

ACT TWO

Scene 1

The garden. That unreal time between night and the break of day in the early hours of the morning. It is cold and dark and frosty, but still and windless; it feels as if the garden is somehow suspended outside of time. The branches of the apple tree are black and twisted and spindly like charred limbs. There is no moon, or, if there is, it is hidden. Lori is wandering, smoking. A light goes on in a downstairs window, casting a muted pool of light over the lawn, which dissolves into the shadows. If Lori notices the light, she does not react, or she does not care. A moment later, Phyllis comes out of the house.

PHYLLIS. You're smoking. I didn't know you smoked. *(Beat.)* Since when do you smoke? *(Lori does not reply.)* Well, it's your body. But I'm — *(Beat.)* Just don't do it in front of your sisters. They look up to you too much.

LORI. No, they don't. / Not any more.

PHYLLIS. Oh, they do, you know. *(Beat.)* And the way they — rushed home from school to see you, oh they couldn't wait to see you. And you wouldn't even so much as look at them.

LORI. Mum — I couldn't. How could I, Mum? *(Beat.)*

PHYLLIS. Well you can't lie in bed all day. It isn't healthy. You're not going to get better by lying in bed all day. *(Silence.)* What are you doing out here?

LORI. Having a cigarette.

PHYLLIS. I can see that.

LORI. Well then.

PHYLLIS. Lori — *(She stops herself. Beat.)* Will you come inside? You'll catch your death. *(Beat.)* I didn't mean — *(Beat.)* Come on, pet. It's too cold to be outside.

LORI. Then go in.

PHYLLIS. Sorry?

LORI. If you're cold, then / go in.

PHYLLIS. Lori —

LORI. I didn't ask you to come outside. I'm not asking you to stay outside. So go in. If you're cold then go in. I'm not cold.

PHYLLIS. Don't be silly, of course you're cold.

LORI. I'm not cold.

PHYLLIS. Of course you're cold. *(Silence.)* It's the middle of winter. It's freezing. Of course you're cold.

LORI. Is that what you want, Mum, do you want me to agree with you, is it? If I say that I'm cold — and I'm not — but if I say that I am, will you leave me alone? *(Beat.)* Mum — please. I just want to be alone. Will you leave me alone? Will you do that, Mum, will you leave me alone?

PHYLLIS. I will do anything for you, Lori, anything. But I'm not leaving you alone, not like this, not now. Alright? Do you hear me? *(Beat.)*

LORI. I shouldn't be here. *(Beat.)*

PHYLLIS. What?

LORI. Here in Belfast, I mean. Jesus. *(Beat.)* It's all wrong, me being back here.

PHYLLIS. I know.

LORI. Then why did you bring me back here? Why couldn't I, why couldn't I — I don't know — it's wrong. Mum — why couldn't I've stayed across the water?

PHYLLIS. For goodness' sake, Lori —

LORI. No, I mean it, Mum you shouldn't have brought me back here.

PHYLLIS. And what were we supposed to do, ey, what were we supposed to do with you?

LORI. What were you supposed to do with me? Jesus, Mum.

PHYLLIS. I didn't mean it like that.

LORI. What were you supposed to do with me.

PHYLLIS. For crying out loud, will you stop twisting my words around. *(Beat.)* I'm sorry. You're ill. You don't mean it.

LORI. Oh, Jesus, Mum — Would you not — Oh, Jesus, would you not —

PHYLLIS. Would I not? Would I not what? *(Beat.)* Would I not what, Lori?

LORI. Would you not — Would you not — *(Beat.)* I just want to

be alone, Mum. Please.

PHYLLIS. What can I do, Lori?

LORI. Mum —

PHYLLIS. What are we going to do?

LORI. I —

PHYLLIS. Can you tell me that? What are we going to do? Where do we go from here, and how? How do we —

LORI. Mum please, just leave it —

PHYLLIS. Where did we go wrong, Lori? Was it something we did or didn't do? Because I've been trying and trying and I simply can't understand —

LORI. This isn't about you, Mum.

PHYLLIS. What?

LORI. I said / this isn't —

PHYLLIS. I heard what you *said*, Lori —

LORI. Well then.

PHYLLIS. — but I don't understand —

LORI. It isn't about you, Mum. It isn't anything to do with you.

PHYLLIS. Well, Lori, I don't know how you can say that because —

LORI. You're embarrassed, aren't you, Mum. See, you don't even try to deny it.

PHYLLIS. Lori —

LORI. Too late, Mum, it's obvious, you're embarrassed of me. Oh I can just imagine it, your, your coffee mornings, or golf, or book club, or whatever — so how are your three, Phyllis? — oh, my three are grand, well, two of them anyway, the other one tried to kill herself, bit embarrassing for all of us really —

PHYLLIS. You're ill, Lori. You don't know what you're saying. This isn't you talking. (*Beats.*) What happened to you, Lori? Did something bad happen to you over there?

LORI. No, Mum — listen — you can't — there wasn't any — *one thing* — Mum. Look Mum — I think — thinking about it — I think it's always been there, inside of me — the sadness — like a shadow — you know — and you can't — you can't — lose — your shadow, you can't — trick it away from you, or — or snip it off and bundle it into a drawer, you know? It's not you, but it's part of you, and — Don't cry Mum — Jesus — Mum, please — This is why, Mum — (*As Phyllis goes to hug her.*) don't touch me, Mum — please — go away from me — this is why I can't — don't you see — this is why I can't —

PHYLLIS. How did we fail you? We fed, and clothed, and loved you — Christ, we loved you — *love you* — love all of you — we read (*Past tense.*) stories to you at night — took you to the playground and pushed you on the swings — taught you to swim and to ride a bike — helped you with your homework, drove you to music lessons, to ice skating lessons, to your friends' houses — and these sound like little things but they aren't — we hovered the monsters up from under the bed when you wouldn't believe that they were gone — do you remember that — laughed when you laughed, cried when you cried — were happy so long as you were happy — were happy *whenever* you were happy. You were everything to us. We did everything it was in our power to do for you. We gave you everything it was in our power to give to you. And I know that there have been times when — I mean not for one second am I saying that things have been in any way perfect, because of course there have been tears, and arguments, and — But — Lori — can you tell me — please can you tell me — (*Silence. Lori does not say anything. Phyllis turns and walks away. Suddenlly.*) Well if you're not going to talk to me then let me tell you something, Lori. When you were born — (*She chuckles despite herself.*) — there was a woman in the bed across from me who'd just had twins. I can't for the life of me remember her name, now. She was only a year or so older than I was, but they were her fourth and fifth, she had three others already, all under five I think — can you imagine! I didn't for the life of me know how I was going to manage with just the one. With you. I was terrified. I was too scared to pick you up in case I dropped you. And one night I told this to your woman. And the following day she hatched a grand plan — and I don't know how on earth she managed to persuade me to go along with it — but she did — she had lipstick and heated rollers in her overnight bag, and we dolled ourselves up, did our hair and what have you — and then when the nurses took the babies away to bathe them, didn't the two of us sneak out of the hospital and into the pub across the way. We had a Bloody Mary each, and your woman turns to me and says, You're going to be alright, so you are, your baby's not going to break. "Your baby's not going to break."

Now why I'm telling you this, Lori, why I'm telling this to you — When we got back to the ward visiting hour had begun, and your father was already there, and oh he was furious with me for leaving you, absolutely furious. Anything could have happened, he