

Lighthouse Beach

A Play

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Characters

Claire	32. Daughter of Jeremy and Kristine.
Claire	10
Jeremy	32 & 42. High-school English teacher.
Kristine	32, 42 & 64. Neurosurgeon
Michael	45, 55, Neurosurgeon

Waiter and Paramedic should be doubled with one or two of the above.

The Settings

Evanston: Lighthouse Beach, Apartment, *Oceanique* Restaurant and Evanston Hospital Intensive Care Unit

Chicago: Lounge/Bar

Notes on Set and Stage Directions

The beach and picnic area will be staged as circumstances allow. Larger stages will create these locations with greater physical details. Smaller stages will be more suggestive. Perhaps the shoreline might be hidden with the suggestion of the lake beyond. The picnic area should border the beach. The presence or suggestion of a lighthouse is suggested.

The Evanston apartment is nicely furnished, modified for the different time periods. The living room is spacious, with a couch, desk, chairs and tables and a baby grand piano. A small liquor bar or station, perhaps on a fashionable wheel-cart is present. There's a kitchenette and, just off the kitchenette, a dining table. There's an entrance to a bedroom, partially visible. The main entrance to the apartment is likely in the center rear with a buzzer and intercom nearby.

The play takes place in and around three different years, 1983, 1994 and the Present Time. Effects, such as cell phones, computers, appliances and TV screens, should reflect the different times.

Act One

We hear the Goldberg Variations, The Aria, by Johann Sebastian Bach. At Rise we see the Evanston Apartment, mostly dark. A single light focuses on CLAIRE, 32, as she plays.

CLAIRE

It is a little known fact that Count Kaiserling, the Russian ambassador to Saxony, commissioned Johann Sebastian Bach in the mid-eighteenth century to compose a work of melodic variations. He did this so that J. G. Goldberg, a pianist he employed, might have a piece to soothe the Count's chronic insomnia. Prince Kaiserling is long forgotten though he enabled one of the greatest classical works ever written. Goldberg, his minion, achieved immortality. All he did was play the music.

I've spent much of my life with *The Goldberg Variations*. I learned it as a child and played it in all my important auditions, recitals and competitions. It was the subject of my PhD thesis and a surprisingly successful solo album that launched my first recital tour. Oddly perhaps, I've always wondered to whom I'm more indebted, Kaiserling for his enabling or Goldberg for his playing. I'm obsessed with indebtedness, particularly the wounds that come along with it.

An upscale hotel bar/lounge in Chicago, November 1982. We hear Staying Alive with Dolly Parton and Kenny Rogers. MICHAEL, 45, and KRISTINE, 31, are seated with drinks. SHE's laughing at something he said while gathering her things.

MICHAEL

Must you? Please, one more.

KRISTINE

(SHE leans over and kisses HIM)

Michael, I can't. I'll miss my train.

MICHAEL

I have some news.

KRISTINE

Oh?

MICHAEL

I should have told you earlier. I'm sorry. I meant to.

KRISTINE

Really?

(HE clears his throat nervously. WAITER ENTERS.)

WAITER

Sir, will there be anything else?

Kristine? MICHAEL

The check please. KRISTINE
(WAITER EXITS)

I've received an offer. MICHAEL

An offer? KRISTINE

NYU. Head of Neuro. MICHAEL

Just like that, out of the blue. KRISTINE

A friend called a friend who called me. MICHAEL

Really! When? KRISTINE

Yesterday. MICHAEL

The interview. KRISTINE

It was a dinner, really. MICHAEL

Michael! KRISTINE

During the symposium. MICHAEL

The one in New York? KRISTINE

I was surprised. The Four Seasons Restaurant, Kobe steaks, Remy cognac. The CEO and his Medical Director showed up. They said it was exploratory. They were anticipating a retirement. MICHAEL

KRISTINE

HoJo's exploratory not Four Seasons.

(SHE takes out her pocket calendar and flips the pages)

When *was* that symposium?

MICHAEL

Does it really matter?

KRISTINE

Here it is. It was a month ago.

MICHAEL

They insisted on secrecy.

KRISTINE

I thought it was a retirement.

MICHAEL

It turns out they were retiring him.

KRISTINE

The deal was sealed before you left the restaurant.

MICHAEL

No. I wasn't sure.

KRISTINE

Actually, that's not the point.

MICHAEL

Kristine, I want you to come to New York with me.

KRISTINE

Really? When do you start?

MICHAEL

Three weeks.

KRISTINE

That's practically tomorrow.

MICHAEL

Why would we not want to do this together?

KRISTINE

Because I'm a seventh year resident.

MICHAEL

Can't we at least talk about it?

KRISTINE

I have to go. I have rounds in the morning.

MICHAEL

You're upset.

KRISTINE

Why would I be upset?

MICHAEL

Honey, I've been meaning to tell you. I was waiting for the right time.

KRISTINE

This is the right time?

MICHAEL

I'm not very good at this. I've never had a partner before.

KRISTINE

Pesky, these relationships.

MICHAEL

I meet with Metcalf tomorrow.

KRISTINE

You finally had to tell me.

MICHAEL

It solves our problem.

KRISTINE

We have a problem?

MICHAEL

I *am* the Chief of Spinal Surgery.

KRISTINE

What are you saying?

MICHAEL

They asked about us.

KRISTINE

Who asked about us?

MICHAEL

Metcalf.

KRISTINE

When?

MICHAEL

I don't know. Maybe three months ago.

KRISTINE

What am I, a fucking mushroom you keep in the dark?

MICHAEL

He'd heard. You know how these guys are. They're old fashioned.

KRISTINE

They're old-fashioned? Listen to yourself!

MICHAEL

He asked if I thought maybe you should report to someone else.

KRISTINE

To whom? The head of dentistry?

MICHAEL

He hasn't raised it since.

KRISTINE

He didn't have to! You got the message. Metcalf made the call, didn't he?

MICHAEL

Yeah.

KRISTINE

That's how it works.

MICHAEL

NYU makes it all go away.

KRISTINE

For you and Metcalf.

MICHAEL

They want to talk with you. I gave them your CV.

KRISTINE

You did what?

MICHAEL

I pitched you.

KRISTINE

You didn't even ask me!

MICHAEL

Shit! You *are* upset.

KRISTINE

Stop telling me I'm upset!

MICHAEL

Sorry!

KRISTINE

I'm a piece of meat in this deal.

MICHAEL

You can finish here. That's not a problem.

KRISTINE

Do you have any idea what you've done?

MICHAEL

I'm tried to create a fresh start for us.

KRISTINE

Who said I wanted to move to New York?

MICHAEL

Just explore it. Talk to them.

KRISTINE

You've humiliated me. The whole hospital will know what happened.

MICHAEL

Honey, okay let's go. I'll drive you home.

KRISTINE

Metcalf already knows, doesn't he?

MICHAEL

Yeah.

KRISTINE

(Rises)

I'll get myself home.

(Steps away to leave. Turns back.)

Tell your buddies at NYU you couldn't deliver the goods.

(EXITS. MICHAEL, with a blank look, remains seated.)

Lighthouse Beach. July 1983. A warm and star-lit night. Sea breezes. Seagulls. We see the outline of a couple making love. Sounds of lovemaking overtake the natural sounds. Climax. When it's over, whispered pleasantries, playful self-consciousness, which we can't fully hear as they struggle to locate and restore their clothing. JEREMY and KRISTINE sit up.

JEREMY

You're okay?

KRISTINE

Yes. Very.

JEREMY

(Wrapping his jacket around HER)

Here. There's a chill.

(THEY look out at the lake and cuddle)

KRISTINE

What are you thinking? Right now!

JEREMY

It's the happiest day of my life.

KRISTINE

You're kidding!

JEREMY

It is.

KRISTINE

Your whole life?

JEREMY

Yeah.

KRISTINE

Jesus!

JEREMY

Do you know there are more stars in the universe than grains of sand in all the world's beaches?

KRISTINE

You think about things that I don't.

JEREMY

It took millions of years for the much of the light to reach us.

KRISTINE

Really?

JEREMY

Tell me it's not a special night.

KRISTINE

The stars come out every night.

JEREMY

Not the light we see tonight. The odds of our being here when these particles of light arrived on earth were one in a gazillion, unfathomable really. Do you realize how unique that is?

KRISTINE

How did you get this way?

JEREMY

We are luckiest people in the universe.

KRISTINE

Don't you think you're stretching things a bit?

JEREMY

I'm understating it.

KRISTINE

You're hopeless.

JEREMY

You're tight assed, but it's just a guise.

KRISTINE

Tight assed! How dare you!

JEREMY

Romantically tight assed. It's really cute.

KRISTINE

Just because I'm a surgeon?

JEREMY

You're the most romantic girl I've ever known.

KRISTINE

You're really laying it on.

JEREMY

It's the truth.

KRISTINE
This isn't me.

JEREMY
How can you say that?

KRISTINE
Experience.

JEREMY
You were in love once. It ended badly.

KRISTINE
How do you know?

JEREMY
You just told me.

KRISTINE
Maybe.

JEREMY
Do you know today's our anniversary.

KRISTINE
What anniversary?

JEREMY
Two months.

KRISTINE
Two months is not an anniversary.

JEREMY
The Phoenix Inn. You picked me up.

KRISTINE
I did not! It was crowded. You had no place to sit! You were looking at me like a starving puppy!

JEREMY
I used to do that in a costume. Kids would pet me.

KRISTINE
You claimed you were an English professor.

JEREMY
I said I was a devoted follower of the Bard.

KRISTINE

You had me fooled.

JEREMY

You had the Roast Duck.

KRISTINE

You had the Roast Duck. I had the Spicy Diced Chicken.

JEREMY

We shared.

KRISTINE

We tasted each other's dishes. That's not sharing.

JEREMY

Are you always so precise?

KRISTINE

Yes. I take great comfort in precision.

JEREMY

It's a problem we need to work on.

KRISTINE

You said Evanston has more splendor than Paris.

JEREMY

Paris doesn't have this.

KRISTINE

Paris is Paris!

JEREMY

You'll see! We'll go there on our honeymoon.

KRISTINE

Jeremy, slow down!

JEREMY

Many of those stars have already died. They burned themselves out. How cool to have your light shine thousands of years after you're gone, like Shakespeare.

KRISTINE

Do you rehearse your lines?

JEREMY

I have to. I'm shy.

KRISTINE

Where, in front of a mirror?

JEREMY

Bars mostly. *Romeo and Juliet* has the best material.

KRISTINE

If I'm in a bar and some guy starts singing *Romeo! Romeo! Where art thou?* I leave.

JEREMY

Most people do. What do you rehearse?

KRISTINE

Not flinching. Staying icy cool no matter how badly damaged my patient is.

JEREMY

Not that. This.

KRISTINE

Never.

JEREMY

Sure you do. Your rehearsals are your fantasies. I think yours are rich.

KRISTINE

Two months in and you think you know my fantasies?

JEREMY

Doing it on a beach under the stars?

KRISTINE

Maybe.

JEREMY

You pretend like a tight-ass. You love like a little girl.

KRISTINE

I removed a spike protruding from a guy's head once. I wasn't rattled at all. I knew exactly what to do. This is different. I'd like your chances better if you had a spike in your head.

JEREMY

My father used to take me swimming.

KRISTINE

You know what eludes me? The horizon. I see it, but then I don't. Something always distorts it, clouds, wind, the sun, not wearing sunglasses. The slightest thing. I'm not good with elusive things. I'm much better with clarity.

JEREMY

It's an illusion.

KRISTINE

It's plain as day.

JEREMY

Until you go there. Then, it's gone.

KRISTINE

Shit!

JEREMY

We learn more from illusion than from the things we think are real.

KRISTINE

If I thought like that all my patients would die.

JEREMY

It tells us what we don't know.

KRISTINE

You may like ambiguity. I go bat shit.

JEREMY

This would be a great time for a cigarette.

KRISTINE

You smoke?

JEREMY

Now and then.

KRISTINE

Now and then means you smoke.

JEREMY

You disapprove. I hereby quit smoking. Pot too.

KRISTINE

Pot? We're so different. What do you see in me?

JEREMY

A romantic girl who wants more out of life.

KRISTINE

Don't make me up like that.

JEREMY

Don't be afraid like that.

KRISTINE

We can't make love on a beach, look out on the glimmering lake, sit in awe at the night sky, listen to seagulls and call it love. That's an illusion!

JEREMY

Do you still love him?

KRISTINE

It doesn't matter. He moved away.

JEREMY

Of course it matters.

KRISTINE

Why do you think there are so few female neurosurgeons?

JEREMY

I never really thought about it.

KRISTINE

Because we can't be nostalgic. We can't be emotional. We can't look back. We have to be tight assed.

JEREMY

My dad worked in an auto factory. He worked hard. Lots of overtime. He loved this beach. He loved to swim. One day, I think I was six or seven, he told me about a buoy two miles out. He said he was the only one who ever got there. No one knew about it and he wasn't about to tell. It was his. That's when I realized my father had an inner self that had nothing to do with making cars. We all do. I named mine Don Quixote. He knows things that nobody else dares to imagine. Dad didn't find a buoy. He discovered a castle on an unmapped island. Someday, I'm going to swim out there and find it.

KRISTINE

That's poetic but it might not be the safest thing to do.

JEREMY

(A flicker of light. The sun will steadily rise)

Look! First Light. Sunrise. Our daily miracle!

KRISTINE

Don't tell me you believe in miracles!

JEREMY

How can you not?

KRISTINE

I'm a doctor.

JEREMY

But, soft! What light through yonder window breaks?

It is the east, and Juliet, is the sun.

Meet Juliet. She'd like to be your inner self.

KRISTINE

I've never met anyone like you.

JEREMY

Let's go for a swim.

KRISTINE

I don't have a bathing suit!

JEREMY

Neither do I. Who cares? No one's watching.

KRISTINE

I don't know how to swim.

JEREMY

I'll teach you how. Trust me. I won't let you down.

(HE stands and gently lifts her. SHE's reluctant at first but goes along. THEY go hand in hand into the water, disrobing. In the shadows of the picnic area, we see the outline of SOMEONE watching.)

The Apartment, November 1983. KRISTINE is seated, reading. JEREMY sits next to her grading papers. HE wears an old tweed jacket that's seen better days.

KRISTINE

Smart, smarter than I.

JEREMY

That's impossible.

KRISTINE

He got me through.

JEREMY

He dropped you like a stone.

KRISTINE

I never thanked him properly.

JEREMY

After what happened, why would you?

KRISTINE

I wouldn't have made it without him.

JEREMY

I doubt that.

KRISTINE

It bothers me.

JEREMY

What's he doing in Chicago?

KRISTINE

He's presenting at the conference.

JEREMY

There's a conference?

KRISTINE

Next week.

JEREMY

Oh.

KRISTINE

Hon' I told you.

JEREMY

I don't think you did.

KRISTINE

I'm sorry, then.

JEREMY

You're going?

KRISTINE

Yeah.

JEREMY

Won't it be awkward?

KRISTINE

I don't see why. We both got what we wanted.

JEREMY

He got a big job. What did you get?

KRISTINE

You!

(SHE kisses HIM playfully, twitches HIS tweed jacket)

You know, this is a sixties jacket. We need to buy you an eighties jacket.

JEREMY

(Puts down his papers)

I love my jacket! It's not that old.

KRISTINE

(SHE snuggles)

Honey, I want to have him over.

JEREMY

You're kidding!

KRISTINE

He was my mentor.

JEREMY

Send him a card, for pete's sake.

KRISTINE

I did.

JEREMY

Huh?

KRISTINE

I sent him a note when we got engaged.

JEREMY

Did you enclose my picture?

KRISTINE`

I wanted to tell him how happy I was.

JEREMY

I'm sure he was thrilled.

KRISTINE

He called.

JEREMY

Of course he called.

KRISTINE

The work they're doing is cutting edge. It's getting attention.

JEREMY

It's a can of worms.

KRISTINE

We're colleagues.

JEREMY

With baggage.

KRISTINE

(SHE cuddles)

Honey, I invited him.

JEREMY

I see. You're not asking.

KRISTINE

I was hoping you'd understand.

JEREMY

When?

KRISTINE

Tuesday. I invited him to dinner.

JEREMY

I tutor on Tuesdays.

KRISTINE

After you tutor.

JEREMY

Don't you think we should have talked about this first?

KRISTINE

I'm sorry. It was spur of the moment.

JEREMY

You loved him.

KRISTINE

Yes.

JEREMY

You still have feelings.

KRISTINE

Memories.

JEREMY

I'm not sure there's a difference.

KRISTINE

We have similar clinical interests.

JEREMY

Cutting edge interests.

KRISTINE

That's part of it. Evanston's not on the map yet.

JEREMY

He was your first?

KRISTINE

Basically.

JEREMY

Basically you're my first.

KRISTINE

It's tough. I know.

JEREMY

It feels weird.

KRISTINE

It doesn't have to be.

JEREMY

Why not a restaurant?

KRISTINE

I want him on my turf.

JEREMY

I shouldn't be here.

KRISTINE

No! I need you.

JEREMY

You hate to cook!

KRISTINE

I know.

JEREMY

That's why you want me there.

KRISTINE

Yeah! You're a great cook.

JEREMY

I can't believe you're actually talking me into doing this.

KRISTINE

It would mean a lot to me.

JEREMY

Are you sure we're ready for this?

KRISTINE

I wouldn't do it otherwise.

JEREMY

I don't know.

KRISTINE

We won't if you're dead-set against it.

JEREMY

I'd prefer Chock-Full-O-Nuts and a donut.

KRISTINE

Okay. I'll cancel.

JEREMY

(Sighs)

I suppose we should use the good china...the linens...the candleholders, all that. What's does he like? Wine...red, white? Brandy? Cognac? You'll have to fill me in.

KRISTINE

(SHE kisses HIM)

I love you.

(SHE snuggles again)

Trust me, okay? Don't worry.

JEREMY

I think you're being more than a little naïve.

KRISTINE

I don't think so.

JEREMY

I don't know. Maybe it's me I don't trust.

The Apartment, A week later. MICHAEL is seated. KRISTINE is at the bar. We briefly hear Lawyers in Love, with Jackson Browne.

KRISTINE

Neat?

MICHAEL

Please.

KRISTINE

Lagavulin?

MICHAEL

You remembered.

KRISTINE

I'm glad you came.

MICHAEL

I like your place.

KRISTINE

It's nice to have moved above the poverty line.

MICHAEL

You're radiant as always.

KRISTINE

Oh! Well, nice of you to say.

MICHAEL

Will your friend be joining us?

KRISTINE

My friend lives here.

MICHAEL

You never said.

KRISTINE

He's the reason I bought it.

MICHAEL

It's yours, not his?

KRISTINE

Financially.

MICHAEL

It all makes perfect sense.

KRISTINE

He's a high school teacher.

MICHAEL

They don't make much, do they? It's a goddamn shame!

KRISTINE

He's not in it for the money. He's what you might call a Renaissance man.

MICHAEL

I didn't aspire to that. I never saw the point.

KRISTINE

You'll try at least?

MICHAEL

Yeah! I'm not a jerk! I'm trying to remember. How long has it been?

KRISTINE

You know damn well how long it's been.

MICHAEL

Did you hear? I've been elected to the association's board.

KRISTINE

Another feather in your bulging cap.

MICHAEL

I never expected it.

KRISTINE

You put your name in.

MICHAEL

I didn't expect to win.

KRISTINE

You were exploring.

MICHAEL

I think the work we're doing at NYU made the difference.

KRISTINE

No doubt! It's very promising. Well, to your board membership!

MICHAEL

If you play your cards right, someday it'll be you.

KRISTINE

I doubt that, but thanks.

MICHAEL

I'll be coming in for board meetings. I see no reason we have to be strangers.

KRISTINE

Professionally.

MICHAEL

Kristine, are you *really* okay?

KRISTINE

I am, actually. Thank you for asking.

MICHAEL

No one has the imaging equipment we do.

KRISTINE

They will.

MICHAEL

Not for a while.

KRISTINE

I was wrong to object. It's been a great move, for you, NYU and neuro in general. I should have looked beyond my own interests.

MICHAEL

Evanston Hospital? What were you thinking?

KRISTINE

I suppose I like firsts. First woman in the program. First neurosurgeon at the hospital.

MICHAEL

Night and day. There's no comparison. Did you plan on wasting your education or did it just happen?

KRISTINE

Check back with me in a few years.

MICHAEL

Secondhand, that's how I heard. Then I get this cryptic note. 'I'm getting married. I'm at Evanston Hospital now. Have a nice life.'

KRISTINE

I did not say 'have a nice life.'

MICHAEL

I went from guiding light to chopped liver.

KRISTINE

For an alpha-man that takes a little getting used to.

MICHAEL

You should have called me.

KRISTINE

I didn't want to.

MICHAEL

Who were you getting your advice from?

KRISTINE

Metcalf. Surprised?

MICHAEL

This was his idea? What an asshole!

KRISTINE

Really! I found him to be a kind and gentle man.

MICHAEL

Metcalf and your Renaissance man! You were doomed.

KRISTINE

Actually, I'm highly optimistic.

MICHAEL

I would have hired you in a heartbeat.

KRISTINE

We both know that would not have been a very good idea.

MICHAEL

Evanston's a backwater!

KRISTINE

For now. Things change.

MICHAEL

I want you come to NYU. I want you on my team.

KRISTINE

You're loaded with talent. You don't need me.

MICHAEL

As good as they are, you're better than anyone I have.

KRISTINE

Michael, please stop putting me on.

MICHAEL

We'll talk at the conference.

KRISTINE

Actually, no.

MICHAEL

You won't even talk?

KRISTINE

I can't go to the conference.

MICHAEL

Are you nuts?

KRISTINE

I'll get the abstracts.

MICHAEL

How often have we talked about the importance of these events?

KRISTINE

Conferences are not my priority right now.

MICHAEL

What *are* your priorities, Kristine?

KRISTINE

I don't think you'd understand.

MICHAEL

You and what's his name, how long?

KRISTINE

His name is Jeremy! Six months.

MICHAEL

It took you eleven years to become a surgeon and six months to throw it all away.

KRISTINE

I want a life. I want a family.

MICHAEL

Next you'll want to be a stay-at-home mom.

KRISTINE

Michael, stop, okay?

MICHAEL

I've had time to think about things.

KRISTINE

That's not at all evident.

MICHAEL

I was wrong. I treated you poorly.

KRISTINE

How surprisingly kind of you. Now we've both said what we needed to say.

MICHAEL

That's it? That's all you can say?

KRISTINE

What do you want me to say?

MICHAEL

'I made a big mistake. I allowed the kind and gentle Metcalf to guide me to career oblivion.'

KRISTINE

I made some *hors d'oeuvres*. I think I should get them.

(SHE goes to the kitchen)

MICHAEL

Since when did you take up cooking?

KRISTINE

Veggies and a dip. I put them on a damn plate!

(Returns with plate)

I poisoned the dip. I hope you like it. Go ahead, help yourself.

MICHAEL

From day one you'll get the most complex cases. You'll have more research projects than you can handle. You'll have your own budget independent of outside funding. Corporate funding would be extra.

KRISTINE

You could have called too.

MICHAEL

I didn't think you wanted to hear from me.

KRISTINE

You're right.

MICHAEL

It was the lounge in Chicago. Do you always get up and walk out when something goes wrong?

KRISTINE

It's hard to say. I'm one for one. I need more data.

MICHAEL

Clinicals?

KRISTINE

They'll come.

MICHAEL

Research?

KRISTINE

I've submitted a proposal.

MICHAEL

Referrals?

KRISTINE

Not yet.

MICHAEL

Nothing.

KRISTINE

It takes time.

MICHAEL

Nothing.

A key turns in the door. JEREMY ENTERS. Stares all around. Lights flicker and the scene is transformed to the apartment later that evening. JEREMY is at the bar. MICHAEL and KRISTINE are seated at the table. Open bottles of wine and cognac indicate there's been a good amount of drinking. We briefly hear We've Got Tonight with Kenny Rogers and Sheena Easton.

MICHAEL

My compliments, Jeremy! The meal was superb.

JEREMY

Remy?

(HE pours and serves)

MICHAEL

I never expected this. You folks went all out.

KRISTINE

It's an overdue thank you, Michael. I owe you a great deal.

MICHAEL

(Toasts)

To the future!

JEREMY

My family has a long history with Evanston Hospital. Both of my parents were born there. I was born there. Mom worked there as a nurse for over twenty years. When dad broke his clavicle, they did his surgery. He passed there. Now, Kristine practices there. We consider it the family hospital.

KRISTINE

(Uneasy silence)

Jeremy, Michael doesn't think I should be at Evanston Hospital.

JEREMY

Oh!

MICHAEL

It's an excellent community hospital but they don't do neurosurgery.

JEREMY

Really? Kristine has lots of patients.

MICHAEL

Not good ones.

JEREMY

I wonder if they know that.

MICHAEL

Jeremy, have you ever been to New York City?

JEREMY

Just Cleveland.

MICHAEL

You've never lived anywhere besides Evanston, have you?

JEREMY

I went to college in Ohio.

MICHAEL

You came back.

JEREMY

The day I graduated.

MICHAEL

(Downs his cordial)

Here you are, teaching high school.

JEREMY

I didn't like Cleveland.

MICHAEL

It's not Cleveland!

KRISTINE

I tried to tell Michael we really like Evanston. I don't think he heard me.

MICHAEL

There's nothing happening at Evanston!

JEREMY

Nothing?

MICHAEL

Neurosurgically!

JEREMY

How would you compare it to Paris?

MICHAEL

What are you talking about?

JEREMY

Never mind.

MICHAEL

I don't want to be disagreeable. It's been a delightful evening.

KRISTINE

Then, let's talk about something else.

MICHAEL

I'm offering your fiancé the opportunity of a lifetime.

JEREMY

That's what I have.

MICHAEL

Yes, well, I mean no disrespect.

KRISTINE

Something light, like politics!

JEREMY

I don't think you understand.

KRISTINE

What about all those missiles we're sending to England?

JEREMY

There's Willie.

MICHAEL

Who the fuck is Willie?

JEREMY

Do you know what a Wildkit is?

MICHAEL

I have no idea.

JEREMY

Evanston Township High. Willie's the mascot.

MICHAEL

How is this relevant to your wife's career as a neurosurgeon?

JEREMY

I'm Willie.

KRISTINE

Or TV shows. Did you hear Archie Bunker's going off the air?

MICHAEL

I was led to believe you're Jeremy.

JEREMY

I was an introvert growing up. Somehow in senior year, I got the part, cheerleader for the high school band. Suddenly, I had a costume and a captive audience. I did things I never thought possible. I made all the kids cheer and laugh, parents too.

MICHAEL

You liked high school.

JEREMY

I kept the part.

MICHAEL

I don't understand. You graduated. Now you're a teacher.

JEREMY

It's the way I teach. I get them excited. I cheer them on.

MICHAEL

They'll love you in New York.

JEREMY

I love my kids.

MICHAEL

They'll find someone. I'm sure there's no shortage of English teachers at Evanston High.

JEREMY

There's a shortage of Willies.

MICHAEL

There's an acute shortage of female neurosurgeons who finished at the top of their class. May I?

(Goes to the bar)

JEREMY

The day came when the games ended. I stood alone in the stadium with Willie in a bag. I'd been given something I never thought possible. There and then I promised myself I'd come back. I'd cheer them on in the classroom.

KRISTINE

It's called giving back, Michael.

MICHAEL

I believe in giving back. I don't believe in giving up.

(To KRISTINE)

You've been given a gift. Use it and you'll change the world.

(To JEREMY)

You're hiding in your Willie gig, reliving your teenage years. You're holding back one of the best neurosurgeons in the world who happens to be a woman. Do you have any idea how significant that is?

JEREMY

You had to sneak out of town.

MICHAEL

What are you talking about?

JEREMY

You were questioned. It was all unraveling.

MICHAEL

Nothing came of it.

JEREMY

How does something like that even begin?

KRISTINE

So much for Archie Bunker. I'd landed in a man's world. I kept my head down, playing by the rules. Let the boys duke it out. Then, my sixth year, Chief Resident. I was the one giving directions, divvying up the cases, taking the best cases like it'd always been done. They didn't like it. I needed a more powerful mentor. I inquired, hesitantly, shyly. You suggested dinner. *Oceanique. Louis XIII* brandy in a baccarat sniffer. I'd be okay.

MICHAEL

Our partnership has always had the greatest potential.

JEREMY

I've never sipped cognac from a baccarat sniffer. I didn't think it mattered.

KRISTINE

Michael took me under his wing because I asked him to. I wasn't some star-struck teenager. Our relationship blossomed. But I should have seen it coming, your moving on. I should have asked more questions. With careers and relationships there are often setbacks.

MICHAEL

Before you arrived Kristine was saying she hoped we'd both be friends.

JEREMY

I'm sure you were skeptical.

MICHAEL

You'll love New York. It's the place to be if you're a Renaissance man.

(Hands JEREMY his card)

My card. Let's set up a trip. What do you have to lose?

Later that evening. JEREMY and KRISTINE cuddle on the couch, fatigued, disheveled, finishing off the Lagavulin.

JEREMY

That was a good idea.

KRISTINE

You kept your cool. I'm proud of you.

JEREMY

I should stick to beer.

KRISTINE

I haven't drunk this much since college.

JEREMY

I used to be good at it.

KRISTINE

What do you think?

JEREMY

I told you. He's out to get you.

KRISTINE

He's right about the conference.

JEREMY

I was hoping you wouldn't say that.

KRISTINE

I'll prove him wrong. I'll get connected.

JEREMY

You've awakened the lion. He's on the prowl.

KRISTINE

You're my lion.

JEREMY

I'll take your pulse when you come home each night.

KRISTINE

Honey, you don't commute to conferences. It defeats the purpose.

JEREMY

Maybe you love two guys.

KRISTINE

I love you.

JEREMY

I love you.

KRISTINE

I need to network.

JEREMY

Go to the other conventions.

KRISTINE

This is the big one.

JEREMY

(A glimmer of sunlight comes through the window)

We shared a sunrise once.

KRISTINE

That's when I fell in love with you.

JEREMY

The stars are beckoning. Let's go back.

KRISTINE

Was it legal to make love there?

JEREMY

Everything we did that night was illegal.

KRISTINE

You're always trying to get me to break the rules.

JEREMY

I don't want to hold you back.

KRISTINE

You're not.

JEREMY

We'll go to New York if that's what you want.

KRISTINE

Maybe someday.

JEREMY

You drive yourself relentlessly. You never let up.

KRISTINE

Fear of failure. It's a ghost. I try to block it out. It's always there, watching me, waiting for me to stumble.

(THEY cuddle more closely)

The bar/lounge in Chicago two days later. MICHAEL and KRISTINE are seated with drinks and menus. WAITER stands, ready to take their orders.

MICHAEL

(He's ordered. Hands menu to WAITER)

I suggest the *Roast Poussin*.

KRISTINE

(Reading)

'Stuffed with chicken forcemeat, fennel, cippolini onion, mushroom, fresh apricot, sage and *saffron jus*.' What is it?

MICHAEL

Cornish Hen.

KRISTINE

He says I should try it.

(THEY hand menus to WAITER who smiles and EXITS)

Great talk, Michael! There was certainly a lot of interest.

MICHAEL

Evanston knows they don't deserve you.

KRISTINE

You know people at Evanston?

MICHAEL

I do now.

KRISTINE

That's what you told them.

MICHAEL

Wildkit Willie! Where did you find him, in a rare bookstore?

KRISTINE

Let's get something straight. I'm engaged to a terrific guy. You and I are professional colleagues. Can you accept that?

MICHAEL

No.

What? KRISTINE

You can't either. MICHAEL

I don't believe this. KRISTINE

Think back. MICHAEL

When? KRISTINE

Our first time. MICHAEL

All I think about is our last time. KRISTINE

My place. MICHAEL

There. KRISTINE

I actually cooked dinner. MICHAEL

Cornish Hen. Talk about a setup! KRISTINE

You were reticent. MICHAEL

You were deceptive. KRISTINE

Trembling. MICHAEL

Angry. KRISTINE

I saw your sensitive side. MICHAEL

KRISTINE

I saw how self-absorbed you were.

MICHAEL

I felt my vulnerability.

KRISTINE

I missed the last train home. The cab fare was outrageous.

MICHAEL

I longed for intimacy, but I was ignorant of its demands.

KRISTINE

Was I doomed to loneliness?

MICHAEL

(Silence. HE readies himself.)

I watched you and Jeremy at Lighthouse Beach.

KRISTINE

Oh my God!

MICHAEL

He taught you how to swim.

KRISTINE

What were you doing there?

MICHAEL

I came back to sell my condo.

KRISTINE

How humiliating!

MICHAEL

I'm a swimmer. I'd never thought to offer.

KRISTINE

I don't believe I'm hearing this!

MICHAEL

You trusted him.

KRISTINE

You had no right!

MICHAEL

He knows you're here?

KRISTINE

Yes.

MICHAEL

He can't be very happy about it.

KRISTINE

He fears the worst.

MICHAEL

You're here.

KRISTINE

You were right about the conference.

MICHAEL

You're in trouble, Kristine.

KRISTINE

You and I just weren't meant to be.

MICHAEL

All day long I sat on the beach thinking about what I'd seen.

KRISTINE

I wish you hadn't gone anywhere near the beach.

MICHAEL

I didn't spy. I turned away. I came back later thinking you'd be gone.

KRISTINE

I'm happy now. Can't you see that?

MICHAEL

I don't think you are.

KRISTINE

You're just saying that.

MICHAEL

He let you off the hook of your relentless ambition.

KRISTINE

Why must I always feel guilty?

MICHAEL

Because you have an extraordinary gift.

KRISTINE

It's a fucking curse!

MICHAEL

You loved me when I hid the truth. You hate me now for saying it.

KRISTINE

(SHE rises to leave)

I should go.

MICHAEL

We haven't been served yet!

KRISTINE

I'm not hungry.

MICHAEL

Again? Two for two. It's not a good pattern.

KRISTINE

He had me at first light. He saw life as a miracle. Imagine that! Who believes in miracles? I want so much to believe in miracles.

(WAITER ENTERS with the servings. Stops. SHE's leaving)

The Cornish Hen. You know, I tried it once. It's not my favorite dish.

The Apartment, two days later. It's in complete disarray. Drawers have been pulled out of desks and dressers. Clothing and various items are strewn about. Furniture has been pushed around haphazardly. A discarded pizza box is prominent on the floor. JEREMY sits in a chair clad in his Willie costume, including the headgear. The movie projector is on and on the wall we see a running homemade tape of an Evanston High School football game. We hear a student radio commentator doing a decidedly amateur play-by-play along with crowd noises. We also hear JEREMY leading cheers. KRISTINE ENTERS, returning from the conference. SHE drops her bags and looks around, incredulous.

KRISTINE

What happened?

JEREMY

You're home!

KRISTINE

Have we been burglarized?

JEREMY

Things got a little out of hand.

KRISTINE

Why are you wearing that ridiculous costume?

JEREMY

I get fatigued thinking about it, cocktails, dinners, schmoozing, introducing, getting introduced. Now they call it 'networking.'

KRISTINE

I called you maybe a dozen times.

JEREMY

Here we are in 1983 trying to reinvent the language. A perfectly functional noun hijacked by a verb gone wild. A network's a system, like a power grid. It's ludicrous to say we're meandering about, meeting people using the same word that implies we're standing still. When we're connecting dots we don't say we're dotting.

KRISTINE

What the fuck are you talking about?

JEREMY

I'm an English teacher. Things like that drive me crazy.

KRISTINE

What's that?

JEREMY

That's me, Willie. State finals, the championship game. We lost.

(Pause. HE stands, removes the headgear. Turns the sound off. The film continues to run silently)

We were favored to win. It still pains me.

KRISTINE

A high school game. You can't be serious!

JEREMY

I learned things while you were conferencing and whatever else you were doing. I learned frozen pizza sucks. Why do we keep buying this shit?

KRISTINE

Jeremy, why are you doing this?

JEREMY

I also learned ignorance is the key. *That* was a big one. Look at all the carnage done to perfectly happy couples by the things they learned. There wouldn't be a divorce attorney with a practice but for the things we find out about each other.

KRISTINE

I thought you were stronger.

JEREMY

I was before I learned what I learned.

KRISTINE

What is it you think you learned?

JEREMY

I find it hard to believe you're questioning.

KRISTINE

What the fuck is going on?

JEREMY

You took your diaphragm. The kit. The jell. All of it.

KRISTINE

You went looking for my diaphragm?

JEREMY

Not originally. It's always there in the bathroom cabinet. It wasn't there. I said to myself don't jump to conclusions. If I found it, all would be well. I didn't find it. You haven't unpacked yet.

KRISTINE

You trashed my apartment, everything I own.

JEREMY

Yours? Already?

KRISTINE

Because you couldn't find my diaphragm?

JEREMY

Because of what it told me.

KRISTINE

Nothing happened!

JEREMY

Maybe you wanted it to happen and it didn't. Maybe you thought it might happen and you wouldn't be able to stop yourself. Maybe it did happen and you're still afraid to tell me. All I know is you haven't let him go. He's your ghost. He's the one who's watching, looking over your shoulder at everything you do.

KRISTINE

You have absolutely no idea!

(SHE slumps to the floor, holding back tears.)

I wasn't thinking. There wasn't a reason in the world for me to take it.

JEREMY

You're the most organized, rational person I've ever known.

KRISTINE

How long have you been sitting there in that ridiculous costume?

JEREMY

How long have you been gone?

KRISTINE

You trash the place. You sit in that chair in that costume watching that stupid football film for days on end. Do you think you're being normal?

JEREMY

Willie helps me get through things.

KRISTINE

Willie the Wildkit! Don Quixote! How many personalities do you have?

JEREMY

I'm scared. I thought I had you. Now I don't. I afraid I've already lost you.

KRISTINE

You call this love, Jeremy?

JEREMY

Heavily tinged with desperation.

KRISTINE

You have no idea what desperation is but you're about to find out.

JEREMY

We can fix this if we try.

KRISTINE

I learned something too, just before I left. I'm pregnant. Pregnant, Jeremy. We're going to be parents. Is Willie's ready for that? Am I?

The darkened apartment, a week later. We hear Variation #20 briefly. It's 3AM. Through the window we see heavy snow falling. The music subsides. All is quiet. Suddenly, the buzzer rings. Unanswered, it rings repeatedly. KRISTINE ENTERS from the bedroom, groggy, wearing a nightdress. SHE pauses, gets oriented, goes to the intercom.

KRISTINE

I think you have the wrong apartment!

(The buzzer rings again. SHE paces. Into the intercom)

Do you know what time it is?

(Buzzer again)

Who is it? What do you want?

MICHAEL (OFF, through the intercom)

It's me!

KRISTINE

Who's me?

MICHAEL (OFF)

Michael!

KRISTINE

What the hell are you doing here?

MICHAEL (OFF, Intercom)

Damn it! It's freezing out here. Would you let me in!

(SHE presses the buzzer and unlocks the door. SHE EXITS to her room and, in a moment, RE-ENTERS pulling on a robe. SHE sits at the table and waits. OFF, HE knocks.)

KRISTINE

It's open!

(MICHAEL ENTERS. HE wears an outlandish, bright pink "balloon" winter coat, maybe with polka dots, bright snow boot flaps. He's covered with ice and snow. He's carrying a bottle of scotch and a large shopping bag bulging with undetermined items. THEY stare at each other. HE stands at the door nervously.)

MICHAEL

Did I wake you?

KRISTINE

It's three o'clock in the goddamn morning. What do you think?

MICHAEL

God! There's a foot of snow out there.

KRISTINE

You were leaning on the buzzer. I didn't know what to think?

MICHAEL

I was freezing to death.

KRISTINE

What are you doing here?

MICHAEL

You threw him out. Why didn't you tell me?

KRISTINE

It just happened yesterday. How do you know?

MICHAEL

He told me.

KRISTINE

You talked to Jeremy?

MICHAEL

You wanted us to be friends!

KRISTINE

Shit, Michael! That was then!

MICHAEL

He went nuts. He screamed at me.

KRISTINE

He's like that.

MICHAEL

I feel awful!

KRISTINE

Like hell you do. How in God's name did you get here?

MICHAEL

It wasn't easy. I had no idea until I got to LaGuardia. We sat for hours on the runway.

KRISTINE

Where did you find the coat, in a circus?

MICHAEL

I'm very fond of this coat.

KRISTINE

Michael, shocking pink is not your color.

MICHAEL

Someone I know told me to lighten up. I take her advice seriously.

KRISTINE

Jeremy calls you all pissed off. You decide to fly here right away despite the weather. You also decide not to call first because you knew what I'd say, assuming I answered the call at all.

MICHAEL

You got it!

KRISTINE

Fuck! Michael, you're the last thing I need right now.

MICHAEL

I know you would have said that too.

KRISTINE

What are your plans? Where are you staying?

MICHAEL

Actually, that's still a work in progress. I'm afraid I don't know.

KRISTINE

What do you mean you don't know?

MICHAEL

The hotels are booked solid. Everyone's stranded.

KRISTINE

Fucking great!

MICHAEL

I'll find something. Don't worry.

KRISTINE

Sure you will.

MICHAEL

I'm here if you need me. I'll be like a mouse. I won't say a word.

KRISTINE

You're dripping snow and ice all over my floor.

MICHAEL

I didn't want to assume.

(HE takes off his outerwear. HE wears a '60's tracksuit.)

KRISTINE

Good God, there's more! Look at you.

MICHAEL

I was headed out for a jog. I didn't bother to change.

KRISTINE

Really? You've taken up jogging! You always hated jogging.

MICHAEL

Didn't I tell you? I'm training for a 5K. I'm psyched!

KRISTINE

Where's your bag?

MICHAEL

The bastards lost it. A few snowflakes and their whole system goes to hell.

KRISTINE

God, I wish they'd lost you too.

MICHAEL

They'll deliver it eventually. I gave them this address. I hope you don't mind.

KRISTINE

Eventually? How long do you intend to hang around?

MICHAEL

As long as I can be helpful.

KRISTINE

Michael, what are you doing? Why are you here?

MICHAEL

To see what you need. Maybe just to be a shoulder to cry on.

KRISTINE

I'm not ready for this. I've hardly slept or eaten since it happened.

MICHAEL

Me too! As a matter of fact, I'm starving.

KRISTINE

Did it ever cross your mind that I might want to be alone?

MICHAEL

As a matter of fact it did.

KRISTINE

You're slick, Michael.

MICHAEL

You kicked him out. That's not like you.

KRISTINE

That doesn't quite paint the full picture.

MICHAEL

He said you gave him an hour to pack.

KRISTINE

First he went nutso. It took us two days to fix the place. I made him help me then I kicked him out.

MICHAEL

Oh my God! Were you in any danger?

KRISTINE

Michael, zip it, okay?

MICHAEL

I just knew it!

KRISTINE

Michael!

MICHAEL

Well, I should start calling hotels. Where are your Yellow Pages?

KRISTINE

I don't have the Yellow Pages. I'm a recluse! Remember?

MICHAEL

Oh!

KRISTINE

You can have the couch, but tomorrow...

MICHAEL

Thank you. It's very kind. I know you're under a lot of stress right now.

KRISTINE

Now I'm going to bed. Sheets are in the closet.

MICHAEL

Didn't you say you were hungry?

KRISTINE

No. You said you were hungry.

MICHAEL

Oh! Right.

KRISTINE

You're actually asking me to cook something?

MICHAEL

Are you cooking now? I didn't know! That's wonderful!

KRISTINE

Michael, you can be such a dick!

MICHAEL

This was a bad idea. I'll just go. I'll find a place.

KRISTINE

No, I haven't learned to cook. I can hardly boil an egg.

MICHAEL

Remember those glorious breakfasts after the overnight procedures? *Lou Mitchell's*, 'the best breakfast on the planet.' Those were happy times.

KRISTINE

Stop it with the memories, okay?

MICHAEL

I can tell you it's not the same in New York. Everyone commutes to some God-forsaken place so they don't hang around. Now I dine alone in the wee small hours. Try explaining to a New York waitress that you've just used the most advanced imaging system in the world to diagnose and surgically repair the traumatic lumbar injury of some asshole who hurled his car into a lamppost. What does she ask? Do I want ketchup with my eggs. Ketchup! How ridiculous!

KRISTINE

Michael, I don't want to hear it!

MICHAEL

I know. I'm sorry.

(Takes his bottle and goes to the bar)

I brought along some scotch. I thought it might be helpful. May I? Would you care to join me?

KRISTINE

Shit! It's hopeless. Nothing for me. I'll see what I can scrape together. I'll be back in a moment.

(SHE EXITS to the bedroom.)

MICHAEL

(Loudly)

Two Dewar's coming up, neat of course!

KRISTINE (OFF)

Michael! I said no.

MICHAEL

Just a shortie. A therapeutic shortie.

KRISTINE (OFF)

I don't want a goddamn drink.

(HE pours it anyway. SHE RE-ENTERS in jeans and a sweatshirt, fashionable as always. HE gives HER the scotch. SHE goes to the kitchen and puts the drink on the counter. SHE'll attempt to prepare bacon, eggs, toast and coffee as THEY talk. HE watches, drink in hand.)

KRISTINE

What's wrong with me?

MICHAEL

There's nothing wrong with you.

KRISTINE

Everything's crashing down.

MICHAEL

You'll right the ship. Give yourself time.

KRISTINE

I'm not very good at this.

MICHAEL

It's hard. I know.

KRISTINE

Cooking.

MICHAEL

That too.

KRISTINE

(Long Pause as she works)

I was just going to stay home and, I don't know, watch soaps.

MICHAEL

An excellent decision!

KRISTINE

I know there's a major 'I told you so' coming, so get it over with, okay?

MICHAEL

There's no 'I told you so' coming.

KRISTINE

If New York's what you're here to talk about, you're completely wasting your time.

(SHE struggles at the stove. She spills water as SHE pours it into the coffee maker. SHE touches a hot pan, burning a finger. SHE can't separate the bacon slices. Then SHE knocks the eggs to the floor. They splatter.)

How is it everyone else can do this and I can't?

(HE moves to her, gently holding her from behind. SHE stiffens but doesn't resist. SHE tears.)

MICHAEL

No one does it well.

(SHE starts to clean up.)

Let me.

(HE gently takes HER to a seat at the table. HE finds an apron.)

I work best in uniform.

(HE clean the mess up, opens the refrigerator)

Lettuce? Tomatoes? Ah, here they are.

(Silence)

You have a very well organized refrigerator. I like all the open space.

(HE will begin to make BLT sandwiches.)

Oh, I love your toaster! It's so clean. It looks as if it's never been used.

(Silence.)

Actually, we don't need eggs. Did I ever tell you I'm certified in BLT formulation? I did an internship the night of my high school prom, although, honestly, it didn't go well. My date got food poisoning and her parents got really pissed. I was never allowed to see her again. Well, the hell with her! Can't hold her BLTs. I've long forgotten her name.

(Silence. HE opens the refrigerator again and finds butter)

Mother would adore you. Butter! I congratulate you for not having fallen for the margarine fad sweeping the nation. I think I'm the only person in America who still thinks saturated fat is a good thing.

(HE serves, pours her coffee, refreshes his drink and sits down. HE will sip his scotch without touching his food. SHE nibbles halfheartedly, staring at HIM blankly)

MICHAEL (cont'd)

He just ranted, really. The poor guy was out of his league, really.

(HE "zips" HIS lips)

Sorry! Zipped! But, I want you to know that I know it's none of my business.

(Silence. THEY steal looks at each other)

You are a very caring person. You allow homeless indigents to wipe your car window at intersections and you reward them generously. Mind you, I've never actually seen you do that, but there's no doubt in my mind. I'm trying to be like that. Unfortunately, I don't own a car.

(Silence)

There's no doubt in my mind you did nothing wrong in this situation. By the way, you didn't do anything wrong the last time either. It was *all* my doing. I know I've have already told you that, but it's worth repeating at a time like this.

(Silence. SHE glowers at HIM)

Yes, well, some other time.

(Silence)

Have you watched any soaps? Aren't they great? I absolutely love *Search for Tomorrow* and *Dynasty*...John Forsythe and Joan Collins are terrific, don't you think?

(Silence)

If you're thinking of movies, I'd suggest *Tender Mercies* over *Terms of Endearment*. Personally, I think *Endearment's* highly overrated, but then, given the timing, you might find it comforting. I could see that.

(Silence. HE finally nibbles)

Not bad, if I do say so myself!

KRISTINE

I'm pregnant.

MICHAEL

Oh!

KRISTINE

If you had called I would have saved you the trip.

MICHAEL

Am I the first to say 'congratulations?' I hope so! How are you feeling?

KRISTINE

It all fell apart.

MICHAEL

No, No! You musn't look at it that way.

(Gets up. Pours another scotch)

One of the flight attendants took a liking to me. That's probably a surprise. So I told her everything. You and me...you and him...all of us...NYU, Evanston, all that I knew. She listened. She went off and thought about it. When she came back, she told me I should keep my goddamn mouth shut and refrain from giving you any advice at all.

KRISTINE

We were living together. We were engaged. I was starting a department.

MICHAEL

She said I should help you remember what it was like as a little girl. I should find something you never did back then, but always wanted to do.

KRISTINE

I'll be single mom struggling to make it work.

MICHAEL

You *were* a little girl once, I assume.

KRISTINE

Way to screw up a promising career.

MICHAEL

Let me ask you. Did you have a best friend growing up?

KRISTINE

My best friends were imaginary.

MICHAEL

I see what attracted you to Jeremy!

KRISTINE

Famous women who went against the grain. I read about them constantly.

MICHAEL

They inspired you!

KRISTINE

My mother was a librarian. That's where I always went after school. She didn't want me hanging out by myself.

MICHAEL

Your best friends were on the shelves.

KRISTINE

I wasn't unhappy.

MICHAEL

(HE gulps his scotch)

So here's the thing. As a kid, did you ever build a snowman?

KRISTINE

Stop!

MICHAEL
Did you?

KRISTINE
No.

MICHAEL
I'm very glad to hear that.

KRISTINE
You never did either.

MICHAEL
You're right.

KRISTINE
The drifts are taller than we are.

MICHAEL
Once we were childhood prodigies. Tonight we're two lonely souls.

KRISTINE
Sorry to burst your bubble, but I don't have anything to wear.

MICHAEL
I thought you'd say that.

KRISTINE
And I don't know how to build a snowman.

MICHAEL
You think I do? I'm from Texas.

(HE retrieves the shopping bag and removes an equally outlandish "balloon" coat, mittens, hat and large rubber boots. HE lays them out)

Snow gear!

KRISTINE
I wouldn't be caught dead in any of that!

MICHAEL
Nobody's out there! No one will see you!

KRISTINE
I don't believe this.

MICHAEL

It'll be a hoot.

KRISTINE

I don't want to.

MICHAEL

Think of it as play therapy. We can analyze it afterwards.

KRISTINE

I'm tired. I haven't slept.

MICHAEL

Kristine, you've done multiple brain surgeries on far less sleep.

KRISTINE

What the hell has gotten into you?

MICHAEL

We'll discuss that later.

KRISTINE

No!

MICHAEL

Please! I promised the flight attendant I'd let her know how it went.

KRISTINE

(Long Pause)

If we see a single goddamn soul we're done.

MICHAEL

Deal!

(THEY awkwardly, with effort, put the gear on. HE gives her considerable help. THEY move about like moon walkers)

I'll be damned. Sally Ride! You look like an astronaut!

KRISTINE

I look ridiculous!

MICHAEL

All the astronauts do.

(THEY move toward the door. SHE stops.)

KRISTINE

Wait!

MICHAEL

What?

KRISTINE

There's something I want to know first.

MICHAEL

You can't chicken out now.

KRISTINE

I can do anything I want!

MICHAEL

What is it?

KRISTINE

How big was your travel bag?

MICHAEL

I don't know. Normal size. Why?

KRISTINE

Normal? What does that mean?

MICHAEL

Normal...average. What's your question?

KRISTINE

You never check.

MICHAEL

I do sometimes.

KRISTINE

You had it with you.

MICHAEL

(Pause. HE realizes)

There was no room in the overheads.

KRISTINE

You said the plane was empty.

MICHAEL

Did I? I really shouldn't have said that.

KRISTINE

You haven't jogged a mile in your life.

MICHAEL

O'Hare's closed. Nothing's moving. There's a place on the West Side that carries odd lot costumes. That's where I got this stuff. I called a guy I know. He arranged a charter to Peoria and a truck and a driver from there. The driver and my bag are at the Orrington. I won't need the Yellow Pages.

KRISTINE

You push and push till there's nothing left.

MICHAEL

I'm not pushing. Not this time.

KRISTINE

I'm going to be a single mother who jumped off the fast track for a guy who didn't work out. There's nothing you can do to change that.

MICHAEL

I told you I'd go. If that's what you want, I will. But first I'm going to build a snowman outside your door, alone if I have to. As long as it lasts, and given the fucking weather it will last a very long time, it will serve as a reminder to you that someone cares. That's what I came to do, simply tell you how great a person you are and tell you again how sorry I am. You're still paying the price for what I did. I'll always regret it.

(Silence. SHE stares at HIM without expression. Then, awkwardly, SHE sits down on the floor.)

KRISTINE

Fuck you! Fuck you! Fuck you!

MICHAEL

We can fix this.

KRISTINE

We?

MICHAEL

Yeah.

KRISTINE

I'm the only one who can fix it and I don't know how.

MICHAEL

Maybe, but we still need to build this snowman.

KRISTINE

There's no nervous system. I'm useless if there's no nervous system. I know nothing about anything else. I can't cook. I don't know how to care for a baby, especially by myself. I can't build a snowman. My relationships fall apart. My career's in the toilet.

MICHAEL

What kind of a mother puts her kid in the library all day?

KRISTINE

It's not my mother's fault!

MICHAEL

I think we should send her a picture.

KRISTINE

She'll think I'm Sally Ride and some guy she doesn't know.

MICHAEL

That's good. No one will know. It'll always be our secret.

(HE picks her up gently. THEY EXIT into the storm)

DARK. END OF ACT ONE.

ACT TWO

The Apartment, eleven months later, October 1984. A baby carriage, unoccupied, sits against a wall. KRISTINE is seated, reading a newspaper. A large shopping bag, which holds Jeremy's Willie costume, sits by the desk. We see the headline in the newspaper, Indira Gandhi, India's PM Assassinated. Over 10,000 dead in Riots That Follow. The radio is on.

DISK JOCKEY (Over)

What's going on in the White House these days? President Reagan was doing a voice check for his weekly radio broadcast yesterday. Apparently he didn't realize his mic was live. "My fellow Americans, I am pleased to tell you today that I've signed legislation that will outlaw Russia forever. We begin bombing in five minutes."

(The buzzer sounds. SHE rises, presses the buzzer and opens the apartment door)

KRISTINE

Are you kidding me?

(SHE EXITS to the bedroom, RE-ENTERING with the infant Claire.)

DISC JOCKEY (Over)

The White House declined comment and is refusing to release the tape. Congressional Democrats are howling. Republican leaders are suggesting he has a terrific sense of humor. No comment from the Mondale camp. Here's Phil Collins's latest hit, Against All Odds (Take A Look At Me Now).

(We hear the song briefly. JEREMY ENTERS, standing nervously at the door. HE's wearing a new tweed jacket.)

KRISTINE

(Silence as THEY stare)

Jeremy, for heaven's sake, come in! Say hello to your daughter.

JEREMY

Hello, Claire. I've missed you.

KRISTINE

I'm sorry. We've been really busy.

JEREMY

(Takes Claire. HE becomes calmer instantly.)

Hey, sweetie-pie. You're so adorable! How about a smile. C'mon. C'mon. There you go. What a fantastic smile!

KRISTINE

She's actually sleeping through the night now. What a relief that's been.

JEREMY

She's really alert.

(HE moves his index finger back and forth)

You're doing something right.

KRISTINE

She's always at ease with you, Jeremy.

JEREMY

Two months already. I can't believe it. How about another smile? There you go! You're so cute!

KRISTINE

I know.

(HE walks around the room gently swaying her. HE sings softly to her)

JEREMY

*Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
How I wonder what you are.
Up above the world so high,
Like a diamond in the sky.*

KRISTINE

You're a natural.

JEREMY

I couldn't be happier.

KRISTINE

You're a more natural parent than I am.

JEREMY

No. You'll be a wonderful mom.

(HE sings)

*When the blazing sun is gone,
When he nothing shines upon,
Then you show your little light,
Twinkle, twinkle, all the night.*

KRISTINE

Jeremy...

JEREMY

(Sings)

*Then the traveler in the dark,
Thanks you for your tiny spark,
He could not see which way to go,
If you did not twinkle so.*

KRISTINE

You know the entire melody!

JEREMY

Didn't I tell you I minored in music?

KRISTINE

I think you minored in everything.

JEREMY

I wish I could see her every day.

KRISTINE

Maybe you can. It's time for her nap. Let me put her in. We have something to discuss.

JEREMY

Oh?

(HE surrenders CLAIRE. SHE EXITS to put her down for a nap. While SHE'S out of the room, HE notices the bag and inspects the costume. SHE RE-ENTERS)

JEREMY

I don't want it any more.

KRISTINE

I thought it meant a lot to you.

JEREMY

Willie's over. Throw him out.

KRISTINE

Are you sure?

JEREMY

Yeah.

KRISTINE

Okay.

JEREMY

New jacket.

KRISTINE

I see that! I like it.

JEREMY

There's so much I want to say.

KRISTINE

Jeremy...

JEREMY

Can we talk?

KRISTINE

Yes. We need to.

JEREMY

I've changed. I want to be able to show you.

KRISTINE

Jeremy...

JEREMY

I want us to try again.

KRISTINE

Jeremy, please!

JEREMY

We owe it to Claire.

KRISTINE

I have something to tell you.

JEREMY

It's about Michael, isn't it?

KRISTINE

Let me explain.

JEREMY

You've been seeing him, haven't you?

KRISTINE

Let me explain!

JEREMY

I knew it.

KRISTINE

Jeremy, please let me explain!

JEREMY

I saw the two of you the night after you told me to leave.

KRISTINE

Oh my God!

JEREMY

You were building a snowman.

KRISTINE

You'd never understand.

JEREMY

I had barely left.

KRISTINE

I have an offer. It's from NYU.

JEREMY

No!

KRISTINE

I took the interview. We really clicked, the team and I.

JEREMY

I knew it!

KRISTINE

I miss that environment.

JEREMY

You're not taking Claire away!

KRISTINE

It's a great offer.

JEREMY

I have rights too!

KRISTINE

I want to accept it.

JEREMY

I'll fight this.

KRISTINE

There's nothing to fight.

JEREMY

What are you saying?

KRISTINE

I'm asking you to raise Claire.

JEREMY

You're abandoning her?

KRISTINE

I'll commute.

JEREMY

You think he's worth giving up your infant daughter?

KRISTINE

Just once, try to see it from my perspective.

JEREMY

You're Claire's mother!

KRISTINE

The work going on there is groundbreaking.

JEREMY

What about your daughter?

KRISTINE

Believe me, I want what's best for her.

JEREMY

This is what's best?

KRISTINE

Yes.

JEREMY

It's not NYU at all. It's him.

KRISTINE

Yes, Jeremy, I couldn't do it without him.

JEREMY

I changed my mind. Don't throw him out.

KRISTINE

Willie? Whatever you want.

JEREMY

You're two are using each other.

KRISTINE

I suppose we'll find out.

JEREMY

How does a mother walk away from her infant daughter?

KRISTINE

Tell me how not to be a neurosurgeon! If I don't do this tell me I won't look at Claire everyday and regret what she cost me. No matter what I do, tell me how to make this relentless guilt go away.

JEREMY

You think commuting will work? You're kidding yourself!

KRISTINE

Actually, there's only one way it might work.

JEREMY

Claire needs a mother.

KRISTINE

You'll be her mother.

JEREMY

What are you saying?

KRISTINE

You'll be a better mother than I could ever be.

JEREMY

That's not true.

KRISTINE

Even if I stayed.

JEREMY

Kristine, how can you say that? She's only two months old. It's Michael.

KRISTINE

I'm the one making the decision.

JEREMY

You'll move in with him?

KRISTINE

Yes.

JEREMY

Jesus!

KRISTINE

I'm sorry, Jeremy.

JEREMY

All this time and never a word.

KRISTINE

I wasn't sure.

JEREMY

You're two of a kind.

KRISTINE

I can't blame you for being angry.

JEREMY

You don't care about my being angry.

KRISTINE

You're dead wrong about that. It's killing me. You're just saying what the world will think. I'm a rotten mother who abandoned her child.

JEREMY

I don't believe this is happening.

KRISTINE

We're very different people. Somehow for her sake we have to make that work.

JEREMY

Mr. Mom. Just like the movie.

KRISTINE

I know I don't have the right to ask you.

(HE goes to the bag again. Looks wistfully at the costume. Handles it.)

JEREMY

You don't get off scot-free.

KRISTINE

What do you mean?

JEREMY

I want her to have a piano. I want to play for her. When she's older, I want to teach her. I can't afford it. She'll know it came from you.

KRISTINE

She's two months old.

JEREMY

She'll always have music in her life.

KRISTINE

You can't predict these things.

JEREMY

I'll play for her.

KRISTINE

Mother's intuition?

JEREMY

Intuition.

KRISTINE

Somehow, I think you just changed her life.

JEREMY

Changed? No. Enabled.

KRISTINE

We'll put it here. You guys can come over every day.

JEREMY

I think someday we'll watch her perform.

KRISTINE

How do you know these things?

JEREMY

How do you do spinal surgery?

KRISTINE

Thank you, Jeremy.

JEREMY

I don't envy you. Someday, you'll deeply regret what you've done.

The apartment, nearly ten years later in August 1994. It's CLAIRE's tenth birthday. KRISTINE, 42, is reviewing a medical chart while adjusting her wardrobe, hair, etc., preparing to leave. CLAIRE, 10, plays a desultory Happy Birthday at the piano.

KRISTINE

Claire, isn't that a bit...well...egotistical?

CLAIRE

I'm not allowed to play *Happy Birthday* on my birthday?

KRISTINE

To yourself?

CLAIRE

Why not?

KRISTINE

Someone else should play it to you.

CLAIRE

I'm sure Dad will.

KRISTINE

You make it sound so mournful. Have you done your homework?

CLAIRE

On my birthday?

KRISTINE

Yes, on your birthday!

CLAIRE

Children shouldn't have to do homework on their birthdays.

KRISTINE

Young lady, you may think that, but they don't.

CLAIRE

When I grow up and have children I'm going to give them their birthday off.

KRISTINE

I'm sure you will.

CLAIRE

I want to wear the new dress you bought me to my party.

KRISTINE

The party's on the beach. Don't you want to go swimming?

CLAIRE

I can change there.

KRISTINE

Honey, wear your bathing suit under your shorts.

CLAIRE

I haven't worn the dress yet.

KRISTINE

Your father will take you someplace soon enough where you can wear it.

(KRISTINE dials a number on the phone. Leaves a voice mail)

KRISTINE

Michael, I agree with your assessment, but I think we should do an MRI to be sure. Given his condition, can we get that scheduled tomorrow? I'm on an early flight. I land at nine. Let's schedule the procedure. Cheers!

CLAIRE

Where are you going?

KRISTINE

I have a big interview today.

CLAIRE

What's an interview?

KRISTINE

It's a meeting to discuss a job.

CLAIRE

Where?

KRISTINE

In Chicago. Northwestern Memorial.

CLAIRE

You said you love your job.

KRISTINE

I do, but this would be a better job.

CLAIRE

Why?

KRISTINE

I'll move back home. I'll oversee a big department. I'll spend more time with you. Wouldn't that be nice?

CLAIRE

I guess.

CLAIRE

You'll live here?

KRISTINE

Of course!

CLAIRE

Where will I live?

KRISTINE

We haven't talked about it yet.

CLAIRE

Father didn't say anything.

KRISTINE

He doesn't know.

CLAIRE

Will Michael move here too?

KRISTINE

Michael will not be moving.

CLAIRE

You'll miss my party, won't you?

KRISTINE

No, I'll be back. I need to get going. Bye, sweetie. Wish me luck!

(KRISTINE kisses HER. EXITS. CLAIRE resumes playing the birthday song even more morosely.)

The apartment, later the same day. We briefly hear The Circle of Life with Elton John. CLAIRE and JEREMY are standing on either side of the couch playacting with blankets serving as the shadows. THEY know the lines.

CLAIRE

*I have a little shadow that goes in and out with me,
And what can be the use of him is more than I can see.*

JEREMY

*He is very, very like me from the heels up to the head;
And I see him jump before me, when I jump into my bed.*

CLAIRE

*He hasn't got a notion of how children ought to play,
And can only make a fool of me in every sort of way.*

JEREMY

*He stays so close beside me, he's a coward you can see;
I'd think shame to stick to nursie as that shadow sticks to me!*

CLAIRE

*One morning, very early, before the sun was up,
I rose and found the shining dew on every buttercup;*

JEREMY

*But my lazy little shadow, like an arrant sleepyhead,
Had stayed at home behind me and was fast asleep in bed.*

(Bows lavishly)

Well done, my lady! Wonderful acting!

CLAIRE

Thanks, Dad.

JEREMY

Now your birthday gift. This is one of the most famous piano pieces ever composed, your first grown up music and your first classical music.

CLAIRE

(Takes and opens package)

The Goldberg Variations?

JEREMY

Have you ever heard of Johann Sebastian Bach?

CLAIRE

No.

JEREMY

It's not easy to play. You'll have to work at it.

CLAIRE

(Takes the score. Plays *The Aria* in a very faltering manner.)

It's hard.

JEREMY

Be patient. It'll take time.

CLAIRE

I've never played this kind of music.

JEREMY

I hope over time you come to love it.

(SHE tries a few more bars without much success.)

It's a beautiful day. Let's go for a swim before your party starts.

CLAIRE

Yeah!

JEREMY

Let's get our suits on.

CLAIRE

Okay!

The picnic area at Lighthouse Beach, later in the afternoon. Claire's birthday. We hear unseen seagulls and children playing. JEREMY is setting up a picnic table and cooking on a grill. CLAIRE ENTERS with various items.

CLAIRE

Plates and napkins, Dad.

JEREMY

Thanks, honey. These dogs will be done soon.

CLAIRE

Mom's not here yet.

JEREMY

I'm sure she's on her way. Let's call everyone to the table.

CLAIRE

Thanks, Dad.

JEREMY

For what, Claire?

CLAIRE

The party.

JEREMY

You're sweet. Go get your friends.

Day turns to dusk. We see the outline of campfire and hear the children singing Happy Birthday to CLAIRE. The party ends with good-byes and departures. JEREMY and CLAIRE begin cleaning up, silhouetted by the dying fire. HE stages a large box.

JEREMY

I really like your friends.

(Silence)

Claire?

(Silence. SHE's distraught.)

Are you okay?

(Silence)

Mom. I know.

(Silence)

I'm sure something happened that she couldn't control.

(Silence)

I should have picked the cake up myself.

(Silence)

Throw everything in here. Let's go home.

(CLAIRE weeps silently)

The apartment, later that evening. CLAIRE is playing Itsy-Bitsy Spider). KRISTINE is standing, trying to get her attention.

KRISTINE

Can we talk?

(CLAIRE plays defiantly briefly, then stops)

CLAIRE

I didn't have a birthday cake.

KRISTINE

I know. The bakery was closed by the time I got there.

(CLAIRE resumes playing)

Claire, please! I want to talk about this!

(CLAIRE stops. Sulks)

I feel terrible!

CLAIRE
You promised!

KRISTINE
I know.

(CLAIRE is silent. She pokes at the keys randomly.)

I couldn't leave. They wanted me to meet more people.

CLAIRE
Why not?

KRISTINE
They lined up more people for me to see.

CLAIRE
You never keep your promises.

KRISTINE
What does that mean?

CLAIRE
You say you're coming then you cancel trips home.

KRISTINE
I know. It can't be helped. Moving back will change that.

CLAIRE
I want to stay with Dad.

KRISTINE
(Stung)
That's fine. You've always lived with him.

CLAIRE
We do fun things.

KRISTINE
We will too.

CLAIRE
You wish I liked science more.

KRISTINE
Claire, what are you talking about?

CLAIRE
You do.

KRISTINE

You decide what you like, not me, not anyone.

CLAIRE

I like music better than anything.

KRISTINE

I know.

CLAIRE

Father gave me new music for my birthday. It's hard. I'm trying to learn it.

KRISTINE

Really? Already?

CLAIRE

Do you want to hear it?

KRISTINE

Sure!

(CLAIRE begins *The Aria*. SHE's been practicing. It's improved already.)

KRISTINE

Claire, that's amazing!

CLAIRE

This is the first one. It'll take me my whole life to learn the rest of the movements.

KRISTINE

It's beautiful.

CLAIRE

It's called classical music.

KRISTINE

Yes, it is.

CLAIRE

Dad took me to a concert at Pick Staiger Hall.

KRISTINE

Yes. I heard.

CLAIRE

That's what I want to do when I grow up.

KRISTINE

Play the piano.

CLAIRE

Yes. I really do.

KRISTINE

I'll help you, if you'd like.

CLAIRE

(Stops playing)

How?

KRISTINE

We should hire a really good tutor for you.

CLAIRE

Dad's teaches me. We have fun.

KRISTINE

He can still teach you things.

CLAIRE

I don't know.

KRISTINE

If you want to be good when you grow up, you're going to have to make sacrifices.

CLAIRE

What sacrifices?

KRISTINE

For one thing, you'll need to spend more time practicing.

CLAIRE

I play all the time! My friends call me a piano nerd.

KRISTINE

You play to have fun. That's fine, but you need an expert to learn technique, learn the harder pieces and learn how to perform.

CLAIRE

Why can't father teach me that?

KRISTINE

Your father's not an expert.

CLAIRE

I like playing with him.

KRISTINE

Do you want to a performer?

CLAIRE

Yes.

KRISTINE

I'll talk to your father about it.

CLAIRE

Mom, do you ever go swimming?

KRISTINE

There aren't many beaches in Manhattan.

CLAIRE

In the summer, we go swimming a lot.

KRISTINE

What does that have to do with music?

CLAIRE

Will we do things like that when you move back home?

KRISTINE

I'd like to.

CLAIRE

Have you ever been to Lighthouse Beach?

KRISTINE

A long, long time ago.

CLAIRE

The moms just stand around in the water. They never go swimming.

KRISTINE

They like to talk.

CLAIRE

Don't take dad away from me.

KRISTINE

Honey, I'd never do that!

CLAIRE

I still want to have fun.

KRISTINE

I know. You're ten years old. You need to have fun.

CLAIRE

Play with my friends.

KRISTINE

You're a prodigy. You have a special talent. I know something about prodigies. It's hard sometimes.

Lighthouse Beach, two years later. Early Autumn. A bright and chilly day. We hear lapping waves and seagulls commingling with Variation #25. HE sits in a wet suit staring out toward the barely visible lake. HE rises and walks into the water and swims away. The music Rises then Stops. We hear an ambulance in the distance.

We will see Claire, 12 at the apartment playing Variation #25 and perhaps others, intermittently, as the following scene progresses.

Evanston Hospital, ICU, brightly lit, the next day. JEREMY lies on a raised hospital bed, with nasal cannula tubing and various bedside devices and systems. HE makes a sound. KRISTINE, dressed and wearing a lab coat, has dozed off on a nearby visitor's chair covered by a blanket. SHE awakens with a jolt, rises and takes his hand.

JEREMY

No doubt you're used to this.

KRISTINE

One never gets used to this.

JEREMY

A dream perhaps?

KRISTINE

Cerebral hypoxia. You're losing brain cells.

JEREMY

Yours.

KRISTINE

I hadn't thought of that.

JEREMY

Can you hear me?

KRISTINE

Your temperature is dangerously low.

JEREMY

You can tell by holding my hand?

KRISTINE

I've seen the chart.

JEREMY

How is it I'm talking?

KRISTINE

How is it you're thinking?

JEREMY

Miracles abound!

KRISTINE

They found you two miles out submerged near a buoy.

JEREMY

I made it?

KRISTINE

What were you trying to do?

JEREMY

We talked about it. Don't you remember?

KRISTINE

The story about your father?

JEREMY

Yes!

KRISTINE

It was a reckless thing to do!

JEREMY

I christened it *Rocinante!*

KRISTINE

I thought you were past all that.

JEREMY

The Island of Rocinante de la Mancha!

KRISTINE

His mule?

JEREMY

No, his stallion!

KRISTINE

Don Quixote was insane. Don't you know that?

JEREMY

Listen!

(The *Variations* rise)

She plays beautifully.

KRISTINE

I don't hear it.

JEREMY

Then imagine it.

KRISTINE

Our prodigy.

JEREMY

A blessing or a curse?

KRISTINE

Both. She's too young to understand.

JEREMY

Would you do it all again?

KRISTINE

I'm not unhappy.

JEREMY

Did you ever hear of a guy named Kaiserling?

KRISTINE

No.

JEREMY

Bach's enabler.

KRISTINE

You've lost me.

JEREMY

He's commissioned the *Variations*.

KRISTINE

So?

JEREMY

It's not called the *Kaiserling Variations*.

KRISTINE

Who was Goldberg?

JEREMY

All he did was play the music.

KRISTINE

We each have our roles.

JEREMY

Stroll the shore at Lighthouse Beach.

KRISTINE

I'm not a dreamer. You know that.

JEREMY

It's not an either – or proposition.

KRISTINE

You certainly tried.

JEREMY

(Again the music rises)

I wish you could hear her.

KRISTINE

You were the one who played the music.

JEREMY

(Listening intently)

The aria, pristine, then the dissonance of canons, toccatas, inversions, fugues, overtures. Finally, back to the aria. The serenity of dissonance. It's very precise. You must like that.

KRISTINE

You're obsessed with the *Variations*.

JEREMY

You think so? Why do you always wear the same white coat?

KRISTINE

It's what I do.

JEREMY

I know. I offered you a secret self once.

KRISTINE

You did! I finally saw the play. Central Park on a summer evening.

JEREMY

It has some great pick-up lines. You never know when they'll come in handy.

KRISTINE

It amazes me that we ever got together.

JEREMY

I delighted to say I never got over it.

KRISTINE

Jeremy, Lighthouse Beach was the best night of my life.

JEREMY

You got scared when I said it.

KRISTINE

Yeah, for me it was a variation.

JEREMY

For me the aria. We weren't all that far off.

KRISTINE

Claire will miss you for the rest of her life.

JEREMY

Please tell her that her music was the last thing I ever heard and it was soothing.

KRISTINE

I certainly will, Jeremy.

JEREMY

We strolled the beach hand in hand each with our separate view. The watery vistas beckoned and the stars came out to watch. Happiness lay there on the horizon. A magnificent sight it was though just beyond our grasp.

(JEREMY rests his head back in the bed and expires. KRISTINE releases his hand, sobs briefly, lays down on the cot, pulls the blanket over her and, exhausted, falls asleep.)

The apartment, a week after Jeremy's death. MICHAEL is seated at the dining table. KRISTINE is serving dinner, which she has prepared. We hear Michael Jackson, You Are Not Alone, briefly. SHE pours wine.)

MICHAEL

Roast Lamb!

KRISTINE
You're surprised.

MICHAEL
I'm in shock.

KRISTINE
I did a dry run the other night.

MICHAEL
That seems a bit obsessive.

KRISTINE
Aren't we both?

MICHAEL
It's been awhile.

KRISTINE
Thanks for coming.

MICHAEL
How are you *really*?

KRISTINE
Work helps.

MICHAEL
Claire?

KRISTINE
She doesn't talk.

MICHAEL
She's twelve. It's not surprising.

KRISTINE
She wishes it'd been me.

MICHAEL
Anger's normal at this age.

KRISTINE
She worshiped him.

MICHAEL
Someday she'll be grateful for everything you've done.

KRISTINE

You'll always be a dear friend.

MICHAEL

They tell me you're doing a bang-up job at Northwestern.

KRISTINE

The technology is changing so fast. It's a challenge to stay ahead.

MICHAEL

Have you thought about applying for a seat on the board? There's no doubt the AANS would love to have you.

KRISTINE

I really can't take on anything more. I have a daughter I'm not spending as much time with as I should.

MICHAEL

Well, I have some news, potential news anyway.

KRISTINE

Oh!

MICHAEL

Cambridge.

KRISTINE

Harvard?

MICHAEL

England.

KRISTINE

You're kidding!

MICHAEL

Division Director Neuro and Trauma.

KRISTINE

Congratulations!

MICHAEL

Not yet. I go there next week.

KRISTINE

You're gone. Did they ask about your favorite cognac?

MICHAEL

That's not funny!

KRISTINE

It's a world-class unit.

MICHAEL

We'll see what comes of it.

KRISTINE

You'll nail it.

MICHAEL

I thought of you. I know it sounds crazy.

KRISTINE

There's nothing holding you back.

MICHAEL

I wish there were.

KRISTINE

Michael.

MICHAEL

A change in scenery might serve you well. Claire, too.

KRISTINE

Cambridge is not a change in scenery. It's a change in planets.

MICHAEL

We'll find you something juicy.

KRISTINE

I can't upset her environment. Not now.

MICHAEL

Do you ever think about us?

KRISTINE

We had ten good years together.

MICHAEL

We stopped paying attention, didn't we? We shouldn't have let it happen.

KRISTINE

NYU consumed us. It would again even today.

MICHAEL

I went to Lighthouse Beach today. It was filled with families. How is it I'd never noticed?

KRISTINE

In the winter when I come home lights are on in all the homes. I see families having dinner, kids with their homework. In the summer I see them outdoors grilling burgers, playing catch. Baseball is on the radio. The guilt seeps in. I should be home cooking dinner, helping Claire with her assignments, watching Seinfeld with her. But when I'm home I realize it's not what she wants. She doesn't need my help. She's engrossed in her music. I'm her Kaiserling, not her Goldberg. I'll never be able to change that.

MICHAEL

What does that mean?

KRISTINE

It's a family adage.

MICHAEL

Who are we? How did it turn out like this?

KRISTINE

We're exactly who we intended to be.

MICHAEL

It's not enough. I know that now.

KRISTINE

I guess I've learned to live with it.

MICHAEL

You said many times you didn't want to be lonely.

KRISTINE

I know.

MICHAEL

Look at us. How did we let it happen?

KRISTINE

We chose to devote our lives the things we do best, defeating pain and suffering.

MICHAEL

I still love you, Kristine. As hopeless as it sounds, I never stopped.

KRISTINE

Michael, neither of us has the slightest idea what that word means.

MICHAEL

Why don't we? It's not brain surgery.

(SHE goes to the CD player. We hear *The Aria*)

KRISTINE

Claire plays this constantly. An aria, followed by thirty variations each trying to remake the original. They're lovely but they can't. Funny! I never thought music could teach me anything.

MICHAEL

That's Claire?

KRISTINE

I know.

MICHAEL

Maybe someday you'll come and visit?

KRISTINE

I'd like that very much. I'd like Claire to see England.

MICHAEL

He was depressed, wasn't he?

KRISTINE

I don't know. All his demons were utterly romantic.

MICHAEL

How will you raise her?

KRISTINE

Never again will I miss her birthday party.

MICHAEL

She has her true mother back.

KRISTINE

Not yet. There's a lot of remedial work to be done.

MICHAEL

The parents on the beach made it look simple.

KRISTINE

It always looks easy when you're watching.

The Present Time. We hear Variation # 2. After some moments, a single strobe light illuminates CLAIRE as she plays at her own apartment. She's 32 now. SHE steps away from the piano, though the music continues quietly in the background. SHE reads from a letter she is writing.

CLAIRE

Mother, I'm coming home. I'm so excited. How long has it been? My recital at Pick-Staiger Hall is fast approaching. I can't remember when you last saw me play. We simply must spend the entire day together. I want to walk with you on Lighthouse Beach. Has it changed at all? Then, I'll do a final practice, a preview just for you. Have you had my old piano tuned? After the performance, we really must grab a late dinner at *Oceanique*. My treat! It's a promotional tour. My *Variations* album will be out by then. My first solo! Can you believe it? I never dreamed of such a thing!

The music ends. Lighthouse Beach. Summer. Present Time on a picture perfect day. KRISTINE, now 64, and CLAIRE walk the beach and picnic area, pausing at times to sit on a bench, swing set or picnic table.

CLAIRE

It's so nice to be back! I love this beach. If I still lived here I'd come here often.

KRISTINE

You never visit. You hardly ever call.

CLAIRE

Mother, you never return my calls.

KRISTINE

I suppose we're both busy.

CLAIRE

Teaching at NYU, I feel like I'm walking in your footsteps.

KRISTINE

My footsteps have long since disappeared.

CLAIRE

You know, I grew up thinking you abandoned us.

KRISTINE

I came home as often as I could.

CLAIRE

It seemed New York was the center of your life...and Michael.

KRISTINE

NYU was the center of my life.

CLAIRE

Father let me read all your cards and letters. New York seemed so glamorous.

KRISTINE

He did? I didn't know that.

CLAIRE

He always talked about what a pioneer you were and how I should be proud of you.

KRISTINE

He said that?

CLAIRE

He never lost hope. He loved you very much.

KRISTINE

He never moved on after I broke it off.

CLAIRE

When I was in tenth grade he put on his old Willie costume and found one for me. We marched around at halftime with the high school band.

KRISTINE

He had the opportunity to get a PhD and move to the college level, but he didn't see it through. It really wasn't in him. He was a kid at heart. I felt like I was paying for him to be your playmate.

CLAIRE

Your visits became less frequent. I didn't understand.

KRISTINE

I was immersed in my work. The field was exploding.

CLAIRE

Whenever you came home I was happy, but you asked about every little thing. It made me nervous.

The apartment, later in the day. CLAIRE is quietly playing Variation #7. KRISTINE is seated. SHE listens for a long moment.

CLAIRE

(Over the music)

What was it like for you growing up as a prodigy?

KRISTINE

When I was young my parents made it clear I'd have to make sacrifices. College was nothing compared to med school and residency. That was an eleven - year survival test. The whole point was to reduce us to shells, extreme fatigue and see how we performed. Patients didn't have names, just conditions, unless you lost them and had to tell their families. Emotions were the enemy. We couldn't flinch even with the most gruesome cases.

CLAIRE

You'll come tonight?

KRISTINE

Will I be proud?

CLAIRE

Mother! What a thing to ask!

KRISTINE

I never coddled you like your father did. I wanted you to be successful.

CLAIRE

You missed my tenth birthday party.

KRISTINE

That was twenty-two years ago!

CLAIRE

It was yesterday.

KRISTINE

Isn't there statute of limitations on parental failings?

CLAIRE

I don't know which was worse, the lack of you or the lack of a cake. You promised to pick it up the next day but you never did.

KRISTINE

I had an emergency surgery! I asked your father to take care of it.

CLAIRE

We saw your note two days later.

KRISTINE

I never knew that.

CLAIRE

But I had the *Variations*..

KRISTINE

You've made a career out of the *Variations*.

CLAIRE

I still use the sheets father gave me.

KRISTINE

I can see that.

CLAIRE

(SHE stops playing)

You took over everything...tutors, competitions, summer music camps, auditions. Father no longer had a say. We barely saw each other. I didn't dare say no. I felt if I could only meet your expectations, you'd finally love me.

KRISTINE

I loved you! Look at the result! Look at what you've become.

CLAIRE

You gave me texts on musical theory. I barely understood them. You taught me fashion. You told me what to wear.

KRISTINE

Is this why you're here, to dredge up the past?

CLAIRE

Isn't it time we talked about the things we've never talked about?

KRISTINE

I held his hand at the end.

CLAIRE

I brought my CD player to his room. I desperately wanted him to hear my music. I thought it might save him.

KRISTINE

I believe it was the last thing he ever heard. He said it was soothing.

CLAIRE

You never told me that!

KRISTINE

I thought I did.

CLAIRE

Mother, I've always wanted to love you but I never knew how.

KRISTINE

What did I do wrong?

CLAIRE

I craved your unconditional love.

KRISTINE

I'm sorry. I never expected this. Not now. It's a lonely feeling.

We see the outline of Pick Staiger Hall at Northwestern University. It's later that same evening. CLAIRE is concluding her solo recital. The audience, unseen, erupts with cheers and applause. The scene then shifts to the Oceanique restaurant. KRISTINE and CLAIRE are having dinner. There's a bottle of champagne by the table.

CLAIRE

I wanted to walk the beach with you, like we did today, but you never had time.

KRISTINE

I had thirty doctors and residents reporting to me. What was I to do?

CLAIRE

Were you close to your mother growing up?

KRISTINE

I suppose, but it was different then. We never talked about love or happiness. I didn't question.

CLAIRE

Really? Love, unspoken? You never learned its language!

KRISTINE

It was all he wanted to talk about. That's why it didn't work.

CLAIRE

In *Autumn Sonata* Eva says that the wounds of the mother are passed on to the daughter.

KRISTINE

Just the wounds?

CLAIRE

That depends, doesn't it?

KRISTINE

Try the champagne. You haven't had a sip.

CLAIRE

You taught me how to live with loneliness. That may have been a good thing.

KRISTINE

Your father was the one who left you. Wasn't that your biggest wound?

CLAIRE

I can't believe you said that!

KRISTINE

What he did was cowardly! Surely you must see that.

CLAIRE

Mother! What are you saying?

KRISTINE

What did he ever do except tell you fairy tales and placate your every whim? He couldn't face reality. He lived in a dream world and kept a secret self. Swimming out that day was suicidal.

CLAIRE

Mother, that's an incredibly vicious thing to say!

KRISTINE

Did he ever mention his make-believe island in the middle of Lake Michigan, the one he named after a fictional mule? That's where he was headed the night he died. If I'd told you at the time, you would have been devastated.

CLAIRE

You're making this up! How do you know that?

KRISTINE

He told me the night he died.

CLAIRE

He couldn't have.

KRISTINE

I didn't make it up.

CLAIRE

He was in a coma. I played music for him that he surely couldn't hear.

KRISTINE

We talked to each other. We actually said fond goodbyes.

CLAIRE

How could you?

KRISTINE

I don't know, but we did.

CLAIRE

He loved to swim. He often took me swimming. He'd go for longer swims. He did swims like that many times.

KRISTINE

I know what he told me. I know what I believe.

CLAIRE

You went there late that night. You pulled an all-nighter. You'd probably worked a twelve-hour day like you always do. You were exhausted and distraught.

KRISTINE

What are you suggesting?

CLAIRE

Maybe you were dreaming.

KRISTINE

I know what I heard. I know what I believe.

CLAIRE

Mother, in over twenty years you've never mentioned a single relationship. I have no idea if you'd had any. Why don't we talk about things like that?

KRISTINE

I swore off relationships. There was nothing to talk about.

CLAIRE

Nothing to talk about! That's absurd! What about mine?

KRISTINE

You never talked about them. You brushed off any of my questions.

CLAIRE

You've never come to visit.

KRISTINE

Why are you staying at the Orrington?

CLAIRE

You never suggested otherwise!

KRISTINE

I thought when you grew up you'd actually be grateful. It's all I expected, not that it would ever be enough. It's not to be. I see that now. You think I wounded you, badly, irrevocably. It's a lonely feeling to say the least. Congratulations. Mission accomplished. Pick Staiger Hall and telling me like it is. It's been a long day. I'm going home. You're leaving in the morning, so I'll say goodbye here.

(KRISTINE rises and kisses CLAIRE coolly on the cheek. SHE stands for a moment looking at her daughter in agony and sorrow)

It's their best champagne. Enjoy it.

Lighthouse Beach. Winter. A cold, dark and misty night with the wind blowing. We hear lapping waves and seagulls commingling with Variation #25. We see the outline of the lighthouse tower. Its revolving beacon intermittently illuminates KRISTINE, 64. SHE is disheveled and chatters incoherently as she sits on the beach, wrapped in an insufficient blanket. SHE stares out toward the barely visible lake. SHE stands and begins to walk aimlessly, still muttering. We see a figure floating toward the shore. SHE freezes. Slowly, it washes up, lifeless. It is JEREMY.

KRISTINE

(Screams)

Jeremy! What have you done? What have you done?

MICHAEL's corpse floats ashore. KRISTINE wails. Dozens of torn, mangled corpses follow, flowing to the shoreline. Death is everywhere. SHE falls to the sand and crawls on her hands and knees, wildly, pointlessly trying to revive the bodies. An ambulance siren arises in the distance (OFF) and steadily draws closer and louder. Then we see CLAIRE'S (32) corpse. KRISTINE breaks down completely, wretchedly. The ambulance arrives and goes abruptly silent. A PARAMEDIC moves to HER and lifts her up gently. HE wraps a second blanket around her shoulders and walks HER toward the vehicle. THEY EXIT. The siren erupts and goes off into the distance. Seagulls. The sun rises. The revolving beacon fades. The beach is pristine. There are no bodies.

We hear Variations #14. The apartment, darkened, five months later. It's 3AM Christmas morning, Through the window we see snow falling. The music stops. All is quiet. A Christmas card stands open on the nearby table. KRISTINE has fallen asleep on the couch reading a book. SHE's in a robe, with a comforter and pillow. The buzzer rings. Unanswered, it rings again for a protracted period. KRISTINE sits up, groggy, knocking the book to the floor. SHE pauses, gets oriented, goes to the intercom.

KRISTINE

(Loudly)

Hello! Do you know what time it is? Whoever you are, you have the wrong apartment!

(The buzzer again. SHE paces, worried. Into the intercom again)

Who is it? What do you want from me?

CLAIRE (OFF, Intercom, muffled)

Mother, it's me! Claire!

KRISTINE

Claire? Christ! I don't believe it!

CLAIRE (OFF, Intercom)

Mom, it's freezing. Let me in!

(SHE presses the buzzer. SHE unlocks the door, sits back on the couch and waits. CLAIRE knocks (OFF).

KRISTINE

C'mon in! It's open!

(CLAIRE ENTERS. SHE wears an outlandish, purple "balloon" winter coat, maybe with polka dots, bright snow boots, shocking pink mittens and a pink winter hat with earflaps. SHE's covered with ice and snow and carrying a small Christmas tree, a bag with unseen items and a bottle of champagne. SHE stands at the door nervously. THEY stare at each other.)

CLAIRE

Did I wake you?

KRISTINE

I must be dreaming! This can't be happening.

CLAIRE

I'm sorry.

KRISTINE

What time is it?

CLAIRE

Three in the morning.

KRISTINE

You were leaning on the buzzer.

CLAIRE

I was freezing.

KRISTINE

What are you doing here?

CLAIRE

Why didn't you call me?

KRISTINE

You're supposed to be touring and teaching and doing all the other things that keep you from staying in touch.

CLAIRE

I called your cell a half-dozen times. Your voice mail was full and wouldn't take a message. Finally, I called your office. Your assistant told me what happened. She said it's been three weeks. Three weeks! Mother, I'm so upset. Are you alright?

KRISTINE

So much for medical confidentiality.

CLAIRE

You should have called me!

KRISTINE

I had a bad night. I'm doing better. I'll be fine.

CLAIRE

A bad night! They said you were hospitalized for a week and now you're in therapy. You had a breakdown!

KRISTINE

Don't ever tell a shrink you saw some ghosts. They're having a field day with me.

CLAIRE

I've been beside myself!

KRISTINE

Do you always fly around in the middle of the night?

CLAIRE

It's the weather. We sat for hours on the runway at LaGuardia.

KRISTINE

That seems to happen when I'm not at my best.

CLAIRE

Do you know what day it is?

KRISTINE

I think it's Tuesday.

CLAIRE

That's it? Tuesday?

KRISTINE

Oh! Right!

CLAIRE

How can you not know it's Christmas?

KRISTINE

Because it's the middle of the night and I just woke up. I was trying to read. I must have dozed off.

(SHE picks up the book and places it on the table and picks up the card)

Thank you for your card. I'm afraid I didn't do cards this year.

CLAIRE

I brought you a tree. I didn't think you'd have one.

KRISTINE

Where do you buy a Christmas tree at three in the morning?

CLAIRE

Actually, I didn't. I took it.

KRISTINE

You stole a Christmas tree?

CLAIRE

They were closed. It was the last one on the lot. They weren't going to sell it.

KRISTINE

Stealing a Christmas tree seems to violate the basic idea of Christmas.

CLAIRE

It's the season for giving. I saw it as their chance to give.

KRISTINE

You need to go back and pay them.

CLAIRE

Now?

KRISTINE

Later on, then. I'm not prepared. No eggnog, I'm afraid.

CLAIRE

There's a childhood memory.

KRISTINE

That's all they have me doing, talking about the past.

CLAIRE

How's it going?

KRISTINE

It's too slow. Of course, I know I'm not the easiest patient.

CLAIRE

You've always worked on Christmas. Finally, you have one off.

KRISTINE

I can't decorate your tree.

CLAIRE

No ornaments. I thought of that.

(SHE offers up the bag.)

Ornaments!

KRISTINE

Are they stolen too?

CLAIRE

Mother!

KRISTINE

You're not suggesting we do this now?

CLAIRE

Why not? We're up!

KRISTINE

Do you realize you're dripping snow and ice all over my floor?

CLAIRE

I should stop doing that.

KRISTINE

I know where you got that coat, a costume place on the West Side.

CLAIRE

How did you know?

KRISTINE

I've seen their stuff before. Did you go through Peoria?

CLAIRE

What?

KRISTINE

Never mind.

(CLAIRE takes off her outerwear. SHE wears bright, gaudy Christmas clothes underneath.)

Good God! You're certainly in the spirit!

CLAIRE

(Models the outfit)

Do you like the colors? I know they clash, but it's the season!

KRISTINE

Where's your bag...at the Orrington?

CLAIRE

Why would they be there?

KRISTINE

It just popped into my head.

CLAIRE

The bastards lost my luggage. Incompetents!

KRISTINE

I'll tell you right now. We are not building a snowman!

CLAIRE

Huh!

KRISTINE

Just so you know.

CLAIRE

Are you sure you're alright? Can I get you anything?

KRISTINE

No. I told you I'm fine.

CLAIRE

I brought some champagne. Since we don't have eggnog, should we?

KRISTINE

If you'd like. It's your bottle.

CLAIRE

Actually, it's yours. We didn't get to it. Remember?

KRISTINE

The *Oceanique*?

CLAIRE

(Opens, pours and serves)

Merry Christmas, Mother! To a full and speedy recovery.

KRISTINE

Merry Christmas.

CLAIRE

(Walks around the apartment. First, the piano)

This piano is as old as I am. You bought it for me before I was born. I never thanked you, did I?

(Checks the tables)

Quite a haul! Two other Christmas cards! I see, one from your boss. That's nice. And, oh! A card from Michael! He probably stays in touch more often than I do.

(Looks around the apartment)

Presents? You must have opened them already. Packed them away. I know you like a tidy house.

(Pause)

So, what are you reading for Christmas? Let's take a look.

(Picks up the book)

Work! Work! Work! For heaven's sake, you're on medical leave.

KRISTINE

Are you through?

CLAIRE

(Back to the piano. Plays some notes from "*Jingle Bells*")

Mother, how can you possibly live without music? I need to download some soothing tunes onto your phone.

KRISTINE

Sweetheart, can we do whatever it is you came to do in the morning?

CLAIRE

(Leaves piano. Picks up the tree)

Shit! You don't have a stand, do you? I didn't think of that. Damn!

KRISTINE

We had one years ago. It must be around here somewhere.

CLAIRE

You haven't put up a Christmas tree in years, have you?

KRISTINE

I can't remember the last time you were here for Christmas.

CLAIRE

Mother, when was the last Christmas you didn't work? You cover for all the doctors with young families. I bet you didn't know I knew that.

KRISTINE

I'm over the shock of your arrival now. I think I'll sleep soundly.

CLAIRE

I'm not over anything.

KRISTINE

Good lord! Not again!

CLAIRE

We didn't finish. You walked out on me. I have it on good authority you've done that once or twice before.

KRISTINE

You couldn't possibly have more to say.

CLAIRE

I haven't been able to play. I cancelled three recitals. It's been impossible for me to play. The record company's going bonkers.

KRISTINE

Didn't I teach you never to lose your focus no matter what!

CLAIRE

Yeah, well you've become my focus. I really fucked up.

KRISTINE

Claire, I can't do this right now.

CLAIRE

I've been trying to call you to schedule another visit. You're voicemail's full. Finally I called your office. When they told me what happened I got on the first flight I could.

KRISTINE

(Rising)

Honey, thank you! It's a wonderful gesture. We can have a nice discussion in the morning, after you go back and pay that tree vendor.

CLAIRE

Mother, please sit down!

(KRISTINE sits)

I said hateful things. I assaulted you with childhood regrets that have no meaning anymore. I never looked at things from your point of view. Since you left me sitting in the restaurant, your point of view is all I've thought about. Now this. I feel awful. I feel responsible.

KRISTINE

Emotions are a surgeon's worst enemy. A performer's too.

CLAIRE

Suppressing emotions almost killed you.

KRISTINE

Have you been talking to my therapist too?

CLAIRE

You're practically a recluse.

KRISTINE

I'm not unhappy.

CLAIRE

What have you learned since the incident happened?

KRISTINE

(Long Pause)

I used to be a prodigy. Now, I'm nothing but a failure. I came up short in everything I tried. I failed Jeremy. I failed Michael. Worst, I failed you. I had convinced myself I could do it all. I could be perfect. Perfection! Wasn't that a joke? Now everyone I work with is younger, brighter, quicker, I'm no longer the authority in the room. We live our lives in private, but we rise and fall in public. It feels as if everyone's been watching, waiting for me to fall.

CLAIRE

I hated you for all you did for me. How perverse is that? I blamed you for wounds you worked intensely hard to heal. When you walked out of that restaurant, it hit me. I finally realized why.

KRISTINE

I need to stop doing that.

CLAIRE

You couldn't give me back the one thing I wanted in the whole world.

KRISTINE

Jesus!

CLAIRE

Father.

KRISTINE

Oh!

CLAIRE

What made it worse was I felt it was my fault. Blaming you disguised my searing guilt.

KRISTINE

How can you say that? You were just a child.

CLAIRE

I think he was incredibly lonely. He'd lost both of us, first you, then me.

KRISTINE

It seems we were all lonely. How did we let that happen?

CLAIRE

The Variations were my only link to him. We bonded with that music. I'd never let it go.

KRISTINE

He'd be very proud of you.

CLAIRE

You became my lifeline but I didn't understand. You kept me moving forward, doing what I loved to do. You followed me everywhere to auditions, competitions, music camps and recitals. You got me into Julliard. I should have been thanking you on a daily basis. Why didn't I see that?

KRISTINE

You got yourself into Julliard. I bought the plane tickets, but you played the music.

CLAIRE

I thought you were judging me. I felt I could never meet your standards. I was blind to the fact you were making it possible to pursue my dream. How could a so-called prodigy be so fucking dumb?

KRISTINE

I probably wasn't the most expressive parent. I never had the right words to say.

CLAIRE

There was something else. I've always been afraid to ask. Now, I have to.

KRISTINE

What?

CLAIRE

I was a mistake, wasn't I?

KRISTINE

Oh my God! Yes...but no! No!

CLAIRE

You messed up?

KRISTINE

I always used a diaphragm. One time I didn't.

CLAIRE

It's hard to believe. You never make mistakes. You hold yourself to an impossible standard.

KRISTINE

After it happened, I became obsessed with it. I wouldn't let it out of my sight. Stupid! It didn't matter any more. You were on your way. How did you...?

CLAIRE

Mother, it didn't take a genius. I've always assumed that was the case. I was sure you resented me.

KRISTINE

Why?

CLAIRE

We never talked about it.

KRISTINE

I didn't think we needed to. It never crossed my mind. That seems ridiculous now. You needed reassurance.

CLAIRE

Mother, I don't blame you. God knows how I would have handled it.

KRISTINE

You know, young lady, you need to fix your own life. I don't see you with a husband and kids in tow.

CLAIRE

No you don't.

KRISTINE

Maybe I shouldn't have said that.

CLAIRE

Mothers are supposed to say things like that to their daughters.

KRISTINE

What are we going to do with your stolen tree?

CLAIRE

In the morning, after I pay the vendor, I'll go and steal a tree-stand.

KRISTINE

You're headed straight to jail on Christmas day.

CLAIRE

You know, I think I'm much more like you than father.

KRISTINE

Oh my God, you're his clone.

CLAIRE

It's eerie. Eleven years for you and eleven years for me in our professional education. I teach where you practiced for so long. God knows we're both perfectionists. He's been gone a long time. I've spent a lot more time with you than I did with him.

KRISTINE

I've listened to *The Goldberg Variations* a thousand times to try to understand my daughter.

CLAIRE

(Sits close to KRISTINE).

Come to New York. Sit in on my lecture.

KRISTINE

(Warming to HER. Fatigued)

I'd like that.

CLAIRE

We'll make it festive in the morning. We have a lot to celebrate. I can't think of a better day to do it.

KRISTINE

Yeah, in the morning.

CLAIRE

When you're rested.

KRISTINE

When I'm rested. Honey, I'm sorry. I'm really tired. I get that way.

CLAIRE

Mother, I'm moving home. It's my turn to do the enabling.

KRISTINE

That's nice to hear. I think I need to sleep now.

(SHE lays down with the blanket and pillow.)

I'm not dreaming, am I? Claire, is it really you?

(SHE falls asleep. CLAIRE gathers the glasses and champagne and inadvertently knocks the book KRISTINE was reading to the floor. It winds up in its original position. SHE cleans the glasses and returns them to their original places. SHE puts on her coat and gathers the tree and bag of ornaments. SHE stands the Christmas card up on the table and looks around. The apartment is exactly as it was at the beginning of the scene. CLAIRE turns off the lights and EXITS.)

DARK. END OF PLAY

