

CRUMBLE
(LAY ME DOWN, JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE)

by Sheila Callaghan

THE APARTMENT

FATHER / JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE / HARRISON FORD – male, 20's – 40's

JANICE- girl, age 11

MOTHER- female, mid-late thirties

BARBARA- female, early 40's

OVERTURE.

Lights up on THE APARTMENT, BARBARA,
MOTHER, FATHER and JANICE, all in separate
spaces.

MOTHER is in a chef's apron, cutting vegetables.

BARBARA is opening a can of tuna.

JANICE is listening to her walkman.

FATHER is falling through space and time.

THE APARTMENT is the floor. He listens to his voice
echoing.

THE APARTMENT

OOOOOOOH.

Cavernous.

OOOOOOOHHHHHHH. Echooooo.

OW OW OW OOOOOOOH.

Musty. I stink. Creak all the time.... My back. Strings of dust ... ffff. Appalling.

Oh. Alright that was a RAT, I just felt a. Possibly a mouse. Unngghuuuuuhhhhaaaa.
Cannot TOLERATE. Dirty dirty little paws... mouths, little rat-mouths, with the the.

Creak.

It's gone.

NEGLECT. Frigid. NO HEAT. Capacious fireplace in the den, no one uses. And DISREPAIR? I was a mansion once. A KEPT mansion. Young women with their young hands, oh small fingers splitting apart to feather my crevices. So gentle. They would kneel, their knees pressed into my wood-- is there anything more delicious than a servant girl's knees? Damp stiff horse-hair brush along my spine back and forth, faint scent of orange rind ... and the giggling, laughter like little bursting soap bubbles... Back then. People hired HELP. Defined themselves by their CLEAN LIVING SPACES. POISONED THEIR RODENTS.

Creak.

MOTHER enters in her coat. She has some bags of groceries. She begins unloading the bag.

Well GOOD AFTERNOON, Baroness. ... you look, hmmm. Holiday tired. Sit down, rest your little footsies...

MOTHER sits.

Look up. Look up. Look up. Look up. Look up.

MOTHER glances absently up.

What do you see?

MOTHER looks slightly concerned.

How do you suppose it got there?

MOTHER looks bewildered.

What does it resemble? A vein? A tributary? A tree branch? Or just a plain old CRACK? Have you any IDEA. How DISGUSTING. I am BECOMING.

MOTHER sighs and looks down again. A piece of plaster falls from the ceiling by her feet. She regards it without interest.

FFAAAHHHH! And this?

A piece of wallpaper begins to peel in the corner. MOTHER smooths it out with her hand slowly, lovingly. It curls back immediately.

PASTE, woman. Not a lot. No I would never DARE to imagine you'd commit the energy to a whole new PAPER JOB. Paper takes TIME. Paper takes EXERTION. Paper takes all the

FUN out of living, yes? But who needs FUN here. No, we sink and sink. We crumble to bits. We shove our fists into our mouths at night to keep those around us from hearing our sobs. Don't we.

MOTHER shivers and puts her scarf back on.

Creak.

For what I am thinking, and for the actions I am prepared to take heretofore... let it be known. I had no other choice.

MOTHER sighs and begins to cut up vegetables.

MOTHER

Janice? JANICE?

JANICE

WWHHHHAAAAAAAAAAAT?

MOTHER

OFF.

JANICE turns her walkman off.

MOTHER (cont.)

Do you have the list / for me yet

JANICE

The list the list the list list / list list list list

JANICE dances mirthlessly around her mother.

MOTHER
(overlapping)

I don't have time for this, Janice...

JANICE

LIST LIST LIST...

MOTHER

JANICE MIRANDA LOUISE PATRICIA ANN!

JANICE stops and stares at MOTHER.

THE APARTMENT

How does one cultivate such an odd human?

JANICE calmly retrieves a much crumpled piece of paper from her sock and hands it to her mother.

MOTHER

Thank you. Three more shopping days... ludicrous... you have any idea what the lines will...

MOTHER reads it. She falls silent a moment.

MOTHER

I don't understand.

JANICE stares at MOTHER.

MOTHER (cont.)

Janice...

JANICE

I have homework okay.

JANICE turns to leave.

MOTHER

Since when do you do home-- wait. Are you eating dinner tonight, I'm making something light. Ah, starting with bruchetta and an olive tappenade, and then pork tenderloin glazed with a brown sugar and bourbon sauce topped with a honey Dijon, and a roma tomato salad with fresh basil and garlic on the side. And peach bread pudding for dessert. And I made some mint lemonade spritzers. So. I'll expect you at the table at seven. Put on something warmer. They still haven't fixed the heat.

JANICE

You haven't. Called them.

MOTHER

What about that sweater Aunt Barbara bought you for your birthday. With the duckies in snowsuits. Yes it's hideous but it's wool. Go.

JANICE hesitates.

MOTHER (cont.)

Go on, now...

JANICE
(carefully)

I would rather bleed to death in an open field slathered in manure.

MOTHER (cont.)

Don't be melodra-- Janice, it's frigid in here, you'll catch pneumonia or strep, we really don't need that this year, and put some socks on, your toes will fall off, you know the radiator was banging all morning, the pipes are, I don't know, contracting maybe, I can't turn the darn thing on because it will leak like last time and ruin the floors so GO Janice and PLEASE close your bedroom door so the heat stays in. NOW. I'm so tired. And don't spend all night on your computer. You'll, your eyes will. You'll go blind, or. Stop looking at me like that.

JANICE

MY TOES ARE FALLING OFF. HOLY CRAP. SOMEONE CALL AN AMBULANCE.

JANICE exits into her room and sets up her dolls.
MOTHER stares at the paper. She begins to hyperventilate.

MOTHER (cont.)

... oh dear Lord...

THE APARTMENT

And here she goes. Breathe...

MOTHER

Breathe

THE APARTMENT

Breathe

MOTHER

Breathe.

THE APARTMENT

Super.

A beat.

THE APARTMENT (cont.)

Look up. Look up. Look up. Look up. Look up.

MOTHER does not. A large piece of plaster falls from the sky.

To calm herself MOTHER does Pilates.

JANICE appears to be having a tea party with some dolls. She pours bleach into their cups.

JANICE
(singing)

Mama I dropped the candy
Mama could I have another one please
That beast gots the sticky behind his knees
Say oooh ah oooh-oooh ah

Slather my body in manure
Cook me over an open flame
I'd rather die die die die die
Than wear that ugly sweater, babe

That butt butt butt ugly
butt butt butt ugly
butt butt butt fucking fucking nasty-ass butt fucking
snowsuit duckie-fuck butt butt butt butt
what what what what butt butt butt butt

She works herself into a frenzy. She then pours each cup of bleach into a pot, one by one.

A shadow or silhouette of FATHER appears somewhere, in his work clothes, moving slowly.

BARBARA is holding a can of tuna.

THE APARTMENT begins to drip. MOTHER tends to is as she speaks on the phone to BARBARA.

It must be hard	BARBARA
It is	MOTHER
For you both	BARBARA
Yes	MOTHER
The holidays	BARBARA
Very	MOTHER

She's had a rough time of it

BARBARA

Yes

MOTHER

Children often do
At times like these
At times

BARBARA

Like these

MOTHER

I need your help

I'm here, Clara

BARBARA

I know

MOTHER

Talking helps

BARBARA

To talk

MOTHER

It really does

BARBARA

Hurts/

MOTHER

It really does.

BARBARA

A beat.

I bought tuna today...

BABARA (cont.)

What?

MOTHER

Tuna? BARABA

Oh. MOTHER

And you wouldn't believe how much they're charging... BARBARA

Oh. MOTHER

I bought it as a treat... BARBARA

Oh. MOTHER

I don't think I'll be doing THAT again.... BARBARA

You aren't listening MOTHER

Oh. I thought you were done. BARBARA

A beat.

Go on BARBARA (cont.)

She wrinkles differently in daylight these days MOTHER

Oh BARBARA

her voice tilts with a purple cast
and sometimes her hair is wire MOTHER

I see BARBARA

MOTHER

And sometimes her breath is yellow

BARBARA

Like

MOTHER

Napalm
like rotting fruit and stomach acid
as though she swallowed a pear months ago
but can't digest it

BARBARA

Since when

MOTHER

Since the/

BARBARA

Calamity?

MOTHER

Yes

BARBARA

I see

MOTHER

She made a list last night

BARBARA

Of what

MOTHER

Seven things

BARBARA

What things

MOTHER

Strange things

BARBARA

Gifts.

MOTHER

Yes.

I see.	BARBARA
Girls that age should care	MOTHER
About	BARBARA
Make-up. Clothes. Gossip.	MOTHER
Indeed	BARBARA
What does she need	MOTHER
To talk	BARBARA
I've tried	MOTHER
To me	BARBARA
She won't	MOTHER
I know things, Clara I know what to make of small girls I know what they think of at night as they watch the squares of moon prowl across their ceilings I know what they think of in the bathtub when they wash behind their knees with a new soap	BARBARA
You always did know things Just like Mother	MOTHER
I intuit like no other	BARBARA
It's worth a try.	MOTHER

I'm hungry

BARBARA

We have left-overs... Janice doesn't

MOTHER

Eat much

BARBARA

These days,

MOTHER

What'd you make?

BARBARA

MOTHER

Um, bistro onion tarts to start with vegetable saté and then chicken breast breaded with pecan nuts in a pineapple green peppercorn sauce with a European cucumber mint salad and a rice wine vinaigrette on the side. And chocolate espresso cheesecake with dark rum for dessert. And I made a non-alcoholic, um. Toddy.

Perfect.

BARBARA

BARBARA disappears.

FATHER vanishes.

MOTHER begins cutting vegetables.

JANICE is arranging her playing dolls.

THE APARTMENT is the window sill.

Clean me. Clean me. Fix me.

THE APARTMENT

A large chunk of the windowpane falls off and hits the ground. JANICE whirls around.

Touch me.

THE APARTMENT (cont.)

JANICE returns to her dolls and talks in different voices.

JANICE

Hey Janice, you know those jelly bracelets you wear, they're a symbol of sex.

Shut up. I have them because they look cool and well I think they're awesome. And I don't give a shit what you think.

They're idiotic. We always talk about them. And other stuff. Like how your breath stinks and don't wash your hair. And you probably eat boogers.

I know, and hey guess what, I don't care.

And like you always bring weird food to lunch

My mom's a cook, okay it's her JOB.

THE APARTMENT blows a cool wind toward JANICE.

THE APARTMENT

Touch me...

JANICE shivers and runs to her closet. She retrieves the duckie/snowsuit number and puts it on.

JANICE

Uglyuglyuglyuglyuglyulgy/uglyuglyuglyuglyug

THE APARTMENT

...please...

JANICE returns to her dolls.

JANICE

Nice sweater, asshole.

Eat me. You think you're so hot just because you have an eyebrow ring but know what it looks retarded and anyway it's FAKE.

Karen and me and my cousin think you're a Lesbian. And you're on crack. My mom said your mom stopped buying Mountain Dew because you're too hyper.

So?

So, you're hyper and weird and your apartment is shitty.

Whatever, Karen's apartment is smaller.

But YOUR apartment is a piece of crap, it's old and it smells like shit, and you smell like shit.

Yeah, but at least I know how to ice skate.

APARTMENT

Your apartment is going to kill you. Your apartment is a murderer.

JANICE

Our mom told us we can't stay there anymore. There's asbestos and ghosts.

Shut up, there's no asbestos.

There's asbestos and mold and stuff. And your mom is crazy.

She's not crazy. She's. She's, like. She hyperventilates sometimes. That doesn't mean she's crazy. And she won't let us leave. But she won't fix anything. She doesn't even try. But. I'm going to change everything, okay. So she'll be happy again, I mean we both will. Because like, I'm very powerful.

Crazy.

Fuck you.

Crazy crazy.

You're a bitch.

Fuck you crazy bitch.

Fuck you asshole.

Fuck you.

Fuck you dick licker.

Fuck you.

BARBARA enters, eating a plate of food.

BARBARA

Hello there, Janice. You look lovely today. What a beautiful sweater. I got you that, didn't I? Well how adorable it looks on you!

JANICE doesn't answer.

BARBARA (cont.)

Your mommy is SUCH a wonderful cook. You are one lucky little girl.

JANICE doesn't answer.

BARBARA (cont.)

So, what have we here? A tea party? May I play?

JANICE doesn't answer. BARBARA grabs a doll and speaks in a doll-voice.

BARBARA (cont.)

Hey there, pal. Looks like you got something stuck in your craw. Why not tell me about it. We're girlfriends, aren't we?

JANICE stands and walks over to a pair of shoes. She begins taking the laces out and tying them together. BARBARA makes the doll drink from a tea cup.

BARBARA (cont.)

Mmm. Nummy.

BARBARA notices the teacups. She picks one up and smells it. Her doll voice drops.

BARBARA (cont.)
(alarmed)

Bleach. Janice? Are you drinking bleach?

JANICE doesn't answer.

BARBARA (cont.)

JANICE.

JANICE

I'm not drinking bleach.

BARBARA

Then what are you doing with it?

JANICE

Cleaning.

Pause. BARBARA places the teacup down.

BARBARA

Janice honey... Mommy says your hair is wire and your breath is napalm. Mommy says you asked for seven really strange gifts this year. Your poor Mommy is so worried. You know how she gets. You don't want to give Mommy a lobotomy, do you?

Are you thinking of Christmas last year? You can talk about it. Hm?

FATHER appears again, as a shadow, moving slowly. He hammers a phantom nail.

BARBARA suddenly gasps in recognition.

BARBARA

Oh, I think I know... I was eleven once too... I had a Secret Crush. Mickey Forinelli. Never told a soul, not even my best friend. I watched him eat lunch every day. That boy could eat... do you watch boys eat

JANICE says nothing.

BARBARA (cont.)

It's all right, it's perfectly healthy. Boys. Feelings about boys? Watching the poster of the boy on your wall come alive at night? He floats over to you like a question mark, lays his boy hands on all your new parts...

JANICE looks blankly at BARBARA.

BARBARA (cont.)

You don't have to answer, your face says it all. Well, now we're talking, this is Girl Talk. Good good. Feels good to talk. Clears the noggin like a blast of freon. Ahhh.

Silence. And more silence. BARBARA is at an utter loss. She grabs the doll from before and reverts back to doll voice.

BARBARA (cont.)

How about it, buddy? Is there a boy out there in Boyland gotcha down? Tell me tell me tell me....

JANICE grabs her doll and makes her speak to BARBARA's doll.

JANICE

Lady Sue with your dirty yarn hair and your mouth stitched shut in a perma-grin
Do you know how your eyes were made?
A needle poking into your head again and again
A million tiny holes in your flesh
How do you feel about that

A pause. FATHER vanishes.

BARBARA

Well, I suppose I wasn't too keen about it at the time....

A pause. BARBARA drops the dolls voice.

You're shy about it. That's okay. You'll talk when you're ready.

BARBARA exits. She moves back to her space and begins opening many, many cans of tuna, placing them around her feet. She saves the last one for herself and eats from the can with a fork.

MOTHER is still cutting vegetables.

JANICE continues intently with her project.

THE APARTMENT steps out of himself a moment.

THE APARTMENT

I was a mansion once. This was an aristocratic neighborhood of course, back in the early eighteen-- Well, first it was a cabbage field. Sold for six shirts, two pairs of shoes, six pairs of stockings, six axes, six knives, two scissors, and six combs. But AFTER... pillows, divans, rugs, merchants' wives lolling about in my parlor awaiting news from their husbands at the trading docks. My plush, decadent, lounging ladies. Never a ruffle out of place, never a stray hair or a—and me as well. Drapes beaten, mattresses aired...

Then, yellow fever. I survived of course. Barely. A time of tears and soot. Time One of Disrepair. Swore I would never allow myself to descend into squalor again...

But AFTER... ladies again, ladies ladies... stronger perfumes and bolder laughs oh and naughty? Supremely naughty. Mattresses EVERYWHERE... All night, every night, my rooms thumping and swelling. Those ladies, well. Not the classiest but they had. Mmmm. And they trimmed me in shiny black. And they papered me in velvet-red. And their knees on my boards and perfumed knickers and.

But then, of course. A fire. Electricity, my wires all... tried to warn them, flicker flicker, but who knew from wiring back then. Time Two of Disrepair. Tears and soot.

THEN, ladies again. Well, one lady. Millie Putnam. Stinking of wealth—the tastiest stink. An eighty-year old woman in high heels. Playing a clarinet. Badly, but it hardly mattered... Millie was. Shhweee. And they all knew it. The record would spin and spin, and she'd be tilted sideways in her chair spitting into her clarinet, bodies moving slower and slower until they simply slumped to the floor. But they always cleaned in the afternoon. Drained the gin from my

tub and washed themselves in it, two and three at once, scrubbing each other first, then of course, me.

Poor Millie. Twenty years I had her. Then, tears. But no soot.

More ladies, for a little while. Six. All pursuing degrees in law. Trim, muscular, shoulder pads and pantyhose, everything ironed. They smoked but never indoors. They swept regularly. Drank white wine. Carried purses. Wore slippers. Called their parents on the telephone. My occasional creak, then two of them in silk pajamas and a flashlight clinging to one another. Several painful and borderline obscene adjustments... fixed.

Then, one by one, rooms were emptied. Milk crates and scarves and vanilla candles and file cabinets and hangers. Poof.

And now... One creepy, tedious pre-teen with terrible hygiene and a mouth like a trucker. And a mother so flooded with sorrow she can't see past her nose.

It wasn't always so Little Princess never smelled so bad. She tap danced in patent leather shoes and pretended she was a child star. She laid on my carpet face down and whispered this:

THE APARTMENT becomes the carpet. JANICE lays down on it. A whisper.

APARTMENT
"I want my birthday. Could you bring it to me."

JANICE
"I want my birthday. Could you bring it to me."

JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE flies in.

JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE
Hello, Janice

JANICE
Justin Timberlake

JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE
It is I

JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE grabs JANICE and sweeps her up into the most dramatically romantic kiss this side of paradise.

JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE
There. You like those. I'm very good at them.

JANICE
You are.

JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE
The best

JANICE
The only

JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE
Yet, you do not smile...

JANICE
I can't

JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE
Why not

JANICE
My face doesn't work right

JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE
May I?

He holds her chin in his hand.

JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE (cont.)
Smile.

She does, shyly.

JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE (cont.)
You are still the prettiest girl in the contiguous sixth grade

JANICE
Am I?

JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE
Indeed. I could gaze at your nose until time folds in on itself and never miss an hour

JANICE
Would you?

JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE
Alas, I have a show tonight

JANICE

Oh.

JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE

But I shall return, I promise

He takes her right hand and holds it up.

Ahhh. The right hand
The angel hand
First the damage-doer
And last,
The hand that shall mend it all

Are you going to tell her your plan?

JANICE

She's not handling things well right now. I don't think she'd get it.

JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE

You're probably right. Not many people would. But I do.

JANICE

You do?

JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE

Of course.

JANICE

Do you think I'm doing the right thing

JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE

Yes.

JANICE

Tell me why

JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE

Close your eyes.

JANICE closes her eyes.

JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE (cont.)

Picture the smell of his neck the second he gets off the train. Picture his good black shoes tossed in the hallway by the mat. Picture the hamper filled with his dirty work clothes. Picture his

crooked blue silhouette in the light of the den as he bends down with a small grunt to kiss you goodnight.

A pause.

JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE (cont.)

You know what's right.

JANICE

I do.

JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE

I have to fly now

JANICE

You can fly?

JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE

Naturally

JANICE

How?

JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE

I hold my breath and my chest puffs up like a marshmallow and I rise into the air, and then the backs of my heels split and tiny propellers snap open like umbrellas and buzz me through the sky.

JANICE

Justin Timberlake, you're magic

JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE

I am

(singing)

I'm a story spun from silk

I stand up there with my moonglow hair

And I draw every song from powdered sugar and milk.

JANICE swoons. JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE kisses her right hand, first the back and then the palm.

Until next time.

JANICE

Good bye Justin Timberlake

JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE

Goodbye Calamity Janice.

JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE holds his breath and floats away.

JANICE touches her right hand, staring at it.

She then pours some granulated sugar into a bowl with water and drops the shoelaces in. She takes another bowl and puts globs of Vaseline into it.

THE APARTMENT is still the carpet.

THE APARTMENT

For what I am thinking, and for the actions I am prepared to take heretofore... let it be known. I had no other choice.

JANICE begins to hum the “Butt Ugly Sweater” song.

MOTHER

How did it go

BARBARA

Are you still looking for a place, Clara?

MOTHER

A place, an apartment? Well yes, but. I mean the holidays, and Janice’s school...

BARBABA

Find another apartment, Clara.

MOTHER

It used to be a mansion/ you know

BARBARA

The draft is terrible. The faucets leak, the floor boards are warped/

MOTHER

Barbara. Janice?

BARBARA

Yes. She’s a very precocious child

MOTHER

Yes

Highly intelligent	BARBARA
Yes	MOTHER
But troubled.	BARBARA
Yes?	MOTHER
Tormented, even	BARBARA
Oh no	MOTHER
But not about what you're thinking	BARBARA
No?	MOTHER
No	BARBARA
Then what?	MOTHER
Boys on the brain	BARBARA
Is that all?	MOTHER
It seems. But I set her straight	BARBARA
How	MOTHER
Girl talk	BARBARA

So she's okay	MOTHER
She'll be fine	BARBARA
Oh Barbara, you don't know how much this means	MOTHER
What are sisters for?	BARBARA
So now what	MOTHER
Meaning	BARBARA
What do I do	MOTHER
About	BARBARA
The gifts	MOTHER
The gifts.	BARBARA
Yes.	MOTHER
Indulge her	BARBARA
Indulge	MOTHER
She needs nurturing She needs to know that some things Are okay Like Christmas Christmas is okay. Christmas provides.	BARBARA

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!!

**Please check playscripts.com for the
published version.**

Thank you for reading!