

THE GROWING STONE

A play by Peter Snoad

50 Dunster Road  
Jamaica Plain, MA 02130  
U.S.A.  
(617) 650-2325  
[psnoad@yahoo.com](mailto:psnoad@yahoo.com)  
[www.petersnoad.com](http://www.petersnoad.com)

© Peter Snoad 2017



Member  
All rights & privileges.

THE GROWING STONE

CHARACTERS

LUKE BARNETT, a teacher, 41

MATT BARNETT, 44, his older brother, an energy consultant

MARYANNE BARNETT, their mother

ENAJ BARNETT, 16, Luke's daughter

SETTING

Luke's cabin in northern Vermont, U.S.A.

TIME

The present

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

In blackout: the sounds of a street protest with yells of “No fracking way! No fracking way!” followed by the voice of a radio news reader.

NEWS READER (V.O.)

In Swanton today, over two hundred people protested at the site of a proposed new gas pipeline. They say the pipeline will damage local water sources and destroy a Native American burial ground.

At rise: Luke’s cabin. August. Late afternoon. The cabin is homey, lived-in, tidy. The entrance is through a screen door up left. Another door up right leads to the three bedrooms. The staging area combines kitchen, living room, and dining spaces. In one corner is a bulky object covered and concealed by a throw blanket of Abenaki design. It’s a telescope. The roof of the cabin has a large almost dominating skylight. LUKE is making a sandwich. He’s dressed in gardening clothes.

NEWS READER (V.O.)

And now for the latest on the weather, we go to Steve Mileski at the Fairbanks Museum in Saint Johnsbury with his “Eye on the Sky”.

LUKE turns off the radio. He completes the sandwich and covers it with a dish towel. His cell phone rings. He answers the call.

LUKE

Hello, this is Luke... Oh hi...Okay....Thursday at ten is fine...No, no, I’m good, I can, er...I will...I’ll see you then. Bye.

He ends the call. He looks out of a window onto the garden, absorbing the news he’s just received. A pause. He is interrupted by a knock on the screen door.

MATT

(Off)  
Hello?! Anyone home?

MATT enters with a wheelie and a laptop shoulder briefcase. He looks affluent and prosperous in an urban way.

MATT (CONT.)

Hey!

LUKE

Hi.

They hug awkwardly.

MATT

You look good. A little thicker round the waist, a little less hair, other than that...It is great to see you.

LUKE

Yeah. You, too.

MATT

So this is it, huh? Cosy. Very cosy. How many bedrooms?

LUKE

Three.

MATT

Land?

LUKE

Four acres.

MATT

Big enough for the big garden. Neighbors?

LUKE

Half a mile that-a-way. They're from New Jersey. They're not here much.

MATT

Weekends in ski season.

LUKE

Yep.

MATT

And you got state forest on the other side.

LUKE  
Yep.

MATT  
I saw the signs. Out back, too?

LUKE  
Huh-uh.

MATT  
Sweet. What you pay for it?

LUKE  
We lucked out.

MATT  
How much?

LUKE  
It was affordable. You hungry?

MATT  
I don't know. I guess.

LUKE  
(Handing him the sandwich)  
Turkey and Swiss on rye, lettuce, tomato, extra mayo, no mustard.

MATT  
And I can barely remember what day it is. Thanks.

He takes a bite of the sandwich.

LUKE  
Something to drink? Jane made ginger beer. Finest in Vermont?

MATT  
You will not believe what I've been through to get here. Surreal. Fucking nightmare, I mean...Okay, so there are thunderstorms over Jakarta, and everything's backed up, and our flight leaves two hours and twenty-two minutes late, which means I miss my connection in Tokyo. Luckily, they have space on the next flight, but the fucking thing is delayed because some bozo's out sick and they don't have a crew. Busiest airport in the world, long-haul international flight, and no crew. I mean, really? They're probably stuck in traffic or mourning a dead pet or something, who the fuck knows. Anyway, we sit on our asses for another three hours and sixteen minutes until they finally get their shit together. Do they

MATT (CONT.)

give us a meal voucher or a complimentary cocktail or even a groveling insincere apology as consolation for this massive fucking inconvenience? The fuck they do, they're American Airlines, Cheapskate Carrier of the Year five years straight on TripAdvisor, if there was such a thing, and there ought to be. I mean, no wonder they're in and out of bankruptcy court. I am never flying with those assholes again, not if they give me free fucking flights for life. How are you?

LUKE

I'm okay.

MATT

Ok-ay. Okay sounds wonderful.

(Beat.)

So, er...Oh, I got you a present.

He holds up a duty-free carton and offers it to  
LUKE.

Indonesian whisky. Grains from Bali, malts from the U.K. Surprisingly good.

LUKE

Well, that's very—

MATT

(Pulling back before LUKE can grasp the carton)

But! But, but, but. To claim your unique and fabulous gift, you have to guess.

LUKE

Guess what?

MATT

Who produced the best single malt in the world last year?

LUKE

I've no idea.

MATT

Which country?

LUKE

Well, obviously—

MATT

Correct, it is not Scotland.

LUKE shrugs ignorance.

MATT

Guess!

LUKE

Lithuania?

MATT

Lithuania?! Jesus. Taiwan.

LUKE

Really?

MATT

They call it Kavalan Solist. Nectar, sheer nectar, out of this world. Unfortunately, they'd sold out at the duty-free so we got to slum it with this. Want a snifter?

LUKE

No thanks.

MATT

Oh come on!

LUKE

I'm good.

MATT

(To himself, affecting a Scots accent)

How about you, laddie? A nice wee dram to toast our reunion? I don't mind if I do. If it's okay with our host here....?

LUKE

Of course.

(Indicating a closet where the glasses are)

Top left.

MATT reaches for a glass and pours a shot of whisky. He sniffs, sips and savors it.

MATT

Mmm. You quite sure?

LUKE nods. MATT takes a second glass from the cabinet and hands it to LUKE, then clinks his glass with LUKE's.

To us. MATT (CONT.)

To all of us. LUKE

MATT drinks.

That fruity finish. How's Jane? MATT

Good. LUKE

Sweet sixteen, right? MATT

Yep. LUKE

Hard to believe. And she's doing what she should be doing? MATT

You mean...? LUKE

Straight A's in school, hating you, breaking hearts. MATT

You can ask her yourself. LUKE

(Topping up his glass)  
Oh, I plan to. I tried friending her on Facebook but she didn't accept my invitation. Millennials and their protocols, go figure. Where is she? MATT

She's at a friend's house playing music. She's in a band. LUKE

Cool. MATT

She's looking forward to seeing you. LUKE



Well, that's reassuring. MATT

You are her one and only uncle. LUKE

No! MATT

Yep. LUKE

But didn't Helen have...? MATT

No. LUKE

Wow. Shit. MATT

No pressure. LUKE

What do you mean, I thrive on the Big P, bring it on! MATT

MATT'S cell phone rings. He checks the caller ID and lets the call go to voicemail.

And Mom?

SHIFT. It is 25 years earlier, immediately after the funeral of MATT's and LUKE's father. MATT and MARYANNE are in conversation. MARYANNE speaks with calm authority.

I would like to pretend that I never heard any of that. MARYANNE

But you are pretending! MATT

Matthew. MARYANNE

MATT

I know you know!

MARYANNE

Listen to me. You are hurting right now.

MATT

No shit.

MARYANNE

Language. And when we're hurting, we don't always say what we mean.

MATT

I meant every word.

MARYANNE

May the Lord have mercy on your soul.

MATT

And his.

MARYANNE

Young man, you show some respect.

MATT

Respect!?

MARYANNE

We have barely laid him in his grave. You have lost a loving and devoted father—

MATT

Mom—

MARYANNE

And I have lost the love of my life. Thirty-five years. Thirty-five years.

(Slight pause. She is emotional.)

He did everything in his power to give you a good life. To have you know God.

And now you defile his memory with this...this....vile fiction?

SHIFT back to LUKE and MATT in the present.

LUKE

She gets confused.

MATT  
Like what?

LUKE  
She doesn't know where she is, what day it is. Not always, I mean—

MATT  
But you can talk to her.

LUKE  
She doesn't talk.

MATT  
She doesn't talk?

LUKE  
A few words now and then, but she can be hard to understand, I mean—

MATT  
But she understands you.

LUKE  
Sometimes. Maybe. It's...you know.

MATT  
And she's living here?

LUKE  
Yep. She goes to a day program three days a week at Hazeldene.

MATT  
Hazeldene?!

LUKE  
She's there now.

MATT  
Hazeldene's a dump.

LUKE  
Not anymore. It's a regional center for dementia.

MATT  
Well, that's timely. What do the doctors say?

LUKE

They're not big on predictions.

MATT

How long?

LUKE

Probably a matter of weeks, but—

MATT

Weeks! You said it was imminent.

LUKE

It is.

MATT

Weeks is not...I mean, it is, but...God.

(Beat.)

LUKE

You want to come with me to pick her up?

MATT

Sure.

LUKE

Really?

MATT

No, no, you're right, I'm totally fried.

LUKE

Why don't you take a nap, and—

MATT

Yeah.

LUKE

Use my bedroom, first on the left. Bathroom's down the hall.

MATT

Thanks.

As MATT reaches for his wheelie, LUKE takes hold of it.

LUKE  
Here, let me.

MATT  
No, no, I got it.

MATT grabs the wheelie and heads for the bedroom.

LUKE  
Matt.

MATT turns and looks at him.

I'm glad you came. It's... I'm glad you're here.

MATT exits. LUKE removes a weed pipe from an ornate wooden box. He lights it, and takes a hit. He sits back and ponders. After a long moment, he rises and exits through the front door.

The lights fade.

ACT ONE

SCENE TWO

The same. One hour later. MATT enters from the bedroom talking on his cell phone.

MATT

Fine. Tell Ahmed to revise the contract... I don't care if he's on a yoga retreat in fucking Tibet, get it done.

He ends the call. He eyes the blanket that covers the telescope. Curious, he lifts it up to see what's underneath. At that moment, ENAJ enters through the front door.

ENAJ

Don't touch that.

MATT

(Backing off)  
I'm sorry. Hi. You must be Jane.

ENAJ

Enaj.

MATT

Enaj?

ENAJ

Jane spelled backwards.

MATT

Really?

ENAJ

Really.

MATT

Well, it's great to see you again, Enaj. I'm Matt, your long-lost uncle.

She accepts his awkward offer of a handshake.

So why...er—?

ENAH

I hate Jane. All that Plain Jane and Mary Jane bullshit, like I was some ugly boring wimp.

MATT

Whereas Enaj is...?

ENAJ

The opposite. Exotic and sensuous and kick-ass fierce.

MATT

Got it.

(Beat.)

I hear you're in a band.

ENAJ

I mess around with some friends.

MATT

What do you play?

ENAJ

You mean music?

MATT

Yeah, and instrument. Or instruments.

ENAJ

We do kind of indie folk stuff. I play guitar. Sing. Write songs.

MATT

Great, that's awesome. And where do you perform?

ENAJ

House concerts mostly.

MATT

House concerts?

ENAJ

A friend's house or barn or whatever.

Cool.  
(Beat.)  
How's school?

MATT

Seriously?

ENAJ

I was just curious.

MATT

You don't ask a teenager how school is going.

ENAJ

Okay. Sorry.

MATT

How was your flight?

ENAJ

Long. Way too long.

MATT

Well, welcome.

ENAJ

Thank you. It's really great to see you after...what, it must be—

MATT

Eleven years.

ENAJ

I guess so, right. Wow. You know, I was thinking, the last time I saw you—

MATT

I threw up on your Armani suit.

ENAJ

I don't remember that. I just remember you as being very cute and very smart.

MATT

I just remember barfing.

ENAJ

Beat. She pours herself a glass of her homemade ginger beer from the refrigerator.



So— MATT

Want some? ENAJ

No thanks. Oh wait, is that the ginger beer you made? MATT

Yeah. ENAJ

Well, I have to try that. MATT

No, you don't. ENAJ

Well, I'd like to. If I may. MATT

You may. ENAJ

ENAJ pours him a glass and hands it to him. He drinks.

Your Dad was right. This is amazing. Thank you. Listen, I, er...I know I've been kind of absent. To put it mildly. But I'm hoping— MATT

Why didn't you come to Mom's funeral? ENAJ

I had planned to, but in the end I just couldn't. MATT

Why not? ENAJ

I wasn't well. I am so sorry about your Mom. MATT

MARYANNE enters, escorted by LUKE.

ENAJ

I'm sorry about yours.

MARYANNE sees MATT and their eyes meet. SHIFT. Their conversation after the funeral 25 years before resumes.

MARYANNE

Vile.

MATT

Mom—

MARYANNE

Remember that photo I took at the Missisquoi Refuge, on the Black Creek Trail? You and Luke and your Dad are sitting on top of that big boulder, arms round each other, grinning like apes. The Growing Stone.

MATT

Please.

MARYANNE

It looked like any big old rock to me, but you gave it a name and you made up a whole story about it. "Mysteries of the Growing Stone." Your Dad loved it. It was your special secret, just the two of you, and you wouldn't share it with anyone, not even your little brother. Poor Luke. He pestered you for days. When you finally told him, I thought his eyes were going to pop right out of his head.

MATT

We have to talk about this.

MARYANNE

You said to him, "This giant rock is millions of years old and it's alive. It grows just like you do, Lukey, but very slowly, a teeny weeny bit every year." Bless his heart, he got a rope from his Dad's backpack, and he wrapped it around the boulder and measured it, so the next time he'd know how much it had grown. Of course, Luke being Luke, when we got home he searched the Internet and found that growing stones really do exist. In Romania of all places. They call them trovants. One more miracle of God's creation.

MATT

Why didn't you do something?

MARYANNE

But you didn't know any of that. Your story was a lie. It wasn't just your childish imagination at work, it was the Devil in you. I see that now. The Devil lives in this new lie, too. And God will punish you for it.

SHIFT back to the present.

MATT

Hi Mom. How are you?

MARYANNE stares at him and says nothing.

Mom?

The lights fade.

ACT ONE

SCENE THREE

The same. That evening. MATT and LUKE have empty dessert bowls in front of them.

More ice-cream?  
LUKE

MATT shakes his head.

Berries?  
MATT  
It's always worse than you imagine.

Yep.  
LUKE

MATT  
I wouldn't wish this on anybody.

LUKE  
It's a preview.

MATT  
Thanks a lot. Put me on an ice floe and push me out to sea.

LUKE  
If there's any ice left.  
(Beat.)  
She did recognize you.

MATT  
Sure.

LUKE  
No, she did.

MATT  
How could you tell?

LUKE  
Trust me, she knows it's you.

ENAJ enters from the spare bedroom.

LUKE  
How is she?

ENAJ  
Asleep.

LUKE  
Did you—?

ENAJ  
Yes.

LUKE  
The Namenda and the—

ENAJ  
Dad.

LUKE  
Enaj is amazing with her.

ENAJ  
She never makes a mistake with the pills.

MATT  
Well, now that I'm here, I can, er...

ENAJ  
Pitch in?

MATT  
Yes.

LUKE  
We'll all do what we can.  
(To MATT)  
How you doing?

MATT  
Not bad.

LUKE  
So what's been going on with you? Still doing the consulting work?

MATT

Yeah. Got a couple of big contracts with the Chinese right now. They're huge investors in Indonesia.

LUKE

And you're still specializing in oil and gas stuff?

MATT

Energy sector infrastructure, that's my thing.

ENAJ

We know all about that in Vermont.

MATT

Oh yeah?

LUKE

Gas pipelines are kind of controversial here.

ENAJ

One in particular.

LUKE

They want to route it right through an Abenaki sacred site, and—

ENAJ

People are pissed. Dad's trying to stop it.

LUKE

Well, not me, I'm just—

ENAJ

You're working with the tribe, you're organizing.

LUKE

It's a collective effort.

ENAJ

(To MATT)

Are they trashing Indigenous lands in Indonesia, too?

MATT

Well, minimizing damage to the environment is always a concern with any extractive project.

ENAJ

What are you, a spokesman for Exxon?

LUKE

Enaj—

MATT

No, it's cool. I mean, these are tough issues.

ENAJ

Yeah, the survival of the planet is kind of a tough issue.

LUKE

Your Uncle Matt—

ENAJ

Don't defend him, Dad, just because he's your brother. He's part of the problem.

MATT

Enaj, it's complicated.

ENAJ

No, it's not. Work on solar instead. Or wind or geothermal.

LUKE

Tea anyone?

ENAJ

(To MATT)

Why did you come?

MATT

I came to see your Grandma before she dies. And to lend a hand and to reconnect with you guys.

LUKE

Tea?

MATT

I'll take a nightcap.

LUKE  
Help yourself.

MATT pours himself a whisky.  
Enaj?

She shakes her head.  
MATT  
You know what? I'm fading here. It's suddenly hit me.

LUKE  
Of course. So. Sleeping arrangements.

ENAJ  
I had a better idea.

LUKE  
What?

ENAJ  
Instead of my room, Uncle Matt can sleep in his old room at Grandma's.

MATT  
I don't think so.

ENAJ  
It's only ten minutes away, and he'll have privacy.

LUKE  
Sweetie, it's a mess in there, it's dusty—

ENAJ  
I cleaned everything and I made up the bed.

MATT  
That's very thoughtful of you, Enaj. But if it's all the same to you, I'd much prefer to stay here with you guys.

LUKE  
No problem. We'll stick with Plan A. Enaj on the couch.

MATT  
No way, the couch is mine.



ENAJ

You do not want to sleep on that thing, trust me, it will kill your back.

MATT

Oh, I can sleep anywhere. I've slept in trees.

LUKE

He has, too.

ENAJ

Seriously? Where?

MATT

We had a tree house in the backyard.

ENAJ

At Grandma's?

MATT

Which I built with zero help from your slacker Dad.

ENAJ

I've never seen it.

LUKE

It's long gone.

MATT

No!

LUKE

Ice storm.

MATT

Really? Damn. Damn!

LUKE

Yeah.

MATT

We had some times, didn't we?

LUKE

Our Palace of Fun.

MATT  
Our Temple of Dreams.

LUKE  
And we ruled.

MATT  
Oh man, did we rule. We were untouchable.  
(Beat.)  
Well, on that nostalgic note—

ENAJ  
I'll get you sheets.  
(Gesturing to the couch)  
Don't say I didn't warn you.

She exits.

LUKE  
It is kind of depressing now.

MATT  
What is?

LUKE  
The old house. It's drab and musty and....

MATT  
Dead?

LUKE  
Lonely.

MATT  
What else is new?

MATT drinks his whisky. ENAJ enters with sheets and a comforter.

ENAJ  
Here you go. Towels are in the bathroom closet, help yourself.

MATT  
Thanks. I feel very looked after.

Goodnight. ENAJ

Goodnight. MATT

‘Night, sweetie, sleep well. LUKE

ENAJ exits.

She’s a lovely young woman. MATT

Yes she is. LUKE

(Topping up his glass)  
You sure? MATT

I don’t actually like whisky. LUKE

Seriously? MATT

It gives me the runs. LUKE

And there’s me thinking it was a gift we could all share.  
(Beat.) MATT

You know, the last thing Mom wanted was to leave the old place and move in here. LUKE

It’s nice but it’s not home. MATT

But it wasn’t like we had a choice. Things had gotten out of control. She couldn’t take care of herself, didn’t eat, didn’t bathe, and the house was a disaster – cat shit everywhere, flies, I mean... She’d take all the clothes out of the closets and just

LUKE (CONT.)

drop them on the floor. It was like some stranger had broken in and turned the place over. And then, oh God, we had the wanderings.

MATT

You mean, like—?

LUKE

She'd just take off and wander. Not in the woods, thank God, in town. The library – the library was her favorite. Churches, people's gardens. One time she talked to a hedge-trimmer like it was a dog. Stroked the blades until her fingers bled.

MATT

Why didn't you move in with her? I mean, if—

LUKE

I wasn't going to do that to Enaj, especially after Helen...

MATT

Of course.

LUKE

And now, I mean... We can't do this anymore. She needs skilled nursing care twenty-four seven.

MATT

Hazeldene.

LUKE

They know her there, they have a bed for her, it's familiar.

MATT

And expensive I'm sure.

LUKE

Matt, I wasn't—

MATT

I'll take care of it.

LUKE

No, we can—

MATT

Lukey. This I can do, okay? Okay?

Okay. Thanks.  
(Beat.)

LUKE

She'll hate it. It'll kill her.

MATT

Please don't say that.

LUKE

The lights fade.

ACT ONESCENE FOUR

The planetarium at the Fairbanks Museum. Twenty-two years earlier. LUKE is making a presentation. He's addressing a child in the audience.

LUKE

I know exactly how you feel. When I was your age, I loved science fiction. My parents not so much – they were religious and kind of strict. But every Thursday night my Dad allowed me to sit up and watch the first twenty minutes of some cheesy old science fiction movie on TV. Giant crabs invading Los Angeles from the Mojave Desert! Aaaargh! Great stuff. Anyway, back to our celestial journey.

(He directs a laser pointer at a night-sky image above)

This next picture is anchored by the star Spika, which means grain of wheat. If you find Spika, you will have discovered the brightest star in what is essentially a picture of a fifty-foot woman in space. Let's connect the dots. Here she is. Virgo. The old agricultural goddess of the Mediterranean basin. She had a different name back then. If you were an ancient Greek, she was Demeter, if you were an ancient Roman, she was Ceres – cereal. Now, Native people, Indigenous people, have a different knowledge of the stars. The Abenaki people here in Vermont share a celestial vocabulary with the Ojibwe-speaking people of the area we call Minnesota. They're originally from here, but they were given prophecies that prompted them to move west to a place where food grows on water. Wild rice. In the Ojibwe language, our Big Dipper is *Ojiig*, the fisher cat. The constellations of Pegasus and Lacerta are *Mooz*, because they're shaped like a moose. The Milky Way is *Jiibay Ziibi*. The River of Souls.

The lights fade.

ACT ONE

SCENE FIVE

The cabin. The same night as in Scene Three.  
3:00 a.m. MATT is on his cell phone, talking in a hushed tone.

MATT

And that's my problem? Run the numbers....What did I just say? Run the fucking numbers.

He ends the call. He reaches for the whisky bottle to refill his glass but decides against it. After a moment, he crosses to the telescope. Slowly, he starts to remove the covering blanket. ENAJ enters. He stops.

MATT

Uh-oh, busted again.

ENAJ ignores him. She fills a glass with water.

So what is under there?

(Beat.)

Enaj?

ENAJ

Check it out.

MATT

You sure?

ENAJ shrugs. MATT removes the blanket to reveal the telescope.

MATT

A telescope. Cool. Is it yours?

ENAJ

My parents'.

MATT

I didn't know they liked astronomy.

ENAJ does not respond. She starts to head back to her bedroom.

MATT (CONT.)

How did they meet? Your parents?

ENAJ

You don't know?

MATT

Your Mom was here on vacation, right?

(Beat. She does not respond.)

And your Dad was working.

ENAJ

He had a summer job.

MATT

Where?

ENAJ

At the planetarium.

MATT

In the Fairbanks Museum?

ENAJ

It is the only museum in Vermont with a planetarium.

MATT

So what happened?

ENAJ

She went to one of his presentations on the night sky.

MATT

And?

ENAJ

What do you want?

MATT

I want to catch up.

(Beat.)



ENAJ

Dad was like crazily enthusiastic and super knowledgeable and whatever, and my Mom really liked him and talked to him afterwards, and they went out for coffee, and the rest is history. Except that it didn't turn out so good because she died.

MATT

In an accident.

ENAJ

Yes.

MATT

In Wyoming.

ENAJ

Montana. Don't you know anything?

MATT

I'm sorry.

(Beat.)

ENAJ

They were hiking a mountain, and she lost her footing. Fell two hundred feet onto some rocks. It was like totally random. One minute she was talking to my Dad about how hungry she was and could she have some trail mix from his backpack, and the next minute she was gone.

SHIFT. Pause. Slowly, ENAJ moves to the telescope. LUKE joins her. It is 10 years earlier. ENAJ looks through the telescope.

LUKE

You got your focus? Okay, you need to—

ENAJ

I got it, I got it. Wow.

LUKE

What do you see?

ENAJ

WOW!

LUKE

Okay, imagine...Jane? Jane?

ENAJ

(Still entranced)

What?

LUKE

Listen to me. Are you listening?

ENAJ

Yeah.

LUKE

Imagine I'm blind and I've never seen the stars, and you're my guide. Take me on a journey. Tell me what you see. I want to see everything, I want to know everything.

SHIFT back to MATT and ENAJ in the present.

ENAJ

He was so into it. That and Native American stuff. The Abenakis.

MATT

Okay.

ENAJ

“Cosmic history and Indigenous history are two sides of the same coin.”

MATT

Who said that?

ENAJ

My Dad. He's famous.

MATT

I know, I'm a huge fan. What about you?

ENAJ

What about me?

MATT

Are you into astronomy?

ENAJ

As a kid I was, sure. At school they used to call me Spacey Janey. Not in a mean way, more like, ironic. We'd spend hours with this thing.

ENAJ puts one hand on the instrument,  
remembering.

ENAJ (CONT.)

When it was warm enough, we'd set up outside in the garden. In the winter, we'd  
turn off all the lights in here and watch the stars through the skylight.

MATT

Sounds magical. Do you still....?

ENAJ

Not since Mom died.

MATT

Too bad.

ENAJ

Not really. It was our thing. It's over.

MATT

So why is it still here?

ENAJ

Dad doesn't want it moved. It's like a memorial.

MATT

Are you okay with that?

ENAJ

Sure, why not. And anyway, Mom's still around.

MARYANNE shuffles in. She begins searching for  
something.

Grandma, can I help? Grandma?

MARYANNE tries to communicate but cannot find  
the words.

What are you looking for?

MARYANNE

F...f...f...

ENAJ  
Facecloth?

MARYANNE doesn't respond; keeps searching.

Fudge! I'll get it, I know where it is.

MATT  
Photo.

MARYANNE stops. She turns and looks at him. A flicker of connection.

Family. Photo.

MARYANNE  
Yes.

MATT  
I don't have any of those photos, Mom. Luke may have some stashed away somewhere, but I don't. I live in Indonesia now, remember? It's a country in Asia. A very long way from here.

A moment. MARYANNE resumes her search.  
ENAJ tries to coax her back to her room.

ENAJ  
Grandma, let's look for those photos in the morning, okay? I'd love to see them, too. Right now, you need to get some rest.

ENAJ takes her by the arm to escort her back to the bedroom. MARYANNE shrugs her off violently, lets out a loud angry cry, and starts hitting ENAJ. ENAJ evades the blows and gently restrains her.

It's okay, Grandma, it's okay. Let's get you to bed, shall we? That's it....take your time. There you go. Good, good....

MARYANNE exits slowly with ENAJ. A few moments later ENAJ returns.

You okay?

MATT nods.

ENAJ (CONT.)

She gets like that, you can't take it personally. She should settle down now.

(Beat.)

How's the couch?

MATT

Fine.

She starts to exit.

Enaj?

She turns.

You have every right to be mad at me. But—

ENAJ

Can we do this—?

MATT

Please, indulge me for one minute, okay? I haven't been in your life or your Dad's for a very long time, and I feel shitty about that.

ENAJ

But why?

MATT

Believe it or not, I have always...I have always held you in my heart. I have something for you.

He gives her a scroll, which she unrolls.

ENAJ

What is this?

MATT

It's your family tree on your Mom's side. I did the research.

ENAJ

Wow.

MATT

(Handing her a gift package)

And here's the fun gift. No need to open it now.

Thank you. ENAJ

Goodnight. MATT

'Night. ENAJ

MATT exits. ENAJ pores over the scroll.

The lights fade.

ACT ONE

SCENE SIX

The same. Several days later. Afternoon. No one is on stage. MATT's wheelie is on the floor beside the couch but not readily visible. ENAJ enters with a basket of zucchini from the garden. She puts the basket down and exits to her bedroom. She returns with a colorful piece of batik cloth – a gift from MATT – and her I-Phone. She taps the screen, and we hear Indonesian rap music. ENAJ dances around the room, twirling the batik cloth around her head and body in joyful improvisation. MATT enters. He watches her for a moment; she is lost in the music. She sees him and stops.

Oh hi.

ENAJ

Having fun?

MATT

Oh my God, it is so beautiful, thank you!

ENAJ

You're welcome.

MATT

Like the music? It's Indonesian rap.

ENAJ

Cool.

MATT

You've got quite the moves.

ENAJ

I just mess around. Mom was a real dancer.

MATT

Oh yeah?

She turns off the music, dons an apron, and starts to make zucchini bread.

ENAJ

She was a natural. I mean, she had the pottery studio and everything, but she loved to dance. Taught salsa down at the Legion Hall. And now I'm thinking maybe she came from a long line of dancers. All those women on the family tree, Myrna and Sara and Melissa. It's wild! Thank you.

MATT

Sure. You know, I didn't know your Mom well, but one thing I'll never forget about her was her eyes. They were always smiling. I mean, no matter what, those eyes...they just beamed.

(Beat.)

ENAJ

Did you see the beavers?

MATT

I did. Like you said, they are...what was it?

ENAJ

Destructively creative—

MATT

And creatively destructive. I'd forgotten – I mean, the extent of it. They sure can tear up a landscape.

ENAJ

Yes, but in a healthy and productive way.

MATT

I don't know about that.

ENAJ

It's true. Native Americans call the beaver the sacred center of the land because the flooding from their dams creates all this amazing habitat for fish and turtles and frogs and birds and whatever. They kind of manage the eco-system.

MATT

I never learned that in school.

ENAJ

Beavers just destroy, right? Like fracking and mining.

MATT

What are you making?



Zucchini bread. ENAJ

It's that time of year. MATT

Yeah. ENAJ

Except you don't actually use a lot of zucchini. MATT

I know. ENAJ

Do you zuke your neighbors? MATT

Oh, do we zuke 'em, we zuke 'em good. ENAJ

I'm glad to hear it, got to keep the old tradition going. MATT

Yep. ENAJ

How did it start do you think? MATT

Boredom. ENAJ

Really? MATT

Probably. Something to do. "I know, let's take this humongous vegetable that weighs twenty-five pounds and go dump it on that asshole's porch." ENAJ

"At midnight." MATT

"And we'll carve some kind of message on it." ENAJ

“Can This, Sucker!”

MATT and ENAJ

They laugh and high-five.

I put “Fucker” once.

ENAJ

That was bold.

MATT

Stupid more like.

ENAJ

Who was the target?

MATT

ENAJ

A kid from school, a bully, a real little shit. I thought Dad would be mad but he was like, “As long you only terrorize him with veggies.” Grandma was a good cook.

Plain is more like it.

MATT

ENAJ

Great mac and cheese. I don’t think I ever had her zucchini bread.

You didn’t miss much.

MATT

No?

ENAJ

Soggy.

MATT

Oh God, it’s in the DNA.

ENAJ

Can I help in some way?

MATT

ENAJ

You don't want to, trust me, I am such a kitchen Nazi. But just with cooking, I'm like totally egalitarian about everything else.

MATT

Like your Dad.

ENAJ

Apple don't fall far from the tree.

(Beat.)

I know I've asked you this before, but—

MATT

You want to come and visit me some time?

ENAJ

You mean—?

MATT

In Indonesia.

ENAJ

Really? Oh my God, that would be awesome! But like when, I mean....

MATT

Whenever.

ENAJ

Because I'll have to...I mean, I've got my tutoring jobs, and babysitting, and apple-picking this fall, they're always short on crews—

MATT

I'll take care of it.

ENAJ

Like the airfare?

MATT

Everything.

ENAJ

No way.

MATT

My guest, my treat.

ENAJ

Wow. That is...oh my God. Thank you.

MATT

My pleasure, we'll make a plan.

ENAJ

Could we go to Bali and see the Balinese dancers?

MATT

Sure.

ENAJ

I saw this documentary, they are incredible. And you can get more of that whisky!

MATT

We can do whatever you want.

(Taking hold of his wheelie case.)

I'm only sorry we can't spend more time together now.

ENAJ

Where you going?

MATT

Home.

ENAJ

To Indonesia?

MATT

I'll be back real soon.

ENAJ

But you only just got here!

MATT

It's an emergency. A business thing.

ENAJ

What about Grandma?

LUKE enters.

Dad, Uncle Matt is leaving.

Crisis with a client. MATT

You can't handle it virtually? LUKE

Got to be face-to-face. MATT

Jesus, Matt. LUKE

I'll be back as soon as— MATT

You can't do this! LUKE

I have to. I don't have a choice. MATT

Mom could die tomorrow. LUKE

Or in two weeks or three or four— MATT

SOUNDS of a loud thud and a groan of pain offstage.

Oh my God! ENAJ

ENAJ runs out towards MARYANNE's bedroom, followed closely by LUKE. LUKE re-enters moments later.

(To MATT)  
Call 911! Now! LUKE

MATT reaches for his cell phone as the lights fade.

ACT ONE

SCENE SEVEN

The same. Late that evening. LUKE enters through the front door followed by MATT.

MATT

What does stable mean anyway?

LUKE

It means she's not going to die immediately.

MATT

(Pouring himself a whisky)

Like they know.

LUKE

They know more than we do.

LUKE fills his pipe with weed.

MATT

I only trust doctors who are honest about their ignorance. Listen, I'm sorry I dragged you back here, I mean—

LUKE

No, no—

MATT

I was just...I couldn't hack it.

LUKE

No worries. Enaj'll call if there's any change.

LUKE lights the pipe, takes a hit, and hands it to MATT.

MATT

Is this okay, I mean...?

LUKE

It's legal now.

MATT

Yes, but Enaj...

LUKE

Not an issue. She's grown up with it.

They smoke and pass the pipe back and forth.

MATT

She's a great kid. I mean, really, she is something else. This is organic, right?

LUKE

Monsanto GMO Gold.

MATT

Of course, I am such a dumb-ass.

LUKE

You know, you gave me my very first joint.

MATT

I did?

LUKE

I was in eighth grade. You said to me, "This'll take the edge off." And you were dead serious. Refusal was not an option.

MATT

God, I hated high school.

LUKE

You hated being home.

MATT

I hated everything.

LUKE

You were a teenager.

MATT

Too bad that wasn't my only excuse.  
(Beat.)

LUKE

Are you staying?

MATT  
Well, I can't run off now, can I?

LUKE  
Was there a crisis?

MATT  
There's always a crisis.  
(Beat.)

LUKE  
Guess what?

MATT  
What?

LUKE  
The Carp's left town.

MATT  
Karpinski? No way! I thought he'd die in the pulpit.

LUKE  
He retired, went back to Ohio. Or so the paper said.

MATT  
The Carp. Oh man, did he make it real. I could feel the heat of that hellfire. I could taste that smoky brimstone on my tongue.

LUKE  
You believed, brother.

MATT  
In the power of the Lord and the power of the Devil.

LUKE  
And let's not forget the Golden Rule.

MATT  
Which one?

LUKE  
Respect, honor –



MATT

And obey your parents. Yes, let's not forget that little pearl of wisdom.

(Beat.)

We haven't talked about you.

LUKE

What about me?

MATT

What are you up to these days?

LUKE

This and that.

MATT

Like what?

LUKE

Protection of sacred sites. I'm doing some support work with the Abenaki Nation.

MATT

Oh right, the pipeline.

LUKE

It would obliterate this old burial ground, and—

MATT

You still teaching?

LUKE

Tenth grade.

MATT

Great.

LUKE

The kids are great, the adults not so much.

MATT

How so?

LUKE

Oh, the usual hypocrisy.

MATT

Like what?

LUKE

Our deep and abiding commitment to education. It is so deep and so abiding that we slash school budgets, we bombard the kids with stupid tests, we make college unaffordable, and we blithely continue on our merry way destroying the planet they're supposed to inherit. The kids are fucked and they know it, and they know that we know it.

MATT

What happened to all that wide-eyed optimism?

LUKE

Still here. Just hibernates once in a while. What about you? What are you focused on?

MATT

Not much. Beyond destroying the planet one gas pipeline at a time.

LUKE

Enaj doesn't pull any punches.

MATT

I'll say, she's relentless.

LUKE

And smart and brave and inquisitive and funny. And stubborn as a mule.

MATT

Like her mother?

LUKE

Exactly like her mother.

MATT

How's she been doing since Helen...?

LUKE

Hanging in there. I mean, she's still...it's tough.

MATT

First her Mom, now her Grandma.

LUKE

Yep.

MATT  
And you?

LUKE  
Helen was everything. I miss her every day. And I worry about Enaj.

MATT  
Of course you do.

LUKE  
No, I mean, in relation to Helen. It's just...I mean, Enaj is amazingly open for a teenager, even with me. She'll talk about anything except her Mom. I mean, it's been eight years, you'd think by now...

MATT  
It takes whatever time it takes.

LUKE  
I guess.

MATT  
Maybe she should see someone.

LUKE  
Has she said anything to you?

MATT  
About Helen?

LUKE  
Yeah.

MATT  
She said her Mom loved to dance.

LUKE  
(Laughing)  
Did she? Yes.  
(Slight pause)  
You know, it's real important to her that you're here. And that family tree you brought her? Beautiful.

MATT  
The prodigal uncle returns, trying desperately to make up for lost time.

I'm serious.

LUKE

I know.

MATT

What?

LUKE

It's just...I don't want to add to her pain and confusion.

MATT

What do you mean?

LUKE

Well, it's obvious her Grandma and I don't give a shit about each other.

MATT

That is so not true.

LUKE

Oh come on, Mom has never even liked me.

MATT

She loves you.

LUKE

Lukey, give me a break, Jesus.

MATT

In her own way, she loves you.

LUKE

How can you say that? She didn't have a positive word to say about me from fifth grade on. She wouldn't even touch me. I was a pariah.

MATT

I think you're—

LUKE

Nothing I did was good enough or smart enough or worthy enough. You, on the other hand, little brother, you were the bees' knees, the apple of her eye, you were going to make her proud, you had a bright and glorious future ahead of you.

MATT

(Beat.)

LUKE  
Why *did* you come back?

MATT  
Because you begged me to.

LUKE  
I did not beg, I simply—

MATT  
I need some air.

He moves to exit through the front door. He stops,  
resumes his seat. Pause.

I want....I wanted to have a conversation with Mom before she died.

LUKE  
Closure?

MATT  
There are things I need to say to her. Things I need to know.  
(Slight pause.)  
You know what? It's not fucking worth it.

LUKE  
It was worth flying ten thousand miles across the globe on a shitty airline.

MATT  
You have no idea.

LUKE  
Try me.

MATT  
Fuck you. FUCK YOU!  
(Slight pause.)

LUKE  
Matt, you've come this far.

MATT  
And the journey never fucking ends.  
(Beat.)  
How much do you know?

LUKE

More than you think.

MATT

Tell me.

LUKE

I was in sixth grade. It was a Monday afternoon. I came home earlier than usual because band practice had been cancelled, there were a lot of kids out sick. I walk into the house and I hear this weird moaning sound upstairs. It sounds like an animal in pain – something that’s gotten in through the roof and it’s trapped or whatever. It’s kind of scary, but I have to check it out, so I go upstairs. The door to your room is open. Just a crack, but it’s enough. I can see everything.

MATT

Why didn’t you tell me?

LUKE

I couldn’t. I mean, I didn’t know what to do, I was just....And then later I thought maybe I dreamed it all, or it was some weird hallucination.

(Beat.)

When did it start?

MATT

My eighth birthday. We had a party in the backyard. Chocolate fudge cake with rainbow sprinkles and French vanilla ice-cream. Ben and Jerry’s. You were there, but then you went to a friend’s house for a sleep-over. There was a treasure hunt, we played volleyball, goofed around. We had fun. By the time we’d cleaned up, it was late. They’d bought me a book for my birthday. “The Right Way”, a real wholesome piece of garbage. He tells me to go get ready for bed and we’d read it together. He comes in and lies next to me and we take turns reading. Then he looks at me and he says, “Son, I love you so much”, and he kisses me on the cheek and the top of my head and strokes my face. The next thing I know he’s climbed in beside me and his hand is on my crotch, and he takes my hand and places it on his dick and he’s got a hard-on. There was a strange kind of innocence about it the first time.

LUKE

Did he—?

MATT

He did everything. Not right away of course, he needed buy-in. I was confused, I was scared shitless. I mean, he was my Dad. But he said it wasn’t wrong, it was special, but other people wouldn’t understand, so we couldn’t tell anyone, not you, not Mom, not my friends. It was our secret.

LUKE

And you didn't.

MATT

Who could I tell? Except Jesus, of course, I told him, I told him all the time. In church, when it was happening... Lord Jesus, Savior, please make it stop. I'll do anything. Anything.

LUKE

How long—?

MATT

Five years, two months and thirteen days.

(Beat.)

You find ways to cope. Disassociate, create another reality. I'd put myself up on the ceiling, and I'd look down at this person who wasn't me.

LUKE

How did you get him to stop?

MATT

It got to the point where I didn't care. He could kill me if he wanted to. I went to him and I said, that's it, we're done. You are not going to touch me or fuck me ever again, and if you so much as lay a finger on Luke I will kill you. Tell me he didn't try anything with you.

LUKE

He didn't.

MATT

Well merciful God.

(Beat.)

LUKE

What about Mom?

MATT

She knew.

LUKE

Are you sure?

MATT

And she did nothing to stop it. You ever notice the way she looked at him when he was affectionate with me? She saw it clear as day. The man she had wed before God was doing the unspeakable to her little boy.

LUKE

But—

MATT

And here's the kicker: She blamed me. I was the evil one, I was an agent of Satan. I had led her faithful God-fearing husband into the deep dark pit of eternal damnation.

LUKE

Jesus. But is it possible—?

MATT

She knew and she turned a blind eye.  
(Beat.)

LUKE

What do you need from her?

MATT

Accountability. That's all. To acknowledge and take responsibility for not protecting me, her son, from the trauma of sexual and emotional abuse at the hands of his father.

LUKE

That's why you're here.

MATT

And wouldn't you know it, I'm too fucking late.

The lights fade.