Characters:

- **Mya**: As undisciplined, unconfident adult still suffering from the ill effects of her excessive rebellion during adolescence.

- **Ivy**: What most would characterize as the “good child” - she attends college while staying at home to tend to her fathers’ failing health.

- **Dad/John**: The father: a kindly man of failing health - in addition to his other ailments, he struggles with memory loss. The combination of his disabilities forced him to retire early.

- **Mom/Cara**: The mother: an honest, insightful woman with much dedication - she works twice her share in order to provide for Ivy’s college and Mya’s endeavors.

**Scene One:**

*around the dining table*

*(John, Cara, and Ivy sit around their freshly polished dining table, where three placemats are topped with plates full of roast and potatoes - the fourth is empty. They all reach for each other’s hands across the table to pray, but John can’t reach Ivy’s hand across the empty space. He stretches, wincing slightly with the pain of the movement. Ivy shakes her head softly at him, and they both settle to lay their palms on the empty placemat. John blinks back tears, but it’s hard to tell if they’re from physical pain or something deeper. Cara squeezes his hand. All close their eyes.)*

**John**: *(after clearing his throat, he begins in a formal rasp)* Father, we thank you for this meal you have provided us with, and we thank you for giving us your Son... for giving us his broken body and his blood poured out for all of our sins. We don’t deserve it *(pauses to come up with the right words, but forgets what he’s going to say, and compensates by*
speaking quickly:).... but there it is. (His voice becomes tight and strained.) But God, we’re a little broken down here, too, and you’ve given us so much already, but we need just a little more help. We need a miracle, God, a miracle, maybe... Just let us know you’re still up there, God, that you’re still listening to our prayer... (He withdraws his hand to blow his nose) Sorry...

(for a moment, there is a pause. Everyone clasps each another’s hands tightly. Cara looks up.)

Cara: Amen.

John and Ivy: Amen.

(All begin eating, and the room is quiet except for the tinkling of forks. There is not tension necessarily, but a shared quiet strength about the room.)

John: (between his careful chewing) Very good, Ivy.

Cara: (nodding) Yes, very good.

Ivy: (smiles modestly) Thanks. Honestly, I enjoyed making it. (laughs softly) Maybe I should have gone to culinary school instead of college.

John: (sincerely) Whatever you want to do, Ivy, you know we support you wholeheartedly. (His hand curls into a trembling fist in passion.)

Ivy: (playfully teasing) Even that means I go to France to start my own bakery?

Cara: (not detecting her jest, candid) We want you to go where your heart leads you. (increasingly passionate) And if you feel called to go to France, well, I say you go on ahead and-

Ivy: (interrupting: touched, yet amused, grinning) Mom, I’m only joking. That means a lot, though, both of you. You are the most supportive people I’ve ever met.
John: Well, we love you, Ivy. We want the best for you and your sister, in everything you do. *(looking to the empty placemat)* And we know it’s best to find your own path, even if it means you have to fall on your face a little. *(softening as he sinks into reverie)* And I remember being so angry at my folks for trying to plan out my life for me, although it was all for my own good. They wanted me to attend medical school at... *(he struggles for a name, but eventually shrugs)* Oh well, I’ll remember later *(looking to his wife, then to the placemat, where he subconsciously begins to direct his speech)* But we didn’t want you girls to feel pressured to go a certain direction. We wanted you to be you. *(Cara nods, also looking to the empty placemat.)*

Ivy: *(capturing their attention once more with her sincerity)* Mya’s going to come back someday, I promise you both. *(she clasps both of their hands and smiles)* Until then, let’s enjoy what we’ve got right here *(she gestures to them, beaming)*

Cara: We’re sorry, Ivy, we can’t help but worry sometimes. *(inhales sharply before forming a weak smile)* It’s just so strange imagining that this *(glances to the empty placemat)* is the new normal. But you’re right, Ivy- we’ve got each other, *(then teasingly)* we’ve got this delicious roast... *(a telephone rings in the distance)* and *(confused)*... we have... a ringing phone? Excuse me. It must be one of my clients- *(in her graceful yet purposeful manner, she walks to the phone and picks it up. Professionally:)* Hello? This is Cara King, how may I- *(her eyes widen and her hands begin to tremble. She glances over at the empty placemat, glances at her family, and the smile she had pasted on at the beginning of the call becomes substantial as it is filled to the brim with jubilation. She nods vigorously to John as she listens to the caller. She attempts to pipe up several times, intaking breath, but is cut short repeatedly: eventually, she interjects:)* That’s great,
honey, that's- (another impatient pause) Of course, honey. Well, we look forwards to-
(pause)- we love (the dial tone sounds) you. (She sighs blissfully, her smile revealing that
she is not disappointed. She comes to the table but doesn't sit. She looks meaningfully at
John, who nods giddily back) This weekend.

Ivy: (with realization) Mya... is coming home?

(Cara and John nod to one another, choking back tears of joy.)

Cara: (practically bubbling) She says she's on her way to another city- I didn't get the
chance to ask where- but she needed a place to stay for the night Saturday, and she asked
if we'd-

John: (interjecting) Ivy, could you make that roast again on Saturday? Mya would just
love-

Cara: I need to do a thorough cleaning of her bedroom before she gets back- the poor
place is filled with dust- Oh! And I'd imagine she's running low on the essentials. Ivy,
you and I are going to have to go to the store sometime to get her some vitamins, and-

(the scene fades as Cara and John continue to alternate a to-do list of preparations, as
Ivy bites her lip, torn between emotions. Her expression is an uncanny mixture of
interest, excitement, and dejected confusion.)

Scene Two:

the living room

(Cara sits on the edge of the couch, tense, while John is squirming in his armchair. Ivy
brings him a glass of water. The doorbell rings. Cara rushes to get it. John nearly jumps
out of his chair, but Ivy helps ease him onto his walker.)

Ivy: Easy, Dad.
(Cara fumbles in excitement with the door handle, and John shuffles as quickly as he can, with Ivy’s hand on his shoulder. The door swings open and the whole family watches as Mya, sporting various choppy lengths of poorly highlighted hair and a look of remorse, wipes her feet on the doormat. There is a moment of silent and stillness. Then, Cara nearly barrels Mya over in a hearty embrace, as John scoots his walker in double-time to reach his daughter. Both parents and Mya burst into tears, while Ivy stands back studying the scene with combined relief and disappointment.)

Cara: (innocently yet fiercely) We always knew you’d come back home.

Mya: (squirming a bit from the comment- formally) Thank you again for having me. I’ll reimburse you as soon as I find a (correcting herself)- as soon as I can.

John: Mya, you are always welcome here. Never feel like you owe us anything. Anything we do for you is because we love you. (he gives her shoulders a squeeze)

(Mya uncomfortably wriggles from her parents’ embrace, and the entire family sits down in the living room. Ivy looks at her feet, tapping her toes. Cara looks directly into Mya’s eyes, as though her gaze could prompt her to speak. John, once seated, clears his throat)

John: (realizing words would be best to convey his thoughts) So… tell me all about it.

Mya: About what?

Cara: (innocently enthusiastic) Your adventure! Did you find what you were looking for? (she looks meaningfully into her daughter’s eyes)

Mya: (confused) I wasn’t looking for anything…

Ivy: (understanding her mother’s question) Well, did you find anything? A job?

(cautiously teasing) A man? (she glances to Mya’s hand to find it devoid of rings)
Mya: Well, I... (pausing for thought, then understanding her mother's question. Indignance flashes across her face) Who said I was looking to find anything? (she glances back at the door and puts her hand on her keys)

Cara: (sweetly) Well, you weren't looking to lose something, were you? (chuckles softly to herself) Ivy, can you check the roast?

(Ivy exits quickly. A silence lasts for a moment as Mya simmers.)

Mya: (suddenly remembering her frustrations) No, I... (becoming angry and spilling her emotions in the absence of her sister) Why would I be looking for something if I already have it all? I am all I need. I never needed you, a husband, or anybody. That's why I left. (throws her arms up in frustration)

John: (earnestly) Well, did you find yourself?

Mya: (silent and pensive for a moment as his question takes root: then, she bursts violently into tears. She shakes her head no bitterly.) I... I

Cara: (rushing in to put an arm around her daughter) It's okay, honey, it's okay.

Mya: (shaking her head more vigorously- her words are nearly unintelligible as she sobs) It's... not (sniffle)... okay! I... I... I didn't find me. I didn't find any thing or any one. I found you! (she embraces her parents as she bitterly sobs) All... this time, I tried to get away from you- I tried to find me, I admit it! I tried to get a job- which doesn't work without a diploma- so I could rely on me and not your stupid money. I tried... But now that I'm here, and you've been here all along, waiting on me to finally grow up and come back home while I tramp around breaking your hearts because I'm determined to prove that me doesn't need you! I never found me, I never found anything but your
stubborn love even though I went out and made me into a complete failure... (collapsing into her mother's arms) I am a failure...

Cara: (lifting up Mya's head and looking her in the eyes) Listen to me. You are not a failure, Mya. There's still so much life ahead of you. You just need to open your eyes to see it.

John: (rubbing Mya's back softly) You are right about one thing, though. We'll always love you. Forever.

Mya: (inhaling deeply to regain her composure) Thank you. Thank you.

(Ivy walks in, drying her hands on her jeans from having washed them. She looks to the scene and her eyebrows knit together unwittingly. However, Cara and John are oblivious to her anger and continue to comfort Mya. Ivy begins to vie for their eye contact, but her efforts are to little avail. Her arms cross and her toe begins to tap incessantly. She clears her throat loudly.)

Cara: (finally looking up) Yes? Is everything doing okay? Is the roast alright in there?

Ivy: The roast? Oh, yes, the roast is fine. (slipping into sarcasm) Thank you so much for asking.

Cara: (detecting her daughter's sarcasm) Well, is everything okay?

Ivy: No.

Cara: (innocently) May I ask why not?

Ivy: (spilling the words she'd swallowed for so long in a blurt) It's just unfair.

(Cara looks at Ivy, silently urging her to go on. At this point, Mya has recovered to a state of silent strength, and she listens to her little sister with curiosity.)
Ivy: I can live here my whole life, support our family, and actually make a future for myself- meanwhile, Mya can waste your money to stay in overpriced hotels just so she can get away from us all, from it all, and you act like nothing’s happened- like it’s all okay. Meanwhile, the only things that matter are Mya and her roast; and what am I? A chef, now, apparently- not family.

(Mya bites her lip, slightly hurt. John shakes his head gently and pats the open spot next to him on the couch, where Ivy sits.)

John: Ivy, you know we don’t have favorites. (chuckles to himself and winks to his girls) It’s against the laws of parenting. I won’t deny that we’re celebrating Mya’s return right now, but what else can a parent do? She’d been missing. If we celebrated every time you came back from school across the street, celebration itself wouldn’t mean much of anything at all.

Ivy: (softening) I guess so.

Cara: You’re here to listen to us tell you we love you probably ten times more often than you’d like to hear. It may not be an all- at once, extravagant affair- but, if you think about it, all we’re doing for Mya is giving her the two years’ worth of “I love you”s that she missed.

John: We love you both so much. Let me say it again. Please let me say it as many times as you deserve to hear it- don’t be angry at me for showing you I care. Let me tell you again what we’ve been trying to show you all of these years.

We love you so, so much.

(fade to black as the family all leans onto one another in rising strength).