

**THE THINGS
YOU LEFT
BEHIND**

BY MARK OXMAN

CHARACTERS

KEVIN ABERMAN, thirty-seven years old
MIMI LOCKARD, his mother, sixty-eight years old
BIRDIE LOCKARD, his grandmother, ninety-one years old

ACT ONE:

SAVANNAH MCLACHLAN, Kevin's sister, thirty-nine years old
THOMAS MCLACHLAN, Savannah's oldest child, eleven years old
LILY MCLACHLAN, Savannah's youngest child, ten years old
DANIEL O'CONNOR, Savannah's fiancé, thirty-nine years old

ACT TWO:

MARIA, hospice nurse
RENEE, social worker
UNCLE CHARLIE, Kevin's uncle
COUSIN ANN, Mimi's cousin

PLACE

Act One: A large two-story home in Missouri City, Texas, twenty miles southwest of Houston.

Act Two: A 1400-square foot home in Orange County, California.

TIME

March 2019.

THE THINGS YOU LEFT BEHIND

PROLOGUE

The curtains are drawn. Downstage left, four elevated chairs are lit in a spot to simulate a large SUV. Savannah McLachlan, 39, five feet tall and about 40 pounds overweight, waits cheerfully in the driver's seat. Upon hearing someone approach, she leans down and unlocks a latch.

Savannah's brother, Kevin, 37, six foot and healthy, tosses a handful of luggage into the trunk. He then climbs into the driver's seat beside her.

SAVANNAH. Sorry I couldn't come to you. But I didn't want to lose my spot at this terminal.

KEVIN. That's okay. We found you. I didn't realize the numbers were on the sliding doors. People were standing in front of them.

SAVANNAH. Yeah. It's confusing.

(Savannah's little grandmother, Birdie, 91, climbs up into the backseat, sliding into the middle seat. Savannah's eyes light up with practiced friendliness.)

SAVANNAH. Hi, Grandma.

BIRDIE. Hi, dear.

SAVANNAH. I haven't seen you since you came to Houston to play bridge. I don't think you've ever seen my house.

BIRDIE. *(reaching for her seatbelt)* Oh.

SAVANNAH. I lost 40 pounds, Grandma. I'm on the Keto diet.

BIRDIE. *(trying to buckle)* You look great.

SAVANNAH. I eat very little carbs but a lot of fat. By lowering my carbohydrate intake, my body goes into ketosis and it burns fat for energy or turns them into ketones.

BIRDIE. Oh. That's nice.

SAVANNAH. It lowers blood sugar and insulin levels. I was borderline diabetic before. So I said, "Huh uh. I'm going to change that." And now I've lost 40 pounds.

BIRDIE. Okay, honey.

(Birdie is still struggling with the belt. Kevin notices, unbuckles and leans over her.)

KEVIN. Here. I'll do it.

(He twists his body to help buckle her in.)

BIRDIE. Thank you, Kevin.

(Kevin returns to his seat. Buckles himself in. Savannah starts the car and begins to drive off. A bit of a silence. And then —)

SAVANNAH. I'm planning on losing a few more pounds. I'm not going to stop until I'm in better shape than my baby brother.

(Nobody says anything. They ride in silence. Finally, Savannah leans over and picks up her GPS.)

SAVANNAH. Directions to 55 Ford Road, Missouri City, Texas.

(The GPS repeats the command – “Getting directions to 55 Ford Road, Missouri City, Texas. Get on TX-8 Beltway West from John F Kennedy Boulevard.”)

(Savannah continues en route. She wrinkles her nose.)

SAVANNAH. I never know which way to go.

(Nobody says anything. Kevin sits silently, seemingly dazed.)

SAVANNAH. Next time fly out of HOBY Airport. It's much closer to me.

KEVIN. There weren't any direct flights.

SAVANNAH. Yeah, there are. You just don't know how to find them.

(Awkward silence. Finally Savannah adds—)

SAVANNAH. I'm glad I picked you up. I'm sorry I told you you'd have to hire a driver.

KEVIN. No problem. I appreciate you taking the time.

SAVANNAH. I hope you aren't planning on staying more than a few days. If you do, you're going to have to get a hotel, like Grandma. It's not about me or Daniel. I'm just concerned about my kids.

KEVIN. I don't think they care.

SAVANNAH. It's just hard for them. They're already dealing with mom and then another person will just make it too much.

(Subconsciously, Kevin shakes his head in annoyance. And then—)

KEVIN. How is she?

SAVANNAH. *(Turning towards him, gleefully)* Not good.

KEVIN. *(Voice wavering)* Oh, no.

SAVANNAH. I think she only has a few hours left to live.

KEVIN. You said that last week.

SAVANNAH. I know. And we're shocked she's lasted this long. She tried to get up the stairs and she couldn't do it. Daniel had to help her. She just stays in her room 23 hours a day. And every time she's upright, she vomits. She's really at the end.

(Kevin begins to cry silently.)

SAVANNAH. That's why I was telling you guys it was impossible for her to go home to California. *(Looking in rear view mirror)* Grandma, she wouldn't survive the hour-long car ride, let alone the plane flight.

BIRDIE. Oh.

SAVANNAH. She only has a few hours left to live.

(Kevin has now completely broken down.)

KEVIN. I was so depressed this week. I told you on the phone. I couldn't move or get off the couch for three days. All I kept thinking about is how much I missed her and wished I could see her again. And then I remembered she was still alive. I just wasn't with her.

SAVANNAH. Yeah. I totally understand.

KEVIN. And even though she's not doing well, she's still here and that's all I want. I wish I could just freeze time right now. I keep thinking about how jealous I will be of myself in this moment. That I get to be with my mom, no matter how sick. And one day all I'll want is this opportunity. And I have all this pressure to make the most of it and I don't even know how.

(He continues sobbing. There is nothing but the sound of his tears for a while. And then from the back seat, Birdie pops up--)

BIRDIE. How's your mom doing, Savannah?

(Savannah wrinkles her brow.)

SAVANNAH. Grandma, I've been telling you.

KEVIN. She's practically deaf now. You have to be facing her when you talk. She sort of reads your lips. *(Twisting around to face his grandma.)* My mom's not doing well. She sleeps 23 hours a day.

BIRDIE. Oh, no.

KEVIN. *(Turns back to Savannah.)* That's why I haven't called these last few days. Her phone was always off so I figured she wanted to sleep.

SAVANNAH. Yeah. I wondered why you stopped calling.

KEVIN. I also knew I was coming today so anything I'd want to say, I could say in person. I usually talk to her every day. It's going to be so hard when I have something to discuss and she won't be around.

SAVANNAH. I just have to warn you, she's having episodes where she doesn't know where she is.

KEVIN. What?

SAVANNAH. Yeah. Like, this morning the hospice nurse stopped by and asked how she was enjoying having Grandma here. And she said, "It's been fine." So she thinks she already saw you guys.

(Kevin gasps.)

SAVANNAH. Yeah. She's delusional and I'll often hear her talking to herself. Don't be alarmed if she doesn't know who you are. *(She twists around to face Birdie in the backseat.)*
MY MOM'S LOSING HER MIND. SHE THINKS SHE ALREADY SAW YOU, GRANDMA!
BIRDIE. Oh.

(Kevin continues to cry. Savannah turns back around.)

SAVANNAH. *(Chipper)* She says she's seen her Grandma Nettie. I heard that when you have one foot in the other world, you start to see all the people who have passed before.

KEVIN. Well, I'm an atheist so I don't believe that.

SAVANNAH. I know. But it's just something your brain does when you're in the last few moments of your life. It's probably just your memory preparing you for death. *(Looking up and noticing a car.)* Oh, God, buddy. Why are you going so slow? *(Whining)* Come on. Oh, God, are you going to make me change lanes? Ugh. Okay. *(She looks over her shoulder, mimics making a lane change.)*

(The GPS resounds, "Take Sam Houston Tollway West and Fort Bend Parkway Toll Road to Sienna Parkway.")

SAVANNAH. You're lucky you're with me because I have a transponder and can take the toll roads. They're expensive so most people don't have them but I have one.

(Kevin is too somber to reply.)

SAVANNAH. We got the hot tub working again. Remember how it wasn't when you came out a few weeks ago? So if you brought your suit, you can use it at night.

KEVIN. I'm not really concerned about the hot tub.

(The group remains in silence. Finally Savannah pipes up--)

SAVANNAH. I just realized you guys haven't eaten since this morning. I can take you some place nice. There's a really good Denny's on the way to grandma's hotel.

KEVIN. That's fine.

(Birdie has managed to hear this. She perks up--)

BIRDIE. I love Denny's.

SCENE ONE

The curtains are pulled open, revealing a large two story set.

The First Floor:

Stage right, the dining room which leads into a kitchen. A large couch sprawled out over the living room. And a hallway that leads to a bathroom and master bedroom, offstage. And downstage left, an office.

The Second Floor:

A stairway arrives at a landing (above the office on the first floor). A large bedroom downstage left. And then a common living space and balcony taking up the rest of the space. A hallway is stage right, leading to the bathroom and children's rooms, offstage.

At rise: Only the front foyer is lit up. The rest of the house is in darkness. The trio enter the home. Kevin carries all of the luggage.

SAVANNAH. Are you sure you don't want to go out to eat first?

KEVIN. No. We should see her. That's why we're here.

SAVANNAH. Okay. But don't be shocked if she doesn't know who you are.

(Kevin leaves the luggage the foot of the stairs. Begins to tiptoe up the steps.)

SAVANNAH. Shoes off please. I just vacuumed.

KEVIN. Oh. Right. *(He removes his shoes.)*

(Kevin removes his shoes. Birdie goes to follow after.)

SAVANNAH. Grandma, shoes off.

(But Birdie doesn't hear her. She just continues upwards.)

SAVANNAH. That's okay.

(Savannah follows the other two. They get to the landing above the stairs. Kevin knocks softly on the door. No response.)

SAVANNAH. I always get scared before I go in. What if this time, she won't wake up?

(Kevin cringes. Savannah pushes the door open, slowly.)

SAVANNAH. Mom?

(Kevin reaches in for the light switch but no light eliminates.)

SAVANNAH. No, Kevin. She has the controls. That switch doesn't work!

(Savannah reaches onto the bed, pulls out a remote control. Clicks a button and the light turns on, revealing Mimi, 68, a 90-pound woman with short hair seated in a queen sized bed. Birdie's jaw drops. She collapses onto the bed, embracing her daughter.)

BIRDIE. Oh, my golden girl. *(She holds onto her daughter, in tears.)*

(Kevin crosses over to his mother, from the opposite side of the bed.)

KEVIN. Hello. Do you know who I am?

(Mimi's head snaps to him. She's immediately annoyed.)

MIMI. Yes, Kevin. I've got pancreatic cancer, not brain damage!

(Kevin studies her, confused.)

KEVIN. Mom?

SAVANNAH. I think she needs her rest.

MIMI. *(Angrily)* No! I've waited all day for them to arrive. But damn it, Savannah, you couldn't have given me a warning? I don't want them to see me without my wig.

KEVIN. No, Mom, it looks so good. Like a chic haircut.

BIRDIE. It really does, Mimi.

SAVANNAH. Mom, we have to go eat something. They're starving.

KEVIN. No. We can stay a bit longer.

SAVANNAH. They haven't eaten since 11 o'clock their time. And now it's 9 o'clock our time.

BIRDIE. Mimi, I fixed my second bedroom up real nice. I got a new mattress if you can get home.

SAVANNAH. She can't, Grandma. She's too sick. The hospice nurse told you on the phone.

BIRDIE. I've looked into it. For 40,000, a helicopter will come to the house and transport you to California. It's expensive but you're a vice president at Morgan Stanley. "That's what money is for," you always told me.

SAVANNAH. Grandma, she would die if she left her bed. She wouldn't survive the trip.

BIRDIE. *(Ignoring her)* You just have to come home.

(Savannah tenses up, glaring angrily at her grandmother. Mimi looks at Savannah, nervously.)

MIMI. Well... we'll talk about it later.

KEVIN. Grandma, she can't come home. The nurse said we waited too long. She won't survive the flight.

BIRDIE. But the ambulance comes right to the door.

SAVANNAH. She's not taking a helicopter, Grandma! She'd die.

BIRDIE. Well, she's going to die anyway. What difference does it make?

(Mimi looks again at Savannah, nervously.)

MIMI. We'll talk about it later.

BIRDIE. Mimi, do you want to come home? You said you did.

MIMI. *(Afraid to look at Savannah. She chooses her words carefully.)* Perhaps.

BIRDIE. Yes or no? Tell me!

KEVIN. Grandma, she can't travel. I think she's afraid to tell you.

BIRDIE. She can't what?

KEVIN. Travel. So she's just pretending to consider it. But she's going to have to stay here.

(Savannah's tension settles. She finally relaxes, now that her brother has point blank explained that their mom is not leaving.)

MIMI. *(Turning to Savannah.)* You should take them to dinner. I don't want Kevin going without food.

KEVIN. I'm fine, Mom.

MIMI. He's been doing CrossFit for two years. I don't want him to get skinny again. He used to weigh 145 pounds.

KEVIN. It's fine.

MIMI. Where are you going to eat?

SAVANNAH. Well, everything's closed now. So I was going to take them to Denny's.

MIMI. The one on Highway 6? Don't go there. They have the worst service. And their food is so gross.

SAVANNAH. Mom, it's the closest one.

MIMI. Okay. I'm sure it will be fine. Honey, can you go put this at the desk downstairs?

(Grabs some paper off her bed.) I need it to do your taxes.

SAVANNAH. Yes, Mom.

MIMI. They'll meet you downstairs. I just want to talk to my son real quick.

SAVANNAH. Okay, Mommy. *(To Kevin)* I'll be in the car.

(Savannah takes the papers and heads downstairs, leaving Birdie and Kevin alone with Mimi.)

KEVIN. Mom, she said you were delusional and you wouldn't know who we were.

MIMI. What?!

KEVIN. And that you were sleeping 23 hours a day. And you can't sit up without vomiting. But you look exactly like you did when I was here two weeks ago.

MIMI. Listen, guys, I'm going back to California. And you have to help me. But she won't let me go.

KEVIN. What? Are you serious?

MIMI. Yes, Kevin!

KEVIN. Or are you just telling Grandma what she wants to hear?

MIMI. Will you *shut up*? *(To Birdie)* I've got to go home. But we can't let Savannah know. She said if I tried to leave, she'd flush all my medication down the toilet. And I need it to survive.

KEVIN. You really want to go home?

MIMI. (*Growing irate*) Yes, Kevin! But we'll talk about it tomorrow. Savannah cannot know!

BIRDIE. Mimi, do you want me to book the helicopter?

MIMI. We don't need a helicopter! I'm going on a plane!

SCENE TWO

Time has passed. Savannah and Kevin enter the front door, having returned from dinner. She heads towards her bedroom downstairs. He makes his way upstairs.

Kevin arrives at the landing. His shy 11-year-old nephew, Thomas, is playing with his toys in what is usually his common area. But which now serves as a makeshift bedroom with a blown-up air mattress in the corner, upstage left. Upon spotting Kevin, Thomas averts eye contact, begins to dart back towards his bedroom.

KEVIN. Hey, Thomas.

THOMAS. Hey.

KEVIN. Where are you going? No hug for your Uncle Kevin?

(Thomas pivots and makes his way to Kevin, hugging him.)

THOMAS. Mom said not to talk to you.

KEVIN. What?

THOMAS. She said you'd want to be with Grandma Mimi and Lily and I couldn't expect you to play with us.

KEVIN. Yes, I'll be with Grandma Mimi. But I can still play with you.

THOMAS. Okay.

(He turns back around and exits to his room. Kevin shakes his head, then enters his mother's room.)

KEVIN. That was the worst meal I've ever had.

MIMI. I told you!

KEVIN. It's a Denny's. I already know the food is going to be crappy. But I didn't expect it to make me sick. I had to use the bathroom and every inch of the floor was covered in some kind of bodily fluid. The entire restaurant had the same smell as the bathroom, like a broken sewer. The water tasted like someone had spilled perfume in it. And they just slathered grease on everything. The eggs were liquid-y and so were the hash browns. I honestly feel like I have a soap bubble in my stomach that's getting bigger every minute. In the morning, I'll look like Violet Beauregard from "Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory."

MIMI. I said not to go there.

KEVIN. Savannah said it was great and that you were probably just complaining about a bad waitress. That you get really short with people nowadays. But the service was bad, too. It took half an hour for the food to arrive and we were the only ones there. We should have listened to you. Savannah said there was nothing wrong with the food. That's just how they do it in Houston. But it's a Denny's. They aren't supposed to change from city to city.

(Kevin settles in a large chair by his mother's bed.)

KEVIN. Do you really want to go back to California?

MIMI. *(Irritated)* Yes, Kevin! God!

KEVIN. So we're going to have to be sneaky. It's like an episode of "Survivor." We're planning on voting Savannah out but we have to blindside her so she doesn't suspect. So we'll pretend we're going along with her plan and then, when she least expects it, bam, we're voting her out! *(Beat)* Which, in this case, means we're sneaking you out!

MIMI. Yes, like "Survivor." Exactly.

KEVIN. Man, she said you only had a few hours left to live. I was so mad she said I had to wait an extra week to return so she could have a break from having someone else in the house. I was afraid, when I got here, you wouldn't even know who I was.

MIMI. She's told the whole family that. Everyone has called me, in tears.

KEVIN. Last week, she told Aunt Wendy that you wouldn't make it to the weekend. And now it's Wednesday night. And you are doing just fine.

MIMI. It's worse than that. She didn't want her information to be wrong so she's really been pushing for me to die. Yesterday I was sleeping on the couch because it helps with the pain when I'm upright. And I opened my eyes and both of my hospice nurses were there, looming over me. Savannah started giggling and said, "Mom? You're alive?" She had told the nurses I wasn't moving. But she didn't check my pulse or shake me awake. She just rushed to pronounce me dead because she had told everyone I wasn't going to make it to Sunday. And it had gotten to Tuesday.

KEVIN. You're her mother! She's supposed to want you to live as long as possible. How is she going to keep you healthy if she is only focused on your death?

MIMI. Exactly. That's why I've got to go home.

KEVIN. Okay, Mom. I'll let you sleep. And I'll see you in the morning.

MIMI. You got to bed now, too. Don't stay up late.

KEVIN. I can never go to sleep before two A.M. When everyone is asleep, I'm alone, without you, again and I get lost in my thoughts. That's why I don't wake up until noon.

MIMI. It's hard for me to sleep, too. I go out on the couch when it hurts too much. If you see me, don't talk to me!

KEVIN. I won't, Mom. But I love when you come out of your room. When you're in your room, it's like my worst fear has come true and you're not around and I have to live without you. And then you emerge and you're here, today, now, and I get so happy.

(He kisses her on the forehead and then exits. She turns out the light with her remote control.)

SCENE THREE

The lights dim. Nighttime has come. When they slowly rise, to simulate sunrise, a pool of light pours over the stage. It's 6 AM. Upstairs, the two children, LILY and THOMAS, quietly cross through the common area, tiptoe downstairs. Meanwhile, SAVANNAH bangs open cupboards, rustles through pots and pans, makes the deliberate noise and commotion.

Lily approaches her mom. She's got a little more spunk than her brother but she's just as reserved, careful about approaching the adults in her home.

LILY. *(Whispering)* Mom, I need you to sign this permission slip.

SAVANNAH. *(At full volume)* Oh, okay. I'll get that for you. Just one minute. I just need a pen.

(Thomas gets her a pen. She signs. Then turns back to stove where she shakes a frying pan.)

SAVANNAH. I'm making breakfast. It's pancakes. Keto pancakes though so I can have some. They're made with almond flour which is more expensive than regular flour but it's a lot healthier.

(Upstairs, Kevin stirs in his air mattress. Savannah is being obnoxiously loud.)

SAVANNAH. *(She flips pancakes onto three plates.)* I bet you won't even taste the difference though. You're going to have to tell me if you can. *(Puts some on a plate)* Here. Try it. Tell me if it tastes different. And here. And with gluten-free, low carb keto maple syrup, too. Tell me if you like it.

LILY. *(Tries a bite; whispering)* It's good.

SAVANNAH. Isn't it good? It tastes just like regular pancakes except it's good for you. I lost 40 pounds eating this way. Don't I look better than I did a few months ago?

LILY. Yeah.

SAVANNAH. Yeah. I also have a keto brownie for you, which I put in your guys' lunchbox. I tried one. It's really good.

(Some noises occur offstage left. Daniel is waking up.)

SAVANNAH. Okay, your dad's awake. I'm going to give him his pancake. You go feed the guinea pigs and then get ready to go.

(Lily crosses to the office, with Thomas rushing behind her. Daniel arrives from stage left. He's 39, a big, burly guy, built like a linebacker with a beer belly. He reaches into the fridge for a beer.)

SAVANNAH. Hey, Dan. I made you keto pancakes.

DANIEL. *(Opening beer.)* With almond flour? They're fucking disgusting. *(He takes a sip.)*

SAVANNAH. Yeah, I know. I hate them. I'll stop buying them from now on.

DANIEL. Damn it, Savannah. I wanted normal pancakes.

SAVANNAH. Do you want me to make a new batch with Bisquick?

DANIEL. There's no time. I'll just go to work hungry.

SAVANNAH. I'm sorry. Do you want a brownie? *(Calling out, to Lily)* Lily! Let Daddy have your brownie! He doesn't like pancakes!

DANIEL. No, Savannah. I'm not going to take her brownie. Just next time, pay attention when I tell you I don't like almond flour.

SAVANNAH. I know. I forgot. I'm sorry.

(Daniel doesn't reply. He makes his way to the kitchen. Grabs at various cupboards, pulling random items out in a stockpile for himself.)

SAVANNAH. All right. I'm going back to bed. Have a good day at work.

(Silence. Daniel crosses to the front door, his arms filled with snacks. Lily quickly abandons the pens of guinea pigs and joins him at the door. Thomas is still with the pigs.)

DANIEL. Thomas!

(Thomas stands alert, like he's been reprimanded. He hurries to Daniel.)

DANIEL. God, what are you doing? Are you stupid? We have to get to school.

THOMAS. *(Weakly)* I'm sorry, Daddy.

DANIEL. God.

(The three of them exit the home.)

(Upstairs, Kevin scoffs at all the activity. He rolls over and goes back to sleep.)