

After

By Kira Gaudynski

CHARACTERS

Mel: Early to mid 30's. Put together. Considers herself to be very traditional. A hard working healthcare professional. Caring.

Joni: Early to mid 20's. Mel's sister. Believes she's the black sheep of the family. Independent and somewhat jaded.

SETTING

Mel and Joni's family summer cottage located near their childhood home in Pennsylvania.

TIME

Winter 2020

NOTES

This play should take place after the initial crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic when things start to return to "normal" but before a vaccine is on the open market. If in the future, winter 2020 doesn't line up with this timeline the play should be set at whatever date seems fit as long as it's in a colder month.

A / indicates when the next line should be interjected.

Space between lines or words should be honored with the appropriate beats applicable to the moment.

Lack of final punctuation at the end of a line means that the thought is unfinished and that next line should follow directly.

Scene 1

Lights up on the front of a rustic looking cabin. We see a large two-part porch as the downstage face of the house. The SR side of the porch is enclosed to create a "three season" sunroom that takes up the majority of the porch. It contains a daybed, and a seating area with a wicker couch a coffee table and a chair. The back wall of sunroom is the siding of the house and is home to windows that look into the house. Adjacent to the SR side of the porch there's a small out door shed. A new sapling tree sits in a wheelbarrow near the shed. The main entrance to the house proper is center stage with the divide between the enclosed porch and the open-air porch is just left of it. Stairs lead up to the porch from a gravel drive way on the SL side.

Joni sits huddled on the front steps with a backpack. She is impatient and cold. Maybe she checks her phone. Maybe she tries to search for service. Maybe she smokes.

We hear the sound of a car on gravel. Then it stops. The engine cuts out. And a car door opens then closes. Footsteps approach.

Joni You're late

Mel enters from the driveway carrying an overnight bag and an expensive looking purse.

Mel I know I'm / sorry

Joni It's fucking freezing

Mel Why didn't you go inside?

Joni I gave the key back when I moved

Mel Oh / what about the spare

Joni The spare's not there

Mel That's odd

Joni If it was here I wouldn't be out here in the cold waiting for you

Mel Ok ok I've got it here

Mel holds out her keys. Joni impatient grabs them, unlocks the door, and goes inside. Mel now alone on the porch pauses to admire the view, loosing herself in her memories.

We hear Joni from off stage.

Joni Dammit

Mel What is it

Joni The furnace is broken

Mel There's a space heater in the hall closet.

Joni Yah got it

Mel I'll have to call about the furnace in the morning. Here bring it out here

Joni reenters pushing an old somewhat dangerous looking space heater out onto the enclosed porch.

Joni This thing barely looks like it'll heat a closet let alone heat a whole cabin

Mel It works it should be able to heat the porch at least

Joni If it doesn't burn us alive

Mel Just plug it in.

Mel brings in her bags while Joni fiddles with the space heater. Once they both settle, still in their coats.

Joni So

Do you have it? Her Can I see her?

Mel No

Joni What

Mel I wasn't able / to get

Joni What do you mean no

Mel I couldn't get / there

Joni So you just came without / it her

Mel Yes

Joni Well that's fucking great you had one job / to do

Mel Don't lecture me about responsibility / I'm not

Joni Oh back to this age old / argument

Mel No

Joni God you're like a broken record

Mel Don't do this / Joni

Joni Despite what you might think Melanie Rose you're not actually my mother

Mel Wow

Paul is bringing it her tomorrow

Joni Tomorrow

Mel Yes he's going there when they open in the morning and is driving her up here afterwards

Joni Great

Mel Did the sapling / arrive?

Joni Yes it came this afternoon right when I got here at like three o'clock like you told / me

Mel I'm sorry I was late

Joni It's by the shed.

Mel Good

Joni Don't worry the bag of soil's there too I managed to bring the one thing / I was supposed

Mel Joan Marie

They freeze in the tension. After a bit of a stare down, Joni surrenders and retreats to the space heater to warm up. Mel takes a bunch of disinfecting cleaning supplies out of one of her bags. She puts on gloves and starts to hit every surface with a wipe.

Joni You don't have / to

Mel There were renters in here last week

Joni I know but it doesn't / matter

Mel Just to be sure

Joni Really it's a waste of time

Mel You're susceptible and I want you to be comfortable staying here

Joni You really don't have to

Mel It's just to be sure. Really I don't mind, I've gotten quite good at it actually lots of practice at home after my shifts at the clinic, turns out though it was for nothing Paul was an asymptomatic carrier and had it all / along

Joni It's fine

Mel I'm almost done

Joni Mel stop. I'm immune.

Mel stops. She turns to face Joni.

Mel What

Joni I had it

Mel What? When? Why didn't you tell me?

Joni I didn't want to worry you

Mel When did you have it?

Joni March

Mel March

Joni Yeah

Mel slumps down onto the couch.

Mel You should have told me.

Joni I'm sorry

Mel You got it right away

Joni Yeah when my bar closed I went to work at a co-op grocery store in my neighborhood. I caught it maybe two weeks later and had to quit. I really was ok like a bad cold that made me very tired for a few weeks and I knew you were dealing with it all day at work and I was so far away I didn't want to bother you...

Are you mad?

Mel Yeah I'm mad

Joni Of course you are

Mel Just gimme two seconds to be mad ok

Joni Fine

You want me to set the timer like Mom used to?

Mel Come on

Joni What! It used to work for me

Mel look skeptical.

Fine. If you're gonna be mad all night I'll just go

She turns to leave.

Mel Fine.

Joni stops.

Get the timer

Joni goes into the house and returns a moment later with an old fashioned egg timer. She hands it Mel.

Joni 3 minutes

Mel Yeah yeah

Joni I'll leave you to self-destruct in peace

Mel shoots a glare at Joni. Joni picks up her bag and heads inside. Mel turns the dial on the timer. Over the next few minutes Mel works out her anger, disappointment, and sadness however she sees fit. Maybe she paces, maybe she screams into a couch cushion, maybe she continues scrubbing the room anyway, or maybe she just holds her head in her hands.

Less than 3 minutes later Joni enters with two glasses of a mixed drink garnished with lime.

Joni Thought this might help

Mel What is that?

Joni Was supposed to be a mojito but they didn't have any mint

Mel Actually...

She goes over to her bag and pulls out a package of mint sprigs.

I had a feeling we'd be needing some

Joni takes the mint and starts to add it to the drinks.

She sure loved mojitos on the porch

Joni She really did. Though it's too fuckin cold. She would have never gone for this

Mel Haha no she wouldn't have

Joni hands Mel the finished drink. She sips.

Mel Oh this is really good

Joni What can I say just because I'm not a bartender anymore doesn't mean I've lost my knack

Mel I thought you were a bar back

Joni Does it taste like a bar back made that drink?

Mel No it doesn't

They laugh. The egg timer goes off. They both jump a little and laugh some more.

Joni See you didn't even need the whole 3 minutes.

Mel I'm sorry.

Joni Me too.

Joni sits on the couch next to Mel. They sip their drinks.

Remember that fall before the official diagnosis? When it was so god awful hot that September so Mom pulled me out of school to come up here for a week and you came up with Paul on your fall break

Mel The Summer That Never Ended she called it

Joni Yah. You two were always off on your own so it was just me and Mom here for most of it

Mel Yeah

Joni That's when she taught me her mojito recipe

Mel You were fifteen!

Joni So what

Mel She shouldn't have been giving you alcohol

Joni Well then I'll just take that right back then

Joni reaches for Mel's drink.

Mel Bup bup bup!

Mel pulls hers away. Joni still goes after it. In an effort to not give it up Mel finishes her drink. She hands her empty glass to Joni.

I'd like another please

Joni But I thought you disapproved / of my mojito upbringing

Mel Well you are the keeper of the secret mojito recipe so who am I to stand in your way

Joni Good then

Joni takes the glass and heads inside to make another round. A moment of quiet.

Mel Actually I wanted to talk to you about something

Joni This should be good

Mel Just hear me out ok

Joni Come on we were just having a nice moment

Joni reenters with fresh drinks. She hands one to Mel.

Mel I think you should move back home

Joni Not this again

Mel I'm serious I'd like you to consider it

Joni We've been over this. No.

Mel I think you should move back here actually

Joni Oh even better! That's definitely not / gonna happen

Mel Think about it Joni! This house is just empty it has a lot of potential plus all your design gigs have been freelance anyway so you could work remotely

Joni From the middle of nowhere Pennsylvania?

Mel Yes

Joni You want me to leave my life in California a life I've worked very hard to create no thanks to you so I can move back into our childhood summer cottage

Mel I think it'd be great for you!

Joni No you think it'd be great for *you*

Mel I mean yes I would like it if you weren't so far away

Joni That doesn't mean I'm gonna move here to suit your needs

Mel A lot's changed over this past year I'd just feel better if you were closer you know if something were to happen you wouldn't be alone we could be with family. And now that Mom's gone

Joni You're right. Mom's gone. So why don't you come to California then if you claim you want us to be closer?

Mel I don't think / that's

Joni You've never even been to visit

Mel Please Joni. It's just you and I now. How can we be a family if you're completely disengaged

Joni You don't get to do this / Mel

Mel Do what

Joni Oh my god. Is Paul even picking her up tomorrow?

Or is that just another lie? Did you leave her ashes at home so you could set this whole thing up?

You're unbelievable

Mel You didn't leave me much of a choice

Joni I can't believe you concocted this whole scheme to derail our plans so that I'd be forced to spend the night here, all so you can guilt me into going along with your plans for "the family"

Mel That's right. I had to scheme up this whole plan. You thought you'd just be in and out. Spread your dead mother's ashes, plant a tree real quick, breeze through some small talk with your only living family member and just be on your way all before dinner right?

Joni Well that certainly sounds more appealing / than this

Mel What else was I supposed to do Joni?

Joni I don't know not fucking lie to me

Mel You never would have stayed

Joni You don't know that

Mel I think I do

Joni You can't just trap me here because *you're* unhappy in your life and you're too chicken shit to do anything about it

Mel That's not what / I

Joni No that's exactly what you do. You stay just put digging yourself deeper into the shit that is your life because you're scared to branch out or I don't know too afraid to ask for help so you just cling to it all like it's a lifeboat that will save you from the reality you've created

Mel Well it's a hell of a lot better than always running away from your problems

Joni There's a difference between running away and running towards

Mel Don't give me that bullshit. You ran away Joni. When things got rough you ran far away

Joni No Mel. I was unhappy so I fucking did something about it. That crap community college wasn't doing shit for me, and my sister wouldn't get off my back / so I moved out

Mel I was just trying to take care of you

Joni That's right you couldn't wait to step in and play Mommy

Mel You were still in high school Mom couldn't handle it what else was I was I supposed to do

Joni Just stop! Stop trying to be Mom

Mel That's not fair

Joni Yeah well neither is our mom losing her fucking mind

Mel You're right. But neither is her daughter abandoning her when things got tough

Joni Daughters

Mel What?

Joni Daughters. Multiple

Mel No I didn't /

Joni What does it matter if I “abandoned her” by moving to California, you abandoned her from right inside the same house

Mel I didn’t abandon her

Joni Sure. You just stepped right in and took over her place instead of helping her

Mel No I was here Joni. I’ve been here

Joni Well she still died alone

Mel You know I couldn’t go see her no one could

Joni I know

Mel It’s no ones fault

Joni I know

Mel goes to Joni to try and comfort her.

Mel It’s not fair but that doesn’t / mean

Joni Just stop!

Joni pulls away.

Can’t you hurry up and have your own family so you can hover-parent them!

Everything stops. Mel looks sick.

Mel?

Mel Paul doesn’t want kids

Joni Jesus But he’s a teacher

Mel I know that’s why he says he doesn’t want to

Joni Well have you talked to him / about it

Mel Of course we’ve talked about it

Joni Ok

I'm sorry / I

Mel I'm tired lets just

Joni Yeah ok

Mel You always did have a way of wearing me down

Joni Mel

Mel I just need to sleep. Do you mind if I take the daybed

Joni Sure

Mel We can talk more in the morning

Joni Yeah

They get ready for bed in silence. Joni on the couch, Mel in the daybed. They turn out the lights. After a moment.

Mel It still smells like her

Joni I miss her

Mel Me too

Joni Goodnight

Mel Night

Blackout

Scene 2

Lights up. It is morning. The porch has been tidied except for the remnants of coffee and breakfast on the coffee table. The sapling in the wheelbarrow is no longer on stage.

Mel enters from the driveway and heads up to the porch. Joni trails behind her carrying a bag of soil. She crosses to the shed and deposits it there. Mel cleans up breakfast from the porch and reenters with two mugs of coffee. They meet on the steps of the porch. Mel hands Joni a mug.

Joni Where did Paul go?

Mel He went into town to give us some space

They sit. Sipping their coffees.

Joni I wanted to

Mel Don't

Joni No I just

She digs in her pockets and pulls out two small jars filled with soil.

Here

Mel Is that?

Joni Kind of. It's soil from the planting

Mel takes a jar.

You know it's natural for our lives to take us farther away but that doesn't mean we forget

Mel I know

Joni I'm not going to move back

Mel Right

Joni But I would like to come up for 4th of July you know like we used to growing up

Mel That'd be nice

Joni I want to see how her tree has grown

I could visit before then too

Mel I'd like that

Joni Sure

A beat. Mel scootches closer and wraps her arm around Joni. Joni leans her head on Mel.

You should talk to Paul

Mel I know

Joni No I mean really tell him how you feel

Mel I don't know if it / would change

Joni Mel that man would do anything for you

Mel Really?

Joni One hundred percent. You just have to give him the chance to.

Mel Ok.

Mel thinks a moment. Then digs in her pocket and pulls out her car keys.

Will you drive my car back to Philly?

Joni What about you?

Mel I'm gonna ride back with Paul. You know... talk

Joni Wow I didn't think you'd actually act that fast

Mel Don't jinx it

Joni takes the keys.

Joni Ok

They look out toward the tree.

Mel Is that?

Joni Oh my god. Is that a turkey?

Mel Yeah I think so

Joni Have you ever seen wild turkeys up here?

Mel Not that I can remember

Joni Wow. Must have showed up just for Mom

Mel Well. She always did like thanksgiving turkey best of all

Joni I think that was more about the stuffing

They laugh looking out at the turkey.

Joni Oh! Did it just?

Mel Take a massive shit at the base of mom's tree?

Joni That's what it looks like

They start to giggle. It grows into a bigger laugh. Once the laughing dies down Mel holds up her mug to do a cheers. Joni clinks her mug. The both sip.

Blackout.

Fin