

**THE OLDEST TRICK IN THE BOOK**

A Comic-drama in Two Acts

by

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(*THE OLDEST TRICK IN THE BOOK*)

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A Comic-drama in Two Acts

by

David W. Christner

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## THE OLDEST TRICK IN THE BOOK

CAST OF CHARACTERS (3 men, 4 women)  
(in order of appearance)

Hillary McNeil.....40, a professional woman & parent  
Naomi Perkins.....40, Hillary's friend and employer  
Nick Adamson.....40, Hillary's lover, an academic  
Elizabeth McNeil.....20, Hillary's daughter  
Eric James.....21, Elizabeth's boyfriend  
Adam Johnson.....72, Hillary's father  
Betsy Johnson.....72, Hillary's mother

### The Setting

The entire play takes place in the well-appointed living area of Hillary's fashionable Back Bay apartment in Boston. However, the location can easily be modified to fit any urban location. Act I is made up of two scenes. Act II also has two scenes.

### The Time

The present. The play begins late in the evening on an autumn day and ends late the following spring.

### Playwright's Notes

The play should be performed with a single intermission between Act I and Act II.

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ACT I, SCENE I

SCENE: Autumn. The interior of a fashionable apartment in the Back Bay section of Boston, MA. A living area with quality furnish-ings, a white marble fireplace and a large gilded mirror is separated from a kitchen, which need be only partially visible, by a counter stage right. There are exits and entrances stage left, stage right and upstage center. Against one wall there is a bookcase, fully stocked, and a bar, stocked at least as well as the bookcase. The lights come up on HILLARY MCNEIL and NAOMI PERKINS as they enter burdened with shopping bags from Filene's, Sak's, Lord and Taylor and other retailers of that ilk. Both Hillary and Naomi are around 40, the former tall, graceful and elegant, although somewhat troubled at the moment. Naomi is a petite and attractive and somehow has a harder edge than Hillary. Both are independent professional women, self-assured, and, one would gather, at the pinnacle of their respective careers and personal lives. Hillary drops her bags on the couch.

HILLARY

Just drop those anywhere, Naomi. I'll put everything away later. Right now I just want to try them on.

NAOMI

Again?

HILLARY

They look different at home.

(Hillary digs through a bag.)

NAOMI

Looks like you're pretty well set for quite a siege.

HILLARY

Where's the Jordan Marsh?

NAOMI

If it's not there, Nick must have it.

HILLARY

God! I might not see it for days.

NAOMI

Traffic wasn't *that* bad; he'll be here, if he can find a place to park once he gets out of the traffic.

HILLARY

He'd *better* be!

NAOMI

What does that mean?

(Hillary slips on a sweater and looks in the mirror.)

HILLARY

I love the fall.

NAOMI

You love the fashions.

HILLARY

*And* the seasons, even winter.

NAOMI

Which means wool.

HILLARY

There I something nostalgic about putting on wool for the first time each season; I don't know, a—a turning inward.

NAOMI

It's also very practical if you're to survive the winter's blast. If I didn't know better I'd think that you were beginning to believe your own copy. (A few beats.) By the way, the campaign you created for Filene's is brilliant. At least they think so, and that's what really matters.

HILLARY

Thanks . . . boss.

NAOMI  
Don't call me that. I'm your friend; that's more important.

HILLARY (Slipping on a blouse.)  
Thanks . . . friend.

NAOMI  
It was brilliant; *you're* brilliant, Hillary.

HILLARY  
Drink?

NAOMI  
Certainly, if you'll join me. I'd like to drink to you, to your . . . continued success and—tranquility.

HILLARY  
I will drink to that; if only it would last another ten minutes. (She goes to the bar.) Scotch all right?

NAOMI  
Scotch is wonderful!

HILLARY  
Do you *want* scotch?

NAOMI  
Brandy.

HILLARY  
Then I'll have the scotch. (Pours.) Here you are.

NAOMI (carefully)  
How's . . . Elizabeth?

HILLARY (reflects, then)  
Wonderful.

NAOMI  
Really?

HILLARY  
Well, she—says she loves school, and she seems happy, happy for Elizabeth. Things are far less turbulent, and I think she has her life in order now.

NAOMI  
Well, I'm glad . . . that's over.

HILLARY

I didn't say it was over; I don't think it will ever be over, completely. But we've gotten by it, and Elizabeth is . . .

NAOMI

What?

HILLARY

I think she sees that—she has choices now. More so than before. And she has to live with them, right or wrong.

NAOMI

Don't we all! It's called being an adult, and I just detest it much of the time. (A beat.) Anyway, cheers! And how's Hillary, really? You've been on edge, you know?

HILLARY (sighs)

I know, but I'm . . .

NAOMI

Fine?

HILLARY

Yes. No. I'm not sure. I saw Rubin this week; his office is supposed to call.

NAOMI

Ah, the good doctor. (Hillary nods.) Is something wrong?

HILLARY

I don't know. That's why I saw him.

NAOMI (concerned)

Nothing serious?

HILLARY

Just—a feeling. I thought I'd better have it checked.

NAOMI

A—lump?

HILLARY

Not yet. I really don't want to talk about it; it's probably nothing. Maybe I've been working too hard.

NAOMI

I hope so—on your salary.

HILLARY

I was kidding.

NAOMI

So was I. (A beat.) So, how are things going with Nick?

HILLARY

I'm not sure.

NAOMI

Happy?

HILLARY

Things are a little strained right now; I'm just not myself, like you said.

NAOMI

Well, when you get through with him let me know. (A beat.) Are you?

HILLARY

Am I what?

NAOMI

Through with him?

HILLARY

Naomi! You make him sound like a--a plaything.

NAOMI

You're not in love with him--are you?

HILLARY

To tell you the truth, I don't know what I am; I wish the hell I did.

(The phone rings.)

HILLARY

Would you get that?

NAOMI (puzzled)

Sure. (She answers the phone.) Hello . . . yes, she is. Just a moment. (To Hillary.) Rubin's office.

HILLARY

I'll take it in my room. Fix yourself another drink.

(Hillary exits. Naomi pours herself another drink then begins to look through Hillary's new things. After a moment, Hillary enters, looking stunned.)

NAOMI

Hillary! My god, what is it? (Hillary just shakes her head.)  
Hillary! (Naomi rushes to her and walks her to the couch where they both sit.) Tell me dammit! A lump? What?

HILLARY (woodenly)

I'm . . . pregnant.

NAOMI

Thank god! I though it was serious.

HILLARY

It *is* serious!

NAOMI (gulping her drink)

But not *terminal*. God, that look. I thought we were going to lose you.

HILLARY

No, not terminal. Just . . . pregnant.

NAOMI

Honey, there are a dozen things worse than a pregnancy.

HILLARY

Dammit!

NAOMI

It doesn't have to change a thing.

HILLARY (thinking aloud)

I knew it; I just wouldn't admit it to myself. I should have done something sooner.

(She stares into her drink.)

NAOMI

You can't do anything until you know; now you know. (A beat.)  
You can't be too far along.

HILLARY (distracted)

Six weeks or so; I'm not positive.

NAOMI

So there's no problem.

HILLARY

When Nick gets here . . .

NAOMI

I know. I have to go anyway. (Checks her watch.) Katy's still at daycare; they'll shoot me. (A beat.) Don't worry about this, Hillary. Everything will be fine, really. Now, I've got to run.

(She hugs Hillary and rushed to the door. She opens it to find NICK ADAMSON, standing in the doorway with the rest of Hillary's bag. He's 40, handsome, a little carelessly groomed, perceptive, and man who is not afraid to show his emotions.)

NICK

Thanks. I couldn't very well knock.

NAOMI

No problem. I'm on my way out.

NICK

Is it my charm or what?

NAOMI

It's not you, Nick, it's--

HILLARY

It is too him!

NAOMI

Evidently, it *is* you. The lady is not happy.

NICK

My charm?

NAOMI

Your sense of humor. See you Monday, Hillary. You two--have a nice weekend.

(Naomi exits. Nick pushes the door closed with his foot then moves to the couch where he deposits Hillary's stuff.)

NICK (puzzled)

What was that all about? (Hillary glares at him.) You two on a man hunt?

HILLARY

Damn you! You know, Nick, sometimes you really tic me off.

NICK

Yeah, my mother said the same thing. Now, what is it?

HILLARY

What do you *think* it is?

NICK

I--don't know. My room a mess? Did I leave the toilet seat up?

HILLARY

Don't! Please.

NICK

What is it?

HILLARY

I'm having the--second worst day of my entire life.

NICK

You've started your period.

HILARY

No, I *haven't* started my period. But I *should have*; that's the problem!

NICK

I see. You haven't started your period, but you should have.

HILLARY

You got it, Professor. No periods, not for a while.

NICK

My god! That's wore than starting it. *Much* worse.

HILLARY

You're very perceptive. For one of the lower animals.

NICK

Don't be nasty, Hillary, that won't help. Are you sure?

HILLARY

Oh, yes, I'm sure. The rabbit has met the maker, Nick. It's

HILLARY (continuing)

deceased, gone, caput! I just heard the wonderful news from my gynecologist. I'm going to have a baby, but--I'm not pregnant.

NICK (confused)

You're going to have a baby--but you're not pregnant? (Hillary nods.) Did you get religion?

HILLARY

No, I got laid; call it an immaculate--misconception if you want, but we got pregnant.

NICK

I get it--got it! You're not pregnant. We are.

HILLARY (studies him, then)

What you're thinking is written all over you face, Nick. Thank goodness you have the decency or the common sense or both not to ask if I'm sure the child is yours.

NICK (stung)

That's not what I'm thnking!

HILLARY

You're a lousy liar; maybe that's why I'm so--fond of you. Anyway, thanks for that. I don't think that lie will hurt anyone, and at the moment it does wonders for a very frail and frightened ego.

NICK (thinks, then)

All right. I admit it.

HILLARY (studies him, then)

You admit what?

NICK

That I lied.

HILLARY

I don't believe you.

NICK

It's the truth.

HILLARY

What is--the lie?

NICK

No. The truth is what I lied about.

HILLARY

Now, I don't know whether to believe you or not. (A beat.) You have me confused.

NICK

The truth does that to people, because they so seldom hear it. (A beat.) It doesn't matter anyway. What matters is that you-- that is: we are pregnant. And I'm the father.

(Hillary extends her empty glass.)

HILLARY

Get me another drink. Please.

NICK

Scotch?

HILLARY

Yes. A healthy shot.

(He pours her a tiny shot and carries the drink over.)

HILLARY

You're not joining me?

NICK

Not in my condition. (A beat.) Rabbit's dead, huh?

HILLARY

Figuratively speaking. They don't actually use rabbits anymore. But if they did, it would be dead and gone. (A beat.) Lucky rabbit.

NICK

And we're still here.

HILLARY

For a while I'm afraid. (Gulps her drink.) I'm thinking of suing that urologist of yours.

NICK

Malpractice?

HILLARY

No practice, evidently. Dammit!

NICK

They're never 100% sure. The tubes can rejoin. Nature's plan.

HILLARY

Certainly wasn't mine. I never should have gone off the pill.

NICK  
It was doing awful things to you.

HILLARY  
Not this awful!

(Nick crosses to the bar,  
thinking, and pours a drink.)

NICK  
Do you want me to marry you?

HILLARY  
What! Why would I want you to do that?

NICK  
Isn't that self-evident? Under the circumstances.

HILLARY  
That's exactly my point! I wouldn't want you to marry me--  
under the circumstances.

NICK  
What if I told you that I would marry you anyway, that I was  
going to ask you tonight--before any of this?

HILLARY  
I'd say that you were lying.

NICK (thinks, then)  
Pick up the phone.

HILLARY  
Why?

NICK  
Just pick it up.

(She picks it up hesitantly.)

NICK  
Dial--267-4961.

HILLARY  
That's your office.

NICK  
No it isn't.

HILLARY  
Yes it is. I know your office number.

NICK  
It's not my office, dammit! Now dial it.

HILLARY (playing along)  
Not until I know who it is.

NICK  
Shreve, Crump, and Low.

HILLARY  
The jewelers? (He nods.) Why do you want me to call a jeweler?

NICK  
That's where your ring is.

HILLARY (incredulously)  
My ring?

NICK  
If you'll have it.

(She puts the phone aside and studies him with an expression of affection and bewilderment.)

HILLARY  
Nick, we've had--have--a wonderful relationship, but we've never talked seriously about anything more permanent than--

NICK (snaps)  
A weekend at the Cape!

HILLARY  
That's right.

NICK  
Only because you refused to. I thought it was time we went a little further. That's why I got the ring.

HILLARY  
And you were going to ask me to marry you tonight?

NICK  
I was thinking of sometime next spring, but I'm flexible. You can set the date.

HILLARY

Stop it! I don't believe that you were going to propose to me tonight, not marriage anyway.

NICK

Then call!

HILLARY

Nick, don't make an ass out of yourself; that's your office number. I don't call often, but I have called.

NICK

Just dial the number, Hillary.

HILLARY

No! Even if there was a ring, I wouldn't believe you, and I'm so frightened--I almost want to.

NICK

Do you want me to call?

HILLARY

No, I don't want you to call. Nick, if passion is love then we love each other passionately. But are we committed to one another from--this day forward? In sickness and health? Richer and poorer? The whole nine yards?

NICK

Richer sounds all right. You might have to work with me on the poorer.

HILLARY

Not me!

NICK

Hillary, we have a wonderful physical relationship, and we're comfortable with each other. We have common interests, a similar worldview; Christ, our signs are even compatible. What more do you want?

HILLARY

Nick, I'll grant you that we're comfortable--with you in Cambridge and me in Back Bay, but I honestly can't imagine *living* with you, not right now. There's Elizabeth, my parents, my work--

NICK (snaps)

Your image!

HILLARY

Don't you start on me, Nick!

NICK

I'm sorry. (A beat.) Hillary, your parents want you to marry.

HILLARY

Of course, *anyone!* They still consider an unmarried daughter to be a liability, one that's not pregnant.

NICK

I've never seen you like this before.

HILLARY

That's because I've never been like *this* before!

(Nick sips his drink during an uncomfortable silence. Hillary starts to fold some of her new things then gives up.)

NICK

Elizabeth might very well thrive on a--

HILLARY

A what? More stable environment?

NICK

I simply meant that her behavior became--less erratic when we settled into what has become a relatively long term and stable relationship. She finished school, enrolled at BC; she's more communicative, she hasn't . . .

HILLARY

Tried to kill herself?

NICK

No, she hasn't tried to kill herself.

HILLARY

Well, that *is* stable, isn't it?

NICK

Don't play the cynic, Hillary. It might just become you.

HILLARY

Well, that's too damn bad because I am very angry--with you, with myself, with the whole damn world. Just I get this house in some semblance of order, I get pregnant!

NICK

*We* get pregnant.

HILLARY

Sure . . . we.

NICK

I don't understand how it happened.

HILLARY

It's really quite simple: during sexual intercourse the egg and the sperm--

NICK

Are you going to call or not?

HILLARY

I told you that I wasn't.

NICK

Why not?

HILLARY

Because I don't believe in coincidences, not of this magnitude anyway, and certainly not one that would work out to somebody's benefit. Particularly mine. (She goes to the bar.) Tell me the truth.

NICK

The whole truth and nothing but?

HILLARY

So help you god. (A beat.) Is there a ring?

NICK (thinks, then)

No.

HILLARY

You would have married me just because you got me pregnant?

NICK

No, not *just* because of that.

HILLARY

That and because you're--comfortable with me? Because we share a similar worldview?

NICK

Hillary, I'm going to answer your question without bringing love into it; I don't want to confuse you. Frankly, I don't know why I lied about the ring, and that is my damned office number, if you must know. I just went with a--feeling, a gut

NICK (continuing)

reaction. It wasn't rational; probably it was illogical, but it was real. You hit me with this news cold, and that impulse was all I had to go on; it felt right. It was like playing horse or the stock market.

HILLARY

That's very flattering--a horse.

NICK

I was making an analogy.

HILLARY

You were making a mistake! (A beat.) Tell me, Professor, how many times do you come in with a winner when you play a feeling at the track. What are the odds, 20 to 1? Better? Worse? What?

NICK

Sometimes it's worth the risk; the payoff can change you entire life.

HILLARY

Or ruin it. Oh, no. I won't have you playing the odds with *this* piece of horseflesh. Or do you think of me as a commodity--your little buttercup?

NICK

Stop it, Hillary.

HILLARY

I *am* stopping it; I won't have you resenting me, even hating me in a year, maybe two, for coercing you into a marriage you don't want.

NICK

But I *do* want it, have wanted it for a long time. You *know* that. And who's to say that our love won't grow, grow to a degree that's beyond or poor present comprehension of that feeling?

HILLARY

I don't think that's likely.

NICK

No, not with such a high degree of reticence on your part.

HILLARY

Or your romantic idealism.

(Nick pours another drink.)

NICK

What are you going to do then?

HILLARY

I don't know . . . maybe shoot myself.

NICK

Like mother, like daughter.

HILLARY

Elizabeth slashed her wrists.

NICK

That's not the point, is it? (A beat.) What are you *really* going to do?

HILLARY

I *really* don't know. There are a number of options.

NICK

Not one of which is marriage?

HILLARY

God, I love the way you scholars use the language: "Not one of which is marriage."

NICK

You won't even--put it on the list?

HILLARY

No, not now, and not for this reason.

NICK

I see. (He sips his drink.) What about . . . abortion, assuming that remains a legal and viable option.

HILLARY

It will. What about it?

NICK

Would you consider it?

HILLARY

Yes.

NICK

And--what about having this child?

HILLARY (impulsively)  
Don't be ridiculous! (A beat.) But why do you ask? Do you want me to put your mind at ease by telling you that I won't?

NICK  
Maybe that's it; I don't really know. Just don't do *anything* without me, okay? Like you said, "we're pregnant."

HILLARY  
But I'm carrying the child.

NICK  
I'm aware of the distinction.

HILLARY (softening now)  
Look, Nick . . . I'm going to need some time to think.

NICK  
Don't let your thinking hide what you *feel*.

HILLARY  
Nick, please, we've been all through that. Please--just go.

NICK  
Okay . . . I'm in the book.

HILLARY  
I *know* the number.

(He smiles and moves to embrace her, but she holds him away.)

HILLARY  
Please, don't. I . . .

NICK (hurt)  
What?

HILLARY (moving away)  
I'm--not sure. I guess I just resent you right now, not so much because you're you, but because you're a man and can't possibly understand what I'm going through.

NICK (thinks, then)  
I can understand *that*.

HILLARY  
Okay, that's a start I guess. Now get out of here before--before I start acting like a--

NICK

Woman?

HILLARY

No. An idiot. Now go!

NICK

All right, I'll go. But not without saying that I *do* love you, Hillary. I don't know what kind of love it is, or if it's strong enough to--to overcome all obstacles, either real or imagined, but I do know that I feel closer to you than I do to anyone else, whatever that means.

(She smiles, touches his face then turns, walks to a window and stares out. Nick goes to door.)

NICK

What are you going to tell Elizabeth?

HILLARY

The truth, I suppose.

(Suddenly the door bursts open; Nick turns as ELIZABETH, 20, rushes in. She is lovely in a brash and natural kind of way, intelligent and emotional. Her stormy adolescence has left her physically and emotionally scarred. When she enters she swings a backpack off her shoulder carelessly and hits Nick in the groin. He goes down.)

ELIZABETH

Nick! What . . . Mom!

NICK (breathlessly)

I'm--okay.

ELIZABETH

What is it?

NICK

If you don't know by now, I can't tell you.

ELIZABETH

God, I'm so sorry. I was in a hurry; are you hurt?

NICK (straining)  
I'm fine; you pack glanced off your hip before it--crashed  
into my balls!

(He limps over to the couch,  
holding himself and collapses.)

ELIZABETH  
Mother!

(Hillary rushes over, restraining  
her laughter.)

HILLARY  
Where does it hurt, Nick?

NICK  
You know damned good and well where it hurts, Hillary!

HILLARY  
Can I get you something?

NICK  
Demerol! And a cupped jock.

HILLARY  
I mean right now.

NICK  
Just don't make me laugh.

(Hillary and Elizabeth look at  
one another then suddenly burst  
into hysterical laughter.)

NICK  
Dammit!

(He grabs Hillary and pulls her  
onto the couch with him. They are  
all laughing together for a  
moment. Nick then kisses Hillary  
a little recklessly, and she  
responds in kind. Then she pulls  
away from him and begins crying  
and rushes out of the room.)

NICK  
Hillary!

ELIZABETH (puzzled)  
Mom! (Now to Nick.) *What* is going on?

NICK  
Your mother isn't what I'd call a feeling individual, Elizabeth, but right now, she *is* feeling something.

ELIZABETH  
What?

NICK  
Panic.

ELIZABETH  
Panic? Why?

NICK  
I'm not at liberty to discuss it.

ELIZABETH  
Don't do this to me, Nick. Now what is going on?

NICK  
I don't honestly know all that much about it. (A beat.) How's she been lately?

ELIZABETH  
A little weird to tell you the truth. Sometimes at night . . . I hear her crying.

NICK  
Recently?

ELIZABETH (not comfortable)  
More often recently. But she's been doing it for a long time; some of the time it's for me, because of me, I guess. Other times—I think it's because she's—I don't know, lonely or frightened. (Now she softens.) I feel that way sometimes, when I'm alone in the dark. It's like there's no one left in the world. You can hear your own breathing and heartbeat, nothing else. When I was little that's when I'd creep into her bed; it was reassuring just to hear another human being breathe. I think I was as comforting to her as she was to me. Now, when I cry, I just cry myself to sleep—and let her do the same.

NICK  
I'm sure she'd like to have you back.

ELIZABETH

I'm not a little girl anymore.

NICK

Maybe in a way, *she* is.

ELIZABETH

Maybe. (A beat.) So what's the matter with her?

NICK

From my perspective, nothing.

ELIZABETH

And from her's?

NICK

She'll have to tell you. Women—know more about these things than men.

ELIZABETH (thinks, then)

She's been so—weird lately. (A beat.) I know! It's menopause, isn't it?

NICK

I think that's a logical assumption, but—

ELIZABETH

I *know* that's it! Nothing else would explain her erratic behavior. She's been so weird.

NICK

Has she been a little weird lately or what?

ELIZABETH

Stop it! You've been a little strange too, you now.

NICK

Just a little? (A beat.) I have to go.

ELIZABETH

Wait! (She grabs a notebook from her backpack.) I need you help, Professor.

NICK

Of course.

ELIZABETH

I have to write a paper on Melville's *Billy Budd*. In three words or less, what's it all about?

Justice, or a lack thereof. NICK (thinks, then)

That's five words. ELIZABETH

It's a difficult book. NICK

Justice, huh? ELIZABETH

Or a lack thereof. NICK

In the British Navy? ELIZABETH

In the world. NICK

Oh . . . I see. Thanks. ELIZABETH

Go write your paper, and *read* the book. NICK

I will! Jeeze. ELIZABETH

Good-bye, Hillary! I'm in the book. NICK

(Elizabeth goes to Nick and hugs him affectionately.)

Don't worry. I'll take care of her. ELIZABETH

Take care of yourself too. NICK

(Nick exits. Hillary enters and heads for the bar.)

That won't help, Mother. ELIZABETH

HILLARY

It won't hurt either. Where's Nick?

ELIZABETH

Gone.

HILLARY

Was he—okay?

ELIZABETH

Fine. I think I just hurt his pride.

HILLARY

And joy!

ELIZABETH

Mother! You're getting coarse in your . . .

HILLARY

Old age?

ELIZABETH

Forty-four isn't old.

HILLARY (snaps)

I won't be 44 for two more months!

ELIZABETH

Sorry! Jeeze.

HILLARY

I'm sorry, Honey. I'm just—in a state.

ELIZABETH

I know.

HILLARY

How was school?

ELIZABETH

I had a good day; I'm liking BC more all the time. I—met this guy—

HILLARY

Guy? What's that—something between a boy and a man?

ELIZABETH (starts to leave)

Just forget it.

HILLARY (rushing after her)

I'm sorry, Baby. Tell me about this—guy you met.

ELIZABETH

I don't think you really care.

HILLARY

I do about you.

ELIZABETH

But not him.

HILLARY

I don't know him. But if you care for him, I'll try. At least I'll give him a chance.

ELIZABETH

I don't know if I care that much or not; I just met him a little while ago. But he's—different, and, I don't know—kind of naïve.

HILLARY

Be careful. The naïve ones are the very worst; no, I take it back. The sweet ones are the worst, the naïve ones next. Nick is sweet.

ELIZABETH

He's naïve *and* brilliant, Dean's list.

HILLARY

That's even worse.

ELIZABETH

Brilliance is bad.

HILLARY

In a man.

HILLARY

Oh my god!

ELIZABETH

He's also a jock.

ELIZABETH

Started at split-end until he hurt his knee.

HILLARY

You've fallen for a brilliant naïve jock?

ELIZABETH

I haven't *fallen* for him, Mother.

HILLARY (knowingly)

Yes you have.

ELIZABETH

I simply find him-interesting.

HILLARY

Tapeworms are interesting, and probably a lot less trouble.

ELIZABETH

He's from Oklahoma.

HILLARY

My god! Oklahoma. With the waving wheat and beautiful mornings?

ELIZABETH

And corn as high as an elephant's ass.

HILLARY

Stop it!

ELIZABETH

You started it.

HILLARY

Why isn't this brilliant naïve split-end with a bum knee at the University of Oklahoma where he belongs?

ELIZABETH

His dad went to BC. (A beat.) He's never eaten a raw oyster.

HILLARY

That's doesn't make him a saint.

ELIZABETH

I'm not looking for a saint, Mother, even if you are. I know better. I simply find things like that appealing.

HILLARY

His-innocence?

ELIZABETH

No, his ability to be himself for lack of being able to be anything else. That and his marvelous good humor.

HILLARY

Well, I can assure you that those naïve farm boys know all about the facts of life, so don't-

ELIZABETH

Mother, I practically just met him!

HILLARY

What difference does that make these days?

ELIZABETH

It makes a great deal of difference to me. (Hillary sighs and nods.) You're not being fair, Mother.

HILLARY

I know, Baby. I'm just not myself.

ELIZABETH

Yes, you are. You're just being that part of yourself that neither of us cares much for. But that's understandable—under the circumstances.

HILLARY

What—circumstances?

ELIZABETH

I understand what you're going through, Mother.

HILLARY

You couldn't possibly.

ELIZABETH

Nick told me.

HILLARY

He didn't!

ELIZABETH

Not directly, but I got the idea. Do you think I didn't notice?

HILLARY

Oh god, have I been acting weird?

ELIZABETH

Frankly, yes. But you can't hide something like that. You shouldn't even try.

HILLARY

God, I'm so frightened. How stupid!

ELIZABETH

Mom, it's not your fault.

HILLARY

I should have been more careful.

ELIZABETH (a little confused)

What can you do? Now it won't be that bad. You have your health, a support systems of friends and family. You can take supplements. It can be a *positive* experience.

HILLARY

Not at my age.

ELIZABETH

What?

HILLARY

I don't see how it can be a positive experience at my age.

ELIZABETH

Mother—it's—happening to women your age all over the country, all over the planet.

HILLARY

I'm just so confused and—ashamed. I don't know what to do.

ELIZABETH

There's nothing you can do, but . . . let Nature take Her course.

HILLARY (now a little confused)

There are other options. *You* know that.

ELIZABETH

Name one.

HILLARY

Well—marriage for one.

ELIZABETH

That won't stop it.

HILLARY

Well, no, but it will certainly make it more acceptable.

ELIZABETH

Acceptable? For whom?

HILLARY

Everybody concerned!

ELIZABETH

It already is acceptable. Besides, why does it have to concern anybody else?

HILLARY

Now, that's a very narrow view, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH

It's *your* body mother.

HILLARY

But Nick is certainly involved.

ELIZABETH

Of course he is. And I'm sure he'll lend you his support in whatever way he can.

HILLARY

You bet he will!

ELIZABETH

But it's . . . not his problem, is it?

HILLARY

How can you even suggest that it's solely *my* problem?

ELIZABETH

How can Nick . . . wait a minute! What are we talking about here?

HILLARY (carefully)

What are *you* talking about?

ELIZABETH

Menopause! What are *you* talking about?

HILLARY

He *didn't* tell you. Oh my god!

(Hillary moves to the couch and sits down in a state of shock.)

ELIZABETH

What? What!

HILLARY

Don't you know?

ELIZABETH (thinks, then)

You're not—no, no you couldn't be.

HILLARY

Why not?

ELIZABETH

You just—wouldn't. You—you couldn't; you're too smart for one thing. And, my god, Mother, I just naturally assumed you were talking about menopause. Are you telling me you're pregnant? (Hillary manages a nod.) Mother! How—could you? You're 44 years old!

HILLARY

I'm 43!

ELIZABETH

Forty-three then. With a grown daughter and a career and a house on the Cape and retired parents, who are Republicans for crying out loud! How did it happen?

HILLARY

You *know* how it happens?

ELIZABETH

How did it happen to *you*?

HILLARY

Oh, it never happens to you; it always happens to someone else, never yourself. And when it happens to someone else, you know perfectly well what to do about it. But when it *does* happen to you, you don't know what the hell to do. You don't have the slightest notion of what to do. Dammit! (A few beats.) I want you to do something for me!

ELIZABETH

Anything!

HILLARY

Tell Mom and Dad for me.

ELIZABETH

Forget it!

HILLARY

You said, "anything."

ELIZABETH

But that. (A beat.) They're your parents.

HILLARY

Which is why *I* can't tell them. You had them tell me when you

HILLARY (continuing)

. . . besides, they're your grandparents, and they've always been much more tolerant of my mistakes than mine.

ELIZABETH

ELIZABETH ~~ELIZABETH~~ Me to tell my grandparents that their daughter, my daughter, is pregnant.

HILLARY

Maybe you can put it a little more delicately than that.

ELIZABETH

Because your condition is so delicate?

Because the grandparents are?

HILLARY

Because theirs is. I'm sure I'm not your parents' daughter.

HILLARY

Won't you tell them for me? Please.

ELIZABETH

I guess so. Somebody has to do the dirty work.

HILLARY

God! What am I going to do?

ELIZABETH

The first thing to do is to be sure. (A beat.) Are you? Are you sure it's not—a hysterical pregnancy?

HILLARY

It's hysterical all right. *I'm* hysterical. But, unfortunately, I'm also very pregnant. I can feel it; from the second it happened somehow I *knew*. It was the same with you, but I couldn't believe it this time because Nick had a vasectomy. I tried to tell myself that I wasn't, but I knew I was. (A beat.) Now my breasts are tender; I'm nauseous, and Dr. Rubin confirmed it. I can actually feel this child growing inside me.

ELIZABETH

I felt that way too.

(They exchange an uncomfortable glance.)

HILLARY

That kind of sensitivity—runs in the family, I suppose. I probably didn't need to see Rubin at all. I could have used one of those kits.

ELIZABETH

If you say so, Mother. Well, what are you going to do? Like you said, you have options. (A beat. Then she goes on critically.) There is marriage, assuming, of course, that you're sure Nick is the father.

HILLARY

Elizabeth!

ELIZABETH

Then it is, Nick. You're sure?

HILLARY

Of course it's Nick. You *know* that.

ELIZABETH  
But you said he had a vasectomy.

HILLARY  
Well, it didn't work.

ELIZABETH  
Obviously.

HILLARY  
It *isn't* obvious!

ELIZABETH  
Yet!

HILLARY  
I see your point, but I can assure you that I have not been promiscuous, young lady.

ELIZABETH  
Neither had I.

HILLARY  
Okay, let's stop this nonsense right now. We won't accomplish anything by fighting.

ELIZABETH  
I'm sorry, I'm just—I don't know . . . maybe feeling kind of motherly.

HILLARY  
Because I'm pregnant?

ELIZABETH  
Maybe. It just seems funny that—I mean how the roles are reversed this time.

HILLARY  
I don't think it's funny.

ELIZABETH  
Not funny, funny—ironic. Now I'm in a position to—advise you.

HILLARY  
I appreciate your concern, Elizabeth, but I think I can manage quite well by myself.

ELIZABETH  
That's what I thought too.

About your—situation? HILLARY (carefully)

About my pregnancy! ELIZABETH

But you were only 16. HILLARY

A very mature 16. ELIZABETH (hard)

Obviously! (This hurts Elizabeth.) I'm sorry, I didn't mean that. HILLARY

What *did* you mean? ELIZABETH

I didn't mean to say that. HILLARY

But you were thinking it. ELIZABETH

I said, I was sorry. I'm not at my best right now, for obvious reasons. HILLARY

The reason's not obvious yet. ELIZABETH

Peace, okay? HILLARY (wearily)

Okay, peace. ELIZABETH (thinks, then)

What you have to understand, is that the decision I made— HILLARY

Was in my own best interest. ELIZABETH (icily)

I thought it was at the time. HILLARY

And now? ELIZABETH

HILLARY

Now? In retrospect, I have to say I made a mistake. God knows I'm not a perfect mother, Elizabeth, nor are you a perfect child. But I never meant to harm you, nor for you to-harm yourself. The abortion, I reasoned, was in your own best interest as well as mine. I . . . couldn't have known-

ELIZABETH

I didn't know either.

HILLARY

Elizabeth, you are my only child, not by any means the only joy in my life, but I love you more than I love myself, but that doesn't mean I won't-haven't make mistakes that you may never forgive me for. Sometimes even reason fails. I couldn't love you anymore, and I wouldn't love you any less for the pain you've caused me.

ELIZABETH

What about the pain you've caused me?

HILLARY

It wasn't just your pain.

ELIZABETH (hard again)

One of the things that hurt the most was that nobody even asked me what I wanted to do. In this enlightened age of yours I thought that was one of the things we women had gained: choice. I heard somewhere that we women were supposed to be able to *choose* what we do about our pregnancies.

HILLARY

You were a child, not a woman.

ELIZABETH

That may be so. But the reason I had an abortion was because you didn't want a child, not because I didn't want one.

HILLARY

That isn't true. Stop this; you're hurting me.

ELIZABETH

That's my job. Children always hurt their parents.

HILLARY

You're being malicious.

ELIZABETH

What's the difference?

HILLARY

It hurts more when it's malicious and from your own child—  
because that child is a reflection of yourself.

ELIZABETH (softening)

It's not malicious, Mother, just-inevitable.

HILLARY

Do you want me to suffer what you did to make us even? Is that  
what you want?

ELIZABETH

Oh, Mother! How could you think that?

HILLARY

What *do* you want?

ELIZABETH

Don't you know?

(Elizabeth turns and rushes off  
crying, slamming the door behind  
her. Hillary follows her to the  
door, waits, starts to knock but  
doesn't. Then she leans her head  
against the door and begins to  
weep quietly. The LIGHTS BEGIN TO  
COME DOWN.)

HILLARY (in the darkness)

I love you, Baby.

END ACT I SCENE I

ACT I SCENE II

SCENE: Late morning, the following day. LIGHTS COME UP on Hillary in living room; she looks elegant in a long luxurious robe; her hair is arranged nicely, and she's wearing just enough makeup to hide the dark circles under her eyes. She pours a cup of coffee with an unsteady hand, sips the coffee, holding back tears of anger and frustration. Finally she sets the coffee aside and walks to the mirror and studies her image, turning one way and then another. She is a remarkably beautiful woman, but as she stands there she begins to break, first trembling slightly before she begins shaking all over almost uncontrollably. After a moment of this she gives in, letting herself tilt back with her belly protruding forward. She wrecks her hair, rushes to the couch where she grabs a pillow and jams it under her robe. She emits a kind of hysterical laugh or cry and returns to the mirror to study her image. A KNOCK sounds at the door.

Nick?

HILLARY (confused)

Is it open?

NICK (off)

You're early. Give me a sec.

HILLARY

(She remains motionless, frozen in indecision. Then with a hysterical shriek, she musses her hair and starts for the door, stopping on the way to get a cigarette from a silver box on the coffee table. With the unlighted cigarette dangling from the side of her mouth, she opens the door.)

HILLARY

Welcome! *I'll* have to do for a doormat.

NICK (shaking his head)

Rough night?

HILLARY

I've had better. You?

NICK (entering)

Not as bad as yours.

HILLARY (holds out the cigarette)

Got a light?

NICK

You don't smoke.

HILLARY

Do now. Just started.

(He lights her cigarette from a lighter on the table. She tries to inhale and begins to cough.)

NICK

Smart, Hillary. Did you start smoking with Elizabeth too?

HILLARY

Leave me alone.

(She stops coughing and crushes out the cigarette. Then she assumes her pregnant woman posture and begins shuffling around the room.)

HILLARY

How do you like the new me?

NICK  
I didn't have anything against yesterday's you.

HILLARY  
That's the point, isn't it?

NICK  
What is?

HILLARY  
That yesterday's me is gone.

NICK (affectionately)  
Come here.

HILLARY  
No. (A beat.) Why

NICK  
I want to hold you.

HILLARY  
For me or for you?

NICK  
I don't know, maybe for both of us. Does it matter?

HILLARY  
Yes, it matters. Nick, I didn't call you here because I wanted you to be nice to me. I *don't* want that right now.

NICK  
Okay. (A beat.) Fine! I'm outta here.

HILLARY  
Where are you going?

NICK  
Away! Away from you. If you think I'm going to get stuck with a pregnant 43-year-old neurotic bitch, you're out of your mind. I don't think it's *my* kid anyway!

(Hillary is stunned momentarily.  
When she gathers her wits she  
grabs the pillow from beneath her  
robe and starts after him.)

HILLARY  
How dare you! You-you-*bastard!*

NICK (backing away)  
You're the one with the bastard.

HILLARY  
Oh!

(She hits him with the pillow.)

NICK  
Hillary!

HILLARY  
By god, I told you we were pregnant! (She starts backing him around the room.) Not your child. Do you take me for a slut?

NICK  
No, I just took you.

HILLARY (hits him)  
Damn you!

NICK  
You told me not to be nice to you. Quit hitting me dammit!

(She catches him at the couch, and they begin struggling. Nick grabs a pillow, and they begin exchanging blows between lines of dialogue.)

HILLARY  
Neurotic bitch, huh!

NICK  
Slut, you said!

HILLARY  
I'll show you slut!

NICK  
You already have! You know you just *let* yourself get pregnant to trap me.

HILLARY  
Oh, that is such a lie. You wimp! I didn't think I needed to take precautions because I didn't think you were man enough to have children.

Oh, wimp is it?

NICK

*Impotent wimp!*

HILLARY

(They begin to laugh now as they exchange blows and insults.)

NICK

Impotent? Then how'd I get you pregnant?

HILLARY

You didn't!

(He grabs her and they tumble over the couch, landing behind it. They continue struggling and exchanging insults. Without either of them noticing, Elizabeth enters with ERIC JAMES, 22, her new boyfriend. They stand just inside the door, watching and listening uncomfortably.)

NICK

You pusillanimous wench!

HILLARY

You impotent bastard!

NICK

I'll give you bastard, you slut!

HILLARY

You already have!

NICK

You fat cow. Give me that pillow; I'll show you pregnant!

HILLARY

No, Nick! Stop it! What are you doing?

NICK

Making you pregnant.

(Hillary is laughing hysterically now.)

HILLARY

Oh, stop it, please! I can't stand it.

NICK

There! (A beat.) Now get up you fat cow and waddle over to the trough to feed.

HILLARY

God, I can't get up. Give me a hand.

(Nick helps her up, and they spot Elizabeth and Eric.)

ELIZABETH

Mother!

(Nick has stuffed two pillows under Hillary robe; she looks about four months over due with twins. Nick and Hillary exchange a glance, then Hillary fluffs her hair and smiles.)

HILLARY

Oh, hello Elizabeth.

ERIC (to Elizabeth)

Maybe this isn't a good time.

ELIZABETH

What-is this, Mother?

HILLARY (meekly)

Outrageous?

ELIZABETH

To say the least!

NICK (to Eric)

I'm Nick Adamson—a—a friend of—Elizabeth's mother.

ERIC

Could have fooled me.

ELIZABETH

He's—my friend too.

ERIC

Eric James. My pleasure—I think.

(As they shake hands, Hillary removes the pillows.)

HILLARY

James? Any relation to Henry James—the novelist?

ERIC

No ma'am, Jesse James—the outlaw.

HILLARY

Is that so?

NICK

We're having something of a domestic-disagreement here.

ERIC

I surmised as much.

HILLARY

Surmised?

ELIZABETH

Surprised? He's not a hick, Mother.

HILLARY (playfully)

I should say not—a relative of Jesse James.

NICK

You're from the west then?

ERIC

I'm from the west *now*.

NICK

Right! Where men are men--

ERIC

And cattle are nervous.

(Hillary chokes on some coffee she has poured for herself.)

NICK

That why they call'em "cowpunchers?"

ERIC

I reckon it is.

HILLARY

Why don't you two cowpunchers mosey on over here and let the matriarch serve you up a hot mug of java?

NICK  
Make mine black. (To Eric.) Jesse?

ERIC  
Just for the record: I've never been on a horse, and the closest I've ever come to cattle is beefsteak. I will have some coffee though.

(Hillary hands Nick a cup.)

HILLARY (to Eric)  
Angus style?

ELIZABETH  
Mother!

HILLARY (politely)  
Cream and sugar, Eric?

ERIC  
Angus style!

ELIZABETH  
Ooooooh! Don't encourage them.

HILLARY  
As I'm sure you've already-surmised, I'm Elizabeth's mother. I hope you won't . . .

ERIC  
I won't.

HILLARY  
I—we—don't ordinarily—

ERIC  
You don't have to explain.

ELIZABETH  
You do to *me*, but not right now.

HILLARY  
Nick was—

NICK  
It was my fault, Elizabeth.

HILLARY  
It was his fault!

Not now!

ELIZABETH

Thanks.

ERIC

(Elizabeth and Eric sit down on the couch. They are obviously very much taken with each other.)

HILLARY

Elizabeth tells me you play football, Eric.

ERIC

I did until I hurt my knee.

NICK

Seriously?

ERIC

I stated for the varsity.

NICK

The knee?

ERIC

Just a strain. I'll be playing again in a week.

NICK

End or halfback, I bet.

ERIC

How much?

NICK

Forget it.

ERIC

Strong safety.

NICK

That's a back.

ERIC

You should have bet.

NICK

Right.

HILLARY  
Quick on his feet, Nick.

ELIZABETH  
I told you he was brilliant.

HILLARY  
You told me he was naïve.

ELIZABETH  
Both.

ERIC (embarrassed)  
My parents are—very capable people; I was blessed with—good genes.

ELIZABETH  
And 4.4 speed.

NICK  
Any professional aspirations?

ERIC  
Not football. I hope to become a doctor.

ELIZABETH  
Eric's father is a physician.

HILLARY  
A surgeon?

ERIC  
No, he's a . . .

ELIZABETH  
Gynecologist.

HILLARY  
Well, there you have it. We could certainly use one in the family. Maybe two.

ELIZABETH  
Well, this has certainly been pleasant, but we have to run. I actually just stopped by to get a sweater.

(She rushes off to get a sweater.)

NICK  
Autumn in New England. Can't be too careful.

ERIC

Like my granddaddy said: "Better to have and not need it than to need it and not have it."

NICK

He didn't *really* say that?

ERIC

Naw, I didn't even have a granddaddy.

(Elizabeth enters, carrying a sweater. She takes Eric by the arm, and they start to exit.)

ELIZABETH

See you later.

ERIC

Nice to meet you, Mr.—

NICK

Nick.

ERIC

Right, Nick. You too, Mrs.--

HILLARY

Hillary.

ERIC

Yes, ma'am.

HILLARY

My pleasure, Eric. Please come again—when things are a little less—

ELIZABETH

Bizarre!

HILLARY

Yes, do come again when things are a little less bizarre.

ERIC

I'd like to. When might that be?

HILLARY

I don't have any idea.

ELIZABETH  
Bye, Nick. Bye, Mom. Come on, Eric.

(They exit.)

NICK  
Well, he's quite a young man.

HILLARY  
Good genes.

NICK  
You liked him, Hillary. I could tell you liked him.

HILLARY  
I know, but I still-worry about her. Sometimes she still seems so-vulnerable.

NICK  
She's been through a lot; she's a tough kid.

HILLARY  
But still a kid.

NICK  
In some ways, we all are.

HILLARY  
Not me.

NICK  
Maybe that's the problem.

HILLARY  
I don't have a problem.

NICK  
Nope, you've got a kid. Maybe two.

HILLARY  
Other than that, I don't have a problem.

NICK  
In your opinion.

HILLARY  
In my life! (A beat.) Why should you care anyway You're-how'd you put it? "Going away." So you won't, "get stuck with a pregnant 43-year-old neurotic bitch." Very flattering.

I have a way with words.

NICK

Oh, you!

HILLARY

You know I didn't mean those things.

NICK

They why did you say them?

HILLARY

Because you were being bitchy.

NICK

How do I know you didn't mean them?

HILLARY

You'll have to take my word for it.

NICK

I don't have to—but I will. I'd rather believe you were just trying to make a point—than to think you really meant them.

HILLARY

Okay, then. Truce. No more hidden truths or needless animosity.

NICK

(He starts for her.)

HILLARY

No! Stay right where you are. I—want to discuss this like two rational adults.

NICK

With no *feelings* to get in the way.

HILLARY

You can feel—but not me. We know what comes of that.

NICK

You're already getting bitchy again.

HILLARY

I'll be as bitchy as I want because I'm the one carrying the major part of the burden here.

NICK

All by yourself?

HILLARY  
Yes, dammit! All by myself.

NICK  
Only because you choose to.

HILLARY  
Stop harassing me, Nick. I'm having a hard enough time with this without that. Just-try to help if you possibly can.

(He sighs heavily, pours a cup of coffee and sits on the couch.)

NICK  
What can I do to help you, Hillary?

HILLARY (thinks, then)  
What I want, no-need to know is what-what you really think of me right now.

NICK  
What I think or what I feel?

HILLARY  
Aren't they the same?

NICK  
Hardly.

HILLARY  
What you think then.

NICK  
I think you're going to do what you think you ought to do about this baby, rather than what you may feel you *want* to do.

HILLARY  
Very well. What do you feel?

NICK  
No different.

HILLARY  
Than what?

NICK  
No different than I felt before I knew you were pregnant.

HILLARY  
No different at all?

NICK

Maybe—more protective. But I don't love you any less, or any more. This pregnancy is incidental to my love for you.

(Hillary walks to an upstage window and stares out.)

NICK

Why can't you accept that? Not just now, but before as well. Why are you so frightened of being loved?

HILLARY

It's your—*behavior* I can't accept, not your love. I simply cannot comprehend you behavior.

NICK

Any more than I can accept yours.

HILLARY (turning to him)

You're not behaving like a man!

NICK

You're not behaving like a woman!

HILLARY

Because I'm not chasing you?

NICK

I'm not running.

HILLARY

Which is exactly my point! You're not behaving like a man.

NICK

You mean I'm not acting like you expect a man to act. You're bewildered because I refuse to be pigeon holed; I refuse to be the ideal son-of-a-bitch that you want me to be.

HILLARY (bewildered, fishing)

You know why I'm reluctant to have this child? Because—because —if it's a boy, he'll grow up to be a man, regardless of what I do, he'll still grow up to be a man.

NICK

You're missing the point, Hillary.

HILLARY

And if it's a girl, she'll have to grow up in what will undoubtedly remain a man's world.

NICK

Most of us never make it to be men, Hillary. We're allowed or even encouraged by our women to remain little boys. That's the problem.

HILLARY

What do you mean?

NICK

I mean that when you give a little boy everything he wants he gets spoiled.

HILLARY

That's what we women are doing?

NICK

In a lot of cases you are. You're giving men everything they want under the erroneous assumption that you're getting everything that you want.

HILLARY

But we're not—in your opinion.

NICK

You tell me. Are you? Is Naomi?

HILLARY

I actually got a little *more* than I wanted. (A beat.) But you're not spoiled.

NICK

I'm not a little boy.

HILLARY

What happened to make this little boy grow up?

NICK

I experienced firsthand the damage a spoiled child can do in a candy shop.

HILLARY

And that made you a man?

NICK

It showed me that I couldn't remain a child.

HILLARY

I take it someone was hurt—someone you loved?

NICK

No, somebody I didn't. That's why the whole thing was so painful.

HILLARY

That doesn't make sense.

NICK

I don't know that it does to me either, but, from what I can make of it, the very nature of an intimate relationship is one of joy and pain. Because we're imperfect we invariably hurt the people we love the most. The reason it hurts so much is because those are the same people with whom we share our greatest joys, our little everyday triumphs. That's why there's no real pain or joy in casual relationships; there's no emotional investment. I'll grant you there's physical pleasure in casual relationships, but that's something you're taking for yourself instead of giving to please someone you cherish. If you don't love someone, there no justifiable reason whatsoever to hurt them.

HILLARY (thinks, then)

Unless you make a mistake; because we're imperfect, like you said.

NICK

We're also intelligent, rational.

HILLARY

And passionate and compulsive and stupid and headstrong!

NICK

And usually at the worst possible moment.

HILLARY

If there was no love why was there so much pain?

NICK

Because sometimes we mistake something for love that isn't love at all.

HILLARY

Something like passion?

NICK

Or duty-obligation.

HILLARY (reflects, then)

Maybe you really are different.

NICK

We're all different; that's how we're alike.

HILLARY

But I think it might be possible to live with your difference.

NICK

And my occasional indifference? My checkered past?

HILLARY

Maybe I could learn to live with that too. (A beat.) If you can. I do know how futile and self-defeating it is to keep something painful bottled up inside.

(He goes to her and they embrace.)

NICK

It's almost gone now; sometimes, not so often anymore, I just-remember. It's like a picture of the black sheep in the family album. You take that picture out, hide it in a box under the bed, but damned if that picture isn't back in the album the next time you drag it out. It just won't go away.

HILLARY

Not until you stop trying to hide it. If you just let it be, after a while nobody will even notice. Sometimes we remember things about ourselves—stupid little things—that everyone else has long since forgotten, if anyone else ever knew. I suppose it's our way of punishing ourselves for those little sins for which we can't forgive ourselves. (A beat.) Nick, if I didn't have a conscience I couldn't live with myself, and if you didn't have one—I couldn't live with you.

NICK

Does that mean that you will?

HILLARY

Don't put words in my mouth. There are lots of things—problems to discuss.

NICK

Rhetoric is my life.

HILLARY

But it's not mine.

NICK

Nor is mine advertising.

HILLARY

If we were—to get together—

NICK

God forbid that one of us should mention anything more permanent than, "to get together."

HILLARY

I'm doing my best, Nick.

NICK

I'm sorry. Go on.

HILLARY

If we were to consider—a more permanent relationship—I would want to continue my career, of course.

NICK

Of course.

HILLARY

You wouldn't mind?

NICK

Should I?

HILLARY

I would think so.

NICK

On the contrary, I've been considering the possibility of a little sabbatical for some time.

HILLARY

You have?

NICK

Absolutely! I'd like to finish some writing projects, catch up on some professional and non-professional reading, paint the house, and do some landscaping. We wouldn't need two incomes.

HILLARY

You wouldn't work at all?

NICK

Of course I'd work; I just told you. I'd simply work at home instead of on campus. But unless I published something with popular appeal I'd never make half of what you do, if that.

NICK (continuing)

That's why it would make more sense for you to keep your job than for me to keep mine—if we were—to get together. (A beat.) What's wrong?

HILLARY

Nothing. I just—never thought you'd be willing to give up your position.

NICK

Position? Ha! That's what *they* call it. I call it a job, and long hours and inadequate compensation are never hard to give up.

HILLARY

You don't like to teach?

NICK

I love to teach, but I do precious little of it. I'd cherish the opportunity to do some research and writing without worrying about starving.

HILLARY

What about—your image?

NICK

Which one?

HILLARY

The one you have of yourself.

NICK

I think I'd be fulfilling whatever image I have of myself, but obviously not the one you have of me.

HILLARY

You wouldn't be threatened?

NICK

By what? Other men? Men who are out there being men instead of doing whatever they have to do to be more human? (A beat.) Hillary, I'm more than willing to accommodate you and your career goals in any way you desire. And I'll continue my career too if that's a problem for you.

HILLARY

It's not!

NICK

But if we had a home, perhaps—a child—

HILLARY

If there was going to be a child, I wouldn't even consider marrying you.

NICK

But there is going to be a child.

HILLARY

That's not a foregone conclusion.

NICK

I see. (A beat.) Would you marry me if there wasn't a pregnancy?

HILLARY

I might. Maybe. Probably. Sometimes I think about you at night when I'm alone. I think about you and wish that you were with me, not for sex, but just to reach out and touch, to hold on to. Elizabeth will be leaving soon, and the world can be a pretty awful place to be alone in.

NICK

You're only alone because you choose to be.

HILLARY (turning away)

No, I'm not! I'm alone because the one man I did love had a defective heart that even I didn't know about until . . .

NICK

I'm sorry.

HILLARY

Don't you know that love means never having to say that?

NICK

Only in novels.

(She turns back to him.)

HILLARY (thinks, then)

I'm going to have an abortion! That way I *can* marry you.

NICK

You don't have to do that, Hillary. I'll marry you anyway.

HILLARY

No, I *do* have to. That's the only way I can be sure.

NICK

Of my love?

HILLARY

Of my own inclinations. (A beat.) And I'm not sure I would want to bring another child into this world.

NICK

Now you're just rationalizing, attempting to justify what is clearly a rash and hasty decision.

HILLARY

But clearly my decision!

NICK

Your decision, *our* pregnancy.

HILLARY

Only up to a point.

NICK

You kind of have me over a barrel.

HILLARY

You didn't have me over one?

NICK

Double-barrel shotgun wedding. I see your point. But I won't object because I *want* to marry you.

HILLARY

Then don't object. That will only make this more difficult. (A beat.) I'm not as cold or compulsive as you might think. It's much more complicated than that. There are things you don't know.

NICK

You don't have to explain anything to *me*!

HILLARY

I'll try! Just give me a chance. (A few beats.) I've lost or almost lost everything in this world that I ever really loved—a sister when I was nine, a cat when I was 14, my husband, Elizabeth almost . . .

NICK

So you're afraid to love me for fear of losing me? (She manages a nod.) Don't worry. I'm tough as nails.

HILLARY

And your heart?

NICK

True blue and solid gold.

(They embrace for a long time.)

HILLARY

You won't hate me for the abortion?

NICK

I couldn't hate you, Hillary. I might not like you sometimes, but then sometimes I don't like myself very much either. And I'll never stop loving you. (A beat.) You're sure this is what you want.

HILLARY

Pretty sure. I really can't imagine myself with an infant right now, but I know it's happening all over to women my age and in not so different situations, but it's by choice. (A beat.) I'm worried about Elizabeth. I told her about my situation—my pregnancy, and she took it very badly. It triggered something, some underlying feelings that we haven't yet dealt with.

NICK

About her—experience.

HILLARY

About her abortion. I think she wants me to abort—to somehow—pay her back for—for my making that decision for her.

NICK

That's not a good basis for this decision, Hillary. She was a child; you're an adult.

HILLARY

I told her that; she wouldn't listen. I just . . . I don't know, take a chance. She seems happy enough on the surface, but, underneath her veneer of tranquility there lingers something very frightening. At night, sometimes I hear her crying.

NICK

Do you go to her?

HILLARY

No. I'm afraid.

NICK

Of what?

HILLARY

Probably of having to share more of her pain. (A beat.) Giving birth is very painfully physically; having an abortion is no less so emotionally, especially for a child. I think now that I expected too much of her, and I can't quite forgive myself— for what I've done to her.

NICK

You've also loved her.

HILLARY

That's my job too. (A beat.) Of course, I'm in a better position to handle myself in this situation than she was.

NICK

Of course. And I'll support whatever decision you make. I'd like to be more involved in making it, but it is your body.

HILLARY

You're a prince.

NICK

No, princes are boys. I'm quite simply a man, not always proud of it, but trying to make the best of it for lack of a viable alternative.

HILLARY

My god, I feel halfway at peace with myself, and the world, for the first time in a very long while.

NICK

Scared?

HILLARY

Half to death. You?

NICK

Shaking in my boots.

HILLARY

So, where do you want to live—your place or mine, assuming we do enter into a more permanent arrangement?

(They embrace fondly as the LIGHTS COME DOWN to end the scene.)

**THE OLDEST TRICK IN THE BOOK**

by

David W. Christner

ACT II, SCENE I

SCENE: Hillary's apartment the following day. LIGHTS COME UP on Elizabeth and her grandparents: BETTY and ADAM JOHNSON. They are in their early seventies, intelligent and have all the trappings of sophistication and wealth about them. Betty is serving tea from a sterling tea set.

BETTY

Now mind you, Elizabeth, I have nothing against pottery, but one doesn't serve tea formally from pottery--regardless of who the potter is.

ELIZABETH

And I don't serve tea formally at all.

BETTY

That's due to your age; it will change.

ELIZABETH

My age?

BETTY

Your attitude.

ADAM

They'll both change--one for the better, one for the worse.

ELIZABETH

Just like Mother, except she got older but not wiser.

ADAM

Your mother was--

BETTY

*Is!*

ADAM

Is an exception to that and a number of other general rules.

BETTY

She never took to serving tea, formally or otherwise. I don't think this silver has been used three times in 20 years.

ELIZABETH

I remember once. (They look at her curiously.) That time we were being burglarized. Mom let that guy have it on the side of the head with the teapot. That's where the dent came from.

ADAM

I remember that! Knocked him cold, didn't she?

BETTY

Adam! She was extremely fortunate that something--terrible didn't happen.

ADAM

Cold-cocked the son-of-a-bitch!

BETTY

She could have been killed!

ELIZABETH

Mother has always been able to take care of herself--up to now anyway.

BETTY

What does that mean?

ELIZABETH

Oh . . . nothing.

BETTY

Tell us about this new young man of yours.

ELIZABETH

He isn't *mine*.

ADAM

Where did you say he's from?

ELIZABETH

I didn't.

BETTY

Didn't you say BC?

ELIZABETH  
I met him at BC; he's not from there.

BETTY  
Is he--Catholic?

ELIZABETH  
Not that I know of.

ADAM  
Where the hell is he from?

ELIZABETH  
Oklahoma.

ADAM  
My god! Oklahoma.

BETTY  
Then he's a Protestant?

ELIZABETH  
We haven't discussed his religion.

ADAM  
What brought him East?

ELIZABETH  
Amtrak.

ADAM  
Jesus

BETTY  
Adam!

ADAM  
Just like your mother. Can't get a straight answer. When I was growing up we learned to respect our elders.

BETTY  
Adam, Elizabeth has heard all this before.

ELIZABETH  
Many, many, many times.

ADAM  
No, I've said it many, many times, but she's never really heard it.

ELIZABETH

I can quote that speech verbatim.

ADAM

Doesn't mean you've heard it.

ELIZABETH

Just because I've not heeded doesn't mean I haven't heard. And I've done every bit as well as *your* daughter.

ADAM

Betty, tell her not to drag Hillary into this.

BETTY

Elizabeth, daughters ought not to be too critical of their mothers.

ELIZABETH

Works both ways.

ADAM (to Betty)

We didn't fail with Hillary; in many ways, perhaps too many, she's an extraordinary woman.

ELIZABETH

But she isn't the child you envisioned?

BETTY

What child is?

ELIZABETH

That's my point. You never stop trying to make your children and your children's children into what you want them to be.

ADAM

Human nature.

ELIZABETH

What is?

ADAM

To want the best for your children and their children.

ELIZABETH

And father knows best, right? Or mother, if you don't have a father.

BETTY

You mother has done everything for you, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH

Which is exactly why I've had so much trouble doing anything for myself! Can't you see that?

(Betty and Adam show some sighs of discomfort and concern over this emotional outburst.)

BETTY

What is it, Elizabeth? (She goes to her.) Something has you upset.

ELIZABETH

Oh, god . . .

BETTY

Something about this young man?

(Elizabeth sighs heavily and gets control of her emotions.)

BETTY

What is it, Elizabeth?

(Elizabeth goes to the liquor cabinet then returns to the coffee table with a bottle of Brandy. She pours a shot into each teacup.)

BETTY

Elizabeth!

ADAM

Leave her be. A little Brandy won't hurt anything.

ELIZABETH

I know it's not formal, but you're both going to need a drink. So am I.

ADAM

I have a bad feeling about this.

BETTY

You're not . . .

ELIZABETH

Pregnant?

Yes.

BETTY

No.

ELIZABETH

Thank god.

BETTY

I'm careful.

ELIZABETH

We don't want to hear this.

ADAM

Yes, we do.

BETTY

Go on, then.

ADAM

What is it, Elizabeth?

BETTY

If you're not pregnant, it can't be all that bad.

ADAM

Sit down, Papa.

ELIZABETH

I'll do no such thing. By god I was erect when this country elected a peanut farmer to the Presidency; if I can stand through that I guess I can stand through anything!

ADAM

You were sloshed, Adam, erect, but horizontal. Now sit down and drink--your Brandy.

BETTY

(He sits and drinks.)

ELIZABETH

It's . . . Mother.

BETTY

Hillary?

ELIZABETH

Yes, your daughter, my mother. (A beat.) She's gotten herself . . . into quite a predicament.

ADAM  
Christ! How much?

ELIZABETH  
It's not money.

ADAM  
Well, if it's not money, it can't be all that bad.

BETTY  
Is she in some kind of--trouble?

ELIZABETH  
She certainly is!

ADAM  
What kind of trouble?

ELIZABETH  
The worst--trouble, trouble.

ADAM  
Double trouble?

ELIZABETH  
Exactly. She *is* what you suspected I might have been. (A beat.) She's--

BETTY  
Don't say it!

ELIZABETH  
Pregnant.

ADAM  
She said not to say it!

ELIZABETH  
Too late. You can't avoid the issue.

ADAM  
Pregnant!

BETTY  
My word! How?

ADAM  
Who?

Nick. ELIZABETH

Nick! ADAM

Nick? How could he do this to us? BETTY

He didn't do it to you. ELIZABETH

She's 44-years old. BETTY

Forty *three*! ELIZABETH

Hand me the Brandy. ADAM

(Elizabeth hands him the bottle.)

What are you going to do? BETTY

Have another drink. ADAM

About your daughter? BETTY

My daughter? ADAM

Hillary! What are you going to do about her? BETTY

Ground her? ADAM (thinks, then)

You're no help. BETTY

What can I do? She 44-years old. ADAM

She only 43; don't make it any worse than it already is. BETTY

ELIZABETH

Marry her off, Papa--shotgun wedding.

BETTY

This is quite serious, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH

I know. Mother isn't the first one in the family to have an unwanted pregnancy.

BETTY

This is different. You hardly expect your--

ELIZABETH

Granddaughter's mother?

BETTY

Yes, your granddaughter's mother. You hardly expect her to get pregnant, at her age.

ELIZABETH

Particularly if she's single.

ADAM

It's those goddamn liberals!

BETTY (wearily)

Oh, Adam, for god's sake! Don't start.

ELIZABETH

Which liberals, Papa?

ADAM

All of them!

BETTY

This is a personal problem, Adam, not a political one.

ADAM

Liberals are everybody's problem.

BETTY

The only problem here is deciding what to do about Hillary's predicament.

ELIZABETH

Why do you have to decide anything?

BETTY  
Because we're her parents.

ELIZABETH  
Not anymore.

BETTY  
Elizabeth, you never stop being a parent.

ELIZABETH  
If you ever are one.

BETTY (ignoring her comment)  
I assume she won't want to have this child.

ELIZABETH  
Why not?

BETTY  
Well, I just don't think--it would fit--her lifestyle.

ELIZABETH  
Or image.

BETTY  
Besides, she--she just--*can't*.

ELIZABETH  
Wouldn't fit your image either. Not the one you have of Hillary or the one you have of yourselves.

BETTY  
Don't be impudent.

ADAM  
Or so damned perspective.

ELIZABETH  
God! It is so easy to know what to do about somebody else's pregnancy.

BETTY  
What do you think she should do? She's your mother.

ELIZABETH  
I won't even pretend to know what she should do, but I know what she shouldn't do.

ADAM  
I suppose I should have a talk with the young man.

BETTY

Nick is not exactly a "young man," Papa.

ADAM

Whatever he is, I probably ought to have a word with him.

ELIZABETH

What on earth for?

ADAM

To ascertain what *his* plans are.

BETTY

Hillary isn't an adolescent, Adam.

ADAM

Well, she's behaving like one, evidently. The obligations remain the same nonetheless. And I'm her father. And is a father not his daughter's keeper?

ELIZABETH

What?

ADAM

Didn't somebody say that?

ELIZABETH

Jesus!

ADAM

That's right, Jesus! He's the one. "Is a father not his daughter's keeper?"

ELIZABETH

He said nothing of the kind. Jesus didn't even have a daughter.

ADAM

Well, if he'd had one, he would have said it.

BETTY

Let's not get Hillary mixed up with Jesus.

ELIZABETH

Mother couldn't be anymore mixed up than she already is.

BETTY

And it's our-obligation to-to help.

ELIZABETH  
In what way?

ADAM  
In any way we can.

(The door opens, and Hillary breezes in carrying a couple of bags of groceries.)

ELIZABETH  
Ah, the prodigal daughter returns.

ADAM  
Shall I slay the fatted calf?

(Hillary puts the bags on the counter then crosses to give her mother a peck on the cheek.)

HILLARY (to Adam)  
No fatted calf, but there is a codfish in one of those bags that needs cleaning. You can do that. (A beat. Then to Elizabeth.) Where were you last night?

ELIZABETH  
Sex orgy in the jock dorm at BC.

HILLARY  
Fun?

ELIZABETH  
Had a ball.

HILLARY  
I don't believe that for a moment.

ELIZABETH  
You probably wouldn't believe the truth, so I told you a lie. Now we know where we stand. (A beat.) You weren't home either, so how'd know I wasn't.

HILLARY  
I called.

ADAM  
Filletted or steaked?

HILLARY  
Filletted, please.

ELIZABETH

That's how I knew you were out. I called to tell you I wouldn't be home. I didn't want you to worry.

HILLARY

Were you out with the outlaw?

ELIZABETH

Outlaw!

ADAM

Do you say, "outlaw?"

ELIZABETH

He's *not* an outlaw.

HILLARY

He said he was.

ELIZABETH

He said he was *related* to an outlaw.

ADAM

I won't have my granddaughter cavorting with outlaws.

ELIZABETH

I wasn't cavorting.

BETTY

She wasn't cavorting.

ADAM

What were you doing?

ELIZABETH

That's a personal matter.

ADAM

No if it was with an outlaw!

ELIZABETH

For god's sake, he's not an outlaw! He's a-a football player.

BETTY

Oh my *god*! That's worse than an outlaw. Elizabeth--a--a--  
football player, my word!

ELIZABETH

Actually, he's a brilliant and sensitive young man who just

ELIZABETH (continuing)  
happens to play football. Now stops this nonsense. This  
subterfuge isn't fooling anyone, Mother.

HILLARY  
Subterfuge is it?

ELIZABETH  
Isn't it? Something to keep us all from facing the—real issue?

HILLARY  
The issue, yes; you clever girl. (A beat.) You must have  
already told them the wonderful news.

ELIZABETH  
You did plead with me to tell them.

HILLARY  
And I decided to plead with you not to, but I missed making a  
connection.

ELIZABETH  
You decided to tell them yourself?

HILLARY  
I actually decided not to tell them at all.

ELIZABETH  
Why?

HILLARY  
Because things have changed.

BETTY  
Then you're not--

HILLARY  
Pregnant?

ELIZABETH  
Yes.

HILLARY  
Yes.

BETTY  
Yes, you're not?

HILLARY  
No, I am.

ELIZABETH

Then what changed?

HILLARY

The--situation. The situation has changed--for the better. I wanted to tell you last night.

ELIZABETH

But I wasn't home.

HILLARY

Neither was I.

BETTY

Don't you two start fighting.

HILLARY

We're all through fighting, Mother.

ADAM

Fish is all set. Somebody coming for dinner?

ELIZABETH

Guess who?

ADAM

The young man.

HILLARY

Nick is dining with me later this evening.

ADAM

Good. I want to have a word with him.

HILLARY

That won't be necessary.

ADAM

I'll be the judge of that.

ELIZABETH

And the jury.

HILLARY

We--do have some news for you.

ELIZABETH

Elizabeth told us all about it.

HILLARY  
Elizabeth doesn't know all about it.

BETTY  
I just don't understand how it happened.

HILLARY  
You've just forgotten, Mother.

ADAM (insulted)  
She certainly has not!

BETTY  
I mean to a woman of your age and position.

HILLARY  
Age is no barrier to random misfortune. And I'm not *that* old.

ELIZABETH  
How old?

HILLARY  
Past--the child bearing years.

ELIZABETH  
Obviously.

ADAM  
When he gets here we'll get things settled.

HILLARY  
Daddy, things are settled.

ELIZABETH  
They are?

BETTY  
How so?

HILLARY  
Nick and I have decided to get married--I think.

ELIZABETH  
When?

ADAM  
Damn soon, I hope!

ELIZABETH  
When did you decide this?

HILLARY

Last night, but he--we've been considering it for some time.

ELIZABETH

That's--great.

BETTY

Then it is all settled. Thank goodness.

ADAM

Just a minute! Isn't Nick a Democrat?

BETTY

Don't bother with trivialities, Adam.

ADAM

Trivialities! I am a direct descendent of a man who signed the Declarations of Independence.

HILLARY

Which made him a radical! So don't fret over politics. Nick is a decent guy, and I--love him.

ADAM

A Democrat! You love a Democrat?

BETTY

Stop it, Adam. Hillary is very fortunate to have . . .

HILLARY

Bagged a man at my age?

ELIZABETH

I can't believe this.

BETTY

I'm sure you didn't *bag* him, Hillary.

HILLARY

Sure I did. Oldest trick in the book. At least that's what people will say. Goes hand in hand with the oldest profession.

ADAM

It's all settled then?

HILLARY

All settled.

ELIZABETH

Not--all. What about--your pregnancy.

HILLARY  
We discussed that, naturally.

BETTY  
Elizabeth, please.

ELIZABETH  
Please what?

BETTY  
Please don't?

ELIZABETH  
What about your pregnancy, Mother?

HILLARY  
What's wrong with you, Elizabeth?

ELIZABETH  
Me! What's wrong with me? (A beat.) Nothing. Nothing is wrong with me!

HILLARY  
I don't understand this.

ELIZABETH  
All I want is for you to answer a simple question.

HILLARY  
All right. I'll tell you what I've decided to do about--my pregnancy.

ELIZABETH  
What you have decided.

HILLARY  
Nick and I have agreed that--that under the circumstances--an abortion would be the most appropriate alternative.

ELIZABETH (thinks, then)  
No. No! I won't permit it!

HILLARY  
It's not for you to permit or not permit.

ELIZABETH  
Is that what Nicks wants?

BETTY  
I think we'd better go, Adam.

ADAM

I want to see Nick.

(She grabs him and they start for the door.)

BETTY

You can see him another time.

HILLARY

Thank you, Mother.

BETTY (leaving with Adam)

Let us know if there's anything we can do.

(Hillary closes the door, crosses to the coffee table and opens a bottle of spring water. Elizabeth sits, brooding silently.)

HILLARY

Don't you want me to marry Nick? (Silence.) I thought you liked him, very much. (Silence.) Elizabeth?

ELIZABETH

I do like Nick, and I'd be very happy to see you marry him.

HILLARY

So what's the problem?

ELIZABETH

You know very well what the problem is.

HILLARY (nods)

The abortion.

ELIZABETH

Why have an abortion if you're getting married? What kind of sense does that make?

HILLARY

It's very difficult to understand.

ELIZABETH

But for me it was simple: No marriage, no father, no means of support, therefor no child.

HILLARY

You were neither physically nor emotionally mature enough to have a child.

ELIZABETH

I was obviously physically mature enough.

HILLARY

To *bear* a child, not have one. The former is much simpler than the latter. That should be painfully clear to both of us by now.

ELIZABETH

But you could *have* a child; that's the point. You and Nick could give a child everything. (A beat.) I can't believe Nick would permit you to have an abortion.

HILLARY

It isn't his function to permit anything. I consulted him, and he will voluntarily support whatever decision--

ELIZABETH

You make!

HILLARY

Yes.

ELIZABETH

So you get to make decisions for yourself. For Nick. For me. Who else, Mother?

HILLARY

I don't have to make them for anybody else.

ELIZABETH

Thank god for that.

(Hillary reaches out to touch Elizabeth, but she jerks away.)

HILLARY

Elizabeth, what's happening to us?

ELIZABETH

Not us, Mother, *me*! And it's not just what's happening now, it's what happened four yeas ago.

HILLARY

I know that, Baby.

ELIZABETH

No, you don't know it. You think you know it, but you can't because you can't feel what I feel. There's no way I can every

ELIZABETH (continuing)

fully forgive you for what you made me do. Never! I've harbored a deep resentment, even hate, for you all this time. Now I can't keep it inside any longer; I love you a lot, but sometimes I still hate you. That's when I find it hard to live with myself—because of that hate. You taught me to love; you also taught me to hate, and it's because of the first that I didn't know what to do with the second. I didn't slash my wrists just because of the abortion. I did it because I had no way to reconcile the hate I felt for my mother.

HILLARY

Oh, Baby, my poor baby. I'm so sorry.

(She starts for Elizabeth.)

ELIZABETH

No! Stay away from me. I don't—feel like touching you now. I thought maybe that it was all over, but not with—this. It proves to me all over again that there is still something very cold and heartless in you.

HILLARY

It's called pragmatism.

ELIZABETH

Only by practitioners of the same religion. I call it something else.

HILLARY

Elizabeth, I have not been emotionally—capable of giving myself to anyone, other than you, since your father died. With Nick, I think I can do that, and I think—that what you perceive, as my coldness will dissipate with time.

ELIZABETH

For you or for me?

HILLARY

For both of us . . . as I become more willing and able to give more freely of myself.

ELIZABETH

You could give yourself to another child as well.

HILLARY

You don't understand.

ELIZABETH

I don't deny that. I don't understand now; I didn't understand

ELIZABETH (continuing)  
then. Why don't you explain it to me in pragmatic terms?

HILLARY  
Very well. (A beat.) I will *only* marry Nick if I can have the abortion. That's our agreement.

ELIZABETH  
What are you saying?

HILLARY  
It's perfectly clear: I won't marry Nick without the abortion.

ELIZABETH  
That's not perfectly clear; it's perfectly insane! Is that what you call pragmatism?

HILLARY  
I will *not* coerce a man into marrying me because I'm pregnant.

ELIZABETH  
Nick would marry you anyway.

HILLARY  
I don't know that. The only way I can know for sure is not to be pregnant when he marries me.

(Elizabeth thinks for a long time.)

ELIZABETH  
No! I will not allow you to do this.

HILLARY  
It has very little to do with you.

ELIZABETH  
Then I'll make it have something to do with me.

HILLARY  
What do you mean?

ELIZABETH  
You know what I mean.

HILLARY (frightened)  
Elizabeth . . . please!

ELIZABETH  
I'll do it.

HILLARY

You're not being rational.

ELIZABETH

And you're being entirely too rational. If you have this abortion—I'll do it. I swear I will.

HILLARY

Stop it! Don't you threaten me with that!

ELIZABETH

It isn't a threat!

HILLARY

You wouldn't!

(Elizabeth holds up her wrists.)

ELIZABETH

Remember these, Mother? They aren't the only scars I'm still carrying from—from my experience. There's that little bit of hate for you that seems to be growing stronger, and there are my own very shadowy doubts about ever being able to be a fit mother, myself, if I can a mother at all.

HILLARY

Elizabeth, you're not thinking or talking rationally. I urge you not to act on any irrational impulses.

ELIZABETH

I'm thinking rationally all right; I'm just not thinking callously. (A beat.) Let me hear your rationale, Mother.

HILLARY

Elizabeth, if there's anything we've gained in the last couple of decades, it's the freedom to choose what we will or will do or have done to our own bodies—

ELIZABETH

Is that so?

HILLARY

In your case, the decision wasn't yours to make.

ELIZABETH

I know; it was yours.

HILLARY

By threatening me now, you're taking away my freedom to

HILLARY (continuing)

choose. (Elizabeth turns away.) Do you want to *force* me to have this child to—to somehow punish me for—forcing you to about yours?

ELIZABETH

God, Mother, you're blinded by your own enlightened sense of being. From your perspective I can see why you did what you did with my pregnancy, but that doesn't mean I'll ever accept it or forgive you for it. But in your case—there is no *need* for it.

HILLARY

Our needs are different. I've decided to marry Nick.

ELIZABETH

Then your decision really has very little to do with the pregnancy itself. It has to do with some notion in your head about how the ideal woman ought to conduct herself. It has to do with your lifestyle, rather than your life.

HILLARY

I simple will not trap a man with a pregnancy.

ELIZABETH

It's not part of your image?

HILLARY

It's not part of *me*!

ELIZABETH

I pity you, Mother, because, your ideas of what you should be have been determined by other people telling you what you ought to be. You're not really free at all. To be free means to be able to do and to be what you want to be. You can't see any further than somebody else's perverted image of a liberated woman.

HILLARY

Elizabeth, I just don't think I could deal with another child.

ELIZABETH

Maybe you'd have better luck with another one.

HILLARY

Do you want this child, Elizabeth? Is that it? Do you want this child to replace the one I took from you?

ELIZABETH

I don't know; maybe that's part of what's happening on an

ELIZABETH (continuing)  
unconscious level, but it's much more complicated than that.  
And at the same time—maybe more simple.

HILLARY  
Try to explain.

ELIZABETH  
I've thought about it a lot; I was up most of the night  
talking with Eric. He's a good listener. (A beat.) Why you  
first told me you were pregnant, I *did* want you to have an  
abortion. I wanted you to experience what I went through.  
That's how I wanted to punish you.

HILLARY  
But it would be a different kind of experience for me.

ELIZABETH  
I don't think so. You would approach it differently, with more  
maturity and knowledge, less fear. But only up to a point  
would it be different. Then it's the same, I think. It's the  
same because you lose a little something of yourself,  
something of your inner being that can never be replace by  
purpose or direction or rationale or image. And as cold and  
pragmatic as you can be, I think, in time, that loss—whatever  
it is—would begin to work on you. (A beat.) You see, I don't  
have to accept full responsibility for my abortion; you made  
the decision for me, but I still feel the pain. I feel pain  
for having gone through just—half of the experience. And you  
only experienced half because you made the decision, but I had  
the abortion.

HILLARY  
They you think you're protecting me from myself?

ELIZABETH  
I couldn't live with myself if I'd made my own decision.

HILLARY  
And you don't think I could live with myself?

ELIZABETH  
Not for very long.

HILLARY  
You think it's—wrong then?

ELIZABETH  
I think it's wrong for you, and under these circumstances.

HILLARY  
If you hate me why should you want to protect me?

ELIZABETH  
Because I also love you.

HILLARY (moved)  
This is an act of love then.

ELIZABETH  
Love and desperation. (A beat.) I did mean what I said.

HILLARY  
I couldn't live with myself if I lost you, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH  
And I can't live with you if you choose to have this abortion.

HILLARY  
Tight spot.

ELIZABETH  
You're superwoman; get out of it.

HILLARY  
I'm not sure I can—in one piece.

ELIZABETH  
I'll help you pick up the pieces. (They finally embrace.) I have to go.

HILLARY (frightened)  
Where?

ELIZABETH  
I'm having dinner—with the outlaw.

HILLARY  
Are you—all right?

ELIZABETH  
If you are.

HILLARY  
I'm—okay. (A beat.) I—I'm not going to have the abortion.

ELIZABETH  
Do you mean it? You're not just scared right now?

HILLARY

No. Yes! I am scared! For you-us. But I won't do it. But-  
promise me . . . you won't hurt yourself.

ELIZABETH

I'm going to be with Eric.

(Hillary grabs Elizabeth's wrists  
and holds them to her heart.)

HILLARY

Promise me!

ELIZABETH

Mother!

(There's a knock at the door.)

NICK (off)

Hillary!

HILLARY

Just a minute, Nick. (To Elizabeth.) Promise me!

ELIZABETH

I'm okay. I won't hurt myself, I promise.

(They embrace.)

HILLARY

Come in, Nick.

(Elizabeth breaks away from  
Hillary and runs out.)

ELIZABETH (exiting)

Talk some sense into her, Nick.

(Hillary's face is stained with  
tears, and she shaking.)

NICK

Doesn't get any easier, does it?

HILLARY

How would you know?

NICK

Just guessing.

HILLARY  
It certainly doesn't.

NICK  
I thought your folks were here.

HILLARY  
They—left. Elizabeth and I had a—misunderstanding.

NICK  
Serious?

HILLARY  
She threatened to—hurt herself.

NICK  
Jesus! And she wants me to talk some sense into you. Where's she going?

HILLARY  
Somewhere with her new friend.

NICK  
The outlaw?

HILLARY  
Yes.

NICK  
Good. He won't let anything happen to her. (A beat.) She okay?

HILLARY  
For the time being.

NICK  
You're sure.

HILLARY  
I'm as sure as a parent ever is about the welfare of a child.

NICK  
Then you're not?

HILLARY  
No. But I couldn't keep her from going. She seems—very close to him, and I suppose that's what she needs right now. This is all—very hard for her too.

(Hillary falls back on the couch exhausted.)

NICK  
Pour me something to drink, would you?

NICK  
Brandy?

HILLARY  
Doesn't matter. Brand will do.

(He pours her a drink.)

HILLARY  
You'd better have one too.

(He pours one for himself.)

NICK  
I thought that was all over--Elizabeth trying to--hurt herself  
and . . .

HILLARY  
She's been hiding some pretty bitter feelings--hostility,  
resentment, even hate.

NICK  
About her abortion?

HILLARY  
About her mother.

NICK  
She doesn't really know you.

HILLARY  
Maybe she does. Maybe better than I know myself.

NICK  
I know I'm seeing a side of you that I haven't seen much of  
before. Elizabeth must be a very perceptive young woman.

HILLARY  
Perceptive and intelligent and emotional and sometimes  
irrational. Elizabeth has always *felt* and acted instead of  
*thought* and acted. I'm just the opposite.

NICK  
I know. (Silence.) Are you going to tell me what she's feeling  
and what you're thinking right now?

(She looks at him uneasily.)

HILLARY

I don't know.

NICK

Which?

HILLARY

Either. (A beat.) I'm exhausted; I can't think at all right now.

NICK

Tell me what you feel then.

HILLARY

I'm not sure--maybe like an idiot.

NICK

For getting pregnant?

HILLARY

For getting my life and Elizabeth's so thoroughly screwed up--when I was trying to do just the opposite. (Sighs.) What happened?

NICK

You want a sermon?

HILLARY

No, soda water.

(Holds out her snifter.)

Will more brandy do?

HILLARY (as Nick pours)

Probably. Thanks. You know why it's so much more difficult to have a child than to have a career?

NICK

No, because I've never had a child.

HILLARY

Because you can never raise a child right. You can read all the books, study the manuals, love the child, seek advice, do everything right, but in the end, it's as much luck as it is skill or "parenting" that determines a child's future. How many times growing up did you do something really stupid or dangerous, things that if some little something hadn't gone

HILLARY (continuing)  
just right, the entire course of you life might have been changed?

NICK  
More time than I care to remember.

HILLARY  
I remember time when I could have ended up dead or maimed or in jail. And over the most stupid and pointless things. It's all just so random.

NICK  
But most of us make it.

HILLARY  
In spite of our parents?

NICK  
Maybe because of.

HILLARY  
All we really have to offer our children is our love, because they won't accept our wisdom or guidance.

NICK  
Sometimes they won't even accept our love. Is that why you're afraid?

HILLARY  
I'm not afraid, just--very confused.

NICK  
Not about us?

HILLARY  
About everything. (A beat.) I don't want to risk the child I already have for one that might not even be.

NICK  
"One that might not even be?" I don't understand: you're *not* pregnant?

HILLARY  
Oh, I'm pregnant all right. It's just that at--my age things don't always go the way they're supposed to.

NICK  
You've changed your mind then. You're going to have this child?

HILLARY

Elizabeth--threatened to hurt herself if I have an abortion.

NICK

I thought that's what she wanted?

HILLARY

She wasn't sure what she wanted--until now. I misread her last night. She wants--insists--that I have this child.

NICK

For punishment?

HILLARY

I don't think so. She's as confused about all this as I am. I just know that I will do *anything* to keep her from hurting herself again.

NICK

Hillary, I swear to you: it doesn't matter to me--that's not true, it does matter. I *want* this child. But Elizabeth is a related but separate problem. You cannot make this kind of decision on the basis of a threat. Elizabeth can be made to understand that.

HILLARY

I won't take that chance. In a single irrational moment she could alter not just her life but the lives of all of us.

NICK

She isn't giving you a choice.

HILLARY

I'm afraid she is.

NICK

And you've already decided what you're going to do.

HILLARY

I've decided what I must do.

NICK

I think you're making a mistake, making a vital decision for the wrong reason, but I don't oppose it nor will I stop loving you for it. If anything, I'll love you more.

(Hillary crosses the room and stares out a window.)

Nick.

HILLARY

What?

NICK

This changes everything.

HILLARY (turning to him)

Don't do this, Hillary. For the love of god, don't do this to me, to yourself, to us.

NICK

Things are different now. I--

HILLARY

Stop it, dammit!

NICK

(He flings his snifter into the fireplace, shattering the crystal.)

HILLARY

Nick! That Waterford crystal!

NICK

You think I give a damn about crystal?

HILLARY

*Waterford* crystal!

(He flings one snifter another into the fireplace.)

NICK

Take that! And that! And that! There's your goddamned Waterford crystal!

HILLARY

Nick!

NICK

Where's the friggin' Wedgewood?

HILLARY

*What* are you doing?

NICK

*Feeling* instead of thinking. And I urge you to do the same.

HILLARY

And I urge you to stop behaving irrationally.

NICK

Hillary, I would have married you anyway! Your pregnancy is not the reason.

HILLARY

I can't accept that.

NICK

Can't accept what--my unconditional love?

HILLARY

No. Your inability to recognize the implications of this situation.

NICK

Those being that your image of yourself is being altered. That you might need somebody after all. That some insensitive bitch might say that, "Hillary McNeil bagged herself a man using the oldest trick in the book." Hillary, I swear to you by all that is Holy that I do not feel coerced into marrying you.

HILLARY

I could never be sure of that.

NICK (thinks, then)

Yes, you can.

HILLARY

You tell me how.

NICK

I got you pregnant.

HILLARY

We're both aware of that.

NICK

No, we're not. I mean, I got you pregnant.

HILLARY

What are you talking about?

NICK

By design. I planned it.

HILLARY

That's impossible.

NICK

I never had the vasectomy, Hillary.

HILLARY

Of course you did. You were shaved; there's a scar.

NICK

I couldn't go through with it. I stopped him in the middle of the procedure. He sewed me up in tact.

HILLARY

You're lying.

NICK

You're pregnant.

HILLARY

I went off the pill because I--

NICK

I encouraged you to go off the pill because I wanted to get you pregnant.

HILLARY

So I'd *have* to marry you?

NICK

Yes.

HILLARY

That's what you thought? Or did you *feel* it?

NICK

I felt--feel--something for you that I've never felt for anyone before, and I'm just enough of a romantic to think I couldn't feel this way about anyone else.

HILLARY

So you got me pregnant?

NICK

I didn't see any other way.

HILLARY

Any other way of what? Bringing me to my senses? Making me realize how much I love you?

NICK

Any other way of getting you to marry me.

HILLARY

This is beyond my comprehension.

NICK

That a man could stoop so low.

HILLARY

And you had the audacity to try and make me think that you were different.

NICK

Dammit, Hillary, I am different. How many other men would impregnate their lovers by design so they'd have to get married?

HILLARY

Now that's a little too different.

NICK

I want this child.

HILLARY

No!

NICK

You don't want another child!

HILLARY

I never said I didn't want a child.

NICK

You were going to have an abortion.

HILLARY

That's because I thought I wanted you.

NICK

You can have both!

HILLARY

But I don't want you anymore.

NICK

That doesn't make sense.

HILLARY

I've been deceived.

NICK

I'm sorry for that.

HILLARY

Do you want to know what I *feel* right now, Professor?

NICK

Not particularly.

HILLARY

I feel as if I have been used, deceived in the very worst kind of way, and not by some ignorant, over-sexed hunk, but by a wily predator, a reasonable man, that consciously and maliciously, not only used, but abused my body to achieve his own selfish goals. Used my body to trap me!

NICK

It wasn't malicious.

HILLARY

What was it?

NICK

Insensitive. Stupid. It's just that . . .

HILLARY

Go on.

NICK

Hillary, I saw marriage as the logical conclusion, not just to a--relationship, but to a deep and abiding love that we have shared for sometime now. If I deceived you, which I did, it was for that love; it was because some damn thing in your psyche kept you from committing yourself to anything but what you thought you ought to be.

HILLARY

That doesn't excuse your using me.

NICK

I think you're offended because what I did was supposed to be a woman's trick.

HILLARY

I'm offended because I've been abused. I'd like for you to leave.

NICK

Why did you even tell me? (A beat.) You could have had your

NICK (continuing)  
abortion; I never would have questioned it. I didn't even know if either of was even capable of having children.

HILLARY  
I told you because you were responsible.

NICK  
That's right! I'm responsible, either way--by design or by accident. What difference does it make?

HILLARY  
It makes a difference because I don't like men who use women.

NICK  
Because women never use men, right? (No response.) I'm a man, Hillary, I'll grant you that. But I'm only a man, not an ideal. If I don't measure up to your ideal then I regret having wasted your precious time on something so trivial as love. I love you; I adore you, and I cherish you. I can't do anymore than that.

HILLARY  
You did a great deal more.

NICK  
Only because I was desperate.

HILLARY  
Please go.

NICK  
For now?

HILLARY  
For good.

NICK  
Hillary--

HILLARY  
Don't you come near me!

NICK  
Good-bye, Hillary. I--I'm sorry I upset your perfectly structured life. (A beat.) You have my number if--

HILLARY  
I won't be needing it.

Nick turns and walks out slowly, leaving the door ajar. Hillary holds herself erect, then goes to the fireplace where she kneels and begins picking up her shattered crystal. The LIGHTS BEGINS TO COME DOWN. As the LIGHTS SLOWLY COME DOWN, we HEAR THE FAINT CRY OF AN INFANT somewhere in the building. Hillary catches her breath.

ACT II, Scene II

SCENE: Hillary's apartment the following spring. Hillary is very pregnant now, about five minutes away from delivery one would gather from her appearance. Still, she is radiant, and now somehow softer, more vulnerable. She's in the living room with Naomi, who is nursing a scotch and water. Both are dressed for spring. A few gifts and flowers are strewn around the room, and near the door, Hillary's overnight case is packed and ready to go.

NAOMI

Well, you are certainly in full bloom, Hillary. When are you due, exactly?

HILLARY

The sonogram told me what, not when. They can't tell that, exactly, even now. But it could be anytime; I'm packed in any case.

NAOMI

It's much easier—the second time around, so I'm told.

HILLARY

That's love, not birthing. Anyway, it's been 20 years since the first time, so I don't think this will be any easier.

NAOMI

A daughter, huh?

HILLARY

So I'm told.

NAOMI

Doesn't that take the fun out of it—knowing?

HILLARY

What fun are you talking about?

NAOMI

I see your point, but thank god, I won't feel your pain. (A beat.) Where are you going—Mass General?

HILLARY

If all goes according to plan.

NAOMI

Brenda had hers at home—natural birth—in the bathtub or something, midwife, lifeguard. No drugs. Mother nature and a midwife attending.

HILLARY

Where was Gordon? Was he supposed to coach or something?

NAOMI

He was at the Fleet Center coaching the Celtics. Turned out they need it more than Brenda; she did fine. The Knicks beat up on the Celtics.

HILLARY

Justice.

NAOMI

So you're not going to give natural child birth a go?

HILLARY

They're putting me under. After that, I don't care what they do to get her out. I experienced the "joy" of childbirth once. I'm not—woman enough to start experimenting at this point.

NAOMI

Hillary, you're probably in better shape than three-quarters of the women in this country who are half your age.

HILLARY

But not as brave. I've never been a trooper when it comes to pain, especially mine.

NAOMI

Anyway, good luck. We'll all be pulling for you.

HILLARY

*Pushing!* Pushing is what I'll need help with.

NAOMI

Of course. Then we'll be pushing for you. (A beat.) The flowers are from everyone in the office.

HILLARY

They're lovely. Please thank everyone for me. I'll get a note in the mail too, of course. (A beat.) How's Ted doing with the Filene's account?

NAOMI

You know Ted.

HILLARY

That's why I asked.

NAOMI

His vision is to turn the entire downtown store into one huge bargain basement, all eight floors.

HILLARY

Oh my god!

NAOMI

That's what they said. I think I've managed to salvage the account, and Jill is attempting to redirect Ted.

HILLARY

The whole store.

NAOMI

That's just the beginning; the branches will be next. Don't leave me, Hillary.

HILLARY

I'll try to keep a hand in.

NAOMI

I felt better with you running the show when I was out with Jennifer than I do about running my own business without you. You won't change you mind?

HILLARY (rubbing her abdomen)

Too late.

NAOMI

About coming back?

HILLARY

No.

NAOMI

You might change you mind after a month of sleepless nights.

HILLARY

That business has given me plenty of sleepless nights. I'll manage. Besides I've decided to give this child something-- that I didn't, or couldn't give Elizabeth.

NAOMI

You gave her everything.

HILLARY

But myself. (A beat.) Circumstances never really allowed me to do that. Somewhere along the way I just . . . lost touch with something very important. The most important thing of all.

NAOMI

But we have to be--providers.

HILLARY

Oh, I did provide for her; I provided quite well for both of us. But I didn't give her what she needed most: my time, my presence, that something that only a *parent* can give a child. And we both suffered for it. (A beat.) I want to give this child more, even if it means sacrificing some of . . . (gestures to room) this. God, did you ever think about how the--lower animals--care for their young. How a mother bear or pig or deer has but a single function: to care for her fawn or cub until it can care for itself. Animals will do anything, even sacrifice their own lives for their young. And we, the only rational species, will go to almost any lengths to keep from having to raise and nurture our own children. I don't why that is, Naomi. Do you? Is it because money and careers and prestige and--image--and adult desires are more important than our own children?

NAOMI

I suppose it's because we're led to believe that they are.

HILLARY

Not me! Not anymore. I'm going to attempt to give this child more than designer jeans and--quality time.

(Naomi nods and smiles a little sadly as if she understands.)

NAOMI

Well . . . if you change your mind about work, or just want to write copy from here, or need a reference. Maybe you'll just need a shoulder to cry on. Anything!

HILLARY (taking her hand)

Thank you.

NAOMI

Just don't expect me to sit for the weekend. I'm sure I would manage to undo whatever nurturing you would have accomplished.

(They embrace.)

HILLARY

You just take care of Jennifer.

NAOMI (checking the time)

Oh, god, Jennifer! I almost forget; the sitter will kill me. I've got to run. (She starts gathering her things.) How did you do it? I mean with Elizabeth.

HILLARY

I'm not even sure yet if I did.

NAOMI

Hillary, I know you're doing what's right for you, and I admire you for it, but it doesn't mean I'll mist you any less. Take care, dear friend. Take care.

HILLARY

You too. Of yourself and your daughter.

(Naomi smiles and exits. Hillary lies back on the couch with her hands on her swollen abdomen and stares at the ceiling. She cries out softly when the baby moves inside her. The LIGHTS COME DOWN SLOWLY, NOT QUITE TO DARKNESS. Then there is some NOISE IN THE HALLWAY. LIGHTS COME UP as Elizabeth, ERIC, BETTY and Adam enter.)

BETTY

Shhh. Hillary's sleeping.

HILLARY

It's all right, Mom. I'm awake, just lying here staring at the ceiling and being kicked around by my unborn child.

ELIZABETH

Hi, Mom.

(Hillary sits up. Elizabeth crosses and kisses her cheek.)

ELIZABETH

How's it going so far?

HILLARY

I think we may have a place kicker here. Hello, Eric.

ERIC

Hi.

HILLARY

Well . . .

ADAM

Well, what?

BETTY

She's talking to the kids.

HILLARY

Did you get it?

(Elizabeth nods and holds out her hand, displaying a diamond ring.)

BETTY

Shreve, Crump and Low.

HILLARY

I know. It's beautiful, Honey. You're very fortunate, both of you.

ELIZABETH

We know.

(Adam pulls out a bottle of champagne from a bag.)

ADAM

Champagne! Champagne all around! Somebody get some glasses.

ERIC  
Not me, thanks.

ADAM  
You don't drink champagne?

ERIC  
It makes me crazy.

HILLARY  
I'd better pass too.

ELIZABETH  
I've had enough, Papa.

ADAM (to Betty)  
Dear, will you share a glass of champagne with me?

BETTY  
I'd prefer to have my own.

ADAM (snorts and pours)  
Here! Here! I'd like to propose a toast on this--doubly joyous occasion. First to Elizabeth and Eric,, whose love has blossomed into a promise to marriage and life long commitment one to the other.

ERIC  
I was thinking maybe we could just try it for a long weekend.

ELIZABETH  
Eric!

ERIC  
Kidding.

BETTY  
We're all so very happy for you.

ADAM  
Cheers! (They drink.) And second, I want to toast Hillary, my daughter, on the eve of--of--

HILLARY  
Nevermind, Daddy.

ADAM  
No, I mean it. I want to toast my daughter on the even of what

ADAM (continuing)  
undoubtedly will and unusual but nonetheless joyous event. I mean to make it so. I only wish--

HILLARY  
This child was going to have a father.

ELIZABETH  
Mother, stop it!

ADAM  
I do wish that, but you've made it very clear that that decision was yours and yours alone to make. In any case, that's not what I was going to say.

HILLARY  
I'm sorry.

ELIZABETH  
Nerves?

HILLARY  
Probably a lack of them. (A beat.) What were you going to say, Daddy?

ADAM  
Just that I only wish that we--(motions to Betty)--would be her to see this child grow up.

HILLARY  
Is that such a pleasant experience?

ADAM  
No, not pleasant, not even rewarding all the time, if any of it, but it is a very--human one.

HILLARY  
All animals grow up, Daddy.

ADAM  
Not like we humans do. You never know what will become of a child, or what a child will become. That's the difference--that humans can become a different kind of animal than what they are born.

HILLARY  
I see. (A beat.) Eric, are you sure you know what you're getting yourself into, getting mixed up with this group of--whatever it is that we've turned out to be?

ERIC (taking Elizabeth's hand)  
No. But I'm committed to getting mixed up in it.

HILLARY  
Do you realize that you'll be Elizabeth's half-sister's  
brother-in-law--or something like that?

ERIC  
Then I'll try to be a good one--remember birthdays and  
graduations.

(This pleases Hillary.)

BETTY  
Now when do you plan of being married?

ELIZABETH  
Next year, after Eric gets his B.S.

ADAM  
Then what.

ERIC  
Medical school.

ADAM  
That's a--tough row to hoe, son.

ERIC  
If that's the worst thing that happens to me in my life, I'll  
be very grateful.

(He leans over and kisses one of  
Elizabeth's wrists.)

BETTY  
Well, let's hope it is then.

ADAM  
If you ever need anything. Don't hesitate to--well, you know  
where we are.

ELIZABETH  
We'll be fine, Papa, really. But thank you.

ADAM (reflecting)  
I don't know. You see your children and your grandchildren  
grow up before your eyes, and you wonder what happened to all  
the years--all the joy and pain, the conflict and resolution,  
the love and hate. In the end you finally realize that's all

ADAM (continuing)

you really ever had--what you felt and shared all those years with someone else. Unless Fate would make you a great leader or artist or genius, who will ever know that you even existed except for those with whom you shared a part of yourself? That's the only meaningful thing we really have to give--ourselves-- and it's the one thing we're most likely to hold back for fear of--I don't know. For fear of not getting something in return?

(During this monologue he moves to Betty and slips his arm around her. Eric and Elizabeth are also very close, however, Hillary is by herself, isolated somewhere in the room.)

ELIZABETH

You're getting to be quite the philosopher in your golden years, Papa.

BETTY

We have lots of time to think now, time to talk, reflect, share our ideas and secrets.

ADAM

Damn right! Now that we've gotten rid of that infernal television.

BETTY

Your father's latest crusade is to ban television.

HILLARY

All of it?

ADAM

Damn right, all of it! The good is just as destructive to the mind as the bad, more so, because it's thinking people who ought to know better than to watch it. And there they are--transfixed like a four-year-old. What do you think, Eric?

ERIC

I don't know. We didn't have television in Oklahoma.

ELIZABETH

You did too!

ERIC

Okay, we got it my last year of high school. But I didn't have time to watch, so I don't have an opinion.

HILLARY

Daddy, much of how I make a living depends on television

ADAM

Maybe it's none of our business, Dear.

BETTY

But it *is* our daughter, Dear.

HILLARY (nods to Elizabeth)

Go ahead. Tell them.

ADAM

Will I need a drink for this?

BETTY

You already have a drink, Adam.

ADAM

So I do. Shoot!

ELIZABETH

Here's the deal. (A beat.) Nick . . . you remember Nick?

BETTY

Of course we remember Nick. He was such a *nice* young man.

ADAM

Like hell! He got Hillary pregnant.

ELIZABETH

The fact is: that's *exactly* what he did--got her pregnant by design so she'd *have* to marry him.

ADAM

Why didn't she for god's sake?

ELIZABETH

It had something to do with her being a woman, or with him being a man. I'm not sure which. Mother?

(No response from Hillary.)

BETTY

How could he get her pregnant?

ELIZABETH

He wasn't thinking straight; he was in love.

BETTY

How could he do it physically? Weren't you using--anything.

HILLARY

He told me he'd been sterilized, so I wasn't using anything.

ADAM

You mean he *wants* to marry you?

ELIZABETH

He *did*.

ADAM

And you wouldn't do it?

HILLARY

He got me pregnant!

ADAM

That's the point now isn't it?

BETTY

For god's sake, call him!

ELIZABETH

He engaged.

ADAM

What? Hillary's pregnant with his child, and he's engaged to someone else? That's an outrage!

HILLARY

Things change, Daddy.

ADAM

They don't change *that* much. (A beat.) He *intentionally* got you pregnant you said?

HILLARY

Yes, and I refused to marry him.

ERIC

Look, I'm from Oklahoma, but back home--no offense intended, Ma'am--but that wouldn't make a lot of horse sense.

BETTY

It doesn't make any sense here either if you ask me.

HILLARY

Which I didn't.

BETTY

Don't be fresh, Hillary.

Nerves?

ELIZABETH

Why, Hillary?

BETTY

Because he used me.

HILLARY

He loved you.

ELIZABETH

HILLARY (beginning to break)  
If he had really love me, he wouldn't have used me, and I wouldn't be--in the shape I'm in now.

ELIZABETH

He used you *because* he loved you.

BETTY

And you never used him, I suppose.

HILLARY

You know you love him, Mother. You were just being stubborn and clinging to some insane image of yourself that has very little to do with reality and nothing to do with love.

ADAM

If that's true Hillary, let it go. Forgive him.

HILLARY

Why? So I won't have a little bastard?

ADAM

That's one good reason.

HILLARY

He's a Democrat, Daddy.

ADAM

I don't care if he's Lenin's brother. Call him!

HILLARY

No. It's a matter of principle.

ADAM

Let me tell you something about principle, young lady.

HILLARY

I'm not a young lady!

ADAM

Then you should have learned this by now: there is no satisfaction in being right if it make you miserable. You want to know why?

HILLARY

No!

ADAM

Because nobody else gives a damn. (A beat.) For once in your life, Hillary, let your mother and me teach you something. You don't *have* to get kicked in the gut to learn this lesson for yourself.

(Hillary suddenly doubles over in pain and shrieks.)

BETTY

What is it?

HILLARY

I just got--kicked in the gut.

(They get her to the couch.)

BETTY

You could put it more demurely than that.

ELIZABETH

Let me call Nick. It's time.

HILLARY

No.

ELIZABETH

Why not?

HILLARY

It's too late.

ELIZABETH

He'd come.

HILLARY

He's engaged.

ELIZABETH

He's come anyway.

HILLARY

I wouldn't want a man who would run out on his fiancée'.

BETTY

I doubt that she's bursting at the seams with his child.

HILLARY

That doesn't mean she wouldn't be hurt.

BETTY

But if she knew about you?

HILLARY

If I know Nick, he's told her everything about me.

ELIZABETH

Didn't he learn *anything* from you?

ADAM (going to bar)

This is just too much. Eric, won't you have that drink now?

ERIC (crossing to bar)

Make my whiskey.

ELIZABETH

I'm calling.

HILLARY

Elizabeth!

(She doubles over in pain.)

BETTY (to Adam and Eric)

Get her some water.

(Eric brings her a glass of water while Elizabeth makes her call.)

BETTY

Better? (Hillary nods.) Is it time?

HILLARY

I don't think so. She's just--very active tonight.

ELIZABETH (hanging up)

No answer.

HILLARY (lacking conviction)  
Good.

ELIZABETH  
Come on, Eric. He's probably in the library.

HILLARY  
Honey, it's too late.

ELIZABETH  
It's never too late.

ADAM  
Not until the final gun, huh son?

ERIC  
We're definitely looking at fourth and long here, but you can always throw up a prayer. Worked for Doug Flutie.

ELIZABETH  
Well we sure as hell aren't going to punt. Come on!

(They rush off, hand in hand.)

BETTY  
It's wonderful to see her so--so vibrant and full of life.

HILLARY  
Maybe a bit too much so.

BETTY  
Does Eric--know everything?

HILLARY  
You can't hide those kinds of scars, Mom.

BETTY  
And the abortion?

HILLARY  
Those either. She told him everything.

ADAM  
Seems like a fine young man.

HILLARY  
The very best and very worst kind.

(Adam pours another drink.)

Don't be so cynical.

BETTY

HILLARY

HILLARY  
That depends on the baby.

ADAM  
And you.

BETTY  
And—maybe Nick?

HILLARY  
I don't know. I'd feel funny about asking him to do anything else.

ADAM  
Anything else! What's he done so far besides—

BETTY  
That's enough, Adam.

HILLARY  
All the—financial arrangements have been made through our attorneys. But since I rejected him, I'm not exactly sure how to handle the rest of it—personal responsibilities and so forth.

ADAM  
What does he want?

HILLARY  
To be as much of a father as I'll permit. Maybe more.

ADAM  
Meaning what?

HILLARY  
Probably litigation.

BETTY  
Don't punish this child, Hillary, or Nick, not for your—

HILLARY  
My what?

BETTY  
Principles? Only you know that for sure.

HILLARY  
Why shouldn't I punish him?

Why should you?

ADAM

It's his fault, isn't it?

HILLARY

That he fell in love with you?

BETTY

Not that. That he . . . got me pregnant.

HILLARY

But he did it because he loved you, and you never discouraged him from doing that. You never gave him a reason not to love you.

BETTY

No, but . . . I don't know.

HILLARY

Hillary, when men are in love they're poor weak creatures with no more sense of reason than a—a cactus plant.

BETTY

And they're just as horny!

ADAM

Adam!

BETTY

I don't know; maybe I did, no I *did* encourage him. We were wonderful together. I suppose we were in love with each other, but he . . . it doesn't matter now. It's too late, and I've adjusted. (A beat.) One thing I *did* learn from all this is not to look back at your mistakes. Learn from them as best you can and forge ahead, right Daddy?

HILLARY

That's right, Baby.

ADAM (wrapping an arm around her)

You've also learned to correct your mistakes.

BETTY

If you can.

HILLARY

You okay?

ADAM

Just tired. HILLARY

We'll go. ADAM

Call if- BETTY

I will. HILLARY

We love you Hillary. BETTY

(Hillary manages a smile.)

Get some rest. ADAM

(They exit. Hillary lies back on the couch; she touches her abdomen and feels the baby moving. She grimaces when the baby kicks. After a while she turns on her side, buries her head in a pillow and begins crying. A KNOCK shakes her.)

Who is it? HILLARY

An old friend, I think. Maybe not. NICK (off)

Nick? HILLARY

Can't you even tell anymore? NICK (off)

(Hillary sits up and dries her tears.)

Oh, god! HILLARY

I saw Naomi over on Newbury, and I've been meaning to come by. NICK (off)

NICK (continuing)  
I'm tired of my attorney talking to your attorney. That's so uncivilized. If this is not a good time . . .

HILLARY  
No, no. Come in. The door's open.

(Nick enters.)

NICK  
Hi.

HILLARY  
"Hi." That's it, "Hi?"

NICK  
How are you?

HILLARY  
You can see how I am.

NICK  
I'm sorry.

HILLARY  
It's not your fault.

NICK  
Yes it is.

HILLARY  
You're right. It *is* your fault, dammit!

NICK  
I said, I was sorry.

HILLARY  
What do you want me to say? That it's okay? It's okay that I'm fat as a pig? That my feet are all swollen? That my back is killing me? That I'm out of work for a year? Want to say that's all okay?

NICK  
No, I don't want you to tell me it's all okay. I want you to tell me the truth.

HILLARY  
Well, the truth is, everything but *me* is okay. My pregnancy-

NICK

Our pregnancy.

HILLARY

Right. Our pregnancy. (A beat.) Actually our pregnancy is going along beautifully. Our daughter is perfectly normal, so far; an uncomplicated delivery is anticipated; her future is financially secure; her parents will undoubtedly be proud, even if a little uneasy, and, with your permission, I'd like to name her Nicki.

NICK (surprised)

Of course.

HILLARY

Anything else?

NICK

Not that I know of.

HILLARY

Help yourself to a drink then.

NICK

No thanks. I've been--drinking a little too much lately.

HILLARY

Nerves?

NICK

Yeah, nerves and stress and depression and anxiety--the human condition.

HILLARY

I'm sorry. (A beat.) Pour me just a sip of Grand Marnier, would you please?

NICK

Do you think you should?

HILLARY

Make it spring water; but if I don't settle *her* down, neither of us will get any sleep.

(Nick goes to the bar and pours her a drink.)

NICK (teasing)

Waterford?

HILLARY

That's what's left of it, and--you know, I don't miss it a bit.

(He sits down close to and reaches out to touch her.)

NICK

Do you mind?

HILLARY (placing his hand)

Not at all. (After a moment.) Oh! Feel that?

NICK

My god! I had no idea.

HILLARY

Thought it was easy, didn't you?

NICK

I didn't know what to think; I'm finding out more all the time. (A beat.) Did you feel that?

HILLARY

I feel a lot of things now, things I didn't feel before. (Sip her drink.) Did you say you saw Elizabeth?

NICK

Naomi. Why?

HILLARY

She--tried to call you earlier.

NICK

Naomi?

HILLARY

Elizabeth.

NICK

Oh. (A beat.) I wasn't there.

HILLARY

So she went looking for you.

NICK

Why?

HILLARY

For me, I think.

NICK  
She went looking for me, for you.

HILLARY  
No, for you, for me.

NICK  
Same thing.

HILLARY  
She's engaged--to Eric, the young man you met.

NICK  
The outlaw?

HILLARY  
Yes, the outlaw.

NICK  
Happy?

HILLARY  
Very much so.

NICK  
Good for her. World can't be all bad, I guess.

HILLARY  
I understand--you're engaged too.

NICK  
Was.

HILLARY  
No more?

NICK  
No.

HILLARY  
What--happened? (A beat.) If it's none of my business . . .

NICK  
No, it's all right. It *is* your business.

HILLARY  
You told her about me.

NICK

Yeah, I told her about--us.

HILLARY

God, Nick! Haven't you learned--*anything* from you relationships with women?

NICK

Oh yeah, that veracity is the mother of discontent.

(Hillary laughs merrily until the baby kicks her again.)

HILLARY

Oh! Your daughter even enjoyed that.

NICK

I have a way with words, if not with women.

HILLARY

Don't be so hard on yourself. You're a decent enough--sort.

NICK

Sort?

HILLARY

Yeah, *sort*.

NICK

Whatever you say. (A beat.) Why was Elizabeth looking for me, for you.

HILLARY

Because she's an incurable romantic.

NICK

Like I used to be?

HILLARY

Not that bad. But she had this crazy notion in her head that maybe . . . we could somehow--get together after all.

NICK

A crazy romantic notion.

HILLARY

Is that what it was?

NICK

Wasn't it?

HILLARY  
What's wrong? Too much romance in your life?

NICK  
Too much reality.

HILLARY (after a few moments)  
Do I know your fiancée?

NICK  
She's not my fiancée.

HILLARY  
I'm sorry. No, I'm glad.

NICK  
She's . . .

HILLARY  
What?

NICK  
My wife.

(Hillary doubled over in pain.  
Nick reaches out to help her.)

HILLARY  
I'm all right--the baby. (A few beats.) Your wife. When you  
said you weren't engaged I thought . . .

NICK  
I know. I--

HILLARY  
You don't have to explain.

NICK  
Yes, I do.

HILLARY  
Not for my sake.

NICK  
Then for my liver's, okay?

HILLARY  
Sure. If you think it's listening.

NICK

I tried to stop loving you, Hillary, because you rejected me. I wanted to prove to myself that I didn't need you. So I attempted to "get on with my life" I think is how the therapist put it. She--Toni--was part of my attempt to rid myself of my--irrational love for you.

HILLARY

Then you used her too.

NICK

She helped ease the pain, and in a way I did--do--love her, but--I finally realized it would never work. I couldn't rid myself of my--attachment to you, so I thought it would be best for both of us if we broke it off. Maybe I did use her, but not consciously or maliciously. I simply let myself respond to her affection for me in an attempt to get from one day to the next. Is that so wrong?

HILLARY

What are you doing here, Nick?

NICK

I didn't come here because I want to "see" you again or even to start a platonic relationship. I know we can't even have that now.

HILLARY

Why did you come?

NICK

To tell you that I--understand.

HILLARY

Understand what?

NICK

I understand how you felt when I--used you; how you felt when I got you pregnant as a means of forcing you to marry me.

HILLARY

How could you possibly . . . oh, god.

NICK

She fell in love with me; she just wouldn't let go.

HILLARY

Not even after you told her about me--us?

NICK

That just made it worse. I think she felt like you had some kind of advantage over her because you were carrying our child.

HILLARY

So she let herself get pregnant?

NICK

Oldest trick in the book.

HILLARY

And you fell for it?

NICK

It wasn't that so much as . . . I don't know. She just couldn't imagine that I didn't love her as much as she loved me. That's a feeling I understand too. In any case, she thought I loved her enough.

HILLARY

Do you?

NICK

I don't know--how much enough is.

HILLARY (after a moment)

My god, Nick. How did we get things so screwed up?

NICK

We both had to work at it pretty hard.

HILLARY

*Why?* Why did you marry her, knowing . . .

NICK

Because she loves me; because she'd be pretty much alone otherwise; because she's pregnant; maybe because I'm a--decent enough sort after all. I'm not completely sure.

HILLARY

Is there anything other than resignation in your voice?

NICK

It's more than that, Hillary. I chose to marry Toni in the end because I chose to get involved with her in the first place. She knew nothing of my history, and I felt as though I had to accept her feelings for me. I had to accept responsibility for how she felt because I didn't discourage her from feeling that way.

HILLARY

I guess that's what I refused to do with you.

NICK

It's what you chose to do, for whatever reasons. I--we--both have different lives now.

HILLARY

I'm--happy about this child; I really am. Not that it's going to be easy, but I feel good about myself, maybe more human and less--driven. (A beat.) And I know she'll keep me young. (She reaches out and touches his hand.) I regret my decision to reject you now; I could have used some help, especially from a--decent sort like yourself, but . . . dammmit, Nick, she used you!

NICK

Which puts her on the same level with me.

HILLARY (reflects, then)

Sometimes you think you have everything figured out, how to impose some sense of order in the very limited world that you construct for yourself and your family. Then fate or reason or circumstance or your own vulnerability to all of those things turns your world upside down.

NICK

That's when you just have to hang on.

HILLARY

For dear life?

NICK

Beats hell out of the alternative.

HILLARY

*Still* the romantic.

NICK

Just not the cynic, not yet.

HILLARY (feels the baby moving)

Well, at least our children won't be alone in the world.

NICK

They'll both undoubtedly have quite a story to tell.

HILLARY  
And someone to tell it to. Oh, that hurt! (A beat.) Do you think they'll grow up to be friends?

NICK  
They'll be far more than that if we let them.

(Hillary doubles over with pain.)

NICK  
Are you all right?

HILLARY  
Are you?

NICK  
I guess I'll have to be.

HILLARY  
Me too. Oh!

NICK  
What can I do?

HILLARY  
That you haven't done already?

NICK  
Yeah.

HILLARY  
Grab that bag and give me a lift to Mass General. I think our daughter is ready to take on the world.

(They start for the door with Nick assisting her. He reaches down for her bag on the way out.)

HILLARY  
Nick?

NICK  
What?

HILLARY  
One more thing . . . will you be there, if we need you?

NICK  
I'll be there, Hillary. One way or another, I'll be there when either of you need me.

The LIGHTS COME DOWN SLOWLY as  
they exit. When the stage is  
empty and dark, we hear the FAINT  
CRY OF AN INFANT down the hall.  
END OF PLAY

CURTAIN

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