

small things

© 2015 Tom Smith
(575) 635-5194
tom@tomsmithplaywright.com

CHARACTERS

Patricia	68
Halley	40s, her daughter
Stephanie	40s, her daughter

TIME/PLACE

Today

A small condominium in Santa Fe, New Mexico

small things

A condominium in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Halley on the phone, pacing angrily. Her sister, Stephanie, looks out a window.

HALLEY

I understand that. But a 300-dollar change fee is outrageous! This! This is exactly why you're losing customers! No, no, you didn't answer my question. As a matter of fact— You know what? Forget it! We're done.

(Hangs up.)

STEPHANIE

300 dollars?

HALLEY

Each!

STEPHANIE

Make Mom pay.

HALLEY

Yeah, like she has that kind of money. I don't even want to go anymore. She had to leave yesterday? She couldn't have waited?

STEPHANIE

The point is: she shouldn't have gone at all. It's a miracle she even made it.

HALLEY

What would she have done if her car broke down? Trapped in the desert in hundred-degree heat? With Dad?

STEPHANIE

Maybe we should have put them both in a home.

HALLEY

God, Steph!

STEPHANIE

Don't be mad at me. She's your responsibility.

HALLEY

I thought I was getting the easier of the two. What's taking her so long? She dropped Dad off 20 minutes ago.

STEPHANIE

She probably stopped to get something to drink.

HALLEY

Because she knows we're waiting for her.

STEPHANIE

Why do we spend more time worrying about Mom and Dad than we do our own families?

HALLEY

MJ's pissed. I was supposed to take her to Albuquerque yesterday to pick up stuff for her dorm room.

STEPHANIE

Come see what Daniella has. She didn't use anything we bought her.

HALLEY

Oh no; nothing second-hand for "Princess" MJ. If it was vintage, maybe.

STEPHANIE

The difference being...?

HALLEY

Price.

STEPHANIE

Could you imagine Mom buying us even half the things we buy our kids?

HALLEY

Oh, I know! I had nothing compared to MJ. When I went off to college all I had was that god-awful quilt Mom made from my old sweatshirts.

STEPHANIE

Dad was never cheap like that.

HALLEY

That's why she never let him have the checkbook. She just needs a tight reign over everything.

(Patricia enters with a duffle bag, her purse, and a very large iced tea. She says nothing. She sets down her tea and puts her bags away, exiting through the kitchen.)

STEPHANIE

Mom?

(Stephanie and Halley wait patiently, smiling about Patricia's unwillingness to address them. Finally:)

You're just going to ignore us?

PATRICIA (off)

I'm in the bathroom.

STEPHANIE

We'll wait.

(In a low voice.)

Like she didn't go when she dropped Dad off.

HALLEY

Don't start attacking her the second she comes in. Let her tell us why she did it first.

STEPHANIE

Screw that! I've waited a lifetime for this moment.

HALLEY

I'm serious, Steph!

STEPHANIE

So am I! Do you know how many yelled at me when I did something I wasn't supposed to?

(Beat.)

Ok, fine. But back me up on this.

HALLEY

I will.

STEPHANIE

I mean it. If you start backtracking, the way you did when she didn't want Dad to go into care...

HALLEY

We're on the same side.

(They continue to wait.)

STEPHANIE

Ten bucks she stays in there until we leave.

HALLEY

(Calling to Patricia.)

Is everything ok in there?

PATRICIA (off)

(Annoyed.)
I'll be right out!
(Muttering.)
Jeez Louise!

STEPHANIE

Maybe next time you should order a human-sized iced tea.
(Stephanie and Halley break into giggles over this.)
This will be the longest pee in the world. Wait and see.

(Another long moment passes in silence, which breaks them into another fit of giggles. Another moment then Patricia enters.)

PATRICIA

I can't even pee?
(Sits down.)

STEPHANIE

How was your trip to Las Cruces?

PATRICIA

Fine.

STEPHANIE

Pretty hot down there.
(Patricia says nothing. A stand-off. Finally:)
You just decided to pick Dad up and take him away for a little get-away?

(Patricia doesn't reply.)

HALLEY

We're going to miss your reunion.

PATRICIA

We were supposed to be back last night.

STEPHANIE

You were going to drive down to Cruces, do whatever it was you did there, and then drive back the same day?

PATRICIA

That was the plan.

STEPHANIE

But it took longer than you thought. How long did the four-hour drive down take you?

PATRICIA

Six and a half.

HALLEY

Jesus!

PATRICIA

We had to keep pulling over to stretch our legs.

STEPHANIE

Getting Dad to sit still is harder than you thought, hunh?

HALLEY

Why didn't you tell us you were going?

PATRICIA

I don't have to tell you girls everything.

STEPHANIE

Yes, you do! This wasn't driving an hour to Albuquerque. You drove from one freaking end of the state to the other! It's a miracle your piece-of-crap car even made it.

PATRICIA

I just got new tires and a belt change.

STEPHANIE

And to take Dad without telling anyone!

PATRICIA

I told Diane.

HALLEY

Who's she?

PATRICIA

Your father's new day nurse.

STEPHANIE

Which you'd know, if you ever went to see him.

(Halley starts to rebuke this but Stephanie barrels on. To Patricia.)

You told Diane you were taking him here.
He could have wandered off, Mom. Dad could have gotten physical again. What were you going to do then?

PATRICIA

But he didn't.

STEPHANIE

Well, thank God for that!

HALLEY

Do you know what this has been like for Steph and me? You don't even call us until after you're—

PATRICIA

You would have stopped me!

STEPHANIE

Damned right we would've!

HALLEY

You should have at least asked one of us to go with you.

PATRICIA

You're both busy.

HALLEY

Then MJ.

STEPHANIE

Or Michael. He's just sitting on his ass all summer playing video games anyway. But you don't drive across state on your own!

HALLEY

Even if you didn't have Dad with you, you shouldn't take off like that without telling us.

PATRICIA

Don't scold me. I can take care of myself.

STEPHANIE

Oh, really? Because Halley's over here cleaning your house every week.

PATRICIA

I didn't ask her to! She's the one who just started doing it.

HALLEY

Oh, so it was all my idea?

PATRICIA

Don't be mad! I appreciate it, but I didn't ask you to.

STEPHANIE

So why Las Cruces?

You may as well tell us. We already know.

PATRICIA

No, you don't.

STEPHANIE

You didn't take Dad to Desert Peaks? To see Carol?

(Patricia is surprised by this. She rises as if to leave.)

I get that you're pissed they moved Dad from Assisted to Nursing. But he didn't stop taking care of himself because of Carol. It was happening regardless.

(Patricia says nothing.)

HALLEY

You thought bringing them together would make things better, didn't you? Make him more like he was before. But it didn't.

PATRICIA

...No.

HALLEY

Did he remember her at all?

PATRICIA

It's like with me. He remembers knowing her, but he doesn't know her.

HALLEY

Carol's being moved is not the reason he got worse, Mom.

PATRICIA

How could I be sure? And what kind of person would I be if I didn't at least try?

HALLEY

You'd still be an incredible wife.

PATRICIA

Would I? Am I?

HALLEY

Of course! No one's done more for him than—

PATRICIA

His wife, I mean?

(Stephanie and Halley are startled by this.)

How did you two know where Carol's family moved her?

(This time, neither Stephanie nor Halley say anything.)

How did you know?

STEPHANIE

Her niece came in for a cleaning and recognized me from the Memory Unit.

PATRICIA

And you didn't tell me?

STEPHANIE

Why would we?

PATRICIA

So I could bring your father there sooner.

HALLEY

Mom, this woman slept with your husband. Dad fell in love with her.

PATRICIA

Because she made him happy!

STEPHANIE

No, because he couldn't remember that he was married! You still don't get that.

PATRICIA

I get it. I'm living it.

HALLEY

Then why would you ever—

PATRICIA

I know your father loved me. When he could.

And this isn't how things were supposed to be. But I've learned to let go of "supposed to." I've learned to let go of a lot of things—small things—every day.

Your father remembering what kind of wine we drink. How to work the remote.

I've learned to let go of his knowing how to calculate a tip, or what our zip code is.

My name,

who I am,

our life together.

And these things, I know they seem so big to you. Monumental. But to me, they're small. I've had to make them small. They're stars in the sky: the darker it gets, the more I see.

But from where I am, every star is exactly the same size. Every single one.

HALLEY

Mom, Dad's still your husband even if he doesn't know you're his wife.

STEPHANIE

What would you have done if Dad and Carol had recognized each other? If they wanted to be together again?

PATRICIA

...Carol did remember your father.

STEPHANIE

She did?

(Patricia nods.)

But he didn't remember her?

(Patricia shakes her head.)

That's good! For him, I mean. For her—

(Stops herself as she realizes what she's saying.)

HALLEY

You have to stop all this, Mom. Carol's family moved her away to keep Dad and her apart. Everyone agreed that the relationship should never have happened. You agreed.

PATRICIA

I know.

HALLEY

Do you?

(Patricia nods.)

STEPHANIE

And do you believe that?

(Patricia doesn't answer.)

HALLEY

Do you believe it, Mom?

(Patricia slowly exits through the kitchen to her room. Halley and Stephanie look at each other for a long moment, unsure what to say, as an overwhelming amount of tiny stars faintly begin to fill the room.)

END OF PLAY