

“DOORSTEPS”

A FULL LENGTH PLAY

BY SAM GRABER

REHEARSAL – JANUARY 2020

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SYNOPSIS – DOORSTEPS

Inspired by the large possibilities of small space, *Doorsteps* features a cast of 6 playing over 40 roles across 13 unconnected scenes, all taking place on the American doorstep before the Middle West home.

CHARACTERS (60)

Many roles are considered open with regard to gender, race and ethnicity. It is hoped that over the course of a production run that such roles are performed by varying actors, allowing certain scenes to flourish and grow in unique ways.

TIME

Now.

PLACE

The American doorstep.

RUN TIME

The estimated run time is 75 minutes.

THE STAGE

A single doorstep leads to the door of a Midwest American home. Steps may lead up from the stage level to an elevated porch to the doorstep before the doorway. The doorstep and doorway are lit in a way to give a sense of significance and distinction.

FIRST STEP.

At curtain we see the doorstep and door.

The entire CAST assembles.

Lines can be spoken in turn, by a single individual, or shared by the entire CAST.

CAST

The doorstep.

The American doorstep.

But not just any doorstep.

This is our doorstep.

The wood. The frame. Porch, steps.

The creek boards and clapboards, the knocker and bell.

It could be anywhere, but it's here.

Right down the street, just around the corner, the next town over.

This is our home, where we live.

How many parts of us are here.

From this one place, how many places we go.

Tonight we'll be looking at our doorstep, the doorstep of Middle America, and taking you across the threshold to what's beyond, and within.

Fun, funny.

Serious, maybe even scary.

This...somewhere. It could be anywhere, but it's our somewhere.

It's our doorstep.

*One of the CAST might knock on the door,
the others perhaps giggle and run off.*

The door opens and a CAST member peeks their head out, seeing an empty stage.

The CAST member emerges carrying a large 'Welcome' mat, shakes it out and places it on the doorstep before the door.

The CAST member goes back inside and closes behind the door.

Lights shift.

VANDERBILT.

We hear a party. Loud music is muffled, as if coming from inside the house, beyond the closed doorway. We also hear voices of the party, girls gone wild.

A city POLICE OFFICER enters, a young man, maybe 20, limping a little.

OFFICER depresses the radio speaker on his uniform top.

OFFICER [OFF]

Six-two-thirty on scene, responding to noise complaint.

RADIO SQUAWK

Six-two-thirty, copy.

OFFICER approaches the door and knocks loudly.

No response, the music and noise continuing.

OFFICER knocks louder.

FRIEND opens the door, sees the cop, nonplussed.

OFFICER

Is this your party?

FRIEND

...uhhhhh, what party?

FRIEND waves 'tata!' and slams the door. More cheering and fracas from behind the door.

OFFICER sighs, then bangs very loudly with his fist.

Now a GIRL, 18, opens the door, sees the cop, freaks out.

OFFICER

Is this your party?

GIRL

Ohmigodohmigodohmigodohmigodohmigodohmigod.

GIRL exits the house through the doorway, quickly shutting the door behind her, facing OFFICER on the outside of the door.

GIRL

Whoa.

OFFICER

Is this your house?

GIRL

Yes? No? I mean sort of? It's my parents' house. They bought it, they own it? I just live here. I have lived here. For eighteen years.

OFFICER

Uh huh.

GIRL

But I won't live here anymore, soon. If that's what you're worried about. Cuz I'm going to college. You know, moving out, college?

OFFICER

I've heard of it.

GIRL

You want something to drink? I mean, if you're thirsty? You ever get thirsty?

OFFICER

Can I speak to them, please?

GIRL

Who.

OFFICER

Your parents.

GIRL

Oh. They're like in Italy? Like the country? Which is not here.

OFFICER

City dispatch received a complaint about excessive noise at this address.

GIRL

Oh...THAT? That's like a one-song event, and it's over, like we're totally done with that now.

FRIEND pops out onto the porch and places a full martini glass into GIRL's hand.

FRIEND

Here you go, girl!!!!!!!!!!!! [To OFFICER] Cops are so hot.

FRIEND disappears back inside.

GIRL

Okay, I know what you're thinking and-and-and I'd be thinking it, too, except—

GIRL physically throws herself in front of the door, blocking the OFFICER's path.

GIRL

It's just a little party and...wait, you received a complaint?

OFFICER

Yes.

GIRL

Cuz we only have one neighbor and they're with my parents. In Italy. You been to Italy?, you like to travel?

OFFICER

I'd like you to open the door.

GIRL

Look, I just got I accepted into Vanderbilt. I'm going to Vanderbilt this fall. You know? Like Vanderbilt? And some friends came over to celebrate.

OFFICER

Open the door.

GIRL

I can't have any problems before I go to Vanderbilt. They can like rescind the offer of acceptance if I get anything on my record, not that I know what a record is, is there even such a thing as a record? Is that like a real thing?

OFFICER

Are you 18?

GIRL

Yeah.

OFFICER

Then you're an adult and anyone under drinking age on premises is culpable of violating the state minor-in-possession law.

GIRL

What, this? This isn't alcohol, this is...[she downs it in one swallow]...water!, whoa!, spiced water! I'm going to Vanderbilt. And my friend you just met is going to Duke. And my other friend's going to Harvard. Where'd you go?

OFFICER

The United States Marine Corps.

GIRL

...oh.

OFFICER

Please keep your hands where I can see them.

GIRL

These? [Waves her hands around, flashes, jazz] These are happy hands! They're so excited about Vanderbilt!

FRIEND emerged from the house.

FRIEND

Hey, I was just thinking out loud here, but aren't you Harold Michener's older brother? You're Harold Michener's older brother, aren't you?

OFFICER

...

FRIEND

[To inside the house, towards the party] I was right!! Alright, who wants another shot!!

*FRIEND goes back into the house,
slamming the door.*

GIRL

...you're Harold Michener's older brother?

OFFICER

Look—

GIRL

—he told us you were in the war.

OFFICER

...I'm gonna need you to //just open—

GIRL

That instead of going to college you...you were shot. In the war. Like actually shot.

OFFICER

...yeah. After the helicopter crash.

GIRL

You crashed a helicopter?

OFFICER

Not intentionally.

GIRL

Into the ground?

OFFICER

...you're going to Vanderbilt?

GIRL

Yeah, that was dumb.

OFFICER

It was a night mission. Those don't always go well. We were pinned down in the Hindu Kush. For days. Fighting people we couldn't even see. Without...water.

GIRL

Oh.

OFFICER

I did the PT, though. Tried everything to get reinstated with my unit. They discharged me, anyway, honorable, but now I'm back...here...look, these body cameras now capture everything, so—

GIRL

Well, there. I turned it off. So since it's off. If you want to come in. I mean, not to arrest.

OFFICER

I have a job. You can't lose Vanderbilt, I can't lose this.

GIRL

Oh.

OFFICER

You ever wonder what college will be like?

GIRL

Intense. Fun. Special. You spend your whole life working for something but never really know how it's going to be until you actually get there.

OFFICER

Tell me about it.

GIRL

I've lived my whole life here. I've never lived anywhere else. It's scary to think that you move some place and you almost have to start yourself all over again.

OFFICER

Or come back to where you started and do the same thing.

GIRL

Yeah.

OFFICER

Let me guess, engineering, full ride.

GIRL

How'd you know?

OFFICER

You seem smart. But even smart people can do dumb things.

GIRL

Yeah, maybe we should've celebrated at an Applebee's or something.

OFFICER

Well. Have a good time. At college. For now, maybe kill the noise. Cuz I have to turn this back on.

GIRL

Okay. Officer...

OFFICER

Matt.

OFFICER

Well. It was nice talking with you. Matt.

OFFICER starts to go.

GIRL

Do you wanna?... hang out? Before I go to...just, hang out?

Pause.

OFFICER

Call the precinct. Tell the duty sergeant you want to see me, about your case.

GIRL

There's gonna be a case.

OFFICER

Yep.

GIRL

Oh.

OFFICER

When you see me, maybe we'll adjust it. Start yourself over. Take it off your record.

GIRL

Okay.

OFFICER goes, limping a little, as GIRL watches.

FRIEND comes back out, two drinks sloshing in each hand, double-fisting.

FRIEND

Yeah, baby!! Got rid of him, huh!

GIRL

What?

FRIEND

Got rid of him!

GIRL

Oh. Yeah.

FRIEND

[Heading back inside] Vanderbilt!!

GIRL

Yeah. Vanderbilt.

GIRL ultimately goes back inside, closing the door behind her.

Lights shift.

REALTOR.

The stage is empty.

REALTOR [OFF]

Oh, now THIS! THIS is the one I want you to see! First on today's list!

*WIFE comes rushing on ahead of
HUSBAND.*

HUSBAND [OFF]

Honey, we talked about this, don't get too ahead of yourself.

WIFE

I'm not getting *ahead* of anything, I'm looking!

HUSBAND

Honey, can you slow down please?

REALTOR

See, I can tell you're both So Very Excited about the fact that as your new realtor how I'm getting you a special sneak preview at this Off Market Sensation before any other potential home buyer steals it away from you.

HUSBAND

If it's off market, is there a listing we can see?

REALTOR

Not exactly.

WIFE

I bet the master bedroom has a *huge* walk-in closet.

HUSBAND

Honey, please, let's not fall in love with something we haven't even gone on a first date with yet.

WIFE

I did with you, didn't I?

HUSBAND

[To REALTOR] We met online.

WIFE

And now we're pregnant. Twins!

HUSBAND

Yes, but this is like Buying A House.

REALTOR

And I do like Mr. Stop The Excitement's thinking here. This is not unprotected sex, this is A Momentous Occasion.

HUSBAND

That's what I'm saying, we should take everything into account first.

WIFE

What account?

HUSBAND

I don't know, the neighborhood.

WIFE

We won't be living in the neighborhood, we'll be living in this house!

HUSBAND

Which seems dark and creepy.

REALTOR

No, no-no-no-no, THIS!...is Undeveloped Sunshine. This is the Unseen Beauty of the Hidden Universe with All The Feels.

HUSBAND

It feels dark and creepy.

REALTOR

Because it's not on the market yet, it's not publicly available for sale, yet!

HUSBAND

So why are we here?

REALTOR

Because I have a friend On The Inside.

HUSBAND

Living here?

REALTOR

No, on the inside.

HUSBAND

Of what.

REALTOR

The System.

HUSBAND

What system.

WIFE

Is this a Deep State house? Oh my God, I've always wanted a Deep State house with a big walk-in closet.

REALTOR

Look, a special friend on The Inside gave me this address and now we're getting Up Close and Personal before anybody else gets a shot at this place. Because a house isn't something that *looks*, a house is something that *feels*.

HUSBAND

What kind of feels.

REALTOR

Short drive to downtown, schools, everything a young go-getting couple of the future like you could want.

WIFE

A walk-in closet?

REALTOR

Practically big enough to be a fifth bedroom. Technically, I'd call it five bed and four bath, but that's just me your new realtor talking.

WIFE

I want to see it!

REALTOR

Listen, I'm gonna let you in on a little secret. I've been selling homes for almost a whole month now!, and I wouldn't be here if it wasn't to get people the homes they want, because I may be new to selling homes but I've been selling peace of mind for a long time.

HUSBAND

That's the secret?

REALTOR

No, the secret is: sometimes you don't need to see the house. Sometimes the house picks you.

WIFE

It's picking me.

HUSBAND

Honey.

REALTOR

That house is picking you.

WIFE

The Deep State house is totally picking me.

REALTOR

Because sometimes opportunity picks you when you least expect it, am I right? Especially when times are hard, like they are now, when people like me are getting axed from old crusty industries of the past, and we have to find ways to get ahead in this futuristic world, and serve the young, successful, pregnant-with-twins couples like you working in futuristic industries like...

HUSBAND

Drone Airspace Traffic Management.

WIFE

E-sports Team Management.

REALTOR

...and say to those types of futuristic people: don't make an offer on a house. Make an offer on a *home*.

WIFE

It's like beyond picking me.

HUSBAND

Alright, fine! Let's see it.

REALTOR

Go ahead. I'll wait here.

HUSBAND

Don't you have to let us in?

REALTOR

Well, we can't really go in.

WIFE

Do we just walk around the back?

REALTOR

Well, we're sort of not allowed to do that.

WIFE

I'm just gonna peek through the front window.

REALTOR

Because at this juncture one of you might say dark and creepy while the other one, the one with a Sense Of Adventure, *feels* how it's going to be with all new carpets, and rebuilt walls, and a patched -up roof.

HUSBAND

What's all this yellow tape?

WIFE

Where?

HUSBAND

Inside. It says: Do Not Cross. Why is there yellow tape in the house that says Do Not Cross?

REALTOR

Alright. You want another secret? Since we're really getting to know each other? I was let go from the funeral business. You think with all those years painting a word picture of positivity to allay sad people grief that I would be a shoo-in for executive promotion until one day the HR Manager, I didn't even know funeral homes had an HR Manager, but there was some *futuristic* virtual HR manager on a screen in the reposing room telling me it was e-mortuary cost-cutting time. So here I am now putting living people in wood boxes above ground instead of dead people in wood boxes below ground. You think this is what I wanted?

HUSBAND

Okay, that's...also dark and creepy, but you're supposed to be helping us buy a house not sell someone else's house.

WIFE

Did someone die here?

REALTOR

All those years slaving away at the funeral home, what is death?

WIFE

Is that a bullet hole in the wall?

HUSBAND

So wait, your friend on the inside is the...

REALTOR

Assistant County Medical Examiner.

HUSBAND/WIFE

...

REALTOR

Hey, people die all the time, right? County busting at the seams doing twelve autopsies a day. Now you want another fact? Almost as many houses coming on the market these days as people going off. The difference? Houses aren't dead. Houses are the forever living dream! And dreams need a receptor. And this house is very lonely now. Very for-lorn. And for-lorn means for-sale. And twenty years from now when you've got twins in some futuristic digital college that even [WIFE] you power couples of the future can't pay for because [HUSBAND] Mr. Excitement here's at the county morgue after he died from a...fallout from a drug deal gone wrong—

HUSBAND

—this was a trap house?

REALTOR

You think the next young couple working in Cyber Whatever that I'm gonna stroll on up here later today is gonna go: gee I wonder who it was that died in the shootout here? No. They're gonna say we got ourselves a sneaky and desperate realtor as their new partner who has *access* from the Deep State to addresses of fresh dead people who got kicked to the curb because they kicked the bucket—

HUSBAND

—what—

REALTOR

—and who found clients by greasing the clerk at the prenatal clinic to get names of young, happy, freshly-impregnated couples no doubt seeking to expand the square footage of their life—

WIFE

—my God—

REALTOR

—and who can show them how to tear out the dogfighting ring in the basement, and replace the upstairs meth station with a nursery, and *Live The Dream!*

WIFE

How many people died. Here. How many people died.

REALTOR

I'm gonna drop my commission because I care about your happiness.

WIFE

Like more than one?

REALTOR

Percent?

WIFE

Died here.

REALTOR

I just get the address. The examiner and clerk, we all split the commission.

WIFE

I feel sick.

HUSBAND

[Leaving] Come on.

REALTOR

Fine! I'm gonna tell that next couple I bring here how this could all be theirs right now at half your budget!

Stopping their exit.

HUSBAND

Half our budget.

REALTOR

Half.

WIFE

Half our budget.

REALTOR

The house, needles, the broken glass, the bloodstains, all of it, full and clear title, buyer assumes as is, four little feet pitter-pattering in bliss, at half your budget.

WIFE

...I mean...for half.

HUSBAND

I guess it's not *that* dark and creepy.

REALTOR

So all I'm asking is we look at the Front Door of Possibility. Knowing that everything is Change, and Change is Risk, but with Risk can come great...

WIFE

Walk-in closets.

REALTOR

Yes. So let us just stare into the Front Door of Possibility, and *feel*...

Lights shift.

REGRET.

*ABRAHAM LINCOLN takes a rocking chair
before the door.*

LINCOLN

Many of us live with regret. Many of us regret that the one statement we ushered forth when we were young, within the heated passion of cold argument, how those small words misrepresent who we truly were, how they remain forever preserved in the unforgiving annals of history, giving those today the small brush by which to tarnish all my great work that was done then.

*COLONEL SANDERS takes another rocking
chair, also blocking the doorway entrance.*

*Throughout the scene LINCOLN and
SANDERS do not see each other.*

SANDERS

Many of us live with regret. I regret many people don't remember I was born in a Kentucky log cabin. I regret how many people today don't think of me as getting out of that cabin, using grit and perseverance to make great waves for American prosperity! I regret instead how people say about me that one thing I did.

LINCOLN

But you see my time, was a difficult time.

SANDERS

My time was the degrading frontier of economic hardship.

LINCOLN

I believed in saving the union.

SANDERS

I believed in bringing us all to a better place!

LINCOLN

So I regret the one thing I said.

SANDERS

So I regret the one thing I did.

LINCOLN

I said: 'if I could save the union without freeing any slave I would do it.'

SANDERS

That I partly stole my recipe.

LINCOLN

'If I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone, I would also do that.'

SANDERS

That I partly stole my recipe from waiter-carrier Negro women traveling north during the great migration.

LINCOLN

'What I do about slavery I do because I believe it helps to save the union.'

SANDERS

The world still won't leave me alone about that.

LINCOLN

People today use that one single statement to sully the honest lawyer from the Kentucky log cabin who toiled to make permanent the equality of race.

SANDERS

If it was only that I must have been racist because I wore a white suit, that would've been fine.

LINCOLN

Knowing in the end I gave every measure of devotion to make an America for all.

SANDERS

Knowing I treated every person who worked for me or against me with common decency!

LINCOLN

Without the blemish of cabin prejudice.

SANDERS

So we could all make it out of that log cabin, or plantation, or wherever life first conspired against us!

LINCOLN

To the blue smooth-meadow grass!

SANDERS

The Cumberland plateau!

LINCOLN

The coal fields!

SANDERS

The Jackson purchase!

LINCOLN

But history...history never sees us for the land.

SANDERS

History never remembers us for the dignity we gave to others.

LINCOLN

History remembers us for how we treated the single most pressing issue of our time.

SANDERS

Whether we said something.

LINCOLN

Did something.

SANDERS

Or did nothing.

LINCOLN

Whether we allowed it to continue.

SANDERS

Stood by idly.

LINCOLN

Dared not interfere.

SANDERS

Stepped to the side.

LINCOLN

Enabled it from the doorway of tacit compliance.

SANDERS

For that reason, even after the empire I created and the riches I spread, today and tomorrow are less concerned about how I found a better way to pressure fry chicken.

LINCOLN

For that reason, even after I risked an entire nation to abolish the notion that America was forged for the benefit of white men, how the future looks back only to look forward, and tugs without mercy the one loose thread to unravel the greater tapestry of human legacy.

SANDERS

Well.

LINCOLN

Well.

SANDERS

From the leviathan of enterprise, an even larger regret.

LINCOLN

The largest regret.

SANDERS

It was a difficult time.

LINCOLN

It is always a difficult time.

Two ICE AGENTS enter, wearing full official uniform, and approach LINCOLN and SANDERS.

ICE AGENT #1

Pursuant to sections 236 of the Immigration and Nationality Act, and by virtue of the authority vested in the Department of Homeland Security, I hereby execute this warrant for immediate custody and detainment of the designated alien currently residing in this homestead!

A long beat.

Then LINCOLN and SANDERS get out of their chairs...and move to the side.

*LINCOLN and SANDERS move to the side,
allowing ICE AGENT #2 to enter the house.*

*A moment later ICE AGENT #2 exits the
house, escorting in handcuffs a person of
color, pushing the detainee to full off.*

ICE AGENT #1

Thank you.

ICE AGENT #1 goes.

Lights shift.

BIRDS.

PIGEON and DOVE fly onto stage.

PIGEON

AHH.

DOVE

AHH.

PIGEON

AHH.

DOVE

AHH.

PIGEON

HEEEEEEEERE!!

DOVE

HEEEEEEEERE!!

PIGEON

Landing!!

DOVE

Landing!!

PIGEON

Down!

DOVE

Down!

*PIGEON and DOVE crash land on the
doorstep, laying there, gasping for breath.*

PIGEON

HOLY GOD.

DOVE

Out of breath.

	PIGEON
We're alive!	
	DOVE
Didn't eat us.	
	PIGEON
It didn't eat us!	
	DOVE
Didn't eat us.	
	PIGEON
Did it follow us?	
	DOVE
Did it follow us?	
	PIGEON
Stay here.	
	DOVE
Where ya going?	
	PIGEON
To take a look.	
	DOVE
What are you, crazy? That falcon's prolly still out there hunting us!	
	PIGEON
I don't see it.	
	DOVE
What if it's hovering, waiting to pounce, to strike!	
	PIGEON
I don't see it.	
	DOVE
You don't see it?	
	PIGEON
I think we're okay.	

Yeah?

DOVE

Although.

PIGEON

What.

DOVE

Hate when this happens. Lost my best tail feather flying through that last tree.

PIGEON

What about the rest of your feathers?

DOVE

Wing check!

PIGEON

Wing check!

DOVE

Two! Tail check!

PIGEON

Tail check! One!

DOVE

Alright. We're good, Dove.

PIGEON

We're not good, Pigeon! We are far from good. We don't even know where we are.

DOVE

Away from that hungry falcon trying to eat our face off, that's where we are.

PIGEON

I'm talking about protection. Look at this place! We got no cover.

DOVE

Hey.

PIGEON

DOVE

We're not safe here.

PIGEON

Hey.

DOVE

Very exposed.

PIGEON

Dove.

DOVE

Open to all kinds of renewed attack.

PIGEON

We got away, didn't we? Fastest I remember us flying.

DOVE

The falcon is always faster.

PIGEON

I'm just saying you could for once try being an optimist.

DOVE

I'm a realist.

PIGEON

Why is it I'm the one always trying to be upbeat and you're always so negative.

DOVE

You spend every waking moment of life terrified about getting your face eaten off by a falcon, it tends to make you a realist.

PIGEON

Well we knew that feed post we'd been hanging around was exposed, didn't we?
A feed post without tree cover, where predators are sure to lurk, but we lived there a good while, yeah?

DOVE

Yeah.

PIGEON

Got some great seed there, right?

DOVE

Yeah.

PIGEON

I mean there we were, the best bird buddy couple yet, Pigeon and Dove, nudging out all those finches and sparrows for seed.

DOVE

Til you saw that falcon.

PIGEON

I felt it. Like you could feel it coming,

DOVE

To gnaw off our face.

PIGEON

And I peered to the sky, it was a little speck against the sun but coming on strong, and I grabbed you and we got the hell outta there! We made it, Dove! We're still alive!

DOVE

Will you squawk the chirp up? Falcons got great hearing.

PIGEON

I told you, I don't see it. So start being an optimist!

DOVE

Lower your voice and get some cover. Under here, this thing.

PIGEON

Look, Dove, we've had some close calls but we've always made it out alive, you know?

DOVE

Fear keeps us alive.

PIGEON

Haven't I always said we'll be the lucky ones who actually live to be one year old! I ever tell you my mother used to talk about a Pigeon and Dove buddy couple that lived to be two? Why I thought we'd make a good team.

DOVE

Yeah, well, can't get too attached in this world.

PIGEON

What's that supposed to mean?

DOVE

Nothing.

PIGEON

Whaddya mean don't get too attached?

DOVE

Forget it.

PIGEON

You saying there've been other birds before me?

DOVE

Just drop it, alright?

PIGEON

No, I wanna know.

DOVE

There was...a little sparrow.

PIGEON

A sparrow.

DOVE

A *little* sparrow.

PIGEON

One of the sparrows from the feed post?

DOVE

I just needed a break, okay? I can't talk to you about some things, you're not a realist!

PIGEON

A freaking *sparrow*?

DOVE

It was a one worm affair!

PIGEON

SHHHHHHHHHHH.

DOVE

Oh God, what?

PIGEON

Thought I heard something.

DOVE

Look at me, Pigeon! I'm shaking, I can't even think straight! Doves have no peace! We spend every moment of our short life terrified!

PIGEON

And I've been trying to help you by getting you to lighten up.

DOVE

Well it's kinda hard to do that when we're part of the food chain! We leave our perch, mornings, evenings, it doesn't matter, the second we poke our beak into the world something's coming to eat our face. It's not about where we're from, or the color of our feathers, *we're food*. It's that simple.

PIGEON

So you buddied up with a sparrow.

DOVE

Well I'm not with a sparrow now, am I?

PIGEON

No.

DOVE

I'm with the best bird buddy I'll ever have.

PIGEON

...really?

DOVE

Yeah. But there's still a falcon out there looking to gnaw our face off. Happened to my mother. Right as she kicked me outta the nest, and I'm falling and flapping in the big billowing wind for the first time, I look back towards my nest, the safe doorstep high above the carnage of the world, just in time to see a falcon take off the face of dear old ma.

PIGEON

You never told me that before.

DOVE

Well I'm telling you now, this spot isn't safe.

PIGEON

We're not gonna die here, okay?

*By now a BLACK CAT has entered,
prowling from behind the doorstep area,
eyeing PIGEON from the low ground.*

PIGEON

Cuz here's what we're gonna do. We're gonna fly ourselves into that little opening up there. I've been looking at it the whole time we've been resting here and I think it could be a good spot for us.

BLACK CAT

Meow.

DOVE

You hear something?

PIGEON

Cuz maybe you're right. Maybe it would be nice to stop flying from seed post to seed post for a while. No more sleeping in the rain, no more wind in our feathers.

DOVE

I hear something.

PIGEON

Maybe settle down in our own nest.

DOVE

Like something's coming.

PIGEON

A warm and dry spot where no falcon can find us.

DOVE

Be right back.

PIGEON

Where you won't have to be terrified that's something hunting you, tracking you, waiting to pounce, to grip you in its sharp claws, and in one ferocious second end your life by gnawing your face—

*BLACK CAT pounces, takes down PIGEON
in one quick move, carries PIGEON to off.*

DOVE

Coast is clear! Maybe you're right, maybe all I need's a little positivity, hah? The further adventures of Pigeon and Dove! So why don't I find some twigs while you...Pigeon? You crawl up in that spot already? Pigeon?

DOVE looks past the spot, towards the sky.

DOVE

Oh God, no. The falcon found us! Get out before it's too late! Fly, Pigeon, fly!
NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO.

*DOVE waddles to the edge of the porch, and
tries to take off, just as—*

The door opens.

*Exiting the house through the door is a
WOMAN, highly fashionable, wearing
shades, a cell phone in her ear, walking
across the stage towards off.*

WOMAN

So they were like you can't just Return A Facial, and I was like but she took too much skin off my cheeks, and like my eyebrows!, and they were like well it's not like you can Give Back a Facial, and I was—ooh, this huge bird just came flying right over my head—and I was like you're not charging my account, unless I could get a pedicure instead?...

Lights shift.

APOLOGY.

GOD appears before the doorstep.

GOD

Miiike.

Miiiiiiiiiiiike.

It's me, Mike. God.

Big Guy In The Sky, Heavenly Father. El Supreme-o.

You wanna open the door, Mike?

*GOD stretches an arm towards the door and
there is knocking.*

GOD [CONT.]

C'mon, Mike! Come downstairs and open the door for God. Right now.

Get out of bed, put on a little something and get down here because even though I'm God it is a little chilly this morning.

Seriously, I need to talk to you, okay?

Mike, I know you can hear me, so get down here because I need to talk to you!

Actually...more like apologize.

Okay Mike, it's really God, and yes I'm really on your doorstep this morning to give you an apology.

And not just any apology but the most awesome, deified, stupendous, pious and moving apology ever heard.

But I can't apologize if you're not gonna get out of bed, Mike.

Fine. If you're not gonna make this easy, I get it, I understand.

Why I first thought to do this whole apology thing as a one-time global event, hold a big press conference, live with God!, issue the big apology, get it over with, instead of the hassle of going door to door like this, so if you're gonna make it difficult for me by—

GOD [CONT.]

Sorry. As God you don't want to start off sounding angry giving the most awesome, deified, stupendous, pious and moving apology ever heard.

But if you don't want to hear The Apology then no problem, I can just keep going, you know, I got...free will.

Guess I should start off with the obvious, huh? I haven't been around of late. Haven't been very attentive. Haven't been here at all actually.

I guess I kind of let you down.

I know your job at the factory got cut to half-salary and you got a sick kid and medical bills you can't pay and a mortgage that won't go away and you're sleeping three hours a night and even though you say you're not blaming yourself you are. And you feel like anything you do won't make a difference, and...

Well I could go on, right?

And you're like why did these things happen to you? What did you do wrong? And why haven't I been here to help you?

And the reason is: it's the way things have gone with the world. Cuz you know I worked pretty hard for six days, it was a six-day workweek back then and I rested on the seventh day, and it was like when it was time to get back from resting...

I got used to seeing how many people down here had kind of blocked me in their hearts. Abandoned me in their souls. Not everyone of course, but enough. Even with all the good out there the bad got hard to listen to.

So I went away. I left you.

So let me say in the most awesome, deified, stupendous, pious and moving way...

I. Apologize.

I convinced myself that normal rules didn't apply to me, that I was somehow above the laws of nature...thought that might get a laugh...

Here's the thing, Mike. I can't solve your problems. I can't do that for you. You gotta do that for yourself.

GOD [CONT.]

Because I have to tell you, I have the same issue as you. Watching what's happening to my world, I feel like a failure too. Like I don't matter anymore.

You believe that? God a failure! Which made me more than step back. Which became me staying away.

But the world can't go like that. It doesn't work with people like you and I just stepping out and staying away.

So I started to do something. And I want you to do it with me, Mike.

First thing I do now when I wake up in the morning is I look at myself in the mirror, and I have a light chortle.

GOD does a light chortle.

GOD [CONT.]

I know, you're like what the opposite-of-God is God doing, but Mike I'm telling you, I'm here to apologize but also to tell you: you gotta have yourself a light chortle.

C'mon, try it with me, Mike. A light chortle. Just once. Do it for God!

Yeah! See? That's better, huh? Look at you, you're already standing up.

And now you're out of bed and before you know it you'll be coming down the stairs and not seeing yourself at the cellar of failure, but before the big door of the world, with all the good things and the good people out there ready to...

Well. That's for you to find out.

So maybe that wasn't the most awesome, deified, stupendous...but a light chortle can go a long way, huh?

Anyway. I gotta get to the next place. Different situation but the same general thing. It's not just you.

Well. Take care, Mike. I missed you. And I'm sorry.

GOD goes, and the lights shift.

SEASONS I.

We hear music.

While the following action happens on stage we see projected pictures of the American doorstep, a visual collage.

Many pictures displaying the many times, places, histories and lives of the American doorstep.

Then one of the CAST drags a large wheeled recycling bin out from behind the doorstep towards opposite offstage.

The recycling bin is wieldy and doesn't roll well. The CAST member is almost having a tug-of-war with the bin. Dragging it, reconfiguring the weight balance. Maybe even pushing it.

As the CAST member gets close to going off another CAST member enters, carrying a rake. This person begins to rake leaves in the front yard. Forming small piles.

Someone else appears above the doorstep and begins fixing a shingle.

Someone else is walking to the side of the house, almost behind the doorstep, and inspecting a utility meter.

Someone else is sweeping the porch and area before the door.

Someone else is airing out dirty laundry.

Someone else is shaking out a towel.

Someone else is clapping muddy shoes.

Is sanding the door.

Is putting out a pumpkin.

Is shoveling snow from before the doorstep.

Is arranging a clay pot.

Is shaking out the welcome mat.

Is mowing the lawn.

Is hanging a wind chime.

Is trimming a hedge.

Is replacing a light bulb.

Is delivering a flyer.

Is putting out a corner bench.

Is hanging a new house number sign.

Is replacing the mailbox.

Is tying on a hammock.

Is washing the window by the front door.

Is adding a wire screen.

Is hanging a flower basket.

The stage finally clears.

Music fades.

INTERMISSION.

SEASONS II.

Music returns.

The first CAST member comes back onstage, easily rolling behind the wheeled recycling bin now empty.

The CAST member approaches the house and smiles, noticing and admiring the change, the difference in the whole place, checking everything out.

But there's one thing missing, one thing not quite right.

The CAST member hangs an American Flag, opening it, letting it unfurl.

The CAST member continues with the recycling bin towards offstage, from where SEASONS I first began.

Music fades.

Lights shift.

PORCH PIRATE.

We hear music.

PORCH PIRATE, a clown, enters.

PORCH PIRATE CLOWN points to a large package on the doorstep, clearly making the package known as the object of desire.

PORCH PIRATE CLOWN is eager.

PORCH PIRATE CLOWN begins a dance, to the music, giddy with anticipation of stealing the package from the porch.

PORCH PIRATE CLOWN makes the first move towards the doorstep.

The door opens and HOMEOWNER, another clown, steps outside.

PORCH PIRATE CLOWN freezes, perhaps taking the shape of a garden fountain, to conceal his identity and presence.

HOMEOWNER CLOWN is looking for the large package but for some reason doesn't see it sitting on the doorstep.

HOMEOWNER returns to inside.

PORCH PIRATE CLOWN is worried.

PORCH PIRATE CLOWN realizes the HOMEOWNER might get the package first, and begins to move closer to the doorstep, again with sway and motion to the music, with sneaky determination.

PORCH PIRATE CLOWN is stymied in approach by a house dog, biting at the ankles.

HOMEOWNER again open the door and enters the doorstep, still searching for the package, still unable to see it.

PORCH PIRATE CLOWN this time perhaps assumes the form of a young tree, or sundial.

HOMEOWNER retreats into the house.

This happens several more times, an amount of choosing by the PORCH PIRATE CLOWN and HOMEOWNER, as the PORCH PIRATE CLOWN is perhaps also stymied by gusts of wind, or sudden rain, or a falling tree.

Finally, when PORCH PIRATE CLOWN reaches the porch, PORCH PIRATE CLOWN grabs the box celebrating the achievement.

PORCH PIRATE CLOWN is rapturous!

Which is when HOMEOWNER opens the door and sees PORCH PIRATE CLOWN for the first time.

This holds.

PORCH PIRATE CLOWN is defeated.

PORCH PIRATE CLOWN extends the package to the HOMEOWNER, who is surprised and glad to see the package finally arrive.

HOMEOWNER opens the box. Inside should be something simple: a happy face sticker, e.g.

HOMEOWNER goes back inside, closing the door on PORCH PIRATE CLOWN.

PORCH PIRATE CLOWN is sad.

HOMEOWNER returns and gives PORCH PIRATE CLOWN a drink, a token of gratitude for the trouble of delivery.

PORCH PIRATE CLOWN is happy.

PORCH PIRATE CLOWN waltzes off stage to full out.

Lights shift.

ELOPE.

*ALLORA and NAT creep to before the
doorstep, expectant.*

NAT

Five a.m.

ALLORA

This time is different.

NAT

Sorry, five oh one. I'm telling you, she's not going to go through with this.

ALLORA

She will.

NAT

She's going to back out like last time, Allora.

ALLORA

You could hear the beauty and hope in her voice.

NAT

All I could hear was her Dads' voices. Screaming at her. Telling her how stupid she is, how foolish and reckless the three of us are.

ALLORA

This time it's going to happen.

NAT

Well it better. Last time was all talk. [NAT takes an engagement ring box out of his pocket] Now we've bought each other engagement rings.

ALLORA

Not until we reach the matrimonial promised land that is Las Vegas.

NAT

Where is she? Five oh two.

*A soft light comes on from inside the house,
as if the inner door landing.*

ALLORA

Yes!

NAT

Thank God.

CARLA peeks her head out of the door.

CARLA

[Whispering] Hold on.

ALLORA

[Whisper shouting] We love you!

CARLA

[Whisper shouting] Shhh!

ALLORA

We Love You!

NAT

Hurry!

CARLA

Will you both shut up!

CARLA, dressed for travel, carrying a duffel bag, exits the door slowly.

ALLORA

Hello our love.

CARLA

Are you crazy? I said I would meet you at the bus station!

NAT

We wanted to make sure.

CARLA

We're not gonna do this at all if we don't get out of here. Both my Dads know something's up.

NAT

Are they up?

CARLA

I don't know.

NAT

Did they try to talk you out of it again?

CARLA

I feel weird about this.

ALLORA

Our love is not weird.

NAT

It's not about them anymore.

CARLA

God.

NAT

What.

CARLA

It's my Dads. You know? They're my Dads.

NAT

I knew it.

ALLORA

Do you have everything packed for the journey that is the rest of our life?

CARLA

Everything except my Dads' blessing.

NAT

We've been through this a million times. They're your Dads now but by tonight
I'll be your husband.

ALLORA

And I your wife.

CARLA

But they'll always be my Dads. The three of us eloping to Vegas like this, without
them being a part of it.

NAT

They're never gonna understand. My parents will never understand.

ALLORA

This is our moment. There will be a land of sunshine in the morning and desert breeze by night where the three of us will finally live under the same roof, sharing our joys and love without worrying anymore, without feeling guilt or shame.

CARLA

My Dads adopted me. Brought me to America. Gave me my life. I owe them so much.

ALLORA

By keeping yourself in debt to love?

NAT

Blocking us from the life we want to live? It's been three years and our parents never once acknowledged us, accepted us, always denying, forbidding this.

CARLA

They see the world a different way, Nat.

NAT

Why Allora and I are here instead of waiting for you at the bus station. If we don't leave now it'll be the same thing, sneaking around this town, only two of us at a time. I can't do that anymore.

CARLA

You know what my Dads said? That polyamory is a movement of defiance. That today's youth goes for polyamory only because it flies in the face of convention.

NAT

I'm sure their parents said the same thing to them before they got married.

CARLA

They couldn't get married.

NAT

Exactly! Why are we even arguing about this?

ALLORA

They knew what love was for them. And we know what love is for us. Love always shatters the rules somebody else once made for it. And it grows in unsure and mysterious ways until it feels *this* right. Let us reintroduce love to love, as only we know how.

NAT

This isn't like last time when we just *said* we're gonna do it. This time I quit my job. I sold everything I own, I even made the down payment on our new place. But even with having done all that: we're not leaving without you. It's the three of us or nothing.

NAT has the engagement rings out of the box.

CARLA

The hell are you doing.

NAT

Come here.

CARLA

Let's just go. Before anything happens.

NAT

Something *is* going to happen, before your Dads come down and open the door and say something to change your mind about eloping for the umpteenth time....[getting on one knee]...will you two marry me?

CARLA

Will you get up?

NAT

Will you marry me?

CARLA

Yeah, in Vegas!

NAT

Right here.

CARLA

Seriously!

ALLORA

I am kneeling before you, Carla, and you Nat, and before this house, before this whole town, where you fought so long in silence for us, where you wouldn't be denied for us. Where we survived the unwillingness to see love for love and will be forever joined in unbroken union.

CARLA

In Las Vegas!

NAT

But I want to engage you here.

CARLA

You're crazy.

NAT

And you're the two bravest people I know. Will you marry me?

ALLORA

Yes.

NAT

Will you?

CARLA

...fine.

NAT

Yes! So how do we do this?

CARLA

You put it on my finger.

NAT

Just slide it up.

CARLA

Pretty much.

NAT

On the count of three.

CARLA

Just go!

NAT

One!

DADS [OFF]

Carla?

NAT

...two.

CARLA

SHHH!

DADS [OFF]

Carla?

*We hear a clinking sound, a ring dropped
and bouncing away.*

NAT

Damnit, I dropped your ring.

DADS [OFF]

Carla!

CARLA

You dropped my ring?

NAT

If you hadn't jerked your hand back!

ALLORA

Engaged I am and betrothed I will be!

DADS [OFF]

Carla, where are you?

NAT

It fell through the porch crack.

ALLORA

But our love will only soar through the heavens.

NAT

Not now, Allora, please, that thing cost fifty dollars!

CARLA

You bought me a fifty-dollar ring.

NAT

You got a metal detector?

CARLA

For a fifty-dollar ring.

NAT

I didn't see you get anything.

CARLA

I was going to give it to you in Vegas!

NAT

Well I thought getting engaged here would have a little more meaning!

A light comes on from the house.

CARLA

Oh, God.

NAT

C'mon, let's just get out of here before...

CARLA opens up her duffel.

*CARLA takes out an engagement ring box,
returns to the doorstep and gets on a knee.*

The door opens and the DADS stand there.

DADS

Carla, what are you doing?

*CARLA opens the engagement ring box and
takes out two rings.*

DADS

Carla, we talked about this.

CARLA
Will you both marry me?

NAT
Yes.

ALLORA
Forever I Will.

*CARLA slides one ring onto NAT's finger
then a second ring onto ALLORA's finger.*

*The three embrace and then with hands held
go towards off.*

CARLA
[To DADS] I'm sorry.

DADS
You won't go through with it.

DADS
You'll be back.

*CARLA hesitates, then with NAT and
ALLORA go off, leaving the DADS standing
there.*

Lights shift.

FINDING.

*A YOUNG BOY, a pre-teen, rides a bike
onto stage.*

*YOUNG BOY hops off and takes out a
wallet. Checks inside, reads an inside label
to make sure he's at the correct address.*

YOUNG BOY goes to knock on the door.

*When the door opens an OLDER MAN, is
there.*

Yes? OLDER MAN

Hi. YOUNG BOY

I help you. OLDER MAN

Are you Ty Williams? YOUNG BOY

...no. OLDER MAN

Oh. YOUNG BOY

He no longer lives here. OLDER MAN

YOUNG BOY
Okay cuz I found this wallet, and I found out it belonged to Ty Williams and I
found out his name and address.

*OLDER MAN looks at the wallet the boy is
holding.*

YOUNG BOY

I didn't take anything out of the wallet, I just found it.

OLDER MAN takes the wallet.

OLDER MAN

Say you found it.

YOUNG BOY

Yeah I mean the color and shape seemed out of place. I'm really good at finding things. Whenever my Dad loses his phone, or my mom loses her keys they always ask me to find it.

OLDER MAN

Where was it. The wallet.

YOUNG BOY

Off one of the new dirt bike paths. We didn't have those at my old house, so I've been riding them all over the place here. And I was hopping off my bike to adjust my helmet and found it hiding behind some new flowers. Which was odd cuz there wasn't anything else growing along the whole path but right there, the only spot, growing up tall and straight were these flowers. So does Ty live here?

OLDER MAN

He died.

YOUNG BOY

Oh.

OLDER MAN

Ty was my grandson.

YOUNG BOY

Oh.

OLDER MAN

Was about your age. You 11?

YOUNG BOY

Eleven and a half.

OLDER MAN

Was your age.

YOUNG BOY

Wow. Well. I'm really sorry.

OLDER MAN

Say you just moved here.

YOUNG BOY

Two months ago.

OLDER MAN

So you didn't hear then. About Ty. They talk about him every year now at the start of school.

YOUNG BOY

No.

OLDER MAN

I see. Also see you rode your bike here.

YOUNG BOY

Yeah.

OLDER MAN

Normal boy thing to do. All I did when I was your age. Used to ride along the streets. Weren't that many drivers. Weren't many houses back then, not like there are now.

YOUNG BOY

I moved into the new development by the mall.

OLDER MAN

When I was eleven we raced from where that mall is to Old Eddie's Soda Shack. It's a Target now. Wasn't dangerous back then. But these days.

YOUNG BOY

I'm only allowed to ride on the dirt paths.

OLDER MAN

Well. Next month when you start at school you'll hear about my grandson. They talk about him to warn kids about being safe.

YOUNG BOY

What happened?

OLDER MAN

Ty's parents, his Mom and Dad, made some bad choices, got close and personal with alcohol, so Ty came here to live with me. He was the only thing in my life. Whatever I did wrong with my own kids I was doing everything right with Ty. Gave this wallet to him when he turned 11. Gave him the new bike as well. I said you ride careful along the side of the roads, with your helmet, when you go to the new Target and the places where boys and their friends today like to go. And I gave him this ten-dollar bill. And I said you have fun with your friends but be home before sundown. Even got him a watch so he wouldn't stay out so late.

YOUNG BOY

And then.

OLDER MAN

Drunk driver. Never stopped. Didn't even slow down.

YOUNG BOY

...they ever find the driver?

OLDER MAN

Never found the wallet either. Guess Ty must have been holding it in his hand. This must have landed far from...the spot.

YOUNG BOY

I wished I lived here when it happened. I'm really good at finding out things.

OLDER MAN

After my Ty died is when they made the new dirt paths. More dirt paths because of more cars.

YOUNG BOY

I would have found that driver. Maybe I still can.

OLDER MAN

...look. You just be careful. These days, just walking out your front door, turning onto the old street...well. Seems today you don't have to go looking very far. These days, the bad things seem to find you. Especially since they let these drunk drivers off with nothing more than a warning, let them do it again and again.

YOUNG BOY

Oh.

OLDER MAN

But I haven't seen any of those friends of his. Maybe their parents told them this house is bad luck. I've been a lot by myself since then. Gets kind of lonely. Well. Wear your helmet.

YOUNG BOY

Sure.

OLDER MAN

Be home by sundown. And stay on the dirt path.

YOUNG BOY

Do you think I could come back sometime? I'd really like to hear more about your grandson.

OLDER MAN

You come back when you find something to tell me.

YOUNG BOY

Okay.

OLDER MAN

We'll sit out on the doorstep here. Talk about...

YOUNG BOY

Finding things.

OLDER MAN

Cuz he also had that watch.

YOUNG BOY

Oh.

OLDER MAN

Blue watch. Was mine when I was his age.

YOUNG BOY

Maybe the watch will show the exact time Ty was...

OLDER MAN

Well. Be careful now. Even though you can't be careful enough.

YOUNG BOY

Okay. See you.

*YOUNG BOY puts on his helmet and walks
the bike to the end of the stage.*

YOUNG BOY

Blue.

YOUNG BOY goes off.

Lights shift.

I TOLD YOU IT'S MORNING.

GRANDPA is before the door. Doesn't remember if coming or going.

PAULA enters with JACK, her son, trailing behind. JACK carries an Elvis snow globe.

As PAULA moves closer to GRANDPA, his concern grows.

PAULA

HEY, POP. IT'S ME. I'M BACK. POP, IT'S ME. PAULA.

GRANDPA

Eleanor?

PAULA

PAULA.

GRANDPA

I've been sitting here, waiting.

JACK

Hey, Grandpa.

PAULA

[To JACK] You have to speak up. [To GRANDPA] JACK IS HERE, TOO.

GRANDPA

What's that?

PAULA

I said JACK'S HERE, TOO.

GRANDPA

[To PAULA] You don't need to shout. [To JACK] GOOD MORNING, JACK.

PAULA

Pop, we just got back from vacation. We came straight here.

GRANDPA

Eleanor, I want my breakfast.

PAULA

It's Paula, and I'm here to get you dinner. What are you doing outside?

GRANDPA

It's morning.

JACK

Grandpa, I got you this Elvis snow globe.

PAULA

Jack, not now.

GRANDPA

Get me in the shower.

PAULA

It's night and you're out here all confused again.

JACK

He's not wearing much.

PAULA

He's confused again.

GRANDPA

Goddamn alarm never went off.

JACK

Told you we should have got the talking Elvis alarm clock instead.

PAULA

Jack, go wait in the car.

GRANDPA

And get me my eggs with jam.

PAULA

Jack.

JACK

It's fine, Mom.

PAULA

I don't want you to see this.

JACK hands GRANDPA the snow globe and exits.

GRANDPA

Thank you for the tacky souvenir!

PAULA

Pop, listen—

GRANDPA

Now don't turn the shower water too hot, like yesterday.

PAULA

This is the third time someone's been here today. Eleanor was here already today for breakfast and lunch. So I'm back from vacation and here to get you dinner, and then ready for bed.

GRANDPA

Nonsense! I've been sitting here since sunrise, alone. Never moved. I watched some dumb movie, bunch of people shooting each other. Don't watch that one. Couldn't fall back asleep so I watched another movie, more people shooting each other, can't remember the name, don't watch that one either. Now hurry up and get my shower going.

PAULA

Pop, it is seven thirty at night.

GRANDPA

Then you should go home.

PAULA

I'd like to go home. I'd like to go home and unpack.

GRANDPA

Where is home?

PAULA

We all live here, in Kentucky.

GRANDPA

Kentucky? That's no home. Kentucky's got liberals. I think Eleanor's one of 'em.

PAULA

Eleanor said everything was okay while I was gone. That she did okay her first time without me around.

GRANDPA

You've been gone?

PAULA

To Memphis. But I called. Practically every hour. I don't want you to think I wasn't...what.

GRANDPA

You hear that?

PAULA

No.

GRANDPA

New people moved in below.

PAULA

You live alone, Pop. This is your house. The house you raised us, me and Eleanor.

GRANDPA

They moved in and started right up with their music!

PAULA

There's nobody below you.

GRANDPA picks up the snow globe and starts banging it on the ground.

GRANDPA

QUIT THAT RACKET YOU GODDAMN LIBERALS.

PAULA

Pop, cut it out! You'll lose your mind with all that...

GRANDPA

[Maybe vicious] Bet you'd like that. Me going totally bonkers. Then you could go vacationing whenever you felt like it thinking I wouldn't notice.

Pause.

PAULA

I've been here every day, Pop. Every day for the last 5 years. I've come three times a day every day for the last five years. Because you can't take care of yourself anymore. And Eleanor doesn't want to help. She thinks it's enabling the problem: this romantic notion of you dying in this house. Well last weekend my family went away for the first time in five years.

GRANDPA

I was born in this house.

PAULA

I know.

GRANDPA

I was born in this house! This is the only place I've lived. This was built by my father.

PAULA

I know.

GRANDPA

The community helped him build it. To have a house get built by friends and neighbors. That doesn't happen anymore. Every good thing I remember is right here. Now don't touch me. Only my daughter Eleanor touches me now. She's coming back tonight.

PAULA

It is night.

GRANDPA

Don't tell me what's night. I still have eyes, you know. I can look at the only walls I ever knew. The only door I've ever had. The old mantle clock your great-grandfather passed down. I can look at it and see seven-three-zero!

PAULA

At night. Seven thirty at night.

Beat.

GRANDPA

Yeah?

PAULA

Yeah.

Beat.

GRANDPA

I got confused again.

PAULA

Yeah.

GRANDPA

Monday?

PAULA

No, it's...Pop, listen. While on vacation. I called Leisure World. The assisted living place in the city. About you living there instead of living alone here.

GRANDPA

I don't live alone, I've got you.

PAULA

Yeah, well, I've got Jack I'm trying to get through high school. And a husband I'm trying to get to fall back in love with me again. And a job I'm trying to keep. Because for the past five years it's been mornings, afternoons and nights here, sometimes more than that, here. All I'm able to talk about is what time you woke up, what you've had to eat.

GRANDPA

Not my fault you're so boring. And I'm not going to any Seizure World.

PAULA

Leisure World. I can't keep doing this.

GRANDPA

You don't have any right to come in here and tell me where to live. I won't let you imprison me.

PAULA

I can't protect you anymore. You need a place where you're not going to fall.

GRANDPA

I fall just fine by myself.

PAULA

Lying on the tile, your face against the bathtub for hours until I found you. I thought you were dead.

GRANDPA

I'm not dead. [Pause] I said I'm not dead.

PAULA

I know that.

*GRANDPA looks at PAULA, as if full
lucidity has returned.*

GRANDPA

Paula.

PAULA

Yes.

GRANDPA

Your husband's not in the car, is he. [PAULA motions, 'no'] Don't remember seeing him lately. [PAULA motions, 'no'] Ahh, happened with my old man, too.

PAULA

You never told me that.

GRANDPA

Your Mom wasn't so happy with all the time I spent on your Grandpa here in his upward years. I told your Mom: no man dies alone.

PAULA

I'm just so tired.

GRANDPA

C'mon, help me up. Let's go inside. We'll...talk about it. I don't want anyone to take care of me but you. You're all I have left.

PAUL

What about Eleanor?

GRANDPA

Socialist liberal.

PAULA

She'll be happy to hear.

GRANDPA

You're the only one who understands.

PAULA

I know, but...sometimes it's not about what we want anymore.

GRANDPA

You understand I'm going to die in this house. And so will you. And so will Jack.

PAULA

...

GRANDPA

I'll eat in the kitchen. I like my eggs with jam.

They go into the house.

Lights shift.

GHOST STORY.

*The CAST enters, a traveling winter chorale.
As they enter, they sing the Carol Of The
Bells.*

*The words are slow, perhaps even off a bit,
a dark rendition.*

*The CAST formulates before the doorstep.
The CAST no longer sings words but hums
softly the melody.*

*How the following ghost story is told is up to
the performers.*

*As the start of the play, lines can be spoken
in turn, by a single individual, or shared
among the entire cast, or spoken in tandem.*

CAST

We'd like to end tonight's performance with the telling of a true ghost story.

True and terrible.

A ghost that came from this house on Christmas.

And passed through this very door.

We have never told this story before.

We often wondered what would happen if we did.

If telling it would bring her back.

Or if it only happened on Christmas.

And since more stories are forgotten than remembered you can be sure this one is
true.

Like all ghost stories.

CAST [CONT.]

It begins and ends here: my aunt's house, a small but cozy wooden log house at the end of a long gravel road beside an old winding stream.

She was like all aunts I suppose. A little crazy with a big laugh and a great hug to share and a kitchen full of old wooden cups and colorful liquors and rich with the endless smell of fresh chocolate.

She lived alone and because she lived alone her greatest joy was when the family came to visit.

She hosted all the big meals for all the big holidays.

Throughout the year my family would gather at her country log house, and play games in the back meadow fields, and eat food before her crackling stove and sing by her warm hearth fire.

Inside her house was magic and wonder and joy and the eternity of childhood.

Christmas was the best of all.

My aunt would decorate the front door. She would decorate the front door in candy canes and stockings with scented candles attached to the frame. The frame of this door, from which she welcomed us.

We would go from the meadow and into the thick canopied forest and she would pick the best Christmas fir and we would drag the tree back to her house over white snow and station the tree by the front door.

Until one Christmas Eve morning.

When I was told we wouldn't be going to my Aunt's house on Christmas anymore.

Until that one Christmas Eve morning.

When I was told the true and terrible news.

Until that one Christmas Eve morning.

That my Aunt had died.

Burned in a fire.

CAST [CONT.]

The candles. Old wood.

The tree and door. Old wood.

A fire that consumed the house.

The entire house destroyed.

That it must have happened during the night.

That my aunt must have been asleep.

I screamed, I yelled, I wailed.

We must still go, she must still be alive!

But there is nothing left to see I was told.

The entire area had been scorched, the house nothing more but flecked ash and smoked soil and blackened char and grey death.

Did no one come to help? Did no one bring water from the old winding stream?

There is nothing left to do but remember her.

And as a family we never went to her house again.

Many years later when most of the family had grown old, and after my own parents passed away, when it turned a December chill, I decided that childhood cannot end with memories of such horror.

Memories of unfinished love and wounds that haven't closed.

So I made to return to where my Aunt used to live in that old cozy wooden log house.

I would go there on Christmas Eve and cross the desiccated land and hang a stocking and lay a present for her on the site of the old doorstep, to let her know she is still remembered in this world.

So on Christmas Eve.

After sunset.

CAST [CONT.]

A clear moonless night though no stars were out.

I drove past the many open meadow fields.

When I arrived.

When I reached the end of that long gravel driveway.

When I came to the place...

There was no ash, no burnt ground, no new forest covering where she used to live.

But somehow the wooden log house was there.

In the moonless night, right there.

The frame, the edges, the shape and size, right there.

The front door, right there.

As if no harm had ever come to it.

A deep chill seemed to follow drifting snow as it floated towards the porch. As if the snow was being pulled to the doorstep, to pile before the outline of the old front door.

I stood there, wondering, what lies had been told.

If my Aunt was still alive inside...

But as I got closer I saw...

Black candy canes on the door, writhed and wretched...

...dripping black candles by the frame...

...rotted planks and crooked ink-night beams...

That's when I heard it.

From the other side of the door.

Scratching. Soft at first.

Like something sharp scraping against the door.

CAST [CONT.]

It grew louder. More intense. A sickening sound. And then.

‘Let me out.’

Whispered like that.

‘Let me out.’

I couldn’t move. I couldn’t breathe.

Then banging. Pounding on the door. I thought the door would shatter from the force.

And then something pushing against it, as if things were being hurled against the door.

I grabbed onto the door handle. I could feel it inside. I could sense it right on the other side of that door.

‘Let me out!’

Screaming it now. A horrid, desperate scream.

The door handle became hot, burning.

I went to a window, to look inside, but all I saw was red. Glowing, cascading red.

‘Let me out!’

It happened so fast. I didn’t know. I didn’t understand.

When I turned the knob, and pushed with all my force, and the door opened, and it went past me, I didn’t see features.

I didn’t see eyes or a body.

But I felt it.

Seething. Hideous. A scalding wave of torridity past me, screaming, scrambling madly towards the old winding stream where it leapt into the water and steam hissed and enveloped its writhing form...and it was gone.

Leaving me before the door, with only blackness inside, a deep black from which no sound or sense did come.

CAST [CONT.]

And I stumbled to my car, and drove away.

Well.

That was last Christmas.

We haven't told anyone.

We're almost too afraid to tell ourselves.

But we still have that wrapped present, the one we wanted to lay before the
doorstep.

The portal to the past.

The doorstep to all our pasts.

And next Christmas, we wonder, just maybe, if we return, if any of us return to
our childhood.

To revisit the lights of our youth, the sweet sanctity of memory.

If we go back to the place of who we were, will our past still be there?

Will the door still be there?

Will whatever we want to remember still be there?

Or will there be something dark and hideous trying to get out?

There's only one way to know.

*The CAST reforms as the traveling winter
chorale. They reprise the Carol Of The
Bells.*

*As the CAST exits the stage, one CAST
member remains behind and goes to the
doorstep.*

And leaves the present on the doorstep.

END OF PLAY.