

***ALL THINGS
BRIGHT***

*By
Jill Maynard*

ALL THINGS BRIGHT

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CHARACTERS:

Al Russo: 58, second-generation Italian. Fiercely loyal to family and country; otherwise accepts with good humor that 99 percent of what happens in life is beyond his control, so why sweat it?

Claire Russo: 56, Al's wife. Second-generation Irish. Feels cheated by life in so many ways. Disappointed in her daughter.

Ashley Russo: 26, Al and Claire's daughter. A daddy's girl. Smart but disaffected underachiever; riddled with resentment like her mom.

Art Stanek: 58, Claire's brother-in-law. Second-generation Polish. A big-hearted straight-shooter. When push comes to shove, he's the guy you'd want in your corner.

Barb Stanek: 57, Art's wife and Claire's sister. The liberal outlier of the family. Devoted to her job. Outspoken; suffers no fools.

Note: The characters' ages are given for 2016, at the top of the play.

TIME:

The action moves backwards and forwards in time as follows:

Scene 1: November 1, 2016.

Scene 2: Labor Day, 2008.

Scene 3: Mid-November, 2010.

Scene 4: Election Day, November 2016.

PLACE:

The living room of the Russo home in a somewhat depressed, post-industrial city in upstate New York.

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SCENE ONE

November 1, 2016. Evening. A living room with worn furnishings of 1970s vintage. An exit upstage center leads to the bathroom and bedrooms; an exit downstage left leads to the kitchen. An exit downstage right leads to the front door. AL, CLAIRE, BARB and ART are seated on a sofa and easy chairs.

AL. So she says, “When’s the last time you saw a doctor?”

ART. Who?

AL. Me.

ART. No, who’s “she?”

AL. “She?”

ART. You said “she” said, When’s the last time...“

AL. *(Interrupting Art.)* Oh. My doctor.

ART. Your doctor’s a she?

BARB. Come on, Art. You’ve been to women doctors.

ART. Yeah, but surgery, especially heart surgery, I think of that as a guy thing.

AL. She’s Indian.

ART. You mean from India?

BARB. For God’s sake, Art.

ART. He could have meant the other kind.

BARB. Nobody calls them that anymore.

ART. I know that. But does Al know that?

CLAIRE. Let him tell the story.

BARB. Yeah, go ahead.

AL. So she says...

ART. *(Interrupting Al.)* Sorry, I just think it’s ... surprising ... an Indian lady heart surgeon.

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BARB. We're about to elect a woman president. Get used to women in high places.

AL. I'm used to women telling me what to do. *(Al gives Claire a playful poke.)*

ART. I'm not saying there aren't a lot of good lady doctors, but they tend toward ... you know, pediatrics, family practice.

CLAIRE. You're sure it's going to be Hillary?

BARB. The alternative is unthinkable.

CLAIRE. She just strikes me as being so cold.

AL. Am I going to get to tell this story?

CLAIRE. Sorry. Go ahead.

AL. So she says, "When's the last time you saw a doctor?" And I say, "When was the election night for Al Gore vs. George W. Bush?"

BARB. Are you serious?

AL. I'm serious. It was in 2000.

BARB. You haven't been to a doctor in sixteen years? Are you some kind of freak?

AL. I'm healthy. This particular time in 2000, it was an accident at work. I needed something stitched up. So I go to emerg, it's packed. I make my way up to the nurse and say, "Any chance I can get out of here before the polls close?" She says, "Depends on who you're voting for." I say, "Which guy will get me to the head of the line?" She laughs. I'm out of there in an hour.

BARB. So who'd you vote for?

AL. Not the guy who was crying about polar bears.

BARB. It turns out he was right and the other guy was wrong.

AL. About what?

BARB. Weapons of mass destruction?

AL. He was acting on the best available intelligence at the time.

BARB. The same intelligence that didn't see 9/11 coming?

AL. Bush didn't ask for 9/11, but he got it. So what was he supposed to do with Saddam Hussein, roll over?

BARB. Serves him right for stealing the election.

AL. Not according to the Supreme Court.

BARB. He lost the popular vote.

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AL. He won the Electoral College. That's how it works.

BARB. That's got to change.

ART. Yeah, good luck with that.

BARB. It's archaic, it's unfair, and it gave us Bush. Let's not wait for something worse to happen.

ART. All those states out west with ten people and twenty cows per mile will scream bloody murder.

BARB. One person, one vote. What's so hard to understand?

CLAIRE. Can we just let Al tell his story?

ART. Yeah. Go on.

AL. So the upshot is, I haven't seen a doctor in sixteen years...

ART. (*Interrupting Al.*) I get it. You've got a system: Every two election cycles you see a doctor. So, who's got your vote this time?

CLAIRE. Nobody. He'll be in a hospital bed.

ART. Yeah, well, you might as well sit this one out. They're both in bed with big money. Only difference is, if the orange guy wins, he'll send my whole crew back to Ecuador and I'll be out of business.

BARB. The whole city would grind to a halt.

CLAIRE. Can't we get away from politics?

BARB. No. We're all affected. Even you.

CLAIRE. Me? How am I affected?

BARB. Well, let's see, Claire. What if nobody's left to pick the potatoes and you end up paying twice as much at the supermarket?

AL. We'll switch to pasta. That doesn't need to get picked.

BARB. Who's going to stock the shelves?

ART. Are we going to hear this story or not? (*to Al*) You were saying?

AL. Yeah, so the Indian lady says to me, "What do you got against doctors?" And I say, "No offense, doc, but I came in here because of sciatica and you're telling me I need a triple bypass. When I used to work in retail, that was called upselling."

CLAIRE. When did you ever work in retail?

AL. See? After thirty years of marriage, I can still surprise you.

CLAIRE. So, tell me.

AL. I was lying. I never worked in retail. But that's the way doctors are. Always the worst-case scenario. Never any optimism.

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CLAIRE. That sciatica was a blessing in disguise.

AL. Right. I feel truly blessed.

CLAIRE. It got you to see a doctor. What if your heart condition went undetected?

AL. One of two things. Either I'd go on like before, or suddenly it would be lights out. I wouldn't know it was coming. That's the way I'd like it. You know, surprise me.

CLAIRE. Don't even joke about it. *(Enter ASHLEY wearing a fast-food server's uniform.)*

ART. Hey. How's my girl?

BARB. Hi, sweetie.

AL. Hello, princess.

ASHLEY. Hey, everybody. *(Ashley goes around the room dispensing kisses.)* Uncle Art ... Aunt Barb... Pop ... *(Ashley turns to face Claire, hesitating to kiss her. Claire fans the air.)*

CLAIRE. I smell smoke.

ASHLEY. Gee, Mom. I just spent eight hours working in a barbecue pit. You think that has anything to do with it?

CLAIRE. I mean cigarette smoke.

ASHLEY. Look, Ma, I agreed I'd only smoke outside, and that's what I'm doing. So don't bust my chops.

AL. Come on, girls. Let's not get upset with each other.

ASHLEY. I'm not the one who started sniping at me when I walked in the door.

AL. Can we have a truce for one night?

CLAIRE. Yes. We're not being very considerate. *(to Ashley)* Let's make this evening as pleasant as possible for your dad. I'm sorry I said anything about your smoking.

ASHLEY. Forget it.

CLAIRE. No, you were right. We have an agreement and you're sticking to it. I was wrong.

ASHLEY. Fine.

AL. There, was that so hard? Doesn't your mom rate a kiss after that? *(Ashley gives Claire a kiss.)* I like to see my two girls getting along. *(Doorbell.)*

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ART. I got this.

AL. Here, let me give you something—

BARB. This is our treat. *(Art exits.)*

CLAIRE. *(To Al.)* No more pizza after tonight. We're going to start eating healthy.

AL. It's got anchovies. That's healthy.

CLAIRE. You're the only person in the world who eats anchovies.

AL. That's why there's a second pizza.

BARB. *(To Ashley.)* Are you staying? We ordered plenty.

ASHLEY. Sorry. I just came home to change. I have to meet Jared.

CLAIRE. Really? We're here to give Dad moral support.

AL. Lighten up, Claire. This is starting to feel like a wake.

ASHLEY. *(To Al.)* Do you mind if I don't stay?

AL. No, sweetheart. Go ahead. I've got plenty of company.

ASHLEY. I'll bring a big bucket of chicken to the hospital tomorrow.

AL. A side of mac 'n' cheese would be nice.

ASHLEY. You got it.

CLAIRE. What did I say about eating right?

ASHLEY. Jeez. It was just a joke.

BARB. Anyway, they'll have him on fluids.

AL. *(To Ashley.)* Then make it a bottle of Scotch.

ASHLEY. *To Claire.* That was a joke too.

CLAIRE. Yes, I know.

ASHLEY. Just making sure. *(Ashley exits upstage to her bedroom. Art enters from downstage right carrying a brochure.)*

ART. Now this is interesting.

BARB. Doesn't look like pizza.

ART. That was a Muslim lady running for City Council.

CLAIRE. Really? Was she wearing one of those— *(Claire gestures to indicate a hijab.)*

ART. No. Not the whole deal. Just a head scarf. Funny, a year ago I never noticed any Muslims walking around. Now I'm seeing them everywhere.

BARB. The community's really taking off. The mosque on Fifth and Elm just bought the adjacent lot to double their parking.

AL. As long as they're in the mosque, they're not blowing anything up.

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CLAIRE. But isn't that where they get radicalized?

AL. No, that's online. I'm fine with the parking as long as they don't set up a loudspeaker and blast that weird music ten times a day.

ART. Speaking of parking, now they're talking about an ordinance to change the zoning so you can't park a commercial vehicle in your driveway. So where do I park my truck? I know who's behind this. It's those goddamn hipsters rehabbing the factory district. Can they see my driveway from there? I'm spoiling their view? *(to Al)* When you were making air conditioners at Carwell, did you ever think they'd turn the place into a health club for snot-nosed kids from Brooklyn? And now we lost the hardware store and it's a— *(To Barb.)* whaddya call it?

BARB. Ramen restaurant.

ART. *(Scornfully.)* Ramen restaurant. You know, some folks worry about all the Hallal butchers and Latino restaurants and say the Muslims and Hispanics are breeding like rabbits, but that noodle joint scares me a lot more. In a few more years I'm going to cash out and buy an RV. Get the hell out of Dodge.

BARB. Over my dead body.

AL. Can we not talk about dead bodies?

BARB. Oh. Sorry, Al.

CLAIRE. He won't admit it but he's nervous about the surgery.

AL. Let's put it this way: I'll be happier this time tomorrow night.

BARB. Take it from a nurse. This kind of surgery has become so routine, it's like getting your tonsils out.

CLAIRE. I'll be there the whole time.

AL. I don't want you doing that. You don't need to sit around there all day.

BARB. They'll call you when he's out of surgery. You're better off waiting at home.

CLAIRE. That may be. But from the time he checks in until the time they move him into a room, a family member is going to be there at all times. That's just the way it's going to work.

ART. I can spell you at the hospital. I'm taking tomorrow off.

AL. Not on my account.

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ART. Hey, you think you're that important? No, seriously, I didn't want to mention this, but tomorrow's the Day of the Dead.

CLAIRE. What's the Day of the Dead?

AL. Probably not a great day for surgery.

ART. Don't worry about it. It's just that it's a big deal—kind of like Halloween on steroids—for the Ecuadorians, so I let them have the day. Every contractor in town's shutting down.

AL. Alright. Then do me a favor and keep an eye on Claire.

ART. Will do. *(Ashley enters wearing camouflage skinny jeans, combat boots, a leather bomber jacket, a tight, cropped tank and a military-style ball cap.)*

BARB. That was a quick change.

ART. All you're missing is an M16.

ASHLEY. Funny, Uncle Art.

CLAIRE. Don't be too late.

ASHLEY. I won't. Jared has work tomorrow.

BARB. Oh, what does Jared do?

ASHLEY. He's a guard.

ART. A security guard?

ASHLEY. He's a guard at Clinton Correctional. *(Silence.)* And a first lieutenant in the New York Citizens Militia.

ART. Whoa. A weekend warrior.

ASHLEY. You think it's funny?

ART. He and his buddies get together and shoot up shit on the weekends? Hey. Whatever floats your boat.

ASHLEY. That's a very simplistic way of putting it.

ART. Okay. Enlighten me.

ASHLEY. A civilian militia is our last line of defense against people who want to take away our freedom, like if that Hillary bitch wins and tries to overturn the Second Amendment.

BARB. For God's sake, she's just talking about gun control.

ASHLEY. That means taking away our God-given...

BARB. *(Interrupting Ashley.)* God-given what? Right to die? How many more Sandy Hooks and Columbines—

ASHLEY. If teachers carried guns, those things wouldn't happen.

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BARB. I can't believe my ears.

ASHLEY. The bad guys will always find a way to get guns. *(To Art.)* Did you fight in Vietnam, so we'd lose the right to arm and defend ourselves at home?

ART. I fought in Vietnam because I couldn't grow bone spurs like your old man did when he was drafted.

AL. No, that was the Orange Guy.

ART. So what was your deal?

AL. Eczema.

ART. Eczema? Are you shitting me?

CLAIRE. Art...

ART. Sorry, Claire. *(to Al)* Eczema. That's a new one.

AL. I wasn't going to argue.

ASHLEY. Go ahead and laugh, but you're the biggest victims.

ART. How's that?

ASHLEY. White working-class males have lost the most under Obama.

ART. Your memory's a little short. We weren't doing so great before that either.

ASHLEY. So you just sit there and take it?

ART. If you're a loser, at least no one's out to get what you've got.

AL. It's a dirty job, but somebody's got to do it.

ASHLEY. *(Sharply.)* Everything isn't a joke, Dad.

ART. Hey. This is my bad. I shouldn't have teased you about Harold.

ASHLEY. Jared.

ART. Sorry. Jared sounds like a ...concerned individual. I'm sure he's a good guy.

ASHLEY. He is.

ART. Well, he'd have to be if he's got someone as terrific as you for his girlfriend.

ASHLEY. Aw ... *(Ashley kisses Art.)*

AL. Got one for me? *(Ashley kisses Al.)*

ASHLEY. Take it easy, Pop. I'll see you in the morning.

AL. You got it, kiddo.

CLAIRE. Have a good time tonight.

ASHLEY. I will.

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ART. Don't drink and drive.

ASHLEY. I won't. (*Doorbell.*)

ART. That must be dinner. (*To Ashley.*) After you, my lovely.

ASHLEY. Night, you guys. (*Al, Claire, and Barb say their various goodbyes. Ashley and Art exit stage right.*)

BARB. How long have they—?

CLAIRE. A couple of months.

BARB. Have you met him?

AL. They “meet up” somewhere. That's how young people do it these days.

BARB. Wouldn't you expect, after a couple of months—

CLAIRE. At twenty-six, I think she wants her parents to stay out of it. I know he's a white Christian male. At least that's something.

BARB. How did they meet?

CLAIRE. She was at work one night. He came in for a bucket of chicken.

BARB. Is this a violation of her probation?

CLAIRE. If he's a prison guard, he can't have a record so she's not consorting with criminals.

BARB. I mean being around guns. And all this crazy talk about arming teachers?

CLAIRE. I think she's a bit under his influence, but she's not there when he drills.

BARB. But—a prison guard?

AL. Probably the best pay around if he doesn't have a trade

CLAIRE. I try not to be too judgmental. I'm just so glad to have her back.

BARB. Still going to meetings?

CLAIRE. Well, yes. She has to.

BARB. I meant you.

CLAIRE. (*Short.*) Yes.

AL. (*Al takes Claire's hand.*) I'm proud of them both. (*Art enters, waving pamphlets. He walks around the room, trying to hand them out.*)

ART. Get 'em while they're hot. Who wants to be saved?

CLAIRE. Oh, Lord. If you accept their literature, they'll keep coming back.

ART. C'mon. Four lapsed Catholics and no takers?

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CLAIRE. For the record, I'm not a lapsed Catholic.

AL. I'm lapsed enough for both of us. Give me one of those. *(Al takes a pamphlet from Art and studies it. Art takes another pamphlet and reads out loud.)*

ART. "And I heard a still, small voice saying, here is the way, walk in it."

AL. Tell that to the pizza guy. He must be lost. *(The doorbell rings, longer and louder than before.)*

SCENE TWO

Labor Day, 2008. Al and Art are sitting in the living room, watching a news program on TV. Art drinks a beer as Al takes apart the base of a blender.

TV NEWS REPORTER. ... Under the plan, the Treasury Department would be authorized to spend as much as \$70 billion to buy back mortgage-related securities, which have slowed and, in some cases, dried up the flow of credit. The Senate added an additional \$110 billion in addition to tax breaks, incentives, and other measures, including an expansion of coverage ... *(Art mutes the TV in disgust.)*

ART. Too big to fail? Fuck that. I say, let them fail. What are we saving their sorry asses for?

AL. If they go down, we go down.

ART. I got news for you, my friend. A lot of people *are* going down. If you sold this house today, you'd get 25 percent less than a year ago. That's not peanuts.

AL. I'm not selling. *(Al holds up the base of the blender.)* I remember when these were made in Cincinnati. They used to work.

ART. So you don't want to sell right now. But if you think you can just sit tight and wait for the market to get back to where it was four years ago, that ain't never gonna happen.

AL. Good thing I didn't buy four years ago.

ART. A lot of people did.

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AL. I understand people wanting to be homeowners, but if something sounds too good to be true—

ART. Yeah, well, these people don't have MBAs.

AL. Neither do I, but my old man taught me something anybody can understand: If you can't afford it, don't buy it.

ART. It's not that cut and dried. There's something called predatory lending.

AL. Yeah, and there's a sucker born every minute.

ART. You pay your taxes?

AL. Sure.

ART. Then you're a sucker.

AL. How do you figure that?

ART. So the Big Banks screw up, right? The market tanks. There goes the pension funds for the police and the fire fighters, all the city workers. City's on the hook. What do you think they're gonna do? Float a junk bond? Nah. Property taxes go up. You and me, my friend, we end up bailing out the guys who fucked up in the first place while they collect their end-of-year bonuses. Those butt wipes won't see a day inside a jail. Yeah, we're suckers.

AL. It's out of our hands. Why get angry about it? *(Ashley and Barb enter from the kitchen, each carrying a glass of club soda.)* How's it going there?

ASHLEY. Hey, Pop. I don't know what you did but now the microwave's working great.

ART. Your dad's a mechanical genius.

AL. Yeah, well, I think I just met my match. *(Al holds up the base of the blender.)* I can't believe the crap coming out of China. This is toast.

BARB. So, no Margaritas. Too bad.

AL. Sorry, girls.

ASHLEY. No way we're eating Mexican with no Margaritas.

AL. Then run over to All-mart and pick up another one. *(Art raises his beer bottle.)*

ART. I'll stick with beer.

BARB. Pace yourself, big guy.

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ART. Hey. This is my first. *(Al takes out his wallet and gives cash to Ashley.)*

AL. Think twenty ought to do it?

ASHLEY. Maybe thirty. I'll bring back the change. *(Al hands Ashley another bill.)*

AL. Got any change left over, get some more chips.

ASHLEY. Mom says you ate too many chips when she was away.

AL. How does she know? You rat me out?

ASHLEY. She saw all the bags in the trash.

AL. Back one day and already she's the food police. I hope she's not overdoing it in the kitchen.

BARB. I'm keeping an eye on her.

AL. She's still not one hundred percent.

BARB. I know that.

AL. But she doesn't. She thinks she can hit the ground running. *(Enter Claire.)*

CLAIRE. Who's not one hundred percent?

AL. I was just saying to Barb, you shouldn't overdo it in there.

CLAIRE. I'm not. I came out to take a breather. How's the repair going? *(Al indicates the disassembled blender with disgust.)*

AL. It's toast. Ashley's going to All-mart to replace it.

ASHLEY. And Dad asked for more chips.

AL. Traitor.

CLAIRE. You're going to start eating right now that I'm home again.

AL. Ashley made very healthy meals when you were away.

CLAIRE. Then what are all those fast-food containers doing in the garbage?

ASHLEY. *(Defensive.)* I cooked a lot.

CLAIRE. Since when did you learn to cook?

ASHLEY. I looked up recipes and followed the instructions. It's not rocket science.

AL. She's a quick study. She only set the chicken on fire once. *(Off Ashley's look.)* Just kidding.

CLAIRE. I still say you need to get your diet back on track.

ASHLEY. Sorry I fucked up the cooking, Mom.

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CLAIRE. Ashley, please. You know that kind of language—

ASHLEY. --upsets you. Yeah, well, I really did make him home-cooked meals every night except this past week because he knew you were coming home, and he asked for moo goo gai pan and all the other takeout you wouldn't let him have when you got back.

AL. Busted.

ASHLEY. That's why you're seeing all those containers. *(Silence.)*

ART. Hey--did you notice? It took them two months, but the city finally took away the tree.

ASHLEY. Like that's any consolation.

ART. What do you say, Claire? Still not going to sue?

AL. The city didn't cause the storm.

ART. But the tree was on city property. They're supposed to maintain it. You get hit by a dead bough, break your back, they're liable.

ASHLEY. She should sue Kohn's. The minute she's back from rehab, they let her go.

AL. They were going to downsize before any of this happened.

ASHLEY. So why pick her? She's got all this seniority.

ART. Frankly, honey, if you're culling the herd, she'd be the place to start. *(to Claire)* With all due respect, Claire, it's just business sense.

AL. She got a very nice package.

CLAIRE. Nice until it runs out.

AL. You've got 12 months' severance. You'll have a new job by then.

CLAIRE. At my age?

AL. You mean, with all your experience? You're very hireable

CLAIRE. I hope so.

AL. They'll be fighting over you.

CLAIRE. Our COBRA coverage runs out in three months.

AL. Then we'll have to dodge any other falling branches until we can sign up for Medicare.

ART. Not to worry. *(Indicates Barb.)* Once her pal Obama gets elected, there'll be free socialized medicine for everybody.

BARB. It's time we joined the rest of the civilized world.

ART. You say "civilized world," I say every time the government gets involved it screws things up.

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BARB. So the insurance companies are doing such a great job? They're just out to gouge the consumer.

ART. In a free market, competition drives prices down and the consumer comes out ahead.

BARB. Not if the whole industry is in cahoots.

ART. Oh, so now a conspiracy theory. Here we go.

BARB. Health care isn't Haagen-das. It's not discretionary. It doesn't belong in the free market.

ART. Says my wife the smoking nurse.

BARB. Notice how every time I'm winning an argument, he brings up my smoking?

ART. Who says you're winning?

BARB. Anyway, I never buy cigarettes. So how much of a smoker can I be?

ASHLEY. You already bummed two from me.

CLAIRE. It's such a filthy habit. I hope you'll quit. *(To Barb.)* Tell her you wish you never started.

BARB. I wish I never started. But as far as vices go, I could do a lot worse.

ART. So that's your excuse? Why do you need a vice?

BARB. I'll give it up eventually.

ART. Lord, make me good. Just not today.

AL. You two are chalk and cheese.

ART. Something must be working. We're going on twenty-three years.

BARB. For better or for worse. We're old school.

AL. And you know what they say...

BARB. No, what do they say?

AL. There's no school like an old school.

ASHLEY. God, Dad, that jumped the shark.

AL. Is that good or bad?

ART. Bad.

AL. I had a feeling.

ASHLEY. That's okay, Pop. I still love you even if your jokes suck.

CLAIRE. Ashley—

ASHLEY. Stink. Jesus.

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CLAIRE. Ashley—

ART. She keeps digging herself in deeper.

AL. (*Ending it.*) I love you too, kiddo. (*to Claire*) And you. I don't say it often enough.

CLAIRE. (*Mollified.*) It goes without saying. (*A beat.*)

BARB. (*To Ashley.*) This summer went by so quickly. What are your plans for the fall, young lady?

CLAIRE. Ashley's decided to take a gap year.

ASHLEY. See, that's Mom's way of saying I've decided not to go to college.

CLAIRE. For now.

ASHLEY. For, like, indefinitely.

CLAIRE. So when are you going to start looking for a job? It's been three months since you graduated high school.

ASHLEY. Hey. Someone had to look after Dad while you were in rehab.

CLAIRE. And that took up all of your time?

ASHLEY. Yeah, between cooking, cleaning, shopping and doing laundry.

CLAIRE. In other words, all the things I normally did on top of working a job for 25 years. (*Bitter.*) Until now.

ASHLEY. What happened sucks.

CLAIRE. Will you please—

AL. She's trying to sympathize.

CLAIRE. Of course you'll take her side.

AL. I'm not taking anybody's side.

ASHLEY. All I meant was, I know how much you loved your job.

CLAIRE. I loved my job. Your dad loved his job. It didn't make any difference. This is why I want you to get a college degree.

ASHLEY. Please, Mom. Don't start.

CLAIRE. I don't want you to turn out like us.

ART. Hey ... she could do a lot worse.

CLAIRE. She could do a lot better if she'd just apply herself.

BARB. You and Al have been wonderful role models.

CLAIRE. We both lost our jobs. (*To Ashley.*) I want you to have a real profession, where you'll have some security.

ASHLEY. What's a "real" profession?

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CLAIRE. Something you need a degree for.

ASHLEY. So, Dad worked at the plant for 30 years. You don't call that a profession? Even though he was using his brain all the time? He invented a whole new part—

AL. Hang on, now, I just—

ASHLEY. —a whole new fan coil—

AL. I just came up with the specs—

ART. That's not small potatoes.

AL. I'm not arguing that, but there's a big difference between the specs and the finished product. That's what engineers get paid for.

CLAIRE. (*To Ashley.*) If he'd had a degree, he would have been an engineer.

ART. (*To Al.*) So, the company gets the patent and you got what?

CLAIRE. A hundred-dollar bonus.

AL. For me, it wasn't about the money.

CLAIRE. It should have been. We could have been so much better off than we are now.

AL. Sweetheart, this is ancient history. We've gone over it again and again, and it doesn't change a thing.

CLAIRE. They took advantage of you. That's all.

AL. Hey, we were all a team back then. I was just glad to be a part of it.

ART. Yeah, some team. They're at peak profitability, and what do they do? Move all the jobs to Mexico.

CLAIRE. They wanted him to go down there and train his replacement. Can you imagine? Like he could be replaced.

AL. Maybe some things changed in the end. These new young guys managing things, with their MBAs, they weren't like the old guard. The guys I came up with, they were solid. That's what I like to remember. I had thirty good years and I'm grateful for that.

CLAIRE. I don't think you're capable of getting angry about anything.

AL. I try to look on the bright side. Now I drive for a car service and I'm grateful to get to sit down.

ASHLEY. You're grateful for everything.

AL. Well, maybe not the sciatica ...

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CLAIRE. (*To Ashley.*) It all comes down to getting a degree if you want any kind of future.

ASHLEY. So, I get a bullshit degree in whatever and still end up pulling lattes at Starbucks. Only now I've got fifty-thousand dollars in student loans. Screw that.

BARB. My nursing degree was a good investment.

ASHLEY. That was a hundred years ago.

BARB. I've never been out of work.

ASHLEY. I don't see myself as a caregiver.

AL. You took good care of me.

ASHLEY. You're family. I don't like the idea of wiping some stranger's ass.

BARB. There are lots of jobs in healthcare that don't involve wiping asses.

ASHLEY. (*Sarcastic.*) I'll give it some thought.

ART. How about I show you the landscaping business? Be your own boss. People will always pay to get the grass cut and the snow shoveled.

ASHLEY. I don't want to work that hard.

ART. Then get a job with Public Works.

ASHLEY. You mean those guys who didn't take down the tree?

ART. Yeah. They don't do shit. But they do take gals and they start you around 18 an hour, which isn't bad.

ASHLEY. So how do you get one of those jobs?

ART. Everybody and his second cousin's on the payroll.

ASHLEY. I'm nobody's second cousin.

ART. You are if you're a registered Republican. It's all pork.

ASHLEY. I'm not a registered anything.

ART. Well, get on it, kid. This may be the most historic election of your life.

ASHLEY. What difference does it make who's president? Things are still going to suck the same.

BARB. Aren't you a little young to be so cynical?

ASHLEY. Just being realistic. Since everyone's so interested in my future, you know what I might be good at? Managing a trailer park. I have no trouble seeing myself in a doublewide. Shit, everybody's losing their home, it's the wave of the future. Or maybe I'll be a cocktail waitress. You

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make a decent buck and then when it's over you go home and think, okay, you can make the rent and put gas in the car and there aren't any motherfuckers screwing with your head because you're smart enough to keep it down and keep things simple. And that's how you get to call the shots.

CLAIRE. What's all this trash talk about? I hope we raised you to aim higher than being a cocktail waitress.

ASHLEY. I just need everybody to back off right now.

ART. It's going to be alright, sweetie. There's plenty of time for you to figure things out. It's a lot harder these days for kids to make a start.

CLAIRE. Is it so wrong of me not to want her to have to worry about the things you and I have had to worry about?

AL. What have we—?

CLAIRE. I take that back. You never worry about a thing. I'm the one who's worried all along what would happen if we lost my income, as small as it was, because it made the difference between us getting by or not getting by. We're just little people. We don't get to decide how things are going to go. It's decided for us. But Ashley's smart enough to be—I don't know, a CPA? Just so her life doesn't end up in other people's hands. That's nowhere to be.

AL. You sound tired, sweetheart. I'm afraid you overdid it in the kitchen.

CLAIRE. I didn't do a thing. Barb did all the work.

BARB. And Ashley.

CLAIRE. Yes, sorry. And Ashley.

BARB. How's the pain?

CLAIRE. I think I'm about ready for another pill.

BARB. Where is it? I'll get it.

CLAIRE. In the kitchen by the toaster oven.

BARB. It's been four hours, right?

CLAIRE. Close enough. *(Barb exits to kitchen.)*

AL. *(To Ashley.)* Everything's going to work out.

ART. You bet it is.

ASHLEY. Yeah. Sure.

AL. Come on, now. This is supposed to be a celebration. *(To Claire.)* We got you back.

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ASHLEY. I better go get the blender. (*Barb enters with a pill bottle and a glass of water.*)

BARB. (*To Claire.*) No Margaritas for you tonight, on top of the Percocet.

CLAIRE. I'm fine with water. (*Barb gives a pill and the glass of water to Claire. Al and Art raise their beer bottles in a toast.*)

AL. Here's to my beautiful wife. Welcome home, sweetheart.

ART. Hear, hear. (*Ashley and Barb grab their glasses of club soda and join the toast.*)

BARB. Hear, hear. (*Claire downs her pill as the others gulp their drinks.*)

CLAIRE. I think I will lie down for a little while.

AL. That's a great idea. (*Ashley grabs her bag and heads for the front door.*)

ASHLEY. I'm off to All-mart.

ART. While you're there, get a job. (*off Ashley's look*) Or some chips.

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