

TAR BEACH

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by Tammy Ryan

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draft: 4_30_15

CHARACTERS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

REENIE – 14 years old, the dream weaver of the play, painfully shy

MARY CLAIRE – 16 years old, Reenie’s sister, Trouble*

MARY FRANCES – 16 years old going on 30 – Mary Claire’s best friend and cohort*

ROGER – 38 years old, Reenie’s father, a Teamster truck driver and moving man, works in a warehouse when he’s not on the trucks, a dreamer, a drinker

BRIGIT – 35 years old, Reenie’s mother, a cook in a deli, unhappy

SETTING

Scenes take place in the Ozone Park, Queens home of Reenie’s memory: on the roof, the second floor hallway, in the girls bedroom, around the dining room table, and on the beach.

TIME

July 12-14, 1977

(and now)

*When Mary Claire and Mary Frances are in a scene together, to avoid confusion they are referred to in the text as Claire and Frances. They usually refer to each other this way as well.

NOTE: As this is a memory play, remember this is not meant to be straight naturalism. The characters in the play spring from Reenie’s memory, almost like actors playing roles that she assigns for them. The scenes should move like snapshots in a photo album, orchestrated by Reenie. While there is darkness in this story, there is love and humor woven through out. Fight the darkness.

PROLOGUE:

DARKNESS. Then a bare light bulb is switched on hanging above a teenage girl. We can barely make her out, sitting cross legged in the dark.

REENIE

Pretend this is a dream. This is a dream you're having about me. About a girl you don't know. It's okay -- you don't have to understand everything right now. This is only the beginning. It's the only way I can tell this story.

(beat)

It is July 14, 1977; 8:30pm. It's hot and I'm sitting in my mother's closet where she stores all of her things. Winter clothes are jam packed in here. And boxes and boxes of stuff. Memories. Photographs, drawings and homemade cards, like the little soap fish my sister made in Brownies. My parents' wedding pictures, all of our baby pictures, every school picture since kindergarten, the red construction paper Valentine's Day hearts on white doilies. Stuff like that you save forever. There is a ladder in here too, if, we want to get out.

(she stands suddenly)

Like if there was a fire, we could escape onto the roof. As if we could jump roof to roof to roof until we got to safety -- or Atlantic Avenue -- whichever came first. Except -- there's not always enough warning, before things catch on fire.

(she pushes her way through the closet)

Reaching through her scratchy coats and polyester pants suits I find the ladder. Yank it open, then climb hand over hand pulling myself up out of quicksand to get to the top, then both hands flat against the ceiling PUSH as HARD as I CAN to OPEN it—

SOUND of a trap door lifting as THE LIGHT from the closet shines straight up into the night sky— SHE walks to the edge and takes a deep breath.

REENIE (cont'd)

Down there, it's like you're trapped on the A train, in the tunnel, under the river, packed with people and it's a hundred and fifty degrees with *no air*. My Father doesn't believe in air conditioning. Okay, he believes in air conditioner. And it's in their bedroom, where it's so loud you can hear it, but they're the only ones who can feel it.

WE HEAR the sound of the elevated TRAIN rumble past, distant SIRENS, a couple SHOUTING at each other, and then distant WAVES crashing softly onshore.

REENIE (cont'd)

Up here, I can breathe even though it's like a hundred degrees out and so humid we might as well be under water... Sometimes if I concentrate, I can smell salt from the ocean... if there's a breeze.

She looks up as the SOUND of an AIRPLANE flying overhead.

REENIE (cont'd)

There were never any stars in the sky. Okay: *Star*. Sometimes there's one. But no, that's an airplane....

She follows the plane, looking out over the neighborhood.

REENIE (cont'd)

...if I could fly...I'd be gone.

SHE PULLS back from the memory and discovers a box and starts unpacking it, first pulling out a small rose patterned diary.

REENIE (cont'd)

My diary -- I keep at the back of my underwear drawer. I think no one will find it. But just in case, I place a hair on the page I've just written on so I'll know when someone reads it. And I keep it locked at all times with a key.

The KEY on a string goes around her neck. SHE puts the diary in her jeans pocket. Then out of another box, she pulls out a PAPER MACHE HEAD, with wild red eyes and green skin and snakes for hair.

REENIE (cont'd)

My Medusa. I win a prize for her.

She places MEDUSA on the ledge of the roof. Then SHE lays out two bath towels and the following objects which she names:

REENIE (cont'd)

Baby oil. Sun-in. Pack of Kools. Boom box.

She sets up the radio, next to the towels, and stashes the cigarettes and lighter in a straw beach bag. She discovers a suede 70s style floppy hat and puts it on her head without comment. Then she pulls out a photo album, holds it to her chest.

TAR BEACH

SOUNDS OF SIRENS and then FIRETRUCKS. A 40 alarm fire. THE RED AND BLUE LIGHTS OF AMBULANCES And POLICE CARS bounce off her face as she looks toward Atlantic avenue.

REENIE (cont'd)

And then I'm back. Tar Beach. The way I remember it.

REENIE crouches suddenly, opens up a real trap door. Light shines up through it like a beacon. She exits down it, taking the photo album as the LIGHTS FADE on MEDUSA, left behind.

REENIE suddenly pops back out for a moment, reaches over and turns on the boom box. Something from the late 70s like "Dream Weaver" plays, as SHE disappears again. The last LIGHT to fade is the light streaming out of "the closet."

LIGHTS SHIFT.

TAR BEACH

SCENE ONE:

LIGHTS RISE: transitioning from DARKNESS to DAWN to AFTERNOON on a hot sunny day in July the day before The NEW YORK CITY BLACK OUT of 1977. SOUND from a portable “boom box” playing songs from the radio.

TWO TEENAGE GIRLS in two piece bathing suits lay side by side on towels on the roof of a row house in Ozone Park, Queens. They are both soaked in baby oil. THE MEDUSA head sits on the ledge of the roof between them. Suddenly one of them bolts up right and cries out in pain.

CLAIRE

Give me a towel, the towel, ow ow ow, that towel you’re sittin on!

FRANCES

Did you get it in your eyes?

CLAIRE

It burns! Ahhh. Give me your water, your water, pour it on my eye!

FRANCES

Damn girl, you’re going to go blind for some highlights. Yow, my feet are burning, yow, yow, yow, yow-- this roof is on fire!

CLAIRE

Hurry!

FRANCES

I am, I am, I got it, here. Pour it on. How’s that?

CLAIRE

It’s still stingin.

FRANCES

Keep pourin it right on your eye. You gotta wash it out.

CLAIRE

What does it say if you get it in your eyes?

FRANCES

It says you’ll go blind.

CLAIRE

What?!

TAR BEACH

FRANCES

I'm kiddin. It says wash it out.

CLAIRE

Ahhh, it friggin hurts...

FRANCES

You should have stuck with the lemon juice.

CLAIRE

That burns too.

FRANCES

It can't be worth all this agony.

CLAIRE

It's still burning...

FRANCES

Uhm, Mary Claire...I know you're in pain and everything...but, can you please turn that head the other way around? It's startin to freak me out.

CLAIRE

Uhm...Mary Frances...I feel like I have a hot poker in my eye, do you think you can do it yourself?

FRANCES leans over, turns Medusa so she faces away from them.

FRANCES

That's a little better.

CLAIRE hands spray can to FRANCES, while holding the towel to one eye.

CLAIRE

Here, spray some in the back.

FRANCES

(shakes can, spraying)

It hurts to be beautiful. That's what my mother says. Not that she'd know.

(beat)

Did you get any money from your mother?

CLAIRE

(shaking her head)

Uh-uh. You?

TAR BEACH

FRANCES

Slipped a ten from my father's wallet. He just got paid, he'll never miss it. How much you got altogether?

CLAIRE

(pouring it out on the towel)

About seven...in change.

FRANCES

That should be enough for a six pack, bottle of Jack and some munchies and train fare if we need it.

CLAIRE

Am I gettin red?

FRANCES

Fryin like a fish.

CLAIRE

Too red?

FRANCES

You're really freckled.

CLAIRE

Does it look like a tan? Am I gettin tan lines?

FRANCES

Put it this way: if you squint your eyes, all the freckles blend together and you can call it a tan.

CLAIRE

Good.

FRANCES

Turn over. You're done on that side.

FRANCES rubs oil on CLAIRE's back, CLAIRE pulls out a box full of half smoked cigarettes.

CLAIRE

Wanna smoke?

FRANCES

What about your mother?

TAR BEACH

CLAIRE

She's downstairs somewhere readin TV Guide. She won't come up here.

FRANCES

We're smokin menthols now?

CLAIRE

My mother left them in the bathroom.

FRANCES

Menthols make your lungs bleed, you know.

CLAIRE

(lighting up a cigarette butt with her mother's stolen lighter)
Really?

FRANCES

There's fiberglass in them, or some shit.

CLAIRE

(blowing out the smoke, then suddenly worried)
No there isn't.

FRANCES

(gives her a look, "see, what'd I tell you")
You don't have any Marlboro 100s left?

CLAIRE

(looking in her box of butts)
I've got one parliament, but I was savin that for later.

FRANCES

We'll buy a fresh pack. You don't wanna be smokin stinky butts tonight.

CLAIRE

No, I hope I'm not smokin stinky butts....

They start laughing hysterically.

CLAIRE (cont'd)

God, I can't wait for tonight!!

FRANCES

Did you ask your parents?

TAR BEACH

CLAIRE

My mother said yes.

FRANCES

She won't call my house will she?

CLAIRE

I don't think so.

FRANCES

Cause I'm tellin my mother, I'm sleepin here.

CLAIRE

What about your mother, will she call?

FRANCES

Uh-uh. She'll be too busy naggin my father to death, in between sayin the rosary.

CLAIRE

Good.

FRANCES

Bonfire on the beach! Then we'll watch the sunrise! With any luck you'll be under the board walk with Jimmy and I'll be with Bobby or Anthony or Michael depends on who comes. I'm not picky. I'll take your cast offs, I'm not proud.

CLAIRE

I still haveta ask my Father.

FRANCES

You were supposed to ask him last night!

CLAIRE

I couldn't ask him last night—

FRANCES

We got it all set up for tonight! Anthony is comin with *his car*, otherwise we'd have to take the train and we'll never get the guys to take the train all the way to Rockaway—

CLAIRE

If I woulda asked him last night, he woulda said no.

FRANCES

Whenever you ask him he's gonna say no. Then you start *beggin*. You won't have time to wear him down if you're just startin now! Just go, your mother said yes. He won't even notice.

TAR BEACH

CLAIRE

Oh no, he'll notice. He doesn't miss anything.

FRANCES

Okay okay okay, then tell him on your way out the door, by the way I'm sleepin over Mary Franceses house tonight because she has air conditionin, and it's goin to be like a hundred and fifty degrees in your room -- he can't say no to that! That's child abuse. Not even a fan in there. He can't even spring for a fan.

CLAIRE

Cuz he's friggin cheap.

FRANCES

I'll buy you a fan, how much could a fan cost.

CLAIRE

He doesn't care about that. Look, I'll figure somethin out.

FRANCES

You better. Because this is a good plan. Genius. If we have all night, something's bound to happen.

CLAIRE

And what if it doesn't?

FRANCES

Then we'll go to Forest Park and look for Son of Sam.

CLAIRE

Just what I want to do tonight: get shot by the forty four caliber killer.

FRANCES

"Get Son of Sam before He Gets You." I saw it on a tee shirt.

CLAIRE

I don't think they mean *us*.

FRANCES

Who better?

CLAIRE

Sixteen year old girls, are supposed to go out and capture a homicidal maniac?

TAR BEACH

FRANCES

Hey, we're the targets! I don't want to be afraid the entire summer of my sixteenth year. I want to be carefree.

CLAIRE

And what do we do if we find him?

FRANCES

We call the cops and get our picture in the paper.

CLAIRE

(putting her own hair in a pony tail)

In the meantime you better put your carefree hair in a pony tail. Son of Sam likes girls with long brown shoulder length hair.

FRANCES

Yeah, well, Son of Sam can suck my....

SHE leans over and whispers in her ear.

CLAIRE

That'll be hard—

FRANCES bursts out laughing, spraying water.

CLAIRE (cont'd)

--to do! That'll be hard to do!! Since you don't have one...!

Without warning REENIE's head pops up.

REENIE

Daddy's home!

REENIE sees The MEDUSA and shoots CLAIRE a deadly glance as she grabs the head and disappears. Then CLAIRE and FRANCES move fast, stubbing out their cigarettes getting rid of any evidence.

FRANCES

Holy Crap.

CLAIRE

What's he doin home!

FRANCES

Holy Crap!!

TAR BEACH

CLAIRE

Don't panic, he won't come up here – I don't think. Put the butts in the can.

FRANCES

Here. In this, throw it all in this!

CLAIRE

Okay lay down. Stop pantin.

(THEY lay down, waving their hands above them to dissipate the smoke)

FRANCES

I'm sorry, your father scares the livin' crap out of me.

CLAIRE

Turn the radio off. No wait! Leave it on. Lower it. No wait. Act normal.

FRANCES

Shouldn't he be at work??

CLAIRE

What time is it?

FRANCES

Do you think he's drunk?

CLAIRE

He doesn't usually start drinkin' til Friday. Sometimes Thursday, but never Tuesday.

FRANCES

He's nicer when he's drunk. When he's sober he looks at me with those x-ray eyes that says, "I know you're doin' somethin' bad with my daughter."

CLAIRE

He's home early on a Tuesday that's not a good sign.

FRANCES

---Shhh! Did you hear—he's coming! Oh my god, he's comin' up here!?! Please tell me he's not comin' up here!!

THE GIRLS freeze, eyes glued to trapdoor.

LIGHTS SHIFT.

TAR BEACH

SCENE TWO:

REENIE backs out of the closet holding onto MEDUSA, she bumps into ROGER, dressed in a blue work uniform jumper, zipper down, a white wife beater T – shirt visible underneath.

Where you goin'?

ROGER

Nowhere.

REENIE

You're goin somewhere.

ROGER

I live here.

REENIE

Where's your mother?

ROGER

Nap.

REENIE

Where's your sister?

ROGER

(hesitates, briefly)
Roof.

REENIE

What?

ROGER

She's on the roof. With Mary Frances.

REENIE

That kid. What is with your mother, lettin them go up on that roof?

ROGER

They always go up there.

REENIE

They do? Why aren't you up there with them?

ROGER

Beat.

TAR BEACH

REENIE
She didn't ask me.

ROGER
You can go up on the roof with them, I'll let you. Go ahead.

REENIE
No.

ROGER
You want to invite one of your little friends over?

REENIE
No.

ROGER
Then go up there with them.

REENIE
She doesn't want me to.

ROGER
Tell her I said so.

HE takes a pack of Parliments out of his chest pocket and starts fishing for a cigarette out of the pack. It's empty, he crushes the pack.

ROGER
Hey. You're not smokin my cigarettes are you?

REENIE
No.

ROGER
What is that?

REENIE
Medusa.

ROGER
Me do what?

REENIE
Medusa. She's a...a Mythological Creature.

TAR BEACH

ROGER

When I was a kid, livin on Steinway Street, we had no money for the train so we'd go up on the roof. It was like the beach with our sunglasses and the radio and our parents' cigarettes. Except no sand. That's why we called it Tar Beach. I know what you kids are doin before you even think about doin it. So don't.

REENIE

I'm not doin anything.

ROGER

Get me a beer and bring it up there.

REENIE

Get it yourself.

ROGER

How about Me Do Wop, she wanna get me a beer?

REENIE

She'd rather turn you to stone.

ROGER

She's too late for that. Here, feel this, feel it, feel me here. Go ahead, you can punch me.

REENIE

I don't want to.

ROGER

Go ahead, right in the gut. Like a rock. Hah? How many of your friends' fathers are like that? Here, my biceps, go ahead, feel 'em. Hah? I'm like the incredible Hulk, right? Commere. Give your father a kiss. You're a good kid, Reenie. I love ya. Now get your your father a beer.

REENIE

I'm busy right now.

ROGER

What are you doin you're busy?

REENIE

I have to hide this so she can't find it.

ROGER

Hey come over here. Let me look at you.

TAR BEACH

REENIE

What?

ROGER

Somethin's different about you -- your face -- or somethin...you got make up on?/ What is it?

REENIE

(embarrassed but secretly pleased)

No. Nothin.

ROGER

Okay. Don't wake up your mother. She doesn't need to know I'm home yet.

HE kisses REENIE on the head, she endures it. HE starts to kiss MEDUSA then, freezes turning to stone. He doesn't move for several seconds.

REENIE

Dad.

ROGER doesn't move.

REENIE (cont'd)

Dad!

ROGER doesn't move. REENIE laughs nervously.

REENIE (cont'd)

Daddy!

ROGER breaks his pose, and grabs her.

ROGER

Gotcha!

REENIE screams. ROGER laughs with her, messes up her hair.

REENIE

Don't do that!

ROGER

Okay, now go get that beer! Bring it up there. One more thing. Your sister been swipin my cigarettes?

REENIE

I don't know.

TAR BEACH

ROGER

You just answered my question.

ROGER puts his hand on the door knob of the closet, is about to open it and climb up to the roof.

LIGHTS SHIFT

REENIE holds onto MEDUSA as SHE moves into the bedroom she shares with her sister, MARY CLAIRE.

REENIE

(to us)

The part of the story I couldn't tell him is that she was really beautiful at first and then Poseidon raped her. He went back into the sea and she got snakes for hair. No one knows why I chose Medusa. The truth is she chose me.

MARY CLARE slams into the bedroom. REENIE watches her for a beat, before entering the scene:

MARY CLAIRE

Thanks a lot!

MARY CLAIRE throws stuff from her side to REENIE'S side.

MARY CLARE (con'td)

Thanks to you all my plans are ruined once again! Stay on your side of the room!

REENIE

What did I do?

MARY CLAIRE

Miss Innocent. You told Daddy I stole his cigarettes/which I did not do.

REENIE

I did not, he asked me and I said I don't/know!

MARY CLAIRE

I had plans tonight! I have a life, you know. Which you wouldn't know about since you don't have any friends. Move over. Do not cross that line. Get that disgustin thing away from me.

REENIE doesn't say anything.

TAR BEACH

MARY CLAIRE (cont'd)

I don't see why I have to have that in my room starin at me all the time.

REENIE doesn't say anything.

MARY CLAIRE (cont'd)

Put it somewhere I don't have to see it, under the bed, or put it in Mommy's closet with all the other stuff.

REENIE

(after a beat)

I think she's beautiful.

MARY CLAIRE

You would. Most people do Zeus or Athena. That's who I did. Some of the boys did the Minotaur. Laura Halferty did Aphrodite. Cause that's who she thought she was, probably. Nobody, *nobody* did Medusa.

Pause.

REENIE

Athena started all the trouble.

MARY CLAIRE

What are you talking about?

REENIE doesn't answer.

Athena turned Medusa into a Gorgon. Before that she was really beautiful and Poseidon—well, Athena got jealous and sent Perseus to chop off her head. Then Pegasus flew out of her neck. Most people don't know that part.

MARY CLAIRE

You're so weird.

MARY CLAIRE grabs her suede hat and puts it on her head then throws herself on her bed, stewing as REENIE looks at her.

MARY CLAIRE (cont'd)

What are you starin at?

REENIE

You read my diary.

MARY CLAIRE

I DID NOT! I'm sick and tired of bein accused of everything around here! Why would I want to read your stupid diary. Nothin happens to you. What do you got to write about it? None of it even made any sense.

REENIE

I thought you didn't read it.

MARY CLAIRE

I didn't have to! I can imagine it doesn't make any sense, because you don't make any sense. God, why don't you just kill yourself or somethin.

MARY CLAIRE closes her eyes. REENIE takes her diary out of her jeans pocket, and writes.

MARY CLAIRE

I'd keep an eye on your little friend there, because if you don't, one day, she's gonna be gone. And you'll never know what happened to her. Go ahead write it down in your diary what a horrible sister I am. *"Why is she so mean to me, boohoo."*

REENIE looks worried. She pulls out a hair and lays it on the page.

REENIE

Mary Claire?

MARY CLAIRE

What.

REENIE

She won first prize.

MARY CLAIRE

You're a freak.

MARY CLAIRE grabs MEDUSA and bolts out of the room. Stunned, REENIE freezes then starts to bolt out after her --

LIGHTS SHIFT. REENIE stops and observes as her parents begin the next scene:

SCENE THREE:

A WOMAN in her mid/late 30's sits at a dining room table smoking a cigarette and drinking a cup of instant coffee, while reading Reader's Digest. An ashtray on the table is full of ashes and cigarette butts. The table cloth is vinyl covered with bicentennial red white and blue american eagles. There is a spot on the table cloth where the vinyl is peeling. The furniture is all "Early American."

Tall folded moving boxes/cartons, lean against the hutch, along with packing tape, stapler guns, moving blankets and other moving equipment.

ROGER sits across from her, still in his jumper which is open now, hanging down from his waist, his wife beater T shirt visible, popping open a Budweiser. HE stares at her. She ignores him. HE drinks from his beer, then slams the can down on the table, not violently, but enough to get her attention. BRIGIT only sighs, takes a drag from her cigarette, turns the page. She lets the smoke blow out from her nose and her mouth at the same time.

ROGER

You look like a dragon when you do that. How do you do that?

BRIGIT's eyes rise slightly to meet ROGER's gaze, for a brief moment, then lower back to her book.

ROGER

Ahhhh! You turned me to stone! I can't move!

HE freezes like with REENIE, but gets no reaction.

ROGER (cont'd)

You're an unhappy woman, Brigit.

BRIGIT

(without looking up)

I come from a long line of unhappy women.

ROGER

Why is that?

BRIGIT

Look at what we married...that's your first clue.

TAR BEACH

REENIE bursts into the scene.

REENIE

She stole it again. I've been lookin for over an hour and I can't find it. She's been doing this ever since I brought it home!

BRIGIT

Brought what home?

REENIE

My project.

BRIGIT

What project?

REENIE

My Greek Mythology project. I told you. She won first place/so I couldn't take it home until the last day of school.

ROGER

Medusa. I know what it's called.

REENIE

She keeps takin it!

ROGER

She's jealous. She can't make one like you did.

REENIE

Mom, please tell her to stop takin it!

BRIGIT

You think I can tell anybody anything in this house. Nobody listens to me.

ROGER

You're the mother.

BRIGIT

You wanna be the mother?

ROGER doesn't answer, instead drinks his beer.

BRIGIT (cont'd)

No, I don't blame you.

TAR BEACH

REENIE takes her diary and sits in the living room.
MARY CLAIRE enters nonchalant. Waits a beat.

MARY CLAIRE

Dad...

ROGER

(overlapping)
No.

MARY CLAIRE

Dad-- .

ROGER

(overlapping)
No.

MARY CLAIRE

But Dad, I didn't/ ask--

ROGER

(overlapping)
No.

MARY CLAIRE

--you anything yet!

ROGER

The answer is still no.

MARY CLAIRE

God! It's not fair!

SHE plops down at the dining room table and is immediately bored. Starts picking at the spot where the vinyl is peeling. ROGER grabs her hand.

ROGER

So you're the one doin that! I'll crush your little hands.

MARY CLAIRE

It's not me!

ROGER

I just caught you! This kid is too much.

TAR BEACH

MARY CLAIRE

It's not my fault! It's so disgustin and hot in here! What's for supper?

ROGER

Give her back her thing.

MARY CLAIRE

I don't got it.

ROGER

Give it back Mary Claire, if you ever want to be let out of this house again. So help me God.

MARY CLAIRE

I DON'T HAVE IT! WHY DO I GET BLAMED FOR EVERYTHING IN THIS HOUSE!

ROGER

Because you are usually the guilty party.

MARY CLAIRE

I did not take it and I do not know where it is.

ROGER

Not only are you a thief you are also a liar. And not a very good one.

MARY CLAIRE

I am not a thief! Or – or -- a liar!

ROGER

You know where it is.

MARY CLAIRE

You can't prove it.

ROGER

You want to go out?

MARY CLAIRE

Yes.

ROGER

(to Brigit)

You know these kids were up on the roof today when you were sleepin?

TAR BEACH

BRIGIT

So what? I took a nap when I got home from work.

ROGER

What if one of them fell off?

MARY CLAIRE

I'm not sayin I took it, but if I help her find it, can I go out?

ROGER

Deal.

MARY CLAIRE

So I can – sleep over too, right?

ROGER

Whoa, what sleepover?

MARY CLAIRE

Mommy already said yes.

ROGER

I don't know nothin about no sleepover.

MARY CLAIRE

Mommy said yes because my room has no air conditionin and Mary Frances/has air conditionin in her room—

ROGER

Mary Frances. That one. You said yes?

BRIGIT

It's summer. Let her go. We're not going anywhere.

ROGER

You wanna go somewhere? Go to Tar Beach. It's close.

BRIGIT

You're a jerk, you know that.

MARY CLAIRE

So can I go?

ROGER

I'll tell you what. You can go.

TAR BEACH

I can? MARY CLAIRE

On one condition. ROGER

What. MARY CLAIRE

You gotta take your sister with you. ROGER

Nooo-wah! I can't take her with me. She never says anything;/she sits there like a stone. MARY CLAIRE

I'm getting a splittin headache. BRIGIT

I don't want to go. REENIE

Then I guess you're out of luck. ROGER

That's no fair-- ! MARY CLAIRE

I got one question for you, Roger. What are you doin home here so early? BRIGIT

It's gonna be a long hot summer, Brigit. We're in the worst heat wave in years and its only July. The city is bankrupt and Gerald Ford told us to all go to hell. There's a crazy maniac on the loose shootin people in their cars. ROGER

(referring to MARY CLAIRE)
Which is why I don't want that one goin out at night.

But I'll be at Mary Franceses house!! MARY CLAIRE

(with a lisp)
"Mary Franceses house!" The two of them together got the names of four saints, but not a one between them. ROGER

TAR BEACH

BRIGIT

Why are you home early?
(referring to boxes)
And what is all this crap you brought home?

ROGER

Just when you think it's not gonna get any worse, it gets worse.
(beat)
I got laid off today. I wasn't the only one. I took what I could on my way out the door.

BRIGIT finally stops with her crossword puzzle.
The GIRLS look up, alerted. ROGER grabs the
puzzle book from BRIGIT.

ROGER

Seven down. "Summer blank...what every prisoner wants." Six letters. That's easy.
Give me that pencil. F - R - E - E - D - O - M.

BRIGIT

That's seven letters.

REENIE

Escape.

ROGER

E - S - C - A - P - E. Atta girl, she knows it, Brigit. Summer Escape.

BRIGIT

If it were only that easy.

BRIGIT takes the book out of his hands and walks
out without a word.

ROGER

(to MARY CLAIRE)

What are you waitin for? You better convince your sister she wants to go with you or
you're gonna be sittin in this sweatbox all night.

ROGER cracks open the beer. MARY CLAIRE
looks at REENIE then runs off to find MEDUSA.
ROGER looks at REENIE a moment before exiting.
REENIE snaps shut her diary, taking us into the
next scene as

LIGHTS SHIFT.

REENIE enters and walks directly to MARY CLAIRE's side of the room and takes the suede hat, puts it on. Moves over to the mirror, checking out what she looks like, then she moves back to MARY CLAIRE's side, takes a jean vest puts that on too. MARY CLAIRE enters.

MARY CLAIRE

Oh, no, don't even think—I'm wearin that tonight.

(pauses)

Come on Reenie, please. What do I have to do? You can wear my Zeppelin tee shirt and the vest, but please not the hat. Not the. Does this mean you're comin'?

REENIE doesn't say a word. MARY CLAIRE pulls MEDUSA from under her bed hands it to her.

MARY CLAIRE (cont'd)

I'm sorry about your "head." It was a joke. I swear to god, you can leave it on your dresser or where ever you want, I won't touch it. Okay. It's a good project, Reenie, it's just-- it scares me. The snaky hair with the red tongues they look like their movin and her mouth all red and stuff, you gotta admit it's pretty gross. But I won't look at it, okay. Put it anywhere you want.

REENIE is silent, but listening.

MARY CLAIRE (cont'd)

If you come out with us tonight you can do whatever you want. You can be quiet. I won't make fun of you, I promise. Please, I'm beggin you, I'm on my knees.

MARY CLAIRE is in fact on her knees.

MARY CLAIRE (cont'd)

And—okay, we're not goin to Mary Franceses house. We're really goin to Rockaway beach. We're gonna sleep on the beach. We're gonna build a bonfire, and we'll get high and *the guys are coming*. Jimmy and Michael and Anthony—

REENIE looks away at the mention of "Anthony."

MARY CLAIRE (cont'd)

I know you like Anthony. I saw him lookin at you that day you came to get me at the park. It could be your chance with him. If you come, that'll be three and three. But—don't worry you don't have to do anything with him if you don't want to. You can sit around the fire while I'm with Jimmy under the boardwalk.

REENIE

Under the boardwalk?

MARY CLAIRE

You don't have to go under the boardwalk if you don't want to. Say you'll come. I'm sorry okay. I'm sorry for everything I ever did, all the mean things I ever said.

REENIE takes off the hat and lays it on Mary Claire's bed.

REENIE

I don't want to go to the beach.

MARY CLAIRE

Why not?! It's gonna be great!! Come oooooonnnnn!!

REENIE

Because.

MARY CLAIRE

Uhhhhn! Because. Because...why?Why, Reenie?! Tell me why!

REENIE

(very quietly)

I got my period.

Silence.

MARY CLAIRE

Whoa. You did? You mean, for the first time? Why didn't you tell me? Did you tell Mommy?

REENIE shakes her head.

MARY CLAIRE (cont'd)

Do you know...like what to do..?

REENIE shrugs.

MARY CLAIRE (cont'd)

Do you have cramps?

REENIE shrugs again.

MARY CLAIRE (cont'd)

Welcome to womanhood. That's what Mommy said to me. "Welcome to Womanhood, don't get yourself pregnant." Nice. You should probably tell her. But no, you're right, not today, she's in a bad mood. Plus Daddy's -job thing--Forget it. We'll stay up here till supper is ready and we won't say a word when we're at the table, we won't give them any excuse to change their minds.

(looks at her)

Don't worry about your little friend. We can bring kotex. I'll carry them in my beach bag. We'll hide them in the towels. No one will know, just don't wear white shorts. Wear your cutoffs, and a bathing suit top under your shirt. You don't have to go in the water. Yeah, no, *don't* go in the water, no, blood and water don't go together.

MARY CLAIRE does the theme music from Jaws.

REENIE

I don't want to stay out all night.

MARY CLAIRE

But it's going to be so much fun!!

REENIE

What about....Son of Sam?

MARY CLAIRE

We're going to Rockaway, that's why we're going there, he's never been anywhere near there! Forest Hills, Bayside, The Bronx, never Rockaway, he's afraid of water or something. Something to do with the bridges. Plus, we'll be with the guys. Anthony will protect you.

REENIE is silent.

MARY CLAIRE (cont'd)

You can *have* my hat. I'll give it to you. It's yours. If you go.

REENIE smiles, takes the hat.

MARY CLAIRE (cont'd)

Your hat of invisibility.

REENIE

Cap. Cap of invisibility.

(beat)

I knew you read my diary.

TAR BEACH

MARY CLAIRE

I swear I didn't.

REENIE

Then how did you know about--?

MARY CLAIRE

Okay okay okay, I read one page. But I didn't understand it and I stopped, I swear to God, and I put it right back and locked it up and put the key back under your mattress!

REENIE immediately retrieves the key under the mattress. Finds a string, loops it around the key then puts the string around her neck during the following:

MARY CLAIRE (cont'd)

It's just. Sometimes you're a mystery, Reenie. I wanted to know what was goin on in your head. There was some really weird stuff in there. About the friggin hat. Flying through mists of invisibility....

REENIE

They're...poems.

MARY CLAIRE

They didn't rhyme. What kind of poem is that?

REENIE

A private poem.

MARY CLAIRE

I'm sorry!! Crucify me. Oh my God.

(half a beat)

It's just-- . I don't know why we fight all the time. We never used to. Let's not anymore. Okay? Let's make up. You can hang out with me and Mary Frances. All summer. Okay? Starting tonight. It's gonna be so much fun. I promise.

(beat)

Just don't get pregnant.

REENIE doesn't answer right away.

MARY CLAIRE (cont'd)

That was a joke!! I'm kiddin, I'm kiddin! But don't, okay, really don't do that. So, you'll come tonight?

REENIE

I'll go.

MARY CLAIRE

Oh Thank You Reenie! Thank you! This has been the most borrr-ring summer of my life. Do you ever feel like you were born at the tail end of a great party, and everyone keeps sayin what a great party it was, but when you get there, all the chips and dip are gone, there's nothin but crumbs on the table and empty beer cans lyin around and everyone is hung over, but it was such an amazin unbelievable party that it's gonna take at least twenty-five years for it to start gettin good again? The 60s were great, the 80s will be good, I bet, but where we are now sucks. Like we were born between times.

REENIE

Just...what do you do... under the boardwalk?

THE SOUND OF BRIGIT and ROGER screaming at each other downstairs can be heard offstage.

BRIGIT

You bastard! I know what you're doin!

ROGER

I'm not doing anything.

BRIGIT

You think I want to be stuck here in this house while you got out every fuckin night.

ROGER

Hey watch your language.

REENIE covers her ears. MARY CLAIRE plops back on her bed.

BRIGIT

Get your fuckin hands off me. I mean it Roger, let go off me, I'll take this fuckin knife and stab you right in the chest –let me go.

ROGER

You aint stabbin nobody, watch what you say. Sit back down and shut up you want these girls--

BRIGIT

Don't you fuckin tell me what to do!

ROGER

Hey, I said watch your language! You want these girls to hear this? What kind of mother talks like that?

MARY CLAIRE

I better call Mary Frances. Maybe we'll skip dinner and just leave now.

But MARY CLAIRE doesn't move.

BRIGIT

What do you care about them? You don't do shit for them. Drunk every other goddamn night. You don't even got a job now. Where's the money gonna come from? We didn't have money to do shit to begin with. How are we gonna make the mortgage payments? Where are you goin, you're not goin out, I'm goin out!

ROGER

(overlapping)

You're not goin nowhere.

BRIGIT

(overlapping)

You walk out that door, Roger, don't you dare come back, I mean it! Bastard!

ROGER

(overlapping)

Who's the one screaming at who here, Brigit? Lower your goddamn voice/I said lower your voice Brigit/--so help me God

BRIGIT

(overlapping)

Go, go, I don't fuckin care what you do—just don't think you're coming back here!

MARY CLAIRE

We're gonna need a new plan.

REENIE grabs the suede hat and puts it on. As soon as she does DARKNESS (and SILENCE) falls all around her. One tiny spot on her, then,

LIGHTS SHIFT. REENIE takes us into the next scene, by dragging a large box full of photographs into the livingroom...

TAR BEACH

SCENE FOUR:

THE NEXT DAY. 3:00pm even hotter and more humid than the day before.

THE DININGROOM TABLE is covered with photo albums. Boxes with loose photos and memorabilia are on the floor. MEDUSA sits on the edge of the table, her face turned away from MARY CLAIRE who lies on the couch in the living room watching TV re-runs of a 70s sitcom, like *I Dream of Jeannie* or *Bewitched* with a laugh track which can be heard in between the dialogue.

REENIE holds up a large white photo album.

REENIE

Found it!

MARY CLAIRE doesn't react. She gets up, makes the TV louder, then drops back down on the couch. REENIE drops the album on the table and starts flipping through the pages.

REENIE (cont'd)

Here's proof!

(whips through the pages, occasionally holding it up to show CLAIRE)
Happy, happy, happy. Smiling. Laughing! Look, look, laughing. Smiling, smiling, happy.

MARY CLAIRE

So what?

REENIE

So she was happy. They both were. Until...

SHE finds the next album.

MARY CLAIRE

...I was born....

REENIE

Baby pictures. Not smiling. Not smiling. No, that is not a smile either.

MARY CLAIRE

....and it's all my fault...

TAR BEACH

REENIE

Here's mine. Nope, nope.....nope. Once the baby pictures start, there's not one happy smiling face.

MARY CLAIRE

There aren't that many pictures of her to begin with.

REENIE

Daddy is smiling.

MARY CLAIRE

So what's your point, Reenie? She was this incredibly happy person full of peace love and understanding – until she had us. Then she became the miserable witch that she is.

REENIE

She's not.

MARY CLAIRE

She's not miserable?

REENIE

...She's not a witch.

MARY CLAIRE

Not officially.

REENIE studies the photographs.

REENIE

She was happy. And...she was pretty.

MARY CLAIRE

Okay, okay, you're right, so what!

REENIE

So you owe me five dollars.

MARY CLAIRE

I didn't bet you.

REENIE

Yes, you did, you said there was never a happy picture of her and I said I knew there was and you said, "Bet you five dollars."

TAR BEACH

MARY CLAIRE

All I have is change and I need it for tonight. Besides bein happy before we were born, shouldn't count anyway.

REENIE

I knew you wouldn't pay me.

MARY CLAIRE

You catch on quick.

REENIE

I'm never gettin married and I'm never havin children.

MARY CLAIRE

That's stupid. Just because she ruined her life marryin Daddy. Not all married people are unhappy.

REENIE

Do you know any happy married people?

MARY CLAIRE hesitates.

MARY CLAIRE

Just because I don't know any, don't mean they don't exist.

REENIE

I'm not gettin married. And if I do, I'm never havin children. She was happy. Then she wasn't.

MARY CLAIRE

No shit, Sherlock. You should be a detective.

REENIE opens up another box.

MARY CLAIRE

What are you doing?

REENIE

I'm looking for clues.

MARY CLAIRE

Clues to what?

REENIE

To us.

MARY CLAIRE

You better put all that away before Mommy gets home. She's not going to be "happy" you're digging around in her closet. Remember we don't want to give her a reason to get mad tonight.

REENIE holds up a little soapfish, luring MARY CLAIRE in.

MARY CLAIRE (cont'd)

Hey, that's mine. I made that in girl scouts.

MARY CLAIRE turns off the TV and jumps off the couch joining REENIE on the floor as they dig through the boxes together.

MARY CLAIRE (cont'd)

What else is in here? Wow. My kindergarten picture. Oh my god. I was so cute...wasn't I?

REENIE

What happened to your hair? It's...curly....sort of.

MARY CLAIRE

She gave me a home permanent. Only half came out. I cried all the way to school.

REENIE

I don't remember that.

MARY CLAIRE

That's because you were always crying. Every morning I left for school, "I wanna go wid Mawy Cwaire!"

REENIE

I did not.

MARY CLAIRE

You always wanted to go everywhere I did. It was so annoying. Look at all this...she saved everything...all of our report cards, mother's day cards, oh look....

SHE holds up a pair of white baby shoes.

REENIE

We must have made her a little happy – if she saved all this.

TAR BEACH

MARY CLAIRE and REENIE looks at the baby shoes, like an artifact from an ancient civilization, when MARY FRANCES walks in.

FRANCES

You don't answer your door?

CLAIRE

The doorbell is broken.

FRANCES

What is all this crap? Hey, I made one of these, I think.

CLAIRE

Ya, we made it together Frances, in girl scouts for Mother's day in the third grade.

FRANCES

My mother didn't keep it. She probably took the beads out and used it in the bathtub, can't waste soap you know. So who died?

REENIE

Nobody died.

FRANCES

Oh. The only time my family takes out old family pictures, is when somebody croaks. Oh my God.

(looking at a picture)

Is that your mother??

(beat)

Your father scares the living crap out of me, but he's like, you know upfront, what you see is what you get. Your mother is like the apocalypse. You know it's coming, you just don't know when. But she was real pretty. She looks like you, Reenie.

REENIE looks at the photo.

CLAIRE

Okay, so what's the plan, Frances?

FRANCES

Okay, here's the plan. I talked to the guys. They're up for the beach. Are they gonna let you out?

CLAIRE

Yes, but she has to come.

TAR BEACH

FRANCES

Fine by me. Reenie's cool. Right, girl?

CLAIRE

She doesn't want to sleep outside.

FRANCES

Who said anything about sleepin'?

CLAIRE

She's afraid to sleep outside now, because of Son of Sam.

FRANCES

Oh, what, are you afraid of a little forty four caliber killer?

CLAIRE

I know.

FRANCES

He's killing people in parked cars, we're not gonna be in a parked car. You can't let this whack job control your life! Okay, look, there's a band tonight at Forest Park they're gonna play Zeppelin and Pink Floyd. There will be a million other people there. It starts at seven it will be over by nine. You'll be in bed by nine thirty.

(picking up MEDUSA)

As long as we don't have to bring this with us.

CLAIRE

(grabs it from FRANCES and tosses it to REENIE)

You said you were gonna put that in Mommy's closet. Go, go put it somewhere it's not gonna pop out at me. Like in a box.

REENIE exits with MEDUSA

CLAIRE (cont'd)

Don't leave the rest of this stuff out here! It's all gotta go away before she gets home!

REENIE exits with MEDUSA.

CLAIRE (cont'd)

What do you mean we'll be in bed by nine thirty?? If I don't sleep out I gotta be home by eight thirty.

FRANCES

The plan is the same, we'll just tell her we're comin home. We'll start out at the concert, then we'll go to the beach. She'll be happy once we get there.

TAR BEACH

CLAIRE

I gotta tell my parents whether I'm sleepin over or not. If I don't come home they'll wonder where I am, they're not that clueless.

MARY FRANCES

Okay, let me think. Your mother said yes. Maybe don't say anything to your father, or to Reenie.

CLAIRE

This is getting too complicated.

FRANCES

Don't freak out on me, Claire. Everything works in theory. We just got to figure out the details. Okay, see if your Dad will let you stay out till ten thirty. Tell him the concert goes till ten. Come on, it's summer! You're the only person I know has to come home at eight thirty. The party's just getting started!

CLAIRE

I wish I didn't have to bring her.

FRANCES

Here's how I look at it, Anthony will definitely come, if he knows she's coming. That way we have a car! Either way we're gonna have a good time. I got money, we'll get stoned, Jimmy will get laid---

CLAIRE

(throws the soapfish at her)

Hey!

FRANCES throws it back.

FRANCES

What, that's what you want.

(looking through the photo albums)

Your family took a lot of pictures.

Pause as FRANCES starts looking through the photos. CLAIRE still holds onto the soapfish.

CLAIRE

Frances.

FRANCES

Yes, Claire?

TAR BEACH

CLAIRE

Do you think I'm pretty?

FRANCES

All the guys want to go with you, what do you think?

CLAIRE

Yeah, but. Am I pretty...like...well...like Reenie?

FRANCES

Reenie is beautiful. But look at you, you got Jimmy crawling all over you, and Michael and George and probably Anthony would jump on the bandwagon if he had the opportunity. What more do you want?

CLAIRE

I don't know. Just, she's the pretty one.

FRANCES

Na, I know what you mean. Reenie turns heads.

CLAIRE

I know.

FRANCES

It doesn't mean you're not pretty, Claire. Fix her up with Anthony and you'll have nothing to worry about.

CLAIRE

Thanks, Frances. You're pretty too.

FRANCES

Don't go there. If there's one thing I do have is twenty-twenty vision, when I look in the mirror I think I could be an astronaut, or a fighter pilot, if I was a guy. Hey, I'm not gonna cry over it. I've got other "qualities." And I know how to use them.

REENIE walks in the room still holding MEDUSA just as BRIGIT enters from outside. They look at each other for a moment.

REENIE

I couldn't find a box it would fit in--

BRIGIT

What is all this...who brought all this out here? You're father's gonna have a fit if he walks in and sees this mess-- Oh, Mary Frances. I didn't see you sittin there. How's your mother doin? Tell her I said hello.

FRANCES

She's fine I will. Bye Mrs. Dolan. See ya later.

BRIGIT

(throws down her pocketbook, takes off her shoes)

Clean this up before your father gets home. I'm gonna go lay down. I don't wanna hear fightin.

SHE exits.

MARY CLAIRE

(to REENIE)

What are you waitin for? Clean it up. And get rid of *that*.

MARY CLAIRE leaves REENIE holding MEDUSA. She puts it down and begins to put a few albums into the boxes but gets distracted again, lost in the memorabilia but the LIGHTS SHIFT pulling her attention to the next scene.

SCENE FIVE:

A few hours later, after dinner. REENIE enters the dining room carrying her diary. SHE sets the scene, introducing each character as they enter.

REENIE

(to us)

My father reads the newspaper looking for catastrophe on every page.

ROGER enters, holding the newspaper up.

ROGER

I don't think it's a good idea, Brigit. The one year anniversary is comin up: July twenty-ninth and they got another note. They think he's gonna strike again before that. I would keep both these girls inside this house.

REENIE

Mary Claire is about to explode from everything she wants.

MARY CLAIRE runs in quickly behind him.

MARY CLAIRE

You said I could go! He said I could go!

BRIGIT enters slowly, lighting a cigarette.

REENIE

My mother is the sleeping Dragon who lives in our house. We hold our breath but keep our eyes on her in case she wakes up and sets fire to everything. We sit there, sticking to the vinyl tablecloth and wait – for the end of the world.

BRIGIT

It's hot as hell in this house. Let them go out for a little while.

ROGER

Then you take responsibility for whatever happens.

BRIGIT

Nothings gonna happen at the kid's house.

REENIE remains watching mostly outside the scene as it continues.

ROGER

Where you goin'?

MARY CLAIRE

Mary Franceses house.

ROGER

Her mother gonna be home?

MARY CLAIRE

Uh-huh... they have air conditioning.

BRIGIT

Where is my TV guide?

ROGER smokes. Waits as BRIGIT throws stuff around looking for her pencil. Then:

ROGER

Are you going to clean those bulbs?

MARY CLAIRE

What bulbs?

ROGER

Them bulbs there.

TAR BEACH

BRIGIT

I can't find my TV guide or my reader's digest. I told you to put this shit away.

BRIGIT says this to REENIE, who watches but doesn't enter the scene yet.

MARY CLAIRE

What are you talkin about?

ROGER

The bulbs, the bulbs in that – there -- the chandelier?

MARY CLAIRE

That's a chandelier?

ROGER

Don't be a wiseass, get a rag and clean 'em.

MARY CLAIRE

Mommy said I only have to clean off the table, that's all I'm doin.

ROGER

Look at them, they're filthy, they're thick with black dust. Like the rest of this shithole. It stinks in here. What is that, that's the garbage. Jesus Kerist. Take that garbage out too.

MARY CLAIRE

Mommy said all we have to do is clean off the table and that's all I'm doin and then I'm goin out!

ROGER

(to Brigit)

What did I tell you about that garbage in this heat?

BRIGIT

You don't like the way I keep the house, hire a maid.

ROGER

Don't give me that shit. I left here at six this mornin, I want to come home to a house that doesn't stink like a pigsty.

BRIGIT

Six this morning? Where'd you go? You didn't go to unemployment.

ROGER

What is all this, all these papers?

TAR BEACH

BRIGIT

Their mine. Get your hands off them.

ROGER

Lake Ronkonkoma? The Poconos? What is this shit?

BRIGIT

They're brochures.

ROGERT

I just got laid off you think we're going on a vacation?

BRIGIT

What did you do today, Roger, if you didn't work? Did you go to the union, what did the union say?

ROGER

They said show up for work which is what I did.

BRIGIT

But there was no work. So you wasted your time.

ROGER

Fuckin shit hole. I tole you take out that garbage!

MARY CLARE struggles with the too full garbage bag.

BRIGIT

So you didn't go to unemployment.

ROGER

I'm not going to unemployment because I'm not unemployed, I'm laid off and if I show up and there's work, then I'm workin that day, instead of wasting a day with the scumbags at unemployment.

At this moment, the garbage bag breaks. MARY CLARE tries to hold it together, but it scatters everywhere.

ROGER

Jeezus H. Keericed. That's it. I'VE HAD IT.

HE grabs the large cardboard moving box that held the photo albums REENIE forgot to put away. Then throughout the following he throws the bag

of garbage in it, along with all of BRIGIT'S papers, laying on the table, etc.

ROGER (cont'd)

Everything's goin out. All of this is garbage! It's all goin out!

ROGER grabs one of the folded cartons, building another box. This triggers BRIGIT to begin throwing everything she can grab into the box.

BRIGIT

You want to throw shit out, Roger? Okay, let's throw everything out. I don't want any of it. Married to a laid off drunk, leaves me home every night with these kids while he sits in some bar talkin to some cheap slut!

ROGER

What are you talkin about?

BRIGIT

Big movin man. Workin in a warehouse. Can't even keep that job. All you know how to do is throw shit out. Fine, you wanna throw shit out. I'll throw shit out. Throw it all away. You don't like my brochures layin around. Fine I'll throw em out. We're never goin anywhere anyway. There! Everything goes straight in the garbage, where this is marriage belongs!

BRIGIT grabs everything in her reach and throws it in the box.

BRIGIT (cont'd)

We don't need any of this! Who needs the evidence of this pathetic life! All these pictures, who needs pictures. Garbage! Wedding pictures, garbage! Who needs them, who wants to be remember anything, every single fuckin picture, is goin in the garbage.

MARY CLAIRE cries out when she sees they are throwing away the photo albums. BRIGIT knocks her down as she barges past, throwing box after box of albums and photos into the large box in the center of the room. MEDUSA falls from REENIE's hands and BRIGIT picks that up and throws it in too. There is no stopping this frenzy. Even ROGER is a little terrified of BRIGIT'S rage.

BRIGIT struggles to yank off her wedding ring.

BRIGIT

And this can go too!

ROGER

Don't you do it Brigit, so help me God, if you throw that out, I will take everything out to the curb and leave it for the garbage truck in the mornin.

THEY FREEZE. MARY CLAIRE hides her face.
REENIE can't look away.

BRIGIT

Fuck you.

BRIGIT throws the ring in the box. IT MAKES A TINY METALLIC SOUND. And then a roaring like a HUGE WAVE coming for them...this sound continues as ROGER takes a packing tape gun from his back pocket and begins sealing all the boxes.

HE exits dragging the boxes outside one at a time through the following.

There is silence. Except for MARY CLAIRE who is crying quietly. Everyone is stunned, frozen in their spots. The GIRLS look at BRIGIT who won't meet their eyes. She cracks opens a beer and finds a glass, pours it into the glass, while she lights a cigarette.

MARY CLAIRE

Ma?

No answer.

MARY CLAIRE (cont'd)

Mommy?

BRIGIT doesn't answer. Silence. The girls look at each other. Then BRIGIT begins to speak quietly.

BRIGIT

Last year for the bicentennial I wanted to see the tall ships. I was looking forward to it all year. He knew how much I loved Early American. He took me to pick out this furniture. It was on sale because it was almost over. In a week no one was gonna want it no more. A table, four chairs and a matching hutch. Plus the eagle over the doorway they threw in for free.

BRIGIT (cont'd)

(pointing to the eagle)

Says right there: 1776 to 1976. The two hundredth anniversary of this country. That was a big deal to me. It might not have mattered to him, but it mattered to me. And you girls were excited about it too. It was supposed to be the best fireworks ever, shot over the harbor. The only thing I wanted to do was go to the city and see those tall ships comin in the harbor. I asked him could we go and he said, "yeah sure." Right. So I get my hopes up. When the day came he was drinkin and said he didn't feel like drivin in all that traffic. All the people, he said. That's why I wanted to go. I wanted to *be* with all the people. He never wants to go to see my family on holidays so they stopped askin us. We didn't go to my best friend April's weddin, cause he didn't like her husband. He don't like any of my friends, so I lost touch with all of them. But I wanted to go see the tall ships that day. To be part of that crowd of people celebrating the Fourth of July. He said be happy you got new furniture. Then he went to the bar. And I sat here at this dinin room table, my elbows stickin to this fuckin tablecloth.

BRIGIT drinks her beer.

MARY CLAIRE

You threw all our stuff away because he wouldn't take you to see some boats?

BRIGIT

When I was a young girl like you, do you think this is the life I dreamed of?

ROGER enters. He's taken the last box out to the curb. He's doesn't meet anyone's eye. MARY CLAIRE grabs his arm.

MARY CLAIRE

Daddy, don't leave it all out there. Tomorrow is Thursday. The garbage men come on Thursday! Please, please bring it back in! We can do it! Let me and Reenie do it!!

ROGER physically restrains her.

MARY CLAIRE (cont'd)

What is wrong with you people!?! One of you has got to give in! I want those pictures for my kids someday!!

BRIGIT

If you go out there Mary Claire, I will break your arm and then your legs.

ROGER

It's too late.

REENIE's past and present collide in a sudden outburst:

TAR BEACH

REENIE

You people are FUCKIN CRAZY!

BRIGIT back hands REENIE across the face.

SILENCE. REENIE's hands fly to her mouth. SHE doesn't cry, but her eyes fill with tears.

ROGER

You didn't have to do that.

FRANCES enters wearing the Tee-shirt, "Get Son of Sam Before He Gets You."

SILENCE.

FRANCES

Hi. I knocked. Uh, the doorbell doesn't work.

No one answers. FRANCES mouths to CLAIRE "what's going on?" Then she sees ROGER.

FRANCES

Oh hi, Mr....Dolan...Bye... Mr. Dolan...

ROGER exits without acknowledging anyone.

SILENCE.

FRANCES

Did I come at a bad time?

CLAIRE

You came at the perfect time. Can we go out now? Yes or no.

BRIGIT

I don't care what you do.

CLAIRE

Then we're going out. *And maybe we won't come back.* Then you can be happy!

MARY CLAIRE runs out. MARY FRANCES follows close behind. REENIE begins to follow too, but hangs back to witness what comes next. AFTER a beat, ROGER reappears from where he dragged out the boxes. He is holding MEDUSA in

one hand. The snakes are bent on one side of its face. He holds a few mismatched photographs in his other hand, which he holds out to REENIE, an offering. He places MEDUSA in the middle of the table and drops the photos on the sticky vinyl tablecloth. He sits at the foot of the table. BRIGIT still sits at the head, without looking at him. The two of them sit there with MEDUSA between them.

LIGHTS FADE on BRIGIT, ROGER, and MEDUSA leaving REENIE in a pool of light.

Waves crash on a shore, behind her are a scattering of random stars. The stars gradually transform into the Electric Grid.

REENIE

At this moment, at 7:37pm July 13, 1977, while my parents are throwing out our baby pictures, thunder clouds are building up high over a power plant on the Hudson River. One hour later, at 8:37pm, lightning strikes three times causing a buildup of power in the system. The thing about power is that once it builds up like that, it has to go somewhere, it has to be released, one way or another.

Beat. SHE moves further into the memory.

REENIE (cont'd)

But I don't know about this. I am fourteen years old on a hot summer night, standing between two Marys in Forest Park, Queens, staring at Anthony. He has blond hair and blue eyes, even though he's Italian. Mary Claire takes back the cap of invisibility as soon as we get there so Anthony can see me. He catches me staring and my face turns to stone. Every time I move, he positions himself so I'm looking right at him. One of the guys says, "Come on, take a toke," I don't know how to smoke, so I try sucking on it like everyone else, but I do it wrong and start to cough. Mary Claire looks at me like, "Say somethin!" Which makes me say even less. Mary Frances hands me a beer. It tastes bitter and terrible, and my heart is beating so loudly in my chest my whole body throbs with the sound of it, but nobody seems to hear. Mary Claire walks away with Jimmy. Mary Frances walks away with Michael. Anthony grabs my hand, and says, "Wanna go for a walk?" I'm dizzy from the beer, from the pot, I am barefoot. The grass is cool and damp. A chill runs up my legs to my heart where it fills my chest. I think this is what love is. I think this will be my first kiss. I imagine this is just the beginning as I spin out the story of our lives together. He will ask me out, he will give me an ankle chain for Christmas, I will give him a Christ Head and we will stay together forever.

Beat.

REENIE (cont'd)

We walk away from the band shell into the quiet dark of the park. He presses me against a tree. He says, "You're really pretty." And then, the lights go out. Just at that moment. "You're really pretty –"*Pop. Pop. Pop, pop, pop, pop, pop, pop, pop, pop, POP.* The lights around the band shell blink off like dominoes. I turn around in a circle and watch the world spin until all the lights, all the music, everything, everywhere goes DARK.

BLACKOUT.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

SCENE ONE:

LIGHTS BUMP UP on BRIGIT and ROGER shining their flashlights on a terrified MARY CLAIRE.

MARY CLAIRE

And then all the lights went out. It was pitch black. We couldn't find our way out, there were so many people runnin around screamin and yellin and pushin/and cryin --

ROGER

Where is your sister?

MARY CLAIRE

She was at the park/ with us.

ROGER

At the park, at the park, what park, Forest Park?/ And where is she now?

MARY CLAIRE

Yes. I – guess she's still at the park. I was callin and callin her name, I screamed for her, I stayed there for over an hour in the dark, but then cops came with flashlights and made everyone leave. I told this cop I lost my sister and he said she probably went home. He made us leave.

BRIGIT

Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

ROGER

Are you sayin you lost your sister in Forest Park?

MARY CLAIRE

She didn't come home?

ROGER

Who else was with you?

MARY CLAIRE

Mary Frances/And...these boys...we know...

ROGER

Mary France and *boys*. Who are these boys? Was Reenie with them?

TAR BEACH

MARY CLAIRE

We know them from the neighborhood. We were watchin the concert, listenin to the music when the lights went out. And people panicked. It's not my fault, I wasn't holdin her hand!

BRIGIT

We should call the cops.

ROGER

First off you won't get nothing but a busy signal. And second who knows what the hell is happenin out there. There could be lootin in the streets.

BRIGIT

Think Mary Claire. What exactly were you doin right before the lights went out?

MARY CLAIRE

...I don't know. I don't remember!

BRIGIT

Were you drinkin?

MARY CLAIRE

Noooo.

BRIGIT

She smells like a barrel of whiskey, what the hell were you drinkin?

ROGER

There's gonna be anarchy out there. Not to mention that nutjob roamin the streets.

MARY CLAIRE

She might be with this boy. Anthony. I – I – just remembered.

ROGER

All right now who is Anthony?

MARY CLAIRE

He's this guy who hangs out with us...he has a car.

ROGER

This story gets better and better. Who is this Anthony? Where does he live?

MARY CLAIRE

I don't know!

TAR BEACH

ROGER

Mary Claire so help me god. Tell me what you know. All at once.

MARY CLAIRE

I don't know anything else. She might have gone with Anthony. After the lights went out we didn't see him either.

ROGER

Get my keys. I'm gonna go out and look for her.

BRIGIT

Wait a minute. Wait a minute! Maybe she's on her way home. Mary Claire just walked in. Maybe she's right behind her.

ROGER starts pulling on his pants.

ROGER

It's after midnight Brigit, she's out there by herself somewhere or she's with this punk Anthony. Either way I'm not sittin around here waitin for somethin to happen. . I tole you Brigit, I didn't want these girls goin out tonight--

BRIGIT

So now you're blamin me.

MARY CLAIRE

Wait!

ROGER

Somethin else you just remember?

MARY CLAIRE

She mighta gone to Rockaway.

BRIGIT

Why would she go to the beach?

MARY CLAIRE

It was kind of an idea we had. It's been so hot! We all were – thinkin – just thinkin -- maybe we'd leave the concert, if it got borin, and go to the beach, but then the lights went out.

ROGER

Is there anything else you need to remember?

TAR BEACH

MARY CLAIRE

No, I swear to god, that's it; I don't even know if that's where she went. She didn't want to go,—so, we weren't sure if we were gonna --but maybe they went there.

ROGER

Jesus H. Christ.

(to MARY CLAIRE)

We'll deal with you later.

HE exits. SILENCE.

MARY CLAIRE

He blames me.

BRIGIT

Well, Mary Claire you took your baby sister out with you tonight and lost her. Who should we blame?

MARY CLAIRE

But it's a black out! That's not my fault!

BRIGIT

Nobody is blamin you for the blackout. But tomorrow we're gonna want some answers, and you can expect not to be goin out for the rest of the summer.

MARY CLAIRE

The rest of the summer!?

BRIGIT

I know you were drinkin somethin and probably smokin somethin too. Even in the dark you don't look right.

MARY CLAIRE

You drink, you smoke. You're a bunch of hypocrites.

BRIGIT

You're lucky I can't see where you're standin, or you'd get a rap in the mouth.

MARY CLAIRE

Why did you guys even have kids?

BRIGIT

Because that's what you did then. You got married, you had kids.

MARY CLAIRE

Lucky now there's a thing called birth control.

TAR BEACH

BRIGIT

Little bitch.

MARY CLAIRE

Nice, Mom.

BRIGIT

What do you expect me to say, you talk to me like that?

MARY CLAIRE

I don't expect anything.

BRIGIT

The world does not revolve around you and the sooner you learn that the better.

MARY CLAIRE

Oh you and Daddy make that perfectly clear. Every night we're held hostage to your marriage.

BRIGIT

Really? Right now you think you're free to live your life anyway you want, runnin around to Forest Park doin what you're doin with boys in cars. I know what you're doin. You did not invent it. But you better watch your step. You make one mistake and all of your freedom is gonna go right down the drain. Eventually life is gonna catch up with you.

MARY CLAIRE

Why do you hate me so much?

BRIGIT

It got nothin to do with you.

(beat)

And I don't hate you.

MARY CLAIRE

If you're so miserable why don't you just leave? That's what I'd do.

BRIGIT

It's not that simple.

MARY CLAIRE

Unless you like bein fuckin miserable.

BRIGIT

If I ever talked to my mother like that I'd be in the hospital. My life is not your business.

MARY CLAIRE

What are we supposed to do, ignore you and Daddy screamin at each other all the time? You threw out all our baby pictures. That's not my business? That's my history out there on the curb, waitin for the garbage men!

BRIGIT

(turns away, looking for her cigarettes)

So, now I owe you a history.

MARY CLAIRE (cont'd)

I'm sorry you hate bein a mother so much. But when the time comes when I'm a mother – I'm gonna be lookin for another role model!

BRIGIT

(this cut, but she covers)

I'm done talkin to you. Go to bed.

CLAIRE

No. I'm gonna wait up for Reenie.

BRIGIT

Suit yourself.

BRIGIT sits at the table, lights a cigarette.
MARY CLAIRE stands there, arms crossed
looking out onto the dark night, whispering.

MARY CLAIRE

Reenie, reenie, come home.

LIGHTS QUICKLY FADE.

TAR BEACH

SCENE TWO:

LIGHTS rise on the morning. MARY CLAIRE is passed out on the couch. MEDUSA is still on the the dining room table. BRIGIT sits at the other end of the table, takes a bobby pin from her hair and is trying to pick the lock on REENIE's diary.

BRIGIT

Son of a bitch, I almost had it. If I had a little more light...and could see...what I'm doin...

MARY CLAIRE starts to wake up.

BRIGIT (cont'd)

Come on, you son of a bitch, open!

MARY CLAIRE

(sleepily, not fully awake yet)

Reenie home?

BRIGIT

Open up, dammit! I can't see anything.

MARY CLAIRE

(to BRIGIT)

What are you doin'?

BRIGIT

Maybe she was doin somethin we don't know about.

MARY CLAIRE

Don't open that. She just writes stupid stuff in there. It's not gonna help.

BRIGIT

There! Popped it open!

MARY CLAIRE grabs the diary.

MARY CLAIRE

No. It's her private diary! It says KEEP OUT!

BRIGIT

Hand it over, Mary Claire, I'm not in the mood for games.

MARY CLAIRE

No.

TAR BEACH

BRIGIT

I'm comin to the end of my patience. Mary. Claire.

MARY CLAIRE

You got no right to know what her private thoughts are and that's all that's in there.

BRIGIT

I have a right to know what's goin on, if its gonna help find out where she is.

MARY CLAIRE

No.

BRIGIT

Give me that goddamn diary.

BRIGIT lunges for MARY CLAIRE, they circle each other around the table. BRIGIT grabs MARY CLAIRE by the hair. MARY CLAIRE tries to yank away, but BRIGIT has a good hold of her, and yanks back, they knock over chairs.

Still MARY CLAIRE won't give up the diary. Finally BRIGIT has straddled her, holding both of MARY CLAIRE'S hands down. SHE reaches for the diary but MARY CLAIRE throws her off, scrambling up and backing into a corner. BRIGIT starts to approach her, when REENIE walks in.

SHE is transformed into her own version of Medusa. Filthy, her hair is tangled and full of wet sand, that is still clumped in the back. Her face and neck are bruised, the side of her mouth caked with some blood. Her clothes are torn, she walks in limping slightly. ROGER enters quietly behind her.

ROGER

I found her.

BRIGIT whirls around to see her, cries out. MARY CLAIRE's hand goes to her mouth.

BRIGIT

Reenie, reenie, my little baby.

REENIE is silent.

TAR BEACH

BRIGIT (cont'd)

Where the hell where you??

ROGER

She was at the train station. Waitin for the train.

BRIGIT

Trains don't run in a black out.

ROGER

Rockaway got power.

BRIGIT

Why didn't you come home last night?

REENIE hasn't moved, hasn't spoken. Pause.
Then just when it seems she is not going to answer,
she lifts her hands, arms out, held together as if
holding a gun, pointing it at them, then "POOF,"
shoots it silently, her hands come down.

BRIGIT

What the hell does that mean? Roger, what happened?

ROGER

We can talk about it later, go, go with your sister and she'll help you clean yourself up.

MARY CLAIRE holds out the diary to REENIE.

MARY CLAIRE

Nobody read it.

REENIE doesn't move. Her eyes are dark.

MARY CLAIRE (cont'd)

I promise.

REENIE doesn't move, doesn't speak.

MARY CLAIRE (cont'd)

Mommy wanted to read it. I wouldn't let her, Reenie.

MARY CLAIRE walks towards REENIE holding
out the diary, takes a hold of REENIE's hand, and
puts the diary in it.

TAR BEACH

BRIGIT

We were all worried about you -- where the hell were you?

(to ROGER)

What happened to her?

ROGER

It's the wild west out there.

BRIGIT

Yeah, and?

ROGER

The guns are comin out, Brigit. They're gonna take this city down, mark my words.

BRIGIT

What about the police, aren't they stoppin it—

ROGER

Pfft. What can they do? The only thing separatin us from anarchy is electricity. It's the end of society as we know it. Mark my words.

BRIGIT

You're exaggeratin.

ROGER

I'm exaggeratin? They're settin fire to everything. Whole blocks are burnin. Smell that? That's Brooklyn burnin.

BRIGIT

I thought you went to Rockaway to look for her.

ROGER

I went to Forest Park first. Then I went down Jamaica Avenue. Bed-Sty is burnin down. You can see the flames lightin up the sky from there. I took Rockaway Blvd comin back down to Crossbay. Looters are lootin the looters. Everywhere. Except Rockway still got power. No trains are runnin, there was just one stuck on the bridge. But she didn't know that. I don't know what made me go up that train station, but there she was sittin there--

He looks at REENIE his voice breaking.

ROGER (cont'd)

She looked like a little bird, fell out of her nest.

REENIE has curled up into herself.

BRIGIT

Reenie, tell me right this minute, what happened to you? Did somebody do this to you?

ROGER

She's not said one word. And neither are we. Whatever happened to her doesn't have to leave this house. Not one word.

BRIGIT

But what about this kid -- if he -- did something to her. Somebody beat her up or something -- look at her.

ROGER

Oh, I'm gonna take care of that.

HE reaches to the top of the hutch and pulls down a bag that looks like a pillow case, and pulls out a gun. MARY CLAIRE's mouth drops open. ROGER dumps out the bullets which go rolling across the floor, he starts gathering them up, putting them in his pockets.

BRIGIT

How long has that been up there...? Where the hell did you get that...?

ROGER

Nevermind. The important thing is I got it now.

BRIGIT

Oh, I feel safe, now.

ROGER

Go ahead, mock it. But you won't be sorry when I blow up some asshole comin in through that window.

(pause)

Yeah, Son of Sam's not the only one packin a forty-four.

BRIGIT

But who are you goin after, you don't even know—

ROGER

Never mind. Now, listena me. The meat is gonna go bad in the freezer. When I'm out there I'll try to find ice. For now put it all in the cooler. Start eatin whatever you can, throw out the milk. And double lock the front doors.

ROGER puts the gun in the back waist of his pants.

TAR BEACH

ROGER (cont'd)

Mary Claire close your mouth and take your sister upstairs, come on, clean her up, get her in bed, then help your mother.

BRIGIT

I always thought it'd be Mary Claire get herself into this kinda trouble.

MARY CLAIRE

Thanks a lot!

ROGER

Me and you got our problems, Brigit, no doubt about that. But these girls are a train wreck waitin to happen. An' somebody's asleep at the switch.

BRIGIT

At least I'm home, I'm here. I'm doin the best I can—

ROGER

I'm not sayin just you. I'm includin myself in this too. But that little girl is gonna need her mother.

ROGER AND BRIGIT

Mary Claire, take her upstairs!

MARY CLAIRE

Come on, Reenie, come let's go up to our room.

MARY CLAIRE helps her up. REENIE walks to the garbage and throws her diary in the garbage. REENIE walks painfully out without another word. MARY CLAIRE runs to the garbage, retrieves the diary before BRIGIT can get it and exits after her.

ROGER

I'm sorry, Brigit.

BRIGIT

....Yeah?

ROGER

I'm sorry for...fill in the blank. I mean it.

BRIGIT

Fill in that blank, Roger. Don't leave it up to me to fill it in.

TAR BEACH

ROGER

I'm sorry...for...disappointin you.

BRIGIT

They're not gonna pick up the garbage today.

ROGER

No.

BRIGIT

I'll start cleanin out the fridge.

LIGHTS FADE on ROGER and BRIGIT. THE SOUND of water running in a shower. LIGHTS SHIFT.

SCENE THREE:

MARY CLAIRE is in the bedroom. SHE puts the diary on REENIE's BED and sits on her own bed. Sound of the shower stops. A long pause. REENIE enters wrapped in a towel.

MARY CLAIRE

I looked for you.

Long pause.

MARY CLAIRE (cont'd)

Me and Mary Frances searched every inch of Forest Park.

Long pause.

MARY CLAIRE (cont'd)

We were screamin for you! I never been so scared, Reenie.

MARY CLAIRE leads her to the foot of the bed.

MARY CLAIRE (cont'd)

Let me help you into a nightgown—

REENIE clutches the towel tighter.

MARY CLAIRE

Okay, okay, stay in the towel, you don't have to take it off. Just sit.

MARY CLAIRE takes the comb and starts combing out Reenie's hair.

MARY CLAIRE (cont'd)
You still have sand in your hair.

MARY CLAIRE continues combing.

MARY CLAIRE (cont'd)
(quiet)
Where'd you go? Did Anthony...take you to Rockaway?

REENIE nods.

MARY CLAIRE (cont'd)
Oh my god, Reenie. What happened? Did he...?

Longest pause, then finally she speaks.

REENIE
Son of Sam.

MARY CLAIRE
What?

REENIE shakes her head.

MARY CLAIRE
Did you see Son of Sam?

REENIE nods her head.

MARY CLAIRE
You didn't see Son of Sam! Not in Rockaway. Oh my God, Reenie. If you saw Son of Sam you'd be dead.

(beat)
Where was Anthony? Reenie, did he hurt you?

REENIE doesn't answer.

MARY CLAIRE (cont'd)
If I'da known he was like that, I wouldn't have pushed you to go with him. It's all my fault. I'm never gonna forgive myself.

REENIE curls up on the bed wrapped in the towel.

TAR BEACH

REENIE

No. More. Words.

MARY CLAIRE

You don't have to talk if you don't want to.

MARY CLAIRE gets the diary and gives it to her, like a teddy bear. SHE watches her a moment then covers her lightly with a sheet from her bed. REENIE kicks it off.

MARY CLAIRE (cont'd)

Okay, okay.

SHE starts to back out quietly, then sees the hat. MARY CLAIRE picks up the hat and lies it on the bed next to REENIE who reaches for it, when she touches it:

LIGHTS SHIFT: DARKNESS surrounds REENIE, a spot of light. SHE sits cross legged in the dark, the diary in her lap, wearing the hat. She begins writing in her diary, hard, fast, fragmented memories. A private poem that doesn't rhyme:

REENIE

Dark. Like the closet.
Black. Like a cave.
Smells like fish, like pee.
Wet Sand. Broken Shells.
Cigarette butts on wet cold hard--
Hands. Numb.
Tongue. Teeth. Biting.
Tastes like blood.
Her heads cut off.
Blood pouring out her neck.
Out of the blood, comes E-S-C-A-P-E, E-S-C-A-P-E.
Crashin into the waves. Tumbling down into the foam.
E-S-C-A-P-E.
Into the waves, into the foam, trying to grow some wings,
so I can gallop away...up up up to the star.
Only one.
There's only ever one.

LIGHTS SHIFT.

TAR BEACH

SCENE FOUR: Several hours have passed. The house is quiet.

MARY CLAIRE is heard offstage as she enters dragging in the box of photographs.

MARY CLAIRE

I can wait the rest of my life for them to be normal. Or I can do what I want. I don't care what they say.

REENIE enters.

MARY CLAIRE (cont'd)

They're still asleep. Without air conditionin. See how they like it.

MARY CLAIRE opens a photo album.

MARY CLAIRE (cont'd)

They might be miserable. But *we* were happy, Reenie. Look: smiles, smiles, laughing, laughing. See. In almost every picture, I'm holdin your hand. I was only eighteen months older, but I was still the big sister. It was my job to protect you. ...And I didn't.

(beat)

This isn't who I am. This boy crazy, partyin teenager who doesn't give a fuck about anybody else. This is more who I am. This little girl. Who loves her little sister.

MARY CLAIRE takes REENIE's hand, they sit there, holding hands for a few beats, then:

MARY FRANCES is heard as she enters.

FRANCES

Holy Crap, what I had to go through to get here. Reenie!! Oh my god, thank God, your home! Where the hell did you go-- ?

(to CLAIRE)

Your parents home?

CLAIRE

Sleepin.

FRANCES

Any chance, them wakin up?

CLAIRE

I don't think so.

FRANCES

Good.

FRANCES starts to light up a joint. Offers it to the girls, CLAIRE shakes her head, REENIE doesn't respond.

FRANCE (cont'd)

(to REENIE)

Reenie, you don't look so good. Hey, hon, you in there? ...She okay?

CLAIRE

No, she's not. Anthony beat her up or somethin! Why'd you let me fix him up with my sister?

FRANCES

How did I know he likes to beat girls up, who knew that? Nobody tole me. It makes you wonder about all guys now, if a guy who looks like that, can do this.

REENIE buries herself in the couch.

FRANCES (cont'd)

I'm just gonna put it right out there. Did he fuckin rape you? Yes or no.

Pause.

CLAIRE

She's not gonna answer you.

FRANCES

You gotta go to the cops. Has she taken a shower? She needs to go to the hospital and get checked out. You need to report this. That sonovabitch! I had no idea he was like that Reenie, I would have never let you go near him.

REENIE

(overlapping)

No! NO! NO!

CLAIRE

My father doesn't want to tell anybody.

FRANCES

She needs medical attention, she needs to report this. And you need to press charges.

REENIE

Nooooo!

FRANCES

Buryin your head in the sand is not gonna make you feel any better, girl.

CLAIRE

I don't think she can. Even under normal circumstances she can't talk to people.

FRANCES

And here's the other thing, Reenie. Listen to me. Sit up now and listen. Keep track that you get your period next month. I'm callin you in twenty-eight days and you better say your friend's over for a visit. Okay? If you don't get it, you tell me and I will help you take care of it. You're not gonna have some rapist's baby.

CLAIRE

Mary Frances!

FRANCES

What? The days of beatin around the bush are over...have you been out there? Do you know what's goin on out there?

CLAIRE

My dad was out lookin for ice. He said the looters are taking everything.

FRANCES

And why not? Shit. I went up to Jamaica Avenue to see if I could get in on some of that action.

CLAIRE

Frances!

FRANCES

What, Claire? I totally get it. Everybody acts like they're surprised. Really? Me, I'm surprised it hasn't happened before. You can push people down for only so long. They're gonna rise up when they get the opportunity. I went passed Lewis's. Mr. Hanigan was outside with the iron gates rolled down, holdin a shotgun. I swear that old man looked me in the eye like I will shoot you dead little girl.

CLAIRE

My father got a gun./It's up there.

FRANCES

Really? Where? I wanna see.

CLAIRE

No.

FRANCES

Come onnn! Show me, I won't touch it. I just wanna see.

TAR BEACH

CLAIRE

Okay fine, if you'll just shut up about it.

CLAIRE drags a chair to the hutch, pulls down pillow case and pulls out gun.

FRANCES

A pillow case, who keeps a gun in a pillow case?Holy Crap.

FRANCES grabs the gun, holds it in her hand, feeling the weight.

FRANCES (cont'd)

I could get used to this.

CLAIRE

Watch it!

FRANCES

Take that Mr. Hanigan, POW.

CLAIRE

Give it back.

FRANCES

Hey Son of Shithead Sam...you lookin for me?

REENIE makes a sound. THE GIRLS both look at REENIE curled on the couch.

CLAIRE

She thinks she saw him. Yeah, Son of Sam. But I don't think so.

FRANCES

Maybe she did.

FRANCES (cont'd)

(to REENIE)

Reenie. Reenie. Look at me. Did you see Son of Sam? What did he look like? Did he do this to you?

REENIE grabs the gun.

CLAIRE

What are you doin! Stop it -- Reenie!!

Holy Crap!

MARY FRANCES

REENIE points the gun her temple. Squeezes shut her eyes, and pulls the trigger against the backdrop of the girls screaming. Click. Nothing.

Holy Fuckin Crap.

MARY FRANCES (cont'd)

CLAIRE
He took the bullets out. Oh my god, thank god, he took the bullets....

SHE dumps the pillow case, the bullets fall out, in every direction. MARY FRANCES grabs gun from Reenie, pillow case from Claire, starts to stuff everything back in.

Who puts a gun in a pillow case--?

MARY FRANCES

BRIGIT enters, pissed off and groggy from sleep.

BRIGIT
What the hell you girls screamin about down here?

FRANCES
Good – good -- good mornin, Mrs. Dolan.

FRANCES hands pillowcase to CLAIRE.

BRIGIT
(looking at the boxes of photo albums and memorabilia)
Who brought this all back in? Did your father--?

CLAIRE
I did. I'm puttin all of it in my room. It's mine now. You don't have to worry about any of it. Here. Your husband's gun.

CLAIRE hands her the gun.

BRIGIT
What were you doing with this? Are you crazy? Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

TAR BEACH

CLAIRE

Put it somewhere a kid can't get at it. Mom. We need to take Reenie to the hospital.

BRIGIT

She'll be all right.

CLAIRE

Do we have to be dead, bleedin on the floor to get some attention around here?

BRIGIT

Stop being so dramatic.

CLAIRE

Ma. We think... he raped her.

BRIGIT

Oh my god. She told you he raped her?

FRANCES

Mrs. Dolan. You gotta take her to the hospital or the police station.

BRIGIT

We can't take her anywhere right now.

FRANCES

You can walk to the 101st precinct. That's not too far.

BRIGIT

She told you he raped her, she said those words? /Did she say those words!

CLAIRE

You can't just ignore what happened to her.

BRIGIT

Until I hear those words from her, I don't know what happened.

CLAIRE

But she's not going to tell us!

BRIGIT

So, I'm gonna take her to the emergency room fulla doctors and cops and she's gonna tell those men what happened to her? She's not and I am not puttin her through it. Jesus Kerist. Now where the hell do I put this? Friggin shit. And where is your father? He's dead asleep. Shit!

As she rants, BRIGIT looks for a place to put the pillowcase. She drags a chair to the hutch, climbs up and is about to throw it up there when she comes face to face with MEDUSA. Stops for a second, then shoves the pillowcase behind it. Then BRIGIT opens the cooler, pulls out a can of beer, cracks open one and exits.

The two MARYS look at each other.

FRANCES

Okay then.

They look around for REENIE

CLAIRE

Where'd she go?

FRANCES

I didn't see her leave.

Beat.

FRANCES (cont'd)

You don't think she'd go up on the roof?

THEY realize at the same time what that means and run out of the room, heading for the upstairs closet.

LIGHTS SHIFT.

TAR BEACH

SCENE FIVE:

THE GIRLS tear open the door, REENIE sits
crossed legged in the closet, writing in her diary.

FRANCES

Reenie, girl, come on out of there.

CLAIRE

Let me, Frances.

(to REENIE)

Maybe you need some air, huh? It's so frickin hot in here. Let's go outside, Reenie, go sit on the stoop. We're not gonna make you go anywhere if you don't want to, but you gotta come outta there.

FRANCES

(motioning to CLAIRE to hand her the MEDUSA)

Here, here's your head, maybe, you know, it will give you strength, you know to fight back. Because you gotta, Reenie. You know that, right? Nobody's holdin your hand crossin the street no more.

REENIE doesn't look up, keeps writing.

FRANCES (cont'd)

I know you feel alone. But you're not. You got a sister. And she's right here.

CLAIRE

Come on Reenie. Come out of the closet. It's too small to sit in there.

REENIE

(looking at Medusa)

Mistake.

CLAIRE and FRANCIS

Medusa? No, no. Well, maybe -- but no. *No*.

FRANCES

It's an interesting choice. I did Pegasus when I was in eighth grade. I thought the wings would be too hard but I just cut out two pieces of cardboard—

CLAIRE

That's wonderful, Frances--

REENIE

Wings.

Pause

TAR BEACH

CLAIRE looks at FRANCES like what the hell is she talking about?

FRANCES

That's right Pegasus has wings. You need wings to fly.

CLAIRE

You must be hungry, let's go see what's left in the fridge --

MARY CLAIRE tries to take the Medusa but REENIE holds on to it.

FRANCIS

If I remember the story right, Medusa was actually raped by Posideon, right? Then Athena, who got jealous, turned her into the Gorgon. Then Perseus chopped off her head.

CLAIRE

You're not helping Francis!

FRANCIS

No, no, wait, then Pegasus flew out of her neck and up into the sky, where he became part of the stars...Some constellation or something.

CLAIRE

How IS this helping Francis?

FRANCIS

Reenie knows. I'm not saying any of what happened is good. But Reenie, you can't see what's gonna come next. That's all I'm saying. Something is gonna come next. Whether you stay in that closet or not.

CLAIRE

If you don't come out of there, I'm coming in there with you.

FRANCES

And I'm coming in there too. And I don't think there's room for me. I might have to sit on your head.

The two GIRLS help REENIE out.

LIGHTS SHIFT.

SCENE SIX

A few hours later. Dinner time but no one is eating.

ROGER sits with a case of beer on the table, drinking his way through it. BRIGIT sits at the other end of the table pouring her beer in a glass, helping him. MARY CLAIRE sits at the table in the habit of dinner time, although the only evidence of dinner is a bowl of chips in the middle of the table. REENIE is not there.

BRIGIT

My mother warned me not to marry him. Said I was gonna make the same mistakes she did. She came to visit that first month we was married. I was doin dishes when I answered the door, my whole front soakin wet. She said if I didn't have sense to put an apron on when I did the dishes, I deserved to marry an alcoholic.

ROGER

Well she got that wrong cause she didn't marry an alcoholic. You know who married an alcoholic?

MARY CLAIRE

Are we gonna eat tonight?

BRIGIT

I got what I deserved. That's what she tole me.

MARY CLAIRE

I don't get the joke.

ROGER

That's cuz you inherited your mother's sense of humor.

MARY CLAIRE

No, it's because I'm starvin.

BRIGIT

I'm trying to give you some advice, I can't make you take it.

REENIE enters.

MARY CLAIRE

Reenie, you hungry?

ROGER

Hey Reenie. My little Reenie. This is the kid that makes it all worth it, right, Reenie? We love you kid. And that's the truth.

HE kisses her on the top of her head, she endures it.
MARY CLAIRE guides REENIE to sit next to her.

MARY CLAIRE

(to her parents)
She needs to eat something. She hasn't eaten all day.

ROGER

Hey Brigit, cooks something for these kids.

BRIGIT

How am I supposed to cook? They shut the gas off too.

MARY CLAIRE

The cooler is full of food!

ROGER

That puny little bag of ice is gonna be bath water. We should have a barbecue. Brigit. Invite the neighbors. Invite your mother over. And get that other Hail Mary, your sneaky little friend. We'll all go up on the roof and cook the meat like the cavemen used to do.

BRIGIT

And burn the goddamn house down.

ROGER

Hey Reenie, you want a hamburger. I'll make you a hamburger, soon as I finish this beer. We'll go up there and have a cookout.

BRIGIT

Here, have some chips.

ROGER

Just chips don't make a balanced meal. I'm gonna cook the meat! If I find my lighter, where's my lighter, I got some lighter fluid and some charcoal.

BRIGIT

You can't even stand up, you're gonna bring the grill up on the roof.

ROGER

You don't think I can do it. This body carries refrigerators up three flights of stairs strapped to my back. I can carry that puny little grill with one hand, the meat in the other, and the beer...I'll balance on my head.

TAR BEACH

BRIGIT

You shoulda joined the circus. Then you'd still have a job.

ROGER

Yeah and you'd be sleepin with the elephants.

(to REENIE)

Your mother lost her sense of humor a long time ago. Mary Claire, you help. Go get the meat. Go get the lighter fluid. Where's the charcoal?

MARY CLAIRE

I think there's charcoal under the porch.

ROGER

Go get it. And get the grill too.

BRIGIT

You aint' goin nowhere sit back down.

ROGER

You're provin my point, Brigit. Your lack of faith, that's always been the problem here. Without that we got nothing.

BRIGIT

I don't believe you're gonna cook that meat, no, so sit back down and stop makin everybody think you're gonna do it.

ROGER

Go get the charcoal, Mary Claire. We're havin a barbeque tonight, no matter what your mother thinks.

MARY CLAIRE

(who doesn't want to leave REENIE alone)

I'll be right back.

MARY CLAIRE exits in search of charcoal.

ROGER

Reenie believes in me right, Reenie? You believe I can carry refrigerators up six flights of stairs. Your mother don't wanna believe, but I know Reenie believes me. Cause she's the only one in this house that's got a heart.

BRIGIT

You broke my heart, you jerk.

ROGER

Well you squeezed mine dry. Like blood from a stone. Because you got no faith in me, Brigit. Never did and never will. That does somethin to a person.

BRIGIT

I had faith – you used it all up.

ROGER

(to REENIE)

You know what I'm sayin, Reenie? You understand me. My little girl. Because she has faith enough for all of us. That kinda faith can make things happen. Right, Reenie. If you believe it enough. You can make anything happen. Like if I tole you right now, I had super powers you'd believe that, wouldn't you?

MARY CLAIRE enters heaving a bag of charcoal.

MARY CLAIRE

I found the charcoal!

ROGER

Where's the grill?

MARY CLAIRE

Uhm, I think I'm gonna need help with the grill.

ROGER

Super Powers!

BRIGIT

Super Stupid.

ROGER

Super Powers, like I can fly. I can fly. 'At's right. I can fly right over this table. You don't believe me. I'll show you.

BRIGIT

Sit back down. You're gonna knock somethin over.

ROGER

I'm not gonna knock nothin over Brigit, I'm gonna fly over this goddamn table. Right now. Reenie, you wanna ride? You jump on my back and we will fly right over this table, right out the window, into the sky and away from this fuckin dark little hole in the ground we live in, we'll fly over the ocean and we won't come back....you wanna do that? I'll do that for you. All you gotta do is—

Before he finishes REENIE jumps on his back.

MARY CLAIRE

Oh my/god! Oh my god!

ROGER

Believe in --Atta girl. You trust your ole man. At's right. We'll show them stick in the muds who don't have faith in nothin what they can't feel in their hearts. Mystery. That's what I'm talkin about. Reenie knows. She made a Medusa. She looked in that thing's eyes, and she got froze with fear, but she's gonna get past that, she knows what I'm talkin about--

ROGER starts circling the table, with REENIE bouncing on his back, her eyes shut tight.

MARY CLAIRE

Nobody's gonna believe this when I tell them!

BRIGIT

Sit the hell back down!

ROGER

Watch and learn Mary Claire, and you too Old Unfaithful, watch and learn. This little house doesn't give us the runway I need, but we'll make do, right Reenie. We can always make do. Here a little warm up first.

HE starts running around the table, with REENIE bouncing up and down, her eyes squeezed shut.

BRIGIT

What are you trying to prove? Be careful./You're gonna hurt her!

MARY CLAIRE

Hold on, Reenie!

ROGER

No Brigit. I would never hurt this little girl. And she knows it. You wanna know what I'm trying to prove. I'm tryin to prove to Reenie and to both of you naysayers, that anything...is...still...possible...we're...not....done yet....we can...fly...right out this window...over Ozone Park Queens, down Rockaway Boulevard, straight over Jamaica Bay...

BRIGIT

Oh Jesus, you're gonna knock down the hutch, watch the table, you stupid bastard—

ROGER

You ready now, Reenie? You ready to show them. Get ready for take off. Cause here we go, one, two...three....four.....five.....six...seven, eight, nine.....TEN!

As ROGER starts counting, MARY CLAIRE starts cheering them on “*Do it! I dare you! Do it! Do it!*”

HE takes a running leap toward the table, and throws his body into the air, arms out stretched, with REENIE still clinging to his back, she suddenly thrusts her arms out too and they fly, for a moment they seem to be suspended in air. THEN TIME starts up again and THEY CRASH. The table collapses.

MARY CLAIRE

(who has been screaming non stop is now laughing hysterically)
Oh My God! Oh My God!!!

BRIGIT

You broke my goddamn table.

MARY CLAIRE

Reenie, are you alright? Did you get hurt?

REENIE still clinging to ROGER’S neck starts to shake violently, emotion is building up inside her, as SHE pulls away and races out of the room heading for the roof.

For a moment everyone is frozen, then BRIGIT runs after REENIE followed closely by MARY CLAIRE. ROGER struggles to stand, and also exits.

LIGHTS SHIFT.

SCENE SEVEN:

REENIE pushes her way through the clothes in her mother's closet, yanks open the ladder and climbs up to the roof, hand over hand in a panic. Once she gets up there, the stars emerge, and the world twirls around her like a crazy merry go round as she walks towards the ledge.

RIGHT behind her is a breathless MARY CLAIRE, She freezes when she sees REENIE on the ledge.

BRIGIT enters behind MARY CLAIRE. SHE also sees REENIE near the ledge then puts her hand on MARY CLAIRE's shoulder, gently pushing her behind her.

BRIGIT

(after a long pause, she speaks quietly)

This is how it used to be. Before Electricity. Now we never get to experience dusk no more. I bet we need that. I bet some part of our brains need that. To watch day slip into night. To be able to let go – whatever happened to you that day – and sleep until the next day comes. I know something irreversible happened to you – and you feel that nothin will ever be the same again. It probably won't. Everyday is like that in one way or another. Things happen that change us, and we can't go back.

REENIE can't answer. SHE is looking far out over the roof, longing to fly.

BRIGIT (cont'd)

When you were born, you were so pretty! Already, perfect features. Not all scrunched up like a little old woman. But china doll perfect. They took you from me and put you on the scale. And they left you there, I don't know why, and the blanket fell off of you, and you were lyin there naked on the scale, cryin, and I couldn't get up off the bed, I tried, but I was connected to tubes and wires and I was weak from the drugs they gave me, and I thought to myself, "Welcome to the World." And then I got home and your father was no help and I couldn't take care of both of you. It was too much for me, one of you was always cryin, and then I just gave in to it. This is what my life was gonna be now, crying babies, on my own. And I resented it. It wasn't your fault. It was me. I got me here. Nobody did this to me. Not like what happened to you.

REENIE steps onto the ledge, sways.

MARY CLAIRE

(slowly, moving towards her)

Reenie, come down off there before you fall.

BRIGIT

(looking at REENIE to start, but this is for both of her daughters)
I'm not a good mother. Not really. Okay. Not at all. My mother wasn't neither. Some women just aren't. Just because you're a woman doesn't automatically mean you know how to be a mother. Or want to be. I think I'm doin better than her. I never threw an iron at yous kids' heads. I talk to you more than she talked to me. I don't think I did worse than that. But I don't blame her. Her mother died when she was twelve. What did she know, she didn't know how to be a mother. She didn't have a mother to show her. So I can't really be a good mother for you girls. You're gonna have to mother yourselves. And that's okay. If it's not comin from the one who gave birth to you, do it for yourselves. I was better than my mother. You'll do a better job than me.

MARY CLAIRE

You also have me, Reenie. I'll always be here for you.

BRIGIT

I wish, that I could've gotten up off that hospital bed, and picked you up and warmed you up and held you. I didn't do it then, let me do it now. Reenie.

BRIGIT reaches out her hand.

MARY CLAIRE

Reenie, come on down, now.

REENIE reaches out and takes BRIGIT's hand and as she does the sound of TVs, Radios and air conditioners kicking on. BRIGIT pulls her down off the ledge. She puts her arms around her, as ROGER pops out of the trap door wearing the MEDUSA HEAD like a hat, carrying the grill.

ROGER

Hey Brigit, you wanna hamburger -- or you wanna eat your words?

(beat)

Yeah, I got the grill -- and the Sister Mary Frances is right behind me with the charcoal.

MARY FRANCIS enters carrying a bag of charcoal. ROGER tears open bag, dumps charcoal into grill.

MARY FRANCIS

Claire, only your family would have a barbeque on the roof!

ROGER

Tar Beach.

TAR BEACH

MARY CLAIRE

Hey! Look! The lights came back on!

THEY listen for a few minutes, watching the street lights that seem to be blazing below them. FIRE ENGINE sirens pass.

ROGER

Okay, Stand Back!

HE squirts a stream of lighter fluid. Lifts a match.

BRIGIT

He's gonna burn down the house.

ROGER

Hungry?

MARY CLAIRE

Starvin.

They FREEZE as REENIE steps outside the memory, addresses audience:

REENIE

There's still time to run. I could jump roof to roof to roof to safety or Atlantic Avenue whichever comes first. But nobody moves. We are frozen on Tar Beach, it seems like forever, and then, somehow time moves on. ...We forget about what happened that summer. Medusa goes into a box in my mother's closet, crumbling paper mache over the years, until in a fit of spring cleaning, she gets thrown out. And I forget her, too.

(beat)

But, I come back to this place again and again and again, not in private poems that don't rhyme in my diary, but in the secret code of dreams and in the hieroglyphics of my body. I loop back, again and again to these things -- my diary, the photographs, my Cap of Invisibility...my Medusa. When I look into her face now, I see the truth: it wasn't Son of Sam I needed to be afraid of.

(beat)

When I look back at all of us together on the roof, the night sky behind us is full of stars. Even though there was only ever one.

(beat)

And sometimes, in the space between then and now, I remember bouncing around our early American dining room table around and around and around, praying that we will somehow lift up off the ground and when we do I am flying through the air on my father's back. In that split second that never comes to an end...we are airborne.

TAR BEACH

As the scene resumes ROGER strikes the match.

Hungry?

ROGER

Starvin.

MARY CLAIRE

ROGER drops the match A HUGE plume of FIRE. MARY CLAIRE instinctively steps away.

(as the fire plumes)
Cool!!

MARY FRANCES

Stay.

BRIGIT

BRIGIT pulls MARY CLAIRE close to her. MARY CLAIRE looks across their mother at REENIE, an acknowledgement of their love.

(to the audience)
Black out.

REENIE

We hear the SOUNDS from the beginning: SIRENS, people shouting, cars, airplanes and then if we listen closely the OCEAN WAVES crashing on the shore, and then just the swells far out into the middle of the ocean, wind. This time the sky behind her is full of stars: The constellation: Perseus holding the Eye of Medusa.

END OF PLAY