

ILLUSTRATED RADIO SHOWS

Written by Ain Gordon & David Gordon

(ST.MGR. OPENS SOUND EFFECT DOOR.)

AIN:Welcome to the dinner. (DOOR SHUTS) The hell dinner. The Hell family dinner. The dinner that never ends. Beyond your dreams. Beyond your appetite. A meal full of people you swear you never met, all of whom remember you when.

ST.MGR:I remember you when.

AIN:When you did things you were too young to remember, which they ask if you remember, "do ya remember?", which you don't remember, "Sorry, I don't remember." but they do - they always remember.

ST.MGR:I always remember. (OPENS SOUND EFFECT DOOR,)

DAVID:I remember. (DOOR SHUTS)

AIN:Meet cousin Josie, also known as Jane, Josephine, Aunt Jenny and Uncle Joe. Born 1893, 1921 and 1974. His/her hobbies are needlepoint, pointmaking and needling.

(ST.MGR. OPENS SOUND EFFECT DOOR. VALDA ENTERS)

VALDA:Good evening. (DOOR SHUTS) I hope everyone is hungry because there is a lot of food. There is the food which was made for tonight, which is really more than anyone could eat tonight so -it has to be taken home but - first it has to be wrapped and it has to be put in bags - which have to be kept separate from other people's bags or bags "you mustn't touch."

AIN:Meet Aunt Blah, also known as Blahblah, Grandma and Grandpa. Born 1910, 1943, 1961, no one really knows and no one really knows. Interested in doing less, having less to do and not doing anything you find interesting.

VALDA:There is also food that was cooked today but isn't for tonight. This is food exactly like what you're going to eat tonight, only it's for tomorrow night or for some other night and it's all "your favorite."

NORMA:(NOT SEEN) Wait till you see. They made "your favorite."

AIN: Luckily, this food is already in bags. Meet Uncle (COUGH), also known as Unk, Sis, Great Aunt (SNORE) and Spot. Born 1901, 1952, 1899, 1981 or 2 or 3 and 1912. Uncle (COUGH)'s interests include being annoyed, being annoying and being ignored. Hello Uncle (COUGH).

NORMA:(APPEARS) Good evening. You need a haircut. I hope you're not counting on me to eat - I'm on a special diet. (ST.MGR. OPENS SOUND EFFECT DOOR)

DAVID:Good evening. (DOOR SHUTS) I'm Aunt Tess, also known as Tessie and Essie. My kids call me Mom, my friends call me Uncle Tom and you can call me Uncle Timmy. I'm 57, 34 or 26 give or take a coupla years. I come to all the dinners. I eat all the food. I love it. I hate it. I hope you didn't use garlic. I smell garlic. (ST.MGR. OPENS DOOR)

KAREN: Good evening. I'm cousin Estelle, or cousin Stella, or Aunt Ella. I used to be Aunt Betty and Uncle Barry. They died last year and the year before and left me feeling very empty but Estelle and Ella are pregnant so, soon, there should be more of me to comfort myself. I have to powder my noses. (DOOR SHUTS)

AIN: More than anyone, I miss Grandma Belle who I used to be and Grandpa Hell who Tess, Tessie and Essie used to be. Their passing really left a gap in us - and the dinner table. (DOOR OPENS) This is my husband, Uncle Dick.

KAREN: Hello. (DOOR CLOSES)

DAVID: He's also my husband, Uncle Rick.

NORMA: As well as my dear nephew, Mick and several others we won't mention because we're not talking to them after what they did or didn't do at the last family dinner.

KAREN: Good evening. I'm pleased to meet you. I'm always sorry to be here and glad that some of me was invited.

AIN: You are here to visit and to eat "special" things.

NORMA: They made it special for you. It's your favorite.

AIN: The things you never eat anywhere else, which you think they eat all the time.

NORMA: Is that all you're going to eat?

AIN: I ate all I can.

VALDA: Then they say, take home all the food you can carry.

AIN: And you say, why don't you keep some for yourself?

VALDA:And they say, oh we don't eat that, we can't eat that, the doctor won't let us eat that - it's for you!

AIN:And you say, oh I don't eat this. I don't eat this way in my life, my real life. It's for here, like visiting another country, visiting you.

NORMA:Is that all you're going to eat?

AIN:So, I take home more than I can carry, none of which I want, most of which I will have to throw away.

NORMA:They cooked all week. They made all your favorites.

AIN:Then I feel guilty. Meet Norma Fire who knew me before I was born.

NORMA:I acted in his first play. (TO AIN) D'ya remember?

DAVID:She went to college with me.

NORMA:I was in your first dance. (TO DAVID) D'ya remember?

VALDA:I was in all the other dances. Meet Karen Graham.

KAREN:I was in every dance for ten years. I feel like somebody's best friend, somebody's sister, somebody's daughter.

DAVID:I am Valda's husband.

VALDA:Ain's my son. In his last play I play my mother.

AIN:My grandmother who I alwa...

VALDA:(INTERRUPTS) I hope you'll add that when I called my mother from Colorado I said, I'm coming to England for four days to see you and she said, "Oh, I was going to have lunch with Edie, but oh never mind darling, I'll cancel it because you're coming. And darling?"

BOTH:"Should I buy half a cucumber or a whole cucumber?"

AIN:I've heard this story.

VALDA:She said, "Of course cucumbers give me indigestion but I know how much you love English cucumbers." She said, "Of course they are so dear these days." I didn't tell her the phone call cost...

BOTH:Far more than a cucumber.

NORMA:Good evening, I'm somebody's aunt, aren't we all. I find it necessary to call your attention to a certain feature, certain features of the family, this family, the Hells.

DAVID:Thank you Josie...

NORMA:Jennie, Essie.

DAVID:Tessie, Jennie. You see, three to six of us inhabit one body at one time. It saves space.

AIN:We haven't had a funeral in years because all the people inside a person rarely die at the same time.

VALDA:Eating out is cheaper.

AIN:Not to mention, but to mention, not all of us are popular and this way no one, no body gets lonely.

VALDA:Although choosing a restaurant is difficult.

AIN:And also not to mention, but to mention, some of us really don't deserve our own body.

NORMA:Good evening. EPIC FAMILY EPIC or THE HELL FAMILY DINNER was written by Ain and produced in 1988 at Dance Theater Workshop in New York. I was in it.

VALDA:You weren't in it. I was in it.

NORMA:I don't know why I wasn't in it.

KAREN:I wasn't in it because I'm the dancing family and there used to be a difference between the acting family and the dancing family.

AIN:I thought I understood my connection to family.

NORMA:My ambivalence about family.

KAREN:My obsession with family.

VALDA:Autobiography is the art of telling the truth about one's own self, or one's own version of the truth, or lying convincingly. Some things get made up because they make a better story and some things get made up because they make a different story and some things just get made up. These stories are about birth, death, music and dance, marriage, the ragman, Doctor Neu, Annelise Kinsman and Great Britain, not to mention...

AIN:Good evening. October 1962. My mother turned away for a fresh diaper. I rolled off the table. I hit the floor. She grabbed me up and held me screaming in her arms.

VALDA:Then he fell asleep. I thought he was very clever.

AIN:I slept for 12 hours.

KAREN:Do you remember this?

AIN:No.

VALDA:I was worried but I thought he must know what he needs. I didn't know anything about babies or being a mother. I learned from him.

AIN:And you bit my nose when I pulled your hair.

KAREN:Do you remember this?

AIN:No.

VALDA:You pulled my hair so I bit your nose. You wouldn't let go. It hurt terribly. I didn't know what to do.

AIN:So you bit my nose.

KAREN:So you remember this?

AIN:No. Stop asking that. It doesn't matter if I remember. She thinks it happened. (TO VALDA) So you bit my nose.

VALDA:And you let go of my hair.

AIN:I let go. (TO KAREN WHO IS READY TO SPEAK) Don't ask!

VALDA:And we both cried.

AIN:My mother was an only child, born Church of England, before World War II, in a small seaside town. She spent her childhood, inland, at Catholic convents avoiding German bombs.

VALDA:The nuns made me fold my arms across my chest when I went to bed in case I died in the night. They said I'd be in the right position to be buried.

AIN:"So practical, those nuns," she says. My mother began ballet lessons, moved to London - became a ballet dancer, went to Italy - became a show dancer, emigrated to America - became a modern dancer, met my father in rehearsal her first week in New York and agreed to marry him before the year was out.

VALDA:It all sounds so simple the way he tells it.

AIN:"I'm getting married," she told her family on the phone. "Oh, darling," her mother asked, "are you sure?"

VALDA:"Is he nice? Who is he, darling?"

AIN:My mother is a seriously sincere woman. It didn't occur to her to fabricate.

VALDA:He's a dancer I'm working with. He's tall and has dark hair. What? Well, I think he's good looking. What? Well, dancers here don't

actually always get paid for dancing. They do other work for...what? I can't hear you very well. Oh...Jewish."

AIN:Pause. Her mother asked, "What is his name, darling?"

VALDA:His name is Gordon. David Gordon.

AIN:"Isn't that lucky?" my English grandmother said. "It sounds Scottish!"

VALDA:Ten years later, in 1971, David made a solo for me as part of a piece called THE MATTER.

(VALDA BEGINS TO DO ONE PART OF THE MATTER)

It was based on a series of photographs by Edward Muybridge showing the body in motion. David cut the photos out of a picture book in random order, scotch taped them onto pages of yellow typing paper, hand wrote instructions and mailed them to me. I was in Detroit with the Merce Cunningham dance company and learned the poses in my hotel room.

AIN:When she got home they rehearsed in the living room.

DAVID:We had no studio.

AIN:David made changes and made Valda angry.

VALDA:I told him to do his own damn solo.

AIN:They made a cassette recording the rehearsal.

NORMA:While they were recording, their eight year old son cut his finger playing and interrupted rehearsal looking for a bandaid. It's all on the tape.

AIN:And it was all in the performance. (TAPE PLAYS)

VALDA:I've done this piece nude, in my own 1920's bathing suit, and in a see through dress designed by Santo Loquasto. I've done it in silence, to the sound of David and me bickering and with the

Philip Glass ensemble performing live. I've done it in our loft, in a pool of water on the BAM opera house stage and in an all black box as a PBS fund raiser. The original score that David mailed, scotch tape and all, was bought by The Museum of Modern Art.

DAVID:But I made another one. I re-use material.

VALDA:I make it into curtains. Then I make it into a skirt.

AIN:Then she makes the skirt into napkins.

VALDA:Then dust rags. I was raised in England during the war.

DAVID:My family never threw anything away. Every couple of months a man with fingerless gloves and a beak of a nose hollers in the hall, "Rags!, old clothes, rags!"

AIN:She was brought up in England but his stories sound like Dickens. We're heading to the ragman story because everything reminds us of something.

DAVID:The ragman climbs the three flights of stairs (SOUND OF FOOTSTEPS, HEAVY BREATHING) carrying burlap...(MORE SOUND OF FOOTSTEPS, MORE BREATHING) He gets there! He's carrying burlap bags and my mother Dolly and my grandma Minnie dump rags in the hall. (SOUND OF CRASH BOX)

AIN:This is all true but nobody was named Dolly or Minnie.

DAVID:The old man offers nickels. "A shame and a crime," Minnie cries, "look at these goods. Oh my God, oh my God!" The old man whines, "she wantsa rob a sick man. Take a pity, help me somebody." Minnie yells to the sky "he robs the food from my daughter's mouth." The old man pulls his thin hair, "three flightsa steps. Oh my God, oh

my God." Finally, Minnie and Dolly take his nickels and quarters, he wipes his eyes, blows his nose in a dirty rag and stuffs our old clothes in his bag.

VALDA:Which reminds me in 1961 David and I are in Rome at the flea market.

David spies a sweater. I speak some Italian. "How much?" A lot of lira the woman says. She says a lot of lira. "Tell her less lira," David says. But David, she said a lot of lira. "I know, offer her less lira, Valda." I am very uncomfortable. He says less lira I tell her. She tears her hair, pounds her chest and David says "now walk away with me" and the woman calls out "murderer! Thief! Okay, okay, less lira."

AIN:Dolly keeps the rag bag in the closet in the room David shares with his younger brother. Small room. Bunk beds.

NORMA:There was never a nursery.

AIN:No extra room.

NORMA:No preparation for birth. No baby clothes or bottles or blankets. No crib.

AIN:Bad luck. Sneak the kid in with no fuss. Dolly ties red ribbons to her brassiere to ward off jealous evil eyes.

NORMA:Don't let the neighbors know you're happy or, Godforbid healthy. Don't let God know you're confident Godforbid.

DAVID:Not our God, the God I grow up with likes fear.

AIN:There was a first baby who was miscarried. My scared grandparents, the second baby around...

NORMA:1936.

DAVID:That's me.

AIN:Get a private doctor in a private hospital.

DAVID:They begin a routine they continue for most of their lives. Buying on time. Layaway living room suite. Layaway spring coats. Layaway baby.

PHIL/AIN:My luck.

DAVID:My father always says my luck. An obsessive gambler, he plays pinochle and cribbage and bets the horses. I'm six or seven when he runs off to the Marines to avoid the bookies who aunt Celesta says, "woulda killed him."

CEL/VAL:They woulda killed him. "Yerr farrtherr" owed so much money to the bookies he was a walking dead man.

DAVID:Everyone calls her Esta because I can't say Celesta. The third oldest of Dolly's sisters, she's the last to marry. An authority on everything, she smokes Pall Malls or Pell Mells, listens to Tchaikovsky and wears black crepe and pearls in the forties. Her sisters all put on weight as they age but Auntiesta gets thinner. Her hair gets blacker.

CEL/VAL:"Yerr farrtherr" had no luck.

PHIL/AIN:My luck.

DAVID:This is going to be the story of when I was born. Dolly and Phil love to tell this story.

PHIL/AIN:It's the middle of the night. Remember Dolores?

DOL/NOR:The middle of the night. My water broke.

PHIL/AIN:Her water broke. In the middle of the night.

DOL/NOR:So we called the doctor.

PHIL/AIN:Go find him. Where is he?

DOL/NOR:It's the middle of the night.

CEL/VAL:Don't say I didn't warrn ya about that docterrr.

PHIL/AIN:So we call emergency.

CEL/VAL:Goodbye private docterrr.

DOL/NOR:Goodbye private hospital.

PHIL/AIN:My luck.

CEL/VAL:The police come with a stretcherrr. I told ya so.

DOL/NOR:And an ambulance and Gouverneer Hospital.

PHIL/AIN:Like a charity patient. A goddamned charity patient.

DAVID:Worse than a miscarriage.

CEL/VAL:A shame for the neighborrrs.

DAVID:The look of poverty. My mother is tied to a stretcher which gets passed down from landing to landing.

PHIL/AIN:By the police. But he weighed ten pounds. Right Dolly? (TO DAVID)
Ya weighed ten pounds.

CEL/VAL:You were a "hawrrrse." Ya tore yerr poor motherr apart. She hadda run across the street she peed in her pants.

DOL/NOR:(LAUGHING) Ten! Ten pounds. Everybody in the hospital was coming to look at you, you were so beautiful.

DAVID:It's 1936 and ten pounds makes everything okay. A wonderful fat horse of a baby, they count my fingers and my toes to make sure I have enough of them.

VALDA:They tie red ribbons on everything to ward off the evil envious eyes of people who love fat babies.

DAVID:But something happens after they get me home.

VALDA:Something about his ears. Mastoid "something" upstairs and the doctors are lined up in the street.

PHIL/AIN:Hundreds of doctors were lined up downstairs in the street waiting to look at you. In the snow.

VALDA:In 1936 the doctor comes to your house. He climbs flights of stairs, however many. He totes a black bag and no matter how sick you feel your mother makes sure you have on clean ironed pajamas.

NORMA:You do not let the doctor see you in dirty pajamas.

DAVID:She hovers just behind him, pulls at her hands, turns her wedding ring round and round while he examines me.

NORMA:In fairy tales when the heir to the throne is sick the King calls all the wise men for a cure and whoever wins gets to look after the

heir forevermore and also make a couple of bucks.

DAVID:One by one the doctors come upstairs to tell Phil and Dolly what to do.

VALDA:Phil insists the doctors wash their hands and wear masks before they
can see or touch David. Somewhere in this line up is Doctor Neu.

PHIL/AIN:Doctor Neu was a "doctor." Not like now.

DAVID:The doctor on Grand street was okay. What was his name?

PHIL/AIN:The one with psoriasis? Dr. Sackman!

DAVID:He looks around triumphantly, proud of his memory and the fancy word.

Psoriasis is a fancy word.

PHIL/AIN:But he was no Dr. Neu. (TO DAVID) Ya remember Dr. Neu?

DAVID:His apartment/office is always darkened. A long foyer. The smell of
something cooking or cooked. Carpeted floor that creaks. (SOUND
EFFECT) No nurse. No receptionist. Dr. Neu answers the door.
(DOOR OPENS)

DR.NEU/NOR:It's dock. Let me turn on tze (gulp) light. He doesn't breathe
through his nose. He gulps air. He talks and gulps air. A
short bald oval man in a grey suit with a vest. Iridescent pink
marks on a thin long nose when he takes off rimless glasses or
pince nez. Some kind of accent. Ven I presz yaw tunk down zay
(gulp) ah. Goot.

DAVID:My father and mother agree he saved my life. Something about pouring
warm oil in each ear every twenty minutes, turning me from side
to side, basting me like a turkey. Doctor Neu becomes the man my
father trusts.

AIN:My grandfather does not trust too many men. Or women.

Ten years later Dolly goes back to Dr. Neu. Why hasn't she been going to him all this time?

DAVID:I grow used to not asking. I accept the stories on their terms. These are myths.

VALDA:Family myths. What, why or how is not important in a myth. In a myth there are the mortals and the Gods. In David's house Dr. Neu has been elevated to a God. Now some other doctor, clearly not a God, says Dolly has a tumor. She must check into the hospital at once. He must operate.

PHIL/AIN:Call Doctor Neu!

DOL/NOR:What am I supposed ta tell the other doctor?

PHIL/AIN:Tell him no.

DOL/NOR:I was so embarrassed.

PHIL/AIN:(TO DAVID) Ya know what Dr. Neu said? Tell what he said, Dolly.

DAVID:He said he didn't think it was a...

PHIL/AIN:He said, "tumor shmumor!"

DOL/NOR:(GRINNING AND NODDING) That's the truth. That's what he said. Tumor shmumor.

PHIL/AIN:Go home and buy a maternity dress.

DOL/NOR:He didn't tell me to buy a dress, Phil.

PHIL/AIN:It makes a better story.

DOL/NOR:It's not true.

PHIL/AIN:Who cares? He said "in six months you'll have a beautiful little
(gulp) girl."

DOL/NOR:He did say girl. Isn't that amazing? He knew it was a..

PHIL/AIN:With that other bastard ya wouldn't have a sister!

DOL/NOR:A beautiful blonde blue eyed sister.

DAVID:They always say that.

PHIL/AIN:A beautiful blonde blue eyed girl.

DAVID:I don't really know how soon after being born I got sick and met Dr.

Neu except I was born in the summer and if my father is to be
believed at all and it is snowing, I am about four or five months
old.

VALDA:Or a year and four or five months?

DAVID:Did Dr. Neu die? Did Dolly and Phil know? Nobody talks about funerals
in front of the kids. Some morning we wake up and everyone is
wearing black and hats and my parents go out and come home with a
headache.

DOL/NOR:Phil, don't light another cigarette. I'm gonna make something to
eat.

DAVID:I was in college when my father's mother died. My first funeral. I saw
my father cry for the first time.

VALDA:The next time was at our wedding.

DAVID:At the funeral they wanted me to help lift the coffin.

AIN:He said no. In 1962 Dolly and Phil are in the hospital waiting room
waiting for me to get born.

(HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM SOUNDS)

VALDA:They wait from eleven o'clock at night until three the next afternoon.
When I finally give birth (BABY CRY) they tell David to count
Ain's fingers and toes.

AIN:And they say he did.

NORMA:Ruth Sabotka was a dancer with the New York City Ballet who, when she
stopped dancing, became an actor.

VALDA:I was Ruth's roommate when I first came to America and David and I
slept in her bed on our wedding night.

NORMA:When the still not old Ruth died suddenly, at a service for friends and
family, Ruth's mother was at the chapel door to greet guests. She
was burying her only child.

VALDA:Her face was powdered and she wore a hat with a veil, and gloves. Who
she had been that morning, and who she would be alone at home
that night, was nobody's affair.

AIN:Getting born stories seem always to be coupled with dying stories. Do
you notice that?

VALDA:When my aunt Maureen died in England the coffin was carried through
town.

DAVID:We, and the rest of the family, followed a man in black tailcoat and
top hat who walked alongside a black plumed horse. (SOUND OF
HORSE HOOFS)

VALDA:The vicar's wife, in a velvet dress with a shiny seat, played the organ
badly.

DAVID: Everyone wore hats and gloves and stood around after the service discussing the flowers (FLOWER HUBBUB) before the champagne and smoked salmon sandwiches were served as a send off for "good old Maureen." (SOUND OF CORK POPPING AND GOOD OLD, GOOD OLD, ETC.)

VALDA: In his family funeral behavior is less restrained. The men are all bewildered and angry, in navy blue suits that smell of camphor with hanger creases at the knees.

NORMA: Yarmulkes sit dangerously on their heads as they hover around red eyed women with black lace doilies pinned to the hair they woke up with, who weep and howl and rock and call to God and to the corpse...

DAVID: "Oh my God, oh Harry. Harryharryharryharry. Oh my God. Oh my God. Oh Hareeeeeeeee. Oh God."

VALDA: Old animosities are strictly adhered to. Nobody talks to anybody they haven't talked to since the last wedding or funeral.

NORMA: Everybody thinks everybody else is behaving badly, crying too much, not crying enough, wearing the wrong thing, has some nerve.

DAVID: "He has some nerve. Did he ever do anything for Harry? Did he come? Did he call? Now look who's carrying on. Who's he fooling? Oh my God. Harryharryharryharry."

VALDA: Some of the mourners haven't seen each other in a long time. They are almost social.

DAVID:"Oh my God, I didn't see you since I don't know when. You put on a couple of pounds, don't say no. C'mere and give me a hug. Oh my God, what are we gonna do without Harreeeeeeee?"

VALDA:The mourners have to pee. They go outside to "grab a cigarette." They stand smoking in exhausted cliques.

NORMA:"I thought the doctor told you to stop (INHALE) smoking. When ya gonna stop? (EXHALE) When ya dead?"

DAVID:I am the son of your living days, I told Dolly and Phil, I love you, I respect you - but I'm not a "funeral" or a "cemetery" son."

STG/MGR:Will the Dolores Eva Seligman Gordon mourners please take a head covering on your way in.

AIN:I duck in the men's room to avoid crazy uncle Leo. I pin the slippery yarmulke to my hair. I need someone to tell me if I'm doing it right. I need my guide to Jewish family occasions. Where is my grandmother?

VALDA:It's 1991.

AIN:Where is she? Grandpa always makes sure they're early.

VALDA:Grandpa died last year. This is grandma's funeral.

AIN:"What are ya hiding in the toilet?" Crazy uncle Leo shuffles in. He has no idea who I am. I can't stay in the mens room. I can't stand with my parents. They're not coming. I don't want to talk about it. I stand near Auntieora. Hello, hello, I'm so sorry, I'm so...I didn't imagine people would say "I'm so sorry" to me.

STG/MGR:Everyone but immediate family find seats in the chapel.

AIN:I follow the crowd. Auntieora grabs me. "No, darling. You are immediate."
We sit with the coffin in a room like a greek coffee shop. Gold

crushed velvet chairs next to a waterfall. I'm always guilty about how much incidental information I can absorb at times of crisis. I should, I think, have such intense feelings that I can't think. Did I mention the wallpaper? The Venus de Milo lamp? They open the coffin. Grandma wears her glasses. She can't see without them. She wears clip on earrings. She never goes out without earrings. Her ears are pierced but the holes are uneven.

A million years ago Phil bought a pair of heavy gold pierced earrings that had to be remade...oh, it's a long story. Her hair is brushed up on the pillow like she's caught in a wind storm. I bend over the coffin and say what she always said to me before I got on a plane. "Gai gesunt, zai gesunt, kim gesunt." I think it means "go with health, stay healthy, come back with health." I kiss the tips of my fingers and put them to her forehead. She is ice cold and I snap them away. I am here to bury grandma. Phil's emphysema killed him. Dolly lived long enough to see the unveiling of Phil's headstone, in the rain, and got pneumonia. Gil, my English grandfather had a heart attack. My grandmother Hillary's death certificate says "arthritis." I will never be anyone's grandson again.

STG/MGR:1997. The first workshop performance of BIRDSEED BUNDLES by Ain Gordon is presented at SoHo Rep.

AIN:1970. The scene is a restaurant somewhere in England.

HILL/VAL:(TO LEO) Leo wants the Dover sole. Don't you Leo?

GIL/DAV:Let him alone, Hillary.

HILL/VAL:I'm just saying it Gil. That's why we came here.

GIL/DAV: (TO LEO) Your silly grandmother thinks I don't know why we're here.

(TO HILLARY) Stop fussing, Hillary.

HILL/VAL: Just soup for me.

GIL/DAV: (TO LEO) Poor old grandma can only manage soup.

HILL/VAL: We can't all conquer the entire menu in one go.

GIL/DAV: You are not having soup. (TO LEO) We won't stand for her just having
soup will we?

HILL/VAL: Leo does not mind if I just have soup.

GIL/DAV: All right, we'll all have soup.

HILL/VAL: Don't be ridiculous. Everyone does not have to have soup because of
me.

GIL/DAV: Soup for the entire restaurant.

HILL/VAL: (TO LEO) Your grandfather.

GIL/DAV: Soup for all of England.

HILL/VAL: (TO LEO) You want the waiter to fillet your Dover sole for you,
don't you darling?

GIL/DAV: Nonsense. They waste the best part of the fish.

HILL/VAL: He can't do it himself Gil.

GIL/DAV: High time he learned.

HILL/VAL: You don't fillet your own fish in America, do you?

GIL/DAV: I suppose fish always comes off the bone in America.

HILL/VAL: It would be much simpler. Laila says they like things simpler in
America.

GIL/DAV: (TO LEO) You can impress your mates by taking everyone's fish off the
bone.

HILL/VAL: Gil, eight year old children do not go about in packs ordering whole

fishes.

GIL/DAV:Never mind. (TO LEO) Your grandfather will teach you. Every time you bone a fish you'll remember me and every time you see an old woman slurp soup you'll remember grandma.

HILL/VAL:I don't slurp Gil.

GIL/DAV:Have some chicken Hillary.

HILL/VAL:I was looking forward to the soup Gil.

GIL/DAV:Have both then. It's not often we come here.

HILL/VAL:Never. (TO LEO) It's all for you darling.

GIL/DAV:That's why grandma's so fond of you. She finally gets a dinner out.

HILL/VAL:(TO LEO) Your grandfather spares no expense when it comes to you.

Do you think I should have the chicken?

GIL/DAV:(TO LEO) I think I can still afford an old bird for the old bird.

HILL/VAL:(TO LEO) Isn't he rude. Isn't your grandfather shockingly rude. (TO GIL) I must be quite red.

GIL/DAV:(TO LEO) That got her. (TO HILLARY) Very well. Duck for me.

Chicken for you. Sole for Leo.

VALDA:When my mother and father died one year apart, I said "Now I'm an orphan."

AIN:When I get home from Dolly's funeral I should call Valda and tell her -
now I get it.

(GASTONE, ITALIAN MUSIC AND DANCE)

DAVID:When Valda said "Now I'm an orphan!" I thought it was melodramatic but now it's 1992 and now I'm an orphan.

AIN:Not quite. He inherits Annelise called Auntie Annie.

DAVID:This is the story of four years of my life and of my son's life, he

being the responsible only child of a responsible oldest child
who was himself the child of a responsible oldest child.

AIN:Annelise falls and cracks her hip and opens her head and goes into the
hospital for three months where she doesn't eat so she loses
weight, so her false teeth don't fit, so she doesn't eat so I go
to see her at meal times

DAVID:"Hospital food stinks!" she says.

AIN:She makes a face. She doesn't want me to know she's too weak to lift the
goddamn lid offa the plate.

DAVID:You eat it.

AIN:I crack a joke and hoist the ten ton lid, saw the food, mash the food and
finally she gums the food. One lunchtime I say...

STG.MGR:Flashback.

AIN:I'm writing all this down.

ANN/DAV:What this?

AIN:Everything we say. Everything that happens in this room. You want me to
open the juice?

ANN/DAV:Could you?

AIN:I can and I will. Listen, I'm serious. Everything that gets said in
here, between us, is mine. I want you to understand this. I'm
gonna own it. If you don't want me to have it - don't say it to
me. You understand?

ANN/DAV:This fish is not bad. Try it.

AIN:No thanks.

ANN/DAV:Ya gonna write that down?

AIN:I just did.

VALDA:The Poetry Project at St. Marks Church called. (PHONE RINGS)

AIN:Hello? Okay. Hello, David? I'm doing the Poetry Project benefit. All I have is this Auntie Annie stuff. We could read it. You wanna do it with me?

DAVID:Sure. Wait, what does "sure" actually mean?

AIN:Meet you an hour before. Read it through twice. Walk over to the church.

It'll be in the back room. There'll be five people there.

It'll be over.

DAVID:Sure.

AIN:It was in the main room. There were three hundred people and Allen

Ginsburg went on right before us.

DAVID:He wasn't there.

AIN:It makes the story better.

DAVID:It's not true.

AIN:Who cares?

STG.MGR:1993. Ain and David read at the Poetry Project.

PAUL/AIN:I enter room 916 of The Hospital for Joint Diseases. I look towards

my aunt, who is in her bedside chair.

ANN/DAV: What happened to you?

PAUL/AIN:I spent all day doing her favors and I'm nasty. What happened to me

when?

ANN/DAV: He doesn't want to say he's a half hour late. Anytime!

PAUL/AIN:Anytime? Nothing ever happened to me anytime! You know, buying a

house coat is not easy.

ANN/DAV: No? How come?

PAUL/AIN:First of all there aren't so many, and second of all they don't come

in numbered sizes.

ANN/DAV: That's baloney, where'd you go?

PAUL/AIN: All over fourteenth street.

ANN/DAV: What about First Avenue?

PAUL/AIN: There's nothing like that left on First Avenue. She hasn't been out of the house in ten years and all of a sudden she's an expert on where to buy a house coat.

ANN/DAV: So he's a half-hour late because there are no house coats on First Avenue. Bullshit. What time is it?

PAUL/AIN: 4:30 [checks watch] well, now it's twenty of. Okay I'm late.

ANN/DAV: What size is it?

PAUL/AIN: Large, but it's a very large large. See it's pleated. I have to sell her on the goddamn house coat.

ANN/DAV: I'll try it on.

PAUL/AIN: Thank you very much Queen Elizabeth.

ANN/DAV: It's good, it's very good. You spent a lot?

PAUL/AIN: \$8.00. Is that a lot? I took fifty.

ANN/DAV: See you're a good shopper.

PAUL/AIN: You want to go through your mail?

ANN/DAV: Sure.

PAUL/AIN:Background: Her mail is always from Blue Cross Blue Shield and Medicare. It consists of notices that one of her doctors has submitted a bill and been paid something. We open each envelope, I read the contents, I put it back, I write the name of the doctor on the envelope in very big letters, so she'll be able to read it later. Dr. Piranha.

ANN/DAV: He got paid?

PAUL/AIN: Yes.

ANN/DAV: How much?

PAUL/AIN: Thirty-seven dollars and seventy-nine cents.

ANN/DAV: Good, write it on the envelope.

PAUL/AIN:She doesn't ask how much the bill was. This one was \$790.00. Dr. Devour.

ANN/DAV: Who?

PAUL/AIN: I don't know, it says Dr. Devour care of this hospital.

ANN/DAV:Oh. That's the psychiatrist. They sent him. I didn't want him. He said why was I depressed. I said, doctor, I am not depressed. I'm just very tired. He said, but Mrs. Kinsman, fatigue can be a symptom of depression. I said, let me tell you something Mister Doctor, I told you I didn't need you, I don't need you and I'm not going to need you. I'm tired because last night the nurse gave me a laxative and I was up all night with -- you should pardon the expression -- the shits. How much did he get paid?

PAUL/AIN: \$26.74.

ANN/DAV: Write it on the envelope.

PAUL/AIN: Look a check!

ANN/DAV: How much?

PAUL/AIN: \$47.79.

ANN/DAV: For what doctor?

PAUL/AIN: Paymore.

ANN/DAV: Who?

PAUL/AIN: Paymore. Andrew Paymore.

ANN/DAV: Never heard of him, where is he?

PAUL/AIN: 33rd Street.

ANN/DAV: I was never there.

PAUL/AIN: So what, it's a check, don't complain.

ANN/DAV:But for me to get a check, I had to pay him and I didn't pay him and you didn't pay him and I don't even know who the bastard is. They come in here and they say how are we today Mrs. Kinsman. How are we? Who the hell is we? Then the bastards send medicare a bill for a visit. I don't even know about it. I'm in the bed. I can't get up and lock the door. They walk down the hall and they say to each other how much did you make today? Why don't you drop in on that old broad Mrs. Kinsman. She's a gold mine. Her medicare number is -

BOTH:7773079G

ANN/DAV:Say hello and boom, one two three, you could send in a bill.

PAUL/AIN:Smile, but don't encourage her.

ANN/DAV:They think I'm some crazy old lady. They send me shrinks I don't want. They go through my stools. They test my urine. They take blood and blood and blood.

PAUL/AIN:I nod.

ANN/DAV:I don't want to be anybody's guinea pig. I came here so I could walk again and that's it! There is nothing they can do, nothing they can tell me I don't know.

PAUL/AIN: I nod.

ANN/DAV: I used to tell your grandmother:

BOTH: All I need is the diploma on the wall, and with what I know, I would be a doctor.

ANN/DAV: Oh, that made her crazy.

PAUL/AIN: I nod.

ANN/DAV:Fifty years ago they were going to use insemination on me. Manny wouldn't let me get inseminated.

PAUL/AIN: I'm thinking of asking why not.

ANN/DAV:I told him, tell your god damn mother to stop asking me about babies.

PAUL/AIN: Wait a minute...

ANN/DAV: Tell her to leave me alone, tell her it's your fault.

PAUL/AIN:She got me. Why wouldn't Manny let you be inseminated?

ANN/DAV:He was afraid they wouldn't use his sperm. He didn't trust the doctors, and he was right, the hand is quicker than the eye.

PAUL/AIN: I nod.

ANN/DAV:That's why your father is my child. And you're my child too.

PAUL/AIN: I nod and she starts to cry, just a little.

ANN/DAV:I don't know what I'm gonna to do when I see ya father.

PAUL/AIN: I give her a tissue.

ANN/DAV: You want to go?

PAUL/AIN: I should.

ANN/DAV: I'll walk you to the door.

PAUL/AIN: (NUZZLES HER) Ya never walked me to the door before.

ANN/DAV: I'm making progress.

NORMA:"The Auntie Annie File" turned into a play called THE FAMILY BUSINESS
performed by David, Valda and Ain.

ANN/DAV:So, it's a play about me?

AIN:No, it's a play about a woman like you. (PHONE RINGS)

NORMA:It's a publisher who wants to know if you two could write a book.

AIN:The autobiographical merry-go-round in which all events beget other
events beget this one. (PHONE RINGS) Hello, David? Ya wanna
write a book?

DAVID:Sure. Wait, what exactly does "sure" mean?

AIN:Chapter One: MINNIE SELIGMAN COMES TO AMERICA.

DAVID:How do we know it's chapter one? (PHONE RINGS)

VALDA:It's somebody named Sandy. From the publisher. He says, "Good first
pass, try again."

AIN:CHAPTER ONE: MINNIE SELIGMAN COMES TO AMERICA

I called Dolores "grandma" and I called great grandma Minnie "little grandma" because she was about as big as me. Her name was Minnie or Manya. Or Manya Veronica or Veronica May born in Russian Poland, or Polish Russia.

MIN/NOR:Who knows? Some place, some time.

AIN:Something, something. The beginning of the "somethings." Before I knew not to ask.

MIN/NOR:You always wanna know something, tatellah.

AIN:Some made up month, some made up day we celebrate with birthday gifts Minnie never unwraps or if she unwraps them to please us, she wraps them up again and never uses them.

MIN/NOR:Who needs them?

AIN:Minnie came, very young, to America with her mother and her cousin Ida and her maiden name was Winkelman. The Winkelmans of Russia. Doesn't seem likely. Minnie's brother Phil, same name as my grandfather and Celesta's husband and a lot of other Phils in these stories, came to America first to avoid the army.

MIN/NOR:Rightaway Phil got me a job. My brother - not your grandfather. I wanted to go to school. Pleeeeze Phil. I beg you. No! The bastard.

AIN:Little grandma went to work doing something with a board of nails and human hair. How old were you?

MIN/NOR:Who knows? I was a little nothing. I hadda pull the hair through the nails to get out the knots.

AIN:She was boarded out in the factory for a month and she came home with dollars in a wad.

MIN/NOR:I wanted to buy American clothes.

AIN:Her brother Phil took the dollars.

MIN/NOR:I held out the dollars so he took. I was stupid.

AIN:When this was all happening she was younger than me, the kid she was telling the story to. I didn't realize. I have a picture series of Minnie in her teens acting for the camera.

MIN/NOR:I wanted to be an actorizza. You think you're such a big artist from nothing. My mothersheshouldrestinpeace was an artist before her hand got not good. In the old country she would beg for the sacks the salt came in, or sugar, and she washed them and dried them and painted pictures. On the sacks. Beautiful pictures and she went to the houses of the rich goyem to sell her pictures, they should have something beautiful on the walls to look at. That's how come you're an artist. From my mother, and I wanted to be an actorizza.

AIN:How did she get to pose for those pictures? Where did she get the money? What kind of theater group did she want to be in? There was a boy she liked.

MIN/NOR:I wasn't so bad looking, ya know, so they let me come. They gave me a book with the words. The boy was sitting there. Everybody was sitting and they said I should read which part I wanted. I said I hadda go in the toilet and I walked real slow out. (FOOTSTEPS RECEDING) That was my acting. I walked real slow when I wanted to run. Then I ran till I got home. I was stupid. I was so stupid. Who knew I would hafta read? I couldn't read.

AIN:So she doesn't become an actress. She meets Leonard called Leo, not my crazy uncle Leo, Leo the man she marries.

ANN/DAVID:The bastard. Let me tell you your great grandfather was some bastard...

AIN:A womanizer, a philanderer...

ANN/DAVID:A whoremaster.

MIN/NOR:But I loved him.

ANN/DAVID:I used ta lay in bed and I hear the knockin on the door in the middle of the night (SOUND OF KNOCKING, VOICE CALLING MINNIE? MINNIE?) and mama lets the bastard in (SOUND OF DOOR UNLOCKING) and one two three she's gonna have another baby and he disappears again.

AIN:Two miscarriages, five living daughters and finally a son and finally Minnie locks the door. (DOOR SHUTS)

MIN/NOR:I'm a single mother. Right? Me and a lotta other stupid women. Single mothers. Work in the house, take care of my old mother upstairs and take care of my children.

AIN:The boards of nails and the human hair have become a profession.

Something to do with dolls wigs or wigs for religious Jewish women. Piece work.

MIN/NOR:How much I can do is how much money we got.

AIN:Leo is hard to find and not generous. Annelise tells stories of being sent to find him when Minnie hears he's living over on Avenue A with some blonde.

MIN/NOR:Tell ya papa ya getting good marks. Show him what the teacher wrote in your homework like ya show me. He can read it. Tell him ya need shoes.

ANN/DAVID:Me and Dolly stand in the street under his window yelling papa, papa. The blond bimbo looks out and tells us go away, he ain't here. Papa papa papa. He sticks out his head and if we're lucky the bastard throws down a coupla bucks in change - we gotta pick up outta the gutter. Under the cars, everything. Everybody's looking at us. We take the money home ta mama. She says how did he look - was he glad to see us? Sure mama he asked how you are. He sent regards. I hated that bastard!

(PHONE RINGS)

KAREN:Hi, this is Sandy. I got the draft of your manuscript and I had a really interesting time reading it. I think you're on a uh interesting track but we need to know where you want to go. I mean where do you want to go with these little stories?

ALL:INTERMISSION

ACT TWO: DANCE FOR TWO WOMEN BEGINS IN SILENCE

AIN:Chapter Two: Annelise and Dolores. Annelise and Dolores are the closest

of the sisters. Dolly goes to college. Annie quits school to go to work but she's not old enough to legally get a job so she uses Dolly's I.D. They call Annie "Dolly" at work. When the real Dolly needs a summer job Annie "gets her in." That's how they say it. She needed a job so "I got her in!"

ANN/DAV:I was Dolly so she hadda be Florence. Cousin Florrie. We used ta laugh. Lemme tell ya, yaw mother was not such a good swindler. She don't remember not ta be Dolly. The boss says why does she call ya Annie, so I says it's my nickname. I'm telling ya we used ta laugh. They used ta call Florrie and ya grandmother don't move a muscle and I'm yelling "Florrie! Florrie! They're calling you."

VALDA:The factory where the two sisters work makes twelve inch square white cotton handkerchiefs with printed ribbon garlands of pink and yellow and blue flowers.

NORMA:In the sixties when the Church of English Valda Setterfield becomes a Jew to marry David, Minnie shoves crumpled brown paper bags full of handkerchiefs in her hand when they visit. She talks in Yiddish to Valda who speaks no Yiddish.

DAVID:She says wait till you're home to open the...Minnie whacks me. Shut up, she says, Zelda understands. She says to Valda in Yiddish, y'understand me, right Zeldala? Gramma, she doesn't understand...Minnie whacks me. How's she gonna know if ya tell her, Mr. Professor?

NORMA:Minnie keeps those handkerchiefs for thirty years before she gives some to Valda who still has them.

VALDA:I sew one on a pair of bell bottom jeans for David in the sixties which Ain wears in the nineties.

DAVID:I re-use material.

NORMA:You already said that.

VALDA:He repeats things.

AIN:Young Annelise elopes with Mannie, who's name is Mendel Kleinmesh but also Emanuel Kinsman, don't ask me. They elope with another couple on a double dare to marry in Connecticut. The others back out but Annie marries her blue eyed blond husband, the love of her life, who has a heart attack and makes her a widow at thirty eight. (PHONE RINGS)

She never marries again and has no children and forty years later, in 1992, one of us calls her every day and once a week we buy her food.

ANN/DAV:(SOUND OF STRUGGLE TO GET THE PHONE) Hello?

AIN:Hi, it's me.

ANN/DAV:I know who it is, tatelah.

AIN:How are you?

ANN/DAV:Ohm toy-ed.

AIN:What did you do?

ANN/DAV: (LAUGHS) Nothing. But ohm toy-ed.

AIN: I'm calling to find out what you want me to buy?

ANN/DAV: Ohhhhh tatelah, I dunno.

AIN: It's thursday. You want the boiled chicken tops?

ANN/DAV: Nooooo, dey don't clean it good.

AIN: I'll tell them to clean it.

ANN/DAV: Nooooo. Ohm toy-ed a chicken. It's comin outta my eahs a-ready.

AIN: How about gefulte fish?

ANN/DAV: Nooooo. I dunno. Last time the pieces were so big.

AIN: I'll tell them smaller pieces.

ANN/DAV: Nooooo. I dunno. Okay, get two pieces. With soup. But tatellah,
watch that they put in the carrots. And not hawsse pieces. Last
time they gave ya hawsse pieces.

AIN: She goes on binges. Lima bean soup four weeks in a row.

ANN/DAV: Ya goin by the store with the lima bean soup, get me.

AIN: Then she doesn't like it anymore.

ANN/DAV: Nooooo, they put in too many lima beans.

AIN: Six weeks of potato blintzes. She smacks her lips. Should I get those
potato blintzes you like?

ANN/DAV: Nooooo, too much onion, it gives me the diarrhea.

AIN: I arrive with the food, unpack it and show it to her. In the beginning I
lie about how much it costs. I say, it was on sale.

ANN/DAV: You think yaw puttin one over on me, huh?

AIN: She writes down what she owes me in a little notebook. After a while she
doesn't ask. (SHOUTS) I'm putting the chopped liver and the
chicken tops on the second shelf and the stuffed cabbage on the

top, okay? Can I throw away what's left of the "whatever this is" from last week?

ANN/DAV:No, leave it. I'll look.

AIN:I already did it. I am ruthless. She never throws anything away.

Sometimes I find something in the refrigerator I didn't buy. She must have called for a delivery. I don't mention it.

ANN/DAV:Tatellah, gimme a glassa seltzer. But be careful.

AIN:She gets bottles of seltzer delivered every two weeks in wooden boxes from Barry the seltzer man. The syphons don't always work and the bottle needs shaking.

ANN/DAV:Be careful, seltzer is dangerous. Sit down fa minute.

AIN: It's hard to run in with shopping and always run out again.

ANN/DAV:So, I told yah grandfather, Phil, what kinda effin job did you find fa me?

AIN:After Mannie died Phil got Annie a job in the post office. My grandfather worked in the post office and one of the things he could do was get everybody jobs. David was a Christmas mailman in Grand Central Station and Annie worked on mail trucks. It's not easy to imagine Annelise Kinsman on trucks in mailman's pants.

ANN/DAV:I didn't pull no punches with yaw grandpa. Him and yaw grandma were like my best friends. He was like my brother-heshouldrestinpeace.

AIN:Then she worked at a publishing company as a file clerk, then in her brother's lower east side bar.

ANN/DAV:Don't think I was no floozy. My brother saw I got respect. Somebody wantsa buy me a drink, no thank you, my sister works fa tips not

booze.

AIN:Finally, a manicurist in the beauty parlor downstairs.

ANN/DAV:You know me tatellah. I talk like a sailor but ya wanna hear
language? Go to the beauty parlor. Effin this and effin that.
Yentas in fur coats with diamonds.

AIN:Auntie Annie, when I am a child, is always heavy and embattled. She is at
war with the hair on her forearms and her upper lip. She sits at
my grandmother's kitchen table with white paste bleaching the
brown arm hair and she spends "a king's fortune" on electrolyses.

ANN/DAV:If I hadda penny for every dollar.

AIN:She is at war with perspiration. She sweats. She mops herself with paper napkins she pulls out of a firm matching handbag that snaps noisily shut. She opens it a minute later to pull out a lighter and a cigarette purse which snaps open and shut and she lights another L&M cigarette. The purse goes back in the bag and the bag snaps shut.

ANN/DAV:Open the window Dolly, I'm sweatin like a pig.

AIN:She is at war with her plain brown hair. She dyes it platinum blonde and intimidates it into immobility with torrents of hair spray. She battles and tames her figure with architectural brassieres and corsets. The beauty parlor is Annie's last battle field until the home health aides and the hospitals.

ANN/DAV:"Oh Annie, (SHE IMITATES) you do the best job with my nails. I always wait for you." Tell it to the Marines. An effin ten cent tip. Sonsabitches.

AIN:She still takes care of her nails and a few women still come to her at home. She stopped dying her short brown baby hair.

ANN/DAV:Eat ya heart out, this is my natural color.

AIN:She finally stopped smoking, she doesn't sweat, in fact she's cold now and her hands begin to be arthritic. How come you never got married again?

ANN/DAV:I had the best.

AIN:But you must have met somebody.

ANN/DAV:I met everybody. Everybody wantsa match me up. My sister Nora? Come to the mountains. She works behind the bar, pee poo pah, y'know Nora, she knows everybody. Why ya gotta sit home by yaself? Come ta the mountains I'll introduce ya t'a million guys. Not just guys - gentlemen. So I go and I sit and I put my money on the bar like a lady and some shmendrick comes over.

AIN:She acts. Her mouth and her eyes say "big deal!"

ANN/DAV:He wantsa buy me a drink. Also, he wantsa put his hand on my leg. I don't need no one to buy me, thank you very much and get ya goddamn hand off my leg, excuse my French. So wait a minute. My sister-in-law, Mannie's brother's wife-theyshouldallrestinpeace also wantsa fix me up.

One guy wantsa housekeeper, I should cook for him and take care of his two kids and another guy wantsa put my money with his money and we both go ta work and save up and take vacations together. If I'm goin' in business I wanna be my own boss, thank you very much. Listen ta me, I had love. There wasn't nothing my Mannie wouldn't do for me and my family. You ask anybody.

VALDA:David is working in California when Annelise falls and cracks her head open. Ain gets into her apartment and finds her covered with blood. He calls the first of the ambulances and gets her to the first of the hospitals.

AIN:This is where they came in.

VALDA:When David gets back from California and before Annie leaves the hospital we go to her one room apartment to try and make it liveable for this new Annelise who is coming home with a walker,

a commode, a part time aide and visiting nurses and therapists.

NORMA:She is in the hospital for three months but the smell of old smoked cigarettes emanating from her apartment is powerful in the hall. They take down venetian blinds thick with brown grease and open windows. She lives on the twelfth floor.

AIN:I realize I have never seen out the window. She has a good view of the Manhattan bridge.

VALDA:We move furniture to opposite sides of the room to get rid of electric wiring crisscrossing the floors.

NORMA:They throw away a thousand brown combat roach killing donuts.

VALDA:We open cupboards hidden under old draped print quilt covers and try to make order of the contents.

AIN:A twelfth floor bomb shelter. Dozens of cans of tuna fish, tomato sauce, vats of ketchup, super size grape jellies, thirty boxes of kitchen matches, a years worth of instant coffee, exploded cans whose once contents glued other cans to shelves, dozens of colossal packs of paper napkins, a gross of boxes of cue tips. We call out while we work separately. (SHOUTS) More cue tips!

VALDA:Me too. And toilet paper.

AIN:More toilet paper. I have ten cans of sardines. No, wait, twenty one, two, twenty two cans of sardines, oh, and cue tips.

NORMA:They wash every surface with 409, throw out one of the three step stools...

DAVID:I lie and tell her it broke. "And I'm the Queen of England," she says.

NORMA:They throw out the collapsing vinyl closet with the collapsing metal frame, the television with no picture she keeps against the wall

with the static sound turned up, to top volume, to torture the neighbor she hates.

AIN:It takes us all to push the enormous washing machine out of the kitchenette, over the filthy orange shag carpet, into the hall, into the elevator, down to the lobby and over to where people dump old toasters.

VALDA:It's illegal to have a washing machine in her building. It is not attached. It never was. She never used it. She covers it with bedspreads when somebody comes to fix something in the kitchen but she refuses to throw it out. We throw it out and begin the home health saga.

NORMA:There is a certain irony in old white racist Jewish women needing to be taken care of by African American, Jamaican, Haitian Christian women. They all don't eat the same food and they all talk in accents they all don't understand.

AIN:I juggle all her doctors and her home health aides.

DAVID:I put her into hospitals and get her out for a terrible long time or a terrible short time that seems long and then one day I can't get her out because she dies. They call me in the middle of the night. I am not surprised. I take a cab. I need a pass. They called me, I say, my aunt died. I practice in the cab. My aunt died. I don't know how to say it. Or how to look. I have no model for reasonable or heroic behavior in the face of death.

AIN:Earlier in the week she began to say confusing things. She told me there was a seal in the room. What do you mean a seal? "Whattaya think," she says, "a seal!" She claps her hands like flippers. She makes seal sounds.

DAVID:"Somebody keeps comin in the other door in the night and wakes me up."

What other door? She's impatient with me, "the other door. There, by the closet." Auntie Annie, there's no closet here. There's no door. You're in the hospital. You're thinking about home. "What? Whattaya talking about? Don't make me crazy. I'm not crazy. He comes in the nighttime and wakes me up. I can see by the clock." What clock? "In the hall. Over there." She pokes her finger. "There!" I go in the hall. What's she pointing at? I stand near a Monet water lily print. Ya mean this? "Yeah. I told you." Auntie Annie, this is not a clock. I swear, it's a picture. There's no clock here. "Ya makin me crazy," she says. "Go home already," she says. "Ohm toyed."

Upstairs, her body is on the bed, where I left her at the end of visiting. It was Sunday, mother's day and I talk to a doctor before I go. No heroic measures, I beg. Can she talk to me, he asks? Auntie Annie? Ya hear me? Tell the doctor no heroic measures. Annie seems to have gone away. Is she talking to Dolly and Minnie somewhere? Is Mannie there? My voice pulls at her and she swims back into this world and nods and swims away. Sign this, the doctor says, and I do and now she's lying on the bed where I left her except she's in a plastic bag which is zipped up to about six inches below her face. Reminds me of the bunting things babies

used to be in. I lean against the wall and cry and cry. I reach for the square box of hospital tissue next to the bed. She used to make me pack all the started boxes when she went home. "Why should we leave them? Since when are you so rich?" I dry my face and back out of the room looking at her. I don't want to see them zip the bag. I tell the nurse I'm going.

AIN:She gives him a see through garbage bag. In it are her slippers, her glasses, her teeth, Nora's hand me down pilling red sweatshirt and Auntie Annie's torn brown plastic tote bag. I never saw her without that falling apart torn bag. Later, when we empty her apartment we find six more of the same bag, brand new, never used.

VALDA:Never used bags, in tissue paper, in boxes.

NORMA:Boxes of stockings.

VALDA:Boxes of handkerchiefs.

NORMA:Boxes of photographs.

VALDA:A million pictures. A picture of David and his brother sitting side by side on a stone bench with legs crossed neatly at the ankle. Very young, with serious eyes, in a studio on Clinton street near the Williamsburg Bridge. They're wearing Howard Clothes twin houndstooth suits with short pants, bought on time.

NORMA:Dolly went into Howard Clothes every week with cash and she marked off the money in a little notebook with her tiny little perfect penmanship. The manager signed it.

VALDA:Weddings pictures.

NORMA:Beautiful young Annie and Mannie in a wedding picture.

AIN:Minnie makes them get married by a rabbi and she pays for rented wedding clothes for photographs.

VALDA:David all dressed up in a suit carrying a ring.

NORMA:Very formal. Dolly and Minnie and Celesta take him to a dark store with creaky wooden floors on Stanton Street. An old man with a tapemeasure around his neck comes out of the darkness pulling at overhead strings as he walks toward us, turning on naked light bulbs which swing and slowly come to still as he says in Yiddish "come in, come on in."

VALDA:Minnie and the aunts poke and pull and say stand up, stand up and settle on a somber brown wool suit called a one button lounge. Ya like it? It has long pants.

AIN:Chapter three: Auntiesta's Wedding.

NORMA:Dolly and Minnie buy black crepe cap sleeve evening gowns with little peplums and silver sequins discreetly peeping.

AIN:Lillian, called Lilly, called Auntie Little is the maid of honor.

NORMA:She gets herself a pale blue gown with a sort of hoop skirt and austrian blind scallops and bows at the hem. Sort of like Disney's Cinderella without the birds.

AIN:She looks really beautiful but Celesta makes her take it back and buy a tailored vee neck gown instead.

NORMA:Eleanora, called Nora, called Auntieora, keeps her gown a secret till the last minute. It turns out to be mint green with spaghetti straps and a bolero which she loses when it's time to march down the aisle with her handsome husband, also named Leo, to give Celesta away.

AIN:Minnie couldn't give her own daughter away because she hadn't lived with her own Leo in too many years.

NORMA:Something happens! They say I do, I do too. Celesta's new husband stomps on the glass wrapped in a napkin and breaks it. Everybody jumps up, seats fall over and men and women scream and curse and choke each other.

DAVID:Maybe this didn't happen at Celesta's wedding.

AIN:Somebody pushes the kids outta the way and the police come and quiet everybody down.

DAVID:Maybe it's Eleanora's wedding.

NORMA:The band starts to play the wedding music. Bum te de bum bum. Violin.

Clarinet. Wahwahwahwah-wahhhwah.

DAVID:I only saw my father drunk once and it was at Celesta's wedding. He got drunk and danced in a circle with a bottle of whiskey, holding my hand with the same hand as the bottle and squeezing it really hard so it hurt.

AIN:Nineteen eighty something. Margaret Hoeffel, one of the Pick Up Company dancers, invites us to hear Klezmer music on Grand Street in New York. I go not knowing what Klezmer music is and Auntie Annie lives on Grand Street so we take her too.

DAVID:She never goes anywhere anymore except to the doctor or the hospital. This is when she could still walk.

AIN:It's the music Minnie hummed, the music the band played at family parties. Bum te de bum te de bum bum bum, cry cry, clap clap, cry cry, clap clap.

DAVID:I began to work on a movement piece to Klezmer music. Men, and women with heads wrapped, in black shirts and skirts over black pants.

AIN:Eastern, western, European generic ethnic smorgasbord.

DAVID:It was 1984 and I called it MY FOLKS. A dumb joke about home made folk dances, and about family.

(KLEZMER MUSIC, DANCE)

AIN:He dedicated MY FOLKS to them and they came. Even my grandfather came. He hadn't seen Valda and David dance in twenty five years. He never saw my work. When he died and then Dolly died, my father said to me: "Remembering them is painful but the first thing you forget

will be more painful...shocking, actually." He kept the big wedding photo that used to hang in their bedroom.

DAVID:In flea markets, I buy other people's family pictures and mix them in with my own. I try to confuse myself. I won't always be here to watch over this stuff, the pictures, and nobody else will want them, except possibly you, and you shouldn't get stuck with all this shit, and anyway what happens after you?

AIN:Right, what happens after me? I have more junk than he does. I keep and curate this junk as if I need it. As if there's a lesson to be found in family tchatchkas. As if who I am will be explained by who they were and what she wrote to him and how he looked at her in a snapshot. As if these artifacts make me real-er. I tell family anecdotes and end with a meaningful look; get it? See the connection? Which really means - do you get it? Can you tell me how it's all connected? CHAPTER FOUR: MY MOTHER'S MOTHER.

HIL/VAL:Darling, I'm not really fond of being called grandma, it makes me
feel so old."

AIN:With a precocious charm I can't defend I volunteer, "but, you're my
gorgeous granny. Why don't I call you G.G.?" I am eight and I
figure she is about sixty-two.

JULIE:She hugs him and tells everybody how he invented the name.

AIN:I did call her G.G. for the rest of her life and she always signed her
letters "yours, G.G."

TINE:Valda's mother was thin with big breasts she wasn't proud of.

VALDA:In fact she was appalled. She thought it unladylike to have such an
immodest bosom.

KAREN:Her face was very very wrinkled and always powdered.

AIN:Layers of powder covered delicate spidery veins and pushing my face into
her cool cheek caused the powder to rise like a sandstorm into my
nose and into my mouth. (I taste it).

TINE:She had short baby fine honey blonded curls.

VALDA:With a lot of scalp showing and inch deep luminescent eye lids and inch
long nostrils with the pink insides visible. She devoured
cigarettes and called them "my fags."

AIN:She lived on a circular tea cake. Mrs. Something's prepackaged tea cake
full of raisins.

VALDA:Not ordinary raisins, sultanas.

NORMA:She ate that cake all day every day.

AIN:It never even made it into the larder. It lived on the kitchen table.

VALDA:The kitchen was her base of action and her haven.

AIN:It had nothing to do with cooking.

NORMA:She avoided her husband and smoked and nibbled and looked out the window at her garden.

AIN:Which was her other favorite territory.

NORMA:And she listened to the radio.

AIN:She loved Englebert Humperdink.

KAREN:Or Tom Jones.

AIN:Or whoever that was who sang...(TAPE PLAYS) With a fag in one hand and a lump of tea cake in the other she rolled her eyes, swung her hip and warbled wo, wo, wo.

KAREN:One hip was higher and one leg was significantly shorter.

NORMA:She walked with a lopsided gait as if trying to make her way from somewhere to somewhere simultaneously on a hill and in a valley.

TINE:When she stopped moving she swung the long leg behind and to the side of the short leg to give her an almost even base to stand on.

AIN:She wouldn't have a built up shoe.

VALDA:(IMITATING) "Ohh, no, darling. Children will laugh at a shoe like that."

AIN:She wore beige and bone.

TINE:Neutral and conventional lady colors.

AIN:The rooms of her house were cream-and-green.

TINE:And rose and pale grey and full of "antiques".

AIN:I know now that these objects were not very old and not very distinguished but to me it was an exciting museum. We called these old things treasures.

NORMA:It is 1995. Ain is sitting at a desk in the loft in what is called "the office."

AIN:Wearing an ancient Missoni tee shirt and her underpants, Valda lugs rocks and trees around a deck she optimistically calls the garden in a large airshaft she refers to as the courtyard. Valda?

VALDA:Just a minute.

JULIE:She holds up a yellow rock.

NORMA:Almost a boulder.

VALDA:This rock is getting dingy, don't you think? I've tried baby oil, olive oil, safflower oil. No use, it's lost it's sparkle. What can I do? So sad.

AIN:My mother loves rocks.

NORMA:She struggles into airports all over the world with deceptively ordinary looking hand luggage.

AIN:Which she allows no one else to lift or weigh. At home she unpacks her rocks and sorts and arranges them like a collector of rare objects.

TINE:When a rock no longer stands up to her scrutiny she returns it to nature.

AIN:I pretend to agree about the yellow rock. I don't know the difference.

VALDA:I'll have to put it in a park somewhere.

KAREN:Somebody else will find it.

VALDA:Did you want something or are you bored with working?

AIN:I explain that I'm trying to build a case. Perhaps my attention to histories begins in England.

TINE:The family bible, the churchyard in the middle of town with all the family stones.

AIN:I remember visiting an old people's home to see auntie Katie (one of those aunt's who isn't your aunt) and G.G. referred to the aged inhabitants as the old treasures. "Let's pay a call on the old treasures, darling."

VALDA:Oh, I don't think so.

AIN:She's not as gracious as I was about the stone.

VALDA:I don't think she called them old treasures. I'm sure she said "the old darlings", that's what I remember.

KAREN:"But if it's okay with you to change it, it's okay with me," Valda says, "I don't mind."

AIN:On afternoons when G.G. and I stayed home together she suggested we pull everything out and have a look at the treasures.

NORMA: Pulling everything out meant emptying the drawers and cabinets and sifting through stuff and telling stories. Ancient playbills...

VALDA: Programme.

NORMA: A buttonhook, a quill pen.

VALDA: A child's tea set.

JULIE: A lead pencil hidden inside a boat you wore on a chain.

AIN: And once - a cigarette lighter...

HIL/VAL: Oh darling, it was the middle of the night and they had us all standing in the street freezing, standing there watching the burning hotel...

KAREN: During World War II a bomb fell on a London hotel where little Valda and her parents were spending the weekend.

AIN: Grandpa was on leave from the R.A.F.

HIL/VAL: The bomb fell through all the floors of the hotel and lodged in the basement without exploding.

AIN: That's what she said. Why was the hotel burning if the bomb didn't explode? I never got a straight answer in England either but the avoidance was different than America.

HIL/VAL: Oh, darling, what an American question. Never mind. The hotel was burning and, suddenly, your silly old grandfather remembers he's left behind his favorite shaving mug and brush. "Hillary," he says to me, "Hillary, I have to go in the building." Ohhh, Gil, don't be such a fool, they won't let you. That's what I told him but you know your grandfather.

TINE: He always got his way.

AIN: "He found a fire warden or a bobby or something", she laughs.

NORMA:A bobby is a cop and the bobby evidently said (in classic American-movie-version-of-England fashion).

AIN:"Well, sir if it's your favorite shaving brush and mug you'd just better go right up and get it and I won't breathe a word about it. But make a quick job of it, and bob's your uncle."

VALDA:Now you're just being silly.

JULIE:Valda stops with a rock in each hand.

AIN:Okay, I say, maybe he didn't say bob's your uncle but that's the kind of thing you say.

VALDA:I doooo naught.

AIN:My mother always reminds me of her mother when she says I doooo naught.

KAREN:Valda puts one rock next to a small fern.

VALDA:The reason the hotel was on fire was that, as well as the bomb that fell in the basement, there were incendiary bombs and they made the fire and your grandfather was running around helping, wearing one of those metal hats, while my mother held me in her arms.

KAREN:Valda puts the other rock down and climbs into the office through the window.

VALDA:We couldn't sleep there, in the hotel...

AIN:She is remembering faster and talking faster.

VALDA:So we went to Maidenhead, which was not all that far away, and we walked around looking for some hotel or somewhere to stay and it must have been about two in the morning and we went to the police station.

AIN:I am typing as fast as I can and trying not to disturb the memory.

VALDA:And we found a policeman who went around with us waking people up, and

we woke up a hotel owner who had no rooms but he offered us his private sitting room and he offered to get clean sheets for the couch. To put on the couch...

AIN:She is so earnest.

VALDA:But my mother said "ohhhh, we don't need clean sheets."

AIN:She imitates her mother.

VALDA:"Ohh, we don't need sheets." My father said "Nonsense."

AIN:She enjoys imitating her father's dismissive bluster.

VALDA:"Nonsense, of course we need clean sheets, thank you so much." Because my father...

AIN:I know what she wants to say here but I wait for her.

VALDA:I'm trying to think how to phrase this, because he would like to continue with civilized behavior...he insisted on it actually, in extreme circumstances.

AIN:Now, if she remembered, she would tell the story of his insisting on dressing for dinner after R.A.F bombing missions which she always tells. I pull her back to London story. Where were they when the air raid began?

JULIE:When the warning sounded, they were sitting in the bar.

VALDA:We could hear gunfire in Hyde park. My father suggested we go into the air raid shelter in the basement of the hotel.

AIN:I want to know how old she was.

VALDA:I dunno. Eight? Ten?

JUL/TAD:1944.

VALDA:I think I was ten.

AIN:She guesses. She is obliging.

VALDA:I was probably ten. We could find out what year it was because they were using ak ak guns and buzz bombs. It was bawrrring in the basement and when we got back up to the lobby, water was cascading down the stairs - the big stairs, the main hotel stairway, and there was a hole right through the roof and you could see the sky. A fireman carried me out of the hotel so I wouldn't wet my feet - my shoes.

AIN:She is on a roll.

NORMA:They took the midnight train to Maidenhead and it was in Maidenhead...

VALDA:(CUTS IN) That my father realized he had left his shaving brush behind.

There was no mug. You can have there be a mug if you want, but there was no mug. I'm sure there was no mug.

AIN:Okay, no mug.

VALDA:So, the next day, we went back to the bombed-out hotel where my father did indeed persuade a policeman to let him in. He emerged victorious with the shaving brush.

KAREN:Valda starts to climb back out the window.

AIN:Does she remember how she felt about it all? I ask.

VALDA:The only treat - the only plus was...

AIN:She grins.

VALDA:They told me it would make a good story when I got back to school and they were right. And it's still a good story.

KAREN:Valda's back out on the deck now and talking loud.

VALDA:Oh, and somehow my father had procured a large bag of oranges, which was a wartime rarity, and which he had not forgotten when he forgot his shaving brush.

AIN:She is rolling a huge bamboo across the deck on a dolly.

VALDA:And my father taught me to make a hole in the top...of the orange, and push in a sugar lump and suck it. Which my mother thought was very messy. Look at this poor bamboo. I have to give my attention to this bamboo right now.

AIN:But how did you feel about it? No answer. My mother doesn't seem to know the end of the story. While my grandfather clambered around the ruined hotel in search of his shaving brush (and mug, Goddammit!) G.G. decided to have a fag.

HIL/VAL:Well darling, I was rummaging through my bag for a light, and cursing my stupid self for not having one, when up walks one of those big American soldiers, and he says, "ya wanna light maaam?"

AIN:She relished her American GI imitation. "'Ya wanna light maaam?'"

HIL/VAL:He pushed the flame right under my cigarette, so American...

AIN:She smiled with the memory.

HIL/VAL:He winked and said, "keep the lyda maaam."

AIN:She loved this imitation. She swung her higher hip, rolled her eyes, said "maaam" like an English-movie-version-of-an-American. Engelbert Humperdink and GI's got the same treatment. To her, they were both exotic, glamorous, and slightly vulgar. She kept the lighter for thirty years and gave it to me that day.

(PHONE RINGS)

KAREN>Hello, it's Sandy. Finished reading the most recent pages. (PAUSE) The story telling is...you know. It's how I got interested. But the people, uh the people who decide what gets published here...well, we should talk. Everybody loves the stories but does this stuff move forward? The past, the present, I mean where...what... what's your point of view? Call me.

DAVID:Derain and Vlaminck were two painters who went around painting side by side, painting the same scenes at the same time but - one foot apart.

AIN:Two paintings of the same bridge one foot apart.

DAVID:Two paintings of the same tree one foot apart.

AIN:Was it the foot apart that made them see differently?

DAVID:Or who was on the right?

AIN:Or was it what they ate for breakfast?

DAVID:Or was it the fact that Derain was not Vlaminck.

AIN:Except I always think a Derain is a Vlaminck or a Vlaminck is a Derain except when I don't recognize them at all or when there aren't any. Then I ask "Whatever happened to Derain and what's the other one's name? It's on the tip of my tongue."

DAVID:Contradiction is the banana peel we slip on as we make our way through memory toward fictionalization. "It was Tuesday. You were in the kitchen."

AIN:"No. It was Thursday. I was in Chicago." (TO AUDIENCE) I never quote reviews but somebody wrote that Epic Family Epic boiled down to this thought, "biology is destiny."

DAVID:In 1988 Ain is working on EPIC FAMILY EPIC.

AIN:David is working on the UNITED STATES PROJECT and Valda can only be in the end of my show because of touring with David's show.

DAVID:And Ain's show closes one week before my opening but Ain has a special showing to drum up some business.

AIN:So I send a car to meet Valda outside the stage door of BAM after the show and she stays in costume and rushes to DTW.

DAVID:Where she changes costume to enter in time to be the mother of siamese twins who split in the womb.

AIN:She abandoned them thirty years ago and she just got back, from wherever she was, for Thanksgiving dinner. Here is the last scene of EPIC FAMILY EPIC.

VALDA:Do you know what your family is? You think you know who they are, which you don't, but do any of you really know what they are? Well, I'll tell you. Your family is a cushion, a pin cushion on which you are lovingly asked to lay your head and when you do, you prick yourself. Yes, you do, and then you wonder why. They tell you they love you, and they do, but how much and for how long and for what reason? Am I right?

ALL:Yes.

VALDA:All right. And what about those smiling, grey haired old relatives of yours - do you really know who they are? Oh yes, I know they're your aunt - everyone's your aunt! But where does that get you? A word that tells you somebody is supposed to mean something to you. Do you hear me?

ALL:Yes.

VALDA:Did you say yes?

ALL:Yes.

VALDA:All right! Did you ever notice that your family knows just how to hurt you? I mean just how to get you where it hurts most? You must have noticed that. I know you have. You have to have. Your family may not know your erogenous zones, but they know your Achilles heel. They fashioned it after their own. Where you are weakest make sure others are too. It's the safest way.

Let me tell you the story of a woman. This woman raised a hundred children and she did it wrong. Wrong, wrong, wrong. She led them to believe she knew what she was talking about and they believed her. They thought she knew things that were better. But did she?

ALL:No.

VALDA:I can't hear you.

ALL:No.

VALDA:Louder.

ALL:No!

VALDA:That's right! Twenty five years of bumping around on this earth making stupid mistakes does not qualify you to be a parent.

Now let me tell you the story of a man who taught his family the wrong lesson. This man taught his family that being a man meant being away. Working all day, sleeping on his day off, keeping a distance, an emotional distance, a distance from them. He raised a hundred children who either emulated him or went looking for him, and he lived with a woman who came to expect no better - and relatives?

ALL:Yes?

VALDA:That was a mistake. And I could call forth the father's father and the mother's mother and so on and so on, all the way back, trying to find the original mistake but to what end?

ALL:No end.

VALDA:To no end. Right! That is why I'm calling for freedom. Freedom from following in footsteps. Freedom from not following in footsteps.

I don't want to be born into a club I didn't ask to join. I don't want to give birth to new members and watch them do it all again.

I say who cares who did what in your family?

ALL:Yes.

VALDA:I say who cares, period?

ALL:Yes.

VALDA:I say you're nothing to me and don't tell me you are.

ALL:Yes.

VALDA:Let me hear you say it.

ALL:You're nothing to me and don't tell me you are.

VALDA:All right, let me hear you say, you are my family and I want you to
leave me alone.

ALL:You are my family and I want you to leave me alone.

VALDA:Louder.

ALL:You are my family and I want you to leave me alone.

VALDA:What's the matter, didn't your parents teach you to yell? Louder!

ALL:You are my family and I want you to leave me alone!

(BEETHOVEN MUSIC AND DANCE)

DAVID:When I visited my parents in the last years of their lives my mother would say, when it was time for me to go, thank you so much for coming and call when you get home.

ALL:Thank you so much for coming and call when you get home.

DAVID: Good evening. I, who like best being alone, have been married for more than thirty five years which is more than half my life and I, who like best staying at home, have to travel as part of the way I make a living. When I'm in a strange town, in a temporary apartment, all by myself, I buy a plastic lidded container for making salads. I buy lettuce, tomatoes, avocado, kirby cucumbers, portobello mushrooms, scallions or red onion, endive and whatever else looks good and canned tuna fish in water, and Italian olive oil and balsamic vinegar and I cut everything that needs to be cut and chop everything that needs to be chopped, add garlic and salt and coarse ground black pepper, all of it into the plastic container, put the lid on and then I shake the hell out of it. The dressing and the avocado coat everything, and everything that went in in neat layers bumps into and slides next to, and falls on top of everything else. Sometimes I eat it as it comes and sometimes I dig down for favorite pieces. Sometimes I have it for dinner, sometimes for breakfast. I make it for myself. I wouldn't ordinarily offer it to eighty five guests. Tonight is unusual. You just saw a scene from EPIC FAMILY EPIC or THE HELL FAMILY DINNER, a play written by Ain Gordon and produced in 1988 at Dance Theater Workshop in New York. I wasn't in it.

Norma: I was in it.

VALDA:You weren't in it. I was in it.

NORMA:I don't know why I wasn't in it.

KAREN:I wasn't in it because I'm the dancing family and there used to be a difference between the acting family and the dancing family.

AIN:I thought I understood my connection to family.

NORMA:My ambivalence about family.

KAREN:My obsession with family.

VALDA:Autobiography is the art of telling the truth about one's own self, or one's own version of the truth, or lying convincingly. Some things get made up because they make a better story and some things get made up because they make a different story and some things just get made up. These are stories with music and dance about Doctor Neu, about Little Great Grandma Minnie and the ragman, about Annelise Kinsman known as Auntie Annie, about Dolores called Dolly, and Celesta called Esta, called Auntiesta, about Hillary and Gil and Great Britain, about trying to write a book about family, about marriage, and death, and birth. Some of these stories have been told in performance. Some of these stories have never been told outside of the family. Some of these stories are believable and some are not to be believed. And everything reminds us of something else.

HIL/VAL:Darling, I'm not really fond of being called grandma, it makes me feel so old."

AIN:With a precocious charm I can't defend I volunteer, "but, you're my gorgeous granny. Why don't I call you G.G.?" I am eight and I figure she is about sixty-two. She hugs me and tells everybody how I invented the name. I did call her G.G. for the rest of her life and she always signed her letters "yours, G.G."

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AIN:She ate that cake all day every day. It never even made it into the larder. It lived on the kitchen table.

VALDA:The kitchen was her base of action and her haven.

AIN:It had nothing to do with cooking. She avoided her husband and smoked and nibbled and looked out the window at her garden which was her other favorite territory and she listened to the radio. She loved Englebert Humperdink or Tom Jones or whoever that was who sang "What's new pussycat?" With a fag in one hand and a lump of tea cake in the other she rolled her eyes and swung her hip and warbled wo, wo, wo.

VALDA:One hip was higher and one leg was significantly shorter.

AIN:She walked with a lopsided gait as if trying to make her way from somewhere to somewhere simultaneously on a hill and in a valley.

VALDA:When she stopped moving she swung the long leg behind and to the side of the short leg to give her an almost even base to stand on.

AIN:She wouldn't have a built up shoe.

VALDA:(IMITATING) "Ohh, no, darling. Children will laugh at a shoe like that." Her hips and legs and walk and stance were the result of the long ago car accident.

AIN:She wore beige and bone, neutral and conventional lady colors and the rooms of her house were cream-and-green and rose and pale grey and full of "antiques". I know now that these objects were not very old and not very distinguished but to me it was an exciting museum. We called these old things treasures.

VALDA:It is 1995. Ain is sitting at a desk in the loft in what is called "the office."

AIN:The office used to be my bedroom and this desk used to be the dining room table. The room that used to be the office is now a closet. We moved in when I was fourteen and I officially moved out eight years later. Outside the window of this room, wearing an ancient Missoni tee shirt and her underpants, Valda lugs rocks and trees around a deck she optimistically calls the garden in a large airshaft she refers to as the courtyard. Valda?

VALDA:Just a minute.

AIN:She holds up a yellow rock, sizable, almost a boulder.

VALDA:This rock is getting dingy, don't you think? I've tried baby oil, olive oil, safflower oil. No use, it's lost it's sparkle. What can I do? So sad.

AIN:My mother loves rocks. She struggles into airports all over the world with deceptively ordinary looking hand luggage which she allows no one else to lift or weigh. At home she unpacks her rocks and sorts and arranges them like a collector of rare objects. When a rock no longer stands up to her scrutiny she returns it to nature. I pretend to agree about the yellow rock. I don't know the difference.

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AIN:I explain that I'm trying to build a case. Perhaps my attention to histories begins in England. The family bible, the churchyard in the middle of town with all the family stones. I remember visiting an old people's home to see auntie Katie (one of those aunt's who isn't your aunt) and G.G. referred to the aged inhabitants as the old treasures. "Let's pay a call on the old treasures, darling."

VALDA:Oh, I don't think so.

AIN:She's not as gracious as I was about the stone.

VALDA:I don't think she called them old treasures. I'm sure she said "the old darlings", that's what I remember.

AIN:"But if it's okay with you to change it, it's okay with me," my mother says, "I don't mind."

On afternoons when G.G. and I stayed home together and my grandfather did his famous disappearing act, she suggested we pull everything out and have a look at the treasures. Pulling everything out meant emptying the drawers and cabinets and sifting through stuff and telling stories. Ancient playbills, a buttonhook, a quill pen, a child's tea set, a lead pencil hidden inside a boat you wore on a chain around your neck and once - a cigarette lighter...

HIL/VAL:Oh darling, it was the middle of the night and they had us all standing in the street freezing, standing there watching the burning hotel...

AIN:During World War II a bomb fell on a London hotel where little Valda and her parents were spending the weekend. Grandpa was on leave from the R.A.F.

HIL/VAL:The bomb fell through all the floors of the hotel and lodged in the basement without exploding.

AIN:That's what she told me. Why was the hotel burning if the bomb didn't explode? I never got a straight answer in England either but the avoidance was different than in America.

HIL/VAL:Oh, darling, what an American question. Never mind. The hotel was burning and, suddenly, your silly old grandfather remembers he's left behind his favorite shaving mug and brush. "Hillary," he says to me, "Hillary, I have to go into the building." Ohhh, Gil, don't be such a fool, they won't let you. That's what I told him but you know your grandfather.

AIN:He always got his way. "He found a fire warden or a bobby or something", she laughs. A bobby is a cop and the bobby evidently said (in classic American-movie-version-of-England fashion) "well, sir if it's your favorite shaving brush and mug you'd just better go right up and get it and I won't breathe a word about it. But make a quick job of it, and bob's your uncle."

VALDA:Now you're just being silly.

AIN:My mother stops with a rock in each hand. Okay, I say, maybe he didn't say bob's your uncle but that's the kind of thing you say. "I doooo naught." My mother always reminds me of her mother when she says I doooo naught.

VALDA:Don't change it if you don't want to.

AIN:She puts one rock next to a small fern.

VALDA:But I was there too. And the reason the hotel was on fire was that, as well as the bomb that fell in the basement, there were incendiary bombs and they made the fire and your grandfather was running around helping, wearing one of those metal hats, while my mother held me in her arms.

AIN:She puts the other rock down and climbs into the office through the window.

VALDA:We couldn't sleep there, in the hotel...

AIN:She is remembering faster and talking faster.

VALDA:So we went to Maidenhead, which was not all that far away, and we walked around looking for some hotel or somewhere to stay and it must have been about two in the morning and we went to the police station.

AIN:I am typing as fast as I can and trying not to disturb the memory.

VALDA:And we found a policeman who went around with us waking people up, asking to stay the night, and we woke up a hotel owner who had no rooms but he offered us his private sitting room and he offered to get clean sheets for the couch. To put on the couch...

AIN:She is so earnest.

VALDA:But my mother said "ohhhh, we don't need clean sheets."

AIN:She imitates her mother.

VALDA:"Ohhhh, we don't need sheets." My father said "Nonsense."

AIN:She enjoys imitating her father's dismissive bluster.

VALDA:"Nonsense, of course we need clean sheets, thank you so much." Because my father...

AIN:I know what she wants to say here but I wait for her.

VALDA:I'm trying to think how to phrase this, because he would like to continue with civilized behavior...he insisted on it actually, in extreme circumstances.

AIN:At this point, if she remembered, she would tell the story of his insisting on dressing for dinner in the R.A.F. (after bombing missions) which she always tells. I pull her back to London, to the beginning of the story. Where were they, I ask, when the air raid began?

VALDA:When the warning sounded, we were sitting in the bar. We could hear gunfire in Hyde park. My father suggested we go into the air raid shelter in the basement of the hotel.

AIN:I want to know how old she was.

VALDA:I dunno. Eight? Ten? 1944. I think I was ten.

AIN:She guesses. She is obliging.

VALDA:We had tickets for the pantomime for the following night which was a treat for me. My mother was wearing a lime green coat and dress with birds cut out and filled in with net all across her bosom. The coat had fur sleeves and a little hat that went with it. I remember what my mother was wearing because she was dressed up. She was as pale as the green of her dress and the green neon light in the shelter. I remember how frightened she looked. My father was in uniform. I was probably ten. We could find out what year it was because they were using ak ak guns and buzz bombs. It was bawrrring in the basement and when we got back up to the lobby, water was cascading down the stairs - the big stairs, the main hotel stairway, and there was a hole right through the roof and you could see the sky. The fireman carried me out of the hotel so I wouldn't wet my feet - my shoes.

AIN:She is on a roll.

VALDA:We took the midnight train to Maidenhead and it was in Maidenhead that my father realized he had left his shaving brush behind. There was no mug. You can have there be a mug if you want, but there was no mug. I'm sure there was no mug.

AIN:Okay, no mug.

VALDA:So, the next day, we took the train back to London. We tried to exchange our evening panto tickets for matinee tickets which we couldn't.

AIN:I ask why.

VALDA:Why we couldn't? I don't know. There probably weren't any. Oh, why we wanted to? My father thought we shouldn't stay another whole night in London. We went back to the hotel where my father did indeed persuade a policeman to let him in. He emerged victorious with the shaving brush.

AIN:She starts to climb back out the window. I ask does she remember how she felt about it all.

VALDA:The only treat - the only plus...

AIN:She grins.

VALDA:Was they told me it would make a good story when I got back to school and they were right. And it's still a good story.

AIN:She's back out on the deck now and talking loud.