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Lane room

M. Ryan Bloyd
University of Dayton

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Lane Room
Thesis
Submitted to
The College of Arts and Sciences
University of Dayton
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
The Degree
Master of Arts in English

by
M. Ryan Bloyd

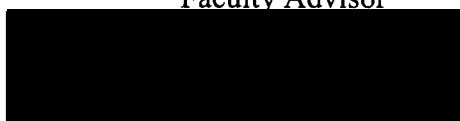
The College of Arts and Sciences
UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON
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APPROVED BY:



Wilhoit, Stephen
Faculty Advisor



Pici, Joseph
Faculty Reader



Strain, Margaret
Faculty Reader

ABSTRACT

LANE ROOM

M. Ryan Bloyd
University of Dayton

Advisor: Stephen Wilhoit P.h.D.

This is the story of three friends growing up in present-day
America—it is the story of love, death and redemption.

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Big thanks to Mary Carlson and Laura Yungblut who taught me to think and write and teach. They are truly brilliant, and I am blessed to have known them.

I would also like to thank my family, as it was they who talked me down from a thousand ledges—I owe this degree to their unwavering support.

Lane Room

M. Ryan Bloyd

CHARACTERS

	Age	Occupation
Amy	25	Reporter
Mike	28	Salesman
Father Hughs	63	Pastor
Sam Murray	30	Social Worker
Jen Mullins	10, 14, 18, 26	Waitress
Carol Bosler	10, 14, 18, 26	Waitress
Megan Lance	10, 14, 18, 26	Shop Girl
Joe Smith	18, 26	Gynecologist
Bill Tawney	29	Speedway
Jen's Father	55	Engineer
Paul Laurel	27	Unemployed
Mark Sandson	28	Subway
Grandma	70	
Grandpa	73	
Aunt Valerie	51	

Scene I

[A church. It is evening, and the sun is setting. The room is dim. Candles in glass lamps line the pews. A small group of people are gathered for a wedding. Soft music is playing. We hear the whisper of conversation. Sam is standing at the end of the aisle fidgeting with his tie. He smiles nervously at the guests.]

[The sound of bridal march begins. It grows louder and calls the guests to attention.]

Amy: Where's Mike?

Mike: I'm here, I'm here. Help me will ya?
[He is running up the stage steps with his tie in his hand. He holds it out to Amy.]

Amy: You might have tried *just a little bit* to be on time to your best friend's wedding.
[She is tying his tie.]

Mike: I'm on time.
[Tucks his tie behind his vest, takes a deep breath and smiles]
He's really gonna do it.

Amy: *She's* really gonna do it!

[The doors swing open and the Amy and Sam begin down the aisle. Jen appears outside the Bridal dressing room. She seems rattled. Her cousin crosses the vestibule and looks at her proudly.]

Alex: You are a beautiful bride. I am so proud of you.

Jen: Thank you, Alex.
[She says distractedly. Her eyes roam the room. Jen takes a deep breath and her cousin's arm. She smiles at him.]

Jen: Here we go.
[She taps his arm lovingly.]

Alex: Here we go.
[He smiles.]

[As they make their way down the aisle, Jen's family and friends smile at her. She makes eye contact with a few of them and smiles back. Jen and Alex come to the end of the aisle, and he stands with her on his arm.]

Father Hughs: Who presents this woman to be married?

Alex: Her mother and I.

[He hands her over to Sam who takes her arm. Sam is beaming. Alex takes his seat next to Jen's mother.]

[Jen smiles at Sam and then looks at the floor.]

Father Hughs: Dearly beloved, we are gathered here today to join Jennifer Riley Mullins and Samuel Robert Murray in Holy Matrimony. Marriage is a sacred covenant in which the two become one. The marriage relationship was established by God as a symbol of his love for his Church. You are to live the symbolism of God's love in your marriage. That is the purpose of this covenant—both of you are to be a gifts to the other.

[Father Hughs opens his Bible to begin the readings]

Father Hughs: It is written in I Corinthians 13 that love is patient and that love is kind. Love does not want its own way. Husbands are to love their wives even as Christ loved the Church and wives are to come under the protection of their husbands. I will now ask you to make your marriage vows. Samuel Robert Murray do you take Jennifer Riley Mullins to be your lawful wedded wife, will you love and honor her in sickness and in health and forsaking all others keep only unto her as long as you both shall live?

Sam: I do.

Father Hughs: Do you Jennifer Riley Mullins take Samuel Robert Murray to be your lawful wedded husband, to love and honor him in sickness and in health and forsaking all others, keep only unto him so long as you both shall live?

[Jens eyes are wide and teary. She is rocking a bit and looks as though she is trying to find her voice. She looks into Sam's eyes searchingly. The scene fades to black.]

Scene II

[1990. It's midnight in any town, suburban America. A full moon illuminates the scene. A dim spotlight follows Jen age 10 as she runs from stage left to the outside of a window. The house is white with red shutters. Jen sits down, leaning against the house. She taps lightly on the shutter with the back of her hand. She is still in pajamas]

Jen: Psst! Megan! *[Whispering. She taps again]* Megan! Wake up!

Megan: *[Just waking]* Jen?

Jen: It's me. Come out and frolic.

Megan: It's midnight. My parents will kill—

Jen: Come on. If they catch us, I'll take the blame.

Megan: Okay. But I have to stay in the yard.

Jen: Fine. *[Helping Megan climb out of the window.]*

Megan: I'm stuck.

Jen: Just swing your leg over.

Megan: I can't. I'm going to fall.

Jen: Swing your leg over; I've got you.

Megan: How are we supposed to *frolic*?

Jen: Like this. *[She dances and spins around the yard. She is laughing loudly.]*

Megan: Okay *[Hesitatingly, she joins Jen. Jen takes Megan's hand and the girls spin until they fall to the ground laughing.]*

Father's voice from offstage: Jen! Jen! *[Angrily.]*

Jen: Oh shit! *[She runs toward stage left. Megan looks around worriedly. Jen's father meets her right outside the exit. The spotlight is on them. He is a heavy man of fifty. He is visibly angry.]*

Father: What the hell did you think you're doing?

Jen: I just—

Father: You *just*, you just get your ass in this house, we have church tomorrow!

[Jen is silent. She looks at the ground and follows her father's instructions. They both exit the stage.]

Scene III

[1990. The front yard outside Megan's house. Neighborhood kids are playing. This scene should work with spotlights, first on all of them then just on Jen and Carol.]

Jen: Come on *[to Megan]* I'll race ya!

Megan: I don't want to race again. You've beaten me three times already today. Isn't that enough?

Jen: Carol! You'll race me, won't you?

Carol: I'm not racing you.

Jen: Are you afraid I'll beat you?

Carol: If I race you will you shut up?

Jen: Promise!

[They race and Carol wins.]

Jen: Best two out of three? *[Winded.]*

[The spotlight goes dark.]

Scene IV

[1994. The spotlight comes back up on Jen and Carol but they are older—they are in high school. They are in the same position that they were in when the spotlight went out in the last scene.]

Carol: I'm not racing again. You need to quit smoking.

Jen: You're one to talk. *[Jen goes over to her jacket and takes a pack of cigarettes out.]*

Jen: You want one Megan? *[Jokingly.]*

Megan: Yeah right. If my parents catch me smoking, they'll have my ass.

Jen: I wasn't going to give you a cigarette! You have track team.

[Carol and Jen light cigarettes and lie back in the grass. Megan is sitting up.]

Carol: School starts in two weeks and I'm not ready.

Jen: I wonder if we will "work to our potential" this year.

Carol: What does that mean anyway?

Megan: *[To Jen]* It probably means you'll have to go to school more than 4 times a week.

Jen: I'm not going on Fridays. The teachers all show movies. I can watch TV at home.

[Shouting is coming from Jen's house]

Jen: Sounds like they're at it again.

Megan: I heard them the other day when you were at your Grandma's. Sounded like your dad was gonna kill your mom. My dad almost called the cops

Jen: Hey Vicky, I'll kill your parents if you'll kill mine.

Carol: Sure but we'll have to wait 'til my mom gets out of the hospital.

Jen: How long'd she get?

Carol: Six months.

Jen: Man! They really let her have it.

Carol: That's what happens when you try to torch your own house, but that's the bad news. The good news is my dad forgot my birthday again this year.

Jen: Your parents are worse then *mine*.

Carol: It's okay. The year he remembered, we went to *Shoney's*. I'd rather stay home.

Megan: Let's talk about something else. Let's play the "Someday."

Carol: I hate that game: it's stupid.

Megan: Come on. Just one time [*Pleadingly.*]

Jen: Okay. Someday, I'm going to Harvard Law School and I'm going to be a great attorney. I'll argue cases before the Supreme Court and I'll change the world! [*She is standing and gesturing as she speaks*]

Megan: [*Happily*] Someday, I'm getting married and having babies, a thousand of 'em, and we'll have cookouts and picnics and our kids will all play together.

Carol: Someday, I'm getting out this place. That's for sure. And maybe I'll take pictures or something.

Jen: Award winning photographs.

Carol: Award winning photographs [*She smiles at Jen.*]

Megan: Who are you going to marry?

Carol: I'd like to marry Joe Smith. He's good looking *and* smart—Honors Calc. and Honors English. Both sides of his brain work!

Jen: I haven't met Joe.

Carol: Maybe if your parents would take you out of that silly private school, you'd make some friends, too.

Jen: Like Joe? [*She's laughing*] I'll probably never get married.

Megan: You'll get married.

Jen: To who? And for what? So I can scream at him all the time?

Scene V

[1996. A high school dance. The "Hand Jive" is playing. Carol is dancing around and Jen is standing still. Megan is dancing with Paul, a young man she's just met.]

Carol: *[Dancing]* Come on Jen. Dance! Have some fun! "How low can you go?" *[She is singing.]*

Jen: *[Starts to dance with Carol]* You think we'll be able to peel Megan away?

Carol: No telling. Poor Paul. Victim number one hundred and thirty-six.

Jen: I bet he won't commit to marriage tonight.

Carol: Bastard!

Jen: *[Taking Vicky's hand]* Vicky, I know we've only just met but would you, I mean, could you marry me forever and ever?

Carol: But we'd have to go to Hawaii and I hate planes and besides my mom told me to stay away from clingy girls.

Jen: Me? Clingy?

Joe: *[He is dressed in a tuxedo and fedora. He has an earring dangling from his left ear]* Hello Ladies! Jen, you are looking beautiful tonight.

Jen: You are ravishing as well, darling!

Joe: What are the two of you up to?

Jen: I was just asking Carol if she'd marry me and she was about to say yes.

Joe: Did you happen to see Eddie this evening? Now there's a promising young man.

Carol: Promisingly straight.

Joe: I love a challenge. *[He begins to sing]* “To dream the impossible dream”—

[Megan has finished dancing with Paul and walks up to the girls]

Megan: He’s the cutest guy here?

Jen: He’s all right.

Megan: Do you think he liked me?

Carol: Of course he liked you. You two danced for three songs in a row.

Megan: Maybe *he’s* the one.

Jen: Girls I hate to break up the fun but if I don’t get home, my dad’s gonna let me have it.

Megan: What movie’d you tell him you were seeing?

[Jen and Carol answer at the same time]

Jen and Carol: An Englishman Who Went up a Hill and Went Down a Mountain.

Megan: Can you believe that we’re all going to graduate tomorrow?

Jen: Can you believe that it’s ten o’clock and I’m not drunk yet?

Megan and Carol: No.

Scene VI

[2000. It's late on a Tuesday. "Famous Blue Raincoat" is playing in the background. About twenty people are gathered in a run-down row house. Jen is wearing a flowered skirt and a t-shirt and sitting on the couch next to Carol who is wearing baggy jeans and a sweater. They are both smoking. Jen is drunk.]

Jen: You have to work tomorrow?

Carol: Yep.

Jen: Me, too. *[Her eyes are far away as she leans back into the couch and exhales.]* I hate that place—I take orders all day from people who think that just because they're the ones ordering the soup and salad, they're better. I can think circles around those assholes. Like this one lady the other day—she was talking about the train that goes by everyday and she said to her husband, "I wonder if anything's on it?" And he says back to her, "No, it's probably empty." I was reaching for her water glass to refill it, and I said, "That's a great idea for a story—people running trains filled with nothing." You know she just looked at me and said, "Oh, I suppose it could be." It was like she couldn't believe I had spoken to her. I just smiled and poured her water.

Carol: Ah, the almighty tip!

Jen: It could be worse. I could still be slinging pizzas over at Ronny's. Now that's a crappy job. *[She shakes another cigarette loose from the open pack on the table.]*

[Paul enters the room. He is in his early twenties and very handsome. He is dressed in faded jeans and a white t-shirt. He is smoking a cigarette]

Paul: Hello, girls. Who wants one? *[He holds up a bag of little white pills.]*

Carol: Put that shit away, Paul!

Jen: Calm down, Mom, you sound like an after school special. *[She is laughing]*

Paul: Want one?

Jen: What are they?

Paul: It's a surprise

[Paul sits down next to Jen]

Paul: It will make you feel good. *[Paul leans in suggestively]*

Jen: Will it? *[She kisses him then takes the pill].*

[Jen leads Paul off-stage.]

[Megan enters with Bill. Bill is in blue work pants and a Speedway shirt and Megan is wearing jeans and a pink, knit top]

Megan: Hello Carol. You look lovely tonight.

Carol: As do you. Your eyes are the most exquisite shade of pink. How come you're so late?

Megan: Bill had to work.

Bill: But we bring offerings to appease the gods of lateness.
[He takes a pack of cigarettes out of his pocket and pulls a six-pack out of a plastic bag.]

Megan: And my mother said a gas station job was a dead end.

Bill: and my mother said never to date a whore. *[He smiles at her and puckers his lips.]*

Megan: Where's Jen?

Carol: Upstairs.

Megan: With who?

Bill: It's with *whom*?

Carol: It's *with* Paul *[Playfully.]*

Bill: Paul! Where's Gina.

Carol: Who knows?

Megan: It's whom.

Carol: Gina cheats all the time.

Bill: This is true.

[Jen comes back onto the stage. She is crying. Paul is following close behind her.]

Paul: What the fuck? Are you crazy or somethin'? You're a fucking tease!

Jen: *[Turning on him]* Leave me alone!

Carol: *[To Paul]* I got this; leave her alone.

Paul: Gladly!

[The spotlight is on Carol and Jen. They are sitting on the edge of the stage.]

Carol: What happened?

Jen: I don't know. I thought . . . and he said . . . and it was awful and I'm just a—

[Carol puts her arm around her.]

Carol: You're just drunk.

Jen: It doesn't matter. *[She has her head on Carol's knees.]*

Carol: Come on, let's get you home.

[Jen hugs Carol around the neck.]

Jen: I love you.

Carol: I know.

Scene VII

[Later that week. The morning sun is streaming in through the windows; bits of dust hang suspended in beams of light. Jen is just waking and finds that she is in a strange room with a strange man. He awakens and begins to kiss her. She pushes him away.]

Jen: What time is it?

Mark: *[Grabs his cell phone next to the bed]* It's one-thirty.

Jen: I've gotta go.

Mark: Where?

Jen: I have a job interview.

Mark: I could take you.

Jen: That's okay. I've got my car.

Mark: I'm still drunk.

Jen: Me, too, *[She sighs and begins dressing.]*

Mark: *[Lighting a cigarette and leaning back in the bed.]* I told you you wouldn't want me in the morning.

Jen: I want you. I'm just late.

[Jen hurries from the room with her shoes in her hand. She turns around to say good-bye but his back is to her. She exits silently.]

Scene VIII

[Later that same day. Jen enters the apartment looking disheveled. She is wearing yesterday's clothes. Carol is lying on the couch with a book. The shades are drawn. A lit cigarette burns down in the ashtray. It's two in the afternoon. The apartment is hot. Carol is fanning herself on the couch and trying to read. Jen takes a beer from the table and sits down on the floor in front of the stereo. Jazz is playing softly. The carpet is badly stained. The room is live with flies. The tables are covered with empty bottles and cigarette ashes. The couches are dingy and the cushions are marked with visible burn holes.]

Carol: You live!

Jen: Of course I *live*. Did you think I was dead?

Carol: No one knew. Bill thought you left with Mark but he wasn't sure—he was a little drunk and I was in the bathroom with that girl Paul brought. She threw up everywhere. I thought we were gonna have to take her somewhere. I've never seen *anyone* convulse before like that.

Jen: She okay?

Carol: Yeah. She finally passed out around 3 am. Paul put her to bed on her side so she wouldn't choke to death.

Jen: The consummate gentleman. I bet that's the last time Paul goes trolling for Buffies.

Carol: I don't know. I think he's smitten. He carried her to his bed and she was covered in vomit and that's not to mention what she did to the bathroom. I think he must have it bad for her.

Jen: Everyone's a sell-out.

Carol: Not you though, right?

Jen: Shut up.

Carol: Did you leave with Mark.

Jen: Works with Ray?

Carol: That's the one.

Jen: Then, yes, I left with Mark.

Carol: Marks a nice guy, Jen.

Jen: So nice, he'll sleep with someone who doesn't even know his name.

Carol: That place where you had the interview this morning called.

Jen: What'd you tell 'em?

Carol: I told them that you're sick.

Jen: Thanks.

Carol: No sweat.

Carol: [*Pulling her book to her chest*] You know, this is my third time through *Das Kapital* and every time I read it, I see something I never saw before. Are you done with *On the Road*, yet?

Jen: Nope. Haven't started it really. You know what my favorite is? [*She lies back on the carpet. Her knees in the air*]

Carol: Listening to Nina Simone and drinking beer in the middle of the afternoon? I swear you really know how to bring down the mood.

Jen: Thanks. I mean my favorite part of a book?

Carol: What?

Jen: It's that part at the beginning of *Gatsby* when Nick first comes to one of those great parties, and he says he was entirely within and without. You know I can remember where I was when I read that line?

Carol: Sure, but can you put your legs behind your head? [*She is attempting to do so*]

Jen: Probably. Can you light my cigarette?

[Bill enters the apartment. He is high and you can tell he has been crying.]

Bill: Megan's in the hospital.

Carol: Again?

Jen: Shut up, Bill. You're stoned.

Bill: Whatever. I'm serious.

Carol: *[Putting her hand up to Jen]* What happened?

Bill: She took a bunch of pills. I couldn't wake her up. She was just lying there. *[He is crying again.]*

Carol: What did she take this time?

Bill: Vikes. I think.

Carol: When?

Bill: I don't know.

Carol: What hospital is she at?

Bill: The Valley.

Carol: We should go.

Bill: You can try but I don't think anyone can get in right now.

Carol: *[To Jen]* You coming with?

Jen: Yeah. I'm comin'.

Scene IX

[Later that night. A hospital room. Megan is seated on the side of her bed. She is in a hospital gown working a puzzle. Carol and Jen enter the room.]

Carol: Are you okay? *[She hugs Megan.]*

Megan: I'm fine. *[Despondently.]*

Jen: *[Taking her hand.]* You know if you wanted attention, all you had to do was ask.

Megan: That's funny. Where's Bill?

Carol: He couldn't come. He's too emotional right now.

Megan: He's emotional? I'm the one who almost died.

Jen: What the hell were you thinking? *[Stridently.]*

Megan: What the hell was *I* thinking? I guess I was thinking that I'm a little sick of sitting around on dirty couches, wishing for a better life. I guess I was thinking that I never wanted to live like my parents but I sure as hell don't want to live like this! I was thinking that I want out, that I don't want to do this anymore. We haven't done any of the things we said we would. We never went to college or got married or had kids or even took fucking pictures! Our rites of passage were EPT, HIV and Anti-depressants! All I ever wanted was to have a family but how am I supposed to bring a child into *this* world?

Megan: I want to be alone. *[She puts her hand over her eyes.]*

Carol: We'll see ya tomorrow, okay?

[Carol hugs Megan but Megan doesn't respond. The girls exit the room.]

Scene X

[Back at the apartment a few hours later. Tori Amos is playing. The room is candlelit Carol and Jen are smoking a joint and drinking wine.]

Jen: It was pretty fucked up to see Megan like that.

Carol: Last time was worse. When they got her to the hospital to pump her stomach, she kept pulling out her IV's. They had to tether her to the bed and she just kept screaming. We could hear her from the waiting room. Her mom was yelling at me. I just stood there. All I could think about was how she knew about her dad, and she never did anything to stop it. *[She takes a hit off the joint and passes it.]*

Jen: Where was I?

Carol: I think you were at camp.

Jen: I hated camp. They made us shower together; I was the only one with the good sense to insist on wearing a bathing suit.

Carol: Prude. *[Playfully]*

Jen: You are. *[They both laugh.]*

Jen: You know she's right. We never did anything we said we would. I mean did you think that we would end up like this?—

Carol: Like what?

Jen: I thought we were gonna do things. I thought we'd get good jobs that paid big bucks and we'd travel the world, but here we sit in the same town where we grew up. I can barely keep the job I have, and I fetch water for a living.

Carol: At least we're not assholes.

Jen: Like our parents.

Carol: For example.

Jen: Don't you want more than that? I mean, I do. I want to do something I'm proud of, you know, something that matters, and I want to have a family. Don't you want to have a family?

Carol: I have a family. You and Adam are my family. Look, Maybe we didn't climb every mountain [*Singing*] and I'm no CEO and I don't have designer clothes and the last award I won was in the third grade and it was for attendance, but I'm a good person, and I love my friends, and that counts for something. [*Pauses. Exhales.*] I don't want to talk about this shit anymore. I'm starving. Are you hungry?

Jen: Fudge cake?

Carol: You read my mind.

Scene XI

[The next morning. Jen is sprawled on the loveseat. Carol is asleep on the couch. Cartoons are on playing on the TV. Bill enters the room. He is drunk and staggering]

Jen: *[Groggy]* Wow, Bill, starting early?

Bill: You think everything is a joke. It's not. It's not funny. I loved her. *[He is slurring.]*

Jen: What are you talking about?

Bill: I fucking loved her and she's gone and it's your fault! It's your fault! *[He falls to his knees. He is crying and pointing at Jen.]*

Jen: Where's Megan? *[Alarmed.]*

Bill: She's gone. She's fucking gone. I tried. I really fucking tried and I loved her! It's over. It's all over, now. I can't...*[He takes a gun from his coat pocket]* I can't.

Carol: *[Rushing at Bill]* No! *[Vicky is standing in front of him when the gun goes off. She grabs it away from him and pulls him close to her. Vicky and Bill are crying. Jen is paralyzed. She is silent.]*

Scene XII

[Several days later. Jen and Carol are back at the apartment. Carol is in a black pants suit and Jen is wearing a black skirt and a gray blouse. They are sitting on the couch smoking]

Carol: It was a nice funeral. Don't you think? I mean they made her look almost pretty.

Jen: Her family didn't even know her—the way her mom kept going on about the weather. And if one more person said that they were sorry for our loss, I didn't know what I would do. All those people were just gawking at the poor little depressive who couldn't make it in the world. They just kept saying that they didn't know and that they wished they'd known and that they might have done something, but they wouldn't have done anything. They would have let her die just like we did.

Carol: You're not making sense.

Jen: I'm not? You know who gave her her first cigarette? Me. Do you know who introduced her to Bill? I did. She was gentle and weak and I didn't protect her. I didn't shield her. I just left her out there to drown.

Carol: It wasn't your fault. It wasn't anybody's fault.

Jen: That's bullshit and you know it! That's just something people say when they don't know what the hell else to do. It means—shit! I don't know how we got here. I hope to hell it wasn't my fault.

Carol: Listen, you sitting there waxing dark isn't doing anybody any good.

Jen: I'm sorry. I didn't mean to be dark. My friend just died. What do you suggest I do?

Carol: We just have to move on.

Jen: I don't want to move on. My whole life all I've ever done is move on. My dad beat the shit out of me. My mom hated me! She fucking *hated* me! And I moved on. We sit around and drink and smoke and screw—we never let

ourselves feel *anything*. My friend is dead and I'm going to feel it. I'm going to sit here and feel sad and dark and all fucked up.

Carol: Well, you'll pardon me if I don't join you, but I have things to do.

[Jen gets up from the couch and heads for the stairs]

Carol: Where are you going?

Jen: I'm leaving.

Carol: Where are you going?

Jen: I'm checking myself in! I'm fucking checking myself in!

Carol: What are you talking about? You shouldn't do anything right now. You're head's not clear.

Jen: I've never been clearer in my life! I'm not going to sit around here and kill myself. We're all of us killing ourselves! I'm not going to just wait for my turn to OD!

Carol: Where are you gonna go? Home?

Jen: I'm going to the hospital. I'm checking myself in! I'm going to get better. I'm going to fucking live!

Carol: You don't have to go to live!

Jen: I do. I do have to go. I have no other choice. If I stay here, I'll die here.

Carol: Now you're just being dramatic.

Jen: Am I? What about last Saturday when I woke up covered with scratches and bruises and didn't know how I'd gotten them. Or when that guy was all over me and I was too drunk to stop him?

Carol: You just push it too far sometimes, that's all

Jen: I can't do this anymore. I can't sit around here and drink myself well, and I can't go to bed with another stranger hoping to wake up in love. And I can't pretend that clever banter is a vocation because it isn't doing it for me. My best friend is dead and it's my fault and all I want to do is

go upstairs and wash down a whole bunch of pills with a bottle of Jack so that I don't have to feel this way anymore.

Carol: Get your things. I'll drive you.

Scene XIII

[Hospital room. Detox. Jen is shaking. She is sick. We hear mobile music playing softly as the light slowly comes up on the scene. Jen is crying.]

Jen: Daddy! Daddy! I'm scared. I see the skeleton man from the movie. He's in my room.

Jen: I will be quiet Daddy! I will. Please come get the skeleton man.

Jen: But Daddy, I'm scared. Just come back here for a minute.

Jen: Daddy, please! The skeleton man is scary!

Jen: Daddy, I'm sorry. I'll be good. I'll be quiet. Don't spank me!

Jen: Daddy, please, no! *[Jen is thrashing violently. She is trying to protect herself from her father.]*

[Jen's grandmother enters and Jen isn't sure she's real. There's a glow around her. She's carrying flowers.]

Jen: Grandma?

Grandmother: *[She sits on the side of Jen's bed and holds Jen. Jen clings to her desperately.] [Singing]*
By-yo, baby, by-yo, by-yo baby, by-yo. "Here comes the sun . . . little darling, here comes the sun, It's all right." *[singing.]*

Jen: Grandma, I'm sick. I feel so awful. *[Whispering. Pleading.]*

Grandma: You're going to be all right, baby. *[She is patting Jen's back]* You're coming to live with me. I've come for you. The sun's come up, and God's come for you. It's all going to be all right. You just trust the Lord, baby.

Scene XIV

[Two weeks later. Thursday night, Easter weekend. The low moon is full and foggy. Grandma's house. Grandma and Jen are on the front porch swinging. Only half the stage is illuminated. Stage right.]

Grandma: It sure is a nice night. Your Uncle Pete will be by later.

Jen: Why? *[She is staring straight ahead.]*

Grandma: It's the foot washing service at church tonight. He's gonna go with us. You should come. It would do you good to get out of the house—you know, see some people.

Jen: I guess *[Her voice is flat and without emotion.]*

Grandma: What's the matter?

Jen: I can't get that place out of my head. It's like I can still hear the girl in the next bed; I can still hear her crying out for someone to help her. I couldn't help her. I couldn't do anything. I just laid there. *[She puts her hands over her ears]* And tried to sleep.

[Stage right goes dark.]

Scene XIV

[Stage left is illuminated. There are four chairs facing the audience and four people are kneeling in front of them. There are water basins and towels set out between the people and the chairs. A line has formed down the stairs coming from the audience onto the stage. An acoustic guitar is playing and the people are singing: "We are climbing Jacob's ladder, higher and higher." Jen and her grandmother come down the stairs on the right of the stage and get in line. There are old and young, even a toddler. One woman needs help sitting and standing. After their feet are washed they gather behind the chairs and continue to sing like a choir. People are hugging the foot washers after their feet have been washed. Some people are crying; others are smiling. Jen is last in line. She takes the middle seat in front of a young man with brown hair. He is turned slightly to the left, revealing part of his profile. Jen sits hesitantly in the chair. She is awkward and unsure. We see him smile at her and gently wash her feet. The choir is still singing as they slowly file off stage left and back into the audience. They get quieter and quieter as they leave the auditorium. He has her foot in his toweled hand when the lights go down.]

Scene XV

[The next evening. The light comes back up on stage right. The front porch of grandma's house. This time it is Carol and Jen on the porch swing. Carol is smoking.]

Carol: You really look good.

Jen: Thanks. So do you.

Carol: You're just being polite. I've known you too long to let you get away with being polite? I know I've gained weight. Of course, my driver's license still says, "130."

Jen: Mine, too.

Carol: It looks better on you.

Jen: It smells like rain.

Carol: It's supposed to storm.

Jen: I hope it's a big one that bows the trees and makes the house shudder.

Carol: Remember our rain dance?

[The spot light comes up on stage left and two young girls are dancing and playing and kicking at the rain. We hear them laughing. Carol continues to talk]

Your grandma used to let us play in the street when the gutters swelled with water and it was rushing so quick to wherever it goes. The ground would get full and the water would just puddle and threaten drown the grass, but it never did. The grass just came back stronger. *[Stage left goes dark. Pause]* When are you coming home? *[Hesitatingly]*

Jen: Things were better then.

Carol: When are you coming home? *[Bolder but softly.]*

Jen: I don't know. I—

Carol: I miss you.

Jen: I miss you, too. It's just that . . . this morning . . . the sun came up. I mean . . . it's going to sound stupid but

remember that line, "I greeted the dawn" . . . well, today, I did. Today, the sun came up and I haven't seen it in so long. Like when we were girls . . . and the whole world was

[Scene right goes dark. Light comes up stage left. Two girls are trying to catch fireflies in mason jars. They are dressed in knit shorts and t-shirts]

Jen: Fireflies! Carol! Carol! I got one. See it? How many have you got?

Carol: I haven't caught any.

Jen: There! See it? *[She's pointing and jumping]* There's one, get it!

Carol: *[Jumping to catch the firefly]* I got it! I got it!

[The lights go down on stage left, and we see the flicker of a match on stage right and then a cigarette smoldering. That is the only light we see. Jen and Carol are still seated on the porch swing.]

Carol: I get it.

Scene XVI

[Later that night. A candle-light service. The lights are dim. Stage left is full of people facing the audience. When the first person lights her candle she begins to sing. She then lights the candle of the person next to her and that person begins to sing with her. Each person lights the candle of the person next to them. As the light increases so too does the volume of the singing until the entire stage is illuminated and everyone is singing. When everyone's candle is lit, the spotlight follows Jen as she moves to the center of the stage. Another spot light comes up on Jen as a girl on stage right. She is swinging on the porch swing. Jen is singing and moving toward the girl. The girl jumps up and comes over to Jen. Jen kneels down and hands her the candle. Jen is still kneeling when the lights go down.]

Scene XVIII

[After church. Everyone is around the table about to eat Easter dinner.]

Grandpa: I was watching that Sam at church—he didn't take his eyes off you. I think he must be smitten.

Jen: I saw him.

Aunt: Cute. Isn't he?

Jen: He's okay, but I'm not ready for anything like that.

Aunt: Like what?

Jen: You know—a relationship. I don't want to be with anybody. I'm just figuring out who I am.

Grandpa: Well, you better find yourself quick cuz he's coming to dinner.

Jen: What!

Grandpa: You know your Grandma. She invited him.

Jen: Grandma!

Grandma: He looked hungry, that's all.

[There's a knock at the door.]

Grandpa: Well, are you gonna get it or do you want me to?

Jen: *[Standing.]* I'll get it. I'll get it. *[She turns to them and smooths her hair.]* How do I look? *[Walking towards the door.]*

Grandma: You look beautiful, baby.

Jen: Hi

Sam: Hi *[He puts out his hand for her to shake it.]* I'm Sam Murray.

Jen: Jen Mullins.

Grandma: Come on in here, Sam. I hope you're hungry.

Sam: *[Calling to them]* I am.

[Sam follows Jen into the kitchen where everyone is eating and talking and having a good time. He pulls her chair out for her and she smiles at him]

Jen: Thanks.

Sam: No problem. *[Sitting]*

Grandpa: Now, what do you do, Sam? Rosemary was telling me that you work with kids?

Sam: Yeah, I mentor young fathers.

Grandpa: I bet that's tough work.

Sam: Some of those guys can be pretty rough around the edges.

Aunt: How long have you been going to our church?

Sam: About a month. I just moved here from Detroit.

Grandma: Detroit? What did you do there?

Sam: Well, I sold insurance, believe it or not.

Grandpa: You went from selling insurance to being a social worker?

Sam: I hated my job and I always did volunteer work and really loved it so I thought I'd just try to make a living at it.

Grandpa: That's nice. That's real nice. What do you think of our Jenny, here?

Sam: Well, I um . . . I like her *[Embarrassed]* And I hope to see more of her, or, I mean see her more *[He clears his throat. Jen blushes]*

Grandpa: I think that would be just fine. Don't you, Jenny?

Jen: *[Smiling. To Sam]* I think I'd like that.

Scene XIX

[6 months later. A coffee shop Jen and Carol are seated across from one another in a booth.]

Jen: *[Her eyes are down. She stirs her coffee.]* He's different. You know? He's not like anyone I've ever met.

Carol: But he's still a man, right?

Jen: Yeah. He's still a man, but he's gentle. He doesn't shout at me or try to put me under his thumb.

Carol: As long as he's getting what he wants. *[She pretends to grab her chest.]*

Jen: We haven't done it.

Carol: *What?*

Jen: We're waiting.

Carol: *For?*

Jen: *For marriage*

Carol: Don't tell me you've gotten religious and gone virginal on me.

Jen: I think it's a little late to go virginal on you.

Carol: You know what I mean. You're not going to turn into one of those Bible thumpers who goes around telling everyone they're going to burn are you?

Jen: No. I'm still me, just different.

Carol: Way different. How long do you really think he's gonna wait 'til he tries to get in your pants? I bet he's just telling you what you want to hear until he's got you. That's what they all do. "Yes dear, I love your mother. Yes dear, I would love to shop with you. Yes dear, I hate sex; let's wait for the Lord."

Jen: It's not like that.

Carol: How do you know? You haven't known him that long.

Jen: I've got my eyes open, and so far, he's, he's *really* good.

Carol: Well, just be careful or I'll have to kill him, and I don't want to spend the best years of my life in the clink. Hey, did you hear Joe's having a party this weekend? It's really just an excuse to show off his new boyfriend. Notice, for six years he has money and space and never threw a party, but as soon as he got Meal Ticket, he throws a real shindig.

Jen: Meal Ticket?

Carol: That's what I call *Randy*, the amazing, careless down-on-his-luck, performance artist slash out-of work waiter who is only too happy he's latched onto the best looking gynecologist in the city.

Jen: Oh. How is Joe? I haven't talked to him in months.

Carol: He's all right. You know Joe. If everything isn't perfect, everything is wrong. He was telling me that *Randy* is moody and *Randy's* truck broke down and Joe had to go pick him up and the whole thing was very disappointing because then *Randy* wanted to borrow twenty bucks.

Jen: It must be love.

Carol: You know Joe: he only falls in love with straight guys.

Jen: He loves a challenge.

Carol: And the security of certain failure.

Jen: Ouch. I don't know if I'll go to his party. That's not really my thing anymore.

Carol: You haven't been out with us in forever. You have to come.

Jen: I don't think so, Ceece. I just don't—

Carol: What? Love us anymore? Think we're not worthy of your company?

Jen: Of course not! I'm sitting here aren't I?

Carol: This is the second time I've seen you in six months. You used to be my best friend.

Jen: I can't do this now.

Carol: Well, when can you do it because I'm sick of wondering when you're gonna come around again. *[She stands up and puts her purse on her shoulder. She is getting ready to leave.]* It's not my fault that you couldn't hold your alcohol, and it's not my fault that Megan killed herself. I lost her, too! You ran home to your family and left me! I don't have anyone!

Jen: I'm sorry. I didn't mean to hurt you. I had to leave. You know I had to go.

Carol: Yeah, well, I'll see ya around. I'll tell Joe you said, "Hello." If you even care. . . *[She exits the stage. Jen remains seated. She watches her go. The spot light dims to dark]*

Scene XX

[3 months have passed. Coffee Shop. The spotlight comes back up and Sam is on one knee in front of Jen's side of the booth]

Sam: So will you? Will you make me the happiest man in the world and say you'll be my wife?

Jen: I...I can't.

Sam: What?

Jen: I can't. I'm not ready.

Sam: Don't you love me?

Jen: Yes, of course, I love you, but I this is too much. We barely know each other and I never thought that I—

Sam: We know each other. I know you. You like to watch TV in the morning and you take your coffee with cream and just a pinch of sugar.

Jen: That's not what I mean.

Sam: Your favorite color is red.

Jen: I mean—

Sam: And your favorite book is The Color Purple, you happen to love an epistolary novel.

Jen: Yes, but—

Sam: And you love San Diego anytime because it's 70 degrees year 'round and if you could you would never wear closed shoes because they don't feel as nice as sandals and your favorite Muppet is . . . is Animal because he makes you laugh. I know that you grew up in St. Louis and that your first dog was named Maggie. She was black with a brown belly, and you used to sneak her fruit roll-ups when nobody was looking. And I know that I love you like I've never loved anyone, and I want to spend the rest of my life getting pizza and hanging out because where you are is home to me . . . Doesn't that mean something?

Jen: Sure it does. It's just that I keep thinking that you're going to change, that you're going to turn on me, and turn into every man I've ever known.

Sam: I'm not them and I never will be. I want you, all of you. Don't you want me? Don't you want to find out if this might be the perfect thing? Don't you believe in your heart that I'm the one?

[The spotlight fades to black. Sam is still holding Jen's hand.]
[Same coffee shop, a few months later. Jen is seated across from Joe. The lights come up.]

Joe: So, he said that he was tired of me telling him where he should work and that all I ever do is yell at him and that I never listen to anything so I told him to leave. And the worst part is that he had already posted his singles page as out of town. He's already moved, and it hasn't even been a week. Can you believe that?

Jen: I'm sorry. Vicky told me that she—

Joe: She did not like him. Meal ticket, that's what she called him. That nickname doesn't even make sense. *I'm* the meal ticket. *Randy* was the freeloader. She should have called him freeloader.

Jen: Doesn't have quite the same ring.

Joe: You know I really thought we had something. I thought we might have been able to make it work but he was so moody and temperamental—always moping about something. I just couldn't take it.

Jen: Didn't his father die?

Joe: Yeah, but they weren't close. When he came out of the closet, his father showed him the door.

Jen: I see.

Joe: It really is good to see you. You know it's been so long. You really look great.

Jen: Thanks. I wish Vicky shared your thought.

Joe: So, you think you're gonna get married?

Jen: I don't know.

Joe: Well, you better figure it out quick. You're wearing the boy's ring.

Jen: I know but I haven't said 'I do' yet.

Joe: What's the ring say, I probably do.

Jen: The ring says, most likely.

Joe: Hilarious. What's happened to our little Jen? Do you even know who you are?

[The lights go down. When they come back up Megan, Carol and Jen as children are on stage left.]

Megan: Let's play "Someday"

Carol: Come on . . .

Jen: Someday, I—

[Jen as an adult joins the circle of girls. She takes Jen the child's hand]

Jen: Someday, the sun's going to come up.

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Scene XXI

[The lights come up on the right side of the stage. Sam and Father Hughes are standing where they were at the beginning. We come back to the scene in the church. Jen walks from the girls over to where Sam is. She takes his hands]

Jen: I do.