

The Wind Phone

By

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## Cast of Characters

ELLEN GRAY (Mid-50s) .... Lives in the suburbs. Married, mother to two.

JENNY MITCHELL (Late 50s) .... Her older sister. Professional humanitarian aid director and professor

PATTY MITCHELL (80s) ...Their mother. Uses a walker.

## The Place

The Mitchell home located in an upscale suburb north of Chicago

## The Time

2015

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

ACT ONE  
SCENE ONE

*Morning. The main floor (living room and dining room) of an early 20<sup>th</sup> century house decorated in an upscale but out of date style. A few pieces of modern art from the 50s and 60s are on the walls. A very large abstract painting dominates one wall (either stage right or stage left, but not directly upstage), full of vibrant color and of chaotic composition.*

*The kitchen is offstage. Packing material (boxes, bubble wrap, etc.) is scattered around. A short flight of stairs leads upstairs. A slimline-style phone with long cord rests on an end table in a dark corner. In the same corner is an organized stack of packed boxes, taped shut, with neatly written typed pages on the exterior.*

*ELLEN comes down the stairs. She's dressed casually, t-shirt, jeans, hair short or tied-up, but with a girlish, flowery flare. She peers out the front window and looks up and down the street outside. She then crosses offstage and returns with a coffee cup in hand. She sits and glares at all the packing material. She takes a sip of coffee, tastes it, and exits back to the kitchen.*

*JENNY enters. She is carrying an battered overnight duffel bag and a relatively pristine large floral suitcase. She is dressed in well-worn clothes designed for practicality, cargo pants, industrial parka, flat walking shoes.*

JENNY

Ellen?

*Ellen comes back, milk container in hand.*

ELLEN

Jenny! Hey. You're here. I've been watching! I was watching. I saw your flight landed and texted you. Did you get my text?

*Ellen puts milk carton on a side table*

JENNY

This was on the porch. I assume it comes in? Or should it stay? -

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

ELLEN

No. Yes. Here, give it to me. It's mine, I just forgot it on...here, let me.

*Ellen grabs the one the suitcases and brings it in. It is clearly empty by the way she handles it. Jenny plops the other on the floor and drops into a chair as Ellen chatters. Jenny takes off her coat, kicks off her shoes, and flops down in a chair.*

I brought it for some of Mom's clothes I found to take to Evergreen. It's been so crazy, deciding what goes where. I keep finding more and more stuff. It's like a fricking archeological excavation! I appreciate you coming to help. Between the two of us, well, anyway, you look good.

JENNY

El, the vision must be really going.

ELLEN

Oh, you've just been traveling. You look great. So! Welcome home.

*Ellen opens her arms for a hug.*

JENNY

Oh. Sorry.

*She rises and they hug.*

ELLEN

How was the flight? I cannot imagine flying so many hours. Once Bob had to take a trip, he flew to Portland, he threw his back out just sitting for four hours straight. I can't imagine flying from Japan!

JENNY

Well, you know. It's...flying from Japan.

ELLEN

No, I don't actually. It's been awhile since I've traveled the world. Like, never. Not like you. Just a suburban mom here. Do you want some coffee? I have coffee.

JENNY

Got tea?

ELLEN

There's already a pot of coffee.

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

JENNY

Well, then, sure. I'll have coffee. I have to pee first.

*Jenny exits.*

ELLEN

If you want tea, I can make it but I made a pot of-

JENNY

*(From bathroom)*

-Fine. Fine. Coffee's fine.

*Ellen rises and crosses offstage to the kitchen, taking milk with her.*

How's Mom? How're you? How are the kids?

ELLEN

*(Also offstage)*

Good. You know. Milk? Sugar? Black?

JENNY

Sugar. Just a little.

*They return simultaneously. Ellen hands a cup of coffee to Jenny. They sit.*

ELLEN

What time is it for you?

JENNY

Oh, Japan is fourteen hours ahead so it's actually about ten at night for me.

ELLEN

Is this going to screw you up?

JENNY

Oh, I'm already screwed up, El.

ELLEN

Well, that's true! *(They both smile)* When I drink coffee late in the day, I mix it. Half regular, half decaf. If I drink regular in the afternoon, I'm up all night but if I need a boost of energy so I mix

ELLEN (CONT'D)

the regular and decaf and it's perfect. Well, I have to drink it before 4. I can't drink it after 4 because even with it being half decaf, I'll still be up all night.

JENNY

But before 4, you're safe?

ELLEN

Yeah. So what you're doing, right now, it's crazy! But your internal clock is probably all out of whack anyway. Or maybe you're just really used to it. I remember when the boys were young and it was Daylight Savings Time and we had to go ahead or behind an hour, it messed us all up for weeks. Then I decided to just behave like the change was normal and just followed the clock and ignored the reality and it all worked out fine. So. How was Japan?

JENNY

It was very...Japanese.

ELLEN

That's helpful. What does that mean? It was "Japanese"?

*Jenny rises and begins wandering around.*

JENNY

I just got in. I need to....process a little.

ELLEN

Sorry! Okay. I've just never been to Japan. I don't know.

JENNY

Sorry. Japan is a complex place that...well...um-

ELLEN

-Never mind.

*A moment*

JENNY

God, it smells like...Mom. And high school. Am I up or down?

ELLEN

Up. The basement is insane. You have so much stuff down there.

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

JENNY

Oh please. So do you. *(She takes a sip of her coffee and makes a face)* Is that Splenda?

ELLEN

Sweet & Low.

JENNY

Oh, god.

ELLEN

You know Mom.

*Ellen crosses to the corner where the boxes are neatly stacked and labeled.*

So. Okay. All of this I've already sorted, researched, labeled with estimated value, and who gets what. It's taken forever. Mom keeps changing her mind on who she wants to have what. And she keeps forgetting some stuff we got rid of ages ago. So, all of this has been dealt with.

JENNY

Wow. Look at all this.

*Peering at one of the lists on a box.*

I'm surprised you don't have Polaroids and hand-drawn renderings. You should be a reality show. "Ellen, The Professional Past-Packer-Upper"

ELLEN

Well, someone has to do it and since I've been the only one here for the last few decades, I got elected.

JENNY

-Sorry. Sorry! I was trying to be funny. I'm sorry. I'm just gross. And jet-lagged.

ELLEN

You should be used to it.

*Another moment.*

JENNY

Mostly, I guess. It looks good. It all looks great. Very organized.

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

ELLEN

Thank you. So, the trip, I mean, your work. It was good? How is everything? Was there a disaster in Japan?

JENNY

Oh no.

ELLEN

So why-

JENNY

I must not have...I thought I told you.

ELLEN

Told me what?

JENNY

I'm not doing the front-line stuff anymore. Now I'm, my work, is focusing on more the long-term effects of disasters and trauma. So, the Japan trip is in the context of the years' post-tsunami. So, it's the usual traumatized people, the bread and butter of humanitarian work. But this is post-tsunami, years-later trauma.

ELLEN

No. I didn't know. It sounds safer. Better.

JENNY

Yeah. But the work is harder in a strange way.

ELLEN

Why? It's not during the crisis.

JENNY

The Japanese try to hide it the effects. Which makes it harder, research-wise. Quantifying the impact, scientifically.

ELLEN

Oh. Well, I wouldn't know about that.

JENNY

Is the shower fixed upstairs?

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

ELLEN

Yup. We had to. Even "as-is" requires basic plumbing. And just so you know, Mom is coming to help.

JENNY

Really? Oh god.

ELLEN

I know. I know.

JENNY

Couldn't you talk her-

ELLEN

-out of it? No. It's her stuff. It's her house. You try talking her out of it.

JENNY

She'll break a hip again.

ELLEN

She's got a walker so we'll just park her in a corner and-

JENNY

She has a walker?

ELLEN

Yes, she uses a walker. She's eight-five, she's had a broken hip so, yes, she uses a walker. They all do there.

JENNY

Wow.

*A moment.*

ELLEN

I know. You get used to it.

JENNY

What?

ELLEN

Mom, old.

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

JENNY

I know. I talk to her. So, how are the boys? And Bob?

ELLEN

Good. Good. Hank's a junior at-

JENNY

-Oh my god! Little Henry's a junior?! He's at...where's he at?

ELLEN

U of I. Business.

JENNY

Wow.

ELLEN

I know. He has a girlfriend, Shannon. Who I don't really like too much. She just talks and talks and I don't think she's good for Hank. I mean, she's not a serious person and Hank is and I think he should be with someone who is a serious about succeeding as he is. But his grades are good and he had an excellent internship and he made some wonderful connections which I think will really help him. And you heard about Kyle?

JENNY

That I remember. MIT. Dad's snob-o-meter would have been making a joyous noise.

ELLEN

I know.

JENNY

It's great. Isn't it super expensive-

ELLEN

-Yeah. Very. But, believe it or not, U of I is more for us. If you manage to get into MIT they really, really help you. We went out and it was so amazing. I think Bob was deep down a little intimidated but they were so nice and friendly. So, the boys are good. Bob is Bob.

JENNY

Bob the Builder.

ELLEN

Don't. He hates that.

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

JENNY

Sorry. Reflex. But he's proud, right? Two kids in college, one in MIT.

ELLEN

Yeah. Oh yeah. Very. Really, really proud.

JENNY

Well, aren't you convincing.

ELLEN

Stop it. He's just worried about all of it. And it's different. For him. He's not comfortable with that world.

JENNY

Because he never went to-

ELLEN

-are you hungry? Because I'm picking stuff up while I'm getting Mom. She likes Panera so I'm going to get that. I really want to get going on the list. There is so much to unpack and repack. It's just crazy. Mom has just thrown stuff into boxes over the years and just crammed everything into the basement. It's like an explosion went off down there.

JENNY

Can I shower and change first?

ELLEN

I've to set up a station for Mom over there so she can have a job. There's a ton to do.

JENNY

But I have to shower first.

ELLEN

So shower. I said to shower. I'll get Mom and get food. But we have a lot to sort through. Decisions to make.

JENNY

That's why I came.

ELLEN

There's about sixty years of packing up to be done in this place.

JENNY

Relax!

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

ELLEN

You relax! Sorry. Sorry. It's just been a lot.

JENNY

I know. I'm sorry. Hey. Maybe we'll find hidden treasure? Perhaps long lost family heirlooms discovered? Maybe even a SECRET GARDEN!?!?!

ELLEN

*(Smiling)*

Do not trash talk Secret Garden. Now or ever!

JENNY

I think the saddest thing ever was that you didn't have a girl. So no chance to Secret Garden her room. God, Dad was so pissed when he saw your handiwork.

ELLEN

Well I had glued flowers directly to the wall. And ceiling. And door.

JENNY

The yelling. I thought there was a body in there. Seriously. Of course, he was pissed, literally and figuratively. As was his wont.

ELLEN

It wasn't that bad.

*A moment.*

JENNY

Yes, it was.

ELLEN

It's all covered up now so. Someone must have sanded the glue off sometime, so.

JENNY

All evidence of your floral escape obliterated. That's too bad. It really was amazing. A great survival tactic.

*Ellen starts putting on her coat to leave.*

ELLEN

I'm going to get Mom, so you can.... what do you mean?

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

JENNY  
About what?

ELLEN  
Survival tactic?

JENNY  
Hiding. Survival tactic. Hiding in your secret garden.

ELLEN  
Hiding. Running away. All the same thing, don't you think? *(Taking her purse)* I'll be back in an hour.

*Ellen exits.*

JENNY  
*(To herself and the room)*  
Wow. Well, welcome home, Jenny!

*Jenny grabs her suitcase and exits upstairs.*

END SCENE ONE

SCENE TWO

*Ellen opens the front door and she and Patty enter. Patty uses a walker. Various colorful bags are hanging on the walker, as well as a cup holder and a small blanket. Patty is wearing a bright, stylish coat, bold scarf, hat and bracelets. Ellen is carrying a few Panera bags and an overnight case. The windows are open in the living room.*

ELLEN

Here, Mom. Watch the door jamb. Just lift up a little. Good. Okay. Give me your hat and coat.

*Ellen pulls the hat off Patty's head.*

PATTY

Is my hair okay?

ELLEN

It's fine, Mom. Give me your arm so we can-

*Ellen helps Patty get her coat off.*

PATTY

-Wait. My bracelet is caught...okay. Where's Jenny?

*They have gotten the coat off and Ellen hangs it up.*

ELLEN

I don't know. *(Calling)* Jen? *(To Patty)* I don't know. Sit down. I've set you up there. I'm going to bring things to you to decide about. I've taken care of most of the items of objective value, you know. Stuff you can research the value of-

PATTY

The art. I don't want to sell any of the art.

ELLEN

*(She's heard this before)*

I know. What we need to do is go through the personal items. Baby books and photo albums and old, I don't know, old homework and toys and stuff. You know, sentimental value things. So, sit down.

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

PATTY

No. I want to look in the kitchen for that plate before I forget. (*Spies the large painting on the wall*)  
Oh my. Oh, my but I love this! Can I take that?

ELLEN

You don't have room for it at Evergreen.

PATTY

Oh, but I love it. It was Fredrick's favorite. It was before its time.

ELLEN

I know, Mom.

PATTY

It was considered provocative, even dangerous, because it was different. A seminal work.

ELLEN

I know, Mom.

PATTY

That's why we...I...we never...well, you know. Can I take it?

ELLEN

Okay, but where would you hang it? It's huge. It fills the entire space.

*Ellen exits to kitchen with food.*

PATTY

But what are we going to do with it? Why don't you take it? Please?

ELLEN

*(Calling upstairs from kitchen)*

Jen!

PATTY

Where is she?

*Ellen returns.*

ELLEN

I don't know, Mom. I never know where Jen is.

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

PATTY

Good point.

*Patty sits and Ellen places her walker next to her chair.*

Why are the windows open?

ELLEN

I have no idea. Jen probably.

*She goes to close them.*

PATTY

Oh no. I like it. It's refreshing.

ELLEN

It's cold and windy.

PATTY

But it feels like something. Not the same old Evergreen air.

ELLEN

Okay. Fine. You're still paying the heating bill.

*Jenny enters from the kitchen, coming in from the backyard.*

JENNY

Mom!

PATTY

Oh, honey!

*Patty and Jenny embrace for a long moment.*

JENNY

Hi, Mom.

PATTY

Oh, honey! My big, big girl. My world traveler.

JENNY

Hi, Mom.

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

PATTY

We're together! All together, here. Come here, sweetie.

*She waves Ellen into the group hug. The three hug, rock back and forth, and then all begin to laugh.*

So, my girls are back together. Jenny, I want the news. All your adventures.

*Patty sits, as does Jenny.*

JENNY

Oh boy. So where did I leave you last?

ELLEN

Mom, do you want some water? Something to drink? Or do you want to eat?

PATTY

Oh, it's too early to eat. I had breakfast at Evergreen. Water is fine.

ELLEN

Okay. *(She starts to exit)* Don't say anything good before-

JENNY

*(To Patty)*

-Mom, I made tea. It's strong, Turkish tea. Really, really good.

PATTY

Oh, that sounds exciting! I'll have that. *(To Ellen)* Thank you, sweetie. You have some too!

ELLEN

Okay. Tea.

*Ellen exits.*

PATTY

*(To Jenny)*

Last time we talked it was, New York, I think? You were at the place, your university?

JENNY

Yes, yes. I finished up the semester and then, you remember the grant came through, so it was back to Japan. A field study to complete-

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

PATTY

-About your disasters?

JENNY

Not my disasters. How natural disasters affect people in the long term.

PATTY

Yes. Yes, you told me that. I forget sometimes.

JENNY

I know. It's okay.

PATTY

*(Whispering conspiratorially)*

I am getting old, you know.

JENNY

*(Whispering back)*

I heard.

PATTY

I show everyone at Evergreen your books. Yaya, she's a day nurse, she even borrowed one!

JENNY

Which one?

PATTY

The African one.

JENNY

Sudanese.

PATTY

Yes, the one with the little black boy on the cover. She's a Muslim gal. Her parents are from there, Sudan!

*Ellen returns with tea and teacups and some cookies on a tray.*

PATTY

Oh god, I always hated this tray.

ELLEN

Sorry.

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

PATTY

Oh no, sweetie. I just...oh, I think my filter is just floating away. More and more I just say what I think and damn the torpedoes.

JENNY

And now we know you hate this tray.

PATTY

It's Asian. Your father picked it up years ago in some gallery. But Asian doesn't work with contemporary. It's just not a good fit. Too ornate. Too literal. And honestly, I always found it lacked passion. Emotion. Now, our Rauschenberg. That had emotion! Where is it?

*Patty looks around.*

ELLEN

*(Quietly)*

We sold it, Mom.

*A moment.*

PATTY

*(To Jenny)*

So, how is New York? I loved New York. So did your father. All the buying trips. The galleries. Do you ever get a chance to get to any galleries? Is the Marlborough still there? I think that's where your Dad and I got the Jasper Johns.

JENNY

Don't know, Mom.

PATTY

Of course not. It was so long ago. New York and London. Twice a year. Do you ever get to London?

JENNY

Not many natural disasters in London, Mom.

PATTY

Of course. Of course not. *(To Ellen)* Do we still have the Jasper Johns?

*Ellen shakes her head.*

*(Sudden gasp)* Did you sign me out? Oh, sweetie! Did you? I didn't.

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

ELLEN

Shoot!

*They both jump up, clearly alarmed.*

JENNY

What?

PATTY

Oh no!

ELLEN

It's a thing. At Evergreen. You have to sign out or...well, it's protocol and they get really upset if you don't.

*Ellen pulls out her cell phone and begins dialing. Patty has risen and, not using her walker, crosses to the phone in the corner. She picks it up and prepares to dial.*

PATTY

Ellen, what's the number? They get so upset if... *(she has put her ear to the phone)* ...why is there no dial tone? Sweetie? There's no-

ELLEN

-Oh, Mom, that phone has been disconnected for ages.

PATTY

Really? Why?

ELLEN

The outlet is busted. There's the phone in the kitchen but I'm just calling now... *(Into cell phone)* ...Yes, Andrea, it's Ellen Gray, Patty Mitchell's.... yes, Mom's with me.... yes.... I know.... I'm sorry.... I realize that.... I'm so sorry-

PATTY

*(Loudly)*

-tell them we forgot.

ELLEN

*(Holding up her hand to shush her)*

-Yes, she's with me...you have my cell.... yes, she's going to stay here until Sunday. I told Michelle and.... yes, I'm bringing her back Sunday.... After breakfast so.... yes, sorry again.

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

*She ends call.*

JENNY

What are you, Mom? On parole? Geez!

ELLEN

Don't do that. You don't know. Evergreen is awesome. They just have safety protocols. You can't just leave things wide open or things can happen.

*Ellen crosses and slams the windows shut. Patty and Jenny exchange a look.*

JENNY

Sorry.

PATTY

Thank you, sweetie. It was getting cold in here.

ELLEN

And Mom, you need to use your walker all the time, even if you're just walking across a room.

PATTY

Yes, you're right. I'm sorry.

ELLEN

You could easily fall again.

*Patty takes a long sip of tea and a nibble of a cookie.*

PATTY

*(To Jenny)*

So, Jenny. Tell me about wherever you're coming in from.

ELLEN

I've gotta call Bob.

*She exits into kitchen.*

JENNY

Whoa. What the hell did I say?

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

PATTY

*(Shrugging lightly)*

Oh, you just criticized Evergreen. She feels very guilty and so the place has to be above reproach to make her feel better. It's quite understandable.

JENNY

It's quite annoying.

PATTY

Well, that too but she likes things tidy so let her be. Now, you.

JENNY

I'm coming from Japan.

PATTY

Japan!? How marvelous! How's Japan?

JENNY

Very Japanese.

*Patty burst out laughing.*

PATTY

Of course it is! Just tell me you didn't bring me anything. You just heard my take on all things Asian art.

JENNY

You're just a crazy old gal.

PATTY

I am!

JENNY

So, I was in Otsuchi. They had a tsunami in 2011. Lost about 2,000 people.

PATTY

Oh my goodness. Oh no.

JENNY

It's coastal and mountainous. Gorgeous. But still ravaged.

PATTY

I can't imagine living through a tsunami.

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

JENNY

Sometimes the living after is the harder part. I mean, that's what my research is exploring. The emotional aftermath. How people cope. Unique ways of surviving after great loss and trauma.

PATTY

Survivor's guilt?

JENNY

Some. And Mom, it's okay you don't read the books.

PATTY

I read them!

JENNY

They're very academic. I understand.

PATTY

They're wonderful. Some of the statistical parts I may skip over a tiny bit but they're wonderful. So, tell me about the people.

JENNY

Well, in Japan, death is...the living and the dead still seem to be linked. I'm trying to refine this part of it but it keeps slipping away from me. It goes beyond typical grief. There's this connection I can't quantify. It's like this huge presence in their lives but I can't flesh it out. It's so frustrating! It's like trying to grab air.

PATTY

Dead men tell no tales?

JENNY

I wish they did 'cuz I'm getting only half the story.

PATTY

Too bad you can't just call them up on one of your cell phones!

JENNY

Some people do. No, really! You'll like this. One of the reasons I went to Otsuchi is that there is this thing called the telephone of the wind. This guy has an old type phone booth in the big backyard of his. And people use it to call their dead relatives.

PATTY

And someone answers?!

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

JENNY

Oh, no. The phone is completely dead. No one answers, Mom. But people go there and talk to their dads, their moms, their husbands, whoever died in the tsunami. A lot of people's bodies were never even found. So people heard about this phone and they come from all over to talk to their dead family members.

PATTY

And no one is on the other side?

JENNY

Nope. And thousands of people have come to this place.

PATTY

Just to talk to no one.

JENNY

Just to talk to someone who isn't there anymore.

PATTY

I don't know if I would want to do that. No. Maybe I would. Maybe I would do it.

*Ellen enters.*

ELLEN

Do what?

PATTY

Talk to your father. On the dead telephone.

ELLEN

Ok? I think I missed something.

JENNY

It's this thing in Japan.

ELLEN

Oh. So, you and Mom are talking about your work?

JENNY

Geez, El. We were just catching up. I don't not tell you about my work. It's just not stuff you can sum up easily.

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

ELLEN

Ok! Fine. So what about this phone thing in Japan?

PATTY

It's fascinating.

JENNY

There is an old phone booth in this town and people started using it to call their relatives who died. In the tsunami. The telephone of the wind. Actually, in English, it translates as The Wind Phone.

PATTY

That's so poetic.

ELLEN

It should really be called the Tsunami Phone.

JENNY

I didn't name it. I just learned about it and was telling Mom.

ELLEN

It sounds like it doesn't serve a real purpose.

JENNY

Well, it serves something because hundreds of people have used it.

PATTY

What do they say? Do you know?

JENNY

A documentary crew has recorded some of the-

ELLEN

-I think we need to get started. Because there's a lot to do. And Mom, I can't bring you every weekend.

PATTY

That's right. *(To Jenny)* Ellen's right. We should get started. What do I unpack first? You know, it's rather exciting! I wonder what we'll find! *(To Ellen)* So. What's the plan, captain?

ELLEN

Everything you can see, I've already mostly dealt with.

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

PATTY

You've done so much. I'm so proud of you. Of both of you.

ELLEN

Mom, I love you, but this will go a lot faster if you just listen.

PATTY

Yes. Yes. I'm sorry. You go. Not another word from me.

ELLEN

A lot of this we've decided. For sure. Right, Mom?

*Patty nods her head, clearly NOT speaking. Ellen crosses to the corner and begins methodically pointing to individual boxes.*

The silver, linens, and Limoges china. For me, because I do holidays. The Eskimo carvings and the one small Bosse sculpture for you.

JENNY

*(To Patty)*

Mom! Thank you! I love that-

PATTY

Oh, you always did. I knew that. Even when you were-

ELLEN

-Shut up! The two of you! *(To Jenny)* You get an Ansel Adams and I get one. Bob wanted the old record collection. Mom, you said he could sell whatever on eBay.

PATTY

He was so excited to find that old Deep Purple album. I remember because I thought, what a crazy name for a group. Deep Purple. But then he told me-

ELLEN

Mom!

JENNY

You're messing with the plan, woman!

PATTY

I AM! Sorry. We're shutting up now. Jen, honey, shut up! You keep talking. It's very contrary of you.

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

ELLEN

Thank you. So, all this, all this has been dealt with. What we need to clean out is all the personal stuff in the basement. *(Pointing to Jenny)* All your kid stuff. Stuffed animals, you have like a million Tiger Beat magazines. My stuff. Mom, there are photo albums. Papers.

*As she talks, Ellen exits quickly to the kitchen, still talking.*

*(Off stage)* I don't know what to do with it all. I need help with that. There's stuff from Grandma and Grandpa even.

*She returns, bouncing a large plastic garbage can behind her.*

And Mom, we ARE going to throw some stuff out, okay? We cannot keep every scrap from our entire lives, right?

PATTY

Right.

ELLEN

This place can't be a shrine to the last fifty years.

PATTY

Right. Not a shrine. Check.

ELLEN

*(To Jenny)*

You either.

JENNY

Check. I don't do the whole shrine thing anyway. I'm very not-shrine. I'm more a big ol' shredder and bomb fire girl.

ELLEN

All right, girls. Who's ready to dig in?

*Jenny and Patty raise their hands.*

END SCENE TWO

SCENE THREE

*Much later in the day. The living room is strewn with boxes, stacks of photo albums, papers, toys, and a number of Barbie dolls. Ellen has on a t-shirt from the 70s with a teen idol on the front (Like David Cassidy, Donny Osmond, or Bobby Sherman) and is teetering around in a pair of platform shoes. Jenny is wearing a plaid skirt over her regular pants and she has multiple costume jewelry brooches pinned to her sweatshirt. Patty, in a pair of pajamas, has on a hat clearly from the late 50s-early 60s. There is a large pizza box containing a mostly eaten pizza, a roll of paper towels, soda cans, and a half empty bottle of wine on the coffee table. Patty and Jenny have mismatched glasses with wine, Ellen, a can of diet soda. They are all howling with laughter.*

PATTY

*(pointing to Jenny)*

And then you said...and then you said...

ELLEN AND JENNY

*(In unison)*

"It's just two floors"!

PATTY

And then you let her go!!! You looked at me with those big eyes and let her go!

*More wild laughter.*

ELLEN

Oh my god.

JENNY

I can't believe I did that.

PATTY

Swoosh! Right down the laundry chute.

ELLEN

You were so mean!

JENNY

No, I wasn't! It wasn't mean. The toy room was in the basement! I was doing you a solid! You wanted to get there, I got ya there!

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

PATTY

Oh my god. When you let her go-

JENNY

-For everyone's information, SHE let go.

ELLEN

Did not!

JENNY

Oh! So DID. You were totally on board.

ELLEN

I was four. I didn't know!

PATTY

*(Beginning to calm herself)*

Thank god I hadn't done laundry for a few days. Do you remember it, honey?

ELLEN

I think I do. I think I remember landing.

JENNY

I don't remember us planning it, but I do remember your face, Mom. The second I let go and your expression, I knew in that second, I had done a bad thing. But before-

ELLEN

-You thought it was a great idea!

JENNY

It WAS. You were tiny. You wanted to go downstairs to play. We had the laundry chute. You do the math.

PATTY

It is so good to see you both laugh. Together. All of us, together. It reminds me of us.

JENNY

Yup. We are us, Mom.

*Ellen pulls an old school photo out of a pile.*

ELLEN

Oh my god. Look at this school picture!

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

JENNY

Is it the one where it looks like you have a lazy eye-

ELLEN

-with that barrette at my ear.

*Ellen hands the picture to Jenny.*

JENNY

You look like a 75-year-old drunken Irishman.

PATTY

El, you're always been beautiful but that was not a good day for you. Even a mother can say that.

ELLEN

*(Giggling)*

It's almost enough to make me start drinking again.

PATTY

Oh, don't be silly!

JENNY

*(Handing Ellen her glass of wine)*

Here ya go, El. It'll take the sting out.

ELLEN

I don't drink.

JENNY

It's not bad. It just twelve-dollar Zinfandel.

ELLEN

Jen, I don't drink.

JENNY

What do you mean? You don't drink?

ELLEN

*(Gently)*

Jen, you know I'm an alcoholic.

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

JENNY

No. No. I don't know you're...what?

ELLEN

I don't drink because I'm an alcoholic.

JENNY

Since when?

ELLEN

Well, I stopped drinking a week after my forty second birthday, October 23<sup>rd</sup>. It was a Tuesday.

PATTY

I was so proud of you.

ELLEN

*(Enjoying Jenny's shock)*

More pizza, Jen?

JENNY

That was, like, fifteen years ago. Why don't I know this?

ELLEN

I don't know. Why don't you know this?

PATTY

Time for me to go to bed. So, you sisters can talk. Someone grab me my walker so El doesn't blow a gasket.

ELLEN

I gotcha, Mom.

*Ellen helps Patty up and over to the staircase. During the following, Jenny looks at her wine, looks at Ellen and Patty, and then quickly finishes her glass. She then reaches for a can of soda.*

Okay, that's good. Just hold on to the railing and take them one at a time. The cane is at the top there.

PATTY

I know. Is my shirt hitched up in the back there?

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

ELLEN

No. Oh. Yes. Here, I'll get it. There. Okay.

*Patty careful makes her way up as Ellen "spots" her.*

I love the dinner-in-pajamas thing you have going on, Mom.

PATTY

I know. Isn't it genius? (*Calling downstairs*) 'Night, sweetie!

JENNY

'Night, Mom. I love you!

*Patty exits and Ellen returns.*

ELLEN

Hey.

JENNY

Story, please.

ELLEN

Mommy Happy Hour was taking an ugly turn. The boys were young, I was at home, there was a group of us subdivision moms that would get together. We had a great excuse. Mommy burnout and all. And it was a playdate so they kids were getting socialized. And no one had to drive because, well, we were subdivision moms. First it was only Thursdays. Then Wednesdays. Then, I started having my own Mommy Happy Hour every afternoon at four, then three. Then two. Then I fell down the stairs.

*Ellen and Jenny both look at the staircase.*

JENNY

Like Dad used to.

ELLEN

Only ours was much bigger. And I was holding Kyle. He was okay. Babies bounce. But I knew. The second I hit the floor, I knew was becoming Dad. Well, I was on the road. So. October 23<sup>rd</sup>.

JENNY

I had no idea.

ELLEN

I know.

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

JENNY

I am so proud of you.

ELLEN

Thanks.

JENNY

Why didn't you tell me?

ELLEN

I was going to. But, well, I was embarrassed, I think. It made me feel like I was weak.

JENNY

Oh, El! You aren't-

ELLEN

-I know, I know. Everyone tells me. But the upside of feeling that way was that I got A LOT done. I was super-Mom there for awhile. I went at it; our life was going to be not our (*gesturing between her and Jenny*) life. I was really motivated. I know I scared some other moms. They told me later.

JENNY

But why didn't you ever tell me? I mean, really?

ELLEN

Well, why is it my job to keep you informed about everything? You don't keep me informed about your life.

JENNY

This again?

ELLEN

What again?

JENNY

Jenny doesn't call enough. Jenny doesn't write enough. Jenny is too busy living her fucking life to be a good sister, good daughter, good person to jump through all your imaginary hoops to qualify as a good sister.

ELLEN

But you didn't call. For years.

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

JENNY

I called. And you could have called me.

ELLEN

I bored you.

JENNY

You did not bore me!

ELLEN

Oh please. I so did! You judged me from ten thousand miles away. "Ellen has no life. Ellen doesn't do anything important. Ellen's just a boring suburban housewife."

JENNY

I never said that.

ELLEN

You thought it.

JENNY

How do you know what I thought?

ELLEN

Because I'm your sister! Of course, I knew what you thought.

JENNY

Alright. Yes. You were a little boring.

ELLEN

I was raising kids! I mean, you spend years watching Teletubbies and see how interesting you are. Sorry I forgot to cure cancer during naptime. My bad.

JENNY

It's not that raising the boys wasn't important but for awhile there, we just didn't have much in common. I mean, one time I called you from...god...I don't know, Haiti maybe, and you spent ten minutes talking about how great the book *Twilight* was. The BOOK. Who reads the fucking book?

ELLEN

OH! You are such a SNOB. You're just like Dad. And Mom. You're all snobs. It was an escapist read. Sorry I didn't break out the Kafka analysis for you.

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

JENNY

We were just in different places and...

ELLEN

"And" what?

JENNY

And I thought you were better than that. Than just having kids and doing the PTA.

ELLEN

I'm so sorry to disappoint you. Sorry I didn't become a doctor or...or civil rights lawyer or...Georgia Keefe! And so what? My husband is nice and normal and nice and my kids are normal! Is that so bad? To just be normal? And nice? And happy? HUH?

JENNY

First of all, NO! No one ever said that and second of all, it's Georgia O'Keefe, not Georgia Keefe.

ELLEN

I know it's Georgia fucking O'Keefe! I misspoke! Bite my boring suburban ass which you clearly don't get or respect or understand or want to understand.

JENNY

I respect you.

ELLEN

BUT?

JENNY

Okay! I don't understand!

ELLEN

What don't you understand?

JENNY

Some of your choices.

ELLEN

MY choices? You're kidding me. Like what?

JENNY

Why didn't you leave? You could have left. You should have left! After college. You're SUPPOSED to leave! Why did you come back?

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

ELLEN

Because. Dad died. Mom was alone. I did what a person is supposed to do.

JENNY

So did I. I grew up. I moved on. Like a person is supposed to do. So why am I the bad guy?

ELLEN

I never said you were the bad guy!

JENNY

But you thought it!

ELLEN

Okay. Yes. You left me here. You left me HERE. And you ran. And you didn't come back. You run around saving all these other families but from every disaster and earthquake and plague and goddamn tsunami but oh, no, not us. Not me. I stayed and took care of everything. So maybe I question some of your choices.

*Silence.*

JENNY

El, I had to get out. I had to. It's not like he was sober enough to notice.

ELLEN

I noticed.

JENNY

Did I ever say-

ELLEN

-No! You never apologized!

JENNY

I'm sorry.

*Ellen sits and pulls off her platform shoes.*

ELLEN

I was glad you got out. And I lied. I didn't take care of everything. Mom did. I was at college when...you know. When he finally died.

JENNY

But then you came home. For the funeral and everything.

ELLEN

I got why you didn't.

JENNY

Do ya? 'Cuz I sure as hell don't. I just couldn't get on a plane for the funeral. I was in Turkey. People tell me all the time how brave and tough I am. And whenever they do, I think of that stupid apartment in Turkey. How was it? The funereal. Was it hard?

ELLEN

The hardest part was that it wasn't. I was relieved he was dead. I was so relieved. I was so sick of being confused and embarrassed. I was so sick of hating his weakness. I was just sick of it all. Do you know what it's like to be relieved your dad has died?

JENNY

Yes.

*Ellen pokes at a box with her foot.*

ELLEN

You know, I don't remember squat. About growing up. Junior high. High school. I mean, I remember the buildings and random stuff but...I mean, I have Facebook friends and they remember me and all this stuff about...everything, and I don't. I did so much after school stuff, it was crazy.

JENNY

To stay out of the house.

ELLEN

But I barely remember. I was the president of the Bicentennial Boosters and I have absolutely no recollection of it.

JENNY

Well, maybe forgetting that one's just a gift from God.

ELLEN

*(Smiling)*

Bitch. *(A moment)* The laundry chute? I say I remember. I don't. My mind wants to. I see you both have it. The memory. But I don't. I pretend. But it's a blank.

JENNY

Well, don't feel too bad. I don't remember shit either.

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

ELLEN

Really?

JENNY

Yes, really. Yes. Well, some stuff. But there're some big black holes where joyful childhood memories should be, I think.

ELLEN

That makes me feel so much better. I thought there was something wrong with me. Like I had reverse Alzheimer's.

JENNY

Me too. Well, not the reverse Alzheimer's thing. That's an Ellen original but the not having memories thing. Yes.

ELLEN

It's not natural. Not to remember, is it?

JENNY

El, I think, I dunno. I think a person only has so much bandwidth. *(She spreads her hands to indicate a space)* Anyone fighting for survival has to make choices. A person only has so many energy outlets. I think we both unplugged from the making memory portal to plug into something else. Nature finds a way to endure. You found a way to endure.

ELLEN

So did you.

JENNY

So did Mom.

*She looks at the large painting*

Sometimes I feel like there's this part of me, of us, just floating out there. The Dad side of us. Just beyond reach. Just beyond the horizon. The eternal Dad question through this haze of memories, flashes of moments and tiny kid emotions. I'm almost sixty but when I think of him-

ELLEN

-Yes. Me too! I don't remember him, like, as me now.

JENNY

It's like your head goes back to being in middle school!

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

ELLEN

I hate feeling that way. So awkward and nervous. I try not to think about it.

JENNY

Maybe we should. Have you?

ELLEN

Have I what?

JENNY

Um. Okay, in my work, after an event, we tell people it's really important to talk about it. To process it, the details, each moment.

ELLEN

Oh god. You're talking about therapy.

JENNY

I'm talking about reflecting on-

ELLEN

It's BS.

JENNY

Here we go.

ELLEN

Life is right now. Not yesterday. Wallowing in stuff you can't do anything about is a waste of time. I don't like waste.

*Ellen begins cramming loose papers into the garbage can.*

Look at me. Am I running all over the world, chasing down the worst possible situation to try to correct? Am I unable to create and maintain meaningful, intimate connections, like with my immediate family? Am I calling up my dead relatives on a dead phone instead of calling my living relatives on a real phone? NO!

JENNY

Oh, fuck you.

ELLEN

Fuck you! I don't need therapy. YOU might need therapy. I don't. I have the life people are supposed to have. A happy marriage, kids, I take care of my mother, we have a house, friends

ELLEN (CONT'D)

and neighbors and lots of stuff. And I take care of everything. My life is fine. My life is fucking fabulous.

JENNY

Your life is SMALL. It's full of "supposed to" and...and...and well, I face shit head on. You say I run. That's BS. Yeah, I've TRAVELLED. I've travelled the world. For my work. I've gotten my PhD. I've helped save people's lives. I've written four books, all published, thank you very much. I received a stack of awards, not that you have ever cared, they threaten you so much. I've got interesting friends, I've had interesting lovers, I've got a tenured position, and lots of experiences which would blow your hair back. And, yes, therapy. Because I look things straight in the eye. You just want things to be...straight and narrow. Life doesn't work like that, in case you haven't noticed. You've never liked mess because you've never had the courage to face mess.

ELLEN

Don't you talk to me about courage.

*A long moment.*

JENNY

I'm sorry. I'm exhausted.

ELLEN

Me too.

*Jenny looks at Ellen.*

I'm exhausted and I'm sorry.

JENNY

I'm going to bed.

*She makes her way to the stairs.*

ELLEN

Jen.

*Jenny looks back at Ellen.*

JENNY

Don't worry about it. Me too.

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

*Jenny goes up the stairs. Ellen begins cleaning up the pizza and plates. Dumping the garbage in the can, her eyes fall on the large painting. Then her gaze slowly travels to the phone.*

ELLEN

This is completely ridiculous.

*She keeps cleaning up. She stops. She picks up the phone and places it on her lap.*

I can't believe I'm-oh god.

*Picks up receiver and prepares to dial.*

Dialing. You're gonna dial? Really, Ellen? Really?

*She hangs up. A moment. Then she picks the receiver up again and randomly jams at the key pad (or furiously dials, depending on model of phone). She puts receiver to her ear.*

Dad. This is Ellen. I'm doing this incredibly stupid thing because Jenny said they're doing it in Japan and I'm not as suburban and provincial as Jen thinks I am so here I am, calling you. I'm being actualized.

So.

You've been dead for awhile. Yeah.

I was nineteen. I think I was nineteen. I was a sophomore at college, so I must have been around that. Do you remember? Of course, you don't. You're dead. You're not listening.

I got married. Bob. He has a construction company. He's really relaxed and just kind. He's super calm. Except when the Bears play. I think you'd like him. Maybe. He's good to me so, yeah. But I don't know if you would get each other. I have two boys and they are...

*She stops herself. A long moment.*

Dad, sometimes I wonder, WHEN I think about you, which is not much if I'm going to be really honest, what you would be like if you had stopped drinking. What kind of grandfather you would have been. And you know what? I have no idea. Because by the time I was actually becoming a person, was when you were becoming...not a person. I was trying to find me and you were getting more and more lost. Lost in booze and the mess of your (*gestures to painting*) fucking chaos. So, I have no idea who you would have been. What you would have thought.

ELLEN (CONT'D)

And you took that from me. You took my dad from me. You decided your pain and your pit of whatever that was inside of you was more, was bigger, than my dad.

I have nightmares that you're still alive. Imagine that. Nightmares about your dad that he's still alive. Normal people don't have those dreams. Normal people have dreams that their parents come back and they say, "Oh, I didn't want to wake up! My dear old daddy was alive and I got to be with him" but Bob has to wake me up if I dream about you. Because the dreams are awful.

And that is what you did to me. Your unpredictable, crazy anger at the world will always be in my dreams. And I haven't decided to forgive you.

*She hangs up. She then grabs the plastic garbage can liner which is full of trash and exits to the kitchen.*

END SCENE THREE

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

SCENE FOUR

*Patty is sitting in the living room. It is the middle of the night. She is slowly unwrapping small figurines from a packing box. A cup of tea and tea pot sit next to her. Jenny comes downstairs, clearly headed to the kitchen. She is dressed in sweats. She stops when she sees Patty.*

JENNY

Mom?

PATTY

Oh, hello, sweetie. I couldn't sleep. I made some of your marvelous tea.

JENNY

How did you get down here? Where's the walker? Or that cane that was in your room-

PATTY

-Upstairs.

JENNY

Then how did you get-

PATTY

-don't tell your sister but I slid down on my butt.

JENNY

Mom!

PATTY

I know! I didn't want to get in trouble with Ellen, but I couldn't sleep. I knew if I fell she'd kill me so (*bouncing lightly in her chair*) bump, bump, bump, and here I sit.

JENNY

Mom, you are something else.

*Jenny sits and begins helping Patty unpack and unwrap. Patty pulls a small framed photo out of the box.*

PATTY

I am. Oh, look. Look at this photo of your dad. He must have been just out of high school. (*She hands it to Jenny*)

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

JENNY

God, even then, he was so handsome.

PATTY

Always. Movie star looks. But not today movie stars. He had that more mature flare. Women would flock to him like butterflies. I'd be standing right there and they would flirt with him. He was very attractive. It used to be called dashing. I always loved that expression. Dashing. They don't use it anymore, do they?

JENNY

No. Never. It's "hot" or "sexy."

PATTY

Dashing is better.

JENNY

Agreed.

PATTY

Women would approach him. Men too.

JENNY

Really?! Even back in the day?

PATTY

Oh yes.

JENNY

How did he take that? Men coming on to him! It must have been like something out of *Mad Men*.

PATTY

He'd get the strangest look on his face. I think it would remind him about what happened during the war.

JENNY

What happened during the war?

PATTY

Oh, we never really talked about it. You didn't, in those days.

JENNY

Talk about what? What happened?

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

*Patty arranges the figurines on the table as she speaks.*

PATTY

I think now that's what his breakdown was really about.

JENNY

What breakdown? Mom, can you go back a little? What happened?

PATTY

Oh, well, he had relationships, I guess you would call it.

JENNY

Relationships?

PATTY

He went over very young, you know. It was late in the war. He was young. It had been going on for a few years. The war. World War Two.

JENNY

I know what war he was in. But what happened to him?

PATTY

He never said. But I think there were older soldiers. And they, well...

JENNY

Dad and older soldiers? Other soldiers. Other...men?!

PATTY

Like I said, you didn't talk about that kind of thing.

JENNY

Dad had relationships with...other men? During the war. Is that what you're saying?

PATTY

I suppose. Sometimes I wonder if they were all...voluntary.

JENNY

You mean, he was...Dad was...assaulted?

PATTY

You just didn't talk about things like that.

*She holds a figurine gently.*

PATTY (CONT'D)

We met after the war. The GI Bill. College. Oh, he was so elegant. Mature, to me. I was just a girl from a small town. I didn't know anything. But he just looked at me and we clicked. We had nothing in common, I mean, with our backgrounds. He, well, the Mitchell family, they were society, business. My family was not. At all. Now that I think about it, maybe that was part of it. For him.

JENNY

Part of it?

PATTY

The attraction to me. His, I mean. Because my life, my family, was simple. Kind. Not confusing. A nice small-town girl from a nice small-town family. Anyway, where was I? Oh. Yes, he graduated, I graduated, we got married and then we ended up in Los Angeles. He got that job there just after we were married. No, it was a little after that. You were maybe six months old. Anyway. That's when it all happened.

JENNY

The breakdown.

PATTY

Yes.

JENNY

Okay. What exactly happened, Mom?

PATTY

I remember sitting in a park right across the street from the hospital. It was in San Diego. Or was it Sacramento? I get those two mixed up now. Funny. We lived there not too long so I guess...anyway...there was this pond with birds. Ducks, maybe? We sat there every day and I fed them. And your dad was right across the street. What a strange time. I haven't thought of that for years.

JENNY

Was it a mental hospital?

PATTY

Oh yes.

JENNY

Dad was in.... how long? How long was he in-?

PATTY

-A month. Maybe two. I do remember sitting in the doctor's office. You were on my lap. And the doctor was just staring at me. There was the oddest look on his face. It wasn't pity. More like...fear. It was fear. Fear for what I was going to have to face, I think. I was only twenty, twenty-two. He knew your father was...troubled. From the war and from what happened to him. And because...well.... we just didn't talk about that kind of thing then.

JENNY

And you were all alone, there. With me.

PATTY

After he got out, we came back here. Fredrick went into the family business and well.... oh, my goodness, we knew nothing back then. There were no groups, support groups or awareness like you all have now. I suppose that's why he...well...

JENNY

Drank.

PATTY

The trauma of the war. And the...sexual...aspects. I guess we'll never know. We did love each other.

JENNY

You did.

PATTY

Oh, yes. Very, very much. He was so exciting. So dynamic and smart. Art and theatre and music. It was a glamorous life for a time. Being patrons of the arts. Gallery openings. Going to artist's studios. Museums. Cocktail parties.

JENNY

I remember those. You two were the most glamorous couple. But, Mom, can we go back a little?

PATTY

Alright.

*Patty waits. Jenny searches for her question.*

JENNY

Wow. Well, okay. Was Dad...wait. Um. Okay. First, did Dad ever have another...episode?

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

PATTY  
Breakdown?

JENNY  
Yes.

PATTY  
No. But when he died, he was so sick-

JENNY  
I'm sorry I was so far away.

PATTY  
*(Waving her comment off)*  
-it all came out, I think. To the doctor. The doctor came out and told me that Fredrick had talked to him. It might have been delirium. But the doctor looked at me, another one, decades and decades later, but with that same look. But this was more like, "How did you not know?"

JENNY  
Know what? About the war and-

PATTY  
-About him. And his...tendencies. And the war. What happened to him then. And how he was. It feels good to talk about it. Does this upset you? I don't like upsetting you girls.

JENNY  
Oh no. I'm just...I'm fine. I think. Mom, when you were married, were there ever...other men? Not for you, I mean. Not you but...Dad. Did Dad ever?

PATTY  
Maybe. But it wasn't talked about. Never. It was the time. It was such a different time.

*She rearranges the figurines.*

He loved when I looked stylish. Took so much pride in me. Even with everything, he would look at me across a room and send me his special smile, the one just for me. I was loved. But now I think coming back from Los Angeles was a mistake.

JENNY  
Why?

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

PATTY

I was scared. I had you. I thought they would help if he started struggling again. Family is supposed to help. I thought it was what we should do. But Rachel didn't help.

JENNY

Grandmother.

PATTY

The Mitchell matriarch. Ugh. She ran the company with a vengeance. Ran the family the same way. She yanked those boys around like puppets. Whoever was in her good graces would get the seat to her right at the board meeting. They never knew who would get the wave over. You know what she said to Fredrick once? That she wanted him to be a girl. She said she didn't want another boy and if she had known he wasn't a girl, she would have aborted him.

JENNY

GRANDMOTHER said that to Dad?!

PATTY

Oh, yes.

JENNY

What a...a.... a-

PATTY

-cunt. She was a cunt.

JENNY

Wow. Mom.

PATTY

She was. A big one.

JENNY

So, after his breakdown, you came back here-

PATTY

-and he went to work in the family business.

JENNY

With Grandmother.

PATTY

And the brothers. I think, I think she should never have had children. Rachel. I have come to think that a lot of the horrible stuff that happens to people is when people who should never have kids, do. Because some people just shouldn't. It's not their nature. When you fight nature, that's when trouble happens. There are folks who should just be business, fighter, competitive, whatever people. You know those people. The people who do really hard, aggressive things or just want to do only one thing, all the time. We make everybody feel like they have to have kids. Rachel should NEVER have had kids. Your dad and his brothers, they never really had a chance.

JENNY

Hurricane Rachel.

PATTY

Yes! She was like a force of nature. No one could escape that. It's odd, when you really think about it, how nature creates and breaks and creates again. Back then it was the nature of business to have a man in charge, so Henry was the face of Mitchell and Rachel was the good wife having the babies. But Rachel was the one who really drove it all, business-wise. Obviously. Goodness, when Henry died, the company barely missed a beat. She was a particular force.

But Fredrick...his nature was gentle. Artistic. Perhaps too gentle for the time. I think Rachel saw that, saw he had a different heart, was more Henry than her, and she punished him for it. Or maybe just all three of the boys were just obstacles. Oh, she should never have been a mother. She built that company and broke those boys.

*Patty picks up another figurine.*

But now, thinking from here...maybe she was broken too? Women and business. It was wrong for a woman to be ambitious then. It wasn't considered natural. She couldn't be who she was just like Fredrick couldn't be...well...anyway. And then he went to war. I can't imagine what he went through. Coming from that house, then the war, then his war...um...experiences. He had no safe haven. Until us.

*She takes Jenny's hand.*

He loved me. He loved you girls. Don't doubt that one moment! I don't want to hurt your feelings.

JENNY

Mom, my feelings are doing a lot of things but hurt isn't one of them.

PATTY

Good. I know you are probably angry or troubled by how your dad was. In the end. El did see the toughest stuff I think. You were gone by then.

*Patting Jenny's hand.*

As you should have been, Jen. It was good you weren't here. Don't be hard on yourself. Sometimes I see you being hard on El-

JENNY

-No-

PATTY

-Yes. But it's hard, watching someone you love drink themselves away. She drew the short straw really. And she survived by keeping her head down and seeing the bright side. Choosing to make a happy life by sheer force of will. No shame in that. Your sister is a very strong woman. It's hard for you to see, but she is.

And, even with all his troubles, your father did take care of us. Even after he died, Fredrick kept taking care of us. Oh, I started working-

JENNY

-The doctor's office.

PATTY

And then that bookstore. But it wasn't enough. In those days. Oh, I just didn't have any skills. But we made do. And whenever we got into a real jam, I'd sell... *(Patty begins to tear up)* ...a painting. Every time I had to, I felt such guilt. Because I was really selling a piece of him. The collection was his passion. But I just couldn't do it all alone. I had to pay for Ellen's college somehow. Bills. The house. And when you needed help with your graduate school. I had two girls doing wonderful things and I just-

JENNY

-Mom, you did great.

PATTY

I don't know.

JENNY

I do. Look how well we turned out!

PATTY

Yes. You both did. I am so proud of you.

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

JENNY

Mom, about Dad. Did-

PATTY

-I'm going back to bed. I should be all jazzed up with all that tea in me but now I'm tired. I'm done for now.

*Patty waves for Jenny to help her up.*

JENNY

Okay, but Mom-

*But Patty interrupts her as they cross to stairs.*

PATTY

-Has your sister told you the coffee gyrations she goes through? Decafe sometimes, regular sometimes, then she mixes it up. She's a little obsessed about it, I think.

*They start up the stairs as Patty continues to talk.*

Maybe because these days I can sleep anywhere. Did you know one morning I fell asleep at breakfast at Evergreen? At breakfast! Right at the table! Who does that?

*Jenny returns and slowly sits down on the floor. She picks up the photograph of Fredrick stares at it.*

END SCENE FOUR

END ACT ONE

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

ACT TWO  
SCENE ONE

*Morning. Jenny is sound asleep on the couch, lightly snoring. The curtains have been drawn. Patty's tea cup and teapot remain on the side table, along with the unpacked figurines, packing material and bubble wrap. Ellen comes down, dressed, ready for the day. She stops and takes in the scene, especially the unpacked box. She begins cleaning up, clattering the cup and saucer, teapot, loudly crinkling the paper. She exits to the kitchen with teapot and cup. Returning, she looks at Jenny, still sound asleep. Ellen then takes the bubble wrap and begins popping the bubbles close to Jenny's ear.*

JENNY

What? Whoa.

*Ellen quickly backs away and resumes cleaning up.*

ELLEN

Oh! You're on the couch. I didn't see you there. I was just cleaning up. Did I wake you?

JENNY

Yes.

ELLEN  
*(Brightly)*

Sorry!

*Ellen pops another bubble in Jenny's face.*

Time to get moving.

*She then snaps open the curtains and light streams in the windows.*

JENNY

Augh! E!

ELLEN

Oh stop. And you're the one who decided to sleep on the couch instead of in your room anyway.

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

JENNY

El, give me one sec, okay?!

ELLEN

I thought you didn't get jet lag. *(Grinning)* Or was it the WINE?

JENNY

Bite my middle age ass.

ELLEN

Just remember, your ass will always be older than my ass.

*Jenny gives her the finger.*

ELLEN

*(Shrugging)*

Whatever. It's time to get up. I set up the coffee last night so it's going. Mom needs to have breakfast. She has two scrambled eggs, an English muffin and fruit cup. And orange juice. What do you want? I can just double that or what?

JENNY

Sure. Thanks. But no fruit cup.

*Ellen exits to kitchen*

ELLEN

*(Offstage)*

So why aren't you in your room?

JENNY

I woke up in the middle of the night. I came down and Mom was here. We sat and talked for a while-

*Ellen enters, carton of orange juice in hand.*

-and I guess I just crashed here after she went back up to bed.

ELLEN

Mom was down here? How did she get down? Did you help her?

JENNY

No, I said she was here.

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

ELLEN

But how did she get down here? Did you help her back up?

JENNY

Yes. On her butt.

ELLEN

What?

JENNY

That's how she got down here. She slid down the stairs on her butt.

ELLEN

Oh my god! You're kidding me!

JENNY  
*(Grinning)*

Nope!

ELLEN  
*(Grinning slightly)*

I can't believe her!

JENNY

She did it for you. She knew you would be mad.

ELLEN

Yeah. She's right.

*Ellen returns to kitchen*

*(Offstage)* So. What did you two talk about?

JENNY

Just...the past. Dad. Dad stuff. And Grandmother. Family. It was a little intense. God, I need coffee.

*Ellen returns with a glass of orange juice for Jenny and then sits.*

Has Mom ever talked to you about Dad. And his wartime experiences?

ELLEN

No. I don't know. Why?

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

JENNY

You know, I think I should have some coffee first.

ELLEN

It's still perking. Mom's machine takes forever.

JENNY

It was interesting. She said Dad had some wartime experiences which might explain some stuff about...him. And you know. How he was. When we were growing up. Why he, you know-

*Ellen rises.*

ELLEN

The coffee should be ready soon.

*Exiting.*

There still is only the artificial sweetener. *(Now offstage, from the kitchen)* Do want that or black or should I make some of your tea?

JENNY

Whatever. I need something.

*Ellen reenters and begins wrapping the figurines and picture from last night and putting them away as she speaks.*

ELLEN

You know, I wish you hadn't done this.

JENNY

Done what?

*Ellen holds up the unwrapped items and points to their box.*

ELLEN

I had already researched everything in this box and packed it up. It was marked.

*She points to the corner of boxes.*

This corner was all stuff I dealt with already. If you had listened to what I said, you would know that all the boxes over there *(points to the corner by the broken phone)* had been dealt with. It's everything in the basement I need you for. God, we're never going to get this all dealt with.

JENNY

Mom was the one who pulled it. Why are you being so anal? Are you still mad? Because I said I was-

ELLEN

-This is not about last night, okay? This is about right now. I've had everything organized for a long time and if we start unwrapping stuff I've already wrapped up we're just going backwards. This won't get done and you won't be able to go home. So. Okay?

JENNY

Okay. I know. But for the official family record, Mom opened the fucking box. And, as you said, it's her house.

*Patty appears at the top of the stairs.*

PATTY

El. Jen. Someone. I'm coming down.

*Patty starts down the stairs. Ellen and Jenny cross to her.*

ELLEN

I got it.

JENNY

I got it.

*Patty is carefully making her way down the stairs.*

PATTY

Stop bickering. I'm fine. Jenny, get the walker there.

*Ellen positions the walker at the bottom of the stairs for Patty.  
Jenny flops back on the couch as Patty grabs it and crosses to her chair.*

PATTY

Oh, you two are just a delight this morning, I can see that.

ELLEN

We're fine.

*Jenny lifts an eyebrow and waves her hand back and forth to indicate "so-so." Ellen exits back into the kitchen.*

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

PATTY

El, come back.

ELLEN  
*(Offstage)*

I'm making everyone breakfast.

PATTY

Ellen.

*Ellen returns, hands on hips.*

Oh, you can stop with that attitude right now.

*Ellen drops her hands as Jenny smirks.*

You too, missy.

*Jenny stops smirking.*

I can see the way this morning is going and it's stopping now. We're going out to breakfast.

ELLEN

-But, Mom, I-

*Patty stops her with a look.*

PATTY

We're going out. To Egg Harbor. My treat. We need to get out of this flood of...of...of all this STUFF. From the past. I'm sick of the past. Let's just enjoy each other for five minutes. Right now. Oh! Oh! I know! We're going to have a Bragging Breakfast.

*Ellen and Jenny start to smile.*

JENNY

Mom, we don't need to-

PATTY

Oh yes, we do. So, start your list now. El, get some paper and pencils.

JENNY

We really don't. We're fine.

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

ELLEN

Mom, we haven't in, like, thirty years.

PATTY

Then high time. Remember, twenty things. And they have to be good. Really big brags. You both should have a lot since its been so long anyway.

*Patty has crossed to the coat closet and is getting her coat.*

Come on! Chop, chop! Get a move on! El, you can recite yours to me as you drive.

*Ellen and Jenny are grinning.*

MOVE!

*They jump and begin scrambling for coats, paper, pencils, and purses.*

END SCENE ONE

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

SCENE TWO

*Ellen enters the house, coming in backwards as she guides Patty and Patty's walker through the doorway. She is talking over Patty's head to Jenny.*

ELLEN

Boyfriend! I've never even ever heard you use that word.

JENNY

Oh, stop it.

ELLEN

Oh no. You always went all feminist with "partner" or "this guy" or "someone I'm seeing."

*They are all now in the house, taking off coats. Jenny is also carrying a few shopping bags from places like Macy's and a bag of restaurant leftovers*

PATTY

She's right.

JENNY

I've never used "partner."

*Jenny deposits bags on a table.*

PATTY

The Dutch fellow. You called him your partner. For the longest time, I thought you had started some sort of business with him.

JENNY

Oh god! Peter. Ugh. No.

*Coats are hung up as Patty sits.*

ELLEN

So, this Mathew.

PATTY

Do you have a picture?

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

JENNY  
Yes.

ELLEN  
Let's see.

JENNY  
The thing about Math is, well, everyone calls him Math.

PATTY  
What's his last name?

JENNY  
Math Summers.

ELLEN  
Let's see!

*Jenny is slowly pulling out her phone.*

JENNY  
Well, the thing is, he's....

ELLEN  
...what? He's what?

JENNY  
Fat. He's really fat. He's short, about five and half feet and maybe, two hundred and eighty pounds. And bald.

ELLEN  
Oh!

PATTY  
Well, the package doesn't matter. It's what's inside.

JENNY  
Thanks, Mom. And he's, well, he's black.

PATTY  
Really? A black man.

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

ELLEN

Well, of course he is.

JENNY

What does that mean?

ELLEN

Oh, come on. You've never gone traditional with your guys.

PATTY

El's right. Remember Jimmy? That redhead with the braids?

ELLEN

Dreadlocks. It was Johnny, the Scottish Rastafarian. And there was Jesus.

JENNY

Hey. Jesus was great.

PATTY

He was. Remember, he made baked Alaska. As a junior in high school! Very impressive. Didn't he become a chef?

JENNY

I don't know, Mom.

ELLEN

He did. He works downtown.

PATTY

So, what does Math do? Where did you meet?

JENNY

We met at this conference in New York, he was a featured speaker. He was...he was just...he killed. He owned the room. He was just magnetic. He spoke about how architecture, he's an architect, effects human behavior. It was standing room only. He's very respected and just...well, I went to watch because I was working with a group on creating better emergency housing and so, we met with him afterwards.

*Jenny puts her hand to her heart. Patty and Ellen wait.*

Fourteen hours later, over breakfast, he took my hand and said, "I'll never be thin, I'll never be unfaithful, and I'll never be inattentive unless the Knicks are in the playoffs."

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

PATTY

He sounds wonderful.

JENNY

He is.

*Jenny hands her phone to Patty, who looks at the photo on it and then hands to Ellen.*

PATTY

He's very handsome, sweetie.

JENNY

Thanks, Mom. When I told him about coming to help with all this, he said, "Freckles." I know, I don't have freckles, but he calls me that, it's a long story. Anyway, he said "Freckles, I carry my baggage on the outside, you carry yours on the inside. Go do some unpacking with your sister."

PATTY

He sounds very intuitive as well.

JENNY

He is. And he was right. There's certainly been a lot of unpacking.

ELLEN

*(laughing)*

Too much! We're supposed to be packing!

JENNY

Yeah. Really. But, you know, I've been thinking all day about...well, Mom, I've been thinking about our conversation last night and I-

PATTY

-Oh geez. El! I forgot my afternoon pill.

ELLEN

Oh. I thought you had it.

PATTY

No. I think it's in my room. Bedside table. Could you?

*Ellen rising and crossing to stairs.*

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

ELLEN

Sure. Sure. Don't say anything good while I'm gone.

*Ellen exits into the upstairs bedroom.*

PATTY

*(Calling)*

You might have to look around a little.

*Patty holds her finger up to Jenny.*

*(Gently, quietly)* No.

JENNY

"No" what?

PATTY

About your dad. She's not ready.

JENNY

But Mom-

PATTY

-Nope. She hasn't gotten past the twisty part of grief. You know this. She still has to grieve him before she can grieve for him. I know you want to talk about it but not to her.

JENNY

Mom, I-

PATTY

-Someday. You'll know when. You will. But not yet.

*After a moment, Jenny nods.*

*(Calling upstairs)* El. I found them. They were in my pocket all along.

ELLEN

*(Returning)*

Oh, okay. *(To Jenny)* What about last night?

PATTY

Sorry, sweetie.

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

ELLEN

It's okay. You need water?

PATTY

Oh no. I remember now, I took it at that café in the mall. You know, girls, after all that delicious shopping-

ELLEN

-you're tired.

PATTY

Yes. Very. I think you both should have naps too.

JENNY

That sounds great.

*Ellen just looks at the floor and then begins gathering their purchases.*

What?

ELLEN

When do you go back?

JENNY

Tomorrow. You're right. Mom, you go up. And, El, you too.

PATTY

Oh no! I'll stay and help.

JENNY

No. The both of you go. Crash. The rest of the boxes are mostly my stuff anyway, right, El? Right? GO! Sleep. The two of you.

ELLEN

Is this how you talk to refugees?

JENNY

Yes.

PATTY

It's very impressive. *(Taking Ellen's arm)* Come on, honey. It is her turn.

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

*Ellen and Patty takes Ellen's arm and leads her to the stairs.  
Ellen reluctantly goes with Patty.*

ELLEN

Okay. Don't make a mess.

JENNY

I won't.

*Ellen and Patty start up the stairs.*

ELLEN

I dragged all your stuff into the kitchen

JENNY

I know, I did it with you.

ELLEN

*(Over her shoulder)*

There's more tape in the kitchen. And bubble wrap. And markers.

JENNY

Stop. I'll be fine.

ELLEN

*(Calling down to Jenny)*

Don't make a mess.

PATTY

*(From her bedroom)*

Ellen! Go to sleep.

*Jenny is alone on stage. She exits into the kitchen and returns, dragging two boxes of papers, books, and miscellaneous items. She rummages unenthusiastically through the boxes. She exits to the kitchen and returns, an empty garbage bag in her hand, floating behind her. She sits. She grabs a handful of papers from a box and stuffs them into the bag. She flops back in her chair. She rises and exits back into the kitchen. She returns with the bag of leftovers and opens a container up. She fishes out a plastic fork and mindlessly forks the food into her mouth as she stares at the boxes.*

*She pitches the now-empty container into the garbage bag and flops back. She looks around the room. She looks upstairs. She looks at the painting. She looks at the phone in the corner. She slowly stands up. After a moment, she crosses to the phone, picks it up and brings it back to her chair. She cradles the phone in her lap for a long moment. She then lifts the receiver.*

JENNY

Hey, Dad. It's me. We've sold the house. I'm here, helping pack up and, well, for a visit. It's been awhile. So. Yeah.

Mom told me. About you. So.

And I felt...what did I feel?

Oh god.

I wasn't surprised.

I'm not surprised! That's so strange! Like...like... puzzle pieces which had been crammed and...busted and smooshed into a space, just unsnapped and then popped right into place. You know how something just glides into where it belongs? It was like that. My dad picture of you just blew apart. And it was replaced by you. Fredrick. You as a person. Not the messed up you, but the "you" you.

My god, of course! Of fucking course! Your...your passion for the arts. How things needed to be just so, visually and just in the world. Your style. You were a dandy. I mean, you wore ascots! And pocket squares. God, you always looked so good. You loved art and theatre and food and parties and creativity and us. And yes, I know. You loved us.

*She looks at the painting.*

That's it. That's why. Why you loved modern art. It's the confusion of it! The tradition on its head. The rebellion. Because you couldn't use words to explain you. You couldn't fit into the traditional landscape. You were in a place with no name. And to have it outside of you, on a canvas, for the world to see, meant you existed. You were seen. The whole of Fredrick was somewhere recognized. Out. Loud. Public and proud. Somewhere.

I'm almost sixty years old and I'm just, finally, seeing you. The complete picture of you. Completely different than the one advertised on the box. The one that's been in my head for fifty years.

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

Mom, in five minutes, the...the...the tectonic plates of my personal history and global assumptions about who I am and where I came from broke apart. And came back together. Realigned. Into a new goddamn continent.

I can't even begin to tell you how pissed I am at Grandmother. She never liked me or El anyway.

No.

No.

It wasn't that. It was that she just didn't care either way. She was neutral. Bitch just didn't give a shit. Looking back, we knew. Oh, she pretended but...nah. Thank god for Grandma and Grandpa.

I'm pissed at society. Nothing new there.

I'm with Math now. The sober "you" would love him. Oh boy. He's like you a little bit. He's smart and witty. And gentle.

I know one day I'm going to walk in on him and he's going to be dead. I wasn't there when you died so I'll pay that penance with Math. It's coming. I know it is.

I've spent my life traveling the world, trying to bring order to chaos. Damn, if Mom had spoken up sooner I could have just stayed put.

I'm sorry I didn't see you. I'm sorry I left. I hope you're proud of me.

Thanks for giving me passion. And love of people. And believing in being fair. And not being afraid of boldness and bigness. I'm okay. We're all okay, Dad. You did good.

END SCENE TWO

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

SCENE THREE

*Late evening. Multiple garbage bags are filled and neatly tied. Boxes and debris still litters the room. Opened Chinese takeout containers, paper towel roll, and paper plates are on the coffee table. Jenny and Ellen sit on the floor, facing each other.*

ELLEN

God, it feels so good to get rid of all this stuff. Finally.

JENNY

God yes. There's still a lot to-

ELLEN

-Don't worry. I can finish up. I know what's left to do. At least we got everything pretty much sorted out.

JENNY

It went so much faster after Mom went up.

ELLEN

Really. She was making me nuts.

JENNY

Me too. Think Bob can get any eBay money for my Tiger Beats?

ELLEN

Ha! He might. He's pretty smart. He loves vintage stuff.

JENNY

I hope so. 'Cuz you are certainly getting to be awful "vintage" yourself.

ELLEN

Screw you, old timer.

*Jenny gives her the finger.*

You know you're a bad influence on me?

JENNY

Am not! How?

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

I don't swear. ELLEN

Bullshit. You swear all the time. JENNY

Only with you! Only when you're around. ELLEN

Really? I bring out your bad ass!? That is so sweet. JENNY  
(Pleased)

Oh, oh...go to hell. ELLEN

No. "Fuck you, Jenny." JENNY

No. ELLEN

Say it! "Fuck you, Jenny." JENNY

I'm not saying it! ELLEN

Say it! JENNY

I'm not going to. I'm better than you. ELLEN

Well, that's true. JENNY

No, it's not. ELLEN

Yeah. You are. That's okay. I need something to aspire to. JENNY

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

ELLEN

Oh please. I'm completely ordinary.

JENNY

What?! No! I didn't mean too...I know I...god, I'm sorry. I'm such a bitch sometimes.

ELLEN

No. It's just that...it's not you. It's what you've accomplished. My friends are always wanting to know what country you're in or what crisis your managing or where you're teaching. You know. I've never been exotic in my life. I mean, even now, you're almost sixty but still. I mean, even your boyfriend is black!

JENNY

El, do you want a black boyfriend?

ELLEN

Fuck you, Jenny.

JENNY

Praise Jesus!

ELLEN

You know, we're both screwed up-

JENNY

-fucked up.

ELLEN

Whatever. But we're okay. I mean, even with everything. I've been a little bitchy this weekend, but I...my life is good. And you are, well, amazing.

JENNY

You're amazing. You are an amazing mom and person and wife. And sister.

ELLEN

Sometimes I haven't been a great sister.

JENNY

Really?! Me neither! Imagine that.

*A moment.*

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

JENNY (CONT'D)

El. You got dealt a shit hand and you played your cards perfectly. I am so proud of you. From our life you built your life. Not everyone can pull something like that off.

ELLEN

I tried to be more Mom than Dad.

*A moment.*

Mom did really good by us.

JENNY

Yeah. She was always there.

ELLEN

Bragging Breakfasts. Hiding American cheese in the middle of meatloaf.

JENNY

When she lifted her foot off the gas pedal whenever we drove past a cemetery and we coasted to the end.

ELLEN

Pillow surprises.

JENNY

The bedtime stories, not from a book, just made up.

ELLEN

When she told off that teacher who whacked you on the knuckles that one time.

JENNY

Sugar sandwiches! God, those were so awful but so good.

ELLEN

She held it all together by sheer will power.

JENNY

Sassy broad is a force to be reckoned with. So are you.

ELLEN

You too.

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

JENNY

Three sassy broads walk into a bar.

*Ellen and Jenny both look at the large painting and then look back at each other.*

I'm going to call more.

ELLEN

Okay. Me too. I'll try not to be boring.

JENNY

Just keep *Twilight* to yourself and we should be fine.

ELLEN

We still need to decide who gets what art. What art is left. That thing is huge. *(She gestures to the painting)* I guess I could stick it in our basement. You said your guys' place is small.

JENNY

*(Shrugging)*

Well, it's a New York apartment, so. *(She slaps Ellen's foot gently)* We'll figure it out.

ELLEN

Fucking A.

END SCENE THREE

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

SCENE FOUR

*It is early morning. Sunny light pours in the windows. The living room is pristine. The large painting is off the wall and sits in the corner as well. All other paintings and items have been cleared away.*

*Ellen comes downstairs and takes in the room.*

ELLEN

Oh my god.

JENNY

*(From kitchen)*

EI?

ELLEN

Did you do this?

*Jenny enters with a cup of coffee. She gently puts it in Ellen's hand.*

JENNY

*(Exiting back, over her shoulder)*

Yup.

ELLEN

When?

JENNY

*(Returning with a mug in her hand)*

After you went to bed.

ELLEN

And the rest of the stuff in the-

JENNY

-All done. Bob and his buddy Rick are coming for your boxes and stuff. I can't wait to see the hubby. It's been ages. He's a hoot and a half, ya know. He did ask for coffee and Dunkin Donuts though, so one of us needs to run out.

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

ELLEN

*(Suddenly turns to the wall where the painting was)*

Where's-

JENNY

*(Points to the corner)*

-There. I think I'm going to take it for awhile.

ELLEN

It's huge. Isn't your place in New York too-?

JENNY

-I called Math. He's clearing a wall. There's room. But I'm just taking a turn. Down the line, you can have it. I figure we can trade off. You can take it when you're ready.

ELLEN

I'll admit it, I'm relieved. I had no idea what to do with that big thing. I did not want it-

JENNY

-I know. I got it.

PATTY

*(From upstairs)*

I hear voices. I'm coming down.

*She arrives at the top of the steps.*

No having fun without me.

*Jenny crosses to help Patty down the stairs. Ellen crosses to the boxes.*

Oh, thank you, sweetie.

JENNY

Just take it slow.

PATTY

How does my hair look? It feels scrunched up.

*Patty arrives at the bottom of the stairs.*

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

JENNY

*(Fluffing Patty's hair)*

Here. Hold still. There. Okay. Better.

PATTY

Thank you. Oh! Look at everything!

ELLEN

Don't look at me. *(Points to Jenny)* It was all her.

PATTY

It was both you girls.

*Ellen positions the walker in front of Patty.*

JENNY

Bob is coming and one of us needs to get him donuts. El, I could run out if-

PATTY

-No. You both go.

ELLEN

Mom, it's just down the-

PATTY

No. Both of you.

ELLEN

Mom, I need to-

PATTY

No. I'm going back to Evergreen today, right?

ELLEN

Yes-

PATTY

I need to be alone here. Just me. So, go get food.

ELLEN

Oh! Okay, Mom.

*Ellen and Jenny glance at each other.*

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

JENNY

Okay.

*They get their coats.*

Mom, there's some tea in the kitchen and I-

PATTY

Jen, sweetie. I'm fine. Go. Get me an apple fritter.

ELLEN

We'll be right back. Be careful. Use the walker.

PATTY

I've made it eight-five years, sweetie. I think I have another fifteen minutes in me.

ELLEN

*(Shrugging)*

Okay!

*Ellen and Jenny exit.*

*Patty shoves her walker into a corner and begins to walk around. She exits into the kitchen. She returns with a cup of tea and crosses over to the window. She opens a window and a breeze comes in. She closes her eyes and enjoys the sensation for a moment. Then her eyes open and she straightens up.*

PATTY

Oh!

*She crosses to the phone, picks it up, and sits with it in her lap. She takes a sip of tea, settles herself and picks up the receiver.*

Hello, Fredrick. It's me. It's very early here. I hope I didn't wake you up. Oh dear. Well that's silly. Of course, you're up. You're dead.

The girls are fine. Ellen is organizing me, you'll be glad to know. Jenny's back so they've been going at it, but I suppose it's time. I don't like arguing but it's probably healthy. I think they finally got their footing in their lives. We didn't screw them up too much. Well, at least not beyond repair. I really tried after you...left us. Not to bungle things up.

PATTY (CONT'D)

I did cut ties with your family. Oh honey, we really should have done that decades sooner. I don't think I'm a particularly vengeful person, but I do hope your mother is in another part of heaven. A worse part. A part with very loud country music and lots of polyester. And I think she should have spent at least a couple of seconds in purgatory for how she treated you boys. If she's around you, she better have asked for your forgiveness. I'm just saying.

And those men during the war. If it's true, what they did to you, well, I'm not God, which is good because, well, I've got no mercy or forgiveness for them.

I told Jenny about all of it. What I know. About you. It felt so good to explain you. El's not ready. She will be though. I hope. I can't do it for her though.

The funny part is that if you were alive now, we would never have gotten married. You would have been a gay man. Oh my god. To say that. I think I needed to say that. Someone needed to say that for you. Fredrick, you were gay.

The price you had to pay was terrible. But remember, we did get the girls. And we had each other. We did have some wonderful times. I still try to look good for you. Do you see that, in heaven? Or wherever you are? I hope so. Although the Evergreen stylist doesn't do my hair quite right. It looks too old lady to me.

*She pats her hair and then leans back and looks at the painting.*

Let's see? Have I told you I know you loved me? I know so don't you fret about that. You showed me in a million ways. You had all your problems, but you were always loving, always full of praise and just.... never mean. Twisted and tortured. So confusing sometimes. But never nasty.

What else? Oh. Yes. I was the one who signed that paper. At the ICU. The girls don't know this. The doctors told me you had...how did they put it? "Shut down." All your vital systems and organ failure. They asked me, "What do you want to do?" Going back and changing a million things wasn't an option. Their eyes told me what to do. I could always read eyes. Remember how you told me, "Patty, I have the collector's eye, you have the compassionate's eye. "

Well, I knew you were already.... gone. Let's be honest, honey. You had been gone for a long time. But it would be nice if you forgave me for that.

I can't say I wish we found each other at another time because then we wouldn't have the girls. And, goodness, well, sex isn't everything. I do I hope you found your kind of love in heaven.

So. That's that. This was quite nice.

THE WIND PHONE/Sergel

*Looks around.*

PATTY (CONT'D)

Time to go.

*She looks at the box-filled corner.*

I don't have room for any of that anymore. Heck, I was finished with most of it ages ago anyway. I am glad we hung on to your painting though. I wish I had room for...

*She stops. And smiles. She speaks into receiver.*

Hold on.

*She slowly rises. She crosses to her walker and wheels it over to her chair. She then crosses to where the phone cord is plugged into the wall. Getting on her hands and knees, she unplugs it from the wall. She rises and, wrapping the cord around her hand, she sits and sticks the cord into one of her bags. She then picks the receiver back up.*

The girls will be back soon. I love you very much, Fredrick. I'll call you tonight.

*She then hangs up and wiggles the phone into the bag on her walker. She then sits back, picks up her cup of tea and sips it as she looks at the painting.*

END OF PLAY