

Three Quarter Inches of Sky

a play by  
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The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there.

The Go-Between

J. P. Hartley

### **CHARACTERS:**

Trula—a woman of a certain age - late 40's to early 60's

Jake—her younger brother

Time—a young girl in her early teens

Time isn't holding us

Time isn't after us

Time isn't holding us

Time isn't after us

Time is the most common noun in the English language

Is time memory or is memory time? No one has enough of either one to figure it out.

### **SETTING:**

Trula's house. The living room is the largest room, in the center of the stage. On one side, her father's room. It's offstage. On the other side of the stage, her kitchen. Trula has to walk across the living room to get from the kitchen to her father's room, and back again.

The house is filled with the usual things that houses are filled with.

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## PROLOGUE

### TIME

(Time enters the living room, carrying two uncooked large, homemade chicken pot pies in colorful ceramic individual pie dishes, ready to go into the oven. They're beautiful.

She shows them to the audience.

She sings, in the range of a *mezzo* soprano:)

Sing a song of sixpence,  
A pocket full of rye.  
Four and twenty blackbirds,  
Baked in a pie.  
When the pie was opened  
The birds began to sing;  
Wasn't that a dainty dish,  
To set before the king?

Early Americans liked their chicken pot pies with robins inside.

They say that a million years from now, when all life on this planet is gone, and only fossils buried deep in landfill will remain, the chicken will appear to have been the only bird that lived on earth. All the song bird bones on the surface will long be dust, the eagles and the vultures and the ducks and geese. All gone. The only memory of a bird left will be the chicken—a bird that will, incidentally, soon have almost no genetic memory of what it was before we tamed and engineered it and fried and baked and nuggeted it, and put it in a thousand different dishes, including a dish with a few vegetables and potatoes.

Chicken pot pie.

(She goes into the kitchen, puts them in the oven.)

90 minutes to bake.

(She comes back out, with a large timer on whose

face the setting is easy to read.)  
I love timers, don't you?

(She sets the timer to 90 minutes. It begins to tick.

She sings again, this time in the range of a soprano:)

When the pie was opened  
The birds began to sing;  
Wasn't that a dainty dish,  
To set before the king?

BLACKOUT

## **PIE #1**

TRULA

I walked into my father's room.

(She walks across the living room, goes offstage into her father's room.)

TRULA (o.s.)

He was watching a movie on TCM. I looked at approximately 2 seconds of it—

TIME (o.s.)

I don't like the way Teddy Roosevelt is looking at me.

TRULA

(She emerges from her father's room.)

--and I said:

(Calling back toward his room)

North by Northwest.

Then I walked into the kitchen to get his chicken pot-pie.

(She walks toward the kitchen.)

I was proud of that. Not of the pie, which was organic and had the lowest sodium content of any chicken pot pie on the market and which I had gone to a dozen grocery stores to find--but the ability I had to "name that tune" when it came to movies, to identify a thousand or two thousand maybe? movies in under three seconds flat. From what felt like a single frame, but was probably...

30 or so? Or is it 300? How many frames are there in a second? Damn it I used to know. Well, however many frames there are? That many.

(She has gone into the kitchen, where she has taken a chicken pot pie from the oven. This pie is much smaller than the ones Time put in the oven, it's not in a ceramic pie dish but in one of those

little aluminum ones. It's a store bought pot pie. It's a deep golden brown. She puts it on a tray that has a napkin and a fork on it and goes into her father's room.)

TRULA (o.s.)

You're not drinking enough water. I know, I know, it seems like you are but you're not. Try harder.

(She emerges, without the tray and pie, a moment later.)

TRULA

I can also do it from three or four notes of a soundtrack. Star Wars is probably two note territory—the orchestration is pretty unique. I can recognize every Hitchcock film and every John Ford movie in two seconds and I can recognize John Wayne and Bette Davis from a single word. I have always been filled with pride, with self-satisfaction about that.

But right after I said, “North by Northwest” and went into the kitchen for the pie and felt the smug knowingness that knowing something brings—I felt something else. I felt the hollowness of having made a home inside me for these...parasites. What was wrong with me? How could recognizing a movie be important, be worth anything at all? My ancestors had to recognize important things—like the mushrooms that could kill them, or that it was time to plant the wheat when the full moon rose over a certain hill. What was recognizing North by Northwest in two seconds protecting me or my children from?

Now the fact that I don't have any children to protect is not the point.

I wouldn't be able to protect anyone with that knowledge. That knowledge? Was worthless.

When I was little, my brother Jake and I played a game about knowing things. We called it The Classics Illustrated Game.

(Time comes out and hands her a small stack of blank comic books.)

We had about a hundred Classics Illustrated comics, we had saved up our money to buy them, they were 15 cents each back when 15 cents was a fortune.

(She holds up one of the blank comics as if to show us.)

Here's the War of the Worlds...here's Moby Dick...Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde...

(She finds another one.)

Oh, yes, my favorite, Kim, by Rudyard Kipling--

(She shows us the blank cover triumphantly)

--it had Kim on the cover, barefoot and free, sitting happily astride a British cannon.

(Pointing to cover of the blank comic as if to demonstrate.)

All the Classics Illustrateds had this yellow box that said Classics Illustrated on the upper left of the cover, and the title was opposite the yellow box on the right hand side. Now, most of the covers were outdoor scenes, so the top part, around the title--

(She points to the upper right hand side.)

--was almost always sky.

But if you're thinking that means a lot blue sky, you'd be wrong. Blue is not the default sky color for a Classics Illustrated. Lorna Doone--

(She shows us another blank comic.)

--has this weird pink sky. Because emotion, tone, that's what the sky is about in a world where illustration is doing the story telling. Angry black and grey clouds are popular. Red skies turn up frequently on covers of books about war. Each sky is a part of the narrative of the story inside it. A blue sky is rare. As rare as a great classic about happiness.

Of course, Kim was exactly that.

(She opens one of the blank comics, pages through it.)

It was about colonialism, which is synonymous now with oppression, racism, and greed, but at the time it was written? It was about the glory of the British Empire in India, which made England so very happy. And all that happiness is reflected on the cover--which had a perfect clear blue sky.

Kim was my hero. He was the son of Kimball O'Hara, a British officer, and an Indian woman, so Kim was a half-caste in India, in a world where caste was everything, which is the way I felt, growing up in a little Midwestern provincial backwater filled with religious fundamentalists—I felt like an untouchable. Kim was an orphan, a beggar, a liar, and a thief. And guess what? His nickname was “the little friend of all the world.”

What child wouldn't want to be called the little friend of all the world? To lie and steal and have everyone love you for it? Oh, and then he grows up to be a spy. Of course he was my hero. My role model.

This book was my idea of a life plan. It was like a field guide to a happy life.

If you leave out the part about colonialism. The part of the book that was a lie.

I teach 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century history at a small college known for its self-actuating students and its trees. I've been the chairman of the history department for 10 years now. I'll be stepping down at the end of the semester. Well, that's okay. I've wanted to for a long time, the nonsense you have to put up with? Anyway, I always meant to have the kids read Kim as part of the section on colonialism. But I've never actually read the book—just the comic—so I couldn't very well assign it. And yes—in college? I did write papers about books I'd only read as Classics Illustrateds. I got A's on those papers. Every time.

I didn't really think I was cheating. I mean I *knew* I was cheating, but I didn't *feel* like I was. I was the World Champion of the Classics Illustrated Game.

This is the way you play the game: Stack your Classics Illustrateds neatly on top of each other—

(She picks up three or four of the blank Classics Illustrateds. Time comes out, takes them from her, and holds them up, so they are facing the audience.)

--and then pull the one on top down, to reveal a fraction of an inch of the one beneath it, uncovering more and more sky. The two of us, my

brother and me, would do this slowly. How slow? We did it slower than any 10 and 12 year-old have ever done anything in the history of the world.

The amount of sky above the title—

(She points.)

--was small. Just three quarter inches of sky, that's all there was. We used every atom of our brains to identify the title before the three quarter inches ended, and the letters of the title appeared.

(She slowly, slowly, moves the one on top down, revealing the one beneath it.)

It was an indescribable pleasure to be the one who cried out--

(At super speed)

--AConnecticutYankeeinKingArthur'sCourt--

(Back to regular speed)

--a fraction of a second before the other one did. And then we just kept going. We didn't keep score.

But winning still mattered. When you know something someone else doesn't know you've won something. Because the knowing of things is not as much about the things you know as your parents and teachers lead you to believe. It's about knowing them faster and better than other people. When you're someplace and Grieg's Wedding Day at Troldhaugen comes on the radio, and you say, "ah, that's Grieg's Wedding Day at Troldhaugen"--

(Grieg's Wedding Day at Troldhaugen plays.)

Time wheels on Jake, playing a piano. It is a baby grand.)

That's my brother. Jake. Playing on Mom's Steinway. I got the Steinway after mom died even though Jake should have—he really loved playing the piano. I didn't. I couldn't figure out how practicing something was knowing it. I couldn't find a way to know a song any better the 20<sup>th</sup> time I played it than the first. I got better at playing it, absolutely, who wouldn't. But practicing it didn't change it. So it wasn't the kind of knowing that interested me.

Anyway, for those of you who don't know, what Jake is playing is, of course, Wedding Day at Troldhaugen. He played it approximately 500 times the week before his regional competition recital during my

senior year in high school, which is why I can recognize it instantly, in any situation, and impress friends and enemies alike with my knowledge of it. I can win with it, without actually knowing it—well, without knowing it the way Jake did.

JAKE

(Without looking up from the keyboard, as he continues playing.)

Cheater.

TRULA

Oh, yes. Always. I always was.

JAKE

You were always a cheater.

TRULA

Didn't I just say that?

JAKE

Yes, but you're going to find a way to turn saying you're a cheater into some kind of virtue.

TRULA

Of course I am, that's the way cheaters work. How do you think they get away with it? With cheating?

JAKE

I don't know.

TRULA

I know you don't. And you know why you don't know?

JAKE

No.

TRULA

You're not a cheater. It took you playing it 500 times to know Wedding Day at Troidhaugen by heart, note perfect.

(Jake is just about finished with the Grieg.

Time continues wheeling the piano across  
the stage.)

JAKE

I didn't even like Grieg. You liked it a lot more than I did.

TRULA

Please, that can't be true. You played it 500 times. How could you  
not have liked it? How could you have not liked it when—Jake?  
Come back--

(Jake and the piano have almost been wheeled  
off stage.)

JAKE

What did the doctor say?

TRULA

Jake I wanted to ask you. Who won the most, when we played The  
Classics Illustrated Game? I'm pretty sure I was the Champion, but  
who won the most often when—

JAKE

That's not what you wanted to ask me.

TRULA

Yes it is. Jake? Jake?

(He's gone, he doesn't answer. The final notes of  
Wedding Day at Troldhaugen play.)

## PIE #2

TRULA

I walked into my father's room.

(She walks across the stage, goes into his room.)

TRULA (o.s.)

He was watching a movie on TCM. I looked at approximately 2 seconds of it—

TIME (o.s.)

Mustn't go to bed. Mustn't sleep. It's a waste. Time doesn't sleep. Oh, look how it's clouding up. It's getting darker every second. It's funny, I can still feel the sun on my hands.

TRULA

(She emerges from her father's room.)

--and I said:

(Calling back toward the room)

Dark Victory.

Then I walked back into the kitchen to get his chicken pot-pie.

(She walks toward the kitchen.)

Dark Victory is the Bette Davis film where she has this super polite brain tumor, it gives her a few headaches now and then, a little memory loss but nothing alarming, and best of all, it's going to send her like a warning to let her know that in five minutes she's going to be dead. The warning will be in the form of sudden darkness. This will be the sign that she'll have five minutes, before she goes completely blind, to arrange herself artistically in bed, and say something moving and memorable, and die. That's brain cancer in the movies. So frigging convenient. That's the thing about movies—they are lifelike. But not like life at all.

(She goes into the kitchen. She takes a chicken pot pie out of the oven, places it on the tray.)

In real life it would go like this: you notice that your long term memory is fine, but your short term memory is shot. You dismiss it. You'll say you're just getting older.

Gradually, you'll realize that things are getting darker. You'll replace all the 75 watt bulbs with 150 watt ones and try to dismiss that too. Eventually, maybe in a year, maybe in 5, no one can say for sure—you'll go completely blind. By this time, of course, you'll have seen a doctor, but because you are not Bette Davis your doctor will not marry you and leave his or her practice and throw themselves into research to try to save you. Nope. You'll sleep more, and more, and you'll slip into a coma. And then you'll die.

Who wouldn't want to die in the movies. No wonder so many characters do. Also, the costumes are great.

(She comes out of the kitchen, carrying the chicken pot pie.)

I can't find the chicken pot pies dad likes at Whole Foods anymore--it's been months since I've been able to get them in a store. So I have to have them delivered by Instacart. They're the only thing he'll eat. I'm not sure how that happened, but other than 2 eggs in the morning, and cereal for lunch, that's it. It's a chicken pot pie for dinner, or nothing.

(She goes into her father's room with the chicken pot pie.)

TIME (o.s.)

I have no idea to this day what them two Italian ladies were singin' about. Truth is, I don't want to know. Some things are best left unsaid. It was like some beautiful bird flapped into our drab little cage and made those walls dissolve away.

TRULA (o.s.)

Shawshank Redemption again? But you just saw it last--no no, no, I agree, Shawshank IS a masterpiece—I'd watch it every day if I had the time.

(She emerges a moment later.)

TRULA

I would. Well, okay, maybe not every day. And maybe not the whole thing. It's a long movie. But—yeah. I'd watch it.

(Time walks by, holding a medium sized shipping box. She puts the box next to Trula.)

Ah. The next shipment of Classics Illustrateds from Ebay has arrived.

They say you can't step in the same river twice. But Ebay is all about that. Ebay is where America time travels to its past. It's a place where you can visit all the things you used to own and threw away. It's a current that runs upstream.

(Trula goes to the kitchen, gets a knife.)

Here's why I have to buy them on Ebay. I had the Classics Illustrateds in two large boxes in the basement, waiting for when I had children so I could play the Classics Illustrated Game with them. But it turned out I'd married someone who had kids already and didn't want more and who could not, much to my complete surprise, even though he'd been crystal clear about it from the moment we'd met--be convinced otherwise. When we split up I got the house. And then I lost those two boxes when I lost everything I owned in Hurricane Irene.

(She comes back with the knife, hands it to Time.)

It took me three months to fill out the insurance claim. Near the top of the list, value wise? Those comics. It was a total surprise, but they were worth a small fortune. They had been in almost perfect condition, we were such careful children. But the real loss, as far as I was concerned? The game. The chance to recognize all those three quarter inches of sky.

(Time opens up the box. She starts to take out the 30 or so blank Classics Illustrateds.)

Replacing everything you own takes more time than you might expect. It took me 5 years to replace everything I lost that I absolutely needed—chairs and beds and can openers and lawn mowers and sheets and bedspreads, but the fact is, of course, that you don't actually replace things—you get new things to impersonate the things you lost. Instead of sitting in a chair your grandmother loved, you sit in a chair nobody loved. Don't tell me that chairs and tablecloths don't have memory, that they aren't containers of it, that they aren't the banks where we stock the moments of the past.

Instead of making the bed with sheets that were part of your mother's trousseau, filled with all those hopes and dreams and plans for the future--you lie in bed at night in Italian made Egyptian cotton sheets with obscenely high thread count you scored on sale at One Kings Lane. You dream and sleep on sheets that are nothing but a bargain. All of a sudden your house, which used to be full of things that your mother and grandmother touched and which made you think of them when you touched them is just full of things. Things that nobody you loved ever touched. Things that make you think of nothing when you touch them. Except the things they can never replace.

When my father moved in with me 2 years ago--his memory was starting to fray, a bit, at the edges, so it was either move in with me, or Courtland Heights, an assisted living place--he brought some furniture and things with him, what I call original issue stuff. It's comforting for him to have his things around him. My memory was starting to fray too, specifically I was having trouble remembering why I was still working full time when all my friends were retiring. Going part time this year so I could take care of dad was like a blessing.

So my house was full to overflowing with the original issue items Dad brought with him, and the fake replacements I'd gotten along the way. I didn't need another thing. Replacing over a hundred Classics Illustrateds was more or less the last thing on my mind.

These--

(She holds the blank comics Time has taken from the box.)

--are the easy ones to find. The common ones. But the websites where collectors buy and sell the rare ones are confusing--should I spend 15 or 25 dollars a comic for one that was just rated G, for good? Or 45 to 75 dollars for VG--very good. Or 150 to 500 dollars for VF--very fine. Well, then how about 10,000 dollars for an impossibly rare one in M--mint condition?

Stepping in the same river twice was harder than I'd anticipated.



### **PIE #3**

TRULA

I walked into my father's room.

(She walks across the stage on her way to her father's room.)

I didn't have to guess what movie it was. I had put in the DVD myself. It's my father's favorite movie.

(She goes into her father's room.)

TIME (o.s.)

Then you and Victor were?

Yes. YES. SAY IT. He was my...BOYFRIEND.

TRULA

(She emerges from his room, laughing.)

Young Frankenstein.

(Calling back toward his room.)

If you get tired we can stop it and finish it tomorrow.

Then I walked back into the kitchen to get his chicken pot-pie.

(She is walking toward the kitchen.)

The whole city is apparently out of the chicken pot pies he likes. Even Instacart can't get them. I had to go to Trader Joes and get some of theirs.

(She goes into the kitchen to take a pie out of the oven and puts it on the tray. The pot pie is much larger than the last ones were.)

I like Trader Joes. But I don't like everything they make.

(She leaves the kitchen, holding the larger pot pie on a tray.)

I'm hopeful, but not optimistic.

(She goes into her father's room, with the chicken pot pie.)

TRULA (o.s.)

Here we go. You don't have to eat it all, dad. I know, it's bigger than the other ones. Just eat what you want. No, it's probably not as good. Well, the pies you like are made in New Hampshire, we could take a fieldtrip to the factory, see if they'll sell us some, but other than that? It's this or nothing. Just try it, okay?

(She comes out of his room.)

He's not going to eat it.

(Jake comes out of the kitchen, holding a Trader Joe's chicken pot pie on a plate, eating it.)

JAKE

It's not so bad.

TRULA

But he's not going to eat it.

(She goes into the kitchen, comes back with a pitcher of water that is half full. She goes into her father's room.)

TIME (o.s.)

Mick! Give him your wallet!

What for?

He's got a knife!

That's not a knife. *That's* a knife.

TRULA (o.s.)

You switched to AMC? No, that's fine. You can watch the rest of Young Frankenstein anytime. And here—we're measuring now, remember? You have to drink it all before you go to bed. I know, I know, but that's the way it is.

TRULA

(She comes out from her father's room.)

Crocodile Dundee. If you weren't here I'd watch it with him. You know what I like about watching old movies set in New York City?

JAKE

What.

TRULA

The sidewalks. They're so clean. Whether the film is set in front of a mansion on Fifth Avenue or a tenement on the Lower East Side. No trash cans. No recycle bins. No bags of trash spilling onto the street. Just clean sidewalks. Not like it is now. I mean, it's so Blade Runner now.

JAKE

What is?

TRULA

New York City. There's trash everywhere and everyone's wearing dirty black clothing that looks grey.

JAKE

You're talking about Midtown.

TRULA

So?

JAKE

Well, I don't go to Midtown. It doesn't look that way on the Upper East Side.

TRULA

It will. Midtown is just time travel to the Upper Eastside, to Fifth Avenue in 2029.

JAKE

Anyway, that was just an artifact.

TRULA

What was?

JAKE

Of the fact that they were filming. They hid the trash cans. So it's a cheat. A lie.

TRULA

You don't know that.

JAKE

Now days, cinema verite and all that, when they film on the Lower East Side, they probably dress the set with *more* trash cans. To make it *more* Lower East Sidey. So it's a lie too.

TRULA

You could be right.

JAKE

Of course I'm right. What's that quote, film is a lie at 24 frames per second?

TRULA

24 frames per second, that's what it is. It was driving me crazy that I couldn't remember. Thanks. But I think it's the truth.

JAKE

What is?

TRULA

At 24 frames per second. "Film is truth at 24 frames per second. And every cut is a lie."

JAKE

See? Your memory's fine. Better than mine.

TRULA

I've known that stupid quote for years, doesn't count.

JAKE

Yes, the quote is stupid. You have to cut, eventually. A movie can't go on forever. You have to cut it so it ends. So, it is by its very nature, a lie.

TRULA

I don't care, I still like seeing those clean sidewalks.

JAKE

When I see a movie set in New York, in the 80's and 90's? And there's a shot of the twin towers? I like that. I like seeing the twin towers again.

TRULA

Me too. I always go, yes.

JAKE

Yes. Yes. Yes.

TRULA

It's like, when we're watching home movies, and every so often, there's mom, and you go oh, she was so beautiful. How is it possible she was so beautiful and now she's gone.

JAKE

But they weren't.

TRULA

Weren't what?

JAKE

Beautiful. The towers. I don't think they were. I don't like that kind of architecture.

TRULA

But you live in a modern building.

JAKE

Yes, *Modern*. I live in a Mies van der Rohe. The architect of the towers, was like...Formalist, or something.

(Trula rolls her eyes.)

TRULA

Well, I don't know if they were beautiful before. But they are now. When I see them, I know they weren't beautiful but they feel

beautiful. Something in my heart just swells, it opens, I feel all these things that I feel when I see something beautiful

JAKE

I know. It's weird. Pictures of them now *are* beautiful, but they were ugly when you saw them during the time those pictures were taken.

TRULA

Huhhh. That's true.

JAKE

But mom really *was* beautiful. She was like a cross between Elizabeth Taylor and Ingrid Bergman.

TRULA

When I see a picture of mom--its overwhelming--all the real beauty and the beauty that is memory, I mean it's like unrecoverable.

JAKE

Yes. Yes. Yes.

TRULA

I wonder, if I got memory loss from the drugs or something, and I saw a picture of her--would that overwhelming explosion of beauty still happen to me?

JAKE

I think it will. I think it's a kind of knowing--that doesn't need memory. That doesn't need recognition. That even if you don't know who she is, when you see that picture, you will still feel that. That thing with your mother--that's forever. The weird thing is that people with Alzheimer's don't remember their children, a lot of times.

TRULA

Well, I got that covered.

JAKE and TRULA

No children.

TRULA

Check. I've pre-forgotten them in an efficient way. And now no one will ever have to look at a picture of me, and have Scarlett Johansson crossed with Uma Thurman blossom inside them.

JAKE

You think you look like a cross between Scarlett Johansson and Uma Thurman?

TRULA

Not on my best day in my wildest dreams.  
(They laugh.)

JAKE

Have you taken him over to look at Courtland Heights and get him signed up on the waiting list?

TRULA

Nope.

JAKE

Trula, you have to—

TRULA

It's not time yet—

JAKE

You're not doing him any favors, the sooner he gets acclimated, used to the place--

TRULA

No.

JAKE

You can't keep this up, Trula.

TRULA

You can't tell me I can't, Jake.

JAKE

This is not the way you should be spending this time. Isn't there something else you want to do, to see, somewhere you've always wanted to go?

TRULA

Yes, and I'm going, next month. To see the Barrier Reef. To be awed and transformed by the great natural wonder of the world. And you're coming to take care of Dad while I'm gone. Two weeks. Is that too much for you? You want to send Dad to Courtland Heights because you can't be here for two weeks?

JAKE

You know that's not what I'm talking about.

TRULA

Do I?

JAKE

You finally quit teaching, you should have done it two years ago, but okay, you quit. You have this window of time. Yes, you're going to the Barrier Reef, but you could do anything.

TRULA

I don't have anything better to do.

JAKE

Don't say that. You have friends, you have money, you have--

TRULA

No, listen, to me, I have Nothing Better To Do.

JAKE

But you do, you do, you--

TRULA

You're not listening. If someone said to me, you can go anywhere you want, do anything in the whole world--well, okay, sure, I'd like to base jump from the Golden Gate Bridge, surf the big Pipe on Oahu--but I can't do those things. Taking care of Dad is something I can do.

There is nothing I *can* do that is better than doing this. Therefore: I have nothing BETTER to do.

And he is not ready for Courtland Heights.

JAKE

But he will be soon--

TRULA

Look, nobody thought he'd be this good this long--when he moved in with me, all his doctors gave him 2 years on the outside before he would need round the clock memory care. That was 3 years ago.

JAKE

Doctors are always wrong about the clock. They tell a person they have 6 months, they're dead in 6 weeks. They tell them to go home and put their lives in order, they die in a car crash 20 years later. Too long, too short, look how wrong they've been with you.

(Pause. Gently)

Look. Everybody else in the family thinks that--

TRULA

Everybody else is not taking care of him. I am.

JAKE

And doing such a beautiful job of it. Here. Take a taste of the delicious food you're serving him.

(He offers her a bite of his chicken pot pie. She eats it.)

TRULA

Oh my god. It's awful.

JAKE

Yep. A vat of chemicals.

(He keeps eating it. She tries to grab the pie from him.)

Get your own.

TRULA

You're kidding. You're actually going to eat it?

JAKE

I'm gonna go have dinner with dad. I'm going to suffer your love in solidarity with him.

(He starts off toward his father's room.)

TRULA

Don't talk to him about it, okay?

JAKE

About what? Courtland Heights? Okay. But you have to put him on the waiting list.

TRULA

No, don't talk to him about it.

JAKE

About what?

TRULA

About me.

JAKE

Why not? If he wants to talk about it—

TRULA

He doesn't.

JAKE

Why not?

TRULA

He doesn't know.

JAKE

What? You still haven't—Trula, I can't believe you haven't told him.

TRULA

I don't want to tell him.

JAKE

Of course you don't want to tell him. But you have to.

No, I don't.

JAKE

Of course you do.

TRULA

I thought I wouldn't have to tell him. I thought he would never have to know. The way his memory's going, if I could just last it out.

JAKE

Until when?

TRULA

Until he doesn't know me anymore. Then he'll never have to know.

JAKE

Great. Just great. In households all over America, Alzheimer's is breaking hearts, people are praying for it to slow down, and in this one, you're praying for it to go faster?

TRULA

I am not. And he does not have Alzheimer's.

JAKE

Trula that's not the point. The point is—don't you see how crazy a plan this is? Really?

TRULA

Well, the only other option is to hope for an asteroid to strike the earth and wipe out the human race before I have to tell him. But that seems extreme. To want to wipe out the human race, to save my father this pain.

If I can just hold out, when I'm gone, he won't know. It would kill him to know.

I'll take him over to look at the place. I'll tell him we need to put his name on the waiting list.

JAKE

Promise.

TRULA

Promise.

JAKE

No, I mean really. Promise. You'll do it.

TRULA

I promise...I'll talk to him about it.

JAKE

And take him over to—

TRULA

I'll talk to him about it, okay?

JAKE

Okay. We'll start there.

(He goes over and holds her, kisses her forehead.)

Okay.

## **PIE #4**

TIME (o.s.)

I will take it up with my lawyer, Lawyer Daggett. And he will make money and I will make money and your lawyer will make money...and you, Mr. Auctioneer, you will foot the bill.

You can't serve papers on a rat, baby sister. You gotta kill him or let him be.

TRULA

(Trula emerges from her father's room with an empty water pitcher.)

The Duke, obviously. And obviously—True Grit. The third time he's watched it this month. When he first moved in, he wouldn't watch something he'd seen in the last year. Still, his memory is remarkable, better than mine is, most of the time. And the other times? It's not Alzheimer's, or maybe it is, it's not dementia, or maybe it is, or maybe it's a kidney function issue. All we know is that there is someone in his memory with a broom, sweeping up the warehouse where my father's life is stored. The broom uses a LIFO inventory control system—Last In, First Out, it's the preferred inventory system for memory storage the world over. You almost never hear of anyone's brain using FIFO—First In, First Out. Nope, the childhood memories stick around long after you'd think their shelf life has expired. It's the new memories that fly out the door.

(She sniffs loudly.)

Oh, no. Do you smell something burning? Crap, not again.

(She runs into the kitchen.)

This is the second time this has happened this week. I can't hear the timer go off from my father's room, or I just forget to set it or--

(She pulls a chicken pot pie from the oven, puts it on the tray. It's smoking a little.)

No, it looks okay. Just a little brown around the edges.  
Thank god.

(She comes out of the kitchen, with the  
chicken pot pie.)

Since the Trader Joe's Chicken Pot Pie disaster last year, I've tried Marie Callenders, Stouffers, which won the Good Housekeeping award for best pot pie but still wasn't up to Dad's exacting standards, Swansons, Harry and David's—it's huge, serves 8, costs a fortune, Boston Market, Schwan's—that's the little refrigerated truck that delivers, and Applegate Farms.

(Holding up the chicken pot pie.)

This is a locally made chicken pot pie, from one of the gourmet shops. So it's probably filled with salt and trans fats and god knows what other unregulated poisons.

(She takes it into her father's room.)

TRULA (o.s.)

This one is supposed to be really good. Top rated in the local foodie blogs. Try to eat it, okay? Oh, and if I were you, I'd change the channel when he starts riding Little Blackie to death in order to save Baby Sister. It always makes me cry.

(Trula comes out of her father's room.)

The Tibetan Buddhists say that crying is confusing to the dead, because it summons them back, and they can't actually come back.

I don't want to confuse anyone, least of all myself. I pretty much hate being confused. From the time I was little, confused was my code word for upset. This is because confusion—the not knowing of things, the not knowing what to do with the things I know, the knowing that what I know is worthless, the knowing that I know better but it doesn't help—all those are the things that upset me.

I used to believe that if I just learned enough, that someday I was going to learn the thing that would save me.

The problem is that confusion, at this stage in my disease, is not uncommon and so my greatest fear now? Is that I *did* learn the thing that could save me. And I've forgotten it.

I wish Jake were here. Whenever he got upset, he didn't get confused. He'd play the piano.

(The sound of Chopin's Military Polonaise comes from off stage. Time comes wheeling on the baby grand, with Jake playing. On top of the closed lid of the grand, there is a box.)

JAKE

This box was outside on the front porch, so I brought it in.  
(He keeps playing throughout.)

TRULA

Thanks.

(She takes the box off the piano, sets it down.)

Do you want the lid up?

JAKE

Yes, please.

(Trula lifts the lid on the baby grand. The music thunders through the house.)

Thank you. That's much better. Isn't it!

TRULA

Remember how loud you used to play the piano when you were upset? I thought you were going bring the house down.

JAKE

I use the code word "disappointed", not upset.

TRULA

Really?

JAKE

Seemed more manly. At the time. How's dad today?

TRULA

He just watched True Grit for the third time this month.

JAKE

That doesn't mean anything. Tomorrow he could be on the phone to his accountant remembering everything she forgot to do on his last three tax returns and how much it cost him down to the penny. True Grit doesn't have anything to do with it.

TRULA

It has everything to do with it.

JAKE

No, because whatever's happening with his clock, yours is the one we have to pay attention to. You can't keep this up.

TRULA

Of course I can.

(Trula picks up the box.)

JAKE

You haven't called Courtland Heights.

TRULA

You called them?

JAKE

Oh, shit, you didn't call them.

TRULA

Dad's happy here. And he won't eat anything but chicken pot pie, so he'll starve at Courtland Heights.

JAKE

No he won't, they'll make him eat.

TRULA

Oh, that sounds so attractive.

JAKE

What's in there anyway?

TRULA

Ummmm...just a few things to replace what I lost in Irene.

JAKE

It's been 6 years, Trula. You should let that go.

TRULA

I did let it go, remember? All of it.

JAKE

Nope, you didn't let it go. You had it taken from you. By force. A force of nature. And it wasn't all of it, you have to stop saying that.

TRULA

So what if I didn't lose the things that could get wet. So I was able to save my china. So what? I lost everything else.

JAKE

So you have three sets of china alone.

TRULA

Yes, lucky for you—one for each of your girls. I'm leaving mom's Wedgewood to Amy. I'm leaving the Limoges to Rachael, she always played with it when she was little. And I'm leaving the Russel Wright to Jennifer. I've got it all written down.

JAKE

(Time has just about got Jake wheeled  
across the stage.)

Thanks. I think you picked the right one for each of them.

TRULA

Oh, they'll still fight over whatever set they didn't get. But this way they'll be mad at me, and not at each other.

JAKE

Are there Classics Illustrateds in that box?

TRULA

What? No. Why would you think that?

JAKE

There better not be Classics Illustrateds in that box.

TRULA

Why? It's my money I can do what I want with it.

JAKE

You don't know the kind of money you'll need, no one knows with this kind of thing, you don't know and if you start just throwing it around-

-

TRULA

I'll throw it wherever I want to. It's my money. For now. IT'S MY MONEY.

(Time wheels Jake off stage, he's gone. The Chopin concludes with a flourish.

(She takes a stack of blank Classics Illustrates from the box, and hides it in the closet in the living room with the other stack of them.)

People don't talk about money in the last moments of their life. Who remembers money at that moment? Orson Wells doesn't whisper "municipal bonds" with his last breath, in Citizen Kane. No, he whispers "Rosebud." The name of his sled. That's the other thing about dying in the movies. You get great last lines. One year one of my freshmen knew the exact words that the replicant played by Rutger Hauer says as his life is ebbing away in Blade Runner. It was a beautiful speech, spoken by an android who knows, like Bette Davis in Dark Victory knows, that he's been given that two-minute warning that the movies so often conveniently provide so that a character can say something profound and we can be appropriately moved by it. Does he talk about money? No. He talks about beauty. Because he is a replicant who could go into places in space no human could survive, he has seen things that have been seen by no one else, and his memories, preserved alive in time, will vanish when he dies.

TIME

(Time comes back on stage.)

I've seen things you people wouldn't believe. Attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion. I watched C-beams glitter in the dark near the

Tannhäuser Gate. All those moments will be lost in time, like tears...in...rain. Time to die.

### TRULA

And then Rutger Hauer, rain falling on him like tears, dies. The student had remembered and recited it perfectly. It was more words than he had said in class the entire semester.

That speech is considered the most beautiful speech in the entire canon of science fiction film. The replicant's memories are singularly beautiful because having memories is sort of what the entire movie is about—because our memories make us human. During the movie, out of a longing to be human, the replicants gather pictures of men who they pretend are their fathers, women they pretend are their mothers, they find pictures of boys or girls who they pretend are themselves when they were children. They invent their memories. And once they invent them they believe in them. They look at those photos last thing before they go to sleep at night. They look at them more and more the closer they are to the moment when they know they are going to die. Their memories—which are completely and totally fake, like small movies they have constructed inside themselves—give them comfort.

At the moment of his death, the replicant lives fully and completely in the memory of something. And this is the moment when he proves that he is human.

His memories make him truly alive. Because our memories make us who we are.

Everyone in class was very impressed that this student knew the whole speech by heart. To be honest, I had no idea that he knew *anything*. I mean, I suppose he had to know something—or other. About something. Probably, I imagined, about...I don't know, music or coding or something. But not something that mattered to me. When I told him, later, in a conference, how impressed I was that he knew this speech by heart, he expressed his surprise that everybody didn't know it.

I didn't tell him, but I knew that speech by heart too. I had been really moved when he recited it, kind of overwhelmed by the memory it had called up in me, of that moment in the movie in the rain. And then I had gone home, and thought about all the memories that made me who I was, and how many of them were moments in movies that were duplicated in the memories of millions.

(She goes into the kitchen, fills a pitcher carefully, half way, with water for her father.)

And it made me feel—not more human, in the sharing of nearly identical things—but more and more like a replicant, like a replica of every other middle aged middle class American.

(She walks toward her father's room.)

And then it hit me: Because almost everything I remembered was identical to everything everybody else remembered, almost all the moments inside me that I treasured would never die. I would die, but they wouldn't die with me. For some reason—this...confused me.

I didn't know what the Tannhäuser Gate was—no one does, apparently a screenwriter just made it up at the last second without any idea what it meant, everybody liked the sound of it, it evoked some huge, Valhalla like mythic thing, maybe you went through it into a worm hole, maybe it was a gate to another dimension, nobody knew, nobody cared, they threw it in and the Tannhäuser Gate became a thing that will live forever, in film and in memory, and the C-Beams will too and they are also unknown, no one knows what they do, no one knows why they glitter.

(She goes into her father's room.)

TIME (o.s.)

Well, Sir, here we are again. Course, the fireworks all blew up, but we can't very well blame that on you. Anyway, everything's turned out fine, as it usually does. Alice is going to marry Tony—

TRULA (o.s.)

Jimmy Stewart! Look how young he is!

TIME (o.s.)

Nobody on our block has to move. We've all got our health; as far as anything else is concerned, we still leave that up to you.

TRULA (o.s.)

Here, dad. Okay, I'll get you another box.

(She comes out of her father's room, heads to the closet, takes out a box of Kleenex.)

TRULA

You Can't Take It With You. One of Jimmy Stewart's first films.

(She goes into her father's room with the box of Kleenex.)

TRULA (o.s.)

I know. It makes me cry too.

(After a moment, she comes back out of her father's room.)

TRULA

Everybody recognizes You Can't Take It With You. Well, everybody over the age of 50 or so. But now even your age won't define what you remember--the Internet is making everything everybody knows exactly identical to everything anybody knows. Not only that, but we now know the things we know in exactly the same way everybody else knows them.

And then I thought--all those three quarter inch skies. Nobody knows them but me. Just us. Just my brother and me. I want them all back--all those skies. No matter what they cost. I want them. If Great Expectations is only available in Near Mint, I'll pay for it. I'll even pay for Mint. What do I care how much they cost. I'm dumping my TIA-CREFF retirement fund into my checking account. And then I'm buying them all back, every single one.

## PIE #5

### TRULA

(Trula is slaving away in an incredibly messy kitchen.)

I'm making Dad a chicken pot pie. If you had any idea how bad a cook I am, you would know the level of my desperation. I didn't have to make the crust—I bought that readymade, so that means I just had to make the filling. Carrots and peas—it's literally the only way he will eat a vegetable, if it's part of a cpp, then I just take chicken breasts, butter, chicken broth, a little milk but not too much, that's restricted for him because of the chronic renal failure. Now some people say, oh, just use Campbell's cream of chicken soup, toss in your cubed chicken and you're done. Well, not for me. I made 7 of these babies, and I'm baking them now, I'm going to freeze all but two and I've got enough for a week.

(She goes into the living room.)

I'm exhausted. I've got to sit down.

(Time moves some things on a chair so that Trula can sit down.)

Thank you. I hate cooking.

(She opens the drawer in the table next to her chair, and takes out a blank Classics Illustrated.)

So here's how Kim, the Little Friend of All the World, grows up and uses his stealing and lying talents to become a spy.

He sort of adopts a Holy man, a Lama, and the Lama takes him on as his apprentice, his chela (*pronounced chayla*), and off they go seeking Enlightenment. Meanwhile, Kim has his own quest—he was once told to look for a red bull on a green field, because his destiny awaits him when he finds it.

Sure enough, on the way to Enlightenment, Kim sees the red bull on a green field on a British regimental banner. He creeps closer to get a

better look at it, and two soldiers catch him and rough him up a bit. But then his amulet is discovered—oh, I forgot to tell you, Kim wears an amulet around his neck, and inside it are his papers. A priest for the regiment opens the amulet, reads the papers, and says—

TIME

(Time comes on stage, says with an Irish brogue)

Powers of Darkness, it's Kimball O'Hara's son. He's—  
(She stops.)

TRULA

Shoot, what does he say next.

TRULA/TIME

(They say it together.)

Powers of Darkness, it's Kimball O'Hara's son. He's—  
(They stop.)

TRULA

I can't believe I can't remember that.

(Softly, to herself)

Powers of Darkness, it's Kimball O'Hara's son. He's...He's...he's--

Crap. I'll have to look.

(She opens the blank Classics Illustrated, starts thumbing through it.)

See, it turns out that the banner is the standard of his father's regiment. They're thrilled to have found him at last! Even though he is a half-caste they take him in, they wash the dirt of the streets off him, dress him in Western clothes, and send him to the very best British school in India. This seems like a no-brainer now, but it is really radical, really inclusive, in the time it was written.

(Still thumbing through the comic.)

So anyway one day Kim, after they've trained him to be a spy, was on a dangerous mission, and--

(She's reading something. She stops.)

Kim was—

(Oh.)

Oh. Wow. What? What?

(She reads for another few moments.

She says to Time:)

But this is not the way I remember it. The way I remember it--

Wow. His mother was an Irish washer woman for his father's regiment. He's all Irish, completely white, not a half-caste at all. No wonder they took him in. The little brown boy deserved our love because he was just a little white boy all along.

For 50 years I have carried the dream of being the little friend of all the world inside me—when the truth was I never had the faintest clue about the world I wanted to be the little friend of.

(Jake comes into the kitchen from the garage, opens the door to the oven, and takes out a chicken pot pie. He gets a fork.)

Unless I just recently rewrote Kim, in my mind. Maybe I remembered it perfectly for 50 years and just yesterday, I completely rewrote my memory of it? But that means I loved a book that worshipped colonialism for 50 years. Unless I made up the memory of loving it? Unless...

That's the thing about memory. Your memories always feel like your memory. Once you discover that there is a hole in the bucket of your memory, you can't use it to check anything, least of all itself.

JAKE

(Jake walks into the living room eating a chicken pot pie.)

Do you think dad's cheating much?

TRULA

(She quickly hands Kim to Time, who hides it back in the closet.)

Dad's not a cheater.

JAKE

I mean about remembering things.

TRULA

A little. About stuff that doesn't matter, like what he ate for breakfast.

JAKE

He eats the same thing every day.

TRULA

Yeah, he knows that. That's why I think he's cheating. He doesn't have to remember what he ate. He says "2 soft boiled eggs" and he knows he's going to be right.

(She sees he's eating a chicken pot pie.)

What are you doing?

JAKE

It's not bad.

TRULA

It's not cooked yet. It's not done. Put it back in.

JAKE

Tastes fine to me.

TRULA

Put it back. And it's not for you anyway, it's for dad.

(He puts the pie back in the oven and then comes back into the living room.)

JAKE

Well, the doctors sure can't explain it. They told us he wouldn't know his own name by now. He knows his name. He knows your name. He knows my name. He knows the names of his senators and congressmen. He knows the names of all the supreme court justices. He's not going to unknow you.

You can't keep putting off the surgery.

TRULA

I won't survive it.

JAKE

That's not true.

TRULA

I'd be useless. If I survive it, the chances of my being blind? It's too close to the optic nerve. At this point, it IS my optic nerve, for all intents and purposes. The tumor and the nerve have merged. Well, I don't want to be blind. Being blind means I can't take care of myself, let alone dad.

JAKE

You should have done it years ago, when they first found it—

TRULA

And risked being blind for longer? For years and years and years?

JAKE

You could still have 20, 30 years—

TRULA

Doing what? Everything I love to do I need my eyes to do. No reading—

JAKE

Books on tape.

TRULA

No movies—

JAKE

Books on tape.

TRULA

Stop saying books on tape.

JAKE

Why?

TRULA

Because books on tape cannot save me.

JAKE

This is the stupidest thing you've ever done.

TRULA

Or the smartest.

JAKE

Bullshit.

TRULA

I know, I know, thinking about it that way strains your tiny mind.

JAKE

Don't do that.

TRULA

Do what?

JAKE

Don't.

TRULA

Don't talk about your tiny mind?

JAKE

Just because you're a knowitall doesn't mean that you know even half of it. You're just a smarty pants.

TRULA

Well, that is true. I am just a smarty pants. But admitting that I am one doesn't make your brain larger. I have an IQ of 160 and you don't. That's just a fact, Jake, I have an IQ of 160 and you--

JAKE

You don't know that's true—mother would never tell us—you've only got Sally's say so--

TRULA

162, to be precise—

JAKE

If you had an IQ of 162 you'd be like Einstein, you do know that, don't you? You'd be Stephen Hawking.

TRULA

I'm just relaying what I was told—on that day—so long ago--

JAKE

You'd be Steve Jobs. At the very least.

TRULA

--when Sally's mother left her alone in the principal's office, and there were all the scores, and she reported to me: 162. And don't bring up Steve Jobs. Whose big brain didn't save him from cancer either.

JAKE

I'm just saying, if you'd really had an IQ that high—you'd have invented time travel or something.

TRULA

This has bothered you your whole life, hasn't it.

JAKE

No, of course not.

TRULA

Well, however high it was or wasn't? My smarty pants days are but a thing of the past now. Every day another five points go down the drain.

JAKE

You're still smart enough to figure out that this is stupid. What you're doing?

TRULA

It'll kill him.

JAKE

No, it—

TRULA  
It'll kill me.

JAKE  
Trula--

TRULA  
You want to tell him?

JAKE  
I will if you won't.

TRULA  
I can't tell him. I can't do it.

JAKE  
All right, I will--

TRULA  
No.

Did you check on the burial plots?

JAKE  
Yes. We have 6. Not including mom and dad's. They bought them for us and our spouses and a child each. I won't be using mine—I'll be buried with Erica's family in Memphis. You can have all 6.

TRULA  
Thanks. I only need the one.

JAKE  
You can't keep this up.

TRULA  
Says who?

JAKE  
He's going to Courtland Heights, we agreed, it's better for him--

TRULA

He'll hate it there—

JAKE

They'll take good care of him—

TRULA

Not as good as I do—

(Her cell phone alarm goes off.)

Saved by the bell.

(She reaches into her pocket, and turns it off as she heads for the kitchen.)

I have to use my phone alarm now whenever I put a cpp in the oven, otherwise I forget all about it and it burns to a crisp. Although frankly I think there's something wrong with the oven—sometimes it doesn't cook the pies at all and I have to put them in twice.

(She goes into the kitchen, gets a cpp out of the oven, puts it on the tray, and heads for her father's room with the pie.)

Well, go on and take the one you started eating. It's cooked now.

(Jake goes into the kitchen as she goes into her father's room.)

TIME (o.s.)

What is it you want, Mary? What do you want? You want the moon? Just say the word and I'll throw a lasso around it and pull it down.

TRULA (o.s.)

Oh, It's A Wonderful Life! Mr. Potter is so evil and Jimmy Stewart is so good. Here. I made this pie. Yes, from scratch. Well, except for the crust. No, you're right, I can't cook, but I decided to cook this. Better wait for it to cool. Yes, it does look good.

(She comes out of her father's room with an empty water pitcher.)

JAKE

(Coming out of the kitchen with his chicken pot pie.)

You know, Trula, this really isn't bad.

TRULA

Thanks.

JAKE

You should get one and come in too.

TRULA

Well, maybe. In a minute.

(Jake goes into his father's room, and she goes into the kitchen. She fills the water pitcher half way.)

I Love It's a Wonderful Life. If Jimmy Stewart walked in that door, I'd recognize him in under a second flat. But if Jimmy Catalano, the guy I lived with in grad school who made love like he was drowning in all seven oceans at once walked in that door—even if he magically hadn't aged a day—I probably wouldn't even recognize him.

Have I switched the real things for the fake? It's hard to believe that those aren't real hopes and fears and feelings, up on the screen. They feel real. They feel real to my father, I think. When I see the pleasure the large TV brings him, when I see that old age now has a sparkling companion, I'm comforted. I know that if I were lucky enough to live long enough, I would be comforted too. Netflix. Netflix would be the small god that comforts me.

But here's the thing.

What would that final speech in Blade Runner be like, if millions of people had seen everything the replicant had seen? If he had said "I've seen things that all you people have seen. Some of you have seen them twice. Adolescent boys have seen them 20 times. Lonely academics and divorcees binge watch them every 6 months." Where would the sweetness be then?

(She takes the pitcher, and heads for her father's room. She stops on the way.)

Of course, it would be silly to say that only a thing which other people, or at least 100 million people, had not seen and felt was valuable. But I don't care. Some feelings and memories are possessions you don't want to share. Or maybe, it isn't the sharing. Maybe it's just that

your feelings are you. Your memories are you. How can millions of people be you?

I want a Tannhäuser Gate to remember and take with me at the moment of my death the way the pharaohs took what was most precious to them to accompany them to the other side. I want a memory of something that no one else has seen, a memory that is only mine, and its beauty is so astonishing and perfect that when I remember it—when I hold it close inside me—its beauty quiets every single fear.

(She heads into her father's room with the water pitcher.)