



**GARDEN NOT
THE WORD**

Brittany Alsol

Characters:

DEIRDRE – CÁEL's wife, an artist in her early 40s.

CÁEL – DEIRDRE's husband, a businessman in his late 40s.

CONNER – CÁEL and DEIRDRE's son, 7 years old.

SCENE I

Setting: Living room with a table and chairs stage right, a couch center stage.

A couple of nice paintings hang in the room – a detailed still life and another, more abstract in content and geometric in structure.

(DEIRDRE, CÁEL enter stage right)

DEIRDRE: We're going to have to tell him at some point, Cáel.

CÁEL: It's too soon – it's only been a couple of hours. I think you – we – need to deal with it first. We have some things to figure out before we should involve him.

DEIRDRE: But we can't always send him to his room with some...*(struggles for a moment to find the right word)* gift and act like nothing's wrong.

CÁEL: I know. Listen, we're going to get through this. You remember my aunt? She recovered.

DEIRDRE: She was a lot older than we are. People our age aren't supposed to have... things like this. I don't think I can deal with all of it.

CÁEL: Let me handle things then.

DEIRDRE: You always do so much.

CÁEL: Then this won't be any different, right? I'm sure you'll do more when you feel up to it. You'll get better, you'll see.

DEIRDRE: But Conner...

CÁEL: He'll be all right, too. Please, Deirdre, don't stress yourself out too much right now. We need to be level-headed.

DEIRDRE: I thought we agreed it was best to be... (*pauses, searching for the word, CÁEL winces*) honest... with him. And he's already noticed and it's only going to get worse and I don't know if I can keep painting and... (*chokes up*)

CÁEL: I think you're tired from the doctor's and you should lie down. I'll take care of dinner and putting Conner to bed. The rest we can deal with another day. One thing at a time.

DEIRDRE: No. I want... (*struggles*) talk this.

CÁEL: The doctor said your symptoms would probably worsen when you got worn out.

DEIRDRE: No! I'm fine.

CÁEL: He said you should rest.

DEIRDRE: I...*heard*.

CÁEL: I'm sorry. It's all right, Deir.

CONNER (*enters stage left at a run, clutching a plastic lizard*): Look, Daddy!

Look what I got!

DEIRDRE: Oh! A nice...uh...

CÁEL: —Lizard

CONNER (*proudly*): It's a lizard, Mommy! I named him Long-tail.

DEIRDRE: What do you say?

CONNER: Thank you, Daddy.

CÁEL: It's from your mother, too.

CONNER: Thanks, Mommy. (to CÁEL) Isn't he cool?

CÁEL: He is a great lizard, Conner.

CONNER: What kind is he?

CÁEL: I'm not sure exactly. Later we can look it up.

CONNER: Can we right now?

CÁEL: No, we're going to have dinner soon.

CONNER: Mommy?

CÁEL: She needs to rest right now.

CONNER: Whatsa matter with Mommy?

CÁEL: She's just...tired.

DEIRDRE: Cáel...

CONNER: Did the doctor say she's sick? Daddy, are you gonna stay home from work to take care of her?

DEIRDRE (to CÁEL): We can't keep...putting it off.

CÁEL: —Your mother's having...some word problems. That's not really the kind of sick where I would need to stay home.

CONNER: How come?

DEIRDRE: He wants to know.

CÁEL: All right. You see, Conner, the doctor said...well—

DEIRDRE: I can explain, if you want to start...

CÁEL: Are you sure?

DEIRDRE: Yes.

CÁEL: All right. Conner, Mommy will explain to you while I get dinner ready, all right?

(CÁEL kisses DEIRDRE on the cheek and exits stage right.)

DEIRDRE: We found out today that...something happened to Mommy's...um, brain.

CONNER: What was it?

DEIRDRE: The doctor, he doesn't know exactly. It's just that sometimes...words are hard for me.

CONNER: Me too, like sgedi...spuh...spaghetti.

DEIRDRE: That is a hard one. But I think you'll grow out of that trouble.

CONNER: Will you, too?

DEIRDRE: Yes, I hope so. The doctors think I can get better.

CONNER: What's it feel like? (*touches her head*) 'Cause sometimes my head hurts when I am trying really hard to think of a word.

DEIRDRE: It feels funny. Sometimes... it's not a feeling. But something is...funny. (CONNER *stares at her*) It's hard. I— (*struggles*) Oh, I know! Go get Mommy's um... (*makes a motion of writing on paper.*)

(CONNER *nods excitedly and runs offstage, appearing a moment later with a sketchpad and charcoal pencil.*)

CONNER (*handing her pad and pencil*): What're you going to draw?

(DEIRDRE *points to paper, signaling for CONNER to watch. She sketches for a few beats, then holds it up so that CONNER, beside her, can see.*)

END SCENE

SCENE II

About two weeks later.

Setting: Living room, as in Scene I.

(CÁEL sits on couch beside DEIRDRE. He puts his arm around her and she leans into him.)

CÁEL: Did you work on your therapy today?

DEIRDRE: No, I painted. I know, I know. I should be doing the...stuff.

CÁEL: The therapy?

DEIRDRE: Yes. But painting helps me. I need to be working. Then I don't feel so... ugh.

CÁEL *(restrains himself from offering words for a beat)*: What, Deir?

DEIRDRE: I don't know! Not myself, I guess.

CÁEL: Well that's something. What did you paint?

DEIRDRE: I'll show you. (*rises and exits stage left, reappearing a moment later carrying a canvas on an easel*) What do you see, Cael?

CÁEL: It's very...*artsy*.

DEIRDRE (*mock annoyed*): Cael, really.

CÁEL: I know, I know. But it's your first piece since...well, and I don't know what I expected. It looks like you're experimenting – in the subject matter, obviously, and the line quality is softer.

DEIRDRE: Yes, it's different. It was what I needed. But I mean, what is it a painting of?

CÁEL: Looks like a tree. A very gnarled one, but. It's good, Deir.

DEIRDRE: It's funny because Conner, at the mere... suggestion, he—

CÁEL: —Did you have any... trouble with him today?

DEIRDRE: No. What do you mean? He's been great...

CÁEL: He understood you all right?

DEIRDRE: Of course.

CÁEL: That reminds me, we should really look at some of those therapy exercises before dinner.

DEIRDRE: Okay. But Conner, he really amazed me today. He's never been so...interested in my art before.

CÁEL: That's great. Was it that you were working in a different style, or was it something else?

DEIRDRE: I don't know, but it was like a whole...a whole other... place opened – so much more to the painting. All I did was say the wrong word – like always now—

CÁEL: Don't say that, Deir.

DEIRDRE: Well, I said “horse” instead of...(gestures to canvas)

CÁEL: Tree?

DEIRDRE: Yes, and Conner just went with it... And I did, too...and then it was a...a horse in the sea?

CÁEL: A sea horse?

DEIRDRE: Yes. It was...I forgot how art, it changes through different eyes. I just love his...how open he is to it. I'm so impressed by him.

CÁEL: Well, it makes sense that a piece like this would be more accessible to a child than... (*gestures to paintings on walls*)

DEIRDRE: It's more. I really think we should... more attention... give to his...um... damn.

CÁEL: All right. Let's work on the writing exercises now. Don't you think they'll help you? An apple a day, you know. (*he rises to get some papers from the table*)

DEIRDRE: It would help me if you'd listen.

CÁEL (*stops*): I do – I am. I'm sorry, it's just getting late and...

DEIRDRE: You're not even... (*pronounced carefully*) giving attention to your own son. I'm talking about his... mind – it's full of these wonderful things beyond... homework. He looked at that painting and saw a horse, made a whole story for it.

(*beat*)

CÁEL (*sets down papers and crosses to consider the painting again*): That is impressive. We don't need to get into this now, but I wonder if you're making too much out of it. I mean, I used to have an imagination too, once upon a time. I worry that...

DEIRDRE: What?

CÁEL: Just—don't forget that children need other things besides playtime.

DEIRDRE: I'm not. He's really special for going along with me and my...difficulties. I never expected that, and it's, it's wonderful. The point is,

where you only see a tree, he sees a whole...so much. Pay attention to that.

Please.

CÁEL: All right.

DEIRDRE: It's really important to me.

CÁEL: I know. (*crosses and hugs her*) I'll try. Maybe I "can't see the forest for the trees." (*beat*) You getting better is important to me. I know it's a slow process, but the exercises do help.

DEIRDRE: I'm sorry. I'm just getting kind of...frustrated.

CÁEL: I know. It's all right. Remember, the exercises aren't the bad guy.

DEIRDRE: I don't see any difference with them, though.

CÁEL: Well...not yet. I think it takes time.

DEIRDRE: I know how to write. It just...doesn't... work sometimes.

CÁEL: Then let's try something different tonight - something more interesting, all right? Conner can even join, if you want.

DEIRDRE: Thank you.

CÁEL: Conner!

DEIRDRE: I think the doctors tell you to do this just so you'll do *something* instead of sitting around and...and forgetting.

CÁEL: You know as well as I do that the therapy has been proven to help people recover. (*concerned*) It's not like you to be so pessimistic about it.

(CONNER *enters stage left*)

CONNER: What, Daddy?

CÁEL: How would you like to play a game with your mother and me?

CONNER: Ooh, yeah! What is it?

DEIRDRE (*with forced enthusiasm*): Yes, Cáel, what is it?

CÁEL: Well, since you're just dying to know, it's a word game. I'll point to an object and, Deir, you'll name it. We'll keep score: you get a point if you can guess it.

CONNER: Whado I getta do?

CÁEL: Then I'll ask you to name the next thing. We'll take turns. Also, you get a point if you can name the one your mother doesn't know. But you have to give her a little time to think, all right?

CONNER: Okay!

DEIRDRE: I don't think this is the best way...

CÁEL: Let's give it a try. Ready? The first one is an easy one. (*points to chair*)

CONNER: Ooh! I know! (*raises hand high*)

CÁEL: Conner, wait your turn.

DEIRDRE: Oh, that's a...a chair.

CÁEL: Very good. Deirdre

CONNER

(disappointed): Awww.

gets a point.

CÁEL: Next. *(points to lamp)*

CONNER: A lamp!

CÁEL: A point for Conner. Deirdre, yours is... *(points to arm of couch)*

DEIRDRE: The couch?

CÁEL: What part of the couch, specifically?

DEIRDRE: Oh...the side of the couch? I...don't know.

CÁEL: Do you know, Conner?

CONNER: Uh-uh.

CÁEL: I'll give you a hint: it's part of the body.

DEIRDRE: The leg...no.

CONNER: Oh! The arm! The arm of the couch.

CÁEL: Great job. A point for Conner.

CONNER: Yay! I knew something Mommy didn't.

DEIRDRE: Remember, be a nice winner.

CONNER: Is it my turn to guess?

CÁEL: Yes. Yours is... (*picks up painting palette*)

CONNER: The painting thing?

CÁEL: What's it called? I bet your mother knows.

CONNER: 'Cause it's hers. I don't know.

CÁEL: Deir?

DEIRDRE: A palette.

CONNER: No fair!

CÁEL: Well, what do you know? It's even now – each of you has two points.

CONNER: Ooh, ooh, I wanna do the next one. (*runs to ease*) I bet you don't know this one, Mommy.

DEIRDRE: It's not about making it hard.

CONNER: What's this? (*points to ease*) Guess!

DEIRDRE: I don't know, honey. Mommy doesn't want to play this game anymore.

CONNER: Awww!

CÁEL: You can keep trying.

DEIRDRE: I'm sorry, Cáel, I did try, but it's just...so much. I'll... do more later, okay?

(doorbell rings)

CÁEL: That must be the pizza. We'll keep working on this.

(CÁEL exits stage right.)

DEIRDRE: Conner, go wash your... *(wiggles fingers)* pants now.

CONNER *(giggles)*: You're silly.

DEIRDRE *(confused for a moment, then stern)*: Please be nice. I'm getting tired and I made a mistake.

CONNER: Sorry, Mommy. *(beat)* I can wash my pants if you want.

DEIRDRE: No, I mean these. (*takes his hands*)

CONNER: Oh, hands. (*he waves them*)

DEIRDRE (*smiles*): And your, um, your sh- sheep are untied.

CONNER (*looks down at his feet, where DEIRDRE is pointing, then walks towards her bleating with each step*): Baa baa baa!

DEIRDRE: What?

CONNER: Sheep. Baa. (*he gets down on all fours*)

DEIRDRE: Oh! (*laughs*) Be careful. Your sheep might get out if you don't tie them up and watch them.

CONNER: Uh-oh.

(*DEIRDRE helps him tie his shoes*)

DEIRDRE: Okay, go on now.

(CONNER runs off stage left. DEIRDRE picks up papers from the table and squints in concentration trying to read them. She shakes her head and drops them, then sinks onto a chair, pressing her fingers into her forehead. After a couple beats she looks at them again, still without comprehending. CÁEL enters stage right with plates and napkins.)

CÁEL: Are you ready to eat? Where's Conner? Conner! *(beat)* Are you all right?

DEIRDRE: Yeah. Fine.

(CÁEL exits stage right and reappears a moment later with the box of pizza.

CONNER enters stage left with his toy lizard from Scene I. They sit at the table.)

DEIRDRE *(taking CÁEL's hand over the table)*: Thanks for letting me pick...um...

CÁEL: Dinner. You're welcome.

DEIRDRE (*smiles*): Yes. Conner, would you like a slice of—

CÁEL: Of pizza?

DEIRDRE (*to CÁEL, annoyed*): It's okay. I'm all right. I just didn't like how the game was going.

(*as they eat*)

CÁEL: How was school today, Conner?

CONNER: Good.

CÁEL: What did you learn?

CONNER: Ummm, we learned about how butterflies come from caterpillars.

CÁEL: That's great.

DEIRDRE: Do you have new words-spell?

CÁEL: Spelling words, you mean?

CONNER: Yup, I do.

DEIRDRE: Maybe I can help you with those later.

CÁEL: Don't worry about it; I can help him with it.

(beat)

DEIRDRE: Cáel, can you...pass the um, the um, white stuff—

CÁEL: —Milk. Here you are.

DEIRDRE *(coldly)*: Thanks. *(beat)* How was your day?

CÁEL: Productive. Markets are in black, *(aside to CONNER)* that means doing well, and we signed the deal with Jacobs and Ashby.

DEIRDRE: Oh good.

CONNER: Can I come to work with you soon, Daddy?

CÁEL: I'll look at my calendar and see when Bring Your Child To Work Day is. Maybe you can, all right?

(CONNER *nods, and then takes his toy lizard off his lap and edges it onto the table*)

DEIRDRE: Conner, honey, please keep the...dragon off the table while we eat.

CONNER (*looking at toy with fresh awe*): He's a dragon, really?

CÁEL: Sometimes your mother says the wrong word. It's a lizard.

DEIRDRE (*somewhat*
think it can breathe fire?

confused): I thought it was...

CONNER: That's cool! You

DEIRDRE (*regaining her composure*): Yes. Yes, I think so. It could burn down this whole... (*taps table*) um, table, if you're not careful.

(CONNER, *delighted, stomps the toy around the table, roaring*)

CÁEL (*sternly*): Let's not interrupt dinner, please. Remember your manners and put it away now.

DEIRDRE: I don't know, dragons are hard to cage once they're loose.

CÁEL (*insistent*): It's just a lizard. (*aside, to DEIRDRE*) You're not helping.

DEIRDRE: Have a little fun.

CONNER: Are dragons real?

CÁEL: No.

DEIRDRE: Yes.

CÁEL (*aside*): What about being honest with him?

DEIRDRE: That's not what this is about. They're just words.

CÁEL: Yes, and their implications are important.

CONNER: Mommy, will you paint me a dragon?

DEIRDRE: I would love to, honey. Tomorrow.

CÁEL: Dragons aren't safe creatures to have in the house. Especially around children.

DEIRDRE: What would you have it be?

CÁEL: Just a lizard. Conner, I promise after dinner we'll look up what kind of lizard it is. In the encyclopedia, all right?

CONNER: But it's a dragon, Daddy, not a lizard.

CÁEL: No, it's—

DEIRDRE: —It can be (*struggles*) one if we want it to be one, okay?

CÁEL (*the final word*): Not at the dinner table.

(they eat in silence for a few beats)

END SCENE

SCENE III

A few months later.

Setting: Living room. Set as before, except the portrait and still life are replaced with more colorful, passionate, and somewhat surreal paintings. An easel is set up stage left.

(CÁEL in socks, black slacks, and a white dress shirt with the top buttons undone and the collar awaiting a tie, enters stage left. He crosses to the table, getting distracted by the paintings on the wall.)

CÁEL *(calling stage left)*: Deir! It's really hard to concentrate out here with these up.

DEIRDRE *(enters stage left in pajamas)*: What?

CÁEL (*organizing papers into a portfolio, his back to DEIRDRE*): Their style, I don't know what it's called. What is it? (*waving an arm in the direction of the paintings without looking up*)

DEIRENRE (*taking him literally*): My art.

CÁEL: I thought I could handle them out here for a few days, but they're starting to... You know how I feel about this space.

(*beat*)

(*DEIRDRE opens mouth to speak, but closes it again. Turns and exits stage left before CÁEL finishes his next sentence.*)

CÁEL (*cont'd*): You know I love the geometric ones. I liked the still lifes you did, and even the landscapes. (*places portfolio in briefcase, shuts it, and then turns to look at DEIRDRE but she is gone*) Deirdre?

(*DEIRDRE returns with a canvas, brush, and tubes of paint gathered in her arms. She sets up to paint at the easel, ignoring CÁEL.*)

CÁEL: I think it's wonderful that you're...working so much these days.

(struggling for some way to engage her) You're really producing.

(A beat, during which DEIRDRE applies the paint directly to the canvas and starts painting with broad, rapid strokes.)

CÁEL: I should already be out the door...but I'm having a hard—we need to talk at some point. All right? *(waits a beat but gets no response, then strides off stage left)*

(DEIRDRE paints, somewhat manically, for a few beats. CÁEL enters stage left wearing his tie and suit coat, pauses behind DEIRDRE to watch her paint for a beat, compulsively adjusting his clothing.)

CÁEL *(desperate, not really expecting an answer)*: What are you trying to do?

What do you want?

(DEIRDRE, surprised and a little suspicious, stops painting, turns to look at

CÁEL. Beat.)

DEIRDRE: I want... *(points to canvas)* this.

CÁEL: Is it finished?

DEIRDRE: No.

CÁEL: I'll look at it when I come back. We'll actually talk later, all right?

(DEIRDRE turns back to her canvas and nods. CÁEL leans to kiss her, but stops short. He turns and crosses stage right, exits. DEIRDRE smiles at her painting, CÁEL already gone from her mind.)

END SCENE

SCENE IV

That evening.

Setting: Same as Scene III.

(DEIRDRE and CONNER are sitting under the dinner table, laughing. CÁEL enters stage left, wearing the same clothes as in Scene III. He looks around for a moment before he locates his wife and son.)

CONNER: Daddy! (*bursts out from under the table to squeeze CÁEL*) Do you want to live in a garden with me and Mommy?

CÁEL: Sure, gardens are nice. Will there be flowers?

CONNER: Yeah! And big trees and animals!

CÁEL: Wow. That does sound nice. Would you like living outside? Or will there be a house?

CONNER: Uh, I dunno. I don't care. It's gonna be so much fun! I'll draw you a picture of it.

CÁEL: All right. I'd like a *picture*.

(CONNER *runs off stage left*)

CÁEL: Deir, what are you doing under there? (*sets his briefcase on top of table*)

DEIRDRE: C'mere.

CÁEL: Why don't you come out and sit on the couch with me?

DEIRDRE: Just c'mere.

CÁEL: Deirdre...

DEIRDRE: Please, come here. Down here.

(CÁEL stands for a beat, hands pressed into the table, gathering himself)

CÁEL *(as he squats down beside the table)*: I've been thinking – a lot. We really need to discuss—

(DEIRDRE takes his hands and pulls him towards her, kissing him softly.)

(CÁEL almost loses his balance and sits on the floor)

DEIRDRE: Do...do you know how, what it's like – I feel like I'm just...

(makes a motion of things being wiped away, like an umpire declaring a player "safe")

CÁEL: Yes, I think I do know. (*beat*) Is that why you moved the easel out of your studio?

DEIRDRE: I had to find a different... I was more comfortable out here.

(*DEIRDRE scoots into an awkward embrace with him. Beat.*)

CÁEL: I feel I'm losing you.

DEIRDRE: Why?

CÁEL: I don't understand...where you're coming from anymore. These paintings, for one. They're so- I don't even know how to describe them. This isn't art that either of us used to like, but now... I know you don't like talking about your... but is it helping you?

DEIRDRE: Let me show you something. (*gets out from under table, pulling CÁEL with her to the easel*) Last night I... dreamed this. I've always painted what's out here, and it's harder to paint... what's in here (*points to her head*).

Especially when it's so...you know. What do you call this place? I don't know, but it's where I want to be.

CÁEL: Is this... the garden?

DEIRDRE: Yes, but it's a special one.

CÁEL: That looks like a wall around it. Is it a Secret Garden, like the book?

DEIRDRE: What? I don't think that's it. This one is more...space, no, open, no—

CÁEL: Free?

DEIRDRE: Yeah. That's it. And so beautiful, I just, I wanted to stay there, so safe, but I had to leave.

CÁEL: You mean you woke up?

DEIRDRE: I guess so. Do you know what I'm talking about?

CÁEL: I- It sounds like a nice place.

DEIRDRE: The *best* place, of anywhere. I explained it to Conner a little bit. I think he got it. He liked that I put him in it...

CÁEL: There are only two people there.

DEIRDRE: Yes.

CÁEL: Is that how you want it to be?

DEIRDRE: I...don't know. It was a dream. But that place – it was... (*closes eyes and hugs herself for lack of a nice enough adjective*)

CÁEL: It's hard to know with you these days, Deirdre. You get so absorbed in your work now, in your own world, and... I can't come in. I love you and I've always loved your work, but I don't know what to do when it doesn't make sense to me anymore. (*beat*) I just hope you're not using it to...escape... or anything.

DEIRDRE: They're...important to me.

CÁEL: Of course I know that. I only mean I've always appreciated your art for its order and its beauty. These, they're not like you.

DEIRDRE: Yes, they're starting to be.

CÁEL: And this fantasy? Is that starting to be like you, too?

DEIRDRE: There's a lot more than what you can see.

CÁEL: That may be true. I just—the thing is, I worry about what message Conner is getting.

DEIRDRE (*soothing*): Cael, you worry too much...P-pulling...playing is good for...him.

CÁEL: Not if it's all that he does.

DEIRDRE: He's a... child.

CÁEL: Precisely.

DEIRDRE: And I like that he is, and you, you don't. Always trying to make him...change.

CÁEL: He needs structure.

DEIRDRE: And fun.

CÁEL: And a balance between them. Systems fall apart without structure, you know. It's necessary. (*beat*) He doesn't even... he'd rather have fun with you.

DEIRDRE: Well, if you're going to lecture like that— (*cuts herself off*) I'm sorry. Cáel, I'm not trying to, it's just, you don't know what it's like to be...stuck in my head.

CÁEL: No. I...wish I did. (*beat*) I don't think Conner can understand what's going on with you. He doesn't know it, but he needs consistency: someone to set clear guidelines and be dependable.

DEIRDRE: I'm with him every day and we always have a good time.

CÁEL: I'm glad you do. Really. I just...I wonder if it's too abstract.

DEIRDRE: He's learning about art. And we tell... store-stores-stories. If I can make a living with...it – art – what's wrong with it? There's...more, more than just the straight... (*makes a motion with her hands in parallel lines to denote a straight path, unable to finish constructing her thought*)

CÁEL: I know. But I'm having a hard time seeing what this garden has to do with us, right here.

DEIRDRE: Everything.

CÁEL: Will you stop being so mysterious?

DEIRDRE: What else can I be? I can see what I want to say, but I open my... and it just won't come.

CÁEL: I think you forget that there are things you can do, therapy that will help. I think I've been patient with your...process. But now it seems to affect Conner, too. If you get help, it will help him, too, ultimately.

DEIRDRE: I am. Painting. That's something. What helps, anyway.

CÁEL: You're not taking this very seriously.

DEIRDRE: Of course I am. He's my...my boy. I love him more than...everything.

CÁEL: Then let's do what's best for him. I know we didn't expect this to happen, but if you actually followed the prescribed steps, maybe sought professional help, I really believe you can improve. Life can be like it was.

DEIRDRE: I don't know if I want that. I don't want...before. I can't, can't go back. (*dissolves into tears, sinks onto couch*)

(*CÁEL hesitates, then leans over DEIRDRE to comfort her*)

(*CONNER enters stage left. Rushes to DEIRDRE.*)

CONNER: Mommy? Mommy, whatsa matter? Why are you crying? Look, I drew a pretty pitcher for you.

CÁEL: That's a nice picture.

CONNER: Mommy? Daddy, why's Mommy upset?

CÁEL: I don't know.

CONNER: Do you need to go to the garden because you're sad?

DEIRDRE: I'm – Cáel, can you...?

CÁEL: Conner, your mother and I are in the middle of talking right now.

CONNER: But Mommy needs to go to the garden 'cause it'll make her feel lots better.

CÁEL: Not right now. Can you go start on your homework? I promise that later we'll go outside and toss a ball around.

CONNER: I wanna be with Mommy. Is she upset 'cause you're mad?

CÁEL (*warning*): Conner. To your room.

CONNER: Yes, Daddy. (*sulks off stage left*)

CÁEL: I know he's not happy about it, but there has to be discipline.

(DEIRDRE *can only nod. beat.*) Is there something with your...condition that makes it... harder?

DEIRDRE: No—Well, yes... it seems less important.

CÁEL: But how—(*controls himself*) What do you mean?

DEIRDRE: I don't know. It's just...I'd rather *be* with him.

CÁEL: I understand that.

DEIRDRE: But you've always been the exciting... one.

CÁEL (*takes a beat to process what she's just said*): And I've disciplined.

DEIRDRE: It's not the same for me.

CÁEL: We used to discuss these things, make sure we were both on the same page. What happened?

DEIRDRE: I'm not sure... even where I'm at anymore.

CÁEL: Well, can you—can we agree to talk through the things that concern him? I want you both to be all right.

DEIRDRE: Okay. It's hard, I—well, okay. (*beat*) But tell me you at least see *something* in these (*gestures to paintings around the room*) – not just what's...right there.

(*CÁEL looks behind him at the paintings.*)

END SCENE

SCENE V

A couple weeks later.

Setting: Living room, with paintings, supplies, and toys cluttering the space.

(*CÁEL and DEIRDRE are cleaning up the room*)

CÁEL: What is this called?

DEIRDRE: A...toy...no, a buh, a ball.

CÁEL: Good.

DEIRDRE: I'll take it to Conner's room.

CÁEL: I think it might be more efficient if we first make piles of things to minimize trips back and forth. Here, this is yours. What is it?

DEIRDRE: A pickle.

CÁEL: I don't think that's what it's called. Can you think of the name? You use it kind of like a pen or a pencil...

DEIRDRE: I want to call it a pickle. Let's clean.

CÁEL: I'm sorry I'm not very good at games. I think that's more your forté.

(beat) You know, we have other rooms for these things: you have a studio and

Conner has his room. This is supposed to be a comfortable space, but we can hardly move around in it.

DEIRDRE: I like the...stuff out...here. It's more interesting.

CÁEL: We can make your studio interesting, but I just, the living room cannot stay like this.

DEIRDRE: I'm all alone in there. You don't come in.

CÁEL: It's always been your space. I don't want to invade that.

DEIRDRE: And the... all of the house?

CÁEL: The rest of the house is our space. For my sake, things need – I'd like things to be in order. I don't know what...this has never been a problem until recently...

DEIRDRE: It helps me...work.

CÁEL: All of this—

DEIRDRE: —I know you don't understand.

CÁEL: Can *you* try to understand how this is for me? It's not so easy to...we're all adjusting, still.

DEIRDRE: I don't think it ever stops.

CÁEL: Deir...

DEIRDRE: I know. What can we do?

CÁEL: At least for this week, let's keep it clean and see how that goes, all right?

DEIRDRE: Okay.

(They pick up more things for another couple beats.)

END SCENE

SCENE VI

The next day.

Setting: The living room, cleaned up from Scene V.

(DEIRDRE and CONNER are seated on the couch, DEIRDRE in the middle of telling a story, which they both become a part of.)

DEIRDRE: Then, they went through the...

CONNER: Through the woods!

DEIRDRE: Yes.

CONNER: Are there dragons there?

DEIRDRE *(shrugs)*: I don't know. Go get yours.

CONNER: Okay! *(runs off stage left and returns a moment later with the toy lizard from Scene I)* He'll protect us. Raar!

DEIRDRE: C'mon. (*gets up and starts following an imaginary winding path around the room*) Through the....woods.

CONNER: It doesn't look like the woods. Not like in your paintings.

DEIRDRE: Ah. I know. (*exits stage left and reappears in a beat with several paintings under her arms. She sets them up to line a path around the room.*)

CONNER: Ooh! I'll get some too. (*exits and enters again with more paintings, one of which depicts dolphins*) Mommy, can the dolphins be in the woods?

DEIRDRE: Sure.

CONNER: Are they afraid of the dragons? Are *you* afraid of dragons?

DEIRDRE: Sometimes. We have to- (*holds hands over eyes*)

CONNER: Hide?

DEIRDRE: Mmm...almost.

CONNER: Oh, I know! We have to cama-, cama-fff-, camaflower ourselves.

DEIRDRE: Yeah! (*gets paints*) Here.

CONNER: Oh, my paint, from Halloween?

DEIRDRE: Mmm-hmm.

(DEIRDRE paints lines on CONNER's face. He holds out his arms and she paints them too. CONNER then paints DEIRDRE with similar markings.)

DEIRDRE: Now we're ready.

(They trek and duck around the room as though they're in a treacherous forest. They end up on opposite sides of the couch.)

DEIRDRE (*calling*): I can't see you.

CONNER (*calling back*): I'm over here.

DEIRDRE: Where?

CONNER: I'm camouflaged!

DEIRDRE: Oh no, I lost you.

(They circle around the room, dodging paintings, until they run into each other and DEIRDRE picks CONNER up and tickles him. CÁEL enters stage right.)

CONNER: Yay! Daddy's in the woods now! Come see, come see all the trees!
(takes CÁEL's hand and tries to lead him to see the paintings, but only pulls him a few steps)

CÁEL *(trying not to lose his temper)*: Yes, that's nice. Deirdre, what – what is going on here?

DEIRDRE: We made a...a story.

CONNER: We went through the woods. There are dolphins and dragons...

CÁEL: Yes, I see that.

CONNER: Mommy said it could happen. Mommy, can we keep playing?

DEIRDRE: Sure. (*They circle the room, looking at each canvas*) Now we found each other, we look at every...every...

CONNER: Tree?

DEIRDRE: Yeah, that we pass. (*they navigate around CÁEL as if he were in their way*) This one—

CÁEL: I can't believe this. Deirdre, we just talked about this – with Conner—

CONNER: I'm sorry, Daddy.

DEIRDRE (*to CÁEL*): Don't be angry.

CÁEL: I will be. And I'll...I'll get rid of—do *something* to these paintings if they stay here.

DEIRDRE: Why?

CÁEL (*momentarily thrown off by her sincerity*): Because I can't live like this.

DEIRDRE: I don't know how else to... to do it. I can't help—I feel—what if this is it?

CÁEL: Then we make do, we make the best—

DEIRDRE: —I have been! What about your—

CÁEL: —I mean, together! We need to all be in this.

DEIRDRE (*quieter*): And if you're not? (*breaking down*) I need...need to be by...myself. (*exits stage left*)

(CÁEL *paces for a couple beats, calms himself, then sits next to CONNER on the couch*)

CÁEL: You like being with your mother, don't you?

CONNER (*nods*): Uh-huh... Is that okay?

(beat)

CÁEL: Of course it is. I miss—would you still like to play ball with me sometimes?

CONNER *(nods)*: Yeah. *(CÁEL tries to rub some of the paint off CONNOR's face. CONNER squirms away after a beat)* I think Mommy needs somebody right now. Can I go by her?

CÁEL: I think you ought to leave her alone right now... if that's what she wants.

CONNER: I wouldn't want to be alone if I was sad.

CÁEL *(in agreement)*: No. But let her be right now. *(a painting catches his eye and he rises and crosses to it.)*

CONNER: Daddy? What are you looking at?

CÁEL (*looking at the painting*): Your mother, when I met her, she used to do these nice – different – paintings.

CONNER: But she got sick?

CÁEL (*continued*): They were so structured, so logical. I didn't know art could be like that. It was perfect. I never knew how she did it. I don't know... (*with barely contained frustration*) Then she started doing these—

CONNER: How come you don't like them? I do. I think they're, um, *espressive* – Mommy taught me that word.

(CÁEL *turns to look at CONNER, though he doesn't seem to completely be aware of him. beat.*)

CÁEL (*comes back to himself*): Conner, you've still got paint all over. Why don't you go wash off your face and hands.

CONNER: All right. (*sulks off stage left*)

(CÁEL looks back at the painting for a beat, then starts straightening up the room. His motion is halted when DEIRDRE strides in from stage left. He stops to watch her as she crosses stage right, collecting some of the wilder paintings under her arms along the way.)

CÁEL (*gently*): Deirdre, what are you doing?

DEIRDRE (*bitter*): *Something*. Getting rid of these.

CÁEL: But—

DEIRDRE: —If they're so bad, I'm gonna...

CÁEL: Deirdre...

DEIRDRE: Cáel, it was you...your (*taps her temple*).

CÁEL: I know I said that, but I didn't mean—

DEIRDRE: —Why don't you (*struggles*)... help me?

(DEIRDRE *continues picking up paintings and then is about to exit stage right. CÁEL crosses and stands in her way, blocking her exit. She tries to shove past him but he stops her by protectively, almost tenderly, wrapping his arms as much as he can around her and the canvases bulging from her arms. She struggles with him for a beat.*)

DEIRDRE (*takes half a step back from him*): What? I thought you wanted...this.

CÁEL: I can't let you do it.

DEIRDRE (*outraged*): Can't *let* me?

CÁEL (*quickly correcting his error*): No, I mean I don't want you to have to...just let them stay for a minute—

DEIRDRE: He'll hear us...so for him, get—get out—move, please. (*tries to walk around him but is thwarted*)

CÁEL: Just put them down.

DEIRDRE: Right here?

CÁEL: Right here.

(DEIRDRE drops the canvases at his feet. CÁEL winces. She whips around and begins picking up more paintings.)

CÁEL (growing desperate, crosses to her, again placing himself in her path, and puts his hands on the paintings as if to protect them): Deirdre, stop.

Please. *(Beat. She fumes at him.)* This isn't necessary.

DEIRDRE: Yes. If they break apart my... fam...fami—all of us, they go.

CÁEL (emphatic, annunciating carefully): They do not. You have to...believe me. Please, do not do anything to these.

DEIRDRE: You were going to.

CÁEL: I didn't know.

DEIRDRE: What do I do?

CÁEL (*takes a painting out of DEIRDRE's hand, placing it on the floor, and holds her hand in his*): Let me just *be*, here with you.

THE END