

SOMETHING OF VALUE

A Comic-drama in Two Acts

by

© David W. Christner 2006

© David W. Christner 2006
PO Box 103
Slocum, RI 02877
Email: david_christner@yahoo.com or
playwright43@gmail.com

***** NOTICE *****

The amateur, stock and professional rights to this work are controlled exclusively by the playwright without whose permission in writing no performance of it may be given. Royalty fees for amateur productions are \$85.00 each time the play is performed. A royalty must be paid whether or not the play is presented for profit and whether or not admission is charged. For definition purposes, a play is performed anytime it is read or acted before an audience. All inquiries concerning performance rights should be addressed to David W. Christner or Linda Thomas, PO Box 103, Slocum, RI 02877. Email address is: playwright@excite.com or playwright43@gmail.com .

COPYRIGHT LAW GIVES THE AUTHOR OR HIS AGENT THE EXCLUSIVE RIGHT TO MAKE COPIES.

This law provides authors with a fair return for their creative endeavors. Authors earn their living from the royalties they receive from book sales and from the performance of their work. SOMETHING OF VALUE is fully protected by copyright. No alternations, deletions or substitutions may be made in the play without the prior written consent of the playwright. No part of this play may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, videotape, film, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the author. It may not be performed either by professionals or amateurs without payment of royalty. All rights, including but not limited to the professional, motion picture, radio, television, videotape, foreign language, tabloid, recitation, lecturing, publication, and reading are reserved by the author.

© DAVID W. CHRISTNER 2006
Printed in the United States of American
All Rights Reserved
(SOMETHING OF VALUE)

SOMETHING OF VALUE

by

© David W. Christner 2006

Cast of Characters

(4 women, 3 men)

Jay Cronley.....30ish, an engineer
Nora Jensen.....30ish, a single mother
Christina Jensen.....12, Nora's daughter
Beatrice Brown.....34, Jay's fiancée, an attorney
Jeremiah Brown.....60, Bea's father, a venture capitalist
Mildred Brown.....56, Bea's mother, a patron of the arts
Father Paul.....60, a Catholic priest & family confidant

Time: The present.

Place: This version of the play is set in Newport, RI; however, the script is designed to be set in the location of the producing theatre. All that is required is to substitute local streets names and landmarks for those in the original script. With the playwright's approval and consultation, the names of the characters can be changed to reflect multi-racial casting and the script can be modified to suit cast/character diversity. Nora and Christina are of Danish origin in this, the baseline version of the script. They could just as well be of African or Hispanic origin with minor modifications to the script.

Setting: The play is staged on an area set. The play opens in the living area of a small condo; then the action shifts to an office, a locker room, a patio, the vestry of a Catholic priest and a park bench. Only the suggestion of these locations is needed for a scene to work; mood is more important than realism in the sets.

SOMETHING OF VALUE

by

© David W. Christner 2006

ACT I, SCENE I

SCENE: 1:00 A.M. Tuesday. LIGHTS COME UP in the living area of a small condo; an efficiency kitchen, dining area and an adjacent living room are dimly illuminated by lamp near the couch. Some newspapers and magazines are strewn about; there is a poster of the New England Patriots (or some other local team) on one wall and a poster of Maria Sharapova on another. There is an upstage door leading "outside" and another door stage left going to the "bedroom." A RED MESSAGE LIGHT is flashing on an answering machine. OFF STAGE, there are voices and some commotion at the door.

JAY (off)

No. No. I won't take no for an answer. Now stop this nonsense and come in. You can't—stay out there any longer.

(LIGHTS COME UP as JAY CRONLEY, 30, an engineer ENTERS with NORA JENSEN, 30, and CHRISTINA, 12, her daughter. Nora is a single-mother, homeless and working three jobs to make ends meet. This she manages to do, but only by living out of her car, which is taking a tremendous toll on her physically and emotionally. Jay is carrying a suitcase, and Christina has a backpack slung over

her shoulder. In spite of being exhausted and attempting to conceal it in jeans and a baggy sweatshirt, Nora is quite beautiful.)

Look, Mr.—

NORA

Cronley, Jay.

JAY

Mr. Cronley Jay.

NORA

No. It's Jay—Cronley.

JAY

Whatever you say. But you don't have to do this—if I can just park in your driveway overnight; the police won't hassle us. We'll we fine.

NORA

Fine? Sleeping in your car? There's nothing fine about it.

JAY

We're used to it.

CHRISTINA

Well, I won't have it!

JAY

I wouldn't sleep a wink in a strange man's house.

NORA

I'm not all that strange, and let's face it: you were asleep at the wheel of your car.

JAY

You were, Mom. I tried to wake you up; you were out.

CHRISTINA

You can use my bedroom; there are sheets, towels, pajamas, a separate bath and you can lock the door from the inside.

JAY

NORA

How do I know you're not some kind of serial killer or something?

JAY

I am—Cheerios are my weapon of choice.

NORA

I don't want to be an imposition.

CHRISTINA

Mom, stop it. He's right, and he looks okay.

NORA

Looks don't mean anything.

JAY

Look, if you're uncomfortable with this, I'll leave you two here and go somewhere else myself. But I won't put you out on the street.

CHRISTINA

Mom, please! I'm so tired.

NORA

I have a gun you know?

CHRISTINA

Mother!

JAY

I'll keep that in mind.

NORA

Where will you sleep?

JAY

On the couch; I'm used to it.

NORA

You do that often?

JAY

No, I just work late out here and all too often fall asleep on the couch. I'll be fine. Now you two get some rest; you look like you could use it.

So do you. Come on Christina.

NORA

Goodnight.

JAY

Goodnight Mr. Cronley Jay.

CHRISTINA

(Nora and Christina EXIT into the bedroom. Jay watches them momentarily and then shakes his head as if asking himself: "What on earth am I doing?" Then he looks around the room and notices the message machine FLASHING. He crosses to the phone and hits the play button.)

BEA (on machine)

Hi Honey. It's me. Sorry to call so late, but I missed you at the office. I just got in myself. I'll drop by for coffee early tomorrow before I go to work. Goodnight Sweetheart. Love you.

Christ!

JAY

(He picks up the phone and dials a number.)

JAY

Hi Honey. It's me. Don't answer; it's late. Listen, about tomorrow—tomorrow morning is not good for me. I'm working late, and I'll need to catch some extra zees. I'll catch up with you at your office. Love you.

(He crosses to the couch, loosens his tie, kicks off his shoes and lies back on the couch. LIGHT COME DOWN SLOWLY to end the scene.)

ACT I SCENE II

SCENE: LIGHTS COME UP ON Christina the next morning; she is moving quietly around the kitchen, preparing breakfast. She's wearing only the top of Jay's pajamas and her underwear. Jay is essentially passed out on the couch. Christina puts a cup of coffee and some toast on a tray for her mother and EXITS into the bedroom. After a moment the upstage doors opens; BEATRICE BROWN, 28, an engineer and Harvard Law graduate ENTERS. She is Jay's fiancée and business partner on a joint venture her wealthy father is helping her put together. Bea is attractive, but nothing like Nora. She sees Jay, moves to the couch, takes off her blouse, straddles him and begins kissing him. Christina ENTERS.

CHRISTINA

Oh, hello!

BEA

Good god! Who are you?

CHRISTINA

Christina?

BEA

Christina who? Jay!

CHRISTINA

Jensen. Who are you?

BEA

Beatrice Brown. I'm—this man's fiancée. Jay. Jay! Get up!

JAY (somewhat incoherent)

Oh, God, Bea. Is that you?

BEA

Yes, it's me, but evidently not your one and only.

JAY

I was having this dream—you came by and I had these two women with me.

BEA

Two? You mean there's another one?

JAY

What?

BEA

It's not a dream; it's a nightmare! It's happening right now, and one of these—women—is about 10-years-old.

CHRISTINA

I'm 12.

BEA

Well, that makes all the difference.

JAY

Oh, God. I have a headache; I may be having an aneurism. Where's your blouse?

BEA

Did you sleep in your clothes?

CHRISTINA

He had too. I had the top of his PJs; mom has the bottoms.

BEA

Mom?

JAY

Give me a minute here, Honey. I need to think. (A beat.) How 'bout some coffee? Do I smell coffee?

CHRISTINA

Yes, I made a fresh pot—French roast. It found it in the cupboard.

JAY

Good work. My favorite. Nothing like a cup of freshly brewed French roast to make the world look like a better place. Coffee, Honey?

BEA

What I want is an explanation!

JAY

Of course you do. But first, some coffee.

CHRISTINA

I'll get it.

(Christina hands Jay and Bea each a cup of coffee.)

JAY

Honey, your blouse; she's just 12.

BEA (grabbing her blouse)

You may be excused.

CHRISTINA

Yes ma'am.

(Christina EXITS.)

JAY

Sugar?

BEA

No.

JAY

Cream?

BEA

No! I don't want any cream or sugar. I want to know what the hell is going on! You tell me not to come over because you want to sleep in and I find you here with two women in the house—a 12-year-old and her *mother*? Is that right?

JAY

Honey—

BEA

Don't you "Honey" me, Jay. Start talking.

JAY

First, let me say that I can fully understand how this—situation could be misinterpreted. If I can just ask for your indulgence for a moment while I think how best to frame a reply.

BEA

Just give it to me straight.

JAY

From the heart?

BEA

If that's where it's coming from.

JAY

Actually, I think it is, and that, in part, is why I can't explain it.

BEA

You're not making any sense.

JAY

It doesn't make sense to me either; it just something I did without analyzing it. It was a spontaneous act of—I don't know what.

BEA

What *act* are you talking about?

JAY

Early this morning; just before I called you. I was driving home, and there was this car—Nora's—

BEA

Nora?

JAY

Miss Jensen. She was stopped at the intersection of Rhode Island Avenue and Old Beach Road—

BEA

I don't care where; I want to know *what* happened.

She— JAY

Miss Jensen? BEA

JAY
Yes. She had literally fallen asleep at the wheel of her Volvo from exhaustion.

BEA
So you—what? Brought her—them—home with you?

JAY
That's right.

BEA
She had better not be attractive!

JAY
I didn't notice.

BEA
Why didn't you drive her to *her* house?

JAY
She doesn't have one.

BEA
She's what—homeless?

JAY
From what I gather, this is the case. Yes.

BEA
You brought a homeless person into your home? Have you lost your mind? Are you completely insane? She could have been a serial killer or something!

JAY
She thought the same thing about me. Maybe—I did have a momentary lapse into—sanity or insanity. I'm not sure which.

BEA
They have shelters for those people. We don't have to bring them into our homes!

JAY

By the time she finishes her night job, the shelters are all full. They can't take her in. The cops won't let her park somewhere so she can sleep, so she literally has to keep driving. If she stops for rest they'll arrest her for vagrancy; if that happens, she could lose her daughter to the state.

BEA

Well, you didn't have to bring them home with you.

JAY

Yes, I did. I couldn't leave a woman and her daughter on the street in the middle of the night. Put yourself in my shoes—or hers. If I didn't know you would do the same thing, I wouldn't be marrying you.

BEA

Okay. I guess one of the reasons I love you is because you have a good heart, but they *can't* stay.

JAY

I know that.

BEA

Do you?

JAY

Of course. Like you said, there are social service agencies in place to take care of —

BEA

Those people?

JAY

Yeah, those people.

BEA

Well, I suppose I should say "hello" *and* "goodbye" to them.

JAY

Yes, I suppose that would be the civil thing to do. I'll get them.

(He crosses to the bedroom door and knocks.)

JAY

Christina, could you and your mom come out? I want you to meet someone.

CHRISTINA (off)

We'll be right out.

JAY

They'll be right out. You don't *have* to wait.

BEA

I want to meet this—Miss Jensen. Or is it "Nora" to you?

JAY

Miss Jensen.

(The door opens and Nora and Christina ENTER. Nora has on Jay's pajama bottoms and a sweat shirt. Her hair is a mess, but even without make-up, she is gorgeous.)

BEA

You said she wasn't attractive.

JAY

I said, "I didn't notice." It was dark, late; I was tired.

BEA

I'm Beatrice Brown—Jay's fiancée. And you are?

NORA

Very tired, I'm afraid. I'm sorry.

CHRISTINA

Her name is Nora; she's my mom.

NORA

My daughter—Christina—Jensen.

BEA

I already had the pleasure of meeting Christina. (A beat.) Jensen? Is that—?

NORA

Danish.

BEA

I thought so, and I'm sure you're just as sweet.

JAY

Be careful, Sweetheart, she has a gun.

BEA

What?

NORA

I don't have a gun!

JAY

You told me you had one.

NORA

That's so you wouldn't—molest me.

JAY

I—wouldn't molest you!

NORA

But I had no way of knowing that. That's why I told you I had a gun.

JAY

Well, you shouldn't have told me because if I was going to molest you, which I wasn't, I would have known about the gun and planned my molestation accordingly.

BEA

Will you two just stop it!

CHRISTINA

Mom, I think she was getting ready to molest him.

BEA

What?

NORA

Christina! Forgive her. She's 12. (To Jay.) Maybe *you* should get a gun.

BEA

For a 12-year-old, she seems *way* too wise in the ways of the world.

Comes with the territory.

NORA

Or the lack thereof.

BEA

Yes, of course, or the lack of territory.

NORA

Look, let's all just relax and try to reach some kind of a—accommodation to alleviate any possibility of a misunderstanding.

JAY

Jay, I think that perhaps your new friend has already found her accommodations.

NORA

Beatrice, there's no need for that.

JAY

For what, Darling?

BEA

For being uncivil.

JAY

Miss Jensen or is it—

BEA

Miss is correct. I'm not married—nor have I ever been, if that's what you're wondering.

NORA

Could you give us a few minutes?

BEA

Of course. Come Christina, we need to pack.

NORA

(They EXIT.)

"Uncivil!" You call me uncivil? Is that what you think I am?

BEA

JAY

Honey—

BEA

Don't "Honey" me, Buster, not with a beautiful Scandinavian doll and her daughter shackled up in your bedroom.

JAY

They aren't "shacked up" for crying out loud. Will you just settle down; you're all revved up. I've never seen you like this.

BEA

I've never *been* like this! What is that woman doing in your bedroom?

JAY

Are you—jealous?

BEA

Jay—she's beautiful!

JAY

Bea, I don't even know who she is.

BEA

Then what in God's name is she doing here? Why did you open your house to a perfect, and I do mean *perfect*, stranger?

JAY

I told you; she was on the street. And I'm not attracted to her in that way.

BEA

In what way *are* you attracted to her then?

JAY

I'm not *attracted* to her at all. It's just that—there she was. In the middle of the street in the middle of the night with nowhere to go. I don't know why I did it; I just did.

BEA

You can't save the world, Jay.

JAY

Well maybe I can make a small piece of it a little more tolerable for a homeless and her daughter for a single night.

There piece of it.

BEA

JAY

BEA

I know all about you. Your mother told me how you were always bringing home stray animals. I won't have it.

JAY

Honey, they'll leave.

BEA

Today?

JAY

Yes, I'll make some calls—find them a place.

BEA (mad, but starting to break)

Find them a place? That's not your responsibility! We're meeting with our investors at nine; you have a tennis date with my father, and tonight we're having cocktails with my parents. And look at you! You look like you slept in your clothes?

JAY

I *did* sleep in my clothes; they had my pajamas.

BEA

Get yourself put back together and don't be late for this meeting; it's important. And get—what's her name?

JAY

Nora.

BEA

Nora! Out of your house. I'll see you at the office.

(Bea EXITS, crying. After a moment, Christina and Nora ENTER; Nora is carrying her suitcase.)

NORA

We'll be going. (To Christina.) Wait for me in the car, Honey.

(Christina EXITS.)

JAY

Can't I fix you some breakfast? Warm up Danish, some coffee?

NORA

No, thank you; you've already been too kind. I have to get to work and Christina starts school today.

JAY

Well, okay then.

NORA

I want to thank you for your kindness, Mr. Cronley. I—don't know if I could have made it through another night in my car.

JAY

Nobody should have to spend the night in their car.

NORA

Oh, we could do much worse than that.

JAY

Yeah, I guess I didn't think of that.

NORA

But because of your kindness, we did much better.

JAY

It really didn't take much effort on my part.

NORA

Effort? No, I think it was something else.

JAY

I suppose so.

NORA

What do you suppose it was?

JAY

I don't know; it wasn't a decision that even required any thought. I didn't do it for you necessarily, or for me, or for God. I just did it because it needed doing. I did it without thinking about why or considering the consequences.

NORA

Or without expecting anything in return?

JAY

Did I get anything?

Your fiancée gave you hell.

NORA

She's under a lot of stress; this big—deal is pending.

JAY

Well, again. Thank you.

NORA

(She turns to go.)

Miss Jensen?

JAY

Yes?

NORA

If you—need a place—another time . . .

JAY

That's very kind of you; but I think we'll be fine now.

NORA

The door's always open, and Christina would be safe here.

JAY

I know that now. Goodbye, Mr. Cronley.

NORA

Goodbye, Miss Jensen.

JAY

(As Nora EXITS, Christina ENTERS.)

Forgot my backpack. (She retrieves her backpack.) Mr. Cronley?

CHRISTINA

Yes.

JAY

CHRISTINA

I start school today at Thompson, and it's like I'm going to need a street address. We have a PO box for mail, and Mom has a cell phone, but I don't like have a place—to call home. Would you mind if I—

JAY

27 Rhode Island Avenue. I don't mind.

CHRISTINA

Thanks. You're pretty cool, like, for someone your age.

JAY

Thanks. I know you mean that as a compliment. Take care of your mom.

CHRISTINA (as she EXITS)

I'll try.

(THE LIGHT COME DOWN SLOWLY to end the scene.)

ACT I, SCENE III

SCENE: That afternoon, the same day.
LIGHTS COME UP ON JERIMIAH (JERRY)
BROWN, 60, a venture capitalist from a
wealthy family with roots going back to
the founding fathers of the state. He's in
the locker room of Bailey's Beach Club
changing into his tennis togs. After a few
moments, Jay ENTERS with his gym bag
and tennis racket.

JERRY

Jay, my boy, glad to see you made it. Thought you might have optioned to avoid another thrashing at the hands of an old man.

JAY

No, there's nothing I like better; keeps me in touch with reality. I'm completely up for it.

JERRY

Did you meet with those people I'm bringing into our project?

JAY

Yes sir I did; this morning in Bea's office. They were—quite a well appointed—

JERRY

And well-connected.

JAY

—and well-connected lot of gentlemen as I'd ever hope to meet.

JERRY

They all loaded too, if you know what I mean.

JAY

I think I have a pretty good idea.

JERRY

They move money around the way we bounce a tennis ball back and forth.

JAY

And I suppose they seldom lose at this money game.

JERRY

They *never* lose, because they always bet on a sure thing.

JAY

That's a fine strategy.

JERRY

That's what we have here isn't it? With this vortex combustion chamber thing—a sure winner?

JAY

I certainly hope so.

JERRY

Hope?

JAY

The prototype works, and I—actually Bea will own the patent on the process.

JERRY

But you invented the thing?

JAY

With her help; she's a fine engineer too—maybe a better engineer than lawyer. By putting the patent in her name, we're protecting ourselves from having Lockheed Martin claim I developed the process on their nickel. I work for them, but I did all this development on my own. If they got control of the patent, we wouldn't see a penny.

JERRY

So Bea will own the patent?

JAY

And she's set-up the corporation so we'll be completely protected.

JERRY

Bring me up to speed again on what I'm getting these people into, not that they give a damn so long as it makes money. But I want to have something to tell people about the thing—keep it simple.

JAY

In very simple terms, supercavitation works by reducing hydrodynamic drag by allowing undersea vehicles and weapons to travel inside a self-generated bubble of water vapor and air. The vortex combustion chamber I developed expands that bubble through the injection of additional gases. Once inside the bubble, the resistance on an undersea projectile is reduced a hundred fold. This translates into a 200 knot torpedo.

JERRY

And you beat the Office of Naval Research on this one? Them and Lockheed Martin and Electric Boat and all the rest?

JAY

That's right. I took a different approach, and it works far better than anything they're developing.

JERRY

And the patent will belong to you?

JAY

No, Beatrice.

JERRY

Right. You told me. (A beat.) So it's a sure thing? You're sure.

JAY

The only *sure* things are death and taxes, and they making some pretty remarkable strides in the area of death.

JERRY

Goddammit, man! A brilliant engineer and a sense of humor too. No wonder Beatrice fell for you.

JAY

I fell for her.

JERRY

Damn good thing too, for all of us. Damn good! (A beat.) Now are you ready for that thrashing?

JAY

I'm always ready.

JERRY

Then let's get to it. (A beat.) Just one thing—don't mean to pry, but is everything all right between you two?

JAY

Sure. Everything's fine. Why?

JERRY

She called me—seemed upset. Said to *talk* to you.

JAY

We're talking.

JERRY

Right, we're talking.

JAY

Probably just nerves—the deal. She's fine.

JERRY

Right. Nerves. (A beat.) Well then, let's get to it. And take it easy on me; I'm the guy who's giving you his daughter.

JAY

I always do.

(LIGHTS COME DOWN SLOWLY to end the scene.)

MILDRED

And *delicious!*

BEA

I thought “girl talk” was when women revealed their most intimate secrets to one another.

MILDRED

Why on earth would anyone want to do that?

BEA

I guess it’s a generational thing. I tell my friends everything.

MILDRED

Everything?

BEA

Almost everything.

MILDRED

Well, that’s a relief. (A beat.) You don’t have anything—of that nature that you want to discuss with me, do you?

BEA

No, Mom, I wouldn’t burden you with my personal problems.

MILDRED

I wasn’t aware that you had any—personal problems.

BEA

You’re right. I don’t. I’m just being silly—me an engineer, a Harvard Law graduate, letting a little thing like—emotions cloud my judgment. I know Jay loves me.

MILDRED

What?

(Jay and Jerry ENTER. Jerry has a bottle of champagne and four glasses.)

JERRY

Jay, here’s a couple of good lookin’ broads; let’s buy them a drink.

JAY

Yeah, maybe they'll take us home with them.

BEA

There will be none of that. Father Paul has us on our best behavior until the wedding.

JERRY

Well, maybe I'll get lucky.

MILDRED

You have no idea of how lucky you already are.

JERRY (kisses her)

Actually, I do.

MILDRED

Are you going to pour that champagne or not?

JERRY

Of course, I'm going to pour it—pour it *and* drink it. Stand up.

(Jerry fills the glasses.)

MILDRED

What are we going to toast?

JERRY

Prosperity!

ALL

Prosperity. Here. Here.

JERRY

The good life!

ALL

The good life.

JERRY

Family!

ALL

Family.

Health! JERRY

Health. ALL

And most of all—the happy couple! JERRY

Better hold off on that one. BEA

What? MILDRED

I said you'd, "better hold off on that one." BEA

"The happy couple," why? JERRY

Honey. JAY

Honey what? BEA

Don't do this. JAY

Do what? MILDRED

What's going on with you two? JERRY

Let's just say: the couple if not so happy right now. BEA

I'm happy. JAY

You should be—spending the night with two Scandinavian beauties. BEA

Bea, for Christ's sake, stop it.

JAY

Two Scandinavian beauties. All right!

JERRY

Jeremiah! Stop that this instant.

MILDRED

Do you want to tell them or shall I?

BEA

There's *nothing* to tell.

JAY

Maybe we should let them discuss this in private.

JERRY

We *already* discussed it in private, but—that wasn't enough. He needs to—see how reckless his behavior was. That's why I brought it up.

BEA

Reckless?

JAY

Wasn't it?

BEA

It was a lot of things, but "reckless" is not one of them.

JAY

Why don't you let them be the judge of that? (A beat.) Tell them unless you want me to.

BEA

Since you don't *know* anything about it, I guess I'd better tell them—Sweetheart!

JAY

I know this much, you—

BEA

I said I'll tell them! If you will just calm down.

JAY

I am calm! BEA (gulping her champagne)

Stopping drinking that stuff! JAY

That “stuff” is Dom Perignon. JERRY

It’s Dom Perignon. BEA (drinking more)

And it will get you all revved up. JAY

I’m not all revved up. BEA (drinks more)

You will be! JAY

Tell them! BEA

You are a little revved up, Honey. JERRY

Mom! BEA

Do you have something to—share with us, Jay? MILDRED

I don’t see that I have a choice—now that my irrational, incoherent, and yet, still, irresistible fiancée has backed me into a corner. JAY

Go on. MILDRED

Last night—actually early this morning, say around one— JAY

BEA

The *time* doesn't matter!

JAY

Okay, let's just say that *sometime* early this morning I encountered a stopped car—vehicle—as the cops say, at the intersection of Rhode Island Avenue and Old Beach Road.

BEA

Dammit, Jay! Who cares where you met them?

JAY

I do.

MILDRED

Met who?

BEA

The woman or *women* he spent the night with!

JAY

One of them was child!

JERRY

What?

MILDRED

Oh dear God!

JAY

No, wait. You don't understand. The daughter is only 12.

JERRY

Don't say anything else, son, not without an attorney present.

JAY

An attorney is present! Her.

BEA

"Her?" I'm the woman you're going to marry! Not "her!"

JAY

You've got it all wrong; nothing is amiss here. This woman is homeless. She was driving around the streets of Newport because the cops will pick her up for vagrancy if she stops. She *lives* in her car!

JERRY

What kind of car?

JAY

Volvo wagon—maybe 12 years old. She and her daughter live in it. I found her asleep at the wheel, so—

BEA

He took them home with him, like stray animals.

JAY

More or less, except that stray animals are more likely to be picked up and cared for than stray people. I took them home; gave them a safe place to clean up and spend the night. I slept on the couch in my clothes—

BEA

Because they had on his pajamas—pajamas I gave him.

JAY

Bea came by this morning—unannounced, and got the wrong idea. That's all there is to it.

BEA

Except for the fact that she's—beautiful!

MILDRED

The mother?

BEA

Of course, the mother—Nora! She's this lanky Scandinavian blonde with big blue eyes and even bigger breasts.

JAY

I didn't notice.

BEA

Oh, she tried to hide it in the PJs and a baggy sweatshirt, but I could tell. She's beautiful, and she *knows* it.

JAY

Her physical attributes, in any case, are neither here nor there.

BEA

They're there are right!

JAY

I can't talk to you about this, not when your behavior is so irrational.

BEA

Me? Irrational? What about you? Our entire future hangs in the balance of attracting investors for our corporation and you—you put everything in jeopardy by spending the night with that woman.

JAY

How does that put our business in jeopardy?

BEA

Because our personal lives—our marriage—and our business lives are inexorably entwined. If we don't get married, the whole deal could fall through.

JERRY

Beatrice, I think you're over reacting. In any case, I won't have either of you doing anything to screw this up at this point; there is just too much at stake.

JAY

Too much what?

JERRY

Money!

JAY

I thought so. In any case, she's gone. They left this morning just after you did. You have blown this whole thing out of proportion.

BEA

She left?

JAY

Both of them left this morning. It's over.

BEA

I didn't know.

JAY

You didn't give me a chance to tell you.

BEA

I guess I got—too revved up.

JAY

It wasn't that bad; I understand. (A beat.) Look, it was just one simple spontaneous act to—lend a hand. And now it's done. I wouldn't do anything to jeopardize our life together.

BEA

You wouldn't?

JAY

Of course not. I'm totally devoted to you. Okay?

BEA

Okay.

MILDRED

Then we can finish that toast.

JERRY

To the happy couple! Here! Here!

ALL

To the happy couple.

(They all drink as the LIGHTS COME DOWN SLOWLY to end the scene.)

ACT I, SCENE V

SCENE: Later that night. LIGHTS COME UP on Nora in Jay's condo; she's in the kitchen, boiling water for tea. After a moment, Jay ENTERS.

We're back.

NORA

I see that you are.

JAY

I'm sorry, really. I just—

NORA

It's okay; you're welcome here. I told you the door was open.

JAY

It's Christina; poor kid. I have to get her settled, if even for a few days. (A beat.)
Tea?

NORA

I don't want to put you out.

JAY

You're not. It's chamomile.

NORA

Whatever.

JAY

(She fixes the tea, adding a little schnapps from a bottle on the counter, and serves him.)

NORA

It will help you relax.

JAY (after drinking)

Whoa! That is—excellent tea.

NORA

I added some schnapps I found in the cabinet.

JAY

Schnapps? It must have been left over from a party or something; I don't drink schnapps.

NORA

You do now.

JAY

Yeah, I guess I do. This tea is just—out of this world!

NORA

Thanks. One of my many talents. (A beat.) What do you do? For a living, I mean.

JAY

I thought you knew: White slaver. I lure women into my condo and then sell them on the foreign market.

NORA

What do you really do?

JAY

Mechanical engineer. It's not nearly as exciting. Fluid dynamics and such is my area of expertise.

NORA

Do you work for the government or what?

JAY

Indirectly. I support the Navy through a contract vehicle with Lockheed Martin. But my fiancée and I are starting our own business. You met her this morning.

NORA

Yes, I remember. She's—

JAY

Really not like that at all; she's been under a lot of pressure to get this project off the ground. She an attorney—Harvard Law—as well as an engineer. She's doing all the legal work herself and arranging the funding, through her dad, to start a new corporation. She's been working hard; it's taking its toll.

NORA

I'm very impressed.

JAY

What about you?

NORA

Well, as you probably suspect, my career path is not exactly on track. I have a dream of someday opening a child care facility—I came here originally as an au pair. But circumstances prevented me from—pursuing my dream.

JAY

Circumstances?

NORA

So, now I work part time as a clerk at Wal-Mart; part time at Subway, and I clean houses in my spare time.

JAY

And raise a daughter. Sounds exhausting.

NORA

It is, but we manage. Christina is really quite wonderful—my daughter and I are best friends.

JAY

That asking a lot of a child.

NORA

I hope not too much.

JAY

I think she'll let you know; kids are like that.

NORA

Look, I really don't want to cause a problem for you—with your fiancée. I can understand her concerns.

JAY

Beatrice will be fine; I'll just have to figure a work around.

NORA

Work around?

JAY

Technical jargon. It's simply a way to—

NORA

Avoid a problem?

JAY

More or less. But I think I have a solution. (A beat.) I need to make a call.

NORA

Of course. I'll just—finish my tea.

(Jay dials a number on his cell; A LIGHT COMES UP ON Bea when she answers.)

BEA

Hello.

JAY

Honey, it's me.

BEA

I know—caller ID.

JAY

Can I come over?

BEA

What about Father Paul? We're supposed to—behave.

JAY

Are you going to let a celibate old priest control our sex life?

BEA

Well no, but—why didn't you just come home with me after dinner?

JAY

I thought—maybe you were still mad. Anyway, I have exterminators coming.

Exterminators?
BEA

JAY
I forgot; the exterminators are coming tomorrow; they'll be here all week. I have to get out. I'm . . . homeless.

BEA
No you're not. Come on over, but don't plan on getting a lot of sleep.

JAY
That's not what I'm planning on getting a lot of.

BEA
Good. I needed to hear that.

JAY
And I needed to say it. I'll be right over.

(They hang up and LIGHTS FADE ON Bea.
Jay turns back to Nora.)

JAY
Okay, all set. The place is all yours.

(Christina ENTERS from the bedroom and goes to her mom. Nora cuddles her close.)

CHRISTINA
Hi.

JAY
Hello.

CHRISTINA
Are we staying here, Mom?

JAY
Yeah, you're staying here.

NORA
For a few days.

JAY

As long as you need to; you two are a blessing. I've wanted to move in with Bea forever, but she has this damned—Catholic sense of morality that—prevents her from doing—what's best for anyone. *This* is perfect.

NORA

I can pay rent.

JAY

We'll talk about that later. In the meantime, if the phone rings, let the machine answer it. My cell number's on my card. Here. Do you need anything?

NORA

Not now.

JAY

Okay, I'll see you two—whenever. Take care.

CHRISTINA

You too.

(LIGHTS COME DOWN SLOWLY to end
the scene.)

ACT I, SCENE VI

SCENE: A couple of weeks later. LIGHTS COME UP on Christina in the condo; she's sitting on the couch and is upset. She's been crying. As soon as she hears a KNOCK, she rushes the door and opens it. Jay ENTERS.

Hey, kiddo, what's wrong?

JAY

It's Mom.

CHRISTINA

You've been crying. (She nods.) What is it? I thought things were going well.

JAY

My mom--

CHRISTINA

What about her?

JAY

I don't know; she won't tell me.

CHRISTINA

Then how do you know something's wrong?

JAY

I can just tell; she's my mother. She's been crying too, and she *never* cries.

CHRISTINA

JAY

You've *both* been crying? (She nods.) Where is your mom?

CHRISTINA

In bed—crying.

JAY

Look, you go outside. Give me a few minutes to talk to her. I'll find out what's going on and if something's wrong, we'll fix it. Okay?

CHRISTINA

Okay, but—what if you can't.

JAY

I'm an engineer; I can fix anything.

CHRISTINA

Promise?

JAY

Cross my heart and hope—I'll just cross my heart.

(She forces a slight smile and EXITS at the upstage door. Jay goes to the bedroom door and knocks gently.)

JAY

Miss Jensen?

NORA (off)

Go away.

JAY

Can't do that; made a promise.

(Knocks again.)

NORA

Leave me alone.

JAY

If you don't come out, I'll have to come in.

NORA

The door's locked.

JAY

Then I'll huff and I'll puff and blow the door down.

NORA

I'm not one of the three little pigs.

JAY

And I'm not the big bad wolf. I just want to talk with you—for Christina. She's upset. Please. Open the door.

(The door finally opens and Nora ENTERS. Her face is all puffy and red from crying. She walks past him.)

NORA

What do you want to talk about?

JAY

You tell me.

NORA

I don't walk to talk at all.

JAY

Christina's in quite a state; I think she half scared to death. She told me you'd been in there crying—and that you *never* cry.

NORA

I cry. I cry *plenty*. I just try not to let her see me cry.

JAY

I see. So she won't—get scared.

NORA

So she won't know how bad things really are.

JAY

How bad are they?

NORA

Maybe—I'm just having a bad day.

JAY

Maybe the worst day of your life.

NORA

Or my period.

JAY

I don't think so. (A beat.) Do you want to tell me? If not, I'll find someone for you to talk to.

NORA

Oh hell! Why not; there's nothing you can do about it anyway.

JAY

We don't know that.

NORA

It's *not* my period, but it *is*—biological.

JAY

I see. I may be an engineer, but I know something about the facts of life.

NORA

It's not that either; I'm not pregnant.

JAY

I didn't think that. (A beat.) What *is* it?

NORA

Well, you see, it goes something like this: just when I'm about to get back on my feet; just when—through your kindness—I get an ounce of stability in my life; just when I can actually begin to pay you some rent; just when I think I just might make it, something comes along and jerks the rug right out from under me.

JAY

Okay, tell me what happened, and we'll talk about ways to deal with it.

NORA

Ways to deal with it!

JAY

Hey—I'm on your side.

Why? NORA

Because you make one fine cup of tea. JAY

Why should I trust you? NORA

You got anyone else? JAY

No. (A beat.) You sure you want to hear this? NORA

No, but I'm willing to listen anyway. Fire away. JAY

NORA (building until she breaks)
Okay, here's the situation: I'm a 28-year-old single mother, homeless, broke, no family, very few friends, no health insurance, and, here's the kicker—I found a lump on my breast. (A few beats.) Do you know what that means to a woman? I have a lump on my breast!

(BLACKOUT TO END ACT I.)

SOMETHING OF VALUE

by

© David W. Christner 2006

ACT II, SCENE I

SCENE: LIGHTS COME UP ON Christina, seated on the couch in Jay's condo; she's thumbing through a magazine and looking to the door. She jumps up and runs to the door when Jay and Nora ENTER.

CHRISTINA

Mom! Are you okay? What did the doctor say? (She doesn't answer.) Is she okay?

NORA

Come here. Let me hold you.

CHRISTINA (to Jay)

She's not, is she?

JAY

She's going to be sick for a while; she needs some treatment, but I think she'll be fine.

NORA

Don't lie to her—or to me either.

CHRISTINA

What's wrong with her—does she have like cancer or something?

NORA

Sit down with me, Honey. (They sit.) There, that's better.

CHRISTINA

Mom—

NORA

Sweetheart, I found a lump on my breast, and I had to have a test to find out if it was just a normal lump or—something else.

CHRISTINA

It's something else isn't it?

NORA

I have a small—growth on my breast—

CHRISTINA

That's cancer! Anyone knows that.

JAY

But she caught it early and it's completely treatable. She can be cured.

NORA (to Jay)

Yes, if I could afford the treatment.

CHRISTINA

I don't understand. If you're sick—doesn't someone *have* to take care of you.

JAY

Not in this country.

CHRISTINA

Are you just supposed to like—die?

JAY

Your mother's not going to die. We'll find a way to get her treated.

NORA

I'm not eligible for any of the so-called "safety net" programs. People like us fall through the cracks. And if I can't work—

JAY

We'll find a way!

NORA

This isn't a *technical* problem that can be solved by an engineer.

JAY

Yes, it is. It about numbers—X number of dollars. And we can't let the emotional issues connected with the numbers fog the real issue of how to pay for your treatment.

NORA

If it's more than \$300.00, I can't afford it. And according to that administrator, it could be 100 times that much.

JAY

That's why we have to get you insured?

NORA

I won't even be able to keep my part-time jobs now; how can I possibly get insurance? Who's going to hire a woman with cancer?

JAY

I'm not talking about you getting a job; I'm thinking about how to get you covered without having a job.

NORA

That's impossible.

JAY

So was going to the moon, and we did that.

NORA

What good did it do?

CHRISTINA

Just listen, Mom; he just wants to help.

NORA

All right. I'm listening.

JAY (thinks, then)

There's only one way.

NORA

One way would be enough.

JAY

This may sound a little crazy.

NORA
Try me. *Anything* is better than—the alternative.

JAY
Marry me.

NORA
What?

JAY
Marry me!

NORA
You're crazy!

CHRISTINA
He's like—really nice, Mom.

NORA
Marry you?

JAY
It's the only way; you would be eligible for coverage under my medical plan. I would rush through the paper work; you could start treatment immediately. This isn't something you can wait on.

NORA
Mr. Cronley—

JAY
Jay, please. I think the fact that I just proposed puts us on a first name basis.

NORA
Jay, I don't know what to say.

CHRISTINA
Say, "yes", Mom!

NORA
You're engaged!

JAY
I'm sure Bea—would understand—given the circumstances.

NORA

You don't know anything about women, do you?

JAY

Admittedly, I probably know more about high speed torpedoes.

NORA

This is not a technical problem you're dealing with; it's an emotional one, and I don't think *any* woman would—understand.

CHRISTINA

I understand.

NORA

You're 12 and I'm your mother; you don't count. Jay, this is a wonderful humanitarian gesture, but—

JAY

Nora. What choice have you got?

NORA (thinks, then)

You would really do this—marry a stranger to—

JAY

We're not strangers anymore.

NORA

And you would *marry* me so I could be treated for cancer?

JAY

I don't see that I have a choice either; now that I'm involved, I can't just—turn away. (A beat.) It's just a marriage of convenience. Once you're cured, we'll get a divorce and I'll marry Beatrice.

NORA

Beatrice, of course; she's going to love this plan.

JAY

Let me take care of Beatrice.

NORA

Isn't that what you're doing for me?

JAY

That's what I'm attempting to do.

NORA

My god. You're serious. You would really do this?

JAY

Yes.

NORA

And what do you get in return?

JAY

I think I stand to lose a lot more than I could possibly gain.

NORA

I would have to make arrangements for Christina; I couldn't leave her here.

JAY

I know that; I wouldn't expect you too.

CHRISTINA

What kind of arrangements?

NORA

Just a place for you to stay; I could be hospitalized for a while.

CHRISTINA

Maybe that Miss Brown would—

NORA

I don't think so, Honey. Miss Brown is not going to be a happy camper.

JAY

So you'll do it.

NORA

Only if your fiancée agrees to it.

JAY

She will. Beatrice is a rational, compassionate, sensitive, intelligent, and caring human being. She'll understand.

(LIGHTS COME DOWN to end the scene.)

ACT II, SCENE II

SCENE: Later that day. LIGHTS COME UP SLOWLY ON Beatrice and Jay in her office. We HEAR Bea before we see them.

BEA

No. No! No! NO! And NO!

JAY

Bea—Honey—

BEA

No! You lied to me, Jay! You told me they left!

JAY

They did.

BEA

But they came back!

JAY

That never came up.

BEA

But you knew they were there; for two weeks you've been in my bed every night, knowing she was in your bed. That's living a lie to get yourself laid! And what about the exterminators?

JAY

I wasn't thinking straight; I had to tell you something.

BEA

So you *did* lie to me!

JAY

We'll if you want to put that fine a point on it, I guess I did. But the exterminators *are* coming—*sometime*. I only lied about that because I wanted to be with you.

BEA

Sleep with me you mean!

JAY

Well, that was *part* of it; I am a guy after all.

BEA

But now you want to *marry* her!

JAY

No, I don't *want* to; I *have* to.

BEA

Have to?

JAY

Yes. No. No! Not in that sense. I don't have to marry her because I *have* to marry her. I have to marry her because it's the most efficient means—maybe the only means—of getting her medical coverage for the treatment she needs.

BEA

There must be some other way.

JAY

You think I haven't tried to find another way? I've made fifty calls and been to half a dozen agencies. They're either all broke or it takes weeks or months to get through the red tape. Nora—Miss Jensen doesn't have weeks or months.

BEA

Do you have any idea of what you're asking me to do?

JAY

I know it's a difficult thing.

BEA

Let me explain it to you.

JAY

I said, "I know."

BEA

You're asking me to put off *our* wedding indefinitely so you can marry another woman.

Not indefinitely—just tell she’s well.

JAY

Which could take—how long?

BEA

I don’t know.

JAY

That’s indefinitely!

BEA

Okay, you’re right about that; that is definitely indefinitely.

JAY

And she’s not just *any* woman. She’s this beautiful blonde Scandinavian with perfect breasts—

BEA

Which she may lose!

JAY

I can’t help that.

BEA

Yes, you can.

JAY

By agreeing to let my fiancée marry her! (A beat.) Jay, you don’t even know her; you don’t owe her anything. You’ve already been—too kind.

BEA

What would you have me do?

JAY

Walk away. Right now, before this nonsense goes any further. Get out. Forget her. Get her out of your house and out of your—*our*—life.

BEA

I can’t do that.

JAY

Won’t do it!

BEA

JAY

Okay. Won't do it.

BEA

Even if it means losing me.

JAY

I know you, Bea; you won't let this destroy what we have.

BEA

Maybe you don't know me as well as you think. And what the hell do *we* have right now? You want to marry another woman after—everything I've given you. And I *have* given you *everything*!

JAY

I know that, Honey. And I've given you my heart and soul too, and I don't mean to take them away from you now. But—this thing has to be done.

BEA

But *you* don't have to do it.

JAY

I hate to use a cliché, but if not me, then who?

BEA

That's not your concern.

JAY

I think it concerns all of us. (A few beats.) Look, let's go to Father Paul for some advice—you, me, your parents, Nora and Christina. We'll sit down in the vestry and hash it out.

BEA

You're not even religious—much less a Catholic.

JAY

That doesn't matter. We'll see what the Church says. If the Church won't recognize this marriage then . . .

BEA

You won't go through with it?

JAY

No, I won't go through with it.

BEA

Promise me!

JAY

Okay, I promise.

BEA

Okay. I don't like it one bit, but I'll go along—as long as you promise—

JAY

I did. I promised. But *you* have to go along with it if he says it okay.

BEA

Okay. I'll set up a meeting.

JAY

Make it soon; we don't have a lot of time here.

(LIGHTS COME DOWN as to end the scene.)

ACT II, SCENE III

SCENE: The next day. LIGHTS COME UP on FATHER PAUL, 60, long time Priest and confidant of the Brown family. He's seated at his desk in the vestry when, Mildred, Jerry, Bea, Jay, Nora and Christina ENTER.

FATHER PAUL (rising)

Welcome. Come in. Come in. Please. Sit. Make yourselves comfortable.

JAY

That would truly take a miracle, Father.

JERRY

You remember Jay, Father. My future son-in-law.

FATHER PAUL

Of course. Jay, welcome. I've been going through the rigors of Catholicism with Jay in his preparation for his union with Beatrice. (To Beatrice.) And how is the blushing bride to be?

BEA

Or not to be! That is the question.

FATHER PAUL

Yes, well. Good to see you too Mildred. Wonderful work your committee is doing for the Island Hospitality Network. Keep up the good work.

JERRY

And here we have Nora Jensen and her daughter.

CHRISTINA

Christina. I'm 12.

FATHER PAUL

Miss Jensen, my pleasure I'm sure. And Christina—what a beautiful name—a

JAY
Let me handle this, Beatrice.

BEA
Jay wants to marry her—Nora.

MILDRED
What?

FATHER PAUL
Is she Catholic? (Laughs to himself. Nobody else laughs.) Good Lord! You're serious.

JAY
Let me explain.

FATHER PAUL
Yes, I think some kind of an explanation is in order. Go ahead.

BEA
Don't leave out the good part.

JAY
There's no good part!

BEA
Then the bad part; don't leave that out!

JAY
You're getting all revved up again.

BEA
I am not!

JERRY
As *I* understand it; correct me if I'm wrong. Jay and Miss Jensen met quite by accident—

BEA
On the street!

JAY
At the intersection of Rhode Island Avenue and Old Beach Road.

She was passed out. BEA

I was not! I had simply fallen asleep— NORA

At the wheel. BEA

It seems she was living in her car. JERRY

What kind of car? FATHER PAUL

A Volvo wagon. NORA

That's a nice car—roomy. FATHER PAUL

It's 12 years old. NORA

Same as me. CHRISTINA

Good Scandinavian design—built to last. FATHER PAUL

Same as her. BEA (referring to Nora)

In any case, without anybody knowing anything about it, Jay—took them in. JERRY

I'm the other one who was "taken in." BEA

You were not! JAY

Yes, I was! You lied to me about the exterminators! BEA

MILDRED

What exterminators?

BEA

There weren't any exterminators!

JAY

I know that. I only told you the exterminators were coming so I could sleep with you instead of her.

MILDRED

What do exterminators have to do with that?

BEA (to Father Paul)

This is all your fault!

FATHER PAUL

My fault?

BEA

If you hadn't have forbade us from sleeping together before the wedding, Jay would have come home to me that night and he never would have met the two of them. But he did the right thing—the thing the Church required of us—and as a consequence of doing the right thing, he ran into them. Now our whole world has turned upside down.

FATHER PAUL

Technically speaking, it wasn't the *sleeping* I objected to.

MILDRED

Explain to me again where the exterminators came in.

BEA

They didn't. Don't you see? He just used them as an excuse to move in with *me* so *they* could move in with him!

MILDRED

Does any of this make sense to you, Jerry?

JERRY

I think—we have to look at the subtext.

JAY

There's no subtext. (To Bea) What good would it do me if they moved in with me when I moved in with you?

BEA

I don't know! It's was probably some underhanded male dominant species thing.

JERRY

Stop it you two! The point is—what the hell is the point?

JAY

Father Paul, the point is: Nora has been diagnosed with breast cancer; she needs to begin treatment right now! She's been working three part-time jobs; she has no health insurance, no money, no one to help her.

BEA

That's where *he* comes in.

JAY

I have a plan.

BEA

He's talking about *way* more than a medical plan. She's been living at his place.

FATHER PAUL

I gathered that, but has he not been living at your place. Bea?

BEA

Well—yes.

JAY

I moved in with Bea so they would have a place to stay. Is that such a sin?

FATHER PAUL

Not so much the moving in as—what I gather was your inability to control your—let's just say, most primal instincts once you two were together.

JAY

I was referring to my giving Nora and Christina a place to stay. Was that wrong?

FATHER PAUL

Certainly not.

JAY

So, now that I've involved myself in their lives, I want to go the next step.

BEA

The step down the aisle.

JAY

Bea, will you just stop it! (A beat.) I don't see any other way to help her through this medical crisis. I simply want to marry her so I can provide her with medical insurance through my provider. When she is cured, we will get divorced and I will marry Bea.

BEA

That last part of it is highly problematic at this point.

MILDRED

Father, doesn't the archdiocese have a contingency fund to cover this sort of thing?

FATHER PAUL

I'm afraid that fund has been depleted—by another contingency. I'm sure you know what I'm talking about!

MILDRED

We needn't go into that.

JAY

I would pay for it out of pocket if all my resources weren't tied up in this start-up.

FATHER PAUL

Jerry, perhaps you could advance the young lady a loan or make a charitable gift designated solely for the purpose of treating her illness.

JERRY

What? How much money we're talking about here?

JAY

Between 100K and 300K, depending on how the treatment goes; whether surgery is required—how much radiation, chemo, drugs. It adds up fast.

BEA

Which is why we have insurance.

JAY

But we don't *all* have it.

FATHER PAUL

Can you do anything, Jerry?

JERRY

Under the circumstances, I don't think Jay's approach is all that bad of an idea. The marriage would just be temporary—

BEA

Dad!

MILDRED

Jerry! For god's sake, this is you daughter.

JERRY

Look at it logically—crunch the numbers. It makes more sense than anything else.

BEA

I can't believe you're saying this. (A beat.) What is the Church's view on such a marriage, Father?

FATHER PAUL

The Church views marriage as a sacred institution, not to be entered into lightly. It is symbolic of the sacred union between Christ and his Church.

JAY

Is a life not more sacred to the Church than an institution, Father?

FATHER PAUL

Certainly, but neither should a marriage be entered into with certain knowledge that it will be dissolved.

JAY

But these are extraordinary circumstances, Father. Surely, the Church can broaden its interpretation of marriage to cover such a unique situation as this.

BEA

Give up, Jay. He's not going to go for it. He doesn't have the authority to rule on this anyway.

FATHER PAUL

I will, of course, look into an alternative means to find funds for this young woman's treatment.

JAY

How long will that take?

FATHER PAUL

A few weeks—or months.

JAY

That will be too late.

CHRISTINA

Mom, what does he mean—"too late?"

BEA

So what you're saying, Father, is that the Church will *not* sanctify or approve a union such as the one Jay proposes.

FATHER PAUL

That's right. I'm sorry, Son.

CHRISTINA

Does that mean my mom going to die?

JAY (after a moment)

Your mother's not going to die, Christina. I'll see that she gets the care she deserves.

BEA

Jay, you promised!

JAY

I don't care.

NORA

She has to say it's okay, Jay. I don't want to—do this to your life. She has to approve.

JAY

Hell with that! She never will. (To Bea) And you—you *knew* the Church wouldn't budge, couldn't budge without a Papal decree. You had me on the ropes going in to this thing. That was unfair!

BEA

If you break your promise to me, we're finished.

JAY

I only agreed to it because I *assumed* that the Church knew right from wrong. Isn't that what you teach here? Help your neighbor? Hold out your hand to those who need it? Why can't the Church do the right thing?

FATHER PAUL

It's more complicated than that, Son.

JAY

No. It's simple; it's *exceedingly* simple: do you help or not? What could be simpler than that? Yes or no? (A few beats.) No answer. I'll take that as a "no." Nora, we're getting married even I have to drag you to the altar. Hell with all my promises! For one time in my life, I'm going to do something of value. Come on you two. We can still make it to City Hall in time to get a license and find a Justice of the Peace.

(Jay starts out with Nora and Christina.)

BEA

Don't do this, Jay.

JAY

I'm sorry, Beatrice, but this train is leaving the station.

BEA

On a trip to nowhere!

(She takes off her engagement ring and hands it to him.)

JAY

Fine. I don't give a damn!

FATHER PAUL

Son, you can't defy the Church!

JAY

The Church? *What* Church? The guy I learned about in Sunday School wouldn't come anywhere near this place!

BEA

Oh sure, bring up Jesus now that you need him.

JAY

I'm not the one that needs him! (To Nora and Christina) Come on. We're leaving this place.

BEA

Don't you dare do this to me! You promised! (They keep going.) Father Paul, *do* something!

FATHER PAUL

What?

BEA

Tell him—tell him he'll go to hell or something!

FATHER PAUL

I don't think he cares.

(BLACKOUT to end the scene.)

ACT II, SCENE IV

SCENE: The next day. LIGHTS COME UP ON Bea and Jerry on the patio. Bea is pacing and looking at the Daily News. Jerry listens as she rants and raves. She is mad and hurt and just on the verge of hysteria.

BEA

He did it; he actually did it! Here it is in the Daily News: Jerry Lee Cronley and Nora Katherine Jensen were married in King's Park by Justice of the Peace blah, blah, blah. I don't believe it! Do you?

JERRY

It's in the paper.

BEA

Yes, right her in the damn paper for the entire world to see.

JERRY

I don't believe the Daily News has that wide of a circulation.

BEA

My world! I am so—humiliated. He didn't give me a chance to explain anything to anybody. Everyone will think he just ran off with another woman—which he *did*. And they'll think, "Poor Beatrice. Poor thing." I just hate it!

JERRY

They won't think that, and—he didn't have a lot of time.

BEA

He's going to pay for this; I'm going to make him pay—big time!

JERRY

Beatrice, don't let your emotions make you do something you'll regret later. I honestly think he'll do what he said; I think he'll be back.

BEA

Well, I won't be here!

JERRY

Honey, you're in a state. Listen to your heart.

BEA

My heart is broken, Daddy.

JERRY

Then use your head. Look at this from the standpoint of an engineer or a lawyer.

BEA

Instead of as a woman—a woman scorned.

JERRY

I just don't want you to make a rash decision that is going to jeopardize the very sensitive negotiations I'm involved in to capitalize your business venture.

BEA

You can't be serious! Do you think I'm going to go through with that now—with *him*?

JERRY

You don't really have a choice.

BEA

The hell I don't!

JERRY

Honey, you're getting all revved up.

BEA

Don't *you* start on me; I'm not revved up. I'm just mad as hell, and I have good reason to be.

JERRY

Mad or not, you're going to need to separate the business from the personal.

BEA

We were going to be partners for—*life*.

JERRY

I know. And you can still be partners for—profit.

BEA

Is money all you ever think about?

JERRY

Pretty much so.

BEA

And you expect me to be a partner with him so you can make money?

JERRY

No, so we can all make money: you, me, Jay, and our investors.

BEA

I don't even care about the money now. Dammit, I don't know what I want! Why should I even care now?

JERRY

Well, not to put too fine a point on it, but since the patent for this vector combustion thing is in *your* name, you do have some options.

BEA

What are you suggesting?

JERRY

I'm simply making an observation.

BEA

That the patent owner for the process controls the corporation.

JERRY

That is especially true in this case because the patent owner also has the option of modifying the incorporation documents to suit—her needs.

BEA

To put it layman's terms, I could "squeeze him out?"

JERRY

If that's what it takes for this deal to go through, I don't care. I honestly think it

JERRY (continuing)

would be a mistake on your part to do that, but my concern has to be with the capital that is being risked to make this deal happen. I can't even let the personal life of my daughter interfere with that.

BEA

Once I own the patent, the corporation will no longer need Jay.

JERRY

No.

BEA

I mean, from an engineering standpoint: if a circuit card is no longer needed or is not doing what it was designed to do, you replace it. Right?

JERRY

I'm not an engineer.

BEA

Okay, then, if a board member of a corporation is no longer fulfilling his responsibilities, you get rid of him, don't you?

JERRY

You try. But it's always a difficult matter, and you must do so without upsetting the delicate balance of the entire board or the business will suffer. Can you do that?

BEA

I can try.

JERRY

What will he do?

BEA

I don't know if he will even notice; his entire focus is on getting this woman—his wife—through her treatment.

JERRY

ACT II, SCENE V

SCENE: A few days later. LIGHTS COME on Nora in Jay's condo; she is going through some papers stacked on a coffee table. There is a KNOCK at the door. Nora opens the door and to find Bea on the doorstep.

Oh, it's you.

NORA

Yes, it's me. May I come in?

BEA

Jay's not here; he's not staying here. I don't know where he is; he just calls or drops by—to see how things are.

NORA

I came to see you, not Jay. I have no reason to see him.

BEA

Come in.

NORA

(Bea ENTERS.)

Please sit.

NORA

I'm fine.

BEA

NORA

Would you like some coffee?

BEA

No, I'm not going to be here that long. (A beat.) When do you start your treatment?

NORA

Tomorrow. At Women and Infants. Couldn't wait, really.

BEA

Look, I'm sorry you—have to go through this. It must be very frightening.

NORA

It is, and I'm sorry too—sorry for what you're going through.

BEA

Maybe it will make us both stronger.

NORA

I guess that the way it works in novels, but in real life—sometimes it just beats you down until you can't get up. But I don't suppose you don't know anything about that.

BEA

No, I didn't until I met you. Now I do, but that's not why I came.

NORA

Why did you?

BEA

It's about your daughter—

NORA

Christina.

BEA

Yes, Christina.

NORA

What about her?

BEA

Who's going to take care of her—during your treatment? I mean—if you're hospitalized for any length of time, she'll need somebody. That sort of thing.

NORA

I've made arrangements to send her to Copenhagen to stay with her aunt until—this is all over.

BEA

Copenhagen—that's a long way off. What about her schooling? And don't you want her here?

NORA

Yes, of course, but--

BEA

I'm sure Jay could—

NORA

No!

BEA

--make arrangements for her to stay somewhere here in Newport. (No response.) Wait? You don't trust him.

NORA

I didn't say that.

BEA

You didn't *state* it, but everything about you says it—you're afraid of men. Aren't you? (Nora looks away.) Of course, that's why you try to hide you looks. What happened to you?

NORA (woodenly)

Nothing happened to me.

BEA

Listen to me! I don't know why I'm telling you this, but you don't have to be afraid of Jay. He would never hurt you or Christina. Jay is incapable of hurting anyone.

NORA

He hurt you.

BEA (breaking)

Yeah, well, you got me three, but I'm a big girl; I can't take it. (They embrace.) I don't know what happened to you, but I'm sorry.

NORA

It was a long time ago.

BEA

If you ever want—to talk about it—

NORA

I won't.

BEA

All right. (A beat.) Anyway, the reason I came here is to tell you that—I'll take care of Christina while you're sick. She needs to stay close by; you'll need each other. And a 12-year-old shouldn't be away from her mother.

NORA

Why would you do that—after, what I've done?

BEA (a little desperately)

Maybe you'll in a position to return the favor some day; I don't know. In any case, stop this Copenhagen nonsense; Christina needs to stay be close to you.

NORA

Thank you, but . . .

BEA

But what?

NORA

I will never understand—you people.

BEA

Neither will I. (A beat.) Just promise me one thing.

NORA

Anything.

BEA

Don't fall for him. (Nora looks away.) Oh, god, you already have.

(BLACKOUT.)

ACT II, SCENE VI

SCENE: A few weeks later. LIGHTS COME UP on Beatrice and Christina in Jay's condo. Christina is doing homework on the floor; Bea is going over some figures from work on the couch.

CHRISTINA

Miss Brown?

BEA

Christina, I've told you a hundred time, you can call me "Bea."

CHRISTINA

And every time I see my mom, she tells me to call you "Miss Brown."

BEA

Well, I guess you'd better do what your mother says. Now what is it?

CHRISTINA

You're an engineer, right?

BEA

Yes, I am. And a lawyer.

CHRISTINA

So, you're like really good with numbers, right?

BEA

I know my multiplication tables. Why?

CHRISTINA

Well, like did you ever think about why a round number has a square root?

BEA

I can't say that I have; it just never came up. But—it's a very good question for which I'm not sure there's a logical, if any, answer. Sometimes, things just seem to happen for no apparent reason.

CHRISTINA

Like my mom getting cancer.

BEA

Yes, like your mom getting cancer and—all its attendant consequences.

CHRISTINA

I know what that means—like mom marrying Mr. Cronley and you taking care of me. It doesn't make much sense to me, but what do I know. I'm 12.

BEA

It doesn't make sense to me either, and I'm—never mind how old I am.

CHRISTINA

You must be like—30 something, right?

BEA

I said, "never mind" young lady. Get back to your homework.

(Christina goes back to her homework for a moment, then she gets up sits next to Bea on the couch.)

Bea?

BEA

What Sweetheart?

CHRISTINA

What will happen to me if my mom dies?

BEA (cuddling her)

Your mom's not going to die.

CHRISTINA

How do you know?

BEA

Because she has wonderful doctors who are giving her the best care possible.

CHRISTINA

When I saw her I got really scared. She was like all puffed up or swollen; and her hair was practically all gone. And she had these like red blotches all over her skin. It was awful.

BEA

That all comes from the treatment, the chemicals they're giving her to treat the cancer are very powerful.

CHRISTINA

It's poison isn't it?

BEA

It's a kind of poison that is designed to kill the cancer—without hurting your mom.

CHRISTINA

Well it's not working; she hurts a lot! (A beat.) She was always so pretty—prettier than all the other moms. And nicer!

BEA

Your mom will be just as pretty as she was before; you'll see.

CHRISTINA

They were looking at me.

BEA

Who?

CHRISTINA

People at the hospital.

BEA

They were looking at you because you're such a beautiful child.

CHRISTINA

No, it wasn't like that. They were looking at me like people look at you when they know you don't have a place to stay, or a place to take a bath, or a place to live or a place to sleep. They look at you like they know how terrible it must be,

CHRISTINA (continuing)

but there's nothing they can do about it. And in the hospital they looked at me like they knew I was going to lose my mom, and there was nothing they could do about that either.

BEA

No, no, Honey.

CHRISTINA

No matter how bad things got, I *never* felt homeless when I was with my mom! (A beat.) I don't know what I'll do if she dies.

BEA

She's not going to die, Sweetheart.

CHRISTINA

How can you be so sure?

BEA

Because we're going to say a prayer for her every night.

CHRISTINA

Do you believe that God answers prayers?

BEA

Some of them—there are just so many.

CHRISTINA

I know. But the night that Mr. Cronley found us, I said a prayer. Mom was so tired she had fallen asleep, and I like—couldn't wake her up. So I closed my eyes and asked God to find us a place to stay—like just for *one* night. Then I heard this tapping on the window. I opened my eyes, and there Mr. Cronley was—just like magic.

BEA

See there. God *does* answer prayers. Now let's get to work on one for your mom.

(BLACKOUT)

ACT II, SCENE VII

SCENE: The following Spring. LIGHTS COME UP on Nora in Jay's condo; she is completely recovered and looks dazzling in a little black dress and a string of pearls. She has on make-up and is busy setting the table which is covered with a white table cloth. A bottle of wine is chilling on the kitchen counter. There is a KNOCK at the door.

Come in.

NORA

(Jay ENTERS. For the first time, he notices how beautiful she is.)

You don't have to knock; this is your place—even if you haven't seen it for months.

NORA

I didn't—want to impose.

JAY

We *are* married.

NORA

Yeah, I almost forgot.

JAY

I think you *did* forget—running off like that to—where did you run off to?

NORA

JAY

New Orleans—the Gulf Coast. But I didn't "run off."

NORA

What do you call it then?

JAY

I just—left.

NORA

Just when I was getting better; we were just really getting to—know each other, and you disappeared. I didn't understand.

JAY

As soon as I saw that you were going to be okay and after I got this pile of money from my business venture, I went down there to lend a hand. My dad was a builder, and I'm pretty handy with a hammer and set of power tools myself.

NORA

I see . . . to lend a hand. I guess I was afraid that you were going to—get away from me.

JAY

Why would I do that?

NORA

I don't know. (A beat.) Maybe you didn't want to be married to a woman with no hair.

JAY

I didn't care about that. I just—needed to get away.

NORA

But not from me—your wife?

JAY

No! (A beat.) Anyway, after our court date tomorrow, there won't be a marriage; that was the deal. (Looks around.) What's all this?

NORA

I guess a kind of backward celebration; I wanted to cook for you at least once before—the dissolution of—our union, Holy or not.

JAY

That's very nice of you. Where's Christina?

NORA

Staying with a friend from school. She wanted to see you, but you know how kids are.

JAY

Actually, I don't. I have no idea.

NORA

Sure you do. You're a natural; believe me.

JAY

Natural what?

NORA

Father.

JAY

Oh. Now there's a scary thought.

NORA

She'll be back in the morning; you can see her then.

JAY (a little uncomfortably)

Great! That would be nice.

NORA

Please. Make yourself comfortable; it *is* your place.

(She brings him a glass of wine and sits down close to him on the couch.)

JAY

You look—great.

NORA

I feel great!

JAY

Everything still okay.

NORA

Everything is fine; I'm fully recovered. The cancer is in complete remission. The doctor gave me a clean bill of health—thanks to you.

JAY

You have your doctors to thank.

NORA

Without you I wouldn't have had a doctor. Might not have had—anything.

JAY

So, you found a place and all?

NORA

Just an efficiency apartment in Middletown, but Nora can finish the school year at Thompson. And they're putting me on full-time at Wal-Mart—in a management track—like I want to be in business. But I'll have benefits so I can't pass on it. And I'm enrolling in some classes at the community college—I still have that dream of mine to run a day care facility.

JAY

Sounds like everything's coming up roses.

NORA

I don't understand—coming up roses?

JAY

It's just an expression.

NORA

It's not anything like pushing up daisies is it?

JAY

No, the complete opposite. Coming up roses is *good*.

NORA

And pushing up daisies is not? They're both flowers.

JAY

No. I shouldn't have brought them up—the roses!

NORA

It's okay.

JAY (after a moment)
You changed my life you know?

NORA
You *saved* mine.

JAY
Mine too.

NORA
I don't understand that either.

JAY
You see, I thought I lived in this perfect world, thought I had everything. I'm reasonably bright, went to the right schools, met the right people, fell in love with an exceptional woman. And I made a lot of money designing weapons. I thought I had it made . . . then you and Christina came along and showed me just how meaningless all that was. You gave me the chance to do something of value. I don't think I can go back to my old way of life.

NORA
You don't have to.

JAY
What do you mean?

(She touches his hand.)

NORA
We don't have to go through with this divorce, Jay; we could try staying together for a while—just to see how it goes.

JAY
You don't even know me, not really.

NORA
Yes, I do. (She kisses him.) And I've fallen in love with you.

JAY (rising)
Nora, you're mistaking gratitude for something else.

NORA
I know what I feel, and I think you feel something too—that's why you ran off. You were afraid to admit it.

JAY

Nora, I do—have feelings for you. How could I not? But I'm in love with someone else.

NORA

But she may not be in love with you. You've changed; you just admitted it. Maybe she can't love the person you've become. I can. I do.

JAY

Nora, Bea has changed too; maybe she doesn't even know it, but she has. Did you know that if you—hadn't have recovered, she was ready to assume guardianship of Christina? She had already drawn up the papers; she just didn't bring them for you to sign because you started getting better.

NORA

No, I didn't know that.

JAY

Now you know.

NORA

That still doesn't mean she'll want you—not like I do.

JAY

But I have to find out.

NORA

I'm sorry; how insensitive of me to . . . I'm so sorry. I guess I thought I had nothing else to give you.

JAY

You don't have to give me anything.

NORA

Can't I even talk you into spending one night, if not for you, then for *me*—no one would ever know.

(She gets up, crosses to him, takes his hand and starts for the bedroom. He follows her, a little reluctantly but he follows.)

NORA

Just—come and lie down next to me for a moment; I just want you to hold me. I need to know that I can let someone do that.

JAY (stops at door)

Nora, I'm just a man. If I cross that doorway with you, everything will change. We'll come out of there having broken promises and maybe someone's heart.

NORA

The world is filled with broken promises and broken hearts, and it just keeps on turning anyway. You think I don't know anything about that?

JAY

But breaking hearts wasn't part of our agreement; just because she grew up rich doesn't mean she doesn't have one.

NORA (sighs, releases his hand)

I guess—I'll have to do this on my own then.

JAY

I know you can, and you have Christina.

NORA (after a moment)

So how *can* I thank you?

JAY (thinks, then)

Follow your dream. (A beat.) Try everyday to make the world a better place for somebody other than yourself.

NORA (sighs)

I just did. (A beat.) Christina's going to miss you too.

JAY

She has my number. (A beat.) I should go.

NORA

I know. I guess—I'll see you in court.

(LIGHTS COME DOWN to end the scene as Jay EXITS. Nora wipes away a tear and takes a sip of wine.)

ACT II, SCENE VIII

SCENE: A month later. LIGHTS COME UP on Bea seated on a park bench in Battery Park on Newport Harbor. After a moment, Jay ENTERS carrying two cups of coffee.

| | |
|---|-----|
| Hey stranger. | JAY |
| Hey to you. | BEA |
| Coffee? | JAY |
| Sure. Why not? | BEA |
| Just the way you like it—black. I remembered. | JAY |
| I drink it with cream and sugar now. | BEA |
| You've changed. | JAY |
| Maybe. | BEA |

Mind if I— JAY

No, go ahead sit. Free country. BEA

Nice day. JAY

For what? BEA

I dunno—a wedding. JAY

Or a funeral. (A beat.) You said we needed to talk. BEA

We do; it's been a while. JAY

I'm all too well aware of that. You're the one who left. BEA

My divorce is final today. JAY

Congratulations. BEA

I'm a free man. JAY

Freedom can be a real burden. BEA

I know; it can be lonely too. JAY

So what are you free to do? BEA

JAY

I dunno—play the field; maybe renew some old acquaintances.

BEA

Play anything you want; it doesn't concern me.

JAY

The second part does.

BEA

You hurt me, Jay. You *really* hurt me, and I don't know if I can ever forgive you for it.

JAY

I didn't mean to hurt you.

BEA

But you did, and it was avoidable.

JAY

Not anymore than a train wreck is avoidable.

BEA

I don't care. You left me. And you made me *hate* you! And it hurts like hell to hate a person you love. I wanted to get back at you; I wanted to hurt you as much as you hurt me, but when I had the opportunity to do it—you know what happened?

JAY

No.

BEA

I couldn't. I could have ruined you financially; taken your idea, squeezed you out of the corporation, but I just couldn't do it. (A beat.) Do you want to know why?

JAY

My boyish charm?

BEA

You lost that a long time ago.

JAY

My animal magnetism?

BEA

No, although that is quite appealing. It was for a much more selfish reason than that; it was more about me than about you. After a lot of thinking, I realized that I would only be hurting myself by driving you away. So I chose to—leave the door open.

JAY

I'm glad you did.

BEA

So am I, but that doesn't mean that I will forgive for your dalliance with Nora.

JAY

Bea, I never touched her.

BEA

Do you expect me to believe that? I happen to know you're a—very sexual being, and she's an exceptionally beautiful woman.

JAY

Honey, don't you know you're the most beautiful woman in the world to me?

BEA

But you *married* her!

JAY

But I never stopped loving *you*. And I haven't been anywhere near Newport for weeks.

BEA

Why did you leave—temptation?

JAY

I don't know—maybe. But I also left because I wanted to build something that would last. I wanted to use my skills to build something worthwhile. And down there they needed people who could build things.

BEA

You always were—good with your hands.

JAY

Runs in the family.

BEA

Builder or not, you can't expect me just to drop everything and marry you just because your divorce is final?

JAY

I don't expect you to drop everything and marry me because of that; I expect you to drop everything, including your defenses, and marry me because you're still desperately in love with me.

BEA

Maybe that's not enough.

JAY

Then because I'm still desperately in love with you.

BEA

Well, that's different.

JAY

Then you will?

BEA (thinks, then)

I suppose so, since you put like that, but you can't be bringing any more—strays home with you. Okay?

JAY

Okay.

BEA

Promise.

JAY

You really don't want me to promise that, do you?

BEA

No. Doesn't matter. You don't keep promises anyway.

JAY

I keep some.

BEA

Like what?

(He takes her engagement ring from his pocket and slips it on her finger. They kiss tenderly.)

JAY

Like this.

(LIGHTS COME DOWN SLOWLY as she pulls him close and kisses him passionately.)

CURTAIN

© David W. Christner 2006
PO Box 103
Slocum, RI 02877
Email: david_christner@yahoo.com or
playwright43@verizon.net