

Act I: Releasing the Tides

The stage is bare, the light is dim. On stage, Rob sits on a worn chair. Nan is on the bench, center. He is facing her while she stares directly out. In his hand is a book. As the lights come up ever so softly it is apparent that he is reading to her.

Rob

“The bay was red that night. Spring had just arrived two days before. I am sitting wearing short-sleeves. Almost in tears ‘cause I had forgotten how it felt. It was the sun that caused the ripples to turn vibrant and when I looked up, I stared and didn’t worry about losing my sight. Tiny portions of clouds crossed the red orb. I am on the shore of wonderland. Where to go from here? Maybe catch a stone. Hop three feet back and still be going forward. Maybe I’ll squint and see fairies across in the woods that never break until you are five feet in front of them, ‘course you never will be. Maybe find a log and be shipwrecked ‘til morning. Do all these things and more if I could. Think I’ll just blow some more bubbles. Watch ‘em float so high. Taking flight, glistening in rainbows. Soft miracles. That’s what I’ll do sitting here. Watch ‘em float up and burst and wait for the light to sink.” Okay, Nan. That’s that. The end of that one. Time to go in and get some sleep.

Nan

Oh no. One more passage. Please, Rob. Just one more.

Rob

I can’t even see the pages now. It’s getting dark out.

Nan

One more. Then I’ll go in. I promise I’ll go in tonight.

Rob

That’s what you said last night.

Nan

It was just so warm.

Rob

Well, I’m going in. Have to get up early tomorrow. Are you coming?

Nan

One more.

Rob

No!

Nan
(pause) I think I will sit out here a while longer.

Rob
It'll start getting cold.

Nan
Thank you for the blanket last night.

Rob
You were shaking.

Nan
It was my quilt.

Rob
Knew it would be warm.

Nan
But, tonight, it will stay warm.

Rob
Nan...

Nan
You have to appreciate it now. I wouldn't want to miss it.

Rob
Huh?

Nan
The warmth.

Rob
You should get some sleep. We do have a visitor coming tomorrow.

Nan
Who?

Rob
Nan, I've told you so many times by now.

Nan
I can't remember, Rob. Is it Miss French from next door? I haven't seen her for so long. We used to drink coffee. Do you remember that Rob? How we would drink coffee and laugh and you would be leaving for work and say, "With all your silly antics, I don't

know how either of you get anything done.” I would smile and hurry you out the door and the two of us would go on laughing. We found time. We always did. Always made the two of you lunch before you left in the morning. In the station wagon. I always had dinner ready when you got back. Always had the house tidy and still had time in the morning to entertain Miss French.

Rob

(pause) She moved a couple of weeks ago. Don't you remember? She got that job upstate.

Nan

No. You never told me.

Rob

I did! She asked to see you before she left. Have some coffee. You said no. You were out here—wouldn't go inside.

Nan

No. You never told me. If you did, I didn't hear you.

Rob

Well, you sure as hell heard me at least one of the times that I told you Harry is coming tomorrow.

Nan

Mr. Richards?

Rob

Coming to look at the house.

Nan

What's wrong with it?

Rob

Nothing.

Nan

It's still there, isn't it?

Rob

Last time I checked.

Nan

Well, what does he want with our house? It's a perfectly good house. That's what you said Rob when we first saw it. "A perfectly good house for a perfectly good family." You remember that, don't you Rob?

Rob

Yeah.

Nan

Now, that was twenty years ago now. My, how time does fly by.

Rob

(distant) Doesn't it.

Nan

Seems like yesterday you picked me up and carried me down that path. Always said you'd buy me a dream. You did huh? Buy me a dream. Knew how much I loved the water. Said, "There's a bay out back for the two of you to sit by when I'm working." We did ya' know. Came out here. Fruit. Lots of fruit. Picnic food. Peanut butter and jelly and iced tea. I'd make that iced tea every day once it started getting warm. Remember that?

Rob

Nan. He's coming to look at the house. He's coming becau—

Nan

Sometimes cottage cheese. He only liked it once in a while. Once in a blue moon.

Rob

Because we're selling the house. Remember, Nan! Harry's coming to look at the house 'cause we're selling it.

Nan

I think that you may be right. I think you may have told me.

Rob

He'll be here bright and early. I think you should get some sleep.

Nan

Oh, I will.

Rob

Inside.

Nan

Maybe inside. Maybe later, Rob. Not now. It's so warm.

Rob begins to leave.

Rob

It's been a year. A full year.

Nan

All the seasons come and go. Now I can sit outside again and not get cold. It was so cold 'til now. Even many months ago—when it was hot.

Rob

Do you want me to get the quilt?

Nan

I won't need it. I'll come in tonight. I promise Rob. I will come in tonight and curl up beside you so you won't be cold.

Rob

I'll be inside.

Nan

You'll be very cold. Haven't you always been cold inside? Even many months ago when it was searing hot out. You were cold, weren't you? At night always the coldest. I know I was. I could tell you were because your skin was so pale. When you are hot you have color. You always have color. Always have something. Tells you feel it. When you're hot that is.

Rob

Are you hot Nan?

Nan

No. I'm warm. Just a little warm. Wearing short-sleeves. Did you notice that?

Rob

Yeah.

Nan

I love short-sleeves too. I know how he felt.

Rob

Always knew how he felt.

Nan

No. I know how he felt. Never knew. Never... Did you know Rob?

Rob

It's late.

Nan

Yes, you go get sleep.

Rob

Do you want the journal? To read to yourself?

Nan

No. You know that. I would never let go of it. You can read to me tomorrow. Won't you, Rob? You read to me again tomorrow. Sunset.

Rob

Do you want to talk to Harry when he comes tomorrow?

Nan

I don't have anything to say.

Rob

Yes. Goodnight Nan.

Nan

Goodnight Rob.

Robs exits. Nan sits up and stares at her hands, her legs. She looks around as if someone watches. As though her movements are not allowed. She then stands. So slowly. She walks downstage and looks down. She sighs and sits, pulling her legs to her chest. She caresses them.

Nan

Do you want to hear Watership Down again tonight? Do you want to hear about the bunnies? You love the bunnies don't you? I remember how you stood every night and waited for it to unravel. And I would squint and hold back that little tear. Do you remember how I would hold you as I read? Your head was cradled in the small perch between shoulder and breast. You would smile up at me. You couldn't talk then. I remember when you started. You never really stopped, did you? You kept going. We waited so long for that first word. And then it came. (stops) Out here it came. All three of us were here that day. You were crawling around, clapping your hands together. Laughing like a real little boy. That was before we could tell you. Before you could have even understood why we always had that little tear. I would touch you and you would giggle. Always giggling before you could talk. Then it came. So slowly you looked up and we, we kept repeating the words to everything you know. Waiting. Pointing—"Momma, say Momma. Dadda—say Dadda". We giggled too. And then you looked up to the sky, right up there, beyond the bay and you took a deep breath, I knew it was deep because my hand was always on your chest and you sighed and lunged your

little hand up and said “moon”. It wasn’t perfect, but we knew what you meant. And then, then we always knew. And you never stopped talking. From then on you just talked and talked, making the most of your time—well, everything was a story.

Rob enters carrying a quilt.

Rob

I brought you the quilt.

Nan

Sshh. He hasn’t come yet.

Rob

The stitches are coming loose.

Nan

I’ll fix them tomorrow.

Rob

(awkward laugh) I was looking for you inside. I was looking when I realized that the threads were falling out and I was going to ask you if you wanted to stitch them up. You weren’t there.

Nan

One more passage about—the one about the moon. You know that one. He talks about you in that one.

Rob

Not like he talked about you.

Nan

In the story. In the story, Rob. He talked about—

Rob

In the evening he talked about you.

Nan

Which one?

Rob

Each.

Nan

No. Story? He never mentioned me in his journal.

Rob

Not in stories. Only in the evening. I could hear him when he was all bundled up. Talking about you.

Nan

He mentions you with the moon. I think sometimes you missed it. He didn't say your name.

Rob

He called yours.

Nan

(quietly) No.

Rob

It was when you were away.

Nan stands. There is a fire in her eyes as she is lifted from the dreams. The dreams that settled her to the shore. She was washed.

Nan

I never left him! It couldn't have been when I was away. Never. Not one of the nights when he was breathing. I never left him!

Rob

I'll read you a story.

Rob hands her the quilt.

Nan

(softly) How can you say I left him? How could you have heard? You haven't heard any story that I haven't.

Rob

(pause) I'm sorry, Nan. I never heard. You were always there. If I had heard, you would have too.

Nan

I would have. I did.

Rob

Nan, (pause) what do you wait for?

Nan

What a silly question, Rob. I'm not waiting for anything.

Rob

Do you wait for him?

Nan

Do you remember the time that we rented that boat and went out on the water--that was such a nice day. It was in autumn, that day. The leaves kept falling into the boat. You said it might just sink us. I knew that they wouldn't. I think that they were gifts really, those leaves. So many fell, we just piled them up on the planks and used them as cushions.

Rob

You said he hadn't come yet. You told me to be quiet.

Nan

You must be mistaken, Rob.

Rob

Maybe we should go out tomorrow.

Nan

Wouldn't that be nice.

Rob

While Harry's here. We could go out to the docks in town. Get a sandwich at Mirabelle's with the bread they make right there. A fresh turkey sandwich with cranberry sauce.

Nan

You got that for me when you told me. When the two of us got back from lying under the stiff sheets and staring at white walls. You told me what they told you that day. The lake was beautiful that day.

Rob

I bought you ice cream too. You loved cherry ice cream.

The two sit on the bench as they did that day. Their motions mimic those of that day as though both are brought back by their movements: as if arched backs and cradled arms birth true image.

Nan
The day that brought his name.

Rob
And I sat you down.

Nan
He was very quiet in the stroller wrapped in blue blankets. Like he was listening too.
Like he knew it was his fate that made our voices heavy.

Rob
They told me in the lobby, under fluorescent lights.

Nan
I don't think I ate the ice cream.

Rob
I was going to wait until you were done.

Nan
Oh, I knew something was wrong with the blood.

Rob
And I took your hand and tried to warm it.

Nan
'Cause it wasn't quite summer.

Rob
And then—

Nan
How do you place limits on a life that's so young?

Rob
There were medicines to make it easier as he got older.

Nan
To your muscles unraveling. Perhaps it was because of my blood.

Rob
Do you want your cherry ice cream?

Nan
It's too cold for ice cream.

Then why is it melting? Rob

Because it's very upset too. Nan

I think we should go home now. Rob

Home. That sounds nice. Nan

I think you should go home, Nan. Rob

Oh, I am. Nan

Nan falls out of the story and lies on the bench.

Maybe I'll read you a story. Rob

Did you notice? It is starting to get cold. Nan

It does every night. Rob

Yes. It does. Doesn't it? Nan

Rob takes out book.

Rob
“And that night, I would have run. I would have left the shore and abandoned it all to find the reason that I uttered at all. Over and over the story of the moon. Of how I gleamed when I realized that mouth had moved. And he stands in calm reserve, waiting for the milk to dry so he could hold me too. He is marked by buttons and ties and home-made handkerchiefs embroidered for desks that don't smile back but put food in our mouths. The same mouths that were pursed to speak even though they are trapped in rerun and won't know any better. Mouths that are destined to only pretend to,”

Nan
Did you catch that, Rob? He meant you back there.

Rob

Maybe.

Nan

I wrote your name on the handkerchiefs. And always a little picture...

Nan begins falling into sleep.

Nan

Sometimes flowers, sometimes big puffy clouds. Always something happy.

She is asleep. Rob wraps the quilt tightly around her frame. He looks at her with love in his eyes. Love and concern. He wanders downstage. Opens journal.

Rob

“to know any other life but this. This life that believes in routine and routine believes in it. I wonder if the moon is made out of cheese. I wonder if it’s warmer up there. Beyond the clouds. The sun heats it all up and you never shake. You only shiver when you want to.”

The lights dim slowly and the picture is framed and it is noticed that one aspect is missing. That in the man of button down shirts and in the woman of blanketed dreams, the bench is lacking that one component that would make it complete. And the lights on the stage fade until little is left to notice, until all that is heard is the sound of a book closing and a heavy sigh.

Lights.

Rob enters. The lights come up ever so dimly on the bench that could once be called red and now only worn. Nan is curled into sleep with the quilt draped over, cascading about. Rob

stops his approach from stage right and gazes, straining as though he may be able to hear the dream if he listens close enough. He has been awake the whole night and his eyes are sunken. His briefcase shakes in his hand. Coming out of the breast-pocket of his jacket is a handkerchief.

Rob

Nan. Nan. Nan, time to get up.

Nan

I was sleeping.

Rob

I think I saw your eyelids move before, like you were having a dream. A dream that you could really see.

Nan

Oh, I think I was.

Rob

You didn't come in last night.

Nan sits up and begins to fold the quilt.

Nan

You see, I was telling stories until very late.

Rob

Oh. (pause) I have to go into the office for a bit. I thought I'd be able to take the whole day, but I only got half.

Nan

You work too much Rob. Seems to me some of the younger boys down there could pick up some of the work that you just can't get to right now. Seems to me that the company depends just a little too much on you being there.

Rob

It really doesn't bother me, you know that Nan. I feel good about them needing me.

Nan

Isn't it time you took a rest?

Rob

It will come. Anyway, Harry should be here soon. I haven't spoken to him in a couple of months, but he told me that he would schedule me in since he is coming down to the area this week. Plus, we decided that today would be the best day out of any to start moving on. A full year's passed and we really don't need the space.

Nan

I don't know if we should leave, Rob. I think that I may stay.

Rob

Nan, you can't stay. We're selling this house.

Nan

No one will want it Rob. The families will come to look at it and they will see that it is someone else's, that they could never live here because another family did and this house will always be filled with our memories--not the people's looking at the house. They will see that it is ours and stays much better as ours.

Rob

It is time for the two of us to have a new home that we can feel is ours, the two of ours.

Nan

It would be a house.

Rob

Harry will be here soon and I will not have you scaring him away or making a scene or anything of the sort. You are to tell him that we are selling the house, you are to tell him that we are moving away from here, you are to tell him that our son has been dead a full year and it is over! You are to tell him that this is no longer that family's house, that it is to be a new family's home.

Nan has become lost in herself, or in some other world, in some place that Rob wants to believe is foreign to him.

Nan

Don't you like the breeze today? Would you like to color it with crayons? I would. I would like to color the wind and then walk on it.

She gets up and passes Rob. In her arms there appears to

be nothing, but to Nan in her arms lies her baby.

Nan

And we would walk the sky and go as high as we wanted, painting our way with crayons. Rubbing them back and forth so that the sky is sparked with patches of blue that still shines through because it is so hard to color in everything when it comes to crayons. And there is only so much color in a crayon, but we could still get very far. Say it, come on, you can say it,

Rob

Nan.

Nan

Cray-yawn. Cray-yawn. Cray-

Rob thrust himself at the memory.

Rob

Nan stop this now! I won't have it.

Nan, in his grasps and being thrown about, appears to notice none of it. Her face does not change the entire time that Rob is tossing her about and her limbs and skirt flail (as though caught in the wind).

Rob

I won't have you carrying on and on! I fucking can't take reliving it all day every day! We knew what was coming since he was born and we prepared, we gave him fucking everything that we could, we gave him every ounce of fucking love that we could drain from our veins! Fuck it, Nan! Fuck it! Let it fucking go!

Nan

And the wind causes us to trip sometimes and slide back down, but the two of us will keep pushing up and up and up—

Rob

Nan! Why, every day, why? I can't take it. Losing my son was just as hard on me! Why, Nan? Why!

Nan

And even if we slide down I will paint more lines. Say it, cray-yawn. Say it for Momma. He said it! Oh, Rob, Rob, did you hear that—

Rob

Wake up Nan! Just wake up!

Nan stops and looks at Rob. By this point she is a mess, her clothes tattered, her hair mangled, and she is even half way to the ground. Yet she looks up with care.

Nan

Did you hear it, Rob? He said it. He really is beginning to talk, what a smart little boy we have.

Rob lets her go. She slumps onto the ground and finds the handkerchief that has fallen out of her husband's pocket.

Nan

This one has a tiger lily. Do you like the tiger lily, Rob, or would you rather I stuck with carnations?

Rob

This mourning. This mourning that has gone on for just too long, what does it do, Nan? It doesn't bring him closer.

Nan

It does, Rob. It does.

Rob

It's time we start our own new stories, ones that aren't scrawled in his journal. Maybe we can even try again—with another child.

Nan

So we can watch as another one of our creations deteriorates before our eyes. So we can hand him a life sentence as soon as he breathes too? No, Rob.

Rob

I'm selling the house.

Nan

I'll relish the cold.

Rob

You can't stay here outside by the bay forever.

Nan stands, she begins to dance.

Nan

I hear the music.

Nan's dance is awkward and slow. Melancholy guides the feet even stronger than the smile because with melancholy the only tune is the stifled tears that are being fought away. So the dance grows faster and fuller and duller, in a sense, because escape can only be embodied in so many flicks of the feet.

Nan

And I will sing out loud and feel him in my toes. Can't you feel your toes, Rob, or have they gone numb? Are they blue, Rob, and about to fall off? Because I can still dance Rob—I can still dance. Do you hear it, Rob, it's a birthday tune. Because it is a year today!

Rob turns pale, so lost in the morning that he woke to, the morning he had believed would give way to possible fresh starts. He has lost sight and tired himself from the battle and simply begins to brush off his briefcase as Nan buries herself under the bench only to emerge with scattered papers.

Nan

"Today is for candles. It is my birthday. I don't want any presents, but Mommy and Daddy I think already got me some things. I wouldn't mind a cake, 'cause I like to blow out candles 'cause candles are for wishes and I like wishes. Daddy gets home soon and I

can't wait. Mommy told me to write in my new journal until daddy gets home. They left it at the end of my bed. It was wrapped in bright blue paper and they gave me a pen and it has water in it and a puppy and he floats up and down with the pen. They told me to write things important in it and important things are things that make things different so today is important because today is different. Today I get to make a wish and spend the whole night with Mommy and Daddy and Daddy promise he wouldn't do work tonight so we can play games and I'll make my wish and just as I do they take a picture, like they always do and that way I won't lose it. I guess that's all but today is important and I have to remember that."

The lights abruptly go off as her dance ends and he stops looking to turn and leave for work.

The lights come up and Nan is seated in front of the bench. She has laid out the quilt as though there will be a picnic. She hums to herself and is trying to calm her hair and her clothes from the earlier frantic yells of Rob. She hums a children's tune, one of the universal that cause any to remember the smell of childhood. From stage left comes Jimmy, he is nearing middle age, possibly already crossing that line without notice. He carries weeds with a few flowers scattered in between. His walk is off, as though one of his legs is too short, or one too long. He begins to hum the tune that Nan is humming and slowly makes his way to Nan. His clothes are just as frayed and his suspenders are snapped and reattached with twine. He is simple in his desires and this allows the look that always accompanies

his bright eye to be deemed
no less than content.

Jimmy

Miss Nan, hello, Miss Nan. I didn'ta mean to interrupt you or nothin' but I picked some flowers for you this mornin' 'cause I remembered what today was and thought you might like 'em.

Nan looks up quietly as though movement at any moment could give something more away. After she realizes it is only Jimmy a broad smile breaks her face.

Nan

Why thank you, Jimmy. That is so nice of you. Won't you stay for a little bit? I am actually waiting on some other company too.

Jimmy

Thank ya, Miss Nan. I would like to stay.

Nan

Would you like some bread and butter and maybe some iced tea?

Jimmy

Yes'um. I didn't really get nothing to eat yet 'cause Momma's still sleepin'. She had a cold all this week and she wants to get rid of it 'fore it gets worse.

Nan

Well, you tell your mother that I hope she feels better soon.

Jimmy

How you feelin', Miss Nan?

Nan

I feel very good because I have been wearing short-sleeved shirts all this week. I really love it when I can wear short-sleeves and not be cold. Don't you?

Jimmy

Yes'um, but I like wearing this shirt most of the time and it has long sleeves.

Jimmy pulls at the red flannel shirt that appears to be a favorite since most of the buttons are missing and the threads coming undone.

Jimmy

So I just wear this one most of the time, 'cause I like it. But I like the weather too 'cause it's the kind where I can put my toes in the water and they don't get cold they just get cooled off.

Nan

You mean down off your side of the bay?

Jimmy

Yes'um. This real good iced tea Miss Nan. I like it when I get pieces of the lemons in it in my mouth and I can suck on 'em.

Nan

Yes. I only like fresh iced tea. I used to make it every day.

Jimmy

That's what John liked wasn't it? He used to like drinkin' it every time he was hot.

There is a silence that coats
the picnicking two.

Nan

(after a pause) Yes, he did like it. That's why I made it every day.

Jimmy

I 'member the two of us drinking the iced tea you made after I'ould take him fishin'.

Nan

How is the fishing this year, Jimmy? Is there still anything left in that bay?

Jimmy

Mostly just catfish but every once in a while there a bass. But it ain't very big. Momma said that bay has just been fished for too long. She always says my poppa did a good job of cleaning it out 'fore he died. Who you waitin' on Miss Nan?

Nan

Harry. He is one of Rob's old acquaintances. He's in real estate.

Jimmy

Why a real estate man a'coming?

Nan

Because Rob wants to sell the house?

Jimmy

Why, Miss Nan, why he wanta do a thing like that?

Nan

He wants to start a new life. I think he is tired of the bay.

Jimmy

That's a shame Miss Nan. I goin' miss you not living here. Where are you going to go?

Nan

Oh, I'm not leaving Jimmy, but that's our secret. Don't tell Rob.

Jimmy

But you won't have a house Miss Nan.

Nan

I know.

Jimmy

Where's Mister Rob gonna go?

Nan

I don't know. I don't think he told me.

Jimmy

I don't think I met Mister Harry.

Nan

Mr. Richards.

Jimmy

Oh, I don't think I've met a Mister Richards.

Nan

He went to school with Rob. You probably never met. (pause) But I know you met his son.

Jimmy

Who his son?

Nan grimaces and begins to, hurriedly, slap peanut butter and jelly sandwiches together. Frantic and untamed—the crusts blow about.

Nan

John's friend.

Jimmy

Mister Andy. I haven't seen 'em in a long time now. Where he go, Miss Nan?

Nan

I couldn't tell you. Sandwich, Jimmy?

Jimmy takes the bread
bleeding with stuffing.

Jimmy

Thank ya' Miss Nan. It look real good. You gonna have one?

Nan

I think I will wait. Harry should be here soon. I think I will invite him to the celebration.

Jimmy

Can we tell stories—tell stories and draw pictures in the sand like we use to?

Nan

Mostly just rocks now. Rob actually bought the sand that was out here. Said we had to have a beach. And he built one. It was just as good as any other beach if you ask me, maybe even better.

Jimmy

Mister Rob use to work outside lot.

Nan

It was one of his favorite things to do. When we would sit out here playing, he would work hard. I think he would catch our laughter.

Jimmy

He didn't plant no flowers this year, did he?

Nan

No Jimmy. There will be no flowers this spring.

Jimmy

I really liked the flowers, Miss Nan.

Nan

Yes, they were pretty.

Jimmy

Is Mister Andy coming with Mister Richards?

Nan

I would suppose not.

Jimmy

You still angry at 'em? I 'member you being angry when you put John to bed.

Nan falls distant and the bay
moves less every day.

Nan

“I remember fall in orange and browns and the scent of the woodstoves healing someone who was cold for too long. I remember dressing up in skin that wasn't mine and joining the parades. Displaying myself as someone else and giggling—hoping they wouldn't know. But limps and braces give you away, no matter how many masks you wear. In the fall leaves, I still wait for the spring.” Spring was his favorite, Jimmy. He always preferred a cool warmth to a cooling cold. (laughs) Do you know, when he would dress up on Halloween, no matter how scary he was trying to be, he always wanted color in the costume 'cause that brought warmth to the streets.

Jimmy

You really learned lot of his writing.

Nan

It's partly mine you know.

Jimmy

What, Miss Nan?

Nan

Well, I did bring such a poetic creature to this world. From my body. In me he was made.

Jimmy

And God.

Nan

(curt) In me he was made. (pause) You know what I'm going to do. You know what I'm setting up for?

Jimmy

No.

Nan

A celebration. A party. I'm going to surprise Rob when he gets home with a party.

Jimmy

For Mister Rob?

Nan

Why don't you go home Jimmy and get dressed up a little. See if you have some balloons or some streamers—anything happy, anything for a good party. You go and see and I'll be waiting right here.

Jimmy

Sure ya' want to?

Nan

Oh, yes. It's going to be a grand affair. Beautiful because it's spring. And if you find any more flowers on your walk you bring them. Okay.

Jimmy

Yes, Miss Nan. I even goin' put on a pressed shirt.

Nan

That'll be nice Jimmy. That'll be really nice.

Jimmy gets up to leave. His movements are slow, not wanting to break the happiness with clumsiness. Nan rubs the blanket down, meticulously placing her hope in creases. Over and over she places the setting down. Inches make miles when the stubborn fantasy leads.

Nan

Where do you go now? Where is the prettiest place for you? Right here. Oh, it's going to be beautiful. There'll be flowers. And cottage cheese with fruit. Today is a special day. It will be magical, magical. You'll love it because we'll have color. So much color. I'm going to get some flowers by the bay, but don't you worry, I will be back soon.

Nan exits in haste, humming a tune. The stage darkens. It is bare for a moment with only the picnic present and a childhood birthday tune being hummed far away. It is happy and dark and haunting (a whisper of the past). This continues for a moment. Vanishes. In place of the previous humming, there is heard the humming of a male's cord. This song is merely tragic and low. From offstage walks in a boy of nineteen. He is dressed in black pants, partially coming undone at the heel. His boots are polished, yet scuffs remain. His shirt is white (starched and pressed). A gray tie hangs, slightly skewed to the side and somewhat covered by the black vest that is antiqued, only taken out of the trunk of mothballs for special occasions. His hair is combed and shines. His hands are clasped. Expectant and frightened, yet determined.

Andy

Mr. Selton? Mr. Selton? I went up to the house—thought maybe you'd be back here.

Andy examines the blanket. Nan comes out bearing a few small flowers. Andy does not see her. She sees him (an intruder!). Her hands ball and then she begins lashing at her clothes. She breaks (and vases split into just as many pieces).

Nan

Today is not your day! Today is not your day! Get out! Get out now! This was never your bay.

Andy

Mrs. Selton—please. I had no intention of coming back here—

Nan

You intentions have always been—

Andy

My intentions were never attacks against you.

Nan

Why, why are you even here?

Andy

My father. He,

Nan

Excuses! I'm sure that are just mere excuses!

Andy

(softly) Today is not your day either.

Nan

What?

Andy

I came because I promised my father I'd take care of the business. He had promised Rob that he would personally take care of the sale of the property. So that is what I am here to do. Where is Mr. Selton?

Nan

Where's Harry then? If he was supposed to take care of this personally, where is your father?

Andy

He passed away a couple of weeks ago. It was a small service.

Nan seems to wake. If only briefly. Maybe she was never asleep.

Nan

I'm sorry to hear that Andy.

Andy

I'm sorry for coming. I realized that this probably wouldn't be for the best. I'll come back when Rob is here.

Nan

I think it is best if you don't come back.

Andy

Doesn't Rob want the house sold?

Nan

Rob wants a new start.

Andy

Well, he asked my father to take care of it because of the personal nature of the situation.

Nan

And since your father has since passed on, I guess we will just have to give up on keeping it personal.

Andy

I believe I do have a personal interest in this family.

Nan

Ha! You have never had any interest in this *family*. Your only interest lay in furthering John's ideas! The only involvement you ever had was in destroying this family. You were like a soldier to him, weren't you. A knight to come in and steal him away from his hopes and bear some distorted reality that he thought he could believe in. You didn't even know him. You don't know where he kept his toys as a child.

Andy

Down by the logs on the shore. As close to the water as possible—he thought the waves might rescue them when no one was looking.

Nan

He never told you that. You stole it! I bet you listened as he was falling asleep and I caressed his temples. I know you stole that. You stole it!

Andy

The only thing I took was a few minutes a day that he could escape from the overbearing nature of a disturbed mother.

Nan

Disturbed! Get off of my shore!

Andy

I'm sorry. I was out of line. But you never even had the decency to acknowledge that we loved each other that whole time.

Nan

Two years out of a boy's life is nothing. It is confused growth. You took him while he was vulnerable and you convinced him to become something he wasn't.

Andy

And you tried to convince him that if he never left your side that the end would never come. You gave false hope to a boy who was happy if he could make it to the bay by himself.

Nan

I would have been his savior for eternity. I would have clutched him to my breast and given him my heartbeat. If he had just stayed there. If he had only stayed...

Andy

Nothing would be different.

Nan

He used to nuzzle in every night. And I would brush his soft hair and tell him about the mists of the shore. How hidden in the fog were the fairies that protected the bay, and when you weren't looking, the fairies would come and listen to your wishes. No matter how soft you spoke, they could hear and they would bring magic from the mist. They would grant your wishes—if you believed.

Andy

I guess none of us really believe then. Do we?

Nan

Oh, some of us do believe, but then tyrants come in and destroy all that we have built. They come in on their shiny horses and they snatch away all the castles that we built.

Andy

You can't blame me for what happened to your son forever Mrs. Selton.

Nan

No. I suppose not.

Andy

I loved him too.

Nan

You don't know what you felt for him. You didn't know him.

Andy

That's right, only you knew him.

Andy exits. Nan repents nothing. She begins picking up the flowers that she earlier dropped and starts arranging them along the outside of the picnic area.

Nan

Sometimes I just didn't know what had gotten into you toward the end. Sometimes I felt that you were giving so much away that you just shouldn't. But today is for all of us and no one will be able to take that away.

The stage darkens and her humming continues where it left off. It is sometimes hard to remember where things left off when interrupted, but to a few it is easier to forget the in between all together.

Rob enters in haste. His whole being shaken and fragmented only to further fall at the sight of the area properly decorated for a party with Nan seated in the midst of it all.

Nan

Hello, Rob. How was work today?

Rob

Just fucking fine, Nan!

Nan

Oh, Rob. Such language, I have a surprise for you.

Rob

He just lost his father and you run him off shouting blame after him.

Nan

I don't remember any shouting today. Up until now that is.

Rob

He came to help us move on and all you want to do is drag us further into the place where we steeped for far too long already.

Nan

I think the mockingbirds are coming out today and I saw a little robin in one of the trees while I was gathering flowers.

Rob

I knew I should have taken care of this so long ago Nan. I knew I should do something. I just kept telling myself that you needed time, that, slowly, things would start falling into place again.

Nan

Things are always getting better, Rob. Things are always getting warmer. I think that I will sleep in the warmth tonight Rob. I think...

Rob

I think that you are going to treat this boy with respect when he gets back.

Nan

He's coming back, to the house?

Rob

Of course he's coming back. He's taking care of the house and you're going to apologize for driving him away. It was ridiculous what you put that boy through before. It's a shame that you could care so much for our son and not even show any respect to the person that he loved.

Nan

He did not—

Rob

What! Are you not even going to respect what he felt now that he is dead? Are you still not going to respect your son's feelings? What he felt, who he loved.

Nan

I'm having a celebration tonight Rob. I don't know if he should be here for the festivities.

Rob

I don't believe that there should be festivities if you ask me. But why would you go through the trouble of that.

Nan

Of festivities Rob? Oh, you don't even know what I plan to celebrate. It's a surprise. Jimmy came by and he's coming back tonight.

Rob

And how is Jimmy?

Nan

He's quite good. I made him some peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. His mother is sick. I think you should bring by some soup for her.

Rob

Is that what this little setup is for?

Nan

It's for the party.

Rob

Nan, there will be no party! There will be no little hats and horns and there will be no shouting children! There will be no laughter, there will be no presents! There will be none of this because all of that is in our past it seems and it seems as though it will never be here again.

Nan

It will be here. And there will be a present Rob. You just wait.

Rob

Andy is coming back here tonight. He is going to access the property and put up a sign and tomorrow, tomorrow Nan, we are going to leave. We'll get you some rest while we're at it. And maybe a dog. Would you like a dog Nan? A little terrier maybe.

Nan

I have to finish getting ready Rob.

Rob

Do you really still believe it was his fault? I wonder about that sometimes when I am alone trying to sleep. I wonder if you still blame him for what our son did. I say to myself, how could she blame him? I know you hated him. You even hated me whenever I was alone with John. I could see little spots in your eyes as though any second you would charge when you found us spending some time—just the two of us. You hated any of us that took time away. I think you even hated the fact that you couldn't go to school with him.

Nan

Miss French and I would make the best little pastries to go with our coffee in the mornings.

Rob

Shame. It's a shame.

Nan

I think that I would have liked to have gotten the recipe for her chocolate pie. I think that might have been good tonight.

Rob

(distant) Do you ever think about God, Nan?

Nan

But I think that a light fruit and cottage cheese dish would be best tonight.

Rob

I think about where we're all going at night. Don't usually think about it in the day 'cause I have work to do in the office. I think about this vast ocean that someone named eternity and can't even imagine it.

Nan

More iced tea while I'm at it.

Rob

I used to not be able to image there not being an eternity. I thought that eternity was in the moment. Used to think about how long all the moments lasted.

Nan

I have those purple paper plates that have the little silver birds on them.

Rob

When I stood right in the center of the time, I could always get lost. Now I wander into the woods at night and I always end up at the office the next day no matter how far down the bay I go.

Nan

And little blue napkins.

Rob

But tomorrow I'm not going into the office and there will be new streets that I can get lost in. And new woods that won't try to spit me out.

Nan

Strawberries, honeydew, grapes, (starts to giggle) peeled. There going to be peeled and they will only taste sweet and never have seeds. I promise.

Rob

Are you coming with me, Nan?

Nan

Isn't funny how some things that are your absolute favorite you only have once in a while. Why is that?

Rob

Because if you spoil it by having it all the time, well, then it will never be a treat. It will just be routine.

Nan

But if it is your absolute favorite—that means that you would want it all the time.

Rob

If you have it all the time it may no longer be your favorite and then you would be disappointed wouldn't you? If one day you woke up and found out your favorite no longer tasted the same.

Nan

I suppose so. But that's why we're having it tonight, because tonight is special, tonight is different and that makes it important. Doesn't Rob? That makes it important?

Rob

Nan, I'm so sorry.

Nan

Why are you sorry, Rob?

Rob

I guess I just think I should be. For something. And when you don't know what else to say, sometimes say that you are sorry seems to be what should be said. As though there is always something to apologize for.

Nan

Why don't you wear a tie tonight Rob? And why don't you have one of your handkerchiefs with you. Tonight Rob. Tonight. I am going to get some stuff ready. I'll be back very soon. Don't you worry.

Rob

I'm not worried at all Nan.

Nan exits. Rob takes her place on the bench. There is the silence that isn't calm. Alive in diagonals and a confetti of noises. The noises that are the loudest quiet. When you can hear the world

move and Rob knows that there will always be these noises on this shore. Even when no one is hearing them, the sounds of the bay will never change. And Rob knows this. And as he sits on the bench, he knows that the most important moments in life are the softest, the hardest to hear. A car door is heard (perhaps only by Rob).

Rob

Andy! Andy. I'm back here.

Andy enters in apprehension.

Andy

Hello, Mr. Selton.

Rob

You know you are supposed to call me Rob, boy.

Rob hugs Andy.

Andy

It's good to see you again.

Rob

It's good to see you too. I'm sorry to hear about your father.

Andy

I was going to call you and Mrs. Selton, but my mother wanted to keep it very small and we thought that it may be a bad time--that things were probably already hectic.

Rob

Now-a-days, it doesn't seem to ever change. There was a hopeful period back there, but then things just went to worse and I don't even know how to talk to her. I just read to her and she falls farther away.

Andy

Have you ever thought about getting her help?

Rob

I don't think that there is any help for her.

Andy

Maybe—

Rob

What she talks about I feel all the time too. If I had more courage I would just get lost too. But she got to it first. I'm moving away anyway. And I can step away. I doubt she'll ever get away from the bay.

Andy

But she's leaving with you, right?

Rob

Physically.

Andy

Does she still think that I am the reason he did it?

Rob

I don't know exactly what she thinks about anything. She's having a party tonight, says that there's some sort of surprise for me.

Andy

Is it a birthday party for him?

Rob

Probably. I don't know what she wants to celebrate. Maybe she's finally accepted we're moving. Maybe we're celebrating the last night here.

Andy

I think I may already have a buyer. A family from the city.

Rob

Be a change for them moving out here.

Andy

I think that's what they're looking for.

Rob

I hope they have a nice time here.

Andy

I'm sure they will. I haven't given them a figure yet, but I think that they would be willing to pay a bit.

Rob

I got this land for a steal. Put in so much work myself, got it looking the way it does today.

Andy

I remember you working almost everyday I came by. John used to talk about how much he wished he could help you out in the garden.

Rob

When he was younger he used to help be a good bit, then he helped less and less. He was always tired by the end, but he refused to give up 'til he did all he planned to.

Andy

He gave everything his all.

Rob

He loved you, didn't he?

Andy

(mild laughter) That's what he told me. (pause) Yeah, he loved me and I loved him a helluva lot myself.

Rob

Well, I'm happy he got that. I think that's one of the only things I really prayed he would get before he died. Someone to love him—someone other than his mother or me. I think that's one of the only things he wished for too.

Andy

I'm sorry about how everything turned out for you.

Rob

You didn't get anything great out of what happened either.

Andy

Yeah, but it seems like I don't have to feel it all the time. Even though I do feel it every day. I think about him and I think I'm starting to learn to smile instead of crying, or pretending I'm more interested in something else—something that's a piece of my routine. Pieces of my life that aren't even pieces of me.

Rob

Well, I guess we all have different ways of distracting ourselves.

Andy

Like moving?

Rob

This isn't a distraction. It's just necessary. I was distracting myself that whole eighteen years, like everything could just go away if I didn't stare too long, stopped holding my breath, then you breathe and all that time's gone and you never even noticed as much as you should have.

Andy

By the way, my father left you some land up in our area. It isn't much. I don't know if you already had a location to go to—but you could build a small little place, be up in the mountains.

Rob

That was real nice of your father to do.

Andy

He always said that you were one of the closest friends he had.

Rob

Then I didn't see him for close to fifteen years.

Andy

He understood the situation.

Rob

At the end--maybe.

Andy

Anyway, you'd have my mother and me around—if you ever did need distractions. We're about ten minutes away from the property.

Rob

That'd be good. I was thinking about just stopping by to see my brother soon. Just for a little while. I really haven't seen him in about twenty years. Oh, we saw each other briefly here and there but I don't think we've really talked, really talked, in a whole twenty years. Funny the way things work out—I don't know if I even noticed for a while. Andy, let me ask you something, do you believe in some great hereafter?

Andy

Yeah, I guess I do.

Rob

Me too.

As the sound of the bay
begins to swell a man's
"giggles" are heard, there is

sound coming from the woods, but the two men do not even notice. They are looking at nothing but they are seeing something beyond skylines painted purple. Leaking the air from their lungs, the warmth is their moisture of memory. Jimmy enters. He is dressed in a slightly absurd manner. He wears faded corduroys with a pressed yellow shirt tucked in (but only in sections). His tie is clasped on and he carries flowers. And petals fall by his side. The limp causes the flowers to brush everywhere that he does not intend. Yet he is satiated and a smile is noted. He is found by Andy and Rob (and they will begin reveling in the meaning soon enough).

Rob

Hello there, Jimmy.

Jimmy

I found flowers for the party. Miss Nan said there should be more flowers since you stopped plantin' and all so I went into the woods and I picked these. Are they nice?

Andy

They're very nice Jimmy. I think I like the purple ones the most.

Jimmy

Mister Andy, it's good to see ya'. Miss Nan said you'ouldn't be comin' tonight. I'm glad you came.

Andy

Well. Yeah, she probably wouldn't be too happy to find me out here. I'm actually helping Rob with some details about selling the property.

Jimmy

Tha's right. Miss Nan said you'd be selling it Mister Rob. It's gonna be sad not having you down the bay ta go fishin' wit.

Rob

I'll come back to visit sometimes. But you take care of the bay for me. Make sure some of those fish stay around.

Jimmy

Oh, I will. We'll find 'em when you come back. (pause) I actually just think they're weeds, but they're pretty weeds, ain't they?

Andy

Yeah, they are.

Jimmy

I brought some to Momma earlier 'cause she's been real sick for a while now and I'anted to do something to cheer her up.

Rob

I'm sure she appreciated them.

Andy

My dad was sick for a while too, Jimmy.

Jimmy

That's not good. I hope he's doing better.

Andy

I think he is.

Rob

Jimmy, do you know what this party is for?

Jimmy

No sir. Misses Nan told me nothing.

Rob

Hmm.

Andy

I should probably get going and leave you guys to the celebration.

Rob

No. Please stay Andy. (pause) For my own sanity.

Jimmy

Yeah, Mister Andy, I ain't seen you in a long while.

Andy

I'll stay for a bit, but then I should hit the road anyway. Do you want me to call those people and tell them that the sale is definitely on?

Rob

Yeah, tell them it's up for grabs. We'll be out of here by tomorrow.

Jimmy

You gonna be packin' quickly Mister Rob.

Rob

I've been going a lot of packing over the last year, Jimmy. I haven't been able to sleep very well so I have been collecting the real essentials over time and packing them up.

Jimmy

Pots and dishes and all that stuff?

Rob

Photos and scraps of paper. By the way, I found some letters the other day that John had written to you. I put them aside.

Andy

That's funny, I thought I had gotten all of them.

Rob

These were some I think Nan buried away.

Andy

Yeah—I would love to have them.

There is the sound of a screen door closing offstage and Nan humming.

Nan

(offstage) My, isn't it starting to get chilly out.

Lights down.

Act II: Washing and Drying

The lights come up. The three men are standing just as they were left. (Anticipating). It is nearing sunset and the breeze is the echo of heart. Nan enters from offstage. It is a haphazard, ridiculous entrance, as though she has discovered something brilliant and cannot wait to speak new. She wears a purple and pink “party” dress and a cardboard birthday hat. It is black and seems to sparkle. She totters on high heels and higher hopes. She carries a basket and moves quickly through the men and starts setting out food and plates.

Nan

I thought you might come anyway, so I brought four plates.

She does not direct the glare at Andy.

Rob

I told him he should stay.

Nan

Well, I suppose he may have a reason to be here.

Jimmy

I brought some flowers.

Nan

Why thank you, Jimmy. They are very pretty and the purple matches my dress—isn't that nice Rob?

Rob

What exactly is the party for Nan?

Nan

It's a surprise—you get the presents with dessert. You know that.

Rob

I guess that is the way it usually goes.

Nan

How about we all sit. Rob, you sit on the bench with me.

Rob

Sure.

Nan

I have sandwiches and iced tea and fruit and cottage cheese for dessert. Doesn't that sound nice everyone?

Andy

Yes, Mrs. Selton.

Nan

So you're in charge of selling our lives--that seems appropriate.

Andy

I don't know how you can blame—

Nan

Rob, take more than one sandwich. Lord, you're going to fade away.

Rob

Of course, dear. Harry left us some property up in his neck of the woods, I think that's where we'll move. How does that sound?

Nan

That was so nice of him and after you forgot all about him and all. Wasn't that nice of your father, Andy?

Rob

I think he forgave me for disappearing for a while there.

Andy

I'm pretty sure he understood.

Nan

Forgiveness—what a novel concept, Rob would say that I don't understand that one.

Jimmy

Oh, Miss Nan, I understand that.

Nan

I bet you do, Jimmy. Have you forgiven God Jimmy—for what he did to you.

Jimmy

I don't under—

Rob

Nan, what in the hell are you doing!

I just asked a simple question.

Nan

How can you?

Rob

I know what she mean Mister Rob. I ain't like most people but I ain't blame God.

Jimmy

What about your mother?

Nan

Nan!

Rob

Do you blame your mother?

Nan

Ain't her fault neither. I just special. I ain't mind it.

Jimmy

Just as you shouldn't, Jimmy. Nan, you can't say these things. What the hell is wrong with you?

Rob

Who do you blame, Rob? Who do you blame, Andy? Hell you've lost a lot this last year haven't you? Must feel kinda lonesome.

Nan

Fucking stop this now Nan!

Rob

How about an entry? How about we read one of my son's passages. He seemed to understand things better than us.

Nan

I should leave. Jimmy do you want a ride home?

Andy

Fine, don't stay for the festivities. After helping our son wheel himself into the bay, you have nothing left to do here.

Nan

Fuck you! You know I was not here when it happened!

Andy

Rob

Nan, stop this now!

Nan

You supported his decision. Why doesn't *he* tell us the truth.

Nan pulls papers from the basket. Preparation.

Nan

"Andy, I watch the stars at night and realize that wishes are answered and maybe fairies do have ears. And I can feel you by me. Wrapped in sparks and fleeting static. I found hushed dreams and softer voices and know I know how it feels to have whispers fall on the ear. And I think about sentences and where we are led when we aren't looking, and, even if we were, how it would never matter. I remember calm. Knowing that if I lived more than eighteen years, I may even get my name in a book, for beating some odds I never cared enough to read. I suppose I am nearing that point, but not without cost. And I hate white walls and the smell of death. I want to feel my quilt in the open air, no starched sheets that only soften with the sweat of sickness. So I will choose my hour and I thank you for understanding that it is all for the best and even if it is the harsh routine of life, of give and take, my last sights will be (Nan begins to cry) of the magic I grew up feeling. It won't be coated by oxygen masks,"

Rob

Nan--Nan...

Nan

"It will be skies. And when I close my eyes and swim, I will see images of Mom and Dad and you, and when I start to fall, I'll listen and hear all the beauty that was my life." You knew, he told you, you said you "understood." How could you? He would have been treated and helped and he would have stayed my son.

Rob

That time wouldn't have helped.

Andy

It was his decision.

Nan

He was my son. Mine!

Rob

What do you want to happen Nan? What do you think will come from all these accusations, huh? He's not coming back!

Nan

Oh, Rob, he never left. He's still here and I am the only one that notices. You people don't even hear him. He's talking to you and you are not even listening. He's just going to give up one of these days.

Rob

Nan.

Jimmy

I ain't heard nothing Miss Nan.

Nan

Jimmy, Jimmy, Jimmy, it's all about listening closely. He's been here all along. You just refuse to notice.

Andy

Have you ever thought about letting him go, Mrs. Selton?

Nan

I am not like you. Why would I let him go when he is still here.

Rob

Because he's not, Nan. He's gone.

Nan

You'll be gone Rob. Not him.

Rob

That's right and so will you.

Nan

I think it is almost time for dessert, don't you?

Andy

You would have hated anyone who was in my role. It was nothing personal, was it? You would have hated whoever it was that your son fell in love with. And if he never left, what are you blaming me for?

Nan

Rob?

Rob

Yes, Nan?

Nan

There are sunny days coming.

Rob
Cloudy ones too.

Nan
But no more storms.

Rob
Maybe, but I'm already wet. (pause) You make me sigh, Nan.

Nan
Oxygen is always good.

Jimmy
Misses Nan, I didn't mean to—but I think I ate all the sandwiches.

Nan
That's quite all right. I don't think any of us are very hungry anyway. I'll make some so you can bring them home with you.

Jimmy
That'd be real nice.

Nan
I'm sorry if I was mean earlier.

Jimmy
That's okay, I realize that you upset. I'd be upset too. John was a real good boy. 'Member that time he caught that big bass. It was the biggest I ever seen out of this bay.

Rob
And then he set it free.

Jimmy
He always set it free.

Andy
He told me that the two of you used to catch catfish with animal crackers.

Jimmy
(glows in laughter) We did! We did! Those fish 'ould eat anything. We 'ould catch big ones with animal crackers and cheese and sometimes even hotdogs. It was real fun.

Rob
My toes aren't numb, Nan.

Would you like to dance? Nan

I would love to. Rob

Nan helps Rob get up. They take the other's hands. They are peeling and chapped. They have been tingling with sleep. The blood was old and now it is time to share. The dance is slow and timed in tune with silent waves. As they dance, Jimmy begins to wander offstage into the woods. No one notices the departure.

Rob, it's nice out isn't it? Nan

Beautiful. Rob

Does it feel this nice where you are moving? Nan

Different breezes. Rob

You'll miss this one. Nan

Yes. You never answered Andy. Rob

John loved him. They danced. Nan

We did. Andy

Nan

He never danced with me. Some days, he didn't even talk to me. Some days, there were journals and fishing and visits from you and he never once asked me how my day was or told me how his day was.

Rob

You didn't always ask me how my day was.

Nan

There were no calendars for your life.

Andy

He loved you. He loved you so much. He cried knowing how upset you would be. He knew he was your son and what that meant.

Nan

Sometimes, he would go to the shore, away from me, and not come back for hours. He would make it clear that he didn't want me to come and rub his back. He would sit alone. I would have sat with him! All I wanted to do was ease it. That's all I ever wanted to do.

Rob

And you did.

Nan

He spent so much time alone.

Andy

You would have too.

Rob

You do now.

Nan

Where'd Jimmy go?

Rob

He must have wandered off.

Nan

Maybe he went to pick more flowers. That was nice of him to bring flowers, wasn't it Rob?

Rob

Yes, it was. You see, other people care Nan. They may not show it as you do, but other people care just as much.

Jimmy enters from offstage. He carries a cake that is filled with wishes and care and nineteen candles. They are lit and he walks ever so carefully so as to not disturb his creation. He stops behind the others.

Jimmy

Don't nobody turn around--I got a surprise for ya'.

Rob

You shouldn't have gone through any trouble for tonight, Jimmy.

Jimmy

Na, I really wanted to.

Nan

Can we turn around?

Jimmy

All right—turn around.

The three turn around to see the cake. Emotions mix for although expecting something, it seems as though none expected this.

Rob

Well, it's very nice, Jimmy.

Jimmy

I spent the whole day working. When Miss Nan said there was goin' be a party I 'sepected that it was for his birthday so I's made this cake. Do you like it?

Nan

It wasn't for a birthday! It wasn't to celebrate birth! It is not to celebrate—

Rob

Nan! He didn't know, he didn't know. How was he supposed to know with you still seeing him and talking to him that you wouldn't necessarily celebrate his birthday! He didn't know any better.

Jimmy

I just tryin' to be thoughtful, I just tryin' Miss Nan to do somethin' you'd like since you ain't been all that happy in a while. I just tryin'.

Rob

And we really do appreciate it, Jimmy.

Andy

It's a mighty fine cake. It looks very nice.

Jimmy

And I walked all the way to town today and bought the candles. Nineteen.

Nan

(softly) Nineteen.

Nan falls into dream and wake and everything other than "sensitivity." Nan falls into old clothes and lost records and antiques that are still in plastic. To say that Nan only falls for good now is a half lie. And half-truths are never found, anyway.

Rob

Why don't we have some cake—to celebrate the move, if nothing else.

Andy

I think that's a great idea. Come bring it over here Jimmy. We'll set it up on the blanket.

Rob

And we'll have the cottage cheese and fruit on the side. Do you want to make a wish, honey?

Nan

I have wished every day and they still haven't heard me.

Jimmy

She talkin' 'bout the fairies. Maybe they'll hear today 'cause there nineteen whole candles. I counted 'em--twice.

Nan

Maybe they will, Jimmy. Andy, why don't you cut the cake. It'll be a wedding cake and I'll hear the bells for you.

Andy

It's to celebrate the move.

Nan

Rob, I think I am too tired to pack anything tonight.

Rob

I understand.

Nan

Maybe in the morning, after Miss French stops by.

Rob

That's sounds good.

Nan

I'll be awake for the day then.

Andy

This looks delicious, Jimmy. What type of cake is it?

Jimmy

It's peanut butter and jelly and a little lemon. To get stuck in your teeth.

Andy

Mmmm, I love homemade recipes.

Jimmy

Me too.

Nan

You don't cry Andy. Do you?

Andy

Excuse me.

Nan

Because you had these wonderful stars that last so very long and as long as you keep looking, and remembering that there, you'll always have that.

Andy

They're still distant.

Oh. Nan

Miss Nan. Do you wanna blow out the candles? Jimmy

Sure. Nan

Nan takes a breath. Heavy and loaded—full of wish.

Wait. Rob, my wish is for you. Nan

She exhales, the breath is overwhelming. The stage is dimmed by the now lack of candles. Tried and true, there is no clapping in the dark and the fog covers those who don't notice.

Do you think it will come true? Rob

It will. Nan

I tried. I tried to talk him out of it, but he thought it was best, so what could I do. I understood because it was his life in the darks and the lights and him fighting all the time. He was tired and he laughed less and less. But, I wasn't there that night when he did it. I didn't help him go through with it. I knew he was planning it soon because the hospital was just around the corner, but I didn't know it would be right after the party. Andy

I gave 'em bait. Jimmy

Poetry—for him to read in that room. Rob

Life. Nan

Rob

You gave him pajamas. Blue plaid print and slippers.

Nan

That I stitched. Sometimes flowers, sometimes big puffy clouds—always something happy.

Andy

Lonely alleys in oil—never acrylic because it dries too fast.

We all pause to dry.

Jimmy

When your birthday, Mister Rob.

Rob

You know, I haven't thought about it in a while. It was last month—the twelfth.

Jimmy

Did you blow out candles?

Rob

Nah. You know, Jimmy, I used to have huge parties when I was a kid. My mother said that birthdays were sacred. But that people shouldn't pause too long under the streetlights. Just long enough to remember the bugs that waltzed. Not too long so the legs stiffen and the knees lock and you notice that the bugs aren't even on beat.

Rob picks up the journal.

Rob

“And sometimes there are voices that aren't there. Happiness is evoked in the vibrations that they never made. It is so much simpler on the shore when it's only memory standing next to you. I think I heard. I wish I heard. I can feel that I heard. I only hear the voices that never speak.” (Puts down journal.) Watching you think that if you stare long enough the bugs will notice and start dancing in time.

Andy

I never learned how to waltz. He always tried to teach me—we laughed too hard.

Nan

Spake. Spoke. Spark. Just throw yourself around and soon it will look like dancing. Where you stood no better than the next step. Tides go by Rob do you have the time?

Rob

It's getting late.

Jimmy
Anyone for another slice?

Nan
Peanut butter and marshmallows.

Jimmy
Jelly and lemon.

Nan
The tea's never too sweet.

Rob
Under streetlights.

Andy
Waltzing.

Jimmy
Slice?

Andy
No, thank you, I should get going.

Andy gets up to go.
Dimensions are split in
diamonds and rubies and far
scattered diagonals—ones
that rarely meet. The world
in darkening in remembrance
and clocks tick in tune with
rotation untimed.

Nan
Don't go quite yet, Andy. The flowers are just too heavy tonight—just like that night. I was in silk pajamas in fields of coal. I felt sleep under pines that night but I just kept moving. I was using two fingers to break the stems so that they were the perfect length. Did you know that Rob? You had gone to bed that night. You were wearing sheets and I was picking flowers. Hand me the journal Rob.

Rob
I thought you would never let it go if I gave it to you.

Nan
I'm giving it to Andy because it's time for my dessert.

Andy

I appreciate it Mrs. Selton, but I think you should keep it.

Nan

Let's eat cottage cheese and fruit. Jimmy, would you like some.

Jimmy

Yes, please. I ain't goin' have been this full in so long.

Andy

I really can't take the journal.

Nan

Shouldn't he have it, Rob?

Rob

He should have had it a long time ago.

Andy

(softly) Thank you.

Nan

He told me enough when he was young and you cradle in his eyes and they're always blue. And I love fresh fruit on warm days and those are the days that your hands pick flowers without your voice.

Rob

When we move I'll have fresh flowers for you all the time.

Nan

You'll be happy Rob and never numb.

Jimmy

I goin' bring some more for momma. She getting' better ya know 'cause I only let her get well. She had an appetite today. I never not ya know. I always eat. I keep her comp'ny.

Nan

I could hear something when I was in the woods and I walked down that path on mulch you laid. I heard crying and sighing and silence. Then, I saw him just sitting there—at the end of the dock. I walked down but I hid in the darkness and the world was purple and pinks and that was my son and he was still strong. He was still there. Like when I used to hold him. I could remember his name and his moon. And I knew you were sleeping Rob. I would never have woken you up 'cause you needed your rest. I wish Andy could have been there, I told that to myself that night. He could have said something because I couldn't speak. He wouldn't have wanted me to anyway. So I stood

holding flowers and watching the moon rise. He sat there. I knew what he was thinking, knew where he was going and I was jealous of God. (pause) Miss French used to say that you shouldn't cry—that God only wants the prettiest of flowers to set on his table and the best are picked first. And it peaked and it was so bright and he was seated right here on the bay and he smiled.

Rob

You could see?

Nan

I could feel his goosebumps. (pause) Then, he pulled himself out, his arms creased.

Nan's movements mirror
fading flesh and more is less
as the contours disappear
(because it must always get
dark).

Nan

And then he fell. The splash was softer than I expected it would be. I did nothing because there was nothing I could do. I stood there clutching purple flowers that bled under my nails and I didn't cry. I didn't turn and run. I didn't scream.

Rob begins to pulse and
release and the world cramps
under tortured thoughts and
pleads goodnight but it is
restraint that bounds us all
and even the worst calms.

Nan

I waited until the sun came up and I went inside and I woke Rob. Then, I came out here.

Rob

And you never left.

Nan

He left a note and crawled over the edge and there was nothing we could do, Rob. Nothing could have held him up—not even us, not even Andy.

Jimmy

And he went to sleep.

Nan

The water is so warm. I think I am going to swim.

Rob
You don't swim.

Andy
I think I am going to head out.

Rob
It was good seeing you. Keep in touch. I guess I'll be up your way soon.

Jimmy
I think I goin' go too. I wanna catch Momma 'fore she goes to sleep. Thanks for everything.

Nan
I couldn't even shake. I curled into a ball.

Andy
Thanks for the journal.

Nan
I wanted to cry out and scream. I did. Howl to God, to him, to anyone who could swim.

Rob
Your welcome, Andy. We got to have the words for so long and it was your turn long ago. It's not like we're going to forget.

Nan
And the sunrise was blue.

Jimmy
Bye ya'll.

Andy
Goodbye, Mrs. Selton.

Andy and Jimmy glance to the image of a woman who wants no stare. She is already hidden and fragile. And they do not want to pay for the shattering shards, for there are signs that the broken is irreplaceable. They shake with Rob and the men protect the slumber and slowly part. And as they

leave Nan turns and replaces the party hat as high as it will go and she notices that they have said their farewells.

Nan. Nan

I wouldn't have been mad. Rob

You would have swam. Nan

No. I would have stood just as firmly. Rob

Nan
But I bleed ribbons when the plug is pulled. And the rainbows I paint always hide from you. Don't they?

Rob
You have captured me in so many of your ribbons, Nan. I couldn't break free if I chose.

Nan
Are you cold?

Rob
The sun's almost gone.

Nan
Did you have dessert?

Rob
I'm about to.

Nan
Me too.

The two sit across from each other. Back on the bench, legs crossed, smiles hidden so very far away. They take utensils and break bread. And the Eucharist was already their sacrifice.

It's sweet. Rob

I could live off of it. Nan

I could live off of you. Rob

Nan giggles from the existing youth in her veins. It is post-school, it is pre-engagement (any that bound the wings). They are in the sidelines lost in storylines.

Without the peel it's so squishy. Makes me giggle. Nan

Me too. Rob

And I just want to roll it around and around and let it melt away. Nan

And the juices spill over the teeth— Rob

When you bite. Nan

And the seeds get all caught up— Rob

And you use your tongue to pry 'em loose. Nan

And it's colder— Rob

Because they're bare. (laughs) I stole their skin and buried them in cheese. Nan

And I would eat it everyday. Rob

Me too. Nan

Can I buy you a dream? Rob

You wouldn't want to. Nan

Why, my dear, nothing would make me happier. Rob

I think that many things could make you happy. Nan

Never like giving you that gift. Rob

And why is that? Nan

Because, if you liked it, your face would light up in brilliant shades and the smile would stay with me forever. You might even laugh in happiness and I would hear it all the time. Rob

All the time? Nan

Even when I was in bare offices counting down the hours, I bet I could hear it if I tried. Rob

Would I like it? Nan

I think that you might. I pray that you would. Rob

Would you wrap it? Nan

In fluffy cotton. Rob

And call it clouds. Nan

Rob
And, after, you could sleep on it.

Nan
On my own dream?

Rob
And I'd put your name in big black letters.

Nan
And it would be waiting outside and you'd hide in the bushes and watch me open it.

Rob
And you would dance.

Nan
Pretending you were there.

Rob
And you find the dream buried in cotton.

Nan
Big bushels of softness. The type of world I could sink into.

Rob
Would you keep it all?

Nan
How could I let myself lose it?

Rob
Sometimes it just slips under other presents that pile up on top.

Nan
I would hold onto it forever.

Rob
Never letting it go. And I would know that I gave you the best present that you ever got.

Nan
And no one else could even see it if they tried.

Rob
Would they?

Nan

They would try, but they wouldn't even understand if they did see it. It would pass them by.

Rob

Yes.

Nan

(softly) Yes. (pause) Rob?

Rob gazes.

Nan

Sometimes I lose my voice and my throat itches and I can't call for help.

Rob

I know.

Nan

And sometimes I lose my voice and I can't tell people what I want to say to them. Sometimes I'm afraid they never knew.

Rob

I don't think you should worry about that, Nan. I'm sure they always knew.

Nan

We won't be reading again tonight. Isn't it funny. (pause) What did you do today?

Rob

Well, I went to work.

Nan

How was it?

Rob

It was great. It was my last day.

Nan

And tomorrow it's time to leave.

Rob

It is.

Nan

It's going to be wonderful for you, Rob. I know it is.

Rob
So do I. What did you do today?

Nan
I played.

Rob
What did you play?

Nan
Dress up. Do you like it?

Rob
It's beautiful.

Nan
I think I've worn it before.

Rob
You have.

Nan
For birthdays?

Rob
Many.

Nan
Oh, I knew I had. When I saw it in the closet, I knew I had worn it before and I said to myself that it was the best birthday dress ever made.

Rob
Because you made it.

Nan
Did I?

Rob
You don't remember?

Nan
No. I had a feeling that I had seen it but I had no idea that I made it.

Rob
You made it years ago—for celebrations.

Nan skips up and twirls.

I used to make so much. Nan

You did. Rob

Things to make you happy. Nan

It all made me happy. Rob

Well, I'm glad. Rob, I have a present for you. Nan

What is it? Rob

It was a gift that I let Andy go. Nan

Was it? Rob

For me. Because I remembered that it was me. Nan

You also gave him the journal. Rob

I did. But I still hear the words. Nan

So do I. Rob

Nan
“And I see fingernails that are breaking and wonder what they’re attached to. I never cared much for my hair, or my teeth, but I always loved my eyes and cleaned my ears. Did you hear my voice or were those the birds flying north? I decided to go and see the world through other eyes and know that clouds always catch you, when you aren’t looking. I know you will miss me and I know that you’ll cry, but some things are better

reflected and not seen. I will miss you tomorrow and the stretch of eternity and no one will fill my eyes like you. This isn't just for me—but also for you.”

Rob

I remember that one, but not as well as you.

Nan

Because I remember them best.

Rob

That you do. So what's my gift, Nan?

Nan

I'm letting you go.

Rob

Are you?

Nan

Free as a bird.

Rob

Won't you miss me?

Nan

I don't even need to respond—you already know.

Rob

I knew.

Nan

So you can fill your life brand new because mine is old and always will be.

Rob

How will I dance?

Nan

On soft toes.

Rob

I don't know if I can let you go.

Nan

I'll paint you big puffy clouds, and grow you flowers. And you'll be happy.

Rob, in the glister of a faint
half smile, finds tear on his
cheeks and moisture on his
brow.

Rob

I'll hold you in the quilt and put you to bed, Nan.

Nan

No, thank you Rob. You're more tired than I am. You should go get some sleep. You'll need your energy tomorrow.

Rob

I'll still hold you, Nan. And rock you back and forth 'til you're dreaming.

Nan

I already have been.

Rob

Then--I'll sing to you!

Nan

And I'll sing back from the bay.

Rob

I'll dance for you!

Nan

And you'll feel it in the rain.

Rob

And you'll have cottage cheese and fruit every day!

Nan

(giggles) It would just lose its flavor.

Rob

I'll plant the flowers wherever I move, Nan. They'll always be growing.

Nan

Can you tell Miss French I don't think that'll I'll be able to have breakfast tomorrow.

Rob

Of course.

Nan
When the telephone rings, you'll answer it, won't you?

Rob
Yes.

Nan
It will be Andy.

Rob
What should I tell him?

Nan
That I'm sorry. (pause) That I know how lucky he was. That I know they were happy.
That I wasn't always watching, because we were both dreaming.

Rob
What do I have to say?

Nan
I told you.

Rob
To you.

Nan
Nothing.

Pause for words to seep and
spill and land in all the right
places with only one simple
breath.

Rob
I'm so tired, Nan.

Nan
I think it's time for bed.

Rob stands before the smile
and knows that it is real.

Rob
If you get cold—I'll be inside.

I know. Nan

Goodnight, Nan. Rob

Goodnight, Rob. Nan

Rob falters wiping the salt from his lips. He stands still and she stands stiller—gazing out over the ripples and the crests, seeing the firsts and lasts and it is never capable of numbering any of them—for who could really say which one was best. Rob moves slowly, making his way into the last of the light. That softness before it all goes out and the stars begin to play.

Nan stands fragile but fierce. She looks up, above it all. Her smile only broadens. A voice is heard. It is Andy's as he reads from the journal. He is never seen. The voice simply resonates over the fading light and the swaying woman who clutches nothing but her mind in fragments and shards and little jewels that you wrap on wrists.

Andy's Voice

“When the floods come and the fires light their flames, the houses fall and you realize you never even needed it. And homes are indefinable and white walls are better clothed. As the wood burns it won't be the vases that are caught and china means less and less as the years go by. I pull at the frames and the photos and search for the scraps. Will you grab those papers for me, they're filled with a voice that isn't mine but I'd hate to forget.

Will you punch a hole in the ground and bury the clutter because I hate to see it. It makes me ill and I lose my balance. Did you catch me there? I knew you would. Can you find that picture I drew because the glasses are shattering and we'll have to move soon. I just felt the floor falling and I want to stand on solid ground. When this is all over, I'll give you the ash and you can rub it back and forth because hands are never clean once they're dirty, but I'd rather have dirt between my nails than blank pages in my book. When you aren't looking, I'll put flowers in your hair as you stare at the destruction and I'll just think about what comes next. I play out the story in my mind, knowing that it could be just about anything and we don't even need to try that hard. I'll jump one life back and still be going forward in as many shoes as I can fit. I never knew what you'd like best, so I refused to go to the store, I could never get there anyway, and I thought about the days and realized my watches always broke because who really wants to keep track anyway? I dated the book in my own hurried scrawl, just so you'd remember, but I was never that worried you'd forget."

The light slowly begins to say its last farewell. Rob is seen walking in from offstage. He is clutching the quilt to his chest. He eyes sunken and face hidden, he watches from the darkness. His heart is the only thing that he hears. He wishes he could run, or scream. Rob wishes he remembered how to swim, but no matter how hard he listens—he would never move, or run, or even whisper. So he stands in that last blue light that breaks the stage in two and her frame is bound to one world. She sees the past and the film flickers by open eyelids. Slowly she moves her mouth and points—arms extending ever so meticulously.

Nan

(hushed) Moon.

As her last word is heard the last of the light disappears behind big puffy clouds only kept company by eternal

stars. As the last of the light
leaves the stage a splash is
heard. Followed by the
silence of a lapping bay.

Curtains.

