

Handcrafted Healing

by

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ACT ONE

SCENE 1

LIGHTS UP on a living room in Bloomington, Indiana, filled with homemade wooden furniture and a lot of books -- which reflect the owners of these items: practical, down-to-earth furniture builder CAM -- short for CATHERINE MARY -- and her partner of six years MEREDITH, a kind and generous high school English teacher. Cam is in her mid-30s, as is Meredith. Right now they're entertaining Meredith's fellow teacher EVIE, 40s, who loves to hold forth. Evie is in mid-story after dinner.

EVIE

... His wife had this AMAZING job working for a software company, it took off like a rocket -- and she had stock options --

CAM

-- I want a job with stock options.

MEREDITH

Me, too.

EVIE

Me, three.

MEREDITH

Wait, what's her name, I want a name so I can picture who this is.

EVIE

... I don't even know if I should be telling this story...

CAM

Then why are you telling it?

They all laugh.

EVIE

Because it's so rich.

CAM

Stock option rich?

EVIE

No, life rich.

MEREDITH

So change the names.

EVIE

Oh, Jesus.

(then)

Her name is Linda, just don't, you know...

CAM

... Go around telling the story the way you are now?

They laugh.

EVIE

Okay, they're set for life financially, so her husband Bob got to --

CAM

(to Meredith)

-- Is it really helping you picture who they are by knowing their names are Bob and Linda?

MEREDITH

Hush. Bob got to what?

EVIE

Bob got to quit his job as a science teacher. He stays home, fixes the place up, plants petunias and then after awhile, he decides he wants to pursue his life-long dream of being a doctor. So he applies for medical school, and he applies all the hell over the place 'cause he's having trouble getting in. Meanwhile, they want to have kids, and Linda miscarries two or three times, they go to doctor after doctor, they're on the verge of giving up and then -- here's the final piece -- Bob decides to take flying lessons.

CAM

Flying lessons??

EVIE

Uh huh. So when Bob goes out for his final test to get his pilot's license -- the plane crashes and he dies. And then two weeks later, Linda finds out she's pregnant and Bob got into medical school!

Stunned silence. Cam and Meredith look at each other. They had no idea this is where the story was headed.

CAM

And you told us this because..?

EVIE

I'm trying to figure out what the hell it MEANS.

CAM

... Don't take flying lessons?

EVIE

Why did he die before starting medical school -- and before meeting his new baby?

CAM

Why did thousands die in the twin towers on 9/11?

MEREDITH

Bad foreign policy.

CAM

Evie, you'll drive yourself nuts if you --

EVIE

-- But what if he was really afraid of being a doctor or Linda needed to learn how to survive on her own or --

CAM

-- Stop, stop! You're way over-analyzing it.

MEREDITH

Maybe it was simply time for him to go.

CAM

Or maybe he had a very unfortunate plane accident. Oops.

EVIE

Cam, this is what gives life meaning! We draw conclusions, we figure out why we created --

CAM

-- And why are you doing it for Bob and Linda?

EVIE

Because it fascinates me!

CAM

I'm going for another Corona with a lime twist, which is fascinating enough for me.

EVIE

And what if in the middle of it, Bob had started paying attention: could he have changed the outcome??

Something in Evie's voice makes Cam stop on her way to the fridge. She turns and looks at Meredith. Meredith hangs her head.

CAM

... You told her, didn't you.

Meredith nods yes.

MEREDITH

(quietly)

I needed someone to talk to.

CAM

(to Evie)

Are you telling everyone my story the way you're telling Bob and Linda's?

EVIE

No. I know Meredith told me that in confidence.

CAM

Okay. Fine. Now let's move on. I'll have your headboard finished by the end of the month. Come back then, I'll show you the different finishes we can put on it.

(pointing)

This chair has a satin finish, nice and understated.

Silence.

CAM (CONT'D)

You want me to talk about it. Well, I'm not going to. Because we'll be here til two in the morning dissecting it twelve ways from Sunday. I have furniture orders to finish by the end of the year -- that's what I care about.

EVIE

Of course. I'm sorry. Thank you for dinner, it was lovely. I especially enjoyed your artichoke heart dip.

Cam nods thank you.

EVIE (CONT'D)

(to Meredith)

See you Monday. Faculty meeting at four.

MEREDITH

Coffee run at 3:30.

EVIE

Perfect. Bye-bye.

They hug goodbye, Evie is almost out the door but first:

EVIE (CONT'D)

My sister has a great oncologist up
in Indianapolis.

CAM

I have a great oncologist here in
Bloomington.

Evie nods "Of course." She exits. A beat.

CAM (CONT'D)

That is so Evie.

MEREDITH

Offering to help?

CAM

Trying to read the tea leaves on Bob-
the-plane-accident guy. Could he
have changed the outcome -- who
knows?

MEREDITH

Well, maybe he could've. Maybe he
wasn't paying attention, maybe there
were red flags that he --

CAM

-- Maybe it was a freak acci --

MEREDITH

-- All I'm saying is --

CAM

What are you saying? I'm not going
to do anything? Don't be ridiculous.

MEREDITH

What are you going to do?

CAM

... Hear the options at my doctor's
appointment Tuesday. Then get going
on the Richardsons' table and chairs.

(then)

I'm not gonna over-think it. Remember
Evie and her boyfriend Harold's
restaurant in Mooresville? She 'feng
shui-ed' it into the ground.

Meredith drops it for now.

MEREDITH

Have you told your father and brother
yet?

Cam shakes her head no.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)

Why not?

Cam looks at her as if it's obvious.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)
 History is not repeating itself.
 (then)
 I'm sure they would love to send
 their support.

CAM
 Dad has his own issues with his high
 blood pressure. And you know Gary,
 he only wants to hear good news.
 Stocks are up! Sales are up! Did I
 tell you what he said when I had
 tendonitis in my elbow a couple of
 years ago? 'Get a shot of cortisone,
 you'll be fine! Phil Mikelson plays
 with tendonitis all the time!'

Meredith nods sympathetically.

CAM (CONT'D)
 Did you tell your sister?

MEREDITH
 Yes. Evie and Melissa are the only
 ones, though.

Cam nods she understands.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)
 Melissa sends her love. She hasn't
 told Alan yet and certainly not
 Brooke. You're still Super Aunt.

CAM
 Good. And so it shall remain.

MEREDITH
 I'm going to bed. Join me when you're
 done leaping tall buildings in a
 single bound.

CAM
 Will do.

They kiss, Meredith exits. Cam looks at the knickknacks in
 their home, touches some of Meredith's books, rubs her hand
 over the chair she referred to earlier, admiring its sleek
 finish. She finally comes to a small, goofy box made of
 Popsicle sticks. She picks it up. LIGHTS SHIFT.

SCENE 2

Cam goes into a memory. She's 16 and turns to her brother
 GARY, 18, who enters. He's cocky and full of himself, but
 overall, a good kid.

CAM

Gary, can you show me how to use
your power tools?

GARY

Power tools?? You building a house?

CAM

No, I'm gonna make something for Mom
for Christmas.

GARY

You're what??

She shyly produces the small goofy chest.

CAM

Don't laugh.

He laughs.

CAM (CONT'D)

But bigger! And really neat, with
real wood. Like that skateboard
ramp or the Soap Box Derby car you
made. They were so cool.

GARY

A big box?

CAM

A chest.

GARY

Why a chest?

CAM

So she can have some place to put
her towels and tablecloths and stuff,
like Grandma has.

GARY

Grandma has a cedar chest that weighs
two tons.

CAM

Okay, not that big.

GARY

A chest. With power tools.

CAM

I can do it! I just need you to
show me how.

(then)

... I gotta do better than a robe
and slippers like last year. Nothing
lame. You know?

A beat.

GARY

... I know.

He nods, hands her the chest and then exits. LIGHTS SHIFT.

SCENE 3

Meredith, who now has her purse, enters. She and Cam go to a couple of plastic chairs and sit. They're now in a waiting room. They wait. Anxiously. They eye the other people around them. Cam sees one in particular and stares for several seconds.

CAM

(whispers)

... How old do you think she is?

MEREDITH

Mmm, 15?

CAM

Your niece's age.

A few beats.

CAM (CONT'D)

... Her hair's gonna grow in and cover that scar, right?

MEREDITH

Yeah.

CAM

... Think she smokes? Maybe she ate too much overcooked bacon. Or she eats a lot of Twinkies -- they're loaded with weird chemicals. If she knew then what she knows now, would she have chucked the Twinkies?

MEREDITH

Evie's not here, sweetie, she's not getting the benefit of your razor-sharp commentary.

Cam can't stop staring at the girl.

CAM

... She's got duct tape on her sneakers. I'll bet they can't afford bottled water and organic food.

MEREDITH

We're fine, Cam.

CAM

... We won't be fine if I don't finish the Richardsons' table. I won't be able to pay my health insurance next year...

MEREDITH

We'll figure it out.

(a beat)

... I could get a different job, one that has domestic partner benefits.

CAM

But you love your job.

MEREDITH

... I love you more.

Cam kisses her, then:

CAM

I know, you hate it when I do that in public.

A beat, Meredith kisses her back -- and then suddenly a VOICE from offstage:

VOICE (O.S.)

Catherine Mary Vogel?

They both look up, startled.

VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

The doctor will see you now.

LIGHT SHIFT.

SCENE 4

Cam and Meredith go home, Meredith pulls pamphlets out of her purse and puts them on a table.

CAM

... I'll be out of work for weeks -- I can't be on chemo and use power tools.

MEREDITH

You won't feel bad every day.

CAM

My job isn't just slapping particle board together.

MEREDITH

And neither is fighting cancer.

CAM

I can't concentrate if I'm throwing up.

MEREDITH

It's temporary.

CAM

It took me years to get this kind of high-end work --

MEREDITH

-- And if you want more years, take the long view. Let the chemo do its job and you'll be back in your shop in no time.

Cam stares at the pile of pamphlets. She picks up one...

CAM

'Decadron... Aloxi... Cytosan' -- see it even sounds toxic. 'Adriamycin is a vesicant --' what's a vesicant?

MEREDITH

It doesn't come up a lot in Sophomore English.

She grabs her reading glasses and a dictionary.

CAM

(continuing)

'Precaution must be taken so as not to miss a vein and send it under the skin, which can cause tissue death and severe scarring.'

She looks at Meredith for the definition.

MEREDITH

(reading quietly)

'... Vesicant: a blistering agent...'

Cam gestures, "Go on."

MEREDITH (CONT'D)

'... Especially, such an agent, as mustard gas, used in chemical warfare.'

Cam looks as if she's been punched in the gut.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)

... Remember the woman across from us, the one in the blue and white striped sweater?

CAM

No.

MEREDITH

Well, she had this look of... peace or something. Everyone else seemed anxious and tense. When you went to the restroom, I felt compelled to talk to her. Turns out she's a lung cancer survivor. Five years, and she did chemo.

(MORE)

MEREDITH (CONT'D)

I told her you were really worried about it, and she said the side effects are just that, side effects.

(then)

The big effect: She just got married a few months ago. She showed me her wedding ring.

CAM

... Meredith, you're in a room full of cancer patients, of course some of them have had success with chemo. This is hardly Jesus in a tortilla.

A beat, then:

MEREDITH

Remember July 4th when you came in from mowing the yard and said your back hurt?

CAM

I still think that was from lifting the lawn mower.

MEREDITH

Cam. We know it wasn't. I know they had to start with treating you for a strained back, but all through August I kept thinking, there's something wrong here.

Cam's a little spooked.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)

It wasn't a random thought and my conversation with that woman wasn't random, either.

CAM

They're random, Meredith, you're just labeling them after the fact.

MEREDITH

No, I'm not.

(then)

Are you seriously considering not doing chemo? Because if you are, I want to hear what Plan B is.

Meredith looks straight at her, Cam hears her.

BLACKOUT. As black as the theatre allows. Several beats.

SCENE 5

LIGHTS UP. A few weeks later. Meredith quietly enters from outside. She carries a grocery sack, her purse, her satchel from work.

She quietly sets them down and takes her coat off. She tiptoes over to peek at the couch, upon which rests a lump of blankets. She goes back to the groceries and puts them away. Then she brings a white to-go carton of soup and a spoon over to the couch.

She stands there, not knowing what to do. Despair creeps in. Finally, at a loss, she sets the soup down on a nearby table. She looks around, straightens up a couple of things, then goes to a window and looks out. Moonlight streams in. A few beats and she begins to softly sing:

MEREDITH

'By the light of the silvery moon
I want to spoon
To my honey I'll croon love's tune...'

Meredith notices the lump of blankets moves ever so slightly. She comes over to the couch, gets on her knees so she's at couch level.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)

Want to do the interactive version
that you like?
(then, singing)
'By the light...'
(then)
This is where you come in...

She waits. Cam doesn't come in. Then:

MEREDITH (CONT'D)

I got you your favorite soup.
Butternut squash.
(a beat)
I heard your phone ringing this
morning. It was one of your clients,
Mr. Richardson. What's his name?
Lawrence? I called him Larry by
accident. He's not a Larry, is he?
I said you were out of town on a
family emergency. I thought that
sounded good.

A beat. A hand comes out from the covers and slowly pulls down just enough of the blanket so that a face can be seen: Cam. In a knit hat. Meredith smiles at her.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)

Hi, baby. Soup?

Cam sits up a little but feels so nauseous that she shakes her head no.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)

Later?

Cam gestures "Who knows?" Then she pulls the covers back over her head. Meredith buries her head in her hands. LIGHTS OUT. A few beats.

SCENE 6

LIGHTS UP, a few days later. Meredith and Evie are planning something at the dining room. They start out talking quietly... and then get louder.

MEREDITH

When are the ballots due?

EVIE

October 15th.

MEREDITH

... God, Homecoming Queen, in this day and age?? I'm staging a protest.

EVIE

As a faculty sponsor, that should be interesting.

MEREDITH

Somebody has to.

EVIE

Next you'll be wanting to eliminate Miss America.

MEREDITH

Oh, don't get me started.

(then)

I have a girl in fourth period, Becky McMahon, she confided to me she wanted to be nominated for Homecoming Queen. She's fairly good-looking, but she has mousy, thin hair. I overhear the other girls talking...

(then)

I didn't want to discourage her but I didn't want her to be ridiculed.

EVIE

What did you do?

MEREDITH

I said the yearbook could really use a go-getter like you. You can write, hit deadlines, be creative. Then I capped it with: Homecoming Queen -- a one-shot deal, but yearbook, you're building a career.

EVIE

Did she go for it?

MEREDITH

Totally.

EVIE

This is why you're going to be
Bloomington North Teacher of the
Year.

MEREDITH

Oh, Evie, stop.

EVIE

No, Meredith, you know how to reach
them.

MEREDITH

Just stop.

EVIE

You have impact. And the nominating
committee is noticing.

Meredith looks dubious.

EVIE (CONT'D)

Tell me you don't want it.

MEREDITH

Heavens.

EVIE

... You want it you want it you want
it you want it you --

MEREDITH

-- OKAY, I WANT IT! If Terry Mumford
can be Teacher of the Year, so can
I, damn it! And I've been there
eight fucking years!

They laugh hysterically. The lump of covers on the couch
stirs.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)

Now, can we make someone else, some
mere mortals, work on Homecoming??

They laugh again.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)

I can't believe I got roped into
this, I hate administrative work.

EVIE

Is it the administrative work or the
fact that it's Homecoming?

MEREDITH

Both.

They grin.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)

Okay, let's do some arm twisting to get the float judges then meet again next Monday and see where we are.

EVIE

(trying for casual)

Ah, I won't be at school Monday.

MEREDITH

Oh?

EVIE

Later in the week okay?

MEREDITH

Sure. What's happening Monday?

EVIE

... There's a shadow on Sharon's latest scan. We're getting a second opinion.

Cam pulls the blankets off to hear better.

MEREDITH

... But she's been in remission for what, a year and a half...

EVIE

Yes, and she's been doing everything I told her to do -- eating all-organic, no sugar, acupuncture, massage. I just wish I could talk her out of that damn job.

CAM

Maybe she likes her job.

Evie jumps, startled.

MEREDITH

Were we too loud?

CAM

'S okay.

(then)

What does she do?

She sits up, still wearing a knit cap and still a little tired -- but much better than when we saw her previously.

EVIE

She's head of an agency for senior citizens in Indianapolis. It's nothing but stress. She pulled an all-nighter last week getting some damn report ready for the county assessor. That can't be good for you.

CAM

You think the universe looked at your sister and said, 'She needs a break. I know: Cancer!'

EVIE

That's the dark version. The light version: Sharon was out of balance.

CAM

You'll be delighted to know I work a stress-free job. I'm doing exactly what I want and get to set my own hours.

EVIE

(genuine)

Good for you.

Cam reaches for the candy dish and plucks a little chocolate bar from it.

CAM

Good for me. Happy Halloween.

She unwraps the chocolate bar and pops it in her mouth.

EVIE

(a little judgment)

Mmhmm.

Cam stares at her. Evie politely smiles.

CAM

What? The candy?

Evie gestures, Well, yeah.

CAM (CONT'D)

What? It causes cancer?

EVIE

Cancer cells need a lot of fuel to grow and they get very sensitive to insulin.

CAM

You're going to deprive me of this? Do you know how awful I've felt the past --

EVIE

-- I'm sure one Hershey miniature isn't going to make or break --

CAM

-- How about two or three? Or a dozen? And what about the lift we get from chocolate --

EVIE

-- It has to be dark chocolate and not the Hershey's fake dark chocol--

CAM

-- Meredith, these are fake, my God, what are we gonna tell the trick or treaters!?

MEREDITH

Okay, jump ball.

CAM

Was I out of bounds?

MEREDITH

A little.

CAM

You calling a foul?

MEREDITH

Time out.

EVIE

I'll be going. I'll call when I'm back in town.

MEREDITH

Great, thanks.

When Evie is at the door, Cam apologizes with:

CAM

... Give your sister my best. Good luck with the second scan.

EVIE

Thank you.

Evie exits. They stare at the dish of little candy bars.

CAM

... Should we feel guilty handing these out?

MEREDITH

... Beats me.

CAM

Evie's nuts. And, hello, there's a shadow on Sharon's scan, so it didn't really matter if she cut back on the candy bars or stocked up on organic pomegranates.

MEREDITH

Well, we don't know for sure...

CAM

Precisely. We don't know. It's a fuckin' crapshoot.

Cam snags a candy bar, unwraps it, pops it in her mouth and exits.

Meredith thoughtfully unwraps one and eats hers as...

SCENE 7

LIGHTS SHIFT. Meredith exits, Cam comes back on carrying a beautiful handcrafted wooden headboard and sandpaper. She takes off her socks so she's barefoot. She sands the wood, a sensuous, full-body operation... She keeps rubbing her hands over the wood, feeling it, feeling for slight bumps, then she looks at it closely, sands some more... inhales the wood smell, in love with it. She then wiggles her fingers and toes... something's wrong. She continues sanding to ignore this, but it's tough. She stops and shakes her hands and feet, worried.

Gary enters, carrying a SkilSaw (which is plugged in via an extension cord offstage), a tape measure, a pencil, and a board. He sets up the board between two chairs that will serve as saw horses. He looks at Cam, who looks blue.

GARY

C'mon over. Time for the SkilSaw lesson.

Cam slips into flashback mode. She looks at Gary, hesitant.

GARY (CONT'D)

I'll help you. C'mon. Stand in front of me.

She does.

GARY (CONT'D)

Okay, the first rule is measure twice, cut once. Got it?

CAM

Got it.

GARY

Measure me out a foot and a half from the left end there.

He hands her the tape measure and pencil. She measures once... then twice, marking the wood again.

GARY (CONT'D)

Pencil behind the ear.

She does that.

GARY (CONT'D)

Left hand here, right hand on the saw... and after the cut, the right piece will drop, so hold on to the left piece.

She nods. She's scared. He sees this and puts his right hand on top of hers on the saw, turns on the saw, they cut the wood together, perfectly. He shuts off the saw.

CAM

I did it!!

GARY

One piece of wood and she's Superman.

CAM

I could feel it! The saw! In my whole body! And I can smell the wood, too! Wow!

She takes a whiff, they laugh.

GARY

Perks of the job. So how are we paying for all the wood we're gonna need?

CAM

I've already signed up a bunch of people to rake their leaves and I could shovel snow, too.

GARY

Good. Maybe Dad'll front us a little, in case it doesn't snow much before Christmas.

CAM

Exactly! I thought of asking him that, too!!

GARY

Easy, easy.

CAM

I'm just excited.

GARY

I know.

(then)

This is gonna rock. Mom's really gonna like it. I was thinking we could trick it out with brass hinges and a brass lock.

CAM

Cool! I was just gonna get something cheap...

(MORE)

CAM (CONT'D)

(then)
How much will...?

GARY

I can pay for 'em. That'll be my contribution.

CAM

Thanks, Gary!

He takes some sawdust and sprinkles it in her hair. She starts dancing around.

CAM (CONT'D)

Whoooo!!

He rolls his eyes, grabs the wood and saw, exits.

Cam turns on a CD on the stereo, "Right Here, Right Now," by Jesus Jones to commemorate that time with Gary. She goes back to sanding the headboard, dancing as she's sanding. Meredith enters, home from school. She's amused by Cam. At some point Cam sees her.

CAM (CONT'D)

Ah!

They both laugh, Cam grabs her, kisses her, and they dance together.

MEREDITH

Look who's feeling better.

CAM

Yep. You need to dance more. We need to dance more.

MEREDITH

We do.

After a few moments of dancing, Meredith brushes the sawdust out of Cam's hair and turns the STEREO OFF.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)

Evie's headboard is looking good. When will it be ready?

CAM

Week or so. First coat of oil goes on tonight.

MEREDITH

Tonight?

CAM

I'm on a roll.

MEREDITH

Did you get around to fixing the bathroom sink?

A beat. Cam has a funny half-confused look on her face.

CAM

... Uh no. I'll look at it tomorrow.

MEREDITH

And where will we brush our teeth tonight?

CAM

In the backyard, like the pioneers.
Or at the kitchen sink.

Meredith smiles.

MEREDITH

How was the rest of your day?

CAM

I went on a little one-mile jog.
Real slow but I felt great. Maybe I
can get back to my running group in
a few weeks.

MEREDITH

Mhmm. Did you get to the store for
the light bulbs?

Another funny confused look.

CAM

Ahhh, I got a bunch a stuff.
Ibuprofen, Scotch tape...

MEREDITH

I wrote out a little list: pens,
tape, light bulbs --

CAM

-- I'll get 'em tomorrow. Promise.
What do you want for dinner?

MEREDITH

Light bulbs... Or homemade lasagne.

Cam smiles.

CAM

How about spaghetti?

MEREDITH

Close enough.

Cam ambles to the kitchen cabinets to get out pots.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)

... Did you hurt your foot?

CAM

No, why?

MEREDITH
You're walking funny. And you're
barefoot in November.

CAM
I dance better barefoot. You want
clam sauce or marinara?

MEREDITH
Marinara.

Cam pulls out ingredients. Meredith watches her, the way
she moves.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)
(dead serious)
... What's wrong with your feet?

CAM
... They tingle a little.

MEREDITH
Neuropathy?

Cam shrugs.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)
The doctor said that might happen.

CAM
So I dance.

MEREDITH
And why are you barefoot?

CAM
The cool floor feels better on my
feet.

MEREDITH
And the floor of your workshop?

CAM
Too cold.

MEREDITH
So you're sanding indoors.

CAM
Back off, okay? By being in here I
can keep working.

Meredith runs a finger through the dust on the table.

CAM (CONT'D)
All right, I'll take the headboard
out.
(to the headboard)
Bad dog, bad dog.

She puts on her shoes, no socks. Meredith goes over to the kitchen. Something she sees causes her to stop.

MEREDITH

Cam.

CAM

What??

Meredith holds up a small can.

MEREDITH

What's this?

CAM

I don't know. Tuna?

MEREDITH

It's a can of clam sauce. I told you I wanted marinara. That was less than two minutes ago.

CAM

I'm tired, that's all.

MEREDITH

You shouldn't be working if you're this fuzzy-headed.

CAM

Sanding is a no brainer. Honey-babe, I had a great afternoon. Listening to the tunes, feeling the wood. It was so... normal. Here, feel this...

Meredith rubs her hand over the headboard, nods, "It's good." They rub it together, a nice moment.

CAM (CONT'D)

I'll take it out to the shop.

MEREDITH

Thank you.

Cam exits with the headboard.

Meredith exhales, looks a little worried, puts the clam sauce away. Suddenly from way offstage:

CAM

(off)

Ah -- FUCK!!

Meredith looks up, panicked.

SCENE 8

LIGHTS SHIFT. Cam enters and she and Meredith take a seat in the plastic chairs again. This time Cam has her hand wrapped in a dishtowel; blood is leaking through. She's in pain and worried about something. Meredith fumes.

CAM

... Different crowd here than at the oncology unit.

Silence from Meredith.

CAM (CONT'D)

We should've pretended this was a gunshot wound, they'd have gotten to me by now.

Then they both suddenly look in one direction and "see" a man who stumbles through.

MEREDITH

(sotto)

... I can smell the liquor all the way over here. I thought windshields were shatterproof.

CAM

Maybe he fell through a store window.

MEREDITH

You can't do that kind of damage in a store window, you need velocity.

(then)

How does someone think it's okay to drive like that?

CAM

He wasn't thinking. The 12-pack was.

MEREDITH

Clearly.

CAM

... First off, I'm not like your mom, drinking myself into oblivion. Second, the saw slipped out of my hand. It was an accident.

MEREDITH

What was the SkilSaw saw doing out in the first place?

CAM

It was just... out. I decided spur of the moment to put it away.

MEREDITH

Isn't it used to cut large pieces of wood?

CAM

It can be.

MEREDITH

Is that what you'd been do --

CAM

-- No!

MEREDITH

Then what was it doing out --

CAM

-- Stop with the fishing expedition!

VOICE

Miss Vogel, we'll see you now.

Cam and Meredith exit. LIGHTS SHIFT.

SCENE 9

Cam enters and goes to the kitchen to continue making dinner, Meredith follows on her heels. Cam takes the towel off, her hand is now bandaged.

MEREDITH

The saw should NOT have been out.

CAM

It slipped! I'm human!

MEREDITH

What are you doing?

CAM

Making dinner.

MEREDITH

Cam, for Christ's sake, I can make --

And just then, Cam accidentally drops a very large cooking pan with a LOUD CLANG. Cam bends over to pick it up -- and it slips out of her hand again. The jig is up.

CAM

... I can't feel my fingertips.

Meredith picks up the fallen pan, stunned.

CAM (CONT'D)

I'd been working on the Richardsons' dining room chairs. That's why I was putting away the saw.

MEREDITH

Excuse me??

CAM

I felt good today!

(then)

Except for the fact that I drop everything and I can't think, damn it!!

MEREDITH

Finishing the Richardsons' order is not where you need to put your energy right now.

CAM

Well, where SHOULD I put it?? What SHOULD I be doing? Giving up sugar? Meditating? Taking vitamins made of green stuff??

MEREDITH

If that's what you want to do!

CAM

What's gonna buy me a clean scan next month? And what about Bob? What should he have done? Well, once the plane's going down, it's a little late, but before that. If he'd done the right things, could he have lived to see his baby??

MEREDITH

Cam, I don't know Bob and I don't care about Bob.

CAM

You said it was time for him to go.

MEREDITH

I said MAYBE. And it's not time for you to go.

CAM

HOW DO YOU KNOW??

MEREDITH

I JUST KNOW!

Gary enters, Meredith goes to the kitchen. Cam goes into a teenage flashback.

CAM

What are we gonna do??

GARY

How bad is it?

CAM

It's all over the bathroom floor.

GARY

Dad'll be home soon.

CAM

We should do something.

GARY

I didn't sign on for this.

CAM

Like Mom did? We could get her a bucket, in case she throws up again. And we should clean up the mess.

GARY

Man.

CAM

C'mon. Help me.

GARY

I'll be in the basement.

CAM

Doing what?!

GARY

Building a Mega Death Blaster.

He exits.

CAM

Gary! Don't leave me alone with this!

LIGHTS SHIFT. Cam goes to Meredith in the kitchen.

CAM (CONT'D)

I don't wanna go back to chemo.

MEREDITH

Honey, you have to go back.

CAM

Don't make me.

MEREDITH

You're only half way through. It's like taking antibiotics, you have to do the full course.

VOICE

(cheerful)

Ready for your next round, Miss Vogel?

CAM

... Fuck.

Cam reluctantly exits. LIGHTS SHIFT.

SCENE 10

A few days later. Meredith is sorting through some brochures and flyers.

EVIE

Knock, knock --

MEREDITH

-- Come in.

Evie enters.

EVIE

Hey, sweetie, you got away today
before I could grab you.

MEREDITH

I stopped by I.U., to, ah, look at a
few things.

Meredith tries to hide the stuff but realizes it's futile.

EVIE

Whatcha got there?
(sees the brochures)
... You're not leaving us, are you?

MEREDITH

The university has a great benefits
package.
(they exchange a look)
So, something bigger than a phone
call could handle?

EVIE

Cam called me, my headboard is done --
and yes, big news. Sharon's second
scan came back clean.

MEREDITH

Wow, congratulations.

EVIE

Thank you, thank you.

Cam enters, looking tired and out of it.

MEREDITH

Want some water?

Cam nods. Meredith gets it.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)

Evie brought over some good news:
Sharon's second scan came back clean.

CAM

Holy shit, that's great.

Evie smiles, tries not to look too smug.

EVIE

You know how I knew to get a second
scan?

CAM

How?

EVIE

My car mechanic.

CAM

Huh?

EVIE

A few weeks ago I was in getting my oil changed and he was saying to another woman, 'Always get a second opinion.' I woke up in the middle of the night and heard him again, clear as a bell.

CAM

(rolls her eyes)

I'll go get your headboard.

EVIE

Do you have the energy?

Cam exits, ignoring the question.

MEREDITH

She doesn't but that won't stop her.

EVIE

You look worried.

MEREDITH

I've practically had to drag her to chemo. If she needs follow-up, like radiation or more chemo, I don't know if wild horses could...

EVIE

Remember when I was dating Harold and he tried to open that restaurant -- a Caribbean restaurant in Mooreville -- not that we don't need diversity here in the land of white bread -- but there went two years of my life and his when he didn't listen to me.

MEREDITH

I know, but on the other hand, Harold had to live his own life, even if --

EVIE

-- Honey, you are a part of Cam's life and on top of that, we all have blind spots, that's why another set of eyes is --

CAM

-- Ta da.

Cam enters with the now-finished luxurious headboard.

EVIE

... Wow.

CAM

Thank you.

EVIE

I just want to run my hands all over
it.

CAM

Please do.

Evie runs her hands sensuously over the wood, they all laugh.

EVIE

God, it's gorgeous! You do amazing
work.

CAM

Thank you.

(then)

So what lucky fella gets to share
this with you?

EVIE

Oh, I have a few candidates in mind...

CAM

I'm sorry it took so long.

EVIE

It didn't take long at all. It makes
a beautiful Thanksgiving gift.

(then)

Are you guys going to your usual
potluck?

CAM

Yep. Dykes with healthy and hearty
vegetarian casseroles.

MEREDITH

She's bringing the turkey.

They all smile.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)

How about you?

EVIE

Insufferable cousins in Southport.

MEREDITH

Your sister will be there?

EVIE

Yes, the saving grace. Sometimes we
escape the relatives and go out to
the car between dinner and pie time
and smoke a joint.

Cam and Meredith laugh.

EVIE (CONT'D)

Oh, you two.

CAM

Evie MacElvoy -- Dope Fiend!

EVIE

Stop!

CAM

Is that the only time you have a joint or do all those freshmen papers on *Romeo and Juliet* make you reach for --

EVIE

-- No, no. It's something Sharon and I used to do when we were younger. Now it's an old time's sake thing. And it...

(downplays it)

Well, it smoothes some of the edges we have now.

CAM

Like what?

EVIE

Sister stuff.

CAM

Like?

EVIE

... Who can roll the best joint.

They laugh but:

CAM

No, really, what kind of stuff do you two tangle over --

EVIE

(overlapping)

-- So what's your plan of action after you get your pathology report?

A beat, Cam decides not to dog Evie with that line of questioning. Instead:

CAM

Wait and see what it says. Not much else I can do.

EVIE

I know from Sharon's case, you've got to get ahead of the curve. Read the signs, tune in to your body --

CAM

-- Listen to my car mechanic --

EVIE

-- Whatever it takes.

CAM

... So your sister's in the clear?

EVIE

Yes. The second scan came out fine,
no shadow. It re-affirmed the reality
I put out there: a clean bill of
health.

CAM

'Put it out there'?

EVIE

I used a variety of techniques.

CAM

Like what?

EVIE

I did a power grid for one thing.
Nine squares, three across, three
down and I put Sharon's name in the
center. Then I put power totems in
all the other boxes -- things I knew
would support her -- a picture of
her boyfriend, the name of her
favorite song, her favorite book. I
said a prayer over the grid every
morning.

MEREDITH

That's lovely.

EVIE

I stopped short of driving to a Navajo
shrine but I'm not above that.

CAM

But everything you did was irrelevant
because that first scan was probably
someone else's.

MEREDITH

(to Cam)

You originally said that eating
organic and cutting back on candy
was irrelevant because that shadow
on the scan meant cancer. Now you
say what they're doing is irrelevant
because the scan belonged to someone
else. You can't keep saying
everything is irrelevant!

CAM

I can say whatever I damn well want!

EVIE

I choose to believe I had a positive impact. Cam, if we'd gone with that first scan, they would've sent Sharon down the chemo road again -- for nothing. And you know how hard that road is.

Cam concedes that, then:

CAM

So, if you'd done a power grid for Bob and Linda would Bob not have crashed his plane?

EVIE

... There were a lot of factors with Bob and Linda.

CAM

What kind of factors?

EVIE

... I've since found out that Bob had some accidents earlier in his life. A near-fatal car crash. A bike crash when he was vacationing in France. Maybe those were warning signs and he wasn't paying attention.

CAM

Well, it's all water under the bridge now.

EVIE

Okay then. What kind of choices are you making now?

CAM

I told you, I'm waiting to see what my scan says!

EVIE

Cam, are you in the driver's seat or the fear seat?

Cam hoists the headboard up over her head like a superhero.

CAM

I'm taking this to your car. I'm putting it in the back seat.

She exits.

MEREDITH

Thank you for trying.

EVIE

Good luck. I've got you both in my prayers.

Evie exits. LIGHTS SHIFT to...

SCENE 11

... the plastic chairs in the oncology waiting area. Cam and Meredith sit down and anxiously await test results. Cam stretches her hand with the cut on it.

MEREDITH

You're getting your mobility back.

Cam nods, then uses her hand as it's a talking lobster.

CAM

"We come in peace. From the Lobster Nation."

They laugh.

CAM (CONT'D)

I think that girl laughed, too.

(then)

Her hair's grown back.

MEREDITH

Yeah.

CAM

Maybe we'll both get clean scans today.

Meredith nods.

CAM (CONT'D)

My hand healed pretty easily. Why can't cancer heal that way?

MEREDITH

Maybe it can. Maybe we just don't know the key.

CAM

I feel good. The fuzziness is passing. My stamina is coming back. Maybe those are good signs.

Meredith nods, then, with some judgment:

MEREDITH

You're going to finish the Richardsons' table and chairs by Christmas, aren't you?

Cam nods.

CAM

Don't be mad. Thanks to them my insurance is paid up through the end of the year.

Meredith nods she gets it, then:

MEREDITH

... Their table looks beautiful.

CAM

Thank you.

MEREDITH

I think it's your best yet. I like how the ends curve under...

(makes a curve with her hand)

I kept running my hand over it.

Where did you get that idea?

Cam gestures to the heavens, the ethers.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)

Do you always trust you'll get design ideas?

Cam nods.

CAM

They always come.

(then)

The Richardsons recommended me to someone. A gay guy, named Klint. With a "K."

MEREDITH

... Have you seen Klint's home, is it nice?

CAM

I have and it is.

MEREDITH

Does he entertain a lot?

CAM

He does and I know I can't get his table order done by his Christmas party, so stop fishing. You're so bad at it.

MEREDITH

I try.

CAM

I'm hoping for late January. If today's scan...

MEREDITH

Fingers crossed...

CAM

So what do you want for Christmas?

MEREDITH

... I'm good. I have everything I need.

CAM

C'mon. You do this every year.

Meredith shrugs, then tosses out:

MEREDITH

... The new Anne Tyler novel. Some of that muffin mix from the Homegrown restaurant.

CAM

Now, c'mon, I want to do something really nice.

MEREDITH

I have you.

(then)

We have to figure out what to get Niece Brooke and Nephew Andy.

CAM

C'mon, I want to get you a big ticket item, give me a big, crazy dream.

Meredith just shakes her head.

MEREDITH

What does Andy want?

CAM

(sighs, gives up)

Last year it was dump trucks, this year it's robots.

MEREDITH

They're hard-wired to want that stuff, aren't they?

CAM

Except for Klint.

(they chuckle, then:)

... I was thinking of making Andy a wooden chest to keep his toys in.

(then)

God, I don't think I can finish it by Christmas...

MEREDITH

There's always his birthday, that's not til summer, right?

VOICE

(off)

Catherine Mary Vogel..? We have
some good news. Your tumors have
shrunk.

A frozen beat, then LIGHTS SHIFT.

SCENE 12

They stagger home, deliriously over the moon.

CAM

Omigod...

MEREDITH

Yay!!!

CAM

They shrank... Omigod...

MEREDITH

-- Yay!!! --

CAM

-- Omigod, is this real?

MEREDITH

Yes, damnit!

CAM

Whooooo! A toast! It's time for a
toast!

MEREDITH

What do we have?!

CAM

(rummaging)

Beer, wine, Scotch...

MEREDITH

We don't own Scotch.

CAM

Then what's this?

MEREDITH

Oh -- Mona's husband must've left
it...

CAM

Hey -- here's that wine your sister
sent from their trip to Napa Valley!
Yeah!

MEREDITH

Perfect!

Meredith gets glasses, Cam uncorks the wine, pours a lot for
Meredith and a sip for her.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)

You know what? I'd like to go on a nice trip next summer.

CAM

Then I shall take you on one. Where would you like to go?

MEREDITH

... Oregon -- I've always wanted to see Oregon.

CAM

Finally she tells me what she wants!

MEREDITH

The whole coast of Oregon! Green forests, waves crashing on rocks -- and Crater Lake, we have to see Crater Lake!

They laugh. They raise their glasses. The laughter is gone. Silence. They look at each other. Tears well up for both of them.

CAM

To... us.

MEREDITH

To us. To you.

CAM

And you.

They clink glasses and take a sip. Then Cam raises her glass again.

CAM (CONT'D)

To chemo. As godawful as it was.

They clink glasses and take another sip.

CAM (CONT'D)

Dipped in fuckin' battery acid from the inside out.

MEREDITH

Well, it fuckin' worked.

CAM

And Evie kept trying to wave red flags. 'What's your gut say??' Well, it said I felt good. So there.

MEREDITH

Don't be so hard on her. She's been through a tough three years with Sharon.

CAM

Yeah, but c'mon, Sharon's scan? A simple mix-up in the lab. I don't care how many chants and grids and spells Evie did.

MEREDITH

... I did a grid for you.

Silence. Cam looks at her.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)

... So maybe it wasn't just the chemo and your kick-ass attitude.

(then)

And it's no more airy-fairy than you getting a table design from...

She gestures to the heavens. Point taken.

CAM

... What did you put on the grid?

MEREDITH

What do you care, you don't believe in it.

CAM

... I believe in you.

Meredith nods thanks.

MEREDITH

It's done its job, so let's move on. Are you going to keep going with the chemo to finish off the tumors?

A beat.

CAM

I'm gonna try the R.F.A. thing.

MEREDITH

Radio Frequency..?

CAM

Yeah --

MEREDITH

-- Ablation -- Radio Frequency Ablation.

CAM

Yeah. I liked how the doctor used the word 'kill.' Gonna burn the tumor and KILL it. Not shrink it.

MEREDITH

Instead of chemo not with chemo?

CAM

Yeah. This is my Plan B.

MEREDITH

... Did you want my opinion on it?

CAM

Yes, please.

MEREDITH

... You had good luck with the chemo. And the R.F.A. thing is a little experimental.

(then)

That's all I'm saying.

CAM

I can have good luck with the R.F.A., too.

(a beat)

Yeah, the woman in the waiting room did great with chemo, but the doctor said the chemo next time would be stronger -- plus harder on me. And the neuropathy and fog brain nearly drove me nuts.

MEREDITH

... You mean it kept you from working.

CAM

(ignoring that)

Three tumors, three needle zaps. And a few days after each burn, I'll feel fine.

MEREDITH

Cam, it's not like you're having moles removed. And may I add the doctor said R.F.A allows patients to 'aggressively continue chemotherapy.'

CAM

C'mon, today's too good of a day to fight. I want to celebrate. In fact, you know what, I want to call Jillian and Gary -- that's how good I feel.

She dials their number.

CAM (CONT'D)

(to Meredith)

Let's have pizza!

(on the phone)

Gary! Cam! Yeah, long time! Hey, the Pacers are on fire, huh?

(winks at Meredith)

How are sales? Great, great.

(MORE)

CAM (CONT'D)

Yeah, me, too. I've had some of my biggest orders yet this year. She's fine -- she's in the running for Teacher of the Year at her school, how about that? Yeah. Hey, we were gonna get Andy a robot for Christmas and I was gonna make him a big chest to put his toys in, how's that sound? Great, great. So we have to work out the timing for Santa to deliver the goodies. The robot's no problem but I haven't started on the toy box yet and, uh, I'm, uh, trying a new treatment in December...

Meredith nods encouragingly.

CAM (CONT'D)

No, not a furniture sealant, a medical thing... Ah, my immune system is down... Oh, gosh, it's, I might as well tell you, Gary, it's cancer. ... No, no, uh, lung cancer. It's a freak accident non-smoker thing. But, thanks to chemo, my tumors shrank, so we're jumpin' up and down over here. And like I said, I'm about to start a second treatment, so by Christmas I should be feelin' pretty good and could get goin' on the toy chest.

(then, vulnerable)

Y'know, Gare, it's been real crazy, what's the Grateful Dead song? 'What a long, strange trip,' trying to sort through everything, all the treatments, and remember how brutal it was with Mom -- ah -- yeah, I can hear him in the background -- what's he doing? Can you put him on the phone? Well, yeah, don't let him tear up the sofa. Okay. Okay. Give him a hug for me. Tell Jillian I said hi... Okay, bye.

She hangs up. Stunned.

CAM (CONT'D)

Could he have gotten off the phone any faster?

MEREDITH

I'm sorry. What did he say?

CAM

(very clipped)

'That's awful. Andy, put that down!! Well. Good luck.'

MEREDITH

I'm sorry. Honey, don't let it throw you. You got some good news today. We're celebrating. You call in the pizza order and I'll go pick it up. Okay? Okay?

She gives Cam a big hug.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)

Okay, bathroom, sweater, money...

She exits. After a few beats, Cam, zombie-like, speed dials a number.

CAM

Uh, yeah... a large pepperoni and mushroom... and a large salad, no garbanzo beans. Uh, Meredith. Okay. Thanks.

She hangs up... goes into a flashback.

LIGHTS SHIFT. Cam brings on cut pieces of wood. She tries to assemble them by bringing ends together to make a corner but things aren't going well.

CAM (CONT'D)

Man!

(then)

Ah!

(then)

Dang it!

She hears yelling from upstairs.

GARY

(off)

Get off my friggin' back! This is not friggin' bootcamp! I'm not one of your EMPLOYEES you can order around!

Cam looks up to where the basement door would be. She waits a moment, the yelling is done, so she calls out:

CAM

Gary? I'm down here! Gary?

A beat, then Gary storms on, distracted.

CAM (CONT'D)

What was going on up there?

GARY

'Pull your weight!' Jeeze, I go to school, I'm a starter on the basketball team, I'm in the chess club and I'm building this friggin' chest.

CAM

What did he want you to do?

GARY

Change the sheets or towels or some damn thing.

He checks his watch.

CAM

You got practice?

GARY

No. What's the friggin' problem down here??

CAM

Don't yell at me. The slats aren't fitting together, we have to do that mitre box thing. You promised to --

GARY

-- Hand me the wood that needs the corners done.

She does. He gets the mitre box.

GARY (CONT'D)

You pick the angle you want and then put the wood in here and the saw in --

CAM

-- Stop! You're going too fast. I'm not a math whiz.

GARY

It's not math. It's a friggin' BOX.

CAM

Well, whatever it is, I'm not an expert like YOU.

GARY

And I'm not an expert in taking care of sick people, so why am I getting dragged into it?

CAM

'Cause it's Mom, jeeze.

GARY

You put the piece of wood in here, you calculate the angle by turning this. That's all there is to it. Mark the angle, cut, boom, you're done. And I'm outta here.

CAM

Gary, wait, let me cut the first piece to make sure I --

GARY

-- I don't have time for this
bullshit!

CAM

Gary!! It's only a week til
Christmas, I gotta get this done and
I don't want to just slap it togeth --

GARY

-- Look, I'm gone. If Dad asks you
where I went, just say you don't
know.

He storms off. Cam looks stunned.

CAM

Gary! What are you going -- GARY!

Meredith, now in a sweater, enters with her purse, grabs her
coat.

MEREDITH

All set?

Cam can't quite snap out of the flashback.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)

Hey... you okay? Cam? Cam? Honey,
forget the call with Gary.

CAM

... How?

MEREDITH

I... I don't know... focus on the
good news. We got good news. You're
gonna be okay.

CAM

... You know that for a fact?

Meredith isn't sure how to answer that.

CAM (CONT'D)

How do you know?

MEREDITH

... The tumors shrank.

CAM

Why?

MEREDITH

The chemo, maybe the grid... Honey,
just go with it.

CAM

It what?

MEREDITH

... Okay. Maybe we're Wiley Coyote running off the cliff and there's nothing holding us up. But SOME people have beaten cancer and why not go with the idea that you're gonna be one of them. And you know what, the alternative SUCKS. I'm gonna go get the pizza.

She exits. Cam stands there lost as ever. She looks around as if the answer is somewhere here... She sees the little model chest made out of Popsicle sticks. She holds it again., puts it down, sad. She goes to a wooden chair... rubs it... then holds on tightly to it.

CAM

A well-built chair will never let you down.
 (off-hand, not really addressing God)
 God, what do I do?
 (then)
 Look at that. Like everyone else I say "God."
 (louder, officially addressing God)
 God: What do I do? Which treatment?

Nothing but silence.

CAM (CONT'D)

Speak up. I need some help here! I need some input!
 (with no answers forthcoming...)
 Yeah, right. Fat chance.
 (then)
 Maybe I can get some of Andy's toy chest done before Christmas... and whatever god damn treatment I pick next...

Resolved, she puts back the little chest, pulls out a CD, puts it on the stereo... Christmas MUSIC PLAYS. She goes off... a few beats... she comes back on carrying a SkilSaw.

CAM (CONT'D)

Warmer in here.

She goes to the lumber of the half-finished "Mom" chest which will now serve as Andy's toy chest.

CAM (CONT'D)

Let's see... maybe two and a half feet by one and a half..?

She plugs the SkilSaw in... hits the "on" button... nothing. Tries it a few times.

CAM (CONT'D)
Oh, for Pete's sake...

She unplugs it, tries a different plug, wiggles the cord, tries the "on" button again... and this time there's an ARC and SPARK and it knocks Cam on her ass.

CAM (CONT'D)
AHHH!

The LIGHTS go eerie and bluish. Cam's no longer 100% conscious.

After a few beats, a man appears. This is BOB. He could be played by the same actor playing Gary. His clothes are torn, his face black and blue... he's barely holding it together. He looks at Cam for a few beats.

BOB
... Cam... Cam... Cam...

CAM
(groggy)
... Huh?

BOB
Cam, wake up.

CAM
Huh?

BOB
Cam, you have to wake up.

CAM
Okay.

A beat.

BOB
Cam, wake up.

CAM
(eyes finally open)
Okay.
(then)
... Who are you?

BOB
Bob.

CAM
... Bob who?

BOB
Linda's husband.

She slowly sits up.

CAM

Linda... Bob...

(then)

Bob and Linda. Evie's friends.

(stares at him)

Bob??

BOB

Yeah.

CAM

Where... are you here or...?

BOB

I'm gone.

CAM

Gone...?

He nods.

BOB

I miss my wife... and my son.

CAM

I'm so sorry.

BOB

Could you say hi to them for me?

CAM

Uh, sure. Of course.

He starts to go.

CAM (CONT'D)

Uh, Bob, wait. I've got some questions. What happened with the plane crash? Did you see it coming? Could you have prevented it?

BOB

I made some mistakes.

CAM

Like what?

BOB

... I wasn't paying attention.

CAM

To what?

BOB

Linda. My life.

CAM

But in the plane...

BOB

It's all the same.

CAM

(jeeze)

Uh, okay, forget the plane crash for a sec -- which treatment should I do next? Chemo, R.F.A., and then there's the nutrition angle -- like no sugar --

BOB

What do you believe in?

CAM

Well, chemo and the R.F.A. needle thing -- they're both pretty good, right?

BOB

What do you think?

CAM

Which one, Bob, which one?

BOB

Which do you believe in?

CAM

I don't know.

BOB

Everyone believes in something.

CAM

Well, I don't believe in God, I don't believe in miracles, I don't believe in angels, I barely believe in science!

BOB

Tell Linda and Shawn hello. Tell them I love them.

He vanishes.

CAM

Wait, wait, what do I do? Wh-what should I have faith in?! Bob, COME BACK!! BOB!!!

He's gone. Cam collapses on the floor. The Christmas MUSIC comes back in: a simple, understated version of "Oh Holy Night" by Karan Casey from *A Christmas Celtic Sojourn*. LIGHTS FADE, MUSIC FADES. A few beats.

SCENE 13

LIGHTS UP. It's now a short time later. Cam is sitting on the couch or at the table still woozy, Meredith is holding her hand, the pizza box and salad box sit unopened. Several beats, finally:

MEREDITH

... Do you want me to call her?

CAM

... Yes.

Meredith gets her cell phone, speed dials someone. Then:

MEREDITH

... Hi, Evie. We're fine. Uh, I'll explain why I'm asking this later, but remember Bob and Linda? What's their son's name?

(a beat)

Okay. Thanks. Yeah, I'll explain later, promise. Thanks. Bye.

She hangs up.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)

It's Shawn.

LIGHTS OUT.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

SCENE 14

In the dark: the sound of a BLENDER. LIGHTS COME UP on the living room that now has some Christmas decorations added to it. Cam is in the kitchen tossing veggies into a blender with great delight.

CAM

Hah hah!
 (more veggies)
 Ka-pow!
 (more)
 Vroooom!

Meredith enters from the bedroom, all dolled up. Cam shuts off the blender.

MEREDITH

... How do I look?

CAM

Good enough to eat. Oh, wait, we did that earlier.

MEREDITH

Oh, stop. I'm sorry you can't come.

CAM

I did come.

MEREDITH

Oh, Lord.

CAM

I won't miss anything. You'll be getting tanked on spiked eggnog and discussing homeroom politics, *MacBeth*, Principal Ed... oh, wait, Principal Ed IS *MacBeth*.

Chuckles.

CAM (CONT'D)

My immune system will be ready to rock by New Year's Eve, we'll be dancing on the roof.

Meredith looks dubiously at her.

CAM (CONT'D)

By Valentine's Day for sure.

MEREDITH

Absolutely. I'm skipping the roof part.

Cam salutes with her veggie drink.

CAM

I'm gonna market this. 'Cam's Cancer-Fighting Concoction.'

Meredith smiles and then passes by the dining room table upon which sits a stack of wooden plaques.

MEREDITH

Now, don't work too hard on these.

CAM

They're square pieces of wood with shellac on 'em.

(reads from a stack
of certificates)

'Best *Scarlet Letter* Essay,' 'Funniest Halloween Story.' Think this'll help you cinch Teacher of the Year?

MEREDITH

C'mon, I do this every year. This is not a ploy or a campaign strategy.

CAM

You've been there eight years. You'd think they'd have given it to you by now.

MEREDITH

They give it to... it's more politics than merit sometimes.

CAM

Do you fantasize doing your acceptance speech?

MEREDITH

No. Except for the evil eye that I'm shooting at Principal Ed.

(as Ed)

'Meat and potatoes, we need to be teaching meat and potatoes, not frou frou stuff.' He throws that at me every semester. When did literature become frou frou? The stuff we get from *The Grapes of Wrath* or *To Kill a Mockingbird* is hardly fr --

A KNOCK at the door, Cam answers it, it's Evie. She's also dressed for the holiday party... and golly, she's already downed a cocktail or two.

CAM

Whoa, it's Evie of the Evening.

EVIE

Ho, ho, ho!

CAM

Slinky Sexy Santa.

EVIE

Mmmhmm.

CAM

(sniffing)

Say, Santa's been sippin' the eggnog already.

Evie looks caught. Cam: oops.

CAM (CONT'D)

... Oh, ah...

MEREDITH

Ah, really?

EVIE

Just one tiny, itty bitty...

MEREDITH

You're the designated driver, it's my turn to be the lush.

EVIE

One. One-ish.

MEREDITH

How "ish"?

EVIE

I just... it was a long day... not horrible, just longish.

CAM

How "ish"?

EVIE

... It started this morning... and ended about a half hour ago.

CAM

That sounds more long than "ish."

MEREDITH

What was the problem?

EVIE

Nothing.

MEREDITH

I'm taking your car keys and leaving you here with Cam and her tools of torture.

EVIE

... Relatives.

CAM

Anyone we know and care about?

EVIE

(sees the plaques)
Oh, there's Meredith's annual awards.
"Most Likely to Dethrone MacBeth."
I'd never come up with something
like this.

CAM

Why do you always dodge my questions?

EVIE

It's the Christmas season, Cam, let's
have Peace on Earth.

CAM

... Sharon?

A few beats, Evie finally nods.

CAM (CONT'D)

Bad news?

EVIE

Well, not exactly. She wants to
stop taking Tamoxifen as her follow-
up. She hates the side effects. Our
aunt, her boyfriend, two cousins and
a niece are backing her up. Thank
God I have a lot of cell phone
minutes.

MEREDITH

And you?

EVIE

She's supposed to take it for five
years!

CAM

It's her life.

EVIE

She's got blind spots! She's not
thinking clearly! She's in denial!

CAM

Yeah, but if she doesn't believe a
hundred percent that Tamoxifen is
gonna help her then --

EVIE

The gospel according to Bob.

CAM

He's Bob. Not God. My R.F.A. thing's
risky, too, and so far so good.

EVIE

Maybe Bob'll come visit Sharon. Or
me.

CAM

I nearly got electrocuted in the process. I don't recommend it.

(then)

How's Linda?

EVIE

So-so. I've only talked to her once since I told her...

CAM

She was happy then, right?

EVIE

Bittersweet.

(then)

Why you?

CAM

I don't know. All I know is I asked for help.

EVIE

You didn't even know Bob.

CAM

That's probably a plus. It was freaky enough as it was.

(then)

Stop looking at me as if I'm special. I'm still stumbling through this.

EVIE

You were given an incredible gift.

CAM

Which I'm grateful for but don't completely understand.

EVIE

Then get on it.

CAM

Don't yell at me 'cause you're mad at Sharon! My gut said go with the R.F.A., so I did. I started eating more veggies --

(gets her drink)

-- 'cause when I couldn't sleep that night Bob stopped by, I turned on the TV, and boom, I saw this doctor who specializes in treating cancer patients. She was talking about how loaded with micro-nutrients certain foods like kale and cauliflower are.

(then)

She also said no sugar.

EVIE

You wouldn't listen to me.

CAM

Maybe I wasn't ready.

(then)

Oh, crap, you were mad at me cause I wouldn't listen to you, now you're mad at me anyway. Stop judging me. Stop judging Sharon.

EVIE

Leave Sharon out of this!

CAM

YOU bring her into this -- and I AM rooting for her but why can't you let her make her own decisions? What's eating at YOU?

MEREDITH

Cam.

CAM

C'mon, Miss New Ager, Miss Get Ahead of the Curve & Read the Signs, put it on the line, what's going on with YOU?

EVIE

She's my little sister! I can't let her die! Our mama left and I was in charge and by God, she's not dying on my watch!

Silence. Cam nods she gets it. Several beats, then:

MEREDITH

O-kay... ah, I haven't had any adult beverages yet, why don't I drive your car to Fran's and then you'll be sober for the drive home, sound good?

Evie nods, she angles for the door.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)

(kissing Cam)

Don't wait up.

CAM

Drink some adult beverages for me.

MEREDITH

Will do.

The two women exit. Cam looks longingly out the window at them. Then she takes her drink and goes to work on the plaques. She looks up after a bit. Mighty lonely and quiet. She tosses a plaque aside and goes into a flashback.

SCENE 15

LIGHTS SHIFT, as a teenager, Cam goes to the dimly lit basement and works on her mom's storage chest.

CAM

... I can do this... I can do this...
 (checks her watch or
 a clock)
 4 a.m., wow, I've never stayed up
 this late before...

She's having trouble getting the pieces of wood to stay in place so she can put the nails in.

CAM (CONT'D)

I could use a third hand. Maybe I
 could grow one... great project for
 biology class...
 (boards fall, she
 throws hammer down)
 I need a vice... Gary, why don't we
 have a vice?!

A LIGHT COMES ON upstairs.

CAM (CONT'D)

Uh, hi, Dad... Nothing... Really?
 I haven't looked at a clock... Making
 something... No, it can't wait, it's
 a Christmas present... It's Friday
 night, I don't HAVE to... I'M NOT
 GOING TO BED. I'M GOING TO FINISH
 THIS! GO AWAY, I CAN DO IT MYSELF!

The LIGHT upstairs GOES OUT. A few beats, Cam whispers in the dark:

CAM (CONT'D)

Gary, please come back.

Silence. She looks at the pieces of wood, in despair. Flashback ends, LIGHTS SHIFT. Cam comes back into the present. She goes to the window and looks out, still lonely. She looks at the plaques... her heart's not in it. She eyes her phone... temptation... she gives in and speed dials a number.

CAM (CONT'D)

Klint, hey, it's Cam. And to you as
 well. I thought I'd confirm our
 appointment: Monday, ten o'clock, I
 have some table designs to show you.
 Great, great. Well, I wanted to
 catch you before you headed out 'cause
 I know you're the kind of guy who
 heads out on a Saturday night.
 (fake surprise)
 Oh -- that's tonight? Oh, I'm just
 puttering at home. Meredith has her
 teachers' party.

(MORE)

CAM (CONT'D)

Gosh, thanks, Klint, that's so sweet,
I'd love to. What time? Perfect.
All right, see you soon!
(hangs up)
Yes!

LIGHTS FADE as "Santa Claus is Comin' to Town" plays.

SCENE 16

MUSIC OUT, a few beats in DARKNESS. Then LIGHTS UP. A few days later. Cam and Meredith sit in the plastic chairs. Meredith has changed clothes. Cam is having trouble breathing and occasionally holds her side, which prompts:

MEREDITH

... I should've put salt on the front stoop. I noticed it when Evie and I went out...

CAM

You keep beating yourself up. It's water, well, ice, under the bridge. A broken rib is a piddly-ass nothing. Let's focus on positive mojo for the R.F.A. results today. Okay?

MEREDITH

... Okay.

CAM

Then we're gonna go watch little kids try and remember the words to 'Away in a Manger.' Okay?

MEREDITH

Okay.

CAM

I changed the windshield wipers on your car, they were really old.
(off Meredith's stare)
It's supposed to rain and sleet tonight.

MEREDITH

Even though you're in pain. When are you going to get over the whole lone-wolf self-reliant thing?

VOICE

(off)

Take a closer look.

A BRIGHT LIGHT COMES ON in front of the women, startling them.

They stand up and lean in to look at a "scan."

VOICE (CONT'D)

The black holes are where the tumors
used to be in your lungs.

CAM

... Wow.

MEREDITH

... Amazing.

CAM

... Gone.

MEREDITH

...Oh my God.

CAM

R.F.A. go, baby, go!

MEREDITH

It's a miracle!

CAM

We're gonna kick this mother --

VOICE

-- However:

The women quickly turn to face the voice again.

VOICE (CONT'D)

We looked more closely at your X-ray
from a few days ago...

CAM

My broken rib X-ray?

VOICE

Yes. There are some irregularities
in your ribs...

SCENE 17

The BRIGHT LIGHT CUTS OUT. They go home.

CAM

Fuck, fuck, fuck. I thought I was
home free!

MEREDITH

Oh, God...

CAM

Now what??

MEREDITH

... I know the doctor mentioned
freezing the rib, but she was really
stressing chemo again. The tumors
reared their ugly little heads without
the chemo.

CAM

Okay, driver's seat, driver's seat.
What do I believe in?? I believed
in the R.F.A.! And it worked! I
played by the rules!

MEREDITH

You think cancer plays by the rules?

They consider the lunacy of that concept.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)

Do you not believe in chemo? It did
work.

CAM

Well... sorta, yeah, well....

MEREDITH

Well?

CAM

I'm just getting started on Klint's
table and then...

MEREDITH

And then...?

CAM

... He liked my table design so much
he wants a dresser and a couple of
night stands for his bedroom.

MEREDITH

That's not your specialty.

CAM

I knew you'd say something. Meredith,
I can do it, plus those extra pieces
will pay a lot of my health insurance
for the second half of the year!

MEREDITH

When were you going to tell me about
Klint's new order?

CAM

I wanted it to be a surprise. I was
gonna tell you.

MEREDITH

When, the spring equinox?

CAM

Don't be silly.

MEREDITH

So when?

CAM

Jeeze, I was going to tell you on Christmas!

(off Meredith's look)

What?

MEREDITH

... I don't know if I believe you.

CAM

What??

MEREDITH

You hear the siren call of your wood shop and then finesse everything including your health to do the work.

CAM

I was going to tell you!

MEREDITH

If we weren't standing here talking about your rib tumors, I really doubt that Klint's new order would've come out until the dresser and end tables were well under way.

CAM

I don't appreciate being called a liar.

MEREDITH

If the shoe fits.

CAM

Oh, thanks a million, Meredith! And you know what? You're missing the Twilight Zone good side to all this: They wouldn't have found the rib tumors without that X-ray, and I wouldn't have had an X-ray without falling on the ice out front.

MEREDITH

Well, that's a stretch.

CAM

Not any more than you doing a power grid and taking credit for whatever good that brought.

MEREDITH

... Okay. So let's start with a clean slate: Anything else you'd like to tell me, any other furniture orders... health issues...?

A few beats.

CAM

... I wasn't getting a CD out of my truck that night. I fell coming back from Klint's Christmas party, which I went to spur of the moment the same night as your teacher party. The lone-wolf was lonely. I had a couple of beers and before you know it, Klint and I were yammering away, and then, boom, he placed the extra order.

MEREDITH

You went to a party and put your immune system at risk?? How dare you! You're not the only one on this slog through hell. Tell you what. You pick whichever fucking treatment you want! I don't care!

Meredith exits to the bedroom, slamming a door if possible. Cam is crushed. After a few beats, she gets her cell phone, takes a few moments to muster her courage and then speed dials.

CAM

Get off the plane before it crashes.
(Klint answers)
Hi, Klint. Good, fine, it's coming along. I've ordered the big piece for the table top. Yeah, I've never worked with Japanese Maple before, it's gonna be a real treat.

During the following, Meredith eventually comes to the doorway to listen.

CAM (CONT'D)

Uh, listen, I was being overly optimistic thinking I could get the table done by mid-January. It'll be more like mid-to-late February. No, nothing's wrong, I, I just have some strained ribs that are taking time to heal. No, I'm doing all the right things so healing is underway. Ah, yeah, the other order, I'm gonna play it by ear... Klint, I have to see how the healing goes. I promise, I will get to -- no, I'm not working on someone else's order. Klint, bear with me. Your furniture will get done and it'll be beautiful. Give me a little time. Okay. Okay. Bye.

She hangs up. Meredith enters.

CAM (CONT'D)

I've put off Klint. I'll call the doctor's office and have them set up the napalm drip at their earliest convenience.

After a few beats:

MEREDITH

... At the holiday party, Fran's husband mentioned there's an unexpected opening in the Comparative Lit department at I.U. this coming semester. The woman's having a rocky pregnancy. Her doctor just told her recently to do bed rest.

CAM

Is it full time? Does it have domestic partner benefits?

MEREDITH

I'd have to ask.

CAM

Well, if you don't get the benefits for being a part-timer, what's the point?

MEREDITH

It's a foot in the door. Then I could go for a full-time position.

CAM

Why not wait and see if the next round of chemo works?

MEREDITH

We won't know that for months. This job opening is now.

Stand-off.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)

I'm gonna get ready for tonight.

Meredith exits.

Cam hesitates, doesn't follow her. Instead she lights some Christmas candles, stares at them for several moments. Meredith re-enters, wearing a nice sweater. She gets her coat.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)

... You changing?

CAM

I don't know if I'm going.

MEREDITH

If you can go to Klint's party, you can go hear six-year-olds sing 'Away in a Manger.'

CAM

... I feel like a hypocrite. I don't go to church the rest of the year.

MEREDITH

That hasn't stopped you before on Christmas Eve.

CAM

... This year I'll look like I'm trying to curry favor, get in good so I'll get some good health in return.

MEREDITH

What if God is bigger than that? The lung tumors are gone. Let's go give thanks for that.

CAM

Why do we have to say thank you in a church?

MEREDITH

We don't. But I want to. Let's go feel we're part of something bigger. Something grander.

Cam finally nods.

CAM

... I'll go change.

Cam exits to the bedroom.

MEREDITH

I'll go warm up the car.

Meredith blows out the candles, exits out the front door.

SCENE 18

Flashback, as a teenager, Cam enters with a Polaroid picture. She pauses, looks anxious.

VOICE

You can go in now, she's awake.

Nervously Cam comes into her Mom's hospital room.

CAM

Hey, Mom... Merry Christmas. It's gonna snow tonight, eight inches they said.

(MORE)

CAM (CONT'D)

Good for my shoveling business. Uh, I made something for you. Dad wouldn't let me bring it so we borrowed a Polaroid camera from the Millers and I took a picture.

(shows it to her)

Can you see it? It's a chest, like Grandma has -- well, not as big, but it'll still hold a lot.

(beams)

Thanks. Not completely, Gary helped me. I finished it on my own, though.

(then)

... The cops found him in Oklahoma City. He called Uncle Herb's and asked for Kevin. Uncle Herb figured out who it was and called the cops. Gary had told Kevin he was at a McDonald's and the cops found him there.

(then)

When can you come home? I hate Dad's cooking.

(then)

I miss you.

SCENE 19

She exits. Meredith enters and sits in a plastic chair.

VOICE

Thanks for coming in.

MEREDITH

Thank you for seeing me.

VOICE

Bloomington North, huh?

MEREDITH

Eight years.

VOICE

Bill and Fran mentioned you do a super job of engaging the students.

MEREDITH

Well, Fran's great, too, and all three of us collaborated on a fund raising project last year for underprivileged kids.

VOICE

Hearts for Arts, I went to that -- you should be proud.

MEREDITH

Thank you.

VOICE

I don't see Comp Lit on your resume...

MEREDITH

I looked at the syllabus for the class and I've actually taught a few of the books that are required reading in it and I'm familiar with the rest.

VOICE

That's great. I, uh, noticed you don't have your Masters...

MEREDITH

I have a few classes towards it and I've already picked out what I want to take this summer.

VOICE

Not this semester?

CAM

(off)
Meredith?

MEREDITH

No.

VOICE

Any particular...?

MEREDITH

My life's a little full right now. Summer will be much better.

VOICE

Wonderful. Well, let us know when you've got that degree in hand.

CAM

(off)
Meredith?

Meredith leaves the "office" and goes home. Cam has crawled onto the couch.

SCENE 20

CAM (CONT'D)

Cold.

Meredith gets Cam a blanket and tucks her in, then goes to grade papers at the table.

CAM (CONT'D)

Bright.

Meredith gets up, turns the lights down, sits back down.

CAM (CONT'D)

Music.

Meredith gets up, brings an iPod to Cam.

MEREDITH
Wouldn't you feel better in bed?

CAM
Lonely.

Meredith tries to fit the ear buds in for Cam but Cam can't get comfortable.

CAM (CONT'D)
Everything hurts.

Meredith doesn't know what to do except for perhaps weep.

CAM (CONT'D)
Uh oh. Bucket.

MEREDITH
Still in the kitchen, damnit.

Meredith is torn between helping Cam walk and running for the bucket. She goes for helping Cam.

CAM
I can make it.

Cam gets to the kitchen but misses the bucket and throws up on the floor.

CAM (CONT'D)
I'm sorry. I'll clean it up.

MEREDITH
You can't.

Meredith grabs paper towels, mops up. Cam stands there looking forlorn. Cam tries to get a drink of water, Meredith starts to help her.

CAM
I can do it.

Cam drops the plastic cup or water bottle.

MEREDITH
No, you can't.

CAM
Yes, I can.

Meredith picks it up, hands it to her, Cam drops it again, Meredith picks it up and throws it in the sink hard: CRASH.

MEREDITH
No you can't.

CAM
... Okay. I can't.

A beat. Meredith puts the cup or bottle in Cam's hands and helps her take a few sips. They put the cup down together.

CAM (CONT'D)

I'll sleep in the bed.

She toddles off, Meredith walks behind her to make sure she doesn't fall. LIGHTS SHIFT.

SCENE 21

It's now late afternoon several days later. Evie takes down Christmas decorations and hangs up a "Welcome Home, Cam" banner. Meredith enters.

EVIE

Welcome ho --

She turns and sees Cam isn't with Meredith.

MEREDITH

... They wouldn't let me bring her home. She has no white blood cells.

EVIE

I'm so sorry.

(then)

Well, I also brought dinner that you can still enjoy: Chinese chicken salad and chocolate cake from the Uptown Cafe.

MEREDITH

Thank you.

EVIE

How's she doing?

MEREDITH

Not throwing up as much. And with the I.V., she's not dehydrated now.

(then)

I've never seen her this sick.

(then)

... I pressured her to do chemo.

EVIE

It worked before. That's not pressure. That's playing the odds. You aren't personally responsible for the side effects.

MEREDITH

What if I mess this up, what if I talk her into or out of something -- and I'm wrong?

EVIE

Meredith, you don't have that kind of power.

MEREDITH

Well what kind of power do I have?!

EVIE

... I don't know.

MEREDITH

But you've had such amazing success with your sister -- and I'm not saying it's in your hands alone --

EVIE

-- It's not, Meredith. I'm a very small piece of it.

MEREDITH

(uh oh)

... How's she doing?

A beat.

EVIE

I don't know. She's not speaking to me at the moment.

MEREDITH

Why not??

EVIE

Now that she's off Tamoxifen, she wants to drive the car all by herself. And now she can run it into the ditch.

MEREDITH

Is she making bad decisions?

EVIE

Maybe. Our aunt had dinner with her. She said something was fishy.

MEREDITH

You need to talk to her.

EVIE

Well, that's going to be tough since she won't return my calls.

MEREDITH

Maybe your aunt can get through to her.

EVIE

I was the one sweating the details. I did all the research, I collared the doctors and nurses in the hallway.

MEREDITH

You did a great job, Evie.

EVIE

I don't know what to do next.

MEREDITH

You can pray.

EVIE

Yeah, I can pray and pray and if Sharon chooses to skip her treatment or work 22 hours a day, well, then, why bother?!

Silence. Meredith nods, then considers long and hard before she shares this story:

MEREDITH

... When I was in college I got a call from my sister Melissa, who was still at home. Our mom had gone on a bender and fallen and cracked her head open. The latest in five million crises. I always went back. This time... I figured, why bother. She died from that head injury.

EVIE

You couldn't save her.

Meredith shakes her head no. They stare at each other and contemplate the ramifications of coming to that moment in their lives. Finally:

EVIE (CONT'D)

Keep me posted.

MEREDITH

Thank you for everything.

Evie nods, exits. A few beats, then LIGHTS SHIFT.

SCENE 22

Cam slowly enters, takes off layers, looks around.

CAM

A banner, cool.

MEREDITH

It's from Evie.

CAM

Did she just hang it and leave?

MEREDITH

She brought it last week. It's her peace offering from when you two went at it a few weeks ago.

CAM

She's a good egg.

(then)

How's Sharon?

MEREDITH

Okay.

CAM

Okay, meaning..?

MEREDITH

Okay.

CAM

Lying isn't your strong suit.

MEREDITH

You just got home, you need to rest.

CAM

I won't rest if I think you're worried, so...

MEREDITH

I don't want to talk about it. I need to grade essays, I'm so behind.

CAM

Meredith.

A beat, she can barely say it:

MEREDITH

... Sharon's got stage 4 bone cancer.

CAM

... Crap.

MEREDITH

They're giving her just a few weeks to live.

CAM

Crap, crap, crap.

Meredith breaks down.

MEREDITH

Oh, God, oh, God...

CAM

Mere, I'm not Sharon. I'm not Bob crashing his plane. I did chemo -- twice -- I did the R.F.A., I'm gonna do the rib freeze, I changed my diet, I've done acupuncture.

This doesn't penetrate Meredith's fatalistic outlook in the least.

CAM (CONT'D)

Look, I'll even...

She gets a tablet and a pen.

CAM (CONT'D)
 ... I'll even do a power grid.

She draws the nine squares.

CAM (CONT'D)
 See. Right here, right now. Huh,
 my name goes in the center -- right?
 And then, number one support --
Meredith -- put her there, top a the
 chart. Then...
 (a beat)
 My mom.

She writes that in. And what started out as a semi-flip
 exercise has turned serious.

CAM (CONT'D)
 Miss you. Love you. Wish you were
 here.
 (then)
 Music. Gotta have tunes. Remember
 driving back from that trip to Utah --
 what we played til the grooves wore
 down?

MEREDITH
 (a fond memory but
 she's still wary)
 Bruce.

CAM
 Darn tootin'.
 (writes it in)
 Live from Madison Square Garden.
 'My Love Will Not Let You Down.'
 Okay.
 (then)
 My furniture. Think I can get the
 dining room table on one of these
 squares?

Meredith smiles.

CAM (CONT'D)
 She's got her sense of humor back,
 folks.
 (then)
 Okay, what can I fit on here?

Cam looks around at the knick knacks scattered around their
 home...

MEREDITH
 The little chest?

CAM
 It's from so long ago. It doesn't
 really count.

MEREDITH

It's wood. You made it.

CAM

What else, what else...

MEREDITH

Well, I think it's adorable, Popsicle sticks and all.

CAM

I'm just gonna write in "woodworking," that can stand for all of the stuff I've made. Oh -- and my running group...

(writes in one box)

Judy... Jo... Gena... Oh -- I could add your sister and her family, they've always been great.

(writes)

Melissa... Alan... and Brooke.

(a few beats, stumped)

What did you put on your grid?

MEREDITH

Most of the same things. I put Nephew Andy on there.

CAM

Oh, how could I forget?

(writes Andy in)

Gotta get going on your toy chest, buddy.

(looks at the grid)

See, I'm not the Lone Ranger.

Meredith smiles, then:

MEREDITH

Gary?

Cam weighs putting him on the grid.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)

... You know, it's kind've funny, but without Gary, there's no Andy. And I know Gary's not Mr. Supportive but without him having taught you woodworking, would you be who you are today?

LIGHTS SHIFT, Cam goes into a flashback.

SCENE 23

Gary, who is now more clamped down and edgy, is looking at the chest Cam made for their mom.

GARY

... Finished it, huh?

CAM
Yeah. It sucks.

GARY
... Not bad but it's a little sloppy.

CAM
If you'd been here.

He shrugs that off as if it was nothing.

CAM (CONT'D)
Christmas was a million laughs.

GARY
Was Mom home?

CAM
What do you think?
(then re: the chest)
It doesn't even have brass hinges
like you promised.

Guilt gnaws at him. Finally:

GARY
Uh, listen, I know I didn't get you
any presents but since I'm going off
to Northwestern next fall, I'm not
taking my tools with me to the dorm.
You can have 'em.

CAM
I don't want 'em.

He wants to say something else but can't quite humble himself
enough for a mea culpa... instead:

GARY
... Okay then. Be that way.

He exits. Cam to the wooden chest:

CAM
WHY DID I EVEN BOTHER?!

LIGHTS SHIFT. Cam comes back into the present, back to the
table, still distraught.

MEREDITH
... Sweetie, it's your grid. You
put anything or anyone you want on
there.

Cam's still undecided.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)
How 'bout I rustle us up something
easy for dinner?

Meredith angles for the kitchen, Cam stares at the grid for several moments, then finally puts the pen down, undecided. As a distraction, she rifles through today's mail and finds something interesting, opens it. She's stunned.

CAM

Mere...

MEREDITH

Hmm?

CAM

Look at this. From my running group:
a gift certificate for Judy's
acupuncturist.

Meredith comes over, reads a card plus a gift certificate.

MEREDITH

Five hundred dollars. You run with
a good crowd.

(then)

Cam, did you see, there are two of
these in here...

CAM

What??

MEREDITH

This one is for massages.

Eventually they both find themselves staring at the grid.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)

... Are you going to say it doesn't
count since they mailed it yesterday?

CAM

... No.

(then)

It counts.

Meredith nods in agreement.

CAM (CONT'D)

I'm gonna go take a nap.

MEREDITH

Okay. I'll make dinner.

Cam exits. Meredith straightens up the table and finds an unopened official-looking letter. Uh oh. She takes a deep breath and then opens it. Reads it. Looks horrified.

VOICE

You've been teaching for eight years?

LIGHTS SHIFT.

SCENE 24

Meredith hustles over to a plastic chair.

MEREDITH

Ah, yes, at Bloomington North. Six
before that in Indianapolis.

VOICE

(a little skeptical)
So you've never had an administrative
job before?

MEREDITH

(her best spin on it)
No, but I set up a Hearts for Arts
Program, to help under-privileged
kids. It was a lot of administrative
work. I've also spent a lot of time
guiding students and this seems like
an extension of that.

VOICE

Well, this isn't counseling. It's
lining up seminars, programs,
training, staying in contact with
different employers from all over
the Midwest. It's about paperwork,
details, follow-through.

MEREDITH

Yes, I-I knew that. I just meant...
it's all connected... helping
students. I'll get you our start-up
plan from Hearts for Arts.

VOICE

Very good. So, why switch jobs right
now?

MEREDITH

I need a new challenge. It's time
for a change.

VOICE

Wouldn't you miss teaching?

MEREDITH

I'm sure I would at first. But I
don't want to be one of those teachers
that doesn't know when to exit.

VOICE

You seem fairly young, I can't imagine
you've overstayed your welcome
already.

Meredith is speechless... sad.

MEREDITH

I... I like being pro-active...

VOICE

Okay, well, we have a website where you can download the application form. Candidates need to submit it by March 30th.

MEREDITH

Okay.

(then)

This job has the same benefits as faculty positions, yes?

VOICE

Yes.

CAM

But you wouldn't be teaching?

Meredith stands, looks as if she has the weight of the world on her shoulders, exits and heads for home. LIGHTS SHIFT.

SCENE 25

MEREDITH

... No.

CAM

What kind of job is it?

MEREDITH

Associate Director at I.U.'s Career Center. I'd be making sure programs are up and running and serving the students.

CAM

It's an administrative job, isn't it?

Guilty as charged.

CAM (CONT'D)

... I found your new power grid. For Teacher of the Year. I saw it on your desk when I was putting a phone message there. I didn't mean to pry.

Meredith nods.

CAM (CONT'D)

Meredith, keep on teaching.

MEREDITH

Cam, that letter from the insurance company. Your rates are going up by 35 percent!

CAM

Fuck the insurance company -- you shouldn't have to give up your job!

Cam picks up the insurance letter from the table and throws it.

CAM (CONT'D)

Ow!

MEREDITH

What?

CAM

Nothing. Just threw too hard. I worked on Klint's table yesterday, my back muscles aren't used to getting a workout.

(then)

How do you know I.U.'s insurance company won't deny me coverage? I have a pre-existing condition.

MEREDITH

It's possible. But so is you not earning enough to pay your insurance and hospital bills. I've got to at least try to --

CAM

-- Why don't we see if the chemo and rib freeze work before you change jobs?

MEREDITH

I can't wait. The Career Center wants the person to start in May.

CAM

What about our trip to Oregon to see Crater Lake in July??

MEREDITH

I know, honey, I thought about that. And I want to go more than you know. I was thinking we could postpone it til next summer --

CAM

-- No, I'd have to change the plane and hotel reservations. This was my Christmas present to you!

Meredith nods, her heart in her throat.

CAM (CONT'D)

Don't you think the chemo and the rib freeze will work??

A tiny beat of hesitation from Meredith, which speaks volumes. Nevertheless, she says:

MEREDITH

I'm sure they will help. But the cancer has been a moving target.

CAM

Well, okay if not chemo and freezing, then look at what just came in the mail. Your sister and her family sent a care package! Monty Python movies from Alan, a goofy book of riddles from Brooke, and a packet of basil seeds from Melissa -- and I was assigned a great new massage therapist today -- her name's Helen -- that was my mom's name -- so two more squares on the grid -- the grid is working!

Cam defies her to challenge her.

CAM (CONT'D)

... Why don't you have faith?

MEREDITH

I have faith. It's just not blind faith. I don't want to be devastated financially if you can't do your job. Don't take this as me not believing in you.

A beat, Cam takes her hand.

CAM

... Let me take you out to dinner.

SCENE 26

LIGHTS SHIFT as Cam leads her over to the plastic chairs. She pulls one out for Meredith, angling it so it'll be facing her chair. Then she takes a seat and begins her wooing.

CAM

Deepest lake in the entire U.S. Practically the clearest water anywhere in the world. And we're gonna do the whole scenic drive -- 33 miles and 20 overlooks. Smell that pine air -- it's gonna take your breath away. Huh?

MEREDITH

(a little reserved)
It sounds beautiful...

CAM

(to the unseen waiter)

A glass of Chardonnay and a cranberry juice, thanks.

(to Meredith)

... And?

MEREDITH

What if you need some kind of treatment this summer, like radiation?

CAM

Radiation is a breeze.

(then)

Let me tell you about Crater Lake Lodge. It's been completely refurbished, and as you walk into the Great Hall: Craftsman style oak furniture, big stone fireplaces, bark on the columns, high ceilings with wood beams... The lodge sits on a thousand foot cliff above the lake, which we'll be able to see as we're dining on fresh grilled trout dripping in sweet butter.

Meredith smiles.

CAM (CONT'D)

Road trip?

MEREDITH

Road trip. God. Yes. Okay. I'm there. I so need this.

CAM

It's gonna be great.

They kiss. The unseen waiter comes back.

CAM (CONT'D)

(re: the drinks)

Thank you.

(then)

What are your specials this evening? We were hoping for that wild mushroom ravioli.

VOICE

(off)

The rib tumors have shrunk... but how long has your back been in pain? We really should take a look at your vertebrae.

The women head for home. LIGHTS SHIFT.

SCENE 27

MEREDITH

You're waiting?!

CAM

Yes.

MEREDITH

You need to get a scan of your spine now.

CAM

I need to get ahead of the curve. Remember Sharon's first scan, the one that turned out to be wrong. I'm skipping that step and going directly to them saying I have strained back muscles and NOT that I have cancer in my vertebrae.

Meredith can only look at her in shock.

CAM (CONT'D)

Watch this.

She gets her cell phone, speed dials a number.

CAM (CONT'D)

Hey, Klint, how's it going? Good. Yes, the table and chairs, almost done, looking very classy. I'm thinking a couple of weeks. Look, I still have a rib issue and healing needs to be on the front burner. So, I need to cancel your second order. Okay. Very good. Thank you. Bye.

(hangs up)

He's in shock but he'll get over it.

(looks right at
Meredith)

Here we go.

Meredith looks pretty stunned. BLACKOUT. A few beats.

SCENE 28

LIGHTS UP on their home. A few days later. Cam's cutting out magazine and comic book pictures. Meredith enters, now in a black blazer. She's tense as she looks around for something.

CAM

... I found these cool robot comic books. I think Andy'll get a kick out of 'em.

MEREDITH

You're cutting them up -- not giving him the whole comic book?

CAM

Gonna decorate his toy chest with them. When, y'know, I eventually have the strength to build it. For now --

She snips the air with the scissors.

CAM (CONT'D)

... You're not listening to me, are you?

MEREDITH

No, frankly, the clock's ticking and I can't find my reading glasses.

CAM

Try next to the bed.

MEREDITH

I did.

CAM

Try your desk.

MEREDITH

I did.

CAM

You could buy some more. Cheap ones at the drugstore.

MEREDITH

I need my winter coat. It's supposed to sleet later. Why can't spring just COME. It's cold, it's hot, it's sunny, it's snowing.

CAM

... The funeral's inside, isn't it?

MEREDITH

Yes, but the burial is grave-side.

CAM

... You're going to that, too?

MEREDITH

Evie needs some non-family support.

She has her coat, continues hunting for the glasses, is throwing things like pillows and books thither and yon.

CAM

Honey, what in the world do you need to read at the funeral?!

MEREDITH

Directions!

(MORE)

MEREDITH (CONT'D)

I need to read the directions! After we leave Southport we're going to East Bumfuck where the cemetery is.

Cam gets up and grabs Meredith by the shoulders.

CAM

Buy cheap glasses at the drugstore.

(then)

I talked to a woman up at the Mayo clinic who had the hot melt glue thing done on her vertebrae. She can barely walk now.

MEREDITH

... I overheard.

CAM

Look at me. Look at me!

MEREDITH

I have a funeral to go to!

CAM

You're not going to mine!

MEREDITH

When are you getting the scan of your back? The longer you wait, the more the cancer can spread!

CAM

I'll make a decision tonight. I just... I...

(then)

Give Evie my best. Tell her... tell her thank you. And I mean it.

Meredith nods. They hug.

CAM (CONT'D)

Drive safe.

MEREDITH

I will.

Meredith exits. Cam looks unsteady. She calls to the heavens.

CAM

Bob, God, whoever is listening, I need some help here. Got some big decisions to make!

A few beats, she marches to the dining room table, picks up the scissors as if to attack something. She glances down. Sees the grid. Picks it up.

CAM (CONT'D)

You with me or against me?

SCENE 29

LIGHTS SHIFT as Meredith enters with her purse, holding a road map and directions. She's angling for the plastic chairs. Evie enters, also in a winter coat, maybe with an umbrella.

EVIE

... Thank you for coming.

MEREDITH

Of course. Didn't see you following me.

EVIE

... It's so damn muddy out here.

MEREDITH

At my mother's funeral, it was 25 below. I don't know how they dug the earth, it was so frozen.

(then)

... Cam sends her best. She said to tell you thanks.

Evie doesn't know that to say to that.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)

She's really in the driver's seat now. You inspired her to do that.

EVIE

How's she..?

MEREDITH

In the middle of the rib freeze right now. She let go of a work order so she can concentrate on healing. I'm... I'm so proud of her.

(then)

Going back to Southport for the family gathering and the casseroles?

Evie shrugs, tired.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)

Been a long day.

EVIE

I need a break. They don't understand.

MEREDITH

... Want to come with me? I'm taking the scenic route home.

Evie looks puzzled.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)

Remember the teachers' retreat we went to, Fran had it at her uncle's farm near Anderson?

Evie nods.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)

Mounds State Park is practically next door. Native Americans used to live there. Fran would find arrowheads in the cornfields when she was a kid.

(then)

She pointed to a sacred mound at the edge of the property. She went out there when Bill had that melanoma scare.

EVIE

... What are you going to do?

MEREDITH

... I don't know. But I'm going to do something. And then... that's it.

A beat. Evie comes over to join her and they both sit in the plastic chairs as a "car." Meredith hands her the map and directions.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)

You get to be navigator. I don't have my glasses.

Evie unfolds the map and looks at the directions, Meredith mimes starting the car and pulling out. SOUND OF RAIN starts.

SCENE 30

LIGHTS SHIFT to Cam, stewing, pacing, snipping the air with scissors.

CAM

... Ideas come, they always come...
(to the heavens)
I'm all ears.

She paces some more, and then finally in frustration, tosses the scissors high in the air, letting them land hard on the table. She blinks. That triggers a memory for her. Flashback. Gary enters, wearing black pants, a dress shirt and a funky tie.

GARY

We're leaving in a couple of minutes. You're not going dressed like that, are you?

CAM

I'm not going.

GARY

You have to go.

CAM

There's no law.

GARY

Well, I'm not going alone.

CAM

Dad'll be there.

Gary rolls his eyes. Then he notices the wooden chest.

GARY

Y'know, this isn't half bad.

CAM

Oh, please. Don't suck up just to get me to go to the funeral.

GARY

I'm not sucking up.

(then)

The corners are shitty 'cause you didn't use the mitre box but other than that...

CAM

... the Titanic was a great ship.

GARY

It's a good chest and it's the first thing you've ever made.

CAM

Well, it doesn't matter 'cause it was a complete waste of time.

GARY

No, it wasn't. You didn't know how things were gonna turn out --

CAM

-- Oh, sure, like everything was gonna be --

GARY

-- You didn't know. You did things 'cause you wanted to -- it was the right thing to do --

CAM

-- It was stupid! The chest was stupid!

GARY

No. It. Wasn't. I didn't place at the Soap Box Derby, all I knew was that I wanted to make a car. And you know what? I ended up putting a bunch of stuff in my college application essays like how I made that car -- and I ended up getting in to Northwestern.

Cam makes a sound like she's blowing him off. Gary grabs a hammer from the toolbox and takes one big swing at the chest Cam made for her mother, SMASHING it. Cam looks as if she's been shot.

GARY (CONT'D)

NOW TELL ME IT DIDN'T MATTER.

Cam doesn't know whether to cry or hit him.

SCENE 31

LIGHTS SHIFT to the "car," Meredith mimes pulling over. Sound of POUNDING RAIN. She and Evie look out the window.

MEREDITH

Jesus.

EVIE

Cats and dogs.

MEREDITH

Drove all this way.

EVIE

Kinda like life. Get to be 35, 40, 45, drive all that way... and where are you?

MEREDITH

Well, we're here. We could pray right here. Right on the highway. We don't need a holy site. We don't need some place special. How about that?

Meredith closes her eyes, Evie does, too.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)

Please let Cam heal. In whatever way she needs to. I've done all I can and I'm turning it over to whatever sacred energy is around us. Please help her.

(then)

Please guide me to make the right decision about my job.

(MORE)

MEREDITH (CONT'D)

(then)

Please watch over Sharon's spirit on the next leg of her journey. Please watch over Evie and let her know she did the best she could and she's profoundly changed my life and Cam's. Thank you.

EVIE

... Amen.

MEREDITH

Amen.

Eyes open, they hug. A few beats, then Evie exits as the LIGHTS SHIFT to Cam.

SCENE 32

The present, Cam goes back to the dining room table, gets a pen and writes on the grid.

CAM

... All filled up.

Then Cam starts a letter.

CAM (CONT'D)

Dear Andy: Happy birthday from your Aunt Cam. This chest is to hold whatever treasures you have.

She gets up, leaves pen and paper behind and walks downstage as she continues reciting the letter.

CAM (CONT'D)

Your dad helped me with a chest kind've like this when we were kids.

(a beat)

He taught me a lot about woodworking. He gave me my first set of tools. He showed me how to use the mitre box. I started my very own company because of him. He taught me to pay attention to the details... to give everything my best shot... and that how I craft things actually matters.

(then)

Tell him thanks.

She stops. Cam's now standing next to Meredith, who's still sitting in her "car." After a moment, Cam sits next to her.

SCENE 33

They sit quietly looking forward. We don't know where they are. Back at the oncology ward? The great beyond? A WHITE LIGHT shines in front of them.

MEREDITH
... I like this moment.

CAM
The expectation?

MEREDITH
Yeah.

CAM
Me, too.

A few beats.

MEREDITH
Chilly?

CAM
Yeah.

MEREDITH
Want some coffee?

CAM
Sure.

Meredith reaches in her big purse and pulls out a thermos. She pours coffee into the thermos's cup-lid; Cam takes the first turn drinking it, then hands it back to Meredith. The LIGHT has been subtly shifting from the white to now pink.

MEREDITH
The sky's starting to turn pink.

CAM
Yeah.

MEREDITH
... I can't believe I'm up this early on vacation.

CAM
... I can't believe the Career Center gave you an advance on your vacation time so we could do this.

MEREDITH
They're Good People. And the Director is so much more fun to work with than Ed. Who knew?
(toasting)
Farewell Jane Eyre, fuck you Principal Ed.

CAM
He did give you Teacher of the Year.

MEREDITH
He handed me the plaque. The committee gave the award.

Meredith smiles broadly, takes a drink.

CAM

Do you have the map? I want to check out the scenic route to Mt. Hood.

Meredith hands her the large purse.

MEREDITH

It's in there somewhere...

Cam digs... and pulls out... two maps, one of which is folded open. She looks at it.

CAM

Indiana?

MEREDITH

Oh, from Sharon's funeral.

CAM

... What's this highlighted road?

MEREDITH

... A little side trip I took with Evie.

CAM

You didn't mention a side trip.

Cam squints at the map.

CAM (CONT'D)

Mounds State Park?

MEREDITH

A sacred Indian site on a farm near there...

(a beat)

A healing site. Fran had told me about it. It was pouring rain when Evie and I got there and just as we were about to leave... it stopped. So we got out -- in our dress shoes and slogged our way to the sacred mound. We laughed ourselves silly. Boy, we both needed that. Then I picked up some dirt there. Well, mud.

She grins, Cam stares at her, amazed.

CAM

When were you going to tell me this?

MEREDITH

It worked, didn't it?

VOICE

(off)

... Your vertebrae are fine. You must have strained your back muscles.

CAM

I thought it was the grid. And me adding Gary's name.

(then)

... What did you do with the dirt?

MEREDITH

I brought some back in a bag. And put it on your garden.

CAM

... Well, no wonder the basil grew so tall.

They smile. The sun is rising now, the light is GOLDEN and GLOWING.

MEREDITH

Look at that.

CAM

Yeah.

A few beats of appreciation, and then:

CAM (CONT'D)

It's not always perfect weather here. The guy at the visitors' center said sometimes there are big clouds and the lake looks ominous or it's covered in fog...

MEREDITH

... Not today.

(then)

My God, the water's so clear...

CAM

And deep.

MEREDITH

I wonder if you can see all the way to the bottom.

CAM

I don't think it's that clear.

They chuckle.

CAM (CONT'D)

We could get out of the car and see.

MEREDITH

In a bit -- maybe the sun'll warm things up.

CAM

Yeah, chilly for July.

A beat, as the SUN RISES and they look at the magnificent view:

CAM (CONT'D)

Mile one. Thirty-two to go. Nineteen more overlooks.

MEREDITH

Yeah.

They hold hands. LIGHTS BRIGHTEN. First we hear John Hiatt's "Have a Little Faith in Me."

LIGHTS & MUSIC FADE OUT...

(For the curtain call, we get Bruce Springsteen doing "My Love Will Not Let You Down.")