

**"A VISCERAL, POWERFUL
& BEAUTIFUL PLAY."**

Chicago Tribune

MARY JANE



WRITTEN BY

AMY HERZOG

DIRECTED BY

ANNE KAUFFMAN

STARRING

RACHEL McADAMS

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MTC
MANHATTAN
THEATRE CLUB

Photo by Jason Bell

MARY JANE

By Amy Herzog

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Contact: John Buzzetti, WME
jbuzzetti@wmeentertainment.com

Characters

Mary Jane.....a woman in her thirties

Part One

Ruthie.....a building superintendent

Sherry.....a nurse

Brianne.....a Facebook friend

Amelia.....Sherry's niece, a college student

Part Two

Dr. Toros.....a pediatric intensivist

Chaya.....a Hasidic woman

Kat.....a music therapist

Tenkei.....A Buddhist nun

Besides Mary Jane, all the roles are doubled, so that five actors are required:

Ruthie/Tenkei (sixties or seventies), Sherry/Dr. Toros (forties or fifties), Brianne/Chaya (thirties or early forties), Amelia/Kat (twenties).

Setting

New York City. Now-ish, June – October

Part One

The living room/kitchen of a junior one-bedroom apartment in Queens. Mary Jane also sleeps in this room.

Part Two

The “parents room” on the pediatric floor of a Manhattan hospital.

A shared room in the Pediatric ICU or PICU (pronounced PICK-you).

Ideally, the play is performed without an intermission.

Note: A forward slash (/) indicates overlapping dialogue, where the following line should interrupt.

This play was a commission for the Yale Repertory Theatre.

PART ONE

Scene One: *I'd be better off dancing in a forest*

Mary Jane's apartment. The living room/kitchen of a small one-bedroom apartment in Queens. In the living room is a pullout couch that serves as Mary Jane's bed.

Ruthie is plunging the kitchen sink and trying to fish muck out.

Mary Jane has a genuine, easy cheer.

MARY JANE

And you know when the train stops underground, and you're waiting, like okay, train traffic ahead or whatever, but there's no announcement and after a while the engine cuts out and the lights dim and there's this collective groan of – "Ohhhhhh no –"

RUTHIE

(Plunging)

Mm-hm.

MARY JANE

And we had these kids in our car, these breakdancers – you know: "Showtime! What time is it? Showtime!" And they had already done their little – well not little, these guys were actually – I notice some people don't watch, on principle, they bury their heads in their books or their phones, but I always feel like they're kids, and I'm sorry, I can't stand on my hands while the subway car is moving, so I admit it, I'm impressed –

RUTHIE

(Same)

Right.

MARY JANE

So the train is stopped, and they had already done their – and I was the only person who had given them anything – sixty cents, or what was in my pocket, so they're sort of *seething*, and the doors to the next cars are locked so they're stuck, and they're *mad* at us, they're so mad –

RUTHIE

Uh-huh.

MARY JANE

One of them says, *really* loudly, he says, "I'd be better off dancing in a forest!"
(She laughs delightedly)

Which I thought was so funny. “In a forest.” But we were stopped more than twenty minutes due to a sick passenger, they said.

RUTHIE

That happened to me last week.

MARY JANE

Uh-huh?

RUTHIE

We were stopped, thirty, forty minutes?

MARY JANE

Yeah?

RUTHIE

He said it was someone under the train.

MARY JANE

(Horrified)

What?

RUTHIE

Yeah, he finally came on, he said we’re delayed due to, uh, due to someone under the train.

(pause. She goes back to plunging)

MARY JANE

It’s been draining slowly for a while...

RUTHIE

Yup.

MARY JANE

I guess I should’ve called you earlier.

(she keeps plunging)

RUTHIE

It’s usually the bathroom sink.

MARY JANE

Hm?

That gets clogged.

RUTHIE

Right, because of the...

MARY JANE

Hair. Yup. Dead skin.

RUTHIE

(brief pause)

I might have to call the plumber.

MARY JANE

Sorry, Ruthie.

RUTHIE

Not your fault. Old pipes.

(pause)

MARY JANE

You want a coke?

RUTHIE

Yeah.

(Mary Jane gets two cans of coke. They open them and sip.)

You alone here tonight?

MARY JANE

Ronda called out sick.

RUTHIE

Which one's Ronda?

MARY JANE

Um. Short hair?

RUTHIE

Nose ring?

MARY JANE

Nose ring?

Yeah. RUTHIE

Oh no -- Luisa. She moved to Florida. MARY JANE

I don't think I met Ronda. RUTHIE

You want to meet her? MARY JANE

Yeah, she's gonna be coming in and out of the building. RUTHIE

I'll introduce you. MARY JANE

(pause)

Florida. RUTHIE

(Ruthie makes a face)

You always lived here, Ruthie? MARY JANE

I was born up in Troy. You know Troy? RUTHIE

(Mary Jane shakes her head)

It's, uh -- never mind. I've lived here since I was a teenager. Ran away from home.

Yeah? MARY JANE

Yeah. RUTHIE

(she laughs like it's a funny memory)

Why? MARY JANE

The usual reasons. RUTHIE

MARY JANE

Do you have kids?

RUTHIE

Uh-huh.

(She doesn't elaborate. Pause. A monitor beeps offstage. Mary Jane goes into the bedroom for ten or twenty seconds. The loud drone of the suction machine can be heard, then the sound of it sucking up some saliva. The beeping stops. Mary Jane returns, resumes her seat and her coke.)

RUTHIE

You seem to be...

You seem to be someone who's carrying a lot of tension in her body.

MARY JANE

Really?

RUTHIE

I'm partly inferring and partly it's what I see in your body.

MARY JANE

Okay.

RUTHIE

You're very nice, very pleasant, you're very pleasant and with what you're dealing with I wonder if you have an outlet for expression or if you're absorbing that all in your body. It's just a thought. It might not be a useful thought.

MARY JANE

No, it's / really –

RUTHIE

Because that's how my sister got cancer.

MARY JANE

Oh.

RUTHIE

Not to scare you. It was Hodgkin's Lymphoma, which is the good kind, you don't want non-Hodgkin's. You don't want non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma.

MARY JANE

Right.

RUTHIE

She's doing well. She's N.E.D., that means no evidence of disease.

MARY JANE

Great.

RUTHIE

They don't say cancer free, that's not the right, the right thing to say, because actually no one is cancer free, you have cancers in your body right now, springing up all the time, then your body shuts them down. They say N.E.D., no evidence of disease. She's doing well.

MARY JANE

I'm so glad.

RUTHIE

But chemo was...

MARY JANE

Sure.

RUTHIE

It's poison. They dump poison in your veins. My sister said she could taste it in her mouth, it tasted like metal. Now she does a lot of different things, she's changed her life around, she meditates, she does Tai Chi. It's very inspiring, it's inspiring to me, because she didn't have to take such a positive— she could've just –
A lot of people do.

MARY JANE

Mm-hm.

RUTHIE

I thought maybe I don't have to get cancer first, I can learn from her. It's something I wanted to share with you. It might not be useful. It's an offering. It's just an offering.

MARY JANE
(Sincerely)

Thank you.

RUTHIE

You're welcome.

(brief pause)

MARY JANE

So you –

RUTHIE

I do yoga, I swim at the Y, I get deep tissue massage. But that's just me. There are all different ways to...

MARY JANE

Right.

RUTHIE

But it's the body. That's what I've learned. Your trauma's written in the cells of your body.

(pause)

MARY JANE

I feel...I feel...

RUTHIE

Uh-huh?

MARY JANE

I feel pretty okay most of the time. I'm tired?

RUTHIE

Sure.

MARY JANE

But I think, I think sometimes when other people look at me – ha! People who know what's going on in / my –

RUTHIE

Uh-huh.

MARY JANE

They're like, *whoa*, but actually, being inside it? I don't know, it's not so... I think they'd be surprised.

RUTHIE

As I said it was an offering.

MARY JANE

Thank you.

RUTHIE

You're welcome.

(pause. The monitor beeps offstage. Mary Jane stands, it stops beeping, she sits back down.)

What about the closet door, is that -- ?

MARY JANE

Perfect. No problem since you fixed / the –

RUTHIE

Good.

(brief pause)

MARY JANE

I am very tired.

RUTHIE

Well / yeah because you -- !

MARY JANE

I used to be someone who treasured sleep, I *cherished* it. Before, if you had asked if there's one thing I couldn't do without, I would have said sleep. But...

RUTHIE

But you adjust.

MARY JANE

It's amazing.

RUTHIE

It is amazing. It is / amazing.

MARY JANE

Yeah! The things that become just –

RUTHIE

What they are.

MARY JANE

When Alex was born a friend of mine, she's since moved to San Diego, her father was – anyway she had been through a lot of stuff, and when Alex was born, she said to me, "Mary Jane, you'll still have good days and bad days." And at the time I was like what kind of thing is that to say, I couldn't understand it at all.

RUTHIE

Your brain / was –

MARY JANE

I mean it wasn't a *bad* thing to say, it just wasn't...

RUTHIE

(finishing her sentence)

Great.

MARY JANE

(correcting her)

No, it wasn't...

RUTHIE

Timely.

MARY JANE

No, uh...

(she looks for it)

But anyway, now I think, what my friend said...now I think that was the best thing, maybe, that anybody said to me at that time, or the truest.

RUTHIE

Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

(pause. Ruthie notices something.)

MARY JANE

What?

(Mary Jane looks where Ruthie is looking.)

RUTHIE

You don't, uh. You don't have the window guards up.

MARY JANE

I...oh.

Sorry, Ruthie. I took them down. I'm sorry.

RUTHIE

Just in here, or in the bedroom too?

MARY JANE

It's just that he loves looking out the windows, especially when he's sick and I can't take him outside? And it seems like such a small thing but the bars actually do bother him.

RUTHIE

I understand. It's just – it's the law.

MARY JANE

I know.

RUTHIE

Even if he can't climb up, *I* know that.

MARY JANE

I know you know.

RUTHIE

But I checked. I did check, and there are no exceptions for...for kids like Alex.

MARY JANE

I just thought – you did your job, you installed them, you're in the clear, it was me who took them down, and if anything happens – I can't imagine how anything could – but I'll take responsibility.

RUTHIE

But now I saw it. I saw that they're not in there.

MARY JANE

Right, but...

(Mary Jane laughs. This is so silly. Oh well.)

Right. I understand.

(pause)

RUTHIE

I mean I guess – I guess it's possible I wouldn't have noticed.

MARY JANE

Yes! You were in here ten minutes / before –

RUTHIE

Let's not talk about it. Let's not talk about it anymore.

MARY JANE

Okay.

(Ruthie adjusts her body to not see out the window)

Can I just say that I admire your seriousness when it comes to your job. You're an excellent superintendent. You're easily the best superintendent I have ever had.

RUTHIE

Thank you.

(Ruthie finishes her coke and goes to the sink. She plunges one more time. No dice. She puts down the plunger, resigned.)

Okay.

Scene Two: *Like the sun was packed in a...*

Mary Jane and Sherry sit at the kitchen table eating their separate dinners.

SHERRY

I took Amelia to get her hair done today.

MARY JANE

Uh-huh.

SHERRY

My regular hairdresser, who knows me well.

MARY JANE

Right, the one with the child who -- ?

SHERRY

Oh yes, I've told you about my hairdresser. She said to Amelia, "how long are you staying with your auntie?" Amelia said, "I don't know, I bought a one way ticket!"

MARY JANE

(laughing)

She's never leaving!

SHERRY

My baby sister keeps asking, "When is she coming home? I miss my daughter!"

MARY JANE

Ohhhh –

SHERRY

No, but my sister's happy to have her out of the house, because Amelia is so shy, she spent her teenage years reading in her room, and she's been living at home while she's in college. And you know, she told me she's still a virgin. She said "I'm not ready!"

MARY JANE

How old is she?

SHERRY

She's going to be twenty-two!

MARY JANE

Well, good for her.

SHERRY

That's what I said, I said don't rush it. But I was surprised! Almost twenty-two!

MARY JANE

I think it's great. I can't remember any of the sex I had before twenty-two.

SHERRY

Me neither!

MARY JANE

Maybe one – nope. No, nothing.

SHERRY

That's what I told her, I said, "College boys? You haven't missed anything. You can do better by yourself."

(Mary Jane laughs)

Then I told my sister, I said, "You know she's still a virgin?" She said "Really?" She didn't know!

MARY JANE

Oh no!

SHERRY

Well Amelia doesn't tell her mother anything. It's because she wants to *be* her mother, I've told my sister that, I said, "You see how she watches you? You see how she admires you?" But my sister doesn't see that. It's hard to be a mother and it's hard to be a daughter. We were all laughing, at my hairdresser's. She said, "I don't know when I'm going home, I bought a one-way ticket!"

MARY JANE

She loves visiting you.

SHERRY

(pleased)

I have no regrets, about not having children. I focused on my career, on my friends; that was right for me. But I love being an aunt. I told her she should come meet Alex. I said, "You have to meet my little prince!" I show her pictures, she says he's the handsomest little boy she's ever seen.

MARY JANE

Bring her! Oh bring her, we'd love to meet her!

SHERRY

We'll see. She's still shy.

(Mary Jane opens her laptop to do some work.)

MARY JANE

Can you get these printed before I come in at...no, I can't, Kelly, 'cause I have to drop Alex off at his day program at 8:30, and you know that.

(She writes back.)

SHERRY

That woman.

MARY JANE

She wants to do the right thing by me so much, she does, but she's also trying to climb the ladder, it's like – it's daily moral agony for her, I tell you, it's really something to behold.

SHERRY

I still say you should go to nursing school. You're a natural, the money's much better than what / you're doing.

MARY JANE

If I could get paid to take care of Alex I'd do it.

SHERRY

It should work like that, but it doesn't.

MARY JANE

Anyway, I can't get any more student loans. I'm sure I'm on some kind of blacklist. You type my name in the computer, a big 'X' comes up, like when you get a strike in bowling.

SHERRY

I remember the day I finished paying my loans. Got myself a steak...a bottle of Cabernet...

MARY JANE

(laughing)

Rub it in, Sherry!

(A monitor beeps offstage, Mary Jane stands.)

SHERRY

I got it.

(Sherry exits. A moment later the beeping stops. Sherry reenters rolling the IV pole for Alex's feedings)

It was just the sensor, he kicked it off in his sleep. It's lost all its stick.

MARY JANE

I meant to call today about getting new ones.

SHERRY

Putting it on your list.

MARY JANE

Thank you, darlin’.

(Sherry makes a note, then begins to prepare a G-Tube feeding.)

SHERRY

When I picked Alex up at his program this afternoon?

MARY JANE

Mm-hm?

SHERRY

He had a toy on his tray, one of those ‘busy boxes,’ he couldn’t quite make the animals pop up but he was reaching for it, he was trying –

MARY JANE

Uh-huh –

SHERRY

And – who’s that cute little girl, the deaf one?

MARY JANE

Nabiha? Or Zoe also has hearing / aids.

SHERRY

Zoe. She ran up to his chair and grabbed the toy right off his tray. And Alex just looked at her, you know that look?

(Sherry imitates his dry, unimpressed stare. Mary Jane laughs)

“Really? You’re just going to go ahead and take that? Anybody going to help me here? Teachers? Anybody?” And I was laughing, and Miss Dana said, “He makes us laugh all day, he’s our little comedian.”

MARY JANE

I’m glad he was playing with a toy, he usually wants to sit and watch the fish in that dinky little / tank.

SHERRY

He loves those fish.

MARY JANE

I gotta get him to the aquarium this summer. Someone told me they have sea lions that act out skirts. And the Natural History Museum. The planetarium.

SHERRY

Yes! Dream big, mommy!

MARY JANE

You don't think I can do it?

SHERRY

I absolutely one hundred percent think you can do it.

(brief pause)

MARY JANE

Hey, is your garden okay? After all that rain?

SHERRY

It's fine. I live on a slight hill. That's nice of you to ask.

MARY JANE

I was thinking of you, that was crazy!

SHERRY

Wasn't it? Amelia said, "Is this normal, for New York?" I said, "There is no more normal."

MARY JANE

Right?

SHERRY

No, the garden is fine, the tomatoes will be ripe next month and I'll bring you some.

MARY JANE

Ohhhhh....those tomatoes...

SHERRY

I remember how much you liked them.

MARY JANE

They were like little...like bursts of...like the sun was packed in a...they were so good.

SHERRY

This year I'll bring you some basil too.

(Sherry hangs the bag of formula on the IV-pole. She goes to set the rate on the feeding pump.)

I'd better get his night feed started. Are we doing forty-five per hour?

MARY JANE

Tonight let's do thirty.

SHERRY

Why so slow?

MARY JANE

Because – oh. Because he vomited last night.

SHERRY

I thought we had that figured out.

MARY JANE

Well, maybe we do. I think that – never mind.

SHERRY

No, what? Who was here last night, Donna?

MARY JANE

I think he needed suctioning, he was flat on his back...he might have had a little, like a mini-seizure...

(Sherry waits for more of an explanation)

I was recovering from a – I had a migraine yesterday / afternoon –

SHERRY

Oh, no.

MARY JANE

It wasn't that bad, but so I was sleeping that post-migraine dead sleep, and I heard the oxygen monitor going off, and I was lying here like, maybe if I just stay here quietly with my eyes closed that'll just – go away – but it didn't, so I went in there and he was on his back, gagging, and –

SHERRY

Donna -- ?

MARY JANE

You know she works two other jobs.

SHERRY

Asleep?

MARY JANE

She woke up when he vomited. She helped me clean him up.

SHERRY

Oh, so she did you that favor.

MARY JANE

(laughing)

She acted like it was a favor.

SHERRY

I'm going to tell the agency.

MARY JANE

No!

SHERRY

That's not acceptable, and it's not safe!

MARY JANE

They won't be able to fill the shifts. We've already lost so many nurses, everyone's burned out -- and they're scared, they say the case is too hard.

SHERRY

It's not hard. These are highly trained RNs making fifty-six dollars an hour. They can stay awake and pay attention.

MARY JANE

Well, and it's not exactly a luxurious work environment.

SHERRY

What are you talking about?

MARY JANE

Hashina told me when she's at her other case, she has her own room with a TV, and there's one of those coffee makers with the little pods --

SHERRY

She shouldn't have told you that.

MARY JANE

Don't tell the agency. I don't want any more empty shifts, we have three anyway this month and those nights I just don't sleep. Please.

(Sherry sets the rate on the pump and rolls it offstage into the bedroom. After a few moments, we hear the "beeeep" of the pump starting, then the faint whirring of the motor, then a few seconds of the loud suction machine.)

SHERRY (OS)

Sh – sh – sh – that's okay, my prince.

(Mary Jane works on her computer. Sherry reenters.)

SHERRY

If he seized last night...

MARY JANE

He may not have. I didn't actually see him seize.

SHERRY

But if he did...

MARY JANE

Yeah.

SHERRY

Maybe a good idea to call his neurologist, there might be some room to go up on the medication. Because that would be the second time.

MARY JANE

I hope that's not what it was.

SHERRY

Me too.

(Mary Jane nods. Sherry goes into the kitchen for a final errand – perhaps rinsing out the suction canister. Mary Jane watches her.)

MARY JANE

You brought us those tomatoes a year ago.

SHERRY

Mm?

MARY JANE

You've been working with us for a year.

SHERRY

A little over a year.

(pause)

MARY JANE

Happy anniversary.

(pause. Sherry finishes what she's doing. She turns off a light.)

SHERRY

Get some sleep.

Scene Three: *(Ladybug)*

In darkness, the sound of a music box playing softly. Mary Jane stirs from her sleep on the pullout couch. A few moments later, she sits up. She goes to the sink for a glass of water.

Sherry enters, silhouetted in the doorframe.

MARY JANE

He's up?

SHERRY

Playing, smiling. Doesn't want to sleep.

(she holds out a toy)

Batteries died.

(Mary Jane takes the toy – a stuffed ladybug with a hard plastic shell. Sherry exits into the bedroom. In darkness, Mary Jane searches in a drawer and finds new batteries. When she pops them in, the ladybug lights up, casting stars and a crescent moon on the ceiling and walls through holes in its plastic shell. Red, then blue, then green, then red again. Mary Jane stops where she is, slowly moving the ladybug around and watching the constellation spin. Offstage, the music box has slowed and Sherry rewinds it. It continues. Mary Jane lies on her bed with the ladybug on her belly, stargazing.)

Scene Four: *How do you come back from that*

Mary Jane is making drinks in the kitchen. Brianne is taking notes.

MARY JANE

If they don't offer you all the services you think he needs, say PT or speech therapy, you don't sign at the end of the meeting. That's what I didn't learn for the first year; you don't have to sign, and if you don't sign, you go into mediation.

BRIANNE

(anxiously)

Mediation?

MARY JANE

It's a meeting with a neutral person, it's just another meeting. I've had good luck with mediation, it's always worth it to ask, the system can be intimidating but –

(Brianne nods as she writes)

Right? But if you're asking for what's reasonable then you / shouldn't –

BRIANNE

So what if I ask for what I think is reasonable, but it turns out he needs more?

MARY JANE

You can always ask for an increase. You don't have to wait for the – oh this is important! They don't tell you this. You don't have to wait for one of the meetings with the city to ask for an increase. The meeting you're having next week – you're gonna have one like it every six months? But you can ask for an increase in services at any time.

BRIANNE

At any time.

MARY JANE

These meetings – to warn you, they can last like three hours and I literally don't know what they're for. They'll say, "What are your goals for Alex in the next six months?" And I say... "Uh, one of my goals is for him to get head control." And they say, "so that...?"

(Mary Jane imitates their coaxing expression)

And I say... "So that he can hold up his head?" And they say, "In order to..."

(again)

The answer is always "to better explore his environment." But they can't say it. You have to say it. I swear, I'm saving you days of your life with that. Oh. Equipment. So I don't forget. Never mind I can come back to that.

BRIANNE

(really trying to keep up)

Equipment -- ?

MARY JANE

At the meeting next week, request an equipment evaluation. You're gonna need, um, a positioning chair.

(Mary Jane comes over with the drinks)

BRIANNE

Thank you.

MARY JANE

Cheers.

BRIANNE

A positioning chair?

MARY JANE

For sitting at the table, or for feedings, you'll get one with a tray.

(Brienne writes furiously)

This may seem like a ton but I didn't get on the equipment train until Alex was like one-and-a-half, and I was mad nobody told me, and the reason they don't tell you is it costs / them money –

BRIANNE

No, go on.

MARY JANE

An adaptive stroller, make sure it's weighted so it can carry his suction machine on the back. You have portable suction, right?

(Brienne nods. Mary Jane goes to look for something)

And his oxygen – is he on oxygen?

BRIANNE

Just at night.

MARY JANE

That's good! This is our stroller, its made by a company called Ottobock; all this equipment is made by German and Scandinavian companies, which means the design is great but it's a huge pain to get replacement parts.

Oh; a bath chair, an adjustable bath chair that can recline, double check there's no metal; this should be obvious, but it rusts.

(Mary Jane hands Brienne a stroller hook she found)

Ummmmmm.

AFO's, which are foot and ankle braces, they come in really cute patterns, Alex loves his.

BRIANNE
(referring to the stroller hook)

What's this?

MARY JANE

That's the kind of stroller hook you need to hang the suction machine on the stroller. You can't get just any kind; get that kind. Keep that one, it's an extra.

BRIANNE

/Thank you.

MARY JANE

For trunk support you're welcome! For trunk support there are different kinds of vests – they prevent scoliosis, and help with sitting up, with stamina for sitting. Um.

What am I forgetting?

Oh oh oh oh oh.

(This is great advice)

Get a stander. Get a stander.

BRIANNE

A stander?

MARY JANE

It's – it'll support him while he stands, it holds him upright, so he can – it improves bone density, and joint, um...formation. Growing kids need to stand. Here look.

(Mary Jane has brought something up on her phone.)

That's Alex in his stander, see? So he's strapped in...

BRIANNE

Okay...uh-huh....

(Brienne is overwhelmed, by the picture, by it all.)

But that doesn't hurt...?

MARY JANE

No! He likes it.

(Mary Jane puts her phone away.)

Do you have some questions? I know I'm going fast.

BRIANNE

Um...

(Brienne hardly knows where to begin.)

I'm not sure I understand the point of a bath chair?

MARY JANE

Oh...

BRIANNE

I just get in the bath with him. I just hold him.

MARY JANE

Right, but... as he gets bigger. And heavier.

(Brianne digests that thought)

Alex is only two and half, but I already have back pain from lifting him. And it just keeps getting harder.

(pause. Mary Jane realizes that Brianne is crying. Mary Jane is suddenly mortified by all the talking she has been doing. She gets Brianne a tissue.)

BRIANNE

I'll be fine in one sec.

MARY JANE

Listen to me, I'm like –

(she does an imitation of herself shaking an instructional finger and lecturing Brianne)

Blaaaaaaaaaaaaa!

I'm sorry, Brianne!

BRIANNE

No...this is so nice of you...

(pause. Brianne recovers.)

MARY JANE

How do you know Kelly?

BRIANNE

She was at my high school a few years above me? I don't really. I just follow her on Instagram and I guess she saw some of my posts after Seth was born...told me I should message you...

MARY JANE

I work for Kelly. She's my boss.

BRIANNE

So you're in real estate development?

MARY JANE

I'm an administrative assistant.

BRIANNE

Oh, okay!

MARY JANE

I was getting my teaching degree when Alex was born. Had to put that on hold for a minute.

(An alarm sounds in the other room – a different alarm than we’ve heard before. Mary Jane gives it a few seconds before calling off.)

Donna? Is that the feeding?

(pause. The alarm continues.)

Donna?

(Mary Jane waits a few more seconds; just as she’s standing to go into the other room the alarm stops.)

Thank you!

BRIANNE

Is Kelly nice to work for?

MARY JANE

Yeah.

(Brianne smells a rat)

BRIANNE

Like I said, I don’t really know her.

MARY JANE

Wait, what did my face just do?

BRIANNE

She’s tough?

MARY JANE

No she’s, yeah, there’s been some stress on the job lately. I’m out of sick days. And vacation days. And it’s only July. It’s a little tense. It’s a little tense.

BRIANNE

Oh, no.

MARY JANE

She went to college with my sister, they were tight. So she hired me a year and a half ago as a favor to my sister because I needed the benefits, it’s great health insurance, it covers home nursing and everything. I really am so grateful.

BRIANNE

Uh-huh.

MARY JANE

And when I started I was able to work from home two days a week which was awesome, but now they want everyone back in the office full time. And Alex had a bad winter, we were in the hospital a couple times, and I'm letting Kelly down and that's kind of a loaded situation. She's a good person. She's doing her best.

(brief pause)

BRIANNE

Did you see the pic she posted yesterday with the –

(Mary Jane almost does a spit-take. They both laugh and feel bad about it.)

MARY JANE

Sometimes I think I should be the one to tell her to stop.

BRIANNE

Definitely not.

MARY JANE

But -- ? Isn't it actually worse? Not to tell her?

BRIANNE

Social media in general for me right now, with what we've been going through with the baby?

MARY JANE

Oh, I know.

BRIANNE

I'm like...

(She stares glassily at an imaginary computer screen.)

This. Is. The world. People. Are. Like this.

MARY JANE

It's true.

BRIANNE

Especially about their kids.

(Mary Jane feels for Brianne but doesn't, generally, like to indulge in people hating.)

MARY JANE

Do you work?

BRIANNE

I'm so lucky, I don't have to right now. My husband's...

MARY JANE

Good.

BRIANNE

I was only planning to take my ten weeks of paid leave, but then...

MARY JANE

That's great. To have that time.

BRIANNE

Yeah, no, I know I'm really lucky.

(That word doesn't ring right. She self-consciously drinks her drink.)

I'll get back to it, though. I miss working. I'm in PR.

MARY JANE

That sounds...fast-paced!

BRIANNE

Before Seth was born I was just starting to break into disaster management, which is what I really want to do.

MARY JANE

You did PR for disasters?

BRIANNE

Yeah, like crisis management, reputation management, for corporations.

MARY JANE

Oh! Ha! I thought disasters, like, "This hurricane has a real name recognition problem." Like, "How do we spin this mudslide?"

BRIANNE

(not annoyed but not finding it funny either)

No, it would be more like if a national chain has an E. Coli outbreak and a few people die.

MARY JANE

Right.

BRIANNE

Or the CEO of a company turns out to be a child molester. That kind of thing. Like how do you come back from that. So you need a comprehensive vision, / for –

MARY JANE

Challenging!

BRIANNE

I like it.

(brief pause)

What would you teach?

MARY JANE

Middle school. Math.

BRIANNE

Awwww.

(They smile at each other. Mary Jane's phone rings. It's startlingly loud, a pop song or something.)

MARY JANE

Whoa! Sorry, that's just rude. I have it on that volume so I can hear it over the – oh, this is Alex's neurologist.

BRIANNE

Go ahead!

MARY JANE

It's just I've been waiting all / day.

BRIANNE

Please!

(Mary Jane answers)

MARY JANE

Hi, doc! Workin' late?

(she smiles apologetically at Brianne)

I have exactly a minute, I have a friend here.

BRIANNE

You're fine, take your time.

(Mary Jane winks at her)

MARY JANE

No, go ahead.

(She listens. As a little performance for Brienne, she mimes hanging herself, then smiles. Then the news she's hearing gets more serious and she just listens.)

Can I interrupt you, because that doesn't make sense to me. Because the seizures were tiny, they couldn't have caused what you're seeing – what you think you're seeing on the MRI. He's had way worse seizures without any changes to the...

(pause)

Twenty-four hours *in* the hospital?

(pause. *Shit*. She rallies her spirits.)

Okay. Wwwwllll, it's just what we gotta do. I'll call in the morning to schedule.

(brief pause)

But to be clear, you're not sure yet what you're seeing. Right? That's why we have to do more tests.

(pause. She doesn't like what she's hearing.)

Thanks, Dr. M. Get some rest.

(She hangs up. She's silent for a little while.)

One thing you learn. Is that you can't get too worked up about every piece of bad news. Because sometimes they're wrong. A big chunk of the time they've been wrong.

(brief pause)

BRIANNE

Sure.

(long pause)

Um...

MARY JANE

So, to back up a little bit...

Brienne takes up her notebook again as Mary Jane tries to think of what to say. Mary Jane changes her mind.

Do you have a picture?

Brienne finds a picture on her phone and hands the phone to Mary Jane. Mary Jane looks at it and flips out.

What????!! Stop it. Stop it!

(She throws the phone down on the couch, stands up, walks around the couch, and then, ready to confront the cuteness again picks it up and looks at the picture. She cracks up.)

He is not having it! He's like:

(She imitates his pout. Brianne laughs.)

BRIANNE

I know! He has attitude.

MARY JANE

Good for you, Seth. You give 'em hell. You hear me? You give those motherfuckers hell.

Scene Five: *why are you sorry?*

Offstage in Alex's bedroom, Mary Jane can be heard singing along to Sesame Street, doing different monster voices. Sherry lets herself in with Amelia behind her. She gestures to Amelia to be quiet.

SHERRY

I'm here!

MARY JANE (OS)

Hi Sherry!

(Mary Jane continues singing)

SHERRY

Mary Jane, can you come in here?

MARY JANE (OS)

Uh...yup!

(Mary Jane enters)

MARY JANE

Everything oka –aaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhh!

(She is beyond excited to see Amelia)

AMELIA

Hi.

MARY JANE

Amelia! You came! Can I hug you?

AMELIA

...yeah.

(Mary Jane bear hugs her)

MARY JANE

I have heard so much about you, young lady!

AMELIA

You too.

MARY JANE

What can I get you both? You want water? Or tea? I might have cookies somewhere.

AMELIA

No, thank you.

MARY JANE

You sure?

AMELIA

We had an early dinner, I don't need anything.

SHERRY

How was last night? I heard Ronda was sick.

MARY JANE

She can't kick this sinus infection.

SHERRY

Did they find a sub?

(Mary Jane shakes her head)

MARY JANE

(to Amelia)

Do you want to meet Alex?

AMELIA

Yeah.

SHERRY

Hand sanitizer.

(Amelia applies some.)

How's he doing?

MARY JANE

Punky! Not a happy camper, I don't know if it's –

(to Amelia)

Go ahead in, he's in his chair watching Sesame Street, I'll be right there.

(Amelia hesitates, then does. To Sherry)

Oh – and constipated, I was just gonna do some prune juice through the G-tube. We went up on his seizure meds, they're not supposed to be constipating / but who knows.

AMELIA (OS)

Hi Alex.

SHERRY

You did go up on the / meds.

AMELIA (OS)

Hello.

MARY JANE

And I have to bring him in overnight next week for some tests.

SHERRY

Why?

MARY JANE

I'll tell you later.

(Amelia appears in the doorframe)

AMELIA

I'm not sure he knows I'm here.

MARY JANE

He does, sweetie, c'mere.

(Mary Jane exits into the bedroom with Amelia. Sherry prepares prune juice in a syringe.)

MARY JANE (OS)

Alex, baby boy! Hey. Hey.

Hey kiddo. Hey space case! This is Amelia. This pretty girl came a long way to see you, you lucky kid. Can you look at her? Can you look at her, sweetie?

(pause)

AMELIA (OS)

That's okay.

MARY JANE (OS)

He's playing it cool. You are full of baloney, mister! And I am onto you.

(Mary Jane reenters, followed by Amelia)

SHERRY

No?

AMELIA

He's so cute.

MARY JANE

He's kinda glassy. I think I wiped him out with twelve hours of mom time.

SHERRY

Why didn't he go to his day program?

MARY JANE

Staff development day? Something? I wasn't the only parent who missed the memo and showed up with my kid. You know Hailey, she has autism, she spins around all day and her mom puts her in these adorable skirts that fly out so she looks like she's on top of a music / box?

SHERRY

Mm-hm.

MARY JANE

Hailey and her mom were there too this morning and we were banging on the door in the rain, it was hilarious! We were like is it the end of the world? Where is everybody? And then somebody finally came to the door and sent us away and we all went to a diner for breakfast and it wasn't busy so they gave us our own whole section where Hailey could spin and the noise from all Alex's machines didn't bother anyone and it was fantastic.

SHERRY

So you missed work again.

AMELIA

He has beautiful eyes, they're so big.

MARY JANE

(to Amelia)

We'll let him rest and try again later.

SHERRY

Did you pick up the vitamin?

(Mary Jane laughs)

MARY JANE

That is what I forgot. That is one of the things I forgot –

SHERRY

I'm back tomorrow night, I'll get it.

MARY JANE

No.

It's easy for / me. SHERRY

I can't / let you. MARY JANE

Yes you can. SHERRY

(Mary Jane concedes and blows Sherry a kiss.)

How do you like New York City? MARY JANE

It's different! AMELIA

From...Durham? MARY JANE

Like a half hour outside. AMELIA

I've never been. MARY JANE

...I think that's okay. AMELIA

Ha! She's like, "I think that's okay!" MARY JANE

It's nice down there, I told you I'm going to retire down there. SHERRY

What did I say about that word? MARY JANE

Not anytime soon. SHERRY

I interrupted you. MARY JANE

AMELIA

Um – no, I don't think so. I've only gone into Manhattan a couple times so far. We went to Times Square, and last week we went to the 9/11 Museum.

MARY JANE

I've been meaning to get down there.

AMELIA

It was really...

SHERRY

It's powerful. If you go, don't make plans for right afterward, leave yourself some time / to...

AMELIA

Yeah, cause we needed like a couple / hours.

MARY JANE

Right.

AMELIA

Yeah. But mostly I've been relaxing, volunteering a little bit.

MARY JANE

Sherry told me, at the senior center?

AMELIA

Yeah.

MARY JANE

What do you do there?

AMELIA

Depends on what they want. There's one lady, I mostly read to her, her eyes aren't so good anymore but she's pretty sharp.

MARY JANE

What do you read?

AMELIA

Mystery novels? She loves them, and she's hilarious, because sometimes like halfway through – I mean like I've read like four or five hours out loud – she's like, "Oh I've read this one before, I know who did it." But then she wants me to finish it anyway. She's so funny.

MARY JANE

What a great thing to do.

AMELIA

I've always liked old people, it's a weird thing about me.

SHERRY

That's why we get along so well.

AMELIA

Aunt Sherry!

MARY JANE

(to Amelia)

Don't even. Don't dignify it with a response.

SHERRY

Nothing wrong with getting old.

MARY JANE

I'm looking forward to it. My sister, last time she visited, pointed out these right here --

(points between her eyebrows)

She said, "You know, just a lllllllittle Botox would clear those right up."

(Amelia gasps)

I said "I earned those lines, no one's taking those away from me!" She was like "Just a lllllllittle Botox..."

(they all laugh)

SHERRY

I'm going to do his vitals and get set up for the night.

MARY JANE

It's a wacky mess in there but don't clean I'll do it later --

(Sherry exits into Alex's room, ignoring her)

SHERRY (OS)

Alex the / Great! Sleepy?

MARY JANE

She's gonna clean.

SHERRY (OS)

Let's make your / bed so you can rest.

AMELIA

Yeah.

(Mary Jane and Amelia smile at each other. Sherry can be heard humming offstage.)

MARY JANE

Hey, what's your tattoo?

(It's partly hidden by her sleeve)

AMELIA

(shyly showing her)

Oh. It's a Jain symbol. It stands for – literally, it's like “non-injury?”

MARY JANE

Beautiful.

AMELIA

Thanks. I'm kind of embarrassed by it now. 'Cause it's not like I'm Jain or something, it's random. I like ran out and got it the second I turned eighteen, because you need parental consent if you're a minor and my mom was not going for that. She was like, “Absolutely, you can get two M's tattooed on either side of your belly-button so it reads M-O-M. But otherwise you are not defacing the body I gave you.” So I had to wait till I was eighteen, which it turns out was still kind of early.

(Mary Jane laughs – she finds Amelia hilarious, which both pleases and embarrasses Amelia.)

MARY JANE

How's college been going?

AMELIA

Um...good.

(Mary Jane waits)

I think my expectations were too high?

MARY JANE

Hm.

AMELIA

Because high school was hard, and everyone was like, “College is gonna be so / much better.”

MARY JANE

Right.

AMELIA

Like “All cool people have a hard time in high school, and then college is amazing.” And so I was like “I guess I’m really cool then because high school was a nightmare.” But then...I rushed sororities, and I didn’t get into one?

MARY JANE
(pierced)

Oh!

AMELIA
And now I’m like – I’m probably better off, but at the time.

MARY JANE
Sure!

AMELIA
It was my first semester, and I was just like aaahhhhh, what did I do in like the two lunches I had with these girls that made them be like, “Nope, that was enough of *that* person for the rest of my life.” My mom was huge into her sorority, she still keeps in touch with her sorority sisters, so *she* was upset, and I had to like manage her disappointment on / top of my own.

MARY JANE
No, no, mom, no!

AMELIA
It’s definitely better now, I found a couple people I –
(Amelia giggles)

MARY JANE
What?

AMELIA
Did you know you do that thing, when I’m talking, you imitate my expressions.

MARY JANE
No I don’t!

AMELIA
You do! You’re doing it now!

MARY JANE
No I’m not!

AMELIA
(laughing)
Yes you are!

MARY JANE

I cannot *imagine* what those girls were thinking when they rejected you!

AMELIA

You were probably in a sorority, right?

MARY JANE

Did they have sororities at my school? I guess they must have...where I went it was less about fraternities and sororities, more about hallucinogens.

(Amelia laughs)

And it was in the mountains, it was *gorgeous*, I used to hike...

(she gets lost in this strange idea for a moment.)

I used to get high and hike in the mountains. True story, Amelia. Seems like a different / life.

SHERRY (OS)

Up up up up we go.

AMELIA

I never do drugs. It's not that I'm against it; I get really intimidated when people around me do drugs. I wouldn't even know how to like...take a bong hit. Some people assume I smoke pot because I'm not – mainstream, I guess? But it's my biggest fear that I'll be at a party and someone will be like, "Can you do me a favor and roll this joint?"

MARY JANE

Well, I don't think you need to start doing drugs. But you should know that if you did, you'd be just as good at it as everyone else. Maybe better.

(Sherry appears in the doorway. Mary Jane looks at her.)

SHERRY

Low-grade fever.

MARY JANE

What?? I checked right before you got here.

SHERRY

He must be spiking just now.

MARY JANE

(exiting into the bedroom)

How high?

SHERRY

One hundred point nine. He's fast asleep...

(Sherry goes to the kitchen cupboard to prepare Tylenol in a syringe.)

MARY JANE (OS)

Kiddo. Oh, kiddo.

(pause. Mary Jane murmurs lovingly to Alex. She reenters)

MARY JANE

Are you giving him --?

(Sherry holds up the syringe on her way back into the bedroom. Pause.)

I wish he could tell me when something's wrong. I just wish he could tell me. That's the one thing...

(She catches herself)

Ay me, oh me! Sing a sad, sad song for poor old Mary Jane.

AMELIA

Don't worry about me. Do whatever you need to.

MARY JANE

Nothing to do except wait. I'm glad to have your company.

(brief pause)

AMELIA

He can't make any noise?

MARY JANE

One of his vocal cords is paralyzed.

(Mary Jane senses that Amelia has more questions)

You can ask me anything you want about Alex.

AMELIA

You probably get sick of talking about it.

MARY JANE

Nope.

AMELIA

Aunt Sherry gave me a basic, like...so, cognitively? Is he...?

MARY JANE

Well. It's hard to know, exactly, because of his physical / limitations.

AMELIA

Uh-huh.

MARY JANE

Is he cognitively completely typical? Maybe not. But – well, you'll see another time when he's feeling – we have reason to believe he has a lot going on upstairs. My feeling is that when I talk to him, he understands me completely.

SHERRY

(having reentered to grab something)

He does.

(she re-exits)

MARY JANE

At first I thought maybe it would be better if he didn't understand. I thought with all the challenges, with how sick he is, I'd rather he wasn't really aware. That's hilarious to me now, how wrong I was. That first year was...

(she laughs)

Yikes! Brutal. I'm glad I'm meeting you now, and not then, Amelia.

(pause)

AMELIA

When did you know?

MARY JANE

That there was a problem?

(Amelia nods)

My water broke at twenty-five weeks.

AMELIA

Oh.

MARY JANE

As a reference point that's – I had barely started wearing maternity clothes.

AMELIA

Okay.

MARY JANE

I didn't know anything about it, I had heard they could save babies who came early like that, so I just thought. Okay. This is gonna be a tough few weeks, we'll get through it. They kept him in as long as they could, he was born at twenty-five weeks and four days. We named him Alexander after Danny's – my ex's – dad.

(brief pause)

Then on his second day – he had all these tubes, in his mouth, in his tiny nose, it was wild, like spaghetti strung through him everywhere – and on his second day they told us he'd had a brain bleed. They didn't know how bad, they didn't know which parts of his brain were affected. But they weren't sure he was gonna live.

(brief pause)

And that was...that was strange. Because I hadn't met Alex yet, you know? He was inside this glass cage, I wasn't allowed to hold him...and I'm looking at the ultrasound, I'm looking at the inside of my son's brain. And the doctor is saying "This is what this is, this is what this is...we're concerned about this here..."

(brief pause)

Danny had a bad panic attack that night. It turned out to be a panic attack, we thought it was a heart attack when it was happening. So I was back and forth between the ER and the NICU, in my – I hadn't been discharged yet myself, I was wearing slippers and a hospital gown, limping back and forth down these hallways, bleeding like I had been harpooned. Too much?

(Amelia shakes her head)

And one time I came back from the ER, and Alex was gone. Where his isolette had been there were just some disconnected wires on the floor. So I'm running around the NICU, screaming like a madwoman, looking at every baby in every isolette trying to find my kid, but I didn't even...I didn't really know what he looked like yet, so I was just... They had moved him to one of the private rooms, for the sickest babies. That was the one time I lost it, I screamed at this poor nurse who I'm sure had nothing to do with it, I said, "You're gonna move my baby and not tell me! This is the kind of place you people run here?!" And I heard myself and I fell into a chair laughing, it was so ridiculous.

(brief pause)

Danny got some pills. I sent him home to rest.

(brief pause)

The middle of that night they told me Alex wasn't gonna make it and I should say goodbye. I didn't know how to do that. I told him, uh...I told him he was wanted. I don't know why that's what occurred to me, Amelia. I don't even know if it was true then, honestly. I just kept saying, "You're wanted, you're wanted, know that you're wanted."

(brief pause)

In the morning I was discharged and he was still alive. I went home to get some rest, knowing that was a gamble. Danny wasn't there.

(pause)

Well the rest you know. He lived. Our neurologist says it's a miracle how much he can do, considering how bad that bleed was. They thought he'd basically sleep through his whole life, but he's – you'll come again sometime when he's feeling better, you'll see.

(pause)

AMELIA

Danny never came back?

MARY JANE

Oh of course he did! He tried. He really did try. But he's really...it's hell for him, not being a part of Alex's life. But I just couldn't...

(She gets lost momentarily in the memory, then redirects.)

I hope he finds some peace, I really do.

SHERRY (OS)

He's seizing!

(Mary Jane freezes for a second, like she's drawing a blank.)

Did you hear me? He's seizing!

(Mary Jane springs to action and exits into the bedroom, leaving Amelia alone onstage.)

Okay, Alex, okay.

MARY JANE (OS)

Let's move that –

SHERRY (OS)

Okay, baby boy.

MARY JANE (OS)

Alex, mama's here, okay? Mama's right here. You have the diastat?

SHERRY

Getting it now.

(Amelia is afraid to look into the bedroom. She calls off)

AMELIA

Can I do / anything?

MARY JANE (OS)

Whoa! Whoa, whoa.

SHERRY (OS)

Easy, easy boy.

SHERRY (OS)

Where's the Diastat?

MARY JANE (OS)

It was in the – it's not there?

SHERRY (OS)

No. I don't like his color.

MARY JANE (OS)

Okay, breathe.

(pause. Offstage we hear rummaging and things falling)

Mama's here, Alex. Mama's right here.

SHERRY (OS)

I think we need to call. I don't like this. I don't like it. Okay?

MARY JANE (OS)

Okay.

SHERRY (OS)

Amelia! Do you have your phone?

AMELIA

Yes.

SHERRY (OS)

Call 911.

(Amelia goes into her bag. Can't find the phone. Starts dumping things out.)

Are you calling?

(She finds it, shakily dialing)

AMELIA

/Yes.

MARY JANE (OS)

Come on, Alex. Come on, sweet boy.

AMELIA

What do I say?

SHERRY (OS)

Say "baby's not breathing."

AMELIA

Baby's not breathing.

Here it / is! MARY JANE (OS)

Where are we? *Where are we??* AMELIA

8710 / 34th Avenue. MARY JANE (OS)

8710 34th. SHERRY (OS)

8710 -- what? AMELIA

/Thirty-fourth Avenue! MARY JANE (OS)

Eighty-seven ten / Thirty – SHERRY (OS)

One of you! AMELIA

Thirty fourth avenue, 8710 / 34th Avenue. MARY JANE (OS)

Thirty-fourth avenue, 8710 34th / Avenue AMELIA

In Queens! MARY JANE (OS)

In Queens. AMELIA

You hold him / I'll insert the medicine. SHERRY (OS)

Is there an apartment number? AMELIA

(Brief pause)

Okay, it's in. Ambubag. SHERRY (OS)

MARY JANE (OS)

Alex, you're gonna feel better / really soon.

SHERRY (OS)

Mary Jane, Ambubag.

MARY JANE (OS)

Yup, I'm hooking it / up to the --

SHERRY (OS)

Now. Now please.

(Amelia has found a stack of mail, locates the address on an envelope. Sound of the oxygen concentrator turning on in the bedroom)

AMELIA

Two F, Apartment Two F.

F as in Frank.

Um...

(calling off)

Is he still not breathing?

SHERRY (OS)

Is the oxygen all the way / up?

MARY JANE (OS)

Yes .

SHERRY (OS)

Get the pulse / ox on him.

AMELIA

I'm not sure...

I think he's / still not breathing.

MARY JANE (OS)

It's okay, kiddo, you're / doing great.

AMELIA

He's two, I think?

MARY JANE (OS)

That's my guy, you're doing so so so / so good

SHERRY (OS)

Do we have a reading / yet?

MARY JANE (OS)

It's coming up, it's coming.

AMELIA

He has cerebral palsy. And – I think some other / things.

SHERRY (OS)

Tell them he has seizure disorder and lung disease.

AMELIA

He has seizure disorder and lung / disease.

MARY JANE (OS)

Come on, Alex, / come on.

(beeping offstage)

SHERRY (OS)

It's not reading, why isn't it / reading?

MARY JANE (OS)

(under her breath)

Shoot...the sensor is all...

AMELIA

Yes, his mother and his nurse.

SHERRY (OS)

What?

MARY JANE (OS)

There. There it goes.

AMELIA

Yeah / there is.

(beeping)

SHERRY (OS)

Okay.

MARY JANE (OS)

All /right.

Okay I / will.

AMELIA

Can we reinforce with / tape-

SHERRY (OS)

Yup.

MARY JANE

(pause)

What?

AMELIA
(calling off)

What's going on?

(pause)

(Mary Jane enters and goes quickly but calmly to the kitchen drawer.)

Are they on their way?

MARY JANE

Are you on your way?

AMELIA

(Mary Jane gets tape out of the kitchen drawer and then gently takes the phone from shaken Amelia)

MARY JANE
Hi. Do you think they'll be much longer? That should be fine. I'm gonna hang up, okay?
Thank you so much. Thanks for your help.

(She gives Amelia back her phone)

I'm so sorry.

AMELIA

Honey. Why are you sorry?

MARY JANE

(Mary Jane exits into the bedroom.)

PART TWO

Scene One: *Too fine a point*

The “parents room.” A few tables and chairs, a full-sized fridge, a smaller Kosher fridge, an ancient microwave, a coffee machine, a water and ice machine.

Mary Jane sits eating an individual serving of cereal. Dr. Toros enters.

DR. TOROS

I’m so sorry, mom.

MARY JANE

Hey Dr. Toros!

DR. TOROS

I got stuck on a new admission.

MARY JANE

It’s busy, huh?

DR. TOROS

No room at the inn. The ER’s all backed up downstairs...

MARY JANE

When’s that new wing gonna be finished? I keep hearing about / it.

DR. TOROS

Construction’s been pushed back and pushed back. 2029. That’s our joke, we say, “But in 2029 everything will be peachy!”

MARY JANE

2029. That’s funny.

DR. TOROS

Anyway. I apologize for keeping you waiting.

MARY JANE

Don’t worry.

DR. TOROS

Shall we go to the bedside?

MARY JANE

He finally just fell asleep, I’d rather talk here if it’s okay. Eat my breakfast.

DR. TOROS
Uh...

MARY JANE
Or -- ?

DR. TOROS
Yyyyeah. If someone comes in we can move.

MARY JANE
I don't mind if anyone hears.

DR. TOROS
I'm technically not supposed to discuss patients in public areas.

MARY JANE
Oh. I'm creating a problem / for you –

DR. TOROS
No, you're not –
Some of these rules are just...you know? Sorry, mom. Long night. For you too, I bet.
Here is fine.

(brief pause)

MARY JANE
Can I offer you some Rice Krispies? They accidentally gave me two!

DR. TOROS
A windfall!

MARY JANE
Right?

DR. TOROS
I haven't had Rice Krispies since I was a kid.

MARY JANE
Take it! I think you'll find it very comforting.

DR. TOROS
I'm not gonna take your food.

MARY JANE
I'm not gonna eat it.

DR. TOROS

I have a whole home-cooked breakfast waiting for me back in the staff room.

MARY JANE

Now you're bragging.

DR. TOROS

(genuinely chagrined)

I – sorry.

MARY JANE

I'm just teasing you! Bad joke, Mary Jane.

DR. TOROS

No, it was...

(Dr. Toros smiles apologetically and slides the package of Rice Krispies back to Mary Jane)

DR. TOROS

How you holding up? You getting any sleep?

MARY JANE

I've been cobbling it together.

DR. TOROS

You've stayed every night, right?

MARY JANE

I got one of the good pullout chairs this time.

DR. TOROS

Can't be that good.

MARY JANE

You might be surprised.

DR. TOROS

I'm gonna give you a little speech. Okay?

MARY JANE

Uh-oh!

DR. TOROS

You can take a night off. You can take *two* nights off. Our nurses are top-notch, Alex is in great hands. Do you work?

MARY JANE

I'm on leave right now.

DR. TOROS

All I can say is...I've seen a lot of parents come through here? It's important to take care of yourself. Sleep in your own bed, take a bubble bath...

MARY JANE

I'm doing fine. A little smelly maybe – sorry!

DR. TOROS

That wasn't / what I was –

MARY JANE

I know. Thank you for your concern. I'm hanging' in there, doc. I just want to get through this and take my little guy home.

(Dr. Toros nods. Pause)

DR. TOROS

Well...we want to help you do that. Um...

(Mary Jane sees Dr. Toros isn't quite sure how to proceed)

MARY JANE

Should I go ahead with my questions?

DR. TOROS

Yup.

(Mary Jane brings up her questions on her phone)

MARY JANE

We raised the dosage on Alex's seizure meds right before he had the grand mal that brought us here.

DR. TOROS

Uh-huh.

MARY JANE

Is it possible that could have actually triggered the seizures he's been having?

DR. TOROS

Raising the dosage? Not likely.

MARY JANE

Not impossible?

DR. TOROS

Not likely.

(brief pause)

MARY JANE

Because obviously I'm not an expert, but I remember our neurologist said that whenever you change dosage there's an adjustment period...

(Dr. Toros nods)

But you don't think...

(Dr. Toros shakes her head, at first thoughtfully, then with more certainty)

MARY JANE

Okay...oh. I'm not sure you're the right person to ask -- but I've requested music therapy a bunch of times?

(Dr. Toros quietly sighs. She is deeply unimpressed with the music therapy program)

DR. TOROS

They haven't come by yet?

MARY JANE

No.

DR. TOROS

I'll put another order in the system, maybe it got lost.

MARY JANE

Thanks.

In / terms of –

DR. TOROS

Hold on, let me send an email about the music therapy, I don't want to forget.

(Dr. Toros composes an email on her phone)

Who *is* getting music therapy, that's what I'd like to know. 'Cause it seems like every parent I talk to...

(She finishes and sends the email. She puts her phone away.)

MARY JANE

In terms of weaning him off the ventilator?

DR. TOROS

(caught by surprise)

Uh...?

MARY JANE

What will you want to see before we can start? What benchmarks, or -- ?

DR. TOROS

We'll want to see him maintaining his oxygen saturations, of course.

MARY JANE

Of course.

DR. TOROS

Which he isn't right now. We'll want to see him initiating his own breaths. Right now he's not doing that. Right now he's riding the vent.

MARY JANE

Last time, I remember, we had to slow down the back-up rate before he started initiating all his breaths himself.

DR. TOROS

I don't want to do that until his O2 sats are stable.

MARY JANE

Okay.

DR. TOROS

I don't want to stress him. He's in charge. When he's ready for the next step, he'll let us know. I understand you're eager, mom, but...

MARY JANE

No, I get it.

DR. TOROS

He's not there right now. We don't want to set him back.

MARY JANE

Of course. No, I just...

(she hesitates, then looks back at her phone. She stares at it for a while. She shakes her head in bewilderment.)

DR. TOROS

What is it, mom?
Mom?

MARY JANE

This must be some kind of autocorrect disaster...I have no fucking idea what this says.
Excuse me.

(she keeps looking it, finally gives up)

Hope it wasn't important.
Can we talk about the chest x-rays?

DR. TOROS

What about them?

MARY JANE

Does he need one every day?

(brief pause)

They don't seem to change that much, and...I wondered if he really needs one every day.
(pause)

DR. TOROS

Mom, what's your concern here?

MARY JANE

I'm not sure what you mean.

DR. TOROS

Are you concerned about the radiation?

MARY JANE

Sure.

(pause)

What?

DR. TOROS

Your saying that makes me think that I've – that my team – has failed you somewhere along the line.

MARY JANE

Why? No. Why?

DR. TOROS

If you're worried about radiation, then I don't think you understand the gravity of your son's situation.

(pause)

MARY JANE

Oh.

(Dr. Toros chooses her words carefully.)

DR. TOROS

The x-ray is one of our main tools for tracking Alex's pneumonia. If things are getting worse, we want to know that right away, that has implications for treatment.

MARY JANE

I understand that –

DR. TOROS

Whereas the radiation you get from a daily x-ray...that wouldn't have implications, and I'm saying at the earliest, okay? For – twenty, thirty years. I don't want to put too fine a point on it, but...let's just say that's a very long time.

(pause)

MARY JANE

Well the other thing is that the x-ray lady comes at like six o'clock every morning which is maybe the only time Alex is reliably asleep, which is a time I tend to be asleep and it's disruptive.

DR. TOROS

That's a different issue.

MARY JANE

That's why I'm bringing it up.

DR. TOROS

I can ask radiology to come in the afternoon instead.

MARY JANE

I would appreciate that. Thank you.

DR. TOROS

You're welcome.

(pause. Mary Jane looks at her phone again)

What else?

MARY JANE

I'm supposed to bring Alex in for an evaluation next week for a...for this communication device. I guess I should postpone that.

(brief pause)

DR. TOROS

I think so.

MARY JANE

Any idea how much I should postpone it?

(brief pause)

Never mind.

(she puts the phone down)

DR. TOROS

I'm sorry this is happening, mom. I hope we can turn it around.

(pause)

MARY JANE

Do you have kids?

(pause)

DR. TOROS

Yeah.

(Mary Jane realizes she doesn't want to ask anything about them.)

MARY JANE

Well, what else should I be asking you? If you were me, what would you ask?

(Dr. Toros thinks)

DR. TOROS

I think you're –

(Kat enters. Dr. Toros falls irritably silent and waits as Kat fills a mug with hot water.)

KAT

Oh Dr. T! I think Dr. Vitale is looking for you.

(Dr. Toros looks at her phone)

DR. TOROS

Yup. He is.

(Dr. Toros waits impatiently for Kat to leave, which she does after getting herself a few napkins, one at a time.)

I think you're striking a pretty good balance between listening to us and advocating for your kid.

MARY JANE

Thank you.

(something occurs to Dr. Toros)

Dr. TOROS

Wait a second.

(she turns to the door)

MARY JANE

What?

DR. TOROS

That was the...

MARY JANE

What's the matter?

DR. TOROS

That was the music therapist!

(Dr. Toros hustles out. She is gone maybe twenty seconds. Mary Jane waits. She comes back a little out of breath.)

Sorry, mom. I don't know where she went.
She's gone.

Scene two: *no stuff at all*

Chaya sits reading a prayer book. Mary Jane enters. She registers Chaya and decides not to disturb her. She gets a yogurt from the fridge. She turns to go, then turns back to Chaya.

MARY JANE

I'm sorry. I hate to bother you, but I just...

(Chaya is impassive, unreadable)

Your daughter's beautiful, and you take such good care of her, and it's really none of my business, but the resident who was short with you this morning, I thought that was out of line.

(Mary Jane goes to leave)

CHAYA

You heard what she said?

MARY JANE

I didn't mean to eavesdrop –

CHAYA

Well the beds, they're four feet from each other.

MARY JANE

I do try not to listen. But I couldn't help noticing her tone.

CHAYA

I can't let it bother me, because if I do, forget it, it takes all my time. And I have a sick child, so I don't have time. As you know.

MARY JANE

Ha! I do know.

CHAYA

It doesn't get to me, but it does get to my husband. I tell him it's not worth it, but he can't help it, he gets offended.

MARY JANE

I've seen your husband with – your daughter's name is Adina, right? He's lovely with her, he's very tender.

CHAYA

You're not married?

MARY JANE

No.

CHAYA

(with feeling)

That's awful. It's terrible to do this by yourself.

MARY JANE

Well, you know, everybody has stuff.

CHAYA

That's not true. Some people don't have stuff, I know a lot of people, in fact, without any stuff at all.

(Mary Jane laughs)

It's true, and what they always say to me: "It's a blessing, what God has given you, Adina is a blessing." I think, right, the kind of blessing you don't know anything about and you don't want to know anything about. They say, "What can I do, tell me what I can do?" I say, "You can pray for her, that's all you can do, so stop asking me."

MARY JANE

You've been pumping. You have a baby at home?

CHAYA

I have twins at home, girls, they're seven months old.

MARY JANE

Oooooooooohhhhhhhh!

CHAYA

They came a little early, but they're all right, thank God. And Adina also has two younger brothers.

MARY JANE

Wow!

CHAYA

And an older brother. And an older sister.

(Mary Jane cracks up)

What?

(laughing a little herself)

That's funny?

MARY JANE
Seven children.

CHAYA
Yes.

MARY JANE
That's...that's perfect. Just as I was thinking I have it pretty tough. My name is Mary Jane.

CHAYA
Chaya.

MARY JANE
Hi. What's yours?

CHAYA
...Chaya.

MARY JANE
Oh! Sorry, I thought...
(she practices the Hebrew "Ch" sound)
Chaya.

CHAYA
Not bad.

MARY JANE
Nice to meet you. I'm sorry I didn't introduce myself earlier, I don't know / what I was –

CHAYA
You don't know who wants to talk and who wants to be left alone.

MARY JANE
I asked you about pumping, because – Alex has never been able to eat by mouth, he's fed by G-Tube –

CHAYA
That's a shame.

MARY JANE
So for his first few months I pumped, and I gotta say, that almost – I think I have a *pretty* good attitude, in general, but something about hooking my, you know, *udders*, up to that machine eight times / a day –

CHAYA

(laughing)

Because it's awful! That's why you felt that way, it's unnatural and it's / awful.

MARY JANE

I used to get this – like my mood would plunge, in the first twenty or thirty seconds of pumping, around letdown, I'd be like everything's fine! I'm dealing everything's gonna be oka – SOMEBODY HELP ME I WANT TO KILL / MYSELF.

CHAYA

Right.

MARY JANE

All of a sudden like / that.

CHAYA

Mm-hm.

MARY JANE

And I finally told my OB, because I thought, is this -- ??! I had only heard about euphoria, and all the – women having orgasms while breastfeeding / their –

CHAYA

That's propaganda. I've breastfed seven children.

MARY JANE

But she told me this problem I was having, it's a syndrome, it has a name. D-MER.

CHAYA

What?

MARY JANE

D-MER. Dysphoric Milk...ejaculation?

CHAYA

Please.

MARY JANE

Dysphoric Milk Ejection Reflex!

CHAYA

You're making that up.

MARY JANE

I'm not! It has to do with, um...serotonin, or – something flooding the brain instead of something else that's supposed to.

CHAYA

Maybe it had to do with your son not being able to eat, which is very upsetting.

MARY JANE

(slight laugh)

Maybe.

CHAYA

Like for me it has to do with not seeing my babies, being back here again. My supply is falling, it doesn't matter how much I pump, it's not the same thing.

MARY JANE

I had problems with that, too. And my sister used to make me these...lactation cookies! I just remembered that! They were awful, full of flax seed and so dry. She read in a magazine that they helped, and she sent a batch every week. For *months*.

(Mary Jane has to catch her breath)

I had completely forgotten about that.

CHAYA

I wish I had a sister like that. My sister...she means well, but...it's like somebody said to her, "just act normal with Chaya, be cheerful, she has enough sadness in her life." But my situation is not normal and I don't feel like being cheerful. Everything I say to her, there's a "but." I say, "Adina isn't doing very well this week, she has no energy." My sister says, "But she doesn't seem uncomfortable, thank God for that!" Okay, but why is she exhausted, is she getting a virus, that's what I'm trying to figure out.

MARY JANE

People don't always know how to be.

CHAYA

My sister has been a disappointment. My oldest daughter on the other hand...

(she is almost overcome)

Listen to me, I can't even speak about it.

MARY JANE

Does she take care of your little ones while you're here?

CHAYA

I don't know where she gets her...I better not, I don't want to cry. I wish you many more children, some day.

(Mary Jane laughs)

MARY JANE

I don't know, Chaya. For now maybe wish me a two-bedroom closer to the subway.

CHAYA

Now that we're talking, what's happening with the baby in our room?

MARY JANE

Have you seen anyone visit him?

CHAYA

Not once!

MARY JANE

I asked one of the nurses if I could hold him, she said no because of Alex's virus, and anyway I'd need the family's permission.

CHAYA

Do you know what's wrong with him?

MARY JANE

I know he had some kind of GI surgery last -- ? Was it before you guys got here?

(Chaya isn't sure)

You would remember, there was a lot of activity for a couple days after. When did you get here, last week?

CHAYA

This is day eight.

MARY JANE

Really? I guess he hasn't seen his family in...must be two weeks then.

CHAYA

That's why he cries like that.

MARY JANE

Breaks my heart!

CHAYA

Last time we were here we got the private room.

MARY JANE

You're kidding!

CHAYA

Just by chance, all the other beds were full.

MARY JANE

Was it deluxe?

CHAYA

Well – it’s still a hospital.

MARY JANE

Is there a bathroom in there?

CHAYA

(of course not!)

No!

MARY JANE

Oh.

CHAYA

No, you still have to walk a quarter of a mile and / go to that –

MARY JANE

Right? It’s like being on an airplane.

CHAYA

For us, though, the privacy was – it was nice. There’s a cot.

MARY JANE

Wow. The private room. That’s something to dream about.

CHAYA

How long have you been here?

MARY JANE

This is week seven.

CHAYA

Our longest was five.

MARY JANE

This is our longest since the NICU.

CHAYA

Are they saying when you might be discharged?

(Mary Jane shakes her head. Chaya shakes her head.
Pause.)

Do you feel sometimes...?

Sometimes when Adina gets sick. When I realize, all right, we have to take her to the hospital, we can’t keep her at home like this.

I'm not sure I can describe what I mean.

MARY JANE

Sure you can.

(pause)

CHAYA

There's so much worry, it's going in a thousand directions all the time, all I can do is keep track of the things I'm worried about. But mostly I'm worried about: will we have to go back to the hospital, will we have another month in the hospital? Because that's the worst thing, right? The worst thing that can happen. But when we decide, okay, the disaster is here, we're going, it's...

Suddenly it's quiet. It's like...

...everything I have been doing, that was very nice, but it wasn't real. This is real. And it's a relief, that's what it is, it's a relief to get back to it.

(pause)

MARY JANE

Do you think your faith makes things easier?

CHAYA

Easier than what?

MARY JANE

Easier – ha! I don't know! Easier than they would be without it.

CHAYA

How could I know? But I don't think so.

MARY JANE

No?

CHAYA

Well...my community makes things easier, in certain ways.

MARY JANE

Adina has so many visitors, it took me a while to figure out which of you were the parents.

CHAYA

People feel a responsibility to each other. Now, your situation. It's okay for me to say this?

MARY JANE

Yeah.

CHAYA

It wouldn't happen. Even if your husband died, or left – you wouldn't be so alone. But does my faith make it easier? I don't think having a sick child is less painful for me than for people without religion, I don't think so.

MARY JANE

No, that's not – I'm not sure what I meant.

(long pause)

I guess maybe my question is...do you believe you're suffering for a reason?

(Chaya is going to say no)

Or – hold on.

I don't mean that you're being punished, obviously, I don't mean...

But...

Do you think...

Look. I'm shaking. I don't know why.

Before when you said "this is real" ...

I lost it. I lost my question.

(pause.)

He just seems so uncomfortable. He seems miserable.

(pause)

CHAYA

It's the worst.

MARY JANE

Well. I better get back there.

(she goes to exit)

CHAYA

If Adina's awake, will you come back and tell me?

MARY JANE

Yes.

CHAYA

You don't mind? I'll go with you.

MARY JANE

If I don't come back, she's sleeping.

(Mary Jane exits)

Scene three: *This guy has been waiting a long time for some music*

The bedside. Mary Jane sits in a chair nearby, on the phone. Intermittent beeps and the sound of a vent breathing for Alex.

Mary Jane listens for a while.

MARY JANE

I do understand. I do. And I'm at a loss, too.

(pause)

If I could give you a date, Kelly, I would, I just...

(pause)

Right.

My only question, and this is a tough one. Is whether there's any way to continue my benefits. Just until I find something else, and I promise you, that won't be too long. I'm very employable. Until you get to know me.

(Slight laugh. Long pause.)

I appreciate that. And I will keep my expectations low.

I know. I should go too.

Oh Kelly -- ?

Thank you again for both the gift baskets, they were spectacular.

Bye.

Mary Jane puts her phone down. She is still for a moment. Then she habitually looks over at Alex, then up at the monitor to see all his stats. She relaxes back into her chair, and into the tense ennui of the PICU.

KAT enters, gowned up including a mask, with an iPad.

KAT

Hi mom. Alexander, right?

MARY JANE

Yup, that's Alex.

KAT

Is he sleeping?

MARY JANE

Mm-hm.

KAT

Do you mind if I -- ?

MARY JANE

Go ahead.

(Kat goes over to Alex)

KAT

Look at that head of hair!

MARY JANE

Yeah.

KAT

Gorgeous!

MARY JANE

He's always had hair, he needed a haircut at three months.

KAT

No!

MARY JANE

Yeah.

KAT

He doesn't get that color from you, huh?

MARY JANE

Nope. No.

(brief pause)

KAT

My niece was bald until she was one and a half. Her mom would put a bow on her bald little skull so people knew she was a girl. Now she's six and she's a tomboy, you'd never catch her with a bow / now!

MARY JANE

I love that.

KAT

She cracks me up.

(pause. Kat looks at Alex again)

So peaceful. Hiya, Alex. You think you might be ready to wake up for me, handsome?

MARY JANE

He had a procedure this morning.

KAT

How did it go?

MARY JANE

We're waiting and seeing. But that's why he's zonked, he's still out from the anesthesia.

KAT

Oh, no. Bad timing, huh?

MARY JANE

(confused)

Are you from neurology...?

KAT

(same)

I'm the music therapist. They didn't tell you I was coming?

MARY JANE

No!

KAT

They're supposed to, to make sure it's a good time...which of course it isn't.

MARY JANE

I'm so glad you're here, though! Maybe you could try back in a couple hours...?

KAT

I wish I could. We're short staffed, there are only two of us and my colleague's on her honeymoon.

MARY JANE

Oh.

KAT

This is my last appointment of the day. Darn it! I know this guy has been waiting a long time for some music.

MARY JANE

Are you back tomorrow?

KAT

...no. I'm off for the long weekend.

MARY JANE

Oh, right.

KAT

I'm back Tuesday. I'll do my best to get you on my list. I don't always get a lot of say, but...

(Mary Jane is uncharacteristically dejected. She tries to be a good sport but this comes out pretty curt.)

MARY JANE

Thanks for trying.

(Long pause. Kat looks at Alex for a while)

KAT

Has Child Life come by at all?
Mom?

MARY JANE

Child Life. Yes. They brought some bubbles and some uh...lost my train of thought. Some coloring books.

KAT

Good.

MARY JANE

Yeah. Alex can't hold a crayon even when he's healthy, but it's the thought that counts, right?

(pause. Kat doesn't know what to say)

And the bubbles are...I think they watered them down to save money. I think the bubble budget may have taken some cuts.

(brief pause)

I'm sorry, what's your name?

KAT

Kat.

MARY JANE

Thanks for coming by, Kat. I know you have places to be.

KAT

(quietly)

Sorry, mom.

MARY JANE

But maybe you can tell your supervisor, or...that I have been telling my son for weeks that someone's coming to play music. And it may seem to you guys that he doesn't hear me or understand me, but he does hear me and he does understand me.

(pause)

And when I tell him there's going to be music and then there's no music... Then that's actually harmful. Your music therapy program has been harmful to my child.

(Mary Jane takes her head in her hands. A long silence.)

Forgive me. We'd love to see you Tuesday.

(pause)

KAT

What kind of procedure was it? Was it a surgery?

MARY JANE

No, it was just a...why?

KAT

Because depending on what it was he may not have gotten that much anesthesia. He might just be, you know...

(she does a gesture)

very mellow.

(Mary Jane looks him)

MARY JANE

You think he might be kind of conscious?

KAT

It's up to you. I'll play if you want. I can still try to come back Tuesday. I don't even have to...

(she looks around -- hushed tone)

I won't submit any paperwork for this visit, so they don't try to push you back down the list.

(Mary Jane is moved. Kat waits.)

What do you think?

MARY JANE

(yes)

Thank you.

(Kat turns on her iPad and strums a chord in the guitar program to check the volume. She takes an egg shaker out of her pocket, shakes it to demonstrate, and hands it to Mary Jane)

KAT

You're my rhythm section. Any requests?

(Mary Jane shakes her head. Kat thinks. She strums a few chords. She starts to sing "The Lion Sleeps Tonight.")

A-wimoweh, A-wimoweh, A-wimoweh A wimo—

MARY JANE

Maybe not that. Sorry. I'm so sorry. Anything but that.

KAT

Okay...

(Kat thinks. For kind of a long time.)

All right. Here we go.

(Kat begins to play and sing. She shouldn't be a total genius musician/singer. She should be more like a friend with a really nice voice. Mary Jane shakes her egg shaker.)

KAT

Bluebird, bluebird, through my window
Bluebird, bluebird, through my window
Bluebird, bluebird, through my window
Oh, Johnny I am tired.

Take a little girl and tap her on the shoulder
Take a little girl and tap her on the shoulder
Take a little girl and tap her on the shoulder
Oh, Johnny I am tired.

Bluebird, bluebird through my window
Bluebird, bluebird through my window
Bluebird, bluebird through my window
Oh, Johnny I am tired.

Take a little boy and tap him on the shoulder
Take a little boy and tap him on the shoulder
Take a little boy and tap him on the shoulder
Oh, Johnny I am tired.

Bluebird, bluebird through my window
Bluebird, bluebird through my window
Bluebird, bluebird through my window
Oh, Johnny I am tired.
Oh, Johnny I am tired.
Oh, Johnny I am tired.

(As the song ends, Mary Jane gets into a “bunny suit” – the white polyester coveralls with cap, mask, and booties to wear into an antiseptic surgery suite. She follows as hospital personnel, perhaps played by the actors playing Dr. Toros and Chaya, wheel Alex’s bed off.)

Scene four: *...and then it blooms*

With Alex's bed gone, the beeps and whirrs of the PICU are quieter, more distant.

Now visible behind where the bed was is a goldfish swimming in a bowl on a table.

Mary Jane enters in her bunny suit and pours herself a cup of water.

After a bit, Tenkei enters, in a Buddhist nun's robes, with a shaved head. Mary Jane notices her.

MARY JANE

Hi.

TENKEI

Hello. I'm one of the hospital chaplains. You listed your religion as "question mark," but I thought I'd see if you wanted company while Alex is in surgery.

MARY JANE

Sure.

(Tenkei and Mary Jane position chairs near each other and sit. Pause.)

Are you a Buddhist?

TENKEI

What gave it away? Tenkei.

MARY JANE

Mary Jane. Tenkei?

(Tenkei nods. Long pause.)

We saw another chaplain overnight...dark hair and glasses?

TENKEI

Eleanor?

MARY JANE

I think so. She came when my son coded. I guess you automatically get paged...?

TENKEI

Yes. The chaplain on call.

(Pause. Then they speak at the same time)

MARY JANE
She was – sorry.

TENKEI
And that...

Go ahead.

TENKEI

No...

(Mary Jane means for Tenkei to continue, but Tenkei still waits)

Oh – I was just going to say she was nice. She was very...

(Mary Jane trails off. Pause)

Do you get many Buddhist patients in this hospital?

TENKEI

Some. Not many.

MARY JANE

Were you raised Buddhist?

TENKEI

Episcopalian.

(pause)

Can I ask you something? I'm afraid this will be offensive...

TENKEI

Ask me.

Do you think – ha! Do you think if you were born in a Buddhist family, in a Buddhist country you would have become a Christian nun?

(Tenkei is quietly delighted with the question.)

TENKEI

Maybe.

Doesn't that...forgive me, Tenkei...doesn't it make your whole life seem kind of arbitrary?

TENKEI

It's not the only thing that makes my life seem arbitrary. It's pretty far down on that list.

MARY JANE

How long have you been a nun?

TENKEI

Seven months.

MARY JANE

You're a brand new nun.

TENKEI

A beginner.

MARY JANE

Congratulations. What did you do before?

TENKEI

Many different things.

MARY JANE

Like...?

(Tenkei sees Mary Jane really wants to know)

TENKEI

Well my longest job was as a teacher.

MARY JANE

I'm a teacher! I want to be.

TENKEI

I was a teacher for almost twenty years. At a Waldorf School.

MARY JANE

Right! That's, like, Montessori...

TENKEI

(ever so slightly crestfallen)

No.

MARY JANE

Oh.

TENKEI

They're often confused. They're very different.

MARY JANE

Sorry.

TENKEI

(laughing at herself a little)

No – that's all right.

MARY JANE

Why did you stop?

TENKEI

I moved to Oregon to take care of my mother when she was sick. I stayed there for a while after she died, I managed an inn, did various...

MARY JANE

Mm-hm.

TENKEI

Then I worked in a hospice. That was my last job before, uh...this.

(Pause. Mary Jane waves her hand in front of her face, moving it closer and farther away, closing one eye and then the other.)

MARY JANE

I get these visual auras. Sometimes it means a migraine is coming on, sometimes it doesn't.

TENKEI

What does it look like? The aura?

MARY JANE

Bright lights, and dark spots. Hard to describe. It starts small and then it blooms. In ten minutes I won't be able to see you. When I was a teenager, around when I got my period, I got migraines so bad, I'd puke, my speech would slur, I just had to go to bed. Once the right side of my face got temporarily paralyzed and my mom thought I was having a stroke.

(brief pause)

Alex has now had three strokes.

(Tenkei nods)

You knew that.

(Tenkei nods)

I never know what everybody knows here.

(pause)

TENKEI

Is that Alex's fish?

MARY JANE

Yes! This is Gloria.

(Mary Jane picks up the bowl and they watch Gloria swim)

Alex hasn't met her yet, because he hasn't woken up since I got her for him.

TENKEI

She's a girl fish.

MARY JANE

Oh good! I was just guessing.

TENKEI

No, I don't know. You said "her."

MARY JANE

Oh. I thought you could tell. I thought maybe that was part of Buddhist training.

TENKEI

No. I have an iPhone, though. Should we look?

MARY JANE

Sure!

(Tenkei types on her phone.)

TENKEI

Here we go. What sex is my goldfish? A simple eight step – uh-oh.

MARY JANE

Eight steps!

TENKEI

Let's see...step one. Shape. Is your goldfish deep-bodied? Females tend to be deeper bodied than their male counterparts when viewed from the side.

(they both look at the fish for a while, perplexed)

MARY JANE

What does deep-bodied mean?

TENKEI

Step two. The anus.

MARY JANE

Ha!

TENKEI

The fish's anal opening, found just above the anal fin, will protrude more on a female goldfish.

(They look briefly and skeptically at the fish before proceeding.)

Step three. Look for tubercles! If you see tubercles, or small white spots, on your goldfish, then more than likely, it's a male.

MARY JANE

Small white spots...

(They both look closely for a while)

TENKEI

This *would* be good training.

(Pause)

Are those white spots? They might be.

MARY JANE

(blinking)

It's hard 'cause of all these lights in my eyes.

TENKEI

Those may be tubercles. I'm not sure.

MARY JANE

You think I have to rename her? Him?

TENKEI

No.

MARY JANE

I don't think I want to go through the other five steps.

(Tenkei nods and puts her phone away)

It's still raining out there, huh?

TENKEI

Yes. They're predicting more floods.

MARY JANE

I have a friend...I'm worried about her garden.

(brief pause)

Oh, no, that's right. That's right. She lives on a hill.

(she's briefly comforted by that)

My memory...

TENKEI

Sure.

MARY JANE

I keep getting disoriented. They've moved Alex's room a few times. This morning I came out of the bathroom and went to the wrong bed. But not a bed he had been in before. I took a wrong turn, then I went to the right spot in the wrong room. There was a teenager there. A nurse was rubbing him down with lotion. He was staring at the ceiling. I wasn't sure what my mistake was for a moment. Was it the right bed but the wrong child? The right child, the wrong...time zone?

(brief pause)

It could also have been part of the migraine.

TENKEI

They think some saints had migraines.

(Mary Jane looks at her)

Saint Teresa of Avila. Now I'm calling upon my Christian education. I was very happy, when I was renouncing my childhood religion, to learn that what I had always been taught were visions from God were, in fact, neurological events. That was the kind of little fact that gave me a lot of pleasure, back then.

MARY JANE

Now what do you think?

(Tenkei thinks)

TENKEI

I wish I could tell my parents I'm no longer so sure of the things that made me look down on them.

(brief pause)

MARY JANE

I think you won't mind my saying this. It must be frightening to start a new job at your age.

TENKEI

(quietly pleased about this)

It is.

(pause. Mary Jane winces, shielding her eyes from the fluorescents)

MARY JANE

I think this one's coming with a headache.

TENKEI

May I turn off the lights for you, Mary Jane?

MARY JANE

Thank you.

(Tenkei turns off the lights. It takes her a minute because the switches are in different places in the room. It's quite dark, excepting the glow of Alex's disconnected monitor and some spill from the hall. Tenkei sits again. They sit together, in silence, for quite a while.)

TENKEI

Do you want to tell me about Alex?

MARY JANE

He's stubborn. Ha. He is such a stubborn kid. I get so mad at him. If he doesn't want to do something? Like say he doesn't want to sit in his wheelchair? If I try to put him in, he'll arch and squirm – I'm five times his size and he isn't supposed to have hardly any muscle control, but I'm telling you, if he doesn't want to sit I cannot get him in that damn chair. And I'm trying to be stern, but I'm laughing, and saying, "This is not funny, mister!" and he's laughing too...

(pause)

He loves fish, of course. He loves our superintendent's dog, Tricia; I bet he misses seeing her. He loves very cold things, I think he likes the feeling of extreme...sensory...he likes touching snow and ice. He likes seeing his breath in the winter.

If he does let me put him in his chair, he loves for me to run with him up and down the street as fast as I can go. People look at me like I'm crazy, like, "Is that safe? Is he supposed to be doing that?" But he just grins and grins.

He's almost three.

I don't know whether he's going to make it out of this surgery.

I don't know what to hope for anymore.

(pause)

TENKEI

I see him very clearly. Thank you.

(pause. Mary Jane smiles a little bit)

MARY JANE

(re: the aura)

...it's closing in...

They're very pretty actually, auras, they look like...computer generated...what am I trying to think of? What's a snowflake?

TENKEI

What's a snowflake?

MARY JANE

It's a...an endlessly repeating...

TENKEI

A fractal?

MARY JANE

Yeah. A fractal.

(Long pause. With her eyes closed, she watches the aura morph and shimmer. It's unimaginably beautiful. She opens her eyes.)

God. What a strange...

(She looks for a word, then loses track of her search.)

TENKEI

Can you still see?

(Bright white light. End of play.)