

The Courtship of Bullfrogs

a new play on love and family by Jake Alexander

Characters:

JOHN, 20-something, the son

BRIDGET, his mother, late 50s

CLAIRE, his twin sister

LIZ, his older sister

MARILYN, his grandmother, mid-80s

MARGARET, his aunt, early 50s

PAUL, his father, early 60's

FRED, his uncle, early 60s

UNCLE BEN, his great-uncle, MARILYN's younger brother

Place: Connecticut-shoreline suburban house, 2018, August

(Lights up. We hear a light buzzing, slowly building until it gives way to the chirps of two bullfrogs, communicating back and forth. Their chirps go from low to high, long to short, for a few moments. JOHN enters carrying a duffel. He listens for a while, then addresses the audience.)

JOHN

According to my father, the two bullfrogs that lived near our pool had a nightly routine in the summer. Starting in May, they followed a simple order of events, which ended in something spectacular. Any nature show you watch would indicate that there is nothing spectacular about it at all, just something natural, animalistic. But look closely, my father told me, you'll see something beautiful. The male, or what we thought was the male, not knowing how to distinguish male and female bullfrogs, would curl underneath a citronella candle, a green pale. It gave enough shade for him to shield his body from the Connecticut heat and sun. The (assumed) female sat high, behind the pool skimmer net, which fell kitty-cornered on the far edge of the pool deck. Every evening, the male would travel down the post on which the citronella candle sat, and he would finally slouch on the plastic edge of the pool, croaking. A low rumble, not quite a chirp, not quite thunder. After roughly an hour of this croaking, which was, I should mention, loud enough to wake the entire neighborhood, the female would acquiesce. She'd shimmy down the pool skimmer net, and sit on the opposite end of the pool. Slowly, but deliberately, they would move to each other. Their croaks would fill the wooden and plastic lined deck, echoing off the neighboring houses and filling the silences that the crickets left. In the end, they would end up next to each other, but never touching, never giving in to whatever temptation a bullfrog can experience. They did this every night from May to August. Isn't that incredible? The consistency of frogs. Whatever relationship they may have had, their chirps the only indication of any connection. The summer nights fell away, and suddenly it was theirs.

(JOHN exits to the driveway. Lights up on a basic Connecticut-shoreline house in the suburbs. It's very modest, and well lived-in. We see the back yard of the house, with an above-ground pool and a raised deck. Paint is chipping and leaves litter the pool. Offstage left is the driveway

and garage. Just above the deck in a screened in porch and a kitchen. Steps run from the driveway up to the porch and a small walkway to the deck. On the deck is a simple grill and a few deck chairs. The windows are open and we hear faint music, some classic rock like Bruce Springsteen or Cat Stevens. BRIDGET is unpacking some groceries and putting beer in a cooler. JOHN walks up to the house, takes a deep breath and walks up the steps and enters the house.)

JOHN
Mom? Bridg?

BRIDGET
Hello hello! Oh he's home!

JOHN (*hugging her*)
Hi mama, how're you doing?

BRIDGET
Fine, fine. Just got back from the store.

JOHN (*putting down his bag and indicating the cooler*)
What's all this?

BRIDGET
Some folks are coming over for a little cook-out, before we head to the hotel tomorrow.

JOHN
That's not too much for you?

BRIDGET
Oh, it's nothing. Hotdogs and burgers. Your father will be home soon, help me would you?

(JOHN starts going through the groceries, carrying a few items into the kitchen.)

JOHN
I mean, have you packed and everything for the weekend? There's a lot to do, isn't there?

BRIDGET
It's all done, dear, don't worry. Oh, what're you doing, go put your bags down. You're in Claire's old room.

JOHN
What's in mine?

BRIDGET
I was going through photo albums and making the center pieces in there, it's a mess. I just didn't get to it. Plus, the cat hair.

JOHN

You move out and immediately you are replaced by a cat.

BRIDGET (*kissing him on the cheek*)

Stop your whining.

(JOHN exits into the rest of the house. BRIDGET exits onto the deck and starts sweeping some of the leaves off of it. She grabs the pool skimmer against the wall and starts skimming the pool. She looks out at the yard. She thinks, gets distracted. JOHN re-enters and sees her. He doesn't want to interrupt.)

JOHN (*making himself known*)

So. Who's coming tonight?

BRIDGET

Oh, anyone who hasn't already headed to the hotel tonight. Claire will be here in a bit. Your aunt and Uncle Fred, Grandma, I think Uncle Ben is in town already as well, he may be staying with her.

JOHN

I'm surprised Aunt Marg hasn't headed there yet. You'd think she'd want to be there the night all the kids get in.

BRIDGET

I think your cousin insisted she come up tomorrow. Didn't want her to have too much time to fret over who's coming to the wedding and who isn't.

JOHN

I thought Uncle Ben wasn't invited? None of the New Jersey group was?

BRIDGET

Well, that's some news-

(We hear a car door slam, PAUL enters and starts climbing the steps. He has concrete-stained shorts on and carries an old lunch cooler. As he enters, he starts singing.)

PAUL (*singing, slightly off-key*)

Is she really going ouuuuut with him? Is she reaaaally gonna take him home toniiiiiiight?

JOHN

Hey, dad.

BRIDGET

Paul, stop that.

PAUL (*to JOHN, reaching to shake his hand*)
When did you get in?

JOHN
A half hour ago.

PAUL
Boy, you don't look good. What happened?

JOHN
Thanks, dad.

PAUL
It's that city air! Killing you slowly with smog and toxins. Thanks De Blasio!

JOHN (*chuckling*)
How was work?

PAUL (*exiting into the kitchen and putting his cooler down, taking his hat off*)
Work was work.. How's work for you? Oh right. When're we gonna get you a real job.

JOHN (*defensive*)
Writing is a real-job, Dad.

BRIDGET
Leave him alone, Paul.

PAUL (*indicating*)
Pool looks good huh? You go in yet?

JOHN
I will.

PAUL
Ya need some money?

JOHN No, Dad, i'm fine.

PAUL (*to BRIDGET, indicating the cooler and groceries*)
What's all this?

BRIDGET
We are having some folks over tonight for a cook-out.

PAUL (*not happy*)
What? Why? Bridg-

BRIDGET
Oh have a beer, would you?

(He acquiesces.)

PAUL
Nothing big, right?

BRIDGET
A few people who hadn't left yet. My mother and Uncle Ben, my sister and brother. Your daughters

PAUL
Burgers and dogs?

BRIDGET
Yes, now go change. Claire will be here soon.

PAUL
She's not bringing that dog is she?

JOHN
I thought you liked the dog?

BRIDGET
He's huge now! You should see him, the lug.

PAUL
Last time he was here he almost cut the liner on the pool.

BRIDGET
He did not, you fibber.

PAUL *(to JOHN)*
Hey! Did I tell ya about the bullfrogs?

JOHN
You did, but I hadn't seen them yet.

PAUL *(exiting to the deck, beckoning JOHN to follow)*
Come here, come here! This here is the male.

(He lifts a small green, citronella candle on a post, a tiny bullfrog sits underneath it.)

JOHN

He's not very big. He really gets that loud?

PAUL

Oh yeah! You'll hear them tonight. The female is up there somewhere. She's less-easy to spot.

(PAUL points up to where the pool skimmer rests against a gutter. He opens his beer.)

JOHN

You mentioned the neighbors complained?

PAUL

They called me over one morning when I was leaving for work. You know that Terry across the street, she can be a real bitch. She hollers at me to come over and talk. I holler back that I gotta leave for work. So she gets on her slippers and comes over to my truck and she says "Paul," she says, "Paul you have to stop with those air horns at night!" And I says "air horns?", she's just looking at me like I'm crazy and I'm not understanding what she's trying to say, so I repeat "what air horns?" And she says, "Those air horns you blow back and forth. There's no need to do that so late at night. Are you scaring deer or something out of your yard?" This lady thinks I'm scaring deer with air horns in the middle of the night! I couldn't believe what she was talking about. So I came out here the next night, sat right there in that chair and I waited to hear what the hell she was talking about. I had never heard nothing like an air horn in the neighborhood before, I sleep so heavy, you know. So I sat here that night, and sure enough, these two are chirping back and forth. Louder than an air horn!

JOHN

That's wild. I can't believe it.

PAUL

Neither could I. So I waltz on over to Terry the next morning. She's sipping her coffee like this on her patio and I walk right up and say "those air horns are bullfrogs, lady". And she says "Bullfrogs ain't that loud!" And so I said, very calm-like, "what do you think is more likely, Terry, that I'm out in the back yard at all hours of the night scaring DEER with an AIRHORN or that two frogs are trying to fuck on my back deck?" And she didn't like that very much.

JOHN *(laughing)*

I'm sure she didn't!

PAUL

And she said "there's no need to cuss like that this early in the morning." And as I turned to walk back to my truck and head to work I shouted "well there's no need to be that stupid in the morning either, but here ya are!" And that was that.

JOHN

What happened next?

PAUL

Nothing. She'll probably steal our paper in the future to get back at me. Anyways, I'm gonna hop in the pool, wanna join? Grab a beer.

JOHN

I'll dip my feet in.

BRIDGET

John, help me get the rest of these groceries away and move the cooler to the deck. Paul I need that grill fired up.

PAUL

Lemme get a dip in first, Bridg.

BRIDGET

A quick one, please. John, you hungry?

JOHN

I'm good for now, mom. Thank you, though.

BRIDGET

Now, tomorrow, John: We have to get out of here pretty quickly.

JOHN

What do you mean?

BRIDGET

Well, the wedding's at 5. And your sisters need to be there around noon for make-up and hair at the venue.

JOHN

Sure, but we don't need to be there at noon.

BRIDGET

Check-in at the hotel is at 11.

JOHN

Which means we can check in at 11, not that we have to.

BRIDGET

Well I'd like to be there for then.

JOHN

So what time do you propose we leave?

BRIDGET

I'd like you up and showered by 8:30.

JOHN

Mom! The hotel is less than an hour away.

BRIDGET

No complaints, please.

JOHN (*to PAUL*)

Are you coming then as well?

PAUL

I'll be driving myself. But you go with your mother.

(The lights shift. JOHN steps downstage on the deck. The bullfrogs start chirp. Time slows around him, as he addresses the audience.)

JOHN

My parents will celebrate their thirty-fifth wedding anniversary this year. My sisters and I have fallen behind on anniversary gifts, usually we scrape together enough time and effort to give them a gift card or some outdoor-gadget that will get used once and put back in the garage for a while. When they first met, my mother didn't like the kind of boyfriend my father was. For instance, he was two hours late to their first date. When he didn't call enough or take her out as much as she'd like, my mother dumped him. They used to go to this old bar all the time, I think it's still there, and my father would sit at the bar and watch the love of his life flirt and date other men. Finally, when he had couldn't take it anymore, he told a buddy of his and the buddy went right up to the guy she was dating at the time and said "that's Paulie's girl. You leave Bridg alone." And the guy did. And my parents got back together. She never knew until after they were engaged and the same freind mentioned it. She didn't know how much my dad wanted to be with her. It's a strange story, sure. But he loved her. And he wanted to be with her. Even if he didn't know how to show it. Nowadays you couldn't get away with that.

(Time speeds back up, JOHN steps back into reality. The bullfrogs quiet. PAUL hops into the pool, and uses the pool water to clean off some of the grime on the deck. JOHN grabs the cooler and bring it out to the deck, BRIDGET starts readying food. CLAIRE enters from the drive-way, she is carrying a bridesmaid dress and a pack of beer.)

CLAIRE

Hello!

JOHN

Hey there!

CLAIRE (*seeing PAUL in the pool*)

Jesus, Paul. Warn me next time.

PAUL
Just working on my summer tan!

JOHN (*giving her a kiss*)
Hey, Cee.

CLAIRE
Hey, Jay. When did you get in?

JOHN
Just this afternoon.

CLAIRE
You know, I would've grabbed you at the train station if you wanted. Mom? Where are you?

BRIDGET (*yelling from kitchen*)
Coming out in a bit! Did you bring the dress?

CLAIRE (*yelling back to her*)
Yes, and it's a mess.

JOHN
Dress?

CLAIRE
My bride's maids dress.

JOHN (*taking off his shoes and dipping his feet in the pool*)
What's wrong with it?

CLAIRE
Hemming. I hate having to pick your own dress, what is with people telling their wedding parties "don't worry about getting the same dress, just get one in this color!" So annoying.

JOHN
How's your toast?

CLAIRE
Oh god, don't remind me. It's short, I just don't want to cry in it.

BRIDGET (*entering with chips and a platter of burgers to be cooked*)
Let me see it.

(CLAIRE hands the dress to BRIDGET. While visibly she doesn't like it, she does her best to hide her displeasure.)

BRIDGET
It's not so bad!

CLAIRE
Mom. It's gray. And the skirt is all....floofy.

BRIDGET
Floofy can be good!

CLAIRE
I look fat in it.

BRIDGET
Stop that. Did you buy Keith's tie for him?

CLAIRE
He needs to learn to tie it. I told him you'd help, John.

JOHN
I'll do my best. Why didn't he come with you?

CLAIRE
I came straight from work. He's packing when he gets out.

PAUL
Out from his garbage duty?

CLAIRE
He's a trash-collector, Paul. Don't make it sound like he swims in the garbage.

BRIDGET
I'm gonna need to see it on you, to fix it.

CLAIRE
Okay, let's do it now. I don't want everyone seeing me in it.

BRIDGET
Your grandmother would love to see you before the big day. You should put it on for her.

CLAIRE
Ew. No.

BRIDGET
Paul, out of the pool, the burgers are ready for you.

PAUL (*splashing her*)
Join me, baby!

BRIDGET
Ah! Paul, knock it off! People will be here any minute.

JOHN
Is Liz coming?

BRIDGET
She should be here soon, she was coming from work as well.

CLAIRE
What about Toni?

BRIDGET
I don't think so.

JOHN
Isn't there a rehearsal dinner or something tonight you guys need to be at?

CLAIRE
Kate said to skip it. It was mostly for the out-of-towners.

JOHN
How many out-of-towners are there?

BRIDGET
Too many.

PAUL (*getting out of the pool*)
Alright, alright. Boy, glad I wore my trunks. Otherwise you guys would be getting a full show.

(He moons CLAIRE and JOHN)

CLAIRE
Paul!

JOHN
Dad!

(Laughing, PAUL goes inside to change. BRIDGET takes the dress in.)

JOHN
Wait, what happened with Uncle Ben? Why is he here?

CLAIRE
Oh my god, Jay, it's a shit show.

JOHN
What happened?

(LIZ enters and start climbing the steps. She carries a suit and a suitcase.)

LIZ
Hello!

CLAIRE
Don't go inside, Paul's naked.

LIZ
...okay. Hey!

JOHN *(hugging her)*
Hey Lizzie!

LIZ
How was the train?

JOHN
Painless, thankfully. Not as many people heading this way this time of year.

LIZ
What're you guys doing out here?

JOHN
Supposed to start getting ready, Claire was just telling me about some shit show?

LIZ
Ah, Uncle Ben. Yeah. Ceecee where's the dress?

CLAIRE
Mom's looking at it.

JOHN
So what happened?

CLAIRE
Grandma opened her mouth and invited him.

JOHN

Can she just...do that? At her granddaughter's wedding?

LIZ

Well, whether or not she can, she did.

JOHN

How did it happen?

CLAIRE

She was having lunch with him a few weeks ago, and she turned to him and asked what he was wearing. Ya know, to the wedding. And he said "what wedding?"

JOHN

Oh god.

LIZ

And she couldn't just say "Kate's getting married, I'm sorry I thought you were invited but now I remember that I was DISTINCTLY told that you weren't because they were keeping it small", so instead she called Kate.

JOHN

And said what?

CLAIRE

She told Kate to invite Uncle Ben! And Aunt Scarlett!

LIZ

And she didn't even tell Kate that she had spilled the beans to him that he wasn't invited in the first place. Grandma made it out like she realized they weren't invited and said "it would be very nice of you to include them, Katherine." And what was Kate supposed to do?

JOHN

She really boxed her in.

LIZ

She also goes out of her way to ask Kate who else is invited and when Kate mentions a few friends from school that have known her for years, Grandma criticized Kate by saying she should've included more family!

CLAIRE

So Kate calls me crying and saying she doesn't want to disappoint her grandmother, but also can't fit another table in the hall and it's this whole thing. And then of course Mom comes to the rescue.

JOHN
What about Aunt Marg?

CLAIRE
She was just fuming that her mother had the audacity to tell her granddaughter who should and shouldn't be invited.

LIZ
So Mom gets in there and tells Kate not to invite anyone else, and then she calls up Grandma and kindly, but firmly, reminds her that she doesn't get to decide who is invited to her granddaughter's wedding and also doesn't get to add to group. And that Kate didn't want to invite the great uncles and aunts or any of the second cousins.

JOHN
How did Grandma take that?

CLAIRE
They haven't talked about it yet.

LIZ
So Kate decides it's okay to add just Uncle Ben and Aunt Scarlett, but that she can't invite the whole extended family from Maryland.

JOHN
Grandma and Uncle Ben are coming tonight, aren't they?

CLAIRE
Aunt Scarlett isn't coming though. Uncle Ben thought it would be too much.

(A beat.)

JOHN
Well, I'm excited. I think this is going to be a great wedding.

LIZ
It will be!

JOHN
Liz what're you wearing? A dress?

LIZ
Kate wouldn't make me do that. I just picked up my suit from the tailor. So: is the dress that bad, Cee?

CLAIRE
Horrible. I don't want to wear it.

LIZ
Little late for that.

(BRIDGET and PAUL re-enter. PAUL has changed and carries a bag of charcoal. BRIDGET hugs LIZ.)

PAUL
Lizzie, when did you get here?

BRIDGET
Good to see you, dearie.

CLAIRE
We were just telling Jay about Uncle Ben.

BRIDGET
Well he's only coming for a bit, he didn't want to leave Aunt Scar alone for too long.
(A beat. A tension in the air.)

JOHN
How is she?

BRIDGET
She's, ya know, there.

LIZ
Well, not really.

BRIDGET
Elizabeth-

LIZ
No, no, I mean she's there, like she's with us, but it's not her anymore.

PAUL
It's not.

BRIDGET
Paul, stop that.

PAUL
Lizzie has a point! She's not in, I don't know, uh...she's not in THERE anymore.

BRIDGET

Let's not talk about it anymore, she won't be here this weekend, and that's very sad, but also, this is a happy occasion.

JOHN

They said you helped?

BRIDGET

Well you know your Aunt, she worries so much and she was furious with your grandmother, and I just want Kate to have a good day. This wedding is supposed to be happy. And who knows when we might get to attend another one.

CLAIRE

Oh come on-

BRIDGET

I'm just saying, there's a wedding planner in me.

LIZ

What you're saying is we better hurry up and get married.

BRIDGET

Well you two are in serious relationships! How much longer until I have a grandchild to hold?

JOHN

Jesus-

PAUL

John doesn't have anyone.

JOHN

Well this is fun.

PAUL

That should be a relief, you're young! Just gotta get you a real job first, then you'll find someone.

CLAIRE

This took a nasty turn.

LIZ

Yeah, can we just focus on the wedding we are attending tomorrow?

CLAIRE

Absolutely. Hand me a seltzer, would you?

(FRED enters. is BRIDGET's older brother. MARILYN, the matriarch of the family, follows close behind with UNCLE BEN. They have all driven together. FRED climbs the steps while UNCLE BEN helps MARILYN up.)

FRED
Anyone home?

BRIDGET
Up here!

FRED
How's everyone? Drinking already?

CLAIRE
Have to start celebrating sometime.

FRED
How's it going Lizzie? Where's Toni?

CLAIRE
She had to work late. She'll be there tomorrow.

BRIDGET *(giving him a kiss)*
Is Mom pulling up the rear?

FRED
She's moving a little slow today. Uncle Ben is helping her.

PAUL
Freddie! Say, what happened down at the mill yesterday? I heard there was a big to-do.

BRIDGET
To-do?

FRED
Oh it was fine, nothing big. John! When did you get here?

JOHN
Just this afternoon.

FRED
Well we are glad you could make it. Claire, will we see Keith tomorrow?

CLAIRE
If he can learn how to tie a tie, then yes.

FRED

Bridg, I have to warn you, before she gets up here-

(MARILYN and UNCLE BEN arrive on the deck.)

UNCLE BEN

You got it?

MARILYN

I'm fine, thank you, Ben.

BRIDGET

Hi Mom, let me take that bag for you.

CLAIRE *(giving her a kiss, then turning to UNCLE BEN)*

Hi, Grandma, watch your step.

MARILYN

Well hello Miss Ceecee, how are we?

CLAIRE

I'm good, Hi Uncle Ben.

UNCLE BEN

Hello there Claire, you look very nice. Lizzie, I like the hair cut.

LIZ *(giving him a kiss and greeting MARILYN)*

Thanks, just trying something new. Hi, Grandma.

MARILYN

Look at you! Where's your friend?

LIZ *(hesitating)*

Toni couldn't make it. She'll be around tomorrow.

PAUL

That's her girlfriend, ya know, Ma.

MARILYN

Right, right. Paul: remind me to ask you later about my gutters.

PAUL

Gutters?

MARILYN

Yes, I'm having some trouble with the, well, what would you call it...

UNCLE BEN

The drainage, I'll point it out to you. Look at this one (*indicating JOHN*) no sun whatsoever. That publication has you inside all day, huh?

JOHN

More in-field reporting now, but not much sun. Hello, Grandma.

MARILYN

John, look at you. You look horrible.

JOHN

....thank you.

BRIDGET (*welcoming UNCLE BEN*)

You're staying with Mom?

UNCLE BEN

She insisted.

BRIDGET

A full house for you tonight, Mom.

MARILYN

Hmm? Yes I guess so. Might as well fill it up while we can.

BRIDGET

What's that?

FRED

When're you guys leaving? First thing in the morning?

JOHN

If Bridget has her way, we will be on the road by 8:43AM.

FRED

Ha! Well, someone has to save seats, who knows if we will be able to get them up front! It's the wedding of the century, I hear. About time we had some good news around here.

MARILYN

Hear-hear.

(The family cheers'. The lights dim, and time seems to slow. The bullfrogs chirp. The lights shift downstage where JOHN speaks with the audience.)

JOHN

He's talking about my grandfather. My grandparents were married for sixty-two years. They have a pretty great story, actually. They started having children to fill the house they bought. My mother still tells a story about how, when they were pregnant with their third kid in under four years, they went to go tell my grandfather's parents. And when he told his mom, she yelled "can't you leave that poor woman alone!". I think it would make a really good tagline for contraception. Their marriage, much like the house they owned, was built on love and a solid foundation. My grandfather, a man of many words and even better lessons, found my grandmother and promised to love her and support her no matter what. He kept that promise to his death a few years ago, after a two year battle with MS. We had just celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary. As a gift, the entire family pitched in to send them wherever they wanted to go. I remember we walked 21 different travel pamphlets to their table, the options overflowing: Italy, London, California, Spain, the Bahamas, any number of cruises. And they picked Florida, because they knew it, and frankly, I suppose it didn't matter where they went. As long as they were together. He was diagnosed on that trip, and it's kind of incredible how quickly a group of people, no matter how connected or related they may, can come together to make the best of the worst possible situation. And yeah, our lives changed, rapidly. I can picture my grandfather and his little green walker, always shuffling towards somewhere where he would inevitably be too cold. In the end, my grandmother knelt next to his body, and she wept and I think it sort of hit us how made for each other they were. Ultimately, he had kept his promise. And there are times where my grandmother will stand at her front window, stare out and watch, as if he's in the front yard, shuffling to a sun-spot and waving just slightly. His green walker lolling off the sun, showering her in a memory she probably won't be able to shake.

(The light's shift back, the family is in the middle of a conversation. JOHN steps into it.)

CLAIRE

So Mom's going to try to do SOMETHING with the dress, although not sure what you'll be able to pull off. I can't believe the seamstress hacked away at it like she did.

FRED

Do they have you in a dress as well, Liz?

LIZ

Nope, I'll be in a suit.

MARILYN

Well, won't that be a sight.

LIZ

Right. As long as Kate is happy.

MARILYN

Are we seeing Margaret this evening, or is she already at the hotel with the young people?

JOHN (*aside to LIZ*)
We're pretty young, I thought.

LIZ (*aside to JOHN*)
Apparently not.

BRIDGET
She should be here any minute, I'm sure she's finishing up her packing.

UNCLE BEN
John, how's the paper? Any good stories to look out for from you?

JOHN
It's alright, obviously a bit more politically-minded nowadays. But I find the human interest stories have been picking up since the election.

PAUL (*scoffing*)
Fake News.

JOHN
Excuse me?

BRIDGET
Paul-

PAUL
It's not, that's not a real section of a newspaper. That's fluff, filler. The stuff you skip over.

JOHN
I have over 30,000 readers online, Dad.

PAUL
And your mother is half of them!

BRIDGET
I'm really not.

UNCLE BEN
I've seen a few of your pieces, actually, and I think it's very good writing. I particularly liked the one of the fruit cart salesperson.

CLAIRE
Fruit cart salesperson?

JOHN
It was a piece I wrote a few months back.

UNCLE BEN

It was about a guy who rolls his cart down to the docks on the east side everyday to buy fruit in bulk, then pushes that cart down to Wall Street? Right? To sell to people who are going into the banks and firms down there. His two most popular times of sale are, if I remember correctly, 8:30AM and 4:45PM.

JOHN

Good memory. When people are going to and coming from work.

UNCLE BEN

Remind me how much he makes in a day?

JOHN

Just about two-hundred dollars. Half of which he sends to his family in Nicaragua.

PAUL

Better than them coming here, I suppose.

FRED (*laughing*)

Could be worse.

BRIDGET

Don't encourage him. I think Jay's stories have taken on a life of their own. The paper wouldn't keep him around if they didn't need him.

PAUL

Wanna bet?

MARILYN (*not quite paying attention*)

And how are your kids, Miss Claire?

CLAIRE

My class is going to be good this year, I have a few bad eggs, but overall I feel really good about those coming back to me and the new kiddos I'm getting. Summer school went by so quick, I feel like I need another two weeks to recover.

MARILYN

It's a shame you have to keep kids if they struggle. You know that stems from their lives at home. Parents aren't doing nearly enough to help at home anymore.

FRED

Lizzie, you must be almost done with grad school?

LIZ

This will be my last semester, and then one more researching term. Only two more classes left.

FRED

A lot to be proud of, Bridg and Paul.

MARILYN

Are your kids reading yet, Ceecee?

CLAIRE

Some. Most will be once they leave my class.

PAUL

At least you have a real sense of how many “readers” you have.

JOHN

I appreciate that.

BRIDGET

Let’s keep it civil. Don’t let him get to you, Jay. Uncle Ben: how long will you be staying?

UNCLE BEN

I think I’ll leave right after the ceremony. Can’t stay away too long, or Scar starts to get nervous.

BRIDGET

Of course.

(A beat.)

FRED

We will miss her tomorrow. I’m sure she would’ve enjoyed herself.

UNCLE BEN

It’s probably best she stayed home. Thankfully her sister can check in, otherwise I probably wouldn’t have made it myself.

(The light’s shift, JOHN steps off the deck. Time slows down. The bullfrogs chirp. The female bullfrog emerges from the gutter at the top of the house, just above the pool skimmer. The male notices. JOHN addresses the audience.)

JOHN

My Aunt Scarlett used to love traveling. Her and Uncle Ben went everywhere, almost as many places as my grandparents. They’d have these grand adventures and she took such amazing photographs. I remember one of an egret, somewhere down south in a bay, and the egret is staring at her, it’s wings about to raise and take off. She captured that, like the egret allowed her to take a moment of it’s life. A few years ago, she started getting lost in conversation. You’d be

talking about your job, her photography, something minute or inconsequential, and suddenly she'd be gone. Then, when she'd come back, she would restart the conversation on a completely different topic. Like an actor forgetting a line and trying to cover for it, she could feel she should be talking, but didn't know about what. It was pretty clearly it was Early-Onset. When they realized this, Uncle Ben made a point to start looking at houses up here, to be closer to family. They had been alone most their lives, they didn't have any children of their own. He's a specific man, he likes what he likes, and what he doesn't he can't stand. He'll find one piece of brick out of line and decide not to bid on the house. Unfortunately, it's pretty clear that Scarlett doesn't have a ton of time to wait. I'm not supposed to know this, but my mom told me a story. A few months ago, Ben called his sister crying. Scarlett had gotten out. We aren't sure if she thought she had somewhere to be, or if there was somewhere she wanted to go, but he found the back door open and she was nowhere in the house. And all Uncle Ben could think about was their pond. See, they had this gorgeous pond on the edge of their property; not for swimming or anything like that, but just to sit next to. And his greatest fear wasn't that Scarlett would run towards the road or wander into a neighbor's house, but that she would go to the pond. And he couldn't bring himself to look there for her. I looked everywhere else, and finally she walked through the front door. Imagine: the fear that you might have to carry your wife's body out of a pond. He's the strongest person I know, because despite this fear, this everyday anxiety that she will forget how to eat or talk or swim, he reads his great-nephew's stories. He's engaged. And I can't think of anything more secure: the ability to carry on, above constant fear.

(Time resumes, the lights shift. MARGARET enters from the driveway and starts climbing the stairs. She carries a cooler.)

MARGARET *(waving like the Pope)*
How are we doing!

BRIDGET
The mother of the bride!

FRED
Looking radiant as ever!

MARGARET
Stop that now!

MARILYN
How is Katie doing?

MARGARET
Kate. She's doing great! They are doing their final sweep of the venue to make sure everything is set.

BRIDGET
Do they need /anything-/
/

MARGARET

/They're/ fine. Paul! You put on pants for this shindig?

PAUL

No guarantee for tomorrow.

LIZ

I called Kate today, she said she was looking forward to it being over. The planning has been stressful.

MARGARET (*frazzled*)

And for everything else, there's wine.

(She pulls out a bottle and gives JOHN a kiss. BRIDGET gets her a glass.)

UNCLE BEN

Margaret. Thank you for the invitation.

MARGARET

Of course. So glad you could make it.

MARILYN

Do I get a hello?

MARGARET (*not pleased*)

Hello, mother. Bridget is there any ice?

PAUL

I better get started on the burgers and dogs.

(PAUL gets up and goes to the grill and starts cooking. BRIDGET helps him with the laid out burger patties and opens a package of hotdogs.)

MARGARET

Ceecee, how's the speech?

CLAIRE

Some funny stuff, some sentimental. Pretty short, I didn't want to drone on about how much I love my cousin and think she picked the perfect guy and blahblahblah.

JOHN

Can we hear some of it?

CLAIRE

Oh, I don't think everyone wants to-

MARGARET

I won't hear it tomorrow, I plan on crying for most of the day anyways.

LIZ

Come on, Ceecee!

ALL

Let's hear it/ go ahead!/ we'd love to!

CLAIRE

Well. Alright. *(She pulls out her phone and goes to prewritten note containing her Maid of Honor toast. She clears her throat a few times. She's nervous. Everyone is silent, except for the sounds of the grill)* Hello everyone, I'm Claire. I am the maid of honor and the beautiful bride's cousin, although she is definitely more than that to me. She is like a sister to me, and one of my best friends. I've known Kate my whole life, like I said, she has been like a sister to me. Our mother's raised us together, gave us terrible haircuts together and showed us how important family truly is. Kate is always there when I need to vent about something, or need someone to take a shot with me. I looked up to her when I was younger and we grew closer and closer as time went on. So I was thrilled when she asked me to be part of her special day and be her maid of honor. She is generous, caring and so kind. Maybe sometimes, even a little too kind. But it is one of her many wonderful qualities. And even though I thought no one would ever be good enough for my cousin, her groom has met those very high expectations that the world has. I see Kate has found her protector, the love of her life, and now her husband. And I know that those who couldn't be with us today, would love and cherish the one's you two have chosen for yourselves. As I always say: "Family Over Everything." Let's all raise a glass to the happy couple. Love you guys. Cheers.

LIZ

Wow. That's really good, Ceecee.

MARGARET *(wiping tears from her eyes)*

Christ.

BRIDGET *(equally blubbing, taking her into the house)*

I'll get the tissues. Should've had them out this whole time. Come on, Claire, let's put on that dress inside and get a better look at it.

CLAIRE

Oh please, not now.

BRIDGET

Come on, we don't have a lot of time to fix whatever we need to fix.

(BRIDGET and MARGARET go into the house, followed by CLAIRE.)

JOHN
God, I'm starving.

PAUL
Gimme a few minutes. Medium Rare okay, Fred?

FRED
Works for me. Do you want any help, Paul?

PAUL
I'm good. Ben, medium rare?

UNCLE BEN
A little more well-done for me, please. How's the mill, Fred?

PAUL
Big to-do there this past week.

UNCLE BEN
That so?

FRED
It wasn't big, no, that's just word around town.

PAUL
I heard it from Mikey Donnelly, he said people were getting canned.

LIZ
Canned?

JAMES
I'm really not supposed to talk about it.

UNCLE BEN
Well can you at least tell us what happened? What they did or didn't do?

FRED
Well. Sure. Embezzlement, I think, is what they will be charged with. They were supposed to be receiving some money on creating an action group to address public outreach; when you start something big like this in such a small town, you have to create a little good faith, you see. And so the town gave this particular group of people money to start that action group, and let's just say the group was never founded.

PAUL
They took it for themselves. One of the guys bought a boat.

UNCLE BEN

My word.

PAUL

Took the whole pot, something like five million? What did that guy Peter do? He, what'd they tell me, he went out and bought shares in a casino with his portion and then the casino was revealed to be a front for money laundering! The town hasn't seen this type of scandal for a while.

FRED

That's true. But they caught them, and there will be consequences.

PAUL

Makes ya wish you had been in the group, huh?

FRED

Not after they got caught.

JOHN

Uncle Fred wouldn't do something dishonest at that.

FRED

It was a lot of money.

JOHN

What do you mean?

FRED

I mean it's tempting. I'm just glad i'm not wrapped up in it.

LIZ

That's a little crazy to me.

FRED

What is?

LIZ

That's pretty unethical.

FRED

I know, but I'm not involved.

LIZ

You said you were tempted.

PAUL

Well the town messed up, too. They didn't create any sort of, whatdya call it, oversight. So no one knew what was going on for a year. No one knew that the committee hadn't been created yet, and no one was checking in on them. Helluva lot of money to just give away. Our tax dollars at work.

MARILYN

Anyone would be. You're telling me you wouldn't take the money?

LIZ

I really don't think so. My moral compass has a pretty strong sense of direction.

PAUL

You're saying Uncle Fred's doesn't have that?

LIZ

He did just admit it would be tempting. How is that different from the guys who got caught?

FRED

This is all hypothetical. I would never, of course.

MARILYN

I think your niece is on a bit of a high horse.

PAUL

Well, maybe let's not dive into it-

LIZ

What is that supposed to mean?

MARILYN

I think your generation is quick to judge your elders.

LIZ

Well, to be fair, the people involved in this scandal are of the older generation. And it goes both ways, with the guys who took the money and the people in government who did nothing to stop them. There was no accountability.

JOHN

Lizzie, maybe let's not-

LIZ

No. No I stand by that. And the examples are sort of endless from history when it comes to the Boomers: the great depression, the 2008 financial crisis. No ethics, no accountability or oversight. Endless pointless wars! A housing market that makes it so my partner and I can't buy

property right now! Massive student debt because the OLD, WHITE, MOSTLY-MEN like profit better than the like ensuring a future for anyone fucking younger than them.

FRED
Whoa!

PAUL
Language, lizzie!

LIZ
I'd love to sit here and be schooled by the older generation, but this world is so screwed up because we gave you the keys for so long. So, forgive me, I won't be silent about corruption, whether actual or moral.

FRED
Well, like I said, I'm not involved, so this hypothetical really isn't necessary.

MARILYN
Maybe if you had a little more respect-

(CLAIRE comes out in her bridesmaid's dress, and yes, it pretty awful. PAUL and FRED turn away. UNCLE BEN is stunned. MARILYN seethes, and LIZ bursts into laughter. JOHN bites his tongue. BRIDGET and MARGARET are close behind.)

BRIDGET
Ta-da!

UNCLE BEN
It looks.....nice.

JOHN
Boy, that does need a lot of work, doesn't it.

MARGARET
This is after some work done to it.

(A beat.)

LIZ
Oh boy. Is it too late to get another dress?

CLAIRE
I should just wear a suit like you.

MARILYN
I feel very insulted, Elizabeth.

BRIDGET
What's going on?

FRED
Maybe we should put it to bed.

UNCLE BEN
This is supposed to be a joyous occasion, Marilyn.

LIZ
Well I'm sorry you feel that way.

MARILYN
That is NOT an apology.

MARGARET
What's this about?

MARILYN
That's not an apology, and I won't be disrespected like that.

LIZ
I told Grandma that the Boomer generation is irresponsible.

BRIDGET
Lizzie!

MARGARET
How did you get on that topic?

FRED
I was talking about something that happened at the mill this week.

MARGARET
The embezzlement?

FRED
How do you- how do you know about that?

BRIDGET
It's a small town.

FRED
And I mentioned that the amount of money was tempting.

JOHN

And Liz expressed surprise at the lack of moral in that.

MARILYN

When you grow up with nothing, then the opportunity to get a little money is perfectly fine to take! Money is Money! We didn't have anything growing up, we shared a big bedroom, we slept on cots, ate potatoes and hardly ever had any extravagance. I won't be lectured that I'm irresponsible, particularly when I have earned it!

(A beat. No one really knows how to respond. Finally, BRIDGET, ever the peace-keeper, speaks.)

BRIDGET

Mom, Lizzie doesn't know any better. She never would've suggested that if she knew how much you struggled.

LIZ

That's true.

MARILYN

Well, maybe next time you'll think before you speak.

(A beat.)

PAUL

Well. The food is up.

BRIDGET

Great, let's get settled.

(They all get their food. PAUL lays out burgers and hotdogs on a plate while BRIDGET gets a crudité platter unwrapped and set on the table. Everyone passes around paper plates and loads up. There's light conversation, small jokes here and there. MARGARET gets MARILYN's plate for her. MARILYN fumes, barely pokes at her food. A long beat as everyone eats. FRED notices the silence.)

FRED

Well. Cheers to love, and to a wonderful weekend ahead.

ALL

Hear-hear/cheers/etc.

CLAIRE

I can't eat in this dress, I need to change. Lizzie, can you help me with the zipper.

LIZ
I'll follow you.

(They set down their plates and head inside. More silence from the group. BRIDGET hates the silence.)

BRIDGET
Mom: you've hardly touched your food.

MARILYN
I've lost my appetite.

FRED
I'm sure Lizzie didn't mean anything by it, and she apologized, Mom.

UNCLE BEN
The girl is from a different time, Marilyn, she didn't mean to offend.

MARILYN
I'm not upset with Lizzie.

BRIDGET
Then what's wrong?

MARILYN
Nothing. Nothing at all.

MARGARET
Let's change the subject. Bridg- you confirmed with the florist for the new delivery time, right?

BRIDGET
I did this afternoon. 2pm right?

MARGARET
Yes. Kate was worried about the-

BRIDGET
The wilting, right, she mentioned.

MARGARET
...okay.

UNCLE BEN
You took care of the flowers, as well?

BRIDGET

How do you mean?

UNCLE BEN

You were in charge of flowers as well as the bridal shower? That must've been some task.

BRIDGET

I helped out where I could.

MARGARET (*defensive*)

You took care of this call, I picked them. Well, Kate and I.

BRIDGET

Right.

UNCLE BEN

Marilyn told me about some of the things you had planned at the bridal shower, Bridget, sounds like you went all out.

BRIDGET

I just wanted everyone to have a good time.

MARGARET

The venue was of course, beautiful. I looked at it last year and knew Kate needed it for her shower.

UNCLE BEN

Marilyn told me about one game about the truths and lies about Kate, I can't remember the details.

BRIDGET

Oh! Twenty truths and ten lies. Yes, that was fun.

MARGARET

Some of the facts weren't great.

BRIDGET

Well-

MARGARET

I mean, Bridal showers are meant to be more formal than just a party.

UNCLE BEN

Marilyn showed me a picture of the center pieces, they look beautiful. You designed those as well, right Bridget?

PAUL (*proud*)
She's been very busy.

BRIDGET
I want my god-daughter to have a good day.

MARGARET
Oh is that it?

BRIDGET
Of course.

MARGARET
Seems like you haven't left anything for anyone else to do.

(*CLAIRE and LIZ re-enter.*)

JOHN
Uncle Ben, did Dad tell you about the bullfrogs?

UNCLE BEN
Bullfrogs?

JOHN
There's one right next to you, actually. Under the candle?

UNCLE BEN (*lifting the candle to expose the bullfrog*)
Well! My, my, my. It lives here?

PAUL
Two do. That's the male. Well, what I assume is the male. The Female is up top there.

UNCLE BEN
They must make quite the racket.

PAUL
Like you wouldn't believe. I was actually telling John a story earlier-

MARILYN
I have something I need to say.

(*A beat.*)

MARILYN
Some. News. I have to share.

FRED

Mom, maybe not tonight.

UNCLE BEN

I think it's best, Fred. Things are moving faster than we expected.

BRIDGET

What's going on?

MARGARET

Are you sick? Jesus, is it...is it cancer?

MARILYN

Now-

BRIDGET

Oh, god!

MARGARET

It's happening again, this can't happen again.

JOHN

Grandma?

CLAIRE

Let her finish-

MARILYN

It's not cancer. I'm not sick.

BRIDGET

This is too much.

UNCLE BEN

Just tell them, Marilyn, it's okay.

FRED

I'm not sure tonight is the best time for this, Ben.

UNCLE BEN

Fred, don't start now, we had this conversation earlier-

MARGARET

What conversation?

PAUL

Someone better tell me what's going on or I'm gonna lose it.

BRIDGET

Mom!

MARILYN

Fred, your sisters deserve to know.

(A long beat. MARILYN stands, walks to the edge of the pool. She goes to bullfrog and covers him back up with the candle. She sighs deep.)

MARILYN

I've been in contact with a realtor.

BRIDGET

A realtor?

MARGARET

For who? For you?

MARILYN

Yes. She took some pictures of the house last month. And she started showing it last week.

BRIDGET

You contacted a realtor without telling us?

MARGARET

I can't believe you did this.

BRIDGET

Wait. Fred: did you know?

(A beat. FRED looks away.)

BRIDGET

Why did you keep this from us?

FRED

I didn't think anything would happen until later, I didn't expect it to be shown until after the wedding.

MARGARET

This is unbelievable.

BRIDGET
How could you!

FRED
I wasn't thinking, and you both were so busy with the wedding planning, I didn't think I should pile on.

UNCLE BEN
He wasn't supposed to know, either.

BRIDGET
So you were just going to sell the house. Without telling us.

MARILYN
No. I'm telling you now. Because I got an offer today. And i'm taking it.

(A long beat.)

FRED
You're taking it?

BRIDGET
How could you have done this? Without consulting us.

MARILYN
It's my house, dear.

FRED
Our house, Mom. Ours. We grew up there.

MARILYN
Well, you're not living there now. It is too much upkeep to maintain alone. I can't do it by myself any longer.

FRED
We can help more, we can be around more to assist with anything you need.

MARILYN
It's too late, dear, I've made up my mind.

BRIDGET
Is the offer ever any good, can we at least help with that?

UNCLE BEN
I've look it over, it's acceptable for the work that needs to be done to the house and what the inspection listed. I have advised your mother to take it, because it's the best she's going to get.

BRIDGET

I don't want some strange family living in that house. Not when we have been through as much in it. There's too much history there to just erase, like this.

MARILYN

I know how much history is there.

MARGARET

I kind of feels, Mom, like you don't care. Frankly, you're being a little callous about this.

MARILYN

Don't speak to me that way, Margaret.

LIZ

He has a point, Grandma.

JOHN

Liz, maybe don't-

LIZ

What I said earlier wasn't meant to be hurtful, but this is a big deal and it's not a bad thing to ask for help on it.

MARILYN

Your Uncle Ben has looked over the offer. I have made up my mind.

(A long beat. MARGARET fumes.)

MARGARET

Why tell us tonight?

MARILYN

I'm sorry?

MARGARET

Why the decision to tell us tonight?

MARILYN

I wanted tomorrow to be a joyous occasion, and I didn't want this hanging over my head.

MARGARET

Oh YOU didn't?

MARILYN

You deserved to know.

MARGARET

Well, now we deserve something. Isn't that great.
It seems to me that you get to determine when we deserve something and when we don't, and I'm not one-hundred percent sure that this decision isn't entirely selfish. Including telling us tonight.

MARILYN

I don't know what you mean-

MARGARET

You couldn't just let Kate have one weekend. You had to make it about you. You had to cast a big, dark shadow over all of this!

UNCLE BEN

Your mother is not trying to steal any spot light.

MARGARET *(to UNCLE BEN)*

You're not even supposed to be here! You're here because she invited you, when she didn't have any right to do so!

MARILYN

Do not speak to your Uncle like that! He's here to support Kate!

MARGARET

That's why you invited him, wasn't it? You wanted back up? So when you told us he'd be here to defend you?

MARILYN

I invited him because I don't have anyone else.

(A long beat.)

MARGARET

Well. You certainly found a way to bring the family together, Mom.

PAUL

Marilyn. You're sure this is what you want?

MARILYN

It very much is.

BRIDGET *(coming around)*

Well. We want to help now. With finding you a new place to live, and the packing and the moving-

MARGARET

Of course, Bridget has to take over now.

BRIDGET

What is that supposed to mean?

MARGARET

Anything to be in charge. You are always taking control, and suddenly you're on board? Ten seconds ago you were just as upset as I am!

BRIDGET

I'm still upset, Maggie, but i'm not just going to abandon responsibilities because of it! Mom can't do this alone.

MARGARET

You just have to take control of everything.

FRED

Oh boy.

BRIDGET

Your daughter asked for my help. She wanted me to be there.

MARGARET

We didn't need you!

BRIDGET

Without me the wedding wouldn't even be happening!

(A beat. MARGARET grabs her bag and slugs the rest of her drink.)

MARGARET

Well this has been nice. But I think I've had enough fun for one night.

BRIDGET

Maggie, don't leave.

MARGARET

I'm sorry I yelled. But I'm too mad to stay.

FRED

Why don't I...why don't I drive you home. Paul can you bring Ben and my mom back?

PAUL

Sure.

(MARGARET exits. FRED follows her.)

BRIDGET

Fred. Just make sure she knows I love her.

FRED

She knows. See you kids tomorrow.

(FRED exits.)

MARILYN

I didn't mean to upset her. To upset any of you.

BRIDGET

I don't think tonight was the best time to tell us, Mom.

MARILYN

Perhaps not.

(Another long beat. BRIDGET starts packing up the food. She carries as much as she can.)

PAUL

I can get that, Bridg.

BRIDGET

It's fine, I've got it.

(She goes to exit, turns back.)

BRIDGET

Just. Tell me it matters to you that Dad died there.

MARILYN *(not making eye contact)*

It does. And that's why I need to leave it be.

(BRIDGET exits.)

PAUL

Maybe we should get you guys home. It's an early morning.

UNCLE BEN

I'll stay, Paul. One of the girls can give me a ride back later. That okay with you, Marilyn?

MARILYN

I'll leave the front door unlocked.

CLAIRE
Grandma, can I just ask you something?

MARILYN
Of course, dear.

CLAIRE
Are you lonely?

MARILYN
No dear. I'm haunted.

(MARILYN exits.)

PAUL
Look after your mom, guys. I'll be home soon.

(PAUL exits. We hear a car start. UNCLE BEN sits, heavily. LIZ goes to him.)

LIZ
I didn't want to ask in front of everyone, but how is Aunt Scarlett? Actually?

UNCLE BEN
She's about as good as she can be, I suppose. It would be cliché to say that she has her good days and her bad days, but truly that's how it goes. Some days she remembers our wedding day, in vivid detail, and some days it's just-

(He chokes up. LIZ kneels down and puts her hand on his knee.)

UNCLE BEN
I am sorry that I couldn't tell your mother, or your uncle and aunt, about the house. Your grandmother, I believe, had their best interests at heart. But your Aunt Margaret had a point: Marilyn should've waited until after the wedding. This is too, I don't know, cloudy, now.

LIZ
I feel bad, I didn't mean to come down on the older generation-thing with her.

UNCLE BEN
I know dear. It's funny, isn't it?

CLAIRE
What's that?

UNCLE BEN
The best times in our lives, or the days that are supposed to be considered that, anyways, are never free from strife.

CLAIRE

I don't think I should include that in my speech tomorrow.

UNCLE BEN (*chuckling*)

Probably not. But you know, there's something lovely about how we can't be pulled apart, not even by the hardships. I think the reason I agreed to I help your grandmother is because I didn't want her to do it alone, no matter how much she might've wanted that. I can't stop your Aunt Scarlett's disease. She's not always there, but We wade through the parts that are tumultuous to get to more stable ground. And we will always do that together, no matter if we want to or not (*A long beat.*) I'm going to step inside and check on your mother. I imagine she needs some comfort.

(UNCLE BEN exits into the house. The three kids sit in silence for a bit. Night begins to fall. After a beat, JOHN steps forward to the audience. He crosses down the stair and circles the pool. Time speeds up, darkness landing and crickets giving their symphony. CLAIRE exits, LIZ dangles her feet into the pool. JOHN speaks to the audience.)

JOHN

There's a lot I didn't tell you. But. I heard a story once about how, when my Uncle Ben was enlisted in the army, my grandmother would sometimes just stare out their front window at the driveway. Uncle Ben was around my age, and it's crazy that he was totally selfless, completely willing to die for his country. They would find my grandmother staring out the window in silence. I imagine my grandmother was watching for her brother to stride up the driveway, suitcase in hand, hoping he was done with the fighting. But her stare was intent, so laser-focused, that it would startle anyone who would enter the room while she was at the window. I don't know what my mother is waiting for, watching for. I don't know what she expects to emerge from the horizon. One time my mother asked "what're you watching?" and my grandmother responded, "waiting on a train that's late". Sometimes I see my mother stare like that, out this back window, towards the horizon. I don't know what she's waiting for, watching for, but I'm sure it's late.

(The night is full. JOHN crosses the pool, walks up the stairs and sits next to LIZ on the pool's edge. Lights go on in the house. Time has passed.)

JOHN

Didn't think you were still here.

LIZ

I wanted to stay for a bit longer.

JOHN

Quite an afternoon.

LIZ

I'll say. I really didn't mean to upset Grandma, I feel like the blow-up was my fault.

JOHN
How would that be your fault?

LIZ
Maybe if I hadn't offered up my opinion on responsibility she wouldn't've mentioned the house.

JOHN
I think she had already made up her mind, Lizzie. I don't think you pushed her in that direction.
Don't get me wrong, you definitely pushed her, I just don't think it would've made any
difference.

LIZ
Maybe. I just hope it doesn't change Kate's day at all.

JOHN
Kate won't even know. Aunt Maggie will keep it quiet until after. She'll fume, but that's just the
way it goes.

(A beat.)

LIZ
I can't believe she's actually selling the house.

JOHN
Yeah. Crazy.

LIZ
I guess I also can't believe it means so much to everyone.

JOHN
How's that?

LIZ
We barely go over there. I understand it being a relic of their childhood and of Grandpa and
everything, but it's not like they worshipped it before she decided to sell it. It's not like she's
even there that much.

JOHN
"Don't know what ya got till it's gone".

LIZ
Well. I would hope that people would realize that's probably why she's selling it.

JOHN
Yeah.

(A long beat. LIZ take her feet out of the pool.)

JOHN

Do you think we'll ever be them?

LIZ

Who? Our parents?

JOHN

The whole of our upper-extended family, I guess.

LIZ

Do you mean will we ever fight like that?

JOHN

Will we hold onto stuff? Aunt Maggie lashing out at mom, both of them mad at Uncle Fred. Will we ever explode like they do?

LIZ

I hope not. I don't think we'll ever keep anything from each other. I won't, I mean.

JOHN

Me neither

LIZ

I think if we were to grab any piece of wisdom from our family, it's that we're stuck together. And sometimes that's a good thing, and sometimes it's not. So you'd better find a way to make it a good thing.

JOHN

We can certainly learn from mistakes, that's for sure.

LIZ

Things will settle soon, just like they always do.

JOHN

Sure.

LIZ

I gotta run. See you tomorrow.

JOHN

Love you.

LIZ

Love you too.

(LIZ exits. JOHN sits for a while. Eventually, a single chirp is heard, and then another. The male bullfrog emerges from the citronella candle. He chirps a number of times, and begins to hop to the edge of the pool. He croaks, a low rumble, not quite a chirp, not quite thunder. Suddenly, the female bullfrog appears, and slides down the pool skimmer towards the edge of the pool. Slowly, but deliberately, they move to each other. Their croaks now an orchestra, back and forth, a ballet of sounds. JOHN watches as they end up just feet apart. He speaks to them.)

JOHN

Maybe you're not partners. Maybe you're family. Maybe you hate each other, maybe you love each other. Maybe you can't figure out what you mean to each other yet, but I think you will one day. But I don't think you'd do this every night if you didn't want to. I don't think you'd be together if you didn't mean at least something to each other. And maybe some nights are harder than others. But you're here now.

(Lights go down on JOHN and the bullfrogs, and the light from the house goes out. CLAIRE steps out to the front of the stage, wearing her bridesmaid's dress and holding a flute of champagne. It's the next day at the wedding. She is at the end of her speech.)

CLAIRE

I see Kate has found her protector, the love of her life, and now her husband. And I know that those who couldn't be with us today, would love and cherish the one's you two have chosen for yourselves. As I always say: "Family Over Everything." (She pauses, going off her speech for a second) I've seen in the last day just how much this family loves each other. How committed they are. How important we all are, and how we can't do this, any of this, alone. And while it might not always be pretty, it might not always have the best outcome, we keep coming back. We keep loving. Because it's all we can do. Cheers.

(End of play.)