

1.

*(Dark.
A radio plays.
"Fly Me to the Moon" as sung by Sarah Vaughn.
And then—
We see the fireflies
Ten
Then twenty...
They multiply like stars.
There are so many that it is impossible to count them all.
RETHA BAKER appears.
She is dressed in black.
She looks out.
After a while, she hears something.
She turns off the radio and listens.)*

RETHA

Mama?/Mama, is that you?

(beat)

I dreamed it snowed last night/Big wet flakes/The kind that linger on yr nose/On yr eyelashes/Yr tongue/It was like.../It was like the inside of a snow globe/Like the ones in Mister Josiah's shop/You know, the ones for show not for sale?/I dreamed it snowed/And it was like God tipped us upside down/Gave us a shake/And stirred everything up

(beat)

I remember you useta say/"Dreaming of snow in the middle of summer?/Baby girl, that's a sign"/You were always talking about signs/A sudden change in the wind/An unexpected pain in yr knee/An animal cry in the night/Signs/All of them

(beat)

I wonder...

(beat)

The house is all right/Everything in its place/I had Mister Nathan by to fix the banister/And that squeaky spot on the floor in the dining room/The spot you always said drove you crazy but never had fixed/I almost can't believe it's still standing without you here to hold it up

(beat)

I need to strip the beds soon/Strip the beds and flip the mattresses/What was it you useta say/"Care for it and it'll care for you..."/I'll have to get Nina to help me...

(RETHA smiles.)

Or George/He's back you know/George/Got here yesterday/"Georgie Porgie..."

(beat)

Nina says he probably brought some girl with him/"He's probably engaged," she says/"You know how those big city girls are"/But I *don't* know.../I've never been to the city/I've never met a big city girl...

(beat)

It seems to me that if George had gone and fallen inlove he'd've said something

RETHA (cont'd)

I've thought on it a little/On love, I mean/Just a little/Everyone makes such a fuss over it/Gloria down at the shop for one/And Nina/Lord Nina/Chasing after this boy/Then that boy/"Did you see his eyes/Did you see his mouth/Did you see his...?"/"Such a big world," she says/"So many pretty boys"/I say to her, yeah, but you only need one/And she says, "What do you know, Retha?/What do you know...?"

(beat)

What I know.../What I know is that love is best in winter/When it's snowy and cold/Cause that's when you want another body around/That's when you want a body around for warmth

(beat)

It's too hot now/Only June and already much too hot/Seems like the sun's already up and burning no matter what time you get outta bed.../No matter what you do you can't never seem to beat the heat

(beat)

Summer, mama/Summer ain't no time for love

NINA, *off*

Retha?

RETHA

Ain't no time for love at all.

*(NINA BAKER appears on the porch.
She is also dressed in black.)*

NINA

Retha, what you doing out here?

RETHA

Nothing/I ain't doing nothing

NINA

Talking to the sky like always/Always talking to the sky

RETHA

I thought you were asleep

NINA

It's too hot for sleep/It's too darn hot

RETHA

There's some lemonade in the icebox/Made it fresh yesterday

NINA

Didn't nobody ever get cool from a glass of lemonade...

NINA (cont'd)

'Cept maybe...

(NINA smiles.)

'Cept maybe if they poured it all over themselves

*(A moment and then—
The sisters laugh.)*

RETHA

Can you imagine?

NINA

So sweet!

RETHA

So sweet?/So sticky is more like it

NINA

Ain't nothing a bath wouldn't fix/Or a dip in the creek/Ooo we should go swimming/Pull out our suits and go "wade in the water"

(NINA does a little dance.)

Retha, you hear me?

(RETHA is somewhere else.)

Retha—!

RETHA

You remember how we useta run around the yard catching fireflies?

NINA

Fireflies?/What you talking about, fireflies—?

RETHA

I was just thinking—

NINA

Yeah and I was just talking about swimming—!

RETHA

Remember how in the evenings we useta catch 'em in our hands?/In jars?/Put them on the windowsill in our bedroom?/Remember how you useta scream whenever one of them would light on yr arm

NINA

I didn't scream

RETHA
Yeah you did/Like a girl—

NINA
I *am* a girl/And so are you—

RETHA
You were like—

(RETHA screams.)

NINA
I never did that!

RETHA
Yeah you did so/Useta scream like a crazy person

*(RETHA screams again—like a crazy person.
NINA tries to get her to stop.)*

NINA
Retha!/Retha!/RETHA—!

(NINA pinches RETHA.)

RETHA
OW! What—?

NINA
I didn't scream like that/So stop!

(NINA sulks.)

RETHA
Oh come on/I'm just playing with you/And yeah you did—

NINA
Yr always playing/Always teasing/You think yr *so* funny

RETHA
I do not

NINA
Yeah/You do

(NINA sulks some more.)

RETHA

Oh come on, Nina/Don't be such a baby—

NINA

Just cause yr the oldest—

RETHA

“Just cause yr the oldest—”

NINA

“Doesn't make me a baby/And it doesn't mean you
get to make fun—

RETHA

I don't make fun—

NINA

Yeah you do/All the time

(RETHA sucks her teeth.)

See there?

(The sisters breathe. RETHA softens.)

RETHA

Fine/I'm sorry, ok?

(beat)

Nina.../What?/Now yr not gonna talk to me?

(RETHA swallows her pride.)

I remember you always useta catch more fireflies than me

(NINA perks up.)

NINA

I did?

RETHA

You know you did

(NINA turns, smiling.)

NINA

Yeah, I know/I just wanted to hear you say it/Mama useta say it was because I was so sweet

RETHA

That was bees, Nina/Mama useta say you were sweet and that's how come you got stung all the
time—

NINA

No/That's not what she said—

RETHA

You got stung cause you were sweet/You caught more fireflies cause.../Well, who knows why you caught more fireflies/You were eager—

NINA

That is *not* the reason—!

RETHA

If yr not going to tell the story right, Nina, then you shouldn't be telling it at all—

NINA

I *am* telling it right—

RETHA

No, yr not—

NINA

Yes I am—!

RETHA

It was bees/Not fireflies/*Bees*—!

NINA

Anyway!

(The sisters breathe.)

I don't see why it matters anyhow/Why it matters whether it was fireflies or bees or whatever/I don't see why you always gotta be such a perfectionist about everything/It's just a story

RETHA

It ain't just a story

(Now it's NINA who has to make amends.)

NINA

Remember how mama useta sit up on the porch/We'd be running around the yard with our jars and she'd be up there/Just a laughing/Remember Retha?/Remember that?

RETHA

With her sweet tea

NINA

I don't think I ever saw her drink nothing but sweet tea

RETHA

That's cause she never drank nothing but sweet tea

RETHA (cont'd)

We musta looked ridiculous in our dresses and bare feet/Arms and legs every which way/Chasing bugs in the dark

NINA

“Watch it girls/Watch where yr running”

RETHA

“If y’all run into each other I don’t wanna hear no crying”

NINA

“Not a sniffle—”

THE SISTERS

“Not a one”

(A shared smile and then—)

NINA

I can’t believe she’s gone

RETHA

I know

NINA

You know how Pastor Wilkins is always talking about how God spoke the universe into being?/I always imagined that mama did the same thing/That she said “let there be”/And made all this

RETHA

I thought I heard her snoring/Earlier, I mean/I was laying up in my bed and I thought I heard her
(RETHA demonstrates.)

God, mama could snore

NINA

Like a tractor—

RETHA

Like ten tractors

NINA

I miss her snore

RETHA

Yeah/Me too

NINA

Why is it when people die we miss the things about them that useta annoy us the most?

*(The sisters look out.
And then—)*

RETHA

Mister Berry's bringing his laundry by in the morning/I'm gonna need yr help

NINA

George is home/All the way back from New York City/Can you believe it?

RETHA

Nina, did you hear what I said?

NINA

Four years away and now he's sleeping right over there—

RETHA

He said, you sure it's ok to bring laundry on the day of yr mama's funeral—?

NINA

“Georgie Porgie”/Home at last—

RETHA

And I said, of course its ok/Mama wouldn't have wanted it any other way

NINA

That's a nice thought at least/Don't you think, Retha?

(NINA looks at RETHA.)

Retha?

RETHA

Huh?

NINA

I said isn't that a nice thought?/About George being home

RETHA

Oh.../Yeah

(NINA laughs at RETHA, but just a little.)

Yeah, it is...