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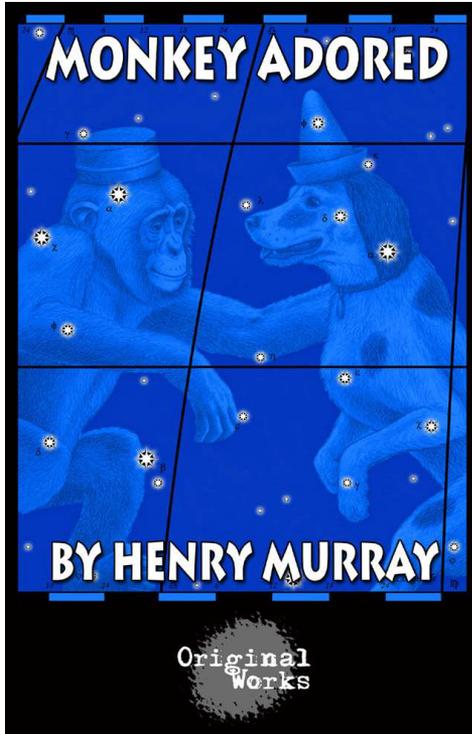
*Three Views of the Same Object*

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*Also Available By  
Henry Murray*



**Monkey Adored**

**Synopsis:** What if animals evolved to the point where they could talk, sit in cafes and carry on interspecies love affairs? What if they decided to seek revenge on the humans who have subjugated them throughout history? A hybrid of ribald sex comedy and action/thriller MONKEY ADORED was lauded as a “Critic’s Pick” by Backstage.

**Cast Size:** 4 Males, 2 Females

# **Three Views of the Same Object**

**A play by  
Henry Murray**

Thank you for this life! Still I miss the alternatives. The sketches, all of them, want to become real. A ship's engine far away on the water expands the summer-night horizon. Both joy and sorrow swell in the dew's magnifying glass. ...Our life has a sister ship, following quietly another route. While the sun blazes behind the islands.

Tomas Tranströmer

All the conventions conspire  
To make this fort assume  
The furniture of home;  
Lest we should see where we are,  
Lost in a haunted wood,  
Children afraid of the night  
Who have never been happy or good.

W. H. Auden

## **Production History**

THREE VIEWS OF THE SAME OBJECT was given its world co-premiere by Rogue Machine Theatre in Los Angeles, California, John Perrin Flynn Artistic Director, and The Bloomington Playwrights Project in Bloomington, Indiana, Chad Rabinovitz Artistic Director.

The BPP production, directed by Dina Epshteyn, opened April 6, 2012. Sam McKay served as the stage manager; Jeff Stone was the technical director; and David Wade was the assistant TD. The cast was as follows:

JESSE 1: Francesca Sobrer

JESSE 2: Darrell Ann Stone

JESSE 3: Kate Braun

POPPY 1: Gerry Pauwels

POPPY 2: Ken Farrell

MRS. WIDKIN: Gail Bray/Catharine DuBois

The Rogue Machine production opened July 30, 2009. It was directed by John Perrin Flynn, Bret Aune and Hollace Starr, was produced by John Perrin Flynn and co-produced by David Combs and Mathew Elkins. The technical director was David Mauer; the set design and costumes were by Stephanie Kerley Schwartz, assisted on costumes by Kellsy MacKilligan; Hazel Kuang designed the properties; the costume design was by Lauren Tyler; the lighting design was by Leigh Allen; the sound design was by Christopher Moscatiello; the stage manager was Ramon Valdez and the production manager was Amanda Mauer. The cast was as follows:

JESSE 1: Anne Gee Byrd  
JESSE 2: K Callan  
JESSE 3: Nancy Linehan Charles  
POPPY 1: Allan Miller  
POPPY 2: Shelly Kurtz  
MRS. WIDKIN: Catherine Carlin

## **Acknowledgements**

The playwright wishes to thank the following people for their essential contributions to the development and birth of **THREE VIEWS OF THE SAME OBJECT**: John Flynn; Chad Rabinovitz and The Bloomington Playwrights Project; Jean Craig; Jennie Webb and Theatricum Botanicum; Diane Williams; Kevin Lawler and The Great Plains Theatre Conference; Laurie Lathem; Jerry Patch, Rebecca Gilman; Shawn Douglas; Miki Warner; Linda Stonerock; Sherry Sonnett; and my Gemini twin Eliza Bent. My four sisters, Connie, Sandy, Susan and Mary-Ann have been a life long source of love and support.

To my steadfast husband of twenty-seven years, Lewin Wertheimer, I have this to say: I am the sum of the people who love me and the biggest part of me is you.

### Cast:

JESSE 1: Alcoholic Jesse, a retired high school English teacher.

JESSE 2: Fun-loving Jesse, retired high school English teacher.

JESSE 3: Grieving Jesse, a retired high school English teacher.

POPPY 1: Intellectual Poppy, a retired university Biology professor.

POPPY 2: Sensualist Poppy, a retired university Biology professor.

MRS. WIDKIN: Poppy's former secretary.

All three Jesses may be played by the same actress but the two Poppys are played by different actors. They are different iterations of the same people. If a single actress plays all the Jesses, she must sometimes change her persona on stage in front of an audience by altering her carriage, gait and vocal qualities. The same actress always plays Mrs. Widkin.

**Scene:**

The set could be realistic or it could be fragmented. The play takes place in Jesse and Poppy's home. Most of it takes place in the living room but it would be provocative if we could see into the kitchen a tad bit. There is a master bedroom that is sometimes visible and sometimes not. The house is a modest one-story ranch style that should have been remodeled forty years ago. A functioning front door would be helpful, and could contain a small glass window, through which we could confirm day or night. Though it need not be represented, the 4<sup>th</sup> wall contains a large picture window, which looks out on the front yard/garden/audience.

**Time:**

Early 21<sup>st</sup> Century, when some people still had landlines.

## Three Views of the Same Object

### Act I

#### Scene 1

*At Rise: [projection: Friday 1:32 p.m. The supertitle fades away.] POPPY 1 is sitting in his chair in the living room. He reads a copy of Final Exit, a manual of self-deliverance, occasionally underlining or tabbing something important, JESSE 1 is asleep on the sofa. She may snore softly.*

*(After a moment, JESSE 1 awakens.)*

JESSE 1: What just happened?

POPPY 1: I'm here.

JESSE 1: It frightened me.

POPPY 1: What?

JESSE 1: It was raining ... a torrent. Mud sucking at my feet. There was a car that was sliding toward the river. And a woman behind the wheel. I kept yelling, "Get out of the car!" *(She mimes "roll down the window.")* But she wouldn't roll down the window. Suddenly a whole section of the bank collapsed and the car went into the water. It never surfaced.

POPPY 1: That is frightening.

JESSE 1: Then I realized that the woman was you.

POPPY 1: Uht? Not yourself?

JESSE 1: How could I be in two places at once?

POPPY 1: Freud. All unidentified characters in a dream are you.

JESSE 1: It was you in a woman's body, not unidentified. Your eyes in a woman's face, desperate behind the glass.

POPPY 1: Okay. I'm not sure I want to analyze that.

JESSE 1: I wanted to save you. I would have thrown myself in the water.

POPPY 1: You were a man?

JESSE 1: Go back to your damn book. (*beat*) What time is it?

POPPY 1: One thirty, approximately... in the afternoon.

JESSE 1: That must be why the sun is shining.

POPPY 1: If I felt like you look, I'd be asking me for a couple of aspirin.

JESSE 1: Fuck you.

POPPY 1: If you're going to cuss, I'm going to stop talking to you.

JESSE 1: My mouth is dry. I have to pee.

POPPY 1: There's a boiled egg in the kitchen if you're hungry.

JESSE 1: ... or throw up.

POPPY 1: In either case, I suggest you try the toilet.

JESSE 1: You really should use your Groucho voice when you say things like that.

POPPY 1: *(In his Groucho voice.)* There are no other things like that.

JESSE 1: Save my place...

*(JESSE 1 rises and exits, a little unsteady on her feet. POPPY underlines something in his book and places a tab.)*

*(POPPY 1 is oblivious to the following action: JESSE 3 enters in her slip, carrying a pair of men's shoes which she places on the back of the sofa. She takes a hidden box of chocolates from the bookshelf and eats one, throwing the paper on the floor. She chews the chocolate, staring at a painting. She marches to the front door and opens it. She crosses to the painting and takes it off the wall and standing at the door, heaves the painting into the front yard. There is a muffled crash as the painting hits the lawn. She closes the front door, exits, reenters, retrieves the shoes, then re-exits. JESSE 1 appears in the doorway wearing dark glasses. She returns to the sofa and takes up the paper.)*

POPPY 1: *(He wants to talk about something.)* It says here...

JESSE 1: I don't want to know.

POPPY 1: ... not to use medication that's been prescribed to you...

JESSE 1: Stop.

POPPY 1: ...that the body builds up an unknown level of tolerance.

JESSE 1: Poppy, I just woke up.

POPPY 1: Alright.

JESSE 1: (*Looking at the paper.*) Wait! It's after one? We're missing Lillian Stewart's funeral service!

POPPY 1: Did you want to go?

JESSE 1: She was my best friend.

POPPY 1: Send her a card.

(*JESSE 1 gives him a look.*)

JESSE 1: Lillian outlived Sam by fourteen years.

POPPY 1: Who knew there was so much money in cement?

JESSE 1: Too bad I didn't marry for money.

POPPY 1: Lasts longer than love. Apparently. Anyway, he wasn't rich when they married.

JESSE 1: No, she was pregnant.

POPPY 1: You don't know that.

JESSE 1: You don't know what I know. Six words, two "knows."

POPPY 1: You can't count a contraction as one word.

JESSE 1: I most certainly can.

POPPY 1: Then I can use hyphens.

JESSE 1: Hyphenate away. Anyway, why would anyone get married in August if they didn't have to?

POPPY 1: Interesting logic. Well, I'm sorry I'm not rich. You deserve better.

JESSE 1: Make me a martini in a highball glass and I'll stick an olive up your butt.

POPPY 1: Is that meant to entice me?

*(POPPY 1 goes to the bar)*

JESSE 1: Your kindness to an old woman has not gone unnoticed. I never liked Lillian Stewart.

POPPY 1: She was your best friend.

JESSE 1: Until she started making art projects by gluing birdseed onto plywood.

POPPY 1: You were never one to suffer fools.

JESSE 1: Only you.

POPPY 1: You might consider my feelings once in a while.

JESSE 1: I married a Narcissist.

POPPY 1: I love you, too.

JESSE 1: As opposed to just yourself? The sink smells like you've been peeing in it again.

POPPY 1: Sorry.

JESSE 1: Sorry what?

POPPY 1: Sorry... sir?

JESSE 1: Men are pigs.

POPPY 1: Yes, we are.

JESSE 1: A woman would never pee in the sink.

POPPY 1: An arresting image.

JESSE 1: You could squat, but noooo, men don't do that.

POPPY 1: Splashes the balls.

JESSE 1: Is there such a thing as a scrotal tuck? (*POPPY gives her a withering look.*) So when you say, "Sorry", you mean: "Too bad, I'm going to keep doing it anyway."

POPPY 1: Urine is sterile when it first comes out.

JESSE 1: Your mother was right.

POPPY 1: Frequently, she was.

JESSE 1: Men are dogs.

POPPY 1: You just said “pigs”.

JESSE 1: Murderous, hairy creatures.

POPPY 1: Possibly, she meant wolves. Though I sometimes congratulate myself that I’ve gotten this far in life without killing another human being.

JESSE 1: Mazel Tov. (*She drinks.*) What other grand accomplishments have you racked up?

POPPY 1: I never deflowered a virgin.

JESSE 1: That’s a bit below the belt.

POPPY 1: “A” for anatomy.

JESSE 1: That’s going to look nice in your obituary: “Nary a hymen busted”. Good drink, by the way.

POPPY 1: I used to believe there were a few guys running around popping cherries right and left...

JESSE 1: Popping cherries?

POPPY 1: ...while the rest of us stumbled in their wake searching for an intact hymen.

JESSE 1: “C” for “commodification”.

POPPY 1: Well, after my first three or four girlfriends confessed to me, I began to feel a little self-conscious. Where the hell was I when all this was going on?

JESSE 1: Must have been horrible for you.

POPPY 1: I've always liked leftovers. And you've been like a virgin to me every time.

JESSE 1: Are you saying I'm sexually inept?

POPPY 1: I'm saying, as mysterious as it is, I've never stopped desiring you.

*(She raises her glass to him and takes a drink.)*

POPPY 1: For very long at a time.

JESSE 1: Honesty appreciated.

POPPY 1: Cocksman, I believe they're called.

JESSE 1: I think with men, the idea of sex is sexier than the real thing. Anyway, I rode horses as a girl.

POPPY 1: You lost your hymen to a horse? You never told me.

JESSE 1: Human men pale by comparison.

*(JESSE 1 goes back to her paper.)*

POPPY 1: When I was a teaching assistant, third grade, we used to have nuclear bomb drills... the kids would crouch in the hall, one behind the other along the wall, like little sheep...

JESSE 1: Like puppies sniffing each other's butts.

POPPY 1: ... as if the Russians would actually waste perfectly good nuclear ordinance on rural Illinois, although really, what's more frightening than the irrational?

JESSE 1: (*As POPPY takes a breath.*) Bookmark!

POPPY 1: Such an innocent time. Those little lambs lined against the wall giggling and whispering.

JESSE 1: Sniffing.

POPPY 1: Maybe it's strange to call the threat of nuclear annihilation innocent. But at least it would have been quick.

JESSE 1: There's still hope for Armageddon.

POPPY 1: You dropped a bookmark.

JESSE 1: Ah. The appearance of being rational.

POPPY 1: What?

JESSE 1: What's more frightening than the irrational? The appearance of being reasonable... logical.

POPPY 1: Are you fully awake?

JESSE 1: Don't be such a pansy; just say it.

POPPY 1: To be absolutely certain, the book recommends tying a plastic bag over one's head.

JESSE 1: Poppy... suffocation?

POPPY 1: One takes the pills first. It's not as if...

JESSE 1: Stop it!

POPPY 1: Of course one has to be careful with the timing...

JESSE 1: One takes the pills? Why are you doing this to me?

POPPY 1: I know it's not easy to contemplate.

*(JESSE kills her drink. She goes to the bar and pours vodka in her glass.)*

POPPY 1: Before you get too drunk, I'd like to...

JESSE 1: No comprendo... too drunk?

POPPY 1: There's this window between drink one and...

JESSE 1: I need a shower.

*(She moves to the hallway.)*

POPPY 1: Jesse. If something happens and you have no recollection of it, did it really happen?

JESSE 1: What is the sound of one hand clapping?

POPPY 1: No glass in the shower.

*(She salutes him and the doorbell rings.)*

JESSE 1: Well Poppy, that will be your insignificant other. *(She opens the front door.)* Come in, Mrs. Widkin.

*(MRS. WIDKIN, with her ever-present purse, enters bearing a foil-covered casserole.)*

JESSE 1: That dress makes you look five minutes younger.

*(JESSE 1 exits.)*

MRS. WIDKIN: Thanks? How are you doing, Poppy?

POPPY 1: Good enough.

MRS. WIDKIN: Don't mean to disturb you but my niece has a piano recital later this afternoon.

POPPY 1: You're a good egg, Mrs. Widkin.

MRS. WIDKIN: Well, I wanted you to have this casserole. Don't get up. I'll put it in the fridge.

*(MRS. WIDKIN exits to the kitchen. POPPY 1 wanders to the window.)*

POPPY 1: Speaking of eggs there's a cooked one on the counter if you want it.

MRS. WIDKIN: *(off)* I'll stick it in the fridge for you. Is Mrs. Elazar having a bad day?

POPPY 1: Oh...she's... She doesn't eat very much.

MRS. WIDKIN: *(Sticking her head in.)* That diet never worked for me. I'm just going to do up these dishes in the sink. By the way, I ran into your teaching assistant on campus and she said she was planning on baking you some brownies.

POPPY 1: Brownies?

MRS. WIDKIN: Ed Edwards was standing nearby and he said he wanted to bake her brownies. *(She laughs.)* Some things never change.

POPPY 1: How's Dean Collier?

MRS. WIDKIN: Doing much better.

*(She exits to the kitchen.)*

POPPY 1: There's a Rufus hummingbird in the garden!

MRS. WIDKIN: *(off)* Yea, Rufus!

POPPY 1: I really should get out there more. Pull some weeds. *(He stands looking at the garden. He notices an insect climbing the glass. He calls out.)* A ladybug! *(To himself.)* Sound like an idiot... but nature is so damn specific. Each little thing so uniquely itself. So dependent on everything around it being exactly what it is. Including an automatic sprinkler system. *(Calling out.)* Because man is a part of nature too!

MRS. WIDKIN: *(off)* Just a minute!

POPPY 1: My memory banks tell me that, yes indeed, this is *Coccinella septempunctata*. But this exact shade of red-orange can't be reproduced. Even a photograph... the movement is lost, the mighty aphid-crushing mandible, the hour, the atmosphere, the glass... the not-so-clean glass ...

MRS. WIDKIN: *(Standing in the doorway.)* What did you say?

POPPY 1: ... because there's still me standing here with my life experiences looking at that damned insect with my eyes and that... specificity... that incredible specificity.

MRS. WIDKIN: You miss teaching, don't you? I'll be done in a moment.

*(MRS. WIDKIN exits.)*

POPPY 1: You get one look, one pass through, no shot at having made different choices. There! The genetic shell opens, those tiny wings... she's gone.

*(POPPY 1 watches the Lady Bug fly off, returns to his chair,)*

*(JESSE 3 enters wearing the tattered remains of her wedding dress. She carries the shears and cuts at it. It's a hopeless, shredded mess, but still constricting. Using her key, MRS. WIDKIN, with her ever-present purse, enters by the front door carrying the broken painting and a foil covered casserole. They stare at each other.)*

JESSE 3: My best friend died.

MRS. WIDKIN: I'm sorry.

JESSE 3: Lillian Stewart, gone. She was the last one.

MRS. WIDKIN: That must be hard.

JESSE 3: There's no one left. *(MRS. WIDKIN looks at the shredded dress. JESSE 3 looks at the broken painting.)*  
I never liked it.

MRS. WIDKIN: Your wedding dress?

JESSE 3: The painting.

MRS. WIDKIN: *(Looking at the painting.)* Well, it's trash now.

JESSE 3: (*Looking at the dress.*) I just wanted to wear it one more time.

MRS. WIDKIN: Let me put this in the fridge and I'll help you out of that.

(*MRS. WIDKIN exits to the kitchen.*)

POPPY 1: If life is specific does that mean death is a lack of specificity?

(*JESSE 3 pulls at the dress, until it lies at her feet. MRS. WIDKIN re-enters and sees what's happened.*)

MRS. WIDKIN: Well, that's two for the trash. Step out of it.

(*MRS. WIDKIN holds JESSE 3's hand to help her balance.*)

JESSE 3: Where was this flesh yesterday? Hiding in the sofa? It glommed onto me while I napped?

MRS. WIDKIN: You're not fat.

JESSE 3: I'm a woman, not a Shar Pei.

MRS. WIDKIN: Why don't you go change?

(*MRS. WIDKIN watches JESSE 3 trundle off to the bedroom. She picks up the dress and heads toward the kitchen but the phone rings. MRS. WIDKIN answers it.*)

MRS. WIDKIN: Elazar Residence. (*Alison: Mrs. Widkin? I'm so glad you're there.*) Hi Alison. (*Alison: She won't answer when you're not there.*) I know. I stopped calling weeks ago. She doesn't answer the door

either. I had a key made. (*Alison: Can I talk to her?*) Well, let's give it a try. (*She covers the mouthpiece on the phone and hollers to JESSE 3.*) Mrs. Elazar! Your daughter's on the phone!

JESSE 3: (*off*) Fuck her! And fuck gravity!

MRS. WIDKIN: She's not having a good day. (*Alison: Why won't she at least talk to me?*) She will. I'll keep after her. She'll call you when she's ready. (*Alison: Tell her I send my love. God knows why.*) I'll tell her, sweetie. (*She hangs up and goes to the hallway and calls out.*) Alison sends her love! (*She waits for a response but doesn't get one.*) You can speed dial her by pressing star one if you change your mind!

(*MRS. WIDKIN exits to the kitchen and a moment later reenters drying her hands on a dishtowel.*)

MRS. WIDKIN: All done, Poppy.

(*She exits to the kitchen.*)

POPPY 1: Thank you. I would have gotten to them eventually.

MRS. WIDKIN: (*Off*) My pleasure. (*She re-enters without the dishtowel but with her purse.*) Are you in pain?

POPPY 1: Some.

MRS. WIDKIN: You want me to get you a pill?

POPPY 1: I have some in the kitchen. I'll take one in a minute.

MRS. WIDKIN: How's your supply?

POPPY 1: I'm seeing the doctor later.

MRS. WIDKIN: You have an appointment?

POPPY 1: Four-thirty.

MRS. WIDKIN: Hmm. I could skip the recital.

POPPY 1: No need, I'm getting used to cabs.

MRS. WIDKIN: Do me a favor. Call me on my cell when you're done. Maybe I can swing by and get you.

POPPY 1: I will do you that favor.

MRS. WIDKIN: Good. Everyone on campus misses you so much.

POPPY 1: I miss you all. More than I can say.

MRS. WIDKIN: Call me?

POPPY 1: Of course.

*(MRS. WIDKIN exits the front door.)*

POPPY 1: Jess?! Jesse?!

*(No answer. POPPY takes up his book.)*

*(MRS. WIDKIN enters from the kitchen and starts going through the mail. She calls out to JESSE 3.)*

MRS. WIDKIN: Jesse?! Your check arrive? (*Spoken to herself, but not unkindly.*) Not that you'd notice. (*Loud again.*) I think you should see an increase this month. You get his full amount now.

(*MRS. WIDKIN continues opening mail and places the bills in her purse. JESSE 3 reenters still wearing her slip but with the addition of a bowtie and sports jacket of Poppy's. MRS. WIDKIN doesn't notice at first.*)

MRS. WIDKIN: Are these all the bills? You're very low on cash but it's only a few days...

JESSE 3: Star one is Poppy's office.

MRS. WIDKIN: That number was reassigned. That's why you kept getting the history department. We have to order more checks...

JESSE 3: I didn't give you permission to change it!

(*MRS. WIDKIN turns and sees how she's dressed.*)

MRS. WIDKIN: Are you missing him?

JESSE 3: You don't see him do you?

MRS. WIDKIN: Why don't you put on your pretty blue print?

JESSE 3: Why?

MRS. WIDKIN: This might be a good day to check out the senior center.

JESSE 3: I don't like old people.

MRS. WIDKIN: It would do you good to get out and mingle.

JESSE 3: I smell.

MRS. WIDKIN: Are you bathing properly?

JESSE 3: It doesn't wash off.

MRS. WIDKIN: Well, that's why God invented Shalimar.

JESSE 3: My bladder leaks. No one will ever touch me again.

*(MRS. WIDKIN moves to her side and puts her arms around JESSE 3.)*

MRS. WIDKIN: How about a nice hot bath with bath oil?

JESSE 3: I feel like I'm in an airplane looking down at my life. And it goes on and on and I just want the damn plane to land somewhere. I don't care where, just let me the fuck off the plane!

MRS. WIDKIN: Let's get you cleaned up.

*(They exit to the hallway.)*

*(We hear JESSE 2's laughter.)*

JESSE 2: *(off)* Hurry Poppy!

POPPY 2: *(off)* Now look. I dropped the keys.

JESSE 2: *(off)* I may have to pee on the lawn!

POPPY 2: *(off)* Hold your horses, hold your horses.

JESSE 2: *(off)* Then what would the neighbors say?

POPPY 2: *(off)* Here we go.

*(The front door opens and POPPY 2 and JESSE 2 enter, slightly breathless and not at all in a bad mood considering where they've been. JESSE 2 immediately runs to a hall powder room.)*

POPPY 2: I got you home as fast as I could. Didn't I?

JESSE 2: *(off)* Oh Poppy, the look on that man's face! He was all puffed up like a puffer fish!

POPPY 2: *(chuckling)* I know.

JESSE 2: *(off)* He was so mad... and Poppy, you really did run that red light.

POPPY 2: *(chuckling)* I know.

JESSE 2: *(off)* You must be more careful.

POPPY 2: I didn't see him. I was blinded by your breasts.

JESSE 2: *(returning)* My breasts?

POPPY 2: I meant to say beauty but your breasts just slipped out.

JESSE 2: Flirt!

POPPY 2: Wishful thinking.

JESSE 2: You don't have to wish, Poppy, just ask. But not while you're driving.

POPPY 2: Is there something I can help you off with?

JESSE 2: Hold your horses. How about I fix us lunch and then we can go relax.

POPPY 2: Can't help it, funerals makes me horny.

JESSE 2: I'm going to pay closer attention to the obituaries. Poor Lillian Stewart, fourteen years without her husband. She never seemed the same after Sam died. I thought her daughter looked very elegant in that black shift. I wish I could be elegant.

POPPY 2: You looked lovely, Jess, as always.

JESSE 2: You were blinded.

POPPY 2: Yes.

JESSE 2: Dazzled.

POPPY 2: Yes.

JESSE 2: After lunch let's have a nice hot bath together.

POPPY 2: Maybe I should take a Viagra?

JESSE 2: Wouldn't Cialis last longer?

POPPY 2: She-devil!

JESSE 2: Don't let these kindly wrinkles fool you.

*(JESSE 2 goes to the kitchen)*

POPPY 2: Shall I get out your favorite video?

JESSE 2: *(off)* Which one?

POPPY 2: Rin Tin Tin and the Lusty Ladies?

JESSE 2: *(off)* Who's going to play Rin Tin Tin?

POPPY 2: Woof!

JESSE 2: *(off)* Maybe I'm more in the mood for The Creature from the Black Lagoon Meets The Fifty-Foot Woman.

POPPY 2: I'll get out the rubber sheet.

JESSE 2: *(off)* Ouch!

POPPY 2: That was in reference to the Black Lagoon.

*(JESSE 2 brings in two small glasses of cranberry juice.)*

JESSE 2: There is surgery I could have that might help.

POPPY 2: Not a problem for me, my love. I like my women wet.

JESSE 2: Said the-one-who-can't-pee to the-one-who-can't-not-pee.

*(JESSE 2 returns to the kitchen. POPPY 2 wanders to the window.)*

POPPY 2: It's only urine... Between us we have one properly functioning bladder.

*(JESSE 2 appears in the doorway and they laugh together. She disappears again.)*

JESSE 2: *(off)* Maybe I should makes some phone calls.  
Find out exactly what it costs.

POPPY 2: Smarty-pants is hopping across the lawn.

JESSE 2: *(off)* Smarty-pants the Corvid?

POPPY 2: The very same. AKA Crowsfeet.

JESSE 2: *(off)* I know all about crowsfeet.

POPPY 2: So does Smarty-pants.

JESSE 2: *(off)* You and Smarty-pants are a comfort to me  
in my old age.

POPPY 2: So black he's almost iridescent. Nothing else is  
the color of a crow. I really need to get out there more.

*(POPPY 2 feels a pain. JESSE 2 enters with two small paper plates, each with a half sandwich on it. She sets them on the coffee table so they can sit side by side on the sofa.)*

POPPY 2: Life just gets more precious.

JESSE 2: Doesn't it.

POPPY 2: What've we got?

JESSE 2: Pickle and potato chip sandwiches on buttered  
white bread.

POPPY: Oh my Gawd! Weight Watchers?

*(The doorbell rings.)*

JESSE 2: I'll get it.

*(JESSE 2 goes to the door.)*

POPPY 2: I'm ravenous but I will be polite and wait. *(He sneaks a bite of his sandwich and chews rapidly.)*

JESSE 2: Mrs. Widkin, how nice! Come in.

*(MRS. WIDKIN enters with her ever-present purse and a casserole.)*

MRS. WIDKIN: I really can't stay. How are you, Poppy?

POPPY 2: *(Caught with his mouth full.)* Fine, Mrs. W. You?

MRS. WIDKIN: Same old. Took the day off to run errands. I just wanted to drop off this casserole.

JESSE 2: I'll take it.

MRS. WIDKIN: I'll put it in the fridge for you. Go back to your lunch.

JESSE 2: No problem, I'll take it. *(MRS. WIDKIN reluctantly hands it over.)* I so appreciate your casseroles Mrs. Widkin. We're almost finished with the last one.

*(JESSE 2 heads off to the kitchen.)*

POPPY 2: *(His voice lowered.)* In her own sweet way, my wife is a bit of a control freak.

MRS. WIDKIN: (*She winks at POPPY 2. Calling out...*) I should have called. Mrs. Elazar, I hope I'm not barging in.

JESSE 2: (*off*) Nonsense! It's sweet of you to think of us so often.

MRS. WIDKIN: Well, I must be off. I have my niece's recital this afternoon.

(*JESSE 2 returns.*)

JESSE 2: What fun!

POPPY 2: Thank you for the casserole.

MRS. WIDKIN: Call me if you need me.

JESSE 2: I keep your phone number in my purse.

MRS. WIDKIN: Don't hesitate to use it.

(*MRS. WIDKIN exits.*)

JESSE 2: We have three casseroles in the freezer. You'd think she'd notice she's not getting the dishes back.

POPPY 2: All tuna and macaroni?

JESSE 2: Beats frozen Weight Watchers.

POPPY 2: I poop better when I have vegetables.

JESSE 2: Tell me more.

POPPY 2: (*Chuckling.*) The bits of celery are special.

JESSE 2: She's very fond of you.

POPPY 2: And we're fond of her. Am I right?

JESSE 2: There might be one or two people we're more fond of... she said, trying not to end a sentence with a preposition.

POPPY 2: I think I prefer these with mayonnaise.

JESSE 2: We're out. (*beat*) Pops...

POPPY 2: What, my love?

JESSE 2: I've been thinking.

POPPY 2: (*His mouth full.*) Mepf?

JESSE 2: Maybe it's time we gave up the car.

POPPY 2: Ohhhh... You think I'm getting dangerous?

JESSE 2: Well, if it were just us, or the odd telephone pole, I wouldn't worry... but there are other people on the road. Innocent people.

POPPY 2: I'm a menace to society?

JESSE 2: You're a great gift to me.

POPPY 2: It would make life more difficult. What if I promise to be more careful? Locked, up-right position. Maintain focus at all times.

JESSE 2: That little market... Alan's? They do home delivery. It's not that much more expensive.

POPPY 2: You have been thinking.

JESSE 2: I understand that this is not an easy topic for a man. It has implications.

POPPY 2: The implication is that I'm old.

JESSE 2: That's what happens if you live long enough.

POPPY 2: I'm a lucky man. And the cancer has been patient until now.

JESSE 2: We have some time. Think it over, Poppy. We don't have to reach a decision today.

POPPY 2: You're a wise and wonderful woman.

JESSE 2: I thought I was a control freak?

POPPY 2: Ah. You weren't meant to hear that.

JESSE 2: It's just that when you present people with the best possible alternative, you want them to be smart enough to recognize it. I don't call that control, do you?

POPPY 2: Sometimes people just have to make their own choices even if it's the wrong one.

JESSE 2: Still, I wish you hadn't said that to her.

POPPY 2: My relationship with the Widkin is like a worn old shoe. And I forgot to tell her the most important part. That I love you more than life itself.

JESSE 2: Silver-tongued devil.

POPPY 2: I'll clean up if you start the bath water.

*(She giggles and they exit in different directions.)*

*(Lights up in the bedroom. MRS. WIDKIN is alone, waiting.)*

MRS. WIDKIN: Well, I don't mind. I could pick you up, We could do the early-bird special at Le Café, take in a movie and have you home by 9:30.

JESSE 3: *(off)* You said I don't have any money.

MRS. WIDKIN: My treat. Just 'til your check comes. One of these days you're going to get an insurance payout as well.

JESSE 3: *(off)* When?

MRS. WIDKIN: Well, I don't know. But when it comes you can treat me. Would you like a massage?

JESSE 3: *(off)* A what?

MRS. WIDKIN: A massage. You know, neck and shoulders.

*(JESSE 3 enters in a robe with a towel wrapped around her head.)*

JESSE 3: Everyone will look at me.

MRS. WIDKIN: If we go out?

JESSE 3: They'll see.

MRS. WIDKIN: What will they see?

JESSE 3: That my husband deserted me.

MRS. WIDKIN: He didn't desert you, Jesse. Poppy loved you.

JESSE 3: So you knew him better than I did?

MRS. WIDKIN: Differently.

JESSE 3: Did you...love him?

MRS. WIDKIN: Of course I loved him.

JESSE 3: Did you have an affair with him?

MRS. WIDKIN: No. He was one of my dearest friends.

JESSE 3: I don't believe you.

MRS. WIDKIN: You should believe me.

JESSE 3: All these years... infringing on my happiness.

MRS. WIDKIN: This is why you never liked me? (*Beat.*)  
Mrs. Elazar?

JESSE 3: Why did you have to buzz around my marriage like that? Buzzing. Couldn't you get a man of your own?

MRS. WIDKIN: Jesse, there's something you should know. I'm not sexually attracted to men. I don't mean to be unkind, but you caused yourself a lot of suffering for nothing.

JESSE 3: Did he know?

MRS. WIDKIN: Yes.

JESSE 3: He never told me. You're a lesbian?

MRS. WIDKIN: If you need to put a label on it.

JESSE 3: Were you always... the way you are?

MRS. WIDKIN: I didn't always know, but yes, probably.  
Haven't you always been the way you are?

JESSE 3: Then why "Mrs." Widkin?

MRS. WIDKIN: People always assume there is a Mr.  
Widkin somewhere. Eventually they stop asking.

JESSE 3: Do you have... a... girlfriend?

MRS. WIDKIN: Not in a few years.

JESSE 3: I wonder why he never told me.

MRS. WIDKIN: Maybe it wasn't important.

JESSE 3: But... We could have been friends.

MRS. WIDKIN: We can be.

JESSE 3: What does that mean?

MRS. WIDKIN: It means friendship. (*JESSE 3 eyes her.*)  
You're not my type, Jesse.

JESSE 3: You mean old and fat.

MRS. WIDKIN: I mean, I've stopped looking outside myself to have my needs met.

JESSE 3: Did he ask you to look after me? (*MRS. WIDKIN is silent.*) He did, didn't he?

MRS. WIDKIN: I've always wanted to be your friend.

JESSE 3: Friends tell each other things.

MRS. WIDKIN: Yes.

JESSE 3: What else did he keep from me?

MRS. WIDKIN: Oh...

JESSE 3: You want to be my friend, God knows why. Tell me why none of this makes any sense.

MRS. WIDKIN: It's going to hurt.

JESSE 3: You'd put a dog out of its misery, wouldn't you?

MRS. WIDKIN: He swore me to secrecy.

JESSE 3: He's dead. (*They stare at each other. JESSE 3 howls like a dog.*) Owwwooooo...

MRS. WIDKIN: (*Quickly interrupting.*) He didn't want you to know that his cancer had come back. It had spread to other organs.

JESSE 3: Why wouldn't he tell me that?

MRS. WIDKIN: It's not a choice I would have made.

JESSE 3: He told you. Why didn't he tell me? (*MRS. WIDKIN doesn't answer.*) We had a suicide pact. Did he tell you that?

MRS. WIDKIN: No.

JESSE 3: Hallelujah!

MRS. WIDKIN: But maybe that's why he didn't tell you. He didn't want to take you with him.

JESSE 3: I've had a stupid, useless life married to someone who didn't trust me.

MRS. WIDKIN: That's not true.

JESSE 3: Friends don't lie!

MRS. WIDKIN: I'm sorry.

JESSE 3: I would have killed him. I would have done anything he wanted.

*(Lights down in the bedroom.)*

*(POPPY 1 is still reading in the living room. JESSE 1 enters in a robe with her hair loose and damp. She holds newspaper.)*

JESSE 1: The Widkin gone?

POPPY 1: Yes. Nice shower?

JESSE 1: The water was wet.

POPPY 1: Not too wet, I trust?

JESSE 1: This is yesterday's paper!

POPPY 1: It's still today. You forget more and more.

JESSE 1: You forget too.

POPPY 1: Not as much as you.

JESSE 1: How would you know?

POPPY 1: Because I see. I'm a witness to how much you forget.

JESSE 1: And I see how much you forget.

POPPY 1: I don't forget as much as you.

JESSE 1: I won't forget this.

POPPY 1: The senses weaken, Jess. Matter wants to find its rest.

JESSE 1: Fuck your philosophizing. (*She turns to the obituaries.*) Lillian Stewart is still dead.

POPPY 1: I have an appointment this afternoon.

JESSE 1: Bon chance.

POPPY 1: Jesse...

JESSE 1: No.

POPPY 1: I can't stop what's happening to my body.

JESSE 1: You can fight it.

POPPY 1: At what cost?

JESSE 1: What are we saving money for? To leave to Alison?

POPPY 1: What about the personal cost? Surgeries that buy a few months? Chemo that drains every ounce of pleasure out of life?

JESSE 1: You have to try.

POPPY 1: I have tried.

JESSE 1: Try more!

POPPY 1: Jesse, either way, what treatments I accept or refuse...

JESSE 1: No.

POPPY 1: I need your help, Jess. This anger... this refusal to face what's right in front of us....

JESSE 1: I'm not ready. I thought we had more time. (*She kills her drink.*)

POPPY 1: What do you want me to do?

JESSE 1: Make time stand still. Are you man enough?

POPPY 1: I understand that this is frightening. But do you want to watch me waste away, miserable, hating life?

JESSE 1: Yes.

POPPY 1: Do you hate me so much?

JESSE 1: I don't hate you, Poppy. I'm just not ready to die.

POPPY 1: What?

JESSE 1: I'm not ready, Poppy. I'm not ready for the pills... and the... (*plastic bag*)

POPPY 1: No... Do you think I'm asking you to go with me?

JESSE 1: Aren't you?

POPPY 1: Jesse. I'm asking you to let me go ahead of you. I'm not asking you to be ready now.

JESSE 1: That was the agreement.

POPPY 1: For when we can no longer take care of ourselves. You don't have to die because I'm sick. That's barbaric. The pact is nullified. I release you.

JESSE 1: No.

POPPY 1: No, what?

JESSE 1: I don't release you, Poppy.

Act I

Scene 2

*At Rise: [Supertitle: **Friday 5:17 p.m.**] JESSE 3 is sitting on the sofa, towel around her neck, picking at a bit of casserole. MRS. WIDKIN hovers, tidying, picking up candy wrappers.*

JESSE 3: Or maybe he'll actually believe that he loves you, I said, but slowly his eyes will glaze over and he'll stop listening to you. Alison, I told her, it's not your fault that you're boring. Women rattle on about the same damn things. Men too, but somehow the things men say are more interesting. Unless it's baseball. Poppy would have said men and women are genetically wired to be interested in different things. Species survival, blah, blah, blah... I don't really like tuna.

*(MRS. WIDKIN removes a box of chocolates from its hiding place and takes chocolates from her purse and replaces the missing ones.)*

MRS. WIDKIN: That's kind of harsh advice from a mother.

JESSE 3: You don't know Alison. Nothing penetrates that hard head.

MRS. WIDKIN: I'm sure she's not a bad person.

JESSE 3: But wait, so Alison says to me: "Mother, you're the perfect example of everything I never want to be."

MRS. WIDKIN: She probably regrets that, don't you think?

JESSE 3: Wish I'd had a son, instead.

MRS. WIDKIN: All mothers have problems with their daughters to some degree.

JESSE 3: A lot you would know about it.

MRS. WIDKIN: I had a mother.

JESSE 3: Whoop-ti-do.

MRS. WIDKIN: I have to go.

JESSE 3: I'm sorry, I don't know what I'm saying.

MRS. WIDKIN: It's okay, but I really do have to go. I already missed my niece's recital. *(beat)* Alison's trying to reach out to you.

JESSE 3: God help me if I'm ever dependant on her.

MRS. WIDKIN: Just don't ... if the phone rings, let yourself decide in the moment if you're ready to answer. You might surprise yourself.

JESSE 3: Listen. If I'm ever incapacitated? Just do me in.

MRS. WIDKIN: Mrs. Elazar.

JESSE 3: I'm not kidding! You're my only friend.

MRS. WIDKIN: Jesse. I can't... I promise not to forget what you've just said to me.

JESSE 3: I've never trusted good people.

MRS. WIDKIN: I'm gonna take that as a compliment.  
There's some Xanax left. You want one?

JESSE 3: Whatever you've got. Just leave the bottle.

*(MRS. WIDKIN hands her a pill and puts the bottle back in her purse.)*

MRS. WIDKIN: I put a couple of sleeping pills on your night table. That should get you through.

JESSE 3: Thank you.

*(JESSE 3 takes the pill with some water and MRS. WIDKIN takes her plate and glass to the kitchen.)*

JESSE 3: This is a sorry-ass way to run things,

*(The sound of water in the kitchen as MRS. WIDKIN washes up. JESSE 3 continues talking in a slightly raised voice.)*

JESSE 3: Hating someone is sometimes how you know you still love them. Really so, because you don't have to blame yourself when there's someone else conveniently standing there like a sitting duck.

*(The water stops and MRS. WIDKIN appears in the doorway.)*

JESSE 3: You wouldn't know what that's like, not having a mate. You can't even hear me, can you?

MRS. WIDKIN: I can hear you.

JESSE 3: At least I haven't started talking to myself.

MRS. WIDKIN: I missed the first part.

JESSE 3: I said Poppy's blood tasted like maple syrup.

MRS. WIDKIN: I don't understand.

JESSE 3: That's because you've never felt a man's weight pressing you down into yourself until you're exactly the same size as your body. And then he enters you.

MRS. WIDKIN: No, you're right. I don't know about that.

JESSE 3: Sometimes he would pin me down and I would scream bloody murder. Then something in me would relax and I'd be grateful for the calm. A spent penis is a touching sight... But then of course, being him, he'd do something that pissed me off and there you go again. He used to say I was like a china shop in a bull pasture.

MRS. WIDKIN: That's a touching insight. Doesn't that prove he loved you and wanted to protect you?

JESSE 3: Not really, just that he was in over his head.

*(MRS. WIDKIN takes up her purse and crosses to the door.)*

JESSE 3: Tell me something. As a friend.

MRS. WIDKIN: Yes.

JESSE 3: Do you think he was afraid for me to be the one to take care of him?

*(Lights fade in the living room and come up in the bedroom where POPPY 2 is sitting on the bed watching TV with the control in his hand. He switches channels for a moment then settles on a news channel. JESSE 2 enters with a shower cap on her head. They are both in robes or perhaps kimonos.)*

JESSE 2: Do you want your pain pill?

POPPY 2: It's not time.

JESSE 2: A minor detail.

POPPY 2: Then, yes.

*(She hands him one, plus a glass of water.)*

POPPY 2: The news is always bad. Murder, mayhem, disasters...

JESSE 2: You're in a dark mood.

POPPY 2: It's overpopulation. Maybe I should help the situation and get off the planet.

JESSE 2: One old man is not going to make much difference. Stay a bit longer and let me love you.

*(POPPY 2 clicks off the TV.)*

POPPY 2: What if I'd never found you?

JESSE 2: That's the gift part of it. That people find each other.

POPPY 2: A gift. That on the other side of my lust, you were waiting. Still, what if I'd been born in Hong Kong?

JESSE 2: Nothing would have kept me from you.

POPPY 2: I suppose even Stephen Hawking married his nurse.

*(When they finish with the bed, JESSE 2 takes off the shower cap and brushes her hair.)*

JESSE 2: What's going on, old Pops?

POPPY 2: It's just the car thing.

JESSE 2: My Darling.

POPPY 2: You're right. It's not fair to John Q. Public. Or Jane Doe. I don't want to hurt anyone.

JESSE 2: Does it make you sad?

POPPY 2: I am sad.

JESSE 2: What can I do?

POPPY 2: It's okay, actually. I want to feel the full weight of it.

JESSE 2: No need to bear it alone.

POPPY 2: I think what I'll miss most is my drive to the park. Not even getting out, just sitting and watching the joggers, mothers with strollers.

*(POPPY 2 takes off his robe and naked, he slips between the sheets.)*

JESSE 2: Identifying birds and insects.

POPPY 2: Not so much these days. I look at the air and the light as much as anything. Just taking it all in. Trying to grasp a single moment of the day, fully, and with pleasure.

JESSE 2: The biologist has stopped dissecting?

POPPY 2: The biologist would say that air and light are not visible in and of themselves...

*(JESSE 2 opens her robe and striking a pose, shows him her body.)*

POPPY 2: Of course, one can have a moment of satori anywhere.

*(She tosses her robe and slips into bed beside him.)*

JESSE 2: Still. It's a big step. A huge loss of freedom...  
But speaking of huge, think of all the things we can still do.

POPPY 2: What did you have in mind?

JESSE 2: Know where I can find a nice long Hong Kong schlong?

POPPY 2: Be careful what you say, I'll take you at your word.

JESSE 2: Word!

*(He grabs her and she squeals and giggles and he laughs. Then...)*

JESSE 2: Oh, dear.

POPPY 2: What?

JESSE 2: I laughed too hard.

*(She takes a dry washcloth from the nightstand and places it between her legs. He cuddles her.)*

POPPY 2: But there's that unavoidable question... what's next? When you can no longer reach your feet to tie shoelaces, you switch to slippers. But that doesn't solve the problem of toenail clipping.

JESSE 2: We should keep a list of all our unhappy moments. Then we can write "we can no longer drive" and right above that we write, Jesse clipped Poppy's toenails, and right below it we'll write, we got naked and fondled each other, so the unhappy moment is surrounded.

POPPY 2: What happens when we can no longer walk to the bathroom? We can't afford a nurse.

JESSE 2: We'll take each moment as it comes, stack one on top of the next, the good with the bad.

POPPY 2: Don't patronize me, Jess.

JESSE 2: And don't shut me out, my love. Ever. Tell me every feeling. I want to be exactly where you are.

POPPY 2: It's just that there's a tendency to accept each day's reality as the status quo. Today is "good enough." And suddenly it's too late. You're peeing in your wheelchair and the night nurse beats you.

JESSE 2: I won't let that happen.

POPPY 2: What will you do?

JESSE 2: I'll throw you down the stairwell.

POPPY 2: We don't have a stairwell.

JESSE 2: I'll find one.

POPPY 2: I wish I had gotten cancer when I was younger so you could still have a good long life with someone.

JESSE 2: I don't want someone else. Besides we have a pact.

POPPY 2: The pact was foolishness.

JESSE 2: "Before we lose control of our lives" was what you said.

POPPY 2: That pact was silly notion in an old man's head.

JESSE 2: You know how fond I am of silly.

POPPY 2: No, Jess. I can't bear the thought of the world without you in it.

JESSE 2: And I can't bear the thought of us separated. Maybe we should set a date. And when that time comes, we just do it.

POPPY 2: The pact was predicated on our mutual decline.  
The same rate.

JESSE 2: The chance that one of us would become ill was  
always a possibility.

POPPY 2: Jess, don't confuse me. I'm befuddled enough as  
it is.

JESSE 2: There comes a point when we say, "This is life."  
We settle into our personal obsessions: Fiesta Ware, or  
news from the Large Hadron Collider, or the best choco-  
late brownie recipe.

POPPY 2: Brownies?

JESSE 2: And then maybe there comes a point when we say,  
"This is what life was."

POPPY 2: Oh my.

JESSE 2: Yes, "oh my". And how lovely. (*They gaze into  
each other's eyes.*) When the time comes, you'll know  
what to do. You will.

POPPY 2: You sound very sure.

JESSE 2: I'm sure about you. You're my man.

POPPY 2: There's not much of the man left.

JESSE 2: There's plenty of man left.

POPPY 2: You're all the woman I ever needed.

JESSE 2: That's close enough to the truth.

*(They kiss.)*

*(The lights dim on the bedroom and come up in the living room. POPPY 1, in sports jacket and bow tie, is sitting in his chair with the phone.)*

POPPY 1: But the lease is in your name, Alison. *(Alison: Yeah and he gets a disability check, except he spent all his money.)* His whole check? *(Alison: And he ran up the phone bill.)* I thought the point of letting him stay was... *(Alison: I know, huh? But, could you send my check a few days early so they don't cut off the phone?)* Well, I guess you need a phone. *(Alison: How was your checkup?)* Oh, I... Yeah, I'm fine. *(Alison: That's good.)* I'm sorry things didn't work out with your guy. *(Alison: Thanks for calling. I love you, Poppy.)* You too, sweetie.

*(POPPY 1 hangs up the phone. JESSE 1 enters and begins making herself a drink.)*

JESSE 1: *(Referencing the phone.)* First hand news of the outside world?

POPPY 1: I told Alison I'd call when I got back from the doctor.

JESSE 1: The Widkin drop you off?

POPPY 1: Yes.

JESSE 1: So everyone has the news but me.

POPPY 1: Are you interested?

JESSE 1: Did you schedule the chemo?

POPPY 1: No. (*Long pause*) Alison says “Hi.” You remember Alison?

JESSE 1: Let me see, Alison...

POPPY 1: She’s willing to forgive you.

JESSE 1: So’s Jesus.

POPPY 1: She’s your daughter.

JESSE 1: The poster child for abortion.

POPPY 1: She’s not a bad person, Jess.

JESSE 1: No, she’s lovely. I just ruined her life.

POPPY 1: You’re an easy person to misunderstand.

JESSE 1: And you’re completely transparent. Between us we lick the platter clean. (*JESSE 1 sips her drink.*)  
Cocktail?

POPPY 1: You mean will I join you in ritually damaging our livers?

JESSE 1: Why would it matter to you? You’re terminal.

POPPY 1: There’s no point to this fighting anymore, Jesse. Everything is done.

JESSE 1: Nothing is ever done.

POPPY 1: Let me go, Jess.

(*JESSE 1 holds onto the wall for support and drinks deeply.*)

JESSE 1: Why did he leave me?

POPPY 1: What?

JESSE 1: Maybe if I hadn't gotten pregnant...

POPPY 1: Nick?

JESSE 1: I had won the Goldberg-Sloan Award. And I was still an undergraduate... I wanted... but Alison was... and every time I tried to put her down she would cry. Finally I squeezed her to my chest and I screamed "SHUTUP!" She was startled. And then she wailed like...

POPPY 1: I'm sure she doesn't remember...

JESSE 1: You always take her side.

POPPY 1: No.

JESSE 1: Always.

*(JESSE 1 wanders off leaving POPPY 1 alone.)*