

REAL ESTATE

a dark comedy in two acts
by

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

SANDY	a middle-aged academic, loves teaching, very into <i>The Wood Wide Web</i> , loves trees, sunny nature, tends to see the glass half full.
HENRY	her husband, a few years older, also an academic, has been working on a philosophical treatise for years, depressed, thoroughly dislikes the administrative work he is currently doing.
ETHEL	Sandy's mother, an actress, sixty-five plus, hates Trump.
SHELDON	President of the co-op board, wealthy upper-class older gentleman, well-mannered, manipulative, charming.
MARION	next-door co-op neighbor, middle-aged widow, wealthy, loves her cocktails. She's an innocent, totally unaware of people's problems, tends to put her foot in, saying the wrong thing at the wrong time. You can't help but like her.
MAN-IN-HOODY	a former stockbroker, homeless, also plays: policeman, waiter, student, nurse, partygoer.
RUFUS*	a dog (only heard from off-stage)

*Rufus is never seen, only heard, unless the theatre has the means and moxie to employ a real dog, which could be delightful and add a touch of 'humanity.'

TIME: fall 2018
PLACE: Manhattan

SYNOPSIS

REAL ESTATE examines the increasing precarity of life under late-stage capitalism. It explores the forces that allow some of us to remain connected, while others are pushed into social exile. A housing crisis in New York? Not for the one-percenters. The middle-class being dragged under? It's happening to **Henry & Sandy**, two brilliant, underpaid academics. **Henry** inherits his father's co-op and with it their good fortune evaporates. The board may approve of **Rufus**, their dog but his owners are not exactly welcome. **Sandy** finds solace in the *Wood-Wide-Web*, the compassionate social system of trees as she perceives it, who can teach the human race ethics and survival. **Henry** finds solace in dilly-dallying with a Moroccan exchange student. Will their marriage survive? **Ethel**, Sandy's Mom, an aging actress and rabble-rousing Trump-hating activist, shows up and complicates matters. She's become homeless. Her building was condemned to make room for a luxury Highrise. She preaches in the street and keeps getting arrested. It's all very funny if it weren't so sad.

SCENES

- ACT I scene 1: The lecture room of a NYC college. There is a spotlight on SANDY teaching, flashback to ETHEL in front of the Metropolitan Museum addressing a crowd, then the light shifts to the living room of Sandy and Henry's Upper Westside apartment.
- scene 2: That same evening, a classy Upper Eastside Restaurant.
- scene 3: Two days later, SANDY's living room, flashback to ETHEL in front of the Stock Exchange, back to the living room.
- scene 4: The living room that same day late in the evening
- scene 5: The next day, the living room.
- scene 6: Two days later, a bench in Riverside Park.
- ACT II scene 1: The following week, SANDY lecturing in her classroom, flashback to ETHEL in front of a Trump building. Light shifts to the living room. It's Sunday afternoon.
- scene 2: Two weeks later, the living room.
- scene 3: A nursing home.
- scene 4: Henry's office.
- scene 5: Riverside Park.

The stage is divided into various playing areas which may overlap and are defined primarily by lighting and sound. A minimum of furniture is used. A table may turn into a desk, chairs into a park bench, etc. However, imaginative details, props, sound and light effects, should give each setting a realistic feel.

Note:

*Two slashes // means the character with the next line of dialogue begins their speech.
Before the lights come up there is a projection through the entire theatre of a beautiful forest.
The crowns of the trees, bathed in sunlight, are swaying and whispering in the wind.*

REAL ESTATE**ACT I****scene 1**

AT RISE we are in the lecture room of a NYC college. A spotlight is on SANDY lecturing about the WOOD-WIDE-WEB with the help of slides.

SANDY

..... No, Merlin Sheldrake, s h e l d r a k e, the son of the brilliant Rupert Sheldrake. Until recently fungi were thought of as harmful to plants, parasites that bring disease. Now we realize that certain kinds of common fungi exist in subtle symbiosis with trees, bringing about not infection but connection.

Think about it. Nature has provided us with most, if not all of our medicines. Take the yew tree, for example, which has given us a potent cancer fighting drug. There is a whole mythology that comes with this tree and for good reason. You may want to read up on the religious practices surrounding the yew. Some of these enormous trees are thought to be two to three-thousand years old. Their leaves are extremely poisonous. Likely this very poison has made it possible for them to grow to these enormous proportions and survive these many years by warding off their enemies. This very poison, extracted from their bark, is the basis of the cancer-fighting drug *Taxol*. Al Gore has led a fight to stop stripping their bark as it causes these ancient beings to die, and he encouraged the development of an equivalent synthetic compound, which is now in use. As for pain medicines

STUDENT

(has been clamoring to get her attention)

Professor! Excuse me, Professor!

SANDY

Yes David?

STUDENT

Are you expecting a paper on this Wood-Wide-Web?

SANDY

I may and I may not.

STUDENT

There was no mention in the curriculum about a Wood-Wide-Web. I don't want to waste time studying medicine and mythology if we're not going to be tested on it. I just want to know what I am expected to ...

SANDY

What I'm expecting, David, is an open mind, if not a fervor, at least an interest in what will save our highly endangered planet ...

The spotlight changes to ETHEL standing in front of the Metropolitan Museum addressing a small crowd. A tree in a planter is listening intently.

ETHEL

..... our new Christian family values I guess

(pointing to a woman)

You said it. And with a porn queen yet. No! The poor girl! Can you imagine? That disgusting fish mouth. Ugh!! Not for a million bucks And she probably had to sue to get paid like those poor Polish workers with their sledge hammers and no helmets

(through her bullhorn)

Lock him up!!

(the crowd joins in, rhythmically)

Lock him up! Lock him up! Lock him

(a policeman moves in on her)

The light shifts to the living room of an upscale, if somewhat run-down Upper Westside apartment on Riverside Drive, which HENRY recently inherited from his father. He and his wife, SANDY, have not yet been approved by the co-op board and shouldn't really be there. Bedding is piled on a chair next to the sofa.

HENRY is on the phone. SANDY is selecting earrings in the off-stage bedroom.

HENRY

This is the last time, the very last time I promise you, that I..... stop ranting, please I do not need to know any of this alright, we will.

(hangs up, calls to Sandy)

We have to bail her out again.

SANDY

(appears in the doorway, putting an earring in)

Now? We can't. Sweetie, we can't be late. We cannot be late. They're so persnickety.

HENRY

You go get her.

SANDY

I can't deal with the police. You know that. You're so much better at it. They respect you.

HENRY

Not true. For some inexplicable reason, my way of expression // seems to be a source of hilarity to them.

SANDY

They'll have me sit there for an hour, ignore me for an hour. They treat you with respect. They call you Professor

HENRY

... and never let me finish a sentence. Leave it to Ethel to foul up the works.

SANDY

Marion made it clear the president wants to meet *me*. You've met him already. Relax, we'll chat till you get there. I'll try to placate him. Ok?

(she gives him a hug)

HENRY

Alright, you go on ahead. Tell them something. I'll bring her back here. I'll be there as soon as I can. Dear God, I don't know which precinct.

SANDY

The usual. No?

HENRY

I'm not sure. At breakfast she was espousing about conquering new territories, bringing enlightenment to the upper Eastside. I have to call her back.

SANDY

Let her stew. Let her spend the night in jail.

HENRY

She is your MOTHER! I'll meet you at the restaurant.

He grabs his jacket, rushes out dialing the phone.

SANDY

(calling after him)

Thank you. Thank you, Sweetie!

(murmuring to herself)

Thank you, thank you, thank

- - -

ACT I

Scene 2

The light shifts to a classy restaurant. A lovely tree is seen outside a window, and a potted one is on the premises. Dignified waiters are hovering. SANDY is seated at a table with SHELDON, a suave older gent and MARION, a middle-aged matron in a very put-together outfit and heavy make-up. They've had drinks. MARION maybe one too many. She is looking at the menu.

MARION

I always start with *Carpaccio di Manzo*. It's divine. And then perhaps the *Baveta di Lombo*? Or is that too much *Carni*? Maybe another cocktail first?

She signals to the waiter to bring her another drink.

SANDY

Why don't we go ahead and order. He should be here any minute. I'm so sorry.

SHELDON

Let's give him five more minutes.

MARION

I'd say another cocktail and then dinner.

SHELDON

What exactly did you say the emergency is?

SANDY

My mother.

SHELDON

Your mother? She doesn't live with you, does she? I don't remember her mentioned in the application. Or am I wrong?

He turns to MARION who is into the cups.

Marion?

SANDY

Well, no, not actually live, not really. She is just

There is a commotion at the entrance. A male voice is heard: "Why don't we checks this for you, Madam?"

ETHEL

I'll hold on to it.

HENRY

Ethel, you do NOT need your bullhorn at dinner.

ETHEL

I'll hold on to it.

HENRY

For god sake, Ethel. Give it to him.

ETHEL surrenders it. They are being shown to the table. ETHEL is sporting a T-shirt over a turtleneck with a slogan that reads Time's Up. As they approach, she takes off her cap and waves with it to the waiter to take it.

HENRY

So sorry to have kept you waiting. My sincere apologies. This is Ethel, my mother-in-law. Marion, you and Ethel have met I believe.

ETHEL

(at her most charming)

Yes, you're right next door to us, aren't you?

HENRY

Sheldon Leland, the president of the board.

SHELDON shakes hands, motions for the waiter to bring another setting. There is an awkward silence.

SANDY

We were just about to order.

ETHEL

I'm starved. Sorry to crash the party.

HENRY

Assessing the immediate situation, I thought the wisest // course of action

ETHEL

(to Sandy)

Don't blame Henry. I made him bring me. I mean we were already on the Eastside. No point in taking me all the way crosstown when I know there is nothing in the fridge ...

MARION

I reckon Ethel would like an aperitif first? Wouldn't you Ethel? What's // your pleasure?

SHELDON

We ought to get down to business.

ETHEL

A bourbon on the rocks would hit the spot.

MARION

A bourbon on the rocks for the lady, Gerald, and you might as well bring me a refill. Isn't he a darling?

ETHEL

I could eat a horse.

(studying the menu)

They don't put prices?

HENRY

Order anything you like.

ETHEL

Who's footing the bill?

SANDY

Mom! It's alright. Anything you want.

ETHEL

(under her breath)

No prices, you know what that means.

SANDY

Mom! Its' fine.

ETHEL

What?! I'm concerned with Henry only working part-time now ...

SANDY

Excuse us for a moment.

(grabs her arm and pulls her up)

Mom, you want to use the facilities, don't you? Wash your hands? If you will excuse us.

ETHEL

(as they exit)

Facilities! The bathroom

There is a time-lapse indicated by lighting and music. The tree seems to be listening, swaying to the music. They are at the end of the meal. SHELDON, SANDY & HENRY are having espresso, ETHEL is attacking an enormous dessert concoction, MARION is sipping wine. SHELDON, meanwhile getting along splendidly with ETHEL, uses his little espresso spoon to dip into her dessert now and then.

ETHEL

..... yes, that was my very first job in New York City. Baby-sitting basically. I mean it's all I knew, the only work experience I had when I dropped out of college. The only problem is, as a fulltime occupation you have to live with them in their apartment.

SHELDON

You were a nanny.

ETHEL

Exactly. That's right. A nanny. One of those nannies, sans a social security number.

SANDY

Mom, that's ancient history. You don't want to // get into all that.

MARION

(dreadily)

EMER! I loved her more than my mother.

SANDY

You had a nanny?

MARION

Emer. I loved her more than my mother.

HENRY

Ethel, if you don't mind, there are a few points that need clarification which I // would like to discuss with

SHELDON

(to Ethel)

Do go on. I am fascinated.

ETHEL

Their previous one had been a Norwegian girl. There was a scandal a few years later. I remember reading about it in the paper, about all these wealthy people employing foreign girls as “nursemaids.” That’s what they called me, a nursemaid. Right, I remember now. And not paying social security for them.

SANDY

Mom, nobody is interested // in these ancient

SHELDON

And you were living in the Senator’s home?

ETHEL

On Park Avenue, in the maid’s room. There was another small room for the Swedish cook, who was usually inebriated by two in the afternoon. She made this mouthwatering pot roast. Oh, I could have eaten the whole potful. We each had our own bathroom though.

SANDY

Mom, finish your desert.

ETHEL

The main thing I didn’t like about the job was having to live **in**. You’re never off, even on your day off. The kids come into // your room.

HENRY

The one issue we haven’t touched on // is Rufus

ETHEL

Another thing I didn’t care for was that ugly uniform. But I only had to wear it when they had company. I’m afraid I didn’t stay the full year I had promised. Once I had enough money saved, I went backpacking in Europe, rediscovering my roots.

SHELDON

You were a rather adventurous youngster, weren’t you? And that’s when you met up with the Senator? A tryst so to speak? In Paris of all places?

He takes a few spoonsful of the dessert in quick succession.

Delicious!

ETHEL

Yep, he had us booked into this big fancy hotel.

SANDY

Mom, // finish your desert.

HENRY tries to get the attention of the waiter to get the check.

ETHEL

The Athena, Plaza Athénée, I think, or something like that. God, I was so naive. After he left, they moved me from the suite into a single room for just that one night as my train wasn't until the next day.

SHELDON

The hotel staff moved you?

ETHEL

Knapsack and all. We had that enormous suite for appearance sake only. The Senator explained that to me. Can you imagine? No need to keep up the façade once he had departed, cheap bastard.

HENRY

(finally got the waiter's attention)

The check please.

SHELDON

And you had been his children's nanny in New York. Fascinating. How old were you?

ETHEL

I was twenty, he was sixty.

SHELDON

Different times.

ETHEL

(points at her t-shirt laughing)

Time was definitely not up.

SHELDON finishes Ethel's dessert with a flourish, turns to Henry.

SHELDON

Thank you for arranging this. It's been quite productive. You've cleared up all of my particular concerns. No point in wasting the board's time on these details.

(turns to Ethel)

It's been an absolute pleasure. Just to be clear on this one point, you are only visiting?

ETHEL

I would say so.

SHELDON

You don't live in the apartment?

ETHEL

I wouldn't call it living.

SHELDON

Is this an extended visit?

ETHEL

Who's to say? Now that I've met you Sheldon ...

MARION

You've met Charlotte, haven't you?

ETHEL

Charlotte?

SHELDON

My wife. She's off on a little vacation with Olivia.

ETHEL

Olivia?

MARION

Charlotte's daughter, a delightful girl. Isn't she, Sheldon? Yes, I remember now, they were quite exhausted apartment hunting, one too many open houses.

ETHEL

Oh, I adore open houses// there is nothing more stimulating then

HENRY

(trying to cover his aggravation)

Not to change the subject, but we never got around to Rufus. It's been weighing on my mind as I'm sure you can appreciate. What exactly are you looking for? What is it that he has to prove? What does he need to demonstrate? The instructions are rather vague.

MARION

May I chime in? In my opinion he has nothing to worry about. For one thing his manners are impeccable. The way he greets me every time I see him in the lobby. He's taken quite a fancy to me, if I may say so myself. As far as I'm concerned, he is approved. But rules are rules. He must appear before the entire board. There's no way around it. It's in the bylaws. He certainly has my vote. Isn't he already scheduled to join us at the end of the next board meeting? Nobody expects him to sit through an entire meeting.

ETHEL

He certainly hasn't taken a fancy to me.

SANDY

You kick him. What do you expect?

ETHEL

Once! Once, and I had cause, believe you me.

SANDY

Maybe if you walked him once in a while.

ETHEL

Maybe if you had him trained not to pull on the leash like a maniac. He knocked me over. Every time he sees a squirrel he goes berserk. He is uncontrollable!

SANDY

Only with you. Because you jerk the leash. You don't let it unspool. I've shown you Let's forget it. Mom, it's ok.

HENRY

(rises, he has signed for the check)

Are we ready?

As they leave a branch of the potted tree touches SANDY's hair. She smiles at the tree and grabs ETHEL's hand.

SANDY

Mom, over here. He caressed my hair.

(she is grinning at ETHEL)

ETHEL

Who?

SANDY

The tree. He is saying good-by.

ETHEL

(lingers under the plant)

What do you know? It feels nice.

(they exit)

- - -

ACT I

scene 3

Two days later. ETHEL is working on her laptop in the living room. She is having one of her meltdowns, suffering from what she calls *computer rage*.

ETHEL

You stupid, stupid, stupid thing!

(stabbing the same key repeatedly)

Center, I'm pressing center, you asshole. This is not center. Here, not here! You're off. This is not center. Now what happened? It's gone. Oh my God. It's gone! Where is it? Where did it go? Oh my God. I have to do it all over again. - I wish I were dead. I wish they had never invented this shit. I can't take this. I can't live like this.

She closes the computer and collapses on the sofa.
HENRY enters, drops his briefcase and coat on the sofa.

ETHEL

Ouch!

HENRY

What are you doing here? Aren't you supposed to be in Englewood looking at the Actors Home?

ETHEL

No.

HENRY

What do you mean no?

ETHEL

I changed my mind.

HENRY

Do you have any idea what it took to set this up? I hope you gave them a good reason why you had to cancel. Did you arrange for a new appointment?

ETHEL

No.

HENRY

I don't believe this.

ETHEL

It doesn't matter.

HENRY

I don't have time for this. As if I had nothing else to worry about. This is intolerable.

ETHEL

It doesn't matter because I'd rather not see it, because they won't accept me, and even if they did, I couldn't afford the place, so I'd rather not see it, because I might like it. Not that I'm anxious to move to New Jersey.

Rufus is heard from the kitchen.

HENRY

You can't stay here. We're lucky if they let us keep Rufus.

ETHEL

(grabs her computer)

I'll be in the bathroom contemplating my options.

HENRY

Hold it! Do you mind if I go first?

He exits, ETHEL sits on the couch staring into space deeply depressed.

Flashback, a spot on ETHEL in front of the Stock Exchange, interacting with a small crowd.

ETHEL

..... Forty million in one year taxpayer money! so the sleaze can fly to his fucking excuse my French Florida resort every other minute. Not to mention the millions it costs every time he's golfing in Jersey.

(pointing to someone in the crowd)

Yes! I remember that! Thank you! Yes, this is the man who complained when Obama – how I miss that man; he had style, grace - when he took Michelle to see a Broadway show and this **freeloader**, this tax evader, this sleaze who boasts about not paying taxes. how patriotic is that? Right, oh so smart, profiting off his office, hawking his hotels and golf courses. not to mention putting children in cages genetic testing to reunite families? What's next, experiments on twins? The final solution?

(through the bullhorn)

Lock him up! Lock him up!

(the crowd joins in)

Lock him up! Lock him up! Lock him

(a policeman moves in on her)

The light changes back to HENRY in the living room talking on the phone, making notes on a yellow pad.

HENRY

Thank you, Dominique. no, no, no, it's a brilliant observation. Thank you. I might put it in a footnote thank you very much. But, Dominique, please, don't call me I know it's innocent. innocent doesn't count, innocent doesn't exist anymore. Just don't call me. Why don't you **email** me your comments? I do appreciate them tremendously. I couldn't possibly say. I don't want to talk about it on the phone, alright? I'll see you Tuesday. Bye and thank you, sweetheart.

HENRY hangs up, lies down on the sofa closing his eyes, the yellow pad on his stomach.

(admonishing himself)

Don't call her sweetheart!

His cell rings, his daughter LILLY, is on the line.

Hello Lilly! How are you, sweetheart? I'm so glad you're calling Your Mom isn't home yet. How are you getting along? Your roommate? Give it time, you have to give it time, sweetheart, give her a chance. You don't know her yet. You can't possibly **"A room of one's own"**

(he laughs)

don't I know. Believe me, I understand How are the classes? You like your professors? No! No! No, not philosophy. I don't care. You know my thinking on that, one philosopher in the family is enough. Just ride it out, sweetheart. Give it a chance. I'll tell her to call you when she gets Tomorrow afternoon? We miss you too. Not yet, but don't you worry about that. See you Thanksgiving at the latest. By sweetheart.

SANDY enters with the mail. She is in great spirits.

SANDY

Oh good, you're here. I want to discuss Mom before she gets back.

She sits down at Henry's father's huge old desk, starts opening the mail, looking if there is anything from the co-op board.

HENRY

You just missed Lilly. She wants you to call her tomorrow afternoon.

SANDY

I have two classes in the afternoon. Anything wrong?

HENRY

No, no. She's fine. She wanted to know if we're approved. And she hates her roommate.

SANDY

I'll try her tonight. We need a plan B for Mom.

HENRY

Right you are. Let's go straight to plan B. Any ideas?

SANDY

As a matter of fact // I've been thinking . . .

HENRY

(interrupting, more like thinking out loud, talking to himself)

We could move to the Bronx, or Queens, or – somewhere in this great wide universe - into a bigger place where she can have a room of her own, where I can have a room of my own, where I don't have to hear her talk in her sleep, where I can stay up and watch an old movie at two AM if I feel so inclined, where the bathroom doesn't have to double as an office.

SANDY

Henry, these are minor inconveniences. The real problem is the board's perception.

HENRY

Where I can relieve my bladder in private. We may have to move anyway. They're not going to approve us.

SANDY

(only half listening, concentrating on the mail)

Don't be so pessimistic, Sweetie. I think that dinner was a great idea.

HENRY

It cost a bundle.

SANDY

Let's see what Mom has to say when she gets back. She probably loved the place. Once we know she likes it

(the next few sentences they are speaking over each other)

HENRY

I'm afraid she's given up on

SANDY

..... we can figure out the details. I can't wait to get rid of your dad's stuff ..

HENRY

She didn't even go look at it ...

SANDY

and get our furniture out of storage. It'll be so great. I'm sick of not having my own things.

HENRY

Hello! Can I get a word in edgewise?

SANDY

It will be wonderful. You'll see, it'll all work out. I mean you're able to walk to work, Sweetie. How great is that? I want that for you.

HENRY

Ethel is in the bathroom! Sitting in the tub! With her computer!

SANDY

What? What are you saying?

HENRY

The other day I had to pee. I didn't know she was there. She had the curtain closed.

SANDY

That's awful. You didn't tell me. How can she sit in the tub?

HENRY

She puts the stool in there and has the computer propped up on the soap tray. She claims the confined space helps her concentrate.

SANDY

I'm supposed to pick her up at the Port Authority at six-thirty.

HENRY

She didn't go.

SANDY

(waving a letter)

I don't believe this.

HENRY

What?

SANDY

This letter from the board. They want more documents "to be distributed to all board members no later than seven days prior to the meeting."

HENRY

Which would be when? - Today? Tomorrow? Yesterday? What else could they possibly want?

SANDY

For one your Dad's will. I guess they want to make sure we're not imposters. They still don't have to approve us. They can force us to sell.

HENRY

I don't think so. That can't be right. That couldn't possibly be right. - Could it?

SANDY

Yes, and the co-op has the right of first refusal. Because you don't own the apartment, you just own shares in the corporation. They can even set the price, I think, or match an offer. Yes, that's it, match an offer.

HENRY

Who told you that? One of the board members?

SANDY

No, I talked to Rosemary. Her place went co-op three years ago. Her brother happens to be a Real Estate lawyer. Taking care of your Dad doesn't count if you didn't actually live here. If it wasn't your primary residence. Or you weren't on the lease. Or a combination of these. She thinks we need a lawyer.

HENRY

She is procuring work for her brother. We can't afford a lawyer. We have to come up with the taxes. That's first, that's paramount. Not to mention the closing costs.

SANDY

Maybe we can't afford not to have a lawyer.

HENRY

We're educated, intelligent people we shouldn't need a lawyer for this.

SANDY

We were too hasty giving up our rental.

HENRY

A lawyer! Only in the US of A. We are the most litigious country in the world.

SANDY

And to think that everything that man in the White House does generates more lawsuits. The cost must be in the billions by now. What a banner year for lawyers.

HENRY

Do we, the taxpayers, pay all the legal fees? Do we? I've never thought of this. We should have a running tab on a billboard in Times Square what this man is costing us.

SANDY

"First let's kill all the lawyers" Henry the Fifth, I think. Maybe we should find an Airbnb for the transition? Too bad we can't get our rental back.

HENRY

What were we thinking?

SANDY

It was just so perfect. Perfect timing.

HENRY

Yes, he kicked the bucket just as our lease was up and they were going to up the rent. Thank you, Dad.

SANDY

I didn't mean it that way. Don't be so mean. I meant with Lilly off to college we didn't really need that big apartment. You agreed, we thought we could make do with a smaller place. And the location is so perfect for you. Sweetie admit it. To be able to walk to work! A dream come true.

HENRY

Then your Mom had to show up.

SANDY

Her building was condemned. What could she do?

HENRY

There was nothing wrong with that building. It was condemned because the owner wants it torn down so he can build another luxury tower with multimillion-dollar condos that come with umpteen years of tax abatements. God forbid these millionaires should have to pay taxes for their pied-à-terre. It's all the mayor's fault.

SANDY

You sound just like Mom.

HENRY

I should join her. Get another bullhorn. The Anti-Real-Estate-Brigade. I just wish she wasn't here. I want her gone, gone!

(SANDY stares at him)

I mean moved out.

(SANDY keeps staring)

Not feet first. You know what I mean.

They become aware of ETHEL standing by the door.

SANDY

Mom!?

ETHEL

Doesn't anybody notice poor Rufus scratching his poor paws bloody? I'm taking him out, poor beast. Where is his leash?

HENRY

Where it always is, on the hook by the door.

(an afterthought)

Thank you, Ethel.

ETHEL

You're welcome.

SANDY

(calling after her)

Thank you, Mom. Have a good walk! We have to talk when you get back. OK?

(back to the letter from the board)

They want our separate incomes? Why? We're married, we file jointly. Are they considering approving one and not the other? And a letter of recommendation from our last two, last **two**, landlords.

HENRY

That would be one from before we were married.

SANDY

And this makes no sense whatsoever. What is this?

HENRY

Let me see.

SANDY

(hands him the letter)

There! We're supposed to have Rufus genetically tested? Why? What for? They only allow purebred dogs to reside on Riverside Drive?

HENRY

They just don't want us.

SANDY

Maybe it's just routine. The place is perfect for us. Once we get our things out of storage and get rid of your dad's stuff ...

HENRY

There is nothing wrong with Dad's furniture. I happen to love his desk.

SANDY

The point is, the apartment is yours. You own it for God's sake. Your dad gave it to you. He wanted you to have it. Close to Columbia so you can walk to work like he did for thirty years. Like father like son. They have no right. How dare they!

HENRY

He never forgave me for not getting tenure. He would be appalled if he knew I'm in administration now. He hated administration. I lied to him. I kept it from him.

SANDY

For his own good. Will you forget about it? Sweetie!

HENRY

He wasn't exactly the most popular guy in this building. They called him the nutty professor. They called his students anarchists. Didn't want them visiting him. I bet they were overjoyed when he died. And now they have us on their hands, a nutty professor with a wife, a nervous dog, and a crazy mother-in-law.

SANDY

Nobody could mistake *your* students for anarchists. I doubt they know the meaning of the word. The selfie generation.

HENRY

I don't have any students any more.

SANDY

At least you are paid a decent salary for the time you put in at work. We adjuncts are so underpaid it's criminal. But hey, I love teaching. And they give me enormous freedom. There have been a few complaints about me injecting too much politics or some such nonsense. Did I tell you? Unbelievable. There is this one student....

HENRY

No, you didn't tell me. What student?

SANDY

It's not important. What matters is, all in all, the students love me. That's what matters. I'm not worried. Don't be so pessimistic. We're just starting the process. I'll get right on it. I'll handle it. I can xerox everything in the office. I'll give them what I can and make excuses for the rest. Who

wants to look at all this paperwork? It's probably just routine. By the way, I have some good news.

The doorbell rings. HENRY goes to answer. We hear Henry taking Rufus to the kitchen, he re-enters.

HENRY

Jose brought Rufus up.

SANDY

Where is Mom?

HENRY

Who cares.

SANDY

What's the matter with you?

HENRY

(staring out the window)

It's raining.

SANDY

Oh Jesus, and it's getting dark. I hope she didn't go over to the park. I should go get her.

HENRY

A little rain won't melt her.

SANDY

She's probably at her favorite bench. She has this bench from where she likes to watch '*the eternal flow of the river.*' She says it calms her, puts things in perspective.

HENRY

The bathtub for concentration, the river for perspective. She could use calming down.

SANDY

So could you.

HENRY

Why didn't she take Rufus if she went to the park? I guess that would've been too much of a good deed. It's really coming down now. It's pouring.

SANDY

You sound happy about it. Why don't you go get her.

There is lightning and a loud thunder crash. Maybe

a projection of a tree waving wildly in the wind
moaning.

HENRY

You get her. She is your mother. I don't know her bench. She'll probably wait it out under some doorway. She's not that far gone.

SANDY

What's that supposed to mean?

HENRY

She's irrational. Surely, you've noticed. She needs professional help. She needs supervision. She needs to be in a home.

SANDY

You want to put her away?

HENRY

Her rants and raves, her bullhorn, her computer rages, getting arrested every other minute. Don't tell me that's normal.

SANDY

(storms out, from offstage)

Where is that goddamn umbrella? What did you do with the umbrella? - Oh, here it is.

The front door shuts with a bang.

- - -

ACT I

scene 4

A few hours later. Violent storm noises during the transition. SANDY is making up the sofa into a bed. HENRY is in the bedroom.

SANDY

I think I'll call the police.

HENRY

Don't! It's too soon. She's only been missing a few hours. Besides, they'll probably be happy to hear she's vanished.

We hear a key in the front door. ETHEL moseys on in.

ETHEL

Hi! You didn't have to wait up for me.

SANDY

Oh Mom! Where have you been? I was worried sick.

ETHEL

I texted you. Didn't I text you? I thought I texted you. I meant to text you.

SANDY

Your phone's been off.

ETHEL

Who wants to be interrupted at a tête-à-tête?

SANDY

A what?

ETHEL

I was having dinner with Lolly.

SANDY

Lolly?

ETHEL

Sheldon.

SANDY

Sheldon Leland? The President of the co-op board? I was about to call the police.

ETHEL

No need. Things didn't go that far.

ETHEL peels out of a fancy raincoat, reveals an even fancier suit.

SANDY

What on earth are you wearing?

ETHEL

After I took Rufus round the block, I ran into Lolly in the lobby.

SANDY

'Lolly in the lobby?!'

ETHEL

He invited me to dinner, and since it was raining, and since he favors fancy eateries, we stopped at his apartment.

SANDY

No kidding.

ETHEL

You should see the place. Incredible! It's enormous. They combined the penthouse with a two-bedroom below. And the terrace - to die for. It winds halfway round the roof. What I could plant on that terrace.

SANDY

Mom, get to the point.

ETHEL

.... Basil, parsley, oregano, rosemary. Remember that cherry tomato I had on my window sill, the heritage one that tasted so good? No, not heritage, what's the word – heirloom the heirloom one

SANDY

Mom, I know you miss your plants, but whose clothes are these?

ETHEL

His wife's.

(Sandy's mouth hangs open)

Don't worry, they're estranged. Isn't it amazing how well they fit me? She's twenty years younger. I guess all those Luigi classes paid off. - You should get to bed. Don't you have to work tomorrow?

SANDY

Yes, I have to work tomorrow. I have to be at the office at eight AM for a special meeting. And I don't have the luxury of walking to work like some around here. It's squeezing into the Number One for me. Don't you think you should have changed back into your own clothes before coming home?

ETHEL

I can take them back tomorrow. I'm tired. I want to get to bed. Alone. I didn't expect you to ambush me like this. I'll probably lunch with Lolly tomorrow.

SANDY

Oh, it's 'lunch with Lolly' now. You're not in a drawing room comedy. Stop calling him Lolly.

ETHEL

Why?

SANDY

It sounds indecent.

ETHEL

What, I'm too old to have a little fun? I should be vegetating in an old-age home?
(shouting toward the bedroom)

I heard you Henry.

HENRY

(coming out of the bedroom)

Why don't you think of your daughter for once. They don't allow three people in a one-bedroom apartment in this building.

ETHEL

For once! For once! Why don't you get off your tuches for once and earn some decent money for once! And contribute your share for once! Get a fulltime job for once! Sitting around here all day pretending to work on your novel. How long have you been writing this thing, five years, ten years?

HENRY

For your information I don't write fiction. It's a scholarly exploration. And if it takes me twenty years, it is none of your business.

SANDY

Calm down everybody. We'll deal with it in the morning. Or when I get home. God only knows when that will be. My contract was extended today for another year. Not that anybody cares around here. It's a promotion of sorts, but there are strings attached. I'm not sure how I'm going to fit my volunteer job at the Horticultural Society into the schedule now. I'm so tired. How can I sleep now?

HENRY

Why don't I move out? That's it, I'll move out. That'll solve all our problems, make everybody happy. I'll be out of your way.

ETHEL

Are you looking for an excuse? Is that it? I'm not going to be your excuse.

SANDY

I'm going to bed. Goodnight.

(she exits)

ETHEL

I know what's going on.

HENRY

You know nothing.

ETHEL

I heard you.

HENRY

You don't know what you're talking about.

ETHEL

I heard you on the phone.

HENRY

You know nothing because there is nothing to know, you old witch.

- - -

ACT I

scene 5

The next day. SANDY, in the living room, is grading papers.

SANDY

She gets it. Good. I should give her an A+

(contemplating it for quite a time)

It's not really an A+ paper. But in comparison. Do I want to grade on a curve again? I do not.

ETHEL comes limping in, flops down on the sofa.

SANDY

How did it go?

ETHEL

Wonderful, just wonderful. For me and the other twenty-three Daisies. You walk in, and there is a room full of Daisies. They must have seen every actress over 60. And then they cast somebody 45 and give her a wig. You'd think our ranks would thin out with advancing age. No such luck. A hex on health food and yoga.

(takes her shoes off)

And probably every one of them has done the part before. You know Marvin, my *Hoke*, has done the play three times now. I'm the one who won the award. Why is there a shortage of *Hokes* and an overabundance of *Daisies*? Not even a call-back.

SANDY

You don't know that.

ETHEL

When they tell you '*that was wonderful, thank you so much for coming in*' you know they're not going to hire you. It's a secret code.

SANDY

How many times have you said you were going to give it all up? How is your knee?

ETHEL

Terrible. How can I give it up? I can't retire on my lousy Equity Pension. I'm homeless, too old to be employed, too young to die. Why don't I jump out the window?

SANDY

(has heard this before)

I made an appointment for you for Friday. I can come with you. I told them you probably just need another cortisone shot. And we can at least get some information on that retirement place

they run up in the Bronx. Maybe take a look at it on the weekend? You would be right here in town. You could still go to auditions. I think. I don't know. I don't know the rules, what you're allowed to

ETHEL

Allowed?! What I'm allowed?! Anyway, I can't. I have an audition Friday. Nothing for six months, then two in one week. A miracle!

SANDY

For God's sake. Your health is more important. Friday is the only day I have the afternoon free. What time is the audition?

ETHEL

(checks her date book)

Four twenty. It's not an audition, it's a go-see. Print. Pharmaceuticals. They want me to peddle drugs. We're all drug dealers now. A medication for Alzheimer's. I'm perfect for it. I won't get it. They see hordes of people. Give me a big smile, turn to the right, turn to the left, thank you, next!

SANDY

So don't go.

ETHEL

It pays seven thousand dollars for a two-day shoot. Oh!!! I could wear that suit. It's perfect. I'm supposed to be upscale.

SANDY

You haven't taken it back? It's been a whole week.

ETHEL

I can never get him on the phone. I think he is avoiding me.

SANDY

Jose could take it up with the dry-cleaning.

ETHEL

That's just it. Do you think I need to have it dry-cleaned?

SANDY

You probably should.

ETHEL

I wore it one night. And I used a deodorant. It's eleven more days till my Social Security. I haven't got a dime.

SANDY

I'll pay for it.

ETHEL

I'll wear it to the go-see and have it dry-cleaned after. Seven thousand, minus 1,400.00 commission. Print they take 20%, highway robbery. That leaves me 5,600. — I'll be swimming in cash. I can take cabs. I can pay my union dues. I'll pay for your dry-cleaning.

SANDY

I don't have any.

ETHEL

Of course, it may be months till I get paid. Print is outside the union. Maybe the suit is too fancy? Let me look at it again.

(she exits)

SANDY

(calling after her)

The doctor is at two. You can make both.

ETHEL

(from the bedroom)

I don't know. It's at a strange location, on Jones Street or St. Jones Lane or something. Ever heard of Jones Street? And you always have to wait at the doctor's.

There is a ring at the front door, SANDY goes to open. Voices from off stage.

MARION

Hello, Sandy. My apologies. How gauche of me to barge in unannounced. I did try to call.

SANDY

Sorry, I always turn the phone off when I'm grading. So as not to be distracted. You know? I mean, to have the flow interrupted. It's just more efficient sorry please come in.

MARION

Are you sure? I can come back later. I wouldn't want to be the one to distract you.

SANDY

Ethel managed that already. Please sit down.

MARION

I thought you might want to hear the good news.

ETHEL
(enters modeling the suit)

What do you think?

MARION
Hello Ethel.

ETHEL
Hello Marion.

MARION
What a lovely suit. Very becoming, dear. It looks familiar. Now where have I seen this before. Bergdorf's, isn't it?

ETHEL
No, but you should see the size of the closet from which it sprang. I could happily spend the rest of my days in there. All it needs is a window or two.
(Marion doesn't follow)
You just decided for me. The Bergdorf look is perfect. It'll get me the job.
(Marion is mystified)

SANDY
You have good news?

ETHEL
We could use some good news.

SANDY
We've been approved?

ETHEL
Fantastic.

MARION
Not yet. I'm afraid there are a few details to be ironed out with which the president took issue.

ETHEL
Lolly?

MARION
However, Rufus passed with flying colors, not a vote against him. I thought you'd want to know.

ETHEL
Bully, the dog is in, I'm out.

MARION

Ethel, you're not a consideration. You are not on the application. Though Sheldon did bring up the fact that you are receiving mail here. I've got to run. I'll see you at the Leland's I trust? Five o'clock, on the terrace?

SANDY

Terrace?

MARION

Welcome home cocktails for Charlotte.

SANDY

Charlotte?

MARION

Mrs. Leland. You haven't met? You'll adore her. She is a great animal lover. Has been raising funds for Bide-a-Wee for years. Such a talented fundraiser. Very active in the anti-abortion movement too. I'll see you five o'clock. On the terrace.

MARION exits. SANDY and ETHEL stare at each other in disbelief.

- - -

ACT I

scene 6

A red sun is setting over the Hudson. ETHEL, wearing sweatpants and carrying a big shoulder bag, is sitting on 'her' bench in Riverside Park. The sun is painting a glowing path to the Jersey side. ETHEL walks over, bends over the railing, and stares into the water.

ETHEL

Jesus! What is this?

(She bends over further)

It's just a rock. It's just a rock. Looks like a body for Christ sake. How do you drown yourself if you know how to swim? Virginia put rocks in her pockets. And Natalie was murdered, I'm sure; she must have known how to swim. Crazy Crane dove from an ocean liner. That I can see, being sucked down by the machinery. How awful.

(she spreads out her arms, quotes the Queen from Hamlet)

"Her clothes spread wide, and, mermaid-like, awhile they bore her up; which time she chanted snatches of old lauds"

She sings a bit of Maury Yeston's *BY THE RIVER*

"People will be born, people will die, as before you were born and long after you ..."

(quoting Dickinson)

*"How the Waters closed above Him
We shall never know --
How He stretched His Anguish to us
That -- is covered too --"*

Suddenly the setting sun disappears. A deep shadow spreads. ETHEL turns back to her bench. A figure in a hoody is sitting on the bench. ETHEL, startled, turns to walk away.

MAN-IN-HOODY

Hey! Lady!

ETHEL keeps walking. The man jumps in front of her. She stands frozen for a second then starts jumping up and down, hitting him with her pocketbook, yelling at the top of her lungs.

ETHEL

Help! Help! Help! Heeeelp!

MAN-IN-HOODY

(grabs her by both wrists)

Shut up! What's the matter with you?

ETHEL

I don't have any money. I'm an actor. Why don't you rob somebody on Park Avenue!

MAN-IN-HOODY

I don't want money. Calm down! I just need a little water.

(he lets go of her wrists)

I thought you might have a bottle in that big bag of yours.

ETHEL

Jesus!

MAN-IN-HOODY

Jesus is right.

ETHEL

I thought you were a robber.

MAN-IN-HOODY

Parched is what I am.

ETHEL

You scared the hell out of me. The hoody and all.

MAN-IN-HOODY

You're a racist?

ETHEL pulls a bottle out of her bag and hands it to him. He takes a big swallow, sits down on the bench.

ETHEL

(she sits next to him)

I'm not a racist.

MAN-IN-HOODY

You're one angry woman.

(a long silence)

Do you have any food?

No! – Wait.

ETHEL

She rummages in her bag, hands him a power bar.

You homeless?

MAN-IN-HOODY

Maybe. Sort of.

ETHEL

Maybe sort of?

(she chuckles)

Hm. So am I, maybe sort of. Where do you sleep nights?

MAN-IN-HOODY

(vaguely)

Here and there - up – near 119th. - way up - underpass. You don't want the shelter, believe me.

ETHEL

Sleeping out in the open. I can't imagine.

He suddenly snatches her bag, holds it out of her reach. Slowly hands it back.

MAN-IN-HOODY

Just kidding.

ETHEL

Very funny.

She holds her bag pressed against her stomach both arms around it.

So, you sleep outside? How can you fall asleep? I have trouble falling asleep on my daughter's couch. Isn't it scary?

MAN-IN-HOODY

Can be. You know what, this one place – not a shelter - is a fucking sanctuary. There are buddies, there are stars in the sky. Not everything comes down to money and real estate. That's all that poor shit in the White House knows.

ETHEL

I wouldn't call him poor.

MAN-IN-HOODY

Hollow, call him hollow, an empty shell, an airbag, a nothing.

ETHEL

More than nothing: mean, malicious, vicious, vindictive, vile, venomous,
(really getting into it, enjoying it)
cruel, disgusting, absolutely disgusting, an egocentric, egotistical, narcissistic, misogynistic son-
of-a-bitch!

MAN-IN-HOODY

You're really getting off on this, aren't you?

ETHEL

I want him dead.

(she shakes her head)

And not just him, his whole family. Like the Romanovs. You know?

MAN-IN- HOODY

Have them assassinated?

ETHEL

Why not? Baron! I wonder he didn't call him Tsar, or Prince, or King. Just Baron? I want them
all dead. Including his son-in-law, especially his son-in-law.

MAN-IN-HOODY

Why him?

ETHEL

He harasses tenants, the greedy son-of-a-bitch, to get them out of their stabilized apartments.
Falsifies records, bribes inspectors.

MAN-IN-HOODY

That's just business. Routine. You'd be surprised.

ETHEL

I don't get it. People voting this disgusting bully into the highest office in the land. In the world,
come to think of it. Or used to be. Are we still number one with this retard at the helm?

MAN-IN-HOODY

He's no retard. He's very smart. You can't get / to the

ETHEL

He's an emotional and intellectual retard. He doesn't care what world he leaves to his
grandchildren. He has grandchildren for Christ sake. He has no empathy. None! And his sons,
hunting tigers in India. In this day and age. Unbelievable! They should be skinned alive, put over
the mantle.

(the man stares at her)

His sons, not the tigers. Fricking adulterer. Everybody else has to resign. What happened to ME
TOO? Why does it apply to everybody except this disgusting fish mouth? Why is he always let

off? He gets accused but is never prosecuted. I want him dead! Isn't it awful? I used to be a pacifist. A flowerchild. Make love, not war.

MAN-IN-HOODY

You're crazy.

ETHEL

And not just die. I want him to suffer, be shamed, stripped naked, castrated - yeah castrated, publicly, that's it, absolutely, paraded about, laughed at. The man with the little hands. Ha-ha-ha!

MAN-IN-HOODY

I think there is a clinical name for it. Can't think of what it is. What did you mean you were maybe homeless?

(she doesn't answer)

You don't look homeless.

ETHEL takes a sip of water, gets up and points at a building on Riverside Drive, counts down.

ETHEL

See that building, the one with the big tree near the entrance? One, two, three, third corner-window from the top. My daughter lives there. I sleep on the couch. My son-in-law wants me gone yesterday. The building thinks I'm visiting. From Europe! That's a laugh. I haven't been to Europe in thirty years.

MAN-IN-HOODY

So what's the problem?

ETHEL

They don't allow three people in a one-bedroom apartment. If I jumped out of that window, I'd splash right at their fancy entrance. I wonder if it's high enough? I wouldn't want to survive and be crippled.

MAN-IN-HOODY

Are you contemplating suicide?

ETHEL

Not really. I don't know why I do that.

MAN-IN-HOODY

Do what?

ETHEL

Talk about killing myself. I would never do it. I wouldn't do that to my daughter. And especially not to my granddaughter. She has death anxieties. A teen with death anxieties. I blame the mayor.

MAN-IN-HOODY

For her anxieties?

ETHEL

No, for rezoning. They offered me money to move. Idiot me refused. I loved my place. I'd been there forever. Stupid, stupid asshole me, I didn't take the offer; next thing I know the building is condemned.

She passes him the water bottle, they sit in silence looking straight out, after a while.

MAN-IN-HOODY

Do you have any money? I know you said you didn't but I've heard brokers who pull down millions say the same thing.

ETHEL

(turns to stare at him)

You were a broker?

He doesn't respond. She checks her wallet, gives him a dollar bill. He keeps his hand stretched out. She puts one more in it, then two more.

What happened?

MAN-IN-HOODY

Stuff. Drugs. I just wasn't cut out for the rat race.

ETHEL

No kidding.

MAN-IN-HOODY

My wife got me into rehab. After about the fifth time she gave up on me. I miss her. You know something, missing can be as good as having. Better.

ETHEL

You're the one who's crazy. How can you be so positive? Glass half full no matter what?

MAN-IN-HOODY

I don't know. Maybe my nature. Nature period. Look!

(points to the walkway)

Grass growing through concrete. There's always tomorrow, unimaginable fortunes looming. I thought I was immune; thought I could / always control

ETHEL

Looming? You slipped up there.

MAN-IN-HOODY

I meant possible. Waiting. Possibly waiting for you. Anything's possible. If you can imagine it, it's possible. Who said that?

ETHEL

Strasberg.

MAN-IN-HOODY

Who?

ETHEL

Lee Strasberg. My acting guru of yore.

MAN-IN-HOODY

Never heard of him. How come you're so miserable?

ETHEL

Work, I guess, not enough work. Things bother me half as much when I'm working.

MAN-IN-HOODY

That's the one thing I don't miss - the rat race.

ETHEL

I feel awful when I'm not working. Like I'm nothing. My family doesn't value what I do. I don't blame them. I'm an actress.

MAN-IN-HOODY

So you said. Have I seen you in anything?

ETHEL

You tell me. My daughter is making damn sure Lilly doesn't go into showbiz. She's right of course; it's a terrible business. I am inconsequential. What good do I do in the world? I can't bear to think of the children. It just kills me thinking of the children. At the border being taken from their families, toddlers, babies, put in cages, lost track of? Can you imagine?

MAN-IN-HOODY

I don't listen to the news.

ETHEL

It's like an addiction. Every ten minutes after the hour I tune into Public Radio for the news summary.

MAN-IN-HOODY

I don't listen to the news.

ETHEL

I'll tell you a story. When I was in first grade - maybe it was second - I know I was in school already. That's in Europe after the war, mind you. My family had nothing to eat. They sent me to live with a well-to-do aunt, my father's sister, who was married to a Nazi.

I was so traumatized, I thought I'd die from homesickness. And that's with a kind relative, a half an hour away from home. I never said boo, never complained. I couldn't admit that I was homesick. It haunts me to this day.

I slept on this big blue sofa under a huge painting, some pastoral scene of a golden wheatfield with poppies and bluebottles along the edges. It had a gilded frame, thick, ornate gilded frame. I thought it would come crashing down on me in my sleep. I cried every night in the dark.

I don't know how long I was there. Probably just a few weeks. Maybe a few months.

Can you imagine, a five-year old, a seven-year-old, taken from her mother? Toddlers, babies! The cruelty of it. Do you have children?

MAN-IN-HOODY

(stands up, moves to leave)

I have to go.

ETHEL

Wait. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to - pry.

(he starts walking)

I'm sorry.

MAN-IN HOODY

(turns around, calls back)

Lady, you haven't got a clue.

We hear the sound of the river and the wind in the trees. It increases, gets very loud and suddenly stops.

end of act one

ACT II

scene 1

Projection of burning forests through the theatre.
The lights come up in Sandy's classroom, SANDY is lecturing with the aid of slides:

SANDY

Not only Australia, the forests have been burning in Siberia, thousands of acres, millions of trees lost. Millions of trees sacrificed like Joan on the Stake. We're destroying our lungs. You don't hear about it because these infernos are in unpopulated areas, far from cities. No private property is destroyed. That's all we care about, private property, real estate. But now the smog is reaching the cities and they have to pay attention. This is happening all over the globe not just in Russia. There are heatwaves in the oceans killing unnamed numbers of

STUDENT

Professor!

SANDY

Yes David?

Lights change.
Spotlight on ETHEL in front of a Trump building on Freedom Blvd. addressing a small crowd.

ETHEL

He wants a wall? Let's give him a wall.A tall one! All around Mar-a-Lago! Keep him safe and snug in there. Add a moat! With alligators! What do you think? To keep these vicious, highly dangerous, asylum seeking women and children out. Why not stick his whole thieving clan in there? We can airdrop some weenies once a week - with Sauerkraut! To honor his heritage!

(into her bullhorn)

Lock him up, lock him up, lock him up

(people joining in)

Lock him up! Lock him up!

Lock him up! Lock him up! Lock him

(a policeman moves in on her)

Lights change to SANDY's living room. It's Sunday afternoon, SANDY is answering email. HENRY enters. He is sipping a drink, hands SANDY something on a plastic plate. He is slightly high.

SANDY

What's that?

HENRY

Take a bite.

SANDY

I'm not hungry.

HENRY

Humor me, take a bite, you'll like it. - Suite yourself.

(he gobbles it down)

Lobster rolls! I think I'll get me another one and a little more champagne to wash it down.

SANDY

They're serving lobster rolls and champagne at the open house?

HENRY

Yep. The agent told me they were doing manicures for the ladies at her last one.

SANDY

Are you serious?

HENRY

That's nothing. Marketing teams for these new super high-end luxury condos that are sprouting like mushrooms, like the one they're building on Ethel's old site, have celebrity chefs serve six-course dinners to prospective buyers right on site, right there in the first finished dining room. It appears, the competition is fierce.

(he chortles)

I'm rhyming. It appears, the competition is fierce. After all there are only so many hedge-fund managers to go around who can afford forty million-dollar pieds-a-terre. You sure you don't want me to bring you a glass of the bubbly?

SANDY

You're drunk. And you're not going back down there. Sweetie, I don't want you to make a spectacle of yourself. We're not officially approved yet. I'm on tender hooks.

HENRY

Ethel is stuffing herself.

SANDY

She is down there? I forbade her to go. I explicitly forbade her to go. She's not supposed to be here period.

HENRY

She's having a party. Well, it is a party. We can have a party when they're selling my place.

SANDY

Your place?

HENRY

Excuse moi, our place. What we have to do is *stage* it!

(looks around)

Yep, it sure needs staging. First a makeover. You can increase the value by hundreds of thousands of dollars. A new kitchen, quartzite counter tops, subzero freezer and, voilà, you're a hundred thousand ahead of the game. Ms. Gerstler is coming up to take a look when she is done down there.

SANDY

What are you talking about? How would we pay for a new kitchen?

HENRY

New bathroom too, definitely new bathroom. Nobody has shower curtains any more. I wonder if there is room for a bidet? I'd say we pass on the remote-controlled toilet and tap-activated dimmers.

SANDY

We're lucky if we can come up with the closing cost.

HENRY

What you do is get a loan using the apartment as collateral. Ms. Gerstler assured me, easy as pie. The president of the board, what's his name

SANDY

Lolly, I mean Sheldon Leland.

HENRY

.... is affiliated with the bank that handles all the financing in this building.

SANDY

(reading an email)

Hm, somebody's dry cleaning is missing again. Management wants to know if anybody got it by mistake. - A suit and a raincoat! It can't be. Mom told me she was going to drop it off at the cleaners under the Leland name. I thought it was so clever of her to think of that. Why would it be missing?

HENRY

Happens all the time, doesn't it?

SANDY jumps up, exits. HENRY dials a number, waits impatiently, in a hushed voice.

HENRY

Dominique, are you still there?Leave!Just leave, get out of This was a really bad idea She wasn't supposed to be there don't talk to her, just don't talk to her she may be crazy but she is not stupid. I've got to go.

He hangs up as SANDY reenters with two items on hangers wrapped in dry-cleaning plastic.

SANDY

They were in the hall closet. I don't get it. Why are they here?

HENRY

Well good. You can return them. No questions asked.

Somebody is pounding on the front door and leaning on the bell. HENRY goes to open.

Hold your horses!

SHELDON

(following Henry inside)

We are having a situation in 7E. You'd better come at once. This is intolerable. Mrs. ... uhm uhm

(he realizes he does not know her last name)

Mrs.

HENRY

Ethel.

SHELDON

Right. She is preaching. I'm afraid somebody may have called the police. She has confiscated the brownies.

HENRY

What about the lobster roles?

SANDY thrusts the dry-cleaning at SHELDON and rushes out. SHELDON stands perplexed for a moment, glares at HENRY, drops the dry-cleaning on the sofa and exits. RUFUS is barking wildly from the kitchen. HENRY closes the door, dials his phone.

HENRY

Have you left? good good what happened? ahaTwo bottles of champagne? That's theft. Oh God, I hope they don't press charges.....before the police came.

At least I don't have to bail her out No, she didn't. I have no idea. Probably taking the champagne to the homeless. I'll meet you at your place Dominique, we have to talk. As soon as I can get there Me too!

The light changes to an eerie twilight. The MAN-IN-HOODY and ETHEL are seen down by the river. We only hear the sound of the lapping water and violent rushing of wind. They walk off in different directions. The sound stops. There is an eerie silence.

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ACT II

scene 2

Two weeks later. The living room has a bare look. The bedding is gone. SANDY is putting books in a cardboard box. HENRY enters from the kitchen and hands her a cup of coffee.

SANDY

She is what, Lilly's age? And you're the love of her life, no doubt. L'amour! Did her student visa run out? I guess I could sic ICE on her. We can all guess how our Commander-in-Chief feels about Moroccans.

HENRY

She is not Moroccan. She is French. She grew up in Paris. She attended the Sorbonne. She is a brilliant young woman. You have no idea what she has done for me. (/) She actually contributed a significant number

SANDY

Let me guess.

HENRY

She has given me a new impetus (/). My book is finally

SANDY

You don't say.

HENRY

Why don't you stop being so spiteful and listen for once. And don't pretend you care. You don't hear me! How many times have I asked you, begged you, for your input on the first chapter? Just the first chapter. One single chapter. You know how important the opening is. You can't be bothered. You don't have time

SANDY

It's true. I don't. One of us has to make a living.

HENRY

It was nothing. She means nothing to me. Do you still give a damn about me or my work? All you care about is saving the world with your cockamamie tree philosophy. Whatever happened to *our* symbiosis? Trees aren't going to save the planet, technology will.

SANDY

How? Technology is the cause of all the problems. The more technology the more pollution on every level, physically, morally, socially. And it's not enough to ruin this earth, let's go pollute outer space. The oceans are already full of garbage, plastic islands as big as Massachusetts floating around, whales being strangled, heatwaves in the oceans.

HENRY

You are so naive. Technology can turn the desert green. We have the knowhow right now. Solar panels and windmills in the Sahara can generate more energy than the entire world population needs or will ever need. We can do that right now.

SANDY

So why don't we? I'll tell you why, because of greed. Instead of caring for each other as trees do, we exploit each other. Big business out for profit, profit, profit! Profit for the shareholders. Profit for the few, nothing for the community. The homeless population is (/) growing. The systemic racism

HENRY

There is this little problem of distributing the energy, which isn't quite solved yet. But it will be. In time.

SANDY

Time's up. The climate crisis is now. Now they want to spend trillions to go back to the moon, go to Mars. Why? What for? Out of vanity? Look how brilliant we are, the incomparable human spirit! Conquering new worlds. Let's destroy our earth and spend trillions to go to Mars, a barren world of which we know nothing, where no human can survive. Let's make it livable and then pollute it. They are giving that lunatic bully billions for a new military department so he can play space wars.

HENRY

You can't stop progress.

SANDY

You call that progress? If we took all the military budgets of all the countries and used the money in peaceful ways, we could all live in paradise. Right here, right now. That would be progress. If we cared for each other as trees do.

HENRY

It's just not realistic.

SANDY

Why? Tell me why?

HENRY

Human nature.

SANDY

Right. Something's gone wrong in our evolution. I'll tell you something, nature will survive, humans will be gone. Nature doesn't need us. Someday nature will come up with a virus that will eradicate us. Look at us, mass shootings, separating children from their parents. There is no love left.

HENRY

Says the woman who can't entertain the thought that even one other female on this planet could possibly be in love with me.

SANDY

Right, it's my fault you're sleeping with a teenager.

HENRY

She is not a teenager. And I'm not sleeping with her.

SANDY

She wants a Green Card. Is she moving in here?

HENRY

No, she is not moving in here. If anything, I might move into her place while the renovation is going on. They graciously agreed to let me stay till this is straightened out. Technically I'm a squatter.

SANDY

Are you out of your mind? A squatter! In your own apartment! In your father's apartment where he has lived for forty years, you're a squatter?

HENRY, very upset, is looking out the window.

SANDY (cont.)

At least you have an apartment. It's been hell sleeping on Sophie's couch. I have no privacy, no place to work. Where am I going to put these books?

She turns the box over, dumping the books out.

I practically live at the college. She doesn't like me in her kitchen. No place to cook. No place for Lilly to come home to. I had to put Mom in that awful home.

HENRY

You're the one who left.

SANDY

(can't believe her ears)

What did you expect? Springing Dominique on me, *after* I co-signed for the loan. You're right, you're the one who should have left. Stupid me.

HENRY

It's because of Ethel we weren't approved.

SANDY

You don't know that. They don't have to give reasons. What kind of insane law is this? Anyway, it's done. We have to move on. Let's concentrate on the future. I can't wait to get my hands on those megabucks you promised. I get half? Right? Nothing for Mademoiselle?

No reaction from HENRY, total mood change from SANDY.

SANDY (cont.)

I looked at a few places over the weekend. This one apartment would be ideal, a little run down but large enough to bring Mom home. There is this large room that could be a study we could share. No, you can have it. Put your dad's desk in. Finish your book. Oh sweetie, we can work it out. Don't you think we should at least try? The place has a wonderful deck and a tiny extra room that could be Lilly's bedroom when she comes home at semester brake. There is a beautiful gnarled crabapple tree in the backyard. An absolute beauty. Oh, and they allow dogs.

HENRY

The reason I called, the reason (/) I wanted you to stop by ...

SANDY

(barrels on, getting more and more enthusiastic)

It's a condo in Brooklyn with amazingly low taxes and common charges, so much lower than Manhattan. The asking price of course is enormous. But I figure in the long run low monthly charges is the better deal. And the commute (/) is not bad at all.

HENRY

Listen, will you listen ...

SANDY

Of course, it will be gone by the time we're ready to do this *staging* thing. What's your estimate? What do you think? How long is this make-over going to take? Another week, a month? Come to think of it, I'll make an offer on that place (/) right now before

HENRY

Listen, the loan, uh, the loan, uh

SANDY

What? What about the loan?

HENRY

It hasn't come through.

SANDY

What are you saying?

HENRY

I don't know what is going on. The bank keeps putting me off.

SANDY

Why?

(suddenly becomes aware)

Where is Rufus? Why is he not here? Where is he? Where is my Rufus? What have you done with Rufus?

HENRY

Calm down. Marion is probably walking him.

SANDY

Probably? Don't you know?

HENRY

She's been dog sitting him. I can't bring him to the office anymore. I do have to work occasionally. The new Dean of Students, Dr. Dunst, who temporarily or so they tell me, shares my office while they're renovating his, cannot abide canines. To be fair, Rufus cannot abide Dr. Dunst. His voice causes him to bark. And as Dr. Dunst is on the phone a great deal. You have no idea with what I am confronted. I'm a teacher, not an administrator.

SANDY

We all have to do some administrative work.

HENRY

As assistant to Dr. Dunst, it's all I have to do, and believe me, I am singularly inapt at it.

SANDY

That I believe.

HENRY

Since Dominique is allergic, and Marion graciously offered...

SANDY

Oh, Marion *graciously* offered. They're *graciously* letting you stay in your own apartment, and Marion *graciously* offered to take in Rufus? Is he sleeping in her apartment?

HENRY

As I said Domi...

(he catches himself)

Look, it might be best if we sold **as is**. Just get rid of the place as soon as possible. I mean, meanwhile we have the maintenance here, plus the rent you pay Sophie, plus the fee for the furniture storage.

SANDY

How about **subletting as is**? Until we're ready. The rent we could get in this building.

HENRY

If we sublet, we still have to come up with the monthly maintenance, which is substantial. I am sure we could make some profit. The thing is, the board has to approve our sublessee too, and you know how difficult they are. God knows how long that could take. Ms. Gerstler is stopping by around four. Could you possibly stay that long? Please! She tells me she has two offers already.

SANDY

Have you lost your mind? What about the mega bucks? How could we buy two places? One for each of us?

(off-noises)

I hear Rufus.

(she runs out, from off-stage)

How is my baby? Yes, yes, yes, mommy missed you too, missed you dreadfully. Give me a kiss. Ok, ok. Mommy give you a treat.

(calling from the kitchen)

Where are his treats for god sakes?

HENRY

I put them... I'll get them.

He exits and ushers MARION into the living room.

Marion, would you mind waiting a moment. About tonight just give me a moment.

He exits into the kitchen. MARION tiptoes through the scattered books, finds somewhere to sit.

SANDY

(reenters, over her shoulder)

And refresh his water. Hi Marion, thank you so much for walking Rufus.

MARION

Not at all. I'm ready to adopt the creature.

SANDY

That won't be necessary.

MARION

Not literally, dear. Though he appears to be quite at home in my humble abode. I see you're packing. Isn't it wonderful how things are working out?

SANDY

What is working out?

MARION

You being able to sell so quickly, and at a more than fair price, don't you agree? Charlotte couldn't be happier. With Olivia transferring to Columbia next semester, it's absolutely ideal.

SANDY

What am I missing? Olivia who?

MARION

Olivia, Charlotte's daughter from her first, no, let me think, her second marriage. She simply refuses to live in the same apartment with Sheldon. Young people. Stepfather problems. You know. It's not unusual. But now with her own apartment right in the building. Charlotte must be so grateful to you for letting her have the place.

HENRY

(has come back in)

The apartment has not been sold.

MARION

Oh, did I speak prematurely? Naturally I assumed..... Not 'signed, sealed and delivered'? Not yet a 'done deal' as they say? 'An offer you couldn't refuse?'

(chuckles, amused at her choice of words)

I hope I didn't speak out of turn. But it's just so perfect for all parties concerned. Obviously, the place is too small for your needs. And now Charlotte can have Olivia under her wings again. I shall miss Rufus of course. He's quite stolen my heart.

(to Henry)

Would you like him to sleep over another night? I could fetch him the usual time?

SANDY

I don't think so. Not tonight. Thank you so much, Marion.

MARION

I shall be home all evening. If you change your mind feel free to bring Rufus by any time.

MARION exits, leaving SANDY and HENRY looking at each other in shocked silence.

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ACT II

scene 3

A Nursing Home. ETHEL is slumped in a wheelchair in a small room she shares with someone who is not present.

SANDY

(enters)

Good morning! Hi Mom! - Hello! - Mom?

She puts down her briefcase and a white deli paper bag, puts her arms around ETHEL from behind and kisses her on the head.

Wake up Mom. It's ten o'clock in the morning.

ETHEL

(mumbling)

Where? Where? Which way Give them to me I want

(she keeps mumbling)

SANDY

Mom, wake up.

ETHEL

(struggles, slaps Sandy's hand away)

Not these, you idiot. The red ones.

SANDY

What are you saying? Mom, look at me! Hi. Hello. Wake up! Open your eyes!

ETHEL

(opening her eyes)

Do I care? I do not.

SANDY

Mom, look at me.

ETHEL

(takes a moment to situate herself)

Hi! What are you doing here? Is it Friday?

SANDY

No, it's not Friday, it's Wednesday. You must have nodded off. You were dreaming. You were talking. Something about 'red ones.' What were you dreaming?

(hugs her)

There. You're alright now. What were you dreaming?

ETHEL

We were shopping in this huge place. Rows and rows of blouses, sorted by color. I was looking for something. I don't know what. I didn't like anything. I wanted to leave. I looked up, and Lily was gone. Or maybe it was you. When you were little.

SANDY

(sits down)

I remember one time at a playground in Central Park, I was maybe four, I climbed (/) up these rocks while you were talking to

ETHEL

.... I went up this hill with these huge rocks on top, and I didn't know the place. I didn't know where I was. I couldn't find Lilly. There were people there. They wouldn't help me. Nobody would answer me. They just ignored me. It was awful, awful.

SANDY

You had a nightmare. It's ok, Mom. You're ok now.

ETHEL

Up on the rocks. Lost. I didn't know where to go. Which direction. You know? It was awful. Nobody cared.

(she takes a deep breath)

Hi. I didn't expect you till Friday.

SANDY

I can't stay. I just wanted to drop this off to cheer you up. An *Everything Bagel* from Zabar's with everything on it. Your favorite. Has the food been any better?

(no answer)

Are you eating? You look thin. Why are you in a wheelchair?

ETHEL

Next you can visit me on Ryker's.

SANDY

What are talking about?

ETHEL

Murder. I'm talking murder. I'm going to murder Margaret. My roommate. I'm going to throttle her to death if she doesn't stop gurgling, and snoring, and rasping, and breathing.

SANDY

She has to breathe.

ETHEL

I haven't slept in two nights. You should have let me sleep. What time is it?

SANDY

Almost eleven. Why are you in a wheelchair?

ETHEL

What time exactly?

SANDY

(checks her phone)

Ten fifty-eight. Oh no, already. I can only stay a minute.

ETHEL

That gives me two minutes to get into character. Out of my way!

She presses a bell and starts spinning her wheelchair around in an agitated manner, emitting pitiful moans. An attendant appears.

I'm in pain! Where have you been? I'm in pain. For pity's sake.

NURSE

Calm down. I was just coming. If anything, I'm early. Here we go. Here we are. Here we go.

He hands her some pills and a paper cup of water.

Down the hatch.

SANDY

What are you giving her?

NURSE

Something for the arthritis pain and something to calm her down.
(he exits).

SANDY

What was that all about?

ETHEL

I have to hand it to them. The one thing they're pretty prompt about is pills.

SANDY

What are you up to?

ETHEL

Nothing. I'm just having a little fun. Putting on a show. I have to keep up my acting skills, don't I? How's Henry?

SANDY

Never mind Henry. Have you heard from your agent at all, what's her name, Rory? Are you in touch with her?

ETHEL

Same as always. She doesn't answer my calls. So where is he staying?

SANDY

(moves to the window)

What a dreary view. Not a tree in sight.

(turns back to Ethel)

I don't want to talk about Henry. I want to know what pills they're giving you. Maybe it's the pills that are making you so depressed. Do they give you sleeping pills too? You said you don't sleep. Maybe the pills don't mix. Maybe the (/) combination of the different

ETHEL

The pills are harmless, believe me. No oxycodone here, for love or money. So are you separated for good? Are you getting divorced?

SANDY

Is that what you want to hear?

ETHEL

No!

SANDY

He was going to move in with his girlfriend till he has a place. Something happened. I don't know what.

ETHEL

She changed her mind?

SANDY

I know he spent a few nights at the office, which the department head did not appreciate.

ETHEL

Well, that was a stupid thing to do. I mean he has plenty of cash for a hotel since you sold the place. I still think you should have hung onto it, and renovated, and get the mega bucks. Are they going to fire him?

SANDY

If they want to fire him, they'll fire him. Bringing Rufus to work and sleeping in the office are hardly reasons to be fired. I don't know.

She stares out the window. There is a silence.

Not a tree in sight. - I don't know. We don't talk. He's gone into his shell again. Like the time when he was denied tenure.

She hands her the deli bag.

Have your bagel. Everybody's having a nervous breakdown. Why am I the one who always has to hold it together?

ETHEL

Because you can. I guess his girlfriend saw the light.

SANDY

Girlfriend. Ridiculous. You don't have a girlfriend at our age. Lover, I guess I should say 'lover.' Funny, I don't like to say the word. I was never a good lover, I don't think. Not really. And it's your fault.

ETHEL

Mine?

SANDY

Well, you and dad weren't exactly the best example when it comes to relationships, were you?

ETHEL

(is stunned)

My fault? How do you figure that?

SANDY

Come on. You weren't ever very loving with dad. And you were oblivious to the needs of the family.

ETHEL

Are you serious?

SANDY

Certainly oblivious to my needs. Always occupied with your career. Always upset, unhappy at not being cast in this or that or the other thing, always stressed out. Totally self-absorbed. I wasn't surprised that Dad left once I was out of the house. I know it wasn't easy for you then with him gone, but did you ever think of me? I could have starved to death. Not a thought. I had to work all through college. Sometimes I lived for weeks on nothing but bananas and peanut butter sandwiches.

ETHEL

How awful. I didn't know. You didn't tell me. Why didn't you tell me? Honestly, I didn't know. How awful.

SANDY

Henry was there for me. He was my savior. You never liked him. You disliked him from the start.

ETHEL

That's not true. I thought he wasn't a good provider. And he wasn't. Spending all his time on his masterwork, a philosophical treatise for god sakes or whatever it is, which, by the way, still isn't finished. Who is going to publish it? Who is going to read it? Who is going to pay money for it?

(Ethel stares at her daughter)

I'm sorry. I didn't know. I'm so sorry. You should have told me. I'm so sorry.

SANDY

Forget it. I don't know why I brought it up. It's a long time ago. Anyway, we're officially separated. That way I can claim abandonment after one year. Or maybe it's two; I forget. It's the easiest way for an amicable divorce.

There's a silence, SANDY is staring out the window, unseeing, close to tears.

I'm so lonely. You have no idea. I miss Lilly and Rufus. I miss Henry. I miss my apartment. I miss my furniture. I miss my trees.

ETHEL

I'm so sorry. I didn't know. You're right, I was oblivious.

SANDY

Yes, you were.

ETHEL

Still am, I guess. Something's wrong with me. I started talking to strangers. You know, on the subway, at the bus stop, telling a total stranger I like the colors she is wearing. Stuff like that. Complimenting complete strangers, being cheerful, outgoing, making witty observations. Talking to people one-on-one, so unlike me.

(SANDY is silent, staring out the window)

ETHEL (cont.)

Maybe it's an after effect of that awful meltdown I had at the Trump Towers, being hauled away in an ambulance. Maybe it's a last-ditch effort to connect to the human race. Connect like your trees. Reaching out with my old, damaged, deteriorating, rotting roots. All these years I labored under the illusion I could do it with acting, connect with acting. Be part of something. The theatre community. Be respected. Belong.

The other day, I was over by the river. It was a beautiful day. Suddenly a whole flock of birds took off in unison, flew around in a big circle, landed for a minute and took off again in another circle, so beautiful against the blue sky, just flying in a circle for no apparent reason, out of pure joy, all in a group. I watched them and this tremendous sadness came over me. I don't have a flock, I thought. I don't have a flock. I'm flockless.

SANDY

You've got me, and Lily, and you had some very good jobs. You've worked opposite some very famous people.

ETHEL

Sure. One day shoots. Nothing parts. Shitty little nothing parts.

SANDY

Have you heard from Rory at all? Is anything happening?

ETHEL

Nothing's happening. I have to get out of here is what's happening. Have you seen what's sitting in the hallways? I'm in the wrong building. I should *maybe* be in wing A, definitely not in the one for the half comatose.

(an attempt to change the mood)

'What a dump!'

SANDY

It's only temporary. There was nothing available in the other building. You'll be out of here very soon. As soon as I'm out of Sophie's. Just hang in there. Ok? I'm looking. I have some great new prospects. And my classes are filling up nicely. Even though there have been some complaints about me.

ETHEL

Complaints? What kind of complaints?

SANDY

I think they're about to offer me a fulltime position.

ETHEL

What kind of complaints?

SANDY

It's nothing. I'm looking at a few more places this weekend.

ETHEL

What about that place near Van Cortland Park you mentioned? That sounded promising.

SANDY

The fixer-upper? Very run down with ancient appliances, but I loved the lay-out, plenty of room, great light too. Best of all, the bedroom was to the back, very quiet, with this gorgeous grey birch practically touching the window. That really sold me. Luckily it required a pre-approved mortgage. Even with the cash for the down payment I'm having trouble getting pre-approved. My lousy salary.

ETHEL

What's lucky about it?

SANDY

On my way out coming down in the elevator this Hispanic guy tells me that the place is infested with bedbugs. The agent neglected to mention that. I should report him. I really should. You're right though, the Bronx may be it as far as affordability goes. I'm going to two more open houses this weekend. And a friend of Sophie's knows somebody who knows of something somewhere. Just hang in there. We'll be ok. We'll be fine. All my friends are having their feelers out.

ETHEL

Why don't I come with you Saturday? I love looking at apartments. I adore open houses. There is nothing more stimulating.

SANDY

Don't expect any lobster rolls, no prosecco either. I've got to run. I want to stop at Marion's, take Rufus for a stroll before my class. Marion is a dear, but God, I get so angry every time I set foot in that building. Luckily, he'll be out of there in a couple of days.

ETHEL

Sophie's changed her mind?

SANDY

No, not a chance. Phoebe is going to board him for a while. Phoebe, one of my students. Haven't I mentioned her to you? Very talented, brilliant girl, and she's crazy about animals, trees too. The problem is she lives in New Jersey. He'll have a backyard, but it will be so much harder for me to visit him. I miss him, I miss Lilly, I miss Henry, I miss our old apartment, I even miss my furniture, my dear desk. Sorry, here I go again. It's just so hard. I'm not the gypsy type. I'm the nesting type. You know? You haven't touched your bagel.

ETHEL

I'll take it with me. I'll walk out with you. They're getting on my nerves with all their rules. Like I'm in kindergarten.

SANDY

Where are you going? It's almost lunch time, isn't it?

ETHEL is stuffing things in her bag, including her laptop.

ETHEL

Forget their disgusting Salisbury steak and limp vegetables. Ugh! When we pass the counter tell them you're taking me to lunch. I'll pick me up a coffee and have my bagel on my bench. Get some air. Look at my river. Look at your trees. Gather my wits. I'll take the bus. Could I borrow fifty bucks? Oh, and I need the key for the storage place.

SANDY

Why are you taking your computer? You don't want to lug that thing around with you.

ETHEL

It'll be gone if I don't. Somebody will steal it.

SANDY

Nobody has so far. Why don't I take it? Would you like me to keep it for you for now? You can get your emails on your phone.

ETHEL

Great idea. I'll sell it to you for fifty bucks.

SANDY

I don't want to buy it. I can keep it for you till you're out of here, which will be soon, very soon. I promise. Cheer up, Mom! What do you need from storage? I can get it for you. I can't wait to have my own furniture back in my own home. What do you need?

ETHEL

I don't suppose you have the key on you? I want to go myself. I just want to take a look, take inventory. I forget what's in there. Could I borrow fifty dollars?

SANDY

Fifty? Why fifty?

(checks her wallet)

I can give you a twenty.

ETHEL

I guess that will have to do.

(she puts the laptop under the bed pillow)

Let's blow this joint. 'What a dump!'

SANDY
(*on their way out*)

About Saturday

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ACT II**scene 4**

The light changes to HENRY's office. He is packing up his personal belongings. His contract was not renewed. He takes a stack of papers out of a drawer, starts reading, getting engrossed he sits down crossing out things, writing in the margins. The desk phone rings. He lets it ring, finally answers, loath to abandon his revising.

HENRY

Hello Hi sweetheart Why are you calling my office? I don't, Lilly I don't know. Maybe she is in transit As to my knowledge she is still at Sophie's I don't know, Lilly. I don't keep track of your mother's whereabouts Have you lost all judgement? You don't drop out of college because your roommate snores. Talk to me just talk to me You can't talk to me? There are two sides to You don't make this kind of decision when you're That's impossible. No, you cannot stay with me..... because the place is not appropriate for I am not and never have been her lover Your mother is wrong. She is back in France if you must know Not possible. Because I don't have a home. I'm staying at the Lucerne, which is no place Whatever she told you, there are two sides of the equation You don't leave in the middle of the semester

(Lilly has hung up)

Henry sits at his desk unmoving. It is very quiet. A firetruck, sirens screeching, passes by outside the building.

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ACT II**scene 5**

Riverside Park, sunset. There is a raucous party in progress on a yacht parked at a distance up on the Hudson. The thump of music, sounds of people laughing, talking, drinking, is drifting over. Across from Ethel's bench a man is leaning with his back against the railing talking on his cell.

PARTY GOER

..... No, sorry, can't do. I'm on my way to Listen, you have my name and my cell I have nothing to do with it. I happened to look down How would I know?

He looks down over the railing.

A woman, I think. Yes, looks like a woman. Could be a man. no, I think it's a man. It's hard to tell; the head is submerged stuck on a rock

He bends over the railing to catch a closer look.

I'm pretty sure it's a man jogging pants Suicide, murder, overdose, a mob hit, how should I know? I have no idea. This is a complete stranger. Listen, I've changed my mind.

He hangs up and walks off. After a bit SANDY approaches, stands in silence for a while looking up and down the walkway. She sits down on Ethel's bench looking up into the crowns of the trees. The MAN-IN-HOODY comes into view. He slowly walks past the bench and disappears. SANDY follows him with her eyes. Then looks back up at the trees. The wind is whispering in their crowns.

SANDY

(to herself)

Such beautiful trees.

(to the tree)

Where is she?

(sits in silence)

Oh Mom, where are you?

HENRY approaches. He stops when he sees SANDY on the bench. She stands up. They stare at each other.

Hello.

SANDY

Well hello there.

HENRY

What are you doing here?

SANDY

I miss you.

HENRY

I miss you too.

SANDY

They both sit in silence.

Lily wants to come home.

HENRY

We don't have a home.

SANDY

It's out there somewhere. We can find it.

HENRY

Oh Henry.

SANDY

She smiles at him with tears in her eyes. ETHEL approaches. She stops, taking in the two on the bench. There is a long silence.

ETHEL

We have to stop meeting like this.

She nudges SANDY over. They look out at the river in silence. A long rumbling thunder rolls in. The trees bend in the wind. A gentle rain starts. SANDY opens an umbrella. They huddle together. The rain comes down hard.

end of play