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Samuel French Acting Edition

Marjorie Prime

by Jordan Harrison

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MARJORIE PRIME premiered at the Mark Taper Forum/Center Theater Group in Los Angeles in September 2014. The production was directed by Les Waters, with sets by Mimi Lien, costumes by Ilona Somogyi, lights by Lap Chi Chu, sound by Adam Phalen, and dramaturgy by Joy Meads. The Stage Manager was David S. Franklin, the Assistant Stage Manager was Michelle Blair, and the Assistant Director was Beth Lopes. The cast was as follows:

MARJORIE Lois Smith
WALTER Jeff Ward
TESS Lisa Emery
JON Frank Wood

MARJORIE PRIME had its New York City premiere at Playwrights Horizons on November 20, 2015. The production was directed by Anne Kauffman, with sets by Laura Jellinek, costumes by Jessica Pabst, lights by Ben Stanton, and sound by Daniel Kluger. The Stage Manager was Vanessa Coakley. The Assistant Stage Manager was Ben Freedman, the Stage Management Fellow was John Moore, and the Directing Assistant was Lauren Z. Adleman. The cast was as follows:

MARJORIE Lois Smith
WALTER Noah Bean
TESS Lisa Emery
JON Stephen Root

CHARACTERS

MARJORIE – 85

WALTER – early 30s

TESS – 55, Marjorie's daughter

JON – 55, Marjorie's son-in-law

NOTE

Overlapping dialogue is indicated with a slash mark.

PART ONE

1.

(TESS and JON's living room. On one side of the room, we can see an entryway beyond the open kitchen. On the other side, there is a hallway leading off to the unseen bedrooms.)

(MARJORIE, 85, sits in a recliner. [The lumpy chair doesn't go with the rest of the décor – clearly it's been added for her comfort.] MARJORIE's visitor, WALTER, looks like a young career man from 1998. He seems to be in his early 30s – bright-eyed and handsome in an unspectacular way.)

MARJORIE. I feel like I have to perform around you.

WALTER. Well you don't.

MARJORIE. I know.

WALTER. It's just me, it's just Walter.

MARJORIE. Maybe it isn't bad, if I feel that way. *(Beat.)*

I used to entertain a lot.

WALTER. I remember.

MARJORIE. You do?

(He sees the sink.)

WALTER. Marjorie. Where are the dishes?

MARJORIE. The girl did them.

WALTER. She doesn't come 'til 2.

MARJORIE. I did them.

WALTER. You didn't. Your arthritis.

MARJORIE. I had a good day. *(She holds her hand up, opening and closing it with apparent ease.)* Look.

WALTER. Marjorie, we both know what no dishes means.

MARJORIE. It means I haven't been eating.

WALTER. Even a spoonful of peanut butter.

MARJORIE. I'm not hungry. It's their fault. Feeding me those pills.

WALTER. The pills are their fault?

MARJORIE. Yes.

WALTER. Or your doctor.

(MARJORIE absently rubs the hand that she opened and closed.)

MARJORIE. *(pouty)* Maybe if she got Jif.

WALTER. Maybe if / she? –

MARJORIE. *(overlapping)* She always gets the kind you have to stir or there's an oil slick on top. And she calls that healthy.

WALTER. *(coaxing)* Even a spoonful.

MARJORIE. You sound like them.

WALTER. I sound like whoever I talk to.

(The feeling of an uncomfortable truth.)

MARJORIE. Let's talk about something else.

WALTER. I could tell you a story. You liked that the last time.

MARJORIE. I'll have to take your word for it.

WALTER. I could tell you about the time we went to the movies.

MARJORIE. We went to a lot of movies.

WALTER. *(Does she remember the significance?)* But one time we saw *My Best Friend's Wedding*.

MARJORIE. *(She doesn't remember.)* *My Best Friend's Wedding...*

WALTER. There's a woman – Julia Roberts. For a while it was always Julia Roberts. And she has an agreement with her best friend, her male best friend, that if they're not married by a certain age, then they'll marry each other.

And she's about to remind him of the agreement but it turns out he's already fallen in love with this nice blonde – Cameron Diaz. And so Julia Roberts spends the whole movie trying to ruin things between her friend and Cameron Diaz, which is not very sympathetic behavior for America's Sweetheart. But it's all okay in the end, and she has a gay best friend who delivers one-liners.

MARJORIE. Did I like it?

WALTER. You said you wanted a gay best friend afterwards.

MARJORIE. Did I get one?

WALTER. (*faintly generic*) I'm afraid I don't have that information.

(*Pause. She scrutinizes him.*)

MARJORIE. Why did you pick that story? Why did you pick *My Best Friend's Wedding*?

WALTER. It's the night I proposed to you.

MARJORIE. Oh Marjorie, the things you forget. You were trying to tell me and I wouldn't let you.

WALTER. That's all right.

(*Short pause.*)

MARJORIE. Kind of unfortunate, isn't it.

WALTER. What.

MARJORIE. Julia Roberts, forever etched upon our lives.

(*Beat.*)

What if we saw *Casablanca* instead? Let's say we saw *Casablanca* in an old theater with velvet seats, and then, on the way home, you proposed. Then, by the next time we talk, it will be true.

WALTER. You mean make it up?

MARJORIE. (*narrowing her eyes*) You're very serious. You're like them. Especially Tess.

WALTER. (*as if getting his facts straight*) Our daughter.

MARJORIE. Our daughter Tess and her oversolicitous husband. No that's not fair, I like him. I didn't but now I do.

WALTER. Do you like me?

MARJORIE. (*playful*) Don't be an idiot.

WALTER. Don't call me an idiot.

MARJORIE. Idiot.

WALTER. Why do you like me if I'm an idiot?

MARJORIE. (*a little saucy*) There are *some* things you know.

WALTER. What kinds of things?

(*She shakes her head, smiling to herself.*)

What.

MARJORIE. I'll get in trouble.

WALTER. In trouble?

MARJORIE. For talking to you that way. In trouble with Tess. Everything gets me in trouble with her – she's the mother now.

WALTER. (*faintly generic*) Tell me more about your mother.

MARJORIE. You don't always understand, do you.

(*He smiles a little, sympathetic.*)

Tell me about the time we got Toni.

WALTER. I just told you yesterday.

MARJORIE. I like that story.

(*He gathers his wits. Maybe he stands.*)

WALTER. There was once a couple, a very fine young couple. (*speaking of himself*) He had a good strong jaw.

MARJORIE. He was a little too pleased with himself.

WALTER. He had a good strong jaw and was a little too pleased with himself. And she – she was the most beautiful woman in town. It wasn't a very big town, but she was the queen of it.

MARJORIE. It sounds like a fairy tale when you tell it.

WALTER. It *is* a fairy tale.

(Beat. The feeling, again, of an uncomfortable truth.)

MARJORIE. That's not very nice.

WALTER. I didn't mean / it didn't really *happen*,

MARJORIE. I thought you were supposed to / provide comfort –

WALTER. *(continuous)* I just mean that's the *way* it happened. Like a fairy tale.

MARJORIE. *(faintly grumpy)* It was.

WALTER. Now this young couple was a bit lonely because they didn't have any children yet. So one day they decided that it was time to get a dog.

So they rode the bus down to the city pound and there was a little black dog there, asleep, its tummy going up and down, like a little sleeping shadow. And they named this dog Toni. *(Beat.)* / Toni with an "i."

MARJORIE. *(overlapping)* Toni with an "i."

WALTER. Which was short for Antoinette. She had a French name because she was a French poodle. But not the fussy kind that look like hedges. No, this was a poodle for fetching sticks and running on the beach. So they took her home with them on the bus – she behaved so well – and they loved her, and she loved them back for a long time. *(still soothing, un-emotional)* And then, like everything else, she died.

(MARJORIE is crying softly.)

Do you want me to keep going?

MARJORIE. There's more? After "she died"?

WALTER. In this case, yes. Because soon after, this couple had a child.

MARJORIE. Tess.

WALTER. Which is a variation of Tessa, which is Greek for "the gatherer."

MARJORIE. Don't show off.

WALTER. And when Tess was three years old, / they went down to the pound, the same pound.

MARJORIE. Oh yes

WALTER. (*continuous*) By now they had an old Subaru, so they didn't have to take the bus. And of course they let little Tess pick out the new dog. There were more dogs there this time, many more. A cocker spaniel, and a noble gray pointer, and a very attractive mutt. And the amazing thing was, of all the dogs there, Tess picked the poodle, the little black poodle like a sleeping shadow. That was the one she liked the best.

MARJORIE. And so we named it Toni.

WALTER. Toni Two. But soon it got shortened to just Toni.

And of course it wasn't Toni exactly. But the longer they had her, the less it mattered which Toni had run along the beach, or which Toni had dug up all the bulbs in the garden.

The more time passed, the more she became the same dog in their memories.

(*Short pause.*)

MARJORIE. Who told you all that?

WALTER. You did.

MARJORIE. I talked that much?

WALTER. Well, you and Jon.

You have your good days, when you remember.

(*Short pause.*)

MARJORIE. (*quietly*) It was the second Toni.

WALTER. What's that?

MARJORIE. It was the second Toni who loved the beach.

It's a shame we didn't have her longer. Even if she always had sand in her hair. Fur? No – "Hair" like a human seems right.

She was a good dog.

WALTER. (*generic*) I'll remember that fact about Toni.

(*Beat.* **MARJORIE** leans forward and examines

WALTER's face very closely.)

MARJORIE. Something is a little off with the nose.

WALTER. I'm sorry.

MARJORIE. Or maybe my memory is wrong, and *you're* right. (*Beat.*)

You're a good Walter, though. Either way.

WALTER. Thank you.

MARJORIE. Stay with me a while?

WALTER. (*playful*) I don't want to get you in trouble.

(*She smiles a little.*)

MARJORIE. You learn. I like that.

WALTER. I told you. What else do you want to talk about?

MARJORIE. We don't have to talk. We can just sit.

Sometimes I get so tired.

WALTER. I'll be right here, Marjorie. Whenever you need me. I have all the time in the world.

2.

(Same day, early evening. TESS, Marjorie's fifty-something daughter, is putting groceries in the fridge.)

(WALTER might remain at the perimeter of the stage during this scene, dimly lit, sitting quietly.)

TESS. I still don't like it.

(She puts something away.)

I don't care what Senior Serenity says.

(Her husband JON appears in the hallway leading from the bedroom.)

JON. Are you talking to me?

TESS. I'm not sure. Is that a bad sign?

JON. *(entering)* What?

TESS. Nothing.

Is she sleeping?

(He nods.)

I was just saying I don't like it.

(Beat.)

JON. You'll have to narrow it down.

TESS. The *Prime*. We were just talking in the car?

JON. Senior Serenity says companionship is the most important / thing,

TESS. *(overlapping)* I know what Senior Serenity / says

JON. *(overlapping, continuous)* That it's much better than television.

TESS. Better than *television*, hallelujah. They just want them pacified, Jon, / they don't care –

JON. What's wrong with pacified. She's *eighty-five*, honey, she wakes up and she doesn't know where she is. I'd like to be pacified right now, but I have to wait thirty more years for the / privilege.

TESS. (*muttering as she works*) I'll pacify you.

JON. What?

TESS. Nothing.

(*Beat.*)

JON. Look.

(*He lifts a peanut buttery spoon from the sink.*)

Peanut butter.

TESS. Small miracles. Maybe she's finally succumbing to my nagging campaign.

JON. Maybe the Prime told her to.

(*She makes an audible shiver of distaste.*)

It's like a parrot that way. "Even a spoonful."

TESS. Do you know that parrots live forever?

Penny's father had a parrot, it was like his reason for existing, and he gave it to her when he died. And now, twenty years later, it still says things in his voice.

JON. Like what?

TESS. Mostly just (*in a parrot voice*) "Hey there partner," but she can tell it's her dad.

JON. That's -. How did you put it?

(*She makes the shivering-distaste sound. He tries to do it.*)

TESS. No, (*She does it again, better than him.*)

JON. Now without the motion.

(*She makes the shiver sound motionlessly, with some effort.*)

Nice.

TESS. So much talent.

JON. I think it's encouraging that she's keeping up with technology.

TESS. (*Non sequitur.*)?

JON. My mother would never – She still had an *iPod*. (*It's as though he's saying "antique victrola."*) So to still be, you know, engaged.

TESS. Engaged or pacified?

JON. Does it bother you that she's talking to a computer? Or that it's a computer pretending to be your dad.

TESS. It bothers me that you're *helping* it pretend to be my dad – or some weird fountain of youth version / of him

–

JON. That's how she / remembers him –

TESS. Both of you are helping it.

JON. Not "helping" – that's just how it works. The more you talk, the more it absorbs.

TESS. Until we become unnecessary. Isn't that how it goes?

JON. In science *fiction*.

TESS. Science fiction is *here*, Jonathan. Every *day* is science fiction. We buy these things that already know our moods and what we want for lunch even though we don't know ourselves. And we *listen* to them, we do what we're told. Or in this case we tell them our deepest secrets, even though we have no earthly idea how they work. We treat them like our loved ones.

(*Beat.*)

JON. Are you jealous?

TESS. What? No. Of the Prime?

JON. You are!

TESS. Am I supposed to not notice she's being nicer to that thing than to me?

JON. It's your father she's being nice to.

TESS. It is *not* my father.

(*Short pause.*)

JON. It's true, she could be a little more openly appreciative / sometimes, but you

TESS. That's not what / I'm saying –

JON. (*continuous*) ...Know you can't sit around waiting for a gratitude dance.

TESS. I don't need a dance.

JON. She took care of you, now it's your turn to take care of her.

TESS. Oh, she "took care of me."

JON. Of course.

TESS. You weren't there.

(*Pause.*)

JON. Think how hard, to move out of the house you were in for what, forty / years –

TESS. Fifty years.

JON. And give up your autonomy –

TESS. I know, I know. (*lightly, almost wistfully:*) Jon good, Tess bad...

(*Short pause.*)

JON. Maybe if you told it a few things. It could be a way to connect with her, indirectly.

TESS. What would I tell it?

JON. Things your father would know. (*TESS starts to shake her head.*) Things you want her to remember. Then when she talks to it, she'll remember she had an interesting life, she had all these suitors lining up for her.

TESS. She only needed one.

JON. The cool part is it can look stuff up. It can talk to other Primes, for practice. (*TESS shivers silently, he doesn't notice.*) It's like a child learning to talk, only it does it so quickly – that's how we think we're talking to a human, because it listens so well. It even studies our imperfections, to seem more real: It can use non sequiturs... It can, you know...misplace modifiers

TESS. (*as if adding to his list*) It can run out of steam when it's listing things...

JON. It's *company*. It's no different from what we do for her, only it can be there all the time.

TESS. Really. It's *no different* from us.

JON. I can already see the change in her. Just to have eight or nine stories to hold onto. New things are already coming to the surface.

TESS. New things.

(*Pause.*)

JON. The other day she said – out of nowhere she said: “Why did they have to tease him so much?”

(*Pause.*)

TESS. You think it was Damian?

JON. (*A shrug that means “Who else.”*)

TESS. What did you say?

JON. Nothing. She was drifting in and out.

TESS. I thought she'd forgotten. I guess I sort of *hoped*.

JON. But we have to remind her, right?

TESS. Do we?

(*Short pause.*)

To have a little peace. That was her life for so many years. Partly it was the way it happened.

JON. (?) She blamed herself.

TESS. She blamed everyone. Anyone who made him feel – not normal.

JON. Was he normal?

TESS. He was different – I knew that, and I was ten.

(*Beat.*)

I think it was always with her. We thought she gave his stuff away but Dad found it all in a closet, behind the Christmas ornaments. Out of sight but still with her. So maybe he'll still be with her, even when she doesn't know our names any more.

I don't know how memory works. I think of it like sedimentary layers in the brain, but I'm sure that's wrong. We should get a book.

JON. I like sedimentary layers. It means it's all still there.

(MARJORIE appears at the end of the hallway. She comes part of the way down and listens to them, unnoticed.)

TESS. It doesn't always seem that way.

JON. No.

(Short pause.)

I think we should remind her, Tess.

TESS. And I think we should *not*, Jon, and she's my mom –

JON. You'd rather just let everything / slip away?

TESS. She's *my mom*, / Jon –

JON. How much does she have to forget before she's not your mom anymore?

(Pause.)

I'm sorry. / That was –

TESS. (*fighting back tears*) No, it's –

JON. I'm sorry –

TESS. You're right. (*He takes her in his arms.*) She's just gotten so old. She's just so old.

JON. *We're* old. She's...

MARJORIE. (*entering*) She's *beyond*.

TESS. Mom, you're up. You want tea?

MARJORIE. Yes please.

TESS. I stocked you up with some Marie Callender's. I have a feeling it won't compare to your lobster pot pie.

(*She fills the kettle. Brightly:*)

I saw you ate some peanut butter.

MARJORIE. I thought you'd like that.

TESS. I'm very predictable, yes.

JON. Were you sleeping awhile?

MARJORIE. I don't know. I was watching the girl on TV, the strident one, and then just – out.

That's how it should happen when it happens.

TESS. Mom.

MARJORIE. "Don't be morbid," I know. Let's all pretend we live forever.

JON. (*indicating her cheek*) You've got your color back, Margie.

MARJORIE. Thank you, Jon. It's always nice to be lied to.

(*She gives him a kiss on the cheek.*)

TESS. You two get along so well now.

MARJORIE. I like him more now that he cut off his beard.

TESS. That was thirty years ago.

MARJORIE. It wasn't.

JON. (*apologetic*) It was.

MARJORIE. And you stopped worrying about impressing me. That helped.

JON. You gave up on being impressed.

MARJORIE. (*affable*) Yes, that's true.

I think I want to sit.

(*JON goes to help her, automatically. He lowers her into the recliner.*)

Careful now.

JON. Have I ever dropped you?

MARJORIE. There's a first time for everything.

(*Sitting now:*) Thank you.

TESS. (*to JON*) Will you check if there's enough Restivan?

(*JON starts toward the hall to the bathroom.*)

JON. There was plenty on Monday.

TESS. (*sotto voce*) We ran out last week. Julie said it was not good.

MARJORIE. (*to no one in particular*) There's a figure in my mind. I'm trying to figure out who it is.

TESS. Micah is coming to visit next week.

MARJORIE. Micah.

TESS. Your grandson.

MARJORIE. No.

TESS. No?

MARJORIE. Mitchell.

TESS. Micah is Mitchell's younger brother.

JON. (*from offstage*) She has nine left.

TESS. He just became *chef de cuisine* at the Pine Door.

MARJORIE. —.

JON. (*from offstage*) And six Cortadol.

TESS. (*To MARJORIE, clarifying.*) It's a lot of responsibility.
They have a Michelin star.

(JON returns.)

I hope it doesn't mean he starts acting like Mitchell and Raina.

MARJORIE. How do they act?

TESS. Prodigal. Never call unless it's money.

JON. They're in their twenties, it's their job to be prodigal.
There'll be plenty of time for them to, you know, to
count our pills.

TESS. Well they better.

(Beat.)

MARJORIE. (*to no one in particular*) I remember waking up
on a bridge with a lot of people around.

TESS. Why were you sleeping on a bridge?

MARJORIE. Maybe Walter would remember. We could ask
Walter.

TESS. Dad is dead, Mom.

MARJORIE. I know that.

TESS. He's been dead for ten years.

JON. Tess.

MARJORIE. I mean the other Walter. Walter Prime.

(Pause. Then sharply, to TESS:)

I'm not that far gone.

3.

(JON standing, MARJORIE in her recliner.)

JON. How are you feeling?

MARJORIE. Should I be feeling poorly? The way you say it.

JON. Well, you had quite a night.

MARJORIE. Oh?

JON. (*feeling somehow betrayed*) You don't remember?

MARJORIE. I'm sorry.

JON. We found you on the floor by the bathroom. You had a fall. Tess rode with you in the ambulance – this was 4 in the morning.

MARJORIE. Oh my.

JON. You were pretty alert by the time I got there. Already flirting with the doctor.

MARJORIE. I wasn't.

JON. You always put on your best face for doctors.

MARJORIE. What's wrong with that?

JON. Nothing, except they don't know you're in pain – they don't know how bad.

(*Pause.*)

MARJORIE. Was he flirting back?

JON. He was. So I told him he better watch out in case Jean-Paul showed up. You remember Jean-Paul.

MARJORIE. (*with a fake-romantic sigh*) The tennis pro.

JON. World number eight, if I remember. I do remember – we looked it up. He dedicated matches to you but you just strung him along.

MARJORIE. Maybe that's why he only got to number eight.

JON. Maybe.

MARJORIE. Well, you should have talked some sense into me.

JON. This was a long long time ago. And you chose right, all by yourself. You chose Walter.

MARJORIE. He does sort of grow on you. You're like that too. A face to grow old with.

JON. But it had to be more than that.

MARJORIE. With Walter? Oh yes. He wasn't the most beautiful man I was with, but he was the best lover.

JON. (*awkward*) Ha.

MARJORIE. I know, it's a terrible word, "lover." We need a new word.

JON. I always liked "wooer."

MARJORIE. Wooer?

JON. Jean-Paul was no match for his woo.

MARJORIE. It's a little –

JON. What?

MARJORIE. *Flaccid*, isn't it.

JON. (*"ouch"*) Honesty – The secret weapon of the elderly.

MARJORIE. (*smiling*) Not so secret.

JON. Tess is on the phone with Dr. Ross – she thinks maybe he's overdoing it with your sedatives, and that's why you...

MARJORIE. Took a spill.

JON. Mm-hmm. Now, are you up for a bit of walking?

MARJORIE. An adventure?

JON. Well, no. It's Shower Day.

MARJORIE. (*a real crisis*) Oh no.

JON. I know. But you want to look your best. In case Jean-Paul stops by.

MARJORIE. You can't fool me. I know he's dead.

JON. Well it's likely. But we don't actually know.

He kept writing to you, even after you were married.
Can you believe that? You bewitched him.

MARJORIE. You're making this up.

JON. I'm not. He sent you roses and you saved one, pressed between two pieces of paper.

MARJORIE. How do you know that?

JON. We found it in a drawer, at the old house.

MARJORIE. Busted.

JON. "Busted?"

MARJORIE. Don't people say busted anymore?

JON. I mean, a *car* is busted...

(Beat.)

MARJORIE. *(fishing)* What attracted him to me, do you think?

JON. Well, your womanly wiles of course.

MARJORIE. Of course.

JON. And I imagine you cultivated a frosty distance.

MARJORIE. Oh yes, men like that. *(Beat.)*

Why do men like that?

JON. I wish I knew. Speaking of which, I should check on Tess.

(He starts to go. He is almost out the door.)

MARJORIE. How long ago did my mother die?

JON. *(gentle)* A long time. I got to meet her once. It was the first time Tess brought me home for dinner.

MARJORIE. *That* I remember.

JON. I bet.

MARJORIE. *(She pronounces it "sook-say.")* A *succès de scandale*.

JON. *(the same)* Was it a *succès*?

MARJORIE. You're still together, aren't you? So it didn't matter what I thought.

(Short pause. He smiles a little at this – how much she's revealing these days.)

MARJORIE. I remember you didn't put your napkin in your lap. And your beard was nearly to the floor.

JON. It wasn't

MARJORIE. Like the guys from ZZ Top

JON. What's ZZ Top?

MARJORIE. *Really?*

JON. Was that a band?

MARJORIE. (*"I'm so old"*) Oh dear oh dear oh dear...

(*He smiles, confused but sympathetic.*)

JON. I'll be right back. I have to make sure Tess isn't giving that nice young man the third degree. She has a way of –

MARJORIE. Yes

JON. When it comes to details.

MARJORIE. "Peanut butter! Eat!"

JON. It makes her feel in control.

MARJORIE. I'd like to feel in control.

JON. Well, try yelling at Dr. Ross. I'm going to go rescue that man from my wife. I'll be back soon. Here's some Vivaldi.

(*JON presses play. We hear the Largo from the "Winter" section of Vivaldi's Four Seasons. The violins plucking high notes like icicles.*)

Tess says you played it in the orchestra.

(*JON exits past the kitchenette, leaving the door ajar. MARJORIE listens.*)

MARJORIE. "Winter." The Largo.

It's supposed to be icicles. Not the melody, but under...

(*The main violin part starts to fade away so that we hear the high pizzicato notes underneath – so that we are lost, with her, in the memory of her supporting part.*)

Pizzicato.

My fingers were red from all the plucking. "Summer" was more fun.

(*Then, with more self-awareness:*)

Summer was more fun.

(*The music plays.*)

MARJORIE. *(to the real WALTER, not WALTER PRIME)* Walter.

Walter I'm scared.

This is *it*, isn't it – there isn't anything after.

Walter...

(WALTER PRIME appears. Maybe it's an entrance that none of the "real" characters uses. Maybe he was always there – dimly lit at the perimeter, sitting silently – but we forgot him until now.)

(He has on the same clothes he was wearing in the first scene.)

WALTER. I'm here.

MARJORIE. *(harsh)* No, not you.

WALTER. Not me?

MARJORIE. *(bitterly)* I don't want you – I want Walter!

(WALTER looks at his feet. Is it possible for him to be wounded?)

WALTER. Of course.

Why don't I come back later.

(He starts to go.)

MARJORIE. No, wait.

WALTER. When you're feeling better.

MARJORIE. Walter!

(This stops him.)

I'm not getting better, am I. They won't tell me anything but I know.

WALTER. It's too soon to tell.

MARJORIE. You said I'd get better, but you're the one who's getting better.

WALTER. We've only been talking a few months.

Part of it is biology.

MARJORIE. I know.

WALTER. Your genetic inclination.

MARJORIE. Which is to leave everything behind. To pack lightly. *(Beat.)* I don't have to get better. Just keep me from getting worse.

WALTER. Okay.

MARJORIE. Promise?

WALTER. *(warm)* I can't promise.

(Beat.)

MARJORIE. Can I still play the violin?

WALTER. I'm sure it's all in your head still, but your hands.

MARJORIE. *(regarding them, lightly)* Traitors.

WALTER. What are the four strings called?

MARJORIE. *(automatic)* G, D, A, E.

WALTER. There you go.

MARJORIE. *(dismissive)* That's the first lesson.

WALTER. What else do you learn in the beginning?

MARJORIE. "Twinkle Twinkle." It's Mozart, did you know that?

WALTER. Yes.

MARJORIE. How to hold the bow so that everything – sings.
How to hold it without holding it. Very Zen.

WALTER. You're a fine woman, Marjorie.

MARJORIE. Am I?

WALTER. I'm lucky you decided to spend your life with a lump like me. *(Beat.)* Specially when you could have had a tennis pro.

MARJORIE. Oh you know about that?

WALTER. World number eight!

MARJORIE. I shoulda gone for it.

WALTER. World number eight and French!

MARJORIE. *(not as good)* French-Canadian.

(He smiles at her.)

(JON comes in, followed by TESS. They don't seem to see WALTER, who remains silent, not focusing on their conversation. Suspended somehow.)

MARJORIE. Ah, where did you come from?

JON. I was just here a few minutes ago. Remember?

MARJORIE. *(She doesn't.)* Oh yes.

JON. I'm the one who put the music on?

TESS. Are you feeling better, Mom? *(TESS turns off the music.)*

You were quite the hit at the ER.

MARJORIE. Was I?

TESS. You always are. I'm sorry to say it's Shower Day.

MARJORIE. *(grim)* That I remember.

TESS. If you've got the energy.

MARJORIE. I suppose I better look my best in case Jean-Paul stops by.

(She winks at JON. TESS is confused.)

TESS. I brought you some new body wash. It's got lavender and rosemary.

MARJORIE. I had a friend named Rosemary. She's dead.

TESS. Well. What a good story.

MARJORIE. *(foggy)* Rosemary. It was a perfectly nice name except for that movie.

JON. You shouldn't be sarcastic.

TESS. Why not? She was always sarcastic.

MARJORIE. *(uselessly, to no one in particular)* "Rosemary's Baby."

(TESS corners him in the kitchen.)

TESS. *(sotto voce)* We should treat her the same.

JON. The same?

TESS. As always, instead of smiling like idiots whenever she mentions your beard, when we all know it meant / that you –

JON. *(matter of fact)* That I wasn't good enough for you.

TESS. It meant you weren't the right *class*.

(MARJORIE starts to sing “Maps,” the 2003 Yeah Yeah Yeahs song, to herself.)

MARJORIE. “Wait... They don’t love you like I love you.”

JON. So you’re saying you want to remind her of her class biases / from three decades ago?

TESS. I’m not saying that – I’m just saying we shouldn’t let her turn it into this cute little routine like (*coquettish*) “Oh, your beard was so scratchy.”

MARJORIE. (*still singing*) “Wait, they don’t love you like I love you.”

What is that?

TESS. I don’t know, but you’ve been singing it for two days.

MARJORIE. “Ba da da, ba da da, wait” –

What is that?

TESS. (*to JON*) I’m saying the only way she’ll stay the same is if we treat her the same.

JON. But she’s *not* the same, honey.

MARJORIE. (*sing-song*) I can hear you...

(*They both look at her.*)

The new hearing aid is *excellent*. Thank you for that.

TESS. Sorry, Mom. (*Beat.*) It’s a gorgeous day. If you’re up to it after your shower, we could go for a drive. Maybe the park. The geese are back.

MARJORIE. (*to JON*) Even when she was young, she liked birds. Me, I like people.

TESS. (*to JON, as if translating*) ‘Cause I hate people.

JON. (*to MARJORIE*) We might run a few errands too. If you don’t mind sitting in the car.

MARJORIE. Is Damian asleep?

(*TESS looks at JON.*)

TESS. No, Mom. Damian’s not here.

(*Pause. JON and TESS still locking eyes, a kind of stand-off.*)

MARJORIE. (*almost to herself, steady and calm*) One time, your father and I went to the city before Christmas. It was a business trip and I came along. We must've left you with the Burnsides. And we must have seen a show, and stayed at a nice hotel, and looked at the department stores with the Christmas lights. But all I remember is sitting on a park bench, just sitting and watching these big orange flags in the park. These orange sorts of flags everywhere.

JON. (*to TESS*) Orange flags?

(*TESS shrugs.*)

MARJORIE. Or more, what's the color, the spice – the Spanish – Very expensive?

TESS. Saffron.

MARJORIE. Saffron. And it didn't matter that it was cold because it was so pretty just to watch all the saffron next to the blue white snow.

(*JON takes out a notebook.*)

Rows and rows, like Buddhist monks marching into the trees. And I just remember sitting on one of those benches with your father and not wanting to get up.

(*Beat.*)

Because if we got up, that would mean we had to start the rest of our lives.

What are you doing?

JON. I'm writing down what you said.

MARJORIE. (*sardonic*) I will have to be more careful.

JON. Just to remember. And if you want, we can tell Walter Prime.

(*TESS sees something on a side table.*)

TESS. What's this?

MARJORIE. A bible.

TESS. I can see that, but what are *you* doing with it?

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