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### Ruth and Lydia: The Last Scenes of the Last Act of a Very Long Play, In No Particular Order

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Ruth and Lydia: The Last Scenes of the Last Act of a Very Long Play, In No Particular  
Order

by

Jamie Rubenstein

Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Fine Arts in Playwriting, Hunter College  
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05/15/2022

Date

Christine Scarfuto

Thesis Sponsor

05/15/2022

Date

Robert Cowan

Second Reader

## CHARACTER BREAKDOWN

### RUTHS and LYDIAS

RUTH	Resident at Brandywine	80s	F
LYDIA	Resident at Brandywine	80s	F
YOUNG RUTH	Ruth in an earlier stage of life	20s-40s	F
YOUNG LYDIA	Lydia in an earlier stage of life	20s-40s	F
RUTH AS A CHILD	Ruth as a child	10ish	F

### THE WORLD THEY LIVE IN

DAUGHTERS	Ariel/Valerie	40s-60s	F
SUPPORT STAFF	Elizabeth/Deb/TV 1/Doctor 2	20s-40s	F
FRUSTRATION	Shirley/TV 2/Doctor 1	70s	F

### SETTING

The Brandywine Retirement community in the years, c. 2014-2019, but also the 80 years leading up to that, at any given time.

### NOTES

(/) – an interruption

Blank space: an internal pause

The bistro at Brandywine.

The back wall of the stage is lined with walkers, a parking lot where residents leave them before they sit to eat.

There is also a small two-seater dining table with two chairs.

RUTH (80s) is seated at the table, sipping coffee.

LYDIA (80s) enters, parks her walker among the rest, and sits in the other chair.

LYDIA

Sorry. I lost track of the time.

RUTH

Good thing I have nowhere else to be.

LYDIA

I don't know where the day goes.

RUTH

Away, forever.

ELIZABETH (20) comes to the table and puts down two glasses of water. She wears a maroon collared shirt, a name tag in large print, black pants, a half-apron around her waist.

ELIZABETH

You girls ready?

RUTH

I'm overwhelmed by all of the amazing options.

ELIZABETH

I can come back in a minute?

RUTH

I'm kidding.

Such a joker.

ELIZABETH

I'll have the usual.

RUTH

Turkey club, no mayo?

ELIZABETH

Good memory!

RUTH

You think I'd forget? What about you, Lydia?

ELIZABETH

I'll have the filet mignon, rare.

LYDIA

Oh--we don't have filet mignon, but we do have a burger.

ELIZABETH

I know.

LYDIA

You two are just on a roll today!

ELIZABETH

Does the grilled chicken come with fries?

LYDIA

No, it comes with roasted potatoes, but I can substitute fries?

ELIZABETH

Oh no. I have to watch my girlish figure.

LYDIA

You have a great figure.

ELIZABETH

No, my pants are too tight.

LYDIA

Okay. One turkey club, no mayo, one grilled chicken.

ELIZABETH

LYDIA

But let me tell you something.

ELIZABETH

Yes?

LYDIA

This is important.

ELIZABETH

No salt?

LYDIA

I can't have any salt.

ELIZABETH

Of course, Lydia, you think I'd forget? You're my special girl!

LYDIA

The other day my soup was very salty.

ELIZABETH

Uh-oh, we can't have that!

LYDIA

Just please remind them.

ELIZABETH

You know I will.

LYDIA

My blood pressure. I don't know why I'm trying to keep staying alive at this point, but my doctor / says I have to.

ELIZABETH

Lydia, Lydia, I'm going to keep you alive forever with all the food here.

LYDIA

Oh, please don't. It's not food worth living for. Someone has to teach those people in the kitchen how to cook. It's criminal. They / call this food.

RUTH

Alright, Lydia, she gets it. Let her go.

LYDIA

One more thing.

ELIZABETH

No butter?

LYDIA

Such a good memory!

ELIZABETH

Don't worry, Lydia, I'll take care of you. No salt, no butter.

LYDIA

You always remember. You're a good person. What are you studying to do again?

ELIZABETH

X-ray technician.

LYDIA

Oh that's wonderful.

RUTH

You can get a lot of practice here on everyone breaking their bones all the time.

ELIZABETH

Well, you stay out of trouble. No skydiving or jumping out of cars.

RUTH

I'll try.

LYDIA

Elizabeth, do you have anyone special in your life?

ELIZABETH

Oh, no. Nobody so special.

LYDIA

Would you like to meet someone?

ELIZABETH

I don't know.

RUTH

Lydia, leave the poor girl alone!

LYDIA

Estelle's grandson was here yesterday--I saw him, I said to Pat, is that Paul Newman! He looked like Paul Newman back to life.

Paul Newman?  
ELIZABETH

You know Paul Newman.  
LYDIA

Should I?  
ELIZABETH

From the salad dressing.  
RUTH

Oh yeah!  
ELIZABETH

Okay, girls, I'll be back soon.  
ELIZABETH

Thank you.  
RUTH

Spotlight on YOUNG LYDIA.

YOUNG LYDIA  
Young Lydia in the kitchen, mixing cake batter. Her husband comes by and dips his finger into the bowl.

Lights up: RUTH and her daughter VALERIE are walking down a hall of Brandywine.

RUTH  
Why do I need a walker? You know I don't need a walker. Look.

RUTH starts to speed walk away.

VALERIE  
Your medicine makes you dizzy.

RUTH  
I'm not dizzy. Do I look dizzy? I can walk. I can run.

In a burst of will, RUTH bolts across the stage and away, leaving VALERIE with the walker.

VALERIE  
Mom! Come back here! Mom!

Resigned, VALERIE pushes the walker off the stage, following RUTH.

Spotlight on YOUNG RUTH:

YOUNG RUTH

Young Ruth walking in the city, darting across the street, her legs strong.

Lights up on LYDIA and RUTH, at the same table as before.

LYDIA

I had the weirdest thing happen to me. I heard from an old boyfriend. I went out with him before I met Howard. He lives nearby at this place called the Regency.

RUTH

Oh yeah, I know the Regency.

LYDIA

In Peaks Point.

RUTH

Isn't it in Bridgewood?

LYDIA

No, that's the other place.

RUTH

Oh right.

LYDIA

I used to go out with one of his friends, and I introduced him to my friend Lorraine, and they got married. But he said he always wanted to be with me!

RUTH

Hm.

LYDIA

That's what he told me. But they were married all these years, and Lorraine passed away I think maybe six years ago. So he called me, / and he said,

RUTH

He called you?

LYDIA

Yes!

RUTH

Why?

LYDIA

I'm going to tell you. He said, "Lydia, would you have dinner with me?"

RUTH

Would you?

LYDIA

It could be fun. To hear about his life, I'm curious.

RUTH

I get that.

LYDIA

He turned out to be so rich. He owned a zipper company.

RUTH

A zipper company?

LYDIA

He manufactured zippers. Think how many things have zippers on them!

RUTH

Hm. Yeah.

LYDIA

All that zipper money. I used to tell Howard about him, remember that guy who wanted to go out with me, he's a zipper tycoon now.

RUTH

I'm sure he loved that.

LYDIA

Howie used to say, "If he wants you, he can have you!"

RUTH

That sounds like something Howie would say.

ELIZABETH has arrived with their food.

LYDIA

Here she comes, Miss America.

ELIZABETH

Okay, here you go: turkey club, no mayo, and grilled chicken, no salt and no butter.

RUTH

Thank you! Can I trouble you for more coffee?

ELIZABETH

No trouble at all.

ELIZABETH exits.

RUTH and LYDIA start to eat.

LYDIA

Howie would have a field day with all this food. I miss him. *(Pause)* Do you ever miss Leonard?

RUTH

I can't say that I do.

LYDIA puts her food down. Something's wrong.

RUTH

What's wrong?

LYDIA

This tastes like there's salt in it.

RUTH

Oh no.

LYDIA

And maybe butter.

RUTH

Let me see.

LYDIA

Here.

RUTH tries a bite.

I'm not sure.

RUTH

Excuse me? Elizabeth?

LYDIA

ELIZABETH returns with a pot of coffee to refill RUTH.

ELIZABETH

What can I do for you?

LYDIA

This tastes like there's salt in it and maybe butter.

ELIZABETH

Oh no! There shouldn't be. I confirmed with the kitchen.

LYDIA

I can taste it, though. *(Pause)* Do you want to try?

ELIZABETH

No. It's okay. Let me take this back.

LYDIA

Sorry to be a bother.

ELIZABETH

No bother at all.

ELIZABETH exits.

LYDIA

Go ahead, eat. Don't wait for me.

RUTH

I wasn't going to. *(Pause)* What do you have planned for today?

LYDIA

A mahjong game.

RUTH

Who with?

Ellen, Dianne, Shirley. LYDIA

Hm. RUTH

What? LYDIA

Shirley. RUTH

What about her? LYDIA

She's not so smart, is she. RUTH

I don't think the president will be calling her for her opinions on foreign policy, but so what? LYDIA

I don't know. RUTH

What's on tap for you today? LYDIA

I don't know. Nothing. RUTH

Oh! Ariel's picking me up for dinner tonight. LYDIA

Lucky. I'll be here. RUTH

But Valerie just had you over the other night. LYDIA

So? Is there a quota? RUTH

Go easy on her. LYDIA

RUTH

I need her to go easy on me! She acts like I'm one of the big stresses in her life.

LYDIA

She doesn't.

RUTH

Don't defend her, you don't know.

SHIRLEY enters.

SHIRLEY

Hello, you two.

LYDIA

Hi, Shirley.

SHIRLEY

How's your lunch?

LYDIA

I had to send mine back.

SHIRLEY

How come?

LYDIA

I said no butter or salt, but they don't listen.

SHIRLEY

Oh, I know all about that. What's doing?

LYDIA

Ruth thinks she's a burden to her daughter but she isn't. (*Off Ruth's reaction*) What?

RUTH

How are you, Shirley?

SHIRLEY

Same as usual.

ELIZABETH returns with LYDIA's food.

ELIZABETH

Here you go, Lydia. Promise there's no salt and no butter.

LYDIA

Thank you. Sorry again to be a pill.

ELIZABETH

Never!

ELIZABETH exits.

SHIRLEY

Well I'll let you eat your lunch. See you later, Lydia.

SHIRLEY exits.

LYDIA

Let's see how this is. (*Off RUTH's face.*) What?

RUTH

I can't believe you just said that thing about my daughter to Shirley!

LYDIA

Why? You talk about it to everyone.

RUTH

But not to Shirley! She'll eat that up. She'll just love that.

LYDIA

I didn't mean anything by it.

RUTH

I just--isn't that common sense, that's a personal thing not to repeat?

LYDIA

Okay! Okay. Sorry.

They eat.

Lights out.

Spotlight on YOUNG RUTH:

YOUNG RUTH

Young Ruth, sitting in a college classroom, listening intently to the discussion.

Lights up on RUTH and VALERIE in a DOCTOR's office.

DOCTOR 1

So Ruth, today we are going to do a few tests to check your memory and see how you're doing. Nothing to worry about.

RUTH

Okay.

DOCTOR 1

I'm going to tell you three objects to remember. Ready?

RUTH

Yes.

DOCTOR 1

Duck, pencil, chair.

RUTH

Duck, pencil, chair.

DOCTOR 1

Duck, pencil, chair.

RUTH

Duck, pencil, chair. Duck, pencil, chair. Duck, pencil chair.

DOCTOR 1

Good! You were able to repeat them back.

RUTH

Is that really an accomplishment? That's a little ridiculous.

DOCTOR 1

One more time.

RUTH

Duck, pencil, chair.

DOCTOR 1

Good. So Ruth, are you sleeping well lately?

RUTH

Yes.

DOCTOR 1

That's good. Sleep is important.

I agree. RUTH

How's living in Brandywine? DOCTOR 1

A dream come true. RUTH

My mother-in-law lives over there. DOCTOR 1

What's her name? RUTH

Eleanore Fuchs. DOCTOR 1

Don't know her. RUTH

What sort of activities do you do to keep busy? DOCTOR 1

They have all kinds of stuff. There's a chorus. RUTH

Do you like to sing? DOCTOR 1

Yes. RUTH

That's great. I understand you have quite a few grandchildren. DOCTOR 1

Correct. RUTH

How many? DOCTOR 1

*(Pause)* 6. RUTH

VALERIE

That's right.

DOCTOR 1

Do you get to see them often?

RUTH

Some more than others.

DOCTOR 1

Okay Ruth, now I'm going to ask you to repeat the three items from before.

RUTH

*(Long pause)* I can't remember.

Lights out.

Lights up on LYDIA and her daughter ARIEL.

ARIEL

Okay, Mom. I gotta head out.

LYDIA

Oh--hold on.

LYDIA exits.

ARIEL

*(After a moment)* Mom, I have to go.

LYDIA

*(Offstage)* One minute...

ARIEL

I'm already running late. I have to pick up Ryan.

LYDIA

*(Returning)* Okay, okay. I couldn't find it. Oh! Here it is. Where's my head?

LYDIA tries to hand ARIEL a bag of pants.

ARIEL

What is this?

LYDIA  
It's the pants.

ARIEL  
What pants?

LYDIA  
From Macy's, to return.

ARIEL  
Oh my god, Mom, I have to go, I'm in a rush, you made me wait for this?

LYDIA  
You'll take these pants to the store? To return them?

ARIEL  
I just bought them for you.

LYDIA  
I don't like them. They're no good.

ARIEL  
What's wrong with them?

LYDIA  
They're not flattering.

ARIEL  
They're the same as the other ones.

LYDIA  
Look, I'll show you.

ARIEL  
No, please don't show me.

LYDIA  
Look.

ARIEL  
Mom. Put them back in the bag.

LYDIA  
Look.

ARIEL

Mom. Don't take them out. I'm not looking at them.

LYDIA

The quality went down.

ARIEL

I tried to do a nice thing and get these for you...

LYDIA

It's not my fault, I don't like them. So I'm just supposed to suck it up and take what I get?

ARIEL

Okay, bye Mom. Love you.

LYDIA

All I do is watch other people live their lives.

ARIEL

Mom. Stop.

LYDIA

I just sit here and take the pants I get. I don't even choose them anymore. Like a child.

ARIEL

Oh god, Mom. I tried to do you a favor.

LYDIA

No, no, I've just lost all agency in my life. It's fine.

ARIEL

Give me the pants.

LYDIA

The receipt is in the bag.

Ariel takes the bag and exits.

Spotlight on YOUNG LYDIA:

YOUNG LYDIA

Young Lydia, putting on lipstick in a mirror, absorbed in the task.

Lights up on RUTH, trying to turn on the TV.

TV 1

--wildfires raging through Cal--

TV 2

--Trump might actually--

TV 1

Side effects include headaches, nausea, diarrhea, suicidal thoughts, liver and kidney failure--

TV 2

--bit of olive oil and wait until it starts to simmer like this--

TV 1

--to really meet someone, I take this seriously, unlike Jenna, like I'm ready to marry Tyler and I've only known him for two weeks--

TV 2

A stabbing on West 80th Street at 4 in the afternoon--

TV 1

*(Same show as previous TV 1, RUTH settling in for this)*--so if Jenna is gonna try and interfere in my relationship with Tyler, that's fine. See her try. She can say whatever she wants. I'm confident. I know I'm his number one choice.

The phone rings. RUTH turns the TV off.

RUTH

Hello?

Just watching TV. Nothing's on, really.

Yeah. What about you?

Mm hmm.

Ah. Okay.

Yes please. I think I need bananas, whole wheat bread, oranges, if any berries look good I'd take them, but only if they're good. I had to throw out the last box. Baby carrots.

I guess I don't.

Okay, so scratch the baby carrots. You're right.

I did throw them out.

No, I don't want to be wasteful.

Okay, okay. I also need almond milk. Unsweetened. Last time--

Last time you got the sweetened.

Oh! I'm also out of coffee. The half caffeine. Half caf. Whatever.

Yes. That's it.

Okay. I'll see you later.

Bye.

She hangs up.

RUTH does not turn the TV back on. Instead, she makes her bed, and then exits to the bathroom.

RUTH AS A CHILD enters from the bathroom. She is about ten years old and dressed in the same exact clothes as RUTH. She picks up the phone and dials.

RUTH AS A CHILD

Hi, Helen?

It's Ruth. Oh not much, just seeing how little there is to watch on TV. What about you?

Yeah, there's so much, and so little!

I'm hoping to play some bridge today, if you're interested.

Of course I understand. Enjoy.

Well maybe we can meet downstairs for dinner?

Ah, okay.

Soon, then.

Oh, I don't mean to interrupt.

Right, okay.

Bye.

RUTH AS A CHILD hangs up.

She picks up the phone and dials again.

RUTH AS A CHILD

Hi Barbara? It's Ruth.

Doing well! How about you?

What happened to Florence?

Oh no. I didn't know.

How long do you think she'll be in the hospital?

Yikes.

Did you want to chip in to send some food over?

Oh. That's nice you all did that already.

Okay, then. I guess I'll send something myself.

Oh no, it's silly now.

I wanted to know if you were interested in getting a bridge game going later.

Oh.

I guess let me know if anyone drops out. I'll be around.

Okay then. I won't keep you.

You too. Bye, Barbara.

She hangs up.

YOUNG RUTH, 30s, enters, though not through the door, and sits down next to RUTH AS A CHILD.

YOUNG RUTH

It's okay.

RUTH AS A CHILD

Sometimes these memories will sneak up on me when I least expect it.

YOUNG RUTH

Which ones?

RUTH AS A CHILD

Sometimes I think about how I exist in other people's memories and it haunts me. I remember a time when I realized that people I wanted so badly to be friends with were laughing at me. I still feel prickles in my skin to think about it.

YOUNG RUTH

You were just a child.

RUTH AS A CHILD

I remember that day of school in second grade. Did I know what I was doing? I couldn't say. I was a child, of course. But why wasn't I the sort of sweet natured child who instinctively scared about other people, cared, sorry, and knew when they needed something? Why was I aggressive and selfish and mean and transparent and desperate for attention?

YOUNG RUTH

It's a good question.

RUTH AS A CHILD

And so many other times, so many other times when I made the wrong choice.

YOUNG RUTH

Yes, why weren't you born perfect? You could have been born so mature and kind and wise and knowing how to be and treat people, knowing the right thing to say, and you chose not to.

RUTH AS A CHILD

And of course I grew up and became different in many ways. Is that even possible? It haunts me.

YOUNG RUTH

I know it does.

RUTH AS A CHILD

I thought at this age I wouldn't have to worry about this anymore.

YOUNG RUTH

Well.

RUTH AS A CHILD

And as a mother...

YOUNG RUTH

What's done is done.

RUTH AS A CHILD

Do you remember when I thought you could leave the past behind?

YOUNG RUTH

Ah.

They laugh.

RUTH AS A CHILD

That was funny of me.

YOUNG RUTH

Well so what.

## RUTH AS A CHILD

It haunts me.

## YOUNG RUTH

None of us are so pure. Right? I mean who among us. Really. If you really dig. So you have to have mercy when you're analyzing the ways that people are selfish and reckless and pick the wrong words or the wrong actions and do harm.

## RUTH AS A CHILD

Nobody will let me play bridge with them.

RUTH enters, sits next to RUTH AS A CHILD and YOUNG RUTH. She doesn't acknowledge them. She picks up a book and starts to read. RUTH AS A CHILD and YOUNG RUTH hover and look over her shoulder.

Lights fade.

Lights up on LYDIA, on the phone:

## LYDIA

Hello? Hi Alice. Do you know who this is?

It's Lydia.

Lydia, your sister.

Alice, I'm so happy to hear your voice.

No, I promise I'll never leave you. I'll always be here.

What did you do today?

I'm sorry, Alice, I can't understand what you're saying.

You what?

You what?

Alice, what did you do today?

What?

You want rice?

Are you saying you want rice?

Alice, I'm sorry, I don't understand what you're saying.

Can you put Joanna on the phone?

Hi Joanna.

How's she doing?

I get so upset. I'm sorry.

I don't know what to say to her.

Do you think she knows who I am?

Sometimes I can't tell. Maybe I'll try again tomorrow.

Thanks Joanna.

Lights out.

Spotlight on YOUNG LYDIA:

YOUNG LYDIA

Young Lydia and her sister sipping tea, lost in conversation while their children play.

Lights up on RUTH's apartment.

VALERIE is working on RUTH's TV/Remote.

RUTH and LYDIA are talking at the door.

RUTH

How was the funeral?

LYDIA

It was nice, actually.

RUTH

Good.

LYDIA

Very emotional.

VALERIE

Okay, Mom, I want to show you something.

RUTH

I'm being summoned.

VALERIE

I stuck a post-it to the back of the remote.

RUTH

Great.

VALERIE

I wrote the instructions / in steps right here.

\*

RUTH

(To LYDIA) Who spoke at the funeral?

VALERIE  
Mom, let me finish this.

RUTH  
I'm in trouble now.

VALERIE  
I wrote the instructions how to get to the DVR here. And it has to be on HDMI3--so there's also the steps to check that if it's not working.

RUTH  
Got it.

LYDIA  
You're a good daughter, Valerie.

RUTH  
So who spoke?

LYDIA  
Both of her sons, two granddaughters.

RUTH  
Anything interesting?

VALERIE  
Hold on a second. Mom. Look. You press power.

RUTH  
Okay.

VALERIE  
You press MENU.

RUTH  
Okay.

VALERIE  
You scroll up to DVR and press "OK"

RUTH  
Okay.

VALERIE  
Select VIEW RECORDINGS.

Okay.

RUTH

And there are all your shows.

VALERIE

Look at that.

RUTH

See if I click JEOPARDY, there are all of your episodes.

VALERIE

Got it.

RUTH

Okay I'm turning it off. Let me see you do it.

VALERIE

It's okay. I got it.

RUTH

Let me see.

VALERIE

No, no, you wrote it down there. I see.

RUTH

Okay.

VALERIE

Sorry Lydia, you were saying.

RUTH

Did you know she played the piano?

LYDIA

One of the sons is that writer, so I thought his speech would've been incredible, but it was just whatever. But the other son--he was amazing.

LYDIA

What did he say?

RUTH

LYDIA

I won't do it justice, but he told this story about her, how she was this incredible pianist. And nobody encouraged her, but she just picked it up and loved it and played so beautifully. If anyone had nurtured it, she could've played professionally. No doubt. But she played at home. She played this old piano in their house every night, he would fall asleep to the sound of her playing. She could have played Carnegie Hall, he said, but all her life, her audience was just them. I never even knew she played the piano.

Lights out.

Lights up on RUTH in DEB's salon chair, having her hair blown out.

RUTH

My grandson keeps trying to convince me to sell my art. Why would I? It's for me to enjoy. Who would buy it?

DEB

I bet lots of people.

RUTH

He keeps saying, "Sell it on Etsy."

DEB

Oh, I like Etsy.

RUTH

I don't understand it. He was trying to explain it to me. You put up pictures of your art online and people buy it and you mail it to them?

DEB

That's right. I got this on Etsy.

She shows RUTH her bracelet.

RUTH

Hm. The computer stuff doesn't stick with me.

DEB

I bet you could learn it.

RUTH

He keeps saying, "Grandma, you can make so much money!" So, what do I need it for? My funeral?

DEB

Ruth! You are dark.

RUTH

He keeps saying, "What's the point of making all this art if you don't sell it?"

DEB

That's like my son. Doesn't want to do anything unless he can make money off it.

RUTH

I said stop harassing me! I like it. It's fun for me.

DEB

Good for you.

YOUNG RUTH

Young Ruth outside, sketching a flower or a leaf on a tree.

RUTH

I also said, you know, you can have all of this when I'm dead and do whatever you want with it. Hang one or two on your wall, and when people come over, you can tell them, "My grandmother made it," and then think of me. And you can tell them I wouldn't listen to you and sell it--and then you can say whatever else you want, because I'll be dead!

Lights out.

Lights up on LYDIA on the phone.

LYDIA

Hello Irene.

It's Lydia.

Lydia.

How are you?

I'm fine. Have you heard from Sarah? I'm supposed to have a game with her later.

Oh.

On the stairs? That's terrible.

Did she hit her head?

So that's good news.

What time did she fall?

So she's still at the hospital?

People are dropping like flies around here.

And Albert was there just the other day, with his shoulder.

I'll have to give her a call. Thanks.

Take care.

Lights out.

Lights up on DEB's station at the hair salon. DEB is blow drying LYDIA's hair.

LYDIA

Ariel's holding her tongue about her daughter. It's not easy for her.

DEB

I bet.

LYDIA

I shouldn't gossip about their private business. It's not my story to tell.

DEB

Of course. I respect that.

Silence. DEB works.

LYDIA

Ariel's just busting at the seams about it.

DEB

I can only imagine!

LYDIA

It's very upsetting. She called me hysterical and said, "Lydia, they're back together! What should I do?"

DEB

No--they're back together?

LYDIA

As of two days ago! Well it's always changing. They're together, they're broken up, they're together, they're broken up. I said to her, what can you do? She's an adult, you can't forbid her, she has to figure it out.

DEB

You know I went through that with my son.

LYDIA

Oh, I went through it with Ariel!

DEB

So it's coming back around.

LYDIA

She had such a boyfriend before she met Mike. Oh. I thought I was going to have a stroke.

ARIEL enters.

ARIEL

Hi, Mom.

LYDIA

Oh! You almost gave me a heart attack. When did you get here?

ARIEL

Hi, Deb. I just walked in. You look nice.

LYDIA

But doesn't Deb look nice? I was just telling her she looks like a model.

DEB

Lydia, I should take you around with me all day!

ARIEL

I just wanted to let you know I'm here. I'll be waiting in the car.

DEB

We're almost done here.

ARIEL

It's okay. No need to rush.

ARIEL exits.

LYDIA waits for her to be gone.

LYDIA

That was a close one. *(Pause)* I'm not saying looks are important, but my granddaughter is beautiful, and this guy, he's not even good looking.

DEB

What's he look like?

LYDIA

Like a little weasel.

DEB

So what's the appeal?

LYDIA

That's what I want to know. I guess that her mother can't stand him.

DEB

She'll figure it out.

LYDIA

I hope so.

DEB

She will.

LYDIA

You're so sure.

DEB

I trust.

LYDIA

That doesn't always work in my experience.

Spotlight on YOUNG LYDIA:

YOUNG LYDIA

Young Lydia looks at the man who would become her husband, and for the first time, she sees who he is.

VALERIE and RUTH are walking down a hallway.

RUTH

You're coming tomorrow, right?

VALERIE

No.

SHIRLEY starts down the hall, towards VALERIE and RUTH.

RUTH

You never visit.

VALERIE

I was here two days ago.

SHIRLEY

Hello.

VALERIE

Hi, Shirley.

SHIRLEY

How are you doing, Valerie?

VALERIE

All good. How about you?

SHIRLEY

I'm doing well today.

RUTH

Bye, Shirley.

SHIRLEY

Bye!

SHIRLEY keeps walking.

RUTH

*(To Val)* Do you want to go to book club with me?

VALERIE

Why don't you ask Shirley?

RUTH gives her a look.

SHIRLEY

Ask Shirley what?

VALERIE

My mom's going to the book club tomorrow, are you going?

SHIRLEY

Tomorrow? I don't think I can read a whole book by then. What is it?

RUTH

War and Peace. See you later, Shirley.

VALERIE

That was rude.

RUTH

I was asking you to go, not Shirley.

VALERIE

I can't come over more than I already do. I have my own life.

YOUNG RUTH

Young Ruth walking with a toddler, holding her hands above her head so she can "walk."

RUTH

I just want to be around someone who knows me.

Lights out.

Lights up on RUTH and LYDIA playing cards.

RUTH

You were in my dream last night.

LYDIA

What was I doing?

RUTH

It was so strange. I never remember my dreams. Do you want to hear it?

LYDIA

I don't know, do I?

RUTH

I'll tell you.

LYDIA

Is it long?

RUTH

There was this bed in a room--not my bed, not my room, but my alarm clock on the nightstand next to it. I sat on the bed, and then the young guy Matthew from the bistro was there, telling me to lie down. / I said, are you sure?

LYDIA

Oh boy, what kind of dream is this.

RUTH

Don't worry. Get your mind out of the gutter. I said, it's not my bed. He said, it is your bed, go ahead and take a nap. So I said okay and lay down, but it was so lumpy, so I reached my hand into the mattress and pulled out a jar of peanut butter. Then I lay back down and it was still lumpy, so I reached around and found a balled up pair of socks. Then I kept reaching it and pulled all these things out of the mattress: a puppy, a knife, a hair dryer. I never got comfortable. Then I realized there were no doors or windows in the room, and all of a sudden you were there! And you were mad at me.

LYDIA

What was I mad at you for?

RUTH

You said, "What are you doing here?" And I / said,

LYDIA

That's not how I talk!

RUTH

It was my dream!

LYDIA

Is that how you think I talk?

RUTH

Just let me tell you! I told you, “Matthew told me to take a nap.” And you said, “Do you always do what Matthew says, you idiot? You’re late for your appointment!” And I said, “Which one?” And you said, “The eye doctor.” And I was very upset because I forgot to write it down and I was very concerned that the eye doctor was going to stop talking to me and then I would lose my glasses prescription and never be able to see again. And then I said, “Wait, there are no doors.” And you said, “Yeah, you have to go through the air vent.” And you were very annoyed that you had to explain it to me, like I was dumb.

LYDIA

Well I’m *sorry*. Pardon me for my behavior in your dream.

RUTH

And then you gave me a boost and I crawled in, and it was HUGE in there! We could walk standing up! And it wasn’t dusty, and people were living up there, having cheese and crackers, and so we just hung out there, and I woke up.

LYDIA

Hm.

RUTH

What do you think that’s about?

LYDIA

I can’t believe how much you remember of it!

RUTH

The whole thing.

LYDIA

I never remember my dreams.

RUTH

Usually me either.

LYDIA

Howard used to tell me his dreams. One time he woke up so mad at me because he dreamed I was leaving him for our neighbor!

RUTH

I wish I knew someone who could tell me what it meant.

LYDIA

I'm just glad I didn't do anything bad in your dream. I'm not responsible for my behavior in other people's dreams.

Spotlight on YOUNG LYDIA:

YOUNG LYDIA

You know when you hear a song you used to hear a lot, and it takes you back to that moment. I hear *Paper Moon* and I remember the feeling of being young. A summer. Loving a boy. Not knowing anything life had in store--just wondering and hoping. That optimism. Good things are coming my way. I remember that girl. I remember her. She's in here somewhere. I don't see her much. I remember my young body. My brown hair. I knew I was good looking. I still worried I was fat. I got so dark in the sun. I was all possibility. Nothing was decided yet. Nothing was set. I remember that feeling.

Lights up on RUTH and LYDIA eating lunch.

RUTH

How's your sister?

LYDIA

It's so upsetting, Ruth.

RUTH

Have you spoken to her?

LYDIA

I call every day. It's just very sad. She's not herself at all. She and I were always so close. I wanted to see her again. But she lives so far.

RUTH

I'm sorry.

LYDIA

You never talk about your sister.

RUTH

She was different from me. And she lived in California, so I didn't see her much.

LYDIA

And you were happier that way?

RUTH

I don't know. She was charming, but she could be mean. It was complicated.

LYDIA

Hm.

RUTH

She always had a little dog that she carried in a bag. Everywhere. She brought the dog to restaurants, movies, weddings. It was so quiet. It just sat in the bag. Never barked.  
(Pause) She was a big smoker.

LYDIA

One of my sisters smoked.

RUTH

Susan?

LYDIA

No, Miriam. She probably spent all of their money on cigarettes.

RUTH

Well my husband did too, he smoked.

LYDIA

I had a theory about my sister smoking, did I tell you?

RUTH

I don't think so.

LYDIA

I think she had colitis.

RUTH

Ohhh.

LYDIA

It's in the family. Her son has it, so does her granddaughter, and my grandson.

RUTH

What does that have to do with the smoking?

LYDIA

We didn't really know much about colitis back then. But she was always miserable. She never felt well. Apparently if people have undiagnosed colitis, smoking is a common way of self

Self medicating. RUTH

Right. LYDIA

That's sad. RUTH

If I had a dollar for all the things we didn't know. LYDIA

It's gutting. RUTH

One time we got in a terrible fight and she tried to kill herself. LYDIA

Because of the fight? RUTH

I think so. LYDIA

What did she do? RUTH

Swallowed a bottle of pills.  
But she didn't die. Thank god.  
Could you imagine if I had to live with that? LYDIA

Spotlight on YOUNG LYDIA:

YOUNG RUTH  
Young Ruth in a fight. So angry. Throwing a glass bowl at the wall.

Lights up on RUTH and VALERIE at the doctor's office.

DOCTOR hands RUTH a piece of paper and a pencil.

DOCTOR 1  
On this piece of paper, will you draw me a clock?

Okay.

RUTH

She draws for a while.

She holds up the clock. It's mostly correct, but some numbers in one section are clumped strangely.

DOCTOR 1

Okay, you had some difficulty with the clock. That's okay.

Lights out.

Lights up on RUTH, LYDIA, and SHIRLEY playing cards:

SHIRLEY

Did you hear about Edie?

RUTH

No.

SHIRLEY

She's moving into assisted living.

RUTH

Oh.

LYDIA

With an aid?

SHIRLEY

Yes.

LYDIA

Nobody should live like that.

SHIRLEY

Mmhm.

LYDIA

If I did, I'd rather die.

SHIRLEY

She was really starting to, you know.

LYDIA

You couldn't have a conversation with her.

SHIRLEY

It's very sad.

LYDIA

I told my daughter if I lose my mind, I want the death with dignity like that girl in Oregon.

SHIRLEY

Lydia! God forbid.

LYDIA

My sister was like that in the end. She had a stroke, that was it.

SHIRLEY

I'm sorry, Lydia. Yes, that girl in Oregon, I need a dose of whatever she had ready to go for that.

RUTH

Okay, enough of this conversation.

SHIRLEY

I told my son, / whatever you do,

RUTH

Shirley, it's your turn.

SHIRLEY

Okay.

Spotlight on RUTH AS A CHILD:

RUTH AS A CHILD

I went out years ago with my cousins and my sister. We were in our 60s. We all realized we'd been molested by the same uncle. Nobody ever mentioned it.

Spotlight on YOUNG RUTH:

YOUNG RUTH

Young Ruth at her wedding. A man's hand roughly grabs her and pulls her away. She laughs.

Lights up on LYDIA on the phone:

LYDIA

Ariel?

Alice died.

Joanna just called me.

I wasn't with her.

I wasn't with her.

She said promise me you'll never leave me.

I wanted to visit her one more time. I wasn't there.

Lights out.

Lights up on DOCTOR 2, ARIEL, and YOUNG LYDIA.

YOUNG LYDIA

Young Lydia lying awake at night, worrying.

DOCTOR 2

Your mother did not respond to the surgery the way we'd hoped.  
Her intestines have failed to start functioning again.

Lights out.

Lights up on RUTH and LYDIA.

RUTH

It's the end of my life.

LYDIA

After all that, here I am.

RUTH

I made my choices when I had them. I worked, I mothered.

LYDIA  
I cooked, shopped, worried.

RUTH  
I worried about my husband, my children.

LYDIA  
Even before they were born.

RUTH  
Miscarriages.

LYDIA  
A stillborn.

RUTH  
Sleepless nights with the baby, the sick child, the unruly teenagers,

LYDIA  
The lost adults in unhappy marriages

RUTH  
I worried about the people I loved as they died

LYDIA  
Grieved them after they were gone.

RUTH  
I did this for my father, my mother, my sister, my brother, my best friends, my husband

LYDIA  
Countless friends

RUTH  
Now we're just exiting, leaving whoever's left

LYDIA  
Their lives are still happening and unfolding and I watch

RUTH  
I'm not jealous though

LYDIA  
I'm just tired

I wouldn't want to do it again  
RUTH

Once was enough  
LYDIA

Still,  
RUTH

It's all behind me  
LYDIA

The other people here, it's the same for them  
RUTH

We're all in the same boat.  
LYDIA

That's just what it is. We're all here. We listened to the same music, saw the same shows.  
RUTH

And we made it to this point  
LYDIA

Without dying first.  
RUTH

There's camaraderie in that.  
LYDIA

The people here have lived interesting lives.  
RUTH

Helen was a Broadway showgirl, and a tap dancer.  
LYDIA

She's very charming, Helen.  
RUTH

She's starting to forget things.  
LYDIA

It's sad.  
RUTH

LYDIA

You start having the same conversations over and over.

RUTH

When it happens around here, the people become like pariahs

LYDIA

Nobody wants to be touched by it

RUTH

Simon was an opera singer

LYDIA

He performed around the world

RUTH

With Joan Sutherland!

LYDIA

He'll never forget to mention it.

RUTH

Albert was a professor at Wesleyan, American history

LYDIA

He does these lectures every Thursday afternoon.

RUTH

They're very interesting.

LYDIA

I don't go. Ed was a doctor, the head of a wing at Sinai

RUTH

A plastic surgeon,

LYDIA

He did a lot of celebrities' noses

RUTH

Then there were lots of women like me, who did this and that

LYDIA

Mostly took care of other people

RUTH

Lots of women here were teachers

LYDIA

That was the main option for most of us who were smart

RUTH

There's a choir that meets in the theater space every Wednesday

LYDIA

A music teacher from the community college comes

RUTH

Arranges a bunch of the standards

LYDIA

All the American songbook, show tunes

RUTH

I hate that line in that Gershwin song though, "I'm a little lamb who's lost in the woods."

LYDIA

(Hums the line)

RUTH

I won't sing it

LYDIA

There are movie nights, usually hosted by Saul, who was a film critic.

RUTH

We have a book club every Tuesday

LYDIA

There's Sheila who never stops talking

RUTH

It's really the Sheila Show.

LYDIA

Though reading makes me tired now

RUTH

I don't enjoy it as much as I used to

LYDIA  
I just start to fall asleep

RUTH  
I can't focus or remember what I read

LYDIA  
There's mahjong and bridge

RUTH  
If you can find people to let you into a game

LYDIA  
Though you wouldn't believe how many people cheat.

RUTH  
All just entertainments, just passing the time

LYDIA  
I don't have the same drive to get out of bed

RUTH  
For some hobby

LYDIA  
This and that

RUTH  
The days blur into each other

LYDIA  
They do.

RUTH  
Sleep in, wander down for breakfast

LYDIA  
Watch TV, noodle around

RUTH  
Maybe join a game

LYDIA  
Go for a little walk

Some sort of entertainment RUTH

The film society LYDIA

Dinner RUTH

And that's that LYDIA

And repeat RUTH

Maybe the idea is just to enjoy LYDIA

Something to be said for waking up another day RUTH

There's the blue sky, the fresh air LYDIA

The smell of fresh coffee grounds RUTH

The birds singing outside the window LYDIA

Card games RUTH

A poem and a comfortable chair LYDIA

Paint bleeding on paper RUTH

Grandchildren LYDIA

Music RUTH

\*

LYDIA  
Old songs that you heard the first time you fell in love

RUTH  
A soft bed

LYDIA  
Coffee ice cream with Oreos

RUTH  
Bread pudding

LYDIA  
A ripe peach at the farm stand

RUTH  
An old photo album

LYDIA  
A laugh

RUTH  
A friend who understands you

LYDIA  
A new sweater on sale

RUTH  
Cozy slippers

LYDIA  
When the leaves change

RUTH  
Fresh bread

LYDIA  
Homemade soup in the fall

RUTH  
Your favorite chair

LYDIA  
A sunset

RUTH

So many pleasures of the world

LYDIA

Still there

RUTH

As long as they're there it's good to live

LYDIA

Though I wish I'd reconciled with my sister

RUTH

Life is too short for grudges

LYDIA

Or to stand on ceremony

RUTH

My grandchildren don't understand that

LYDIA

They're always not talking to each other

RUTH

Or to their parents

LYDIA

They say they're taking care of themselves

RUTH

Protecting their boundaries

LYDIA

When you're young and you haven't lost, you think you have all the time in the world to make your point

RUTH

You stop talking to someone because you assume they'll be around

LYDIA

I've been irritated, indignant, annoyed

RUTH

It's always hard to dredge those feelings up, to remember the feeling

LYDIA

But not the grief

RUTH

That's always right there

LYDIA

That's what I try to explain

RUTH

But they don't understand

LYDIA

Everyone thinks they have until forever

Lights out.

Spotlight on YOUNG RUTH and YOUNG LYDIA. They sing "Bye Bye Blackbird"

YOUNG RUTH, YOUNG LYDIA

"Pack up all my care and woe, here I go singing low,  
Bye bye blackbird

"Where somebody waits for me, sugar's sweet, so is she  
Bye bye blackbird

"No one here can love or understand me.  
Oh, what hard-luck stories they all hand me.

"Make my bed and light the light  
I'll arrive late tonight,  
Blackbird, bye bye."

Lights out.

Lights up on LYDIA in a hospital bed. \*

ARIEL sits in a chair next to the bed.

DOCTOR sits in another chair, at the other side.

YOUNG LYDIA sits on a window ledge or a countertop, quietly strumming “Bye Bye Blackbird” on the ukulele.

DOCTOR 2

Hi, Lydia. I heard we had an incident this morning.

LYDIA

Yes.

DOCTOR 2

So right now, I’m going to ask you a few questions, and we’ll see if we can find a way to make you more comfortable.

LYDIA

No more.

DOCTOR 2

Lydia, can you tell me what day it is?

LYDIA

August...

DOCTOR 2

August what?

LYDIA

I’ve been here two weeks. I don’t know. I’m not checking my calendar for plans.

DOCTOR 2

What year is it?

LYDIA

2019

DOCTOR 2

Okay, and who’s president?

LYDIA

Trump.

DOCTOR 2

When’s your birthday?

LYDIA

March 11.

DOCTOR 2

Year?

LYDIA

I'll never tell.

DOCTOR 2

Okay, Lydia, it seems like you have a clear head right now, so that's good.

LYDIA

Totally clear.

DOCTOR 2

We do have some options. There's another surgery we can do, since your intestines haven't gotten going from / the last one

LYDIA

NO. MORE.

NO. MORE.

NO. SURGERY.

DOCTOR 2

We can try that, and there's another procedure.

LYDIA

Is there no end? Listen to me. They treat dogs better than this. Even dogs get put to sleep. I can't do this anymore. It's torture.

ARIEL

Mom.

LYDIA

I've had enough. It's enough. I've been like this for two weeks. Don't keep me alive and drag me along like this. I'm old. No more. No more.

DOCTOR 2

Okay, Lydia. I hear you.

LYDIA  
No more.

DOCTOR 2  
I understand.

LYDIA  
No surgery.

DOCTOR 2  
No surgery.

ARIEL  
Don't worry, Mom. Nobody's making you get another surgery.

LYDIA  
I want to be put to sleep.

DOCTOR 2  
Okay, Lydia. I'm going to talk to Dr. Heller and we'll see what we can do to make you more comfortable.

LYDIA  
Thank you.

YOUNG LYDIA  
Young Lydia swimming in the ocean, unmoored or free. Weightless or drifting. The light becomes bright, almost blinding.

Lights up on RUTH.

She tries to turn on the TV. The screen is clearly on, but the cable box isn't. It glows without playing anything.

RUTH presses a few buttons on the remote. Nothing gets her watching cable.

RUTH AS A CHILD enters and takes over the moment:

RUTH AS A CHILD  
Oh come on.  
What the?  
No!  
On!  
On!

She goes over to the TV and shakes it, the punching bag for her pent-up anger and frustration.

She picks up the phone.

RUTH AS A CHILD

Hi.

Well I'm not so good actually.

This TV you got me is a piece of shit!

It won't turn on.

How much did you pay for it?

You have to tell the store.

This is absurd.

Don't you think I tried that already!

You are telling me things I already did.

Let's just throw it in the garbage where it belongs.

Okay.

(She picks up the remote.)

Okay.

I did what you said. It STILL doesn't work! (This is exciting.)

Input? There's no input button.

There's not!

I don't see it.

Oh.

What? HB

HDMI3

Select

The TV works!

TV 1

Tyler, you have to be honest / with me about your feelings for Jenna. Like, is it me or her? Because she's going around telling people that you told her that she's your number one choice but you told me I was your number one choice--

RUTH returns, taking over for RUTH AS A CHILD.

RUTH

Oh! It worked.

Okay. Well.

Okay. Sorry. You can get back to it.

Bye.

RUTH hangs up.

She sits and looks at the TV, now working.

She turns it off.

She puts on her shoes and an outer layer, and gets up to go.

YOUNG RUTH enters.

YOUNG RUTH

Whoa, whoa, whoa. Where are you going?

RUTH

Out.

YOUNG RUTH

After that outburst?

RUTH

I'm feeling restless.

YOUNG RUTH

That wasn't a very nice way to talk to Valerie.

RUTH

I suppose that's true.

YOUNG RUTH

Stay here and relax.

RUTH

No. I'm going out. You stay here if you want.

RUTH grabs her purse and turns off the light and opens the door to leave, then realizes she's forgotten something. YOUNG RUTH hands her keys to her, and then follows her as she exits.

Spotlight on RUTH AS A CHILD

RUTH AS A CHILD

Ruth as a Child curled up in a chair, reading *Jane Eyre*.

Lights up on LYDIA and RUTH playing cards.

LYDIA

What did you do yesterday?

RUTH

I had my old friend Pat's funeral.

LYDIA

Oh, yes.

RUTH

You know what drives me crazy? When the rabbi or the priest doesn't know the person who died, but they pretend to, and they go on and on.

LYDIA

I know.

RUTH

You could tell he just asked her sons a couple of questions about her, and he just kept talking about her making amazing dinners and loving Florida. Like that's all she did, make dinner and go to Florida.

Lights out.

Lights up on RUTH and VALERIE at the doctor's office.

DOCTOR hands RUTH a piece of paper and a pencil.

The old clock from the previous scene is displayed prominently on the wall.

DOCTOR 1

On this piece of paper, will you draw me a clock?

RUTH

Okay.

She draws for a while.

She holds up the clock. The doctor puts it next to the earlier one. It's worse than before. The numbers are clumped strangely.

Lights out.

Lights up on RUTH and LYDIA.

RUTH

Did you go to Florence's funeral?

LYDIA

I did.

RUTH  
How was it?

LYDIA  
Very long. Too many people spoke.

RUTH  
How many?

LYDIA  
It had to be at least twelve.

RUTH  
Oy.

LYDIA  
It was like an open mic night.

Lights out.

Lights out. Lights up on RUTH and VALERIE, who is unloading groceries for RUTH.

VALERIE  
Okay. Your oranges are in the fridge. I'm picking you up tomorrow at 10 for the eye doctor. I wrote it on your calendar.

RUTH  
And then the next day is my chorus concert.

VALERIE  
No, that's Thanksgiving. I'm bringing you to the house.

RUTH  
Why don't I host?

VALERIE  
Are you kidding?

RUTH  
No.

VALERIE  
That's okay mom. I appreciate the offer.

I should've done it more.

RUTH

Lights out.

The hospital. LYDIA is sleeping.

DOCTOR and ARIEL stand in the doorway.

DOCTOR 2  
It's pretty amazing. She's totally with it.

ARIEL  
She is.

DOCTOR 2  
It's lucky, because we can honor what she wants.

ARIEL  
Okay...

DOCTOR 2  
So what we do is we start to up the morphine. Every fifteen minutes, we increase the dose, little by little.

ARIEL  
How long will that take?

DOCTOR 2  
After a couple of hours, she'll be under. It can take hours, but some people can hold on for days. *(Pause)* We can start this at 8 tonight. Go home, eat, shower.

ARIEL  
Thank you for taking care of my mom.

DOCTOR 2  
She reminds me of my grandmother.

LYDIA wakes up.

LYDIA  
Are they putting me to sleep?

ARIEL  
Soon.

Lights out.

RUTH and LYDIA, playing cards:

RUTH

Wondering if we should visit Florence in assisted living?

LYDIA

Oh, I don't know.

RUTH

She's all alone over there. I'm sure it would lift her spirits.

LYDIA

But would she even know or remember we went?

RUTH

I don't know, but does that matter?

LYDIA

I couldn't tell you.

RUTH

I think we should go.

LYDIA

Okay, if you feel so strongly about it.

RUTH

I don't think it's right how people drop people around here when they start to (*you know*).

LYDIA

It's upsetting to see people that way.

RUTH

Like my friend Helen. You remember Helen?

LYDIA

Yes.

RUTH

When she died, everyone said, "It was like she died years ago." Every day, Helen disappeared a little, bit by bit, so incrementally that you never noticed. I mean you noticed. Things happened. But you couldn't quite put your finger on the last day that Helen was Helen. One day I realized, Helen is gone. There's no Helen in there. I don't want-- The person that died wasn't Helen. I never got to say goodbye to Helen.

I never got to say, thank you for listening to me and talking to me and watching movies with me and playing bridge with me and going to museums with me and laughing with me and understanding me. She just sort of faded away, like a gong keeps ringing softer and softer until you just can't hear it anymore.

LYDIA

Well this has been uplifting.

RUTH

Psh.

LYDIA

I don't know why they don't nominate you for the sunshine committee.

RUTH

I'd like to go over and see Florence.

LYDIA

Okay. We can visit.

Lights out.

Lights up on LYDIA, on the phone:

LYDIA

Hello honey!

Happy birthday.

Are you having a good day?

I can't believe you're twenty nine. That's a beautiful age, twenty nine.

I can't believe you're twenty nine.

I remember when you were born, and I wore pink to the hospital because you were girl, and one of the doctors said, grandmothers don't look like they used to!

We bought you a bunch of balloons and they were in the trunk of the car, and then your grandfather opened the trunk and they all went flying away. I said "Howie! Get them! Do something!"

Twenty nine is a good age.

So you aren't with anyone special?

You think you still don't want to meet anyone?

That's how they do it now. They all want to do their jobs first. It's so different than when I was young.

How's teaching?

It must be so nice for the kids to have someone so pretty to look at all day.

You think you want to teach forever? You think you'll do anything else?

It's a nice job, teaching. You get the summers off.

Oh you know there's nothing doing here. I'm old and boring.

Never get old. You just don't feel the same.

But it's a good place here. If my mother was in a place like this I would be happy. It's good.

Lights out.

Lights up. RUTH and VALERIE in the doctor's office.  
Many clocks on the wall, getting progressively worse.

DOCTOR 1

Okay, Ruth, if you can just go ahead and draw a clock for me.

RUTH draws, and she hands the doctor a clock.

DOCTOR 1

Okay, you weren't quite able to draw the clock. That's okay. It can be hard.

Lights out.

Lights up on RUTH and LYDIA seated at a table,  
ELIZABETH beside them.

RUTH

Coffee for me.

LYDIA

Me too, please.

ELIZABETH exits.

RUTH

I guess we won't be living to see the day.

LYDIA

No.

RUTH

It was a nice fantasy, for a moment.

SHIRLEY enters.

SHIRLEY

Morning, ladies.

LYDIA

Hi, Shirley.

SHIRLEY

Mind if I join?

RUTH

By all means.

LYDIA

You don't seem sufficiently depressed.

SHIRLEY

Why should I be? Hillary's a criminal.

RUTH and LYDIA have a silent conversation with their eyes.

RUTH

Did you vote for him?

SHIRLEY

No, I sat this one out.

LYDIA

Bold way to spend your last presidential election.

SHIRLEY

Why do you say it's my last?

LYDIA

You think you'll be around in four years to vote again?

RUTH

I like this game. Let's go around the table. What are the odds--on a scale of one to ten--that you will be alive to vote four years from now.

LYDIA

On a scale of one to ten? Or a percentage. Like a ninety percent chance?

RUTH

Whatever. I was thinking a scale. Ten is I'm sure I'll be alive, and one is I'm sure I'll be dead.

LYDIA

I was thinking more like percentages, forty percent, sixty percent, et cetera.

RUTH

Same difference.

LYDIA

Shirley, you go first.

SHIRLEY

No. I don't like this game.

RUTH

Come on, Shirley.

SHIRLEY

You two are so morbid.

LYDIA

Scale of one to ten. Four years from now. Go.

SHIRLEY

No.

LYDIA

You have to play.

SHIRLEY

Says who?

RUTH

You're no fun, Shirley.

SHIRLEY

Okay, okay. Uhhhh. Fifty fifty for me. Five out of ten. Maybe yes, maybe no.

RUTH

Very optimistic of you, Shirley!

LYDIA

That's a cop out.

SHIRLEY

Why?

LYDIA

It's not really an answer. Okay. I'm going to say, let's switch to percentages. You have to choose: 49% or 51%. But you can't say 50%.

SHIRLEY

That's not fair.

LYDIA

It's the rule.

SHIRLEY

You just made it up.

RUTH

Come on, Shirley. 49% or 51%?

SHIRLEY

Okay. 51.

RUTH

Interesting.

LYDIA

That *is* interesting.

RUTH

How'd you land on that number?

SHIRLEY

Well, I figure I feel good, and I still have my wits about me. I walk every morning, three miles, and do the crossword puzzle every day. And I still play bridge and mahjong and read. Never smoked a cigarette my whole life, almost never drink.

LYDIA

Now you're just bragging, Shirley.

SHIRLEY

I just went to the doctor last week, in fact. He said I have the heart of a forty year old.

RUTH

I don't know, Shirley. I think it sounds like you're one hundred percent sure you'll be around to throw your vote away in four years.

SHIRLEY

You never know.

LYDIA

That's true, Shirley. It's good to hedge your bets. You could just fall in the bathroom one night like Celia, and that's it.

SHIRLEY

Lovely.

RUTH

Okay. My turn. I'm giving myself zero percent odds.

SHIRLEY

Zero?

RUTH

I have no plans to be here in four years.

LYDIA

That's fair.

RUTH

Even if I could be, I don't want to be.

LYDIA

Okay. My turn. On a scale of one to ten, ten being most alive, one being most dead, I am a two.

RUTH

Why a two?

LYDIA

I don't want to be here, either, but I am a little curious to see how a few things turn out.

SHIRLEY

But it's not about whether you WANT to be here. It's about whether you will.

LYDIA

You don't have to be here if you don't want to be!

SHIRLEY

Lydia!

RUTH

Shirley, do your kids know you didn't vote?

SHIRLEY

They're not happy about it.

RUTH

I bet.

RUTH

I'm not surprised how it all turned out.

LYDIA

You're not?

You are? RUTH

Of course I am. LYDIA

They'd never pick a woman. RUTH

That's true. LYDIA

I think they will go through every type of man in the world, they'll have to run out of men, before they let a woman be president. RUTH

That's right. LYDIA

This country hates women so much. RUTH

Darkness. The sound of someone humming "Someone to Watch Over Me."

Lights up on LYDIA in a hospital bed.

ARIEL sits in a chair beside her.

LYDIA  
(Exiting consciousness) February seventh  
February seventh

Lost the baby  
That's the day I lost the baby

My mother  
She was so funny

She and her sister, they would argue

Don't drive so late at night Ariel  
Don't drive all the way home  
Okay?

Sleep at your brother's house

Don't drive home

Call me when you get home

Don't drive

Be careful

You have such a beautiful life ahead of you,  
The beginning of a beautiful forever

Be

Happy

Be

Happy

Be

Happy

Lights out.

YOUNG RUTH and YOUNG LYDIA sing a very upbeat  
version of "Bill Bailey Won't You Please Come Home"

YOUNG RUTH, YOUNG LYDIA

"Won't you come home, Bill Bailey, won't you come home  
I've moaned the whole night long

I'll do the cookin', honey, I'll pay the rent  
I know I done you wrong

“You remember that rainy evenin’  
I threw you out with nothin’ but a fine tooth comb  
I know I’m to blame, now ain’t it a shame  
Bill Bailey won’t you please come home”

YOUNG LYDIA

Young Lydia sitting in the grass, looking up at the sky through tree branches.

Lights out.

Lights up on LYDIA and RUTH, at the same table as before. The row of walkers behind them.

LYDIA

What day is it today?

RUTH

Tuesday?

LYDIA

It’s Tuesday?

RUTH

I thought you’d know?

LYDIA

I can’t keep track.

RUTH

It all feels the same.

LYDIA

It’s Wednesday.

RUTH

That’s right.

LYDIA

Yes because I had my hair appointment yesterday. And the cardiologist tomorrow.

RUTH

What would I do without you?

You'd be okay. LYDIA

I'm scared. RUTH

I know. LYDIA

I'm glad you're here. I know you don't believe me. RUTH

I believe you. LYDIA

I am. RUTH

I know. LYDIA

ELIZABETH enters with a tray.

Okay... turkey club, no mayo. ELIZABETH

Thank you. RUTH

Grilled chicken and roasted veggies, no butter, no salt. ELIZABETH

I hope so. LYDIA

How are you girls doing on coffee? Need me to top you off? ELIZABETH

Yes please. RUTH

Lydia? ELIZABETH

I'm okay. LYDIA

ELIZABETH exits.

RUTH

Well?

LYDIA

Well what?

RUTH

Aren't you glad I'm here, too?

LYDIA

Oh, I guess.

RUTH

It's so funny that I'm with you right now.

LYDIA

What's that supposed to mean?

RUTH

Don't be offended.

LYDIA

Why is it funny?

RUTH

You know what I mean.

LYDIA

I don't think I do!

RUTH

You do!

LYDIA

No.

RUTH

You know, out of everyone in your life, out of everyone in my life, who would think?

LYDIA

Mm hmm.

RUTH

I just wouldn't have guessed is all I'm saying.

LYDIA  
(*The food:*) Ugh.

RUTH  
No good?

LYDIA  
Try this.

RUTH  
Why would I? You just took a bite and said “ugh.”

LYDIA  
It’s not good, but it’s not *bad*.

RUTH  
Why would I want to eat something that’s not good?

LYDIA  
I want to know if I’m being a pill or if I’m right.

RUTH  
You can be both. (*Pause*) Okay. Give me.

LYDIA  
No, now I don’t want you to.

RUTH  
I’ll try it.

LYDIA  
No. I don’t want to hear about it later.

RUTH  
Give me.

LYDIA  
No!

RUTH  
(*Takes a forkful*) Hm. Yeah.

LYDIA  
Right?

You're right. RUTH

It's not good, right? LYDIA

No. RUTH

The food here. LYDIA

So send it back. RUTH

Why make a fuss? LYDIA

It's your lunch. RUTH

It's okay. LYDIA

It's not. (*Outward*) Excuse me? Elizabeth, excuse me? RUTH

What can I do for you, Ruth? ELIZABETH

This just doesn't taste right. RUTH

Oh no! What's wrong? ELIZABETH

It's just inedible. Can she order something else? I mean how many more lunches does this woman have before she dies? RUTH

That's very morbid. Hopefully thousands of lunches! ELIZABETH

Can we send this back? RUTH

ELIZABETH

Of course. Would you like something else, Lydia?

LYDIA

I'm having ice cream for lunch.

ELIZABETH

Love it!

LYDIA

Can I get the coffee Oreo fudge with whipped cream?

ELIZABETH

Absolutely!

RUTH

Oh, I want that, too.

ELIZABETH

You got it!

ELIZABETH exits.

RUTH gives LYDIA half her sandwich.

LYDIA

No, it's okay.

RUTH

Have it.

LYDIA

It's yours.

RUTH

I'm sharing it with you.

LYDIA

I've got ice cream coming.

RUTH

But you still need to eat food-food.

LYDIA

Okay.

I just want you to be happy.

RUTH

I am.

LYDIA

With your lunch.

RUTH

Really not bad.

LYDIA

The sandwiches are the way to go here.

RUTH

I try not to eat so much bread. Because I love bread. It's my favorite.

LYDIA

The YOUNG RUTH and YOUNG LYDIA enter.

YOUNG LYDIA plays "Paper Moon" on the ukulele.

RUTH hears it and starts to hum along.

Oh, what's that song.

RUTH

It's at the tip of my tongue.

LYDIA

YOUNG RUTH and YOUNG LYDIA sing *It's Only A Paper Moon*.

RUTH and LYDIA eat until YOUNG RUTH and YOUNG LYDIA pull them up to dance with them.

They dance the walkers off the stage, so none remain.

YOUNG RUTH and YOUNG LYDIA sit at the table.

ELIZABETH brings them their ice cream.

Here you go girls.

ELIZABETH

Thank you!

YOUNG RUTH

ELIZABETH exits.

YOUNG LYDIA

This is so good.

YOUNG RUTH

The name of that song will come to me at 3 in the morning.

YOUNG LYDIA

Don't think about it so hard.

YOUNG RUTH

It'll nag at me.

YOUNG LYDIA

You've got all the time in the world.

Lights out on YOUNG RUTH and YOUNG LYDIA.

Spotlights on RUTH and LYDIA.

RUTH

Ruth laughing so hard she can barely breathe.

LYDIA

Lydia holding her first grandson for the first time. He yawns in her arms, like a kitten.

RUTH

Ruth hanging a new painting on her wall.

LYDIA

Lydia choosing the couch she would have for over fifty years.

RUTH

Ruth at dinner with her friends.

LYDIA

Lydia reaching over in bed for her husband.

RUTH

Ruth driving like a demon to get that parking spot.

LYDIA

Lydia skiing, the wind in her face.

RUTH

Ruth in an unfamiliar city, just walking.

LYDIA

Lydia finding a perfect melon in the grocery store.

RUTH

Ruth lying in the sand, the sun warming her skin.

LYDIA

Lydia dancing.

RUTH

Lights start to fade.

The lights start to fade.

LYDIA

For whatever it's worth.

RUTH

Lights out.

End of play.