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Cast of Characters

KATE: In her 40s, a poet and holder of various part-time jobs. Off-centered, contradictory: one moment she's sensual, impulsive; the next moment she's ephemeral, vague. Smart but not academic, extremely interested in ideas but never sure about anything. In crisis in her marriage.

CHRISTOPHER: 40s. Married to Kate. A mathematician. Abstract, kind, deliberate, confused. In crisis, which causes everything to be heightened for him, more confused, frenzied, painful.

ANGIE: 40s. Was Kate's close friend until Kate and Christopher moved away. Unflappable, wry, game. An OBS/GYN.

HAL: 40s. Was a rising-star, genius composer in his twenties, couldn't handle it, was married to Maureen, separated, now is going out with Ben. He's warm, messy, funny, defensive, contradictory.

MAUREEN: 40s. Was married to Hal. Rides extreme emotions: rage and vindictiveness make hairpin turns into deep love and remorse and back. Passionate, unstable. Needs completion with Hal.

BEN: 40s. A critic (music and theatre). Loves Hal. Enjoys his ideas and sharing his theories. Has been with Hal for six months; hasn't met anyone else until today.

BERT: 30. A wedding guest. Working class. Enjoys being in the moment. Thinks deep in a very simple way.

AMELIA: 40s. A former classmate of Christopher's. A scientist. Intellectual, with deep feelings.

LILY: 50. Russian. Works doing body waxes. Has a deep love for her mother country. Very practical.

The actress playing AMELIA might also play LILY.

Setting

The play takes place on a recent late summer evening after a wedding in the room of an old seaside hotel somewhere north of Boston.

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THE WAX

by Kathleen Tolan

(A room in an old, seaside, New England hotel. Bleached, worn, clean.)

(ANGIE and KATE enter the room, KATE pausing to pull the key out of the lock. During the following, ANGIE checks her reflection, adjusts her makeup and hair, and then sits on a chair as KATE changes her clothes.)

KATE. God, he was cute.

ANGIE. Who?

KATE. That guy.

ANGIE. Where?

KATE. In the hall.

ANGIE. Missed him. Damn.

KATE. He had a kind of dewy-eyed look. I always fall for that.

ANGIE. Hardly.

KATE. What does that mean?

ANGIE. Christopher is hardly dewy eyed.

KATE. Oh. Well, he's my husband. I wonder if he hires himself out.

ANGIE. Who?

KATE. The guy in the hall.

ANGIE. I thought you and Christopher were in therapy.

KATE. We are. It's made me ravenous. And besides, what are weddings for? Away from the dull tasks, the dull identity, to hear the I do, I do, in spite of the exposure we've had all these years to I guess realism, that startling jolt of possibility.

ANGIE. I saw you sidling up to that guy Bert at the reception.

KATE. Yes. I actually gave him my room number.

ANGIE. You're joking, right?

KATE. I'm desperate.

ANGIE. Well, yeah, but, Kate, in case you didn't notice, you're sharing this room with what's his name.

KATE. Oh, he won't notice. Then I wondered if he's a psychopath.

ANGIE. Who?

KATE. Bert.

ANGIE. Oh.

KATE. He kept looking at the spot between my eyebrows, like I had some riveting growth. Do I?

ANGIE. Seems to have fallen off on the way over. Come on.

KATE. I forgot about all this waning cuteness.

ANGIE. Who, us? I wouldn't say waning.

KATE. No. The sea, the gnarled fishermen, the brawn, the spray. Oh. I made an appointment to get my legs waxed.

ANGIE. When?

KATE. Um. I guess now.

ANGIE. Kate. They're waiting.

KATE. It won't take long. I keep putting it off. Don't you find it excruciating?

ANGIE. Worse than child birth.

KATE. (*Sighs:*) I feel like Woyzeck.

ANGIE. Who's that?

KATE. You know. The Polish guy in the opera, the soldier who was fed only peas and went mad.

ANGIE. Weird.

KATE. I lie beside him at night and think, I'm Woyzeck. I'm about to go mad.

ANGIE. Can't you get him to throw you a, you know, leg of mutton or something?

KATE. He won't touch me.

ANGIE. Poor Kate. God. I'd touch you.

KATE. (*Touched:*) Thanks, Ange.

ANGIE. I'd love to touch you.

KATE. Thanks.

ANGIE. But we're not doing that.

KATE. Right.

(They both sigh.)

ANGIE. Can't you surprise him into something, you know, take him out, nice restaurant, wine, music, sexy dress.

KATE. I can't.

ANGIE. Why?

KATE. Because of the constant diet of peas. I'm teetering on the edge of insanity. And I'm seething with resentment, until it slides into some muddy depression. Some slough of despond.

ANGIE. Right.

KATE. I don't have the fizz, the flair. I'm just clumping in my heavy Army boots from one point to another. Do the tasks. I'm a tragic figure. Except when I think of myself in a greater context. Then I realize I'm a comic figure. Which is why I try not to think of myself in a greater context. Which is why I feel like Woyzeck. I lie beside him at night and weep, bitterly and pathetically.

ANGIE. Why don't you sleep on the couch? Or, dammit, kick him out of the damn bed. Put up or shut up.

KATE. This is why I need an affair. Just for while we're trying to work it out.

ANGIE. Not that Freddy and I are getting any.

KATE. Last time you told me you did it on the kitchen floor while the kids were in the bathtub.

ANGIE. Yeah. But it's very rare. I'm just too tired. Now that I'm working full-time. Freddy says we've joined the DINS.

KATE. What's that?

ANGIE. Dual Income, No Sex.

KATE. Gee, Ange. I'm so sorry.

ANGIE. Do you mind if I just try something?

KATE. Of course not.

ANGIE. You may think this is a bad idea, but it's not. It's a great idea.

KATE. Okay.

ANGIE. You just have to go with it.

KATE. Right.

(ANGIE leans over and kisses KATE, whose surprise gives way to a murky pleasure.)

KATE. Ange. This is a very bad idea.

ANGIE. Yeah. It is...

(They kiss again.)

KATE. Ange...

ANGIE. Isn't it a relief? You have to find some kind of relief from the stress and strain—

KATE. If only one could...just...hang one's life up on a hook for an hour.

ANGIE. And why risk it with a stranger? I mean, who is Bert, other than a guy who stares at that growth between your eyebrows?

KATE. You said it had fallen off.

ANGIE. My point is, we're old friends. Hey—these clothes. Don't you think we should—

KATE. Well...

(They begin to peel off their own and each other's clothes.)

Yeah. Why not? Really?

ANGIE. Good question. Why not?

(There's a knock at the door. They freeze, then throw their clothes back on, getting some of it wrong.)

KATE. Oh. *(Calling:)* Hello?

HAL. *(Offstage:)* It's Hal.

KATE. *(Calling:)* Oh.

ANGIE. How nice.

KATE. Okay. Um.

(KATE opens the door. HAL enters with sloe gin fizz all over his face and suit.)

KATE. Hi.

HAL. Sorry. May I use your shower?

KATE. Yes.

HAL. Maureen emptied her sloe gin fizz on me. For old times' sake. We were waiting for you. What've you been doing?

ANGIE. Changing.

KATE. *(Going to Christopher's suitcase, pulling out some clothes:)* Do you need... Chris has some...

HAL. That'd be great. Ben took the car. We're staying down the road. A little "inn." Quite claustrophobic. But no flying drinks.

ANGIE. She aimed well.

HAL. She claimed she hit a bump.

KATE. In the bar?

HAL. She was doubled over laughing at the time. Well, we all need to find a way to be entertained. I do think, as we get older, that's the greatest challenge.

ANGIE. Is that what “Ben” says?

HAL. Maureen just did the same thing.

ANGIE. What’s that?

HAL. Said “Ben” as if it’s in quotation marks.

ANGIE. Gee, I wonder why.

HAL. I see. There are camps developing.

ANGIE. Well-developed. You’ve just been too busy with “Ben” to notice.

HAL. I didn’t realize you were homophobic. How interesting.

ANGIE. Oh, yeah, Hal, that’s it.

KATE. (*Offers clothes to HAL.*) Is this...?

HAL. (*Takes clothes.*) Thank you. You’ll be...?

KATE. Yes.

ANGIE. Changing. Kate, let me see your other outfit.

HAL. (*Heading toward the bathroom.*) Okay.

(HAL goes into the bathroom. ANGIE moves quickly to KATE, helps her off with her dress.)

KATE. Gosh, Ange, I don’t want to be, you know, rigid or anything...

ANGIE. I’m helping you with your outfit, what are you going on about?

(They kiss.)

KATE. Oh, Ange.

(HAL opens the bathroom door, calls out.)

HAL. Sorry—can I just?

ANGIE. Hal, we’re changing.

(KATE grabs her dress and pulls it back on.)

KATE. No—it's all right.

(HAL backs into the room.)

HAL. Sorry—I just wanted—can I?

(He gestures to turn around.)

KATE. Yes.

(HAL turns and faces them.)

HAL. Just that it's interesting to me that in spite of the fact that our marriage disintegrated, *three years ago, by mutual agreement*, that, as you may recall at the time it wasn't *my* infidelity that helped advance the crumbling and decay—

KATE. Oh.

HAL. Yeah, well everyone seems to agree that I'm the bad guy. I don't get it.

ANGIE. It's weird how that works.

HAL. And now—I don't know if it's because I arrived with another person or that he's a man or even, someone suggested, because he's a critic—

KATE. Oh.

HAL. And, yeah, okay, that was a stumbling block even for me, initially, the projection, the perceived blasphemy, and, okay, the impulse to “have,” to “own” the “critic.”

KATE. Yes.

ANGIE. Makes a lot of sense.

HAL. But, you know, you move past that.

KATE. Yes.

HAL. Okay. Sorry. I'll just...

(HAL begins to move toward the bathroom.)

Anyway, I hope Maureen feels better.

KATE. Yes.

ANGIE. I guess when she found out you'd written an exposé—

(HAL stops.)

HAL. I wouldn't characterize my novel as an exposé. And I realize I'm a musician, a composer, what right do I have to change forms?

KATE. *(Protesting:)* No. But, sorry, I have loved your music. In the past.

HAL. Thank you. That's very kind.

ANGIE. Yeah. It was...strange.

HAL. Well, I wasn't up to it, became completely uncomfortable with...well, letting anyone hear what I'd written.

KATE. That might be a problem.

ANGIE. You think so? For a composer?

HAL. And as conductor of my own work, flailing my arms at hostile, contemptuous musicians in various orchestras across Europe, it was only a matter of time before it occurred to the greater public that my music had become completely derivative, without a single original impulse.

ANGIE. I wouldn't know the difference.

KATE. And "original," I do think, is overrated.

HAL. Yes. Well, I had been thinking, before I arrived, that I am *happier*, now, than I've ever been.

ANGIE. You're kidding yourself, Hal.

HAL. Yes. Well, I forgot what a terrible person I am.

ANGIE. Leave it to old friends, the fond memories—

HAL. Right.

(HAL starts back up to the bathroom, stops.)

You know, I'm sorry I've offended Maureen.

ANGIE. Right.

KATE. Yes.

HAL. Though I did change *everything*. I don't believe, if you've developed any craft at all, and I said *craft*—I never said it was art, though Ben—

ANGIE. Oh, Ben. Let's quote Ben.

HAL. I don't think your only choice is to splat your sordid life onto the page.

ANGIE. I agree.

KATE. Yes.

HAL. I changed her build, her complexion, her interests—and mine! But, okay—the center, the dark and teeming center, the feelings, fears, animosity, yearning, blame, the rigidity, high moral tone, narrow, seething, vindictive, brutal—

ANGIE. That was still there.

HAL. But, well, this was *my life* I was writing about. I mean, don't I get to have my life? Am I obliged to just stare into a hole and write about that? Or maybe write about what I read in some other guy's book? Or just take notes of my observations of the newsboy, the grocer, the stray dog nosing through the garbage and write about that? Is there a way that one can write something of value that isn't also an act of betrayal?

ANGIE. I'd be interested in the stray dog. But that's just me.

HAL. Yes, well, I'll just—

KATE. Christopher's paper on a particular mathematical theory, I mean, in terms of betrayal, human betrayal. There was some enormous uproar about it at a conference he attended, other mathematicians felt, well, they did, betrayed, that he'd come to certain conclusions without them or something. I mean, even that, and, well, my poetry, however opaque, though *things* and *nature* seem like safer terrain, but even, I wrote a poem about an old cottage we rented one year, and the leak in the roof, the rusted-out drainpipe, the plip, plip of the rain on the bureau by the bed. It was published in the local newspaper and the caretaker of the cottage was mortified, so... Though there are degrees...

HAL. Okay.

(HAL moves to the bathroom. ANGIE grabs a chair and follows.)

ANGIE. We should—this needs to be propped up. Sorry.

HAL. Okay.

(HAL goes into the bathroom; we hear the shower go on. ANGIE fits the back of the chair under the doorknob.)

ANGIE. Okay. I think that'll do the trick.

(She goes over to KATE and helps her out of her clothes, then tosses her own clothes off.)

ANGIE. I'll help you. I mean, they really are cumbersome.

KATE. I know what you mean. But...

ANGIE. Kate, admit it, you've wanted to do this. You had a crush on me when we first met. Remember those moments, in the playground with the kids, very hot.

KATE. Well, that was a number of years ago.

ANGIE. But you know it would be fun.

KATE. Yes, but fun, I'm not sure it's all it's been cracked up to be. And, these moments, well, I may have some wires crossed, but, for instance, I was sitting on the subway the other day reading Dorothy Sayer's introduction to the *Purgatorio*—not what anyone would call erotic—something about the nature of symbolism or allegory or something and I felt, I felt suddenly, well, incredibly aroused—

ANGIE. Really?

KATE. Do you ever feel that? Aroused by an idea?

ANGIE. No.

KATE. I had to stop reading and just—you know—get through it—

ANGIE. Yeah.

KATE. It made me wonder whether that's why I did poorly in school—

ANGIE. Really.

KATE. I never finished my homework—

ANGIE. Huh.

KATE. Perhaps it wasn't as I'd always thought, that it *wasn't* interesting but because it was *too* interesting, just too exciting to actually have a thought and think it.

ANGIE. Huh. But, you know, arousal doesn't have to be because your wires are crossed.

KATE. No. But if I responded to each of these moments, I mean, I'm not sure they should prove anything.

ANGIE. I'm not trying to prove anything.

KATE. Well, but, Ange, first of all, we are *friends*. And, however this *should* work, well, it just never does. And secondly, when I have taken a roll with a, well, *woman*, well, very soon I just find it incredibly *suffocating*. Just, all this woman-woman-woman-woman. Whereas, for instance, with a *man* when you want to share your feelings, he gets so incredibly tense and his response is well, what do you want me to *do*? And it does make you feel so very alone.

ANGIE. Dear Kate.

KATE. But with a woman, good god! You're both just sharing your feelings all the time, you never get anything done!

ANGIE. But I'm not suggesting we have a *relationship*...

KATE. Well, that's a good point.

ANGIE. It is?

(There's the sound of a key in the lock. The women look over to the door, frozen. Then ANGIE rolls off the bed as the door opens. CHRISTOPHER and AMELIA enter as KATE throws the bedspread over herself and lies still and ANGIE crawls under the bed. CHRISTOPHER surveys the mess with distress.)

CHRISTOPHER. I'm so sorry this is...

(During the following CHRISTOPHER moves to neaten up the room while AMELIA, after putting her purse down, eventually goes and sits on the bed.)

AMELIA. It's fine. So good to have this opportunity, or, myself, I am, often, isolated—

CHRISTOPHER. Yes.

AMELIA. —in my work, the lab, the students, their work and ambitions—

CHRISTOPHER. Ah ha.

AMELIA. And, trying to nurture, to keep some connection to the initial impulse, the mystery of life, to not get pulled down by the drudgery, the necessity of the painstaking process of experimentation—

CHRISTOPHER. Quite...

AMELIA. Clean the mouse cages, titrate the solutions, clean the petri dishes, of course, one has to believe that this could lead to something—

CHRISTOPHER. Of course.

AMELIA. A greater clarity, some illumination.

CHRISTOPHER. Yes.

AMELIA. So, human lives, a weekend away, the ritual, the vows, the innocence, the hope, the sense of purity, or rather the illusion of purity, of order—is it the impulse to impose order on chaos?—

CHRISTOPHER. Hm.

AMELIA. To control, codify one's more primitive, to "have" another, to submit, consume, own, be owned, to taste, the breast, the loin, the sweat of course, the sea, the oceanic feeling, and the accompanying fears of losing, the rage at losing, the subsequent jealously, all resulting in the need to codify, to control.

CHRISTOPHER. Yes.

AMELIA. Chaos, instability, nonlinear dynamics have been embraced I believe because they reflect the modern feeling of flux, the loss of belief in the great unifying ideas, be they religious, political, artistic, scientific...

CHRISTOPHER. Ah ha. Will you...?

AMELIA. Thank you.

(CHRISTOPHER pours them each a drink.)

The trend toward probabilities, away from certitude. All the more quaint and touching, a wedding, in spite of the trend, the statistics, to continue to achieve the hope, the purity, the faith that it might last, of course George and mine did, not without a tangle or two but I think that's inevitable if one is honest.

(CHRISTOPHER moves to sit beside AMELIA and in doing so sits on KATE. They all scream. KATE reveals herself.)

CHRISTOPHER. Kate!

KATE. Oh.

CHRISTOPHER. Sorry. I thought you were...

KATE. *(Very alert:)* Hi.

CHRISTOPHER. Weren't you going...? Sorry. We'll just, sorry, this is Amelia.

KATE. Hi.

AMELIA. Hi. Sorry to...

KATE. No problem.

CHRISTOPHER. My wife, Kate.

KATE. How you doing?

AMELIA. Just fine.

CHRISTOPHER. We'll just...

AMELIA. I'd really better... I need to get back to the lab...

CHRISTOPHER. No, please.

KATE. Don't mind me.

CHRISTOPHER. Amelia and I were classmates at Cornell.

KATE. How nice.

AMELIA. I really need to...

KATE. Not at all. I was just...changing, or planning, resting, intending to change and go out, or not. *(To CHRISTOPHER:)* Maybe you should—you were in the middle of—not that I heard, but vaguely, a conversation.

AMELIA. It's all right.

KATE. Yes. *(To CHRISTOPHER:)* Why don't you walk Amelia back to the lab. It's in the hotel?

AMELIA. No.

KATE. I see.

CHRISTOPHER. *(To AMELIA:)* If you like I can walk you back.

AMELIA. I have my car.

CHRISTOPHER. All right.

KATE. So you can just walk her to her car.

AMELIA. *(Vehemently:)* There's really no need.

(AMELIA goes to the closet door, mistaking it for the exit. CHRISTOPHER follows.)

CHRISTOPHER. All right. Well, it was wonderful to run into you after all these years.

AMELIA. Goodbye.

(AMELIA opens the closet door, stands there, stymied.)

There doesn't seem to be a way out.

CHRISTOPHER. *(Not following:)* Yes. *(Noticing the closet:)* Oh. I believe it's over here.

(CHRISTOPHER moves toward the door. Mortified, AMELIA moves past him and out.)

AMELIA. Oh.

CHRISTOPHER. So good to—

(AMELIA is gone. CHRISTOPHER closes the door. Beat.)

Incredible, to run into her here. Seemed distraught.

KATE. I know this is crass, and presumptuous, I mean, forgive me, but, well, um, did it seem in any way odd, to bring her into our hotel room?

CHRISTOPHER. Well, gosh, I don't know. I really don't know Kate. I don't know.

KATE. Do I exist? Am I just a dirty rag?

CHRISTOPHER. Please.

KATE. Well, what did you have in mind?

CHRISTOPHER. Nothing that would interest you.

KATE. What does that mean?

CHRISTOPHER. Amelia is an old friend, a dedicated scientist and teacher, the widow of a distinguished scientist and teacher, and theirs was a marriage I have, actually, envied over the years, one where each's work was respected—no, more than that—celebrated! Both of whom led supremely ethical lives, both rigorous thinkers, she, as well, a marvelous cellist, he was active in various international—

KATE. How “marvelous.” How absolutely “marvelous.”

(The phone rings. KATE picks it up.)

KATE. Hello?...Who's calling?...Cynthia? *(KATE looks over at an extremely uncomfortable CHRISTOPHER.)* Yes, he's right here.

(KATE passes the phone to CHRISTOPHER.)

CHRISTOPHER. Hello?...Oh...it turns out I'm not free, no...We don't live here...my wife and I... *(He reacts to being hung up on, frazzled, caught.)* Huh.

KATE. I shouldn't ask, right?

CHRISTOPHER. Well, Kate, I don't know. You could ask. If you want to know. Go ahead, ask. Do you want to know?

KATE. I don't know.

CHRISTOPHER. *(Crumbles:)* I realize this is, really, despicable, it's disgusting what we, sorry, what I have become. I just, I'm so desperate. It shouldn't matter, that you can't bear to touch me. I should be able to rise above it...

KATE. *(Thrown:)* Sorry?

CHRISTOPHER. It should be enough, however you love me, however you want to be with me, that I should be so concerned with the act of love, that it should make a difference that you don't find me attractive, that you can't bear to reach out and touch me...

(A knock on the door. They look at each other, then CHRISTOPHER goes and opens the door. It's BERT.)

BERT. Hey.

CHRISTOPHER. Yes?

BERT. Kate here?

CHRISTOPHER. Yes.

KATE. Oh, hi, Bert.

BERT. Hi.

(BERT stares at CHRISTOPHER. CHRISTOPHER, uncomfortable, rubs the area between his eyebrows.)

CHRISTOPHER. *(Rubbing his forehead:)* Is there something...?

BERT. Huh?

(KATE looks around, spots a book on the night table, gets it, walks over and gives it to BERT.)

KATE. Here's the book.

BERT. Huh?

KATE. The book you wanted to borrow.

BERT. Oh. Gee. Right. Hey, this looks good. Does it have a happy ending? I know I'm a wuss but I really need happy endings.

CHRISTOPHER. That's my book.

BERT. No kidding. Hey, thanks. *(Beat.)* So, does it have a happy ending?

CHRISTOPHER. I don't know.

BERT. Huh.

CHRISTOPHER. I haven't finished it.

KATE. I'm sure it does.

BERT. I like to be taken for a ride. Well, come to think about it, I feel like I've been taken for a ride, but, hey, it's a wedding, right? Stuff happens. But I like a good plot, and I'll go to the edge, I'll go there, but I want to be set down okay. None of this no-hope stuff, you know? Life is hard enough. Like, for instance, my body. The experience of my body, like, in space, right?

CHRISTOPHER. Right.

BERT. Well, like, my body is a totally different thing—take, lying in bed, the sun pouring in through the grate, sheets crumpled, magazines, the cat walking on me, smell of old beer and cigarette butts from the bottle by the bed, it's totally different from, like, speeding down the road on my bike, the wind ripping through my shirt, gravel spitting—or—kissing a woman, feeling her moving up against me, she wants me, I want her, that takes over, pushes through you, the ba-bum, ba-bum of want, like there's nothing else, wow, like, totally different bodies, but it's all me. Maybe the "me" idea is the mistake, you know what I mean?

CHRISTOPHER. Yes, well, the me, it is so often a stumbling block, the me. Then there's the you. That can be a real problem. The me, the you, oh, and the her. The her can loom large, threatening to overtake or overshadow, overwhelm, well, everything. But would she exist if there wasn't the you, the me, the him?

BERT. Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER. What do you think, Kate?

KATE. Well, it is complicated, everything, though that may be a trap, to allow oneself to dwell in the murkiness. Would you two like to discuss it further? I could meet you shortly in the bar.

BERT. I could do that.

CHRISTOPHER. No.

BERT. Okay. That's cool. Like, a person does need limits, what you can do or don't want to do, like, I do think, being open to everything, well, probably there comes a time when you need to say no, I really don't want to do that.

CHRISTOPHER. Right.

KATE. Yes. Well, see you later.

BERT. Okay. I'll be reading in the bar, if either of you would like to reconsider and join me.

CHRISTOPHER. Thank you.

BERT. Bye.

KATE. Bye.

(He leaves.)

CHRISTOPHER. That was stimulating.

KATE. Yes. Lending books often leads to stimulating conversations, I find.

CHRISTOPHER. I see.

KATE. And, well, yes, the question has popped up: what *is* the point of fidelity?

CHRISTOPHER. I don't know. Or, "I" don't know.

KATE. And, even, does anything mean anything?

CHRISTOPHER. Gosh.

KATE. *Would* you care for me more if I played a cello? If I had a degree? If I owned a lab jacket? If I were a waitress, a slut, a whore?

CHRISTOPHER. Well, yes, “I” am, always have been quite particular to lab jackets. Bert, I’m sure, would understand.

KATE. I think you should go discuss this with Bert.

CHRISTOPHER. Does Bert have an affinity for lab jackets?

KATE. Why don’t you find out?

CHRISTOPHER. And “we” could discuss waitresses, perhaps, and sluts and whores?

KATE. Perhaps. Perhaps you could.

CHRISTOPHER. Okay.

KATE. But you’re just sitting there.

CHRISTOPHER. I seem to be.

KATE. Don’t you want to just leave?

CHRISTOPHER. Maybe I do.

(A knock on the door.)

(To KATE:) Have you started a book club?

KATE. Possibly.

(CHRISTOPHER opens the door to MAUREEN who comes in with a sloe gin fizz in a tall narrow glass and a boom box.)

MAUREEN. I know he’s here. It’s okay, I won’t attack, I’ve had a stern talking with myself, bad dog, ruff, ruff, and I brought my tapes so if I’m on the brink, pop! *(She pushes a button on the boom box. Caruso sings.)* Cool, huh? Psychopharmacology without the drugs.

CHRISTOPHER. Sorry?

MAUREEN. *(Thinking he said she should turn it off:)* Okay. *(She turns off the music.)* Mind if I? *(She puts the boom box down.)* It’s really heavy, I’d’a thought a Walkman’d’ve been the same and much more “discreet”—important to be “discreet,” don’t you find, except when you pick up the piece of trash knocked out by—or was it knocked up? Ha, ha—I’ll have to think about that—your *husband*, okay, *ex-husband*, but who’s counting?—and anyway, what we said was “trial separation,” okay, I admit, gee, I’m admitting a lot—I’d

better call my lawyer—admissions are never advised, though I have a tendency to admit everything even if I don't recognize it, I'm sure I did it—um—sorry. *(She turns on Caruso, listens, turns him off.)* Still there. Oh, yeah, okay, it has been three years, during which he's knocked out or up a "novel" of our "marriage" and taken up with "Ben." In that order. He's gone from this brilliant unrecognized composer to a brilliant recognized composer to the no longer composing but appearing on all the talk shows and getting fat composer to the quivering mass of uncertainty and lacerating self-doubt composer—that was all during my term, gosh, when I think of it that way, we accomplished a lot, to, during the "trial" separation, a former brilliant composer to a cheap, so-called "novelist" with a hot new boyfriend. And in the "novel" of our marriage, I'm not there!

(There's a rattling of the bathroom doorknob and a pounding on the bathroom door.)

KATE. Oh—I think, for some reason, a chair.

(KATE goes and removes the chair under the doorknob. HAL, showered and buttoning Christopher's shirt, comes out.)

HAL. Seems to be something wrong with the doorknob. I'd take care if you're alone. I was in Turkey once— *(Sees CHRISTOPHER, acknowledges:)* Chris. *(Sees MAUREEN:)* Oh—Hi, Maureen. Nice of you to stop by. Is that glass full?

MAUREEN. I'm so sorry, Hal, really I am. It was just a reflexive, a jolt, nothing, I assure you, intended or personal.

HAL. Of course not. It's not a problem. I was trying to say, I thought you weren't coming to the wedding. Betsy said—

MAUREEN. Well, I am here. I don't know what Betsy was thinking, really.

HAL. Yes, well, it's always been hard to tell.

CHRISTOPHER. Is that my shirt?

HAL. Do you mind? Kate thought—

CHRISTOPHER. *(To KATE:)* You thought? What did you think?

KATE. Gosh, I'm not sure, I'll have to think about that.

(MAUREEN goes up to HAL, who backs away.)

MAUREEN. I was trying to say that I picked the excerpt of your exposé—are you avoiding me?

HAL. No. Not at all. Just, the drink, the shirt. It's a novel, actually.

MAUREEN. Right, "excerpted," don't they say, in the latest *Him*. Congratulations, Hal, really.

HAL. Well, I know you think—

MAUREEN. Do you really?

HAL. Well—

MAUREEN. How do you know?

HAL. I'm just saying—

MAUREEN. I just want to know how you know.

HAL. I don't know.

MAUREEN. You really don't know, Hal, you really don't.

HAL. No, I don't.

MAUREEN. Excuse me. It's a chemical thing.

(MAUREEN presses the button on the boom box. Caruso sings. She turns it off.)

Okay.

HAL. Well, the others, we should—where's Angie?

KATE. Um...

(ANGIE comes out from under the bed, dressed, casual.)

ANGIE. Here I am. Found it.

(CHRISTOPHER frowns, as if trying to figure out a math problem, the solution just out of reach.)

HAL. All right, well... (To CHRISTOPHER:) Are you—hello? Are coming with us? I thought you had plans.

CHRISTOPHER. I have no plans. None at all. No plans. None. Or, I may have. Maybe I did. Maybe I just did. I'll have to consult which me I'm in.

HAL. Sorry?

CHRISTOPHER. But please don't let me thwart— *(To KATE:)* Don't let me get in the way of whichever you you're in.

KATE. Fine. That's just fine.

CHRISTOPHER. Good.

(CHRISTOPHER leaves.)

MAUREEN. Don't you love weddings? And where's "Ben"? I've heard about "Ben."

HAL. I just don't want to, I mean, this is Chris's shirt.

MAUREEN. Of course. I keep trying to tell you, Hal, that was wholly and entirely unintentional.

(The phone rings.)

KATE. I don't want to answer the phone.

HAL. Shall I? Or you just don't want...?

MAUREEN. She doesn't want to answer it.

(ANGIE answers the phone.)

ANGIE. Hello? Hi, Bettina. They have *lice*? What? They've been banned from the birthday party? Fuck.

(During the above, HAL, KATE, and MAUREEN all sit on the bed. MAUREEN inadvertently spills her drink on HAL and KATE.)

MAUREEN. Oh, god, I'm so sorry.

HAL. God, Maureen.

MAUREEN. That was completely and totally unintentional.

KATE. It's all right.

(KATE goes to her suitcase and gets some fresh clothes.)

ANGIE. Can you get the toxic gunk from the pharmacy? I'll ask Freddy. He's watching the game in the bar.

(ANGIE hangs up. Heads to the door.)

I really don't want to have to go home early. This is too much fun.

HAL. Yeah.

ANGIE. And you guys never come up here anymore.

MAUREEN. Yeah, it is such fun.

KATE. Yes.

ANGIE. I'll see if the pharmacy downstairs is open. The problem is the stuff that kills the bugs eats into your scalp or something. And Freddy has lost his reading glasses, I know on purpose—it's the only way to find those little eggs they glue onto the hair follicles. Kate, do you want to come?

KATE. I think, a shower.

ANGIE. Okay, and I think all bets are off, we really should have some fun.

KATE. *(Uncertain:)* Yes...

(ANGIE leaves.)

(To HAL:) Do you mind if I go first?

HAL. Of course.

KATE. You'll be...

MAUREEN. You should take those off. Does Chris have any...?

KATE. You can check...

(KATE goes into the bathroom. MAUREEN finds some pants in Christopher's suitcase.)

MAUREEN. Aren't you glad it wasn't martinis?

HAL. Yes.

MAUREEN. With martinis I'd be looking for a gun.

HAL. You wouldn't want to do that.

(MAUREEN *moves to help HAL get his pants off.*)

MAUREEN. Right. Too messy.

HAL. Really, Maureen, it's okay.

MAUREEN. Come on, Hal, these are wet. You should take them off.

HAL. I just think it isn't exactly appropriate—

MAUREEN. (*Sudden rage.*) *Appropriate? Are you kidding? You fuck.*

HAL. (*Trying to mollify.*) Yes, well...

MAUREEN. I mean, what is "appropriate," Hal, really?

HAL. I see what you mean.

MAUREEN. It's just interesting, really, you know, "*fah-cinating*"—that *our marriage*—not that it any longer *exists*—or, merely, okay, on paper, but that's obviously just due to some, well, on my part, inertia—god knows it's not some *desire* to go back into that *morass*—

HAL. No.

MAUREEN. (*Laughs.*) Oh, Hal, you're so *transparent*.

HAL. Huh?

MAUREEN. What a relief, the unspooling, unraveling *ex* says she *doesn't* want to get back together—*thank god*, right? Maybe there's hope yet that the weekend won't descend into the sloppy maudlin quagmire suggested by the weaving, spouting, *maniac*, the loose screw, the live wire, though weddings, I find, do loosen the screws of the best of us, don't you find?

HAL. Yes.

MAUREEN. Anyway, I did pick up the latest *Him* where your new "novel" is "excerpted."

HAL. Yes, you mentioned that. Shall we...?

MAUREEN. And it's curious to me that however it may be what you call fiction, it is basically the ten years of our marriage except *I'm not there*.

HAL. Yes, well, Maureen, it is a fine line, an age-old issue, autobiography, fiction and I have to say—

MAUREEN. Do you?

HAL. I do, that I find the whole thing rather tedious, the question, is this autobiographical, is it fiction, really—

MAUREEN. Well, that's interesting, Hal. That really gets you off the hook.

HAL. Well, Maureen, if I'm on the hook I'm not sure I'd be off it if I'd've done anything differently. But I will say, though I'm sure you won't believe it, that I was trying to be discreet.

MAUREEN. Well, not that I would know, I mean, I just have a day job, I'm not brilliant and I'm not a linguist but "discretion" can be a nice word, well, in this case, for *murder*.

HAL. Gosh.

MAUREEN. How do you think that feels? To be murdered.

HAL. Not great, I'd guess.

MAUREEN. Take the damn pants off.

HAL. I am, I am, but I don't want you to go at me.

MAUREEN. I'm not going to go at you. I know you're delicate. I just want to see your stretch marks.

HAL. I've lost a lot of the weight.

MAUREEN. Yeah but don't you still have stretch marks? (*Off HAL's look:*) I'm interested. In the human body, its descent, its decay, the inevitable falling of the flesh on the bone.

HAL. You know, if Ben found us like this—

MAUREEN. Like what—

HAL. In this compromised—

MAUREEN. Gee, yeah, big threat to “Ben.” And does he speak English?

HAL. Yes.

MAUREEN. What luck. Then you could tell him that we weren’t in the clutch of nostalgia, the clamp of desire, the black hole of yearning, I was just laughing at your body for old-time’s sake.

(She goes to him and kisses him hard on the mouth. He wilts with passion.)

HAL. Oh, Maureen.

MAUREEN. Oh, Hal, help me off with the—

HAL. Oh, Maureen—

MAUREEN. Yes, oh, can you get the—

HAL. What is it?

MAUREEN. It’s a hook.

HAL. A hook? You never wore a hook.

MAUREEN. Things change.

HAL. Oh, Maureen.

(The sound of a key in the door. HAL grabs his wet pants and hides. MAUREEN, in her slip, tosses Christopher’s pants behind the dresser and lies back on the pillows on the bed, grabs a magazine and flips through it. BEN and CHRISTOPHER come in, nod to MAUREEN who nods back. CHRISTOPHER works to be polite to BEN though he is suffering.)

BEN. The “women” complain it’s a boys club. Well, of course, on a certain level, it is a boys club—I mean, *we’re boys!*

CHRISTOPHER. Yes.

BEN. *(To MAUREEN:)* Sorry—hi!

MAUREEN. Hi. Don’t mind me.

BEN. *(To CHRISTOPHER:)* So we’re going to, not to seem reductive, but we’re going to appreciate a clean, clear, linear, coherent,

rational work—a work, even if it's a farce, for instance, that adds up.

CHRISTOPHER. Yes.

BEN. But there are boys. And there are men. And then there are the English.

CHRISTOPHER. Yes.

BEN. And, well, like it or not, the English just *sound smarter*. There's no avoiding the fact that they just do.

CHRISTOPHER. Huh.

BEN. Listen to this (*American accent:*) "It's difficult to say." And (*English accent:*) "It's difficult to say."

CHRISTOPHER. You do that very well.

BEN. I've spent time in London. Actually, or, rather, (*English accent:*) "actually"—

(They laugh. HAL, clutching his pants, manages to sneak out of his hiding place and slip out the door.)

CHRISTOPHER. Yes.

BEN. I apprenticed myself one summer, assisted a director at a theatre, an invaluable experience although I'd anticipated returning to the States with an English accent, however pretentious that sounds, I was looking forward to it but the whole company—everyone—would only speak to me like this: (*In caricatured cowboy:*) "Howdy, Ben, how's it hangin'?"

CHRISTOPHER. That must have been...

BEN. Well, at first of course I found it mildly funny, then rather irritating and quite frustrating but in the end I too fell into it and when Mom met me at the plane it was (*Cowboy:*) "Hi, Mom, gull dern but yer a sight fer sore eyes!"

(They laugh.)

But I did develop a theory about why the English are better dramatists and I think it has to do with the class system. There are categories, life, society isn't a big mush, one is on top or underneath and

whichever position gives one a perspective, a point of view. And the assumption of superiority is the crucial thing, the historical imperialism, the chauvinism, the arrogance of the English, conquering the primitive world and so on has developed the critical faculty and the subsequent vitality. And then the English are so very *repressed* which I think is a good thing. It means they must use their minds more rigorously and it tends to make them see in black and white, up-down, good-bad which, let's face it, is more dramatic. Anyway, that's my contribution.

CHRISTOPHER. Well, yes, it is important to feel one is making a contribution, in some way.

BEN. Yes.

CHRISTOPHER. There are times it feels, well, ephemeral, or, out of reach...

BEN. Yes.

CHRISTOPHER. Even, who one is, what one is doing...

BEN. Well, yes, that can be...

CHRISTOPHER. And, in one's work, the laborious, often quite fraught attempt to prove a theory, for instance, the chasm between conjecture and proof, a great deal is known, for instance, about the nature of the components in physical and biological systems, but very little is known about the mechanisms by which these components act together to generate the complexity.

(BEN is moved by CHRISTOPHER's apparent anguish. There's a knock on the door.)

CHRISTOPHER. Excuse me.

(CHRISTOPHER opens the door. HAL, wearing his wet pants, comes in.)

HAL. *(To BEN:)* There you are. I seem to have spilled something on my pants. How are you, darling? Dazzling Christopher with your wit?

CHRISTOPHER. He was looking for you. I guess I'll just...

BEN. Excuse me, if I may, that ephemera, the chasm, I too have felt, sorry, I don't mean to presume but I imagine that I was in a similar state, that fever, the extreme awareness of the—I think “abyss” is so overused—let's stick with “chasm” —

CHRISTOPHER. Yes.

BEN. *(Including HAL:)* When Hal and I first met, in fact—

HAL. Yes, well, we needn't—

BEN. We're among friends, yes?

HAL. That's one way of putting it.

(ANGIE comes back in.)

ANGIE. Hi, guys—I'm back! Ready to party? *(Sees MAUREEN:)* What happened to your dress?

MAUREEN. *(Surprised:)* Oh. I don't know.

(CHRISTOPHER spots it on the floor, picks it up.)

CHRISTOPHER. Is this...?

MAUREEN. Thanks.

CHRISTOPHER. You're welcome.

(MAUREEN puts on the dress.)

MAUREEN. Don't mind me, guys.

ANGIE. No prob.

(The phone rings.)

HAL. Maybe we should...

ANGIE. Where's Kate?

(KATE comes out of the bathroom. MAUREEN answers the phone.)

MAUREEN. *(Into phone:)* Hello?

ANGIE. There you are, looking ravishing.

MAUREEN. *(Into phone:)* Okay. *(Hangs up. To KATE:)* Confirming your wax.

KATE. Okay.

ANGIE. Kate, really, we need to go out.

KATE. We are.

CHRISTOPHER. Well, I think, *(To KATE:)* I may be in the way, or—depending on which “I” I’m talking about. Which “I” do you see?

KATE. I’m not seeing very well.

ANGIE. She’s starving. On peas. It’s affected her eyesight.

CHRISTOPHER. I see, little references, in-jokes, how incredibly pleasant.

KATE. *(To ANGIE:)* Did you find Freddy?

CHRISTOPHER. *(To ANGIE:)* Your husband? Why think of your husband at a time like this? I mean, “your” husband. And how meaningless, how archaic, these titles, these categories, don’t “you” think?

BEN. I did find it, today, quite moving, really, the apparent love, the youth, the hope. Of course it is painful, I used to be angry, that Chip and I couldn’t, here we were, faithful to each other, completely devoted, expecting to spend our lives together and yet this ritual was denied us. Not to bring a negative strain to the festivities.

CHRISTOPHER. A negative strain? Not at all! How could “you”?

BEN. Of course Chip and I in the end didn’t last.

CHRISTOPHER. Who does, in the end, I wonder?

MAUREEN. That’s such a good point, “Chris.”

HAL. Why is his name in quotes?

MAUREEN. Gosh, you’re so observant, “Hal”—can I call you “Hal”? Or do you prefer “Harold”? Or “Has Been”?

HAL. Hal is fine.

MAUREEN. I think all “men” should be in quotes. Don’t you think, gals? Doesn’t it feel right, give you a surge of power and irony?

BEN. Irony is, I think, crucial. And so often absent.

HAL. Sorry, Ben, this is Maureen. You remember, we were—

ANGIE. Married. You were married.

HAL. Yes. Years ago.

ANGIE. And now, aren't you still, Hal, or is that just—

HAL. Yes, it's just—

MAUREEN. Not a big deal.

BEN. How do you do.

MAUREEN. Great. How about you?

BEN. Good.

CHRISTOPHER. You know, I flashed on an evening, about ten or twelve years ago, it just popped up as I watched Hal coming out of our shower, buttoning my shirt, not that assumptions should be drawn, not that I have a moral leg to stand on though, historically, moral outrage hasn't been the sole domain of the innocent.

BEN. That's a very good point.

CHRISTOPHER. It was a cocktail party, (*To KATE:*) I walked up to you, you were actually speaking with *Hal*, you were flushed, feverish, leaning into him, we were not even married yet but there you were, red with passion, eyes wet, and you said to him that what you loved, yes, loved about him was that he had a "visceral relationship to culture." That was it, wasn't it? I see the gleam, the flicker of memory in your eye—I knew you'd remember because you were so proud of that, that theory, that concept—

KATE. Well, yes, I think it is hard to have what seems to be one's own idea—it does seem rare, it's difficult not to feel some excitement—

ANGIE. (*Significantly:*) That was an idea that excited you?

KATE. Or—pride or anyway attachment—

HAL. Gee. I don't remember, though I should.

CHRISTOPHER. —that Hal had a “visceral relationship to culture.” Which meant he was incredibly sexy—

KATE. Well...

MAUREEN. He was sexy.

HAL. Do you think so?

MAUREEN. Did. I did.

HAL. How far we’ve fallen.

MAUREEN. I would say now you have a visceral relationship to yourself.

HAL. Ah.

CHRISTOPHER. Although as we all know, “culture”—what the hell does that mean, whose culture and so on—

BEN. Yes.

MAUREEN. And visceral. I mean, the visceral relationship to culture in your 20s can turn into the flab of failure as you dwindle into middle age.

HAL. (*Stung:*) That’s such a good point, Maureen. And you were there to witness the decline.

(*HAL and MAUREEN’s hurt and rage erupts.*)

MAUREEN. I believed in you.

HAL. Oh. That was very good of you. Then you have every right to your disappointment, your contempt.

MAUREEN. I remember those mornings in the country, our cottage, the idyllic chirping birds, the muddy river flowing past, the sunshine streaming in, I brightly ask if you want a poached egg with your English muffin and you look at me like I was this *criminal*, shattering your delicate creativity.

HAL. Gosh, I’m sorry, I was having a hard time.

BEN. I think, though I’m the first to admit that I don’t know this firsthand, creativity can be, well, elusive—

ANGIE. Hey, let's play best bad moments from our worst marriages.

KATE. That sounds like fun.

CHRISTOPHER. (*To KATE:*) What you've always felt was that I was a farm boy with a big brain and a lot of tenacity and nothing I can do will ever erase that judgment, that caricature from your slate, will it?

KATE. Well...

ANGIE. Probably not.

CHRISTOPHER. And it's true, my ancestors were potato farmers, their nights were spent sitting in grim fatigue, staring into their Guinness if they managed to wrestle a few coins from the wife to go down to the pub, or just staring at the wall of their pathetic cottages, watching the light dim, what was the point of using up the lamp oil, for what?—there were no *books*—*my* great-grandparents didn't study the Talmud, okay? We didn't know music or philosophy. Though I have sometimes thought *that's* what's kept you and me together this long, my farm boy tenacity, my dull, methodical, dependable, though of course this might not be a positive note, depending on what you—or anyone—thinks about the value of staying together. There's that.

ANGIE. You know, we all have these noble ideas about ourselves, Chris. But you may not be quite as noble as you think.

CHRISTOPHER. Noble? I hardly think I am claiming nobility.

MAUREEN. Maybe it's your ironic, long-suffering tone.

CHRISTOPHER. That's probably true. Are you speaking for Kate?

ANGIE. We all seem to be speaking for Kate.

KATE. Just because you want me to speak for myself doesn't mean that I want to or that I will. That's just maybe not how I am. People have always said, why don't you *do* something but maybe your idea of doing something isn't the same as mine.

CHRISTOPHER. Fine. That's clear.

KATE. I never said I was clear.

CHRISTOPHER. No, you didn't.

ANGIE. How can you be clear when you're that Polish soldier, mad with peas—

HAL. Woyzeck?

CHRISTOPHER. Excuse me?

HAL. "Jawohl, Herr Hauptman." Yes. Sorry. A great opera. (*Sings, from Berg's opera:*) "Soldaten, soldaten..." Sorry.

CHRISTOPHER. Kate and I saw it last year. Not to my taste but clearly a revelation for (*To KATE:*) you. Starving on peas. How could I have missed this?

KATE. I don't know. We miss so much, in life, just walking down the street, we tend to not look, to step over the sick, the poor, the diseased, we all do it.

CHRISTOPHER. I see. So you're the abused Woyzeck and I'm the sadistic captain?

HAL. (*Sings:*) "Eia popeia..."

CHRISTOPHER. (*To HAL:*) Excuse me.

HAL. Sorry. Berg's opera. Beautiful, wrenching. And—his Lyric Suite— (*Sings.*) Exquisite. Actually, my demise. So beautiful, brilliant— (*Sings.*) And then— (*Sings.*) Of course, the revolutionary approach, and the codes imbedded in the music (*Sings*). But beyond that, to create something so intensely intimate... I was, literally, captured by that work, writing a piece, an important commission and Berg's piece (*Sings*), what he did, I couldn't get it out of my head. I convinced myself I was quoting him, legitimate, really, but I knew this was the end, I couldn't get out.

BEN. Brahms, you know, always felt in the shadow of Beethoven, suffered enormously, but he did, he did break through, write some truly exquisite—

HAL. (*Touched by Ben's empathy:*) Thanks, Ben.

CHRISTOPHER. (*Erupts, to KATE:*) But don't you find this incredibly *convenient*?

KATE. What?

CHRISTOPHER. That you're Woyzeck and I'm the mean captain?

KATE. I don't think "convenient"...

ANGIE. If the shoe fits...

CHRISTOPHER. Who is Marie?

ANGIE. I'm Marie. Who's Marie?

CHRISTOPHER. The beloved Marie—

ANGIE. I'm Marie.

CHRISTOPHER. —Murdered in a fit of jealousy—

ANGIE. I'm not Marie.

CHRISTOPHER. *I'm Marie.* Poor, misunderstood Marie who actually loved you.

(CHRISTOPHER *storms out.* Silence as KATE *wrestles with her feelings.*)

KATE. (*Achieving a light tone:*) How perfect, really, how symmetrical, ecologically balanced or something. A wedding, a...termination.

ANGIE. You're just feeling this way. Come on, Kate, buck up, let's go out, have some fun.

KATE. Last month, Christopher was away, I was going to go out, see friends but I'd been out of the habit for so long I realized I didn't really have any friends anymore, and if I did, well, theoretically, actually, in terms of people actually being free to go out, well, I didn't. So I just came home every day, ate whatever was in the pantry—cereal, applesauce, peanut butter and crackers—and got into bed with Proust. That's how I spent my week. And I did think, feeling the hard corner of the book digging into my ribs as I drifted off, maybe I would just rather be in bed with Proust.

ANGIE. What a picture, Woyzeck in bed with Proust.

BEN. Well, yes, and nature, I'm convinced I have a more profound experience of nature sitting in my arm chair reading, well, yes, Proust: "...a spangled veil of buttercups...the play of sunlight on a stone, a roof, the sound of a bell, the smell of fallen leaves...the corn flowers, the hawthorns, the apple trees..."

KATE. Yes.

ANGIE. Ah, yes.

KATE. *(A new resolve:)* You know, I think I'll call Bert.

ANGIE. Are you serious?

KATE. Why not, really?

(KATE goes to the phone and dials.)

HAL. Who is Bert?

MAUREEN. Wouldn't you like to know?

KATE. *(Into phone:)* May I have the bar, please?

HAL. Ben, I'm so sorry to expose you to this hostility and sarcasm—

MAUREEN. No, no, I'm so sorry. I really have no idea what's come over me.

KATE. Is there a man called Bert reading a book at the bar?

BEN. It's quite all right. Hostility and sarcasm, I have to say, are not unknown quantities in my field.

KATE. *(On the phone:)* Bert? It's Kate.

MAUREEN. Who's Bert?

HAL. Wouldn't you like to know?

MAUREEN. Yes, I would, I would, I happen to would like to know.

ANGIE. He's in her book club.

KATE. I was wondering whether you'd had a chance to read the book...I see...Yes, I would like to know what you think of it so far...All right. Yes.

(KATE hangs up, checks her reflection.)

ANGIE. Kate, all this literary speculation, I really think it's not good for the system.

KATE. *(Bright:)* It's possible.

(The phone rings.)

BEN. *(Referring to the phone:)* Shall I...?

KATE. Yes.

(BEN answers the phone.)

BEN. Hello?

(MAUREEN lies back on the bed.)

MAUREEN. Sorry, guys, I'm fading. Kate, do you mind if I just...?

KATE. It's fine.

(Eventually MAUREEN closes her eyes.)

BEN. *(Into phone:)* All right... *(To ANGIE:)* Something about little animals, poison, angry children...

ANGIE. Great. *(Takes the phone.)* Bettina. Yeah. You got the poison? On their heads, just for ten minutes, then rinse.

KATE. *(Heading for the door:)* See you later.

ANGIE. Kate! I'm coming down.

KATE. All right.

(KATE goes.)

BEN. I wonder what book it is.

ANGIE. *(Into phone:)* Sorry. You can go to the hardware store and get one of those helmets with the lamp on the head...It helps you see.

HAL. I'll just quickly shower, very sticky.

BEN. Do you have clothes?

(HAL looks around for Christopher's pants.)

HAL. I thought Christopher had some...

ANGIE. *(Into phone:)* You can use my reading glasses. Did you look in the bed?

BEN. Do you want me to get some from the inn?

HAL. That would be great...unless...Maureen?

(MAUREEN opens her eyes.)

MAUREEN. *(Irritable:)* What?

HAL. Sorry. You didn't see...there were some pants of Christopher's...

MAUREEN. What are you talking about?

HAL. Nothing. Sorry.

(MAUREEN closes her eyes.)

ANGIE. A bonus. Two weeks off. I'd be there, it's just, you know, I have to be here, very tedious, familial obligation, yes, a raise.

BEN. I'll go get yours.

HAL. Or I could just come...

BEN. Take a shower. I'll be right back.

HAL. Thanks.

ANGIE. If you can't find the reading glasses, there's a magnifying glass with the dictionary, but really you need your hands free to pull out the bugs and the nits.

HAL. You okay?

BEN. Great. How about you?

HAL. Great. Okay.

(HAL goes into the bathroom.)

ANGIE. Well, the poison doesn't really kill them, they've developed a resistance...but it slows them down. Let me talk to Kevin.

BEN. Okay.

(BEN goes.)

ANGIE. Kev? I really wish I were there. Okay, honey. I'll be fast as I can. Bye-bye. *(She hangs up.)* God. How tedious. Where is everybody?

MAUREEN. "Ben" went to get "Hal" some clothes.

ANGIE. What a good boy he is. Would you have done that?

MAUREEN. No.

ANGIE. I need some *red meat*. Those canapés were pathetic. Are you coming?

MAUREEN. I'll meet you. I need to conduct a session.

ANGIE. Cool. Is it weddings do you think or the resulting reunions that whack a gal into major arousal?

MAUREEN. I wouldn't know.

ANGIE. Okay. Bye.

(ANGIE goes. MAUREEN turns on the boom box. "Que Faro" from Gluck's "Orfeo ed Euridice" is sung. MAUREEN lies back on the pillows, closes her eyes, and breathes deeply. HAL comes in in a towel, sees MAUREEN on the bed, looks around, realizes they're alone. Careful not to disturb her, he goes over to Christopher's suitcase and rifles through it. He takes out some pajamas and a hairbrush falls to the floor making a clunk. MAUREEN jolts up.)

MAUREEN. What are you doing?

(He pulls on the pajamas.)

HAL. Nothing. Go back to sleep.

MAUREEN. I wasn't sleeping.

HAL. That's Gluck.

MAUREEN. Excuse me?

HAL. *(Sings:)* "Che faro senza Euridice..." He's lost her.

MAUREEN. How tragic for him.

HAL. He looked back.

MAUREEN. Big mistake.

HAL. Maureen, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I didn't mean—

(MAUREEN turns off the tape.)

MAUREEN. Spit it out, Hal.

HAL. You kissed me. And I responded. I don't want to give you the wrong impression.

MAUREEN. Gee, Hal, don't worry. I got the wrong impression long before that kiss.

HAL. Oh. Right.

MAUREEN. It meant nothing.

HAL. I knew that.

MAUREEN. I was just embracing the paradox. I was fucking with your head.

HAL. Well, thanks.

MAUREEN. Come here.

HAL. What for?

MAUREEN. Just come here.

HAL. No.

MAUREEN. I dare you.

HAL. All right.

(He goes to her. She kisses him. It becomes passionate.)

HAL. Oh, Maureen.

(MAUREEN pulls back.)

MAUREEN. You slut.

HAL. I know.

(*They embrace, full of feeling.*)

MAUREEN. How could you write a *memoir* and say *nothing* about this, about us, about floating down our muddy river on our tube, do you remember that?

HAL. Yes.

MAUREEN. The weeds, the rocks, the gentle current pulling us along—

HAL. Yes

MAUREEN. Pulling you up on the bank, sliding on the bank, the mud, sliding on the mud—

HAL. Yes

MAUREEN. Taking you on the mud—

HAL. Oh, Maureen, Maureen—

MAUREEN. Having you on the mud, the slime, and then, with the frogs, the fish, in the shade of the birds and branches—

HAL. (*The memory is too painful:*) Please, don't, Maureen, really, no need to bring up the muck—

MAUREEN. You sang to me.

HAL. No.

MAUREEN. Your music. Your most beautiful music.

HAL. No.

MAUREEN. I miss it. Just once, now, one more time, before the others come.

(*HAL sings. MAUREEN harmonizes. It's a beautiful, atonal, eerie work.*)

HAL. I do miss you, Maureen, and the mud, the silt, the squall and squander and decay that was our life.

MAUREEN. (*Sudden rage:*) And you gave that up to write cheap *fiction* and hang out at the *gay bars* with your *critic*?!

HAL. (*Furious:*) See! You are homophobic.

MAUREEN. And you're a moron.

HAL. What are you, my mother?

MAUREEN. I should be your mother. I'd slap you around.

HAL. You're the one who started fucking around, Maureen. I really don't know how you get to assume the mantle of the wounded martyr when it was you—

MAUREEN. You wouldn't have me.

HAL. Well I would in my way. You started watching those talk shows, reading those self-help books, you decided that what we had wasn't enough.

MAUREEN. Okay, I got into this thing that I wanted to be plowed, penetrated, okay, so maybe I shouldn't have taken it literally.

HAL. Well it's over, okay? But if I ever write a "novel" again I assure you I'll put you in. And, dammit, why don't you write your own damn novel. Did you ever think of that?

MAUREEN. Well, maybe I will.

HAL. Good.

MAUREEN. Maybe I just goddamn will.

HAL. Great.

MAUREEN. You love me, admit it.

HAL. Fine. I love my mother. That doesn't mean I want to live with her. And what's it to you, anyway? Do you want me? Do you really want me?

MAUREEN. I want to take you, use you, spit you out and discard you.

HAL. Gee, that sounds like fun.

MAUREEN. (*She begins to cry*) I want you...I want you to remember me.

HAL. (*Moved:*) I'm sorry. I am sorry, Maureen. Of course I remember you. How could I not?

(They hold and comfort each other. The doorknob rattles. They freeze, panic, rush to hide. MAUREEN hides in the closet. HAL grabs his pajama top and dives under the bed.)

(BERT and KATE come in.)

KATE. I'll just get my— (*Surprised:*) No one's here. They've cleared out. How odd.

BERT. I haven't read the whole thing but what I read I really was working, really sweating, trying to figure out, why did she lend me this book, what did she mean by it, was she just toying with me or was there something here that meant something?

KATE. I was just, it was...an impulse.

BERT. And what's wrong with that, right?

KATE. I don't know.

BERT. You're pretty.

KATE. Thank you. So are you. Or, sorry...

BERT. That's nice. Thank you.

KATE. You're welcome. Your shirt is very white.

BERT. Yeah, well, I like a white shirt.

KATE. You do?

(BERT kisses KATE.)

KATE. Oh. Thank you.

BERT. You're welcome. Thank you.

(They kiss again, then she bursts out crying.)

BERT. Sorry.

(She clings to him, her face in his shirt, sobbing.)

KATE. No, I'm sorry. Oh, I'm messing up your shirt.

BERT. That's okay. I know how to wash a shirt.

KATE. You do?

BERT. Uh huh.

KATE. That's nice.

(They kiss, she pulls away.)

KATE. Sorry.

BERT. Maybe you want to...talk about the book?

KATE. No, it's lovely, really, your lips, and your shirt. Just, there's the idea of something and then, suddenly, the thing, you know, a difference.

BERT. Uh huh.

(During the following they kiss, embrace, peel each other's clothes off.)

KATE. Oh, Bert.

BERT. I could love you.

KATE. Oh, no, don't do that. Why not just, these lips, this shirt—could that be enough?

BERT. It could be everything.

KATE. Or nothing.

BERT. It can't be nothing.

KATE. Right.

BERT. It's gotta be something.

KATE. Yes.

(She pulls away.)

Sorry. This is so dumb.

BERT. Hey, sometimes you think you want to do something but then it turns out you don't.

KATE. Yes, or that you are a certain person or that you need something or someone. And, need, well, what does that mean?

BERT. I don't know.

KATE. I mean, to think that you need someone to feel complete, well, I'm not sure I've ever felt complete with anyone, not even myself or especially myself, come to think about it.

BERT. Yeah. That's tough.

(They sit, thoughtful, for a moment.)

I was at my cousin's barbecue.

KATE. Oh.

BERT. This was a while back, we were teenagers.

KATE. Right.

BERT. So my cousin says, see that girl across the yard, the one pulling on the cigarette like it's life support, the one kind of sliding and jerking over the lawn to the pool, the one just plunged into the pool, her dress still on, her cigarette still clenched in her teeth? That's the girl to stay away from. Forty-five minutes later, Brenda and me are making it behind the couch in the den, her smelling of chlorine and tobacco, rug burns like you don't want to know. Two years later, she's totally cleaned me out—even the furniture. I'm standing on my front lawn screaming *You forgot me*. I mean, I guess one time or another everybody gets that feeling you might as well be an old chair, a table, you know, when you're really low. But to have your furniture chosen over you. And it wasn't even mine. It was my folks'. I was still living at home. And they were still making payments, the bedroom set, the dinette. It was hard all around. You try to get over that stuff but it gets branded on your brain.

KATE. Yes. Brain branding can be a problem.

(Pause. There's a rattle of the doorknob. They freeze.)

Oh, no.

BERT. It's okay.

KATE. I don't want him to—

BERT. No problem.

(BERT slips into the closet, which causes a yell of shock.)

BERT / MAUREEN. Ahh!

(BERT closes the closet door just in time as KATE hides somewhere else. CHRISTOPHER and BEN come in.)

BEN. What I hate, what I really hate is those slice-of-life so-called dramas, as if “life,” in all its flab, it’s grizzle, its fat and tendons, one can just whack off a slice of it and slap it onto a plate and call that Art! It’s ridiculous!

CHRISTOPHER. Yes.

BEN. The best is a well-written not overly ambitious play with a *clear thesis: we know* what it’s about, we *see* what it’s about and then it’s *executed well* and it *is* about what it *says* it’s about! Unless it’s Irish, then there’s more leeway for the sappy story, the drunken meander, the rustic old sod, the red herring, the sentimental detour. And the English, well—

CHRISTOPHER. Yes.

BEN. They just—

BEN / CHRISTOPHER. —sound smarter.

CHRISTOPHER. Yes.

BEN. They just do.

CHRISTOPHER. Yes.

(BEN goes to the bathroom, knocks on the bathroom door which swings open.)

BEN. Huh. Strange, I thought Hal was...

CHRISTOPHER. Yes, well, maybe they all...

BEN. Right. I was going to drive over to the inn to get him some clothes, but then I got to the car and realized I’d given him the keys.

(CHRISTOPHER goes over to his suitcase.)

CHRISTOPHER. I may have some pajamas.

(He looks in.)

No. I guess not.

(HAL, from under the bed, puts the car keys out on the rug. Before he disappears back under the bed, BEN sees him though HAL is unaware. BEN looks around and sees Maureen's discarded dress. He picks it up, examines it.)

BEN. She seems to keep misplacing...

CHRISTOPHER. (Not following:) Sorry?

BEN. Nothing.

(BEN folds the dress, puts it down, and wrestles with the devastating impact of his discovery.)

Anyway, you asked earlier how I'd met Hal.

CHRISTOPHER. Yes.

BEN. I was at one of the many incredibly strained soirees one is obliged to attend, the obligatory plastic cup of Chablis and obligatory vapid chat after an awards ceremony, and if you yourself were a judge, feigning delight in the recipient when more often than not the "artist" your committee has agreed on is rarely anyone's first choice—usually it's the least interesting, the least surprising or extreme, the one no one can get hot about in one direction or another. I had recently broken up with Chip and had disintegrated in the most typical and mundane manner, was on my fourth or fifth Chablis and in any case was quite unhinged, and I recognized Hal, he was standing next to me, as a composer I had, actually, once, been quite excited by—. We began talking but then I saw him glance over to the door, looking for a way to make an escape, realizing who I was—you know, the hated critic. And I felt this surge of desperation, the need to somehow bridge the chasm—there it is, the chasm.

CHRISTOPHER. Yes.

BEN. And I grabbed his sleeve and said—and my voice I realized was shaking, I was weeping, I sort of screamed in this high-pitched sort of wheeze—Why doesn't anyone write a play about a critic who is a person? I mean, we all have our judgments, we all have our opinions, we all say things, cutting, damning things—because we all have standards, values, ideals—we actually believe in something—and just because I do it in public, I put it out there for

everyone to see, I'm either treated like a leper, like the lowest scum, or even, believe it or not, worse—like some tyrant king who requires to be surrounded by sycophants, who could never be seen as a *person*, a fellow *person*, no, that just could never be possible. Well, I may as well go sell shoes. Why don't I do that? I think I'll just go sell shoes. He looked at me like I was the insane person that I was and I realized there was nothing for me to do but make good on my threat—though given my profession one would've thought I could've come up with something a bit more damning, a bit more salacious, but this is what I spewed in my sodden state. I left, he followed, not, he told me later, out of any coherent interest, but rather a perverse curiosity. It was an afternoon, grey, wet, midtown, I weaved and lurched uptown past the theatre marquis, Carnegie Hall, Columbus Circle, Lincoln Center, occasionally glancing back to see that he was still following, wondering if I should stop and curse him out or just grab a cab and go home, wondering if in fact he was the sick one, what did he want from me? Then there I was, standing outside Harry's Shoes. I went in, sat down, my heart thumping. He came in, sat down next to me. We just sat there. Then a guy asked us what we wanted. He looked at me, very sweet, gave me a little smile, asked if I wanted anything. I said no. We left, went home together. We've been together ever since.

CHRISTOPHER. (*Moved:*) That's very...

BEN. (*"Discovers" the keys:*) I believe these are the keys. Are they yours?

(CHRISTOPHER *examines them.*)

CHRISTOPHER. No.

BEN. Anyway, that's the beginning of our history, our love, yes, I'll call it that, not to judge it as better or more valid than another's but it has been, well, real, whatever that means.

CHRISTOPHER. Yes.

BEN. All right, I'll just... If you see Hal, please tell him...I'm getting his clothes.

CHRISTOPHER. All right.

(As BEN opens the door to go he finds AMELIA standing there.)

BEN. Excuse me.

CHRISTOPHER. Amelia. You've come back.

AMELIA. I'm so sorry.

CHRISTOPHER. Not at all. I mean, I'm sorry.

AMELIA. I left my bag here.

CHRISTOPHER. All right.

AMELIA. I wasn't going to come back.

CHRISTOPHER. Yes.

AMELIA. I don't mean to intrude.

CHRISTOPHER. No, please, intrude.

(KATE, deeply upset, moves out of her hiding place, finishes dressing and heads for the door.)

KATE. Sorry—I'll just—I need to get—I don't mean to be intruding—really, I don't. Excuse me.

CHRISTOPHER. *(Shocked, confused:)* Kate.

AMELIA. *(Also confused:)* I'm sorry.

CHRISTOPHER. No, I—

KATE. No, I— *(To CHRISTOPHER:)* It's fine. This is so good to know. Really, feel free.

(KATE leaves.)

BEN. I think I'll...do you mind if I...?

CHRISTOPHER. It's fine.

BEN. *(To AMELIA:)* Nice to see you.

AMELIA. Yes.

(BEN leaves. CHRISTOPHER stands there. AMELIA, uncertain, looks around for her bag.)

AMELIA. I'll feel terrible if it isn't here—I mean, it's somewhere—just, I didn't want to disrupt—

CHRISTOPHER. Oh.

(CHRISTOPHER makes an effort, looks around, spots the bag.)

Is this it?

AMELIA. Yes. Thank you.

CHRISTOPHER. It's all right.

AMELIA. I considered leaving it here, letting it go, sometimes that is the better choice, our attachments, don't you think, begin to feel too confining, overwhelming, life, one's life, one's self feels reduced, atrophied.

CHRISTOPHER. Yes.

AMELIA. And the attachment to “things” really can distract one from the more important, more compelling endeavors.

CHRISTOPHER. I agree.

AMELIA. So I thought, the comb, the brush, the mirror, the paperback—none of that even worth thinking about.

CHRISTOPHER. Right.

AMELIA. The wallet, the cards, the cash—more difficult but not impossible to let go.

CHRISTOPHER. Uh huh.

AMELIA. Then, the snapshots, a 30-year-old lock of someone's hair, a pebble from a particular beach on a particular day, much more difficult. And then, I remembered, before I emptied George's ashes into the wind, I couldn't quite let them all go, I folded a pinch into a corner of a page of a magazine I had with me and tucked that into my wallet. Even that, I thought, why be attached? But these are things of value, they are, I don't want to let them go.

CHRISTOPHER. Well, yes, things of value, although, sometimes, though they may have incredible value to you, well, you may have lost your value to them. What about that?

AMELIA. I don't know.

CHRISTOPHER. Whether one is part of the equation. Or feels part of the equation. There's that. Does *x* *feel* part of the equation? Of course, in mathematics, that's a ludicrous question.

AMELIA. Well, I should...

CHRISTOPHER. Yes.

AMELIA. Goodbye, Christopher.

CHRISTOPHER. Goodbye.

(AMELIA goes to the closet door mistaking it for the way out. She opens it to find BERT and MAUREEN in an embrace.)

AMELIA. *(Shocked:)* I'm so sorry. I thought this was the way out.

(MAUREEN and BERT come out.)

MAUREEN. Oh—yeah, me too.

BERT. It's not? That's weird.

CHRISTOPHER. I believe it's over here.

BERT. Oh, great.

(MAUREEN goes to her boom box, turns it on, sits on the bed as a Mozart concerto plays.)

MAUREEN. Hey, do you guys mind? I just need a little shot. Don't let me elbow anybody out, okay?

(CHRISTOPHER opens the door for AMELIA.)

AMELIA. Goodbye.

(AMELIA leaves. BERT watches MAUREEN, then looks over at CHRISTOPHER.)

BERT. Hey.

CHRISTOPHER. Hello. It's Bert, isn't it?

BERT. Yeah. How you doing?

CHRISTOPHER. Great.

(HAL comes out from under the bed wearing Christopher's pajamas.)

HAL. Here we are. Found it.

MAUREEN. Hi, Hal.

HAL. Oh, hi, Maureen.

MAUREEN. Do you know Bert?

BERT. Hey.

HAL. Hi, Bert.

(CHRISTOPHER notices HAL is wearing his pajamas.)

CHRISTOPHER. I see you found the pajamas. I'm so glad. Ben went to get you *your* clothes, not that I have any feeling one way or another, I mean, if there's anything else of mine, anything you haven't tried, worn, had, please feel free to inform me.

HAL. Thanks, Chris. Actually, I'd like to try to catch up with Ben, it'd be great if you had a pair of pants.

(CHRISTOPHER takes off his pants and hands them to HAL.)

CHRISTOPHER. Not at all, I'd be delighted. Maybe you'll return them if you have the opportunity but don't strain yourself.

HAL. Thanks. That's incredibly good of you. I'll just rinse off if it's okay with you.

CHRISTOPHER. Yes.

HAL. For some reason I'm covered with dust. I'd have a word with housekeeping.

CHRISTOPHER. All right.

(HAL takes Christopher's pants and goes into the bathroom.)

BERT. *(To CHRISTOPHER, suddenly remembering, pulls out the book he'd borrowed:)* Hey. I wanted to return the book. I didn't finish it but I wrote down the title so I can check it out when I get home. I never read a mystery where the detective is a mathematician.

CHRISTOPHER. Yes, well, it's a series I'm quite fond of.

BERT. I liked the part when they go to the ballgame and they're being chased through the crowd in the stadium, the killer is after them and just at the crack of a bat, the gun goes off and the ball soars up in an arc, all eyes on the ball and the guy teeters against the rail, the ball makes the arc and goes out into the bleachers as the guy careens over the rail into the field. Wow.

CHRISTOPHER. I didn't get to that part yet.

BERT. Oh—sorry—it gets a little bogged down when the detective starts ruminating about how these events remind him of like rules of physics—entropy, convergence, what comes up must come down.

CHRISTOPHER. Yes.

BERT. But it's good.

CHRISTOPHER. Thank you for returning it.

(CHRISTOPHER goes and sits, sinking into a deep depressive reverie.)

BERT. *(Looks over at MAUREEN, appreciative:)* Hey. I love that music.

MAUREEN. You do?

BERT. Yeah. I was, a few years ago I went into a store and told the guy, man, I really need something different, you know, like, when nothing's working?

MAUREEN. Yeah.

BERT. So I go right past the rock, pop, jazz, I mean, I really love that stuff but I needed something different and this lady hears me, and she says, I know what you need.

MAUREEN. And did she?

BERT. She did.

MAUREEN. What did you need?

BERT. It was this, an old recording, this guy, a Spanish guy from years ago, man, this guy knows how to pull that stuff out, wa-wa-wa, you know?

MAUREEN. Yeah. Hey. Do I have something...?

(MAUREEN rubs between her eyebrows.)

BERT. Huh?

MAUREEN. Lower your gaze. Two inches.

(BERT looks into MAUREEN's eyes.)

Wow. Yeah. Music. It's very powerful. You know, it changes, literally changes your chemistry.

BERT. I believe it.

MAUREEN. You do?

BERT. Yeah. Anyway, I guess the lady knew I was really hurting and she says, this concerto, right?, this part—this second movement, right? But you got to lie down on the floor to listen to it because it's so beautiful you're going to cry.

MAUREEN. And did you?

BERT. Yeah. I sobbed like a baby. I have to admit, I was crying a lot at the time.

MAUREEN. How come?

BERT. Same old story.

MAUREEN. Bad love.

BERT. You know about that?

MAUREEN. Yeah.

BERT. You know about waking up the morning and looking across the sheets and it hitting you in the chest, damn, this is a big mistake and I don't know how to get out of it?

MAUREEN. Yeah. I know about that.

BERT. Yeah, well, I'm taking off in the morning and I wanted to go hear some jazz tonight. (*Glances at MAUREEN.*) Anybody interested...?

MAUREEN. Sure.

BERT. You wanna...?

MAUREEN. Yeah.

BERT. You like jazz?

MAUREEN. Yeah.

BERT. I mean, I guess it's not gonna give you what that concerto is going to give you but that's you know not what it's about.

MAUREEN. Right. It's the give and take, daring to not know, to go with what the other is putting out, to slide into that or play against it, to riff on it, laugh at it, take it over or fold into it...

BERT. Yeah. That's what I think.

MAUREEN. Let's go.

(MAUREEN checks her reflection, applies some lipstick as BERT watches appreciatively.)

MAUREEN. Hey, Chris.

(CHRISTOPHER shakes himself out of his reverie.)

CHRISTOPHER. Yes.

MAUREEN. Want to hear some jazz?

CHRISTOPHER. (*Unenthusiastic.*) How nice.

MAUREEN. Tell the others, okay?

CHRISTOPHER. Great.

(As MAUREEN and BERT begin to leave, there's a knock on the door. BERT opens the door. In comes KATE, soaking wet, escorted by BEN with a bag over his shoulder.)

CHRISTOPHER. Kate.

KATE. Hi.

MAUREEN. What happened?

(ANGIE comes in.)

ANGIE. *(To KATE:)* There you are, you bum. I've been looking all over for you. You're soaking wet.

BEN. *(To KATE:)* I think, these clothes, though it's a warm night for September, your teeth are chattering.

KATE. Thank you.

BEN. *(Including CHRISTOPHER:)* Maybe—a robe or a shirt...?

(MAUREEN moves to the bathroom as CHRISTOPHER starts unbuttoning his shirt and ANGIE pulls a blanket off the bed.)

CHRISTOPHER. I have a shirt.

MAUREEN. I'll get a—

(She knocks on the bathroom door.)

HAL. *(Offstage:)* Yeah.

MAUREEN. *(Calls through the door:)* Hal. What the hell are you doing in there?

(ANGIE wraps the blanket around KATE.)

ANGIE. What happened? You poor baby.

(HAL comes out, drying his hair with a towel.)

HAL. Sorry. *(Sees BEN, delighted:)* Ben. You've come back. I was going to look for you.

(MAUREEN grabs the towel, then tosses it on the bed.)

MAUREEN. It's soaking wet.

HAL. *(Baffled:)* Sorry.

(MAUREEN goes into the bathroom, comes back out with another towel. CHRISTOPHER takes off his shirt and holds it out to KATE.)

CHRISTOPHER. *(With great feeling:)* My shirt.

KATE. *(Thrown:)* Thank you.

(KATE takes Christopher's shirt. ANGIE helps KATE get her clothes off as BEN, looking discretely away, holds the blanket up to insure KATE's privacy.)

BEN. Sorry, shall I...?

MAUREEN. Angie.

(MAUREEN tosses the towel to ANGIE who helps KATE dry herself. MAUREEN takes over holding up the blanket.)

CHRISTOPHER. What happened?

BEN. I'd driven back to the inn, fetched Hal's clothes and on the way back I glimpsed the moonlight on the water. I pulled over, got out of the car to consider it, and saw Kate at the shore, leaning over, and then she slipped into the water, disappeared and I thought, how odd, that she should go swimming in her clothes and then I thought perhaps I should, I didn't want to intrude if it was some private ritual but in spite of that I thought I really needed to ask.

(KATE, in Christopher's shirt, with the towel around her shoulders and the blanket across her lap, sits on the bed with ANGIE and MAUREEN.)

CHRISTOPHER. Kate.

KATE. It was just, waiting to pay the bill—

CHRISTOPHER. I can pay the bill.

KATE. So can I. And I did.

HAL. What happened?

KATE. Oh, just, waiting, I went out, began to walk along the shore, the rocks, gleaming in the moonlight, quite beautiful, the waves, the variation of light, and how it stretched out. *(To BEN:)* Not, it occurred to me, something I'd quite encountered in Proust.

BEN. Yes.

KATE. I leaned over to examine something sparkling in the light, it was a piece of sea weed, flattened against the rock, and I slipped—

there was a film of, some invisible moss or something, I just slipped into the sea and it seemed at first almost amusing, the water was cool but incredibly pleasant, the movement of the waves, and my feet could touch the rocks but they were so slick I couldn't get a grip. I thought, well, I'll just work my way down the coast, surely there'll be a place to get a foothold but the waves, the undertow was quite strong and I couldn't make much headway and the water was beginning to feel quite cold and I thought, oh dear, it would be such a pity to just slip away, inadvertently.

(Beat.)

CHRISTOPHER. *(Shaken:)* Kate.

ANGIE. Thanks, Ben.

BEN. No, no, but I'm so glad I was there.

ANGIE. *(Suddenly remembering:)* Damn. I forgot. I have to go.

MAUREEN. No!

(ANGIE makes her way around the room, giving hugs.)

ANGIE. Freddy's loading the car. Bettina's threatening to quit. Back to the little tyrants. Kate, do you want to come, stay for a few days? *(To CHRISTOPHER:)* You don't need her, do you?

CHRISTOPHER. *(Covering his feelings:)* No.

(KATE hugs ANGIE.)

KATE. Bye.

ANGIE. Okay, maybe this winter, a gals' weekend away, a spa somewhere. Think about it.

KATE. Sounds great.

HAL. *(To ANGIE:)* Bye.

(ANGIE leaves.)

MAUREEN. *(To BERT:)* You still want to hear some jazz?

BERT. Yeah.

KATE. Oh, hi, Bert.

BERT. Hi.

CHRISTOPHER. He returned the book. The book he borrowed.

KATE. Oh. Good.

MAUREEN. You guys want to hear some jazz?

HAL. Ben?

BEN. Why not?

HAL. Great!

MAUREEN. Kate?

KATE. Sure.

MAUREEN. Chris?

CHRISTOPHER. *(Suddenly insecure:)* I don't know.

(There's a knock on the door, then a deep woman's voice with a thick Russian accent.)

LILY. *(Offstage:)* Mrs. Cartlin?

KATE. *(Remembering:)* Oh. Can you—?

(BEN goes to the door, opens it. A massage table on wheels with a fondue pot and various paraphernalia is pushed in by LILY.)

LILY. I almost went on. Okay. Bikini wax?

CHRISTOPHER. Is this?

KATE. It's okay. I ordered it.

(Goes to her suitcase, rifles through it.)

MAUREEN. Hey, cool, the wax lady.

LILY. If you want to call me that.

MAUREEN. Meet you over there, Kate?

KATE. Okay.

(MAUREEN and BERT leave.)

LILY. *(Checking her book:)* I have one person, not a committee.

(LILY sets up.)

HAL. Chris, are you...?

CHRISTOPHER. I'll just...

HAL. Okay.

BEN. *(To CHRISTOPHER:)* I hope to see you over there.

CHRISTOPHER. Thank you.

HAL. *(To KATE:)* See you.

KATE. Okay.

(HAL and BEN leave. LILY looks at CHRISTOPHER.)

LILY. This is your husband?

KATE. He actually is. How shocking.

LILY. I cannot be shocked by anything. I am from Russia.

(LILY pats on the table.)

KATE. *(As she climbs on the table:)* Oh. Russia.

LILY. What do you know about Russia?

KATE. Well... I know Chekhov.

LILY. Chekhov? You know Chekhov? He was one of our great writers. He knew Russia. He loved Russia. He felt the beauty and the pain of his mother country. This is what I can not find here in this country—where is the pain of the mother country?

(LILY dips a wooden applicator into the tub of hot wax and applies it to KATE's leg.)

KATE. *(In pain:)* Ah!

LILY. It is too hot?

KATE. Yes.

LILY. It is not too hot.

(She applies a strip of muslin to the hot wax on the leg.)

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!

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