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SF PERUSALS

Precious Little

by Madeleine George

A Samuel French Acting Edition

SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830

SAMUELFRENCH.COM

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In addition the following credit *must* be given in all programs and publicity information distributed in association with this piece:

***PRECIOUS LITTLE* was originally produced by Clubbed Thumb as part of Summerworks 2009, their annual festival of new plays**

PRECIOUS LITTLE was first produced in June 2009, as part of the Summerworks series, by Clubbed Thumb, Maria Striar, Artistic Director. It was directed by Hal Brooks. The set design was by Alexis Distler, the costume design was by Becky Lasky, the lighting design was by Lucrecia Briceno, and the sound design and original music were by Daniel Baker and Ryan Rumery. The stage manager was Donald Butchko. The cast was as follows:

A . . . . . .Randy Danson
B . . . . . Emily Ackerman
C . . . . . Kelly McCreary

PRECIOUS LITTLE was subsequently produced in March 2011 by Rivendell Theatre Ensemble in Chicago, Tara Mallen and Mary Cross, Producers. It was directed by Julieanne Ehre. The set design was by Chelsea Warren, the costume design was by Janice Pytel, the lighting design was by Diane Fairchild, and the sound design was by Christopher Kriz. The stage manager was Stephanie Hurovitz. The cast was as follows:

A . . . . . Marilyn Dodds Frank
B . . . . . Meighan Gerachis
C . . . . . Kathy Logelin

PRECIOUS LITTLE was produced in April 2011 by City Theatre in Pittsburgh, Tracy Brigden, Artistic Director. It was directed by Tracy Brigden. The set design was by Anne Mundell, the costume design was by Ange Vesco, the lighting design was by Andy Ostrowski, and the sound design and original music were by Eric Shim. The stage manager was Patti Kelly. The cast was as follows:

A . . . . . Laurie Klatscher
B . . . . . Kelly McAndrew
C . . . . . Theo Allyn

CHARACTERS

A – F, 60s **–** plays **THE APE, DOROTHY, CLEVA, THE BABY**

B – F, 40s **–** plays **BRODIE**

C – F, 20s **–** plays **THE ZOOGOERS, RHIANNON, EVELYN, DRE, GLORIA**

SETTING

Institutional enclosures: counseling room, office, ultrasound room, audio booth, zoo.

TIME

Early millenial.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

The Ape does not wear an ape suit.

The Zoogoers are a single character – the multivoiced character of a crowd – rather than one actor playing many roles. The actor who plays them should not "become" individual Zoogoers and interact with imaginary people, but rather hold mostly still, face mostly out, and allow the voices of the many Zoogoers to pass through her. She is a channel – a different kind of character from everyone else in the play.

The sparer the set, the better. One desk/table/gurney ought to do it; one recording console/ultrasound machine/lexigram board; one enclosure.

Generally, actors should move set pieces. Generally, actors should change costumes (if there are costume changes) in view of the audience. Transitions are part of the play, and should generally be lit (except, perhaps, where indicated), and played through rather than rushed through.

Creatures live and move over against us, but cannot come to us, and when we address them as Thou, our words cling to the threshold of speech.
– Martin Buber, *I and Thou*

What kind of beast would turn its life into words?
What atonement is this all about?
– Adrienne Rich, *Twenty-One Love Poems*

1.

(In black: Silence.)

(Then:)

(Jungle sounds. Foliage, birds, moisture.)

(Pinlight up on **THE APE***, draped over a great gnarled log. She reclines halfway, Odalisque, elegant and weary. She is barefoot; she wears Chanel. She does not wear an ape suit.)*

*(***THE APE** *lifts her big hand, a stalk of celery in it. She works the celery into her mouth contemplatively, grinding it into her face as if feeding a tree branch into a chipper – leaves and all.)*

*(***THE APE***'s every movement is animal, heedless and perfect, uncontaminated by ambivalence.)*

(Jungle sounds build.)

(We watch **THE APE***, spotlit, as through the peephole end of an Easter egg: odd figure in an odd world.)*

THE APE. *(even, calm)* I chew. I swallow. I recognize the vegetable. I drop my hand with the vegetable, forget the vegetable. A breeze. I swell my chest to it. Light comes from every direction here. Light comes from the ceiling, someone left the ceiling open here. I stretch myself out on what they have for me to lie on. I smell the air; it smells like buildings here. I smack my lips. I close my lips like a purse over my yellow teeth.

(Sudden shift, to which **THE APE** *does not react:)*

(Lights snap up, fluorescent and dry, to reveal **THE APE** *in her enclosure, upstage behind the glass – but there*

is no glass. Jungle sounds out. **THE ZOOGOERS** *are revealed, played by C, downstage facing out. The instant the shift occurs* **THE ZOOGOERS** *are talking.)*

THE ZOOGOERS. *(quick – pirouettes of talk)* Mom, look. I'm looking. Oh my *gosh* it's so realistic. Why's he just lying there? He's just chillin. No you're gonna see in a second, like – *voom!* He's gonna get up and start beating the ground. They look so much like people, how do people not believe in evolution? Hey Aliss, Alissa, lookit the gorilla. Hi gorilla. Hi gorilla. Why won't he say hi. Anna stop it, you wouldn't do that if there wasn't glass there. Okay guys, we saw him. Come on Rachel. Zach, come on, we're going to the next thing. We're going to see the *movie* about gorillas. Say bye bye monkey. Bye bye monkey. Bye bye monkey. Bye bye. Bye bye.

(Lights: abrupt, total.)

2.

(Holiday-Inn-yellow light up on the counseling room. Fake wood desk, phalanx of Holiday-Inn-uncomfortable chairs on either side. Manila file folder full of papers open on the desk.)

*(***BRODIE** *– practical, wry, calm – and* **RHIANNON** *– ponytailed, peppy, outstanding – are on their feet, about to shake hands.* **DOROTHY** *– assembled, aloof – sits beside* **RHIANNON***.)*

*(***RHIANNON** *seizes* **BRODIE***'s hand and shakes it vigorously.)*

BRODIE. Sarah Brodie. You can call me Brodie.

RHIANNON. Great, that's what you prefer to go by? Brodie? Great.

*(***RHIANNON** *drops* **BRODIE***'s hand to make a note of this in the open file on the desk.)*

BRODIE. It's what everyone calls me.

*(***RHIANNON** *drops her ball point and as abruptly re-grasps* **BRODIE***'s hand, resumes the shake.)*

RHIANNON. Great, it's great to meet you, Brodie. *(an explanation)* So I'm Rhiannon Doyle.

BRODIE. *(pleasant)* Rhiannon, is that as in rings like a bell through the night? And wouldn't you love to love her?

RHIANNON. Oh, um, yes, my parents really loved that song when it came out.

BRODIE. *(ha ha – I'm old enough to be your mother)* So did I.

RHIANNON. *(cheerful, blank)* Uh-huh.

*(***BRODIE** *turns to* **DOROTHY***.)*

BRODIE. And you are?

RHIANNON. Oh this is Dorothy Amberson, my mentor. She's going to be observing me today.

DOROTHY. How are you.

BRODIE. Nice to meet you.

*(***BRODIE** *and* **DOROTHY** *shake briefly.* **DOROTHY** *does not stand.)*

RHIANNON. She's not going to be speaking or participating, she's just going to be observing.

BRODIE. *(to* **RHIANNON***)* First day on the job?

RHIANNON. Oh no, oh no, we're just coming to the end of my transitional period. For the first two months all the new counselors work under the supervision of a mentor counselor and then the mentor counselor phases out. Dorothy's phasing out right now.

BRODIE. Before our very eyes?

DOROTHY. Feel free to ignore me, I'm used to it.

*(***BRODIE** *raises her eyebrows, takes a breath to say something but* **RHIANNON** *jumps in.)*

RHIANNON. Okay great, so why don't we get started. I usually like to start with a few basic questions just to give me a sense of where things are.

BRODIE. By all means.

RHIANNON. And I also like to give clients a heads-up that some of the questions I'll be asking today might feel pretty personal, we will be getting into some pretty personal areas today, but the reason I ask is only because I want to get as complete a picture of you as I can, so I can be really thorough about finding red flags. Okay?

BRODIE. Okay.

RHIANNON. Okay great, so if you'll just do your best to answer as honestly as possible that'll be great.

BRODIE. I'll do my best.

RHIANNON. Great. Okay.

*(***RHIANNON** *emits a satisfied little sigh, looks down at the open file to prompt her.)*

Okay so first of all name, that's covered – Brodie. And is this your first pregnancy, Brodie?

BRODIE. It is.

RHIANNON. Great. And how many weeks since your last menstrual period?

BRODIE. Twelve and a half.

*(***RHIANNON** *notes this.)*

RHIANNON. Great, okay, and your date of birth?

BRODIE. It's not on the chart there? That my OB faxed over?

RHIANNON. It is, yes, on the chart, I just want to confirm it for our records.

BRODIE. Nine twenty-one sixty-nine.

RHIANNON. Great, so that makes you…

BRODIE. Forty-two.

RHIANNON. Great. And is this pregnancy planned or unplanned?

BRODIE. Um…

RHIANNON. Okay, I know this might feel like one of those pretty personal questions I was talking about, but the reason I ask is just informational, so I can help you make decisions later on. In case I have to help you make decisions later on.

*(***BRODIE** *glances briefly at* **DOROTHY**, *back to* **RHIANNON**.*)*

BRODIE. People like me plan our pregnancies.

RHIANNON. People, you mean like older moms?

BRODIE. I mean like lesbians.

RHIANNON. *(medium. high. low.)* Oh. Oh. Oh.

(She nods a little too vigorously.)

BRODIE. We don't typically get *accidentally* knocked up.

*(***RHIANNON** *laughs to show she's not uncomfortable.)*

RHIANNON. No, you wouldn't, would you! *(She laughs again, musically.)* Well great. So okay then, huh, I'm just wondering about this series of questions about your husband then, do I just…skip them I wonder, or…?

*(***RHIANNON** *looks sideways at* **DOROTHY**.*)*

BRODIE. I'm guessing no.

*(***DOROTHY** *shakes her head slightly.)*

RHIANNON. No, of course, no I'm sorry, you just threw me for a loop for a second there – you're my first lesbian!

BRODIE. It's a pleasure.

RHIANNON. But okay yes, I am still going to need to ask you about the father –

BRODIE. Donor.

RHIANNON. Right, yes, because we will need his medical history today. So do you, I mean, is he available?

BRODIE. I happen to have him right here.

*(***BRODIE** *reaches into a briefcase by her feet and pulls out a dossier in a manila folder, hands it over to* **RHIANNON**, *who reads off it.)*

RHIANNON. Number Six Three Nine.

*(***RHIANNON** *begins to page through the dossier, increasingly impressed.)*

Wow, great. This is great.

BRODIE. Yes, they're very thorough at CryoBank.

*(***DOROTHY** *leans in to read over* **RHIANNON***'s shoulder.)*

RHIANNON. Wow, I've never actually seen a donor profile before. *(showing* **DOROTHY***)* They've got morbidity going back three generations, a full cancer tree, CMV infection – CMV infection, that's crazy! *(to* **BRODIE***)* Most actual people who come in here have no idea what their CMV status is.

BRODIE. What's CMV?

RHIANNON. *(dismissive)* Oh, cytomegalovirus, it's not important.

BRODIE. *Cytomegalovirus* is not important?

RHIANNON. You really don't need to know about it, I wasn't even going to mention it. But it's great that this has it, and he's negative, too, which is great.

*(***DOROTHY** *has eased the profile over into her viewing range, reads.)*

DOROTHY. "I am an outgoing and laid back and fun-loving guy. I get along with everyone and I like hanging out. My interests include stand-up comedy, kayaking, and hanging out with friends. I think this is a great opportunity to help other people while supporting myself as a sound engineering student."

BRODIE. Nice, right? Vigorous-sounding.

*(***DOROTHY** *smiles, takes a breath to respond to that, but* **RHIANNON** *reinserts herself into the center of the moment.)*

RHIANNON. Great, so if I can, if you don't mind?

*(***DOROTHY** *nods, recedes.)*

Okay so before I get into your history, Brodie, I just wanted to ask if there are any red flags you know about that you want to discuss up front. Any heritable diseases or other risk factors that you already know are on the table?

BRODIE. Not that I know of.

RHIANNON. So just your age.

*(***DOROTHY** *casts a look in* **RHIANNON***'s direction;* **RHIANNON** *misses it.)*

BRODIE. Right, I guess, just my age –

RHIANNON. *(apologetic)* Because, you know, one of the things we do have to tell people is that increased maternal age does increase the risk of birth defects.

BRODIE. Yes, I know.

RHIANNON. Of course the majority of pregnancies are uneventful, but it is true that for women over forty the overall risk of birth defects does actually go up to one in one hundred.

BRODIE. Yes, I understand, that's why I'm here.

RHIANNON. I know those statistics can be a little scary to hear, but –

BRODIE. No, I'm not scared of statistics.

RHIANNON. Great, that's great.

BRODIE. You know, I don't know what kind of person is usually sitting here across from you, but I didn't come here so you could convince me about amniocentesis, I came because I know I want the test.

RHIANNON. Oh, great.

BRODIE. I understand my situation. I waited a long time to get pregnant and now I'm perched on a statistical precipice, I get it.

RHIANNON. Great.

*(***BRODIE** *addresses most of the following to* **DOROTHY**.*)*

BRODIE. Not that I'm cavalier about having put myself in this position, I'm not a reckless person. I just, you know, I spent my twenties and the better part of my thirties working extremely, extremely hard, my research involves a great deal of travel and I spent years at a time in remote, isolated areas, and then I was on the tenure clock which you may or may not know is designed to suit the needs of young married men with stay-at-home wives and which absorbed all my energy until fairly recently, and then the all-consuming grant proposals, and when I finally did feel like I had the financial and institutional and, ah, emotional stability to turn my attention to this part of my life I was, you know, it was now.

RHIANNON. Sure.

BRODIE. I understand that there's risk involved in what I've done. But it was my choice to do it, it's my choice to have the test, and I'm prepared to make a new choice if it turns out something's wrong.

RHIANNON. Great. Great. That's great to hear.

(Lights.)

3.

(Lights up, watery, on **BRODIE***'s basement office at the university.)*

*(***BRODIE** *standing behind the desk,* **CLEVA** *– shy, sweet, old – and* **EVELYN** *– guarded, bulky-shouldered – sitting in front of it.)*

BRODIE. It's great to meet you.

*(***BRODIE** *shakes* **CLEVA***'s delicate hand.)*

EVELYN. It's no problem.

BRODIE. *(as if reminded of* **EVELYN***'s presence)* And you too, thank you for bringing her here.

EVELYN. It's no problem.

*(***BRODIE** *and* **EVELYN** *shake perfunctorily.)*

BRODIE. *(to* **CLEVA***)* It's such a stroke of luck for me to have found you right here in the city, I mean, all these years I've been working on Kari in the field where conditions are so rough, comparatively, and I'm just so excited to get to work with you here, in a real recording booth with real equipment and real stretches of time – I feel like we're really going to be able to shine a light into all the little dark corners of the language and just, document the hell out of it, you know?

*(***CLEVA** *smiles.* **EVELYN** *leans in.)*

EVELYN. *(concerned)* What do you mean, dark corners?

BRODIE. Oh I just mean, you know, every little beautiful grammatical structure. Every little phoneme.

EVELYN. *(tense)* Uh-hunh.

*(***BRODIE** *assesses* **EVELYN***'s wariness.)*

BRODIE. You do know how many speakers are left, don't you? It's in danger of dying out within one generation, your mother's first language. It's moribund.

EVELYN. Yeah. She doesn't use it anymore.

BRODIE. No I know, *no one's* using it anymore.

EVELYN. She came over on her own when she was young. Even she doesn't remember how old she was. For a while she lived with her aunt who spoke it with her, I guess, but then the aunt passed away and my mom was the last one left. She let it go.

BRODIE. So you don't speak any Kari with her?

EVELYN. Who me? I don't speak a word of that.

BRODIE. That's too bad.

EVELYN. No, it's no problem.

BRODIE. But you'd be so lucky to be a native speaker, it's not a typical language, I don't – maybe you don't know what's so rare about it, but Kari is sort of an extraordinary specimen, typologically, in that it combines a Finno-Ugric substrate with both Slavic and Turkic superstrates, it's an amazing mash-up of radically different grammars, *(to* **CLEVA***)* I mean, *you* know, I don't have to tell *you* how unusual it is. For us, to see the elaborate case structure of a typical Ugric language working right alongside the vowel harmony, for example, or the absolutely extraordinary body-based counting system that we typically associate with Tuvan or Mongol reindeer-herder languages from thousands of miles away, I mean, that's just not something you see every day.

*(***EVELYN** *stares blankly at* **BRODIE***;* **CLEVA** *stares brightly at* **BRODIE***.)*

*(***BRODIE** *forges on.)*

And as you know there are only half a dozen villages left up by Murmansk where you can still hear it on the street, Russian has completely decimated it at this point. *(to* **EVELYN***)* It would be wrong, it would be a tragedy, really, for us to let this extraordinary language die out without documenting it, not just because the language is beautiful, *(to* **CLEVA***)* although it is beautiful, but because of what Kari can teach us about language itself. *(moving into her spiel)* Because you know, our minds are really the final frontier, we've

seen to the edge of the universe and the bottom of the ocean and the beginning of time, for all practical purposes, and yet our own brains are still shrouded in mystery, and language is the key to unraveling that mystery. When languages die out, and more and more languages are dying out every day, we don't just lose the indigenous knowledge each language may carry, we lose an entire way of understanding what cognition is, what consciousness is, what, in the profoundest sense, human beings are.

*(***BRODIE** *looks at* **EVELYN** *and* **CLEVA** *like: See?)*

*(***EVELYN** *blank.* **CLEVA** *bright.)*

Anyway the point is thanks for coming in.

EVELYN. It's no problem.

BRODIE. Can I get you anything, glass of water, coffee, soda from the machine?

EVELYN. We're fine. **CLEVA**. Dr. Pepper.

BRODIE. *(to* **CLEVA***)* Oh. *(breaking into a smile)* Oh sure, absolutely. What I'll do is I'll get my grad student to grab one for you on the way to the booth, and you can have it in there with you while we record.

EVELYN. *(to* **CLEVA***)* No, she can't have soda, she knows that, it's bad for her acid reflux, and anyway we don't have time to stay today, I only have my lunch hour and then I have to put her back on the train.

BRODIE. Oh. Okay. That's no problem.

EVELYN. But we were going to discuss payment, you said over the phone?

BRODIE. Oh yes, absolutely, okay, here, here. *(She rifles her desk for forms.)* So we said seventy-five a session, right? And assuming that we'll probably do five or six over the next few weeks…All we need is for your mom to fill out this form and I can have the bursar cut a check for her within five days.

EVELYN. There's no possibility of cash?

BRODIE. Oh I wish we could, it's just, you know, the project has NEH support, so federal money, every little cent's got to be traceable. We don't compensate informants in cash.

EVELYN. Okay. Yeah, okay. Informant, did you call her?

BRODIE. That's just a technical term.

EVELYN. Like a stool pigeon? For the cops?

BRODIE. Oh no, no no! No that's just the term we use in these kinds of studies for the person who offers the raw data. The person who has the information, is the informant. *(to* **CLEVA***)* That's you.

CLEVA. Me.

*(***CLEVA** *smiles.* **BRODIE** *smiles.)*

*(***EVELYN** *doesn't smile.)*

(Lights shift.)

4.

(Evening light in Brodie's office.)

*(***DRE** *– quick-witted pain-in-the-ass tomboy – and* **BRODIE** *making out on Brodie's desk.)*

(Deep, sexy. Then **DRE** *pulls away.)*

DRE. Yeah, no, sorry, it's fucked up.

BRODIE. *("What is?")* What?

*(***BRODIE** *tries to pull* **DRE** *back into the kiss,* **DRE** *resists.)*

DRE. I'm sorry, it's just fucked up that you're, you know, that there's something growing in you.

BRODIE. Okay. I wouldn't use the word "something," I wouldn't use the words "fucked up," but –

DRE. Not fucked up like bad, just fucked up like, you know.

BRODIE. Yeah.

DRE. I'm like fine about it, I said I was fine. I just feel like, you know, we shouldn't be doing this anyway.

BRODIE. And why's that?

DRE. Well *you* know, *you* know, it's not smart. It hasn't been smart this whole time.

BRODIE. We're both adults. At least legally.

DRE. Hey – !

BRODIE. We're not breaking any rules. It specifically says "frowned upon" in the faculty handbook, it does not say "prohibited," it says "frowned upon."

DRE. No it's not that we're breaking the rules, it's just that, *you* know, I'm gonna come into the office one day and you're gonna be like, hey Dre can I see you a second, and I'll be like yeah what is it, and you'll be like oh, I've been thinking that maybe I'm not actually the best person in the department to chair your committee, and I'll be like oh, really?, still kind of naïve, and you'll be like yeah but I lined up McWhorter as a replacement

and why don't you go see him right now, and the next day you'll be like hey how'd it go with McWhorter and I'll be like great, he's really great with structured feedback and you'll be like yeah that's what I hear and hey you know what else I was thinking was that maybe Stengel's field work is a better fit for you than mine, and I'll be like okay, now I'm getting suspicious, and then you'll be like oh and coincidentally Stengel told me that he needs one more person for his Yakut-Buryat team and I volunteered you and you leave for Irkutsk next week and before I know what's happening to me I'll be in a fucking yurt with an eight-track in fucking Siberia looking around me like, what the fuck?

*(***BRODIE** *can't help but be amused.)*

BRODIE. Is that what's going to happen.

DRE. That's what happens to grad students who screw their advisors.

BRODIE. *(teasing, flirty)* Poor baby. It's cold in Irkutsk.

*(***BRODIE** *kisses* **DRE***; kiss, kiss;* **DRE** *breaks.)*

DRE. And you'd miss me, right?

BRODIE. And I'd miss you. Right.

DRE. You'd be like, Oh man, *now* who's gonna make out with me inappropriately in the booth?

BRODIE. I'd be like, now who's gonna transcribe the ten hours of data I'm about to collect from the new Kari informant?

DRE. Oh my God I can't wait to hear her.

BRODIE. You're going to love this one. She's ridiculously cute.

DRE. Cuter than Baba Anyuta?

BRODIE. There was nothing cute about Baba Anyuta.

DRE. Come on, telling us the folk tale about the kissing fish? While she force-fed us bowl after bowl of sour berry soup?

BRODIE. She was demented. By the end of the afternoon she was rocking you in her lap and singing you lullabies.

DRE. I fucking loved it. I was like, This is fieldwork? This fucking rocks.

BRODIE. I was like, Please stop stroking my assistant.

DRE. You were like, If anyone's going to stroke my assistant it's me.

*(***BRODIE** *smiles.)*

BRODIE. If anyone's going to take advantage of my assistant on the floor of a mildewed Soviet-era hotel, it's me.

*(***DRE** *smiles. Kiss. Kiss.* **DRE** *breaks.)*

DRE. Hey um. I was thinking we should go out and do something together. In the world.

BRODIE. Why?

DRE. 'Cause it's a thing human beings do for pleasure? Called "socializing"?

BRODIE. I've heard of it, yeah.

DRE. Not dumb socializing, obviously, not dinner and a movie, I was thinking like, What is something super rigorous and strange that would actually appeal to her arcane sensibilities?

BRODIE. And you came up with…?

DRE. *(ta-da!)* The zoo. *(beat)* Wanna come with me to the zoo?

BRODIE. Um, not really.

DRE. Come on! It's pay-what-you-want day at the zoo on Friday, I'm going, you should come.

BRODIE. *That's* what you thought would appeal to my sensibilities? The *zoo?*

DRE. Yes because zoos rule.

BRODIE. Sorry, I'm not much of an animal person.

*(***BRODIE** *shifts away.)*

DRE. Yeah, you're cold hearted.

BRODIE. I am not, I just feel about zoos the way I feel about mental hospitals. All the sad faces locked up in the rooms, all the bony fingers clutching the bars…

DRE. Okay it's nothing like that, we have a prize-winning zoo in this town, it's totally innovative and cruelty-free and accurate about reproducing natural habitats, and I was specifically thinking you should come with me on Friday because they just got this new talking ape.

BRODIE. *(quick, authoritative)* No such thing.

DRE. It's real, I read about it in the *Post*. They got it from some defunded language-acquisition study in Arizona, apparently it knows like thirty words.

BRODIE. My Tivo knows thirty words, that doesn't mean it talks.

DRE. Okay, but –

BRODIE. You *know* what I think about those studies. The NSF can barely be bothered to support the preservation of languages we're about to lose forever but they'll happily dole out millions to a bunch of ponytailed Sea World trainers teaching pidgin English to monkeys – I refuse to be party to that bullshit. I'm not going all the way up to the zoo to stare at some government-funded circus act.

*(***DRE** *starts to gather up her stuff to go.)*

DRE. Fine. I just thought you might like to meet somewhere in public for once. Do something else besides fuck and transcribe.

(Lights.)

5.

(Imaging center light, dim and blue. **BRODIE** *on her back on an examining table facing up.* **GLORIA** *– sweet, thoughtful, restrained – on her feet beside her.)*

(An ultrasound machine with a screen facing upstage that only **GLORIA** *can see, a big screen over Brodie's head, mounted high upstage where she – and we – can see it. Screen dark.)*

BRODIE. I'm sorry, I didn't catch your name?

GLORIA. Oh I'm Gloria.

BRODIE. Nice to meet you, I'm Brodie.

GLORIA. Hi.

BRODIE. Hi.

(pause)

GLORIA. So are we waiting on someone before we get started?

BRODIE. Who?

GLORIA. I don't know, is someone with you today?

BRODIE. Oh, no. I'm on my own today.

GLORIA. Okay. I guess I'll get started, then.

BRODIE. Okay.

*(***GLORIA** *fiddles with the machine.)*

BRODIE. So are people usually pretty scared at this point?

GLORIA. *(pleasant)* Not really. I guess some of them. You don't have to be scared.

BRODIE. I'm not thrilled about the needle, I have to admit.

GLORIA. It's not that bad. You're gonna be fine. If you feel afraid you can hold my hand.

BRODIE. *(small)* Thanks.

GLORIA. First of all we'll look around in there, see how everything's going in there, and then when the doctor comes in to perform the procedure I'll swab your

abdomen with iodine to disinfect it. Your skin might be a little stained for a day or two in the area where I apply it.

BRODIE. Yeah, okay. I'm okay with that. *(pause)* So do people usually ask you a lot of questions?

GLORIA. I guess some of them. Do you have a question?

BRODIE. Well, I was just wondering what made you want to go into this line of work.

GLORIA. Oh, that's funny, you mean questions about me? No, people don't usually ask about me.

BRODIE. I'm just curious. You don't have to talk about it if you don't want to.

GLORIA. No, no, I don't mind. I guess, hm. I guess I always wanted to do something like this, even when I was little.

BRODIE. Even when you were little you wanted to be an ultrasound tech?

GLORIA. Um, I had an aunt who did it? And it pays good, the hours are regular, you can make your own hours.

BRODIE. Uh-hunh.

GLORIA. And you get to spend all day watching babies swim around in space. I mean, not in cardiac or sports injury or something, but obstetric sonography is pretty nice. People are pretty happy here.

BRODIE. And do you –

GLORIA. I'm just gonna have you scootch your bottom down a smidge.

BRODIE. No, sure.

GLORIA. And just…a couple more inches.

BRODIE. Sure.

GLORIA. That's perfect. So we can give you a shot of lidocaine at the insertion site if you think you might have a problem with pain.

BRODIE. I might, I might have a problem with pain.

GLORIA. Okay.

BRODIE. What kind of pain are we talking about?

GLORIA. It's usually pretty mild. You'll feel a pinch and then some pressure and possibly cramping.

BRODIE. You guys always say "pinch" when you mean "sting," why is that?

GLORIA. I don't know, that's funny, I don't think I mean "sting."

BRODIE. I'll feel cramping while it's happening?

GLORIA. Most ladies have some mild cramping during the procedure. But some ladies don't even feel it. I had it three times, I barely felt a thing. And the anesthetic won't help with the cramping anyway.

BRODIE. So fuck it.

GLORIA. Excuse me?

BRODIE. Forget the anesthetic. One puncture wound is enough.

GLORIA. Really it's not a puncture wound, it's the thinnest needle, you're going to be fine.

*(***BRODIE** *drops into herself.)*

(pause)

GLORIA. Warm gel.

BRODIE. *(startled)* What?

GLORIA. Oh I'm just warning you: warm gel.

*(***GLORIA** *squirts a blob of gel onto* **BRODIE***'s semi-exposed stomach.)*

BRODIE. Oh. Thanks for warning me.

GLORIA. It's no problem.

*(***GLORIA** *fiddles with the machine, picks up the ultrasound wand, mooshes the gel on* **BRODIE***'s stomach around with the wand.)*

(The pulsing underwater thrum of the ultrasound.)

Almost there.

(Pause. **GLORIA** *works.)*

BRODIE. So you have three kids?

GLORIA. No, I had three amnios. Okay, hon, look.

*(***GLORIA** *points up to the screen above* **BRODIE***'s head.)*

(On the screen appears **THE BABY***, a silvery fish, darting in and out of focus, sometimes only a slice of her visible, sometimes a sudden vision of her complete body.)*

(She moves in jerks and spasms, punches and kicks the walls of her enclosure.)

BRODIE. Wow.

GLORIA. There we are.

*(***GLORIA** *moves the mouse on the machine. A little arrow floats over* **THE BABY***, sweeps the flickering staticky curve of her back.)*

Okay, right there, see, is the spine.

BRODIE. Wow.

GLORIA. And here's the eye.

(The arrow rests briefly on **THE BABY***'s head.)*

BRODIE. Wow.

GLORIA. And here you can see the heart beating.

(The arrow circles the center of **THE BABY'***s body.)*

BRODIE. Oh my God.

(Unselfconsciously, without looking at her, **BRODIE** *reaches out for* **GLORIA***'s hand.* **GLORIA** *drops the mouse, takes* **BRODIE***'s hand easily, unremarkably. They watch* **THE BABY** *for a beat, holding hands.)*

*(***THE BABY***'s arm flails up and down, a quick flash.)*

GLORIA. Someone's waving at you.

BRODIE. Oh…

GLORIA. Someone wants to say hi. Say hello, baby.

BRODIE. *(self-conscious)* Oh, I don't…

*(***GLORIA** *lifts* **BRODIE***'s hand and makes it wave back at* **THE BABY***.)*

GLORIA. Hello, baby.

BRODIE. Hello, baby. Hello. Hello.

(Lights.)

6.

*(***CLEVA** *in the recording booth upstage, behind glass [but there is no glass]. She's dwarfed, comically, by a big pair of 70s-era headphones over her ears.)*

*(***BRODIE** *and* **EVELYN** *downstage,* **BRODIE** *facing the booth,* **EVELYN** *facing* **BRODIE**.*)*

EVELYN. When she woke up this morning she didn't seem up for it, I said forget it, it doesn't matter, but she insisted on coming.

BRODIE. *(her attention elsewhere)* Well I'm so glad you made it.

EVELYN. She could run out of energy at any moment. I didn't really explain it to you but she's got Type II diabetes, and arthritis and high blood pressure, she's a fragile lady. I don't know what you need her to do in there, but –

BRODIE. There's really nothing to worry about, she's just going to be reading words off a page. It's not calisthenics.

EVELYN. It doesn't take much to wear her out, is what I'm saying. I'll be here to keep an eye on her, but just in case things get out of hand while she's in the box maybe we should work out a signal? *(loud, to* **CLEVA** *through the glass-that-isn't-glass)* What do you think, Ma, maybe you wave like this?

*(***EVELYN** *waves, demonstrating the signal.)*

*(***CLEVA** *waves back, friendly.)*

And that means it's time to quit. *(to* **BRODIE***)* How's that?

BRODIE. I mean, sure. But she's gonna be fine.

*(***BRODIE** *presses a button and speaks into a microphone, into* **CLEVA***'s ears.)*

How you doing, Cleva, you ready in there?

*(***CLEVA** *nods, big smile, thumbs up.)*

EVELYN. I can't hear her.

BRODIE. She's not talking yet.

EVELYN. Tell her to speak up.

BRODIE. But she's not –

*(***EVELYN** *leans into the microphone, crowding* **BRODIE**.*)*

EVELYN. Speak up, okay, Ma? And don't forget we gotta be out of here at one.

BRODIE. Okay but *(into the mic)* don't rush, okay, Cleva? I'd rather you didn't speak quickly, so we can make sure the clarity is good in the recording.

*(***CLEVA** *nods, big smile, thumbs up.)*

Okay, so today we're doing basic phonetic work, you'll see I've got just a big vocabulary list there for you to read grouped by sound. So I'm going to give you a 3-2-1 countdown, and then you begin. Just read what it says on the page, okay?

(In the booth **CLEVA** *mouths "okay.")*

*(***BRODIE** *fiddles, adjusts, clears her throat. Looks at* **CLEVA**, *nods encouragingly: Here we go!)*

Three, two, one.

*(***BRODIE** *presses a button.* **CLEVA** *takes a deep breath, holds the paper up to read.)*

*(***CLEVA***'s voice over the loudspeaker, clear and strong.)*

CLEVA. *(intercom)* Kalesuuala. *(pause)* Issakauula. *(pause)* Baluualka. *(pause)* I have a question.

*(***BRODIE** *hits a button.)*

BRODIE. Of course.

CLEVA. *(intercom)* Kalesuuala means morning, issakauula means… *(She thinks.)* ribbon, and baluualka means dog, I don't understand why it's "morning ribbon dog."

EVELYN. *(warning)* Ma?

BRODIE. No it's okay, it's a good question. *(to* **CLEVA***)* I know it might seem weird, Cleva, but remember we're not telling a story. We're just collecting the sounds you make. So the meaning of the words isn't important.

CLEVA. The meaning isn't important?

BRODIE. No, see, in the column you just started reading the phoneme we're focusing on is "uu." See how the "uu" sound recurs in every word?

*(***CLEVA** *peers at the paper, nods.* **EVELYN** *leans in to* **BRODIE** *again.)*

EVELYN. Just read it like she told you, Ma.

BRODIE. No it's okay. It's okay to ask. *(to* **CLEVA***)* Whenever you're ready you can start again.

CLEVA. Do I need 3-2-1?

BRODIE. Just go ahead.

*(***CLEVA** *neatens the script in front of her, raises it, and reads.)*

CLEVA. KalesUUala. *(pause)* IssakaUUla. *(pause)* BalUUalka.

*(***BRODIE** *hits the button.)*

BRODIE. Okay, Cleva? I hate to interrupt you but I'm just going to interrupt you for a second here, because you don't have to stress the "uu" sound, in fact don't stress the "uu" sound, okay? Just read the words exactly as you would read them normally, just like you'd say them every day.

CLEVA. Every day I speak English.

BRODIE. No I understand, I mean, just as you would speak them to someone from your hometown.

CLEVA. Aha. Okay. *(She cues herself.)* Three two one. *(She reads, clearly, strangely, beautifully.)* Kalesuuala. Issakauula. Baluualka. Suuridenne. Kaikuutte. Komekuumne. Olnuuzhe. Lopuusaishe. Nuuoremme. Tuuretan. Tuukselle. Raihotuuzhe.

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