

point getting into all the ways Eileen didn't follow through.) And her old school didn't have her records...they lost them. She couldn't get the papers she was told she needed. So she left.

ELLEN. Why?

JUDY. She thought they were throwing her out.

ELLEN. But they weren't, were they?

JUDY. An administrator there told her that without that paperwork she would lose her financial aid.

ELLEN. And...did // you—

JUDY. *(With increasing impatience.)* I wrote to her school. I wrote to Kentucky social services. I assumed it was being taken care of.

ELLEN. Oh God, it's unbelievable she's back in Corbin. It's so crazy! We could have pulled strings // for her

JUDY. She didn't know that.

ELLEN. No, no, I get it, I get it. I just... I know D.C. was so hard for her at first but I thought she had really...risen above it.

JUDY. She was never not having a hard time.

ELLEN. Yeah, she has to come back to D.C.

JUDY. To what?

ELLEN. Oh I... I don't know. I was thinking if she got a job— But I know you're leaving—

JUDY. *(Finally snaps.)* What kind of job would she get with no high school diploma that would make her enough money to live there? *(Ellen nods. A beat.)*

JUDY. I can't do it again, Ellen.

ELLEN. I know. *(A beat.)* Well, at least the election went well.

JUDY. *(A laugh.)* Oh yeah.

ELLEN. I don't know, Judy. I don't know. I woke up in that horrible hotel room in Ohio on Wednesday morning and I couldn't—I couldn't turn on the TV. I couldn't bear to hear them say that he had won again. I felt so sick.

JUDY. It's sickening.

ELLEN. My roommate, this woman who'd traveled from Arizona to help get people to the polls, she and I just lay there. Nobody could talk. I don't think I've ever felt people so crushed politically. So many people worked so fucking hard. How did it happen? I mean when you went to the polls, how many people were in line?

JUDY. I didn't vote. *(Beat.)*

ELLEN. What?

JUDY. I don't vote.

ELLEN. I don't... I can't... How could you not vote in this election?
How could you—help George Bush to get re-elected?

JUDY. I didn't do that.

ELLEN. You didn't vote. I don't understand. I don't know how
you, especially—You're out there seeing first-hand the impact he's
having in the world, how could you not have cast a vote against
him?

JUDY. I don't vote.

ELLEN. Never?

JUDY. No.

ELLEN. Okay. You have to say more

JUDY. I—I don't want to participate in a system I don't believe in.

ELLEN. What system? The American system?

JUDY. Right.

ELLEN. (*Not believing Judy is seriously making this argument.*) You
don't believe in American democracy?

JUDY. No.

ELLEN. (*Incredulous.*) You don't believe in American democracy.

JUDY. No.

ELLEN. (*Dumbfounded.*) That's crazy.

JUDY. Why?

ELLEN. What system is better?

JUDY. I don't know. But I do know that voting is a false exercise.
You know this. You're the one who talks about how the system is
skewed so that the votes in rich, white Republican districts are
counted at much higher levels.

ELLEN. If more people voted they could change that.

JUDY. How? Gore did get more votes than Bush.

ELLEN. I know, but—

JUDY. The Supreme Court handed Bush the election.

ELLEN. Yes, exactly. This right-wing mob has abdicated from the
system. That's why we have to do everything we can to get them
out before they dismantle the whole apparatus.

JUDY. (*Obvious.*) The apparatus is working as it's meant to work,
to facilitate the self interests of wealthy men in power.

ELLEN. But that's not what it's meant to do.

JUDY. Ellen, for the first twenty-something years of this country
only white male property owners could vote. That's what this
country was set up to do. We can put whatever Band-Aids on that
we want, but that's the set-up.

ELLEN. Okay, yes. The founders reflected the world at the time. But they set up systems that could grow and become more inclusive.

JUDY. I think you have a totally romanticized view of their intentions and of any inclusion. My grandmother grew up in a world where she couldn't vote. The Voting Rights Act wasn't passed until 1965. When *I* was in junior high school, black people still couldn't vote.

[Note: Ellen is not defensive with Judy. She knows much of what Judy says makes sense. But she also knows there's a counter-argument to be made that can hold both Judy's reality and her own belief in American democracy. Throughout this scene she's trying to find it. As for Judy, her arguments are not driven by disillusionment and rage, but rather an almost bemused disbelief that Ellen cannot see what to Judy is as plain as day.]

ELLEN. Okay. Yes. Maybe I'm assigning retroactive intentionality. That's probably right. That's what we do, right? We look back at things that happened randomly and we assign intentionality to them. But that's what I'm saying. The genius of the system is that it was set up to allow for the dynamic accretion of those random events which have made the system more inclusive.

JUDY. Whatever inclusion you see has happened in spite of the system, not because of it.

ELLEN. What about Civil Rights? The judicial branch stepped up and the system protected the minority, as it was meant to.

JUDY. Are you talking about the Supreme Court?

ELLEN. Yes.

JUDY. The Supreme Court that said that Dred Scott was not a citizen and could never be one because he was black? The Supreme Court that defended the // Japanese internment camps—

ELLEN. Alright. Alright. But as more people, more women and more minorities have gotten power, those things shift.

JUDY. Where do you see that manifesting?

ELLEN. Everywhere.

JUDY. Look, Ellen, the idea that the system leads to a place for everyone is a myth. There has never been a place for everyone. It's only the people who benefit from that who think there is. But the people at the top are the same people who've always been at the top. And the people who are at the bottom are the same people who've always been at the bottom.

ELLEN. But // —

JUDY. But what, Ellen? I see a system that adjusts to maintain that order. Occasionally, a door cracks open for a decade or so, and then it gets slammed shut. Reconstruction lasted twenty years and was crushed by Jim Crow. Johnson's War on Poverty was actually working. You know that, right? Nixon put Rumsfeld and Cheney in charge of it and told them to strangle it. It's all documented. It's no secret. Poor people aren't even part of the political discussion any more. Have you noticed that? What I see in the wake of Civil Rights is the population of black men exploding in prison. I see less access to health care, to public schools, to all sorts of public amenities. All the things you rail about. It's not coincidental that those things are being privatized, being put into the hands of fewer people with more money and taken out of the public sector. Poor people and black people are suffering and that's not an anomaly. That's written into the system.

ELLEN. But Judy, change is possible here. People can move. Isn't that what you did? Aren't you the example of that.

JUDY. No. I'm an exception that proves the rule. I had a tremendous amount of luck. People who crossed my path, teachers and so forth who pulled me onto a different track.

ELLEN. But isn't that the thing? Isn't that the system?

JUDY. No. That's luck. Plus I was smart.

ELLEN. Right.

JUDY. Yes. If you're poor and you're smart you might get out. Rich people don't have to be smart. Middle-class people don't either.

ELLEN. (*Really trying to understand.*) So what are you saying? There's no special potential in our system? It's not any better for poor people here than—what? A refugee camp in Guinea? Saddam Hussein's Iraq?

JUDY. Yes, I'm saying that for some people there is no more potential here.

ELLEN. I don't see that.

JUDY. Right. Because you're a middle-class person and you are served well by the system, so you have to believe that change is possible. It's what American liberals do. Because what could you do otherwise? You'd have to give up your middle-class life or your ideals.

ELLEN. No. No. The difference here is aspirational. Not everyone is treated the same here, of course. But it is the goal. There is an equality of aspiration.

JUDY. But that's what I'm saying. There's not. Look at my sister, staying with a man who beats her. Look at my mother, sabotaging

herself and her kid at every turn. You know that stereotype of welfare dependency the right wing loves talk about? That's my family. Do I look at them and think they're fuck-ups? Yes. Do I blame them for the fact that Tessa couldn't keep it together long enough to just get a lousy high school diploma? Yes. That girl broke my fucking heart. I'm ashamed of my family. It's unbearable to me. I can hardly even get the words out of my mouth because I'm ashamed of being ashamed. The political line on them is they just aren't trying hard enough. They don't believe in themselves. And it's true. And why? Because they don't have that sense of *aspiration* you're talking about. Because they live in an America where, if you can't get the paperwork you're told you need for the forms someone tells you you have to fill out, you are shit out of luck. They live in an America that is configured to keep them right where they are. And if you grow up in that place, you understand that—and if you don't, you don't.

ELLEN. Okay...but—flawed as it is—it is the system that gives the best quality of life to the biggest number of people.

JUDY. (*Rueful laugh.*) Okay, Ellen. First of all, you know that's not true. Look at health care. And education. And whatever else—it's just not true. Second—isn't this the thing you rail against? The blind assumption that this country is good, even when it's behaving badly? Isn't this what you want? To find the blind spots, look at what's really happening and to go deeper?

ELLEN. Yes.

JUDY. You talk about what people take for granted—you take for granted your own worth—you take for granted that you are worthy of love. Who but someone who completely believes in that could live the way you've lived? Who else could make the choices you've made? You can criticize marriage and have “expansive” thoughts about relationships, not because you think the system of marriage is wrong, but because you don't need it. You don't need to be reassured you won't be left. Most people, they don't know that. They don't believe that. Look at how shocked you are. How can that be the case? How did you get this far in life without having your heart broken?

ELLEN. I don't know.

Ellen steps back into the present.

ELLEN. (*Dawning.*) I don't know why I thought... I mean, it's obvious, it's obvious, it's obvious. The thing about the blind spot—is...*you can't see it.* It doesn't matter how much you try...*that's what makes it a blind spot.* (*A beat.*) So... So... What? What can you do? (*A beat.*) Look at your wake, I guess—at the damage you've left in your wake... And try to figure out what was really happening when you were looking forward, trying so hard, thinking you were paying such close, careful attention.

Scene 6

PROJECTIONS: FRAGMENTED IMAGES OF KATRINA AND ITS AFTERMATH

September 2005. Ten months later.

Danny and Ellen are in their living room, getting ready to go to the beach. Danny is singing a happy, meander-y going-to-the-beach song he's making up as he goes along.

DANNY. (*Sings.*) *Going to the beach. We're going to the beach. What's more fun than the beach—*

ELLEN. (*Holding the sunscreen.*) Did you get the tops of your ears?

DANNY. Yep—*There's sand and sun and a big roller coaster—*

ELLEN. Did you get the tops of your feet?

DANNY. Yep—*and some washed up syringes and some other kinds of trash at the New York Beach! Love the beach! I love the beach! Hey! We're going to the beach! (Ellen points to a plastic grocery bag. He picks it up.)* What is this?

ELLEN. I cut up watermelon.

DANNY. Ah! Good thinkin', Linkin'.