

WHY WATER FALLS

by

Leigh Curran

PROPS: Legal pad, pen, cell, crumpled paper, yellow "Ray" shirt, sequined bottle, water, end table, small trunk w journal tied with knotted string inside, throw, laptop, a half-eaten rice cake on small plate. Joint and lighter in Leigh's pocket.

TECH NEEDS: Lights, sound, video/slide projector, screen or wall

AT RISE: LEIGH's writing room

LEIGH sits in a comfortable armchair in a sea of crumpled papers. A yellow bowling shirt from the 1930s is hanging on the back of her chair and there is a small trunk on the floor to her left. On top of the trunk is a half-eaten rice cake and a sequined bottle. To her right is a small end table with a cellphone and laptop on top and a thermal blanket and water bottle underneath. LEIGH is writing on a legal pad. SHE tears the paper off - crumples it up and starts over. Nothing. SHE drops her legal pad to the floor and gets up; stretches her arms behind her back, leans over and picks up a crumpled piece of paper and, with as much enthusiasm as SHE can muster, reads to HERSELF:

LEIGH

It's 1964. I'm twenty and sitting uncertainly before an abortionist with my classically-trained musician boyfriend.

(SHE lives with that for a second then crumples the paper up and tosses it to one side)

Whatever.

(SHE picks up another piece of paper and reads:)

Career-wise I'm fresh out of acting school and ready to make my mark.

(SHE lets the paper go)

Some "mark."

(SHE picks up a third piece of paper and reads:)

We stare the abortionist in the face - paunchy belly, kitchen table, back alley -

(SHE tears up paper)

Uch! Sounds like the back alley's in his face. I never should've agreed to be in this reading series. And I wouldn't've if Jessica weren't a great friend in desperate need of a writer for tomorrow night. But why did she ask me? I don't know from personal essays - and I've certainly never read one in front of an audience. Gives me the chills just thinking about it. I bring characters to life, Jess - it's called fiction and I prefer it to some sort of angst-y blah, blah about some life altering blah, blah, blah.

(Opens laptop)

LEIGH (CONT)

This is where I'd rather be - working on my novel - following Ray, my 17-year old farm girl, who's just run away to New York City. If I had half a brain, I'd read the Breaker's Bar part out loud. Practice for tomorrow night. Pretend that wall is the audience.

(looks at Audience)

Too weird.

(straightens computer screen)

Oh, Leigh - live a little!

(Stands and reads)

Ray didn't know why she was walking through the door of Breaker's Bar. It was as if she'd stuck out her hand and it pulled all seventeen years of her skinny body along with it.

(Pause)

That wasn't so bad. And I bet they all want to know what happens next.

(to Audience)

Don't you? It's far more interesting than some confessional something. Not that uncovering this story is a walk in the park. Ray and I have zip in common. I don't know from farm life. I grew up on the campus of a boy's boarding school, married an actor, earned my living as a character actress mainly in TV commercials - but every time I sit down to write I get pulled into Breakers Bar just like Ray does. The place stinks of New York sleaze and I barely drink. Ray doesn't drink at all - she's principled ... and clueless. Alright, maybe when I was 17 I was clueless, too - but I never ran away from home ... Well, once - when I was eight - hid in the dry river bed below our house where I planned to live, do my homework and go to school. The plan ended when my father, walking home from a faculty meeting, saw my flashlight flickering in the boulder cave and, with amusement in his voice, called:

LIGHT CUE: Flashback

"Leigh?"

"Don't talk to me - I'm running away from home."

"Have you had supper?"

"Mummy hates me."

My father approached my hideout thoughtfully because he did everything thoughtfully.

"May I come in?"

"Only if you promise not to tell Mummy about my hideout."

LIGHT CUE: Flashback ends

My father promised and I knew I could trust him. Ray knew she could trust her father, too - but then he up and dies and she has nothing left but loneliness so she hops on a Greyhound to Port

LEIGH (CONT)

Authority with \$20 to her name - something that would scare the shit out of me - and winds up in Breakers Bar where she embarks on a long-term relationship with a 20-year-old stoner named Stevie. And for no good reason, they're both girls with boys' names. Don't ask. It just "came" to me.

(Goes to yellow "Ray" shirt on back of chair)

I blame my yellow shirt. I found it in an underground thrift store in New York. I liked the collar. And there was something about the name over the pocket ... Ray ... that conjured up ... Whatever - it fit so I bought it. Wore it selectively so it wouldn't fray. Then my marriage blew up - I moved to LA - blah, blah, blah, blah, Life.

(Starts to pick up crumpled paper - is distracted by:)

SOUND CUE: Beeps for text arriving on cell

SOUND CUE: Beeps for text arriving on cell - OUT

(LEIGH picks up cell - reads text)

Are u working away? Writing deadline tomorrow AM. Performance tomorrow night, 6 PM call. Not sure I told u theme: Integration. U r a true friend!

(LEIGH starts to text back)

What if nothing comes to me between now and -

(SHE hits delete and puts down cell)

Give it a rest! Jessica's a great producer. You're lucky she invited you to do this. And, hello, she only introduced you to your literary agent, for Christ's sake - the least you can do is hang in there because ...

(Picks up legal pad - sits)

I know, I know - getting personal is "good for me."

(SHE puts her pen to the legal pad. Nothing. In frustration, SHE scribbles on the page - shows it to Audience)

And that's what I mean - I have nothing personal to write about - let alone share with a bunch of strangers - because I've had a fine life! I mean, shit happens but why dredge up the details? Isn't the point to keep moving forward? Isn't that how we become ... grown ups?

(Something occurs to HER. To Audience)

Hold on ... I'm having an idea.

(Typing on laptop)

Ray was so far under Stevie's skin she rumbled like an earthquake pulling Stevie all tough and jittery into the nervous arms of possibility.

(to Audience - suddenly excited)

I want my novel about Stevie and Ray to be told through a series of poems that go backward and forward in time so I need the intro to have space in it ... I like the idea of possibility. Except Ray is so far into the power of thought - everything is possible

LEIGH (CONT)

because she believes it is. And too much hope is a big, fat turn off.

RAY (VO)

D'you say a turn off?

LEIGH

You heard me, Ray. You're a hope junkie. You float through life waiting for your thoughts to manifest your dreams. It's too airy-fairy - I don't want people making fun of you.

RAY (VO)

'Cause Ah b'lieve in human potential?

LEIGH

(to Audience)

Excuse me.

(to RAY)

Exactly - you're a victim of magical thinking. Even Stevie says so.

RAY (VO)

Stevie niver said Ah think like magic - you made her say that 'n Ah don't 'preciate bein' treated like Ah'm dumb 'cause Ah don't un'erstan' what ya mean. So ya better tell me.

LEIGH

Alright, since you're so determined - Magical Thinking Example Number One: When Stevie's old man makes her have sex with him you lie on their living room couch, the door open just enough so you can hear him rough her up - then you put your thumb and forefinger together and close your eyes as if you can will Stevie to stand up for herself. A: you can't and B: Stevie's salvation is my business - not yours.

(LEIGH puts her laptop to one side)

RAY (VO)

Ah was tryin' to help. Why can't -

LEIGH

(picking up legal pad)

Ray, I need to focus! Jessica needs a personal essay from me in the morning. Something about Integration. Whoop dee do - a theme!

(SHE gets an idea)

Okay - so my musician boyfriend and I are staring the abortionist in the face ...

(Comments as SHE writes)

We're scared - yes we were - but determined. My boyfriend hands over the tens - no, the hard-earned tens and twenties we raised

LEIGH (CONT)

from our artist friends and secures our appointment for the following day with half the fee.

(Gets another idea)

Oh, my God - wait! Just a quick note ...

(Picks up laptop - writes:)

Stevie's old man empties himself into her. Stevie sees a flash of light over his shoulder and knows they've just made a baby.

RAY (VO)

Stevie won't like that.

LEIGH

No, Ray ... you don't know if Stevie will or won't like getting pregnant because I don't know and even if you think I do know you have to pretend I don't if for no other reason than the sake of the story.

RAY (VO)

What story?

LEIGH

Don't "what story" me. You exist within a context. Period. End of sentence.

RAY (VO)

Niver you mind.

LEIGH

(to Audience)

Now she's sulking. It never ends!

(SHE puts down laptop - picks up legal pad)

I just need a strong opening line -

(SHE yawns)

Something that really ... happened ... that involves -

(Yawns again)

- integration.

(Shakes her head, picks up legal pad and writes)

It's 1954 - I'm ten - my father has oxygen tubes up his nose.

He's about to die and leave me with Mortal Enemy Number One ... my ... Mummy.

(crossing out writing)

Oh, who cares?

(yawns)

The abortion story is much more ... Maybe I could combine ...

(starts nodding off)

Oh, god ... too confusing ... sorry - just five minutes.

(Legal pad falls to floor as LEIGH closes her eyes and sleeps)

LIGHT CUE: Lights shift

(RAY emerges. Looks at the Audience as if SHE's seeing them for the first time)

RAY

Oh, hi.

(RAY gets up - covers her body with the yellow shirt. Looks at LEIGH's chair)

Leigh falls asleep when she writes - like clockwork. She wants for it to come out all at once. Like that guy ... Mozart? But where he's a genius ... she's a human.

(SHE turns her back and slips her arms into yellow shirt. To Audience)

Ah didn't ask to be here. But Ah'm glad Ah came. It was gittin' kinda borin' vibratin' in the ether at no particular frequency then Leigh wrote this incomprehensible poem called "The Underside of Snow." Put me in a kitchen on a farm in the Bible Belt the day the world ended. Said Ah just "came" to her. But we both know the day Leigh saw this shirt ... the moment she tried it on ... that was the day Ah coalesced. Ah didn't know it right away 'n neither did she. But the hopeful feelin' she had when her arms slid in the sleeves like they belonged there ... that moment was the beginnin' of me. For a while Ah laid so low in Leigh's belly not even Stevie knew Ah was there. Then Leigh wrote the bad poem Ah told you 'bout 'n made me talk like white trash. Later, in another "poem" she had my moma go insane and my deddy kill hisself. She wanted me to toughen up - like she did, Ah guess.

(Pause)

Ah'm drawn to Stevie every time Ah see her. It ain't just 'cause she needs help. She's got a good mind. She can see what she's doin' to herself - plus she's been where Ah'm at. But Ah'm only seventeen 'n Stevie's fucked up on drugs 'n sex 'n wontin' to waste her life - which could take a while seein' as how she's only three years older'n me. That's the main reason Ah practice patience. Ah may be naive but Ah been around.

(SHE goes behind LEIGH's chair)

There goes Leigh, dreamin' about the moment Stevie and Ah met. She can't get the words right 'cause she thinks she controls the story. Ah think it belongs to all of us. Ah tried sayin' as much but she don't take me serious 'cause Ah'm a "magical thinker." If it was up to me to describe the moment Stevie and Ah met Ah'd say: "Ray looked through the stench of stale beer and saw a girl, not much older 'n she was, sittin' all slurry in the corner. The bartender nodded in Stevie's direction. "Talk to my old lady," he said. "She knows why water falls."

(Silence. SHE looks at LEIGH's chair - excited)

Ah never thought of tryin' to reach Leigh when she's nappin'. But her mind's real open right now, isn't it? Ah gotta tell Stevie.

(SHE sits in the chair, puts her thumb and forefinger together and closes her eyes. Silence. LEIGH wakes up. To Audience)

LEIGH

I am so sorry. I must have drifted off. How rude. I worry I'm a dilettante. I mean, you hear about writers typing away for days on end ... then there's me. Two words and I have to sleep on it - despite a looming deadline.

(grabs laptop)

Excuse me.

(writes)

Ray looked through the stench of stale beer and saw a girl, not much older than she was, sitting all slurry in the corner.

(To Audience)

Oh, I like that.

(writing)

The bartender nodded in Stevie's direction. "Talk to my old lady," he said. "She knows why ..." Why flies walk upside down.

(crosses it out)

Why lemons are sour.

(crosses it out)

Why water ... trickles ... rages ... no ... falls! Why water falls.

Yes!

(SHE feels momentarily victorious. Looks at shirt)

I don't remember putting on my yellow shirt.

(puts down laptop)

God ... did I just have a blackout?

(picks up sequined bottle)

Well, if I did it's a good thing I bought this. It's Haitian. It embodies Erzuli, the Love Goddess of the Sequined Bottle. When you're having ... oh, any kind of problem - like blackouts ... you appeal to her with perfume and petit fours ... I don't wear perfume and petit fours? Let's just say I'm all out.

(SHE looks for something to offer. Picks up half-eaten rice cake, puts it next to sequined bottle and curtsies)

Then, after you've made your offering ... you wait.

(LEIGH waits - eyes closed)

Patience has never been my strong suit.

(Gives up waiting. Takes off yellow shirt)

I should call Jessica - tell her I've had a mini seizure.

Supposedly I'd outgrown them. I mean, I haven't had one in over 40 years ... so ... it stands to reason I'd want to bail on the whole personal essay shebang.

(SHE picks up cellphone - starts to make call. Stops)

I'm a fake friend, you know that? A fuckin' fake. I should "open to possibility." However the fuck you do that.

(SHE puts down cellphone)

Ray would yammer on about circles of energy ... and some bullshit about light ...

(SHE touches her thumbs to her forefingers)

Then she'd close her eyes and say: Ommm shanti ommmm.

(Closes her eyes - yawns)

LEIGH (CONT)

I could write about ... blacking out in that ballet recital when I was seven ... and playing ... the Wind ...

(LEIGH yawns and goes under. STEVIE emerges - takes a toke. To Audience)

STEVIE

Just for the record ... I'm sick of being a stoner ... it's not me - never was, never will be. It's the character Leigh's turned me into and, okay, maybe I asked for it ... Fuck, no, Stevie! Don't go there - you were trying to help. Memories are meant to be shared. Even the painful ones. Damn.

(SHE gets out of chair)

Yeah ... fuck you, Leigh. I'm through helping you remember. Every time I try you stick a fucking joint in my mouth like that's all I care about.

(pause)

Go ahead - distract yourself with your pathetic novel about Stevie and Ray. Make the "irresponsible junkie" pregnant ... like that's never been done before ... Damn.

(to Audience)

You'd never know it, but when Leigh and I were kids - I was her best friend. So I was imaginary ... it didn't matter. When Leigh's mother sent her to her room for being defiant she had me to turn to. We'd just make up another story. Back then Leigh relied on me. She'd say: Stevie, help me remember my homework. So I'd help her remember her homework. And when she was seven and had her first mini-seizure in that ballet recital - I was the one who, from deep inside her blacked out mind, remembered her choreography so her body could keep moving diagonally across the stage. I was the one who flapped her arms so she could make the breeze that caused the kids who were flowers to dance.

(Tries to dance - loses balance - sits on trunk)

Wow, shit ... If Ray were here she'd say: See, Stevie? I told you - you and Leigh are the same but different. Ray believes in our individuality. I love her enthusiasm ... but it's unrealistic ... we're figments of Leigh's imagination - nothing more - and sometimes Ray's determination to prove otherwise makes me sad. Really sad. Damn.

(STEVIE takes a toke)

Like when Leigh's father died. That sad. We were only ten. He was our world. I wanted us to cry and I didn't care if we ever stopped but she gritted her teeth and tightened her stomach ... Sometimes I think it was because of growing up in a boys' school where crying was something to be ashamed of. But it hurt holding all that longing inside so I'd send her a memory of her father holding us on his lap but she'd turn her back. Every time. During her teens, a distance grew between us because I remembered too much. When Leigh moved to New York City to start her adult life she wanted a clean slate so she pretty much stopped hanging out with me and, by the time she was 25, when she thought of her

STEVIE (CONT)

childhood all she could see was the color black. And I was buried under a mountain of memories that were so repressed they'd tied themselves in knots. I thought if I could untangle those knots maybe we'd find each other again - got my hopes up when Leigh started keeping a journal - threw in some details when she wasn't looking. Maybe that was wrong of me but I couldn't help it. I mean, isn't: today I met a tweedy-looking actor who is so tall he makes me feel all fluttery - isn't that more interesting than: today I met someone? I wanted her words to jump off the page like mind movies ... I wanted details. Truth is, I thought they might be another way to help Leigh remember. Not that she ever re-reads her journals ... so, fuck me.

(Silence)

Anyway, in 1986 Leigh's marriage crumbled and her career - which she thought was going to be so stellar she'd put motherhood on hold to prepare the world for her wonderfulness - was nowhere. She kept writing in her journal only now she was stoned and Hope was a four-letter word. And I'd run out of ways to help her and was losing hope myself. Then Leigh saw that yellow shirt and along came Ray. I liked Ray the minute she materialized - she was up for anything. Helped me unravel the first knot in Leigh's memory - the one about hiding out in the boulder cave. And the minute Ray and I shook it loose, Leigh started writing Ray's story. Ray got all excited - she was finally going to become a character - get a life. I was afraid that life might not include me so I floated some memories into Leigh's imagination that she could convert into fiction without feeling exposed. Lonely memories like eating by herself in a packed restaurant. Next thing I know, I'm slouched in the corner of Breaker's Bar and Ray is sitting down next to me. I was so excited I'd finally gotten through to Leigh I thought I could get her to do anything - but when Ray and I loosened the knot that centered on a fight between Leigh and her mother, Leigh slammed the door shut. And when she realized what I'd been up to - she turned me into the stoner you see before you.

(Silence. STEVIE puts down yellow shirt - looks at LEIGH's chair)

Sometimes I wonder who Leigh and I would've become if she hadn't been so afraid to have her babies. Babies ... yes, plural. She had two abortions and never looked back. Left that part up to me.

(STEVIE goes to LEIGH's laptop and presses a key)

SLIDE CUE: LEIGH's 1964 headshot

That's how I remember Leigh in 1964 when abortions were illegal. She'd only been in New York eight months when:

LIGHT CUE: Flashback

(LEIGH emerges - picks up phone)

LEIGH

Hi, Mummy! Guess what? I've met someone! Sam. He's a classical accompanist - plays for Itzak Perlman and Leonard Rose. And this new cellist, Lynn Harrell. Well, he looks like - have you heard of Woody Allen? He does a lot of stand-up. Well, he looks like him only with black, curly hair. What do you mean: What is he? I don't know - Arabian or something. Arabian, Jewish - what difference does it make? - he's kind and gentle and we make each other laugh so there's nothing wrong with him if that's what you're looking for. On 10th Avenue ... in a walk up with the bathtub in the kitchen. And he introduces me to the most interesting people - like this guy ... he directs Shakespeare in parks and stuff. Something Papp. Papp - like pap smear. He said I remind him of a young Wendy Hiller.

LIGHT CUE: Flashback ends

STEVIE

Truth be told, Leigh didn't have a clue who Wendy Hiller was but the compliment fueled her dreams of becoming a major Broadway star with a yacht on the Hudson to escape to after each wildly successful performance. So I opted for practicality because one of us had to - got us a job as a tour guide at NBC Studios in Rockefeller Center. A short while later, Leigh discovered she was pregnant and Sam and his artist friends rose to the occasion. One of them even sent Leigh to a gyno for shots to induce a miscarriage but - nothing. So Sam secured the appointment with the abortionist for the following day. That night Leigh got lucky.

LIGHT CUE: Flashback

LEIGH

Sam! I'm spotting! We can call the gyno. He can admit me to the hospital for ... what did he call it? A b and d? D and c? We should celebrate. Sam? Shouldn't we?

LIGHT CUE: Flashback ends

STEVIE

In the fallout, Sam admitted he'd probably end up marrying a nice Jewish girl. So, shortly thereafter, the diaphragm with the microscopic hole, the baby that attempted to take advantage and the boyfriend were behind us. Our "artistic destiny" in front. And, as I said, Leigh never looked back ... so I did or we would've exploded.

SLIDE CUE: LEIGH's 1964 headshot - OUT

(STEVIE presses a key on LEIGH's laptop)

SLIDE CUE: LEIGH's 1978 headshot

STEVIE (CONT)

The second unwanted pregnancy was fourteen years later. Leigh and Theodore would've made beautiful babies. Smart, perceptive - like Theodore. And he had a good heart, too. They would marry, eventually - but, at the time, Theodore was afraid to propose and Leigh wanted their babies to be conceived during lovemaking - not a high-speed fantasy fuck on the Orient Express as that one was - swear to God! See, Theodore had an active imagination. On the Orient Express, Leigh was his femme fatale and, had she been clued in beforehand, she might not have worn her flannel nightgown with the rubber duckies - but even that didn't stop Theodore from turning himself into Leigh's anonymous admirer who furtively climbed into her bunk bed to have his way with her because he just plain couldn't contain his ardor. Between you and me, that was some good, once-in-a-lifetime kind of fun! Damn. But Leigh had her principles ... didn't want to walk down the aisle pregnant - code for: she was scared shitless to become a mother.

(SHE sits in LEIGH's chair)

And I didn't help matters much - I mean, the first abortion I understood - Leigh was just starting her adult life ... but this baby ... I tried to tell her it would bring her closer to Theodore and vice versa. But Leigh didn't want to be accused of entrapment. Little did she know.

(STEVIE leans her head back, full of the memory. LEIGH comes to - sees her headshot on her laptop)

LEIGH

How did my headshot get here? I should have my head examined. Seriously. Except it's been so long since I've had a seizure I don't even know who to go to anymore.

(picks up legal pad)

I could write about the fit I had when I was a guidette at NBC - started writhing on the floor in the middle of a tour. Public writhing - that's pretty personal. Except I don't really remember any of it. Left that part up to the terrified tourists. Whoops! Bad, Leigh. Bad, Leigh.

(puts down legal pad - turns to laptop)

SLIDE CUE: LEIGH's 1978 headshot - OUT

Okay, so Stevie's old man gets her pregnant and Stevie decides to have an abortion.

(LEIGH types. RAY emerges - reads over LEIGH's shoulder)

RAY

Stevie - come quick! Look what Leigh's writin'! You're gonna git an abortion!

STEVIE

Another surprise twist in the predictable story of Stevie and Ray.

RAY

No, but listen! When Leigh was nappin' a while back, Ah made up the line for when Ah see ya the first time 'n when she woke up she wrote it down. Word for word. An' it was ... kinda, well ... better 'n what she usually writes?

STEVIE

If you do say so yourself.

RAY

No. But yeah. But no, but - yeah, 'n even Leigh got excited. 'N Ah felt ... like what Ah been sayin' all along - our story could be great if Leigh includes our ideas in the tellin'.

STEVIE

Don't go there, Ray.

RAY

Ah'm serious - it could become a movie. Ah been secretly picturin' that - with real good actors 'cause when they bring ya ta life it's like they set ya free. 'Magine us vibratin' through the hearts and minds of millions of people - pure Ray and Stevie energy. We could do a lot more good out there 'n in here.

STEVIE

And as soon as Leigh realizes what you're up to she'll shut you down just like she did me.

RAY

God! You're so - alla time: cain't this, cain't that.

STEVIE

I have my reasons.

RAY

Like what?

STEVIE

Like I've known her longer than you have.

RAY

'N that's my point! You got influence. Ah'm just a fiction. You know where she keeps her secrets.

STEVIE

I'm through trying to help her remember, Ray.

RAY

But, Stevie ... you 'n Ah could jump-start Leigh's imagination. Ain't ya sick of bein' a cliché? Don't it piss ya off?

STEVIE

Leigh has deadlines to meet and bills to pay - becoming a better anything is beside the point.

RAY

Well, Ah think as long as she can re-write there's hope.

STEVIE

She doesn't re-write the ideas she falls in love with, Ray - she's not that good a writer. Damn.

RAY

(looking over LEIGH's shoulder)

Jesus, Mary and Joseph - Leigh's makin' me go with ya. Ah cain't do that - abortion's 'gainst my principles. Ah don't know 'bout you but Ah take my character profile serious.

(STEVIE gets out joint)

STEVIE

You mean: White trash farm girl - uneducated but innately smart - runs away to New York City with dreams of making a difference? I thought you didn't like cliches.

RAY

We all gotta start some place and if you ain't gonna help me then Ah'm gonna start with what Ah got. You should put down that joint 'n try it some time.

STEVIE

Fuck you.

RAY

Oh, Stevie, Ah'm sorry. It's just ... Ah don't think Ah can take Leigh stuck and you not givin' a shit one more minute. Half the time Ah feel like a fool 'n the other half Ah worry you two'll wind up in a mental institution for the negatively insane.

(Silence)

Run away with me.

STEVIE

Run away - perfect.

RAY

Ah'm serious. We'll find a better writer.

(STEVIE shakes her head in disbelief)

STEVIE

And how would we do that?

RAY

Ah don't know but at least Ah'm thinkin' ahead which is more'n Ah can say for you.

STEVIE

(putting joint away)

Ray, running away is your thing. Just like getting stoned is mine. It's what Leigh makes us do when we make her uncomfortable. And you think we have a say in our story?

RAY

You are in love with your own despair.

STEVIE

We're figments of Leigh's imagination, Ray! How many times do I have to tell you?

RAY

(nervously)

But ... with imaginations of our own. All Ah wont for us ta do is git Leigh ta take our hearts 'n minds serious. Together we got so much potential it ain't funny. Don't ya wanna fly free?

STEVIE

I didn't come from a yellow shirt, Ray. I was born in Leigh's bones so no matter what becomes of our story, I won't be flying anywhere.

RAY

That's not fair!

STEVIE

Her bones have their moments. You play your cards right you could end up in them, too.

RAY

Why would I wanna do that?

STEVIE

Hey, all I'm saying is you have a choice. Become part of Leigh or fly into the Greater Consciousness. Of course, Leigh has to write something millions of people will want to read or your freedom is pretty well fucked so maybe her bones aren't such a bad idea after all.

RAY

Just ... help me ... git through ta her.

(STEVIE gets Leigh's journal out of the trunk and puts it at LEIGH's feet)

STEVIE

Something personal - for good measure.

RAY

What's her journal gotta do with our story?

STEVIE

I don't know ... just a feeling.

RAY

But -

STEVIE

You want my help?

RAY

Sorry. Ah won't say a word - swear on a stack o' super holy Bibles.

(RAY sits in Leigh's chair - her finger to her lips.
LEIGH emerges)

LEIGH

Okay - I got this.

(starts to pace)

The doctor inserts ... whatever it's called - the abortion tool.
And says:

LIGHT CUE: Flashback

"You're going to hear a sucking sound."

"Okay."

"Are you sure you want to do this?"

"Um, yes. Um, yes, I'm ... sure."

(LEIGH is unexpectedly moved by memory - catches
HERSELF)

No!

LIGHT CUE: End Flashback

What I said was: "Yes, I'm sure." That's better ...

(writes on legal pad)

*And it's done. My second child sacrificed on the altar of fear
and career.*

(switches to laptop)

I mean ... *Stevie's child sacrificed on the altar of ...*

LEIGH (CONT)

(to herself)

Forget the fucking altar ...

(writes)

The abortionist snaps off his gloves as Ray takes Stevie's hand and - And ... then what?

(Silence)

Ray? I know you don't believe in abortion but that's what gives the scene dramatic tension.

(Silence)

Just hang in there - I'll find something for you to do that won't compromise your character profile.

(Silence)

You know just because you think abortion's immoral doesn't mean it is! What about rape? Stevie was raped. Just because it was her boyfriend ...

(Silence)

Ray?

(Silence)

Am I talking to myself here?

(to HERSELF)

One could freely jump to that conclusion.

(picks up legal pad - discards it)

Whatever.

(kneels on chair - writes on laptop)

Stevie takes her feet out of the stirrups, closes her legs and -

STEVIE

- sobers up. Stevie sobers up.

LEIGH

- and turns to Ray who ... who ...

(deleting what SHE's written)

Okay, forget the whole abortion extravaganza ... Stevie tells Ray she's pregnant. Ray is mortified ... and runs away because that's what Ray does. Perfect. Then Stevie tells her old man she's leaving him for Ray - he beats her up and ... she loses the baby.

(excited - standing up)

That's it!! Ray ... this is your last chance - will that work for you?

RAY

No! Stevie - tell her no!

STEVIE

It's not about our story, Ray. Not yet.

RAY

But our story's everythin'!

LEIGH

Going once. Going twice.

RAY

Answer her, Stevie. Or Ah'll tell her how you and Ah raise the baby together - on the farm - it's a much better idea than -

STEVIE

Shut the fuck up!

RAY

(hurt)

You cursed at me.

STEVIE

I can't fucking focus, Ray!

RAY

Ah don't have ta take this!

STEVIE

Just chill! I'm trying to find the most effective way in.

LEIGH

Going thrice! You snooze you lose! Okay so:

(typing on laptop)

A bruised and battered Stevie lights a joint, thumbs a ride and goes in search of Ray. She doesn't know where Ray is but believes "love" will guide her.

RAY

Well, excuse me for livin' but that ain't my idea of originality.

STEVIE

All I know is Leigh's not ready for our input.

RAY

'Cause she didn't sober ya up when ya asked her to?

STEVIE

I don't know!

RAY

No - 'cause if you did know we might git some place. You're jist as scared o' her potential as she is.

STEVIE

I'm never going to be who you want me to be - am I, Ray?

RAY

Not when ya tell me ya cain't fly free when you ain't never even tried. Have ya? No. It's easier ta bullshit me inta stayin' with ya in - what? Her bones? Real excitin'.

STEVIE

I never said that.

RAY

You're shittin' me! That's it!

(RAY leaves)

STEVIE

Ray ... Ray, don't go - please ... I'm trying ... it's just ... something's missing ... I can't put ... my ...

(frustrated)

Life! What is it about life?

(STEVIE slumps in chair)

I'm such an asshole.

(LEIGH comes to - sees journal at her feet)

LEIGH

How the fuck did my journal get here? What is going on?

(kicks journal across room)

Stevie, am I having blackouts again?

(Silence)

Answer me! This isn't funny!

(Silence)

Okay. You know what? I have better things to do with my time than write your story.

(Calmly puts laptop and crumpled paper in the trunk. Suddenly slams lid)

Fuck you both!

(SHE sits on trunk - takes a deep breath, struggling for self-control)

1-2-3-

(As LEIGH counts to 100 STEVIE emerges)

STEVIE

(to Audience)

4-5 ... she's aiming for 100. She'll slow down around 15 and conk out around 35.

(STEVIE retrieves the journal, unknots it, hangs string around her neck. To Audience)

I know I said I was done with helping her remember but - screw it. Maybe she'll get so mad at me she'll have me put a gun to my head. I hope so because now that I've alienated Ray I don't care much about going on.

(SHE flips journal open, looks at LEIGH on trunk)

Something PERSONAL, Leigh - for Auld Lange Syne.

(SHE reads:)

June, 1978.

(to LEIGH)

STEVIE (CONT)

Theodore was driving us away from the abortion clinic, remember that trip?

LIGHT CUE: Flashback

(STEVIE momentarily becomes LEIGH)

LEIGH

Theodore, I know this isn't what you wanted. And I promise - when the remodel of the house is complete we'll get pregnant.

(Silence)

Say something.

(Silence)

It's just ... because I can't see raising a baby in plaster dust. And you can't even ask me to marry you.

(Silence)

Say something, please.

(Silence)

I keep thinking about my grandmother being the first woman editor of a New York City newspaper and how she gave it all up to have my mother who wanted to be a singer but then married a teacher who left her a widow with two young kids. I don't want to end up feeling trapped and resentful because I don't have the freedom to follow my destiny.

(Silence)

I know, I know ... maybe my destiny is kids.

LIGHT CUE: Flashback ends

STEVIE

(reading journal)

Theodore cleared his throat, which usually signaled a confession and said: "I don't know why I'm so afraid of getting married - I know I love you."

(to LEIGH)

Then you said:

(reading journal)

And I know you'll make a fabulous father.

(to LEIGH)

Remember? It's right here.

(to Audience)

... 31 - her counting's getting much slow-er.

(Silence)

Okay, before you conk out completely see if you can remember this:

(reading journal)

We were holding hands when we arrived at our exit. I just know we'll be fine because when push comes to shove we're really good friends. We just need to work through Theodore's firmly held conviction that a woman's place is in the home and a man's place is pretty much anywhere because he's the provider.

STEVIE (CONT)

(looks at LEIGH then at Audience)

... 35 and ... and ... out like a light.

(flips through journal - reads:)

Visiting Theodore on location in Mormon Country.

(to Audience)

This will put Leigh into a coma.

(reading from journal)

Came here to celebrate six months of marriage - guess that will have to wait. No sooner had I gotten settled than Theodore gets a telegram that turns his face white.

(to Audience)

Here's the part that's burned into both of us:

(reading from journal)

I'm lying on the bed. Theodore lies on top of me - holds me closer than usual. "I did something bad," he says, "And whatever you do - don't leave me. Please, please don't leave me."

(To Audience)

Inside Leigh's mind starts racing:

LIGHT CUE: Flashback

LEIGH

Oh, God - help! Theodore had a one-night stand ... with an extra. An extra playing a prostitute. What am I supposed to do with this? Stay calm. Stay calm? Today she sends him a telegram - she's pregnant. Okay, okay - breathe.

(SHE breathes)

We'll be fine - it's entrapment. We'll get a really good lawyer.

(Pause)

Yeah, and what makes her so sure it's his baby? She obviously sleeps around. We just need to prove it. I can help with that - I don't know how but I can. If I could just stop picturing the two of them - in the actual moment when ... uch! I mean, we've only been married six months. Shouldn't that've ... mattered? Stay calm. I'm calm. I'm so calm I'm -

LIGHT CUE: Flashback ends

STEVIE

- numb. You went completely numb. I held on for dear life.

(STEVIE puts journal on LEIGH's lap)

But no one can accuse you of not giving your marriage your best shot.

LIGHT CUE: Flashback

LEIGH

Theodore's a good man. I have to remember that. Even though today I hate his guts. We can get through this - I have to be patient and he has to ... to believe in himself again. Maybe his

LEIGH (CONT)

extra will drop dead. I shouldn't wish for that. Why not? She keeps coming back for his money like she's entitled to it. It's gotten so Theodore can't look me in the eyes so he looks in the eyes of others. When he can't stand himself anymore we talk. Today he said: I'm such a weak and evil man. And I said: You made a mistake. And he said: What if I make more?

(Silence)

I have to give him space. I know it'll be rough - but if I can love him unconditionally, he'll realize how lucky we are to be married, we'll move to a deeper level of understanding - he'll support my need for a career and we'll happily raise our babies together.

LIGHT CUE: Flashback ends

STEVIE

(to Audience)

So you see, once upon a time even Leigh had hope. But that came to a sad end in 1986 - also known as the year of living hideously.

(looks at LEIGH - gets out joint)

Wish I could forget the details of that year, too, Leigh. But I can't ... anymore than I can forget about Ray. You may have slammed your laptop in that trunk and you can fall asleep on the details for the rest of your life but Ray will never be dead to you. I'll make sure of that.

(Silence)

Hey, Ray.

(Silence)

I'm sorry I got mad at you. I panicked. I was afraid of losing you ... you're right.

(Silence)

For what it's worth, I gave Leigh a detailed marriage memory about Theodore's one-night stand. I don't know why ... maybe I wanted to punish her ... I'm so fucking lost ...

(Takes a toke. Silence)

I don't blame you for keeping quiet.

RAY (VO)

Ah'm lost, too, Stevie.

STEVIE

There you are.

RAY (VO)

When ya told me the only way you 'n Ah can stay together is in Leigh's bones Ah felt trapped so Ah did what Ah always do - Ah ran ... 'n the whole time Ah'm wonderin' what you said: is it me doin' the runnin' or Leigh?

STEVIE

Maybe we're better off not knowing.

RAY

Ah wish that yella shirt had niver been made.

(Silence)

STEVIE

Aw ... just tell me where you are.

RAY

So deep inside she'll niver come lookin' for me. Way too dark.

STEVIE

Will I be able to find you?

RAY (VO)

Put down that joint and we'll see.

(STEVIE looks at joint - starts to put it out.
Changes her mind - turns her back and takes a long
toke - holding the smoke in her lungs)

STEVIE

Ray?

(Silence. Still holding breath)

Wait! I didn't inhale.

(lets go of breath)

Ray? Don't go! That wasn't me.

(puts down joint and lighter)

Don't go!! Pleeese don't go!!

(Silence. Picks up journal and sits on trunk)

I'm so fucking screwed.

(STEVIE goes under. LEIGH wakes with a start as
journal starts to fall from her lap. SHE catches
journal, looks at it then at journal-string around her
neck - seriously perplexed)

LEIGH

I'm so fucking screwed.

(LEIGH starts to re-tie journal - sees a headshot
peeking out between the pages - shows it to Audience)

SLIDE CUE: LEIGH's Headshot 1986

That's me - 1986. Aka the year of living hideously.

(LEIGH reads journal aloud)

This morning Theodore and I decided to call it quits ... again.

(to Audience)

And just in case you don't believe in the size of its hideousity:

LEIGH (CONT)

(reading from journal)

It's been eight years of the extra coming back for more and more baby money - of Theodore feeling like shit and me trying to love him unconditionally.

(to Audience)

Who here can love another person unconditionally? A dog, maybe - but a person ... ? Here's how badly I sucked at unconditional love.

(reading)

I slam cupboard doors - curse my sewing machine - resent caring for the vegetable garden. Theodore is never here to eat what I grow anyway - he's in this play or that movie ... and I know, I know - I shouldn't be jealous and I try really hard not to be but the best I can do is score a Joy commercial because my face reflects well in a plate?

(to Audience)

Hm. I'd forgotten all about that.

(reading)

Okay, my first novel was published.

(to Audience)

True.

(reading)

But it didn't lead to anything - so ... it's just ... My whole life feels so fucking arbitrary.

(to Audience)

Funny - I don't remember writing the arbitrary part ...

SLIDE CUE: LEIGH's Headshot 1986 - OUT

(LEIGH flips through journal)

SLIDE CUE: LEIGH in 'Night Mother

(reading)

Guess what? I got the part in "Night Mother" - I head for Louisville next week! Guess our trial separation will have to wait. Theodore seems happy for me but he's so passive aggressive I never really know. I wish he'd just say what he thinks ... just once - so I could hear what's really on his mind.

(to Audience)

Wow ... I don't remember writing all that, either.

(Flips through journal - reads)

Okay, brace yourself - you know how I've never cheated on anyone in my entire life? Well, I did last night - with Rowan. A woman. Holy fuck! What's happening to me?

(to Audience)

Yeah - what is happening to me? I never wrote about Rowan!

(reading)

We were just talking about how lonely we are in our relationships when she asked me if I'd ever been in love with a woman. I said:

LEIGH (CONT)

No, but I have a ton of women friends. Then she kissed me. It felt so natural - like love. Plus her lips are ... well, warm and cushiony. Mmmmm. Get a grip! Theodore arrives tonight to see the show. I'm such a lousy liar. What if he wants to have sex?

(looks at journal in horror then at Audience)

TMI. TM fucking I, right?

SLIDE CUE: LEIGH in 'Night Mother' - OUT

(LEIGH flips through journal. Shows it to Audience)

Okay, this is my handwriting ... and, in case you're wondering, all this really happened ... It's just ... I have no clue how it got here. Unless I was so stoned I was writing from an altered state. I don't even know if that's possible. I mean, there was so much turmoil I was afraid if I wrote about Rowan she'd disappear - irrational, I know ... but real - so I never would've written anything about that entire episode because it was so ... I mean, I loved them both - but differently because ... Never mind.

(Silence. To Audience)

Well, alright - for practice for tomorrow night:

(reads)

Rowan says she loves me but her partner - the unmentionable Beth - is fighting hard. She's agreed to go into therapy - after 18 years of turning Rowan down ... fucking great.

(Flips through journal)

Just got off the phone with Theodore. He doesn't want to continue with couple's therapy. We've been together for 12 years - two sessions and he's done? 12 years! That's got to count for something, doesn't it? But, no - the extra tricks him into getting pregnant and now he thinks he should get involved with the child. Is he out of his mind? And then he mutters something about me being gay - and I tell him, again, I'm bi - he sooooo doesn't get to use that as an excuse to not save our marriage. PS The theatrical agency that was so interested in handling me decided not to. Typical.

(to Audience)

Why would I want to commit any of this to paper? It was one great, big, never-ending wall of pain.

(SHE starts to shiver - picks up throw)

Ray would say it was the making of me ...

(sits in chair)

And Stevie would say ... something ... I'd have to remember.

(pulls throw over her body up to her neck)

*This is exactly why I hate getting personal - I start shivering and I can't stop. Seriously, why do I need to remember 1986? There was so much fucking back and forth and gnashing of teeth on all our parts - ending for me with the *thrill* of being left by a man and woman simultaneously -*

(still shivering)

- which drove me deep into bed ... never to rise again ... no husband, no wife, no career and two aborted babies.

(Silence. STEVIE lowers throw and looks in imaginary mirror)

STEVIE

Getting beaten up by my old man was Leigh's idea - not mine. So was aborting you. If this had been my story I would've sobered up by now, moved in with Ray and we'd be raising you together. I keep wondering who you would've become.

(LEIGH raises throw over HERSELF and looks in imaginary mirror)

LEIGH

I keep wondering who you would've become. One of your fathers and I would still be together ... maybe. Or maybe I would've raised you babies on my own. I can't imagine anything more terrifying but it wouldn't be terrifying anymore because I would've done it. And gotten used to it. And been glad ... I hope I would've been glad ... I'm not sure my mother was always glad - or my grandmother, for that matter. Plus some women don't fall in love with their babies at first sight ... or ever - what if that's me? What if when you looked in my eyes you saw the truth about my heart - that, for as long as I can remember, it's been blacker than the blackest blackout?

(SHE starts to unravel)

I'm sorry - sorry I put my ambition, my fears, my freedom ahead of your human potential. I'm sure you would've been very nice people ... but, well ... never mind ...

(SHE sees the joint, starts to light it - watches the flame. Silence. STEVIE appears - takes joint and lighter)

STEVIE

Remember what happened next?

LEIGH

When?

STEVIE

After you apologized.

LEIGH

No.

STEVIE

(putting joint on end table)

The phone rang. It was Willie from the 52nd Street Project.

LEIGH

Oh, that - yes. I remember that. He wanted me to write, direct and perform in a short play with a 10-year-old girl from Hell's Kitchen.

STEVIE

And you said Yes because -

LEIGH

- The 52nd Street Project was the hot place to be seen. I figured it would lead to more work.

STEVIE

And you said Yes because -

LEIGH

Because. I don't know. What's your point?

STEVIE

Because you had an Urge.

LEIGH

I never had the Urge - that was part of the problem. I didn't feel strongly enough and no one should have children if they don't feel strongly enough - why do you think there are so many screwed up families?

STEVIE

Are you done?

LEIGH

For now.

STEVIE

I didn't say The Urge - I said An Urge.

LEIGH

To what?

STEVIE

To make it up to your unborn babies.

LEIGH

Now you've gone too far. I was never that sentimental.

STEVIE

My bad. That's right - you're the proud bearer of a black heart.

LEIGH

Have you been writing in my journal?

(Silence)

STEVIE

What if I have?

LEIGH

That's a violation, Stevie. Rowan, Theodore - whomever - those are my stories to tell.

STEVIE

And they're mine to remember.

LEIGH

Well, you didn't have to be so explicit. I thought it was something I'd written and shared it with these nice people. Threw them all for a loop. You own them an explanation.

STEVIE

I was suffocating.

(Silence)

LEIGH

What's that supposed to mean?

STEVIE

It's been my job to be there for you come hell or high water. No matter how badly you treated me - I believed one day you'd see how lucky you were to have me inside you. Not stoned me. Me - who cared for our memories - who floated details to the surface when you needed them and did it so gently you could turn them into metaphors without getting your knickers in a twist about the personal. When we were kids I was proud to be part of you. But when you moved to New York to become something ... important - you shut me out. And that scared me. It really scared me. So when you'd write in your journal I'd fill in the details - I was afraid if we lost our connection ... I mean, what would happen if I disappeared? Damn. Besides, I didn't think you'd re-read your journals - but if you did, I hoped you'd at least be grateful.

LEIGH

For what?

(STEVIE shakes her head in disbelief)

STEVIE

I'm so done protecting you from yourself.

LEIGH

Are we disassociating or something?

STEVIE

I don't know what we're doing - I just know I've been wanting you to see me as integral to who you are ever since your father died. Maybe even thank me for trying to help you take him into your heart - help you remember his sweetness even if it made you sad. So what if you cried? I could've been there for you then, too - and maybe your heart wouldn't've turned out so black. But you toughed it out like one of the boys. And when you turned me into Stevie, you turned me into a stoner who is so unbelievably one-dimensional I could die. And the way things are right now I wish I could. I really wish I could.

LEIGH

Don't say that.

STEVIE

But it's the truth.

LEIGH

I didn't know.

STEVIE

No, you didn't want to know.

(Silence)

LEIGH

What if I change your story? Sober you up?

STEVIE

Change your story.

LEIGH

Stevie, please, don't go. I'll get Alzheimer's - won't I?

STEVIE

Alzheimer's, Abortions, Blackouts - it's all about you, isn't it?

(Silence)

Damn. I gotta find Ray.

LEIGH

Yeah - like she can help!

STEVIE

Watch it! You don't know the first thing about her.

LEIGH

She's uncooperative - I know that much.

STEVIE

(starting to leave)

Write your personal essay. It'll be good for you.

LEIGH

No, wait! The blackness ... It's so impenetrable.

STEVIE

Start with the orange juice fight.

LEIGH

Wait! Stevie! I never wrote about that. Did you?

(Pause)

Tell me, please! I was what ... 13?

STEVIE

I don't know ... were you?

LEIGH

Or 14. Yes, 14. It was a few years after Papa died ... Mummy and I were avoiding each other ... Then what? Stevie? Help me remember! This is the last time I'll ask! Please, please, please!

(STEVIE vanishes)

Gone ... Fucking great!

(LEIGH walks aimlessly around room. Eventually kneels in front of sequined bottle. Takes bite of rice cake)

Erzuli, I need some help remembering the argument I had with my mother when she threw orange juice in my face.

(starts pacing)

I mean, I remember the argument but not the details. That was Stevie's job. And as she was leaving she said the orange juice fight was important. So I'll just wait ... over here. I know you like it when people wait ...

(SHE sits in chair and waits. Silence)

Um ... excuse me, I'm not hearing anything and I have this writing deadline.

(Silence)

Actually, I could use some help with that, too. See, by the end of the year of living hideously, I'd lost everything - become one with my bed. Then one day I saw my reflection in the mirror on the back of the bathroom door. And next thing I know I'm apologizing to my unborn babies - I don't know why but I am ... and shortly after that I get a call from the 52nd Street Project to write, direct and perform in a short play with a ten-year-old girl from Hell's Kitchen. Hell being the operative word. Our rehearsals went something like this:

LIGHT CUE: Flashback

"You're late."

Silence.

"That's disrespectful."

Silence with attitude.

"The theatre is a place of worship."

LEIGH (CONT)

Scoffing followed by silence.

"It's that powerful but you have to be willing to commit. Do you know what it means to commit?"

Hard, cold eyes looking so far into me I get scared.

'Oh, Jesus! She knows I'm a baby killer. Stop it, Leigh! Just because she's a kid doesn't mean she has super powers of perception. Just give her something to do ... just ... direct her!'

"Okay. So when I'm standing at the bus stop and you come running on - can you look at me when you ask if the 104 bus stops here? Do you know where I am in the script?"

Defiance.

"Can you look at me?"

Hostile shrug.

"My performance is in your eyes. And yours is in mine. Do you know what that means?"

The finger. She just gave me the finger. I swear, she's one of my babies come back for revenge. Why did I tell Willie I'd do this? I have no frame of reference. What was I thinking?'

LIGHT CUE: Flashback ends

(To sequined bottle then to Audience:)

Wow - I'm digressing from the orange juice fight, aren't I? My mother loved men - that much I remember. They were essential to her survival. She was 37 when my father died. She started rounding up her paramours, mostly the married kind, right as I was hitting puberty. The orange juice fight started ... when ... I'm walking into the living room. My mother's enjoying a tryst with a French tennis player who's between us in age. My mother sees me, laughs her cocktail party laugh and says:

LIGHT CUE: Flashback

"And this is Leigh - my Self-Centered Teenager."

I freeze - hurt and on alert.

"Say hello to Jacques, Dear."

"Hello."

Jacques kisses my hand the way the French do which prompts my mother to ask me if I'd like to join them.

"I uh ... have ... homework."

My mother looks at Jacques as if to prove her point.

(singing)

"Whatever Leigh Leigh wants, Leigh Leigh gets ..."

"Fuck off!"

(to Audience)

Naturally, my mother sends me to my room - but I have Stevie to talk to when I'm in the mood so solitary doesn't really bother me ... except maybe ... it does.

(Pause)

Anyway, after the tennis player leaves, my mother makes her way to my bedroom door - uppity tension in her face. She's holding a

LEIGH (CONT)

glass of orange juice. She was probably in the middle of fortifying herself with another screwdriver but, in her haste to remind me she's top dog, overlooked the vodka.

"How dare you insult me in front of company!"

"You insulted me!"

"You mortified Jacques! He left early."

"Well, maybe he wanted to be with somebody younger!"

Steam rises from my mother's ears. She swings her arm back, throws the orange juice in my face and hisses:

"Selfish bitch!"

I just stand there ... as the juice drips down my cheeks, down my neck and into my nightgown.

(LEIGH gets down on her knees)

I miss you, Papa - I miss you so much. I know how much you hate it when Mummy and I fight. I wish you could know how much I hate it, too. And how frightened I am that when I have children I'll be cruel to them the way Mummy is cruel to me and her mother is cruel to her and on and on with no end in sight. I need you to tell me how to stop the madness. Because it needs to stop. With me. I need to make that my job - from now on - to become a better person because ...

(wanting to bail)

... deep inside ... I know -

(slaps face to stay present)

LIGHT CUE: Flashback fades slowly

... come on, Leigh ... come on, you can do this ... I know ... I know ... I know ... I'm a ... waste ...

(child and adult struggling)

... a waste of space with a black heart ... who doesn't deserve to ... live.

(Silence. LEIGH regards the Audience now at her most vulnerable)

LIGHT CUE: Flashback OUT

Oh.

(LEIGH takes journal-string from around her neck, winds it up and puts it on top of journal. SHE starts to fold the throw - sees her cell - throws throw over back of chair. SHE dials a number)

Hi, Jess - it's your old writer friend, Leigh. I have a sort of idea ... too bad you're not there ... it kind of deals with integration ... and these two aborted babies. Anyway, call me back when you get this.

(SHE starts to hang up - stops)

LEIGH (CONT)

Just so you know - I support the right to choose. This isn't about that ...

(starts to hang up - stops)

It's about ... Because, when you think about it - I just went on ... after each abortion ... I just went on - following the call of some imagined destiny that didn't include children and that would justify the space I was taking up on earth.

(starts pacing)

I'm sorry - I know I'm babbling ... it's just ... I'm not sure how personal to get here - because at the end of 1986 I was a basket case - you remember - and, well ... I've never told this to anyone ... but I ... I ended up apologizing to my ... unborn babies. Oh, God - I know that sounds all airy-fairy ... we better talk in person.

(stops pacing)

But one more thing: right after the apology, I filled with this Urge to make it up to them. I didn't know how I was going to do that until I started working with that girl from the 52nd Street Project and while I felt totally inadequate during rehearsals - I began to look forward to getting out of bed. There was a life-affirming vibe permeating the company. The artists were open - the kids excited - the work loaded with integrity, respect, imagination.

(leans phone against sequined bottle)

Next thing I know, it's opening night and I'm on stage with a troubled ten-year-old:

LIGHT CUE: Flashback

'- she's running toward the bus stop ... we're making ... yes, eye contact!'

"Right, the 104 bus stops here."

'Why's she going stage right? Adjust, Leigh, you're the grown up. Why's she looking at me like it's my line or something? It is my line! Oh, god. My performance is in her ... in her mouth - she's mouthing the line.'

"But it's late - the 104. It's usually on time. Are you in a hurry?"

LIGHT CUE: Flashback ends

(to Audience)

The kid saves the day. The audience loves it and the kid ... well, we share a brief moment of amazement before she withdraws again. I leave the theatre feeling uncertain but also enlivened as kids and their adult acting partners tumble onto the street and in the aftermath of their departure a voice inside whispers: "This is where you belong."

(to cell)

That's all it says, Jess. But, I know not to shilly shally when I get my marching orders. I become a class mentor.

LEIGH (CONT)

Volunteer in the office. Help with mailings and go through a training to teach kids to write plays. I'm blown away by the process. I belong in the work - I know this now with every fiber of my being. But not in New York. I need to bring it to LA! Am I out of my mind? Yes!

(to Audience)

Three months later, car loaded to the gills, I swoosh down the 5 - all of LA spread before me and for the first time in my career, the wind is at my back. Never mind, I don't know what grant writing is - I can write with passion. Never mind I don't know the difference between an Executive Director and an Artistic Director - someone will enlighten me. Never mind I don't know the first thing about kids. I'll be myself - warts and all - and together we'll create an organization that uses theatre arts to give kids life skills.

SLIDE CUE: VAP shot of LEIGH as Tree

I remember that show!

(to cell)

Oh, Jessica, I wish you could see what I'm remembering - it's from the first Virginia Avenue Project production in 1992. I was an aging tree trying to get into paradise and my kid was the border guard who had to keep anything over 30 out. I don't know where the audiences came from but every show was standing room only. I came home after opening night - sat on my bed - which also doubled as my office - and felt this wave of gratitude wash through me. And from then on, I willingly immersed myself in the lives of struggling school-age children sharing my passion for bringing characters to life through writing and performing. And as my kids connected with their creativity, the color of my heart began to shift and I remembered -

SLIDE CUE: VAP shot of LEIGH as Tree - OUT

- what it was like to be a kid - not the kid my mother felt stuck with, the kid she loved when she forgot her life had been derailed.

(Silence)

SLIDE CUE: Shot of LEIGH, age 7, holding kitten

That was Us, Stevie. I hope you can see what I'm seeing - that tender-eyed, scruffy little ... wonder filled kid ... that was Us ... wasn't it?

(Silence)

SLIDE CUE: Shot of LEIGH, age 7, holding kitten - OUT

(to Audience)

LEIGH (CONT)

Anyway, there's a "meant-to-be-ness" about the Virginia Avenue Project. The right people show up to help me find our youth center - to launch our writing and performing programs. The right artists show up to share the stage with our first group of kids who show up ready to take a chance on the Arts. The boys' school I grew up in in Ojai becomes the site for our summer drama camp. And suddenly my whole life starts making sense - why I grew up among educators - why I've always made up stories ... why I was afraid to have kids.

(Pause)

Why I was afraid of kids.

(to Audience)

And then there was the day - I called a kid Honey. I never called anyone anything but their name - it was too ... sentimental, gooey - whatever. So this kid was struggling to write his play.

LIGHT CUE: Flashback

(LEIGH looks over imaginary kid's shoulder)

"Can I see what you're working on? So the Hurricane's greatest wish is to make a friend, right? But the alien wants to be his friend from the very beginning so you have no ... what? Remember when we talked about conflict? And how you have to make it hard for your characters to get what they want?"

'Oh, god - he doesn't remember and he's feeling ashamed. I better ... I better sit down beside him.'

(SHE mimes sitting)

"I know this is hard."

'His eyes are welling up with tears. I'll ... I'll just put my arm around him.'

"But hard is good, Honey - it's how we learn."

LIGHT CUE: Flashback ends

(To Audience)

And then we went to work - he with tentative enthusiasm and me bewildered and encouraged by the emergence of ... I don't know ... a tender hand ... a seven-year-old ...

(Silence)

That night, in the dead silence of my personal life - I realized there was no right way to do kids.

(SHE looks at sequined bottle)

Just like there's no right way to write something personal or appeal to Erzuli or tell the story of Stevie and Ray so it belongs to all three of us.

(LEIGH thinks for a moment then somewhat sardonically:)

And now it's time for the big, dawning awareness ...

(to Audience)

And, in the spirit of all truly great pivotal moments, I take Stevie and Ray into my heart - like this:

LEIGH (CONT)

(SHE opens her arms and takes STEVIE and RAY into her heart in jest - gets into it then catches herself)
- or however the director will direct it. Then ... cut to:

LIGHT CUE: Flashback

(to Audience)

"Thank you so much for coming tonight to celebrate my retirement from the Virginia Avenue Project. It's been an amazing 22-year ride. I've loved every aspect of my job - particularly the connections I've forged with my kids."

LIGHT CUE: End Flashback

(LEIGH picks up cell)

Anyway, it goes on from there, Jess - you get the gyst. And now - this is me giving you the pleasure of me hanging up!

(LEIGH clicks off cell. Reties string around journal.
To Audience)

You know, all this talking out loud about the insanely personal ... I feel a bit ready-er for tomorrow night.

(Puts journal in trunk. Picks up yellow shirt. Puts it over her shoulder then, absent-mindedly starts hum/singing "Across the Universe" by George Harrison - particularly this part:)

Nothing's going to change my world
Nothing's going to change my world
Jai guru deva
Ohhhh

(Dances with shirt momentarily. Hears something)
Stevie? Is that you? Your voice ... you sound ... like yourself before I turned you into Stevie. Um ... so ... did you find Ray?

(Pause)

What does she mean: there's more to my story?

(Pause)

Well, can I speak to her directly?

(Pause)

Well, you know, Stevie - Ray scares me, too. But, maybe we could all just ... get over ourselves. It's just a thought.

(Pause)

Hi, Ray. Sorry if I scare you. I scare me sometimes, too.

(Pause)

Anyway, Stevie says you think there's still more to my story.

(Pause)

How recent?

(Pause)

Ray? Would you feel more comfortable if I guessed?

(Pause)

Okay. Well, most recently I've been thinking about you, actually, and your ... insane faith in everything. And how that

LEIGH (CONT)

makes me acutely uncomfortable - and how maybe I should ... take a look at that. Anyway, the faith thing reminded me of the stories Stevie and I used to make up about the fairies that lived in the dry riverbed. And how she tried to get me to see them. Remember, Stevie? Listen to me - asking Stevie if she remembers! Anyway, I was too scared to be weird so I never saw them. But, when Margit moved in with me first thing she did was make a place for fairies in our garden. I was taken aback. I'd never told her about the fairies in the dry riverbed so it was ... Oh, my God - Margit! Something recent! I never made the connection. Thank you, Ray - you're a lifesaver! It starts with the whole alone thing ... right, Stevie? No, don't tell me - I've got this. I've so got this!

(Picks up cell - makes a call)

So, Jess, you know how we've talked about how after a break up I go through long periods of celibacy? And how seven years into the Virginia Avenue Project I decide I'm destined to live alone for the rest of my life - and how all that is actually just fine? And then I meet Margit? And she arrives with two sons, two dogs and a cat and I never look back ...

(to Audience and cell)

Of course, there wasn't much to look back on. I'd been living alone in a house that was so well organized I was basically living in a still life. Anyway, Margit and I combine our lives and furniture and as Margit goes back to school to become a sustainable landscape designer, I carry on with the Virginia Avenue Project. Anyway, call me - I don't want to leave another long message.

(Hangs up. To Audience)

At the end of 2013, shortly after my retirement, I figured I'd more than made it up to my unborn babies. I badly needed time to drift - to get to know who I'd become - to rediscover Stevie and Ray ...

(Pause)

But three months into the freedom of my retirement, Margit's younger son and his wife have a baby and make us grandmothers.

SLIDE CUE: Tabitha and LEIGH Day One

(LEIGH takes an imaginary baby in her arms)

When you were born, Tabitha, your mother had to finish law school and pass the bar - a big deal ordeal that your grandma and I wanted to help her accomplish. So you came to live with us and, suddenly, at the ripe age of seventy, I found myself mixing formula at 4am, peeking into the crib to make sure you were still breathing, bathing you in the kitchen sink and missing you so much when you went home on weekends that eventually, your mommy and daddy moved in with us, too.

SLIDE CUE: Tabitha and LEIGH Day One - OUT

LEIGH (CONT)

(To Audience)

But the night Margit and I, in bathrobes and slippers, took three-week-old Tabitha for a drive to calm her cries, I knew for certain if my babies had been born when they weren't I would've taken their crying personally. The interruptions would've angered me. The responsibility would've turned into resentment. Those weren't some trumped up excuses at the time - they were my truth.

(LEIGH holds hands with her babies. To Audience)

Now I hold my babies as close as Tabitha - two souls who probably knew they'd never become human but who made a mother out of me when the time was right and, in the process, changed the color of my heart.

SLIDE CUE: Tabitha lying on top of LEIGH

SOUND CUE: Cell rings

(LEIGH picks up cell)

SOUND CUE: Cell ring - OUT

Jessica, I've got something for you - something Personal. Delete my message, sorry it's so long. It's about, well, motherhood at 70 and these two characters who ... Integration - it's about integration. I hope.

(sits in chair)

It starts with a writer ... well, that would be me, wouldn't it? - and I'm sitting in a sea of crumpled papers - that part's been done before - but I can make it my own ... trying to write about an abortion ... but I can't because ...

LIGHT CUE: Blackout

SLIDE CUE: Tabitha lying on top of LEIGH - OUT

THE END