

Second Sight

by

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SETTING

Present, late summer. Home of Tom, Sarah, and Jonathan Mohr.
Nearby creek.

CHARACTERS

Jonathan Mohr: Son of Tom and Sarah. One day shy of 13.

Laura Stearn: New neighbor. Age 13.

Douglas Early: Jonathan's grandfather.

Tom Mohr: Jonathan's father.

Sarah Mohr: Jonathan's mother.

Mattie Early: Jonathan's grandmother.

Joan Acton: Mattie's sister.

ACT I.

SCENE 1

A yard by side of house, bordered by woods. JONATHAN sits on a bench by a table, next to which is a chair. Rosebush nearby. He is reading a large book (dictionary), which he puts on the table. On the bench next to him is a leather-bound journal. He picks it up and examines it uncertainly, looking in it but not reading it. The brown paper it was wrapped in is on the table.

CROWS CALL in the distance. The sky is bright in some places and gray in others. HEAT LIGHTNING flashes in the distance, followed by SOFT THUNDER, which makes JONATHAN look up. As he does a Frisbee sails out of the woods. His arm shoots up and he catches it by reflex. LAURA enters, wearing a backpack.

LAURA

Oh, hi. Didn't know I could throw it this far.

Behind her a DOG BARKS. LAURA looks back. As she does, JONATHAN slides the journal under the brown paper on the table.

LAURA (cont'd)

Max was supposed to fetch it and bring it back.

JONATHAN

Is Max a retriever?

LAURA

No. He's a watcher. I guess I'm the retriever.

JONATHAN tosses the frisbee to LAURA.

LAURA (cont'd)

I'm Laura. Laura Stearn. We moved in over there. Well, you can't see our house because of the woods, but by Fall you'll probably see us through the trees. An overgrown path joins our yards.

JONATHAN frowns.

JONATHAN

I know.

LAURA

It was used a lot, once. But not so much anymore.

Pause.

JONATHAN

I'm Jonathan.

LAURA

Thought so. ... What are you reading?

JONATHAN

You thought I was me? Why?

LAURA

Saw your mom at the market today. She mentioned Jonathan.

JONATHAN

How do you know my mom?

LAURA

I've seen her drive by and turn into your driveway. I notice things. When you're new someplace, there's a lot of things to notice. *(pause)* I introduced my mom and your mom today. They hit it off pretty good. They'd still be talking if the ice cream hadn't started to melt.

Pause. JONATHAN doesn't know what to do.

JONATHAN

Ah ... Wanna sit down?

LAURA

Sure. Thanks.

LAURA removes her pack and sits in the chair.

LAURA (cont'd)

She was buying birthday candles and ice cream. Is it your birthday?

JONATHAN

Tomorrow.

LAURA

How old?

JONATHAN

Thirteen.

LAURA

I'm already thirteen. Three weeks ago. Had a big party. ...
Then we moved.

LAURA looks to the CROWS CALLING in the distance.

LAURA (cont'd)

Are there always crows in those trees along the creek?

JONATHAN

Most of the time. I like hearing them in the distance. Makes me think that something's happening. You don't know quite what it is. But you know it's something.

LAURA

I was down by them yesterday. I thought they were talking about me. *(pause)* Sounds stupid doesn't it.

JONATHAN

Hmm...nah. I guess crows are like that.

LAURA

I saw you with some of your friends. They're not coming tomorrow, are they?

JONATHAN

What makes you think they're not? Were you following us?

LAURA

No. I walked up and saw you, and I left. I wasn't sneaking around. Guys just don't see much.

JONATHAN

You were wearing a green sweatshirt. I saw you turn and leave.

LAURA

And if I hadn't, were you going to say something like "Hello, you just moved in next door, didn't you." Or "Hello, we haven't met, have we?" Or (*giggling*) "Run, my friends are assholes."

JONATHAN

They are not— (*pause*) —oh. You got me. (*pause*) Well, I guess we've met now, haven't we. (*pause*) Why do you think my friends aren't coming over for my birthday?

LAURA

Ice cream. Your mother only bought a quart. Not much of a party in a quart of ice cream.

JONATHAN

There's just five of us this year, and Mom and Gramma don't eat dairy. Last year we went to an indoor karting track with a bunch of my friends and raced, even the parents. But this year—it's just family. Mom and Dad and my grandmother; she lives with us now. And my grandfather, and me, the entrée.

LAURA

Why just family?

Pause.

JONATHAN

Because I'll be thirteen.

LAURA

That's it? You're thirteen so, you can't have a party?

JONATHAN

It's just that my mom—my parents—want to do something different this year.

LAURA

Different how? Why this year?

JONATHAN

It's a ... a family thing.

LAURA

Oh, one of those. Does your family have some special rite of passage? Is that it? Like the Padulee tribesmen. When a boy turns twelve, they send him into the forest all alone.

JONATHAN

And then what?

LAURA

I don't know. There was a commercial and I changed channels. Probably has to kill something, or eat something horrible that makes him throw up and have a vision. Or he gets voted out of the tribe.

JONATHAN

Something like that. A sacrifice, then too much cake and ice cream, followed by throwing up.

LAURA

What is it, really? My family doesn't have any traditions. We just follow my dad's transfers around the country. You can tell me. I won't tell anyone, I promise. *(pause)* I can't. I don't know anyone.

JONATHAN

When school starts, you'll meet a lot of girls who will tell you secrets.

LAURA

Don't wanna wait. This is good. "Why wouldn't the parents of a thirteen-year-old boy want him to have a birthday party?" "What could such people be like?" "What could this boy have done to deserve such a fate?"

JONATHAN

Maybe there isn't a story.

LAURA

There's always a story. Sometimes you just have to make it up. Come on, tell me.

JONATHAN

I'm not supposed to talk about it outside the family. That's what my mom and grandma say. They act like it's a big secret.

LAURA

A family secret! What kind? One that everyone knows but no one talks about? Like everyone in town knew my father was arrested, but only my friends knew the whole story. I'll tell you if you want.

JONATHAN

Only your friends know, but you tell everyone you meet?

LAURA

No. I'll tell you. Don't be dense. *(pause)* I've moved a lot. I've learned not to waste time. I can tell when I meet someone if we're likely to be friends. Can't you?

JONATHAN

I've always lived here. Never thought it about it.

LAURA

It's not a thinking thing. So, do you wanna know?

JONATHAN

Sure. Why was your dad arrested?

LAURA

Kidnapping, and stealing a minivan. He was on the news.

JONATHAN

Wow! What happened? Is he in jail! How often do you visit?

LAURA

Someone told their kids to wait in our minivan while they ran back to get something they forgot. Their minivan looked just like ours. Kids fell asleep, and my dad came back and drove off.

JONATHAN

Then what happened?

LAURA

All the cops in the world stopped him on the freeway, and he was, like, film at eleven.

JONATHAN

But it was all OK, after they found out?

LAURA

Oh sure. He had to give the kids back, and the minivan was ours, so we got to keep it. He got probation for resisting arrest. That's what most people don't know. Mom said he should learn not to say things he'll regret later. He said it was all a simple misunderstanding.

JONATHAN

Like movie stars and politicians.

LAURA

Except without *People* magazine.

JONATHAN

I didn't know regular people could have simple misunderstandings.

LAURA

They can, but they get probation. When you meet my dad, don't say anything. We're never supposed to talk about it.

JONATHAN

I won't.

LAURA

Now it's your turn. Tell me why you're not having a birthday party. Pretend I'm family.

JONATHAN

You'll think I'm strange.

LAURA

So what. Maybe you are. Maybe I already do.

JONATHAN

Do you?

LAURA

How could I? You haven't given me a chance. You've got to talk to me first. You'll feel better if you talk to someone. Me.

JONATHAN

Something is supposed to happen to me tomorrow. I'm supposed to get ... second sight.

LAURA

Second sight?

JONATHAN picks up the dictionary and reads.

JONATHAN

"Second sight. The supposed ability to see things not physically present. Foresee the future. And so on." My mom says there's a history of this in our family. Happens to the oldest kid on the thirteenth birthday. First one in each generation.

LAURA

Wow! No wonder you're nervous. What happens? What if nothing happens?

JONATHAN

I'm not nervous. I don't know, and I don't know.

LAURA

A tradition based on supposed to and I don't know? Can't you ask whoever has this sight thing now?

JONATHAN

No. Didn't happen last time. Shoulda been my mom.

LAURA

You're lucky. Who want's a mom who knows what you're going to do? This is so cool. Does your grandmother have this double vision?

JONATHAN

Second sight. No. Her sister did, but I never met her.

LAURA

Why not? She's your aunt.

JONATHAN

Grampa said because she's unbalanced. She was in a mental hospital, and then she disappeared. Out west somewhere. Mom tried to get him to explain once, but he said "It's not something we talk about. No need." My grandfather has this tone of voice that says "this conversation is over." He's pretty good at it.

LAURA

My dad's got it too. *(pause)* Maybe all adults do. ... What about your grandmother? Did you ask her?

JONATHAN

Yeah. She didn't say anything for a long time... I got bored waiting... She finally said I'd hear about it later, on my birthday. Then she said something funny. She asked me not to talk to my mom about it.

LAURA

Because...?

JONATHAN

Dunno. I think maybe because nothing happened to my mom. She didn't get second sight.

LAURA

Maybe she was lucky. Tomorrow you could end up like your aunt. Unbalanced. No wonder your parents don't want anyone around.

JONATHAN

Nothing is going to happen.

LAURA

And you know this because...you can see the future?

JONATHAN

Good one. No. This whole thing is my mom's deal. She can be kinda New Agey sometimes. I'm just a normal kid.

LAURA

Me too.

LAURA sees the brown paper the journal was wrapped in, leans over, and reads.

LAURA (cont'd)

"For Jonathan on his birthday."

She continues to study the paper. JONATHAN pulls it away from her, inadvertently revealing the journal underneath.

LAURA (cont'd)

Did you see the postmark? This was sent from out west. Did your aunt send this book?

She picks up the journal and looks inside, flipping pages, stopping on one, and beginning to read. JONATHAN takes it from her.

JONATHAN

It doesn't belong to you.

LAURA

I wasn't stealing it.

JONATHAN

You were going to read it.

LAURA

No I wasn't. (pause) Well, yes, I was. Sorry.

JONATHAN

I haven't even read it.

LAURA

What is it?

JONATHAN

It's a journal. From my aunt.

LAURA

The one you never met? Who can see the future?

JONATHAN

The one who got unbalanced and disappeared.

LAURA

Read something!

JONATHAN

What?

LAURA

Read something. You're right. I shouldn't read it. So you read something. And tell me about it.

JONATHAN

Why?

LAURA
(realizing)

Because...because...I want to know about second sight. I've never heard of it.

JONATHAN

What if it's private?

LAURA

She wouldn't have sent it to you if it was that private.

JONATHAN

What if I don't want to read it?

LAURA

Why wouldn't you?

JONATHAN

I... ah...back off, OK. I just haven't decided yet. You know. It's supposed to be a surprise. Maybe I want to be surprised.

LAURA

That's why you got it out of hiding and unwrapped it when no one was home? So you could be surprised. *(pause)* Oh, I'm doing it, aren't I. My mom says I can be a too much sometimes. My dad says I'm too much all the time.

JONATHAN

Somewhere in the middle.

LAURA

I want to know things. It's like a...hunger.

JONATHAN

What kinds of things?

LAURA

Everything. Why things are the way they are.

JONATHAN

Because if they weren't the way they are, they'd be different, and then they wouldn't be the way they are.

LAURA

Like, why boys say dumb things.

JONATHAN

Because they don't know the answer.

LAURA

Why do some things happen and other things don't? Why do I have to learn history if history repeats itself. I'll just get it next time around when I'm not so busy. Why doesn't my mom tell my dad when he's acting stupid? It's like so obvious.

JONATHAN

I bet you do.

LAURA

Not anymore. He's lost his sense of humor since I got older. First I was cuddly, then I was cute, now I'm a provocateur. Do you think I'm cute? My mom says my eyes—

JONATHAN

—Yes.

LAURA

You answered too fast. You've been coached, haven't you?

JONATHAN

My dad.

LAURA

Right answer. Bad timing. Try it again. Do you think I'm cute?

Pause.

JONATHAN

Yes. *(pause)* You're pretty.

Moment becomes awkward.

LAURA

Well...um...thank you. What are going to be when you grow up?

JONATHAN

Not sure yet. A race car driver, or may be a writer. I have a lot of thoughts. Like my grandfather. Runs in the family I guess. He taught philosophy at...some school. I forget which one. He has thoughts about everything. I don't have that many, but maybe enough to be a writer.

LAURA

Do you write?

JONATHAN

Not much. But I think about it.

LAURA

I wanted to win a Nobel prize in science, then I wanted to have a talk show, then I started an organic garden with my mom, but we moved before anything grew. Don't you want to know things?

JONATHAN

Sure.

LAURA

Like what? *(pause as she realizes)* Oh ... like what's going to happen tomorrow.

JONATHAN

Yeah.

LAURA

Maybe you'll just know more.

JONATHAN

Or maybe less. Like my aunt.

LAURA

You'll be OK.

JONATHAN

Why, because you said so? "How are you? I'm fine." Like people say all the time when they're not. When I think about tomorrow, I feel sick.

Pause.

LAURA

I thought maybe you looked a little...something. Don't worry... It's not like me to meet someone who changes overnight. I mean, my parents haven't changed ever. And my friends...well, they're gone now. But they were the same when I left.

JONATHAN

Thanks for trying.

LAURA

If you did change...Maybe you wouldn't have to wait to find out what you'll be like the rest of us. Maybe you just get it all tomorrow.

JONATHAN

It's not like waiting for Christmas. It's like waiting to go to the dentist! I'm already not sure who I am. I don't want to be different until I'm the same for awhile.

LAURA

I'd rather be lots of different things and see which one fits.

JONATHAN

But how would you know which one is you?

LAURA

It would feel right. I'll find out when it happens. Can I come over and watch tomorrow? If you change, I can tell you how you used to be, if you can't remember.

JONATHAN

What if I'm worse?

LAURA

I'll lie and say you're the same.

JONATHAN

(laughing in spite of himself)

Sorry. Family only.

LAURA

Well, read something from the book then. In case I never see this you again.

JONATHAN

OK. Beginning, middle, end?

LAURA

Just open it and pick something.

JONATHAN opens the journal, points finger, does nothing, then holds the journal out it to Laura.

JONATHAN

You pick.

Instead of taking it where she is, she joins him on the bench and takes it. She fans the pages and sticks a finger resolutely on a page and passes the book back to Jonathan.

LAURA

This one.

Jonathan looks and begins to read silently. Laura glances at him and then down at the page. She also reads silently, her lips moving with the words. They finish.

LAURA (cont'd)

Hmmmp. What's that all about?

JONATHAN

What's permission got to do with second sight?

LAURA

Let's find a better one.

Laura chooses another passage on another page for Jonathan.

LAURA (cont'd)

Try this one.

Jonathan starts to read silently again.

LAURA (cont'd)

Read it out loud. The writing's too bad for me.

JONATHAN

"I got fired today. I saw the mayor in the hall and he said something mindlessly insulting like he does, and I got pissed and blurted out "What are you hiding?" I'd been seeing that for awhile. I didn't know what it was, and I didn't care. It must have been important to him. I stopped by his office on the way out with my box of things. I told him he had cancer, which I made up on the spot, to wipe the smile off his face. It worked. He turned white."

JONATHAN closes the journal.

LAURA

Mean.

JONATHAN

I don't want to be like that. I shouldn't have read anything.

LAURA

Read another one.

JONATHAN

Why! To entertain you?

LAURA

No! Because now you're really waiting for the dentist. If the next one is bad, then you're where you are right now anyway. But maybe it won't be bad. Not everything is bad.

JONATHAN

What do you know?

Pause.

LAURA

Please. If you don't read another one, you'll just think about this one. You'll think about bad things happening and people being mean. You'll think about me picking this one.

JONATHAN

I should have left it in the closet. Why would anybody want to give me this?

From the house comes the sound of someone KNOCKING loudly, two sets of three.

DOUGLAS (O.S.)

Hello! Hello! Anyone home?

He KNOCKS three time again.

JONATHAN

It's my grandfather!
(toward house)

Grampa! Over here! By the side of the house!
(to Laura)

Oh no! I'm not supposed to have this!

JONATHAN looks around and sees no good place to hide the journal.

JONATHAN (cont'd)

Here, put it in your pack.

He hurriedly gives the journal and the brown paper to Laura, who puts them in her pack, finishing as DOUGLAS enters.

DOUGLAS is neatly dressed, his shirt unwrinkled and his expensive pants creased exactly as they should be. In one hand he carries a long black umbrella with a polished wood handle.

In his other hand is an expensive bouquet of flowers, held pointed down in an off-hand manner as he picks his way across the grass, on the lookout for anything that might mar his shoes.

JONATHAN (cont'd)

Hello Grampa! I thought you weren't coming until dinner.

DOUGLAS

I...wanted to drop these off. No surprises from the dog, are there?

JONATHAN
(subdued)

That was Alan's dog. You don't have to worry.

DOUGLAS

Hello, Jonathan. It's been but two months since I saw you, and I believe you're two inches taller. And hello young lady. ... My name is Douglas Early, Professor Douglas Early. I'm Jonathan's grandfather.

LAURA

I'm Laura. We just moved in next door.

DOUGLAS

Oh, the Flanagan's house. So they moved. I thought they might. (to Jonathan) You and he were friends, weren't you?

JONATHAN

Best friends. Me 'n Alan.

DOUGLAS

A tragedy. Jonathan's handled it well. Would you take these in the house and do something with them. They're for your mother.

JONATHAN takes the flowers and leaves.

JONATHAN

You know Mom doesn't like cut flowers.

DOUGLAS

So she says. Don't believe her, Jonathan. It's nonsense. All women like flowers. Isn't that so, Laura?

LAURA

I guess. I only get them when I'm sick.

DOUGLAS

Well, here. I can fix that.

DOUGLAS roughly breaks a rose from the bush.

LAURA

What happened to Alan?

DOUGLAS

He was riding home. From here, on his bicycle. Someone drove by reading a map. Drove off the road and hit him. A tragedy. (pause) For you, my dear.

DOUGLAS gives LAURA the rose.

LAURA

Uh...Thanks.

DOUGLAS

What brings you over here today, Laura?

LAURA

My dog. Max. We were playing frisbee. He's off somewhere now, probably where there's mud.

DOUGLAS

Good luck finding him. Better hurry. Looks like weather's on the way.

THUNDER sounds.

DOUGLAS (cont'd)

If he's new to the area, he might get lost, especially in a thunderstorm.

LAURA

I guess I better go. Nice meeting you, Mr. Early.

LAURA starts to leave without her pack. DOUGLAS notices and picks it up.

DOUGLAS

Is this yours?

LAURA

Oh. Yes. Thanks

LAURA takes the pack from him and leaves, but goes just out of sight by the side of the yard. JONATHAN returns.

JONATHAN

Where's Laura?

DOUGLAS

Left. Said she had to find her dog.

DOUGLAS studies JONATHAN.

DOUGLAS (cont'd)

Have a seat. Let's chat. (Jonathan sits) So, Jonathan. Big day tomorrow. Lots going on it seems. Your mother's apparently excited. But from what I gather, your father's taken a level-headed approach to the whole thing.

JONATHAN

He has? Thought he wasn't doing anything.

DOUGLAS

Oh, I wouldn't count him out. What do you think? It is your birthday, after all. Your thirteenth birthday. I guess you know what's been said about that . On your grandmother's side of the family.

JONATHAN

Mom's told me some stuff. Not much. I guess tomorrow's when I'm supposed to be told...most of whatever I'm supposed to be told. But ... well ... what I mean ...

(more)

JONATHAN (cont'd)

What could it be like to ...see more than you see, or know more than you know? I mean... I'm not sure what I mean. What if someone could...

DOUGLAS

Jonathan, there have always been people who believed in the unseen, the unknown...the "magical." People who hope that a richer life exists beyond the senses we're born with. Why? I don't know. I can't imagine. Second sight? Not much evidence for such things. Not real evidence. Why do you think you need it?

JONATHAN

Uh...I don't. But if it happens...I'll have to do something, won't I? It mean, it would be a ... gift, or something, wouldn't it?

DOUGLAS

A gift? From whom. Certainly not. Gifts are what you find under the tree on Christmas.

JONATHAN

Or get for your birthday.

DOUGLAS

Exactly. Just enjoy being thirteen.

JONATHAN

Grampa, what do you think will happen tomorrow? To me.

DOUGLAS

Nothing! Nothing besides being a day older. This "second sight" business, you know, is something from your grandmother's side of the family. I just put up with it. But I'll tell you what I told your mother when she was your age. *(pause)* You're fine just the way you are. Yesterday, today, tomorrow. No matter what.

JONATHAN

Really? Even if nothing happens?

DOUGLAS

Especially if nothing happens—how's that? You don't have to pretend to be anything other than what you are—a normal teenager, if there is such a thing. No evidence for that either. Don't change. No need.

JONATHAN

Great. I won't. Thanks. ... I wish Mom felt more like you do. She acts like I'm already different.

DOUGLAS

Don't blame your mother for having some odd expectations this year. Your grandmother gave her some funny ideas when she was growing up. Soon you can forget all about them. I think tomorrow will be quite special enough.

JONATHAN

Really. tell me about it.

DOUGLAS

Tomorrow, young man. Just wait and see. I must be off. I need to check into my hotel and pick up a few things downtown. I'll be back later for dinner.

DOUGLAS leaves. After a moment LAURA returns.

LAURA

Is he gone?

JONATHAN

Yes. I thought you were too. Were you spying on us?

LAURA

Your grandfather wanted me to leave, so I did. I stayed close so I could give you your book back.

LAURA removes the book and the paper from her pack and gives them to JONATHAN.

JONATHAN

(coolly)

He wouldn't want you to leave. Grampa's not like that. He's nice.

LAURA

Maybe he is. He still wanted me to leave. He came over to talk to you about second sight, and he didn't want anyone else around.

JONATHAN

He stopped by to drop off some flowers, and chatted with me.

Pause.

LAURA

You're not going to read any more, are you?

JONATHAN

I'm going to put it back where I got it. I don't want it.

Pause.

LAURA

Well, gotta go. Bye, Jonathan.

JONATHAN

Yeah, bye.

LAURA leaves. JONATHAN wraps the journal carefully in the paper it came in. When he finishes he walks to the house.

SCENE 2

Kitchen. Douglas's flowers are in a vase on the counter. Outside, a car DRIVES UP AND STOPS. CAR DOORS OPEN AND CLOSE, and then TOM enters with groceries, followed by SARAH.

TOM

I am not!

SARAH

You are too! You 're trying to make up for the substandard birthday you think I'm forcing Jonathan to have this year!

TOM

I want it to be special. That's all.

SARAH

It's already special! In my family this is a special event. Spending a lot of money on a new race kart doesn't make it more special. It makes what I'm doing less!

TOM puts the bags down. MATTIE enters, struggling with a bag of groceries, which SARAH tries to take from her.

MATTIE

Now, now. I can handle a bag of groceries. You kids go ahead and finish your conversation. I'll be invisible.

SARAH

We're done.

MATTIE

If it was Douglas and me, we'd be done. Not you two.

TOM

(to Sarah)

I know it's a special day for you. But you don't really know if it will be special for Jonathan, do you?

(to Mattie)

Mattie, this thing— What is it? In my family, people just know what they know, you know, and we get older every year on our birthdays, with cake and ice cream. That's it.

SARAH

Tom, I didn't ask for much when we got married. But I asked for this. Our first child's thirteenth birthday. I explained it to you. And you agreed. I remember what you said. "Your people are now my people. Your ways are my ways." It was sappy. It was beautiful. You sealed it with a kiss.

TOM

You were naked. We were drinking champagne. I didn't know what you were talking about. *(pause)* I thought if I ignored it, it would go away. And it did, until recently.

SARAH

I tried to talk to you about it. You said about two words and ended the conversation.

TOM

Did not.

SARAH

You said "Second sight, why would that happen?"

TOM

And *you* stopped talking.

SARAH

It was the tone of your voice. I was giving you a chance to participate, with me, on an important day in the raising of our son.

TOM

Participate? By believing he would change overnight?

SARAH turns away, and sees the flowers on the counter. JONATHAN comes in from outside.

SARAH

Where did these come from?

JONATHAN

Grampa dropped them off. They're for you, Mom.

SARAH

He's coming over later. Why drop them off? Here, Mom, you can have them.

MATTIE

No thanks. Douglas stopped giving me flowers years ago,

SARAH

He knows I don't like cut flowers.

MATTIE

No he doesn't.

SARAH

Jonathan, take these in the living room, please.

JONATHAN exits with the flowers.

TOM

Mattie, how far back does this thing go? Wait, exactly what is this thing? Is it covered by insurance?

MATTIE

It's not a disease, Tom. It's an opening. A change in awareness.

MATTIE slumps into a chair at the table.

SARAH

Mom, you want some tea?

MATTIE

Yes. Thank you. A pick-me-up.

TOM

You should get a checkup. You've been a little slow lately.

MATTIE

Not slow. Old, with a summer cold.

TOM

(to Sarah)

Tell me about tomorrow. (pause) When we met, I told you I wasn't even sure if there was a God. This is a bit of a stretch for me.

SARAH

You said you believed in life. That was enough. And you act like it, which is what matters. (pause) When I was Jonathan's age--

JONATHAN returns.

JONATHAN

I'm Jonathan's age. What happened?

TOM

Go ahead.

SARAH

Well, the way it's been done, he should hear it tomorrow.

TOM

Well, as I understand it, things are already different. With Joan being gone, and you not getting ... second sight. Just fill us in now, so I can decide if I let Jonathan go ahead with this thing.

JONATHAN

You?

TOM

Father's can do anything.

JONATHAN

Tell me, Mom. Why wait until tomorrow. In Australia, I'm already thirteen.

TOM checks his watch.

TOM

He's right. Where'd you learn to tell time like that? Not from me.

JONATHAN

Grampa gave me the idea. He wanted a drink before five o'clock, "When civilized people have a cocktail." He said it was five o'clock somewhere.

TOM

(to Mattie)

And you said he was inflexible.

MATTIE

Hmmph.

SARAH

Mom explained it to me like this. Mom, correct me if I'm wrong. My awareness might change, open up in some way. It wasn't the same for everyone, but it's always been referred to as second sight. Second sight is—

TOM

"—the ability to see things that aren't there." I looked it up.

(more)

TOM (cont'd)

The same dictionary defines hallucination as "the apparent perception of sights and sounds that aren't actually present." And Jonathan, I'm not suggesting anything about anything. I'm just, trying to figure things out. (to Sarah) How do you tell the difference? Have you considered that maybe Jonathan thinks he's OK just the way he is? Today, tomorrow?

JONATHAN

I think--

SARAH

--You can intellectualize a thing until you suck the life right out of it!

TOM

Don't accuse me of being like your father!

JONATHAN sits at table with MATTIE. TOM and SARAH go on without them, finishing a conversation that apparently has some charge on it.

SARAH

I'm not. You're not, most of the time. It was the general you, not the you you.

TOM

Why can't Jonathan have a regular birthday, and if something happens, we just deal with it then?

SARAH

What do you mean just deal with it! It's not that you have your doubts, is it. You think this is all a load of crap!

TOM

I think that where Jonathan's welfare is involved, I can't afford to be as open-minded as you are.

SARAH

Nice try. Didn't work. If you think this is an issue of Jonathan's well-being, then why have you ignored it for so long?

TOM

Because, it wasn't an issue until last week when that package arrived and you and Mattie began talking in hushed voices. I've seen you watching Jonathan like ... like you're waiting for him to hatch or something. ... And Jonathan--

TOM remembers JONATHAN and looks at him, smiling and continuing in a softer tone.

--the closer it gets to his birthday, the more moody he is. A twelve-year-old boy who's afraid of his birthday! ... And I'm suddenly wrong for being the way I've always been. What could be more wrong than that?

Pause.

SARAH

OK.

TOM

OK what?

SARAH

OK, so I don't know what I'm doing. But there's no roadmap for this, Tom, Jonathan. I'm trying to figure it out as I go.

TOM

If this second sight thing is true, why didn't it happen to you? And what makes anyone think it happened to Joan? Douglas said she was committed because she failed a psychiatric evaluation. Maybe she wasn't psychic. Maybe she was wired wrong at the factory. And given the first and the second, why do you want to make a big deal of it to Jonathan? (to Jonathan) Jonathan, I'm not trying to make you afraid of anything. Really, I'm not. I'm just afraid that something might happen to you. And I couldn't stand that. (to Sarah and Mattie) Maybe you shouldn't have told him anything!

SARAH

You don't understand.

TOM

Absolutely not.

SARAH turns away.

TOM (cont'd)

That's why I asked about your birthday. For Jonathan. Tell him about your thirteenth birthday.

Pause.

SARAH

I can't.

JONATHAN

Why not. It's OK, Mom.

SARAH

I can't, Jonathan, because I don't remember. Just bits and pieces of ... nothing. (pause) Mom, what happened?

MATTIE

You know, dear. The opening ... wasn't for you.

SARAH

I remember swimming. (pause) That day was so important to me, and all I have is this faint memory of swimming. I try to remember more, and I can't. Wasn't there more?

MATTIE

There was disappointment. You withdrew.

SARAH

Me?

MATTIE

Sarah, perhaps what happened...what didn't happen...was for the best. If you had changed, who knows what would have happened. ... Joan had a hard time. I didn't look forward to your birthday. And after...

SARAH

You had trouble looking at me.

MATTIE

Not at you, at your pain. ... It hurt me too, Sarah.
Sometimes the past needs to be left in the past. Try to let
it go.

SARAH

When was the last time I asked you about this? I was..
what... seventeen? I didn't stop asking because you answered.
I stopped because you wouldn't. But now I need to know. About
me, about you, about Joan. We all need to know.

MATTIE

I feel like I'm being accused of something.

SARAH

There's got to be more. Just start talking. Maybe you'll
remember something.

MATTIE

You think I know more? I don't. *(pause)* I never lied to you.
Is that what you think?

Pause.

SARAH

I think something's missing, and you're the only person I can
ask.

MATTIE starts to leave.

JONATHAN

Tell us about Joan.

MATTIE stops.

MATTIE

Joan's abilities were perhaps part of her problems, but they
weren't imaginary either. Her awareness did change ... like
popcorn in a microwave...and we all suffered trying to keep
up. *(pause)* That pretty much sums it up.

TOM

Not to me.

JONATHAN

What else?

MATTIE

What else. She was stubborn and demanding before she had the sight. Robert, the person who opened before her—my mother's brother—died in the war. So for Joan, the last wasn't there to help the next. I tried as best I could. I explained her behavior to Mother and tried to explain it away to Father, and tried to stay out of her way, which I could never seem to do to her liking.

JONATHAN

What behavior? What did she do?

MATTIE

Oh, she heard voices, she knew things out of the blue. Sometimes she saw through people like they were glass.

TOM

So, how was her hearing voices different from ...you know, hearing voices? Maybe what happened to Joan had nothing to do with second sight.

MATTIE

These things are real, Tom, and they have consequences.

TOM

What was real? She heard voices. She knew things because she listened to these voices. She ended up in a mental institution.

MATTIE

Tom, how is your willful ignorance of anything spiritual or metaphysical different from stupidity? You could be Douglas. She got in trouble with the law! She was arrested for fortune telling! It was either be committed or go to jail.

TOM

Fortune-telling?

MATTIE

Back then a lot of places had laws against fortune-telling. And Joan had a temper. That's what landed her in the mental institute. She lost control, her friends got involved, everyone got arrested.

SARAH

Getting arrested for doing one psychic reading? Isn't that strange, even back then?

MATTIE

Not after you've kicked a policeman. She was lucky the judge ordered a psychiatric evaluation instead of sending her to jail. She could have shut up then and everything might have been fine.

Pause.

JONATHAN

The fortune. Was it true?

Pause.

MATTIE

Yes, Jonathan. It was true. The person she read was an undercover policeman. And what she said was true.

MATTIE drifts off. JONATHAN looks a bit shell-shocked. MATTIE gets up and staggers a little. JONATHAN jumps to her side.

MATTIE (cont'd)

Got up too fast. I'll be all right. I'm going to lie down for a little while.

JONATHAN supports MATTIE and they leave.

TOM

Well, that conversation didn't go so well, did it.

SARAH

Not what I would have said in front of Jonathan. No.

TOM

I'll fix it.

SARAH

How? What are you going to say now?

TOM

It'll come to me.

Pause.

SARAH

Mom doesn't seem well.

TOM

Memories are strong stuff.

Pause.

SARAH

Living here isn't easy for her. She and Dad were together a long time.

TOM

Under the same roof. She'll bounce back. Give her time.

SARAH

Right. Get over it. Like a missed field goal. Dad is... Dad.

TOM

Yes he is. Life's expert witness.

SARAH

He has blind spots. Like you.

TOM

Well, at least I keep mine where no one can see them.

SARAH

Every one of them.

TOM

Sarah?

SARAH

Yes?

TOM

Why do you think you didn't...open? Is that something you want to ask Jonathan, after tomorrow? Is that what you've been waiting for?

SARAH

I don't know why nothing happened to me. Dad brought me flowers every day for a week to cheer me up. Mom didn't say anything. That birthday became something that never happened.

TOM

Honey, I'm sorry.

SARAH

No you're not.

TOM

OK, I'm not. I like you the way you are. If something had happened, we might not have met, got married, had Jonathan. Then where would I be?

SARAH

Nice save.

SARAH shushes his attempt to go on with a finger.

SARAH (cont'd)

Stop there. Anything more you say right now is going to be wrong.

Pause, then JONATHAN returns.

JONATHAN

(nervous)

Now what? More conversation?

TOM

Yes. Now what.

Pause.

TOM (cont'd)

Now what indeed. Well ... well ... (pause) Isn't this a fine mess you've gotten us into.

JONATHAN laughs a little.

JONATHAN

Me?

TOM

It's not my birthday.

JONATHAN

You're in this movie too. Both of you.

TOM

Absolutely. Director's cut, special edition.

SARAH

Deleted scenes.

JONATHAN

Special features. Boxed set.

TOM

Jonathan, under normal circumstances, you've wouldn't have heard a conversation like the one we just had, because you'd have normal parents and relatives. But you've got us instead. But whatever happens, we'll figure it out. (pause) So ... for Now What, whatdaya say we go down to the creek and take a turtle census.

JONATHAN

Yeah, why not.

TOM

Has to be done at least twice a summer. I found a great turtle log. Bet we'll see ten on it at the same time.

JONATHAN

Bet I found it already. By the willows.

TOM gives SARAH a quick kiss as leave. SARAH gets a glass of water and sits at the table, thinking, becoming lost in thought.

HOURS pass--SARAH sits, gets up, makes tea, sits with a cup, thinks—in abbreviated time as shadows move and the light through the window changes position and becomes more orange as the afternoon passes.

TOM and JONATHAN enter, carrying their shoes; their pants rolled up and wet.

TOM

Wow, Jurassic Creek.

JONATHAN

Told you we'd see some monsters.

SARAH

Hi guys. How many?

TOM

Twenty-three. Two huge ones. (pause) Have you moved?

SARAH

I've been thinking. (pause) There is something I can tell you about my birthday, about the sight. To me, the opening is about being more aware. Understanding more of what makes the world the way it is. I wanted that. I thought it was my birthright. When it didn't happen, I was crushed. I felt... like a flower that didn't get to bloom. ... But I think the opening would have been a good thing, and Jonathan, I've always wanted you to have your chance.

Pause. Jonathan looks as if he might say something but he doesn't.

TOM

I had no idea.

SARAH

I've never put it into words. ... Tom, you should start the grill. I'll start dinner. Dad'll be here soon.

JONATHAN

Oh, and Dad, the toilet's acting up again.

TOM

Did you jiggle the handle?

JONATHAN

A lot.

SARAH

Tom, take a look. We've been jiggling the handle all summer.

TOM

OK. I'll start the grill, then I'll have a talk with the toilet.

TOM exits.

SARAH

You all right?

JONATHAN

Compared to what?

SARAH

I thought you were going to say something a minute ago. You're not OK. What is it? Is something happening?

JONATHAN

Nothing is happening. Except you and Dad talk about me like it's not me you're talking about. Like I'm not there. How would you feel? How should I feel?

SARAH hugs him, and he waits for it to be over.

SARAH

Oh, Jonathan. We didn't mean to talk behind your back in front of you. It'll make more sense tomorrow. Grandma will explain the family history. There's more than Joan. One of the reasons I haven't talked about this much with you, besides not knowing much, is that part of the process is you finding your own way. It's always been like that.

JONATHAN

Like being sent into the forest alone.

SARAH

Well, yes. In a manner of speaking.

From outside comes a loud WHOOSH and the sound of a roaring fire. TOM enters, lit by an orange glow from outside, and passes through.

TOM

Fire's started. Don't go near it for a few minutes.

SARAH

How much lighter fluid did you use?

TOM

We were out. I used something else.

TOM exits.

JONATHAN

Racing gas. I know, don't do everything Dad does.

SARAH

I need to check on the fire.

JONATHAN

Mom?

SARAH

Yes dear.

JONATHAN

Would you be mad if nothing happened? I mean, that'd be OK, wouldn't it?

SARAH

There's nothing to be afraid of. Nothing bad is going to happen. Think of it like a flower opening. It's a beautiful thing.

SARAH hurries outside.

JONATHAN

Jonathan, the flower.

SCENE 3

*Living room, about five in the afternoon.
Douglas's flowers are on the table. There's a
KNOCKS on the front door. JONATHAN opens it to
find LAURA, holding a baking pan.*

LAURA

Hi. Me again.

JONATHAN
(coolly)

Hi.

LAURA

Can I come in.

JONATHAN

Sure.

JONATHAN steps back to let LAURA enter.

LAURA

I'm sorry about what you read in the journal. I was kinda butting in. Pushing you. You're not angry, are you? Not real angry?

Pause.

JONATHAN

Yes...no. I mean I was...but you didn't write that stuff. Besides, my grandfather made me feel better, before everyone else made me feel worse. Now I don't know. Guess I'm back where I started.

LAURA

I was so bummed when I got home. I told my parents that I made a mess of meeting you. I didn't tell them about your birthday. Don't worry about that.

JONATHAN

Thanks.

LAURA

Mom said what she always says. "Bake some brownies and take them over."

JONATHAN

And your dad?

LAURA

(mimicking dad as best she can)

He said "How long did it take this time? Fifteen minutes? Don't you ever think before you talk?"

JONATHAN laughs.

LAURA (cont'd)

So, we're OK again?

JONATHAN

Yeah, we're OK. Actually...it was nice to talk to someone. Even if you—

LAURA

—I know I know. Won't happen again.

JONATHAN

Right.

SARAH enters, smudged with charcoal.

SARAH

Hello. Laura, isn't it? We met at the store.

LAURA

Yes. Hello Mrs. Mohr.

JONATHAN

Mom, can Laura stay for dinner?

SARAH

Well...Jonathan, you know this time...around your birthday...is a special time, this year. A family time. Perhaps next week even. How about—

JONATHAN

—She knows about my birthday. I told her.

SARAH

You told her? I asked you to keep this in the family. Why would you tell a complete stranger? I'm sorry Laura, I don't mean that the way it sounds. It's just that this year things are different. I'm afraid tonight just won't work.

JONATHAN

It just came to me, Mom. Out of the blue. I saw it. Ask Laura to dinner. I could just...like...see it. All of us at the table...eating brownies.

LAURA

With nuts.

JONATHAN

With nuts.

SARAH

I see. I guess that's the way it should be then. Laura, please stay for dinner.

There's a knock at the front door and DOUGLAS lets himself in.

JONATHAN

Hi Grampa.

DOUGLAS

Hello. Hello, young lady, we meet again. Sarah, dear, you look...blackened.

SARAH

Hi Dad. You've met Laura, I see.

DOUGLAS

Oh, yes. I was by earlier. (seeing the flowers on the table) The flowers. Is Mattie about?

SARAH

Taking a nap. She's got a cold.

DOUGLAS

A shame.

TOM enters. TOM and DOUGLAS start to shake hands, but refrain because TOM's hands are wet and dirty.

TOM

Douglas, good to see you. (to Laura) Hi, I'm Jonathan's father.

LAURA

I'm Laura. We moved in next door.

TOM

The Flanagan's place. Nice house. Welcome to the neighborhood.

LAURA

Thank you.

SARAH

Laura's staying for dinner.

TOM

Great. More the merrier. Maybe I should put some more charcoal on the fire.

SARAH

No.

TOM

A joke. Douglas, can I get you something? A scotch perhaps? It's after five somewhere.

DOUGLAS

With a splash of water.

TOM

Coming right up. Laura, would you like something to drink?

LAURA

No thank you.

TOM

Sarah? Jonathan?

JONATHAN

No.

SARAH

A glass of wine. Thanks, dear. Sit down, Dad. I could use a break. Jonathan, tell your grandfather what you've been doing.

SARAH takes a seat on the couch and motions LAURA and JONATHAN to join her. DOUGLAS commandeers a large chair.

JONATHAN

Don't have to. I talked to Grampa already today.

SARAH

You did?

DOUGLAS

I decided to drop off the flowers. Jonathan was home, so we talked a bit.

SARAH

About what?

DOUGLAS

(end-of-conversation tone)

This and that. Just talking.

Pause, finally...

LAURA

What do you do, Mr. Early?

DOUGLAS

I lead tours. Normally at this time of the year I'm in Europe, lecturing at a number of historic locations. I created an academic intensive series called "Birthplaces of Profound Thought." It's quite popular.

JONATHAN

Places where philosophy happened.

LAURA

...Oh.

DOUGLAS

Last year I spoke at a number of important existential sites. Existentialists hold that existence comes before essence—or, if you will—that we must begin from the subjective. The gestation sites of such evocative ideas are significant destinations to many.

SARAH

You're losing ground, Dad.

DOUGLAS

Sorry. It's the professor in me. I hear a question, and it triggers a Pavlovian response to enlighten. Jonathan, how has your thinking been lately? Any...confusion? Anything odd going on? Any changes?

SARAH

Dad! What a thing to ask. Jonathan's fine.

JONATHAN

No. Same old me.

DOUGLAS

Good boy.

TOM comes in and serves drinks.

TOM

Cheers.

DOUGLAS

(to Tom) Good health. *(to Sarah)* I know which birthday this is.

SARAH

When did you start caring about that? You've been in Europe most years since Jonathan was eight.

TOM

I asked him about it. About you. You know. When you were a girl.

SARAH

Tom, I can't believe you went behind my back on this! While pretending you were avoiding it.

TOM

I was avoiding it.

SARAH

Not completely.

DOUGLAS

Sarah, don't blame Tom for this. He was right to ask.

SARAH

How about if I blame both of you!

TOM

I just wanted to know what he did, when you were Jonathan's age.

DOUGLAS

I said you were fine just the way you were. Yesterday, today, tomorrow. No matter what.

JONATHAN

Even if nothing happens.

DOUGLAS

Especially if nothing happens. He couldn't be more special to me. Neither could you.

SARAH

When?

DOUGLAS

When you were growing up.

SARAH

No, Jonathan. When did you say that to him? You came over today and told him that?

DOUGLAS

(end-of-conversation tone)

I dropped off the flowers. We chatted.

Pause.

SARAH

You didn't "chat." You came over to talk to Jonathan about the sight. What did you say to him?

SARAH continues to look at her father as she speaks to JONATHAN.

SARAH (cont'd)

Jonathan, go into the kitchen with Laura and put the brownies on a plate. Close the door.

JONATHAN and LAURA go into the kitchen.

TOM

(delivered as a straight man)

It's nice when kids reach the age where they can do things for themselves, isn't it? Douglas, have any kids?

SARAH

You told me that? You're fine just the way you are? I'm going to ask Mom.

DOUGLAS

You often heard only what you wanted to hear, something you shared with your mother.

SARAH

Takes two not to have a conversation, Dad.

DOUGLAS

Not always.

TOM

Why don't we finish this later, after we've had another round of drinks, laughed a little, perhaps gone our separate ways.

SARAH finishes her wine in one swallow and puts her glass down so hard DOUGLAS winces.

DOUGLAS

I'm sorry, dear. I didn't mean to upset you. ... Tom, how's work?

TOM

Good.

Pause.

DOUGLAS

What's the itinerary for tomorrow? For Sarah's thirteenth birthday, *(to Sarah)* I'm sure you remember, *(to Tom)* we took her and all her friends to the lake for the day. Cooked out, got a little sunburned, swam until we were waterlogged. A very special day. We had a good time, didn't we, Sarah.

SARAH has dropped out, lost in thought.

TOM

Sarah...? It's a family day, Douglas, as I'm sure you know.

From the kitchen comes the sound of someone KNOCKING at the back door.

JONATHAN (O.S.)

Someone's at the back door.

SARAH gets up and goes into kitchen.

TOM

How have you been, Douglas?

DOUGLAS

Couldn't be better.

DOUGLAS and TOM drink, and drink again.

After a moment SARAH returns, looking a bit shocked. JOAN trails her into the room, followed by JONATHAN and LAURA. JOAN and DOUGLAS are shocked to see each other.

SARAH

Tom, this is Joan, Mattie's sister. Joan, this is Tom, my husband, and Jonathan, and his friend Laura. And I guess you know Douglas.

JOAN

(warm to Tom, cold to Douglas)

Hello, Tom. Nice to meet you. Douglas. I hoped never to see you again.

TOM stands. JOAN remains standing.

TOM

Well, ... what an unexpected surprise. Hello, Joan. Please, sit down. Can I get you something?

DOUGLAS

Did you have a long trip?

JOAN

Yes, very long. No, thank you, Tom. (to Douglas) Douglas, I thought you would be in Europe.

DOUGLAS

Not this year. But how would you come to know that?

JOAN

I kept track, just in case.

DOUGLAS

In case of what?

JOAN

In case you tried to do something to Jonathan.

DOUGLAS

Interesting behavior. Perhaps you should leave now.

JOAN

(to the others)

I'm sorry to barge in like this. You don't know me. I'm not part of the family. I would never have contacted you, except, I know you have a son, Jonathan, and I know tomorrow is his birthday. His thirteenth birthday. I need to talk to you about it. Actually, I need to talk to Jonathan about it.

TOM looks at JOAN warily.

TOM

Let's just slow down a little. (to kitchen) Jonathan, how are things coming in there? Would you and Laura finish the brownies.

JONATHAN and LAURA move back into kitchen and closes the door, which soon opens a little as they continue to watch.

SARAH

I know about his birthday. I'm going to talk to him about it tomorrow.

DOUGLAS

(too harshly, blurting out)

And say what!

SARAH stares at her father. JOAN ignores him.

JOAN

You don't know what to say.

SARAH

We were going to do the best we could.

JOAN

That won't be enough. I need to be the one to talk to Jonathan. There was no one to help me, or you, Sarah. It can't happen like that again.

SARAH

I was hoping it wouldn't.

DOUGLAS

Certainly, Joan. Tell us all about it. I would be delighted to hear what you have to say.

JOAN

You were never delighted to hear what anyone had to say who wasn't you. What I have to say isn't anything you can understand. I know that.

DOUGLAS

A lucid moment, or a delusion of insight? How *do* you tell them apart? Mental distress is not heightened awareness. Not then, not now.

Pause.

JOAN

Now that we're all caught up. Sarah, Tom, I would like to be able to talk to Jonathan tomorrow. It needs to be from me to him, from the last to the next. Alone. Without outside influences.

DOUGLAS

Absolutely not!

TOM

Douglas may be overreacting, but perhaps he has a point. Jonathan's our only son, and Joan, you're ... a total stranger.

DOUGLAS

Quite right. And an unstable one at that. Tell me something, Joan. Anything, using your special gifts of greater than normal awareness.

Pause.

JOAN

All right. All those years ago, when I was arrested. You were involved.

DOUGLAS

I was not. Ludicrous.

JOAN

(calmly)

And now you are lying. That's two things.

DOUGLAS

Preposterous! They should have kept you in that institution a little longer. A lot longer!

JOAN

And now you're speaking from fear. The fear that you can be seen through. That's three things.

DOUGLAS

You're just playing with words.

JOAN

No, I'm playing with you.

SARAH

Stop it! There are children present!

JOAN

They should be. It's how kids grow up. They find out what people are really like!

DOUGLAS

Yes, they do, don't they.

JOAN

Yes, they do. *(to Sarah, Tom)* I need to talk to Jonathan. He needs help.

DOUGLAS

You need help.

TOM

Douglas, please, shut up. Let me get you a refill.

TOM takes DOUGLAS's glass and leaves, ushering JONATHAN and LAURA back into kitchen.

SARAH

Joan, you and I should talk. Are you staying in town?

JOAN

I have a camper. I thought I could park around here somewhere.

SARAH

Down by the creek. There's a nice spot. Follow the two-wheel track across from the driveway.

MATTIE enters the room, moving a bit sleepily.

MATTIE

I heard voices. You started the party without...oh my.
(pause) Joan, is that you? ... It is you.

JOAN
(shocked)

Mattie...

TOM returns with a larger, very full glass for DOUGLAS. JONATHAN and LAURA trail him into the room.

MATTIE

It's been so long.

JOAN looks from MATTIE to DOUGLAS and back. She is a bit unsteady.

JOAN

It feels like...yesterday.

TOM

Are you all right, Joan? You look pale.

JOAN wobbles a bit.

JOAN

I have to go.

JOAN hurries out the front door, leaving it open. SARAH starts to follow her.

SARAH

Joan!

DOUGLAS

Best that she's gone.

SARAH stands at the door, looking out. CROWS CALL in the distance.

END ACT I

ACT II.

SCENE 1

Clearing by the creek at dusk. A FROG CROAKS once or twice and a RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD ANSWERS with a trilling call. JOAN paces back and forth in front of two chairs and a camp table on which lie three journals like the one JONATHAN had. A camp lantern is already lit on the table.

JOAN

God, why didn't I know they were here? Don't answer that. ... I always knew when Mattie was near. She was always near. You can't protect somebody from themselves. You know that. And Douglas. How could I have not known he was here? He's like a fingernail dragged across a chalkboard.

JOAN sits and starts writing in the journal. JONATHAN enters, carrying a covered plate and Douglas's flowers in a jar. JOAN doesn't notice him. JONATHAN stands a moment and looks.

JONATHAN

Hi.

JOAN

What! Oh, hello. I was expecting your mother. I thought.

JONATHAN

She was going to come. But then she asked me if I wanted to go instead.

JOAN

And your dad?

JONATHAN

He thought I should decide.

JOAN

Hmmm. And you came.

JONATHAN

Why wouldn't I?

JOAN

Lots of reasons.

JONATHAN

Here, Mom made you a plate. And these.

JOAN

How thoughtful. Thank you. Flowers?

JONATHAN

They were for Mom, but she doesn't like cut flowers. And Gramma wouldn't take them.

JOAN

Why not?

JONATHAN

Because of where they came from. My grandfather. They don't live together anymore.

JOAN

Really. Douglas? These are from Douglas. Well, it's the thought that counts, isn't it?

In one motion JOAN flips the flowers out of the jar and over her shoulder. She replaces them with a few cattails. A brief FLASH OF LIGHTNING is followed by soft THUNDER.

JOAN (cont'd)

What's with this weather?

JONATHAN

Wants to rain but can't. Should be a good show when it breaks.

JOAN

I love the feel of the air when a thunderstorm is rolling in.

JONATHAN

Me too. The wind feels like you could drink it.

JOAN

Don't get that much where I come from. I miss it sometimes. This isn't quite it, though. More of a prickly feeling.

(more)

JOAN (cont'd)

(pause) So, Jonathan, what do you think about all this?
Pretty strange, eh?

JONATHAN

Makes people act strange.

JOAN

Like me?

JONATHAN

Like everyone. You did leave in a hurry when you saw Gramma.

JOAN

I did, didn't I. Surprised me too. What did she say?

JONATHAN

Nothing. She got kinda...far off, like she was thinking of
stuff.

JOAN

I'm sure she was. Funny how the past waits for us to catch up
with it.

JONATHAN

Huh?

JOAN

Nothing. You'll understand when you have a past.

JONATHAN

She was upset that you left. I told her you'd be coming back
tomorrow, to do the talk thing.

JOAN

Well, Jonathan, I think we'll do it here. Right now. This is
a good place for it. Outside in nature, at one of your
favorite spots. And this is something that is done just
between the last and the next, in this case, me and you.

JOAN stands and JONATHAN shrinks back a step.

JOAN (cont'd)

My goodness, I didn't say let's go to the dentist, did I? Or where would you like your third eye? Have a seat. What I'm going to say should make you feel better, not worse. What kinds of ideas has your mother given you?

JONATHAN

What if I'm OK just the way I am. Why should I change?

JOAN

Because I'm Jonathan and I'm just a normal kid?

JONATHAN

Something wrong with that?

JOAN

Well, that depends. When did you first realize you were normal?

JONATHAN

My dad would say something like that.

JOAN

I'm normal. Care to comment on that?

JONATHAN

Do I have to?

JOAN

Yes.

JONATHAN

Mmmm. I'm too young to know what normal is for an adult.

JOAN

Good answer. If you act like most of the people around you, they'll think you're normal. Even I learned how to do that, although it took me a little longer than most. And sometimes I don't do so well. But to be normal in here (taps head), to yourself, you've got to be aware of everything that goes on with you. Can't hide anything, can't lie to yourself, can't pretend. Can't be afraid to be different.

JONATHAN

Or what?

JOAN

Or you forget who you are. What you know. Or never find out.

JONATHAN

What if you don't know who you are. What if you can't figure out what's happening in here?

JOAN

Well, then, you're normal. ... Nobody's normal. What I'm getting at—maybe I wasn't—is that to understand the changes happening to you, you have to accept whatever presents itself. Don't expect to hear voices with echoes when people think, don't expect to see transparent people for ghosts, don't look for special effects.

JONATHAN

I don't expect anything. I don't want anything. I'm not looking for anything! Maybe you should have this talk with my mom.

JOAN

I can't.

JONATHAN

Why not!

JOAN

It's about you.

JONATHAN

No it isn't! I was never into this stuff. My mom was. You didn't exist, and everything was OK. I think I better go back to the house. It's going to be dark soon.

JOAN

Very dark. Very soon. ... We need to have this talk. I've come a long way. It's important.

JONATHAN

We talked.

JOAN
(manipulative)

Actually I haven't started yet. Please, Jonathan. Your mother would want you to stay. She wanted you to come.

JONATHAN

Cheap shot!

JOAN

Did it work? Never mind. I take it back. I'll fight fair. No guilt. Stay, and I'll keep it to three things. Only three things I'll tell you. Then you're free to be normal.

JONATHAN

If you answer a question first.

JOAN

Deal.

JONATHAN

Even if any of this stuff were true, it doesn't make any sense that second sight would turn on like a light on my birthday.

JOAN

Absolutely right! Doesn't make any sense at all. It's not true.

JONATHAN

Really! So tomorrow...

JOAN

...is just a birthday.

JONATHAN

And I don't have to worry about anything?

JOAN

Probably not. Have a seat. This is interesting. I'll tell you how I figured this out.

JONATHAN sits.

JOAN (cont'd)

I spent some time in Europe learning about our family. The first opening was in the 1500s in Scotland. A young woman manifested psychic ability on her thirteenth birthday. The church thought she was possessed, but her village protected her. She grew up and had a son, and on his thirteenth birthday, they hid him. Nothing happened then, but later he developed the sight. The family, our family, developed a tradition of secrecy around the sight, and the thirteenth birthday. That tradition was how we survived. How we stayed safe.

JONATHAN

Safe from what? Being unpopular?

JOAN

Being dead. In the past, people who didn't see like everyone else...sometimes they didn't see for very long.

JONATHAN

But now it's everywhere.

JOAN

Discretion is still a good idea. Gives you time to learn and decide what you want to do, without a lot of expectations and people getting in your face and deciding for you. It's a way the last can help the next. Or it used to be.

JONATHAN

What happened?

JOAN

Robert, the person who opened before me, died. I learned on my own, and I suppose you know the story.

JONATHAN

A little. After the mental hospital, why didn't you ever come back?

JOAN

That...is a story for another time. When you're older.

JONATHAN

Oh. One of those. How about, why didn't you at least come back to talk to my mom on her birthday? She needed you.

JOAN

There are things you don't understand.

JONATHAN

Now it's when I'm older and smarter.

JOAN

Not smarter. When you have more experience.

JONATHAN

And by then you'll be gone. Right.

Pause.

JOAN

Yes. Jonathan, there are things I don't want to talk about. Simple as that. Did I answer your question? What was it?

JONATHAN

The light switch.

JOAN

Oh, yes, the light switch. There isn't one. It's a belief that grew out of what happened once. A tradition that became a habit. No one remembered why, but there it is. We live it without thinking about it. Believing it affects what happens.

JONATHAN

So nothing might happen. Like my mom.

Pause.

JOAN

That was a possibility. Or something might have already happened.

A RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD CALLS, and JOAN looks. JONATHAN pays no attention.

JOAN (cont'd)

Does that answer your question?

JONATHAN

I guess. Go ahead. Your turn.

JOAN

There's a lot of things I could say, Jonathan. But there's only a few things I think you need to get started. *(pause)* The first is that it is possible to know. To know something is true. To know what something means. To know which way to turn. To know something without figuring it out. Without reasoning. The truth isn't out there; it's in here. *(taps chest)*

JONATHAN

How will I know when I know?

JOAN

You'll know.

JONATHAN

Walked right into that one, didn't I.

JOAN

Head on. You can't practice knowing like you can practice multiplication. Thank goodness. Just know that it's possible, and see what happens. Any questions?

JONATHAN

It's possible because...

JOAN

For now, because I told you. ... When you experience it, you'll know. The second thing is intent. Beyond what people say is what they mean, what they intend.

JONATHAN

Intend?

JOAN becomes agitated.

JOAN

Not everyone is here to help you! See people for what they are, not what they seem to be! Hear what they mean, not what they say!

JONATHAN

How? Oh, right, you just know.

JOAN

You act like you think I'm full of it, or whatever kids call it nowadays.

JONATHAN

Full of it still works.

JOAN

I'm trying to help you, Jonathan. I don't want you to go through what I did. Intent is like a TV signal. Learn to receive it. No matter what people say, or how they say it, or how they act when they say it, their intent is what it is. It doesn't change. It's hard to hide. There are people in the world who are going to try to stop you! Believe me. That's the third thing. Many people see awareness as a threat.

JONATHAN

Why are you telling me this stuff? Do you want me to be afraid like you? Do you want me to hate my family like you? Why didn't you wait until tomorrow? You could have come over, and if nothing happened, you could just go away again!

JOAN

I'm telling you this stuff, Jonathan, because I think something has already happened. The opening has started. It can come like fireworks, or like a fog lifting. It can start and stop. It's different for everybody.

JONATHAN

Nothing has happened! Nothing is going to happen! I just want to be thirteen, get some presents, and not know things I shouldn't. And you're not normal!

JOAN

No, I'm not. But how many of your friends have relatives like me?

In the silence a RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD CALLS. JONATHAN looks to the call this time and smiles unconsciously. The BIRD CALLS again.

JOAN (cont'd)

You smiled. Why?

JONATHAN

Huh? Did I?

JOAN

Yes. Just then when the blackbird called.

JONATHAN

I don't know.

JOAN

Yes you do.

JONATHAN

I do not! I'll know when I know, right! But I don't know now!

JOAN

When you're down here, do you always look and smile when a red-winged blackbird calls?

JONATHAN

No.

JOAN

What was different this time?

JONATHAN

I don't know.

JOAN

Yes you do! I can see it. Don't think about it. Just know what happened. Was the bird talking to you, this one, this time, but not the others? Yes or no. You smiled without thinking. Why? Yes or no.

JONATHAN

Sometimes...sometimes I think a bird is talking to me. Or I pretend it is.

JOAN

What did it say?

JONATHAN

Say? I don't speak bird.

JOAN

Replay it in your head.

The RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD CALLS again. JOAN looks toward it and smiles.

JONATHAN

Hello. It said hello...but more like hello, I see you. Now, and before. The others were just bird calls. I mean, I'm sure to other birds they were—

JOAN

—yes yes! Hello. I see you. Just what you'd say to introduce yourself. This is where you'll find great joy! In hearing nature talk directly to you. And it's why it's good not to share everything that happens to you. Most people can't understand.

JONATHAN

I think I made that up. I did. Birds have...bird brains. I like the sound of red-winged blackbirds, and crows. That's all. I don't know what it means.

JOAN

Well, if that's what you really believe.

JONATHAN

Why would they want to talk to me?

JOAN

Maybe because you can hear them. *(pause)* One more thing; then we're done. Look at this.

JOAN gives JONATHAN the journal she was writing in. JONATHAN opens it.

JONATHAN

This is like the one you sent. Sent my mom.

JOAN

So you've seen it already? Take care of it. It's important.
(pause) When I sent that one, I didn't think I was coming.
But I wanted you to have something to help you. Then I
changed my mind. *(pause)* No, I felt pulled here, and I fought
it. I sent the journal hoping the feeling would go away.

JONATHAN

But it didn't.

JOAN

No. So I came to find out why. I thought the feeling would
... I thought I would understand it when I got here, but it
just became this swirling I-don't-know-what.

JONATHAN

In the living room.

JOAN

Yes.

*JOAN take a drink and picks up a fork and the
plate. She walks and takes a few bites. JONATHAN
looks at the journal.*

JOAN (cont'd)

Eating helps. Remember that.

JONATHAN

These people...all had second sight?

JOAN

Yes. They're all relatives. Yours and mine. It's our history,
passed from generation to generation, from the last to the
next. There are many books. They tell what we've discovered
about the sight, or about the world because we have it, or
about ourselves. We write it down in these.

JONATHAN

Abraham ... Dunning, wrote, "When a person lies, the auric field that surrounds him wavers momentarily like a shimmer on water. I tested this with Emma. I asked her to say she didn't love me, and was most pleased when she spoke to see her aura waver."

JOAN

I don't see auras, but intent can tell you the same thing.

JONATHAN flips to the back and picks another page.

JONATHAN

Here's one from you. "To the sighted, people may be more than they seem, or less. Animals are always more than they seem, even insects. There are no lesser life forms." What does that mean?

Pause.

JOAN

Look at it for yourself some day and see if your answer matches mine.

JONATHAN

You also wrote about getting fired by the mayor?

JOAN

Hmmm...yes, that was me. In the journal I sent. Not a good day. Helped me learn to bite my tongue though. Want to see the scars? *(pause)* I have something for you.

JOAN puts the plate down and picks up one of the other journals, which she gives to JONATHAN. He looks inside.

JONATHAN

It's empty.

JOAN

It's for you to write in.

JONATHAN

I don't have anything to say.

JOAN

You could start with "Today a red-winged blackbird said hello to me."

JONATHAN

That's not anything, even if it was true.

JOAN

Then write it down somewhere else, and put it in here when you decide that it is something. Don't forget it.

JONATHAN

What does it matter to you? What difference does it make? Why should I listen to you anyhow?

Pause.

JOAN

Blah blah blah blah blah! Why do you think I have to answer all your questions! I don't. You might want to consider what I've said because I'm right. But you don't have to. You've made that clear. And, well, that's the talk. That's what I wanted to tell you. You are free to tell anyone you wish, or not tell anyone. You decide.

JONATHAN

I can tell people?

JOAN

Anyone you want. But choose wisely.

JOAN takes the chair and her journal to the van and returns. She gives the lantern to JONATHAN and folds up the table.

JOAN (cont'd)

Take this. You'll need it. ... Good night, Jonathan

JOAN walks toward her van.

JONATHAN

Good night.

Pause.

JONATHAN (cont'd)

You're not coming over tomorrow are you?

JOAN stops.

JOAN

No. It's only you I needed to see.

JONATHAN

What about Gramma? And my mom.

JOAN

I can't, Jonathan. I wish I could. Douglas, your grandfather...there are things about him. ... Some things hurt too much to forget. There are places...inside, where I'm stuck. Don't let that happen to you.

JONATHAN

Couldn't you hate him, and come over anyhow?

JOAN

(laughs)

Perhaps, in an ideal world.

JOAN leaves.

SCENE 2

Living room. Morning sun shines through the windows. TOM sits on the couch with coffee, reading the paper. JONATHAN walks in.

JONATHAN

Mornin.

TOM

Hey champ. How's it feel to be a year older?

JONATHAN

Feels a lot like being twelve so far.

TOM

I think we can fix that.

JONATHAN

Give it your best shot. Where's Mom?

TOM

Kitchen.

JONATHAN

Gramma up?

TOM

Awake, and feeling better, judging by the bashing around I heard from her room.

JONATHAN

Bashing? Gramma?

TOM

She's upset that Joan left. Speaking of which, what did the two of you talk about last night? If I can ask. If it's not some secret.

JONATHAN

She told me about second sight, the family, knowing stuff, and talking to birds. I'll tell you all about it when you're older. When you have more experience.

TOM

How about now because I'm bigger?

JONATHAN

How about later with Mom and Gramma.

TOM

Don't forget your grandfather. Jonathan, I feel a little left out of your birthday this year. My side of the family doesn't have any special traditions, or long-lost relatives.

JONATHAN

One's enough.

TOM

So I've decided to pass on some of the tricks of being a guy. The first one has to do with washing dishes.

JONATHAN

Boring.

TOM

Exactly. Here's the deal, you know when you have to do dishes, but the dish drainer is already full and you have to put away all those other dishes first, before you can even start.

TOM stands and acts out stacking dishes.

JONATHAN

I hate that.

TOM

The trick is, don't put any dishes away. Wash the dirty ones and rinse them and pile them on top of the clean ones. Making the pile high and strong will test your manly engineering skills. Build a tower to the sky.

TOM balances the last imaginary dish carefully on top.

JONATHAN

Here. You need a flag for the top.

JONATHAN gives him an imaginary flag. TOM puts the flag on top and steps back, assessing his work.

TOM

Needs a bigger flag.

JONATHAN

Here.

JONATHAN gives him a larger imaginary flag, and TOM changes them.

TOM

Yes. That's it.

JONATHAN

... Don't the dry dishes get wet?

TOM

So what. They dry again. That's the beauty of it. It's a miracle that happens thousands of times a day all across the country. Probably all over the world. I'm sure of it.

JONATHAN

Would Mom agree?

TOM

Jonathan, the second thing I want to tell you is there are things that women don't understand about men, and will never understand.

SARAH walks in.

TOM (cont'd)

And we can finish this another time.

JONATHAN

Let's finish it now.

TOM

No, let's finish it later.

SARAH

Finish what?

JONATHAN

Dad's giving me some manly birthday advice about being a guy.

SARAH

You didn't tell him about that thing you used to do with the dishes, did you?

(TOM looks at JONATHAN and mouths the words "No, no" in an exaggerated way.)

SARAH (cont'd)

Did he, Jonathan?

JONATHAN

He was telling me about the things women don't understand about men.

SARAH

Oh we understand, we just put up with them. Hey, Birthday Boy, breakfast is ready.

JONATHAN

Omelets?

SARAH

With sausage, tomato, onion, and cheese. Potatoes, juice, your choice of white, wheat, or sourdough toast, or all three, bearclaws...you name it.

MATTIE enters, holding an envelope.

JONATHAN

Hi, Gramma. Feeling better?

MATTIE

Good morning, Jonathan. Yes. Yes. Much better.

JONATHAN

Are you sure? You look—

MATTIE

—Old is the word. Some days I'm not as sharp as others. But I'm sharp today. Look at the color in these cheeks.

SARAH

Looks like it might be blush, Mom.

MATTIE

Want to look my best. Big day. Here, Jonathan, happy birthday. Go ahead. Open it now.

MATTIE gives JONATHAN an envelope. JONATHAN opens it and removes tickets.

JONATHAN

Wow! Great seats. Thanks Gramma.

TOM

To the opera I hope.

JONATHAN

No way. Soccer!

Someone KNOCKS at the front door.

MATTIE

I'll get it.

MATTIE opens the door to find JOAN standing there.

JONATHAN

I thought you left.

JOAN

I did. Got as far as town, and stopped for ice cream. Then I came back. Nice place, your creek, but my goodness, don't those crows ever sleep?

JONATHAN

I think they take turns.

JOAN

You'll find, Jonathan, that with increased awareness comes an increased need for ice cream.

MATTIE

Still chocolate?

JOAN

Yes, Mattie. Still chocolate. How— How are you?

JOAN enters. MATTIE hugs her, surprising her.

MATTIE

I'm well. I'm so glad to see you, Joan.

JOAN

It's time, isn't it. (pause) Good morning everyone. Here I am, barging in again.

SARAH

Please, stay. Can I get you something? Coffee? Tea?

JOAN

I think, what I really need is a few minutes with Mattie, to talk. I don't want to be rude, but it's what needs to happen first. If you don't mind.

MATTIE

We can go into the den.

SARAH

No, stay here. Com'on guys, breakfast is ready.

SARAH and TOM go into the kitchen, trailed by JONATHAN, who pauses briefly to look back at MATTIE, puzzled, before leaving.

JOAN

Would you like to start with a barrage of questions?

MATTIE

Still the same Joan. It is you, isn't it. Assuming the worst. There's no barrage. Yes, I'm curious about you. It's been so long. But I won't pepper you with questions. I'm sure you have your reasons. Just as you had a reason for returning. It was good of you to come back for Jonathan's birthday. It's good to see you. I've missed you so.

JOAN

I wanted him to have a better time of it than I did.

SARAH comes to the kitchen door and listens.

MATTIE

Was your time with us that bad? I'm sorry none of us could give you what you wanted. Lord knows we tried. But that was a long time ago.

JOAN

Give me what I wanted? You think I left because I didn't get what I wanted? You act like you weren't involved!

MATTIE

My god, Joan, involved in what? I did what I could. I helped you more than you ever gave me credit for. What did you want from me? Tell me. Maybe I can give it to you now and you can be done with it!

JOAN

Mattie, I left because you betrayed me.

MATTIE

Betrayed you? What are you talking about?

JOAN takes a worn photograph from her purse and gives it to MATTIE.

JOAN

Look at this! Do you remember the state mental institution? It was used as a set for a Stephen King movie. Do you know what it was like for me to be locked up in there? I wasn't crazy. But I nearly was when I got out!

MATTIE

Do you blame me for that? What do you think happened? You got arrested for breaking a stupid law, and then acting even more stupid! You got yourself committed. Do you think maybe you had some responsibility for what happened to you? Why do you carry this picture around? Do you cherish the bad things in your life? Everyone wasn't out to get you. I wasn't. (pause) Sometimes, Joan, you could see everything except yourself.

JOAN

Stop pretending you don't know what happened!

MATTIE

I don't know what you're talking about! Honestly, Joan. What happened to you? What do you think happened?

JOAN

You were there! You knew! It was a setup! That detective--he was only there to arrest me. He and Douglas knew each other. It was all arranged. Douglas set me up and you knew. I saw it! You knew. The way you looked at him when they took me away. I bet he was pretty convincing, wasn't he. Saying I needed help. Saying I'd be better off where I couldn't hurt myself.

MATTIE

You did need help! Do you remember that day? You didn't know what was happening. You were repeating the same thing over and over.

JOAN

I knew exactly what was happening. What was I saying?

MATTIE

"She'll leave you when she finds out what a bastard you are."
Over and over. What you said to the policeman.

JOAN

I wasn't repeating myself.

MATTIE

Of course you were.

JOAN

I wasn't repeating myself. Who was I talking to?

MATTIE

No one. The policeman, and then no one. You were just
screaming.

JOAN

Who was I talking to?

MATTIE

I really don't know. And I think I've had enough of this.
Somehow, Joan, you could always turn a question into an
interrogation.

JOAN

I wasn't looking at you.

MATTIE looks inward and remembers.

MATTIE

No.(pause) No. You were looking at Douglas. Right at Douglas.

JOAN

I wasn't repeating myself. I was saying the same thing to
someone else. to Douglas -- Perhaps you were confused because
I was still screaming like a crazy woman. -- But maybe you
didn't want to hear. That you would leave him. You knew what
he was. What he did.

MATTIE

No, Joan, I didn't know. And he had only the kindest things to say about you after it happened, after you were gone.

JOAN

And did you believe him?

MATTIE

Why did you dislike him so? Why would Douglas want to do anything to you?

JOAN

Because people who have to control everything—people who manipulate—hate being seen. Even if they won't admit they can be seen. It's just the way it is. The dark hates the light. Mattie, the only good thing about Douglas was you, and you were only a spectator for him. You were worth so much more. (pause) How long were you married?

MATTIE

Forty-three years. Until about a year ago.

JOAN

I'd have shot myself.

MATTIE

No, you'd have shot Douglas.

JOAN

Why did it end then? After so long. What changed?

MATTIE

(reflecting)

Nothing changed. I was just ... there ... the site of a once profound idea. (pause) Joan, I'm not quite sure what you want from me.

JOAN

You lied to yourself. It's how you got by. You pretended things weren't the way they were.

MATTIE

And perhaps you should have accepted that you lived in a world with people who were blind to things you saw.

JOAN collects her things.

MATTIE (cont'd)

You're leaving? Already? Again?

JOAN

It's Jonathan's day. I don't belong here.

SARAH comes fully into the room.

SARAH

Just a minute. I don't think so. You're not going anywhere. You can't waltz in, muddy the water, dispense a few fortune cookies of wisdom, and then RV off into the sunset! You may be done with us, but we're not done with you!

JOAN

Sarah, you've probably picked up that I don't take direction well.

SARAH

Maybe you can find it within yourself to stay. Jonathan may have questions; I do. I'd like to know what it's like to have...second sight. I'd like to know what happened to you. I'd like to know ... you. *(pause)* Breakfast is ready. Omelets, potatoes, The works.

Pause as JOAN considers.

JOAN

Well. How much trouble could I cause eating?

SARAH turns and leaves, followed by MATTIE and JOAN walking together.

SCENE 3

The yard beside the house. JOAN and MATTIE are seated. SARAH has pruning shears and is studying the rosebush.

SARAH

It doesn't look right. I don't know what it is. *(pause)* I'm glad you came, Joan. It means a lot to us.

JOAN

I'm more flexible than I thought. Not sure I like it.

Pause. JOAN looks at SARAH. After a moment SARAH stops what she's doing and looks back.

JOAN *(cont'd)*

I came for your birthday too.

MATTIE

How is that possible?

JOAN glances at MATTIE but addresses SARAH.

JOAN

I arrived in the afternoon. No one was there.

MATTIE

We were all at the lake.

JOAN

I sat down to wait. In the rocker on the porch. Looking at the garden.

MATTIE

My chair.

JOAN

I thought you'd be back by dark. I waited, Sarah. And as I did, I became afraid. I don't know why. ... The fear grew. It seemed to be in everything around me. I tried to understand it, to see it. But I couldn't. I left. I ran.

(more)

JOAN (cont'd)

You might think I don't have both oars in the water, but, well, I did want to help you. Sometimes, when you're sensitive, you experience things you don't understand.

SARAH

Actually, I think I do understand. ... Thank you for telling me. ... I'm sorry about what happened to you.

MATTIE

Sarah, did Jonathan tell you he invited Laura over for today?

SARAH

After the fact. But it's good, I think. She seems to fit in with ... all this.

MATTIE

Nice girl. Has good taste.

SARAH

Don't marry him off yet, Mom. I'm not through with him.

SARAH studies the rosebush from a different angle.

SARAH (cont'd)

The stem's been broken off. That's why it looks odd. I wonder how that happened. There.

SARAH cuts off the broken stem. LAURA enters from the path, carrying a frisbee with bow.

SARAH (cont'd)

Hi Laura.

LAURA

Hello! Hi and Hi.

TOM, carrying barbecue utensils, enters with JONATHAN.

LAURA (cont'd)

Here. Happy birthday. We're the same age now.

JONATHAN

Thanks, Laura.

LAURA

Sorry about the teeth marks.

TOM

So, Joan, I've been reading up. Googled all this. Tell me about a past life.

SARAH

Tom!

TOM

No, seriously. Reincarnation. I want to know. Did I have any past lives? Is it OK to ask?

JOAN

Yes, it is. These are not the dark arts.

JOAN closes her eyes and looks inward.

Note: What she sees can be portrayed in any of several ways: with projected images, a video, silhouettes on a screen, or character dressed as Indian behind Tom, with lighting adjusted for effect. Images or video should be more suggestive than explicit. Alternatively, nothing can be done and Joan can just speak.

JOAN (cont'd)

You were an Indian once on the northern plains. You made noise when you hunted and scared the animals away. During a war party, you stepped on a stick and broke it, and one of the enemy killed you. (pause, looks again) The tribe felt safer with you gone. They wrote a song about you that brought laughter to many. You became a lesson to the young.

SARAH

I knew it! He clomps around the house like a gorilla!

TOM

That's it? Find another one, out there. (waves his arm) One that is a little more ... noble.

JOAN

The point is, Tom, your body awareness wasn't very good, which in that life was lethal. You weren't very careful. It's something you're working on this time.

JONATHAN

You're clumsy, Dad.

SARAH

And not the most careful person.

TOM

Hmmph.

LAURA

How about me. Was I ever an explorer, or a singer, or someone famous or interesting?

Note: Portray or not same as above.

JOAN

It's not who you were, but what did you learn? What didn't you learn? (looks) Let's see. You were once, a long time ago in ...Britain... a priestess. You lived in the forest. This was before the Romans came. I think that's interesting.

LAURA

So? What does that mean now?

JOAN

I don't know. It's your life. Why do think you would want to hear about a priestess life now?

LAURA

I didn't. You picked it.

JOAN

No, I just saw it. You apparently want to know something about it. Perhaps it will come to you.

LAURA

In case it doesn't, could you tell me now?

JONATHAN

Don't bother. She doesn't fall for that. If she doesn't want to answer, she won't.

JOAN

Or doesn't know. If there's time later, Laura, perhaps I can look more deeply.

MATTIE gets up.

MATTIE

If you would all excuse me, I think I'm going to retire for a while. Didn't sleep well last night. Jonathan, don't let me miss all the food.

JONATHAN

Not a chance.

SARAH

You OK, Mom?

MATTIE

Stop it! See you later.

MATTIE leaves.

TOM

Jonathan, next weekend we'll go to the track so you can try out your new kart.

JONATHAN

Yes! Mom, wanna come?

SARAH

You guys go without me. Please. I hate the noise.

DOUGLAS (O.S.)

Hello! Hello!

SARAH

We're out back!

DOUGLAS enters carrying a large model plane.

DOUGLAS

Jonathan, for you, happy birthday.

JONATHAN

A radio-controlled plane! Thanks, Grampa. With a video camera for remote viewing.

DOUGLAS

Same as the government has.

JONATHAN

Wait till the crows get a load of this. Let's try it out.

TOM

Yeah, let's.

DOUGLAS

I'm afraid you'll have to charge the battery first. The modern version of batteries not included.

JONATHAN

What a great day. Soccer tickets, a racing kart, and now this.

LAURA

A racing kart! What's that, the backup plan in case nothing happens?

JONATHAN

I think so. Works for me.

DOUGLAS

(to Sarah and Tom)

A new kart, very nice. I was afraid that, perhaps, you were relying on something less substantial to make the day as special as it should be. That's why, the airplane. I hope I didn't—

SARAH

—not at all, Dad. I'm sure Jonathan will agree you did the right thing.

TOM

Honey, I encouraged your dad to be generous. Don't blame him. Don't blame me either.

SARAH

(some anger coming through)

Well, Tom, if I were you I'd start thinking of ways to make it up to me.

JOAN

Take a few deep breaths, Sarah. And remember, they're incapable of change. They're not like us.

LAURA

Mr. Early, just before you came, Joan was telling me about a past life. She's psychic, you know. She said I was a priestess in the forest in England.

DOUGLAS

A princess. How nice.

LAURA

A priestess. I— What did I do?

JOAN

(looks briefly)

You knew about the earth...about plants that healed. About weather.

DOUGLAS

(cross-examining)

And you would verify this how?

JOAN

I wouldn't. People like you create tests that can't be passed. People who understand don't need them.

DOUGLAS

The logic of convenience. Hardly the foundation of meaningful thought.

JOAN

Well, admittedly, if you have to choose between insight and ignorance, ignorance is more enduring.

DOUGLAS

New Age drivel is not wisdom! It barely passes as thinking.

JOAN

Thinking is not awareness. Douglas, your world is a thimble. You revel in the belief that what it holds is all there is.

DOUGLAS

And yours is the tattered remains of a balloon that burst many years ago. Past lives are for people who can't function in this one.

JOAN

You're half right. I apologize everyone. I told myself I wasn't going to engage Douglas, and here I've torn him to pieces.

DOUGLAS rise up to strike back, but TOM picks up a metal chip bowl and bangs it with a BBQ utensil, sending some chips flying.

TOM

OK, end of round 1. Speaking of balloons, this is a party, isn't it?

SARAH

Yes it is. Maybe we should drop this line of conversation. Talk about soccer or NASCAR or something. I can't believe I said that.

LAURA

Mr. Early, I have a question.

DOUGLAS

(end of conversation tone)

I believe we are finished.

LAURA

It sounds like you don't believe in this second sight thing that Joan has.

SARAH

That's OK, Laura. Dad still supports the First Amendment, don't you, Dad. Why don't we talk about something else.

TOM

No. No, let's finish this and be done with it.

SARAH

Who's side are you on?

TOM

Ours. Douglas, closing argument. But no arguing. Why don't you believe in second sight?

DOUGLAS

I believe that with the normal awareness we, all of us, are born with, we have everything we need. There is no reason to look for more. It can lead to not working with what you have. Jonathan has no such weakness. He has everything he needs, like his mother. We all do.

TOM

Joan, you have one minute for a rebuttal. But no head butting, and remember the rules of engagement. You must say it with a smile.

JOAN

Pass.

DOUGLAS

While we're on the subject of this family curiosity, I would like to ask a question. I heard, years ago, that there was a book. A book written by those who had "opened," as you say. Is this true? I should like to see such a book if it exists.

JONATHAN looks at JOAN, who offers nothing, then at his mother, whose attention suddenly goes to her drink.

JOAN

Go ahead Jonathan.

JONATHAN

(to Douglas)

Why, if you don't believe in second sight?

During DOUGLAS'S reply, there is a very subtle flickering of light on him. Joan notices, and JONATHAN sees it. He looks around and sees that Joan has seen it also.

DOUGLAS

I'm an inquisitive person. I like to learn new things. I might find reading such a book useful. I might come to understand the people better. I might even become convinced that second sight is real. Who knows.

Pause. MATTIE, SARAH, LAURA all in turn look at JONATHAN.

JONATHAN

Yes, I have it. A journal. Would you like to see it?

DOUGLAS

I would.

JONATHAN leaves.

SARAH

Dad, when I was Jonathan's age, did you talk to me like that? There's no reason to be more than what you are. Not working with what you have. Is that what you said about the opening? About what was supposed to happen to me?

DOUGLAS

I don't remember, dear.

SARAH

"Why do you think you need to be more than what you are?" Did you say that? No, not that. "You don't need to be more than you are." That's what you said. ... Over and over.

DOUGLAS

If I did, it's not something I remember. Perhaps you're imagining. I loved you just the way you were. I didn't want you to feel you had to change.

SARAH

What if it wasn't *more* than I was. What if it's *what I was*?

JOAN

You were afraid she'd turn out like me.

DOUGLAS snorts.

SARAH

I'm not imagining, Dad.

DOUGLAS

Now now, Sarah. I'm sure you're right. If I didn't say it, your mother did.

SARAH

Not her, Dad. You. I wanted to change. You never understood that, did you?

DOUGLAS

I wanted you to be able to live without some magical transformation that wasn't going to happen. Do you think I had something to do with this "opening" not happening to you? Really? Do you think that's possible? ... Do you think I, or anyone, could have anything to do with whether you "opened" or not? What experience could you possibly have that--that would be so--so whatever! I can't imagine. That you couldn't have just the way you are?

They stare at each other.

SARAH

Guess we didn't find out, did we?

JOAN

Perhaps it was killed before it could take root.

JONATHAN returns with a journal. JOAN looks a bit surprised at what LAURA says next, recognizing it as something she wrote.

LAURA
(softly)

"It can be difficult for children to go beyond the limitations of their parents."

JONATHAN
"But not impossible."

TOM
Where did that come from?

JONATHAN
We read it in a book.

SARAH
Let's not talk about this anymore. OK, Dad? No more words. No more ideas. No more discussion. And don't ever talk to Jonathan about the opening.

Pause.

SARAH (cont'd)
OK, Dad?

DOUGLAS
I would be quite happy never to talk about this subject again.

JOAN
Tell me something, Douglas. When I was arrested, did you know the police officer?

DOUGLAS
What a ridiculous thing to ask. No, of course not. (pause)

There is a less-subtle flickering of light on DOUGLAS. Surprised, he stares at his grandfather as he holds out the journal, which DOUGLAS takes.

DOUGLAS (cont'd)
Here we are.

JONATHAN

Joan gave it to me.

DOUGLAS opens journal and looks inside, turns over a few pages.

DOUGLAS

It's empty.

JONATHAN

It's for me to write in.

Pause.

DOUGLAS

Look at this. Leather bound, quality paper. A nice gift. Very nice.

DOUGLAS gives the journal back to JONATHAN.

JONATHAN

Yes it is. Mom, I'm going to go check on Gramma. Must be time to put the food on.

SARAH

Sure. Go wake her.

JONATHAN exits. JOAN stands.

JOAN

And excuse me too. I'll be right back.

TOM

If you're headed to the bathroom, you may have to jiggle the handle.

SCENE 4

MATTIE's bedroom and the hall outside. MATTIE lies in bed. JONATHAN stands in the hall outside her door, wobbling slightly. JOAN enters.

JOAN

What is it, Jonathan? What's wrong?

JONATHAN

I'm not sure. I feel... funny.

JOAN

You saw something, didn't you. About your grandfather.

JONATHAN

He...flickered.

JOAN

Yes. His aura wavered because he was...because he was..

JONATHAN

Lying?

JOAN

Not being truthful, and he knew it. ... *Seeing* your grandfather—opening— it's a physical thing too. You might feel a little sick sometimes. Your body has to adapt. (pause) ... Have you felt like this before? ... Jonathan, sometimes events are too painful too forget. And sometimes they're too painful to remember.

Pause.

JONATHAN

Last Spring. Alan Flanagan, my best friend. I ... ohhh...I saw something. A sort of...darkness about him. But more like a feeling. It's ... hard to describe.

JOAN

There aren't words for these things. Not good ones anyhow. What happened?

JONATHAN

He was in an accident. He was killed the next day. I forgot...what I saw. I didn't do anything. I forgot.

JOAN

There was nothing to do, Jonathan. Seeing something doesn't cause it. ... How do you feel now?

JONATHAN

Better. I'm OK.

JOAN

Jonathan, things like what you saw. They're always there. They happen all the time whether you see them or not. It's your choice to be aware of them. Your gift. If you don't want to see, you can become blind again. If you don't use the sight, it will leave you again.

JONATHAN

So second sight is a gift?

JOAN

No. It's our right to be aware. The gift is knowing that, and being able to choose.

MATTIE

Who's there? Is that you, Joan?

JOAN

Yes. And Jonathan.

MATTIE

Come in. Come in.

JONATHAN opens the door and they enter MATTIE's room. MATTIE props herself up a little.

MATTIE (cont'd)

Time to eat? We should eat the cake first, shouldn't we Jonathan, before we spoil our appetites.

JONATHAN

Always. I'm getting my wish ready.

MATTIE

You know what to do with a wish, don't you?

JONATHAN

Double it.

MATTIE

Never skimp on a wish. ... Joan, sit here a minute. In the light where I can see you.

JOAN sits in a chair by the window.

MATTIE (cont'd)

I was lying here thinking, until I fell asleep. In your life, you've lost someone, someone close to you?

JOAN

Yes.

MATTIE

Do you remember how you felt?

JOAN

It's hard to forget.

MATTIE

Joan, that's how I felt when you left. How bad we all felt. Whatever happened back then, Joan, we truly mourned when you left.

JOAN

Mattie, I don't know what to say.

MATTIE takes JOAN's hand.

MATTIE

Don't say anything. It's OK. We don't understand each other, and we've had lifetimes apart. I just want to say that to see you again, to feel your hand in mine, like when we were girls. One more time, when I thought there was never going to be another time. I'm so glad you came. And for you to be here to help Jonathan. A miracle when one was needed.

JOAN bows head, overcome.

MATTIE (cont'd)

Joan?

JOAN

Yes, Mattie.

MATTIE

You were right. About your arrest. I did know something. I didn't know, facts. But I knew Douglas. I knew he was involved somehow. ... It went so far. ... I couldn't face you, or him. ... I'm sorry. (pause) I've been so sorry for so long...(pause, drifting) ... Oh, the two of you!...(chuckles) What was it you used to say to him? Made him so mad.

JOAN

Awareness isn't measured with words.

MATTIE

(laughs softly)

Oh my yes. That was Douglas. Words for everything. And you...the things you said. ... What a day it's been. Two days.

SARAH enters quietly and sits on the other side of MATTIE's bed.

SARAH

Every thing OK, Mom?

MATTIE

Yes, yes. Sit with us, Sarah. We're just...catching up a bit.

JOAN

Do you remember the afternoon when I was, what, twelve? And you were nine I think.

MATTIE

The meadow.

JOAN

Yes. The meadow down behind the house. It was the first really warm day of Spring.

MATTIE's form becomes dim. Light coalesces brighter near her chest and head. JONATHAN sees this.

MATTIE

We wove flowers into crowns.

JOAN

Yes. We made each other crowns. I made yours of blue forget-me-nots and some dandelions. You made me one of violets and white... what were those white things?...I think we called them fairy flowers.

The light collects above MATTIE's head, and then rises. JONATHAN's watches.

JOAN (cont'd)

I was already beginning to have the sight then. I hadn't told anybody. (*laughs*) I waited until my birthday to tell Mom, so the story would be right. ... I put your blue crown on your head, and I looked at you, and I knew how special you were. I knew you were going to create something wonderful in your life. ... And you did.

JOAN notices MATTIE is still, unresponsive.

JOAN (cont'd)

Mattie? Mattie! ... She's not breathing! She's stopped breathing!

SARAH

Mom? Mom!

MATTIE's light continues to rise. SARAH checks for a pulse

JONATHAN

She's beautiful.

The light rises.

JOAN

It's not too late yet. We can get help!

SARAH

Jonathan, call 9-1-1.

TOM and DOUGLAS enter and stop near the door, DOUGLAS in shadow. LAURA comes in behind and continues over near the bed.

JONATHAN watches the light leave.

JONATHAN

She doesn't need help, Mom. ... She's gone. It was her time. ... She said that to me ... in my head. *(pause)* She called to you, Aunt Joan. She called for a long time. And she waited ... until you came ... and then she was finished.

JOAN

Oh my, yes. Mattie. Mattie, you were always there for me... You waited. *(pause)* You waited for me to come back.

JOAN bows her head to MATTIE's hand. SARAH smooths her mothers hair and gently touches her face.

SARAH

Oh, Mom. I understand.

SCENE 5

The creek, late afternoon. CROWS CALL and shortly JONATHAN enter. A RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD CALLS twice and JONATHAN waves. He picks up a stone and skips it in the creek. A FROG RIBBITS. Shortly, LAURA enters.

FLASH of heat lightning followed by distant thunder. Jonathan looks off in the sky.

JONATHAN

Hi. What's with this weather? Ever gonna rain?

LAURA

No. It's moving off to the north.

JONATHAN

My mom ask you to check on me?

LAURA

Joan said you were fine down here. Thought I'd stop by on the way home.

JONATHAN

I knew something was happening, with Gramma.

LAURA

I'm sorry. When did you find out?

JONATHAN

I didn't. I just knew, except I didn't. I forgot. Until Aunt Joan helped me remember. Right at the end. *(pause)* Why would I know something like that?

Pause.

LAURA

Maybe so you could watch her go and tell us about it. It was nice, what you said. It made what happened seem special, magical. Before the ambulance and everyone came and changed what it felt like.

JONATHAN

Yeah ... When I was talking, I saw her again. In my mind, like she was right there. Bright and young. Not as young as us, but you know, young. She's gone, but... it's not like when Alan died. She doesn't seem so far away.

LAURA

Maybe she isn't.

JONATHAN

I think I'll write about her first in my journal.

The RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD CALLS again.

JONATHAN (cont'd)

...or second.

Pause.

LAURA

Do birds talk to people?

JONATHAN

What do you think?

LAURA

I think they do, sometimes.

JONATHAN

Sometimes.

CURTAIN