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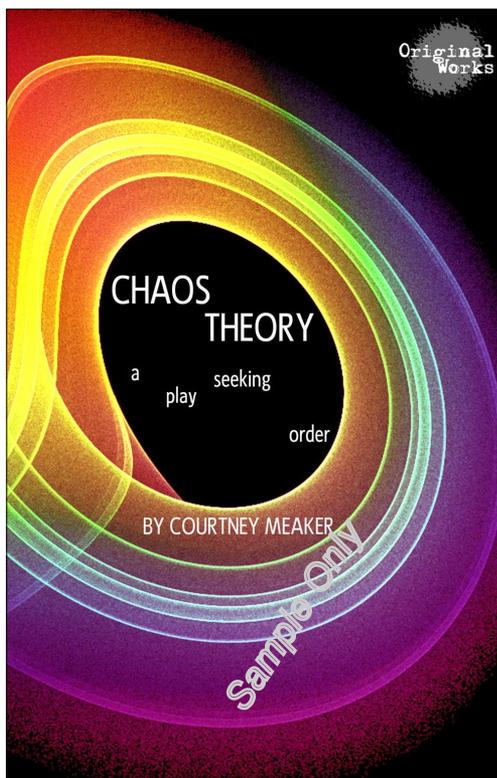
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*THINGS YOU CAN DO*  
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**Synopsis:** When her lover disappears Frannie sinks into a pajamas-only depression. Her friends try to distract her with a book about chaos theory little knowing they're headed down a slippery path through enticing alternate realities. Does the Machine they're building actually work, or are they luring each other into collective delusions of wish-fulfillment? And what if these seductive changes bring about the end of the world?

**Cast Size:** Diverse Cast of 4

**Things You Can Do**  
by  
**Kristen Palmer**

Sample Only

***THINGS YOU CAN DO*** was first produced by Live Girls! Theater and ACT. It opened on July 8, 2016 in the Eulalie Scanduzzi Space at ACT in Seattle, WA.

DIRECTED BY Meghan Arnette

STEVIE        Hannah Ruwe  
BELLA        Clara Hayes  
CLARA        Aly Bedford  
FIONA        Maria Glanz  
FLETCHER    Jonah Martin

Assistant Director	Erin Bednarz
Stage Manager	Blake Huddleston
Dramaturg	Jessica Chisum
Set Design	Roberta Christensen
Lighting Design	Trina Wright
Sound Design	Joseph Swartz
Costume Design	Michael Notestine

Special thanks to the artists and theaters, family and friends who contributed their time, talent, perception, intelligence, resources and love to the development and production of this play. In no particular order and with apologies to anyone left off: Live Girls! Theater, the staff and crew at ACT, John Langs, Jenn Creegan and Joslyn Main, Jana Vitols, Adam Szymkowicz, Connecticut Office of the Arts, Capital Theater of Sacramento, Hal Brooks, P. Carl, The Playwrights Center, The Jerome Foundation, Women's Project, Sarah Rasmussen, Margaret Lanterman, Awoye Timpo, Soho Rep, Writer/Director Lab, and New Georges.

*This play is dedicated to my mother.*

Sample Only

## THINGS YOU CAN DO

### Characters (4W/1M):

CLARA, late 40/50. Volunteer, friend of Fiona, mother of Bella and Stevie.

STEVIE, mid 20s. PhD candidate. Daughter of Clara.

BELLA, 15. Daughter of Clara.

FIONA, late 50/60s. Emergency Medical Technician, friend of Clara.

FLETCHER, mid 20s. Self-employed.

### Setting:

The southern part of northern Virginia. The present.

### Stage:

Clara's living room in a modest suburban house.

### Other areas:

Riverbank, Bella's Window, Bella's room, Fletcher's room, suburban street at night. These can be indicated with minimal set or lighting changes.

It is winter. Characters should be dressed accordingly. The suggestion of Ice and Water.

### Note on punctuation:

Hard interruptions are indicated with a /

Trailing off into thought is indicated with a —

## Scenes

- 1 - Riverbank. Stevie, Fletcher, Fiona, Clara, Bella
- 2 - Clara's living room. Stevie, Clara, Bella
- 3 - Outside the house. Stevie, Fletcher
- 4 - Outside the meeting. Fiona, Clara, Bella
- 5 - Bella's window. Bella
- 6 - Fletcher's living room. Stevie, Fletcher, Fiona
- 7 - Clara.
- 8 - Clara's living room. Stevie, Fletcher, Fiona, Clara, Bella
- 9 - Riverbank. Fiona, Clara

(optional intermission after scene 7)

## THINGS YOU CAN DO

### 1.

*(A blue light shines on STEVIE. Illuminating her face. The suggestion of ice and water.)*

*(Nothing moves.)*

STEVIE: The Cryosphere refers to the portions of the earth's surface where water is in a solid form - sea ice, lake ice, river ice, snow cover, glaciers, ice caps, ice sheets and frozen ground, like permafrost, like in Canada and Siberia where the ground never thaws or we thought it would never thaw — The cryosphere effects all aspects of the global climate system, primarily through its interaction with other elements. It is changing radically throughout the world. The river here is ice — partly ice. It is part of the cryosphere. It's the part that I study — the thickness, depth, the wind patterns frozen in water. I thought it would hold me. It looked like it would hold me. Anyways. It's not the first time I fell through —

*(The silent rotating light of an ambulance.)*

STEVIE: There was the blankness of snow extending into forever. There was the comfort of work, of routines and rituals. There was a sense of purpose, a sense of importance, a sense that I couldn't work fast enough - that I couldn't hold on to anything — and then — then — I —

Then the ice broke.

*(Lights up on everyone.)*

*(STEVIE, dressed for winter cold, is soaking wet and shivering.)*

*(BELLA watches from a perch out of sight. She wears an over-sized black wool coat with a hoodie underneath and a sock hat.)*

*(FLETCHER is next to STEVIE, out of breath and wet. He is wrapped in a blanket.)*

*(FIONA in her EMT gear, is checking STEVIE's vitals, wrapping a blanket around her.)*

FLETCHER: Dude. That's cold water.

STEVIE: Sorry. I thought it was thicker.

FIONA: Do you know where you are?

STEVIE: Home —

FIONA: I need to know that you're orientated/

STEVIE: Right. Stafford County.

FIONA: How long were you in?

STEVIE: Barely. I don't need/

FIONA: Let me decide that. *(to FLETCHER)* What happened exactly?

FLETCHER: I was in the bar. We were talking. Or I was talking. She just sat there. Then she left - said she'd be back. I went out for a smoke. Heard a creaky kindof scraping sound coming from the river - looked over and saw her go down. I immediately sprang into action - laid across the ice, extended my hand.

FIONA: Good work —

FLETCHER: Fletcher.

FIONA: I've seen you around. Where'd you learn that?

FLETCHER: Survival manuals.

FIONA: Right.

FLETCHER: I know a lot of things.

FIONA: *(to STEVIE)* There are posted signs young lady.  
Nobody goes out on this ice.

STEVIE: I was checking – the ice – I study it – the Cry-  
osphere – everything frozen –

FLETCHER: Wait a minute. I do know you! I knew I  
knew you.

STEVIE: No.

FLETCHER: Yes.

STEVIE: No.

FLETCHER: You worked at Shoney's.

FIONA: The one that burnt down?

FLETCHER: Little cutie in the green polyester uniform.  
Nights over the summer. You went to college up  
north? I washed dishes?

STEVIE: Sorry, I don't –

FLETCHER: It's cool – I was only there a week or some-  
thing.

STEVIE: Oh.

FIONA: No obvious damage. You're lucky. Now, Fletcher, let me get you checked out. Excuse us for a moment. (*Quiet – to FLETCHER, while checking his vitals.*) Was she trying to - you know — is she stable?

FLETCHER: I don't know – she just showed up at the bar - I ordered her a drink – then she said she wanted some air - she seemed kindof – you know, but not like she was going to – Anyways. Like I said. I followed her out.

FIONA: Good thing you did.

STEVIE: Excuse me? Can I go now? I'm sorry about the trouble and all, but I'm fine. Really.

FIONA: I'm sorry dear, I can't let you go alone. Is there someone we can call for you?

FLETCHER: If you need a place to crash —

FIONA: Friends? Family?

STEVIE: My mom.

FIONA: What's that honey?

STEVIE: Call my mom, 703 no it changed - (540) 659-2847.

FIONA: (*starts to call*) Her name?

STEVIE: Clara Knowles.

FIONA: Wait - Clara? Well you must be/

STEVIE: Stevie – I'm Stevie.

FIONA: Stevie! That's a kicker, your mom know you're home? She doesn't does she? She doesn't. She would have said - Fiona Tanglewood. A good friend of your mother's - here, I'll call her.

*(FIONA steps back to make the phone call. Her phone conversation occurs under STEVIE and FLETCHER's exchange.)*

FIONA: Clara? Hi, it's Fiona. Yes, I'm out on a call and, well, your daughter's here - no, no not Bella, Stevie - she's fine, but -

FLETCHER: You gonna be okay?

STEVIE: I'm fine.

FLETCHER: Cool.

STEVIE: Thanks.

FLETCHER: That's what I'm here for. You sure you don't remember me?

STEVIE: Maybe - vaguely.

FLETCHER: I got fired?

STEVIE: Mmm -

FLETCHER: For selling pot to the line cook?

STEVIE: Oh yeah - sure - you uh, you stayed here?

FLETCHER: Yeah - I was going to go to college, but I couldn't get a ride.

STEVIE: Oh.

FLETCHER: You in town a while?

STEVIE: I don't know.

FLETCHER: I'll stop by.

STEVIE: I don't know —

FLETCHER: Nah, it's cool. I'll see you soon.

FIONA: She's on her way. *(To FLETCHER)* And you need to get changed out of those wet clothes young man. Wait in the truck and I'll give you a ride home.

FLETCHER: Thanks but no thanks. I can walk from here. Sayonara sweetheart.

*(FLETCHER exits wrapped in the blanket.)*

STEVIE: I thought the ice was thicker —

FIONA: What were you doing out there honey?

STEVIE: Just — checking something.

FIONA: That young man said you were distraught.

STEVIE: No. No. Not at all. No. I'm fine. Fine. I was surprised that the river had frozen. It's not usual for here - for this time of year. Did it freeze last year?

FIONA: I don't think so. Weather's been weird.

STEVIE: Not weird. Wrong. Different. A shift. I shouldn't have walked out on it - tired I guess. Long trip here.

FIONA: Your mom was surprised.

STEVIE: Yeah - I should've called.

FIONA: She'll be happy to see you.

STEVIE: Hah. Yeah.

*(Pause)*

FIONA: She always talks about your work —

STEVIE: Really?

FIONA: Of course - I feel like I know you. Doing your dissertation. All your awards/

STEVIE: Research grants. There are some now, now that the ice is disappearing. Now that people are freaking out. Too late.

FIONA: Too late for what?

STEVIE: To do anything.

FIONA: About what dear?

STEVIE: Massive climate change?

FIONA: Right, right.

STEVIE: We've got no idea. Every year, every month — we're just hanging on to see what happens. We're recording unprecedented rates of change. There's no map for this, the predictions are —

FIONA: Okay, okay - take a breath.

STEVIE: We should just wipe the slate clean. Start over. No cars no planes no coal no gas no meat no plastic -

no wonder no one wants to face this. It's too much.  
It's seriously too much -

FIONA: Are you sure you're okay – I can take you to the hospital? I should take you, get you checked out.

STEVIE: No. I'm fine. Really. Barely got wet. Fell in the Arctic Sea once. That was scary. This is nothing.

FIONA: Still. If you're – upset, if you need to talk with someone.

STEVIE: Oh. Oh no. I'm just tired. Really. An accident. Embarrassing. I should know better. I do know better.

FIONA: OK. If you're sure.

STEVIE: Yup.

FIONA: Just. It sounds like, with your work, you might start to feel overwhelmed? Sample Only

STEVIE: That's one word for it.

FIONA: When we're overwhelmed we don't think clearly - we do things we might regret - we lose perspective.

STEVIE: I'm fine. Okay? Fine. I mean - yes, overwhelmed. I mean - it's just a lot - I just need to rest you know? Come home and disappear for a bit.

FIONA: Okay. Sure, let your mother take care of you.

*(CLARA enters. She carries an extra coat, something stiff and big, maybe orangey-pink. She bundles STEVIE into it.)*

CLARA: Stevie! Stevie! Is that you? Look at you. Oh honey – what did you do?

FIONA: I gave her a blanket, no signs of shock – a bit disoriented, but who isn't? She says she's feeling okay, but it might be a good idea to take her in, get her checked out by a doctor.

CLARA: Oh – okay. Do we need to? Stevie—

STEVIE: Mom I'm fine.

CLARA: Is she?

FIONA: Physically she's fine.

CLARA: What happened to you? I got here as fast as I could. When did you get back – you didn't call? I didn't know – and now? What were you doing on the ice?

STEVIE: I - was just – I thought it could hold me.

CLARA: Your teeth are chattering honey. She's okay?

FIONA: Seems to be, keep her warm, if she starts shaking uncontrollably or goes catatonic, call the hospital – but she should probably get to bed, rest. Let you look after her for a bit.

CLARA: Shouldn't she stay up?

FIONA: That's for concussion.

CLARA: Oh. Well. All right then. I'll see you at the meeting later.

FIONA: I'm sure they'll understand if you -

CLARA: You just said she was okay – you're tired, right honey?

STEVIE: Exhausted.

FIONA: Still – she's — *(Pulls CLARA to one side.)*  
Clara, she walked out onto the ice – ice that is clearly not safe. Now, she says it's an accident and I'm inclined to believe her – but, she shouldn't be left alone.

CLARA: I'm not going to leave her alone, Bella should be home.

FIONA: Sure, but/

CLARA: Don't worry, we'll be fine.

FIONA: Just doing my job. Nice meeting you Stevie.  
You take care of yourself.

STEVIE: Thanks.

FIONA: Call if you need anything. Anytime.

CLARA: She'll be fine. She's home now.

FIONA: Course. Bye Clara.

CLARA: Look at you - oh - Stevie.

*(FIONA exits.)*

*(CLARA and STEVIE gather themselves to go.)*

CLARA: Now. Sweetie. Where are your bags?

STEVIE: In the bar.

CLARA: In a bar? What are they doing in a bar? Are you drunk?

STEVIE: No. Jeez. Mom. I'm not drunk.

*(CLARA and STEVIE exit.)*

*(BELLA watches them leave. She walks up to the edge of the river. She smokes a cigarette.)*

BELLA: My sister's a fucking stupid twat. She runs across the ice slip slip slippery. She knocks right through. Slip slop splash. "Oh Bella – look at your sister, she's so independent. I heard she was going to be presenting at a conference about the permafrost and its interaction with the suck my ass-stream – Oh Bella, are you thinking of college? You know your sister was always thinking of college. Your sister was always thinking of what's next..."

Well what's next for you baby Bella? Huh? What's next for you little mushroom? Little Bella? You need something very special? You do don't you... *(BELLA's phone beeps a 'message received' signal. She pulls it out and reads it.)* Yeah right you stupid cunt chunk. Go suck your own ass.

*(BELLA texts a long reply. Typing so fast with her thumbs.)*

*(LIGHTS fade)*

2.

*(CLARA's living room.)*

*(STEVIE has changed into dry clothes, has her hair wrapped in a towel and a blanket around her. CLARA is hanging her wet clothes on any available surface. She is trying not to get the floor wet.)*

CLARA: You didn't think to call first?

STEVIE: Oh. No. Sorry - I didn't plan it through.

CLARA: I'll fix up the spare bedroom for you – Bella's moved into your room in the attic, she won't give it up. Don't ask her. I want you two to get along. We'll move the papers out of that room. There's a lot of crap in there. I used to re-do the bathrooms whenever I needed a change – seashells, then lighthouses, then a series of cartoon characters, anyways. It's nice stuff. Maybe you can take some back with you. All on sale too. The stores that have gone up! You barely have to leave the county anymore. No planning, bunch of erosion and traffic - no community discussion about it - just bulldozed everything. How'd you get here?

STEVIE: Flew to DC and caught a bus down.

CLARA: I would have picked you up.

STEVIE: It was fine. I slept a lot.

CLARA: So? You're okay?

STEVIE: Sure.

CLARA: I don't know why you thought you could just go out on the ice. No one else goes out on it.

STEVIE: I know. Sorry.

CLARA: No. I'm glad you're fine. They fished you out.  
That's good.

STEVIE: Fletcher.

CLARA: Who?

STEVIE: Fletcher. His name. Fletcher.

CLARA: That one of those new names?

STEVIE: It might be his last name.

CLARA: No.

*(CLARA turns on a radio. Easy listening station, maybe Fleetwood Mac's Rhiannon is playing. CLARA hums along she has a lovely voice. She rummages for something warm for STEVIE to wear.)*

*(STEVIE looks out the window. CLARA gives STEVIE a pair of socks from her pocket.)*

CLARA: I'm covered in moles. They're multiplying - age, sun exposure, can you tell?

STEVIE: I didn't notice.

CLARA: I am. They're everywhere. I'll put these in the dryer. Do you need clothes?

STEVIE: No Mom - I brought clothes.

CLARA: Okay - I guess you're going to stay awhile?  
Are you going to stay awhile?

STEVIE: I don't know.

CLARA: Well I can't plan if you don't tell me.

STEVIE: I don't need you to plan anything.

CLARA: Meals, laundry, and it's not like I'm just home all day – you don't have a car/

STEVIE: I'm just here. Okay? I don't need anything. I won't ask for anything. I'm just here.

CLARA: You need to eat. And you don't eat meat - right?

STEVIE: Yes.

CLARA: So I'll need to go to the store. Maybe you could tell me what you like? Make a list.

STEVIE: I can go.

CLARA: You can't walk there. There's no bus.

STEVIE: I'll bike.

CLARA: Oh my god. Just make a list. I'm going tomorrow anyway.

STEVIE: Okay. Thanks.

CLARA: Honey, really, what were you doing going out on the ice like that?

STEVIE: I don't know.

CLARA: You always know what you're doing. Always -

STEVIE: Sometimes - maybe not now -

*(CLARA's phone rings. She goes to answer it, takes the wet clothes with her. BELLA enters with a big bag of stuff. Camps out on the floor in front of STEVIE. BELLA pulls a series of hand-made dolls and outfits out of the bag. A bottle of prescription pills rolls out. She puts it back before STEVIE notices.)*

STEVIE: Hey Bella. Look at you - you grew up.

BELLA: And look at you - a drowned rat. A drowned homeless rat.

STEVIE: Nice to see you too.

BELLA: Mom's pissed.

STEVIE: How do you know?

BELLA: Because I talk to her. All the time. Not that she listens. So, I do what she says. Till I leave the house. Then I do what I want. I do exactly what I want. I want to do.

STEVIE: Huh.

BELLA: And what I want to do is whatever I want to do if you were wondering.

STEVIE: Fine.

BELLA: She's been freaked since the lady at school said I've got Oppositional Defiant Disorder.

STEVIE: Oppositional -

BELLA: ODD. Pills, therapy. An IEP. I'm in the crazy kid class. It's in the basement.

STEVIE: Is that okay for you?

BELLA: I don't go much.

STEVIE: Oh.

BELLA: I used to be in smart kid class. Then I freaked out one day and kicked a Vice-Principal in the head.

STEVIE: Bella -

BELLA: It was an accident! He was trying to stop me from pounding Kia. This chick who totally has it in for me. She stole my diorama of the MacKenzie Valley Glacier - and stomped it before class. That was last year, year before that she pulled off my costume for Dress Up Like An Author Day. I was Sappho - This Greek poet? and I was in a sheet, anyways I was like standing there in just my underpants and everybody's freaking out laughing at me. I'd been plotting her demise for a while. She fucking deserves everything she gets.

STEVIE: Why didn't you wear clothes under it?

BELLA: The Greeks didn't even have underwear. I study shit too you know?

STEVIE: Oh. Right. Did you and - Kia - make up?

BELLA: I've got like a school restraining order? I can't be near her.

STEVIE: Oh.

BELLA: Hey, try to blink your eyes slowly - really slow - really try to control the in/out light of your eye.

STEVIE: Why?

BELLA: Nobody can do it. You just blink. Nobody can do it slow.

STEVIE: I can't.

BELLA: See. If you could – then – then you could bring patience to your eyes.

STEVIE: Can you do it?

BELLA: No. Dad can though. I saw him do it once. He said it was for marksmanship. If you could do it you could be a sharpshooter. I'm practicing.

STEVIE: I don't remember.

BELLA: You were gone. I was 11. He was working at the Pentagon.

STEVIE: Oh right - I was - where was I?

BELLA: College. He was an asshole. Made me clean my room. Go to church. Wear skirts. What's he do anyway?

STEVIE: I asked him once – he just looked at me – kind of grinned, and said he had a knack for watching. A patience. A knack for connecting dots where there were none and a knack for being alone in the cold, so he worked for the government.

BELLA: Do you have a knack?

STEVIE: I guess.

BELLA: School?

STEVIE: Sure.

BELLA: Hey, how'd they find out rice was bad for birds?

STEVIE: I don't know that rice is bad for birds.

BELLA: Here – a joke - So this bride's walking out of the church after her wedding right? She's all white dress and glowing and ten doves are released into the sky they flutter around - but before they get too far right? The bridesmaids and everybody start throwing rice at the couple who are laughing and smiling – they were like “We don't care rice if rice hurts birds. We don't listen to science!” and all the doves come back to eat up the rice, they're pecking and pecking frantically, nobody thought to feed them while they were waiting so they're so hungry right? And the wedding group is so happy all gathering for pictures and smiling when suddenly the doves explode. Splattering blood and guts all over everybody. ... Because the rice?

STEVIE: That's a weird joke.

BELLA: Whatever.

STEVIE: I mean - I don't think it would actually happen that way.

BELLA: Oh. My. God. You are so lame.

*(CLARA enters with cookies.)*

CLARA: So. Girls – you're catching up?

BELLA: Yes mom. I'm telling her all about school and my friends and everything.

CLARA: Oh. Great.

BELLA: You know Stevie is a scientist? She's so very, very smart. I really hope that I can grow up to be half as smart as her someday.

CLARA: Watch your tone Bella.

STEVIE: It's okay mom.

CLARA: It is not. She's being sarcastic. I can't stand that. She's always being sarcastic these days.

BELLA: I am not.

STEVIE: It's fine. Really.

CLARA: Well. She knows better. Here, I made these for my meeting later, but - they're your favorite.

*(CLARA puts four cookies down near STEVIE.)*

STEVIE: Thanks mom.

BELLA: They're all for her?

CLARA: To share. Now, girls. I'm going out for a bit. You're okay aren't you Stevie?

STEVIE: Um - I guess.

CLARA: You look so much better and I won't be long – and you can just call if you need anything and help yourself to what's in the fridge — *(CLARA kisses them each on the tops of their heads.)* It's great to see you dear.

STEVIE: You too mom.

CLARA: I wish you would've called before – I would've been prepared.

STEVIE: It's okay. I don't need anything.

CLARA: Okay. Are you sure?

STEVIE: I'm fine.

CLARA: My two girls together. Have fun. Catch up!

*(CLARA exits.)*

*(The sound of a door shutting, a car door, engine starting, gravel crunching in the driveway.)*

STEVIE: Where does she go?

BELLA: Work in the day. Meetings in the night.

STEVIE: For what?

BELLA: Library on Tuesday, Singing on Wednesday, School Board on Thursday.

STEVIE: It's Monday.

BELLA: Oh. That's um, something about Mothers For A Better Tomorrow. It's her favorite.

STEVIE: Mmafabit?

BELLA: Mbaft.

*(Pause.)*

BELLA: Wanna play video games? I've got a bunch -

STEVIE: I don't really play video games.

BELLA: Oh. *(pause)* What do you do?

STEVIE: Research mostly, some writing. I've been tracking the changes in thicknesses of the ice/

BELLA: Boring fucking boring.

STEVIE: No – it's not boring. It's important – it's/

BELLA: Sure right. I know all about how important. Planet's going to heat up from all the carbon dioxide and crap we spew out with our cars and power and jets and junk and we have to recycle and go green and eat dirt. Whatever, we're all gonna die. We knew that anyway. You ever hear from him?

STEVIE: Who? Dad?

BELLA: Yeah –

STEVIE: No.

BELLA: Me neither. Mom used to. Not anymore. She got divorce papers.

STEVIE: When?

BELLA: Last year. They came in the mail.

STEVIE: She didn't tell me.

BELLA: Did you ask?

STEVIE: No - I guess I didn't.

BELLA: She thinks you talk to him.

STEVIE: I don't. I used to - but - I guess he got busy.

BELLA: Asshole.

STEVIE: Bella!

BELLA: What?

STEVIE: You never really knew him.

BELLA: Oh and you did?

STEVIE: Yes.

BELLA: Whatever. If you knew him so well you'd be talking all the time. If he wanted to talk to you, which obviously he doesn't.

STEVIE: Or he can't. Or he's working on something. Or something happened and they're not telling us. Things happen all the time. We don't know. Okay? That's what the deal is. We don't know what happens or what's going to happen.

*(Pause.)*

BELLA: Or he's an asshole and just fucked off somewhere better.

STEVIE: He's not an asshole.

BELLA: You don't know that. Most people are assholes really. You certainly seem to be. Showing up here - I bet you think you're getting your old room back. You're not.

STEVIE: That's fine.

BELLA: You think you can just come home and people will care. Hah! You're so wrong, nobody even remembers you anymore.

*(Pause.)*

STEVIE: Okay. So, I think I'll go for a walk. Get some air.

BELLA: Whatever.

STEVIE: What, uh – what will you do tonight?

BELLA: Like I said. Whatever I want.

STEVIE: Well. Have fun.

*(STEVIE grabs a coat and exits.)*

*(BELLA turns on her music. It is piercing. BELLA takes out the bottle of prescription pills. Pours them into her hand. They are many colors. She picks out one. Gulps it with no water.)*

*(Practices blinking her eyes slowly.)*

3.

*(STEVIE sits outside on a green electric box. She watches her breath condense in the cold air. She takes a voice recorder from her pocket and begins to dictate.)*

STEVIE: Here. The way the earth is going to change – the climates – microclimates – water scarcities and floods – new lakes, rivers, streams – running unfrozen – all into free flow – all will be in free flow and maybe it will take so long for it to happen but so long to us is nothing compared to geological time – like nothing – so I don't know why people find that reassuring. I don't know why any one finds anything reassuring. Except maybe they think they will be dead. But what about us? And what about our kids?

And you know when you are buried in the ground and that ground goes underwater that water will sink in and long fingered unloose your corpse – and bloated you, full of rotty rotty water, you will taint all you are in contact with and you'll still be contributing to the mess that your grand children will be dying from.

Better after all to burn.

*(FLETCHER leaps in with a ninja stance.)*

FLETCHER: Do not mess with the sentinel of the night.

STEVIE: What the/

FLETCHER: Stevie! Knew I'd find you girl. Didn't know it'd be so soon. But I'm charmed that it is. How's it going?

*(FLETCHER hops up to sit next to STEVIE.)*

STEVIE: Fine. I was just/

FLETCHER: Talking to your self?

STEVIE: No. I'm dictating. I'm working on my dissertation - and I can take notes this way.

FLETCHER: Cool. I need to get one of those - I never was much for writing down - but I get ideas all the time. But then I forget them. ADD. Let me see it - This to record?

STEVIE: Uh - yeah -

FLETCHER: Winter. Frozen earth. The streets of the suburbs are the quietest place of all - but who can fully comprehend the governmental machinations that surround this peaceful bedroom community in the southern part of Northern Virginia - Mt. Weather looms on the horizon, a safe harbor for our fearless leaders in the event of disaster - man-made or natural. FEMA, CIA, FBI, NSA, NORAD, Navy, Marines, OSHA all a mere stones throw away.

STEVIE: I don't think OSHA belongs on that list.

FLETCHER: Whatever. You know what I mean. Eyes everywhere.

*(Returns her dictaphone.)*

STEVIE: Thanks.

FLETCHER: I remember you. You were a smart girl. You were. I could tell - back then. You had that thing going on.

STEVIE: Thing?

FLETCHER: Sexy librarian thing.

STEVIE: Uh. I was like 16.

FLETCHER: So?

STEVIE: You were like 20 or something.

FLETCHER: No. 17.

STEVIE: Oh. Sorry. I thought you were older.

FLETCHER: That's cause I wasn't in school. Plus I'm old in the soul.

STEVIE: Right. Look, I'm sorry about earlier. It was stupid.

FLETCHER: That's cool. I got to be a hero. They'll write it up in the paper. Good deal for me – I don't get the good press too often.

STEVIE: Why not?

FLETCHER: Eh – my trade is on the black list.

STEVIE: Oh.

FLETCHER: These days I do a lot more redistribution of legal substances than I do hippy stuff if you follow.

STEVIE: Not really.

FLETCHER: You know – prescriptions? People are nuts for them, and it's way easier for me.

STEVIE: Oh. Well. Thanks again, for earlier -

*(STEVIE hops down to leave.)*

FLETCHER: Where are you going? Let's get a drink or something – come on – it's been years. I want to hear about what you've been doing.

STEVIE: I was just heading home.

FLETCHER: What? You are home! Right here on the well-lit streets that made you! Come on. We can drive around - look at what was and what is as we go – mostly what is – there's not much left of what was.

STEVIE: Well –

FLETCHER: My truck's around the corner.

STEVIE: I don't know –

FLETCHER: You owe me! I saved your life remember?

STEVIE: Okay. Okay – a drink. Sounds fun.

FLETCHER: Exactly. Fun. Possibly mind-blowing – maybe just okay – you never know.

*(FLETCHER and STEVIE exit.)*

4.

*(After the meeting. CLARA and FIONA outside.)*

CLARA: I really don't see what they think writing polite letters will accomplish. The planning commission already signed off on the development. They haven't started clearing yet – so that is something, but still –

*(FIONA takes out a cigarette and lights it.)*

CLARA: Fiona, what are you doing? You don't smoke.

FIONA: Used to. Your Stevie – how is she?

CLARA: Fiona would you put that out? People don't start smoking at your age.

FIONA: I smoked a pack a day for years.

CLARA: Ugh.

FIONA: Quit when I was 35. Cold. I just decided - so long ago.

CLARA: Did you buy those?

FIONA: Found them. Back of a drawer. Like they were waiting for me.

CLARA: Are you okay?

FIONA: Hope so. Look - I don't think Stevie was 'just checking something' on that ice. I think she was hoping it would break. I think she wanted to fall in.

CLARA: That's ridiculous. She was happy as a clam when I left.

FIONA: I should have sent her to the hospital.

CLARA: No. Don't be silly. It was so little – just a chill.  
She's at home resting, like you said. Catching up with Bella.

FIONA: But, why is she home all of a sudden? It's not a holiday.

CLARA: She wanted to see us.

FIONA: Middle of term? Does she usually come home like this?

CLARA: Never. It's been years.

FIONA: So why?

CLARA: I don't know - I never know. She'll tell me when she's ready. And seriously. You need to put that out. It stinks.

*(FIONA stubs out her cigarette.)*

FIONA: I'd be worried.

CLARA: I give her space. What else can I do? I'm not smart enough for her.

FIONA: I'm sure that's not/

CLARA: No, it's true. It's always been this way. Ever since she was a baby. Steve – her father – was the only one who could hold her. She'd just curl up in his arms, staring at him, never fussy, never screaming. But he would leave and he'd hand her back to me and head out the door. She'd scream and scream – and I'd

hold her and bounce her and clutch her and rub her and squeeze her and shake her and she'd howl. She would wake the neighbors. They'd come knocking, the dogs would start barking and she would howl.

I was a terrible mother.

FIONA: No.

CLARA: I couldn't comfort my daughter, I still can't.

FIONA: That's not true.

CLARA: She wouldn't take my breast. Only the bottle. And only from her father without fussing. Argh. She was a dream around him – just perfect, and as she grew – they'd just sit for hours and hours talking, go for lunches – I'd feel so useless.

FIONA: You were lonely.

CLARA: Bitter. And I knew I should be happy for this child. This girl who loved her daddy. I wasn't. I resented.

FIONA: But then he would leave.

CLARA: Yes. And her door would shut and there would be nothing for me. She didn't need anything from me. She never needed anything from me.

FIONA: That's not true.

CLARA: She didn't. And I didn't worry about her. She's like her father. Knows what she's doing and just does it. Bella though - little Bella growing in my spiteful belly. A girl I wanted, a girl from her father, who

would need only me. I didn't tell him she was growing. I didn't tell. He came back and there she was and she screamed and screamed at him and spit thick white goo down his navy blue uniform and he left for longer and longer until the papers came, got signed and sent. Stevie never called. Didn't ask. Not then. Just - left. Just did her work. And now she's back? Why is she back?

FIONA: She's overwhelmed - she needs something/

CLARA: But what can I do? What can any of us do?

FIONA: I don't know. Talk to her?

CLARA: She doesn't listen. I try - where do I even start?

FIONA: Just sit her down. Be there for her.

CLARA: That sounds so sensible.

FIONA: That's cause it is. Still. Doesn't mean its easy.

CLARA: But - how do you? When they've grown and they've left and they don't even try - for years. For years. She didn't even try.

FIONA: I drive to my son's house. It's an hour from here. I sit out on the street and try to know what he does. What his life is. I ask him and he doesn't say. He doesn't have the words. It's just - fill. But if he came home to me —

*(Lights another cigarette.)*

CLARA: Would you stop that?

FIONA: Go to your daughter.

*(FIONA starts coughing.)*

CLARA: Put that out - jeez Fiona/

FIONA: She needs you.

CLARA: You need some water - you need/

FIONA: I don't need anything. I can't do anything - I  
can't change it/

CLARA: Change what?

FIONA: This - this - they say if you quit you're in the  
clear. But that's bull.

CLARA: Clear for what? Fiona/

FIONA: Just. Just go home - go home to your daughter.

*(FIONA stops coughing.)*

CLARA: She's fine. You're - you're/

FIONA: Just call - make sure she's okay.

*(CLARA calls. FIONA stubs out her cigarette. The phone  
rings. No one answers.)*

*(Light out on CLARA and FIONA.)*

5.

*(Lights up on BELLA in her attic room, sitting in her window, legs dangling. She has her dolls and a BB gun beside her. She plays with her dolls. This is a puppet show, BELLA plays both parts.)*

DOLL 1: All I wish is to become gloriously maddeningly spectacularly rich. To eat up the world with my riches. To devour all fools – and the smarty pants too! I won't need anything anymore. I won't need anyone anymore.

DOLL 2: No one!

DOLL 1: Once I've got all the money I'll decide what's funny!

DOLL 2: Yes! You and only you!

DOLL 1: And therapists and social workers are not funny!

DOLL 2: That's right!

DOLL 1: Skinny ass skater boys are not funny!

DOLL 2: No!

DOLL 1: Militant cheerleaders are not funny!

DOLL 2: No way!

DOLL 1: You can only do what you can do, and you know what you can do!

DOLL 2: You know it! You kick it out of the park! You are an undiscovered genius! Oh fearless leader show us! Show us the way!

BELLA: Like this!

*(BELLA flings her dolls out the window. She shoots them as they fly. Like a skeet shoot. They collapse one by one into a pile in the front yard.)*

*(Car alarms sound. Dogs bark.)*

*(BELLA sits in her window, looking at the night.)*

**END OF SAMPLE.**

Sample Only