

~ ~ ~ TWO ~ ~ ~

WAVY

~ ~ ~ LINES ~ ~ ~

BY G H ELLIS

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CHARACTERS:

CALLIE (female 35)

JANUS (male 35, twin brother of Callie)

TRIGS (male 95, grandfather to the twins)

Time: present

Places: Front door and inside the home of Trigs

Sets:

1. Trigs' front door is a simple doorway aside the curtain on a wing.
2. Behind the curtain is the inside of Trigs' home which has a sofa, a large painting, and a bureau or table upon which are a pill container, a world globe, photo of a terrarium housing a bonsai like plant (see final page), a 6-8 inch green plastic ball, and a Matryoshka set (Russian nested dolls: set of 5). The painting should be large enough for the audience to see clearly or be projected, and/or printed on the playbills.



Production note: This play is envisioned to run 60+ minutes with two scenes and no intermission.

Dialogue note: Phrases set off in quotation marks are suggested to be delivered using voice inflections or finger air-quotes as deemed appropriate.

(The play opens with CALLIE pounding on TRIGS' front door.)

CALLIE

Trigs, Trigs. Are you OK? Trigs, please, open the door!

(We hear a loud muscle car engine then a car door slam. JANUS enters.)

CALLIE

Janus, thank god you're here. Trigs isn't answering.

JANUS

Think he's dead?

CALLIE

Don't say that!

JANUS

He's 95 and having Hail-Mary bypass surgery tomorrow that may kill him. Yeah, he could be dead.

CALLIE

He can't die yet. He wants to see us. I'm calling the fire department.

JANUS

There's no fire.

CALLIE

That car is way too loud.

JANUS

The engine or the color?

CALLIE

Both. A red sports car, Janus? You're so 35 years old.

JANUS

Only an hour younger than you, Sissy.

CALLIE

One hour older, but years more mature. Really, a red noisy jalopy?

JANUS

Jalopy, my ass, that is my Ferrari.

CALLIE

It's your don't look at my small dick noise-polluting cliché.

JANUS

Roarin' with 500 horsepower.

CALLIE

Trigs' neighbors don't tolerate loud noises.

(A loud church bell tolls once.)

JANUS

That church bell; that's loud. So screw the neighbors.

CALLIE

Yes, it's loud, but it only rang once for eleven o'clock? Not eleven times. It only rings once on the odd hours and twice on the evens: minimal noise pollution, Why? Because the church and the neighbors reached a quiet civilized solution. Tolerable noise, not the unnecessary din of your red penis-mobile.

JANUS

That luxury vehicle got me here by eleven, rocket transport from the city.

CALLIE

Thank goodness. Trigs is all about punctuality. His eleven means eleven sharp.

JANUS

Talk about the kettle dissing the pot. Don't hang that on Trigs. You're the one who's time obsessed. Not that it matters if he's dead.

CALLIE

God, Trigs! I forgot. Call the fire department!

JANUS

See if the door's unlocked.

(The door opens easily.)

CALLIE

B and E, is that a required course at hedge fund school?

(The curtain rises to unveil Trigs' home. TRIGS is on the floor.)

CALLIE

Oh my god! Trigs, are you dead?

JANUS

Callie, dead people don't answer.

(TRIGS gasps and points to the table.)

TRIGS

Nitro.

(JANUS grabs pills and opens them. TRIGS takes one into his mouth and in a few moments is better.)

TRIGS

Ahh, better.

CALLIE

Trigs, when you didn't answer the door I thought, I thought....

TRIGS

That the ninety-five year old geezer was done opening doors.

CALLIE

It's just so...something today. This house has a pounding aura.

TRIGS

My crescendo angina. Zaps me about once an hour.

JANUS

Crescendo, say what?

TRIGS

Angina, heart pain, crescendo means the episodes are more frequent, the reason I need surgery tomorrow and why I wanted you to come today.

CALLIE

How long were you on the floor?

TRIGS

Maybe a minute. I heard the knocking and the church bell, then bam, the pain got me before I could open the door.

CALLIE

You need to keep these in your pocket. (The pills.)

TRIGS

Too hard to get out of my pocket when I get an attack. Anyway, won't need 'em after tomorrow.

CALLIE

Of course, you'll feel better after the bypass.

TRIGS

Or feel nothing. Heart surgeons hate operating on people over 90, but it's the only thing left to try. Either way, no more pills.

CALLIE

They rarely operate....

JANUS

Surgical risk. You want to go to the hospital now, Trigs?

TRIGS

God no, I hate doctors and hospitals. They get me tomorrow.

CALLIE

Amen to had it with the the medical system.

JANUS

Yeah, Mom said your fertility docs have called it quits.

CALLIE

They have.

JANUS

So, you guys going the adoption route?

CALLIE

NO! I want my baby, not somebody else's discard. If I just wanted a varmint to feed,

I'd get a dog.

JANUS

Whoa, sorry.

CALLIE

No more doctors, hospitals, or fucking adoptions, OK.

JANUS

Not OK. Today is about Trigs, not you, Callie. And he is in the hospital queue.

CALLIE

Sorry, Trigs, Janus is right. The important thing is your surgery. But I'm worried. How often do people actually die during the surgery?

TRIGS

Just once.

JANUS

Good one, Trigs.

CALLIE

You two, this is serious.

TRIGS

The O.R stats? 50 percent odds I make it through surgery, 25 through the recovery period. So I am seizing the day in seeing my two favorite grand-kids.

JANUS

Har-har, your only two.

TRIGS (to Janus)

Three. Don't forget my sweet 5 year-old great-granddaughter, daddeo.

JANUS

"Great," semantics.

TRIGS

Speaking of my great-granddaughter, lest I forget, today's most important agenda item is that she get the Matryoshkas. (Mah' trehosh" kuz)

CALLIE

The what?

JANUS

Matryoshkas, nested Russian dolls. She loves them, a perfect keepsake.

TRIGS

When you give them to her, you must repeat the story I always tell her.

(TRIGS takes apart the 5 dolls and lines them up
smallest to largest.)

These dolls represent five stages in a girl's life. The first is childhood from birth through college. The second is when you're a young grownup. You find a job, a husband, make a home, and raise your children. Number three is the transition years. Your children grow up, and you look outside your home. At the fourth stage of late adulthood you're a wise grandmother and community servant. The fifth is your life's completion, a glorious final passage into eternal happiness.

CALLIE

Five stages, OK. The final glorification of death as eternal happiness is a great spin against existential angst. No Heaven of course. But skip the mother part, in case she inherits her aunt's infertility.

TRIGS

Oh Callie. I wish I could magically make that happen. I'd die in a heartbeat, not that's even a sacrifice at my stage.

JANUS

We all would do anything, Callie.

CALLIE

As I've been told, today is not about me. Trigs, Janus is driving back to the city this afternoon. I'm having dinner and staying with old Cornell friends here in Ithaca tonight, but I'll be at the hospital tomorrow with Mom and Dad. So how shall we spend the morning?

JANUS

I do need to get back this afternoon, but I'll be here with you this weekend.

CALLIE

Name your pleasure, Trigs.

TRIGS

The reason I invited you two is I'd like you to look around and take whatever from the house. Something useful, or perhaps a remembrance of me or Nana. I mean anything and everything. No U-haul hitches on the hearse.

CALLIE

We could never forget you or Nana. But as for house stuff uh....I...my husband...we really don't have room.

JANUS

Yeah, we're full up too.

TRIGS

Such liars, just admit the truth that Nana and Trigs' decor is an anachronistic nightmare.

CALLIE

No, Trigs, our house is too small. State employees live modestly compared to hedge fund wolves. Janus has loads more room.

JANUS

My 55 minute elder sister, like our father, is so quick to disparage my success, of which I remain unapologetic. I appreciate the offer, Trigs. But my wife: she's very particular about what I bring home.

CALLIE

So she's okay with a loud, red Ferrari, but your girlfriend has to be put up in an apartment downtown.

TRIGS

Callie!

JANUS

Not your business, or place to pollute this quiet neighborhood with noisy gossip.

CALLIE

What? Big house can't accommodate a little extra baggage?

TRIGS

Stop it, both of you! Callie's not airing any dirty laundry, Janus. I know about your situation from your mother. Listen, you two, I'm imposing a strict house rule today: no judging, no shaming, no lecturing.

CALLIE

You tell Mom, and not me? I have to hear it third hand from Dad?

JANUS

Maybe a reason to check in with Mom occasionally.

CALLIE

You can deal with that woo-woo, astrology psycho, I'll pass.

JANUS

She's into astrology. So what? It's bunk, but it's harmless.

TRIG

Perhaps not complete bunk.

JANUS

You softening to her nonsense, Trigs?

TRIGS (Shrugs.)

Meh?

JANUS

Trigs, I know you don't buy the hocus-pocus of planets and stars controlling our destiny.

TRIGS

I'm a scientist. I analyze with an open mind. Some of Dawn's astrology predictions seem surprisingly too accurate to be random guesses.

JANUS

No way. People are different. Take Callie and me. Same birthday, yet we're totally different.

CALLIE

Mom says birth times, even minutes, make a difference.

(CALLIE picks up the globe and slowly rotates it.)

As the earth revolves its relation to the constellations and planets changes constantly. Fifty-five minutes can make huge difference astro-and -mature-ologically.

JANUS

I got your astrology. Taurus are bulls, Aries's are rams. Both shit a lot; their alignment rains tons of bullshit.

TRIGS

Astrology is about heavenly cycles coinciding with behavioral cycles. The former is astronomy, the latter psychology.

CALLIE

Revolving orbs that create seasons, sunspots, magnetic poles, tides isn't bullshit.

TRIGS

Those cycles we understand. Who knows what other influential forces may exist.

JANUS

Doesn't make astrology credible.

TRIGS

Everything in the universe evolved in a background of preexisting energy fields. Plants know when to flower and when to drop their leaves. Birds know when to build nests and when to migrate.

JANUS

And stars and planets conspire to control us. Not.

TRIGS

I don't believe they care one way or another. They simply go about their orbiting. It's the coincidence of their orbits with events that makes astrology interesting.

JANUS

Impossible.

TRIGS

Consider this. There is an eighty-plus year cycle of U. S. political crises. Starting about 1700 the Europeans brought colonial slavery to the New World along with indigenous genocides. Forward eighty years it's revolutionary war time followed in eighty years by the Civil War, eighty later World War II, and eighty more today we have a cultural war. Coincidentally the orbit of Uranus is eighty-four years.

CALLIE

According to Mom, Uranus brings big radical changes, innovations, and revolutions.

JANUS

Uranus is a big ball of methane. How can it make wars?

TRIGS

Not saying it does. North American wars recur in sync with Uranus' position. The ancients intuited an eighty year war cycle, then devised a Uranus myth to match.

CALLIE

Russia has a revolutions every 30-40 years. Peasant riots against the tsars peaked in 30-40 year cycles prior to the success in 1917, but their revolution cycle continues. Russians raised the iron curtain in the forties, dissolved the Soviet Union in the eighties, and invaded Ukraine now.

TRIGS

Behavior cycles seem to be hard wired for individuals and cultures. Fashion styles repeat. Economies cycle through prosperity and recession. Dark ages give rise to renaissances.

JANUS

I thought we were discussing astrology.

CALLIE

We are. Mom and her astrology friends say, hey, have you noticed whenever Mars and Jupiter and Leo are in a certain position every 33 years, Russia goes at it. Expect another Russian war about 2055.

JANUS

Planets are just rocks.

TRIGS

They are just rocks that do nothing but circle the sun. Humans have projected their behavioral cycles onto them through mythic stories.

JANUS

Did Mom hypnotize you guys?

CALLIE

Only explaining Mom's woo-woo. Not riding her bus. Rocks are rocks.

JANUS

Then ignore Mom's woo-woo. She's your mother. Take her as she is. Nazi Dad gets along with her.

CALLIE

Dad's not a Nazi.

JANUS

He voted for Trump.

CALLIE

So did most the guys in your hedge fund office.

JANUS

They're just wallet conservatives, not real Trumpers like Dad. If you can ignore Dad's crap, you can ignore hers. Moms need their daughters.

CALLIE

Daughters need their dads too, and not the ones shacking up in the city.

TRIGS

Callie, mind the house rules. To Janus' point, Dawn wishes you two were closer.

CALLIE

Mom and I are too toxic. God knows how Dad tolerates her.

JANUS

I don't see how she tolerates Dad.

CALLIE

Find out. Call him. Ask him.

JANUS

Not masochistic enough. He only opens his mouth is to auger me a new asshole.

CALLIE

Try. Should be easy, you two are just alike.

JANUS

No, he calls me the con-man.

TRIGS

Are you?

JANUS

Of course not. I mean, Clients have to put their money somewhere. Hedge funds are

a better place than timeshares, the stupidest investment on the planet.

CALLIE

People got to vacation somewhere. Proves my point; you're both alike. The father-son war, another cliché; like a red sports car and a hot young trophy babe.

TRIGS

Callie!

(He gives a finger across the neck to cut it out.)

Janus, why do you think he says that?

JANUS

I don't know. Maybe he sees hedge funds as evil?

TRIGS

Are they?

JANUS

It's my living, a good one.

TRIGS

Maybe a part of your job is a con?

JANUS

People with scads of money get the comfort of trusting us and feeling fiscally responsible.

CALLIE

Your selling confidence, that's the definition of a con-man.

JANUS

The market says comfort and confidence is a valuable product.

TRIGS

The bigger question, Janus, is your job fulfilling?

JANUS

I make a great living.

TRIGS

That's filling your treasure chest, not the same. Callie said you're like your father. Could part of the problem be your similar jobs?

CALLIE

I get what you're suggesting, Trigs. Dad criticizes in Janus's work what he doesn't want to admit about his.

JANUS

I don't get what you're suggesting.

CALLIE

Dad has said on several occasions that he wished he'd done something else in life. But you wouldn't know that, because you never talk to him.

JANUS

I'm happy with my job.

CALLIE

And happy with everything else? Not!

JANUS

What????

TRIGS

OK, Janus, let's look from a different angle. I know you've seen the Disney movies, Pirates of the Caribbean.

JANUS

Go on...

TRIGS

The main pirate, Jack Sparrow, says to his father, "I think surviving is the key to life." His father responds, "The secret to life is living with yourself, forever."

JANUS

Duh, what?

CALLIE

Dad is unfulfilled from selling timeshares to just make money: surviving. Sparrow's father warns him to attend to his complete self.

TRIGS

Millions of older men haven't lived full enough lives. They are crotchety, old curmudgeons like most of the faculty here at Cornell.

JANUS

Dad's a charter member of that club.

TRIGS

How?

JANUS

The way he disparages immigrants, gays, liberals, anyone different from him.

CALLIE

Rants like a conservative talk show host. Thankfully he doesn't own an AR-15.

TRIGS

This may sound paradoxical: perhaps he cares enough about you that he hopes you don't repeat his mistakes.

JANUS

Nice sugar-coated spin: he cares enough to be an Olympic asshole reamer.

CALLIE

He's a grumpy old man, but he's our dad. Sons and dads need each other. Call him and be nice to him.

JANUS

He's intolerable. How does Mom do it?

CALLIE

Women understand grumpy old men.

JANUS

But why stay with him?

CALLIE

Nobody likes grumpy, but she's compassionate. Mom thinks "The forces of the universe put us together for a higher cosmic purpose."

JANUS

She told you that?

CALLIE

Her big picture, not mine.

JANUS

Must be a really big picture.

CALLIE

He pays the bills, a necessity because whacko Mom's never been organized enough to hold a real job. In return she evaluates potential timeshare units with aura checks and astrology charting. She's actually good at picking winners; and it boosts Mom's esteem.

TRIGS

Non-random useful woo-woo.

CALLIE

Bah! Lots of people have good business Karma.

TRIGS

Karma is a gift of big picture connection.

JANUS

Guess I'm too little picture.

CALLIE

Like your little difficulties in the city?

TRIGS

Callie.

CALLIE

Not criticizing. Suggesting that the girl and car may be details of a bigger picture.

JANUS

Are you going to paint me that big picture?

CALLIE

I am not. You said before, that's none of my business.

JANUS

No, c'mon, it's OK. I'm open to some big picture enlightenment.

CALLIE

Alright then, I'll share a detail of my big picture. I know Trigs is never shocked by

anything, so you can both hear this. Note you're not hearing this third hand. One reason I'm nasty about your girlfriend, is guilt, my guilt. Despite medical assurance that my husband is fertile, I befriended a man hoping to poach some baby daddy seed. Yeah, really desperate and unforgivable. So for guilt I have unloaded on you, Janus, I apologize.

JANUS

I accept your apology. Thank you. You've always been smarter and more righteous than me. Makes me feel less awful, and makes you seem almost normal.

CALLIE

I'm just sneakier than you. And my spouse doesn't know by the way.

JANUS

Your secret is sound, and trust me it's better if he never finds out. My wife's so fricking understanding; it'd be easier if she'd just throw me out. I don't want to abandon anybody, especially my daughter, It's complicated....

TRIGS

Situations are complicated. Transitions are hard.

JANUS

Transitions?

(TRIGS uses the dolls.)

TRIGS

Moving from one stage of life to the next. Look here. Your lady friend is transitioning from her first doll, childhood, into young adulthood. Having her bills paid and not having to find a job, and borrowing a husband, is security to stay in the child phase. She's resisting doll two, the tasks of the early adult.

JANUS

This is about her, not me?

CALLIE

You're her enabler.

TRIGS

Enabling her to resist "adulthood" as millennials say; said without shaming.

CALLIE

No shaming is the reason I said enabler instead of sugar-daddy.

TRIGS (Next sentence spoken sarcastically.)

So polite of you, Callie. Realize, Janus, in exchange she is enabling your situation, resisting transition to doll number 3.

JANUS

My “situation” keeps coming riding back into town. Can we rest that horse?

TRIGS

Absolutely, let’s. I’m proud of you both. It takes courage to talk about these things.

CALLIE

Trigs, you’re close to doll 5, the final transition stage. Are you resisting?

TRIGS

Of course. Death is a transition I’m disinclined to rush, why I’m gambling on surgery. I’m running low on time outs, so I’m concentrating on what the moment requires.

JANUS

Knowing what is required, there’s the rub.

TRIGS

Two huge problems complicate life transitions. Resistance is commonest.

JANUS

Avoiding change?

TRIGS

Yes, from fear. Fear of losing the known past and fear of the unknown future.

CALLIE

And the second huge problem, transitioning too fast?

TRIGS

No, it takes as long as it takes. The second is getting haunted.

JANUS

Haunted? Like specters from the woo-woo?

TRIGS

Not ghosts like Casper or Jacob Marley. A ghost that haunts a transition is a debilitating obsession with a missing experience that renders one permanently

incapable of further maturation.

JANUS

Can you be more vague?

CALLIE

I could use an example myself.

TRIGS

Sure, many novels have haunted characters. Take Jay Gatsby. The unrequited love of Daisy Buchanan deprives Jay of a healthy love relationship, making him a desperate gangster trying to win her back, obsessing permanently, and never moving on.

Or Miss Havesham, in Great Expectations. Her development is permanently stopped from being jilted at the altar. Thereafter she never takes off her wedding dress.

Resistance can be overcome, but many people never succeed. Take grumpy old men, they're stuck trying to be twenty-five and end up miserable.

CALLIE

But they still could change?

TRIGS

They could unlike haunting which is permanent zombie-ism: one's soul wandering the halls of a decaying inner mansion.

JANUS

Fiction, not real people.

TRIGS

Hmm....real person example,.....OK, who was the king of moonwalk?

JANUS

Michael Jackson.

CALLIE

He wanted to be somebody else? All that cosmetic surgery, the costumes.

JANUS

He was haunted by a ghost with a white glove?

TRIGS

Sort of. What do you think was haunted him?

JANUS

Maybe the other glove, a sheet and a hood? Fear of the KKK stifled him?

CALLIE

Fear causes resistance; a ghost is searching for a missing experience, right, Trigs?

TRIGS

His ghost was searching for Michael's missed childhood. He was stuck in Matryoshka level one. From the time Michael was five he was exploited to perform, make money, and cow-tow to his agent and his father, haunted from never having experienced the play and delight of an authentic childhood.

He built a playground mansion named Neverland and idolized Peter Pan. Having had his childhood stolen, his ghost wandered his mansion searching for the lost little boy spirit of Michael Jackson. He would "never land" in adulthood. Michael pursued childhood fantasies. He got an imaginary friend, albeit a real chimpanzee. He befriended young boys as playmates and to invite for sleepovers. Young boys have innocent sexual experiences as part of their play. Micheal wasn't a pedophile, he was a zombie haunted by the ghost of a childhood denied.

JANUS

Do you think Callie and I don't want to grow up?

TRIGS

Not at all. You have both successfully accomplished early adulthood. You've reached Matryoshka level 3. But I offer one warning: time and fate have taken the experience of motherhood from Callie. It's her potential ghost.

CALLIE

I wish I could get past it. I hate that I snapped at you, Janus, but if another person spits out that platitude about adoption, I'll strangle them.

TRIGS

Adoption offers no relief for what's missing in your life, Callie. The desire to be pregnant, to build a nursery, to go through labor, to suckle your newborn, to create a child legacy is embedded deep in your DNA. The essence of species survival depends upon the maternal instinct. There is no getting past it.

An unhappy barren woman carries a wound similar to a soldier who loses a limb in combat. The loss is called a phantom limb, which after the stump heals lingers as a

ghost. If the loss festers, he becomes bitter; but if he appeases his ghost, he can find vitality. Callie, if the baby you desire haunts you, there's no getting past it.

CALLIE

Great, now I'm cursed and haunted. Just shoot me.

JANUS

Trigs.

TRIGS

The ghost will always be with you, so try befriending it. Appreciate it for reminding you that you are a loving, caring person who wanted a baby so intensely.

CALLIE

Have you tried this?

TRIGS

As a child I missed out on music development. I didn't have a record player, musical instruments, or lessons to develop my musical ear. Music is a joy to most people, but I can't sing or interpret music. It confuses and frustrates me. My music ghost haunts me with feelings of estrangement and inferiority.

CALLIE

You befriended it?

TRIGS

I give it credit for allowing me to study and love plants instead of wasting time gyrating to rock-n-roll. I tell my ghost I hear the music of orchids in bloom.

JANUS

What might my ghost want?

TRIGS

I don't think you have one. Resistance is your situation.

JANUS

My situation again: that horse is harder to ditch than spam calls.

TRIGS

Go with your horse imagery. Ferrari has a horse logo. If your apartment and lady friend are saddle bags, what are they securing that you need?

JANUS

They make me feel good.

TRIGS

By “feels good” I suspect you mean youthful virility and pride of achievement.

JANUS

Feels mighty good, pardner.

CALLIE

And when you get bored, you can get new ones like your hedge fund buddies.

JANUS

Not exactly my plan. Nothing wrong with a new car.

CALLIE

Dad is always looking for the next timeshare project.

JANUS

The need for money doesn't disappear.

TRIGS

Nor do unfulfilled needs.

JANUS

I can buy anything I want. So what needs, tell me!

TRIGS

My Matryoshkas differentiate five life stages. The great Freudian psychologist, Eric Erickson described eight. Erickson's last two, which occur in late adulthood, my doll 4, require achieving generativity and integrity to avoid ending up in stagnation and despair. Doll 2's tasks of outer world work and relationships aren't sufficient fulfillment in stage 4 to avoid stagnation and despair.

JANUS

Dad still hawking timeshares is related to his despair?

CALLIE

And stagnation.

TRIGS

Erickson saw integrity as self acceptance with attention to total needs, or as Jack

Sparrow's father put it, "Living with yourself forever." Generativity is having purpose for society and descendants above one's self. Your dad has stagnation and despair because he's stuck trying to be young and powerful like much of the male world.

JANUS

Not sure this relates to me.

TRIGS

The part of you that looks backward to preserve what feels good is like your dad. Your challenge, Janus, is to look forward, suffer losing what has "felt good", and endure the uncertainty of what may come.

JANUS

Is the point of all this to make me feel sorry for Dad and call him?

CALLIE

Michael Jackson's sang, "The Man in the Mirror."

JANUS

Are you saying I'm like him?

TRIGS

You needn't end up like him.

CALLIE

At least he hasn't dumped Mom. Although I wouldn't blame him.

TRIGS

Over the line, Callie.

JANUS

It's OK, I deserve it. And she deserves an apology from me. For my adoption insensitivity, Callie, I apologize.

CALLIE

Thank you. Let's have a truce. No judging, shaming, or lecturing, right Trigs?

TRIGS

What the moment requires.

JANUS

How about some reprieve from Matryoshka doll overload. Can we just....

TRIGS

Change the subject, of course. Back to today's B.I.D. agenda, the moment requires I ask you again to look around the house. Humor me.

CALLIE

B.I.D.?

TRIGS

Before I die. So be super quick.

JANUS

I don't recall seeing that painting.

CALLIE

Big.

TRIGS

I was beginning to think you wouldn't notice. What do you think?

CALLIE (Callie strains to be polite.)

Not bad, I mean, interesting. (beat, then a revelation)

Wow, did you paint this, yourself? I never realized you were an artist.

JANUS (Trying to be nice also, but almost laughing.)

Yeah, it's big,....and dark,.....and colorful...and...

CALLIE

Yes, yes, colorful, almost ... psychedelic.

JANUS (Can't sustain his facade.)

Psychedelic, purloined psychedelic, that's the ticket. The background is Starry Night pilfered from schizophrenic Van Gogh. Floating in that stolen background are objects pilfered from Salvador Dali on LSD, although LSD was unnecessary for Dali. It's a stupendous hallucinogenic larceny, worthy of a dumpster imprisonment.

CALLIE

Rude, Janus. Not what I meant by psychedelic, Trigs. You did a wonderful job. Stand there; I want to get a picture of you and your painting.

TRIGS

Me? Oh, no,no,no. I commissioned an artist to paint it.

JANUS

I hope you didn't pay more than minimum wage.

CALLIE

Stop it, Janus.

TRIGS

I'm very pleased with her work. It's a dream I wanted to preserve.

JANUS

A dream painting, whose?

TRIGS

Her painting, not her dream; my dream, not my painting.

CALLIE

I'm taking your picture with it nonetheless.

(CALLIE takes a photo.)

JANUS

Her LSD trip or yours?

CALLIE

Hilarious. So, Trigs, does it have a name?

TRIGS

Names are significant and complicated. A name might bias your reaction. Before we get to the painting's name, you must tell me what catches your eye, intrigues you.

JANUS

Is this a new kind of parlor game?

TRIGS

Yes, it's called humor the old geezer on his death bed.

CALLIE

On his pre-op day.

JANUS

OK, Trigs, if you really mean it, but I play hardball. Sure you can handle the truth?

TRIGS

Of course I can handle the truth. You think I'm Q-Anon?

JANUS

Then fasten your seatbelt. This road is paved with speed bumps of truth.

TRIGS

The geezer is all ears.

JANUS

Dumpster worthiness because my eyes see a collection of back porch discarded junk, perhaps from a third world island hut adjacent the ocean. The trash includes a green ball, a discarded globe, and a dilapidated milk bucket: objects poached from Salvador Dali. The swirling night sky, lifted from Van Gogh, is opposite the sunrise. Those two wavy lines on the bucket look like Sesame Street graffiti. And that poor little terrarium drifts abandoned in outer space. Terrariums aren't spacecraft; they're city decorations, oases of green in deserts of concrete.

CALLIE

Quite poetic, Janus: oases of green in concrete deserts.

TRIGS

So the terrarium is your focus.

JANUS

I said it looked lost in space.

TRIGS

Callie picked up on its poetic inspiration.

CALLIE

Maybe a connection the New York apartment.

JANUS

Callie, truce.

CALLIE

I wasn't bringing her up. I meant struggling to survive in the city.

JANUS

Actually the twig reminds me of Nana, of her story how Grampa Graham Garrett

Schmitt here got the name, Trigs.

CALLIE

How your college nickname was Twigs, but baby Janus mispronounced it as Trigs; and it stuck. I miss Nana.

JANUS

Was it really me, Trigs, or did Callie mispronounce Twigs? Everyone knows girls are the talkers.

TRIGS

Well...

JANUS

"Well!" Does "Well" mean it was Callie?

TRIGS

Meh?

CALLIE

"Well," Trigs, who was it?

TRIGS

Don't expect a death bed confession over a nickname. That'll be house rule number two. I go to the next world secrets intact.

JANUS

Secrets? You're prepared to tell Saint Peter you lied to your grand-kids?

CALLIE

Absolutely no secrets! That's my house rule number one today.

TRIGS

I will not speak ill of Nana. Rest her soul. She loved her family, especially you two.

(They cross arms staring demandingly.)

Stop that!

(They continue, more intently.)

Nana had stories.

CALLIE

Nana was a liar?

TRIGS

Stories, Nana's were like cable news, a kernel of truth, the rest scripted narrative.

CALLIE

Nana trafficked in alternative facts?

JANUS

Trigs, Saint Pete is listening.

TRIGS

Damn....alright. The God's truth. Listening, Peter? I was once called Twigs in my late twenties, after college and my Ph.D, before I came to teach at Cornell. I was a botany post-graduate fellow working on axillary merostem stimulation.

JANUS

Time out. English translation.

TRIGS

Sorry, botany lecturing is in my DNA.

So plants have growth plates of cell clusters called merostem. The tops of plants grow upward from apical merostem, and the branches and twigs grow out laterally from axillary merostem like that twig growing out sideways from the terrarium plant. Axillary means armpit. Your arm is a limb that grew out from your armpit in-utero.

CALLIE

Please skip all in-utero parts.

JANUS

S000? Who called you Trigs, me or Callie?

TRIGS

I'll get there. My research involved grafting techniques to accelerate growth. I had twig grafts all over the apartment and my friends started calling me Twig-head which got shortened to Twigs. Only people from that time in ever called me Twigs.

CALLIE

Which was like 30 years before we were born.

TRIGS

The Twigs part is the truth kernel. When Dawn was pregnant with you two, Nana dreaded imagining two toddlers chirping, Gramma, Gramma. Plus at the time it was trendy to replace Grampa and Gramma with less senile-sounding alternatives.

JANUS

And Trigs was a fad back then?

TRIGS

Of course not. We brainstormed. First dismissing all names with Schmitt fearing toddler speak would come out sounding like a fecal sculpture.

CALLIE

Good call.

TRIGS

Grampa didn't bother me, but Grampa Graham sounded hermaphroditic.

JANUS

Gender confusing...

CALLIE

They say non-binary these days.

JANUS

And we would have to call you they.

TRIGS

Nana suggested we resurrect Twigs, which I rejected as a slur on me and my work. So what to call Grampa Graham Garrett Schmitt. Jokingly, I suggested an acronym using the initials G,G,G,S: Gees-S. Get it?

CALLIE

Too New Testament?

JANUS

Especially for an atheist.

TRIGS

Then I said how about triple-Gs-S.

CALLIE

Three times worse than Jesus.

TRIGS

I said we could shorten triple to trip: Trip-Gs-S

JANUS

Aggressively sacrilegious, even for an atheist.

TRIGS

Or tri-Gs-S?

CALLIE

Aggressively evangelical.

TRIGS

I was joking, but Nana was serious and said, "We'll pronounce T-R-I-Gs-S, as Trigs." She then launched her yarn about Janus mispronouncing Twigs as Trigs before either of you could actually talk.

CALLIE

And you've been an accomplice to this lie for 35 years?

TRIGS

I liked the acronym and saw no harm in Nana's family bonding narrative.

JANUS

Sure, you're not the lisping, fall guy.

TRIGS

Good enough, Pete? Worth a cushy cumulus upgrade or a wing feather-cure?

CALLIE

Saint Peter has an angel spa?

TRIGS

I hope. Back to business. Callie, your turn. What in the painting catches your eye?

CALLIE

Can't lie. The earth's umbilical cord morphing into a rope to strangle motherhood, which I don't want to talk about. Janus' terrarium is a lot more interesting.

JANUS

My terrarium is a nothing burger.

TRIGS

I find it very interesting. How do you young people say; awesome?

JANUS

Always been hip with the latest jargon, Trigs.

TRIGS

Living amid college students is a daily tutorial in slang-uage.

CALLIE

You interrupted Trigs and his “awesome” terrarium.

TRIGS

Awesome because it’s an actual plant hanging in a friend’s lanai. Here’s its picture.

(Picks it up and shows them.)

I never noticed the sprouting branch before my unconscious showcased it in my dream. Your unconscious obviously noticed it too, Janus.

JANUS

My conscious eyes saw it.

CALLIE

But your unconscious poetically called it a city oasis.

JANUS

Are you two implying my apartment needs a terrarium?

TRIGS

You have to answer that.

JANUS

I say no.

TRIGS (TRIGS picks up picture of terrarium.)

Try this. Take the picture and hang it in your apartment. Contemplate how the terrarium fits into your life.

JANUS

OK, pictures don’t require watering. I even have a name for it, Bud, the picture. Want to hang out in my apartment, Bud?

CALLIE

Speaking of names. The painting?

TRIGS

Ah, name of the painting, I don't have one yet. I intend to ask your mother to name it today.

CALLIE

Has she seen it yet?

TRIGS

Not yet. The artist just finished it last week.

JANUS

Speaking of Mom, she texted that their plane is still delayed and they won't be here until 7:30 or 8 tonight. Are you serious about wanting Mom to do the naming?

CALLIE

Mom, astrology, woo-woo, cosmic energy whacko, who goes total rooty-kazooty about any discussion of names? Perfectly insane idea.

TRIGS

She's very skilled at naming. She adeptly named you two.

CALLIE

Callie's normal, better than Mr. Calendar. To her credit though, Janus beats January.

JANUS

Not synonymous. Janus is not a month, he's a god with two faces, one looking forward and one back.

CALLIE

A useful trait for mafia bosses and guys with unhappy wives.

JANUS

Truce violation, but I'll ignore it, 'cuz I want to hear why Mom chose Callie and Janus.

CALLIE

Hard to believe woo-woo Mom would name him after a god. She's uber-paranoid that "summoning the gods brings perilous consequences."

TRIGS

Some woo-woo warrants our attention.

JANUS

Screw the woo-woo attention; why our names.

TRIGS

Names are very important to Dawn. Her name wasn't always Dawn, you know.

CALLIE

What? No? Mom's name is not Dawn?

JANUS

Nana named her Aurora and she hated it?

CALLIE

O.M.G.!

JANUS

The other girls teased her about being Princess Aurora, Sleeping Beauty? The princess thing, totally not Mom. Worse people mispronounced and misspelled Aurora. That really blew her top. Turning 18, she legally changed it to Dawn.

TRIGS

She believed the spirits linked her to sunrises and new beginnings. She dared not insult them. Eos was worse than Aurora, so she took the English equivalent, Dawn.

CALLIE

How come she told you and not me? How come you didn't tell me?

JANUS

She told me not to. She said your criticism would dump a new turd on your relationship shit-pile.

CALLIE

Am I even a part of this family? Trigs, tell me she isn't my real mother.

TRIGS

She's definitely your mother. Sorry about the family legacy of mother-daughter discord. Nana wanted a girly girl, but Dawn was cosmos and spirits. Trying to drag Dawn along to frilly outings was a bloody war. When Dawn was pregnant she screamed at Nana to stop suggesting baby names. "I will convey their names when the spirit world delivers them."

CALLIE

I always felt Mom was mean to Nana, but tea parties and phoney narratives, that

would drive me rooty-kazooty too.

TRIGS

Unrealistic parental expectations, a ubiquitous scourge.

JANUS

So the spirits sent her our names. How? By text message?

CALLIE

Didn't have texting thirty-five years ago, mister dead people don't answer.

JANUS

Rotary phone, smoke plume, carrier pigeon? They had those.

TRIGS

She got an in-person incantation.

JANUS

Now this woo-woo does have my attention. Go on.

TRIGS

Callie, you were born first, normal, head-first and looking around peacefully until the nurse held you up to Dawn's face. Immediately you screamed. Dawn sensed indignant anger, as if you were a dragon breathing flames. She blurted out, Collie.

CALLIE

Collie, just the way Mom pronounces it. She's so difficult. Why can't she say Callie, normally, like everyone else. Collie, what do I look like, Timmy's Lassie?

JANUS

Collie, Callie what's the diff? It's you, modern, sweet and sassy.

TRIGS

Callie is Greek for beautiful girl, like Bella, Naomi, or Bonnie.

CALLIE

Yeah, yeah, all baby girls are beautiful. Bullshit, there are lots of ugly ones.

JANUS

Never you, Callie. Lots of my friends growing up thought you were beautiful. Are, are beautiful.

CALLIE

Good save, Bro. Trigs, back to me in the delivery room screaming at Mom. Obviously I was born a good judge of character.

TRIGS

I won't share that comment with your mother. The nurse whisked you away to the nursery, because Dawn still had to deliver your brother, who was breech with his head looking up and backward into the uterus.

CALLIE

I was 13 when Mom told me the next part. Mom thought Janus didn't want to come out and be born. It was an excruciating 55 minutes of more labor. Finally the OB got forceps around his butt and yanked him out.

JANUS

Ouch, poor baby me.

CALLIE

You were blue so the neonatologist raced you to ped's intensive care.

JANUS

Birth trauma felt at age 35. Trigs, you've saved me thousands in new age therapy.

TRIGS

Because you were looking backward while coming forward, Dawn named you after the god, Janus.

JANUS

Cool. Janus, usually pronounced and spelled right. No urge to change it.

CALLIE

Mom said the point of the story was to understand that to be a good sister, I needed to keep Janus looking forward. But I thought Mom was instilling childbirth terror to deter me from getting pregnant. I didn't realize she was cursing me permanently.

JANUS

Don't think that.

CALLIE

That Mom would curse me to be barren?

JANUS

That you're cursed in any way. You could get pregnant tomorrow.

CALLIE

The best doctors in New England are certain my infertility is permanent. Whatever it is: Mom curse, name curse, bad luck, it's real.

TRIGS

Callie, the earth in the painting, tell me more.

CALLIE

It's like those satellite pictures of earth with expansive blue oceans and wispy clouds, except in this one the earth is a fetus whose umbilical cord has dried out, dying at sunset. The rope dangles from a bucket that catches fetuses under the gallows of dead motherhood.

JANUS

Gallows of dead motherhood: that too is poetic, like a Hershey bar, rich and DARK.

TRIGS

Janus, help her. Callie described the earth as a stillborn baby. Use your ability to see both ways. What's the opposite view from the sun?

JANUS

You want me to be in the painting and look back toward us from the sun?

TRIGS

Yes, imagine that viewpoint.

JANUS

Well, there's a bucket trying to empty into the ocean at dawn. An umbilical cord connects the bucket to Mother Earth. The bucket is a womb gestating and nourishing a fetus. Behind the earth is the grand mystery of stars and galaxies. Birth is imminent so the cord transforms into a strong rope to deliver the bucket's contents.

TRIGS

Callie? Can you imagine yourself, an earth mother, delivering new life at sunrise?

CALLIE

I'm no mother and I'm not going to be.

JANUS

You give birth to projects at the capitol that nourish students.

CALLIE

Yeah, but I kill projects too.

TRIGS

That what Collie does! She is life and death.

CALLIE

Don't you start calling me, Collie!

TRIGS

Callie, Collie, figure it out! Kali, K,A,L,I is the Hindu goddess of feminine empowerment. She is Time, life creator, and also the great destroyer. What Dawn felt in you in the delivery room was the volcanic spirit of the goddess, Kali.

CALLIE

Mom thought I was an incarnation of Kali? She's so whacko.

TRIGS

Spirit is her gift.

JANUS

Hundred percent.

TRIGS

She was determined not to repeat her trauma of having a teasable name that could be misspelled and mispronounced, so she nixed K,A,L,I. The hospital refused her discharge until she signed the birth certificate. Took her two days to settle on Callie-Collie.

JANUS

Kali is you, Callie. You judge; get angry; make plans; kill plans, you're time obsessed, a sweet aunt, and a vicious sister. Whatever goes down you see the big picture.

TRIGS

And you're a creative mother.

CALLIE

You two are so full of it. I'm excusing myself from the witness stand. Next witness, I call Trigs. What's "grabs your eye" in the painting?

TRIGS

It's my dream, so all of it.

JANUS

Buzzkill. No copping out or Kali will vomit lava on you. Won't you, goddess?

(CALLIE hisses at both of them.)

TRIGS

That's intimidation.

CALLIE

Be specific, Trigs. Or: (Another hiss.)

TRIGS

When you put it that way. Hmmmm.....

In defense of the painting, I feel it's more than a trash-worthy hallucination.

JANUS

Did I say dumpster and LSD? J.K. My bad.

CALLIE

Still, fair is fair. Your turn to own what most catches your attention.

TRIGS

Easy, the green ball. It's my personal god image.

JANUS

Renouncing atheism?

CALLIE

House rules, Janus: no shaming. Trigs, finding religion at this point in your life is fine. We're happy for you, aren't we, Janus?

JANUS

Sure, whatever brings you peace. Belief is personal. No shame, just disappointment. You have always been my idol of science: free thinking botany professor at Cornell who described religion as a bug-filled operating system that never got beta tested.

TRIGS

Nothing changes on my deathbed. I don't believe in one omnipotent God who gives a rat's butt about anything, but still I'm OK that all gods exist in the pleromaverse.

CALLIE

No mystery where Mom gets her woo-woo.

JANUS

Plural verse? What's that, slang-uage for the multi-verse?

TRIGS

No, pleromaverse is my invention. Look at the painting. The background is akin to Van Gogh's Starry Night. Yes, the swirling lights are the stars and galaxies of the physical universe, the verse part of pleromaverse. The word pleroma means the realm of images, ideas and spirits, the non-physical. Pleromaverse then is a composite of everything physical and everything conceptual.

CALLIE

The whole ball of wax, everything real and imaginable.

TRIGS

It's all real: concepts are real, just not physical. Take Santa Claus. Janus, if your daughter asks, "Daddy, is Santa Claus real?" I'll bet you'll say, and you damn well better say, "Yes! Santa is totally real." And you won't be lying. Does Santa exist as an obese gray-beard living at the North Pole? No! But, he is a real concept, a character with a spiritual force that delights in giving and celebrating Christmas.

JANUS

And where is Santa in the painting?

TRIGS

In the physically unseen.

CALLIE

In the dark. Along with the gods?

TRIGS

Precisely.

JANUS

She always gets stuff that I don't.

TRIGS

Gods are spirits of the pleroma, not physical matter but they can inspire human action. Santa induces delighting children, Mars induces wars and nuclear bombs, Athena brings wisdom, Kali erupts anger, and Janus is the capacity of humans to see

future and past. All gods are out there exerting their influence.

CALLIE

Not of the universe, but inspiring it.

JANUS

So Kali spews lava, then takes a side gig of making mothers-daughter feuds?

TRIGS

You got it, the fierce feminine.

JANUS

Energy or spirit, which is it?

TRIGS

Both. Hmmm. How can I say this another way? Ah, the Matryoshkas. The gods have specific realms. Take the first doll, the level of one's personal god.

JANUS

Cockroaches have a their own?

TRIGS

I believe they do. Everyone has a personal inner god that controls our bodies and our actions. Mine is represented in the painting as the green orb.

JANUS

And it doesn't give a rat's butt about other people or cockroaches?

TRIGS

None. I think gods are organizing influences without consciousness, Don't know how or why. This next higher realm for humans are collective gods that inspire humans. They govern wars, love, construction, governments, culture, economics, and art: essentially everything that emanates from individuals or groups of humans. This realm is the anthropomorphic pantheon: Mars, Jupiter, Jesus, Athena, and all the tribal deities. These gods are human personality patterns.

CALLIE

Such as?

TRIGS

The motherhood goddess that led to your affair.

JANUS

But Kali also can spew lava, that's more than personality.

TRIGS

She inhabits the realm represented by the third Matryoshka doll. She is a force of the biosphere and shifting tectonic plates, birth and death of everything on earth. She is also the spiritual influence of of creation and destruction such as evaluating teacher projects.

CALLIE

Any higher realms?

TRIGS

The fourth doll represents the level that organizes planets, stars, and galaxies, black holes, and who knows what else. We don't know too much about these gods other than they affect energies of cosmic scale.

CALLIE

Mom's realm of astrological forces?

JANUS

The bunko realm?

TRIGS

A scientist with an open mind is undaunted by the unexplained. The fifth doll's realm is completely unexplained, everything beyond the pleromaverse like the inside of a black hole. However it happens, the forces of those gods affect all that exists: matter, ideas, multi-verses, and time itself.

JANUS

And I thought Mom drowned in the woo-woo deep end.

CALLIE

Drowning in woo-woo! That inspires a personal question. Trigs, may I ask?

TRIGS

Of course, and of course, I may not answer.

CALLIE

That green ball of your inner god, is it connected to your near drowning as a child?

TRIGS

I don't remember telling you that, but I don't remember a lot of things.
You know about my near drowning when I was 11?

CALLIE

A story Mom told both of us sans her usual whacko. You were playing in a river when an eddy current sucked your body deep under the water. You couldn't get to the surface and gave up resigned that you were drowning.

JANUS

Then you became relaxed as a sphere of pastel green light encompassed you.

CALLIE

The reason I asked about the green ball.

JANUS

You felt ecstatic and thought, wow death is wonderful beyond compare. Next a voice spoke to you, "It's not your time," and somehow indicated the direction toward shore. Is that correct?

TRIGS

Only left out how disappointed I was on having to come back to the living. Your mother was the first person I ever told, thirty-five years ago.

CALLIE

How could you keep that inside? It's a classic near death experience.

JANUS

Mom was pregnant with us thirty-five years ago. Related?

TRIGS

Pregnancy was making her extra "rooty-kazooty," so I tried to reassure her that the spirits would protect her children.

JANUS

Like God would watch over them?

CALLIE

You said God told you to swim?

JANUS

Hypocrite!

TRIGS

I'm a scientist: open to anything, and skeptical of everything. I'm also a father and Dawn responds to the spirit world. In my drowning experience, I was in a pastel green bubble. I was in a river. Do I think there was a physical green bubble? No, the image came into my awareness via my brain. Religious people invoke God for everything. As an atheist-scientist I label it a baffling experience, "unexplained."

JANUS

Doll number one can talk?

TRIGS

Gods of all realms can influence us. Let me offer an example from an epic poem.

CALLIE

Like Beowulf?

TRIGS

Like the Odyssey. Familiar with it, Janus?

JANUS

Senior high school. The only book that boys would stay awake for.

TRIGS

Remember how it begins?

JANUS

I do. Odysseus is on his way home after winning the Trojan war.

CALLIE

Actually it begins on Mount Olympus. After 20 years Athena decides it's time for Odysseus to return to his wife and kingdom. The last seven he has been a sex-slave, boy-toy of Calypso. Athena does two things: she sends Mercury to Calypso to demand Odysseus' release and she descends to Ithaca to prod Telemachus, Odysseus' son, to go find his father.

JANUS

Girls do all the talking; they also get all the A's in English. Miss smarty pants here got an A plus. Thank god they put twins in different classes. Anyhoo, the Odyssey has what to do with the price of mangoes?

CALLIE

Trigs was explaining the voice of his inner god.

JANUS

I thought we moved on to epic poetry?

CALLIE

Trigs was relating the Odyssey to his near death experience.

TRIGS

Callie mentioned Mercury, Athena's messenger. My inner Mercury voiced the message from my inner Athena to swim to shore.

CALLIE

I get the parallel.

JANUS

Odysseus is fictional, the real Trigs almost drown.

TRIGS

Everything in the pleromaverse is real. Janus, what's the difference between any old story no one remembers and an epic that is read for thousands of years?

JANUS

Duh, they're good stories.

TRIGS

And good means?

JANUS

Box office hits?

TRIGS

Because....

JANUS

Can I call a friend who got A pluses in English?

CALLIE

They're Mercury.

JANUS

The runny silver stuff in the thermometer?

CALLIE

Messengers of the gods. A good book is a road map of divine wisdom.

JANUS

“Good book,” sounds like code for the Bible?

TRIGS

Which is epic-like in that it’s still in print and spiritually moving for some.

CALLIE

But not a “good book.” It was cobbled together over hundreds of years by a bunch of arrogant men that failed literature class. Forever a poorly written book in need of major editing.

TRIGS

My point, Janus, is that you might find the epic useful.

JANUS

The Bible?

TRIGS

The Odyssey. When we engage a piece of art there are aspects that catch our eye, clench our guts, or race our hearts. Our visceral responses are the agendas of our inner pantheon.

CALLIE

Trigs’ parlor game of what grabs you in his painting.

JANUS

What if I don’t have any inner gods with agendas?

TRIGS

Check it out. What do you recall vividly from the Odyssey?

JANUS

Uh....Scylla and Charybdis. Odysseus had to sail through a narrow isthmus. Scylla, the devouring monster with six heads, was on one side. Charybdis, a lethal whirlpool, was on the other. He eventually sails near Scylla who eats six of his men, but he survives.

CALLIE

Sophie’s choice.

TRIGS

Transitional times require sacrifice.....

JANUS

What? I have to sacrifice someone?

TRIGS

Not someone, something you don't want to let go of.

JANUS

Home when I'm in New York?

CALLIE

Now you're cooking. Athena's advice is, "Go home."

JANUS

Easy for you to say.

TRIGS

What does go home mean, Janus? For you, for any man?

JANUS

Not sure where home is right now.

CALLIE

Where you take care of wife and child.

TRIGS

That's the outer home, Callie. The inner world holds all your inner personalities.
What is your inner home, Janus?

JANUS

No clue.

TRIGS

Does that bother you?

JANUS

Should it?

TRIGS

It does or it doesn't. Check your gut. Any annoyance or fears?

JANUS

What annoys me is all this push to get me to move back home. If I knew what to do, I'd do it.

CALLIE

Bullseye.

TRIGS

One of the hardest things is knowing our true desires; not knowing is uncomfortable.

CALLIE

Dad gets angry when he can't make up his mind.

TRIGS

Anger is a steam vent to unload discomfort.

JANUS

OK, sorry about angry. I don't know what going home means. OK?

TRIGS

Athena might know.

JANUS

Haven't met her.

TRIGS

Epic myths offer guidance. Athena meets with whom in the Odyssey?

JANUS

Mercury.

CALLIE

She sends Mercury to Calypso. She meets with Telemachus.

JANUS

I don't have a son.

CALLIE

Back row boys, wake up. English lit 101. Characters represent inner people; events represent inner processes. Telemachus is a metaphor of the boy inside any man.

TRIGS

Athena tells Telemachus to go find his father.

CALLIE

Hint, Telemachus's name means waging war far away.

TRIGS

Work with these metaphors. What is finding your father and waging war far away?

JANUS

Figure out why Dad's such a grump? End our war, make peace?

TRIG

Yes, really find out what your father's world is like and how it relates to you.

JANUS

Raising my daughter?

TRIGS

Parenting is an outer world task. A young man waging war in the outer world is what early adulthood is about job, family, making your way. You've done that. Athena is telling Telemachus to do that, to leave childhood behind and become an adult like your girlfriend needs to do. Odysseus on the other hand is done waging war in the outer world. He must come home to his inner world like you are struggling to do.

JANUS

And am I supposed to be Telemachus or Odysseus?

CALLIE

Both, remember?

TRIGS

Waging war far away from the inner home is Matryoshka doll 2, Telemachus's work. Odysseus is done with ten years of waging actual war away. He is in transition, doll 3, experiencing another ten years of torturous mid-life. He learns the perils of tempting sirens, of substance abuse in lotus eating, of chauvinist pigs that see women as witches like Circe, of idiotic cruelty in becoming dogmatic one-eyed cyclopes, of the soul eating death of men submitting to Laestrygonian patriarchal giants, and how to endure sailing the ill winds of fate.

JANUS

Mid-life takes ten years?

TRIGS

It takes as long as it takes to survive Scylla and not get swirled into Charybdis' whirlpool of failure that ends in stagnation and despair. That's the odyssey required every man, to do what is necessary to return home and thrive in later adulthood.

JANUS

I'm still confused, who am I?

CALLIE

You're everybody including the suitors trying to steal your kingdom and Penelope.

JANUS

I don't feel any inner suitors.

TRIGS

Suitors are blockages of access to your kingdom and its queen.

JANUS

Blockages?

TRIGS

Odysseus is being held hostage by Calypso which delays his journey home. Do you have an imprisoning feminine inside preventing you from moving on? Preventing to you from decisions? Manifesting as a siren in your outer life?

JANUS

This is too confusing.

(The church bell rings twice.)

CALLIE

Noon, already.

TRIGS

It's midday! Seize the day. Do what's required.

JANUS

What is required is for me to hit the road to beat rush hour. Three hours back to the city. I will see you Saturday, Trigs. Good luck, tomorrow.

TRIGS.

Thanks for coming, Janus. This has been one of the best days of my life. Don't forget the Matryoshkas and the terrarium picture.

JANUS

I will. Let's go, Bud.

(TRIGS has another angina episode and slips to the floor, gasping.)

CALLIE

Call the fire department.

JANUS

Get the pills.

(Blackout; end of scene.)



SCENE 2

(In the dark we again hear the loud car noise followed by a car door slam. JANUS is at the doorway as the lights come up. He knocks lightly on the door.)

JANUS

Trigs, Trigs, are you up? Open the door, it's Janus.

(Callie opens the door as she says her line.)

CALLIE

I know who it is. I heard your jalopy's sonic boom. God, you look awful.

JANUS

Seeing is believing. I'm back.

CALLIE

That fact-checks. Why are you here? What about staying in the city?

JANUS

Why are *you* here? I thought you were staying at your friends.

CALLIE

I called Mom.

JANUS

I called Dad.

CALLIE and JANUS

Nice.

Their flight got canceled.

(Church bell peals twice.)

Ten P.M.

CALLIE
Go ahead.

JANUS
No, you first.

CALLIE
I had dinner with my friends, then I called Mom to tell her about the painting. Mom said they couldn't fix the mechanical issues so the airline was putting them up overnight in Atlanta. I came back to stay with Trigs and take him to the hospital tomorrow. You've been crying.

JANUS
No.....yes..(nearly cries, holding back).

CALLIE
Come, get in here. Trigs is asleep on the couch.

(Curtain rises and Trigs is stirring on the couch.)

TRIGS
Who's here?

CALLIE
It's me Trigs, Callie.

TRIGS
I heard two bells. Is it eight? I have to be at the hospital.

JANUS
Ten, ten Trigs.

TRIGS
Ten,? Oh, am I dead? Did the surgery get me?

JANUS
Dead people don't get to ask questions.

CALLIE
No, it's ten P.M. Your operation is tomorrow.

(JANUS leaks a snuffle trying to resist.)

JANUS
I'm sorry.

CALLIE
What's the matter?

JANUS
I don't know, I can't stop it. One minute I'm crying, the next minute I'm fine.

TRIGS
Janus, I was sleeping. Is it happening?

JANUS
No, tomorrow, it happens tomorrow. Your surgery is tomorrow.

TRIGS
Not me, happening to you.

JANUS
What's happening?

CALLIE
Janus came back when he heard Mom and Dad wouldn't make it tonight.

TRIGS
The tears.

CALLIE
What's the matter, Janus?

JANUS
At the apartment I taped the terrarium picture to the window. I felt Bud's loneliness. Tears started. I felt bad she didn't own the apartment, and how she is wasting her youth with me; and my daughter wonders why daddy is gone; and I'm such a shitty husband. And....

(JANUS cries as he can no longer hold back.)

CALLIE
It's OK.

JANUS

When I got my composure I did it. I called Dad. He said it was the worst shitty day ever with the flight cancellation. Figures I'd call too, a crowning turd for his day. Everything is so.....(cries)

CALLIE

Janus, thanks for calling Dad. It's a start. Any not-so-shitty conversation?

JANUS

I said that Trigs looked good.

TRIGS

Such an adept liar. (Men laugh.)

CALLIE

You do look great, Trigs.

JANUS

I asked why he's so irritable.

CALLIE

Did he know?

JANUS

He said, "Janus, we get bonuses for wiping the boss man's ass. Bone-Us means BONES thrown to US dogs until we get too old. We die on the job or get euthanized with a forced retirement.

CALLIE

All he knows is selling timeshares. Retirement will kill him.

JANUS

The only people he feels respect him are Mom and Callie. I protested that I respect him. He said my eyes conveyed otherwise. Exactly how he looks at me.

CALLIE

That's not true about either of you.

TRIGS

Easier to see what's outside than inside.

JANUS

After I cried for Dad. I thought about Odysseus, how he couldn't get home to Ithaca and all his crew dying and I cried. Everything makes me cry. I cried for Trigs. I didn't know who would take him to the hospital, so I got in the Ferrari and here I am back in Ithaca.

(JANUS lies face down on the couch sobbing more.)

CALLIE

I'm sorry, Janus.

TRIGS

It feels bad, but it's good, the crying. Young men are happier than young women because young women feel too much. Old men are sadder than old women because men don't feel enough. But if a man cries in the middle times, he learns to feel.

JANUS

I'm sorry, I can't help it.

TRIGS

You're in good company. Jesus was a weeper.

(JANUS sobs louder.)

TRIGS (continues)

Odysseus lost his crew and mourned.

CALLIE

It'll be OK, Janus. Dark clouds have silver linings, right, Trigs?

TRIGS

Jesus wept for Lazarus and his kin. At Gethsemane he wept for himself.

CALLIE

Sure you haven't converted, Trigs?

TRIGS

Maybe tomorrow if surgery lands me in St Peter's spa.

CALLIE

Are you afraid, Trigs, of dying?

JANUS

Callie, decorum ignores elephants in the room.

TRIGS

It's okay, Janus, Collie will ensure all goes as it should.

CALLIE

Callie is here to watch over you tonight and make sure you get to the hospital tomorrow. Janus is right, my probing was inappropriate, I apologize.

TRIGS

Unnecessary, I love elephants. It's my time to transition. My life's been full enough.

CALLIE

We love you, Trigs.

TRIGS

Before birth, I was a potential story in the pleroma. I got incarnated into this now worn out body; and soon I will return to the pleroma as memory. No, I'm not afraid anymore.

JANUS

I hope I'm this good at accepting death.

CALLIE

Any regrets?

TRIGS

I grieve leaving everyone. My main regret is that I won't see how the war ends.

JANUS

What war? Ukraine?

TRIG

No, the discord across the planet.

JANUS

You see a war coming?

TRIGS

It's already here. One side is striving to create a cooperative sustainability, the resisters are perpetuating the winner-take-everything tract of history.

CALLIE

I bet you're rooting for sustainability with the plants.

TRIGS

I'm not optimistic. History teaches that humans choose annihilation in pursuit of conquest over cooperation.

CALLIE

That's bleak.

TRIGS

Looking back also teaches that utopias, communes, kibbutzes, and hippie farms are universal failures because community spirit is short lived.

JANUS

Why? Why can't people understand they have to get along?

TRIGS

Maybe cooperation just isn't in the human DNA. There are no myths where Zeus and Hera get along.

CALLIE

Where is Athena when you need her?

TRIGS

She's there directing Mercury to point out melting glaciers, burning forests, and heating the air and oceans. Too few heed her message.

JANUS

Why don't they get it?

CALLIE

Too few can feel it.

TRIGS

Divine forces have run amok since Pandora peeked into her box. Too many gods stoke fear, hatred, and cruelty. The only thing remaining in Pandora's box is Hope. Let's hope somehow the humans avert extinction.

(JANUS sobs louder.)

Janus

Too much suffering.

TRIGS

The tears, Janus. Go with it, the filling and spilling. Compassion fills the heart and spills out the eyes.

I was forty when it hit me. My career, loving family, new house, and students were a dream come true, when zap like lightning; all the woes of the world, overwhelmed my head and heart, flooding me like rains on Noah. For six months a simple comment could send me into tears.

(JANUS wails.)

Let it fill and spill. Like the bucket in the painting, filling with sadness and spilling into the new dawn.

JANUS (Covers his face.)

There's so much: dead birds, dead bees, floods, droughts.....it hurts....it hurts so much.....

TRIGS

Like the grief that spilled from Jesus at Gethsemane. Jesus' realm is resurrection, how to accept death and conquer the fear of the next life.

CALLIE

Atheism cred running low, Trigs.

TRIGS

Janus' early adulthood has ended. His time to grieve.

CALLIE

I feel the air heavy with death. Pluto transiting Mom would say.

JANUS (tears changing to laughter)

Callie, I know it's the worst thing to say to a woman, but you're turning into Mom.

CALLIE

I'd slap you for slander, (beat) but truth is a valid defense.

TRIGS

Embrace who you are, Callie. Speaking of your mom, Dawn called me after she talked to you.

CALLIE

About the painting?

TRIGS

About the painting!

JANUS

What'd Mom say?

TRIGS

She said Callie texted her a picture of the painting.

CALLIE

I told her Trigs wanted her to name it. Then it got weird: for both of us.

JANUS

What kind of weird?

CALLIE

We both instantaneously became quiet. She asked if I felt it.

JANUS

Felt what?

CALLIE

Our spirit bond.

JANUS

Oh god, did you hang up on her?

CALLIE

No. I said I feel Kali. She said I am the earth in the painting and the green ball is Trigs.

JANUS

And me, I'm the terrarium, I suppose?

CALLIE

No, you didn't come up. I did tell her you thought the two wavy lines were Sesame Street graffiti.

JANUS

Did she say Big Bird was channeling in.

CALLIE

She said she must talk with Trigs, immediately.

TRIGS

And she called.

JANUS

Why?

TRIGS

The two wavy lines.

JANUS

Let me guess, not from Sesame Street.

TRIGS

She asked if I remembered those wavy lines being in my dream. I said no. She asked again. I was certain because the dream was so vivid I recalled minute details and sketched the elements for the artist. I know I didn't sketch any wavy lines on the bucket. I never even noticed them before Janus pointed them out today.

JANUS

If you could sketch it so well, why bother hiring an artist?

TRIGS

Artists add life and spirit, that's their gift. My sketches couldn't capture the divine in green sphere, the globe, Bud's desperation, or the hope of the sunrise.

JANUS

Bud is definitely more something in the painting.

CALLIE

The painting is a big picture. It's Trig's big picture: Born from the pleromaverse, childhood near drowning, connection to plants, and a future beyond this world.

TRIGS

Better than an urn, I think. You can hang it on a wall with no spilled ashes to worry about. It's for you and Janus and Dawn.

CALLIE

We'll cherish it. But why was Mom interested in wavy lines that you didn't sketch?

TRIGS

My same question to her.

CALLIE

Knowing Mom, the interrogation went deeper.

TRIGS

Of course. I explained that the artist got an internet picture of a bucket with a rope and asked if it was close enough to the bucket in my dream to use as a model. I said the aged oaken grain of the wood and the handle were perfect. I never noticed the two wavy lines. Dawn insisted I call the artist and verify. The artist said that the two wavy lines were on the bucket picture, so she left them in.

JANUS

A lot of fuss over Sesame Street graffiti.

CALLIE

Not for Mom obviously.

TRIGS

She said two wavy lines is the astrological symbol Aquarius.

CALLIE

Mom has a picture in her den of a man pouring water out of a jug with those lines. The man is Aquarius, the water bearer.

TRIGS

Aquarius empties the flow of unconsciousness, the god of filling and spilling.

(This sends JANUS into crying again.)

Not just for you, Janus, the time of filling and spilling has arrived for humanity.

JANUS

Scylla, just eat me.

TRIGS

Odysseus survived. So will you.

CALLIE

Finish what Mom said about the lines.

TRIGS

Dawn believes the cosmic spirits sent that symbol of Aquarius.

CALLIE

Did she name the painting.

TRIGS

She did: Birthing the Aquarian Age.

JANUS

Vintage Mom, astro-whacko, gotta love her.

CALLIE

I see it. I feel it. It is happening now.

JANUS

What now?

TRIGS

Mercury's message to Trigs. The Aquarian age has come.

JANUS

What the "f" are you talking about?

CALLIE

The age of Aquarius.

TRIGS

It's earth's orientation in space. Now it points toward the constellation of Aquarius for the next two millennia.

JANUS

The earth points?

TRIGS (CALLIE takes the globe again and demonstrates.)

The earth rotates daily around its polar axis like a spinning top. Spinning tops wobble in smaller slow circles. You've played with a top that spins very fast and has a secondary wobbling in a slow circle.

CALLIE

It's called precession. The earth's wobbling is a result of the moon and sun's gravitation along with the swelling of the earth at the equator. It takes over 2000 years for the earth to creep through each sign. Since civilization began its been through Gemini, Taurus, Aries, Pisces and now Aquarius. Got an A in geology too.

JANUS

Alright, wobbling is a physical thing. So?

Callie

According to astrology each transit into a new constellation brings big changes to human culture reflecting the powers projected onto the specific Zodiac sign.

JANUS

Such as?

TRIGS

Pisces' symbol is two fishes; one swimming horizontally in the sea, the other pointed vertically toward heaven.

JANUS

Two disoriented fishes, so?

CALLIE

The lower horizontal fish is a symbol of the suppressed profane inferior elements of earth, animals, femininity, sexuality, and interdependence. The vertical fish is a symbol of the exalted: hierarchy, spiritual rule, male dominance. In Pisces male monotheism replaced Aries' pantheon, many of which were women, animals or human-beast hybrids. Duality replaced unconscious multiplicity and has dominated human culture for the last two millennia. The age of Aquarius is the next new era to hopefully dissolve Piscean dualism by pouring forth those unconscious waters for a conscious multiplicity.

JANUS

According to Mom?

CALLIE

According to the stories our ancestors have given the stars.

TRIGS

It's an unconscious projection of pre-configured human behavioral culture onto constellations.

JANUS

So Trigs has a dream that Mom thinks means the earth's North pole is wobbling into a new star cluster and that proves the predictions of astrology?

CALLIE

For Mom, Trigs' dream is a message that the myths from the collective human psyche about Aquarius are on track.

TRIGS

We don't know how, or in what way, collective spirits send their messages, but I received this dream. It inspired me to have it immortalized in a painting, and the pleromaverse included the two wavy lines.

CALLIE

Mom named it, Birthing the Aquarian Age, believing it is confirmation for Trigs, on the cusp of his death transition, of his cosmic contribution.

JANUS

Woo-woo aside for moment. One biggie disturbs me. The painting has no people.

CALLIE

The Age of Aquarius may annihilate all of us.

JANUS

Back to rich and DARK. Don't need any more of that today. Couldn't the perspective simply be too distant to see people?

TRIGS

Hopefully the green globe means the plants survive. And optimistically, like the Piscean age replaced male, female, and animal gods with male monotheism, the Aquarian age will usher in a new god image that sanctifies femininity-masculine interdependence for cooperative sustainability allowing human viability. Survival or extinction; that's up to Kali.

(Church bell gongs once.)

JANUS

It's the eleventh hour.

CALLIE

For us all.

(TRIGS grabs his chest and gasps in another angina attack.)

JANUS

Quick, Callie, get him a pill.

(She gives him one, but there is no change.)

JANUS
 Try another. (She gives him another.)

CALLIE
 They're not working.
 (TRIGS falls to the floor and spasms.)

JANUS
 This is bad. I am calling the fire department.

CALLIE
 NO! There's no fire; just light.

(The lights dim to a pale green with a brighter circular green spotlight on TRIGS.)

JANUS
 What?

CALLIE
 I feel the green light.

JANUS
 I don't see anything.

CALLIE
 It cannot be seen. The light has come for him.

(CALLIE places the green orb on his chest.)

JANUS
 I'm calling an ambulance.

CALLIE
 Kali says NO.

(The back lights fade to dark then the circle of green light fades to a pinpoint. Blackout is followed immediately by a loud playing of the post-intro crescendo line, "This is the dawning of the Age of Aquarius" by the Fifth Dimension.

The song continues during the curtain call as JANUS bows with Matryoshkas in one hand, and the terrarium picture in the other. CALLIE is next holding the globe. TRIGS rises with both hands caressing the green orb.)

THE END

Note: This play is dedicated to my astrology friend, Janice, who gracefully tolerates my atheism, allergies to the spirits, and tone-deafness to ritual.

