

MAURA

...I remember asking him what he thought about the right for women to choose.

AGNES

And what did he say to you?

MAURA

He said, "Well your mother never really had a choice."

(Silence between MAURA & AGNES.  
Then AGNES looks intently at  
MAURA.)

AGNES

I know life hurts sometimes, my love. But a child can relieve a sorry set of woes. . .think of Phoebe.

(PHOEBE enters abruptly from SL carrying a school backpack, wearing earphones listening to her walkman. AGNES sees PHOEBE and continues folding clothes.)

AGNES

There's my dearest granddaughter. How's darling Phoebe doin' today?

(MAURA crosses over to PHOEBE to hug her; PHOEBE reluctantly hugs mom then crosses to AGNES, gives her a hug then PHOEBE takes a seat in the rocker on the porch.)

AGNES

Well, you're a real fine thing today! I think you've grown some since I last saw you!

(No response from PHOEBE. AGNES speaks softly to MAURA so PHOEBE doesn't hear.)

AGNES

Tell me, is her 'aunt lo visitin' yet? (MAURA looks at her clueless) I mean . . . have the 'painters' shown up yet?

(MORE)

AGNES (cont'd)

(aside) I can't imagine her father being much help with her female changes.

(MAURA shows frustration with AGNES while putting her report away.)

MAURA

Mom, Phoebe's fifteen. . . She's well aware of how to deal with menstruation. She's a woman now.

(PHOEBE takes off her headphones for a moment and starts to enter the kitchen.)

PHOEBE

Nana, may I have a snack?

(AGNES starts to get up then sits back down.)

AGNES

There's some corn soup on the stove and fresh bread - help yourself dear!

(AGNES leans in to speak softly to MAURA)

AGNES

How's she coping with the separation?

MAURA

Mom, I'm doing all I can to take care of my daughter. . . It's been difficult for the two of us to talk lately; I'm hoping to get some time with her today and tomorrow - just the two of us.

AGNES

Well, maybe she feels a bit embarrassed to share her feelings. I know I was with my mum.

MAURA

Mom, I'm trying to do for Phoebe what you didn't do for me. (pause) At her age my biggest fear was SEX and PREGNANCY! Now there's AIDS to worry about, too!

(AGNES pauses to look at MAURA intently as MAURA puts away her papers.)

AGNES

I know I didn't do such a great job telling you about a woman's changes. I relied on the nuns to share the basics; sex just wasn't mentioned in our household.

MAURA

Mom, relying on a nun to teach you about sex is like asking Reagan to say the word AIDS out loud!

(AGNES is not really listening; she continues with her story)

AGNES

. . . when you were going through puberty, I gave you a basket of feminine napkins with a lace ribbon wrapped around them and a card with the words 'for your special time each month.'

(MAURA interrupts her mom)

MAURA

Yes, mom, I remember it well. Your sex education was more like a scavenger hunt.

AGNES

Well, I didn't want you to stand in line with a box of 'cotton penises' --- (alarmed).

MAURA

A tampon, mom!! . . . I can't believe you see a tampon as a sex toy (disgusted-disbelieving)

(PHOEBE leans into the kitchen window and shouts back at the two women)

PHOEBE

Are periods and tampons all you two talk about? Geez. . .

(AGNES crosses to porch to get a bowl of peas and potatoes. AGNES carries both bowls to the bench down right. AGNES begins snapping beans while MAURA crosses to get an apple from the basket on the porch and then joins AGNES on the bench, sees the bowl of potatoes, sits and begins to peel them while alternating eating the apple.)

AGNES

Darlin' I didn't mean to upset you; I was just as stymied by my mother's warnings as you seem to have been by my ignorance. I'm sorry, dearest.

MAURA

Mom, the unspoken fear of periods, sex, pregnancy . . . Catholic mothers for generations inherited a fear of their bodies - It's like their body belonged to the church!

AGNES

Why when I was going through puberty, saying 'birth control' out loud was considered "obscene" . . . even blasphemy.

MAURA

That's exactly my point, mother.

AGNES

In my day, abstinence was the ONLY option. My mother never uttered a word about the female urges - just used her silent glare which we interpreted to mean 'You best not try any risky shenanigans with boys.' Instilling the fear of sex was my sex education.

MAURA

Well, did you risk any shenanigans with boys, mom?

AGNES

Oh, I don't remember. . . there was one boy before your father . . . But it was short lived. Nothing serious.

MAURA

You've never spoken about this 'other boy' before . . . Did you love him?

AGNES

Well, that's a good question. When you're fifteen, do you really know what love is versus heated passion? . . . They can feel like the same thing at that age. . . He was a first flame for me . . . but it died out quickly.

MAURA

You never mentioned you had a boyfriend before.

AGNES

Well, not when you're father was alive . . . Let's move on.

MAURA

Well, I had to figure out dating on my own, mom. The silence between us made me feel ashamed of my sex drive. . . Like it wasn't normal. . .

(PHOEBE enters from the kitchen eating a muffin. She sits on the porch step listening to AGNES and MAURA's conversation.)

AGNES

Well, I never even thought about my sex drive; the urge just appeared unexpected and unannounced!

PHOEBE

Nana, are you talking about sex?

MAURA

What about BIRTH CONTROL? You never mentioned the word, mom!

PHOEBE

Mom, really?

AGNES

Well, back then, they didn't exist.

MAURA

What do you mean? Contraceptives have been around since ancient times, mom. They've given a woman the best control over when to have a child.

AGNES

Well, I can't believe that now . . . ? (continued to snap beans)

MAURA

In fact, I read in college that during the Middle Ages, there was a Pope who offered advice on birth control and how to cause menstruation using herbs.

(AGNES looks shocked, unbelieving.  
PHOEBE continues to eat her muffin  
quietly while AGNES becomes more  
agitated by the story.)

AGNES

Really?

MAURA

Yes, but around the 15th century, the church got wind of these treatments and charged any women providing herbs to other women with 'witchcraft' - sending them to the gallows.

PHOEBE

Thanks for the history lesson, mom.

(PHOEBE gets up and crosses to the  
cellar door listening to her  
walkman eating her snack.)

AGNES

Well, it's obvious you know more about the history of contraception... (pause) My mother's warnings against pregnancy was to tell me the story about Eve eating the apple - making the sin of premarital sex the woman's fault.

(AGNES pauses and looks at MAURA eating her apple. Then, AGNES stands, upset and confused, approaches the Oak Tree leaving the beans on the bench while mixing the snapped ends of the beans into a compost pile next to the house.)

AGNES

I always doubted my abilities and relied on everyone else's opinions of me - (emphasizing) except my OWN! Made sure I didn't offend anyone; if I thought I did, I just defaulted to my Catholic guilt - the Friday confessional 'Bless me father for I have sinned' even though I couldn't actually think of a sin during confession; so I made up a sin so I wouldn't feel guilty not havin' any . . .

PHOEBE

That's intense, Nana. . .

AGNES

Well, standing up for myself when I was fifteen wasn't easy!

(MAURA motions to PHOEBE to exit with her to the kitchen.)

MAURA

Time to make the salad, Phoeb...

PHOEBE

I'll be right there...

(AGNES rummages through some canning jars and baskets on her porch while PHOEBE sits on the step next to AGNES.)

PHOEBE

Nana, did your mom never talk about sex?

AGNES

Saying the "S" word was a struggle for her.

(PHOEBE exits through the porch door to the kitchen to help with dinner. AGNES crosses from the porch to the Oak Tree DR holding her jars in a basket.)

AGNES

Oh Harry, I wish you were here. . . I felt that pain again. . . I'm not sure how to help our daughter. Remember all the times I tried to help Lily?. . .Right now, I fear I may be losing Maura 'cause I don't know how to help her, Harry.

(AGNES takes off her husband's hat and places it on his urn. Then exits to the kitchen to finish preparing dinner.)

## 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.)