

They All Fall Down

a play in two acts

by

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CHARACTERS

MICHAEL ..... In his late twenties

MICHELLE..... In her late twenties

JEFF ..... In his late twenties

JILL ..... In her late twenties

SETTING

Act I: Michael and Michelle's apartment in Manhattan. Saturday, July 17, 1999.  
Early Evening.

Act II, Scene 1: Jeff and Jill's apartment in Manhattan, later that evening.

Act II, Scene 2: Jeff and Jill's apartment in Manhattan, just before sunrise.

ACT I

*Ring Around The Rosey: Michael and Michelle.*

*(MICHELLE is looking out the window,  
down at the street.)*

MICHELLE

. . . so you see all of this is very confusing to me, I mean, all day today, all week-  
especially the last few days-I've just been feeling insane, really out of my mind . .  
. and I hope . . . I just really hope . . .

*(Beat.)*

Michael?

MICHAEL *(O.S.)*

Yeah?

MICHELLE

Are you listening to me?

MICHAEL *(O.S.)*

Yes. Of course.

MICHELLE

Then what did I just say?

MICHAEL *(O.S.)*

You said that "all week long you've been feeling insane and you just really hope . . ."

MICHELLE

What?

MICHAEL *(O.S.)*

*What?*

MICHELLE

Hope what?

*(Beat.)*

Repetition doesn't count.

MICHAEL *(O.S.)*

I don't know. You didn't finish your sentence.

MICHELLE

Well you should be able to figure it out. From the context.

*(Beat.)*

MICHAEL (*O.S.*)

The context?

MICHELLE

Well, what was I talking about *before* that?

MICHAEL (*O.S.*)

The kids . . . Today . . . The kids. Volunteering with the kids. . .

MICHELLE

And . . . ?

MICHAEL (*O.S.*)

And how you were teaching them to become comfortable with the water. How you would gather them into a circle in the pool, everyone holding hands in a big circle. And spin them around until they were dizzy, everyone singing Ring Around The Rosey.

MICHELLE

And . . . ?

MICHAEL (*O.S.*)

And how they would all “fall down” at the end and go under the water, dizzy, holding their noses.

MICHELLE

And . . . ?

MICHAEL (*O.S.*)

And “. . . you just really hope . . .”

*(Beat.)*

MICHELLE

*And . . . ?*

MICHAEL (*O.S.*)

And that was it.

MICHELLE

That *wasn't* it. The subject. What was I talking about? The subject.

(*Beat.*)

I'm *waiting*.

MICHAEL (*O.S.*)

Michelle, I . . .

MICHELLE

I didn't think so. You know, the next time you have the impulse to ask me what's wrong . . .? Do me a favor: Don't bother.

MICHAEL (*O.S.*)

Look: All week long I-

MICHELLE

Forget it. I don't want to hear it, OK?

MICHAEL (*O.S.*)

It's like my brain-

(*MICHAEL enters wearing boxers and a t-shirt.*)

MICHELLE

I *said* for-You're not ready?

MICHAEL

I still have twenty minutes. I'm early. Or at least on time.

MICHELLE

No. You're late. They said they'd be here at six and it's-

MICHAEL

I thought they said they were going to be here at six-thirty.

MICHELLE

No. Six.

MICHAEL

I think you're wrong about that. I distinctly remember six-thirty.

MICHELLE

*No.* They said that they were going to catch a cab on Broadway a little before . . . and . . . and have them cut across the park and they weren't going to buzz but just have them beep and-

MICHAEL

Well, then they'd be here already, wouldn't they? Because it's almost-

MICHELLE

Would you just . . .!

MICHAEL

*Fine!*

*(MICHAEL exits. Beat.)*

MICHAEL (O.S.)

I'm sorry but *why* are we going together again?

MICHELLE

We already talked about this.

MICHAEL (O.S.)

Did we?

MICHELLE

*Yes.*

MICHAEL (O.S.)

Well, remind me. Because this all seems unnecessarily complicated and-

MICHELLE

Money.

MICHAEL (O.S.)

Money.

MICHELLE

Yes. Because it will be cheaper.

MICHAEL (O.S.)

Cheaper.

MICHELLE

*Yes.* The fare. We're splitting it. I talked to Jill and-

*(MICHAEL enters.)*

MICHAEL

You talked to Jill about splitting cab fare?

MICHELLE  
Yes.

MICHAEL  
Great.

*(MICHAEL exits.)*

MICHELLE  
We *talked* about this.

MICHAEL *(O.S.)*  
What? Humiliating ourselves in front of our-?

MICHELLE  
It's not humiliating-

MICHAEL *(O.S.)*  
It's not?

MICHELLE  
*No.* Not when they're our friends.

MICHAEL *(O.S.)*  
I see. Don't you mean "*if*"?

MICHELLE  
What are *you-? Besides*, we talked about this.

MICHAEL *(O.S.)*  
Friendship?

MICHELLE  
*No.* Cab fare.

MICHAEL *(O.S.)*  
Cab fare? Last week?

MICHELLE  
*Yes.* Money.

*(Beat.)*

Last week. Money. We *agreed* to-The city is expensive enough and if we're ever going to save enough to get a nicer place-not to mention pay for a wedding-we have to start being careful instead of washing all of our money down the drain on cabs and coffee and nice restaurants and wine and all of the little things that-

MICHAEL (*O.S., brushing his teeth.*)

Excuse me, but . . . they're . . . not . . .

MICHELLE

WHAT?

MICHAEL (*O.S.*)

I *said*: THEY'RE. NOT. LITTLE.

(*MICHAEL enters holding a toothbrush.*)

They're the things that make life worth living. If you can't have good sushi and good coffee and wine . . . then why bother to live in the city in the first place. Why not live in some pathetic place where everything looks and tastes like it was made by some *generic* . . .

MICHELLE

*Look*: Would you *just* . . . I'm not in the mood for one of your little speeches about how much better the city-

MICHAEL

*Fine.*

MICHELLE

I'm just not in the mood for that tonight.

MICHAEL

I said: "Fine."

(*Beat.*)

Generally though, most people get engaged before they start planning their wedding-

MICHELLE

Oh don't start that again.

MICHAEL

Just thought I'd point that out.

MICHELLE

Fine. Let's get it over with: "We're engaged."

MICHAEL

Wow. I never knew you were such a romantic.

MICHELLE

It's wonderful, isn't it? That we can still learn things about each other?

(*Beat.*)

MICHAEL

Yes it is. And it makes me truly excited about the future. All of those secrets we've yet to discover about each other.

MICHELLE

Don't get your hopes up. We're not that complicated.

MICHAEL

Speak for yourself.

MICHELLE

Fine. You're obviously an incredibly complex person hiding beneath a veneer of stunning openness and simplicity. *Me*, on the other hand: what you see is what you get.

MICHAEL

Ah, just the kind of response I'd expect from a *truly* complicated person.

*(MICHAEL exits.)*

MICHELLE

The point *is*: We've got to find ways to live cheaper.

MICHAEL *(O.S.)*

Fine. You want to save, we'll save. But let's not start throwing inexact definitions around.

MICHELLE

*Oh*, and what's *that* supposed to mean?

MICHAEL *(O.S.)*

It means it depends on what you mean by "cheaper."

MICHELLE

Look: If you have something on your mind, say it. I'm in no mood for-

*(MICHAEL enters holding a pair of pants.)*

MICHAEL

Fine. To be honest with you, I'm not really in the mood for them tonight. To be honest with you, I'm a little tired of their games and . . .

MICHELLE

Games?

MICHAEL

Yes, *games*, Michelle.

MICHELLE

What games?

(*Beat.*)

MICHAEL

Forget it. All I'm saying is that there is more than one definition of what is valuable and how one comes to that decision is something that-

MICHELLE

No. Answer the que-what games? You said there were games.

MICHAEL

Fine. Their games. Their one-upmanship. Their constant competitive shit.

MICHELLE

They're not competitive.

MICHAEL

Oh, please. Either I'm totally delusional or you're completely naive because Jill and Jeff are two of the most competitive people I know. The last time we went out all Jill talked about was the outrageous apartments they were seeing and this new job opening at the firm Jeff was interviewing for and how superior they would be if he got it.

MICHELLE

She never said they would be-

MICHAEL

The *subtext*, Michelle. Jesus, I didn't mean it literally. Do you think I meant it lit- . . . That was the entire subtext of the whole conversation all through dinner. Don't you see? His unblemished reputation at work . . . This job? Would he get it? This apartment? Would they buy it? And so, *ultimately*, would they be superior to us? I just feel like everything we discuss-restaurants, movies, work-is really just a code and our friendship is really just a translation of that code into some . . . marker of who stands higher in the social ladder.

(*Beat.*)

MICHELLE

You read too much into things.

Do I? MICHAEL

Yes. MICHELLE

*(Beat.)*

Fine. MICHAEL

*(MICHAEL exits. Beat.)*

Besides she apologized for that. MICHELLE

What? Being superior? MICHAEL *(O.S.)*

MICHELLE  
No. Her behavior at dinner. She called me the next day and-She said they were going through a hard time and she was a little . . .

*(Beat.)*

What? MICHAEL *(O.S.)*

Forget it. MICHELLE

No what? MICHAEL *(O.S.)*

It's private. MICHELLE

*(MICHAEL enters holding his pants.)*

Private? MICHAEL

Yes. MICHELLE

Jeff and Jill. Private? MICHAEL

No Jill and I private. MICHELLE

I see. A “*secret.*” MICHAEL

(*Beat.*)

If you want to know so badly ask Jeff. MICHELLE

(*Beat.*)

OK. MICHAEL

(*MICHAEL exits.*)

Don’t you even think about -! MICHELLE

Why not? You just-? MICHAEL (*O.S.*)

I was being-! MICHELLE

No. Hey you just- MICHAEL (*O.S.*)

I’m *warning* you . . . MICHELLE

Fine. I’ll-*fine*. Have your little secrets. MICHAEL (*O.S.*)

I will, thank you. Besides, what’s wrong with wanting more money? MICHELLE

MICHAEL (*O.S.*)

That's not what I was-

MICHELLE

No? And what it can buy.

MICHAEL (*O.S.*)

*No, OK? And what it can buy. Money is beside the-*  
*(He enters with a tie.)*

What do you think of this tie?

MICHELLE

It looks great.

MICHAEL

You didn't even look at me.

MICHELLE

You'll wear what you want anyway.

*(Beat. MICHAEL exits.)*

MICHELLE

So money's beside the point, is it?

MICHAEL (*O.S.*)

No. Not entirely. But-

MICHELLE

Not entirely?

MICHAEL (*O.S.*)

No. But-

MICHELLE

Good. Because "entirely" would be a little ironic coming from you.

MICHAEL (*O.S.*)

WHAT . . . ?

MICHELLE

I *said* "entirely" would be a little-Christ, you work with it all day.

MICHAEL (*O.S.*)

Yes, my lovely job.

MICHELLE

Get used to it. A little late to pursue your dreams of joining the Peace Corps.

MICHAEL (*O.S.*)

Go ahead. Make fun of the dreams of an idealistic twenty-two year old.

*(He enters.)*

By the way how's that novel coming? You know, the one you were supposed to write by the time you were twenty-nine?

*(MICHAEL exits.)*

MICHELLE

Great. I think I finally found my subject. It's about a girl who kills her investment banker boyfriend.

MICHAEL (*O.S.*)

Can't wait to read it. One thing though? I'm not an "investment banker." I *work* for an investment bank. I'm a financial analyst-Jeff is an-

MICHELLE

You want to split hairs? Fine. You work for-

*(MICHAEL enters still in his pants and t-shirt but holding a different tie.)*

MICHAEL

It's not "splitting hairs," OK? It *means* something. So you shouldn't go around *telling* people-

MICHELLE

I don't "go around" telling people that-

*(Beat.)*

Michael?

MICHAEL

What?

MICHELLE

Take your time getting dressed, OK?

*(Beat. MICHAEL exits.)*

MICHAEL (*O.S.*)

What I'm talking about here is friendship. Friendship and everything that goes along with that whole . . . concept. Such as liking the people you're with. And to be honest with you, lately . . .? I don't like them all that much, all right?

MICHELLE

We haven't even *seen* them lately so I don't even know what you're-

MICHAEL(O.S.)

I see almost Jeff every day and-

MICHELLE

Well good for you that's just great but I haven't seen Jill in forever and she's still *my* friend *despite* the fact that she may have hurt your feelings a few months ago and just because we share the same career doesn't mean-

MICHAEL (O.S.)

Well then you should call her and do lunch if you're so-Christ you work across the street and-

MICHELLE

I *have* and if you'd listen to me for five minutes and not-you'd *know* that. I've been trying for the past two *months* but she hasn't been available and-

MICHAEL (O.S.)

Two months and you can't plan a-?

MICHELLE

*Yes.* Do you *not* listen or have any understanding of anything I-*anything* in my *life*-?

*(MICHAEL enters holding a silver lighter and a bottle of wine.)*

MICHAEL

Well maybe if you'd let me in on your secrets I'd have a better understanding of your life and we'd be on better footing and we wouldn't have to go through all of this.

*(Beat.)*

MICHELLE

What's that?

*(MICHAEL opens the lighter, lights it and then puts it out. Beat.)*

MICHAEL

A lighter.

MICHELLE

I can see that.

*(MICHAEL closes the lighter.)*

MICHAEL

And a bottle of wine

MICHELLE

Again, I have eyes.

MICHAEL

Quite beautiful ones.

MICHELLE

I didn't know you were paying attention.

MICHAEL

I bought it for our anniversary a few years ago and then forgot about it.  
I thought we could have a glass before we leave.

MICHELLE

Of course, as you're extremely prepared for our night already and have time to burn.

MICHAEL

It was just a thought.

MICHELLE

Besides, some wines get better with age and that isn't one of them.

MICHAEL

Suit yourself.

*(MICHAEL tosses the wine on the couch and pockets the lighter.)*

MICHELLE

And um, I hope you're not planning on slipping out back into the alley or wherever it is that you guys go during these things and getting high.

MICHAEL

I thought this was supposed to be a "fun" night.

MICHELLE

Your idea of *fun* is not-

MICHAEL

What?

*(Beat.)*

The same as yours?

MICHELLE

Something like that.

*(MICHAEL exits.)*

MICHAEL *(O.S.)*

*Fine.* Besides, I'm not sure what the big . . . you know Jeff will bring some and want me to slip out back for-

MICHELLE

Well Jeff can handle it.

MICHAEL *(O.S.)*

Thank you for that. Now do you want to tell me what this little secret is about or do I really have to discover it on my own?

MICHELLE

I thought we'd already agreed to drop that.

MICHAEL *(O.S.)*

*You* agreed.

MICHELLE

That's right.

MICHAEL *(O.S.)*

A dictatorship, is it?

MICHELLE

You know you don't have to know everything.

MICHAEL *(O.S.)*

I'm not asking to know everything. I'm asking to know a *specific* thing.

MICHELLE

And she told *me* this specific thing.

MICHAEL *(O.S.)*

So you just want me to try to discover it on my own then?

MICHELLE

Assuming you *can*.

MICHAEL (*O.S.*)

Oh I can.

MICHELLE

I already *told* you you're not to say anything to Jeff.

MICHAEL (*O.S.*)

Fine, if those are the rules I need to work around then when Jill and I are alone I'll just casually bring up the evening-

MICHELLE

You are *so* impossible . . .

MICHAEL (*O.S.*)

After all I assume that apology was directed at me too. So if you won't tell me . . .

(*Beat.*)

MICHELLE

You are *so*. . . *Fine!*

(*Beat. MICHAEL enters.*)

MICHELLE (*Continued.*)

But if you even breathe a word of this to-

MICHAEL

Relax O-? Why would I-

MICHELLE

*Fine.*

(*Beat.*)

Fine if you must . . .

(*Beat.*)

They're trying to have children.

(*Beat.*)

And it's been difficult. Taking time. Too much time apparently. And Jeff's been pushing-

MICHAEL

*Jeff?*

MICHAEL  
Yes “*Jeff*.”

MICHAEL  
*Jeff*'s been pushing to-?

MICHELLE  
Some people want to move on with their lives.

MICHAEL  
Thank you.

MICHELLE  
So they put her on medication. And the medication apparently makes her edgy.

MICHAEL  
I'll say.

(*Beat.*)

MICHELLE  
That's kind.

(*Beat.*)

MICHAEL  
I'm sorry I didn't mean it that-

MICHELLE  
No that's your response? Jill is having this awful time and-

MICHAEL  
No. I'm sure she is. I'm sure it's been awful and I'm sorry for her but-

MICHELLE  
What? Your ego was hurt by talk of jobs and apartments?

MICHAEL  
Yes Michelle. My ego was hurt. But thank you for informing me because now I understand.

MICHELLE  
What?

MICHAEL  
What all of this money talk is about.

MICHELLE

Money talk?

MICHAEL

Yes. Money Talk: Marriage, apartments, children. Jeff and Jill. And where we stand in comparison.

*(Beat.)*

MICHELLE

Why do you have to always do that?

*(Beat.)*

MICHAEL

What?

MICHELLE

Turn things around like that.

MICHAEL

Am I wrong?

*(Beat.)*

MICHELLE

You're pathetic.

*(Beat.)*

MICHAEL

Fine, I'm pathetic.

*(MICHAEL exits. O.S.)*

I still don't understand what all of that has to do with planning a lunch.

MICHELLE

Do you not listen to a word I say? I just told you-

MICHAEL *(O.S.)*

You *didn't* just tell me.

MICHELLE

*Apparently* she took time off. From work. She's been traveling, ok? Going for treatments. Seeing people outside the city. I would think your *friend* might have mentioned it.

MICHAEL (*O.S.*)

I'm sorry but why would she go for *treatments* outside of New York?

MICHELLE

Believe it or not things happen outside of New York.

MICHAEL (*O.S.*)

No argument there. But they're usually not *good* things. *Interesting* things.

MICHELLE

My, that's quite a position to take from some boy from some small town in the Midwest.

(*MICHAEL enters.*)

MICHAEL

Chicago.

MICHELLE

Exactly. And it's not-: the suburbs.

MICHAEL

We had a train.

MICHELLE

Which you obviously missed.

(*MICHAEL exits.*)

MICHAEL (*O.S.*)

Go ahead. Make fun of my unsophisticated origins.

MICHELLE

Gladly.

MICHAEL (*O.S.*)

And hardscrabble.

MICHELLE

A generic middle-class suburb carved out of the cornfields isn't "hardscrabble."

MICHAEL (*O.S.*)

Try growing up there.

MICHELLE

Seems like you didn't.

MICHAEL (*O.S.*)

Ah but look how far I've come.

MICHELLE

Because my point is, you have no real *standing* to look down on their or anyone else's approach to the world.

MICHAEL (*O.S.*)

So what? Is she going to some *church* then? The laying on of hands?

MICHELLE

That is *so* . . . Why would you even-?

(*MICHAEL enters.*)

MICHAEL

I'm sorry I-I just think it's amusing.

MICHELLE

What? That our *friend* can't get pregnant?

MICHAEL

No that's tragic but I'm sure they'll be fi-Their resources. Their money. What I'm . . . their history.

MICHELLE

History.

MICHAEL

Yes History Michelle. Secrets. History. The way people think they can conceal or escape or recreate-I mean, you have to admit it's weird that they never talk about it.

MICHELLE

My God why are you so *after them*?

MICHAEL

I'm not- I'm just making an *observation*, an *amusing* observation that these two pleasure-loving pot smoking upwardly *whatever* "New Yorkers" have this concealed all consuming hyper-religious upbringing. Since we're speaking of origins. I mean, you brought it up after all.

MICHELLE

Besides Jill talks about it-

MICHAEL

Not with me.

MICHELLE

Of course not with-And Jeff jokes about it all-

MICHAEL

Joking is different than talking.

MICHELLE

You might want to take that statement to heart. And thank you. Thank you for your “*Amusing obser*”-but you’re not the center of the universe and . . .

MICHAEL

Thank you for informing me of-I was only *saying* I don’t want to share a-

MICHELLE

You don’t like them now so you can’t share a *cab*?

MICHAEL

That’s not my . . . I was just . . . the point of this whole discussion . . . the value of money. I’d rather pay the fare myself.

MICHELLE

Oh, and we can continually afford to do *that*.

MICHAEL

I’m not saying we can continually afford to . . . Look: All I’m talking about is cost. There is a price to be paid. The money we save. What is it? Ten, fifteen-

MICHELLE

They’re our *friends*. Can’t you under-and I *appreciate* their company-

MICHAEL

They’re *not* our friends. Jill is your friend. And I’m not even sure if that’s the case. Colleague is probably more accurate. Jeff and I share the same profession. So we’re all colleagues. Colleagues is more like-

MICHELLE

What do you mean, they’re not our friends? You’ve known Jeff since you came to New- “Not our . . .?” Christ, all you talked about when we first met was your adventures with your buddy in the wilds of New York –So for all I know he’s your *best* friend in New York and-even if you *don’t* appear to talk about anything remotely important such as your *histories* and-

MICHAEL

I just *explained* to you . . .

MICHELLE

. . . You explained to me your view of them which is different than mine and I decide who my friends are.

MICHAEL

You do?

MICHELLE

My *God, yes!*

MICHAEL

Because it strikes me that it's not something you decide.

*(Beat.)*

MICHELLE

*Meaning?*

MICHAEL

That either someone is your friend or they're not.

MICHELLE

You mean, you're telling me that you know who my friends-!

MICHAEL

That's not what I'm-!

MICHELLE

Well, then what . . .!

*(Beat.)*

MICHAEL

Look: Forget it. All I'm saying is that I'd rather not share a cab, OK?

MICHELLE

Fine, you have the money to-

MICHAEL

I never said I had the money to waste. But we're certainly not going to be able to afford a better place saving ten, fifteen-

MICHELLE

I *know*, but we have to start thinking about . . . every little thing, it adds-

MICHAEL

Ten, fifteen is not-Besides, if you're so worried about money then we shouldn't be going to some exclusive *benefit*-where we'll be spending-

MICHELLE

We don't have to spend anything if we don't-

MICHAEL

Right. They'll have an auction Michelle. We just go and sit on our hands while everyone around us bids-

MICHELLE

No one expects-the tickets alone were-

MICHAEL

I *know* how much the tickets were OK? Which is *ironic* given what you were just-Besides, you don't just go to one of these things and not spend-

MICHELLE

Why not?

MICHAEL

Because it's not just about some event, some *charity*, it's about who's in the room and who is buying-the people I work with-*perception*-like everything else in this town.

MICHELLE

That's missing the-

MICHAEL

You really don't understand where I work, do you?

(*Beat.*)

MICHELLE

No, Michael I'm an idiot.

(*Beat.*)

Besides, it's for a good cause.

MICHAEL

Right. One of Jeff's *pet*-

MICHELLE

This has nothing to do with Jeff. Jill and I were the ones who-Christ, why do you turn everything upside- or into some *contest-?!?*

MICHAEL

I'm not *turning-!*

MICHELLE

Yes you-or upside-Christ one minute they're our best friends the next they're mercenary social climbing careerists-

MICHAEL

Hey welcome to New York-

MICHELLE

Look: Can we please not . . . !

MICHAEL

I'm not-!

MICHELLE

What is *wrong* with you!

MICHAEL

*Me?* What is . . .?! Here you are going on about money when-! As if you didn't like the same restaurants and-!

MICHELLE

I *told* you that all week I've been feeling a little insane and I just don't have the patience-!

MICHAEL

I JUST . . . !

MICHELLE

FINE!

*(Pause.)*

MICHAEL

So what is it?

*(Beat.)*

What's wrong?

*(Beat.)*

Michelle?

I told you. MICHELLE

(*Beat.*)

Earlier.

(*Beat.*)

Remind me again. MICHAEL

(*Beat.*)

MICHELLE  
Look: Just forget it. I don't want to go into this whole big spiel again to find out that you haven't even been . . .

MICHAEL  
That's not fair.

MICHELLE  
Oh, it's not, is it?

MICHAEL  
LOOK: I already told you that I've had a lot on my mind this week and . . . !

(*Beat.*)

MICHELLE  
Fine. Let's just forget it, OK? The point is, there are a lot of things going on in my life right now . . . And I just feel like I . . . And on top of that, this whole plane thing . . .

MICHAEL  
Plane thing?

MICHELLE  
Yes. This plane thing. This missing plane.

MICHAEL  
Missing plane.

(*Beat.*)

MICHELLE  
Oh, don't do that. Don't pretend . . . Look: Don't pretend you don't . . . God, I hate when you . . . I mean all of *New York* . . . the whole *country* . . . John Jr. . . .? My God, a president's son and his wife . . .? Just don't pretend you're unaware, OK? Jesus. The T.V.? You've been watching it too.

(*Beat.*)

MICHAEL

Fine. So you're upset by this plane thing.

MICHELLE

Yes.

*(Pause.)*

MICHAEL

Why?

MICHELLE

“WHY?”

MICHAEL

I'm sorry. I didn't mean it that way. It's upsetting. I know it is. I just meant what in particular upset you about it.

MICHELLE

“What in particular?”

MICHAEL

Yes. No . . . I mean . . . what I meant to say was . . . I'm sorry. Just . . . Look: Can we start over?

*(Beat.)*

Just talk to me, OK? I'll listen this time, I promise.

*(Beat. Tenderly:)*

Michelle?

*(Beat.)*

Can we at least try? I'm sorry. OK?

*(Beat.)*

Please.

*(Beat.)*

MICHELLE

Fine.

MICHAEL

So what is it? What's wrong?

MICHELLE

I don't know.

*(Beat.)*

I think this whole thing has just really affected me.

*(Beat.)*

MICHAEL

Uh huh. Sure. No, I understand. A president's son.

MICHELLE

He wasn't just a president's son.

MICHAEL

I know that I-Look I . . .

MICHELLE

I mean, I can't stop thinking about it. The suddenness of it, you know? And the way it- . . . On their way to a wedding. I mean, they're so young. Just starting out. And so to maybe have their lives taken . . .

(*Beat.*)

And then today . . . this morning, on the subway . . . reading about it . . . seeing the pictures . . . I just found myself crying. Just bawling uncontrollably behind my paper . . .

MICHAEL

You were crying?

MICHELLE

Yes. Bawling, really. What . . .? Are you . . .? Are you *laughing* . . .?

MICHAEL

I'm sorry. It's upsetting I know. It's just that . . .

MICHELLE

My God, I can't believe you're . . .

MICHAEL

Well, I'm sorry but you have to admit this whole thing is a bit ridiculous . . . the whole city . . . This whole spectacle . . . Let's be honest: We don't even know them.

MICHELLE

I know that! Don't you think I know that?!

MICHAEL

Yes. I just . . .

MICHELLE

You can really be an asshole sometimes. You know that? A real monster.

(*Beat.*)

MICHAEL

You're right. I just . . . I'm sorry . . . I just . . . You're absolutely right. My God I don't know what's wrong with me. I'm . . . I should really have my head . . . sometimes . . . I wonder sometimes if I'm even human. You know? I just . . . Shelly? Please. I'm sorry. Go ahead.

MICHELLE

No.

MICHAEL

I said that I was sorry.

MICHELLE

No, you're right. If I really think about it. You're absolutely right. I mean, I don't know even know them, do I?

MICHAEL

No but-

MICHELLE

So it's foolish, right?

MICHAEL

No. Not at-

MICHELLE

And it's probably "projection" or something like that. Some false "value" I'm placing on these two people who . . . I mean, I didn't even cry when my grandfather died.

MICHAEL

I really don't think it's that sim-

MICHELLE

My *grandfather* . . . and here I am . . .

MICHAEL

Or fair.

MICHELLE

*Oh?* And why not?

MICHAEL

Well . . . for one, you didn't *like* your grandfather.

MICHELLE

But that's not the *point*. The point is I *knew* him.

MICHAEL

I know that. All I'm saying is that he wasn't a nice person. I mean, let's be honest. And to tell you the truth, you can know people and they don't mean a thing to you. As sad as that is . . . And then there can be someone, someone else who you have no contact with who . . . Which is what I think you're getting at here . . . right?

MICHELLE

Right. I mean . . . why should I care, really . . .? I try to put it away . . . But then I still keep thinking . . . I keep going back in my head . . . The two of them in the water. That icy water. All night. You know? What if they're still alive and . . .

MICHAEL

They're not alive, Michelle.

MICHELLE

You don't know that.

MICHAEL

Come on. The water . . .

MICHELLE

You don't *know* that.

MICHAEL

The water alone would . . .

MICHELLE

For a fact you don't.

MICHAEL

Yes. I do.

(*Beat.*)

Besides, it's three.

MICHELLE

What?

MICHAEL

There are three of them down there. There were three people in the plane.

MICHELLE

Jesus! I know that! Do you think I don't know that?!

MICHAEL

*Yes . . .*

MICHELLE

Well, then why do you . . .!

MICHAEL

I don't know . . . I *just*. . . It bothers me, OK? That they never mention that. Her unfamous sister. The one with the *real* job. Or if they do . . . it's almost an afterthought.

MICHELLE

We're not talking about the papers here! We're talking about *me!* We're talking about . . .!

MICHAEL

OK. Fine. I'm sorry. *Jesus*.

MICHELLE

If you're sorry then why do *you* . . .!

MICHAEL

I don't know! It's important to me. She was a real person too. Even if she wasn't a celebrity-

MICHELLE

And do you think the only reason I care is because-!

MICHAEL

No!

MICHELLE

Is that what you think?! "The famous wife of a-!"

MICHAEL

*No*. I just . . . this whole thing is kind of hard to take seriously is all I'm saying. I mean, who were they, after all?

MICHELLE

Jesus, does it matter?! They were two people-

MICHAEL

They weren't just two people. They were-

MICHELLE

. . . *like us*. Yes. They were.

MICHAEL

He ran a glossy magazine and she worked in the fashion world. Their lives were as distant from us as-

MICHELLE

My God, you were just *saying* . . .

MICHAEL

I was talking about people . . . people who we don't know and how we place certain complex emotions-meanings . . . And then there are those lives . . . Those lives right there in front of us who . . .

MICHELLE

I know. And I was just *saying* . . . I was *agreeing* . . . And . . . and . . . to just have that happen, to them. I mean, just as they were starting out . . .

(*Beat.*)

MICHAEL

Well, I don't know if it just "happened."

(*Beat.*)

MICHELLE

What do you mean?

MICHAEL

I mean . . . I don't know if it just . . . "happened."

(*Beat.*)

MICHELLE

*Meaning?*

(*Beat.*)

Look: If you're worried about upsetting me, you can forget it because you've done it already so you might as well say what's on your mind, OK?

MICHAEL

Fine. OK. Fine. Let's . . . let's face it. They shouldn't have left. There's a certain recklessness . . . In the way that . . . procedure . . . *experience* . . .

MICHELLE

*Recklessness?*

MICHAEL

Yes. Recklessness. Like everything else in that family.

MICHELLE

Oh, and you're the expert on *that*. You've never had a *minute*, a *moment* where . . .

MICHAEL

I never said that I was the expert. But if you read what was in the papers . . . then they shouldn't have left. It was too close to dark. They were late. The weather-

MICHELLE

The weather was fine.

MICHAEL

It wasn't-

MICHELLE

The weather was *fine*. I looked-

MICHAEL

Not according to the papers. They hit a fog bank and-

MICHELLE

I *looked*. It was clear. I remember. When I left work I looked. I saw the sky. And it was blue. The weather was fine.

MICHAEL

It obviously wasn't.

MICHELLE

Here it was. I meant *here*. *Jesus*. The sky-

MICHAEL

Fine. All right. Fine. I won't argue with you. The sky was blue. You saw it and I didn't.

MICHELLE

I *saw* it, OK?

(*Beat.*)

At least I think I did. Isn't that funny? I'm not even sure now. Because I might have seen a patch, a part. That's what I hate about it here. You never see the sky. At least not much of it. You might see "patches" of it if you're lucky. But it's nothing like a children's book.

MICHAEL

I'm sorry, I must have missed something. A children's book? New York? Not to be mean, Shell, but what was your first clue?

MICHELLE

It's just something that I've been thinking about lately. The city. The way it really is as opposed to how I . . . Forget it. It's stupid.

MICHAEL

No. Tell me.

MICHELLE

No it's . . .

MICHAEL

*Don't.*

*(Beat.)*

Tell me. And how did you think it was going to be?

*(Beat.)*

MICHELLE

I don't know. When I was young I used to dream about living here.

MICHAEL

*Here?*

MICHELLE

Yes.

MICHAEL

My *God*, why? You hate it-

MICHELLE

*I don't . . .*

MICHAEL

You're always *saying . . .*

MICHELLE

I'm *saying*, but I think deep down I . . . I don't know . . . deep down I . . .

MICHAEL

You love it?

MICHELLE

No . . . I . . . I don't know . . . it's . . . it's . . .

*(Beat.)*

When I was a child-when I was a kid-I got the idea that New York was the most exciting place in the world to live. It was probably from a story someone read to me. Books used to affect me like that when I was young. I used to find a book and read it over and over again. It was like a new world I could crawl into. And somehow all of my favorite books, all of my favorite stories, came to be about New York. There was this one that I used to read over and over again about these kids who got lost in one of the museums-I think it was the Met-and they would come out at night and live among these beautiful paintings and statues. And there was this other one about these kids who lived in this big beautiful building bordering the park and they had this hot air balloon that they would dock at their window and they would go float across the park and visit their friends. I fell in love with those books. I would read them again and again. And when I got bored with them, I would scour the library more, for any book I could find that took place in the city. Because I wanted to have that experience again and again. And I think all of the pictures I had of the city came out of those stories. My idea of New York was like an illustration from a children's book. Water colors. The park big and clean and green, bordered by those enormous buildings. The sky big and blue above it. The streets shining in the rain. Those words and images. Like the watercolors in Madeline . . .

MICHAEL

Madeline took place in Paris.

MICHELLE

I know that! It was an example! I mean, can't I even tell a st . . . ! Christ would you let me . . . ! I'm talking about the illustrations! The pictures! The style! The way they were painted! Romantic and awash in . . . !

MICHAEL

Well, I'm just-

MICHELLE

It was an example, OK?! Can't I even tell a st-! My God, Everything I say tonight! Can't I have a moment of comfort in this relationship?! A moment when I know where I stand?!

MICHAEL

FINE!

*(MICHAEL begins to exit, then stops and comes over to MICHELLE. Beat.)*

Look, I'm . . . sorry. I don't know what's wrong with me. I don't know why I keep . . .

MICHELLE

Look: Just . . .

MICHAEL

No, I . . . I just . . . You're right. I should just . . . And earlier . . . I'm sorry I shouldn't have . . . When you said that you were crying . . . on the subway . . . I shouldn't have done that. I shouldn't have laughed.

MICHELLE

Really. Forget it. I think we're both just . . .

MICHAEL

No, I really . . . There's something I should . . .

MICHELLE

What?

*(Pause.)*

MICHAEL

It's just that . . . yesterday . . . I was watching the coverage. The coverage of the crash. And they played this old speech. It was a speech John's father gave, when he was president. And it was the most amazing thing. Because, in the speech, he was talking about the sea. About why we're drawn to it. How the percentage of salt in our blood is equivalent to the percentage in the sea. How it's like coming home for us. And that's why we go there. To be restored.

*(Beat.)*

And in the midst of this speech they were showing clips of him. Old clips of him in black and white sailing with his son. And it was the most amazing thing. The two of them on the water and I just . . .

*(Beat.)*

And it was strange. It was this strange disorienting feeling. Because I couldn't figure out when he gave the speech. I mean, from the pictures, it must have been when he was president. But *why* would he give it? What was the occasion? Why would a president give a speech like that. About the sea. And it was so . . .

*(Pause.)*

And I really couldn't imagine the circumstances under which it was given. I half thought I was hallucinating. I mean, what president would say these things? And why?

*(Beat.)*

And then I remembered the other speeches he'd given: "Ask not . . ." All of the idealistic speeches, you know? There was this other speech about Cuba: how we screwed them over by allying ourselves with Batista, raping the poor. And these were people who were contemplating blowing us up a few months earlier.

MICHAEL (*Continued.*)

And then, later, they played this beautiful speech that his brother gave, that Bobby gave, about South Africa when he was running for president. And it was just so articulate. So idealistic. And I thought . . . Words are dangerous. Sometimes more dangerous than actions.

MICHELLE

I suppose.

MICHAEL

And no wonder, you know, that they killed them.

MICHELLE

Who?

MICHAEL

The CIA. The FBI. Whatever name you want to give to powerful forces. So maybe it's better that his son went down like this, maybe it's better that John went down like this, in his own plane, at his own hands rather than like his father, his uncle-

MICHELLE

You don't know that.

MICHAEL

What?

MICHELLE

That they killed them.

MICHAEL

I think I do. I think everybody does.

MICHELLE

For a fact you don't.

MICHAEL

For a fact? No, but in all prob-

MICHELLE

Then don't say it.

MICHAEL

What?

MICHELLE  
Don't say it.

MICHAEL  
Why?

MICHELLE  
Because it's . . . wrong . . .

MICHAEL  
Well, what do you think happened?

MICHELLE  
I don't know what happened. But to say you know . . . to act like . . . like it's some *certainty* . . .

MICHAEL  
I never said it was a certainty.

MICHELLE  
Well, you might as well have.

MICHAEL  
Who knows what to believe? I mean, Jesus, the things we're capable of . . . Sometimes you wake up and wonder what country you live in.

MICHELLE  
Michael? Do me a favor: Don't get all college on me, OK?

*(Beat. MICHAEL takes off his tie and then exits.)*

MICHAEL (O.S.)  
*(Coldly:)*  
Anyway, when I saw that, that's when I realized what was amazing about him: To say those things, simply to say them. Even if he wasn't perfect. Even if he was fucking scores of women in the Lincoln bedroom-

MICHELLE  
*Please* don't say that.

MICHAEL (O.S.)  
What? That he was fucking-

MICHELLE  
*No.* That word.

*(MICHAEL enters with a different tie and begins tying it.)*

“Fuck?”  
MICHAEL

Yes. It’s vulgar.  
MICHELLE

You’re bothered by “fuck?”  
MICHAEL

Would you *just* . . .  
MICHELLE

But I say it all the time.  
MICHAEL

I *know*. And you’re better than that.  
MICHELLE

I don’t say fuck, it makes me a better person?  
MICHAEL

Yes!  
MICHELLE

You really believe that?  
MICHAEL

*Yes*, my God, you were just saying . . . !  
MICHELLE

I was saying . . . !  
MICHAEL

Would you *just* . . . !  
MICHELLE

*(Beat.)*

Fine.  
MICHAEL

*(MICHAEL pulls off his tie and then exits. Beat.)*

MICHAEL (*O.S.*)

Anyway they shouldn't have left. I read all about it. He wasn't prepared to fly at night, by instruments. I know it's not what you want to hear, but it's the truth.

MICHELLE

It was an accident, all right? It could have happened to anyone.

MICHAEL (*O.S.*)

Not to someone who was prepared.

MICHELLE

He had training.

MICHAEL (*O.S.*)

Obviously not enough.

MICHELLE

He could navigate by the stars and the lights below. . .

MICHAEL (*O.S.*)

*If* he could see them. Which according to the papers-

MICHELLE

He had the best training money could buy.

*(MICHAEL enters tying a different tie.)*

MICHAEL

Why are you so stuck on that?

MICHELLE

What?

MICHAEL

Money.

MICHELLE

I'm not . . .

MICHAEL

Lately you are. *Jeff* . . . *Jill* . . . the *apartment* . . .

MICHELLE

It's just a fact, OK? It affects us. It's like not being stuck on food or air. Besides, you're not?

MICHAEL

I never pretended otherwise.

MICHELLE

No. You didn't.

MICHAEL

Hey, you saw the goods first and you chose me, baby.

*(MICHAEL exits. Beat.)*

MICHELLE

Oh, where are they! I'm going insane. I should *just* . . .

MICHAEL (*O.S.*)

What?

MICHELLE

Forget it.

*(MICHAEL enters with his suit jacket.)*

MICHAEL

You should forget it. Seriously. You can't let this crash get you down. Ruin your . . .

MICHELLE

Night?

*(Beat.)*

Hey, you're right. I mean, after all, this will completely be forgotten in . . . what? A few weeks? A few months? Or in a few hundred years turned into some sort of myth. Or come to mean something entirely different. Like that rhyme.

MICHAEL

Rhyme?

MICHELLE

The one the kids sang. The awful one I was telling you about . . .

MICHAEL

Awful? It's a silly children's song. A nonsense song . . .

MICHELLE

No. It's about the plague.

MICHAEL

The plague? Ring Around The Rosey? You're kidding right?

MICHELLE

No . . . It's from the sixteenth century. London school children would sing it while everyone was dying around them. Think about it? The words . . .? It's what I told you. The new book I'm editing on children's rhymes. It's obvious really, once you . . .

*(Reciting.)*

Ring around the rosey/Pocket full of posies/Ashes, ashes, they all fall down?

*(Beat.)*

Don't you see . . .?

MICHAEL

No, I . . .

MICHELLE

The ring is apparently this pink or "rosy" spot you would get on your arm or chest when you first contracted the disease. The posies are the flower petals you would keep in your pockets to ward away death-because they basically believed if you could smell death that you would die . . . Either for that purpose or to throw on the graves of your family. And the ashes are either the final sacrament the priest would give you . . . Extreme Unction . . . "ashes to ashes" . . . a cross of ashes on the forehead . . . or the sneezing-achoo-before you would "fall down" and die. But apparently no one realizes that anymore. The meaning has been lost. That's what I was trying to tell you. Earlier. How things become divorced from their meaning.

*(Beat.)*

Anyway, that's probably what will happen to them. Four hundred years from now, they will come to mean something completely different.

*(Beat.)*

You're probably right. Fog bank. They shouldn't have left.

*(Beat.)*

MICHAEL

Still at some point, I suppose, you have to take a leap into the darkness.

MICHELLE

And then look what happens.

*(Beat.)*

So. How do I look? MICHAEL

You look great. MICHELLE

You didn't even look at me. MICHAEL

Fine. MICHELLE

*(MICHELLE turns from the window and looks at MICHAEL.)*

You look great. MICHELLE

Hey, thanks for the enthusiasm, Shell. MICHAEL

You should talk. I haven't once heard you say that I look beautiful tonight. MICHELLE

Not true: your eyes. MICHAEL

My eyes. MICHELLE

*(Beat.)*

No, you're right. MICHAEL

*(Beat.)*

But I've thought it. A lot.

*(Beat.)*

I did, Shelly.

Right. MICHELLE

I did. And I say it all the time. MICHAEL

MICHELLE

But you didn't say it tonight.

MICHAEL

Jesus! Why are you so . . . !

MICHELLE

Sometimes the things people don't say are more important than what they do say.

MICHAEL

Well, gosh, Michelle, that's kind of ironic coming from you of all people.

MICHELLE

Why?

*(Beat.)*

MICHAEL

Forget it. Let's not-

MICHELLE

*God*, you can really push me to the-!

MICHAEL

Can we just drop it?

MICHELLE

Would you just fucking say what's on your . . . !

MICHAEL

And who's using inappropriate words now?

*(Beat.)*

Fine. If you really want to . . . Fine.

*(Beat.)*

You never say that you love me.

*(Pause.)*

MICHELLE

You know how I feel about that.

MICHAEL

Why are you with me, Shelly? Why do you want to get married anyway? Is it just because . . .

MICHELLE

No-!

MICHAEL

Well?

*(Beat.)*

MICHELLE

Michael, I just . . . I feel . . . the words . . . it's not something I take . . . Look, I'm not sure that this is the conversation to have right now when . . .

MICHAEL

Hey, you we're the one who wanted to know what was on my mind.

MICHELLE

You're right. And . . . and I . . . I just . . .

MICHAEL

Hey, I realize I'm right, OK?

MICHELLE

I know. And I know that it's not fair of me to-

MICHAEL

No, it's not.

MICHELLE

It's me, Michael. It's me and I'm probably confused . . . and . . . and . . . mixed up about a lot of things.

MICHAEL

You can say that again.

MICHELLE

Look: I'm trying to explain to you . . .!

MICHAEL

Hey, whatever, Shell.

*(Pause. A car horn sounds outside. MICHELLE looks out the window.)*

MICHELLE

They're here.

MICHAEL

*(He checks his watch.)*

I guess I was right. It was six-thirty.

MICHELLE

Of course you were. You have that *need*, don't you?

(*Beat.*)

MICHAEL

Unless they're late. Which is also quite possible.

(*Beat.*)

So what are they auctioning anyway?

MICHELLE

Wine.

MICHAEL

I should have known. Jeff and his wine.

(*Beat.*)

At least we'll drink well tonight.

MICHELLE

Michael, I'm sorry. I . . .

MICHAEL

So do you know anything about Jeff or not?

MICHELLE

What?

MICHAEL

The job. Did he get it? Has Jill said any-I just want to know before we get in the cab with them. I just want to be prepared before he . . .

MICHELLE

I don't know.

MICHAEL

They're probably waiting for the cab ride to spring it on us. So that they can watch our faces. Christ, here I am barely hanging on while he moves up and up. My whole career is . . . I need to do something big.

(*Pause.*)

MICHELLE

Michael?

(*The car horn sounds again on the street.*)

MICHAEL

They're waiting. Let's go.

*(MICHAEL goes to the door. MICHELLE doesn't move.)*

MICHELLE

Michael . . . I . . .

MICHAEL

C'mon, Shelly! Jesus Christ, for the past twenty minutes you've been all over me to be ready and now here you are . . .!

*(Beat.)*

I'm sorry. What were you going to say?

*(They stare at each other for a moment.)*

MICHELLE

Nothing.

*(Beat.)*

Let's go.

*(Blackout. End of Act I.)*

ACT IISCENE 1*Tumbling After: Jeff and Jill*

*(JEFF and JILL'S apartment later the same evening. JEFF, JILL, MICHAEL and MICHELLE enter. JEFF is carrying an old bottle of wine. Beat.)*

It's big.

Yes, well-

Huge

There's no-

*Christ* it's big.

. . . furniture.

It's what we've been telling you-

Exactly, it just looks big because of the-

No, it's big all right.

Really it's not *that* . . . it's just the lack of . . .

We wanted a place that would give us a feeling of openness so we wouldn't feel . . .

. . . trapped.

MICHAEL

JEFF

MICHAEL

JILL

MICHAEL

JEFF

JILL

JEFF

MICHAEL

JILL

JEFF

JILL

Trapped . . . ?  
 MICHAEL  
 Exactly.  
 JILL  
 But we're still filling it-  
 JEFF  
 Clearly: TV?  
 MICHAEL  
 Not yet.  
 JILL  
 MICHAEL  
 Guess you won't be able to watch the coverage of the plane then. Not that that's a bad thing.  
 (From the window:)  
 It's high.  
 JILL  
 We were surprised. Because the stories aren't *that*-  
 JEFF  
 We would have been just as happy a few stories above the other buildings.  
 JILL  
 So we could get the view . . .  
 JEFF  
 You forget, you know? That they built these old places that high. The ceilings.  
 JILL  
 Because it's nice not to have the sense of, you know people staring into your apartment all day.  
 MICHAEL  
*Christ* it's high.  
 MICHELLE  
 Would you stop *saying* that?  
 MICHAEL  
 What?

MICHELLE

It's "big", it's "high."

MICHAEL

Well, it is. It's enormous. It's like something out of another time. It's- . . . Pre-war?

JEFF

Excuse me?

MICHAEL

The apartment. Is it pre-war?

JEFF

As a matter of fact, it is.

MICHAEL

Whenever I hear that I always wonder, which war? Because they always say that and they never specify which war, when in reality we've had a shitload of wars: I mean there was The Gulf War, Vietnam, The Korean War, World War Two, World War One, The Spanish American, American Indian, Civil, The War of 1812, *Revolutionary* . . .

MICHELLE

I really doubt that this apartment was built prior to the Revolutionary War.

JEFF

Twenties I think. Late.

MICHAEL

Twenties. That explains it. Big. Money. Although Pre-Revolutionary *would be* the proper terminology for a pre-war apartment. Being the first. Officially. I mean, just going by correct use of the language. But twenties, that really explains it. Sunken living room . . . Arches . . . Big. View of the park . . . And, of course, speaking of language, now it will really fit.

JEFF

What?

MICHAEL

The old rhyme they used to tease you about? 'Jeff and Jill . . . went up the hill.'

JEFF

Right. Except it's a building, not a hill.

MICHAEL

Minor detail. Old water tower on top of the building or anything?

JILL

We haven't made it up to investigate yet.

MICHAEL

I'd do it soon. Might be important. Right Michelle?

MICHELLE

I sincerely doubt it.

MICHAEL

Did you know Michelle was editing a book on the history of children's rhymes?

JILL

No. Really? Hadn't heard.

MICHAEL

She can tell you everything you wanted to know about the meaning of rhymes. Watch:

*(To MICHELLE:)*

What's Jack and Jill about?

MICHELLE

Its meaning has been lost to us. Kind of like your behavior.

MICHAEL

Figures. Christ it's big.

JILL

Really it's not that-There's no furniture. It's just the illusion of-

MICHAEL

Not true, you have a chair.

JILL

Right. Wow. A chair.

JEFF

Two chairs actually.

MICHAEL

Am I missing something? I see one.

JEFF

It's in one of the other rooms.

JILL

In the back.

MICHAEL

There are *other* rooms?

JEFF

It's the first thing Jill bought. This set of matching chairs . . .

MICHAEL

*Really.* There are other *rooms*?

JILL

But of course they only delivered one. And then when they finally *did* deliver it, it was *damaged*.

JEFF

So we stuck it in the back room along with everything from the old place until we can unpack.

MICHAEL

Seriously, there are other rooms?

MICHELLE

Michael, would you *stop*.

JILL

We're still deciding whether we want to keep the furniture from the old place or make a fresh start.

MICHAEL

See I told you it was big. The things from the *old* place fit into the back room.

MICHELLE

We're going to stick you into the back room in a minute if you don't-

*(MICHAEL sits in the chair.)*

MICHAEL

Have you been interrogating people in here because it looks like . . .?

JILL

I've been interrogating Jeff about whether we're going to be able to afford new furniture.

JEFF

And I've been interrogating Jill about cutting down on the benefits so we can actually *afford* furniture-

JILL

It's true. It's like a little ritual we have every night.

MICHAEL

Sounds like fun. Sounds like an evening at our place. Smaller scale, of course. Which is the only thing that's smaller.

JILL

I'm sorry, we really shouldn't have come back here.

MICHELLE

Why not? It's great.

JILL

No. It's . . . We have nothing. Not even a place to sit and-

MICHAEL

I'm comfortable.

MICHELLE

Just ignore him. I'm glad we . . . It's great it's-

JILL

No, this was stupid-It's embarrassing.

MICHAEL

What? You're going to be embarrassed by the big emptiness of-

MICHELLE

You forgot to say high.

MICHAEL

Right, the big *high* emptiness of . . .

JILL

And it's . . . you can see all of the flaws this way.

MICHAEL

*(Incredulous.)*

Flaws?

JILL

The molding is a mess. The egg shell cracks in the ceiling.

JEFF

We need to have lots of work done still and-

MICHAEL

Really, no need to start getting embarrassed until you actually have stuff to fill this enormous place. Not that you *can*.

MICHELLE

Michael, would you *stop!*

MICHAEL

What? I can't state the *obvious?*

MICHELLE

You have to excuse him. He hasn't been out in public much lately.

MICHAEL

Right. They generally keep me locked up in some back room at the bank these days reading reports. Tonight was just a-what's the word I'm looking for?

MICHELLE

Day-pass.

MICHAEL

No, that's for people in the mental hospital. Furlough.

MICHELLE

Day-pass is Exactly the right word.

(*Beat.*)

JEFF

Look, can we get you guys a drink or-?

MICHAEL

Sure.

MICHELLE

No. It's late. We should let you guys-

JILL

Don't be silly.

MICHELLE

We'll just take a quick look around and-Besides, you guys are probably exhausted from the move and-

JILL

Stay. It's were not that exh-We just don't have much to offer. Although we do have some good vodka-a housewarming gift from the real estate agent that we haven't touched. Besides, how often do we get a chance to hang out these days?

MICHAEL

Well, it's certainly not going to be much anymore. Not after you guys moved way up here in the clouds. Although if I can get our hot air balloon working we can just float up over the Park and-dock at the window.

MICHELLE

I'll have a vodka rocks.

JILL

Great. Michael?

MICHAEL

Wine, thank you.

JEFF

I'm afraid we're fresh out, partner.

MICHAEL

You're kidding, right?

JEFF

No-

MICHAEL

How is *that* possible?

JEFF

Um, Jill was nice enough to donate all of our wine to the neighbors before the move.

MICHAEL

Your collection?

JILL

Which is *obviously* still a sore spot.

JEFF

(*To JILL:*)

I'm sorry I was kidding O-?

(*Beat.*)

Besides, it wasn't really a collec-There was nothing so valuable that-you know my attempts at collecting wine are a joke really so-

JILL

Forget it O-?

(*To MICHAEL:*)

Look: Jeff will run out and-there's an all night place around the corner-

MICHAEL

Don't be ri-We'll open my bottle then and-

JILL

*NO!*

MICHAEL

It's fine.

JILL

Don't you dare!

MICHAEL

Really, it's fine. I forgot about it or I would have offered. If you'd just bring me a corkscrew I'll-

JILL

You won't. I won't let you.

(*JILL takes the bottle from MICHAEL.*)

Jeff will run out to the place down the street and get you something interesting and it will only take a-

MICHAEL

Get out. It's just wine. Besides, you won't find anything remotely interesting down the street at this time of night. And certainly not as interesting as this so-

MICHELLE

Michael . . .

MICHAEL

Look: It's *just*-

JILL

It's not "just"-it's an enormously *old* bottle-

JEFF

*A ridiculously* old bottle-

JILL

Exactly-and you shouldn't-

JEFF

Not to mention obscenely expensive-

JILL

. . . so you shouldn't-

MICHAEL

What? Waste it on friends?

JEFF

Right. Because wine like that would be a waste on-

MICHAEL

Would you just . . .

JILL

Really this isn't the . . .

MICHELLE

Michael stop it.

JEFF

Seriously buddy, listen to your future wife.

MICHAEL

But wine like this was made for an important occasion.

JEFF

Save it then. *For* an important occasion.

MICHAEL

But this *is* an important-

JILL

It's not.

MICHAEL

Up here in the clouds? This feudal place?

JEFF

What I mean is something personal. An anniversary or-

MICHAEL

Anniversary? We're not even married yet. Engaged even-

MICHELLE

Technically.

MICHAEL

There's a technically to engaged?

MICHELLE

You've got a point. You generally need to be engaged or married before you ever have an anniversary. Something you should keep in mind.

JEFF

Well, then since you're not engaged, you can save it for when you *do* have an anniversary. And not on some *random* . . . Of course, you can always *get* engaged tonight and then we can *join* you in tasting some of that ridiculously expensive wine.

JILL

JEFF!

JEFF

Relax, I was just-

MICHAEL

That's not a bad-What do you say Michelle? Should we just get it over with right now and celebrate?

JILL

Stop it. He was just-

JEFF

. . . kidding. I mean, Christ, that bottle is-

MICHELLE

Besides, it's going back.

MICHAEL

What do you mean it's going-?

MICHELLE

Stop it, OK?

MICHAEL

Stop *what*?

MICHELLE

Whatever you are trying to *prove* tonight.

MICHAEL

I'm not-

JILL

Hide it, Jeff. Lock it up. I won't have him waste . . .

*(JILL gives the bottle to JEFF.)*

MICHAEL

*Hide it.* Where are you going to hide it? Under the *chair*?

JEFF

Good idea.

*(JEFF places the bottle under the chair. Beat.)*

MICHAEL

OH, MY GOD! What happened to my exceedingly rare, old and expensive bottle of wine?!

*(Beat. MICHAEL picks up the bottle.)*

MICHELLE

*Michael . . .*

JILL

Relax. He doesn't have an opener so-

MICHAEL

*Yet.* I'm sure there has to be one here somewhere. Don't think I don't know that Jeff would have celebrated the acquisition of this place with a very good bottle of wine. If I know my colleague here and his rituals-

JILL

Well, this time you're wrong.

JEFF

It's true buddy. And the corkscrew is still packed away somewhere. Lost in the countless unpacked boxes. You're welcome to look but it may take you till morning cuz-

MICHAEL

Oh that old ploy: The lost corkscrew. Fine. You want to play games, we'll play games. But by the end of the evening I guarantee you that wine will be open and we will each have a glass.

JEFF

Over my dead body.

MICHAEL

Well, I knew it was going to be an interesting evening.

*(Beat.)*

JILL

So what's it going to be?

*(Beat.)*

Drinks . . . ?

MICHAEL

Fine.

*(Beat.)*

We'll open the wine later. What are the choices again?

JILL

Vodka.

MICHAEL

Excellent. Let's make it a Russian evening then. We'll drink, talk, bare our souls. Celebrate the acquisition of this place.

MICHELLE

Spectacular.

JILL

No, I think it's a great idea. Like old times.

MICHELLE

Sure. I'm just a little . . . But sure.

JILL

Great.

*(Beat.)*

MICHELLE

Where's your . . . ?

JEFF

Around the corner.

MICHELLE

Thanks.

*(MICHELLE exits. MICHAEL goes to the window to see the view. Beat.)*

JILL

Jeff . . . ?

JEFF

Right. Um, why don't you let me get it.

*(Beat.)*

So *where* are the glasses?

*(Beat.)*

JILL

Forget it.

JEFF

I'm sorry. Just tell me and I'll-

JILL

It's *fine*.

*(Beat.)*

Where's your bag?

JEFF

Bag . . . ?

JILL

Yes "Bag." The bag you found.

*(Beat.)*

JEFF

On the dresser.

JILL

Great. You didn't throw it out then.

JEFF

No, I was going to when I found it but-

JILL

It slipped your mind?

JEFF

No I just . . . Are you sure you want to . . . ?

JILL

Yes.

*(Beat.)*

Yes.

JEFF

Look: I'm not sure it's such a-

JILL

Relax O-

JEFF

Besides I thought you said that-?

JILL

I *know*. But now I-

JEFF

Jill . . .

JILL

*Besides*, I thought *you* said that you wanted to give me a normal evening with our friends.

JEFF

I did.

JILL

And isn't this a normal evening with our friends?

JEFF

Look-

JILL

Like old times-? I mean that's what we're all about, right, pushing things, testing things?

JEFF

*Jill* . . .

*(Beat.)*

JILL

*What?*

*(Pause.)*

I'm fine O-Would you just . . . I'm fine.

*(Beat.)*

JILL (*Continued.*)

I'm sorry, OK?

(*Beat.*)

OK . . . ?

JEFF

OK but I'm still not sure that's such a-

JILL

It's fine, OK. Really. Would you *just* . . . ?

(*Beat.*)

JEFF

Fine.

(*Beat.*)

JILL

And the papers?

JEFF

Um . . .

(*Beat. JEFF reaches in his suit jacket and hands the rolling papers to JILL. Beat.*)

JILL

You and Jeff *smoked* tonight?

JEFF

No I-

JILL

After all of this? "Jill are you sure?" After we agreed before that-

JEFF

No I-

JILL

Well then why-?

JEFF

They're from six months ago.

JILL

Six . . . ?

JEFF

The benefit suit? I wear this suit to benefits and the last time we smoked was . . .

*(Beat.)*

It's where I found the bag. Why I had it in the first place. Tonight. I was getting ready tonight and found it in the pocket. The suit pocket . . . You know I wouldn't . . .

JILL

Do I?

JEFF

Yes, after we-

*(Beat.)*

Jill . . .

JILL

What?

JEFF

Honestly, I-It's just that you know how I like to be-

JILL

Fine

JEFF

Really I . . .

JILL

Fine.

JEFF

I just like to be-

JILL

It's *fine*. I know, OK?

*(Beat.)*

The Boy Scout. Always be prepared.

JEFF

Hey.

*(JILL takes the papers from JEFF. To MICHAEL:)*

JILL

Don't mind us we're . . . Family squabbles, you know?

MICHAEL

I'm acquainted. *Intimately*, you might say.

*(Beat.)*

JILL

So, did you know that?

MICHAEL

What?

JILL

That Jeff used to be a Boy Scout?

MICHAEL

No.

JILL

I thought you knew all of each other's secrets.

*(To JEFF:)*

Now was it a really a Boy Scout or Eagle Scout?

JEFF

A Boy Scout.

JILL

Surprising. And did you get all of your badges?

JEFF

Yes.

JILL

Of course.

*(To MICHAEL:)*

Kind of hard to believe huh? I mean, not the badge part but the Boy Scout part. In his green pants and green tie. Ready for adventures. Innocent.

MICHAEL

I suppose so.

JILL

But then I've known him longer than you. Before he came to New York. When he was a somewhat different person. Isn't that right?

*(MICHELLE enters.)*



MICHAEL

What? Make ourselves comfortable on the floor?

MICHELLE

What I was going to say-do the manly thing and fight over the chair while Jill and I get the drinks.

JILL

Exactly. Let the women tend to the domestic chores. You guys stay here and pummel each other to death. Rocks or straight?

MICHAEL

We'll just use our fists thanks.

MICHELLE

She meant the drinks.

MICHAEL

Rocks, then.

JILL

Jeff . . . ?

*(Beat.)*

JEFF

Same.

*(Beat.)*

JILL

*(To MICHAEL and MICHELLE:)*

This is nice. I'm glad you guys came by. It's been such a long time since we've been able to hang out like this. You guys are such good friends. Special friends. We've known each other since we first came to the city and that means a lot. Things can get so busy that you forget that history. And it all becomes about other things. But I want you both to know that it means a lot to me. You coming by. Seeing this place. Which is great, yes, but would mean nothing without you.

*(Beat.)*

MICHAEL

Likewise.

*(Beat.)*

JILL

So let's celebrate.

MICHAEL

By all means.

*(Beat.)*

JILL

Great. Like old times. When we first came to the city. When we all had nothing. Just us, our stories and our late nights.

*(Beat. To MICHELLE:)*

So the tour?

MICHELLE

The tour.

MICHAEL

See you in a few weeks.

*(JILL and MICHELLE exit. Pause.)*

MICHAEL *(Continued.)*

Congrats.

JEFF

Thanks. We must have seen fifty places. It was really nerve wracking. Real estate, you know? It can drive you insane. All you can think is: I'm going to get screwed, pay way too much. Or I better move on this because somebody's going to come in here and *steal* it. And you go back and forth like that until you don't know what to think. It was fun though. The strategizing.

MICHAEL

I meant the big new job.

JEFF

Well, hey.

MICHAEL

Not that the apartment is a *small* thing.

JEFF

No. It meant a lot. To Jill I mean. I work so much and she's alone and now even more so with me traveling more with the new position-her freelancing now-

MICHAEL

She left her job?

JEFF

You hadn't heard?

MICHAEL

No I-Michelle mentioned something about her taking some time off and . . .

JEFF

Right well . . . It's a relatively new development. I'm not sure if Michelle even knows yet.

*(Beat.)*

A few months ago? Jill began editing this book on religion. Mystics and their beliefs. All of these guys going off to the woods munching on berries, away from the hustle and bustle . . . I think it took her back to . . .

*(Beat.)*

Anyway, she decided it might be useful to do that. To take a break from the grind, you know? Focus on what she really wanted. So she took a leave, decided to freelance.

*(Beat.)*

But the place, I thought . . . It was the least I could do. She put up with a lot. Coming here. My late nights. The city was never her thing. But thanks. The job is . . . Thanks.

MICHAEL

Well, hey, you deserve it.

JEFF

I was lucky.

MICHAEL

Don't-

JEFF

It's *true*.

MICHAEL

Jeff, Hey please. Don't even-

JEFF

I'm not-The right moment, the right *time* . . .

MICHAEL

Seriously, it's great. You're headed to the top. Everyone knows that. If you don't screw it up you'll probably end up running the place.

JEFF

That's a little premature, isn't it?

MICHAEL

Is it? I mean, this place alone is evidence of that.

JEFF

This place? No this place is mortgaged on the future, buddy.

*(Beat.)*

No hard feelings?

MICHAEL

Excuse me?

JEFF

The job. No hard feelings?

MICHAEL

I'm sorry, I don't-

JEFF

Oh come on don't-I mean, you were in there too.

MICHAEL

What are you-?

JEFF

The interview?

MICHAEL

Interview?

JEFF

Don't even-your interview. For the-the promotion? Your department? I *heard*, OK?

MICHAEL

Hey.

JEFF

I take it you didn't get it.

MICHAEL

No I-Passed over.

*(Beat.)*

JEFF

The job . . . I was lucky. Mergers are complicated. Political, you know and-

MICHAEL

Sure

JEFF

It could just have well have been you celebrating instead of-

Right. MICHAEL

It *could*- JEFF

Look: Just stop O- MICHAEL

Really. They wouldn't have talked to you if you weren't in the running. JEFF

Please. They were humoring me. Along with the fifty other people they hauled in there to make it look good. So they could say they weren't just coming in there, cleaning house. MICHAEL

That's not- JEFF

It *is*. True. It was a show. Christ, the plodder. A courtesy. For all of my loyal years of service. It was a charade. MICHAEL

I'm sure that's not- JEFF

OK. Fine. You want to-? Fine, we'll stick to the story: You were lucky. I wasn't. MICHAEL  
(*Beat.*)  
Still, congrats. You've come a long way.

Thanks. But we both have. Since our training days. JEFF  
(*Beat.*)  
I've been thinking about that lately you know. Our training days?

Yeah? MICHAEL

Those days when we were just starting out at the bank? JEFF  
(*Beat.*)  
I owe you.

You owe me? MICHAEL

Yes. JEFF

MICHAEL

Wait, you owe *me*?

JEFF

*Yes.*

MICHAEL

That first year at work I was so in over my *head* . . . Christ, I can't count the number of times you saved my ass. It was a miracle I didn't get fired.

JEFF

I'm talking about something bigger than that.

MICHAEL

Bigger?

JEFF

The city.

MICHAEL

The city.

JEFF

Yes. New York. Our late nights . . .?

*(Beat..)*

When I first came here I was so . . .

*(Beat.)*

Before I came here I thought: 'Dream, don't limit yourself: Anything is possible.' But then when I actually got here and saw the reality I began to doubt that. Because where I came from was so different and my dreams so different. Those late nights on the town? You helped me hold onto my dream. Showed me that I belonged here. That I *could* belong. You were my tour guide into this new world.

MICHAEL

Corrupted you, you mean? Drinks, drugs, bright lights . . .

*(Beat.)*

JEFF

Sure. Some people would see it that way.

MICHAEL

Jill.

JEFF

I wasn't referring to-

MICHAEL

No I just . . . Looking back I sometimes wonder if she still resents me for that and-

JEFF

It was growing pains. She missed home and . . . The city was still a shock to her. If anything it's me that she blame for . . . No, I was-: History: Church. Family. School. *History*. Pick your poison.

*(Beat.)*

Look, it's not something I like to talk about. History-

MICHAEL

Join the club.

JEFF

I like to move on. But Jill . . . Jill-the old guilt, the old . . .-Jill may have been less adaptable. Less suited to this new-world. That's something I'm just realizing . . .

*(Beat.)*

But still, I owe you. You were my teacher, my tour guide to this new world.

MICHAEL

I guess was a fair trade then: You tutored me in finance and I tutored you in New York.

JEFF

And most importantly that-in this town-the sky was the limit. But never in my wildest dreams did I think I'd get this far.

MICHAEL

Well you moved to the right place then.

JEFF

Manhattan.

MICHAEL

The clouds.

*(Beat.)*

JEFF

Well, since we seem to find ourselves stranded here all alone here in the clouds-at least for the moment-do you mind if bring you back down to earth and I ask you a somewhat pointed question about your purchase of a certain bottle of wine earlier tonight?

MICHAEL

Do you have a parachute in this place?

*(Beat.)*

Apparently not.

*(Beat.)*

Sorry but I'm not big on hard landings. I'd rather just float here in the air and wait for the vodka to arrive.

JEFF

Unfortunately I can't let you do that.

MICHAEL

I guess I was right about the interrogation.

JEFF

Look I don't mean to be a rude host and change the subject to money-

MICHAEL

God forbid.

JEFF

. . . it's just that when someone arrives at your apartment with a bottle of wine that insanely expensive, you have to be somewhat concerned that they'll open it.

MICHAEL

Anxious?

JEFF

*Anxious . . . ?* You might say that.

MICHAEL

Hey, I don't blame you. I'm wondering what it tastes like myself.

JEFF

Believe me, that's not where my anxiety comes from.

MICHAEL

Besides, It would make a nice housewarming gift though, don't you think?

JEFF

Oh it would make this place warm all right.

*(Beat.)*

Look I don't want to get too personal here but you can't help overhearing things in cabs and-

MICHAEL

Well I'd love to give you a definitive answer, but things are kind of confusing right now and . . .

JEFF

Do you want to elaborate on that?

MICHAEL

I'd rather not thanks.

JEFF

Well don't you think it's kind of important that you do-come up with some sort of an answer? Because, in a nutshell you've just spent every penny you made since you came to New York-not to mention risked your future with Michelle-on a single bottle of wine.

MICHAEL

And how do you know that I didn't get it for my wedding? That I won't drink it at my wedding?

JEFF

Alone?

*(Beat.)*

I'm not deaf OK? I didn't pick up everything in the cab, but there's clearly a choice to be made between that girl you came with and this bottle of wine.

MICHAEL

I knew it was a mistake to split the fare.

*(Beat.)*

Besides, what makes you so sure she'll marry me anyway? I mean technically we're not really engaged.

JEFF

Well there is the small fact of this wedding that you're planning.

MICHAEL

See. Planning a wedding. Not engaged. I told you things were a little confusing.

JEFF

OK I'm sure I don't understand everything that's going on here-God knows relationships are . . . I just don't want to see you blow this.

MICHAEL

I appreciate your concern but-like I said things are a little confusing right now and-

JEFF

It's more than concern. I feel some investment here, knowing you both as long as I have: And Jill . . . she'd be crushed if you two-

MICHAEL

She'll get over it.

JEFF

No Mike she-You two mean a lot to her. She talks about it all of the time. And not just the wedding, helping Michelle plan it, but the future, all of us in the city, kids . . .

MICHAEL

Really she'll get over it. It happens all the time. Couples break up and-

JEFF

No Mike, she wouldn't. *She* . . .

*(Pause.)*

MICHAEL

Not to be insensitive to Jill's needs. But why should my personal path of destruction matter so much to Jill? I mean, who's getting married here? Theoretically, of course?

JEFF

No you're right. I . . .

*(Beat.)*

It's just that Michelle was Jill's first real friend in the city and . . . Look: You two mean a lot to her. And it's not just the wedding that-but the future, all of us, in the city, kids . . . Jill she . . .

*(Beat.)*

MICHAEL

The feeling is mutual. And I certainly don't want to disappoint Jill, but I'm beginning to realize this whole thing between Michelle and I just isn't meant to be.

JEFF

How so?

MICHAEL

It's complicated.

JEFF

*Try.*

*(Beat.)*

So what, you and that bottle of wine go off somewhere and live happily ever after?

MICHAEL

Why not? We'd find a nice cellar somewhere. We're both very comfortable below ground.

JEFF

Just disappear into the deep, like our friend and his plane?

MICHAEL

It has its appeal.

JEFF

Don't you want to get started?

MICHAEL

Started?

JEFF

Sure. A life together. Kids, family, that sort of thing. Someone to read those nursery rhymes to.

MICHAEL

Have you noticed how depressing most nursery rhymes are? Sure they all start sweetly, hopefully. Babies rocking peacefully in tree tops. Eggs sitting on walls watching parades. But the endings are so-Eggs cracking. Boughs breaking. I mean, Christ Jack and Jill . . . Not that it applies to you and your lovely wife in any way.

JEFF

Then maybe we should concentrate on the beginnings: After all, the way you two met . . . Some people would have something to say about that.

*(Beat.)*

MICHAEL

Oh?

*(Beat. Uncomfortably. )*

And what would they have to say?

JEFF

I don't know. What would you call it? Fate. Cosmic order-

MICHAEL

Divine plan?

JEFF

I certainly know lots of people who would call it that.

MICHAEL

Right well if I recall, it was your wife who introduced us.

JEFF

Still, I mean, what are the odds? You both go to the same small college in the Midwest. Never meet. And then, later, find each other in New York- a city of ten million. That has to be worth something.

MICHAEL

Hey some things just happen and, much as you like to think so, they have no meaning. No purpose. As much as you'd like to think so.

JEFF

You know, it's kind of silly. But this book Jill is working on, the one I told you about, one of these sects of mystics had this firm belief that everything in the world was connected by threads. And that there was a time when we saw the connections. But that we've lost that ability. But that under the spell of certain influences-meditations, potions, substances-you could see the important things in life to grab on to them and pull: Water, Food, Heaven. Since everything is connected. The trick, of course, is to find the *right* thread before you pulled. Maybe you two were attached all along and one of you chose the right thread and gave it small a tug.

MICHAEL

I've never really been one for mystical mind sets.

JEFF

Have my upbringing and believe me it would creep in.

MICHAEL

No doubt. But it's why I like this city. It's all about the tangible. Give me a good restaurant, a beautiful girl to fall in love with, a decent job to afford it all.

*(Beat.)*

Look, I'm sorry I . . . New York may have turned out to be a fairytale experience for you and Jill. But for us it hasn't been so simple. And to be honest, if that's what we're doing here, I've come to realize that, fine, I'm more than a little lost and . . .

JEFF

. . . A two hundred year old bottle of wine is going to save you?

MICHAEL

Like I said-I hadn't really thought it through.

JEFF

How about this then? We'll start from the beginning: Follow the breadcrumbs.

*(Beat.)*

New York: Why did you come here in the first place?

MICHAEL

Ah, the city because I-

*(Beat.)*

I don't know-I suppose I just ended up here.

JEFF

Like some leaf blown by the wind?

MICHAEL

Actually it was a plane. American.

*(Beat.)*

JEFF

So a plane took you here? That's your story?

MICHAEL

Not that there weren't extenuating circumstances.

JEFF

Good. The job.

MICHAEL

That came after. Later. I just fell into that.

JEFF

No one just falls into the financial world. You claw your way into it.

MICHAEL

I did. When I first got here I was floating. Looking for something.

*(Beat.)*

Of course when I realized how *expensive* it was to live here . . . well then I pursued it. The job. Aggressively. Used every connection I could find to get a shot at something that would pull me up in the world. But it was just a means, a way to get what I wanted.

JEFF

And what's that?

MICHAEL

Look can we talk about something else?

JEFF

We're just talking here, right?

MICHAEL

I know. I just . . .

JEFF

You were getting somewhere. What is it you wanted when you first came to New York?

*(Beat.)*

MICHAEL

The truth?

JEFF

You were the one who wanted the Russian evening.

*(Beat.)*

MICHAEL

Fine.

*(Beat.)*

Michelle.

JEFF

*Michelle . . . ?* But you didn't . . .

MICHAEL

Know her yet?

*(Beat.)*

Depends on your definition of "know".

*(Pause.)*

JEFF

Wow. Well, now we really are getting somewhere.

MICHAEL

Are we?

JEFF

I am. You've never exactly shared this part of your history.

MICHAEL

Hey, I guess we all have histories we don't like to talk about.

*(Beat.)*

I met Michelle once before. In college and . . . She doesn't remember. It's not something I like broadcast.

JEFF

You mean she doesn't . . . ?

MICHAEL

No.

*(Beat.)*

JEFF

So it was Michelle . . . ?

*(Beat.)*

Chasing her . . . ? What? Some kind of infatuation?

MICHAEL

You could call it that. It certainly beats stalking. Which is probably a more accurate word.

JEFF

But I don't understand. You didn't-Jill introduced you at-

MICHAEL

Right well, what you said earlier, about strings, connection? My first few years in New York, I kept track of them. The connections. I knew I'd meet her at some point. I had planned to meet her at some point. People like to think of New York as a big place but the circles that define your life are small. But the timing was never . . . And then one day, there it was: You and I in the same class at the bank. Your wife at the same publishing house as Michelle . . .

JEFF

Hey.

MICHAEL

And from there it was just a matter of time. We were all at the same party. Jill was talking to her. I used it as an opportunity: "I know you look familiar. Why do you look . . ." All along thinking: "Now I've got you." I saw the right thread and gave it a tug.

JEFF

Our friendship.

*(Beat.)*

MICHAEL

Look, our friendship may have started as-

*(Beat.)*

I was chasing her all along but I couldn't let her know.

JEFF

And now you've caught her so . . .

*(Beat.)*

MICHAEL

Or maybe I've been chasing her ever since.

*(Beat.)*

JEFF

What am I missing here?

MICHAEL

Missing, that's the key. It's hard to catch someone who's chasing someone else.

JEFF

I'm sorry but . . . Michelle . . . she's in love with someone else?

MICHAEL

I'm not the only one who chases after things.

*(Beat.)*

In college Michelle met this boy. And this boy was one of the golden boys of the college. For everything came easy to him. And they fell in love. And after college they came to New York to live, where Michelle would study literature and teach and he would write novels.

*(Beat.)*

Of course things don't always work out as planned. For though his life seemed easy, it was short. On a ski trip with some friends during their first year in the city he was coming down the mountain. And it began to snow. And he went off the path and hit a tree.

*(Beat.)*

JEFF

And does she ever . . . ?

MICHAEL

Talk about him? As far as I know she put that part of her life away. She left graduate school and took a job in publishing and locked that part of her life away.

*(Beat.)*

All of our secrets and dreams. We try to lock them away, build elaborate structures and walls around them. Keep them safe, so that no one will ever know . . . But in the end they all fall down.

*(Beat.)*

JEFF

Look . . . I'm sure she just . . . It's a hard thing to get over especially if you're young and- it doesn't mean she doesn't . . .

MICHAEL

What? Love me?

*(Beat.)*

They fired me.

What?

JEFF

MICHAEL  
The bank. Yesterday. They called me in and let me go.

JEFF  
I'm sorry to . . .

MICHAEL  
Hey.

JEFF  
But you know it means noth-

MICHAEL  
No.

JEFF  
It's a reorg-a merger, you know and-

MICHAEL  
Right.

JEFF  
And you're smart-you'll easily find another-Look: I'll call someone Monday, I'll step in-

MICHAEL  
It's funny, earlier tonight I was half-hoping you got the job, the promotion, so you could use your influence to save my ass. Not to mention spare me the prospect of breaking the news of yet another failure to Michelle. But now I'm not even sure I want to . . .  
(*Beat.*)  
Look, do you mind if we change the subject?

JEFF  
Sure.

MICHAEL  
Talk about something else now?

JEFF  
Sure. Anything.

MICHAEL  
Anything? Great. How about the donation of your wine collection to the neighbors or that awkward exchange between you and your wife over drugs.

JEFF

That was just . . . I'd be more than happy to but it's, um, complicated.

MICHAEL

Hey it's fine, I-

JEFF

No. I-

MICHAEL

Really. It's fine. I was just being facetious. Giving you shit-

JEFF

No it's-Secrets . . . Clearly you've *noticed* that things are a bit-

MICHAEL

Forget it-

JEFF

And you've been more than . . .

MICHAEL

Really, Jeff forget it-

JEFF

No look I probably owe you an expla-

MICHAEL

Really Jeff-

JEFF

No, hey I . . . look:

*(Beat.)*

Jill probably wouldn't want me to advertise this. But we've been going through a difficult time. Trying to get our life started again. And it hasn't been easy for various reasons . . . and she's a little sensitive about . . . It's partly why she left her job . . . Anyway it's like reading tea leaves. Her moods. I never know when it's OK to . . .

MICHAEL

Look. Really. Don't feel like you have to-

JEFF

No I-you're my friend and-

MICHAEL

Besides she told Michelle all about it so you don't have to-

JEFF

She-?

MICHAEL

Yes. Everything she-

JEFF

Everything?

MICHAEL

Yes everything. The treatments the-

JEFF

Treatments . . . ?

MICHEAL

Yes the fertility treatments. The specialists. The trips out of town. All of it. That you are trying to have a child and-

JEFF

Right.

*(Beat.)*

It's complicated.

*(JILL enters with the drinks and a bag of marijuana in a cardboard box.)*

JILL

Miss me?

MICHAEL

*Miss you?* We were just getting ready to send a *rescue* party.

JILL

I'm touched.

*(Beat.)*

So who had the vodka?

JEFF

I believe it was both of us.

JILL

So what were you boys talking about?

Mystical mindsets.

MICHAEL

*(Beat.)*

Oh?

JILL

*(Beat.)*

JEFF

He means the book. The book you were editing. I was telling him about your work. How you've decided to freelance and we began talking about the book you were editing last year. The one on mystics.

Right.

JILL

*(Beat.)*

Where's Michelle-lose her?

MICHAEL

JILL

She wanted to see the view from the bedroom. And what else were you talking about? Call me paranoid. But I doubt you were just talking about books.

JEFF

New York, the early years.

JILL

No really.

JEFF

Really.

JILL

But what, specifically?

MICHAEL

We were sharing secrets.

JILL

What kind of secrets?

MICHAEL

If we told you then they wouldn't be secrets.

JILL

Jeff?

JEFF

Jill it was nothing-

JILL

If it was nothing then why won't you-?!

JEFF

Because it isn't import-

JILL

If it isn't important that why can't you-!

JEFF

*Fine:* Following.

*(Beat.)*

I learned something about our guest. He followed Michelle to New York.

MICHAEL

Great. Thank you Jeff.

JILL

That's the big secret . . .? Following Michelle . . .?

JEFF

That's it.

JILL

But I introduced you at-

MICHAEL

Right well, you did, but I had known her before and . . . In college . . .

*(Beat.)*

Look, it's not big deal. We had met briefly and-it's old news really. We were rehashing old memories of the early days in New York. Training days. War stories. Old unrequited loves. Mine that is. That sort of thing.

JILL

So why the big secret?

MICHAEL

It's not something I like to . . . You know us guys. Our pride . . .

JILL

Well you shouldn't feel alone. Besides, you have company: Jeff followed me here too. Did you know that?

MICHAEL

Not really.

JILL

That doesn't surprise me. It was before you two met. And it's not something that Jeff likes to talk about: The past. Revivals. Merit badges. All of those converted souls.

JEFF

I didn't convert that many.

JILL

Oh I doubt that. You're generally good at whatever you do.

*(To MICHAEL:)*

But it's true. Technically he followed me here. When I got an offer at the publishing house, Jeff still had another six months in the field, as they say.

*(To JEFF:)*

Is that what they say, "In the field?" It's been so long I forget, the old terms and definitions.

*(Beat.)*

Anyway, Jeff still had another six months in the field so he sent me on to New York ahead of him: Throwing his young bride to the wolves.

JEFF

After I secured the perimeter of course; came down and rented a studio in a safe, nice neighborhood with way to high rent so my betrothed would feel secure. So I guess, in truth, you followed me here.

JILL

"In truth" he wanted everything set up before he got here. So he could "take on" the city even if he did secure the perimeter.

MICHAEL

Apparently it worked.

JILL

Yes it did. For him. But he's always been focused. At least on goals.

*(MICHELLE enters.)*

MICHAEL  
(*To JILL:*)

Look if you could-

MICHELLE  
You should see the views from the bedroom. You can see the castle.

MICHAEL  
Castle?

MICHELLE  
Central Park. The castle?

MICHAEL  
Wow. Just when I think I can't be any more impressed-you look *down* on a castle?

MICHELLE  
Forget I mentioned it.

(*Beat.*)  
Relax Michael, it's a fake castle.

MICHAEL  
That's right. We don't have real ones in this country do we?

MICHELLE  
Why don't you go out to the park and make sure?

MICHAEL  
I would but I was just getting comfortable again.

MICHELLE  
Yes, you're big on the comforts of New York.

MICHAEL  
The one's I can afford at least.

MICHELLE  
And even the one's you can't.

MICHAEL  
Depends on what you mean by afford. For instance, as I was just explaining to my good friend, I thought this bottle of wine would be a good investment. Besides, the wine is French. Not really a product of New York at all.

MICHELLE  
Chateau Lafite Rothschild . . . ? *Noooo!*

*(Beat. MICHAEL takes his drink and goes to the window.)*

MICHAEL

Good drink Jill.

JILL

Can't really take credit. Except maybe for the ice cubes. But I suppose that would be thanks to Jeff, for buying the refrigerator.

MICHAEL

So where is it? The castle?

*(JILL goes to the window and points.)*

JILL

Down there. Just on the other side of that clump of trees.

MICHAEL

Wow. It looks positively tiny. Does anyone else think it's strange that there's a castle in the middle of Central Park?

JEFF

No stranger than a sheep's meadow.

JILL

I've always thought of it like a vestigial organ.

MICHAEL

What's that?

JILL

In evolutionary terms: The useless remains of organs that were once useful in an ancestor. Like the tail bone. It's kind of like a marker of the past that we can't quite give up. Of course, at our old school they taught us that evolution didn't really exist. That it was wrong. Isn't that right Jeff?

JEFF

If you say so.

JILL

And how did they explain it? It being wrong. *If* you can remember.

JEFF

That it had a created function, originally. But as a result of Adam's sin and the consequent curse on all creation, humanity has degenerated and our body has lost some of the fine functions it once had.

MICHAEL

Fine functions? Like tail wagging?

JEFF

It would seem so.

*(Beat.)*

JILL

So do you think they've landed somewhere? The plane? I mean, it's hard to get out of your head isn't it?

MICHAEL

Oh, I'm sure they've landed somewhere.

MICHELLE

Michael, *Christ* . . .

JEFF

Who knows? They might have slipped below radar and landed safely on a beach.

MICHAEL

Don't hold your breath. But who knows, maybe he found Camelot somewhere off the coast of Martha's Vineyard.

JILL

I hear they're lighting candles outside his place tonight. Sad. You know I saw him once. It was a few months after I had come to the city. I was coming down a path in the park. A path I always took on my way home from work. It was one of the paths with the high hedges that you can't see the end of because they curve. Apparently all of the paths in the park were designed that way, to give you a sense of openness, of comfort, of relief from the closeness of the city. But because it was getting late and the hedges were high and the shadows were growing . . . this night, the path, it just seemed scary. And as I went further down it, dark and isolated. And then suddenly, in the distance, I saw this figure. At first I thought it was a statue because it was so still. But as I approached, I realized it was a person. And I just froze. Because he had a hood on, one of those sweatshirts with a hood on it that hides your face. And he didn't seem to be doing anything but waiting.

*(Beat.)*

I thought about running. Turning around and running. Because why would somebody just stop in the middle of the path, in this place and stand there? And I started cursing. Cursing my life and ever moving here because it was late and I was alone and I knew what would happen to me. But then I saw this flash, this little flash of silver near his feet. And I realized it was a dog, a small dog, searching for something in the bushes. And so I moved on. And when I got closer I recognized who it was. And he smiled at me. This smile he must have smiled at a million New Yorkers. And it was strange. Strange because

JILL (*Continued.*)

he wasn't moving. Because all of the pictures you see of the family, they're always moving: playing football or sailing or running down the beach or swimming in the ocean. And it was odd to see him still like that, someone you've seen your entire life. And I thought: This is what it must be like to live when the Greeks did. When Gods would just appear and mingle with ordinary human beings, have lunch, and then head back up to Mount Olympus while the rest of us are stuck here on the ground.

(*Beat.*)

Silly, I know. He's just a person.

(*Re the joint.*)

Is somebody going to light that? Jeff, why don't you do the honors?

(*Beat.*)

JEFF

Right.

(*JEFF lights the joint, barely does a hit and hands it to JILL, who takes a large hit and then passes it to MICHELLE.*)

JILL

(*To MICHELLE:*)

So tell us the story of Michael following you here.

MICHELLE

What?

JEFF

*Jill-*

JILL

What? It's funny that you can know someone forever and still not know all of their stories. But I've never heard it before. Tell me.

MICHELLE

You mean how we met?

MICHAEL

Exactly.

JILL

I know how you met. I mean how he followed you here to New York.

MICHELLE

He didn't follow me here.

JILL

That's what Jeff said.

JEFF

*(Overlapping. A warning:)*

*Jill . . .*

MICHELLE

That's not true.

JILL

It's not?

MICHELLE

No the first time we met was at that party. The new book that was being published. The publishing party. You introduced us.

JEFF

Maybe I heard wrong then.

MICHELLE

*(To JEFF:)*

I mean we may have *run into* each other before. At some college function . . . but if we did we never *remembered*.

JEFF

OK.

*(Beat.)*

MICHELLE

Michael?

MICHAEL

What?

MICHELLE

What did you say?

MICHAEL

Nothing.

MICHELLE

Clearly it wasn't. What did you tell him?

MICHAEL

Michelle it was nothing.

MICHELLE  
Did you-did you tell him that you *followed* me here?

MICHAEL  
I . . .

MICHELLE  
Why would you say that?

(*Beat. MICHAEL goes to the window.*)

MICHELLE (*Continued.*)  
Michael?

MICHAEL  
What?

MICHELLE  
Answer me.

(*Beat.*)  
My God, did you-did you *follow* me here?

MICHAEL  
Oops.

MICHELLE  
But you didn't even . . . how could you have-?

MICHAEL  
This really is a hell of a view.

MICHELLE  
Michael?

MICHAEL  
Look, it's no big deal.

MICHELLE  
It's no big-I'm sorry, but are you *joking*. Is this a *joke*?

MICHAEL  
Honestly?

MICHELLE  
Don't play games with-!

MICHAEL

*Fine.* I followed you here.

*(Beat.)*

MICHELLE

I don't under-we didn't even *know* each other.

MICHAEL

Yes. Yes we did. We went to the same school.

MICHELLE

We didn't. We went to the same school. Yes. But we didn't-

MICHAEL

It was a small school.

MICHELLE

We didn't even speak.

MICHAEL

*(Overlapping with "speak.")*

Yes we did.

MICHELLE

*When?*

MICHAEL

Does it matter?

MICHELLE

Yes, of *course* it-

MICHAEL

Look, it's silly-

MICHELLE

No, it's not.

MICHAEL

This whole thing. Does it matter if-

MICHELLE

*Tell me!*

*(Beat.)*

MICHAEL

Fine.

*(Beat.)*

“Nice shoes.”

MICHELLE

What?

MICHAEL

You complimented me on my shoes. It was at school. After a party. I was standing in the quad talking and you walked across it and stumbled and you had been drinking and you grabbed my arm to steady yourself and when you did you looked down and you saw my shoes. We talked for an hour. Clearly it was memorable.

MICHELLE

I . . .

MICHAEL

I also heard you talk. In a class. We had one class together. I was impressed. The things that you said in class. The way you saw things. And I . . .

MICHELLE

My God, a *class*?

MICHAEL

Yes, a class OK? That was enough for me. That and one conversation. Call it stupid.

*(Beat. He takes MICHELLE'S hand.)*

Look, I'm sorry I . . . I should have told you. I wanted to, I just . . .

*(MICHELLE pulls away from him and goes over to the window and looks down at the city. Pause. )*

JILL

*(To MICHAEL:)*

God, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to . . .

MICHAEL

Reveal my pathetic secret? No. It's OK.

JILL

No really I . . .

MICHAEL

Hey, no. Seriously. It's fine. I was going to tell her anyway. I was just waiting for the right occasion. Say our fiftieth anniversary.

JILL

*Michelle . . . ?*

*(Beat. To everyone:)*

Well, I think it's nice. Poetic.

MICHAEL

Sure. If stalking can be called poetic.

JILL

Seriously, I mean, just coming out here just on the hope . . .

MICHAEL

Hey, we all do crazy things when we're young.

MICHELLE

So you and Jeff-it was your secret all along?

MICHAEL

Until tonight he didn't know anything. I knew where you worked. Jeff mentioned the book party. I thought you might be there.

MICHELLE

Wow. You really did your homework, didn't you? Just biding your time. Just waiting for an opening. Capitalizing on my "luck."

MICHAEL

It wasn't like that.

MICHELLE

Oh? What was it like?

*(Beat.)*

MICHAEL

Nothing. I don't . . . It was like being in love.

*(Beat.)*

JILL

Well I think it's kind of amazing. Amazing and romantic.

MICHELLE

It's amazing all right.

(*Jill goes over to MICHELLE.*)

JILL

Seriously, *it's* . . .

MICHELLE

Really you don't have to . . .

(*Beat.*)

I'm sorry but I need to-

(*MICHELLE begins to leave. JILL stops her.*)

JILL

*Seriously.* You should be flattered.

MICHELLE

No I . . .

JILL

That he fell so hard for you.

MICHELLE

No, I . . . It's just-it's a hard thing to process, you know?

(*Beat.*)

JILL

Sure.

MICHELLE

It's just a hard thing to . . . I'm sorry I really need to-

JILL

Don't. Please. Hey. Look . . . *look* . . . It *just* requires seeing your beau in a new light.

(*Trying to make light of the situation:*)

I mean, I can't imagine Jeff making such a romantic-

JEFF

(*Playing along.*)

Hey, hey . . .

JILL

It's true. Or, in fact, doing anything *remotely* romantic.

JEFF

Oh I'm not *that* bad.

JILL

No? For instance, your proposal. What were your words? Something about wanting to get started.

JEFF

What's wrong with that?

JILL

*I repeat:* It's not romantic.

JEFF

It was *meant* to be romantic.

JILL

You still don't see it?

JEFF

No.

JILL

*(To MICHELLE:)*

See, he's hopeless.

*(Beat.)*

You're *lucky*. You're . . .

*(Beat.)*

In *fact*, did you know that before you came into the picture, in the early days, before we became a foursome, Jeff used to abandon me on a very regular basis to go on adventures with Michael into the city?

JEFF

That's not-

JILL

It *is*.

JEFF

. . . true.

JILL

Oh don't deny-*weekends*?

JEFF

*Sure*. Once and a-But "abandon?"

JILL

Yes a-every weekend night some new adventure.

JEFF

Not every-

JILL

Yes "every."

JEFF

I always invited you.

JILL

You *didn't*-

JEFF

I *did*. But you would never go because you were afraid to-The city was still a shock to you.

JILL

Ah. And it was a big help that my new young husband would walk in at five a.m. after his adventures in the city.

JEFF

And then the rest of the week I stayed at home with you.

JILL

You didn't "stay" at home. You used it as a base-camp. An outpost for your forays into the wilds of New York.

JEFF

Forays? They were innocent adventures.

JILL

Yes. Innocent, I know.

(*Beat.*)

Do you think I was stupid?

(*To MICHELLE:*)

Those days before you came into the picture? Jeff would be off with Michael every weekend exploring some new corner of the city, some unexplored borough, some hidden spot, pushing out into the unknown. And then afterwards, he would come home, early the next the morning, hoping to sneak into our bed before I was awake. And sometimes he was successful, because when I would wake up the next morning, there he was, as if he had never been away. At least he thought so. But it was never so. Because he would always carry the traces of his adventures with him. In his clothing. On his skin. Like souvenirs of a visit to some undiscovered land. And after every night that he would come

JILL (*Continued.*)

in from some new adventure, I would smell some new and exotic scent on my young innocent husband: tobacco, marijuana, new spices from some restaurant in some outer borough, strange new drinks spilled on his clothes, incense, perfume . . . *women* . . .

JEFF

Jill, I would never have . . .

JILL

What?

JEFF

You know I didn't-

JILL

What? Become seduced by this new world?

(*Beat.*)

I know: God still had too much of a hold on you then.

JEFF

You had too much of a hold on me.

MICHAEL

Good answer.

(*To JILL:*)

I'm sorry. He's being honest.

(*Beat.*)

JILL

Honesty. Good.

(*Beat.*)

But still I-even though I knew he was dependable . . . safe . . . worthy of my trust, I could see these things, these *influences* coming into him, entering him, and he was becoming a different person. And I was afraid because of the distance that was developing between us.

(*Beat.*)

And the city was becoming a rival to me.

(*Beat.*)

Until of course Michelle came into the picture . . . And I gained a friend, a companion.

(*Beat.*)

And I gained the courage to go on some of these adventures with my husband myself.

(*Beat.*)

And I've followed you on many adventures since then, haven't I Jeff? Far from our home.

JEFF

Jill . . . Look, this isn't the time to for-

JILL

What? Honesty?

*(Beat.)*

Tell our friends where I've followed you?

*(Beat.)*

JEFF

You followed me here. To New York.

JILL

Yes. Even though I was reluctant. Imagine that?

*(Beat.)*

Did you know that when we were in school, Jeff used to cut out articles, these magazine and newspaper articles about New York and keep them under his bed?

JEFF

*Don't . . .*

JILL

Why not? It's funny-

JEFF

It's not funny, it's ri-

JILL

What, your innocence?

JEFF

I was, what? *Eighteen-*?

JILL

Well then you won't mind if I tell that story then. Since we're telling stories here.

*(Beat.)*

After all.

*(Beat.)*

JEFF

Fine.

*(JILL takes another hit from the joint and passes it to JEFF. HE declines and JILL passes it to MICHAEL.)*

JILL

From the first moment we met and fell in love at our “little Christian school” Jeff talked about our escape to New York. And it was a struggle, wasn’t it? You had to be strong to escape all of that history. But Jeff had it all planned out.

*(Beat.)*

Jill would get a job in publishing and Jeff would get a job in finance, after he paid his dues for a year as a missionary. They could pull it off, of course, because Jill was a reader and Jeff knew all about New York

*(Beat.)*

And then one day, as the time came close for us to leave. I asked him: “So what’s it like, New York?” And he said, “Amazing of course.” And I said, “No, really. What’s it really like?”

*(Beat.)*

And he said, “You read, Jill. You should know. My God, you more than anyone else.”

*(Beat.)*

And it was then that I realized he had never even been there. This kid from a small southern town strategizing in his dorm room about conquering the world.

*(Pause.)*

Which, of course, made me love him more. For innocence coupled with grand ambition is an irresistible cocktail. And so my fall was complete . . .

*(JILL stops, unable to continue.)*

MICHELLE

Jill . . .

JILL

It’s O-

*(Beat.)*

I’m sorry. Here I am trying to cheer you up and . . .

JEFF

Jill look . . .

JILL

*Don’t!*

*(To MICHELLE:)*

He liked me because I read. Can you believe it?

JEFF

I liked you because you strove for higher things.

JILL

We were at a religious fucking school. Everyone strove for higher things.

JEFF

You were one of the few who strayed beyond the confines of our small world.

JILL

Well, I'm certainly much farther than that now, huh?

*(JILL begins to cry.)*

JEFF

Hey, hey.

MICHELLE

Jill . . . ?

JILL

I'm sorry, I . . .

MICHELLE

Look, this evening . . . I think we're all a bit . . .

JEFF

It's OK. Jill look we can get through this.

JILL

"We" can?

JEFF

You know without you I'm nothing.

JILL

I suppose I should finish my funny story, huh? Kind of rude to leave our friends hanging?

MICHELLE

Jill, look whatever you two are-you don't have to-

JILL

*No.*

*(Beat.)*

So Jeff and Jill came to New York. And he said, you're strong. And everything happened the way he said it would. And I began to believe it. And I became stronger and more adventurous. And I began to fall in love with the city. And I began to see how limited and oppressive my former world had been, these people that made me believe that I was only fit for having children . . . And so I was nothing but grateful to him for opening up my world. And on one of our adventures-my innocent husband and I found ourselves at a party. And it became late. And just as we were about to leave, the host pulled out a pipe and some white powder and invited us to try. And I said, "No" of course. But my

JILL (*Continued.*)

husband said, "Wait." And I said, "No." And he said, "Let's try it. When will you get the chance to do this again? Our life is going to change soon." Because we were planning to have kids soon. And that would temper our adventuring. But here was this person who had opened up my world, and I thought, "Why not." So I did. And I liked it. A lot. Because it was unlike anything I had ever know before. It was like seeing God. And my husband, my strong husband, well, he stopped. Isn't that right? But not me. I kept going. I kept going until he had to take me away. To someplace that could save me. And I thought, I'll never get over this. And when I had come back, I found this waiting for me. This gift. From my talented husband. And I looked out the window and I saw the clouds and saw New York and I thought, how far I've come.

JEFF

Jill . . .

JILL

I know. I'm strong.

JEFF

You are.

*(JEFF gets up and goes over to JILL. He is about to say something. Beat.)*

JILL

I know. I'm strong.

*(End of scene.)*

ACT II  
SCENE 2  
*All the King's Horses*

*(Several hours later, just before dawn. JILL is sitting on the floor in the dark in front of the window. MICHAEL enters with a glass. He's wearing a t-shirt and a pair of JEFF'S pajama bottoms.)*

MICHAEL  
Hey

JILL  
Hey.

MICHAEL  
I needed a glass of water so . . .

JILL  
Sure.

*(Beat.)*  
I'm impressed you managed to find a glass.

MICHAEL  
Actually I took my vodka glass to bed-couldn't go to sleep alone you know-so it was comforting to have it close at hand. Took me awhile to find the water though.

JILL  
Funny. You'd think Jeff and Jill's place it'd be easy. We should have pails laying around. Hope you didn't have to go out onto the roof.

MICHAEL  
No thank God. Wouldn't be the safest place for me under the present circumstances.  
*(Beat.)*

Thanks for letting me stay and-

JILL  
Sleep on our bare uncomfortable floor?

MICHAEL

Actually it wasn't that bad. Jeff laid out a sleeping bag and . . . It was kind of like camping out. Or when I first came to the city. No furniture. No money. No job. Back to the basics, you know?

*(Beat.)*

Couldn't sleep?

JILL

No. I . . . I'm still getting used to this place.

MICHAEL

You will. Get used to it. I'm sure it seems big now but once you fill it with books, wine, kids, heck furniture even . . .

*(MICHAEL sits down on the floor next to her.)*

JILL

I'm sorry about tonight, Michelle . . .

MICHAEL

Hey.

JILL

And of course my sad little scene . . .

MICHAEL

*Don't-really* . . . Besides, it's me who should be apologizing. You were nice enough to entertain us at your nice new place and there I go ruining the whole thing.

*(Beat.)*

JILL

You can stay as long as you want, you know.

MICHAEL

Thanks but I wouldn't think of it. As much as I like you two.

*(Beat.)*

Besides, this is your sanctuary. You have work to do: books to edit, authors to comfort.

JILL

No, I'll probably go back to my cubicle. Who wants to stay in a big old apartment all alone all day?

MICHAEL

Oh I'm sure you'll have some company soon.

JILL

I'm not so sure of that. Not that I wouldn't want . . . It's just that I don't trust myself. I'm not sure what kind of parent I would be anymore.

MICHAEL

Ah the people who say that always make the best parents.

*(Beat.)*

JILL

You know this?

MICHAEL

Absolutely. Doubt, uncertainty is a good thing. A healthy thing. It means you know you're deciding about something, important, something bigger than yourself.

JILL

You know this, for a fact?

MICHAEL

An absolute fact.

JILL

Good. I've never really like those uncertain bastards.

MICHAEL

Besides you've got that big old park outside your place.

JILL

Yes, the park.

*(Beat. MICHAEL starts to get up.)*

MICHAEL

Well I should-

JILL

*(Stopping him.)*

*Don't.*

*(Beat.)*

Kind of lonely here. Funny I can't seem to get to sleep in this place. Jeff sleeps like a rock . . . Although when I first came back from the treatment place he would wake up every time I rolled over. I think he was afraid I would run off in the middle of the night to "score."

*(Beat.)*

JILL (*Continued.*)

Thing I never realized about being up this high? You can see all of the places you might find drugs. The guy who built this place probably never realized it could be used for that.

MICHAEL

Probably not. Although it may be good marketing tool for the resale. I can see the listing: Pre-war with great view of the dealers.

JILL

Don't forget the park.

MICHAEL

Yes the park. Where would we be without it?

*(Beat. MICHAEL sits back down next to her.)*

JILL

Amazing really, that somebody could dream something this big and beautiful and green into existence in the middle of the city.

MICHAEL

Shocking really.

*(Beat.)*

Do you remember the first time you saw it?

JILL

Our first night in the city. We got all dressed up and Jeff, being Jeff, took me for dinner to the Rainbow Room to celebrate. And then, afterwards, we went for a carriage ride in the park. And it was so . . . Now of course, that would all seem . . . what?

*(Beat.)*

I guess I've become more cynical. But for this sheltered girl . . . Riding through the park at night. On the back of a carriage. For the first time. Seeing all of it: The bright lights, the big buildings, the future in front of her . . . It inspired vertigo.

MICHAEL

Yes.

JILL

And you?

MICHAEL

Much more prosaic. I came off the subway at Columbus Circle. Feeling this hole in my stomach. Frightened about what I has just done. Come here on this quest. And of course there were all of these guys at the entrance to the park offering me everything: coke, heroin, every kind of drug imaginable. So I bought a joint and walked into the park.

MICHAEL (*Continued.*)

And it was this bright summer day. So I just wandered along this path until I came upon the meadow.

(*Beat.*)

And it was this bright summer day. A Sunday in late summer. And there were all of these people playing. Kids before they had to go back to school. Adults before they had to go back to work. An enormous meadow full of them. And so I just laid down in the grass and watched them play. And it was nice. Nothing remarkable really. Just nice. The grass. The trees. These kids playing Frisbee. The buildings in the distance. And I put the joint away because I thought: Who would need drugs for this? And it was great. Michelle out there somewhere. My life spooling out before me: Hopeful.

(*Beat.*)

Until, eventually, the fear came back. And so I smoked the joint until I passed out and could forget the future.

(*Beat.*)

Which was silly really. I should have just picked up a Frisbee and joined in. Trusted myself, trusted the future.

JILL

Thank you. For trying. But you don't have to . . .

(*Beat.*)

It's OK.

(*Beat.*)

Really. I won't run out to Columbus Circle. You can go to bed.

MICHAEL

And miss the sunrise?

JILL

In a way I'm dreading it. Everyone says it's so beautiful but in reality it's harsh and unforgiving and unnecessarily bright.

(*MICHAEL picks up the bottle of wine: an invitation.*)

MICHAEL

Maybe we really should prepare ourselves.

JILL

Don't even think about it.

(*JILL takes the bottle from him. Beat.*)

So do you think Thomas Jefferson really owned this bottle?

MICHAEL

Stupid of me to buy it. I'm sure it's undrinkable by now.

JILL

You don't really believe that.

MICHAEL

No I . . . Hey, I've always been a sucker for hope.

*(MICHAEL starts to break down and then stops himself.  
Pause.)*

JILL

She'll come back you know, she just needs time.

MICHAEL

It'd be nice to think so.

JILL

Then *think* so.

*(Beat.)*

You know, sometimes I still catch sight of it. When the light is right. And I'm feeling hopeful. And the city hangs in the background like a dream. And I feel what I felt when I first set foot here: All of that possibility.

MICHAEL

Yes, all of that possibility.

*(Blackout. End of play.)*