

Pieces

By
Paul Hood

PIECES

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PIECES

for Tanaia, Cameron and Grace

PIECES

Pieces was originally produced at the Krevsky Center at Theatre Harrisburg in Harrisburg, PA., it was directed by Francesca Amendolia featuring the following cast:

Phil Blakeny.....Andrew “Sarge” Dixon
Kes Blakeny.....Dana Kinsey
Ele Blakeny.....Mia Thornton
Hota Pasquale.....Gerren Wagner
Graham Blakeny.....John “Chick” Lee
Delphy Winton.....Diego Sandino
Fenton Dundalk.....Tessa Eberlein

CAST: 3-4 Men 3-4 Women (see casting note below)

PHIL BLAKENY 30s-40s, Keen, yet weary businessman
KES BLAKENY 30s-40s, Lonely housewife, stern and independent
ELE BLAKENY 18-20, Independent, inquisitive, confident
GRAHAM BLAKENY 50s-60s, A tough spirit, no nonsense and prideful
HOTA PASQUALE 30s-40s, Outspoken, quick witted, introspective
DELPHY WINTOR 30s-40s, Straight-shooting accountant, soft-spoken.
*FENTON DUNDALK 18-20S, Inquisitive, mellow in disposition

SPECIAL CASTING NOTE

The character of Fenton can be portrayed by male or female depending on the director’s choice. Also, stagehands can act as furniture store employees and are free to casually improvise during scene changes

TIME: Present Day, Future, Past.

PLACE: A South-Central Pennsylvania City

PIECES

PIECES

ACT I
SCENE 1

Early morning. At center is a living room in the soft glow of dawn. It is a hodge-podge of thrift-store relics and ratty, aged furniture. Draped exhausted over the width of a bent sofa-chair is PHIL BLAKENY, asleep. His shoes are somewhere near the living room, somewhere they are perhaps forbidden to be.

KES enters, trips over the shoes.

KES. Your shoes...I tripped over your Cole Haans—again—fifth time this week...

PHIL. S-sorry...

KES. Sorry doesn't have feet and a brain.

PHIL. Got in late, long night at the shop.

KES. Thought you said long nights were coming to an end.

PHIL. As soon as I find someone to help with managing the store they will. Until then—

KES. I'll keep tripping over your shoes in the morning while you leave me worrying why you're sleeping on that chair all night?

PHIL. Come on, Kes. You get all grumpy when I come in late and crawl in bed smelling like work.

KES. (*softly*) Elé called last night, asked how you were. She wanted to call you at the store but...

PHIL. You told her not to?

KES. Would you have answered?

PHIL. (*sarcastically*) Why would I want to talk to my daughter that's away at college? Like, who does that? Why do I feel like this is the morning after Elé's graduation when you dug into me about showing up late. I saw her walk across the stage, get the diploma, smile and wave at us, was in the family photo, and still you were pissed!

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KES. I wanted us all there at the same time, no anxiety or pressure. That's all I wanted.

PHIL. (*mumbles*) I was there.

KES. She's doing well.

PHIL. Of course she is.

KES. Your shoes are where you left them.

PHIL. I know. Have you seen my phone?

KES. I only just discovered you—in your chair again—for the third time this week! How do I know where you left your phone?

PHIL. Can I use yours to call Elé?

KES. The bedroom, on the nightstand, phone's there. Sure wish you'd tell me what's really going on at the shop.

PHIL. What do you mean? Everything's fine at the shop.

KES. You said you'd hire help and have more time to spend with us. Elé was involved in so many things last year, and you missed a lot of them.

PHIL. Touché. But what'd you say to me when we first met? Your ideal man: lemme see...oh, yes, a provider, a family man, the breadwinner, strong and supportive, nurturing, sensitive—

KES. You must find a balance.

PHIL. I can't be the champion of everything! I'm trying.

KES. Remember what I said to you on our first date?

PHIL. (*with humor*) How can I forget the nearly impossible standards?

KES. Call Elé when you find your phone. She misses her father.

PHIL. Yes, that part. A better idea than a potential argument.

KES. Don't trip over your shoes. (*Kes exits.*)

SCENE 2

Phil returns, his phone against his ear. Nearby, in an area that represents a college dorm, sits ELÉ. She quickly answers her phone.

ELÉ. Should I worry you're the only person that calls me?

PHIL. I am?

ELÉ. Oh, Dad...hey...thought you were Mom.

PHIL. I called at a bad time. How are classes, school stuff?

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ELÉ. Mom told you I called?

PHIL. She did—after berating me about how I was asleep on the sofa-chair and left my shoes—

ELÉ. Still sleeping in that chair?

PHIL. You know?

ELÉ. Mom talks about it all the time, Dad. Every time she calls me, which is too much...

PHIL. Oh, okay...didn't know that.

ELÉ. Dad...

PHIL. You're doing well then?

ELÉ. Yeah, guess so. I haven't been out much, not sure if I'm ready to walk around campus. Met some cool people during freshman orientation though—so that's encouraging.

PHIL. Your academic life should equal your social life, you have to...find a balance. All work, no play...you know the saying...

ELÉ. Where's Mom, anyway?

PHIL. Probably in the kitchen making coffee. She was up early.

ELÉ. Early?

PHIL. Having trouble sleeping, I guess. Probably misses you.

ELÉ. Please, Mom's glad to have time alone is my guess. She was stressed last year with all the college stuff, remember?

PHIL. Unfortunately.

ELÉ. Thought she had insomnia—like that guy from that movie we watched...what was it...

PHIL. Fight Club?

ELÉ. Could you imagine Mom, I mean at the end of her sanity, bat-shit crazy, boxing other women in some underground club for empty-nesters?

PHIL. Actually...I can imagine it.

ELÉ. Huh?

PHIL. So you're doing well?

ELÉ. You asked me that already.

PHIL. So, you're good?

ELÉ. You wanted me to go to that community college for a year first, stay and work at the store, remember?

PHIL. I did.

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ELÉ. Have you hired anyone?

PHIL. Well, there's been a small hitch in that plan.

ELÉ. Dad, you were spending all day and night there!

PHIL. I know.

ELÉ. What about Mom? Is that why you're coming home late?

PHIL. Not that serious.

ELÉ. Fight Club, Dad. I'm telling you. Mom's going nuts worrying about you.

PHIL. ...And this phone call was to see how my daughter's doing?

ELÉ. I don't understand.

PHIL. You shouldn't be concerned with what's going on here. Enjoy your college experience while you have it right in front of you. I never had the privilege, and I regret it. Had to learn things from the grass-root up.

ELÉ. It's you that told me to get help when I was failing calculus. The mule that fails to move forward fails to...whatever that weird saying was you spouted off to me.

PHIL. It's not that simple. Things with the store involve money. If I hire the wrong person...well, there's the chance I lose...money.

ELÉ. Mom's at home alone...a lot.

PHIL. She needs something to occupy her mind. She needs a hobby.

ELÉ. Hobby?

PHIL. Yoga, join a gym, a book club...something. It'd be good for her.

ELÉ. Remember your date nights with her, before you took over the store?

PHIL. Haven't done that in years, too busy. Money's tight. Last week I worked nearly eighty hours to keep things afloat. I asked your mom to come down and help—thought maybe she'd feel less alone if she were at the store with me. She seems to enjoy doing nothing, sits around all day just wasting hour after hour. Clearly, you've gained your motivation from me or your grandfather.

ELÉ. (*softly*) I miss Graham Cracker.

PHIL. You still call'em that?

ELÉ. It was all he ever had to eat in his house.

PHIL. The reason I hate graham crackers—

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ELÉ. Dad. Gotta run...have class...

PHIL. Right...try and call your mom later this week.

ELÉ. I'll call tomorrow. If I wait till the end of the week, she'll call me first, and our conversation will be about you. Give yourself a break and hire someone for the store and take Mom out. Loves, bye! *(Phil, standing in silence, keeps the phone against his ear and finally—in the form of a monologue—says what he truly wanted to tell Elé.)*

PHIL. Store's closing in a month. I can't keep up with the downed economy, the bigger stores, and definitely can't afford to hire someone...which means...yeahcan't afford to help you with tuition anymore... Elé...I love you so much...my little angel...I hope one day you understand...no, sweetheart...the store's been on its last leg for a while now. I know you're upset...sorry to spring this bad news on you so suddenly. Yeah, I know, it's your first year at Temple. I know, I know...the first school you chose out of many...I know it's the school you've always wanted to attend. I hope you'll forgive me for failing. I gave it all I could. I really did. It's a new day and age...maybe I could try something different! That's why I called now, because I actually have the time, and it is time away from...*(pulls the phone from his ear, stares across the room)*...failure.

SCENE 3

A kitchen adorned with outdated, old appliances and furniture. It is early evening and Kes determinedly roots through cabinets as her close friend HOTA stands nearby.

HOTA. The smell from the river this time of year...fishy...

KES. After years of living in the same town—in the same house—I worry when I don't smell it. Absence of an earthy aroma means winter's coming.

HOTA. Thought you quit smoking. *(Abruptly, Kes ends her search.)*

KES. You know?

HOTA. I *know* you.

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KES. Confession: I told Phillip and Elé I gave up smoking. That was a lie.

HOTA. Shit...

KES. ...What is it?

HOTA. Thought I was alone. (*Hota opens a small clutch to reveal a lone joint.*)

KES. You bitch.

HOTA. Tried CBD oil in a vape pen, felt like I was...

KES. ...Lying?

HOTA. Exactly.

KES. Nothing beats a smoke or a good, slow drag on a nicely filled joint. Like, after an amazing meal or...

HOTA. A good...

KES. Lay...

HOTA. Yes, that. ...A good pounding.

KES. (*sighs*) We were good girls once. Then we...

HOTA. Married.

KES. Speak for yourself.

HOTA. Unhappy liars. Look at us, fibbing to each other for how long? Men do it all the time, mostly to themselves. I was happy for you when you said you quit getting high. Shit, I felt guilty every time I stepped outside and lit one, hoping the tempting tendrils wouldn't float toward your bedroom window.

KES. Hilarious how as adults we cannot be honest with ourselves.

HOTA. (*holding out the joint*) How's about we celebrate our dishonesty?

KES. With Glee, sis.

HOTA. Just one joint though?

KES. Hey, baby steps.

HOTA. That time when we snatched your mom's pack of Virginia Slims.

KES. My mom still talks about that.

HOTA. You're kidding.

KES. She still refers to it when she thinks I'm hiding something from her. Like when Phil went to the Eagles game instead of going to her house for Sunday dinner.

HOTA. Drove pass the store yesterday.

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KES. You did?

HOTA. It wasn't as busy as I'm used to seeing.

KES. Phillip's always coming home late.

HOTA. You think something's up—something you need to worry about?

KES. Ah, I know what you're thinking. And no, it's not an affair.

Although Phil screwing another woman would give me something to grip. It's the mystery that stresses me.

HOTA. Suppressing the need to stray myself. I need the fluttering in my belly again.

KES. Where does that go, the fluttering?

HOTA. I wish I knew the answer. Why do you think I haven't quit the self-medicating? I'm in this weird transition in my marriage, where each day looks to me like a painting, and one I'm rather bored with.

KES. Like a Norman Rockwell knock-off?

HOTA. More like the angry lines of a Jackson Pollock painting, confusing in its chaotic beauty, which terrifies me, honestly. It's not linear or clear, and it scares me that I admire other men...and wonder. I wonder what they feel like, how they smell, where they go at night, because I...

KES. You should've brought two joints.

HOTA. How long have we been friends?

KES. A long time. You know all my quirks.

HOTA. Tell me you can't sleep because you're worried about Phil and the store.

KES. He hasn't slept in our bed in...

HOTA. You think it's another woman, so you go and get someone to make you...well, give you the flutters again?

KES. It's not about sex...this other guy...we haven't done that. There's something there though— something far from physical.

HOTA. I know.

KES. We talk.

HOTA. Yeah, after you fuck. That's surprising. Most men want to roll over and bask in the glory...or sleep.

KES. Okay, we kissed...once. That's all, I swear. But conversation is how it started. Casual conversation, then walks, then...but we haven't slept

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together. I won't lie and say I haven't thought about it. I think about it a lot.

HOTA. It's like sunlight to a flower. A warm gaze from another man and then...you blossom. You're open!

KES. You're a good friend, but you'd make a horrible shrink.

HOTA. Phil's presence is like the old furniture in your living room: he exists, offers comfort, but isn't as functional as you once thought. That's why you can't sleep. I think you know this deep down.

KES. I wish you were wrong.

HOTA. Not one soul was at his store. Is he closing?

KES. It's his father's store. Been in the family since I can remember. There's no way he'd....

HOTA. Phil's not telling you something, Kes.

KES. (*curt*) He promised his father he'd keep the business going. Phil may be negligent of our household but one thing he does is keep promises.

HOTA. Don't mean to ruffle your feathers.

KES. I want Phillip to ruffle my feathers, like he used to, like when we first met. He hasn't even held my hand in months. Last time he touched me was...I...How horrible is that? I don't have deep, romantic feelings for the other guy. We just fill the voids in each other's lives. We...fill in the blanks, feel the blanks, talk about...the blanks. It's [fine] while it's happening but when it's over, the guilt sets in, and I come home crying and trying to sleep away the mess I've made. My mind won't allow me to do anything but worry until Phil gets home. And in he comes, exhausted, more focused on something he said he would ease up on, but he can't because he made a promise to his father before he died.

HOTA. Listen to yourself.

KES. I've turned into the type of person I avoid.

HOTA. It's not all your fault.

KES. What if I'm driving Phil away? What if the promise to his father is now just a cover for how he truly feels about our family?

HOTA. You two should join a gym together. (*Kes delivers a searing glare.*)

KES. Yeah, right after I hit this doobie like Snoop Dogg.

PIECES

HOTA. The anxiety of being in love, the click, click, clicking sound of the eventual ride with the potential to thrill you or give you a heart attack? That—my love—is what's missing. The ride is closed.

KES. I miss the ride.

HOTA. Maybe the excitement will return when Phil comes to his senses?

KES. His senses...

HOTA. So, what's your plan?

KES. I need a plan?

HOTA. Gotta begin somewhere. Find some way to make yourself happy.

KES. What if I don't?

HOTA. Just devise a plan and follow through.

KES. You're suggesting I keep up with the other guy?

HOTA. Of course not. That's a basketball game: passes, the occasional dribble, a shot here and there...then a fucking pass and...rebounds.

KES. Shame on you for the sports analogy.

HOTA. All my brothers played basketball, remember?

KES. (*considering*) A plan.

HOTA. Part of your plan should include more girls' nights. We don't do those anymore. Look at us, two broken housewives, hiding from each other and what's in front of us. Remember when we were younger and how we used to laugh at the women we've become? Maybe that's what we need to do, you know, regain some part of our youth, some part of the fresh ladies we were at one time. I don't know, maybe I'm just talking out of my ass, like some drunk man at a bar...

KES. You're right. I sit around feeling sorry for myself. I need to let Phil run through his course while I consider mine. That's part of the deal, right? For better for worse, till death, or till I get fat and tired and start reading really shitty Harlequin novels.

HOTA. (*matter of fact*) I still read those.

KES. Grabbed a copy of *Shades of Red* myself.

HOTA. Bad idea.

KES. Yeah, tell me about it.

HOTA. That book would have me running all over the city looking for men in cheap suits.

PIECES

KES. I had a man in a suit at one time in my life.

SCENE 4

It is the next day. Phil enters, takes off his jacket, surveys the space. As he does this, Kes enters. She does not see Phil—they are in the same space but not the same time or dimension.

PHIL. Wonder if she knows I'd come home during the day sometimes when she ran errands. Wonder if she could smell me or even sense I came through to merely feel what home was like while I was at the shop? *(Phil walks away from the door, heads toward his favorite chair where he sits and watches Kes, who continues to move about, tidying.)* I wanted to come home and realize I was missing something; something that would make me reshape my family business and want to stay home with Kes and do the things we used to do. Those days...gone like words written in sand, sand infiltrated by rushing water. I used to come home to her smile—something I found endearing. It was her that intrigued me most, the attempt of trying to fulfill whatever role she thought a wife should play. The cover of this so-called love story was an incomplete drawing, a careless yet striking doodle, an image of a young woman in love. *(Nearby the house phone rings. Kes, alerted, allows the phone to ring...)*

KES. The phone ringing meant he was coming home early to spend time with me, early enough so we could...you know, do what young couples do in the middle of the afternoon. But it was never him...just wrong numbers and bill collectors, telemarketers...I'd have conversations with whoever was on the phone. I used to think it was boredom that made me do this but, then I realized it was... *(Kes answers, places the phone to her ear.)*

PHIL. Loneliness. I was a horrible husband, shortsighted, one-track-work became the need instead of a means...

KES. Hello?

PHIL. I should be on the phone: "Hey, busy? I've some free time and was wondering if you wanted to meet for lunch...yeah...that place near our house...the one with that bread we like..."

PIECES

KES. I hang up and go about my business...which became no business—the business of a woman...doing nothing...waiting...wanting...needing...

PHIL. “...See ya soon.” But I never would. Before my dad died, he said, “Be a man of your word or get treated like a boy, son.” Dad, your man is a boy in a wrinkled suit, a failed business owner, a bad husband, a father who’s merely a sketch of the father you were. The suffering...it feels warranted.

KES. The other guy, I can’t say his name. It hurts to say his name or even think about him, but I do. It’s a casual thing, like when you think about eating...or watching TV...you think...then you want...you want it until it comes, gives you what you need and then hate it when you’re done. It’s the bad, mind-numbing TV show, the greasy, unhealthy meal...the one that tastes like everything you ever missed when eating...

PHIL. I deserve to have Kes leave me, stray even. Elé to leave college, come home, and be miserable, struggle to help me keep the business afloat then when it closes, have her enroll in a community college and get a junk degree that leads her toward a dreadful job, where she’ll become miserable...stuck...

KES. Elé must know I’m crazy, I can see it in her eyes, even hear it in her voice. It’s her inflections, the rise on the end of her statements, like “Mom, you really should get out more” or “Mom, Dad sleepwalks, I’m pretty sure of it.” Little things Elé said, now just echoes within the house, whispered remembrances from the mouth of our daughter, someone we created from a love long gone. Could it in fact be...gone? *(A quiet moment. Kes and Phil stand, move about the house while looking over odds and ends. Kes comes across Phil’s misplaced cell phone. Phil makes his way to the door and leaves. Kes stands still, silently.)*

Scene 5

DELPHY WINTOR, a slight, gentle man, stands in the middle of the kitchen with a bundle of documents in his hand. He looks exhausted. Phil is nearby, a drink in his hand. Kes enters, a casual stroll toward the refrigerator. The two men do not acknowledge her right away.

PIECES

KES. Del?

DELPHY. *(to Kes)* You look rested.

PHIL. Was just telling Del about your insomnia.

KES. I wouldn't say—

DELPHY. My wife has the same issue. Happens most times during the summer, the heat—

KES. Surprised to see you here, Del. It's tax season, your busiest time.

DELPHY. Early visit.

PHIL. Del wanted to get a head start on our taxes this year.

KES. Fair enough. *(Kes exits.)*

PHIL. I haven't told her.

DELPHY. Figured that.

PHIL. I think she knows.

DELPHY. How could she not. The store's foot traffic decreased ten percent last quarter.

PHIL. Big box stores, I can't keep up. They're killing me in the field, like D-day. I'm off the boat, already wounded, on the beach...dying.

DELPHY. It's not that serious. Maybe you need to change—

PHIL. No promised my dad I would keep the store as it is, same traditions, refurbished discount furniture, low prices.

DELPHY. Things have changed. What about a new business venture? Come on, you're a sharp guy, cut out something new!

PHIL. Like what? Reupholstering furniture is all I know.

DELPHY. What about the sports thing you mentioned to me a few years back? You know, refurbishing sports equipment, something like that—remember that idea?

PHIL. And it was [just] that...an idea.

DELPHY. I know what this means to you. Fact is you can't keep the store open—you're looking at a month. The lease is running out and the company you're up against wants to discuss a possible buyout.

PHIL. I've failed.

DELPHY. Don't start that.

PHIL. Being honest?

DELPHY. Self-pity.

PIECES

PHIL. Being honest with myself is all I'm doing. I let down the neighborhood, dad, Elé, and Kes...

DELPHY. You're a victim of change is all. Don't beat yourself up.

PHIL. I'd like to beat myself blue, bloody, to a pulp—until I'm a mess, a person you can form into something different, you know? Ever feel like you've done nothing good to the point of wanting to punish yourself?

DELPHY. Have you forgotten I'm a tax guy?

PHIL. Have you forgotten where I live? Everyone's far younger than you and me, and the neighborhood is foreign. I used to get smiles from strangers, now I get sideways glances, weak half-smiles and excluded from most events. Those stores moving in, the ones devouring the mom-and-pop stores like mine are eating the soul and fiber of what made my store flourish. I'm old and out of touch, Del. Disconnected. I deserve this. All of it. My early success...maybe I did something similar and didn't know it. Could I have been that guy? The guy that pushed someone else out?

DELPHY. Doubt that when you were already here for so long.

PHIL. The look on Elé's face when she was accepted to college. It's gonna hurt, Del. Didn't have the heart to tell her it's bound to get tougher for our family with lots of unwanted changes.

DELPHY. She's a smart kid. She'll get through it. She has your strong mind and...Kes...she'll get through it too. You all will.

PHIL. What if we don't?

DELPHY. Don't lose before you play the odds.

PHIL. Too late. Game over. You said it yourself.

DELPHY. I suggested an option.

PHIL. The option...giving in. Waving a white flag.

DELPHY. That's not quite what I—

PHIL. I can't.

DELPHY. What else is there?

PHIL. Know what?

DELPHY. You have an idea?

PHIL. Gonna go sleep with the enemy, see what's...under the bed?

DELPHY. Why do that? It could make you feel worse.

PIECES

PHIL. What would make this worse is...if I didn't like the stuff they sold in the larger furniture stores. You know...I...look at the furniture in my living room. I'm surrounded by pieces of my own nightmare, the unraveling of my own life. Frayed. Old. Sunken in and worn.

DELPHY. May I suggest a different view.

PHIL. Maybe it'll light a fire under me. You know, to see what I'm up against? How bad could it be? Might get ideas...you said I was sharp, right? What'd you tell me—

DELPHY. Cut out a new...niche or...retire.

PHIL. Too young for retirement. *(Kes returns, walks over toward the kitchen sink. The men watch her.)*

KES. You two are awfully quiet.

DELPHY. Was just finishing up.

PHIL. Thanks, Del. See you next year?

SCENE 6

Early morning. The bedroom. It is a display of chic living, a room consumed by sleek furniture.

KES. You were in a hurry to get out of those shoes last night.

PHIL. Could you blame me? The real hurry was me getting you out of that dress...

KES. Those long days at the store, so glad they're done. Nice having you here.

PHIL. Where else is there to be?

KES. You're onto something...I didn't say get off me...

PHIL. Ever have that moment where you just wanna sit back and think about how good it all feels, how everything is comfortable and how good it all looks?

KES. Every day.

PHIL. It's what I'm doing now. I sit back and stare at the good stuff, allowing it to take place in the room without touching it—for a bit of time.

PIECES

KES. Like when we're at a party and mingling—and you walk away—and I see you across the room...

PHIL. Exactly...

KES. And I think to myself how lucky I am to have such a successful, handsome man who's given me more than I thought I could get in life?

PHIL. You're laying it on, and I like it.

KES. I revel in truth.

PHIL. I second that. I'm a lucky man.

KES. We're both lucky. *(Kes and Phil resume affection.)*

PHIL. Called Elé today.

KES. You made her day, you know?

PHIL. She told you?

KES. She did. *(The bedroom dims. Lights up on Elé, off in the distance that represents her college dorm room.)*

ELÉ. Dad called...yes...I know...he said things are going well and he's hired someone to help...oh...he's hiring another person too? That's great news! Guess that Ikea decided not to buy up the whole block. Yeah...that would've killed Dad...and Graham Cracker...Graham Cracker would've rolled over in his grave...yeah...tell him I miss him and thanks for the money and care package... *(Lights fade on Elé, come up on bedroom.)*

PHIL. Talking to her makes sense of this.

KES. It does. Can't believe how fast she's grown.

PHIL. Didn't she just graduate? I mean, really...

KES. Went too fast. Like I still expect her to walk in on us.

PHIL. I'll never forget that.

KES. Never get over seeing your parents naked...I know I didn't.

PHIL. Me either. I wonder if she...

KES. I'm sure she heard everything.

PHIL. Not on this bed. This thing is quiet, has that memory foam we always wanted. That trick with the wine glass on one side of the bed...that sold us if you remember.

KES. It's perfect, so comfortable.

PHIL. It was our old mattress? The springs...can't remember anything about our bedroom furniture before we bought the new stuff. That part of our lives is like...like...some kind of fuzzy dream, fragmented.

PIECES

KES. I remember it. How could I not? It's like looking at old pictures of yourself as a child. Through the haze and distant recall, you see how happy or sad you were, and then you remember and you either like it or you don't. I liked it, loved it. Because it was the beginning of something for both of us—albeit mismatched and old—it was the beginning.

PHIL. I think it more than I say it.

KES. You show me though. Look at how we live and the things you've done for our family.

PHIL. That's enough, right?

KES. Love is all around this place. The kitchen is just how I dreamed, like what I saw in those home and gardening magazines my mom used to keep all over the house. She even kept them in the bathrooms ...which gave me an idea for our bathroom.

PHIL. *(as if reflecting)* My chair in the living room.

KES. You love that chair.

PHIL. My dad had one just like it. His was old and worn though, smelled like his pipe, spicy and old like burnt cedar. He used to read the paper out loud while sitting with his feet propped up on an ottoman with a sunken center...none of it matched anything else in the living room but it was the most comfortable chair in the whole house because he made it that way. I knew as soon as I got a chance or when I was older—I'd want to have something similar, a chair in my house designated for comfort. 'You have to make it difficult for people to want to leave their homes, son.' Dad said that to me one day when I was trying to sell my first recliner. That stuck with me. *(Nearby, in the cut of the room, stands GRAHAM BLAKENY, a mere silhouette.)*

GRAHAM. You're not only selling a piece of furniture. You're selling life. You're giving form to possibilities, shaping dreams made by young couples or the bachelor just starting out, the elderly man or woman starting their golden years in a new home. You're filling in the void. Like this chair: a sturdy thing, eh? The fabric is the key. The frame must be strong to allow time for the fabric adjusts—the whole thing becomes one with the other. It all must last or it's for nothing. Don't sell just the piece...sell 'em the dream. *(Graham fades away.)*

KES. I think your dad told me that story when we first started dating.

PIECES

PHIL. Oh, the horror you must've felt.

KES. No, I liked it. It was like he was selling me on you and your family. Like he was enticing me to buy into my own happiness. He was good at what he did, and it was passed on to you. That's why people like coming to the store. It's not one of the big stores, where it's about commissions and sales.

PHIL. I never knew he told you.

KES. It was nice of him.

PHIL. I take pride in being able to keep the store open all these years.

KES. We're all glad.

PHIL. He's a hard man to replace. But I try, he gave me a solid foundation, a good apprenticeship.

KES. Selling life...I love that saying.

PHIL. It's why the dream is still going.

SCENE 7

The kitchen, perhaps years earlier, Elé, Phil, and Kes are having dinner.

ELÉ. Highly unlikely I could ever become a vegetarian.

KES. It's easier than being vegan.

PHIL. Both are rather bizarre.

ELÉ. Not really—I mean, you could live without meat—just get protein other ways. *(Kes and Phil appear surprised by Elé's statement.)*

KES. You're rather verse on this.

ELÉ. District writing prompt this year.

PHIL. Not to eat meat?

KES. Oh, Phil...

ELÉ. Am I for or against the killing of animals for human consumption?

PHIL. Interesting.

KES. Seems heavy to me.

PHIL. Kids today are in tune with the environment. I couldn't imagine...

ELÉ. It's more about animal rights than health, at least that's my slant.

KES. So, you're against it?

PHIL. *(laughs)* As she peppers that Salisbury steak in front of her.

PIECES

ELÉ. Haha, Dad. I know my essay requires...what'd my English teacher say...various amounts of ethos, pathos, and logos.

PHIL. I'd stick mostly to logos. The idea of not eating meat to me is rather illogical. Still considering college?

ELÉ. Yes.

KES. Well, if you still want—

ELÉ. I'm excited about choosing a school. Not sure what major though.

PHIL. I'm sure there are many places of higher learning that would be honored to have such a bright, young lady like you among bright minds.

KES. I agree.

ELÉ. I do know I want to live in a bigger city after I graduate.

PHIL. Lots of meat eaters in bigger cities. Actually, once thought about opening a store somewhere bustling—but realized a huge metro area may too big for what I have to offer. And I was much younger then and wanted to leave town like everyone else. Probably a good move too, a large market would've eaten me alive.

KES. You never told me you thought about having a store somewhere else.

PHIL. Just put it in the back of my mind.

ELÉ. Why?

PHIL. Your grandfather—bless his ornery soul—would've killed me. He was against anything outside of this town. Especially the dream. And he was right, our small shop needed to stay where it could flourish. *(to Elé)* He'd say, "Bigger's not always better, having a plant-based diet isn't always better than a high protein diet. There're pros, cons, sometimes there's just cons, con artists, conflicts..." I'm glad he instilled his love of this town in me. I was on my way out.

ELÉ. Most of my friends are leaving.

KES. Just have a back-up plan.

PHIL. Always have a back-up plan.

ELÉ. Do you have one, Dad?

PHIL. For what?

ELÉ. The store. What if something happens and you're not able to reopen?

PHIL. We're insured, if you're worried.

PIECES

ELÉ. There's a rumor going around.

KES. Rumor?

PHIL. It's not true.

KES. What's not true?

ELÉ. That a bigger store is coming to town?

KES. A what?

PHIL. (*adamant*) Not true.

ELÉ. Read in the paper they're thinking about opening a huge shopping plaza, right near—

KES. That's not gonna happen. No big box stores make it in this town.

PHIL. Those stores can't push me out. I provide this neighborhood with just what it needs a family-owned business...that's what makes this neighborhood...well...the whole city a place that's unique. Only one fast food chain within the city limits—did you know that? I take pride in that. All of us business owners, no matter what type of business we have, there's an amount of pride and we won't be eaten by the animals of big business.

ELÉ. Just a rumor.

PHIL. I won't be eaten.

ELÉ. It's not that serious, Dad.

PHIL. I'll tell you this. No big business will come in here and push out the little guys like me without a few bloody nips at their ankles.

KES. Poetic.

PHIL. We're meat eaters too. Those big stores are for yuppies, vegans, and vegetarians. (*to Elé*) Put that in your essay.

ELÉ. (*jokingly*) You're scaring me.

KES. I second that. Finish your dinner.

PHIL. I'll gladly consume this meat in all its glory.

KES. And there you have it...

PHIL. Have what?

ELÉ. This is why we love you, Dad.

PHIL. I'll do whatever it takes to keep our livelihood intact, existing. I sell the best damn furniture this side of the river. Look at this table, these chairs, classic and elegant...hand-crafted, beautiful and last much longer

PIECES

than that hollow stuff made in some sweatshop overseas one can assemble in a few minutes. The Dream, sell the dream. I'm doing that.

ELÉ. Yes, you are.

KES. I agree. *(Elé removes herself from the table, exits. Phil and Kes remain.)* Phillip? Honey? I wouldn't worry. Your father would be very proud of how well you've taken over the business... *(Kes removes herself from the table, but Phil remains.)*

PHIL. Sweetie, you were saying?

SCENE 8

The living room. Phil, still seated at the dining table, watches as Hota and Kes sit on a nice couch. Hota is running her hand over the arm of the couch admiringly.

HOTA. Love this fabric.

KES. What's that?

HOTA. The fabric on this sofa.

KES. Oh...

HOTA. Wish I would've saw this piece first. It'd be in my living room.

KES. Is that right?

HOTA. You can't have all the nice things.

KES. First on deck swims to the finish line first.

HOTA. *(rolls eyes)* Or gets pushed off the plank.

KES. Guess I'm lucky to get first dibs on things in the store.

HOTA. And the Dream's still holding up. Despite all the stuff about...

KES. You heard that too?

HOTA. You know me, I need to know everything outside of anything that's in front of me or within my life.

KES. It's not going to affect us. Phil wouldn't let that happen anyway.

HOTA. Over his dead body, eh? *(Nearby, the light fades on Phil.)*

KES. He was rather passionate about his feelings at dinner yesterday.

HOTA. Passionate?

KES. I hadn't seen that side of him in a while.

HOTA. Did he at least look sexy?

PIECES

KES. Only you would ask that.

HOTA. A man with passion is a man of action.

KES. I do worry though...if there's a change, Phil won't handle it well.

HOTA. Seriously, it's the man's life. It's not just a store. Look at your house. This place is like a showroom!

KES. Nice things.

HOTA. An accumulation of nice things for when it all goes to shit. It's like a life 401k. You save the good stuff and when the crap hits the fan... It's what keeps us sane—hopefully things will stay as they are.

KES. Since you put it that way. *(Aside)* a life 401k.

HOTA. Save it all.

KES. How's about we just save ourselves?

HOTA. Yep, save us. I like how that sounds too. *(The women become quiet, almost reflective. Graham enters in full. A ghostly figure, he's rather spry, dressed in casual business attire. He surveys the room as the women go on about their business. Phil enters, walking slowly out of the darkness. The two men talk to each other across the space.)*

PHIL. Figured you'd like this piece as much as I do.

GRAHAM. Looks comfortable.

PHIL. Exactly, it's stain-resistant too, tough. Tough as silk.

GRAHAM. She'll love it.

PHIL. You think so?

GRAHAM. I [know] so.

PHIL. She can drink wine and not worry about spills. That's important.

GRAHAM. More than that, son. What's important is the longevity in the wear.

PHIL. The wear... *(Phil begins pacing.)*

GRAHAM. ...Before you were born, I lived in an empty apartment on Hamilton Street. Was so empty I could hear the roaches clicking across the hardwood floors. One night in April, I walked down to Third Street. It was bulk pick up. The whole neighborhood was gutting their basements—odds and ends everywhere...saw some pieces of discarded furniture—most of it in good shape—most of it not. When you don't have much, you learn to see the possibilities in everything—if your mind's right. I didn't see a dilapidated chair, a mold-covered couch, a withered

PIECES

bedframe... less than three hours later I rented a truck, got a storage room in Penbrook, and like a thief in the night...a savior of relics. I became a sort of Robin Hood in the used furniture business. I was determined to be the finest furniture retailer in town. I had to learn this craft first, how to bring old things back to life—to resurrect the hope within the frames and fabric...to redesign the shape of things....

PHIL. (*proud*) I kept the name. “The Dream.”

GRAHAM. It’s all we have when alive, dreams. Some men walk through life as if they are a discarded thing...thrown on the side of a city street to be picked up and later incinerated and forgotten about...or as I wanted for our family, refurbished, renewed.

PHIL. I kept my promise to you, Dad.

GRAHAM. Are you sure, son?

PHIL. I am.

GRAHAM. You’ve taken good care of my...

PHIL. Dream? Oh, yes...I have but...

GRAHAM. Then why the nerves, the pacing...are you sweating?

PHIL. This house is always warm.

GRAHAM. Now you stall.

PHIL. No, it’s just...I may be in the middle of a change. Well, not the middle...maybe...in the way?

GRAHAM. How’s that?

PHIL. Times have changed in the city, Dad. (*Phil stops pacing.*)

GRAHAM. Explain this change to me in detail, son...I’m talking to you, son. I want to know what the changes are.

PHIL. The story of The Dream always gets me. On Kes and my third date, I told her that story. She never knew it, but I ran out of things to talk about...felt like I was losing her. I told her about your dream, and she fell in love with me...with our family. We were sitting on a park bench—I could feel the weight of her head increase as she leaned against my shoulder, like her affection for me swelled. Call me crazy but I’m sure when I told her about how the store began it saved me from losing the love of my life.

GRAHAM. So, what is your concern?

PHIL. Big business infiltrates—

PIECES

GRAHAM. No competition for authenticity. No room in a close-knit neighborhood for places like that.

PHIL. Always the optimist.

GRAHAM. Sometimes life doesn't give you the option. Optimism is what's required, keeps you alive. Without it you...just look at the bright side, son. Follow that light.

PHIL. Let's not talk about following lights.

GRAHAM. Ideas...bright, shiny things, come from the minds of enlightened men.

PHIL. Is that what light you're really referring too?

GRAHAM. Of course. Don't be silly.

PHIL. I brought you here to see how well I've done.

GRAHAM. Are you sure, son?

PHIL. Positive.

GRAHAM. I have reason to believe you fear the worst, and that's why you asked me to visit.

PHIL. Just needing a little reassurance.

GRAHAM. You've nothing to be worried about.

PHIL. The enemy.

GRAHAM. Is this really the life you have or the one you want?

PHIL. I'm sure you know.

GRAHAM. It's that nice couch, the smile on Kes's face. Elé's off somewhere, happy. But I sense it's not real. None of it.

PHIL. Don't expose this—

GRAHAM. Where are you?

PHIL. In my living room, why ask me that?

Graham looks about carefully.

GRAHAM. Something's different about it.

PHIL. What's different?

GRAHAM. (*surveying the space more intently*) Seems none of this furniture is reupholstered

PHIL. It's all from the store.

GRAHAM. I know a refurbished piece when I see it. I knew something was different. Even smells new, manufactured by machines, people in sweatshops, factories—

PIECES

PHIL. It's not from another store. It's handcrafted, elegant. Please believe me.

GRAHAM. This isn't what I wanted from you.

PHIL. Damn vegetarians, ruin everything.

GRAHAM. Excuse me, son?

PHIL. Huh? Oh...nothing...

GRAHAM. What you eat has nothing... (*Graham stops mid-sentence, appears to get it.*) Wait, this isn't your life?

PHIL. I'm...not sure what it is...not anymore.

GRAHAM. I'm in your nightmare?

PHIL. None of this started that way. I had it all figured out. I really did...

GRAHAM. Get me out of here...now!

PHIL. No, I need you! Please...

GRAHAM. You need to figure this out on your own.

PHIL. This is real. Kes, Elé, and I had dinner. After dinner, you came to visit...

GRAHAM. (*grim*) You're not selling furniture anymore, are you?

PHIL. We were having dinner. Then you came...

GRAHAM. Stop avoiding my questions, son. Be a man. What's happening to The Dream?

PHIL. Nothing's changed...all is well with the store. Business is better than ever, so much I'm able to help Elé with her college expenses, hire new employees, and not stay at the store for long hours, and give Kes the life she's always talked about, the one with the vacations and dinner parties she likes to host...in fact...she's so happy she even quit smoking!

GRAHAM. You are sweating. I see it through your shirt. You sweat horribly when you lie, always did—even as a child. The beads on your forehead, fibs, little white lies, tall lies...you're lying.

PHIL. This is my life. All of it. The furniture's from our store, refurbished to perfection, I swear!

GRAHAM. I'm not buying this. You need to wake up!

PHIL. I am awake.

GRAHAM. You're not.

PHIL. Bullshit!

PIECES

GRAHAM. Watch your language, son. Men of business have a certain tongue.

PHIL. You need to leave.

GRAHAM. Excuse me?

PHIL. I need you to go.

GRAHAM. I'll leave when I'm good and ready, son.

PHIL. (*whispers*) Wake up. Wake up. Wake up...

GRAHAM. My advice suits you. (*Graham fades. Phil does not notice immediately.*)

PHIL. Dad?

END OF ACT 1

THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS—

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