

ABOVE & BEYOND

by

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EXT. MIDDLE CLASS NEIGHBORHOOD - RAINY NIGHT

INT. BEDROOM NEAT RANCHER

JOHN (mid-40s WHITE MALE, Sean Penn type) and MARY (ala Debra Winger, early 40s WHITE FEMALE) are adoringly wrapped in each other's arms.

Sound of RAIN on the Windows is Musical.

A HEALTHY TREE sits on floor in corner by the window, several HEALTHY PLANTS are neatly arranged on each of two dressers.

MARY

I love the sound of rain.

JOHN

(softly SINGING)

Rain, rain go away.

MARY

You writing a new song?

JOHN

You like it?

MARY

I don't think it's ever been done.

JOHN

(sings SOFTLY)

Let me stay forever where I lay.

If at all physically possible, the two SNUGGLE CLOSER.

JOHN (CONT'D)

(murmured)

I love you.

MARY

Hmmm.

The telephone RINGS

JOHN

Please. Don't.

Second RING

*

MARY
Go to sleep.

Mary picks up the phone.

MARY (CONT'D)
Hello?
(PAUSE)
What time is it?
(PAUSE)
Okay. (BEAT) Okay. I'm coming.

Mary hangs up phone.

JOHN
(expectant, groggy)
Who's in crisis?

*

MARY
Grace's cat is outside.

JOHN
So sad.

MARY
Molly's an indoor cat.

Mary GROPEs around at foot of the bed for her clothes.

John sits up.

JOHN
It's the middle of the night.

MARY
To normal people it's only eleven
o'clock, Honey.

JOHN
You're gonna drive over there in
the rain? You hate driving in the
rain. In the rain at night, yet?

MARY
I'll be careful.

JOHN
I'll drive.

He already has one leg in his jeans.

MARY
You hate cats.

JOHN
I'll sleep in the car while you and
Grace look for him.

MARY
Her.

JOHN
Him. Her. There will be punishment.

MARY
(smart-alecky)
You'll miss your beauty sleep.

JOHN
Tomorrow's Saturday.

EXT. CITY STREET DIFFERENT NEIGHBORHOOD - SAME RAINY NIGHT

Patrons ENTER and EXIT Bar named "DESTINY'S DATE."

LOUD MUSIC is heard every time door OPENS.

RITA, forty-year-old FEMALE of German descent, leans against
Late Model Saab parked across the street.

CHARLES aka CHARLIE unlocks car door.

Rita plays with Charlie's hair.

CHARLIE is mid-forty-year-old MALE of Swedish descent.

RITA
(sweetly)
One more, Charles. Please?

CHARLES
Why you call me that?

Rita STAGGERS back toward Destiny's front door.

Charlie brings her back, props her against car.

CHARLIE
You have enough. Stay.

RITA
I can drive, Charles.

CHARLIE
(impatiently)
Stop that.

RITA
I tease you.
(flirty)
You love me, Charlie?

CHARLIE
Ja. Ich lieber dich. But I not
drunk. I drive better.

INT. LATE MODEL SAAB

Windshield Wipers SLAP! SLAP!

Saab navigates streets.

CHARLIE
Seat belt.

RITA
You drive good. I no need.

Distracted by Rita's belligerence, Charlie reaches for her seat belt while absentmindedly STEERING the moving vehicle.

CHARLIE
(testy)
Put on.

DIFFERENT VIEW

John navigates rain-slicked streets behind the wheel of ten year old "Honda Civic".

Mary brushes her hair in passenger seat.

JOHN
Close your eyes and rest.

He takes his eyes from road, caresses Mary's cheek.

Mary nestles into John's touch.

MARY

Mmmm. I love you.

Approaching Intersection

In Saab

Charlie is distracted in his argument over Rita's seat belt.

In Civic

John's eyes are adoringly on Mary.

Saab is going faster than speed limit. SPEEDS through stop sign just as...

Honda reaches intersection...

CRASH

SEVERAL WEEKS LATER

EXT./INT. GOOD SAMARITAN HOSPITAL, BALTIMORE - (EST.) NIGHT

Visitors, Nurses, Doctors exit and enter through front doors.

JOHN (V.O.)

I've learned a lot since I died,
like for one, hindsight is
definitely twenty-twenty.

Enter through front doors, proceed through lobby to elevator.

INT. ELEVATOR

JOHN (V.O.)

You are here to witness what
becomes of those we leave behind
when fate or foolishness brings us
to Death's Door without warning.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM 304

Against one wall is a long table on which are several PILES OF LITERATURE, a coffee pot, paper cups, cream and sugar.

NATHANIEL, sixty year old WHITE MALE, is this Bereavement Group's Facilitator.

Nathaniel pours coffee for MARY, forty-eight year old WHITE FEMALE dressed in black slacks and sweater. Her left leg in a cast, her face bruised, Mary supports herself on CRUTCHES.

NATHANIEL

How do you like it?

MARY

Cream, two sugars, please.

NATHANIEL

Sit down. I'll get it.

Charles, known as CHARLIE, awaits his turn for coffee. A forty-five year old WHITE MALE of SWEDISH ANCESTRY, Charlie wears a Sling to support his right arm in a CAST.

MARY

Wow. Two accident victims in the same room at the same time. What are the odds?

CHARLIE

You give right arm, I give left leg, ha.

MARY

Wouldn't fit.

Charlie wears a confused look.

MARY (CONT'D)

Different size.

CHARLIE

Ja?

MARY

How'd you do it?

CHARLIE
 (snickering)
 Huh? I clumsy.

NATHANIEL
 (to all)
 Let's take our seats, why don't we.
 Where you sitting, Mary?

MARY
 (to Charlie)
 We'll talk.

Nathaniel carries Mary's cup to the table.

Mary takes a seat next to EVA.

EVA is youngest of the Group, a thirty-four-year-old WHITE FEMALE who lost her husband, SONNY, her home and all of its belongings in a fire. Eva wears a black blouse and tight-fitted slacks. Her dark hair is pulled back.

NATHANIEL
 (to Group)
 Why don't we get started.

Nathaniel places Mary's coffee in front of her on the eight foot rectangular table set in the middle of Room 304.

BERNICE, last of four Group Members, is a forty-nine-year-old six-foot-tall BLACK FEMALE, former Police Officer. She is dressed in denim jeans, flannel work shirt and tennis shoes.

Nathaniel passes out literature to the four NEW Bereavement Group Members at this, their "first meeting".

A SMALL rather unhealthy PLANT of unknown determination sits alone at far end of table by Nathaniel's briefcase.

Bernice and Eva have taken seats across the table from each other and, as well, at opposite ends.

NATHANIEL (CONT'D)
 My name is Nathaniel. Don't call me Nate. Ha. I will be your facilitator over the next six weeks. There are flyers here with names and numbers of other services that might be of help during the grieving process.

NATHANIEL (CONT'D)

In front of each of you is a name tag. There are pens here. If you would please.

Four Members write their names on tags, apply to shirts.

NATHANIEL CONT'D)

Our hope is that each of you will find answers to the many questions you hoped you'd never have to ask. Please respect each other by not interrupting when someone else is speaking. We have an unusually small group here, which in one way is a good sign, but please, I ask that you limit your thoughts and considerations to two minutes at a time. Any questions? (PAUSE) Good. I'll go first.

SHOW

FOUR YEAR OLD Nathaniel and his MOTHER BOARD PLANE.

NATHANIEL (V.O.)

My father died when we were in Africa. My mother worked with the Red Cross. When we returned to the States, we settled in Baltimore.

SHOW

Nathaniel as a HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT and ALTAR BOY.

NATHANIEL (V.O.)

I was seriously considering the Priesthood, but while volunteering at a Soup Kitchen I met Patty Lou, fell in love and never regretted marrying just out of high school.

SHOW

Nathaniel and Patty Lou with CHILDREN and FAMILY at Holiday gatherings.

RETURN TO PRESENT

NATHANIEL

We have two grown children and five grandchildren, the youngest of which Patty Lou never got to meet. Not physically anyway. Patty Lou died of breast cancer five years ago, two days before the birth of her namesake.

Nathaniel sips from water glass.

NATHANIEL (CONT'D)

Who wants to go first?

He looks around. Mary sits first to his left at the table.

NATHANIEL (CONT'D)

Mary?

MARY

It's okay. You go first.

Mary NODS graciously, gently LAYS a hand on Eva's.

EVA

I ain't got no clue even why I'm here. It's not like I even miss the bastard.

Nathaniel scans his notes.

NATHANIEL

Why don't you tell us about him. Sonny, right? How he passed. How you feel. Are you eating? Sleeping?

Eva is a tiny woman, five feet tall, maybe one hundred pounds soaking wet. She is unquestionably "cute" with a Baltimore-bred accent delivered with a slow and deliberate "homey" dialect in the cadence of someone who doesn't mince words.

Eva FIDDLES with an unidentifiable BROCHURE.

EVA

His name was John. No one ever called him that though. It was Sonny. Asshole, for short. He never hit me or nothing, except that night. He's lucky I didn't cut his fucking balls off. Dog.

This directness is a call for all to listen up.

EVA (CONT'D)

He had the paying gig, so I was his fucking whore. I was the cook and maid, too, like I was supposed to, he said. I never liked working anyway, so it was no big deal. I smoked my weed, he drank his beer. Other than sleeping in the same house, he basically didn't give two shits except for getting in my pants. It was like I had a roommate with nothing else in common, for I don't know. Ten, eleven years? We never talked so he ain't being here nothing's different. I mean, except for the sex and like, where I live, in an apartment. And that pisses me off more than anything, definitely more than that fart-ass, beer-drinking pig dying. First time in my life I lived anywhere but the house on Pinewood which is where I grew up. My Mom and Dad left the house for me when they died. This apartment life sucks. But as far as Sonny goes, him not being there, it's different, but it's not, so I'm cool with that.

BERNICE

Men are fucking animals.

Bernice NODS complacently toward Nathaniel and then Charlie.

BERNICE (CONT'D)

No offense or nothing.

EVA

I don't remember asking you.

BERNICE

I'm just saying.

EVA

The man said don't interrupt.
I was talking.

NATHANIEL

Eva, you said that Sonny...

BERNICE

(muted)

Bitch.

Eva SPRINGS to her feet, drops the as yet, unidentifiable brochure that FLUTTERS to the floor by her feet.

Mary picks up brochure.

Never one to back down, and a foot taller than Eva's miniature form, Bernice rises to the occasion.

The table separates the two.

Nathaniel SPRINGS to his feet as "referee."

NATHANIEL

Eva. Bernice. Can we act like adults here?

EVA

She better shut her trap or I will.

NATHANIEL

(adamant)

EVA! Sit down! Both of you. Down!

The two reluctantly cede to the mediation.

NATHANIEL (CONT'D)

I have never, in the five years I've been doing this, I have never seen anything like that. You're grown women, for crying out loud, not girls fighting over boyfriends.

The dirt settles.

EVA

I got me a paying gig now. In the grocery store my parents used to own. It was Sam's back then. That was my father's name, Sam. Samuel. The job is cool and all, but the real big change in my life is the neighborhood where I live now.

EVA (CONT'D)

On Pinewood everyone always said
'Hi' to everyone else. It ain't
like that in the apartment.

BERNICE

I wonder why.

NATHANIEL

Bernice.

SHOW

SAM (mid-thirties) and Eva's Mother, ELIZABETH (mid-thirties) share grocery store duties; while one GREETs customers and BAGS groceries the other stocks shelves and assists CUSTOMERS find products.

FIVE-YEAR-OLD EVA sits, in a corner mostly, reading or when at home, where CATS and DOGS abound.

SHOW

TEENAGE EVA hanging on corner with friends, smoking weed.

EVA (V.O.)

After I graduated from high school,
my parents needed me at the store.
It wasn't doing good cause Giant
and Stop & Shop could sell stuff
cheaper. They never had time for
me, but hey, it's okay I gotta put
my life on hold. Sonny came in
almost everyday for smokes. It's
where I met him.

SHOW

Sonny waits for Eva outside the grocery store. They get into his car, though he does not hold her door open.

SONNY

I figure we better go back to my
place cause you sure ain't gonna
pass for twenty-one at no bar.

EVA

Whatever. I got the smoke. What you
got to drink, big boy?

SONNY
Beers. Maybe some whisky.

EVA
I want the hard stuff.

EXT./INT. BOARDING HOUSE

No sooner the two are in the door, Sonny begins PAWING Eva.

EVA
You want some of this, old man, you
got to pour me some fire water.

Sonny pours whiskey for Eva.

Eva downs the shot.

EVA (CONT'D)
One more.

Sonny latches onto Eva's right arm.

INT. DARK ROOM

Two bodies GRAPPLE on the bed.

EVA
(muffled voice)
I don't like that, I told you.

SONNY
Come on, girl. Give it up.

Sonny persists with more enthusiasm.

Eva's face in the pillow, Sonny persists in his desire to enter her from behind.

EVA
(screaming)
OW! OW! Stop. You fucking dog.

Eva manages to free herself.

On her feet now, Eva PUNCHES at Sonny.

Laughing, Sonny struggles to hold her arms.

RETURN TO ROOM 304

EVA (CONT'D)
Hey, he talked me out of being a
Nun. Boring.

Bernice breaks out in LAUGHTER.

BERNICE
The girl's a riot.

Nathaniel has had enough of this disrespect.

NATHANIEL
(adamantly)
Bernice.

Eva looks Bernice directly in the eyes while continuing.

EVA
It's called ironic. Like me and you
being in the same room.

Eva rises from her chair, goes to front of room for coffee.

EVA (CONT'D)
I gotta cool my jets.

Mary makes it to her feet, follows, returns Brochure to Eva.

MARY
What Lynne Bricks do you go to?

EVA
I don't yet. I saw a commercial and
thought I'd check it out.

Charlie rises from chair, approaches coffee table.

Nathaniel is RATTLED by the break in the flow.

NATHANIEL
(sardonic)
Let's take a break, why don't we.

Only Bernice remains seated.

CLOSE IN

MARY

(to Eva)

Before the accident I went to Lynne
Brick's in Belvedere Square. My
John worked for the Bricks.

Charlie EXAGGERATES a stiff back, HOBBLER comically to the
coffee table. He pours himself a cup with one hand, again,
exaggerating the awkwardness.

As he does so, he overhears Mary and Eva converse.

CHARLIE

I go Brick Bodies in Timonium.

MARY

That's where my John worked.

CHARLIE

Ja? Maybe I know...

Charlie stops speaking suddenly. His smile quickly
evaporates. His mind elsewhere, he remembers a secret he
needs to keep.

Charlie quickly and silently returns to his seat.

MARY

John worked in...where'd he go?

Eva CHUCKLES softly.

EVA

(WHISPERS, to Mary)

He no speaky good English.

MARY

Yeah. Maybe.

Mary and Eva return to their seats.

NATHANIEL

How about if we agree to limit
coffee breaks to before and after?

All nod in consideration, oblivious to the disruption.

MARY

Charles just told me...

Charlie POINTS to his name tag.

CHARLES

(in jest)

Charlie mean man when stranger call
him Charles. Haw, haw.

MARY

Charlie just told me he goes to the
same gym where my John worked.
Small world, huh?

NATHANIEL

Sure is. How curious.

EVA

(indifferently)

Coincidence.

MARY

I don't believe in coincidence.
More like a Divine plan, I think.
He brings His people together to
help each other.

Mary BLESSES herself.

BERNICE

First a bitch and now a Holy
Roller? I'm on Candid Camera,
right?

Eva is perched on the edge of her chair.

MARY

I need God more than ever today. If
for nothing else than to help me
deal with the Insurance Company.

NATHANIEL

Amen.

BERNICE

I thought Shrinks were Godless.

NATHANIEL

I'm not a Shrink. I am a Volunteer,
a Survivor just like you.

A moment of silence prevails; maybe a sign of truce?

BERNICE

I ain't into blessings'n shit.

NATHANIEL

It's important we feel secure here
so we can speak from our hearts.

BERNICE

'at's cool. Just don't expect me to
be on my knees or nothin'. You want
to, go 'head. Get down.

MARY

Prayer is a big part of my life.

EVA

(to Bernice)

You got something to say about
everything and everyone, don't you?

BERNICE

It's too late for God now.

MARY

Oh, I hope not.

Nathaniel allows a few seconds for breathing room.

NATHANIEL

Eva? You finished?

SHOW

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT (EST.)

Eva RUNS out of the bungalow home on Pinewood Avenue.

Sonny follows to porch.

SONNY

I'm sorry, Eva.

EVA (V.O.)

They think it was accidental. Sonny was wired tight and we had a fight and he hit me. I...I was ripped and left the house. Went for a walk.

(PAUSE, to reflect)

So I wouldn't kill him.

SHOW

FIRE ENGINES CONVERGE IN FRONT OF INFLAMED HOME

A block away, Eva turns and watches Fire Trucks head in the direction from which she just came.

RETURN TO ROOM 304

EVA

I went back, but my house was gone. Later they found Sonny inside. He was dead. His left hand was gone. There was a butcher knife.

BERNICE

The fucker chopped his hand off?

NATHANIEL

Bernice.

Eva is suddenly in the spotlight of questions to which she has no answer.

EVA

Maybe the fire was an accident. Maybe he set it so I wouldn't know about the hand. I don't know. It made me sick.

Charlie wears the expression of one who is lost in a place NOT of his choosing.

Mary BLESSES herself.

MARY

Oh, my God.

EVA

He hit me. He was sorry. Maybe the fire was an accident. I don't know.

Bernice has the look of the willing warrior with conscience.

MARY

I read about that fire.

NATHANIEL

You lost everything. How tragic.

Eva looks away, determined not to show emotion.

NATHANIEL (CONT'D)

M. Scott Peck wrote in "The Road Less Travelled" that pain and growth are partners. When we honestly seek answers to the why of our pain, rather than dwelling on the pain itself, we heighten our sense of being. When we feel the pain, it is then that we know the why of it. Which is when we are more likely to find the answers. Maybe not reasons "why", but how we can evolve.

MARY

John said that he coined that phrase, 'Pain and growth are partners.' I believed him.

A few SNICKERS.

NATHANIEL

Thank you, Eva.

EVA

'at's cool.

NATHANIEL

Mary, tell us about John.

BERNICE

I don't mean to be rude or nothing, but if you don't mind cause I'm just so pissed, ya know?

Eva slinks down in her chair, drained of her life force.

NATHANIEL

Mary?

MARY

I can wait.

BERNICE

I used to be a Cop, but I had to quit. Eighteen years. Next year I woulda got a pension.

EVA

(indignantly)

You? A Cop?

BERNICE

Fuck you, smart ass.

Nathaniel SLAMS shut his book of notes.

Too late. Flames ensue.

EVA

I know you ain't talking to me.

BERNICE

You see another smart ass here?

NATHANIEL

Bernice. Eva. I...we can NOT tolerate disrespect. Anger is definitely one of the stages of grieving, and if you are angry at Frank, I, we...

BERNICE

(adamantly)

There's no "Frank". Her name was Frankie, Francine. I called her Frankie. So you all think cause I didn't lose my husband or wife I don't have nothing to say or what? Frankie was the love of my life.

Mary is visibly SHOCKED, BLESSES herself.

Eva perks up with a look of emerging comprehension.

Charlie is engrossed in possibilities.

NATHANIEL

I must have the wrong files.

BERNICE

You probably got Samuel, right?
That the name you got? I ain't here
for him. He's in the slammer
probably getting it up his poop
shute for what he done.

FLASHBACK

SHOW

EXT./INT. RESTAURANT LOUNGE - NIGHT

ROCK MUSIC PLAYS

Dance floor has cleared except for

Bernice, in Police Officer uniform, DANCES DRUNKENLY with
Civilian, FRANCINE (mid-thirties, BLACK FEMALE).

Restaurant PATRONS, including MALE and FEMALE POLICE OFFICERS
CHEER and CLAP.

Dance is over. Bernice and Dance Partner, Francine HUG and go
to their respective tables.

MALE OFFICER

(to Bernice)

You be having too much fun.

BERNICE

Ain't we here to party?

MALE OFFICER

But you were INTO her, man.

OFFICERS good-naturedly ENCOURAGE the reference.

Bernice PLAYS ALONG, looks around for Francine.

BERNICE
She's a cutey, alright.

MALE OFFICER
If you was a man...

MALE OFFICER is on his feet, HUMPS at air.

Other Officers ENCOURAGE the display.

MALE OFFICER (CONT'D)
(SINGING)
Do it. Do it.

Bernice's MOOD CHANGES abruptly.

BERNICE
Why you wanna be a pig about it?

Male Officer persists.

Bernice SPRINGS to her feet, GRABS male Officer.

BERNICE (CONT'D)
Asshole.

Male Officer puts Bernice in a NECK HOLD.

MALE OFFICER
You want trouble, dyke bitch?

Other Officers are on their feet.

Bernice SQUIRMS herself free from the hold, SQUARES off with the Male Officer.

BERNICE
Now you got trouble.

Other Officers intercede.

LATER IN THE EVENING

SHOW

Bernice and Frankie alone at a corner table.

FRANKIE
So where you been all my life?

BERNICE

Bet you say that to all the girls.

FRANKIE

You wanna be my boyfriend?

Bernice looks away, then sits up stiff and straight as if to convince herself of the innocence of the situation.

BERNICE

I'm a Cop, girl.

FRANKIE

Who's off duty.

BERNICE

Am I giving off a vibe or what? I mean, first that dick and now you.

FRANKIE

Just asking.

BERNICE

(pause; gently)

Cause I ain't never been with a woman before.

FRANKIE

(pseudo-shocked)

Get out.

BERNICE

(huffy)

Why you act like that, Francine?

FRANKIE

It's Frankie. And there ain't no reason. I just like you, girl.

Frankie caresses Bernice's leg under the table.

Bernice is so very ill-at-ease; looks around for anyone she knows who can see what she is about to do.

BERNICE

Yeah?

FRANKIE

You ready to split this scene?

Bernice is in her own world right now.

BERNICE

I think about it, you know? I mean,
like I shoulda been born with a
dick cause of how I'm wired.

Frankie is more brazen, lovingly lays a hand on Bernice's.

FRANKIE

Well, I'm just glad you weren't.
Wanna pop your cherry tonight?

BERNICE

I got an old man and all.

FRANKIE

My place then.

They get up to leave.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

Call me Frankie, okay?

BERNICE

I'm Bernie.

INT. BEDROOM

SHOW

Bernice and Frankie in bed, making TENDER LOVE.

BERNICE (V.O.)

After a couple months we got
reckless and started getting it on
at my place when Samuel wasn't
home. It was closer to the bar.

SHOW

The two in bed at Bernice's apartment.

FRANKIE

I'm gonna make you my beneficiary.
I ain't got no family but you.

BERNICE

Don't worry 'bout it. You ain't
gonna die anytime soon.

FRONT DOOR SLAMS

Bernice's live-in boyfriend, SAMUEL, forty-eight-year-old white male enters front door.

SAMUEL (O.S.)
(LOUDLY)
Hey, Woman. Your man is here.

INT. BEDROOM

Frankie and Bernice SCRAMBLE to dress and straighten bed.

Samuel enters bedroom, is astonished by the scene.

SAMUEL
You're a fucking dike?

Frankie SPRINGS from the bed.

Samuel SLAMS Frankie with an elbow, knocks her to the floor.

He CRASHES his right knee into Frankie's chest, then POUNDS her face continuously with both fists, over and over again.

Bernice SCREAMS, CLIMBS on Samuel's back trying to hold back his fists, PUNCHING at him with hers.

RETURN TO ROOM 304

BERNICE
He killed my Frankie right in front
of me. Beat her...pretty face...

Bernice's expression, her body language vacillates between angry aggression and surrender, fear and determination.

BERNICE (CONT'D)
I just ain't had luck with men. My first old man was a prick, too. He was offed in a drug thing. I want never to tie that knot again when I met Samuel. He was a thug, I knew. But cute, man. Like to die for. I bought his line, and like in no time, he moved in. Shoulda known cause he didn't have a job or nothing.

BERNICE (CONT'D)

And his temper, but he never hit me...ever...so when he was...doing this, I...was...I don't know what. Mad, real fucking mad, and so sad...and scared. I think.

Bernice SUCKS air into her lungs, collects herself.

BERNICE (CONT'D)

The Department Shrink says I got a complex about my gayness.

Bernice GLARES at Eva "daring" a comment.

NATHANIEL

So you're here to find closure to your life with...

Nathaniel rifles through his notes.

BERNIE

(persistently)

I ain't closing nothing. I loved Frankie. I'm grieving like all you. Samuel can rot in that hole man.

Room is silent yet filled with anxiety.

Bernice NODS, concedes to Mary.

BERNIE (CONT'D)

(softly)

Thank you.

NATHANIEL

Mary?

MARY

My name is Mary. Ha!

ALL

Hello, Mary.

Tension is momentarily dissolved.

MARY

Thank you. John was my second husband. Timothy was my first. That's not true. Our son, Gary was born out of wedlock.

MARY (CONT'D)

Tim and I never married. It was an error in judgment, but not a mistake. We were young. But I can't imagine my life without my son.

Mary BLESSES herself with the Sign of the Cross.

Bernie parodies BLESSING herself, CLUTCHES her chest.

ALL EYES BURN into her.

BERNIE

'at's cool. I be chillin'.

MARY

Gary lives in Pennsylvania, just over the Maryland line. He wants me to move there.

NATHANIEL

That's nice. Will you?

MARY

Maybe. I don't see him too much. He and John tolerated each other. It was territorial. But John was a good father to him. It was hard at times, you know, Gary being someone else's child and being gay and all.

Mary blesses herself.

BERNIE

Another gay-basher.

NATHANIEL

(sympathetically)

Bernice.

MARY

It's okay. I understand. I felt like that, too, I think at first. No, it was more shock than anything. I wanted grandchildren.

SHOW

INT./ EXT. GOOD SAMARITAN HOSPITAL

MARY (V.O.)

I...I met John here, as a matter of fact. I was volunteering in the Children's Ward.

YOUNGER Mary digs through her purse as she exits to street.

She stops at Newspaper Box.

John is READING a newspaper.

JOHN

Sorry. I got the last one, but I'm almost finished if you want...

MARY

It's okay. I'll stop at 7-11.

JOHN

No. Please.

John puts paper back together.

JOHN (CONT'D)

I think the sections are mixed up. The Maryland Section is supposed to be in front of the Sports pages.

MARY

It's okay. You can have the Sports. I don't read it.

JOHN

Your husband might.

MARY

If I had one.

RETURN TO ROOM 304

MARY (CONT'D)

A little over a year later we got married. I still, or I was anyway, doing Volunteer Work.

EVA

How you pay the rent?

MARY

I'm a Massage Therapist, or I was anyway. I can't now.

EVA

You got people?

MARY

Yes. My family. I love my family. I see by Caller ID they call, but I don't answer if it's them. I know they worry about me. My sister, Grace came by last week.

NATHANIEL

Did you feel better after talking with her?

MARY

I know she knew I was home, and she probably feels guilty and I, oh believe me God I don't want that, but...I didn't want to talk.

Mary blesses herself, takes a DEEP BREATH.

MARY (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. I just...

NATHANIEL

It's not unusual. When we lose someone dear to us, or in any way suffer tragedy in our lives, it's difficult staying the path. Our priorities change.

Mary fights back tears.

Nathaniel PUSHES a box of Kleenex to he.

NATHANIEL (CONT'D)

It's important to the grieving process that we stay connected to our friends and family and allow them to be there for us. It's okay, in fact, it's good to cry, to talk about him and her, all they meant to you and the plans you had. But now they are your plans. The same or different, they are your plans.

It is as if the spirit of John's being inspires her.

MARY

It was raining hard.

Mary DABS at her eyes with Kleenex.

MARY (CONT'D)

Grace called. Her cat went outside and she was freaked and asked me to come help. I couldn't say no. I'm not like that. John knows I hate driving in the rain. (holds back tears) He drove me. He was so good.

Mary GASPS DEEPLY, BOWS her head shyly.

MARY (CONT'D)

Next thing I know my leg is in a cast and he's...dead...gone. The police said a Saab went through the stop sign. Crashed right into us.

CLOSE IN on

Charlie is visibly ANXIOUS. PANIC in his eyes, He COVERS his mouth with both hands. The CLOWN has become a VICTIM.

MARY (CONT'D)

When I woke up, nobody would say where John was. No one had to tell me. I knew.

Mary BREAKS DOWN, SOBBING.

Eva places a cold, stiff hand on Mary's.

Bernice is uncharacteristically VISIBLY MOVED.

Charlie QUICKLY SPRINGS to his feet, KNOCKS his chair back.

CHARLIE

I think...I...no feel good.

BERNICE

You got sympathy pains, man?

NATHANIEL

(harshly)

BERNICE.

(redirected)

Charles. Charlie. Please.

BERNICE

(defiantly)

What? He can, but I can't?

CHARLIE

I...I go home. I sorry...I...

BERNICE

What? Where are the fucking cameras? This is a joke, right?

Charlie "quickly" EXITS room.

Nathaniel follows to the door, CALLS to Charlie.

NATHANIEL

Charlie. Wait.

BERNICE

(aloud, to herself)

You gotta be kidding me?

Nathaniel returns to the room.

EVA

One weird dude.

NATHANIEL CONT'D)

I've got his number. I'll call him.

BERNICE

What? No rules against honky man leaving class early?

Nathaniel BURNS a glare into her, GRABS his chair, sits, takes a DEEP BREATH, puts his head in his hands, looks up.

NATHANIEL

Bernice. If you don't mind.

Bernice rights herself all PRIM and PROPER in her chair.

BERNICE

No. No. I don't mind. Why should I?

NATHANIEL

This is a first for me. I'm sorry.
I probably should have handled that
better. But hey, listen, it's ten
til anyway. Mary? You okay?

MARY

I am. Are you?

Nathaniel is speechless. It's good a place as any to stop.

NATHANIEL

Alright then. See you, and Charlie
too, I hope, next week.

CUT TO:

OMNISCIENT BEYOND

HEAVEN is a lush Garden of Eden, Paradise unlike any Earthly
Being could ever portray; fresh and wholesome and good.

Heaven is congested, but free flowing, everything in it is
the same, but different.

Since Souls ascend at different rates of Oneness, not all of
heaven's inhabitants are yet AS ONE.

WITNESS

A hospital-gown-clad MALE of indeterminate age pulls an
intravenous feeder along with him in his AIMLESS WANDERING.

An Assemblage of Angels of varying degrees of Ascension
gather aside to observe in a pseudo-classroom environment.

HOSPITAL GOWN-CLAD MALE

Is this heaven?

ANGEL INSTRUCTOR

Yes, this is Heaven.

HOSPITAL GOWN-CLAD MALE

I'm in heaven? How'd I get here?

ASSEMBLAGE OF ANGELS LAUGH.

Angel Instructor extends a "commanding air."

ANGEL INSTRUCTOR
You have evolved from your earthly
Self.

HOSPITAL GOWN-CLAD MALE
But I'm in heaven? Are you sure?

ASSEMBLAGE OF ANGELS LAUGH.

Angel Instructor knowingly NODS toward an ANGEL ATTENDANT who
steps in to GUIDE the new Arrival.

In the distance there sounds a CRACK OF THUNDER followed by a
BRIGHTNESS not unlike a sustained flash of lightning.

All observe a well-dressed, BLACK FEMALE (late-twenties)
emerge from the clouds, STAGGER toward the group of Departed.

WELL-DRESSED BLACK FEMALE
(anxious)
Just a little more time, please.
It's not for me. Please. My child.
I need to ready my child.

ANGEL INSTRUCTOR
We have been known to make errors
in judgment....

An omniscient CHUCKLE prevails.

Assemblage of Newly-Arrived departed look around curiously
for the source.

Angel Instructor touches his/her forehead with finger tips of
hands folded in Prayer.

ANGEL INSTRUCTOR (CONT'D)
It is not often, but on those
occasions it serves no purpose to
ignore the error in judgment by not
allowing the newly departed to, and
to put it in words you can
understand, "see the light" and
return to their earthly habitat.

Four New Arrivals, Rita, Frankie, Sonny and John network with
this Assemblage of Angels who are eager to share experiences.

Angel Instructor PUFFS his/her chest proudly.

ANGEL INSTRUCTOR (CONT'D)
Ah, and then there are those who
are as I am...

CRACK OF THUNDER

Angel Instructor BOWS again in homage.

ANGEL INSTRUCTOR (CONT'D)
..."Special Ones" like our newly-
arrived John here who was blessed
with living an Earthly existence
with one of Our Father's own.
We...they are indeed Special from
whom you...we have much to learn.

Several in the Assemblage, reach to touch John.

As one of the Four New Arrivals, John displays a GASH on his forehead and across his face. His movements are STIFF. He is dressed still as he was at the time of his physical passing.

John appears tentative and despondent having just observed the scene in the Bereavement Group meeting.

JOHN
She doesn't deserve this. It was
me, I was driving.

CUT TO:

EXT./ INT. SUBURBAN HOME - EARTHLY NIGHT

The RADIO plays ROCK 'N ROLL.

Charlie tidies up the kitchen, one hand at a time, DITTY-BOPPING as he goes, SINGING along to Rolling Stones.

CHARLIE AND BOB SEGER
(singing)
Rock 'n roll never forget...

The lights are turned down. He DANCES awkwardly.

Suddenly, he stops, turns off the radio, picks up a woman's sweater from the back of a chair. There is a moment of hesitation, a CONFLICTED LOOK before he puts it to his face.

He INHALES DEEPLY until the smile that has slowly crept in is replaced quickly by a scornful, hateful look.

He FLINGS sweater back to the chair, PIVOTS to leave the room, returns, SNATCHES the sweater as if it were a rag.

INT. BEDROOM

Charlie FLIPS sweater into hamper, turns away, then back again, RIPS sweater from hamper and casts it to the floor where he STOMPS it with both feet all the time SCREAMING...

CHARLIE

I hate you! I hate you!

Exhausted by the outburst, he FLOPS onto his unmade bed.

Seconds later he turns on the lamp, GLARES at Rita's Vanity with ornately trimmed mirror, arranged with expensive perfumes, powders, exotically named eye liners and makeups.

Charlie picks up a FRAMED PHOTO of him and Rita on their Wedding Day.

SHOW in FLASHBACK

YOUNGER Charlie and Rita DANCE to UPBEAT MUSIC.

Guests CLAP in encouragement.

Rita breaks away from Charlie, KICKS up her feet, LIFTS her dress, revealing her underwear.

DIFFERENT WEDDING PARTY SCENE

Rita downs shots of liquor.

Guests avoid confrontation with Rita's arrogant self.

Rita wants Charlie to act on her behalf.

RITA

Why you no be a man, Charles?

CHARLIE
(hushed)
You drink too much.

RITA
(LOUDER)
You ain't my father, Charles.

Charlie speaks SOFTLY, his head bowed before her.

CHARLIE
You know I no like that.

RITA
No like what? I know how to party
with fun? I teach you, Charles.

Rita STAGGERS to dance floor.

CHARLIE
(louder now)
It's Charlie! I am Charlie!

All eyes are on Charlie.

Rita DANCES WILDLY.

RETURN TO BEDROOM

A tired man on a mission, Charlie PUSHES up from bed.

He ponders briefly the course of his actions, and then, with one SWOOP, wipes everything on the vanity to the floor.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
(SCREAMING with attitude)
HOW I TELL WHAT I DO!

He DROPS to his knees and WEEPS.

With greater effort, Charlie pushes himself to his feet, SHUFFLES to his dresser, finds what he needs, sits back on edge of bed, PONDERES his next move.

As if determined by an unseen inner force, Charlie BLESSES himself with tentative nature of one new to the belief.

Then just as quickly, having caught himself in an act in which he finds no redeeming value, Charlie GRABS the phone.

He DIALS a number from the page. Quickly, before the connection can be made, he SLAMS receiver back down.

Having conceded, Charlie WEEPS LOUDLY in anguish.

EXT./ INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

In a corner booth Mary sips hot coffee, Eva a soda.

Mary's crutches lean against the booth.

EVA

Thanks for inviting me. I ain't got any java at home.

Mary is lost in the swirl designs her spoon makes in the cup.

EVA (CONT'D)

I ain't been sleeping worth a damn last coupla weeks.

Eva tries a different approach to breaking through Mary's emotional barrier.

EVA (CONT'D)

I need me some weed.

Mary continues to stare into her coffee cup.

EVA (CONT'D)

You wanna catch a buzz?

Mary wipes away a tear with napkin.

MARY

I'm sorry. What?

EVA

Wanna talk?

MARY

I was thinking about John. I still feel him at home.

EVA

I'm sorry.

MARY

I didn't mean it like that.

SOUNDS of Coffee Shop prevail.

Mary is lost again in the coffee cup.

EVA

What's it like? Being in love with someone who loves you the same?

MARY

I want to believe that stuff like this changes us. For good, you know? You see the news, a tsunami in Thailand or someplace. A hurricane ruins people's lives. Adult children take care of their elderly parents. This was quick.

EVA

You can look at it that way.

MARY

I HAVE to. I mean, I don't want to die. I do, but I don't. Does that make sense?

EVA

I guess.

MARY

I need to go to the gym. And work. It's just that...

FLASHBACK to John's Viewing

Many Family and Friends, MEMBERS and EMPLOYEES of the Brick Body's Gym CROWD the Funeral Home.

Mary does not move from aside the CLOSED CASKET, her hand resting on it.

A PHOTO of JOHN AND MARY at his surprise Birthday Party rests against the casket.

Mary's Son, GARY (twenty years of age) stands by his mother.

RETURN to Coffee Shop

MARY (CONT'D)

When my aunt died, she had cancer,
and when she died, my uncle
changed. He wasn't happy anymore.
He was mean. He didn't pay
attention to his kids anymore even.
I don't want to be like that. I
want to live. I love life. I used
to. I want to. Again. I believe
that things like this happen so
that we can...feel other people's
pain. We aren't alone.

EVA

You're cool for an old chick.

Mary's look is INCREDULOUS.

MARY

I'm not old, honey. You're young.
You just don't know yet.

EVA

I don't think I ever loved Sonny
like that. It wasn't...you know, it
wasn't nothing special.

The two sip in silence.

MARY

I need to go back to work, not the
Spa, I can't yet, but volunteer,
the Children's Ward, maybe, but I
don't know. Too many memories
there. I just need something.

A SPEECHLESS Moment during which

A HOMELESS MALE (mid-thirties) makes a scene at the counter.

HOMELESS MALE

A broken piece on the floor, man,
come on. I'm hungry.

DUNKIN DONUTS EMPLOYEE

(loudly)
GET OUT!

The disturbance draws Mary and Eva's attention.

Homeless Male turns away, approaches a Patron at the counter.

DUNKIN DONUTS EMPLOYEE (CONT'D)
(LOUDER)
I'M CALLING THE COPS.

Homeless Male ignores the warning.

Mary rifles through her purse.

Eva picks up on the notion, digs into HER pocket, lays a dollar bill on the table.

MARY
Thank you.

Mary STRUGGLES to free herself from the booth.

EVA
I got it.

Eva takes the money to homeless male.

EVA (CONT'D)
Here. Before you get arrested.

Homeless Male accepts gift.

HOMELESS MALE
Thank you. God Bless You.

Mary sips from her coffee. Eva smiles over her Soda.

EVA
That was cool.

MARY
It is in giving that we receive.

Eva is not yet ready to be converted.

EVA
Whatever.

Another moment of reflective silence.

EVA (CONT'D)
Insurance companies suck.

MARY

I haven't even started with that business yet.

EVA

I won't get nothing for the house. 'Negligence,' they said. What a fucking waste.

Silence prevails.

EVA (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. I got a mouth.

MARY

That was John's favorite cuss word. I used to make him put a dollar in a "Cuss Jar" every time he said it.

EVA

Did he?

MARY

He did. Every time.

(PAUSE)

It's probably overflowed.

EVA

Maybe it'll help til insurance comes through.

MARY

I forget where it is.

They both CHUCKLE.

Mary reflects again on the sublime moment.

EVA

If I had to put money in a Cuss Jar I'd have to get a loan.

The two sip.

EVA (CONT'D)

My homeys gave me some rags.

Eva demonstrates by brushing a hand across her chest.

Mary smiles.

The two SIP for a brief moment.

MARY

I talked to John last night. I asked him what it's like up there, but...he's not...not ready to be in our bed yet. Maybe. We had just made love...I miss him.

Mary CRIES softly.

EVA

I hope I love like you do one day.

MARY

Oh, you will, girl. You're a beautiful little thing. And you know, I got so many clothes I can never wear. I'll bring you some.

EVA

Maybe, but um, I don't know. No hard feelings or nothing.

MARY

Or "anything."

Eva's eyes question.

MARY (CONT'D)

Nothing. Forget it.

Silent sipping prevails.

MARY (CONT'D)

We were going to live at the beach. Rehobeth or Bethany. I mean, it wouldn't be for awhile. It's not like we had money. I was the cautious one. John would have just up and moved. 'I can write songs anywhere you are,' he said.

Mary CHOKES UP some before continuing.

MARY (CONT'D)

He was a good Writer. A Song Writer. A real romantic.

ORIGINAL MUSIC over.

Mary smiles. The memory is sweet.

The two drink without speaking.

EVA

When will you get the cast off?

MARY

A few weeks. Then there's Physical Therapy. It all depends.

EVA

What a drag. Wish I could help.

MARY

This might be pushy, but would you ever consider having a roommate?

EVA

I crash in a studio pad, girl.

MARY

I know you do. I mean my place. The extra bedroom down the hall was John's writing room. It'd be good for both of us. I can't go in there anymore. I keep the door closed.

EXT./INT. DIFFERENT NEIGHBORHOOD APARTMENT - DAY

Bernice is dressed in long, loose-fitting T-shirt. She spaces out on the television, sits with telephone on her lap, a BONG PIPE in one hand. The GLASSY EYES leave no doubt, she's "stoned".

Telephone RINGS twice before she acknowledges.

BERNICE

(into phone)

Ah, huh?

(beat)

Hey, Sista, what's happening?

(beat)

Yeah. How'd you know?

She puts Bong to her lips, is about to light up again.

BERNICE (CONT'D)
 All I got is time.
 (beat)
 I ain't goin' back.

Her eyes make love to the bowl.

BERNICE (CONT'D)
 (feisty)
 Now why would I visit that fuck?
 (pause)
 Yeah, Lilies. Her favorite.
 (pause)
 'at might be cool. I got a lot
 going on now, but maybe.

She hangs up phone, takes a long, hard TOKE on the bong.

EXT./INT. GOOD SAMARITAN HOSPITAL, BALTIMORE - NIGHT

Room 304 - Second of Eight BEREAVEMENT GROUP Sessions

Bernice is looking rather ragged tonight; her hair is
 uncombed, her clothes hang in loose wrinkles.

Bernice SNIFFLES and WIPES her nose.

NATHANIEL
 It's five after. We should probably
 begin. I'll call Charles later.

EVA
 (pseudo-Swedish accent)
 Charlie. His name Charlie.

NATHANIEL
 I know, I...

MARY
 I hope he's all right.

Charlie enters Room 304.

His movements are calculated, but awkward. He avoids eye
 contact, sits, his head tilted forward.

NATHANIEL CONT'D)
 Speaking of the devil.

CHARLIE

I forget day.

MARY

The mind is the first to go.

NATHANIEL

My kids call it getting old.

EVA

I ain't there yet. Hey listen. This might be...I don't know, like so soon and all and I ain't even sure, but there's this guy at work that keeps hitting on me, and I've always thought he was cute so we went for drinks on Saturday. I mean, you know it's not like I'm in mourning or nothin' but is it too soon to be thinking of...you know.

Eva uses hand movements to connote intercourse.

Bernice PERKS up.

BERNICE

(slurred)

You do the nasty?

Eva GLARES at Bernice.

NATHANIEL

I think what Bernice is trying to say is if you got the itch, scratch it, girl.

Bernice NODS indifferently, manages an EXHAUSTED backhand WAVING motion in agreement, returns to la-la land.

Nathaniel turns toward and addresses Charlie.

NATHANIEL (CONT'D)

Charlie? You alright?

Charlie is in HYPER MODE, his hands CLENCHED, he SHIFTS around in his seat, GIGGLES.

CHARLIE

I'm cool. I know the nasty.

NATHANIEL

This is the place to talk about it.

(PAUSE)

We have a challenge before us, to look within ourselves, to assess that which we need to change, or not. What is necessary for us to evolve, to become the person that this catastrophe was intended for us to be. Here, in this room, we can learn to change ourselves. And maybe, not really change, per se, but understand, better understand the why of it. If and when we do, our lives will be better for it.

MARY

The only thing I would change about John is how he farted in his sleep.

EVA

Sonny could light a fuc...damn bomb he farted so much, especially after drinking beer all night. (BEAT) I hated that motherfucker.

NATHANIEL

Eva, please. Get outa the gutta.

EVA

'at's cool, but when I'm pissed I cuss like a motha...you know.

Mary BLESSES herself.

BERNICE

(to Nathaniel)

You probably fart all sweet-smelling breezes.

NATHANIEL

(taken aback)

Um...well, I...I sleep alone so I don't know, but...

Charlie has heard none of this.

He stares at a spot on the carpet while speaking.

CHARLIE
Rita was bitch.

EVA
She fart in her sleep?

CHARLIE
She make things...I mean...I
try...to make...

Charlie looks up, first at the wall across from him, then to Nathaniel to whom he speaks.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Last week, I not...

AN EXPLOSIVE PAUSE accentuates the pending mystery.

NATHANIEL
You okay?

The mood changes again.

CHARLIE
(singing)
I feel like dancin...

Charlie SPRINGS to his feet, has second thoughts. FREEZES.

All eyes and ears are alert to Charlie's ODDNESS.

NATHANIEL
Charlie?

CHARLIE
How I say?

The PAUSE is painful. Charlie looks up from the spot on the carpet his SUDDENLY SERIOUS STARE has burned a hole into.

He PACES, STOPS, looks around, BOLTS for the door.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
I...sorry...I...not now.

NATHANIEL
But if it...

Charlie quickly EXITS the room.

A COMMUNITY CHUCKLE escapes the group.

Then SILENCE. Anticipation.

Mary blesses herself with Sign of the Cross.

NATHANIEL (CONT'D)

(aloud)

You can come back in now, Charlie.

Silence.

Nathaniel rises from his chair, EXITS THE ROOM.

IN THE HALL

NATHANIEL (CONT'D)

Charlie?

INT. NATHANIEL'S HOME - NIGHT - LATER (EST.)

Nathaniel dials a number into the kitchen wall phone.

NATHANIEL

Charlie. Nathaniel. You have a way
of...how to say...leaving a
conversation hanging.

Nathaniel listens.

A look of HORROR comes into his eyes.

He PLOPS down onto kitchen chair, nearly drops the phone from
his ear.

NATHANIEL CONT'D)

Oh, my God. That's a problem.

CUT TO:

OMNISCIENT BEYOND

RITA

(to John)

Why you not do nothing?

JOHN

What am I going to do? And anyway,
we're not supposed to interfere.
Remember? Mary needed to find out
on her own. I couldn't protect her.
Again.

FRANKIE

You gots to heed your own advise.

John questions with his eyes.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

Some things you can't change.

RITA

What's done is finished.

JOHN

Not quite.

CUT TO:

ROOM 304 - SESSION THREE

Charlie is not in attendance.

Bernice appears EMOTIONALLY and PHYSICALLY RAGGED.

Nathaniel's mind is elsewhere. He keeps looking at the clock.

Bernice SLURS her words, is obviously STONED.

BERNICE

I had this dream...like I was...I
think I was...I forget, but...

Ever the Professional, Nathaniel collects himself.

NATHANIEL
What will you do?

BERNICE
I don't know.

Uncharacteristically, Bernice SAGS SLIGHTLY in her chair.

NATHANIEL
How will you live?

BERNICE
I don't know.

MARY
Can you afford to not work?

Bernice SLUMPS down further in her chair.

BERNICE
I don't know.

NATHANIEL
Just making an observation, but
this sounds self-destructive.

BERNICE
Like I fuckin' care.

Bernice wipes her nose with back of one hand.

MARY
You're depressed.

BERNICE
(insinuating)
Duh?

NATHANIEL
You see a doctor?

BERNICE
I ain't got money for a doctor.

EVA
You could see a doctor with what
you're spending on the stuff, dig?

Mary TAPS Eva on the hand, shakes her head in "motherly"
disagreeing manner.

EVA (CONT'D)

What? I mean, it's so obvious.

Bernice does not have the energy to respond.

NATHANIEL

We provide Individual Grief
Counseling at no cost.

BERNICE

I'll think about it.

Eva looks from Nathaniel to Bernice.

EVA

Can I?

NATHANIEL

Bernice?

Bernice FLIPS her hand in agreement.

EVA

I wasn't sleeping, but I'm taking,
and I don't even remember the name.

MARY

Lunesta.

EVA

I feel better.

NATHANIEL

That's prescription.

EVA

Yeah, like one of my homey's a
Sales Rep and gave me samples.

BERNICE

Good for you.

EVA

Hey, Sister, I'm just saying.

BERNICE

Oh so now you're my sista?

Nathaniel intercedes.

NATHANIEL

(to Bernice)

No one's going to do it for you.

BERNICE

For real.

MARY

How about over the counter stuff
like Sominex?

Eva catches Bernice's eye on the sly, MIMICS toking.

Nathaniel turns. Eva FREEZES mid-toke.

BERNICE

The weed ain't working.

NATHANIEL

Which merely creates more problems.

Eva looks PERPLEXED.

EVA

Weed ain't working?

BERNICE

So I'm what? Self-destructive?

NATHANIEL

Why'd you come here?

BERNICE

I don't know.

NATHANIEL

Part of you wants healing.

BERNICE

It's too late.

NATHANIEL

(with impatience)

Maybe if you stopped saying 'I
don't know' then...

BERNICE

What? My Frankie be back?

NATHANIEL

There are resources. There are meds. No one is going to do it for you. Ask yourself why you decided to come here.

BERNICE

I don't...

NATHANIEL

Bernice.

(beat)

Why'd you come here?

BERNICE

In "The Examiner" there was a story about a little boy hit by a car. The mother and father came to sessions like this, only at St. Joe's. They said how it helped So I figured why the fuck not.

Nathaniel SLOWLY SHAKES his head.

NATHANIEL

Bernice. It's obvious that a part of you does care. There is a Spirit of life in you that is not ready to roll over and die even if what you suffered is so painful.

Bernice SPRINGS from her chair, TOPPLING it to the floor.

Charlie is in his own world.

Eva glares defiantly.

Mary CRINGES, her hands folded in prayer.

BERNICE

Why you all be jumpin' in my shit? I can get a job if I want. I ain't doing nothing for nobody but me, myself and I. So fuck off.

NATHANIEL

Bernice. Please.

Bernice PACES.

BERNICE

You all be thinking I'm a loser
cause I ain't like you. Why? Cause
my skin is black? Is that it? Well,
Fuck allaya. I got just as much
right to be here as you.

Bernice STORMS out of the room.

NATHANIEL

I hope I'm not...

CUT TO:

OMNISCIENT BEYOND

FRANKIE

She got more on the ball than that.

ANGEL INSTRUCTOR

You can help her, but she has to
truly want it.

A gathering of DEPARTED await today's CENTERING SEMINAR.

Rita stands first in line, determined to master the Art.

RITA

I go first.

Rita focuses.

RITA (CONT'D)

I want Charles see me, ja?

ANGEL INSTRUCTOR

He won't really "see" you. It's
more like he will "sense" you.
Though when you fine tune it, the
communication will ultimately be
more physical.

RITA

Ja? I touch him?

GROUP OF ANGELS MOAN SEXY

ANGEL INSTRUCTOR

Not that way. Just relax. Know that you are with him. "Be" with him.

RITA

Charlie. Can you hear me, Charlie?

CUT TO:

EXT. INT. SAINT DOMINIC'S CHURCH - DAY

Mary and PRIEST consult in Vestibule outside Confessional.

INT. BERNICE'S APARTMENT

SHOW

Bernice KNEELS on floor. Is she INTOXICATED? Fatigued? Injured? She RAISES her head, surveys the room strewn still with clothing and table lamp and other things that remain as they were since the night Frankie was beaten to death.

Telephone RINGS in background.

Bernice can "not" HEAR it.

EXT./INT. SPA ON THE AVENUE - DAY

Mary enters awkwardly through front door. One of her Crutches slips from her grasp.

A (thirty-something-yea-old) MALE picks them up, holds the door open for Mary.

MARY

Thank you. I appreciate it.

Two CUSTOMERS remit payment for services at desk.

SPA CLERK

(excitedly)

Mary. You're back.

Twenty-something FEMALE HURRIES around counter, joyfully HUGS Mary, KISSES her on the cheek.

Mary fights to remain upright.

SPA CLERK (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. It's just so nice to see you. You okay? I'm sorry I didn't make the funeral but I was working.

MARY

I'm okay, Jessica. Thank you.

Mary RECALLS:

A SUNNY SPRING DAY

Mary and John enter the Spa hand in hand.

SPA MANAGER "directs traffic" in lobby.

SPA MANAGER

(to John and Mary)

Hello, Love Birds. All the rooms are taken, but you can have my office if you want. Wink. Wink.

RETURN TO SCENE

Spa Manager HUGS Mary.

MARY

Doctor says two more weeks on crutches, then therapy with a cane, but I think I can work then.

SPA MANAGER

You just take your time, okay? Hey, you ever pick up that CD?

MARY

What CD?

SPA MANAGER

I meant to bring it to the funeral. I found it in a locker.

Spa Manager rifles through drawer, retrieves musical CD.

Mary's smile becomes melancholy.

MARY
(reads the Label aloud)
'John's mushy love songs inspired
by my Mary's muse.' Thank you.

EXT. PARKING LOT PADONIA FITNESS CENTER - DARK

"White Geo" pulls to spot in front of the building.

Three cars are already there.

Male (thirty-ish) exits Mini-Van upon Geo's arrival.

TEEN MALE gets out of the White Geo.

RUSTY
You're actually early.

TEEN MALE
It's still night time, man.

SAM (forty-something WHITE MALE) waits at stairs.

SAM
I have to be in Frederick by eight
so I appreciate this.

CUT TO:

OMNISCIENT BEYOND

JOHN
It's nice. The kids, I mean,
getting up early. Members here are
spoiled. I spoiled them.

RITA
You cuckoo bird, ya?

JOHN
I miss my job, the Members. I was
the longest tenured Towel Boy in
the business. Hey, I wonder if I
can talk to them.

RITA
Ya, you cuckoo bird.

John focuses his AURA

CUT TO:

INT. GYM LOCKER ROOM

Members enter in workout clothes carrying gym bags and clothing bags, GREET each other with tired, morning voices.

BILL

Rusty.

RUSTY

Bill.

Bill opens a locker, finds a notebook.

BILL

Somebody left their homework.

Bill lays notebook on the bench.

RUSTY

Leave it at the front desk.

Bill puts gym bag in locker before picking up and opening notebook, reading on his way out.

BILL

Oh, man. This is John's.

FRANK enters locker room.

FRANK

What you got there?

RUSTY

John's notebook.

FRANK

Where'd you find it?

BILL

It wasn't there yesterday.

RUSTY

You weren't here yesterday.

FRANK

Neither were you. But someone must
have used this locker yesterday.

CUT TO:

OMNISCIENT BEYOND

FRANKIE

How'd you do that?

JOHN

It's called "Centering."

SONNY

I'm taking that seminar.

JOHN

We all are. It's a way for us to
communicate with...them.

RITA

You no cuckoo bird?

JOHN

Naw, I'm in love.

CUT TO:

EXT./INT. WALTERS ART GALLERY - DAY

Presenting impassive demeanor, Bernice awaits her INTERVIEWER
for the position of Security Guard. She is dressed in tight-
fitting slacks and loose-hanging, brightly colored flowered
blouse. The top two buttons are in opposite button holes.

INT. INTERVIEW OFFICE

Bernice FIDGETS in her chair, SNIFFLES and wipes her nose
with the back of one hand.

BLACK MALE (forty-something) reads Bernie's Resume.

BERNICE

I always liked museums when I was in school. That was a long time ago so it probably don't count, ha.

INTERVIEWER

I'd offer you coffee, but it's strong and you're pretty wired already. Relax. I don't bite.

BERNICE

Ha! Too bad. I like it rough.

Interviewer appears suddenly more ATTENTIVE.

BERNICE (CONT'D)

Only kidding. Just trying to get a rise outa ya.

INTERVIEWER

Are you on something, Bernice?

BERNICE

Am I high, you mean? It's a natural high, man. I just love life. I mean it ain't all spit and polish or nothing, but yeah, I'm hip with it.

INTERVIEWER

I should let you know up front that we do require our Employees to submit to random drug screenings. You don't have a problem with that, do you, Bernice?

BERNICE

I don't need no drug screen.

INTERVIEWER

I'm not asking, Bernice. It's not voluntary. Very simple procedure. You pee in a cup basically.

BERNICE

Naw, that's okay. I don't need one.

Interviewer lays Resume on his desk, looks Bernice dead on.

INTERVIEWER

So you're refusing to be screened?

BERNICE

You know I shouldna come in today anyway. I ain't feeling so good. Can we schedule this for another day? Next week maybe?

EXT. CITY STREET

There's a car parked on the corner. Bernice gets in and as it pulls away from the curb, BLACK MALE DRIVER hands her a BONG.

INT. ROOM 304 - MEETING FOUR

Eva and Mary enter Room 304.

Mary walks with the use of a cane. Cast has been removed.

Bernice AMBLES into room, UNSTEADY on her feet.

MARY

Hey, Bernice.

Bernice sits with her back to the door, avoids eye contact, NODS silently.

Eva pours coffee.

Nathaniel enters, goes directly to his seat, PLOPS into it as if so very much EXHAUSTED.

NATHANIEL

Thanks for coming back, Bernice.

Bernice SHRUGS her shoulders.

BERNICE

Like for real.

NATHANIEL

Bernice?

BERNICE

It's Bernie! Why's that so hard?

A "silent alarm" sounds in Nathaniel.

NATHANIEL
You stoned, Bernie?

BERNICE
(riled)
Why you wanna get in my face, too?

NATHANIEL
Simple question, Bernice.

BERNICE
(louder)
I got a 'ttorney friend help me.

Bernice STANDS quickly, KNOCKING BACK her chair.

Mary SHRIEKS, every nerve in her body on edge.

NATHANIEL
Bernice. Where are you going?

BERNICE
(slurred)
Ain't lettin nobody 'scrimate me.

Bernice STORMS from the room.

Nathaniel is metaphorically "on the ropes," takes a DEEP BREATH, psyches himself into the task at hand.

NATHANIEL
That is not our only problem.

MARY
Charlie?

NATHANIEL
He said he would be here. I
hope...I mean, I want...

As if ON cue, Charlie ENTERS.

Out of options, Nathaniel BLESSES HIMself.

A sense of PENDING DOOM settles on the room.

Mary SENSES it, looks away.

Nathaniel drops his head into his hands on his lap.

Charlie sits in the chair next to Mary, and because there is no other way to put it...

CHARLIE

I drive Saab.

Eva is oblivious to the significance.

EVA

Nice wheels. What year?

Mary has yet to look directly at Charlie.

Nathaniel rises from his seat, stands behind Mary.

MARY

(reluctantly, softly)
Some part of me knew that.

EVA

Oh, my God.

Nathaniel lightly lays his hands on Mary's shoulders.

Mary RISES UP from her chair, falters, loses her balance and falls away from Nathaniel, into Charlie's arms.

Charlie and Nathaniel help Mary to her feet.

Mary stands face to face with Charlie.

Nathaniel stands behind Mary.

MARY

You can't be here. My John is dead...you...

CHARLIE

I lose my Rita.

Mary is speechless.

Nathaniel SAGS against the wall.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

I get ticket and pay insurance more now, so what...

MARY

You got to be kidding. You pay more insurance?

MARY (CONT'D)

I can't be in the same room with this...this person. I'm sorry, but it's my turn to leave early.

Mary heads toward door.

NATHANIEL

Mary, please. This may sound ridiculous right now, but if we can get through this, the hardest part of all of it, I mean.

Mary stops cold in her tracks. Turns.

MARY

(incredulously)
Are you taking his side?

NATHANIEL

Oh, God no, Mary. I am merely looking for words, for something good that might come of this.

MARY

Good? My John is dead and I am face to face with his killer. What good can come of this?

Eva follows Mary to door.

EVA

She's my ride.

CUT TO:

OMNISCIENT BEYOND

ANGEL

Father works in mysterious ways.

JOHN

But she doesn't deserve this.

ANGEL

We must find the joy in pain.

JOHN

How? She is so...

ANGEL

Your Mary hurts for the joy she knew with you and now grieves for. To be whole again, to find that joy, she must face the pain. It will not be the joy you had, of course. That particular joy, that was special and can never be again. But there can be joy.

CUT TO:

EXT./INT. RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOOD - PENNSYLVANIA

Mary and her son, neatly-dressed GARY (early-twenties) sit at kitchen table in his apartment.

GARY

I thought you were cool with it.

MARY

With you being gay? And not giving me grandchildren? Never. Am I wearing a sign says "Take advantage of me?" What is going on?

Mary EXITS the room.

Gary makes sandwiches, places on table.

Mary RETURNS, HUGS her son.

GARY

I'm sorry, Ma.

MARY

It has nothing to do with you.

GARY

But of course it does.

Mary PLAYFULLY NUDGES Gary.

MARY

As long as you don't like boys.

GARY

I'm Gay, Ma, not a pedophile.

Mary blesses herself.

MARY

I know that.

GARY

Then you'll move in?

MARY

It's too far, Gary. The cost of gas alone. But it's not only that. I think, no, I am going to have a roommate. Eva. I met her in the Bereavement Group. Her husband didn't leave her much.

Gary HUGS his mother.

GARY

Oh Ma, ever the Angel.

EXT./INT. SAINT DOMINICS CHURCH

The church is quiet and empty except for Mary and FATHER CURTIN (youngish fifty-year-old WHITE MALE) who quietly converse in a pew near the Confessional.

FATHER CURTIN

You know this already, but try to imagine that if God could give up his Son for us in such a brutal way that was "not" an accident, then your John, and every person who dies, brutally or not, if we can think of it as being sacrificed. Not in a real sense, but yes, so we can know what it feels like and maybe better learn to accept it.

EXT./INT. GOOD SAMARITAN HOSPITAL, BALTIMORE - EST.

Room 304 - BEREAVEMENT GROUP FINAL MEETING

Nathaniel arranges donuts on a tray.

Eva and Mary enter. Mary is somewhat steadier with her cane.

Eva places a medium-sized healthy plant on table.

NATHANIEL

Thank you, Eva.

EVA

It was Mary's idea. She bought it.

NATHANIEL

(to Mary)

Thank you for coming back.

MARY

I was out of line. Just that...

NATHANIEL

Thank you.

The two HUG.

Eva's eyes GLAZE over a chocolate donut.

EVA

(aloud, to herself)

I love chocolate donuts.

MARY

We were thinking a little life in the room might be good for all of us, especially after my emotional display last week.

NATHANIEL

(depressed)

Don't beat yourself up about it.

Nathaniel looks at his watch, compares with clock on wall.

NATHANIEL (CONT'D)

There's a good chance Bernice won't be here. I thought Charlie might.

EVA

Bernie call you?

NATHANIEL

Bernie, I mean. And no, she didn't,
but after last week I don't know.

Nathaniel opens his notebook.

NATHANIEL (CONT'D)

Ironically, this can actually be a
sign of progress, a sense of
"growing together" when emotions
intercede the relationship between
Therapist and Patient. (beat)
And Patient and Patient.

EVA

I couldn't do your job.

Nathaniel looks at Eva, refrains from speaking, gently closes
his notebook. SIGHS.

NATHANIEL

Someone. Talk to me. Please.

MARY

I went back to the Salon.

NATHANIEL

A good move?

MARY

I needed to say "Hi" to people I
am close to. I had been trying to
pack John's things in boxes to
donate to charity, but I didn't get
very far. I think back on when my
father died, but I was a girl then.
Fifteen. This is...different. I
figured seeing the girls at the
Salon would help. John had made a
CD for me. I had left it there and
forgot. He labelled it 'John's
mushy love songs inspired by my
Mary's Muse.' Something made me go
there so I could remember him as he
was. Such a romantic.

Eva hands Mary box of Kleenex.

MARY (CONT'D)

Thank you.

Mary HONKS into a tissue.

MARY (CONT'D)

I had lunch with my son, Gary. He asked me to move in with him.

NATHANIEL

Ah, change. The only constant in our lives even when it doesn't happen overnight.

MARY

I won't. I mean, nothing to do with him, but Eva moved in with me over the weekend.

It is just what the proverbial doctor ordered for Nathaniel.

His SMILE says it all.

MARY (CONT'D)

I think I'll like having her there, having her in John's room.

EVA

Me, too. I won't have to work so many hours at the Green Line.

Eva and Mary touch hands.

Late AGAIN, Charlie ENTERS the room.

The sudden stillness is suffocating.

CHARLIE

(to Mary)

I need talk to you.

EVA

Give her time, Charlie.

MARY

I pray for you, Charlie.

Charlie looks HOPEFUL.

MARY (CONT'D)

John and I talked about this often. I thought it was weird, but I know now God was preparing us in some way to be ready to live alone.

MARY (CONT'D)

We talked about what it would be like to be without the other. We agreed it could cripple the survivor if we allowed it. But we knew that life is a gift we have to appreciate. God gives us what we can handle. He allows pain so that we can grow spiritually. Maybe help someone else in a tough spot later. John was special like that. Unlike any man I'd ever known.

Mary BLESSES herself.

Nathaniel hides his tears.

Eva LOOKS to far end of table, Nathaniel takes a tissue for himself, HANDS the box to Eva who relays it to Mary.

CHARLIE

(with attitude)

I no want to come back.

NATHANIEL

But you did and that says a lot for your character, Charlie. Thank you.

MARY

I never meant to insinuate I am an Angel by any means, Charlie. I'm human. I have feelings that I find hard to control sometimes. But I have a right to...

Charlie FIDGETS in his chair.

MARY (CONT'D)

I'm thinking, after meeting with Father Curtin, that I might do more volunteer work at the hospital. If knowing John died so that I could help someone else understand the pain of loss, I mean, no way does it make it any easier for me or them, but if in some way I can help other people. Maybe something like what you do, Nathaniel. I'm not focused too much today, but does that make sense?

NATHANIEL

"Life is suffering." By suffering we are made more whole. We're getting off on a more Clerical track here and this is probably not the venue...

Nathaniel pauses for reflection.

NATHANIEL (CONT'D)

But if it helps you to share, to pray, if in your faith you find peace, if it helps you understand you are not alone, then by all means, embrace it. It is true. We all suffer. No one promised us a rose garden. Know this. Know that you have not been singled out to suffer pain.

EVA

I used to think, well, I was taught as a child, that shit goes around and comes around. You fuck me over I'm gonna get your ass.

NATHANIEL

From the mouths of babes.

EVA

It's true. Life is dog eat dog. Sonny damn well cleared it up for me. Life is a jungle. I feel someplace in the middle though these days. We meet people, good people and bad people so we can see how living is beautiful and dangerous, too, if you don't pay attention to where you're going.

MARY

Isn't the way we were raised, how our parents were, the religion we practice, don't all of those make us who we are?

CHARLIE

I no have religion.

NATHANIEL

But isn't Religion more a belief in what we see and feel and hear? It's truth revealed through experience. Religion is so much more than what you worship. And I don't mean how you worship God, as defined as Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth, but "what" you worship. Money. Power. Is your attitude that you think the world owes you a living? Or do we owe the world for allowing us to live?

MARY

Both? All of it?

EVA

It don't make sense.

NATHANIEL

It doesn't have to make sense. It's not science. It's life. It's experience. It's what you are, what you believe. We are influenced by our surroundings, clerical, paternal, material. Familial. How we were raised. The rules our parents and teachers and Priests, too, the rules they imposed on us. All of this is who we are. And yet, at the same time we create our surroundings. We choose to be who we are as a result of what we experience and know.

EVA

God is probably pissed cause we screwed up his Garden.

NATHANIEL

I'm not talking about God. I'm saying that religion is what you believe in, how you see the world as a result of the experiences you have lived. The choices we've made.

It is a quiet moment.

Nathaniel SAGS back in his chair.

A long moment passes.

NATHANIEL (CONT'D)
What were we talking about?

EVA
You forget, Counselor?

MARY
CRS?

EVA
"Can't remember shit."

Nathaniel LAUGHS.

NATHANIEL
Everything is as it is as a direct
result of our actions, our
thoughts, our wishes.

(to Charlie)
You chose to not allow Rita to
drive home drunk.

(to Mary)
You chose to allow John to drive
you to work.

MARY
My sister's.

NATHANIEL
(impatiently)
Doesn't matter where, how or when.
It is the why of our choices that
affects us. Some choices will cause
ripple effects that will follow us.
Hours. Tomorrow. Years from now.

MARY
And so maybe I brought my pain on
by letting John drive?

NATHANIEL
Yes. And no. John's driving you
didn't "cause" the pain, per se.
But because John was driving, I
mean, it could have been you, the
passenger. Was that random?

MARY

No. It wasn't...

NATHANIEL

I know. I know. I'm just saying. We can ask forever. Will we ever know? Probably not. So was it fate? Premeditated? What lessons are there in this for you, me, everyone here, your families? What lessons are there to learn from this? We live. We die. It's everything that we do while living that will be remembered by those who survive the loss. And maybe, just maybe, that is what we are to reflect on. The "how" that person lived. Not how they died. And how we move on.

Nathaniel sits back, takes DEEP BREATH.

NATHANIEL (CONT'D)

Does any of this make sense?

EVA

I think, and I'm not really religious or nothing, but I think that God "lets" things happen to certain people, special people that we look up to, strong people who are an example to everyone.

MARY

I think I've always known that Religion is more than what Church you go to or what God you pray to. John read me something once from the Bhagavad Gita, a Buddhist text. "God is One. Men call Him by different names."

NATHANIEL

So depending on how you were raised, you will or will not believe in God as you were taught. Christianity professes Angels who communicate to those they leave behind.

NATHANIEL (CONT'D)

If the departed was a schmuck or mean or a thief, anything other than an inspiration to people, their death would not create in us the spark to look deeply into our hearts and the why of who "we" are.

EVA

(addressing Mary)

I appreciate the Group and everything, but I think God put you here, you and me in the same group so I would learn from you how to be strong. And I don't mean street strong, but in my heart. Like with that homeless dude...

NATHANIEL

So you believe in living Angels?

MARY

It seems too simple than being reminded to wear seat belts.

CHARLIE

Or angry drive.

EVA

Or not play with matches.

NATHANIEL

It doesn't explain how or why it happened, that...that...well, it bears no credence. Except in hindsight.

(beat)

Because John offered to drive, Mary should be punished? And Charlie?

(beat)

Or Eva should lose her family home because Sonny...

EVA

Was an ass...you know.

NATHANIEL

Thank you. I was going to put it "exactly" that way.

NATHANIEL (CONT'D)

And because Bernice was having an extramarital affair she should be forced to live alone? Without someone to love?

MARY

Speaking of Bernice. How will this work? Will you call her?

NATHANIEL

I will. I sense she needs greater help than we can offer her here.

EVA

That weren't no smoke high.

CUT TO:

OMNISCIENT BEYOND

RITA

I no Angel yet, but I understand.

JOHN

He's good, how he can get everyone on the same page.

RITA

It nice if I go back tell Charlie what I know now, how it is.

JOHN

You've heard of reincarnation?

SONNY

I'm taking that Seminar.

ALL ANGELS

You all are.

CUT TO:

EXT./INT. CHARLIE'S HOME - NIGHT (EST.)

Dressed still in "work clothes", Charlie washes his hands over kitchen sink. He opens fridge. It is pretty much empty. He rifles through vegetable bin. Nothing.

He settles for a meal from freezer, sticks it in microwave, sets timer.

A bottle of red wine is on the counter. He ponders a moment before he pulls the cork, pours a glass of the red, SALUTES the moment.

CHARLIE

To life. Without Rita.

Charlie takes a BIGGER SWIG.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

I sorry for not patient.

RETURN TO ROOM 304

MARY

You have a new life now, Charlie. Live it for you, for reasons you believe in and not because you don't want to be like your father. I could have driven myself to work that night. Why did I let John drive? Was I allowing him to enable me? No. I was letting him love me.

NATHANIEL

We can "why" and "why not" our choices forever and a day and nothing is going to change. We need to learn to live with what is. It is important we develop a new identity, and I don't mean we forget our Loved Ones or go off the deep end mourning. Or jump in the sack with a new love. I'm just...

EVA

(hushed)

Right on.

EXT. STREET CORNER - NIGHT (EST.)

Eva hangs with her "Homeys", though on the periphery.

She appears out of place, more or less an "observer."

Eva walks away from the "gang" without explanation.

EXT./ INT. MCDONALD'S FAST FOOD - NIGHT

Eva chows down on a "Big Mac", fries and chocolate shake.

SHOW

Eva's REFLECTION staring back at her, freezing her for a moment just as she sucks milk-shake through straw.

Her expression evolves from serious to smiling.

EVA
Right on, Girl.

EXT./ INT. BERNICE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT (EST.)

FUNKY MUSIC OVER

Bernice does PUSH-UPS and SIT-UPS on living room floor.

INT. MARY'S HOME

Mary and Eva PACK John's clothes in boxes and plastic bags, UNPACK Eva's belongings to dressers and closet.

A healthy leafy-green plant sits on Dresser.

EVA
I hope I don't kill it. I ain't never taken care of plants before.

MARY
Water it lightly once a week, turn it so it grows evenly. Let Mother Nature do the rest.

Return to Room 304

MARY (CONT'D)
We kept John's books.

EVA

Like maybe I might read one.

MARY

...and his stereo. Eva didn't have one. But everything else we donated to Helping Up Mission so someone, a homeless or jobless man, maybe. Maybe John's grace will help him.

Nathaniel nods. His smile wry with fatigue.

A silent moment follows.

NATHANIEL

Our time is just about up.

Mary turns toward Nathaniel, then back to Charlie.

MARY

Are you going to be okay?

There is a moment of absolute silence.

NATHANIEL

Mary? Charlie? I don't know how this happened. There was no way to know. And yet, it is all sublime.

MARY

Life...it's so...what do I want to say? Iffy? So strange sometimes.

EVA

You were brought together by God so you could see the other's pain.

NATHANIEL

To quote a not so famous person in this very room. Life's a bitch.

Mary BLESSES herself.

Charlie WIPES his eyes with a handkerchief.

Mary regards Charlie with a look so tender.

Insecure in the emotional context, Charlie looks away.

NATHANIEL (CONT'D)
Some things will take longer than
six weeks to change.

CHARLIE
I ain't never changed. Now I am.

NATHANIEL
And you will continue to do so.

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT

As Mary, Eva and Charlie enter the lot, a lone figure can be
made out at the back end.

Bernice approaches in all her glory.

BERNICE
Don't worry. I'm straight.

Bernice HUGS Mary.

BERNICE (CONT'D)
My sista from another motha.

MARY
I take that as a compliment.

EVA
Why didn't you come in?

Eva and Bernice offer tentative STREET HANDSHAKES.

BERNICE
I ain't good admitting how much of
a you-know-what I can be sometimes.

EVA
We ain't in the room. You can say
the "F" word.

BERNICE
Huh. Yeah. I can be a f...

Nathaniel approaches.

NATHANIEL
Bernice. A hug. I need a hug.

Bernice wraps herself around Nathaniel.

BERNICE

Last time I went home, got a bigger buzz on, saw my face in the mirror doing it, you know, the bong to my lips and I didn't even recognize myself. How would Frankie? I want her to be proud.

NATHANIEL

Like you should be.

BERNICE

Oh yeah. And it ain't over til it's over, but I think I got it licked. I'm doing NA Meetings.

(to Charlie)

You got bigger balls than me, man, coming back after leaving.

Charlie and Bernice HUG.

All linger in the lot with their "good-byes."

MARY

Why don't we get together for dinner some night?

BERNICE

I make a mean Soul Food.

Charlie CRIES.

EVA

What's up, Charlie?

CHARLIE

I'm happy. Sad, but happy.

MARY

Amen.

Charlie and Mary HUG.

CHARLIE

I bring food. I cook.

EVA

Hard to believe. You be getting so skinny, boy.

MARY
Our place isn't really big enough.

BERNICE
Mine's a mess. Still.

CHARLIE
Come my home. I write directions.

MARY
Should we make a date?

BERNICE
Phone numbers.

NATHANIEL
Here. I made copies of everyone's
phone number.

EVA
'cept mine. I phoneless.

MARY
She's with me.

EVA
Oh yeah.

CUT TO:

OMNISCIENT BEYOND

SONNY
I just realized I don't miss
smoking anymore.

FRANKIE
You've been here how long?

JOHN
Forever.

SONNY
And I love my hair.

RITA
I love your hair, too.

SONNY
You do?

FRANKIE
What do you care? You're dead.

SONNY
Yeah, but I still got feelings. It used to be angry feelings. Now I just got feelings. And a big feeling is that if your girlfriend's boyfriend didn't kill you somebody else would've.

FRANKIE
(mimicking Rita)
Hindsight, ja?

CUT TO:

INT. BERNICE'S APARTMENT

RAP MUSIC OVER

Bernice DANCES.

Except for a single cactus Plant by the window, the place is still a mess.

INT. - CHARLIE'S HOME

Charlie VACUUMS living room, WATERS the many plants, TRIMS the dead leaves not accustomed to the lack of attention.

EXT./INT. JOHN AND MARY'S HOME - FRIDAY NIGHT

Mary and Eva watch television.

Telephone sits on sofa between them.

MARY
When a Spa Client is fifteen minutes late, it's a "no show".

EVA

Let's you and me eat out. My treat.

MARY

We've got Chinese food, remember?

EVA

It'll still be good tomorrow.

MARY

Okay. Yeah.

Both look at the telephone, wondering their own "why" and "why not" of the moment.

Telephone RINGS.

EVA

Talk about timing.

Telephone RINGS.

EVA (CONT'D)

You want me to answer?

Mary raises an index finger indicating "wait".

Telephone RINGS.

EVA (CONT'D)

Ah ha. Playing hard to get.

Answering machine picks up.

JOHN (O.S.)

If you dialed the right number
you've reached John and Mary. If
you didn't dial the right number
you reached us anyway. So tell us
what you want and we'll think about
calling you back.

Mary can be heard in the background.

MARY (O.S.)

You can't leave it like that.

BEEP

Eva leans lovingly into Mary.

EVA
You're such a romantic.

Mary picks up phone.

MARY
Hello!
(beat)
They hung up.

She replaces the phone to its cradle.

MARY (CONT'D)
John's voice is soothing.

EVA
You're cool, girl.

EXT./INT. UPSCALE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Charlie dines with an attractive thirty-something-year-old WOMAN. He is very animated. She is only slightly impressed.

EXT. GRACE FELLOWSHIP CHURCH - NIGHT (EST.)

INT. MEETING HALL

Bernice "shares" in this crowded NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS Meeting.

Later

EXT./INT. NEIGHBORHOOD RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Bernice and a forty-something-year-old BLACK MALE dine in local Bar Restaurant.

Although he appears to be having a good time, Bernie is miles away in her mind, wishing it was Frankie sitting across.

EXT. / INT. GRACE'S HOME - DAY (EST.)

Matriarch, MARGE (mid-seventy-year-old) and her Grandson Gary do magic tricks for Marge's four GREAT GRANDCHILDREN.

LOTS of healthy green and colorful plants thrive in this loving environment.

Mary's sisters, GRACE (a young fifty), younger KATE (forty-years) ROSE and CHARLOTTE (early-forties) and Mary OBSERVE.

Eva stands with Mary as her guest.

EVA
This how you grew up?

KATE
Cool, huh?

MARY
It is.

CHARLOTTE
It was.

EVA
No wonder you're so special.

MARY
Little Eddie looks more and more
like Daddy every day.

GRACE
You said that about me and Daddy.

ROSE
Right. You were Little Bobby.

MARY
You used to wear his vest. You
remember that?

GRACE
I loved that vest.

All LAUGH

Marge joins her children and their Spouses.

Kids aren't ready to quit yet.

KIDS
Don't stop now, Grandma.

ROSE
Move in with us, Grandma.

MARGE
(to kids)
Grandma's got to rest.
(to daughters)
What are you talking about?

ROSE
Grace used to be 'Little Bobby.'

FOUR HUSBANDS join in.

ED
I've seen pictures. It's more in
the way she smokes cigars.

GRACE
I don't smoke cigars.

RICHARD
We've got a picture of Little Bobby
at Halloween one year.

ROSE
Right. You had a cigar.

GRACE
Oh, God. I remember that costume.
(to Mary)
You were my sidekick, remember?

MARY
We were who?

ROSE
Pancho and Cisco.

MARY
Right. I was Pancho.

GRACE
You were Cisco. You used to say,
"Cisco's older. I'm older." You
were proud being the big sister.

MARY
I still am.

Four sisters do a MASS HUG.

MARGE

You were a proud little girl.
Wouldn't do anything you didn't
want to do even if everyone else
was doing it.

ROSE

Like getting married.

A QUIET, REFLECTIVE MOMENT PREVAILS

Mary's son, Gary saves the moment.

Gary GASPS, slaps his hand to his heart.

GARY

What? I was illegitimate?

Mary continues the ruse.

MARY

(to Rose)

See what you've done? I never told
him that.

Rose is not quite sure of how to respond.

ROSE

I'm sorry.

MARY

Only kidding.

GARY

(taunting)

We got you, Aunt Rosey.

ROSE

You brats.

Marge moves in close to Mary.

MARGE

John was worth the wait.

CUT TO:

OMNISCIENT BEYOND

John observes, focusing his love on Mary.

CUT TO:

RETURN TO SCENE

Little MEGHAN runs into the room carrying a picture.

LITTLE MEGHAN
Mommy, look what I found. A picture
of Aunty Mary and Uncle John.

Meghan's Mother, Kate YANKS photo from Meghan's hands.

KATE
Meghan. Don't touch things that
don't belong to you.

MARY
Let me see that.

CLOSE IN on photo of
John and Mary on their Honeymoon.
Stillness prevails.

MARY (CONT'D)
Wasn't he beautiful?

MEGHAN
Mommy says Daddy beautiful.

A tender moment replaces the awkwardness.

ED
She does? You never tell me that.

KATE
No, Honey. You're handsome.

ROSE
I'm hungry. Who's hungry?

ALL CHILDREN

I am. Me.

Marge and Rose and Charlotte go to kitchen.

CHARLOTTE

Dinner time.

KATE

I'm sorry.

MARY

Yeah, me too.

CUT TO:

OMNISCIENT BEYOND

RITA

Charles do nice in yard, ja?
He need me clean house.

JOHN

You're lucky he can't hear you.

SONNY

I never learned to clean house.

RITA

Men no like to clean. Except my
Charlie. He good man.

SONNY

Eva didn't clean either. And she
sure as hell wasn't a man.

Sonny WATCHES over Eva.

SONNY (CONT'D)

I wish I had been nicer to you. I
ain't never seen you so happy.

Rita WAVES at Charlie, TOSSES him a KISS.

JOHN

I'm glad Eva's there for Mary.

SONNY

Who woulda thunk it?

FRANKIE

My Bernie's smiling and she ain't
even stoned.

JOHN

They're all gonna have good days
and bad, just like we did. It's a
journey. Come on. It's time for
Spiritual Exchange class.

ORIGINAL MUSIC over.

The Four SKIP arm-in-arm...

FADE OUT