

1
2ACT IScene 1

At rise: A tree is present downstage right. Mr. Nealy, 63, enters. He speaks to the tree as if it is a person.

HENRY NEALY:

Hey Liv. You doing alright?

I was worried with all the rain we got last night. I'm glad you're okay.

(Beat.)

Nasty bunch of storms we've had the past few days. I can't believe the hail damage.

(Beat.)

Sorry I didn't come visit sooner, but I had to check on the house.

Maggie's voice is heard from her father's house offstage left.

MAGGIE:

Dad!

HENRY NEALY:

Took me nearly all day to clear some of the debris. But I made it. I made it out here. I had to see you.

MAGGIE:

Dad, what are you doing?

HENRY NEALY:

Oh, and it always takes a bad storm to make you realize there are some leaks in your roof. Maggie flew in a few days early when she got word about the storm. Didn't want to leave me up here all by myself. I'll look into the roof damage tomorrow. Hey. Come on now. Just because I'm sixty-three doesn't mean I can't fend for myself.

Maggie has now reached her father at the tree.

MAGGIE:

Dad, common.

HENRY NEALY:

What?

MAGGIE:

She's not here anymore.

(CONTINUED)

HENRY NEALY:

(Addressing the tree.)

Now don't look at me like that, I'm perfectly capable of patching up a roof. I built the thing you know?

MAGGIE:

Dad, come back inside. I've got dinner in the oven.

HENRY NEALY:

(Still paying absolutely no attention to his daughter.)

I haven't seen Rosemary lately. She usually comes by begging for scraps but I think the rain has kept her away. Deer are fickle creatures.

MAGGIE:

I got the generator working so the electricity is up and running again. You don't have to rely on just candles anymore.

HENRY NEALY:

I started writing again. Just a couple poems. I haven't done much since you left. It felt good to write again. You want to hear one? It's not my best... maybe you could help me with it?

MAGGIE:

DAD! Com'on dad. I know you miss her, but you're talking to a tree.

Henry finally acknowledges his daughters presence and begins speaking to her.

HENRY NEALY:

I'm talking to your mother.

MAGGIE:

Dad, no! Okay, I know this has been hard on you. It's been hard on all of us. But mom's gone, okay? She's not coming back.

HENRY NEALY:

You know, for a split second I thought I saw her in the living room the other day, but it was just my shadow from the candlelight. I keep walking into the bedroom expecting to see her lying in bed reading, waiting for me. I miss her.

MAGGIE:

I miss her too dad. But why do you keep pretending to talk to her? It's not like she can answer you anymore.

(CONTINUED)

HENRY NEALY:

Oh, but she does. In her own way she does. She's not really gone until we start to act like it.

MAGGIE:

Listen to me. It's time to go inside now. Dinner is almost done. I tried my best to replicate mom's mac n' cheese.

HENRY NEALY:

Okay Maggie.

(To the tree.)

I'll see you later tonight.

Blackout.

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Scene two

Maggie and Sam, her husband, enter from the house and cross to the tree.

MAGGIE:

(To the tree.)

Why the hell are you so important to him?

SAM:

Well you did bury your mom's ashes here.

MAGGIE:

Yes but... If I get one more concerned phone call from his neighbors saying he's been sitting here since the morning and won't come inside and won't acknowledge anyone...

SAM:

I mean it did come as quite a bit of a shock. And it hasn't even been a year.

MAGGIE:

I'm not saying he shouldn't be sad. I'm sad. Easter is going to be... But this is ridiculous. It's not living in reality.

SAM:

A significant portion of the grieving process is denial.

MAGGIE:

Honey, I love you. But I need you on my side here.

SAM:

I am on your side I just... I think you may be overreacting a bit. He is simply externalizing his grief.

(CONTINUED)

MAGGIE:

Just because we buried her ashes there doesn't mean her spirit lives in the tree or anything. He's convinced the tree will answer him. That there are signs or something. It isn't healthy.

SAM:

He simply needs a way to vent his feelings.

MAGGIE:

Well he could vent to me if he wanted to! We're all going through this together.

SAM:

He needs some time to himself.

MAGGIE:

Well what about me? I need to know that he's going to be okay.

SAM:

He will get there in his own way, at his own pace.

MAGGIE:

You're acting like I'm trying to get him to take a cruise or something. I just want him to act like a normal grieving person.

SAM:

He is acting like a normal grieving person. According to Elisabeth Kubler Ross -

MAGGIE:

Damnit, hon. Not everyone you interact with is a client!

SAM:

You don't need to go attacking my profession now. You didn't seem to have a problem with it when it financed our honeymoon.

MAGGIE:

I have plenty of respect for your profession. It's when you offer your services unsolicited that I have a problem.

SAM:

What do you want me to do then? You're freaked out about your dad's behavior. I'm telling you I've seen clients react much more strangely to grief. He's going to be fine.

(CONTINUED)

MAGGIE:

How can you be so sure? You didn't grow up with him, you didn't live with him, you haven't had to watch him deal with emotional situations.

SAM:

Hon, calm down. This is nothing we can't handle.

MAGGIE:

He won't listen to me. He's all alone up here.

(Beat. Maggie makes a realization.)

We need to get him to come down to Florida with us.

SAM:

What? No. It's way too sudden. We can't just-

MAGGIE:

It will make everything so much easier.

SAM:

For him, or for you?

MAGGIE:

What the hell is that supposed to mean?

SAM:

I... okay so don't hate me for this. But from a third party observer it looks like you are trying to gain control over your father's life.

MAGGIE:

Well he was never great at controlling it himself.

That's what mom was for, that's why-

SAM:

Hear me out. This is your childhood home. Your mother is buried here. He's grieving. Your grieving. Now isn't the time to be uprooting anyone.

MAGGIE:

You...God, you wouldn't understand but I just... I need him right now. I need him with me.

SAM:

Why?

MAGGIE:

I just.. mom's gone. And what if, without her... he, I don't know it could get really bad again and he was finally...

(CONTINUED)

SAM:

Why don't you come stay up here for a bit then? It might be good for the both of you to spend some time together. I can take care of Caleb, your firm will be more than understanding, financially it won't-

MAGGIE:

I can't do that.

SAM:

Why not?

MAGGIE:

I... I left. I left for a reason. I can't just come back after something like that.

SAM:

You were eighteen.

MAGGIE:

Even so.

SAM:

Things have been getting better between the two of you. You've been talking for the past five years.

MAGGIE:

Postcards and emails.

SAM:

It's been more than that, you know it.

MAGGIE:

But still. With mom gone...

SAM:

Well how about this then? We come up and check on him every couple of months to see how he's doing. That way you'll have eyes on him. I know your dad. If he doesn't want to go, we won't be able to make him-

Henry enters.

HENRY NEALY:

Make me do what?

MAGGIE:

Hi Dad. Sam and I have something we want to talk to you about.

SAM:

Maggie and I were just talking about how we ought to try to visit more often.

(CONTINUED)

MAGGIE:

No, actually we were-

HENRY NEALY:

That would be nice.

MAGGIE:

You know, it would be a lot easier to visit if you lived closer by.

HENRY NEALY:

Well I'm not the one who moved half a country away.

SAM:

We don't want to put pressure on you.

MAGGIE:

But we'd like to have you move down to Florida and live with us. We really don't think you should stay here alone.

HENRY NEALY:

I'm not alone.

MAGGIE:

Yes you are! Dad, mom's not here anymore. You need to get a grip on the reality of the situation.

HENRY NEALY:

Maggie. The reality of the situation is that I'm lost. I lost you the second you moved out of this house and I lost your mother the second she got diagnosed.

MAGGIE:

Dad you didn't lose me...

HENRY NEALY:

What do you call driving away in the middle of the night and not speaking to me for ten years?

SAM:

Past circumstances aside we wanted to-

MAGGIE:

I was a kid. I... I had to... it was too much.

HENRY NEALY:

Too much what?

MAGGIE:

That house was not a good place for me and you know it.

(CONTINUED)

HENRY NEALY:

That's not true.

SAM:

Henry what we really wanted to discu-

MAGGIE:

You really want me to go through the list?

HENRY NEALY:

You've never stopped hating me for it have you? I got better, I-

MAGGIE:

After I left.

HENRY NEALY:

Your mother. She's the only thing that got me to stop.

MAGGIE:

God. After all this time. I still never was enough for you was I?

HENRY NEALY:

Maggie, that's not true. You don't understand.

SAM:

Henry we're not going to force you to do anything you don't want to do.

HENRY NEALY:

Damn right you're not.

SAM:

But we do want you to know, that if you don't want to be alone up here anymore, there are other options. You can take as much time as you want think it over.

MAGGIE:

Dad, this doesn't have to be a bad thing. Florida has a lot to offer. It could be a fresh start.

HENRY NEALY:

What am I going to do in Florida, play mini golf and bingo in a retirement community?

MAGGIE:

Think about it dad. You could go fishing. Spend time by the ocean.

HENRY NEALY:

I can fish here.

(CONTINUED)

MAGGIE:

Dad I don't want you to start drinking again.

Beat.

HENRY NEALY:

That's what you really came here to say.

MAGGIE:

Yes. Yes, Dad that is what I came here to say. Because with mom gone, I'm worried about you.

HENRY NEALY:

Maggie, I wish you had a little more faith in your old man.

MAGGIE:

Well I don't exactly have the best evidence to the contrary.

HENRY NEALY:

Because you weren't around to see it! When you left it... everything changed.

MAGGIE:

I want to believe you. I want to forgive you. I ... I want you to come to Florida.

HENRY NEALY:

Well, I'd have to check with Olivia.

MAGGIE:

DAD!-

SAM:

That sounds perfectly reasonable.

MAGGIE:

Reasonable!?

HENRY NEALY:

Olivia wouldn't like me leaving right now. She just wouldn't. You don't understand.

MAGGIE:

Dad I think Mom would want what is best for you. And right now I don't think you're the best judge of that.

HENRY NEALY:

What is that supposed to mean?

(CONTINUED)

MAGGIE:

You're- You spend hours out there all by yourself. Mom wouldn't want you to be alone.

HENRY NEALY:

Maggie I don't expect you to understand but this is what I need right now.

MAGGIE:

And what if I need a father?

HENRY NEALY:

I'm not leaving.

MAGGIE:

Why not? Mom's not here anymore. But I'm still here. You've got me. I'm here and I'm asking you, please, do this for me. You sitting by yourself in a house full of memories isn't going to bring mom back. It's just going to make things worse for you. It's just going to drag you back to the bottle! Why can't you understand that?

SAM:

Maggie, please.

HENRY NEALY:

You're here. Oh, now you're here? You expect me to believe you're really here of your own volition. Maggie you only ever came when your mother forced you too. Christmas. Birthdays. If it weren't for her you'd still be gossiping with your fellow PTA moms right now.

MAGGIE:

My biggest crime against you is leaving. I'm trying to fix that, we could start over...

HENRY NEALY:

Maggie I am your father. Which means that you do not get to tell me what to do.

MAGGIE:

You were only ever a father when it was convenient for you.

Maggie storms off, Sam follows at a loss.

Blackout. Lights up on just Henry and the tree.

HENRY NEALY:

Liv, you understand right? I can't go. I can't leave this place. I can't leave you. Maggie doesn't understand what it was like. She was just a kid. But you. You were there. You saw. You know why I can't leave.

(CONTINUED)

I have to wait for the blossoms this spring. And then the apples in the fall. Of course I'll have to keep Rosemary from eating them all.

I told you it was a bad idea to feed the deer leftover apple cores and now guess who wakes me up at six o'clock every morning hungry?

(long beat.)

I made Maggie mad didn't I? She just sprung this idea on me so suddenly. I'm not going to be able to make her understand. You at least know why I can't leave.

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Scene 3

Maggie and Sam are back at the house.

MAGGIE:

What the hell was that?

SAM:

Maggie I-

MAGGIE:

You're supposed to have my back.

SAM:

I do, it's just-

MAGGIE:

You let me look like some kind of cruel, controlling daughter who won't let their father grieve in peace but that is not what this is about.

SAM:

I know. I-

MAGGIE:

I don't think you do.

SAM:

Okay. Can you explain to me what I don't understand?

MAGGIE:

I can't set foot in this house without shaking. I know dad is different now. But every time I look at that bookshelf I'm fourteen again and he's throwing books like a mad man. Mom was incredible. She always saw the good. Even after something like that she just saw what was good in him.

SAM:

It takes a lot of resiliency to put up with something like that.

(CONTINUED)

MAGGIE:

And I'm not... Sam I'm not strong enough. I do love him but I can't. This place. There are just too many burdens to bear.

SAM:

I know hon. I know.

MAGGIE:

But someone has to look after him. We can't leave him alone up here.

SAM:

I think he'll be okay.

MAGGIE:

He needs someone.

SAM:

But you don't have to be that person. If it hurts you that much, you don't have to be that person.

MAGGIE:

Who else does he have? He had mom. But now? I left. I have to make it up to him somehow.

SAM:

You shouldn't let him make you feel guilty for leaving. You did what you needed to do for yourself.

MAGGIE:

Even so.

SAM:

It isn't your job to be a parent.

MAGGIE:

No. It isn't. But that's just the way it is. He isn't going to move. You said it yourself. We can't make him. I'll just... take a lot of Xanax before I come visit.

SAM:

Maggie that isn't funny. If being here is really that triggering for you...

MAGGIE:

I'm just being dramatic.

SAM:

I think you need to talk to him about Florida again. I don't think he realizes how hard being here is for you.

(CONTINUED)

MAGGIE:

I've tried talking to him. You were there. You saw how that went.

SAM:

Maybe after Easter dinner? When everything has calmed down a little bit.

MAGGIE:

Okay.

SAM:

We leave in a week. The two of you should be able to sort something out before then.

MAGGIE:

Way to put a timeline on it.

SAM:

I'm not saying you'll figure everything out. But at the least you might be able to see more of each others' point of view.

MAGGIE:

Maybe.

SAM:

Maggie.

MAGGIE:

Yeah?

SAM:

I'm always on your side, you know that right sweetheart?

MAGGIE:

Yeah. Yeah I do.

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Scene 4

Easter Sunday. Afternoon.

HENRY NEALY:

So Caleb tell me, are you ready for the annual Nealy Easter egg scavenger hunt?

,CALEB:

Been looking forward to it all year!

HENRY NEALY:

Your clues and basket are on the porch. I'm warning you, they're pretty tricky this year.

(CONTINUED)

CALEB:

I'll figure it out.

Caleb runs off to get the clues.

HENRY NEALY:

(Talking to the tree.)

I wasn't about to let the Nealy Easter egg hunt tradition end. I made sure to include you, don't you worry.

Got another chip last week. Fifteen years. Fifteen. I couldn't have done it without you Liv. I know... I know what I was like. I just pray Caleb will never know.

Thanks for getting Maggie to let him visit. Thanks for getting her to invite me to her wedding. God, I don't know how to talk to her without you in the room. How long does it take to forgive someone? How many Easter's are going to go by? How many times does Christ have to get hung on a cross for her to forgive my sins?

I'm gonna plant another tree. If I go. To Florida I mean. Maybe a palm tree. Another tree, another fifteen years sober. It's gotta account for something, doesn't it? Trying?

Caleb reenters, easter basket in hand. He has two plastic eggs in it and it and is holding a clue sheet.

CALEB:

I found the one by the grill and the birdhouse. I'm stuck on this clue for some reason.

HENRY NEALY:

Which one? Let me see.

CALEB:

It says "Southwest down the yard a little ways, is the perfect place to spend lazy days. You'll find your egg where in the fall apples grow, a little birdie told me so."

HENRY NEALY:

Well where do you think?

CALEB:

Well this is the southwest side of the yard, but there are so many different trees I can't tell any of them apart.

(CONTINUED)

HENRY NEALY:

You know how you can tell which one is an apple tree?

CALEB:

How?

HENRY NEALY:

Well if you look, the color of the bud turns
an orangish red in the spring. That's how you know
it's about to bloom.

CALEB:

Oh, I found it!

HENRY NEALY:

I knew you would.

CALEB:

Hey grandpa?

HENRY NEALY:

Yeah?

CALEB:

How come you are out here with this tree all the time?

HENRY NEALY:

Well. Caleb, you know how your grandma isn't around
anymore?

CALEB:

Yeah. Mommy says she'll always be in here.
(He gestures to his heart.)

HENRY NEALY:

Your mom is right. But for me, your grandma is here
too.

(Gestures to the tree.)

CALEB:

Grandma is in an apple tree?

HENRY NEALY:

In a way. We planted it together and watched it grow.
I like to come out here and talk sometimes because it
feels like she's listening to me.

CALEB:

Does she say anything back?

HENRY NEALY:

In her own way.

(CONTINUED)

CALEB:
How?

Henry lifts Caleb up and sets him on a branch of the tree. He points to a bud that is just beginning to bloom.

HENRY NEALY:
You see that?

CALEB:
Yeah. It's pretty.

HENRY NEALY:
That means she's smiling at us.

CALEB:
She had a very pretty smile.

HENRY NEALY:
Yeah. Yeah she did.

Maggie enters.

MAGGIE:
Hey dad I was just wondering what time you wanted to start cooking... Why is Caleb in the tree?

HENRY NEALY:
I was just showing him Liv's smile.

MAGGIE:
Her what?

CALEB:
The blossom. The blossom means Grandma is smiling.

MAGGIE:
Oh. okay. That's neat. Does the tree... I mean grandma have any thoughts on when we should start cooking dinner?

HENRY NEALY:
I'll come in in a bit Maggie. Just as soon as Caleb finds his last couple of eggs.

CALEB:
I've got two left!

MAGGIE:
Well, you better go quick if you're hungry.

CALEB:

I will go so quick you won't even believe!

Caleb jumps off of the tree branch and runs in search of the next egg.

MAGGIE:

So if a blossom means she's smiling... does an apple mean she's hungry?

HENRY NEALY:

No. Not at all. An apple means I need to listen.

MAGGIE:

Okay. What does this peeled piece of bark mean here?

HENRY NEALY:

It's a reminder.

MAGGIE:

A reminder about what?

HENRY NEALY:

That there are powers greater than us in this world. There are things we cannot control. Sometimes we just have to let them be.

MAGGIE:

I don't like the things we can't control.

HENRY NEALY:

You and me both.

(Beat.)

Well, one thing we can control is when dinner is done. We best get to work in the kitchen shouldn't we?

MAGGIE:

Yeah. Dad why don't you go ahead? I'll meet you in a minute.

HENRY NEALY:

Okay.

Maggie is left alone on stage with the tree. She is caught up in the mysticism of it. She knows it's illogical but she can't help herself.

MAGGIE:

Mom? It's me, Maggie. I know this is kind of you and Dad's thing but I thought that maybe, I might...Oh, what is the point of this? You're not really going talk to me are you? Of course not. Yeah. I... It was stupid to think.

(CONTINUED)

What does Dad get out of this? You are bark and branches and buds you are not my mother. You are not his wife. You are solid and whole and alive. Goddamnit you are alive and she isn't. What the hell kind of stand in do you get to be, huh?

What, do you tell him that its just one mistake too? That Maggie will forgive him. That hey, what's an overturned coffee table if the liquor did it right? She could always separate the two. Him and the liquor. But as far as I saw it they made up the same father.

She wasn't strong enough. She should have stopped him. And then when she finally did, it took all the strength out of her. She didn't deserve that. He didn't deserve her. He didn't deserve someone that forgiving.

Are you strong enough? Are these branches thick enough to keep him from falling again? I... I'm sorry I don't trust you, I'm just too afraid to find out.

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Scene 5

It is evening of the same day. The sun hasn't quite gone down. Henry enters to talk to the tree.

HENRY NEALY:

Liv, you are not going to believe this. I burnt the rolls. I burnt the rolls. I ruined Easter. Here I am trying to prove to Maggie that I've changed and then I go and burn the rolls. I've never been much of a cook. That was always your area of expertise. You should be here. You should be here to help me.

Oh, and the Easter egg hunt. Caleb only took about ten minutes to find the eggs, can you believe that! The Nealy Easter Egg hunt is not supposed to be easy. You always came up with the most clever hiding places. Everything has been so much harder without you. Easter just wasn't the same.

Maggie enters. She is carrying a basket with her.

MAGGIE:

Hey dad.

HENRY NEALY:

What? Oh. Hi Maggie. I didn't see you there.

MAGGIE:

Sorry.

(CONTINUED)

HENRY NEALY:

No, it's okay.

MAGGIE:

(Gesturing to the tree.)

What's mom have to say today?

HENRY NEALY:

Oh, just that I put too much garlic on the lamb chops
and too much butter on the corn on the cob.

MAGGIE:

I liked the corn on the cob.

HENRY NEALY:

Thank you.

MAGGIE:

(tentatively gesturing to the basket.)

The rolls, however.

HENRY NEALY:

Yeah, I got a little over zealous there.

MAGGIE:

You always were a little over zealous.

(Beat. A moment of tension, then:)

Anyways, I thought maybe, uh, maybe Rosemary would like
them?

HENRY NEALY:

That deer will eat anything.

MAGGIE:

So do I just...

(She begins to tear the rolls into
little pieces and scatter them about the
stage. She beckons to the deer like one
would a cat. She looks ridiculous. Henry
laughs.)

What?

HENRY NEALY:

Rosemary is kinda shy. She won't come if we're still
sitting here. Of course she would eat right out of your
mom's hand. She was special that way.

MAGGIE:

Yeah. Yeah she was.

(Beat.)

She was fine. She was so fine. She was healthy. She did
yoga every day for christsake! Wouldn't let me eat a
single meal unless it had a fruit or vegetable. People

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MAGGIE: (cont'd)

are not just healthy one day and then undergoing chemo for stage four breast cancer the next, that's not how things are supposed to happen! That's not... it's not... it wasn't supposed to. And I was so far away... I wasn't here for you... I was so mad...I wasn't... Who's going to take care of you now?

HENRY NEALY:

Maggie. Mags, love. It's not your job to take care of me.

MAGGIE:

It was mom's, so now it's mine.

HENRY NEALY:

You've got Caleb to take care of. You've got Sam.

MAGGIE:

You're never going to understand.

HENRY NEALY:

What?

MAGGIE:

Dad when I was 7 years old, I came downstairs for a glass of water because I couldn't sleep and I found you in the middle of the floor passed out, beer bottles littered all over the floor.

HENRY NEALY:

Maggie I-

MAGGIE:

I didn't know what to do. I tried to wake you up but you wouldn't move. It was like you couldn't hear me. Finally mom came down and told me you were just really, really tired and that I shouldn't bother you. I was seven, but I wasn't stupid. I just didn't realize you were doing it to yourself yet.

HENRY NEALY:

I don't even remember tha-

MAGGIE:

And then mom's 'Daddy's just really tired' became 'Daddy had a long day at work' or 'Daddy needs some alone time'. Mom was really good at excuses. She enabled it. Every bit of it. I watched her let you pick liquor over me and her every day.

(CONTINUED)

HENRY NEALY:

Maggie I- I am so sorry. I know I let you down. I let your mom down.

MAGGIE:

May 7th, fifteen years ago. Senior prom. I came home an hour past curfew. There was a car accident, traffic was at a standstill, so I got home late. "Where the hell have you been? where the hell- you were with Robert weren't you? You little slut!" You're screaming. I'm screaming. Mom's crying. The next thing I know the coffee table is overturned and there's broken glass everywhere. And I realized I couldn't feel responsible to take care of you anymore. I couldn't save you. I couldn't save mom. If she wanted to keep letting you destroy yourself she could but I couldn't keep watching it happen. So I left.

HENRY NEALY:

I'm sorry. I'm so sorry Maggie. It's... it's unforgivable. But I need you to know I always loved you. I always loved you both. I love you both so much.

MAGGIE:

I wish... I wish love was enough.

HENRY NEALY:

Are you ever going to be able to stop being mad at me?

MAGGIE:

Are you ever going to be able to stop being mad at me?

HENRY NEALY:

Maggie hun, I'm not mad at you.

MAGGIE:

Then what are you?

HENRY NEALY:

Guilty.

MAGGIE:

What?

HENRY NEALY:

You said it yourself. I never was a father for you. I see you now and I see this whole life you built for yourself. And I missed it. I wasn't there. If it weren't for your mom forcing you to come visit-

MAGGIE:

Dad mom didn't force me to visit you...

(CONTINUED)

HENRY NEALY:

Five years ago you could hardly make eye contact with me across the dinner table.

MAGGIE:

That was five years ago. Dad, you... you just have to be patient with me. I'm trying. Really I am.

HENRY NEALY:

I'm trying too.

MAGGIE:

Then prove it. Come to Florida. Come be a father. Come be a grandfather. Caleb worships you, you should hear the way he talks about you.

HENRY NEALY:

Maggie you know I can't leave yet...

MAGGIE:

Then you have to start eating beets at least.

HENRY NEALY:

What?

MAGGIE:

They help detox your liver. I don't know, Sam read about it in some health food magazine. It's no secret drinking really fucks up your liver and I kinda need you to stick around for awhile because I'm getting used to this whole us talking to each other again thing and I don't really want it to go away and from what I hear liver failure is just a downright painful way to go so I don't want you to-

HENRY NEALY:

Beets are disgusting.

MAGGIE:

I found some recipes. There are ways to make them tolerable.

HENRY NEALY:

Okay. You know what Maggie, if it means that much to you, I'll start eating beets.

MAGGIE:

Really?

HENRY NEALY:

Really.

(CONTINUED)

MAGGIE:

Thank you.

(beat.)

Dad, you know what you said? About not being a father?

HENRY NEALY:

Yeah.

MAGGIE:

There were times. There were times you were. I don't know if you remember. I must have been about eight years old. I came home from school crying because Ian Schafer told me to shut up because I was singing too loudly on the bus. You took me fishing with you that afternoon. Told me to sing as loud as I possibly could. We caught six snapper that afternoon. You said it was all because the fish wanted to come hear me sing.

HENRY NEALY:

I miss that.

MAGGIE:

I miss that too.

(Beat.)

Dad?

HENRY NEALY:

Yeah?

MAGGIE:

How'd you stop?

HENRY NEALY:

Stop what?

MAGGIE:

You know?

HENRY NEALY:

Oh, hon. Well. You had left. After that, your mom...she was like you, you know that right? You've always been one in the same spirit. You leaving made her realize something needed to change. So she gave me an ultimatum. It was her or the liquor. I had already lost you, I couldn't lose her too. So I stopped.

MAGGIE:

You got me back eventually.

HENRY NEALY:

Thank you. Thank you for giving me a chance again. I know... I know that couldn't have been easy.

(CONTINUED)

MAGGIE:

You're family. You need to be there for your family.

HENRY NEALY:

It's getting a little late, I suppose we should head back inside.

MAGGIE:

Yeah

(Beat. Maggie notices something offstage)

Wait! Dad, is that?

HENRY NEALY:

Rosemary!

Blackout.

7

Scene 6

It is morning the day after Easter. Maggie, Caleb, and Sam are leaving soon. Henry is outside visiting with the tree.

HENRY NEALY:

Do you remember on our honeymoon when we went skinny dipping on that beach in Cancun? Turned out to be a really dumb idea, I mean the water was freezing! But I've been thinking about that a lot lately. There were all those signs that said to be cautious of riptides.

That's sort of how I've been feeling lately. Like I'm caught up in a riptide. I keep fighting it and fighting it but after a while my muscles get sore and I get tired. So I take a break for a minute and the current starts to lull me out to sea. And for a second it's peaceful and calm, but then I start to panic and I fight to keep my head above water again. For those couple of moments though, before the panic sets in, the lull of the water is so alluring that I don't feel like fighting the current so badly anymore.

And then I start to think of you. And how you don't have to fight anymore. And I'm kind of relieved. Because at least now you're free.

MAGGIE:

Hey Dad we're getting ready to go soon. I thought I'd come visit mom with you one last time.

HENRY NEALY:

I can't fight. Without you I don't have a reason to fight.

(CONTINUED)

MAGGIE:

What are you talking about?

HENRY NEALY:

It's gonna pull me under. I'm gonna get swept under again.

MAGGIE:

You mean alcohol?

HENRY NEALY:

I can't breathe.

MAGGIE:

Should I call someone?

HENRY NEALY:

I don't know if I want to breathe.

MAGGIE:

How could you say something like that? Dad, please you're scaring me!

HENRY NEALY:

Olivia everything is dark. I want to let go. I want the current to win.

MAGGIE:

What current? Dad, look! See? See this apple blossom? That means, she's smiling right? Mom is smiling at us. She believes in you. She wants you to keep fighting.

HENRY NEALY:

I can't do it. I'm going to fail Maggie again.

MAGGIE:

Dad it's... it's okay.

HENRY NEALY:

I keep failing her. The coffee table. The rolls. She deserves better. You deserve better.

MAGGIE:

Dad it's okay. Everything is going to be okay just please look at me!

HENRY NEALY:

Olivia how did things wind up like this? You deserve to be here not me. Maggie deserves you.

MAGGIE:

Dad I'm going to go get Sam okay? Don't go anywhere.

(CONTINUED)

HENRY NEALY:

Maggie was right to leave. She was always right. You saw it too. You never let it show, but you knew she was right. An apple tree can't bear olives. You said it to me yourself. After all this time. After everything that has happened. "From the same mouth come blessing and cursing, these things ought not be so." Ought not to be so. It shouldn't have turned out this way. Blessing and cursing, sweetness and bitterness. I'm both. Somehow, you loved all of it. Even my sin.

Why'd you have to go Liv? I understand why Maggie left but you? Why'd you have to do this to me. You can't just leave me here all alone to figure this out. I can't do it by myself. This isn't fair.

Olivia please, look at me. Please don't be gone okay? I don't know what to do with you gone.

You're not listening to me are you? You're not. I don't believe this. You just left! you just up and left all of a sudden. How is that fair?
You just keep fading. You keep getting further and further away.

Henry has collapsed at the base of the tree. He is sobbing, wretched. We finally see the full expression of his grief. He isn't getting the answers he needs from the tree anymore. There are no more signs. Olivia is really gone, lost. He doesn't know what to do. He stops moving. He is just curled up at the base of the tree. Maggie reenters with Sam and finds him.

MAGGIE:

Dad!

(No response.)

Dad are you okay?

(Still no response.)

Dad please talk to me!

(To Sam)

He isn't responding to me. I came out here and he was talking to the tree. He wouldn't even look at me. It's like he can't hear me. Usually it's just a charade and I'll play along and he'll recognize me eventually, but this time he's just stuck in this hallucination or something.

SAM:

Henry?

(He reaches down and lightly touches Henry's shoulder. Henry doesn't respond.)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

SAM: (cont'd)
Henry it's okay. It's Sam and Maggie. We're outside with you. You're with Liv. Can you hear me? Can you understand me?

MAGGIE:
Why isn't he saying anything? He's gonna be okay right?

SAM:
I think so. We need to just give him a little bit of time to come out of it.

MAGGIE:
Come out of what?

Henry rises out of his slump. He is still not responding to anyone.

HENRY NEALY:
Henry. Henry. Henry. Liv. No not Liv. No more Liv.
Henry. Henry. Maggie. Sam. Caleb. Maggie. Maggie. Sam.
Caleb. Henry...

Henry continues to repeat names under Maggie and Sam's remaining dialogue. He is trying to recenter himself in reality.

MAGGIE:
What is he doing?

SAM:
I think... I don't know why I didn't see it before. I think he has been experiencing symptoms of brief reactive psychosis.

MAGGIE:
Of brief, what?

SAM:
Reactive psychosis. It's essentially a psychotic break in response to a traumatic event. In this case, the loss of your mother.

MAGGIE:
So what do we do for him?

SAM:
Symptoms usually go away slowly over time. Knowing your dad I think it is unlikely that this is a symptom of a larger mental disorder. It's like I said we just need to give him time.

(CONTINUED)

MAGGIE:

Should we get him to come inside?

SAM:

I think it might be best to leave him here. Trying to move him might increase the risk of violence.

MAGGIE:

Violence?

SAM:

It's just a possibility. I don't think it's likely in this case.

MAGGIE:

Well we can't just leave him here.

SAM:

No we should probably sit with him for a while.

MAGGIE:

How long?

SAM:

It's hard to say.

MAGGIE:

Well what about our flight?

SAM:

We can reschedule it.

MAGGIE:

We have to get Caleb back home for school. You, you go with him. I'll stay here. I'll catch a flight out later.

SAM:

Are you sure?

MAGGIE:

Yes.

SAM:

I feel like my expertise could be of use here. I'd like to do a psychological screening when he comes out of it. Make sure he's okay.

MAGGIE:

He's my dad. I'll be able to help him.

(CONTINUED)

SAM:

I'm just not sure that would be wise given the situation.

MAGGIE:

Trust me.

SAM:

Okay. Okay. I'll go get Caleb ready then.

They exchange goodbyes. Blackout to reflect that time has past. Lights up on Henry and Maggie still at the tree. Henry appears to be becoming more and more in touch with reality.

HENRY NEALY:

Henry. Henry. Henry. Maggie. Sam. Maggie. Maggie. Maggie.

(He becomes aware of Maggie's presence)

Maggie. Hi Maggie.

MAGGIE:

Dad! Dad are you okay?

HENRY NEALY:

Yeah. Yeah I'm okay. She's gone.

MAGGIE:

Who's gone?

HENRY NEALY:

Olivia.

MAGGIE:

I know dad. I know.

Henry begins to run his hands along the branches of the tree, remembering.

MAGGIE:

You know, Dad, I never asked you. I was too afraid. What is so important about this tree?

HENRY NEALY:

Do you remember that book Because of Winn Dixie?

MAGGIE:

Vaguely. I think mom read it to me when I was little.

HENRY NEALY:

You know with the little girl who names her dog after the grocery store?

(CONTINUED)

MAGGIE:

Yeah she was the pastor's daughter and met all kinds of eccentric people in their town.

HENRY NEALY:

Right! There's that one woman who all the kids are afraid of. She's all alone because she drank everyone out of her life. And she ties up all of her empty bottles to a tree so she can hear them clank together every time the wind blows. Says it reminds her of her sins. I thought that was horrible. I told your mom, I don't want to remember, I want to forget. I want a sin free tree. And she says well go plant one then. So the next day I drive to home depot pick up an apple sapling and plant it in the front yard. Right here. Haven't touched a drop of liquor since.

MAGGIE:

I... I never knew.

HENRY NEALY:

You were long gone at that point.

MAGGIE:

I never meant to hurt you that badly. I've always loved you.

HENRY NEALY:

I wish... I wish that love were enough.

MAGGIE:

I know.

(long beat.)

Dad?

HENRY NEALY:

Yeah?

MAGGIE:

Do you really want to stay here?

HENRY NEALY:

I... I don't know. I've been waiting for a sign. But it was all in my head. I'm really confused.

MAGGIE:

It's okay, Dad. I trust you.

HENRY NEALY:

She's quiet, you know. She's not talking to me anymore.

(CONTINUED)

MAGGIE:

I know. I'm sorry.

HENRY NEALY:

An apple tree can't bear olives.

MAGGIE:

What?

HENRY NEALY:

It's a bible verse.

MAGGIE:

Isn't it a fig tree?

HENRY NEALY:

What?

MAGGIE:

James 3:12 right? My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs?

HENRY NEALY:

Fig tree, really?

MAGGIE:

Yeah, I think so.

HENRY NEALY:

Hey Maggie?

MAGGIE:

Yeah?

HENRY NEALY:

Can fig trees grow in Florida?

MAGGIE:

Yeah. Yeah they can.

Suddenly the wind picks up and flower petals fall from the apple tree. The stage is littered in color. Blackout. End of play.