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Carry my bones to the smallest nest

CHARACTERS:

ERVINE: Male. 35. Wears a dusty, worn hat, a moth-eaten, semi-formal shirt, and blue jeans. A newspaper writer.

JULIETTA: Female. 32. Ervine's wife. Her hair is messy, perhaps caked with leaves or twigs. She wears a bandanna, a patched-up sundress, a frayed sweater, and boots.

SCENE:

The kitchen of a run-down suburban house. The doorframe is crooked. The walls are cracked, the window pocked by small holes. Over the course of the play, the house deteriorates. The ceiling collapses. The window becomes completely smashed through. The refrigerator door falls off its hinges. These changes should happen quietly, yet noticeably, paralleling what's happening in the action. Nothing is slow—the house decays in sudden moments: lapse, then collapse, lapse, then collapse, like a kind of rhythm. Perhaps things decay realistically. Or, perhaps, they fall apart like pages being turned, or a deck of cards flipped, one by one. In the final scene, the table is in two parts, collapsed in on the center.

The street outside the house lies in shambles. Debris is strewn about the road. Telephone polls have fallen on cars. Trash cans tumble down the sidewalk in the wind. Nancy & Jordan's house, visible across the street, is completely caved in, a tree fallen into it. Though this outside scene may or may not be indicated by the set, the characters should be acutely aware of the state of their former neighborhood.

NOTE ON SCENE TRANSITIONS:

There should be no blackouts between scenes. The transition should occur through action, and changes in lighting and set (perhaps even sound). Actors leaving the stage and re-appearing is perfectly acceptable. But the stage should never go dark.

Scene 1

[Late afternoon. The sun slowly sets as the scene progresses. A tea kettle heats on the stove. Ervine sits at the table. A mug with a tea bag and a plate with toast sits beside him. He cuts the toast with a knife, but eats with his hands. He writes absorbed. Julietta enters by removing the door from its hinges, then setting it back. She carries two bags filled with pasta boxes and a roast chicken.]

JULIETTA: They were out of cheese.

ERVINE: Nothing new.

JULIETTA: *[After a moment. Eagerly.]* You don't even ask what I brought?

ERVINE: I'm sick of pasta.

JULIETTA: You could try to enjoy things.

ERVINE: I'm writing.

JULIETTA: You're always writing.

ERVINE: It's my job—

JULIETTA: And once you run out of paper, what then? Your job is to eat your pasta.

ERVINE: I'm sick of pasta.

JULIETTA: It's dangerous to walk all that way, you know.

ERVINE: Julietta.

JULIETTA: But you wouldn't care if I died, as long as I didn't bring home pasta—

ERVINE: Julietta. Enough.

[Pause. Julietta throws the bags on the table and pulls up a stool. The tea kettle whistles. Ervine rises, turns off the stove, brings the kettle to the table, and pours his tea. Silence. She pulls out the chicken, begins to eat.]

ERVINE: That's a chicken.

JULIETTA: He lives.

ERVINE: Give me a piece.

JULIETTA: Yet he has no manners. He doesn't care if I live or die.

ERVINE: Come on, Jules. It's been months.

JULIETTA: But he remembers my name. That's a start.
You know, when I was walking to the store, I saw the strangest look-

ing bird—it was something like a hawk but—I don't know how to put it.

ERVINE: I don't give a shit about birds, I want chicken.

JULIETTA: At least I'm trying to find something beautiful.

It was mostly white with—but that black mask, it was—piercing. I know I've heard the name somewhere...

ERVINE: Chicken.

JULIETTA: You could ask.

[Ervine slams his knife on the table like a gavel.]

JULIETTA: You never ask.

[Ervine slams the knife.]

JULIETTA: That bird was beautiful.

[Ervine begins to slam the knife repeatedly, slowly, then faster.]

JULIETTA: Enough!

[Julietta tosses a drumstick on the floor. Ervine dives on top of it, feasting like a starved hyena. Throughout the next lines of dialogue, Ervine continues to eat ravenously, snarling and chewing.]

ERVINE: Beauty's gone. Dead. Like everything else.

JULIETTA: We aren't dead. That bird wasn't dead.

ERVINE: Everything is dead. Every-thing. Every-one. Dead.
The bird. The grass. The city. Nancy, Jordan, all dead. Us
too. Especially us.

JULIETTA: *[Cold.]* Then why don't you kill us both, and get it over with.

[Ervin ceases eating. He walks to the table, picks up the tea kettle, walks to the stove, and slams it down on the stove top. He turns on the stove, walks back to the table, and sits down.]

JULIETTA: No thank you.

ERVINE: It's for me.

JULIETTA: You already have your tea.

[Ervin stares for a beat in silence, then dumps his tea onto the floor. Silence. Julietta's cold demeanor begins to crack. She thinks genuinely about the two of them dying.]

JULIETTA: *[Apologetic.]* What are you writing, dear?

ERVINE: Nothing, yet. Dear.

JULIETTA: You could write about... about the culvert. There was a car in there, today.

ERVINE: Why would I write about a car in a culvert?

JULIETTA: It—it wasn't there yesterday. It's new.

ERVINE: It's wrecked, same as everything else.

JULIETTA: But someone wrecked it. Someone had to. That's news, someone else was there, to drive the car into the culvert,/ that's new—

ERVINE: /And did you find their body?

[Silence.]

ERVINE: That's all we are, isn't it? Bodies.

JULIETTA: I don't know what you're saying.

ERVINE: We're flesh. Bone. Breakable.

JULIETTA: Enough.

ERVINE: Look at you! Look at me. What are we?

[Silence.]

JULIETTA: I... I would love to read what/ you—

ERVINE: /For Christssake, will you shut up!
 Enough with my writing. There's nothing to write about. I'm... I'm
 unemployed. I'm useless. Hell, the publisher's gone. The reader-
 ship, the editor...

[Ervine knocks his stack of papers onto the ground. Slowly, as the scene continues, newspaper clippings begin to blow through the holes in the house. Neither character takes notice.]

ERVINE: And you bring home pasta we don't have the fuel to cook, and you tell me "that" is my job.

JULIETTA: *[Quiet.]* You need food...

ERVINE: I used to work. I used to feed you.

JULIETTA: You still need to eat.

ERVINE: I'm sorry? *[Beat.]* Louder!

JULIETTA: Don't yell at me.

ERVINE: Yell back!

JULIETTA: I said you need to eat! We need to eat.
That's our job.

ERVINE: I thought my job was to kill us both.
Get it over with.

[Ervine stands, and exits through the door. Silence. Julietta begins to rock back and forth.]

JULIETTA: *[Singing.]* Hush, little baby, don't say a word...

[A loud crash. Ervine has leapt off the roof.]

JULIETTA: *[Continuing the song.]* Momma's gonna buy you... Ervine?
Ervine!

ERVINE: *[Offstage. Moaning.]* For fuck's sake.

[Julietta runs out the door. Ervine groans throughout Julietta's next lines.]

JULIETTA: *[Offstage.]* No. Oh, no, God... We have to get you inside.
No, come inside.

[They re-enter. Ervine's arm is slumped over Julietta's shoulders. He stumbles, mildly concussed. Julietta seats him in a chair.]

JULIETTA: I didn't... What do you need?

ERVINE: I should've used a rope.

JULIETTA: You hit your head. You need ice.

ERVINE: Nine feet. Maybe eight—

[Julietta scans the room. She sees the marmalade, and has Ervine hold it up to his head.]

JULIETTA: How do you feel?

[10 second pause.]

ERVINE: *[Resigned.]* Alive.

[Julietta hurries to wrap his arm, ripping a piece of clothing for the wrap, and using her bandanna as a sling. Her movements are tender. She gets up, puts bread in the toaster.]

JULIETTA: I didn't mean it.

ERVINE: You shouldn't say things you don't mean.

JULIETTA: I was upset. What you were saying, about... it made/ me feel—

ERVINE: I meant it.

[Long pause. Toast is finished. Julietta tends to the toast.]

ERVINE: Everyone dies.

JULIETTA: Not like this.

ERVINE: They do if it comes to this. You should eat your toast with marmalade. *[Offers the marmalade.]* We still have marmalade.

JULIETTA: *[She finishes wrapping his arm.]* I'm sick of marmalade.

ERVINE: There's chicken, at least.

JULIETTA: There was chicken.

ERVINE: Then it's over. We should be used to things being over.

[Long beat.]

JULIETTA: I want to have a child.

[Long pause.]

ERVINE: The fall wasn't long enough, that's why it didn't work.

JULIETTA: Stop it.

ERVINE: I should have used a rope.

JULIETTA: Did you hear me? I said I want a child.

ERVINE: To hell with me.

JULIETTA: I want you. I want you too. I/ do

ERVINE: /You want things to be like they used to.

JULIETTA: They can be—

ERVINE: They can't.

[Beat.]

I can't even remember his name. Twenty-five days, and I can't
remember his name?

JULIETTA: Who? Dear?

[Realizes. Trembling.] Who?

Arthur. His name was Arthur.

ERVINE: It was.
It doesn't matter. Jordan's gone.

JULIETTA: No—

ERVINE: *[Continuing.]* Nancy's gone.

JULIETTA: They made it somewhere/ safe—

ERVINE: /Will you look? Look at their house. *[He leads her to the window and points across the street at Nancy and Jordan's old house.]* Do you see them? Anywhere? We both saw it Jules, we saw the roof fall in/

JULIETTA: /No—

ERVINE: *[Continuing.]* We knew they were inside, and they never came out.

JULIETTA: Are you even listening to me? I said, I want a /child!

ERVINE: *[Explosive. Desperate.]* /Arthur was their child!
[Defeated.] I can't keep you safe. Nothing. Nothing is safe.
[Long pause.] I'm leaving. I'm done. You can't stop me.
[Begins to exit. Pauses. Nodding.] That bird you saw. It was a vulture.

Scene 2

[Morning. Julietta sits cross-legged on the floor, a bird's nest between her legs. Sound of chicks squeaking. Beside her, a grocery bag full of bones. Throughout the scene, she feeds these bones to the chicks.]

JULIETTA: *[Singing.]* Hush little babies, don't say a word. Momma's gonna buy you a mockingbird.

[Beat.] Ervine? Ervine, will you come here? They're laughing.

[Beat.] Next time I'll bring you the whole chicken. Darlings. Someday, you'll do something momma can't do. You'll fly, up, and up. Won't that be something?

[Ervine enters. He carries a rope and a backpack.]

ERVINE: Do you need anything else?

JULIETTA: I want you to stay.

ERVINE: *[Worn out. Done arguing.]* There's nothing left. We're it, Jules.

JULIETTA: I want to stay.

[Beat.] Will it be cold? Do you want your coat?

ERVINE: No. I don't think so.

[Beat. Drops his rope onto the floor beside her.] If you change your mind.

[Ervine exits. Silence. Julietta begins to hum.]

JULIETTA: *[Singing.]* And if that mockingbird don't sing...

[Calling after him.] You were wrong you know! She wasn't a vulture!
They're Ospreys. My darlings.

[Beat. She gets up, looks in the fridge.]

JULIETTA: No marmalade. That's a shame.

[She returns to the nest, begins to sit back down, but pauses. She looks at the rope. Picks it up. She goes to the door, looks to be on the point of exiting.]

JULIETTA: Wait—!

[She deliberates. Then, she takes the rope, uncoils it, and ties it to a beam above the door. She threads it around the door frame, and slowly hoists the door back up. She closes the door, remaining inside the house.]

The sound of osprey chicks crying furiously.]

END OF PLAY.