

The Forsaken



a play by

Gordon Blitz

CAST OF CHARACTERS:

Ralph - an overweight 45-year-old gay man.

Jasper - a 35-year-old gay man physically challenged. Needs to use a wheelchair and forearm crutches. Lives with Ralph. They were previously a couple.

Lisa - a 50-year-old overweight depressed straight woman. Ralph's older sister.

Penny - A mature straight teenage girl. Lisa's daughter and Ralph's niece.

Young Ralph*

Young Jasper*

Young Lisa*

Young Penny*

*Each of these parts can be played by the same actor who portrays their older selves

Summary:

Ralph and Jasper, no longer a couple, are forced to continue living together because of financial reasons. Then Ralph's sister, Lisa, and her teenage daughter, Penny, join them and ask to move in. They all must now find a way to continue existing under these downtrodden conditions. They search for solace in each other, and in their struggle discover how relationships are meant to work. Not everything can be 'fixed,' but each in their own way must accept their situation. It is in this acceptance that they learn to move forward to a more positive outlook.

SCENE 1

A dingy apartment with kitchen and living room visible to the audience. There are two bedrooms offstage. An overweight 45-year-old man, RALPH, limps toward the kitchen table holding a casserole dish. A 35-year-old man, JASPER, in a wheelchair, is already at the table. There are forearm crutches leaning against the wall. There is an assortment of pill bottles on the kitchen counter as well as five bottles of hand sanitizer.

JASPER

Careful with that casserole. I spent a long time making it.

RALPH

Not that tuna-scrambled egg casserole again!

JASPER

That's all we can afford. And you keep insisting that you only want to eat protein. Hey, why did you start limping?

RALPH

It's this damn prosthesis. It's been bothering me lately. I hate it! You know, I never stopped limping. It's just that when I was working, showing clients houses, I was able to disguise the limp. It was difficult, but I didn't want them to feel sorry for me. If I dare tell anyone that it's from my diabetes, people have to nerve to say,

Ralph takes on a high affected voice

'I thought that was a manageable disease like the cocktail used to treat HIV.'

JASPER

At least you can walk. I wonder if you had taken better care of your diabetes, you wouldn't have had to have your foot amputated.

RALPH

The doctor said it didn't matter. Maybe I need a newer model of this prosthesis. It's almost seven years old. Don't give me that look of 'we can't afford it.'

JASPER

So, hey, what do you think of my casserole?

RALPH

It was fine the first night, but it's been three days in a row now.

JASPER

If you'd get a job, we could have something different every night.

RALPH

Are you saying that we can't afford anything else? And, by the way, you should talk. When have you ever worked?

JASPER

You *know* I'm paralyzed from the waist down. And I *do* have a job. I write essays and articles for *The Advocate*. I know they don't pay much, but I'm hoping for name recognition. Look, being paralyzed limits the kind of work I can do. We've already gone over this a *hundred* times.

RALPH

That's just an excuse. At least, I *did* work. Can I help it if the real estate market collapsed. I was a damn good agent.

JASPER

I can't believe there are no jobs as a broker in all of Los Angeles.

RALPH

Well, I don't want to do it anymore. It was too stressful, and the income was never consistent. Plus . . .

JASPER

Oh, please, don't delude yourself! You do a great job of rationalizing. I know the real reason you can't get work. You had that drug problem, and you got caught.

RALPH

Whose fault was that? I begged you to get a prescription from your doctor, but you said 'no.'

JASPER

I wasn't going to be your dealer.

RALPH

And it was painful having part of my foot removed. I had that neuropathy.

JASPER

Why are you always playing the victim?

RALPH

You're one to talk about *that*! You might not say it, but frankly, I think you do a pretty good job of playing the victim, too.

The doorbell rings.

RALPH (CONT'D)

Who could that be? We're not expecting anyone, are we?

JASPER

Don't look at me!

RALPH gets up from the table and looks through the peep hole. Doesn't see anybody. A piece of paper has been slipped through the bottom of the door. RALPH picks it up and gasps.

JASPER (CONT'D)

What is it?

RALPH

It's a letter from the company that manages our apartment. They're raising our rent by twenty dollars. We can't afford that!

After RALPH finishes reading the note, he throws it on the floor and then applies sanitizer to his hands.

JASPER

When did 'not being able to afford something' stop you? Why don't you just cut down on all those diabetic drugs? You would save a fortune if you just went on insulin. And think about how much money you spend on hand sanitizer. This place is such a mess! How can you be such a germaphobe? And I don't know how you keep track of all those pills you're taking.

RALPH

I don't want to go on insulin! I can't imagine giving myself shots every day. I'm tired of you telling me what to do! I don't want to talk about this. I can't believe we were lovers. How did we ever put up with each other? Amazing that we lasted ten years!

JASPER

And now it feels like we've been ex-lovers for an eternity.

RALPH

I should have thrown you out when I had the chance.

JASPER

When was that?

RALPH

Right after I came home early from that big Beverly Hills sale. I wanted to

RALPH

celebrate my gigantic commission. I even made reservations at The Ivy!

JASPER

Oh please, don't go over the story about what happened . . . again!

RALPH

Well, you seem to have forgotten about it . . . I opened the door and it was so quiet. I thought maybe you were sleeping, so I didn't want to disturb you. I saw your wheelchair all toppled over, and I thought, 'Something's wrong! Someone's broken into the apartment and attacked you!' Then I went into the bedroom, and there you were in bed with your damn caregiver, Renn. Both in the spoon position! Fast asleep! I wanted to kill you both! I was so hurt. I had been doing everything for you! And I was paying that asshole, Renn, to take care of you when I was at work. Bathe you, cook for you, take you to doctors' appointments; anything, so you wouldn't feel trapped being in the apartment.

JASPER

Ralph, you've forgotten about the agreement we had. I told you that Renn and I weren't having sex. I tried to explain that to you, but you wouldn't believe me! I just wanted someone to sleep with. It was like you and I were just friends living together rather than lovers without any benefits. I needed someone to want me. You don't know what it's like to feel like half a man. Useless legs. Feeling like a cripple. And Renn wanted to be with me. He found me sexy.

RALPH

So it was all my fault that you cheated?

JASPER

I didn't *cheat*! But you weren't showing any affection. And didn't you sometimes have sex with your clients? You kept telling me stories about clients who were coming on to you.

RALPH

No! But even if I did, I wouldn't have shoved it in your face. And I would never have sex with someone in *our* bed. That bed was a sacred space!

JASPER

What kind of crap are you talking about? A sacred bed?

RALPH

That's what it was to me. That's where we were the most intimate. It was the first purchase we made together. It cost a fortune! It's like a hospital bed; each side going up and down to make it easier for you to get in and out of bed. I'm still amazed that you let us buy it. You were so cheap; you still are! But this *one* time you treated yourself.

JASPER

(looking off in the distance, speaking wistfully and reminiscing)

We used to stay in that bed all day sometimes. Making love two or three times. And we didn't have to worry about getting hungry. We would have all kinds of snacks to eat right on the nightstand. When we had to move out of our house because we couldn't afford the mortgage, *this* bed was the only thing we took. We sold all our other furniture. It wouldn't have fit in here, anyway.

RALPH

God, I don't know how you ever convinced me to sleep in that same bed even though we weren't lovers anymore.

JASPER

I guess I used my magic powers.

RALPH

We were going to use the second bedroom here as an office. But sleeping together was such a disaster! We were fighting all the time. I hated you! I could swear you were kicking me even though you're paralyzed! So *I* got stuck moving into the second bedroom because the bed, my *sacred* bed, would only fit in the *master* bedroom.

JASPER

You know the main reason I'm sleeping in the master bedroom. That bed was really for *me*. It's easier for me to get in and out. And I needed a place for my writing desk. That second bedroom was useless. All that could fit in there was a bed. There was no place for me to write!

RALPH

Why am I even rehashing the past?

JASPER

You were trying to explain to me when you thought you could throw me out.

The phone rings and RALPH answers it.

RALPH

Hello! Hello! Who is this? Can you please stop calling! I can't make any payments! I'm broke! Stop calling me! I don't care what you do! So send it to

RALPH

a collection agency! I don't care about my credit rating.

RALPH hangs up and then uses some hand sanitizer on the receiver.

JASPER

Is that the bank again? They call here every day! I tell them the same thing. And why in the world are you using the sanitizer?

RALPH

I wish we could declare bankruptcy, but we don't even have enough money for that. Thank god, you're still getting disability, and you're on Medi-Cal. And for your information, I used the hand sanitizer because my hands were dirty.

JASPER

You're nuts! Why can't *you* at least get on Medi-Cal?

RALPH

You know why! Because I started taking social security early, and that small pension I get from when I was working at IBM has me making too much money to qualify. The rent here is taking up more than *half* our income. And I'm paying a fortune for health insurance.

JASPER

I can't believe how much money we went through. You had almost a million dollars in the bank, and now there's nothing!

RALPH

I don't know where you came up with *that* amount. I lost most of that through no fault of my own.

JASPER tries to get up from his wheelchair and stand by leaning on the table, but he starts to fall. RALPH rushes over and tries to help steady JASPER.

RALPH (CONT'D)

What are you trying to do? You could have fallen.

JASPER

I just want to know what it feels like to be able to stand without anyone's help. You wouldn't understand. Just get me my fucking crutches! I'm tired of this damn chair!

RALPH takes the forearm crutches leaning against the wall and brings them over to JASPER. When JASPER slides them on his lower arms, he grabs hold of RALPH. RALPH bristles from JASPER's touch.

JASPER (CONT'D)

You know, you never touch me.

RALPH

I *do* . . . when you need help. And how do you think my back got wrecked? I was doing fine. Slowly easing off the Vicodin, but then having to lift you ruined me! I had to start all over again! The spasms were crippling me.

JASPER

That's your fault, too! You went ahead and fired Renn after you found us in bed together.

RALPH

And I *do* touch you when I have to.

JASPER

You make it seem like a job; taking care of me. I'm talking about the *human* touch. Some form of intimacy among friends. That's what friends do.

RALPH

Maybe lesbians are better at handling their ex-girlfriends, but it's hard for me. It brings up all kinds of shit!

JASPER uses his crutches, leaves the kitchen and goes offstage to his bedroom. RALPH searches the kitchen looking for pills. He talks to himself.

RALPH (CONT'D)

I'm such an idiot. Why did I throw away all those Vicodin pills? As if, just because I'm in AA now, I'm going to stay clean. I just need enough for a week.

JASPER

(shouting from the bedroom)

Stop talking to yourself, I can hear everything you're saying. And don't bother looking for any pills. I threw them out. That's what you told me to do.

RALPH picks up the phone and dials a number.

RALPH

Hi, Louise. You know I'm a patient of Dr. Freidman. Can you help me out? I've run out of those pills that he prescribed for me. My elbow is really bothering me. He said he wouldn't do any more prescriptions until I came in for an appointment, but that's two months away. I can't wait that long. So maybe you can talk to him. Ask him to call it into my pharmacy. Oh, that would be lovely. Thank you. Yes, you too.

JASPER

(shouting from the bedroom)

You're incorrigible!

JASPER, on crutches, comes back into the kitchen and sits down. He grabs a piece of paper and starts writing. RALPH is sitting on the couch in the living room.

RALPH

What kind of notes are you writing now?

JASPER

Listing how we can afford the rent increase. And what kind of jobs I might be able to get. Of course, if we stuck to the budget I made for us, we might be able to handle that extra twenty dollars. And I also write down ideas for articles I plan on writing. Sometimes I even get inspired while I'm cooking.

RALPH

Anyway, when you're finished, come and sit on the couch with me. I want to talk to you.

JASPER finishes writing and tacks the paper on the wall. Then he takes his crutches and goes over to the couch and sits by RALPH.

JASPER

Okay. What is it?

RALPH

I want you to come up with a plan to get the IRS and the banks off our backs. You're good with getting us out of jams.

JASPER

I have an idea on how we could get some extra money. Why don't you teach Real Estate? You don't need a license for that, and I think you would be a good teacher.

RALPH

I don't know. I'm still considered a disgraced broker. And it's hard for me to stand for long with my foot, or should I say my *missing* foot. Isn't that what a teacher has to do?

JASPER begins massaging RALPH's lower leg.

RALPH (CONT'D)

Oh, that feels so good.

JASPER

Remember how you used to massage
my legs since I couldn't exercise them?
Would it kill you to do that for me
now?

As RALPH tries to get up from the couch, JASPER pulls him back down.

RALPH

I keep forgetting how strong your
upper body is.

RALPH starts massaging JASPER's legs.

JASPER

(speaking softly and intimately)

You know, even though I have no
feeling in my legs, I imagine what
your massaging feels like.

After a minute, they both fall asleep.

Lights dim.

SCENE 2

Lights come up. JASPER is in the kitchen on crutches, preparing breakfast. RALPH enters from the bedroom.

RALPH

I have to hand it to you, being able to cook while you're on crutches is quite amazing. Hey, I thought you were going to let *me* do breakfast.

JASPER

I don't have a choice. You don't know how to cook, and you would probably find a way of spending money we don't have on breakfast.

RALPH

Can you at least let me try? I can do the basics.

JASPER

Okay. Why don't you finish the rest of the preparation.

JASPER stops cooking and wipes his hands on his pants.

RALPH

Did you think I didn't see that? Can't you wipe your hands on a paper towel or a clean towel, not your pants?

JASPER

I'm not going to answer that.

JASPER uses his crutches and sits at the kitchen table while RALPH continues making breakfast. RALPH brings the food to the table.

RALPH

So, what's on the agenda for today?

JASPER

I got a letter from my mother yesterday, and I'm not sure what I should do about it.

RALPH

I thought you had no communication with her.

JASPER

I don't even know how she found me. I'm going to read you some of her letter. Let me know what you think.

Dear Jasper. You probably never thought you would hear from me since the last time I saw you. I said, 'I can't have a queer son. Don't come back until you get fixed.' I was so hurt when you told me about your sexuality after all I did for you. Taking care of you after the accident. Attending to all your physical needs. Things like getting dressed, showering, and getting to school. And then you dump this gay stuff on me! I still think the guy you're living with, Ralph, made you gay. You never would have turned out that way. I knew the minute you introduced him to me that he was sick. I wouldn't be surprised if he has that homosexual disease. I wanted to let you know that I have breast cancer and am going for treatment. Since you're my only living relative, I thought you should know . . .

RALPH

That's it? No 'love, mom?' That's a laugh that she thought I made you gay.

JASPER

Right. Is she expecting me to see her or feel sorry for her? And she didn't even apologize for the way she treated me.

RALPH

I don't know what to tell you to do. If it was me, I would just ignore it. I'll never know how my parents would have reacted. They both died in that

RALPH

condominium when it collapsed before I came out to see them. Thank goodness, me and my sister, Lisa, weren't living with them by that time.

JASPER

Are you still estranged from your sister?

RALPH

We just aren't close. I rarely hear from her. We just live our own lives.

JASPER

You're lucky not to be an only child like me. And it's nice that she was accepting of you being gay.

RALPH

It seemed that she was okay with me being gay, but I wondered if she had some kind of resentments that I had these privileges or entitlements.

JASPER

About being male?

RALPH

And that until I came out, I was my parents' favorite.

The doorbell rings and RALPH walks over to the door, and looks through the peep hole.

RALPH (CONT'D)

Who is it?

VOICE

We are serving you a subpoena.

RALPH looks at JASPER with bewilderment. He opens the door, takes the subpoena and closes the door. He quickly reads through it.

JASPER

What's it for?

RALPH

Oh, my god, it's the IRS! I never paid my taxes, and they think I'm hiding assets. I have to appear in court and show my portfolio. This must be some kind of joke. I have nothing to pay *anyone*. I should just ignore it. What are they going to do to me?

JASPER

Maybe we should get a lawyer.

RALPH

Huh? You *know* we can't afford an attorney. It's times like this that make me think, 'what's the point?' I would probably be better off dead. I don't get joy out of anything. I hate my life!

JASPER

You're just depressed. This is temporary.

RALPH

At least when I used to take Vicodin, I felt that buzz. Not just a high, but it relaxed me, and I had those moments of happiness. To be able to feel gratitude; that's what Vicodin did for me. And that's why it's so hard to get off of it. And it's awful now since I don't have a steady stream. When I get some pills, I have to make them last, but I don't get the full effect. But if I had to stop completely, I would go into withdrawal, and that would be awful!

JASPER

And no one can help you at your twelve-step meetings?

RALPH

No! That's just bullshit! And there are so many people like me that use the meetings just as a way to get pills,

RALPH
anyway. Who better than these people
to be a source of drugs?

JASPER
Shit! I can't listen to you anymore!
If you want to fuck up your life, then
just *do* it!

JASPER uses his crutches and goes offstage into his bedroom.

Lights dim.

SCENE 3

Lights come up. Later that day. JASPER is preparing dinner. RALPH enters the apartment.

RALPH

Damn! I wish I liked to drink. I'm so angry!

JASPER

Whoa! Whoa! Why don't you wait until we sit down to dinner, and then you can tell me all about it?

RALPH

No! I want to tell you now! It's your fault! I went back to my old real estate office and asked if I could do some teaching just like you suggested. They laughed and said there was nothing like that and really not needed. Most of the time, it would just be online training. And then the woman who reported me to corporate asked,

RALPH takes on a high affected voice.

RALPH (CONT'D)

'So, where are you working now?'

RALPH goes back to his regular voice.

RALPH (CONT'D)

As if she gave a shit! I think she was just gloating! And then they asked about you.

RALPH takes on a high affected voice.

RALPH (CONT'D)

'How is Jasper doing?'

JASPER

Well, that's sweet.

RALPH goes back to his regular voice.

RALPH

They never once asked how *I* was doing! Nothing about helping me. No comment about why I was limping.

JASPER

Well, what did you expect? You were the one who sabotaged your career. And I never told you to go back to your old job.

RALPH

You're impossible! Don't talk to me about sabotaging my career. Look at *you*. You write those articles, but what about the novel you've been writing, huh? I don't see you submitting *that* anywhere. You know that's the only way you're going to get published. But you're such a damn perfectionist!

RALPH goes up to where JASPER is cutting up some vegetables.

RALPH (CONT'D)

Give me that knife. I hate the way you cut vegetables.

RALPH grabs the knife from JASPER's hand, but as he takes the knife away, the blade slices JASPER's thumb. The knife falls to the floor.

JASPER

Ow! Ow! You cut me! I'm bleeding! Get me something to stop the bleeding! Shit!

RALPH

God, you're such a baby. It's just a scratch.

RALPH picks the knife up from the floor and when he gives it back to JASPER, he points the knife at JASPER's stomach.

JASPER

What are you doing? Are you going to kill me?

RALPH drops the knife on the counter and storms offstage to the bedroom and slams the door. JASPER grabs a paper towel to stop the bleeding. Then he finds his crutches and goes to the bedroom door and shouts.

JASPER (CONT'D)

Shit! Are you stewing in there? Okay, I'm sorry! I *do* need help finishing dinner. Damn! I don't know why *I'm* saying, 'I'm sorry.' It's *you* who should be apologizing!

RALPH

I'm not hungry.

JASPER

Shit! You're acting like a child. Open the door!

RALPH

No! I'm going to take a nap.

JASPER

Sheesh! Whatever!

JASPER walks back to the kitchen using his crutches and continues dinner preparations. The phone rings and JASPER answers it.

JASPER (CONT'D)

Hello? Who is this?

JASPER talks out loud to himself.

JASPER (CONT'D)

Oh shit! They hung up. I hate when people do that. Well, it wasn't a bill collector. They *never* hang up on you.

JASPER hangs up the phone, and the phone rings again. JASPER answers it.

JASPER (CONT'D)

Hello?

Another hang-up. JASPER hangs up the phone, and the phone rings again. This time, JASPER shouts through the bedroom door.

JASPER (CONT'D)

Ralph, you better take this. They hung up on me. I think they were expecting your voice.

RALPH bursts out of the bedroom. Picks up the phone.

RALPH

Hello? Oh, that's my friend, Jasper. Uh, . . . this is so unexpected. It's been years since we talked. Yes, I'm around for the rest of the evening. Okay, I guess that's fine. My address is 208 Flores Street in West Hollywood, Apartment 6. No, it's not a security building.

After RALPH hangs up, his demeanor changes when he looks at JASPER.

RALPH (CONT'D)

Well, we're going to have visitors. My sister and her daughter are stopping by around 8:00. So you don't have to worry about cooking dinner. I have no idea what they want.

Lights dim.

SCENE 4

Lights come up. A 50-year-old woman, LISA, and her teenage daughter, PENNY, sit on the couch in the living room with luggage leaning against the wall. RALPH and JASPER sit in chairs.

RALPH

Is this really all the luggage?

PENNY

No. We rented a storage unit where we have our clothes and other things that couldn't fit in the suitcases. But we only have that unit for a month. We can't afford to pay for another month. We're in the process of finding a place to stay. That's why we came here. We have no money. Mom lost her job, and she just stays in bed most of the day. She hasn't even looked for another place to work.

RALPH

Can Lisa hear us talking?

PENNY

Most of her hearing is gone. I think she's been reading lips, so that helps her understand what people are saying as long as they speak slowly.

RALPH

And this condition came on suddenly?

PENNY

Well, I'm not sure. Because Mom never mentioned that anything was wrong. But I could tell she kept repeating '*what*' when I would talk to her. And if she didn't see my face, she had no idea that I was talking to her.

RALPH

And what does the doctor say?

PENNY

He doesn't think her hearing will come back. This is why we're in this situation. The clinic where she was working let her go.

LISA

Could you please stop talking like I'm not even in the room! It's very rude!

PENNY

I'm sorry, Mom. I just wanted to get Uncle Ralph up to date with what's been going on.

RALPH

That's right, Lisa. I'm sorry you lost your job.

LISA

What did you say?

PENNY

(raising her voice)

He said he was sorry that you lost your job.

LISA

I really should have fought the dismissal. But what could I do? I couldn't do the job anymore. For god's sake, I'm an audiologist! How could I test someone's hearing if I can't hear myself!

JASPER

But there are laws that they can't discriminate against people who are physically challenged.

LISA yawns, starts crying and then falls asleep.

RALPH

What's wrong with her?

PENNY

I don't know. She hasn't been sleeping at all, and so when she gets tired, she just starts dozing off. Is there someplace where she could lie down?

RALPH

I guess she could go into my bedroom. It's the door in the hallway on the right.

PENNY

Thanks. I'm going to take a nap with her. I want to make sure she's okay. Now I'm worried that she has that disease, narcolepsy.

PENNY proceeds to wake up her mother and lead her offstage to the bedroom. Once the bedroom door is closed, RALPH uses some hand sanitizer.

JASPER

Why are you using that stuff?

RALPH

Jasper, who knows where my sister has been! We hugged them when they first got here.

JASPER

You're impossible! But Ralph, it sounds like they want to stay here.

RALPH

Yeah. But we don't have room for two more people. It's crowded enough with just the two of us.

JASPER

I guess if it's just temporary, you could sleep in my room. I mean we've done it before. They could have the second bedroom until they get established.

JASPER reaches for RALPH's hand. RALPH pulls away.

RALPH

Would you stop that? If it comes down to us sleeping in the same bed, it doesn't mean that we're getting back together as a couple. I don't know how many times I have to tell you that it's *not* going to happen.

JASPER

Okay. You've made your point. I just keep hoping that you'll realize that we *do* love each other. We have a history together. And if we were sleeping in the same bed then you might come to recognize those feelings again.

RALPH

I'm so concerned about Lisa. She seems very depressed, and Penny is still in high school. If we let them stay here, they might never leave.

JASPER

What are you going to do? Throw them out in the street like garbage? They're your flesh and blood. You've got to help them!

RALPH

I have enough on my plate taking care of you! . . . Now I have to take care of my sister and my niece as well?

JASPER

I'll help.

RALPH

Give me a break. What can you do?

JASPER

Cook for them. Maybe Lisa can apply for disability and get Medi-Cal

RALPH

Jasper, please! You're not making any sense. Those things are going to take forever. Look, the most I can do is tell them they can stay for a couple of

RALPH

weeks. Lisa *has* to get a job and look for housing.

JASPER

But remember, she's deaf. We don't even know what skills she has besides being an audiologist. Unfortunately, it looks like it'll be Penny who'll have to take care of her mother until Lisa gets back on her feet.

RALPH

I'm so tired of caring! And a young girl like Penny shouldn't have to be taking care of her mother. It should be the other way around. When we got together, I knew there would be challenges, but it never felt like a burden . . . Of course, I was younger then.

Lights dim.

SCENE 5

Lights come up hazy blue. Fifteen years earlier. Thirty-year-old RALPH and twenty-year-old JASPER are sitting at a table in a restaurant at the front of the stage. There are coffee cups on the table.

RALPH

This is unusual for me to go on a *date*. And a blind date, too. So old-fashioned. In the past, I've would usually meet a guy at my neighborhood bar, and *bam!* we'd go home together.

JASPER

Well that seems very old-school. I actually thought bar hookups were a thing of the past. Nice coincidence that Suzie is a friend of mine and a friend of yours, and that she thought we'd be a good fit.

RALPH

(chuckling)

Yeah, we can blame Suzie if this doesn't work out.

JASPER

Did she tell you we'd work out because I'm a Taurus and you're a Gemini and that our stars were aligned?

RALPH

Nah, she knew that I don't believe in that stuff, so that's something she wouldn't have told me, but she *did* say you were my type.

JASPER

And what's your type?

RALPH

She said you were smart, a writer, have a good sense of humor, and you were muscular.

JASPER

Ha! So she said I was a triple threat?
Nice! Did she mention me being in a
wheelchair, or that the reason I'm so
muscular is because I need upper body
strength for crutches and maneuvering
these wheels?

RALPH

She *did* say you were physically
challenged.

JASPER

And just in case you're wondering, all
the machinery works down there.

RALPH laughs.

RALPH

Ha! What did she say about me?

JASPER

She told me that you were a great
conversationalist and a good
storyteller, and that's why you were
so successful as a real estate agent.

RALPH

Well, I *am* good at telling stories
about homes for future buyers.

JASPER

True stories?

RALPH

Oh, yeah! After all, a home is one of
the most important purchases anyone
makes. And I want to help that along.
I try to make sure they don't have
'buyer's regret.' And I like matching
up buyers with the houses I'm
showing. I'm good at analyzing
people. And what better way than
talking to them. Words matter.

JASPER

Boy, sounds like you love what you're
doing.

RALPH

I want to make people happy. But what about you? What are *your* passions?

JASPER

It's my writing. Sometimes, I look at an article I've written, and I say to myself, 'Did I write that?' I'm not religious, but I swear to God, some higher power is helping me write. But it's such a crapshoot getting anything published, and right now I have serious writer's block. I can go a week without writing. And, of course, my dream project is getting my novel published. I've been working on it for five years.

RALPH is moved by JASPER's words. He reaches across the table and takes JASPER's hand.

RALPH

I'd like us to go back to my place. How do we do that?

JASPER

Before we do that, tell me that your house is all on one floor. I don't do well with stairs, and I doubt you'd want to carry me.

RALPH

No stairs.

JASPER

Good! So, I'm ambidextrous with crutches and the wheelchair, although I *do* get tired using the crutches. This chair folds up. We can put it in your trunk or back seat. I'm ready when you are.

JASPER transfers to the wheelchair. Before JASPER begins wheeling toward the door, RALPH stops him, bends down and gives him a long kiss.

JASPER (CONT'D)

Wow! That was *some* kiss. Can't wait
to see what you'll do to me when
we're in bed in the dark!

Lights dim.

SCENE 6

Lights come up. The present time; the next day. LISA and PENNY open their bedroom door and walk into the living room from offstage. PENNY looks back and sees that the other bedroom door is closed.

PENNY

They must be sleeping. Don't want to wake them up, so I'm not going to talk loud. I wish I could use sign language with you. Why won't you learn how to sign? It would make it so much easier, and I'm willing to learn it.

LISA

Just leave me alone. I don't want people looking at me and knowing that I'm deaf. I do pretty well with reading lips. Maybe one day, I'll get those cochlear implants.

PENNY

And who is going to pay for that, huh?

LISA

I don't know.

PENNY

Anyway, I get the feeling that they used to be a couple but are just friends now. That could be super awkward if they're sharing the same bed. I don't think they're going to let us stay here.

LISA

Why not? He owes it to me. I'm his big sister! And I helped him out when he told our parents he was gay. I let him stay with me in my one-bedroom apartment when our parents threw him out. I had one of those sofa beds.

PENNY

But what happened to you guys? It seems like you had some sort of

PENNY

falling out. I mean, this is like the first time I've ever seen him.

LISA

I don't want to get into it!

PENNY

Fine.

RALPH comes out of the other bedroom door with only his underpants on. He is limping.

RALPH

Oh, shit, I forgot you guys slept over. Let me get a bathrobe.

PENNY

Is Jasper still sleeping?

RALPH

No, he's just reading in bed waiting to make a grand entrance . . .when I've finished making breakfast. That's the only meal I know how to prepare.

RALPH leaves the living room, goes offstage and comes back wearing a bathrobe.

RALPH (CONT'D)

I guess I'll make breakfast for everyone.

PENNY

Can I help?

RALPH

It's just going to be cold cereal, toast and coffee. I think I can handle that.

RALPH busies himself making coffee and plugging in the coffeemaker.

LISA

Thank you for letting us stay. I don't know what we would have done if you weren't home or wouldn't let us spend the night.

RALPH

Not a problem. It's just one night.
Anyway, Jasper has been trying to get
me to sleep with him forever. Don't
worry; nothing happened. And it's not
going to happen.

PENNY

Did you hurt your leg? You're
limping.

RALPH

Oh, right! You don't know about my
health issues. Diabetes got the better
of me, and they had to amputate part
of my foot. I have a prosthetic.

LISA

I can't hear him. What did he say?

PENNY

(raising her voice)

He said he had to have his foot
amputated because of diabetes.

RALPH

Penny, how in the world do you put up
with her? Having to repeat everything
I say! I'm trying to speak slowly and
make sure that she can see my face.

PENNY

I think she's just used to me telling her
what people are talking about. She's
lazy. And, actually, she *does* have
some hearing.

LISA

I'm not lazy! I just don't feel like
reading lips all the time. I can hear
some words . . . they just aren't clear.

JASPER enters the room in his wheelchair.

JASPER

I smell coffee!

LISA, PENNY and JASPER all sit at the kitchen table while RALPH gives them bowls of cereal and coffee mugs. Then he sits down.

RALPH

Should we pray before we eat? Oh, wait a minute, I want to make sure everyone's hands are clean.

RALPH proceeds to pass out bottles of sanitizer.

JASPER

Are we praying that the food won't make us sick?

All uncomfortably laugh.

RALPH

C'mon! We're a family! Somewhat healthy. And, look, we're all eating together.

PENNY

Okay, Uncle Ralph. I see how important family is to you, and I guess family *is* important.

JASPER

And even though I'm not blood related, I can feel part of this new family.

LISA

I hope this is a new beginning for all of us. Ralph, why don't you lead us in prayer?

RALPH

I'm filled with gratitude that we can all enjoy this meal together. And let us raise our mugs and say, Amen!

After a first sip of coffee, the foursome begin eating their cereal and toast. All make facial signs of joy as they eat their breakfast.

JASPER

Ralph, did you take all your pills?

RALPH

Yes, mother. I may not keep track of money and other stuff in my life, but I never make a mistake with these diabetic drugs.

JASPER

Just checking. You don't want another episode.

RALPH

Please, Jasper! Sometimes you treat me like a child!

PENNY

He's just looking out for your health, Uncle Ralph.

RALPH

I feel like you have a hidden agenda.

JASPER

Now you're being paranoid.

RALPH

See, everybody! That's why we couldn't continue to make it as a couple.

RALPH gets up from the table and grabs all his pill bottles and throws them at JASPER.

RALPH (CONT'D)

Go ahead and count the pills. Make sure the right amounts are left.

JASPER

Stop it! You're acting like a child!
Let's just drop it!

JASPER lines up the pill bottles by RALPH's plate. RALPH looks at PENNY and LISA.

RALPH

Just ignore Jasper. Now, how did you both sleep last night?

PENNY

The best part was that we got to sleep through the night without having to get up. You don't want to know where we've been sleeping.

LISA

And it was the first time I didn't feel forsaken about losing my hearing and losing my job. I usually dread going to bed. I can't distract myself from all the shit that's happened to me! It all comes crashing down! Sometimes I want to smother myself in my pillow rather than face the nightmares. That's true what Penny said; that last night I slept straight through. I didn't have nightmares that would wake me up during the night.

RALPH

So, what are your plans now?

PENNY

We both need jobs. I've just graduated from high school, but my plans for college are on hold until we can get settled.

JASPER

Does that mean you'll be looking for a job?

PENNY

Yes. Something where I can make decent money until mom can find work. We were hoping that we could stay here if that's all right with both of you.

RALPH

I don't think that's going to work. I can't sleep with Jasper. We made an exception last night. You can see how difficult things are between us. This place is just too small to begin with.

RALPH looks straight at LISA to make sure she understands what he is saying. But LISA turns away not wanting to answer.

RALPH (CONT'D)

Where have you been staying in the past?

PENNY

Sometimes with friends or in my car or if we can get into a homeless shelter.

LISA gets up from the table and walks toward the second bedroom.

RALPH

Where are you going, Lisa?

RALPH gets up and tries to stop LISA from leaving the room. He blocks the bedroom door and tries to push her from entering the bedroom.

LISA

Get your fucking hands off me!

RALPH

I want you to talk to me. Something else is going on with you. I haven't heard from you in twenty years! Was I such a bad brother? Do you hate me so much?

LISA

You know why I never contacted you!

RALPH

I don't know what you're talking about.

LISA

You really have no idea?

RALPH

Go ahead; tell me!

LISA

Not with Penny here. I don't want her to hear what happened.

JASPER points at PENNY.

JASPER

Penny, let the brother and sister have their privacy. We'll go into my bedroom, and I can show you some of my writing. You can tell me what you think of it. I'm thinking about writing a YA novel, and you might want to help me.

PENNY follows JASPER offstage into his bedroom. Once they slam the door closed, RALPH and LISA sit on the couch.

LISA

You did something unforgivable!

RALPH

You mean because you took me in after our parents threw me out? I thanked you.

LISA

No! . . . It was something else.

Lights dim.

SCENE 7

Lights come up hazy blue. Twenty years earlier. Twenty-five-year-old RALPH and thirty-year-old LISA are sitting at LISA's kitchen table. Both are drinking coffee.

RALPH

I don't have a lot of time. I'm showing a house at two o'clock. Oh, by the way, where's your husband?

LISA

That's what I wanted to talk to you about. He just up and left! Said he didn't want to be married anymore! Can you imagine that? I need to get a divorce, but there's a problem. As a married couple we owe the IRS money. I don't have an address for that jerk, so all the notices are coming to *my* address. I need your help. I can't afford \$10,000! And even if I declared bankruptcy, I still would be responsible. And right now I can't even afford to hire an attorney. Can you lend me the money?

RALPH

Are you crazy? I don't have that kind of money lying around. I've got properties that I'm trying to flip. Land rich, cash poor. Isn't there anyone else you can ask?

LISA

No! I don't have anyone else! My whole life revolved around Myles. I did everything for that guy! He never had a steady job. We were basically living on my income as an audiologist. Hell, I still have student loans that I'm paying off.

RALPH

Well, I'm sorry, but I can't help you.
Uh, . . . can you top off my cup? I
always get tired after lunch. I'm
probably pre-diabetic. Anyway, I
need the caffeine to perk me up.

LISA angrily grabs RALPH's mug, gets up from the table, goes to the counter and fills his mug with coffee. In her anger, she quickly hands it back to him, and it splatters.

RALPH (CONT'D)

Hey! Watch what you're doing!

LISA

(sits back down trying to control herself)
Okay, okay! What about signing for a
line of credit? Or even taking a second
mortgage?

RALPH

Lisa! I'm just starting out! I already
told you I don't really own any
property. So there's no second
mortgage to take. And besides, it's
a bad idea to loan family money. It
never ends well.

LISA, agitated, gets up from the table, circles the room and starts shouting.

LISA

I can't believe this! I'm so
disappointed in you, Ralph! I let you
live with me rent free for years! You
know what? You're a spoiled brat!
You never tried to get a job while you
stayed with me. You made it seem like
you were a victim because you were
gay. I never understood that. Did you
even *try* to date girls? Maybe our
parents were right; that it was a
choice!

RALPH

That is such bullshit, and you know it!
You never said anything about me
having to work. I was fast-tracking my
college degree. Three years instead of
four.

LISA

And you invited guys over! Didn't
even ask permission.

RALPH

But you said you were okay with me
being gay!

LISA stops moving and goes right up to RALPH and gets up in his face.

LISA

That's *not* what I'm talking about! You
took advantage of me! And I would
hear you on the phone when you
thought I wasn't listening. Telling your
friends:

(uses a sing-song voice)

'Oh, Lisa doesn't mind me being here.
She's lonely. She never dates. I'm not
surprised. She's fat. Doesn't even try to
make herself look good. Who would
even want to go out with her?'

RALPH

I didn't mean it! You're taking it out
of context!

LISA

You're such a liar! I can see this was a
waste of time. I *knew* you wouldn't
help me. I'll just have to figure out
something else. I'll tell you this: I'm
tired of being the good older sister that
you can take advantage of! You're
going to have to learn to survive
without me. As far as I'm concerned, I
don't have a brother anymore! You
know what? Why don't you just leave!
(points to the front door)

RALPH

*(throwing his arms up in a
gesture of helplessness)*

What do you want from me? I'm sorry
you feel this way. I'm sorry I've
disappointed you. I'm sorry I can't
help you.

*RALPH gets up from the table shaking his head and leaves the apartment.
After he leaves, LISA see a light flashing on her voice mail machine. She
listens to the message.*

VOICE

This is just to confirm that your test
came back positive. You are, in fact,
pregnant. Please make an appointment
to see your doctor.

LISA

I'm so fucked!

Lights dim.

SCENE 8

Lights come up. The present time. RALPH and LISA are sitting on the couch.

RALPH

Why didn't you want Penny to hear about this horrible thing I did; this thing that you won't forgive me for after twenty years?

LISA

Believe it or not, I didn't want to have to explain why I wasn't talking to my brother. It was enough that I had to tell her about her deadbeat father. That I have no idea where he is.

LISA starts weeping. RALPH tries to comfort her, but she pushes him away.

RALPH

So, the last time I visited you, you were pregnant with Penny?

LISA

I wasn't certain. I had taken a home test, and it showed I was pregnant, but I didn't believe it. I had my doctor give me the test, and I found out the result just after you left.

RALPH

Why didn't you tell me?

LISA

Why? Because it wouldn't have made a difference! You wouldn't have helped me!

RALPH gets up from the couch. He begins walking around the room speaking.

RALPH

Well, maybe I would have. Being a single mother with a child makes a big

RALPH

difference. Who knows, I might have helped you with getting an abortion if you had asked.

LISA

Ralph, slow down! I can't understand what you're saying if you keep moving around. I can't read your lips.

RALPH

(faces LISA and louder)

I said I might have helped with an abortion.

LISA

Ralph! Who said anything about an abortion? Penny is one of the best things that ever happened to me. She's been taking care of me when I didn't feel like getting out of bed. When it got really bad, she would have to skip school. I would write notes so that she could be excused.

RALPH

That doesn't sound very healthy. You shouldn't be Penny's responsibility.

LISA

Of course, you would say *that!* When have you ever been responsible for *anyone?* You're a selfish prick! You never had kids. Oh right, that's one of the benefits of being gay. You are so fucking privileged!

RALPH

Shit! That's such a mean-spirited comment to make! I had a lover who was *paralyzed!*

LISA

Well, how did that turn out? You broke up with Jasper.

JASPER and PENNY come out of JASPER's bedroom.

JASPER

Just in time. I heard someone say my name.

RALPH

Have you and Penny been dishing us?

PENNY

No, not at all. We were just getting to know each other. Jasper shared some of his writing with me, and I sang for him. And he sang for me, too.

RALPH

I didn't know you had a good voice.

JASPER

As if you would care. Didn't I ever tell you that in school I was in the choir, and I used to sing in church? It was a good way for the church to raise money. Having a boy in a wheelchair serenade the congregants.

PENNY

We even sang a duet of 'When You're Smiling.'

LISA

Oh, god! Are you on that kick again about becoming a pop star? You *know* the odds are so against that ever happening.

JASPER

Well, she has a unique voice and style. Almost as good as mine. Who knows, she could be the next Diana Krall.

RALPH

Uh, . . . who's that?

JASPER

The jazz singer married to Elvis.

RALPH

Elvis Presley?

JASPER

No, Costello.

RALPH

I give up!

LISA

I'm going back to bed. I still haven't caught up on my sleep.

RALPH

And I'm going out to look for some kind of work for a 45-year-old man with a missing foot.

RALPH leaves the apartment and LISA goes offstage into the second bedroom.

JASPER

Are you really planning on becoming a singer?

PENNY

Yes! That way I won't have to go to college.

JASPER

But how would you live? You need to find a job where you get paid.

PENNY

Why can't I be a street performer and have a tin can where people can throw in money?

JASPER

My goodness, you're living in some sort of fantasy world, girl. Reminds me of how I used to think I could just be sitting on the Venice boardwalk in my wheelchair and read my poetry and have people pay me.

PENNY starts singing.

PENNY

*But when you're cryin', you bring on
the rain,
So stop your sighin', be happy again,
Keep on smilin', 'cause when you're
smilin'
The whole world smiles with you.*

JASPER

So now, you've cured 'crying?'

PENNY

My mom used to sing that to me when
I had a crying spell. Of course, *now*
she seems to be the one doing all the
crying.

JASPER

What were *you* crying about?

PENNY

Of being left alone. My mom had a
habit of deserting me.

Lights dim

SCENE 9

Lights come up hazy blue. Eight years earlier. PENNY is sitting in an apartment alone and crying. She is ten years old. The door opens and LISA walks in. LISA runs over to PENNY and hugs her.

LISA

I'm so sorry, baby.

When LISA tries to stop PENNY from crying, PENNY turns away.

PENNY

Where were you? You never came back.

LISA

I just got tied up and couldn't make it home. I was afraid to drive because I drank too much. I stayed at Harry's.

PENNY

I don't care. I've been alone. I was hungry. I hate you!

LISA

Don't hate me. I didn't do this on purpose.

PENNY

I got scared, too. What was I supposed to do?

LISA

But you were a brave little girl. Nothing bad happened while I was gone.

PENNY

Promise me you won't do this again.

LISA

I promise.

PENNY

I don't believe you. You've done this before.

LISA

I have not! Let's not discuss this anymore. I'm home. That's all that matters.

PENNY

You do this all the time. Leave me here alone. I bet my father would never do this.

LISA

Your father? What brought that on? Your father doesn't care about you *or* me! He *abandoned* us! It's like we don't exist. He betrayed us! I trusted him. I counted on him just like you counted on me, but *I* came back.

PENNY

Why won't you tell me where you went?

LISA

I was on a date.

PENNY

Why couldn't I come with you?

LISA

Because it was a date, and on a date you have to be alone with another person. If you tagged along it would be three.

PENNY

I don't understand.

LISA

Sometimes I can't be here. I'm working. I can't just leave anytime I want and pick you up. That's why I have Josie pick you up.

PENNY

But when I open the door, and no one says 'hello', it's *so* scary. Like a monster will jump out at me, and you won't be here to protect me.

LISA

How about we go out for ice cream?
I'll let you get two scoops.

PENNY kisses her mother.

PENNY

I love you, mommy.

LISA

I love you too, baby girl.

Lights dim.

SCENE 10

Lights come up. The present time. PENNY and JASPER are sitting on the couch.

PENNY

She left me alone so many times. Eventually I didn't care. I was tired of feeling desolate. So I learned how to not be helpless. I could be alone, and that was okay. I wouldn't let what she was doing to me crush me.

JASPER

You're quite mature for an eighteen-year-old.

PENNY

Thank you. It's nice to hear someone say that.

JASPER

Still, I'm surprised that you're putting your life on hold to take care of a woman who didn't do such a good job of taking care of *you*.

PENNY

You should have seen her when her hearing was going. It was so quick. And she became despondent. They were horrible to her at work. As soon as patients started complaining, she was fired. And she worked at that clinic for *ten years!* I never wanted to feel like I was abandoning her. No one should ever feel like they have been forsaken.

JASPER

I used to feel that way when I was growing up. After the car accident that left me in this chair, my mom changed. She kept me home from school because she didn't want people staring at me. And she was so

JASPER

overprotective. I rarely went outside to play. But you know what the worst part was? It was that I felt so alone, even though I had my mother around all the time.

PENNY

The opposite of what happened to me. So what was so wrong about that?

JASPER

But that's the thing. It's like she *wasn't* there. Fussing over me, sure, but never *talking* to me. I never felt like she wanted to spend time with me. That because I was paralyzed, I became someone else. Not her perfect son anymore. And no matter what she did, she couldn't make me walk again.

PENNY

So are things better between you and your mother now?

JASPER

I wish. When she found out I was gay, she went crazy! She practically threw me out on the streets! And once I met Ralph, she didn't want to have anything to do with me when I moved in with him.

PENNY

So you haven't had any contact with your mother?

JASPER

No, except only just recently she sent me a letter saying that she had breast cancer and wanted me to know.

PENNY

Sounds like she's attempting to reach out to you.

JASPER

But it was such a mean-spirited letter. She still won't accept me as gay, and what's more, she thinks that Ralph made me gay.

PENNY

You never mentioned your father. Was he absent like mine?

JASPER

Yes, I'm fatherless. All I know is that he died right after I was born. At least that's all my mother ever told me.

PENNY

Well, I think that it's nice that we have that in common. I think that people who are brought up by only a mother have a bunch of stuff against them. I've been reading up about this, and we tend to be more aggressive and prone to anger.

JASPER

Ha! The only thing I'm aggressive about is sex. And I'm *not* angry. What about you?

PENNY

Well, I haven't had sex yet, so I wouldn't know about being aggressive or passive. And I'm rarely angry. I guess we missed that trait. Thank goodness! Do you mind me asking why you and my Uncle Ralph split up?

JASPER

He thinks I was cheating with my caregiver. He found us in bed.

PENNY

Why do you say, *thinks*? If he found you in bed with another man, I assume

PENNY

it was a man, then you *must* have been having sex.

JASPER

That's the thing. We *never* actually had sex. Oh. we kissed, and maybe played with our bodies. But we never had orgasms. It was all just fun and a way to be intimate. Ralph and I had stopped having sex. That's the cliché about gay men who stay together as a couple for a long time. Unfortunately, it was true for us. That we just got tired of having sex and just became friends.

PENNY

That doesn't sound so horrible. Can't friends show affection?

JASPER

I actually wish that I had that with Ralph. No, we hardly touch each other. Like he's afraid of something. Yet periodically we say, 'I still love you' to each other, but it isn't true. Like we say it as an afterthought. I keep thinking that I've been in a loveless marriage. And we were always fighting about money. Ralph doesn't know the value of a dollar. He should probably be in one of those OverSpenders meetings.

PENNY

And you never talked to Ralph about any of this?

JASPER

I tried, but he's not open about his feelings. You know the only time we were really open and vulnerable was after we had sex. And right now, we have worse problems. The IRS and bill collectors are after us. And they just raised our rent! Even with rent

JASPER

control, it's taking up way too much of our income. The calls never stop. Actually, we're broke.

PENNY

How do you get by?

JASPER

We both started taking social security as soon as we could. I get a disability check, and I'm on Medi-Cal. We gave up owning a car since West Hollywood is a walking city. That has saved a bunch of money.

LISA comes out of the bedroom.

LISA

Oh, I feel so much better now. My body was telling me that I needed that extra sleep. Penny, we need to start working on a plan. I think I'm ready to start looking for a job. Jasper, can you talk to Ralph and convince him to let us stay temporarily. Once I start working, we'll be able to save enough money for an apartment.

JASPER

I'll try, but he can be very stubborn. Maybe Penny would be the best person to ask him about that.

PENNY

Sure, let me have a go at it. I could tell him that since I'm his niece, we should be bonding.

LISA

Ha! A guilt trip just might work.

RALPH enters the apartment, looking disgusted.

RALPH

It's brutal out there. Looking for work. Especially at my age. My background in real estate doesn't seem useful. I

RALPH

tried going for a job as a bank clerk. And I even thought of doing house-cleaning since I know so much about houses. What about you guys? What have you been up to?

LISA

I slept the whole time you were gone. Right now, I feel like some fresh air. Jasper, are you up for showing me around the neighborhood? Maybe we'll see an apartment rental sign.

JASPER

Good idea. Hand me my crutches just in case I need to get out of my wheel chair.

LISA hands JASPER his crutches, and then walks over to RALPH and hugs him.

RALPH

What brought that on?

LISA

I just felt like hugging my brother. I saw all those pills in the kitchen. Are you okay?

RALPH

It's for my diabetes.

LISA

Oh, I see.

Okay, we're off. See you guys later.

LISA and JASPER leave the apartment. RALPH gets some hand sanitizer and then looks at PENNY.

PENNY

This works out perfectly. I wanted to get to know you, Uncle Ralph. What's the deal with you always cleaning your hands? Are you one of those germaphobes?

RALPH

I never used to be this way, but after I lost my job and my foot, something changed. No, I'm not a germaphobe; it's OCD, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. Someone tried to explain it to me once. That I'm trying to relieve the distress associated with the fear of getting contaminated. It's crazy! If I keep washing my hands, I somehow feel safer. Preventing any other bad things from happening to me, I guess.

PENNY

Maybe it's not so bad. You probably never get sick. But please, tell me anything I should know about you.

RALPH

Do you really want me to rehash my life to you? As you can see, it's not a pretty ending.

PENNY

No, don't say that. Let me be the judge of that. I'm wondering how successful you were as a real estate agent.

RALPH

Well, I had some good years. Made a ton of money. Of course, I spent it, too. I had to keep up my image. Always drove a Lexus and bought my clothes at Neiman Marcus. I even found homes for some B-list celebrities like Bill Paxton. Of course, I treated clients to lunch or dinner, but it paid off most of the time.

PENNY

So, then what happened?

RALPH

I was working so hard, not taking care of myself, ignoring my diabetes. They tried to save my foot, but it was too

RALPH

late; it had to be amputated. And the pain was so intense afterward. And learning how to use a prosthetic! I was off work for three months. I felt abandoned. No one from work visited me. And Jasper blamed me for not paying attention to my body. Plus, he said being paralyzed was worse than a foot amputation. But I knew I had to get back. We needed the money. And I was tired of feeling sorry for myself.

PENNY reaches for RALPH's hand

PENNY

I would have been there for you, Uncle Ralph. Isn't that what nieces are for?

RALPH

You are being so sweet. I wish I'd known about you sooner.

PENNY

Mom had her reasons whether they were valid or not. So how were you able to start working again?

RALPH

So that's when I discovered Vicodin. And the relief was instant! No more pain. And the 'high' I felt helped me return to my job. I guess you could say I became a functional addict.

PENNY

I had no idea that was a 'thing.'

RALPH

Yes, and boy, did I function! I was Employee of the Month for seven months in a row because of my sales. And the stress I used to feel about whether a sale would go through or not was gone. The Vicodin had rewired my brain.

PENNY

Oh, wow! I can see why people get addicted.

RALPH

But then when I found out that Jasper was cheating on me with his care-giver; that's when everything crashed. My back went out after I fired the guy, and I was taking care of Jasper by myself. When I took anti-inflammatory pills, I got some relief, and I would be fine until I wasn't fine.

PENNY

But you were taking Vicodin. That should have helped your back.

RALPH

No, because I was only taking a small amount. Now I had to up the dose, and it became harder to come by those magic pills. My doctor wouldn't fill prescriptions. I became desperate. Then withdrawal kicked in. I started asking friends and other employees if they had extra pills. When that didn't work, I would go into the medicine cabinets of houses I was listing. You would be amazed at how many people have Vicodin. Somehow I got caught. I was instantly fired. Lost my license.

PENNY

No first-time warning? Sounds like you were a top employee, and yet *one* mistake and you were out. Didn't anyone come to your defense?

RALPH

No! And even Jasper refused to be there for me. He said it was my fault. That I didn't take responsibility for my actions.

Ha! You probably wished you had never asked me about my history. The

RALPH

only good thing is that I'm going to AA meetings to try to get clean. The longest I've gone has been six months, but unfortunately, I just fell off the wagon.

But what about you? I've been doing all the talking. What were you going to major in if you had gone to college?

PENNY

Well, you know how I have dreams of being a singer. That I would make a living as a performer doing vocals with a rock band. Anything having to do with music. Music was going to be my major. I would sing any chance I got. And mom was actually gung-ho about it, too. She would take me to auditions. We couldn't afford for me to take singing lessons, but it didn't matter. I had a natural talent. I could visualize the notes in my head.

I listened to all the great singers -- Sinatra, Ella Fitzgerald, Streisand. Learned their techniques and phrasing. How to make the lyrics sound conversational. That was when I was fifteen. But then when I turned fifteen, my voice started changing, but not in a good way.

Lights dim.

SCENE 11

Lights come up hazy blue. Three years earlier. Fifteen-year-old LISA is sitting on the couch. PENNY comes storming into the apartment.

PENNY

Where were you?

LISA

What are you talking about?

PENNY

You didn't remember! I had a doctor's appointment, and you were supposed to be there.

LISA

Oh, that's right. I'm sorry. I got tied up at work.

PENNY

You *know* the reason I went. It was because I was having trouble singing, and I went through all those tests.

LISA

I thought you had just strained your voice.

PENNY

How could you forget that they took a biopsy of nodules in my neck? I was sitting in the doctor's waiting room scared out of my mind. Angry that you weren't there. I was actually sweating.

LISA

I'm sorry. I didn't realize that this was such a big deal. I got the feeling you were handling this on your own.

PENNY

That's ridiculous! A fifteen-year-old who might have cancer is frightening! I felt totally isolated. I couldn't believe

PENNY

that you had forgotten about the appointment. For a minute, I even worried that something might have happened to you. All I knew was that I wanted my mother to be with me when they broke the news -- good *or* bad!

LISA

Well, what were the results?

PENNY

Does it matter to you? It wasn't cancer, but I do have thyroid problems that need to be treated.

LISA

Well, that's good news, isn't it?

PENNY

No! I still need surgery because I have cysts on my vocal cords that have to be removed even though they're benign. If not, I'll have permanent vocal cord damage.

LISA

I don't know if we can afford that.

PENNY

Well, you should have been with me and talked to the doctor about that!

LISA

I'm sorry you had to go through this alone. Remember, I have a job that supports both of us, and I can't just leave unless it's an emergency.

PENNY

And this wasn't an emergency?

LISA

No. You weren't dying. You hadn't been in a car accident or horribly sick.

PENNY

But Mom, you *know* how important singing is to me. This is my future career I'm talking about. I have this God-given talent. I don't want it to go to waste.

LISA

But none of the auditions ever panned out. I thought maybe you were going to be more realistic about this and decide to major in something else in college.

PENNY

What made you think that?

LISA

Because that's what people do when they face reality. You *know* the odds of becoming a famous singer are almost nil. It was a crapshoot!

PENNY

But I'm so young. I shouldn't have to give this up. Did you *ever* have faith in my dream?

LISA

I took you to auditions, didn't I? Wasn't that enough support? I can't help it if you weren't chosen.

PENNY

You're my mother! You're supposed to support me whether you believe it or not. That's what I need right now.

LISA

Penny, I'm a single mother. There is only so much I can do! Don't blame me!

PENNY

You're so selfish! Do you ever look at me? Sometimes I wonder if I remind you of my father. That my face looks like his face. Why don't you admit it?

PENNY

You don't want me to succeed! Why should I have my dreams fulfilled while yours never were?

LISA

Yes, I got screwed by your father. But I love you. How can you say that I'm not there for you?

PENNY

You *say* you love me, but I don't know if it's true. That you're only saying it to make yourself and me feel better. I can't get over all those times you left me alone when I was a child. I want to hate you, but I can't!

LISA

Haven't you gotten over that already?

PENNY

I thought I had, but today when I was with the doctor, alone in his office, all I could think about was that this was just like when Mom didn't come home for days when I was only ten. You deserted me! I didn't know the word for what you were doing *then*, but *now* I do. It's feeling like I was *forsaken*.

LISA

Oh, don't be so dramatic.

PENNY

Are you telling me you've never felt that way?

LISA

Okay, maybe you're right. *Everybody* ends up feeling forsaken, but eventually you move past it.

Lights dim.

SCENE 12

Lights come up. Present time. PENNY and RALPH are sitting on the couch.

RALPH

Did you ever end up getting surgery?

PENNY

Yes, but it was a little late, and my voice had already changed. I no longer had a sweet soprano voice; it was more suited for jazz. And when I realized that, I just wasn't interested in music anymore. So I no longer really had a major for college. I figured once I got there, I would figure out what I wanted to do careerwise. Then Mom got sick, so I didn't have to make a decision.

The phone rings.

PENNY (CONT'D)

Aren't you going to get the phone?

RALPH

No, it's probably the IRS or the bank. So, I'm glad we talked. In some ways I feel closer to Lisa now that I know more about her life. You brought us together.

PENNY

Does that mean there is a chance that you'll let us stay for a while?

RALPH

I'll talk to Jasper about it. It's a possibility. Maybe you can help get me out of trouble with the IRS, and with the other debts that we have. We're just not savvy enough technically, and even with so many opportunities out there, everything has to be done online

RALPH

these days. Nothing seems to be done
in person anymore.

LISA and JASPER enter the apartment, both laughing.

RALPH (CONT'D)

What's so funny? We could use a good
laugh. We've been having a heavy-
duty conversation here about the past.

LISA

Oh, we were people-watching, and
Jasper kept coming up with these
funny comments.

JASPER

That's where I get my inspiration to
write. When I see people, I make up
stories about them; imagining their
background, where they're going and
what problems they have to solve.

LISA

There was this fat couple pushing a
stroller, but it looked empty. Jasper
whispered, 'They must have lost their
pigs. You know what they say . . . that
people begin to look like their pets.'

PENNY

That's horrible! They could have lost
their child, and this was their way of
remembering them.

JASPER

Oh, god! That's a great idea for a
story. Thank you, Penny. When it gets
published, I'll give you a finder's fee!

LISA

And you know, Jasper was *so* good
about only talking when I could see
his face. Made it so easy to read his
lips. Not like some people.

PENNY

Mom, I need to talk to you privately in the bedroom.

PENNY and LISA go to their bedroom and close the door. RALPH walks over to JASPER's wheelchair.

RALPH

Penny asked me if they could stay.

JASPER

How can we afford to feed two more people? They've got to be committed to bringing in money; otherwise, it's not going to work.

RALPH

But they're family. So, we have to make some sacrifices. I want to do this.

JASPER

Well, . . . all right. I'll try to redo the budget and see if we can squeak by.

LISA and PENNY come back into the living room, both smiling. LISA stares at RALPH.

LISA

You both look guilty. What were you talking about?

JASPER

We're just trying to figure out how to pay for the rent increase on this apartment.

LISA

Hey, you made dinner last night. Why don't Ralph and I prepare dinner tonight?

JASPER

Penny, is she a good cook?

PENNY

You'll find out tonight. It will be a surprise!

LISA

I really enjoyed doing the neighborhood with Jasper, but we have some unfinished business to discuss.

PENNY

Ralph, since mom had a tour, are you up for a walk?

RALPH

Anything for my niece. With this prosthesis, I can't walk very fast, though.

RALPH and PENNY leave. JASPER wheels himself to the kitchen area with LISA.

LISA

What were you guys really talking about?

JASPER

About you staying here temporarily. We just need to work some things out.

LISA

You mean about your relationship?

JASPER

Oh, I haven't even gotten into *that* with him. It was so odd being in the same bed with him last night. It's been a long time. Nothing happened, although I wish it had.

LISA

How come you're still living with him? Usually when people break up, one of them moves out.

JASPER

I was providing pain pills for him, and I guess we decided to just be friends. Maybe he felt sorry for me. That I had no place to go. It's not so easy when you're confined to a wheelchair. And we had a history. Ten years together!

LISA

It's a shame you can't make things work. Penny told me what happened. But that was years ago.

JASPER

And did Penny tell you that we had an arrangement where either of us could fool around? Just to the point of kissing? Nothing more than that? The only caveat was that we wouldn't be throwing it into each other's faces. I made one mistake, and he won't let me forget it!

LISA

So is this going to be a dealbreaker; that he won't let us stay because you'll have to be sharing a bed the whole time?

JASPER

Surprisingly, I think he's okay with that. Family triumphs!

LISA

Well, *that's* good news.

JASPER

You know I *do* deserve some of the blame for the breakup. The way I handled the loss of his foot and then his job. It all started two years ago . . .

Lights dim.

SCENE 13

Lights come up hazy blue. Two years earlier. JASPER and RALPH are sitting on the couch.

RALPH

I am so fucked! They *fired* me! They found out what I was doing. I was going through the medicine cabinets of the houses I was showing. It's your fault! You stopped asking your doctors.

JASPER

I told you. I couldn't do it anymore. You've become an out-of-control addict! Go to a support group or at least go to AA!

RALPH

And I'm going to lose my license! I won't be able to work!

JASPER

Oh, god! What about money? How are we going to live?

RALPH

I just knew you were going to ask about that. All you care about is money! Don't worry! I've got a nest egg that should last us a while, and I think we should move into an apartment. I know of one in West Hollywood. It's rent control. This place is a money pit! Without my salary, we can't afford to keep it. We need to sell it!

JASPER

I wish I felt sorry for you, but you *know* you brought this on *yourself*!

RALPH

That's not what I need to hear right now! Why do you hate me so much?

RALPH grabs hold of JASPER and tries to kiss him. JASPER turns away.

RALPH (CONT'D)

I thought this is what you wanted. For us to be lovers again.

JASPER

Not this way! I don't know what you're trying to do! It feels like you're begging me to save you.

RALPH

But didn't I save *you*?

JASPER

From *what*?

RALPH

From your mother. From wallowing in the grief that you lost the use of your legs.

JASPER

I didn't need you to do that. I never *asked* you to do that. I just wanted you to love me, and to let me love *you*.

RALPH

Jasper, I never treated you like you were physically challenged. I didn't ever feel sorry for you. I loved you. And after I fired Renn, I helped you shower and accompanied you to appointments with special needs transportation. I never complained even when my back hurt. All I'm asking is for you to show some compassion for me. I understand that you can't always be there for me physically. When they amputated my foot, it felt like you didn't care. Have I done something *so* wrong, and that's why you treat me this way?

JASPER

It's because you never forgave me. You didn't trust me when I told you

JASPER

that I never had sex with Renn. You refused to believe me! You were the one who stopped letting me touch you. You had to be in control. If this was something you were doing to help me, maybe I could understand, but I should be able to reach out to you. You wouldn't let me make love to you. And you can't just snap your fingers *now*, and all of a sudden want me physically. I can't handle being hurt by you!

RALPH

Well, at least you're being honest with me.

JASPER pulls himself off the couch into his wheelchair and rolls offstage to his bedroom.

Lights dim.

SCENE 14

Lights come up. The present time: JASPER, RALPH, LISA and PENNY are all sitting at the kitchen table.

JASPER

Bravo to the chefs! Lisa and Ralph, you've outdone yourselves. Somehow you made this tuna and egg casserole into a gourmet delight.

RALPH

It feels like having Lisa and Penny here has changed us. It's as if you both have given us permission to empty our souls.

JASPER

Yes. And you know something else I've discovered? That there is power in saying 'I hate you.' You know how they say that love and hate can be the opposite sides of a relationship? That you can only hate a person that you love?

LISA

Saying 'I love you' has become perfunctory. We just say it because we think it makes us feel good or we want the other person to feel good.

PENNY

But saying 'I hate you' is a more honest emotion?

JASPER

It might be. It feels more real. It used to be that people rarely said 'I love you.' But now *everyone* says it. We've been conditioned not to hate even if that is what's really going on. I wish I could have told my mother how much I hated the way she treated my being in this wheelchair and my being

JASPER

gay. I think it's a form of radical acceptance. Accepting how fucked up a situation is. Hating it! Then we can move on.

LISA

So you're actually telling us that we should accept our physical limitations? If I hate going deaf, and you guys hate being stuck in a wheelchair and having your foot amputated, then we should openly acknowledge how much we hate it?

RALPH

Yes, I think that's exactly what Jasper is talking about. If we acknowledge that we hate a situation or that we tell someone 'I hate you,' it doesn't have to be the end. It gives the relationship a starting point. We can work on the things we hate.

PENNY

Should we all say 'I hate you' out loud?

LISA

Why not? What do we have to lose?

RALPH looks at JASPER and shouts:

RALPH

I hate you! I hate diabetes!

JASPER shouts back at RALPH.

JASPER

I hate you!

JASPER looks at LISA and shouts:

JASPER

I hate you! I hate crutches and wheelchairs!

LISA shouts at RALPH.

LISA
I hate you! I hate going deaf!

PENNY shouts at LISA

PENNY
I hate you! You abandoned me! I hate
that I have to give up college because
of you!

LISA shouts back at PENNY

LISA
I hate you! I hate the kind of mother
I've become! Actually, I hate you
because you hate *me*!

*They all scream 'I hate you' to one another followed by wild laughter.
Then they all hug each other, cry, and face the audience; all smiling.*

Lights dim.