"As if language had surrendered": Transcending Speech in the Plays of Brian Friel

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"A play offers you a shape and a form to accommodate your anxieties and disturbances for this period of your life you happen to be passing through"; "you delve into a particular corner of yourself that's dark and uneasy, and you articulate the confusion and the unease... When you do that, that's finished, and you acquire other corners of unease and discontent" ("Ciarán Carty" 82, "Fintan O'Toole" 110). These are the terms in which Brian Friel, the prominent Irish dramatist whose works have now influenced both the British and the American theatre, describes the work of the playwright. Since the first performance of Philadelphia, Here I Come! in 1964, Friel has carried on a successful theatrical career that now spans four decades. In particular, his play Translations has gained him international acclaim, earning him a place among the most renowned playwrights of our day.

Despite an extensive body of work, almost all of Friel’s plays remain thematically grounded in a very short list of persistent ideas. In particular, Friel is known for his recurring treatment of the problematic nature of verbal communication. “Friel’s plays,” according to Richard Kearney, “have become increasingly concerned with the problem of language, so much so that they constitute not just a theatre of language, but a theatre about language” (86). If writing delves into “corners of unease and discontent”, as Friel suggests, then Friel must be positively haunted by words.

Kearney suggests that this preoccupation results in part from Friel’s cultural background. He places Friel within a long history of Irish “Verbal Theatre,” recalling that the Irish dramatic tradition began with a poet, W. B. Yeats, and naming Friel as one of the most skilled practitioners of the Irish Language Play. More than just Ireland’s theatrical history, however, the political history of Friel’s homeland also clearly plays into Friel’s obsession with verbal communication. The English colonization of Ireland and the subsequent replacement of the Irish tongue with English has placed questions of language at the center of Irish/English tensions. “The whole issue of language is a very problematic force for us all on the island,” said Friel in an interview with Fintan O’Toole. “And in some ways I don’t think we’ve resolved it... We flirt with the English language, but we haven’t absorbed it and we haven’t regurgitated it in some kind of way” (108). It is not surprising, then, that linguistic concerns rest at the heart of Friel’s dramas, so rooted are they in the cultural and political history of the Irish nation.

Though in some of Friel’s dramas, such as Freedom of the City and Translations, political interests do take center stage, the more general idea that communication has the potential both to wound and to offer healing for individuals and cultures, presents itself in much of Friel’s work that has no specific political theme. Indeed, in many plays, little or no reference to the political situation in Ireland appears, and the exploration of language and speech focuses specifically on individuals and local communities. Such plays concentrate primarily on the interactions between members of family units and groups of friends. Nevertheless, they often urge the audience toward the same conclusion as the more political plays, that the common language of human discourse all too often proves ineffectual in communicating true meaning, and therefore new methods of communication must be found if people desire genuine interaction with one another.

In exploring this theme throughout the course of his career, Friel has progressed from detailed exploration of the problem itself in his earlier work, to examining possible solutions to the dilemmas of communication in his later plays. Plays such as Philadelphia, Here I Come and Faith Healer, strive merely to express the difficulties inherent in linguistic expression, stressing separation, misperception, and involuntarily silence among communities of people; other works, such as Translations, “suggest that perhaps communication isn’t possible at all” (“Ray Comiskey” 103), and go so far to posit silence itself as a better alternative than speech; and his more recent works such as Wonderful Tennessee and Dancing at Lughnasa begin to envision creative means of nonverbal communication between people, particularly through the use of artistic forms.

Articulating the Problem: Philadelphia, Here I Come! and Faith Healer

To hell with all strong, silent men
Gar, Philadelphia Here I Come

Friel’s exploration of language begins with some of his very earliest plays. In Philadelphia, Here I Come and Faith Healer, Friel is concerned with articulating some of the specific barriers to uninhibited communication, from old habits to fundamental discrepancies in perception. Specifically, these works concentrate on highlighting how these barriers often become impenetrable, making isolation seem more
viable than connection. In both works, the form of the text itself creates a sense of fragmentation — in Philadelphia, because the protagonist is split into two selves, the public self and the private self, and in Faith Healer, because the play is divided into four separate monologues, each given from different perspectives. These devices add to the feeling of disunity in both works, strengthening the suggestion that communities, individuals, and even histories are fragmented by the failure of humans to communicate fully with one another (Andrews 76, 123).

In Philadelphia. Here I Come, Friel explores the differences between a person’s inner reality and the persona one shows to others through the use of a particularly effective staging device, the split character. The protagonist of the play, Gar, is represented on stage by two different actors, one representing the “Public” self, and one the “Private” self. Friel details the relationship of these two characters in the preface of the play: “The two Gar, PUBLIC GAR and PRIVATE GAR, are two views of the one man. PUBLIC GAR is the Gar that people see, talk to, talk about. PRIVATE GAR is the unseen man, the man within, the conscience, the alter ego, the secret thoughts, the id” (27). Even in this explanatory note, Friel begins to articulate the communication problems that his protagonist will face in the action of the play. Note in this description that Private Gar portrays the “secret thoughts” of Gar, while his public self “is the Gar that people see, talk to.” The very need for such a dichotomy of character, with two separate bodies to represent the inner and outer life, implies the suppression of the person within in favor of the person without.

For Gar, two central conflicts surface again and again in the action of the play. One is the conflict between moving to Philadelphia to live with his Americanized relatives and remaining in Ireland with his father and familiar community. The second conflict, between expressing to his father and friends the feelings that Private Gar is continually revealing to the audience, and resigning himself the involuntary silence that his public self and community impose on him, turns out to be strongly related to the first. As the play progresses, it becomes clear that for Gar to choose to remain in his hometown of Ballybeg is to choose a community which makes it difficult, if not impossible, to articulate his private thoughts, desires, and feelings. On the other hand, Philadelphia seems to promise Gar a previously unknown freedom of expression among a new, more open community.

Gar’s interactions with his closest acquaintances highlight his inability to communicate effectively with even — or especially — the people most physically present in his life, as most poignantly illustrated through his failing relationship with his father, S.B. O’Donnel. A man of few words, S.B.’s habitual silence over the years has formed an impassable wall between the two men, so that their conversation now consists only of predictable remarks and terse instructions. According to the stage directions at S.B.’s first appearance, S.B.’s very entrance into the room effects a visible change in Gar’s demeanor: “[Gar] assumes in speech and gesture a surly, taciturn gruffness. He always behaves this way when he is in his father’s company” (34). In the following interaction between father and son, the interaction of the Public and Private voice reveals at once the habitual external intimacy of the two and the insurmountable barriers to communication that exist between them internally:

(S.B. enters from the shop and goes through his nightly routine.) . . .
PRIVATE: Perfectly trained; the most obedient father I ever had. And now for our nightly lesson in the English language. Repeat slowly after me: another day over.
S. B.: Another day over.
PRIVATE: Good. Next phrase: I suppose we can’t complain.
S. B.: I suppose we can’t complain.
PRIVATE: Not bad. Now for a little free conversation . . .
S. B.: Did you set the rat trap in the store?
PUBLIC: Aye.
. . . (S. B. takes out a handkerchief, removes his teeth, wraps them in the handkerchief, and puts them in his pocket. PRIVATE exhales with satisfaction.)
PRIVATE: Ah! That’s what we were waiting for; complete informality; total relaxation between intimates . . . Screwballs, we’ve eaten together like this for the past twenty-odd years, and never once in all that time have you made as much as one unpredictable remark. . . . If one of us were to say, ‘You’re looking tired,’ or ‘That’s a bad cough you have,’ the other would fall over backwards with embarrassment. . . . (48-49).

Here, Private’s monologue continues on and on, articulating clearly and intricately the pain he is experiencing as a result of his father’s silence. Nevertheless, the audience will do well to note that Public Gar does not at any point voice these feelings to his father. He speaks only two words in the entire course
of their interaction, “Aye,” and “Aye” again, far less than his father speaks. “There is,” as Elmer Andrews puts it, “no dialogue between father and son, and the result is paralysis, ossification” (94).

Rather than overcome this failure to connect with his father, Gar plans to flee it by going to America. Gar claims that he wants from America only “impermanence – anonymity . . . a vast restless place that doesn’t give a damn about the past” (79). This declaration, however, is undermined by the fact that Gar is persuaded to leave Ireland by his mother’s sister Lizzy, a talkative, physically affectionate, and maternal woman who loves Gar because he is connected to her own Irish history. When she comes to see them in Ireland, she does what Gar’s father never does, reminisces about Gar’s mother and her sisters, even recalling the day when his mother and father were married. Finally, when Lizzy reveals that she has come for the express purpose of asking him to live with them in Philadelphia, Gar manages to sputter out, perhaps for the first time in the play, an awkward sentence expressing a deep desire, even against the contrary urgings of his private self: “I want to go to America – If you’ll have me” (66). America, then, perhaps functions as a “land of opportunity” for Gar, a place where he would be able to connect emotionally, both to his past and to his relations there.

The end of the play, however, does not leave its audience with any assurance that Gar will actually achieve this connection. Indeed at the end of the play, Gar is not even fully resolved to leave Ireland. His true longing is not for new relationships abroad, but for real communication with those already near to him, and so as the play closes the private self asks, “Boy, why do you have to leave? Why? Why?” and the public self responds, “I don’t know. I-I-I don’t know” (99). And though it is possible that Gar will achieve a new level of relationships, either in Ireland or in America, the play perhaps leads one to agree with Madge’s final prophecy, that Gar will end up as uncommunicative as his father:

When the boss was his age, he was just the same as him: leppin’ and eejitin’ about . . .; as like as two peas. And when he’s the age the boss is now, he’ll turn out just the same. And although I won’t be here to see it, you’ll find that he’s learned nothin’ in between times (98).

By closing the play with such uncertainty, Philadelphia, Here I Come clearly presents the painful difficulties of person-to-person communication, but does not necessarily offer any clear way out of those difficulties. Though no cultural ramifications of these difficulties are explicitly suggested, the link that is developed between effective communication and a shared past – that is, that common memories and histories promote connection between otherwise isolated individuals – implies that without a shared history, cultures will have little basis upon which they can build communication.

The communicative dilemmas suggested in Philadelphia, Here I Come take on an even more bleak aspect in Faith Healer. Elmer Andrews notes that the sense of isolation in Faith Healer is more pointed than it was in Philadelphia, Here I Come, as “Friel’s dramatic structure doesn’t allow even for the possibility of dialogue between the characters” (94). Instead of being composed of traditional character action and interaction, Faith Healer is made up of a series of four monologues delivered by three different characters – Frank, his lover Grace, and his manager Teddy -- and there is no contact between the characters at any time. “The monologic format,” according to Richard Kearney, “is ingeniously exploited by Friel as an exact correlate of their solitary confinement. They have ceased to communicate with each other; the confessional mode of private address has become the last resort of their language” (88). In addition, the isolated way in which Friel chooses to stage the monologues -- placing one speaker on the stage by him or herself to speak, removing them, darkening the theater, and invisibly bringing in another to take the place of the first -- creates a sense of total separation one from another, not only in terms of space, but also chronologically; the audience has no sense of where each monologue is occurring on a time line.

The formal separation of the characters matches the evident perspectival disconnect that emerges between the three characters. Though every character tells essentially the same story, each individual’s interpretation of events and even recollection of basic historical facts differs greatly from those of the other two. Because Freddy gives the first monologue, the audience is initially prone to take what he says at face value. He reveals that he works as a faith healer, that he has a profound and burdensome gift of healing that he can’t control, but also that he “always knew when nothing was going to happen” at a healing service; that Grace is his Yorkshire mistress with “indefatigable loyalty”; and that Teddy, his publicity manager, insists on playing “Just the Way You Look Tonight” during the services.

However, as the play moves forward from Frank’s first monologue to Grace’s monologue, these basic facts are called into question. Where Frank recalled uncertainty and solemnity about his “gift” and the exercise of it, Grace recalls arrogance and confidence: “He always called it a performance, teasing the word with that mocking voice of his. . . as if it were a game he might take part in only if he felt like it. . . but always before a performance he’d be . . . in complete mastery” (343). In addition, Grace describes Frank’s indentification of her as his mistress, which the audience at first believed to be factual, as a cruel
joke Frank liked to play: “One of his tricks was to humiliate me by always changing my surname. . . . and we weren’t married – I was his mistress – always that—that was the one constant” (345). She also recalls that Frank was the one who picked “Just the Way You Look Tonight” as their song for services. “I begged Frank to get something else,” she says, “anything else. But he wouldn’t. It had to be that. ‘I like it,’ he’d say, ‘And it confuses them’” (350).

As regards the theme music, Teddy seems to give the most authoritative – or at least the most cleverly-told – recounting of events. “It was Gracie who insisted on that,” he tells the audience:

And you know why, dear heart? She wouldn’t admit it to him but she told me. Because that was the big hit the year she and Frank was married. Can you imagine! But of course as time goes by she forgets that. And of course he never knows why its our theme – probably thinks I’ve got some sort of a twisted mind. So that the two of them end up blaming me for picking it! (354)

Whoever the audience chooses to believe in this case, however, it highlights the fact that Frank, Grace, and Teddy’s perceptions vary not just in insignificant ways, but sometimes to the point of being entirely incompatible, even antagonistic to one another.

Neither do these incongruities in perception limit themselves to unimportant parts of the story, as Karen DevInney points out: “No two characters agree completely about two central events: what happened in Kinlochbrervie [where Frank and Grace’s was born dead, according to Grace and Teddy] and Frank’s final evening in . . . Ballybeg [when Frank is killed after failing to heal a crippled man]” (113). Indeed, the disparities in the three accounts of Frank’s last hours point out the great gulf existing between one character and another, for though each character tells essentially the same story, the theme of each is different. Teddy remembers both Frank and Grace as perfectly at home, and primarily focused on each other – “Side by side. Easy; relaxed; chatting; laughing” (367); Frank remembers a sense of foreboding, which caused him to be wary of the wedding party in the bar -- “Not for a second,” he says, “not for a single second was I disarmed” (372); and in contrast to both other accounts, Grace remembers Frank as bold to the point of intrusiveness that night, and claims that he approached the party of men uninvited:

Frank suddenly leaned across to one of the wedding guests . . . and said, ‘I can cure that finger of yours.’ And it was dropped as lightly, as casually, as naturally into the conversation as if he had said, ‘This is my round.’ . . . And he caught the twisted finger between his palms . . . and then released it and the finger was straight and he turned immediately to me and gave me an icy, exultant, theatrical smile and said, ‘That’s the curtain raiser.’ (352)

These crucial differences in recollection highlight not only the “contention that truth is subjective, a matter of perception and recall,” (111) as DevInney suggests, but also that a person’s individual perceptions and expressions of those perceptions are shaped by his or her own biases, inadequacies, and unique set of experiences. “The spoken language,” then, “is what separates these characters from each other, because it is rooted in private perceptions and other selfish motivations” (DeVinney 118). The same ideas can also be applied to cross-cultural relations; if the histories and inclinations, and therefore, the viewpoint, of one culture is fundamentally different from that of another, then those two cultures will not be able to understand one another at an essential level. Therefore, just as “the potential . . . for any cooperative action [between characters] is minimal” in Faith Healer cultures will not be able to cooperate until they find a way to overcome the basic differences in their perceptions, and therefore in their language.1

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1 In “Monologue as Dramatic Action in Brian Friel’s Faith Healer and Molly Sweeney,” Karen DevInney suggests that, though the characters in the play are clearly isolated from one another, the theater itself functions as a realm in which unity can be achieved, as the audience is united by the very experience of watching the play. “Clearly, [Friel’s] choice of fiction or theater is a political choice, in that by choosing theater over fiction for the last 20 years, Friel has seen himself as doing his part to create cultural community in his divided homeland” (117). Karen DevInney sees the theater itself as an attempt to create the “fifth province”, as “the acting of [the characters’] stories unites them for those moments, and unites them with us” (118).
politeness, and reserve – is difficult enough on its own to bring effective communication to a halt. But even once this barrier is overcome, the fundamental conflicts in perceptions which are created by divergent experiences of the world, can cause voices to clash with one another, generating tension and distance rather than closeness and connection.

In *Translations*, however, Friel seems to reach a turning point in his treatment of language and its necessary limitations. Rather than merely restating the problem, *Translations* begins the process of positing solutions to the linguistic dilemmas in which individuals and cultures find themselves. Set in 1833 in the town of Ballybeg, an imaginary Irish village in which Friel sets many of his plays, *Translations* depicts the Anglicization of Irish placenames during the British ordnance survey of the 1830’s (Deane 21), and the effect of the British presence on a small community of Irish farmers and scholars. In the course of the play, Friel seems to be suggesting even more strongly than in his early works that linguistic expression, particularly between individuals separated by formidable cultural barriers, is simply inadequate to create genuine communication and connection, and indeed has the potential to be devastatingly destructive. Therefore, *Translations* presents two possible alternatives to the world of speech: one, an abandonment of language and a resultant lapse into silence; and two, the achievement of a “transcendental metalanguage” that surpasses the barriers between individuals, connecting them by virtue of their common humanity.

Translations particularly lends itself to exploration of the inadequacies of verbal communication, due to the fact that the Irish characters are ostensibly speaking in Gaelic, while the soldiers speak only English. Ciaran Carty reflects that “much of [Translations’] theatrical impact comes from Friel’s inspired device of having all the characters speak the same language but with a translator all the time interpreting what the English and the Irish are saying to each other: a recurring reminder of the fundamental differences that can be embodied in the same language” (140). Of course, this theatrical device also has a practical function; because the audience can hear both sides of a supposedly bilingual dialogue, they are able to closely observe how different the Irish methods of communicating are from English ones. For example, when Captain Lancey, the head of the team of mapmakers, arrives at the Ballybeg schoolhouse to explain the team’s presence in Donegal, Owen, the son of the schoolmaster, serves as translator for the captain. It quickly becomes evident from Owen’s rendition of Lancey’s speeches that Owen’s “translation” is actually a complete retelling, altering Lancey’s communications not only in form or structure, but also in content. After Lancey gives a detailed and complex explanation of the soldiers’ mapmaking project, Owen translates his long pronouncement in one short sentence:

**OWEN:** A new map is being made of the whole country.

**LANCEY:** This enormous task has been embarked upon so that the military authorities will be equipped with up-to-date and accurate information on every corner of this part of the Empire. The job is being done by soldiers because they are skilled in this work.

**LANCEY:** And also so that the entire basis of land valuation can be reassessed for purposes of equitable taxation.

**OWEN:** This new map will take the place of the estate agent’s map so that from now on you will know exactly what is yours in law. (406)

It is important to note here that, while Owen’s first alteration in translation, “A new map is being made . . .” seems to be done for purposes of simplicity, as he goes on the changes are more substantial, leaving out or smoothing over more controversial parts of the message. And while these changes make the information more palatable to the Irish peasants, the necessity of making them indicates to the theatre audience that even if the Irish peasants and English soldiers could understand one another, it might lead to more harm than good.

Ultimately, however, the linguistic barriers between the two peoples begin to be overcome. Infatuated with Ireland and its people, Lancey’s assistant Yolland soon begins to make faltering attempts at communication with the native Irish. Apologetic from the beginning “to be working here and not to speak your language” (407), he begins to learn Gaelic with Owen’s help; however, Lancey soon recognizes that even a common language is not adequate for true communication; in learning the language, he discovers “intimations of the ultimately impenetrable barrier of words which no translation, however well-intentioned, can traverse” (Kearney 96), and he expresses this feeling to Owen: “Even if I did speak Irish I’d always be an outsider here, wouldn’t I? I may learn the password but the language of the tribe will always elude me, won’t it? The private core will always be . . . hermetic, won’t it?” (416).

Despite Owen’s reassurances that Yolland “can learn to decode us”, the text soon reveals that Yolland is, in fact, correct. As the scene progresses, Yolland is encouraged by comfortable conversation with Owen and a jug of poteen to believe that the “language of the tribe” might be obtainable, and in a flash
of excitement, he cries “I’ll decode you yet” (422). Immediately, however, Owen’s brother Manus arrives to reintroduce doubt. Though Manus knows English, he refuses to speak it before Yolland despite Owen’s prodding, viewing the soldier as a dangerous outsider. When Owen argues that Yolland is “a decent man,” Manus responds with hostility, jeering, “Aren’t they all at some level?”, and again Owen is forced to decode Manus’s words for Yolland. Manus’s actions in this case confirm that many Irish will indeed continue to see Yolland as an outsider, even if he learns Gaelic. In spite of a common language, Yolland may always be in need of a translator.

Ironically, Yolland does ultimately achieve a brief connection with the Irish people, through a romance with a young woman named Maire, but this success is immediately followed by Yolland’s death. The next day finds Yolland missing, and various members of the Irish community under suspicion for his murder, including Maire’s fiancé. At this point, all genial communication between the English and the Irish breaks down, reduced primarily to shows of power by the English and angry insults by the Irish. Lancey threatens to level the entire village, and the play closes with catastrophe looming over the heads of the townspeople.

In light of the disastrous failure of verbal communication at the play’s end, it is safe to assume that Friel sees mere language as inadequate to bridge the chasm between two hostile cultures. In fact, Friel seems to assert that cross-cultural communication is so futile and even so potentially destructive, that silence is a better alternative than speech This assertion is embodied in Sarah, a speech-impaired character who ultimately rejects language completely in favor of silence. As a minor character in Translations, and one who is often read as a one-dimensional symbol, Sarah has not been thoroughly explored in critical literature. However, though Sarah has only a handful of lines in the entire work, she holds an important position in the composition of Translations. Not only does she remain on stage for a full two-thirds of the play, but as the person who first discovers and reports Maire and Yolland’s romance, she is the character upon whom the course of the dramatic action turns. Moreover, her symbolic value further elevates her importance to the script, as she becomes a visual and auditory representation of the profound struggles of cultural communication.

Though Sarah speaks very little in the play, a careful reading that this silence is to some degree voluntary, rather than resulting from a total inability to communicate. The text indicates that Sarah is not a mute learning to speak; rather, stage directions specify that “Sarah’s speech defect is so bad that all her life she has been considered locally to be dumb, and she has accepted this: when she wishes to communicate, she grunts and makes unintelligible nasal sounds” (383). It is unclear, therefore, whether Sarah’s hesitance to speak is based primarily in the physical difficulty of the task, or in the embarrassment attached to her faltering articulation. In the opening scene of the play, Manus, the schoolmaster’s son who has become Sarah’s trusted tutor, is coaxing her to speak, and her posture and nonverbal responses both indicate that Manus is fighting as much against Sarah’s will as against her physical impediment:

(When the play opens, MANUS is teaching SARAH to speak. He kneels beside her. She is sitting on a low stool, her head down, very tense, clutching a slate on her knees . . .)
MANUS: We’re doing very well. And we’re going to try it once more – just once more . . .
(SARAH shakes her head vigorously and stubbornly.)
MANUS: Come on, Sarah. This is our secret.
(Again vigorous and stubborn shaking of SARAH’s head.)
MANUS: Nobody’s listening. Nobody hears you. (383-384)

When Sarah finally does speak, her words come out “in a rush,” not in a stutter, and clearly are intended for Manus’s ears alone, as his reassurance that “Nobody’s listening” indicates. In fact, Sarah never speaks at all in the play that her words are not either directed toward Manus, or intended to elicit praise from him. Because she trusts him, she is willing to communicate with him.

Moreover, when it comes to nonverbal expression, Sarah expresses herself aptly to Manus, who is familiar with her language of gesture. This shared "language" is developed to the point that Sarah can pass on even very specific information:

MANUS: Where the hell has he got to?
(SARAH goes to MANUS and touches his elbow. She mimics rocking a baby.)

MANUS: Yes, I know he’s at the christening; but it doesn’t take them all day to put a name on a baby, does it?
(SARAH mimics pouring drinks and tossing them back quickly.)

MANUS: You may be sure. Which pub?
(SARAH indicates.)

MANUS: Gracies?

(No. Further away.)

MANUS: Con Connie Tim's?

(No. To the right of there.)

MANUS: Anna na mBreag's?

(Yes. That's it.)

MANUS: Great. She'll fill him up. I suppose I may take the class, then.

It is evident, then, that Sarah, while frequently silent, is not without recourse to communicative strategies. These strategies, though, are inadequate for full self-expression -- just as, for example, Gar and his father's small talk about the store communicates little beyond the cold facts. Appropriately, then, the first phrase that Sarah learns to speak is one of self-identification --"My name is Sarah" -- and so language appears initially to be a gateway for Sarah into more adequate modes of communication.

The fact that the play opens with Sarah learning to speak these few words suggests the importance of her progress -- or lack of progress -- toward speech throughout the play. Though she is surrounded by people for most of Act I, she does not try her new skill before anyone else until Owen, Manus's brother and the translator for the British surveyors, appears in the schoolhouse. When he asks her name, Sarah succeeds in articulating it without prodding or help, apparently taking a large step toward communication with the broader community. This progress, however, is short-lived. Sarah is the one who announces to the rest of the community that Maire, Manus's fiancé, has fallen in love with Yolland, and when Yolland is murdered, Manus is implicated in the crime. Manus's subsequent flight leaves Sarah without a trusted confidante, and after only a few parting words to Manus, she falls silent again for the remainder of Act III. Again, the script leaves room for the possibility that Sarah's silence is voluntary. Though in her Act III confrontation with Captain Lancey, her inability to tell Lancey her name evidently results from her physical impairment, her later exchange with Owen once more suggests that she is not just unable, but unwilling to speak:

OWEN: How are you? Are you all right?
(SARAH nods: Yes.)
OWEN: Don't worry. It will come back to you again.
(SARAH shakes her head.)
OWEN: It will. You're upset now. He frightened you. That's all wrong.
(Again SARAH shakes her head, slowly, emphatically, and smiles at OWEN.)

Here, Sarah's insistence that she is "all right," her sure, "emphatic" shaking of the head, and especially her smile to Owen, indicate that Sarah has indeed regained control, and that the choice to remain silent is her own. Having experienced the world of common speech as a place where tongues falter, words destroy, and identity can be usurped (as Lancey attempts to do by demanding that she speak her name), Sarah voluntarily resigns herself to the world of silence once again.2

2 This reading of Sarah's final encounter with Owen is strongly influenced by Lauren Onkey's interpretation of Sarah's actions in The Woman as Nation in Brian Friel's Translations. Onkey's essay responds to critics who read Sarah "only as a symbol of Ireland," a strategy which she believes "shuts down rather than opens up meaning" (170). She declares that reading Sarah's return to silence as merely symbolic of an Irish response to English authority is inadequate to explain her behavior: "If Sarah represents the nation's difficulty with speech, then she is silent either in defiance or fear of the colonizer. Given her struggle to say her name [to Lancey] . . . , defiance is implausible. Most critics explain her response as fear of the colonial authority, but I think such a reading ignores the source of Sarah's attempts at speech . . . [which] has been motivated by Manus's encouragement . . . After Lancey leaves, Owen tries to encourage her, but she asserts that she will not be speaking again . . . . That emphatic shake of her head tells Owen that Manus, not Lancey, has caused her speech defect to return" (170).
While many readers have interpreted Sarah as an explicit symbol for Ireland itself, some critics warn against overly-simplistic readings which would "confine the meaning of Sarah to a representation of a tongue-tied nation" (Onkey 167). Friel's own comments also discourage a "public" reading of *Translations* that deals with "issues for politicians," instead of "concern[ing] itself only with the explorations of the dark and private places of individual souls" (Onkey 167). Nevertheless, it seems valid to read Sarah's encounters with language as partially representative of the Irish introduction to the English language and experience of Anglicization. In fact, the trajectory of Sarah's progression and subsequent regression into and out of the realm of verbal communication follows the same trajectory as the formation and successive deterioration of Irish/English relations. Friel, then, seems to be presenting his first proposal for dealing with the agonies of interpersonal and intercultural communication. Rather than attempt a faltering, ineffectual, and sometimes destructive dialogue, perhaps it is more productive to simply acknowledge the impossibility of communication, and lapse into silence.

The play does introduce another possibility, however, in the form of Yolland's romantic relationship with Maire. Though neither Yolland nor Maire has any substantial knowledge of the other's language, over the course of the play they learn to communicate using only the evocative and musical sounds of their respective tongues, as well as the language of physical touch. At first, the pair uses Owen as a go-between, but soon they find themselves without a translator. Then they attempt to find a common way of dialoguing, tripping out the few words of each other's language that they know. Maire even tries speaking Latin, which Yolland mistakes for Gaelic, telling her to "say anything at all -- I love the sound of your speech" (427).

Finally, however, it is through a simple repetition of poetic Gaelic place names that Yolland and Maire connect, saying them back and forth to one another as if in conversation, though of course the names have no conversational meaning. From this point on, they seem to understand each other perfectly, "declar[ing] their love to each other through a transcendent metalanguage that conveys meaning without a common language" (Boltwood 573)³:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Yolland:} & \quad \text{I wish to God you could understand me. ... I would tell you ...} \\
\text{Maire:} & \quad \text{Don't stop -- I know what you're saying.} \\
\text{Yolland:} & \quad \text{I would tell you how I want to be here -- to live here -- always -- with you --}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Maire:} & \quad \text{always, always. ...} \\
\text{Yolland:} & \quad \text{You're trembling.} \\
\text{Maire:} & \quad \text{Yes, I'm trembling because of you.} \\
\text{Yolland:} & \quad \text{I'm trembling too. ... Listen to me. I want you too, soldier.} \\
\text{Maire:} & \quad \text{Don't stop -- I know what you're saying.} \\
\text{Maire:} & \quad \text{Take me away with you, George.}
\end{align*}
\]

(Pause. Suddenly they kiss.)

Maire and Yolland's kiss, as a form of communication that requires no words at all, comes just at the couple's emotional point of contact, a connection that has occurred completely apart from rational comprehension of one another's speech. Maire and Yolland's communication, then, is significant because it is not reliant on common cultural or linguistic backgrounds, but rests merely upon their common humanity and love for one another. ⁴

The tragic conclusion of Maire and Yolland's interaction, of course, cannot be overlooked; perhaps Yolland's death and the village's subsequent destruction indicates the enormity of the task of overcoming barriers to communication, both between estranged cultures and between people who are estranged from one another. It cannot be done in a day; therefore, Maire and Yolland cannot immediately

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³ In "The Woman as Nation in Brian Friel's *Translations*, Lauren Onkey also posits quite persuasively that this moment of transcendent communication that Yolland and Maire ostensibly experience is belied by their simultaneous misunderstanding of one another: "Their misunderstanding culminates in the crucial scene of their embrace. If he could speak her language, Yolland says, he "would tell you how I want to be here -- to live here -- always" ... to which she happily responds, "Take me away with you, George," revealing her perception of him as representative of all that lies outside Baile Beag" (164). This could indicate, in the context of this paper, that their connection, their wordless communication, was incomplete, too easy in light of the very real barriers that block true communication, as well as those that block Irish/English relations.
succeed. Nevertheless, the very occurrence of such a connection does leave open the possibility that something like Maire and Yolland’s “transcendental metalanguage” can be achieved. *Translations*, in fact, maps the path from the kind of faltering, hindered language that requires a translator to make itself understood, to a communication that does not require words at all, but makes itself known immediately to the receiver.

**Exchanging Silence for Song: Dancing at Lughnasa and Wonderful Tennessee**

*Dancing . . . as if this ritual, this wordless ceremony, was now the way to speak, to whisper private and sacred things . . . Dancing as if language no longer existed . . .*

Dancing at Lughnasa

The trouble, of course, with silence, is that it necessitates some degree of isolation. Though in *Translations*, Sarah finds ways to communicate without speech – even occasionally to communicate the personal, as when she gives Manus a bouquet of flowers – her ability to connect with others on a meaningful level is severely impeded by her rejection of the common mode of communication. In his later plays, therefore, Friel begins the process of formulating new methods of overcoming the limitations of verbal communication. In *Dancing at Lughnasa* and *Wonderful Tennessee*, Friel specifically suggests that art can replace language as a means of significant communication; while *Wonderful Tennessee* replaces traditional language with music, *Dancing at Lughnasa* exchanges words for dance.

The idea that some artistic form could actually supplant language as a means of expression and communication is more explicitly suggested in *Dancing at Lughnasa* than anywhere else in Friel’s body of work. *Dancing at Lughnasa* is a memory play, framed and ordered by the monologic narrations of Michael, a young man who is recalling the summer of his seventh year. In thinking back to that summer, one of his most vivid memories is of his aunts dancing to the music of their wireless radio, and in his closing narration, he suggests that their dancing was a kind of transcendental communication:

> When I remember [that summer], I think of it as dancing. Dancing with eyes half closed because to open them would break the spell. Dancing as if language had surrendered to movement – as if this ritual, this wordless ceremony, was now the way to speak, to whisper private and sacred things, to be in touch with some otherness . . . Dancing as if language no longer existed because words were no longer necessary (71).

Here, Michael is clearly recalling in particular one incident of dance recounted in the play, when one afternoon all five aunts, even his rigid Aunt Kate, break into a wild dance to an Irish jig that is playing on the radio. But he is also recalling the entire summer as having some of the feel of that dance, carrying a sense of a “private and sacred” communication, of “language . . . surrendered to movement.”

In light of the events of the play, Michael’s memory seems to be somewhat biased on this point; indeed the prevailing tone of the play, especially in its early scenes, seems to be one of stifled communications and repressed desire, rather than of the freedom that Michael describes. Elmer Andrews notes that the earliest scenes introduce us to a set of characters who “have lost touch with their deepest emotions” (220) and are only dimly aware of their own abandoned longings. The sisters, according to Andrews, assist each other in stifling their own desires by turns: “The characteristic pattern is established: tidal surges of desire welling up within one or the other of the sisters which are constantly checked or diffused” (222).

Kate, in particular, works hard to crush these surges of desire. As the oldest sister and the primary breadwinner, she seems to bear a large share of responsibility for order in the house, a burden which she takes extremely seriously. When Agnes suggests that all of the sisters go to the harvest dance for the festival of Lughnasa, the group of women becomes suddenly enlivened, until Kate squelches the idea: “No, no, no! We’re going nowhere! . . . Look at yourselves, will you! Just look at yourselves! Dancing at our time of day? That’s for young people with no duties and no responsibilities and nothing in their heads but pleasure. . . . No, no, we’re going to no harvest dance” (13). Andrews attributes Kate’s “objection to levity, playfulness, and novelty” to a desire to preserve “the fragile order” of the family (223), one which, as the play reveals, is on the verge of disintegration: Michael reveals that in the year following the action of the play, sisters Rose and Agnes flee the household, Kate loses her job at the local school, and their Uncle Jack dies (41). To prevent this impending breakup, which Kate senses before it occurs, she continually urges “responsibilities and obligations and good order” (35) over expression of desire.
The result of this suppression of desire is an inhibition of expression in the aunts’ speech. In his article “The Failed Words of Brian Friel,” David Krause states that “an examination of some representative passages in Friel’s play indicates that the characters seldom speak in vivid, rhythmic, or figurative language. . . . [T]here are no signs of genuinely colorful or striking talk by the aunts. . . . They never search beneath their skins and on the whole tend to talk in brief and banal monosyllables” (370). While Krause interprets this as a failing in the work, another reading would indicate that the blandness of the aunt’s words is suited to Friel’s purposes; the denial of the five women’s desires has resulted in an inability to “search beneath their skins,” and therefore their language has become as dull as their lives.5

Inevitably, however, recognition and expression of desire begin to occur; fueled by the music of the new wireless radio, a set which only works sporadically but when it does causes the kitchen to “[throb] with the beat of Irish dance music” (2), the passions of the five sisters become irresistible, and finally they pour out, not through verbal expression, but through the medium of dance. In the jig scene, even Kate is caught up in the fervent, frantic motions of the dance. As one by one the sisters join in, the character of the jig, which the stage directions describe as climbing to a pitch of “near-hysteria,” becomes an outpouring of the pent-up emotions of year upon quiet year, not so much beautiful as frightening:

[The four younger sisters] form a circle and wheel round and round. But the movement seems caricatured; and the sound is too loud; and the beat is too fast; and the almost unrecognizable dance is made grotesque . . . Finally, KATE, who has been watching the scene with unease, with alarm, suddenly leaps to her feet, flings her head back, and emits a loud ‘Yaaaah!’

KATE dances alone, totally concentrated, totally private; a movement that is simultaneously controlled and frantic . . . a pattern of action that is out of character and at the same time ominous of some deep and true emotion. . . . (22)

These descriptions seem to indicate an urgency to the act of dancing, and the directions also instruct that the scene should carry “a sense of order being subverted” (22). If the audience is to believe Michael when he says that the dance was an act of “language surrender[ing] to movement” (71), then they must conclude that within the context of an orderly household run by the severe command of Kate, genuine communication had become impossible. The dance, then, becomes a substitute for language, one that allows the five women to express “deep and true emotion,” if only for a moment.

Dance, then, seems to be one artistic avenue through which language can be bypassed in the effort to communicate, and Friel suggests a second one in Wonderful Tennessee. A play about three married couples who attempt a pilgrimage to a mysterious island in County Donegal, only to end up waiting all night on the Ballybeg pier, Wonderful Tennessee suggests that music also has some power to transcend language and create more effective and genuine expression among humans.

In this work, as in Translations, Friel uses a silent character to eludicate linguistic themes; the character George, like Sarah, has only a sparse scattering of spoken lines in the course of the play, and “on those rare occasions when he speaks his voice is husky and barely audible” (6-7). Unlike Sarah, however, George has no speech impediment at all; his choice to remain silent as much as possible is, in this case, entirely his own. In addition, Friel specifies in the stage directions that “On those rare occasions when [George] speaks his voice is husky and barely audible” (6-7). Instead of speaking, George almost continually plays the accordion he carries with him, churning out familiar tunes for himself and the group of friends he is traveling with.

George’s reticence begins to make more sense to the audience when they learn from his wife Trish that he is terminally ill, with “three months at most” to live (15). George’s silence can clearly be read as linked to his illness, perhaps a strategy for coping with his coming death. But why, in the last few months of his life, would George choose silence over speech, especially in the company of his wife and closest friends? If George’s silence is indeed linked to his illness, then the audience must make sense of why the abandonment of language is an appropriate response to his approaching death.

The beginning of this answer might be found by studying the communication of the other characters. Nearly every character, the text gradually reveals, is in the midst of some terrible turmoil. Berna, Terry’s wife, seems to be afflicted by some sort of mental instability, the nature of which is never

5 David Krause’s “The Failed Words of Brian Friel” is ironically titled, in my opinion. Though he sets out to prove that Friel’s “main failure” in his later works “lies in Friel’s inability to create a vital and resilient language” (361). Though some of Krause’s criticisms are perhaps valid, some – particularly the abovementioned critique of Dancing at Lughnasa simply miss the point of the plays. He fails to catch on to some of the nuances of the plays, and therefore posits that Friels’ language has “failed” – which was, if I am to be believed, exactly Friel’s point.
clearly specified in the text; her behavior and speech throughout is frequently erratic and irrational, and at one point Terry comments that “she’s really most content when she’s in the nursing home” (25). Frequently, Berna gives her fears a kind of half-expression; when they first arrive at the island, for example, Berna begs her husband to “take me home, Terry . . . I don’t think I can carry on” (5), but never specifies just what she is afraid of. When in one scene the group gathers to tell stories, Berna tells a bizarre tale of a sacred flying house, and then bursts promptly into tears. She also expresses vague fears that her nephew is uncomfortable around her, and then with more clarity her conviction that Terry is unhappy with their marriage. However, she never manages to give these fears a full verbal expression, particularly to Terry himself, and both the audience and her friends are left to guess about what is really troubling her so deeply.

The other characters, too, seem to be hiding their own set of secrets and sorrows, and like Berna, they never manage to fully give them voice. The text reveals gradually that Terry and Angela are involved in, or perhaps at the end of, an affair, but they only discuss it in brief moments of ambiguous conversation. Though Angela’s husband Frank seems at least partly unaware of the affair, the stage notes often describe his words to his wife as “cold” or “icy,” as if they failed to conceal some otherwise unexpressed hostility. Trish, of course, is struggling with the knowledge of her husband’s coming death but seems continually to put a brave, if false, face on it, cheerily chatting and attempting to bring George into the circle of conversation.

Though this complex web of pain and complexity is always just under the surface of the action, it is almost never expressed in words, except in hurried snatches of whispered dialogue. The majority of the talk is composed of various attempts to unify the group in festive activity – eating, stories, and singing – and avoids the real issues present. George bows out of all these conversations, perhaps because he recognizes their inadequacy to address his pressing fears and emotions. Nevertheless, he seems unwilling to submit to quiet, even for short periods of time, and instead of filling his own silence with words, he plays his accordion almost continually throughout the play, “as if he were afraid to stop,” as Trish puts it (15).

As in Dancing at Lugnasa, at one particular point George’s playing takes on the character of an outburst of expression, one that at least Trish seems to recognize and understand. While the group is waiting for the boatman, they begin to go in a circle and tell stories, and Angela attempts to get George to tell one. Instead of “telling” his story, however, George plays it on his accordion:

*George looks at each of them in turn. Then he plays the first fifteen seconds of the first movement (Presto) of Beethoven’s Sonata No. 14 (‘Moonlight’). He plays with astonishing virtuosity, very rapidly, much faster than the piece is scored, and with an internal fury; so that his performance . . . seems close to parody. And then in the middle of a phrase, he suddenly stops.*

*He bows to them very formally . . . (37).*

The language used here to describe his performance recalls the descriptions of the *Lugnasa* dance, which is “caricatured; . . . too loud; too fast”; and also like the dance, it cuts off in mid-phrase. George’s song also seems to communicate at least some form of explicit meaning to his audience — though there is no indication in the text that George is visibly upset at the end of his performance, Trish is “close to tears.” As in Dancing at Lugnasa, then, George’s poignant moment of musical expression can be viewed as a sudden rush of communication that could not come out in words, due to the stifling restrictions on verbal communication present in his community.

Friel views art, then, as one possibility — perhaps the one great possibility — for creating a new language that is capable of communicating between one individual and another, and perhaps cross-culturally as well. In fact, Karen DeVinney suggests that, for Friel, the theater itself functions as the artistic realm in which unity can best be achieved, as the audience members, despite their varying backgrounds and perspectives, are united by the very experience of watching the play. “Theater,” Friel reminds us, “can be experienced only in community with other people. One can stand alone in an art gallery and gaze for three hours at an El Greco; or one can sit alone in one’s living room and listen to Mahler. But one cannot sit by himself in the stalls and be moved by a dramatic performance — and for this reason: that the dramatist does not write for one man; he writes for an audience, a collection of people” (“Hope and Despair” 18).

“Clearly,” then, according to DeVinney, “. . . by choosing theater over fiction for the last 20 years, Friel has seen himself as doing his part to create cultural community in his divided homeland” (117). By participating in the production of theatre, Friel helps to create an alternative mode of expression that will connect people and cultures, mediating between them in a way that perhaps even other art forms — painting, or music, or dancing — can’t do. “[The playwright] has a function to portray . . . man’s frustrations and hopes and anguishes and joys and miseries and pleasures with all the precision and accuracy and truth that they know; and by doing so help to create a community of individuals” (“Hope and Despair” 24).
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Act I, scene i

NARRATOR

Tonight a boy is looking out the window at the night sky. Above his dark lawn the white moon lights the clouds. And far away above the moon the arc of the sky stretches farther than you or I can possibly imagine. It is filled with planets and moons and stars without number. [Lights to blue, then fully up. Scene opens on Gregory sitting at the breakfast table eating a bowl of cereal. Anne is at the counter making his lunch.]

GREGORY

[kicking his chair and continuing to take bites as he chants] Eeny meeny miny mo... catcha tiger by the toe... if he hollers let him go... eeny meeny miny mo [stops, takes a couple of bites, starts over, repeating until Anne cuts him off]

ANNE

[interrupting] You’re making a lot of noise, Greg.

GREGORY

Sorry, mom. I’m trying to decide.

ANNE

What are you trying to decide? [Before Gregory can answer, Luke rushes through the kitchen.]

LUKE

All right, I’m off to work. Have fun at school, Greg.

GREGORY

[through a mouthful of cereal] Bye, Dad.

ANNE

Luke, did you remember to bring the laundry down with you?

LUKE

[stops, but only momentarily] Oh — no I forgot it. Sorry hon. See you tonight.

ANNE

Hang on! Will you run up and get it for me?

LUKE

Hon, I’m already late. I’ve got an early meeting.

ANNE

[starting on top of “meeting”] But I’m running late too, and its Tuesday. I can’t do everything.

LUKE

For pity’s sake, it’ll take you five seconds.

ANNE

Exactly, so why --

GREGORY

[jumps up on “exactly”] I’ll take it! [runs out the door before they can respond. Luke sets his briefcase down heavily and throws up his hands.]

LUKE

Well, that was very nice.

ANNE

[turns to face him, calm but hurt] What do you mean by that?

LUKE

[In a raised whisper] It’s one thing to hassle me, but can’t we keep Greg out of it.

ANNE

[still calm, but with an edge] Look, this is not my fault. Please, just go on to work.
You make a big deal out of every little thing!

LUKE

[now in an angry whisper] That’s because I have to do every little thing. I’m working a double load here, and you don’t do very much to lighten it up.

LUKE

Oh, so you think its better if Greg picks up the slack?

ANNE

[a sharp, disgusted sigh] Yes. You’re right Luke, that’s exactly what I want. Please go on to work. You’ll be late.

LUKE

Fine. [Luke picks up his briefcase and exits in a hurry. By this time Gregory is already descending the stairs. He enters with the basket of laundry, with as much energy as possible.]

GREGORY

Done! [looks around] Did Dad leave?

ANNE

Yeah, he did.

GREGORY

[frowns, sags a little] Oh. Okay. [sits down, soon starts to eat his cereal again.]

ANNE

[after a long pause] What were you trying to decide?

GREGORY

What, mom?

ANNE

You said you were trying to decide something. What are you trying to decide?

GREGORY

Oh yeah. What project I want.

ANNE

What project?

GREGORY

Yeah, what science project I want. Tyler is going to do a model of the human body, but I want mine to win.

ANNE

Is it a contest?

GREGORY

Yeah.

ANNE

Like a science fair?

GREGORY

It is a science fair. And the winner of the whole city gets a prize. Miss Peters said she didn’t know what it was, but she thought it was money.

ANNE

Wow. Now hurry up with this, cause Carol and Tyler will be here any minute. [Gregory responds to his mother by taking enormous bites that drip down his chin] Ham or peanut butter?

GREGORY

[through a mouthful of cereal] Peanut butter. [Gregory keeps eating, and mom keeps at the sandwich until Carol knocks at the door.]

ANNE

Come on in, Carol! [Carol opens the door and Tyler and Carol enter the kitchen. Tyler has a backpack and plastic lunchbox. Carol is wearing a business suit.] I’m just finishing up Greg’s sandwich. Are you almost finished, Gregory?

GREGORY

[takes a long drink of milk from the bowl] Finished, mom.

ANNE

All right, well put your bowl in the sink, and then go get your backpack. [Greg takes bowl to sink. Anne catches him and wipes his chin and front of shirt with dish rag. Greg leaves room to find his backpack.] Sorry, we’re running so late, Carol. It’s been a really hectic morning. [Gives Carol a meaningful look.]
CAROL
Oh. Did you and Luke -- [glances at Tyler, then back at Anne. Anne nod and rolls her eyes.] Again? Good grief. Is he still talking about quitting his job?

ANNE
[glances at Tyler, who looks away, wanders a few steps as if not hearing] No, not for a couple of weeks now. [lowers voice] But this morning we started fighting before we even got out of bed. Really stupid stuff. I'm telling you, Carol, I've just about had it.

CAROL
[nods seriously] How long have you guys been -- [Gregory enters and Carol cuts off immediately] Well, are you ready?

GREGORY
Yup. All ready.

CAROL
Do you need a jacket or anything?

GREGORY
No, I'm good.

ANNE
Here's your lunch. Have a good day. [kisses him on the forehead] Hey, and try to decide on that science project, huh? I hear you're going to do the human body, Tyler.

TYLER
Yup, and I'm going to make a 3-D stomach.

ANNE
Neat. All right guys. [to Carol] Maybe I'll call you tonight.

All right. Have a good day.

CAROL
Bye, Mom.

GREGORY
TYLER
Bye, Mrs. Freeman. [Carol, Gregory, Tyler exit. Anne waves from doorway.]

Act I, sc. ii

[In the blackout, an answering machine begins to play messages. Message 1, Luke. "Anne, this is Luke. Hey, I'm sorry, I know it's my night, but could you go ahead and start dinner? I've got a meeting late and I don't know what time I'll be done. Bye." Message 2 as lights come up on Anne starting dinner. Clearly she hasn't had time to change since work. "Mr. Freeman, this is Dr. Stevenson's office, just calling to confirm your appointment for this afternoon at 4 p.m. If you have any questions just give us a call before then. Thank you." During message, Anne accidentally pushes a glass into the sink and breaks it; Anne swears quietly. There is a knock at the kitchen door, and Anne goes to answer it. Tyler enters.]

TYLER
Hi, Mrs. Freeman. Can Gregory play?

ANNE
Sure, Tyler. [going to the door of the kitchen and calling] Gregory? Gregory, Tyler's here.

GREGORY
[from upstairs] Okay, Mom. [Gregory comes downstairs and into the kitchen, noisily.] Hi Tyler. What's up?

TYLER
Do you want to play Legos?

GREGORY
Sure. Mom, can we have some cookies first? [Anne looks uncertain] Just one?

ANNE
All right. But only if you have milk too. [She gets out plastic cups for both and pours the milk. The boys rummage in the cookie jar for Double Stuff Oreos. They sit down at the kitchen table and eat their cookies.]

GREGORY
[As if remembering suddenly] Oh yeah! I want to do a model of the solar system for my project. Do you know how many planets are in the solar system?

TYLER
I do. There are nine.

Can you name them all?

GREGORY

TYLER

No.

GREGORY

There’s Jupiter, Mars, Mercury . . . Saturn . . . Pluto, Uranus, ooh, Neptune . . . [and then in a rush] Venus and earth.

ANNE

Very good. I’m glad you came up with such a great project. [after a pause] How is your project coming, Tyler?

TYLER

Good. I’m going to make a brain that you can open and see inside all the different parts of it.

ANNE

That sounds neat. Sounds like you’ve both got some great ideas.

GREGORY

Maybe we’ll both get first place, Mom.

ANNE

I bet you will. And then you can split the prize money, huh?

TYLER

No, or they’ll give us both first prizes, so we will have two times as much money, and I would buy the Starway Galactica Super Cruiser with shooting missiles [makes explosion sounds; Gregory starts too; they both start pretending to shoot and running around the table.]

ANNE

Calm down, boys. Don’t forget to put your glasses in the sink. [The boys go back to the table to get their glasses and carry them to the sink. Pretending to be Galactic cruisers, they zoom out of the room. Anne goes back to her dishes, food, etc. Enter Uncle Don through kitchen door. He sneaks up behind Anne and covers her eyes. She pulls his hand away and turns.]

DON

Donald! What are you doing here, and where is my husband?

ANNE

Luke brought me home for dinner. A single guy can’t feed himself all the time you know, and a pretty cook doesn’t hurt. [reaches around and tweaks his side. She shrieks and hits him with her dish towel, giving him a look of disapproval.] I know, I know. Why did you ever marry into this family?

ANNE

Very funny. So there’s a game tonight?

DON

Yessir, Cowboys and the Rams. Win this one and Dallas is in the playoffs.

ANNE

[peering through the window of the kitchen door] Where is your brother?

DON

Oh, he’s out there staring at the stars again, that’s all. No clouds, you know.

ANNE

Hmn, that’s my Luke.

DON

I know. [after a pause, his words a little more weighted] A little moody lately, isn’t he?

ANNE

He’s always moody. [long pause. Anne turns back to her preparations, Don moves to put his hand on her shoulder, she puts her hand on top of his for a second. Then she removes her hand, he puts her shoulder, drops his hand. Luke enters.]

DON
Luke, Luke, Lukey my boy [getting up to pat him on the back] How are the stars tonight? Come sit down. [the two sit as Don keeps talking] Anne was just going to grab us both beers from the fridge [with a broad wink] Weren’t you Annie? [Anne stares him down, Don gets the beer. Gregory and Tyler come charging into the room excitedly.]

Hi, Uncle Don!

Hello, boys. What wild things are you up to?

Legos.

We’re building this huge fort with canons and with a secret trap door.

Great. You boys take after your Uncle Donald here, the world class construction worker. [Anne moves back to her dinner preparations]

Do you want to help us build our fort?

Well, I’d love to, guys, except that tonight is not Lego night. Tonight is football night. You gonna watch the game?

Are we allowed?

Sure, sure. You can even bring your Legos down if you want.

Yeah!

Will you help us bring the fort down?

Sure. Just lead me to it. Don’t let Anne drink my beer, Luke. [the boys lead Uncle Don out of the room. A silence follows their departure.]

[with an edge] So should I serve dinner in the living room tonight?

[absently] The game doesn’t start until eight. [pause, realization] Sorry about dinner. I had to review a set of bridge plans.

[heavily] It’s all right. I’m just going to do spaghetti anyway.

[sighs and leans his head on his hand] Thanks.

Something wrong?

What? No, nothing. How was your day at work?

Fine. Spent half the day wading through zoning codes for Roger. [long pause] Well, what?

Sorry. What does he have you working on?

Well, nothing important. Some kind of eminent domain case. The new highway is knocking out a bunch of houses. [pause] Luke, there was a message on the machine from the doctor’s office, a receptionist or something. Did you get it?

Huh?

It was to confirm your appointment for today, at four o’clock. Did you have a doctor’s appointment?
Uh... no. No, I think it must have been a – Or no, it wasn't the doctor, it was Mike from the Department of Transportation. I had a meeting with him today.

Oh. I see. [long silence]

Anne?

Yeah.

If I were to – well, let's say – say I had to quit my job.

Quit your job? Gosh, Luke, I thought we were done with that.

But if I needed to... What if for some reason I needed to quit? We could get by on your pay by itself, couldn't we?

What are you talking about? Why would you need to quit your job?

I'm saying if I had to. Could we get by on just what you make?

I don't understand what you're asking me. Even if you did quit your job, why wouldn't you get a new one? Do you think you're going to get fired or something?

No. It's not that. Just –

It's one thing to change jobs, Luke; it's another to quit your job entirely. Now if you're still thinking about becoming an astronaut or whatever –

Working for NASA, Anne, I never wanted to be an astronaut, and you know it. But that's not – it's just --

What?

[pause. Confusion.] It's – it's just that, n-not that easy to, to switch from one career, to... I -- I mean, I'm a civil engineer, not a d-d --

It wasn't Mike at all.

What?

That woman, on the machine, she wasn't from Mike's office. What's Mike's last name, Johnson?

What? W-well -- [pause. Confusion. Then control.] Johnson, yes, it must have been a mistake.

[volume rising] What do you mean a mistake?

The receptionist, she must have made a mistake. She must have mixed up the files, or something. I'm sure these things --

But we don't even have a Dr. Stevenson, I've never even heard of him before. Who was that woman on the machine?

For pity's sake, how should I know?

Luke, what is going on? Why do you want to quit your job?

I told you --
And why are you lying about this? Did you meet that receptionist or something, is that what’s happening?

No, what are you --

Look, Luke, if you have something to say to me, just spit it out!

LUKE

Just forget it, all right? Dammit! [Gets up, pushes the chair and exits the room. Anne slams the table. Lights down.]

Act I, sc. iii

[scene opens on Luke and Gregory entering the living room, wearing jackets and ball caps, Gregory carrying a bag of supplies. Gregory is struggling with the bag as they enter the room.]

You sure you got that, tiger?

Yeah, I got it.

All right. Now, where’s Mom? Anne?

Where should I put it, Dad?

What?

[holding up the bag] Where should I put it?

LUKE

Oh. Go ahead and put everything on the table, Greg. Anne! We’re back. [waits for a response. Long silence instead.] Anne!

ANNE

[Appears at the top of the stairs. She is dressed in a t-shirt and sweat pants, looks tired and disheveled.] Back already?

Yeah Mom, but we couldn’t find any big foam balls for Jupiter. I want it to be really big.

GREGORY

That’s okay honey. We can get started anyway. I’ll get the craft stuff. [She disappears and then eventually reappears with a crayon box, scissors, construction paper, tape, and glue. Meanwhile, Greg and Luke take off their coats. Luke throws his over the arm of the chair, while Greg puts his in the closet, on the floor if he cannot reach the hangers. Anne sets the supplies down beside the bags on the table.]

ANNIE

[Pointing at the glue] Dad let me get some rubber cement. Can we use that instead Mom?

That’s fine Gregory. [Gregory starts pulling supplies out of the bag and arranges them on the table. Mom kneels down to help; Dad remains awkwardly standing, hands in pockets. They pull out fishing line, foam balls, rubber cement, a bag of bath salt rocks and another of bath beads. Anne looks at Luke as she pulls these last two out.] What are these for?

GREGORY

Meteors, Mom. The rocks are for meteors, and the round things are for Mercury and Pluto, because they are so small.

ANNE

Oh, of course. I should have thought of Mercury and Pluto. You’re pretty smart to think of that.

GREGORY

Dad thought of it. I’m going to make all the other ones out of these [holds up foam ball], but I don’t want just to paint them. I want to cover them with other stuff, to show their surfaces are different.

LUKE
sits down on couch] What kind of stuff Gregory?

[pauses to think] I don’t know yet.

LUKE

Like, for example, what kind of surface does Venus have?

Oh I know. It’s covered with clouds and gas.

LUKE

That’s right. So how might you show a cloudy and gassy surface? [Gregory pauses to think.] How could you show the clouds on Venus’s surface? [emphasis on clouds]

GREGORY

Oh, I know. I’ll be right back. [He rushes up the stairs, leaving Anne and Luke alone.]

LUKE

[After a long silence] He seems pretty excited about this project, huh?

ANNE

[distractedly] Yeah.

LUKE

[half to himself] I should get down some of my old astronomy books for him to look at. [another awkward pause] He made me go to three different stores looking for Jupiter.

What?

LUKE

Looking for the foam ball for Jupiter. He said he needed a bigger one.

ANNE

Oh. Yeah. He said so when he came in. [another silence. Anne busys herself with things on the table, arranging them, or opening packages, laying things out. Luke wanders the room, ends up by the bookshelf; picks up a glass ornament in the shape of a star and stares at it.]

LUKE

[to self] Maybe he’ll end up as an astronomer.

So did you quit your job today?

ANNE

What?

LUKE

Did you quit your job today? You said you –

GREGORY

[calling suddenly from right at the top of the stairs] Mom, where are the cotton balls?

Look in the cabinet under my bathroom sink.

ANNE

Okay.

GREGORY

[Resumes her former tone, but at a lowered volume] You said you were going to quit your job, so did you quit?

LUKE

I never said that. That isn’t what I said.

ANNE

Well then, what were you saying? Really, Luke, I need to understand.

LUKE

It’s hard to explain, Anne. Until I know -- it’s hard to . . . [trails off]

ANNE

What’s so hard to explain? [pause] Luke, please, I need to know what’s going on. You’ve been acting so crazy lately.
LUKE
[suddenly with raised voice] Well, what if that’s it? What if I am actually losing my mind, Anne?

ANNE
[matching his volume] And what, some day work’s just going to crack you, and then you’ll have to quit, is that it? Come on, Luke, everybody hates their job.

LUKE
[Cutting her off] I’m not kidding, Anne! Do you think I don’t know I’ve been acting weird lately? Do you think I don’t know this is out of control?

ANNE
Out of --?

LUKE
I thought it was just my stupid job, so I went to a doctor.

ANNE
LUKE
And do you know what he said?

[Heavy running footsteps are heard above. Right before Gregory’s stampede of footsteps, Luke and Anne have reached their peak of both volume and anger, but their tension should exceed their volume, since Gregory appears not to have heard them; his entrance reduces them immediately to a very tense silence]

GREGORY
[Charging down from upstairs] I found them! [Parents both stop immediately, stare at Gregory. Gregory looks from one to the other, sensing the tension. Turns to Dad.] Will these work okay for Venus?

LUKE
Oh sure, they’ll be perfect.

ANNE
Why don’t you and Daddy work on Venus for a little while, and I’ll go finish up in the kitchen?

GREGORY
Okay, but will you help me with Mars later? I want to make craters with that salty playdough. Do you remember how to make it?

ANNE
Sure, honey. [Anne goes into kitchen, starts working on dishes, then sits down at the table, lying her head down on her arms. Lights fade down to dark, but not full black.]

Act I, sc.iv

[When they come up again, Anne is still sitting in the same place, now drinking from a mug of tea. Luke comes down the kitchen stairs, and sits down beside her. This conversation never rises to the volume level of an ‘argument.’]

LUKE
Gregory’s in bed. I got him all dressed, and he brushed his teeth. [pause] Honey?

ANNE
So that’s what the call from the doctor was? [Luke nods] Why on earth didn’t you just tell me?

LUKE
I don’t know, Anne. I just couldn’t, I don’t even know why.

ANNE
Didn’t you think you could tell me? I’m your wife, Luke, you can tell me anything. [pause] So what exactly is it? Does he say what you’ve got?

LUKE
They’re still running tests. I don’t know. The doctor says it – might be pretty serious.

ANNE
Like what, how serious?
LUKE
[sits down, faces Anne] I've been having trouble – remembering little things. Just little – but weird things, and I've been moody – you know. The doctor says it might be neurological.

Neurological?

ANNE

LUKE
Like, a neurological problem – of some kind –

ANNE

LUKE
What, like what kind?

I don't know. The doctor mentioned Huntington's disease and some –

ANNE

LUKE
Huntington's disease? Oh my God.

ANNE

LUKE
He said that was very unlikely. It could just be stress, he said. But he also mentioned some form of Alzheimer's, and a couple other things I can't remember.

ANNE

LUKE
Why didn't you tell me?


ANNE

LUKE
Even me?

ANNE

LUKE
Even Gregory, sometimes. [a long silence follows] It might get worse, you know. Dr. Stevenson says it might. Anne, I don't –

ANNE

No. Luke, it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter at all for us. I'm your wife no matter what. [puts her arms around him] I'm your wife.

Act I, scene v

NARRATOR 2
The constitution of the universe I believe may be set in the first place among all others in grandeur by reason of its universal content; it must also stand above them all in nobility as their rule and standard. Therefore if any man might claim distinction in intellect above all mankind, Ptolmey and Coperincus were such men, whose gazes were thus raised on high and who philosophized about the constitution of the world.

[narrator fades into sound of Anne on the phone in blackout. Then lights up. Anne is in the kitchen on the phone, Luke is in the living room.]

ANNE
... been feeling especially disoriented these last couple days, so his boss gave him the week off. ... uh huh. Yes, I'm very eager to. ... Sure. ... Wednesday would be fine. Three-thirty, sure. [as she talks she scribbles notes on a fridge calendar.] All right. We'll see you then. Thanks, Doctor. [hangs up, rushes to finish note] Luke! [moves to living room while talking, gathers Greg's toys into a bin] We have an appointment with Dr. Stevenson on Wednesday at 3:30, okay? [checks watch/clock] Damn, I'm going to be late.

LUKE
Can I help with anything?

ANNE

LUKE
Umm, [pauses] Yeah, could you make Greg's lunch?

Yeah, sure.

ANNE

[moving to stairs] Perfect. Thanks hon. [exits up stairs.]

(Luke moves to kitchen, opens two cupboards, finds bread. Gets bread, ham; sets them out on the table beside Greg's cereal bowl. Takes out two pieces of bread, then pauses, looks around as if confused. Goes back to the cupboard, gets...
peanut butter and knife. Spreads peanut butter on both slices. Starts to put them together, but accidentally knocks over a cup of juice on the table.]

LUKE

Shit. [gets a rag and cleans up the spill. Goes back to the sandwich, grabs some ham, quickly finishes it up, and then starts getting out other stuff for the lunch.]

ANNE

Five minutes, Greg! [to kitchen] You almost finished, hon?

LUKE

Yeah, sorry. I got held up. Sandwich is on the table.

ANNE


LUKE

What? [Anne holds sandwich open] Oh hell, Anne I’m sorry. How did I--

ANNE

It’s all right, its-- [starts cleaning up quickly; throws sandwich away] no big deal. Do you have any cash, Greg can just buy lunch. [Luke searches pockets for money, rather inefficiently; Anne cleans up lunch stuff. Greg enters living room, headed to kitchen. Luke finds a wad of bills and change, hands it to Anne] Thanks. [Anne gets a ziploc and starts counting money into it. Enter Greg] Here honey, you can just buy today. Have you got everything?

GREGORY

Can I get a soda?

ANNE

No, I want you to get milk or juice. Here’s your jacket. Bye Luke. [noticing his face] Don’t worry about it.

LUKE

Yeah. All right. [Door slams. Lights down on Luke.]

Act I, sc. vi

[Scene opens on the kitchen and the living room. In the living room, Tyler and Gregory are sitting; Gregory is surrounded by supplies for his project, faithfully gluing yellow cotton onto Venus; Tyler has a book about the human body, from which he is reading periodically. In the kitchen, Anne and Carol are drinking coffee.]

TYLER

[Reading like a third grader, hesitating frequently and mispronouncing harder words] “The stomach is the first big stop in digestion after your mouth. The muscles in your stomach, along with special juice that your stomach makes, turn your food into a gooey substance called chyme that your stomach squeezes into your small intestine.” Look, Greg, this is what food looks like when its in your stomach. [Points to the picture]

GREG

Si-ick.

TYLER

Gross, huh? I’m going to put some in my 3D model. It’s going to be really cool.

Have you finished making it yet?

GREG

TYLER

Kind of. My dad is helping me do a drawing of what it should look like, and I colored all the different parts.

ANNE

[takes a sip of coffee] We’ll have more test results on Friday. Dr. Stevenson put him on a bunch of meds three weeks ago, and his mood seems better, but his memory has clearly gotten worse.

CAROL

And they don’t have anything new to tell you?

ANNE

Nothing.
[pause] How's Greg doing?

CAROL

Oh gosh. He seems -- all right. I almost don't know. He's quieter lately, and he works on his project all the time.

CAROL

Are you sure he's holding up?

ANNE

No, I don't feel sure. But he's so steady most of the time, and things with Luke are so unsteady, I'm just not sure what to do.

TYLER

Did your parents help you a lot with your planets?

GREGORY

No, I did them all by myself, except Dad helped me color the clouds yellow for Venus. It doesn't have normal clouds, they're made out of acid. But I haven't finished earth yet, because it's hard to do by myself.

CAROL

Isn't there anyone you could ask to come stay? I mean, to help with Gregory for just a little while, until things straighten out?

ANNE

You know, I've thought of asking Don. He knows everything anyway, and Gregory loves him. But I feel bad, asking him to come.

CAROL

Well, he's over here all the time anyway. He might be glad to be asked.

ANNE

Could be. And honestly, I don't know how much longer I can keep up with myself and Gregory.

CAROL

I'm sure he'd be happy to stay for a while. And you know, you can always send Gregory over to our house any old afternoon.

Thanks Carol. I know.

ANNE

TYLER

"The human brain has control over your entire body. Without your brain, you could not move, speak, think, or feel. Even when you are asleep, your brain stays turned on, controlling your breathing and heart rate, and making your dreams." Hey, Gregory, do you think if you took out the thinking part of your brain, the rest of your body would keep working?

GREGORY


[Anne and Carol enter from kitchen]

[Anne and Carol enter from kitchen]

CAROL

Okay Tyler, it's time for us to get on home. Daddy's cooking on the grill tonight.

TYLER

Aww, cool. Can Greg come?

CAROL

[Carol looks to Anne; Anne nods.] Sure, if he wants to.

GREGORY

Yesss!

CAROL

All right, head on over guys. [The boys rush out the door. Carol gives Anne a hug.] Have a good night. And call Don, really. It'll be good for everybody.

ANNE

Maybe I will. Thanks.

[Carol heads out through the kitchen, and Anne sits down heavily on the sofa. Lights go down.]
Act II scene I

[Luke and Gregory are settled on the floor in front of the coffee table. They are working to perfect the model, adding rings and moons, asteroids, maybe some kind of backdrop. Somewhere on or near the model lies a 1st prize ribbon. Luke has a messy stack of books beside him, and he is consulting one of them as he talks to Gregory.]

LUKE

Now, the closest planet to the sun is – what?

GREGORY

Mercury.

LUKE

That’s right, Mercury. [Luke points to the correct orbit, and Greg begins to string up Mercury. Luke, absorbed in the text, does not assist him.] [From Peterson’s First Guide] “Mercury, the innermost planet, orbits very close to the sun. Anyone watching it from Earth will never see it stray far from the sun in our sky. Mercury is not bright enough to be visible in the daytime, except during a total solar eclipse; it can be seen only near sunrise or sunset, usually low in the sky.”

ANNE

[ Begins to call at around ‘sunset’, from open door into the kitchen from outside ] Luke! Luke, Don is here!

LUKE

All right, Anne! “Mercury is, on average, 36 million miles from the sun – 40 per cent of the distance of Earth from the sun. However, Mercury’s orbit is not round. In fact it is much farther out of round than that of Earth or any other planet except Pluto.”

ANNE


LUKE

Well I’m helping Greg with . . .

GREGORY

Mercury.

LUKE

Right. Couldn’t you guys just bring it in?

ANNE

Fine, sure. [pause] Greg, how’s it coming?

GREGORY

Good.

LUKE

All right now. What’s the second planet from the sun?

GREGORY

I know, Venus. But I already did that one. And the third one, which is earth.

LUKE

All right then, what about number four? [pause. Gregory thinks.] What planet is fourth out from the sun?

GREGORY

I can’t think of it.

LUKE

[pause] You can’t remember at all? [Gregory shakes his head] No guesses?

GREGORY

No, Dad, I give up. What is it?

LUKE

Right. It’s –

DONALD

[Entering from the kitchen with suitcases, Anne in tow] Oh, I know this one. Mars, right Luke.

LUKE

Right. How’s it going, Don?
Pretty good. How’s the project, Greg?

GREGORY

Awesome! I won the competition at my school, so now I get to go to the city science fair. [holds up ribbon] See? So Dad’s helping me fix it up.

DON

Wow, when is that?

GREGORY

I don’t know. In a few more weeks.

[During this conversation Don continues to move slowly across the room and up the stairs, but Anne stops behind the couch and watches Gregory and Luke. Luke is leafing through books toward the end of the conversation. Anne should remain behind couch until Don heads back down, they cross on stairs.]

GREGORY

Dad, I want to make the moon, but I don’t know how.

LUKE

Hrmn? Oh the moon. The earth’s moon?

GREGORY

Yes. But I don’t know how to do it. It needs to be small.

ANNE

[Coming back down through the room] Greg, Luke, don’t forget to clean up this mess when you’re done. Greg, are you listening?

GREGORY

Yeah mom. [Luke and Greg begin discussion of moon, which will overlap with Donald and Anne’s discussion of the mess]

DONALD

[Just entered again from outside with a little more stuff] Ah, don’t worry about that, Anne. It’s just me you know.

ANNE


DONALD

We’ll clean it up later Annie, I swear. Scout’s honor. [Don heads back upstairs. Anne starts picking up clutter for a minute, then heads up the stairs right before Luke’s question.]

LUKE

[Talking over Anne, starting right after Greg’s “yeah mom”] Well, you’ll want the moon to look like it’s in earth’s orbit.

GREGORY

Yeah, it should.

LUKE

And we don’t want to just hang it from this wire, because it won’t stay close to earth that way.

GREGORY

Right and then you couldn’t move the moon and the earth together. [demonstrates sliding the earth around its orbit]

LUKE

Well, what about – here [Luke takes a small round piece of styrofoam, sticks a toothpick in it, sticks it into the earth. This action takes a little more effort than it would normally.] Will that work?

GREGORY

Oh yeah! That will be good and we can paint it gray.

LUKE

Well, let’s paint it then. [stopping Anne on the stairs] Anne, do we have any gray paint?

ANNE

No. Just mix black and white.

LUKE

Thanks hon.

[Anne pauses to watch Greg and Luke again, then goes upstairs]
Act II, scene ii

NARRATOR 3

Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease, or CJD, is a rare, fatal brain disorder, which causes a rapid, progressive dementia and associated neurological disturbances. This disease is often referred to as a subacute spongiform encephalopathy because it usually produces microscopic vacuoles, or holes, in neurons that appear sponglike. The disease is named after Drs. Hans Gerhard Creutzfeldt and Alfons Jakobs, who documented the first cases of this illness in the 1920s. Reports indicate that the disease occurs sporadically worldwide, including in the United States, with an incidence of one case per million people each year.

[Lights up. Afternoon. Light slanting through from kitchen and window, outside of which you can see bare trees. Anne is on couch, napping, dust rag in hand; there is a basket of unfolded laundry beside her. Luke enters down stairway, holding Galileo’s Dialogues.]

LUKE
Don! Donald? [Anne wakes up] Oh, hey, sorry honey.

ANNE
Uh, its all right. Everything okay? How’s your reading coming?

LUKE
All right. It’s getting hard to focus, I thought I’d take a break. Where’s Don, do you know?

ANNE
Yeah, I sent him to the store for me. We need dinner food.

LUKE
Ah.

ANNE
Well, I’d better start the bathrooms.

LUKE
Oh is that your next, uh, thing?

ANNE
Unfortunately [groans as she sits up]

LUKE
Do you want some help up there?

ANNE
Oh. Oh, well --well you could -- [pauses to consider] Well, there’s only one can of bleach. I’ll just do it.

LUKE
[slightly disappointed] Oh. All right.

ANNE
Thanks though, hon. [Anne exits to kitchen. Luke sits down in recliner. After about twenty seconds, he moves to the couch and starts folding the laundry. The job is cumbersome for him, moreso than it would normally be. Anne opens cabinet under kitchen sink, searches for bleach and yellow rubber gloves. Don enters carrying two bags of groceries.]

DON
Hey Annie. Hey, where do you want these?

ANNE
Oh, hey, just . . . in the fridge or whatever [pulls out can of bleach powder, one glove]

DON
[pulling a loaf of bread out of the bag.] Well, this doesn’t go in the fridge.

ANNE
Oh, here, I'm sorry. [puts bread away, goes back to search] I'm just trying to find my other glove. Oh did you find the –

DON
Teriyaki sauce, yes, I found it. Right there in the ketchup aisle.

ANNE
Thanks, you're a godsend.

DON
No problem.

ANNE
You've really helped out around here; I mean I know I haven't said much about it, but these last couple of weeks have been much smoother.

DON
Really, don't mention it. I'm family you know.

ANNE
I know. But you didn't have to.

DON
Well, you're welcome. [Awkward pause. Don is holding a gallon of milk. Both suddenly move – Anne crawls back under the sink.]

ANNE
Ah here's the other. If you can't figure out where something goes, just leave it and I'll get it later. [Anne exits]

DON
All-righty. [lights down as Anne reaches the kitchen doorway.]

Act II, scene iii

[The living room. Luke is sleeping in the recliner, and Anne is quietly tidying around him. There is a very messy pile of books beside the chair, filled with various books, some astronomy textbooks, some children's; Anne puts all of them back on the shelf, except for the one that is in Luke's lap. Other objects in the room may be telling of Luke's state of mind. The model is also beside the couch, hanging precariously; Anne can certainly tidy this area, but she treats any model pieces with caution, even delicacy. She is folding a blanket when Gregory appears on the steps in his PJ's, with a blanket and pillow.]

GREGORY
Mom?

ANNE
Oh, honey. What are you doing up? I thought Uncle Donald was going to read you a bedtime story.

GREGORY
[In a whisper, conscious of his sleeping father] He did, but fell asleep before he got to the end.

ANNE
Oh, on your bed?

GREGORY
Yeah. He almost was falling off, but I pushed him the whole way on.

ANNE
Good job, Gregory. Do you want to go to sleep in my room then?

GREGORY
No, I want to sleep down here. [Gregory sets down the pillow and begins to spread the blanket over the couch as best he can. Anne quickly comes to help him, then gets another blanket from a shelf or chairback. Gregory moves the pillow to the model side of the couch.] If I put my pillow over here, I can look at planets while I fall asleep.
Uh huh.

Gregory

I want to study them as much as possible, because it’s hard to get a job working with the planets. So I have to know a lot.

Anne

Did daddy tell you that?

Gregory

Kind of.

Anne

And is that what you want to do when you grow up, Greg?

Maybe.

Anne

Be an astronaut or something?

Gregory

Yeah.

Anne

Just like daddy, huh?

Gregory

But dad’s not an astronaut. Is he? He says he helps make buildings and things.

Anne

What? Oh, Greg I know. No, he’s not an astronaut. Goodnight now.

[Greg raises his arms to his mother. She bends down to hug him, kisses him. Anne exits into the kitchen, begins to leaf through a stack of photocopied articles on neurological disorders. Lights down briefly. Lights immediately back up – just down long enough to indicate a time lapse. Anne is still sitting at the kitchen table, a good deal further into the book. She closes it and saves her place.

Anne exits the kitchen into the living room, just as Don comes down the stairs in a t-shirt and some kind of pajama pants. He stops on the stairs when he notices her. As they talk she moves up the stairs to meet him, so they can speak more quietly. There is a consciousness of the two who are sleeping.]

Don

Oh Hey.

Anne

Hey. Greg said you fell asleep in his bed.

Don

Yes, I’m sorry. I should move him back upstairs.

Anne

No, it’s all right, he’s asleep now. He didn’t seem to mind.

Don

I’ve never seen such an easygoing kid.

Anne


Don

No, you’re right. Not easygoing.

Anne

He’s like a little –

Don

Grownup?

Anne

Mystic.

Don

Ah. [Pause.] Well, time for bed. You coming?

Anne

Hmm? No. Goodnight.

[Don exits up the stairs; Anne begins to return to the kitchen. Lights down.]

Act II scene iv
[The middle of the night. Anne is standing by the window of the kitchen; all the lights in the house are off, and a slight glow comes in through the window. Don comes down the stairs, across the living room quietly, into the kitchen. He hesitates in the doorway when he sees Anne, but then comes in and goes to the cupboard for a glass. Anne puts up a hand.]

ANNE

[In a whisper.] Shhh. Donald. [pause] It’s really dark tonight.

DON

Yeah?

ANNE

There’s no moon.

DON

Yes there is, it was nearly full [Don comes to the window]

ANNE

It’s already set.

DON

The stars are so bright though. Look, there’s Orion there.

ANNE

Where? Oh there, I see it now.

[The two of them stand together by the window, still and silent, for a full minute. At the end of the minute, Don goes to the cupboard, gets a cup, fills it with water. Anne does not move or look.]

DON

[without looking] Goodnight, Anne. [Don exits into living room. Lights down when he gets through the door.]

Act II, scene iv

[Scene opens on Gregory and Luke sitting on the floor working on the model. Gregory is faithfully stringing up rocks for his asteroid belt, while his father glues strips of gauzy cloth onto Saturn. He is cutting them with a pair of nice shears, and at some point during the scene and probably more than once he will dip them in the rubber cement and use them to slather glue onto Saturn. The two work silently. Anne enters by the stairs, and immediately starts searching the room -- drawers, baskets, desk -- for something. Each one is thoroughly absorbed in their separate task. Don enters from outside through the kitchen.]

DON

Brrr, it’s cold as Christmas out there. I’m afraid you won’t be able to go stargazing tonight boys, but from the looks of those clouds we might get a snowstorm.

GREG

Aww, do you think I’ll get off school?

DON

Could be, could be.

GREG

Yes!!!

DON


GREG

They have big storms sometimes too. You can see them on the surface, like Jupiter’s big red spot, but there not as big. It’s mostly just gassy, though.

DON

Gassy weather, huh? Anne, you look like you’re up to no good over there.

ANNE

[Resumes with vigor the scissor search, which had flagged since Don’s entrance.] I’m looking for my good scissors. Help me, I can’t find them anywhere, and I could have sworn they were in my desk.
I saw some in the kitchen drawer.

Oh no, those are my kitchen scissors. These are my good sewing scissors. You haven’t seen them, have you guys?

[looks up after too long a pause] Huh? Sorry, what?

Never mind. Greg, you haven’t been using my good scissors, have you?

No, Mom you told me not to, remember?

Yeah, I know. Sorry.

[has been half-heartedly searching shelves, the top of the stereo, somewhat nonsensical places, until his eyes light on the scissors that Luke had been using, currently sitting beside the can of glue.] Say, are those the ones there Anne?

Oh where?

There. Luke’s got them, that’s all.

What? Oh, these. Yes, I’ve got them.

[looking at the scissors] Luke, these are my good sewing scissors. Good grief, what have you been doing with them?

Nothing, just --

They’re completely covered in glue! Couldn’t you have used something else?

I’m sorry Anne. I needed them for Jupiter.

That’s Saturn, Dad.

We needed an extra pair.

[Visibly angry, but attempting to keep control] No, no. That’s all right.

I’m sorry. I just didn’t remember.

It’s okay. Really. I’ll just -- I’ll wash them off. Here. [Goes to Luke and takes the scissors out of his hand, then hurries into the kitchen, where she begins washing the scissors rather furiously. Greg watches his mother leave, then looks with concern toward Uncle Don.]

Is Mom all right?

Yeah, she’s all right. Just a little upset. Go ahead and keep working, and I’ll come help you guys in a second.

[Greg nods and goes back to his model. Don goes into the kitchen, and Gregory slowly returns to his model. Luke gets up and goes to the desk, where he rummages around for something he ultimately does not find. Eventually he gets up and resumes his place on the floor, now spreading glue with a pencil from the floor. This all goes on at the same time as Anne and Don are talking.]

[To Anne] Hey. You all right?

[to Anne] Yeah, sure I’m fine. Just — I’m just — [starts to cry.] Sorry, Gosh, this is really dumb. It’s just

I’m really —
Stressed out, yeah I know. It’s all right. [She sets the scissors in the sink, lets herself cry. Don gives her a long hug.] There we are. And Luke’s going to be fine just as soon as they figure out what’s wrong.

ANNE

I’m not sure I can keep it together til then.

DON

Of course you can. You’re a brave woman, Anne. Really. Now here [Grabs a handful of tissue from a box on the counter] You get your eyes, and I’ll get your nose, all right. [Anne laugh through her tears. Don holds a tissue in front of her nose.] Now blow. [Anne laughs again, still a shaky laugh. She blows her nose into the tissue, then they both dab at her eyes; their hands get a bit tangled up. Anne reaches over and touches Dons face, then kisses him, briefly, then they kiss again. Just before the kiss, Greg gets up and walks toward the doorway, at such an angle that he can see into the kitchen before he is actually visible in the door. He stops abruptly when they begin to kiss. After freezing momentarily, he backs up a few steps, turns with a stunned look on his face, and returns slowly to his former position on the floor. After a somewhat extended second kiss, Don breaks abruptly away from Anne. They stare at each other. Lights down on kitchen.]

GREGORY

[AFTER a long pause, in a shocked, low tone.] Dad?

LUKE

[Pause] Greg?

GREG

Can I go to bed now? I don’t want to do this anymore.

LUKE

[Pause, distantly] Sure, Greg. Should I read you a bedtime story?

GREG

All right. [Luke gets up, moves toward the stairs. Greg does not move. He looks back at the kitchen doorway.]

LUKE


Act II, scene v

[Night. Don is asleep on the living room couch.]

NARRATOR 2

All in all, I find in my heart a great reluctance to grant this companionship between the earth and the moon, of which you want to persuade me, placing the earth in the host of the stars... for even if there were nothing else, the immense separation and distance between the earth and the heavenly bodies seems to me to imply necessarily a great dissimilarity.

NARRATOR 4

If separation and distance are valid facts for arguing a great difference in natures, it is necessary on the other hand that closeness and contiguity should mean dissimilarity; and how much closer is the moon to Earth than it is to the other heavenly bodies. Confess, then, by your own admission, the great affinity between the earth and the moon.

[Don starts awake, sits up suddenly but not violently. Stares silently. Lights down.]

Act III, scene I

NARRATOR 1

Tonight a boy is looking at the night sky. “How many stars are there in the sky?” he asks his mother. “Billions and billions,” she says. “Do people live on them?” he asks his mother. “People can’t live on stars,” she says.

[Lights up on morning in the kitchen. Luke is sitting at the kitchen table. Donald is making eggs at the stove. Gregory enters through living room, dragging feet.]

DON

What’s the matter with you?
Nothing. [Sits down immediately next to Luke]

DON

Nothing, huh?

GREG

There’s no snow. [pause] Dad doesn’t like eggs.

DON

Oh, he doesn’t? What do you want for breakfast, Luke?

LUKE

Huh?

GREG

Dad, what do you want to eat instead of eggs?

LUKE

Oh yeah. [pause] Toast, please.

DON

Alrighty, two pieces of toast, coming right up. [Don puts four slices of toast in the toaster.] Butter?

GREG

[after a pause for Luke and no response] He always has jelly. [Don gets into the fridge to hunt the jelly. Enter Anne, fully ready for the day. Her embarrassment should be immediately evident. She doesn’t look at Don, but Don does stop to steal a long glance at her]

ANNE


DON

Do you want eggs?

ANNE

Oh, sure. Thanks. [pause] Greg, did you finish your math last night?

GREG

Yeah.

ANNE

Good.

DON

[brings over plates, all three at once] Okay, we’ve got toast for you, [sets down plate] and two plates of eggs. [sets down plates, pauses behind Anne. Then quietly.] How are you?

ANNE

[flushed] Oh. Yeah, fine. All right. [starts putting butter on her toast]

DON

[quieter] You sleep?

ANNE

Some. [Greg slams his glass down noisily. Don moves.]

DON


[Once Greg is out of the way. Don gets a fork out, tries to hand it to Anne. She drops it.]

DON

Sorry. [Anne gets up.] No, its all right, sit down. [Anne grabs the fork off the floor and takes it to the sink; Don gets one out of the drawer, hands it to her.]

[Don returns to cleanup. Anne begins to eat, but slowly. Long silence, maybe thirty seconds, of eating, while Don washes dishes.]

ANNE

Gregory, did you make your bed?

GREG

No.
ANNE: Well, once you're done eating, go upstairs and make it, okay?

GREG: I don't want to.

ANNE: [with a warning tone] Greg.

GREGORY: I don't feel like it.

DON: Come on now, Greg. What's the matter with you this morning?

GREG: Nothing. Leave me alone!

LUKE: [raising his voice just enough to silence Greg] Gregory. [pause. Greg looks down.] You have to listen to your mom.

GREGORY: [pause] Fine.

[Greg Exits. Anne watches him go. Pause.]

ANNE: [with a sigh] Have you got any coffee over there, Don?

DON: Uh yeah sure. I'll get you some. [begins to open cupboard]

ANNE: No, I'll get it. [Anne rises, moves to cupboard. Don gets jelly from counter, takes it to fridge, brushes past Anne.]

DON: [Opens the fridge, sets down jelly] Milk?

ANNE: Yeah, sure. [Anne holds cup out, Don also holds cup to steady it. Pours milk. Silhouettes to audience. They stare at each other.]

LUKE: [distantly and not very loud, but when he speaks Anne starts and spills his coffee.] You know. I think I'll have some more coffee too. [Luke gets up with his mug, moves toward the coffee pot. Anne and Don move out of his way.]

ANNE: [starts suddenly] Oh, my dress. I've gotta go - change. [moves nervously, sets down cup.] Uh, I'll - see you later. [Anne rushes out door; Don looks at Luke. Lights down.]

Act III, scene ii

[Afternoon. Don in living room, sitting in Luke's armchair. Anne enters through kitchen, hurries out of her heels by the door, sets down her purse, and continues into living room while taking off her earrings. Surprised by Don.]

Oh. [stops short]

DON: Hey there.

ANNE: Hi. [starts up the stairs]

DON: [to stop her] How's work?
You know – we didn’t really talk about it.

Yeah, I know.

I – don’t think I can yet. Can we do it later?

I guess so.

Are you going to leave?

Uh – I don’t know.

Gosh, you scared me.

Gosh. What did you need?

Nothing, I was just going to get a drink, that’s all. What was that crash?

What? Oh, I dropped my shoe. [goes to retrieve it under the table]

Small wonder. You jumped a mile.

Yeah, no kidding. I almost fell over. Hey, you wanna grab me a coke?

Sure.

Where’s Gregory, do you know?

He’s still at Tyler’s.

Mmm. [long silence]

So – uhh – [cuts off]

Yeah?
Well – are you in love with me, or what?

Oh geez, Don. Something like that.  

Hmmm. Well, there are worse things I guess.  

[half laugh] You sure about that?  

Not really. [long pause. Anne fiddles with the tab on her can.]  

Do you want to leave?

No. I don’t want to leave. Do you think I should?

Well, no. Not if you don’t want to.

Well, then. I’ll stay I guess.  

[sighing and rubbing her forehead.] Well good. And I’m really, really sorry.

Well, I was asking for it, blowing your nose and all. Do you remember when they made us kiss at Aunt Lynn’s?

[almost in unison with his ‘Aunt Lynn’] Aunt Lynn’s Christmas party, yes I do. Damned mistletoe. You milked it for all it was worth I remember.

[still in a flirting way] Well, you know, you did look really hot that night.

Oh yeah, I bet I did.

Yes, you did. In that green dress?

[looks at him hard] I can’t believe you remember that.

[a little embarrassed. Looks down.] Yeah, well. You know.

[after a pause] Thanks.

You’re welcome.

Act III, scene iii

NARRATOR 3

The difficulties involved in diagnosing Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease may have prevented its identification in some cases. Since the disease progresses rapidly, the patient may die before a diagnosis can be made. Furthermore, some physicians may not even consider the possibility of a CJD diagnosis because the disease is deemed to be rare. A definitive diagnosis of CJD has traditionally required a brain biopsy; however, this procedure is often discouraged due to its invasive nature, and the lack of benefit to the patient from a correct CJD diagnosis, since the disease is invariably fatal.


DON

Aww, they’re all over him! Come on, go, go – shit! [Throws his hands up. Looks at Luke] Luke, you with me there? [no response, game resumes] All right, here we go. [leans forward as the play gets underway] Yes, aww, man, are
you seeing this! Go, go, go, come on – come on – touchdown! Luke are you watching this? Come on, thirty-nine seconds left! [talking again to the TV] Allright Fil, this is for the game – and it's good! Dallas is going to the Superbowl! [pause] Luke?

LUKE

[quietly, slowly] Do you know the constellation Aries? Its named for a ram who rescued two children. Hermes sent the ram to the Phrixus and Helle, to carry them away from danger. [pause] But Helle fell from his back and drowned in the sea. [pause] Do you know the story?

DON

[after a pause] No, I don't

LUKE

I read that today in one of my old astronomy books, but then after that I couldn’t concentrate. I read a whole chapter on the Pleiades that I can't remember.

DON

It's okay, Luke. You'll go back to the doctors tomorrow, they'll run a few more tests, and they'll get this thing figured out.

LUKE

Street, calm] What if they don’t.

DON

[long pause] I don't know.

LUKE

Thanks for helping Anne.

DON

Don’t mention it.

[don pauses. Don turns back to game. Greg enters in pajamas.] Hey Greg.

GREG

Hi. [Greg comes around couch to Lukes side.] Dad, Mom said to remind you about your appointment tomorrow.


LUKE

Okay. Thanks. [Greg sits down facing the TV, on the floor next to his dad. Long silence. TV.]

DON

Hey, Greg, do you want to work on your model tomorrow afternoon? You and me and your dad could all work on it together.

GREG

No thank you.

DON

But isn’t the fair coming up next week? Don’t you want to work on it?

GREG

I’m sick of it.

DON

Aww, come on Greg, you can’t be sick of it.

GREG

I am sick of it.

DON

But you’re gonna have to finish it sometime–

[over sometime] No I don’t! I hate it!

[Greg stands up, kicks the model over hard. Stands over it, then stomps on it twice. Long silence. Gregory starts to cry, still looking at the model. When Gregory begins his attack, Don stands up, but Luke also stands and lays a hand on Don’s shoulder. When Greg begins to cry, Luke moves over to him and kneels, placing a hand on his shoulder.]

GREG

[through tears] I’m sorry Dad

LUKE

It’s okay. [puts his arms around Greg]

GREG

I’m really sorry.
Don’t worry. We’ll fix it tomorrow.

Will you work on it with me?

Sure. Now go up and brush your teeth.

[Greg stares for a minute, a little puzzled by Luke’s response, but then heads slowly upstairs. Don, who has remained standing, goes to the model and stands over it. Lights down]

Act III, scene iv

[Midnight. Snow is falling outside the window. Don is asleep on the couch. Anne appears on the stairs in a nightgown, no robe. She comes down the stairs halfway, pauses, continues down. She stops behind the couch and looks over at the living room window, then down over Don. She looks down at him, moves to the stage right side of the couch, perches there, looking at his face. After a short time, she reaches out hesitantly toward his face, comes close, pulls back but without changing expression. Then her eyes fall on the model. Her face falls, hardens. She stands, looks down at it for a while, crouches, reaches out to put her hand on it. She examines it. Then she stands again, looks at Don without changing expression. Then she exits to the kitchen, stands by the window as in Act II. Lights down.]

Act III, scene v

[In blackout a radio is heard; tuning, then “further accumulation through the morning and well into the afternoon. Businesses and schools have been closed all across the greater Baltimore area. Stay tuned for a detailed list of closings and cancellations, after the break.” Sound of commercials turned down low. Lights up first in the window to show the snow, then in the kitchen and living room. Anne is sitting at the kitchen table in a bathrobe with coffee, head buried in one hand. The clock indicates that it is 9:30ish. In the living room, Legos are all scattered – space shuttles, lego men, individual blocks and half-constructed fortresses. Tyler and Gregory enter through the kitchen door, covered in snow. They are chasing each other]

GREGORY
Chee-o-o, chee-o-o, chee-o-o [other laser sounds, continuing]

TYLER
Rarrrrr, I’m an alien, I’m an alien, raarr, I’m going to eeeaat, yourrrrr, braiiiiinnnnnn. Raaaar! [Boys continue to yell similar sounds, Gregory making shooting noises, Tyler yelling, etc. Anne only looks up momentarily.]

ANNE
Boots off, boys.

[Greg stops briefly in response, but Tyler keeps running, and then both continue, chasing each other into the living room and picking up ships. They immediately transition into a lego battle.]

TYLER
[Slamming his ship against Gregory’s] Pwoooosssssshhh! You’re dead!

GREGORY
No way, because my ship has super invincibility shields. Pow, pow, pow, pow!

TYLER
[stops attacking] You can’t have invincibility shields! I already bombed your ship!

GREGORY
Yes I can! I already called it before we went outside!

ANNE
Boys!
It doesn’t matter. Invincibility is against the rules!

TYLER

ANNE
[over the rules] Greg and Tyler! Quiet down please, your father is still sleeping! Did you take off your boots?

GREGORY
Just a minute, mom!

ANNE
Don’t just a minute me. I want you in this kitchen, right now, taking those boots off.

GREGORY
All right, mom. [The boys go into the kitchen and sit down by the door to take off their boots.] Where did Uncle Don go?

ANNE
[pause] I don’t know, honey.

GREGORY
How long is he going to stay at our house?

ANNE
I don’t know, Gregory. Now, boys, why don’t you – go – play in the living room, quietly.

[Boys exit to living room, where they pantomime play for a short time, then go upstairs, still pantomiming play. Shortly after the boys exit the kitchen, Don enters]

DON
Hey, good morning

ANNE
Morning. Where did you go?

DON
Work, but they sent us home. Geez, you look beat. Didn’t you sleep?

ANNE
Not much.

DON
Well, don’t worry so much, huh?

ANNE
Very funny.

[Don begins to massage her shoulders, then kisses her hair. Anne stiffens a little.]

DON
It’ll work out fine. [goes for coffee. Silence]

ANNE
How do you know?

DON
Well – there’s not really much to work out, is there? I came here to support you, and that’s what I’m doing.

ANNE
You know it’s not that simple.

DON
Why not?
ANNE
Because I have a husband and a son who need support. And Greg's smart. He's -- intuitive. Did he wreck the model?

DON
[pause] Yeah, he did. I put it in the closet this morning.

[As they speak, Luke appears on the steps. He begins to descend, but he is a bit wobbly and has to concentrate more than usual. Not frail, just unsteady. About three steps from the bottom, his leg stiffens and jerks, causing him to stumble and fall with a bang. This fall corresponds with the end of Anne and Don's conversation.]

ANNE
[tensely] Well, I saw it last night. He might not understand it, but he senses what's happening.

DON
[with a sharp exhale] Allright.

ANNE
I could be wrong.

DON
Well, what do you think we should --

[Loud noise of Luke falling]

ANNE
Oh no, Greg? [rushes to living room] Luke, what happened? Are you hurt?

LUKE
I --

GREG
[coming down stairs, with Tyler in tow; Tyler remains at the top] Dad?

ANNE
It's all right Greg.

GREG
What happened?

ANNE
How far did you fall?

LUKE
I just slipped.

DON
Should I call the hospital?

ANNE
No, call the doctor. His number's by the phone. Oh my God.

LUKE
I couldn't make my leg move. It started shaking, and I couldn't stop it.

ANNE
Do you think you can stand on it?

LUKE
It just gave out.

ANNE
Come on, let's get you to the couch. [Anne helps Luke to his feet; Greg attempts to aid in the support.]
Act III, scene vi

[Lights up on Don at the kitchen table, close to twilight. Enter Anne through the kitchen door in a coat. Don stands up as she enters.]

DON

ANNE
Fine now. The doctor wants him at the hospital overnight for observation. Where's Gregory?

DON
Asleep. After all the action he was exhausted. [a little tenderly] How are you?

ANNE
All right. I'm going back to the hospital for the night. I just need to get some stuff together.

DON
Oh. Should I just stay here with Greg, then?

ANNE
[deep breath] No, I think I'll send him over to Carol's for the night. I guess you can—go home. [looks at him]

DON
[pause, realization] Oh. Well. Just like that, huh?

ANNE
Yeah.

DON
I see.

ANNE
I know it's not fair. But I'm so ashamed of myself, Don. It's the only thing I can think of.

DON
Well, what can I say? I'll pack tonight I guess. [starts to leave the kitchen]

ANNE
I'm sorry.

DON
It's alright, Anne. [then, as a misplaced joke] I think I'm a terminal bachelor anyway. [Don leaves kitchen. Anne hangs up her coat and purse, leans on the table, begins to cry. Lights down.]

Act III, scene vii

[Lights up. Luke is hobbling toward the couch with a bandaged ankle; he sits down slowly on the stage right side. Greg is rummaging through the closet for pieces of his model. He comes out the first time with the main body of the model, then the second time with odds and ends, as well as the two smashed planets. In this scene, Luke's responses are slightly delayed.]

GREGORY
I think the earth and Saturn are both ruined. Look. [Comes over to Luke, holds the two planets up.]

LUKE
Oh. We'll have to do them over.

GREGORY
Do you think we can fix them in time? [waits. Luke nods] We've only got two days though. Can we finish?
S—sure, Greg. I think so.

What should we do first? [no immediate response] Should we make new rings for Saturn?

Yes, I remember. We used pipe cleaners.

Yeah. We still have some left over. [searches for pipe cleaners in closet, brings them to Luke. Luke starts working on the rings, a little painstakingly.] Should I work on earth?

Sure.

[Greg begins to work on earth, using glue to affix a piece of green cloth. While trying to attach it, Greg gets glue on his fingers, which causes the cloth to stick to his fingers rather than the ball. He flings his fingers through the air in an attempt to detach the cloth. Anne enters from upstairs, looking exhausted and carrying a laundry basket.]

Darn it!

[setting down basket, a little surprised] Whoa, hey, what’s up Greg? Oh, I see. Here. [Kneels by Greg, helps him to detach the cloth, deftly glues it to the earth.] There we go.

We need Don to help us. Where is he?

Well, hon—he had to go back home for a while. He might come over tomorrow.

Is he coming to stay again?

[awkward pause] Well—

[suddenly anxious] He’s not, is he mom?

[kneels down by Greg] No, Greg, he’s not.

[Anne reaches out to stroke Gregory’s hair, but he shys away from her.]

[clearly still upset] Are you mad that he went home?

No. Look at me, honey. I told him he should go home, because we needed some time as a family. Okay? [Gregory looks away. She reaches over to lay her hand on his shoulder, and speaks gently.] All right?

[quietly] Okay.

Will Don still help us with the planets?

Do you want him to, Greg?

[a long, deliberating pause] No, I want you to help us instead. Will you?

All right. I’ll come down in just a little while. [Anne rises, picks up laundry basket. Lights down.]

Act III, scene viii
Beyond Pluto the stars stretch out. Little and big, bright and dim.

[Enter Anne. Silence as Anne enters, comes down the stairs, goes to the window.]

And then beyond those stars there is still more space – more moons, stars, planets, galaxies.

[pause. Anne looks out window.]

LUKE

The night is very dark. The moon is waning.

ANNE

[without expression] You’re right. But there it is, shining low in the sky.

[pause]

NARRATOR 1

Somewhere way out in the distant spaces of the sky, a faraway planet spins around a faraway sun.

[Anne moves away from the window, sits on the stage left side of the couch by Gregory’s feet, drops her head.]

And far, far away a boy looks out the window at the night sky.

Constellations
Debbie DeGeorge

Act I, scene i

NARRATOR 1

Tonight a boy is looking out the window at the night sky. Above his dark lawn the white moon lights the clouds. And far away above the moon the arc of the sky stretches farther than you or I can possibly imagine. It is filled with planets and moons and stars without number. [Lights to blue, then fully up. Scene opens on Gregory sitting at the breakfast table eating a bowl of cereal. Anne is at the counter making his lunch.]

GREGORY

[kicking his chair and continuing to take bites as he chants] Eeny meeny miney mo . . . catcha tiger by the toe . . . if he hollers let him go . . . eeny meeny miney mo [stops, takes a couple of bites, starts over, repeating until Anne cuts him off]

ANNE

[interrupting] You’re making a lot of noise, Greg.

GREGORY

Sorry, mom. I’m trying to decide.

ANNE

What are you trying to decide? [Before Gregory can answer, Luke rushes through the kitchen.]

LUKE

All right, I’m off to work. Have fun at school, Greg.

GREGORY

[through a mouthful of cereal] Bye, Dad.

ANNE

Luke, did you remember to bring the laundry down with you?

LUKE

[stops, but only momentarily] Oh – no I forgot it. Sorry hon. See you tonight.

ANNE

Hang on! Will you run up and get it for me?
Hon, I'm already late. I've got an early meeting.

[Starting on top of "meeting"] But I'm running late too, and it's Tuesday. I can't do everything.

For pity's sake, it'll take you five seconds.

Exactly, so why --

GREGORY

[jumps up on "exactly". ] I'll take it! [ runs out the door before they can respond. Luke sets his briefcase down heavily and throws up his hands.]

Well, that was very nice.

[turns to face him, calm but hurt] What do you mean by that?

LUKE

[In a raised whisper] It's one thing to hassle me, but can't we keep Greg out of it.

ANNE

[still calm, but with an edge] Look, this is not my fault. Please, just go on to work.

You make a big deal out of every little thing!

ANNE

[now in an angry whisper] That's because I have to do every little thing. I'm working a double load here, and you don't do very much to lighten it up.

LUKE

Oh, so you think it's better if Greg picks up the slack?

ANNE


LUKE

Fine. [Luke picks up his briefcase and exits in a hurry. By this time Gregory is already descending the stairs. He enters with the basket of laundry, with as much energy as possible.]

Done! [Looks around] Did Dad leave?

Yeah, he did.

GREGORY

[frowns, sags a little] Oh. Okay. [sits down, soon starts to eat his cereal again.]

ANNE

[after a long pause] What were you trying to decide?

GREGORY

What, mom?

ANNE

You said you were trying to decide something. What are you trying to decide?

GREGORY

Oh yeah. What project I want.

ANNE

What project?

GREGORY

Yeah, what science project I want. Tyler is going to do a model of the human body, but I want mine to win.

ANNE

Is it a contest?

GREGORY
Yeah.

Like a science fair?

GREGORY

It is a science fair. And the winner of the whole city gets a prize. Miss Peters said she didn’t know what it was, but she thought it was money.

ANNE

Wow. Now hurry up with this, cause Carol and Tyler will be here any minute. [Gregory responds to his mother by taking enormous bites that drip down his chin] Ham or peanut butter?

GREGORY

[through a mouthful of cereal] Peanut butter. [Gregory keeps eating, and mom keeps at the sandwich until Carol knocks at the door.]

ANNE

Come on in, Carol! [Carol opens the door and Tyler and Carol enter the kitchen. Tyler has a backpack and plastic lunchbox. Carol is wearing a business suit.] I’m just finishing up Greg’s sandwich. Are you almost finished, Gregory?

GREGORY

[takes a long drink of milk from the bowl] Finished, mom.

ANNE

All right, well put your bowl in the sink, and then go get your backpack. [Greg takes bowl to sink. Anne catches him and wipes his chin and front of shirt with dish rag. Greg leaves room to find his backpack.] Sorry, we’re running so late, Carol. It’s been a really hectic morning. [Gives Carol a meaningful look.]

CAROL

Oh. Did you and Luke -- [glances at Tyler, then back at Anne. Anne nods and rolls her eyes.] Again? Good grief. Is he still talking about quitting his job?

ANNE

[glances at Tyler, who looks away, wanders a few steps as if not hearing] No, not for a couple of weeks now. [lowers voice] But this morning we started fighting before we even got out of bed. Really stupid stuff. I’m telling you, Carol, I’ve just about had it.

CAROL

[nods seriously] How long have you guys been -- [Gregory enters and Carol cuts off immediately] Well, are you ready?

Yup. All ready.

Do you need a jacket or anything?

GREGORY

No, I’m good.

ANNE

Here’s your lunch. Have a good day. [kisses him on the forehead.] Hey, and try to decide on that science project, huh? I hear you’re going to do the human body, Tyler.

TYLER

Yup, and I’m going to make a 3-D stomach.

ANNE

Neat. All right guys. [to Carol] Maybe I’ll call you tonight.

CAROL

All right. Have a good day.

BYE, Mom.

GREGORY

BYE, Mrs. Freeman. [Carol, Gregory, Tyler exit. Anne waves from doorway.]

Act I, sc. ii

[In the blackout, an answering machine begins to play messages. Message 1, Luke. “Anne, this is Luke. Hey, I’m sorry, I know its my night, but could you go ahead and start dinner? I’ve got a meeting late and I don’t know what time I’ll be done. Bye.” Message 2 as lights come up on Anne starting dinner. Clearly she hasn’t had time to change since work. “Mr. Freeman, this is Dr. Stevenson’s office, just calling to confirm your appointment for this afternoon at]
4 p.m. “If you have any questions just give us a call before then. Thank you.” During message, Anne accidentally pushes a glass into the sink and breaks it; Anne swears quietly. There is a knock at the kitchen door, and Anne goes to answer it. Tyler enters.

**TYLER**

Hi, Mrs. Freeman. Can Gregory play?

**ANNE**

Sure, Tyler. [going to the door of the kitchen and calling] Gregory? Gregory, Tyler’s here.

**GREGORY**

[from upstairs] Okay, Mom. [Gregory comes downstairs and into the kitchen, noisily.] Hi Tyler. What’s up?

**TYLER**

Do you want to play Legos?

**GREGORY**

Sure. Mom, can we have some cookies first? [Anne looks uncertain] Just one?

**ANNE**

All right. But only if you have milk too. [She gets out plastic cups for both and pours the milk. The boys rummage in the cookie jar for Double Stuff Oreos. They sit down at the kitchen table and eat their cookies.]

**GREGORY**

[As if remembering suddenly] Oh yeah! I want to do a model of the solar system for my project. Do you know how many planets are in the solar system?

**TYLER**

I do. There are nine.

**GREGORY**

Can you name them all?

**TYLER**

No.

**GREGORY**

There’s Jupiter, Mars, Mercury . . . Saturn . . . Pluto, Uranus, ooh, Neptune . . . [and then in a rush] Venus and earth.

**ANNE**

Very good. I’m glad you came up with such a great project. [after a pause] How is your project coming, Tyler?

**TYLER**

Good. I’m going to make a brain that you can open and see inside all the different parts of it.

**ANNE**

That sounds neat. Sounds like you’ve both got some great ideas.

**GREGORY**

Maybe we’ll both get first place, Mom.

**ANNE**

I bet you will. And then you can split the prize money, huh?

**TYLER**

No, or they’ll give us both first prizes, so we will have two times as much money, and I would buy the Starway Galactica Super Cruiser with shooting missiles [makes explosion sounds; Gregory starts too; they both start pretending to shoot and running around the table.]

**ANNE**

Calm down, boys. Don’t forget to put your glasses in the sink. [The boys go back to the table to get their glasses and carry them to the sink. Pretending to be Galactic cruisers, they zoom out of the room. Anne goes back to her dishes, food, etc. Enter Uncle Don through kitchen door. He sneaks up behind Anne and covers her eyes. She pulls his hand away and turns.]

**ANNE**

Donald! What are you doing here, and where is my husband?

**DON**

Luke brought me home for dinner. A single guy can’t feed himself all the time you know, and a pretty cook doesn’t hurt. [reaches around and tweaks her side. She shrieks and hits him with her dish towel, giving him a look of disapproval.] I know, I know. Why did you ever marry into this family?
Very funny. So there's a game tonight?

ANNIE

DON

Yessir, Cowboys and the Rams. Win this one and Dallas is in the playoffs.

ANNIE

[peering through the window of the kitchen door] Where is your brother?

DON

Oh, he's out there staring at the stars again, that's all. No clouds, you know.

ANNIE

Hmm, that's my Luke.

DON

I know. [after a pause, his words a little more weighted] A little moody lately, isn't he?

ANNIE

He's always moody. [long pause. Anne turns back to her preparations. Don moves to put his hand on her shoulder, she puts her hand on top of his for a second. Then she removes her hand, he pats her shoulder, drops his hand. Luke enters.]

DON

Luke, Luke, Lukey my boy [getting up to pat him on the back] How are the stars tonight? Come sit down. [the two sit as Don keeps talking] Anne was just going to grab us both beers from the fridge [with a broad wink] Weren't you Annie? [Anne stares him down, Don gets the beer. Gregory and Tyler come charging into the room excitedly.]

GREGORY

Hi, Uncle Don!

DON

Hello, boys. What wild things are you up to?

GREGORY

Legos.

Tyler

We're building this huge fort with canons and with a secret trap door.

DON

Great. You boys take after your Uncle Donald here, the world class construction worker. [Anne moves back to her dinner preparations]

GREGORY

Do you want to help us build our fort?

DON

Well, I'd love to, guys, except that tonight is not Lego night. Tonight is football night. You gonna watch the game?

GREGORY

Are we allowed?

DON

Sure, sure. You can even bring your Legos down if you want.

TYLER

Yeah!

GREGORY

Will you help us bring the fort down?

DON

Sure. Just lead me to it. Don't let Anne drink my beer, Luke. [the boys lead Uncle Don out of the room. A silence follows their departure.]

ANNE

[with an edge] So should I serve dinner in the living room tonight?

LUKE

[absently] The game doesn't start until eight. [pause, realization] Sorry about dinner. I had to review a set of bridge plans.

ANNE

[heavily] It's all right. I'm just going to do spaghetti anyway.
[sighs and leans his head on his hand] Thanks.

Something wrong?

What? No, nothing. How was your day at work?

Fine. Spent half the day wading through zoning codes for Roger. [long pause] Well, what?

Sorry. What does he have you working on?

Well, nothing important. Some kind of eminent domain case. The new highway is knocking out a bunch of houses. [pause] Luke, there was a message on the machine from the doctor's office, a receptionist or something. Did you get it?

Huh?

It was to confirm your appointment for today, at four o'clock. Did you have a doctor's appointment?

Uh... no. No, I think it must have been a - Or no, it wasn't the doctor, it was Mike from the Department of Transportation. I had a meeting with him today.

Oh. I see. [long silence]

Anne?

Yeah.

If I were to - well, let's say - say I had to quit my job.

Quit your job? Gosh, Luke, I thought we were done with that.

But if I needed to... What if for some reason I needed to quit? We could get by on your pay by itself, couldn't we?

What are you talking about? Why would you need to quit your job?

I'm saying if I had to. Could we get by on just what you make?

I don't understand what you're asking me. Even if you did quit your job, why wouldn't you get a new one? Do you think you're going to get fired or something?

No. It's not that. Just -

It's one thing to change jobs, Luke; it's another to quit your job entirely. Now if you're still thinking about becoming a - an astronaut or whatever -

Working for NASA, Anne, I never wanted to be an astronaut, and you know it. But that's not - it's just --

What?

[pause. Confusion.] It's - it's just that, n-not that easy to, to switch from one career, to... I - I mean, I'm a civil engineer, not a d-d --

It wasn't Mike at all.

What?
ANNE
That woman, on the machine, she wasn’t from Mike’s office. What’s Mike’s last name, Johnson?

LUKE
What? W-well -- [pause. Confusion. Then control.] Johnson, yes, it must have been a mistake.

ANNE
[volume rising] What do you mean a mistake?

LUKE
The receptionist, she must have made a mistake. She must have mixed up the files, or something. I’m sure these things --.

ANNE
But we don’t even have a Dr. Stevenson, I’ve never even heard of him before. Who was that woman on the machine?

LUKE
For pity’s sake, how should I know?

ANNE
Luke, what is going on? Why do you want to quit your job?

LUKE
I told you --

ANNE
And why are you lying about this? Did you meet that receptionist or something, is that what’s happening?

LUKE
No, what are you --

ANNE
Look, Luke, if you have something to say to me, just spit it out!

LUKE
Just forget it, all right? Dammit! [Gets up, pushes the chair and exits the room. Anne slams the table. Lights down.]

Act I, sc. iii

[scene opens on Luke and Gregory entering the living room, wearing jackets and ball caps. Gregory carrying a bag of supplies. Gregory is struggling with the bag as they enter the room.] 

LUKE
You sure you got that, tiger?

GREGORY
Yeah, I got it.

LUKE
All right. Now, where’s Mom? Anne?

GREGORY
Where should I put it, Dad?

LUKE
What?

GREGORY
[holding up the bag] Where should I put it?

LUKE
Oh. Go ahead and put everything on the table, Greg. Anne! We’re back. [waits for a response. Long silence instead.] Anne!

ANNE
[Appears at the top of the stairs. She is dressed in a t-shirt and sweat pants, looks tired and disheveled.] Back already?

GREGORY
Yeah Mom, but we couldn’t find any big foam balls for Jupiter. I want it to be really big.

ANNE
That’s okay honey. We can get started anyway. I’ll get the craft stuff. [She disappears and then eventually reappears with a crayon box, scissors, construction paper, tape, and glue. Meanwhile, Greg and Luke take off their coats. Luke
throws his over the arm of the chair, while Greg puts his in the closet, on the floor if he cannot reach the hangers. Anne sets the supplies down beside the bags on the table.

GREGORY
[Pointing at the glue] Dad let me get some rubber cement. Can we use that instead Mom?

ANNE
That’s fine Gregory. [Gregory starts pulling supplies out of the bag and arranges them on the table. Mom kneels down to help; Dad remains awkwardly standing, hands in pockets. They pull out fishing line, foam balls, rubber cement, a bag of bath salt rocks and another of bath beads. Anne looks at Luke as she pulls thees last two out.] What are these for?

GREGORY
Meteors, Mom. The rocks are for meteors, and the round things are for Mercury and Pluto, because they are so small.

ANNE
Oh, of course. I should have thought of Mercury and Pluto. You’re pretty smart to think of that.

GREGORY
Dad thought of it. I’m going to make all the other ones out of these [holds up foam ball], but I don’t want just to paint them. I want to cover them with other stuff, to show their surfaces are different.

LUKE
[sits down on couch] What kind of stuff Gregory?

GREGORY
[pauses to think] I don’t know yet.

LUKE
Like, for example, what kind of surface does Venus have?

GREGORY
Oh I know. It’s covered with clouds and gas.

LUKE
That’s right. So how might you show a cloudy and gassy surface? [Gregory pauses to think.] How could you show the clouds on Venus’s surface? [emphasis on clouds]

GREGORY
Oh, I know. I’ll be right back. [He rushes up the stairs, leaving Anne and Luke alone.]

LUKE
[After a long silence] He seems pretty excited about this project, huh?

ANNE
[distractedly] Yeah.

LUKE
[half to himself] I should get down some of my old astronomy books for him to look at. [another awkward pause] He made me go to three different stores looking for Jupiter.

ANNE
What?

LUKE
Looking for the foam ball for Jupiter. He said he needed a bigger one.

ANNE
Oh. Yeah. He said so when he came in. [another silence. Anne busys herself with things on the table, arranging them, or opening packages, laying things out. Luke wanders the room, ends up by the bookshelf; picks up a glass ornament in the shape of a star and stares at it.]

[to self] Maybe he’ll end up as an astronomer.

ANNE
So did you quit your job today?

LUKE
What?
Did you quit your job today? You said you —

GREGORY

[calling suddenly from right at the top of the stairs] Mom, where are the cotton balls?

Look in the cabinet under my bathroom sink.

ANNE

Okay.

GREGORY

[Resumes her former tone, but at a lowered volume] You said you were going to quit your job, so did you quit?

ANNE

I never said that. That isn’t what I said.

LUKE

Well then, what were you saying? Really, Luke, I need to understand.

ANNE

It’s hard to explain, Anne. Until I know -- it’s hard to . . . [trails off]

LUKE

What’s so hard to explain? [pause] Luke, please, I need to know what’s going on. You’ve been acting so crazy lately.

ANNE

[suddenly with raised voice] Well, what if that’s it? What if I am actually losing my mind, Anne?

LUKE

[matching his volume] And what, some day work’s just going to crack you, and then you’ll have to quit, is that it? Come on, Luke, everybody hates their job.

ANNE

[Cutting her off] I’m not kidding, Anne! Do you think I don’t know I’ve been acting weird lately? Do you think I don’t know this is out of control?

Out of --?

LUKE

I thought it was just my stupid job, so I went to a doctor.

ANNE

LUKE

And do you know what he said?

[Heavy running footsteps are heard above. Right before Gregory’s stampede of footsteps, Luke and Anne have reached their peak of both volume and anger, but their tension should exceed their volume, since Gregory appears not to have heard them; his entrance reduces them immediately to a very tense silence]

GREGORY

[Charging down from upstairs] I found them! [parents both stop immediately, stare at Gregory. Gregory looks from one to the other, sensing the tension. Turns to Dad.] Will these work okay for Venus?

LUKE

Oh sure, they’ll be perfect.

ANNE

Why don’t you and Daddy work on Venus for a little while, and I’ll go finish up in the kitchen?

GREGORY

Okay, but will you help me with Mars later? I want to make craters with that salty playdough. Do you remember how to make it?

ANNE

Sure, honey. [Anne goes into kitchen, starts working on dishes, then sits down at the table, lying her head down on her arms. Lights fade down to dark, but not full black.]
Act I, sc.iv

[When they come up again, Anne is still sitting in the same place, now drinking from a mug of tea. Luke comes down the kitchen stairs, and sits down beside her. This conversation never rises to the volume level of an 'argument.]

LUKE

Gregory’s in bed. I got him all dressed, and he brushed his teeth. [pause] Honey?

ANNE

So that’s what the call from the doctor was? [Luke nods] Why on earth didn’t you just tell me?

LUKE

I don’t know, Anne. I just couldn’t, I don’t even know why.

ANNE

Didn’t you think you could tell me? I’m your wife, Luke, you can tell me anything. [pause] So what exactly is it? Does he say what you’ve got?

LUKE

They’re still running tests. I don’t know. The doctor says it – might be pretty serious.

Like what, how serious?

ANNE

LUKE

[sits down, faces Anne] I’ve been having trouble – remembering little things. Just little – but weird things, and I’ve been moody – you know. The doctor says it might be neurological.

Neurological?

ANNE

LUKE

Like, a neurological problem – of some kind –

What, like what kind?

ANNE

LUKE

I don’t know. The doctor mentioned Huntington’s disease and some –

Huntington’s disease? Oh my God.

LUKE

He said that was very unlikely. It could just be stress, he said. But he also mentioned some form of Alzheimer’s, and a couple other things I can’t remember.

Why didn’t you tell me?

LUKE


ANNE

LUKE

Even me?

Even Gregory, sometimes. [a long silence follows] It might get worse, you know. Dr. Stevenson says it might. Anne, I don’t –

ANNE

No. Luke, it doesn’t matter. It doesn’t matter at all for us. I’m your wife no matter what. [puts her arms around him] I’m your wife.

Act I, scene v

NARRATOR 2

The constitution of the universe I believe may be set in the first place among all others in grandeur by reason of its universal content; it must also stand above them all in nobility as their rule and standard. Therefore if any man might claim distinction in intellect above all mankind, Ptolemy and Copernicus were such men, whose gazes were thus raised on high and who philosophized about the constitution of the world.
[narrator fades into sound of Anne on the phone in blackout. Then lights up. Anne is in the kitchen on the phone, Luke is in the living room.]

ANNE

... been feeling especially disoriented these last couple days, so his boss gave him the week off. ... uh huh. Yes, I'm very eager to. ... Sure. ... Wednesday would be fine. Three-thirty, sure. [as she talks she scribbles notes on a fridge calendar.] All right. We'll see you then. Thanks, Doctor. [hangs up, rushes to finish note] Luke! [moves to living room while talking, gathers Greg's toys into a bin] We have an appointment with Dr. Stevenson on Wednesday at 3:30, okay? [checks watch/clock] Damn, I'm going to be late.

LUKE

Can I help with anything?

ANNE

Umm, [pauses] Yeah, could you make Greg's lunch?

LUKE

Yeah, sure.

ANNE

[moving to stairs] Perfect. Thanks hon. [exits up stairs.]

[Luke moves to kitchen, opens two cupboards, finds bread. Gets bread, ham; sets them out on the table beside Greg's cereal bowl. Takes out two pieces of bread, then pauses, looks around as if confused. Goes back to the cupboard, gets peanut butter and knife. Spreads peanut butter on both slices. Starts to put them together, but accidentally knocks over a cup of juice on the table.]

LUKE

Shit. [gets a rag and cleans up the spill. Goes back to the sandwich, grabs some ham, quickly finishes it up, and then starts getting out other stuff for the lunch.]

ANNE

Five minutes, Greg! [to kitchen] You almost finished, hon?

LUKE

Yeah, sorry. I got held up. Sandwich is on the table.

ANNE


LUKE

What? [Anne holds sandwich open] Oh hell, Anne I'm sorry. How did I --

ANNE

It's all right, its -- [starts cleaning up quickly; throws sandwich away] no big deal. Do you have any cash, Greg can just buy lunch. [Luke searches pockets for money, rather inefficiently; Anne cleans up lunch stuff. Greg enters living room, headed to kitchen. Luke finds a wad of bills and change, hands it to Anne] Thanks. [Anne gets a ziploc and starts counting money into it. Enter Greg] Here honey, you can just buy today. Have you got everything?

GREGORY

Can I get a soda?

ANNE

No, I want you to get milk or juice. Here's your jacket. Bye Luke. [noticing his face] Don't worry about it.

LUKE

Yeah. All right. [Door slams. Lights down on Luke.]

Act I, sc. vi

[Scene opens on the kitchen and the living room. In the living room, Tyler and Gregory are sitting; Gregory is surrounded by supplies for his project, faithfully gluing yellow cotton onto Venus; Tyler has a book about the human body, from which he is reading periodically. In the kitchen, Anne and Carol are drinking coffee.]

TYLER

[Reading like a third grader, hesitating frequently and mispronouncing harder words] "The stomach is the first big stop in digestion after your mouth. The muscles in your stomach, along with special juice that your stomach makes, turn
your food into a gooey substance called chyme that your stomach squeezes into your small intestine.” Look, Greg, this is what food looks like when its in your stomach. [Points to the picture]

GREG

Si-ick.

TYLER

Gross, huh? I’m going to put some in my 3D model. It’s going to be really cool.

GREG

Have you finished making it yet?

TYLER

Kind of. My dad is helping me do a drawing of what it should look like, and I colored all the different parts.

ANNE

[takes a sip of coffee] We’ll have more test results on Friday. Dr. Stevenson put him on a bunch of meds three weeks ago, and his mood seems better, but his memory has clearly gotten worse.

CAROL

And they don’t have anything new to tell you?

ANNE

Nothing.

CAROL

[pause] How’s Greg doing?

ANNE

Oh gosh. He seems -- all right. I almost don’t know. He’s quieter lately, and he works on his project all the time.

CAROL

Are you sure he’s holding up?

ANNE

No, I don’t feel sure. But he’s so steady most of the time, and things with Luke are so unsteady, I’m just not sure what to do.

TYLER

Did your parents help you a lot with your planets?

GREGORY

No, I did them all by myself, except Dad helped me color the clouds yellow for Venus. It doesn’t have normal clouds, they’re made out of acid. But I haven’t finished earth yet, because its hard to do by myself.

CAROL

Isn’t there anyone you could ask to come stay? I mean, to help with Gregory for just a little while, until things straighten out?

ANNE

You know, I’ve thought of asking Don. He knows everything anyway, and Gregory loves him. But I feel bad, asking him to come.

CAROL

Well, he’s over here all the time anyway. He might be glad to be asked.

ANNE

Could be. And honestly, I don’t know how much longer I can keep up with myself and Gregory.

CAROL

I’m sure he’d be happy to stay for a while. And you know, you can always send Gregory over to our house any old afternoon.

ANNE

Thanks Carol. I know.

TYLER

“The human brain has control over your entire body. Without your brain, you could not move, speak, think, or feel. Even when you are asleep, your brain stays turned on, controlling your breathing and heart rate, and making your dreams.” Hey, Gregory, do you think if you took out the thinking part of your brain, the rest of your body would keep working?

GREGORY

[Anne and Carol enter from kitchen]

Carol
Okay Tyler, it’s time for us to get on home. Daddy’s cooking on the grill tonight.

Tyler
Aww, cool. Can Greg come?

Carol
[Carol looks to Anne; Anne nods.] Sure, if he wants to.

Gregory
Yesss!

Carol
All right, head on over guys. [The boys rush out the door. Carol gives Anne a hug.] Have a good night. And call Don, really. It’ll be good for everybody.

Anne
Maybe I will. Thanks.

[Carol heads out through the kitchen, and Anne sits down heavily on the sofa. Lights go down.]

Act II scene I

[Luke and Gregory are settled on the floor in front of the coffee table. They are working to perfect the model, adding rings and moons, asteroids, maybe some kind of backdrop. Somewhere on or near the model lies a 1st prize ribbon. Luke has a messy stack of books beside him, and he is consulting one of them as he talks to Gregory.]

Luke
Now, the closest planet to the sun is—what?

Gregory
Mercury.

Luke
That’s right, Mercury. [Luke points to the correct orbit, and Greg begins to string up Mercury. Luke, absorbed in the text, does not assist him.] [From Peterson’s First Guide] “Mercury, the innermost planet, orbits very close to the sun. Anyone watching it from Earth will never see it stray far from the sun in our sky. Mercury is not bright enough to be visible in the daytime, except during a total solar eclipse; it can be seen only near sunrise or sunset, usually low in the sky.”

Anne
[Begins to call at around “sunset”, from open door into the kitchen from outside] Luke! Luke, Don is here!

Luke
All right, Anne! “Mercury is, on average, 36 million miles from the sun—40 per cent of the distance of Earth from the sun. However, Mercury’s orbit is not round. In fact it is much farther out of round than that of Earth or any other planet except Pluto.”

Anne

Luke
Well I’m helping Greg with...

Gregory
Mercury.

Luke
Right. Couldn’t you guys just bring it in?

Anne
Fine, sure. [pause] Greg, how’s it coming?

Gregory
Good.

Luke
All right now. What’s the second planet from the sun?
I know, Venus. But I already did that one. And the third one, which is earth.

LUKE
All right then, what about number four? [pause. Gregory thinks.] What planet is fourth out from the sun?

GREGORY
I can’t think of it.

LUKE
[pause] You can’t remember at all? [Gregory shakes his head] No guesses?

GREGORY
No, Dad, I give up. What is it?

LUKE
Right. It’s –

DONALD
[Entering from the kitchen with suitcases, Anne in tow] Oh, I know this one. Mars, right Luke.

LUKE
Right. How’s it going, Don?

DON
Pretty good. How’s the project, Greg?

GREGORY
Awesome! I won the competition at my school, so now I get to go to the city science fair. [holds up ribbon] See? So Dad’s helping me fix it up.

DON
Wow, when is that?

GREGORY
I don’t know. In a few more weeks.

[During this conversation Don continues to move slowly across the room and up the stairs, but Anne stops behind the couch and watches Gregory and Luke. Luke is leafing through books toward the end of the conversation. Anne should remain behind couch until Don heads back down, they cross on stairs.]

GREGORY
Dad, I want to make the moon, but I don’t know how.

LUKE
Hmm? Oh the moon. The earth’s moon?

GREGORY
Yes. But I don’t know how to do it. It needs to be small.

ANNE
[Coming back down through the room] Greg, Luke, don’t forget to clean up this mess when you’re done. Greg, are you listening?

GREGORY
Yeah mom. [Luke and Greg begin discussion of moon, which will overlap with Donald and Anne’s discussion of the mess]

DONALD
[Just entered again from outside with a little more stuff] Ah, don’t worry about that, Anne. It’s just me you know.

ANNE

DONALD
We’ll clean it up later Annie, I swear. Scout’s honor. [Don heads back upstairs. Anne starts picking up clutter for a minute, then heads up the stairs right before Luke’s question.]

LUKE
[Talking over Anne, starting right after Greg’s “yeah mom”] Well, you’ll want the moon to look like it’s in earth’s orbit.

GREGORY
Yeah, it should.

LUKE
And we don’t want to just hang it from this wire, because it won’t stay close to earth that way.
GREGORY
Right and then you couldn't move the moon and the earth together. [demonstrates sliding the earth around its orbit]

LUKE
Well, what about — here [Luke takes a small round piece of styrofoam, sticks a toothpick in it, sticks it into the earth. This action takes a little more effort than it would normally.] Will that work?

GREGORY
Oh yeah! That will be good and we can paint it gray.

LUKE
Well, let's paint it then. [stopping Anne on the stairs] Anne, do we have any gray paint?

No. Just mix black and white.

ANNIE

LUKE
Thanks hon.

[Anne pauses to watch Greg and Luke again, then goes upstairs]

Act II, scene ii

NARRATOR 3
Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease, or CJD, is a rare, fatal brain disorder, which causes a rapid, progressive dementia and associated neurological disturbances. This disease is often referred to as a subacute spongiform encephalopathy because it usually produces microscopic vacuoles, or holes, in neurons that appear spongellite. The disease is named after Drs. Hans Gerhard Creutzfeldt and Alfons Jakobs, who documented the first cases of this illness in the 1920s. Reports indicate that the disease occurs sporadically worldwide, including in the United States, with an incidence of one case per million people each year.

[Lights up. Afternoon. Light slanting through from kitchen and window, outside of which you can see bare trees. Anne is on couch, napping, dust rag in hand; there is a basket of unfolded laundry beside her. Luke enters down stairway, holding Galileo's Dialogues.]

LUKE
Don! Donald? [Anne wakes up] Oh, hey, sorry honey.

ANNIE
Uh, its all right. Everything okay? How's your reading coming?

LUKE
All right. It's getting hard to focus, I thought I'd take a break. Where's Don, do you know?

ANNIE
Yeah, I sent him to the store for me. We need dinner food.

LUKE
Ah.

ANNIE
Well, I'd better start the bathrooms.

LUKE
Oh is that your next, uh, thing?

ANNIE
Unfortunately [groans as she sits up]

LUKE
Do you want some help up there?

ANNIE
Oh. Oh, well -- well you could -- [pauses to consider] Well, there's only one can of bleach. I'll just do it.
LUKE
[slightly disappointed] Oh. All right.

ANNIE
Thanks though, hon. [Anne exits to kitchen. Luke sits down in recliner. After about twenty seconds, he moves to the couch and starts folding the laundry. The job is cumbersome for him, moreso than it would normally be. Anne opens cabinet under kitchen sink, searches for bleach and yellow rubber gloves. Don enters carrying two bags of groceries.]

DON
Hey Annie. Hey, where do you want these?

ANNIE
Oh, hey, just ... in the fridge or whatever [pulls out can of bleach powder, one glove]

DON
[pulling a loaf of bread out of the bag.] Well, this doesn't go in the fridge.

ANNIE
Oh, here, I'm sorry. [puts bread away, goes back to search] I'm just trying to find my other glove. Oh did you find the --

DON
Teriyaki sauce, yes, I found it. Right there in the ketchup aisle.

ANNIE
Thanks, you're a godsend.

DON
No problem.

ANNIE
You've really helped out around here; I mean I know I haven't said much about it, but these last couple of weeks have been much smoother.

DON
Really, don't mention it. I'm family you know.

ANNIE
I know. But you didn't have to.

DON
Well, you're welcome. [Awkward pause. Don is holding a gallon of milk. Both suddenly move – Anne crawls back under the sink.]

ANNIE
Ah here's the other. If you can't figure out where something goes, just leave it and I'll get it later. [Anne exits]

DON
All-righty. [lights down as Anne reaches the kitchen doorway.]

Act II, scene iii

[The living room. Luke is sleeping in the recliner, and Anne is quietly tidying around him. There is a very messy pile of books beside the chair, filled with various books, some astronomy textbooks, some children's; Anne puts all of them back on the shelf, except for the one that is in Luke's lap. Other objects in the room may be telling of Luke's state of mind. The model is also beside the couch, hanging precariously; Anne can certainly tidy this area, but she treats any model pieces with caution, even delicacy. She is folding a blanket when Gregory appears on the steps in his PJ's, with a blanket and pillow.]

GREGORY
Mom?

Oh, honey. What are you doing up? I thought Uncle Donald was going to read you a bedtime story.

Gregory

[In a whisper, conscious of his sleeping father] He did, but fell asleep before he got to the end.

Anne

Oh, on your bed?

Gregory

Yeah. He almost was falling off, but I pushed him the whole way on.

Anne

Good job, Gregory. Do you want to go to sleep in my room then?

Gregory

No, I want to sleep down here. [Gregory sets down the pillow and begins to spread the blanket over the couch as best he can. Anne quickly comes to help him, then gets another blanket from a shelf or chairback. Gregory moves the pillow to the model side of the couch.] If I put my pillow over here, I can look at planets while I fall asleep.

Anne

Uh huh.

Gregory

I want to study them as much as possible, because it’s hard to get a job working with the planets. So I have to know a lot.

Anne

Did daddy tell you that?

Gregory

Kind of.

Anne

And is that what you want to do when you grow up, Greg?

Maybe.

Anne

Be an astronaut or something?

Gregory

Yeah.

Anne

Just like daddy, huh?

Gregory

But dad’s not an astronaut. Is he? He says he helps make buildings and things.

Anne

What? Oh, Greg I know. No, he’s not an astronaut. Goodnight now.

[Greg raises his arms to his mother. She bends down to hug him, kisses him. Anne exits into the kitchen, begins to leaf through a stack of photocopied articles on neurological disorders. Lights down briefly. Lights immediately back up – just down long enough to indicate a time lapse. Anne is still sitting at the kitchen table, a good deal further into the book. She closes it and saves her place. Anne exits the kitchen into the living room, just as Don comes down the stairs in a t-shirt and some kind of pajama pants. He stops on the stairs when he notices her. As they talk she moves up the stairs to meet him, so they can speak more quietly. There is a consciousness of the two who are sleeping.]

Don

Oh Hey.

Anne

Hey. Greg said you fell asleep in his bed.

Don

Yes, I’m sorry. I should move him back upstairs.

Anne

No, its all right, he’s asleep now. He didn’t seem to mind.

Don

I’ve never seen such an easygoing kid.

Anne

No, you're right. Not easygoing.

He's like a little –

Grownup?

Mystic.

Ah. [Pause.] Well, time for bed. You coming?

Hmm? No. Goodnight.

[Don exits up the stairs; Anne begins to return to the kitchen. Lights down.]

Act II scene iv

[The middle of the night. Anne is standing by the window of the kitchen; all the lights in the house are off, and a slight glow comes in through the window. Don comes down the stairs, across the living room quietly, into the kitchen. He hesitates in the doorway when he sees Anne, but then comes in and goes to the cupboard for a glass. Anne puts up a hand.]

ANNE

[In a whisper.] Shhh. Donald. [pause] It's really dark tonight.

Yeah?

Anne

There's no moon.

Yes there is, it was nearly full [Don comes to the window]

ANNE

It's already set.

DON

The stars are so bright though. Look, there's Orion there.

Where? Oh there, I see it now.

[The two of them stand together by the window, still and silent, for a full minute. At the end of the minute, Don goes to the cupboard, gets a cup, fills it with water. Anne does not move or look.]

DON

[without looking] Goodnight, Anne. [Don exits into living room. Lights down when he gets through the door.]

Act II, scene iv

[scene opens on Gregory and Luke sitting on the floor working on the model. Gregory is faithfully stringing up rocks for his asteroid belt, while his father glues strips of gauzy cloth onto Saturn. He is cutting them with a pair of nice shears, and at some point during the scene and probably more than once he will dip them in the rubber cement and use them to slather glue onto Saturn. The two work silently. Anne enters by the stairs, and immediately starts searching the room -- drawers, baskets, desk -- for something. Each one is thoroughly absorbed in their separate task. Don enters from outside through the kitchen.]

DON
Brr, it's cold as Christmas out there. I'm afraid you won't be able to go stargazing tonight boys, but from the looks of those clouds we might get a snowstorm.

Aww, do you think I'll get off school?

Could be, could be.

Yes!!!


They have big storms sometimes too. You can see them on the surface, like Jupiter's big red spot, but there not as big. It's mostly just gassy, though.

Gassy weather, huh? Anne, you look like you're up to no good over there.

[Resumes with vigor the scissor search, which had flagged since Don's entrance.] I'm looking for my good scissors. Help me, I can't find them anywhere, and I could have sworn they were in my desk.

I saw some in the kitchen drawer.

Oh no, those are my kitchen scissors. These are my good sewing scissors. You haven't seen them, have you guys?

[looks up after too long a pause] Huh? Sorry, what?

Never mind. Greg, you haven't been using my good scissors, have you?

No, Mom you told me not to, remember?

Yeah, I know. Sorry.

[has been half-heartedly searching shelves, the top of the stereo, somewhat nonsensical places, until his eyes light on the scissors that Luke had been using, currently sitting beside the can of glue.] Say, are those the ones there Anne?

Oh where?

There. Luke's got them, that's all.

What? Oh, these. Yes, I've got them.

[looking at the scissors] Luke, these are my good sewing scissors. Good grief, what have you been doing with them?

Nothing, just --

They're completely covered in glue! Couldn't you have used something else?

I'm sorry Anne. I needed them for Jupiter.

That's Saturn, Dad.

We needed an extra pair.

[Visibly angry, but attempting to keep control] No, no. That's all right.
I’m sorry. I just didn’t remember.

ANNE

It’s okay. Really. I’ll just – I’ll wash them off. Here. [Goes to Luke and takes the scissors out of his hand, then hurries into the kitchen, where she begins washing the scissors rather furiously. Greg watches his mother leave, then looks with concern toward Uncle Don.]

GREG

Is Mom all right?

DON

Yeah, she’s all right. Just a little upset. Go ahead and keep working, and I’ll come help you guys in a second.

[Greg nods and goes back to his model. Don goes into the kitchen, and Gregory slowly returns to his model. Luke gets up and goes to the desk, where he rummages around for something he ultimately does not find. Eventually he gives up and resumes his place on the floor, now spreading glue with a pencil from the floor. This all goes on at the same time as Anne and Don are talking.]

DON

[To Anne] Hey. You all right?

ANNE

[turns] Oh hey, Don. Yeah, sure I’m fine. Just – I’m just – [starts to cry,] Sorry, Gosh, this is really dumb. It’s just I’m really –

DON

Stressed out, yeah I know. It’s all right. [She sets the scissors in the sink, lets herself cry. Don gives her a long hug.]

There we are. And Luke’s going to be fine just as soon as they figure out what’s wrong.

I’m not sure I can keep it together til then.

DON

Of course you can. You’re a brave woman, Anne. Really. Now here [Grabs a handful of tissue from a box on the counter] You get your eyes, and I’ll get your nose, all right. [Anne laugh through her tears. Don holds a tissue in front of her nose.] Now blow. [Anne laughs again, still a shaky laugh. She blows her nose into the tissue, then they both dab at her eyes; their hands get a bit tangled up. Anne reaches over and touches Don’s face, then kisses him, briefly, then they kiss again. Just before the kiss, Greg gets up and walks toward the doorway, at such an angle that he can see into the kitchen before he is actually visible in the door. He stops abruptly when they begin to kiss. After freezing momentarily, he backs up a few steps, turns with a stunned look on his face, and returns slowly to his former position on the floor. After a somewhat extended second kiss, Don breaks abruptly away from Anne. They stare at each other. Lights down on kitchen.]

GREGORY

[AFTER A LONG PAUSE, IN A SHOCKED, LOW TONE.] Dad?

LUKE

[PAUSE] Greg?

GREG

Can I go to bed now? I don’t want to do this anymore.

LUKE

[PAUSE, DISTANTLY] Sure, Greg. Should I read you a bedtime story?

GREG

All right. [Luke gets up, moves toward the stairs. Greg does not move. He looks back at the kitchen doorway.]

LUKE


Act II, scene v

[Night. Don is asleep on the living room couch.]

NARRATOR 2

All in all, I find in my heart a great reluctance to grant this companionship between the earth and the moon, of which you want to persuade me, placing the earth in the host of the stars . . . for even if there were nothing else, the immense
separation and distance between the earth and the heavenly bodies seems to me to imply necessarily a great dissimilarity.

NARRATOR 4

If separation and distance are valid facts for arguing a great difference in natures, it is necessary on the other hand that closeness and contiguity should mean dissimilarity; and how much closer is the moon to Earth than it is to the other heavenly bodies. Confess, then, by your own admission, the great affinity between the earth and the moon.

[Don starts awake, sits up suddenly but not violently. Stares silently. Lights down.]

Act III, scene I

NARRATOR 1

Tonight a boy is looking at the night sky. “How many stars are there in the sky?” he asks his mother. “Billions and billions,” she says. “Do people live on them?” he asks his mother. “People can’t live on stars,” she says.

[Lights up on morning in the kitchen. Luke is sitting at the kitchen table. Donald is making eggs at the stove. Gregory enters through living room, dragging feet.]

What’s the matter with you? DON
Nothing. [Sits down immediately next to Luke] GREG
Nothing, huh? DON
There’s no snow. [pause] Dad doesn’t like eggs. GREG
Oh, he doesn’t? What do you want for breakfast, Luke? DON
Huh? GREG
Dad, what do you want to eat instead of eggs? LUKE
Oh yeah. [pause] Toast, please. DON
Allrighty, two pieces of toast, coming right up. [Donald cuts four slices of toast in the toaster.] Butter? GREG

[after a pause for Luke and no response] He always has jelly. [Donald puts the toast in the toaster and goes to the refrigerator. He comes back with a jar of thick, red jelly. Enter Anne, fully ready for the day. Her embarrassment should be immediately evident. She doesn’t look at Donald, but Donald does stop to steal a long glance at her.]

ANNE

Do you want eggs? DON
Oh, sure. Thanks. [pause] Greg, did you finish your math last night? ANNE

Yeah.

Good.

DON [brings over plates, all three at once] Okay, we’ve got toast for you, [sets down plate] and two plates of eggs. [sets down plates, pauses behind Anne. Then quietly.] How are you?

ANNE [flushed] Oh. Yeah, fine. All right. [starts putting butter on her toast]
DON
[quieter] You sleep?

ANNE
Some. [Greg slams his glass down noisily. Don moves.]

DON

[Once Greg is out of the way, Don gets a fork out, tries to hand it to Anne. She drops it.]

DON
Sorry. [Anne gets up.] No, its all right, sit down. [Anne grabs the fork off the floor and takes it to the sink; Don gets one out of the drawer, hands it to her.]

[Don returns to cleanup. Anne begins to eat, but slowly. Long silence, maybe thirty seconds, of eating, while Don washes dishes.]

Gregory, did you make your bed?

ANNE
GREG
No.

ANNE
Well, once you're done eating, go upstairs and make it, okay?

GREG
[ pause] I don't want to.

ANNE

GREGORY
I don't feel like it.

DON
Come on now, Greg. What's the matter with you this morning?

GREG
Nothing. Leave me alone!

LUKE
[ raising his voice just enough to silence Greg] Gregory. [ pause. Greg looks down.] You have to listen to your mom.

GREGORY
[ pause] Fine.

[Greg Exits. Anne watches him go. Pause.]

ANNE
[ with a sigh] Have you got any coffee over there, Don?

DON
Uh yeah sure. I'll get you some. [begins to open cupboard]

ANNE
No, I'll get it. [Anne rises, moves to cupboard. Don gets jelly from counter, takes it to fridge, brushes past Anne.]

[Opens the fridge, sets down jelly] Milk?

DON
ANNE
Yeah, sure. [Anne holds cup out, Don also holds cup to steady it. Pours milk. Silhouettes to audience. They stare at each other.]

LUKE
[distantly and not very loud, but when he speaks Anne starts and spills his coffee.] You know. I think I'll have some more coffee too. [Luke gets up with his mug, moves toward the coffee pot. Anne and Don move out of his way.]
[starts suddenly] Oh, my dress. I've gotta go - change. [moves nervously, sets down cup.] Uh, I'll see you later. [Anne rushes out door; Don looks at Luke. Lights down.]

Act III, scene ii

[Afternoon. Don in living room, sitting in Luke's armchair. Anne enters through kitchen, hurries out of her heels by the door, sets down her purse, and continues into living room while taking off her earrings. Surprised by Don.]

Oh. [stops short]

Hey there.

Hi. [starts up the stairs]

[to stop her] How's work?

[stopping again] Fine. Good. [turns, comes down the stairs a couple steps] Roger had me working on a divorce settlement in the morning, but after that it was mostly filing and stuff. [long pause, awkward. Anne turns to go upstairs again] Well --

You know - we didn't really talk about it.

[takes two steps toward the couch and leans on the back] Yeah, I know.

[turns again, walks toward the kitchen] I don't think I can yet. Can we do it later?

I guess so.

Okay. [takes two steps toward the kitchen, stops again without turning around] Are you going to leave?

Uh - I don't know.

All right. [Goes into kitchen, stands for a moment as if lost, then moves to the fridge and takes meat out to thaw. In the living room, Don looks at the kitchen doorway, then gets up and moves toward the kitchen. Anne picks up her shoes and moves toward the living room. She and Don nearly collide just inside the kitchen doorway. Anne is so startled that she start, screams, and drops one shoe. Don moves instinctively forward to steady her.]

Oh, sorry. Are you all right?

[breathlessly, leaning forward a little in relief, hand to heart] Gosh, you scared me.

[laughing] I know, are you okay?

Yes. Gosh. [starting to laugh, moving back a step] What did you need?

Nothing, I was just going to get a drink, that's all. [moves toward the fridge to grab a coke] What was that crash?

What? Oh, I dropped my shoe. [goes to retrieve it under the table]
[laughs] Small wonder. You jumped a mile.

Yeah, no kidding. I almost fell over. [pause] Hey, you wanna grab me a coke?

Sure.

[Don opens the fridge again and grabs a coke. Anne takes it from his hand. She leans against counter, pops it open, takes a sip.]

Where’s Gregory, do you know?

He’s still at Tyler’s.

Mmm. [long silence]

So – uhh – [cuts off]

Yeah?

[embarrassed] Well – are you in love with me, or what?

Oh geez, Don. Something like that.

Hmm. Well, there are worse things I guess.

[half laugh] You sure about that?

Not really. [long pause. Anne fiddles with the tab on her can.]

Do you want to leave?

No. I don’t want to leave. Do you think I should?

Well, no. Not if you don’t want to.

Well, then. I’ll stay I guess.

[sighing and rubbing her forehead.] Well good. And I’m really, really sorry.

Well, I was asking for it, blowing your nose and all. Do you remember when they made us kiss at Aunt Lynn’s?

[almost in unison with his ‘Aunt Lynn’] Aunt Lynn’s Christmas party, yes I do. Damned mistletoe. You milked it for all it was worth I remember.

[still in a flirting way] Well, you know, you did look really hot that night.

Oh yeah, I bet I did.

Yes, you did. In that green dress?

[looks at him hard] I can’t believe you remember that.

[a little embarrassed. Looks down.] Yeah, well. You know.

[after a pause] Thanks.
Act III, scene iii

NARRATOR 3
The difficulties involved in diagnosing Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease may have prevented its identification in some cases. Since the disease progresses rapidly, the patient may die before a diagnosis can be made. Furthermore, some physicians may not even consider the possibility of a CJD diagnosis because the disease is deemed to be rare. A definitive diagnosis of CJD has traditionally required a brain biopsy, however, this procedure is often discouraged due to its invasive nature, and the lack of benefit to the patient from a correct CJD diagnosis, since the disease is invariably fatal.


DON
Aww, they’re all over him! Come on, go, go – shit! [Throws his hands up. Looks at Luke] Luke, you with me there? [no response, game resumes] All right, here we go. [leans forward as the play gets underway] Yes, aww, man, are you seeing this! Go, go, go, come on – come on – touchdown! Luke are you watching this? Come on, thirty-nine seconds left! [talking again to the TV] Alright Fil, this is for the game – and it’s good! Dallas is going to the Superbowl! [pause] Luke?

LUKE
[quietly, slowly] Do you know the constellation Aries? It’s named for a ram who rescued two children. Hermes sent the ram to the Phrixus and Helle, to carry them away from danger. [pause] But Helle fell from his back and drowned in the sea. [pause] Do you know the story?

[after a pause] No, I don’t

DON
I read that today in one of my old astronomy books, but then after that I couldn’t concentrate. I read a whole chapter on the Pleiades that I can’t remember.

DON
It’s okay, Luke. You’ll go back to the doctors tomorrow, they’ll run a few more tests, and they’ll get this thing figured out.

[remote, calm] What if they don’t.

DON
[long pause] I don’t know.

LUKE
Thanks for helping Anne.

DON
Don’t mention it.

[pause. Don turns back to game. Greg enters in pajamas.] Hey Greg.

GREG
Hi. [Greg comes around couch to Lukes side.] Dad, Mom said to remind you about your appointment tomorrow. [long pause. Greg waits, watching. Don turns back to TV. Greg lays his hand on Luke’s arm.] Dad?

LUKE
Okay. Thanks. [Greg sits down facing the TV, on the floor next to his dad. Long silence. TV.]

DON
Hey, Greg, do you want to work on your model tomorrow afternoon? You and me and your dad could all work on it together.

GREG
No thank you.

DON
But isn’t the fair coming up next week? Don’t you want to work on it?

GREG
I’m sick of it.
Aww, come on Greg, you can't be sick of it.

DON

I am sick of it.

GREG

But you're gonna have to finish it sometime—

DON

[over sometime] No I don't! I hate it!

GREG

[Greg stands up, kicks the model over hard. Stands over it, then stomps on it twice. Long silence. Gregory starts to cry, still looking at the model. When Gregory begins his attack, Don stands up, but Luke also stands and lays a hand on Don's shoulder. When Greg begins to cry, Luke moves over to him and kneels, placing a hand on his shoulder.]

GREG

[through tears] I'm sorry Dad

LUKE

It's okay. [puts his arms around Greg]

GREG

I'm really sorry.

LUKE

Don't worry. We'll fix it tomorrow.

GREG

Will you work on it with me?

LUKE

Sure. Now go up and brush your teeth.

GREG

[Greg stares for a minute, a little puzzled by Luke's response, but then heads slowly upstairs. Don, who has remained standing, goes to the model and stands over it. Lights down]

Act III, scene iv

[Midnight. Snow is falling outside the window. Don is asleep on the couch. Anne appears on the stairs in a nightgown, no robe. She comes down the stairs halfway, pauses, continues down. She stops behind the couch and looks over at the living room window, then down over Don. She looks down at him, moves to the stage right side of the couch, perches there, looking at his face. After a short time, she reaches out hesitantly toward his face, comes close, pulls back but without changing expression. Then her eyes fall on the model. Her face falls, hardens. She stands, looks down at it for a while, crouches, reaches out to put her hand on it. She examines it. Then she stands again, looks at Don without changing expression. Then she exits to the kitchen, stands by the window as in Act II. Lights down.]

Act III, scene v

[In blackout a radio is heard, tuning, then "further accumulation through the morning and well into the afternoon. Businesses and schools have been closed all across the greater Baltimore area. Stay tuned for a detailed list of closing and cancellations, after the break." Sound of commercials turned down low. Lights up first in the window to show the snow, then in the kitchen and living room. Anne is sitting at the kitchen table in a bathrobe with coffee, head buried in one hand. The clock indicates that it is 9:30ish. In the living room, Legos are all scattered – space shuttles, lego men, individual blocks and half-constructed fortresses. Tyler and Gregory enter through the kitchen door, covered in snow. They are chasing each other]

GREGORY

Chee-ooo, chee-ooo, chee-ooo [other laser sounds, continuing]

TYLER

Rarrrrr, I'm an alien, I'm an alien, raarr, I'm going to eeeaaat, yourrrr, braiiiiinnnnnn. Raar! [Boys continue to yell similar sounds, Gregory making shooting noises, Tyler yelling, etc. Anne only looks up momentarily.]

ANNE

Boots off, boys.
[Greg stops briefly in response, but Tyler keeps running, and then both continue, chasing each other into the living room and picking up ships. They immediately transition into a lego battle.]

TYLER
[Slamming his ship against Gregory’s] Pwoooossshhh! You’re dead!

GREGORY
No way, because my ship has super invincibility shields. Pow, pow, pow, pow!

TYLER
[stops attacking] You can’t have invincibility shields! I already bombed your ship!

GREGORY
Yes I can! I already called it before we went outside!

ANNE
Boys!

TYLER
It doesn’t matter. Invincibility is against the rules!

ANNE
[over ‘the rules’] Greg and Tyler! Quiet down please, your father is still sleeping! Did you take off your boots?

GREGORY
Just a minute, mom!

ANNE
Don’t just a minute me. I want you in this kitchen, right now, taking those boots off.

GREGORY
All right, mom. [The boys go into the kitchen and sit down by the door to take off their boots.] Where did Uncle Don go?

ANNE
[pause] I don’t know, honey.

GREGORY
How long is he going to stay at our house?

ANNE
I don’t know, Gregory. Now, boys, why don’t you – go – play in the living room, quietly.

[Boys exit to living room, where they pantomime play for a short time, then go upstairs, still pantomiming play. Shortly after the boys exit the kitchen, Don enters]

DON
Hey, good morning

ANNE
Morning. Where did you go?

DON
Work, but they sent us home. Geez, you look beat. Didn’t you sleep?

ANNE
Not much.

DON
Well, don’t worry so much, huh?

ANNE
Very funny.

[Don begins to massage her shoulders, then kisses her hair. Anne stiffens a little.]

DON
It’ll work out fine. [goes for coffee. Silence]

ANNE
How do you know?

DON
Well – there’s not really much to work out, is there? I came here to support you, and that’s what I’m doing.

ANNE
You know it’s not that simple.

DON
Why not?

ANNE
Because I have a husband and a son who need support. And Greg’s smart. He’s – intuitive. Did he wreck the model?

DON
[pause] Yeah, he did. I put it in the closet this morning.

[As they speak, Luke appears on the steps. He begins to descend, but he is a bit wobbly and has to concentrate more than usual. Not frail, just unsteady. About three steps from the bottom, his leg stiffens and jerks, causing him to stumble and fall with a bang. This fall corresponds with the end of Anne and Don’s conversation.]

ANNE
[tensely] Well, I saw it last night. He might not understand it, but he senses what’s happening.

DON
[with a sharp exhale] Alright.

ANNE
I could be wrong.

DON
Well, what do you think we should –

[Loud noise of Luke falling]

ANNE
Oh no, Greg? [rushes to living room] Luke, what happened? Are you hurt?

LUKE
I –

GREG
[coming down stairs, with Tyler in tow; Tyler remains at the top] Dad?

ANNE
It’s all right Greg.

GREG
What happened?

ANNE
How far did you fall?

LUKE
I just slipped.
DON
Should I call the hospital?

ANNE
No, call the doctor. His number's by the phone. Oh my God.

LUKE
I couldn't make my leg move. It started shaking, and I couldn't stop it.

ANNE
Do you think you can stand on it?

LUKE
It just gave out.

ANNE
Come on, let's get you to the couch. [Anne helps Luke to his feet; Greg attempts to aid in the support.]

Act III, scene vi

[Lights up on Don at the kitchen table, close to twilight. Enter Anne through the kitchen door in a coat. Don stands up as she enters.]

DON

ANNE
Fine now. The doctor wants him at the hospital overnight for observation. Where's Gregory?

DON
Asleep. After all the action he was exhausted. [a little tenderly] How are you?

ANNE
All right. I'm going back to the hospital for the night. I just need to get some stuff together.

DON
Oh. Should I just stay here with Greg, then?

ANNE
[deep breath] No, I think I'll send him over to Carol's for the night. I guess you can - go home. [looks at him]

DON
[pause, realization] Oh. Well. Just like that, huh?

ANNE
Yeah.

DON
I see.

ANNE
I know its not fair. But I'm so ashamed of myself, Don. It's the only thing I can think of.

DON
Well, what can I say? I'll pack tonight I guess. [starts to leave the kitchen]

ANNE
I'm sorry.

DON
Act III, scene vii

[Lights up. Luke is hobbling toward the couch with a bandaged ankle; he sits down slowly on the stage right side. Greg is rummaging through the closet for pieces of his model. He comes out the first time with the main body of the model, then the second time with odds and ends, as well as the two smashed planets. In this scene, Luke’s responses are slightly delayed.]

GREGORY
I think the earth and Saturn are both ruined. Look. [Comes over to Luke, holds the two planets up.]

LUKE
Oh. We’ll have to do them over.

GREGORY
Do you think we can fix them in time? [waits. Luke nods] We’ve only got two days, though. Can we finish?

LUKE
S-sure, Greg. I think so.

GREGORY
What should we do first? [no immediate response] Should we make new rings for Saturn?

LUKE
Yes, I remember. We used pipe cleaners.

GREGORY
Yeah. We still have some left over. [searches for pipe cleaners in closet, brings them to Luke. Luke starts working on the rings, a little painstakingly.] Should I work on earth?

LUKE
Sure.

[Greg begins to work on earth, using glue to affix a piece of green cloth. While trying to attach it, Greg gets glue on his fingers, which causes the cloth to stick to his fingers rather than the ball. He flings his fingers through the air in an attempt to detach the cloth. Anne enters from upstairs, looking exhausted and carrying a laundry basket.]

GREG
Darn it!

ANNE
[setting down basket, a little surprised] Whoa, hey, what’s up Greg? Oh, I see. Here. [Kneels by Greg, helps him to detach the cloth, deftly glues it to the earth.] There we go.

LUKE
We need Don to help us. Where is he?

ANNE
Well, hon—he had to go back home for a while. He might come over tomorrow.

LUKE
Is he coming to stay again?

ANNE
[awkward pause] Well—

GREGORY
[suddenly anxious] He’s not, is he mom?

ANNE
[kneels down by Greg] No, Greg, he’s not.

[Anne reaches out to stroke Gregory’s hair, but he shys away from her.]

GREGORY
[clearly still upset] Are you mad that he went home?

ANNE
No. Look at me, honey. I told him he should go home, because we needed some time as a family. Okay? [Gregory looks away. She reaches over to lay her hand on his shoulder, and speaks gently.] All right?

GREGORY

[quietly] Okay.

LUKE

Will Don still help us with the planets?

ANNE

Do you want him to, Greg?

GREGORY

[a long, deliberating pause] No, I want you to help us instead. Will you?

ANNE

All right. I'll come down in just a little while. [Anne rises, picks up laundry basket. Lights down.]

Act III, scene viii

[Scene opens on Luke and Gregory in the living room. Gregory is asleep on the couch. Luke is sitting on the floor with the half-reconstructed model, working on repairs. Snipping of scissors.]

NARRATOR I

Beyond Pluto the stars stretch out. Little and big, bright and dim.

[Enter Anne. Silence as Anne enters, comes down the stairs, goes to the window.]

And then beyond those stars there is still more space – more moons, stars, planets, galaxies.

[pause. Anne looks out window.]

LUKE

The night is very dark. The moon is waning.

ANNE

[without expression] You're right. But there it is, shining low in the sky.

[pause]

NARRATOR I

Somewhere way out in the distant spaces of the sky, a faraway planet spins around a faraway sun.

[Anne moves away from the window, sits on the stage left side of the couch by Gregory's feet, drops her head.]

And far, far away a boy looks out the window at the night sky.