

The Dinosaur Within

by

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The flint lives inside this stone like a dream inside your mind.
Its essence has been prepared inside the stone since the Dreamtime...
Now, it is ready to be born.

—Aboriginal Tribal Elder

A dreaming story is not necessarily factual or moralistic; rather it is designed to open thoughts
beyond conventional horizons and make visible patterns underlying the history of the cosmos,
earth, and humankind.

—Robert Lawlor

It is the nature of grace always to fill spaces that have been empty.

—Goethe

For David, because red shoes leave colorful footprints.

MAIN CHARACTERS

WORRU Australian aboriginal tribal elder
ELI Australian aboriginal immigrant in LA, son of Worru
JERRY newspaperman who lost interest in the human-interest section
TOMMY twelve-year-old boy and resident dinosaur whiz kid, Jerry's son
MISS WELLS crumbling beauty and falling movie star
MARIA professional student, faux finisher, daughter of Miss Wells
HONEY WELLS (*appears on screen*) a Hollywood starlet and force of nature

SUPPORTING CHARACTERS

Two performers should play the following characters.

DOLLY Jerry's exhausted wife^
VOICE-OVER a voice-over pro*
REPORTERS A, B (*appear on screen*) old style reporters^ *
DESTINA a woman who knows more than she lets on^
MARVIN aging publicist without much clout*
DOUGLAS GREENE an Australian paleontologist*
NAOMI SULLIVAN an American anthropologist^
CARL a construction worker*
MR. SCHREMMER senile resident of the Sunset Hills Nursing Home*
MERLIN acting coach and audition wizard*
AD VOICE more voice-over work...hey, it's good when you can get it^
SECURITY GUARD bully with a billyclub*
P.A. an eager production assistant*
DIRECTOR there's method to the madness^

*, ^ Suggested doubling

SETTING

In the Dreamtime, when all things are one. Los Angeles and Western Australia exist simultaneously on an open stage. Various locations (a rock outcrop, the forecourt of Grauman's Chinese Theatre, the office of the *Los Angeles Times*, an acting studio, etc.) should be depicted as simply as possible. Allow the lights, sound, and the performer to create environment as fully as possible.

There is a movie screen on which the newsreel clip and other effects are shown.

TIME

In the geological record, there exists an anomalous 1cm thick band of clay that separates the white limestone representing the Age of the Dinosaurs from the pink limestone representing the Age of the Mammals. It is theorized that somewhere in the time period represented by this layer of clay (called the K-T boundary) lies the explanation for one of the great mysteries of science: *why did the dinosaurs become extinct?*

The play takes place in a similar time period; a time of loss, confusion, change, hope.

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE

Although inspired by an actual incident, the persons and events depicted herein are my own invention. Any similarities to actual people . . . and the rest of that . . . is completely incidental.

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ACT ONE:**Scene One: The Dinosaur Within**

Shadows of an enormous bird flit across the projection screen. There is the sound of gigantic wings approaching—the anticipation of something momentous appearing hangs in the air. As the sound builds and the shadows loom larger, a light rises on a boy—TOMMY. He has his back to the audience and flaps his arms, trying to fly. As the sound dies out, he sees the audience, goes to a lectern and begins to give a speech. He uses note cards and has clearly practiced, but he is nervous and makes some mistakes. TOMMY wears a Kansas City Royals baseball cap.

TOMMY

(reading from CARD #1)

Hello and welcome to the mid-American annual junior paleontologists' conference. My name is Tommy Lane and it's a pleasure to welcome you and an honor for our chapter to host this year's conference.

(He fumbles for his next card, but can't find it.)

Card two, card two? Hmm. . . Guess, I'm a little nervous; I didn't expect so many people. Mostly these kinds of things aren't so well attended.

(TOMMY whispers secretly to the audience.)

Tell you a secret, there's a dinosaur inside me. Look, can you see it?

(TOMMY opens his mouth wide and speaks with his mouth open.)

Way down there. See?

(TOMMY closes his mouth.)

Maybe you can't see him yet, but he looks like this.

(TOMMY reveals a small toy theropod.)

A theropod. He's down there, inside me, but I don't know how to get him out. He's stuck and until he's out I'm stuck, but I'm gonna figure it out.

(TOMMY goes back behind lectern and gets back on track. CARD #2.)

A theropod is a type of dinosaur and it's been theorized that birds are descendants of the dinosaur line—in particular, the theropod. In this conference, we will be discussing modern birds and their possible link to the dinosaurs. If birds are decedents of dinosaurs that means that dinosaurs aren't really extinct. They're just different. They changed, you know? But lots of people feel the need to say extinct. They need a way to describe such monumental loss. And so they keep going back 65 million years ago, sifting through the fossils, and looking for an answer to what happened—*why did the dinosaurs become extinct?*

(CARD #3)

But I'm not sure that's the right question. They're not really extinct, not all of them. You can see for yourself, five dinosaurs here.

(Lights rise separately on WORRU, ELI, MARIA, MISS WELLS, and JERRY. The sound of a didgeridoo stretches lethargically through the space. WORRU stands playing the didgeridoo.

Then.

The sharp staccato sound of a jackhammer. Lights reveal ELI. He wears a hard-hat and digs with a jackhammer. All sounds continue.

Then.

The sound of someone tearing newspapers. Lights reveal MARIA. She tears sheets of newspaper and places them on the floor. All sounds continue.

Then.

The sound of a cigarette lighter striking. Lights reveal MISS WELLS sitting in a wheelchair lighting her cigarette. All sounds continue.

Then.

The sound of birds. Lights reveal JERRY looking through a pair of binoculars.

All sounds continue for a moment, then—one by one—each character speaks. As they speak their sound fades out leaving us with a chorus of voices.)

A curse is upon me.	WORRU
You afraid?	MARIA
I'm your biggest fan.	ELI
To be young again.	MISS WELLS
Said they'd be fossils someday.	JERRY
A curse is upon me.	WORRU
You afraid?	MARIA

ELI

I'm your biggest fan.

MISS WELLS

To be young again.

JERRY

Said they'd be fossils someday.

(As the characters speak again, their light fades leaving only a light up on TOMMY.)

WORRU

A curse is upon me.

MARIA

You afraid?

ELI

I'm your biggest fan.

MISS WELLS

To be young again.

JERRY

Said they'd be fossils someday.

TOMMY

(CARD #4)

Of course, not all of these dinosaurs survived whatever terrible thing happened 65 million years ago, but some did. Now to understand why some survived and others didn't, we'll have to look at a bunch of different factors.

I know this seems like a whole lot of stuff for the mid-American junior paleontologists' annual conference to cover, but you'll get a better understanding as we dig into it, and I think we owe it to the dinosaurs inside all of us to try.

(CARD #6)

Now when I say dinosaur and bird—

(As TOMMY speaks, a shadow falls over him plunging the stage into darkness. From the darkness we hear a strange bird like call that mixes with the squeal of tires. Lights shift.)

Scene Two: Early Risers

A faint light rises on JERRY on his brick front walk. The sun has just broken the horizon. He whistles like a bird and looks through a pair of binoculars, searching the skies. A flashlight cuts through the darkness and lands on him. Holding the flashlight is JERRY'S wife, DOLLY.

DOLLY

Jerry? Jer? What are you doing out here? It's not even light yet.

JERRY

I heard a call. A strange call. And then a giant shadow fell over the house, like the moon was swallowed. And I thought: a bird is out there. A giant bird. So I grabbed my binoculars.

DOLLY

See anything?

JERRY

Dinosaurs. Toy dinosaurs. Tommy, he was at the mid-American junior—

DOLLY

Jerry, no.

JERRY

—giving his lecture about birds and dinosaurs and extinction, but, he was getting all mixed up and then this shadow fell over him and he screamed.

DOLLY

Jerry, please.

JERRY

Remember how he used to collect those toy dinosaurs? He collected them, categorized them, a junior paleontologist. Our little genius. And then one day, right before the conference . . . he went and buried them under the front walk. Took out all those bricks. Said they'd be fossils someday. Remember?

DOLLY

Come back to bed, Jerry.

(Pause. Sound of birds singing in distance.)

JERRY

How can they sing? Every morning—no matter what happened the night before—they still sing.

DOLLY

They're birds, it's what they do.

(Pause. JERRY looks through binoculars.)

DOLLY

Jerry, you have to work in the morning, it's late, come back to bed.

(Leading JERRY off, singing a kind of lullaby.)

Shh. . . song sparrow, yellow warbler, hooping crane, wood thrush. . . there we go now, back to bed. . . Northern flicker, snowy owl, California condor...

(DOLLY flips off flashlight and leads JERRY back to bed. Lights shift.)

Scene Three: A Perfect Fit

MARIA stands in the forecourt of Grauman's Chinese Theater on Hollywood Boulevard holding a backpack. A projection of a square of concrete fills the screen. Set in the concrete are two footprints, made with highheels. Scratched into the concrete above the prints reads: "My biggest thrill. Honey Wells. The Thief Within." MARIA stands contemplating the pair of footprints in the concrete. She mumbles something inaudible. ELI approaches. He holds a hard hat. They stand in silence for a moment, each contemplating the footprints in the cement.

ELI

What are you waiting for? Go on.

MARIA

Pardon me?

ELI

Step into the footprints and step into history. That's what the guidebook says. Go on.

MARIA

That's all right, thanks.

ELI

Come on, what are you afraid of?

MARIA

Overly friendly strangers.

ELI

Oh, hey, sorry. Just making conversation.

(Pause. They look at the footprints. ELI takes out a cigarette.)

Need one?

MARIA

I don't smoke, thanks.

(ELI puts away his cigarette, pause they stand awkwardly.)

ELI

Come 'round here a lot, don't ya?

MARIA

Sometimes.

ELI

Seen ya here yesterday and the day before, must be a big Honey Wells fan, eh?

MARIA

No, I'm no fan.

ELI

So why do you come?

MARIA

Self-torture. . . No, I mean, I just love old Hollywood.

(He produces an old, gold cigarette lighter. Spark. Spark. Spark.)

ELI

Then you'll love this—look. Found it today.

MARIA

A lighter?

ELI

A Ronson. Must be 50 years old. Doesn't work of course, but some fluid and a flint and who knows. Inscription on it too, can't make it out. You?

(Gives MARIA the lighter. She inspects the lighter.)

MARIA

. . . you . . . afraid. . . It says: you . . . afraid. You found this?

ELI

In the subway tunnels. I'm a shovel bum, I dig.

MARIA

That's amazing, I never really thought of there being anything underneath this. Fossils in Hollywood.

ELI

And there's more of em down there. A hubcap from an old cab, coffee-cup from The Cocoanut Grove, rusted film canisters. Everyday I find something new. Kind of got a collection going.

MARIA

How long have you been doing this?

ELI

Couple months, since coming over from Perth.

MARIA

Australia? God, I hear it's beautiful there, why would you come to L.A.?

ELI

Training to be an actor. Want to be a star like...

(looks at footprints on ground)

Humphrey Bogart . . . John Wayne . . . Cary Grant.

MARIA

All from the fifties? Why not...

(finding footprint)

...Tom Hanks.

ELI

You heard of the Outback? Where I grew up was way-the-fuck-out-back. Aboriginal lands. Only got old prints, so I grew up watching the old stars.

MARIA

You mean the dead stars.

(They look at the footprints.)

ELI

You think they ever change? Make room for new stars?

MARIA

I don't think so.

ELI

There's only so much space, though, seems like someday they gotta change em out.

MARIA

I'm afraid these are the stars we're stuck with.

(Pause. They look at the footprints.)

I like that they're so quiet.

ELI

And small. They look small.

MARIA

Seem huge to me.

ELI

I'm telling you, your foot would fit. Go on, step into history.

(MARIA steps into the footprints. Lights whirl from MARIA and ELI to reveal MISS WELLS who sits in a wheelchair smoking a cigarette. She is in her apartment, which is indicated by a mountain of shoeboxes. YOUNG HONEY WELLS appears on screen in an old newsreel. The image is an old woman watching her younger self. On screen, YOUNG HONEY stands on one leg and beams as she prepares to make a footprint in the wet cement. A passel of REPORTERS photograph her and vie for attention. A VOICE-OVER is heard.)

VOICE-OVER

In one of Filmland's quaintest customs, screen sensation Honey Wells stepped into the Hollywood history books today making her mark in the sidewalk of Grauman's Chinese Theater at the premiere of her newest movie, *The Thief Within*.

		REPORTERS <i>(on camera)</i>	
Miss Wells!		Miss Wells!	Miss Wells!
	Miss Wells!		Miss Wells!

Call me Honey.

HONEY *(o.c.)*

		REPORTERS <i>(o.c.)</i>	
Honey!		Honey!	Honey!
	Honey!		Honey!

Sweet as. *(General laughter.)* Who's first?

HONEY *(o.c.)*

REPORTER A

Honey, how does it feel being honored at Hollywood's most famous attraction?

HONEY *(o.c.)*

It makes me feel like anything is possible.

MISS WELLS

Maria? . . . Maria?

		REPORTERS	
	Honey!		Honey!
Honey!	Honey!	Honey!	

HONEY *(o.c.)*

Sweet as.

REPORTER B

Honey, fifty years from now an impressionable girl is standing in your footprints, dreaming of being a big star. What do you tell her?

HONEY (*o.c.*)

Never to give up on her dreams, nothing can stand in her way as long as she believes that anything is possible . . .

REPORTERS (*o.c.*)

Honey! Honey! Honey!
 Honey! Honey!

MISS WELLS

Maria, come look.

HONEY (*o.c.*)

My oh my. So many, many questions. Haven't you boys learned that a woman needs to guard some secrets. After all, worst thing you can do to a mystery is reveal it.

(Referring to her one-legged stance.)

Now if we don't get this over with, I'll be starring as a flamingo in my next picture.

(General laughter.)

REPORTER A

Any last words before you take the plunge?

HONEY (*o.c.*)

I guess I always did want to make a big impression.

(HONEY sinks her foot into the wet cement. Thunderous applause is heard as the camera focuses in on the impression. Her footprint fills the screen and returns to the first image of the footprint frozen in time. Lights fade on MISS WELLS and restore full on MARIA and ELI still in the forecourt of the Chinese Theatre. MARIA steps out of the print.)

ELI

You feel anything? . . .

MARIA

What would I have felt?

ELI

Footprints have a vibration. Like a pulse. My father taught me how to read a person or an animal from the tracks they leave behind.

MARIA

So what do you get from these?

ELI

Honey Wells?

("reads" the prints)

Let's see . . . Honey Wells: one of Hollywood's most glamorous stars. Last big picture was *The Thief Within*. One Oscar nomination. Career brought to a halt when she had a kid. Big scandal.

MARIA

You can tell all that from her footprints?

ELI

Sure, and that it was an inter-racial affair, fell for her driver.

MARIA

That's just what the gossip columns said. Once you've been in Hollywood long enough, you'll learn: the only proper use for those papers is / training a puppy.

ELI *(overlapping at /)*

—training a puppy. Same line she used in her *Life* magazine interview.

MARIA

How do you know all this?

ELI

President of the Honey Wells fan club. Course, it's not much of a fan club. Only like three members, all senior cits, we meet in the lounge of the Sunset Hills nursing home.

MARIA

Come on, tell me something you can't read about her online.

ELI

It's easier reading fresh tracks but it looks like. . . she was scared when she made these.

MARIA

Scared, what are you talking about?

ELI

Or nervous, restless, something. Hard to tell with such an old track, but see here. The impression's not evenly set, slightly off-kilter, little wobbly.

(MARIA looks at the footprint, a moment.)

MARIA

Look, I gotta go.

ELI

Hold on, wait a tick.

MARIA (*realizing she still has the lighter*)

Oh—God—here. Your lighter.

ELI

Keep it.

MARIA

No, no, I couldn't.

ELI

Tell you what, come to a fan club meeting and we'll call it even.

MARIA

I told you I'm not a fan.

ELI

For someone who's not a fan, you know a lot about her. . . Besides, it'd be good to have someone with, you know, a pulse?

MARIA

I'm sorry, I can't . . . But what if I gave you Honey Wells's phone number?

ELI

You have Honey Wells's phone number? How?

MARIA (*jots phone number*)

You're not the only one with fossils of old Hollywood. . . . She loves hearing from her fans and maybe she'd even come to your fan club; gossip is that she's dying to get out of the house. Here.

ELI

Really? Oh my god, this is so great, thank you so much.

MARIA

No problem. Thanks for the lighter, see you around. Good luck.

ELI

Yeah, thanks.

(*MARIA exits.*)

Honey Wells.

(*ELI lights cigarette and steps into the footprints. Lights shift.*)

Scene Four: A Time Before

A light from a small fire bucket catches somewhere across the stage and reveals WORRU on top of a rock out-cropping. ELI remains at the forecourt of the Chinese Theatre. ELI and WORRU occupy the same stage, but stand an ocean apart. WORRU tells a story

WORRU

Pete, Rusty, Eli—my sons. Gather round the fire-bucket and hear. This is how our country was made.

(The didgeridoo underscores periodically.)

In the Dreamtime everything was one.
The world was flat and filled with
giant creatures—our Creative Ancestors.
Their dreams and movements created everything:
animals, plants, mountains,
us people.

After making so much our Creative Ancestors
went back in—returning to land and sky.
But they left traces of themselves, dreaming tracks,
all over our country and in the rock formation here—footprints.

(A trackway of five dinosaur footprints appear on the screen.)

Five giant footprints.
They are a part of our song-line
follow them and you walk back into the dreaming.
This is a sacred spot for us people.
One of the few sacred things the *gadia*
has not taken.
I am custodian of the footprints,
and in time you three little fellas, my sons,
will be custodians of these footprints
protectors of our country, our culture.
They are yours to look after.
Never let them gadias take them.
Do you understand, Eli? Rusty? Pete?

(A noose fashioned from electrical wire flies in.)

ELI

Pete.

WORRU

Rusty and Eli, the sorry business has brung us here.

Your big brother was a good-un,
a read an write man—sharp,
learned the whitefella's game.
Played it good, but the rules and regs. been changing on him
an eat him inside out
till he hang himself with 'lectric wire.

Now we bury him, in line with the tradition
I learn you how:

One. Do not speak the name of the dead.
Speaking his name works like
the fishhook
keeps his spirit held to
us.

Two. We carry his bones in our mouths to the burial place
Do you understand, Eli? Rusty?

(Another noose fashioned from electrical wire flies in.)

ELI

Rusty!

WORRU

Eli the sorry business has brung us here.

Your big brother was a good-un,
made his home in the bush—strong,
But he got the troubles after your brother suicided
and got on the grog
grog being the only space he could forget.
Time come he couldn't even forget on the grog
an he hang himself with 'lectric wire.

Now we bury him, in line with the tradition
I learn you how:

Three. Break his spear
this lets him go home.

(WORRU breaks spear and lays it down ceremoniously.)

WORRU

Eli, you are the last who knows
the ways of us people.
Someday, I will die
And nobody will know how to bury me,
how to break the spear, so my line can continue.
Someday, I will die
with my culture
and these footprints will be yours to look after.

(ELI steps out of the footprint, the spell is broken.)

ELI

I can't, Pop. I'm leaving.

(ELI begins cordoning off an area of the stage with yellow, "caution" tape. This becomes the subway tunnel. He picks up a jackhammer, puts his hard hat back on, and begins digging.)

WORRU

Pete, Rusty, Eli—my sons.

This is how our country was destroyed.

A curse is upon me.

(The sound of didgeridoo mixes with the sound of a jackhammer. The image of the dinosaur footprints disappears. Lights shift.)

Scene Five: Early Impressions

MISS WELLS sits a wheelchair in her living room watching the projection screen as she did in the previous scene. She watches the same newsreel clip. YOUNG HONEY appears on camera with REPORTERS:

REPORTERS (o.c.)
Honey! Honey! Honey!
Honey! Honey! Honey!

YOUNG HONEY (o.c.)
Sweet as. (General laughter.) Who's first?

REPORTER A (o.c.)
Honey, how does it feel being honored at Hollywood's most famous attraction?

YOUNG HONEY (o.c.)
It makes me feel like anything is possible.

(On stage, DESTINA enters behind MISS WELLS. MISS WELLS pauses the image on screen.)

MISS WELLS
Maria, is that you?

DESTINA
No, Miss Wells, just me.

MISS WELLS
Oh. . . Destina, what is it?

DESTINA
You have a visitor.

MISS WELLS
I told you not to let anyone in—no exceptions.

DESTINA
It is Mr. Hunter. He says he must see you—

MARVIN (from off)
Honey?

MISS WELLS
Marvin?

MARVIN

Can I come in?

MISS WELLS

Marvin, yes, of course, come-in, come-in. That'll be all Destina.

(MARVIN enters carrying a long thin box, DESTINA exits.)

MARVIN

Hello, hello.

MISS WELLS *(turning around)*

Why Marvin. What a surprise. It's been ages.

MARVIN

It's been—well—since the hospital. . . I see you got the clip I sent you.

MISS WELLS

Yes, what a delight. *The Thief Within*, really brings back memories.

MARVIN

Anniversary's coming right up.

MISS WELLS

Is that what your cryptic note was about? Where is it? Here.

(finding note)

"Feeling nostalgic? Your next step is both backwards and forwards. Call me."

MARVIN

But you didn't call.

MISS WELLS

Well, Marvin, I've been . . . convalescing . . . You look tired. Coffee? / Destina! *Café!*

MARVIN *(overlapping at /)*

Please, don't bother, I'm—

MISS WELLS

Well, it could do me some good; I'm afraid I'm a frightful sight.

MARVIN

No, you look— You look. Well, swell.

MISS WELLS

Bless you, Marvin, little lies make life possible. So, to what do I owe the pleasure?

MARVIN

Thought I should pop in and see how you're living. It's a very nice complex.

MISS WELLS

I'm afraid I have a complex about my complex.

MARVIN

Once you settle in—

MISS WELLS

I've been here almost two years now.

(A square of light rises on MARIA. She's in the walk-in closet. A bucket of primer sits next to her as does a stack of old newspaper. She carefully lays out newspapers on the floor covering the square of light. She opens a sheet at a time, smooths it, tapes it down. She pauses between sheets to read sections of the paper she has taped down. She repeats process.)

MARVIN

I meant now that Maria has moved back home.

MISS WELLS

Ah, yes, the prodigal daughter returns.

MARVIN

Where was she last? Stanford? Duke? Cornell?

MISS WELLS

Some university.

MARVIN

Must be nice to have her back.

MISS WELLS

Nice, yes. Especially when you only have two bedrooms.

MARVIN

So where's Destina sleep when she stays?

MISS WELLS

On the rollout. And Maria's racked with guilt, so she's hell-bent on turning the walk-in closet into an extra bedroom. As you see, she's dragged out all my shoes and wants to *faux finish* the walls, but she's agonized over the color for a month now and keeps shoving these ridiculous paint chips under my nose: Sweet Butter, Mayan Sunset, Spring Daffodil, Yellow Brick Road.

MARVIN

Yellows are tricky. Tell her to try Lemon Bay. We just did a bathroom in it—very fresh.

MISS WELLS

Maria doesn't need more choices, she needs to decide and paint the damn thing.

(Pause. MARVIN gives her the box.)

MARVIN

Here, I brought you a gift.

MISS WELLS

Why, Marvin, you shouldn't have.

(MISS WELLS opens box. In the closet, MARIA has stopped laying out newspapers and now reads from an article in one of the newspapers.)

MARIA

The only known set of fossilized stegosaurus footprints have been stolen from a sacred rock outcrop in outback Australia, enraging aborigines. . .

MISS WELLS *(pulls out a cane)*

A cane. How utterly Charlie Chaplin of you. Cut to the chase, Marvin.

MARVIN

Yes, well, your name came up at the agency the other day and everyone said how great it would be to see you back out in circulation.

MISS WELLS

Light.

(MARVIN lights her cigarette.)

MARVIN

Honey, we're sitting on a mother lode here. Osteoporosis is a very common disease among... mature...women and nobody's doing anything with it. Now, I got a line on a Public Service Announcement—outside the Chinese Theatre, a past/present kind of thing mixing shots of you stepping back into your footprints. Very classy for a P.S.A.

MISS WELLS

Marvin, if you think I'm going to become the osteoporosis poster crone, you're a bigger idiot than I imagined.

MARVIN

But this is the break we've been waiting for.

MISS WELLS

More like the break in the hip *you've* been waiting for.

(Pause.)

MARVIN

Honey, the agency is paring down its client list; it wants a healthy roster and . . . you . . . you are not a healthy client. I've protected you for the last. . . but the agency, kids run it now. I have a 29 year-old boss. . . Consider my offer.

MISS WELLS

There's nothing to consider. I'm not going out till I feel my old self again.

MARVIN

If I drop you, no agent will come within ten miles of you or your old self.

MISS WELLS

Nonsense, I could snap and have a dozen agents here by cocktail hour sipping gimlets and waving contracts for me to sign.

MARVIN

Nobody drinks gimlets any more, nobody even smokes anymore.

MISS WELLS *(referencing cane)*

So, you're giving me the hook?

MARVIN

I'm not giving you the hook, Honey, I'm just trying to get you back on your feet.

MISS WELLS

Get out. . . . Go, Marvin. I mean it. Go.

(MARIA enters with a sheet of newspaper.)

MARIA

Mother? . . . —Oh, hi Marvin. I didn't hear you come in.

MARVIN

Maria, nice to see you. Your mother was just telling me how good it's been to have you back.

MARIA

She did?

MISS WELLS

Marvin's a notorious liar, dear, it's his job.

MARIA

Mother. Excuse her Marvin.

MISS WELLS

And Marvin, what part of *get out* didn't you understand?

MARVIN

Yes, well, consider my offer, call me if you change your mind. Good-bye, Honey. Good luck, Maria.

(MARVIN exits.)

MARIA

Mother, did you just fire Marvin?

MISS WELLS

I gave him the hook.

MARIA

How could you do that? / He's been with you forever.

MISS WELLS *(overlapping at /)*

He was taking advantage, Maria. Wants me to do a P.S.A. with this ridiculous cane.

MARIA

I'm sure he just wanted to help, Mother. We all are just trying to help.

MISS WELLS

You could help me, Maria, by taking my side every once in awhile.

(MISS WELLS gets out another cigarette. MARIA picks up cane and hangs it off the back of MISS WELLS'S wheelchair.)

MARIA

Well, Mother, at some point you are going to have to start exercising. If you don't you're prone to a number of complications: another break, an embolism. Any one of these could kill you. We need to get your circulation moving.

MISS WELLS

I can't walk around with some absurd cane.

MARIA

Can't or won't?

MISS WELLS

Pride goeth before a fall, Maria.

(MISS WELLS lights her cigarette.)

MARIA

You shouldn't be smoking so much. Nicotine depresses osteoblastic activity.

MISS WELLS

And you're depressing me. Now I want you to clean this place up, get all my shoes back in the closet—

MARIA

I'm working on the closet.

MISS WELLS

Like a glacier works on melting.

MARIA

I was going to prime today, but before I got started this article caught my eye—

MISS WELLS

Before I got started . . . Maria's favorite phrase. Before I get started, I need to prime before I paint. Before I get started, I need to faux finish degrees in interior design, comp lit., journalism—

MARIA

That's what I came to tell you. Remember that journalism professor I had—Jerry Lane? He's writing for the *L.A. Times* now and he wrote this really interesting article, I thought you might want to hear it—

MISS WELLS

You know when I was your age...

MARIA

Forget it, Mother.

MISS WELLS

...I was still on my way up, a rising star. . . .

MARIA

Yes, yes, trudging twelve miles through the Los Angeles snow. In high-heels. God, Mother, spare me the speech.

(MARIA exits with newspaper article.)

MISS WELLS

. . . Every move I made took me one step higher and I never considered that I could fall. That's the opiate of success—the illusion that you exist in a world without gravity.

(DESTINA enters.)

DESTINA

Café, Miss Wells?

MISS WELLS

No, Destina, I'll have a gimlet instead.

DESTINA

No lunch?

MISS WELLS

Just get it, Destina and I have calls to make. Where's my address book?

(DESTINA picks up address book from the table and hands it her.)

DESTINA

You and Miss Maria. This fighting, it must stop.

MISS WELLS

It's okay, Destina. Just get my drink.

DESTINA

It's not okay. Two months she's been home and everyday a fight. I can only take so much. Next time, don't fight—talk.

MISS WELLS

If we didn't fight, we wouldn't talk. Now my gimlet.

DESTINA

Ice?

MISS WELLS

No, just give it to me straight.

(DESTINA exits and MISS WELLS hits the remote, activating the screen. The newsreel clip begins to play again.)

REPORTERS (o.c.)

Honey!

Honey!

Honey!

(Lights shift.)