

# THE WEIGHT

A full-length play

by Richard Ehrlich

© 2025 Richard Ehrlich. All rights reserved.

80 minutes

## NOTE ON TEXT MESSAGES:

*Text messages appear as written dialogue and are heard as the sender's voice.*

## CAST

DAVID — the youngest; steady, principled, emotionally stable.

ANNA — his wife; loving, direct, increasingly unwilling to be erased by the caretaking.

MARK — oldest brother; largely absent, grateful, certain gratitude is contribution.

LISA — sister; overwhelmed by proximity to decline; offers sympathy more than presence.

SARAH — teenage daughter; observant; inherits the moral question.

FACILITY COORDINATOR / STAFF / DOCTOR — can be doubled.

## MOVEMENT I — ASSUMPTION

Focus: Responsibility settles without discussion

## SCENE 1 — THE MEETING

*Setting: Facility conference room. Sterile, fluorescent. Three chairs on one side of a table, one on the other.*

*At rise: DAVID, MARK, and LISA sit across from a FACILITY COORDINATOR. The Coordinator has a folder. There's an awkwardness—they've been here before for the tour, but this is different. This is real.*

**COORDINATOR**

Thank you all for coming. I know this isn't easy.

*No one responds. They look at their hands, the table, anywhere but at each other.*

**COORDINATOR**

Your parents can no longer live independently. The incidents—the fall, the missed medications, the confusion—these aren't isolated anymore.

**MARK**

We understand.

**COORDINATOR**

Good. Then let's talk about next steps.

*She opens the folder.*

**COORDINATOR**

We'll need a primary contact. Someone who can be reached during business hours. For medications, appointments, emergency decisions.

*Beat. Mark and Lisa both glance at David. Not obviously. Just a flicker.*

**COORDINATOR**

*(to David, without asking)*

*Your cell number?*

**DAVID**

Yes.

*He gives it. The Coordinator writes it down. Mark and Lisa don't object.*

**COORDINATOR**

And you'll be the healthcare proxy?

*Pause. David looks at Mark. Mark is the oldest. This should probably be Mark.*

**MARK**

David's good with this kind of thing.

**DAVID**

I can do that.

**LISA**

Are you sure?

**DAVID**

I can handle that.

**COORDINATOR**

You'll need to review these forms. Financial responsibility, medical decisions, end-of-life preferences.

*She slides the folder across. David takes it. Mark and Lisa lean in to look, but don't touch it.*

**LISA**

This is a lot.

**DAVID**

Yeah.

**MARK**

We'll help however we can.

**DAVID**

I know.

*But somehow the folder is still only in David's hands.*

**COORDINATOR**

Any questions?

*Silence.*

**MARK**

How often do we need to visit?

**COORDINATOR**

That's entirely up to you. Some families come daily. Some weekly. Some less.

**LISA**

What's typical?

**COORDINATOR**

There is no typical. Every family is different.

*Another silence.*

**COORDINATOR**

I'll leave you to look these over. Take your time.

*She exits. David opens the folder. Mark and Lisa lean in to see.*

**LISA**

This is a lot.

**MARK**

We should divide it up. Split the load.

**DAVID**

Yeah, that makes sense.

**MARK**

What's the timeline on these?

**DAVID**

*(reading)*

*Intake forms by tomorrow. Medical proxy within a week. Power of attorney—she needs both of us to sign this one.*

**MARK**

Both?

**DAVID**

Two signatures required for financial decisions over a certain amount.

**LISA**

That's good. Checks and balances.

**MARK**

So we'll coordinate.

**DAVID**

Right.

*But David is already signing the first form. Then the second. Mark and Lisa watch. They mean to help. They will help. But right now, David is signing.*

**MARK**

I can take some of those home. Look them over.

**DAVID**

They need them back tomorrow.

**MARK**

Oh.

*Pause.*

**MARK**

You want me to stay? Help you go through them?

**DAVID**

No, it's okay. It's mostly just signatures.

**LISA**

Thank you for doing this.

**DAVID**

Of course.

*Relief. Immediate relief from Mark and Lisa. They stand.*

**MARK**

We should probably get going. I have a four o'clock.

**LISA**

Me too. Conference call.

**MARK**

Call us if you need anything.

**LISA**

Anything at all.

*They leave. David stays seated. Looks at the forms. Keeps signing.*

*Blackout.*

## **SCENE 2 — THE FIRST MISSED THING**

*Setting: David's kitchen. Evening. The table is set for three—plates, forks, napkins carefully arranged. A birthday cake sits in the center, candles already placed but not yet lit. Everything is ready. Except David isn't there.*

*At rise: ANNA stands at the counter, looking at her phone. She sets it down. Picks it up. Sets it down. DAVID enters, late. His tie is loosened, he carries a folder.*

**DAVID**

I texted. I said I'd be late.

**ANNA**

You texted at 4:47 that you'd be late to a 6:00 dinner.

**DAVID**

I texted as soon as I knew.



**ANNA**

You thought an hour and thirteen minutes was enough notice.

*Pause.*

**DAVID**

Where's Sarah?

**ANNA**

In her room.

**DAVID**

Is she okay?

**ANNA**

She stopped asking where you were around 5:30. She just said 'Dad's probably at the facility.'

*David sets down his keys. The folder. Notices the cake.*

**DAVID**

I forgot the candles were pink.

**ANNA**

She asked for pink.

**DAVID**

Right.

*He moves toward Sarah's room.*

**ANNA**

How many patients did you reschedule today?

*David stops.*

**DAVID**

What?

**ANNA**

Patients. How many did you reschedule?

**DAVID**

Three.

**ANNA**

This week?

**DAVID**

Today.

*Pause.*

**ANNA**

David—

**DAVID**

I know.

**ANNA**

Do you?

*He doesn't answer. He moves toward Sarah's room again.*

**ANNA**

She stopped asking where you were.

*He stops.*

**ANNA**

She didn't ask if you were coming. She didn't ask me to call you. She didn't cry or complain. She just... accepted it.

*Long pause.*

**DAVID**

The intake coordinator needed the forms back by tomorrow morning. And Mom was having a bad day. She kept asking where Dad was. They couldn't calm her down.

**ANNA**

So you went.

**DAVID**

Yes.

**ANNA**

Instead of calling Mark or Lisa.

**DAVID**

They were both in meetings.

**ANNA**

And you weren't?

**DAVID**

I rescheduled.

**ANNA**

You always reschedule.

*Silence.*

**DAVID**

I'll try to do better.

**ANNA**

Will you?

**DAVID**

Yes.

**ANNA**

How?

*David doesn't have an answer. Anna picks up her phone.*

**ANNA**

She's thirteen. She'll remember this birthday. She'll remember you weren't here.

**DAVID**

I'm here now.

**ANNA**

Are you?

*She looks at him. Really looks at him. He's physically present. But his mind is still at the facility, with the forms, with his mother's confusion, with all of it.*

*On the counter, a dental journal sits unopened, still in plastic. It's been there a while. Maybe weeks. Anna sees David notice it. He looks away quickly.*

*Blackout.*

### **SCENE 3 — YOU'RE ALREADY THERE**

*Setting: David's car, morning. Or a hallway. Somewhere in transit.*

*At rise: DAVID on phone. Three-way call with MARK and LISA. He's driving, or walking with purpose. Always moving.*

**MARK**

So the social worker called me yesterday.

**DAVID**

About Dad's DNR?

**MARK**

Yeah. She said someone needs to sit down with her about it.

**LISA**

Did she say when?

**MARK**

Afternoons, apparently. That's when she's at the facility.

**DAVID**

What days?

**MARK**

She didn't specify. Just afternoons.

*Pause.*

**LISA**

I could probably make Wednesday afternoon work.

**MARK**

I could do Thursday morning.

*Beat.*

**DAVID**

She said afternoons?

**MARK**

That's what she told me.

**LISA**

Wait, is she there mornings at all?

**DAVID**

No. Just afternoons. That's her schedule.

*Silence.*

**MARK**

Oh. Well, I'm only free mornings this week.

**LISA**

And I have that conference Wednesday.

*Longer silence.*

**DAVID**

I'll handle it.

**MARK**

You sure?

**DAVID**

Yeah.

**LISA**

We can try to coordinate for next week—

**DAVID**

It's okay. She wants to meet soon. I'll go this week.

**MARK**

Thanks, man. Let us know what she says.

**DAVID**

I will.

**LISA**

You're the best, David.



*They hang up. David continues driving. Or walking. He's already going there anyway. It makes sense. Of course it makes sense.*

*He checks his calendar on his phone. Three patient appointments this afternoon.*

*He texts his hygienist: 'Need to reschedule 2pm, 3pm, 4pm today.'*

*Sends it. Keeps driving.*

*Blackout.*

#### **SCENE 4 — THE CORRIDOR**

*Setting: Facility hallway, outside Father's room in the dementia ward.*

*At rise: DAVID waits outside a closed door. From inside—FATHER's voice. Shouting. Incoherent and angry. It's been going on for a while. A STAFF MEMBER exits Father's room, closes the door carefully behind her. The shouting continues, muffled now but still audible.*

**STAFF**

You came.

**DAVID**

You called.

**STAFF**

I know, but—most family members, when we tell them it's a difficult day, they... they don't come.

**DAVID**

Is that better? For him?

**STAFF**

I don't know. Maybe. Sometimes.

*Another shout from inside. David flinches slightly.*

**STAFF**

He's been like this for two days. We thought... sometimes family helps. Sometimes it calms them down.

**DAVID**

And sometimes?

**STAFF**

Sometimes it makes it worse.

*Pause.*

**DAVID**

Is this normal? The anger?

**STAFF**

For this stage, yes. It passes eventually.

**DAVID**

Eventually.

**STAFF**

Weeks. Sometimes months. It's different for everyone.

*The shouting intensifies. Words that might be words, might be nothing. Pure rage at something he can't name.*

**STAFF**

You don't have to go in if you don't want to.

**DAVID**

But you called me.

**STAFF**

I called the primary contact. That's you. But that doesn't mean—

**DAVID**

He's my father.

**STAFF**

He doesn't know that.

*Long pause. The shouting continues. David doesn't move toward the door. Just stands there, listening.*

**DAVID**

I know.

*She hands him a form on a clipboard.*

**STAFF**

I need you to sign here. Emergency contact update. We have to do it quarterly.

**DAVID**

Okay.

*He signs without reading. She checks it.*

**STAFF**

Not there—there. Where it says primary.

*He signs again. The shouting continues. It feels like it will never stop.*

**STAFF**

Can I tell you something?

**DAVID**

Sure.

**STAFF**

The ones who take all the calls? The ones who come whenever we need them? Their marriages suffer. Their kids remember the absence. I've seen it happen over and over.

*David doesn't respond. The warning is there. He hears it. He knows she's right.*

**STAFF**

You can say no sometimes. You can tell us to call someone else.

**DAVID**

Who would you call?

**STAFF**

His other children.

**DAVID**

They're busy.

**STAFF**

So are you.

*Silence. The shouting continues. David stands there in the hallway, listening to his father rage at shadows, at strangers, at nothing. He doesn't go in. He just stands there. Listening. Being available.*

*Blackout.*

## **SCENE 5 — THE SIGNATURE**

*Setting: Home, late night. Kitchen.*

*At rise: DAVID sits at the kitchen table. It's after midnight. Paperwork is spread everywhere—two distinct piles. Medical forms. Legal forms. Pamphlets about end-of-life care. ANNA enters, wearing a robe.*

**ANNA**

Still up?

**DAVID**

DNR forms. One for each of them.

**ANNA**

What did they say they wanted?

*David laughs—hollow, mirthless.*

**DAVID**

Dad can't say anything. He hasn't spoken in eight months. Not words. Just sounds.

**ANNA**

And your mom?

**DAVID**

Yesterday she said 'do everything possible.' This morning she said 'I'm ready to go, just let me go.' This afternoon she asked me why I was being so morbid and told me to stop talking about death.

*Pause. Anna sits down across from him.*

**ANNA**

So you just... decide?

**DAVID**

Yeah.

*He picks up the pen. Stares at the forms. Puts the pen down.*

**ANNA**

What are you going to do?

**DAVID**

Sign them both. Dad wouldn't want interventions. I know that. I remember him talking about it years ago, when his friend Harold was in the hospital with tubes everywhere. He said 'don't ever let them do that to me.'

**ANNA**

And your mom?

**DAVID**

Mom... I don't think she understands what she's asking for when she says 'do everything.' She doesn't remember what 'everything' means. The breathing tubes, the feeding tubes, the—

*He stops.*

**ANNA**

And if you're wrong?

*Long pause. David picks up the pen again.*

**DAVID**

Then I'm wrong.

*He signs the first form. Father's DNR. Then picks up the second. Mother's. Stares at it longer.*

**ANNA**

You don't have to do this tonight.

**DAVID**

They need them back tomorrow.

**ANNA**

Who told you that?

**DAVID**

The coordinator.

**ANNA**

Did she say why?

**DAVID**

Hospital policy. They need them on file within 72 hours of placement.

*He signs the second form. Mother's DNR. Anna watches.*

**ANNA**

Mark didn't want to do this?



**DAVID**

He offered. But he's not... he hasn't been there as much. He doesn't know what they're like now. What they need.

**ANNA**

So it falls to you.

**DAVID**

It makes sense.

**ANNA**

Does it?

*David doesn't answer. He stacks the forms neatly. Puts them in the folder. His hands are shaking slightly.*

**ANNA**

Come to bed.

**DAVID**

In a minute.

**ANNA**

David—

**DAVID**

I just need a minute.

*She stands. Touches his shoulder. He doesn't look up. She leaves. David sits alone with the signed forms. Two decisions. Two lives. In his hands. He doesn't move.*

*Blackout.*

## **SCENE 6 — THE DAYS**

*Setting: Montage across various locations—home, David's dental office, car, facility.*

*At rise: Time passes. Days blur into weeks. The phone becomes a constant presence. DAVID in perpetual motion—organizing, responding, managing. We see the accumulation of availability.*

*MORNING. Kitchen. David at breakfast with ANNA and SARAH. Phone buzzes on table.*

### **DAVID**

*(checking phone)*

*Facility. Mom's medication time changed. They need confirmation.*

*He types response while eating. Phone buzzes again immediately.*

### **ANNA**

Can you put that away?

### **DAVID**

It's the pharmacy. They need to verify the prescription.

*He answers. Listens. Nods.*

**DAVID**

Yes, that's correct. The dosage changed last week. Thank you.

*Hangs up. Phone buzzes again before he sets it down.*

**SARAH**

Dad—

**DAVID**

*(reading text)*

*It's Mark. He wants to know if I can handle Mom's podiatrist appointment Thursday.*

**ANNA**

Can you tell him you're busy Thursday?

**DAVID**

I can move things around.

*He types back. Sets phone down. Tries to eat. Phone buzzes.*

**DAVID**

*(to himself)*

*I'll check it in a minute.*

*But he picks it up. Reads. Sighs.*

*LATER THAT MORNING. David's dental office. Patient in chair. HYGIENIST assisting. David's phone buzzes in his pocket. He ignores it. It buzzes again. Again.*

**PATIENT**

Do you need to get that?

**DAVID**

Let's continue. I apologize for the interruption.

*He works. Phone buzzes. Buzzes. Buzzes. Finally:*

**DAVID**

*(to Hygienist)*

*Can you take over for just one second?*

*He steps out. Checks phone. Multiple texts from LISA:*

*NOTE: Text messages (marked "(text)") are delivered by offstage voices or shown on screen. Texting characters are not visible.*

**LISA**

*(text)*

*Mom's pharmacy called me. Prescription ready.*

**LISA**

*(text)*

*Can you grab it?*

**LISA**

*(text)*

*Also Dad needs hearing aid batteries*

**LISA**

*(text)*

*Sorry to bug you! Just whenever you're there next*

*Then a voicemail notification from the facility. Then another text from Mark. David closes his eyes. Takes a breath. Goes back to his patient.*

*AFTERNOON. David's car. Driving between office and facility. Phone mounted on dashboard. It rings. He answers on speaker.*

**COORDINATOR**

*(on phone)*

*David, hi. Your father had an incident this morning. He became agitated during bathing. We had to stop the procedure.*

**DAVID**

Is he okay?

**COORDINATOR**

He's fine now. But we're wondering if you could come by tomorrow to discuss a behavioral plan.

**DAVID**

Tomorrow I have—

*He stops himself.*

**DAVID**

What time?

**COORDINATOR**

Afternoon works best. Say two-thirty?

**DAVID**

I'll be there.

*Hangs up. Immediately, phone rings again. Different number. He answers.*

**DAVID**

Hello?

**MARK**

*(on phone)*

*Hey. Did the facility call you about Dad?*

**DAVID**

Yeah. Just now.

**MARK**

They called me too. I told them you'd handle it since you're there more often.

**DAVID**

Okay.

**MARK**

Thanks, man. I'm swamped this week.

*Hangs up. David drives. Phone buzzes. Text from pharmacy. He glances at it at a red light. Prescription ready for pickup. Phone buzzes again. Facility. Mom needs new slippers, hers are missing. Can he bring some? Phone buzzes. Lisa asking if he talked to Mark about Thursday. Phone buzzes. Facility again, different staff member, asking about dietary restrictions update.*

*The light turns green. David doesn't move. The phone is still buzzing. Someone honks behind him. He drives.*

*EVENING. Home. Kitchen table covered in David's paperwork. Phone next to his hand. ANNA watches from doorway as it buzzes. David reaches for it automatically.*

**ANNA**

How many today?

**DAVID**

What?

**ANNA**

Calls. Texts. How many?

*David looks at his phone. Scrolls.*

**DAVID**

Facility called three times. Texted twice. Mark called once, texted four times. Lisa texted... six times. Pharmacy called. Coordinator called. Social worker left a voicemail.

**ANNA**

That's just today?

**DAVID**

Yeah.

**ANNA**

Every day is like this?

*David nods. Doesn't look up from the paperwork.*

**ANNA**

Mark called me today too.

**DAVID**

*(still working)*

*Yeah?*

**ANNA**

He said you're a saint. For 'sharing' you with your parents.

*David's pen stops moving. He looks up.*

**DAVID**

What?

**ANNA**



His exact words. 'Thanks for sharing David with Mom and Dad. We know how lucky we are.'

*Silence. David's phone buzzes on the table. They both look at it. He doesn't pick it up.*

**ANNA**

It's after nine.

**DAVID**

I know.

**ANNA**

It's probably the facility.

**DAVID**

Probably.

*It stops buzzing. Then immediately starts again. David picks it up. Looks at the screen.*

**DAVID**

It's them.

*He answers.*

**DAVID**

Hello? ... Yes. ... No, that's fine. I can come by tomorrow. ... What time? ... Okay. I'll be there.

*He hangs up. Anna watches him. He goes back to his paperwork. The phone sits there between them. Silent now. But only for a moment.*

*On the counter, behind them, that dental journal sits unopened. Still in plastic. It's been there for weeks now. Maybe longer.*

*David's phone buzzes again. He reaches for it without looking up.*

*Blackout.*

## **MOVEMENT II — NORMALIZATION**

Focus: Endurance becomes permission

## **SCENE 7 — GRATITUDE AS HARM**

*Setting: Facility waiting area.*

*At rise: DAVID and MARK. Mark has just arrived for a brief visit. This is rare—Mark visiting on his own. David happened to be here.*

**MARK**

You're here.

**DAVID**

Yeah. Had to drop off some forms.

**MARK**

On a Saturday?

**DAVID**

They needed them for Monday.

**MARK**

Right.

*Pause. Awkward. They're brothers but this feels formal.*

**MARK**

How are they?

**DAVID**

Dad's having a good day. Mom's... Mom.

**MARK**

Confused?

**DAVID**

Yeah.

*Silence.*

**MARK**

Mom has a cardiology appointment Thursday.

**DAVID**

I know. I scheduled it.

**MARK**

Oh. What time?

**DAVID**

They offered two-thirty or four-thirty.

**MARK**

Okay. I could probably do one of those.

**DAVID**

I appreciate that.

**MARK**

I want to help.

*Pause.*

**DAVID**

Two-thirty works better for me. I have Sarah's play at six.

**MARK**

Two-thirty...

*He checks his phone.*

**MARK**

Ah. I have that presentation to the board.

**DAVID**

It's fine. I'll take it.

**MARK**

Could we do four-thirty?

**DAVID**

I'd have to leave by five-thirty to make Sarah's play. And the appointment could run long.

**MARK**

That's tight.

*Silence.*

**DAVID**

I'll take the two-thirty.

**MARK**

You sure? I could maybe move my presentation...

**DAVID**

No, it's fine. I'll make it work.

**MARK**

You're the best, David. Seriously. I don't know how you do this. I couldn't handle it.

*David doesn't respond.*

**MARK**

I know I'm not here as much as you. But I handle all the financial stuff—that's got to count for something. The facility, all their bills, everything on auto-pay. You don't have to worry about any of that.

**DAVID**

I appreciate that.

**MARK**

*(relieved)*

*Good. We each contribute what we can, right?*

*(beat)*

*You're just... better at the personal stuff.*

**MARK**

We're lucky to have you.

*Mark's phone buzzes. He checks it.*

**MARK**

I should get going. Meeting got moved up.

*He stands.*

**MARK**

Thanks again. For everything. For being so good about all this.

*Mark leaves. David sits alone in the waiting area. He'll make it work. He always makes it work.*

**MARK**

Listen, I don't say this enough, but... thank you. For handling all the day-to-day stuff. I honestly don't know how you do it.

**DAVID**

Someone has to.

**MARK**

Yeah, but... you make it look easy. Like you've got everything under control.

*Pause. David doesn't correct this.*

**MARK**

It's a relief. Knowing you're on top of it.

*He says this warmly. David nods.*

*Mark leaves. David sits alone.*

*Blackout.*

**SCENE 8 — SARAH OBSERVES**

*Setting: Facility waiting area.*

*At rise: DAVID and SARAH. She's come with him to visit her grandparents. They're waiting outside the visiting rooms.*

**SARAH**

Can I see Grandpa?

**DAVID**

Not today.

**SARAH**

Why not?

**DAVID**

He's having a hard day.

**SARAH**

What does that mean?

*David doesn't answer immediately.*

**SARAH**

Is he mean to you?



**DAVID**

He's not mean. He's... confused. Angry sometimes. He doesn't understand where he is.

**SARAH**

Does he know who you are?

**DAVID**

Not anymore.

*Long pause. Sarah processes this.*

**SARAH**

Then why do you keep coming when they call?

**DAVID**

Because he's still my father.

**SARAH**

But he doesn't know that.

**DAVID**

I know that.

**SARAH**

Uncle Mark is the oldest. Isn't he supposed to take care of things?

**DAVID**

Everyone takes care in different ways.

**SARAH**

He never visits.

**DAVID**

It's hard for him to see Grandpa like this.

**SARAH**

It's not hard for you?

**DAVID**

*(quiet)*

*It's hard for everyone.*

**SARAH**

But you come anyway.

*Long pause.*

**SARAH**

Because you can.

*David doesn't deny this. She's right.*

*Silence.*

*Silence. Sarah understands something she didn't before.*

**SARAH**

Mom says Uncle Mark never visits.

**DAVID**

That's not true. He visited three weeks ago.

**SARAH**

Three weeks ago.

*The way she says it—she knows that's a long time.*

**SARAH**

Why do they always call you?

**DAVID**

Who?

**SARAH**

The facility. Uncle Mark. Aunt Lisa. Whenever there's something that needs doing.

**DAVID**

I don't know. I'm available. It makes sense.

**SARAH**

Uncle Mark is the oldest. Isn't he supposed to take care of things?

**SARAH**

Mom says you don't get credit for it.

**DAVID**

Credit's not the point.

**SARAH**

Then what is?

*David doesn't have an answer. Sarah's phone buzzes. She looks at it.*

**SARAH**

Uncle Mark called the house this morning.

**DAVID**

When?

**SARAH**

Early. Around eight. He asked if you were home. I said you were at the facility.

*Pause.*

**SARAH**

He said 'of course he is.'

*She looks at her father.*

**SARAH**

Like he knew you'd drop everything. Like you always do.

**DAVID**

He didn't mean it that way.

**SARAH**

Didn't he?

*David says nothing. They sit together in the too-bright hallway. Waiting.*

*Blackout.*

## **SCENE 9 — ANOTHER CORRIDOR**

*Setting: Facility hallway.*

*At rise: DAVID waits outside a door. No shouting this time. Just silence. He's been waiting twenty minutes. The stage time reflects real waiting—slow, heavy, performative. He checks his phone. Text from ANNA appears:*

**ANNA**

*(text)*

*How long?*

*David types:*

**DAVID**

*(text)*

*Not sure. Soon.*

*He puts phone away. Continues sitting. The silence from Father's room is somehow worse than the shouting was. A NURSE passes.*

**NURSE**

Still waiting for Dr. Chen?

**DAVID**

Yeah.

**NURSE**

He's running about thirty minutes behind. Maybe forty.

**DAVID**

Okay.

*She continues on. David sits. Waits. Checks his watch. Looks at his phone. Puts it away. The waiting itself is the scene. The audience feels it. The weight of time passing. Of being on call. Of availability.*

*Finally—after what feels like an eternity—David stands. Stretches. Sits back down. Phone buzzes. Text from ANNA:*

**ANNA**

*(text)*

*Sarah wants to know if you'll be home for dinner.*

*David looks at his watch. Types:*

**DAVID**

*(text)*

*I'll try.*

*He keeps waiting. Dr. Chen still hasn't arrived.*

*Blackout.*

## **SCENE 10 — SOCIAL NORMALCY**

*Setting: Facility cafeteria.*

*At rise: DAVID, MARK, and LISA sit with coffee. An attempt at normal family time after visiting their parents. But the conversation keeps stalling.*

**MARK**

How are the kids, Lisa?

**LISA**

Good. Busy. Emma made varsity.

**MARK**

That's great. Soccer?

**LISA**

Volleyball.

**MARK**

Nice.

*Pause. Small talk isn't working.*

**LISA**

How's work, Mark?

**MARK**

Busy. The new product launch is... it's a lot.

**LISA**

I bet.

*More silence. They sip coffee. David hasn't said much.*

**LISA**

How's Sarah, David?

**DAVID**

Good. She had her play last week.



**MARK**

How was it?

**DAVID**

I missed most of it. Got there for the curtain call.

**LISA**

Oh no. Why?

**DAVID**

Mom's cardiology appointment ran long.

*Silence. Mark and Lisa exchange a glance.*

**MARK**

We should do this more often. Just... check in. As a family.

**LISA**

Definitely. What works for everyone?

**DAVID**

I'm here this week. Probably next week too.

**MARK**

Right.

*Beat.*

**MARK**

We'll coordinate. Maybe in a couple weeks?

**LISA**

I'll text you both.

*They finish their coffee. Mark checks his watch.*

**MARK**

I should get going. Told the kids I'd be home for dinner.

**LISA**

Me too. Carpool pickup at four.

*They stand. Gather their things.*

**MARK**

Good seeing you guys. David, call if anything comes up.

**LISA**

Yes, definitely. We're here for you.

**DAVID**

I know.

*They leave. David sits alone with his coffee, now cold. He doesn't move to leave. Just sits there in the cafeteria, surrounded by other people's families. Other people's normal.*

*Blackout.*

### **MOVEMENT III — RESISTANCE**

Focus: Love pushes back against principle

### **SCENE 11 — WHAT YOU WON'T SAY**

*Setting: Kitchen, night.*

*At rise: ANNA and DAVID. A confrontation that's been building for months.*

**ANNA**

Your hygienist called me. She wanted to know if you're closing the practice.

*Pause.*

**DAVID**

What did you tell her?

**ANNA**

I said I didn't know. Because I don't. You don't tell me these things anymore.

**DAVID**

I'm not closing it. I'm just... cutting back.

**ANNA**

Cutting back.

**DAVID**

I need more flexibility. For appointments, emergencies—

**ANNA**

You're disappearing from there too. You're disappearing from everywhere except that phone.

*Silence.*

**ANNA**

When's the last time your father recognized you?

**DAVID**

He doesn't.

**ANNA**

I know. When was the last time?

*Pause.*

**DAVID**

Eighteen months ago. Maybe longer.

**ANNA**

And you still go whenever they call.

**DAVID**

He's still my father.

**ANNA**

No, David. He's not. Not anymore. And you know it.

*Silence. This is the truth neither of them has said out loud.*

**ANNA**

I'm not saying stop going. I'm saying... you're grieving someone who's still alive. And you won't let yourself feel it because you're too busy being available.

**DAVID**

What am I supposed to do? Stop answering the phone?

**ANNA**

I don't know. But you can't keep pretending this doesn't hurt.

*Long pause.*

**ANNA**

**ANNA**

Why won't you let yourself hate them?

**DAVID**

Who?

**ANNA**

Mark. Lisa. For leaving you with this.

**DAVID**

They're not leaving me with anything. Mark can't handle watching the decline. And Lisa has her family.

**ANNA**

Can't? Or won't?

**DAVID**

Can't. Not everyone can do what I can do.

**ANNA**

*(this lands)*

*That's the problem.*

**DAVID**

What is?

**ANNA**

That you can. So you do. And they don't have to.

*Silence.*

**DAVID**

Someone has to be there for them.

**ANNA**

I'm not saying stop. I'm saying... you're proud you're the one who can handle it. And that pride won't let you ask for help.

**DAVID**

I don't need help.

**ANNA**

I know. That's what I'm saying.

*Long pause. This has landed.*

**ANNA**

You're teaching our children that love looks like disappearance.

**DAVID**

I'm teaching them that showing up matters.

**ANNA**

What about showing up for us?

**DAVID**

*(no good answer)*

*I'm trying.*

*Silence. David has no answer. Anna waits. He still says nothing.*

**ANNA**

You're the youngest. You were never supposed to carry this alone. Mark's the oldest—this should be his. But somehow it's yours. And you won't even admit it's destroying you.

**DAVID**

I can handle it.

**ANNA**

I know you can. That's the problem.

*She leaves. David stands alone in the kitchen.*

*Blackout.*

## **SCENE 12 — SARAH WANTS FAIRNESS**

*Setting: Kitchen.*

*At rise: ANNA and DAVID. Anna is setting a boundary.*

**ANNA**

Wednesdays.



**DAVID**

What?

**ANNA**

Wednesdays. Home by eight pm. No phone. No leaving. Just here.

**DAVID**

Anna—

**ANNA**

One night a week. That's all I'm asking.

**DAVID**

What if something happens?

**ANNA**

Something always happens. Mark can handle it. Lisa can handle it. The facility staff can handle it.

**DAVID**

What about emergencies?

**ANNA**

Wednesday nights. You're here.

*Pause.*

**DAVID**

Okay.

**ANNA**

I need to hear you say it.

**DAVID**

I promise I'll be home every Wednesday by eight.

**ANNA**

I already told Mark. I called him this morning. I said Wednesdays you're not available.

**DAVID**

You told him?

**ANNA**

He laughed. He said 'we'll see how long that lasts.'

*David's face changes slightly. Anna sees it.*

**ANNA**

One night a week, David. That's all I'm asking.

**DAVID**

Okay.

*She doesn't believe him. But she nods. She has to try.*

*Blackout.*

### **SCENE 13 — SARAH WANTS ANGER**

*Setting: Car, night.*

*At rise: DAVID driving. SARAH in passenger seat. They've just left the facility after visiting Grandma.*

**SARAH**

You know what I remember about Grandpa?

**DAVID**

What?

**SARAH**

He used to do card tricks. He'd pull quarters from behind my ear. Make them disappear and reappear.

**DAVID**

Yeah. He was good at that.

**SARAH**

When did he stop?

**DAVID**

A long time ago.

**SARAH**

Do you think he remembers doing that?

**DAVID**

No.

**SARAH**

Do you think he remembers me?

*Long pause.*

**DAVID**

I don't think so.

**SARAH**

But you still come when the facility calls.

**DAVID**

Yes.

**SARAH**

Even though he doesn't know you're there.

**DAVID**

I'm there. That matters.

**SARAH**

To who?

*Silence. David has no answer. Sarah pulls out her phone. Shows him something.*

**SARAH**

Uncle Mark posted this today.

*David glances at it while driving. A throwback photo of their father. Younger. Smiling.*

**SARAH**

The caption says 'Missing you already, Dad.' People called him a good son. In the comments.

*Pause.*

**SARAH**

That's wrong, right?

**DAVID**

It's just a picture, Sarah.

**SARAH**

It's a lie. And everyone believes it.

**DAVID**

Sarah—

**SARAH**

Why don't you say something? Why don't you tell people the truth?

**DAVID**

Because it won't change anything.

**SARAH**

It would make me feel better.

*The conversation escalates.*

**SARAH**

I think you're choosing them over us.

*David pulls over. Stops the car. This is serious now.*

**DAVID**

They're dying.

**SARAH**

We're living. Doesn't that count?

*Long silence. The question hangs there. David can't answer. Sarah opens the car door.*

**DAVID**

Sarah—

**SARAH**

I'm walking. It's two blocks.

*She gets out. Starts walking toward the house. David sits alone in the driver's seat, engine running, watching his daughter walk away.*

*Blackout.*

## **SCENE 14 — WAITING**

*Setting: Facility conference room.*

*At rise: DAVID, LISA present. MARK on speakerphone. STAFF member with clipboard. Father's condition has worsened.*

**STAFF**

Your father's pneumonia has worsened significantly. We need to decide: hospital transfer for aggressive treatment, or comfort care here at the facility.

**MARK**

*(on phone)*

*What does Dad want?*

**DAVID**

He can't tell us.

**LISA**

Can we ask Mom?

**DAVID**

She thinks he's at work. Yesterday she asked when he's coming home for dinner.

*Silence on the phone. In the room.*

**STAFF**

We need a decision within the hour. His oxygen levels are dropping.

**MARK**

What do you think, David?

**DAVID**

*(to Staff)*

*If we transfer him to the hospital, what does that look like?*

**STAFF**

Emergency transport. Intubation in the ambulance. ICU admission. Broad-spectrum antibiotics. Possible ventilator.

*She pauses.*



**STAFF**

At his stage of dementia, the trauma of transport, the confusion of a new environment, the invasive procedures... it would be very difficult.

**LISA**

But it might save him?

**STAFF**

It might extend his life. For a time.

**DAVID**

How long?

**STAFF**

Days. Maybe weeks. It's impossible to say.

*Silence.*

**LISA**

What would he want?

**DAVID**

I don't know. He can't tell me.

**MARK**

You've been there more. You know him better right now. What's your read?

*Long pause. The weight of this decision.*

**DAVID**

Comfort care. Keep him here.

**LISA**

Are you sure?

**DAVID**

No.

*He signs the form. Lisa watches. Mark stays silent on the phone.*

**STAFF**

We'll keep him comfortable. We'll manage his pain. He won't be alone.

*She exits. Silence.*

**LISA**

Thank you for being here.

**DAVID**

Someone has to be.

**LISA**

It shouldn't always be you.

**DAVID**

But it is.

*Lisa stands. Touches his shoulder. Leaves. David sits alone. Phone still on. Mark still there, saying nothing.*

**MARK**

I should have been there.

**DAVID**

Yes.

*Mark hangs up. David sits with the signed form. Comfort care. No heroics. He's decided his father will die.*

**DAVID**

*(to himself, quietly)*

*He's been gone a long time. This is just... making it official.*

*Blackout.*

## **SCENE 15 — THE CALL**

*Setting: Home. Evening. Three days after the comfort care decision.*

*At rise: DAVID and ANNA. Dinner dishes on the table. Phone rings. David answers.*

**DAVID**

Hello.

*Pause. He listens. His face changes.*

**DAVID**

When?

*Listens.*

**DAVID**

Okay. Thank you.

*He hangs up. Sits. ANNA watches him.*

**ANNA**

What happened?

**DAVID**

Dad. Twenty minutes ago.

*Silence. ANNA reaches for him, but he's already picking up his phone.*

**DAVID**

I need to call Mark.

*He dials. ANNA sits beside him, listening to his side of the conversation.*

**DAVID**

Mark. Dad died. About twenty minutes ago.

*Pause. Mark speaking.*

**DAVID**

Peacefully. In his sleep. They said it was peaceful.

*Mark says something. David listens.*

**DAVID**

Yeah. At the facility.

*Mark says something urgent. Insistent.*

**DAVID**

**DAVID**

*(Pause)*

*What?*

*Mark repeats it. Urgent. David processes what's being asked.*

**DAVID**

How long will it take you to get there?

*Mark answers.*

**DAVID**

*(quiet, a beat—he sees it clearly)*

*Over an hour?*

*Mark confirms.*

**DAVID**

I'll wait with him.

*He hangs up. Sits for a moment. ANNA watches him.*

**ANNA**

What did he say?

**DAVID**

He needs to see him. Asked me to tell them not to move the body.

**ANNA**

See him?

**DAVID**

He wants to say goodbye. Needs me to wait until he gets there.

*Long pause. Anna processes this. The exact request.*

**ANNA**

When's the last time Mark visited?

**DAVID**

Thanksgiving. Three months ago.

*Silence.*

**ANNA**

And now he wants to see the body.

**DAVID**

*(simply—no judgment)*

*He needs to say goodbye. He needs that.*

**ANNA**

What about what you need?

**DAVID**

I've been saying goodbye. Every week for three years.

*Silence. This is the truth.*

**ANNA**

Did he ask how you are?

*David doesn't answer. He picks up his phone.*

**DAVID**

I need to call the facility.

*He dials. Anna watches him make the arrangements. He's calm. Efficient. Doing what needs to be done. Always doing what needs to be done.*

*Blackout.*

## **MOVEMENT IV — ISOLATION**

Focus: The weight doesn't end

## **SCENE 16 — AFTERMATH**

*Setting: Facility hallway outside Father's room.*

*At rise: DAVID sits outside Father's room. He's been here over an hour. Waiting for Mark. STAFF passes.*

**STAFF**

Your brother still coming?

**DAVID**

Yeah. Traffic.

**STAFF**

We really need to... we have procedures. Timelines.

**DAVID**



I know. He'll be here soon.

*She nods. Leaves. David checks phone. Text from MARK appears:*

**MARK**

*(text)*

*So sorry. Still 20 min. Traffic nightmare on 95.*

*David texts back:*

**DAVID**

*(text)*

*It's okay. They're waiting.*

*Time passes. David waits. This is performative—the audience feels the weight of waiting. Finally, MARK arrives. Rushed, distressed.*

**MARK**

God, I'm so sorry. The highway was completely—

**DAVID**

It's okay. He's in there.

**MARK**

Thank you for waiting. For... setting this up.

**DAVID**

Of course.

*Mark hesitates at the door.*

**MARK**

Have you seen him?

**DAVID**

Yeah.

**MARK**

How does he look?

**DAVID**

Peaceful.

*Mark takes a breath. Preparing himself.*

**MARK**

Would you... come in with me?

**DAVID**

If you want.

**MARK**

I don't think I can do this alone.

*Pause. David stands. They go in together.*

*Father's body on the bed, covered with a white sheet. Mark approaches slowly. Stops. Breaks down crying.*

**MARK**

I should have been here more.

*David says nothing.*

**MARK**

I always thought I had more time. I kept thinking next week, next month, when this project is done...

*He looks at David.*

**MARK**

You were here. Whenever they called. And I...

*He can't finish. Can't say what he should say.*

**DAVID**

It's okay.

**MARK**

No it's not.

*Silence. They stand with Father's body. Mark crying. David not crying. David already cried. Months ago. Years ago, maybe.*

**MARK**

He doesn't even look like Dad anymore.

**DAVID**

He hasn't looked like Dad for three years.

*Silence. Mark realizes—David has been visiting this stranger, this body that used to be their father, for years. Whenever called. Alone.*

**MARK**

Thank you for taking care of him.

**DAVID**

Yeah.

*They stay longer. Mark needs this. David has already had his goodbye—many goodbyes, actually. Finally, Mark is ready. They leave together.*

*Blackout.*

## **SCENE 17 — IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH**

*Setting: Facility quiet room.*

*At rise: After viewing the body. MARK, LISA, and DAVID together.*

**MARK**

I'm glad I got to see him.

*David nods.*

**LISA**

Me too. I think it helps. With closure.

*Pause.*

**DAVID**

I watched him disappear. For three years. You saw him a few times a year. It's not the same.

*Uncomfortable silence. This is the first time David has said it out loud.*

**MARK**

David, we all—

**DAVID**

I'm not blaming you. But it's true.

**LISA**

No. You should have.

*Long silence. No one knows what to say.*

**MARK**

We should talk about arrangements. Funeral home, service, burial plot...

**DAVID**

I'll handle it.

**MARK**

We can help—

**DAVID**

I'll handle it.

*Lisa and Mark exchange a look. They don't push. They never push.*

*Blackout.*

## **SCENE 18 — ALONE WITH MOM**

*Setting: Mother's room. Two weeks after Father's death.*

*At rise: DAVID visits. MOTHER in her chair. Confused.*

**MOTHER**

Where's your father?

**DAVID**

Mom... Dad died. Two weeks ago.

**MOTHER**

*(Blank)*

*He's at the office.*

**DAVID**

No. He passed away.

**MOTHER**

Don't be ridiculous.

*Pause. David has had this conversation before. Will have it again.*

**DAVID**

Okay.

*She looks at him closely. Trying to place him.*

**MOTHER**

Do I know you?

**DAVID**

I'm David. Your son.

**MOTHER**

David's at school.

*Long silence. Then, suddenly, she's lucid. Clear. Sharp.*

**MOTHER**

He's really gone?

**DAVID**

Yes.

**MOTHER**

*(Clear, sharp, cruel)*

*Why did you let him die?*

**DAVID**

Mom—

**MOTHER**

You should have done more. You should have saved him.

*Beat. Then the clarity vanishes. Back to confusion.*

**MOTHER**

When is your father coming home?

**DAVID**

I don't know, Mom.

**MOTHER**

Tell him I'm waiting.

*David sits with her. Says nothing. She doesn't recognize him anymore. But he's still here.*

*Blackout.*



## SCENE 19 — THE BREAKING POINT

*Setting: Kitchen.*

*At rise: ANNA and DAVID. Anna has reached her limit.*

**ANNA**

Lisa called yesterday. She wanted your schedule. So she could 'coordinate better.'

*Pause.*

**ANNA**

She didn't ask for mine. Or Mark's. Just yours.

**DAVID**

She's trying to help.

**ANNA**

She's trying to use you more efficiently.

*Long pause.*

**ANNA**

**ANNA**

Do you know what Lisa said to me last week? She said 'We're so lucky David's practice is slow right now.'

*Silence.*

**ANNA**

Your practice isn't slow. It's bleeding patients. They can't rely on you anymore. And Lisa thinks you're just... available. She doesn't even know what it's costing you.

*David says nothing.*

**ANNA**

How many patients did you reschedule this week?

**DAVID**

Twelve.

**ANNA**

Twelve. And last week?

**DAVID**

Anna, I—

**ANNA**

Your practice is eroding, David. Not closed, not slow—eroding. Because you're never fully there. You're keeping it open, but barely.

*David says nothing.*

**ANNA**

Mark kept his career. Lisa kept hers. You're keeping yours. But you're carrying this alone.

*Pause.*

**ANNA**

They're at arm's length. You're not.

**DAVID**

They do what they can.

**ANNA**

And you do the rest. Because you can.

*Silence.*

**ANNA**

You know what kills me? You're proud of it. You'd do it all again.

**DAVID**

*(defensive—she's hit truth)*

*What's wrong with doing what's right?*

**ANNA**

Nothing. Until it destroys you.

*Long silence.*

**ANNA**

I can't watch you do this anymore.

**ANNA**

If you're not here Wednesday, I'm taking Sarah and we're going to my sister's for the weekend. And maybe longer.

**DAVID**

Anna—

**ANNA**

I mean it.

*She leaves. David stands alone in the kitchen.*

*Blackout.*

## **SCENE 20 — THE INHERITANCE**

*Setting: Kitchen.*

*At rise: DAVID and SARAH. A conversation about what she's learned.*

**SARAH**

Uncle Mark was here yesterday when you were at the facility. He stayed two hours with Grandma.

**DAVID**

That's good.

**SARAH**

He cried a lot. He kept saying he should have visited Grandpa more.

*Pause.*

**SARAH**

Grandma asked him why he never came. He said he was busy.

**DAVID**

Sarah—

**SARAH**

She told him 'David always came.' Then she forgot who Uncle Mark was.

*Long pause.*

**SARAH**

He wanted to see Grandpa's body but he didn't want to see Grandpa.

**DAVID**

It's complicated.

**SARAH**

No it's not. It's simple. You showed up. He didn't.

*Beat.*

**SARAH**

He loves the idea of being a good son. You actually were one.

**DAVID**

He's your uncle. He loves—

**SARAH**

There's a difference.

*Pause.*

**SARAH**

And Uncle Mark is the oldest. Shouldn't he have been the one?

**SARAH**

I don't want what you're teaching me.

**DAVID**

What am I teaching you?

**SARAH**

That the people who do the most get the least credit. That love means erasing yourself.  
That being available all the time makes you invisible.

*Long silence.*

**SARAH**

I don't want to inherit that.

*She leaves. David sits alone.*

*Blackout.*

## **SCENE 21 — THE QUESTION**

*Setting: Car, night.*

*At rise: DAVID and SARAH. Driving home from facility.*

**SARAH**

Was it worth it? Being there?

**DAVID**

I don't know yet.

**SARAH**

Did Grandpa ever know you were there?

**DAVID**

At the end? No.

**SARAH**

Then why did you keep going?

*Long pause.*

**DAVID**

Because I knew. And I needed to know I did everything I could. Even if he didn't.

**SARAH**

That sounds lonely.

**DAVID**

It was.

*They drive in silence.*

**SARAH**

I hope I never love anyone that much.

*David glances at her. She's staring out the window. He wants to tell her something—that love shouldn't look like this, that she deserves better, that he's sorry. But he doesn't know how.*

*Blackout.*



## SCENE 22 — GRATITUDE

*Setting: Facility cafeteria.*

*At rise: DAVID and LISA. Coffee after visiting Mother.*

**LISA**

We couldn't have done this without you. You were amazing.

**DAVID**

I know.

*(LISA is shocked—he's never said this before)*

**LISA**

You make it sound like we had a choice.

**DAVID**

You did. You made it. Mark pays all the bills—that's his contribution. You visit sometimes—that's yours. I do everything else. Those were the choices.

**LISA**

That's not fair—

**DAVID**

You're right. It's not.

*(beat)*

*Your gratitude doesn't give me back the time.*

*Silence. Lisa doesn't know what to say.*

**LISA**

I promise I'll do better with Mom.

**DAVID**

I'll believe it when I see it.

*Lisa stands. Leaves. David sits alone with cold coffee.*

*Blackout.*

## **SCENE 23 — FINAL IMAGE**

*Setting: Kitchen. Wednesday night, 7:45 PM.*

*At rise: ANNA at the table. SARAH doing homework. The door opens. DAVID enters. He's home. On Wednesday. At 7:45.*

**ANNA**

You're home.

**DAVID**

I'm home.

**ANNA**

How was your day?

**DAVID**

Long.

**ANNA**

Your mom?

**DAVID**

She asked about Dad again. I told her. She forgot five minutes later.

**ANNA**

How much longer?

**DAVID**

I don't know.

*Pause.*

**ANNA**

You're home.

**DAVID**

I'm home.

*They sit together. SARAH looks up from her homework, sees her father. Goes back to her work.*

*Light holds them. David reaches for the overhead light switch. Turns it off. Only a small lamp remains. They stay. Together. In the quiet.*

*Outside, somewhere, a phone might be ringing. It might be the facility. It might be Mark or Lisa. It might be important.*

*David's phone is on the counter. He can see it light up. He doesn't move to answer it.*

*They sit. Wednesday. Home. Together.*

*The weight doesn't end. But for this moment, for this one night, he's here.*

*Blackout.*

**END OF PLAY**