

HATH TAKEN AWAY

A Full-Length Play

By Jacob Juntunen

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Post Last Frontier Conference Reading

For Daniel

CHARACTERS

DOROTHEA: A woman, early 20s. Provincial, milk-fed, striving for grace.

JOHN: A man, early 20s. Provincial, milk-fed, striving to understand.

LUCY: A woman, early 20s. Provincial, milk-fed, striving for family.

Author's Note: Though I wrote this play for three actors, I can easily imagine it being done with three primary actors and a chorus. I would also welcome other interpretations.

SETTING

In front of the horizon.

For He crushes me with a tempest,
And multiplies my wounds without cause;
He will not let me catch my breath.
—Book of Job, 9:17-18.

And He takes and He takes and He takes.
—Sufjan Stevens.

DOROTHEA, JOHN, and LUCY
stand in front of the horizon.

In unison, they take a breath.

ALL

The First Night.

JOHN

She was breathless.

DOROTHEA

He was huffing.

JOHN

She was holding her breath—

DOROTHEA

He was like a bull snorting—

JOHN

—then letting it go, in sharp gasps.

DOROTHEA

Like a bull after feeding.

JOHN

Then she'd hold her breath again, until she had to gasp in more air.

DOROTHEA

I was looking out the half moon window.

JOHN

The moon's porcelain light fell on her breasts, shadowed by the window's cross-hatch.

DOROTHEA

I breathed him in.

JOHN

Thank God, she finally took a deep breath.

DOROTHEA

He smelled like oil. The garage never entirely washed off of him.

JOHN

I used to walk by her house after school and look up at this half moon window and wonder what she did up here.

LUCY

I'd been spending the night with her in that room under the half moon window since we were little girls. But I wasn't there that night.

DOROTHEA

An oily bull, chuffing next to me afterwards, like one of the coughing trucks he kept running for the town's old-timers.

JOHN

The deed came from her parents with their wedding card. Now she'd never have to leave her childhood room. She wanted to look out the half moon window the rest of her life. I did, too.

DOROTHEA

A mechanical bull had ridden me.

JOHN

"Did I hurt you?"

LUCY

I was stumbling home from the reception, but I felt like I was close to them even in my separateness.

DOROTHEA

My mother didn't attend. She hadn't been back to our hometown for three years. And I hadn't visited her and my father up north. I hadn't seen my sister since she was ten.

LUCY

Dorothea's parents left town when she was eighteen, leaving her in the house to finish the last year of high school. Every woman in town gave a smile and advice to her face, and a cluck of the tongue to her backside. Nothing made her feel more alone. So I came over every night during our senior year. We'd make dinner together. Do our homework. Talk about John. I used to lie in bed with her, eyes softening, hands wandering, looking out that half moon window.

JOHN

I was worried I hurt her.

DOROTHEA

So I couldn't ask my mother what it would be like. I could have asked one of the other secretaries at the school what it would be like. Well, except Lucy.

LUCY

She couldn't ask me.

DOROTHEA

I could have asked one of the women at church.

LUCY

Because I wouldn't know.

DOROTHEA

But they wouldn't know what it was like to be with John. No one would know what it was like to be with John.

JOHN

My hands were so calloused.

LUCY

I didn't know what it was like to be with anybody. I'd never even had a boyfriend. Not really. So she couldn't ask me.

JOHN

I wasn't always gentle. With engines you need strong hands.

DOROTHEA

Being with John was like being swept away in a whirlwind.

JOHN

There was a bit of red on the bleached white sheets.

DOROTHEA

I was proud of the stain. Maybe that pride is where it all started?

LUCY

There is no reason why it started. Any of it.

DOROTHEA

There has to be a reason for all this, doesn't there?

JOHN

I thought of the cardinal in the snow I saw outside the church before the reception.

DOROTHEA

"You feel wonderful. Come here."

JOHN

Dorothea was soft, smooth under me. I breathed her in.

DOROTHEA

The hair on his body was coarse, like a goat's.

JOHN

She smelled like a baby.

DOROTHEA

For some reason, I thought of Lucy.

LUCY

I thought about them all night, after they left the reception.

JOHN

Like baby oil.

DOROTHEA

Why would I think of Lucy with John's weight on me?

LUCY

I threw up seven times walking home. Cheap champagne: a blessing and a curse.

JOHN

The half moon fell ghostly on her; I tried to keep weight on my elbows so I didn't crush her; I inhaled her hair and those baby smells.

DOROTHEA

We got jobs as secretaries at the high school after we graduated. Sitting in our cubicles in front of the counselors' offices, Lucy told me,

LUCY

"You'll just feel a pinch, then there'll be a little blood. That's it."

DOROTHEA

Then the phone rang, and Lucy had to answer it.

LUCY

Kristy's Mom was calling about her again. Kristy was only a sophomore and she already saw the counselor every week.

DOROTHEA

But how would Lucy know?

LUCY

Dorothea was always giving Kristy advice, and that wasn't her job. That was the counselor's job. Dorothea couldn't understand that Kristy had a choice.

JOHN

I couldn't stop thinking about baby oil.

DOROTHEA

Under the half moon window, there was a pinch, but the ecstasy after— Does nine months of vomit and then labor ripping your insides apart produce a proportional rapture?

LUCY

Walking home from the reception, at first I tried to vomit into those wire mesh trashcans, but then I just gave up. I vomited right on the sidewalk, in the snow, anywhere. Seven piles of half-digested white wedding cake and champagne during my walk. I laughed at the police car that slowed then drove away. By the time I was home gripping the porcelain I thought my insides were being ripped apart. I threw up three more times for good measure.

DOROTHEA

It was my first time.

LUCY

It was my first time.

JOHN

I didn't want to admit it to Dorothea, but it was my first time.

ALL

It was so still, I thought I could hear God breathing.

They listen.

In unison, they take a breath.

ALL

Friday.

A whirlwind of snow.

DOROTHEA

I felt a flutter in my abdomen.

JOHN

"Dorothea?"

DOROTHEA

My heart raced at the breath touching deep inside me.

JOHN

"What are you saying?"

LUCY

"Are you okay, honey?"

DOROTHEA

Why was she there?

LUCY

“I always come for dinner on Fridays—”

DOROTHEA

Why was she there? Why did John let her in? Why was Lucy there?

JOHN

“Just calm down honey—”

DOROTHEA

Why was Lucy wearing white?

JOHN

“I’m calling 9-1-1.”

DOROTHEA

My abdomen was fluttering.

LUCY

“Is something wrong with your stomach?”

DOROTHEA

From that first night under the half moon, we’d been waiting—

LUCY

“That’s right. We’re just waiting for John to get help.”

DOROTHEA

I’d been waiting. For something more. More than inhaling his oil fumes at the dinner table.

JOHN

“We need an ambulance.”

DOROTHEA

More than Lucy and I spending the days talking across our cubicles—

LUCY

“That’s right honey, I’m here.”

DOROTHEA

Kristy saw the counselor every week, and every week I told her she had to have it.

LUCY

“You’re at home, honey, you’re safe.”

DOROTHEA

We needed more than Lucy coming to dinner every Friday night. It was a year since we were married, and only now did I feel the fluttering.

JOHN

“An ambulance is on the way.”

DOROTHEA

This was a blessing.

JOHN

“It’s on its way. You’re going to be okay.”

DOROTHEA

This was the blessing we were waiting for.

JOHN

“It’s on its way. Can you hear me? Dorothea, it’s on its way.”

DOROTHEA

Lucy brought tulips.

The snow stops.

In unison, they take a breath.

ALL

Saturday.

JOHN leaves.

DOROTHEA

Morning light.

LUCY

There were tulips in front of the congregation.

DOROTHEA

I was missing my parents. My sister was thirteen now. She posted a picture of the three of them up north with the caption, “It’s nice to have the whole family together.” So I guess they weren’t missing me. My eyes were adjusting to the darkness in the vestibule, waiting to walk down the aisle. Mom would never let me wear sunglasses walking to church, no matter how brightly the sun sparkled off the snow. So I didn’t that day either. Even if Mom was up north with Dad.

LUCY

I made sure the nave, the aisles, the pulpit, everywhere, was covered in tulips. They were her favorite.

DOROTHEA

But Mom sent a check to buy my dress.

LUCY

Dorothea and I were still together, waiting for the processional when I would be separated from her, before she had to walk down the aisle by herself.

DOROTHEA

Mom was being a good pastor's wife. Doing her duty in a church miles away from mine.

LUCY

It snowed overnight even though it was April. But the sky was a cobalt blue now, the white coating on the ground and trees sparkling like Dorothea's square cut ring that waited for its corresponding band.

DOROTHEA

I begged Dad to come. But being a Pastor means being with your own flock on Holy Saturday. He could have driven down, with Mom, in the morning, and still been back for his Easter Vigil service, but he said that would be too much. Laziness or fear, I wondered. I'm sure my sister didn't want to come. She was so young when she left that we didn't really even know each other. Lucy tried to distract me.

LUCY

I talked to her about the snow.

DOROTHEA

Cold air mingled with light under the door to the vestibule. My feet were quivering.

LUCY

"So much for your outdoor photo shoot."

DOROTHEA

"Why?"

LUCY

"The snow."

DOROTHEA

"It's clean. It will be unique."

LUCY

"You're not even wearing nylons."

DOROTHEA

"This is the day the Lord has made, and I won't question it. I'll wear my coat for some of the pictures. The contrast will be beautiful."

LUCY

She was wearing a red raincoat.

DOROTHEA

It wasn't that cold.

LUCY

I thought it was odd that she wore a red coat that morning.

DOROTHEA

Lucy had a white parka.

LUCY

If anyone deserved to wear white, it was Dorothea.

DOROTHEA

The pictures were beautiful. The red coat set my dress off against the snow like holly berries.

LUCY

John's parents were dead. Dorothea's typically absent.

DOROTHEA

Lucy wanted a white maid of honor dress.

LUCY

So it's not like the family photographs were going to take a lot of time.

DOROTHEA

The other girls in my party, a couple cousins, some girls from work, didn't care. I don't think they even wanted to be bridesmaids. Not really. So white it was.

LUCY

But there's not much material to those dresses. Mine was a classic A-frame, chic, and our bouquets were burning love tulips—deep, cardinal-colored, early blooming, a strong stem, and easy to find in April.

DOROTHEA

It was a footnote in my mind, though. Lucy wore white to my wedding.

LUCY

The organ began playing a canon.

DOROTHEA

I took off my coat. My whole body quivered.

LUCY

I took off my coat. I wrapped my arms around her. "You don't have to march alone."

DOROTHEA

“You think Dad will show up with the cavalry?”

LUCY

“Let me do it.”

DOROTHEA

“What about What’s His Name? Your groomsman?”

LUCY

“I don’t care about What’s His Name.” There was a knock at the door.

DOROTHEA

“Reverend Daniel wouldn’t like it.”

LUCY

Another knock, and What’s His Name said, “Lucy, we need to go.” I ignored him. “Is this ceremony for you or Reverend Daniel?”

DOROTHEA

“Maybe you could hold my train, then Reverend Daniel—”

LUCY

“If we go, we go arm in arm.”

DOROTHEA

More knocking. What’s His Name was John’s second cousin or something. Lucy didn’t give a damn about marching down the aisle with him.

LUCY

I wanted to stroke her hair, but it was too perfect. From outside the vestibule: “Lucy, come on! They’re waiting!”

DOROTHEA

“Go without her.”

LUCY

What’s His Name said: “But she’s supposed to march with me. That’s how we rehearsed.”

DOROTHEA

“She’s marching with me.”

LUCY

I’d known her eyes since plastic ponies and sleeping bag sleepovers. They were always shining.

DOROTHEA

“I need her.”

LUCY

We walked down the aisle towards John—

DOROTHEA

—arm in arm.

LUCY

It was just like I always dreamed.

DOROTHEA and LUCY stand
before JOHN .

LUCY (cont.)

John looked surprised at the two women in white standing before him.

DOROTHEA

Reverend Daniel looked... curious?

LUCY

Tulips colored everything. Lining the pews. Along the chancel. Right up to the sanctuary. Reds, purples, yellows, whites, alongside the golden wood. I maxed out my credit card to buy them, but so what? It was worth it. We reached John.

DOROTHEA

Lucy and I just stood there. Facing each other. This wasn't in the rehearsal.

LUCY

I wished I could stop time so my moment at this altar would never end.

DOROTHEA

She lifted my veil, and I thought she was going to kiss me.

LUCY

I wondered what her eyes would look like after her first night with John.

DOROTHEA

But instead her eyes got wet, and mascara pooled around her eyes like a devilish bride.

LUCY

Would I still recognize the little girl in her eyes?

DOROTHEA

I was scared it would get on her dress.

I gave Lucy a handkerchief.

JOHN

—

LUCY

It looked like she was going to say something.

DOROTHEA

Then Reverend Daniel made a joke. “I hope you’ve got one of those for your bride, John.”

JOHN

Was that awkward? Or did it release the tension?

DOROTHEA

“I’ve got an infinite supply.”

JOHN

I never said what I wanted to say.

LUCY

Reverend Daniel said, “To keep the grease off your hands, no doubt. Shall we start?”

JOHN

Was that an insult? Because of my father?

DOROTHEA

I never said it.

LUCY

Or was it friendly ribbing because John was the only person at the garage who could keep the Reverend’s ark of a Buick running?

DOROTHEA

Never. No sinful words escaped my lips, so there is no reason for any of this.

LUCY

Reverend Daniel talked.

JOHN

And talked.

DOROTHEA

And talked.

LUCY

JOHN

Just about every day I woke up and wished my parents hadn't gotten into their car that night. Or that the other guy hadn't gotten behind the wheel after he left the bar. But standing there, that morning, looking at the tulips, I missed them even more.

DOROTHEA

I felt the rayon fabric against my skin, and tried to understand my mother's love.

JOHN

I don't know if our parents' absence was worse on me or Dorothea, though.

DOROTHEA

Dad called from his church early in the morning. He left a voicemail. He wished me the best. He was choked up. He started to say something, but instead said I shouldn't have gotten married on Holy Saturday.

LUCY

I wondered if I still had to get up early for Easter services the next day or if this counted.

DOROTHEA

Like the God damn ecumenical calendar was worth more than seeing me on my wedding day.

JOHN

Dorothea didn't know yet that her dad had sent the deed to the house.

DOROTHEA

But throughout the ceremony, I never sinned with my lips.

JOHN

She didn't know that we owned it.

DOROTHEA

No breath made my thoughts manifest. I was whole and righteous.

JOHN

Well, that I owned it. Her dad signed the deed over to me.

DOROTHEA

I was pure and ready for sacrifice.

LUCY

Glimmering flakes blew around outside the window, the wind whipping them up from the ground and branches, sending them staggering through the air, out of control, in whirlwinds.

JOHN

She'd be so happy owning that half-moon window.

LUCY

Beautiful chaos shimmered in the morning light

JOHN

We'd never have to leave.

LUCY

I saw a flash of red fly by. A cardinal?

DOROTHEA

Why was I mad at Dad with John smiling at me?

LUCY

Reverend Daniel was saying,

JOHN

"They are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, no man must separate."

LUCY

So we were getting towards the end.

Whirlwinds of snow.

DOROTHEA

"Why's that siren so loud?"

JOHN

I was scared I'd break down completely.

DOROTHEA

"What's happening?"

LUCY

John's eyes were filling with water.

DOROTHEA

"Am I strapped down?"

LUCY

I wanted to see her eyes.

DOROTHEA

"Why am I at my wedding but hearing sirens?"

LUCY

But I was standing behind her.

JOHN

I never knew why pastors say the vows a few words at a time.

DOROTHEA

“Let me up!”

JOHN

But I could barely repeat them—

DOROTHEA

“Where’s John? I want John!”

JOHN

—even three words at a time.

DOROTHEA

“Where are you taking me?”

LUCY

There was no way John was making it through this.

DOROTHEA

“Don’t take me away from John!”

JOHN

“Till death do us—”

DOROTHEA

“I’m not dead!”

JOHN

“Till death do us—”

DOROTHEA

“I’m not dead!”

LUCY

John lost it.

JOHN

“Till death—”

LUCY

He sobbed.

DOROTHEA

“I’m not dead!”

Darkness.

No snow.

Then:

LUCY appears.

JOHN and DOROTHEA appear in an area apart from LUCY.

JOHN lets his head drop.

His shoulders shake.

There is no sound.

JOHN and DOROTHEA embody the actions LUCY describes.

LUCY

He couldn't finish the words. He stood there, body wracked with jagged little breaths, a tiny squeaking sound coming from deep within his diaphragm. The whole congregation inhaled and let no air escape. How long? Minutes? Then I heard a sob from somewhere in the back pews, then another, and another. The whole room gasped with John, struggling to get air, flailing like we were underwater, trying to contain an ocean within ourselves—No, we were trying to resist a vast, dark, undersea leviathan, a giant eye so close to us we couldn't see the entire sleek shadowed fuselage of a body, not knowing whether to struggle against the waves and flee, or turn and face the creature. But how could we face it? How could we understand it? We didn't know what it was or where it came from. We didn't understand its creation let alone how to confront it. We barely knew where we were.

I was behind Dorothea, watching John cry. Reverend Daniel was helpless. Time stopped. I felt Dorothea smile. Even from behind, I sensed the warmth of the light shining from her eyes. Or maybe I saw her face reflected in the window panes behind John. Dorothea smiled, took half a step towards John, and put her hand on his shoulder. He looked up, still gasping, into the radiance of her manifestation, and he could breathe again. The light of her eyes was the flame that signified the dawn of Easter. John took another handkerchief out of his pocket, wiped his face, and this time Reverend Daniel made no jokes. We were all too hushed.

JOHN

“Till death do us part.”

LUCY

The busy world was hushed. Entirely.

In unison, they take a breath.

The First Night.

ALL

LUCY leaves.

JOHN and DOROTHEA alone.

DOROTHEA seems unconscious.

LUCY returns.

LUCY

“There’s a machine down the hall that has coffee and hot chocolate and it’s free so I got one of each because I didn’t know— What’s wrong?”

JOHN

“The doctor was finally here.”

LUCY

“Is she all right?”

JOHN

“Obviously not.”

LUCY

“I mean, what did he say was wrong with her?”

JOHN

“She’s pregnant.”

LUCY

“Why was she talking gibberish?”

JOHN

“Just a month or so. She didn’t say anything to me.”

LUCY

“Maybe she didn’t know.”

JOHN

“Maybe.”

LUCY

“That’s all the doctor said?”

JOHN

“Don’t you think she would have told me if she knew?”

LUCY

“I haven’t had my period yet either.”

JOHN

“Lucy, please—”

LUCY

“We usually have them at the same time—”

JOHN

“I don’t need to know about your—”

LUCY

“Unless she didn’t have one last month. I just assumed when I got mine that she got—”

JOHN

“Lucy.”

LUCY

The blood had drained from John’s face. He couldn’t handle women’s bodies for some reason. Maybe because he didn’t have any sisters and the only woman he grew up with was his grandmother. She was too old to worry about periods anymore.

JOHN

Lucy was always talking about inappropriate things.

LUCY

“Dorothea didn’t get strapped down screaming babble in an ambulance because she was pregnant.”

JOHN

“She has a brain tumor. Benign. Malignant. Pre-malignant. Who knows?”

LUCY

“The doctor. The doctor should know. What kind of tests are they—”

JOHN

“They can’t.”

LUCY

“They can’t what?”

JOHN

“They would normally do an MRI to find out. But they can’t. Because she’s pregnant.”

LUCY

“What if they get rid of—”

JOHN

“No—”

LUCY

“If it’s her life or the baby’s—”

JOHN

“Everyday she comes home talking about Kristy getting bigger and bigger—”

LUCY

“This isn’t the same situation—”

JOHN

“She always says Kristy can’t get rid of it, no matter what, that it’s a life, that it’s murder.”

LUCY

“If she dies, the baby dies.”

JOHN

“She’s wanted to be pregnant since she married me. This is the blessing she wanted.”

LUCY

“Right. A blessing. They can’t do anything?”

JOHN

“They’re going to stabilize her overnight. There’s some other kind of MRI that’s, I don’t know, less damaging or something— I don’t remember. They’ll do that in the morning. Then we’ll know more.”

LUCY

“If they find something serious you’re going to have to help me convince her.”

JOHN

“We already know nothing’s going to convince her.”

LUCY

“If anybody can convince her, it’s you.”

JOHN

“I don’t know how.”

LUCY

“We’ll pray and God will show you the way. You just have to listen and do what you’re told. When she wakes up, we can talk it out with her. Find out for sure what she wants.”

JOHN

“She always says that no matter how hard it is on Kristy, she’s got to keep it. And with her Dad... We know what she wants. You should go home. Get some rest.”

LUCY

“I’m not leaving her.”

Silence.

LUCY (cont)

“I guess you’re not either.”

Silence.

LUCY (cont)

“Do you want the coffee or the hot chocolate?”

JOHN

“Either. I need to sit.”

LUCY

I stood there.

JOHN

I sat. My chin on my palms, elbows on knees. Slumped. But upright.

LUCY

John sat in the hard plastic chair. It was white, like the sheets, like the floor, like the walls, like the moonlight on the snow outside the white-curtained windows.

JOHN

I watched her stomach rising and falling under the sheets.

LUCY

I sipped the dark bitter liquid from the white foam cup.

JOHN

Even though I was sitting, my legs were quivering.

LUCY

I didn’t taste it.

JOHN

Something was wrong with my chest.

LUCY

But I drank it.

JOHN

Something was fluttering in my ribcage.

LUCY

There wasn't a garbage can for the styrofoam cup.

JOHN

There was darkness in my peripheral vision.

LUCY

They give you free coffee but no place to put the cup?

JOHN

I wanted to put my head between my knees and breath deeply.

LUCY

Two white chairs and a bed with wires and monitors and no God damn garbage can.

JOHN

But I wouldn't be able to see the rising and falling if I did that.

LUCY

I didn't mean to think God damn. But I did. I did think it. But we all think it. Right? Don't we? As long as we suffer in silence, it's okay to think it. Isn't it?

JOHN

My stomach was trembling.

LUCY

Our reckless thoughts are not to blame. Not for any of this.

JOHN

I could feel clammy water forming on my forehead.

LUCY

"Did you call Dorothea's parents?"

JOHN

"Why don't you go outside and call them?"

LUCY

"I'm not leaving."

JOHN

"Well, you can't use a cell phone in here."

Silence.

LUCY
“I’m going to call her parents.”

JOHN
“Okay.”

LUCY begins to leave.

LUCY
“Or do you think it’s too late?”

JOHN
“It’s not midnight yet.”

LUCY
“But they go to bed early, don’t they?”

JOHN
“Dorothea will be here when you get back.”

LUCY
“I know that. Obviously. I just want to be here with her. But her parents would want to know. So I’ll just go call them.”

JOHN
“Go ahead.”

LUCY
“But I don’t want to wake them up. But if it was my kid I’d want to be woken up, I mean, if it’s serious, right? They might want to get in the car right now, drive here overnight, especially if in the morning we have to decide about the baby—”

JOHN
“Just go call them.”

LUCY
“Okay. I’ll call them. I’ll be just outside if you need me.”

LUCY leaves.

Silence.

LUCY returns.

LUCY (cont)
“I’m going to get some more coffee. Do you want anything?”

JOHN

I was scared to shake my head, scared to send the room spinning. My stomach kept dropping like an unholy fairground ride.

LUCY

“I’ll just get you some more hot chocolate.”

JOHN

I had a full cup already.

LUCY

He hadn’t touched the last one, but it was cold now. He might want something hot.

JOHN

Drops of water started sliding down my skin. Like snow melting on cold glass.

LUCY

I left the room.

LUCY leaves.

DOROTHEA seems unconscious.

JOHN

I refused to believe this was the last night. It was the first night. The first night Dorothea would be in the hospital.

Silence.

JOHN (cont.)

I struggled to stay upright, to stay in the chair, to keep my vision clear enough to see the rising and the falling, swallowing air as best I could, when I realized it was quiet.

Silence.

JOHN (cont.)

There were no beeps. No hisses or pumps. It was nothing like TV. It was silent. As the sheets rose and fell, there was no sound except the whisper of her feather-soft inhalation. I was glad. When Dorothea’s dad led our church, he told me to smile in adversity, to trust God. And so I thanked God for this simple mercy. She could sleep peacefully. And if this was her last night, her dreams wouldn’t be infected by hospital sounds.

Except it wasn’t the last night; it was the first. She would survive. But sitting there in silence, listening to her breath wasn’t what I wanted to do. I was working up the courage to do what I wanted. It was so simple. I was going to do it. I really was.

Darkness.

LUCY, JOHN, and DOROTHEA are
in front of the horizon.

In unison, they take a breath.

ALL

Friday.

LUCY

“Happy Anniversary!”

DOROTHEA

It was really the day before our first anniversary. Good Friday.

JOHN

Actually, since Easter is a different date every year, it wasn't really the day before our anniversary. But we decided we would always celebrate on Holy Saturday, regardless of the date.

LUCY

I came over every Friday for dinner. Why would Good Friday be any different?

JOHN

We'd been married almost a year. I should have been celebrating. We would be celebrating the next day. Without Lucy. But my mind couldn't get away from Good Friday.

LUCY

“Can you believe it's snowing?”

DOROTHEA

“It snowed the night before we got married, too.”

LUCY

“Snow on your wedding day is supposed to be a fertility blessing.”

DOROTHEA

“We seem to be cursed in that department.”

JOHN

“Maybe everything will be as white and beautiful tomorrow as it was a year ago.”

LUCY

We were always so happy to have dinner Fridays. You'd think me and Dorothea would get tired of seeing each other at work all day, but nope. We looked forward to it all week.

DOROTHEA

How lucky was it that I got to work with my best friend? The high school seemed to take pity on both of us and hired us right after graduation to be in the secretary pool.

JOHN

After my parents' accident, Dorothea's dad really took me in. I mean, I lived with my grandparents, but Grandpa lost a leg to diabetes so he couldn't play ball or anything. And Grandma was totally preoccupied taking care of Grandpa. So I spent a lot of time at the church. And took apart cars in the driveway.

LUCY

John's long fingers were always smudged dark with a gasoline smell.

JOHN

I didn't like going to my parents' graves. It didn't feel like they were there. Instead, I would go to the church to pray, to look for some reason it happened. I don't know. People had all kinds of answers.

DOROTHEA

John never quite got the cars he loved off of him.

LUCY

I couldn't stand thinking about those dirty fingers touching Dorothea.

DOROTHEA

It was sexy.

LUCY

Some dinners, I just stared at his hands that taking cars apart made so strong.

JOHN

My grandma said, "We'll understand when we're with God." My grandpa said, "Everything happens for a reason." My shop teacher said, "It'll make you stronger." I wondered if I'd done something wrong, if it was a punishment. I looked for answers in engines and axels.

LUCY

Even in high school he always had some car half taken apart in his drive way.

DOROTHEA

John smelled so... virile. Not like Dad. Incense permeated everything Dad wore. Floral.

LUCY

Dorothea was as fresh as the tulips I brought whenever they were in season.

JOHN

But Dorothea's Dad, he found me in the Church, crying, and said to me, "You can take apart a car, put it back together, but do you really know how it runs?" and, before I could

answer, he said, “We’ve learned to trap little explosions and use them, but do you know where energy comes from? Do you know where it goes when it’s used up?”

DOROTHEA

And that first year, everything John did ignited me, fused us together, until we detonated in each other’s arms.

LUCY

When I hugged Dorothea hello and goodbye, I put my nose in her hair, and understood why bees circled her in the spring.

JOHN

What could I say to that?

DOROTHEA

He was so good at making things, but after a whole year, nothing inside me.

LUCY

Her cotton dresses soft against my arms.

DOROTHEA

I went to the doctor, but he said it was too early to worry and to just enjoy myself.

JOHN

I didn’t say anything to that. Dorothea’s dad taught me ours is not to reason why. But every year at Holy Week I thought I understood better and better the loneliness at Golgotha that Dorothea’s dad described from the pulpit.

LUCY

I just wanted to hug Dorothea. But to hug her, I had to hug John, too, every Friday night. But that can’t be why it all happened, can it?

JOHN

We are abandoned on Good Friday and Holy Saturday, I used to think, but on Easter Sunday reunion is promised. I used to kneel in the church and pray for that reunion.

JOHN, in a space apart, kneels.

DOROTHEA

What was I supposed to tell the doctor? That I fell asleep every night with a smile on my face?

LUCY

And Dorothea’s smile was just as fragrant as her hair. No matter the situation, her lips trickled upwards with just the right scent: radiance for her wedding, mischievousness for joking, and with tea and sympathy for Kristy.

DOROTHEA and LUCY step into a separate space.

DOROTHEA

Every day I saw Kristy getting bigger and bigger, and I was so jealous.

LUCY

Dorothea said to me once, ‘A smile costs nothing but creates much.’

DOROTHEA

But, whenever I wished for what Kristy had, I smiled at her even more—I thought my smiles made up for my envy.

LUCY

I’m not much of a smiler.

DOROTHEA

I thought to myself, ‘No one is so rich they can get along without a smile; and no one is so poor they can’t give one away. And both people smiling are richer for its benefits.’ So coveting what Kristy had couldn’t be the cause of all this, could it?

LUCY

“It’s not too late.”

DOROTHEA

“For what?”

LUCY

“She could still get rid of it.”

DOROTHEA

“Lucy!”

LUCY

“She’s fifteen.”

DOROTHEA

“It’s a blessing.”

LUCY

“Not the type of blessing a fifteen-year-old wants.”

DOROTHEA

“There are lots of parents waiting for a baby. She’ll have it, and it will go to good hands.”

LUCY

“My parents should have just given me away.”

DOROTHEA

“Every parent expresses love differently.”

LUCY

“They live eight blocks away and my mother mailed me a birthday card.”

DOROTHEA

“Some people don’t understand the gifts they’re given.”

LUCY

“And she just wrote in Dad’s signature.”

DOROTHEA

“This isn’t what I want to spend my anniversary talking about.”

LUCY

“Do you still want me to come over tonight?”

DOROTHEA

“Who’d bring me anniversary tulips if you don’t come?”

LUCY

“Silly.”

DOROTHEA

I told Lucy once that I loved tulips, and now she always brought them. I didn’t have the heart to tell her that I was tired of them.

LUCY

I waited all year for tulips to be in season to bring to Dorothea’s.

DOROTHEA

“Kristy’s baby will be such a blessing to somebody.”

LUCY

“I’d be a horrible mother.”

DOROTHEA

“That’s not true.”

LUCY

“I don’t have any models.”

DOROTHEA

“If you treat a daughter half as well as you treat me, you’ll be a wonderful mother. Be sure to wear your parka tonight. It’s supposed to snow.”

LUCY

I had to hold my breath. Otherwise, tears would have come.

DOROTHEA

Kristy had wanted a boyfriend. I had wanted to feel a child growing within me. Lucy had wanted to be a good parent. None of us were careful with our wishes.

JOHN

I would kneel until Dorothea's dad told me it was time to leave. I never wanted to. Then there was all that trouble, and he got sent to another parish.

LUCY

I can't count the times that Dorothea's words brought me to tears.

JOHN

I never thought what he did was bad enough to get sent away.

LUCY

I just held my breath and kept quiet.

JOHN

I mean, what he did was bad, don't get me wrong. Really bad. But bad enough to get banished from our congregation? He's human, isn't he? And they just gave him a new church up north, so how bad could it really be?

LUCY

Her words would have brought me to tears if I ever admitted to her how much they meant to me. She never knew.

DOROTHEA

Lucy looked like she was going to cry when I told her she'd make a good mother. Her older sister basically raised her before running off to college in California. She never came back, not even to visit. Lucy was alone, even though her parents lived in town. She moved into a small apartment when John and I got married and she couldn't stay the night with me anymore. She lived there by herself now. I couldn't imagine that solitude, so I could never begrudge her coming over on Fridays.

LUCY

Kristy came out of the office then. She stood in front of me, wanting to schedule her next appointment. I just nodded and kept holding my breath.

DOROTHEA

Lucy wasn't going to be able to talk so near to tears, so I went to her desk and said, "Let me schedule that for you, dear. Did you look at that adoption website I wrote down for you?"

LUCY

Kristy rolled her eyes, "I just need to make my next appointment."

DOROTHEA

“Your baby’s going to make somebody really happy.”

LUCY

“When are you going to start a family?”

DOROTHEA

I just kept smiling.

LUCY

Kristy could be vicious.

DOROTHEA

“Does the same time work for you next week?”

LUCY

Kristy nodded and walked away, slamming the door as she left.

DOROTHEA

How could I explain to Kristy about my lost family? About how desperately I wanted to make a new one? What kind of woman would I be if I didn’t want John to have a baby?

LUCY

Dorothea and John were already a family.

DOROTHEA

Lucy didn’t understand. But she never really had a family, so how could she? She brought tulips on my first anniversary, trying to show her love.

JOHN

Dorothea’s dad always let me stay in the church as long as I needed. Reverend Daniel kept the door locked except when there were services.

DOROTHEA, LUCY and JOHN are
all in the same space again.

DOROTHEA

I put Lucy’s tulips in a vase, and we ate dinner.

LUCY

We toasted their anniversary.

JOHN

Our real celebration would be the next day when we ate the frozen piece of cake from our wedding. Without Lucy complicating things.

DOROTHEA

I wondered if an anniversary toast was like a birthday, if you got to make a wish. I wished for God's ultimate blessing to finally visit our marriage.

JOHN

Dorothea made another cake for our dinner with Lucy, though.

LUCY

You couldn't have a celebration without Dorothea making a cake.

DOROTHEA

Red velvet with cream cheese frosting; my favorite.

LUCY

I wasn't much of a baker.

DOROTHEA

I cut out the triangles, red layers with white stripes separating them, and we ate it with coffee in the thick white mugs John liked so much. I think they reminded him of a diner.

LUCY

The red and white tulips in their porcelain vase matched the cake.

JOHN

And how's that for a perfect picture?

DOROTHEA

But I couldn't forget my wish, made over the toast.

JOHN

What else could a man ask to come home to?

LUCY

It was one of those perfectly blessed evenings.

DOROTHEA

Maybe it was asking for more, not being content with what I had, that was the cause of it all?

JOHN

Good coffee in thick white mugs, red and white remains of cake on sturdy white plates, and a wife whose name means gift from God.

LUCY

I felt as fine as a warm house on a snowy night, a red glow coming from the windows and keeping the darkness at bay.

DOROTHEA

But how could I not wish for it?

JOHN

Even if Lucy was there—so what? I just tried not to look at her, and it made Dorothea so happy to have her there. I was used to being by myself, but Dorothea needed company in a way I never understood. I think it was to replace her sister.

LUCY

So what if the dishes were a little too thick, a little too plain, not at all like the china set my Mom let me take and that now sat mostly unused in my quiet little kitchen?

JOHN

Lucy made me uncomfortable. She made me think about Dorothea's dad's disgrace.

DOROTHEA

You tell me—if you had all this, wouldn't you want the next step? Wouldn't you want to wake up in the middle of the night to feed a little mouth, to sing to her gently, 'The monster's gone, it's on the run, and mommy's here?'

JOHN

I ignored Lucy, and I had everything I wanted.

LUCY

On Fridays, I had everything I wanted.

DOROTHEA

So I made a wish. Could God be so capricious that a wish could be held against me? A wish made over a toast, with my love and my best friend, on the eve of my anniversary, on the celebration of His son's sacrifice? I didn't believe it.

JOHN

I had everything, I guess, except my parents. They would have liked to see me and Dorothea married.

LUCY

But Friday only came once a week, of course.

DOROTHEA

I didn't believe it could be held against me then, but maybe I was wrong. Or maybe it was what we did the summer before.

JOHN

After Friday dinners, I always got out the Bible. Dorothea's Dad gave one to me before he moved away. Reading out loud from it made me feel like he was there with us, at least in spirit.

DOROTHEA

It was about three months after we got married, a hot summer night, humid and full of cicada chirps. It was after eight o'clock, but the sun's fingers were still holding on to the horizon. I said, "Before we have our Bible study this week, could we do something?"

JOHN

I wasn't sure it was proper.

LUCY

It seemed silly.

DOROTHEA

I couldn't help asking.

JOHN

But what could it hurt, if we did it with humility and reverence?

DOROTHEA

So I lay down on the couch in my cotton sun dress, and they laid hands on me.

JOHN

"Bless this body, oh Lord, that it may follow your commandment to be fruitful and multiply."

JOHN and LUCY

"Amen."

LUCY

I had a hard time not laughing, but I knew it meant a lot to Dorothea.

JOHN

I can't see how I sinned in that moment.

DOROTHEA

"Thank you, John. Thank you, Lucy."

JOHN

She had tears in her eyes.

DOROTHEA

"Okay. Enough of my foolishness. Let's do the Bible study."

LUCY

And that was it. We didn't do anything wrong in that moment. Besides, it was months ago. John led prayer every Friday night; that evening was just... particular.

JOHN

But maybe asking for something specific was a sign of disrespect. It seemed okay to me at the time.

DOROTHEA

Talking about the verses with John was everything it should have been with my Dad.

JOHN

It's not like I was an expert, but I tried to keep up. I checked commentaries out of the library. I got discussion plans from online. Ever since Dorothea's Dad got sent to the parish up north, I kinda felt like I needed to do some work on my own. Reverend Daniel just wasn't... Well... I shouldn't speak against a man of God.

LUCY

I have to admit, hearing John read those words every week did give me chills.

JOHN

I mean, Reverend Daniel did his able best, but his sermons just didn't have the same depth as Dorothea's Dad's.

DOROTHEA

The night they laid hands on me, our Bible study was about the Book of Job.

JOHN

"So when the Book says Job is 'righteous,' the Hebrew word is actually the kind of 'wholeness' necessary for the proper sacrifice of an animal."

DOROTHEA

"So Job is sacrificed? To what?"

JOHN

"That's the question, isn't it? If he is wholly righteous, like, a good man, then why is he sacrificed?"

LUCY

"It turns out all right for him at the end, though, doesn't it? Doesn't it say he dies blessed and full of days?"

JOHN

"Well, maybe, and maybe not. This commentary says the Hebrew word for 'blessing' used throughout the Book of Job is 'barak,' but in Job every time it says 'curse' it's using the same Hebrew word: 'barak.'"

LUCY

"So how do we know whether 'barak' means blessing or curse?"

JOHN

"Context, I guess."

DOROTHEA

“So everything in the book is both a blessing and a curse?”

JOHN

“I don’t see how it could be both.”

DOROTHEA

“Couldn’t it be like those optical illusions where it’s two faces and a candlestick at the same time? A blessing and a curse, depending on how you look at it?”

LUCY

“But at the end of the book, Job has a family and all those camels and stuff.”

DOROTHEA

“But what about his first family?”

JOHN

“I’m not sure we’re supposed to be thinking about his first family—”

DOROTHEA

“If it’s the same word for blessing and curse, couldn’t the whirlwind be blessing and cursing Job at the same time?”

LUCY

“And why is God a whirlwind?”

JOHN

“Um... All it says in the commentary is that there’s a lot of repetition of “wind” in the book.”

DOROTHEA

“Like breath. There’s lots about breath. That’s a kind of wind”

JOHN

“Job sees God in the whirlwind and God says, ‘Do you understand creating the Leviathon?’, and of course Job doesn’t, so Job shuts up and is blessed. Right?”

DOROTHEA

“As long as his second family’s as good as the one God killed.”

LUCY

“Jeez.”

DOROTHEA

“What? It’s how the story goes. It’s as bad as my sister posting all those photos of my happy family up north without me in them.”

LUCY

“You’re being harsh.”

DOROTHEA

“Because Job doesn’t understand how a whale was created it’s okay his first family was killed? What does the compendium say about his first family?”

JOHN

“Um... I’m not sure...”

DOROTHEA

We looked through the compendium John checked out from the library, but we never figured out what we were supposed to think about Job’s first family being killed.

JOHN

Well, like I said, I’m no expert.

DOROTHEA

But it was still better than Reverend Daniel.

LUCY

Every sermon with Reverend Daniel was a sports metaphor.

JOHN

He thought he’d reach the men that way, but really it just made all the guys think about the games on TV they could be watching. I was the only guy at the garage who actually cared about this stuff.

DOROTHEA

And sometimes John did better at Bible study than the week we read the Book of Job.

JOHN

We laid hands on Dorothea and talked about Job months before our first anniversary. That couldn’t be the reason for any of this.

LUCY

The Bible study on their first anniversary was different. There was no faltering over meaning, no hesitation. John’s words got so... firm.

JOHN

On Good Friday, when Lucy was over for our anniversary, I tried harder. Really delved into the verses. For our first anniversary celebration, I wanted the Words to say what I couldn’t.

DOROTHEA

His reading on our anniversary was deep, rolling, and penetrating.

LUCY

On their first anniversary, John breathed out those ragged, jagged, dry and dusty Good Friday Words,

JOHN

“*Eli, eli, lema sabachani?*”

DOROTHEA and LUCY

How could you not love that?

JOHN

Every year, I understood more and more. What a terrible loneliness He must have felt. Waiting for someone you knew would never come.

LUCY

We talked about it all.

DOROTHEA

I kept the coffee coming.

JOHN

The night felt endless.

LUCY

Like we could somehow solve the great mysteries of life in their living room.

DOROTHEA

It was different from other Fridays. Energized. Animated. Breathless.

JOHN

Like we were staring into the deep, fathoming all the beasts that were far beneath the dark surface.

LUCY

Like if we could just talk it out, keep the caffeine buzzing at just the right level, return to the Book just the right amount—

A whirlwind of snow.

DOROTHEA

“Guys.”

JOHN

Like there was a light penetrating the ocean, revealing the bioluminescent fish that can somehow breath in the depths—

DOROTHEA

“Guys.”

LUCY

Like if we never had to stop, never had to sleep, never had to see sunrise—

DOROTHEA

“Guys. Something’s not right...”

JOHN

Like everything was illuminated.

DOROTHEA

“I felt a flutter in my abdomen.”

JOHN

“Dorothea?”

DOROTHEA

“My heart raced at the breath touching deep inside me.”

JOHN

“What are you saying?”

LUCY

“Are you okay, honey?”

DOROTHEA

“Why was she there?”

LUCY

“I always come for dinner on Fridays—”

DOROTHEA

“Why was she there? Why did John let her in? Why was Lucy there?”

JOHN

“Just calm down honey—”

DOROTHEA

“Why was Lucy wearing white?”

JOHN

“I’m calling 9-1-1.”

DOROTHEA

“My abdomen was fluttering.”

LUCY

“Is something wrong with your stomach?”

DOROTHEA

“From that first night under the half moon, we’d been waiting—”

LUCY

“That’s right. We’re just waiting for John to get help.”

Darkness.

The snow stops.

JOHN, LUCY, and DOROTHEA
appear in front of the horizon.

In unison, they take a breath.

ALL

The First Night.

LUCY leaves.

DOROTHEA seems unconscious.

JOHN

I was working up the courage to do what I wanted. It was so simple. I was going to do it. I really was. Then Lucy came back. She brought tulips and kicked over my full cup of cold hot chocolate.

LUCY returns.

LUCY

“Darn it!”

JOHN

“Quiet. Don’t wake her.”

DOROTHEA

But I’d been awake. For a while.

LUCY

“I’ll go get some paper towels.”

LUCY goes.

DOROTHEA

I kept my eyes shut. I was too tired to talk. I listened to John breathe. He was holding his breath until he had to draw in a sharp bit of air. How bad was it, really? I wasn’t awake when John talked to the doctor, so I wasn’t sure. I tried to keep the rise and fall of my chest regular and calm so he wouldn’t know I was awake. I heard the door open.

LUCY returns.

LUCY

“Can you lift your feet? Some got on your shoes, if you—”

JOHN

“It’s fine.”

LUCY

“At least let me—”

JOHN

“It’s fine.”

LUCY leaves.

DOROTHEA

I heard the door again, then John’s breathing in the silence. It was sharp, ragged. My memory was full of snatches of images—Lucy standing over me, John on the phone, straps holding me down under a siren, then waking up here. But I didn’t hear any beeps or hisses from machines, so it couldn’t be that bad. I felt a flutter in my abdomen— The blessing I was waiting for, that I prayed for. I listened to John’s breath shudder in and out. I thought, ‘If he just takes one deep breath, it will show that he can relax, that it’s okay.’ But his breath kept quivering. I could have just opened my eyes and talked to him. But that’s not what I wanted.

I wanted him to get up, cross the room, and lay down beside me. To bring that gasoline perfume into this sterile room, to put his head against my chest, and to bring his arm gently across me. And as his hand grasped my side and his cheek nuzzled my breast, he would feel a tiny movement, a soft, mouse-like trembling. His body would stiffen, and he would lift his head in surprise. He’d come sharply up on one elbow, mouth slightly open, and put his hand on my belly. He’d hold it there, and he’d feel the first flutterings of life. Tears would come to his eyes, and he would kiss me on the mouth. Maybe I’d smile. Maybe I’d open my eyes like a princess in a fairy tale. Maybe all I needed was for him to get into bed with me.

LUCY returns.

LUCY

“Do you want another hot chocolate?”

DOROTHEA

At the sound of Lucy’s voice, the baby in my womb leapt for joy. That made no sense to me. Was Lucy bearing some blessed child?

LUCY

“They had tulips in the hospital flower shop. Should I put them by the bed?”

JOHN

“It doesn’t matter.”

DOROTHEA

Lucy was there. And John was not in bed with me.

In unison, they take a breath.

ALL

Saturday.

DOROTHEA

Morning light again. So I must have dropped off. I felt hands on me.

JOHN

“We thank You for the glory that You have made,”

DOROTHEA

John and Lucy were praying over my body. But I wasn’t dead. Their eyes were closed. I turned my head and saw Lucy’s red tulips in a white vase on the nightstand by the window.

JOHN

“and pray to understand the complications you create.”

DOROTHEA

I wondered at the clean, spring snow shimmering in sunlight beyond the flower arrangement.

JOHN and LUCY

“Amen.”

DOROTHEA

Would the whirlwinds of snow be my last view?

LUCY

“She’s awake.”

JOHN

I kissed her.

DOROTHEA

John kissed me on the mouth, but didn’t climb into bed with me. Maybe it would have all been different if he’d climbed into bed with me. Maybe he could have convinced me.

JOHN

“Happy anniversary.”

DOROTHEA

I smiled at him. “Or at least the day we’re celebrating. Every day with you both is a blessing.”

LUCY

Of course she was the one smiling at us, giving us comfort while she was in the hospital.

DOROTHEA

“Did you bring our frozen piece of cake?”

JOHN

I laughed.

LUCY

Even I smiled at that.

DOROTHEA

Laughter, like the smile, pays big dividends with no price. Except, of course, to the one who has to make the joke from the hospital bed.

JOHN

“I have some good news.”

DOROTHEA

“I’m pregnant.”

JOHN

“You knew?”

LUCY

I would call that an inscrutable smile.

JOHN

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

LUCY

She just kept smiling.

JOHN

“Anyway, there’s something else.”

LUCY

The same ineffable smile.

JOHN

“They did an MRI this morning—”

DOROTHEA

“Did that hurt the baby?”

JOHN

“Not this kind. It’s... I don’t understand it. Less invasive or less magnetic or something.”

DOROTHEA

“As long as the baby’s safe.”

JOHN

“You don’t understand. There’s a growth... in your brain. It’s why you...”

Silence.

DOROTHEA

“I see.”

LUCY

I didn’t understand how she could keep smiling through that news. But it was perfect: a serious, letting the news sink in, but let’s not let this ruin the moment smile.

JOHN

“The tests this morning were inconclusive. The doctors want to move aggressively, to... treat you.”

DOROTHEA

“And the baby?”

JOHN

“The doctors say you can have more.”

DOROTHEA

“No. Absolutely not. How can you even say that?”

JOHN

“I know, but they say you could die.”

DOROTHEA

“There must be other options.”

LUCY

“No good ones.”

JOHN

“The doctors suggested it. Without more tests, they can’t even tell exactly what’s growing inside you.”

DOROTHEA
“A baby is growing inside me.”

JOHN
“Don’t get snippy.”

DOROTHEA
“What’s the other option?”

JOHN
“They can’t do anything while keeping the baby safe.”

DOROTHEA
“Lucy said there were no good options. What are my bad options?”

JOHN
“The doctors said you have to have an—”

DOROTHEA
“Lucy, tell me the truth.”

JOHN
“I am telling you the truth.”

DOROTHEA
“Lucy?”

A moment.

LUCY
“Once you’re three months pregnant, there’s more they can do. More tests they can run. Even types of chemotherapy if you need it. After three months there are therapies that won’t hurt the child.”

DOROTHEA
“But they’d hurt the baby now?”

JOHN
“There’s a tumor on your right cerebellum with a cyst the size of a golf ball on it. Doing nothing is not an option.”

DOROTHEA
“Can’t they tell how long I have? If I can survive three months?”

LUCY
“They couldn’t even tell if it was malignant or benign, whether or not it had spread—”

JOHN

“If they do nothing, they don’t expect you to live long enough to do more tests, let alone to have a viable baby.”

DOROTHEA

“Why couldn’t they tell?”

LUCY

“They can’t do the right kind of tests without hurting the baby.”

DOROTHEA

“There’s no way they could tell?”

JOHN

“They were very clear that to save you they need to—”

DOROTHEA

“What aren’t you telling me?”

JOHN

“I’m telling you everything, that the doctors said you need to have an—”

DOROTHEA

“Lucy?”

LUCY

“They said they could perform brain surgery to see whether the tumor—”

JOHN

“They are not boring a hole in your skull. We know what we need to know, and we need to listen to the doctors—”

DOROTHEA

“Not if there’s a chance to save our child. God is gracious. You’re just too scared to have faith.”

JOHN

“How can you say that?”

DOROTHEA

“After your parents’ accident—”

JOHN

“This isn’t about my parents—”

DOROTHEA

“It’s understandable, but if doing brain surgery can tell us more, we can’t let your fear get in the way of—”

LUCY

“I agree with John. It’s too big of a risk. The doctors said brain surgery was the worst option. John’s listening to the what the doctors are saying, he isn’t thinking about his parents.”

DOROTHEA

“John’s parents’ death was an accident. This baby isn’t.”

JOHN

“You can get pregnant again.”

DOROTHEA

“What if we terminate, and then the tumor’s benign?”

LUCY

“Then you’re safe and you and John can have another.”

DOROTHEA

“We don’t know that. After a year of trying? How sorry are we going to be if we don’t try brain surgery and the tumor’s benign? How much repentance are we going to need if this is a life we never get to meet because we don’t have faith? That’s what my dad did, and look how his life has ended up. He’s banished. Doctors don’t know everything. If we do what they want, we’ll always wonder who this person was, always feel like we’re waiting for someone who’s never arriving. It’s not like a baby can just be replaced.”

JOHN

“I think we need to listen to the doctors.”

LUCY

“Me, too.”

DOROTHEA

“Well. I got my wish. Happy anniversary to me.”

LUCY

I’d never heard Dorothea be sarcastic before.

JOHN

Her tone was sharp, but her smile was soft. Like part of her was out of focus.

DOROTHEA

“You didn’t bring our wedding cake?”

JOHN

“We followed the ambulance last night, neither of us have been back home—”

DOROTHEA

“Someone’s going to have to go and get it.”

LUCY

“I thought you were joking about—”

DOROTHEA

“That was before I knew about my situation. I’m not going to miss my anniversary cake. Especially if this is my only anniversary.”

JOHN

“Don’t say—”

DOROTHEA

“Why don’t you go get the cake, Lucy?”

LUCY

“John drove—”

JOHN

“You can take my car.”

DOROTHEA

“It’s in the freezer. Clearly labeled.”

LUCY

Of course Dorothea labeled the food in her freezer.

LUCY leaves.

DOROTHEA

And so we were alone.

JOHN

Just like on our wedding day.

DOROTHEA

We sat at a reception table by ourselves.

JOHN

There was no family table. My grandparents were dead by then, my aunts and uncles weren’t people I saw often. Cousins I saw at holidays, but otherwise... We split them up at tables around the church’s rec room. It wasn’t a big group.

DOROTHEA

I kept my phone on the table, hoping my parents would call. That a perfunctory voicemail in the morning chastising my choice of wedding dates wouldn’t be all I heard from them. Besides the money for my dress, they didn’t even send a present.

JOHN

Dorothea would never count the deed to the house a present.

DOROTHEA

I'd been living there for years, ever since Dad got kicked out of the congregation and I stayed to finish high school. Besides, Dad gave the house to John, not to us. If something happened to me, John would keep it. If something happened to John, it would have to be willed to me.

JOHN

The church let us use the rec room for free, and a cousin of mine had a PA system for his computer and did an okay job with the music.

DOROTHEA

I made my own cake. The same red and white one my mother would have made.

JOHN

My aunts made a sea of fried chicken, scalloped potatoes, and the garage donated a keg and a crate of champagne.

DOROTHEA

My aunts and uncles didn't come. They wouldn't go to the church that drove out my father, they said. As if it was the church's fault.

LUCY enters.

LUCY

I was at a table near them. I sat with some of John's friends from the garage. I suppose I knew them from high school, but every beefy, crew-cut guy stuffed into a suit looked the same to me. And their wives spoke like dog whistles.

DOROTHEA

I couldn't stop checking my phone.

JOHN

"Do you want me to put it in my pocket?"

A moment.

DOROTHEA

I gave it to him. At that moment, I put an end to my childish ways.

LUCY

I've never felt as alone as I did among that whirlwind of crew-cuts and dog whistles.

DOROTHEA

Then it was time for the maid of honor speech.

LUCY

I admit it: John's thickset compatriots wouldn't let my champagne glass empty, and it was my first time drinking.

DOROTHEA

But that was no excuse.

LUCY

But that was no excuse. “Ladies and gentlemen, we’ve come to the part of the evening when I am supposed to do honor to the blushing bride and her smudgy groom! Though both have known their share of sadness, and there are obvious absences at their table—”

DOROTHEA

“Lucy—”

LUCY

“—whatever absences they’re feeling in this moment, it can’t compare to what I feel in my heart. Dorothea, what will become of my best friend now? Will a forty-hour work week be enough? How could it be? Let me move in with the two of you! I’ll cook, I’ll clean... except I don’t do either. Anyway, John, you probably wouldn’t approve, right?”

JOHN

“Er, right.”

LUCY

“Right. Right. And you shouldn’t. You shouldn’t. Never before has there been a more blameless couple, a more righteous couple, one as whole and— If they’ve suffered like wicked people—and they have suffered, haven’t they?—it’s surely through no fault of their own. And now they’ll suffer loneliness no more. When you’re panting together, tonight, your first night, in bed, in each other’s arms—”

DOROTHEA

“Okay, Lucy—”

LUCY

“—may there be a lifetime of satisfied sleep for you. But the rest of us will return tonight to our ordinary lives, filled with night visions, wondering how many more nights lie ahead of us. Thank you.”

DOROTHEA

There was no applause, of course.

JOHN

Luckily my cousin had the sense to start the music and announce, “Will the bride and groom please have their first dance?”

DOROTHEA

We were supposed to cut the cake first, but I was glad for the impromptu save.

LUCY

I stumbled back to my seat where I was presented with another glass of champagne. “I

think she's had enough," one of the dog whistles said, but the side of beef didn't listen. I winked at him and spilled some of the champagne down my cleavage.

JOHN

I stood up and offered Dorothea my hand.

DOROTHEA

I took it and stood up.

JOHN

Some people said the song we picked was sad.

LUCY

It was damned sad.

JOHN

But what I heard was, the chorus: "You can rely on me honey."

DOROTHEA

"You can come by any time you want."

LUCY

Okay, sure, but "voices escape, singing sad, sad songs, tuned to chords strung down your cheeks, bitter melodies turning your orbits around"? That's damned sad. It's like a curse. And during such a blessed night?

DOROTHEA

So we danced.

JOHN

And danced.

DOROTHEA

And danced.

JOHN

And there was no one to cut in.

DOROTHEA

And I didn't have to dance with my dad.

JOHN

And I didn't have to dance with my mom.

DOROTHEA and JOHN

And the dance never had to end.

Except, of course, it did.

DOROTHEA

When the song ended.

JOHN

It turned out I liked drinking. A lot.

LUCY

But even after the song ended.

DOROTHEA

It felt like we were still dancing.

JOHN

Breathing in unison.

DOROTHEA and JOHN

I felt like dancing. I felt like dancing. A lot.

LUCY

I became aware of the room applauding, and I blushed. We'd been alone until then.

DOROTHEA

I did a little bow. I felt like an idiot. I was glad we were sitting at a table by ourselves to eat.

JOHN

But I didn't want to dance with any of these beefeaters.

LUCY

And it wasn't even that weird. I'd been to plenty of weddings where the bride and groom sat by themselves. So our parents weren't there—so what?

JOHN

I knew who I wanted to dance with.

LUCY

Lucy got up and stumbled toward us.

DOROTHEA

“Here comes trouble.”

JOHN

She fell into John's lap.

DOROTHEA

LUCY

“It’s not fair to dance with my best friend.”

DOROTHEA

“Do you want to dance with me, Lucy?”

LUCY

“I’ll take what I can get.”

JOHN

So they danced. To some fast number that my cousin put on to attract people to the dance floor.

DOROTHEA

It was a fast song, but Lucy slow-danced with me.

LUCY

I held her tight and put my cheek against her chest. I would have climbed inside her if I knew how.

JOHN

I didn’t want to dance with anyone else, so I stayed at the table and ate. Then Dorothea’s phone rang.

DOROTHEA

I heard the familiar ring tone over the music.

JOHN

I took the phone out of my coat pocket.

DOROTHEA

I disentangled myself from Lucy—

LUCY

“Wait—”

DOROTHEA

I ran to the table.

JOHN

I handed her the phone.

DOROTHEA

I was breathless. “Hello?”

LUCY

I was scared I’d be sick, and it took me two tries to get into the bathroom. But I just

heaved at the reception. I didn't vomit until I started walking home at the end of the evening. It turns out I don't actually like drinking.

LUCY leaves.

JOHN

I know they're Dorothea's parents, but it would have meant a lot to me, too, if we heard from them. If we had their blessing besides a deed and a check for a dress.

DOROTHEA

"Okay. Thanks for calling."

JOHN

"Who was it?"

DOROTHEA

"Our plane's leaving an hour later out of St. Louis tomorrow. But we'll still be in Charleston by two o'clock."

JOHN

We were taking a little honeymoon since I got the Monday after Easter off. My boss even said I didn't need to come in on Tuesday, but I wouldn't get paid for it. That seemed fair. We were excited to have two nights in Charleston.

DOROTHEA

It was nice of the travel agent to call. Or maybe it's normal. It's the only time I've flown.

JOHN

Dorothea's parents still hadn't called us back at the hospital either. I stood over her in the silence of her monitors and couldn't think of a worse first anniversary. That showed a lack of imagination.

DOROTHEA

"We need to talk about something without Lucy."

JOHN

"We're going to get through this."

DOROTHEA

"I might not."

JOHN

"Don't say—"

DOROTHEA

"If, during the operation—"

JOHN

“You’re not having brain surgery—”

DOROTHEA

“You need to support me when I’m unconscious. You’ll be the one the doctors come to for decisions.”

JOHN

“The doctors will know what’s best.”

DOROTHEA

“I want the baby protected.”

JOHN

“It’s not viable yet— it’s not even a fetus yet.”

DOROTHEA

“It’s a life, and I need you to tell me you’ll protect it.”

JOHN

“If you die, it dies.”

DOROTHEA

“I want them to exhaust all the options, even if it’s risky for me, before they—”

JOHN

“If something goes wrong, I’ll listen to the doctors and—”

DOROTHEA

“Consider this my last request.”

JOHN

“No, no, no. Not your last.”

DOROTHEA

“My anniversary present, then.”

JOHN

“But it’s pointless for you to risk yourself—”

LUCY returns.

LUCY

I should have knocked.

JOHN

We were still talking it over when Lucy got back to the room with the anniversary cake.

LUCY

“It needs to defrost.”

JOHN

“Anyway, who says you’re even having the operation? Have we made any definite decision?”

DOROTHEA

“What do my parents think?”

JOHN

“Well...”

LUCY

“It’s hard to...”

DOROTHEA

“Someone told them?”

LUCY

“We called them.”

JOHN

“But they haven’t called back.”

DOROTHEA

“When did you call them?”

LUCY

“Late last night. They probably just haven’t gotten the message yet.”

DOROTHEA

“You told them it was important?”

JOHN

“Honey, I’m sure they just haven’t checked their messages yet. It’s Holy Saturday, and they’re always so busy this time of year—”

DOROTHEA

“I inconvenience them every Holy Saturday, don’t I?”

JOHN

“Come on, your Dad’s just busy and hasn’t checked his messages yet. Besides, it’s a message from Lucy, so he probably doesn’t realize it’s about you. Anyway, they’d just be taking it all in, and I’ve been thinking about it all night. You’re pregnant. We can’t just take this for granted, sure, but the doctor says we need to terminate that and move forward with treatment for you. I don’t think there’s any reason for brain surgery.”

DOROTHEA

“Maybe the best thing is to just wait a couple months and move forward more aggressively then.”

JOHN

“You were foaming at the mouth last night.”

LUCY

“John.”

JOHN

“We can’t make light of this! You were foaming at the mouth, screaming gibberish, and they had to strap you down. That bag over you? It’s got chemicals to keep your seizures under control. There’s a golf ball latched to your brain. That’s why you’ve been having all those headaches. You really think you can just go a couple months without doing anything about this?”

DOROTHEA

“So we could do the surgery, and if it’s benign, everything’s okay. I live, the baby lives.”

LUCY

“Best case.”

JOHN

“Or they discover it’s spread and inoperable and you’ve let someone saw open your skull for no reason. They can get so much more information from a CAT scan if you just get an abortion—”

DOROTHEA

“I’m not letting this baby die—”

JOHN

“You may not have a choice.”

DOROTHEA

“I’m not losing anyone else from my family.”

JOHN

“This isn’t losing someone, just waiting until—”

LUCY

“You don’t understand waiting for someone who finally arrives—”

JOHN

“I’m waiting for people to arrive every holiday—”

LUCY

“Try living blocks from your parents who never—”

DOROTHEA

“We all know about losing people—”

LUCY

“Your Dad had sex with that woman, that wasn’t your choice. John’s parents got hit by a drunk, that wasn’t his choice. My parents stopped talking to me, that wasn’t my choice. We have a choice here. I’m not going to lose you. What would happen with John if you weren’t around?”

JOHN

“She’s going to be around.”

LUCY

“Right. Right. Because she’s going to do what the doctors say, have the abortion, have the treatment, and stay with us.”

DOROTHEA

“It’s not your choice.”

LUCY

Words were inadequate, so I kissed her.

JOHN

Lucy kissed Dorothea, on the lips, right in front of me.

DOROTHEA

Lucy’s lips were... like figs. They tasted sweet, but covered something shameful.

LUCY

Well. That complicated things. I couldn’t even look at John. So I fled.

LUCY leaves.

DOROTHEA

“Lucy!”

JOHN

“What was that about?”

DOROTHEA

“When can I have the surgery?”

JOHN

“The doctor said if we were going to do it, the sooner the better. This evening. But I wish you would—”

DOROTHEA

“I want to see you and a baby under that half moon window. You need a new family. What kind of woman would I be if I didn’t want you to have a baby?”

A moment.

JOHN

“All right.”

DOROTHEA

Then John kissed me. On the forehead.

JOHN

I couldn’t put my lips where Lucy’s had been. It seemed indecent.

In unison, JOHN and DOROTHEA
take a breath.

JOHN and DOROTHEA

The First Night.

DOROTHEA seems unconscious.

JOHN

I was working up the courage to do what I wanted. It was so simple. I was going to do it. I really was. I believed then, and I believe now, that it’s what God wanted me to do. It was easy. I wanted to get into bed with her. I wanted to lie next to her, and wrap my arms around her. To shelter her from the storm that surrounded us.

It was just before midnight, so still Good Friday. Jesus was dead. Growing up, that’s what Dorothea’s Dad always used to tell me, back when he was our church’s pastor. Before he got that woman pregnant. Before he drove her to that clinic. Before someone recognized him coming out with her.

But back when I had complete faith in him, he told me that Good Friday and Holy Saturday are the only days of the year that Jesus is dead. And try as I might, I couldn’t completely deny that maybe we were abandoned. That maybe this first night in the hospital might be Dorothea’s last.

So I did what I most wanted. I pushed myself to my feet. I swayed on seasick legs, and took baby steps to Dorothea’s bed. I lowered the railing on the side without the IV. Cold sweat dripped stinging ocean water into my eyes, but I held the bed like a life raft and climbed in beside her. I put my cheek against her breast, and wrapped my arms around the wires that embraced her body. I breathed with the rise and fall of her soft stomach. The bed floated through a stormy sea, but if some creature should capsize us, our breath would stop together. If she left and I could just continue on, wouldn’t that make a lie of every vow? When her Dad got that woman pregnant, didn’t that make a lie of his vows to Dorothea’s mother? If Dorothea died, I would never recover. I would sink into the

depths, stone cold, alone, breathless, but holding her hand. There was no other option if my love was true. Then Lucy came back.

LUCY returns.

LUCY

I came in with more coffee and hot chocolate. John was on the chair, his head between his legs.

JOHN

She brought tulips and kicked over my full cup of hot chocolate. I didn't do it. I didn't climb into Dorothea's bed. I imagined it over and over, but I couldn't do what I felt called to do. I couldn't even keep my head up to watch her breathing. I denied all night that this might be the last night with Dorothea. I said to myself over and over again, 'This is the first night, not the last.' And Lucy was the one who took care of me.

LUCY

"Darn it!"

JOHN

"Quiet. Don't wake her."

LUCY

"I'll go get some paper towels."

LUCY leaves.

JOHN

I have never stopped regretting that I didn't climb into bed with Dorothea just before midnight.

LUCY returns.

JOHN (cont.)

Never.

LUCY

"Can you lift your feet? Some got on your shoes, if you—"

JOHN

"It's fine."

LUCY

"At least let me—"

JOHN

"It's fine."

LUCY

Something was wrong. I mean, beyond the obvious. I put my hand on his shoulder:
“John?”

JOHN

“Don’t touch me.”

In unison, all three take a breath.

ALL

Sunday.

DOROTHEA

Morning light.

JOHN

I was back in my chair, watching the sheets move up and down.

DOROTHEA

Had a whole night passed?

LUCY

John always said Easter Sunday was the day for reunions, when the people to whom we
cried out, for whom we most longed, returned... But...

DOROTHEA

I turned my head and saw the pure snow covering the outside world, past the pane of
glass, past my vase of tulips. Dear Lucy. She never let me down.

LUCY

I couldn’t help it, I started crying.

JOHN

I managed to get up and give Lucy a handkerchief.

DOROTHEA

“Was the surgery a success?”

LUCY

John’s handkerchief just made me cry more.

DOROTHEA

They were facing me, looking grave, John silent, Lucy crying. “Did we lose the baby?”

JOHN

I walked to the side of the bed and put my hand on Dorothea’s, feeling the blood pulse
through it.

DOROTHEA

I smiled up at John as he took my hand.

JOHN

I forced myself to smile down at her. It is not ours to reason why.

DOROTHEA

Since John smiled, I didn't think we'd lost the baby. Yet.

LUCY

I blew my nose and tried to get it together.

DOROTHEA

"What did they find? If the surgery didn't work, can we wait until I'm far enough along for chemo?"

JOHN

Outside I smiled, but inside the dry heat of a desert whirlwind blew sand against me, cutting my eyes, my brain, my heart, and I screamed in rage.

LUCY

There was no way John was making it through this.

JOHN

But I only screamed on the inside.

DOROTHEA

"John?" I tried to reach up to him, but I couldn't move.

JOHN

No purpose of the Lord can be thwarted, and His ways are too wonderful for me to know.

DOROTHEA

Was I strapped down again? Maybe I'd been raving and that's why they weren't listening to me? But why couldn't I move?

JOHN

I was bellowing inside, but we do not speak against the Lord's blessings in this world that is resplendent and luminous beyond comprehension.

DOROTHEA

John's smile turned into a death mask of agony.

JOHN

We do not speak against his curses. We do not doubt. Beyond all else, we do not doubt. Even looking down at Dorothea in the morning light shining in the hospital's window, I would will myself not to doubt. At the very least, I would be silent. I would breathe no blasphemy. I was afraid if I spoke, I might damage Dorothea's soul.

DOROTHEA
He was huffing.

JOHN
“I can see the sheets moving up and down.”

LUCY
“No, John.”

DOROTHEA
Like a bull snorting.

JOHN
“I can see it though.”

DOROTHEA
The words came out in shudders.

LUCY
“No, John.”

JOHN
“And I feel a pulse in her hand.”

DOROTHEA
Why was he talking about my pulse and my breath?

A whirlwind of snow begins gently.

LUCY
I saw his reflection in the window, outside of which a whirlwind of snow began to blow. I wanted to stroke Dorothea’s hair, but it was too perfect. “No, John.”

JOHN
“But look at the sheets. Doesn’t it look like they’re moving?”

DOROTHEA
Of course they were moving.

LUCY
“It looks like it.”

DOROTHEA
They are. They are moving.

LUCY
“But they’re not.”

DOROTHEA

“I’m here. I’m right here!” I screamed, forcing my way out of the bed, standing in front of the window, but they just kept staring at the bed. Then I saw it: my body lying there, still and breathless.

LUCY

“We’re just used to seeing her breathe.”

DOROTHEA

We were separated.

JOHN

“But I can see the sheets moving.”

DOROTHEA

Why wasn’t he cursing my loss?

LUCY

“It was nice of them to let us stay all night, but they said they’d need the room at nine.”

DOROTHEA

Why wasn’t he commanding God to answer for taking me away?

JOHN

“It just looks like she’s sleeping.”

DOROTHEA

Why didn’t he use blasphemous rage to drag me back, or follow me into the coming darkness? Because, like my father, he was a coward. Using a code of silence to hide what they could not understand. Refusing to question, refusing to challenge the whirlwind, and instead repenting out of fear in dust and ashes for some crime they didn’t commit.

LUCY

“She’s at peace now.”

DOROTHEA

I was definitely not at peace.

JOHN

I finally saw: she was breathless.

LUCY

“She’s in a better place.”

DOROTHEA

I was right there.

JOHN

I didn't answer, but I hoped my silence would add to her soul's peace. I was afraid the rageful words that struggled to escape my lungs might send her to hell.

LUCY

The nurse came in, head bowed, and lowed, "I'm sorry folks, but we need the room." John lost it.

DOROTHEA

Fight for me.

LUCY

He sobbed.

DOROTHEA

Speak up for me.

LUCY

I went to John and put my hand on his shoulder.

JOHN

The gesture felt familiar, a woman calming my tears with a hand on my shoulder. It kept me from howling.

DOROTHEA

Storm for me.

LUCY

Behind John, outside the window, was the whirlwind of snow. What could I say that wouldn't make it worse? I just smiled.

DOROTHEA

I walked to the window, staring down the whirlwind.

LUCY

I saw a flash of red streak by outside, then a thud.

JOHN

"What was that?"

LUCY

We went to the window. A cardinal lay dead in the snow.

DOROTHEA

I said to John: "I'm still here. How can you say nothing?"

JOHN

Just then, the surgeon came in. He said, "Oh, good. You're still here. I know we chatted

last night, but I wanted to see you now that you've had some time for the news to sink in."

LUCY

The nurse looked patient. She must have seen this sort of thing everyday, but she looked genuinely concerned. How did she manage that?

JOHN

How could I tell him that the news hadn't sunk in at all? He continued, "I just wanted to touch base and let you know, again, that there was nothing anyone could have done. It wouldn't have mattered what choice you made. It was so far gone, and the cerebral hemorrhage so massive, that, even if she hadn't been on the operating table, she would have died."

LUCY

"We had no choice?"

JOHN

"No choice that could have saved her." But, I had to ask, "What caused it?" The doctor looked up and to the left, just like Dorothea's dad used to when I asked him why my parents got into their car that night. Then he looked me in the eyes. "This was biology, plain and simple. It was how she was made."

LUCY

"Come on, John, we need to let them have the room. I'll bring the tulips for the funeral." John kissed Dorothea one last time.

JOHN

I kissed her, on the lips. Maybe, like a fairy tale, it would wake her up.

LUCY

We left.

JOHN and LUCY leave.

DOROTHEA

I looked at the snow spinning in a whirlwind outside the window. I looked at the dead cardinal. And I knew there was no answer. Maybe God saw the cardinal fall, and maybe He loved that bird, but not in any way I could understand. What a pointless death, knowing you hit something, but never fathoming how the invisible surface killed you mid-flight. Did the cardinal, bleeding red against the white snow, even know enough to confront the whirlwind that killed it? When it's John and Lucy's turn, will they dare face the giant eye of the Leviathan that pulls them down into the abyss? Will they question it?

JOHN and LUCY return. Together.

DOROTHEA (cont.)

They will not. They keep their counsel, and do not sin with their lips—no red, bloody,

prideful words will escape their virgin, snow-white, breathless bodies. But before You show me my final vision of earth, I will speak again, even if it destroys my soul. When You breathed life into my womb, I knew what it was to have the sea of creation inside me. I knew what it was to have new life swim deep inside my watery depths. I knew what it meant to create in a way no man ever could. So, yes, I know the feeling of creating the leviathan under the cover of darkness, and I risked everything in order to create somebody worthy of being in Your world. Why was I not allowed to fulfill my dream? Why were John and I joined and then separated so violently? There is no reason. It is utterly capricious. I was wholly Yours, wholly righteous, and wholly consumed in Your fire. You are no more worthy of prayer than a volcano.

DOROTHEA, LUCY, and JOHN
stand in front of the horizon.

In unison, all three take a breath.

ALL

The First Night.

JOHN

She was breathless.

LUCY

His breathing was quick, but I knew it was from excitement.

DOROTHEA

This was the last image of Earth that I would see. It was shown to me after I spoke, but before I left entirely. I wasn't there, but I could see as John looked out the half-moon window.

JOHN

"Come to bed."

LUCY

"In a minute."

DOROTHEA

Was this final vision given to me because I chose to answer the whirlwind? Or would I have seen it regardless? Was it a blessing or a curse?

JOHN

I was afraid she was hurting. Her breathing was so shallow.

LUCY

It was my first night, so I was a little anxious.

JOHN

When I was cleaning the house for Lucy to come home to, I found the letter Dorothea's

dad brought to the funeral. They drove all night to be there, finally braving their old congregation's stares. In his letter, he said that he was sorry. But he could never say it out loud.

DOROTHEA

Mom put a letter in my coffin. No one read it.

JOHN

I think Dorothea would have forgiven him.

DOROTHEA

My sister didn't even attend. She was probably glad the last remnant of the first family was gone.

JOHN

So I'm trying to forgive him, too.

LUCY

I felt euphoric, and my whole breast was tingling.

JOHN

Suddenly, her whole lungs filled—Lucy must have inhaled for a good ten seconds before slowly releasing it.

LUCY

There was just a little pinch, and then the milk finally flowed, just like she'd been learning at the hospital. No one told me newborns don't know how to nurse. I held little Dorothea to my breast, and sang to her: "The monster's gone, it's on the run, and mommy's here."

JOHN

Porcelain moonlight came through the half-moon window and fell on little Dorothea's empty crib.

LUCY

Some people in the congregation thought it was morbid us naming her Dorothea, but we both wanted to honor Dorothea's memory with this little one.

DOROTHEA

I watched Lucy sing a lullaby to her and my husband's child under the shadow formed by my window's cross-hatch. But what kind of woman would I be if I didn't want John to have a baby?

JOHN

It was Lucy's first night back home from the hospital after a routine delivery. Though they kept her for a few days just to give her a rest.

LUCY

No one told me that during labor they might take a scalpel to the skin between my anus and vagina. The skin ripped apart down there during birth even after they cut it. The tear was big enough I needed stitches.

JOHN

During the labor, I walked by the room where Dorothea spent her last night.

LUCY

I stayed in the hospital a few days until the stitches were removed, but I was still bleeding pretty heavily, my body dumping the extra blood, mucus and tissue it had needed to nourish the baby. I didn't tell John any of this. If he couldn't handle hearing about my period...

JOHN

I stopped in front of Dorothea's hospital room door. Just before midnight. And felt the regret anew that I didn't climb into bed with her that last night.

LUCY

I think Dorothea, senior, would have liked meeting this little one.

DOROTHEA

I stared at my namesake. And she stared back at me. I guess we weren't as separated as I was from John and Lucy.

LUCY

Little Dorothea looked like she was staring at something next to me, but newborns' eyes aren't focused yet. They don't see what we do. I looked over my shoulder out of instinct, though, and, for a minute, just a breath, really, I thought I saw Dorothea standing next to me.

DOROTHEA

Lucy saw me.

LUCY

I started to say something, but couldn't.

DOROTHEA

I guess I wasn't as separate from any of them as I thought.

LUCY

I struggled to speak, but could only sputter out ragged breaths. The tears began to grow inside me—

DOROTHEA

I reached out and put my hand on Lucy's shoulder.

LUCY

Her eyes shined like the little girl I grew up with. Like the little girl I held. The little one who I loved more than I ever thought I could love another human being.

JOHN

Lucy's eyes watered. I didn't know if she was hurting or happy.

LUCY

Dorothea's eyes hadn't changed at all.

DOROTHEA

I smiled at Lucy, although I wasn't sure I wanted to. I tried to tell her that everything could end, in an instant, for no reason. That this blessing and curse gives weight to every moment of our lives.

LUCY

Maybe Dorothea was trying to tell me something? I guess my baby, the little one who finally gave me and John the family we were waiting for, never would have existed if Dorothea hadn't...

LUCY can't finish her thought.

DOROTHEA

But how could any living person bear to realize life's instability?

LUCY

Shhh. Let's not talk about that, right little one?

DOROTHEA

Lucy separated herself from me.

JOHN

If I'm up in the darkness just before midnight, I regret what I didn't do. The more I lose, the more I realize the present is all we have.

DOROTHEA

I had already told the whirlwind my full, so I said nothing about this final vision. I felt myself fading, but I thought: no matter where I was headed, currents from the past would keep them from being able to move into the future without me.

JOHN

But God is gracious, and Lucy is full of light, like the morning star that has guided ships for millenia.

LUCY

"I think she's asleep." I put her in the crib.

JOHN

“Are you in pain?”

LUCY

“A little. I’ll probably get some blood on the sheets. They gave me these pads at the hospital to take home, but—”

JOHN

“The sheets can be bleached.”

DOROTHEA

Their memories of me, when full of light, would be a final blessing.

LUCY

“I miss her.”

DOROTHEA

Their memories of me, when an unfillable void, would be a final curse.

JOHN

“I do, too.”

DOROTHEA

Both Dorotheas were silent.

LUCY

“Better get some sleep while we can.”

DOROTHEA

So John and Lucy lay back with their separate thoughts. I closed my eyes and took a final breath of this world.

LUCY

I just wanted to treat little Dorothea like I did her namesake. I’d be a good mother if I did that, right? I didn’t want to admit I was worried, so I just concentrated on my breathing.

JOHN

I put the letter from Dorothea’s father in the Bible he gave me when I was a teenager. And, despite everything, Lucy and I still did our Bible study every Friday. I felt so blessed lying beside her that I thought I might start to cry. So I just concentrated on my breathing.

DOROTHEA

For what is life if not a breath?

LUCY

We met our grandchildren, even one great-grandchild.

JOHN

We died old and full of days.

ALL

And every night was as blessed as The First Night.

DOROTHEA, LUCY and JOHN
In front of the horizon
In a whirlwind of snow.

In unison, all three take a breath.

END OF PLAY