

The Loon Cries at Night

By Jake Alexander

CHARACTERS

JUNE, Black, early-thirties, female-identifying. Was previously married to CJ's grandson.
CJ, White, mid-nineties, male-identifying. Is suffering from a terminal disease

SETTING: a small beach bungalow located just outside of Sag Harbor, NY, on Noyak Bay. Late Summer.

(Lights up. The back, screened-in porch of the bungalow. It furnished in whicker furniture, and an old, worn, wooden dining table off to one side. There is one single lightbulb hanging above the table. French doors leading into the rest of the cabin (bedrooms, bathroom, kitchen). Steps lead down to the backyard, and the shoreline of the beach. We hear waves lapping, slowly. CJ sits in a wheelchair, his legs covered in an old afghan, a heavy sweater despite the heat. JUNE sits on one of the whicker chairs, uncomfortably. Two suitcases idle nearby. JUNE's knee bounces anxiously. CJ stares out at the water. Suddenly, a single seagull cries above. JUNE launches into a diatribe.)

JUNE

Work has been okay, all things considering. Weird, but nice. I'm happy to be back. But, you know, people keep coming up to my cubicle- I work, I think I told you, I work for a firm. It's a marketing- a pretty big one, actually, a marketing agency. A firm. It's both, really, a firm and an agency. I kind of go back and forth on what I call it, I guess I don't really know the difference.

Most people don't, I think, I'm not sure. *(A beat.)* Anyways. People keep coming up to my cubicle and sort of knocking and saying "How *are* You?" Just like that, emphasis on the "are".

Like they won't believe me if they asked without making it clear they really, really want to know. And that's been weird. But otherwise, work is fine. I have this client, I'm not sure if I mentioned him, he works for a dishwashing soap company, he's their managing director, his name is Dave, and he is going through a divorce and he keeps trying to like, relate to me. My coworkers think he's flirting with me. But he keeps trying to equate the two things, he keeps saying to me "it's like losing a limb, right?". As if I'm going to say "exactly! Like losing an arm or leg!" He doesn't get it. Most people don't get it. I appreciate what they have to say, that they have sympathy at all, I guess, but. Still. *(A beat.)* Rebecca mentioned you've been out here since Memorial Day, that must've been nice. Has it been nice? *(CJ looks over at her and stares)* She made it sound nice. Rebecca. She's been so good, sending flowers and cookies and groceries and all these things. Did I tell you about the candle she sent? It was from Hawaii. Where we had our honeymoon. I don't know where she got it from. Etsy maybe. Do you know Etsy? *(A beat, CJ doesn't respond.)* Well, it's a great website. You can order from all of these artisanal and independently-owned artists that can sell their stuff, really get their name out there. That's huge for them. I think she, Rebecca, got the candle on Etsy. I should've brought it, you could've smelled it. *(A beat.)* Smelled is a funny word. *(A beat. She chuckles. Then back to awkward.)* Rebecca says your doctors like the look of your last CAT scan. That's good. And you're up and about. Did you have anyone out here for Memorial Day? Aunt Sue and Uncle Tim, maybe? They're always a good time. So welcoming. I remember the first year we came out here, they

were passing the red wine like it was going to be taken from them. What does Uncle Tim always say? Like it's going out of style? The red wine was going out of style. Hmm. How are they? (*A beat. CJ doesn't answer, just stares.*) They're very kind. Always so nice to me, so welcoming. Which, you know, you don't expect given the- anyways. Do you like your doctors? Are they nice to you? That seems like a good hospital, out there in Ronkonkoma. I was sorry I couldn't visit you while you were in. It's hard getting out of the city, especially now. Hard to get out socially too. My friends keep telling me to get out there, meet someone, take up a hobby, but I don't know. It feels too soon. Too real, you know? Like I'm suddenly going to gain consciousness and burst into tears sitting at some bar. Which I have done before, just not under these circumstances. You ever feel like that? Like you're going to just wake up even when you're already awake? One time, this was back in college, I took a hit of a bong and I swore I was dreaming the entire time. I was wondering around the dorm just pinching other people, trying to wake up. I was awake the whole time. (*A beat.*) That was an inappropriate story. I'm sorry I told you that. You don't care about that. (*A beat.*) I really was sorry I couldn't visit you in the hospital. I wanted to be there for you.

(A beat. CJ inhales, then speaks, finally.)

CJ

What kind of fish are you?

JUNE

I'm sorry?

CJ

I asked what kind of fish you are.

JUNE

Mr. Robertson, I don't understand-

CJ

CJ is fine.

JUNE

Okay. CJ, I don't understand.

CJ

I asked what kind of fish you are.

JUNE

Is this some sort of riddle-?

CJ

You kept talking, I thought you'd never come up for air. So, I'm curious what kind of fish you are.

JUNE

Oh. (*A long beat.*) Sorry. I guess I'm just nervous. (*Another long beat.*) This is stupid, I shouldn't be here. Rebecca was desperate, she said, she needed someone to sit with you, but you're really fine, and she said it would only take a little while. She said she'd be right back.

CJ

It was a work thing.

JUNE

What's that?

CJ

She got called in for a work emergency.

JUNE

Yes. That's what she said, anyways.

CJ

Those never take "a little while".

JUNE

You seem fine. Really. You don't need me here, right? And more importantly, you clearly don't want me here.

CJ

I really couldn't care less either way.

JUNE

Right. Exactly. So. I'm just gonna go. I'll call your daughter.

(JUNE begins collecting her things, gets up to leave.)

CJ

Why do you have so many bags?

JUNE

It's only two.

CJ

That's a lot.

JUNE

It's really not.

CJ

Why do you have so many?

JUNE
I'm going away tonight.

CJ
Where to?

JUNE
Tahoe.

CJ
The lake?

JUNE
Yes. Yes, Lake Tahoe.

CJ
Why?

JUNE
Rebecca said you wouldn't talk much.

CJ
You talked enough for the two of us, it's my turn. Why Lake Tahoe?

JUNE
I thought it would be a nice place to- just. A little escape. For a little while.

CJ
Away from the city?

JUNE
Exactly.

CJ
A nice place for what?

JUNE
To get away from the city.

CJ
No. You said that after, but you started to say that it was a nice place for something. For what?

JUNE
It doesn't matter.

CJ

You're going to scatter him up there aren't you?

(A beat. JUNE looks down at the floor. The seagull cries.)

CJ

Horrible place to scatter ashes.

JUNE

Why?

CJ

Too windy. There's a chance he'll end up in Vegas.

JUNE

I was reading online-

CJ

Right.

JUNE

I was reading online that it was nice. I think he would've liked it there.

CJ

Who gives a shit what he wouldn't like, he ain't here anymore.

JUNE

Right.

(JUNE turns away from CJ. She begins to cry, softly. It's hard to tell why. CJ notices, but clearly doesn't care.)

CJ

I'm not going to comfort you.

JUNE

No, no, it's nothing, just some sand in my eye.

CJ

Right. Anyways, my daughter would be pretty pissed if you left me here alone. I could have a fall.

JUNE

Can't you not get out of the wheelchair by yourself?

CJ

I'm a mystery.

(A beat. JUNE sits back down.)

JUNE
I'll stay until she gets back.

CJ
Okay.

JUNE
Are you hungry at all?

CJ
Nope.

JUNE
Why did you say that?

CJ
I'm not hungry, is all.

JUNE
No, I mean. Before. You said you weren't going to comfort me.

CJ
Yeah?

JUNE
Why not? Don't I deserve some comfort?

CJ
I'm not one to say.

JUNE
So why not comfort me?

CJ
Because look at me, kid. I'm the one who deserves comfort. I'm stuck like this. Going nowhere,
and fast.

(A beat.)

JUNE
Right.

(Lights down. The seagull cries. Lights up. Later on in the day. JUNE sits alone on the same seat. CJ is elsewhere in the cabin. She stands, moves around the space, looking at the shoreline. She doesn't speak. Suddenly, we hear a crash in the other room. JUNE turns quickly, rushes through the doors. We hear "How did that happen?" and "Are you alright" and a lot of struggling on the other end. Soon, JUNE pushes CJ's wheelchair through the doors and locks it in place. He's holding a bloody napkin to the bridge of his nose. JUNE is flustered.)

JUNE

Sit right there, don't move. Let me get some ice.

CJ

I don't need any ice.

JUNE

You fell right on your face!

CJ

Leave me alone.

JUNE

Mr. Robertson, you could've been really hurt.

CJ

I am really hurt, I just don't need any ice.

JUNE

Tilt your head back, so the blood doesn't land all over your shirt. Let me grab some more tissues

(She exits into the house.)

CJ

Don't worry about it.

JUNE *(inside)*

What on earth were you doing?!

CJ

I needed to piss.

JUNE *(inside)*

I could've helped you.

CJ

Right.

(She returns with more tissues.)

JUNE *(handing him the tissues)*
You're not supposed to get out of the wheelchair alone.

CJ
And you were afraid I couldn't do it.

JUNE
I was positive you couldn't do it, and look what happened.

CJ
I'm fine.

JUNE *(fishing her phone out of her bag)*
I have to call Rebecca.

CJ
Christ, no-

JUNE
If I don't, and she sees you like this

CJ
I said don't do that!

JUNE
I have to, I told her I'd call if anything happened.

CJ
Look at me.

JUNE
Exactly, look at you!

CJ *(staring at her)*
No, I mean. Look at me.

JUNE *(turning to face him)*
What?

CJ
I'm fine. It's all fine.

JUNE
I feel like I should still call.

CJ
Don't call her, she's just gonna race back here, driving all dangerously, all for nothing.

JUNE
It's not nothing, Mr. Robertson. You fell! I'm calling Rebecca.

CJ
Oh, shit, you did it.

JUNE
Did what?

CJ
You said her name three times. Whenever something happens with blood if you say her names three times-

JUNE
So?

CJ
You'll see.

JUNE
I don't remember you being superstitious.

CJ (*tilting his head back*)
Just good sense. Wait for it.

JUNE
Wait for what?

CJ
It's coming.

(JUNE's phone begins to buzz. She looks down, sees it's Rebecca calling.)

JUNE
It's her.

CJ
I know it's her.

JUNE
Okay, well. I have to pick up.

CJ
Just don't tell her.

JUNE
I've got to tell her you fell, Mr. Robertson. Please.

CJ
Call me CJ.

JUNE (*picking up phone call*)
Hello? Hi, yeah- Hey, Rebecca. How's work? (*A pause.*) Oh, yeah? Okay, sure. Sure, no I can do that. Sorry you're going through- What? No, it's no problem. No rush out or anything, I can get the next flight. You're okay though? (*A pause.*) Mhm. Mhm. How're we? (*She looks over at CJ who pleads with his eyes.*) We're fine. Just hanging on porch, watching the waves. (*A pause.*)
Nope. No problems. (*A pause.*) Oh. (*A long pause.*) No, I can do that. Sure. Oh, don't you apologize. Everything's fine. Really. You do what you have to do. I'll be here. Sure, sure. Call me in the morning. Yup. (*A pause. She looks away, muffles her voice.*) Yup. Yup, I appreciate it. Yes- thanks- thank you. Yup. (*A beat.*) Love you too. Okay. Bye-bye.

(*A beat. She hangs up the phone, turns back to CJ.*)

JUNE
How did you-?

CJ
It happens anytime there's blood. Or sometimes just randomly.

JUNE
She's going to be there all night.

CJ
Oh.

JUNE
So. I'm going to stay. If that's okay.

(*A beat. CJ looks away.*)

CJ
Better get comfortable, then.

(*They sit in silence. JUNE stares out at the water. CJ balls up the bloodied tissues, places them on the dining table. No one speaks for a very long time. Finally:*)

CJ
You feel weird doing that?

JUNE
Doing what?

CJ
Saying "I love you" to her?

JUNE
Who?

CJ
You're not gonna get me to say her name.

JUNE
To Reb- to your daughter?

CJ
Yeah.

JUNE
No. Why would you say that?

CJ
You lowered your voice. Got all quiet.

JUNE
I guess I- no, no, I don't feel weird saying "I Love You" to her.

CJ
You know what my father used to say to us kids growing up?

JUNE
You change the subject very quickly.

CJ
You know what he used to say?

JUNE
What's that?

CJ
That no one has ever had more fun lying than they have telling the truth.

(A beat. They sit in silence for a while longer.)

JUNE

Why would I feel weird about saying it to Rebecca?

CJ

Well, I guess there's a number of possible reasons but I think because you're not really a member of this family anymore.

JUNE *(stunned)*

Excuse me.

CJ

Not legally, anyways.

JUNE

I'm not family?

CJ

Are you married to a member of this family anymore?

JUNE

Not technically, but I was-

CJ

See when you start to bring technicality into the whole thing, that's when you know.

JUNE

Family's aren't just about who you share blood with or who you're related to!

CJ

Okay, well do you **feel** like a member of this family?

(A beat.)

JUNE

So you think I should feel weird about saying I Love You to Rebecca when I'm not related to her.

CJ

I didn't say you should, I asked if you did.

JUNE

Well. I don't.

CJ
Alright then.

(A beat. More silence.)

JUNE
That bothered me.

CJ
Well. Sorry for you.

JUNE
That's not a real apology.

CJ
At my age, you don't give apologies anymore. You're allowed to say anything you want.

JUNE
That's bullshit.

CJ
Nice mouth!

JUNE
You just said I wasn't a part of the family.

CJ
Girl, you got it wrong. I didn't say you weren't a part of the family, I said you weren't a part of the family *legally*. All I was asking was if you felt weird saying "I Love You" to her.

JUNE
Don't call me girl.

CJ
Don't do that.

JUNE
Do what?

CJ
Make it a race-thing.

JUNE
I wasn't!

CJ

Yeah, you're implying that I only call colored folks "girl" or "thug".

JUNE

Mr. Robertson!

CJ

CJ is fine.

JUNE

I wasn't making it a "race-thing" or whatever. I have a name is all.

CJ

It's a nice one.

(A beat.)

JUNE

Do you remember it?

CJ

Is this some sort of test?

JUNE

No, but you haven't said it since I've been here.

CJ

It's June. It's very pretty. He liked you for your name, you know.

JUNE

I'm sure there were other reasons, too.

CJ

Maybe. Who knows?

JUNE

And I said I don't.

CJ

Don't what?

JUNE

Feel weird or bad. Saying "I love you" to you or to Rebecca.

CJ

Look who's changing the subject on a dime now.

JUNE
Because I do love you both.

(A beat. CJ doesn't look at her.)

CJ
Then that's that. *(Silence)* What did he used to call you?

JUNE
I'm sorry?

CJ
There was some nickname. Something he'd call you. Something funny.

JUNE *(lying)*
I don't remember.

CJ *(turning to her)*
You keep trying to make lying fun, but it's never gonna be.

JUNE
Cj-

CJ
It's on the tip of my tongue, what on earth was it?

(A beat. JUNE moves on.)

JUNE
How's your nose?

CJ
I'll live.

JUNE
Do you need more tissues?

CJ
Think the bleeding has stopped for now.

JUNE
Good. *(Silence)* It was Junebug. He'd call me Junebug.

CJ
That's right. That's right.

(The sit in silence for a few minutes. Lights fade down. The seagull cries. Lights come back up, a little while later. The suitcases have been moved into the house. JUNE is elsewhere inside the bungalow. CJ sits at the dining table, in a new shirt, one that isn't blood-stained. He uses a pair of binoculars to look out at the shoreline. He puts the binoculars down, picks a book on birds which sits on the table. He flips through, checks the binoculars again to make sure that's the right bird. After a minute, JUNE re-enters with two plates of sandwiches. She places one down on the table, and another on the whicker chair.)

JUNE

Here you are. There wasn't much in fridge so I made due with what you had.

CJ *(looking a sandwich with distaste)*

What is this?

JUNE

It's turkey on rye with mustard and tomato.

CJ

Don't think there was rye in there.

JUNE

Turkey on something. It's good, I promise.

CJ

You still mad at me?

JUNE

Why would I be mad?

CJ

For what I said before.

JUNE

Mr. Robertson-

CJ

CJ is fine.

JUNE

CJ, let's just move on.

CJ

I'm not asking because I'm still thinking about it. I'm asking because I'm trying gauge how much you'd want to kill me with this sandwich.

JUNE

It turkey on bread with mustard and a tomato from your own garden. Nothing more, I promise.

(She exits back into the house. CJ eyes the sandwich, looks inside the bread. He sniffs it, takes a small bite. Surprisingly, he likes it. He continues to eat it. JUNE re-enters with a bag of chips.)

JUNE

My mom always said you can't have a sandwich without a bag of chips. These are *(looking at the bag)* Salt and vinegar. I hope you like these. Do you like these? I can check for more.

CJ

If they're in the kitchen, I like them.

JUNE

Great. Lemme just-

(She exits again into the bungalow. CJ tries to rip open the bag of chips, can't do with his hands. He wipes them on his shirt, tries again. Still won't open. He uses his teeth, making a massive hole in the side of the bag of chips. He takes one out, eats it. JUNE returns with a couple glasses of water.)

JUNE *(placing the cup on the table)*

I couldn't find any straws, is that going to be okay?

CJ

I can lift my arms, I'm not bed-ridden.

JUNE *(beginning to exit)*

Let me grab you a napkin-

CJ

Would you sit down and eat your damn sandwich? You're driving me crazy, running around like that-

JUNE *(embarrassed)*

Sorry. I haven't made lunch for anyone in awhile. *(sees the bag of chips)* Did you open these with shears from the garden?

CJ

I got thirty-two perfectly good shears right here in my mouth.

(She sits back down on the whicker chair and stares at CJ. After a few beats, he sees her, noticing. She doesn't stop staring.)

CJ
What?

JUNE
Nothing.

CJ
Why're you looking at me like that.

JUNE
Is it good?

CJ
Is what good??

JUNE
The sandwich.

CJ
I already took a bite. (*showing her the sandwich*) See? Stop staring, you look like a monkey.

JUNE
That's offensive.

CJ
What is?

JUNE
Calling me a monkey.

CJ
Why?

JUNE
It's been historically associated with people of color, and was used as a slur-

CJ
Oh would you let the race stuff go already? I meant because you're watching me eat. How about a dog? You look like a dog. Is that better?

JUNE
I mean, not really.

CJ
Stop staring at me and eat your sandwich.

JUNE
Fine.

(JUNE eats her sandwich quietly. She stares out at the shoreline. They both eat in silence for a few moments. After a minute, JUNE points out to the bay.)

JUNE
That's a cormorant, right?

CJ
Hmm?

JUNE
Out a few yards, the bird that's diving.

CJ
Yes. They come around a lot out here.

JUNE
My dad taught me about those. They eat small fish.

CJ
That's right. You know, sometimes we confuse them with eels out here. We got a lot of eels in these waters, and sometimes they pop their heads up, just like that. The difference is in the snouts, cormorant have their, you know, their beak. And the eels are rounded, less, whatyacallit, pointy at the end there. We used to go eel fishing, James and I. He'd come out and we would go out at night, not too late, but dark enough they can't see you coming. And you drop a light down there, on the wire, see, and you can see them slipping around. The water's gotta be calm, you can't see them otherwise, so the night works best, no wake or pull or nothing. So you throw the light down and then you kind of drop the line in smooth, so it's not obvious. And you don't want the line to get into the light otherwise it'll cast a shadow down and the eels will see it. We use nightcrawlers, those big worms you get? There's a guy a few doors down who gets me a tub at the tackle shop in town. Or, he used to. So you ease the line in and *(makes a popping noise with his mouth)* as soon as you got a bite, you each got pull the line up, but you gotta be careful not to let the line tear and rip. Eels are nasty fighters. We smoked 'em one summer. Lots of little bones. You just got to pick those out. But tasty. The trick is to dry them out.

JUNE
Was James any good at it?

CJ
No. He wasn't good at it. He made too much noise on the water, couldn't figure out how to stay silent.

(A beat. JUNE looks out at the cormorant.)

CJ (*pointing at the bird*)
He's got something.

JUNE (*wanting to keep talking about him*)
I don't think I ever saw James fish.

CJ
Your dad a fisherman?

JUNE
Uhm, no. Not that I know of.

CJ
Even down in Louisiana? No shrimp fishing?

JUNE
No- Louisiana? No, he lives up in Massachusetts.

CJ
Your folks moved?

JUNE
No. We've always been from Massachusetts.

CJ
Huh. Guess I forgot.

JUNE
Did you know someone else from Louisiana that you confused me for?

CJ
Nope. Just you.

JUNE
But I'm not from there.

CJ
Right. I'm old. I just forgot.

(*A beat.*)

CJ (*pointing back out to the bird*)
He's got something else out there now. Looks bigger. (*He takes a bite of his sandwich*) It is a good sandwich.

JUNE (*getting up, uncomfortably*)

I'm gonna grab some more water, do you want anything?

CJ

Say, there should be a bottle of red wine in the fridge. Grab me a small glass of that would ya?

JUNE

Oh. I'm not sure- can you take that with the pills your on?

CJ

Just a small glass. She doesn't need to know. Get some for yourself if you want.

JUNE

Okay?

(JUNE exits into the house. CJ keeps eating his sandwich, watching the bird. The seagull cries. JUNE re-enters with a small glass of red wine.)

JUNE

What is this stuff?

CJ

It's good, just drink it.

JUNE *(reading the label)*

Manischewitz?

CJ

Those Pollocks know how to make a red wine.

JUNE

I don't know if it's polish-

CJ

I buy a bottle of this every year. Gets me from January first all the way through Christmas.

JUNE

What do you do from the twenty-sixth to the thirty-first?

CJ

Sleep, usually.

(A beat. They smile at each other.)

JUNE

Are you sure you can take this with your medication?

CJ

Would you relax? What's gonna happen to me? The end'll just come quicker.

JUNE

Okay.

(A beat. They listen to the waves on the beach.)

CJ

It was another of James' girlfriends. I think her name was May, she was from Louisiana. I got you two mixed up.

JUNE

Oh.

CJ

Nice black girl, her daddy was a shrimper. Down there in the Bayou. She brought me some once.
(*Silence*) That boy had a type.

JUNE (*about to be offended*)

What do you mean-

CJ

Girl who were named after months in the year.

JUNE

Well. I wasn't just one of his girlfriends.

CJ

What's that?

JUNE

Nevermind.

(*A beat.*)

CJ

High tide's coming in.

JUNE

We got married, you know.

CJ

What're you talking about? Of course I know you were married.

JUNE

Well to get me confused with a girl he used to date is a little-

CJ

Why're you always looking to be offended by something?

JUNE

I'm not!

CJ

I got confused is all. Think the red wine is getting to my head already.

JUNE

Well then eat more of your sandwich.

(A beat. They chew.)

JUNE

I don't remember you drinking at the wedding.

CJ

What wedding?

JUNE

Mine. Ours.

CJ

When was that?

JUNE

Three years ago, October.

CJ

Right.

JUNE

There you go again! Do you not remember?

CJ

No, I do.

JUNE

We came out here the night before.

CJ

I remember, I remember.

JUNE

I just don't remember you drinking then.

CJ

Everyone else was doing enough drinking to cover me.

JUNE

Sure.

CJ

Open bars. A stain on weddings.

JUNE

You think?

CJ

Used to be, small dinner the night before, usually at the parent's of the bride's home, just the couple and the immediate family. Dad's would make a toast. You'd have champagne, *only*.

None of this beer, wine, mixed cocktail shit. Then the wedding you were going to church, couldn't be blasted then! Of course there's the reception, but that was at some local hall, and they'd serve wine with dinner. Maybe a scotch or spritzer. But none of this manhattan-tom-collins-gin-and-whatever shit.

JUNE

I wish you had said something, we would have pulled back on the alcohol if we had known-

CJ

What's my opinion got to do with it?

JUNE

You were hosting. Paying for some of the reception.

CJ

If you consider Rebecca and Tom got most of their money from me, I paid for all of it, Junebug.

(A beat. JUNE wipes an eye.)

JUNE

Please don't call me that.

CJ

Why?

JUNE

No one has called me that in a while.

CJ

James used to. I remember that. He did in his vows.

JUNE

That's right. I guess it just makes me uncomfortable.

CJ

Well. Alright.

(A beat. CJ sighs.)

CJ

Anyways. Open bars. Killing the average American. Country can't go a day without getting drunk. Don't know what they're staving off; nothing's that painful that you gotta be numb to it 24/7.

JUNE

You're drinking right now.

CJ

I'm at the end of my life. Numbness is all I got.

JUNE

You're very cavalier about it.

CJ

About what?

JUNE

Death. Being at the end of your life.

CJ

My mother used to say "the truth is gonna bite you eventually, might as well hold out your hand."

(A beat.)

JUNE

Your parents had a lot of one-liners.

CJ

Three years ago-October was when I was first diagnosed. I had just started chemo, I couldn't keep anything done. Guess you also didn't notice that I wasn't eating either.

JUNE

I didn't.

CJ

Well you were pretty sauced.

JUNE

Hey!

CJ

No harm, it was your day. Everyone deserves a little something on their day.

JUNE

I wasn't the only one. You can blame James for that.

CJ

That's true. He looked a little funny on that dance floor. (*A beat.*) He looked good in a tux, I'll say that. I'm not being, you know, all fruity or whatever, but he wore a suit like my father did.

JUNE

What was he like?

CJ

Nothing like me.

JUNE

How so?

CJ

Well, the sonofabitch was racist as hell, I'll tell ya that.

JUNE

Okay.

CJ

Hard-headed. Quiet. Was a worker though. Steel engines, he worked in a factory out here. One of the first. The man practically built the Long Island Railroad, God rest his soul. (*A beat. He goes somewhere else*) He had this knack for, I don't know. Caring. His hands were always soft, even though he worked them day in and day out. He would, you know, come home and give my mother a kiss on the cheek and rustle our heads, and his hands wouldn't feel rough. He was quiet, he stewed, you know, but he loved us. He would, ya know, he'd hit us, he'd be the one we were in trouble with. Our mother would always be saying "your father's gonna hear about this!" and that got us all scared. Used to hide from him when he'd get home. But no matter what, end of the night, he'd come into the bedroom off here, and he'd rustle our heads, never gave us kisses, and his soft hand would rest down. He was saying he loved us. Just like that, with his hands. Soft hands. That's what I remember.

(A beat.)

JUNE

That's really nice. Did James ever get to meet him?

CJ

Maybe, who knows. The bastard passed I don't know how many years ago.

(They are silent for awhile.)

CJ

Your folk's okay?

JUNE

They're fine.

CJ

They know you're going out to Vegas?

JUNE

Tahoe. And yeah, I told my mother.

CJ

She didn't want to go with ya?

JUNE

I thought. I mean, I felt. This was something to do alone, you know?

CJ (looking at her for the first time in awhile)

No one should be alone too long.

JUNE

You may be right.

(CJ downs his wine, and holds out his glass.)

CJ

Get me another one, would ya?

JUNE

You sure you're up to it?

CJ

Makes me feel warm. Come on now.

JUNE (getting up, taking his glass)

All right.

(JUNE exits into the house. CJ sits, picks up the binoculars again. He watches a group of birds on the edge of the shore for a while. He puts the binoculars down, and opens the book on birds, he reads. JUNE re-enters with both their glasses refilled.)

JUNE
See another one?

CJ
Hmm?

JUNE
Is there another bird?

CJ
Piping Plovers. They usually come this time of day. *(pointing)* See them there?

JUNE
Those little ones?

CJ
They travel in packs, see. Endangered. Living like they know it, too. See how they move around so quickly? Don't wanna get in the sights of a predator. *(He reads from the book, holding it far away from his eyes)* "From March through October, the shores of the Long Island Sound are home to the federally threatened Atlantic Coast Piping Plover (or Chara-dri-us melod-us) population. After spending the winter in the southeastern US and Caribbean, piping plovers migrate north, establish territories, and nest on flat, open areas of the beach. They lay eggs directly on the sand in shallow scrapes and males and females take turns incubating the eggs."
(he puts down the book and looks out at the birds.) Must be nice!

JUNE
What's that?

CJ
Going down to the Caribbean for mating.

JUNE
Have you ever been.

CJ
Once. On a cruise.

JUNE
What's it like?

CJ

Keep it down, you'll scare away the birds!

JUNE

Sorry.

(A beat. They watch the birds.)

CJ

They're looking for little crabs, snails. They drill these little holes in the sand right at high tide, when the shellfish don't know any better. And these guys hunt in packs. They come swooping in all together, low-like, so they aren't detected. Not like gulls or osprey, swooping down, making all sort of noise. These guys are silent. See? Watch them! Watch them go. Beautiful birds.

JUNE

You like them.

CJ

They're quiet. They work together. It's nice.

JUNE

So. You've been?

CJ

On a cruise. With Patty.

JUNE

Ah. For your honeymoon?

CJ

Who can remember?

JUNE

I figured you'd know-

CJ

It was the Caribbean! It was nice. Hot as hell, we didn't leave the pool. Patty looked good in bathing suit. Honestly think it was the only reason we kept this place.

JUNE

Ew.

CJ

Hey, you've seen pictures!

JUNE

All right, old man.

CJ

Now you're getting it. Watch the birds.

(A beat.)

JUNE

Do you miss her?

CJ

Who?

JUNE

Your wife?

CJ

Sure.

JUNE

Just sure?

CJ

Sure. She'd hate what I'd be doing to the family.

JUNE

What's that?

CJ

Making them take care of me like this. Ridiculous.

JUNE

I'm pretty sure it's against your will.

CJ

Yeah, but all the same.

JUNE

I think we have that in common.

CJ

What's that?

JUNE

Lost partners.

CJ

You can't compare, girl.

JUNE

What's that supposed to mean?

CJ

I had Patty for forty-three years. You had James for two.

JUNE

Longer than that.

CJ

What's that?

JUNE

We dated. We were together for- you know, longer than that.

CJ

Was it for forty-one years?

JUNE

Don't do that-

CJ

Then don't compare them.

JUNE

I'm not suggesting-

CJ

You can't come in here all mopey, making it out like you miss your dead boyfriend more than I miss my long-gone wife of forty-three years.

JUNE

That dead "boyfriend" was my husband.

CJ (angry)

And Patty was my wife!

JUNE

And when I asked if you missed her you said "sure".

CJ

So?

JUNE

When I asked whether you went on the cruise for your honeymoon you said “who can remember”.

CJ

What’s your point, girl?

JUNE

The fucking picture is on your nightstand. You two standing in your wedding clothes on the fucking boat. You can’t remember that?

CJ

What’re you doing in my bedroom? That’s private.

JUNE

I’m looking after you.

CJ

And you’re doing a hell of a job.

JUNE

You keep calling James my boyfriend, he was my husband. Everytime you do-

CJ

What in what way have I wronged you now?

JUNE

You’re diminishing what time we had together.

CJ

Which was less than what Patty and I had!

JUNE

Why does that matter? A marriage is a marriage.

CJ

It ain’t.

JUNE

Why not?

CJ

Because two years again forty-three. You can’t build anything in two years.

JUNE

We did!

CJ

Dis you have kids?

JUNE

Why would you ask that?

CJ

That's building something. That's a foundation.

JUNE

You couldn't even remember your honeymoon.

CJ

I can't remember a lot of stuff that I'm "supposed" to remember.

JUNE

So how meaningful was your marriage then?

CJ

You better watch yourself.

JUNE

I don't think I will. You have no idea how horrible it is to be trapped in knowing what you missed out on with your partner. The person you thought you'd spend the rest of your life with.

(A beat.) I was wrong before, we don't have that in common. You got a full, happy life with Patty. I got robbed. I was fucking robbed. And the worst possible thing you could say to a person in my shoes right now is that I should forget about what I had because I didn't have it for as long as you did. I may never have it. And I'm fucking haunted by that every day. I'm trapped in knowing what I had with James, and what we could've been. You can't even appreciate the time you had with Patty. Can you tell me any memory that shows me how important she was to you? Huh? (Silence. He does not answer.) That's what I fucking thought. You and I have nothing in common.

(A beat. He's silent. They don't speak for awhile. JUNE finishes her wine, exits into the house. CJ sits alone. A seagull cries above. Some time later, the sun is setting. CJ snores in his wheelchair, having fallen asleep. JUNE re-enters, her glass of wine full again. She sees him asleep, takes a blanket off of the whicker couch and lays it over him. She places her glass of wine on the table and cleans up from this afternoon. She exits with dirty dishes back into the house. CJ snorts himself awake. He looks around, sees the blanket laid on him. He sees the full glass of wine in front of him, takes a sip from it. JUNE re-enters.)

JUNE

You're awake.

CJ

I don't need the blanket.

JUNE

Well you had fallen asleep and I didn't want you to get cold. Are you drinking my wine?

CJ

It's mine now.

JUNE

Fine.

CJ

Get another glass.

JUNE

It's fine. Whatever.

CJ

Why's that always the way it's gotta go with you people?

JUNE (*exasperated*)

What people?

CJ

Millennials or whatever you call yourselves these days. You always gotta say "whatever" at the end of a sentence. Like getting the last word is more important than moving on.

JUNE

I'm not getting the last word!

CJ

You just did it again!

JUNE

I didn't!

CJ

Keep going!

(JUNE stews in furiousness. CJ chuckles to himself.)

CJ

What's for dinner?

JUNE

I don't know.

CJ

You're sort of in charge around here, you should probably think about it.

JUNE

Are you hungry yet?

CJ

We just ate lunch!

JUNE

Well neither am I!

(A beat.)

CJ

You're too easy.

JUNE

Excuse me?

CJ

To get under your skin, it's too easy. Ya gotta let stuff roll off your chest.

JUNE

Why is it your generation is always telling us to get over stuff? Why are we the ones who have to move on if we get pissed off?

CJ

Pissed off?

JUNE

Yeah!

CJ

I pissed you off?

JUNE

Very much so.

CJ

Well. Good. You deserve to be mad.

JUNE

I do?

CJ

It's the first reasonable emotion you've shown since you got here.

(A beat.)

JUNE

I'm gonna get more wine.

CJ

Good. Don't make me drink alone.

(JUNE exits into the house. CJ sits there, looking around at the shoreline. A single gull cries above. He sighs, rubs his eyes. He looks more tired than he did before. He takes a big gulp of his wine. JUNE re-emerges.)

CJ

All set?

JUNE

I looked, there's some pasta sauce and spaghetti I can make for dinner.

CJ

In a few hours.

JUNE

Sure.

CJ

You should go feel the water.

JUNE

Why?

CJ

I wanna know how the temperature is.

JUNE

I could walk you down there if you wanted-

CJ

No, no, I just wanna know how it feels. I've been in there a million times over.

JUNE

Do you ever think you'll go in there again?

CJ

Who's to say? Probably not.

JUNE

And you're okay with that.

CJ

Whether I'm okay with it or not doesn't really matter.

(A beat.)

CJ

We get to tell you that because we've lived longer.

JUNE

Excuse me?

CJ

To answer your question from before: why we get to tell you to get over yourselves- we've lived longer.

JUNE

It seems to me that you use that excuse for pretty much anything.

CJ

So what?

JUNE

So it's not fair.

CJ

Oh, knock it off. "Not fair". Come on. Look around: none of it is fair. Absolutely none of it. I'm not saying that to be negative or a pessimist, and I'm not "dropping any truths" or whatever the hell it is, it's just a fact. That's all there is here. Facts. Look out there. You see those waves? High tide now. The water is at the bulkhead. That's a fact. High tide's gonna come when high tide's gonna come. And after that, low tide. Those are facts. We have tide tables and we read the moon or whatever shit tells us when it is, and that's when we fish and when we move our chairs. Nothing's fair. That's the most important fact of all.

JUNE

Sounds like you're ready to write a book.

CJ

I have a lot to say.

(A beat.)

JUNE
I'm still upset.

CJ
Yeah?

JUNE
Do you not care?

CJ
Why would I?

JUNE
Because it's your fault.

CJ
Nothing's my fault.

JUNE
You hurt my feelings.

CJ
When did I do that?

JUNE
I'm worried about your memory, Mr.-

CJ
CJ! Christ, just call me CJ. And my memory's fine.

JUNE
It's really not. You can't remember what you said?

CJ
Which part?

JUNE
You're losing track, you forgot the photo, I think I should called Rebecca-

CJ
Don't. Which part of what I said is "upsetting" you?

JUNE

Well don't put it in air-quotes.

CJ

Okay. Which part?

JUNE

What you said about James and I's relationship not meaning as much. I don't think you can quantify it like that.

CJ

Look-

JUNE

Just because you were married for forty-some-odd years doesn't mean it meant more.

CJ

I think it did. But why does that matter?

JUNE

What do you mean?

CJ

Why does what I think matter?

JUNE

Just because.

CJ

That's a child's answer.

JUNE

Look-

CJ

Why does what I think of you and James together matter?

JUNE

Because you're important to me! (*A beat.*) You were important to us together.

CJ

Well that's the stupidest thing you've said today.

JUNE

Why?

CJ

I'm an old man, I shouldn't mean squat to your relationship with my grandson.

JUNE

We had our rehearsal dinner here. You paid for some of the wedding. He looked up to you. He modelled what kind of husband he wanted to be off of you.

CJ

Well, I'm not a saint.

JUNE

You were to him!

CJ

You know I had affairs.

(A beat.)

JUNE

You did?

CJ

Of course.

JUNE

Why is that a given?

CJ

Everyone did back then! I'm sure Patty did too.

JUNE

How do you know?

CJ

I don't, but I'm just saying, you know, I made mistakes. I hit my kids when I wanted to punish them, I was rough. My father was with me! I'm no role model. I never wanted to be. I just tried to do the best I could. *(A beat.)* I met Patricia before the I was shipped off. Over there, when we weren't fighting, I slept with women, girls really, who's job it was to sleep with US soldiers. I knew Patty was waiting for me, I mean we weren't married or nothing then, but I didn't care. I made selfish decisions. We all do! That's another fact for you.

JUNE

What does any of this have to do with James?

CJ

That's what I'm trying to tell you, nothing! James shouldn't have looked up to me, just because his Daddy was off being an ass. I wasn't any better. I'm the *original* ass. You get that? James never came into the picture when I made a selfish decision. I never considered him. I feel bad now, and that's your fault.

JUNE

How is that *my* fault? Your guilt?

CJ

Because if you hadn't told me that, I wouldn't have thought I did wrong by him. Now I know I did.

JUNE

Not intentionally.

CJ

Ain't that always the way mistakes go?

(A beat.)

JUNE

It still hurt. When you minimized our relationship.

CJ

Frankly, I don't give a damn. *(A beat. She doesn't react)* That's Casablanca. See? The memory ain't gone yet.

JUNE

How can you not see how horrible that sounds?

CJ

What am I supposed to do? Not speak my feelings?

JUNE

You could be more aware of how your "feelings" might affect the people you're interacting with.

CJ

Now who's using air quotes?

JUNE

You still don't get it. You can't have a serious conversation.

CJ

Why are we rehashing this?

JUNE
Because you still haven't apologized!

CJ
Junebug, you're not going to get an apology. If I started apologizing for everything wrong I've ever done in my life, I'll never stop. I'll be using my last breath to apologize, and that's just a waste of breath. You don't want me to waste breath, do you?

(A beat.)

JUNE
You're right.

CJ
This is trick.

JUNE
No, it's not. I'm saying you're right.

CJ
No, this is some way you're going to rope me into talking about your feelings again.

JUNE
No, you're right. You don't have much time left, so why waste it with apologizing for every horrible thing you say? You'd run out of air.

CJ
You're sure?

JUNE
Yes.

(A beat. CJ bursts into laughter. JUNE smiles.)

CJ
All right then. *(he stares out at water, pointing at a bird flying overhead)* See that?

JUNE
What is it?

CJ
An osprey. It's hunting. Watch it.

(They watch the osprey. It flies around in circles, their eyes following it. Suddenly it divebombs the water. JUNE looks shocked.)

JUNE
Why did it do that?

CJ
It saw something. That's how they hunt- they dive down, sometimes from over 100 feet. Fastest speed is 80 miles per hour. It's incredible. There's a nest over there, you see it on the pole?

JUNE
That's man-made, isn't it?

CJ
Yeah. They're endangered, so they do what they can to protect them. Incredible birds. See it? See it coming up with something? They can go down 30 feet from their dive. Incredible eyesight. They see fish that people can't see while they're in the water. Probably taking it back to the nest.

JUNE
That's a mother?

CJ
They're like lions. The females are the only ones who hunt.

JUNE
The female species is what hold this world together.

CJ
I see you dangling the bait, I'm not going to bite at it.

JUNE
That wasn't bait!

CJ
You wanted me to make a comment on females so you could get mad at me. I raised girls. I lived with girls. I know the traps.

JUNE
It wasn't a trap, CJ.

CJ
If you say so.

(A beat. The osprey flies off with whatever it caught.)

CJ
Speaking of mothers, you heard from her?

JUNE
Who?

CJ
I won't say her name, I don't want her calling.

JUNE
No, she hasn't called. She said she would in the morning when she was on her way.

CJ
Has she- I don't know how to put it, has she recovered yet?

JUNE
From what?

CJ
From James.

JUNE
Why do you ask?

CJ
Just wondering.

JUNE
Why don't you ask her?

CJ
I can't, she's not here.

JUNE
I mean before.

CJ
We don't, you know...

JUNE
What?

CJ
Talk about that stuff.

JUNE
Why not?

CJ
It's not our way.

JUNE
"Your way"?

CJ
Right.

JUNE
That's pretty stupid, CJ.

CJ
Well, I just figured since she calls you-

JUNE
You can talk to your own daughter about the death of her son.

CJ
No. We don't share that. I'm asking you.

JUNE
Your family. Lord.

CJ
What's that supposed to mean?

JUNE
None of you know how to talk to each other. James was the exact same way.

CJ
How do you mean?

JUNE
He wouldn't get into it with his mother! I was the middle man the entire time. He had a problem?
I'd tell Rebecca. He wanted help? I'd call Rebecca. He was scared? Me and Rebecca. I didn't
know it was genetic. Why can't you all just say "This is how I feel and I think you should know
that"?

CJ
Because this is how we do it.

JUNE
Well that's stupid.

CJ

For someone who ain't a part of the family, you have a lot of criticism of how we do things.

(A beat.)

JUNE

Yes. Rebecca talks to me about it.

CJ

And?

JUNE

And she's not doing well. She misses him. She's alone. But she likes that work keeps her busy.

CJ

I wish she would...

JUNE

What?

CJ

I wish she wouldn't be so involved with work. It takes her away too much. She's not facing the shit she's been through.

JUNE

I think that's also genetic. *(A beat.)* She called me a few months ago. Right after the service. She couldn't find the vacuum James used to clean out the gutters. It's not even a vacuum, I guess it's more of a hose with some sort of air pressure or whatever. It's this big piece of machinery, I've watched James use it before on her house, but she called me. She was really upset, she had been crying, I could tell. It's not like I was seeing her face, I couldn't see her eyes or anything, but the way she was breathing. The way she kept trying to catch her breath, like someone was dunking her underwater. Pulling her down. And all because she couldn't find this vacuum. I mean it's huge, and she was kicking herself because she's walking around the garage and she's looking on every shelf, in every corner and nook of this concrete room, and she can't find it. And she kept saying "James knew where it was! He knew where it was!" like I was keeping the information from her. So I helped as much as I could, we retraced his steps. I think that's all you can do. Try to understand how he was thinking, where he could have put the vacuum. And it turns out, he had broken it down. He had wanted to store it better, and so he had taken the thing apart. And Rebecca- sorry, *she* was so mad at him. And then she started laughing. She's cracking herself up. And I ask her, "Why are you laughing?". I didn't get it. And she said "This is the first time I've let myself be mad at him since he was gone. And that feels good. To blame him for something." Because up until then, he hadn't done anything wrong. *(A beat. CJ doesn't respond.)* I think she's doing better. But she misses him. She definitely misses him.

CJ

I'll teach her how to put the vacuum back together tomorrow.

JUNE
We figured it out. Together.

CJ
Hmm.

JUNE
Can I ask you a question?

CJ
This must be a doozy. You haven't asked permission yet.

JUNE
It's just. You keep talking about how close you are to death's doorstep.

CJ
Uh-huh.

JUNE
But how close are we talking?

CJ
Junebug, I like ya, but you're not in the will.

JUNE
No, no, I know. That's not why I'm asking. I'm wondering because you're being very cavalier, you know, about no longer being around. What was the prognosis?

CJ
Lemme see.

(He thinks long and hard for several moments.)

CJ
When was your wedding?

JUNE
Three years ago.

CJ
I was in chemo and they gave me...three years.

JUNE
Wait. What do you mean?

CJ
My time's up.

(A beat.)

JUNE
Cj...

CJ *(definitive)*
No worries. We knew. We knew.

JUNE
Is there...you know, anything they can do?

CJ
You could ask that same question to the fish that osprey just caught, and you'd get the same answer. I'm flying to that nest one way or another.

JUNE
I'm sorry.

CJ
For what?

JUNE
For what you're going through.

CJ
Ain't nothing to be sorry for. Facts, Junebug. Just facts.

JUNE
Rebecca, she knows-

CJ
Now, why would you do that?

JUNE
What?

CJ
That's the third time saying her name. We were home free.

JUNE
I thought blood had to be involved.

CJ

Really anything related to death or being hurt.

(JUNE's cellphone starts ringing. She looks at it.)

CJ

I thought you had learned your lesson.

JUNE *(answering the phone)*

Hello? Hi, Rebecca. How's it going? *(a pause)* That's good. *(A pause)* Everything's good here.

Just sitting and chatting. He took a little nap. *(A pause. She laughs)* Yes, he CAN get kind of cranky right after waking up. *(A pause)* Yup. Yup. *(A pause)* Probably some pasta. I found some-

yes. Yeah, in the cabinet. *(A pause)* Okay. Okay. Yes. Of course. You drive safe. Wait! *(A pause)* Rebecca. I think, and don't mention to him I said anything, but I think you should talk to

CJ about how to do the stuff James was doing around the house for you. He's got a lot of knowledge on it that I can't always give you, you know? I mean, of course, call me anytime. I just think he'd know how to help. You know? *(A long pause)* Right. I understand. I know it's hard. *(A pause. She looks at CJ)* Okay. Okay I'll let him know. You have a good night. Yup. *(A*

pause) I love you too. Bye now.

(She hangs up the phone.)

CJ

Playing match-maker, hmm?

JUNE

Between you and your daughter, yes.

CJ

It's not gonna change anything.

JUNE

Maybe. But at least I can try.

CJ

So you got to ask a penetrating question, can I now?

JUNE

Should I get another glass of wine?

CJ

Just bring the bottle out here.

JUNE

Okay but I have to cook dinner at some point.

CJ

You will, you will. But come on, let's live a little while I still can.

(JUNE nods solemnly. She stands and exits into the house. CJ looks very serious for a moment. He doesn't look at the shoreline at all. A single gull cries above. The waves crash slowly against the coast. JUNE reenters with the jug of wine. She pours CJ another glass, and pours herself one as well.)

JUNE

It's really more of a jug.

CJ

When the pollacks were leaving their villages, jugs were more easy to transport than bottles.

JUNE

I don't think that's true.

CJ

Maybe not. Listen-

JUNE

I have to get dinner started in five minutes.

CJ

Okay. Listen to me for a minute.

JUNE

Okay. Is everything okay?

CJ

Why Tahoe?

JUNE

What's that?

CJ

Why do you want to scatter him at that lake?

JUNE

Well, like I said before, I thought he'd like it.

CJ

That's a child's answer.

JUNE

It's beautiful out there. He liked the outdoors.

CJ

I don't think that's a good reason to leave him there.

JUNE

Why is this coming up now?

CJ

Because you're going on this trip and it's a waste.

JUNE

A waste?

CJ

Yes. You can't leave my grandson there.

JUNE

Why not?

CJ

Because it didn't mean anything to him.

JUNE

I think it would've.

CJ

That's flawed logic./

JUNE

/You said before that I shouldn't listen to your opinion./

CJ

Well you should on this.

JUNE

I have no idea where this is coming from.

CJ

Truth be told, I don't have any idea why you're the one who is scattering his ashes at all.

JUNE

Excuse me.

CJ

I said what I said.

JUNE

I'm his wife.

CJ

For two years. I have milk in the back of the fridge that long.

JUNE

First off, that's disgusting. Secondly, you're insulting me again. You're insinuating that our relationship didn't matter at all, and that exactly whay made me upset before-

CJ

It should be his family. His mother, his cousins. Me. We should be the ones who get his remains and decide what to do with them.

JUNE

I was his next-of-kin.

CJ

But you're not, really.

JUNE

What would you suggest then? Hmm? What do I do with his remains?

CJ

Give them to me. When Rebecca gets back we decide where to scatter him together.

JUNE

You're not even talking to your daughter about the death of her only son. Forgive me if I won't hand him over to you.

CJ

Junebug-

JUNE

Stop calling me that.

CJ

He shouldn't be scattered at Tahoe.

(A beat. JUNE stews.)

JUNE

You know what he said about you on his death bed? Nothing. He didn't send any message of love or support along. He didn't say anything about you. He said he loved me. He would always love me. That's what he said. He told his mother goodbye, but his last words were to me. CJ. To me. I would always be the love of his life, because I will love him as long as I'm alive. And he loved me until he died. Don't I get to scatter him? Don't I get to say goodbye?

CJ
You cared for him. I won't deny that-

JUNE
I watched him die.

(A beat.)

CJ
I don't mean to be blunt here-

JUNE
That would be a first

CJ
But it should be us. That scatters him. He shouldn't be scattered somewhere that didn't matter to him.

(A beat. JUNE storms into the house. CJ sits for awhile.)

CJ
June?

(JUNE reenters with a metal box. She slams it on the table in front of CJ.)

JUNE
Put him where you want. I don't care.

(JUNE exits back into the house. CJ stares at the metal box. A single gull cries above: once, twice, then a third time. CJ exhales. The gull cries again. Some time later, around sunset. The backporch lit with crimson and darkness. CJ sits on the bench, no longer in his wheelchair. The box is still in the same spot. There's a bustle behind him, and suddenly JUNE enters from the house with two plates of pasta. She gingerly places hers on the whicker table, then slams CJ's down in front of him. She throws a fork nearby. She grabs her glass and pours herself a healthy amount of wine. She sits on the whicker couch and begins eating. She doesn't speak. CJ stares over at her, then looks out at the coast. He begins eating, slowly. He clearly needs more help than she's willing to give. She does not help him. There's a few minutes of silence as they eat. CJ looks around, needs to wipe his mouth with something. Finally, he uses his sleeve to wipe his mouth. JUNE sees this, sighs exasperatedly, then exits into the house. She reenters with two cloth napkins. She tosses his to him over her shoulder. JUNE sits back down and begins eating again. There's another few moments of silence while they eat. CJ finishes his glass of wine. He reaches for the jug of wine but can't quite reach it. He tries several times to no avail. JUNE sees this. She sighs again, then puts her plate down. She doesn't move. He feels her watching him. He looks over at her, doesn't say anything. She gets up and pours him another glass of wine. She finishes pouring at an acceptable amount. He gestures for a little bit more. She sighs, pours a little more.

He gestures that that's enough. She pours the glass all the way to the top, practically overflowing. CJ stares at the glass while JUNE retakes her seat, begins eating her pasta again. CJ attempts to lift the glass to take a sip, spills a little bit. JUNE doesn't respond. CJ has no choice but to slurp a bit of wine off the top of the glass. There's another few moments of silence as they both eat. JUNE finishes her meal. She gets up to take her plate back into the house. On her way she grabs his plate, regardless of if he has finished his meal, and takes that into the house as well. She is gone for a while, we hear water running in another room in the house. She reenters and sits back down. It's getting darker. They both watch the sun set over the bay. CJ looks to JUNE. She does not return his look. Finally, he looks away and watches the sunset. JUNE looks over at the metal box on the table. She stares. Faraway, a single gull cries. The lights shift. It's much, much later, around 2AM. The lights in the house have been shut off. The beach is dark, the sound of waves lapping fills the air. After a moment, we hear a person struggling with a light switch. The light above the table on the backporch clicks on. CJ eases himself onto the bench at the table, having left his wheelchair. He sighs, pants. There's a cry like a woman: a loon on the waters. CJ strains to see through the screens to the coast. He grabs the binoculars, searches. He finally lands on the loon. He puts down the binoculars, watches for awhile. We hear footsteps from within the house. Suddenly, JUNE enters from the house.)

JUNE

What're you doing?

CJ

Shh!

JUNE

It's two o'clock in the morning.

CJ

You're going to scare it away.

JUNE

What?

CJ

The loon! Quiet!

JUNE

You should be in bed, CJ.

CJ

If you don't stop talking-

JUNE

This is ridiculous, you have to take better care of yourself.

CJ (*pointing at the bird*)

Look!

JUNE
Where?

CJ
Right there!

(The loon cries again: a distinct sound of a woman, almost moaning.)

JUNE
What is making that noise?

CJ
The loon is. That's how they sound. We hardly ever get them on the bay. This is a real treat.

(The both watch the bird for awhile. The cries continue, echoing off of the empty waters.)

JUNE
I'm going to grab a glass of water. Do you want one?

CJ
Grab me a small glass of the manischewitz.

JUNE
It's too late for wine.

CJ
Be quiet! You'll scare it off.

JUNE
I'm not getting you a glass of wine.

CJ
This is a treat, Junebug. We gotta celebrate it. Who knows when I'll see another loon like this.

JUNE *(hesitantly)*
I asked you not to call me that.

CJ
Please.

(She exits into the house. CJ continues watching the bird. He looks down at box of ashes, swallows hard. JUNE reenters with two glasses of wine, and hands the smallest one to CJ he eyes her own glass. She smirks a little, rolls her eyes. He raises his glass to hers in a silent

cheers. She sits on one of the whicker chairs, far away from him. They both watch the loon. We hear the cry again.)

JUNE
Such a sad cry.

CJ
Haunting, isn't it?

JUNE
Why does it call this late at night? Aren't most birds not nocturnal?

CJ
Loons are. This one is probably a male, looking for a mate. But it could be a female, maybe, searching for it's chick. Sometimes they get separated from the mothers and they call out to find them. Like echolocation. *(A beat. The loon cries again.)* They don't usually come this far south, this a real rare situation. You know, the native Americans believed that loons were the embodiment of our dreams. That they were symbols of wishes and hopes. To hear one call out like this meant our dreams were going to come true. The ghosts of the water. That's what they called them.

JUNE
Native Americans? Huh.

CJ
What?

JUNE
That's the most politically correct thing you've said this entire day. I expected something far more racist.

CJ *(sarcastic)*
Very funny. *(A beat.)* Beautiful bird.

JUNE
Cj?

CJ
Yeah.

JUNE
About earlier.

CJ
It's all right. We don't have to get into it.

JUNE
But what you said-

CJ
You really don't have to apologize.

(A beat.)

JUNE
Apologize?

CJ
Yeah. No need.

JUNE
I wasn't planning on apologizing.

CJ
Well that's good, because you don't have to. (*The loon cries again.*) Just like someone crying.
As long as I've lived here I've only ever heard that twice.

JUNE
Only twice?

CJ
Mhm.

JUNE
When?

CJ
Oh who can remember.

JUNE
You do. I know you do.

CJ
Look-

JUNE
You make this big act like you're aloof or ambivalent to it all. You're not.

CJ
Can I just watch the bird?

JUNE

No, because you *do* remember. And I think I deserve to know.

CJ

Why you?

JUNE

Because I'm the only one here.

(A beat.)

JUNE

So. When was it?

CJ

Fine. Patty had just taken me here. Her parents were still around, we had just started dating again, after I got back. It was late, maybe four in the morning. I wasn't allowed to share a bed with her yet, her parents were pretty strict, and I said I'd sleep right out here. Right on the hardwood. I had laid out a sleeping bag and I couldn't sleep. I was tossing and turning, couldn't get more than fifteen minutes at a time. And the reason was because...the reason.

JUNE

What was it?

CJ

Like I said, I can't remember everything.

JUNE

You get so close to be emotional and then you shove it down.

CJ

Maybe that's just the way it's gotta be.

JUNE

But it doesn't!

CJ

The reason was because I was gonna ask Patty's dad for his blessing the next day. And I was certain he was gonna say no. I knew he was gonna say no. He didn't like me so much, I didn't have a good job or a dollar to my name and Patty was taking care of me after getting back. I know now there was definitely some undiagnosed PTSD or whatever they call it. And I couldn't imagine why he would want me as a son-in-law. I was the worst kind of person. I was just the worst. *(A beat.)* And then I heard this crying, this moaning on the water and I bolt upright. I'm thinking it's someone in pain, some poor sonofabitch like me, sobbing into the night, hoping for some comfort. And I go out on the shoreline, I'm waiting, I'm listening, it's pitch-black I can't see a thing out there. And I'm squatting in the darkness, knee deep in the water and I see this bird

just floating out there. Just bobbing on the waves, gently, and it tilts it's head back, just ever so slightly, and it lets out this cry. And I watched it for hours, just bobbing near me. Crying for itself. And for me. (*A beat.*) The next day Patty's dad said I could marry her. He said any man who took the hardwood floor over sharing a bed outa respect for her parents, must really love her. And anyone who loved her that much deserved her.

JUNE

What kind of fish are you?

(*A beat. CJ smiles.*)

CJ

That was a good one.

JUNE (*smiling*)

Thank you. (*A beat*) When was the second time?

CJ

Hmm?

JUNE

You said you heard a loon twice before tonight.

CJ

It doesn't matter.

JUNE

It matters to me. Come on.

(*A beat.*)

CJ

The day Patty died. I came out here again, couldn't sleep in that damn bed without her one night. I laid on this floor again, and it cried out again. That time I just laid here listening. Pretty sure I cried too. Pretty sure you wouldn't be able to tell if it was the loon or me that night.

(*A beat.*)

JUNE

I'm not going to Tahoe.

CJ

You should.

JUNE

I can't. I don't want to go without James. I'll cancel my flight in the morning.

(A beat.)

CJ

Your reason for going was good. You should still.

JUNE

My reason was to scatter his ashes there.

CJ

Yeah, but was it really?

JUNE

What do you mean?

CJ

You wanted to not be here, right? You wanted to get away.

JUNE

Did you do anything like that when Patty died? Get away?

CJ

I thought about it. But I couldn't bring myself to leave the house. Mostly, I wanted to get away from the lonely bed.

JUNE

So what did you do?

CJ

I told ya. I laid out here.

JUNE (*after a moment*)

Yes.

CJ

You should go. James would've liked it. And he would've wanted you to go.

(A beat. JUNE bursts into tears. CJ stares at her.)

CJ

You know I do miss him.

JUNE

I don't need your comfort.

CJ

I'm not trying to comfort you. I'm just trying to tell you a fact. I do miss him. And I'm angry.

JUNE
Why angry?

(They stay like for some time. He stares at the box of ashes.)

CJ *(getting worked up)*
I hate that it was him.

JUNE
What do you mean?

CJ
I hate that he went, and it wasn't me.

JUNE
Cj. You can't-

CJ
It should've been me. Damnit. Damnit *(he starts to cry with her)* It should've been me. He had so much more to do, some much more to learn. He had you. It should've been me.

JUNE
CJ.

CJ
No. It should've been me. *(screaming out at the bird)* I shouldn't be here! You hear me?! I don't deserve to be here! Why did it have to be him? Huh? Why the hell did you take him and not me? I only had three years, and you took him after months! You sonofabitch. What kind of sick joke it that? What did you mean by that? It should've been me! You hear me?! Do you?

(CJ sobs uncontrollably. JUNE moves to him, strokes his arm, lets him cry. After a moment, she looks to the box of ashes. She reaches out, picks it up. CJ calms a little.)

JUNE
Come on, let's go.

CJ
I can't go anywhere.

JUNE
I won't let you fall.

CJ
But-

JUNE
You wanted to feel the water. Let's go.

CJ
Junebug-

JUNE
Let's go say goodbye.

(A beat. CJ sees the box of ashes in her hands. He nods. She goes to help him up.)

CJ
No, no. I got it.

(CJ lifts himself to his feet, unsteadily. He begins making his way towards the screen door. He opens it, JUNE holds it for him. He shakily takes the three steps down to the path that runs to the beach. He stands, barefoot, on the path, smells the air outside. JUNE joins him at his side. She carries the box of ashes, puts her other arm around CJ. They make their way down the path together. They disappear from view. We hear footsteps in the tide. The loon cries out again. Lights down.)

(End of play.)