

Remaining in Orbit

by

Scott Gibson

REMAINING IN ORBIT

© 2000 by Scott Gibson

CAUTION: Professionals and Amateurs are hereby warned that performance of **REMAINING IN ORBIT** is subject to payment of a royalty. It is fully protected under the copyright laws of The United States of America, and of all countries covered by the International Copyright Union (including the Dominion of Canada and the rest of the British Commonwealth) and of all countries covered by the Pan-American Copyright Convention, the Universal Copyright Convention, the Berne Convention, and of all countries with which the United States has reciprocal copyright relations. All rights, including without limitation professional/amateur stage rights, motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television, video or sound recording, all other forms of mechanical, electronic and digital reproduction, transmission and distribution, such as CD, DVD, the Internet, private and file-sharing networks, information storage and retrieval systems, photocopying, and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved. Particular emphasis is placed upon the matter of readings, permission of which must be obtained from the Author in writing.

The English language stock and amateur stage performance rights in the United States, its territories, possessions and Canada for **REMAINING IN ORBIT** are controlled exclusively by Next Stage Press. No professional or nonprofessional performance of the Play may be given without obtaining in advance written permission and paying the requisite fee. Inquiries concerning production rights should be addressed to Gene Kato at: licensing@nextstagepress.net

SPECIAL NOTE

Anyone receiving permission to produce **REMAINING IN ORBIT** is required to give credit to the Author as sole and exclusive Author of the Play on the title page of all programs distributed in connection with performances of the Play and in all instances in which the title of the Play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the Play and/or a production thereof. The name of the Author must appear on a separate line, in which no other name appears, immediately beneath the title and in size of type equal to 50% of the size of the largest, most prominent letter used for the title of the Play. No person, firm, or entity may receive credit larger or more prominent than that accorded the Author.

REMAINING IN ORBIT

REMAINING IN ORBIT received its World Premiere at Center/Stage presented by Evergreen Players, opening on January 13, 2012. It was directed by Len Matheo; the set design was by Biz Schaugaard; the costume design was by Amy Bergevin; the lighting design was by Dave Avery; the sound design was by Len Matheo; and the production was stage managed by Rachael Henney. The cast was as follows:

HEN.....John Samson
GINNIE.....Megan Heffernan
LISSIE.....Rachel Graham

REMAINING IN ORBIT was first performed as a staged reading at The Buchanan Recreation Center in Littleton, Colorado on July 20, 2007, produced by The South Suburban Theatre Company.

Cast

Ginnie ... Michelle Grimes
Hen ... Davis Bennett
Lissie ... Whitney Nuchols

Director ... Scott Gibson
Producer/Lighting Designer ... Christy Cass

REMAINING IN ORBIT

REMAINING IN ORBIT

ACT ONE

Scene One

Lights up on Hen's living room/study. To one side is a cluttered desk with a computer monitor and stacks of books and papers. To the other side of the room is what appears to be a sort of living room/sitting room "compromise," with a sofa and chair, coffee table and end table. The two sides of the room are fairly schizophrenic in their style of upkeep. The study is a mess; the sitting room area is Spartan and pristine. At rise, the room is empty. Upstage center, an archway leads into an unseen kitchen. Upstage left is an archway that leads to a front door. Upstage right is another archway leading to a bedroom. After a moment, keys can be heard jingling in an offstage door, and then the sound of that door opening and closing.

GINNIE. *(Off.)* Hen? You home? You decent? *(Ginnie, an attractive woman in her late forties to mid-fifties appears in the archway. Her arms are loaded down with two bags of groceries, mail and clothing in a plastic dry cleaner's bag. She moves awkwardly through the room, pausing to toss the mail on the desk, but not stopping. She makes her way through the room as she talks and crosses up into the recessed kitchen alcove.)* Mail's on the desk. I think I'm leaving a trail of ice cream. I got to talking to Mrs. LaMore by the elevator, and you know how that goes. *(In the alcove, moving in and out of view as she puts items away, Ginnie keeps up a running conversation.)* They had that bread you like, the one I usually can't find. The ultra-multi-grain-colon-vacuuming kind? I got two loaves. I'm putting them in the refrigerator. *(Pause.)* Yeah, the ice cream's pretty soft. I'm going to have a bowl, do you mind? I like it when it gets soupy like this. *(Ginnie comes down into the room. She glances around.)* You want some, too? *(She looks around a moment longer, then retreats from view again. Off.)* Oh, grapefruits

REMAINING IN ORBIT

were on sale. I got some for myself, and some for you, too. I know, you recoil at the sight of fresh fruit and vegetables, but citrus is our friend, and someday you'll thank me. When you're ninety, and you still have the strength to complain about all the things I do wrong when I run errands for you. Like buying you grapefruit, for instance. *(Hen shuffles in from the hallway. He's dressed, but his hair is a bit ruffled. He blinks sleepily and scratches his head. He's a handsome man, though faded in appearance, in his late forties or early fifties. He reacts not at all to Ginnie's voice still coming from the kitchen. He crosses to the desk, where he picks up the mail and sorts through it slowly.)* Oh, Mrs. LaMore's son finally moved out, did you hear? She says he's moving in with that girlfriend nobody's ever seen. She's putting on a brave face, but you can tell she's unhappy about it. Wonder how unhappy she'd be if she knew his girlfriend's name is Maurice? *(Pause; talking about the ice cream.)* Oh, this is fabulous! *(Back to the previous topic.)* I ask you, how do you raise a child, keep one that close, and not have a clue? Of course, it's easy for me to talk. People without kids are always experts on parenting. *(Ginnie comes into the room carrying two bowls of somewhat melted ice cream, each with a spoon in it. She does not seem at all surprised that Hen is now there, looking through his mail. Hen does not glance up at her. Ginnie crosses to him and sets a bowl down next to him on the desk, then retreats to the far side of the room with her own bowl, keeping up her running discourse. She sits in one of the chairs and puts her feet up on the table.)* I think my niece Juliette might be gay. Lesbian, I mean. It's funny, isn't it? Women have the sub-heading—lesbian—but men just have the main title. Gay. I wonder why that is. Is “fag” strictly a gay male term? I've never heard a lesbian called a fag. But I guess that's sort of like comparing apples and oranges. Or apples and grapefruits. “Lesbian” doesn't carry the pejorative connotation that “fag” does. *(Pauses while holding up a spoonful of ice cream.)* She's on the cross-country team at school. And she's a big fan of Hilary Swank movies. *(Hen sets aside his mail, now divided into two stacks. He picks up the bowl of ice cream. He lifts the spoon and watches melted ice cream drip off of it, back into the bowl.)*

REMAINING IN ORBIT

He crosses to sit opposite Ginnie.) My sister thinks it's just a phase. I don't know... I think a phase is more like when you decide you're only going to wear black for six months. Sleeping with someone who comes with the same...sexual apparatus that you have seems a lot less capricious than that. *(Hen looks at Ginnie directly for the first time. It would seem that he's going to respond to her comments.)*

HEN. There wasn't any more mail than that? No package? From Winton?

GINNIE. No. That was everything.

HEN. You're sure? You checked?

GINNIE. I checked. I'm sure.

HEN. There wasn't a slip? To take up to the window? For a package? From Winton?

GINNIE. *(As if it has suddenly become clear.)* Oh. A slip. For a package. *(Pausing for dramatic effect.)* No.

HEN. Oh.

GINNIE. He couriers things over, you know that. He never mails them.

HEN. There's supposed to be a second set of corrections. *(Gestures to desk.)* Oh, I finished that instructional design piece. But I think I want to look over it one more time before you take it. And, can you go by the bank in the morning? I was going to go today, but I didn't get around to it.

GINNIE. Are you okay? You look kind of crappy.

HEN. Headache. I've been lying down, and it's better now.

GINNIE. But not gone.

HEN. Almost.

GINNIE. Did you take anything for it?

HEN. Alka-Seltzer.

GINNIE. *(Setting her bowl on the table.)* Alka-Seltzer? That's for upset stomachs, you noodnick. *(Ginnie stands and crosses up into the kitchen alcove where she retrieves her purse.)*

HEN. It said "for relief of discomfort symptoms." I couldn't find anything else.

REMAINING IN ORBIT

GINNIE. You are such a babe in the woods. (*Tossing him a bottle from her purse.*) Here. (*Ginnie returns to the kitchen alcove. She brings back a glass of water and hands it to him.*) So you put up with a headache all day rather than do something for it. (*Correcting herself.*) Rather than do something sensible for it. (*Ginnie sits down and resumes eating her ice cream. Hen studies the aspirin bottle and then sets it on the table.*)

HEN. It's mostly gone now. I couldn't sleep very well last night. I think that was it. I worked until one or so. After I got into bed, I couldn't stop thinking about the design document. And the people who moved in next door—their stereo is right on the other side of my bedroom wall, and it was playing at about six this morning. I tapped on the wall, and when that didn't do any good, I got up and went over and knocked on their front door. But nobody ever answered. I think they must have gone off somewhere and forgot to turn it off. When I got back into bed, that's when I realized I had a headache.

GINNIE. Didn't you call the super?

HEN. I didn't want to do that. Not yet. They just moved in. I don't want to be one of those crabby neighbors who complains about everything.

GINNIE. So instead, you'll be one of those long-suffering neighbors with a permanent headache.

HEN. I want to talk to them in person. They're probably perfectly reasonable people. If I involve the super, then I come off looking like a jerk. Or a coward.

GINNIE. If your new neighbors have a gun or something, you could come off looking dead.

HEN. I've seen them in the hall once or twice. We might have even said hello. They're young and...unkempt, sort of. But they seem nice enough. Not "gun people."

GINNIE. You're not sure you exchanged hellos, but you *are* sure they don't have concealed weapons? Sometimes, I marvel at what it must be like inside your head.

HEN. I was getting the paper. The elevator doors opened, and they got out, carrying a bunch of boxes and things. Our eyes met, and he said something. I wasn't sure if he was talking to her, and just happened to be

REMAINING IN ORBIT

looking my way, or if he was actually saying “Hello” or “How ya doing?” to me. So I kind of nodded and muttered something back. Just in case. I didn’t want to be intrusive, but I also didn’t want to seem aloof.

GINNIE. So you settled for a nice middle ground. Eccentric. After you closed your door, they probably thought, “Great. We’re living next door to a guy who stares at people and mutters to himself.” Probably they didn’t have a gun, but after that, they went out and got one. *(Ginnie finishes her ice cream, rises and crosses to the kitchen, talking as she moves.)*

GINNIE. So, what do you need from the bank?

HEN. I’ll go in the morning. I thought I’d be proofing those galleys. Winton said it was going to be a quick turnaround, so I didn’t think I’d have time. I wonder why he didn’t send them this afternoon. *(Ginnie returns from the alcove. She holds out her hand to Hen for his ice cream bowl.)*

GINNIE. You done with that? *(Hen hands her his bowl, which he’s barely touched, and she takes it back into the kitchen.)*

HEN. Of course, this gives me a chance to look over that design piece again. With the headache and all, I don’t feel like I really gave it my full attention. I’d like to get it off my plate before the weekend. Coral may be sending me something next week, and I don’t like having stuff stack up. *(Ginnie comes to the archway, drying her hands on a dish towel.)*

GINNIE. Did she call you?

HEN. Yeah. No, I called her. The end of last month. Asked her if she had anything in the pipeline for me. She said not right away, but there might be something coming in a few weeks. *(Ginnie continues to dry her hands slowly, watching Hen with a look of concern.)* I figured something had to be on the way. You know those projects she used to toss in my lap—the leader guides and participant materials never seemed to match correctly... Half a dozen different writers working on the project, and none of them checking to see how the others are doing it. It would take me a week or more to get it all sorted out. I haven’t worked on one of those for six months or more. Maybe close to a year.

REMAINING IN ORBIT

GINNIE. (*Tossing the towel on the counter.*) I'm going right by the bank tomorrow. (*Crossing a few steps towards Hen.*) Maybe the package from Winton will arrive in the morning. You'll want to get started on it right away.

HEN. (*Standing.*) That's true... Yeah, why don't you go ahead and run this in for me. (*Hen crosses to the desk and pokes through some stacks of papers, talking as he looks. Ginnie follows.*)

HEN. So, how are you liking being over on the campus?

GINNIE. It's all right. Mindless clerical stuff, mostly. Entering a lot of data.

HEN. Sounds tedious.

GINNIE. I don't mind. It's nowhere near as aggravating as working for you.

HEN. Things may pick up more towards autumn. I might have more hours for you then. (*Pulling some things from the stack.*) Here we are. (*Handing them to Ginnie.*) A couple of small things that I've been meaning to deposit. And would you give this to the teller? I'm just about out of checks. I keep meaning to reorder.

GINNIE. You can do this online, you know. It's a hell of a lot faster.

HEN. (*Turning his attention to other papers.*) It's complicated.

GINNIE. It's not. (*Touching the computer.*) This isn't just a large, stylish paperweight, you know.

HEN. I use it.

GINNIE. You check e-mail once or twice a week.

HEN. (*Pulling out his chair and sitting.*) That's using it.

GINNIE. That's like buying a seventy-five thousand dollar car so that you can sit in it and play the radio. Which, by the way, you could also do on this.

HEN. (*Half paying attention.*) I don't listen to the radio.

GINNIE. (*Sighs.*) That's not what this is about.

HEN. Then why'd you bring it up?

GINNIE. Hen, a day-long word processing class would make you so much more efficient. You could do all of your editing and proofing

REMAINING IN ORBIT

online. They offer instruction at the college. I could set you up, get you registered.

HEN. I'm as efficient as I need to be, right now.

GINNIE. But you're not as efficient as *they* need you to be: Winton. The McGuiles Group. Coral. (*Picking her words carefully.*) You're at a standstill right now because you're waiting for a package to arrive. It could already be here, in an attachment to an e-mail, if you'd just let them send things to you that way. (*Music starts playing from the apartment next door. Both Ginnie and Hen turn to look, then they look at each other. Ginnie resumes her lecture.*) With a click, you could have it open and be working on it. After you've done your magic, another couple of clicks, and it's on its way back to them. That simple. That clean. (*Ginnie looks at Hen expectantly. He has gone back to reading the pages in his hands. After a second or so, he flips to a new page. Trying to be gentle.*) That's why The McGuiles don't use you anymore. It's why Coral hasn't sent you anything in so long. Everybody agrees; you're a great editor. None better. But you've reached a point of diminishing returns, Hen. You want these people to send you a hard copy of everything, and it slows things down. It's an added expense. Sometimes—

HEN. —They've always known how I like to do things, right from the start. I'm not the one who's changing the procedures.

GINNIE. I know that.

HEN. I like to lay the pages out, side by side. Look from one to the other. Scrolling up and down to check for inconsistencies just isn't as thorough.

GINNIE. I understand that.

HEN. Winton feels the same way I do. Says he doesn't want my edits any other way.

GINNIE. Yeah, well, Thank God for Winton. He's about the only one. But one day, he's going to retire, and whoever takes his place is going to want to do things differently.

HEN. Then I'll retire, too.

GINNIE. (*Tossing up her hands in surrender.*) Fine. You have it all worked out. Don't know why I worry.

REMAINING IN ORBIT

HEN. I don't know why you do, either. It gets you worked up, and it annoys the hell out of me. And if I retire, I might actually get back to that thing of my own that I started.

GINNIE. That'll be the day. *(Ginnie crosses up into the kitchen alcove.)*

GINNIE. You've been picking that up and putting it down for as long as I've known you. I'll bet you don't even know where all of the pieces are.

HEN. Sure I do! In the blue spiral notebooks... *(He puts down his pen and looks around. He has to look in several places.)* And one green one... *(Hen tries to pull a notebook out from the bottom of a stack as the things on top start to wobble. Ginnie comes to the front of the archway, her purse in her hand and her dry-cleaning over her arm.)*...And some pages in the drawer, here, when I'd misplaced the last notebook... *(Producing a blue notebook and waving it at her.)* Aha!

GINNIE. I'm going to resist the temptation to... Oh, hell, no, I'm not. *(Ginnie crosses down to stand by the desk.)* Yet another thing you could be doing on this... *(Patting the computer monitor.)* ...that would simplify your life and might actually have you writing, instead of talking about writing.

HEN. *(Looking through his notebook.)* Sorry you have to rush off. Sorrier you didn't rush off sooner.

GINNIE. Grocery receipt's on the counter. Don't forget about the— *(There is a knock at the door. Hen and Ginnie look in the direction of the door and then at each other. Hen sets down his notebook. He glances at his watch.)*

HEN. I bet it's the courier. With Winton's stuff. He said it would be today. *(Hen stands.)*

GINNIE. He didn't buzz. How could he have gotten up? *(Hen crosses to the archway leading to the front door.)*

HEN. Probably came in with somebody else.

GINNIE. Well, for God's Sake, check before you open the door.

HEN. Okay. If it's a stranger, I hope he has candy. *(Hen exits through the archway. Ginnie puts the dry cleaning bag over the back of the couch.)*

HEN. *(Off.)* Yes?

REMAINING IN ORBIT

LISSIE. *(Off.)* Uh, yeah. I hate to bother you, but I'm having... Could I use your phone? *(Ginnie takes a couple of steps towards the archway. The sound of Hen opening the front door and Lissie stepping inside are heard. Ginnie retreats to the kitchen archway. Lissie enters the room. She's an attractive woman in her mid-twenties, wearing jeans and a jacket over a somewhat clingy blouse. Her hair is spiky and disheveled in a way that might either be deliberate or simply uncombed—it is difficult to tell. She wears heavy eye make-up and several bracelets, as well as a number of chains around her neck. She moves gingerly, with her right hand pressed against the left side of her stomach.)*

LISSIE. Hey.

GINNIE. *(Faintly.)* Hey. *(Hen has closed the door and re-enters through the archway.)*

HEN. Are you okay?

LISSIE. I couldn't find my cell, and then, when I finally did, it was dead. I guess I left it on... *(Taking a slow, deep breath.)* I thought it was in my bag. But I was looking for it on the bus, and it wasn't there. *(Swallowing hard.)* I forgot it in the pocket of the pants I wore yesterday. So, when I finally found it... *(Turning to look at Hen.)* I don't have any other phone yet.

HEN. Do you want some water? *(To Ginnie.)* Ginnie, would you get a glass of water? *(Ginnie moves into the kitchen, out of sight. Hen crosses to Lissie, but does not touch her.)* You live next door. We sort of met last week. You were bringing in boxes. I was getting the paper. *(Lissie looks at Hen blankly. Hen trails off. Ginnie returns to the archway with a glass of water, where she stops. She is reluctant to approach Lissie.)*

LISSIE. Where's your appendix?

HEN. My...what? *(Hen looks at Ginnie. Lissie turns and looks at her as well, noticing the glass of water in her hand.)*

LISSIE. No, thanks. I had some when I first got home. I threw it up. *(It takes Ginnie a second to realize Lissie is talking about the glass of water. She looks down at it and then up at Lissie again. Lissie has turned back to Hen.)* I haven't felt well since last night. I thought it was just a stomach-ache, or the flu. But it's gotten worse. Now it's a sharp,

REMAINING IN ORBIT

steady pain, right here. *(Looking down at where her hand is pressed against her stomach.)* I wonder if it's appendicitis. *(Lissie is suddenly seized by a fresh wave of pain. She grunts and doubles over. Hen puts his hand on her shoulder. She moans for several seconds, then straightens and sags into Hen.)*

HEN. Do you want to sit down? Let's get you onto the couch. Ginnie, call 911. *(Ginnie nods and moves into the kitchen alcove where she picks up the phone and dials. Hen guides Lissie to the sofa and lowers her onto it gently. As Lissie starts to sit, she cries out sharply.)*

LISSIE. I can't! It hurts too much! *(Hen tilts her over gently, until she is lying on her side. She pulls her knees up until she is in a fetal position. In the kitchen, Ginnie talks quietly on the phone, pacing back and forth, nodding and gesturing with her free hand.)*

HEN. Is that a little better?

LISSIE. I guess so. Now there's just...excruciating pain.

GINNIE. *(Into the phone.)* A sharp pain on the left side of her stomach. ...No, constant. It might be appendicitis. ...No. *(Indignant.)* No, I'm not a doctor. ...Well, because she said... Look, I'm not going to stand here and argue with you. Whether it's appendicitis or whether an alien monster baby is about to burst through her belly is beside the point. So stop cross-examining me, and send an ambulance before this poor girl dies! Thank you! *(Ginnie slams down the phone. She turns and realizes that both Hen and Lissie are watching her. Ginnie turns apologetic and consoling.)* They're on their way. You'll be fine. *(Ginnie moves into the room. She and Hen stands a respectful distance away from the sofa, looking at Lissie. Lissie moves gingerly, trying to find a position that is less painful.)*

LISSIE. This...really...sucks.

HEN. *(To Ginnie.)* Should we give her something?

GINNIE. Probably not. We might make it worse.

HEN. Maybe a cold, damp cloth?

GINNIE. For what? Her stomach?

HEN. For her forehead!

REMAINING IN ORBIT

LISSIE. An appendix can burst, can't it? You can die from a ruptured appendix. *(Hen and Ginnie look at each other nervously. Neither wants to answer that question.)*

LISSIE. That's not how I thought I would go. I hope I don't die on your couch.

HEN. Oh, that's all right. *(Ginnie looks at Hen, shocked. Until he sees her looking at him, he doesn't realize how that just sounded.)* You aren't going to die. Don't even think that. *(Pause.)* Do you want a cold cloth?

LISSIE. Only if you promise to smother me with it. I don't think... I can't take much more of this.

HEN. Someone will be here soon. *(Hen looks to Ginnie for affirmation. Ginnie shrugs.)* Is there anybody you'd like us to call? Family, or anybody?

LISSIE. No.

HEN. Your husband?

LISSIE. Don't have one. *(Hen and Ginnie exchange a glance.)*

HEN. Boyfriend..?

LISSIE. No.

HEN. "No," don't call him, or "No," you don't have one?

GINNIE. Hen...

LISSIE. If you're trying to...ask me out...this really isn't a good time.

HEN. *(To Ginnie.)* Well, there was that guy in the hall. I just figured...

GINNIE. Why don't you go downstairs and wait for the ambulance?

LISSIE. Ask me again tomorrow... *(Pause. Hen and Ginnie look at Lissie.)*

HEN. What?

LISSIE. *(Shifting painfully.)* I had plans, but I'm starting to think they may fall through.

HEN. *(Fumbling.)* Oh, you're probably going to be in the hospital for at least a couple of days. *(Lissie is grinning at Hen.)*

GINNIE. Hen, she's making a joke. *(Pause. Hen looks at Ginnie as if he'd almost forgotten she was there.)* Go wait for the ambulance. You can show them up when they get here.

REMAINING IN ORBIT

HEN. Oh. Oh, sure. *(Crossing to the archway.)* Yeah. *(To Lissie.)* You just relax and stay here.

LISSIE. All right. *(Hen pauses a second, as if thinking there's something else he should say or do. Then he turns and exits through the archway. A few seconds later, the sound of the front door opening and closing is heard.)* He's a trip. *(Lissie closes her eyes and takes several short breaths. Ginnie watches her.)*

GINNIE. It is going to be all right. They'll be here soon.

LISSIE. I've never been in the hospital before. Except for being born. On television and in the movies, it looks scary. Lots of doctors and nurses yelling and running around. People bleeding.

GINNIE. Well, television. They have to make everything seem interesting. Otherwise, no one would watch.

LISSIE. Were you ever in one?

GINNIE. Only to visit. My mother was a visit. ...For quite a long time. *(Smiles.)* I don't remember much yelling. Or bleeding. Mostly just quiet. You'll want to bring a book.

LISSIE. I don't have any.

GINNIE. Oh, well, they have things there. Magazines. And, of course, there's the gift shop. Do you knit, or anything? My mother crocheted. Like a madwoman. That's what she did. I still have several of the things she—

LISSIE. *(Looking around.)* You have lots of books. *(Both women look around the cluttered room.)*

GINNIE. Oh, no I don't. This isn't my... Well, Hen is something of a pack rat.

LISSIE. Could I borrow one of these, do you think?

GINNIE. Oh. *(Crossing to the bookcases.)* No, that's not such a good idea. These are mostly reference books. He uses them in his work. Not good, light reading. *(Awkward pause. Lissie studies Ginnie, almost as if reading her. It makes Ginnie increasingly uncomfortable.)* Do you have pajamas, or something you'd like to take? Could... Could I pack some things for you? And... And, really isn't there someone we should notify? Let them know what's happening? Where you've gone? *(Lissie*

REMAINING IN ORBIT

continues to study Ginnie, smiling slightly. She enjoys Ginnie's awkwardness, and waits a second before responding.)

LISSIE. No. To all of the above. Nice of you to offer, though.

GINNIE. Happy to. I just didn't want you to... Maybe I'm being premature. Maybe you won't even have to stay overnight. If... If it's something besides appendicitis, I mean. *(Lissie moves slowly on the couch, preparing to rise.)*

LISSIE. I should go turn off the lights and lock the door. Everything I own is crap, but it's my crap.

GINNIE. *(Crossing up to the archway.)* I can do that. If you don't mind me going into your place. *(Lissie wipes her forehead with the back of her hand and nods. Ginnie nods, as well. She starts through the archway, then turns back.)* Do I need a key?

LISSIE. It's open. But the key's sitting on the counter in the kitchen.

GINNIE. I'll just be a minute. Are you okay?

(Lissie nods. Ginnie hesitates a moment, then turns and exits through the archway. The sound of the door opening and closing is heard. Alone, Lissie takes a couple of deep breaths. She rises and looks around the room. She crosses to the desk, where she folds her arms against her stomach and grimaces, as if trying to suppress a wave of pain. After a few seconds, she picks up the blue spiral notebook Hen had found earlier. She opens it, leafs through a few pages, then puts it down again. She glances over her shoulder, then begins opening various desk drawers. From one, she extracts some envelopes, all already sliced open. She looks through a few, then puts them back. Lissie starts to turn away from the desk, but then something catches her eye. There is a small stack of paper money sticking out from under the desk pad. She pulls it out and holds it up. With another quick glance over her shoulder, she fans it out and counts it. She extracts one twenty, one ten, and one five, and stuffs them in her pocket. She puts the rest back and turns away. She hesitates, turns back, and pulls the money out again. She takes one more five and then puts the rest back once more. She moves to the bookcases, picking up a book or two for examination. As she leafs through one, she raises her head, and the book falls from her hands to the floor. An

REMAINING IN ORBIT

expression of intense pain crosses her face. She moves falteringly to the desk, but as she reaches to steady herself, the pain increases. Eyes closed, mouth open, she utters just a tiny grunt and then crumples to the floor behind the desk.)

LISSIE. *(Out of sight.) Oh, perfect... (She does not move, and the room is silent. In the distance, a siren is heard, and the lights fade to black.)*

REMAINING IN ORBIT

SCENE TWO

Several days later. Lights up on the same room, almost unchanged from earlier. Hen is seated at his desk. He has the phone pinned to his ear with his shoulder as he studies a sheaf of papers spread out in front of him. He sorts through a handful. There is a red pen in his mouth. Periodically, he removes it to make marks on the paper. He talks into the phone with the pen in his mouth.

HEN. *(Into the phone.)* It's on...hold on. It's on page seventy-two, about two-thirds of the way down the page. You see where she's referencing Swerdlow? ...Yeah. No. *(Picking up the page in question.)* It's the paragraph that begins, "Results were called into question..." *(Taking the pen from his mouth and putting it on the desk.)* The book. Swerdlow's book. You with me now? Anyway, you see the word "participants?" Where it says, "Results were called into question when it was determined that participants' responses had been deemed..." Yes. *Participants.* *(As Hen continues to talk, Lissie enters from the kitchen. She wears pajama bottoms, a t-shirt and fuzzy slippers, and she carries a mug and two small plates, balanced somewhat precariously on her arm. She moves carefully to the desk, where she sets down one plate.)*

LISSIE. *(Whispering loudly.)* Cinnamon toast. *(Hen nods at her as he continues to talk. She crosses to the sofa with the other plate and mug. She sits down, putting the dishes on the coffee table, and picks up a magazine. As she leafs through it, she occasionally takes a sip from the mug or a bite from the toast.)*

HEN. *(Into the phone.)* They still didn't make that edit. *(Listens; impatient.)* I know it's spelled correctly. I never said it wasn't. It's the apostrophe. ...No, I know there isn't one. That's my point. There's supposed to be! No, I never told you to take it out! I'm looking through the edits I made last week, and I asked... No. ...Yes, I know it's plural. That isn't the point. Look, will you please just listen for a minute? *(Lissie, on the couch, continues to leaf through the magazine, but her face registers amusement at Hen's conversation.)* Last week, I pointed

REMAINING IN ORBIT

out that the apostrophe was in the wrong place. Before the ‘s.’ It should be after the ‘s.’ It’s plural, like you said. But now, I see that it’s gone altogether. You need to put it back. In the right place. ...I don’t know who did it. I don’t care who did it. All I care about is that someone fixes it. ...Yes. *(Sighs.)* ...Yes. *(Rests forehead on his hands.)* Yes. *(Moaning.)* Yes... *(Sitting up straight; businesslike tone.)* Good. Fine. That’s what I want. Thank you. *(Hen hangs up the phone. He sets down his papers and picks up a piece of toast, inspecting it.)*

HEN. This is rye.

LISSIE. What?

HEN. It’s rye. That’s what all the little seeds are. Couldn’t you tell?

LISSIE. *(Looking at her toast; taking another bite.)* Oh.

HEN. You can’t make cinnamon toast from rye bread.

LISSIE. Could’ve fooled me. *(Hen sighs and puts the toast back on the plate. He stands, takes the plate, and starts to cross into the kitchen. As he passes Lissie, she speaks.)* You aren’t going to eat it? Well, don’t throw it out. I’ll take it. *(Hen circles back to the couch, hands the plate to Lissie, and then goes through the archway into the kitchen. Mostly to herself.)* I think it tastes good with the seeds. *(She takes another bite and continues reading her magazine. Calling.)* What do you think about Mr. Avery? *(Hen re-enters, carrying a coffee mug. He crosses back to his desk.)*

HEN. The super?

LISSIE. Yeah.

HEN. I don’t know. *(Sitting.)* I never gave him much thought.

LISSIE. You’ve lived here a long time. You must know something about him.

HEN. *(Picking up his pen; pausing to consider.)* He sent someone to fix the leaky shower once. We say “hi” when we pass in the hall, or by the laundry room. I think he’s from San Diego. He wears a Padres cap sometimes. *(Hen goes back to leafing through pages, making occasional marks with the pen.)*

LISSIE. That’s it? You see a person, day in and day out, and you don’t know any more about them than that?

REMAINING IN ORBIT

HEN. *(Not looking up.)* That's it.

LISSIE. What about his interests? His family?

HEN. Just told you. I think he likes baseball. I've only seen his wife a few times. We never even say "hi."

LISSIE. He doesn't have a wife.

HEN. His girlfriend, then.

LISSIE. She's his sister.

HEN. The red-haired woman? Always wears those kind of... flour-sack dresses?

LISSIE. They're muumuus. But, yes. She's on disability. She only has one lung. Isn't that interesting?

HEN. Not particularly.

LISSIE. You're awfully self-absorbed.

HEN. That's because I'm trying to work.

LISSIE. I can't believe you don't know more about the people who live under your same roof.

HEN. I'd wager that Mr. Avery doesn't know any more about me than I do about him.

LISSIE. You'd be wrong. Tony knows a lot about you. What papers you take. What kind of frozen dinners you eat.

HEN. Going through my garbage is not the same as knowing me.

LISSIE. You have a favorite yellow sweater. But it's made of heavy material, and he says you only wear it in the winter, or on chilly days.

(Lissie, her back to Hen, smiles as she continues to turn pages in her magazine, knowing that this has gotten his attention. Hen looks up from his work.)

LISSIE. We're never as invisible as we might think. *(Hen contemplates this for a moment and then goes back to work.)* Anyway, Tony asked me out sometime. I think I might go.

HEN. Tony?

LISSIE. Mr. Avery. His first name's Tony.

HEN. He's got to be twice your age, if not older.

LISSIE. He's about your age. Maybe a little younger.

REMAINING IN ORBIT

HEN. *(Back to working.)* That's too old. *(Long pause. Hen works. Lissie reads her magazine. Not looking up.)* I don't think the super should be asking out the tenants.

LISSIE. Oh. Self-absorbed *and* an elitist.

HEN. *(Sighs; putting down his pen.)* What about Patrick? What does he say about all this?

LISSIE. He has forfeited his right to have an opinion. He never even came to see me while I was in the hospital.

HEN. You didn't let him! *(Changes his mind.)* Fine. Date Mr. Avery. Tony. Maybe he'll take you to a Padres game. *(Lissie tosses her magazine on the coffee table and stands. She picks up a piece of toast.)*

LISSIE. I'm going to go pack.

HEN. Don't lift anything heavy. *(Hen goes back to work. Lissie takes a bite of toast. She wanders around the room rather aimlessly and winds up standing behind Hen, looking over his shoulder. He takes no notice of her. After a moment, she wanders away again up to the bookcases. She picks up a blue spiral notebook and turns back to him.)*

LISSIE. I read this. A couple of nights ago. Well, I skimmed it. When you were out. *(Hen glances up at her and then goes back to his work.)*

HEN. My personal papers are your personal papers.

LISSIE. Is it, like, a novel?

HEN. Yes. That's what it's like. *(Lissie opens the notebook and leafs through a few pages.)*

LISSIE. It's hard to follow. *(Hen looks up again. He considers her words without looking directly at her.)*

HEN. That's only part of it. There are some other notebooks around here, as well.

LISSIE. I know. I looked at them all.

HEN. Oh. ... Well, maybe you... Oh. *(Lissie continues to turn pages.)*

LISSIE. Maybe we should write a book together. *(Turning another page.)* I could tell you the ideas, and you could write them down. *(Pause; looking thoughtful.)* You know, I haven't pooped since the appendectomy. The nurse told me I should be careful. With the stitches,

REMAINING IN ORBIT

and all. She said I should consider a laxative. (*The sound of the front door opening and closing is heard.*)

GINNIE. (*Off.*) Hen? Pack mule's here! (*Ginnie enters from the front hallway, carrying a grocery bag, her purse, and some manila envelopes under one arm.*)

GINNIE. I ran into Jodi as I was leaving. She gave me something she— (*Seeing Lissie.*) Oh. Hello.

LISSIE. Hey. (*Gesturing to Ginnie's bag.*) Is there prune juice in there, by any chance? (*Ginnie peers into her bag and then looks at Lissie.*)

GINNIE. No... Should there be?

LISSIE. I guess not. But sometimes, you get lucky. (*Lissie closes the notebook and gestures to Hen with it.*) Think about it. I bet we could come up with something really good. (*Lissie sets down the notebook and inspects her shirt.*)

LISSIE. I should do some laundry. Maybe I'll start a load and then do some packing. See you guys later. (*Lissie moves back to the coffee table to toss her uneaten toast onto the plate and then crosses up to exit through the archway to the front door.*)

GINNIE. (*Watching her go.*) Bye... (*The sound of the front door opening and closing is heard. Ginnie turns back to Hen.*) I always feel like I've come in in the middle of a conversation with her.

HEN. (*Continuing to work.*) It's like that even if you're there from the beginning. (*Looking at Ginnie's bag.*) Did I ask you to bring me some things? (*Ginnie sets the bag on the sofa.*)

GINNIE. No, these are mine. (*Handing Hen a manila envelope.*) Jodi gave me this as I was leaving. She wondered if you'd like to take a crack at it. (*Hen opens the envelope and pulls out some pages.*)

HEN. What is it?

GINNIE. They're some ops docs. For HR, I think. She usually tries to edit them herself, but she's swamped. And, truthfully, she's not very good at it.

HEN. (*Studying the pages.*) You taking that job has been great for increasing my workload. (*Ginnie crosses to the couch and coffee table*

REMAINING IN ORBIT

and begins straightening the mess Lissie has left. She gathers up the plates, inspecting the leftover toast. She recoils from it in distaste.)

GINNIE. Is there any coffee left?

HEN. I made a pot about an hour ago. *(Ginnie crosses up into the archway to the kitchen.)*

GINNIE. Great. *(She exits into the kitchen. Pause.)*

GINNIE. *(Off.)* Good Lord, what happened in here?

HEN. What do you mean?

GINNIE. *(Appearing in the doorway.)* Have you alerted the hazardous wastes unit?

HEN. It's not that bad.

GINNIE. "Not that bad?" Compared to what? Hold on a minute. *(Ginnie exits. There are sounds of things being moved, cupboard doors opened and closed. Then Ginnie reappears, holding a mug of coffee. She shakes her head as she walks into the room.)* I closed up the bread bag and put it—and the butter—back into the fridge. I put the half-eaten banana in the trash. It looked like a work in progress from maybe last week. I left the stack of dishes and the coffee grounds that are all over the counter and floor for the upstairs maid. *(Leaning against the couch, facing Hen.)* You may want to hire an upstairs maid.

HEN. Your heroics are duly noted. Thank you. *(Hen continues to work. Ginnie watches him as she sips her coffee.)*

GINNIE. So... Is she living here now?

HEN. What? Of course not.

GINNIE. Well, I figured I should ask. She's been here every time I've stopped by the last couple of weeks. Eating. Napping. Hanging out.

HEN. Coincidence. She stops in now and then.

GINNIE. She was using your shower on Tuesday.

HEN. She only has a bathtub in her place. *(Pause. Hen is studying his papers. Ginnie is looking at him. After a moment, he looks up at her.)*

HEN. She wanted a shower.

GINNIE. I got that part. *(Ginnie crosses around the sofa to pick up the magazine Lissie was leafing through. Hen watches her.)*

HEN. She's still recuperating.

REMAINING IN ORBIT

GINNIE. Mm-hm.

HEN. I just want to be sure she's all right.

GINNIE. Isn't that her boyfriend's job? Or whoever that guy is who lives with her?

HEN. He's gone. *(Ginnie turns and looks at Hen. Hen stands, taking his coffee mug, and crosses to the chair on the opposite side of the coffee table from Ginnie.)* They had a fight a day or two before she got sick. Took his stuff and left.

GINNIE. Oh. *(Ginnie tosses the magazine on the table and sits on the couch.)* Maybe she stole from him, too. *(Hen sits.)*

HEN. You're making too much of that, Gin.

GINNIE. We left her alone in here for five minutes. Even in the throes of appendicitis, she managed to find and pocket your cash.

HEN. Not all of it. She only took forty dollars. She put the rest of it back.

GINNIE. Ah, yes. A thief who exercises restraint. So much more noble than those criminals who don't know when to stop.

HEN. I told you; she and I have already worked through this.

GINNIE. You never would have caught her if she hadn't collapsed.

HEN. Ginnie...

GINNIE. Fine. Whatever. *(Beat; they both sip their coffee.)*

HEN. She had forty in the bank. She knew she could cover that much and pay me back later.

GINNIE. You've convinced me. It was purely a business transaction. *(Pause.)* She thought she might need forty dollars while she was in the hospital. *(Hen starts to respond, but Ginnie holds up her hand.)* No. I know. You two have already worked it out. None of my business. I don't know where that came from. *(Looking at her watch.)* I should get going. I've got groceries that need to be refrigerated.

HEN. You want to catch a movie later?

GINNIE. *(Standing.)* What did you have in mind?

HEN. I don't know. Revival or sub-titled.

GINNIE. I'm not in the mood to read.

REMAINING IN ORBIT

HEN. Revival, then. I'll come by your place at seven-thirty. (*Ginnie crosses up into the kitchen archway with her mug.*)

GINNIE. Is it at The Marakesh? I think I still have a couple of passes. (*Looking back at Hen.*) Did Lissie say she was going to do some packing? (*Hen picks up the magazine both Lissie and Ginnie have flipped through. He talks while turning pages.*) Yeah. She's moving this weekend. In with a friend. With Patrick gone, she can't afford the place by herself. (*Hen continues to turn pages. Ginnie stands in the archway another moment, contemplating this, then turns and goes into the kitchen. She returns a moment later and picks up her grocery bag from the sofa.*) So, I can tell Jodi you'll do the extra edits?

HEN. Sure. Why not?

GINNIE. Oh, there's a check in there, as well. Don't lose it. See you in ninety. (*As Ginnie turns to go, the sound of the front door opening and closing is heard. A second later, Lissie enters.*)

LISSIE. (*To Hen.*) You got any soap? (*To Ginnie.*) Hey. (*To Hen.*) I never bought any, and I don't have change for the vending machine in the laundry room. (*To Ginnie.*) Anyway, who wants to pay a buck twenty-five for one of those tiny, single-load boxes? (*Lissie peers into Ginnie's grocery sack again. Ginnie peers in, as well.*)

HEN. There's some on the bottom shelf in the pantry. (*Lissie crosses to the kitchen.*)

LISSIE. Thanks. (*Ginnie crosses to the archway leading out to the front door.*)

GINNIE. Poor thing. No boyfriend. No detergent. No prune juice. (*Hen smiles as he turns a page. Ginnie exits. The sound of the front door opening and closing is heard. After a moment, Lissie appears in the kitchen archway, holding a box of laundry soap and a measuring cup. She watches Hen a moment before speaking.*)

LISSIE. So, I was wondering... How's your storage space?

HEN. My storage space?

LISSIE. Yeah. The one in the basement.

HEN. It's fine, I think. Thanks for asking. (*Lissie crosses into the room and stands on the opposite side of the coffee table from Hen.*)

REMAINING IN ORBIT

LISSIE. I mean, how full is it? *(Hen thinks about this. He shrugs.)* Jeanette's place is junk shop central. She's a pack rat. So there isn't a lot of extra room, even for as little crap as I've got. So, I was wondering... *(Lissie waits for Hen to offer. He looks up at her, but says nothing. After a couple of seconds, she sits.)* ...If there's room, and you don't mind, could I put some of my stuff in your space? My futon, since I'll be sleeping on her couch, and maybe my chest of drawers, and some paintings? Oh, and would you like to have a couple of plants? Not big ones, ones that can sit in the window. An African Violet, and an ivy. *(Beat.)* Or, if you don't want them, I was going to ask Tony's sister. *(Beat.)* I think they'd do better here, though.

HEN. Sure, I guess. Why not.

LISSIE. To which part? To the plants, or to using your storage unit?

HEN. Both.

LISSIE. Great. Thanks. *(Hen looks through his pages of edits. Lissie sits, still holding the measuring cup and detergent, staring ahead. After a few seconds, Hen glances up at her.)*

HEN. Anything else? *(Lissie shakes her head No. She continues to gaze forward. Hen puts down the magazine, stands and goes back to his desk with the manila envelope. He sets it down and pulls out a sheaf of pages and begins looking through them.)*

LISSIE. How do you get started on life? Every time I think I'm doing it, something happens, and I'm living with Jeanette again. A break-up with my boyfriend... Appendicitis... The bathtub comes through the ceiling. I want to be a grown-up. Able to take care of myself. Not crashing on somebody's couch because I can't pay my own way. *(Studying the detergent box.)* "Now with built-in bleaching action." What does that mean? Does it mean it has bleach? Or just something like bleach?

HEN. *(Looking up from his papers.)* What was that about a bathtub?

LISSIE. Oh, don't worry. Not here. That was the last place I lived. *(Looking at the detergent.)* I was just going to wash everything together, but I don't want the colors to run. Do you think it's safe? Do you wash all your stuff together?

HEN. I'm... sure it's fine. Just do it in warm water, not hot.

REMAINING IN ORBIT

LISSIE. (*nods; beat.*) So, how did you get started? You know, become a grown-up?

HEN. I don't know. I just did. It happens. You don't really get a choice.

LISSIE. Sure you do. You're not here, sitting at that desk, because somebody put a gun to your head, right? You didn't just wake up one morning in this apartment and look around and go, "Oh. Well, I guess this is it, then." (*Lissie looks at Hen expectantly.*)

HEN. Well, no.

LISSIE. No. But, see, that's exactly what my life is. Day after day of looking around and going, "Now, how did I get here, again?" So, I'm going to figure out how to change that. You went to college, right? Or, like, an editing school, or something?

HEN. Uh, college.

LISSIE. And then you graduated, and you got a job, and you got a home, and you pay all your bills on time. Right? Like, it's not a question. You always pay them.

HEN. (*Smiling.*) Yes.

LISSIE. I'd like to do that. And you don't overdraw your checking account, and you take vacations, and you and Ms. Brazelton will get married someday.

HEN. Ginnie?

LISSIE. I don't suppose you'll have kids, though. Neither of you really seems like the parent-type. Plus, no offense, but you're kind of getting up there.

HEN. No, Ginnie and I aren't... involved. We're friendly, I guess, but she's my assistant. Part-time. Has been, for years.

LISSIE. Oh.

HEN. Yeah. No. That's all.

LISSIE. Oh. ... You divorced?

HEN. No.

LISSIE. Widowed?

HEN. No.

LISSIE. Oh. (*Beat.*) Gay, then.

HEN. Don't you have laundry to do?

REMAINING IN ORBIT

LISSIE. (*Stands.*) Ah. There's my answer.

HEN. I'm not... I just am not... interested. I don't care for people all that much.

LISSIE. (*Considers this for a moment.*) Yeah. People pretty much suck. (*Lissie crosses towards the front door archway with the detergent and measuring cup.*)

HEN. No, they don't. Not really. They're just... exhausting. They want so much from you.

LISSIE. Like what?

HEN. That's just it. I don't know. I always get the feeling that I've let them down, somehow. That they've been waiting for me to offer them something, but I don't know what.

LISSIE. Am I like that? Do you find me exhausting? (*Lissie and Hen look at each other in silence for a few seconds.*)

LISSIE. You can tell me.

HEN. Well, yes. More exhausting than most, actually.

LISSIE. ...Oh.

HEN. I don't mean to offend you.

LISSIE. Well, I sort of am. (*Beat.*) What about Ginnie? Does she exhaust you?

HEN. Sometimes, yes.

LISSIE. That makes me feel a little better.

HEN. There are times, when she comes flying in, her arms full of things, and a day's worth of stories to tell, it's as though she's using up more than her fair share of oxygen in the room. I find my breath coming in shallow gasps, and my heart is thudding.

LISSIE. Maybe it's love. Aren't those some of the symptoms?

HEN. No. You have the same effect on me.

LISSIE. Oh. Gosh, thanks.

HEN. I understand that it's my character flaw, nobody else's. (*Lissie holds up the box of laundry detergent.*)

LISSIE. I'm tempted to put this back and say I'll wait to do my laundry until I buy my own soap. But who am I kidding? (*Lissie turns and exits through the front archway. The sound of the front door opening and*

REMAINING IN ORBIT

closing is heard. Hen sits at his desk, staring forward for a few seconds, as if thinking about this. He looks at his watch, then gathers up his pages and places them neatly in a manila folder. He closes it and sets it to one side on his desk. He stands, takes his coffee mug, and crosses up through the kitchen archway and out of sight. The sound of the front door opening and closing is heard. Hen returns from the kitchen without his mug, nearly colliding with Lissie, who has returned.)

HEN. Oh!

LISSIE. I apologize if I've used up more than my fair share of oxygen.

HEN. That isn't what I meant—

LISSIE. —Yeah, yeah. Analogy. I get the picture. But since you started it, I just have to say: I don't think you can blame it all on me or Ms. Brazelton.

HEN. ...What are you—

LISSIE. —There's...there's just these... these great... gobs of oxygen lying around in here. Like dust, gathering on top of all this stuff. You know what I think?

HEN. “Gobs?”

LISSIE. You don't breathe enough of it! It just *seems* like other people are sucking it all up when they come in. They can't help themselves. You've let it stack up in here, and so when somebody else walks in, it's like getting...oh, you know...the bends, or something. There's too much of it! *(Pause. Hen studies Lissie. She seems to have run out of things to say.)*

LISSIE. Anyway... That's what I think. *(Hen, looking thoughtful, crosses past Lissie and moves a few steps downstage.)* You should, you know... breathe more. *(Several seconds pass as Lissie studies Hen, who continues to gaze forward.)* So, anyhow... Um, do you have anything that needs washing? As long as I'm doing it anyway? *(Holding up the detergent.)* And, seeing as how it's your soap?

HEN. *(Smiling.)* No, I think I'm fine. Thanks.

LISSIE. Okay. I'll bring this back in a little bit.

(Hen nods. Lissie crosses up and exits through the front archway. The sound of the front door opening and closing is heard. Hen surveys the

REMAINING IN ORBIT

room. After a few seconds, he draws in a deep breath, holding it a few seconds before exhaling slowly. The lights fade.)

INTERMISSION

THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS, ORDER AN ACTING EDITION AT WWW.NEXTSTAGEPRESS.NET