

I SEE THE MOON

ACT 1

Scene 1

Riverbend Psychiatric Hospital. 1995. Evening. *Lights come up* to reveal DR. JOAL SEGAL (mid-40's) outside GINA's isolation room. He is clearly agitated, on the lookout for someone. *ENTER ADULT KIT* (early 40's), a psychiatric social worker for the deaf. (**Note: For production purposes AUNT REENIE and SELA can provide interpretive support for these opening scenes.**)

DR. SEGAL

(raising hand to get Adult Kit's attention, speaking directly to her)

Kit! Thank God!

ADULT KIT

(lipreading, voicing with some sign)

I'm sorry, Dr. Segal. I came as soon as I could. I was with a client. Your message said something about a child at risk? I'm not too late, am I?

DR. SEGAL

(pulling out his key ring, unlocking Gina's door)

Brace yourself, Kit. This isn't a pretty sight.

Lights come up on GINA (age 13), a deaf Psychiatric patient huddled on the floor, clutching a ragged doll. GINA raises one hand against the light, revealing a heavily bandaged wrist.

ADULT KIT

(shock of recognition, rubbing scar on own wrist)

Oh! She's like me...is she? Is she...

DR. SEGAL

Yes. The client I was telling you about. The one whose mother committed suicide. You want some water, honey? I got some Poland Springs in the car.

ADULT KIT

Suicide...

DR. SEGAL

She had a long history of psychiatric problems. Apparently, Gina was there.

ADULT KIT

(startled)

But then, how do you explain...

DR. SEGAL

Gina's injury? We don't know if she was attacked or if this was self-inflicted.

ADULT KIT

Who found her?

DR. SEGAL

The neighbors. In the trailer park. Apparently it's not the first time they summoned an ambulance.

ADULT KIT

There's no other family?

DR. SEGAL

None that we know of.

ADULT KIT

She won't talk?.

DR. SEGAL

Not to any of us. But then, she's deaf.

ADULT KIT

(tersely, taking offense)

That doesn't mean she can't...

DR. SEGAL

That's why we called you, Kit.?

ADULT KIT

(studying GINA)

The doll. She's holding it as though it's a real child.

DR. SEGAL

Yes. Incredible, really. She hasn't responded to much of anything. Not food, not touch. Yet she refuses to give up the doll.

ADULT KIT

What's her name?

DR. SEGAL

Gina.

ADULT KIT

Gina...

She approaches GINA, kneels, touches her shoulder, speaking and fingerspelling GINA's name.

Gina? Gina?

GINA

(noticeably deaf speech, added sign & gestures)

Mama? Mama, is that you?

ADULT KIT

(voice breaking)

Oh, Gina...

She closes her hand over GINA's. GINA trembles violently, throws off KIT's hand and scuttles back against the wall, baring her teeth as she stands in a defensive crouch.

DR. SEGAL

Kit.

ADULT KIT

It's all right. She's just frightened. Just stay calm.

She cautiously approaches GINA, speaking and signing.

Gina? Gina? It's okay...I won't hurt you, Gina... You're safe, Gina, you're safe.

GINA, clutching the doll, screams and pounds the walls in frenzied fear and rage.

DR. SEGAL

(with a shout of alarm)

Kit! Kit, back away!

He pulls a hypodermic needle from his lab coat pocket, yanks off the protective plastic sheath.

ADULT KIT

No! You don't have to do that! She's just frightened. Let me talk to her!

GINA, seeing the hypodermic needle, lashes out. DR. SEGAL ducks and plunges the needle into her arm. She howls, pulls away, cradling her arm as she stares wild-eyed.

ADULT KIT

(furious, rounding on DR. SEGAL)

Why did you do that? Why?

DR. SEGAL doesn't immediately respond as he clinically watches as GINA's eyes close as she slumps against the wall and slides down to the floor, hugging her knees and her doll. He kneels and checks her pulse as she sits, rocking and crooning to her doll.

DR. SEGAL

(to ADULT KIT)

The sedative will last about two hours. I suggest we come back then. In the meantime, let's go to my office. I'll finish filling you in.

He rises, takes ADULT KIT's arm, escorting her away. She pulls back, anxiously looking back at GINA.

ADULT KIT

I can't just leave her here! Not like this.

DR. SEGAL

She'll be fine. There's nothing here that can hurt her.

ADULT KIT

There's her memories!!

DR. SEGAL

Her memories?

ADULT KIT

She might not hear, and she may not talk, but this little girl has seen things.

DR. SEGAL

Kit, I asked for you specifically. I've seen your work, know what you can do but...Are you going to be able to handle this case? It's important to maintain a level of professional detachment at all times. You know that.

ADULT KIT
(impassioned)

I know what I'm talking about!

DR. SEGAL
(gently)

Perhaps this was a mistake. I'll contact the Commission, see if they have another psychiatric social worker for the deaf they can recommend.

ADULT KIT

I know because, because...I've been through it.

DR. SEGAL stares at ADULT KIT with surprise and concern.

Lights slowly dim until only a spotlight frames ADULT KIT and DR. SEGAL.

ACT 1

Scene 2

Begin flashback. South Carolina. 1966. *Lights come up to reveal* inside the MAHONEY kitchen. BILL MAHONEY (mid-30’s) is working at the kitchen table, still in his shirt and tie. His briefcase is propped open in front of him. His children, KIT (age 12) and CHIP (age 13) are also at the table, doing homework. His wife, SELA (mid-30’s) a fresh-faced, natural earth mother type, is painting at an easel. KIT looks up from her books and eyes SELA longingly. The family speaks directly to KIT so she can lipread. Only SELA adds sign. KIT speaks, her voice bearing the tell-tale flat, nasal “deaf” sound. She uses some sign. ***A spotlight comes up to reveal ADULT KIT reliving this scene in memory while DR. SEGAL observes. Both lend interpretive support.***

BILL

(smacking the table, causing KIT to look up)

Kit? Kit, pay attention!

KIT

(signing, no voice)

But, Daddy...

BILL

Use your voice!

KIT

(voice & sign)

But, Daddy...

BILL

Your voice, Kit, your voice.

SELA

She is using her voice, Bill.

BILL

You know what I mean, Sela. I still think it was a mistake for you and Reenie to ever teach her sign..

SELA

It helps her, Bill. Really it does. If you’d only try you’d see just how much.

BILL

Helps her what? Kit doesn’t need sign! She can talk, read our lips.

SELA

(long-suffering sigh)

Oh, Bill...

BILL

You know she can! You and Reenie taught her.

SELA

The speech therapist taught her. Reenie and I just helped with the drills.

BILL

Drills? What drills?

CHIP

You know, Daddy! *(does the drill)* Say the word, “shoe.” “Shoe.” Say the word, “skirt.” “Skunk?” Oh, oh, and this one’s the best! “See Sally swim at the seashore.” Kit spits buckets when she tries that one! Wanna see?

BILL

No I don’t want to see! I want to hear! I want to her Kit talk. Kit!

He again smacks the table, causing KIT to jump and look up.

KIT

(sign only, no voice)

I am doing my homework, Daddy.

BILL

Talk, Kit. Talk.

SELA

Bill, honey, please...it’s hard for her.

BILL

People talk, Sela. They don’t go around flapping hands. People talk.

CHIP

Sign’s neat, Daddy. It’s like a secret code, you know, like the Russians use! *(Pantomiming broadly to KIT)* Hey, Kit! Are you a Commie? You got a secret decoder ring? You got a laser gun?

BILL

(sternly, to CHIP)

You got a geography test tomorrow?

CHIP
(chagrined)

Uh, yessir.

BILL

You want to pass it?

CHIP

Yessir.

BILL

Then get studying. I don't want to see another “C” coming into this house.

CHIP

I thought I knew it, Daddy.

BILL

Thought won't cut it, Chip. Either you do or you don't. In the real world you don't get second chances. You have to be responsible. Have to know your stuff inside out, have it down cold.

CHIP

But, Daddy...

BILL

“But, Daddy,” nothing! Down cold, son. Down cold.

He point at CHIP'S book. Scowling, CHIP begins to study with fierce concentration.

KIT

(banging her book shut and jumping to her feet)

I'm done!

BILL

Whoa! Whoa, whoa, come back here. Let me see.

He scans KIT's worksheet and frowns as he reads aloud from her paper.

“If $X = 2$, then $12 = XY$.” And you wrote...

KIT

“ $6+6=12$.” That's the answer.

BILL

That’s the wrong answer.

KIT

No it’s not! That’s right, Daddy.

BILL

You’re not adding, Kit. You’re multiplying.

KIT

There’s nothing to multiply, Daddy! X and Y aren’t numbers.

BILL

They most certainly are.

KIT

Wh-what?

CHIP

Jeez, what a dimwit!

SELA

Chip!

CHIP

What did I do? Jeez, you can’t say anything around here!

BILL

(pulling a slide ruler from his briefcase, launching into a rapid demo)

Kit. Kit, pay attention! Watch my lips. Read this line. What’s it say? Three, right? Okay, now read this line. What’s it say? What’s it say, Kit? It says two, right? Okay, now read this line. What’s it say? Kit, look right here. It says six, right?

KIT stares at him, totally lost.

Why? Because...because six is the answer! Now you sit down and do this worksheet again, Kit. And this time you do it right.

KIT slumps, dejected and dismayed.

CHIP

Jeez, what a nincompoop...

SELA shoots him a silent warning.

I didn’t say it! I didn’t say it.

SELA

Well don't y'all even think about thinking it either. Y'hear?

CHIP

Jeez....

SELA

(crossing to BILL, massaging his shoulders)

Bill? Why don't you go relax, Hon? Read the paper, watch some TV.

BILL

I can't, Sela. I've got this dang presentation for the Chicken Lickin' account. God know what you can say to make folks buy freezer-burned drumsticks that taste like over-salted cardboard when there's down-home Southern fried to be had at every church corner and diner.

SELA

You'll do fine. Y'all been working on that ad campaign for weeks now. Go on. I'll finish up here. Go on, now.

BILL rises, crosses to the doorway with a sigh of relief.

Wait! Take some pie with you.

BILL

I don't need any...

SELA

(teasing and tempting BILL as she waves a plate of pie beneath his nose)

Homemade pe-ee-each. Mama's recipe.

BILL

(weakening)

Peach? Ahhh, Seal! That ain't playing fair. I'd better not. Gotta start watching it.

SELA

Bill, you? Why you're a regular "fine figure of a man," as my mama always says.

BILL

(grinning, flirting back)

Your mama, huh? And what do you say, Mrs. Mahoney?

SELA

I say, who am I to argue with my mama? 'Sides this here's the last piece.

BILL
(weakening)

Last piece?

SELA

Last piece..

BILL

Well, in that case, you'd better give it here.

CHIP
(protesting)

Hey! Mama, you said I could have...

SELA

I say you can have some pecan sandies, Chip.

CHIP
(salivating)

Pecan...

SELA

After you take a shower.

CHIP

Awww, Mama!

BILL
(exaggerated sniff)

You smell a little ripe, Chip. Mmmm, this pie is scrumptious, Seal!

CHIP

I had football practice!

SELA

I believe the gym has showers?

CHIP

I don't have time. I don't! I mean, shi-i-oot, we only get something like five minutes before we gotta catch the bus. And I ain't about to get on any bus buck naked!

SELA
(frowning)

Chip.

CHIP

And when I get home I gotta feed the dog, I gotta take out the garbage, do homework...

SELA

And I gotta cook supper, set the table, wash the dishes...

CHIP

You're the mom! You're supposed to do that!

SELA

To the showers, young man. March!

CHIP

(muttering)

Jeez, you can't do anything around here! You can't even watch TV.

SELA

Not on a school night. Now hit the showers.

CHIP

Daddy...

BILL

You heard your mama.

CHIP stomps to the doorway.

SELA

And put on some deodorant.

CHIP

(mortified)

Cripes, give a guy some privacy, why don't'cha?

BILL steps aside as CHIP plows by him,
muttering pseudo curses under his breath.
EXIT CHIP.

BILL

Oh, that boy!

SELA

Don't you worry about Chip. Chip's all right.

BILL

(forking pie, eyeing SELA appreciatively as she neatens the kitchen)

There’s a cocktail party for a new client tomorrow night. Want to go? Kick up your high heels? Twirl your pearls?

SELA

Oh! Bill, I’d love to! Oh, wait, Kit has a science fair tomorrow night at school.

BILL

(darkly, passion doused)

Kit. So much for that. Did you pick up my suit from the cleaners?

SELA

(brightly, trying to salvage the evening)

It’s in your closet.

BILL

What about my blue shirt?

SELA

(with trepidation)

Your blue shirt?

BILL

You ironed it, didn’t you? Ah, Sela! I’ve got a presentation tomorrow!

SELA

You’ve got a whole closet full of white shirts, Bill.

BILL

Oh, for Chrissake, Hon!

SELA

Bill...

BILL

One shirt. I ask you to iron one shirt. Is that so much?

SELA

I’ll get to it. I’ll get to it. As soon as I’m done helping Kit.

BILL

(exasperated)

Kit, Kit, it’s always Kit!

SELA

Bill!

BILL

Oh, never mind! Just forget it! Do what you have to do. But if you can't make time for me, at least make time for yourself.

SELA

I make time for you!

BILL

Get your hair done. Buy some clothes. And, put on some makeup, will ya!

SELA stares at him, hurt.

Christ!

Angry, yet ashamed, BILL stomps off.
EXIT BILL.

SELA

(calling after BILL, struggling for control)

I said I'd get to it! (*a beat*) Bill?

ACT 1
Scene 3

Moments later. The MAHONEY kitchen. Night. Frustrated, KIT angrily shoves her math book off the kitchen table. SELA jumps at the noise and turns to see KIT slumped miserably at the table, head in hands.

Oh, Kit...

SELA

She crosses to KIT, rubs her back. With a sigh, KIT looks up.

Come here.

She guides KIT to the easel, picks up a brush, and begins to paint.

What do you see?

SELA
(speaking directly to KIT, adding gesture and sign)

Birds?

KIT
(speaking, adding gesture and sign)

Sparrows.

SELA

What are they doing?

KIT

Flocking. Getting ready to fly away.

SELA

Away? Where are they going, Mama?

KIT

Just away...someplace nice.

SELA

KIT

(impassioned)

Oh, I wish I could fly! Don't you, Mama?

SELA

Oh, yes...more than anything. *(a beat)* This isn't hard, Kit. Algebra's just a fancy word for math. A puzzle. It's just a different way of looking at things. And once you see you never forget. *(a beat)* Look! How many sparrow all together?

KIT

(counting)

Ten, eleven, twelve.

SELA

Twelve. Now watch. They're going to fly between branches.

She rapidly paints a few strokes.

How many now?

KIT

Three.

SELA

And how many on this branch?

KIT

Three.

SELA

And these two?

KIT

Three. They're all three, Mama. And all together they're twelve.

SELA

Twelve. Twelve little sparrow perching in a tree. Now watch. *(paints rapidly)* They're flying faster and faster, swirling all around. Can you see them?

KIT

I can only see two clearly. The others are...

SELA

“Y.”

KIT

They’re still sparrows!

SELA

Are they?

KIT

Yes!

SELA

How do you know?

KIT

Because...because...because they’re there! Three times flour, or six times two, they all equal twelve! If I can see some, I know the others must be there!

SELA

(with a soft smile)

That’s all there is to it, Kit.

KIT

(with disbelief)

That’s all? Mama, are you sure?

SELA

If you don’t believe me, ask Aunt Reenie. She’s the teacher.

KIT

What about Daddy? What would he say?

SELA

What do you mean, what would Daddy say?

KIT

He thinks I’m stupid.

SELA

Kit, you’re not stupid!

KIT

Then why does Daddy think I am? He does, Mama!

SELA

Daddy just wants you, you and Chip, to do your best.

KIT

But it’s so hard!

SELA

I know that, Kit, but...well, you know what Daddy says. “Being deaf isn’t an excuse.”
(a beat) It just means you have to try harder.

SELA

Scares you?

KIT

When he gets so mad like that? *(a beat)* Doesn’t he ever scare you?

SELA

Lots of things scare me, Kit, but never Daddy.

KIT

But...things scare you?

SELA

Oh, yes.

KIT

What things?

SELA

Things like...oh never mind! You don’t need to know. You’re only...just a little girl.

KIT

Are you afraid of the dark?

SELA

The dark? Oh, what does it matter what I’m afraid of?

KIT

But what do you do, Mama? When you’re afraid?

SELA

I go off, by myself.

KIT

You do? But, where do you go? You’re always here.

SELA

(with a rueful smile)

I’m still here, but my mind is far away.

KIT

Away? Away where?

SELA

Anywhere I want to go. Sometimes I'm on a magic carpet flying over Inda.

KIT

(captivated)

India!

SELA

And sometimes I'm in a secret garden.

KIT

A secret garden?

SELA

Oh, it's a beautiful place, Kit. I love it there! There's roses, and violets, pansies and peach trees. Bees hum, and the air smells like honey. *(she sways dreamily)* And me? I'm wearing a white dress. A beautiful white dress with long sleeves, pearl buttons, and yards and yards of lace. And on my head I have a straw hat. A big straw hat with a huge brim and blue satin ribbons streaming down my back...

KIT

Oh, Mama, you sound beautiful! Like a fairy-tale princess.

SELA

(laughing ruefully)

Imagine that.

KIT

Is there a prince?

SELA

(wistfully)

Oh, yes...there's a prince...He has wonderful hands...and a soft, warm smile. He brings me flowers, reads me poems...and lets me paint all day.

KIT

All day?

SELA

(sighing dreamily)

All day...

KIT

(impassioned)

Oh, I wish I could go away like that!

SELA

(with heart-felt conviction)

You can, Kit! You can.

KIT

How?

SELA

It's not hard. *(a beat)* Look, out the window, at the moon.

KIT

The moon?

SELA

Look. It's up tonight. Can you see it?

KIT

(leaning against SELA, craning her head)

I see it. *(a beat)* It's beautiful, Mama.

ENTER BILL. Hovering in the doorway, unseen by SELA or KIT, he eavesdrops, wistful, intrigued, and perturbed.

SELA

(speaking and signing almost to herself)

I love to look at the moon. I always did. *(a beat)* Funny, but sometimes I think the man-in-the-moon can look down and see me. Look, there he is right now! See? He's so bright, and then so dark. *(a beat)* Where does he go when it's dark? I always think, If I try, if I could just try hard enough, I could reach him! I could touch him! But I never can...

KIT

(growing alarmed)

Mama?

SELA

I like to sit and look at the moon...and then I like to sing...very softly...just to myself...*(she sings and signs "The Moon Song.")* "I see the moon, the moon sees me./ Way up high above the apple tree./ What's he trying to say to me?/ I see the moon, the moon sees me."

KIT

(lighting up)

I know that song! You used to sing it to me when I was little. Before...

SELA

You remember it?

KIT

Sing it again, Mama. Please?

SELA

(signing & signing)

“I see the moon, the moon sees me./ Way up high above the apple tree.”

KIT

(joining in)

“What’s he trying to say to me?”

SELA & KIT

“I see the moon, the moon sees me.”

KIT signs and leans her head against SELA’s shoulder. SELA smoothes her hair and pulls back so KIT can see her lips.

SELA

Feel better?

KIT

Yes, Mama. I do.

In the doorway BILL sighs, hangs his head, touched, saddened, and lonely.

SELA

(musing to herself)

A fairy-tale princess...

Lights slowly fade.

ACT 1
Scene 4

*Spotlight comes up to reveal a **Tableux Viviant**. MAHONEY living room.*

WE SEE the family dynamics in geometrical forms. KIT, SELA and BILL stand in a triangle, each pulling in their own way at the other for power and attention. IT is standing by SELA at the easel, learning how to paint. She looks up from her painting, seeking SELA’s approval. SELA absently nods, smiles and turns back to her own easel.

CHIP stands outside the triangle, unable to break in as BILL constantly blocks CHIP as he becomes more and more persistent in trying to capture SELA’s undivided attention. CHIP finally throws his arms wide as if to say, “Hey, what about *me*?” BILL crosses his arms in stern irritation and disapproval.

WE SEE SELA’s smile grow strained, see her both flooded and torn with guilt and resentment, see the look of longing to escape wash over her features.

SELA’S paint brush falls. KIT picks it up and tentatively extends it to SELA. SELA smiles sadly, shakes her head, “no.” Shoulders slumping, SELA stares at nothing, withdrawing into herself. KIT, standing next to SELA, reaches out to touch SELA’s hand, but stops at the last minute, afraid and feeling oddly shut out.

Spotlight slowly fades.

ACT 1
Scene 5

A short time later. Evening. *Lights come up to reveal SELA’s bedroom.* SELA, in a modest nightgown and her hair in a long braid, lies in bed. She is clearly fighting a cold and seems unusually tired, yet terribly anxious. KIT is curled up beside her, watching “Bonanza” on SELA’s portable black & white TV. Both speak and use a mixture of sign and gesture. **ADULT KIT & DR. SEGAL look on, adding interpretive support.**

KIT

No, Mama! No, I meant *Little Joe’s* horse. Look at him! Isn’t he beautiful?

SELA

I always wanted a horse...ever since I was a little girl.

KIT

(surprised)

You did?

SELA

We never had enough money for a horse of our very own. But every summer? When the carnival came to town? My Daddy would slip me a quarter so I could ride the ponies.

KIT

Maybe Daddy can buy us a horse, Mama.

She turns back to the TV, missing SELA’s Sudden grimace of pain causing SELA to clench her fists and grit her teeth, fighting for control.

Mama? What are they saying? Mama, what are they saying?

SELA

(struggling to concentrate)

They say...they’re saying, “I thought I thaw a puddy-cat.”

KIT

(dubiously)

What? Really? Are you sure?

SELA

(vehemently)

“I did! I did! I did see a puddy-cat!”

KIT

That can't be right! Stop teasing me. This is “Bonanza,” not cartoons. What's Little Joe *saying?*”

SELA

(wearily rubbing forehead)

Later, Kit. I'll tell you later.

KIT

Oh, tell me now, Mama! Please? I love Little Joe. He's so cute!

SELA

(sharply)

I said later!

KIT

(with growing concern)

Mama? Mama, what's wrong?

SELA

(frightened whisper, furtively looking around)

Oh my God...What?...Who? *(a beat)* Who's saying that?

She stares at her watch with horror.

KIT

Mama? Mama!

SELA

(frightened whisper)

Shhhh! *(a beat)* Oh...oh...oh my God!.

She jams her watch against KIT's ear.

Listen!

KIT

Mama? You know I can't hear...

SELA

(growing frantic)

Listen!

KIT

(futilely obeying, voice choked)

I'm listening, Mama. I'm listening! *(a beat)* But, Mama, what am I supposed to hear?

SELA

(hoarse whisper & ragged sign)

Voices. *(a beat* Oh, God!

She tears the watch from her wrist, leaps from the bed, falling to her knees, smashing the watch repeatedly against the floor.

No! No! Stop! Stop it! Stop saying that!

KIT

(struggling with SELA)

Mama! Mama, what are you doing?

SELA

(desperately frightened, growing paranoid)

Who’s saying that? Who are you? *(a beat)* No! God, no!

KIT

Mama, what’s wrong? Mama? Mama!

ENTER BILL, a newspaper in hand. He freezes in shock and disbelief.

SELA

(screaming)

Stop! Stop...please...stop!

KIT

Mama? Mama!

BILL

(to KIT, yelling and pointing to television)

What the... Turn that blasted TV off!

KIT

(desperately, to BILL)

She hears voices, Daddy! Voices...

BILL

I said turn that blasted TV off! You *know* you mother’s sick!

KIT

No, Daddy...no, not the TV...*the watch*, Daddy...the watch! Mama hears voices from the watch!

BILL stiffens. With an oath he crosses to The TV, snaps it off. He stands there with his back turned, rigid and shaking.

KIT

(hesitantly, approaching BILL with trepidation)

Daddy?.

BILL

Wait outside, Kit.

KIT

What...what are you going to do, Daddy?

SELA

(whimpering)

Bill? Help me...please, God...help me!

BILL

(with anguish)

Oh, Seal...

He hunkers down, tries to put his arms around SELA. She pulls away, curling into herself, rocking frantically.

KIT

(fearfully)

Daddy? Daddy, what are you going to do?

BILL looks at KIT helplessly, then turns his attention back to SELA.

Lights slowly dim.

ACT 1
Scene 6

A short time later. Evening. Mount Zion Psychiatric Hospital. *Lights come up to reveal SELA’s hospital room. SELA, in a hospital gown, lies pale and listless in her hospital bed. BILL sits by her side, trying to tempt her to eat. A spotlight comes up to reveal ADULT KIT and DR. SEGAL, who interpret this scene.*

BILL

Sela? Come on, Hon. Eat something...I want to get you out of here.

SELA refuses to part her lips and take the forkful of food BILL offers. He goes on talking, carrying the conversation for them both.

The kids have been asking about you. Wanting to know ho you’re getting on...when you’re coming home...I tell them everything will be fine, don’t worry...Reenie thinks I should just come right out and tell them. But how can I do that? They’re just kids! They wouldn’t understand...Besides, things will be all right. *(a beat)* Won’t they? *(a beat)* Com on, Hon, eat something! I want to get you *out* of here!

SELA again turns her head away, stubbornly resisting the food.

Sela? *(a beat)* C’mon, please...Honey, you gotta help me here...I *need* you!

SELA stares at BILL, but is actually withdrawing into herself before his eyes, which BILL realizes all too clearly.

BILL

(sighing, stroking SELA’s hand)

Oh, Hon...*(a beat)* When I met y’all? Huh, that was *it!* Y’know? I mean, I might’ve only been twenty-one...we both were, weren’t we? We always *did* do everything together. *(a beat)* I don’t know how it was for you, Seal...you never really came out and said...But for me? That was *it.*

SELA’s hand remains limp. BILL continues to hold it, stroke it.

BILL

Everyone thought I was crazy rushing into marriage like that. “Play the field, Mahoney! Enjoy yourself!” (*a beat*) But what was the point? After I saw you? Well, there wasn’t any need to look any further. Everything I ever wanted was right there...

(*a beat*) Remember that dance we went to, Seal? That one with Benny Goodman? *Benny Goodman!* You were in that dress I liked so much...that yellow one with the black velvet sash. Made you look like a Black-eyed Susan, all sunny and sultry...Remember? I always thought of you that way. Did you know that? Sunny and sultry. (*a beat*) We listened to Benny Goodman...laughed and danced...and laughed some more. Didn’t stop...even when we got home. You just marched right to the closet, fished out my clarinet, and said, “Play.”

Ha! That closet! What would we have done without that closet? Huh, Seal? It held more than the rest of the whole damn place put together—your grandma’s good china...my college books...your paint supplies. I never say so many paint supplies! Charcoals, pencils, chalks, oils. I’d go to brush my teeth, reach for the toothpaste, and pick up a tube of Cadmium Red. Looked like I was hemorrhaging.

(*a beat*) Hmmph! “Officer’s Housing.” Nothing more than a glorified shoebox...Only good thing about it was the Air Force paid for my schooling. (*a beat*) It was a dump, wasn’t it, Hon? Whole damn place smelled like mildew, mold and mothballs—even when you cleaned. And then it smelled like *Ajax*, mildew, mold and mothballs...And turpentine. Always turpentine...(a *beat*) I played, and you sang...all the show tunes...one right after another...”Carousel”...”Oklahoma”...”Camelot”...

He begins to sway as if to music.

I could never leave you, Seal...not in springtime...not in summer...*never*. (*a beat*) God, I loved that place! Crash into a wall when you rolled out of bed...Anyone drop by for dinner we’d have to eat standing up...”Intimate gatherings,” you called them...(a *beat*) I looked at you in that yellow dress and played like I’d never played before and never would again...I think we both knew that...That was the night you told me about Chip...(a *beat*) And after that we moved on up, didn’t we? Until we finally moved out altogether...Whatever happened to that dress?

It hasn’t been so bad, has it, Hon? Sela? (*a beat*) Oh, Seal, what am I saying? It’s been awful...Without you? Day after day coming home to an empty house...no one to talk to, just the kids...Both of them in my face, demanding attention the minute I walk in the door? With Chip it’s always, “Take me here, Dad! I need to be there, Dad! I need milk money, Dad! It’s your turn to drive, Dad”...And Kit...Oh my God, who can understand Kit? (*a beat*) I don’t know how you did it Seal. I honest-to-God don’t.

SELA does not respond. BILL sighs, rubs his face, tries food again.

BILL

(fervently)

Thank God for Reenie! At least now we finally eat decent home-cooked meals. You know me and cooking. *(a beat)* But it's not the same, Seal...it's just not the same...it's...lonely!

He grabs SELA's limp hand.

Hon? Hon, every night I turn over in bed...reach out for you...wake up...and there's no one there...*(a beat)* C'mon, Hon, eat up!

SELA doesn't respond, doesn't even turn away, just stares right through BILL.

Try, Sela! Seal? Please, try, Hon, just for me. Please? *(a beat)* C'mon, Hon! Don't shut me out. Sela? C'mon, honey, c'mon...

SELA does not respond. BILL slams the fork down on the hospital tray and climbs onto SELA's hospital bed, taking her forcefully into his arms.

Damnit, Sela! I'm not gonna let you do this! I'm not gonna lose you! *(a beat)* You can't leave me alone...not like this...Sela? Seal? *(a beat)* Please...God, I'm only 36 years old!

SELA limply lies unresponsive in BILL's arms. BILL groans in despair and pulls her to his chest, his shoulders shaking as he breaks down.

Lights slowly dim.

ACT 1
Scene 7

3 months later. Summer. Late twilight. *Lights come up to reveal* KIT. She is seated on the front steps of her house, knees drawn to her chest and chin in hand, watching the sun set and the moon rise. Out in the yard under the porch light CHIP tosses a ball, catching it in his catcher’s mitt repeatedly while AUNT REENIE (early 30’s) shakes her head in disgust as she fingers the clothes hanging limply on the clothesline.

Spotlight comes up on ADULT KIT and DR. SEGAL who look on and help interpret this scene.

AUNT REENIE
(muttering to self)

Oh don’t tell me I’m too late! Oh, dang! Soaked through by the dew again. *(sighing)* Reenie, when you gonna learn, girl? *(a beat)* Oh well, nothing to do about it now. Just leave ‘em out to dry and try to remember to bring ‘em in tomorrow.

She catches sight of KIT on the steps.

Look at her, just sitting there in the dark...what’s she thinking?

She turns to CHIP.

Chip? Go call your sister to get inside. It’s getting late.

CHIP
(concentrating on tossing and catching his ball)

I’m practicing! I want to make the team.

AUNT REENIE
You’ll make the team, Chip. Y’all been practicing all summer.

CHIP
I’ll only be a freshman. All those other guys are bigger than me.

AUNT REENIE
You’re growing like a weed, Chip.

CHIP
But they’re still bigger!

AUNT REENIE
So?

CHIP
So that means they’re better.

AUNT REENIE
Go get Kit. You can pitch to us both.

CHIP
It’s too dark.

AUNT REENIE
Not under the lights.

CHIP
Jut can’t throw!

AUNT REENIE
She can still catch.

CHIP
But...but, you guys are girls!

AUNT REENIE
Well, thank you for noticing.

CHIP
You can’t teach me anything. Dad’s the one I need.

AUNT REENIE
(softening)
Your daddy’s busy, what with your mama ‘n all...Go on. Go call Kit.

CHIP
(with misplaced anger)
Everybody’s always bossing me around!

AUNT REENIE
Chip! C’mon, help me out, huh?

CHIP
(muttering darkly as he stops to KIT’s side)
Kit, you are such a royal pain! *(yelling at KIT’s back)* Ki-ii-iiittt! Aunt Reenie says y’all gotta go in. Now! Ki-i-iitt!

KIT does not respond.

CHIP

Huh! Fine. You wanna act that way? Fine with me. Be that way! Ain't no skin off my nose. I did my part.

He stomps back and resumes practice.
AUNT REENIE snatches his ball away.

CHIP

Hey! Give me my ball! How can I make the majors if y'all won't give me my ball?

AUNT REENIE
(*glaring, with arms crossed*)

Who do you think you are?

CHIP
(*belligerent*)

I called her! Jeez, Michey Mantle would never have to put up with this crap!

AUNT REENIE

What's *wrong* with you?

CHIP
What? I called her! I yelled my head off! You heard me.

AUNT REENIE

But Kit didn't.

CHIP
She heard me! She hears just fine when she wants to.

AUNT REENIE
When she can *look* at you, Chip...to read your lips. You know that!

CHIP
Can I help it that she won't look at me? That she ignores me?

AUNT REENIE
Chip, Kit can't help being deaf.

CHIP
(*yelling*)
Stop making excuses for her! She thinks she's the only one who misses Mama!

AUNT REENIE
(with compassion)

Oh, Chip...

CHIP
(throwing her off)

Forget it, Aunt Reenie! Just forget it! I don't wanna talk about it!

He snatches his ball back and stomps into
the house.

EXIT CHIP

ACT 1
Scene 8

Moments later. Front porch of the MAHONEY house. Evening. AUNT REENIE sighs helplessly as she watches CHIP stomp off. KIT, looking at the moon, begins to gently sway. She hums to herself, and then begins to sing “The Moon Song,” signing some of the words.

ADULT KIT and DR. SEGAL look on, lending interpretive support.

KIT

(singing & signing)

“I see the moon, the moon sees me/ Way up high above the apple tree...”

AUNT REENIE

(to self)

Oh my God, she’s singing! The same song Ma used to sing to Sela ‘n me.

She watches wistfully, softly joins in.

KIT & AUNT REENIE

“What’s he tryin’ to say to me?/ I see the moon, the moon sees me...”

She touches KIT’s shoulder. KIT jumps, then immediately clams up.

AUNT REENIE

(speaking directly to KIT, with added sign & gestures)

Wath’cha doing?

KIT

(clamming up)

Nothing

AUNT KIT

(trying to draw KIT in)

Look at that moon shine! Look, Kit! You can see the man-in-the-moon..see?

KIT

(shrugging)

I see.

AUNT REENIE

Mm! It’s nice out here. Soft...warm...feels good to be outside, doesn’t it, Kit?

KIT

(with surprise)

You *like* it outside, Aunt Reenie?

AUNT REENIE

I love it! Nothing better than being outside on a summer night. Mm, smell that honeysuckle! I think honeysuckle’s ‘bout the best smelling thing in the world, don’t you?

KIT

If you like it outside so much, how come you’re always stuck inside?

AUNT REENIE

(ruffling KIT’s hair)

Ha! Nothing wrong with your *eyes*, Kitten! (*a beat*) Oh, I don’t know...maybe it’s a good thing I’m not married yet. I never realized how much work goes into taking care of a home and a family. I don’t know how Sela did it.

KIT

(anxiously)

You’re not gonna get sick too, are you?

AUNT REENIE

Get sick? No! ‘Lease I’m not plannin’ on it.

KIT

You sure?

AUNT REENIE

Kit! What a question!

She lights a cigarette, inhales deeply.

KIT

(imploringly)

Stay outside, Aunt Reenie!

AUNT REENIE

What?

KIT

Don’t wash clothes...don’t do dishes...don’t yell at Chip to clean his room. Stay outside, with me. We could run away! Live in the woods. In a tent!

AUNT REENIE

(hooting with laughter)

A tent? And live off what, roots and berries? (*a beat*) Ah, Kit, it might be fun for a day or so, but I'd miss a bed, a hot bath, and a cupboard full of Hostess Twinkies.

KIT

You think it's a dumb idea. A dumb kid idea.

AUNT REENIE

No, no! It's just...well, running away won't solve anything.

KIT

(defiantly)

It would solve everything!

AUNT REENIE

No it wouldn't, Kit. It would only make things worse. Your daddy's got enough to worry about, what with your mama 'n all. You want to make things easier for him, not harder.

KIT

Now how can I do that? I'm just a dumb kid, remember?

AUNT REENIE

By washing the car...or mowing the lawn...or, or sweeping the floor. Lots of ways!

KIT

(passionately, almost in tears)

None of that matters! It don't mean shit!

AUNT REENIE

(shocked)

Katherine Anne Mahoney!

KIT

It don't! It don't!

AUNT REENIE

Who taught you that word? Chip?

KIT

(distraught)

Aunt Reenie, please, listen to me!

AUNT REENIE

No! You listen to me, Kit Mahoney! Don't you ever use that language again!

KIT

(stung, newly defiant)

Go away, Aunt Reenie! Go away before I make you sick!

AUNT REENIE

(perplexed)

You won't make me sick. Kit, honey, you can't.

KIT

I made Mama sick.

AUNT REENIE

That's not true.

KIT

Yes it is! It's true!

AUNT REENIE

Who told you that?

KIT

Grandma told me.

AUNT REENIE

Grandma? Kit, are you sure you heard her right?

KIT

Yes! She said Mama got sick because we wore her out.

AUNT REENIE

(with a rueful laugh)

Oh, Kit...lots of people say things they don't mean. People don't always think straight when they're upset. Remember, Grandma's Mama's mama. When she heard about Sela she near went crazy herself.

KIT

Is that what's wrong with Mama? She's crazy?

AUNT REENIE

(brought up short)

What? No! Your mama's...sick. *(a beat)* She had a breakdown.

KIT

Mama has something broken? What's wrong with her?

AUNT REENIE

Sela...your mama...well, she's sick...that's all...she's...sick.

KIT

(turning away, gazing at the moon)

(a beat) When I was seven I had a bad fever. I was in the hospital for an entire week. *(a beat)* When the fever finally...my ears did too.

AUNT REENIE

(overcome)

Oh, Kit...

KIT

I just woke up and I couldn't hear...not like before...it's all...muffled.

AUNT REENIE

(struggling to explain and make KIT understand)

Oh...that, that fever? Well, it was like, like... You know how you test a hot iron? How you fling a drop of water on it to see if it's ready? How the water will just shrivel up and disappear? Well, inside your ears? You have nerves. Really tiny, itty-bitty nerves, smaller than that drop of water. *(a beat)* Your fever was so hot, Kit...it lasted so long that...

KIT

(anticipating and finishing the thought)

That the nerves in my ear just went *(signs “dissolved”)*. Is that what happened to Mama? Did she dissolve too?

AUNT REENIE

(with a weak laugh)

Well, something like that.

KIT

(solemnly)

My ears are still broken. But I got better.

AUNT REENIE

(voice breaking)

You're fine, Kit! You're just fine!

KIT

Aunt Reenie? I'm gonna ask you something...and I want you to think real hard before you answer me. *(a beat)* Is Mama dying?

AUNT REENIE

What? Oh, Kit...no!

KIT

You didn't think very long.

AUNT REENIE

I don't have to think about it because it's not true! Your mama's not dying.

KIT

You mean that? You're not just saying that?

AUNT REENIE

Of course I mean it! I wouldn't lie to you.

KIT

No...but you might say something you don't mean. Swearing ain't half as bad as saying something you don't really mean. That's lying.

She turns away, hugs her knees, gazing intently at the moon, shutting everyone and everything out. AUNT REENIE sighs, stubs out her cigarette, moves to where she knows KIT can see her. They contemplate the moon as they struggle to control emotions.

AUNT REENIE

I heard you singing. You sounded nice...I always loved that song.

KIT

(surprised)

Really?

AUNT REENIE

Grandma used to sing it to us...Sela 'n me... When we were little? Ha, they told us the moon was made of cheese! But Sela 'n me? We thought the moon was a big, fat pearl...and the stars? They were diamonds! We used to lie down on the grass and try to count how many stars were in the sky...and we made wishes.

KIT

You made wishes?

AUNT REENIE

All the time. All the other kids made wishes on stars, but Sela said that was silly. The stars couldn't see who was talking! She said we should tell our wishes to the moon. If we could see him, maybe he could see us.

KIT

To the moon? How could you do that?

AUNT REENIE

It’s easy! Want me to show you?

KIT

(shaking head)

I don’t know, Aunt Reenie...wishes? That’s kid’s stuff.

AUNT REENIE

No it’s not. I still make them.

KIT

Wishes?

AUNT REENIE

All the time.

KIT

Do your wishes ever come true?

AUNT REENIE

Some. Sometimes you have to wait a while... Want to try? Come on, it won’t hurt you! Listen. “Moonlight/ moon so bright/ does the man-in-the-moon see me tonight?” C’mon, Kit!

KIT & AUNT REENIE

“Moonlight/ moon so bright/ does the man-in-the-moon see me tonight?”

AUNT REENIE

“I wish I may/ I wish I might/ Have the wish I wish tonight...” Now close your eyes and make your wish, Kit.

KIT

(fervently, eyes tightly shut)

I wish my mama would come home so we could be a family again! And I wish I could be so good my mama would never have to go away, ever, ever again! I wish...I wish...I wish...

Lights slowly fade to two spotlights. One illuminates KIT with her eyes shut, hands cupping her heart. The second spotlight frames ADULT KIT, eyes also closed, a hand also cupping her heart. LIGHTS SLOWLY FADE.

ACT 1
Scene 9

One month later. MAHONEY living room. Early afternoon. Lights come up to reveal KIT and CHIP, in the Sunday best, and AUNT REENIE who is busy sprucing them up and issuing last-minute instructions. *ADULT KIT stands off to the side, signing the scene as she looks on, reliving it in memory. DR. SEGAL stands nearby, observing and lending interpretive support.*

AIMT REENIE

(speaking & signing)

Now remember, don't y'all go pouncing on her the minute she walks in the door. Your mama's been gone awhile. Give her a chance to get her bearings.

KIT

(sniffing, speaking & signing)

What's that smell? Chip? Is that you?

CHIP

(speaking and struggling to finger-spell)

English Leather.

KIT

What?

CHIP

(speaking, struggling to sign)

What's the matter? Didn't I spell it right?

KIT

Aftershave? You put on aftershave?

CHIP

It's what you're supposed to do after you finish shaving...aw, forget it!

KIT

(cracking up)

Shaving? You shaved, Chip? You?

CHIP

Jeez, why do I even bother trying to talk to you? Letting you teach me sign was the dumbest thing I ever did!

KIT

(through laughter)

I'm sorry, Chip. It's just so funny! You? Shaving? Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!.

CHIP

I don't care what you think, Kit. I put it on for Mama. At least when she walks in the door she'll notice me.

KIT

(instantly sobering)

Will she remember me, Aunt Reenie?

AUNT REENIE

What a question! 'Course she'll remember you, Kit.

CHIP

(tauntingly, speaking with broad pantomime)

Don't worry, Pea-brain. Mama will know you. She'll walk in that door and say, “Oh, my ba-aa-by! Come here my little Pea-brain! Let me give you a big, sloppy kiss!”

He claps KIT's cheeks and slobbers all over her face like a dog.

KIT

(squealing, pulling away)

Eew! Gross! And I'm not a Pea-brain!

CHIP

(sobering)

Just don't mess this up, Kit. You're not the only one who's been waiting for Mama to come home. So just don't go and mess this up, okay?

KIT

(hotly)

I'm not going to mess anything up!

AUNT REENIE

Shhh! That's enough, y'all, save it for another day. They're here.

CHIP and KIT suck their breath, smooth their hair and, squaring their shoulders, face the door with hope and fear.

ENTER BILL. He stops just inside the door, filling it, blocking out the view behind.

CHIP

(sorely disappointed)

Oh...it's only Daddy.

BILL

(speaking only, with feigned hurt)

“Only Daddy?” Well, how's *that* for a welcome?

KIT

Where's Mama? Aunt Reenie said you were bringing Mama home today!

CHIP

(speaking with rough sign to KIT)

Aw, Pea-brain, don't be so dumb.

KIT

I'm not dumb!

CHIP

Then stop bugging Daddy about Mama. She not comin' home..

KIT

(plaintively)

She's not?

CHIP

Well she ain't here, is she?

BILL

(with a showman's flourish)

Whoa, now just hold on! Who says Mama's not here?

With a big grin, BILL steps aside.

ENTER SELA, framed in the doorway. She is thin, chic and brittle in a black cocktail dress, stockings and high heels. She sports a spiked pixie haircut and blood red lips.

CHIP, KIT and AUNT REENIE stare at her, stunned, and exchanged worried glances.

CHIP

Mama? Mama...you're...home.

CHIP steps forward to kiss SELA’s cheek,
but she steps away.

CHIP

(taken aback)

Oh...okay...ummm...hi, Mama...uh...gee, you sure look, uh...different.

BILL

(proudly throwing arm around SELA’s bare shoulder, nuzzling her neck)

Doesn’t she look great?

CHIP

(stiffly, deeply perturbed)

Ummm...yeah...yeah...really...great. Nice, uh...nice makeup...Mama.

BILL

(overly loud, to KIT)

Kit? Aren’t y’all gonna say hello to your mama here?

KIT

(lipreading, holding back)

Th-that’s okay...maybe later...

AUNT REENIE

(speaking/signing/gesturing to KIT)

Go on, honey. You’ve been wanting to see your mama for the longest time. Go give her a kiss.

She gently pushes KIT forward. KIT, with hesitant steps, warily approaches SELA who stiffens as though steeling herself, smiles woodenly, and offers her cheek for an air kiss. The slight infuriates a bewildered KIT.

KIT

(hotly, speaking & signing to SELA)

Who, who *are* you?

BILL

(overload admonishment)

Kit! That’s your mama! Talk to her nice.

KIT

That’s not my mama.

SELA
(startled, speaking & signing)

I'm your mama!

A furious private conversation, with much added sign and gesture, ensues between KIT and SELA (*in bold type*). BILL, struggling to understand, grows increasingly irritated at being shut out. CHIP and AUNT REENIE look on, both bewildered.

KIT
(hotly)
My mama would never wear a dress like that!

SELA
Daddy bought me this dress!

KIT
And how come you cut your hair like that? And wear so much makeup? You smell like perfume and...cigarettes.

SELA
(alarmed)
Stop this now...stop! This isn't like you. Where's my sweet little girl? (a beat) You don't want to get Daddy all upset.

KIT
You might be a good enough actress to fool Daddy, but you don't fool me!

SELA
(desperately)
Kit...pleas, I need you to help me.

KIT
(with disbelief)
Help you?

SELA
(pleading)
Please...for Daddy.

KIT
Daddy?

SELA

(wringing hands)

I've been gone a long time, Kit...a long time from Daddy.

KIT

You've been gone a long time from me too, Mama! *(voice breaking)* So long...

SELA

(gritting teeth, struggling for control)

Kit, for once I just wish...

KIT

(hotly)

You're not what I wished for!

SELA

Kit, please, don't make this any harder for me than it already is.

KIT

(incredulous)

Hard for you?

SELA

I'm doing this for Daddy.

KIT

For Daddy? You, you dressed up like...you're acting like, like some *movie star* for Daddy?

SELA

(with misplaced relief)

Yes! Oh, Kit, yes.

KIT

(totally bewildered)

But...why?

SELA

(conspiring)

Daddy...Daddy's trying Kit...really trying. *(a beat)* I have to try too.

KIT

Try to do what?

SELA

(fighting to control rising panic)

If...if I can make Daddy happy? Then we'll all be happy. (a beat) Please, Kit, just go along with me. It will be alright. Please, just trust me on this, okay?

KIT

(suddenly drained, lost and confused)

I...what? What? (a beat) Okay...okay, Mama...I'll...I'll try. (breaking into tears) Oh, Mama, I'll do anything to keep you from going away again!

*She throws her arms around SELA, desperate for love and reassurance. SELA holds her stiffly. BILL immediately steps in and none too gently pulls KIT away.

BILL

(loudly, to KIT)

Kit! Kit, look at me! That's enough now. You can't be monopolizing all of Mama's attention anymore. You're not a baby. It's time you grew up, accepted more responsibility.

KIT

(newly stung)

I'm responsible!

BILL

Mama needs to rest. I don't want you bothering her. You're going to have to start doing more things for yourself, help out cooking and cleaning.

KIT

(speaking with some sign)

I do cook and clean! I do a lot around here! More than Chip! Don't I, Aunt Reenie?

BILL

Leave Aunt Reenie out of this. I'm talking about you, Kit. I don't want you bothering Mama

KIT

(hotly, angrily swiping away tears)

I'm not bothering her! I'm talking to her!

BILL

Mama needs to rest. She needs peace and quiet, not you two hounding her all day. From now on you two come to me if you have a problem or need something. Understand?

CHIP and KIT exchange glances, the longed for reunion turning miserable for them both.
CHIP tries to salvage the situation

CHIP

(brightly, to SELA)

Mama? I got some new records. The Beatles! Want to hear?

BILL

(disgruntled)

Mama doesn't want to listen to The Beatles, Chip.

CHIP

Huh? The Beatles are great, Daddy! They were on “The Ed Sullivan Show.”

BILL

So was Elvis!

CHIP

(scoffing)

Elvis? Daddy, he's a...he's a greaser!

BILL

He can sing rings around The Beatles and play the guitar to boot!

CHIP

(hotly defensive)

The Beatles can sing!

BILL

(rolling eyes)

That what you call it? Yelling the same damn lyrics over and over while playing all of, what, three chords? Trust me, son, that ain't singing.

CHIP

Awww, Daddy! You're such an old...

BILL

Elvis *works* a song, no matter what it is...rock, gospel, ballad, blues...the King can sing! But if it's music you want, you can't go wrong with the big bands. Now take swing! Jazz! That, son, is music!

CHIP

(with tear-threatened fury)

Elvis is washed-upped, a has-been!

BILL

(red-faced, sweating)

And The Beatles are a flash in the pan! Elvis was big long before anyone even heard of them, and he'll be big long after. You mark my words!

SELA

(overwhelmed by the arguing)

Bill!

BILL

(instantly solicitous)

What is it, Princess? You feeling okay?

CHIP

(bewildered)

“Princess?” You’re calling Mama, “Princess?” What is this?

SELA

(grabbing the first thought she can think of)

I’m...I’m...I’m...hungry!

AUNT REENIE

(brightly stepping in)

Oh! ‘Course you are! Sela, honey, why don’t we all go into the kitchen? I’ve got a nice baked ham...fresh cornbread...baked beans...

SELA

(frantic to escape)

Oh...Bill? Can’t we just...can’t we just...go out?

BILL

Oh, uh...sure! How ‘bout we all go to The Calabash?

CHIP

The Calabash! Wow! You hear that, Kit?

KIT shrugs, bewildered by their new sudden good fortune.

SELA

(close to breaking point)

Oh, Bill, please...not with the kids. I...I just...I just...can’t.

CHIP

(stung)

Mama!

BILL

(struggling to appease and control)

Uh, maybe not this time, son. I think it might be better if y’all stay here. Your mama and I...well, we need some time...alone. You understand, don’t you, Reenie?

AUNT REENIE

Sure, Bill...sure. You and Sela go ahead. I’ll feed the kids.

BEN

(relieved)

Thanks, Reenie.

AUNT REENIE

Yeah.

She lays a hand on SELA’s shoulder.

But Sela? Y’all hurry back, y’hear? Your family’s missed you.

SELA

(pulling away, badly agitated)

Bill? Please, can’t we just go?

EXIT SELA. BILL, alarmed, hurries after her. *EXIT BILL.*

CHIP and KIT, crushed and bewildered, turn to AUNT REENIE.

AUNT REENIE

(softly, almost to self)

Well...Mama’s home...things will be different now...

Lights slowly dim.

ACT 1
Scene 10

A short time later. Lights come up to reveal the MAHONEY living room. SELA’s easel, with a bland canvas resting on it, is prominently displayed. SELA, filled with nervous energy, is frantically dusting. She eyes the easel, stops, and gingerly touches the canvas. Trembling, she spins away, resuming her dusting with new intensity. *ENTER KIT.*

Spotlight comes up on ADULT KIT. She looks on, reliving the scene in her memory while DR. SEGAL, observing, lends interpretive support.

KIT

(speaking with added signs & gestures)

Mama? Mama, what are you doing?

SELA

(dusting, speaking only, avoiding KIT)

I’m busy, Kit. House hasn’t had a good cleaning in I don’t know how long.

KIT

You’re not supposed to be doing that, Mama. Daddy wants you to rest.

SELA

(snapping)

I can’t rest! I rested long enough...in the hospital.

KIT

But...Mama, I just don’t want you to get sick again.

SELA

(peevisly with sharp voice & sign)

I’m fine, Kit, just fine! I’d be even better if y’all would just stop hovering!

KIT

Hovering? Oh, no... Mama, I love you! I’m just trying to help.

SELA freezes as though startled by something we can’t see or hear.

SELA

(whispering, clearly frightened)

Did you turn the TV on?

KIT
(startled)

The TV?

SELA checks the TV. Shaking, she taps her watch, holds it up to her ear.

KIT
(with a sick feeling of dread)

Mama?

SELA
(taking a deep breath, squaring her shoulders)

Nothing. I must have imagined it.

KIT

Mama?

SELA
(resuming her frantic dusting)

I'm busy, Kit.

KIT

Mama? You're not...you're not hearing them again...are you?

SELA
(sharply)

What? Hearing what?

KIT

The...the...voices?

SELA

I told you, Kit, that was all in my head!

KIT

But...

SELA

It wasn't real!

KIT, confused and filled with dread, backs away, watching helplessly as SELA attacks imaginary dust and dirt with her rag.

Lights slowly dim.

ACT 1
Scene 11

Christmas morning. The MAHONEY living room. WE HEAR Christmas music. Lights come up to reveal SELA, in high-heeled mules and a new satin robe, hanging from BILL’s arm like an ornament as she sips juice from a cut-crystal glass. On the floor, in their new Christmas pajamas, a beaming CHIP strums his new guitar while KIT kneels by the tree, worried and withdrawn. She holds a baby doll, a toy much too young for her.

ADULT KIT and DR. SEGAL look on, interpreting the scene as needed.

ENTER AUNT REENIE, in a red wool coat, arms laden with presents.

AUNT REENIE

Merry Christmas, y’all!

CHIP

Aunt Reenie!

He jumps up, runs to her, tugs at gifts.

What’d ya get me?

AUNT REENIE

Whoa there, rock star! Where’s my Christmas kiss?

CHIP

(planting a loud raspberry on her cheek)

How’s that?!

AUNT REENIE

(with a laughing grimace)

Yuk! Wet! You’ll never get a second date if you kiss a girl like that, Chip.

CHIP

(laughing)

I ain’t worried about a second date. Gotta get me a first one first! Here, let me take your coat.

AUNT REENIE

(charmed)

Why, Chip Mahoney! Since when have you been such a gentleman?

CHIP

Since I saw this here big box with the red bow on it. It’s mine, right?

AUNT REENIE

(teasing)

Actually, it’s for me.

CHIP

(sorely disappointed)

What?

AUNT REENIE

Instead of opening my presents all by my lonesome two towns over, I thought I’d open them up here with y’all.

CHIP

You’re joking, aren’t ya, Aunt Reenie. Please say you’re joking.

AUNT REENIE

(punching CHIP’S arm)

Why of course I’m joking, you big ape! My name’s not Scrooge!

CHIP

(whooping with excitement)

I knew it! Can I open it now?.

AUNT REENIE

If it’s okay with your mama and daddy.

BILL

Go ahead, son...slowly!

CHIP

(tearing into his present)

What the...a card? You wrapped a baseball card? In that huge box?

He tosses aside clouds of tissue paper,
hoping to unearth buried treasure..

AUNT REENIE

Read what it says, Chip..

CHIP

(grudgingly at first, then with mounting excitement)

“To Chip—step up to the plate, Slugger—Mickey Mantle.” Mickey Mantle? Is this for real?

AUNT REENIE

It’s real. I sent him a letter saying he was my favorite nephew’s favorite, and...

CHIP

And he signed his card? For me?

BILL

You be sure to take good care of that, son. That could be worth something someday.

AUNT REENIE

I don’t think you need to worry about that, Bill. Chip knows what it’s worth.

BILL

At least thank your Aunt Reenie proper.

Cradling the card, CHIP rises and hugs
AUNT REENIE awkwardly, then clings,
desperately, trying hard not to cry.

AUNT REENIE

(softly, patting CHIP’s back)

It’s alright, Chip...it’s alright.

She kisses his cheek. CHIP breaks away,
trying to laugh it off.

SELA

(handing exquisitely wrapped present to REENIE)

For you.

AUNT REENIE

(staggered)

Oh, my, Sela! Look at this wrapping! It’s beautiful! Way too pretty to open.

SELA

(very brittle)

It’s Christmas, Reenie. It’s important to make everything magical.

AUNT REENIE

(looking around, taking note)

Well, you sure knocked yourself out here! Homemade ornaments...fresh eggnog...warm gingerbread. *(sniffs deeply)* And your roast smells like heaven. And those stockings! They’re all needlepoint and embroidered. Don’t tell me y’all did those too?

BILL

She did it all, Reenie. I'm proud of you, Princess.

He squeezes SELA's shoulder. SELA stiffens, her smile overly bright.

AUNT REENIE

(noting SELA's reaction, concerned)

Well...I don't...I just hope it wasn't too much for you, Sela

SELA

Oh no... It's Christmas! My family deserves the best.

AUNT REENIE

Well, you sure gave them that. Looks like you bought out all downtown.

She sees KIT kneeling forlornly by the tree. She crosses to her, kneeling by KIT's side.

AUNT REENIE

(speaking & signing)

Hi, Kit. What's that you got there?

KIT

(despondent, speaking & signing)

A baby doll...

SHEBA

(backing away in terror)

No. Oh, Mama, no!

SELA

(cutting in)

That's not just any baby doll. That's Chatty Cathy!

AUNT REENIE

(stunned dismay)

Chatty Cathy?

SHEBA

(taking doll from KIT, gently cradling it, crooning)

The closest thing to a real live baby.

AUNT REENIE

(exchanging worried looks with KIT)

Uh...Sela?

SELA

She walks...and talks...oh, listen! She’s saying, “I love you, Mama!” Look at her! Isn’t she precious?

She hugs and kisses the doll desperately.

AUNT REENIE

(speaking & signing)

I’m sure she’s a very nice doll, Sela, but do you think Kit can fully, uh, appreciate her? I mean, she’s cute ‘n’all, but...

SELA

(sharply)

But what?

AUNT REENIE

But...well, do you think she’s appropriate for Kit?

SELA

What do you mean, “appropriate?” Do you know how many other little girls would be thrilled to find Chatty Cathy under their Christmas tree?

AUNT REENIE

I’m sure you meant well, Sela. But, well...can’t you think a Barbie doll, or a game, might be a better choice for Kit?

KIT

No! I play enough games!

SELA

Barbie? *Barbie!* I tried. I tried so hard to give y’all a nice Christmas...

AUNT REENIE

Oh, now, Sela...

SELA

(growing incensed, harsh voice & sign)

And, and now you want to go out and bring that, that *trailer trash* into my home?

KIT

I’m sorry, Mama. I don’t need a Barbie. Chatty Chathy’s fine.

SELA

She’s more than fine, she’s *precious*, just like my little girl’s gonna be. Precious. (*a beat*) Do you like that name, Bill?

KIT

(confused, struggling to comprehend)

Who? What?

BILL

(stepping forward with embarrassed pride)

Ah, well...I guess this is as good a time as any to tell y'all.

KIT

What, Daddy? Tell us what?

BILL

(gazing lovingly at SELA)

Well...Mama and I...we're going to have...a baby.

CHIP

(shocked)

A baby?

BILL

Right around Mother's Day. Perfect timing, wouldn't you say, Princess?

SELA

(crooning to the doll)

I'm gonna be a mama, Precious, yes I am!

KIT

(desperately trying to remove doll and get SELA's attention)

Mama, you already are a mama!

SELA

(impatiently slapping KIT's away)

Oh, that's not what I mean, Kit! Why can't you ever understand what I mean?

KIT

What?

SELA

You're too old for me to mama.

KIT

(stung, close to tears)

No I'm not!

BILL

(stepping in)

Mama’s right, Kit. You’re a big girl now. Old enough to really help out around here. Mama’s gonna need a lot of rest now that she’s going to have a baby. So I’m counting on you to pitch in and help.

KIT

(protesting)

I help all the time! What about Chip?

BILL

Chip? Oh, well...Chip’s a boy.

KIT

That’s not fair! He never has to do anything around here!

BILL

(sternly)

Kit...it’s Christmas.

KIT

(hotly, to SELA)

And why’d you give me this, this stupid baby doll, Mama?

SELA

(stung)

Kit! I, I thought you’d like her! Look at her...she’s beautiful! Just like a real baby.

KIT

You keep her if you like her so much, Mama!

SELA

Kit!

KIT

I didn’t ask for her.

SELA

But...but I bought her special...just for you!

KIT

You keep her, Mama, since you like her so much. You keep her. I might break her.

SELA rises, clutching the doll protectively. She crosses to a chair, sits, pulls a pill vial from her pocket with trembling fingers.

BILL

(solicitous, handing SELA her juice)

You alright, Princess?

SELA

I'll be fine, Bill...just fine.

She shakes out one pill, then defiantly
shakes out two more, gulping them down.

KIT

What are you doing, Mama?

SELA

I'm taking my medicine, Kit.

BILL

(rounding on KIT)

What's wrong with you, Kit, upsetting your mama like that?

KIT

(stung)

Why is everything always my fault?

AUNT REENIE

(cutting in, overly bright)

Well, I don't know what to say! *(a beat)* Congratulations. Merry Christmas, Bill.

BILL

(smiling in relief)

Thanks, Reenie.

AUNT REENIE

(hugging SELA tightly, whispering in her ear)

Just be happy, Sela.

SELA

(with brittle determination)

I am, Reenie. Happy. Very, very happy.

INTERMISSION

ACT 2
Scene 1

Later that afternoon. Outside. KIT and AUNT REENIE stand in the front yard, savoring a rare snowfall. KIT throws back her head and spins in delight. AUNT REENIE, wanting to prolong KIT’s joy, scoops up some snow and throws it at KIT. A snowball fight ensues with much laughter. Finally, played out, KIT stops and sighs.

A spotlight comes up on ADULT KIT and DR. SEGAL, both lending interpretive support.

KIT

(plaintively, speaking & signing)

Oh, Aunt Reenie...why did you have to leave?

AUNT REENIE

(speaking & signing)

You ‘n me were roommates long enough, Snowflake.

She lights a cigarette, inhales deeply.

KIT

You didn’t have to leave!

AUNT REENIE

(sighing deeply)

Yes I did. Kit, I had to! I’ve got twenty-eight students to teach...a new principal...a book sale to run...meetings...conferences. Not to mention friends and an apartment I haven’t seen for months!

KIT

That means more to you than us...Chip’n me?

AUNT REENIE

Chip’n you? Kit, I didn’t *abandon* you. Your mama and daddy are here. They’ll take care of you.

KIT

(scoffing)

Mama?

AUNT REENIE

She'll be fine, Kit. She's already so much better. Things will be fine.

KIT

No they won't!

She turns away, angrily swipes her eyes.

AUNT REENIE

(chastened)

Oh, Kit!

She stubs out her cigarette, pulls KIT into her arms, rocking her.

AUNT REENIE

(lifting KIT's chin so she can lipread)

We've had a tough time of it...you especially.

KIT

(sniffing)

Me?

AUNT REENIE

You're so sensitive, Kit...just like your mama.

KIT

(abruptly, pulling away)

I'm not like Mama!

AUNT REENIE

(misunderstanding)

Oh, yes you are...so bright...and loving...so gifted.

KIT

(vehemently)

No, I'm not! I'm...I'm...stupid!

AUNT REENIE

(frowning)

Kit! That's not true.

KIT

Yes it is! Everyone says so!

AUNT REENIE

Kit!

KIT

Ask Chip! He'll tell you I'm dumb!

AUNT REENIE

Chip's just teasing when he says that. He doesn't mean...

KIT

Then what about everyone else?

AUNT REENIE

(perplexed)

Everyone else?

KIT

What about everyone at school? They all think I'm stupid. Because I'm deaf!

AUNT REENIE

Oh, Kit...no they don't. You're smart! You do great in school!

KIT

(erupts with frustration)

Oh, school...I hate school!

AUNT REENIE

What?

KIT

All that lipreading...all day long? I hate it! It makes my head ache. I hate it!

AUNT REENIE

But, Kit, I thought your teacher signed.

KIT

Sign? Ha! Maybe when we're alone. But when I'm with everyone else? I have to lipread and use my voice...just like home...just like now...even with you!

AUNT REENIE

But you do so well. Oh, Kit, it can't be *that* hard.

KIT

(newly furious)

It can't? It *can't*? Huh! Well, let's see *you* try it, Aunt Reenie!

KIT

(furiously mouthing words with no added voice or sign)

What am I saying? “A...B...C...D...the cow jumped over the moon...1...2...3...4...I pledge the allegiance to the flag...” What am I saying? Huh? Huh?

AUNT REENIE

(struggling to comprehend)

A, B, C? Moon? 3...4...flag? Oh, Kit, stop!

KIT

(furiously mouthing words with no added voice or sign)

What am I saying, huh? “Who was the 16th president of the United States?” Do you know? What’s wrong, Aunt Reenie? Are you stupid?

AUNT REENIE

(snapping)

Abraham Lincoln! (*a beat*) I’m not stupid, and neither are you. What’s your problem?

KIT

(frenzied sign only, no voice)

I’m different! No I’m not...not where it matters...not inside...not... Oh, I don’t *know!* I don’t know, I don’t know, I don’t know! (*a beat*) I, I hear things! Inside my head.

AUNT REENIE

(alarmed)

You *hear* things?

KIT

(sign only, no voice)

Music playing...phones ringing...cars honking...people laughing...

AUNT REENIE

Music? Phones? Cars? Laughing? Kit, you hear all that?

KIT

(screaming and signing)

Yes!!

AUNT REENIE

(gently probing)

Or are you remembering it?

KIT

*(signing only, no voice until noted with *)*

No! Yes! Oh...(*a beat*)...I don’t want to be like Mama.

AUNT REENIE

Like Mama?

KIT

Hearing voices.

AUNT REENIE

Hearing voices? Oh, Kit, no! You don't understand. *Everyone* hears voices.

KIT

(stiffening, newly afraid)

What?

AUNT REENIE

There's our inner voice...our voice of reason...our conscience! And there's our memories...we hear the voices of all the people we've met and remembered. There's the voice of warning...and that little voice...the one that whispers our wishes and our dreams. And when you say your prayers, at night? Sometimes you hear God's voice.

KIT, badly frightened, turns away.
Scooping up snow she studies it intently.

AUNT REENIE

(gently touching KIT's shoulder)

Kit?

KIT

**(voicing with added sign to scene's end)*

I never saw real snow before.

AUNT REENIE

It doesn't snow much in South Carolina.

KIT

(touching snow with the tip of her tongue, savoring it)

Mmm! It tastes just like I imagined.

AUNT REENIE

And how's that, Kit?

KIT

I imagined snow would taste like the moon. And it does.

AUNT REENIE

It does?

KIT

Cool...and clean...and white...look how white, Aunt Reenie.

AUNT REENIE

(fervently)

I'll buy you a Barbie doll, Kit!

KIT

(flinching)

No! That's okay. I'm too old to play, especially with dolls.

AUNT REENIE

(fighting back tears)

No you're not, Kit...you're only twelve years old.

KIT

Almost thirteen!

AUNT REENIE

(stroking KIT's cheek)

It's not right, you having to grow up so fast. Oh, Kit...

KIT

Maybe later...after Mama....

AUNT REENIE

After she has the baby? *(a beat)* Kit, you can call me any time. You know that, right?

KIT

Now how can I do that, Aunt Reenie? I'm deaf, remember?

AUNT REENIE

(cupping KIT's chin, looking steadily into KIT's eyes)

No...you know how...you know what I mean. *(a beat)* No matter what, Kit...you hear me? No matter what.

KIT

(solemnly)

I hear you, Aunt Reenie. I hear you.

Lights slowly dim.

ACT 2
Scene 2

A few months later. July. Afternoon. Lights come up to reveal SELA and BILL’s bedroom. Fashion magazines and decorating books spill of the bed, piled on the floor. A portable fan blows on a thin, very brittle SELA. She is inappropriately dressed for the hour in a fancy negligee. She sits rigidly upright in bed, obsessively peeling an apple with a small, sharp paring knife. She takes a tiny bite of the apple, chews for a moment, pulls some Kleenex out of a box, then spits the bite out, tightly balling it up and tossing the Kleenex into her wastebasket. She sets the paring knife back on the china plate resting on her bedside tray. Opening a bottle of nail polish she obsessively polishes her nails, growing more and more tense at the thought of making a mistake. She ignores the television that is blaring away, not as a source of entertainment, but as a source of white noise to help her drown out her inner turmoil.

WE HEAR thunder and pounding rain. Lights flicker as lightening flashes. SELA, intent on her nails, doesn’t react.

ADULT KIT stand off to the side, watching, signing the scene as she relives it in memory. By her side is DR. SEGAL, observing and lending interpretive support.

ENTER KIT, anxiously holding the baby,
POLLY, lying in her portable bassinet.

KIT

Mama?

SELA

(peevisly, extremely tense)

What is Precious doing up? It took me half the afternoon to get that baby down in her crib and here you go and get her up!

KIT

(placing bassinet on SELA’s bed, clearly worried)

I, I think you’d better look at Polly. There might be something...wrong...with her

SELA

What are you talking about? There’s nothing wrong with my Precious. Here, give her to me...oh, wait! My nails are wet. *(a beat)* Oh, why did you have to go and get her up, Kit? I want to look pretty for when Daddy gets home with Chip from their fishing trip. And now...oh, I’m gonna be all frazzled!

KIT

Mama? Mama, please...just, just *talk* to her! Maybe she’ll understand.

SELA

Kit, can't you see I'm resting?

KIT

Mama? It's raining outside, Mama. Thunder and lightening!

SELA

(anxiously biting lower lip)

Oh, dear! Daddy 'n Chip...they'll get soaked...

KIT

When, when I went in to check on Polly? She didn't even blink...not once.

SELA

(with growing dread)

What, what are you saying, Kit? What are you saying?

KIT

Mama? I think...I think Polly...she might be...

SELA

(sharply)

Stop that, Kit!

KIT

Watch, Mama! Please, just watch. *(snaps fingers by POLLY's ear)* She didn't blink, Mama. She didn't even blink.

SELA

(shouting)

You stop! Do you hear me? Stop that! There's nothing wrong with her! Nothing!

KIT

(growing desperate)

Mama, please, there is! I know there is! You're yelling at me, Mama. A baby would hear yelling, wouldn't she? Most babies would cry, wouldn't they?

SELA

(with a deathly quiet whisper)

I, I know what you're trying to do.

KIT

(begging)

Please, Mama, take her to the doctor! See what he says. She's *your* baby!

SELA

(still whispering)

You're, you're trying to scare me. You're jealous of your own little sister, so you're trying to scare me. Well it won't work. I...won't...listen!

KIT

Please! Mama, please...I don't know what to do!

SELA scurries off the bed, darting furtively away from KIT.

SELA

(speaking in an eerie, rapid monotone)

I won't listen! I won't, I won't, I won't! Not one word, do you hear me? You can't send me back there again. You can't! I won't go. I won't...I won't...I won't!

KIT

(crying)

Mama? Mama, please, don't be like this. Polly needs your help!

SELA

(frantically pacing, trying to fight off mounting panic)

Don't listen to them, Sela...don't listen to them...don't...don't listen, don't listen, don't, don't, don't... listen...*(wailing)* Stop it! Stop, stop, stop! No! No, oh God, please, no!

She lunges for the paring knife, presses it to her wrist, intent on ending all the pain.

KIT

Mama, no!

She desperately throws herself at SELA. They struggle fiercely. KIT cries out in shock and pain. Clamping her wrist she tries to staunch the gush of blood.

SELA

(horrified)

Kit! Oh, no...oh, my God...no, no, no....

Dropping the knife, SELA scuttles into a corner, whimpering .

KIT

Mama? Mama, please! Mama, you've gotta help me!

SELA curls into the fetal position and stares fixedly, slipping into a catatonic state. KIT frantically shakes her, but gets no response.

KIT

(terrified)

Mama? Mama! Oh, God...Mama, I'm sorry! I'm sorry! Please, Mama. Mama, please!

Clutching her bleeding wrist, KIT wildly looks around for help.

KIT

Aunt Reenie! Oh, God, how do I call Aunt Reenie? No, wait! Operator! Dial “O” for Operator.

She frantically snatches up the phone, dials, her attention torn between POLLY and SELA.

KIT

(desperately, alternately screaming into the phone and at SELA)

Yes! Operator! Operator? Are you there? Hello? Hello! Mama, please, it will be alright! Please, Mama, please, please...oh God! Operator? Operator! Hello? Operator! Can you hear me? My name is Kit. Kit Mahoney! I live on Whippoorwill Road. Please...my baby sister...my mama...please, help! Please, you gotta help me! Hello? Hello? My name is Kit. Kit Mahoney! Hello? Can you hear me? Can you hear me?

Lights slowly dim over KIT, SELA and POLLY.

A spotlight remains fixed on ADULT KIT and DR. SEGAL. DR. SEGAL stares at ADULT KIT with a mixture of compassion and comprehension. He reaches for her hand, slowly traces the scar on her wrist. ADULT KIT looks at him, vulnerable. DR. SEGAL gently folds her hand between his own.

Spotlight slowly fades.

ACT 2
Scene 3

Early evening, the same day. Inside the Emergency Room waiting room. *Lights come up to reveal* KIT holding POLLY in her bassinet, , her wrist freshly bandaged. She is very anxious, watching all the activity around her for any clue as to what is happening with SELA.

Spotlight reveals ADULT KIT, reliving this moment in memory while DR. SEGAL observes, both lending interpretive support to this scene.

ENTER ER DOCTOR.

KIT

(jumping up, speaking to DOCTOR)

Please! My mother?

ER DOCTOR

(scribbling on clipboard, not looking at KIT)

Is there an adult with you?

KIT

(struggling to lipread and sign while balancing POLLY's bassinet)

I'm sorry...I'm deaf. What did you say?

ER DOCTOR

(loudly, over-enunciating)

Is anyone with you?

KIT

No, no...please, my mother? Can I see her?

She tries to step by and enter SELA's cubicle.

ER DOCTOR

(blocking KIT's path)

Not until she's stabilized.

KIT

What? I'm sorry, I don't understand

ER DOCTOR
(with exasperation)

I don't know sign language.

KIT
If you'd just *look* at me...I could read your lips.

ER DOCTOR
(complying begrudgingly)

Is there anyone with you? Your father?

KIT
He's gone...on a fishing trip...with Chip.

ER DOCTOR
Any neighbor we can call? Any relative?

KIT
Aunt Reenie!!

ER DOCTOR
Aunt Reenie? Is she here?

KIT
(frantically trying to communicate)
No, no...but, you can call her! Please, call Aunt Reenie!

ER DOCTOR
Do you know her number?

KIT
No, but...you could look! In the book!

ER DOCTOR
What's her name?

KIT
What? I told you! Aunt Reenie!

ER DOCTOR
Her last name.

KIT
(perplexed)
Her last name?

ER DOCTOR

Do you know?

KIT

Of course I know!!

ER DOCTOR

(holding out his clipboard and pen)

Can you write it for me?

KIT

(eyeing the clipboard and pen with dread)

Why? *(a beat)* What’s wrong with my mother? What happened to her?

ER DOCTOR

She’s had a relapse. I need your aunt’s name.

KIT

A what? Mama had what?

ER DOCTOR

She was on medication?

KIT

Medicine? Yes! Mama took pills...lots and lots of pills.

ER DOCTOR

She must have been over-medicating herself. The results of her blood test show a toxic build-up. That could be lethal.

KIT

What? Are you saying...Mama was *poisoning* herself?

ER DOCTOR

I’ve contacted her psychiatrist.

KIT

Psy-chi-a-trist? Why? What’s happening? What’s wrong with Mama? What’s *wrong* with her?

ER DOCTOR

I need your aunt’s name.

KIT

(heatedly)

You can tell me! I’m not a child!

ER DOCTOR

I really can't discuss it with you.

KIT

What? Are you saying...is my mama...

ER DOCTOR
(interrupting)

I really need your aunt's name.

KIT angrily scrawls it on the clipboard.

ER DOCTOR

Wait here, okay?

He walks a short distance down the hall.

KIT

(stamping floor, calling out to ER DOCTOR)

Is my mama dying?

ER DOCTOR
(without breaking stride or turning back to KIT)

Just wait right there.

KIT

(calling out to ER DOCTOR)

Is she dead? *Tell me!*

ER DOCTOR picks up the phone on the desk, dials, and begins talking into the mouthpiece. POLLY whimpers, demanding KIT's attention.

KIT

(rocking POLLY in her bassinet)

Shhh, Polly...shhh...it's alright...I'm here...it's alright...everything will be alright.

KIT sinks down on the waiting room bench, cradling the bassinet, trying hard not to cry herself.

Lights slowly dim.

ACT 2
Scene 4

A few days later. Early evening. The MAHONEY kitchen. *Lights come up to reveal AUNT REENIE slicing a chocolate cake while KIT and CHIP sit at the table, forlornly pushing food around their plates.*

ADULT KIT and DR. SEGAL, in a small spotlight, look on, interpreting the scene as necessary.

AUNT REENIE

(speaking with added sign & gestures)

Kit? Do you want some chocolate cake?

KIT

(woodenly)

Mama hates me.

AUNT REENIE

(stunned, crossing to KIT)

Why would your mama hate you?

KIT

Because I scared her so bad she started hearing them again.

AUNT REENIE

(perplexed)

Hearing them? Hearing who, Kit?

KIT

(frantically backpedaling)

Nothing, Aunt Reenie. Just forget it! Mama didn't hear anything.

AUNT REENIE

Then why would your mama hate you? Kit, you saved her life.

KIT

(desperate to believe)

Really?

AUNT REENIE

Oh, honey...yes.

KIT

(voice thickening)

I...we thought she was...dying...didn't we, Chip?

CHIP

(swallowing hard, fighting not to lose control)

Yeah...

AUNT REENIE

What? You thought...oh my God! Oh, kids...

CHIP

(speaking with jerky sign & gestures)

What's wrong with her, Aunt Reenie? Why won't they let us see her?

ENTER BILL, utterly drained. KIT and
CHIP eye him warily.

AUNT REENIE

(crossing to BILL)

Bill? Have you eaten? I can warm up some supper.

BILL

(speaking, almost to self)

She's admitted...Sela...at Mount Zion...Dr. Rappatore saw her this morning. *(a beat)*
Jesus, what a day!

He sits wearily, scrubbing his face with his
hands.

AUNT REENIE

Bill...

BILL

I don't want to talk about it, Reenie.

AUNT REENIE

Please, Bill, tell me! Nothing you can say is as bad as what I can imagine. Bill?

BILL

(harshly, with emotion)

Look, Sela's where you needs to be. Alright? They're taking care of her. Okay? She'll
be just fine! *(a beat)* I just, I just...I just with to God I could say the same for Polly.

CHIP

Polly? What's wrong with Polly? I thought she was okay.

KIT

(with dawning realization)

Deaf. Polly’s deaf, isn’t she, Daddy? Isn’t she! Polly’s deaf...like me.

CHIP

(speaking, signing roughly to KIT)

Deaf? No! Kit, that ain’t true! *(turning to BILL)* Is it?

BILL

(burying his head in his hands)

Jesus, God, what did I do to deserve this?

KIT

(crossing to BILL, touching his shoulder)

Daddy? Look at me, please. Daddy?

BILL

(wearily)

Later, Kit...okay? Please...later...

KIT

I’m not gonna lie and say I’m glad Polly can’t hear, ‘cause I’m not!

BILL

(stunned)

What?

CHIP

(to KIT, with added jerky signs & gestures)

Kit! Polly’s just a baby!

BILL looks from KIT to CHIP, noting their signing, their new closeness.

KIT

I’m *glad* Polly’s deaf—like me! But...I’m sad she won’t ever hear dogs barking...or ice-cream trucks ringing...or fireworks banging...or, or crickets chirping when you lay in bed and watch the moon shine through the window.

BILL

(dazedly, speaking directly to KIT)

But, but *you* don’t hear that, Kit.

KIT

Yes I do! I here it here *(touches head)*, and here *(touches heart)* inside. I had *years* to store up all those sounds—seven whole years!

BILL
(*voice breaking*)

And Polly...didn't...

KIT
I'll help her, Daddy! I'll help her all I know how! But...

BILL
(*gently*)
But what, Kit?

KIT
You have to help Mama!

BILL
(*taken aback, defensive*)
Huh! I'm *trying* to help her! Kit, I didn't want to put Mama back in Mount Zion! It just about killed me putting her back there! I wanted to bring her home! (*a beat*) God, I love her! I miss her so much.

KIT
(*plaintively*)
I miss Mama too...my *real* Mama.

BILL
(*taken aback*)
What? What are you talking about, Kit?

KIT
That lady? The one you brought home? She wasn't my real mama. Mama was never like that.

BILL
She most certainly was!

KIT
No she wasn't! All that makeup? Always fussing with her nails and her hair? With her clothes? (*a beat*) She wouldn't even eat, Daddy! She was so afraid of gaining weight. Mama was never like that. Was she, Chip?

CHIP
(*levelly, to BILL*)
No. She wasn't. Not the mama I grew up with.

BILL
But, but I *liked* her like that!

Agitated, BILL jumps up, paces.

BILL

She looked so...so pretty! She was so sweet, so loving, so eager to please... She depended on me! Leaned on me. She needed me, damn it! Needed me! To take care of her.

KIT

(solemnly)

She didn't need you, Daddy. She just did all that because she was scared.

BILL

(dumbstruck)

What?

KIT

That you wouldn't love her anymore. That, that you would...

CHIP

(cutting in, speaking w/ jerky sign)

Kit'n me? Well, sometimes we think you're gonna...that you're gonna...

BILL

(belligerent)

What? That I'm going to what?

CHIP

(continuing despite misgivings)

Leave...

BILL

(pole-axed)

What? Where'd you get an idea like...

CHIP

You're never here.

BILL

Leave your *mother*? I could never leave...*Sela*?

CHIP

(spark of anger)

Well what about *us*, huh, Daddy? What about Kit'n *me*?

BILL
(misdirected anger)

What is this—a conspiracy?

CHIP
No! It’s just...well...would you?

BILL
All this signing—behind my back!

CHIP
(yelling back)
It’s *not* behind your back! Kit’n me have been signing to each other for a long time now. You just weren’t here to see!

BILL
Who gave you permission to do that?

CHIP
I don’t need permission! Kit’s my sister!

BILL
You know how I feel about signing!

CHIP
Who else am I supposed to talk to?

BILL
I don’t want to hear it!

CHIP
That’s the problem!

BILL
(stunned speechless)
Wh-what?

CHIP
(shaking, but pressing on)
We all have to listen to what *you* say. But you never listen to *us*. Not to me, not to Kit, and not to Mama.

BILL
(addressing the room at large)
Jesus! What the hell do they know about it? They’re just kids! That’s not the way it was...is it? Reenie, you were there! You saw us together!

AUNT REENIE

(with quiet resignation)

All I know, Bill, is the Sela you brought home wasn't the Sela I knew.

BILL

(shouting)

Well maybe it was the Sela I wanted!

There is a long moment of painful silence.

KIT

(breaking in)

What was wrong with Mama before?

BILL

(furious, rounding on KIT)

Nothing!

KIT flinches. BILL, guilt-stricken, slumps in his chair, gouging his eyes with his fists.

Oh, Jesus...you got everything all twisted up, Kit...

KIT

(overwhelmed by her loss)

I always thought Mama—my real mama—was beautiful, all by herself. She always smelled so good, like clean laundry...and cookies! Remember? Oh, and her *hands!*

BILL

(in agony)

Stop it, Kit!

KIT

(caught up in her memories)

Oh, Mama's hands could do anything—just anything! Make pies...sew doll clothes...paint pictures...she used to sign for me—all the words—so I wouldn't have to give up TV. Remember?

BILL

Kit, stop...stop! You hear me?

KIT

And her painting? Oh, the things you painted! Those sparrows? It felt like I was in that nest up in that tree with them—like I could reach out and ruffle their feathers—those sparrows were so real. Mama's hands moved like magic and everything was there—right there! Oh, Daddy, don't you remember?

BILL

(lurching to his feet)

I remember! Yes, Jesus God...yes, I remember! And, and it's, it's *killing* me! It's tearing me apart!

CHIP

(levelly)

It's killing all of us, Daddy. Not just you.

BILL, with a muffled oath, turns away blindly. AUNT REENIE tries to pull CHIP and KIT from the room, but KIT holds back, tearfully studying BILL. CHIP gives her a searching look. KIT, biting her lip, nods, reassuring him.

EXIT CHIP and AUNT REENIE.

ACT 2
Scene 5

Moments later. The MAHONEY kitchen. Evening. Slumped in his chair at the kitchen table, BILL pulls out his wallet, flips it open, and studies a picture, unaware of KIT watching him.

ADULT KIT and DR. SEGAL look on, interpreting the scene as necessary.

BILL

(to self, studying photo)

Were they right, Seal? *Were* we too young? Should we have listened to them and waited? *(a beat)* I don't know why I was in such a rush, Hon. It just seemed...it was just *right*, ya know? We were *meant* for each other! Isn't that what we always said? *(a beat)* We weren't foolish! We weren't just some dumb kids running off to get married! Oh no, Seal, not us! We had it all *planned!* We waited until I finished college. And then I enlisted. First Lieutenant. *(a beat)* Barrack housing—barracks make good housing when you're just starting out. There was even a job for you, Seal—secretarial, in the officer's pool. We were all set! All set...

KIT cautiously approaches BILL. He does not notice her.

BILL

(caressing photo)

Look at her. Just look! Sela...my Seal...see that smile, those stars in her eyes? She always look at me that way. Like I could do anything, anything at all! No one ever looked at me like that before...no one. *(a beat)* You should've seen her eyes shine when we had Chip! Huh, it was like I gave her the sun, moon, stars and Christmas to boot all rolled up together.

KIT

(plaintively)

Did she look like that when I was born, Daddy?

BILL

(continuing, oblivious to KIT)

But me? I wasn't so sure...a baby changes things. And two babies? Back to back? That changes everything.

KIT

Daddy?

BILL

(continues musing)

Is that when it started? Did it all just take too much out of her? And then all that...well, everything that happened with Kit. *(a beat)* If I'd know all that was going to happen I never would've pushed so hard! We didn't have to get married—not that soon. I could've given you more time. It's just that...I was so afraid I'd lose you! And now, it looks like...oh, Sela! Oh God, I miss you, honey! I miss you....

KIT

(crossing to BILL, touching his arm)

Daddy?

BILL

(looking up)

Kit?

KIT

Oh, Daddy, I know! I know how you feel! I miss Mama too—my real mama. And, and Daddy? Oh, Daddy, I miss you too!

BILL

What, Kit? Miss me?

KIT

The way you used to be? Back when I was little? Before I... *(a beat)* I remember you running next to my bike, holding me up so I wouldn't crash after you took the training wheels off. I was so scared! But you laughed, and ran faster and faster. You kept saying, “That's it, Kit! That's it!” And suddenly I was taking off—just flying down the sidewalk! And you weren't there. But when I looked back? You were cheering, Daddy. Cheering! I loved you so much then. I thought you were better than Superman.

BILL

(deeply moved)

You thought I was Superman? Oh, Kit...

KIT

And summer? I used to dive off your shoulders, do flips off your knees.

BILL

Flips! I remember that! You did the best flips—sometimes two, even three in a row! You were like a little trained seal.

KIT

(voice breaking)

Oh, Daddy, sometimes it feels like you *both* went away—you *and* Mama.

BILL
(hoarsely)

I never went away.

KIT
That’s not how it feels to me! That’s not how it feels to Chip!

BILL
(resentment seeping in)

Oh, Chip...

KIT
He thinks you hate him, Daddy.

BILL
(brought up short)
Hate him?

KIT
You’re always yelling.

BILL
But, I don’t...I just want...*(a beat)* And what about you? What do you think, Kit?

KIT
(biting lip)
You yell at me a lot too.

BILL
(stricken)
Oh! Huh!

He rises, mutters, paces, fists clenched.

It’s just like...I swore I would never be like that, I’d never let that happen! My children would know I loved them! Jesus, Mahoney! Jesus!

KIT
(crying)
Daddy...

BILL
(turning to KIT, pulling her into a hug)
Oh Kit...I’m sorry. I never meant for you to feel like that. I never wanted to hurt you. I love you, honey.

KIT

(wanting desperately to believe)

Really?

BILL

I...yes! Of course I do! And your mother—and Chip too.

KIT

Then why did Mama get so sick?

BILL

What?

KIT

Why did Mama get so sick? Was it because you didn't love her enough?

BILL

(recoiling)

Huh! Jesus, what am I supposed to say to that? *(a beat)* This isn't about me—it's about your mother! What do you want from me, Kit? I'm not a doctor! I don't know how to fix her! I thought...I thought...if she just rested! I thought Polly would pull her out of it. Do you think I *like* seeing Mama like this?

KIT

I don't know, Daddy. You said you did.

BILL

No! No! I said I liked seeing Mama look so pretty. I never said—oh, Jesus, I don't believe this! *(a beat)* Look, I'm doing the best I can. I work night and day—race to the hospital...confer with all the doctors...go to your school conferences...pick you'n Chip up from practice...from band rehearsals...from field trips...from, from...oh Christ, there's always something! And then there's meals...and shopping...and laundry...and lunches. And now there's Polly...it just goes on, and on, and on...

KIT

But Aunt Reenie...

BILL

Aunt Reenie can't do it all! No one can!

Frustrated and angry, BILL strides to the doorway. KIT runs after him.

KIT

(grabbing BILL's arm)

Daddy? Are you leaving?

BILL

No! Goddamn it, no!

KIT's stricken look fills BILL with remorse. He squats down, facing her.

Listen, Kit, what I'm trying to say is...I was wrong. I shouldn't have brought Mama home before she was ready...shouldn't have tried to change her into something she's not. *(a beat)* I'm not leaving—not your mama, not Chip, not Polly...and not you. I'm gonna do my level best to help Mama get well. I don't know if the doctors can ever make Mama what she used to be...but I'm tell you, I'm sure gonna help them try. Understand?

KIT

I...Mama might never be the same?

BILL

(comforting KIT)

Honey, the doctors are doing everything they can.

KIT

But, she'll never be the same? I won't ever see my real mama again?

BILL

You don't know that, Kit. Besides, no one ever really stays the same. People are always changing. They grow up...grow old...get fat. And a few lucky ones? They grow special—just like you.

BILL opens his arms. KIT, with a small cry, falls into them. BILL strokes KIT's back. She pulls back, studies his face.

BILL

What, Kit?

KIT

Will they let me see Mama?

BILL

In the hospital? Well, I don't know, honey. Usually you have to be twelve.

KIT

I'm past twelve, Daddy...way past twelve.

BILL

Huh! That's right, you are. You're growing up before my eyes. But...oh, Kit, that's no place you want to go. I don't know if the doctors would allow it.

KIT

Could, could you...ask them?

BILL

Well...yeah! Sure...I could try...but...why, Kit? Why do you want to go there?

KIT

(determined)

Because it's important to me. I'm gonna go to that hospital every day the doctors will let me. (a beat) And I'm gonna help Mama find herself again.

BILL studies KIT, as though seeing her
Clearly for the first time. He squeezes her
shoulder, nods his approval.

Lights slowly dim.

ACT 2
Scene 6

A short time later. Afternoon. *Lights come up to reveal* KIT pacing anxiously inside Mount Zion Hospital’s patient day room. Half-finished paintings and ceramic projects line easels and tables set against the wall. The windows are barred. **ADULT KIT and DR. SEGAL, standing off to the side, help interpret the scene.**

ENTER ORDERLY escorting SELA who is dressed in drab hospital garb.

ORDERLY

(speaking down, as though to a feeble-minded child)

Here we are, Sela...in the visitor’s room. And look here! Y’all have a visitor! Why, it’s your little girl, Kit! Isn’t that nice, Sela...

KIT

(running to SELA, face lit with joy)

Mama! I’m so happy to see you!

She tries to hug SELA, who stands stiffly with no welcome. KIT pulls back, hurt.

ORDERLY

(leading SELA to a chair by a table)

You just set down, Sela. Set down and have yourself a nice chat with Kit here. Go on, Sela, go on now. I’m jest gonna be settin’ right over by the door if y’all need me.

ORDERLY takes up his post by the door.

SELA

(sharply, to KIT, speaking & signing)

Why are you here? They don’t allow children in here. I want you to go home. I don’t want you to see me here. **(jumping up, seeking escape)** Orderly? Take me back. Now!

ORDERLY

You sure, Sela? Y’all got twenty minutes left.

KIT

It’s alright, Mama. Daddy said I could come.

SELA

Daddy? He said you could come? **(a beat)** No, that’ can’t be right...

KIT

I’m not lying, Mama. Dr. Rappatore okayed it himself. He even said that if you enjoy this visit...maybe I can come back...

ORDERLY

Your girl’s right, Sela. Cain’t do nothing ‘round here if old Doc Rap don’t approve hisself. *(to KIT)* Y’all a smart one, honey, but what’s wrong with your voice?

KIT

(flatly, with resentment)

I’m deaf.

ORDERLY

(laughing, as if at a good joke)

Say what? Ha-ha-ha! Well, ain’t that a born shame! Explains all that hand flapping.

KIT

It’s called “sign.”

ORDERLY

(veiled threat)

Well y’all sound like you kin *talk* alright to me. So you be sure to *talk* so I kin listen in. We don’t want to go upsettin’ your mama now, do we?

KIT

(addressing SELA while glaring at ORDERLY)

C’mon, Mama...let’s sit down.

SELA

(allowing KIT to lead and settle her at a table)

You can be here? They’ll let you be here...with me?

KIT

I’m not lying, Mama. I know how important it is to know what’s going on.

SELA

You?

KIT

Me, Mama. At school...when everyone’s talking and the teacher makes me read everyone’s lips...oh, Mama, I get so scared sometimes!

SELA

Scared?

KIT

Yes! I get scared that I’m missing something, like I’m always behind and can’t catch up.

SELA

(shock of recognition)

Behind...yes!

KIT

And I want to catch up so bad!

SELA

Only, you’re afraid...

KIT

(lighting up, relieved by SELA’s insight)

Yes, Mama!

SELA

Because you know you’re not like everyone else.

KIT

Yes!

SELA

You’re afraid, so afraid that if everyone knows you’re different they won’t like you...

KIT

Yes! But...oh, Mama, I don’t *like* you...I *love* you!

She leans forward, tries to hug SELA who stiffens and pulls back.

Okay...okay, Mama...I won’t crowd you...*(looking around)* Did you paint that picture?

SELA

(startled, looking to where KIT points)

What? That? Oh, yes...yes...I painted that.

KIT

(rising, crossing to picture, studying it)

Wow!

SELA

(nervously, crossing to KIT)

It’s not finished...it’s not even very good...oh, I don’t why I ever started it! I...I think I’ll throw it away.

KIT

(alarmed)

No! Oh, no, you can't throw it away!

SELA

It's ugly!

KIT

No, it's beautiful! I've never seen anything like it before! It's different from the way you used to paint. You used to paint flowers, and fruit, teapots and...sparrows. *(a beat)* Do you remember the sparrows, Mama?

SELA

I haven't painted in...oh, a long time. I've forgotten how!

KIT

No you haven't, Mama! Look at that! That's beautiful. I wish I could paint like that.

SELA

You...like it? You really like it?

KIT

I want to hang it up...in my room...over my bed.

SELA

Over your bed? You do? But...why? It isn't even done.

KIT

Because it's perfect...just the way it is.

SELA

But, I was just...dabbling...just slapping paint on canvas...I don't even know what I was trying to paint.

KIT

(pointing things out in the painting)

But look, Mama, look at what you did! You painted a family...a family dancing under the moon...a family with children, all holding hands like, like a wedding ring...and all the fireflies are lit up like diamonds. *(a beat)* That's the mama...and there's the daddy...this looks like Chip...and this is Polly and...oh, Mama, is this me?

SELA

(studying the painting)

Yes...yes, I see...

ORDERLY

(calling out to SELA from his post)

Hat to interrupt, but time’s up, Sela. Y’all have to be getting’ back to your room for meds.

SELA

(deflating)

Oh...yes...meds...yes...

ORDERLY

(crossing to SELA, taking her arm)

But looks to me like you done enjoyed y’all’s little visit. Did y’all enjoy it, Sela?

SELA

(with a burst of energy)

I...yes! I enjoyed the visit. I enjoyed it very much.

She docilely allows ORDERLY to lead her to the door.

KIT

(biting back tears)

Bye, Mama...

SELA

(halting, turning to KIT)

Goodbye, Kit. Will you come again...soon?

KIT

Oh...yes, Mama! Yes! I’ll come again...and again...and again...

Lights slowly dim with only the spotlight over ADULT KIT remaining. Eyes closed, head bowed, she holds the pose until lights come up again on the next scene.

ACT 2
Scene 7

One month later. Mount Zion Hospital patient day room. Afternoon. Lights come up to reveal KIT and SELA seated a table, thumbing through a photo album, while the ORDERLY sits his post by the door. SELA is noticeably healthier, better groomed. **ADULT KIT and DR. SEGAL look on, helping to interpret the scene.**

SELA

(pointing to a snapshot in book)

That can't be Chip! He's too tall to be Chip! And his shoulders are too wide! It must be a picture of your daddy when he was younger.

KIT

No, Mama, that's Chip! You should see him eat. He's a pig, Mama! Oink, oink!

SELA

(startled laughter)

That sounds like Chip.

KIT

He wants to see you too, Mama.

SELA

See me?

KIT

Can I bring him...next time?

SELA

I...I...I don't...*(turns page)* Oh! Oh....

KIT

That's me holding Polly...isn't she sweet?

SELA

(longingly stroking snapshot)

Sweet...yes...precious...

KIT

She's a good baby...she eats everything I feed her...her favorite is rice cereal with mashed bananas.

SELA

That was your favorite!

KIT

She can roll over...sit up...and she sleeps real good—straight through the night! She’s always smiling! When we go out people always smile back at Polly.

SELA

(sharp change of personality)

She looks...happy. (*a beat*) Just remember, Kit, Polly’s *my* baby, not yours.

KIT

(taken aback)

I know that! I’m not trying to take Polly away from you. I don’t *want* to be the mama! I want you to come home and be the mama...when, when you’re...ready...

SELA

(becoming agitated)

I don’t know...

KIT

What, Mama? What don’t you know?

SELA

I don’t know if I can. Be a mama? To two deaf children? *Two?* Oh, God!

KIT

Mama? Are you saying...am I the one who made you sick?

SELA

No! No, I won’t talk about this...I won’t, I won’t, I won’t, won’t, won’t, won’t...

She jumps up, crosses to ORDERLY.

I want to go back to my room! I want to go back to my room right now!

KIT

(grabbing SELA’s arm, pulling her back)

Don’t you dare leave without answering my question!

SELA

(highly agitated)

Kit, don’t...

ORDERLY

Hey! Stop that now, missy! Y’all know the rules.

KIT

(furious)

I won't stop! And I won't let you leave, Mama, not until I know the truth!

ORDERLY

Y'all getting your mama all upset. It ain't nice to be upset. You upset, Sela? Y'all want to go back to your room? Don't you worry none...we get you back...we'll get you back to your room right now...get you some meds...get y'all calmed down.

He starts to lead SELA away.

KIT

(yanking on SELA's arm, forcing her around)

Am I the one who made you sick, Mama? *Am I?*

SELA

(stricken)

What? Oh...oh, God...Kit...

ORDERLY

Hey, now, Sela, c'mon. C'mon now...

SELA

(ignoring ORDERLY, eyes locked on KIT)

Why would you think that?

KIT

(shouting, crying)

Because you always treat me like I am!

SELA

(flooded with guilt)

Oh! Oh, Kit...oh God...oh my God...

ORDERLY

(manhandling SELA)

C'mon, now, Sela.

SELA

(forcefully, pulling away from ORDERLY)

I need to speak to my daughter!

ORDERLY

(noticing SELA's newfound strength and steely determination)

Alright...okay...I'm stepping back. But I'll be watching y'all—right over there.

SELA

(stoically waiting for ORDERLY to take up post)

Kit? Honey, look at me...please? You, you need to listen to me...to what I'm going to say. Can you do that?

KIT sniffs, wipes her face on her sleeve.

Something...something inside me...it went...wrong...

KIT

(sniffing)

But...how?

SELA

I...I don't know, Kit. I don't think even the doctors know. All I know is...I was so scared when it was happening. *(a beat)* And then the voices started.

KIT

Fr-from the watch?

SELA

(with a brittle laugh of despair)

From the watch...the clock...the stove...the sink...the dishes! At first, if I stayed really busy I could ignore them—push them aside. But they just got louder and louder and louder. And it was harder and harder and...oh, so hard to hear over them.

KIT

Wh-what did the voices say, Mama?

SELA

Awful things...terrible things...things I knew weren't true. But I couldn't make them stop! They just went on and on and on—I couldn't even think! *(a beat)* It was so hard keeping everything straight, so hard signing what Daddy was saying, what Chip was saying so you'd understand. And then you always needed me to sign TV shows, or radio announcements. Sign...sign...sign—day-in and day-out sign! *(a beat)* It meant I had to listen, Kit! I had to listen—for you! *(a beat)* All that listening...that I had to do for you? Oh Kit, the more I listened, the more you wanted me to sign, the louder the voices would get. It got to the point where I dreaded it...just wanted to pull the covers over my head and shut everything out whenever I'd see you coming!

KIT

(recoiling, blindly stumbling back to photo table)

Oh! Oh...I have to go, Mama...I have to go now. The Orderly...he's, he's right. I don't want to upset you any more.

She blindly scoops up the photo album,

SELA

(crossing to KIT, grabbing her arm)

No, wait! Kit, wait! You don't understand!

KIT

(breaking down)

I'm trying to, Mama! I'm trying! *(a beat)* Are you in there? I know you have to be in there...somewhere...like those sparrows. Do you remember the sparrows, Mama? Do remember singing to the moon? *(a beat)* I think I see you, Mama, but...oh where did you go? Please...please, Mama...are you ever coming back?

SELA

(with full dawning realization)

Oh...oh, God...Kit, I never meant to hurt you.

KIT

You didn't?

SELA

No. I'm so sorry if I did.

KIT turns away. SELA reaches for her.

Kit? I want you to listen to me. I want you to listen to me very, very hard, understand? *(a beat)* You are not to blame.

KIT

But...but you said...

SELA

(cupping KIT's face, speaking slowly, deliberately)

I tried so hard to everything right but...I did so much wrong...so much. *(a beat)* But if I let you believe it was you? Kit, that would be worse than wrong—that would be a lie. Kit, you're not to blame. Do you hear me? You're not to blame.

KIT

(voice breaking)

I'm, I'm not?

SELA

You never were. *(a beat)* Oh, Kit...I want to be your mama again.

KIT

(hardly daring to hope and believe)

You, you do?

SELA

Oh, Kit...yes! But...*(a beat)* I can't promise that the voices won't come back. I, I can't promise that I won't...slip away. *(a beat)* But, but if I do? Kit, it's not your fault! It's not your fault.

KIT

(hugging SELA desperately)

Oh, Mama! I needed to hear that—so bad! Mama...Mama...Mama...

SELA

(stroking KIT's hair)

When I get home things are going to be different.

KIT

Oh Mama, don't be different! You're doing fine the way you are right now.

SELA

(with a rueful laugh)

Ha! What I mean by different, Kitten, is that Daddy and Chip are gonna have to start helping out a whole lot more.

KIT

They are? Now how are you gonna do that, Mama? They're both stubborn as mules.

SELA

(cooly)

Oh, I have my way! **(sobering)** Seriously, Kit, it's time Daddy and Chip really learned how to sign instead of always depending on Reenie and me.

KIT

Chip's signing.

SELA

Chip?

KIT

I taught him. And you should see Polly...she's so cute trying to sign with those fat little fingers of hers. Oh, Mama, she's so sweet!

SELA

(with mixed emotions)

Oh...oh...oh, God...oh, well, it's only right. With two deaf children that makes us a deaf family. It's only right that we all sign. Families talk to each other, Kit. Good families do...and I have a good family.

Yes, Mama, we do—the best!

KIT

SELA hugs KIT, drawing strength.

I’m ready now.

SELA
(to *ORDERLY*)

To go back to your room?

ORDERLY

No...*home*...I’m ready to go home.

SELA

SELA and KIT stand with their arms
wrapped around each other.

Lights slowly dim.

ACT 2
Scene 8

A short time later. The MAHONEY living room. Lights come up to bathe the room in warm sunshine and reveal THE MAHONEY FAMILY in a silent pantomime. BILL is hanging SELA’s painting on the wall, being advised by CHIP, KIT and AUNT REENIE.

ENTER SELA, carrying POLLY laying in her bassinet. SELA smiles approvingly when she sees her painting hanging up, nodding her head in agreement that it looks perfect.

THE MAHONEY FAMILY steps back, inadvertently arranging themselves in the perfect picture of a loving family. They hold the pose for a long beat.

A spotlight comes up on ADULT KIT who stands Center Stage with the frozen family portrait posed behind her. The spotlight widens to reveal DR. SEGAL standing beside ADULT KIT.

Lights over family slowly fade.

ACT 2
Scene 9

End flashback. 1995. Riverbend Hospital. Night. Lights come up to reveal ADULT KIT standing outside Gina’s isolation room, conferring with DR. SEGAL. (**Note: For production purposes, AUNT REENIE and SELA can lend interpretive support to these final scenes if necessary.*)

And now you know...everything. ADULT KIT

Kit...I, I don’t know what to say. DR. SEGAL
(*deeply moved*)

Dr. Segal... ADULT KIT

Joel. DR. SEGAL

Excuse me? ADULT KIT

Call me Joel. DR. SEGAL
(*smiling warmly*)

But... ADULT KIT

We’ve known each other long enough, especially after what you just told me. Kit, I’m so sorry. DR. SEGAL

No! No, don’t be sorry! I didn’t tell you all that for you to be sorry for me! ADULT KIT

No, no, you misunderstand. What I mean is...Kit, I’m sorry you had to go through all that. DR. SEGAL

ADULT KIT

(impassioned)

I love my family! Especially my mother! She’s an incredible woman! And my father? Oh, don’t you see? They could have given up! Could so easily just given up...

DR. SEGAL

I know that, Kit.

ADULT KIT

But they didn’t! Because, because they had love! And devotion! And, and compassion and strength—they still do!

DR. SEGAL

Yes. You do.

ADULTKIT

(not hearing him, rushing on)

I didn’t tell you all that for you to be sorry—I told you so you’d understand!

DR. SEGAL

I do, Kit. I do.

ADULT KIT

That’s why I want to try to help Gina.

DR. SEGAL

All the Ginas...

ADULT KIT looks at him, stunned.

You always had a terrific reputation. I can see now that you come by it honestly.

ADULT KIT

So, so you’re not...you’re not taking me off the case?

DR. SEGAL

(rueful smile)

I’d be crazy if I did. *(a beat)* I think Gina should be coming out of sedation right about now. Shall we?

He escorts ADULT KIT to GINA’s door
pulls out a key ring, unlocks door and enters.
ADULT KIT follows.

ACT 2
Scene 10

Moments later. Inside GINA’s isolation room. Spotlight comes up to reveal a subdued GINA huddled in the corner, wrist heavily bandaged, clutching her doll fiercely. ADULT KIT and DR. SEGAL face GINA, speaking to her directly. GINA speaks, with added sign and gestures. ADULT KIT’s signs are much more fluid than DR. SEGAL’s.

DR. SEGAL

Gina? Gina, I have someone here I’d like you to meet. This is Kit. Gina?

ADULT KIT

(politely interrupting)

Let me...

She slowly approaches GINA, kneels,
speaking and signing slowly and directly.

Hello, Gina, my name is Kit. I’m here to help you.

GINA

(shaky sign, “deafened” speech)

H-help me?

ADULT KIT

That’s right.

GINA

Can’t no one help me. Can’t, can’t, can’t, can’t.

ADULT KIT

(calmly)

Why don’t you give me a chance first before you decide?

GINA

Why?

ADULT KIT

(looking around)

Would you like to get out of here?

GINA

The hospital?

ADULT KIT

Yes...but first, would you like to get out of here, this room?

GINA

(with much feeling)

Yes! I hate it here! Locked up, everyone staring at me!

ADULT KIT

Would you like to go sit in the lounge with me? We could sit by the window. It's a beautiful night. The stars are out and the moon's up.

GINA doesn't respond, rocks doll.

Or we can stay here. It doesn't matter, Gina. Wherever you feel comfortable.

GINA

(looks around furtively, chews bottom lip)

I...I don't know.

ADULT KIT

(gently)

What, Gina? What don't you know?

GINA

I...I'm scared!

ADULT KIT

(soothingly)

I know, Gina...I know.

GINA

You, you do? You fooling me?

ADULT KIT

No, Gina, I'm not fooling you. I'm telling you the truth.

GINA

You get scared? A big, grownup person like you?

ADULT KIT

Yes. I get scared. A big, grownup person like me.

DR. SEGAL

We all get scared sometimes, Gina.

GINA

(rounding on DR. SEGAL)

What are *you* scared for? You’re the one with the needles! I *hate* needles!

ADULT KIT

I know, Gina...I know.

GINA

I wasn’t trying to be bad!

DR. SEGAL

It was for your own good, Gina.

GINA

You got a needle in your pocket?

DR. SEGAL

No, there’s nothing in my pocket.

GINA

Where you hiding it? Up your sleeve?

ADULT KIT

(comforting)

It’s all over now, Gina. No more needles tonight.

GINA

(studying KIT)

Are you really deaf?

ADULT KIT

Yes. I’m really deaf.

GINA

I thought so. You’re different from him! You born deaf?

ADULT KIT

No. I became deaf...when I was a little girl...not much younger than you.

GINA

Were you scared? I was! I was so scared.

ADULT KIT

(exchanging surprised glances with DR. SEGAL)

Yes, at first. But my family learned sign language. And I have a deaf sister.

GINA

A deaf sister?

ADULT KIT

Yes. We sign to each other all the time.

GINA

I wish I had a sister! (*a beat*) What you said...was it true?

ADULT KIT

About what, Gina?

GINA

The moon and the stars...was that true? They're really out? You saw them?

ADULT KIT

Oh! Yes. Would you like to come see?

GINA

Ummm...sure...yeah...I, I guess that would be okay.

ADULT KIT

(*extending her hand to GINA*)

Good.

GINA

This ain't a trick?

ADULT KIT

No. No trick, Gina.

GINA

You ain't gonna stick me with another needle? You got another needle in your pocket?

ADULT KIT

No, Gina, no more needles. We'll just go sit out there, by the window.

GINA

By the window? Just you and me?

ADULTKIT

Just you and me. Would you like that?

GINA

Ummm...okay...okay...

GINA gingerly places one finger in ADULT KIT’s outstretched hand. They both rise, head out the door into the corridor.

GINA

You’re not gonna throw me in the showers?

ADULT KIT

Do you need one?

GINA

I don’t know. I feel hot and sweaty.

ADULT KIT

That’s understandable. You’ve been pretty busy.

GINA

Do I stink to you?

ADULT KIT laughs. GINA scowls.

Why are you laughing?

ADULT KIT

I’m laughing because you sound just like my brother.

GINA

Really? (*a beat*) You gonna lock me in my room?

ADULT KIT

No.

GINA

Then what *are* you gonna do to me?

ADULT KIT

I’m not going to do anything to you, Gina.

GINA

Nothing?

ADULT KIT

Not a thing?

GINA

You fooling me?

A light comes up to reveal a couch and chairs in front of a picture window at the end of the corridor.

ADULT KIT

(sinking onto the couch with a contented sigh)

I'm too tired to fool you, Gina. It's been a long day—for both of us. Let's just sit here for a bit, okay?

GINA

(on guard, finally sitting at the very edge of a chair)

Okay.

ADULT KIT

The moon's pretty tonight, isn't it?

GINA

I don't want to talk! All day long all they do is talk, talk, talk! I hate talk!

ADULT KIT

Yes, I imagine you would.

GINA

So don't try to make me talk, okay?

ADULT KIT

You don't have to talk, Gina. Just sit and relax.

GINA

(warily copying KIT's contemplation of the moon)

(a beat) What's your sister's name?

ADULT KIT

Polly.

GINA

Polly. Is she your only sister?

ADULT KIT

Yes. And I have my brother too. His name is Chip.

GINA

Chip...like a potato? Is he deaf too?

ADULT KIT

No. But he's a good signer.

GINA

(impassioned, hugging doll fiercely)

When I grow up I’m gonna have lots of babies!

ADULT KIT

I like babies.

GINA

I love babies! Their names are gonna be Polly, Chip, and Kit. And I’m gonna hug them and kiss them and never let them go!

ADULT KIT

(visibly moved)

Oh, Gina...that’s...that’s *nice*.

GINA

You think I’m fooling you?

ADULT KIT

No. I think you really want to be a mama.

GINA

I do! I want to be a great mama!

ADULT KIT

I can see that.

GINA

Do you have any babies?

ADULT KIT

No...but I wish I did.

GINA rises, paces. She turns, studying
ADULT KIT.

GINA

My mama’s dead. Do you have a mama?

ADULT KIT

(struggling to keep emotions in check)

Oh, yes, Gina! Yes, I have a mama. A very special mama...

GINA

(shyly sitting next to ADULT KIT on the couch)

I’m glad you got me out.

ADULT KIT

You are?

GINA

It’s nice here. (*gazing at the moon*) It’s so bright! Almost as bright as the sun.

ADULT KIT

(*nodding, smiling softly*)

Almost.

GINA

Can you see the face?

ADULT KIT

(*with a touch of clinical concern*)

The man-in-the-moon?

GINA

Yes. Can you see him?

ADULT KIT

(*relieved*)

I see him.

GINA

Do you think he sees us?

ADULT KIT

Maybe...(beginning to gently hum and sway)

GINA

What are you doing?

ADULT KIT

Singing.

GINA

Why?

ADULT KIT

Because I like to.

GINA

But you’re deaf!

ADULT KIT

So? It doesn't matter. I hear the words in my head. Don't you ever sing?

GINA

No.

ADULT KIT

No? I'll teach you. Listen. “I see the moon, the moon sees me/ Way up high above the apple tree/ What's he trying to say to me/ I see the moon, the moon sees me.”

GINA

I know that song! I know it!

ADULT KIT

You know it?

GINA

My mama used to sing it to me before I became...before she...sing it again. Please?

ADULT KIT

(repeating song)

“I see the moon, the moon sees me/ Way up high above the apple tree...”

GINA

(softly joining in, singing & signing)

“What's he trying to say to me?! I see the moon, the moon sees me...”

GINA, holding her doll, lays her head on ADULT KIT's shoulder. ADULT KIT hugs GINA's shoulders, kisses her head.

Lights slowly fade.

CURTAIN

