August : Osage County
F/F/F

ACT THREE

Scene 1

The window shades have all been removed. Nighttime is now free to encroach.

At rise: the three sisters in the study. They share a bottle of whiskey. An inflatable mattress, covered with a thin sheet, now lies on the study floor.

Elsewhere in the house: a game of spades in the dining room—Charlie and Mattie Fae versus Jean and Steve. Little Charles sits by himself in the living room, watching TV. Bill sorts through paperwork on the porch. Violet, pensive, wearing a robe, her hair wrapped in a towel, sits at the window on the second-floor landing.

KAREN: The doctor really thinks she needs to go to an institution? *Does* she need to go? Did he examine her?

BARBARA: Dr. Burke says she may be brain-damaged. "Slightly brain-damaged." I told him he was "slightly incompetent"

and I hoped some day soon he'd be "slightly dead." He claims not to know she was taking so much. That's why he's eager to put her away, he's afraid of a malpractice suit. I told him I was considering it. Irresponsible shithead—

KAREN: Why did he write so many prescriptions? Doesn't he know—?

BARBARA: It's not just him; she's got a doctor in every port—

IVY: Here's how she does it: she sees a doctor for back spasms and gets a prescription. Day or two later she goes back, says she lost her pills and he writes her another one. Then next week she pulls a muscle, more pills, then the dosage is wrong, more pills, over and over, until she makes one too many trips and he says I'm not prescribing anymore. And she pulls a sheaf of prescription receipts out of her purse and says, "I'll go to the AMA and have your ass in court for over-prescribing me." She genuinely threatens these men and they give in to her.

BARBARA *(To Ivy)*: You knew this was going on again?

(Ivy shrugs.)

Different tactic today, just at her wounded best, this wilting hothouse flower. Which made me look like Bette Davis. I tried to goad her into it, you know, "C'mon, Mom, give him your speech about the Greatest Generation. Tell him about the claw hammer." I was like that guy in the cartoon with the frog that only sings for him.

IVY: It wouldn't have done any good, Dr. Burke's part of the same generation.

BARBARA: "Greatest Generation," my ass. Are they really considering *all* the generations? Maybe there are some generations from the *Iron Age* that could compete. And what makes them so great anyway? Because they were poor and hated Nazis? Who doesn't fucking hate Nazis?! You remember when we checked her in the psych ward, that stunt she pulled?

IVY: Which time?

KAREN: I wasn't there.

BARBARA: Big speech, she's getting clean, this sacrifice she's making for her family, and—

IVY: Right, she's let her *family* down but now she wants to prove she's a good family member—

BARBARA: She smuggled Darvocet into the psych ward . . . *in her vagina*. There's your Greatest Generation for you. She made this speech to us while she was clenching a bottle of pills in her cooch, for God's sake.

KAREN: God, I've never heard that story.

IVY: Did you just say "cooch"?

BARBARA: The phrase "Mom's pussy" seems a bit gauche.

IVY: You're a little more comfortable with "cooch," are you?

BARBARA: What word should I use to describe our mother's vagina?

IVY: I don't know, but—

BARBARA: "Mom's beaver"? "Mother's box"?

IVY: Oh God—

KAREN: Barbara!

(Laughter, finally dying out.)

I'm sorry about you and Bill.

IVY: Me, too, Barb.

BARBARA: If I had my way, you never would've known.

KAREN: Do you think it's a temporary thing, or . . . ?

BARBARA: Who knows? We've been married a long time.

KAREN: That's one thing about Mom and Dad. You have to tip your cap to anyone who can stay married that long.

IVY: Karen. He killed himself.

KAREN: Yeah, but still.

BARBARA: Is there something going on between you and Little Charles?

IVY: I don't know that I'm comfortable talking about that.

BARBARA: Because you know he is our first cousin.

IVY: Give me a break.
KAREN: You know you shouldn't consider children.
IVY: ~~I'm almost forty-five~~, Karen, I put those thoughts behind me a long time ago. Anyway, I had a hysterectomy year before last.
KAREN: Why?
IVY: Cervical cancer.
KAREN: I didn't know that.
BARBARA: Neither did I.
IVY: I didn't tell anyone except Charles. That's where it started between him and me.
BARBARA: Why not? Why wouldn't you tell anyone?
IVY: And hear those comments from Mom for the rest of my life? She doesn't need any more excuses to treat me like some damaged thing.
BARBARA: You might have told us.
IVY: You weren't going to tell us about you and Bill.
BARBARA: That's different.
IVY: Why? Because it's you, and not me?
BARBARA: No, because divorce is an embarrassing public admission of defeat. Cancer's fucking cancer, you can't help that. We're your sisters. We might've given you some comfort.
IVY: I just don't feel that connection very keenly.
KAREN: I feel very connected, to both of you.
IVY *(Amused)*: We never see you, you're never around, you haven't been around for—
KAREN: But I still feel that connection!
IVY: You think if you tether yourself to this place in mind only, you don't need to actually appear.
KAREN: You know me that well.
IVY: No, and that's my point. I can't perpetuate these myths of family or sisterhood anymore. We're all just people, some of us accidentally connected by genetics, a random selection of cells. Nothing more.
BARBARA: When did you get so cynical?
IVY: That's funny coming from you.

BARBARA: Bitter, sure, but "random selection of cells"?
IVY: Maybe my cynicism flowered with the realization that the obligation of caring for our parents was mine alone.
BARBARA: Don't give me that. I participated in every goddamn—
IVY: Until you had enough and got out, you and Karen.
BARBARA: I had my own family to think about.
IVY: That's a cheap excuse. As if by having a child you were alleviated of all responsibility.
BARBARA: So now I'm being criticized for procreating.
IVY: I'm not criticizing. Do what you want. You did, Karen did.
BARBARA: And if you didn't, that's not my fault.
IVY: That's right, so don't lay this sister thing on me now, all right? I don't buy it. I haven't bought it for a long time. When I leave here and leave for good I won't feel any more guilty than you two did.
KAREN: Who says we don't?
BARBARA: Are you leaving here?
IVY: Charles and I are going to New York.

(Barbara bursts out laughing.)

BARBARA: What the hell are you going to do in New York?
IVY: We have plans.
BARBARA: Like what?
IVY: None of your business.
BARBARA: You can't just go to New York.
IVY: This isn't whimsy. This isn't fleeting. This is unlike anything I've ever felt, for anybody. Charles and I have something rare, and extraordinary, something very few people ever have.
KAREN: Which is what?
IVY: Understanding.
BARBARA: What about Mom?
IVY: What about her?
BARBARA: You feel comfortable leaving Mom here?

IVY: Do you?

(No response.)

You think she was difficult while Dad was alive? Think about what it's going to be like now. You can't imagine the cumulative effect, after a month, after a year, after many years. You can't imagine. And even if you could, you can only imagine for yourself, for yourself, the favorite.

BARBARA: Christ, Mom pulled that on me the other day about Dad, that I was his favorite.

IVY: Well . . . that's not true. You weren't his favorite. I was. You're Mom's favorite.

BARBARA: *What?*

KAREN: Thanks, Ivy.

IVY: You don't think so? Good God, Barb, I've lived my life by that standard.

BARBARA: She said Dad was heartbroken when we moved to Boulder—

IVY: Mom was heartbroken, not Dad. She was convinced you left to get away from her.

KAREN: If you were Daddy's favorite, you must take his suicide kind of personally.

IVY: Daddy killed himself for his own reasons.

BARBARA: And what were those reasons?

IVY: I won't presume.

BARBARA: Aren't you angry with him?

IVY: No. He's accountable to no one but himself. If he's better off now, and I don't doubt he is, who are we to begrudge him that?

BARBARA: *His daughters.*

KAREN: *Yeah—*

BARBARA: And I'm fucking furious. The selfish son-of-a-bitch, his silence, his melancholy . . . he could have, for me, for us, for all of us, he could have helped us, included us, talked to us.

IVY: You might not have liked what you heard. What if the truth of the matter is that Beverly Weston never liked you? That he never liked any of us, never had any special feeling of any kind for his children?

BARBARA: You know that's not true.

IVY: Do I? How? Do *you*?

KAREN: You said you were his favorite.

IVY: Only because he recognized a kindred spirit.

BARBARA: Mm, sorry, but your little theory, your "accidental genetics," that doesn't fly, not with me. I believe he had a responsibility to something greater than himself; we *all* do.

IVY: Good luck with that.

KAREN: I just can't believe your worldview is that dark.

IVY: You live in Florida.

BARBARA: When are you and Little Charles leaving?

IVY: Weeks, if not days. And his name is Charles.

BARBARA: Are you telling Mom?

IVY: I'm trying to figure that out.

BARBARA: What about your job, your house?

IVY: I've been taking care of myself a lot longer than you've been in charge. Karen, you're going back to Miami, right?

KAREN: Yes.

(Violet descends the stairs.)

IVY: There you go, Barb. You want to know what we're going to do about Mom? Karen and I are leaving. You want to stay and deal with her, that's your decision; if you don't like it, that's your prerogative. But nobody gets to point a finger at me. Nobody.

END

~~*(Shaky but mainly lucid, Violet enters, knocking softly.)*~~

VIOLET: Hello? Am ~~I interrupting anything~~?

~~*(Ad-libs: "Not at all," "Come in," etc.)*~~