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# Belles: The Reunion

Mark Dunn

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION

**SAMUEL  
FRENCH**  
FOUNDED 1830

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ISBN 978-0-573-70495-6

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**BELLES: THE REUNION** opened at McKinney Repertory Theatre in McKinney, Texas on October 9, 2015. The director was Pamela Harden. The producer was Jacob Correll. The stage manager and costume designer was Nicole Holbert. The set was designed by Jacob Correll and Pam Harden. The lighting designer was Alex Ammons. The sound board operator was Dan Slay. The light board operator was Sara Tamimi. Special assistance was rendered by Terry Copeland. The Walker sisters (in order of character age) were played as follows:

**PEGGY REESE**. . . . .Linda Eicher  
**ANEECE WALKER**. . . . .Vanessa Chandler  
**AUDREY HART**. . . . .Jean Roberts  
**SHERRY WALKER**. . . . .Davette Shands  
**ROSEANNE CORBETT** . . . . . Katrina Jones  
**PAIGE HUDDLESTON**. . . . . Nicole Holbert

## **CHARACTERS**

**PEGGY REESE** – age 65, Memphis Tennessee, (Area Code 901)

**ANEECE WALKER** – age 62, New York City (Area Code 212)

**AUDREY HART** – age 57, Collierstown, Mississippi (Area Code 601)

**SHERRY WALKER** – age 55, Santa Fe, New Mexico (Area Code 505)

**ROSEANNE CORBETT** – age 54, Marietta, Georgia (Area Code 770)

**PAIGE HUDDLESTON** – age 47, Cedar Rapids, Iowa (Area Code 319)

## **WHERE THE BELLS RING**

The stage is divided into six distinct sections or “mini-sets,” all visible to the audience as the play begins. The stage should not have a cluttered, crowded look. Each area should be furnished with as little furniture and as few props as possible to suggest the following:

Peggy Reese’s living room

Aneece Walker’s bedroom

Roseanne Corbett’s kitchen

Audrey Hart’s den

Sherry Walker’s patio

Paige Huddleston’s living room

Each of the six areas of the stage will also require its own lighting; the play will sometimes resemble a split-screen montage, with our attention moving quickly from one location to another as conversations start and finish or alternate between sisters.

## **WHEN THE BELLS RING**

From Saturday morning to early Monday morning on a weekend in October, 2014. The play ends with a coda in limbo set at some undesignated point in the future.

## AUTHOR'S NOTES

In the original *Belles*, first produced in 1988, and therefore roughly set around that time, each of the Walker sisters had landline phones, which by 2014, as we all know, were becoming extinct. Still, the ages of the sisters in this sequel argues for at least half of these women holding on to their traditional phones (even if they have cell phones as well). For the purpose of our story, the three oldest sisters – Peggy, Aneece, and Audrey – use traditional landline phones. The three youngest – Sherry, Roseanne, and Paige – use cell phones. We'll assume that some of these sisters also Skype, but not on this particular weekend.

Although *Belles: The Reunion* was written as a stand-alone play – one that even an audience unfamiliar with its antecedent might appreciate – I think the optimum staging concept, speaking as one who doesn't have to worry about either the financing or the logistics involved – would be to produce the play in repertory with the original *Belles*, cast, obviously with two different ensembles, representative of two different generational incarnations of the same characters. To facilitate a companionate presentation, I've employed the same unit staging set-up for *Belles: The Reunion* as that used in the original *Belles*, obviously with different set dressing for each play.

If a theatre company wished to go the repertory route, I would make the additional suggestion that for the benefit of audiences wishing to attend performances of both plays, the assignment of the sisters' spaces on the stage be identical in each. I believe that the various character evolutions stand out in stronger relief when projected upon a backdrop of familiarity and continuity.

## FOREWORD

Back in 1986 when I was a wet-behind-the-ears playwright with a handful of one acts and a couple of failed attempts at full-length plays in my satchel, I began work on the play, which, among all of my thirty-plus full-length plays over a quarter-century-long career of writing for the stage, became my most popular and enduring. *Belles* literally launched my career, as well as my long and happy affiliation with Samuel French, Inc., which continues to publish and license my work, largely for the amateur stage.

Of all the hundreds of characters I've written over the years, both those that live on the stage and those that live on the pages of my novels and short stories, I reserve a special spot in my heart for the six Walker sisters. They have become, in an odd way, like real sisters to me, and it's been fun watching all the different theatrical realizations of these women in the many productions of *Belles* I've attended around the country. Because these six women have never left my consciousness, and have probably informed in some small way every other character I've ever written, I started to wonder whatever became of them in the context of that world I'd created for them. Like me, they're now twenty-five years older, struggling with all those life adjustments that we must inevitably make as we transition begrudgingly from middle to old age. I wondered: to what degree had they changed? I've found that the older we get, the more hurdles we must surmount and the more disappointments come along that must be taken in stride. Disappointment and loss become permanent fellow travelers in those later legs of life's journey. How were my Walker sisters holding up?

I'm happy to report they're all alive and relatively well, considering the odds, and even Mama is still around, and determined to keep on being around, at whatever cost to her daughters' sanity. But life has taken its toll on all of the belles. How are they coping? Have the relationships between the sisters changed? Spoiler alert: they have, and in interesting ways.

When I was trying to decide if I wanted to invite them back into my creative life, I wondered if they would just sit there staring at me in stony silence, while deliberately withholding their opinions and their secrets from this meddling, intrusive scribe. Fortunately, they did not. They walked right in, plopped themselves down, and proceeded to never shut up. And I think I was fairly successful in getting down most of what they had to say, though they did surprise me from time to time in their unbosoming.

The original *Belles* has become somewhat iconic. Would *Belles: The Reunion* stake out a similar place in the canon? As of my writing this, the jury is still out. But if I don't succeed as well as I did with my first visit with these loquacious telephone-lovin' southern belles, it certainly was nice getting to know them all over again. Hopefully, others will enjoy the visit, as well.

– Mark Dunn  
January, 2015

*Again, and always, for Mary.*



## ACT ONE

*(AT RISE - Lights come up on: all six spaces, empty at present. One by one, each space goes black [or as close to a state of blackout as is feasible], with the exception of that part of the stage representative of PEGGY REESE's apartment living room. It is Saturday morning.)*

*(After a moment, PEGGY REESE enters. She goes and sits down next to her telephone table and pulls the phone into her lap. Having lost none of her organizational compulsiveness over the last twenty-five years, she carries a pad and pencil. She places the pad on the table and makes a check mark, then dials a number. Lights come up in AUDREY's den. The phone rings a couple of times before AUDREY HART enters to answer it. She is dressed in a clown costume. Note that she doesn't wear clown makeup. She holds a colorful clown wig in her hand, which she tosses aside as she answers.)*

AUDREY. Hello?

PEGGY. Hi Audrey. It's Peggy.

AUDREY. What happened?

PEGGY. Why do you think something happened?

AUDREY. Because you're calling. What did she do?

PEGGY. I don't know how to say it.

AUDREY. Peggy, nothing you could tell me will surprise me.

PEGGY. Ms. Coliatus called this morning.

AUDREY. I always thought that was such an interesting name. It sounds like "Colitis." It's like, "So nice to meet you, Ms. Crohn's Disease."

PEGGY. Do you want to know what happened or not?

(*cranky*)

I'm just performing my duty here. I'm just going down my list.

AUDREY. Am I last?

PEGGY. What?

AUDREY. On your list. Am I last? I'm usually last.

PEGGY. As it so happens, Miss Smarty-pants, you're first this time.

AUDREY. (*sincerely*) That was thoughtful. I really appreciate that.

PEGGY. Practically speaking, you should *always* be first. Since you live the closest. I mean, in case there's an emergency and I need one of ya'll to come to Memphis and help me out.

AUDREY. Is this one of those times? Do you need me to drive to Memphis, Peggy? Please don't tell me this new nursing home is throwing her out too. Hasn't she only been there a month?

PEGGY. Even less than that. She hates it, Audrey. She tells me she hates it every time I go see her. And now Ms. Coliatus reports that – well, I'm just going to tell it to you the way she told it to me: Yesterday morning Mama walked into the community room and placed herself in front of the television while *The View* was on, and proceeded to take off all her clothes.

AUDREY. Every stitch?

PEGGY. Ms. Coliatus said she was standing there “butt naked” – I think Ms. Coliatus was raised in a swamp – butt naked right there in front of Whoopi Goldberg and Nicolle Wallace and that other new one – the Latina. I read that we're supposed to call them Latinas.

AUDREY. I don't watch *The View*.

PEGGY. Anyway, I now have to drive over there and talk to the head of the nursing home about whether it might not be best for Mama to pack up and, in the words of

Ms. Crohn's Disease, "Get the hell out of here." And Audrey, I simply don't know where else to put her. This will be number three. I'm running out of options.

AUDREY. Do you think –

PEGGY. Don't say it.

AUDREY. Say what?

PEGGY. What you're thinking.

AUDREY. I'm not thinking that at all.

PEGGY. Then how do you know what I think you're thinking?

AUDREY. Oh, Peggy, you're giving me a headache.

PEGGY. Because I just do not have room for her in this tiny apartment.

AUDREY. I know you don't.

PEGGY. I hardly have room to turn around in here myself.

AUDREY. I *know* that, Peggy. That's why I was wondering if maybe I should take her in for a while.

PEGGY. I thought about maybe *all* of you taking her for a while. Taking turns.

AUDREY. Now I think that would be very fair.

PEGGY. Of course, I wouldn't want to subject any of you to her for more than a few months at a time.

AUDREY. Even though *you* took care of her for almost thirty years?

PEGGY. That's different. I *wanted* to. And I could afford to. I mean, until recently.

AUDREY. Don't you worry about it, Peggy.

PEGGY. I know it won't be easy. She has dietary issues and there are all these different medications you have to keep track of.

AUDREY. And she sometimes takes her clothes off in front of people. That might take a little getting used to. Which reminds me: wasn't Roseanne going to look into putting her into some kind of – what did she call it?

PEGGY. Mental institution?

AUDREY. I think there's a kinder word for it. But "nut-house" always worked for Harry.

*(glancing up at an implied clock)*

I really have to go, Peggy. I'm late for my little show at the children's hospital.

*(She picks up her clown wig and starts to put it on.)*

PEGGY. Are you going as Bimbles?

AUDREY. Oh yes. Bimbles is pretty much the only character I do these days. The children really seem to love her, except, obviously, those children who are afraid of clowns. But that's why I don't wear the clown makeup. Without the clown makeup, I can usually talk them down from the precipice of fear.

PEGGY. I really admire you, Audrey.

AUDREY. Everybody does a little something.

PEGGY. I mean, the fact that you keep going back to that hospital where little Harry died.

AUDREY. It helps me, Peggy. I see him in each and every one of those sweet bald-headed children. You call me later and tell me what the others said. Oh. Are you going to call Aneece?

PEGGY. I thought *somebody* should.

AUDREY. I'd be happy to call her for you.

PEGGY. Would you mind? You're an angel.

*(beat)*

How is she?

AUDREY. She's doing really well. From what Michelle's told me. Eight years sober as of the last time we talked.

PEGGY. I'm really proud of her.

AUDREY. *(matter of factly)* One Walker sister eight years sober, and another fifteen years drunk. There's such a nice balance to our lives these days.

PEGGY. Audrey, I wish you wouldn't –

AUDREY. *(gently remonstrating)* I only drink after six o'clock.

PEGGY. And that's – ?

AUDREY. Six o'clock in the *evening*, Peggy. Bye.

PEGGY. Bye.

AUDREY. (*just remembering something*) Oh, wait!

PEGGY. What?

AUDREY. Cousin Judith sent me a box of candy. Did she send you one too?

(*PEGGY picks up the candy box that has been lying on her table.*)

PEGGY. The FedEx man brought it last night.

AUDREY. What are we supposed to do with it?

PEGGY. Didn't you get the letter? We're supposed to eat it. Then we're supposed to fill out the survey and tell her how we liked it. We're her "beta-tasters."

AUDREY. I like Judith's candy. Some day I'd like to drive to Kansas City and visit her little shop.

PEGGY. You don't know? She doesn't have the shop anymore. The health authorities closed it down.

AUDREY. Then I'm not sure I want to "beta-taste" her new candy.

PEGGY. That *was* a while ago.

AUDREY. Are *you* going to eat it?

PEGGY. I might. Although, I have a house full of Halloween candy. I have a sort of reputation in my neighborhood. I always buy Godivas and Ghirardellis. The kids start lining up in front of my apartment building before dark.

AUDREY. I love children. They're our future.

PEGGY. They are, Audrey. They are.

AUDREY. (*warmly*) Bye, Peg.

PEGGY. Bye, Audrey.

(*Both hang up. Lights go out in AUDREY's den as she exits. PEGGY puts down the candy. She stares at her pad, as if deciding who next to call. Decision made, she dials. She listens, and finally speaks into the phone.*)

Hi Sherry. It's Peggy.

*(Just realizing something, she slaps herself in the head.)*

I am so sorry. I totally forgot that you're selling at the artist market this morning. I need to talk to you about Mama. Can you call me when you get home? Love you.

*(PEGGY hangs up. She depresses the plunger and dials again. Lights come up in ROSEANNE's kitchen. ROSEANNE CORBETT enters, talking on her cell.)*

**ROSEANNE.** *(with a shrug)* I just don't drive down to Atlanta much anymore. The traffic has gotten *so* horrible. Wait a minute. I've got another c – No. It's just my sister Peggy. It can wait. It'll be about Mama. It will be about some harebrained thing that Mama just did.

**PEGGY.** *(Into phone, leaving ROSEANNE a message.)* Hi Roseanne. You wouldn't believe what harebrained thing Mama did this time. Call me, honey. *(She hangs up. While PEGGY considers the names remaining on her list, ROSEANNE continues with her call.)*

**ROSEANNE.** Yes, she's still living downtown with Roy and the kids. But I don't want to impose. Roy has said a few things that got back to me.

*(listens)*

Well, they just did. They got back to me. He's never liked me. I know I'm being – well, it's just that I don't think I'm one of his favorite people.

*(listens)*

You're right. It could just be a mother-in-law thing, but regardless, June-Ellen, I just don't like to go where it's so obvious I'm not wanted.

*(She listens to June Ellen's response as PEGGY checks off another name and speed dials another sister.)*

*(continuation into phone; countering an accusation)* Of course I want to see my grandchildren! And to her credit, Melissa *does* bring them up here a couple of times a month, but I refuse to be one of those mothers that just horn in on her grown kids all the time.

*(She listens.)*

PEGGY. *(into phone)* Hi Paige. Could you call me back, honey? Your mother took off all her clothes in the community room of her nursing home and everyone's overreacting! Call me, baby-girl.

*(She hangs up, gets up, leaves the room, though the lights stay on here.)*

ROSEANNE. She's still in California. When was the last time we talked? She's becoming a Jew. No, I'm not. Melanie is converting to the ancient faith of her new husband. Isn't that a hoot?

*(listens, frowns)*

I wasn't being disrespectful. I think it *is* a hoot. Her father was a Methodist minister. And her two step-fathers were Baptist ministers and here she is turning her back on Christ altogether.

*(listens, then an outburst)*

What an awful thing to say, June Ellen! Have you had your coffee this morning?

*(She listens as PEGGY, now with her purse hanging over her arm, enters, crosses her living room, and exits. We hear the sound of a slammed door. PEGGY REECE has "left the building.")*

ROSEANNE. I didn't turn my back on Christ, June Ellen. He turned his back on me. Don't you get me going or I'm liable to –

*(Interrupted, she listens.)*

I've thought about it. Judaism. Or Buddhism. I even thought about Scientology until I saw Tom Cruise jumping up and down on that couch like an ape.

I thought to myself, “Well, *this* certainly is a very unruly religion.” I should probably call Peggy back. Bye, June-  
Ellen. Go get yourself in a better mood.

*(ROSEANNE hangs up, speed-dials her cell. As she waits through the ringing of PEGGY’s phone and the playing of PEGGY’s OGM, ROSEANNE will pick up a box of candy from the counter. It is identical to the one PEGGY has. She looks at it casually and puts it down.)*

**PEGGY’S RECORDED VOICE.** Hi. This is Peggy Reese. I’m not available right now. If this is about my mother, Juanita Walker, you have my permission to put her under heavy sedation.

*(Beep!)*

**ROSEANNE.** Hi, Peggy. I saw that you called. I’ll be out for a while. You can reach me this evening if you like. Bye.

*(Lights go out on both PEGGY and ROSEANNE’s spaces on ROSEANNE’s exit. Lights come up in PAIGE’s empty living room and SHERRY’s sunlit southwestern-styled patio. SHERRY WALKER enters, talking on her cell, and carrying a steaming cup of tea. She settles into a bent-willow rocker, stretches back and soaks up some sun while listening to the voice on the other end.)*

**SHERRY.** Uh huh. Uh huh.

*(listens)*

No. I bailed on the artist market this morning. It was worth losing the booth fee not to have to sit in that tent for six hours and listen to all those Texans and New Yorkers who infest our beautiful city twelve months out of the year, some of whom have the nerve – the absolute *nerve*, Paige, to *haggle*. To haggle over art. *Art!* Can you imagine Picasso giving a volume discount? Did Grandma Moses charge by the one-horse-sleigh? Speaking of Grandma Moses, right before you called, Peggy called. I was in the shower.

*(PAIGE HUDDLESTON enters her living room on her response. She's got a cell phone in one hand and a tall glass of wine in the other. She goes to her couch and sits down.)*

**PAIGE.** What did she want?

**SHERRY.** Just to tell me something about Mama. She didn't say what it was about. Did she call *you*?

**PAIGE.** Wait. Let me check. She did. Hang on. I'll see what she said. Sometimes I wish she'd just text.

**SHERRY.** She can't text. She's still got that old phone that Daddy probably got from Alexander Graham Bell. Sometimes I picture her standing in her kitchen looking like June Lockhart, trying to find out where the hell Timmy and Lassie went.

*(PAIGE is now listening to PEGGY's voicemail. She bursts out laughing.)*

**PAIGE.** *(shaking her head in wonderment, into phone)* Oh, Sherry. Mama did a naughty, naughty thing. Apparently, she doesn't like Fair Haven any more than she liked those other two assisted-living places.

**SHERRY.** Mercy Crest and Azalea-something.

*(chuckles)*

I had a friend on Staten Island who put his father into the "Fresh Kills Aged Care Center." I made a death-panel joke and he stopped talking to me.

**PAIGE.** Well, this is a new one for Mama: she took off all her clothes, and I know that Peggy's pulling her hair out trying to decide what to do with her next. So we need to be supportive and help her out.

**SHERRY.** Of course we do. Do you have room for her in Cedar Rapids?

**PAIGE.** As luck would have it, I actually do. Now with Trent and Becky off at college, she can take her pick of all the empty bedrooms in my house – including the one once occupied by Barry before he finally packed and moved out.

**SHERRY.** Boy, you sure are good at burying the lead. But I already knew this.

**PAIGE.** Oh, you did? Sherry, is there a single one of our ex-husbands or *soon-to-be* ex-husbands that you don't serve as Mama Confessor to?

*(not giving SHERRY a chance to answer)*

Oh dear God.

**SHERRY.** *(alarmed)* What?

**PAIGE.** Once Barry and I get divorced, there won't be a single one of us left who'll still be married. That defies all the odds and in a very sad and disturbing way.

**SHERRY.** It's sad, Paige, but I wouldn't construe it as any kind of indictment of the Walker family. Remember that Peggy and Audrey were both happily married when their husbands died. Roseanne divorcing three different minister husbands is sort of off-the-charts weird, but Aneece has been with Michelle for thirty years. She isn't a spouse by *traditional* definition, but they *are* legally married.

*(Lights come up on ANEECE WALKER. She is sitting on her bed, dialing her bedside phone. Her eyes are red, as if she's been crying.)*

**PAIGE.** I'm once divorced – if that even counts. Kurt and I had only been married for four months when he came out to me. Not that I didn't already suspect it. And I'm very soon to be *twice* divorced unless Barry decides to stop cheating on me and *I* decide to be loving and forgiving and take him the hell back.

*(Lights come up in AUDREY's den. Her phone is ringing. AUDREY, still dressed as a clown, enters. It appears that AUDREY has also been crying. It appears this way because she's wiping her eyes with a handkerchief and blowing her nose.)*

**AUDREY.** *(shouting at the phone)* Hold on! Hold on!

**PAIGE.** So how did you know? Did Barry *call* you? "Telegraph. Telephone. Tella-Sherry."

**SHERRY.** Paige, sweetie, that one got old twenty years ago.

**AUDREY.** *(answering)* Hello?

**ANEECE.** Hi, Audrey.

**SHERRY.** Barry's here in Santa Fe, honey.

*(This revelation puts PAIGE into a momentary state of shock.)*

**AUDREY.** Your ears must be burning! Peggy and I were just talking about you.

**ANEECE.** Well, I was just *thinking* about you.

**AUDREY.** Oh, Aneece, how long has it been since you've talked to *any* of us?

**ANEECE.** *(apologetically, softly)* A long, long time.

**SHERRY.** Paige? Are you still there?

**PAIGE.** I'm still here. But I'm not here anymore.

*(She promptly punches out, leaving SHERRY staring at her phone. PAIGE sits fuming on the couch, taking angry gulps of wine. During the following exchange between AUDREY and ANEECE, SHERRY will eventually pick up a box of candy from the little table next to her, open it and look at the chocolates inside, and will be just about to eat one, when PAIGE calls her back.)*

**AUDREY.** Please tell me the cancer hasn't come back.

**ANEECE.** Still in the clear. I've never been healthier. That isn't why I called.

**AUDREY.** *(gingerly touching one of her breasts)* I thought I felt a lump when I was in the bathtub a few weeks ago. It ended up being a cyst. But I didn't know that at the time. I went into a panic and drove straight to the doctor. This is a death house, you know – this house I live in.

**ANEECE.** *(overlapping, sensitively)* Now you stop talking that [way] –

**AUDREY.** People who live in this house die of horrible diseases. The woman who owned it before Harry and me died from a silver overdose. That's right. She got

that disease that people get from eating silver – I don't know the name of it.

ANEECE. Why would anyone need to know the name of a disease like that?

AUDREY. After we moved in, we found a book of hers, which her children didn't know she'd hidden away. It was filled with poetry about blue people. See, that's what happens to you when you eat silver. You turn blue.

ANEECE. Why are we talking about this?

AUDREY. Because I'm not sure I want to hear what it is you're calling about. Because I know it's something bad. You're saying it isn't about the cancer, but it is something, isn't it?

ANEECE. Maybe I should just call back some other time.

AUDREY. No. That wouldn't be good. Then I'll just sit around here and wonder and worry. I'm already having a terrible day, Aneece. I drove halfway to the hospital and decided I couldn't do it. Not today. Some days I just can't do it. Some days I'm just not strong enough.

ANEECE. Do what?

AUDREY. Entertain the children in the oncology ward. I made a U-turn. A police officer saw me and pulled me over. He said, "Clowns have to obey traffic laws too, ma'am." Then he shook his head and said really sad-like: "But I'll let you off with a warning this time. 'Cause there ain't no sorrier sight to see than a clown car with only one clown inside."

ANEECE. Audrey, I have no earthly idea what you're talking about.

AUDREY. I'm talking about: maybe you *should* call back some other time. Or call one of our sisters. Four years. That's actually how long it's been since you've talked to any of us. That's how long it's been since big Harry's funeral. And you were sweet to come. I know how busy you were before you retired. But you came anyway. And you hugged me and you hugged Peggy and you even hugged Mama and then you went away and you didn't

stay in touch with a single one of us. You didn't take any of our calls, and we *did* keep calling for a while, Aneece, until we finally got the message that you didn't want to have anything else to do with us. And so I've had to call Michelle from time to time just to find out if you were still alive.

(*ANEECE doesn't respond.*)

Aneece, are you still there?

ANEECE. I'm still here.

(*She takes a deep breath.*)

Audrey, I'm sorry I've been a stranger. And after all you've been through.

AUDREY. It's been hard – losing both of my precious Harrys. But you know what, Aneece? Our sisters haven't had it so easy either. Poor Peggy's really been through the ringer.

ANEECE. What happened to Peggy?

AUDREY. She lost nearly every penny Vincent left her.

ANEECE. (*stunned*) How?

AUDREY. There was a man she was seeing a couple of years ago. He got her to co-sign on a business loan, and then when everything fell apart, she was left holding the bag. She had to sell her house, Aneece. She lives in a one-bedroom apartment on Madison and works at the Hallmark store.

ANEECE. Oh no.

AUDREY. So say what you called to say. I'm ready. Is it Michelle? Did something happen to Michelle, because I haven't gotten a call-back from her in weeks.

ANEECE. Yes. Something happened to Michelle. She left me.

AUDREY. Oh.

(*beat; relieved*)

At least she isn't dead.

ANEECE. She might as well be.

AUDREY. What happened? The two of you have been together since Jesus was in Pampers.

ANEECE. I don't know. I guess she just got tired of all my crap. Retirement works for some people, Audrey. Early retirement didn't work for me. I left Cooper Fidelity and it was like my life just stopped.

AUDREY. Then why did you go?

ANEECE. It's called a golden parachute. I couldn't pass it up. I pictured Michelle and me going on cruises together, taking that trip to Russia we'd always talked about. And then I quit my job and slid into a depression. I couldn't even get myself out of bed in the morning. Michelle got tired of it. I think she'd actually gotten tired of me a long time ago, but we were too busy to realize that we just didn't much like each other anymore. So I – so I just had to talk to somebody. You and I always seemed to – to the extent that we – well *my* friends are *Michelle's* friends, and nobody wanted to get in the middle of it all.

AUDREY. (*after a deep fortifying breath*) They're throwing Mama out of her nursing home. This is number three. It's time for all of us to step up to the plate.

(*smiles*)

Harry liked that phrase. You have to step up to the plate, Aneece, if you want to be a member of the Walker family again. I think it's going to come down to each of us taking Mama in for a while.

ANEECE. I'd sooner remove off all my limbs with a hack saw.

AUDREY. Why do you say awful things like that?

ANEECE. I'm sorry. My head's not in a very good place right now.

AUDREY. I *am* glad you called, Aneece. I really am.

ANEECE. I'm glad I called too. I promise to behave.

(*Lights fade out in both of these spaces. PAIGE punches a number into her cell. SHERRY, who hasn't budged from her chair, answers her chirping phone.*)

SHERRY. (*answering*) Did you take some deep breaths?

**PAIGE.** Yes. I'm calm now. I'm collected. I'm not going to hang up on you again. Is this why you took off this morning? To see Barry?

**SHERRY.** He wanted to see me. It's the right thing to do.

**PAIGE.** (*Her tone says she isn't buying it.*) You did this very same thing to Roseanne. Years ago. You made a play for William.

**SHERRY.** Paige Purebread, I did *not* make a play for William. He didn't even make a play for me. He was on the run. He was confused. I don't know why everybody comes to *me* for succor.

**PAIGE.** For what?

**SHERRY.** For succor. It means help and support.

**PAIGE.** I know what the word means, Sherry. You might not remember, but while you were still slouching toward your G.E.D., I was getting a PhD in public policy.

**SHERRY.** That was mean. And you ignore the possibility that maybe my sisters' husbands come to me because they know I won't judge them.

**PAIGE.** Sherry. Look. I like what you did with your life. I like the way you turned things around. You left the goat farm. You gave up on wanting to be a trapeze artist. You found something you could actually be good at, and even make some money doing. And you've turned into a really good businesswoman with your tinwork.

**SHERRY.** Before you insert your "but," may I just interject here, Baby Sister, that you've also done some nice things with *your* life. Even if you *weren't* a college professor, my gracious God, Paige, you and Barry have done an incredible job with those kids. Compared to those two bitch daughters of Roseanne's –

**PAIGE.** (*interrupting*) I am *not* letting you take potshots at Roseanne's kids, Sherry. Do you know how hurt she'd be if she ever found out you talk about her girls that way?

**SHERRY.** I was making a point – that it doesn't matter how things end up between you and Barry, because you have all this other positive stuff happening in your life. And

you really should face the fact that some relationships just aren't meant to last forever. Especially when there are – are – *factors* working against them.

**PAIGE.** (*alarmed*) *Factors?* What are you saying?

**SHERRY.** That from what Barry tells me – and I'm just telling you what he told me – there's someone else in his life now and he really needs to be with this other person.

**PAIGE.** Do you know who it is?

**SHERRY.** I do. You know this person too.

**PAIGE.** And have you any interest in telling me?

**SHERRY.** I will if you think you can handle it.

**PAIGE.** Don't be glib, Sherry. You're so obnoxious when you get glib. Just spill it. Who is she?

**SHERRY.** It isn't a "she," baby-doll.

**PAIGE.** Oh God.

**SHERRY.** You seem to have a real knack for attracting the gays, sweet pea. Remember Clint Montgomery – the boy who took you to the senior prom? He designed your gown, baby-doll. He was sending you oodles of signals.

**PAIGE.** Barry sent me no signals. Not for any of the twenty years we've been married. For God's sake, Sherry! I have proof that two of his earlier affairs were with *women*!

**SHERRY.** So he's bisexual. What difference does it make? Make it a clean break, baby-doll. The kids are grown. It doesn't *have* to be messy. Lord knows, I've made my share of clean breaks over the years. And if you'll recall, you were once pretty good at this yourself.

**PAIGE.** Back when I was a selfish bitch with unrealistically high standards.

**SHERRY.** So be selfish again. You're young. You're the only one of us who's still pre-menopausal, bless your little ovulating ovaries. You have life and youth left in you. Unlike me. I'm fast becoming an old crone.

**PAIGE.** I wouldn't call you a crone. "Sassy-mouthed old broad," but definitely not a crone.

**SHERRY.** Ain't you sweet? Some men like all the spit and spunk. Others – not so much.

**PAIGE.** What happened to Ted? You don't talk about him anymore.

**SHERRY.** Ted's still in the picture. But Ted's about to be taken *out* of the picture. By me. Let's keep this conversation about *you*, okay? There's something else I need to tell you.

**PAIGE.** Oh God.

**SHERRY.** About this guy your husband's fallen for.

**PAIGE.** You said it was somebody I know.

**SHERRY.** It is, peanut. It's – well, honey-child, it's your first husband.

*(Lights go down in these two spaces, the whole stage going into blackout. Time passes. Music underscores the transition [and the time transitions that will follow]. We have now moved ahead to Saturday night. Nocturnal lighting comes up in ROSEANNE's kitchen and PEGGY's living room. ROSEANNE sits at her kitchen table, eating a frozen dinner, her cell phone resting on the table in front of her. We will soon notice that she's punched it to speaker, so she can keep her hands free to attend her dinner. PEGGY rushes into her living room and picks up her phone receiver, which has been lying, off-hook, on her phone table. She's slightly breathless from the exertion.)*

**PEGGY.** So sorry about that.

**ROSEANNE.** Who was it?

**PEGGY.** A girl who lives down the street. She's lost her cat. People in my neighborhood with lost cats come to my apartment because I grow catnip in my little balcony herb garden. Everyone lives on threads of hope these days.

**ROSEANNE.** *(a studied observation)* You've spent your whole life helping people. In one way or another.

PEGGY. (*without levity*) I'm thinking about retiring.

ROSEANNE. Has it worn you out, Peggy?

PEGGY. To a frazzle. I'm going to spend what little time the good Lord has left me being selfish for a change.

ROSEANNE. You say that, but I don't believe you. I don't think you could be selfish if you tried.

PEGGY. You make me out to be a saint. I'm not a saint. Roseanne. I've cheated on my income tax. *Twice*. One time I stole some grapes. From the produce department at Save-a-Lot.

ROSEANNE. I'm sure you had your reason.

PEGGY. Well, as it turned out I *did* have a reason. The store manager wouldn't give me a refund on the bunch I got the day before that had a spider in it.

ROSEANNE. Yech!

PEGGY. So when nobody was watching I just took another bunch that *didn't* have a spider in it and I put it in my purse. And when I got home and ate those grapes, oh Roseanne! They were the best tasting Thompson seedless I've ever had, because *sin*, as Sunday school teachers never tell you, can give you the most wonderful kind of high. Of course, that makes perfect sense. If *sin didn't* tempt us, we'd *all* be saints, and what a boring world *that* would be. You must know this from all those years you were tethered to the pulpit.

ROSEANNE. I wasn't tethered to the pulpit, Peggy. I was tethered to three religious snake-oil salesmen who put themselves *behind* the pulpit because they were, each of them, dancing-bear narcissists.

PEGGY. Have you lost your faith, Roseanne?

ROSEANNE. Should I make it official? Okay. I no longer believe. We now have two fully-fledged agnostics in the family.

PEGGY. Well, at least Sherry doesn't *brag* about it.

ROSEANNE. *I'm* not bragging. I'm just stating fact. And when did you start *cozying* up so much to the church?

I remember after Vincent died you said you'd never be caught dead in one. You said you were even going to put it in your will – that your funeral had to be held in the church parking lot.

PEGGY. I've just turned sixty five, Rosie. That's a milestone that used to seem a thousand years away. Maybe it was because I'd never had kids. Maybe it was because I always had Mama right in the next room, I mean before we started playing "Nursing Home Red Rover." *She* was old. I was young. I had a purpose. I helped people. I helped Mama. But now I'm there. I'm a whisker shy of "little old lady." So I'm putting my house in order – what little house I have left. I've come to realize that there are a lot of good things that churches – that people of faith do. I like my church. I like the people I've become friends with there. For the first time since Vincent's death I actually think I'm happy. I'm old and I'm poor, but happy. And you want to know one of the biggest reasons for my happiness? Because all of *you* get to be saddled with Mama for a change. I've done my time.

*(PEGGY smiles triumphantly. She's probably been waiting a long time to make this stand.)*

ROSEANNE. Is that all you wanted to know? Fine. I'll take her. Just tell me when and for how long, because I'll have to rearrange my life to accommodate her.

*(with bitter sarcasm)*

Because my life is so damned rich and full right now, you know.

PEGGY. You'll see that having Mama will be a nice change from all those years of sitting in your empty nest.

ROSEANNE. I love you, Peggy, but that last statement was a crock of baby poop. Nobody wants Mama. Nobody can even *relate* to Mama. Aneece hasn't talked to her for over twenty years. She didn't even talk to her at big Harry's funeral. Do you want to know a scary thing, Peggy? I don't think I love Mama. And an even scarier thought: I don't think *any* of us do. I used to feel guilty about all

the negative feelings I had for her. Back when Jesus was making me feel guilty about *everything*. But I sent Jesus away and now it doesn't bother me one bit. Peggy, tell me why it is that we *have* to love people – people we're related to by blood or marriage. Who came up with this rule?

PEGGY. (*struggling*) I don't know about the bigger question, Roseanne, but I do think it's – it's a natural – a, a biological thing to at least feel *something* for the person who brought you into the world.

ROSEANNE. A person who never made any effort to protect us from Daddy's rampages? You did a far better job fighting for us than Mama ever did. Where is it required that I love a woman who hardly showed any love for us at all?

PEGGY. Those are hard words, Roseanne. And they make me think that once she moves in, you and Mama are definitely going to have some *issues*.

ROSEANNE. (*through laughter*) Oh you think I'm saying this to get you to strike me off your list.

PEGGY. (*also seeing the humor*) Yes, little sister, you're most-assuredly demonstrating a conniving side that I never thought you had.

ROSEANNE. As it so happens, you're exactly right.

PEGGY. Then you're officially off the hook. I don't think it would be healthy for the two of you to be subjected to one another like that.

ROSEANNE. (*with a sly smile*) Whatever you think works best, Big Sister.

(*Lights fade out here. They come up on ANEECE sitting on her bed talking on her phone.*)

ANEECE. (*distraught*) Do we have to do this on the phone? Will you come over? There's still some stuff of yours in the hall closet. I'll make Gevalia. We can sit and discuss this like –

(*Interrupted, listens; now she interrupts.*)

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