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## **Cast of Characters**

MORGAN

BOB, Morgan's father

JOANNE, Morgan's mother

UNCLE GEORGE

UNCLE MIKE

NICK, Mike's son

CHRISTINE, Mike's daughter

DELIA, Morgan's younger sister

MINDY, Morgan's cousin

SASHA, Morgan's cousin

CONNIE, Morgan's cousin

GRACE, Morgan's aunt

DIANE, Morgan's aunt

TINA, Morgan's aunt

CAROLE, Morgan's aunt

UNCLE STEVE, Joanne's brother

GRAMMY NEWMAN, Joanne's mother

GRANDPA NEWMAN, Joanne's father

GRANDMA KNOWLES

JASON, Morgan's brother

LAURA, Jason's wife

# THANKSGIVING PRAYER

by Alan Haehnel

*(Lights up to MORGAN, sitting on a tall platform center stage, hugging her knees. The platform suggests a tree, but it is constructed in such a way that we can see through it. MORGAN looks up at us.)*

**MORGAN.** I...I couldn't do it. I just couldn't bring myself to say the words. I mean, was I thankful? Yes! Yes, I was glad to be home, so happy to be home for Thanksgiving. It's always been my favorite holiday. Family and food without all the complications of gifts, without so much commercial junk—I was very thankful to be home. By noon today, everybody had arrived.

*(The lights come up on the rest of the stage. It is populated with many people—a large, extended family gathered for Thanksgiving. They are dressed up a bit for dinner. Though there are no walls, the selected pieces of furniture suggest various areas in the house—the living room, the television room, the dining room, the kitchen, a den, a bedroom. As MORGAN speaks, the family members move silently around, pantomiming talking or watching television or cooking—the variety of things a family might do on Thanksgiving Day. They move around the tree as if it weren't there.)*

Sure, a few things have changed over the years: People have gotten older. Grandpa Knowles wasn't there; he died around Christmas last year. The cousins I used to run around the house with, now they're all cool and sit around talking while a whole new batch of cousins is running around. A couple of new babies. But it was all basically the same. The same feeling. Everyone spread out in their various spots throughout the house. We have a big house. A huge house! They all arrive and sort of set up their various camps, but still—knowing they were all there, inside the confines of one home—it was the feeling I always loved. If you walked through the house, you could visit the different camps. That's what I did.

*(As MORGAN describes each of the camps, the lights focus on them, leaving the other areas of the stage in darkness.)*

Dad, Uncle George, Uncle Mike and my Uncle Mike's two kids—Nick and Christine—they comprised the football camp. They were gathered around the wide-screen television my dad bought while I was gone. It's even bigger than the old one.

**BOB.** How do you like the definition on this baby, huh?

**UNCLE GEORGE.** It's not bad.

**UNCLE MIKE.** I've seen better.

**NICK.** *(To UNCLE MIKE:)* Dad, this set is uber-cool. We need a new one.

**BOB.** Uh-huh, uh-huh, see? See? It's uber-cool. You heard the boy.

**UNCLE GEORGE.** It looks a little fuzzy to me.

**BOB.** Fuzzy? What fuzzy? That picture is as clean as you're going to get. You can see the pimples on the guys' faces, for crying out loud.

**CHRISTINE.** Yeah, and I'm so glad for that.

**MORGAN.** My dad and his brothers—so competitive, always ribbing each other about who's got the latest and best and most expensive.

*(CHRISTINE turns to "notice" MORGAN entering the room, though MORGAN is still on the platform. This convention occurs throughout the play; MORGAN speaks from the platform but people interact with the air as if speaking to MORGAN.)*

**CHRISTINE.** Hey, Morgan! What's going on?

**MORGAN.** Nothing much; how've you been?

**UNCLE GEORGE.** Morgan! Sit down here.

**MORGAN.** I'm all right, Uncle George, thanks.

**UNCLE GEORGE.** Let me guess. During your trip overseas, in your vast world travels, you came to a realization. You saw things as they really were, and so now you've come to join us with your new-found knowledge.

**MORGAN.** What's that, Uncle George?

**UNCLE GEORGE.** That Nebraska has the greatest football team in the history of the world!

*(BOB and UNCLE MIKE groan. NICK throws a pillow at his uncle.)*

**BOB.** Boo!

**NICK.** Nebraska? They stink!

**CHRISTINE.** Get a life, Uncle George!

**UNCLE MIKE.** Talk about corruption of a youthful mind—that would be it right there, if Morgan came back with that attitude.

**BOB.** She wouldn't be eating here if she came back with that attitude!

**MORGAN.** Is that who's playing today, Nebraska?

**UNCLE GEORGE.** Uh...they should be.

**UNCLE MIKE.** Yeah. Only trouble was, they didn't win enough.

**UNCLE GEORGE.** They had the toughest schedule of any team in the conference!

**NICK.** Yeah, that hurt them, plus the fact that they pretty much stunk up the place.

**UNCLE GEORGE.** Control your kid, there, Mike—he doesn't have respect for his elders.

**UNCLE MIKE.** Oh, he has no trouble with his elders. I just can't get him to respect morons.

**CHRISTINE.** Oooh, that was low. Low!

**BOB.** *(To MORGAN:)* Sweetie, where're you going? Come watch the game. With this TV, it's like actually being there.

**MORGAN.** Yeah, well, Dad, when it comes to football, that's not exactly an enticement for me.

**BOB.** The commercials are great, though.

**UNCLE MIKE.** Yeah. HiDef. Budweiser; who could ask for more?

**MORGAN.** Maybe later. (*The lights fade on the football area, focus just on MORGAN as she speaks to the audience:*) You'd hear them all through the day, these eruptions from the TV. room—yells or boos or laughter letting you know, at least vaguely, who was winning. Or at least who liked whoever was winning. (*Lights up on another part of the stage featuring four girls.*) Up in my sister's bedroom was the pre-teen camp: Delia, my sister; and her three cousins—Mindy, Sasha and Connie, all 13 and 14-year-olds.

**DELIA.** He, like, stole my iPod.

**MINDY.** What did you do?

**DELIA.** I couldn't do anything.

**CONNIE.** I would've killed him.

**MORGAN.** I just stood outside their door and listened for a while, remembering talking like that.

**SASHA.** Did he say he did it?

**DELIA.** No, he would never admit it, but he told this other kid, Peter, who told me he had it.

**SASHA.** Is that the same Peter you gave my screen name?

**DELIA.** No, that was Peter Donovan.

**SASHA.** He is, like, so annoying. He won't stop I.M.-ing me. He's like a stalker.

**DELIA.** Peter? Really?

**SASHA.** Yeah!

**CONNIE.** I was in this chat room once, and...

**MINDY.** I'm not allowed to go in chat rooms. They're blocked.

**SASHA.** MonkeyBoy3112—every time I get online.

**DELIA.** That's not Peter Donovan. He's KewlyKewlyDude18.

**SASHA.** Well, then, who's MonkeyBoy3112?

**DELIA.** I don't know.

**MINDY.** I was talking to, like, 13 people the other night.

**CONNIE.** So anyway, you want to talk about stalker? I was in this chat room and... Hey, Morgan.

**MORGAN.** Hi, guys.

**DELIA.** Is it time to eat yet?

**MORGAN.** No, no—it'll still be a while. How's it going up here?

**SASHA.** Good.

**DELIA.** What do you mean?

**MORGAN.** I mean, how's it going? Connie, Sasha, how's life in Indiana?

**CONNIE.** Boring.

**MORGAN.** Really? Aren't you still doing gymnastics?

**CONNIE.** I quit.

**SASHA.** I still do it. I'm going to regionals next month. We get to stay overnight in a huge hotel.

**MORGAN.** That should be...that'll be fun. Great.

**DELIA.** So, like, do you need something, Morgan?

**MORGAN.** No, I was just—checking in, I guess.

**DELIA.** Cool. So, how 'bout you...check out?

**MORGAN.** I will do that. Nice seeing you again, Sasha, Connie, Mindy.

**MINDY.** Good to see you, too.

**SASHA.** Bye!

*(The girls look at one another and giggle as the lights fade on them.)*

**DELIA.** *(Whispering:)* She has been so weird since she got back.

**MORGAN.** *(To the audience:)* I heard them giggling as I left, heard my sister telling them how weird I've been. She's right. I have been weird. Disconnected. Well, no Thanksgiving tour of the family camps could be complete without a stop in the center of all activity—the kitchen.

*(Lights up on the kitchen. Morgan's mom, JOANNE, is there, along with Morgan's Aunts, GRACE, DIANE, TINA, and CAROLE and her GRAMMY NEWMAN. The kitchen is suggested by a table with chairs. The stove, counters, sink and so on are all suggested through pantomime. JOANNE, GRACE, DIANE, and TINA are busy chopping, mashing, forming rolls, etc. CAROLE sits at the table with a drink.)*

**CAROLE.** Oh, Lord, I guess I should feel guilty that I'm not doing anything, but it takes too much energy to feel that way. I'm just going to drink.

**GRAMMY NEWMAN.** You need to go easy on that stuff.

**CAROLE.** It's going down easy enough, Mom.

**GRACE.** Joanne, how small do you want these carrots cut? Is this good?

**JOANNE.** Oh, I don't really care...you do them that way?

**GRACE.** Is that all right?

**JOANNE.** Sure, it's fine, fine. It'll all taste the same.

**DIANE.** Joanne, tell her the way you like them cut.

**JOANNE.** What difference does it make? I'm not picky. *(DIANE and TINA laugh.)* What?

**DIANE.** If you're not picky, the Pope is a Baptist, Honey.

**CAROLE.** Oh, did he finally convert?

**GRAMMY NEWMAN.** I will not have you making fun of the Pope; that's enough of that nonsense.

**TINA.** Joanne, sister of mine, you have many wonderful traits, but being relaxed about food is not one of them.

**JOANNE.** Oh, now, you're exaggerating.

**GRACE.** Somebody tell me what I am doing wrong with the carrots.

**CAROLE.** Somebody tell me where I can find more of this wine.

**TINA.** Carole, maybe you should slow down until you get a little food in your stomach, hm?

**JOANNE.** You are not doing a thing wrong with the carrots. I just have never seen them done like that.

**DIANE.** Cross-cut, at an angle, with this tool. It makes little ridges.

**TINA.** God forbid if there are no ridges in the carrots.

**GRACE.** I'm sorry.

**JOANNE.** Don't be sorry! You are all making me sound like a food Nazi!

**CAROLE.** I don't mind food Nazis, but I can't stand booze Nazis! Refill!

**MORGAN.** The women. Somehow, through all the sniping, and despite the fact that my Aunt Carole is well on her way to getting sloshed, a mountain of food is being prepared. It's a little intimidating, walking in there, but I did. I asked if they needed any help.

**JOANNE.** Oh, hi, Honey. I think we're doing okay.

**CAROLE.** Speak for yourself. Where did the bottle go?

**GRAMMY NEWMAN.** Just never mind about the bottle, Carole.

**DIANE.** (*Handing CAROLE the bottle:*) There. Knock yourself out. The sooner the better.

**CAROLE.** Thank-you, sister dear. So, Morgan, how was deepest, darkest Africa?

**JOANNE.** She went to India, Carole.

**CAROLE.** Africa, India, both far away, both deepest darkest.

**DIANE.** So politically sensitive, Carole.

**TINA.** Are you, shall we say, involved with anyone these days, Morgan?

**MORGAN.** Uh, no—nothing serious, Aunt Tina.

**CAROLE.** Keep it that way, I say! After three husbands, I have concluded that the male gender is an evolutionary mistake.

**JOANNE.** Well, they're still just a tad necessary for the propagation of the species, don't you think?

**CAROLE.** Oh, hell—sperm's cheap.

**GRAMMY NEWMAN.** Carole!

**CAROLE.** Listen to 'em yowling in the other room. Apes!

**GRACE.** Excuse me, but my daughter happens to be in there, too.

**CAROLE.** Whatever.

**DIANE.** So what's your next plan, Morgan, now that you've seen the world a bit? Off to college?

**MORGAN.** Ummm...I haven't quite decided.

**JOANNE.** Much to her mother's chagrin.

**DIANE.** Don't wait, kiddo. You get your schooling—as fast and as much as you can. You've got to have it in this world.

**JOANNE.** I second that.

**MORGAN.** Okay, okay, I surrender. I hear you.

**CAROLE.** You know what they say about the kitchen, Honey. If you can't stand the heat...

**JOANNE.** We are not pressuring her.

**TINA.** Really? That's the most pressure-full non-pressure I have ever heard.

**DIANE.** Well, I am pressuring! What's the trouble, Morgan, money?

**MORGAN.** No, I... (*Joking, pseudo-military:*) I'll go right upstairs and fill out some applications, Aunt Diane.

**DIANE.** Oh, come on—it's Thanksgiving. Wait 'til the morning. Very early.

**MORGAN.** I hear you. In both ears.

**DIANE.** Perfect.

*(The lights fade on the kitchen, center on MORGAN again.)*

**MORGAN.** I escaped from the kitchen. I guess I didn't want to take the heat anymore. I walked past the den, saw my sister-in-law, Laura, in there, nursing her baby.

*(The light comes up on LAURA, sitting in a chair with a blanket over her torso as she is nursing her infant. Lying on the floor near her is Morgan's brother, JASON. He is asleep.)*

I waved a little, not wanting to interrupt, but she gestured for me to come in.

**LAURA.** Hey.

**MORGAN.** Hi. How're you doing?

**LAURA.** Okay.

**MORGAN.** Why is my brother on the floor?

**LAURA.** Oh, his back's been bothering him. He stretches out on the floor, says it helps him. I think it mainly helps him get a nap. I can't really blame him, though—they've got him working like 75 hours a week at his new job. He really wants to make a good impression, so he does everything they ask, and more. It's what you have to do to get ahead, he keeps telling me. I guess he's right, but it's hard. I can't wait until we can get out of that tiny apartment we're in and into a house.

**MORGAN.** Yeah. How's little Chelsea?

**LAURA.** Hungry about every 30 seconds, not sleeping through the night, a touch of colic, driving me pretty much crazy, but otherwise great. But how about you? How was your trip to India? I think it's so great that you took some time to travel like that. I should have done more of that before...well, before your brother here convinced me I just had to be his wife.

**MORGAN.** He's pretty good at convincing people.

**JASON.** *(Not opening his eyes:)* Yes, I am.

**LAURA.** You rat; you were awake all the time.

**JASON.** No, just long enough to hear the compliment. Now I'm going back to sleep.

**LAURA.** Get up; talk to your sister.

**JASON.** Hey, Morgan.

**MORGAN.** Hey, Jason.

**JASON.** My back is killing me.

**MORGAN.** So I heard.

**JASON.** The rat race is killing me.

**MORGAN.** So I understand. Are you planning to quit?

**JASON.** Nope. I'm planning to win.

**LAURA.** I certainly hope winning means getting a house. I don't want to still be in an apartment when this little animal starts walking.

**JASON.** What's that give me, a year?

**LAURA.** Only if you're lucky.

**JASON.** I was born lucky.

**MORGAN.** You know, I once heard a quote that went something like, "Even if you win the rat race, you're still a rat."

**JASON.** Yeah, but the goal is to become a comfortable rat with a Jacuzzi, a healthy 401k, and a Jag in the garage.

**LAURA.** A Jag?

**JASON.** Or something comparable. How was the India trip?

**MORGAN.** It was...um...

**LAURA.** How did you do with the food? I've heard it's really spicy.

**MORGAN.** Yeah, some of it could be.

**LAURA.** *(Regarding the baby:)* Oh, oh, oh, she's waking up. And I think there's a diaper problem. Jason, your turn.

**JASON.** Completely crippled right at the moment. Sorry.

**LAURA.** You said your back was stiff, not crippling.

**JASON.** Well, there's a fine line.

**MORGAN.** *(To the audience:)* I left them to their little domestic tiff.

*(The lights fade on JASON and LAURA.)*

I floated through the house some more, passing through various other pockets of family members. Some of the younger kids were out in the backyard; my Grampa Newman was talking politics with Uncle Steve, my mother's brother. I wandered through, saying hello, answering the polite questions people asked me about my trip, about my future plans. I wandered through my family, wishing I could feel a part of them, like I used to. I couldn't, though. At one point, I stood in the hallway between the kitchen and the living room, in about the center of the house. I leaned my back against the wall and closed my eyes, just listening to the sounds of everyone around.

*(The sounds of the family members talking and shouting from the various parts of the house rise in the darkness, then decrescendo as MORGAN continues to talk.)*

I listened to the sounds of my family here in the suburbs of Chicago, listened to them talking in the kitchen, whispering upstairs, yelling at the television in this giant, comfortable house in the richest nation in the world. I listened and began to hear another sound, one from my memory.

*(From the darkness, the sound of Morgan's family begins to mix with the sound of many more people, of people speaking and shouting in a foreign tongue, of babies crying—the sound of a slum in India.)*

I was transported by the memory of this sound, brought back to New Delhi. I could see in my mind's eye all the colors and the smoke and the confusion of that place. I could smell the exhaust from the trucks, the spicy aroma from the open-air cooking, the sickly-sweet of overripe fruit and, under it all, the sewage. In the hallway of my home in Chicago, the sounds of my family were taking me back to a place thousands of miles away where I had felt so utterly foreign, so utterly homesick. But the trouble was, when the sounds of New Delhi faded *(The sound of Morgan's family disentangles from the Indian sounds until we hear only Morgan's family again.)*, the loneliness and homesickness...didn't. I still felt them.

I used to avoid my Grandma Knowles when I was a kid.

*(The lights come up on GRANDMA KNOWLES, staring blankly off into space as she sits in a comfortable armchair.)*

She always wanted to ask these probing sorts of questions. She didn't like small talk, I guess, so she'd really grill us about our lives. "Are you taking your studies seriously?" "How are you progressing spiritually?" No kidding, she wanted 10-year-olds to answer these kinds of questions. Grandpa Knowles used to tell her, "For heaven's sake, Fiona, stop terrorizing your grand-children. Give 'em a chocolate bar; don't psychoanalyze 'em!" He died, though, almost a year ago. Grandma Knowles used to seem so independent, but seeing how her husband's death...deflated her—I mean, literally, seemed to take away the amount of oxygen she could take in... She really relied on him. Now, when she comes to the house, she doesn't really take up any room. She's not a presence anymore, like she used to be. But in her tiny camp, that's where I felt the most comfortable. I tapped her on the hand and said hi.

**GRANDMA KNOWLES.** Hm? Oh, hello, there.

**MORGAN.** Hi, Grandma. Remember me?

**GRANDMA KNOWLES.** Of course I do. I don't remember your name, but I remember you.

**MORGAN.** It's Morgan.

**GRANDMA KNOWLES.** Morgan, yes. You've been away, haven't you?

**MORGAN.** Yeah. I went to India for three months, on a mission trip.

**GRANDMA KNOWLES.** Oh, that's good; that's good. Your grandfather and I, we did some traveling. He liked it more than I did. We never got to India.

**MORGAN.** Well, that's okay. Personally, I think there are prettier places in the world.

**GRANDMA KNOWLES.** He liked to travel. He liked it.

**MORGAN.** How are you feeling, Grandma?

**GRANDMA KNOWLES.** Creaky. But that's all right. How are you feeling?

**MORGAN.** Um... Okay. A little... I'm feeling fine.

**GRANDMA KNOWLES.** Of course, I'm pretty lonely.

**MORGAN.** Yeah. Yeah, I miss Grandpa.

**GRANDMA KNOWLES.** Guess he just needed to travel, didn't he? He went and left without me. That wasn't very nice, was it?

**MORGAN.** No, I guess not.

**GRANDMA KNOWLES.** Well, all right. All right, all right. You said you're lonely?

**MORGAN.** I...yeah, kind of.

**GRANDMA KNOWLES.** You miss home?

**MORGAN.** *(To the audience:)* I didn't know what she meant. She was probably confused, actually; that's been happening a lot. Even in the few months I was gone, she had lost a lot of ground. But I could relate to her...disorientation. I told her, yes, I missed home. *(The lights fade on GRANDMA KNOWLES.)* I said it half to be polite and half because I meant it. I did miss home, even though I was there. It hadn't moved, but something in me had.

Well, about three o'clock, the time came for everybody to gather for Thanksgiving dinner.

*(The lights come up dimly to show the family gathering together in a crowded, multi-layered line, as if facing the food.)*

There were too many of us to all eat at the table—that had been true as long as I can remember—so my mother and my aunts had laid all the food out on the counters so we could go at it buffet style. So really, the only time we all came together and stayed in the same room, even for a short time, was when we met to load up our plates. But before that, the other thing that kept us in the room together was a family tradition: The Thanksgiving Prayer. In our family, everyone gave one—no matter how many people. If you could talk, you said a Thanksgiving prayer. It used to be torture for us kids...and I'm sure it was for all the children there today. Imag-

ine—30 people gathered around all this food, smelling it, ready for it, and they have to have this prayer delay. Generally, people kept it short. This year was probably going to be the shortest of all because Grandpa Knowles wasn't there. He had been a preacher at one time, so he could really go on and on. I guess he was accustomed to a captive, uncomfortable audience. It didn't seem to bother him. But he wasn't there today, anyway, so it was going to be short. One by one, we went through the prayers. My mother would pull names from a hat to say who was next.

**JOANNE.** Grandpa Newman.

**GRANDPA NEWMAN.** Dear God, we thank you for this bounty. We thank you for this great land in which we live, for the freedoms we enjoy. We thank you, God, for keeping us safe during this past year. We thank you for all Your Blessings. Amen.

**MORGAN.** As usual, there was a variety of prayer styles and languages. We had some Baptists, some Mormons, some Catholics...I suspect even an agnostic or two, if not outright atheists. But everybody tended to go along for tradition's sake.

**JOANNE.** Connie.

**CONNIE.** Dear Heavenly Father, we thank thee for our many blessings and we thank thee for helping us all be able to be here for Thanksgiving. We thank thee for this food in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

**JOANNE.** Grandma Knowles, do you feel up to...

**GRANDMA KNOWLES.** Oh, sure. I won't go on as long as my husband used to, don't you worry about that. *(The family laughs, then bows its head when GRANDMA KNOWLES does.)* Dearest God in Heaven, Jesus Lord, we thank you for our many blessings. We hope... Thank you for the years we've had with those we love. Thank you for...well, just we give thanks. Amen.

**JOANNE.** Tina.

**TINA.** Our father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name... *(Others join in with the Lord's prayer as TINA recites it.)* Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

**JOANNE.** Carole.

**CAROLE.** Oh, boy. Uh... Through the teeth and past the gums; look out, stomach, here it comes.

**GRAMMY NEWMAN.** Carole, for God's sake!

**CAROLE.** All right, all right. Dear God in Heaven, thanks for...thanks for family, for putting us together with people who will...who will put up with you even when it's not all that easy. Happy Thanksgiving. Uh...amen.

*(As MORGAN speaks, JOANNE pantomimes taking out and saying Diane's name. DIANE pantomimes praying.)*

**MORGAN.** I couldn't bow my head. I had always been taught to bow my head and close my eyes during prayers, but today, I just kept looking around. I looked at all these well-dressed, well-off people around me—my family. I looked at the food. The food! Two huge turkeys, plates of other kinds of meat, deep dishes of mashed potatoes, squash, glazed onions, carrots—with the ridges, of course, pickles, cranberry, other fruits, three kinds of salad, four kinds of rolls...not to mention the desserts! This was typical! All these well-fed people standing in front of this impossible feast, thanking God for it...I couldn't bow my head. I couldn't say amen. And I knew my turn was coming.

**JOANNE.** Oops, my turn. Our Father, on this day of Thanksgiving, we just want to tell you how much we appreciate your blessings on us. We just want to tell you that we love you, Father God, and we love how you have chosen to bestow your bounty on this family. We just thank you for our health, for this warm home, for the opportunities we have, and we certainly thank you for the chance we have to gather together and enjoy this food. Amen. *(Choosing another name:)* Laura.

**LAURA.** Dear Heavenly Father, we come together and thank thee for our many blessings.

*(LAURA pantomimes continuing the prayer as MORGAN speaks.)*

**MORGAN.** “We love how you have chosen to bestow your bounty on this family.” “We love how you have chosen to bestow your bounty on this family.” My mother’s words...they sounded so...so arrogant! Why were we chosen? Did she really believe that? That God chose us, that we somehow deserved the bounty of heaven? And in granting us this bounty, did that mean he withheld it from those hundreds of people I saw in India?

**JOANNE.** Bob, your turn.

**MORGAN.** My dad. It was the only time in the year I ever heard him pray. I used to love it. Today, I feared it.

**BOB.** God, thank you for this country of ours. Thank you for the chance we have to live and work and worship as we please. Thank you to those who have sacrificed and continue to sacrifice to keep this land free and open for its citizens to make good lives for themselves. Thank you for this food. Thank you for making my wife such a good cook.

**JOANNE.** Oh.

**BOB.** Amen.

*(JOANNE pantomimes calling on SASHA. SASHA pantomimes praying.)*

**MORGAN.** I was feeling faint. I was feeling suffocated. The smell of all this food, the sight of it piled in front of me—more food than most families in India would eat in three weeks, more food than some people in India would ever see, ever! And praying to a God who would seem to choose one family over another, one nation over another. Literally, I felt as if I might pass out. And then my mother called on me.

**JOANNE.** Morgan.

**MORGAN.** I could barely breathe, never mind speak. They all turned to me.

**BOB.** Morgan? Your turn, Honey.

**MORGAN.** I loved them. Every one I looked at—I loved them all. I knew that! But they were strangers to me. The God they wanted me to pray to—he was suddenly a stranger to me.

**JASON.** Morgan, we're hungry. Come on!

**DELIA.** Yeah!

**MORGAN.** They were hungry. After not eating for less than two hours, most of them, they were hungry, impatient to eat. A week ago, I attended the funeral of a five-year-old girl in India who starved to death! I listened to the prayers of those people, thanking their God for the blessing of having that child in their lives for five years! And my family was turning to me, impatience in their voices, demanding that I say a quick prayer so they could get to their food that they did not even need to eat. I almost threw up. I retched, and I started to cry.

**JOANNE.** Morgan! Morgan, what is it?

**GRAMMY NEWMAN.** She's sick. Oh, honey!

**MORGAN.** I yelled at them. I yelled, I'm not sick! You are! And then I ran out of the room. I ran out of the house.

*(The lights fade on the rest of the family. They exit.)*

I ran across our half an acre back yard, our beautifully-manicured grass, and into these woods, to this tree. I climbed up to this platform that my father built for us when we were kids. Here I've spent my Thanksgiving afternoon and evening. It didn't take them long to find me. Mom and Dad came out with a plate of food and a blanket.

*(JOANNE and BOB come to stand at the base of the tree, looking up.)*

**BOB.** Morgan, Morgan, up in a tree.

**JOANNE.** We've brought you some dinner, Honey.

**BOB.** And a blanket.

**JOANNE.** Do you know how long you're planning to stay up there? Morgan, it's chilly out here. You must be cold and hungry.

**MORGAN.** I want to be cold and hungry.

**BOB.** Morgan, what kind of talk is that? Come on, now—you've got everybody worried about you.

**JOANNE.** Honey, what's happened? Are you depressed?

**BOB.** Jo, she's not going to know if she's depressed.

**JOANNE.** What do you mean, she's not? You can tell when you're sad; what's so hard about that?

**BOB.** True depression is more of a...never mind. Morgan, what happened in India? I had my doubts about you going, frankly. It was an awfully big trip for someone who hasn't been out of the states before.

**JOANNE.** We've been to the Bahamas, Bob.

**BOB.** Yeah, well, that was a very sheltered sort of thing.

**JOANNE.** Morgan, tell us the truth: Did someone hurt you?

**MORGAN.** Yes, I wanted to yell to them, yes, someone hurt me, but not in India. My own family hurt me, hurt me here, by having a large-screen television that wouldn't even fit in the living spaces of thousands of the families in India, by making an obscene amount of food, by wanting to get out of an apartment that many Indians would call a mansion, by stressing over iPods and football. I wanted to tell them that I hurt myself by being a part of it. By being this spoiled American who cried for days because she missed her luxuries. In India, I griped about not having the right shampoo, not having a hot enough shower. I hated the crowded buses and the noisy, smelly streets. Yes, I wanted to tell my parents, I was hurt in India. I am hurt now, deeply. But not by the Indian people. No. No, they were good to me. Too good. If you weren't careful, they would give you much more than they could afford to, out of hospitality. I was hurt because we had so incredibly much, far more than we needed, and that little girl in India didn't even have enough to keep on living past her fifth birthday. I was hurt because we prayed as if we deserved it, as if God was on our side. I wanted to say all of that to them, but I couldn't. Not yet.

**BOB.** Morgan, your mother's getting cold.

**MORGAN.** Go ahead back inside. I'm all right.

**JOANNE.** Let us bring you up some food.

**MORGAN.** I don't need it.

**BOB.** Well, this is crazy. I'm bringing it up.

*(He climbs up the tree, struggling to pull himself up with one hand and balance the pantomimed plate of food in the other.)*

**JOANNE.** Bob, you're going to spill it. You're dropping the dressing, Bob!

**BOB.** I can't help dropping the dressing, Joanne. This is not as easy as it used to be.

**JOANNE.** Are you sure those boards can support you?

**BOB.** I built them sturdy, Joanne.

**MORGAN.** *(Reaching down to get the plate:)* Dad, thanks—I've got it. You don't have to climb all the way up.

**BOB.** Good. Now, eat! If you're going to stay up there, for whatever reason, I don't want you starving to death. *(MORGAN lets out a short, ironic laugh.)* What, that's funny? That I don't want my own daughter to starve?

**MORGAN.** I am not going to starve, Dad. We are all a long way from starving.

**BOB** *(To JOANNE:)* How am I supposed to take that? What is that, a crack about my weight?

**JOANNE.** Honey, do you want the blanket?

**BOB.** She's taking the blanket. Morgan, the blanket is coming up.

**MORGAN.** Dad, I don't...

*(He's already thrown the blanket up on the platform.)*

**BOB.** *(To JOANNE:)* Come on. She's got food and a blanket now; she'll survive. Now, let's get back in...

*(MORGAN throws the blanket back down. JOANNE and BOB stare at it.)*

You know something, Morgan? I can take a lot of things. I think I have taken a lot of things.

**JOANNE.** Bob, don't yell. The neighbors...

**BOB.** The neighbors maybe should know that we have, up in a tree right now, a deeply ungrateful daughter.

**JOANNE.** Bob, that's enough.

**BOB.** Who, on Thanksgiving no less, decides she's just a little too good for the rest of her family.

**MORGAN.** Dad, that is not true.

**BOB.** Then what is true, Morgan? Why don't you let us in on your thought process a little, huh? Then maybe we could come to a different conclusion about why you decided to put such a damper on the day.

**MORGAN.** I'm not trying to be ungrateful, Dad. I'm...

**JOANNE.** What, honey?

**MORGAN.** I...don't know how to pray anymore.

**JOANNE.** Oh. Oh, Honey, that's okay. I mean, we all...I mean, it's a normal thing, to question our faith at times.

**BOB.** Sure, yeah, everybody goes through that, at some point.

**JOANNE.** Do you want me to get in touch with Pastor Gray? I'm sure he'd be happy to...

**BOB.** Not tonight. You don't need to be calling him at 8:30 on...

**JOANNE.** I know; I wasn't saying tonight. I just...

**MORGAN.** Mom, Dad, um, yeah, maybe sometime I'll talk to Pastor Gray. I just need some time. I'm okay up here.

**JOANNE.** Are you sleeping out here?

**MORGAN.** I might.

**BOB.** Take the blanket, then.

**MORGAN.** Okay. (*BOB throws the blanket back up.*) Thank-you.

**BOB.** You're welcome. Come in soon, will you?

**JOANNE.** You can be alone inside, Honey; we won't bother you.

**MORGAN.** I know. I just...

**BOB.** Okay, come on, Joanne. Let's get inside.

**JOANNE.** We love you, Sweetheart.

**MORGAN.** I love you, too.

**BOB.** Okay.

*(They exit.)*

**MORGAN.** As the night went on, a few more family members came out to pay their respects or say good-bye to me—crazy, mixed-up Morgan, going through some sort of phase.

*(The lights come up on the various family members, though they don't actually come to stand at the base of the tree. They say their piece and leave. LAURA and JASON enter together; LAURA carries the baby in a blanket.)*

**JASON.** Hey, kiddo, we've got to be taking off. Geez, I can't believe that platform is still standing after all this time.

**LAURA.** I never knew it existed.

**JASON.** I never showed you that? We had a lot of fun on that when we were kids, right, Morgan? She pushed me off that platform more than once, I'll tell you that.

**LAURA.** Are you sure it wasn't the other way around?

**JASON.** What are you accusing me of? I was the protective older brother.

**LAURA.** Anyway...

**JASON.** Right. Morgan, you take it easy, all right? I'd come up and give you a hug, but, uh, my back...

**LAURA.** Call us anytime.

**JASON.** Yeah, absolutely. Or e-mail; that's probably better. We're hardly ever home.

**LAURA.** Anytime, though.

**JASON.** Absolutely. You...hang in there, kiddo. Love you.

**LAURA.** Bye.

*(Lights up on DIANE.)*

## **THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!**

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