

# KNOWING CAIRO

By  
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**Characters:**

Rose: An elderly German-Jewish New Yorker.

Lydia: Her middle-aged daughter.

Winsome: An African-American home care worker.

**Setting:**

Rose's NYC Upper West Side Apartment.

**Time:**

Present.

*Rose sits at a nicely set table. She has a huge napkin tied around her neck and her plate is full. Offstage we hear pots being shuffled around by Lydia. Rose cringes each time. Finally all the pots crash down. Rose waits a beat and then calls off stage--*

ROSE

I don't like pudding.

LYDIA

Mom-

*another pot bangs down*

ROSE

I don't like pudding Lydia.

LYDIA

He said you should eat more.

ROSE

I paid him \$200 for the visit. He had to say something, didn't he?

*Rose presses the meat on her plate with her finger and makes a face. More pans bang and Lydia enters.*

LYDIA

Eat it. Please.

ROSE

I don't care for pork chops.

LYDIA

You said you wanted pork chops.

ROSE

I meant the other ones.

LYDIA

What?

ROSE

You know, those other chops. Lamb chops.

LYDIA

Eat the pork chop Mom.

ROSE

I'm not hungry.

LYDIA

I'm going to count to three and then you are going to take a bite. OK

One.

Two.

Three.

*Rose doesn't move.*

Fine. I don't care.  
You know I cancelled all of my patients for today.

ROSE

I was sick.

LYDIA

And we went to the doctor.

ROSE

That I should eat more? That's a solution?

LYDIA

Nobody can find anything wrong with you.

ROSE

I know what you're thinking.

LYDIA

It's true isn't it?

ROSE

Don't start that with me.

*Lydia looks hard at Rose.*

ROSE (CONT'D)

Somebody has so much pain that it causes them to scream out in the middle of the night and you think it's psychological. Well one day I hope you have pain like I do.

LYDIA

Three hours.

ROSE

What three hours?

LYDIA

You screamed for three hours, Ma.

ROSE

I had pain.

LYDIA

You had pain that nobody can find.

*Lydia begins to eat pork chop. Rose moves plate towards her. Lydia ads ketchup.*

ROSE

You shouldn't eat ketchup with that.

LYDIA

I like it.

ROSE

You cooked it too long. Now it's dry.

LYDIA  
You haven't even tried it.

ROSE  
Are you staying tonight?

LYDIA  
Ma-

ROSE  
The night before this I have such pain that I scream for three hours and you won't stay.

LYDIA  
You just want to get rid of them, don't you?

ROSE  
I don't know what you're talking about.

LYDIA  
This is the fourth one.

ROSE  
They want to be nurses and they can't handle an old lady screaming?

LYDIA  
They can't sleep.

ROSE  
I had pain.

LYDIA  
Life is much worse at a permanent care facility-

*Rose stares at her.*

ROSE  
Something's burning.

LYDIA  
What?

ROSE  
In the kitchen.

*Lydia jumps up and runs off stage. We hear her banging around in the kitchen.*

LYDIA  
(offstage)  
Oh damn it. Damn it. Damn it.

*Rose sits and waits. A pot crashes. She winces. Lydia re-enters and sits down again.*

LYDIA (CONT'D)  
Well. You didn't want it anyway.

ROSE

What do you do with those people when they come in to your office?

LYDIA

Why? Are you interested in coming?

ROSE

Don't start that with me.  
Who are they that they are so unhappy?

LYDIA

Just people.

ROSE

It's a shame they are so unhappy. Your father was a depressive you know.

LYDIA

I know Ma. I grew up with him, remember?

ROSE

I could never understand. He would tell me he was depressed and I would think what does he mean? The man escaped death in Europe and he's depressed in Westchester?

LYDIA

I'm sure that helped.

ROSE

Ach-What did we know about things like that. Back then only homos went to shrinks.

LYDIA

Ma-

ROSE

It's true. Homos went to shrinks.

LYDIA

Stop it-

ROSE

Ach. We can't even have a conversation anymore.

*Rose stands up.*

LYDIA

You're not going to bed yet.

ROSE

Why not?

LYDIA

It's 6:30.

ROSE

I didn't sleep well last night.

*Doorbell rings.*

ROSE (CONT'D)

Don't answer it.  
It's the religious nuts.

LYDIA

Ma, listen-

ROSE

I always tell them that I'm a Jewish lady but they don't go away.

*Doorbell rings again.*

For this we have religious freedom?

*Lydia goes to open the door. Winsome is there. Rose can't see her.*

LYDIA

Come in please.

*Winsome enters.*

ROSE

No Lydia. This is not fair.

LYDIA (CONT'D)  
(to Winsome)

Have a seat.

*Winsome remains standing, looking at Rose.*

ROSE

Does this one speak English? That other Schwarze had such an accent that-

LYDIA

Can I get you something to drink?

ROSE

You think this one will stay?  
They don't want sick old screaming ladies with pain.  
These people aren't caretakers, they're bloodsuckers.  
She'll be gone in two days Lydia.

LYDIA  
(to Winsome)

Please, sit down, make yourself comfortable.

ROSE

Vampires, vampires. Both of you.

*Rose exits in a huff. Lydia looks at Winsome apologetically. Winsome is nonplussed.*

LYDIA

I'm so sorry. She didn't mean that...She's just...

WINSOME

I understand.

LYDIA

Well, thank you for coming.

WINSOME

The agency sent me.

LYDIA

Well still, on such short notice, it was very nice--

WINSOME

That's how the agencies work. Someone gets fired and then it's a big rush to get someone new. I'm used to it.

LYDIA

Right. Well you know in this case nobody got fired.

*Winsome looks at her.*

LYDIA (CONT'D)

Please, sit down. I'm sorry if I'm a little edgy. I've spent all day with my mother. She can be a challenge.

*Winsome sits.*

I don't know if you know very much about her case but--

WINSOME

She's class 1. The agency told me.

LYDIA

Class 1?

WINSOME

It's what they call the really difficult ones.  
Pays the most.

LYDIA

Oh. I see.

WINSOME

I've handled screamers before.

LYDIA

Screamers?

WINSOME

That's what they told me. Screamer-Class 1.

*Lydia stares.*

LYDIA

Oh.

So you can spend the night and stay through tomorrow evening?

WINSOME

The agency gave me your instructions.

LYDIA

We're looking for a more permanent person for her, but well-

WINSOME

They told me if I wanted, I could have the job.

LYDIA

They did?

WINSOME

Hard to find permanent situations for class ones.

LYDIA

Well, I'd still have to interview you...Take a look at your references.

WINSOME

Of course.

LYDIA

I mean I'm sure everything's just fine. It's just that these days you can't be too careful.

*Lydia sighs and looks around the apartment. She sighs again. Winsome looks around as Lydia does.*

WINSOME

I've gotta tell you, I don't clean.

LYDIA

Sorry?

WINSOME

Dust is bad for old people. Exacerbates respiratory illnesses. If I were you I'd get somebody in here to clean.

LYDIA

Uh. Oh. OK. I'll call around tomorrow.

WINSOME

Yep. Dust is terrible for the old folks.  
You live in Westchester?

LYDIA

Yes. Yes, I do.

WINSOME

Uh-huh.

LYDIA

Do you know the area?

WINSOME

No. Last screamer's daughter lived there too though.

LYDIA

Oh--I, I see.

*Lydia stands there but doesn't move.*

WINSOME

Anyway, I should let you go. And don't worry. Your mother and I will get along famously.

LYDIA

Good. Good. Uh--I'll just go and say goodbye to her.

*Scene 2. Lydia is sorting through her mother's old wooden desk and trying to clean up. Papers are everywhere.*

LYDIA (CONT'D)

We'll store them.

ROSE

I know you. You'll throw them away.

LYDIA

Well where do you want to put all this stuff?

ROSE

I like it fine where it is.

LYDIA

We've been through this.

ROSE

I like the desk.

LYDIA

You never use it.

ROSE

It's my furniture.

LYDIA

It's taking up too much space in here.

ROSE

I don't believe you're listening to her.

LYDIA

Who?

ROSE

You know who. Her who.

LYDIA

She has a name.

ROSE

All the others slept on it just fine. No complaints, but her--

LYDIA

She's good for you.

ROSE

How would you know? You're never here.

LYDIA

What am I doing now?

ROSE

Ruining my furniture. Changing my apartment so she can have a sofa bed. You know when I first came to-

LYDIA

Yes Ma. I know.

*Lydia adds more to the throw-out pile.*

ROSE

Just throw everything away why don't you?

LYDIA

You said you didn't want to pay for storage.

ROSE

My own daughter, with a basement the size of the Hindenburg can't even store my things.

LYDIA

We're taking the desk.

ROSE

You always wanted my desk.

LYDIA

It's his desk.

ROSE

What was his is mine. That's how marriage works you know.

*Lydia looks at more papers.*

LYDIA

You never use it and the sofa bed needs the room to open up.

*Lydia looks at papers*

My god mother. This is the receipt for when you sold the house in 1982.

ROSE

I'm tired.

LYDIA

His check ledger from 1979.

ROSE

Well where were you when he died to help me clean it all out? You were saving the world doing some peace work in Africa. You didn't even make it to his funeral.

LYDIA

That's because you insisted that it be done within 24 hours of his death.

ROSE

Jewish law.

LYDIA

You've never followed Jewish law in your life. You let Justin sit around for days while I tried to find a rabbi who--

ROSE

That was different.

LYDIA

How was that different? He was dead, wasn't he?

ROSE

Your father was forced to leave his home because of his religion. I should ignore that at his funeral?

That divan you're throwing away to replace with a sofa bed was his mother's. He had it shipped all the way here at great expense just to make her happy. He wanted his mother to be happy.

LYDIA

Please. And it's a sofa Ma. Freud had a divan.

ROSE

And you can just throw it out. Throw your history on the curb like that, so some hired help can have a better night's sleep.

LYDIA

If that's what she needs to rest-

ROSE

She rests well enough through my screams.

LYDIA

Mother--

ROSE

That's right. I screamed until my throat hurt and she didn't even come check on me.

*Lydia grins.*

What are you grinning at?

LYDIA

You've met your match.

ROSE

Wipe that smile off your face.

LYDIA

Let's finish these papers.

ROSE

When you were in Africa, missing your father's funeral, who stored your things in her basement?

LYDIA

I was 21 Ma.

ROSE

When I was that age I had already been thrown out of my country, learned a new language, supported my parents--your grandfather, owner of this desk. I worked to marry your father, to have a house that had a basement to store your things so you could help some people in Africa and come back to a home which I gave you.

*Lydia is reading papers.*

LYDIA

This you should file.

ROSE

Oh. I figured that would interest you.

LYDIA

It's good to know you have one.

ROSE

What did you think? I was gonna leave it to the state?

LYDIA

(reading)

You want to be buried in Baden Württemberg?

ROSE

That's old. Your father and I once talked about it.

LYDIA

You should change that.

ROSE

Why? Are you gonna ship me off to Baden Württemberg with all the money I leave you?

LYDIA

Do you want me to take care of this?

ROSE

You're interested in being helpful all of a sudden. Leave it. I'll take care of it.

*Lydia pulls out an old wooden box that contains chips for card playing. The chips are made of painted and dyed ivory. Lydia spills out the chips and presses down on a big chip with a small one, causing it to spring forward. Rose holds the box.*

LYDIA

Look how far that one went.  
Do you remember?

ROSE

The headaches.

LYDIA

Yeah.

ROSE

He would put them on your eyes. You said the purple ones cured your headaches.

*Lydia puts the chips on her eyes and lies back on the carpet. She massages her head. Rose watches and then collects the chips and puts them away. Rose takes the chips off of Lydia's eyes last.*

ROSE (CONT'D)

Don't get things made like this anymore. Ivory, not plastic.

LYDIA

Let's finish up. They'll be here at two.

ROSE

Who?

LYDIA

Jennifer's Convertibles.

ROSE

Who's Jennifer?

*Lydia takes the box of chips and puts it on her bag, with her things.*

ROSE (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

LYDIA

What?

ROSE

The box of chips.

LYDIA

I wanted to bring it home for the kids. Billy loves marbles and I thought--

ROSE

He'll swallow them.

LYDIA

He's eight Ma. He doesn't do that anymore.

ROSE

That's what you said about my platinum ring.

LYDIA

You got it back eventually, didn't you?

ROSE

That's not funny Lydia.

LYDIA

It's a game for kids.

ROSE

And for the moment it is still mine.

LYDIA

Mother--

ROSE

You can throw away the divan, claim the desk, force me to get a sofa bed of all things, leave me with the Queen-of-Sheba-sleeping-beauty-of-the-Bronx as my only companion, but you can't have everything your way.

*The doorbell rings. Mother and daughter stare at each other. Rose puts out her hand for the box. Lydia doesn't give it. Rose takes it out of Lydia's hands.*

ROSE

You can have them when I'm dead.

*She exits with box and chips.*

*Scene 3: Winsome sits on the new sofa reading. Rose enters, looks around, and coughs. Winsome doesn't look up. She coughs again. Winsome reads.*

ROSE (CONT'D)

Where's my coffee?

*Winsome ignores this. Rose stands.*

I don't know if Lydia told you, but I like to have half a cup of decaf mixed with half a cup of regular with two tablespoons of 2% milk first thing every morning. The coffee beans come from Zabar's.

*Winsome reads.*

Excuse me?  
Hello?

*Winsome doesn't move.*

Hey!  
HEY!

*Winsome ignores her; Rose walks over.*

You wait until I tell Lydia.  
I'll count to three and then you are fired. One. Two. Three.

*Rose moves closer to Winsome.*

You listen to me. Lydia's going to file a complaint with the agency and you won't get a job anywhere ever again. You'll be gone by tomorrow. It was nice meeting you and I'm terribly sorry we won't have time to get to know each other.

*Rose walks to breakfast table and sits down alone.*

WINSOME

She'll just get someone else.

ROSE

What?

WINSOME

Don't fool yourself. That daughter of yours got plenty a things to do all day and I can bet you that not one of them includes taking care of you.

ROSE

Well--that's just not true. You're wrong about that. What would you know about it anyway?

WINSOME

Some things are just obvious.

*Winsome continues reading her book. Rose sits at table.*

*Scene 4. Rose stands at the table while Lydia sets it.*

ROSE

Listen. You're not listening. I don't like her.

LYDIA

Shh. Ma, please. She'll hear you.

ROSE

Fire her.

LYDIA

Shh.

ROSE

She ignores me. The other day I asked her for coffee in a civil manner--

LYDIA

Yeah right.

(to Winsome in kitchen)

Do you need any help in there?

WINSOME

Just finishing up the chicken.

ROSE

She ignores me--

LYDIA

If you make her quit mother, so help me God I'll move you to a home.

*Lydia looks at Rose.*

You did it again, didn't you? You told her I was going to fire her, didn't you?  
Mother?

*Rose gets a bit tearful.*

ROSE

She doesn't even answer when I speak. Doesn't even acknowledge that I'm there.  
Please Lydia. Please don't make me stay with her. Please Lydia.  
I would never do this to you.

*Winsome enters with chicken carved on a platter.*

LYDIA

Winsome. How lovely. Thank you so much. Look Ma, how nice.

ROSE

I'm not hungry.

LYDIA

Good then. More for us.

*They sit. Winsome serves food. Winsome and Lydia eat.  
Rose stares.*

LYDIA (CONT'D)

So. Winsome. How was your day?

WINSOME

Fine I guess. You?

LYDIA

Well, today was not such a good day.

ROSE

(to Winsome)

That means she lost more patients.

LYDIA

But thank you for asking. It's not often I have the opportunity to talk about my day in  
this apartment. In fact, I can't remember the last time.

*Rose starts to exit.*

Ma, wait until dinner is finished.

ROSE

Can't an old lady decide when she has to go to the toilet? After that performance you  
gave I think I want to vomit.

*She exits. Winsome doesn't look up.*

LYDIA

This chicken is fantastic. My mother's lucky to have someone who can cook as well as  
you can.

*Lydia pauses. Silence.*

LYDIA (CONT'D)

I just want to say, first off, I don't know what my mother might have said, but I am not going to fire you. She likes to make idle threats.

WINSOME

Oh I know that--last screamer did it too. Threatened to fire me at least twice every day. It makes 'em feel like they got some kind a power. I don't let it get to me. I'd be no good at my job if I let them folks get to me.

LYDIA

Oh. I see. Well, I know my mother is a difficult lady. But still, I do want her to be happy.

I mean, my mother says you ignore her. Now I am sure it is simply her perception and that you are in fact not ignoring her. But maybe if you just, I don't know, tried harder to give her the feeling that you were paying attention to her, maybe she would, I don't know, maybe she would be happier.

*Winsome slowly looks up and meets Lydia's gaze.*

WINSOME

Yes Ma'am.

*Winsome stands up and clears her place.*

LYDIA

Winsome, call me Lydia.

Look-I didn't mean to...I'm sorry. I've upset you haven't I?

WINSOME

I should be getting to that kitchen. You have a good night now, Miss Lydia.

*Winsome exits. Lydia stares.*

LYDIA

Winsome-

*Lydia clears her place and follows Winsome out.*

*Scene 5. Very early morning. The room is dark and the sofa bed is opened. Rose is offstage in kitchen, light is on. We see the outline of Winsome in the bed. There is water running in the kitchen. Suddenly a loud crash, sound of broken glass. Winsome wakes up and turn on the light.*

WINSOME

Rose?

*There's no answer.*

Rose? Are you OK?

*Winsome gets out of bed just as Rose enters. Rose is holding her hand out and whining.*

What happened, Rose? Sit down. Are You OK? Let me see your hand.

*Winsome supports Rose as she walks to a chair by the table. Winsome takes out the first aid kit.*

WINSOME (CONT'D)

Now we'll just hold your hand up high and put some pressure on it. Come on Rose. I need you to talk to me so I know you're not going into shock or something, cuz then I'd have to rush you right to the hospital and I know you wouldn't like being wheeled through the hospital in your nightie. Right?

ROSE

I dropped it.  
I tried to pick up the big pieces.

WINSOME

Glass is sharp.

ROSE

It wasn't glass.

*Winsome holds Rose's hand up and applies a piece of gauze.*

WINSOME

You hold this on your hand now.

*Winsome looks through first aid kit.*

ROSE

Glass doesn't shatter like that.  
Crystal shatters like that. Long shards. Has to do with the molecules or something.

Winsome

And what were you doing up in the kitchen at four in the morning?

ROSE (CONT'D)

I couldn't sleep.

WINSOME

I see.

ROSE

And I couldn't get any stupid radio reception. I like to listen to the BBC at night. But this time there was no good reception. Stupid radio.  
So I got up to get some water.

WINSOME

And?

ROSE

I wanted to have a look at the bowl.

WINSOME

The bowl?

ROSE

The one all over the floor.

WINSOME

I see.

ROSE

It was all dusty, so I thought I should clean it. It's not good to treat valuable things with such little respect.

*Winsome checks Rose's hand*

It was from my grandmother.

WINSOME

Stopped bleeding. Won't need stitches. Just a lot of blood.

*She pulls out the spray antiseptic.*

ROSE

No.

WINSOME

No what?

ROSE

I don't want that stuff.

WINSOME

Why not?

ROSE

It stings.

WINSOME

It won't sting.

ROSE

Yes it will.

WINSOME

It'll sting for only a second.

ROSE

See, I told you it would sting.

WINSOME

You're having it.

ROSE

No.

WINSOME

Listen to me, I am paid to take care of you and I will do my job whether you like it or not. Now, give me your hand.

*Rose stares at her and finally does. Winsome inspects her hand for glass shards. She pulls up the antiseptic. Rose closes her eyes and cringes. Winsome sprays it. Rose screams. Winsome blows on the hand. Rose calms down. Winsome dresses the cut.*

WINSOME (CONT'D)

There. That wasn't so bad.

ROSE

From your perspective I suppose it wasn't.

WINSOME

Ready to go back to bed?

ROSE

No.

*Winsome looks at her.*

ROSE (CONT'D)

I'm not tired.

WINSOME

Well I am and it's the middle of the night and I got to clean up that mess you made in there.

ROSE

Don't throw away the pieces. We'll get it fixed.  
If we were in Germany they could fix it. The workmanship is much better over there. People are actually trained to do a job and then know how to do it.

WINSOME

Rose, I'm gonna go in there and clean up the floor now. And you are going to bed, OK?

*Rose looks at her, deciding.*

ROSE

Will you turn on the radio in here?

WINSOME

And you'll stay in bed?

ROSE

Yes.

WINSOME

OK then.

ROSE

You're going tomorrow?

WINSOME

Yes. Tomorrow night.

ROSE

And you come back when?

WINSOME

Sunday night.

*Winsome turns the radio on. It is set to the BBC. Rose closes her eyes.*

*Scene 6: Monday morning. Rose enters and walks to the breakfast table. Her cup of coffee is there. Winsome sits on the sofa and reads.*

ROSE  
What are you reading?

*Winsome looks up and pauses.*

WINSOME  
Anna Karenina.

ROSE  
By Tolstoy?

WINSOME  
You know another Anna Karenina?

ROSE  
You're reading that?

WINSOME  
Yes Rose. I like to read.

ROSE  
Oh.  
She gets run over by a train in the end.

*Pause.*

ROSE (CONT'D)  
Aren't you hungry?

WINSOME  
I already ate.

ROSE  
Oh.  
I stopped screaming. In the night I mean.

WINSOME  
That's true.

ROSE  
Lydia thinks I do it to get rid of the nurses. That it's on purpose so that she'll have to stay with me.

WINSOME  
Is it?

I don't know.  
Did you sleep well?

ROSE

Yes.

WINSOME

The new pull-out sofa is comfortable?

ROSE

Very.

WINSOME

Lydia threw away the divan.

ROSE

I know.

WINSOME

When I first came to this country I slept on hard wood floors.

ROSE

When my ancestors first came to this country they were shackled to them.

WINSOME

You're smart.

ROSE

Not smart enough to have a better job.

WINSOME

It could be worse.  
I could wet the bed like some old people.

ROSE

You could also sleep all day and be friendly when you are awake, like some old people.

WINSOME

How long do you think I'll live?

ROSE

You're chatty today.

WINSOME

Last week was a bad week.

ROSE

Lydia tell you to be nice to me so I don't quit and she has to find someone new?

WINSOME

No.

ROSE

You apologizing for last week?

WINSOME

How was your weekend?

ROSE

Saw my kids. WINSOME

Oh. You have kids. Where are they? ROSE

The Bronx. WINSOME

Oh. You miss them during the week? ROSE

Silly question. 'Course I do. WINSOME

Oh. How many? ROSE

Two. WINSOME

That's a good number. I had two.  
Do you want to know how my weekend was? ROSE

Not really. WINSOME

Boring. ROSE

Boring because you didn't have me to torture. WINSOME

The one Lydia got for weekends watches TV all day long. ROSE

I see. And I suppose you sit there telling her how bad it is with me. WINSOME

No. ROSE

Why not? WINSOME

Well it's not so bad with you. ROSE

That's not what you thought last week. WINSOME

I think we should declare a cease-fire. ROSE

I can't do that until I have a sign of good faith from you. WINSOME

ROSE  
What?

WINSOME  
You hollered at me every day.

ROSE  
You ignored me.

WINSOME  
You told me to get my lazy ass into the kitchen.

ROSE  
The others just quit.

WINSOME  
I'm not a quitter.  
Anyways, I need the money.

ROSE  
Well. I said sorry.

WINSOME  
No. You didn't.

ROSE  
Well you know I meant it.

*Winsome returns to reading and Rose looks at her from the table.*

ROSE (CONT'D)  
Do you want some breakfast?

WINSOME  
No.

ROSE  
I don't like sitting at the table alone. That's what lonely people do. People with no friends have to eat alone.

WINSOME  
I'm right here.

*Winsome reads, Rose stares.*

ROSE  
You could read here.

WINSOME  
I want to make good use of the sofa you bought me.

ROSE  
Ok. Ok. You win.

*Rose picks up her coffee and sits down in a chair near the couch.*

WINSOME

Oh.

ROSE

I really don't like eating alone. We could just sit together. We don't even have to talk.

*Winsome considers and then puts the book down.*

*Scene 7: Rose is playing with her food. Winsome sits with her.*

WINSOME

Eat it.

*Rose pushes the food around the plate.*

I mean it Rose. You can't hide the peas under your mashed potatoes.

ROSE

What are we doing today?

*Rose takes a bite. She talks with her mouth full. It's hard to understand.*

WINSOME

Swallow, then talk Rose.

*Rose swallows a huge bite.*

ROSE

It's sunny out.

WINSOME

Yes...

ROSE

Do you know I haven't been out since November.  
None of the others wanted to take me out. Too much work in case I got tired.

WINSOME

What? You want to go to the park?

ROSE

Old people go to the park.

WINSOME

OK.

ROSE

You have a magazine?

WINSOME

A magazine?

ROSE  
New Yorker.

WINSOME  
No.

ROSE  
We could, well, I mean if you wanted...We could go to a show.

WINSOME  
A show?

ROSE  
A matinee. On Broadway. A real play, nothing with singing animals.  
I used to go with my husband Joe. And then with Lydia.  
But no one, I mean the other nurses, ever wanted to go. They preferred TV they said.  
But I thought--I mean since you are reading Anna Karenina, I thought you might be  
interested. We could see whatever you wanted. If you go downstairs and get a  
magazine we can pick.

*Winsome looks at Rose.*

I would like to go. And it's so sunny out. We can even take a taxi. Do you want to?  
It'll be fun. Really it will.

*Winsome thinks.*

I'm sorry about last week. I apologize. I really do. I won't act like that again.

WINSOME  
Clean your plate.  
And then we can go.

*Rose starts to eat.*

*Scene 8. Lights up on Lydia and Rose.*

LYDIA  
I'm sorry I couldn't visit last week.

ROSE  
It's OK.

LYDIA  
Don't be like that.

ROSE  
What?

LYDIA  
Say it's OK and then be upset.

ROSE  
I'm really not upset, I've been busy.

LYDIA  
What have you been doing?

ROSE  
We go out everyday.

LYDIA  
You do?

ROSE  
Yes. We've gone all over the city. And to a Broadway play.

LYDIA  
Really?

ROSE  
Yes.

LYDIA  
I knew you'd get used to Winsome!

ROSE  
Oh, I like her.

LYDIA  
You do? But just last week you were...

ROSE  
I was wrong.

LYDIA  
Well that's a change of heart. So she doesn't ignore you anymore?

ROSE  
No. I like her. And I like seeing all these parts of the city. I even like the subway.

LYDIA  
Well, that's great.

ROSE  
Yes.

LYDIA  
I honestly thought this wasn't going to work out.

ROSE  
Well, perhaps you shouldn't be such a negative minded person. No wonder your patients are diving off of buildings.

*Pause.*

Have you ever been to Williamsburg?

LYDIA  
No.

ROSE

We went on Thursday. We took the subway. It's much cleaner these days and there were some funny Koreans selling battery operated dogs that bark. I bought one. It didn't work. Then we went to an art gallery. The people who run it are lesbians. Tomorrow we're going to the Cloisters, and the day after to the Bronx Zoo.

LYDIA

Listen Ma. Don't get carried away. I wouldn't want you to wear her out.

ROSE

Oh butt out, would you. We're having fun.

LYDIA

Excuse me. For years you had no interest in this stuff.

ROSE

Not true.

LYDIA

When the kids were younger we invited you to come with us every weekend somewhere. We even went to the Cloisters once.

ROSE

Do you want some chicken? Winsome made it. It's delicious.

LYDIA

I had a big lunch.

ROSE

Fine.

*She reaches over and takes some off Lydia's plate.*

More for me then.

LYDIA

You know, Ma, you could come up to us this weekend. I could pick you up after work, say 3:30 or so. I know everyone would love to see you.

*Pause.*

ROSE

I like to sleep in my own bed.

*Pause.*

ROSE (CONT'D)

You could come down here with Steve and the boys. For the day I mean. We could do whatever they wanted.

LYDIA

They have basketball Saturday and Sunday. Steve's coaching.

ROSE

Oh.

LYDIA

Maybe another time.

ROSE  
Well tell them I say hello.

LYDIA  
I will.

*Lydia looks around*

LYDIA (CONT'D)  
I need to get going.

ROSE  
Ok.

LYDIA  
Well I wanted to wait until Winsome got back.

ROSE  
She's food shopping.

LYDIA  
The supermarket's just down the-

ROSE  
The other one's better.

LYDIA  
It's twice as expensive.

ROSE  
What? You afraid I'm spending your inheritance on overpriced zucchini?

LYDIA  
Mother, you can shop wherever you like. It's just that she's been out for a while.

ROSE  
So?

LYDIA  
Well, what if something happens to you while she's out?

ROSE  
What could happen?

LYDIA  
I don't know, if you fall or something.

ROSE  
If you're so worried maybe you should come over whenever she goes out.

LYDIA  
OK.  
Just let me know in advance and I'll-

ROSE  
Don't be absurd.  
Do you want to lose all your patients? Besides, I've got Winsome with me most of the day. Don't worry about me.

*The sound of the front door opening is heard*

LYDIA

Mother--I just think that maybe it would be good for us to spend some time together.

ROSE

(yells to Winsome)

Lydia's here.

*Winsome enters, wearing a matching coat and hat.*

WINSOME

Hello Lydia.

LYDIA

Hello.

*They all stare at each other. Silence.*

Where are the groceries?

ROSE

I told her to have them delivered. No use wearing her out, right Lydia?

*Winsome takes off her coat. They all watch. Rose points to the coat.*

ROSE (CONT'D)

(to Lydia)

Four hundred and twenty dollars with the hat. A steal.

WINSOME

Rose-

ROSE

Look at that trim. That's quality.  
She didn't have one warm enough. Now she's plenty warm.

LYDIA

I have lots of nice coats, all you had to do was tell me and I could have--

ROSE

The poor dear was freezing. How can I go out if she's not comfortable? And you said you didn't want her to get sick.

*Doorbell rings.*

Agh good. That must be the food delivery.  
Let him in would you, Lydia dear.

*Scene 9. Lights up on Winsome and Rose.*

ROSE

I hate being cooped up like this.

WINSOME  
You'll get sicker if you go out now.

ROSE  
I'm not sick; I've got a slight cold.

WINSOME  
We're not going out.

ROSE  
So what do you want to do?

WINSOME  
We could read.

ROSE  
What are you reading?

WINSOME  
War and Peace.

ROSE  
The Russians depress me.

WINSOME  
You wanna watch TV?

ROSE  
God no.

WINSOME  
OK. I'll read until you decide.

*Winsome reads.*

ROSE  
You're different than most.

WINSOME  
Uh-huh

ROSE  
You're smart. That's not a typical characteristic.

WINSOME  
What, for my people?

ROSE  
For any people.

WINSOME  
I'm trained to care for people.

ROSE  
Why not be a doctor?

WINSOME

It takes years. There are courses I should have taken when I was in high school. There's a huge entrance test.

ROSE

So?

WINSOME

I got my kids. Who's gonna pay for everything while I spend eight years in school?

*Rose is silent.*

You people think we're lazy, but maybe my priorities are just different.

ROSE

You mean white people when you say you people?

WINSOME

You would go to medical school in my shoes?

ROSE

I would. Or I would have told Lydia to.

WINSOME

You people are funny.

ROSE

Why? And stop saying you people. I don't know if you mean Jewish or white.

WINSOME

You've got all sorts of skills and education but you have people like me taking care of the old folks and the babies all day long. I don't get it. My mother takes care of my kids all week and she knows when she gets old I'll take care of her. I would never leave her all day with some stranger.

ROSE

You can't judge everyone by me and Lydia. We have troubles.

WINSOME

I worked other places you know. I worked in a nursing home. Those were some messed up people. I felt sorry for them. There was this one woman, Anna. She stank to high heaven and wouldn't let anyone but her daughter wash her. But her daughter didn't like coming more than once a month so we had to sedate her just to wash her off. Washing her took an hour. And the smell. Mildew and urine. And when the daughter came she'd bring a plant for her mother, stay an hour and tell her mother to bathe once a day. Then the taxi would come and she would leave. The plant always died because the room didn't have enough light or something. And all of us nurses, mostly black except for some Indian ones who didn't want nothing to do with nobody, well we'd just shake our heads.

ROSE

That's going to be me.

WINSOME

Rose--I'm sorry. I didn't mean...Well...Lydia loves you.

ROSE

No.

WINSOME

Come on. Let's put you to bed for a little rest.

ROSE

Lydia wants to put me in a home.

WINSOME

Come on. Stand up now.

ROSE

Because I was a bad mother.

WINSOME

I shouldn't have told you that story.

ROSE

And I wasn't a good wife.

WINSOME

I'm sure you were great.

ROSE

Stop trying to make me stand up.

WINSOME

Come on Rose.

ROSE

I think you're my only friend.

WINSOME

I'll bring you some warm milk.

ROSE

You spend more time with me than anyone else.

WINSOME

With some tea biscuits.

ROSE

And then one day you'll leave me too, right?  
If I didn't pay you, you wouldn't visit me right? So I have no friends. None.

WINSOME

Come on. Let's go now. You'll feel better when you lie down.

*Rose is getting hysterical.*

ROSE

Tell me! If I didn't pay you, would you be my friend?

WINSOME

Rose, you need to calm down.

ROSE

Tell me. Would you visit me?

WINSOME

Rose please.

*Rose starts with the high-pitched screaming. She has almost what looks like a panic attack.*

Stop it. Rose.

ROSE

Would you visit me?

WINSOME

Rose-  
Calm down.

*Rose begins to thrash around, getting more hysterical*

ROSE

WOULD YOU? TELL ME?

*Rose is now screaming and thrashing about. Winsome approaches her. Winsome tries to grab her but Rose is hard to catch. Rose screams in Winsome's face. Winsome slaps Rose, hard, across the face. Rose stops screaming. She holds on to her cheek, just below her eye, where Winsome hit her. She reaches her hand out to Winsome.*

ROSE (CONT'D)

Would you visit me?

*Winsome looks at Rose and considers her answer and Rose's future hysterics.*

WINSOME

Yes Rose. I would.

*They stand.*

ROSE

I'm ready for bed now.

*Rose allows Winsome to help her.*

*Scene 10: Winsome is in the living room with Lydia. It's late in the evening.*

LYDIA

I meant to get here earlier.

WINSOME

Don't worry. I'll tell her you came by.

LYDIA

I was just busy at work and then there was traffic.

WINSOME

Really, I'll tell her.

LYDIA

It's just that, well, I promised her I'd come.

*Lydia pauses and looks around.*

She got new curtains.

WINSOME

She was hell bent on getting new curtains, what was it, last Wednesday. She made me go all the way down to Orchard street with her. But she got 'em. And then we had sauerbraten at her favorite German restaurant.

LYDIA

So it's going well then?

WINSOME

Oh fine.

LYDIA

Her cold is better?

WINSOME

All gone.

LYDIA

I'm glad she's so happy. She's usually really hard to please.

WINSOME

Well, you know, she's probably just going through a good phase.

LYDIA

She doesn't complain anymore. And she's always too busy to talk on the phone. She used to beg me to call.

WINSOME

Yep. She's all bark and no bite.

LYDIA

I was wondering...Why is it, I mean why did you leave your other job? The other lady?

*Winsome looks at Lydia.*

I mean it seems like you'd be in such high demand.

WINSOME

Her daughter, well she moved her to a nursing home.

LYDIA

Was she sick?

WINSOME

I thought she was alright. She was active. Liked to do things like Rose does. But her daughter, well she said it was just too expensive to keep me on. Better to move her to a nursing home.

LYDIA

Oh.

WINSOME

She was a good lady. Didn't do too well once she was moved to that home though.

LYDIA

That's too bad.

Well you be sure to let me know if you need my help dealing with my mother. I know she can be tough.

WINSOME

Don't worry about us. We're fine together. Like two peas in a pod we are.

LYDIA

Tell my mother to call anytime.

*Scene 11: Rain splatters against the window. Winsome brings tea. Rose has a small bruise on her cheek, near her eye.*

ROSE

Are we going out today?

WINSOME

Bad weather.

ROSE

Read to me.

WINSOME

Pick a book. You've got so many.

ROSE

I don't know.

WINSOME

Well, let's see what you got down here.

*Winsome begins to look and remove books from shelf. Dust flies.*

*Winsome looks through the shelf, piling up books that haven't been touched in years. Rose looks at Winsome*

ROSE

Stop. There. What's that?

WINSOME

What?

ROSE

What you have there, by your leg.

*Winsome picks up the book*

ROSE (CONT'D)

Bring it here.

*Winsome does.*

ROSE (CONT'D)

That is a book of the history of the families of the town of Esmer.

*Rose looks through book. She holds up a picture.*

ROSE (CONT'D)

Look. See--There.

*Rose points to a figure in the picture.*

ROSE (CONT'D)

I was 15 there. You can see Joe in the back with his parents. He's the skinny, fidgety looking one.  
And here, that's Peter.

WINSOME

Good looking.

ROSE

Yes. Very. He was 17. And the opposite of Joe. He was an excellent dancer. Smart too. He had asked me to marry him. Not that night of course. But later. Right before we left for America. He had a ring and everything. I told him as soon as all this political nonsense is over we'll marry and have such delightful children. He loved children. He wrote to me in New York. From the front. My parents were furious. When the letters stopped I first believed my mother and father were hiding them from me. But then I got a letter from him in Stalingrad. And then nothing more.

*Rose flips to a marked page.*

That was our house.

WINSOME

It's big.

ROSE

In the summer we had garden parties with decorated Chinese lanterns hung in the trees. Sometimes Joe would come. I never would have guessed I'd end up marrying him. I was so in love with Peter.  
But then suddenly it was 1945 and here we all were in America. And so many people were dead. Joe proposed to me on my birthday.

WINSOME

When is your birthday Rose?

ROSE

Oh-It doesn't matter.

WINSOME

No come on. When is it?

ROSE  
Well. March 18th.

WINSOME  
That's in two weeks Rose!

ROSE  
At my age it's hardly exciting.  
Trust me.

WINSOME  
You're going to be 80, right?  
You should have a party--

ROSE  
Ha!

WINSOME  
Why not?

ROSE  
And who would come?

WINSOME  
Invite your daughter. Your grandkids. Your son-in-law.  
There's no use dwelling on the pictures of parties you used to have.

*Pause.*

ROSE  
A party takes a lot of work.

WINSOME  
We sit here all day.

ROSE  
You want to help me throw a party?

WINSOME  
Too cold to go outside.

ROSE  
We could really do it up big. Decorate and everything.

WINSOME  
See that.

ROSE  
We could get the invitations printed up, really nice, on stationary. Hire a caterer.

WINSOME  
A caterer-

ROSE  
Well, if we invite the neighbors-

WINSOME

The neighbors?  
What about Lydia and your grandkids-

ROSE

They can come too.

WINSOME

Rose--Don't you want to spend your 80th birthday with your family? I know Lydia will want to spend it with you.

ROSE

I guess we could have the neighbors come for a quick cocktail hour.

WINSOME

And then Lydia, Steve and the grandkids for dinner.  
And instead of snails or frogs legs, we can have my fried chicken.

ROSE

At a party?

*Winsome looks at Rose.*

Oh, alright.

WINSOME

Let them have it in their memories like you have it in yours.

ROSE

Fried chicken though?

WINSOME

Trust me.

*Rose hands Winsome the book to put back. As she bends down she picks up another book.*

WINSOME (CONT'D)

Hey look what you've got here.

*Rose looks over.*

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. Mark Twain. My kids are reading it for school.

ROSE

I think I read it. Years ago. About that kid and his journey down the Mississippi with Jim.

Maybe I saw the movie. Did they make a movie?

WINSOME

Probably.

That town--where the book starts, that's where my mother comes from. When my kids read it I tell them to imagine an extra fine house with a big garden and huge tomato plants and flowers.

My mother laughs. She says what we got ourselves in the Bronx is better than some run-down Missouri shack with no hot water. She said they didn't have a toilet until 1958.

*Winsome opens the book to the middle and reads it to herself.*

ROSE

Aren't you going to read it to me?  
I'm ready.

*Winsome opens the book wider and reads.*

WINSOME

"We went drifting down into a big bend and the night clouded up and got hot. The river was very wide and was walled with solid timber on both sides"

*She pauses. Rose looks up.*

ROSE

Go on. I'm listening.

WINSOME

"You couldn't see a break in it hardly ever, or a light. We talked about Cairo and wondered whether we would know it when we got to it."

*Winsome stops reading. She and Rose look at each other.*

WINSOME (CONT'D)

The confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. Cairo. Cairo, Illinois.

ROSE

They pass it, right? They float too far down the river.

WINSOME

They do. They float right past it.

*Blackout.*

*INTERMISSION*

*ACT TWO*

*Scene 12. Winsome has fabric and sewing equipment out. Rose looks at patterns.*

ROSE

Look at this. Silk flowers.  
And I like the linen tablecloth in the picture here.

*There's a knock at the door.*

ROSE (CONT'D)

Don't answer. It's the religious nuts.

LYDIA

(through door)

Mother--

*Winsome opens the door and lets her in.*

ROSE

Lydia, you should call first. What if we weren't here, you would've wasted all that time traveling-

LYDIA

I was in the neighborhood anyway. I just thought I'd drop in.

WINSOME

It's nice to see you Lydia.

LYDIA

Thank you.  
What's going on in here?

WINSOME

We've started decorating for the party. Rose was eager--

LYDIA

You're having a party mother?

WINSOME

A birthday party. For her 80th.

LYDIA

Oh.  
I tried to throw you one when you were 75 but you said parties were-

ROSE

That was then.

LYDIA

(To Winsome)

If I knew she wanted a party I would have organized one.

ROSE

It doesn't matter. Winsome and I are doing it.

LYDIA

Well is there anything I can do to help?

ROSE  
Winsome and I can handle it just fine.

LYDIA  
Ok.

ROSE  
You and Steve and the kids are invited for dinner that night. I was going to send an invitation, but now you know.

*Lydia sits down. She looks a bit dazed.*

WINSOME  
Anyone want some tea?

ROSE  
Tea gives me digestive problems.

LYDIA  
That would be lovely. Thank you.

*Winsome exits.*

ROSE  
So--

LYDIA  
Ma--If I had known you wanted a party--

ROSE  
It's fine. Winsome and I can handle it.

LYDIA  
I've called a few times but--

ROSE  
Sometimes we don't answer the phone.

LYDIA  
I was a little worried that things weren't going well.

ROSE  
Oh no. She's great. Very smart and interesting. Quick.  
She's different. I told you.

LYDIA  
You seem to be getting pretty attached.

*Lydia looks at Rose carefully. She looks at her cheek and eye where Winsome slapped her.*

LYDIA (CONT'D)  
Is there something wrong with your eye?

ROSE  
No.

LYDIA  
Let me see. Hold still.

ROSE  
It's fine.

LYDIA  
Ma-

ROSE  
Lydia, please, do stop fussing. I'm fine; we're planning a party.

*Lydia moves closer.*

LYDIA  
You have make-up on your cheek.

ROSE  
I fell down, OK?

LYDIA  
What?

ROSE  
In the bathroom. Last weekend already  
Winsome put ice on it immediately.

LYDIA  
Winsome isn't here on weekends.

ROSE  
When she came in on Monday she put ice on it.

LYDIA  
Mother--

*Winsome re-enters from the kitchen.*

WINSOME  
I'm making your favorite. Rose says you love Earl Grey.

LYDIA  
Yes, yes I do.

ROSE  
See that Lydia. We all care for you. We're always happy when you visit us. Right  
Winsome?

WINSOME  
Of course we are.

*Scene 13. A few days later. Apartment has more party items strewn about. The finished silk flowers are in a large vase in the center of the table. Rose gestures around the apartment.*

ROSE  
So, what do you think Lydia?

LYDIA  
Nice.

ROSE  
That's it. Only nice?

LYDIA  
Wonderful.

ROSE  
I think it's great.

LYDIA  
It is.

ROSE  
Are the kids looking forward to it?

LYDIA  
Yes. Yes, of course.

ROSE  
Good. Because we're going to make sure they have a good time. We're even getting new wallpaper.

LYDIA  
Wallpaper?

ROSE  
Stop spending my money. This wallpaper is 10 years old.

WINSOME  
Rose-

ROSE  
Yes?

WINSOME  
Why don't you get the patterns from your bedroom and show them to Lydia.

ROSE  
Ok.

*Rose exits. Lydia and Winsome remain.*

LYDIA  
You have quite an influence on her.

WINSOME  
She's a tough lady. Been through a lot.

LYDIA  
Yes. She has.

*Pause.*

LYDIA (CONT'D)

Uh-It must be difficult for you to be away from your family all week.

*Winsome stares.*

WINSOME

Yes. It is.

LYDIA

I was thinking...A friend of mine was talking to me last week, and it turns out that she's looking for a nanny for her two kids. Not live-in. Just during the day. And I was telling her about you, and about how good you are with my mother and she begged me to ask you if you were maybe interested in changing jobs. At first I told her that there was just no way, but then, well she told me how much she was willing to pay and I just felt it would be unfair not to tell you about the job. You see what I mean?

WINSOME

Well, I don't know--I mean Rose and I--

LYDIA

I told Janet, that's my friend, that I'd talk to you and she suggested that you could, if you wanted, come by sometime next week to meet her kids and spend the day. She said next Friday would good.

WINSOME

What about--

LYDIA

It's no problem. I can stay with my mother that day. I mean you do it all week, one day won't kill me right?

*Winsome looks at Lydia*

WINSOME

Of course.

LYDIA

Shall I...Well, I'll give you a call next week to give you directions to her house.

*Beat. Rose comes back in.*

ROSE

These are the patterns, Lydia.

*Lydia looks.*

LYDIA

Nice.

ROSE

Has Winsome been telling you about the party?

LYDIA

Yes. Yes.

ROSE

Next week we're going shopping for more decorations and supplies. Winsome knows of a fantastic party supply store. And we're going to firm up the menu and order all the food too. Right?

*Pause. Winsome looks at Lydia.*

LYDIA

That sounds just lovely.

ROSE

It's going to be a really great party and Winsome said she'd teach me calligraphy to do the envelopes. We're also going to have--

WINSOME

Rose-

LYDIA

Ma, don't tire yourself out. Relax. I want you to be relaxed.

ROSE

Thank you Lydia.

LYDIA

You're welcome mother.

*Pause. They all look at each other. Silence.*

ROSE

Don't you need to head back to the office?

LYDIA

Uh, yeah. At three.

ROSE

Well, you'd better hurry up then. You haven't got wings.

LYDIA

Alright then.

*Lydia bends down to kiss her mother.*

ROSE

Bye Lydia.

LYDIA

Bye Mom.

*Lydia turns to Winsome*

Bye.

*Winsome waves goodbye. Lydia exits. Pause.*

ROSE

So, tell me, how should we set up the table?

WINSOME

Not now Rose.

ROSE

Are you feeling sick?

WINSOME

No. Just tired. Really tired.

*Scene 14: Winsome and Rose are at the table. They have soup bowls. Rose is tasting.*

ROSE

Good. Very good. Just the right amount of marrow gives it the proper taste. It's identical to the one my mother made.  
Taste it.

*Winsome does.*

Do you think it's disgusting?

WINSOME

Before or after you tell me the ingredients?

ROSE

Before.

WINSOME

No, then it's delicious.

ROSE

So you think the kids will like it?

WINSOME

Just don't talk about the oxtail and marrow and you'll be fine.

ROSE

My mother made it every year for my birthday. It was because after the war, nobody had anything to eat. We got scraps. But my mother always made it seem like it was a delicacy.

*They eat their soup.*

ROSE (CONT'D)

I want to make this soup for my grandkids. I mean to share it. The story of it. That my mother made it. I want them to think of it when they think of me. I want them to think of something, when they think of me. When I'm dead I want them to remember the smell of oxtail soup.

*Winsome laughs. Rose looks at her.*

What's so amusing about that?

WINSOME

Not too many people want to be remembered by the smell of oxtail soup.  
So are you going to make the soup for your party?

ROSE

I thought you would. This is delicious.

WINSOME

Maybe we could make it in advance and then freeze it.

ROSE

No, no. It has to be fresh. Freezing kills the vitamins.

WINSOME

I think it wouldn't be bad to make it in advance. Maybe before Friday.

ROSE

No. It's my 80th birthday party. I don't want to serve soup that's been frozen, especially when you just learned how to make it. That was the whole point of making a small batch now. We'll have plenty of time the day before the party, we don't need to make it a week in advance.

WINSOME

Fine.

ROSE

I thought we understood that.

WINSOME

You mean you thought I understood that.

ROSE

Well, yes, I did.

WINSOME

The problem with you Rose, is that you're completely inflexible. It's your way or no way. You could let a person have an opinion once in a while.

ROSE

Oh I see. I prevent you from having an opinion?

WINSOME

Yes, you do.

ROSE

Maybe I also prevented you from getting an education? Maybe I prevent you from living in semi-poverty in the Bronx by having you live here with me. Convenient to blame someone else, isn't it?

WINSOME

No wonder Lydia doesn't want to take care of you.

ROSE

What does this have to do with Lydia?

WINSOME

It's strange isn't it, that a daughter couldn't find the time to care for her mother. That you need me at all? You ever wonder about that?

ROSE

Listen, if you dislike it so much here then maybe you should just find someone else to pay your salary.

WINSOME

Maybe that's a good idea Rose. Maybe I just will.

*Rose and Winsome stare at each other. Rose turns away.*

WINSOME (CONT'D)

Rose--  
Rose-

*Rose sniffles.*

ROSE

I'm sorry. I don't want to fight with you.

WINSOME

No. I'm sorry. I didn't mean that.

ROSE

Lydia's always telling me I drive people away. I'm just not the kind of person anyone will ever care about. You're right about the soup. It won't hurt to freeze it. You didn't mean it did you? About finding someone else?

*There's a pause.*

WINSOME

It's just that sometimes I have a lot of outside pressures.

ROSE

Money?

WINSOME

Money is certainly one. A big one.

ROSE

Do you need money?

WINSOME

Well, let's just say it wouldn't hurt.

ROSE

I could lend you some.

WINSOME

No no--

ROSE

I won't tell Lydia.

WINSOME

You can't just give me money Rose.

ROSE

I'm not going to live forever, what do I need it for? I don't want to fight with you.

WINSOME

Rose you know, it's not always your fault. I mean lots a times there's somethin' else going on that you just don't know about, see?

I guess. ROSE

Are you finished? WINSOME

It doesn't mean anything does it? ROSE

What? WINSOME

Our fight. Huck and Jim didn't always get along. And they had a lot of outside pressures. They were better friends by the end. ROSE

Of course it doesn't mean anything. Come on, finish your soup. WINSOME

It's cold. ROSE

I'll warm it up for you. WINSOME

Will you warm up yours too? ROSE

Sure. WINSOME

*Winsome exits with the two bowls of soup. Rose goes to her desk and pulls out three hundred dollars. She puts it in an envelope and puts it on Winsome's place setting. Winsome returns with the soup.*

There we go. Warm soup. WINSOME (CONT'D)

What's that Rose? *She sees the envelope.*

It's for you. ROSE

I can't-- WINSOME

Please. Let's not talk about it. Let's just eat our soup, OK? ROSE

*They eat the soup.*

*Scene 15. Winsome is pinning/tying silk flowers to corners of the apartment. Rose is tacking small silver stars next to all the flowers.*

ROSE (CONT'D)

It looks good.

WINSOME

I told you it would.

ROSE

I can see it now, the whole table filled with the food, the cakes, the decorations, the guests.  
It's all because of you.

WINSOME

No--

ROSE

It's true. I can't imagine what it was like before you.

WINSOME

Rose--come on stop it. I appreciate it, but really, I don't do anything that somebody else couldn't do. You just have to give them a chance.

*The phone rings.*

ROSE

Don't answer it. It's the telemarketers. Last time they tried to sell me a year's subscription to *Rods and Babes Magazine*.

*The phone rings. Winsome goes to answer it.*

WINSOME

Good afternoon, Schneider residence.

*Winsome listens. Rose whispers.*

ROSE

Tell them you're illiterate.

*Winsome listens.*

ROSE (CONT'D)

Just hang up! Don't be so polite.

*Winsome listens. Rose approaches and grabs the phone from Winsome.*

WINSOME

Rose-

ROSE

I know what I'm doing.

*Rose speaks into phone.*

Now you listen here; we're not interested in whatever it is you are sell-

Lydia? What are you doing on the phone? I didn't know it was you. For heaven's sake, what do you want?  
Oh. OK. Here she is.

*Rose hands phone back to Winsome.*

ROSE (CONT'D)

It's for you.

*Winsome takes the phone. She listens.*

WINSOME

Uh-huh. Uh-huh. OK.

*Winsome hangs up. She avoids looking at Rose.*

ROSE

What did Lydia want?

WINSOME

She just needed to tell me something. Anyway, let's get back to decorating.

ROSE

What did she want to tell you?

WINSOME

Rose-

ROSE

What is she up to?

WINSOME

Come on, let's decorate.

ROSE

I know.

WINSOME

What?

ROSE

You can't fool me. It's something about the party isn't it? You and she are planning some kind of surprise for me. Right?

*Winsome stares.*

ROSE (CONT'D)

Never mind. I'll pretend I don't know about it. I love surprises. Lydia is really getting better lately. You don't turn 80 every day you know. I would never have expected her to set up some kind of party surprise for me. I'll just wait and see what it is.

*Scene 16: Thursday night, late. Winsome has fallen asleep reading. Suddenly piercing terrible screams are heard and Rose enters. Winsom goes to her.*

WINSOME

Rose? Rose? What happened? Are you hurt?

*Rose goes to Winsome and clings to her.*

ROSE

It was terrible.

WINSOME

What? What was it?

ROSE

I saw Justin. But not how he looked normally. How he looked when Lydia described him to me. I hear her voice, screaming into the phone, telling me about the blood everywhere. About how she just found him like this. That her plane was late. And I saw his face. All pale, bleached, his blue eyes dull. And he just kept staring at me. Lydia was in the dream too. She was just standing there, watching me look at him.

*Rose shudders and shakes her head.*

WINSOME

Want some water?

ROSE

No. I'm OK.

*They sit there.*

Maybe we can turn on more lights though. I still feel his eyes on me.

*Winsome turns on the light. Rose sits there.*

ROSE (CONT'D)

Read to me?

*Winsome pulls out Huckleberry Finn. She reads.*

WINSOME

"I never felt easy till the raft was two miles below there and out in the middle of the Mississippi. I hadn't had a bite to eat since yesterday; so Jim he got out some corn-dodgers and buttermilk and pork and cabbage and greens-there ain't nothin' in the world so good when it's cooked right. We said there wasn't no home like a raft after all. You might feel free and easy and comfortable on a raft."

*Scene 17. Lydia reads. Rose is in her pajamas. She comes out to the living room expecting Winsome.*

ROSE

Good morning!

LYDIA

Morning.

*Rose is taken aback.*

ROSE  
Lydia?

LYDIA  
Hi Ma.

ROSE  
What are you doing here? Where's Winsome?

LYDIA  
She...She had to go home.

ROSE  
Why?

LYDIA  
Something to do with one of her children. I think one was sick.

ROSE  
Why didn't she wake me?

LYDIA  
She said you weren't well last night. How are you feeling now?

ROSE  
She should have woken me.

LYDIA  
It's OK, Ma, she called me.  
How about some breakfast? I could make you an egg. 3 minute, right?

ROSE  
Which one of her boys is it?

LYDIA  
Or an omelet. With the cheese layered on top. The way you like.

ROSE  
Marcus or Eddie?

LYDIA  
She didn't say which one was sick.

ROSE  
Eddie had a cold last week.

LYDIA  
She didn't seem that worried.

ROSE  
It's the times when people don't seem upset that they are really the most upset.

LYDIA  
Thank you for the analysis. How 'bout the egg?

ROSE  
If her son is really sick and she has to stay with him, are you going to come everyday?

LYDIA

Would you like me to?

ROSE

Don't be silly Lydia. You can't take off that much time.

LYDIA

Your eye looks better. The bruise is nearly gone.

ROSE

Do you think she'll come back today?

LYDIA

I told her to take as much time as she needed.

*Rose sighs.*

Here, sit down, Ma. Stop fretting about. Come on. Relax.

*Lydia stands and helps her mother sit down. Pause.*

*Rose is agitated.*

There. That's better.

*They sit. Silence.*

We can do something nice today. Whatever you want.

ROSE

I don't know.

LYDIA

I could read to you if you want.

ROSE

Winsome's already reading to me. We're reading The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.

LYDIA

I know. You told me. I'm just saying I could read it to you also.

ROSE

Well. I don't know. We're kind of going on the adventure together. I mean she might be upset if I read it without her.

LYDIA

Oh. Well we could read another book.

ROSE

Which one?

LYDIA

Whatever you'd like is fine with me. Anything, really.

ROSE

I think one book at a time is probably better for me. I'll confuse the characters otherwise. Don't you think?

LYDIA

Whatever you want Ma.

*Lydia returns to her book.*

ROSE  
What are you reading?

LYDIA  
Rationally Motivated Therapy.

ROSE  
Maybe I'll go lie down.  
Do you think she'll come today?

LYDIA  
I don't know Ma.

*Rose stands slowly*

LYDIA (CONT'D)  
You can't get too attached you know mother.  
These people leave all the time.

*Pause*  
She's not family. She doesn't care for you like family.

ROSE  
She likes me. She told me so.

LYDIA  
I'm sure she told you that.

ROSE  
You think she doesn't?

LYDIA  
No, I'm not saying that Ma, I'm just saying that things change all the time.

ROSE  
What do you mean?

LYDIA  
What if her son is really sick and she needs to be there? I mean like long term.

ROSE  
Well, I don't know...I mean what did she say exactly?

LYDIA  
I'm not saying it's going to occur in this instance, I'm just giving you a hypothetical situation and trying to explain to you that it's best not to get too attached.

ROSE  
I would die if she didn't come back.

LYDIA  
Mother!

ROSE  
I want to call her.

LYDIA  
Just wait a little while.

ROSE

I don't know what to do now.

LYDIA

Go get yourself washed up, OK? I'll get your coffee.

ROSE

If she calls make sure you get me. OK?

LYDIA

Of course Mother.

*Scene 18. Later the same day. Lydia is reading. Rose enters.*

ROSE

She still hasn't called?

LYDIA

You would have heard the phone.

ROSE

This is so strange.

LYDIA

I told her to take the day if she needed.

ROSE

I feel restless.

LYDIA

I said we could go to the park.

ROSE

We might miss her call.

LYDIA

You have an answering machine.

ROSE

I hate that thing.

LYDIA

Ok. Suit yourself.

ROSE

The book's good?

LYDIA

Very interesting. I'm on a chapter about codependent schizophrenics.

ROSE

Great.

*Rose sits there and waits. She sighs. She sighs again.*

LYDIA  
Stop sighing mother. Shall I get you something?

ROSE  
No.

*Lydia goes back to her book. Rose watches her.*

ROSE (CONT'D)  
I've been thinking.

LYDIA  
About?

ROSE  
There's something I want to say to you.

LYDIA  
Ok.

*Rose looks at Lydia.*

ROSE  
I'm sorry about Florida.

LYDIA  
What?

ROSE  
You know.  
That I didn't go down there with you. To help you. With Justin I mean. That you had to do it all alone. Pack up his things, organize the funeral, clean the apartment. All that.

LYDIA  
That was a long time ago Ma--

ROSE  
I know.

LYDIA  
You're a little late, don't you think?

ROSE  
Better late than never, right?

LYDIA  
I didn't even have a credit card. I was on spring break. I was just a kid Ma.

ROSE  
You know Lydia, when I was that age-

LYDIA  
So just because you saw everyone die, I should have to also?  
Did you know funeral homes require deposits? Did you know rabbis don't do suicides?

ROSE  
Lydia-

LYDIA  
No Ma-- And then, of all things, Dad's funeral. You just wanted me to feel as bad as you did when you missed Justin's. You made me miss Dad's funeral.

ROSE  
That's not true. I told you. It's Jewish law Lydia.

LYDIA  
In this case, it was your law, wasn't it mother?

*Lydia and Rose look at each other.*

ROSE  
I think I'll go lie down now.

*At that moment Winsome walks in. Her arms are laden with party decorating things.*

WINSOME  
Hey!!

ROSE  
Winsome!

WINSOME  
Hey Rosie--

ROSE  
I thought you weren't coming.

WINSOME  
Not coming--look at all this.  
This was everything on your list, right?

ROSE  
What happened to your son?

WINSOME  
Nothing, he's fine.

ROSE  
What?

WINSOME  
That was just an excuse to get all this stuff and surprise you.

ROSE  
It was?

WINSOME  
Sure it was.

ROSE  
You scared me half to death. Why were you so secretive? I thought you were leaving me.

WINSOME

No. No.

ROSE

Lydia, look at this stuff, isn't it fabulous?  
Let's start.

*Rose looks through the bags.*

WINSOME

Did you see the candles?

*Rose digs more stuff out of the bags. Lydia approaches.*

*Lydia stands there.*

ROSE

(to Winsome)

I knew you would come today.

WINSOME

Of course I would.

LYDIA

So what happened?

ROSE

What are you talking about Lydia? She bought all these things.

WINSOME

I changed my mind. I just didn't think it was right.

ROSE

What wasn't right?

*Winsome and Lydia look at each other.*

WINSOME

Oh--I was just gonna buy something else, but it didn't look right. Poor quality.

ROSE

Oh.

*To Lydia*

That's what I like about her. She's discerning.

WINSOME

Do you want to stay and help us decorate Lydia?

ROSE

She can't. She had a lot of work to do today which she couldn't do because she had to come here. Right? Don't worry about us Lydia. We're fine.

*Scene 19. Apartment is more decorated. Rose is hanging up silk streamers.*

*Rose begins to arrange pine boughs on the table and adds oranges and lemons. It's looking very festive. She sets wine glasses onto the table. She picks them up and clinks them together as in a toast. She closes her eyes and holds the glasses to her cheeks. Suddenly Winsome enters.*

ROSE

I love these glasses.

*Winsome looks serious.*

ROSE (CONT'D)

What's wrong?

*Winsome stares.*

WINSOME

He took the money.

ROSE

Who?

WINSOME

The guy in line behind me. At the ATM.

ROSE

I don't understand.

WINSOME

I was taking out the money you told me to. \$200. And before I knew it--

ROSE

What?

WINSOME

He grabbed it out of my hand and ran away.  
By the time I figured out what happened he was gone.

ROSE

Are you hurt?

WINSOME

I am so sorry. Rose--  
Really. I'm sorry.

ROSE

Shh. It's not your fault. Those ATMs are completely unsafe.

WINSOME

Here's your card back. I don't want to hold it anymore.

*She hands over the card.*

ROSE

It's not your fault. It's the guard's fault. What was he doing anyway?

WINSOME

I didn't see a guard.

ROSE

This is outrageous. They sent me a pamphlet just last week describing their ATM security and now look what happens.

*She gets up.*

WINSOME

What are you doing?

ROSE

I'm calling the bank.

WINSOME

What are they going to do?

ROSE

Fire the guard who was supposed to be there.

WINSOME

Rose. You're going to get yourself all upset before your party. Please. Just take the money out of my pay. It's my fault that you don't have it.

ROSE

I'm not taking it out of your pay. You need that money. And anyway, this could have happened to anyone.

WINSOME

But it didn't.

I don't know, maybe there was a guard, maybe I didn't yell loud enough-

ROSE

I don't care what you did or didn't do. You were robbed in broad daylight IN MY BANK. Now let me call them.

WINSOME

You're too old to try to solve everything.

*Rose looks at Winsome. She considers.*

ROSE.

You're right. I'll call Lydia. This is a perfect job for her. She's good at dealing with those kinds of bank-y people.

WINSOME

You don't understand.

ROSE

What?

WINSOME

They'll all think...  
That I did it. That I robbed you.

ROSE

Nonsense. I'll tell them you didn't.

WINSOME

The bank will ask questions and you'll tell them you sent your hired help to the ATM and they'll laugh and tell you there was no robbery. The guard will say he was there the whole time, he didn't see a thing. And Lydia will agree with them.

ROSE

Stop it. I trust you.  
I'll explain it to Lydia. She'll understand.

WINSOME

Rose. Lydia will most certainly agree with the bank people.

ROSE

That's ridiculous.

WINSOME

She'll say I took the money.

ROSE

I'll tell her you didn't.

WINSOME

Do you want to check my wallet? She'll ask you if you did, you know.

ROSE

Stop it.

*Winsome pulls out her purse.*

WINSOME

Check.

ROSE

I'm not looking through your purse.

WINSOME

What about when you wake up in the middle of the night and wonder if I took it.

ROSE

Now you listen here. Lydia is going to talk to them. And no one will accuse you.

WINSOME

Lydia doesn't want me here with you.

ROSE

Nonsense. She's relieved that we get along.

WINSOME

Rose.

ROSE

Come on. We have things to do.

WINSOME

Remember last week, when I came in late?

ROSE

We'll need to wash the martini glasses.

WINSOME

It was because of her.

ROSE

And fruit. We've got to have fruit.

WINSOME

It was because she wanted me to look at another job. That she arranged for me. Working as a nanny for one of her friends.

*Rose stops and looks at Winsome.*

ROSE

But she knows. She knows I like you. That I couldn't do it without you.

WINSOME

She doesn't like me Rose.

*Pause as this sinks in.*

Come on. Let's finish setting up in here, OK?

*Winsome gathers up and organizes the streamers.  
Blackout.*

*Scene 20. Party. Everything is grandly decorated.  
Winsome and Rose sit at the dinner table waiting for  
Lydia and family.*

ROSE

What do you think? Should we put the presents on their plates? I think it looks kind of festive.

WINSOME

Sure.

*Rose stands and places all the presents on the plates.*

ROSE

There.  
I could light the candles.

*Rose lights the candles.*

ROSE (CONT'D)

The cocktail party went well.

WINSOME

Except for when Mrs. Greenbaum threw her drink in Mr. Katzenellenbogen's face.

ROSE

They're having an affair.

WINSOME

I gathered.

ROSE

The caviar was delicious. Caviar is great for old people. No chewing.

WINSOME

They all want you to do it again next year.

ROSE

They were just being polite.

WINSOME

I don't think so Rose. I think this was more fun than some of them have had in years. Did you see how they toasted you for your birthday.

ROSE

It was nice, wasn't it?

WINSOME

Yes.

*They wait.*

ROSE

They're late aren't they.

WINSOME

Just a few minutes. Probably traffic. Don't worry.

ROSE

I have a present for you.

WINSOME

You do?

ROSE

Yeah.

WINSOME

But it's your birthday.

ROSE

I know. But I found something I want you to have.

WINSOME

I have a present for you too.

Really? ROSE

Of course. WINSOME

What is it? ROSE

You'll have to see. WINSOME

*Winsome hands her the present. Rose shakes it. She tries to guess.*

Stationary? ROSE

No. WINSOME

*She shakes it.*

A book. ROSE

Open it. WINSOME

*Rose tears off the paper. She looks at the book.*

ROSE  
Huckleberry Finn. A hardback copy.

WINSOME  
There's an inscription.

*Rose opens the book.*

It's what Mark Twain wrote in the copy he gave to his children. I found the quote in the library in a book about the life of Samuel Clemens. I copied it in this book for you.

*Rose turns the page and reads inscription aloud.*

ROSE  
"To my darlings--May you have the presence of mind and the clarity of spirit to recognize Cairo when you are upon it."  
That's beautiful. Thank you.

WINSOME  
You're welcome.

ROSE  
Now you.

*Rose pulls out a small neatly wrapped box. She hands it to Winsome.*

WINSOME

I never get presents that look like this. I actually can't remember the last present I got that was a surprise. Thank you.

ROSE

You don't even know if you like it yet. Open it.

*Winsome opens the present. It is a pair of very old diamond earrings.*

Go ahead. Put them in.

*Winsome does. They look great.*

Beautiful. You look beautiful.

WINSOME

I can't accept these.

ROSE

Yes, you can.

WINSOME

They are extremely valuable.

ROSE

I can't wear pierced earrings anymore. Lydia has a lot of jewelry from me that she never wears. They are for you.

*Winsome touches her ears.*

My grandfather bought them for my grandmother with all the money he had.

WINSOME

Romantic.

ROSE

Pragmatic. Diamonds always have value, are easy to transport and easy to hide. My grandmother brought them over here in her padded bra. Let's have some wine.

WINSOME

You don't want to wait?

ROSE

A quick toast before the guests arrive. Pour me some Chardonnay.

*Winsome does. She pours a drink for her and Rose.*

ROSE (CONT'D)

Cheers.

WINSOME

Cheers.

*They drink.*

ROSE

What time is it now?

WINSOME

Stop asking me that. They're coming.

*They empty their glasses.*

ROSE

You know what I dreamt about last night?

WINSOME

No.

ROSE

Peter. When I was 16 and he came to my birthday party. And how the lights spun around and the champagne made me dizzy and how he held me outside so I could breathe in the cold air.

WINSOME

All that?

ROSE

And then I woke up. Well sort of woke up, and I thought about every single person that I've ever been friends with.

WINSOME

Busy night.

ROSE

But in the morning I felt completely rested.

*Rose refills the wine glasses.*

ROSE (CONT'D)

They're really late aren't they?

WINSOME

Just a bit.

ROSE

Maybe something happened to the car?

WINSOME

Traffic probably.

ROSE

But they would have called if it was traffic. They both have cell phones.

WINSOME

They're on their way.

ROSE

How late are they?

WINSOME

Rose--

ROSE  
What if something's happened?

WINSOME  
Hey--Hey you know what?

ROSE  
What?

WINSOME  
Let me do your hair.

ROSE  
We just had it done yesterday.

WINSOME  
It's looking a little flat on one side. I'll fix it for you.

ROSE  
It looks flat?

WINSOME  
Come on. Sit down here. I'll make it really festive.

*Winsome pulls a chair away from the table and puts it in front of her. Rose sits. Winsome pulls some flowers off the table.*

ROSE  
Pour me another glass of wine.

WINSOME  
That'll be your--

ROSE  
Don't worry. I'm over 21.

*Winsome pours wine for both of them. She sits behind Rose and begins to untangle and comb her hair. She weaves the flowers in.*

That feels nice. Very gentle. Does it look nice?

WINSOME  
It's looking great.

ROSE  
They're not coming.

WINSOME  
Of course they are. It's traffic. Hold still. I'm nearly finished.

ROSE  
Open another bottle of wine.

WINSOME  
Look in the mirror first.

*Rose stands up and looks in the mirror.*

ROSE

Happy Birthday to me.

*She drinks. Winsome drinks.*

I want to see them open their presents. You do it.

WINSOME

What?

ROSE

Open them--

WINSOME

Rose. They're on their way-

ROSE

Come on. You have little boys. You must know what they sound like when they open presents. Go ahead. Sit in Tommy's seat. He's the youngest.

*Winsome changes seats.*

Open it.

*Winsome opens the present carefully.*

ROSE (CONT'D)

Little children tear open presents.

WINSOME

Rose-

ROSE

Please.

*Winsome tears open the present.*

Do you like it?

WINSOME

Yes. Thanks.

ROSE

Grandma. Thanks Grandma.

WINSOME

(as Tommy)

Thanks Grandma, you're the best.

ROSE

Now the next. Billy.

*Winsome looks at her and finally changes seats. Rose drinks.*

Go ahead. Open it.

*Winsome tears off the wrapping and throws it on the floor. Both she and Rose laugh.*

WINSOME

(as Billy)

Cool. Hanson rocks. Thanks Grandma. This is their newest CD after their Under 13 Down Under tour.

ROSE

And now, Jacob. Go ahead. Please.

*Winsome changes seats again. She is Jacob--the oldest, studious grandchild. It's a large present.*

ROSE (CONT'D)

This is something from your grandfather. I know if he were with us he'd want you to have it.

*Winsome opens the present. It's large old-fashioned microscope.*

WINSOME

(as Jacob)

This is cool.

ROSE

Your grandfather used it when he first came here to America. He said he couldn't be a doctor without it. And now it is for you.

WINSOME

(as Jacob)

Thank you.

ROSE

You're welcome. You're welcome.

*Winsome smiles. Rose continues.*

ROSE (CONT'D)

And now you. Steve.

*She looks at Winsome. Winsome moves over. Winsome opens the small boxy present.*

I know we haven't always been so close. I want you to have these.

*They are black onyx cuff links.*

WINSOME

(as Steve)

Rose. I don't know what to say.

ROSE

And now last but never never least, my daughter, Lydia.

*Winsome moves to Lydia's seat.*

I just always, always wanted to tell you-



*Rose stands. She holds out her hand to Winsome.  
Winsome takes it. They dance around the room. Rose  
lays her head on Winsome's shoulder.*

ROSE (CONT'D)

Don't leave me anymore Peter. I am so relieved you are back. Don't leave again.

WINSOME

(as Peter)

You don't leave either.

ROSE

I couldn't.

*They dance*

I have something for you.

WINSOME

For Peter?

ROSE

No. For you.

*Rose picks up a large bulky envelope.*

WINSOME

What is this?

*Rose holds the envelope.*

ROSE

Mail it for me. Promise.

WINSOME

What is it?

ROSE

It doesn't matter. Do you promise to mail it for me? That's all you have to do. Drop it in a mail box. OK? Put it in your purse now.

*Winsome does. Rose leans on the chair for support.*

WINSOME

Tired?

ROSE

Is Peter putting me to bed?

WINSOME

Rose-

ROSE

Come on--For my birthday.

WINSOME

OK. Let's go.

*Winsome walks towards the bedroom.*

ROSE

After one last dance.

WINSOME

Rose-

ROSE

Peter would never refuse to dance with a pretty girl on her birthday. Especially not when he's about to go off to die in Stalingrad. Please. We'll dance with our wine glasses, like the grown-ups. Swinging around in beautiful gowns holding delicate crystal glasses.

*Winsome grabs the glasses and they dance. Lydia enters the apartment. She's holding a fluorescent happy birthday helium balloon and brightly wrapped present. She watches her mother and Winsome dance. Lydia stops the music, It is silent. They all stare. Rose drops her wine glass. It shatters.*

LYDIA

Mother-

ROSE

No. No. Peter. Come back. Please come back.

LYDIA

Mother?

ROSE

You scared him away.

WINSOME

Come on Rose. It's time for bed.

LYDIA

Ma?

*Rose sits in the floor.*

LYDIA (CONT'D)

What's wrong with her?

ROSE

Peter--Please come back Peter. Please come back.

LYDIA

Is she drunk?  
Did you let her drink?

WINSOME

Rose-

LYDIA

She's not supposed to drink. She takes medicine that-

*Lydia bends down to her mother.*

Ma--Are you OK?

ROSE

Winsome--Is that you?

LYDIA

No Ma. It's me. It's Lydia. We're sorry. Tommy got sick in the car and then we all had to go back and then I didn't realize how late it was.

*Rose slumps on the floor. Winsome goes to pull her up.  
Lydia helps.*

ROSE

Peter, you are so strong.

WINSOME

Come on Rose stand up.

*Rose stands.*

LYDIA

Ma-

*Rose looks at Lydia and spits in her face. Lydia stares.*

ROSE

Winsome. Please. Take me to my room.

*Winsome takes Rose away. Lydia stands there. We hear the faint cries of Rose from the other room and then the screams. She screams and screams.*

*Scene 21. One week later. Rose's apartment. There are boxes stacked neatly by the bookcase. An old flowered suitcase is packed and waiting by the sofa. We hear sounds of someone offstage, banging away in the kitchen. The front door opens and Winsome enters. She looks around the apartment and sits at the table. A pot drops in the kitchen.*

LYDIA

(offstage)

Damn it.

*She walks out of the kitchen and calls to her mother. She doesn't see Winsome.*

Ma--Don't take all day in there. I want to get up there before traffic hits. OK?

*No answer from Rose. Lydia calls again.*

OK Ma?

*She sighs and waits.*

WINSOME

She can't hear you in there.

*Lydia flips around and stares.*

The bathroom fan is real loud.

LYDIA

What are you doing here?

WINSOME

I wanted to say goodbye to Rose. And return your key.

*She hands the key to Lydia.*

The agency told me you were moving her.

LYDIA

It took me the entire last week to calm my mother down. I don't want you getting her all upset again.

WINSOME

Me? You're the one who didn't come to her party.

LYDIA

You let an 80 year old woman who takes heart medication get drunk.

WINSOME

I once promised Rose I would visit her, even if I didn't work for her anymore. I promised.

LYDIA

You knew what it was, didn't you? That envelope she gave you the night of the party?

WINSOME

How could I have known what it was?

LYDIA

It's been voided you know.

*Silence*

I know why you left your last position.

WINSOME

That was different.

LYDIA

It seems the same to me. First you befriend them and then when they grow attached to you, you alienate their families and then suddenly they all seem to want to give you presents and money and then finally write you into their wills. Do you usually hit them, or was it just my mother?

*Winsome stares at Lydia.*

The other lady gave you \$25,000. That's a pretty big holiday bonus.

WINSOME

I never asked for that money.

LYDIA

But you didn't refuse it or give it back either.

WINSOME

It was Edith. She wanted me to buy a house one day, for me and my kids and my mother. She said we should move upstate and have a garden with corn and tomatoes. I promised her there would always be a room in the house for her.

LYDIA

I reported you to the agency.

WINSOME

I know. They took away my license.

LYDIA

Don't try to contact my mother again.

Please.

*Beat.*

WINSOME

Good-bye Ms. Lydia. You take good care of your mother now.

*Winsome walks out. Lydia stares after her. Rose enters slowly; Lydia rushes to help her.*

LYDIA

Oh Ma--Sorry, I--

ROSE

The bathroom's not packed up yet.

LYDIA

Don't worry about it. The movers will do it. It's a good company. And if you need anything when you get there you can always call me and I'll take you to the store.

*Rose looks around the apartment.*

LYDIA (CONT'D)

It'll be fine Ma. You'll see.

You'll like it there. I know you will. Steve and I talked to other families, other people there. They have activities, book clubs, singing groups. It'll be good for you to meet people your own age. They even have theater trips.

*Rose looks depressed.*

And I know Steve and the boys will love having you so close.

*The buzzer rings from downstairs.*

LYDIA (CONT'D)

The car's here.

ROSE

I'm not ready yet.

LYDIA

I'll tell him we'll be down in a minute, okay Ma?

*Lydia exits to the kitchen where the intercom is. Rose picks up the inscribed copy of HUCKLEBERRY FINN from Winsome and opens it.*

*Rose stands reading the book. Lydia re-enters carrying Rose's coat.*

LYDIA (CONT'D)

Ma-You already brought a book for the trip.

ROSE

I thought I'd bring this one too.

LYDIA

Come on Ma. Don't bother yourself. With all the fuss going on you'll misplace it. The movers'll bring it. I promise. Come on, let's put on your coat now.

*Rose puts the book on the pile of other books and looks at Lydia holding the coat.*

LYDIA (CONT'D)

It's OK Ma. Let's go.

*Rose walks to Lydia and climbs into her coat. Lydia looks at her mother and then goes back to pick up the copy of HUCKLEBERRY FINN. She gives it to Rose. Rose looks around the apartment.*

Come on Ma. The car's waiting.  
And we want to beat the traffic.

*Lydia helps her mother out of the apartment. Lights fade.*

*Blackout. End of play.*