

BROKEN THREAD

By

D-Davis

BROKEN THREAD

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CAST: 5 Women

AURORA (Nicknamed Rory) / Friend: 29/30-year-old, pregnant in the present, 5 years older than Adeline

ZANDER (Short for Alexandra): Nonbinary, 27/28 in the present 2-3 years older than Adeline

ADELINE (Nicknamed Addy): 25 years old in the present

CAMI (Short for Camille): 23 years old in the present and always 2 years younger than Adeline

MRS. DOMBROWSKI [to be doubled by Therese]: An Eastern European, professional classical piano teacher

MR. G [male voiceover/action played onstage by Zander]: Late 20s/early 30s nerd

DOCTOR [male voiceover]: A crisis clinician

FRIEND [to be doubled by Aurora]: A high school ‘bestie’ of Adeline

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NOTE ON LANGUAGE: The family's ethnicity and culture are flexible. The "first generation" may be of any ethnicity or race: a family striving for a middle-class American Dream that contrasts with the expectations of their home country. Lines marked in bold italics (e.g., ****Stop hitting your sister.* ***) can be spoken in the mother's native language. Beyond these marked lines, any character may speak cultural/ethnic phrases in their native language at any point in the script for added effect, as long as the line's intention and meaning stay the same.

PLACE: A family home anywhere in suburban northern America.

TIME: Between the present and memories—a back-and-forth between what is and what was.

NOTATIONS:

- **** a phrase that can be spoken in the colloquial language of the ethnic/racial identity of the family
- an em dash at the end of a phrase means the next line interrupts
- [xx] a word or phrase inside of brackets is not meant to be spoken
- // next line begins
- - - the line connects to previous line and/or the line after it
- . . . within a line means a slight hesitation from phrase to phrase
- . . . in place of a line denotes a visual reaction or gesture by a character

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE:

The audience is an observant player - a voyeur - like the photographer - witnessing the family's reflection of their past. This play is an ensemble piece using viewpoints, tableaux, and vignettes to tell the story. Actors not in scenes remain onstage to change or observe the play. There are no blackouts. All transitions are fluid. The set is a baby grand piano and five chairs, with occasional props to advance a scene. Also, at any point throughout the script, ethnic/cultural phrases can be spoken in the native language, to add an effect but not to change the intention or relative meaning of the line. Content for drug use and pedophilia considered in this work.

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BROKEN THREAD was developed at Columbia University Collab Workshop in Shapiro Theater, May 2025, directed by Miles Sternfeld, and featuring the following cast:

Mother.....Jennifer Sklias-Gahan
Daughter 1.....Catherine Sholtis
Daughter 2.....Clarissa Hernandez
Daughter 3.....Phoebe Jennings Johnson
Daughter 4.....Rachel Patrice
Mr. G/Doctor....Denis Lambert

BROKEN THREAD received its first production at 14Y Theater in New York City, by The Femme Collective, January 2025, directed by Miles Sternfeld, featuring the following cast:

Therese.....Laura Lee Botsacos
Aurora.....Alyssa LaVacca
Zander.....Ella Raymont
Adeline.....Jenna Krasowski
Cami.....Sydney Kamel
Mr. G/Doctor....D.B. Milliken

Special thanks for those who read, gave notes and supported the development, production and printing of this play: Morgan Jeness, David Henry Hwang, Lynn Nottage, Martyna Majok, Aimée Hayes, Miles Sternfeld, Cassandra Paras, Darby Davis, Lisa Kitchens and Phil Estrera.

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PROJECTION

THREAD:

- - noun

1. filaments woven together

2. something continuous, drawn out

[in music] a melodic motif that weaves several progressions

- - verb

1. to pass through the eye of (a needle)

2. to make one's way through or between

[in music] a recurring rhythmic pattern unifying sections of a composition

The stage is dark.

THE PRESENT

A doorbell rings.

ZANDER. (O.S.). Coming. (*A light on ZANDER (28) downstage.*

Upbeat.) Hi! You're early! Oh...maybe I'm...I'm sorry. Don't mind me.

You're here for the—[portrait]. Please, come in. I'm Zander. (*Turns on the living room light.*) I'm not sure where my mom is, but, um...Come in.

Come in. You can put your gear under this chair...Oh wait...no...not that one...it's my grandmother's chair. An antique. My mother would...put it under the bench over there. Great. Anyway. Ahh. I think my mom wants the portrait in the living room, maybe around the piano. Or. Maybe she changed her mind I dunno. Anyway. She'll tell ya. Sooooo—this is the living room. Kinda feels like a lot of stuff...right? Requires imagination. But that's what you have...creative imagination...and you make magic

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happen because you believe in magic, right? Oh...yeah...I...uh...um...I don't know about moving things around...um...Mom's particular. I like the less is more strategy...brings more engagement into a space...too much clutter shields the truth of things. (*AURORA interrupts.*)

AURORA. What's going on?

ZANDER. Portrait people.

AURORA. The what?

ZANDER. Photographers.

AURORA. You're early. Right. O.K. Hello. Welcome. I'm Aurora—the oldest. You've met my sister, Alexandra.

ZANDER. Zander.

AURORA. We are taking the picture around the piano— (*CAMI appears.*)

ZANDER. We don't know that—

CAMI. I heard the door...Who's?

AURORA. For the portrait.

CAMI. (*Flirtatious.*) Oh. Hi. I'm Camille. But my friends call me Cami. // I'm the baby.

ZANDER. Geez. She has a warning label.

AURORA. We're doing full individual portraits and // then the group around the piano.

ZANDER. Individuals?

AURORA. (*Annoyed.*) It was in the email.

CAMI. Daughter 3...Addy //Adeline—

AURORA. My mother prefers to use the room's natural lighting.

CAMI. Lighting is everything.

AURORA. Why don't you get unpacked and make // yourself [comfortable].

ZANDER. You sound like Mom.

AURORA. I sound like me.

CAMI. Do you live in town?

ZANDER. What are you doing?

CAMI. Being friendly.

AURORA. It's just going to be my mother and us girls.

CAMI. Our Dad's away on a biz-ness trip.

AURORA. (*Sotto voce.*) We do not talk // about—

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ZANDER. Our Dad runs a plastics company // the town over.

AURORA. (*Through her teeth.*) Mom doesn't like it // [when you talk about].

ZANDER. (*Whispering back.*) What is your problem?

CAMI. (*To the photographer.*) The portrait is for our dad - - -

AURORA. Stop it.

CAMI. - - - To remind him of our love.

ZANDER. Portraits use-ta be every year // but it's—

AURORA. I'm sure you have a lot to set up.

ZANDER. I can help // if ya need.

AURORA. They do not need // your [help].

CAMI. I can show you the house. (*THERESE appears.*)

ZANDER. Do you guys want some water or—

CAMI. Are you going to be taking candids?

THERESE. (*Interrupting the cacophony of the girls.*) Excuse me, Ladies.

AURORA. The photographers are here.

ZANDER. I told them to set up in the living room.

THERESE. Thank you. (*To the Photographer.*) I'm Therese. But you can call me Terry. I am so sorry I wasn't here to greet you. (*Therese signals Zander and Cami to get ready. They leave whispering over each other.*)

THERESE. (*To Aurora.*) Please push the chairs out of the way.

ZANDER. (*Shouting to the photographer.*) Nice to meet you. (*Therese turns to the photographer with a big smile, while Aurora sets up the chairs.*)

THERESE. I hope the girls weren't a distraction. Alexandra just flew in and Camille drove quite a distance. They all haven't seen each other for the last couple of years...so we're still getting settled. But that's more my problem than your problem. Thank you for coming last minute. Normally, I am very organized, but I wasn't sure...well, you know how daughters can be. Or maybe you don't. I originally thought we would have the portrait around the piano. (*Gathering herself.*) But with the sun so bright and beautiful today, I thought the back garden might be a better choice. We have a western view, and the light in the late afternoon is stunning. So beautiful. But look around. Maybe something else will catch your eye. Mmm? We've had a portrait nearly every year, but...well...it's been a

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while since our last one. (*She stiffens.*) I'm sure your eye is much better than mine, but please run it by me before you decide on anything. Mmm? (*Aurora comes to Therese's side.*) This is my eldest. I'm going to be a grandmother. (*Aurora leaves.*) O.K. The bathroom is in the hall. And there are drinks in the kitchen. Coffee. Juice. Water. Please help yourself. And of course, if you have any questions, do not hesitate to ask. (*Looking at her watch.*) I was hoping to start everything sooner rather than later. Perhaps in an hour? Take some candid. Get to know us. Mmm? I'll show you the kitchen. (*Therese disappears.*)

IN ANOTHER ROOM

Cami applies make-up to Aurora, while Zander fixes a button on her sweater.

CAMI. What does it feel like being pregnant?

AURORA. It feels like I've been hungover for 12 straight weeks. But, the prettier the girl, the more painful the pregnancy.

CAMI. It's a girl!? Oh Rory, that's wonderful.

ZANDER. Really? Poor kid.

AURORA. Not funny. Let's not talk about it.

ZANDER. Why?

CAMI. Mom must have been crazy happy.

AURORA. She said girls steal your beauty.

ZANDER. I see that.

AURORA. She's been so—

CAMI. Distracted.

AURORA. Yeah.

CAMI. Well, you don't look pregnant. You look *really* good.

ZANDER. (*Deflecting.*) The whole portrait thing feels—

CAMI. Yeah. Everything looks right, but underneath // it's. . .

AURORA. (*To Zander.*) Well, it's good you came up. We're finally all in the same place and Mom can get the portrait she thinks'll make her feel better.

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ZANDER. I'm not staying long.

AURORA. You just got here.

ZANDER. I'm leavin' tomorrah night.

CAMI. Why?

ZANDER. I have work.

AURORA. Really?

ZANDER. They need me. Besides, one night sleeping with this wallpaper is enough.

CAMI. Pink flowers on day-glow yellowlike, what the fuck was Mom thinking?

ZANDER. Maybe one too many.

AURORA. You haven't stayed more than 24 hours since the last portrait.

ZANDER. I have a life.

AURORA. Right. A life. Just not one that overlaps with this family - - -

CAMI. Leave her alone.

AURORA. - - - You float in and out like you're allergic to us.

ZANDER. They need me. (*Beat.*) Maybe I'm not built for this...the role you want me to play. You slipped into Mom's mold like it was made for you. Me? Always feels like I'm wearing someone else's skin.

AURORA. That's not a reason to not show up.

ZANDER. Being here now isn't enough? (*A moment.*)

CAMI. We haven't decided on what we're wearing.

AURORA. I think wearing a dress is better than pants.

ZANDER. Dresses?

CAMI. Did you bring a dress? (*Zander shakes her head no.*)

AURORA. You knew we were getting a portrait done!

ZANDER. Don't yell at me!

AURORA. I am not yelling at you! Dresses are—

ZANDER. BINARY!

AURORA. Sophisticated. It's what girls wear.

ZANDER. Not all girls wear dresses.

CAMI. We should have told you beforehand.

AURORA. It was in the email.

ZANDER. I am NOT going to wear a dress.

CAMI. This is more than about the dress...

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AURORA. (*Uptight.*) Not a problem. Do you mind if I wear one?

ZANDER. Wear whatever you want.

CAMI. The “No dress” declaration feels like you’re trying to tell us something.

AURORA. Did you bring nice pants?

ZANDER. We should wear what we want.

AURORA. What did // you [bring]?

ZANDER. I have blue jeans—black pants—and white pants.

AURORA and CAMI. White?

AURORA. Mom doesn’t want white outfits.

ZANDER. Well if white is still an issue, why are we doing this?

CAMI. Because Mom. . .[she]—

AURORA. It just is what it is.

(ADELINE appears sitting at the piano, playing a slow melody as an undertone to the scene like “Tell Me a Story” or a Bach Partita.)

CAMI. I came home about a month ago, because I hate my job // and—

ZANDER. You have a great job.

CAMI. Yeah—junior exec IS a great job if they let you do it! But they treat me like a stewardess—ANYWAY!! I came home...passed out...but woke up super early to piano playing. It was Mom playing the Bach Suite. *(They imagine.)*

AURORA. Wow.

ZANDER. Ya think ya know someone—

CAMI. If you wanted to know you would have known. I mean do people really wanna know what’s going on? Not me. I’d rather strap on my heels and live my life.

AURORA. We are so different.

CAMI. Because we’re different people.

AURORA. No argument there. I’m permanently Mom Flats.

ZANDER. Well, if the shoe fits.

AURORA. And you wear sneakers that light up when you walk.

ZANDER. . . .

CAMI. We make choices. And choices have consequences. Sometimes good. And sometimes bad.

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ZANDER. And sometimes things happen that you don't expect and the emotions are just too big so you go on autopilot and the obsessive-compulsive nerve-ending explodes and BOOM you're in a place you thought you'd never be. And you're someone you never knew existed.

AURORA. What's going on with you?

ZANDER. Nothing.

CAMI. Zander, sometimes you look at us like we're speaking a language you don't know. It makes me wonder what language you're waiting for us to speak.

ZANDER. Ya know we're wired by the time we're five.

CAMI. That explains a lot.

AURORA. Are you saying it's Mom and Dad's fault?

CAMI. It's always the parent's fault.

AURORA. Convenient. That takes you out of the equation.

ZANDER. You sound like Mom.

AURORA. That isn't a bad thing.

ZANDER. Really?

AURORA. Mom did the best she could.

ZANDER. She wasn't exactly Mom of the Year when we were kids—

CAMI. (*Mimicking Therese.*) "Priorities ladies." "How you look is your calling card."

ZANDER. Triggering me doesn't make it better.

CAMI. Growin' up isn't easy—but we had fun (*Puts on a blue bow.*)...didn't we?

A MEMORY

The piano moves counterclockwise. Adeline (7-8) runs in and scoops up Cami (6) They dance, play, twirl, and hug each other, as the best of friends.

ADELINE and CAMILLE. (*Running around the room.*) Sisters sisters, hand in hand. Skipping together across the land. Laughing and twirling, round we go. Sharing secrets only we know. (*They are interrupted by Aurora (11) and Zander (9) playing a game of tag, while the two sisters*

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continue playing.) Building castles. Chasing the wind. Together we play. Together we sing. Sisters, sisters, forever at play. Sharing secrets and laughing all day. *(A young, seemingly hopeful, Therese enters and tries to make her daughters behave.)*

THERESE. Stop running around. You have to get ready. SIT DOWN.

*****Stop hitting your sister.*** ***Sit down!!***** Rory help.

Alexandra! You have a lesson. Stop running around. Sit. Down. Please. Why can't you behave? Mrs. D's going to be here any minute. Sit. Down. NOW. *(A moment. All the young girls sit on the floor facing the audience)*

THERESE. *(Angry.)* Sit properly. Excuse me. No touching. No fidgeting. Please. Just sit properly. Choices are everything...and there are no second chances. . . so think before you act. *(To Aurora.)*

Now that you're ten // [you will.]

AURORA. I'm eleven.

THERESE. I know that. *(Beat.)* Since you're eleven, and the oldest, you're responsible to watch your sisters.

AURORA. That's your job.

THERESE. Hey! *(Therese motions a slap to Aurora, who goes to the piano and angrily plays the Bach Partita in B-Flat. Pointing to Aurora and Zander.)* The two of you have lessons with Mrs. D.

ADELINE. Why don't I have lessons?

THERESE. Because she can only have time for two lessons. *(To Adeline.)* Don't give me that wince young lady...And stop fidgeting.

ADELINE. I'm not.

THERESE. Don't use that tone with me.

ADELINE. I...I...jus...I want to play the piano.

ZANDER. She can have my lesson.

ADELINE. Oh please, let me take her lesson.

THERESE. You'll have your lesson next week.

ADELINE. But I want to play now...because I play better than her.

ZANDER. She does. I hate the piano.

THERESE. *(Scolding.)* What is with you girls? You will all learn to PLAY the piano, and you will all learn to play the piano with per-fec-tion.

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(*Beat.*) Music is the essence of culture. Our world depends on PERCEPTIONS...PER-CEP-TIONS. How the world sees you. A woman's place in the world depends on her cultural prowess. (*To Zander.*)

Stop being disrespectful. Who you sit with at the table means everything. So, you must all know your roles. And know it to perfection.

ZANDER. I don't wanna play the piano. (*Therese looks at her diamond watch.*)

THERESE. Your teacher will be here any minute // [get ready]. (*Chaos among the daughters breaks in a cacophony of complaints.*)

ZANDER. Pleeese, I don't wanna // play the piano.

THERESE. I do not want to hear // complaints.

ZANDER. Please, no

THERESE. *****Stop It** *** // [*****Concentrate*****]

ZANDER. I don't wanna play.

THERESE. Stop complaining.

ADELINE. Can I take her lesson?

ZANDER. I hate the piano. She can have my lesson!

ADELINE. I love playing. Let me show you—

THERESE. No. And I don't want any backtalk.

AURORA. I can't concentrate.

ZANDER. I hate sitting // on a stupid bench.

THERESE. Don't get that tone with me.

AURORA. Stop Whining.

ADELINE. Mommy I can play already.

THERESE. Please, just do as you're told.

ZANDER. I like being outside and climbing or building things

ADELINE. I need lessons to get better. Please. I'll make you proud.

THERESE. (*Exhausted.*) ENOUGH. Enough! Please. (*To Adeline.*) Look at you. You're a mess. Sit up and fix your hair. Tuck in your shirt. Stop it with your selfishness. You're an embarrassment. (*Referring to a crying Camille.*) Look what you've done now. (*Beat.*) You can take your sister's lesson. But do not behave like this with your teacher. (*Pointing to Zander.*) Alexandra. There are no free passes. Cami is your responsibility. (*Therese disappears.*)

AURORA. (*Whispering.*) Addy, help me turn my pages.

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ADELINE. *(Softly.)* Yippee.

ZANDER. *(To Cami.)* Stop being a mope.

CAMI. I'm not.

ZANDER. Then why are you sucking your thumb?

CAMI. I like your dress.

ZANDER. I hate my dress.

CAMI. Can we play dance competition?

ZANDER. Let's go. *(The sisters turn the piano clockwise.)*

THE PRESENT

*A camera shot and photo flash. Aurora plays the Bach Partita in B-Flat
[Major BMV 815 Allemande]*

AURORA. *(To the Photographer.)* Please don't take my picture.

I...I'm...I'm just trying to settle my nerves. My doctor suggested playing to de-stress...I swear this dress was looser last week...[it's tight]. It's like everything's changing before I'm ready. *(Breathes heavily.)* It's a hot flash. My mom thinks I get them because I'm having a girl...like it's payback or something. I still work...And get tired WAY too easily...And my husband? Ugh. Please. Playing's my "me" moment. *(Intermittently plays.)* The key to success is to be precise...Direct...Determined...I wanted to go to conservatory, but Dad wanted something else. "Rory, you're good at the piano, no doubt. But talent doesn't always pay the bills...It's chasing light through water—Go into FINANCE. *(Beat.)* So...I learned to read balance sheets instead of arpeggios. I don't need to depend on anyone. That's the kind of power you want in this world. Independence. Stability. Something that builds something. *(Beat.)* Don't you love this piece? I played it in my fifth-grade recital. *(The piano moves counterclockwise.)*

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A MEMORY

Adeline (7) sits on a chair, listening and waiting for her turn.

MS. DOMBROWSKI (Mrs. D) watches Aurora (11) play the piano during her lesson.

MRS. D. (*To Aurora.*) That was excellent work. You have a natural talent.

AURORA. Thank you, Ms. Dombrowski.

MRS. D. Practice, and there will be great opportunities for you.

AURORA. Can I play this song in the fifth-grade concert?

MRS. D. I don't see why not. But make sure you practice.

AURORA. I will.

MRS. D. Daily. Two hours. But three...better. Be disciplined.

AURORA. I will play to perfection.

MRS. D. And you will be above the average. Maybe, a lead soloist.

AURORA. A soloist?

MRS. D. So. Let's see what your sister can do. (*She approaches ADELINE.*)

MRS. D. Show me your hands. (*Examining them.*) Humpf. (*Glaring.*) Do you bite your nails?

ADELINE. (*Freezes and meekly nods "No".*)

MRS. D. No? If you lie to me you will NOT be my student.

ADELINE. (*She does a sheepish "yes".*)

MRS. D. I thought so. Don't bite. Cut them. So much better.

ADELINE. Yes Ma'am

MRS. D. Now. Play me what you prepared. (*Aurora watches the lesson. Adeline perfectly plays Mozart Minuet in G Major. [KV 1].*)

MRS. D. (*Impressed.*) Oh my. How did you learn this?

ADELINE. From the stereo.

AURORA. That was amazing.

MRS. D. Well. We have our work cut out for us.

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A TURN FORWARD

The piano turns clockwise while we hear a Bach Partita. Aurora disappears and Cami (7) appears and turns the pages for Adeline (9) playing the Partita.

MRS. D. *(Conducting over the music.)* Don't rush. Let the music in. Your heart will dictate the tone. *(Adeline stops playing.)*

CAMI. That's beautiful.

MRS. D. You're progressing with excellent dexterity. Quite impressive for a grader.

CAMI. You're a natural.

MRS. D. Gifted. But we have much work to do. Again. *(Adeline embraces the music while playing as Mrs. D tries to shape her posture.)*

MRS. D. Your positioning is all wrong. It is 5-2-3-1 in the left...the same in the right.

MRS. D. AGAIN.

ADELINE. I can't seem—

MRS. D. No-no-no-no-no you can. *(She shows her the correct fingering.)* Use your common sense. 5-2-3-1. Again.

ADELINE. But I—

MRS. D. Stop making excuses. The work will get more difficult so you must concentrate.

ANOTHER TURN FORWARD

The piano turns clockwise while we hear the Bach English Suite in A [No.2 in A, BWV 807:5, Bourrée]; then Cami disappears. Adeline (11) feverishly plays.

MRS. D. You are not threading your phrases with perfection, and there's only one more month to make it right to the fifth-grade concert.

ADELINE. But I // can't—

MRS. D. No-no-no-no-no. Do as you are told...There is no room for excuses. Keep focused on the practice. Thread through the openings.

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(Listening.) Setting aside everything you think you know to open up your senses. The playing continues.

MRS. D. *(Conducting as she listens.)* Let go. Open up...from your ear to your heart. Yah. Very Good. Very nice. *(Adeline stops playing and takes a deep breath, as the music continues underneath the scene.)* Excellent. You have hit your marks wonderfully.

ADELINE. It feels right.

MRS. D. We make the music part of your body and spirit.

ADELINE. That felt good.

MRS. D. It was good.

ADELINE. It could be better.

MRS. D. Allow yourself a moment.

ADELINE. I will make it better.

MRS. D. Let the keys be a part of you, and they will always be there for you to be the musician you want to be and more—

ADELINE. I must play better.

MRS. D. Yes. We practice. That's how you get to Carnegie Hall!

ADELINE. How will I know I'm good?

MRS. D. The world will let you know. Do as the music tell you...and you will be appreciated. BUT...if you play through your creative imagination letting the intuitive guide you. Ahhhh. The world will love you more. *(Mrs. D disappears.)*

INTERSECTION OF THE PAST WITH THE PRESENT

A camera sounds off with a photo flash. Adeline is swept up in the shadows in a poetic symbiotic dance to the music. Her expressions are intermittently overlapping with Aurora.

ADELINE. Left hand. Right hand. A pathway. A melody. Left hand. Right hand. Two hands connected.

AURORA. I thought I was talented enough to be a concert pianist. I practiced scales and sonatas like prayers...learning to be perfect and precise. With four girls in one house, there's only so much spotlight to go

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around. Addy wasn't like that. She didn't need the spotlight...she was the spotlight. Played one note and everyone stopped to listen. Her music came from somewhere else. Like she was just the antenna. I remember the day Mrs. D told her she had "a rare gift." I was standing right there. After that, I stopped pretending I was the star of the story. Some people walk into a room, and you just know. The rest of us...we learn how to hold the light for them. Mom started saying things like, "Aurora will be the stable one." Which is code for...you'll be the one who drives the others to lessons, holds the fort, and cleans up the mess. Addy broke rules and got applause. I kept everything together. . .And no one noticed. I disappeared into the margins by being reliable. Reasonable. Never too much fuss. While the reward was trust and stability. I wonder what it would have been like to just fall apart. Just once. And let someone else clean things up. Maybe if I'd played a little messier. . .I'd have been heard, too. (*Adeline disappears.*)

LATER

Cami now puts make-up on AURORA (or paints her nails). Zander practices her smile in the mirror.

ZANDER. Maybe we shouldn't have big smiles.

AURORA. Don't force a smile.

CAMI. Do what you're comfortable doing. But if it's that half-smile thing you do, it's gonna look weird.

AURORA. They're going to take a ton of pictures, so you'll have plenty of chances to get it right.

CAMI. (*To Aurora.*) Stay still!

AURORA. I am staying still.

ZANDER. Do you think we should move things around? Like open up the space?

AURORA. We are not moving anything.

CAMI. Relax your face.

ZANDER. It's...cluttered. Like the glass figurines all crammed on the shelves—dusty—and then there's the piano. It's supposed to be the

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centerpiece, but everything around it just screams, “Look at me!” Like each piece of furniture is fighting for attention.

CAMI. Less is more.

ZANDER. Exactly.

AURORA. If Mom wants something moved the photographers will do it.

CAMI. Why do you always see everything closing in?

ZANDER. I don’t. Do I?

AURORA. You do.

CAMI. Yup.

ZANDER. There’s nothing wrong with the way I see the world.

AURORA. Look at the way you dress.

CAMI. I have to agree with her on that.

ZANDER. I like how I dress.

AURORA. Ergo, the problem is real.

CAMI. Don’t encourage her. (*To Aurora.*) Come here.

AURORA. You dress to disappear. Like you don’t want to be seen at all.

CAMI. Blending into the woodwork.

ZANDER. That’s not true. I’m just. . .simpler than you.

AURORA. Simpler? You’re like an S.O.S. call screaming “Help meee”!

CAMI. Sit still.

ZANDER. (*Declarative.*) I’m gonna wear my plaid pants.

AURORA and CAMI. NO!

AURORA. (*To Zander.*) Go ask the photographers what they think is best.

ZANDER. Why me?

AURORA. Cause we’re busy.

CAMI. (*Having made a mistake with the make-up.*) I told you to stop moving. I don’t want to—

AURORA. Well, fix it.

CAMI. Stop moving and it won’t happen.

ZANDER. Mom’s obsession with these portraits is suffocating. I don’t get it.

AURORA. It’s her way of proving something.

CAMI. To who?

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AURORA. To herself...To everyone. She grew up “old country,” surrounded by ***[Ethnicity]*** values. The piano, the portraits—it’s all her way of saying, “We’ve made it.”

CAMI. A Steinway is pretty status-y.

AURORA. Exactly. It’s her legacy piece.

ZANDER. Legacy? It’s a giant guilt machine. Her way of making sure we never stop hearing her. It’s like she’s stuffed all of her expectations into this one thing, forcing her ideas on us—

CAMI. Is that why you played like shit?

ZANDER. Very funny.

AURORA. Mom only wanted us to have opportunities she didn’t have.

CAMI. Well, she might have wanted the best for us, but sometimes, it was too much.

ZANDER. Is that how you’re gonna raise our little girl?

CAMI. Don’t start.

AURORA. Not if I can help it. I don’t want my daughter to earn love by being good at something. She’ll know she’s loved because she exists. Not because she practiced scales until her hands bled.

ZANDER. What if she doesn’t like music?

AURORA. What child doesn’t like music?

CAMI. (*Pointing to Zander.*) This one. (*Zander glares but doesn’t argue. She shrugs, defeated.*)

ZANDER. If she doesn’t wanna play don’t force her.

AURORA. Playing and practicing keeps kids focused...less time for trouble.

CAMI. Forced practicing as a management strategy?

ZANDER. More like torturing.

CAMI. Is that why Mom made us play a second instrument?

ZANDER. That didn’t work.

CAMI. She really said that?

AURORA. Those were her exact words.

CAMI. I hated playing the flute. (*Zander shivers from thinking about it.*) It ruined my dance team practices.

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AURORA. Well, ‘daughters of world’ how do I look? (*Zander winces while CAMI puts her stuff away. She waits for a compliment but gets none. Aurora straightens her posture, drawing herself together.*)

AURORA. Good enough.

LATER

A camera and a photoflash. AURORA and CAMI disappear.

ZANDER. (*To the photographer.*) You guys have kool gear. In high school my mom got me a Nikon. Fully manual...don’t need batteries to push the shutter...but you probably know that. Anyway, I thought maybe I’d be a sports photographer...or a photojournalist. I’d point and shoot everywhere. Click. Click. Click. Fast in the hand. Fast on the feet. Yeah. I’m an accountant. Independence and stability are the smart kind-a are power...right? Anyway, I’ve been sent to ask if you guys have a preference for what we wear. Last time we wore dresses...white...but um...that...don’t wanna...What do you think would be best? (*Beat.*) Mom probably wants matching. She always wants matching. When we were maybe nine or ten we lined up around the piano in scratchy pastel dresses. Addy and Cami are twirling like ballerinas, showing off, while Aurora practiced smiling like it’s a modeling job. And I’m tugging at my PINK dress that feels like it’s choking me—like a straitjacket made of cotton candy. I tell Mom I hate it. Then she kneels down. . .smiles like it’s all normal...fixes the bow in my hair...and says, “Sweetheart, just for today. Can you try to look like your sisters?” So I do. I always do. I smile in every photo. I stand where I’m told. And then I go upstairs, peel off my clothes like they’re burning me—And cry into my pillow. We never talk about it. That makes disappearing easy. Back then I didn’t have the words to tell people how I felt. Now I do...and no one wants to listen. (*Beat.*) Do you have sisters? (*Projection: A sixth-grade portrait of ADELINE.*) Oh...that was Addy’s sixth-grade portrait. Pictures are a big part of the moving up experience. (*Projection: A picture of Adeline playing the oboe.*) Oh...that’s her playing the oboe...in sixth...or 7th grade? She loved

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playing any instrument...but of course chose the most difficult one. She doesn't look happy in this picture—Anyway, her playing was good. REAL good...like a savant or something. Always movin' to the music...[so not like me.] (*The piano turns counterclockwise.*)

A MEMORY

Adeline (11), a sixth grader, is sitting on the edge of her seat in a school assembly, watching and reacting to the kids and sounds around her. We hear the voiceover of MR. G over the quiet chaos of kids in a school assembly. Adeline reacts to the students around her, and all of the instruments with they are presented.

MR. G. Settle down. Ok everyone, Quiet. Please, quiet down. Okay, folks. Let's focus. Welcome to the 6th grade Instrument Assembly. Boys in the back. SIT down. Do you want to go to the principal's office? I didn't think so. Let's park it. In the seats. Thank you. Alright. Here we go. The music department is presenting all the available instruments for you to learn during your sixth-grade music classes this year. Each of you will choose the instrument you wish to play, and then we will arrange rentals. As each one is played, listen...listen with an open ear to the sound that moves you. (*Each of the different instruments is played when described by Mr. G.*) First, the flute...has a refined, yet subtle distinctive warm sound, and is usually a favorite with the ladies. Whatever your personality, there is an instrument for you. (Beat) Next, the clarinet, good for boys and girls, can produce both a tear-jerking, melancholy sound in contrast to comical and fun-sounding notes. Just choose the one that moves you. (*Adeline's body is taken over by the sounds, dancing in her seat to the instrument's rhythm. Each sound strangely moves her...pushing...or pulling...always coercing her to move.*)

ADELINE. How can he play everything so well? Ohhhh. I love the strings. Maybe...Eeeww. Noo. Not the horns. Mallets are for bangers. (*Then we hear the penetrating, reedy, powerful, and robust sound of an oboe. Lensky's Aria by Tchaikovsky.*) Ahhhhhh. That sound...it's

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rich...deep...beautiful...The most beautiful sound in the room. (*Mr. G, played by Zander, gives Adeline the oboe who embraces it—dancing to the Tchaikovsky oboe solo that will also play underneath the following scene.*)

TIME FORWARD

ADELINE. You're the best teacher, Mr. G.

MR. G. You've become an incredible musician throughout these years. I want you to play a solo piece in the Christmas concert.

ADELINE. You really think I'm that good?

MR. G. You have a gift. A special gift. Appreciate what's been bestowed on you.

ADELINE. I'll play to perfection. I just have to find the sound. That perfect sound. (*We hear a powerful and robust Oboe solo playing as Adeline rises to play.*)

TIME FORWARD

Adeline basks in the spotlight of her performance as the oboe solo crescendos. The audience claps in appreciation. She bows. Her sisters rush in.

AURORA. That was amazing.

CAMI. Never heard you play like that.

ZANDER. So impressive

AURORA. Really on it.

ADELINE. It was good, wasn't it?

ZANDER. Amazing.

AURORA. Really beautiful.

CAMI. Real music.

ZANDER. I'll never be as good as you.

AURORA. (*She takes out a joint.*) How about a little something to celebrate with? (*They are unsure what to do.*)

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ADELINE. Oh my god.

ZANDER. Where'd you get that?

ADELINE. (*Excited.*) Oh my god!

CAMI. I don't think that's—

AURORA. It's just once. (*She lights the joint, and then they pass it around.*)

ZANDER. It's a celebration.

ADELINE. The end of something, and the beginning of something else.

ZANDER. I'm in.

ADELINE. Pass it here.

CAMI. I don't know.

AURORA. You don't have to.

ADELINE. Don't tell mom.

AURORA. No one likes a tattler teller.

ADELINE. Be the lookout.

ZANDER. (*Jokingly threatening.*) Or I'll tie you up and put you on a shelf.

CAMI. (*Leaving.*) I'm going to tell Mom. (*Aurora and Zander chase Cami.*)

AURORA. No you don't.

ZANDER. You little brat. (*While the sisters chase after Cami and exit, Adeline, isolated in her world, smokes the joint.*)

ADELINE. (*To anyone and no one.*) Do you hear this sound? I want to play like that. To suspend time in that pure sound. Pure joy.

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