

Trees Don't Mourn the Autumn

by

Alice F. Chang, PhD

and

Paul J. Donnelly

For rights and permissions contact
paul@pauldonnellyplays.com

“In this crisis, I watch the cycle of the seasons. Trees do not mourn their autumn as the leaves fall at the appointed time. New ones are ready to replace them.”

- Jenilu Schoolman
“Within Measured Boundaries”

For rights and permissions contact
paul@pauldonnellyplays.com

Cast of Characters

Peter Alpert, MD, Emily's oncologist.*

Allison Cooper, 28, Emily's daughter.

Margot Hudson, MD, a near contemporary of Emily's, her surgeon.

Emily Lin, PhD, late 40's-early 50's, a clinical psychologist with breast cancer.

Walter K. Lin, PhD, mid-'80's, her father.

Agnes Lin, early-80's, her mother.

Byron Melamed, MD, a particularly insensitive gynecologist.*

Rachel Olsen, 50's, a former patient of Emily's.**

Darryl Polk, late 30's, a neighbor and friend.

Enrique San Marcos, 24, Emily's first husband.

William Siwek, MD, Emily's radiologist.*

Gretchen Wulfers, late 50's, Darryl's aunt.**

David Wulfers, early 60's, her husband.*

Technician's Voice, female.



*The same actor can easily play Drs. Alpert, Melamed & Siwek and David Wulfers.

** The same actor can easily play Rachel Olson and Gretchen Wulfers.

The authors are certainly open to other multiple casting.

For rights and permissions contact
paul@pauldonnellyplays.com

Trees Don't Mourn the Autumn

ACT I

Scene 1

Setting: The WULFERS' living room. September, 1997.

At rise: GRETCHEN WULFERS is peering through a large, ornate brass kaleidoscope. Her husband, DAVID, is watching her rather too intently.

GRETCHEN (not looking at him)
Would you PLEASE stop staring ...

DAVID
I'm sorry...

GRETCHEN
If you don't stop this incessant hovering and watching over, you'll have me feeling like Ingrid Bergman in *Gaslight* ...

DAVID
I was taken aback. Momentarily. That thing has lain on the table for ... what? six years? seven? I've never seen you lift it before, except to dust underneath it.

GRETCHEN sets the kaleidoscope down gingerly. SHE winces from the strain this seems to put on her right arm. The kaleidoscope slips from her grasp just as she is about to set it in its holder. SHE is startled, but manages to catch it with her left hand and set it back in its cradle.

DAVID has to visibly restrain himself from rushing to her assistance.

GRETCHEN
I've got it.

DAVID
Of course.

GRETCHEN
And how is dinner coming?

For rights and permissions contact
paul@pauldonnellyplays.com

DAVID (lightly)
All is in readiness ...

GRETCHEN (agitated)
Oh hell!! I shouldn't have lifted that damn thing. (Gesturing toward her right breast.)
Excuse me ... I need to adjust ... (she rushes past him and off)

DAVID
Do you need any help with the straps?

GRETCHEN (after a beat, from off)
Yes, please ...

Sound of a doorbell.

DAVID
Damn! Let me get that. I'll get them settled and be right with you.

DAVID goes off and returns followed by his wife's
nephew, DARRYL POLK, and his neighbor, EMILY LIN.

DAVID
We really appreciate your taking the time to visit ...

EMILY
I hope I can be helpful.

DAVID
If you'll excuse me just a moment, I'll let Gretchen know you're here.

EMILY
Of course.

DARRYL
Something must be up.

EMILY
That's possible.

DARRYL
I really appreciate your doing this ...

EMILY
Take a breath ...

For rights and permissions contact
paul@pauldonnellyplays.com

DARRYL

I don't even know what I think this is going to accomplish.

EMILY

If we enjoy an evening with your aunt and uncle will that be a bad thing?

DARRYL

Her breast is actually bleeding. They ignored it until the tumor broke through the skin ... I don't see how ... I just want to shake them both!

EMILY

I told myself that I'd strained a muscle lifting weights ...

DARRYL

At least that had some basis in reality.

EMILY

For two months after I stopped going to the gym?

DARRYL

It's just so frustrating ...

EMILY (shrugs)

Sometimes denial is extraordinarily resilient ...

DARRYL

They're not stupid people ...

EMILY

Smart people get very frightened, too.

DARRYL

I know ... it's just ... well ... you know ...

EMILY

Maybe, maybe not ... Who is she besides a woman with cancer?

DARRYL

Em?

EMILY

You haven't said much about her, except what you fear.

DARRYL

It's hard not to be preoccupied ...

For rights and permissions contact

paul@pauldonnellyplays.com

EMILY

Don't do that.

DARRYL

I'm supposed to join them in pretending not to notice ...

EMILY

What does she do for a living? What's her favorite food? What were her childhood dreams? What is she proudest of having accomplished? What is her greatest regret?

DARRYL

You think you got me, do you? Well, she's vice chancellor for finance at Pima Community College. ... She's mad for pecan pie and anything connected to raspberries. She always wanted to be an astronomer. ... Let's see ... She learned to sail in her forties.

EMILY (teasing)

You missed regret ...

DARRYL

My cousin Sharon is schizophrenic and has been in an institution for nearly ten years.

EMILY

Oh my.

DARRYL

Why are we playing 20 questions?

EMILY

You didn't start loving her when the tumor appeared, don't stop seeing the rest of her just because the tumor is there.

DARRYL

Is that how you felt?

EMILY shrugs

I suppose ... Sometimes. Sometimes still feel. That. And sad. And angry. And sometimes grateful. And sometimes absolutely nothing at all.

DARRYL

Where do you think she's at with it?

For rights and permissions contact
paul@pauldonnellyplays.com

EMILY

I wouldn't presume to guess. I can only tell you where I was at in retrospect. Most of the time it was much too confusing in the moment ...

GRETCHEN (entering)

Dr. Lin, it's such a pleasure. Darryl has told us so much ...

EMILY

My pleasure as well, Mrs. Wulfers.

GRETCHEN

Gretchen, please.

EMILY

Then Emily ...

GRETCHEN

Of course. Thank you. David why don't our guests have beverages? Honestly!

DAVID

May I offer you something to drink, Emily? Darryl?

DARRYL

I could go for a beer. Em?

EMILY

That sounds good to me.

DAVID

Gretchen?

GRETCHEN

Make it a round. We can clink mugs and sing rounds and have ourselves a regular Oktoberfest!

DARRYL

Shall I give you a hand?

DAVID

I'd appreciate that.

DAVID and DARRYL exit.

GRETCHEN (sitting)

Shall we ...

For rights and permissions contact
paul@pauldonnellyplays.com

EMILY

Thank you. (a beat) Darryl tells me you sail, I wouldn't think there'd be much opportunity in the desert.

GRETCHEN

What an odd thing for him to mention. I don't any more. I learned back east. I decided the only way I would survive turning 40 would be to start some kind of grand adventure ...So I learned to sail ...

EMILY

How long have you been in Tucson?

GRETCHEN

Almost seven years. When my husband retired from the Navy ... we decided to make a big change ... I found a position at PIMA and we came here. ... Are you a native?

EMILY (laughing)

Hardly. I went to U of A years ago, but I've only been back about 4 years. I hadn't even been back a year when I got my diagnosis.

GRETCHEN

Which one?

EMILY

Excuse me? ... Oh. The left.

GRETCHEN

You really can't tell. It's not just the prosthesis. I would have expected it to effect your posture or your gait ...

EMILY

Are you concerned about losing ...

GRETCHEN (shaking her head)

No. I'm sure that won't be necessary.

EMILY

Have you seen a surgeon ...

GRETCHEN

Heavens, no. I have an appointment for a mammogram on Nov 18.

EMILY

That's nearly six weeks away ...

For rights and permissions contact
paul@pauldonnellyplays.com

GRETCHEN

Exactly. I'm sure if there was a problem they would have made it sooner ...

EMILY

Are you with the college's HMO?

GRETCHEN

Yes.

EMILY

And they're making you wait six weeks for a mammogram?

GRETCHEN

It's annoying, I'll grant you. But I'm not going to make a big fuss over a simple cyst.

EMILY

Gretchen ...

GRETCHEN

Yes?

EMILY

I'm certainly not a physician, but this doesn't sound like a simple cyst. When a tumor is growing so rapidly, time is of the essence.

GRETCHEN

Who said anything about a tumor?

EMILY

Surely, your primary care physician ...

GRETCHEN

Wanted the mammogram to rule out the highly unlikely possibility ...

EMILY

Is that what he said?

GRETCHEN

I'm sure your experience has made you cautious, Dr. Lin. But I'm not even certain why Darryl thought it would be applicable to my situation.

DAVID and DARRYL return, each carrying two steins of beer.

For rights and permissions contact
paul@pauldonnellyplays.com

Here you go ... DARRYL (handing one to EMILY)

Thanks. EMILY

DAVID hands a stein to GRETCHEN who is careful to take it with her left hand. EMILY watches carefully, GRETCHEN's eyes meet hers.

GRETCHEN
The cyst does cause me some discomfort.

EMILY
I was lead to believe that because my breast hurt that it was unlikely to be a malignancy. You can't let yourself believe only the comforting things ...

GRETCHEN
Did Darryl also mention our daughter, Dr. Lin?

DAVID
What's this about ...

GRETCHEN
She is in a mental hospital. There is very little hope of her getting better ..

EMILY
I'm sorry, that must be difficult for you ...

GRETCHEN
It makes it very hard for me to have any kind of faith ... But I do know my dues are paid in full. Not even a son-of-a-bitch like god would ask more of me.

EMILY
No.

Lights fade to BLACK.

Trees Don't Mourn the Autumn

ACT I

Scene 2

Setting: A Mammography Center, January 1994.

At rise: Lights come back up on EMILY in a grey hospital gown. She is standing next to a chair and staring out.

TECHNICIAN'S VOICE

Okay. Hold your breath.

Using her hands, EMILY squeezes her right breast top to bottom.

TECHNICIAN'S VOICE

Hold it. ... Hold it

A light flashes.

TECHNICIAN'S VOICE

Okay. Breath normally.

EMILY relaxes.

TECHNICIAN'S VOICE

Okay. Hold your breath.

EMILY squeezes her breast again, side to side.

TECHNICIAN'S VOICE

Hold it. ... Hold it

A light flashes.

TECHNICIAN'S VOICE

Okay. Breath normally.

EMILY relaxes.

TECHNICIAN'S VOICE

Okay. Hold your breath.

For rights and permissions contact

paul@pauldonnellyplays.com

EMILY squeezes her breast again, diagonally.

TECHNICIAN'S VOICE

Hold it. ... Hold it

A light flashes.

TECHNICIAN'S VOICE

Okay. Breath normally.

EMILY relaxes.

TECHNICIAN'S VOICE

Okay. Hold your breath.

EMILY pushes her breast into her chest, hard.

TECHNICIAN'S VOICE

Hold it ... Hold it ...

A light flashes.

TECHNICIAN'S VOICE

Okay. Breath normally.

EMILY relaxes.

TECHNICIAN'S VOICE

That's great Dr. Lin. Now let's get the other one. Okay?

EMILY nods.

TECHNICIAN'S VOICE

Okay. Hold your breath.

Using her hands, EMILY squeezes her left breast, top to bottom. She winces.

TECHNICIAN'S VOICE

Hold it ... Hold it ...

A light flashes.

TECHNICIAN'S VOICE

Okay. Breath normally.

For rights and permissions contact
paul@pauldonnellyplays.com

EMILY sighs.

TECHNICIAN'S VOICE

Okay. Hold your breath.

EMILY squeezes her breast again, side to side.
She winces.

TECHNICIAN'S VOICE

Hold it ... Hold it ...

A light flashes.

TECHNICIAN'S VOICE

Okay. Breath normally.

EMILY sighs.

TECHNICIAN'S VOICE

Okay. Hold your breath.

EMILY squeezes her breast again, diagonally. She
gasps.

TECHNICIAN'S VOICE

Hold it ... Hold it ...

A light flashes.

TECHNICIAN'S VOICE

Okay. Breath normally.

EMILY sighs.

TECHNICIAN'S VOICE

Okay. Hold your breath.

EMILY pushes her breast into her chest, hard. She
clenches her teeth furiously.

TECHNICIAN'S VOICE

Hold it ... Hold ...

A light flashes.

For rights and permissions contact
paul@pauldonnellyplays.com

TECHNICIANS'S VOICE

Okay. Breath normally.

EMILY

Oh my. Thank god that's over ...

TECHNICIAN'S VOICE

I'm sorry, Dr. Lin. Could I get one more from the side ... Okay. Hold your breath.

EMILY squeezes her left breast again, side to side. She winces.

TECHNICIAN'S VOICE

Hold it ... Hold ... I'm sorry, Dr. Lin. We're going to have to flatten it a bit more.

EMILY squeezes harder. SHE bites her lower lip.

TECHNICIAN'S VOICE

Hold it ... Hold it ...

A light flashes.

TECHNICIAN'S VOICE

Okay. Breath normally. ... While we wait for that set, why don't you relax for a little bit ..

EMILY manages a wry smile.

TECHNICIAN'S VOICE

I'm sorry, Dr. Lin. We're going to have to try a different angle.

EMILY

Is there a problem?

TECHNICIAN'S VOICE

I'm afraid I haven't gotten anything clear enough to read on that side ...

EMILY

Why?

TECHNICIAN'S VOICE

There is ... something, Dr. Lin. Your left breast seems thicker ...

EMILY nods.

For rights and permissions contact
paul@pauldonnellyplays.com

TECHNICIAN'S VOICE

Let's just adjust that angle a little.

EMILY squeezes her left breast, diagonally.

TECHNICIAN'S VOICE

Could we increase the pressure, a little ... the doctor is going to need to be able to see ...

EMILY nods and squeezes harder.

TECHNICIAN'S VOICE

Okay. Hold your breath.

EMILY's face becomes a mask of agony.

TECHNICIAN'S VOICE

Hold it ... Hold it ...

A light flashes.

TECHNICIAN'S VOICE

Okay. Breath normally.

EMILY

Oh my ...

TECHNICIAN'S VOICE

I'm sorry, Dr. Lin. Could we get one more, with just a little more pressure?

EMILY

I don't know ...

TECHNICIAN'S VOICE

I'm sorry, Dr. Lin, but we need to get this clear enough for the doctor to be able to read ...it will make it better for you in the long run.

EMILY squeezes her left breast harder still. SHE begins to wobble on her feet.

TECHNICIAN'S VOICE

I'm sorry, Dr. Lin. This will only work if you are absolutely still.

EMILY sighs.

For rights and permissions contact

paul@pauldonnellyplays.com

Okay. Hold your breath.

TECHNICIAN'S VOICE

EMILY squeezes her left breast hard. With great effort, SHE holds her body rigid.

Hold it ... Hold it ...

TECHNICIAN'S VOICE

A light flashes.

Is that it?

EMILY

Why don't you have a seat for a few minutes, Dr. Lin

TECHNICIAN'S VOICE

This is bad, isn't it?

EMILY

Not necessarily, Dr. Lin. Strange as it sounds, the pain may be a good thing.

TECHNICIAN'S VOICE

That's a matter of perspective, isn't it?

EMILY

There are no guarantees either way, Dr. Lin, but they say fibroids are usually more painful ...

EMILY (sits)

If pain is the measure, I'm living on planet fibroid.

EMILY sits for a moment with HER head in HER hands.

Dr. Lin ...

TECHNICIAN'S VOICE

Yes?

EMILY (warily)

TECHNICIAN'S VOICE

I'm terribly sorry, Dr. Lin. We're going to have to try another set ...

For rights and permissions contact
paul@pauldonnellyplays.com

Are “we”?
EMILY

Please, Dr. Lin ...
TECHNICIAN’S VOICE

EMILY sighs and stands facing out.

Okay. Hold your breath.
TECHNICIAN’S VOICE

EMILY squeezes left breast, diagonally.

Let’s adjust that angle a little ...
TECHNICIAN’S VOICE

EMILY changes the angle of HER hands slightly.

And increase the pressure ...
TECHNICIAN’S VOICE

EMILY squeezes harder. SHE grimaces.

Okay. Hold your breath. Hold it ... Hold it ...
TECHNICIAN’S VOICE

BLACKOUT.

Trees Don't Mourn the Autumn

ACT I

Scene 3

Setting: EMILY's memory.

At rise: WALTER LIN sits at a table set with the remains of a dinner and five place settings.

EMILY watches him from a slight distance.

AGNES enters carrying a small jelly roll, from which she has just removed the cellophane, on a plate. The jelly roll holds three lit pink birthday candles.

When AGNES sings, she is joined by the recorded voices of two small children, a boy and a girl. WALTER does not sing.

AGNES

"Happy Birthday to you. Happy Birthday to you. Happy Birthday, dear Emily. Happy Birthday to you."

AGNES sets the jelly roll down on the table and smiles expectantly.

EMILY walks over to the table, blows out the candles and steps away again.

AGNES

Good girl! Very good.

WALTER

Was it necessary to waste three candles? Could the point not have been made with one?

AGNES pulls the candles from the jelly roll and slides it in front of WALTER.

AGNES

I thought since she is turning three ... and it helps her learn to count ...

WALTER lifts his fork and begins to eat the jelly roll.

WALTER

She can learn to count other ways. What will it take to make you see that a lifetime of just this kind of petty extravagance will leave us destitute in our old age?

AGNES

Two small candles? Candles that can be reused? This is hardly an extravagance.

WALTER

Since you refuse to see reason and since you need to flaunt your defiance in front of the children, there will be no more birthday candles in this house.

AGNES

Walter!

WALTER snaps each of the candles in half.

WALTER

Hear that Peggy? Hear that Frank? You have your mother and sister to thank. There will be no more birthday candles in this house. Ever. Since your mother will not exercise the slightest self control we will do without these foolish things completely.

WALTER stands, holding plate with partially eaten jelly roll.

WALTER

I will take my coffee at my desk. Frank, I will see your homework in one hour. Margaret, help your mother keep this one quiet while I work.

EMILY shakes her head at the memory as lights fade to BLACK.

Trees Don't Mourn the Autumn

ACT I

Scene 4

Setting: A Dr. Melamed's Office, January 1994.

At rise: EMILY, still in her hospital gown, is sitting on an examining table. DR. MELAMED, carrying a file, joins HER.

Miss Lin? DR. MELAMED

Yes. EMILY

I'm Dr. Melamed. DR. MELAMED

Yes. EMILY

DR. MELAMED
Miss Lin, I'm afraid I have to ask why you had a mammogram before seeing me?

EMILY
I was following your nurse's instructions.

Oh? DR. MELAMED

EMILY
I had an appointment the day before.

DR. MELAMED
I didn't see you.

EMILY
No. My period started early. And my flow was heavy. Due to nerves I would guess. I asked about it and was told to reschedule for after ...

DR. MELAMED
Yes, of course.

EMILY

When I called, I asked the nurse about the mammogram. She said that, since appointments were so hard to come by, I should go ahead and have the mammogram.

DR. MELAMED

I see. Well, I do have the results ...

EMILY

And ...

DR. MELAMED

I don't know you at all, Miss Lin, so I don't know how to best couch this ...

EMILY

Yes?

DR. MELAMED

Keep in mind that mammography is an imprecise diagnostic tool. You will need the results of a biopsy to reach a conclusive diagnosis.

EMILY

A biopsy?

DR. MELAMED

There is also the very real possibility of a false positive.

EMILY

Positive?

DR. MELAMED

The results of your mammogram are not encouraging. The size and density of the mass, as well as the presence of star asterisk clusters, would seem to indicate a malignant tumor.

EMILY

No. Fibroid. You mean, fibroid ...

DR. MELAMED

No, Miss Lin, I don't. I'm very sorry, but your tumor is also growing rapidly. It is imperative that you not delude yourself and that we get you an appointment with a surgeon immediately.

EMILY

There must be some mistake ...

For rights and permissions contact
paul@pauldonnellyplays.com

DR. MELAMED

That, I'm afraid, is not likely ...

EMILY

My fibroid has been quite painful. Malignancies don't hurt. Everyone has told me that. Malignancies aren't painful. Silent killer and all that ...

DR. MELAMED

That is usually the case, Miss Lin. I can only tell you what these results indicate ... It would probably be best for you to discuss your concerns with a surgeon as quickly as possible ...

EMILY

Oh my god ... I can't have cancer. I can't ...

DR. MELAMED

I will get a list of surgeons together for you. Meredith will have it at the desk. You can stop by after you've dressed, pay your bill and pick up the list of surgeon references.

EMILY

I don't know what my insurance covers ...

DR. MELAMED

You would be better off discussing that with your carrier, Miss Lin. Your visit here today will only be \$125. If you can't give us a check, Meredith will happily take your VISA or MasterCard.

EMILY

I can't have cancer ... that can't be right. Oh my ... oh my ... What am I going to do?

DR. MELAMED

You'll start by seeing a surgeon. I'll leave a list with Meredith at the desk.

EMILY turns away to compose herself.

DR. MELAMED

I'll leave you to get dressed ... Good luck, Miss Lin.

EMILY (not turning back to HIM)

Thank you.

DR. MELAMED exits. EMILY sits, dazed.

Lights fade to BLACK.

For rights and permissions contact
paul@pauldonnellyplays.com

Trees Don't Mourn the Autumn

ACT I

Scene 5

Setting: Dr. Hudson's Office, January 1994.

At rise: An enormous X-ray of a breast with an evident tumor and conspicuous star asterisk clusters fills the UC wall. DR. MARGOT HUDSON, a surgeon, is facing the X-ray. SHE turns back to a folding screen UL.

DR. HUDSON

Emily ... Emily ... Are you all right?

EMILY (from behind the screen)

I'll just be a little bit longer ...

DR. HUDSON

I'm sorry. I know that's a particularly stupid question ... under the circumstances.

EMILY bursts from behind the screen. SHE is in street clothes that have clearly been donned in haste. SHE is still pulling on a shoe as SHE appears.

EMILY

Sorry ... sorry, didn't mean to hold you up.

DR. HUDSON

No, *I'm* sorry. I didn't mean to rush you. (holding out a chair) Here. Sit for a minute. Catch your breath ...

EMILY

I'm sorry. This has all been so sudden. A week ago I was a healthy person with a muscle pull ... and now ... it's just all so sudden. ... Not that I don't appreciate you seeing me so quickly. I do. I appreciate it very much. I was so surprised when your office called at 2 to say you had a cancellation at 4. I was very grateful. When I first called, the young lady told me you didn't have an opening for 3 weeks. I was glad not to have to wait. ... But then I had this terrible panic when I stopped by the radiologist's to pick up the x-rays. There wouldn't be all this rush if something wasn't terribly wrong. But then I told myself that couldn't be right ... it's been so painful, it couldn't be serious ... it couldn't be ... well, you know ... is it? How bad is it?

DR. HUDSON

Well, Emily ... I don't think we need to panic. I'll certainly try to pull my foot back off the accelerator a little and give you some time to absorb things.

EMILY

What things?

DR. HUDSON.

You haven't seen the x-ray's yet, have you?

EMILY

No.

DR. HUDSON

Let's have a look together.

EMILY

All right.

DR. HUDSON

Here. This is your right breast. (Slide filling the back wall changes.) You can see how clear and relatively even ...

EMILY

Yes, yes ... and the other?

DR. HUDSON (as the original slide returns)

I think you can see the differences.

EMILY nods.

DR. HUDSON

Where it is darker ...from here to here ... that indicates some kind of an abnormality. And these little burst of light ...

EMILY

Star asterisk clusters.

DR. HUDSON

Yes. Do you know what they usually indicate?

EMILY

Sites of calcification, right?

DR. HUDSON

Yes. But, I'm afraid these are almost always indicative of a malignancy.

For rights and permissions contact
paul@pauldonnellyplays.com

EMILY stiffens.

DR. HUDSON

I'm sorry. In twenty years I haven't found the right way to tell someone she has cancer.

EMILY

Why are you telling me ...

DR. HUDSON

We need a biopsy, of course, to confirm ... but I'm afraid the indications are pretty clear.

EMILY

I hear you and I guess what you are saying is true. I've worked with so many women ... and yet, now, I can't believe ... it just doesn't feel like we're talking about me. I've seen x-rays like this before ... and I feel for that woman and I hope I can help her ... but I can't possibly be her!

DR. HUDSON

I know it's not easy. And if you don't need to make any decisions today. In fact, I won't let you. But we need to talk about options. If you need to come back and hear them again, we can talk again. But we have to start a conversation today.

EMILY nods.

DR. HUDSON

This part has gotten easier over the past 20 years, Emily. A lot easier. I have better ... less intrusive, less debilitating options to offer ... and when we get to treatments, there's real hope today. It's not going to be an easy path, but it is one that is likely to lead to recovery. And that wasn't as often the case when I was starting out. I know that's not much comfort right this minute ...

EMILY

No. "Fibrous mass." "Cyst." "Fibroid." Hearing them would be a comfort ...

DR. HUDSON

Yes. And hearing otherwise is an awful shock. One that you can't prepare for, no matter what you might have suspected or feared ...

EMILY

I never considered ... and I'm not convinced. That technician wasn't very good, you know. She kept squeezing and adjusting ... Someone who knew her business wouldn't have needed that many exposures ...

DR. HUDSON

We need a biopsy to be certain of anything, but, in the meantime, may I sketch out a hypothetical course of treatment ... a “just in case” scenario.

EMILY

I don't know. My life is already in an uproar. I'm just starting to get my practice going here. I came back to Tucson to reinvigorate the research side of my work. I have several research grant applications in process, but right now I'm barely making my basic living expenses. I can't be sick now. I can't ... If I can't work, I have no income. If I have no income, I can't pay my deductible ... never mind my mortgage. This hypothetical conversation sounds like an unnecessary stressor to me!

DR. HUDSON

I'd like to hope it will be just the opposite ... That it may ground us and help alleviate some of your anxiety.

EMILY

Somehow I doubt it. But go ahead ...

DR. HUDSON

We'll start with the biopsy. As you probably know, all biopsy procedures remove a tissue sample for microscopic evaluation. We have two primary options. The Fine-Needle Biopsy can be done here in the office. As the name suggests, I will insert a thin needle into the breast and withdraw some tissue. If we find we need a larger sample, then I'd perform an excisional biopsy. That would be done on an outpatient basis, most likely under a local anesthesia. I'd make an incision and remove a larger sample.

EMILY

You know that every procedure has to be pre-certified by my insurance company ... I can't agree to anything without their approval.

DR. HUDSON

Lauren has her whip and chair at the ready ...

EMILY

I beg your pardon?

DR. HUDSON

I'm sorry ... my office manager has yet to encounter an insurance company she can't tame.

EMILY (smiling)

That will be a big help ...

DR. HUDSON

She's wonderful. And we find doing what we can to lighten that load makes a huge difference for our patients. In either case, we'll have time to discuss treatment options with your full team after we have results ...

EMILY

My "team"?

DR. HUDSON

At the minimum, we'll have a radiologist and an oncologist working with us ...

EMILY

Only if it's not a fibroid ...

DR. HUDSON

I'd like to go ahead and help you make some appointments, if you don't mind ...

EMILY

I don't know ...

DR. HUDSON

How would you counsel a patient?

EMILY

To trust her instincts ... to retain her autonomy ...

DR. HUDSON

We're of one mind there. What are your instincts really telling you ...

EMILY doesn't answer.

DR. HUDSON

Emily?

EMILY

To run like hell.

DR. HUDSON

I'll bet they are. And I don't blame you for feeling that way. But I really hope you'll trust me a little bit further ...

EMILY (not convinced)

Go on.

DR. HUDSON

Being relatively new in town, I assume you haven't had an opportunity to get to know the medical community ...

EMILY

No.

DR. HUDSON

Not that many lifelong residents keep a radiologist or an oncologist on call. I can think of several good people in both areas if you want to look at a variety of options or want to ask around. Although, for my money, I don't think you'll beat Billy Siwek and Peter Alpert.

EMILY

I could start with them, I suppose ...

DR. HUDSON

I'll have Lauren call for you now, so you can be all set before you leave here today ...

EMILY

Hold on. I have to be in Washington for a SAMHSA review panel on Friday ...

DR. HUDSON

This is only Tuesday. I'm sure Billy and Peter will do their best to see you before you have to leave, or, at worst, as soon as you get back. When will that be?

EMILY

Sunday. I leave Thursday afternoon.

DR. HUDSON

I'll get Lauren right on it and then come back so we can talk some more ...

EMILY

Oh my ...

DR. HUDSON

Is that all right?

EMILY

I don't like this sense of urgency. I don't like it one bit.

DR. HUDSON

Think of it as "better safe, than sorry" ...

EMILY

I'm already feeling sorry ...

DR. HUDSON (taking EMILY's hand)

I will do everything in my power to make sure that you will never be sorry for trusting me. Okay?

EMILY

I guess I have to be, for now.

DR. HUDSON

I'll always take "for now." I'll be right back.

DR. HUDSON exits R.

After a beat, DR. SIWEK emerges from behind the screen UL.

DR. SIWEK

Dr. Lin?

EMILY

Yes.

DR. SIWEK

I'm Bill Siwek.

EMILY

Hello. Thanks for arranging to see me so quickly.

DR. SIWEK

I'm always glad to accommodate Dr. Hudson. I'm afraid we need to start with yet another exam.

EMILY

Of course. I've had my top on and off so much in the past week ... (removes her jacket) I'm well beyond modesty at this point .

DR. SIWEK stands US of EMILY. SHE faces HIM and begins to unbutton HER blouse.

EMILY (looking down)

They hardly seem like part of me ... Actually, I wish they weren't. Have at them.

DR. SIWEK

I hope that's not how you really feel. Every part of your body is a part of you and needs your care. Illness doesn't make your breast bad or alien. Your body's not the enemy.

EMILY

That's easy for you to say ...

DR. SIWEK

Dr. Hudson and Dr. Alpert and I will fight the enemy with you, but part of your job is to take care of yourself and, frankly, to love yourself.

EMILY

I'm afraid, that flies in the face of the way I was raised. These ... that ... the left one feels like the most worthless part of a worthless whole.

As DR. SIWEK touches her left breast gently, EMILY winces.

DR. SIWEK

It's tender ...

EMILY

Very.

DR. SIWEK

I'll try to be careful... (EMILY winces again) I'm sorry. The main mass is here. In the upper, outer quadrant ...

EMILY

That's what everyone says ...

DR. SIWEK

Hmmm ...

EMILY

What does that mean ...

DR. SIWEK

I'm sorry. It's a significant size ...

EMILY

How significant?

DR. SIWEK

The chemo might help shrink it ...

For rights and permissions contact
paul@pauldonnellyplays.com

EMILY

I guess when I'm bald and nauseous it will seem less significant ...

DR. SIWEK

I can't deny that there will be some side effects. We have lots of new adjunctive therapies that should alleviate the worst of them ...

Lights fade on EMILY and DR. SIWEK and come up on WALTER and AGNES, bathed in the purple glow of WALTER's Gro-Lux tubes.

WALTER is seated at a table working with bark and sphagnum moss to prepare community pots for replanting orchid seedlings. AGNES stands behind him.

WALTER

Who was that?

AGNES

Emily.

WALTER does not respond further.

AGNES is clearly fretful.

WALTER (finally, with a sigh)

What did she say that gives you need to disrupt my work at this delicate juncture?

AGNES

She has some bad news.

WALTER

We have no money to send her ...

AGNES

She wasn't asking ...

WALTER

Not directly, I'm sure. She's the sly one. Too clever to ask directly.

AGNES

She may have cancer.

WALTER immediately returns to his labors. HE uses tweezers to pick a seedling from a bowl of fungicide solution and place it in the community bowl. He uses the tweezers to position moss loosely over the seedling's roots.

AGNES

Breast cancer. ... Possibly. She said it wasn't definite. She's having a biopsy next week to confirm ...

WALTER

Then why didn't she wait until next week to call?

AGNES

I think she knows already, but she didn't want me to be alarmed.

WALTER

If she didn't want you to be alarmed, why did she call?

AGNES

For comfort.

WALTER

Typical. Concerned only for her own comfort.

WALTER continues intently with his work.

AGNES

Walter ...

WALTER

Yes?

AGNES

I ...

WALTER

Yes?

AGNES

What time will you want to stop for supper?

WALTER

I will be ready in about 2 hours.

WALTER continues working. Agnes does not go away.

For rights and permissions contact
paul@pauldonnellyplays.com

WALTER

At least we may take some comfort in knowing that this is the last shame *she* will bring upon this family.

Lights fade on WALTER and AGNES and come back up on EMILY, seated in the doctor's treatment room. SHE is again wearing a gray hospital gown. SHE is clearly distressed by this scene SHE has just imagined.

DR. ALPERT enters from behind the screen.

DR. ALPERT (looking at chart)

Emily?

EMILY

Yes.

DR. ALPERT

Excuse me, Dr. Lin ...

EMILY

Emily is fine.

DR. ALPERT

I'm sorry to have kept you waiting ...

EMILY

I doubt things have gotten much worse in 20 minutes ...

DR. ALPERT

No. That might take at least half an hour.

EMILY smiles at his attempt at humor, but can't quite manage a laugh.

EMILY

I assume you need to examine ...

DR. ALPERT

Yes, I'm sorry ...

EMILY

Don't be. It makes the prospect of a prosthesis less daunting ...

DR. ALPERT

Oh?

For rights and permissions contact
paul@pauldonnellyplays.com

EMILY

At this point I would like to be able to just take it off and hand it to you to examine.

DR. ALPERT (still with chart)

You have had a lot of poking and prodding this week, haven't you?

EMILY

To the point that I don't even have the energy to joke about it anymore.

DR. ALPERT

Well, I'm sorry to say that I'm inclined to agree with Dr. Siwek. And also Dr. Hudson. It looks like you have inflammatory breast cancer. And the tumor looks fairly large ...

EMILY

We don't know that it's a tumor.

DR. ALPERT

Well ...

EMILY

I haven't had a biopsy, yet.

DR. ALPERT

No. But I know you must be familiar with clinical judgment.

EMILY

Sure. But this time I'm holding out for test results.

DR. ALPERT

Fair enough. To be safe, I'm going to schedule you for a chest x-ray, blood work, and bone scan before the biopsy. Has Dr. Hudson ...

EMILY

Next week. When I get back from Bethesda.

DR. ALPERT

I'll see you then when we have biopsy results. And I hope you won't take it the wrong way if I say I hope not to see much of you thereafter.

EMILY

That's the nicest thing I've heard this week.

Lights fade to BLACK.

Trees Don't Mourn the Autumn

ACT I

Scene 6

Setting: EMILY's next dream.

At rise: Gobos project a frenzied landscape of light and shadow across the stage. RACHEL OLSON moves through a series of tai chi stances DL. RACHEL is a wraith-like figure, drawn face, sunken cheeks, hollow eyes, scrawny limbs, but the neck-line of her negligee reveals incongruously full, round, reconstructed breasts.

EMILY races on from R as though being chased. SHE encounters a series of invisible obstacles, branches, briars, roots that catch her and trip her up repeatedly. After several stumbles and escapes, SHE trips and ends up sprawled flat out DC. While laying on the ground, terrified and gasping for breath, SHE sees RACHEL.

EMILY

Rachel ...

RACHEL

Why Dr. Lin, how nice to see you after such a long time ...

EMILY

How is ... What was ... Are you ... Is this ...

RACHEL

Catch your breath.

EMILY

Sorry. I'm so sorry ...

RACHEL (extending a hand)

Here ...

EMILY reaches out, then pulls HER hand back.

RACHEL

Please, let me help you up ...

EMILY extends HER hand tentatively. RACHEL takes it and lifts EMILY gently to HER feet.

There you go.
RACHEL

Thank you so much.
EMILY

Thank you.
RACHEL

For?
EMILY

Giving me the opportunity to try to begin to repay you.
RACHEL

Was I really helpful?
EMILY

You and you alone. You must remember.
RACHEL

I knew it was hard for you.
EMILY

It was hell. I guess that's why this isn't.
RACHEL

That's good. ... So you know you're dead?
EMILY

Of course. Mine wasn't a brain tumor either ... Although I think dementia would have been a relief. Not to know what was happening would have been so much better ...
RACHEL

You had it worse than anyone I'd ever worked with. That nightmare family ... (catching herself) ... oh dear, Rachel!! I am so sorry ...
EMILY

RACHEL

For telling the truth? If those asshole doctors had told me the truth a little earlier I wouldn't be here. Or at least it wouldn't have happened that horrible way. It's how I found you. So many of them told me the pain was in my head, I broke down and saw a shrink. And you were the only one who believed it wasn't all in my head ...

EMILY

Am I dead?

RACHEL

I don't think so. You don't think it could be that easy, do you?

EMILY

No.

RACHEL

Oh dear, now I'm the one whose sorry ...

EMILY

For telling me the truth?

RACHEL

For telling such a cruel, gratuitous truth.

EMILY

How can the truth be gratuitous?

RACHEL

When knowing it won't change anything for the better. When knowing how bad it's going to be won't make it any easier to get through ... You look like you could use to get off your feet.

RACHEL snaps a finger and a wheeled office chair rolls to her from off L. EMILY is startled.

RACHEL

Oh you'll like being dead ... once you get here. It's the process that sucks. Please, sit ...

EMILY sits.

RACHEL

I hope you have a you ...

EMILY

What do you mean?

RACHEL

Someone who will listen. Will believe. Will seek to understand. We both face this without partners, without families ...

EMILY

I have family ...

RACHEL

... to speak of. How much comfort and support will your family really offer?

EMILY

I'm sure they'll come through when I need them.

RACHEL

Are you? Really?

EMILY

Of course.

RACHEL

Visits to pre-scavenge the estate don't count.

EMILY (regarding Rachel coldly)

Another gratuitous truth?

RACHEL

Not at all. Facing up to the fact that you can't count on your family will free you to develop other resources while there's still time

EMILY

But there isn't time. (Freezes in horror) I mean I don't need time. There's nothing to be in a rush about ...

RACHEL

Look what that kind of thinking got me. And it wasn't even my own!! Oh well, at least I died every inch a woman, hunh?

EMILY

What happened to you was unconscionable.

RACHEL

It happened because I didn't have information. Because I didn't know the truth. Don't do this to yourself. Stop refusing to see the truth you know is staring you in the face.

EMILY

Don't project your bitterness and loss onto me!!

RACHEL

I'm not bitter. I am every man's fantasy.

EMILY

Somehow I doubt that.

RACHEL

Why? Don't I truly have the tits of death?

EMILY

Oh please ...

RACHEL

Am I losing my touch or have you gotten hard ...

EMILY

What do you mean?

RACHEL

One of my last joys was being able to shock you every once in a while.

EMILY

You only really got me once ...

RACHEL

When you said how much you admired me for seeming to have so few regrets ...

EMILY nods.

RACHEL

And I said I really only had one big regret. That I didn't die in a car wreck when I was 28.

EMILY

I finally get to ask my follow up question.

Which is?
RACHEL

Why did you pick 28?
EMILY

RACHEL
It was the last year I could be sure my sense of possibility was greater than my sense of loss.

EMILY turns away and rests her head on her arms on the back of the chair.

RACHEL resumes her tai chi, gradually moving off L. As SHE exits, lights begin to change. Gobos fade out and more normal illumination rises.

DR. ALPERT emerges from behind the screen UL.

DR. ALPERT
I am so sorry, Emily. I know this is the worst time in the world to keep you waiting ...

EMILY (raising her head groggily)
Not a problem ... really.

DR. ALPERT
You've been having trouble sleeping?

EMILY (sharply)
Wouldn't you?

DR. ALPERT
Without a doubt. I sometimes think that the more you know, the harder it is ...

EMILY
Really?

DR. ALPERT
No. Not really. An informed patient will almost always make better choices. And comply more fully with treatment regimens. Have you had a chance to speak with Dr. Hudson?

EMILY
Yes.

DR. ALPERT

So you've heard the bad news once.

EMILY nods.

DR. ALPERT

Are you ready to consider treatment options?

EMILY

I'm still not ready for the damn slice biopsy. This has been one nasty surprise after another ... bam ... Bam ... BAM ... without let up. I can't sleep. I can't concentrate ... and the awful part hasn't started yet, has it?

DR. ALPERT

I think starting treatment will only help all that. Chemotherapy will reduce the size of the tumor and so reduce your discomfort. Even with Adriamycin, which I'm going to recommend as your tumor is so large and is inflamed, we can control nausea and vomiting pretty well with Zofran or Kytril. It's not like the bad old days, you will have some side effects, but you should be able to sustain most of your day to day activities over the course of your chemotherapy.

EMILY

If you say so ...

DR. ALPERT

I assume Dr. Hudson reviewed the course of treatment ...

EMILY

Chemo, surgery, radiation.

DR. ALPERT

Chemotherapy has a 21 day cycle, we'll need to do six treatments. After that 18 weeks, Dr. Hudson will perform your mastectomy, which will be followed by 5 weeks of radiation. Five daily treatments, with weekends off.

EMILY

I don't know ...

DR. ALPERT

I cannot stress strongly enough how much it will be in your best interest to start chemotherapy at once.

EMILY

You mean soon ...

For rights and permissions contact
paul@pauldonnellyplays.com

DR. ALPERT
I mean today.

EMILY
That's out of the question.

DR. ALPERT
It's imperative ...

EMILY
First I have to decide that I want treatment ...

DR. ALPERT
Excuse me?

EMILY
I respect the soundness of your advice, doctor, but I'm not sure I'm going to take it.

DR. ALPERT
You aren't considering not being treated are you?

EMILY
I am considering it very strongly.

DR. ALPERT
Dr. Lin ... you are an educated woman ... you have to know that you cannot let Stage IIIB Inflammatory Breast Cancer remain untreated ...

EMILY
Dr. Alpert ... I've had a good life, but it's been a hard life. I've struggled most every day for nearly 50 years, I don't know that I want to struggle any more. This may be the perfect time for me to let go. I am virtually unemployed. Since I haven't built up much of a practice here, I'm unencumbered. I don't have obligations to many patients **and** I'm not sure how I would pay major medical bills. I don't ever, ever want to be poor again. I don't want to lose my home.

DR. ALPERT
I know I speak for Dr. Hudson, as well as myself when I say we'll find a way to get bills taken care of. Please don't let payment worries be an obstacle to treatment. Immediate treatment.

EMILY
Thank you. I really appreciate that. I do. But I've been really poor in my life. I've known grinding, relentless, soul-rending poverty. And I would honestly rather die than face that again.

For rights and permissions contact
paul@pauldonnellyplays.com

DR. ALPERT

I can't believe you would really refuse treatment.

EMILY

I've accomplished many of my life goals. I know I've done a lot of good for a lot of people. I'm a lot less uncomfortable with the idea of dying than I am with a lot of the things that going through this course of treatment would mean ...

DR. ALPERT

I'm at a loss ... I don't know what to say ... Of course it's your decision. But I have to say that I still don't understand how you could even consider refusing treatment.

EMILY

I don't need you to understand. I do need some more time with this.

DR. ALPERT

Of course. I have to say that I hope you will come to your senses on this and quickly.

EMILY

I really do appreciate your concern ...

DR. ALPERT

Will you do me one favor?

EMILY

Possibly.

DR. ALPERT

See Dr. Hudson again before the week is out.

EMILY

All right, I will do that.

DR. ALPERT

I can't tell you how troubling I find your hesitation. I certainly hope I will see you again. And soon.

EMILY

Thank you.

DR. ALPERT starts to try to say more, can't find the words, and exits abruptly.

Lights fade to BLACK.

For rights and permissions contact
paul@pauldonnellyplays.com

Trees Don't Mourn the Autumn

ACT I

Scene 7

Setting: EMILY's apartment, January 1994.

At rise: EMILY sleeps on the sofa. DARRYL, wearing a U of A sweatshirt, knocks on the door. Getting no answer, HE knocks more loudly. EMILY stirs but does not rise. HE knocks again.

Hang on ... EMILY

EMILY sits up. DARRYL, who did not hear her, knocks again, more loudly still.

Who is it? EMILY (annoyed)

It's me ... DARRYL

Hang on ... I'll be right there. EMILY

EMILY rises wearily, makes HER way slowly to the door, turns on a light, waits for her eyes to adjust, then admits DARRYL.

You're not ready? DARRYL

For what? EMILY

"For what?" Only the home opener. Against the hated "Bruins"! DARRYL

We have basketball tickets tonight? EMILY

Are you okay? (realizing) Uh-oh, you got results today. DARRYL

For rights and permissions contact
paul@pauldonnellyplays.com

EMILY nods.

The worst? DARRYL

EMILY nods.

I'm so sorry, Em'. DARRYL

Me too. EMILY

When do you start chemo? DARRYL

I don't know. EMILY

Oh? DARRYL

Dr. Alpert wanted to start today. EMILY

But? DARRYL

I told him I wasn't sure I wanted to go through all of that. EMILY

That you need some time to get used to the idea? DARRYL

No. I said I wasn't sure I wanted treatment ... EMILY

At all? DARRYL

EMILY nods.

Oh my god! What did he do? DARRYL

EMILY

He seemed quite annoyed and got out of the room as quickly as he could.

DARRYL

I'll just bet he did. You sure have the devil in you, don't you?

EMILY

Darryl?

DARRYL

Prominent oncologists are not used to hearing, "no thanks," after they've set out treatment options. I bet he's still in shock. Now what are you really going to do?

EMILY

I don't know. I don't know if I can face months and months of weakness and nausea. Not being able to work. Piling up bills I can't pay. Losing this place ... I don't think it's worth the struggle ...

DARRYL

By "it's" you mean life?

EMILY nods.

DARRYL

Well ... I can't make that choice for you. But if I can influence your choice at all, then I hope you'll reconsider and go with treatment.

EMILY

Why?

DARRYL

I'd miss you. The world would miss you.

EMILY

That's ridiculous ...

DARRYL

You know how much you've done for so many people. Your patients. The students you've mentored and been role-model to. All the places you've boldly gone where no Asian woman has gone before... Not that you owe anybody anything, but do you really feel your work is done?

EMILY

No. But sometimes the role model business is pretty exhausting. Role model isn't all that far from freak. People nudging and staring. I don't know if I'm up to being a bald role model...

For rights and permissions contact
paul@pauldonnellyplays.com

DARRYL

How about a blonde role model?

EMILY (smiles)

Oh dear. I don't think so ...

DARRYL

I would really hate to have to break in a new game partner. Speaking of which ...

EMILY

Oh I don't know ...

DARRYL

Come on. I know it would kill you to see the ticket go to waste. You're not really ready to die tonight.

EMILY

I'm not dressed ... Why don't you go on without me.

DARRYL

I'll wait. For you, I'll even miss the opening tip off.

EMILY

No

DARRYL

You're not going to get anything out of laying here alone in the dark giving your fears free reign. Come to the game ...

EMILY

Let me go do something with my hair, while I still have it ...

As EMILY starts to exit, lights fade to BLACK.

Trees Don't Mourn the Autumn

ACT I

Scene 8

Setting: DR. HUDSON's Office, UR. Late January 1994.

At rise: DR. HUDSON and EMILY are sitting in chairs arranged conversationally in front of a small, round occasional table. DR. HUDSON closes a file and smiles at EMILY, who seems ill-at-ease.

DR. HUDSON

I know nothing is settled, but I'm glad you're at least allowing us to start treatment.

EMILY shrugs.

DR. HUDSON

Letting us get started is really the only way to keep your options opened.

EMILY

Zippity-do-dah.

DR. HUDSON

We've sort of talked around your situation ...

EMILY

Yes?

DR. HUDSON

If you don't mind, I'd like to spend a few minutes learning a little bit more about your support system.

EMILY

Meaning what?

DR. HUDSON

Are you seeing anyone, for instance?

EMILY

No. I told you I live alone ...

DR. HUDSON

Yes. I meant are you in any sort of counseling ...

For rights and permissions contact
paul@pauldonnellyplays.com

EMILY

Oh. I'm sorry. I feel very foolish.

DR. HUDSON

Please don't. I'll also want to know if there was someone significant that you want included in any consultations. Or anyone with any powers of attorney.

EMILY

No. There's no one like that.

DR. HUDSON

What about my original question?

EMILY

No. I haven't been in therapy since moving here. I've been so busy with the move and getting established professionally.

DR. HUDSON

And your family of origin?

EMILY

My parents are both still alive. They're in their eighties. He's a retired academic. They live in Oakland.

DR. HUDSON

And how would you characterize your relationship with them?

EMILY

Correct. I pay them an obligatory visit two or three times a year. I call my mother every week or so just to make sure they're okay.

DR. HUDSON

So they're not going to be much of a source of support?

EMILY

No. I wouldn't dream ... No. He has a pension and social security. And they have some investments, but they live very hand-to-mouth. It's a reflex among Chinese immigrants of their generation.

DR. HUDSON

I meant emotional support ...

EMILY laughs quite heartily.

DR. HUDSON

Emily?

For rights and permissions contact
paul@pauldonnellyplays.com

EMILY

That would be even less likely.

DR. HUDSON

Why?

EMILY

As I said, they were typical immigrants of their generation.

DR. HUDSON

Meaning ...

EMILY

They faced a lot of struggle. Everything they were at home was stripped away when they entered an alien and pretty hostile culture. He came for graduate school in the thirties. He was a good student and a good scientist. He was evidently a good teacher of other people's children.

DR. HUDSON

Oh?

EMILY

When colleagues would speak of his kindness or generosity, our family were always sure they had to be talking about someone else.

DR. HUDSON

And the rest of your family?

EMILY

We're not close.

DR. HUDSON

Who's "we?"

EMILY

I have a brother and a sister. I was the youngest. Margaret was the eldest. And Frank was, and is, the prince. Frank wasn't raised to care for anyone other than himself.

DR. HUDSON

It sounds like it was difficult for you.

EMILY

I was unplanned and distinctly unwanted. They were already "burdened" with one daughter. The birth of a second daughter was the tragedy that blighted their lives.

For rights and permissions contact
paul@pauldonnellyplays.com

DR. HUDSON

And this was made clear to you?

EMILY

“Every day, in every way ...” They actually gave me away, for awhile, to a childless couple they knew.

DR. HUDSON

No!

EMILY

Oh yes. I have no memory, of course. I was only a few weeks old. When I'd been with them almost a year, the couple, they became pregnant. If they had had a boy, I would have stayed with them and been a resident handmaiden. Much to the dismay of all, they too were “cursed” with a daughter and they shamed my parents into taking me back when I was about 22 months old.

DR. HUDSON

That's extraordinary.

EMILY

It set the pattern. When Margaret started junior high school, they decided she was old enough to take care of me. After that they would take Frank on vacations and trips and leave Margaret and me at home.

DR. HUDSON

Are you and Margaret close?

EMILY

Not particularly.

DR. HUDSON

It just seems as though you might have been natural allies ..

EMILY

It took all the energy and concentration and resources Margaret and I could muster to survive childhood, to get out and to build our separate lives. There wasn't a lot left over for bonding. Sometimes the only life you can afford to save is your own, you know?

DR. HUDSON (shaking her head)

I'd be lying if I said I did. But I believe you. I don't suppose there's any chance ...

EMILY

Of what?

For rights and permissions contact
paul@pauldonnellyplays.com

DR. HUDSON

That your family ... or even your sister ... might rise to the occasion? Might what you're going through be extraordinary enough to make a different kind of connection?

EMILY

NO! There are no "Hallmark Moments" in the offing here, Dr. Hudson! Let me be absolutely clear. There is no place for my parents or my siblings in any of this. They are not to be informed or consulted in any way. Do you understand?

DR. HUDSON

Yes.

EMILY

I put myself through school, doctor. College and grad school. I built a career and an identity and a life alone. Alone. And I will do what has to be done now, alone. Until I just can't do it anymore ... And then I'll stop.

DR. HUDSON

Emily, please believe me, I will never consult or inform anyone or do anything without your expressed permission. I swear to you that I will adhere absolutely to your wishes ...

EMILY

I hope so ...

DR. HUDSON

But there are difficult times coming and I would like to help you identify some kind of support ...

EMILY

I do have friends here and all around the country. If you'll recall I got a ride to and from that miserable biopsy ...

DR. HUDSON

Yes.

EMILY

But if this is something I can't get through mostly on my own, then it's not going to happen. I will NOT become a burden to friends and well-intentioned neighbors. I will not live that way. If you don't think I can do this as I've accomplished every other aspect of my life, then it is not be worth doing ...

DR. HUDSON

No, no ... I will do everything in my power to keep this from infringing on your autonomy. And I'll ride herd on Peter and Billy to the best of my ability.

For rights and permissions contact
paul@pauldonnellyplays.com

EMILY

Would you excuse me?

DR. HUDSON

Of course. I didn't mean to upset you ...

EMILY

It's not that. You can note in my chart that my periods continue to arrive regularly ..

DR. HUDSON

Oh, yes. Of course. You know where the restroom is ...

EMILY

I'll be right back.

EMILY exits behind the screen, C.

As lights fade out slowly on DR. HUDSON, she perches on the edge of her desk, looking toward the screen.

Trees Don't Mourn the Autumn

ACT I

Scene 9

Setting: EMILY & ENRIQUE's squalid apartment, DL.
October, 1967.

At rise: "She Has Funny Cars" from Jefferson Airplane's *Surrealistic Pillow* blares from the stereo as ENRIQUE SAN MARCOS works intently graphing a higher math proof. In addition to books, notebooks and reams of graph paper, HE is surrounded by the detritus of several meals and many empty cans of RC cola. Several overflowing ashtrays dot the room.

A very pregnant, 21-year old EMILY enters from behind the screen C. Her short hair and dress should suggest a poor and strait-laced '60's undergrad. EMILY is dragging, clearly at the end of a long day and a shortening rope.

EMILY enters above ENRIQUE who neither hears nor notices her. SHE stares around the apartment. Its condition makes her quite miserable. Finally, SHE crosses R and turns down the stereo.

EMILY
Do you mind?

ENRIQUE
No, that's fine. (Finishes graphing a line.) Sorry. I didn't hear you come in.

ENRIQUE crosses to EMILY and gives her a perfunctory peck on the cheek.

ENRIQUE
Hey sweet thing. You look bushed. (clearing a space on the sofa.) Have a seat. You're gonna love this ... Hildebrand thought this proof would take me weeks, if I ever got it at all. I can't wait to see the look on his face when I walk into our tutorial tomorrow with the damn thing done!

HE notices that EMILY is not quite sharing his glee.

ENRIQUE
What's the matter, sweetie pie? Bad day?

EMILY

I thought you were going to meet me for my ob-gyn appointment this afternoon.

ENRIQUE

Oh god! Oh honey bunch, I am soo sorry. Things just started to click this morning and I lost track ... I'm sorry. You can see I haven't been out at all today ... I got caught up and I'm afraid I forgot.

EMILY

And this place ... Doesn't the smell get to you?

ENRIQUE

What smell?

EMILY

Oh ... these stale cigarettes ... I'm sorry, I don't mean to pick ... but would it really destroy your concentration to walk the 8 feet to the kitchen and dump an ashtray into the garbage?

ENRIQUE

I'm sorry, babe ...

EMILY

Or to clean one of ... (examining a dish) ... YESTERDAY's breakfast dishes?

ENRIQUE

You know how I get when I get focused.

EMILY

You promised ... when you said you loved me ...

ENRIQUE

Oh babe, I DO love you. You know I love you.

EMILY

I know ...

ENRIQUE

And isn't that all that really matters?

EMILY doesn't respond.

ENRIQUE

Isn't it?

EMILY

I don't know ...

ENRIQUE

You're tired. You've had a long day ...

EMILY

Yes I have. Which is why it would be nice to come home to a reasonably clean apartment. I go to classes, too. I study, too. And I work two jobs. I can't be your domestic, too. I can't ...

ENRIQUE

Oh come on now, honey ... a few dirty dishes ... I was working. My work consumes me, you know that ...

EMILY

I can't do this alone, 'Rique. And we can't bring a baby into this kind of a mess ... And you promised I wouldn't be going from being servant to my father and brother to being servant to you! You promised!

ENRIQUE

And I'm not asking you to ... You don't have to clean up after me. You just have to lighten up and give me a chance to get around to it ...

EMILY

And it's only going to get worse when I have a baby to take care of on top of everything else! I don't know if I can do it.

ENRIQUE

Maybe the baby is too much?

EMILY

What?

ENRIQUE

Maybe the baby is too much for you to be taking on.

EMILY

It's a little late for that.

ENRIQUE

Not necessarily.

EMILY

What? What do you mean?

ENRIQUE

Well ...

EMILY

Yes?

ENRIQUE

It's not too late for the adoption option.

EMILY (very upset)

You don't WANT our baby? You don't want this baby?

ENRIQUE

Sweet heart ... that's not what I said. I didn't say I don't *want* the baby. If you want to keep the baby, then I'm behind you 100%.

EMILY

But?

ENRIQUE

It might make more sense to give this one up ...

EMILY

"Give this one up?"

ENRIQUE

You said yourself you can't do it alone.

EMILY

No! And you agreed ...

ENRIQUE

I'm within a year, year and a half on the outside, of my PhD. It would make no sense for me to leave the program now.

EMILY

I haven't ever suggested anything like that ...

ENRIQUE

If I stay, it has to be my focus. What kind of life would I be able to make for you and a kid with an MA in Applied Math? I'd never make it as a high school teacher, y'know?

EMILY

No.

ENRIQUE

And if we didn't start a family now, you'd be able to graduate next June.

EMILY

I was planning to graduate next June anyway.

ENRIQUE

I know that's what we talked about, but is that realistic with a baby and me still in school full time? If we give up this baby, we have a better chance of putting together the right kind of life for ourselves and all the ones that come after ...

EMILY stares at him expressionlessly.

ENRIQUE (embracing and nuzzling her)

And I'm sure once you've had a chance to recover, we can figure out how to make lots more ...

EMILY doesn't respond.

ENRIQUE

I'll back you up, whatever you decide, but if a few dirty dishes are going to get you this bent out of shape do you really think you're ready for a kid?

EMILY

I don't know ...

ENRIQUE

We may be giving this kid a better life, too, by giving it to people who are really ready ...

EMILY

I don't know. I don't know ... I don't know how to begin to know what to think.

ENRIQUE

Sleep on it. You're not going to have to decide anything final for another month, right? C'mon, no matter what you decide we have each other, right? Who's gonna be my "Somebody to Love" for all time ...

EMILY

Me?

ENRIQUE

You betcha! You wait right here. I'm gonna put on a pot of tea. You'll see, we're gonna be okay no matter what. We just gotta make the decision that will give all three of us the best shot in life.

EMILY

And you really think that's giving up the baby?

ENRIQUE doesn't respond.

EMILY

'Rique?

ENRIQUE

Promise you won't be angry?

EMILY

Yes. I promise.

ENRIQUE

Then, yeah, I do. I don't want to pressure you. I want it to be your decision ...but I do. What about you?

EMILY looks away.

ENRIQUE

Em?

EMILY nods slowly as lights fade to BLACK.

Trees Don't Mourn the Autumn

ACT I

Scene 10

Setting: EMILY's kitchen. Late March, 1994.

At rise: EMILY is removing a loaf of banana bread from a battered loaf pan. She is surrounded by piles of loaves wrapped in foil and loaves cooling on ancient racks.

EMILY is completely bald.

The doorbell rings. EMILY starts to go answer it, catches herself and returns to pick up and don an outrageous wig of strawberry blonde dreadlocks.

SHE returns quickly, followed by DARRYL.

DARRYL

Finally, we hit a decent break with the timing.

EMILY

Yes, indeed.

DARRYL

I'm so glad you won't need to sleep through the national championship game ...

EMILY

Or, even worse, retch through it ...

DARRYL

Even if the Sun Devils aren't there like they should be! ... What is going on here?

EMILY

I thought I'd do a little baking.

DARRYL

Boy, you are feeling well if you can deal with cooking smells.

EMILY

Too bad I have to go back for another dose Thursday and start the whole miserable cycle again.

For rights and permissions contact
paul@pauldonnellyplays.com

DARRYL

It doesn't seem fair that you have to go in and get sandbagged again just as you're starting to get up to speed.

EMILY

Let's not let it ruin tonight ...

DARRYL

Right you are. Think you're up for pizza?

EMILY

I think so. It's definitely worth a shot.

DARRYL

Are these pans actually antiques?

EMILY

No ...

DARRYL

If you're going to be home cooking ... the days you feel up to it, anyway ... why not splurge on some decent cookware.

EMILY

These work fine.

DARRYL

I have two words to say to that.

EMILY

Don't be rude.

DARRYL

Not those two. "Non-stick." Hmm. Is that really two words?

EMILY

You have no idea how cathartic scrubbing a pan really hard can be.

DARRYL

With newer cookware it would be an option instead of a necessity.

EMILY

I can't see spending the money on something I may not be here to use in six months or a year ...

DARRYL

I know better than to say "it's only money" to you.

EMILY

Good!

DARRYL

So, what are you going to do with all this stuff ...

EMILY

It freezes ...

DARRYL

Which is not an answer ...

EMILY

If I actually make it through surgery, I know I'm going to need help with a lot of things, rides and whatnot ... I'm going to want to have some tangible way of expressing my thanks. And, if things don't go well, there will be food in the house for the mourners. I know there will be people from out of town. Friends. Former colleagues. My parents probably won't come. But I bet Margaret and her family will. Maybe even Frank. ... What's the matter?

DARRYL

Nothing. Really. Okay, I hate to hear you talk that way, but I'd really hate it if you started censoring yourself around me.

EMILY

Good. 'Cause even at my best I no longer have the energy for that. In fact, I have something else to tell you.

DARRYL

Yes?

EMILY

There may be one other mourner.

DARRYL

Oh?

EMILY

You know I was married ...

DARRYL

Briefly. A long time ago?

EMILY

Three years. While I was in college.

DARRYL

You got in touch with your ex?

EMILY

Dear god, no. But we had a daughter ...

DARRYL

You had a child?

EMILY

Had. Have? Had? We gave her up for adoption.

DARRYL

Oh my god!

EMILY

Part of how he became my ex. Anyway. I registered with a search service this week. If she's looking for me we ought to get a match pretty quickly. She at least has the right to know that there's breast cancer in her gene pool.

DARRYL

Wow.

EMILY

So, if anything happens and someone comes along claiming to be my daughter, I didn't want you caught unawares.

DARRYL

Thanks.

EMILY

Since you seem to be my executor by default.

DARRYL

A role I hope never to fulfill!

EMILY

We'll see. Let's hope I hear something on a good day and before May.

DARRYL

Could you do me one other favor?

For rights and permissions contact
paul@pauldonnellyplays.com

EMILY

What's that?

DARRYL

Since it's just the two of us, could you lose the wig? It's kinda unnerving and I really like your bare head better.

EMILY (removing the wig)

Good. So do I.

Lights fade to BLACK.

Trees Don't Mourn the Autumn

ACT I

Scene 11

Setting: Emily's hospital room. May, 1994.

At rise: In a deliberately ritualistic sequence the stage is stripped of all the set pieces that have represented various locales in EMILY's life and imagination.

When the stage is completely bare, lights come up full in a harsh white glare.

Masked attendants wheel on a hospital bed containing EMILY, who is bald and connected to a number of drains and tubes. The attendants set the bed center stage and exit.

After EMILY is alone in the bed for a beat, lights cross to a less harsh area lighting around the bed. After another beat, DR. HUDSON enters the light and looks at EMILY.

EMILY stirs.

EMILY

Dr. Hudson?

DR. HUDSON

Hello, Emily.

EMILY

Hi.

DR. HUDSON

How are you feeling?

EMILY

Not bad. (surprised) Not bad at all.

EMILY holds out her unintubated hand. DR. HUDSON takes it gently.

EMILY

Thank you.

For rights and permissions contact
paul@pauldonnellyplays.com

DR. HUDSON

You're welcome. I'm glad we've gotten this far.

EMILY

The worst is over, isn't it?

DR. HUDSON smiles, but doesn't answer.

EMILY

The worst is over. I'm sure.

EMILY shuts her eyes and drifts back to sleep as lights
fade to BLACK.

End ACT I.

Trees Don't Mourn the Autumn

ACT II

Scene 1

Setting: EMILY's kitchen. July 1994.

At rise: EMILY sits at the table with her head down. A bowl sits by her head. A box of cereal lays on its side, contents spilling across the table. A carton of milk stands warming.

After a beat we hear the sound of key in a lock and a door opening, followed by DARRYL's voice.

DARRYL

Hey 'Em. It's me. ... You up?

EMILY (groggily, not moving)

I'm out here.

DARRYL enters with a drugstore bag and EMILY's mail. HE stops and takes in the full tableau.

DARRYL

Had a little spill here?

DARRYL begins cleaning up the table. HE feels the milk carton.

DARRYL

This has been out a while. What happened.

EMILY

I dropped the damn cereal. And then I just couldn't keep my head up. God I'm sick of this. I can't even pour myself a bowl of goddamn cereal. My life, like Gaul, can be divided into three parts. Sleep. Pain. And Fog. I'm useless. Useless. And I hate it. I don't know if it's the goddamn radiation or the fucking percocet but it's gotta stop. I can't live like this. I just can't ...

DARRYL

I'm sorry.

EMILY

And now I'm becoming a burden to you ...

For rights and permissions contact
paul@pauldonnellyplays.com

DARRYL

You are not a burden.

EMILY

Yes, I am. A wretched useless burden. I never should have started all this. I should have just gotten into my car and driven somewhere cold and let myself die peacefully of exposure ...

DARRYL

Oh Em ...

EMILY

What?

DARRYL

Please don't say that. I know it's hard...

EMILY

Of course you do. You've had to listen to my whining for weeks. Don't tell me I'm not a burden.

DARRYL

I'm going to dump this milk. You don't need food poisoning on top of everything else.

EMILY

It really wouldn't matter much, would it?

DARRYL

You might want to take a look at your mail.

EMILY

Bills I can't pay? Catalogues for lingerie that's not going to fall quite right from a single breast? Joys I can't even begin to imagine?

DARRYL

There's a letter with a Houston return address.

EMILY

What?

DARRYL

Didn't you say when the agency called to confirm they said she lived in Houston?

EMILY

Oh no. It can't be ...

For rights and permissions contact
paul@pauldonnellyplays.com

DARRYL (holding out the letter)
The handwriting is even similar.

EMILY stares at him, but doesn't reach for the letter.

Em?
DARRYL

I don't want it.
EMILY

Of course you do ...
DARRYL

EMILY
No, I don't. I really don't. I don't know what I was thinking ... This was one more bad idea. One more thing I shouldn't have done ...

DARRYL
Aren't you at least curious?

EMILY
No. What do I have to offer her? Sick and useless. And, thanks to me, this could also happen to you!!

DARRYL
That's hardly inevitable.

EMILY
It's probably why I'm still alive. So I can live to see it happen to her.

DARRYL
When do you see Dr. Siwek again?

EMILY
I'll be in his office tomorrow. Why? Treatment number 14! The fun's more than half over. (a beat) I'm not going to make it. I can't do this anymore.

DARRYL
Talk to Siwek, please. Maybe a different pain med would help.

EMILY
Or introduce some brand new side effect. What the hell. Never let it be said I didn't live life to the fullest. Do me a favor?

Sure. DARRYL

Open it for me. EMILY

You sure? DARRYL

EMILY nods.

DARRYL
I mean are you sure you don't want to open it yourself.

EMILY
If I touch it I may just burn it. Would you please just open it and tell me what it says.

DARRYL
Okay.

HE opens the envelope.

DARRYL
There's a picture. Oh my god.

EMILY
What?

DARRYL
Talk about the spitting image. She's beautiful!

EMILY
Then she's the spitting image of her father. He was a selfish, lazy, son-of-a-bitch, but he was charm incarnate. And as gorgeous as I've ever seen, unto this day.

DARRYL (holding out the picture)
Here.

EMILY (not taking the picture)
What's that expression? "That which doesn't kill us just fucks with our heads"?

DARRYL (still holding out the picture)
It's time.

EMILY

I wasn't strong enough for this before I got sick, what makes you think I need it now?

DARRYL doesn't respond, but continues holding out the picture. After a beat, EMILY takes it.

DARRYL turns away and busies himself reading the letter.

EMILY

Oh my.

Lights fade to BLACK.

Trees Don't Mourn the Autumn

Act II

Scene 2

Setting: Dr. SIWEK's Office. September 1994.

At rise: DR. SIWEK is seated behind his desk doing paperwork. There is a knock on the door.

DR. SIWEK

C'mon in ...

EMILY appears, bald again, and approaches DR. SIWEK's desk with a halting shuffle. SHE occasionally has to pause or winces from the pain, but SHE forges on.

EMILY

Hi there.

DR. SIWEK

Oh boy. The neuropathy's still pretty bad.

EMILY (waving away his concern)

I appreciate your seeing me at this late hour. I didn't want Darryl using work time to bring me.

DR. SIWEK

Of course. Is the MS Contin helping at all?

EMILY

Contrary to appearances, it is. I'm able to sleep some. Nothing helps when I try to walk. But I'm going to keep walking. I don't know whether its the taxol or the morphine, but I've got chemo-brain again. Worse than when I was in chemo. It gets so that I forget why I hurt so much. Very disconcerting. ... Sit. Sit ... If you wait for me to get to the chair we may not get out of here until morning.

DR. SIWEK (sitting)

I am so sorry you are going through this. I've never had someone experience this kind of neuropathy with taxol. All the literature indicates that it occurs in fewer than 3% of patients.

EMILY

And it's usually just a little tingling in the fingers or toes. I know. I checked the literature, too.

For rights and permissions contact
paul@pauldonnellyplays.com

DR. SIWEK

Good. It's important to understand what's happening to you...

EMILY (dryly)

Yeah. It's a huge help. But I checked the literature to make sure you weren't lying when you told me the side effects wouldn't be bad. Leave it to me to beat the odds this way!

DR. SIWEK

How's the nausea ...

EMILY

Haven't had anymore projectile vomiting.

DR. SIWEK

Celebrate the small victories?

EMILY

It's also disconcerting to feel stabbing pain in a breast that isn't there ... but I didn't come in to rehash my nightmare side effects or to get anymore prescriptions for drugs to address the side effects of the drugs I'm taking to address the side effects of my primary treatment drug.

DR. SIWEK

What can I do for you?

EMILY

I want to postpone my next dose.

DR. SIWEK

I know it's a lot to ask, with all you've been through, and I know my credibility is hanging by a thread, but these last two treatments are really critical if we're going to hope to prevent a recurrence.

EMILY

I didn't say stop. I didn't say never ...

DR. SIWEK

How long?

EMILY

Until after October 12.

DR. SIWEK

That's over three weeks. And you're due next week, right?

For rights and permissions contact
paul@pauldonnellyplays.com

EMILY

That's right.

DR. SIWEK

I certainly wouldn't recommend that much of a delay.

EMILY

I don't care what the effect will be. I'm not coming in for another treatment until after October 12. If you tell me that it screws things up so badly that I might as well not bother coming back at all, I'll take that risk.

DR. SIWEK

I don't actually know if that would be the case or not. So please, come back for the last two treatments.

EMILY

Fair enough.

DR. SIWEK

May I ask why you're so hell bent on waiting until after October 12?

EMILY

Because every treatment seems to make me feel a whole lot worse. I'm going to Las Vegas for Columbus Day Weekend. And I am going to walk off the plane. I'm not going to spend that weekend getting around in a wheelchair.

DR. SIWEK

You think beating the odds is going to be a trend? It's nice to see you so optimistic despite the pain ...

EMILY

I'm going to meet my daughter.

DR. SIWEK

Under the circumstances she couldn't come here?

EMILY

I'm seeing her for the first time in 27 years.

DR. SIWEK

Oh.

EMILY

Since I gave her up for adoption at birth. She wanted to meet on neutral ground and she's going to be at a trade show in Las Vegas that weekend. Something called Networld + InterOp. And we're going to meet there afterward. So, no, she can't come here. And, no, it can't wait. And if I postpone the treatment I know that my neuropathy and my memory loss won't get any worse before then.

SIWEK

I think that's wonderful. I can't imagine any treatment that would be better for you. And I certainly wish you all the luck in the world with your visit.

EMILY

Thank you. By then my system should be clean enough that I'll have to blame my nausea on anxiety, won't I?

DR. SIWEK

I hope it makes a nice change. Can I book you in here for later that week?

EMILY

I guess I better sign up now, hunh?

DR. SIWEK

I'd appreciate it ... I'll put you down for Thursday. But I'd really, really appreciate it if you'd call as soon as you get back and let me know how it all goes. Will you do that, please?

EMILY nods as lights fade to BLACK.

Trees Don't Mourn the Autumn

ACT II

Scene 3

Setting:

A table at an out of the way cocktail lounge in one of the big Vegas hotels. October, 1994.

EMILY is seated alone at a table. A glass of white wine sits in front of her untouched, but surrounded by empty bar snack bowls.

ALLISON COOPER walks in and looks around. SHE spots EMILY, their eyes meet and they wave awkwardly.

ALLISON

Emily ...

EMILY

Hi ...

ALLISON

Sorry I'm late. I hope you haven't been waiting long.

EMILY

Not at all ...

ALLISON extends her hand. They shake hands.

EMILY

I would have recognized you even if I hadn't seen your picture.

ALLISON

You, too. In fact that's how I used to imagine meeting you. Suddenly. Serendipitously. In an airport or mall. I'd see you walk by and just know, "Oh, that's her. There she is."

EMILY

And here I am. And here you are, finally. (embarrassed, clearing the snack bowls) I don't know why they didn't take the empties away when they brought new ones.

ALLISON

It's a different union that clears.

EMILY

No ...

ALLISON

No. Just a little trade show humor.

EMILY

Of course. Was the show a success for you?

ALLISON

I'm still standing and it's over. It was a triumph.

EMILY

I'm afraid I find computers fairly intimidating under the best of circumstances and, of course, lately I've been finding electric can openers too complex and confusing.

ALLISON

How are you doing with all that?

EMILY

Well, I think. I have two more treatments after I get home, then I sure hope I'll be in the clear.

ALLISON

Me, too.

EMILY

Thanks.

ALLISON

Is that why you registered ...

EMILY

Yes. Thought I'd try to take care of unfinished business ... just in case ...
And I thought you might need to know about the increased risk to you ...

ALLISON

I appreciate your good intentions, but it makes me feel what we call in the trade "burdened with knowledge." Here's this perfectly valid data, but I don't really have a clue what to do with it. Can't quite ignore it, can't quite find a real use for it ...

EMILY

If you're aware of the risk factor, you can screen ... catch it earlier if there is a problem ...

ALLISON

Where do you draw the line between screening and obsessing? It's not like if I just use a condom or take my insulin I'll be okay ...

EMILY

No.

ALLISON

And I really don't want to become some kind of neurotic harpie, losing sleep over every bump, bruise and twinge.

EMILY

Well ... I certainly didn't register only to be a bearer of ill-tidings. Why did you register?

ALLISON

I've always been curious. It makes mom ...

EMILY

She is your mother. Go ahead.

ALLISON

She never understood why I'd be curious. She still doesn't know we've been in touch. She's great, they're both great ... about most things. But anytime I'd ask about you there'd be stony silence or a quivering lip. It hurt her to the bone to think there was any kind of gap or need she couldn't fill. So I stopped asking. Michael has been great though. I guess I'm here because of his encouragement.

EMILY

How long have you been married?

ALLISON

Little over two years. But I've known him forever. We've been going out since we were sophomores at Baylor. Are you ...

EMILY shakes her head.

ALLISON

Can I ask about my father?

EMILY

You can ask about anything.

ALLISON

Do you know where he is?

For rights and permissions contact
paul@pauldonnellyplays.com

EMILY

No. I haven't seen him since before the divorce was final. We had no reason to stay in touch.

ALLISON

So you were married?

EMILY

Yes

ALLISON

To him?

EMILY

Yes.

ALLISON

Oh. Do you have any pictures?

EMILY

Not a one. Neither of us favor him, though. He was Italian. Enrique San Marcos. Two thirds of the classic equation.

ALLISON

Meaning?

EMILY

He was dark and handsome.

ALLISON

But not tall?

EMILY (nodding)

To his eternal regret. He was very bright and very, very charming. And even more lazy and irresponsible. And not, I'm afraid, likely to be looking for you.

ALLISON (shrugs)

His loss.

EMILY

Yes.

ALLISON

Listen, I've been on my feet since 7:30 this morning. If it's okay with you, I'm going to skip out on the drink and go up to my room, grab a shower, and get into even more comfortable shoes. What do you say we meet for dinner around 7:30?

EMILY

That sounds great.

ALLISON

I'll see you then.

As ALLISON exits without looking back, lights fade to BLACK.

Trees Don't Mourn the Autumn

ACT II

Scene 4

Setting: EMILY & ENRIQUE's apartment. April, 1968.

At rise: The apartment is now spartan, rather than slovenly. ENRIQUE is sprawled across the sofa listening to music through a pair of headphones.

A young, but clearly no longer pregnant, EMILY enters. SHE sees ENRIQUE and slams the door.

HE clearly hears the door and makes a decision not to acknowledge it.

SHE steps around in front of him. HE closes his eyes. SHE shuts off the stereo.

ENRIQUE (calmly removing headphones)

Home already?

EMILY

I see you've at least dressed. (sniffs) And even showered.

ENRIQUE

So what's for dinner?

EMILY

What day is this?

ENRIQUE

Oh, I didn't realize we had scheduled menus. If this is Thursday, it must be tuna helper ... If this is Friday, it must be spaghetti ...

EMILY

The date. What is the date?

ENRIQUE

April 5th?

EMILY

And what is due today?

For rights and permissions contact
paul@pauldonnellyplays.com

ENRIQUE
Rent.

EMILY
And you have your half?

ENRIQUE
And how much was that again?

EMILY
\$75.

ENRIQUE
And in that really annoying smug, supercilious way you have, you are absolutely certain that I don't have it, aren't you?

EMILY
I don't want to play games. Do you have it?

ENRIQUE
My half of the rent?

EMILY
Or any part of it?

ENRIQUE
Ah, there's that complete lack of faith I've come to cherish! 'Cause if the woman you love can't kick you when you're down what motivation would she have for sticking around?

EMILY
Don't change the subject.

ENRIQUE
Isn't the subject your incessant nagging?

EMILY
No. It's your complete lack of responsibility. I leave in the morning, you're laying on the couch. I come home at night, you're laying on the couch.

ENRIQUE
That's the sweet, compassionate nature I fell for ...

EMILY

You're just sorry I've stopped falling for your nonsense. And that I'm not going to support both of us indefinitely while you sit on that sofa sulking day-in and day-out.

ENRIQUE

Forgive me for talking the collapse of all my dreams and aspirations a little hard.

EMILY

Flunking out of grad school doesn't make you a martyr. It's been almost 4 months. It's time for you to get a job. It's time for you to carry some infinitesimal share of the load around here.

ENRIQUE

Well why don't I start with half of April's rent?

EMILY

What?

ENRIQUE

\$75. Two and one half times 30 pieces of silver. (opening his wallet, producing the currency) Here. Satisfied?

EMILY

Yes. Thank you. I'm sorry I doubted ... but this is the first time since December ... oh well. This is our new leaf, right? Right?

ENRIQUE

Sure.

EMILY

Let me get my half ... We can stop by the management office on our way out to dinner. My treat, okay?

ENRIQUE (shrugs)

I have to eat.

EMILY exits.

ENRIGUE sits with his head in his hands. HE does not look up when HE hears her return.

EMILY (shaking)

This is not an accusation, it's a question. I'm just asking a question. Have you seen my jade brush and mirror? The jade brush and mirror that my grandmother gave to my mother when she and my father were leaving Shandong? I thought I left them on the dresser this morning. I must have mislaid them. Did you happen to see where I set them down?

ENRIQUE

You said you wanted my half of the rent. You said you didn't care how I got it.

EMILY

You didn't ...

ENRIQUE

The slip is in the middle drawer under my socks.

EMILY (after a long beat)

I'm going to go ahead and pay the rent.

ENRIQUE

Okay.

EMILY

But you'll be on your own at the end of this month.

ENRIQUE

Sweetheart?

EMILY

Don't. Just don't. I'll find somewhere to stay tonight. I'll be back for whatever you don't steal in the morning.

ENRIQUE

Don't say that. I love you, Emily. I really do.

EMILY

Whatever that means.

ENRIQUE

Less than a jade brush and mirror, apparently.

EMILY

Much, much less. I gave up a child for you.

ENRIQUE

Don't ...

EMILY

I don't blame you for that, but I will never ever be able to forgive myself. I just hope she never finds out what a worthless pair her parents were.

ENRIQUE

Please believe me. I do love you.

EMILY

Yes, I know. That's the worst part, isn't it?

Lights fade to BLACK.

Trees Don't Mourn the Autumn

ACT II

Scene 5

Setting: The "chair room" of Dr. SIWEK's office. November 1994.

At rise: EMILY sits in a cozy recliner, laptop open on her lap, receiving a slow drip of taxol through the catheter in her chest. HER attention drifts from the laptop to an imagined conversation between ALLISON and AGNES which we watch with her.

ALLISON sits cross-legged on the ground with a styrofoam cup in her hand.

ALLISON

Change? Spare change? ...

EMILY

Oh no. Oh my, no ...

ALLISON

Got any spare change, mister? (mimes catching coins in the cup) Thank you, sir. God bless you, sir. ... Change? Spare change?

AGNES walks by and their eyes meet. AGNES immediately averts her gaze and begins walking away quickly.

ALLISON

Excuse me Ma'am ... (rising) Excuse me!! (cutting AGNES off) Hold on there.

AGNES

Yes, miss? May I help you?

ALLISON

Oh it's a little late for that, don't ya think?

AGNES

Excuse me?

ALLISON

I saw the way you looked away. You recognize me, don't you?

For rights and permissions contact
paul@pauldonnellyplays.com

AGNES

Miss, I've never seen you before ...

ALLISON

Except maybe a quick glance through an anesthetized haze before the nurse whisked me away ...

AGNES

What on earth are you talking about?

ALLISON

You feel the connection. I know you do. I may be poor and miserable and you may have ruined my life, but I'm not crazy. I've waited for this day for 27 years ...
Mother!!

AGNES

Oh no, that's just not possible ...

ALLISON

Just not possible or just not comfortable?

AGNES

I don't know ... no ... you couldn't be ...

ALLISON

So you thought you could just cast me aside and forget me and never have to pay a price ...

AGNES

Not forget ... never, never forget ...

ALLISON

So you admit ...

AGNES

You could be ... There is a hint of a resemblance.

ALLISON

That's right, mama. It's me, your precious baby, all grewed up!

AGNES

Heavens above. I don't know what to say ...

ALLISON (shaking her cup)

How about starting with a little spare change? Maybe even a few bills ...

For rights and permissions contact
paul@pauldonnellyplays.com

AGNES

Oh my ... well of course ... anything you need.

ALLISON (suddenly retracting the cup)

Nevermind. Forget it. I don't want your blood money. You don't get to buy a clean conscience ...

AGNES

Please let me help ...

ALLISON

Why should I? When you abandoned me? How do you think it felt growing up knowing I wasn't wanted by my own mother ...

AGNES & EMILY (in unison)

No! That's not true.

ALLISON

You cast me aside easily enough.

AGNES

No.

ALLISON

Tell me something ... would it have been as easy to cast aside a boy?

EMILY gasps.

AGNES

A boy would have been safe. He would have loved a boy. Like he loves Frankie. I knew I couldn't protect you if you stayed.

EMILY and AGNES (in unison)

I wanted to kill him the night after we gave you away. I don't know how my heart didn't just burst.

AGNES

I hated my own womanly weakness. I knew I wouldn't be able to stand up to him on your behalf.

EMILY and AGNES (in unison)

I convinced myself you would be better off.

ANGES

And I'm still not convinced you weren't better off.

For rights and permissions contact
paul@pauldonnellyplays.com

ALLISON

How convenient for you. The fact that you found me on the street begging from strangers doesn't shake your conviction?

AGNES

How did this happen? Tell me about your life ...Was there neglect? Were you abused?

ALLISON

I was loved and accepted. I had nothing second best. But when I refused to stop needing you they closed their hearts and cast me out ...

AGNES

I am sorry that things have worked out this way for you, but I can't take the blame any more than I could take the credit if things had turned out differently. At your age, you make your own life ...

ALLISON

And the life you made? A life of not being responsible? Of not being to blame?

AGNES

A life of shouldering sorrows you can't begin to imagine and trudging on through all the bleak and joyless days. I am fortunate in that I was not raised to expect happiness. It lets me celebrate the few joys I find as pleasant surprises and spares me the paralyzing modern sense that something must be wrong every moment I am not happy. Perhaps your life was ruined when you were told you had the right to be happy.

ALLISON

Boy are you ever one big disappointment.

AGNES

So you will let me leave you with a few dollars?

ALLISON

I guess. One of us might as well come out of this feeling better.

AGNES

Oh I will feel very well, indeed. It would kill the old man to see me throwing money away in this frivolous way.

EMILY laughs aloud as AGNES stuffs a few bills into ALLISON's Styrofoam cup.

For rights and permissions contact
paul@pauldonnellyplays.com

ALLISON

Listen, this is a good location. I'm here through the holidays. Come back and see me again.

AGNES

I will do that.

ALLISON

Thanks. This wasn't at all like I expected, but I'm still glad you wandered by.

AGNES

I'm glad you are well. The only sorrow to exceed the sorrow of giving you away would be the sorrow of knowing you had died before me.

ALLISON

Not to worry. I'm healthy as a horse.

AGNES

Well I must go, your father will be expecting his dinner.

ALLISON

You'll really come back sometime?

AGNES

I will.

ALLISON (holding out her hand)

Good to meet ya.

AGNES (taking her hand)

Likewise it would seem.

EMILY watches AGNES and ALLISON shake hands as lights fade to BLACK.

Trees Don't Mourn the Autumn

ACT II

Scene 6

Setting: EMILY's kitchen. January 1995.

At rise: EMILY is in the midst of elaborate meal preparations, employing her sparkling new Calphalon cookware. HER movements, particularly her walk, are still somewhat tentative and halting, indicating that the neuropathy is not completely behind her. SHE is, however, generally both more contented and animated than she has seemed at any other point.

Sound of key in a lock, followed by door opening.

DARRYL

It's me ...

EMILY

It's about time! I'm in the kitchen.

DARRYL

Hi. Sorry I'm late.

DARRYL enters with an enormous spray of mylar balloons, about half brightly colored and half reading "Congratulations" and "Way to Go."

EMILY

You nutcase!! What is this?

DARRYL

I know I'm a day or two late ... and I know it's an odd anniversary to celebrate ... I guess I wanted to acknowledge that you're still here a year later ...

EMILY

Thank you. Look at these. Thank you ... and thank you.

DARRYL

You're welcome. And please, that's all the sentimentality either one of us can stand. ... I thought you were going to wait for me to get started ...

For rights and permissions contact
paul@pauldonnellyplays.com

EMILY

Would you look at the time? If I had waited for you nobody would get fed until half-time. I invited people to a Super Bowl Party not a hunger strike. Tell you what, there's a batch of empenadas ready to come out of the oven. I still don't trust myself with a pan that's both hot and heavy, do me a favor and pull them out.

DARRYL

Aye, aye. (as he does) Would you check this out? You've been shopping?

EMILY

I'm finding catalogues quite a blessing!! You know that's how I did all of Christmas.

DARRYL

Sure. But that was for other people. That I would have expected.

EMILY

My way of saying I'm glad I'm still here, too?

DARRYL

Good-oh! Keep it up.

EMILY

You want them if I don't make it the whole way?

DARRYL

Emily! Please!

EMILY shrugs.

Just a thought ...

DARRYL

Let's stick with glad you're here!

EMILY

That's not the same as pretending I'll be here forever.

DARRYL

May we assume the odds are good you'll still be here at kick-off time?

EMILY smiles and nods.

DARRYL

So what else needs to be done to get this shindig ready?

EMILY

I guess we could start putting out cheeses. Did you get the napkins and plates?

For rights and permissions contact
paul@pauldonnellyplays.com

DARRYL

Right you are. Two packages each green and yellow and blue and white. I'll get them from the car ...

The phone rings. As EMILY goes to answer it, lights come up on ALLISON, DL, holding a phone.

ALLISON is nearly six months pregnant and just beginning to show.

EMILY (into the receiver)

Ice.

ALLISON

Excuse me?

EMILY

Oh gosh, Allison! Hello! I'm sorry ...

ALLISON

That's okay. "Ice"?

EMILY

I'm having a little Super Bowl gathering ... I assumed you were a guest calling to ask what you could bring.

ALLISON

Well then I won't keep you ...

EMILY

I've got plenty of time. The help just arrived so everything is under control.

DARRYL sticks his tongue out at her on "the help," then exits.

ALLISON

Sounds like fun.

EMILY

It's the first time in a while I've been up to having people in. It should be very nice. What about you? How were your holidays?

ALLISON

Really great. And I really, really want to thank you for your beautiful gift ... It really meant ... (her voice breaks) ... so much. Shit! I wanted to wait until I could talk about them without crying. Looks like I didn't wait quite long enough.

EMILY

That's okay. I'm so glad you liked them ...

ALLISON

I did. I do. Very much.

EMILY

I'm glad. I was afraid I might be pushing too hard ...

ALLISON

Not at all.

EMILY

And I'm sure you've been busy with the holidays. I was afraid they might make things more difficult with your mother.

ALLISON

No. If anything they seemed to help her understand.

EMILY

Good. That's good.

ALLISON

And I have news that helped. And which may help explain why I have been so emotional lately.

EMILY

What's that?

ALLISON

You sitting down?

EMILY

What? What is it?

ALLISON

I'm going to have a baby.

EMILY is speechless.

ALLISON
Did you hear me?

EMILY node mutely.

ALLISON
Emily?

EMILY
Oh Allison ...

ALLISON
It's supposed to be good news.

EMILY
It is. It's wonderful.

ALLISON
Yes, it is. Michael is so excited I think he's getting even less sleep than me.

EMILY
Tell him not to waste the sleepless nights now. He'll get plenty of them later
Do you know ...

ALLISON
A little girl. Catherine Agnes. You'll have to come visit ...

EMILY
May I? I would love to. If it won't be a problem ...

ALLISON
She'll take a little more coaxing. But she'll come around.

EMILY
Are you sure?

ALLISON
No.

EMILY
Well ...

ALLISON
But I'm not sure about anything, y'know? Lately that just stops me less.

EMILY

That's good?

ALLISON

Yes. I'm just beginning to get a clue as to how hard it must have been for you ... It's really not possible to imagine is it?

EMILY

No, it's not.

ALLISON

Okay. I'm going to let you get back to setting up your party. But I hope you'll come for the christening.

EMILY

I wouldn't miss it.

ALLISON

Good.

EMILY

I'll give you a call real soon.

ALLISON

I'd like that. Bye for now.

EMILY

Bye.

As they each set down their receivers, lights fade out on ALLISON.

DARRYL (returning)

I was trying not to get caught listening ...

EMILY sits.

DARRYL

Em?

DARRYL

I take it she liked the mirror and brush?

EMILY nods.

DARRYL

Maybe someday you'll stop worrying about everything.

EMILY

You just can't ever know ... You can never predict ...

DARRYL

How could she not appreciate your grandmother's jade mirror and brush?
Nevermind the sentimental value, they were beautiful pieces...

EMILY

No. You can never predict...

DARRYL

What?

EMILY

Where life will take you next ...

DARRYL

What's going on now?

EMILY

You can never know how bad it's going to be, sometimes. And then you can't guess
how wonderful it can be others.

DARRYL

If I stop asking will you tell me?

EMILY

I like this year's news a whole lot better!

DARRYL

And that "news" is?

EMILY is again speechless.

DARRYL

What, already? What?

EMILY

A sentence I truly never thought I'd say ...

DARRYL

Oh boy!

EMILY

Close. Oh girl.

DARRYL

When did you get so didactic ... (getting it) oh my ...

EMILY (nodding)

I'm going to be a grandmother. Me.

DARRYL

Congratulations.

EMILY doesn't respond.

DARRYL

This is a good thing, right?

EMILY

Yes.

DARRYL

Your enthusiasm is breathtaking.

EMILY

When you never held your child, it doesn't even cross you mind that you might hold a grandchild someday. I'm stunned. But I'm here. Bald and aching, but about to be a grandmother.

Lights fade to BLACK.

CURTAIN

End of *Trees Don't Mourn the Autumn*