

THIRTY STORIES DOWN

a play in one act

by

Kiran Kaur Saini

Copyright © Kiran Kaur Saini
kiran@kirankoursaini.com
323.527.8387

FOR MANINDER

Thirty Stories Down was first produced by Theatre Studio, Inc. in New York, NY, in December 1997, with the following cast:

JENNY Erin Eagar

SHEILA Beverly Wallace

ARTHUR Joseph Cady

This production was directed by Maninder K. Saini.

It was produced by DreamWeaver Productions at Kampo Cultural Center in March of 1998 with the same cast. The production manager for these performances was Michael D. Wilson.

CHARACTERS

SHEILA	Late 40s or early 50s
ARTHUR	Mid 50s
JENNY	Late teens or early 20s, their daughter

SETTING

The living room of a small apartment. Very sparse furnishing. Stage left a window. Stage right a door. Upstage, a curtain, flats, or nothing. It is a flat wall with no exit. Near the window is a folding card table. Near the door is an armchair. Upstage center, near back wall, is a large wooden box or chest.

TIME

The present

SCENE I

(At rise, SHEILA is looking out the window. She and all characters look down rather than out into the distance.)

(SHEILA crosses to JENNY's box, lifts the lid and peers inside. She starts pulling things out of the box: a little locked DIARY, A MOVIE STAR MAGAZINE, a few dried FLOWER STEMS, whatever. At the discretion of the director.)

SHEILA

Nothing interesting today.

(SHEILA pulls out a JUMPROPE)

SHEILA

Nothing new.

(SHEILA looks offstage furtively, hastily puts items back in JENNY's box, closes lid, crosses back to window.)

(Enter JENNY, dressed in workout clothes. She opens her box and pulls out her jump rope, a small TOWEL, and two small DUMBELLS. She puts the towel on the table and begins to jump rope.)

JENNY

One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten.

(Now, and at every interval of ten, JENNY drops the rope, squats, leaps into the air

and then starts jumping rope again.)

Eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, twenty...

(Pause for leap. JENNY continues this throughout the scene, counting under her breath. She also alternates with different forms of exercise using the dumbbells.)

SHEILA

Honey, I wish you would stop doing that. Think of the poor neighbors.

JENNY

No one can hear me, Mom.

(Their exchanges are casual, friendly, joking.)

SHEILA

(Looking out the window)
It looks like it might be raining today. I think people are wearing raincoats.

JENNY

You can't see anybody's coats from way up here.

SHEILA

Of course you can. I see one man right there in a London Fog trench coat, going into that shiny gold building.

JENNY

Shiny gold building? What building is that?

SHEILA

It's... Why it's... Well, I can't seem to remember what it is just now, but I'm sure I will. Maybe it's the newspaper building where they print that rag your father likes so much.

JENNY

He's been reading the same paper for as long as I can remember.

SHEILA

I think I've been inside that building.

JENNY

I don't think you've ever been anywhere. None of us have ever been anywhere.

SHEILA

Why, that's just not true. We've been lots of places. We just don't go anymore.

JENNY

How could we go anywhere? It's thirty stories down. How did we go anywhere? That way?

(JENNY gestures towards the window.)

SHEILA

Well...Maybe we...it does seem sort of difficult. Maybe there was... Sweetheart, please stop it. You'll wear yourself out.

JENNY

No, I'll energize myself.

SHEILA

Did I ever tell you the story about your Uncle Henry? He went to the emergency room at St. Vincent's because he thought his head was breaking open. Your father and I got there just as they were doing the brain scan. They thought he had a brain tumor. Your father was very upset. And it turned out he did have a brain tumor, but you know what else he had? A broken rib. It showed up on the MRI. It was from like ten years before and he had no idea how he could have gotten it. Isn't that the funniest thing?

JENNY

Well...

SHEILA

Jenny, for goodness' sake, think of your father. Poor man never sleeps. With all your jumping and carrying on. You're like a cuckoo clock gone haywire.

(JENNY leaps.)

JENNY

Well, I'm determined.

SHEILA

Determined? Determined about what?

JENNY

I don't know. It's just a feeling. Determined. It's like, I don't know, an instinct.

SHEILA

Oh, don't start with instincts. You're not an animal, Jenny. I want you to always remember that. We are not animals.

JENNY

Okay, whatever. I just think it's important to be fit.

SHEILA

Fit? Fit for what? What have you got to be fit for?

(Pause. JENNY switches to another exercise. SHEILA turns to look out the window.)

SHEILA (CONT'D.)

It looks like it might be windy.

(pause)

Did I tell you that your Aunt Mary became a phlebotomist?

JENNY

Yes, Mom.

SHEILA

She thought you had to be fit, too. Always going to those seminars and talking about health screenings. Oh, my. I think they're lining up down there. Maybe there's something going on.

JENNY

I'm sure there's nothing going on.

SHEILA

Well, it certainly looks like it.

JENNY

Whoop de doo.

SHEILA

As if being a phlebotomist were something sexy. I don't think being a phlebotomist is sexy, do you?

JENNY

I don't know, Mom. I don't know what a phlebotomist is and I've never seen Aunt Mary.

SHEILA

Well, of course you have, dear. Of course you have.

(She watches out the window for a moment.)

SHEILA (CONT'D.)

Well, maybe it's Thanksgiving. Maybe it's Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. I love Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. Remember when we used to take you and Christina when you were little?

JENNY

No.

SHEILA

Of course you do. We dressed Christina in that little pink fake-fur coat, and you were so cute. We couldn't pick you up or anything, you wouldn't let go of Christina's hand. And thank God you didn't. If you had, that child would have run all over tarnation.

JENNY

No, I don't remember.

SHEILA

Just like your father used to be. Short attention span. I couldn't keep up with either of them. Couldn't even keep them facing the right direction at a parade. But not you. You're like me. You loved the floats.

JENNY

I can't remember that.

SHEILA

You could have sat there just looking, just watching, for hours. We could have spent the whole afternoon there, you and I, if your father and sister hadn't been so impatient.

JENNY

I still don't remember.

SHEILA

Christina... At any rate, it's some event down there.

JENNY

I suppose when the time comes.

SHEILA

What?

JENNY

What I've got to be fit for. I suppose I'll know.

SHEILA

Suppose, suppose. You sound just like your father. There's nothing to suppose about.

JENNY

He's not that bad.

SHEILA

Oh! All your father does is suppose. "I suppose!" Your father supposes everything.

JENNY

Well maybe he can't think of anything else.

SHEILA

Well, is that any excuse? I suppose! That's all he ever says! I suppose! Suppose this! Suppose that! I suppose, suppose, suppose!

JENNY

Like you don't suppose.

SHEILA

Well, maybe I do, but I don't go around announcing it.

JENNY

Oh, yeah, you suppose discreetly.

SHEILA

Well, I don't say it.

JENNY

It's not like you have to. We know you're supposing.

SHEILA

And just what does that mean?

JENNY

You suppose more than Dad does. You're in our faces with it all day long. You suppose like it's going out of style. You suppose as if you could sell it bit by bit on the street and make a million dollars. You suppose like there's no tomorrow.

SHEILA

I'll not have you talk to me like this. I'm your mother.

JENNY

(in a "here-we-go-again" tone)
Oh my God.

SHEILA

Absolutely not!

JENNY

Don't get all hyped up.

SHEILA

I'm your mother!

(A pause. No response from JENNY.)

SHEILA (CONT'D.)

I'm your mother! I'm...

(looks out window)
Well, what do you think this is?

JENNY

I'm sure it's nothing different.

SHEILA

I think it is. I think it's some event.

JENNY

Mom, there are never any events.

SHEILA

But look.

(JENNY, still in movement curling a dumbbell, crosses to window. She joins her mother and peers down. Same angle of heads for a moment. Then JENNY stops moving. For the first time, she is still, her arm poised in midair. She stares.)

JENNY

What in-

SHEILA

See?

JENNY

What are they do-

SHEILA

They're doing something.

JENNY

It is something different. Something's actually happening.

SHEILA

Something certainly is.

JENNY

(suddenly disturbed)

But how will we know?

SHEILA

What?

JENNY

What it is. How will we know what it is?

(pause)

SHEILA

I guess we'll just have to suppose.

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 2

(ARTHUR sits in armchair reading his NEWSPAPER. SHEILA is pacing behind ARTHUR, glancing at him occasionally. She approaches JENNY's box and lifts the lid cautiously, checking to make sure that ARTHUR is still reading his newspaper. She pulls out the end of a huge, thick ROPE, and expresses surprise. ARTHUR laughs uproariously at something in the paper and turns the page. SHEILA is startled and closes the box hastily and sits on it. ARTHUR turns around and, seeing her on the box, gives her an insinuating look. A few beats of silence and ARTHUR reading.)

SHEILA

Any news?

ARTHUR

(grunts)

SHEILA

Well, what are you reading?

(pause)

Something funny?

(pause)

I know you're reading something. You're sitting there with the paper open.

(pause)

SHEILA (CONT'D.)

I'm interested. Go ahead. Tell me something. Go ahead. Anything. The comic strips. Political satire. Even the stock market quotes. I don't care. I'm interested in whatever you're interested in. I want to be involved.

(pause)

Well, what about the ads? What are they advertising at Macy's? Remember that year I had the job at the Chanel counter? That was the first job I ever had. A counter girl. Eau de cologne. Parfum de la nuit. Poudre de la bain. When you met me you said you wanted to photograph me. You thought they hired me because I was a model. That's what you said. I loved that counter. I loved that perfume.

ARTHUR

(grunts)

SHEILA

Arthur, remember the time your sister Ellen got her hair stuck down the bathroom tub drain at your mother's house before Christmas dinner? And your mother kept shouting, "Ellen, come out! It's my turn! And I'm the hostess!" And none of us knew what was taking her so long!

(pause)

Arthur, what if Christina's still alive? I think she might be. Maybe she's out there. Of course, she wasn't nice, like Jenny, but sometimes that can work for a girl, right? ...Not that I miss her, or anything, she was more trouble than she was worth, really. ...But for all we know, she could be just fine.

ARTHUR

(grunts)

SHEILA

I mean, after all, if something had happened to her it would have been in the newspaper... And then you would have told me about it, right? Don't you think it would have been in the newspaper?

(No response from ARTHUR.)

SHEILA (CONT'D.)

Arthur? Arthur! Don't you think it would have been in the newspaper?!

ARTHUR

I suppose.

SHEILA

Aaargh! You never tell me anything. For all I know, there's some article right there in that very paper.

ARTHUR

(Grunts)

SHEILA

Maybe she did survive. Maybe everything she wanted to happen did happen to her. Maybe she's married. Maybe she's a star. Maybe her picture's right there in the entertainment section.

ARTHUR

(Grunts)

SHEILA

I think I should know. What does it say?

(pause)

SHEILA

I'm your wife. I think you ought to tell me... Don't you think you ought to?... Arthur! Don't you think you ought to tell me?

ARTHUR

I suppose.

SHEILA

Well, why don't you!

ARTHUR

Well, you can read.

SHEILA

It's not the same! Why can't you just tell me? Is that so hard? Is it so hard to share things with me? Answer me that! We used to have such a good time together. Going places. Going out.

(looks about the apartment)
Going places.

(SHEILA looks as if she's about to cry. Exits.)

(ARTHUR reads his paper for a moment, then, hesitatingly, lowers it, looks around, then rises and goes to wall upstage. He feels the wall with his hands.)

ARTHUR

It was here somewhere. Right here in this wall. I think it was. Crazy thing. Just like that. Swung back and forth. There was a squeaking or something, like a little voice. Like a mouse.

(ARTHUR crosses to chair, reaches under and pulls out a SCREWDRIVER and tries to pry it into anything that looks like it might be a crack in the wall.)

ARTHUR (CONT'D.)

There has to be a crack. It swung back and forth. Like the revolving door at Macy's. Sheila loved that revolving door. That's class, she said. A revolving door is class. She actually used to think that.

(SHEILA reenters, looking at a handful of POSTCARDS she's carrying.)

SHEILA

Arthur, look at these.

(she looks up)
What are you doing?

ARTHUR

Sheila, don't let's start.

SHEILA

Arthur, there is no door here. The only door here is right there and goes to the bedroom.

(sees the screwdriver)
Where did you get that? I thought all the tools were gone.

ARTHUR

Oh, so you admit that we had tools.

SHEILA

You know very well I threw them out the window.

ARTHUR

Out the window! You could have killed someone! It's thirty stories down!

SHEILA

Please. Please. You know there's no thirteenth floor. Twenty-nine, darling, only twenty-nine.

(SHEILA takes the screwdriver away from him and exits back into the other room. ARTHUR crosses back to the chair and pulls a CROWBAR from beneath. He returns to the wall and starts the same process. Re-enter SHEILA, without the screwdriver.)

SHEILA

Oh, for heaven's sake. Where are you hiding these things?

(glances cursorily about the room)

Give me that.

(SHEILA takes the crowbar and exits again. ARTHUR continues his search with bare hands. Enter JENNY. ARTHUR looks a little embarrassed, but continues his search.)

JENNY

(as if expecting "no" for an answer)

Any luck?

ARTHUR

No.

(JENNY peers out the window, shifting her position frequently to try to get a better viewing angle.)

JENNY

Dad?

ARTHUR

Hmmm?

JENNY

I think there's something going on down there.

ARTHUR

(Looks tired. Sits down on JENNY's box.)
Well, pumpkin. I suppose there probably is. Very likely.

JENNY

Doesn't it bother you? That there might be something going on down there?

ARTHUR

I suppose.

JENNY

I mean, what if it's something important? What if there's something important?

ARTHUR

Well...

JENNY

Dad... Was there really ever a door here?

ARTHUR

Yes. There was. I remember it. It was right here.

JENNY

And you could go through it? And could you go down to the street from it?

ARTHUR

I think so.

JENNY

And you could go places?

(She joins him on the box.)

ARTHUR

I think so.

JENNY

And we really did go places like Mom says?

ARTHUR

We must have.

JENNY

I can't remember any of this. And I really had a sister?

ARTHUR

(pause)

I suppose so.

(pause)

JENNY

Dad, I want to go down there.

ARTHUR

I know.

(They sit for a few moments. Arthur crosses back to his armchair, sits back down and picks up his newspaper.)

JENNY

What are you reading?

ARTHUR

Oh. Well...

(JENNY crosses to ARTHUR and gently takes the paper out of his hand.)

JENNY

Dad, this is the same paper.

(turns through the pages)
These are the same articles. The same stories. The same photographs and cartoons. Dad - you've been reading the same paper for as long as I can remember.

(ARTHUR is embarrassed. JENNY hands the paper back to him. She crosses to her box and lifts the lid. She pulls out the end of the big rope and thinks for a moment.)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 3

(SHEILA and JENNY onstage)

JENNY

Tell me about Christina.

SHEILA

Christina? Since when have you been interested in Christina?

(JENNY shrugs)

SHEILA (CONT'D.)

She was... She was... Well, it's hard to think about it. Older than you. Headstrong. A girl with an attitude. That's what your father used to call her. She loved the subway. She was always running off when we were shopping. She was kind of a juvenile delinquent, in my opinion. Macy's was an absolute nightmare with her along. Winter coats? Oh, my God. Don't even ask. It was just awful.

JENNY

Mom?

SHEILA

Hmmm?

JENNY

Did she disappear before or after the door was here?

SHEILA

The door? Have you been talking to your father? Sweetheart, there never was any door here. That's just some fool idea of your father's. *(cont'd.)*

SHEILA (CONT'D.)

I don't know how to explain it to you. Your father just sees things a little funny sometimes.

JENNY

But how could you go out and do things if you couldn't leave the apartment?

SHEILA

Well, honey, that's just part of life. It's part of growing up. Things change. Times are different. That was then. This is now.

JENNY

But how could you have gone to Macy's?

SHEILA

Macy's? Macy's isn't that important.

(hesitatingly, uncertain)

It really isn't... Besides we've already been there so many times.

JENNY

But I can't remember any of those times.

SHEILA

You don't have to. I'll tell you everything.

JENNY

But—

SHEILA

And I'm sure we have everything we need now.

JENNY

But maybe you didn't go to Macy's because you needed stuff.

SHEILA

Well...

JENNY

How did she leave, Mom? Did you lose track of her when you were out? Did she go out and never come back?

SHEILA

Maybe it's not such a good idea that we talk about this.

JENNY

Did something happen to make her leave?

SHEILA

No, no! Of course not!

JENNY

Then what?

SHEILA

I don't know! I don't know why she left. She just did. I don't know when it was. It seemed so sudden.

JENNY

Is it something to do with the door?

(pause)

Is it something to do with the window?

SHEILA

(becoming stern, but also tearful)

We are not going to talk about this anymore. This is ridiculous. It's absurd. This whole thing is completely absurd!

JENNY

Hey! I'm finally interested in hearing about this stuff! I would think you would be happy. I thought you'd like this. Do you think my feelings are absurd?

SHEILA

Well, since you're asking, in all honesty, right now I do. I don't know what's happened to you. Yesterday you were so nice and sweet.

JENNY

Oh, thank you. Thank you very much.

SHEILA

Why are you doing this to me?

JENNY

Doing this to you? I'm not doing anything. I'm just asking questions.

SHEILA

But you never would have before.

JENNY

(looking out the window)
Well, like you said. Sometimes things change.

SHEILA

But it seems so sudden.

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 4

(Lights up to half on JENNY. She is sitting on the floor CS in her pajamas. She is tying knots into her large rope at intervals of about a foot and a half apart. Many feet of the rope are already knotted. The rest of the rope trails into the box and she yanks on it periodically to get more out. Silence as we watch her for a few moments.)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 5

(JENNY is jumping rope with a fierce determination. ARTHUR is in his chair reading his newspaper, but obviously with less satisfaction than before, putting it down and picking it up again. He can't seem to find anything interesting in it. Every now and then he glances at JENNY in concern.)

ARTHUR

Pumpkin, aren't you getting tired?

JENNY

No.

ARTHUR

Don't hurt yourself.

JENNY

Do I look like I'm hurting myself?

ARTHUR

...No... Just be careful, Pumpkin. You know you mean a lot to me.

(JENNY slows down for a moment, softens)

JENNY

Thanks, Dad.

(Enter SHEILA)

SHEILA

Jenny, stop that.

JENNY

No.

SHEILA

I have a headache and I'm not in the mood right now.

(JENNY scrunches up her body and jumps rope slowly on tiptoe, lifting her knees high, one foot at a time.)

SHEILA

That's not funny.

ARTHUR

(laughs uproariously)

(SHEILA shoots him a look. He quiets down immediately.)

ARTHUR

Ahem...

(SHEILA passes around JENNY to the window.)

SHEILA

Jenny, stop it. I can't concentrate.

JENNY

I have to get strong.

SHEILA

Strong? What have you got to get strong for?

(JENNY doesn't answer but exercises stonily.)

SHEILA (CONT'D.)

You're going to get bulked up like a hulk.

JENNY

Good. I don't care.

SHEILA

(not really believing herself)
Of course you do...

(JENNY switches to weights, deliberately knocking them together and making a loud clinking noise.)

SHEILA (CONT'D.)

Arthur, make her stop. Tell her what's going to happen to her. Pretty soon you're going to look like a chimpanzee. Arthur, tell her. Isn't she going to look like a chimpanzee?

ARTHUR

(approvingly)
I suppose.

(SHEILA crosses to JENNY and snatches the weights out of JENNY's hands. They are heavy for her. She crosses to the window and heaves them out. Sound of BREAKING GLASS.)

ARTHUR

Sheila! For God's sake!

(JENNY shrieks, bursts into tears, and exits.)

SHEILA

This is all your fault!

ARTHUR

My fault!?

SHEILA

Yes, you and your talk about your damn door. There is no door, Arthur. There is no door. There is no door!

ARTHUR

Maybe there is no door, but there was a door.

SHEILA

No!

ARTHUR

How do you think we ever went anywhere? It doesn't make any sense. There was a door, Sheila. A door.

SHEILA

No, Arthur. We don't need a door.

ARTHUR

We had one.

SHEILA

Arthur, stop it. My head is pounding.

ARTHUR

We had a door. And we used it. How do you think you got all your damn stories?

SHEILA

But, Arthur, we have everything we need now. We don't need a door anymore. Having the window is bad enough. My God, do you know what Jenny's been thinking about lately?

(She crosses to JENNY's box and lifts the lid.)

ARTHUR

Now you leave Jenny's stuff alone.

SHEILA

But do you know what's in here?

(She pulls out the end of the big rope. ARTHUR is taken aback for a moment.)

What do you think she's planning on doing with this? Huh, Arthur?

(She starts pulling it out. There is no end to it.)

ARTHUR

Sheila, put that back.

SHEILA

How can I?

ARTHUR

It's Jenny's business.

SHEILA

Don't you think it's our business, too? Don't you think this will affect us?

(ARTHUR has no response to that. SHEILA gathers a bunch of rope in her arms and heads for the window. The other end of the rope stays in the box.)

ARTHUR

Sheila, no!

(He tries to block her.)

SHEILA

Get out of my way! Leave me alone!

ARTHUR

I'm not going to let you do this.

SHEILA

(struggling)

You can't stop me.

ARTHUR

I will.

(They grapple with the rope, with increasing intensity. Neither seems capable of gaining an upper hand. Finally, Arthur raises his hand to violently strike Sheila and they freeze. Both are horrified. Sheila lets go of the rope, leaving it in Arthur's hands, and exits with her hand covering her mouth. Arthur takes a few moments to recover, then crosses to JENNY's box with the rope. He pauses and looks after SHEILA.)

ARTHUR

(optional:)

I'm sorry, Sheila.

(He crosses to his chair and stuffs the bunch of rope under his chair. Lights dim as he gradually pulls the snake of rope from JENNY's box foot by foot and continues to push it under his chair.)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 6

(Lights up to half on SHEILA. She is in her nightgown, and she is plowing through Jenny's box. She can't find Jenny's rope. She scans around the room a bit, then sits down in Arthur's armchair. She looks about her a bit then notices Arthur's paper on the floor near the chair. She picks it up and attempts to read it. She sighs and huffs while she tries to focus on it and turns pages impatiently.)

SHEILA

It's not the same.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 7

(ARTHUR is sitting in his armchair. One end of Jenny's rope is tied to the leg of his chair. The other end of the rope trails out the window. ARTHUR reads his newspaper, but is really paying attention to JENNY. He looks worried, but is not going to interfere. JENNY pulls on the rope, testing it. She climbs over the windowsill just as SHEILA enters in time to see her.)

SHEILA

No! Jenny! Stop! You can't do this! It's 30 stories down!

JENNY

(out of sight)
It's okay, I think it's long enough.

SHEILA

Come back!

JENNY

I'm doing it. I'm out the window!

SHEILA

You have to stop!

JENNY

I'm out the window!

SHEILA

Jenny, you can't go!

JENNY

I'm already out.

SHEILA

We can't lose you! ...Arthur, make her stop. Make her come back. Jenny! Stop! Give me your hand!

JENNY

No!

SHEILA

I'll never tell another story!

JENNY

It's okay, Mom.

SHEILA

Arthur! What's wrong with you? Don't you realize what's happening?

ARTHUR

I suppose.

SHEILA

Jenny! Come back up here this instant!

JENNY

No!

SHEILA

Jenny, please stop this. I can't stand it.

JENNY

I'm halfway there!

SHEILA

(to Arthur)
For once in your life!

JENNY

Oh my God. Look at it!

SHEILA

Arthur!

(SHEILA grabs the rope and tries to pull JENNY back up, but can't budge it.)

SHEILA (CONT'D.)

Arthur! Do something!

(ARTHUR looks over at SHEILA and then away. He thinks. After a moment of thought, he slowly gets out of the chair. The chair suddenly slides across the room towards the window under Jenny's weight. The rope speeds through Sheila's hands. JENNY starts screaming.)

JENNY

What's happening!!?

(more screams)

(Just before the chair hits the back of her legs, SHEILA catches hold of the rope, braces her weight against the pull, and stops Jenny's fall. She tries to look over her shoulder to see what's happened, but just holding onto the rope is a struggle, and there's no time.)

SHEILA

I don't know. Arthur! What's happening?

(looks over shoulder)

SHEILA (CONT'D.)

My God! Arthur! Jenny, hang on.

(ARTHUR comes to stand beside SHEILA for a moment.)

SHEILA (CONT'D.)

For God's sake, Arthur! Sit down! Sit down!

JENNY

Mom!

SHEILA

Arthur! My God!

(ARTHUR puts his hand on Sheila's shoulder. SHEILA is speechless for a moment. The rope is still out of control. She struggles with it in silence for a few moments.)

JENNY

Mom!

(SHEILA continues to struggle with the rope and manages to stabilize it.)

SHEILA

Honey? Hold on, I think...

JENNY

Is it going to fall?

SHEILA

I don't know. I think... I don't know.

JENNY

Don't let go. There are only 10 stories left.

SHEILA

It's slipping!

JENNY

Hold on!

SHEILA

I can't.

JENNY

You have to.

SHEILA

I'm not strong enough for this.

JENNY

Yes you are. Hang on!

(Arthur checks to make sure SHEILA isn't failing, then quietly exits.)

I'm going down! Hold on, Mom!

SHEILA

(assessing her situation with the rope)
I... I think it's okay...

JENNY

Wow! Look at that!

SHEILA

Well... I'm hanging on...

(She braces her feet against the wall.)

JENNY

I'm almost down.

SHEILA

I've got you, honey. I'm holding on.

JENNY

I'm almost there.

SHEILA

It's okay, baby. I've got you. I've got you. I'm holding on.

(FADE OUT)

(THE END)