

Light Through the Cellar Door

Excerpt - Scene Two

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SCENE TWO

THE NEXT MORNING

(AGNES is seated next to PHOEBE who is lying down on the cellar door. PHOEBE appears to be sleeping while AGNES sings a traditional Irish lullaby titled "Toora, loora, loora" while knitting. AGNES is wearing her husband's flannel work shirt over her dress.)

AGNES

OVER IN KILARNEY, MANY YEARS AGO, MY MOTHER SANG A SONG TO ME IN TONES SO SWEET AND LOW; JUST A SIMPLE LITTLE DITTY, IN THAT GOOD OLD IRISH WAY. AND I'D GIVE THE WORLD TO HEAR HER SING THIS SONG TO ME THIS DAY. TOORA, LOORA, LOORA, TOORA LOORA LYE. TOORA, LOORA, LOORA, LOORA, HUSH NOW DON'T YOU CRY. TOORA, LOORA, LOORA. TOORA, LOORA, LYE. TOORA, LOORA, LOORA, THAT'S AN IRISH LULLABY.

(PHOEBE sits up at the end of the song just as AGNES finishes the lullaby.)

PHOEBE

Nana, I need to sleep for a bit, OK?

AGNES

Sure dear.

(PHOEBE puts on her walkman, pretending to sleep but is listening to her music. AGNES looks affectionately at PHOEBE but then notices PHOEBE keeping rhythm with her music. AGNES touches PHOEBE'S shoulder to get her attention.)

AGNES

Either you're having a bad dream or developing some sort of epilepsy? Which is it?

PHOEBE

I can't go to sleep without my music.

AGNES

Really? Well, what about reading before sleeping or being read to?

PHOEBE

Nana, I just need to sleep...I had to get up early every day this week and weekends are when I 'catch up.

AGNES

How about I read one of your mom's favorite stories when she was a young girl. It's called "Goodnight Moon".

PHOEBE

Nana...Mom read that book to me every night till third grade.

AGNES

Looks like we've been saying goodnight to the moon now for over forty years!

(PHOEBE doesn't respond. She appears to be sleeping.)

AGNES

Would you like to hear one of my own stories?

PHOEBE

Right now? (trying to sleep)

AGNES

When I was your age, I had such a time trying to figure things out!

(PHOEBE changes position on the cellar door, getting more uncomfortable)

AGNES

In fact, I remember when I felt the most embarrassed... It's quite a story...Would you like to hear it?

(PHOEBE reluctantly takes her headphones off.)

PHOEBE

Whatever...

AGNES

When I was about thirteen, I performed an Irish dance my mother had taught me for our parish talent show. I did some fancy footwork with a broom, bouncing around, jumping over the stick. It was called a 'sean-nos' (shan-nos) dance.

PHOEBE

A what?

AGNES

An old dance to traditional Irish music. When I saw my mother lookin' at me smiling, I tried some fancy leap then tripped and fell, "lookin' arseways" as my mother would say.

(AGNES gets up off bench disrupting PHOEBE'S repose, clumsily tries some of the old style steps while humming an Irish tune. PHOEBE puts her earphones back on and stares blankly at her grandma dancing.)

\*Refer to "Introduction to Sean Nos Dance with Emma O'Sullivan" on Youtube.

(AGNES takes PHOEBE's hand inviting her to dance while PHOEBE reluctantly attempts one of AGNES' steps. BOTH trip over the other, and fall. AGNES, out of breath, bows to PHOEBE while catching a glimpse of a tattoo on PHOEBE's low back.)

PHOEBE

Didn't you feel humiliated?

AGNES

At the time, yes. But I did get some good laughs which softened the blows. (Reaching for her heart due to fatigue) You know, it's no sin to make a fool of yourself - a 'maggot' as my mother would say. (continues imitating her mother's Irish accent) "But it's a sin to wallow in self-pity all scarlet and all."

(AGNES reaches towards PHOEBE's low back. PHOEBE fixes her clothes and sits next to AGNES.)

AGNES

So I thought I saw something on your low back?

PHOEBE

It's nothing just a tattoo.

AGNES

A tattoo? What of?

PHOEBE

Just someone I admire...

AGNES

Really? What's her name?

PHOEBE

Well she's not real; she's a princess with special powers.

AGNES

Hmmm...Can I have a closer look?

(PHOEBE lets AGNES lift her shirt  
to take a look at the tattoo)

AGNES

She's a beauty!

PHOEBE

Nana, mom will freak when she sees I got a tattoo. Can this  
just be between you and me?

AGNES

My father offered this Irish wisdom to keep me on the  
straight and narrow - "May you have the hindsight to know  
where you've been, the foresight to know where you are  
going, and the insight to know when you've gone too far."

(PHOEBE looks at AGNES concerned.)

PHOEBE

Is mom around?

(MAURA enters from the porch  
rushing to make a delivery in  
town.)

MAURA

Good morning, you two. From what I just heard, it sounded  
like you were both enjoying the morning air. I've got to  
drop a package off in town. I'll be back in a bit.

(PHOEBE stands up looking at her  
mom exit stage left. PHOEBE  
glances at AGNES, shrugs her  
shoulders and starts to walk over  
to the Pecan Tree down right, and  
out of frustration, begins kicking

some of the old pecan shells with her foot. AGNES goes into the cellar and comes out with a basket of pecans to shell. AGNES crosses to the bench DR, then motions to PHOEBE to sit with her and help shell the pecans.)

AGNES

Notice how this tall pecan tree stands all alone. Because it wasn't shadowed by any larger tree, your grandad called it an 'outlier' - meaning it had to survive on its own.

PHOEBE

So, how does it survive on its own?

AGNES

Look around on the ground. The tree's got potent seed-producing ability - continually nurturing its soil with all these old pecans.

(AGNES hesitates to ask PHOEBE the following question. PHOEBE shells the pecans reluctantly.)

AGNES

How's your dad doing these days.

PHOEBE

He's pretty busy with work, but not as busy as mom.

AGNES

I asked him last month what he's been working on and he told me he's been applying for grants for his research projects.

PHOEBE

He works from home a lot...he's got a crazy schedule just like mom, but at least he's home more than she is.

AGNES

I remember one time last month he forgot to pick you up at school without telling me or your mom.

PHOEBE

It wasn't a problem; he called the attendance office to let me know to either take the bus or get a ride with a friend.

AGNES

How long were you waiting?

PHOEBE

Not long... (pause) I just wish he didn't move out.

AGNES

Do you want to talk about it?

(PHOEBE struggles with the nutcracker to shell a pecan; she becomes more frustrated with the nutcracker.)

AGNES

I understand it's been hard on you given their separation these past few months.

(PHOEBE stands up, puts the pecan on the ground, and stomps on the shell.)

PHOEBE

When dad and mom are together, all they do is argue about me.

(AGNES sees the crumbled pecan on the ground and ignores the mess.)

AGNES

So, how is it when you're just with your mom and just with your dad? (continues to crack the pecan shells with the nutcracker.)

(PHOEBE continues to stomp on the next pecan on the ground, crumbling the nut, and leaving it on the ground. AGNES watches intently.)

PHOEBE

Since dad moved out, I'm always forgetting my homework or books at his house; then I don't have what I need at school or at home with mom.

AGNES

Well, you're kinda like this pecan tree now, surviving on your own - a true outlier!

PHOEBE

...(sarcastically) Yeah, right...But no matter what I do, it always seems to create an argument between mom and dad. (pause) It's hard to feel like I belong in my own family.

AGNES

But I'm your family, aren't I? Now why do you feel that way?

PHOEBE

Dad's fine with my friends...mom isn't.

AGNES

Who are your friends these days?

PHOEBE

I usually hang out with Carol and Jason. But sometimes Jason and I come home together and mom FREAKS out!

AGNES

Why do you think your mom freaks out about Jason?

PHOEBE

I don't know...I think she just doesn't trust guys! But Jason's always there for me.

AGNES

I'm glad you trust Jason.

PHOEBE

I do. One night when I was swimming at Carol's house...

AGNES

...(listening) What happened?

PHOEBE

Not much - just some guys at Carol's house swimming with us in the pool. They were being jerks!

AGNES

Did they try to hurt you?

PHOEBE

No, not really, just playing a game I guess.

AGNES

What kind of game?

PHOEBE

They kept trying to pull on my swim suit-

AGNES

What in God's name for?

PHOEBE

I think they were trying to get a look at my tattoo.

AGNES

Sometimes a young man thinks they are having fun but with no idea how they are hurting a young girl.



PHOEBE

Jason and Carol's older brother threw them out of the pool.

AGNES

Jason sounds like a real gentleman.

PHOEBE

Let's just say I realized that there are good guys and bad guys...and Jason is definitely a good guy!

AGNES

I'm glad you have a friend you can count on...How about we finish shelling these pecans on the porch before dinner? Here, let me show you a secret with the nutcracker.

(PHOEBE and AGNES cross to sit on the porch steps; AGNES hands PHOEBE a pecan, shows her how to put it in the nutcracker, crack the nut then remove the pecan from the shells. PHOEBE struggles but then succeeds in shelling the pecan.)

AGNES

Now YOU can have some fun crackin' these nuts!

PHOEBE

Was grandpa good at shelling pecans?

AGNES

Oh, he was a grand master at crackin' nuts! But he always knew to leave enough on the ground for the critters. Always thinking of others, even the littlest furry thing!

PHOEBE

I miss grandpa!

AGNES

...So do I....so do I...Lately my heart's been shifting.

PHOEBE

Nana, you feel ok?

AGNES

I'm fine dear. Not to worry. I'm going in to start dinner. You relax for a while.

(AGNES kisses PHOEBE's forehead, covers her with her shawl, picks up the bowl of shelled pecans and then approaches the door into the kitchen. She stops to grab her chest before exiting.)

(PHOEBE becomes disinterested in the pecans; she crosses to sit on the cellar door. She lies down, listening to her walkman, wrapping AGNES' shawl around herself.)

(MAURA enters from SL returning from her errand in town; she moves towards her daughter who is seated on the cellar door.)

MAURA

May I join you?

(PHOEBE sees MAURA, moves over making room for her mom on the cellar door. MAURA sits silently next to her daughter)

PHOEBE

Thought you had to finish a report for work? Is that where you went? On a Saturday morning?

MAURA

No, I had --- something else to do. (PHOEBE looks unconvinced) No more work this weekend, promise! Just us hanging out together with Nana!

(MAURA watches PHOEBE lying still next to her.)

MAURA

Do you want to take a nap? Or, if not, would you like me to braid your hair?

(PHOEBE shrugs a bit, takes off her walkman then reluctantly allows MAURA to braid her hair. There's a brief moment of silence between them.)

PHOEBE

Are you and dad getting a divorce?

(MAURA stops braiding PHOEBE's hair for a beat and pauses to look intently at her.)

MAURA

I've been planning to talk to your dad-

PHOEBE

Mom, it's great that you want to change the world. But what about us?

MAURA

Phoebe, I'm trying to manage a full time job plus make sure you're safe, fed...and cared for. (pause) I'd like to believe that your father could be trusted to-

PHOEBE

Dad? Why are you always blaming him? Ever since you started traveling more with your work, that's when things started to fall apart-

MAURA

Phoebe, that's not fair. You are much more important to me than my job... (Pause) I hate how little time it leaves me with you.

PHOEBE

Then why do you work so much?

MAURA

I have a big appeal case next week to fund the Women's Clinic.

PHOEBE

And what about dad? Have you asked him what he wants?

MAURA

Phoebe, first I need to figure out what I want, plus your dad and I haven't had any time to talk lately.

PHOEBE

Well, whose fault is that?

MAURA

So, you blame me for the separation?

PHOEBE

What if you BOTH screwed up?

MAURA  
(deflecting) How's Carol these days?

(MAURA resumes braiding PHOEBE'S  
hair)

PHOEBE  
She's fine.

MAURA  
What do you two do together?

PHOEBE  
We just hang out.

MAURA  
So are there any boys you like?

PHOEBE  
Why would I be looking for a boy to date when I'm with  
Jason?

MAURA  
So, you're "with" Jason? Meaning he's now a "boyfriend"?

PHOEBE  
Sort of...but mainly we're just friends. We've known each  
other since sixth grade so we're pretty comfortable  
together.

MAURA  
I see. What do you two enjoy doing together?

PHOEBE  
We argue about which video game we want to play. I like  
Zelda II and he likes Super Mario Brothers.

MAURA  
Are you both just staring at your game boy the entire time?  
What do you talk about?

PHOEBE  
...We talk about how to increase our magic proficiency for  
our Final Fantasy characters.

MAURA

Magic? As in a spell or supernatural power?

(PHOEBE looks at her mom puzzled)

PHOEBE

Sort of...Mom, why don't you like Jason?

MAURA

I never said I didn't like him.

PHOEBE

Why do you freak out when he comes over?

MAURA

I don't freak out. Do I?

PHOEBE

Jason's the only one who understands me.

(MAURA stops braiding PHOEBE's hair. PHOEBE gets up abruptly, drops the shawl and bends forward to pick up her walkman and begins listening to her music. MAURA sees the top of what looks like a tattoo on PHOEBE's lower back.)

(MAURA reaches to try to lift PHOEBE's shirt but PHOEBE resists her mother's reach.)

MAURA

Phoebe, what's on your lower back?

PHOEBE

Mom, it's nothing!

MAURA

Is..is..it a tattoo? What?! When did you get...Well what does it look like? I can't believe this!...Oh my god... Phoebe!

(AGNES enters from the porch. She stops and observes the following.)

PHOEBE

It's not a big deal mom! Dad was all for it when I asked him about getting it.

MAURA

Nick? Unbelievable...what a screw up! It's illegal for a minor to get a tattoo, Phoebe! Your dad should have known-

PHOEBE

Dad didn't screw up! I chose to do it and dad approved. It's my body and my choice! You are always telling me women get to decide about their own bodies!

(AGNES steps towards them,  
interrupting them.)

AGNES

I'm going to need to get some canned tomatoes from the cellar for dinner. Did I interrupt something?

(MAURA stands up while PHOEBE walks  
towards the bench DR. MAURA follows  
PHOEBE DR.)

MAURA

Just your grand daughter's display of her tattoo on her behind.

AGNES

Body painting was popular when I was her age - we used finger paints then decorated our face and arms with daises.

(AGNES enters the cellar to get  
jars of canned tomatoes.)

MAURA

Mom, you're not helping! Phoebe, because you are under 18 you need a parent's consent to get a tattoo.

PHOEBE

Well, dad gave me his consent!

(AGNES exits cellar and starts to cross towards porch.)

AGNES

It's just a lovely portrait of some sort of princess. Right? Doesn't she give you special powers? Like in the pool the other day?

MAURA

Wait, what pool? What happened, Phoebe?

PHOEBE

It's no big deal mom - just a pool party at Carol's.

MAURA

And did your dad know about this pool party?

PHOEBE

He said it was fine if I was there with Carol and her older brother.

MAURA

What happened?

PHOEBE

NOTHING HAPPENED!

AGNES

I thought Medli must be a very special princess to earn a place on your bum!

MAURA

Mother! Please stay out of this!

PHOEBE

You were out of town when Carol invited me! Dad said it was ok!

AGNES

Phoebe's magic princess took care of those two bratty pups! She sounds like a true warrior-

MAURA

What? Who were these bratty pups? You're not helping here, Mom! Go, just, go!

(All three characters just stand there looking at each other.)

PHOEBE

You stay, Nana. I'll go ---

(PHOEBE storms out and exits through the porch door. MAURA sits on the bench distraught as AGNES tries to comfort her.)