



LIGHTS UP on the dining room. No one is in the room yet, but there's a knock on the front door.

CHRISTINE

*(through door)*

Mom? Are you there?

A jingling of keys on the other side, and Christine opens the front door just as Older Joni shuffles into the dining room through the kitchen door.

OLDER JONI

Sorry, Christine. I didn't hear you knocking.

Christine shuts the door behind her and comes into the room.

CHRISTINE

That's okay. I've still got a key. *(She glances around.)* You haven't started packing yet?

OLDER JONI

I don't want to pack at all.

CHRISTINE

I know. But it will be easier after the move.

OLDER JONI

You mean the move into "assisted living." *(She rolls her eyes.)* I don't need to be assisted, you know. Not now. Not ever.

Christine walks over to the desk and starts trying to sort through the mountains of mail.

CHRISTINE

Mom, you can't keep putting everything off. We have to start talking about all of this.

OLDER JONI

All of what?

CHRISTINE

Everything. Your finances, this house, what you want to happen after—

Christine hesitates, staring down at the desk, not looking at her mother.

OLDER JONI

After what?

CHRISTINE

After... you know. (*She sighs.*) Don't make this any harder. It's already awful enough.

OLDER JONI

Yes, getting old *is* awful.

CHRISTINE

I didn't mean it like that. (*Pauses.*) Do you want me to help fix you lunch?

OLDER JONI

(*with a scowl*)

I can fix my own lunch, thank you. And I can fix yours too. I've been fixing things for you for years. Lunches, dinners, birthday cakes. I'm not so feeble that I can't do that anymore.

Older Joni starts to shuffle toward the door that leads into the kitchen. Christine looks around the room, helplessly.

CHRISTINE

How about I help you pack then? We've got to go through all this junk.

Older Joni seizes up in the doorway and turns around to glare at Christine.

OLDER JONI

Junk? You didn't have a problem with all of this *junk* when you still lived here.

CHRISTINE

And I haven't lived here for almost thirty years, but it's still the same junk that was here when I was a kid. We just need to throw a few things away, that's all. You don't need to get rid of everything.

OLDER JONI

If it were up to you, you'd send me packing to the nursing home with no more than the clothes on my back. And maybe not even that much!

CHRISTINE

Mother, please stop being melodramatic.

OLDER JONI

I miss the way it used to be. Back when your father was still here.

They're both silent for a moment, neither one looking at the other.

CHRISTINE

*(quietly, as if to herself)*

I miss that too.

Older Joni stares at a family portrait on the wall before turning away.

OLDER JONI

Let me start on lunch.

CHRISTINE

Mom, you don't have to do that—

Christine tries to stop her mother, but Older Joni disappears into the kitchen.

Sighing, Christine settles down at the desk and starts sorting through the bills, shaking her head and murmuring to herself as she does.

Middle-aged Joni comes into the room from the kitchen, carrying a briefcase. She checks her watch and shakes her head, as though she's late.

Christine glances up and see this younger version of her mother. She stands up from the desk and takes a single step closer, her jaw slack.

CHRISTINE

Mom?

MIDDLE-AGED JONI

Yes, honey?

CHRISTINE

What are you doing? Why are you dressed that way?

MIDDLE-AGED JONI

I'm on my way out. Can you tell your father his dinner is wrapped in foil on the bottom shelf of the refrigerator?

CHRISTINE

*(incredulously)*

I can't do that.

MIDDLE-AGED JONI

*(sighing)*

Why ever not?

CHRISTINE

Because Daddy's dead.

MIDDLE-AGED JONI

Don't be morbid.

Christine takes another step closer to Middle-Aged Joni before backing away.

CHRISTINE

I don't understand what's happening.

MIDDLE-AGED JONI

Fine. Don't worry about it. I'll just leave him a note in the kitchen.

Middle-Aged Joni disappears back into the kitchen. Christine stands there, speechless for a moment, before she moves toward the kitchen door, staring at it.

Just as she gets closer, the door swings open, and Young Joni comes strolling through, arrayed in her vintage dress, pearls, and apron, while carrying a birthday cake.

CHRISTINE

Oh no.

Young Joni sees Christine and tries to shield the birthday cake from her.

YOUNG JONI

Oh no indeed! You weren't supposed to see this yet.

CHRISTINE

I've already seen it, mother. That's my cake from my fifth birthday party. And that makes you my mother... at my fifth birthday party.

YOUNG JONI

*(with a shrug)*

Well, of course, I am. Who else would I be?

CHRISTINE

My mother *now*.

Young Joni sets down the cake in the middle of the table.

YOUNG JONI

*(playing along with what she thinks is a joke)*

And exactly who is your mother now?

CHRISTINE

Retired. Widowed. *(Pauses.)* Unhappy.

YOUNG JONI

Well, from the sounds of it, I'm certainly glad I'm not her. Now where are those birthday candles?

Young Joni glances around the table and the desk, searching all over for the candles, before wandering back into the kitchen to find them.

Christine backs against the wall by the desk, her eyes still fixed on the kitchen door.

After a moment, the door swings open again, and Older Joni emerges. Christine exhales a sigh of relief.

CHRISTINE

There you are. Listen, I have no idea what's going on here. I don't know if this is some kind of elaborate joke or what, but I just want to help you. That's all, Mom.

OLDER JONI

Joke? What joke?

The kitchen door swings open, and Middle-Aged Joni appears.

MIDDLE-AGED JONI

So I left a note for your father—

Middle-Aged Joni sees Older Joni, and she stops in the middle of the room. They stare at each other until the door swings open again, and Young Joni appears, holding a box of birthday candles.

YOUNG JONI

I found the candles!

Young Joni sees Middle-Aged Joni and Older Joni, and they all just marvel at one another. Christine circles each one of them, her eyebrows raised.

CHRISTINE

They're all you.

Christine stops in front of Young Joni, leaning in to get a closer look.

CHRISTINE

This is you on my fifth birthday.

Then Christine moves on to Middle-Aged Joni who clutches her briefcase closer, as though Christine might try to take it from her.

CHRISTINE

And this is you when you went back to work when I was in high school.

Christine finally stops in front of Older Joni.

CHRISTINE

And this is you now.

The Jonis all look at each other in wonder before shrugging it off, returning to what they were doing. Young Joni counts the birthday candles and starts searching for a lighter or match. Middle-Aged Joni reviews files in her briefcase. Meanwhile, Christine just paces back and forth, exasperated, while Older Joni smiles at her younger selves.

OLDER JONI

I did say I missed those old times.

CHRISTINE

I miss them too, but this— (*She waves her hands at the other Jonis*)—isn't normal, Mom.

MIDDLE-AGED JONI

(*glancing at her watch again*)

Who wants normal?

YOUNGER JONI

(*holding up five candles*)

Does somebody have a match for these candles?

Older Joni examines the birthday cake on the table.

OLDER JONI

I remember that cake. It took me six hours to bake and decorate it, and I was so exhausted by the end of it, but it was all worth it when you saw it. You squealed so loud. You loved that cake so much that you didn't want us to cut it. You didn't want anyone to have a piece.

CHRISTINE

I tried to hide it in my room and keep it forever. (*She smiles.*) That was a good day.

Older Joni shuffles around Middle-Aged Joni, admiring her business suit.

OLDER JONI

I remember that suit too. The very first one I bought for that job at the ad agency.

CHRISTINE

*(smiling)*

I was so proud of you when you went back to work.

Christine glances at the cake.

CHRISTINE

How about when you tried to freeze some of this cake for me, but Dad didn't know you were saving it, so he ate the rest of it himself?

OLDER JONI

*(shaking her head)*

I don't remember that.

YOUNG JONI & MIDDLE-AGED JONI

*(in unison)*

I do.

All three of the Jonis look at each other before they start to snicker at the same time. Christine can't help but smile too.

CHRISTINE

What's next?

OLDER JONI

We pack everything up like you said. At least we have some help now.

MIDDLE-AGED JONI

I'm not so sure about that. I've got to get to work.

YOUNGER JONI

And I've got a kitchen full of dirty dishes to wash up.

OLDER JONI

I promise both of you that you don't have to worry about any of that anymore.

Older Joni takes one of the moving boxes and puts a few odds and ends inside. Middle-Aged Joni and Younger Joni hesitate before they both start to help her. Together, the three of them pack up their lives.

Christine watches them for a beat before walking over to the desk and trying to sort through a few of the envelopes again. Then she runs her hands through her hair, exasperated.

CHRISTINE

Sometimes, it seems like it all went way too fast. That it was just over in an instant.

ALL THREE JONIS

How do you think we feel?

They're all silent for a long moment, nobody speaking or moving until finally, Young Joni shrugs and takes a step toward the table.

YOUNG JONI

So are we going to have cake now or what?

CHRISTINE

*(sighing again)*

It's not my birthday, Mom. It's definitely not my *fifth* birthday.

MIDDLE-AGED JONI

*(shrugging)*

That's okay.

Older Joni pats Christine's hand.

OLDER JONI

Just humor your mothers. We can sort out the finances and the packing soon enough.

Christine glances down at the stack of bills. She brushes them aside on the desk.

CHRISTINE

I guess this can wait.

She crosses to the table where she carefully cuts the birthday cake. Then she serves each of them a piece of cake, one after another, starting with Young Joni, then Middle-Aged Joni, and then Older Joni. Finally, Christine cuts a piece for herself as well.

The four of them sit together at the table and start to have their cake.

CHRISTINE

*(between bites)*

This is so much better than I remember it. I forgot how good your birthday cakes always were.

ALL THREE JONIS

I'm glad.

Christine smiles at them.

CHRISTINE

Thank you. All of you.

The Jonis smile and return to their birthday cake.

LIGHTS OUT.