

## THE FOSSIL RECORD

By Lisa Hall

*For production permission or to read the full script, please contact lisahall3107@gmail.com*

*The situation of this play is loosely based on media coverage of similar circumstances all over the world, For example: Bernadette Quirk in St. Helens, England; Megan Huntsman in Pleasant Grove, Utah; Dominique Cottrez of Douai, France; and Emi Wakabayashi of Yawatahama, Japan. However, the characters and details are fictitious.*

*Although some characters in this play are related by blood, there is no reason (creative or genetic) that they must all share the same race or ethnic background. There are also no practical requirements in the script that necessitate able bodied performers.*

MARGARET: The fragile matriarch of the family. Female identifying, 50s.

LAURIE: Margaret's oldest child. Female identifying or non-binary, late 30s.

KIM: Margaret's younger child. Female identifying, 30s.

ANDREW: Kim's child. Male identifying or non-binary, about 17.

RYAN: Kim's husband, Andrew's stepfather. Male identifying, 30s.

ELISE: Laurie's partner. Female identifying or non-binary, 20s.

ACT I: Margaret's home

ACT II: Elise's apartment

## ACT I: SCENE 1

*Margaret's home. Late afternoon, fall or winter. Before the Act begins the following text (from "The Penitent" by Millay) is projected onto the stage:*

*I had a little Sorrow,  
Born of a little Sin,  
I found a room all damp with gloom  
And shut us all within;  
And, "Little Sorrow, weep," said I,  
"And, Little Sin, pray God to die,  
And I upon the floor will lie  
And think how bad I've been!"*

*The space is oriented in the round. It is completely cluttered and hoarded with small furniture items, every one of them covered with small items: pictures, candlesticks, anything domestic. There are a few pathways that allow actors to move around. The setting is not naturalistic, it's more about a feeling. The "ceiling" of the playing area is hung with a collection of glassware.*

MARGARET. *(Limping through the space. There's an open suitcase on a surface)* Laurie? Where are you?

LAURIE. Coming -

MARGARET. - you're packing?

LAURIE. We talked/ about this -

MARGARET. I just didn't realize you meant -

LAURIE. I know.

MARGARET. There's a lot left to do here.

LAURIE. Not that much.

MARGARET. I have a list with/ a million things

LAURIE. I know.

MARGARET. It will take at least another week to get it/ all done.

LAURIE. It won't take that long. Would you please sit down? You're making me nervous.

MARGARET. I'm fine.

LAURIE. If you fall/ I'll have to

MARGARET. Fine.

*MARGARET sits, LAURIE keeps packing, then stops and sits as well.*

LAURIE. If you fall it'll set back your recovery.

MARGARET. And you don't want to be stuck here forever with an old fart of a mother who has a bad attitude and a failing mind.

LAURIE. You don't have a failing mind.

MARGARET. But the rest is true?

LAURIE. *(They laugh)* The rest is true. I'm just getting a start on the packing. Don't worry.

MARGARET. Don't start in on it - in a week or two I'll help you - I'll be well enough to do some laundry.

LAURIE. I have to start - my stuff is all over the house.

MARGARET. You spread out.

LAURIE. It will take forever.

MARGARET. Good.

LAURIE. But not a week.

MARGARET. How can you hit the ground running when you get home with no clean clothes?

LAURIE. Because I'm disgusting. I'll be fine.

MARGARET. Well, look. You need to come help me because I tried to find those bank papers you mentioned and I can't.

LAURIE. Tell me where to look and I'll find them -

MARGARET. I didn't say they can't be found ever - you just need to give me time to get organized -

LAURIE. No no no - no getting organized. That could take a decade.

MARGARET. Watch it -

LAURIE. If I leave the packing alone will you sit down at the table and go over the accounts with me?

MARGARET. Yes. After dinner.

LAURIE. Now.

MARGARET. You're rushing me.

LAURIE. (*Gently*) We've been gearing up to this for six weeks.

MARGARET. Not that you're counting.

LAURIE. Not that I'm counting. It's time to deal with your accounts, it's just reality and I can't be here long term to manage all that.

MARGARET. "Reality is something you rise above."

LAURIE. No - reality is - who said that?

MARGARET. Liza Minnelli.

LAURIE. Don't quote Liza Minnelli at me again. Table, now. Bring your reading glasses.

MARGARET. "There's part of you that always remains a child, no matter how mature you get." (*LAURIE just stares.*) Barbara Streisand. (*MARGARET goes to sit at the kitchen table, covered with papers. As LAURIE finishes what she's doing and takes the suitcase off the bed, MARGARET calls out.*) This is a mess.

LAURIE. Find your reading glasses. (*They meet at the table.*) I know you don't want to do this.

MARGARET. Just get it over with. Do I have any left? Just/ say it

LAURIE. Not really, no. You know that though. And I suppose I knew it too. I was surprised when there wasn't money for home care - but I'm glad I was able to help/ you get better

MARGARET. Why would I save for home care? I'm only 55/ and I'm healthy

LAURIE. Not the point - you don't know you'll need these things, it's a contingency.

MARGARET. I can't plan for everything.

LAURIE. You haven't planned for *anything*.

MARGARET. Maybe you should just go home. This is my problem to solve and I don't want you looking through all of this shit -

LAURIE. Mom -

MARGARET. No! It's shit and I know it and I don't want you judging everything.

LAURIE. I'm trying to help.

MARGARET. And I can't help feeling like you're the parent.

LAURIE. I'll leave.

MARGARET. I meant that endearingly. It's hard to be scolded by your kid.

LAURIE. You need it.

MARGARET. Kim can help me.

LAURIE. *That* - THAT is the funniest fucking thing you've ever said.

MARGARET. Be sweet to her, she's the only sister you're going to get. And I know she's grateful you stepped up to help me. (*LAURIE gets up and starts collecting dishes with terrifying focus.*) I know you don't want me to defend her but that's not fair. She is trying her best but she's a newlywed!

LAURIE. She's an adult.

MARGARET. She's in love and she's got a home and she's -

LAURIE. I have a home. You don't have to be married to have something to miss out on.

MARGARET. Stop slamming the plates. And those ones don't go in the dishwasher, you/ have to hand wash

LAURIE. What's the point of "everyday" dishes you have to *hand wash*? (*MARGARET takes over the dish collecting.*) We need to get back on track. The last option I can think of is to cash out your IRA.

MARGARET. Mm-hmm.

LAURIE. I need to see if you have online access -

MARGARET. I have no idea - I wouldn't know where to start to find that out.

LAURIE. We'll get your account number off the statements and see. It will tide you over until we can apply for some benefits and figure out a plan. I can help from home and Kim will have to come over during the week.

MARGARET. I'll manage.

LAURIE. I'll help you find the IRA info and then I'll have to go back.

MARGARET. I can find it myself.

LAURIE. Andrew is coming tomorrow morning to help look -

MARGARET. Don't be ridiculous, don't bother him, he's got school/ work to do.

LAURIE. He wants to come. He misses being here.

MARGARET. He should spend more time at home with Kim and Ryan anyway.

LAURIE. He doesn't like Ryan.

MARGARET. Did he tell you that?

LAURIE. Yes. He's young and energetic - we can make him lift boxes.

MARGARET. We don't need to move any boxes.

LAURIE. I'm going to go lay down. When Andrew gets here tomorrow we'll solve the IRA thing and then I'll be out of your hair.

MARGARET. Forget the damn IRA. (*LAURIE shakes her head and goes to lie down. As she exits she takes some items off stage with her. MARGARET mutters to herself.*) Forget this - this is shit. It's shit. (*Glancing in the direction of Laurie's exit, MARGARET shakily gathers all the papers from the table and throws them away.*)

*Light transforms dark into morning and time passes as MARGARET transitions the scene.*

## SCENE 2

*The next morning MARGARET is sitting at the clean kitchen table with a cup of coffee, waiting. She has her pill bottles lined up and a pad with a written list. She thinks and adds items to the list every now and then. ANDREW enters.*

ANDREW. Grandma? Laurie?

MARGARET. Here.

ANDREW. Jesus you look great!

MARGARET. God love you for a liar

ANDREW. I thought you'd be all, you know, like

MARGARET. Dead?

ANDREW. Like laid out in bed with a million machines (*MARGARET laughs, they hug.*) Missed you.

MARGARET. Missed you too.

ANDREW. Can I have a sandwich?

MARGARET. There's one in the fridge.

ANDREW. Yes... (*As in: Of course - perfect!*)

LAURIE. Okay I think we're ready to get going on the -

ANDREW. Hi!

LAURIE. Hi handsome! Thanks for coming by to help

MARGARET. I told her you didn't need to be missing time at home/ to come help

ANDREW. I wanted to be here, don't even/ worry about it

LAURIE. I told you he wanted to help -

MARGARET. There is nothing to help with.

LAURIE. If only that were true. Where are you going?

ANDREW. To pee.

LAURIE. With a sandwich?

ANDREW. I'm lonely. (*He exits*)

MARGARET. (*To LAURIE*) Sit down. I've got this whole thing drawn out and I need to/ tell you the

LAURIE. Yes, we'll definitely talk but I need you to deal with your follow up appointments.

MARGARET. What do I need to do?

LAURIE. Call them back and set the time

MARGARET. I don't understand why I have to go back if I'm doing fine.

LAURIE. Just make the appointment.

MARGARET. They'll just keep me on hold/ until I

LAURIE. Do you want me to call?

MARGARET. No. Don't mess with my list, okay?

LAURIE. I won't -

MARGARET. I've got it all laid out so you don't/ need to -

LAURIE. I won't!

*MARGARET goes to make the call in the other room. ANDREW reenters.*

ANDREW. Okay. What can I do?

LAURIE. Give me a hug, I missed you.

ANDREW. Missed you too. You're mean keeping me away

LAURIE. She needed to recover.

ANDREW. I'm an excellent nurse -

LAURIE. I don't think she needs the kind of nurse who wears latex.



ANDREW. ONE TIME. That was/one time

LAURIE. And it was for a costume, right.

ANDREW. Don't be a cranky old lesbian about it.

LAURIE. I am not old.

ANDREW. Fine. Don't be a cranky/ lesbian

LAURIE. (*Laughing*) Enough enough.

ANDREW. How's Elise? Have you been talking to her while you're here?

LAURIE. Good - fine, yes we've been talking. (*Beat*) She wants me to help from there.

ANDREW. Well, I could help if you need to go -

LAURIE. No it's fine - she just wants me to come home. She must be worried I'll stay here forever.

ANDREW. Gross, no. Obviously you wouldn't.

LAURIE. I'm always looking for opportunities to fuck up good things, so why not?

ANDREW. Hooray! But she knows how important it is for us to help, right?

LAURIE. She knows.

*Beat*

ANDREW. She thinks mom should be helping.

LAURIE. Yes.

ANDREW. Which is a joke.

LAURIE. ...yes.

ANDREW. Because mama is busy.

LAURIE. With yoga.

ANDREW. With Ryan.

LAURIE. With Ryan. *(Beat)* You surviving?

ANDREW. That is probably an appropriate word.

LAURIE. Sorry buddy - she'll come up for air soon.

ANDREW. Um - NASTY.

LAURIE. Not what I meant/ that's not

ANDREW. I'll never be able to un-think that. *(Beat)* Anyway. What do you need me to do?

LAURIE. I've looked at everything in here, so we have to tackle the garage.

ANDREW. Not sure she'd like that/ if she

LAURIE. She has to like it.

ANDREW. What are we looking for again?

LAURIE. Paperwork for her IRA, do you know what that is?

ANDREW. Yes I'm familiar with paperwork.

LAURIE. Don't be a shit. *(She hands him a paper)* Something like this - use your best judgment. *(As he exits)* Check everything - god knows how she's got it organized out there.

ANDREW. It's neat -

LAURIE. Neat, yes - organized, not necessarily.

ANDREW. Got it. *(Grabs another sandwich and heads out. Laurie starts to look at what's on the table, then MARGARET reenters.)*

MARGARET. Done.

LAURIE. So they didn't keep you on hold forever.

MARGARET. Don't be rude. *(LAURIE kisses her on the cheek.)* I bear no grudges. I have a mind that retains nothing.

LAURIE. Cher.

MARGARET. Bette.

LAURIE. Davis?

MARGARET. Midler.

LAURIE. Midler, right.

MARGARET. Sit down. *(Beat)* I need to tell you my plan.

LAURIE. We'll have the paperwork in a little bit then/ we can

MARGARET. That doesn't *matter*.

LAURIE. I'm not having this conversation again.

MARGARET. Look. I've made this list of my issues, the money, the appointments, the medications, all of it and I am prepared to take care of it all.

LAURIE. Yourself?

MARGARET. I appreciate everything you've done, honey, but I can take it from here. *(Beat)* I think you should go home. As soon as you'd like.

LAURIE. This is a change of heart.

MARGARET. Not really, I've never wanted to keep you here/ too long -

LAURIE. No?

MARGARET. Not really.

LAURIE. I'm not sure -

MARGARET. Just look at the list. *(She hands it to LAURIE)* I'm not really asking you, I'm telling you to go home.

LAURIE. *(Beat)* Okay. Are you all right?

MARGARET. I'm ready to take care of everything again. I have all my prescriptions on an automatic refill and they'll call me directly to pick them up. I made a full list of house maintenance for Andrew to help with every month or so, so that I'm not up on ladders changing light bulbs and all that. I've made an appointment to do a free financial planning course at the Rec Center -

LAURIE. *(Confused)* Wow -

MARGARET. - and Kim is close. And so are you. And I'm sure Ryan will help once his business, thing, his -

LAURIE. - merger -

MARGARET. - merger is over.

LAURIE. If you're ready for me to go, I'll go.

MARGARET. Thank you for helping so much - I couldn't have dealt with this without you.

LAURIE. Should we do a dinner or something, maybe Kim and Ryan would come over.

MARGARET. I can cook.

LAURIE. Once we finish up with the IRA stuff we can get me packed -

MARGARET. That doesn't matter now.

LAURIE. We'll have the papers today, and hopefully a login too.

MARGARET. I can do it myself.

LAURIE. You haven't so far - I'd rather make sure it was settled before I go.

MARGARET. I'll call you as soon as I find them.

LAURIE. I'm not going to leave with one thing left -

MARGARET. Why won't you just do what I'm asking you to do?

LAURIE. You're getting upset, please/ calm down

MARGARET. You're treating me as though I haven't managed my own accounts for the past 30 years!

LAURIE. You're making this a fight.

MARGARET. It doesn't *matter*.

LAURIE. It doesn't matter until you need it to pay the mortgage.

MARGARET. It doesn't matter!

LAURIE. If you really feel that way don't think you can call me when it's gone, or -

*In rapid succession.*

MARGARET. It doesn't matter because it *is* gone.

LAURIE. Andrew is searching the garage/ for the paperwork

MARGARET. What? No - no not the garage - it's not in there. Go get him.

LAURIE. Wait, it's gone? The IRA is/ tapped?

MARGARET. Dammit, yes - Andrew! Come in here! Get out of the/ garage

LAURIE. No no no - where the fuck did/ it go?

MARGARET. Watch it/ - go get him -

LAURIE. What the hell did you do with thirty thousand dollars?

MARGARET. I *spent* it.

LAURIE. Thirty thousand dollars?

MARGARET. You're confusing me, I don't know exactly how much/ it was

LAURIE. Oh my god - that was your/ whole -

MARGARET. (*Trying to get up but she's out of breath*) Andrew!

LAURIE. He's probably on his phone/ just leave him

MARGARET. On his phone?

LAURIE. How long has it been gone? Why/ didn't you tell me?

MARGARET. A long time.

LAURIE. How long?

MARGARET. Since right after you left for school.

LAURIE. That was/ 20 years ago!

MARGARET. What did you think I would spend? (*Beat*) I was still drinking - a bit, and -

LAURIE. I know, okay.

MARGARET. You don't need to worry about it - I've got a plan in place.

LAURIE. (*Rubbing her eyes*) Okay.

MARGARET. Don't be angry with me.

LAURIE. I wish you'd told me sooner.

MARGARET. It's not totally your business.

LAURIE. I'm trying to make sure you don't end up losing the house or your benefits or start using. Are you going to meetings?

MARGARET. Of course. There's nothing more for you to do right now, honey.

LAURIE. Do you still want me to leave right away?

MARGARET. Don't you?

LAURIE. I don't know.

MARGARET. You can't be on leave forever.

LAURIE. I thought you wanted me to stay?

MARGARET. (*Beat*) I always want you here. But I need some time to myself - maybe - (*She seems out of breath or just overwhelmed*) maybe it's better/ if you

LAURIE. Are you in pain/ or just dizzy

MARGARET. A little out of breath, tired/ but there's nothing -

LAURIE. You are getting stressed out - that's not going to help/ you get better

MARGARET. Promise me you'll get Andrew out of that dusty garage and you'll let this whole thing go/ for now

LAURIE. I will - of course. I'm sorry. Lay/ down for a bit

MARGARET. Get him out of there.

LAURIE. He's coming in.

*Laurie helps Margaret offstage to lay down. After a moment, Andrew walks into the room, immediately checking to see who is there. He is panicked, pale, maybe a little dirty. He looks as if he might cry. Laurie reenters.*

LAURIE. So you can stop looking -

ANDREW. Is she asleep? Is she coming back/ in here?

LAURIE. She's asleep -

ANDREW. Oh my god, I don't even/ know

LAURIE. What's wrong?

ANDREW. I can't even say what -

LAURIE. About the paperwork...?

ANDREW. God, no - no it's/ something else

LAURIE. What is wrong?

ANDREW. Quiet -

LAURIE. Sit down for a second -

ANDREW. No - oh god, okay you have to come out here.

LAURIE. Okay -

ANDREW. I found something.

LAURIE. What?

ANDREW. Just - it's - come out here.

*They rush off stage to the garage. During any exit, actors take items off.*