

HOW WATER BEHAVES

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c. 2012
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1/11/2016

HOW WATER BEHAVES CHARACTERS

NAN, our luckless heroine

Middle to late 20's. She works at Crespy, a private high school. She's not happy about it. She is obsessed with Melinda Gates and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. She's married to Steve. Any race.

STEVE, our reluctant hero

Middle to late 20's. He designs websites. The website designing company he works for just went under, so he's out of work. He's married to Nan. Any race.

MOLLY Nan's best friend.

Middle to late 20's. She wants a baby. She works at Crespy, a private high school, with Nan. She's been an everyday hero to Nan since they were 8. Any race.

ALLEN BELL string theory poet

Early 30's. Well, he's our hero too...they're all heroes! Any race.

HANK Steve's older brother

Late 20's, early 30's. Hank is the same race as Steve. He's not much of a hero, actually. But he means well.

SALLY married to Hank

Late 20's, early 30's. She's made a lot of money in the market, and she's rich and not ashamed of it. Any race.

AYUTUNDE a young and lovely woman from Africa.

In her 20's. African.

STRING THEORY POETRY written mostly by Michael Dickman, with my apologies for edits and revisions.

SETTING

The living room of Nan and Steve's home, in a city that might be Troy, New York. Nan and Steve live in an old, cared for house, and the heating system is steam heat that comes from large, old fashioned, free standing radiators. One of those radiators is in the living room in a prominent position. The thermostat for the house is in the living room, probably right above the radiator, visible from everywhere in the audience.

Doors lead off to the kitchen and the bedroom. The front door of the house leads directly into the living room.

SOUND DESIGN

Music/sound design for Ilsa, the radiator, is essential for the piece, as well as water sounds for the website. The sound element of the play is where much of the magical realism of the piece can flourish. Steam heat tends to hiss and gurgle along when it is running, even when it is not turning on and clanging.

COSTUME

The story that clothing tells in the play is tricky to orchestrate, but is a visual narration of the "upside down" disruption of reality that occurs during the play—a world where it is colder inside than outside. It has practical considerations--for most of the play, Nan and Steve have to wear obscene amounts of warm clothing, but no actor can wear a pile of polar fleece and a down jacket without collapsing from heat stroke. One solution is to build the warm clothing costumes that look like there are five layers, when in reality there are only, say, one and a half.

HOW WATER BEHAVES

SCENE 1*

Evening. The end of Thanksgiving weekend

NAN

(The sound of a steam radiator clanging and steaming away.)

Nan and Steve walk into their house, carrying overnight bags. They start to take their coats off. They stop. Something's wrong. They hear the radiator. That's what's wrong.)

CRAP!!!

(Nan rushes over to the thermostat.)

Crap. Crap. Crap. I put it on hold when I thought I was turning it down. It's been 70 all weekend.

STEVE

70? What was it doing at 70? It's supposed to be set at 55.
(The radiator keeps clanging and hissing.)

NAN

I was cold, okay? The house wouldn't warm up, so I knocked it up to 70.

STEVE

And you left it at 70 since we left for Thanksgiving?

NAN

I thought I was turning it down! I'm sorry! It's not the end of the world, Steve. It's just a little heat.

STEVE

No, it's not! It's not heat anymore. It's money. Money we don't have.

NAN

Look, I'm turning it down.

(She begins pressing the temperature button.)

STEVE

Money we're never going to have. Money that we used to have and didn't even notice. We're going to have to move somewhere warm.

(She keeps pressing the button.)

Somewhere we don't need heat. Somewhere we--

(She is still pressing the button.)

What are you doing?

NAN

(She finishes pressing the button.)

I set it to 33.

STEVE

What?!?

(The clanging stops and the radiator makes that final hiss it makes when it's turning off.)

NAN

It's one degree above freezing. An acceptable margin of error.

STEVE

Are you serious?

NAN

I'm tired of you hating me about the heat. If water doesn't freeze at 33, then 33 it is.

STEVE

I don't hate you about the heat.

NAN

Yes you do.

STEVE

No, I don't.

NAN

You do a little.

STEVE

Okay. I...do.

NAN

And I'm tired of it. I used to love it when the heat kicked on, I used to think, mmmmm, I love the heat. But now when it kicks on I think, we're the people I always feel so bad for, in the supermarket, when their kid puts something in the cart they can't afford and longingly says

‘please’ and the mother pries it out of their fingers, puts it back on the shelf and sadly says “no”. We’re the people who can’t afford to feed our kids.

STEVE

Except we don’t have any kids.

(He tries to reach for the thermostat. Nan stands resolutely in front of it.)

NAN

Now I’m like you, I hate the heat. That heat is killing us. And then I think about those mothers in the supermarket, and how much they must hate the heat too, and how now I know how hard it is to be a mother-- you have to be full of love when in reality you hate everything you need and can’t afford.

STEVE

Are you hiding something from me? Do we have kids, and I just haven’t noticed?

NAN

Just because we’ve put the Master Plan on hold doesn’t mean I haven’t started exploring what it will feel like when it starts up again.

STEVE

You’re exploring motherhood by feeling what it feels like to hate everything?

(He tries again to get to the thermostat. She won’t move.)

NAN

It stays at 33. I can’t stand breaking your heart every time I turn the heat up. So I’m never doing it again.

STEVE

You know we can’t keep it there.

NAN

Sure we can. You can borrow my expedition weight Patagonia.

STEVE

It’s pink!

NAN

You’ll survive.

STEVE
The pipes will freeze.

NAN
Not in one night.

STEVE
Famous last words.
(He kisses her and pushes her gently aside.)
I'm turning it up to 55.
(He does.

The radiator clangs back on, banging and hissing.)

NAN
Coward.

STEVE
No, realist.

NAN
Same thing.
(She turns on the radio and settles in on the couch
with papers to grade.)

RADIO
(NPR)
"This hours programming brought to you by The Bill and Melinda Gates
Foundation, dedicated to the idea that all people deserve to live healthy
and productive lives."
(Music programming on NPR starts.)

NAN
They're so lucky.

STEVE
Who?

NAN
Bill and Melinda.

STEVE
Yeah. I bet Melinda never sets the thermostat to 33 just to piss Bill off.

NAN
You don't know that.

STEVE

They probably have upper-class heat like geo-thermal or radiant, it's so cheap and carbon neutral they set it at 90 and never even think about it.

(Steve has gotten out his laptop and is getting to work.)

The richer you are, the less it costs you to stay warm.

NAN

I know! It should be the other way around! But at least when Bill was sure his family was warm enough he took the rest of his money and turned it into the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. So that's good. It's like magic, really. He took all the money he made from little bits of electricity, from almost nothing, he took all that almost nothing and he spun it into gold.

STEVE

Well, actually, he sort of stole that almost nothing. He didn't even write the original Microsoft program—he paid the guy who *did* write it like 250 bucks.

NAN

Wow. You sort of steal something that's almost nothing, and you spin it into a better world.

(She sighs.)

I wish we could do that. I'd love to sort of steal something so we could change the world. Wouldn't you?

STEVE

In the first place, Bill Gates didn't know he was stealing it because it really was worth 250 dollars at the time, and in the second, he didn't steal it to make the world better, he stole it to get rich.

NAN

Yes, but once you get rich everything is so much easier. So if sort of stealing something makes it easier to make the world better—

STEVE

No, Nan. It's still stealing.

NAN

No. It's *sort of* stealing. You said so yourself.

STEVE

Fine. Find me a program to *sort of* steal to make my template perfect, and after we're rich we'll save the world.

NAN
Really?

STEVE
Really.

NAN
Deal. Can we go out to dinner first?

STEVE
No. We can't afford it, and I've still got some work to do on this.

NAN
No you don't, you're done working on that template, it's perfect. Send it and your resume out NOW.

STEVE
They only look at it once! If it isn't good enough then you can't get them to look at it again.

NAN
And they won't look at it at all if you don't send it out.
(She hugs him.)

It's okay. I've got all these papers to grade tonight anyway. If Christmas break weren't in two weeks I'd go mad. I hate teaching English. I wish I taught physics. There's unambiguous right or wrong, and nothing in-between.

STEVE
True, but you might have to actually understand physics to teach it.

NAN
Not if I taught really advanced topics. The physics teacher says no one actually understands any of the theoretical stuff, that it's more like poetry.

STEVE
Well, if it's poetry, then you'd just be teaching English again.
(*The heat kicks on, clanging and hissing.*)

Noooooo! How can it be kicking on, you're telling me it dropped 15 degrees in the last 5 minutes? How is that possible?
(Steve races over to look at the thermostat.)

NAN
Because the heat hates us.

STEVE

A radiator can not hate us, Nan. It's an inanimate chunk of metal.
(He fiddles with the radiator.)

It continues to clang and clatter and hiss.)

NAN

I didn't say the radiator hates us. I said the heat does. It can definitely hate us. Fire is a god. Vulcan, and Vesta, and a lot of cultures have different names for it like, the little fire that warms your baby, or the big fire that spreads through the trees, or the fire that cooks your dinner, or the fire that heats the house—

STEVE

Is there a name for the fire that makes the heat we won't be able to pay for next month when my unemployment runs out?

(Ilsa quiets down.)

NAN

(She pulls him away from the thermostat.)

Stop worrying. You're going to get a job—a better one than you had before. And we're going to get back on the Master Plan, and everything's going to be okay.

STEVE

You're right. Everything's going to okay. We just have to get through Christmas and—

(His face falls.)

Crap. Christmas.

NAN

CRAP. Christmas.

STEVE

CRAP. Christmas. Oh my God, why did I have to mention Christmas.

NAN

Don't think about it.

STEVE

I'm so sorry, Nan. It just slipped out.

NAN

Well, slip it back in.

STEVE

Too late. We're both thinking about Christmas. How are we going to get through Christmas?

Our life savings. NAN

No. STEVE

Yes. NAN

No! STEVE

NAN
Steve. We've talked about this. I understand. I'm fine with it. There's no other way.

STEVE
Okay. Our life savings.

NAN
We'll get through your family's insane Give Till It Kills You Christmas. Then you'll get a job and then we'll get back on the Master Plan. And everything will be okay.
(They hold each other.

Lights fade.)

SCENE 2*

MOLLY

(Molly, Nan's best friend, and Nan are busy at the table gluing bows onto cards. The cards are bright red and large sized. The bows are black.)

How many so far tonight?

NAN

(Checking the pile of completed cards next to her)

35.

MOLLY

Great. I've got 33. Let's stop the killing pace. We can finish these tomorrow night, right?

NAN

You've got your first rehearsal for the spring Shakespeare play, remember?

MOLLY

SHIT!!! I forgot. Damn it. And I don't have it cut down yet, either.

NAN

It's so much work, cutting a different Shakespeare down to 45 minutes every year. Don't you hate it?

MOLLY

It's not so hard after you've done a 45 minute Hamlet for 15 year olds. Once you've reduced that masterpiece to rubble, the rest are a piece of cake.

NAN

What is it this year?

MOLLY

All's Well That Ends Well. I just cut to the chase 5 times, make everybody fall in love, and I'm done.

(Holding up a card.)

I think this is our best design yet.

NAN

I'm glad we'll have these in the shops in time for the after Christmas surge. Women leave their husbands in droves after the holidays, apparently.

MOLLY

Yep. Nothing like eating a Yule log with someone you despise to get you out the door with the kids, the dog, and everything your family gave you as a wedding gift.

NAN

Well, I hate to profit from other people's misfortune—but we can really use the extra cash.

MOLLY

Who says it's misfortune? Flood, tornado, 3 years with my ex, teaching at Crespy Academy—now that's misfortune. They're choosing happiness.

NAN

Yeah, but a lot of unhappiness went into that choice.

MOLLY

Don't think about that. Think 3 dollars of pure profit a card. Think how we are both just an hour or so away from our nightly goal: 300 dollars. We're choosing happiness, too.

(Molly takes out a joint, lights it up.)

NAN

That won't make it any easier to glue the bows on straight.

MOLLY

It makes it harder to glue the bows technically, but easier philosophically. So it's a wash. What would make it easier would be if I could feel my fingers. I'm turning up the heat.

(She goes over to turn up the thermostat.)

NAN

Don't touch it.

MOLLY

What?

NAN

We can't turn up the heat. I promised Steve.

MOLLY

Just a little...

(She turns up the thermostat.)

It hisses and clangs.)

NAN

Molly, no--

MOLLY

But it's freezing in here.

NAN

I know, but every time it kicks on it breaks Steve's heart. And when the bill comes he opens it and...he says he's going to the gym but he just goes and sits in the car for two hours and listens to his old Weezer CD's.

MOLLY

That is sad.

NAN

Yeah. Sad as it gets.

MOLLY

All right, I'll turn it back down.

(Molly turns the thermostat back down.

The radiator hisses off.

Molly gets her coat and puts it back on, and comes back to the table.)

So. I guess that means the job search is not going well.

(Nan shakes her head, no.)

You know, if you need to borrow some money—

NAN

No.

MOLLY

Because it's no big deal.

NAN

It is if you're the one borrowing it. Thank you, Molly, really. But no. If we sell enough of these during the after Christmas divorce rush that will cover the groceries and heat. Thank God we've got enough saved to get us through the Williams' Family Suicidal Yuletide Extravaganza.

MOLLY

Oh, right, the feudal redistribution of wealth Steve's family calls Christmas.

NAN

I hate it. Every year, I just feel cheap and poor and resentful.

MOLLY

You do get a lot of great gifts, you have to admit that.

NAN

That I don't want and I don't need. It's obscene. Everybody brings in truck loads of gifts to prove they're the most generous, which is really just code for who makes the most money. Well it's easy to give it away when you've got plenty.

MOLLY

Just say no.

NAN

That's what I said. But when Steve was little he had an uncle who tried that, he was saving up to pay for his daughters wedding or his mother's surgery, I forget which. Banned from the family. Never heard from again. It's haunted Steve ever since.

MOLLY

That's ridiculous. You can't do it. You can't. Not if you're going to get back on the Master Plan.

NAN

The Master Plan is temporarily on hold.

MOLLY

But your eggs aren't.

NAN

We can't until Steve gets a job, okay? I mean that would be crazy, to do it now. Don't you think?

MOLLY

(Shrugs.)

Maybe. Maybe not. What do I know?

(Pause)

No. I do know. I think you should go ahead and get pregnant. I'd do it. I wouldn't wait. If I were married to someone I loved and who loved me? And while we're talking about money, do you know how expensive sperm is these days? Do you? I do. And every time it doesn't work you have to go there and--

(She makes a swiping gesture.)

--swipe another 300 dollars on your visa card. You, on the other hand, have got a free, endless supply of quality sperm at your beck and call. Do it.

NAN

Oh Molly. Why didn't you tell me?

MOLLY

When it worked, that was when I was going to tell you.

NAN

I thought Peter was giving you some?

(Molly shakes her head.)

Stan wouldn't either?

(Molly shakes her head.)

MOLLY

They don't want to be responsible for a child. Even though I promise them they won't be. But if they have a child they want to be responsible for it. Which I guess is responsible.

(Pause)

Stop the insanity, Nan. Just say no to Give Till It Kills You Christmas.

NAN

I can't. Not that it's going to be easy this year. We've maxed out our credit cards.

MOLLY

Then how are you going to buy anything?

NAN

There's a thing called...cash?

MOLLY

Can you shop on line with cash?

NAN

There are things called...stores? Friday I'm gonna go to the bank and take out our life savings and start the endless shopping.

MOLLY

You're scaring me. You're like someone in a Dickens novel. You're going to spend all your money on Christmas gifts when you can't even afford to pay for heat.

NAN

To that, I reply—what heat?

MOLLY

My sentiments exactly.

(Molly takes another hit of the joint, passes it to Nan who has one too.)

Remember how we used to get stoned in high school and go to the Sonic so we didn't have to get out of the car?

NAN

Every time I got high back then, if I went to a restroom I was POSITIVE the walls were transparent and everyone could see me.

MOLLY

(Wistfully remembering Nan at those moments.)

Yeah. That was my favorite part.

(She sighs.)

And then, after you'd freak out in some random restroom, we'd drive around pretending we were Thelma and Louise.

NAN

Right now I'm pretending I am Melinda Gates. I am wearing a white sari with patterns woven with gold threads in it and I am saving the world from malaria.

(A sweeping gesture with her hand.)

I just wave my hand and poof—the mosquitos are vaporized. I go to a leper colony—I hand out state of the art pharmaceuticals Bill has cooked up in his spare time using a logarithm he found stuck on the bottom of his shoe while running a marathon to cure world wide wall eye. I walk through the streets of Bombay handing out Microsoft word to infant programmers so they can pull their families out of poverty by the age of 3. My hair blows in the breeze. I wear no make up but I look refreshed and dewy at all times. I walk through the crowds like a good looking Mother Teresa.

MOLLY

If you could choose, to be the most beautiful woman on earth but it takes like 95% of your time to be beautiful, or ugly, but be like Mother Teresa and do good deeds and not care at all about your looks—which would you choose?

NAN

You don't know she didn't care about her looks.

MOLLY

Oh she couldn't have.

NAN

Maybe it was her struggle with not caring about it that made her a saint.

MOLLY

You did not just say that.

NAN

Oh, like we're not supposed to notice what she looks like? I might point out that all the paintings and statues of saints? They're always beautiful. Beautification, that's what it's called when you get made a saint, right?

MOLLY

No, it's called be-AT-ification.

NAN

(The heat kicks on, hissing and clanging.)

Oh, Jesus. There goes Ilsa again.

(Nan goes over to the radiator, looks at the thermostat, shakes her head.)

Nope. No reason at all for her to kick on, but Ilsa comes on no matter how low we set her, even when we turn her off. Weird, huh?

MOLLY

You've named the heat Ilsa?

NAN

It's the name of Ingrid Bergman's character in Casablanca. You can't have her, no matter how much you love her. And she's the most desirable thing in all the occupied world.

MOLLY

(She looks at Nan's work.)

Hey—you're putting the ring too low.

NAN

I am not.

MOLLY

You are too, the bow is supposed to be like—the diamond, on top of the ring.

NAN

It is, it is, see?

(Nan holds up the card. It's red. A little black bow on top of a ring. Nan reads the text.)

“HAPPY NEW YEAR TO ME
I’M RINGING OUT THE OLD
RINGING IN THE NEW
CASHING IN THE RING”

(They work for a moment.)

Do you ever think about the kind of women who spend 15.95 each on handmade divorce announcements instead of calling people to tell them?

MOLLY

Yep. And whenever I start, I stop.

NAN

Me too.

MOLLY

Well, you’ll never be one of them. You guys have a great marriage. The best one I know.

NAN

Well, that’s good because I won’t be able to afford these cards.

MOLLY

Stop worrying about the money. Steve’s luck is going to change. Before you know it you’re going to be back on the Master Plan. And then I’m going to hit the jackpot with a sperm donation and call my baby girl Ilsa—

NAN

After Ingrid Bergman’s character?

MOLLY

After your heat. And we’re going to have our babies together and everything is going to be perfect. You’ll see.

(They go back to work.)

Ilsa clangs away.

Lights fade.)

SCENE 3*

The Friday before Christmas

STEVE

(The sound of crying.)

Steve comes in from the outside. He takes off his coat, and immediately begins putting on three layers of sweaters, scarfs, etc.)

Nan. Nan?

(He hears the crying.)

Nan!

(It gets louder. He sees Nan weeping on the floor.)

What's wrong?

NAN

Everything!

STEVE

(He rushes over to her.)

Are you hurt?

NAN

No.

STEVE

Then why are you on the floor?

(He helps her up.)

Did someone attack you?

NAN

Yes.

STEVE

WHAT!

NAN

No. I was at a poetry reading.

STEVE

What were you doing at a poetry reading

NAN

I was walking by the Barnes and Noble the sign said "Poetry Reading Today" so I went in.

STEVE

And someone attacked you at a poetry reading?

NAN

Well, in a way. There was this sweet little old lady, her walker caught on a chair, and she went over, and I jumped up to help her, everybody did. She wasn't hurt, so we put her back up on her feet. She stumped away. I sat back down. That's when it must have happened.

STEVE

But what. Happened.

(Nan sobs and sobs and sobs.)

NAN

My purse.

STEVE

Oh, sweetie, your purse?

(She sobs, nods her head.)

So what, so you lost your credit cards, they're completely maxed out, silver lining, right--

NAN

The money--

STEVE

What did you have in your wallet, 30 or 40 dollars? Don't cry over 30 or 40 dollars, don't.

NAN

It was a little more than 30 or 40 dollars.

STEVE

So it was 50! It's okay! They were probably a team working together, the old lady goes over, the gang cleans out the purses.

NAN

It was all the money.

STEVE

What do you mean, all the money.

NAN

All the Christmas money.

STEVE

But our Christmas money is safe in the bank!

NAN

Not anymore. I took it out this morning to do the Christmas shopping.

STEVE

All of it?

NAN

Yes.

STEVE

(Ilsa starts clanging and hissing.)

(He's in a little bit of a daze.)

Do you mind if I turn the heat down to 45?

NAN

Don't bother. I turned Ilsa off this morning when I left to go to the bank. She's just kicking us when we're down.

STEVE

Nan, she's the heat, not a god, and she doesn't hate us.

NAN

Of course she's a god. Everybody knows she's a god. Only people who have never had her abandon them think she isn't. When you need the heat and you can't have it—then you know! She is an all powerful and vengeful god.

(Ilsa bangs and clangs impressively.)

STEVE

I'm not having this discussion with you again. Who was it?

NAN

I told you, I didn't see who did it.

STEVE

No, the poet.

NAN

Oh, his name is Allen Bell. All his poems were about this love song that could only be sung by a billion tiny strings which no one can hear. I didn't get the metaphor.

STEVE

You went to a poetry reading about strings singing songs you can't hear, you lost our life savings, and you didn't get the metaphor.

NAN

No, but I got his book.

(She produces a book she's been lying on top of.)

STEVE

What's this?

NAN

It's called 57893. I was screaming that I was going to kill myself so he gave it to me. He signed it first.

STEVE

He thought a signed copy of his poems would keep you from killing yourself?

(Steve looks at it, dumfounded.)

It's like Jack and the Beanstalk. You go to town with the cow, and you come back with a handful of horse manure.

NAN

(Reading)

Here's his bio. "Mr. Bell is the prestigious Lillian Germania Foundation Poet of the Year." Maybe the fact that it's signed makes it more valuable.

STEVE

Maybe it makes it less. If he hadn't signed it, we could have returned it. We could have used the 19.95.

NAN

Well, we could give it to Maryann and Peter. They like this sort of thing.

STEVE

Billions of tiny strings singing love songs you can't hear? Yeah. Actually, they do. That's one Christmas gift down, 47 to go. Lucky us.
(Ilsa hisses and chirps away.)

NAN

I'm so sorry.

STEVE

Have you called and cancelled the cards yet?

NAN

Steve! I've been traumatized.

STEVE

It's okay. I'll do it.

(He gets a credit card out of his wallet, starts to call the number on the back.)

NAN

(She grabs him, wraps her arms around him tight.)

I know I've ruined Christmas. Possibly even endangered the Master Plan—

STEVE

It was an accident. It wasn't your fault. Let me go.

NAN

How are we going to get back on our feet now? Now we'll have to borrow the money for Christmas.

STEVE

A loan! You know how I feel about a loan--

NAN

I know! We can't start the Master Plan unless we're debt free.

STEVE

We'll talk about this later but now—

(To the phone)

Yes. Yes. I'm here. It was stolen today.

NAN

We could take out another mortgage on the house—but that's debt, isn't it, so that wouldn't work. I'm so sorry, Steve. Can you forgive me?
STEVE!! STEVE!!! I AM IN DESPAIR!!!

STEVE

(Trying to hear on the phone.)

Be quiet, Nan I can't hear the prompts.

(On the phone)

Actually, it was my wife.

NAN

I'm so sorry!

(She lets go and sinks to the floor.)

STEVE

(To Nan)

I know you're sorry, it wasn't your fault, now --

(To Phone)

Williams. Last 4 of social is 4716. Billing address is--

NAN

You're right. It wasn't my fault. You know whose fault it was? It was Give Till it Kills You Christmas' fault.

STEVE

(To Nan)

Nan, please. I know you're upset, but--

NAN

If it weren't for your family's annual insane consumerist orgy that money would still be in the bank where it belongs.

STEVE

Really? Really? And your random, selfish trip to a poetry reading—

(To phone)

Earlier today.

NAN

Selfish! What's selfish about going to a poetry reading!

STEVE

Everything! You were supposed to be running errands and getting things done!

NAN

Reading poetry is a thing!

STEVE

IN WHAT UNIVERSE!!

NAN

THIS ONE. I'll show you.

(Nan opens the book of poetry with a furious flourish. She will read a poem from it at the top of her lungs. The poem was written by Michael Dickman.)

String String Theory Theory I LOVE YOU by Allen Bell

STEVE

NAN

It was stolen (She noisily clears her throat)
 At a poetry reading In the night in the night
 The veins are light

Yes. Yes. We've done that. The veins
 I can't—can you speak Are lights in the night
 Louder, I can't-- In the rivers.

(To Nan)
 Did you report it to the police? (To Steve, snarling)
 The store manager did.
 (Back to poetry.)

I'm going to have to-- I love you I love you
 Can you hold for a-- Says the small string
 Yes, just a-- To the big string who loves you

STEVE

(Glaring at Nan)
 I'm going to have to call you back, my wife has been *traumatized* by the
 theft or by the poetry. We're not sure which.

NAN

String calls to string, *Hello! Hello!*
 I love you I love you is all that they—

STEVE

(He hangs up.)
 You are making me CRAZY!!!

NAN

You're just mad about the money.
(Ilsa bangs and clatters and chimes in.)

STEVE

I'm not mad...at *you*...about the money. ILSA SHUT UP!
(She does.)
 Of course I'm mad about the money.

NAN

About Christmas...it means we don't have any money for Give Till It
 Kills You Christma--

STEVE

DON'T CALL IT THAT. You know I HATE IT when you call it that.
 Yes I'm mad at you. I'm mad at everything. I know it's not my fault the
 company went bellyup, but I also know that if I'd been smarter or
 luckier I would have gotten a job at a smarter, luckier company. I design

websites. So does half of everybody else in this town, apparently. I am a redundancy on the market. I have no value or worth. So *I'm* the reason we can't stick to the Master Plan.

I'm just humiliated, okay? I'm humiliated every minute of the day. Do you really think I don't want to go out anymore because we're watching our pennies? It's because I can't stand to have someone ask me what I do when I don't *do* anything.

(As he takes off several layers of polar fleece.)

I'm going to go out to the car and get this done.

(He throws all the polar fleece he was wearing on the floor and storms out the door.)

NAN

Steve! Don't go. Steve. Don't you dare go!!!

(He goes, slamming the door, then opening it to drop a final layer of warm clothing on the floor, slamming the door again.)

Nan immediately locks the deadbolt on the door.
Then she retrieves her hidden cigarette stash.)

Oh god, what are we going to do.

(She lights up. She has two blissful inhales.)

Ilsa starts clanging and hissing to beat the band, then stops.

Nan snarls at the thermostat.)

Ilsa! What are you, a sadist?

(She takes another drag.)

Ilsa clangs again, then stops.)

Oh, I get it, you're not a sadist. You're A NAG!

(She takes another drag.)

Ilsa clangs, then stops.)

Well, I need a god who will deliver me from evil and answer my prayers, not a god who's just in it for smug self-righteousness.

(She takes a drag.)

Ilsa clangs violently.)

No. This can't be happening. I'm imagining it. My heat is not nagging me about smoking. It's a coincidence.

(There's pounding on the door.)

Crap. Steve? Steve—

(She puts out the cigarette, tries fanning the air.)

Hang on, I'm coming...I'm coming...I'm...
 (The knocking continues.)

VOICE ON OTHER SIDE OF DOOR

I've got your purse.

NAN

What?

VOICE ON OTHER SIDE OF DOOR

I've got your purse.

NAN

You've got my--

(She opens the door. There's a man, holding her
 purse.)

OH MY GOD!!! You found it.
 (She grabs it from him.)

MAN

Empty, I'm afraid.

(She turns it upside down, it is, of course, empty.)

Professional pick pockets throw them away immediately, they say. Dead
 giveaway, man holding a handbag.

(Nan slumps down on the floor.)

NAN

Thanks for bringing it to me.

MAN

Well, it was the least I could do.

(She looks at him blankly.)

I mean, if you hadn't come to my reading, you wouldn't have lost your
 purse.

NAN

Oh, Allen, I didn't recognize you, come in, come in.

ALLEN

That's not surprising. You've had a traumatic event.

NAN

Yes, I have. I'm glad someone recognizes that. Would you like
 something to drink?

ALLEN

Yes, I would.

NAN

We have...water.

ALLEN

That would be nice.

NAN

I don't have anything else to offer you, I'm afraid—
(She goes off into the kitchen.)

ALLEN

That's okay. You've been traumatized. As for me? I can't help feeling that I am somehow to blame. Is there something in my poetry that drew a gang of geriatric thieves to Barnes and Noble today? Are my poems trespassing on some kind of cosmic territory, and the universe had to strike back? Are there no accidents? Is this fate? Should I be calm and accepting or outraged and furious?

NAN (o.s.)

My husband was furious when he came home.

ALLEN

(Shattered by this information.)

Oh. I didn't know you were married. Is he here?

NAN (o.s.)

Oh, no, he's...he's back at work. He just came home for lunch, a late lunch, but he's back at work now.

ALLEN

What does he do?

NAN

(She comes out of the kitchen with a glass of water.)

What does he do? Funny you should ask. He...he works for a charitable organization.

ALLEN

Which one?

NAN

It's--

(She hands him the glass of water.)

--water.

(She grabs the idea out of the air.)
Water in Africa. His charity drills wells in Africa.

ALLEN

What's it called?

NAN

ALL'S WELL WHEN IT ENDS WITH A WELL. It was started by theatre people.

ALLEN

Oh, I think I've heard of it.

NAN

Oh, I don't think so. It's very low profile. We have this arrangement, one of us has the money job, and the other one has the repairing the world job. I got stuck with the money job. The problem is, the money job doesn't actually make very much. Money.

ALLEN

But isn't it harder to repair the world than it is to make money?

NAN

In the long run, sure, but in the short run it's 100% better. I mean, when you work at a place like ALL'S WELL or, say, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, you work with very evolved people. You work with people who care about things, and I bet you can take as long a lunch as you like, because your long lunches are with *other* people who are also trying to repair the world and you're not cranky when you come home from work like you are when you come home from building internet websites, for instance. Everyone's fair and kind to each other, and everybody's ideas are given equal consideration. And nobody cares about things like fashion or pro-football or anything trivial, nobody in your office has a face lift or gets Botox. It's like a temple, a sacred place. All the paper is recycled effortlessly, the coffee in the coffee room is organic and fair trade, and it's always warm enough without you ever hearing the heat turning on.

(During the above monologue, Allen has fallen totally in love with Nan.)

ALLEN

I'd like to donate to it.

NAN

To the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation?

ALLEN

No! To your husband's charity. To ALL'S WELL WHEN IT ENDS
WITH A WELL.

NAN

(Whoops)

Oh. That would be so great.
(BLACKOUT)

SCENE 4*
The next day

STEVE

(Steve and Nan at home. Steve might be working at his computer. Steve is wearing many layers of polar fleece and an old boiled wool vest. Nan is pretty bundled up too, wearing a pink expedition weight fleece.)

You lied to a poet?

NAN

Yes, I lied to a poet. Why, is that worse?

STEVE

Why did you lie to him?

NAN

I wasn't lying, I was *sort of* lying. I was protecting you. He said, what does your husband do, and you'd just said how much you hated that. So I told him you had a job, and you worked at a charity called—oh you're not going to believe this—a charity called ALL'S WELL WHEN IT ENDS WITH A WELL.

STEVE

You didn't!

NAN

I did!

STEVE

And he bought it?

NAN

He not only bought it, look--

(She takes a check out of the purse that Allen brought back.)

--/he gave me a—

STEVE

(His back to her, he doesn't see the check.)

We're lucky he didn't give you a contribution for it. Now that would be my worst nightmare.

NAN

(Stuffing the check back into the purse so Steve doesn't

see it.)
Why? Why would it be a nightmare?

STEVE

Why would accepting a check for a charity that doesn't exist be a nightmare? Oh, I don't know. It's fraud? Theft? Completely unethical? Fortunately for us, nobody carries their checkbook with them.

NAN

They might have a check, if they'd just picked up their mail, and gotten their American Express statement and it had those annoying checks they're always sending you that you have to shred.

STEVE

Yeah, but who uses those? They're not really checks, they're loans from your credit card company, they cost you 17 point 4 percent interest the minute you write them.

NAN

Well, you know, a poet might use them, they don't care about practical things. In fact, he said he wanted to give me a check.

STEVE

What?

NAN

But I was fast, I was thinking on my feet. I said that All's Well When It Ends With a Well was in trouble, they had drilled too many wells in bedrock. So he shouldn't bother donating because the charity was going under.

STEVE

Where is this charity, drilling these unfortunate wells into bedrock, if you don't mind my asking?

NAN

Africa.

STEVE

Africa. So. Any specific place, in Africa?

NAN

I didn't have time to consult a map, Steve, I was thinking on my feet.

STEVE

I don't think there's any bedrock in Africa. Isn't it mostly sand with a little soil on top? The veldt? The Serengeti?

NAN

Well, I'm sure there's bedrock somewhere. I mean, I don't think that Allen is going to race home and start googling African bedrock.
(There is a knock on the door.)

STEVE

That must be Sally and Hank. They asked if they could bring their Christmas gift over early.

(He opens the door.)

Hi, come on in.

(Sally walks in, kisses Steve, then kisses Nan.)

SALLY

I know this goes against tradition! Christmas isn't even till next week which makes this even more against the rules. But there's just no room in the car to take it and all the other gifts out to Hank and Steve's folks which is a rotten shame because this gift is the best gift we've ever given anyone! But that's not going to happen. We're dropping it off early, and we're sorry but that's what we're doing. And, we broke it. Hank broke it cramming it into the trunk.

(Yelling back out the door.)

Hank! Come on! We're already late.

(Back to Nan and Steve.)

NO—keep away from the door—don't peek! We've got to get this delivered and get going to the--WHAT'S THAT SMELL?

NAN

What? Oh, just some gingerbread I made this morning.

SALLY

There is no such thing as "just some gingerbread" anymore. Oh my god.

(There it is on the table. Sally crams a huge piece into her mouth.)

That is heaven. I haven't had anything with wheat in it for three months! Your brother is driving me crazy with his gluten free diet. I'm surprised I haven't had a complete breakdown. Not eating flour is one thing. Not cooking with it? You can't believe what it's like for me. The end of my world.

(Sally keeps eating.)

NAN

Oh, I can believe it. I don't think I've ever seen you go anywhere without your famous sweet chili chocolate cheesecake or your dragon fruit spice layer cake or--

SALLY

Stop. STOP! Don't say their names out loud. They are dead to me! If this makes him feel better, of course it's worth it. And they say you lose weight on it, even if that hasn't worked out for Hank yet. Keep an eye out for him, I don't want him to see me eating this. I'm trying to be supportive.

(Sally keeps eating.)

STEVE

What's he doing--

SALLY

I told him to rent a trailer, but no, he had to cram it in the trunk. And now, of course, not only is it broken it's stuck.

HANK

(Hank bursts into the house.)

MERRY CHRISTMAS!

(Sally tries to hide the fact that she is swallowing a huge mouthful of gingerbread.)

Okay now close your eyes. No peeking!

(Steve and Nan close their eyes and wait. Sally and Hank push in an enormous Trojan Horse covered with Christmas garlands. The Horse is so big there is no way it could fit in a trunk. It hardly fits in the door.)

HANK AND SALLY

1. 2. 3. Tada!!!!

(Steve and Nan open their eyes. They are stunned.)

NAN

What is it?

HANK and SALLY

A Trojan Horse!!!!

(Hank holds out a broken piece, the large long lever type handle that opens the door to the inside compartment in the chest of the Horse.)

HANK

And here's the part I broke off. It's the handle. The best Christmas gift we've ever given anyone ever and I broke it.

SALLY

I told you so.

HANK

But I'm going to fix it. Have you got a soldering iron?

SALLY

Seriously? A soldering iron? You?

HANK

(Ignoring her, he and Steve fiddle with the broken handle.)

See, it snapped off here—

STEVE

Yeah, I see--

SALLY

Hank, if we don't get there the second they open they're going to be sold out!

HANK

But I think we can make a bond here—

STEVE

Yeah, that might work—

SALLY

HANK! HANK!!!

(He totally ignores her. Frustrated, she turns back to Nan.)

He knows we have to go. We've tracked down this food collective that has organic zucchini flour they say makes cakes you can't tell are gluten free—some secret, proprietary process. The whole thing is like a black ops operation—first you track down the rumor, then you start emailing around, watching out for tweets, checking all the pertinent blogs, finally, after two or three weeks they text you the secret location for their truck. Foodies. Insane! But what you gonna do. HANK! WE GOTTA GO!!!

HANK

Sorry. I'll fix it later. I'll just put the handle under the tree—

(He sees the tree. It couldn't be smaller. In fact, it is so frail that the weight of three ornaments is almost enough to make it fall over.)

This is your tree? Steve?

(Concerned.)
This is your tree?

NAN
Cut trees are an irresponsible use of precious resources, Hank. Did you know it takes 300 gallons of water for every inch of growth on a Christmas tree? That was a dying shrub someone had thrown out. We decided to repurpose it.

SALLY
Oh, wow. That's...cool.
(She elbows Hank to respond.)

HANK
Yeah. Cool.

SALLY
I didn't know you guys were so into—water.

NAN
Oh, we are.

STEVE
We are.

HANK
Well, we gotta go.
(Hank sees the gingerbread.)
I'm just gonna run to the bathroom, okay, hon? Wait for me in the car, okay?
(He heads for the bathroom)

SALLY
(She is at the door, hugging Nan.)
Bye, see you soon Steve. Nan, walk me out?

NAN
Sure.
(They leave. As they pass the Horse.)
This was so...nice of you—

SALLY
I know, it takes your breath away, doesn't it?
(The instant they are gone, Hank sprints back from the hall and locks the door and heads for the gingerbread.)

HANK

Gingerbread. My favorite.
(Smashes it into his mouth.)
Wow. This is delicious.

STEVE

Put that down.

HANK

Why? Oh, shit, was this for company or something?

STEVE

You're gluten intolerant! You'll have an attack.

HANK

Oh please.
(He keeps eating.)

STEVE

But--

HANK

I just told her that to get back at her.

STEVE

For what?

HANK

For all those years I was trying to lose weight and she was like, "show some discipline", while she was baking non-stop and filling the house with cakes and strudel and pies?

(He inhales some more gingerbread.)

Well, the discipline is on the other foot now. You know how hard it is to bake without real flour! Now *that* takes discipline!

STEVE

You're not gluten intolerant?

HANK

God no.

STEVE

You're lying to her.

HANK

NO! Well. Sort of. I am *sort of* lying to her. I mean it's not like lying to her about have a mistress or being addicted to internet porn or--

(Steve stares at him, disbelieving.)

--don't look at me like that, I'm going to tell her.

STEVE

When?

HANK

After the New Year. You know how much she loves baking everything for your party. Not this year! She'll have to come up with an entire party menu that's gluten free.

STEVE

You're torturing her.

HANK

Yeah, so, she was torturing me.

Why is it so cold in here?

STEVE

Is it cold in here?

HANK

Steve, you're wearing three polar fleece jackets and dad's old boiled wool vest.

STEVE

We like it cold.

HANK

Since when? You've always hated the cold.

(Hank goes over to the thermostat and turns it up.)

Ilsa starts clanging and hissing away.)

I love the sound of steam heat. Miss it so much since we had the radiant heat put in.

STEVE

Turn that down.

HANK

Why?

(Steve turns the thermostat down.)

Ilsa sputters.)
I'm freezing.
(Hank turns it up.

Ilsa hisses on.)

STEVE
This is not your house. She is not your heat! She's mine! And I want her—

(Steve turns the thermostat down roughly.

Ilsa responds in kind, sort of exploding as she sputters off.)
--off.

HANK
Why did you just call the heat she, Steve?

STEVE
No I didn't.

HANK
Yes, you did. You called the heat—

STEVE
We call her Ilsa. That's our name for her. For the heat. Just a little...ah...joke...between Nan and me.

HANK
Ilsa?

STEVE
Like in Casablanca?

HANK
Oh, yeah, Ilsa. She loves Humphrey Bogart but she goes with Victor Lazlo because Lazlo can save the world from the Nazis and Bogart can't.

STEVE
Well, Bogart could, if he wanted to. He proves that in the end.

HANK
Yeah, but he doesn't want to, until the woman he loves leaves him for someone who does. Then he gets it.

Look, sorry about touching Ilsa. It's your house. She's your heat. I just forget, you're so sensitive since the job thing.

STEVE

Well, wouldn't you be?

HANK

No, I'd be thrilled for the time off. Catch up on my Netflix cue. Look. Do you want to borrow some money? Is it so cold because your furnace is broken or something?

STEVE

No! Nan read somewhere that the colder it is, the higher it boosts your metabolism. You know Nan, always trying the newest diets.

HANK

Really?

STEVE

Really.

HANK

Wow. The things people believe when it comes to losing weight. Shit, Steve, if that were true, Eskimos would look like Ethiopians and Ethiopians would look like Eskimos.

You're gonna get a great new job, Steve. It's just gonna take some time.

(The sound of a car horn, Sally really laying on it.

Hank opens the door, stuffing a last mouthful of gingerbread down.)

So—the gluten free thing—that's our little secret, okay? Okay.

(And goes out just as Nan comes back in.)

NAN

Bye, Hank. See you at your folks on Christmas.

(Nan and Steve stand staring at the huge Trojan Horse.)

STEVE

What did Sally want to talk to you about.

NAN

You. The job situation.

STEVE

What'd you say?

NAN

I said, "How the hell did Hank get this in the trunk?"

STEVE

How did he?

NAN

She has no idea.

STEVE

I wonder if it ever crossed their minds that they were giving us an instrument of war as a Christmas Gift?

NAN

Yeah. There's always something inside a Trojan Horse that's going to sack your city and rape your women.

STEVE

(Steve is looking for the compartment in the Horse's belly.)

Probably not in this case. I think it's some sort of giant gift basket.

NAN

It must have cost a fortune. How do they afford this kind of stuff? Sally's rich but she's not that rich...is she?

STEVE

She's a genius in the market. She inherited a bundle and every year the bundle gets bigger, and bigger, and--

(Steve shows Nan the compartment in the Horse's belly.)

This is where Hank broke off the handle.

NAN

(Holding up the handle that Hank broke off.)

How are we going to get it open?

STEVE

Maybe there's a handle on the inside to let whatever's inside out.

(Steve grabs something and starts trying to get the compartment open.)

NAN

Do you think there's someone in there?

STEVE

Of course not! My brother and Sally did not give us a horse filled with Trojans. Unless that's what's in there. Condoms. Could be. That's so like Hank.

NAN

Not funny.

(She sits down, and takes a piece of gingerbread-- almost none of it is left.)

Steve! What—oh my God, you didn't let Hank eat any of this, did you? He'll have an attack!

STEVE

No, no, of course not—

NAN

Then what—

STEVE

I ate it.

NAN

What?

STEVE

I didn't eat all of it. You saw--Sally had about a third of it, and—I can't help it, I'm panic eating!

(He immediately grabs a piece and crams it in his mouth.)

NAN

Panic eating? Why?

STEVE

(Mouth full)

Why? Why? Why?

(He gestures wildly at the Trojan Horse.)

NAN

Oh, of course you're in a white hot panic. Your brother knows you're out of work and he buys us the biggest Christmas gift on earth when he knows we can't reciprocate.

(There is a loud knock on the door.)

NAN

Why would they come back?

STEVE

To rub it in?

(The knocking continues.)

NAN

(Gesturing at the Horse)

How do you rub this in more than it's already rubbed?

(The knocking gets even more aggressive. She opens the door. It's Allen Bell.)

ALLEN

Nan! Nan. NAN. I—

(He sees Steve, standing right in front of him.)

Oh. And you must be Steve. I'm Alan Bell, the poet who—

STEVE

I know who you are.

ALLEN

Yes. Well. I just want you to know how sorry I am about what happened.

NAN

It wasn't his fault, Steve.

STEVE

It wasn't his fault. In a way. And in another way—it sort of was.

ALLEN

I know. That's why I'm sorry.

STEVE

Are you?

ALLEN

Yes. I've said so twice.

STEVE

Oh, you're counting now.

ALLEN

I'm not counting.

STEVE

You're not? Seems like you're counting to me.

NAN
Steve stop it!

STEVE
Not till he gets to a hundred.

NAN
He said he was sorry, let it go. Allen, can I get you something to drink?
Some water?

ALLEN
No, but water is why I'm here. Nan, I wondered if you had that check I
gave you for All's Well When It Ends With a Well?

STEVE
Check? What check?

NAN
Oh, I forgot all about it—

STEVE
What. Check.

ALLEN
A small check. A token.

NAN
(Gets her purse, gets the check.)
No, it was very generous.

ALLEN
Thank God, you've still got it. I shouldn't have done it.

NAN
It was a beautiful gesture.

ALLEN
Yes, but did you know that the credit card companies charge 17 point 4
percent interest on these checks?

NAN
Really? I didn't know that.

ALLEN
Just because I'm a poet doesn't mean I have my head in the fiscal clouds!
It dawned on me--why should American Express get rich on my

charitable impulses! So here is a personal check, and if you'll just give me back my other one—

(They trade checks. He rips up the old one up.)

There, all done. I even included the vig—that's loan-sharkese for the interest American Express would have charged me—to show what I was saving by being smart.

I feel like Father Christmas!

(He grabs Steve by the shoulders.)

Steve, I'm so jealous—you get to give for a living! What's it like, working at All's Well When it Ends With A Well! I can't even imagine.

STEVE

Me either.

ALLEN

But I can still give even if I don't give for a living—my poetry is free verse, my giving can be too! I've been googling Africa to look into that bedrock situation Nan was telling me about. But I have to go, I've got to make a deposit—and then I've got a plane to catch.

(Passionately.)

MERRY CHRISTMAS, NAN.

(A crushing after thought.)

And Steve.

(He pauses in the door.)

Nan. You may have lost your purse. But you've changed my life.

(And is gone.)

NAN

So. Why didn't I tell you?

STEVE

He's in LOVE with you.

NAN

Oh, that's not why I didn't tell you—

STEVE

You knew he was in love with you!?

NAN

I was just going to keep it for a little while and then shred it.

(He grabs the check from her.)

Really. I was going to shred it.

STEVE

Then why didn't you? I told you it was fraud! I told you it was stealing!
I told you it was—

(He looks at the check.)

--10 thousand one hundred seventy-four dollars?

NAN

What? No it wasn't, it was a thousand dollars.

STEVE

Well, this one isn't.

(Gazing at the check.)

It has to be a joke.

NAN

I don't think so.

STEVE

Nobody gives a total stranger a check for 10,000 dollars for a charity they've never heard of before.

NAN

Allen Bell did.

STEVE

But why?

NAN

You mean, other than him being in love with me?

STEVE

It's probably not in your best interests to keep bringing that up.

NAN

Right.

STEVE

I'd like to cash it just to spite him!

NAN

Oh, Steve, that's a great idea. We'll cash it and give it to a charity in Africa!

STEVE

No we won't. We'd have to run it through our account, where it would look like income, and then we'd have to pay taxes on it.

NAN

Oh, I didn't think about that. But wouldn't it be worth it?

STEVE

For what?

NAN

For the chance to give ten thousand, one hundred seventy four dollars to charity.

STEVE

No, for the chance to give ten thousand, one hundred seventy four dollars of Allen *Bell's* to charity.

NAN

I liked it, okay! A man gave money to charity in my name!

STEVE

This charity obsession of yours is getting out of hand. It's starting to impair your judgment.

NAN

It takes a village!

STEVE

Right. One person to actually donate the 10,000, and two people to lie and cheat him into doing it.

NAN

That ten thousand and change would do good. Unambiguous good. So what if there is a small amount of ambiguity along the way.

Donating this money made Allen Bell so happy. Wouldn't it make you happy if instead of getting a broken Trojan Horse for Christmas, we'd gotten an email saying, a donation has been made in your name to a charity bringing water to people in Africa?

STEVE

Yeah. It would.

(He throws his arms around her.)

It would!

(He kisses her.)

You're a genius. That's exactly what we're going to give our family and friends this year. Come on—

(He drags her over to the computer.)

I can build the website tonight—I'll use the new template—I finished it this morning—it's a beauty, and I'll--

NAN

What are you talking about—

STEVE

What do you mean, what am I talking about, it's your idea!

NAN

But my idea is to make a million dollars, give it to charity and have lunch with Melinda Gates. How can a website do that?

STEVE

I'm going to use it to generate emails to our friends and family saying a donation has been made in your name to All's Well When It Ends With a Well.

NAN

You can do that? And it will look real?

STEVE

It will look realer than real. It'll look great. And when we're back on our feet—we'll just make real donations to a charity that really is real. We'll just pick the one we want to give to. Look at this.

(He clicks a few keys. He sits back.)

Safe water is the biggest problem to stable rural communities in Africa. Who knew there are so many charities drilling wells in Africa??

NAN

But that's wonderful.

STEVE

There are dozens of them. Look, they dig wells—they build these above ground cisterns to hold the water—I can cut and paste their images so it looks like All's Well is bringing water to Africa.

NAN

So the people in these photos are people getting safe water?

STEVE

Yeah, from legitimate charities. Well, they look like legitimate charities—it's the internet, so who knows?

NAN

I wish All's Well When It Ends With A Well were real. And not imaginary.

STEVE

Me too. But we don't get what we want by wishing for it.

NAN

Sometimes you do.

STEVE

No you don't.

NAN

Well, you sort of do, sometimes.

STEVE

You work for it, Nan. That's how you get what you want.

NAN

No, sometimes—

STEVE

Nan?

NAN

Okay. I'll wish silently.

(Lights fade on Steve, his face lit by the computer screen.)

BLACKOUT)

SCENE 5*

The morning after Christmas

NAN

(They are surrounded by piles of Christmas gifts. They are wearing lots of warm clothing. Nan sweeps her hand across the piles.)

Look at all of this stuff we got. These gifts are worth a small fortune. Which we can return and convert to cash. Your Aunt Emily is always so generous—these pearls will cover the mortgage this month. And this—

(She holds up an expensive cocktail shaker.)

--will take care of our electric bill. There's enough to cover the dentist and the plumber, groceries for two months. The only gift we don't have a retail price on yet is--

(They both turn to look at the Horse.)

STEVE

What do you think it's worth?

NAN

Well, if it weren't broken and if the food inside weren't rotting—who knows? But as it is? No resale value.

STEVE

That's not true. With the right Craig's listing you can sell anything. "Life size Trojan horse. Invade the home of the man who has everything."

(He goes to the Horse, picks up a long b-b-que fork to try to get the compartment open.)

NAN

Well, thanks to these gifts we have kept the wolf from the door for another month. We're just...

(She checks her list.)

474 dollars short on the heating bill and that's it.

STEVE

Almost...almost...almo—

(The fork breaks. He drops it on the floor next to the other things he tried to use.)

I'm going to get this open if it—

(Steve desperately tries to open the compartment again, using a small pair of ornamental scissors.)

NAN

Hey, don't use those, those are my grandmother's grape scissors—
(He breaks them too.)

STEVE

I'm sorry.

(She goes off to the kitchen. Steve puts his head to the chest of the Horse. We hear nothing.)

Nan. NAN!! I HEAR SOMETHING.

(He puts his ear to the belly of the Horse again.)

NAN (o.s.)

(From the kitchen.)

What?

STEVE

I think there are Trojans inside.

NAN (o.s.)

Of course there aren't. You're being ridiculous.

(There is knocking on the door. Nan goes to the door, Molly enters, carrying a bag for more divorce cards.)

Hey, Molly.

MOLLY

Hey, Nan. Hey, Steve.

(She sees the Trojan Horse.)

Hey...Trojan Horse?

NAN

Don't ask.

MOLLY

Don't have to. It has Sally and Hank written all over it.

(She sees the piles of Christmas gifts.)

Oh my God, what a haul! You guys made out like bandits this year. Did you get the Roses are Red cards finished?

NAN

Yep.

(Nan gets the completed divorce announcements and puts them in Molly's bag. They are purple and red, with gaudy flowers on the front.)

MOLLY

All 50?

Yep. NAN
 STEVE
 Those are the absolute worst cards you guys have ever made.
 MOLLY
 What is he talking about?
 NAN and MOLLY
 Roses are red
 Violets are blue
 You act like a jerk
 I act like a shrew
 NAN
 You shattered my dreams
 NAN and MOLLY
 So I'm leaving you!!!
 STEVE
 The worst!
 NAN
 But our best seller.
 MOLLY
 (One of the divorce announcements falls between
 the cushions of the couch, no one notices.)
 This is the third reorder we've had. They can't keep these in the stores.
 (She stops, listens. We can't hear anything.)
 What was that?
 NAN
 What was what?
 MOLLY
 I don't know. Like—sighing? Singing? Oh my God it's coming from
 inside the Trojan Horse!!
 STEVE
 (To Nan)
 See! See! I told you so!
 (To Molly)

Singing coming from inside the horse! You can hear it too!

NAN

Molly, do not encourage him.

MOLLY

(She goes over to the Horse, listens. We still don't hear anything.)

But I do hear something—

STEVE

A-HA!!!!

NAN

Stop it! Both of you. There is nobody inside that horse!

MOLLY

Oh my god, there's someone inside it? Why haven't you let them out?

NAN

BECAUSE THERE IS NO ONE INSIDE IT!

MOLLY

Then why did you say there was?

NAN

I didn't. You did.

MOLLY

No, I said you should let them out.

NAN

Which we would do if there were someone in there. But there isn't.

(She controls herself. She holds up the bag of divorce announcements.)

Don't you have to get these into the hands of disillusioned, psychologically depleted women everywhere?

MOLLY

(Molly takes the bag of announcements.)

I did hear something.

NAN

No, you didn't. Goodbye.

(Nan opens the door for her.)

MOLLY

Bye! Good luck with your haunted horse.
(She leaves.)

NAN

(Calling after her.)
It's not haunted.

MOLLY (o.s.)

Right, keep on telling yourself that.

STEVE

(Steve sifts through the pile of broken things
he's tried to use to open the Horse.)
I wonder if everything I'm using breaks because metal fatigue sets in in
extreme cold.

(He heads over to the thermostat.)
Why do you keep messing with the thermostat?

NAN

I haven't touched it! I promised, remember? It's set at 55, like always.

STEVE

But it's 39 degrees in here!

NAN

(Shrugging)
So? Ilsa has a mind of her own. You set her at 55, but she knows deep
down inside you won't love and worship her unless she's at 39.

STEVE

No. That is not the way things work. She is a thermostat. When you
set her at 55 she is supposed to heat your home to 55. That is the
contract that you make with your heat.

NAN

She is a cruel and imperious god. Put on a sweater.

STEVE

I assume that's a metaphorical suggestion?
(He holds out his arms. He does indeed look like the
Michelin tire guy.)
How exactly would I get one on? I wouldn't be so cold if you hadn't
stolen my Patagonia arm warmers.

(He goes over to the computer.)

NAN

You know I didn't steal them, keep looking.

(She bundles up the wrapping paper from all the gifts.)

You know, yesterday was the first Christmas since we've been together that I enjoyed. Being at your parents was great, now that we were able to hold our own. When you showed all your relatives the All's Well website I was so proud of you. It's your best work Steve.

STEVE

Except it's not real.

NAN

It's "sort of" real—it's a functional work of real art. Play the sound the water makes when someone makes a donation?

STEVE

No.

NAN

Please?

STEVE

Last time.

(He plays the water donation sound. Water flowing into a cistern.)

NAN

Mmmmmm. I love the sound of that water.

STEVE

Oh my god.

NAN

What?

STEVE

I just added up how many donations we gave.

NAN

Well?

STEVE

30,000 dollars.

(She rushes over to the computer, looks at the screen with him.)

NAN

You must have added it up wrong, do it again.

STEVE

I did it three times. How many donation emails did you send to your friends at Crespy?

NAN

I don't know...three or four? Maybe five?

STEVE

You sent over two dozen. Added to what we sent my family? We just donated 30,000 dollars we don't have to a charity that doesn't exist.

NAN

So I got carried away. It was just so—great. Sending out those emails. “A donation of 500 dollars has been made in your name to bring water to Africa.” It made me...happy.

STEVE

30,000 dollars.

NAN

Stop it, Steve. The website is irresistible. The instant you go on it you want to click the donate button and listen to the water—

(She comes over, clicks the button. We hear the water.)

Wouldn't it be funny if somebody tried to make a contribution?

STEVE

It's not real, Nan. It's not even “sort of” real.

NAN

I know that.

STEVE

I'm not sure you do. I feel funny about the whole thing, now. I wish we hadn't lied to them.

NAN

You think I liked it?

STEVE

Well, you sort of did.

NAN

Okay, that's fair. Mean, but fair.

STEVE

This is a disaster.

NAN

No it's not.

STEVE

No? How much worse could it get.

(There is knocking on the door. She opens the door, and Hank and Sally enter. Sally is wearing full English riding gear.)

SALLY

We're here!

(She kisses Nan and Steve.)

HANK

(He kisses Nan.)

We just came over for pictures. With the horse. Wow. It's so monumental! In such a compact way.

(Hank takes a selfie of himself and Sally in front of the Horse.)

SALLY

Sweetheart, can you get my good side with it?

(Hank takes a photo of Sally. Hank looks at the photo.)

That's incredible. Instagram it!

(Hank posts it.)

HANK

The ultimate gift basket! A 9 foot tall Trojan Horse filled with Greek Delicacies fit for a God--olives and rare cheeses, dolmas and roasted figs, and a case of Dionysian wine. We picked it because we thought you'd like the food. Do you?

STEVE

Do we what?

HANK

Like the food?

STEVE

We haven't tasted any of the food because we can't get the compartment open.

HANK

But it's been days since we dropped it off—the food in there must be rotting—well, no, actually, it's like a large walk in freezer in here, so I'm sure it's all fine.

SALLY

(To Nan)

By the way, you look great, that cold diet is really working.

NAN

(Has no idea what Sally is talking about.)

What?

SALLY

Hank told me all about it.

NAN

But I don't know what you're talking about.

SALLY

That's okay, I know how people like to keep their diet secrets a secret.

HANK

(Busy with Steve inspecting the Trojan Horse.)

There must be something you can pry it open with.

STEVE

(Indicating two or three broken things he tried to use.)

Don't you think I've tried?

HANK

Hey, isn't this dad's special barbeque fork? He's gonna be pissed.

SALLY

(She starts rooting around in the pockets of her jodhpurs.)

Damn. If I left my stomach meds at home—

STEVE

Oh, I suppose you're going to tell him?

HANK

Of course I'm not gonna tell him.

(He grabs the fork.)

I'm gonna take it to him and show him.

(Steve and Hank start fighting over the fork.)

SALLY

The two of you, grow up!
(She finds her pills.)
Thank the lord.
(Takes some pills)

NAN
I thought the stomach thing was gone?
(Steve and Hank go back to trying to get the
compartment open.)

SALLY
Nope, the stomach thing is back.
(Sally heads for the couch.)
The stomach thing is back, and my back thing is back.

NAN
I thought all that was better?

SALLY
Me too. I had like three glorious months where I felt like a human
being. Then this week, from out of nowhere—bam. I'm in agony again.
(Sally and Nan sit on the couch.)
I'm in agony and I'm freezing. Do you have a—
(Nan puts an afghan over Sally to keep her warm.)
Thanks. You know, the whole family was so impressed with your new
job at All's Well, Steve. A dream job like that—it probably doesn't even
feel like work.

STEVE
You're right. It doesn't.

SALLY
And then the donations you two made for all of us.

NAN
Well, we were happy to do it.

HANK
But yesterday after you guys left, Uncle Andrew tried to go on line to
All's Well and contribute for a retirement gift for somebody at his firm
and he said the donate button wouldn't work.

STEVE
What?

SALLY

He just kept clicking the button. But nothing happened.

NAN

Uh, Steve, uh, did you know about this?

STEVE

Yes, yes I did. I hate to say it but we're a bit underfunded at the moment and things are a bit precarious. Uncle Andrew should just find another charity for his gift.

HANK

But he wants to bring water to Africa.

STEVE

That's no problem! There are a dozen other charities that do virtually the same thing—

NAN

Charity: Water—

STEVE

Or, or The Water Project—

NAN

Yeah, or Clean Water for Africa--

SALLY

No, his heart is set on All's Well When It Ends With A Well.

(Sally gets out her cell.)

I'm texting you Uncle Andrew's number, you'll let him know when the website is fixed.

(Hank stops fiddling with the Horse and gets under the afghan on the couch with Sally and Nan. Steve, hard at work, doesn't notice.)

HANK

And we've been thinking—well, you know what Warren Buffet did, right? He gave all his money to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, he said, why do all the work making another charity when theirs had already been made. So we want to give all our gifts this year to All's Well too—birthday, weddings, graduations—the works. Better get that donate button fixed, brother. We've decided to Buffet this.

NAN

Well, Steve, I guess you'll have to talk to the guys in tech first thing tomorrow morning. See what the problem is.

STEVE

Yeah, sure I'll—

(He notices Hank is on the couch.)

Hank—

(He comes over to the couch.)

I thought you were helping me?

HANK

Nope. Can't feel my fingers. Too cold.

(Steve sits on the couch, gets under the afghan too.)

I'll call and get somebody over with a blow torch to open up the horse, but it's gonna be hard to get someone till after the New Year, so if you can hang on till after the party--

SALLY

Oh, Lord, don't remind me, your New Year's Eve party. Look--I've got to go home and start baking for it.

HANK

But we just got here—

SALLY

I know, but as exhausted as I am again—dragging myself out of bed in the morning, going to bed at 8--

(Everybody gets off the couch. Sally can't get up.)

OW!!!

(Nan tries to help her.)

NAN

Your back hurts that much? I'm so sorry.

SALLY

My back, my knees, my elbows. But I'm okay, I'm okay, go on, just don't watch me stand up, it's humiliating.

(Sally slowly works at straightening up.)

NAN

I'll get you some Advil.

(She goes off to the bathroom.)

HANK

(To Steve.)

She's been feeling so good the last two or three months. All this energy, losing weight. Now it's starting all over again.

(To Sally.)

Honey, I'll go warm up the car.
 (Hank leaves, and Steve goes to get a glass of water from the kitchen.)

SALLY

(She notices the divorce card that Nan accidentally dropped in the sofa earlier. She picks it up.)

ROSES ARE RED
 VIOLETS ARE BLUE
 YOU ACT LIKE A JERK
 I ACT LIKE A SHREW

(She opens the card, and reads with increasing dismay.)

YOU'VE SHATTERED MY DREAMS
 SO I'M LEAVING YOU

(She's horrified. She stuffs the card back into the cushions of the couch to hide that she's looking at it as Nan comes over to her with the Advil and Steve returns with a glass of water.)

SALLY

You know you guys can talk to us about anything, don't you?

NAN

What?

STEVE

Sure. What's wrong?

SALLY

That's what I'm asking.

NAN/STEVE

Nothing's wrong.

SALLY

You know, Christmas is a hard time for a lot of couples, so if you want to tell me what's wrong--

NAN/STEVE

What could be wrong?
 (They both smile at her.)

SALLY

Right. Okay. Okay. Okay.
 (Sally leaves. Nan slumps to the floor.)

NAN
Oh my God, Sally knows! She knows!

STEVE
She doesn't, she can't.

NAN
Then what was all that about!

STEVE
Who knows with Sally. It's Uncle Andrew I'm worried about.

NAN
Uncle Andrew! He's going to find out it's a fake!

STEVE
What was I THINKING!! We're never going to get away with this.
What are we going to do?

NAN
Don't panic.

STEVE
Oh, this is way past panic. This is full blown apocalyptic Armageddon.
If they find out—if they find out—

NAN
They're not going to find out.

STEVE
So we just let them keep clicking a donate button that doesn't work?

NAN
Half the things I click on line don't work. I give up eventually. So will they.

STEVE
And this is your idea of how to repair the world?

NAN
I just don't want your family finding out.

STEVE
What happens if the people at Crespy Academy find out?

NAN

Oh my God. I could lose my job. Do you think it's a violation of the morals clause?

STEVE

Giving fake Christmas gifts to a made up charity? Yeah.

NAN

Wait—wait—what if we fix the website donate button, and after people donate, we give it to a charity in Africa. I know we'll have to pay taxes on it, but--

STEVE

Look, pretending to give money to charity is not against the law. But taking people's charitable donations under false pretenses—even if you give it away later—that's fraud.

NAN

It's not fraud if your intentions are good.

STEVE

In what universe!

NAN

It's more like *sort of* fraud. This is our chance to make the world better.

STEVE

There is no such thing as *sort of* fraud. It's either fraud or it isn't.

NAN

But this way we can bring water to Africa!

STEVE

There are rules, Nan. And if the people who want to do good in the world don't follow them—then we're lost.

NAN

There must be some other way.

STEVE

Yes. There is. We're going to tell them the truth.

NAN

NO!!!

STEVE

You really want to keep lying to them?

NAN

Yes! I mean—no, of course not. I mean—sort of—just till we figure this out.

STEVE

Is that what Melinda Gates would do?

NAN

Steve you're being unfair!

STEVE

Am I? Yeah. I sort of am.

NAN

But if we tell them they'll ban you from the family.

STEVE

Better than prison.

NAN

(They embrace desperately.)

What are we going to do?

STEVE

I don't know.

NAN

I don't know either. Wait! I do know.

STEVE

What?

NAN

We're going to go to bed and sleep on it.

STEVE

You know what? That's a really good plan.

NAN

Thank you.

STEVE

We'll get some sleep, we'll wake up refreshed. With new ideas.

NAN

Maybe all this will turn out to be a dream.

STEVE

I wouldn't count on that.

NAN

No, it never works out that way does it.

STEVE

No. But it's still a good plan.

NAN

We're going to get some sleep. We're going to wake up refreshed. And when we wake up--

(They cling to each other.)

We're going to know what to do.

(BLACKOUT

END OF ACT ONE)

ACT TWO

SCENE 6*

The next morning

NAN

(The sound of Ilsa clanging away as lights come up.)

Nan, pulling her puffy down coat over her nightgown, comes stumbling out of the bedroom.

She is carrying a golf club.)

That's it. Ilsa, you've gotten me up out of a dream for the last time.
(She runs right into the Trojan Horse, which is in a different place than it was at the end of act one.)

Steve!

(She calls off back to the bedroom.)

Stop moving the horse. This is the third time it's ambushed me.

(She moves it so it is effectively blocking the bedroom.)

There.

(Ilsa clangs louder.)

We can't go on like this, Ilsa. I can't be sleep deprived and freezing. One or the other I can handle, but both?

(She stands in front of the thermostat with the club raised high.)

And let's face it. You're in love with Steve. Which shouldn't bother me but—you don't want favoritism in your gods, or in your heat. It's just the way it is. Goodbye.

(But she stops in the middle of her swing when she hears the water donating sound coming from the computer.)

What?

(She goes over to the computer. Confused. The donation water sound happens again.)

Oh my God. Ilsa, is this why you woke me up? Is this what you were trying to tell me?

(Ilsa bangs YES.)

Nan sits down at the computer, amazed. She reads from the screen.)

1000 dollars at 9:30 am. 50 dollars at 9:37 am.

(Water sound)

5000 dollars—a minute ago.

(She calls off, as she heads for the bedroom door.)

Steve—Steve—you angel—you wonderful, wonderful man—
 (She tries to move the horse, but it's stuck in the
 bedroom doorway.)

Steve—the horse is stuck. Steve?

MOLLY (o.s.)

(Molly is pounding on the door.)

Nan! NAN! Let me in!

NAN

Steve! You're my hero, you're my Achilles without his heel, you're my
 Odysseus without the wanderlust, you're--

MOLLY (o.s.)

(Banging on the door.)

NAN what are you DOING in there, it's cold out here! Of course, it's
 cold in there too, but LET ME IN ANYWAY!!

(She pounds away.)

NAN!

NAN

Coming, coming.

(She opens the door.)

Molly, you're not going to believe this!

(She drags Molly over to the computer. Molly keeps
 her coat on, and grabs a big fur hat from the rack
 at the door and puts it on.)

Look. Isn't it wonderful?

MOLLY

The All's Well Website? I've seen it. It's compelling design with a user
 friendly interface in the service of social change.

NAN

But look at all the donations—

(She turns up the volume. The sound of water flowing.)

Someone just donated 5000 dollars to All's Well When it Ends With a
 Well! Listen! Isn't it beautiful! Can you believe it?

MOLLY

Yes I can believe it, it's the same sound I heard when I donated last
 night.

NAN

Last night?

MOLLY

My cousin Betty, in Wyoming just had a baby, and I thought I'd donate a little something in her name.

NAN

(Does a quick search.)

Here it is—you gave 35 dollars at 1:57am.

MOLLY

I killed two birds with one stone. Sending my cousin a gift, and supporting Steve's new charity.

NAN

Steve waited till I was asleep and then sneaked out and did it. He loved me enough to do it anyway!

MOLLY

Did what? Oh, the water sound thing? Yeah, he outdid himself this time. That water sound is great—it's very calming. Very rewarding. Makes you want to give more money so you can hear it again.

NAN

No, he activated the donate button and then linked it so the money would bring water to Africa!

MOLLY

What? I thought it was always going to Africa.

NAN

Oh. Oh. Well. This is a drier part of Africa. Oh my god. You should see the money pouring in.

MOLLY

It's the sound of that water! And watching the big clay pot fill up and tip and flow into the cistern. It's practically hypnotic.

NAN

There are 45 cisterns full already just from last night. 45! Every cistern is a thousand dollars. That's forty-five thousand dollars bringing clean water to Africa!

MOLLY

Honey—are you okay? Is doing all that advanced math making you woozy? Maybe you should lie down.

NAN

You just don't know how much this means to me.

MOLLY

My donation? I was glad to do it. Made me feel good—well, 35 dollars worth of good. Oh, here--

(She takes a check out of her purse.)

I know you're still kind of in a financial hole, until Steve gets his first paycheck from All's Well? So take it.

NAN

But you need it as much as we do--

MOLLY

No, as it turns out I don't.

(Silence)

I don't need 300 dollars from our last batch of cards this month.

(Silence)

NAN. Are you not listening to me? I DON'T NEED AN EXTRA 300 dollars THIS MONTH because...because...BECAUSE...

(She mimes cradling and rocking a baby in her arms.)

NAN

Oh, Molly! You mean it?

MOLLY

Yep. They gave me two blood tests and I aced both of them. Genius Collection, Arts and Science Number 57893 had some strong swimmers after all.

NAN

So you'll never know his name?

MOLLY

You know his number, and that's it.

(She pats her stomach.)

Darling little fish, I shopped for your father in the best sperm bank in the state. I hope you appreciate it. Nothing but Nobel Prize winners and theoretical science pioneers.

NAN

(She throws her arms around her.)

I'm so happy for you.

MOLLY

I know. The way I'm going to be happy for you.

NAN

(She kisses Molly on the cheek.)

I just don't know how long you're going to have to wait to be happy for me.

MOLLY

I'm already a month more pregnant than you are, so if we're going to breast feed together you're going to have to get to work on Steve pronto. So. Will you take the money?

NAN

Yes—in honor of your darling little fish, I accept it. Thank you. We can use the extra 300.

(She waves the check in Ilsa's direction.)

Now we can almost pay our heating bill. Ilsa! Did you hear that!

(*Ilsa makes a sputtering, gurgling noise.*)

MOLLY

That is...creepy.

NAN

Oh, it's just a coincidence. We don't think Ilsa has acquired language skills yet.

(She gets her purse, opens it to put in the check.)

The bill is 474 bucks, so that will leave just 174 dollars.

(Nan holds Molly's and Allen Bell's checks up, side by side.)

And look at that. Allen Bell's check for All's Well. 10 thousand and 174 dollars. And the 174 dollars is the vig. It's a sign!

(She sits down at the computer.)

First, I'll pay off the heat bill with your check and the vig.

(She types, entering the routing numbers. The sound of an electronic cash register ca-chims. Ca-chims again.)

(*Ilsa clangs on happily.*)

And now, 10,000 goes to bring clean water to Africa.

(She types some more. The water sounds start in earnest:

One cistern. The sound of another cistern being poured.)

I love the sound of that water!

MOLLY

Be careful! It's like a siren song. You'll be hypnotized. I gotta run, I'm meeting my doula in 20 minutes.

(Molly heads for the door.)

NAN

I need to get some milk at the store on the corner, I'll walk you out.

MOLLY

Like that?

NAN

(Pulling on some boots)

I do it all the time. One of the perks of always wearing your coat, you're always sort of dressed.

(Nan pulls up her robe to hide it under her coat.)

MOLLY

(She takes Nan's scarf from where it's hanging on the Trojan Horse and hands it to Nan.)

I think a Trojan Horse is a very passive aggressive gift, don't you?

(As they leave.)

Maybe you can re-gift it.

(They are gone.)

The computer continues to make the water sounds.

The third cistern. The fourth cistern.

Steve tries to come out of the bedroom. He can't.)

STEVE

Nan? Nan?

(He jumps up to look over the horse.)

Nan? The Horse is stuck, I can't get out. NAN!! Where are you?

(He tries harder to move the Horse, no dice.)

We hear the sound of him dragging some furniture over to the doorway.

He throws some warm clothing over the horse and into the living room. Then he climbs on top of the furniture he's dragged over, and climbs down over the horse. He comes tumbling down into the living room. He struggles to pull on some warm clothing over his pajamas.)

NAN! FOR THE LAST TIME, IF YOU DON'T STOP MOVING THE TROJAN HORSE I AM GOING TO--

(He hears the sound of the fifth cistern.)

What?

(He runs over to the computer.)

No, this can't be happening. Oh my god. NAN!! What have you done?

(He starts doing things on the computer. That horrible

“wrong” electronic sound is heard.)
 What’s wrong—my password is—my password...why won’t it work?
 (He enters it again, again the “wrong” sound.)

The sound of the sixth cistern.)
 Oh my god.

NAN
 (Comes running back in.)
 Forgot my purse just getting some milk be back in a minute.
 (The seventh cistern.)

STEVE
 Why did you do it?

NAN
 Well, anyone can forget their purse, Steve—

STEVE
 I can’t believe you would do this.
 (The eighth cistern.)

NAN
 Look, hon, I’m getting some milk and I’m making you pancakes.
 Breakfast in bed.
 (She goes over and kisses him.)
 Thank you for making All’s Well real. You’re my hero.
 (The ninth cistern.)

STEVE
 You think I did this?

NAN
 Well—of course. Didn’t you?

STEVE
 No!! You did it.

NAN
 Me Steve?
 (They listen to the tenth cistern.)
 I don’t know how to do this. YOU DID IT!!! And it was the most
 beautiful, generous thing you’ve ever done. It’s genius! We should have
 thought of it before.

STEVE

We did think of it. And I said I didn't want to do it.

NAN

We did? We thought about linking the All's Well donation button to another charity so that all the money people give to All's Well goes directly to Clean Water for Africa! Well, who cares when we thought it up. Oh I love you so much for doing it—

(She tries to hug him, he pushes her away.)

STEVE

BUT I DIDN'T!

NAN

Are you sure?

STEVE

OF COURSE I'M SURE!!

NAN

Maybe in your sleep? When your subconscious impulses are stronger than your moral governors?

STEVE

My subconscious impulses are never stronger than my moral governors! Just think about it, Nan. Why on EARTH would I do it!

NAN

Because you wanted to make All's Well When It Ends With A Well real and repair the world with me!

(He says nothing. They stare at each other.)

Could the website have linked to Clean Water for Africa all by itself?

STEVE

Of course it couldn't.

NAN

Well, Ilsa turns herself on and off all the time--

(The water sounds have gotten louder.)

STEVE

Stop it! Websites do not activate themselves and link themselves to other websites! That is not the way the world works! Oh my god. This is serious. There's all this money flooding into All's Well When It Ends With a Well. Look—ten thousand dollars just a few minutes ago!

NAN

Oh. Crap. Ten thousand dollars. Steve?
(Terrified)

I have something I have to tell you. Don't be angry.

STEVE

Who has time to be angry? I'm in full blown panic at this point.
How could it be any worse than this?

NAN

If I donated Allen's check to All's Well, could that be worse?

STEVE

No.

NAN

Really?

STEVE

Because you wouldn't have done that, we agreed you were giving the
check back.

NAN

Well, yes, we did but when I saw that you linked the donate button to
Clean Water for Africa—

STEVE

BUT I DIDN'T.

NAN

But I thought YOU DID!!!

STEVE

Okay. Don't talk to me for a minute, I'll try to calm down.

NAN

Okay, but that's not all.

STEVE

How can it not be all?

NAN

I umm...I used the 174 dollar vig to pay off our heating bill.

STEVE

You did WHAT?!!?

NAN

I wanted to be paid up! I couldn't stand watching your heart break every time the heat kicked on!

STEVE

We talked about the check. You promised you'd give it back.

NAN

Allen Bell didn't *want* me to give him the check back, he *wanted* me to give it to All's Well. So I did.

STEVE

After STEALING part of it!!!

NAN

It's not stealing. It's—sort of stealing. It's the vig.

STEVE

I don't even know what you're saying to me.

NAN

174 dollars is what he saved by writing the personal check, remember? Money that wasn't going to All's Well, but to American Express, so I just diverted the flow into our account, which we will of course pay back.

STEVE

You shouldn't have deposited that check. You had no right to take his money--

NAN

It's not your check, it's Allen's.

STEVE

Written to a charity that does not exist.

NAN

Didn't before, but does exist now! Does! You made it exist!

STEVE

I DID NOT!!!

NAN

YOU MADE THE WEBSITE!!

STEVE

BECAUSE YOU MADE ME!

NAN

I made you? We made this together!

STEVE

That's right! We did. This is our creation! Our Frankenstein! A monster that is circling around in the cold arctic wastes and coming back to destroy us. And all because you wanted to be Melinda Gates. Well, I hope you're happy now.

NAN

This is not what it's like to be Melinda Gates! This is what it's like to be trapped in a horror movie where you create a program, and it self replicates and takes over the world!

STEVE

Do you know how much money has been donated in the last 12 hours to All's Well When it Ends With a Well? Do you? One hundred and 57 thousand dollars.

NAN

I can't believe it.

(She take a big breath.)

No. I can believe it. Steve. This is wonderful. This is amazing. All that money, going to bring water to Africa? It's like we're a stealth Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Operating under the radar. Yeah, we don't have our name on our foundation, our foundation doesn't even really exist. But the good it does is just as good. Maybe better. Like Zorro. We do good in disguise.

STEVE

I just can't believe you deposited that check. Allen Bell tries to buy your love with a charitable donation--

NAN

I am tired of your jealousy! So it's a harmless little crush. Is that any reason not to give his money to charity? Is that any reason for you to throw away his book?

STEVE

Stop accusing me of everything! I didn't drink all your special blend coffee, I didn't use up all the hot water yesterday, and I didn't throw away his stupid poetry book!

NAN

Oh, please! So you tossed it out in a fit of rage! It's kind of hot. Kinda of. Hot and annoying.

STEVE

Hot and annoying. What is wrong with you?

NAN

Allen Bell walked in the door and gave me money, and that was YES, merely hot, and not at ALL ANNOYING. ALLEN BELL GAVE ME MONEY!!!! Which is more than I can say for SOME people around here.

(Gasp.)

Oh. Steve. I didn't mean that.

STEVE

Yes you did.

NAN

No, I didn't, I didn't I'm just upset, I'm...Molly's pregnant.

STEVE

That's...wow. That's...wonderful.

(He calms down.)

She'll make a great mother. I'm glad it's working out for her.

NAN

Molly and I have been talking about having our children at the same time since we were 7, you know. Before you came along, I already had a Master Plan, with her.

(Silence.)

I know that we're waiting for you to get a job, but Molly's doing this on her Crespy salary—

STEVE

With a little help from her parents--

NAN

We have parents too, you know. Who could help us.

STEVE

Nan, we talked about that and we both decided we didn't want that. But you're right. It's important that we talk about this now. Let's make a list. Let's set up a schedule. How long do you think it will take us to pay it all off?

NAN

Pay what off?

STEVE

The 30,000 dollars we gave. We have to start paying it back right away.

NAN

We can't pay it all back right away.

STEVE

I know. So. How long do you think it's going to take?

NAN

I don't know. I thought we'd figure it out, you know, later.

STEVE

As soon as I get a job we're going to set up a donation schedule. We're not going to buy anything except the necessities or take a vacation or—

NAN

Yes, of course. So what if it takes us 5 years. So what if it takes 10? What's wrong with that?

STEVE

Nan? We can't restart the Master Plan until we've paid it all back.

NAN

What?

STEVE

We can't restart the Master Plan—

NAN

I heard you, I just can't believe you. You're kidding right?

(She waits, she says nothing.)

You're not kidding?

(It sinks in. Quietly.)

There's no law that says we can't have a child and still make regular donations to charity.

STEVE

The Master Plan clearly calls for us to be debt free before we start a family.

NAN

It's not real debt, Steve.

STEVE

Yes it is.

NAN

Well, okay, it is, but it isn't. It's sort of debt.
(Steve glowers at her.)

We can't wait 10 years to start our family Steve—we can't.

STEVE

You can't have both. Repair of the world *or* a family. You made that choice.

NAN

No I didn't.

STEVE

Yes, you did.

NAN

No I didn't, we did this together.

STEVE

What did you think? That this was a freebie—a fantasy—that there were no consequences? You wanted to pretend to be Melinda Gates and save the world, and feel good about it, and then go on with your life?

NAN

You have no right to talk this way to me.

STEVE

No right? I have every right. Why do you think people don't repair the world? Because they're cheap? Because they're lazy? Because they just didn't think of it? No, Nan. People wake up, every day, and they think, "I can repair the world, or I can fix my car. I can repair the world, or send my kid to college." And a couple hundred times, waking up like that, they stop thinking about it at all. Repairing the world is for rich people, not us. We don't get to do it. They do. It is the ultimate right and privilege of the rich.

NAN

I hate it when you talk like this.

STEVE

Because you hate the truth. You said it yourself: it's easier to save the world when you're rich. The truth is that the little people race for the cure, they band together, they raise this or that. And they give a bigger

percentage of their worth to charity than the rich, everywhere on earth. But they could give it all, and it wouldn't matter.

NAN

Communities used to take care of their own. They used to band together and take care of them.

STEVE

Grow up, Nan. There are people in America with more wealth than entire countries. You know how every country changes the course of its rivers, sooner or later? To make dams or to control flooding or just for the fucking sheer hell of it? That's how much money you need to make a difference. You need enough to control the course of the river of money that flows through the world. You need to control that flow. And if you can't do that, then you're just a bobbing cork at the mercy of the current.

The reason why people don't repair the world is because they can't afford it. We can't afford it. But we made a pledge to do it anyway. That pledge comes with a cost. A cost you don't want to pay. But I have to, Nan.

(He heads for the door.)

NAN

You're wrong! You're wrong and you've got to stop it.

STEVE

Keep living in your fantasy! Keep idolizing Melinda Gates! But guess what? The rich *are* different from you and me. THEY HAVE MONEY.

NAN

I don't want to live in a world that I can't try to make better.

STEVE

Well I don't want to live in a fantasy world!

NAN

Your world's not worth living in.

STEVE

And your world doesn't exist! I can't live in it with you!
(He storms out of the apartment.)

Nan watches him go.

Then she heads into the bedroom, weeping.

The computer beeps, and the water keeps flowing.

Fade to BLACKOUT)

SCENE 7*

Three days later

NAN

(Molly and Nan in the living room. They are both wearing lots of warm clothing, both in big hats.

Nan and Molly are moving the Trojan Horse away from the window.)

He comes when I'm not here and does stuff to annoy me. First, he always moves the horse from where I've put it and puts it somewhere where he knows it will be in my way.

(They move the Horse so that it is now positioned near the couch--almost a part of the conversation—and they sit down on the couch.)

And he brings food into the house, eats it, and leaves the wrappers in the trash. Oh, and olive pits, piles of them. What's that all about? He doesn't even like olives. I'm the one who likes them. Two empty bottles of really expensive looking wine and an empty bottle of Ouzo. At least he's neat, neater than he's ever been. But what's really driving me nuts? The notes. He leaves them all over the house. They all say the same thing: "Thank you for the water, the gift of life." He's driving me crazy.

MOLLY

Thank you for the water, the gift of life?

NAN

What the hell does that mean?

MOLLY

Don't worry. He'll come back.

NAN

I don't know if I want him to.

MOLLY

You don't mean that.

NAN

Yes I do. Yesterday when I was out he took my expedition weight Patagonia fleece. I'm freezing without it. Even Ilsa misses him. She kicks on, and when Steve doesn't yell at her she just loses heart and fizzles out.

(Ilsa clangs on. Hisses. Fades away.)

See?

(Nan reaches up, gets a new pack of cigarettes from her purse, which is hanging around the Horse's neck.

Ilsa begins clanging away.)

You want a god who's all loving, who understands you. But what do you get? A nag. A shrew. A scold.

(To Ilsa)

I'm smoking this cigarette, Ilsa. I don't care how loud you clang.

(To Molly)

She's so judgmental.

(Ilsa stops clanging.)

MOLLY

(Nan unwraps the cigarettes. Takes out a smoke.)

And with good reason. That's your second pack?

NAN

That's how I know it's bad. He's never stayed away a whole pack before.

MOLLY

Why do you always smoke when he walks out?

NAN

At first it was to punish him, because he hated it so much. Then I realized it was because I knew that by the second, or third cigarette, he'd be back. So it was a way to measure the time until he came home. But this time I keep smoking them, and he keeps not coming home, and it's been three days, Molly. Three days.

I just don't understand why he always has to behave a certain way because of some arbitrary rule book. Sometimes you have to bend the rules. I thought we wanted the same things. That we thought the same things were important. Now I walk in the house and I don't know where I am. Our whole life all of a sudden makes no sense.

Remember that dying amusement park out near the airport we always used to beg our parents to take us? Everything was made out of fake rotten-looking wood that was so decayed it put real rotten wood to shame. And in the middle of the park there was this fun house called Confusion Hill. When you stepped into Confusion Hill, everything was wrong. Big things looked small and small things looked big. Shadows were the wrong shade. If you dropped five balls on the floor, they attacked each other and then rolled away in five different directions at once. And best of all--water ran up hill. That's the thing that had me hypnotized. The last time my family went there, my parents couldn't find me, they thought I had fallen into one of those sink holes that were

swallowing the whole park up but I was just sitting quiet, and still, in Confusion Hill. I couldn't stop watching the water cascade into this trough and run uphill. Of course it was just an illusion. Gravity is the fundamental force in the universe. Without it everything we believe to be true just stops. Stops being true, and then, stops being. As long as gravity is stronger than water is, water has to behave.

MOLLY

He'll come back.

NAN

He's too much like water. His relationship with gravity is set. I can't change it.

MOLLY

But maybe we can change the gravity.

NAN

Nobody can change the gravity, Molly.

MOLLY

Now who's playing by the rules.

NAN

Well, actually, gravity is more like a law.

MOLLY

Nan, don't you get it. You're the gravity. You're the gravity for him. He's the gravity for you.

NAN

Jesus, Molly, that sounds like something somebody would put on a card.

MOLLY

That doesn't mean it isn't true.

NAN

I wish you were right. Because that day in Confusion Hill, it occurred to me. Maybe water wants to run up hill. Maybe that's what it wants.

(She lights the cigarette, takes a puff. Stabs it out and takes out her phone,)

MOLLY

Who you calling?

NAN

Steve. At this rate I'll have to smoke the rest of my life. And I hate smoking.
(BLACKOUT)

SCENE 8*

That evening

NAN

(Nan and Steve in the living room. They're wearing way too much warm clothing, as usual.)

The Trojan Horse is in yet another place in the room.)
I know this is my fault, Steve. I just don't know what to do to make it right. Do you want me to call and tell your family?

STEVE

No.

NAN

Because I will—

STEVE

Maybe, I don't know. I mean, that would fix the lies we told. The problem is—we have to—we have to figure out more than just what to do about the website.

NAN

Oh. Right.

STEVE

When we made all our plans—when we decided how we were going to live—did I force the Master Plan on you, Nan? Because I don't think I did, but—

NAN

No. You didn't. It was what I wanted too. I love that part about you. The part that wants to make things safe for us.

STEVE

And I love the way you want—all the things that you want. And the way you work so hard for them. The saving the world things, along with the normal, everyday ones. But this time, Nan. This time—

NAN

I'm so sorry, Steve—

STEVE

I want you to get what you want, Nan. The babies, the dog, the house with the big yard—those are things we both want. But we can't have those things if we don't give up wanting things we can't have.

NAN

Everybody wants things they can't have. It's normal.

STEVE

I'm not saying it's not. I'm saying—I'm asking you--can you give this up? This dream you have? To make room for our life?

NAN

I thought it was a good thing, to have a dream like that. To put those things first.

STEVE

Nan—

NAN

I thought it was one of the things you loved about me. I mean, didn't you just say that?

STEVE

I did, I do. Nan, you know what I mean—

NAN

Yeah. I do. I love you so much--

(Ilsa clangs on.)

Ilsa does too. She's missed you.

STEVE

Nan, she can't love me because--

NAN

Trust me. She loves you. Feel that? Heat. She hasn't made any since you left. Oh, she's clangs on and made a racket, but nothing in the way of actual warmth. She loves you.

(Nan takes off the top layer of warm clothing, lets it fall to the ground.)

I thought because what I wanted money for was to repair the world, and not buy a big house or a big car that made it all right. But it's still wanting money. I'm just a philanthropic wanna be. A parvenu.

STEVE

I always liked the word parvenu. So much classier than social climber.
(He takes off his top layers too. He can now embrace her.)

NAN

I've always liked the word parvenu too.

STEVE

And now you are one.

NAN

Oh, I was always one. In my heart. We're a nation of parvenus.

(Nan removes a few more layers.)

The problem is that the entire middle class has climbed up and arrived, and it doesn't make us feel as good as we thought it would. Money has not made us happy. Even the one percenters aren't happy with it. Money doesn't work the way it used to. No matter how rich you are, you can't have a better iPhone than the guy who serves you at MacDonald's. It doesn't exist. And when it does exist, next month it will come out for 199.99. So you're in the 1% and you have seven luxury vacation homes. But everything you have in those houses is probably in half of the houses of the 99%—do you know what this mac, with this much computing power, would have cost if it existed twenty five years ago? Like two million dollars? Now you can get a less elegant iteration for a couple of hundred bucks. You can get better face-lifts when you're rich, and private jets are nice. But your life isn't better the way it used to be better, it isn't separate and all gold leafed—you're rubbing elbows with the riff-raff everywhere you go. Everybody has what you have, either the real McCoy or the knockoff version, and if their knock off makes their life better the way your real one does, then what's the difference between you and them anymore. There's no way to be really rich except philanthropically. That is their Alamo. Their final stand. The philanthropic buzz of Palm Beach is the last real thing they had. So, of course I wanted to have it.

STEVE

Sweetheart, I'm sorry.

NAN

I guess I have to find another American Dream.

STEVE

I'm so sorry, Nan—I wanted it to come true—

NAN

Don't be sorry. About anything. Except maybe about the notes.

STEVE

What notes!

NAN

They sort of drove me crazy.

STEVE

No, Nan. WHAT. NOTES.

NAN

(Reluctantly removing herself from the embrace,
she goes to get one. Reading.)

Thank you for the water. The gift of life.

STEVE

You think I wrote that?

NAN

Does that mean you haven't been sneaking in and leaving little mounds
of olive pits and folding your trash in tiny, tidy piles?

STEVE

Does that sound like something I'd do?

(They both move, as one, to the Trojan Horse.)

NAN

(Nan knocks on the compartment.)

Hello? Hello? We know you're in there. We read the thank you notes.
We found the olive pits.

(She knocks some more, and listens carefully. No noise
of any kind can be heard.)

Do you think they left?

STEVE

I don't know.

NAN

Do you think there's more than one?

STEVE

I DON'T KNOW.

NAN

Well don't be angry at me, Steve. This is not a Christmas gift from MY
brother. My brother gave us 12 months of fruit of the month club.

(They knock on the Horse again.)

STEVE

Hello? Hello?

NAN

It's just freaking me out. It would freak anyone out. What are we going to do?

(The compartment swings open.

A magnificent African woman, in full ceremonial dress, and wearing Nan's pink, expedition weight polar fleece and Steve's arm warmers, climbs out of the Trojan Horse. The interior of the Horse should have some evidence of the packages of food basket delicacies inside it.)

AYUTUNDE

I have eaten all the figs, so I will come out now.

STEVE

Who—are you?

AYUTUNDE

I am Ayutunde. Thank you for the water. The gift of life.

NAN

What are you talking about?

AYUTUNDE

You are Nan and Steve, you work for All's Well When it Ends With a Well, yes?

STEVE

No.

NAN

Yes.

AYUTUNDE

I have been listening to everything you say for almost a week now. At first, I had trouble hearing due to the muffling effect of the horse's construction and the foods. But as I consumed the food, audio qualities have improved. So. Do you, or do you not work for this charity?

NAN

(Hesitantly)

Yes. We do. In a way.

AYUTUNDE

All's Well When it Ends With a Well brought water, the gift of life to my village--

STEVE

All's Well did?

AYUTUNDE

We were in desperate need. But now 3 children are alive because of the new well. Everyday more lives are saved because of the gift of water. So I said to Allen Bell—

NAN

Allen Bell?

AYUTUNDE

I said to him, I must thank All's Well When It Ends With a Well, and Allen Bell said, "that's a good idea." And I said that a plane ticket to America cost more than everyone in my village made in three lifetimes. And Allen Bell said, "I have frequent flyer miles." So here I am.

NAN

And you've been staying in our Trojan Horse?

AYUTUNDE

It is very comfortable. And brimming with delicious food.

NAN

Well. Welcome.

STEVE

Yes. Welcome to our home.

AYUTUNDE

I am eternally in your debt. The three children your water saved were mine.

NAN

It was nothing.

AYUTUNDE

It was everything.

STEVE

No, really. It. Was. Nothing.

AYUTUNDE

And yet. Your nothing somehow saved my children. It is an irony, yes? An irony that would be merely amusing and satisfying in fiction, but in life is instead a matter of life and death. Your nothing was my everything.

NAN

So—you're the one who left the notes.

STEVE

And stole Nan's polar fleece.

AYUTUNDE

Borrowed it--

NAN

And drank the coffee and used all the hot water.

STEVE

And posted those things on my Facebook!

NAN

And graded my last batch of papers!

AYUTUNDE

It was me!

STEVE

Oh my God! You were the one who connected All's Well to Clean Water for Africa! You made the website active!

AYUTUNDE

All's Well When It Ends With A Well was having some technical difficulties that were keeping your relatives from making donations. Well this seemed more than merely inconvenient—it is a great shame that even a single charitable impulse should die unfulfilled. So I sat down at your computer, and linked the All's Well donate button to Clean Water For Africa, so that while you made repairs, the money could continue to flow. There is no need to thank me. It was—my nothing, to thank you for yours.

(There is a knock on the door. Nan hurries to open it.
It is Allen Bell.)

ALLEN

(Excited)

Nan—

(He starts to embrace her, then stops himself. Much less enthusiastically.)

Steve.

(He sees Ayutunde. He runs to her and they joyously greet each other with a brief African greeting.)

Ayutunde! You made it!

AYUTUNDE

I arrived late on Christmas day. The door was locked but the window offered little resistance, which in my village is a welcome mat. I saw no one here but the horse. There is always a spirit animal guarding the source of a sacred river, so I presented myself to it, put my hand on its heart--

(She demonstrates how pressing on the Horse's chest opens the compartment. Nan, Steve, and Allen are audibly impressed.)

--and when its stomach opened, I climbed in. I have been waiting for you, and here you are.

NAN

You've really been to Africa?

ALLEN

I went to see Steve's charity at work. But when I got there, they'd never even heard of All's Well! The money didn't seem to be making it to the villages. Well, I listen to NPR, I know how common that is, the aid money gets grafted off, I did a little investigating and found out that all the pumps that were supposed to go to the region from a half dozen charities had been sold to a war lord in the south to fill his swimming pool. So I took care of putting in three wells in Ayutunde's village, and one each in 195 bordering villages, all in ALL'S WELL's name.

NAN

195 villages? But how?

ALLEN

Well, it just so happened that I knew a scientist in Khartoum—a fan of my book of my poetry, actually, and he set me up with the right resource people who would treat me fairly. The wells themselves are insanely simple to install, once you figure out how deep to dig the well—that's it. It's just a matter of computing the amount of gravity you need to defeat. And then you do it.

STEVE

No, what did you use for money, how did you afford it? It's 5 thousand dollars a well. That's almost a million dollars right there!

ALLEN

Well, I am the Lillian Germania Foundation Poet of the Year.

NAN

Yes, but those prizes—5,000, 10,000 tops, right?

ALLEN

The Lillian Germania Foundation Poet receives a million dollar stipend every year for...for 10 years.

NAN

That's 10 million dollars.

ALLEN

I know.

STEVE

Before taxes or after?

ALLEN

After.

NAN

They give one poet 10 million dollars? No disrespect, Allen, but wouldn't it be better to give 100 poets 100,000?

STEVE

Wouldn't you get more good poetry that way?

ALLEN

Oh, Lillian isn't interested in more good poetry.

NAN

Really?

ALLEN

Well it's not that she's *against* it—she's just interested in a specific kind of poem. My fellowship was for the best poet writing about string theory and human inter-relationships.

AYUTUNDE

(Holding his book.)

I have read your poems, Allen Bell! They are—like water. Hard to grab ahold of, but sparkling and full of life.

NAN

(Taking the book from Ayutunde.)

Your book!

STEVE

I told you I didn't throw it away!

AYUTUNDE

It is difficult to read poetry inside a horse. The only light came through the glass eyes.

ALLEN

Lillian's husband was a string theory theoretician, he was obsessed with it, and she named string theory as a respondent in the divorce proceedings. Took all her money back and left him penniless. Then he died and she felt badly about it and decided to make it up to string theory. She was especially fond of the idea of super symmetry—the theory that for every particle in the world there is a perfect other particle that fits it exactly.

NAN

But that sounds like love!!!

ALLEN

Yes, but unfortunately so far love only exists in reality, not in theory. Anyway, winning all that money made me rich, and rich people donate to charities, and ALL'S WELL was important to you, Nan, and I've always wanted to go to Africa. So. Off I went.

STEVE

Just like that, you went to Africa and dropped your entire income for a year?

ALLEN

Well, one million was a tenth of my total award—it was a tithe. You're supposed to tithe, especially if you're rich. Now I'm free for the next nine years to do whatever I like.

(He checks his watch.)

Speaking of which, I've got to go, I've got to make a deposit at the bank.

NAN

But you just got here—

AYUTUNDE

And I have been waiting for you—

STEVE

Of course, we understand, if you have to go you have to go—

(Ushering him to the door.)

NAN

Come back tomorrow night. It's New Years Eve! We're having a party!

ALLEN
I wouldn't miss it for the world.
(BLACKOUT)

SCENE 9*
New Years Eve

MOLLY

(Molly and Ayutunde are decorating for the New Year's Eve party. Streamers, banners, etc. Molly is all dressed up, both are wearing party hats, and neither is wearing a winter coat or polar fleece or warm mittens.

The TV is turned on but the sound is way down, tuned to the Time's Square New Years Eve.

Instead, there is the sound of really, really happy steam heat. Ilsa seems content, for the first time.

Every New Year, we watch the giant ball. It starts dropping, and when it gets to the last ten seconds, everyone in America counts along.

AYUTUNDE

And this is your New Year celebration? Watching a ball? Why?

MOLLY

I don't know. I don't think anyone knows. It's just what we do.

AYUTUNDE

It must do something. Perhaps it makes the crops grow or the rain to fall? Does it make your children strong or increase the wisdom of your elders?

MOLLY

No. As far as we know, it does absolutely nothing.

AYUTUNDE

And you do it anyway?

MOLLY

Yes.

AYUTUNDE

I think I will visit this Ball of Times Square. I am very curious to see what kind of snacks are inside.

(There is a pounding on the door. Before anyone can react, the door is flung open.

Hank and Sally, dressed to the nines, carrying in

mounds of food, barrel in just as Nan and Steve come in from the kitchen, carrying champagne. They are both dressed to the nines as well.)

HANK

We're here! Let the party begin!

NAN

Ayutunde, I'd like you to meet my sister-in-law, Sally, and my brother-in-law, Hank. This is our houseguest, Ayutunde, she's been living in the Trojan Horse you gave us.

(As they all shake hands.)

SALLY and HANK

Phenomenal.

AYUTUNDE

The figs were delicious.

SALLY

We're so glad you liked them.

HANK

We're glad to meet you.

SALLY

Yes! We are!

NAN

Wow. Sally—look at it all. It all looks beautiful.

SALLY

Thank you. And every last crumb of it gluten free.

NAN

How did you ever get enough of that special flour—I thought it was in limited supply?

SALLY

It is. We have spent the last week cornering the market on it.

HANK

I think we may end up in court over a woman Sally body checked a little too enthusiastically.

SALLY

I had no choice, Hank. She was going for the last bag. Here—you gotta try one of these—and one of these—

(She picks num-nums for Nan to taste.)

NAN

Wow. This is great. But should you be body checking with your back thing?

STEVE

(Steve and Molly and Ayutunde all try the food.)

Yeah, how are you feeling?

SALLY

Great. Now that I know.

STEVE

(To Hank)

Oh, good, you told her you weren't gluten intolerant.

HANK

Oh, my brother. You're gonna love this. Sal?

SALLY

It turns out I'M THE ONE whose gluten intolerant! And I would never have known if it hadn't been for Hank.

HANK

How about that?

SALLY

Those three months I went without gluten to help Hank, I was feeling so good, and as soon as I ate all your gingerbread before Christmas—sick as a dog.

NAN

Wait a minute—Hank *isn't* gluten intolerant, but you are?

SALLY

Yes! He was just lying to me to make my life a living hell baking things without flour. Isn't your brother a genius!

STEVE

For lying to you?

(Sally kisses Hank lustily.)

Sally, Hank was lying to you. Torturing you.

NAN

Stop being a kill joy, Steve.

STEVE

On what world does lying to your wife make her love you more?

NAN

Steve. It worked out for them. Let it go.

SALLY

(Hank and Sally stop kissing.)

Yes, Nan, against all odds it's worked out for us.

(She goes over to the couch.)

And that's why I feel like I can talk to you about—

(She pulls out the divorce announcement card.)

--this. I don't mind telling you I was shocked when I found this.

MOLLY

Really?

SALLY

Well, who wouldn't be?

NAN

Anyone who's spent any time on the internet?

SALLY

Really? I had no idea. So everybody knows? You went on Facebook with this?

MOLLY

Well, we do use a variety of social media in an attempt to reach as much of the target audience as we can.

SALLY

Getting the word out is important, I guess. When things go bad. So— it's definite?

MOLLY

Definite? Oh, well, Nan and I have only been in bed with this for six months, but—

SALLY

You and Nan? Wow. I never saw that coming.

MOLLY

I needed Nan's help because I needed--well, sperm, if you want to know the truth--but now that I'm pregnant--

SALLY

(To Nan)

But I thought you wanted to have a baby.

NAN

I do, you know I do, but--

MOLLY

She does, but Steve just won't come around. I love you like a brother, Steve, but you're chained to your ridiculous Master Plan--

HANK

A Master Plan, Steve? What are you, still in high school?

SALLY

But this is terrible. I thought it was just about the money.

MOLLY

Well it is, it's not like we're in favor of divorce.

SALLY

Oh please, easy for you to say, you're the one benefiting from it.

MOLLY

Hey. When a woman leaves a man she married in good faith, there's usually a good reason for it.

SALLY

I just didn't know it would be the other woman.

NAN

Another woman? Oh, Sally--

(She hugs Sally. Takes the card from her.)

Is that what you've been trying to tell us? Hank's cheating on you?

HANK

NOOOOOOO!!!!!!!!!!

SALLY

Oh please, Hank couldn't cheat his way out of a wet paper sack.

(She snatches the card back.)

I'm not talking about Hank! I'm talking about why I invested my entire Christmas bonus in All's Well When It Ends With a Well.

AYUTUNDE

Oh, good for you, Sally!

SALLY

Thank you.

MOLLY

You can't invest in a charity, can you?

SALLY

You can if you're willing to take your dividends in social good.

HANK

Honey—I'm so proud! I didn't know you had it in you.
(He gives Sally a nice hug and kiss.)

SALLY

I did it because I wanted Steve to have job security. He said they were underfunded and I thought if they had a stronger cash flow—he'd feel more secure. And then Nan wouldn't leave him.

MOLLY

(Horrified)

NAN, YOU'RE LEAVING STEVE?

STEVE

YOU'RE LEAVING ME FOR ALLEN BELL?

NAN

OF COURSE I'M NOT LEAVING YOU FOR ALLEN BELL!

SALLY and HANK

WHO'S ALLEN BELL?

NAN

Sally, where did you get the crazy idea I was leaving Steve?
(At this point, both Nan and Molly are comforting Steve,
and they may all be embracing each other.)

SALLY

Well you can't be in bed and having a baby with Molly if you're--oh my god, you're in one of these new non-traditional group relationships!
You, Molly, and Steve!

MOLLY/NAN/STEVE

(They realize they are all embracing. They leap away from each other.)

NO!

SALLY

Which of course I'm all in favor of—theoretically.

(Confused)

But that wouldn't make any sense. If the three of you are together, why would you need to give Steve this card?

NAN

I didn't give Steve this card—I *made* this card.

MOLLY

It's our business. We make divorce announcements.

SALLY

You make these?

(Collapses on the couch.)

This is terrible.

HANK

Yeah. You make money from divorce, from unhappiness?

MOLLY

Hey—these woman are choosing happiness.

SALLY

I didn't mean that. I meant it was terrible I filled 100 cisterns for nothing.

AYUTUNDE

It *is* nothing, Sally. Or rather, it is the nothing to you that is everything to others. It is, as you say, social good.

NAN

But if Sally filled 100 cisterns—who filled the other 57?

(Everyone goes over to the computer.)

STEVE

(Scrolling through the website.)

Well...Uncle Andrew gave a couple. Molly gave 35 dollars towards one.

Thanks, Molly. Nan filled 10, with Allen Bell's check.

(He glowers very briefly at her.)

NAN

I don't recognize any of the other names at all.

STEVE

They're just random people.

NAN

People on the internet.

MOLLY

Hypnotized by the water.

NAN

It really worked, Steve. People we will never know saw your website, and did something. Maybe something they hadn't done before. And the more people do it, the more people will see them do it and everything will change.

AYUTUNDE

All's Well When It Ends With a Well is a mighty river, Steve. It runs through every computer in America, maybe in the world. That is a lot of water.

ALLEN

(Knocks on the still open door, enters.)

Hello? Nan? It's me.

STEVE

(Viciously)

Oh, great. It's Allen Bell.

NAN

Allen, this is Sally, my sister-in-law.

ALLEN

Nice to meet you.

(They shake hands.)

NAN

Hank, my brother-in-law.

ALLEN

Nice to meet you.

(They shake hands.)

NAN

And Molly, my best friend since the age of seven.

(Molly and Allen shake hands. Time sort of stops. Probably there is a special that holds them in a soft golden light.)

MOLLY

I feel that I know you.

ALLEN

I feel that I know you. In fact, I feel like I love you.

MOLLY

But you're in love with Nan.

ALLEN

It's true that when she told me how she wanted to repair the world, I fell head over heels and all the way to Africa in love with her. But then I realized—I could repair the world myself.

MOLLY

I feel like I love you too. But I am not in control of my emotions. I'm pregnant.

ALLEN

I must be cursed. Every woman I fall in love with is married.

MOLLY

What?

ALLEN

I mean—I'm happy for you and your husband.

MOLLY

I don't have a husband. I have a sperm donor.

ALLEN

Oh.

MOLLY

I wanted a child, and no one wanted one with me. So I started a small business with Nan, just so I could afford sperm donations. If they're donations, it seems to me they shouldn't cost so much, but there it is. I've been going to the clinic at Olive and 8th for months.

ALLEN

Olive and 8th? But I've been making deposits there, as part of their Genius Collection, for months.

MOLLY

I've been using the Genius Collection! My sperm donor's number is 57893.

(Steve throws her Allen's book.)

Which also happens to be the title of your book! I knew it sounded familiar!

ALLEN

57893 million is the number of powers smaller than the smallest perceived something in the universe that we believe is the size of a string.

MOLLY AND ALLEN

57893.

(Molly tosses Allen's book back to Steve.)

MOLLY

You're the father of my child.

ALLEN

You're the mother of my child.

(They kiss.)

If only we were theoretical, and not real, this would prove that super symmetry exists!

MOLLY

What's super symmetry?

ALLEN

Love at first sight in a world where everything is so small it might be nothing, but where that nothing turns out to be everything.

(They kiss. They are madly, eternally in love. They tumble onto the couch, and over the back, and onto the floor where they continue to...whatever...where the audience cannot see them.)

NAN

Wow. They just fell in love.

SALLY

Wow. They sure did.

AYUTUNDE

I am so happy they have found each other. And you—

(She turns to Steve.)

You must be especially happy. Now that Allen Bell is in love with Molly, he is no longer a rival for your wife. Still, I know you worry about your other rival. This man called Bill and Melinda Gates.

STEVE

You know about that?

AYUTUNDE

Remember, I have been listening to every word you two have said through the horse's ass.

NAN

Actually, that's two people, Bill *and* Melinda Gates.

HANK

They're a couple.

AYUTUNDE

Oh, of course, Bill *and* Melinda Gates. And you are in love with them both?

NAN

Well, Melinda more than Bill, really. But I respect and admire them both.

AYUTUNDE

In my country it is frowned upon, but I am sure the three of you will be very happy.

NAN

No, no, Ayutunde—you've got it all wrong—I don't love them that way.

AYUTUNDE

You love them in a way that makes Steve miserable, yes?

NAN

Yes, but—

AYUTUNDE

Then what is the difference?

But I digress. I have something to say to you, Steve, and it is this: this Bill Gates got rich by making—almost nothing. And then he receives bags of gold for these tiny bits, and then he showers this gold down on the poor and needy, like a god. Only he is not a god. He is just a man. With this almost nothing he changes the world. If he can do this, why

not you? This is my question to you: what is your problem. You have enough nothing to do the trick, I am sure. Look at Allen Bell—look at the nothing he used to dig my people a well. He used his poems about strings. If there is any nothing smaller than that nothing, I do not know.

ALLEN

(Popping up from behind the couch, hair all mussed, tie undone.)

She's right! Her ancient tribal wisdom understands string theory intuitively!

AYUTUNDE

No, we watch the TED talks—those are some crazy cats, those TED lecturers.

(Allen goes back behind the couch.)

But I digress. It is time for me to do what I have come here to do.

It is our custom that if you are going to drink the water from an unknown river, you must send a warrior to its source, to see if it flows from a place of goodness, and to thank the water in person, for the gift. I was chosen by my tribe to do this.

(She takes 3 sprigs of a flowering plant from her headdress. She gives one to Nan.)

Thank you, Nan.

(One to Steve.)

Thank you Steve.

(And she tosses one over the back of the couch so she doesn't have to see what is happening back there.)

Thank you Allen, for the water, the gift of life.

We were in desperate need. Of course, that need was caused by the American missionaries who came in my grandmother's time and destroyed our trading routes and traditions, and then in my mother's time by the American aid workers who brought us assistance food dumped by your government to avoid surplus in your country that destroyed our agriculture and fishing, and in my time by the warlords who manipulated the American NGO's into moving our village to a worthless place where there was nothing to eat and no water to drink. And so my children were dying. And then All's Well dug a well. And I came here to thank you.

STEVE

(Tries to give the sprig back to Ayutunde.)

No. You can't thank me! I won't let you! I did nothing!

AYUTUNDE

Steve, the shame you feel is inevitable. Imagine what you could have done if you'd done *something*? Still, your nothing did the trick.

STEVE

So I have to accept that a lie my wife told and a click of a mouse can save the world! I can't! I can't accept it. You can't save the world with just the click of a mouse!

NAN

(In one breath?)

But we just did, a little! Well, Allen did. But he wouldn't have done it if I hadn't lied to him—and I wouldn't have lied to him if you hadn't lost your job and I lost our life savings, and then Allen wouldn't have returned my purse and gone to Africa and built those wells and you wouldn't have built the website that means more wells are being built every day.

ALLEN

(Allen pops up again from behind the couch, this time without his shirt. Molly pops up too, in serious disarray.)

Everything good happened because of something bad! Steve's lost job was the almost nothing that started the cascade of events—like the way a loose screw holding an insignificant part starts the chain of events that causes a plane crash.

STEVE

Losing my job is not a loose screw in an insignificant--

ALLEN

Please, Steve, I'm talking metaphorically. Look at me--I did what I did for all the wrong reasons—because I was in love with Nan. But when I got to Africa, doing good changed me.

AYUTUNDE

In my village we say, what a man does for love, a chicken can do in half the time, and at the end of it, you have an omelet.

(Brief pause while everybody tries to figure that out.

They can't.)

But I have not come here to dispense wisdom. I have come to thank you, which I have, and now I must go.

STEVE

(He sinks down on the floor.)

How is this happening? At least with Bill Gates, you could understand it. You could see how he made the nothing into something, but Allen

Bell? Why should he get to repair the world! What is he, but just an average, everyday asshole!

MOLLY

Hey! He's not an asshole!

NAN

Steve, apologize!

STEVE

I won't!

ALLEN

(Allen has probably put his jacket back on by now.)
It's okay. I've been called an asshole by better men than Steve. Let him call me an asshole, if it makes him feel better.

STEVE

Oh, now the asshole's not content to just save the world, he's going to save me too!

AYUTUNDE

(She pulls him up off the floor.)
You see the light at last, Steve. You can save the world even if you are an asshole.

HANK

That sounds suspiciously like wisdom.

AYUTUNDE

And yet, it is merely simple, inescapable truth.

STEVE

No, this can't be right, you're saying all we have to do is want to make the world better, and it happens?

AYUTUNDE

Once a thing has been thought, it is almost done.

STEVE

No, if that were true—just wanting to save the world would be enough to save it.

SALLY

And wanting to destroy it would destroy it.

AYUTUNDE

But that is obvious true as well. Both those things, they almost enough. Inside that almost—that is where the world lives, the good and the bad of it. That is where your puny version of courage and your pathetic facsimile of faith have a chance. To do something to make you worthy of the luck that has placed you here in this garden of plenty and not in some war-torn desert or jungle where there is only suffering and dust.

HANK

That was definitely wisdom.

AYUTUNDE

Forgive me. I am cranky. I am missing my time in the Trojan Horse already. There was nectar and ambrosia to eat, rare cheeses and fragrant figs to nibble on. Wine to drink. It is my understanding that it was not unlike a Saturday morning eating free samples at your Trader Joes. But it was a paradise to me.

(She turns to go.)

STEVE

Where are you going?

AYUTUNDE

Home.

STEVE

But you have to help me understand how the nothing is everything.

AYUTUNDE

No I don't. I came here to thank you for the water, not solve your problems.

HANK

Don't look at us, Steve. Sally and I are happy just the way things are.

STEVE

Molly—I've always liked you—can you help me figure out how the nothing is everything?

MOLLY

(Hugging Allen close.)

I've always liked you too, but what do I know? I just fell in love at first sight with the father of my unborn child. The odds against that?

ALLEN

Probably impossible to calculate before the heat death of the universe.

MOLLY

Right. Sorry. I can't help.

STEVE

But how do I live in this world where everything's upside down?

NAN

With me.

STEVE

I don't know how to turn the nothing into everything.

NAN

You already did.

STEVE

Or how *sort of* stealing and lying turned into something that saved Ayutunde's children when for 100 years it was stealing and lying that was killing them. Or how almost enough is enough—

NAN

Steve, stop—

STEVE

NO!!! I don't know how to repair the world, Nan. You want me to repair the world with you, and that's what I want to do, what I have to do, not just for you to love me, but for us to find our way--but I don't know how.

NAN

Nobody knows how anymore, Steve. The old ways aren't working and we can't figure out the new ones yet. But we have to do it anyway.

STEVE

But—

NAN

No buts. We repaired the world a little already.

STEVE

By accident. By *sort of* stealing and flat out lying and—

NAN

Okay. I accept.

STEVE

Accept what?

NAN

My new American dream.

Do you want to live in it with me?

STEVE

You know I do.

(He grabs her in his arms.)

I love you more than I hate not understanding how nothing is everything and how sort of stealing is how we repaired the world and how any of this is happening. I love you more than I hate your Bill and Melinda Gates obsession.

NAN

I'll give it up!

STEVE

No, don't. It keeps you from despair!

NAN

You keep me from despair.

(They kiss.

Ilsa begins to clang insistently, louder than she ever has before.)

HANK

Your heat sounds like she's broken or something.

MOLLY

Yeah, Ilsa sounds like she's going to explode.

STEVE

No, she's trying to tell us something.

(The computer makes a sound unlike any it has made before. It's a water sound, but bigger, fuller, more magnificent.

Ilsa also begins to clang and bang in concert with it.

The computer and Ilsa are playing a duet.)

NAN

She's not talking to us--I think she's telling the computer something.

SALLY

You think your heat is talking to your computer?

NAN

Yes. I'm pretty sure she is.

(Everyone listens very carefully.)

SALLY

And nobody thinks that's strange?

ALLEN

Computers talk to the heat in homes all over America and nobody thinks that's strange.

(Ilsa makes sounds like the water sounds.

The computer makes a celestial chime.)

(More water sounds from Ilsa, in unison with the computer.)

Oh my God—that's the chime that means a million dollars has been donated to All's Well When It Ends With a Well.

(Everyone runs over to the computer.)

Look—there's a message from the CEO of Clean Water for Africa. Oh my God!

NAN

Oh my God!

EVERYBODY

Oh my God!

STEVE

He says that since we linked to their website their donations have increased 8000%.

(Everyone gasps.)

He says the All's Well website is so good he's offering me a job.

(They kiss.)

He's inviting the entire staff of All's Well—

(To Nan)

--that's you--to their annual lunch where the guest of honor is--

NAN

(Reading in awe.)

Melinda Gates.

(Nan screams and hugs him.)

I'm going to have lunch with Melinda Gates!

EVERYBODY

Oh my God!

MOLLY

Look—the ball's about to fall in Times Square.
(She turns up the volume on the TV, we hear the sound
of the New Years Eve celebration.)

STEVE

This is the new American dream, where you don't have to be rich to save
the world—every asshole can save the world if he just wants to badly
enough. Well, okay. I'll be that asshole!

ALL BUT NAN AND STEVE

(They have gathered in front of the TV, and chant
all together.)

10

NAN

I want us to have a baby, Steve.

ALL BUT NAN AND STEVE

9

STEVE

All right.

ALL BUT NAN AND STEVE

8

NAN

Now. I don't want to wait.

ALL BUT NAN AND STEVE

7

STEVE

All right.

ALL BUT NAN AND STEVE

6

NAN

The Master Plan can go—

ALL BUT NAN AND STEVE

5

STEVE

I said all right!

ALL BUT NAN AND STEVE

4

STEVE

We'll find a way. The 30,000 we owe to charity—

ALL BUT NAN AND STEVE

3

STEVE

—that's our gift to our child.

ALLEN

(Alan holds out his hand, magically stopping the countdown and all the noise from Times Square.)

Hold on hold on! I'm no fiscal genius, Steve, but 30,000 in debt is not something you want to give to your child.

ALL BUT NAN, STEVE,
and ALLEN

2?

STEVE

No, that's not what I meant, I meant that we'll spend 30,000 to repair the world, in her name. Not this year, not next year. A little at a time. Everything we do for our child will find a way to include that gift. It will be her heritage.

(The countdown and Time's Square sounds magically continue.)

ALL BUT NAN AND STEVE

1!

ALL

HAPPY NEW YEAR!!!!

(Everybody hugs and kisses, going around the room until everyone has hugged everyone.)

Ilsa clangs beautifully along.)

ALLEN

(All jumps up on the couch and calls out his poem
to the Audience.)

String calls to string: *Hello! Hello!*

Tiny mouths repeat in an echo

I love you I love you is all that they know

Love is a string

That rings like a bell

Love is a guest

In god's cosmic motel

And calls to us all

To open our hands

To open our hearts

To open our purses

And celebrate love

In all universes

And when we all fall

Under its spell

ALL

All's Well When it Ends With a Well!

THE END

A NOTE ABOUT TROJAN HORSE DESIGN AND THE SET:

Let's face it--it's a Trojan Horse. And in a Trojan Horse's essential nature: Hidden trouble. And not just trouble: Ambush. And the point of that ambush: Rack and ruin.

So be prepared.

There are logistical problems the set designer and the Trojan Horse designer should solve together: how Ayutunde gets in the horse without the audience seeing her and how she emerges safely and elegantly. To make matters even more baroque, the horse is the Ultimate Gift Basket—so when Ayutunde makes her entrance from inside it, the interior of the Trojan Horse must be seen to have some residue of all those delicious treats. Empty wrappings, empty bottles of wine hanging from the ceiling, three or four piles of boxes of delicacies. These can double as the padding required to make the actress' short stay in the horse more comfortable.

In the best of all possible worlds, the horse will look exactly the way we think the Trojan Horse looked, but will be covered in all kinds of Christmas garlands, so that the Greek's great deception--the lie that won the Trojan war--will merge with the trappings of the American consumerist Christmas, creating a large, blended metaphor. The horse needs to loom very large in the room. If it is placed behind too far upstage behind too much furniture, or if it is less than 9 feet tall, it may not have the right effect. It must be impossibly large, overwhelming the scale of the room, so that it is never made familiar. It is a mythic creature. The door to the living room may need to be taller than an eight foot door to accommodate the height of the horse's head, but many old homes have tall ceilings and 10 foot doors, so this will not be a violation of historical scale. It may not be the worst thing in the world if the horse creates "traffic problems" in the living room. It is an invader, after all. I recommend the horse be built on wheels, and in my mind, I always saw it with a door in its chest, dropping down onto the floor like an old fashioned airplane stairway...but that's up to your Trojan Horse engineers, and a side door may make more sense, and make Ayutunde's exit more graceful. So that's fine, as long as sight lines make it a viable choice. Practically speaking, the set needs to be designed around the Trojan Horse. Designing the set without incorporating the horse's function will create all kinds of problems downstream. Trojan Horse design is trickier than you might think. Well, it was certainly trickier than I thought. The sooner you have your Trojan Horse built, the less it will feel like an unsolvable problem that will pillage your rehearsal period.