

# **RESCUERS**

**a play by Tom Baum**

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## Characters

PENNY SUTCLIFFE, mid 20s, a graduate student

SETH MILSTEIN, mid 20s, her boyfriend, an aspiring artist

CARTER SUTCLIFFE, 60s, Penny's dad, a retired lawyer

LEAH MILSTEIN, late 20s, Seth's older sister, a preschool teacher

MAXINE MILSTEIN, 60s, Seth's mom, a housewife

LOU MILSTEIN, 60s, Seth's dad, a businessman

The action takes place over several weeks, in Penny and Carter's apartment and in the Milstein house. The settings can share the stage and be minimally suggested.

**Act 1****Scene 1**

*(In darkness:)*

PENNY: Did you come? Seth? I couldn't tell.

SETH: I kind of missed my window.

PENNY: Wow. Don't stress, all right?

SETH: But you're OK.

PENNY: Ohmigosh yes. Better than OK.

*(Lights up on the apartment where PENNY lives. PENNY, mid-20s, and SETH, mid-20s, are dressing after sex.)*

PENNY: He was the last guy to carry a handkerchief.

SETH: Names can really kill you.

PENNY: I know, right? "Myron Graber." He was always blowing his nose and these horrible jocks would pretend to sneeze on him.

SETH: So basically this was a pity fuck.

PENNY: No! I thought you said first kiss. OK, your turn.

SETH: My first what. Let's clear that up.

PENNY: OK, first orgasm.

SETH: I can't remember back that far.

PENNY: Oh you! With another person.

*(Pause.)*

SETH: Nah, I don't want to do this anymore.

PENNY: Come on, you were about to say something. Who was she?

*(Pause.)*

SETH: Donny Moscovitz.

PENNY: Oh.

SETH: Oh?

PENNY: No, it's fine. I'm listening.

SETH: All right. You have to know this about me. I was the scrawniest kid in my high-school class.

PENNY: Really? Can't tell now.

SETH: Well, I was. Last to grow. Last to grow hair. OK, so our high school had a swimming pool. Every Thursday we had naked swimming.

PENNY: Totally naked?

SETH: Totally naked. No trunks. You sure you want to hear this?

PENNY: Seth...yes.

SETH: You get this look on your face.

PENNY: What look?

SETH: Like the sun is in your eyes.

PENNY: That's 'cause you dazzle me.

SETH: Yeah, sure.

PENNY: You do. Seriously. I want to know everything about you.

SETH: OK. So the gym teacher, Underhill, he'd throw this volleyball into the pool. Everybody jump on it, jump on each other, two teams, trying to move the ball across the pool...incredible sight....this squirming knot of naked flesh.

PENNY: So is this when you had your orgasm?

SETH: What? No.

PENNY: Oh.

SETH: Whew, right?

PENNY: Seth. You need to know this about me. I'm the least judgmental person you've ever met. When you meet my dad, you'll understand why. So what about the orgasm?

SETH: That came later.

PENNY: OK.

SETH: I never went in the pool. I just sat there naked on the bench, with Donny Moscovitz. He was like two years older than me. The scrawniest kid in his class. Two non-violent, naked, hairless freaks. All right, so one day, we ran into each other on the way to the bus. Boom, all of a sudden, like somebody rang a bell, we started wrestling. For like an hour. Grunting, groaning, crying, till we were both lying there. Totally exhausted. With our arms around each other. And we stayed like that for I don't know how long. People were walking by, saying stuff. We didn't hear anything. We were too wiped out to care.

*(Pause.)*

SETH: So? Are you totally creeped out?

PENNY: That's not really an orgasm.

SETH: It was the orgasm ballpark.

PENNY: So is that your deepest darkest secret?

SETH: No, not really.

PENNY: What about your first time with a girl?

SETH: Seriously, let's stop this, all right?

PENNY: No, I want to know. I promise I won't be jealous.

SETH: Just forget it, OK?

PENNY: Seth, look at me. I'm not creeped out. Not in the slightest. I think you're amazing—

*(Sudden blast of music. Haydn's Symphony #83.)*

SETH: What the fuck—

PENNY: Ohmigosh. What time is it?

SETH: It's only nine o'clock. You told me he was going to a concert.

PENNY: He said he was. Oh boy. Here we go. Play it like nothing's happening, OK?

*(PENNY grabs the rest of her clothes, SETH pulls on his pants.)*

SETH: Why is the music so loud? Is he deaf?

PENNY: No. You'll see.

*(A knock on the door.)*

PENNY: *(calling)* For heaven's sake turn the music down!

*(The music lowers a touch. The door opens. CARTER, a handsome man in his 60s, enters, dangling a pair of shoes and holding a bra in front of his chest.)*

CARTER: Somebody lose this?

PENNY: Dad, what are you doing back?

*(CARTER tosses PENNY the bra, sniffs the inside of SETH's shoes.)*

CARTER: *(to SETH, re shoes)* And these must be yours. *(to PENNY)* Is this what's-his-name?

SETH: Seth.

CARTER: Haydn or Mozart, Seth?

PENNY: Dad, please go.

CARTER: Don't think, just answer. Haydn or Mozart? I used to play this game with her mother.

SETH: Haydn?

CARTER: Want to guess which symphony?

SETH: No idea.

CARTER: Penny, want to help him out?

PENNY: No, I don't want to help him out. Why aren't you at the concert?

CARTER: I walked out. Oh, that poor woman. First Schubert song, she started choking on her phlegm. Your mother, she knew how to deal with that situation. Not this broad. She hacked up this huge gob. Had to start over from the top. It was mortifying. Where's the mail? I didn't see today's mail.

PENNY: I put your mail on your night table. So you just left?

CARTER: Well, I had to hear something good. Walked all the way from Chandler Hall. Have either of you noticed? There's more unpicked-up dogshit on the sidewalks lately. People are pissed off at the government. This is how they show it, by leaving dogshit on public thoroughfares.

PENNY: That's a really good theory, Dad. Now please let us finish dressing, OK?

CARTER: *(to SETH)* Orders me around. Every chance she gets. Just like her mom. Haydn or Mozart, Seth?

*(CARTER has hit a button on his iTunes remote. The music changes to a Schumann string quartet.)*

PENNY: *(to SETH)* Don't indulge him.

CARTER: Haydn or Mozart!

SETH: Um, neither?

CARTER: Is that your final answer? Well, you happen to be right.  
Any guesses who it is?

SETH: I don't know, somebody romantic?

CARTER: Right again! It's Schumann. String Quartet #3. The man couldn't orchestrate to save his ass, but what he could do with four instruments, nobody else could do. You know what happened to Schumann, don't you?

SETH: Not really, sir.

CARTER: Tell me, Seth, did you ever call your father "sir"? No, Jews don't inflict that on each other. Schumann went barking mad. From syphilis, supposedly. Personally, I think he had serious marital problems. Clara was ten times more famous than Robert. Who's your favorite composer, Seth?

SETH: I don't know. That guy from *2001*?

CARTER: We like Strauss too, don't we, Penny? So did her mother. She recorded the "Four Last Songs." Richard Strauss, Rossini, Bernard Hermann. Those are my top three. Benny was a friend of mine. I did legal work for Benny. You staying the night, Seth?

SETH: No...I'm expected at home.

PENNY: He has to go to work tomorrow.

CARTER: What kind of work? Call in sick.

PENNY: It's his dad's store.

CARTER: What kind of store?

PENNY: Medical supplies.



SETH: He knows who you are. He used to go to all your wife's concerts. *(pause)* He said he'd love to meet you. I mean they'd like to meet you both. Both my parents. Like maybe next Saturday, for tea?

CARTER: With crustless sandwiches? A Jewish tea? Sure, we're game, aren't we, kitten? Tell your folks we'd be delighted.

SETH: That's great. Thank you, sir. *(corrects himself)* Carter.

CARTER: Careful going home. Watch out for the dogshit.

*(CARTER exits. SETH lowers his voice:)*

SETH: Don't worry, this tea thing wasn't my idea. My dad kept bugging me.

PENNY: Why?

SETH: *(evasive)* You'll have to ask him. Did you tell him I was Jewish?

PENNY: No, he's got Jew-dar...gay-dar...all kinds of -dar. I think this tea is a wonderful idea. I'll get to meet your sister.

SETH: Yeah, let's hope not.

PENNY: Why? You have to tell me why.

SETH: Because she's a fucking pain in the ass. Before you know it, you'll be buying shoes together. And her advice will deliberately suck.

PENNY: Why would she give me bad advice?

SETH: Penny, you're adorable, OK? But not everybody's as tender-hearted as you are. Can we leave it at that?

PENNY: I don't think of myself as tender-hearted.

SETH: No agendas. That's what I mean.

PENNY: I want you to be happy, is that an agenda?

SETH: Then stay away from Leah. Trust me. Call me before you go to sleep?

PENNY: You bet. Come here.

*(PENNY hugs SETH. They kiss. CARTER enters. SETH sees him, breaks the hug.)*

SETH: *(to CARTER)* I was just going. It was great to meet you. See you at the tea.

*(SETH exits.)*

CARTER: Handsome young lad. Could be a keeper. I liked his shoes.

PENNY: Yes, I saw you sniffing them. That was creepy, Dad.

CARTER: I can tell a lot about a man that way. Where did you toss the rest of the mail? Sometimes with a bar code it's personal.

PENNY: Dad, relax. There was nothing personal. All junk.

CARTER: Nothing from Traveler's Insurance?

PENNY: Why would Traveler's Insurance be writing you? The file's closed. Mom knew you'd be devastated, that's why she took out the policy. It's your money, free and clear, nobody's taking it away from you. Please stop obsessing, or I'm calling Dr. Grayson.

CARTER: You'll have to drag me, kitten. You know what Grayson called me last time I saw him? "A fearless scourer of my soul." That pea-brained flatterer! I've been to places in my psyche that quack never dreamed of.

PENNY: I think maybe you need a dosage adjustment.

CARTER: Nah, the pills are working fine. Are you absolutely sure there was nothing from Traveler's?

PENNY: Ohmigosh, what did I just say?

CARTER: All right, I'll try to process. It's not like we're dependent on that money. Merely a gift from the grave. Which I fully intend to pass along to you. (*going*) Goodnight, kitten.

PENNY: Goodnight, Dad. Try and get some sleep for a change.

CARTER: Don't worry, I'll sleep like a baby tonight. I really liked that boy!

(CARTER *exits*. *Blackout*.)

**Scene 2**

*(Lights up on SETH and LEAH, in the Milstein living room.)*

LEAH: I hear this guy Carter's richer than God. Lou's gonna hit him up, isn't he.

SETH: Yeah, he was Googling him this morning. Before he left for the store.

LEAH: Well, I'll try to leave work early.

SETH: Whoa, please don't.

LEAH: Why? I want to meet this girl.

SETH: Yeah, I know you do. Leah? Do me a big favor? Stay away.

LEAH: Oh you're such a nervous *hilaria*. Hey, guess what I'm reading my kids.

SETH: No clue. Did you hear what I just said?

LEAH: *The Snowball That Wouldn't Melt*. They adored the first half. They agree you're a fucking genius.

SETH: Promise me you won't be here.

LEAH: Ohmigod, you never appreciate anything I do for you. All right, yes, I promise. Oh, and while I was looking for *Snowball*? Look what else I found.

*(LEAH takes a hand-decorated CD case out of her bag.)*

LEAH: Recognize it?

SETH: Yeah, put it away please.

*(LEAH puts the CD in the stereo. Donna Summer blasts out: "Love to Love You Baby.")*

SETH: What are you doing Turn it down.

LEAH: Mom can't hear, she's tanked up on Ativan.

*(LEAH jumps to the next cut: Britney Spears: "I'm a Slave 4 U.")*

LEAH: You don't remember this? Dude, you're such a liar. Your going-away-to-college present. "Music to Come By."

SETH: I didn't make that CD for you.

LEAH: Oh right. That's why you left it on my pillow.

SETH: It wasn't any kind of present, I just thought you'd be amused.

*(LEAH continues to jump the cuts. Black Flag: "Slip It In." Amy Winehouse: "Me and Mr. Jones." Fiona Apple: "Criminal.")*

LEAH: Do you come with Penny?

SETH: Just shut up.

LEAH: I'm gonna take that as a no.

SETH: I mean it, turn it off. God damn it, Leah!

LEAH: Wait, I love this song!

*(SETH lunges for the stereo. LEAH grabs him from behind, laughing. MAXINE enters as they're horsing around to Fiona Apple. SETH unhands LEAH, mutes the stereo.)*

MAXINE: What's going on here? Where's your father?

SETH: At the store.

MAXINE: So soon on a Saturday?

SETH: He opened at nine, since we're closing early. Because of the tea? I'm late, I'd better go.

MAXINE: What were you two fighting about?

SETH: We weren't fighting.

LEAH: We were just having a...musical disagreement.

SETH: Yeah, our tastes are growing apart. See ya, Mom.

(SETH *exits*. LEAH *starts out*.)

MAXINE: You're leaving too?

LEAH: Maxine....I always work on Saturdays.

MAXINE: Who's going to help me with the tea sandwiches?

LEAH: I'm guessing you can handle it. Just don't make them now, they'll get too soggy.

MAXINE: I don't know why we're having this get-together. I don't know what your father expects to gain.

LEAH: Yeah, you do. He's hoping the guy will invest.

MAXINE: What about this girl?

LEAH: What about her?

MAXINE: Is this a serious relationship? He never talks about her.

LEAH: And with Seth that means it's serious. Why don't you just crawl back in bed, Maxine? You look like you spent your whole night dreaming.

(LEAH *gives MAXINE a perfunctory kiss and exits*. MAXINE *unmutes the stereo, reaches for a bottle of brandy, pours herself two fingers*.)

FIONA APPLE: (*on stereo*) "I've been a bad bad girl...I've been careless with a delicate man...And it's a sad sad world...When a girl will break a boy...Just because she can..."

(MAXINE *drinks*. *Lights down*.)

### Scene 3

*(Lights up on SETH, PENNY, SETH's dad LOU, and MAXINE, having drinks in the Milstein living room. CARTER's contemplating the geode he's picked up from an end table.)*

CARTER: This is true ugliness. This is downright malignant. The geode has inspired more terrible sculpture than any other natural phenomenon. Seth, as an artist, I know you agree with me. We think of nature as beautiful, but boy, what about those fish at the bottom of the sea? Ugly as sin. Why? Because they don't have to look attractive. On the surface, you have peacocks and gazelles. Below... eels with feathers and moles with starfish noses.

MAXINE: I never thought of that rock as ugly.

LOU: I did.

MAXINE: You never said a word.

LOU: I always hated the look of that thing. *(lightly)* Just didn't have the courage.

CARTER: But hey, I absolutely love your house. Penny and I, we live in an apartment. Do I know how to fix a boiler? Do I know how to reshingle a roof? I don't. I'm an apartment dweller.

MAXINE: Didn't you also live in Europe?

CARTER: Sorry?

MAXINE: While your wife was touring?

CARTER: *(uneasily)* Yes, my wife toured a good deal. *(to LOU)* So Lou, Penny tells me you and Seth are in business together?

LOU: I wouldn't say "together."

CARTER: Trusses? Ace bandages? That sort of thing?

LOU: Everything in that line. A lot of wheelchair rental. Seth doesn't care for the business. Can't say I blame him, with the big chains moving in. *(pause)* Which is why I do a little tinkering on the side.

CARTER: What sort of tinkering?

LOU: Improvements. Innovations.

CARTER: For example.

LOU: Right now? I'm working on a something fantastic.

MAXINE: Lou. Let's not start with that.

LOU: What? He wants to know. It's a new wheelchair concept. "The Milstein Chair," I like to call it.

CARTER: I'd love to hear about it, Lou.

MAXINE: *(to CARTER)* We'll be here all night. The point is, we've done all right by ourselves. After all, we put two children through Cornell.

PENNY: Seth, you never told me your sister went to Cornell.

LOU: Leah went first. Showed him the ropes. Made his first year so much easier.

CARTER: So they're close, your children. That must be such a comfort.

MAXINE: Oh, they're utterly devoted. Never a harsh word between them, from the time they were small. With the neighborhood children, yes, all sorts of battles. Why not? They were the brightest kids on the block. So Penny, how do you spend your days?

PENNY: I'm studying to be an accountant.

MAXINE: Where?

PENNY: University of Phoenix.



MAXINE: Phoenix? (*brightens*) So you're only here on vacation?

LOU: It's an on-line university, Maxine.

MAXINE: Home study?

PENNY: Yes, home study. Oh...hello.

(LEAH *has entered.*)

LEAH: Hi. Mom, don't worry, it's a legitimate institution. You must be Penny. I'm Leah. And you're Penny's dad? Nice to meet you. Hey, Seth.

SETH: Yeah, hey. (*sarcastic*) Thanks for coming.

LEAH: No problem. Sorry I'm so late, we had an incident at B'nai Simcha.

MAXINE: Oh don't tell me, one of the children?

LEAH: No, this poor homeless woman. She thought we were a shelter and I couldn't convince her otherwise. We almost had to call the police. What are we drinking? Absinthe? How *louche*.

MAXINE: I couldn't find the Grand Marnier. I think Yolanda's been at it again.

LEAH: Mom, you're three generations removed from the *shtetl*, how can you still be singing that tune? It wasn't Yolanda. (*to SETH*) I read the kids the rest of *Snowball*. They were ecstatic. They loved the ending.

PENNY: What's *Snowball*?

LEAH: Ohmigod, Seth never told you? It's this wonderful book he wrote for a writing workshop at Cornell. *The Snowball That Wouldn't Melt*.

CARTER: Great title.

LEAH: You know how dirty snow can hang around like into April?

CARTER: Yes, the melting point is higher. All the impurities.

LEAH: Exactly. So this kid makes this snowball and he takes it home and no matter how hot it gets it stays a snowball all through summer, because of all the dirty stuff inside. And it sort of gives him courage, because he has all these impure thoughts he's ashamed of.

CARTER: I love it! Masturbation fears?

PENNY: Dad, it's a children's book.

CARTER: All the more reason.

LEAH: Anyway, it's insanely brilliant.

CARTER: (to SETH) Do your own illustrations?

LEAH: Ohmigod, of course he does. Since he was four years old. When he was in middle school he made up this comic strip about us? *Seth and Leah.* (to SETH) How would you describe it?

SETH: I wouldn't.

LEAH: It was post-apocalyptic. The whole human race gets wiped out, except for this brother and sister. Seth's an amazing artist.

CARTER: You guys can't possibly be twins, can you? I'm picking up a twin vibe.

PENNY: Dad, she went to Cornell first, weren't you listening?

CARTER: Well look, boys and girls are growing more and more alike. It's all the birth-control hormones in the drinking water. Into the urine. Into the sewer. Into the reservoir. Into the bloodstream.

PENNY: Dad has his pet theories.

MAXINE: I don't know about that theory, but I've got dinner to get on the stove.

PENNY: Yes, ohmigosh, we've overstayed our welcome. Time to scoot. This was so great, you guys. Thanks so much for inviting us.

LOU: It was our pleasure.

PENNY: It was really great to meet you, Leah.

LEAH: Oh, same here. Send me your email. We'll make a coffee date.

CARTER: And Seth? I know the people at Candlewick. I represented them in a copyright case. I know they'll want a shot at publishing *Snowball*.

SETH: Wow. That's awesome.

CARTER: They usually assign their own artists. But I can twist some arms. Scan me a copy, won't you?

SETH: Sure. That's great. Thank you, Carter.

CARTER: Thank me later. We're just getting started here. And Lou, I'm dying to hear about the "Milstein Chair." Give me a call. I mean it.

*(CARTER hands business cards to both SETH and LOU, then gives a lingering hug to MAXINE.)*

CARTER: Maxine? "I've had a perfectly wonderful afternoon...but this wasn't it." I'm joking. A true pleasure. The sandwiches were perfect. Food for thought—your food, my thoughts. Bye, everybody. Santa's on his way!

*(CARTER and PENNY exit. MAXINE pours herself a drink.)*

MAXINE: Well. I could certainly have lived without that.

LOU: Shh, Maxie, can't you wait till they're out of earshot?

MAXINE: I'm well-acquainted with his type. You're going to the airport? He knows a better route.

LOU: He was a very successful litigator. Very connected. Big arts donor. Didn't you hear? He's going to help Seth place his book.

MAXINE: To me he sounded off-balance. What happened to the opera singer?

SETH: She died about a year ago. Just before he retired.

LEAH: How did she die?

MAXINE: From boredom, probably. Did you see how the girl had to interrupt him? When he started to yap yap yap?

SETH: Mom, her name's Penny, OK?

MAXINE: She's his keeper.

LEAH: Yeah, let's go to the bad place right away.

MAXINE: Why else is she getting her degree on-line?

LOU: It's the new thing, Maxie. Everybody's getting internet degrees. It's part of the Green Revolution.

MAXINE: So you say. I say she's his keeper. I don't get a good feeling from these people. I was biting my tongue the whole time.

LOU: As any fool could see.

MAXINE: Fool is the word. I never heard so many half-assed remarks in my life.

LEAH: Guys, take it in the kitchen, OK? I've had it up to here today with squabbling children.

*(MAXINE exits. LOU piles the glasses on a tray.)*

LOU: *(to LEAH)* Well, I thought that man was delightful. And you should have seen his wife. Beautiful. A spellbinder. Sang like an angel. Anna Marie Kreutzer. Big entry in Wikipedia.

*(LOU exits with the tray. SETH slumps onto the couch.)*

LEAH: What are we doing here, Seth? They're turning into two old Jews. We really need a place of our own.

SETH: Yeah, like that's gonna happen. You promised you'd stay away. Not only that, you invite yourself for coffee! Give me a fucking break.

LEAH: Seth, come on, I liked her! She seems really really nice and totally devoted to her dad. And you never said how pretty she is. She's like those churchgoing *shiksies* who wear pink bows in their hair but they're really really hot. I can totally believe she's a Mercy Fucker.

SETH: Jesus. That's the last thing I'll ever share with you.

LEAH: Oh you. You're just saying that to annoy me.

SETH: And no coffee date, you got that?

LEAH: You're not even gonna thank me for plugging your book?

(LEAH *is toying with* SETH's hair. SETH *shrugs her off*.)

SETH: I can agent myself, all right?

LEAH: Oh please, you're totally helpless.

SETH: Yeah, around you I am. A place of our own, are you kidding?

LEAH: And how are you around her?

SETH: Great. Never better.

LEAH: What happens when you—

SETH: What? When I what?

LEAH: Get into one of your horrible moods. And you can't get out.

SETH: Don't worry about it. It's not your problem.

LEAH: She can handle things from now on.

SETH: There's nothing to handle, OK? That's all in your head.

LEAH: I hope so for her sake.

SETH: No more. It's over. Leave me the fuck alone!

*(Blackout.)*

**Scene 4**

*(Lights up on LOU and MAXINE in their living room.)*

MAXINE: You could have warned me sooner.

LOU: So I'm warning you now.

MAXINE: Well, you watch who shows up. It'll be the two of them, father and daughter. This man goes nowhere by himself. I keep waiting for him to unzip his pants.

LOU: Maxie, don't exaggerate.

MAXINE: The man's got serious boundary issues. You didn't see that? How he grabbed me and hung on for dear life?

LOU: He's an enthusiastic person. I don't hold that against him.

MAXINE: No, it's more than that. Everything question he asks, every word out of his mouth, it's a personal remark.

LOU: It's the lawyer in him, Maxie.

MAXINE: No. It's the crazy person. The "mind reader." A man like that, he could suck the dreams out of a sleeping baby.

LOU: He doesn't miss much, I grant you that.

MAXINE: And that doesn't worry you.

LOU: Why should it worry me?

MAXINE: I'm not saying we have anything to hide. I'm just telling you he scares me.

*(MAXINE pours herself a brandy.)*

LOU: Maxine, no, what are you doing?

MAXINE: What am I doing? I'm fortifying myself against the onslaught.

LOU: Well, don't. Save some for "Yolanda." You really shouldn't be drinking so much. With a glucose of 170? It's not a good idea.

MAXINE: Lou, stop coddling, I'm not a diabetic.

LOU: At the rate you're going.

MAXINE: You'll worry me into that wheelchair, at the rate you're going. You want to save us both some aggravation? Scrap the "Milstein Chair," buy me a fancy headstone, instead.

LOU: Maxie, shh, come here.

*(LOU sets MAXINE's glass aside, puts his arms around her.)*

LOU: I'm not trying to put you in your grave. I'm just trying to secure our future.

*(Doorbell.)*

LOU: Don't be rude, Maxie, please. Say hello and then you can leave.

*(LOU exits to answer the door. MAXINE knocks back the brandy, pours herself another two fingers, knocks that back. LOU re-enters with CARTER.)*

CARTER: —When she was eight years old, Penny decided she wanted to be a singer like her mother. Then she found out she couldn't carry a tune. I told her not to worry, there's not an artist who ever lived who isn't utterly expendable. Hello, Maxine.

*(CARTER gives her a hug that lingers. MAXINE stiffens.)*

MAXINE: Is your daughter parking the car?

CARTER: What car. We gave the Town Car to charity. No, Penny's cramming for an exam. Real estate taxation. I'll tell her you asked for her.



MAXINE: Would you? We so enjoyed meeting her. If you'll excuse me, I have chores I have to catch up on. Nice to see you again, Carter.

CARTER: My pleasure as always, Maxine.

(MAXINE *exits*.)

CARTER: You know it's strange. Women usually prefer me to their husbands.

LOU: You don't say. What can I get you to drink?

CARTER: Irish whiskey, if you have any. No ice. When I was an arrogant young attorney? I used to bed the neglected wives of powerful men.

LOU: Nice work if you can get it.

CARTER: But after I got married? I was completely faithful to my wife. And mind you, Anna Marie Kreutzer was away a good deal. Meeting her share of charismatic conductors.

LOU: Must have been difficult for you.

CARTER: Not for me, not so much. For Penny, yes. By the time the bookings dried up, Penny was away at school. So she never really knew her mother. (*takes glass*) *La highem* [sic].

LOU: *L'chaim*. That's very sad.

CARTER: Not necessarily! We were far too happy, Anna and I. We were like an egg. There was a shell around us Penny couldn't penetrate. And she was so jealous of her mother's looks.

LOU: Seth's teenage years....he was the dark side of the moon.

CARTER: Not Penny. Little Miss Sunshine.

LOU: Used to lock himself in his room. Drove Maxine crazy. Turned out he was studying his head off.

CARTER: So he could join Leah at Cornell.

LOU: They always got along famously, the kids.

CARTER: You can tell that right away.

LOU: Maxie and I, we do enough fighting for the family. What is Maxine always saying? "I don't want to turn out like my mother." Phi Beta Kappa at Brandeis...a Master of Music from Juilliard, and now? A yenta in spite of herself.

CARTER: The return of the repressed. So she's musical too?

LOU: We don't even have a piano.

CARTER: And Leah? Is she talented?

LOU: (*lightly*) No, she was spared that aggravation. Poor girl, they pay her peanuts at that preschool. I pay Seth what I can. Both kids living at home, you run out of steam. When do we get our turn?

CARTER: Your turn is coming, Lou.

LOU: You won't repeat this conversation? Sounds like I'm begging for a handout.

CARTER: *Carpe diem*, my friend. Let's see what you've got to show me.

LOU: OK. But be kind. (*calling offstage*) Milstein Chair, come here!

(*A strange-looking, homemade wheelchair wheels itself into view.*

CARTER *bursts out laughing.*)

LOU: I was afraid of that. Maybe Maxine was right.

CARTER: No, Lou, come on, I'm intrigued. Talk to me.

LOU: Well...it works on the same principle as Bucky Fuller's Dymaxion Car. Five-foot turning radius, goes around corners, beeps when there's an object in its path. The idea is to keep seniors out of nursing homes.

CARTER: May I?

LOU: Oh, be my guest.

*(CARTER gets into the wheelchair, takes it for a spin.)*

CARTER: Nice ride. Very quiet. Like a Rolls! I don't hear any beeps.

LOU: That's still on the drawing board. It's got its own operating system, with built-in redundancies. You never have to reboot.

CARTER: Your wife must be proud of you.

LOU: You kidding? She won't even sit in it.

CARTER: Ah, that must hurt.

LOU: She takes it personally. As if I've created it only for her. As if I'm rushing her into old age.

CARTER: How much to launch?

LOU: You mean a production model?

CARTER: What else are we talking about?

*(CARTER takes out his checkbook.)*

CARTER: This should help get you started.

LOU: Carter, believe me, I never expected this.

CARTER: I'm making it out to "Cash." Let's keep this in the family, all right?

*(CARTER tears off the check, hands it to LOU.)*

LOU: You didn't include an amount.

CARTER: I think we trust each other, Lou?

(MAXINE *enters.*)

MAXINE: What is that contraption doing in the living room?

LOU: What do you mean? I was showing it to Carter.

CARTER: And I'm thrilled he did. Maxine, mark my words, you married a millionaire. And now, as my daughter's so fond of saying, it's time to "scoot." So lovely to see you again, Maxine.

(CARTER *hugs* MAXINE, *who again tightens in his embrace.*)

CARTER: See you next time, Milsteins!

(CARTER *exits.*)

MAXINE: Lou, what's going on here? Millionaire, what is he talking about? It's all *goyishe dummheit*.

LOU: Well, let's hope you're a bad judge of character.

(LOU *shows her the check.*)

MAXINE: A blank check.

LOU: That's right.

MAXINE: That's crazy, Lou. I'm telling you, this is manic behavior.

LOU: He really wants to help.

MAXINE: We'll see if it bounces.

LOU: It won't bounce. He had a major practice. And his wife was no slouch either.

MAXINE: Yes, and you know where she was born? Munich. Bavaria. Where all the Nazis were from.

LOU: And the Sutcliffes in Britain were Nazi sympathizers.

MAXINE: Well, there you are.

LOU: Maxie, I'm kidding. This is paranoid even for you.

MAXINE: You watch.

LOU: I'm watching all right. I'm watching my business go under. If this man's not on the level, I'll be forced to sell the store. And it won't be for a good price.

MAXINE: Lou...darling...I don't like when you talk like this. The closer you get to this fellow? The closer our Seth gets with Little Miss Muffet.

LOU: And that's something we should be encouraging.

MAXINE: Why? You talk as if he's a Neediest Case, our handsome, talented son. I don't understand this sudden interest in his social life.

LOU: It's never too late.

MAXINE: I'm sorry, I don't agree. This girl, with a grieving father—there's no room in her life for Seth.

LOU: Let's hope you're wrong.

*(MAXINE reaches for the brandy bottle. LOU stops her.)*

LOU: I said no. Please try and be more trusting. For all our sakes.

*(LOU puts the bottle aside. Crossfade to PENNY and CARTER's apartment.)*

**Scene 5**

*(PENNY and LEAH are having coffee in PENNY's apartment.)*

LEAH: —So what kind of music do you like? Do you listen to your mom's CDs?

PENNY: Not really. Not lately.

LEAH: Makes you sad?

PENNY: Honestly? I don't listen to that much music.

LEAH: Isn't that weird. And your mom was so famous. What about non-classical?

PENNY: I'm not an iTunes person.

LEAH: Amy Winehouse? Fiona Apple?

PENNY: I don't really know those people. Why do you want to know my musical preferences?

LEAH: I just wondered if you ever rebelled.

PENNY: Against what?

LEAH: You know...opera. Your mom's music. Maxine wanted a concert career, but then I was born. She used to drag us to the ballet. And "Peter and the Wolf." Seth and I both hate "Peter and the Wolf." And then she made me take piano. I quit after two lessons. Little Miss No Talent.

PENNY: Don't say that.

LEAH: Why not? That's what Maxine called me. Right after I quit.

PENNY: That's so hard to imagine. I mean, she seems so sympathetic, really.

LEAH: Ohmigod, you're like the girl in the Civics Reader. "If you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all."

PENNY: I guess that's me, uh-huh. Listen, I'm not keeping you from anything, am I?

LEAH: No, I'm good. Where did your dad take Seth?

PENNY: They didn't say. Maybe a museum.

LEAH: Which museum?

PENNY: I don't know which museum.

LEAH: No, I guess you wouldn't. Seth loathes museums. They make him envious. He's been really blocked lately. Hasn't done a canvas in God, how long has it been? When did you two start dating?

PENNY: Why, are you blaming me?

LEAH: No! Ohmigod no. I was just trying to get a timeline. No, you've been great for Seth. He was such a basket case in college, he didn't paint for two whole years. Zero social life. His puberty kicked in late...that scarred him terribly. He couldn't ask girls out. And when he finally got up the courage, he'd be sick to his stomach on the date.

PENNY: Really. Well then he has changed.

LEAH: I know! And your dad seems so fond of him too. Must be hard for you, though.

PENNY: Hard for me how?

LEAH: Well, you know. Living with him day and night. He kind of sucks up all the air in the room, doesn't he. But I guess you're used to that. Plus the heredity issue.

PENNY: Excuse me?

LEAH: Sorry. Touchy subject. Anyway, you're right, why worry about your genetics. Seth and me...we're nothing like Lou and Maxine. But listen, go easy, OK? Don't rush things with Seth. I so desperately want you two to be together. I know he's in very good hands.

PENNY: We're not "rushing" and he's not "in my hands." He's my boyfriend and my lover and if that's making you crazy, then it's your problem, not mine.

LEAH: I didn't mean to imply your dad was crazy—

PENNY: Yes you did. You've been implying all over the place—

(PENNY *breaks off, hearing CARTER's voice.*)

CARTER: (*singing; off then on*) "There's a change in the weather and a change in the sea...So from now on, there'll be a change in me...My walk will be different, my talk and my name...Nothin' about me is gonna be the same..."

(CARTER *enters, with SETH. CARTER is wearing a jaunty new hat and carrying several grocery bags.*)

CARTER: Whoa. Look who's here. Hi, Leah.

LEAH: Hi. Hi, Seth. Carter, I like the hat.

CARTER: Can you believe it? My first hat. Hey, there's an idea for you, Seth. *My First Hat*. A children's book for adults. Could be a whole series. *My First Lawsuit*. *My First DUI*. *My First Restraining Order*. Seth, you OK?

SETH: Yeah, I'll let you know.

LEAH: Penny invited me over.

SETH: No she didn't. You barged in. Why won't you fucking listen?

PENNY: Seth, shh, it's OK. Won't happen again, I promise.

SETH: (*to LEAH*) Leah? Back your ass out of here.

LEAH: Hey, no worries. I was on my way.

CARTER: Whoa, Leah, hold on a second. Penny, mind taking these groceries in the kitchen? My back is acting up. Seth, want to give her a hand? I need to talk to your sister.

SETH: Why?



CARTER: I'd like to get to know her better. For all our sakes. Penny?  
Indulge me.

(PENNY and SETH exit with the groceries.)

CARTER: I'm curious, Leah. What did you and Penny talk about?

LEAH: Nothing earth-shattering. Getting-to-know-you stuff.

CARTER: Why didn't your brother want you here?

LEAH: Oh, that's just Seth.

CARTER: We both want the best for him.

LEAH: I know I do.

CARTER: You made sure to mention his book to me. Now he's at the  
threshold of a fine career. I'm grateful to you for that.

LEAH: I've always helped him. Any way I could.

CARTER: If you're going to have a sibling, you might as well be close. An only  
child is a lonely child. In Penny's case, absolutely. No one to play Doctor with.  
Although they say playing Doctor can lead to pedophilia. What about you and  
Seth?

LEAH: What about us what?

CARTER: You weren't lonely. No, you were happy little ducklings.  
Where was Mama Duck, I wonder? Dozing in the sun?

LEAH: Sorry, I don't have a clue what you're driving at.

CARTER: Don't you? Ah well.

LEAH: Why don't you say what's on your mind?

CARTER: I don't have to. It's already been sent. From my brain to  
yours.

LEAH: Okaaaay. In that case, I really think it's time to "scoot." Try not to worry too much, OK? About things you really don't understand?

CARTER: Oh, I understand all right. And you needn't worry, Leah.  
*Tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner.*

LEAH: Whatever. Bye, Carter. Thanks for the chat.

*(LEAH exits. SETH and PENNY enter.)*

CARTER: Don't worry, she's gone. I'm going to go change my clothes. *(to PENNY)* I know. Don't say it. No hats on the bed. *(to SETH)* You think Penny's a Christian? A churchgoer, yes, fully paid up. No hats on the bed? That's her true religion. Learned that from her mother. The only thing Anna ever deigned to teach her.

*(SETH waits for CARTER to exit, lowers his voice.)*

SETH: What else was Leah pumping you about? Besides your music tastes.

PENNY: Seth, it doesn't matter. She was all over the place. It was like talking to a mother-in-law.

SETH: What did she say about me?

PENNY: You hate "Peter and the Wolf."

SETH: No, seriously.

PENNY: OK, your dating problems. In college. You got nervous on dates. Who didn't.

SETH: Nervous? Is that what she said?

PENNY: Nauseous.

SETH: Yeah, OK, this is why I'm moving out.

PENNY: Wow. When did you decide this?

SETH: I can't take it anymore. I can't paint, I can't even sketch, I feel like I'm back in high school. I just lie on my bed with the door locked. It's time I started my life. And this is what I'm thinking, and I don't know if this fits in with your budget: I'm wondering could we split the rent on an apartment.

PENNY: You mean move in together?

SETH: Or if Candlewick gives me a big advance, maybe you wouldn't have to pitch in. What? Say something.

PENNY: I'm just, you know, amazed.

SETH: Why? Isn't this what people in love do?

PENNY: Ohmigosh. Let me catch my breath.

SETH: I think about you all the time. We might as well be in the same room while I'm doing it. Unless, of course—your dad.

PENNY: What about my dad?

SETH: It's bound to freak him out.

PENNY: No. He approves of you, Seth.

SETH: I'm not looking for his approval. This is a whole new deal. Just you and me. Nobody looking over our shoulders.

PENNY: Seth: He loves you too. We both love you.

SETH: Do you mean that?

PENNY: Completely. With all my heart.

SETH: Whoa. Now I'm getting dizzy.

PENNY: I've been praying every night for this.

SETH: Maybe he's not all that weird. Maybe he just acts that way to keep you close.

PENNY: It's complicated. More than we'll ever know.

SETH: But you'll deal with him? Seriously.

PENNY: I'll have to pick my time, but yes.

SETH: No time like the present. I'll get out of your way.

PENNY: Ohmigod, Seth! I'm so proud of us!

SETH: Come here. Let's seal the deal.

*(SETH kisses her deeply.)*

PENNY: Wow.

SETH: Yeah. I'll call you.

*(SETH kisses her again and exits. CARTER enters, hatless, in an apron, carrying a dishtowel.)*

CARTER: What happened to Seth?

PENNY: He had to run. He said to say goodbye. He's really happy. About all you're doing for him.

CARTER: You look happy too, Penny. You're positively glowing. OK, this is what we're going to do tonight. I'm going to blindfold you, open the fridge, you point to any four ingredients, and I'll make us something miraculous.

PENNY: Is Candlewick really serious about his book? He's kind of counting on it.

CARTER: Perfectly serious.

PENNY: Just try not to overwhelm him, OK?

CARTER: Come on, you need all the help you can get, your generation, with your intimacy fears, your Facebook fantasies, your blowjobs in the parking lot—

PENNY: Ohmigosh, is that what this is about? Because you caught us in the act?

CARTER: Don't be silly, I'm one hundred per cent in favor of the act. Snowball that wouldn't melt? That's his pecker. He thinks his pecker is so dirty it won't go soft.

PENNY: See, that's exactly what I mean! Don't you dare say that to him.

CARTER: I wouldn't dream of it, kitten.

PENNY: Yes, you would. You know you would.

CARTER: I promise to hold my tongue. Keep still.

*(CARTER is tying the towel around PENNY's eyes, steering her toward the hallway.)*

PENNY: I'm serious about calling Dr. Grayson.

CARTER: Ah, you're throwing me to the wolves already. Tell Grayson I said good riddance!

*(Blackout as they exit. In darkness:)*

LEAH: *(over)* What are you doing in the dark?

**Scene 6**

*(Dim light up on SETH, carrying a packing box in the direction of the front door, where several other boxes are stacked. LEAH enters from that direction, dressed for a date from which she's just returned, and switches on a light.)*

LEAH: Ohmigod! That's your Rent-a-Truck outside? Where do you think you're going?

SETH: We'll see.

LEAH: Oh great. You're just going to cruise around until you find a place to live?

SETH: I'm putting things in storage. Until I decide exactly what to do.

LEAH: Dude, that's crazy. Why spend the money on storage?

SETH: Because if I stay here any longer I'll kill myself.

LEAH: I hate you when you talk like that. Where are you planning to sleep, the Sutcliffes? And leave me holding the bag with Lou and Maxine? Where are they, by the way?

SETH: With Carter. He got them all concert tickets.

LEAH: So you picked this time to sneak out.

SETH: I'm doing this, Leah.

LEAH: I know you're doing it. Please sit down, I had a perfectly horrible date tonight. I can't talk to you if you're standing there.

*(SETH puts the carton down. Sits.)*

LEAH: Have you cleared this plan with the nutcase?

SETH: Fuck you, Leah.

LEAH: Where are you going to sleep, in her bedroom? Isn't his bedroom on the other side of the wall?

SETH: Until we get a place of our own.

LEAH: Seth. That's never gonna happen. He's totally dependent. He'll be like your stepbrother or something. With Henny Penny clucking over her sad little chicks.

SETH: Just shut up, OK?

LEAH: You'll have an hour commute to the store.

SETH: As soon as this Candlewick deal kicks in, I'm giving notice.

LEAH: The Candlewick deal! Please, that's just more of his insanity. God, it's steaming in here. Do you want a drink? I'm gonna have a drink. See if Maxine left us any brandy.

*(LEAH pours herself a drink.)*

LEAH: What a gropefest tonight. Started the second I sat down. I almost walked out on the guy. I've had it. No more dates. From now on, I'm celibate.

SETH: You know what, Leah? It wouldn't kill me not to hear about it.

*(LEAH gulps her drink, sits across from SETH. SETH watches her wave her legs in and out.)*

LEAH: You know what I dreamed last night? I dreamed we were back at Cornell, in Helen Newman Hall. There was a trampoline by the side of the pool and we were bouncing on it, higher and higher, and suddenly the pool turned into a gorge. Wanta guess what happened next?

SETH: Quit waving your legs back and forth.

*(LEAH doesn't stop waving her legs.)*

SETH: OK, I'm going.

LEAH: Wait. Please don't go.

SETH: What? What is it?

LEAH: Maybe I'm a little scared, do you mind?

SETH: Scared of what?

LEAH: Being alone? In this horrible place, with Lou and Maxine needling each other all the time? You remember what that's like.

SETH: So move out.

LEAH: Using what for money?

SETH: Stop trying to guilt me, Leah. I'll call you, I'll text you, it's not like I'm moving a thousand miles away.

LEAH: Then why does it feel that way?

SETH: Man up, all right?

LEAH: OK, yes, forget it.

SETH: Goodbye then.

LEAH: Wait! Something to take with you.

*(LEAH exits. SETH picks up two of the boxes, starts out. LEAH enters. She's carrying a manila envelope.)*

LEAH: For old times' sake.

*(SETH sits. LEAH opens the envelope. We glimpse a nude drawing as she hands it across.)*

SETH: Whoa, you kept these?

LEAH: This was your breakthrough, remember? You couldn't draw people to save yourself.

*(LEAH plants her legs in SETH's lap, leafs through the drawings.)*



LEAH: God, you made me so fat here. Like a Rubens. What an insult to your muse.

SETH: That's how you looked to me that day.

LEAH: Lush. Ripe. Delicious. (*another drawing*) Remember when you did this one? Your tongue was hanging out.

SETH: Yeah, it was a hot day.

LEAH: Oh, this one's my favorite, I want to keep this one.

SETH: Gimme them.

LEAH: What for?

SETH: I'm gonna burn them.

LEAH: Oh don't be such a fag.

SETH: Shut the fuck up.

LEAH: Your girlfriend should pay me a commission. You'd still be puking. Remember that time we went to Cape Hatteras, that seaside motel?

SETH: No. What motel.

LEAH: And the sky was all orange, and Lou was lying on his bed reading some trade journal and playing with himself and Maxine was walking up and down with her bathing suit half off?

SETH: Oh right. And that girl by the pool.

LEAH: With the hair under her arms.

SETH: She winked at me. Yeah, her I remember.

LEAH: You threw up in the bushes.

SETH: Thanks for reminding me.

LEAH: Oh, and that time you came home from that horrible date, what was her name, Rebecca something, fat girl in your writing class, you were making out in her dorm room and it filled up with her odor?

SETH: Becca Levine.

LEAH: You were so disgusted you thought you couldn't ever be with a woman.

SETH: Yeah, well I got over that, didn't I?

LEAH: Yes you did, thank you, Leah. And you started painting again. After two years of total famine.

SETH: That was then. Forget it. We're done. You may consider me out of your life.

LEAH: Out of the frying pan into the fire.

SETH: No. This was the fire. Here. This family. You.

LEAH: You can't save her from her crazy dad. That's totally futile.

SETH: It's already happening.

LEAH: Have you told her you love her?

SETH: None of your business. Yes, as a matter of fact, and I do. I love her a lot. Does that make you want to puke?

LEAH: How did she react? "Heavens to Betsy, Seth, how sweet of you!"

SETH: Oh, fuck you in the heart.

LEAH: No wonder you never orgasm. Maybe I need to send her the CD.

*(SETH puts the pillow over LEAH's face. She's giggling. He keeps the pillow there. She stops giggling. We hear her smothered cries.)*

LEAH: Dude, I can't breathe! Seth! Cut it out!

*(SETH holds the pillow down, then lets go.)*

LEAH: You fucking bastard!

*(SETH lets out an involuntary laugh. LEAH grabs him and kisses him on the mouth. SETH starts to pull away, then kisses back. Sound of a garage door opening. SETH shoves LEAH aside, races for the door and flees. LEAH curls into a ball on the couch.)*

LOU and MAXINE enter. *At first they don't see LEAH.*)

MAXINE: —So what would you call it?

LOU: It's not dementia. That's ridiculous.

MAXINE: Half the time he was humming, the rest of the time he was gazing around at the audience. And then he fell asleep.

LOU: He wasn't asleep. He was daydreaming.

MAXINE: Were you sitting next to him? He was snoring. And then he leaps to his feet at the end.

LOU: He never lost touch with the music. He knows the score by heart. He told me exactly what to listen for and he was right. Better than anybody on the radio.

MAXINE: This is some love affair, the two of you. Maybe I should move out, let him move in.

LOU: Don't talk foolishness. Sometimes I wonder if it's Carter you're really jealous of.

MAXINE: As opposed to who?

LOU: Anna Marie Kreutzer.

MAXINE: The dead wife? A third-rate diva? You think I wanted that kind of career? No time for my husband, my children running wild? You'd have divorced me in a heartbeat. This man stuck it out, and it made him crazy. Seriously, Lou, if he hugs me one more time, I'm going to knee him in the testicles. What's this brandy bottle doing out? *(sees LEAH)* Leah? What are you doing here? Why is the sofa all *zappudeled*? What are these cartons?

LEAH: They're Seth's.

MAXINE: What do you mean, they're Seth's? What are they doing in the living room? What's going on?

LEAH: Isn't it obvious? Your son is moving out.

MAXINE: No! You're mistaken. Where's he going?

LEAH: Probably to live with Penny Sutcliffe.

MAXINE: You can't be serious. Lou, did you know about this?

LOU: I had hints.

MAXINE: And you didn't say anything? You didn't warn me? Don't tell me you actually approve.

LOU: It's Seth's decision, Maxie. I'm butting out.

MAXINE: It's totally unacceptable. What are these drawings? Where did these come from?

LEAH: Oh yeah. Seth did those at Cornell.

MAXINE: Who is this girl? Is this a real person?

LEAH: Yes, she's real.

MAXINE: She posed for him?

LEAH: He was working out a problem.

MAXINE: What kind of problem?

LEAH: You really want to know?

MAXINE: No, I'm just talking to hear myself talk.

LEAH: He couldn't get it up. Happy now?

MAXINE: And this helped? To draw a naked girl? A girl he was seeing at Cornell?

LEAH: Yeah. He was in love with her.

MAXINE: I don't believe it. He never mentioned her.

LEAH: You never took an interest.

LOU: Leah, that's not necessary.

MAXINE: Did you know her? Did you meet her?

LOU: Drop it, Maxie.

MAXINE: Don't tell me to drop it. These are nude pictures.

LEAH: Got it. You're upset. I'm going to bed. Goodnight, Lou.

LOU: Goodnight, sweetheart.

*(LEAH exits. LOU is leafing through the drawings. MAXINE caps the liquor bottle, puts it away.)*

MAXINE: I don't believe this was his girlfriend. He never breathed a word. Until this *shikse* princess with the nutso father.

LOU: She's very beautiful, isn't she?

MAXINE: Penny Sutcliffe? She's no Miss America.

LOU: I meant this one in the drawing.

MAXINE: Who can tell? The face is nothing. A mask. If he was in love with this girl, why draw her without a face?

LOU: Maybe he couldn't draw faces yet. It's a skill you have to learn.

MAXINE: And maybe Leah was trying to get our goat, as usual. Are you going to say something to Seth? Before he ruins his life? Lou, I'm talking to you! Oh God, what's the use. I give up. You know what? You can all rot in hell.

*(MAXINE exits. LOU is left staring at a nude drawing. Lights fade.  
In darkness, a Haydn symphony at high volume.)*

PENNY: *(over)* Dad, will you please turn it off!

**Scene 7**

*(Lights up on CARTER in his apartment, listening to the Haydn symphony. PENNY has bank statements in her hand.)*

CARTER: I want to try something on you. Haydn or Mozart?

PENNY: Dad, why are these checks made out to “cash”?

CARTER: It’s Haydn. But which Haydn?

PENNY: Did you hear what I asked you?

CARTER: It’s Haydn’s hundredth. Now here’s the second movement. Hear anything weird?

PENNY: They’re endorsed by Lou Milstein. Why are you giving money to Lou Milstein?

CARTER: The second movement is not from Haydn’s hundredth. I made my own personal Haydn symphony. First movement from the hundredth, second movement from the 92nd—

*(PENNY yanks the iPod cord out of the jack.)*

PENNY: What is Lou Milstein doing with the money?

CARTER: He’s perfecting the Milstein Chair. Don’t look at me in that tone of voice, it’s a very sound investment. He’s a shrewd and brilliant man, under all that false modesty. He just needs a break, like his son. Why do you think Seth was working at the store? Lou couldn’t meet his payroll otherwise.

PENNY: And if you’ve lured Seth away, how is that helping Lou Milstein?

CARTER: When the Milstein Chair hits, he’ll unload the store. And Seth will be free to pursue his art. Two birds with one stone.

PENNY: Meanwhile, Lou Milstein is milking you like a prize cow!

CARTER: Absolutely untrue! No one takes advantage of Carter Sutcliffe! I have 20/10 vision! I see the future through my eyelids!

PENNY: Dad. Calm down.

CARTER: Don't tell me to calm down. This chair can see around corners. It'll keep millions of people from languishing in nursing homes. It could solve the whole Medicare crisis! No wonder I'm excited.

PENNY: How much more money were you planning to put in?

CARTER: Can't tell yet.

PENNY: Until all the insurance money is gone?

CARTER: If that's what it takes.

PENNY: And you don't realize why you're doing this?

CARTER: To help a friend. And make a killing in the process.

PENNY: You're doing this out of guilt.

CARTER: I am guilty. Put the music back on.

PENNY: What do you think you're guilty of?

CARTER: I didn't really poison her, if that's what you're thinking.

PENNY: What do you mean, you "didn't really poison her"? Poison her how? What are you trying to say?

*(Pause.)*

CARTER: I knew she had high blood pressure, and still I added salt to her food.

PENNY: And that's all.

CARTER: No, that's not all.

PENNY: Salt and butter.



CARTER: You think this is a joke.

PENNY: What else did you do? Let's have it.

CARTER: You remember our garage in the country? There wasn't any side clearance, so she had to get out before I pulled the car in. She'd get out, she'd go up to the connecting door, right in front of the car. No space between Anna and the wall. What if I stepped on the gas and crushed her? Every morning, drinking my scalding hot coffee, what if I suddenly lost control and flung it in Anna's face? Would she ever be able to sing again?

PENNY: Those were just thoughts. Morbid guilty thoughts.

CARTER: Thoughts have consequences.

PENNY: You didn't kill her. Your brain waves aren't that powerful. She died of a heart attack. What's the last time you took your lithium?

*(Doorbell rings.)*

CARTER: Who's that? Who are you expecting?

PENNY: Answer me.

*(Doorbell rings again.)*

CARTER: Excuse me.

*(CARTER exits. PENNY turns the music off, starts out after him. CARTER and SETH enter, in mid-conversation.)*

CARTER: —So have you ever been present at an autopsy?

SETH: No, I never have. Penny, you got a minute?

CARTER: I've seen dozens of autopsies in my time. The yellow nerves—they look like puppet strings. There are strings between people, too. Just like the nerves in the body. *(accusingly, to PENNY)* We get pulled in all directions.

SETH: (to PENNY) Can we go somewhere, please?

CARTER: What's the matter, Seth? You're quivering. Trouble at home? Are your folks fighting about me? I was just telling Penny about getting into business with your dad.

SETH: It had nothing to do with you.

CARTER: Oh but it always does. You're moving out, aren't you.

SETH: That's right. We both are.

CARTER: Well well. Your sister must be freaking out. Is she trying to talk you out of it? No? Worse than that?

SETH: Yeah, it's worse. Penny, seriously, can we go get coffee?

CARTER: Wait a minute, Seth. (to PENNY) So you're part of this glorious adventure? When were you planning on cluing me in?

SETH: You haven't told him yet?

PENNY: I was getting ready to. (to CARTER) As soon as you calmed down.

CARTER: (to SETH) You expect me to stand in your way, don't you?

SETH: Yeah, frankly, I do.

CARTER: This is how much I'm standing in your way. I'm gifting you the first and last month's rent. Oh what the hell, get yourself a loft, I'll sign the lease and pay for the whole damn year.

PENNY: Dad, you're not doing that.

CARTER: She's worried I'm spending her inheritance. So what if I am? It's in the best possible cause. So tell me, Seth, what was the straw that broke the camel's back?

PENNY: Dad, enough. Not everything's your business.

CARTER: Not everything's God's business either. Or there wouldn't be Free Will. *(to SETH)* Whatever happened between you and Leah, it's not the end of the world. I know you feel like shit right now.

SETH: Don't tell me what I'm feeling, OK? Penny, you coming?

CARTER: Incest doesn't turn you gay.

SETH: Oh Jesus.

CARTER: The fear of incest, that's another story. That's what makes the world go round.

SETH: Penny, can you shut him up, please?

PENNY: Dad, what are you talking about?

CARTER: *(to SETH)* Stop being so hard on yourself! You know what I call a boy who doesn't have the hots for his sister? Especially a sister as pretty as yours? A pervert.

*(SETH starts out.)*

PENNY: Seth, please! Don't go. Dad, that's enough. Not another word.

CARTER: Eve was made from Adam's rib. Their children, who did they marry? Penny knows her Bible, she can tell you. Each other. With God's blessing.

PENNY: Stop talking! Seth, is it true?

SETH: Shit happened, OK?

PENNY: No, please don't shut down. Dad, please go.

CARTER: I can help you through this, Seth.

PENNY: No, you can't. Leave us alone. Go to your room!

CARTER: *(going)* If you were an ancient Egyptian, you and Leah would already be man and wife. Like Ptolemy and Cleopatra.

(CARTER *exits.*)

PENNY: Seth, I'm sorry.

SETH: Not your problem. It's mine and I'm dealing with it.

PENNY: It's not just your problem. It's both our problems. Your parents, my dad, my mom, they didn't look out for us properly. We were bootstrap kids, we brought ourselves up, and you know what, Seth? I think we did a darn good job, considering.

SETH: I know. I know. You're great.

PENNY: And so are you. I don't care what happened between you and Leah, I don't need to know, if we love each other, Seth, that's all that matters. We'll go on Craigslist, we'll find ourselves a place to live.

SETH: Come with me now.

PENNY: Now? I can't.

SETH: Why not? What's stopping us?

PENNY: He's in one of his states, he's liable to do anything. I'll calm him down, I'll call you as soon as I can, we'll start looking for an apartment right away.

SETH: I don't want him paying for it.

PENNY: Neither do I. Trust me, we'll get past this. I promise.

(PENNY *kisses* SETH. CARTER *enters*. SETH *breaks the kiss and bolts for the door.*)

CARTER: Bye, Seth! Don't worry about a thing! Everything's copasetic!

(SETH *exits.*)

CARTER: Give him time. Wasn't his fault. A wet pussy has no conscience.

PENNY: Shut up, that's disgusting. When did you go off your meds?

CARTER: I knew it the minute I saw them together. Your mother and I were like brother and sister.

PENNY: I don't want to hear about it. I'm calling Grayson and I'm moving out as soon as I can.

CARTER: We'd be lying in bed, middle of the night, I'd wake her up just to make sure she was still alive.

PENNY: Did you hear what I said? Seth and I are in love. The sooner you get your head around that, the better.

CARTER: For years I rehearsed her death. What life would be like without her? What I would say at her funeral? You remember, when the time came? I couldn't say a word.

PENNY: Just shut up about mom! I'm sick of sharing this place with her ghost!

CARTER: You know what your mother would say if she were here? Exactly that. Don't talk to him. Give him the silent treatment. Used to pull that on me all the time. In front of people! Surrounded by her fans! So you know what I did? I chatted up the chorus girls. Where are you going? I'm talking to you!

PENNY: Good night.

CARTER: Typical. Walk away. Ignore me. You remember!

PENNY: Remember what?

CARTER: Those backstage fiascos.

PENNY: No, Dad, how could I?

CARTER: The lawyer husband! The civilian! I was a big fish in my own right! And it wasn't a small pond either! I was thriving. Couldn't have cared less. Never came to court. Not a shred of interest. You took it all for granted. Bitch.

PENNY: Dad, look at me. Who am I?

CARTER: Social parity. Mutual regard. That's all I ever asked of you.

*(PENNY has taken out her cell and is finding a number.)*

PENNY: *(on phone)* This message is for Dr. Grayson—

CARTER: Anna, put the phone down!

PENNY: *(on phone)* This is Penny Sutcliffe, Carter Sutcliffe's daughter. I'm calling in reference to my dad. Please call me back as soon as you can. It's an emergency.

CARTER: You know what? Let's put on some nostalgia music. What would you like to hear? Something of your own? About time you learned some humility—

*(The phone rings.)*

CARTER: Don't answer that. None of their business.

*(PENNY goes for the phone. CARTER grabs PENNY, pins her against the wall.)*

CARTER: See, I know why you never came to court. You were afraid nobody would recognize you. That's why you wore dark glasses. Hiding from nothing! From obscurity! AIDS killed off your audience! I'm your last remaining fan!

*(PENNY pulls free, lunges for the ringing phone. CARTER grabs it away, flings the phone aside. PENNY takes out her cell, sprints for the door.)*

CARTER: What are you doing? Who are you calling now? Come back here, you Nazi cunt!

PENNY: I'm not Anna! I'm Penny!

CARTER: I know exactly who you are! Stop trying to gaslight me!

*(PENNY flings open the door, locking it behind her. CARTER tugs at the knob.)*

CARTER: Don't you dare make any calls. I've broken no laws. All my crimes are thought crimes. We have to save that boy from his sister, I can't do it alone!

*(CARTER pounds and pounds on the locked door. Blackout.*

*Fade in sound of sirens, muffled voices. In darkness:)*

CARTER: *(over)* I suggest you remove your hand from my arm. Unless you want to face me in court.

*(The sound of sirens rises.)*

CARTER: *(over)* Ignorant cocksuckers! I'll sue you till you bleed, you fucking Neanderthals!

*(Blackout. Sirens. END OF ACT 1.)*

**Act 2****Scene 1**

*(Lights up on PENNY and LOU in LOU's living room.)*

PENNY: —I don't have a clue where he is. If I did, I wouldn't be here. I've texted him, I've left messages every hour, not a single word.

LOU: What makes you think we know? Why come to us?

PENNY: I left you a dozen messages, you didn't call me back. Has he shown up at the store?

LOU: No, he hasn't come in.

PENNY: And that doesn't worry you.

LOU: Of course it worries us. I have to say, Penny, I resent your tone.

PENNY: Why don't you ask your daughter why Seth's gone into hiding?

LOU: Why do you assume he's hiding? Hiding from what? Never mind. I don't know what you're implying, and frankly I don't care to continue this discussion. If you'll excuse me, Penny, I have business to attend to.

PENNY: With my dad?

LOU: Yes, as a matter of fact.

PENNY: Just so you know...he won't be keeping his appointments with you. That phase of his life is over.

LOU: *(carefully)* Why do you say that?

PENNY: He hasn't tried to call you?

LOU: Why do you say it's over?



PENNY: I can't believe he hasn't been in touch. Maybe he was ashamed. My dad a serious episode, he's been hospitalized, and he won't be writing you any more checks.

LOU: A psychiatric episode?

PENNY: Don't pretend to be surprised. You knew he was unstable, and still you let him squander his money on your Milstein Chair.

LOU: I beg your pardon. The money was well-invested and I never asked for a penny. Your father approached me.

PENNY: Oh please. Mr. Milstein, I was there. Out of nowhere you invited us to "tea." Then you dropped hints about a secret project. That was catnip to my dad, in his manic state, and you knew it.

LOU: I knew no such thing. You shouldn't make such accusations. Manic, is that your diagnosis?

PENNY: It's what he's been his whole life. Before my mother died, he had it under control. Not since. He's in no condition to manage his finances. I plan to go to probate court and establish a conservatorship. I'm told this won't be hard to do.

LOU: Well. That puts a new light on things, doesn't it?

PENNY: I'm sorry to throw cold water on your hopes. If you hear from Seth, I'd appreciate your letting me know right away, and I'll do the same for you. My number's on your voice mail.

(PENNY *exits*. *Pause*.)

LOU: (*calling*) It's all right. She's gone.

(MAXINE *enters*.)

LOU: Did you hear any of that?

MAXINE: Every word.

LOU: Those weren't idle threats. She's on the warpath.

MAXINE: Didn't I tell you these people were trouble?

LOU: Shh, Maxie, not so loud.

MAXINE: I hate what we're doing here, Lou. The minute that girl learns the truth about what you've done, she'll be back here like a bat out of hell.

CARTER (*off*) Maxine, this chicken is out of this world!

MAXINE: Ay, that voice. It sends shivers down my spine. He's crazier than ever.

LOU: No, he's back on his medication. I helped him fill the prescription myself.

MAXINE: OK, you helped him. Now tell him to leave.

LOU: I can't do that, Maxie.

MAXINE: Fine. Then I'm leaving.

LOU: And where's the money going to come from? You?

(CARTER *enters, munching on a chicken bone.*)

CARTER: You know what they fed me at the hospital? Nothing but boneless. What was I going to do, stab myself with a drumstick? I insist on having the recipe.

MAXINE: I'll print it out, Carter, and then you have to leave.

CARTER: Lou, are you in agreement?

MAXINE: I don't want your daughter to find you here. I'm not even sure it's legal.

LOU: Maxine, I didn't sneak him out the back way.

MAXINE: Only because they caught you.

LOU: He was officially discharged.

MAXINE: “Against medical advice,” am I right?

CARTER: Not “against medical advice.” Because of medical advice.  
I’m going to sue the pants off Grayson. Do you know what else that quack had me doing?

LOU: Stop dwelling on it, Carter. You’re here, and that’s what counts.

CARTER: He hooked me up to an EEG. Told me to move things with my mind. I was nothing but his trained flea—he would have swatted me if he could. Then he shoves me in an MRI machine. Showed me pictures of Anna, see what part of my brain lights up. The angry part! I wanted to murder the sonofabitch! I told Grayson to go fuck himself and they put me in the Quiet Room. Like I had manhandled them!

LOU: Shh...Carter. You know the story about the lady on the train? It’s a hot day. No A/C. She’s sweating bullets. “Oy,” she says, “am I thirsty!....Oy, am I thirsty!...Oy, am I thirsty!” Guy calls out: “Will somebody get that woman a glass of water!” Conductor brings her the water. Two minutes later: “Oy, was I thirsty!”

CARTER: I get it, Lou. I’ll stop *ka-vetching*.

MAXINE: Not *ka-vetching*. *Kvetching*.

CARTER: *Kvetching*. No more. Ancient history.

LOU: Forget the lawsuit. We’ve got bigger problems than that.

CARTER: Who am I going to sue, my daughter?

LOU: Yes, well, that’s exactly what we’re up against. She’s already hired an attorney. I just got it from the horse’s mouth.

CARTER: What are you talking about? I’m her attorney.

LOU: She’s trying to get control of your money. Stop you from writing me any more checks.

CARTER: OK. This is why she had me committed.

LOU: Maybe you should agree to see a psychiatrist. Not Grayson, of course not. Your daughter can use it against you if you don't see a shrink. I'm talking about a court of law.

CARTER: I promise you both it will never get that far.

MAXINE: Please, don't make me any promises. The main thing is, you shouldn't be here. I'll go print out that recipe for you, then you have to leave.

(MAXINE *exits*.)

LOU: It's nothing personal. She's upset about the children.

CARTER: You haven't heard from Seth.

LOU: Nobody has. I'm tearing my hair.

CARTER: He'll be back soon enough. And you know what? Then Penny will calm down again. I guarantee. We'll be on the fast track again.

LOU: Yes, but now Leah's leaving. Out of a blue sky. She gave notice at B'nai Simcah.

CARTER: (*carefully*) Did she say why?

LOU: Does she ever tell us anything? Thank God for small favors, she found a new job upstate. With Gan Eden—the Garden of Eden. Big chain of Jewish daycare centers. So it's more money, but why all of a sudden? Did something happen with Seth? I gather from Leah they had words. Maybe more than words, I didn't press her on it. They never used to fight, all of a sudden he couldn't stand to be around her.

CARTER: He's a dark horse, that boy.

LOU: Both my children.

CARTER: He suffers in silence. The curse of the gifted.

LOU: When Seth was in college...we wouldn't hear from him for months. High school as well. He'd run off, then come back with these horrible stories. How he got picked up by a child molester in a limousine. A celebrity, no less! But he wouldn't name the guy. Did it even happen? Who knows.

CARTER: Artists are liars. My Anna, she claimed she sang Wagner in kindergarten. Penny, on the other hand? Strictly left-brain. Not a devious bone in her body—up till now.

LOU: When I drove Seth to Cornell, first time, I asked if he had any questions about sex. He hinted he was worried about potency. I asked did he masturbate. He said yes. Did he get an erection? Yes, he said. I said well, then you have nothing to worry about.

CARTER: What else were you going to say?

LOU: Maybe I screwed him up more.

CARTER: You mustn't blame yourself.

LOU: Kids today, they raise each other. Seth and me, we were never close. Leah, the same. Not like you and Penny. Sometimes I think I don't get close to anybody.

CARTER: I feel close to you, Lou.

LOU: That's kind of you to say. The feeling's mutual, Carter.

CARTER: If my wife were still alive? She might have tried to come between us. Anna was possessive by nature. Over vast distances.

LOU: And Penny takes after her?

CARTER: I wouldn't say "takes after." She's picking up where Anna left off. Believe me, it's temporary. This legal maneuvering will not stand. Once Seth is back in the picture, she'll see the error of her ways.

LOU: I wish I could be so confident.

CARTER: They're like you and me, Lou. Made for each other.

LOU: Don't let my wife hear you say that. Oh Christ.

CARTER: Shh, what is it, Lou?

LOU: We're going down the tubes. I can feel it.

CARTER: Lou, I said hush.

LOU: I so wanted Seth and Penny to make a go of it.

CARTER: And you know what? They will. No question about it.  
And Maxine will come round as well. That's my pledge to you, Lou.  
You saved my ass, you sprung me from that nuthouse, I'm your friend  
for life, together we will prevail, on every front. So how's the  
Milstein Chair coming? Is it beeping yet?

LOU: No, not yet.

CARTER: Chin up. Let's have a look.

*(CARTER and LOU exit. Doorbell rings. Nothing happens.  
Doorbell rings again. LEAH enters.)*

LEAH: All right, all right, I'm coming!

*(LEAH exits in the direction of the front door. MAXINE enters.)*

MAXINE: Is somebody getting the door?

*(PENNY bursts in, LEAH behind her.)*

PENNY: Where's my dad? I just called the hospital, they said he left  
with your husband. Why did he lie to me?

MAXINE: Easy does it, Penny. Yes, your father's here. He phoned  
my husband from the hospital, and he asked to come here.

PENNY: And you didn't see fit to tell me?

MAXINE: He asked my husband not to. So don't start with the  
accusations. Clearly, your father doesn't want to go home at this  
time.

PENNY: I'm afraid that's not up to him. (*calls*) Dad?

LEAH: Maxine, let me talk to Penny.

PENNY: I don't think I want to talk to you.

LEAH: Well, you'd better. This won't take long. Maxine, go warn Carter his daughter's here.

MAXINE: (*to PENNY*) If I were you, I wouldn't be so eager to contradict his wishes.

(MAXINE *exits*.)

LEAH: Can I get you something to drink?

PENNY: I don't want anything to drink. (*calling*) Dad?

LEAH: Penny, shh. You must have something to say to me. Sit down.

(PENNY *remains standing*.)

LEAH: Do you want to tell me what happened to Seth?

PENNY: Not unless Seth wants me to.

LEAH: Are you still planning to move in together?

PENNY: Once things calm down? Yes, of course we are.

LEAH: Because I'd really like to know before I leave.

PENNY: Leave what? Leave here? When?

LEAH: As soon as I'm packed. I've taken a new job.

PENNY: Where?

LEAH: Garden of Eden.

PENNY: Here in the city?

LEAH: No. Upstate. Three hours away. Whoa, look at you, I just made your day.

PENNY: What kind of job?

LEAH: What I do. Teaching preschool. Why isn't Seth answering my calls?

PENNY: Do you mind if we don't talk about it? Does that work for you?

LEAH: Your dad spooked him, didn't he? Did he do one of his crazy "summations"?

PENNY: Please drop it.

LEAH: Do you want to know the real story? Obviously you don't. With you people, everything's great until it's not.

PENNY: "You people"? Oh, that's wonderful.

LEAH: Do you want to know what happened with Seth at Cornell?  
Yes or no.

PENNY: You obviously want to tell me.

LEAH: He was suicidal. He hadn't left his room for days. No sheets on the bed, place smelled like a nest of dead rats. We had an art history final and if he didn't get his ass to the exam they were going to put him on suspension.

PENNY: What year was this?

LEAH: What difference does that make. His first year.

PENNY: He was homesick.

LEAH: For what? This home? Please. Homesick. How would you know. You've never been away from home. He was ready to gorge out! Jump off a bridge!

PENNY: How do you know that? Did you follow him to the bridge?



LEAH: Ohmigod, why is this so hard for you? My brother was threatening to kill himself. He said it to my face!

PENNY: So you did what?

LEAH: Same thing as you. You've been there.

PENNY: Excuse me—what “thing”?

LEAH: In high school. You took pity on a class pariah.

PENNY: Seth shared that with you?

LEAH: Hello? Seth shares everything with me. Pretend that poor boy was in love with you. He couldn't eat, sleep, study, anything, he was going crazy, couldn't get you out of his mind. No, but wait a second, you're absolutely right, there's no parallel. You weren't trying to save a life. You were just giving yourself a Merit Badge. OK? Are you getting the picture now? God didn't strike us dead.

PENNY: Yes, I get it. You're trying to shock me.

LEAH: I'm telling you what happened! If you don't want to believe it, that's your problem.

PENNY: This new preschool you're going to. I wonder if they know who they're entrusting children to.

LEAH: Ohmigod, will you listen to her! What a snobbish, detestable prig you are! I take back every hopeful thing I ever said about you and my brother. Did you ever ask to see his children's book? Or his comic strip? Or anything else he's ever done? If he never painted another picture, would you even care? You know what, Penny? I hope you never lay eyes on him again. You and your dad, between the two of you, he could be lying dead somewhere. I hope you're fucking satisfied.

(MAXINE *rushes in.*)

MAXINE: What's going on here? What's all this yelling, will somebody please tell me?

LEAH: Nothing. We're done.

MAXINE: I want to know what you two were discussing.

PENNY: I'll let your daughter tell you. Would you be good enough to get my dad?

MAXINE: They're in the middle of a meeting.

PENNY: (*shouts*) Dad? It's me, it's Penny, I'm here!

(LOU *enters.*)

LOU: Your father asks you to go home. He's not ready to see you yet.

PENNY: That's not his call. He's not in a position to judge what's best for him.

LOU: I think you underestimate your dad.

PENNY: You weren't there when he had his episode. Did he tell you the circumstances?

LOU: He said he lost his temper. And because of that, he was put in lockdown. Thank God I was there to bail him out.

PENNY: Did he tell you he was hallucinating?

LOU: No, and that's none of my concern.

PENNY: He thought I was his wife.

LOU: Are you sure? Were you inside his head?

PENNY: He called me Anna! He pinned me against the wall and threatened to kill me! It was a full-blown psychotic break!

MAXINE: Then perhaps you'd be wise to keep your distance.

PENNY: Please get out of my way.

MAXINE: Oh, and now the pushing starts.

PENNY: What do I have to do, call the police?

LOU: That will only embarrass you, Penny. Your dad is here of his own free will.

PENNY: And whatever the money wants, that's fine with you. Dad!  
We're leaving! Now!

LOU: Penny, shh, calm yourself, stop talking nonsense!

(CARTER *enters*.)

CARTER: Penny? What's going on?

PENNY: I'm taking you home.

CARTER: Not today, kitten. You need a holiday from your poor old dad. I'm going to stay here at Chez Milstein for a while.

LEAH: Why not? He'll have his choice of rooms.

PENNY: (*to MAXINE*) Mrs. Milstein, you can't possibly approve of this.

MAXINE: Do me a favor? Leave me out of this discussion.

LOU: It's up to your father, Penny. He's a free man.

PENNY: Some freedom. He went AWOL from one madhouse, and now you want him to live in this one.

MAXINE: Oh my God, the nerve!

CARTER: Penny, that's quite enough.

PENNY: (*to MAXINE*) Your son is M.I.A. Do you even care why?  
Ask your husband, he knows.

CARTER: Kitten, I said that's enough! You'll have to excuse my daughter, she's not usually this rude. Lou? Many thanks for your kind offer, but I need to be with Penny right now. Come on, kitten, we're going.

(CARTER *exits*. PENNY *hangs back a moment*.)

PENNY: (to LOU and MAXINE) We'll see what the courts have to say.

(PENNY exits. MAXINE reaches for a bottle, pours herself a drink.)

MAXINE: I told you, Lou. You should never have brought him here.

LOU: What else could I do? He refused to go home.

MAXINE: Oh, that's bullshit and you know it's bullshit. All you care about is his money. Never mind what I'm feeling, never mind what's happened to our son.

LOU: Nothing's happened to him, Maxie.

MAXINE: How do you know that?

LOU: Please put the bottle away. We would have heard.

MAXINE: Heard what? How do you know he's not living at their place?

LOU: Then why would she come here looking for him?

MAXINE: Why does she do anything, this girl? First she lets her father get our hopes up, then she dashes them.

LOU: I don't think she ever knew he was investing.

MAXINE: So you say. I say she was playing possum. There's a darkness there, Lou. A deep selfishness. Leah, you stuck up for this girl, but I know you see it too.

LEAH: Absolutely. I was fooled.

MAXINE: In my opinion? She's got a case of what he's got.

LEAH: Maybe worse.

LOU: We should only be so lucky.

MAXINE: Lucky how?

LOU: If she acts like that in court.

MAXINE: Did you notice? She practically shoved me aside, in my own living room. And what did she mean by “ask your husband”?

LOU: Nothing, Maxie. Idle suspicions.

MAXINE: Suspicions of what?

LOU: It’s nothing. *Narishkeit*. Random craziness.

MAXINE: Leah, did anything that girl said make sense to you? What were you two arguing about?

LEAH: I told her she was bad for Seth.

MAXINE: I’m glad one of us finally said it. “M.I.A.” What a way to put it. Leave it to the *goyim*.

(MAXINE *pours herself a drink*. *Blackout*. *Music up: the Bernard Hermann score from Vertigo*.)

**Scene 2**

*(Lights up on CARTER, sitting alone in his bathrobe and pajamas, listening to Bernard Hermann. PENNY enters.)*

CARTER: Hello, kitten. Did I wake you?

PENNY: Wasn't that the point? What are you doing out here? Why are the blinds closed?

CARTER: I'm avoiding the sunrise.

PENNY: Why?

CARTER: Because it's so depressing.

PENNY: Then go to bed, for goodness sake.

CARTER: The dogs fetching the newspapers....children waiting for the school bus....storeowners cranking down their awnings. I've always hated the dawn hours.

PENNY: Fine. Could we please not have Bernard Hermann at three in the morning? Turn it off.

CARTER: Who the fuck is this attorney?

PENNY: Don't curse at me please.

*(PENNY turns the stereo off.)*

CARTER: Is this really what you want to do? Go to war with your own father?

PENNY: If you think I'm enjoying this, you're dead wrong.

CARTER: I want that fucking lawyer's name.

PENNY: Not if you talk to me like that.

CARTER: Very well. The language of therapy, will that do? This is your revenge.

PENNY: Revenge for what?

CARTER: You were a third wheel growing up. Now you're in charge.

PENNY: Third wheel? I was a non-wheel.

CARTER: Exactly. And I applaud your personal development.  
Nevertheless, I'll wipe the fucking floor with your fucking attorney.

PENNY: OK, now here's my advice. Unless you want to make a fool  
of yourself in court, don't spend another dime on Milstein's Folly.

CARTER: What, you'd rather see his business go under? This man went out  
on a limb for me, kitten. If he hadn't come to the hospital, I'd still be in  
lockdown. Lou's my dear dear friend, and he's this close to a production  
model. I'll spend as much as we need to put it over the top.

PENNY: All the insurance money.

CARTER: If that's what it takes.

PENNY: And what if it takes more? What if it takes all we've got? You'd  
better set aside enough to buy a car, because you're going to need a place to  
sleep.

CARTER: While you'll be living with Seth.

PENNY: That's right.

CARTER: Happily ever after.

PENNY: Not if you're destitute.

CARTER: Oh Penny. Did it never occur to you I might know what I'm doing?  
That I might have a chance to double my money? Are you so jealous of my  
relationship with Lou? Are you angry that I opened up to Seth? It was high  
time, and you know it. I know what people can absorb. That comes from  
years of speaking to juries. Seth's young, he's an artist, he was ready to hear  
the truth.

PENNY: Then where is he? Tell me that. Where is he?

CARTER: He's nursing his wounds. He took a big step. He told his muse to take a hike.

PENNY: Please don't call her that.

CARTER: That's what she was, for better or worse. Try and be patient, he's working things out on a whole new level.

PENNY: Working things out! He could be at the bottom of the river!

CARTER: That may have crossed his mind, but no. He'll come to us when he's ready, and he'll come to us first.

PENNY: Right, I forgot, you can see the future through your eyelids. Dad, really, I've heard enough nonsense out of you for one night. Please go to bed.

CARTER: I need to keep one eye open. I could wake up in a straitjacket.

PENNY: *(suddenly)* What was that?

CARTER: What was what?

PENNY: That sound.

CARTER: Now you're hearing things. Where are you going?

*(PENNY exits. CARTER turns on the stereo, humming along to Bernard Hermann. PENNY enters.)*

PENNY: Turn it off, for heaven's sake! *(calls off)* Come on, it's OK!

*(SETH appears in the doorway, hanging back. His clothes are smeared with dirt and sopping wet, his face is bruised and dirty, his eye is swollen and trickling blood.)*

CARTER: Oh gracious, what happened to you, pal?

PENNY: He was mugged. Get a washcloth. And some Bactine. Put soap on the washcloth. And turn off the damn music.



CARTER: Aye aye, doctor.

*(CARTER pauses the stereo and exits.)*

PENNY: Who did this to you?

SETH: Couple of guys.

PENNY: Where?

SETH: The park.

PENNY: Did they rob you?

SETH: Yeah, my wallet and my hotel key.

PENNY: What hotel?

SETH: The Wickersham.

PENNY: I don't know that hotel.

SETH: You wouldn't. It's a fleabag off 4<sup>th</sup>.

PENNY: Is that where you've been staying?

SETH: Yeah. It was agony.

PENNY: Shh, you're home now.

SETH: What happened after I split? Did your dad freak on you too?

PENNY: Yes. He spent some time in a hospital.

SETH: So it got worse.

PENNY: Yes, it got much worse. I went to your house, looking for you. Leah gave me an earful.

SETH: Yeah, I guess she would.

*(CARTER enters with a washcloth, Band-Aids, Bactine. PENNY dresses the wound.)*

CARTER: So have we been hitting the bars, my friend?

SETH: Why, do I smell of liquor?

PENNY: Your clothes are drenched with it.

SETH: Jesus. They must have poured it on me.

CARTER: Where were you? Where did this happen?

SETH: Where the maze is.

CARTER: The Primrose Path?

SETH: Yeah, I don't know. I was lost.

CARTER: Why did you go to the Primrose Path?

PENNY: Dad, let him alone, he said he was lost.

CARTER: You believed that crap about cleaning up the Path? No more fag-bashings? I guess the Neanderthals didn't get the memo. Fucking homophobes. You ever see the guys who get sex changes? They're huge. Ex-brutes, most of them. Come on, pal, what's this new suicide trip you're on?

SETH: "New suicide trip?"

PENNY: Dad, leave the room, please. I need to talk to Seth.

CARTER: Hey, so do I.

PENNY: Just go.

(CARTER *starts out.*)

CARTER: You've got everything to live for, kid. *Snowball's* getting published, OK?

SETH: It is?

CARTER: Absolutely. So quit beating your head against the wall. I know it feels great when you stop, but take it from an expert, it's bad for the brain.

SETH: *(to CARTER)* So Candlewick said yes? Do they have a pub date yet?

CARTER: Candlewick? They passed.

SETH: What?

CARTER: And I'll tell you why that's good news. The deal would have been onerous. I've got new and bigger plans for *Snowball*. And we'll be working closely together.

SETH: I see.

CARTER: You're not processing, kiddo. This is win-win.

SETH: No, I get it. Self-publishing. DIY.

CARTER: Wave of the future, my friend. So how about that loft? I want you to get back to work ASAP. I want a Seth Milstein hanging on every wall. No more death wish, promise me, pal?

*(CARTER exits with the Bactine and the Band-Aid box.)*

SETH: He's not publishing my book.

PENNY: Seth, I know.

SETH: You know who'll read it? Nobody.

PENNY: Don't worry, he can't.

SETH: He's a juggernaut. He could do it behind my back.

PENNY: That can't happen. He can't spend a penny. I've hired an attorney. I'll be signing all checks from now on.

SETH: All the checks? What about my dad?

PENNY: He's free to look elsewhere for a backer.

SETH: Lou's been counting on your dad.

PENNY: From day one. That's why he invited us to tea.

SETH: That's kinda harsh.

PENNY: But it's true.

SETH: Lou will be crushed. Does your dad think he's been hustled?

PENNY: Of course not. He thinks he's saving the world.

SETH: What did he mean by "new suicide trip"?

PENNY: Nothing. It's not important.

SETH: Yeah, it's important. What exactly did Leah say to you?

PENNY: It doesn't matter what she said.

SETH: I'll be the judge of what matters. Tell me!

PENNY: At Cornell. Your first year. She said you didn't come out of your dorm room for days.

SETH: And?

PENNY: No "ands." I don't care what happened, it's over.

SETH: So you forgive me.

PENNY: Forgive you for what? I'm not God.

SETH: No, you just live with God. You're God's nursemaid.

PENNY: Seth, shh. That's cruel.

SETH: It's true, though, isn't it. Never mind, you don't want to talk about anything.

PENNY: Oh come on, of course I do. Ohmigosh, after all we've been through, you don't know that yet? Seth, you can tell me whatever you want. I'm like a lawyer, or a doctor, that's what a CPA is, somebody people trust, somebody they tell their money secrets to. I mean, ohmigosh, Grayson always avoided the subject of money, and his fees were astronomical—

SETH: What's that got to do with me?

PENNY: And if you want to forget it, that's all right, too.

SETH: Yeah, I've already told you too much.

PENNY: Oh for heaven's sake, Seth, you haven't said a thing!  
(*Pause*) I'm sorry. I didn't mean to shout.

SETH: Donny Moscovitz? That was nothing?

PENNY: I know. You're right. Anything you want to say.

SETH: I was sleeping a lot.

PENNY: That's what she said.

SETH: A couple of kids jumped into the gorges that winter.

PENNY: She said she saved your life.

SETH: Yeah, OK.

PENNY: Was she exaggerating?

SETH: What do you think?

PENNY: I think yeah, she probably was. She does that all the time.

SETH: It's a family trait.

PENNY: No! You're not like that at all!

SETH: Did she say how she saved my life?

PENNY: No.

SETH: No?

PENNY: I mean she didn't go into detail.

SETH: We went to a motel.

PENNY: All right.

SETH: All right?

PENNY: Go on.

SETH: The Royal Pagoda.

PENNY: Sounds...fancy.

SETH: One of those hot-sheet places.

PENNY: I get it.

SETH: No. You don't.

PENNY: Well then, tell me. I can take it. Whatever you want to say.

*(Pause.)*

SETH: It had theme rooms.

PENNY: Theme rooms?

*(Pause.)*

SETH: The guy at the desk....he had this weirdly shaped head. Little chin, huge cranium. His head was like a beet.

PENNY: That's so funny.

SETH: Yeah, it was funny. *(pause)* He put us in the gay room.

PENNY: Why the gay room?

SETH: I guess he thought...I don't know what he thought.

PENNY: I mean, you showed up with...with a girl.

SETH: Yeah. I didn't stop to analyze it.

PENNY: What was gay about it?

SETH: The TV. It only had gay porn. *(pause)* What's the matter?

PENNY: Nothing.

SETH: You don't believe me?

PENNY: Why shouldn't I believe you? Why would you lie about this?

SETH: *(warming to it)* The whole thing was totally retro. Instead of air-conditioning the room had these window boxes, with wet ferns, and a fan blowing the wet air across the room....you sure you want to hear this?

PENNY: Yes. Go on.

SETH: There was a Gideon Bible in the drawer...with dirty illustrations...Onan spilling his seed...David and Jonathan....Jesus doing Mary Magdalene...

PENNY: That's so vile.

SETH: You getting the picture?

PENNY: Yeah. I think so.

SETH: Are you? Because I'm actually thinking of doing a painting.

PENNY: Of what? You and your sister in that room? No. You're teasing me. I mean, ohmigod, ferns? And a dirty Bible? It's almost like you dreamed it.

SETH: Ask Lou.

PENNY: What do you mean? You told him? Ohmigod.

SETH: No, are you kidding? No, I put the room on my credit card, and Lou called me on it....."What's this Royal Pagoda? What were you doing at a motel?"... I told him I took a girl there....He was totally relieved.

PENNY: He knows who the girl was.

SETH: No way.

PENNY: He's keeping it from your mom. That's why she drinks. To keep the whole thing out of her head.

SETH: Maybe that's where it belongs.

PENNY: Seth, they were enablers. Both your parents. They need to face that fact, and the sooner the better. That's why you didn't pay cash for the room, that's why you put it on a credit card, you wanted your parents to know the hell you were going through. Do you want me to be there when you talk to them?

SETH: Are you kidding?

PENNY: I think I should be. Did you leave anything at the Wickersham?

SETH: Yeah, I don't remember. A toothbrush. Maybe a pair of shoes.

PENNY: Don't go back there. Those thugs could be waiting. Here's what you do: Call the hotel, say you're checked out. If the cut opens up, go to the E.R. And get a tetanus shot. You probably should get one anyway. St. Mary's overcharges, but your wait time is less. Are you covered by Lou's policy? Don't worry, they won't turn you away. What are you going to tell your folks about your eye? You were beaten and robbed. You don't have to say where. But honestly, you should. That bill is way overdue. I'll rent a car in the morning and pick you up at your house. We'll start looking for lofts this side of the river.

SETH: We meaning all three of us.

PENNY: That's not what I mean! Not at all! Please trust me.

(PENNY *digs in her bag, takes out a handful of twenties.*)



PENNY: I'll call down for a cab. Bye, Seth. Be careful. I love you.

(PENNY *hugs* SETH *and walks him to the door*. SETH *exits*.  
PENNY *gets on her cell*.)

PENNY: (*into phone*) My friend is on the way down. Can you get him a cab, please? Thank you.

(CARTER *enters*.)

CARTER: I put clean pillowcases on the bed.

PENNY: You needn't have bothered. Seth went home.

CARTER: Why would you send him home?

PENNY: I didn't "send him." He needs to clear the air with his parents.

CARTER: I don't like the sound of that, Penny. We're at a very delicate juncture here.

PENNY: It's got nothing to do with you, Dad. It's strictly between Seth and his folks. He doesn't want you in the middle, and neither do I.

CARTER: I see. Sounds like you and I are still at war.

PENNY: Are you willing to see a psychiatrist? And I mean regular visits.

CARTER: Cancel that attorney, then we'll have something to talk about.

PENNY: Fat chance, the way you're acting.

CARTER: Listen to that! *C'est l'hôpital qui se moque de la charité*.

PENNY: I don't know what the fuck that means!

CARTER: Exactly. You're the pot, and I'm the kettle. Fine, stick to your guns, I'll stick to mine, and we'll see who fires the last shot.

PENNY: You bet I will. Goodnight, Dad. Get some sleep.

*(PENNY slams out of the room. CARTER turns up the stereo. The music soars. Lights fade.)*

### Scene 3

*(Music fades. Dim light up on the Milstein living room. SETH is sitting alone, staring into space. Kitchen sounds, off. LEAH enters, in T-shirt and panties.)*

LEAH: Seth?!

SETH: Yeah, it's me.

LEAH: How long have you been here? Why are you sitting in the dark?

*(LEAH turns on a light. Sees SETH's blood-stained clothes, his bandaged eye.)*

LEAH: What the fuck? Seth, ohmigod, what happened to you?!

SETH: Never mind. It's fine.

LEAH: It's not fine. Look at you. you're all bruised, what did you do, run into a lamppost?

SETH: A couple of guys jumped me.

LEAH: What guys?

SETH: In the park.

LEAH: Oh Jesus. Which park?

SETH: The Primrose Path.

LEAH: You're kidding. What were you doing there?

SETH: I don't know what I was doing. I kept walking around and ending up in the same place. Like I was trapped inside some weird geometry.

LEAH: Were you trying to get picked up?

SETH: No! Jesus.

LEAH: Kidding! You got lost, that's all, poor baby. Where'd you get the Band-Aid?

SETH: The Sutcliffes. *(pause)* I was bleeding. I was scared.

LEAH: Of course you were. Come here. Who put this on for you, Penny? She didn't do a very good job, it's coming loose. Hold still.

*(LEAH settles in beside SETH, fixes the loose Band-Aid..)*

LEAH: Where have you been? Why didn't you answer any of my calls?

SETH: I didn't answer anybody's calls.

LEAH: I left you a million messages.

SETH: I was holed up in a horrible hotel. I was totally freaked out.

LEAH: Well thank God you're here. I thought, ohmigod, how can I possibly leave without saying goodbye?

SETH: What do you mean, leave? Where are you going?

LEAH: Penny didn't tell you? I've taken a new job.

SETH: What job where?

LEAH: Garden of Eden. It's a chain of preschools. *(re Band-Aid)*  
There, that's better.

SETH: Where's this place? Not here in the city?

LEAH: Unh-unh. No.

SETH: So where?

LEAH: Upstate.

SETH: Upstate?

LEAH: Yeah, I know, that sucks. I went on-line, I checked out three apartments in the area. One great one.

SETH: How far upstate?

LEAH: Far enough so you can't smother me again. I'm kidding. I kinda enjoyed it, actually.

SETH: Yeah, I sensed that. Why did you have to blab to Penny?

LEAH: Believe me, I said less than I could have. What did you tell her?

SETH: Don't ask.

LEAH: Seth, I want to know.

SETH: I told her everything, all right?

LEAH: Good for you.

SETH: And then some.

LEAH: Did she freak?

SETH: I told her it was a theme motel.

LEAH: No way.

SETH: I don't know why. It just popped out.

LEAH: It was just a ratty old fuck motel.

SETH: All my neurons were firing.

LEAH: It's about time.

SETH: I said they put us in the gay room.

LEAH: The gay room! Leave it to you.

SETH: I made it sound like that Ensor painting—"Christ's Entry into Brussels."

LEAH: You know what? You need to actually do a painting.

SETH: That's exactly what I said.

LEAH: Huge. Supersize. Billboard size.

SETH: "Seth's Entry into Hell."

LEAH: You could do a whole series. The Royal Pagoda...The Primrose Path....Narrative painting! You could revive the whole stupid genre.

SETH: Get me off my ass.

LEAH: Finally. Volleyball in Swim Class, don't forget that one.

SETH: Cape Hatteras. Lou and Maxine naked, the girl with the pit hair, the rotting crabs on the beach....

LEAH: ...and you going through my suitcase and finding my box of Tampax. I was just getting my period that summer, you remember? I told you I was menstruating—and I thought you said "mend straightening." What a dork you were. You thought a straight meant a boner, and mending a boner meant giving a handjob. You thought I was giving handjobs, you were so cute, nine years old, you pleaded with me not to have sex with other guys. You put that in the comic strip, remember?

SETH: Yeah, if you say so.

LEAH: We should take another look at *Seth and Leah*. I bet it really holds up. Seth, this is so exciting!

(LEAH *kisses him*.)

SETH: Jesus, cut it out.

LEAH: Admit it. You're as stoked as I am.

SETH: Just keep away. Go put some clothes on.

LEAH: Check it out. Seriously, look.

*(LEAH is showing SETH a photo on her phone.)*

SETH: What am I looking at?

LEAH: This is one of the three apartments. It's got two bedrooms, big kitchen, big living room, amazing light, and ohmigod, you wouldn't believe how cheap the rents are up there. Doesn't it look fantastic?

SETH: In the pictures they always look great.

LEAH: Oh, you're such a buzzkill. God, Seth, I'm going to miss you.

LOU: *(off)* Who's there? Leah?

LEAH: Here we go. What are you gonna tell them?

SETH: About what?

LEAH: Your eye. Getting beat up.

SETH: I'll tell them what happened.

LEAH: No. Seth. Wrong. Don't alarm them.

SETH: See, I'm not so sure.

LEAH: Ohmigod. She told you to spill your guts, didn't she? Please. Trust me. Lou's climbing the walls. You know about the attorney she's hiring?

SETH: Yeah, I know all about it.

LEAH: He hasn't been to work in two days, and you know he never misses a day. Don't make it any worse for him.

*(LOU enters with MAXINE, both in PJs and robes. Turns on a light.)*

MAXINE: Ohmigod...Seth!

LEAH: It's OK. He's fine.

LOU: What happened to you? Oh Christ.

LEAH: Car accident.

MAXINE: Oh no. Seth, is that true?

SETH: Yeah, I was hit by a car. Don't worry, no bones broken.

MAXINE: Where did this happen?

LEAH: He was crossing the street—where was it? Springfield Avenue?

SETH: Yeah, Springfield Avenue.

LEAH: Car came roaring around a corner. He had to throw himself over the hood to avoid getting crushed.

MAXINE: Oh Seth, how awful. Look at your shirt, it's all bloody. Leah, go get him a fresh shirt.

LOU: And get dressed while you're at it.

(LEAH *exits*.)

LOU: Did you get a license number?

SETH: No, it was hit and run.

LOU: How? With you draped over the guy's hood? What kind of car was it?

SETH: Dad, I was in no condition to look.

LOU: Witnesses?

SETH: No, nobody was around. It was like three in the morning.

MAXINE: So where have you been since then?



SETH: St. Mary's. The E.R.

MAXINE: Did they take X-rays?

SETH: I told you, nothing's broken.

LOU: This is very sloppy work. I should give Carter a call.

SETH: No, Jesus, don't do that. Don't get litigious, it's all good.

MAXINE: Lou, he's right. It's only his eye, thank God.

LOU: And before that where were you? Your mother was frantic.

SETH: Yeah, I'm sorry. I didn't have my charger, I couldn't call.

MAXINE: You could have used their phone.

SETH: Whose phone?

MAXINE: The Sutcliffes?

SETH: That's not where I was.

MAXINE: So where were you staying if not Penny's?

SETH: A hotel, OK?

MAXINE: There wasn't a phone in the room? Seth?

SETH: Look, I'm sorry....I would have been back sooner....If I'd known what you guys were going through....

(SETH's *phone buzzes*.)

MAXINE: You just said your phone was dead. Who's calling you?

SETH: Hey. Could we stop with the third degree?

LOU: Lay off, Maxine. He's been through hell.

MAXINE: Is it the Sutcliffe girl?

LOU: Is it?

SETH: We're supposed to be looking at lofts.

MAXINE: Now? *In mitten drinnen?*

SETH: She's waiting outside. She rented a car.

MAXINE: That's ridiculous. Why can't she ring the doorbell?

SETH: Because she knows you hate her.

LOU: Don't say that.

SETH: Why? It's true.

LOU: Tell her to come in. I have business I need to discuss with her.

*(Doorbell.)*

MAXINE: Isn't somebody going to get it?

*(Pause.)*

LOU: I'll get it.

*(LOU exits. SETH hangs back in the shadows.)*

MAXINE: It's like the boys who used to beep their horns for Leah.  
You call for somebody, you come to the door, like an adult.

*(LOU enters, with PENNY.)*

PENNY: Sorry I'm so early. I hope I didn't wake anybody. Is Seth here?

LOU: Yes, he's here. He's had an accident.

*(SETH steps into the light.)*

LOU: Don't be alarmed, he's OK. Stupid car came roaring around a corner. He would have been run over, but he had the presence of mind to jump on the hood.

PENNY: Well. That was really smart of him, wasn't it.

LOU: You bet it was smart. Too bad he didn't get the license plate.

PENNY: Yes, that's really unfortunate.

MAXINE: You don't seem terribly upset.

PENNY: What? No. I'm very upset. Seth, you ready to go?

MAXINE: Go where? He just got home.

LOU: Why don't you ask your father to come in?

SETH: (to PENNY) Your dad came with you?

LOU: I saw him. He's waiting out there in the car.

SETH: (to PENNY) You promised me.

LOU: I'll go get him.

PENNY: No. Mr. Milstein? Wait. (to SETH) Can I talk to you a second? Alone?

(Pause.)

SETH: Yeah, OK. Dad? Mom? She needs to talk to me. Go get dressed.

LOU: (to PENNY) Don't leave without speaking to me.

(LOU and MAXINE exit.)

PENNY: I couldn't leave my dad all alone. He didn't sleep all night, he's high as a kite this morning.

SETH: Does he plan on moving in with us?

PENNY: Seth...that's not the issue here.

SETH: In other words, yes.

PENNY: No. Stop it. These things take time.

SETH: Why didn't you tell me my sister was leaving?

PENNY: Because I knew it would upset you. Why did you have to say you got hit by a car?

SETH: Shh, not so loud. They're miserable enough.

PENNY: Why can't you ever tell them the truth?

SETH: Oh Jesus, here we go.

PENNY: Seriously, why?

SETH: Because I'm not a Puritan, OK?

PENNY: Meaning what?

SETH: Forget it.

PENNY: Is that what you think I am?

SETH: Penny, lay off, all right? I'm tired, my head hurts, I haven't been to sleep in 24 hours.

PENNY: I'm not a Puritan.

SETH: Fine, you're not a Puritan.

PENNY: Seth, why are you so angry with me? I love you.

SETH: I know. I know you do. (*uneasily*) I love you too. (*pause*) I was sucked off by Donny Moscowitz.

PENNY: What?!

SETH: You think that's funny?

PENNY: No.

SETH: Then what's that look on your face?

PENNY: I'm not laughing. Why even bring it up?

SETH: See, you're horrified. It was payback.

PENNY: Payback for what?

SETH: Temptation.

PENNY: Whose temptation? What are you trying to say?

*(LEAH enters, dressed for travel, carrying an overnight bag, and two shirts.)*

LEAH: Sorry, am I interrupting? Which shirt do you want, Seth? The cotton or the silk?

SETH: *(to LEAH)* We're talking here, all right? *(to PENNY)* Guys used to flash me all the time. In gym class. In the shower. They'd wave their dicks at me. Some guy would come over to the house, they'd unzip and whip it out, like some fucking ape ritual. So I did that to Donny Moscovitz. For weeks and weeks and weeks. Until he blew me.

PENNY: I don't believe you.

LEAH: Yeah, because you don't want to.

SETH: Shut up, Leah.

PENNY: I can hear it in your voice. You're trying to confuse me.

SETH: Oh Jesus, when does this not happen? You say you want the truth, then you get all embarrassed.

PENNY: Seth, believe me, I'm not embarrassed.

SETH: You want me to be better than I am. I can't live up to that. Everything that ever happened to me, that's who I am. And you know what? I'm fine with it. I'm not ashamed.

PENNY: I know. I'm not criticizing you.

SETH: You're the one. Feeling sorry for everybody. Way above the world.

PENNY: Seth, why are you torturing me?

SETH: I don't know why. I guess because I can. *(pause)* I didn't mean to say that. I take that back.

LEAH: Dude, don't apologize. You didn't say anything wrong.

*(Doorbell.)*

SETH: That's your dad. I don't want to see him.

PENNY: *(calling)* Dad, go back to the car!

LEAH: So which shirt do you want, Seth?

SETH: Doesn't matter. Both of you, leave me alone.

LEAH: My A/C's still on the fritz. I recommend the yellow one.

PENNY: Seth, what is she talking about?

LEAH: Oh, he hasn't told you? Seth's coming with me. We're going to pick out our apartment.

PENNY: What?! No. That's ridiculous!

LEAH: It's happening. Get used to it.

PENNY: There's no way I'm letting him go with you!

LEAH: You're not "letting him go with me"? Is that what you said? Fuck you, Penny. Go crunch some numbers.

SETH: Leah, I said shut up! Penny, simmer down, OK? Come here. I really am sorry.

PENNY: Sorry about what. You're never sorry.

SETH: You're shivering. Calm down.

*(Doorbell again.)*

SETH: Oh shit. Somebody tell him to go away.

PENNY: Seth, forget my dad.

SETH: How can I forget him? He comes with the dinner. He always did and he always will.

PENNY: That's not true. It's just you and me. No Carter. No Lilith.

LEAH: Lilith!

PENNY: That's exactly who you are. You're Lilith in the Garden of Eden.

LEAH: Oh dear. Now she's getting Biblical.

PENNY: I'll kill you before I'll let you do this.

LEAH: I'm quaking in my boots. Word of advice, Pennykins? You might want to dip into your father's meds.

*(PENNY utters a screech and leaps at LEAH, slamming her against a wall. CARTER enters.)*

LEAH: Jesus fucking Christ! Get her off me!

*(CARTER pulls PENNY off LEAH.)*

CARTER: Penny, what are you doing. Calm down.

*(LOU and MAXINE enter, dressed.)*

MAXINE: What in heaven's name is going on here?

(PENNY *pulls free of* CARTER.)

PENNY: OK, you want to know? What nobody has the guts to tell you? Your son has been lying to everybody.

SETH: Penny, if you ever loved me, shut the fuck up, OK? I mean it.

MAXINE: Seth, don't talk to her like that. What are these shirts doing here?

LEAH: We're leaving.

MAXINE: The two of you? Where?

LEAH: To look at apartments.

MAXINE: Oh. Well, I hope you find something you like.

PENNY: (*to LOU and MAXINE*) Ohmigod, is that all you're going to say? Are you totally insane? (*to SETH*) You're just going to abandon your father? What kind of son are you? (*to LOU*) What about your business? What about the store?

LOU: I don't want Seth at the store, any more than he does. I want him to be what he was born to be—an artist.

PENNY: Oh, and nothing else matters. So long Seth can paint. Tell me, were you hoping for grandchildren? You might just get one with two heads.

MAXINE: Lou, what is she talking about?

LOU: She doesn't know what she's saying. Carter, help me please.

CARTER: Penny, we're leaving. Before you say something we'll all regret.

PENNY: (*to CARTER*) Take your fucking hands off me!

(PENNY *pulls free from* CARTER.)



PENNY: (*to LOU and MAXINE*) Your children are lovers. They've been sexual ever since childhood. You condoned it, you let it go on and on, right under your very noses.

MAXINE: Seth, is this true? Is that who's in those nude pictures?

SETH: What nude pictures? No.

LEAH: I told you, Mom. Just a girl he knew at Cornell.

PENNY: Ohmigosh, that's a total lie! Seth lies to you about everything. He lied to you about the car accident! He went for a walk in the park, he was taken for gay, and he was beaten up! Dad, you were there, you heard everything he said... tell them!

CARTER: We're going, Penny. This isn't doing anybody any good.

PENNY: Ohmigod...you're taking their side!

CARTER: It's their family, Penny.

PENNY: Family, yes—family of liars!

LEAH: Dude, let's get out of here. If I stay another second my head's gonna explode.

PENNY: Seth, don't listen to her. She's evil, Seth.

SETH: Well, that means I'm evil too, OK?

(*SETH takes off the blood-stained shirt, puts on the yellow one.*)

SETH: Your dad, he nailed it. We are twins. We were just born in different years.

PENNY: No. Seth. Please.

SETH: Tell them whatever you want. I'm sorry. I tried. I failed. Hate me, please. Dad? Mom? Sorry you had to hear all that crap.

MAXINE: Seth, I need you to tell me the truth.

SETH: No, it's ridiculous, we're not lovers. That's all in her head.

MAXINE: And this gay business?

SETH: She's making it up. I don't know why.

LEAH: Seth, god damn it, will you come on!

MAXINE: Leah, hold on a second! *(to PENNY)* You want us to say we were bad parents.

PENNY: I'm not asking you to say anything. If you can't own what you've done, that's your nightmare.

MAXINE: Lou, help me—

LOU: It's all right, Maxie. You don't have to defend yourself.

MAXINE: *(to PENNY)* I don't know what goes on in that brain of yours, to make such wild accusations. My husband and I, we brought up our children the very best we knew how. We encouraged their...their creativity...we taught them to be independent...to think for themselves, to act for themselves... without interference from people who think they know everything better. And that's all I'm ever going to say to you. Seth? Leah? You're free to go now.

LEAH: Bravo, Mom.

SETH: We'll call you from the road.

*(SETH exits. LEAH starts out, stops, reaches in her overnight bag, tosses PENNY a CD case.)*

LEAH: Something to remember us by.

*(LEAH exits. PENNY starts for the door.)*

PENNY: Seth!

*(CARTER stops her.)*

CARTER: Penny, let him go.

PENNY: SETH!

LOU: Shh, Penny, easy does it. He's where he needs to be.

PENNY: Oh yes. For his "art."

LOU: I wouldn't be so quick to sneer at that.

PENNY: Who's sneering? At least they're both out of your hair.

MAXINE: Carter, I've had about all I can take.

*(PENNY has gone over to the stereo and is putting in the CD.)*

MAXINE: What is she doing? Does she think she's in her own house?

*(PENNY has pressed Play. Donna Summers comes on: "Love to Love You Baby.")*

MAXINE: What is that? Where did that come from? Lou, please, I want this craziness out of my life.

PENNY: No! This is wonderful! It's muse music!

*(PENNY jumps from one cut to the next. Black Flag. Amy Winehouse. Fiona Apple.)*

FIONA APPLE: "I've been a bad bad girl...I've been careless with a delicate man..."

*(PENNY turns the stereo full blast. She starts giggling. And doesn't stop.)*

CARTER: Penny, shh. Stop. Stop that.

MAXINE: Lou, do something.

LOU: What do you want me to do, slap her face?

PENNY: Oh, you'd like to slap my face? Why didn't you slap your children when you had the chance? What if they'd turned out to be

murderers? “Oh well, that’s too bad, somebody must have said something to hurt their feelings.”

*(CARTER turns off the stereo, grabs PENNY’s arm.)*

PENNY: Let go of me!

*(PENNY squirms out of CARTER’s grasp and snatches up the geode.)*

MAXINE: Lou, before she smashes it to pieces.

LOU: Carter, tell her to put it down.

PENNY: *(to CARTER)* Don’t come any closer, you liar. I’ll kill you.

LOU: Carter, be careful.

PENNY: *(re geode)* You know what this is, don’t you?

CARTER: Yes, I do.

PENNY: It’s a horrible fact of nature.

CARTER: I know it is, kitten.

PENNY: It’s been here the whole time. Nobody saw a thing. Like those creatures at the bottom of the sea. The eels with the feathers...*(to LOU and MAXINE)* and the moles with horrible noses!

CARTER: Put it down, sweetheart.

PENNY: Do you know why they live in the dark? Because they’re too fucking ugly to be seen!

*(CARTER lunges at PENNY. PENNY hurls the geode. It shatters on the wall above CARTER’s head.)*

MAXINE: Lou, oh my God, get her out of here!

*(PENNY starts to go limp. CARTER grabs PENNY and holds her.)*

CARTER: Come on, kitten. We're going home.

PENNY: You made this happen. Right where you want us.

CARTER: Think you can pull yourself together?

PENNY: I don't know. Oh God

CARTER: Give me the keys to the car.

PENNY: Here. Here they are.

(PENNY *hands* CARTER *the keys*.)

CARTER: Go out to the car and wait for me. Can you do that?

PENNY: Yes.

CARTER: Don't wander off. Promise me.

PENNY: I promise.

CARTER: I'll be right out. Say goodbye to the Milsteins.

PENNY: Goodbye, Lou. Goodbye, Maxine. The *shikse* princess is leaving the asylum.

(PENNY *exits*.)

CARTER: Please don't blame Penny.

LOU: Carter, I feel terrible.

CARTER: Sins of the father. I was hoping she'd be spared. I really shouldn't leave her alone too long.

LOU: If you need my help in court...we can say what we saw here today.

CARTER: That won't be necessary, Lou. I'll be managing my accounts from now on. Book us into some trade shows, all right? And send me a list of the relevant journals. I'll make a bunch of calls. Try and get you on the "Today" show.

LOU: That's a real possibility?

CARTER: "A man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's a heaven for?" Bye, Maxine.

MAXINE: Carter, she called you a liar.

CARTER: I heard what she said. I'm sorry for all the *tsimmes*. Send me a bill for the damage.

LOU: I think you meant *tsuris*.

CARTER: I probably did. See you later, Milsteins.

(CARTER *exits*. *The shards of rock are scattered on the floor.*  
MAXINE *starts to clean up*.)

LOU: Leave it, Maxine. I'll clean up later.

MAXINE: Lou, tell me the truth.

LOU: Come on, you saw. The girl was hysterical.

MAXINE: But Lou, those drawings. That music.

LOU: It's over, Maxine. Not even God can change the past.

MAXINE: Ay, Lou—Lou, what did we do?

LOU: Shh. Maxie. Calm down.

(LOU *sits her down, pours her a drink*.)

MAXINE: What happens when they come back?

LOU: You don't have to worry about Penny. I think we've seen the last of her.

MAXINE: Lou, I'm talking about our children! What do we say to them?

LOU: We say what we always say.

MAXINE: Which is what, Lou?

LOU: Follow your destinies. Live and be well.

MAXINE: Oh God, Lou. Lou, I'm feeling so dizzy.

LOU: Then you'd better have a seat.

MAXINE: What do you mean? I'm sitting.

LOU: (*calling*) Milstein Chair, come here!

(*The Milstein Chair enters.*)

MAXINE: Oh Lou.

LOU: Indulge me.

(*MAXINE downs her drink. LOU seats MAXINE in the wheelchair.*)

MAXINE: One of these days you'll drive me nuts.

LOU: Pull on that lever.

(*MAXINE pulls on the lever.*)

LOU: There you go. You've got the hang of it already!

MAXINE: It's a quiet ride, isn't it?

LOU: What have I been telling you?

(*MAXINE is steering the wheelchair in a giddy, frightened circle.*)

MAXINE: Whee! I'm airborne!

(*She spins faster and faster. The lights stay up on MAXINE...*)

*...as CARTER and PENNY enter CARTER and PENNY's apartment. PENNY has a thousand-yard stare.)*

CARTER: What can you do? We tossed the boy a lifeline and he dropped it.

*(PENNY sinks onto the couch, staring into the middle distance.)*

CARTER: Hey, maybe they'll tie the knot. Like Ptolemy and Cleopatra.

*(CARTER activates the stereo. Haydn's "The Creation" comes on.*

*CARTER has sat down next to PENNY. The lights are fading on MAXINE.)*

CARTER: Remember when we bought this score? No, of course you don't, that was before you were born. We'd spend hours in music stores, your mother and I, while she leafed through their library, singing to herself. Never gave a damn how bored I was. I'd complain of a dizzy spell, wait in the car. And when Anna finally came out, I'd be slumped at the wheel, pretending to be dead. She'd scream with laughter. Hit E above high C. Got so furious one time she clawed my face. So many angry women in the world.... *(pause)* Shh. I don't mean you. You're my special angel. What do you want for dinner, kitten? You're probably hypoglycemic. I'll make you something sweet.

*(Pause.)*

CARTER: Wait. Is this Mozart or Haydn?

*(PENNY doesn't answer.)*

CARTER: Is this Haydn's "Creation" or the Mozart "Requiem"? Life or Death? I must be getting senile.

*(Pause.)*

CARTER: Come here. Come here to your morbid old dad.

*(CARTER puts his arm around PENNY. She rests her head on his shoulder. From the stereo, a woman's voice—a stirring aria from "The Creation.")*

CARTER: Listen. Shh. That's her. That's Anna.

*(The music soars triumphantly. The lights slowly fade. END OF PLAY.)*



