

Maytag Virgin

a play in two acts

good hearts... are good at being broken...

Cast of Characters

JACK KEY: high school physics teacher
30s-40s, Southern (Alabama)

ELIZABETH "LIZZY" NASH: high school English teacher
30s-40s, Southern (Alabama)

Scene

The fictional town of Lenoraville, Alabama.

Time

Present day.

ACT IScene 1.1

SETTING:

*Mid-morning. August.**Playing area 1: Jack Key's back porch and yard, which are in total disarray, filled with moving boxes and small furniture.**Playing area 2: Elizabeth Nash's back porch and yard, populated with an eclectic mix of wind chimes, bird houses, bottle trees and folk art. There is a clothes line that runs along the edge of her property adjacent to Jack's yard, and at times like this, when it is filled with laundry, it serves as a boundary (a sort of virtual "wall") between them.*

AT RISE:

JACK KEY is busy moving boxes and furniture around, in and out of the house. ELIZABETH "LIZZY" NASH emerges from her house with a pie. She approaches Jack's yard.

LIZZY

Hello?

JACK

(From off.)

Hello?

LIZZY

(Calling.)

Mr. Key?

JACK

(Appearing in his doorway.)

Yes ma'am.

LIZZY

Elizabeth Nash. That's a job there, I see.

*JACK walks out onto his porch and
approaches her for a handshake.*

I'm so sorry, I've been out of town this week, I'm a bad neighbor.

JACK

Oh, alright. That's a nice place there. Good to meet ya'.

LIZZY

Lizzy...

JACK

Lizzy.

(Regarding her colorful yard.)

You an artist?

LIZZY

Uh...no. I'm mean...am I?

JACK

It's an explosion.

LIZZY

Oh. Yes, I guess so. Well. That's me.

(Beat.)

I love the color and the...well the sounds, I guess.

JACK

Aren't the bottles supposed to hang upside down?

LIZZY

Oh, yes, upside down to catch the-but I like 'em this way. They catch the rain instead of the evil spirits...I don't need any more...spirits, ya know. So...

(Beat.)

When they get too full, they don't sing real well, so I do have to patrol now and then, and, uh...feed the weeds or whatever.

(Beat.)

Well. Neighbors. Am I keeping you from-

JACK

(Overlapping.)

No, no, it's-

LIZZY

(Overlapping.)

I can come back.

JACK

It's fine. It's fine.

LIZZY

Okay. Well, welcome to the neighborhood.

JACK

Alright.

LIZZY

And to the city too, teaching over at the high school, have I got that right?

JACK

That's right.

LIZZY

Up from Biloxi?

JACK

You seem to have the advantage.

LIZZY

Oh, I hope that's alright if I take an interest in my new neighbor. I guess the days of welcome wagons are all over, but I just had to bring you a pie or something.

(Beat.)

Or maybe you don't eat pie, are you a diabetic?

JACK

I eat pie, yes ma'am I do.

LIZZY

(Nervously.)

It's really nothing. I mean it is a pie, but it's-I could bake one in my sleep.

JACK

Very sweet of you.

SHE holds on to the pie as if carrying a security blanket.

LIZZY

(Regarding the house.)

How do you like it?

JACK

It's a keeper.

LIZZY

Isn't it great?

LIZZY turns to look up at the house, shielding her eyes from the sun, straining the buttons on her blouse. JACK notices...

JACK

Yes, it is.

LIZZY

It's got good bones.

JACK

Mnn hm.

LIZZY

You think you can do something with it?

(Beat.)

JACK

Mnn hm...

LIZZY

Well good! I was so happy to hear somebody had bought the place. Not exactly a selling point: *dead man's house*.

JACK

I'm aware of the story.

LIZZY

Oh good. See any ghosts yet?

JACK

Not a one.

LIZZY

Well, that's good. I mean they were lovely people, but you never know about a ghost. That sounds like I know something about ghosts, I have nothing to base that on, really.

(Beat.)

Oh my gosh, I just thought of something, did you take the front room?

JACK

The front room?

LIZZY

For the master, I mean?

JACK

Uh...yeah.

LIZZY

Oh...

(Beat.)

Well, that's where he died. Mr. McElway...

JACK

In the front room?

LIZZY gives him a pained expression.

I did not know that.

LIZZY

(Almost a whisper.)

Yes, and his wife Minnie Faye a few months before.

JACK

Oh.

LIZZY

(Horrified.)

Oh, lord, Mr. Morgan didn't tell you?

JACK

I don't-

LIZZY

What good is a realtor-I'm gon' get him. I should have been here to tell you!

JACK

(Overlapping.)

No, no...I, uh...

LIZZY

(Overlapping.)

I am so sorry.

JACK

(Unsettled.)

You wanna sit down?

LIZZY

(Concerned.)

Do you?

JACK

(Exiting into the house.)

Excuse me...

LIZZY

Alright...

*JACK exits into the house, leaving
LIZZY alone on the porch, unsure if
he plans on returning.*

(Calling.)

Well that was thoughtless of me. I mean sometimes you say things, they need to be said, but maybe just not...

(To herself.)

...not like that. Stupid Lizzy.

(Calling.)

I'm so sorry. I guess I figured you knew the whole story...you said you knew the...story. Not that I believe in ghosts, but you just never know about the hereafter. If you

start seeing dead people you might wanna-well, I don't know what you'd do about that, but let's just hope you don't.

(Beat.)

It's a beautiful day for...construction. I really am sorry I wasn't here to help you move in, Mr. Key. I've been up at my brother's in Savannah-

JACK re-enters the porch wiping his face with a tea towel and handing Lizzy a cold Coca-cola.

Oh, thank you.

JACK

Lemme get this...

LIZZY

Mr. Key, are you alright?

JACK rather abruptly begins moving boxes out of her way.

Oh, don't fuss.

(Beat.)

Do you need me to-

JACK

(Overlapping.)

Nope.

LIZZY

(Almost overlapping.)

Alright.

(Beat.)

You know, I'm a teacher there too. At the high school.

(Beat.)

I'm on a leave of absence.

JACK

I'm sorry for that. I heard about your husband.

LIZZY

What have you heard?

JACK

An accident. He fell?

LIZZY nods.

It was recent?

LIZZY

We buried him a month ago, Sunday.

JACK

Awful thing.

*JACK leans against the porch railing
drinking his Coke as Lizzy drinks
hers. Neither notices the awkward
silence, each in their own memory.*

LIZZY

Sometimes I feel like I have a scarlet "W" on my chest, the way people talk and stare. It's like you're branded. You ever notice when people come up to you and they hadn't seen you in a while, and no matter how long it's been, they take that tone with you, you know the one people use when someone has died?

(Beat.)

In this case, I mean, someone *has* died, but they still take that tone with you-*I'm so sorry...someone has died*. As if that's the only allowable tone. I mean there must be some other tones out there, but that's the one, you know, they use, or whatever.

JACK

You say it all out loud, huh?

LIZZY

(Mortified.)

I've brought nothing but death into your yard. Mr. Key, I am so sorry, I don't know your situation.

(Beat.)

Do you need some help unpacking?

JACK

I can manage.

LIZZY

Alright.

JACK

Thank you.

LIZZY

(Somewhat nervous now.)

You just let me know what you need, I may not be able to lift the heavy stuff, but I know all the high school boys and I can make the sandwiches.

JACK smiles politely.

Have you met Mr. Sutherland? In the Cape Cod?

JACK

Ah, yes, I have.

LIZZY

He is the sweetest neighbor.

JACK

Real nice.

LIZZY

He can fix wiring, too. And he doesn't charge anything. His family has money and he just does it to pass the time in his golden years. But they left you in good shape, it's a good house and you won't have any trouble. Most likely you won't.

JACK

I like a challenge.

LIZZY

When I saw you leaning against that porch railing just now, I thought you reminded me of him. Mr. McElway, I mean. He never could sit still, especially after Miss Minnie Faye died. Oh that was a terrible thing, we all felt that one.

(Beat.)

So you teach physics?

JACK

There's a lot you know.

LIZZY

I know nothing about physics.

JACK

I don't know much myself.

LIZZY

Oh, I don't believe that. I teach English.

JACK

Yes I know. I'm in your room. 202.

LIZZY

202? What'd they do, put you in there?

JACK

I don't know.

LIZZY

Who's in 308?

JACK

Uh...

*LIZZY walks through JACK'S yard
looking at the mess.*

LIZZY

(Rapid fire.)

Three-oh-four, three-oh-six, three-oh-eight: math, math,
physics on three; English, history, civics on two. There
must be something goin' on up on three-

*LIZZY notices a small statue of the
Virgin Mary on Jack's porch.*

Is that the Virgin Mary?

JACK

Yeah...

LIZZY

Hmn.

LIZZY looks around, suspiciously.

JACK

Actually now that I think about it, I believe they are doing some painting up on the floor above me.

LIZZY

(Distracted.)

How's that?

JACK

I think I've seen some workers in and out.

LIZZY

Ooooh, have they started that, okay, that makes more sense now.

JACK

Probably just a temporary situation.

LIZZY

I imagine.

JACK

I guess I won't unpack then.

LIZZY

Unpack. Why not?

JACK

At the school.

LIZZY

Oh, at the school.

JACK

In case they plan on moving me.

LIZZY

To 308.

JACK

308, right.

LIZZY

That building could be hit by a hurricane, they'd prop it up with sticks. I don't know what it's gon' take to get a new school in this district.

JACK

It's quite an old building, yes ma'am.

(Beat.)

LIZZY

(Pointedly.)

We can leave off the ma'am.

JACK

Alright...

LIZZY

It's not dried up and dead or anything...

JACK

No...

LIZZY

Still has some life in it.

(Moving on now.)

We need a proper school, Mr. Key. One with lab equipment and decent plumbing, wouldn't you agree?

JACK

I believe I would.

LIZZY

So many desperate people here, Mr. Key. Desperate, desperate people. No jobs, there's nothing here. Tired old men, hard labor up in their seventies over at the mill or on a rooftop or crawling under houses on a Sunday. Mr. McElway was installing new urinals over at the truck stop three days before he passed away. So undignified.

JACK

My daddy was a trucker until he was seventy-seven. I never saw the man.

LIZZY

How sad.

JACK

He didn't think so. And I never knew anything different.

LIZZY

But your mama must have hated that.

JACK

Did she? I don't know. She still had her card games and bingo. Always in the garden. With a cigarette.

LIZZY

She sounds like someone I wanna know.

JACK

You want another Coke?

LIZZY

Oh, no, I'm fine.

(Beat.)

How is 202, Mr. Key?

JACK

It's alright.

LIZZY

Is it a mess? Did I leave a mess?

JACK

(Overlapping.)

No, no, it's -

LIZZY

(Overlapping.)

If my things are in the way, I can-

JACK

(Overlapping.)

They're not in the way.

LIZZY

Ten years in that room.

JACK

Long time...

LIZZY

Full of secrets, 202.

JACK

Secrets...

LIZZY

Secrets.

JACK

Like what?

LIZZY

(Playfully.)

Do you know what a secret is? Oh, I bet you do. I bet you know your way around a secret. In fact, I bet you know the secret of all secrets. The inner workings of a secret. There must be some law, some axiom of secrets in the scientific community-some algorithm-

JACK

(Amused, but 'over it.')

Are you done?

LIZZY

You'll get used to me.

JACK

Oh, I don't wanna do that.

LIZZY

I'm a menace.

JACK

Something...

LIZZY

(In a fake panic.)

Run! Run for your life! Oh, that's right, you can't, you have a mortgage!

JACK

Too late.

LIZZY

Tragic situation.

JACK

I see that now.

LIZZY

Buyer's remorse-

JACK

(Overlapping.)

Buyer's remorse!

(Beat.)

LIZZY

What time is it?

JACK

(Checking his watch.)

'Bout four?

LIZZY

(Indicating the clothes on the line.)

Oh, I gotta get to my laundry.

JACK

You don't have a dryer?

LIZZY

Do you know, I never have?

JACK

What?

LIZZY

I've never used one. Never had the need to.

JACK

You've *never* used a dryer?

LIZZY

I-it's-trust issues.

LIZZY begins taking clothes off the line.

JACK

(Amused.)

What's to trust about a dryer, you trust it will actually dry your clothes?

LIZZY

Mind your business.

JACK

Oh, I almost forgot. I found something in the attic.

JACK exits into his house.

LIZZY

(Calling.)

So, are you like a real Catholic or one of those cafeteria Catholics?

JACK

(From off.)

A real Catholic...

LIZZY

(Calling.)

You have a statue.

JACK

(From off.)

Religion is a touchy subject.

LIZZY

(Calling.)

Yes it is.

JACK

(From off.)

Might be better discussed over dinner than a picket fence.

(Beat.)

LIZZY

(Calling.)

You don't have a fence.

*JACK re-enters with an old military
style canvas ruck sack.*

JACK

That was a metaphor-

LIZZY

I know what it was.

JACK

You don't miss much.

LIZZY

What is that?

JACK

It was in the crawlspace...above the porch.

LIZZY

Is this his?

JACK

I don't know.

LIZZY

It's so old...doesn't it look old to you?

JACK

It does.

LIZZY

He doesn't have any family, not that I know of. He outlived all of em.

LIZZY opens the bag.

Mr. Key. Did you see all this?

JACK

No, what is it?

LIZZY

Oh my gosh...letters? Letters maybe? My goodness. So many...there must be hundreds. This one looks old, is this a- it's a love letter. From Mick.

(Amused.)

Mick and Minnie.

LIZZY reads a few lines...

Oh, this is personal.

SHE quickly puts the letters away.

This feels wrong.

JACK

You want me to put it back?

LIZZY

(Suddenly territorial.)

No!

(Beat.)

No, I'll think about what to do.

JACK

Alright.

LIZZY

I'll look through it.

*SHE goes to leave with the ruck sack
and the pie.*

You let me know if you need some moving help.

JACK

You can leave the pie, but I don't mind chasin' you for it.

LIZZY

Lost my head.

*LIZZY returns with pie and hands it
to Jack. She collects her laundry
basket and walks to her porch.*

JACK

Miss Maymee Fuller came by with some cookies last night.

LIZZY

Is that right?

JACK

She seems nice.

LIZZY

Maymee Fuller cooks with arsenic. Oh...and there are weevils
in her pantry.

JACK

Damn. What'd she do to you?

LIZZY

(She exits.)

Welcome to the neighborhood!

*JACK exits into his house with the
pie, screen door slamming.*

Lights fade.

Scene 1.2

Lights up to reveal Jack's yard, more cluttered than before. There is now a Maytag dryer visible on his porch.

LIZZY emerges onto her porch with a laundry basket and another pie. She deposits the laundry basket near the clothes line and walks into JACK'S yard just in time to see a box being hurled out of his back door.

LIZZY

(Calling.)

How are you Mr. Key?

JACK

(Appearing in his doorway.)

Hey there.

LIZZY

I can't wait til this heat breaks, can you? It's a bit too warm for September.

(Beat.)

So what's with the porch, Mr. Key? Is that a Maytag? It's been out here a while...

JACK

Okay.

LIZZY

(Smiling sweetly.)

Can I help you move it? Please?

(Handing him the pie.)

It's tomato, red onion and cheddar. Eat it before I do.

JACK

(Looking over the pie.)

Man...

LIZZY

Sometimes I make it with hot peppers too, but I didn't know your taste.

JACK

Oh, I like the heat.

LIZZY

It's just whatever I have in my garden.

JACK

Thank you.

JACK exits into his house with the pie.

LIZZY

(Calling.)

That there is my mama's recipe. You have to use the heirloom tomatoes, or don't bother.

JACK

(From off.)

You tryin' to fatten me or what?

LIZZY looks around at the mess.

LIZZY

(Under her breath.)

Guess it's true what they say about progress...

(Calling.)

Mr. Key, are you movin' in or movin' out?

JACK

(From off.)

How's that?

LIZZY

What is all this?

JACK

(Emerging from the house.)

Oh, I'm just doing some rearranging.

LIZZY

Rearranging?

JACK

Remodeling.

LIZZY

Well, which is it, rearranging or remodeling?

JACK

Would you like a Coke?

LIZZY

Yes, while you answer my question.

JACK reaches into the cooler on his porch to get her a drink.

JACK

I just noticed some things that need doing here and there.

LIZZY

Like what?

JACK

Oh, you know, painting, plastering, other things.

LIZZY

Other things...

LIZZY looks around a bit more. She notices a beautiful wind chime on Jack's porch. She touches it, smiling.

I've always loved this house.

HE hands her a Coke.

Mr. Key...have you been sleeping out here?

(Beat.)

You can answer but I already know the answer. Mr. McElway used to sleep out here when he and Miss Minnie Faye would squabble and they would get so loud, they would rattle the house. You know sometimes, I don't know if you noticed, you can hear across the yard there to things goin' on at the other house.

(Beat.)

JACK

I hadn't noticed.

LIZZY

Well, anyway, I told him he needed a sleeping porch, you know, with some netting or curtains or somethin' to keep out the bugs and whatnot. Might be a good idea. I've thought about doin' that at my place.

JACK

You got the room for it.

LIZZY

Maybe.

JACK

I could help you out with that.

LIZZY

Oh, you wanna help me with my sleeping porch?

JACK

Sounds like a weekend.

LIZZY

(Nervously.)

You keep your lawn so nice.

JACK

Just busy work.

LIZZY

Oh, I know all about that. Or meditation. Anything to keep the dark thoughts away. Richard Bandler, do you know him? He has a meditation for clearing out those negative thoughts. It's not very ladylike, but I do it, I do.

*LIZZY sits upright, closes her eyes,
inhales deeply and exhales the
mantra:*

Shutthefuckupshutthefuckupshutthefuckupshutthefuckup...

JACK

(Highly amused.)

Does it work?

LIZZY

Yep! I do a lot of cooking too. But then there's no one around to eat it, so...

(Beat.)

The problem is the grocery store. I'm only one person, I do not need that much asparagus. But it's not like you can divide up the package: *no, I'm cooking for one...*

JACK

You can cook for me.

(Beat.)

LIZZY

(Blushing.)

I cooked for Mr. McElway just about every day after Miss Minnie Faye died. We got real close there toward the end. That sweet man. I think he knew something wasn't right about me and Jesse, but he was too afraid to ask, ya know. He would say things like *you're a good woman, Lizzy...you go and get happy*. And then he died of a broken heart. Is there a worse way to die?

(Beat.)

Oh, my gosh, the letters. I didn't tell you about the letters.

LIZZY goes to her laundry basket and pulls out a small stack of letters.

I went to see the estate lawyer. He took one look at 'em and sent me home. There's no one. Just you and me.

JACK

Have you read 'em?

LIZZY

Mr. Key, I can't tell you, it's like a puzzle. I got 'em all spread out on my kitchen table, tryin' to make sense of it. Like, these...quite obviously from when he was in the war. And these...these from when she went up to Montgomery for something like a year, I think, to see about her sister back in '96, I remember Miss Alice was going through the chemo. But some of these, I can't make it out...it's like the handwriting of a child...

JACK

(Looking at the letters.)

Oh, wow...

LIZZY

And these...these have never been opened. Five letters.

JACK

They look recent. You gon' read 'em?

(Beat.)

Maybe start with the oldest ones?

LIZZY

Oh, that's a good idea! Okay.

LIZZY puts the letters back in the laundry basket.

Kinda creepy isn't it? Readin' through other people's letters. It's like lookin' through somebody's underwear drawer.

LIZZY begins sorting out her laundry and hanging clothes on the line. JACK watches her a moment. He reaches into the cooler for an apple.

JACK

So, when you comin' back to work?

LIZZY

Don't ask me that question.

JACK

You been out a little bit.

LIZZY

(Thinking.)

Three months. *Three months?* Wow...

JACK walks over to Lizzy's clothes line and watches her hang laundry as he eats his apple.

JACK

You do a lotta laundry.

LIZZY

I do. It's my addiction, I can't explain, it's like yoga.

JACK

You know, there's a dryer. Right there. You're more than welcome...

LIZZY

I'm not going to use your dryer, Mr. Key.

JACK

You don't like my Maytag?

LIZZY

I'd like it off the porch.

JACK

Heated steam cycle.

LIZZY

Heated steam cycle?

JACK

Wrinkle guard..

LIZZY

I have been doing my laundry the same way since grade school, Mr. Key. I do not need a dryer, I will never need a dryer.

JACK

You're not the least bit curious?

LIZZY

(Changing the subject.)

You still in 202?

JACK

Oh, they moved me up.

LIZZY

Oh, yeah?

JACK

Yeah, back up to three.

LIZZY

Fresh coat of paint?

JACK

New lights. New paint. It's nice.

LIZZY
Well, good.

(Beat.)
Do they ask about me?

JACK
Yeah.

LIZZY
What do they say?

JACK
Umn...it's a mix...

LIZZY
Okay. *Good.*

(Off Jack's smile.)
You have a nice smile, Mr. Key.

(Beat.)

JACK
Bob Searcy.

LIZZY
(Alarmed.)
Don't say it.

JACK
He is sweet...on...you.

LIZZY
Stop. Stop. Stop!

JACK
You don't like him?

LIZZY
Mr. Key...have you not noticed his halitosis problem?

JACK
Halitosis...

LIZZY
Do not encourage him!

JACK

Oh, I think I need to.

LIZZY

Mr. Key!

JACK

Lots and lots.

(Beat.)

LIZZY glares at him.

LIZZY

(Slow and deliberate.)

I will create such pain in your world, you will pray for the sweet release of death...

JACK bites into his apple.

JACK

(Mouth full.)

You keep making promises.

LIZZY

Let's talk about real life, how 'bout that? *Actual* things. What else have you been up to, you makin' friends?

JACK

Ummn...I got up to Montgomery last week.

LIZZY

Oh yeah?

JACK

Went on a date.

LIZZY

Uh oh...

JACK

It was so awful.

LIZZY

Oh no.

JACK

That girl would not stop talkin'. I took her over to Old Cloverdale for a bite, you ever eat over at Sinclair's?

LIZZY

Fried tomatoes...

JACK

Shrimp and grits.

LIZZY

I die!

JACK

I know!

LIZZY

So what happened?

JACK

She was just tellin' me her life story.

LIZZY

Oh, Lord.

JACK

She wore me out.

LIZZY

You do a lot of dating?

JACK

I don't. It was just a setup, blind date kinda thing.

LIZZY

Oh, I hate that.

JACK

I don't think I'll do that again.

LIZZY

I wouldn't know the first thing about datin'.

JACK

So painful. It's not what I remember. People don't *engage* anymore, you notice that?

LIZZY

How do you mean?

JACK

Well, everything is a damn text message. I'd rather just know a woman. Face to face.

LIZZY

Did you kiss her?

(Off his non-verbal "no.")

Why not?

JACK

(Thinking.)

I didn't feel it.

LIZZY

I'm being nosy.

JACK

(In agreement.)

Yeah.

LIZZY

Did she want to be kissed?

JACK

Yes.

LIZZY

How do you know?

JACK

She told me.

LIZZY

She *told* you?

JACK

Well, not in words, no...

LIZZY

How?

JACK

It was obvious.

LIZZY
Obvious?

JACK
Yeah...in her eyes...

LIZZY
But you didn't want to...

JACK
Naw, ya know, I just didn't want to.

LIZZY
Was she pretty?

JACK
She was...but you know, there's more to a woman than that...

LIZZY
Oh, *whatever!*

JACK
I kiss who I want to.

LIZZY
(Playfully.)
You just go around kissing people?

JACK
(Amused.)
Yeah, that's what I meant.

LIZZY
You gon' see her again?

JACK
No.

LIZZY
Why not?

JACK
I told you, she talks too much.

LIZZY
Well, maybe she was nervous.

JACK
I was nervous. I was quiet.

LIZZY

Well, maybe if you were so quiet, that's why she was so nervous, ever think o' that?

JACK

I was *listenin'*.

LIZZY

Well, don't be so selfish!

JACK

I thought you said you didn't know anything about datin'.

LIZZY

It doesn't matter anyway, she's through with you.

JACK

Oh really?

LIZZY`

Yep.

JACK

And how do you know that?

LIZZY

Because if she wanted that kiss the way you say she did, and you didn't give it to her, then she's probably mortified and never wants to speak to you again.

JACK

Mortified?

JACK pulls out his phone. He opens the text messages from Daphne, hands the phone to Lizzy.

LIZZY

Daphne? That's her name, Daphne? Is that her picture? I can't click it. Make it bigger.

HE takes the phone and enlarges the picture. Hands the phone back.

Oh, she's cute. Some people are so cute. How do I get it back?

JACK

What do you want?

LIZZY

I want the part where she's mortified.

JACK assists with the phone.

LIZZY reads.

Thank you for a lovely evening. I cannot wait to see you again.

JACK

Mortified.

LIZZY

Well what kind of an idiot sends a message like that when she knows you didn't wanna kiss her?

JACK

I don't think she knew that. Maybe I was just being polite.

LIZZY

That is a really good point, and you know that is what is wrong with you boys, you all are just too complicated.

(Beat.)

She sent you all these pictures? She takes too many selfies.

(Beat.)

You didn't reply.

JACK

Yes, I did.

LIZZY

(Holding up the phone.)

No, you didn't.

JACK

I *called* her.

LIZZY

(Confused.)

Called her?

JACK

(Pointing to the phone.)

On the phone!

LIZZY

Oh. Well, what'd you tell her?

JACK

You are something else.

(Beat.)

She knows I won't be calling again, let's just put it that way.

LIZZY

What's the real reason?

JACK

For what?

LIZZY

For why you didn't kiss her?

(Beat.)

How long has it been?

JACK

You like to ask a personal question.

LIZZY

I've been known to.

JACK

You first.

LIZZY

Nuh uh...

JACK

No deal.

LIZZY

You have to call her back.

JACK

Who?

LIZZY

Is there some *other* Daphne? You need to take a step.

JACK

Oh, do I?

LIZZY

Is that some crazy notion?

JACK

I went on the date!

LIZZY

Blind date. Doesn't count.

JACK

Man alive!

*LIZZY turns to exit with her laundry
basket.*

LIZZY

(Calling.)

Coercion, forced. It's a good thing you're not my type.

JACK

Oh, I'm not your type?

LIZZY howls with laughter.

LIZZY`

No!!!

LIZZY exits into her house.

JACK

(Calling.)

So funny!

(To himself.)

Hilarious.

JACK exits into his house.

Lights fade.

Scene 1.3

Lights up to the sound of a lawn mower, which runs for a few moments and then stops. LIZZY sits on her porch stoop surrounded by letters.

LIZZY

(Reading.)

In the early days, they told us to travel light. But the worry is the heaviest of all. You looked so pretty in that velvet dress. It was all I could do not to-

LIZZY blushes and looks around to see if anyone is watching.

It was all I could do not to take you up in my arms and cover you with kisses-

LIZZY looks up to see Jack entering his yard, covered in sweat and dirt. HE goes to his porch, removes his gloves, and pulls a bottle of water out of his cooler. She returns to reading the letter, but is now somewhat distracted.

I wanted to hold you until my arms fell off from the holding, and I wouldn't need my arms anyway, if you were my girl...

LIZZY looks up to see JACK pouring water on his face and shoulders. She tries desperately to keep focus on the letter...

You don't know the effect you have on me, Miss Minnie Faye-

JACK removes his T-shirt.

(To herself.)

That...is NOT happening.

JACK wipes his face and chest with the T-shirt.

(Reading, somewhat furiously now.)

Please think about what I asked you. I'm a wreck. And I know I will be until I can see your sweet face again. Wait for me. Will you?

JACK grabs a beer from the cooler and exits into the house, screen door slamming. The sound of the door jolts Lizzy. She stands abruptly and turns to exit, spinning back around almost instantly to retrieve the letters she nearly left behind.

(Flustered.)

Shit.

SHE looks over at Jack's house.

SHIT!

SHE exits.

Lights fade.

Scene 1.4

Early December. Late afternoon. More clutter than ever in JACK'S yard.

Throughout the following scene, as Lizzy orbits all around him, Jack climbs up and down a ladder, hanging a strand of Christmas lights on his porch.

LIZZY emerges from her house with her laundry basket and walks over to Jack's yard.

LIZZY

HAVE YOU LOST YOUR MIND?!

JACK

Lizzy.

LIZZY

You have a installed a graven statue of Mary at the end of your driveway, do you want to go to hell?!

JACK

That's a pretty dress.

LIZZY

You don't even know what you've done, do you? You need to get down here. God does not share his glory with another, not even Jesus' mama, first commandment!

JACK

You know the trouble with Protestants is, they don't know how to think for themselves.

LIZZY

That is not a very Christian thing to say.

JACK

Well now, correct me here, but I believe you have a Virgin Mary in your yard too, right there by the manger.

LIZZY

What? Oh, be serious.

JACK

Well don't you?

LIZZY

Yes, Mr. Key! I do, but she's not the focus!

JACK

Oh, okay.

LIZZY

She's a *supporting character*. In a Christmas Nativity!

JACK

Oh, I see. So Jesus is the focus.

LIZZY

That's right. Jesus is the focus.

JACK

Like the flashing baby Jesus...

LIZZY

The what?

JACK

Over in Zeke's yard. He has a flashing baby Jesus.

(Beat.)

Not like *flashing*, no...like...blinking on and off.

LIZZY

Oh, flashing...

JACK

You haven't seen it?

LIZZY

I have not.

JACK

Like some neon sign at a cheap motel: *Born today. Born today.*

LIZZY

That sounds perfectly festive and seasonally appropriate.

JACK

Why don't you take a walk down there and then we'll talk.

LIZZY

No, I don't need to take a walk, I know all I need to know right here and you really should be focusing on your own yard and the fact that your Maytag dryer is still on the porch.

JACK

You are somethin' else.

LIZZY

Mr. Key...

JACK

Why do I care what anybody sees from my side yard?

LIZZY

Oh, you are not foolin' anybody, I can see your house of horrors from my kitchen window, Mr. Key. And so can all the other neighbors up that way, and anybody who drives by from Oak Street. It seems to me, you spend hours and hours with your crisscross patterns and gardening scissors like it's the eighteenth hole at Cambrian Ridge, and yet you can't be bothered to move the-

JACK

(Overlapping.)

Bill Stanley has two rusted-out Mustangs in his back forty and another one on blocks. It's been there since June. I actually care about my property, Lizzy. You wanna come back when you have something serious to complain about?

LIZZY

Appliances belong inside, Mr. Key.

JACK

I'm not moving my dryer, Lizzy.

LIZZY

Is there a storage problem?

HE returns to his work with the lights.

Mr. Key?

(Beat.)

...or some overarching reason why you need to have it outside in plain view?

(Beat.)

What is the big deal? Just move it inside and plug it in.

(Softening.)

Please...I'm trying to understand.

JACK

Well, if you must know...oddly enough, I find it comforting.

LIZZY

What? Oddly comforting.

JACK

(Pointing to a box of nails.)

Hand me that, would ya?

LIZZY

Mr. Key, am I to understand that you mean for this to be a permanent arrangement?

JACK

(Regarding the nails.)

I got it.

JACK descends the ladder to fetch the nails.

LIZZY

Mr. McElway is pitching a fit in his grave! Are you serious? You cannot be serious.

(Beat.)

Mr. Key! You know folks have been airing their laundry outside for quite some time, or maybe you've never heard of such a thing called a clothes line?

JACK

Lizzy, I don't dictate what you put on your porch.

JACK pulls the strand of lights across a section of the porch, briefly entangling Lizzy in the wires.

LIZZY

(Batting at the wires.)

No...no! I'm not talking about variations on taste and decor, Mr. Key. Please don't try to warp the subject.

(Beat.)

And you do have a bed, right? Inside the house? What is goin' on out here, do you ever go inside?

JACK

I go in there to cook.

LIZZY

Good Lord, this is not the
sticks, okay, where people
burn trash and run on septic,
Mr. Key...

JACK

We are on Ft. Dale Road, a
very desirable address.

You sound like a horrible
person, right now...

And I assure you that I speak
for all of us...

Bossy.

LIZZY

...when I tell you that we do not find it oddly comforting, not at
ALL comforting. We just find it odd!

(Beat.)

JACK

You really know how to hurt a man.

LIZZY

Mr. Key.

JACK

Cut deep, Lizzy.

LIZZY

Oh, stop it!

JACK

There are worse things than being odd, girl. I like oddness, I
like it a lot. You need to loosen up.

LIZZY

Don't. You. Dare...

JACK

No, I mean it. It's a fine thing for you to go around telling
people all day how it should be. Now when do you rest, I wonder?

LIZZY

(Prideful.)

I don't sleep, I never sleep.

JACK

That's a problem.

LIZZY

Off. Topic.

JACK

I think you need to put your laundry away and get a life. This ain't healthy what you do.

LIZZY

Excuse me?

(Beat.)

Are you in there?

JACK

You are such a beautiful woman, you know that?

LIZZY

I am about to knock. Your. Head off!

JACK

(Repositioning the ladder.)

Looking forward to it.

LIZZY

I want your word that you will move that dryer...

JACK

(Overlapping.)

I cannot give you that.

LIZZY

I do not want to have to take further action.

JACK

Come on over and have dinner with me.

(Beat.)

LIZZY

(Stunned but determined to stay on topic.)

It would be embarrassing for all of us.

JACK

Homemade ginger beer. Steak.

LIZZY

You are putting me in a very uncomfortable position!

JACK

We can hang out on the porch and talk like real people.

LIZZY

(Overlapping.)

MR. KEY!

JACK

(Overlapping.)

Just say yes.

(Beat.)

LIZZY

I will not have dinner with you on this porch or any porch!

JACK

(Climbing back up the ladder.)

Resistance is futile.

(Beat.)

LIZZY

Resistance...is futile?

JACK

I said it.

LIZZY

I suppose you consider yourself quite the ladies' man.

JACK

Nope.

LIZZY

What then?

JACK

Observant?

(Beat.)

LIZZY

That sounds creepy.

*LIZZY crosses to her yard and hastily
begins removing laundry from the clothes
line.*

JACK

It is the best ginger beer you will ever have. And, I cook, by the way. Rib-eye, sweet purple hull peas, roasted sweet potatoes.

LIZZY

I don't eat red meat.

JACK

Is that true?

LIZZY

(Overlapping.)

I'M CUTTIN' BACK! I'm cutting waaaaay back.

JACK

I'm sure I can think of something you'll be interested in.

(Beat.)

LIZZY

Is that sex talk?

JACK

What?

LIZZY

Is it?!

JACK

It's just a damn porch date, Lizzy.

LIZZY

A date?

JACK

No, no, no. Not a date, just a whatever.

LIZZY

Oh. Just a *whatever*.

LIZZY grabs her basket and turns to exit.

JACK

(Calling.)

You can bring your laundry.

LIZZY

(Exiting.)

Oh, soooooo romantic, folding boxer shorts in the moonlight.
Lucky girl!

LIZZY exits into her house, inadvertently leaving her beautiful white nightgown as the only thing hanging on the line. Jack stares at the nightgown.

JACK

(Calling.)

I can help you outta some of your clothes too.

(Long pause.)

LIZZY re-enters with a tape measure.

LIZZY

(Incredulous.)

What did you say?

JACK

(Back pedaling.)

I said I can help you out. With some of your clothes...too.

LIZZY glares at him suspiciously and then snappily opens her tape measure.

Whatcha got there?

LIZZY

Measurin'. For a fence.

LIZZY begins to measure her yard.

JACK

A fence...

LIZ

Good fences, good neighbors.

SHE thrust one end of the tape measure at Jack to hold.

JACK

Oh...a *mending wall*.

LIZZY

Robert Frost. Impressive.

JACK

I'm not a complete cretin.

LIZZY

You said it!

JACK

I can save you the trouble. This here's about twenty feet.

LIZZY

How do you know that?

JACK

(Reading the tape measure.)

Minus two inches.

LIZZY

Ugh. Math genius.

JACK

I'm all pine and you're orchard, is that it?

LIZZY

You can stop quotin' now!

LIZZY snatches the tape measure out of his hands.

JACK

Just what exactly are you tryin' to wall in, I wonder?

SHE glares at him.

LIZZY

(Slow and deliberate.)

I would advise you to move your Maytag dryer off of the porch and into your perfectly good laundry room by 8AM Monday morning.

SHE turns to exit and comes face to face with her nightgown that is still hanging on the line. She yanks it off the line and exits hastily.

JACK

(Calling.)

Lizzy...

LIZZY

(Screen door slamming.)

NO!!!

JACK returns to his porch. He plugs in the Christmas lights and smiles, pleased with his handiwork. HE returns the ladder to the side of the house. He notices one bulb out. He flicks it gentle with his finger. It lights. He smiles, glances back at Lizzy's house, and then exits into the house.

Lights fade.

Scene 1.5

Three Weeks Later. A few days before Christmas.

LIZZY emerges from her house with a small wreath and a box of Christmas decorations. She opens the box and pulls out one of her favorite decorations, a bobble-head snowman family. She puts each family member on the porch cupboard, one by one—dad, mom, snow boy—and watches them dance. She returns to the box and discovers two Christmas stockings (hers and Jesse's). She stands there a moment, frozen, then hastily folds them back up and returns them to the box. She finds a Christmas ribbon and some wire for her wreath and begins assembling it. JACK emerges from his house carrying a bag of trash. He wears an ugly Christmas sweater and a pair of festive reindeer antlers. He walks around to the side of his house to put the trash in the trashcan.

LIZZY

Mr. Key. How are you?

JACK

Lizzy.

LIZZY

You see anybody around my porch this morning?

(Beat.)

It is the strangest thing...I had left a big pile of clippings off to the side there and when I came out just now, I noticed it was all cleaned up.

(Beat.)

JACK

(Walking toward her porch.)

That's crazy...

LIZZY

(Noticing his sweater for the first time.)

It is...

JACK

Blue ribbon, three years running, faculty Christmas party. And I am countin' Biloxi.

LIZZY

(Highly amused.)

It's so good...I can barely talk about it.

JACK

(Taking a bow.)

Thank you so much.

LIZZY

Oh, you're welcome.

(Beat.)

What can I get you, Mr. Key?

JACK

I'm just about to drive up to Clanton to visit my sister 'n them. You got any plans for Christmas?

LIZZY

I haven't decided.

JACK

You got family here?

LIZZY

No. Just my brother's family, but they're all in Savannah. Jesse and I used to ride up there, but I just can't do it by myself, it's too far. I might go in the summer though, my niece is gettin' married.

JACK

Can't be alone on Christmas.

LIZZY

I have invitations, Mr. Key. Jennifer Tate.

JACK

Oh?

LIZZY

Mmn hm. Dr. Yancy and his wife...they're having an open house.

JACK

Well, that's good.

LIZZY

Yeah...

JACK

You could come with me if you like.

LIZZY

(Smiling politely.)

Oh, thank you.

JACK

I mean it. She's got plenty of room. Think on it.

LIZZY

I saw you cleaned up some.

JACK

I did.

LIZZY

Thank you.

JACK

Did you hear the Hartmans are moving?

LIZZY

I did. Bobby got a job up in Birmingham.

JACK

He's a nice fella.

LIZZY

He really is. He asked me out once, years ago.

JACK

Oh?

LIZZY

Back when I was a sex goddess.

JACK

What?

LIZZY

He asked me out once...

JACK

(Overlapping.)

Back when you were a sex goddess?

LIZZY

Yeah.

JACK

I don't follow.

LIZZY

Oh, I don't think I need to elaborate on the ways in which the female body turns on its host, Mr. Key, I just had my dinner. Scissors, please.

JACK searches for scissors.

JACK

There is not a thing wrong with you...

LIZZY

You're just being polite, that's what Southern boys do.

LIZZY holds out the ribbon for JACK to cut.

JACK

(Cutting the ribbon.)

What has poisoned your head this way?

LIZZY hands him the finished wreath.

LIZZY

(A request for him to hang the wreath.)

Do you mind?

JACK walks to the door to hang the wreath for her. SHE watches him intently. Throughout the remainder of the scene, Lizzy sits on the porch stoop tidying up an unruly box of ribbon, while Jack fiddles with the wreath.

JACK

Can I ask a personal question? You don't have to answer it.

LIZZY

Alright...

JACK

Do you feel beautiful?

LIZZY

(Regarding the wreath.)

A little higher...

JACK

I'm asking you as a friend. That's all.

LIZZY

What do you mean?

JACK

Well, you've been alone for a little while now, right? And I'm an outsider...I don't know your history, Lizzy. All I know is the woman I see right now and I have some opinions on her, if you're interested.

LIZZY

And what do you see?

JACK

You really want to know?

LIZZY

No.

(Beat.)

I can't believe how warm it is, can you? We had snow once, a few years back.

JACK

Oh, yeah?

LIZZY

Christmas miracle.

JACK

Never seen that on the Gulf.

LIZZY

No, I guess you wouldn't, that far South.

(Beat.)

Did you love your wife, Mr. Key?

JACK finishes with the wreath and leans against the porch railing.

JACK
I did.

LIZZY
Was she beautiful?

JACK
Beyond...

LIZZY
What did she look like?

JACK
She was...curvy...a little thing, enormous green eyes...crazy red hair
that was just...impossible.

*JACK pulls a photo out of his wallet,
hands it to LIZZY*

LIZZY
Impossible.

JACK
She always wanted the straight hair, but I loved how hers was
just...everywhere. Even toward the end...

LIZZY
Cancer...

JACK
She didn't want the chemo. And I don't think it would have-I
mean I think it would have given her a few more weeks, but...

LIZZY
(Overlapping.)
What was her name?

JACK
Amy.

LIZZY
Amy. How long has it been?

JACK
Two years.

LIZZY
And you miss her?

(Beat.)

Of course you do. Do you believe that God makes mistakes, Mr. Key?

(Beat.)

It's something I secretly think about. Maybe the things that happen to us and to the people we love are sometimes so awful and senseless, that we look for a reason...or someone to blame. But if there is a divine plan, how can we know what that is? I don't think it makes you any less godly if you believe he gets it wrong from time to time...do you?

LIZZY hands Jack the photograph. HE returns it to his wallet.

Jesse fell off a roof in Opelika. He died instantly.

JACK

You don't talk about him.

LIZZY

(Realizing.)

No...

JACK

No.

LIZZY

(Noticing the wreath.)

Can you turn it so the ribbon is at the top?

(Beat.)

I like the ribbon at the top...

JACK adjusts the wreath.

Why did you move away from Biloxi, Mr. Key?

JACK

(Stalling.)

What's that?

LIZZY

Why are you here? You're here for a reason.

JACK

This job came up. Seemed like a good-

LIZZY

(Overlapping.)

That's not the reason.

(Beat.)

JACK

I couldn't stay in that house anymore.

LIZZY

Oh...

JACK

Too many reminders. It was just a rental, anyway. Thought maybe a change of pace...

(Beat.)

LIZZY

And how's that workin' out?

(Beat.)

I finally gave away the last of Jesse's things over the weekend. Still a few boxes in the attic, but I know what you mean, though. At least I think I do. I asked Jesse to fix this porch step a few days before he died. He said *put it on the list*.

(Beat.)

Would you like to change the subject?

JACK smiles appreciatively.

How's school? Is my room still free?

JACK

I straightened everything up. Put some plants in there.

LIZZY

You did?

JACK

I go in there sometimes, when I need the quiet.

LIZZY

I like imagining that.

JACK

It's not quite as sexy as it sounds. Bologna sandwich...

LIZZY

(Amused.)

Do you want to know what I love about a school Mr. Key?

JACK

What's that?

LIZZY

I'll give you a hint. It's not the quiet. The noise, Mr. Key, the *noise*. Like a war zone...just...filling up every hallway...every classroom. Always with the *me, me, me!* That constant hum of hundreds of teenagers all talking at the top of their lungs, everything is of the utmost importance, obviously!

JACK

Life or death...

LIZZY

Oh, life or death!! Squeaking tennis shoes and lockers slamming shut! Man, it feels so good to slam a locker!

JACK

It does!

LIZZY

Doesn't it?!

JACK

It sure does.

LIZZY

I remember when I was that age, it seemed like there was always some boy to slam a locker for. Slam it so hard and then give him that look-you know the look-and flip my hair and just walk away with my algebra textbook, like *take that shit-for-brains!*

JACK smiles wildly at LIZZY.

JACK

You kept the boys running...

LIZZY

Oh, I did.

JACK

I bet you had to beat 'em off with the stick.

LIZZY

Oh, no, the boys in my school were different, Mr. Key. They wanted me for my big giant brain, hordes and hordes: *Lizzy, meet me in the library...fiction.*

JACK

That's fiction, alright.

LIZZY

Well, except for Jim Godwin. He wanted me for my brain...among other things. In fact, he gave me a promise ring my junior year. But then he went and got a football scholarship to Georgia State.

(Beat.)

And that was the end of Jim Godwin.

JACK

Jim Godwin chose poorly.

LIZZY

Oh, yeah?

JACK

Georgia State?

LIZZY

Smart ass!

LIZZY nudges him with her foot, playfully.

(Beat.)

JACK

(Regarding the wreath.)

Hey. Is it perfect?

LIZZY stands and turns to look back at the house.

LIZZY

It is.

(Beat.)

JACK

Well...if I don't see ya'...

LIZZY hugs him. He is touched by the gesture, awkward as it is.

(Blushing. Hugging her back.)

Okay...

JACK turns to exit but then returns with the reindeer antlers and puts them on Lizzy's head. She curtsies in her new crown of horns.

(Beat.)

LIZZY

Merry Christmas, Mr. Key.

JACK

Merry Christmas, Lizzy.

JACK exits. LIZZY watches him leave. Her smile dissolves.

LIZZY

(Suddenly very aware of her own solitude.)

Happy New Year...

LIZZY gathers her supplies and exits into the house.

Lights fade.

Scene 1.6

*Four months later. Spring. Late evening.
The sound of distant thunder.*

*JACK stumbles sleepily out onto his porch,
barefoot in pajamas. HE carries his pillow
and a blanket.*

JACK

(Yelling back at the house.)

There is no such thing as ghosts!!!

*JACK unfolds a cot and makes his bed on
the porch.*

It's the plaster and the stupid roof. And that's all it is, so
shut up!

(Angrily making his "bed.")

A widower in a widower's house. How do you like that?

(Punching his pillow.)

Stupid.

*JACK slowly drifts off to sleep. LIZZY,
wearing a robe and drinking a glass of
wine, walks out onto her porch to check on
the approaching thunderstorm. She sees
Jack on his porch...*

LIZZY

(Calling.)

You know there's a storm coming, Mr. Key, you ought not to...

*SHE notices him sleeping. She walks over
to his yard and studies him a moment. She
sees the dryer at the edge of the porch.
She walks over to it. She touches it, runs
her hand across it. She reaches for the
dial, it buzzes. LOUD.*

(Whispering.)

Shiiiiiiiiit!!! I'm 'on have a heart attack!

(Beat.)

LIZZY looks over at Jack, who stirs, but does not waken.

(A whisper.)

Mr. Key...

LIZZY takes a swig of her wine and sits down beside him on the porch. Jack snores softly. Lizzy talks in the safety of knowing he can't hear any of it.

I went by the school today. Looks like I'll be starting back after the summer. Ooooh, they had so many questions. Don't worry. I protected your reputation.

Sound of distant rolling thunder.

Bob Searcy asked me out for coffee. I declined. I guess that's one good thing about being a grieving widow, you can just...blame it on death. He said I have nice legs...for a Baptist. I baked him a casserole. It seemed like the appropriate response.

(Beat.)

I don't remember the last time I was on any kind of a date. Okay, I won't lie. I do remember. Six years ago, July third, over on Tybee Island in Savannah. My brother's wedding. There was a groomsman...*Michael*. We danced at the wedding, snuck out, went over to the beach and watched the sun go down. Talked and talked. He told me he had big plans to open his own hardware business, and I told him he could do it too and he believed me. And then there was the *not talking*. It was like falling...falling and falling over and over. Like we'd always have that moment, and I could just die right then and there, because nothing else mattered.

More thunder, storm approaching.

In the morning we walked over to the coffee shop and got breakfast. And we walked out onto the pier for a while...fed the seagulls. He pulled me into him and I put my head on his chest and he said...*I will never forget you.*

(A whisper.)

I will never forget you...

(Beat.)

And then he kissed me and left for California. I knew we'd keep in touch, I just knew it. But he...he told me his life was complicated, some girl back home. And he never made me any promises, so I told myself I had no right to feel anything. I still do that, by the way. Real fun game I play with myself. But you know, I wonder sometimes, if there was a way of wiping that memory away, would I do it? I don't know what's worse...to have a moment like that and lose it...or to go through life in the dark...

Bright flash of light followed by a loud thunder clap. The chimes tinkle softly in the wind. JACK shifts his weight on the cot. Suddenly aware of Jack's presence, LIZZY tucks him in, stands and walks toward her house, sipping her wine. JACK opens his eyes (unseen by Lizzy), it is evident he's heard all of it.

One thing I do know. I don't trust any of it. Not anymore. Because walks on the beach at twilight...they don't mean anything. It seems as if they must, but they don't.

LIZZY climbs her steps, her foot landing on the creaking porch board. She presses it with the ball of her foot a few times.

I really need to fix that step...

The storm is upon them now. Everything is alive and churning. Lightning flashes and thunder chases in hot pursuit.

The rain is sheeting now, like a river from the sky. The chimes and bottles dance and sing as LIZZY reaches her hand out to catch the droplets.

JACK watches the entire spectacle from his porch. He is undone. LIZZY sits down on her porch stoop. She closes her eyes and lifts her face to welcome the deluge.

Lights fade.

END OF ACT I

ACT IIScene 2.1

Three months later. End of summer. Twilight.

Jack's yard is now clean and tidy. Festive garden lights hang from the porch and there is a makeshift table set for dinner in front of a charming vintage porch glider that now sits in his yard.

LIZZY approaches from around the side of her house, keys in hand, carrying her purse and wearing sunglasses. She stops in her tracks to see Jack fussing over the table setting and wearing an apron that reads "Will Grill for Kisses."

LIZZY

(Astonished. Tickled to death.)

Oh, my gosh-OH...MY GOSH!

(Taking in every detail.)

What are you-what on earth?!

(Regarding the glider.)

Ha! Would you look at-THAT is cutest thing I've ever seen!

(Looking at the porch and the garden lights.)

This is, I just can't-this is AMAZING! Is this-

(Suddenly noticing the table set for two.)

Oh.

(Beat.)

Oh, I'm sorry...

JACK

Lizzy.

LIZZY

You have a date.

JACK

Welcome back.

LIZZY

(Only slightly jealous.)

Well, Mr. Key. She must be somethin'. It looks good out here!

LIZZY notices an item missing from the setup.

Candles?

JACK

Oh!

LIZZY

Not the tall ones, no.

JACK

Okay.

LIZZY

You have some?

JACK

Umn...I have some of the...

LIZZY

(Overlapping.)

Citronella? Votives?

JACK

Yeah.

LIZZY

(Nervously.)

That's fine. Just a few, ya know? Then it won't be so buggy.

(Beat.)

Thank you for looking after the house, Mr. Key.

JACK

I got your mail. It's...just inside there. Kitchen counter.

LIZZY

Oh, thank you. I'm so glad the heat has lifted.

(Awkward pause.)

JACK

You look good.

(Beat.)

LIZZY

So do you.

JACK

How was Savannah?

LIZZY

Oh, I got my hair done for the wedding, remind me to show you the pictures. I looked like the bride of Frankenstein.

(Trance-like.)

It was lovely though. There's just something about a wedding, ya know?

(Beat.)

Well. I'll leave you to it.

LIZZY turns to exit.

JACK

Lizzy...

LIZZY

Hmn?

JACK

(Nervously.)

I know this our *last hurrah* with school startin' tomorrow, so...I was kinda hoping you'd come over and try my cooking.

(Beat.)

LIZZY

Oh.

JACK

I mean, unless..

LIZZY

No.

JACK

Or just a drink, maybe. Glass of wine.

LIZZY

No, I-I'm sorry, I just assumed you had a date...

Lizzy flushes, suddenly realizing she is the intended date.

That's...umh...okay. Sure. Can I, uh...can I-

JACK
(Overlapping.)

Whenever.

LIZZY
Okay. Okay.

LIZZY turns to exit, but then spins back around to give him a gift.

Oh, I brought you something.

JACK
Oh?

SHE freezes, thinking better of it.

LIZZY
(Very flustered now.)
I'll bring it. I'll bring it...

(Beat.)
Just a little something.

HE smiles. LIZZY turns to exit.

(Now at her porch door.)
This is so awkward.

JACK
(Highly amused.)
Yeah.

LIZZY exits.

Music plays softly over the following:

JACK fusses with a few things on the table and then exits into his house for candles, as...

LIZZY emerges into her yard, as if in her private dressing area, holding up an outfit. She sighs at the reflection in the mirror. Exits, as...

JACK re-enters with some votive candles and two wine glasses. He attempts to light a votive with a torch lighter. The lighter refuses to light. He exits for another lighter, as...

LIZZY re-enters her dressing area, all dressed and stands before the mirror. She adjusts her bra strap, fidgets with her outfit and then exits, as...

JACK re-enters with some wine and fills two glasses. He attempts to light one of the candles with a different lighter, but again, the lighter will not light. Exits as...

Lizzy re-enters her dressing area and puts on some lip gloss. JACK re-enters with a little vase of flowers and sets it on the table. He reaches into his apron pocket for a book of matches.

LIZZY exits as...

JACK strikes a match and finally lights the two votives. HE removes his apron, sits on the glider, takes a swig of wine and looks nervously at Lizzy's house, as...

Lights fade.

Lights up on Lizzy and Jack sitting on the glider, finishing up the last bites of red beans and rice.

LIZZY

No, look, I'm not kidding.

LIZZY pulls out her cell phone to show him pictures.

I said you gotta fix it so it won't blow around, I want it down, but like barrettes, or whatever, and she said, *honestly if you want my opinion...that just looks like two pigtails hangin down*. I just looked at her. She said stop flipping your hair around, you're all stressed and you're taking it out on your hair. I was just so damn nervous. I took a xanax. After that, I didn't give a shit what she did. Look, she had these tattoos and they were scary, from prison maybe. Pair of scissors on one arm-look, there's my hair! SO AWFUL! She said, *honey, I know aaaaaalll about beach hair, we gotta be teasing that crown to Jesus*. Look there it is from the back! You could hang pots from it! I went and took it all down.

SHE turns to see Jack smiling at her.

What?

JACK

Nothin.

LIZZY

Somethin...

JACK

You just...seem different.

LIZZY

I do? How?

JACK

I've never seen you this happy.

LIZZY

(A realization.)

I am happy.

JACK

It looks good on you.

JACK tidies up the dishes.

LIZZY

You're a good cook, Mr. Key. I'll let you do that more often.

JACK

You want some ice cream? I made some...

LIZZY

Stop it. You did not make ice cream!

JACK

Butter pecan?

LIZZY

Nooooooooo, that's my poison.

JACK

I'll get it.

LIZZY

No, let's wait, I need to settle.

JACK

Okay.

LIZZY

(Shaking her head at him.)

Ice cream.

(Admitting she might have underestimated him.)

Hmn.

JACK laughs.

LIZZY

(Returns to looking at wedding pictures on her phone.)

They went on their honeymoon to Antigua. Did you have a honeymoon, Mr. Key?

JACK

We went to Disney.

LIZZY

No, really?

JACK

It was a blast.

LIZZY

Gosh, that sounds fun. Small World? Little tea cups?

JACK

Yep. What about you?

LIZZY

Well...I wanted to go see some shows on Broadway and he wanted the mountains. I cried on my honeymoon.

JACK

Oh...

LIZZY

It was awful.

(Beat.)

I've been goin' through Mr. McElway's letters. So personal. It seems he and Miss Minnie had a falling out about ten years ago. And I don't know what happened, they ended up in separate rooms, I guess. I had no idea they were goin' through all that. I mean...I'd like to believe if an *entire* world was collapsing all around me, I'd have taken some notice.

(Beat.)

And those letters...the ones written in chicken scratch. Those were his too. Written around the time he broke his hand during a fight they had in the kitchen.

JACK

(A whistle.)

Pfeeewww...

LIZZY

He loved her.

JACK

How do you know?

LIZZY

(Handing Jack a letter.)

This is one of the recent ones.

JACK

You opened it?

LIZZY

Find some quiet time.

(Beat.)

LIZZY begins to speak, but stops herself.

JACK

What?

LIZZY

I never loved my husband. Is that shocking?

JACK

Did he love you?

LIZZY

Yes, he did.

JACK

Why did you marry him?

LIZZY

Because he's a good-because he was...a good man.

JACK

I've heard good things.

LIZZY

Oh?

JACK

Salt of the earth. Loyal.

LIZZY

Yes. God-fearing. Good to his workers. He was. He was all those things. And he was good to me.

JACK

And do you miss him?

SHE looks at Jack intently.

LIZZY

I never told anybody that before, Mr. Key...the part about me not loving my husband.

JACK

You can tell me anything.

LIZZY

I'm rather a private person.

(Beat.)

I don't know how people don't know, I mean, they must, I didn't cry at the funeral.

JACK

People deal with grief in different ways. Would you like some more wine? Something stronger?

LIZZY

What you got?

JACK pulls out a small bottle of moonshine.

Ooooh...is that from down yonder, Yellowfoot Road?!

JACK

What do you know about Yellowfoot Road?

LIZZY

Ooooh, you got that apple pie shine!

JACK

Quick, like a band aid.

LIZZY drinks.

LIZZY

Owww!! Dammit all!

(Chasing it with a swig of wine.)

It's like liquid fire. Shit.

(Off his amused reaction.)

Well, there's no water!

JACK drinks. LIZZY leans back in the porch glider and looks up at the night sky.

Is this the part where we get all wasted and loose-lipped and slip dangerously into uncharted territory?

JACK

(Looking at the stars.)

Let's do that.

The dryer buzzes.

LIZZY

I'm a terrible drinker. There's all this liquor in the house, I have no idea what any of it is, the bottles are so pretty, I dust them. It always looks so delicious when people are sipping

cocktails on TV, you know, the soap operas? We had a girl's night over here last year and Missy Odom showed me some recipes, but I might have been gone by that point, I can't remember any of it.

JACK

I drive people to it.

LIZZY

To drink?

JACK

Yeah.

LIZZY

Oh, lord, I'm sure I do.

JACK

I drink whiskey now and then. When I'm grading papers.

LIZZY

Yeah?

JACK

Keeps me honest.

LIZZY

Honest?

JACK

Oh, I leave comments.

LIZZY

(Amused.)

Bad?

JACK

Rivers of blood.

JACK goes to unload the dryer.

Hey, who's your most disappointing student?

LIZZY

(Thinking.)

My most-oh gosh...umn...Willie Morgan.

JACK

Willie Morgan?

LIZZY

Yeah.

JACK

He's a straight A student.

LIZZY

Psh. Maybe I'm the disappointment.

JACK

How?

LIZZY

Oh, that child. Every year in the Spring, I ask my kids to write a personal essay, you know, something autobiographical. And he writes, he does.

JACK

Oh, I've seen it.

LIZZY

He's good, he's got it. And so, they all came in with their stories...and you know, all over the map, but it's good, it's a good project. And you know most of the boys will write about football or huntin', what else is there, south Alabama...

JACK

(Overlapping.)

Right.

LIZZY

(Overlapping.)

...and I never really expect anything else. So a few of 'em got up to read, aloud, you know, in class, and then I called on Willie to read his. And he looked at me...and he said he hadn't written anything.

(Beat.)

Oh really, Mr. Morgan? You don't have anything for me today? No ma'am. Few hours later, I found his paper...torn up in the trash.

(Beat.)

Mr. Key, I can't even tell you, it was so beautiful. He had written about a hike on the Appalachian trail, with words...I hadn't ever seen in that order. And by a sixteen year old boy? I mean I was speechless. I've not seen a boy write like that in my classroom, ever. The girls do. They get it, but you know, that's

all they do is bleed all over the page, they're so expressive, and everything so devastating, ya' know, but the boys...

JACK

We don't want to seem foolish.

LIZZY

What is that?

JACK

Play it cool. Learn guitar.

LIZZY

See, that is so short-sighted. And only a high school girl would put up with that shit. A woman wants a man who can spell. Or write a love note or know the ones to steal.

(Beat.)

Where was I? Oh, yeah, okay, so the next day I took him out into the hallway and I asked what happened. And he said he had forgotten the assignment. And I said now that's not true and you know it. And he asked me how I knew and I showed him the papers...

(Beat.)

He just looked at me. And I said, now Willie, what is it, what are you afraid of? And it was like one of those scenes from a tragic movie...the bell rang and all the kids rushed out into the hall...but we were sorta frozen there for a minute like in slow motion and he had these tears in his eyes. I reached out to him and he gave me the saddest look and just walked off.

JACK

Poor kid.

LIZZY

Broke my heart.

(Beat.)

The stars lay on the ragged ridge line...and blankets of cotton mist. A white stag in silhouette, blackened by the light.

JACK

(A whisper.)

Pffffff...

LIZZY

(Overlapping.)

Sixteen years old.

JACK

Wow.

LIZZY notices a sock that has fallen out of the basket. SHE goes to pick it up and searches the laundry basket for its mate.

LIZZY

I've read it a hundred times, I still have it. He just pushes it all down so no one can see it. And I wonder maybe...if his mama hadn't died when he was little...or if he'd had a daddy who understood his potential...if maybe he'd have the courage for it. And then I think...no. Because then what would he have to write about? Other than his perfect life. And no one wants to read that.

LIZZY is now busily pairing all the socks together.

JACK

(Charmed.)

Lizzy.

LIZZY

(Holding up a shirt.)

OK, this is cute. I hadn't ever seen you wear this one.

JACK fills their wine glasses.

JACK

It occurred to me this morning, we have something to celebrate.

LIZZY

Oh?

JACK

Today's our one year anniversary.

LIZZY

What?

JACK

I moved in one year ago today.

LIZZY

A year?

JACK

Yep.

LIZZY

It seems like way longer.

JACK

Doesn't it?

LIZZYy

Oh well. We're in it now.

THEY toast.

(Tossing him the shirt.)

I like this one. Wear it more.

LIZZY notices the whites and colors all mixed together in the basket.

Well, you have just mixed it all up here, huh, tossed salad.

SHE moves the basket closer to the glider.

Ooh, I'm feelin' a little wobbly, Mr. Key, you gettin' tipsy?

HE smiles in response. SHE begins folding the clothes.

Mr. Key?

JACK

Hmn?

LIZZY

How come you never had kids?

JACK

We wanted to. We were trying to, actually...

LIZZY

Oh, I'm sorry...

JACK

No, it's okay.

LIZZY

Maybe they're in your future...

JACK

I hadn't ruled it out. What about you?

SHE answers by throwing him a pair of his boxer shorts.

Too personal.

LIZZY

We're the leftovers, Mr. Key. Ever thinka that? People say all the time that life isn't fair...but have you ever noticed they never say that about death? No matter how bad it is, death just gets a free pass.

JACK

How do you mean?

LIZZY

Well, like if someone's been suffering for a long time and finally passes, they say well death is a mercy. But if someone dies of an accident all of a sudden, you know, with no warning, they just say...life's not fair. I mean I do think it's true, life's not fair, but neither is death, and I think death kinda sucks, personally, if you ask me. There's no fairness to it.

LIZZY wrestles with a sheet. JACK stands to help her. Throughout the following exchange, THEY fold the sheet together.

JACK

They tell you to remember the good times...but that's not how it works. You can't edit out the end, like it didn't happen.

LIZZY

No, I guess not...

JACK

The end is the loudest part. I've seen death come around, barge right in. Make itself at home. Seen it take my whole world, everything I loved, take it right out of my arms. But that's alright. Cuz I know I was lucky. I got to say goodbye. I got to walk her through it. I got to bathe her...comb her hair...read to her from all those...ridiculous magazines.

JACK takes the sheet from Lizzy and smooths it down, tenderly tucking it into the basket and pressing it lightly with the palm of his hand.

And finally...when the time came...I got to be brave for both of us and smile at her and see her smile back at me...and give me permission...

LIZZY

Permission.

JACK

You know, Lizzy...for a long time I made death out to be this monster because it wouldn't-fucking-leave. Even when it was done with her, it just... *hung around* for months and months...ate all my food.

LIZZY

(Trance-like.)

But you're not bitter...

(Tipsy and stumbling.)

My husband cheated on me. Isn't life just the craziest? You pray and pray to god on your hands and knees for deliverance from your own awful existence, from your own sickening self and to take it all away and then one day, god answers all your prayers, like magic. Whoosh!

(Childlike.)

All gone!

JACK

Lizzy...

LIZZY

(Overlapping.)

Oh, I almost forgot!

LIZZY crosses to her porch.

I was at the big folk art festival up in Savannah last weekend and I got you this precious little Catholic church bird house!

*LIZZY holds up the bird house, calling
from across the yard.*

Do you love it?!

JACK

I do...

LIZZY

It's good, right?

JACK crosses to Lizzy's porch.

JACK

It is.

LIZZY

Oh, but it needs a little something...

SHE hands the bird house to Jack while she attempts to attach a bow. She falters.

JACK

Lizzy...

LIZZY

(Childlike.)

I got you a bird house...

JACK

Hey...

LIZZY

His mama knew it was all a lie. All she wanted was a grand baby. I just couldn't do it. God, the way she would look at me. I've never seen such hate in my life.

JACK

Come and sit down.

LIZZY

I know what you see. You don't have to tell me. You can save yourself the trouble. Here's your bird house.

LIZZY walks over to Jack's yard and looks for a place to hang the bird house.

You can hang it next to the Virgin Mary on your porch and she can—she can go in there when it gets cold at night.

(Laughing at the absurdity of it.)

Who am I kidding? She can't fit inside a bird house...

LIZZY falters. She collapses on the glider. She holds onto the bird house.

JACK

Lizzy...

Silence.

LIZZY

I was the one who gave him permission.

JACK

Permission.

LIZZY

To cheat.

JACK

What?

LIZZY

I know, right?

(Beat.)

He would reach for me. And I...couldn't. I just-it's not that I'm afraid of that. You think I'm afraid of sex, Mr. Key?

JACK

Lizzy...

LIZZY

I'm not! I'm not! Sex is good, Mr. Key. I mean, good sex is good, right?

JACK

Yeah.

LIZZY

I'm not afraid of it.

(A whisper.)

I-I miss it.

JACK

Has it been a while?

LIZZY

(As if to say "you have no idea.")

Oh...

(Beat.)

I wanted it, Mr. Key. Just not with him.

(Beat.)

JACK

Was there someone else?

LIZZY

No. There never was. I was faithful. I was a good wife. He gave me something solid, something real. I didn't want a divorce. I don't believe in it. And so I sat him down one night and I told him if he needed that...if he needed to go and find that somewhere else, I wouldn't stop him. And it was awful. He was so angry. He started yelling at me, said it was a crime against God what I was doing. I said, but I can't give you what I don't have, I can't feel what I don't feel. I said, what do you want me to do, just lay there and lie to you? He threw his plate across the kitchen. We didn't talk for weeks. When summer came around, I noticed he was working longer hours, coming home late. And then one night I heard him leave the bed around midnight. And I knew he was—I smelled his cologne. I didn't say a word, but in my head I was like...yes. *Go. Go do...what you need to do.* He came back a few hours later like nothing had happened...he put his hand on my shoulder, like he always does, but I laid real still...waited for him to fall asleep. And then I went downstairs and sat at the kitchen table for a while...watched the sun come up. Cooked him some eggs and he came down and we sat there and ate in total silence. And then when he stood up to go to work he kissed me on my forehead and said *I love you*. And I looked up at him...and all the color just drained right oWAut of his face...the sadness of a million days of him knowing I'd resent him for it, but it wasn't that at all, I just didn't want it floatin' around in my head, ya know? And that's what I wanted to tell him, but I didn't say anything. He went off to work down to that roofing job in Opelika and I sat there at the table...fell asleep, I guess, I don't know how long I slept, I woke up to a phone call from Mr. Ledbetter: *Jesse took a fall.*

(A realization.)

I've ruined lives Mr. Key.

JACK

No.

LIZZY

Yes, I have. I know how to love, I do. I just didn't know how to love him. He is a good man. He is *such*...a good man. And now, I feel like I'm surrounded by all these people, all over town—(mimicking) *I'm so sorry*. I'm going to hell for the things I've done.

JACK

You're not going to hell.

LIZZY

How do you know?

JACK

I know!

LIZZY

You don't! I've destroyed lives, Mr. Key. Whole lives!

JACK

(Overlapping.)

No.

LIZZY

Yes, I have! He was my best friend! I could have given him his whole life back, and I hung on like a damn IDIOT!

JACK

(Overlapping.)

You're so wrong.

LIZZY

How?

JACK

It wasn't your choice to make, Lizzy! It was his. Don't you see that? You wanna feel bad because you stayed? Because you stuck around and tried to do right by the man?

LIZZY

You just know it all, don't you? You know everything. How wrong I am...how I'm supposed to feel. You have it all so carefully arranged. Sleeping in the yard. And your laundry outside because you're too afraid to go in there and take back your damn life! And you won't kiss Daphne for the same reasons. You...are afraid. You're afraid you might *actually* feel something. Or that you'll keep losing...the people that you love.

(Beat.)

The only ghost in that house...is you. And it's too bad, isn't it? Because you have a mortgage. And now we're neighbors. And one of us has to MOVE. Because I don't want to be your neighbor anymore!

LIZZY grabs Jack and kisses him hard on the mouth, clawing at him.

JACK

Lizzy. Lizzy...

JACK relents for a moment, but then pushes Lizzy back, holding onto her wrists.

LIZZY

(Suddenly horrified, disoriented.)

Oh no...

JACK

Shhh shh shhhhh...

LIZZY

No. No. No, no, no, no, no. You have become too familiar!

JACK

(Overlapping.)

Lizzy! Don't go like this...hold on...

LIZZY

(Overlapping.)

Let me go. Let me go, LET ME GO!!!

LIZZY pulls away from Jack and shoves him. Hard.

YOU STAY AWAY FROM ME!

LIZZY exits into her house.

JACK

(Chasing after her.)

Is that how it is, Lizzy? I'm not feeling bad enough for you? Or feeling it in the right order? I got news for you.

(Pounding on the screen door frame.)

It's a fucking nightmare! And there is no end! There's no structure. It doesn't give a SHIT about you. Or what you're doing, or whether you're happy, or whether it's convenient...or anything at all about your cute little plans!!!

(Staggering backwards.)

It just lays there, waiting...like a crazy ex-girlfriend. With a shotgun.

(LIZZY appears in the doorway.)
You don't know my life.

LIZZY

I hate you.

LIZZY disappears into the house.

JACK stands there frozen. Stunned. HE staggers to his own yard, sits on the glider, blows out the candles and picks up his jar of moonshine.

JACK

Perfect.

HE drinks.

Lights fade.

Scene 2.2

Later that evening. Out of the darkness, a flashlight clicks "on." Fairly drunk now, JACK lies on the porch glider singing an old drinking song and making spooky flashlight faces in the dark, clicking the flashlight on and off.

JACK

Cause the whiskey ain't workin' anymore...thank you...

JACK puts the flashlight to his forehead.

Shutthefuckupshutthefuckupshutthefuckupshutthefuckup.

JACK notices the letter still on the table. He sits up, opens it and reads it by the glow of the flashlight.

Miss Minnie Faye. I'm 'on put this letter with the others, you know the place. I'm bettin' you don't want to hear from me, but this house is worse than awful since you went away. I feel sorry for the sad bastard that ends up with this dump. And I'll be so glad to die and get out from under it.

Opposite side of the stage: a pool of light on LIZZY. SHE recites the letter as Jack silently reads along...

Big tree limb fell on the roof over the summer...and there was a leak in the hallway all through July. Went up there to fix it...still ain't right. I do not understand about the plaster. Seems like no matter what I do, the mix comes out wrong. And you know I'm too cheap to call a professional. But that's alright. Go ahead and tell me you told me so.

JACK reads aloud...

I miss the smell of your cooking.

THEY read aloud...

All the times I wished for you to leave me, and now you went and done it.

HE reads.

They brought you to me in a little box. I have no idea what I'm supposed to do with you now. If I could tell you some things...

SHE reads.

If I'd known you'd be taken so quick...I'd want you to know how grateful I am for you puttin' up with my sorry ass...sticking with me as long as you did. For making us a home...and for keeping me safe...from myself. The truth is, I did love you. And I still do.

Lights out on LIZZY. She exits.

JACK cradles the letter and the flashlight. He slowly falls to pieces on the glider.

Lights fade.

Scene 2.3

The next morning. LIZZY emerges onto her porch with a cup of coffee. She sees Jack asleep on the glider. She pulls her cell phone out of her pocket and dials his number. Jack's phone rings. HE awakens, confused, searching for the noise. He pulls his cell phone out of his pocket and sees Lizzy's number on the caller ID. He looks over at Lizzy's porch to see her standing there, then answers but does not speak. Over the following exchange, THEY sometimes talk directly to each other and sometimes into their phones.

LIZZY

I'm calling you on the phone. It is Lizzy. The basket case. From next door.

(Calling across the yard.)

I can hear you breathing.

(Pause.)

Did I wake you?

JACK

No.

LIZZY

Okay, good. Cuz I've made a list.

JACK

A list?

LIZZY

Hold on.

LIZZY takes a few hits from her coffee and pulls out a notepad from her pocket.

Okay, I'm back.

JACK

Okay...

LIZZY

First off...I want to say that I'm sorry.

JACK

It's okay, Lizzy.

LIZZY`

It's not okay. It's not at all okay.

JACK

(Overlapping.)

Lizzy...

LIZZY

Just-what did I say? Tell me everything I said, and speak very slowly.

(Beat.)

Was there anything contractual?

(Beat.)

That bad, huh?

(Beat.)

JACK

I was dead in Biloxi...

LIZZY

What?

JACK

As dead as a man can be. Without actually dying.

LIZZY

Mr. Key...

JACK

(Overlapping.)

Mapped it all out, I was ready. And then it came, and I was...I was standing on the other side of it. And I felt so *relieved*. And that sounds so awful, but that's how I felt, I felt *free*. The thing is, I just...I just hadn't counted on the *quiet*. The *stillness* of it. Ya know?

(Beat.)

I miss her. Some days I miss her so much, I wanna curl up and die. When she finally passed, there wasn't anything left for me to do, except...float around all day. House started closing in, I couldn't breathe. Get in my Jeep and just drive and drive. Check

into motels, sleep at the school. Folks at St. Bernard would pray for me, I said don't do it.

LIZZY

You asked 'em not to?

JACK

I said pray for Nacine Waters, her kid's run off, or Randy Sawgrass, his baby's got cancer...

LIZZY

Mr. Key...

JACK

(Overlapping.)

Don't pray for me, I'm good, I'm a healthy man. I thought I was.

LIZZY

Mr. Key. I'm sorry about what I said. There's nothing wrong with you.

JACK

Yeah...

LIZZY

Are you okay?

JACK

Next question...

LIZZY

(Looking over her list.)

I can look at my list. Lemme see.

(Beat.)

Oh. Yeah. Was there-just a little thing, but umn-did I kiss you?

JACK

You did. Wait, lemme think. Yep, that was kissing.

LIZZY

(Crumbling into a heap on the floor.)

That-is-disappointing...

JACK

Gee, thanks.

(Calling across the yard.)
It's a good thing I'm not your type!

LIZZY
(Muffled.)
Mnn hmnn.

JACK
Can you imagine?

LIZZY
(Muffled.)
No!

JACK
You know what I think? I think you're afraid I'm 'on find out
what a mess you really are.

(Beat.)
Too late!

*LIZZY sits back upright and smirks at
Jack.*

(Earnestly.)
What happened to Jesse...that's not on you, Lizzy. It was an
accident. You're a good woman, Lizzy. The best kinda woman...

LIZZY
(Rubbing her forehead.)
Yeah. And you don't want me...

JACK
I care about you, Lizzy.

LIZZY
You do?

JACK
You know I do.

LIZZY
Am I a good kisser?

JACK
Compared to what?

LIZZY

Please don't wait around for me, okay? I mean it. *Call Daphne*. Besides, I can't fall in love with a Catholic.

JACK

And why not?

LIZZY

It's just not done.

JACK

We're cannibals you know. The rumor's true.

LIZZY

Oh, yeah, y'all eat protestant babies, right?

JACK

Mnn hmnn. Boiled. Like Lobster.

LIZZY

Hey, did I ever tell you about the time I snuck into my uncle's Episcopal church down in Eufala and ate up all the communion wafers?

JACK

Whoa! Man, you must have really wanted the body of Christ!

LIZZY

I never did find any wine, but I did look around when I was trying on all the vestments. *Ves-ta-ments*? Vestments...

JACK

(Instructing.)

Vestments.

LIZZY

Vestments.

(Beat.)

I really am sorry.

JACK

Stop.

LIZZY

So many unknowns, Mr. Key. We're just supposed to jump in the water, I guess. With the sharks.

JACK

Maybe that's it.

LIZZY

I'm going back to bed.

JACK

Sweet dreams, Lizzy.

LIZZY hangs up the phone and exits into house.

JACK removes a wind chime from his porch and hangs the bird house in its place. He takes the wind chime (the one LIZZY favored on the day they met) over to Lizzy's porch and hangs it. He straightens a large wooden heart hanging on her door then gently presses the palm of his hand against it. He inhales deeply and lets it all go. He walks back to his own yard and then exits into the house.

Lights fade.

Scene 2.4

Later that day. Mid-afternoon.

Lights up to LIZZY sitting on her porch, surrounded by papers and lesson plans. SHE wears an apron and reads one of her textbooks while snapping green beans into a colander. She looks up to notice the new wind chime now hanging on her porch and the church bird house now hanging at Jack's place. She smiles.

JACK

(From off. A yelp.)

Dammit! All!

LIZZY

(Chewing on a green bean.)

Mr. Key, I hear you hollerin'!

JACK enters from his side yard and limps over to Lizzy's porch.

What? What? What? What is it?

JACK

Gone and done it.

LIZZY

What'd you do, what is it?

JACK

Caught a nail in my foot.

LIZZY

A nail, you stepped on it?

JACK

Well, I don't know, probably, I can't look.

LIZZY

Okay, lemme see...sit, sit down here.

JACK sits on Lizzy's porch stoop. SHE touches the bottom of his foot. He winces.

Sorry. Ugh. Well, there's no blood...

JACK
No blood?

LIZZY
Not yet.

LIZZY exits for supplies.

JACK
What is it?

LIZZY
(Calling.)
Splinter!

JACK
What?

LIZZY
(From off.)
Hang on.

JACK
A splinter...

LIZZY
(From off.)
Does it hurt?

JACK
(Thinking.)
Yeah.

LIZZY
(From off.)
We'll get you fixed up.

JACK notices Lizzy's books and papers.

JACK
You ready for school, tomorrow?

LIZZY
(From off.)
Shit. No way!

JACK

Animals!

(Beat.)

You want a ride over?

LIZZY

(From off.)

Umn...sure.

LIZZY returns with a basin of warm sudsy water, a few towels and some first aid supplies.

As long as I can pick the music.

SHE examines the bottom of his foot.

Okay, when did you step on it?

JACK

Just now.

LIZZY

(Yanking out the nail.)

You want me to take it out?

JACK

DAMN, WOMAN!!!

LIZZY

Breathe!

JACK

(Overlapping.)

I-

LIZZY

(Overlapping.)

Nope! Just breathe!

SHE applies pressure to the wound.

CCR, John Lee Hooker, Def Leppard, quick, name some going into battle songs!

JACK

Eye of the Tiger!

LIZZY

Nice! Good one.

LIZZY rinses off the "nail" that was stuck in Jack's foot and holds it up to show it to him.

Ooh, you caught a big one. What is that, a wood screw?

JACK

You said it was a splinter!

LIZZY

OH MY GOD THERE'S A TRAIN COMING-see how scary that sounds?

JACK

Oh, you're gon' get it.

LIZZY

(Overlapping.)

Shhhh. You're gonna need a tetanus shot.

HE nods.

Soon. You promise?

HE nods. LIZZY presses a wash cloth against the wound and gives it to him to hold.

Hold that.

Throughout the following, LIZZY disinfects the wound and washes his entire foot with warm soapy water.

Did you read the letter?

JACK

That was rough...

LIZZY

Can you imagine writing a letter like that to someone you know is never going to read it?

JACK

No. But I can see why he needed to write it.

LIZZY

Why do we stick with somebody for so long even after it's tragic and awful? Is it fear?

(Beat.)

What are you afraid of Mr. Key?

JACK

(Picking one from thin air.)

Clowns?

(Beat.)

What a question. Uh...let's see. Well, I suppose when I was younger, I was afraid I'd never amount to anything. And then much later, obviously, I was afraid I might lose it all. Which, of course...I did. After that, what is there to be afraid of really?

(Beat.)

Dying alone?

LIZZY

What about living alone?

JACK

Oh, I've gotten real good at that. Ya know, when you think about it, there's really only two reasons to be afraid of something...either it's gon' kill you...or you're gon' kill it.

(Beat.)

LIZZY

You mean like being chased by a bear?

JACK

Umn...

LIZZY

What is your favorite way to die? If you could pick, I mean. Have you thought about it?

JACK

Quick.

LIZZY

Quick how?

Bullet to the head. JACK

Whoa. Really? LIZZY

Yeah. JACK

So violent! LIZZY

What about you? JACK

LIZZY
(Digging through the first aid kit.)
Well, probably in my sleep but if I can't have that, I'd like to be trampled by an elephant.

(Beat.)

How is that *not* violent? JACK

Oh, it's violent. Does it still hurt? LIZZY

Little. JACK

LIZZY
OK. Little's better than nothing, if it was nothing, we'd need to amputate.

Pffffffffffff. JACK

Relax! LIZZY

Yeah. JACK

(Beat.)

LIZZY
This is nice. Lookin' after somebody...

LIZZY applies a band aid and finishes up with his foot.

Don't forget the tetanus.

(Beat.)

You got a nail in the other foot?

(Beat.)

Lemme see...

THEY exchange a playful look. JACK gives her his other foot.

How do your feet get so filthy?

JACK

I work at it.

LIZZY washes the other foot. Her touch is overwhelming to Jack. HE closes his eyes.

LIZZY

Are you in pain, Mr. Key?

JACK opens his eyes and searches her face.

Silence.

Are you?

JACK

(Softly.)

No...

SHE flushes.

LIZZY

You have nice feet, Mr. Key.

As LIZZY leans toward the basin of water, her breast presses against Jack's foot. HE notices.

Thank you for this morning. Sometimes I forget I'm allowed to be happy. Miss Minnie Faye could have left him, She could have found somebody better. Well, maybe not *better*, but...better for

her, ya know? But she stayed. Is that what a good heart does, it just breaks and breaks until it's good at being broken? What *is* that? Didn't she want to be happy?

JACK

Have you ever heard the term *horse latitudes*?

LIZZY

Is that a song by The Doors?

HE nods, amused that she gets the reference.

JACK

It's also a place.

LIZZY

Horse latitudes...

JACK

Somewhere in the subtropics, I think. But it's *calm* there. All the time. There's not a lot of rain or storms or anything really to speak of, just a lot of sunshine.

LIZZY

Sounds perfect.

JACK

It does. It does. Except...there's a story-apocryphal, probably-but, so the story goes that back in the trade days when the Spanish would cross the Atlantic in these massive sailboats, ya' know, carrying the food and livestock to the colonies...sometimes, when they reached...*horse latitudes*...the ships would just stall...in the ocean. No wind, just...just the stillness of nothing.

LIZZY

Stillness of nothing...

JACK

They might be stuck there for weeks, for months...running out of food and water. And the wind might pick up and they would be on their way but then sometimes, the wind never came...and the rations were gettin' thin and the animals began to starve. And so the crew had to make a decision...on what to do about the horses. And if it got bad-*bad enough*-they would bring the horses up on deck-the dead ones or the sick and the dying-and they would umn...send 'em off the boat.

LIZZY

Into the ocean?

(Beat.)

While they were still alive?

JACK

Sometimes.

LIZZY

Oh...

LIZZY dries his foot and holds it in her warm hands.

JACK

Like I said, it's probably a made up story. But, still beautiful.

(Looking intently at her.)

Survival.

LIZZY looks at him quizzically, not understanding his meaning.

(Clarifying.)

Do you...remember...the pain?

LIZZY

What pain?

JACK

The pain that was there...before.

LIZZY

What-oh...

Silence.

LIZZY thinks for a moment, recalling the pain of her marriage. It all comes rushing back-the longing, the heartache...the guilt. SHE looks up at Jack.

LIZZY

Yeah...

JACK

(Pointedly.)

Good.

(Beat.)

LIZZY

(Heartfelt.)

Thank you.

JACK

It's all you, Lizzy.

JACK looks down at Lizzy's textbooks.

You're gonna be back in the pit tomorrow.

LIZZY

Did you kiss Daphne?

JACK

(A million meanings.)

A year's a long time...

LIZZY presses her hand firmly against Jack's leg so that there is no misunderstanding. She asks again...

LIZZY

(Pointedly.)

Did you?

Silence.

JACK looks up at Lizzy and leans his head back against the porch railing. HE takes in the whole of her, the fullness of the moment. THEY stare at each other intently.

JACK

Now why would I go and do a thing like that?

LIZZY stares back at him, absorbing the full weight of his meaning.

Lights fade.

Scene 2.5

Later that evening. 2AM.

JACK limps out onto his porch and digs into his laundry basket, which is still on the porch from the night before. He changes into the shirt that caught Lizzy's attention earlier. He stares across the yard at her house. He takes a deep breath, gathers his courage, and then begins the cross to Lizzy's porch, as if going into battle. He climbs the steps, knocks on her door, then returns to the bottom of the steps to wait.

After a few moments and no answer, he climbs the steps again and knocks a little louder. He returns to the bottom of the steps. LIZZY peeks through the door...

LIZZY

What is it?

JACK

Come on out.

LIZZY

Oh my gosh, what?

JACK

Just come out.

LIZZY

Are you okay? Is it your foot?

JACK

I'm fine.

LIZZY

You're fine, it's two in the morning, is something on fire?

JACK

There's no fire Lizzy, I mean there is a fire-

LIZZY

(Overlapping.)

What?

JACK

Just-just come out!

LIZZY

(Not amused.)

Well, what do you want, you crazy boy?

JACK

I want you. I want you right now, that's what I want.

LIZZY

What?!

JACK

Come out on the porch, Lizzy.

LIZZY

What? No!

JACK

Lizzy.

LIZZY

Why?

JACK

Because it's *necessary*.

LIZZY

For what?

JACK

(At the end of his rope.)

Could ya' come out?! Would ya' do that?!

(Beat.)

LIZZY

Hold on...

SHE turns to get a robe.

JACK

No! No, I will not hold on. I'm done holding on. Let me see you.

LIZZY

I'm in my nightgown.

JACK

Lizzy!

LIZZY

(Overlapping.)

Can I get a robe first?

JACK

No. No! You cannot get a robe. Stay just like that, don't change a thing, just *walk out here*.

LIZZY

I cannot believe you right now!

Silence.

JACK takes a deep breath to calm himself.

JACK

Lizzy. Listen to me. It's just you and me. It's 2AM. It's quiet. Everyone's asleep. And I have been so, so patient. Please...

(Beat.)

Let me see you.

LIZZY finally realizes his intentions. She hesitates. She opens the door and walks out onto the porch. She is barefoot and she wears a long white nightgown that glows in the moonlight. There is sleep in her eyes and she squints from the porch light. Her long, unruly hair falls down around her shoulders. She nervously crosses her arms to cover her body.

JACK

Don't.

LIZZY puts her hands down and leans against the railing. Jack looks over her entire body. HE is transfixed.

(A whisper.)

Turn around...

LIZZY

Turn around?

JACK

Please.

LIZZY hesitates for a moment. She slowly turns around. JACK inhales and exhales sharply. She turns back around.

LIZZY

Making me nervous...

JACK takes a few steps toward her. SHE stands slightly above him on the porch step. He reaches up to touch her shoulder, tracing down her arm and hand to the tips of her fingers. He slowly traces down the folds of her long white nightgown. He touches the tops of her delicate bare feet. He moves his hands slowly up the calves of her warm, soft legs. Lizzy begins to shake. She closes her eyes, overcome with emotion. She reaches her hand out to touch his hair.

JACK

My god...

LIZZY

(Overlapping.)

I can't do this.

JACK

(Overlapping.)

Beautiful...

LIZZY

(Overlapping.)

No...

JACK

(Overlapping.)

Shhhh...

LIZZY

(Overlapping.)

I'm not...

JACK

(Overlapping.)

Lizzy. You are. And I don't mind saying that I wouldn't mind saying that every night for a long, long time.

LIZZY

(A whisper.)

You are crazy.

JACK

Yeah...

JACK reaches his hand out to help her down the stairs. They are face to face.

LIZZY

(Barely breathing.)

I told my pastor I was having impure thoughts about a Maytag dryer. He said there was no such thing. I said but it has a heated steam cycle, and he said, *ooooh, there might be something to that.*

(Beat.)

You smell like Joe Namath.

JACK

(Amused.)

What?

LIZZY

(Shaking.)

I always think of him from those Brut commercials. And when I smell a man that smells good, I always think he might smell like Joe Namath. And then I imagine him in that other commercial with the pantyhose and I get all confused.

JACK

Old Spice.

LIZZY

Old spice?

JACK

Yeah.

LIZZY

(Playing it off.)

It's good.

JACK

You know, Joe Namath was a Catholic.

LIZZY

(Voice cracking.)

Oh?

JACK

Mnn hm.

LIZZY

We have many fine Catholics all over this town, they're not bad people, just misguided.

JACK

You're still a sex goddess.

LIZZY

See what I mean-

JACK'S kiss is so lethal, it nearly flattens her. After a long, hard kiss...Lizzy emerges for air, breathless.

Well...we'll need to work on the kissing.

(Inaudible. Unseen by Jack.)

OH MY GOD!

JACK

I've been waitin' a whole year to do that.

LIZZY

(Bleary-eyed drunk.)

Was it good for you? Jack?

JACK

(Teasing.)

Oh, we're all on first names now.

LIZZY

(Blushing.)

Shut up...

JACK

Lizzy, I'm in love with you.

LIZZY

(Retreating up the steps.)

You are smoking-high-stoned-out-of-your-mind-drunk, what you saying, what are the words you are saying-

JACK

(Overlapping.)

Lizzy, I am not drunk.

LIZZY

(Overlapping.)

You are not-how can you be in love with me?

(Beat.)

JACK

Are you blind?!!

LIZZY

No. I'm not...

JACK

Well?

LIZZY

(A realization.)

I didn't want to see it.

JACK

I figured.

LIZZY

I'm so awful.

JACK

Yeah, you are.

LIZZY

I'm sorry.

JACK

That's not a turn off for me, Lizzy. When you dig in I just want more of you.

LIZZY

You do not.

JACK

I love everything about you. Even the things you think I won't.
You don't scare me.

LIZZY

Well, shit.

(Beat.)

I don't know how to do this...

JACK

Good!

LIZZY

(Overlapping.)

No, I mean it, I think I forgot some things.

JACK

(Overlapping.)

Tell me you don't want me. Tell me.

(Beat.)

LIZZY

(Faltering.)

I do want you.

(Beat.)

Is that shocking?

JACK

I already knew.

LIZZY

You don't know anything...

JACK

Mmn hmn. It's all in my head.

LIZZY

(Babbling.)

Oh, you are so hilarious, ya know that, with your
"observations."

JACK

(Overlapping.)

You can't hide from me Lizzy, I see it all.

LIZZY

What do you see?

JACK

You wanna know?

(Beat.)

LIZZY

Nope.

JACK

I watch you when you don't know I'm watching. You're left-handed. Your gardening gloves don't match. You wear lavender, but sometimes, on special days-and I haven't figured out the pattern-you wear another fragrance...

LIZZY

(Overlapping.)

Gardenia.

JACK

Gardenia. You collect wind chimes in low registers...and baby elephants. You take walks, but you wait for the light. You listen to Sinatra in the kitchen and Coltrane in the bedroom.

LIZZY glares at him.

Stop me any time...

LIZZY

What else do you know?

JACK

I know that I want you. *All of you.*

LIZZY

All of me?

(Beat.)

That's a lot.

JACK

I am aware.

LIZZY

You have a Maytag dryer on your porch. It's been out there a year. And I have to ask myself why it doesn't bother me anymore, it hasn't bothered me for a while, actually.

(Beat.)

Mr. Key, can I tell you something?

JACK

(Correcting.)

Jack.

LIZZY

Jack. I don't remember anything about being happy. I don't know if I've ever been happy. And I'm standing here, and I'm wanting to trust you. I'm wanting to tell you that you are a really good kisser. And that I have feelings for you. *Important* ones. And that as terrified as I am right now, I really do want more of those kisses. And I'm saying all of this-out loud-while being fully and completely aware that you might run away.

JACK

I have a mortgage.

LIZZY

No, no, NO! I am not imagining this, Mr. Key! This is very real, the fears that I have very, very real. Every single time I have reached out for something like this it has fallen right through fingers. And I have to think that maybe some people just aren't meant to have the things they want in this world, ya' know, or to be loved in the way that they ought to. I don't want to believe that that's true, but *dammit*, what else is there?

JACK

(Overlapping.)

Lizzy...

LIZZY

I am alone, Mr. Key. And I always have been. And I'm so tired. I am so tired of waiting...and why-why does a man just stand there and let a woman ramble on and on like this!

JACK

(Overlapping.)

Ask me how I know.

(Beat.)

Just ask me...say...*how do you know, Jack?*

(Beat.)

LIZZY

How do you know...Jack?

JACK

Because the only thing I'm afraid of Lizzy-the only thing that scares me anymore-is that I won't ever be as good in life...as I am when I'm with you.

LIZZY

Who are you? Did you really just say that to me?

SHE looks around the yard.

JACK

(Amused.)

What are you looking for?

LIZZY

A hidden camera, are you serious? What are you, from the future?

JACK

(Enamored. Taken.)

I love you.

LIZZY inhales sharply.

Silence.

SHE stares at Jack, unable to speak.

Take a walk with me.

LIZZY

A walk?

JACK

Yes.

LIZZY

Where?

JACK

(Emotional.)

I don't care.

LIZZY

This is a school night.

JACK

Mnn hmnn.

LIZZY

You're crazy.

LIZZY concedes. She looks around her porch and finds an afghan and wraps it around her shoulders.

JACK

Oh, good, a blanket.

LIZZY

(Resisting the implication.)

No!

SHE puts on a pair of gardening clogs.

We have two perfectly good homes right here, this is the shit teenagers do.

(Beat.)

I look like a mental patient.

JACK

(Referring to her ensemble.)

That's hot.

Silence.

They stand. Apart. Together.

Every memory...every daydream...every emotion--in distinct succession--picked up and returned by the other, like a silent game of tennis:

The longing. The panic. The fear.

The knowing. The fight. The release.

Last night. Last year. Last chances.

The lost. The found. The new.

Forever. Tomorrow. Right now.

The scars. The salve. The rain.

JACK

Lizzy...

LIZZY

Why aren't you kissing me?

JACK reaches for her hand.

HE guides her down the steps.

HE brushes back her impossibly long hair.

HE cradles her face in his hands.

HE envelopes her lips with his own.

Exhale...

Lights fade.

END OF PLAY