

DREW

What are they?
What's that- why is the table shaking?

GARRETH

I think...they're talking about...Portia's, you know- when she was seventeen/

DREW

OH FUCK-IN *WOMEN*

(as though across an ocean)

WILL YOU LAY OFF IT, ALREADY, Portia? Portia!

YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE-

SEE-

THERE'S A THING CALLED A

GROWN UP?

(ELLEN's tapping gets louder)

a **GROWN UP**

MIGHT'VE HAD TROUBLE WHEN THEY WERE A KID-

KIDS MIGHT'VE STARVED OR OR OR *BINGED* OR HAD *REAL* PROBLEMS:

BEEN BURNED, BEEN IN FIRES, LOST HOUSES, LOST HOMES, LOST PARENTS-

BEEN IN EARTHQUAKES, GOTTEN RAPED!

SHIT HAPPENS TO *KIDS* YES,

HORRIBLE SHIT

AND

PORTIA

You can't get away with this abusive crap just 'cuz Mom isn't-

(DREW squints at her. He glances at GARRETH)

GARRETH

Um- it's- something about your ex- dece- *late* wife, Mr. Nelson

DREW

(barely pausing to take this in)

AND HORRIBLE SHIT HAPPENS TO GROWN UPS, TOO BUT SEE THE THING ABOUT
GROWN UPS

IS THAT

GROWN UPS

ONLY DEAL WITH THE HORRIBLE SHIT THAT IS

HAPPENING TO THEM *NOW* AND

OUT OF NECCE-FUCKIN-SITY THEY LET ALL THE OTHER SHIT GO

Let all the other shit go- let it go- let it go!

Portia!

Let it go- you just-

(somewhat to GARRETH)

it's such a BS culture, out there-
 well, I don't need to tell *you*-
 it's all the coffee they drink, and the neuroses, and the Woody Allen, she got- caught
 up in it, I think- being a mess is like the national pastime over there it's just- excuse
 me-

(back to PORTIA)

YOU WEREN'T BORN BROKEN!
 YOU JUST DECIDED TO TRY IT ON FOR SIZE, AND I DON'T KNOW- GOT
 COMFORTABLE IN IT-
 fuckin...women...

(Pause.

ELLEN is just tapping.)

MARSHA

(standing behind DREW)

You can't just- the horrible shit doesn't excuse- doesn't excuse anything, Porche.
 There's apology, and repentance and then there's forgiveness-

PORTIA

Forgiveness. Forgiveness. Forgiveness. Forgiveness forgiveness forgiveness
 forgiveness.

*(She climbs up on the table nimbly, gets on her knees, clutches her hand together. In a
 Valley Girl voice)*

Sooooo hey there, God like, totally what's UP?! how's it hangin' whaz goin' oonnnn...
 So- I guess I'm kinda like supposed to be asking you for something right now but I
 like can't remember what it is soooooo...

MARSHA

(starting to leave)

I don't have to watch this sick shit- performance art

(ELLEN drops her fork. It clatters against the plate.)

ELLEN

Mom- like- *listen.*

PORTIA

(snapping her fingers)

Oh-my-god RIGHT! Forgiveness.

...I feel like that come's up a *lot??*

..,for me?

(Beat.

She drops the Valley Girl accent)

So- God?

Do you have somewhere you need to be right now?
 How 'bout this: a guy walks in to a bar, a girl is born, and they both say: "ouch"...
 'cuz of the impact
 ...whenever we're down on our knees it's like we're begging for SOMEbody to save
 us, right? The capital H Him, the flavor of the week...
 Forgiveness...well: you're God, you know everything, you GET it you were there:
 I was seventeen, and I sat in Dr. Berman's office and played with her designer tissue
 boxes with my toe and we, together, worked on me saying no to people's shit, right?
 Control-release-control-release-control-release-control-release
 That's the thing about bulimia, it's a perfect crime n' punishment system, it's an
 exact science...I was seventeen and this expensive Dr. helped me shatter that-
 just be an artist, just do shit, don't worry about it don't prove anything
 It's kind of a game- it's like a game you play with yourself- it's like when they put
 blinders on race horses
(singing- tunelessly- it's improv'ed) I'm gonna pretend that there aren't people
 around me-
 judging me, judging me
 I'm gonna pretend I'm all alonnnne because it's easier that way,
 Oh it's easier that way-
 Cuz I know I know what's good for me,
 but what's good for me seems bad to you
 What's good for me looks bad to you
 What's good for me what's good for me what's good for me-
(still singing)
 I saved my life, but I chipped away at yours. To save my life, I had to chip away at
 yours- to save my life, I had to bite off part of yours-

(speaking or maybe still singing) I wish I could...I wish I could...I would be the worst
 Catholic ever, and I never had a problem with that- bulimic girls can't be Catholics,
 we'll kill ourselves- so I threw out the Judeo-Christian handbook- I threw out crime
 n' punishment but then I ruin marriages and I ruin lives- and mortality is an abstract
 thrown on gallery walls-
(she looks upward- speaking)
 Are you listening?
 Show me- show me- that it matters...
 It was, uh, it was A-okay it was A-okay it was A-okay for me because
(singing, kinda to the tune of "Summertime")
 You had it sooo easssssssy- and I had it so hard-
 To everyone else oh the livin' is easssssssy
 But for me it's hard
(speaking) But for me it's hard
 But for me it's hard
 I feel bad that I can't feel bad I feel bad that I can't feel bad I feel bad that I can't feel
 bad I feel
 Just- huh! *(she pounds her chest with one fist)*
 Huh! *(pound)*

Huh! (*pound*)

Huh! (*pound*)

MARSHA

Don't- what the fuck are you- ?

PORTIA

(*with pounds*)

HUH!

HUH!

HUH!

MARSHA

(*going to her*)

Just STOP- you're fucking freaking me out- just stop-
(*holding her sister's fists back*)

Just stop- why do you- break like this-

Dad? DAD? Why does she always insist on breaking down?

STOP HITTING YOURSELF WE DON'T WANT YOU HITTING YOURSELF!

(*Beat*)

Look at that I even- even now I can't stop myself from like- *saving* you.

It's your greatest talent- people just wanna fucking reach in and fish you out.

All the time.

GARRETH

...jesus.

Amen.

PORTIA

That's an awful greatest talent to /have

DREW

WHAT DID SHE- WHAT DID SHE SAY?

GARRETH

She said-

well she said-

really singing for my supper, here ah

Mr. Nelson: your DAUGHTer said, that, uh-

being born was hard?

And- bulimic girls can have sex with people's husbands? Or- it makes some sort of sense-

(*flipping back through the pages*)

also- that you might have overpaid for Dr. *Berman*...

she feels like a racehorse,
 she pretends to be invisible,
(muttering) Judeo-Christian...George Gershwin...
 uhhhhhhh- and then she started hitting herself.
(Furrowed brow.)
 Yeah. Yeah.

(Beat)

DREW
(to PORTIA)

WHY CAN'T YOU JUST
SAY IT?

PORTIA

I'm-
(PORTIA crawls on all fours on the table until she is face-to-face with her Dad at the end of it- her face is very close to his, and she moves her lips slowly)
 I'm TRYING, Daddy
 I'm trying to say it
(she looks around briefly, then stops speaking and just mouths the words.
(mouthing) "I'm trying to say it. I'm trying to say it"
(slowly, DREW takes his hands and places them on her shoulders.)

DREW

OK. OK.

(The two of them stay like that. GARRETH collects his notes, and exits slowly. He's waiting to see if someone might stop him- and the longer he waits, the more he realizes they won't, and his confidence in leaving grows.

PORTIA leans her forehead in to DREW's, and he allows this to happen. A beat. He pulls back, cups her cheeks in his hands, gets up, and exits. As he passes the table, he drops his hearing aid on it.

MARSHA walks until she's standing in front of the kneeling PORTIA, still on the table. Beat.)

PORTIA

/Martie-

MARSHA
(softly)

"ouch"

PORTIA

What?

MARSHA

I just wanted to say: "ouch"/

PORTIA

'Cuz of the impact

MARSHA

Right

PORTIA

Right

MARSHA

So- basically...you'd just taken your story

PORTIA

Basically

MARSHA

You're gonna play the role

PORTIA

I don't know...I don't want to- anymore...

(MARSHA *nods.*
Beat.)

So what're we going to do/now

MARSHA

It's just- there's just- I think I know the answer, already but you didn't slash
don't/love him, do y-

PORTIA

No

MARSHA

Right
well then-
oh and then so then he doesn't/love y-

PORTIA

No. No.

MARSHA

So then maybe you could/leave us al-

PORTIA

Yes. Yes.

(She climbs down off the table. She starts to leave- turns around, grabs her old note to Garreth- "I'm sorry"- and begins to slide it across the table to Marsha, who waves it away.)

MARSHA

Porche- I know.

(smiles) don't over-explicate. I feel like it loses it's- power?

(PORTIA balls up the note and throws it at her. A cordial exchange-)

PORTIA

Fuck you

MARSHA

Fuck you too

(PORTIA begins to leave- stops in front of ELLEN)

ELLEN

(doesn't look at her)

It's alright it's just- I just wanna talk to my Mom right now?

(PORTIA exits. MARSHA runs over to her daughter)

MARSHA

(hurriedly)

Oh you must be so confused you poor baby you must be feeling about a million different things- maybe hating your father? You might be hating your father- I'm kinda hating him too- or not, no that's awful parenting- you might be hating me, too that would be understandable ALL that would be understandable whatever you're feeling is understandable, *totally* fine- just talk to me - I'm sorry that you had to hear me swear- and see that horrible horrible ugly side of me- I'm sorry you had to listen to all that shit- oh!- crap- oh! you're so strong- you're so incredible the way you- oh my god- that I let you- listen- to all that- I shoulda ushered you out of the room- I shoulda- where's my protective instinct I'm really- sorry I- I'm not sure that I know how to be- I just don't know- /you're thirteen I shouldn't be- but your mother doesn't really know who to be- I can't juggle- more than one at a time- mom, or angry, or angry mom but I can't- I couldn't be a sister and a mom and a wronged- wronged?- wife at the same time- you're thirteen and I am sorry...but you're so much STRONGER, BETTER than me or Portia or Granddaddy, or- tell me- just say it- what you're feeling- sometimes I get scared because you're so silent that you seem so strong but then I don't know- whether- or rather-

ELLEN

-Mom
 -Mom if you'll just let me
 -Mom-?
 -Mom I'm trying to-
 -Mom-are-you-gonna-let-me-speak?

MARSHA

Yes. Yes-I-am-gonna-let-you-speak.

(A long pause.)

ELLEN

It's just-
 I don't know
(Pause. She fiddles with her phone in her hands.
Exhale:)
 Ahhhhhhhh- it's just like
(she looks upstage)
 I-don't-know.
 Don't get mad? But I feel like: I get it?
 I get what it's like to feel like I-don't-know everyone has it easy and you have it
 really hard?

MARSHA

Okayyyyy

ELLEN

Yeah- I just-
(her throat catches)
 she kept saying "release-control-release-control"-
 I don't know.

(long beat)

MARSHA

what

ELLEN

(throat catching)

I-feel-like-I'm-all-control?
(MARSHA, kneeling by her daughter, embraces her. MARSHA releases, looks down.
Beat.
Beat.)
 Mom?

Yes

MARSHA

Are you gonna say anything-?/

ELLEN

I'm just trying to think of. the right thing to say.

(Beat. This is not enough.)

...are you OK?

ELLEN

I have no idea

MARSHA

(Beat)

Are you and Portia OK?

ELLEN

I don't know how she- yeah. We're fine.
The not-being-OK-, 'Len, it comes from a lot of things...

MARSHA

Like not just Dad?

ELLEN

Exactly not just Dad.

MARSHA

It feels weird/

ELLEN

What/does

MARSHA

How everything is now different

ELLEN

Right. Right. /Right.

MARSHA

ELLEN

Like...how...(throat catches) this morning?
He was just "Dad", and now-

MARSHA

Right. Right.

(Long pause)

So. ...sweetie? You were saying- that you feel like- you're going through a tough phase, /right now?

ELLEN

No, it's-

MARSHA

Because, honestly, I mean- I think this is just a matter of perspective here, because, I mean- you were elected captain of JV field hockey within, what? The first two weeks of school? And I mean, you have plenty of friends- all those texts? Imagine how it would feel if you were some really overweight girl- or not- I just mean- or like if you had *Down Syndrome* now *that* would be really-

ELLEN

Mom? It's not about *things* like outside things like I can DO the outside things- I can BE okay at field hockey, and...be the first freshman to get a *Letter to the Editor* published/I do *those* things but its like all the little in between things like getting up, getting showered and then walking from our car in to school- to the front doors of school- seems like- such a long distance and just *walking* places yeah *walking* I need to like screw up my courage, gather my energies for a walk from like one place to the next, like when you ask me to drop-off the dry-cleaning- /

MARSHA

-When did...that happen- ?
-so you're...fatigued?

ELLEN

No. It's not- "*energy*" it's energy like I don't have the energy like emotional energy to walk down hallways with people looking and never show disappointment and also suck my stomach in and be polite to teachers and funny around boys and- the little things?
Release-control-release-control...I just wait...until I can get to my room and...unroll...

MARSHA

Ellen- you don't need to be thinking about boys until at least a few more years- HECK! you don't need to be thinking about boys ever- you can think about girls, you can think about *no* one

ELLEN

No- Mom-

MARSHA

Trust me- "BOYS" aren't the great shakes they're made out to be

ELLEN

Mom-

MARSHA

You can just put that out of your head altogether, OK? "Poof!" Out! It doesn't matter

ELLEN

But-Mom-I-CAN'T-get-it-out-of-my-head-that's-what-I'm-saying
I'M not in control of my head- all this stuff is just- heaped on it and-

MARSHA

You're over-reacting! LOOK at the speech you just gave- you're telling me that speech wasn't given by an CONFIDENT thirteen year-old girl

ELLEN

Yes. I am.

Mom.

(annunciating)

you didn't hear it.

It's- I *understand* why but just- don't ACT like your attention was on me.

(Beat)

Just- tell me- when you don't know what to say. Just- say when you're confused and- I'll try and explain it better/

MARSHA

I'm trying to. I'm trying to say it.

(Pause)

I'm confused.

(Beat)

I'm at a loss.

I'm/really unhappy.

I'm- I don't know- my husband- FUCK- my sister- and...
my daughter.

(She looks at ELLEN. She is perfect.)

Look at you. Look at you./

ELLEN

-...unhappy.

-Mom did you hear me? I said I'm really unhappy, too.

MARSHA

Yes. I did.

(She extends her hand, palm out, and ELLEN meets it with her own- they line up their spread fingers, one by one.)

Lights down.

END OF PLAY