid of.

JANEY

Or donate them to the library.

BRIAN

Yeah...

Pause.

BRIAN

Thank you for breakfast.

JANEY

No problem.

Pause. A moment between them. They approach each other and embrace.

JANEY

You should visit me at Harvard some time. For a weekend or something.

BRIAN

I'd like that.

Pause.

JANEY

Text me when you're home so I know you're home safe.

BRIAN

You got it.

BRIAN smiles, then leaves the room.

JANEY looks around the room that hasn't been cleaned yet. She picks up a piece of paper and reads it. It is the paper BRIAN read from at the funeral. SONDRÄ enters.

SONDRÄ

In a lot of ways, I feel like I should have had a better life than I actually did. But there are some things I just can't regret. Like being a mother to a daughter who, at the end of the day, is beautiful. A lot of us strive to be beautiful when, really, we just need to let go. That's when the beauty of life comes, when we have no control. I've gradually been losing control over my life the last three years, but getting to spend those with people who love and care about me makes me feel like I have something to live for. I can only hope that those I lived for will continue to live for other things. For other people. That's what life is.

JANEY looks around the journal-strewn room. She picks up a few. She then moves to the couch and opens up a journal at random.

SONDRÄ

"March 1st, 1978. I just finished this book called "Valley of the Dolls", and I have a lot of questions."

JANEY laughs, then keeps on reading her mother's journals. SONDRÄ smiles at her as the lights fade.

END OF PLAY