

# Garden of Blue Chairs

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a play by Stanley Rutherford

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## **The characters**

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Catherine:	Mid-fifties, attractive, no make-up
Becca:	Same age, Catherine's friend since childhood.
Jessica:	Catherine's daughter, early thirties
Philip:	Catherine's "lover," late fifties, trim, handsome, sensitive
Pauline:	Catherine's aunt, mid- to late seventies, fun

## **The setting**

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The suggestion of a northern California wine-country landscape, oaks and madrones, blue sky, reddish earth, muted grey-greens of vegetation, grasses the color of wheat. Amidst the grasses, center stage, there are two old wooden chairs, painted slightly different shades of faded-blue.

## Act I

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Lights rise on the suggestion of a northern California wine-country landscape. Center stage, there are two old wooden chairs, painted slightly different shades of faded-blue.

Catherine—mid-fifties, no make-up, attractive—sits with her friend, Becca, who's the same age. Catherine is paging through the *Sunset Western Garden Book*.

Becca: Unbelievable anger.

Catherine: **[As she studies a page in the book]** Do you like penstemon?

Becca: We were part of her life.

Catherine: I'm never too sure about penstemon.

Becca: She was part of *our* life.

Catherine: I think I like it, but...

Becca: ...there were *relationships*...

Catherine: Nepeta I like....

Becca: ...expectations...

Catherine: ...salvia I like ...

Becca: **[Shaking her head]** ...the arrogance.

Catherine: But penstemon? **[She studies the book]**

Becca: **[After a long beat]** What if Conor had killed himself?

Catherine: He *did* kill himself.

Becca: But I mean...

Catherine: Passively. Slowly. Deliberately.

Becca: **[An awkward beat]** Penstemon gets all...leggy.

Catherine: Everything gets all leggy.

Becca: You'd be....

Catherine: Please, Becca.

Becca: ...furious.

Catherine: Please, Becca, please.

Becca: I'm sorry.

**Catherine studies the book.**

Becca: **[After a long beat]** How about oregano? Lovely ornamental oreganos, I had hillsides of them, little water, cut them back at the end of the season, lovely colors, purples, pinks....

Catherine: Kendra's mother was a suicide.

Becca: I don't think that...

Catherine: Emotional wiring,

Becca: Salvias, thymes, there are a million different thymes, lovely, subtle colors.

Catherine: Almost inevitable....

Becca: No warning!

Catherine: Well...

Becca: None, not a sign...I saw her three days before.

Catherine: You don't exactly *tell* people.

Becca: Talk, talk, talk...all busy, busy, going to Spain in the spring, for god's sake, *going to Spain in the spring!*

Catherine: She'd gone through that...

Becca: She was mortified...

Catherine: ...vicious divorce...

Becca: ...humiliated, just destroyed...

Catherine: Go to Spain, or kill herself.

Becca: I never particularly *liked* Kendra.

Catherine: She held two cards in her hand.

Becca: No one particularly liked Kendra.

Catherine: She picked one.

Becca: **[Beat]** Once I started getting the skin cancers it destroyed my whole gardening career. They want you to wear hats, I don't like to wear hats, and they want you to have your arms covered, and at a certain point, my god, you might as well stay indoors and read.

Catherine: I'd looked at this property for years.

Becca: I miss my garden.

Catherine: I never thought that I'd...

Becca: I like the condo, but...

Catherine: I have a lovely little house, but...

Becca: It was just too much for me, and then the skin cancers and they wanted me to wear hats.

Catherine: I'm very happy with my little house, my little garden, but I wanted more... land, more...space.

Becca: I worry about you.

Catherine: Conor and I spent our entire married lives there, and now that he's gone...

Becca: ...emotionally, I mean.

Catherine: I wanted to...expand, have my own land.

Becca: You've just been through all this...

Catherine: Becca, I'm fine, really, never felt better...

Becca: **[Beat]** Nadine said she saw you last week...having lunch with...Phil Decker.

Catherine: Really.

Becca: At The Orleans.

Catherine: I didn't see Nadine.

Becca: She didn't want to...intrude.

Catherine: Well, it's not like there was anything...

Becca: She jumps to any...

Catherine: His wife...

Becca: It's very sad.

Catherine: She's doing really very well...complete remission, she's going to be fine.

Becca: **[Looking around]** What if something happens to you?

Catherine: I've known them for years, and I ran into...

Becca: A fall or something, there's nobody...

Catherine: It's just three miles down the road and I can come here, this has sun, this has quiet...

Becca: Nobody would hear you, there are hunters.

Catherine: They're not going to hunt me.

Becca: There are accidents,

Catherine: Do you sleep?

Becca: No.

Catherine: I sleep very well, thank you. I might camp out here.

Becca: I wash my face, I brush, and I get into bed and I try to sleep but I can't, so I get up and put on my robe and get in my car, and drive up the coast, alone in the night...

Catherine: I worry about you. **[They laugh]**

Becca: ...wondering about the drivers of the oncoming cars, their lives, who they are, where they're going, what they're thinking, surrounded by darkness, losing myself, who I am, crazed, scared, alive...

Catherine: **[Reading from her garden book]** "Penstemon is commonly referred to as 'beard tongue', tubular flowers, bright red and blues are the most common, but there are soft pink penstemon, salmon, peach, deep rose, lilac, purple, deep purple, white...

**As Catherine is reading, Becca stands, exits, as simultaneously, Catherine's daughter Jessica enters and sits. Jessica is in her early thirties.**

Jessica: Why would someone kill herself if she were going to Spain in the spring?

Catherine: **[As she continues studying the book]** A lot of people are asking.

Jessica: You'd think that she'd...

Catherine: Do you know anything about verbena?

Jessica: She was always so...

Catherine: Mindless.

Jessica: Confident.

Catherine: Deer are the problem.

Jessica: Forging ahead, despite...

Catherine: Drought tolerant, deer resistant.

Jessica: **[Beat, looking around]** I love this out here.

Catherine: Maybe I'll leave it to you.

Jessica: I understand perfectly.

Catherine: Maybe I won't. **[They laugh]**

Jessica: May I come up and...

Catherine: Of course.

Jessica: I don't want to disturb.

Catherine: You wouldn't.

Jessica: Maybe I could help.

Catherine: You don't have to.

Jessica: Maybe I could make up for...

Catherine: I doubt it.

**Pause**

Jessica: Since daddy died, I've...

Catherine: I've never felt better in my life.

Jessica: ...I've wanted to try to...

Catherine: I had to take care of him that's what I had to do and I did.

Jessica: I was...

Catherine: I understand.

Jessica: He never...

Catherine: I don't hold it against any one.

Jessica: It was hard in the end...

Catherine: Of course.

Jessica: ....to feel like I wanted to be there to be with him, and for you too, but it was just too...too...

Catherine: I understand.

Jessica: I was awful. I loved him, I love you, I couldn't bear to watch... see...witness...and I...I...I cared, but I just couldn't....

Catherine: **[Indicating]** What I like is the long gentle slope, the oaks, madrones...I don't want to change anything, I want to...I've been raking, just raking, weeding, "editing" things, "this is nice, I like this, this isn't nice, I don't like this," and I'm piling rocks, lines of rocks, mounds of rocks, I only want projects now that have no end, an infinite open-ended-ness, something that can't...be completed.  
**[Beat]** If you'd like to join us for dinner...Philip's coming...

Jessica; **[Beat]** I thought...

Catherine: His wife's in L.A.

Jessica: I wouldn't want to...

Catherine: He'd enjoy it...

Jessica: I...I...

Catherine: He's harmless.

Jessica: **[Long beat]** Do you think about...marrying him?

Catherine: He's married.

Jessica: I mean...

Catherine: I'm no home-wrecker.

Jessica: But you...

Catherine: I'm making a pork roast, there's plenty for three.

Jessica: You're the last person in the world I ever thought...

Catherine: I don't think you can "plan" a garden, diagrams, charts...

Jessica: ...first, this place... then this...man...

Catherine: You have to get to know the land, spend time with it, walk it, work it.

Jessica: It's all...quite a shock.

Catherine: It's a friendship, Jessica.

Jessica: It would be different if you were just, you know... getting together.

Catherine: I don't know why I told you.

Jessica: ...but even while daddy was...

Catherine: Something about after he died...

Jessica: I'm glad you told me.

Catherine: I wanted to...to share.

Jessica: I don't have any problem with...

Catherine: I'm planning on creating a little chaos...

Jessica: I worry about you.

Catherine: ...nothing neat, nothing aligned or carefully placed, things that re-seed themselves, things that grow outside their boundaries....

Jessica: You don't exactly have a history of ...

Catherine: I might plant grasses.

Jessica: ...emotional stability.

Catherine: Different grasses.

Jessica: **[Beat]** Why don't we have lunch next week.

Catherine: Could you help me with his clothes?

Jessica: Come down to the city and we'll have lunch and go to the book fair.

Catherine: If you could help with the...

Jessica: Come on, you need to get...

Catherine: It's one of the reasons I want to be here, away from...

Jessica: Of course I can help, I'll be glad to help, in fact if you'd like me to just take it off your hands...

Catherine: ...that old house, our whole life...

Jessica: Let me take care of the clothes, please, you don't have to worry about it.

Catherine: ...things we bought together, his closet, his desk, drawers, everything that was... private.

Jessica: **[Beat]** Did daddy know? About you and...?

Catherine: He told me years ago that he was...really more interested in... men.

Jessica: I beg your pardon.

Catherine: In men.

Jessica: Daddy?

Catherine: He loved me, he married me, but really he was more interested in men... sexually.

Jessica: Daddy.

Catherine: Your father.

Jessica: In men.

Catherine: Yes.

Jessica: **[Beat]** Did he...?

Catherine: I don't....

Jessica: I mean...

Catherine: Next week isn't really very good for me.

Jessica: Mother, I mean, what does this mean, I mean, it's just that...

Catherine: I don't think it means anything.

Jessica: I mean, there are...

Catherine: We never talked about it again, he said it once, and I...

Jessica: No wonder you've been having an affair.

Catherine: It's not an affair.

Jessica: Well, I mean...

Catherine: It's a friendship...Jess, honey, I'm very deliberately making the choice not to do too much explaining, or justifying, or rationalizing, I don't want to rationalize any more, and I don't *need* to justify anything to anybody.

Jessica: But his wife.

Catherine: What about his wife?

Jessica: I mean, she's...

Catherine: He's very good to his wife, he loves his wife, I'm his friend, end of story.

Jessica: But she must...

Catherine: Becca said that Nadine Pritzer saw us at The Orleans.

Jessica: Oh, my god.

Catherine: I don't think...

Jessica: Becca has the biggest mouth in the...

Catherine: Oh, but...

Jessica: But, mother...

Catherine: It was *lunch*.

Jessica: But of course she's telling everyone.

Catherine: She's all in a dither about Kendra and "the suicide."

Jessica: That's *last* week's news.

Catherine: **[Referring to the land]** I bought this the day after your father died, didn't tell anybody...It's been for sale for years, and I...with Conor gone, I'll...have more time, and ...I just walk here, work here, hide...from everything...do whatever, sit, stare, laugh, rake the hillside, make paths, discover the different...there are the most amazing little blue flowers down there, small little starbursts of pale blue ... **[trails off]**

**During the speech, Jessica stands and exits, as simultaneously Philip enters and sits where Jessica had been seated. Philip is in his late fifties, trim, handsome, a sensitive, intelligent-looking man.**

Philip: It feels like it should be....

Catherine: **[Referring to the land]** Lovely isn't it.

Philip: ...different somehow...

Catherine: It isn't.

Philip: ...now that Conor...

Catherine: Conor's irrelevant.

Philip: ...and you're....

Catherine: I'm more demanding.

Philip: **[Amused]** Well, I'm certainly in trouble.

Catherine: You should be.

Philip: **[Beat]** It's just that...

Catherine: I have more time now to flirt.

Philip: You're very accomplished.

Catherine: I wrote the book. **[They're both laughing]**

Philip: **[Beat, as he looks around]** I like this.

Catherine: I love it.

Philip: You...belong here.

Catherine: Well...

Philip: Really, you're...

Catherine: Crazy.

Philip: I never imagined you...

Catherine: I used to climb in the hills, as a kid, behind our house and wander the trails in the woods, fantasize about building a tree house...

Philip: Up high, with a ladder?

Catherine: ...camouflaged, leaves, branches, barely visible...

Philip: If you wanted to...Nell's going to be going to Seattle for a week...and I thought maybe.... to see her sister...and we could...go up to Fort Ross or... Mendocino, I don't know...it would be a chance to...now that...

Catherine: I don't think so.

Philip: We've never been able to....

Catherine: I like the way we've handled...

Philip: I'd like to be able to go away for a bit...with you, you know... and I think that now that...

Catherine: I've been having a dream, recurring, where I'm asleep, but then I hear something, and I...open my eyes, and... Conor is standing there...at the foot of the bed... and I start to say something, and then I remember that he's...dead...and I want to scream, I can't scream, I try to scream ...it's the house, the association that Conor is part of the house, will always be part of the house, Conor *is* the house.

Philip: There's a lovely B&B out at Point Reyes, we could have our own rooms, it would be a way for us...

Catherine: It's like he's part of me, surrounds me,

Philip: ...which is why I'm suggesting that...

Catherine: ...inhabits me...

Philip: ...when Nell's away.

Catherine: **[But then...]** I'm not... ready...quite, I'm not, it's not that...

Philip: Just for a night, or two, a drive, dinner...

Catherine: I'd like to, but...

Philip: I don't want to do anything that...

Catherine: Jessica was here, I invited her to join us for dinner.

Philip: With Nell it's always the anxiety...she feels something, a lump, a pain, and she's sure that it's some kind of recurrence.

Catherine: I was feeling that since you've been a part of my life, it would be nice finally to tell her.

Philip: It's been over two years since she had the surgery, the chemo...

Catherine: Every woman who's ever had...

Philip: If we went away for just a bit...a day trip, maybe...we could pretend that we...

Catherine: I'm not going to pretend, Philip, that's the thing I'm never going to do.

Philip: **[Long beat]** What I like about you is your...hairstyle.

Catherine: Yes.

Philip: What I like about you is that you don't wear makeup.

Catherine: Yes.

Philip: What I like about you is... you don't have any shortcomings.

Catherine: I'm glad you realize that.

Philip: I never have any idea what you're going to say but whatever it is I always want to hear it.

Catherine: You're the most lovely man of the several thousand I've interviewed, and in particular I like...the humble way you hold your hands and the arrogant pitch of your hips when you walk.

Philip: I like the way you kiss.

**They kiss**

Catherine: **[Pulling away]** So your wife has breast cancer...

Philip: Essentially she's cured, but...

Catherine: And my husband, died one month and five days ago...

Philip: ...each year is a victory really...

Catherine: ...at a far too-early age of acute alcoholism, hepatitis, cirrhosis...

Philip: ... less and less possibility that...

Catherine: The worst thing was writing the little thank you notes, "so nice of you to...always appreciated your.... it meant so much to me that..."  
...flowers, notes from all the people that for all those last years never called, never asked if they could... but then, it's awkward, isn't it?  
People don't quite know what to say, it's not like he had some sort of "socially-acceptable" illness, he was a drunk, self-induced, self-

perpetuating ... disease is so embarrassing, really, human disintegration is so unsightly.

Philip: **[Looking around]** Are you thinking about building?

Catherine: You can't...the septic regulations are designed to prevent anyone from building anything anywhere at any time.

Philip: It's so very peaceful.

Catherine: Years of what seemed like friendships...

Philip: You could build a little shelter... under so many square feet, I think...

Catherine: ...at some point you connected, there was mutual interest or attraction, and then at some point...

Philip: Like a potting shed, a shelter for a chair...a room of her own, two acres of her own.

Catherine: It didn't cost much, because you can't build, and it's too small to farm.

Philip: I've missed seeing you.

Catherine: It was horrible to watch him...trying to speak...he could get out a few words, he tried, and he'd been, all his life... and then the anger, the frustration, the bitterness, the withdrawal, everyone wanted me to hire some one...but I couldn't, I mean, I could, but I *wanted* to take care of him...

**During the preceding speech, Philip stands and exits, as simultaneously Catherine's aunt, Pauline, enters and sits. Pauline is in her 70's, her prime.**

Pauline: Of course you did.

Catherine: You understood.

Pauline: You loved him.

Catherine: You were one of the few people he liked.

Pauline: All those years, my dear.

Catherine: I think he regretted some of the things he...

Pauline: We had marvelous times together.

Catherine: I was an "enabler," apparently.

Pauline: When you love someone, and they need you...

Catherine: ...a co-dependent or something.

Pauline: I'm the only person still around who knew you as a young child, who watched you grow, who saw the hurts, the stammering, the braces...

Catherine: **[Indicating the land]** I wanted to have a place to come to that was...

Pauline: I worry about you.

Catherine: ...just mine.

Pauline: You're still a young woman really...

Catherine: ...a secret sanctuary.

Pauline: I had all those wretched experiences with men.

Catherine: I've been making pathways, finding my way through the property.

Pauline: ...two husbands, countless affairs.

Catherine: There are lovely rocks, I've been collecting them, sorting them, piling them up...

Pauline: You're not going to bury him here, are you?

Catherine: He wanted his ashes in our garden at home.

Pauline: You shouldn't listen to a thing he said.

Catherine: The light is wonderful here.

Pauline: Ashes are meaningless.

Catherine: Lovely early morning sun light, behind the redwoods for a bit around eleven or so then it reemerges in the afternoon until dusk.

Pauline: Ever since you lost that baby...

Catherine: Pauline...

Pauline: When that baby died...

Catherine: I'd rather not talk about...

Pauline: Conor, the drinking...it's a shame.

Catherine: I've been smashing rocks.

Pauline: I hate psychology.

Catherine: I see a rock and if it's a...small, inconsequential rock I throw it down the hill...

Pauline: Psychology is one of the worst things they ever invented.

Catherine: If it's a substantial rock and I can move it I move it to one of the places where I'm piling them or lining them, arranging them to retain a bit of land, and if it's too big to move and if I don't like it where it is, I smash it with a sledge hammer.

Pauline: Such an original mind.

Catherine: It was very hard on us...Jessica was barely two and then unexpectedly I was pregnant...

Pauline: ...that determined creativity as a child...

Catherine: ...horrible pregnancy, a bloody birth, a strangling death...

Pauline: ...those little drawings you did, little umbrellas and geishas and gingko trees, and you wrote that brilliantly marvelous book of stories.

Catherine: I didn't want the child, and then I wanted the child, and then I desperately wanted the child, and then...

Pauline: You should have a nice affair.

Catherine: Pauline...

Pauline: Find a nice fellow, you're an attractive woman, and just have a marvelously romantic, scandalously lurid affair.

Catherine: Do deer eat echium?

Pauline: Deer eat everything.

Catherine: I thought echium was native.

Pauline: Echium *is* native, it was here when I first settled the West. Deer eat everything... they'll eat salvia too, mark my word, they'll tell you that deer won't eat salvia and it's true that *sometimes* they won't eat salvia, and sometimes they'll only eat a particular *cultivar* of salvia, but the next time they'll eat a *different* cultivar...digitalis is poison, you can plant digitalis, I know all about that.

Catherine: You've always been my favorite aunt.

Pauline: I enjoyed my affairs far more than my marriages.

Catherine: If you'd like to come here sometime and smash rocks with me...

Pauline: Your mother's dead, father's dead, husband's dead, the whole outfit, and I'm the only one who sees the whole story, the whole historical...

Catherine: Maybe I *am* having an affair.

Pauline: I thought so.

Catherine: Maybe I'm not.

Pauline: Just don't get married again.

Catherine: Never thought about having an...well once...Bill Frierson, but...

Pauline: I recommend them.

Catherine: Connor wasn't a sloppy drunk or a violent drunk or an irresponsible...

Pauline: He was a fun drunk.

Catherine: ...kept it all to himself, hidden, controlled...

Pauline: It's Jessica who suffered the most.

Catherine: I think the cruelty of life, he was too sensitive to deal with...

Pauline: Have you thought about Perovskia?

Catherine: ...and when the baby was born dead, he could never...

Pauline: ...fabulous purple, like a haze hovering above the horizon.

Catherine: I don't want to be too...

Pauline: Cultivated.

Catherine: I want a natural sense of...

Pauline: Chaos.

Catherine: No borders, no beds.

Pauline: You must write another book.

Catherine: I'd like to create something that looks like no one has ever touched it, like it grew all on its own, in its own way, at its own time.

Pauline: I like books with facts.

Catherine: And I would be a human form sitting silent, motionless, just part of the landscape.

Pauline: I like books that tell things, report things, and I think you could be the person who could write such a book... you could write it beautifully.

Catherine: I'm going to garden, here, quietly, that's all I want to do.

Pauline: I like self-destructive people.

Catherine: **[Laughing]** Why don't *you* write a book.

Pauline: I'm drawn to people who when you look in their eyes, look at their face, the way they stand, the way they hold their mouth, you see loss, you see desperation.

Catherine: I can't stand humanity.

Pauline: This is my point.

Catherine: I'm rejecting humanity.

Pauline: And you should write about it.

Catherine: Most of all, I'm rejecting myself.

Pauline: **[Beat, as she looks at Catherine penetratingly, then...]** It's a shame your mother didn't live to see what a magnificently beautiful, brilliantly pathological person you've become.

**Blackout**

## Act II

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Pots of plants are set in rows stage right—rosemary, lavender, perovskia, nepeta, echium, thyme, but nothing is blooming.

Philip is standing. Catherine is seated. They are drinking wine, a red.

Philip: ...hanging the work is always...he's done these gorgeous, abstract, but with... figurative ghosts, hints, outlines, shoulder, thigh, neck...and we started out thinking that we'd move from the front to the back with the... smaller canvases just as you come in the door...but Toshiko, very smart, I like him, started placing things in more of a... random...I don't usually like working with the artist, they're not always the best at hanging the work, often it's better to... have a separate eye, see different...but he's...it's fun, the most amazing things happened, really a wonderful... I'm hoping you'll come...to the opening, I'd really like it if...Nell's not coming, she never, can't stand... but I was hoping...

Catherine: I'll wear dark glasses.

Philip: Please.

Catherine: Do you think it's time for American women to start wearing face scarves? I'm thinking about covering the lower half of my face, hide the mouth, which, is, let's be serious here, a significantly...erogenous organ...

Philip: Yes.

Catherine: ...and one that...

Philip: ...betrays...

Catherine: ...like the eyes...

Philip: ...the emotions...

Catherine: ...the desires.

Philip: **[Beat as he studies her]** I don't think you need additional... "mystery."

Catherine: I love your fingers,

Philip: **[Laughing]** Maybe additional...."modesty."

Catherine: I love the line of that vein...**[she traces a vein on the top of his hand]**

Philip: I never have conversations like this with Nell.

Catherine: I love this little...**[indicates]**

Philip: **[Looking at the spot she indicates]** I cut my hand the other day,

Catherine: Distracted?

Philip: ...knife, trying to open a CD, jabbed my hand, deep, blood all over...

Catherine: All accidents have a subliminal intent.

Philip: I thought you liked me.

Catherine: I'm fascinated by you.

Philip: ...a deep wound...

Catherine: ...all your repressed desires....

Philip: ...thought about going to the emergency but Nell was...

Catherine: Have you ever thought about suicide?

Philip: **[Beat]** It's...it's occurred to me.

Catherine: Seriously.

Philip: There have been times, but...

Catherine: Have you ever had an affair?

Philip: Is that what you call this?

Catherine: No.

Philip: Yes.

Catherine: Who?

Philip: Have you?

Catherine: Was she married too or was she a...shop girl.

Philip: Shop girl.

Catherine: You're full of shit. **[They laugh]**

Philip: The possibility of suicide appeared to me one night, a sleepless middle of the night, and it had to do with...rejection... I can't

remember who or what had rejected me, but the important thing was that / had rejected me and all of sudden there was suicide.

- Catherine: I was a...seventeen when I met suicide.
- Philip: She's been sort of a... "friend" ever since...
- Catherine: Furiously angry, betrayed...
- Philip: ...more of a mistress really....
- Catherine: ... couldn't stand myself
- Philip: ...something I can hold on to when it seems like there's nothing else... How could I not love you?
- Catherine: You don't know me.
- Philip: I would love you even more if you'd cover your erogenous mouth.
- Catherine: Once you know me better, you'll discover...
- Philip: ...and come to Toshiko's opening...
- Catherine: ...dark glasses, red silk scarf....
- Philip: ...and you'll enter and people will turn, look, and you'll wander, glancing, occasionally stopping, and you'll approach the largest work in the far back room... eight by ten, a fabulous swath of blues and greens with a glorious big gash of orange-red through the center, and you'll stand there, motionless... a sensation.
- Catherine: **[Beat]** Did you ever... paint?
- Philip: Sort of.
- Catherine: But you couldn't...
- Philip: It takes a certain combination of desperation and arrogance to be an artist.
- Catherine: And you didn't quite have...
- Philip: I had the desperation, not the arrogance.
- Catherine: I wrote.
- Philip: Wonderfully.
- Catherine: And then I didn't write.

Philip: I'd heard of you, saw you, bought your book, I read the stories, I wanted to know you.

Catherine: Now if you wanted to take me on a buying trip...do you go on buying trips?

Philip: You wrote and then you didn't write.

Catherine: Desperation and arrogance.

Philip: No more desperation?

Catherine: No more arrogance.

Philip: I hadn't noticed.

**They laugh, then embrace and kiss, quite a prolonged kiss, then they pull back from each other**

Catherine: Maybe if you were going to Tokyo or something, or Kyoto or something...

Philip: You'd come with me?

Catherine: I might...

**They start to kiss again, but just then from offstage...**

Becca: **[Calling from offstage right]** You-who... **[beat]** You-who! It's me...Catherine, where are you? Are you here somewhere?

Catherine: **[Calling]** Hello!

Becca: **[Calling]** It's me... I stopped down by the house, but you weren't...**[then entering, startled]** ...oh! I didn't realize...

Catherine: Becca, you know Philip, don't you?

Becca: **[Embarrassed]** I didn't know you had...

Catherine: Phil Decker.

Philip: Nice to see you.

Catherine: **[To Philip]** Becca Hargroves...old friend, we go back to...where do we go back to?

Becca: Childhood or something... **[To Philip]** I just stopped down by the house, and Catherine wasn't there, and I just thought I'd...

Catherine: We were just talking about...

Philip: The arts.

Catherine: Desperation and arrogance.

Becca: **[To Catherine]** I was just on my way out to the coast, and I thought maybe you'd like to...

Philip: **[Checking his watch]** I really need to be going.

Becca: I didn't mean to...

Philip: I was just about to...

Becca: No...really...you two...please, I didn't...

Catherine: Philip was just leaving, sit down, shut up.

Philip: I've got an appointment at three, and I was supposed to pick up the laundry, and I'm a failure, and I'm late.

Becca: **[To Catherine]** If you had a cell phone, I could have called you up here...

Catherine: He was just leaving...

Becca: ...at least announce myself.

Philip: **[To Catherine]** Thanks for the a...therapy.

Catherine: Call me. **[She gives him a little kiss]**

Philip: **[To Becca]** Very nice to see you again...

Becca: Oh, likewise...I'm just sorry...

Philip: **[To Catherine]** I'll call...

Catherine: Maybe lunch.

Philip: Not tomorrow, maybe Thursday... **[He turns and starts to exit]** Why don't you go for a ride up the coast?

Becca: No clouds, absolutely beautiful sunny day.

Catherine: **[Waving good by to Philip]** Call me.  
**Beat as Philip exits, another beat, then...**

Becca: I didn't mean to...

Catherine: It's fine.

Becca: I...I... well, I didn't expect.

Catherine: He's the most lovely man.

Becca: Well...yes...

Catherine: Nice fingers.

Becca: **[Hesitating then...]** I don't know you, I really just don't know you, I thought I knew you.

Catherine: Nice hips.

Becca: Who are you?

Catherine: I love the way men move their hips.

Becca: Two acres in the woods, no phone, and a... a... man.

Catherine: I'd love to go out to the coast, but I...

Becca: Catherine, dear, your husband just died a few weeks ago and now...I... I... I...Catherine, he's a married man.

Catherine: Yes.

Becca: His wife is...

Catherine: She's very nice.

Becca: And you and he are...

Catherine: What?

Becca: That's what I want to know... **[beat]** I'd tell you if I were having an affair.

Catherine: Of course you would.

Becca: Well?

Catherine: Well what?

Becca: Maybe I'm having a date next Saturday.

Catherine: Yes.

Becca: Maybe I'd tell you if you'd tell...

Catherine: **[Laughing]** You haven't had a date since...who, Ken Paley?

Becca: Please.

Catherine: Brett...what was his name, the proctologist...

Becca: Catherine Frances Staynor Parsons, I've not been your best friend for over 40 something years to sit here and...

Catherine: **[Laughing]** Why do you put up with me?

Becca: I love you, do you realize that? I care about you, there are a lot of us who care about you, love you, worry about you...you're not exactly easy, you know.

Catherine: You know all the secrets.

Becca: Well, maybe not.

Catherine: Becca, please, don't make more of this than there is, please... Philip and I are friends, just friends, there is such a thing, just a *friendship*.

Becca: Okay, I'm going for a ride up the coast and it's a beautiful day, and I thought I'd invite you to come along if you'd like, just sort of nice... *friendship* kind of thing.

Catherine: Thank you.

Becca: But then if we're not friends...

Catherine: Maybe we can stop at The Tides and I'll buy you a drink...maybe two.

Becca: And if you're nice, maybe I'll tell you about Kim Braddock's breast reduction surgery.

Catherine: Maybe I'll throw in some fried calamari. **[They laugh]**

Becca: **[Sighing]** My mother called today, you don't how lucky you are that your mother is dead, my mother isn't dead, so she called today, in fact so far she's called five times today...she's hiding her "silverware" in her bed...her attendant is stealing it...this the fifth attendant whose been stealing her "silverware," but it isn't silver, it's stainless steel, and nobody's stealing it, and I took away the real silver months ago because my mother wanted to give it to the nuns so they could set a nice table for Jesus...**[she sighs, distressed, a beat, then]** You're going to get hurt,

Catherine: I'm not going to get hurt.

Becca: I don't want to see you get hurt, but if you're going to be sleeping with a married man...

Catherine: No one's going to get hurt. No one's sleeping with anyone.

Becca: Kendra took Nembutal and put a plastic bag over her head and then held it tight until she stopped breathing.

Catherine: **[Looking over the land]** Everyone always wants to "organize" things...

Becca: **[Looking at her left palm]** I cut my hand the other day,

Catherine: ...control things ...

Becca: ...knife, trying to get a CD open, jabbed my hand, deep, blood all over...

Catherine: ...change something and turn it into something it isn't.

Becca: **[Beat]** Do you wait for his phone calls?

Catherine: Sometimes.

Becca: Do you pine for him and wonder...

Catherine: Sometimes.

Becca: Do you smile when you hear his voice, look forward to hearing it, wait for him to touch you, want him to touch you... **[she's close to tears]**

Catherine: I'm getting rid of most of my furniture...

Becca: I couldn't stand that, I couldn't stand to be so... **[she rises]**

Catherine: ...getting rid of the art...

Becca: ...vulnerable...**[she starts to cross to exit]**

Catherine: ... a lot of the things that Conor and I bought together... I want as little as possible... no junk... no history... no...memories.

**As Becca exits, Jessica simultaneously enters.**

Jessica: I got all the clothes, took them to St. Vincent de Paul, I kept his old Stetson, and a couple of the nice Pendleton's. **[she sits]**

Catherine: Thank you.

Jessica: There are still some of his old scrapbooks.

Catherine: If you'd like them...

Jessica: Are you getting rid of everything?

Catherine: Take them.

Jessica: Are you getting rid of me?

Catherine: I got rid of you a long time ago.

Jessica: **[Laughing]** I got rid of you too.

Catherine: We've gotten along much better since. **[They both laugh]**

Jessica: **[Long beat]** Don't you worry about his wife?

Catherine: He loves his wife, he's very good to her.

Jessica: His wife's going to find...

Catherine: Nell knows we're friends.

Jessica: You're going to be left...

Catherine: We see each other and spend time with each other, and we... it's been a long time since I felt that I *could* feel anything, and I *want* to feel... I don't care if it's painful, what's painful... is longing painful, I don't think so, I think longing is beautiful.

Jessica: I know you're angry.

Catherine: Of course I'm angry.

Jessica: I just couldn't...

Catherine: It went on for years, the indigestion, the bloating, the fatigue...

Jessica: It was far too painful for...

Catherine: ...the trips to the emergency, they'd drain the fluids, and warn him, the whole side of his body, bulging veins, his liver trying to find a way to function... and then the night he started losing his vision, the brain, the encephalopathy, and the last trip to the hospital, ambulance, semi-conscious, I held his hand, scared, terrified... **[Beat]** And then the very quiet, silent, completely un-dramatic death. **[Beat]** There was nothing you could have done.

Jessica: He was my father, I loved him.

Catherine: I don't really want to plant things, I *think* I want to plant things, but I look at the land, the grasses, nature does a very nice job.

Jessica: I worry about you.

Catherine: **[Laughing]** I'm lost.

Jessica: Really.

Catherine: I like being lost.

Jessica: **[Beat]** Is it exciting?

Catherine: Being lost?

Jessica: Having an affair?

Catherine: It's not exactly an affair.

Jessica: Well, it's....

Catherine: It's not sexual.

Jessica: It's...it's... it's not?

Catherine: Well...

Jessica: It's none of my business.

Catherine: We're...attracted, but...

Jessica: You don't...?

Catherine: We hold each other, we laugh, we kiss... it's very... romantic, but we don't... **[then laughing]** I'm lost.

Jessica: This is what worries me.

Catherine: He wants to go away for a night or two.

Jessica: Well.

Catherine: And I keep...

Jessica: Why don't you?

Catherine: I thought you were the one who....

Jessica: I hate to think of you alone.

Catherine: I've always been alone.

Jessica: But...

Catherine: You're alone.

Jessica: I have a son.

Catherine: I have a daughter.

Jessica: He's having a girl friend.

Catherine: Good for him.

Jessica: He's nine, mother.

Catherine: Morgan's precocious.

Jessica: I was way too young to have a child.

Catherine: **[Laughing]** So was I.

Jessica: Mark and I stopped sleeping together about a year after Morgan....

Catherine: The desire.

Jessica: That's what I mean.

Catherine: It's there, and then...

Jessica: I was full of resentment, and we weren't...

Catherine: We started sleeping in separate rooms, and "visiting" each other, and then shortly after that we didn't "visit" each other, and then...

Jessica: Daddy was queer?!

Catherine: Jessica...

Jessica: I mean, I just don't...

Catherine: I don't think you can...

Jessica: How could he just tell you that he wasn't attracted to...

Catherine: He was attracted to me, but...apparently there was something more attractive about...

Jessica: And you just...?

Catherine: We stopped sleeping together, but we didn't stop loving each other, we were sort of... comrades, had an understanding about how our lives were never going to be...**[trails off]**

Jessica: **[Awkward beat, then...]** Mother...Morgan wants to come and see your place, he's all excited.

Catherine: I'd love to have him.

Jessica: Maybe next weekend.

Catherine: We can look for animals.

Jessica: **[Looking at her left palm]** I cut my hand the other day,

Catherine: There are raccoons that come around at night...

Jessica: ...knife, trying to open a CD...

Catherine: ...squirrels, quail...

Jessica: ...jabbed my hand, deep, blood all over...

Catherine: ...lizards, fabulous lizards, Morgan will love the lizards...

Jessica: You never really believe that anyone's going to die....

Catherine: ...they lie out here in the sun for hours, scurry away when they hear you...

Jessica: ...everything dies...

Catherine: I feel like all of my ancestors are here...

Jessica: ... but you never really believe that they're going to die....

Catherine: ...mother, father, grandmothers, the spirits of generations going back forever living here... I'm going to put a chair out for each of them...keep my eyes open for old wooden chairs with strong personalities, and paint them, blues, different blues, and find places, beneath trees, on the ridge, quiet places, and set a chair for each of them, mother's chair, daddy's chair, each in a...serene...resting place

**During the preceding speech, Jessica stands and exits, as simultaneously Pauline enters and sits.**

Pauline: **[Indicating the potted plants]** Are we planting these or what is it here? This is very nice, but...I thought you wanted to plant...

Catherine: I sort of like them just...in pots.

Pauline: I thought you were going to...

Catherine: I can't decide quite how I...

Pauline: **[Looking over the horizon]** You've such a wonderful view here...hills, sky, the slope of the land... **[looking at the rows of plants]** This is not chaos.

Catherine: I thought if I bought these...**[indicating the plants]**

Pauline: I thought you wanted to create a little chaos.

Catherine: ...maybe I'd...

Pauline: They could sit here until you die.

Catherine: ...get some sort of...

Pauline: ...or until they die...**[picking up a pot]** At least integrate them, mix them up a bit.

Catherine: **[Laughing]** Pauline...

Pauline: **[Holding two different plant together]** These are nice together, you can just place them...

Catherine: Darling, I might not even plant these...I rather like them just sitting...

Pauline: We take our lives for granted, my dear.

Catherine: I know that.

Pauline: We should look at the key, look at the lock, watch as we put the key into the lock...

Catherine: I know that.

Pauline: ...and turn the key...

Catherine: This is what I'm trying to do.

Pauline: ...and push against the door.

Catherine: Kendra knew exactly what she was doing.

Pauline: Of course she did, so did Harriet Benton.

Catherine: Practically every other person on that block committed suicide.

Pauline: Old Reverend Broshears, the widow Casey ...You're not planning on anything are you?

Catherine: Some day...something tasteful.

Pauline: I respect those people.

Catherine: I honor those people.

Pauline: I think it's awful the lack of compassion...

Catherine: No one can just accept, understand, forgive...

Pauline: I'm going to do something quite elegant when the time comes, state-of-the-art, but beautiful.

Catherine: You'll inform me, I trust.

Pauline: I'll invite you out to dinner...that lovely place where they show the movies on the brick wall and the gorgeous young people waiting tables and it's all very expensive and I'll tell you all that this is my last supper, and I wanted you all to share it with me.

Catherine: I'd pick up the tab.

Pauline: No, no, no, no...I'll pay, my treat, a final little get together, lovely delicate wine, beautifully presented food, and it would be you and Jessica and Morgan, just the family... and... maybe you could invite...Phil Decker.

Catherine: **[Beat]** Oh, my.

Pauline: Your dear friend, Becca, called.

Catherine: Oh, dear.

Pauline: She assumed I knew.

Catherine: There's nothing to...

Pauline: And then Jessica called.

Catherine: Well...

Pauline: Was I to be the last to know?

Catherine: Pauline...

Pauline: You slut.

Catherine: There's nothing to...

Pauline: *And* this has been going on for months?

Catherine: Pauline...

Pauline: I thought we were friends.

Catherine: It's not an affair.

Pauline: I've been having palpitations...arrhythmia, they call it, all of a sudden my heart starts pounding, and I get this...

Catherine: Pauline...

Pauline: Phil Decker! He's lovely, absolutely lovely, I think it's fabulous, but the least you could do is tell me about it.

Catherine: He's very nice, very sweet, very married.

Pauline: You told me about you and Johnny Mitchell and holding hands, your first kiss, you and Robbie Nielson and how you felt him up.

Catherine: Pauline, dear...

Pauline: Monogamy is the most horrifying thing, absolutely barbaric.

Catherine: Thank you.

Pauline: Marriage is rubbish... I think the government should stay out of our lives and I think the church should stay out of our lives, and we should plant things if we want to, not plant things if we don't want to, and have erotic adventures with married men if we want to.

Catherine: You could write a book, *and* you could host a talk show.

Pauline: Thank you.

Catherine: Tell me about your heart.

Pauline: It's fine.

Catherine: The arrhythmia.

Pauline: Never been better.

Catherine: You're taking your...

Pauline: I don't like it.

Catherine: Pauline...

Pauline: **[Indicating the plants]** This is so like you.

Catherine: Don't change the subject.

Pauline: Like that time you had the fourteen different colors of paint... you never did paint the dining room did you.

Catherine: The same color.

Pauline: See what I mean.

Catherine: The medication is good for you, Pauline, you need to take the medication.

Pauline: ...and then you open the door, and there's a space, a silence, it's your space, your silence... **[Looking around]** You're on to something here, I think...really. Don't plant, just...

Catherine: **[Indicating the land]** This is my art project... it's an earthwork...shaping, moving, experiencing, all process, no ultimate object...

Pauline: You're angry, aren't you?

Catherine: ...cutting back branches, pulling up shrubs...

Pauline: You're miserable

Catherine: I'm furious.

Pauline: You've held it all in for years and years, dealing with dear drunken Conor.

Catherine: I'd like to destroy things for once, just obliterate things, annihilate, exterminate, all those wonderfully deviant inhumane words. **[She picks up a pot and viciously throws the plant/pot at the ground, and then another]**

Pauline: **[Long beat, looking at the mess]** People who kill themselves break the unspoken covenant that says that life is the only possible choice.

Catherine: People seem to think you should have a reason.

Pauline: You've tried three times.

Catherine: Sometimes it's beyond "reason"...

Pauline: "Oh, yes, my lovely niece, the three-time suicide..."

Catherine: Sometimes you just can't bear it...

Pauline: Makes you really quite special, doesn't it, untouchable somehow...

Catherine: ...the endless horror of life...

Pauline: ...sort of a death-defying angel...

Catherine: **[Looking at the mess of plant/pots]** Chaos: the state of things in which chance is supreme.

Pauline: **[Looking at her left palm]** I cut my hand the other day...

Catherine: Chaos: the confused unorganized state of matter before the creation of distinct forms.

Pauline: ...knife, trying to open a CD...

Catherine: Chaos: the state of utter confusion...

Pauline: ...jabbed my hand, deep, blood all over...

Catherine: If you look carefully, if you walk slowly and observe with complete stillness, there are, according to my count to date, six distinct kinds of grasses, eleven different kinds of what I'll call shrubs, seven different kinds of trees...

Pauline: ...and I watched as the cut continued to bleed...

Catherine: ...redwoods, bay laurels, madrones...

Pauline: ...a little rich red rivulet pouring down my hand, dripping to the floor...

Catherine: ... two different oaks, some sort of pine...

Pauline: ....a little round puddle of my own lovely red blood...

Catherine: ... a sort of scrubby white-barked tree that I don't know...

Pauline: ... drip...**[beat]** ...drip... **[beat]** ...drip....

**Blackout**

## Act III

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**Two months later. The pots of plants are still in rows, but they're blooming... shades of blues, violets, purples, Catherine is moving the pots around, arranging them, very intensely focused. Becca is seated, watching her. An array of seven or eight blue chairs, randomly arranged, sits stage right.**

Catherine: **[As she focuses on arranging the plants]** I haven't liked you since third grade.

Becca: But...

Catherine: I don't think I ever really liked you at all.

Becca: **[Standing]** I'll just...

Catherine: Sit down. **[She continues to focus on the plants]**

**Long beat, as Becca sits back down, and Catherine moves a plant, then...**

Becca: I have feelings too you know.

Catherine: You do not.

Becca: I do too.

Catherine: You have no feelings, none, completely insensitive.

Becca: **[Standing]** I am sorry, but I am not...

Catherine: Sit down.

**Long beat, as Becca sits back down, Catherine places a pot/plant, studies it, then...**

Becca: I've always defended you.

Catherine: I don't need defending.

Becca: I'm *still* defending you.

Catherine: The problem with you and people like you ...

Becca: Catherine, my dear, everyone knows...

Catherine: Thanks to you.

Becca: I assumed that...

Catherine: You had to call Pauline, you had to call Rachael...Naomi Paton called me just to say she'd heard all about it from Hilly Winslow, who'd heard it from *you*, and then she went on about how *she* was having an affair with somebody she'd known at Cal...

**Becca stands,**

Catherine: Sit down.

Becca: **[Still standing]** I'm not good enough am I?

Catherine: Sit down.

Becca: I have always felt...

Catherine: Sit down.

Becca: That you were somehow ashamed to...

Catherine: He loves his wife, he adores his wife, he's surrounded her with.... it's all very...he's just a man, Becca, he's just a frail, needy...very kind...hurt, really, he's hurt, do you understand that?

Becca: In the third grade I was going through...

Catherine: ...and what he doesn't need and what his wife doesn't need are people like you running around drumming up an affair when there isn't an affair. **[She turns away]**

Becca: **[Beat, she sits, then...]** Go ahead hate me.

Catherine: **[Holding up pots]** Do you like the perovskia with the lavender?

Becca: You have everything, you have absolutely everything.

Catherine: The big question is should you introduce something "domesticated" into a palate of indigenous... **[she continues messing around with the pots]**

Becca: No one wants to have an affair with me, no one has ever wanted to have an affair with me...other than, well, maybe the proctologist...I'm not interesting, it's really... you haven't been calling me and I thought that after Conor died, we'd see more of each other, but then...

Catherine: I can't give you what you need, Becca... I'm the one who's the neighborhood tragedy, the unstable one, the crazy one...You're the sensible one, the one people like, the one who everyone relies on, counts on...*I'm* the one who's not good enough, *I'm* the one everyone avoids.

Becca: I put dinner in the microwave, I eat it, I wash the dish, I start to turn on the TV and I realize that it's over, isn't it, life is something that young people have, and at some point you're living it out, but you're not really alive anymore. **[She's crying]**

**Pause**

Catherine: I'm sorry.

Becca: I know.

Catherine: I don't want to hurt...

Becca: It's fine.

Catherine: ...but, for my own sake...

Becca: You were very kind to me, do you remember when you were kind to me? You walked to school with me, talked to me, made me feel like you were interested in me...

Catherine: Becca...

Becca: Please don't hate me.

Catherine: I don't hate you...

Becca: I didn't go to Swarthmore.

Catherine: I've always had Conor and now I don't have Conor, and I'm trying to find out how to live without Conor, and I...I...I don't know what I'm trying to do.

Becca: I thought you were the most fabulous person in the world, went to Swarthmore, what could possibly be more...I didn't go to Swarthmore, I didn't have...and you left and we wrote, then you came back...I never thought you'd come back...

Catherine: Conor.

Becca: But...

Catherine: There was Richard, there was Peter, there were a dozen other...

Becca: But there was Conor.

Catherine: I hated Swarthmore.

Becca: ...handsome, well off...

Catherine: I thought I'd love the East, but I didn't, and Conor was out here and...

Becca: I've always just deferred, haven't I, I just agree, support, never try to challenge, always sweet, kind, giving, helpful...

Catherine: I used you.

Becca: Yes.

Catherine: Good old Becca, always there...

Becca: **[Starts crying]** I don't like you either, I hate you, everything was easy for you, everything was...**[angrily]** What are you doing here? Just what exactly do you think you're doing here? Rejecting everyone and everything before they can reject you?

Catherine: **[Beat]** A man called Jessica yesterday and said he'd been Conor's lover.

Becca: Pardon me.

Catherine: A man called Jessica yesterday and said that he'd been Conor's lover.

Becca: Conor's...?

Catherine: Lover.

Becca: Conor?

Catherine: His lover. A man.

Becca: **[Stunned]** I guess it's quite... the thing now.

Catherine: Jessica's going to meet him for lunch, and maybe we'll all get together for dinner and get to know each other better... **[pats Becca on the hand]** Pass it on.

**Catherine turns and works, Becca turns and exits, as simultaneously, Jessica enters.**

Jessica: He was very nice, I mean, he was really very nice, and we...

Catherine: Jess, I don't think I want...

Jessica: He and daddy.

Catherine: I've thought about this and I...

Jessica: He's a ...

Catherine: I've asked people not to bother me up here, it's fine if you want to call first, but...

Jessica: Mother...

Catherine: I'm serious.

Jessica: **[Beat]** I need to talk to someone about this.

Catherine: Then find someone else, please, I don't want to know, I don't want to hear, Okay? Is that all right? Thank you.

Jessica: **[Beat]** I feel sorry for him.

Catherine: **[Looking over the land]** You should come up and spend the night sometime, camp out, I've been sleeping up here a couple nights a week, eerie skies, sounds, bats at dusk, swooping down over the grasses, raccoons, squirrels, the most astonishingly beautiful sunrise.

Jessica: They'd had a relationship since the late '80s... he wanted to talk to someone, share some of the... He and daddy were lovers, I would like to know daddy's lover...

Catherine: I don't want to put a face, I don't want to put name...

Jessica: Ben.

Catherine: **[Beat]** Jess, I'm going through sort of an...

Jessica: You are so full of it.

Catherine: ... and the hardest thing to deal with is that...

Jessica: ...so fucking arrogantly, narcissistically, full of it.

Catherine: I can't stand myself, I can't bear to look at myself, I can't stand to *be* with myself, I positively disgust myself.

Jessica: There's this lovely arbitrary way you have of...

Catherine: ...completely arbitrary,

Jessica: It's not exactly easy for the rest of us to quite figure out...

Catherine: I don't want to be figured out.

**Pause**

Jessica: Did you ever suspect that daddy...?

Catherine: We had a friendship, Jessica, we had a shared...understanding...

Jessica: Ben said....

Catherine: ...we had fun...

Jessica: ...he said that daddy...

Catherine: Jess, please...

Jessica: ... cried one night when you and he...

Catherine: Please...

Jessica: He was terrified of hurting you, you were the only person, he said this...

Catherine: He was locked inside himself, I was locked inside myself.

Jessica: ...the only person he really loved.

Catherine: We could see each other trapped.

Jessica: I miss him.

Catherine: Jess, I'm exhausted.

Jessica: I'm sorry I bothered you.

Catherine: No...

Jessica: You weren't at home and so I just came up here and your car...

Catherine: It's fine.

Jessica: If you had...

Catherine: I found every piece of writing I ever did and burned them, all the manuscripts, I burned every letter, photograph...

Jessica: You've been drinking.

Catherine: Yes.

Jessica: I worry that you're heading into...

Catherine: I'm trying to survive.

Jessica: The times you went under, there were...

Catherine: It's not like that.

Jessica: You were throwing things out, doing erratic...

Catherine: This is completely different.

Jessica: And then we found you.

Catherine: Children are terrifying, I was terrified of you the minute you were born and everyday you were growing up... you're even more terrifying now.

Jessica: I'm your... "creation."

Catherine: Exactly.

Jessica: It must be awful.

Catherine: Terrifying.

Jessica: I'm becoming more like you every day.

Catherine: A mother's worst fear. **[Long beat as she turns and starts arranging the chairs]** I have a chair for grandma, a chair for grandpa, a chair for Great Aunt Eleanor... there's a spot down there, by the creek that... I thought I'd put grandpa and grandma together down there, next to each other... I'd like to find a place for everyone... a safe place... **[as she starts to move a chair, she suddenly breaks down, crying, then...]** I need help.

Jessica: I know.

Catherine: I've started...

Jessica: **[Moving to hold/comfort Catherine]** Your husband of 35 years died, and no matter what your relationship was like...

Catherine: ...falling into a...

Jessica: It's a major...

Catherine: I don't think it has much to do...

Jessica: You've tried before, mother... and it feels like you're sending all the same signals...

Catherine: I'm fine.

Jessica: I don't want to come up here one day... Do you know what it was like for me and daddy?

Catherine: Please...

Jessica: Every time you...

Catherine: Please...

Jessica: ...an endless fear that you were going to do it again, are you aware of the damage, to daddy, to me, did you ever think about...it was horrible for us...

Catherine: **[Hands over her ears]** Please, please, please....

Jessica: **[Bursting into tears]** I couldn't bear to watch him die, I just couldn't stand there and... he and I... he... he helped me...I could count on him...and then he...he...he... **[she stands, crying, long beat, then...]** I'm sorry. I didn't mean...**[she's drying her tears]** It was... I couldn't bear...

Catherine: Neither could I.

Jessica: It was just....

Catherine: I loved him too.

Jessica: I know, I know... **[Again in tears]**

Catherine: I'm sorry.

Jessica: I know.

Catherine: I've always hated myself for...

Jessica: Mother, please.

**There's a pause as Jessica dries her tears, recovers, then...**

Jessica: Do you have...feelings about Philip? I mean...

Catherine: He's married, he loves Nell, he's staying with Nell, I know he's staying with Nell, *he* knows he's staying with Nell, he *should* stay with Nell, I *want* him to stay with Nell...

Jessica: But don't you...?

Catherine: We neck... it's very nice...

Jessica: ...and you....

Catherine: Jessica, really, it's none of your...

Jessica: I want you to be okay, please, mother, I want you to have...

Catherine: I don't want to "obtain" because once you "obtain" it's all over, and all you can do is move onto the next thing you want/ desire/ need, and I only want to desire...it's thrilling...right here **[touching her heart]** ...we can never "have" each other, but we can always "want" each other and it's...fine....

Jessica: Will you call me if you feel like you need...I just....

Catherine: I'm fine.

Jessica: I don't want you to get...

**Suddenly Pauline enters, carrying a bag.**

Pauline: **[As she enters]** Hideous traffic down River Road, phone pole went over and they've got everything stopped...

Catherine: **[Turning/greeting]** Ahh... Pauline.

Pauline: I am never ever going shopping again *ever!* Piles and piles, rows and rows, hideous colors, irritating fabrics, and not one single solitary ugly thing fits me...at all...

Jessica: **[Laughing]** You're not alone.

Pauline: **[To Jessica]** I never see you, you never call...

Jessica: **[Opening her arms]** Pauline...

Pauline: **[Embracing Jessica]** Darling, I keep meaning to...

Jessica: You were the one who backed out of lunch, I've tried eighteen times to...

Pauline: Let's make a promise...

Jessica: I said I'd come up, any time, any time, and...

Pauline: **[Turning to Catherine]** I hope I'm not interrupting.

Catherine: You were invited.

Jessica: **[To Pauline]** She doesn't like unannounced...

Catherine: **[To Jessica]** She was invited.

Jessica: Maybe I should leave...

Catherine: **[To Jessica]** You're not going anywhere.

Pauline: I'm delighted you're both here, let's drink...I have this sensational fumé blanc and I don't usually like fumé blanc... but this is...Salmon Creek, do you know them, lovely little winery, lovely couple...  
**[handing the wine bottle to Catherine]** Darling, open this, make yourself useful... **[then indicating the chairs]** Are we having a party?

Catherine: Just sit down, dear, take a few deep...

Pauline: **[Holding her chest]** ...pounding, pounding, thump-thump-thump-thump-thump...

Catherine: Are you taking the medicati...

Pauline: It doesn't help.

Catherine: If you'd take the medi...

Pauline: Comes and goes...

Catherine: **[To Jessica]** She's having an arrhythmia thing, her heart...

Pauline: Sugar is the problem, I shouldn't eat sugar, that's what Clyde Kinsloe said, he had the same thing, said it was sugar... **[looking in her bag]** I have some cheese here somewhere, and some bread, I was at the Italian's and...

Jessica: **[With an eye to Catherine]** Clyde Kinsloe?

Catherine: **[To Pauline]** You slut.

Pauline: I ran into him at the *eye doctors*, we discussed *ailments*... I know I have some cheese here...

Catherine: He's still...

Pauline: **[Nodding]** ...moving around, talking, complaining... **[then handing the cheese and bread to Catherine]** Here, do something with this.

Catherine: **[Wine opened, pouring a glass for Pauline]** Here.

Pauline: Thank you.

Catherine: **[Serving Jessica]** Salmon Creek fumé blanc...

Pauline: You never think you're going to disintegrate, but after 54, that's the year it all starts, you fall apart beginning at 54, spectacular degeneration from that point on...**[Raising her glass]** Cheers.

Catherine: **[Raising her glass]** Cheers.

Jessica: **[Raising her glass]** Spectacular degeneration.  
**They all drink.**

Pauline: **[Referring to the plants//pots]** Fascinating... I've never heard of having a container garden out in the woods, usually you'd plant the plants, but...

Catherine: I can't quite decide...

Pauline: **[Then looking again at the chairs]** Really, are more people coming by?

Catherine: I'm creating a chair garden.

Jessica: A chair for every dead relative.

Catherine: **[Indicating a chair]** Only special dead relatives...this is mother's chair...this is daddy's chair...this is Aunt Eleanor's chair...

Pauline: Where's mine?

Catherine: You're not dead yet.

Pauline: I want something more comfortable...these are not...

Catherine: Whatever you'd...

Pauline: An Adirondack chair...in the sun...with a glass of wine... I'm "going to Spain in the spring"...and I'm going to have a bon voyage party at...

Catherine: Pauline...

Pauline: ...can't move my fingers, can't move my arm, can't remember a damn thing... what is the name of that restaurant...the courtyard and an old brick wall and they show...

Catherine: Why don't you have an affair with Clyde Kinsloe instead?

Pauline: He wanted to meet later for a drink.

Jessica: Well...?

Pauline: I'm getting rid of everything, sofa, chairs...if you need anything.

Catherine: Stop this, please.

Pauline: What *is* the name of that restaur...

Catherine: Foreign Cinema.

Jessica: Oh, I love that...

Catherine: **[To Jessica]** She wants to have her last...

Pauline: I'm taking a stand. I'm asserting control over...if one is going to die, and one *is*, and some of us sooner than others, then I'm going to say *when*, I'm going to say *how*, and I'm going to say *where*.

Catherine: Why don't you...

Pauline: **[To Catherine]** You are one of the great hypocrites of...

Catherine: I am anything but a....

Jessica: Girls, girls...

Pauline: It's fine for *you* to run off and kill yourself, but for the rest of us...

Catherine: I didn't run off and...

Pauline: You tried.

Jessica: Three times.

Pauline: I'm going to do it once, and for good.

Catherine: It's tricky.

Pauline: With a pistol.

Catherine: Forget it.

Pauline: I have a lovely pistol.

Catherine: Pauline...

Pauline: It was your grandmother's, and it works, I've fired it, beautiful craftsmanship... and I would like a pedicure...promise me that before you burn me, you'll give me a pedicure...and I would like my ashes scattered right here...would that be all right? I'd like that...this is a... a perfectly wonderful...sun, vista, a lovely ...ashes scattered down the hillside, a blue Adirondack chair in the sun. Perfect. Settled. Done. **[She takes a sip of the wine]** Isn't this lovely? They're out on Westside Road, after the bridge, the nicest couple...

Jessica: Pauline...

Catherine: **[To Jessica]** She's fine...

Pauline: Never been better.

Jessica: Am I the only one who...?

Pauline: Whose life is it, really? Is it your life, or is it someone else's life? I didn't choose life, but it's my life now, isn't it, and I can decide...this is final, I am final, and I will decide when I'm ready for the final beautiful act.

Jessica: Pauline....

Catherine: So will I.

Jessica: Mother.

Catherine: Not now, but later.

Pauline: **[Clinking glasses with Catherine]** It's a pact.

Jessica: My therapist is going to love this, just love it.

Pauline: Life has never been better, and it's because now I know, I know just exactly...you should, everyone should, the end point, you suffer the daily assaults, but the end point, you need to know the end point.

Catherine: I don't think a pistol, Pauline...

Pauline: Well, I'm not going to put a bag over my head like Kendra...I've joined a group, suicide support...marvelous, lovely people, and we meet...a little wine, just talk, laugh, marvelous lovely desperate people.

Jessica: Why am I always the one left behind?

Pauline: I've got so much to do before I "go to Spain."

Jessica: I really turned out quite well considering...

Pauline: A few day trips, see people...

Jessica: ...alcoholic father, suicidal mother, suicidal aunt...

Pauline: I'd like to go down to Monterrey and see the Aquarium...

Jessica: Everybody's just so far ahead of me, so "evolved."

Pauline: And I'm going to Yosemite and I'm going to take a class...Wabi-Sabi" or something like that, it's Japanese, something about the beauty of imperfect things, things that are falling apart.

Catherine: **[Looking over the land]** It's fascinating how as you rake the hillside, you start pulling out little rocks, and the broom and thistles pop up from the grasses and you pull them out and there are all these little

brush-like, prickly little dry things and I cut them, sever them from their roots and throw them down the hill, and the earth slowly redistributes itself, and everything becomes...it's amazing, the intimacy you gain ... pathways just "announce" themselves, and I'm digging a series of earth steps in the clay going down the hill...it's all I care about now, my pathways, my sloping beautifully-groomed hills, the meadow, the rocky bed of the seasonal creek...that's what's important, that's all that's important, my blue chairs, where to put my blue chairs, will I plant the lavender? Will the deer eat the echium? Will the salvia make it through the winter? These are the big questions.

## **Blackout**

## Act IV

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**The pots of plants have been rearranged... randomly. The chairs have been rearranged... randomly. Catherine and Philip are downstage. Philip stands looking out.**

Philip: ...I found her staring out the window...terrifyingly alone... it's metastasized... to her bones...after all this time and they thought...  
**[beat]** I held her. She says she doesn't care ... I'm angry, Nell isn't angry, she doesn't talk, she's so defeated that...**[beat]** I blame myself.

Catherine: Philip...

Philip: She was angry at me...

Catherine: It's not your....

Philip: ... and turned the anger against herself.

Catherine: I blamed myself too.

Philip: I loved her and we...

Catherine: I thought that Conor...

Philip: All very passionate...and then...

Catherine: ....his problems, the drinking...

Philip: Nell just accepts, I don't accept...

Catherine: ... it was because I didn't give him...and he had to blot out....

Philip: **[Turning to her]** I put you in a compartment...I put you in a safe little place that's all separate and away from...

Catherine: Reality.

Philip: Where I can meet you...

Catherine: ...and we can....

**They kiss, then kiss a bit more.**

Catherine: **[Pulling away]** We shouldn't do this.

Philip: But we want to.

Catherine: Sooner or later it all becomes...

Philip: It's easy.

Catherine: ...routine, I don't want it to be routine.

**They kiss again and laugh.**

Philip: **[Pulling away]** I'm an emotional wreck.

Catherine: I'm fourteen years old.

Philip: You've taken over my mind...

Catherine: My heart is pounding.

Philip: ...my dreams.

Catherine: People ask me...

Philip: ...me too.

Catherine: I tell them we're friends.

Philip: We are.

Catherine: They don't want that.

Philip: They want...

Catherine: Secrets.

Philip: Illicit.

Catherine: Exciting.

Philip: Furtive.

Catherine: ...all the things they don't have.

**They kiss.**

Philip: **[Beat, then paces away from Catherine]** Nell's always been...

Catherine: Needy.

Philip: Always wanting, and then no matter what...

Catherine: It's never enough.

Philip: I do everything I could to assure...

Catherine: Conor was late one night, years ago...drunk, sullen, I could smell...it was another person's scent it was...I didn't realize it then, but it was a... a man's smell...

Philip: I come home, find her crying, standing there, crying... I'm watching her die.

Catherine: I watched Conor die.

Philip: She wants to die.

Catherine: He wanted to die.

Philip: Tormented by her life, dreading, fearing...

Catherine: I remember meeting you.

Philip: I remember meeting you.

Catherine; Standing there, looking very... self-contained, penetrating sensitive eyes...

Philip: It was Nell who pointed you out..."the author," she said.

Catherine: ... an observer, strong silent, beautiful...

Philip: I was transfixed.

Catherine: I assumed you'd never notice me.

Philip: Couldn't keep my eyes off you.

Catherine: I was never selected to be a cheerleader.

Philip: I was never on varsity anything.

Catherine: I never tried out.

Philip I was the guy sitting in the third row...

Catherine: I was the girl gazing off into space.

Philip: ...trying to hide so that...

### **They kiss.**

Philip: And then I bought your book...and read every story right through, couldn't put it down...

Catherine: I don't know who wrote them.

Philip: ...they're not like....

Catherine: The words appeared on the page....

Philip: ...personalities begin to take shape...

Catherine: ...I wrote them at a time, after I'd had Jessica...

Philip: ...and then they fragment...

Catherine: ...and Conor and I...we'd...grown tired of...everything, should be happy, weren't happy, and then I was pregnant again, eight and half horrifying months, I didn't want the child, Conor didn't want the...Jessica had been easy, remarkably for the first time, just wanted out, ran headlong into life, but the next one...hours, hideous pain, screaming, screaming, blood-drenched baby, strangling, and it didn't...you couldn't tell... sexless... nothing that...and they tried... they... tried...tried... tried... **[fades off, then...]** And *then* I wrote, it was the child's voice, that's what it felt like, the child as the adult it would have...

Philip: ...an adult who's still a child...

Catherine: ...fractured, tortured...

Philip: ... beautiful vulnerable.... **[He reaches to touch her, but...**

Catherine: **[Pulling away, uncomfortable, then]** I'd like to do something for Nell... I don't know what I can do...

Philip: She likes the fact that we're friends.

Catherine: I'd like her to know that I respect her and I don't want anything to ...

Philip: You and I exist in a different dimension...I'm a different person with you, I'm a different person with her, there's nothing...simultaneous, contiguous... in her world you're irrelevant, you don't exist... parallel universes...

Catherine: I'd like to run my hands all over your body and handle everything you've got that I can handle.

Philip: **[Beat]** I won't let you. **[They laugh]**

Catherine: I'd like to strip you and tie you up to a tree I've picked out down there, lovely spot, rays of sun, oaks and madrones, and dance for you, naked, and then have my way with you, all morning, all afternoon, and open you up to sexual possibilities that you never knew existed.

Philip: **[Thinks for a moment]** Maybe. **[They laugh]**

Catherine: It would be terrible if we ever had the opportunity to be...

Philip: Together.

Catherine: Permanently

Philip: Dreadful word.

Catherine: Locked into...

Philip: It's so much more exciting to be...

Catherine: ...illegal...

Philip: ...unnamed...

**They start to kiss, then Catherine pulls back**

Catherine: You are so fabulously attractive, fabulously fucking... it pisses me off, I don't want to be attracted to any thing or any one and you come waltzing through the...

Philip: **[Indicating]** Is not planting things an aesthetic position, a moral position, a new approach to...?

Catherine: **[Turning away]** I drove myself going 85 when I was seventeen crash into a concrete overpass, a moment of spontaneous...

Philip: I'd heard about...

Catherine: ...and then later I took pills...

Philip: ...I mean, people talk about...

Catherine: ...but not enough, cleaned house, put everything in place, everything just exactly how I wanted it and then...**[beat]** ... and after I wrote the so-called stories I slashed my wrists.

Philip: **[Beat]** I hope you're not...

Catherine: I can't promise anything...

Philip: But you wouldn't...

Catherine: It's not exactly rational...

Philip: I couldn't bear...

Catherine: ...more of an overwhelming narcissistic necessity...

Philip: ...to think that you'd...

Catherine: ...like you're born with the deep driving need to obliterate yourself.

Philip: **[Beat]** I thought maybe we could... go dancing.

Catherine: You dance?

Philip: Divinely.

Catherine: I love to dance.

Philip: Old time check-to-cheek...Look, Nell and I are going away for awhile...they want to give her chemo, more radiation, and it's hopeless, she knows it's hopeless, and she's decided not to....she doesn't see the point and the suffering... **[beat, he's quite choked up]** So we're going away for a few weeks, while she still can, drive down the coast, Carmel Valley, Big Sur, places we've loved... **[He's near tears, there's a pause then...]** May I come here and sit with you? I love to be here with you...

Catherine: I love you to be here.

Philip: But I have to...

Catherine: I understand.

Philip: I feel like...

Catherine: I'm fine.

Philip: You shouldn't have to...

Catherine: I'm the other woman.

Philip: Please...

Catherine: It's fine, I accept that, I like that.

Philip: But, you're...

Catherine: She loves you, you love her, she needs you.

Philip: It's not...easy for me, to...

Catherine: I wouldn't want to be your wife...

Philip: ...the emotional...

Catherine: ...the only person you were...

Philip: **[Suddenly, starts to cry]** I don't know...

Catherine: It's okay.

Philip: I just can't...

Catherine: **[Touching him]** We can be...

Philip: ...it should all be so...so... simple, shouldn't it? **[he holds his head, rocks back and forth, he calms himself, then...]**

Philip: You have everything, you know.

Catherine: I know...

Philip: Don't you feel...?

Catherine: I'm the most undeserving...

Philip: ...blessed, really, you're blessed.

Catherine: I don't have the usual...

Philip: Jealousies.

Catherine: ...the usual...

Philip: ...selfish...

Catherine: I'm the most totally thoroughly disgustingly selfish human...

Philip: I admire you.

Catherine: I came into the world screaming, angry, didn't want to be here, never should have arrived, and my whole life...every day, trapped inside a life that I didn't want, and no matter what I try, how I try... **[beat]** Do know how lovely it is to kill yourself? It's a beautiful...you make a...there's this moment, this decisive... moment when you start to take action and your heart...the first time I did it my heart was pounding like... I was accelerating, driving as fast as...and my heart was bang, bang, bang, unbearable excitement, and then, I just, just drove into the wall, and at the moment when it was inevitable, when the wall was coming at me... it was the most exhilarating, thrilling, blacking out a... **[long beat]** Pills weren't... there was a moment of a...serenity, a release, a quiet...joy...heart pounding, banging in my head, confusion, it wasn't a...then the nausea, that's the problem, retching, coughing, horrible spinning...**[long beat]** But, the knife...I loved the knife...I loved holding the knife, turning it over, admiring it, loving it, sliding it along my skin, studying my veins... control, absolute control, complete choice, a rather...artistic way of...and I ran a hot bath, undressed, got in the tub and soaked for a bit, luxuriating in the...and I wasn't afraid, I wasn't upset, my heart was

calm steady, and I placed the knife just so against my arm **[she demonstrates]** ...and then I slipped it in quickly...and then pulled the knife slowly....deeply...down the arm all the way to the wrist **[she demonstrates, then a beat]** It didn't hurt... stung a little, but I wasn't...there wasn't a feeling of sudden...just calm, a detached... tranquil...fascination and sense of overwhelming relief....and blood....**[long beat, then turning to him]** I've been looking for you my whole life.

Philip: I know.

Catherine: I saw you and I knew.

Philip: And I've been looking for you.

Catherine: **[Turning away]** I don't like patterns, that's the problem, I don't like...if I were to plant these **[indicating the plants]**, I'd throw out a handful of...rocks...and see where they landed and then I'd put each plant where each rock...randomly, it wouldn't be like a...pattern that I would...but it would still be a...

Philip: Commitment. **[They laugh]**

Catherine: **[Beat]** The thing I like about you...

Philip: You're dangerous...

Catherine: ...is that your lips have a beautiful way of ...trembling...

Philip: Very dangerous.

Catherine: ... betraying every feeling...

Philip: ...dazzlingly, terrifyingly, conflictingly dangerous...

Catherine: Would you like a bite of my apple?

Philip: **[Laughing]** Shall we torment each other forever?

Catherine: We could...

Philip: Tease.

Catherine: But not...

Philip: Consummate.

**They kiss, then...**

Catherine: **[Turning, moving away]** I have a lot of work to do...

Philip: You're the most terrifying woman I've ever met.

Catherine: ...the whole hillside, I want to groom it, clean it...

Philip: And the most attractive.

Catherine: ...watch the flowers multiply, establish colonies of iris, hyacinths, soft whispering colors, secret pathways, special places where I'll place my blue chairs...Do you like the blue chairs? **[Beat]** You don't like the blue chairs.

Philip: I don't give a shit about the blue chairs.

Catherine: Would you like to die with me?

Philip: **[Beat, as he studies her, then...]** Most of the time, my dear Catherine, if you really want to know... I don't quite believe that you exist. **[Beat]** You're, a dream...a...a... *I* exist. *Nell* exists, these *plants* exist... but you... ? I'm here, I see you, I'm with you, we talk, laugh, play with each other, kiss, and you tease me and arouse me and tempt me and I'm unbelievably happy and excited and alive... **[Beat]** And then I leave you and you disappear into a terrifying silence, and I reenter a world alone that is all too familiar and brutal and...and sad... **[Beat]** And I always assume that I'll never see you again. **[Beat]** Ever.

Catherine: I'm terrified, Philip.

Philip: I am too.

Catherine: I'm terrified that if I allow myself to feel what I feel about you in my heart, deep in my heart...you're the loveliest of men.

Philip: I'll never understand you. **[She turns away]**

Catherine: Neither will I.

Philip: I'm afraid you'll dismiss me, deny me, abandon me.

Catherine: Just walk away?

Philip: I'll call, and you won't answer, and I'll call again, and then days, weeks, months, and then... I'll see you coming toward me, and I'll wonder, my heart beating...

**Catherine has turned and has started walking slowly offstage...**

Philip: ...and we'll approach and you'll...pass right by, blindly, not seeing, not caring, dismissing the fact that at one time, for awhile, a lovely wonderful while, we were together...and in love.

**Philip watches as Catherine exits, and then, after a considerable pause, walks down stage, stands and pauses again, then ...**

Philip:

I came here one day... months had passed, and Nell had died, and Catherine and I continued to see each other, just like we had...but she hadn't called, and I... we'd always agreed that I'd call first, I wouldn't...surprise her...and...her car was here, parked as it always was... and I walked down the usual path... there was an ominous silence, and I... kept on walking down the hill...

**Long beat**

She'd been dead for...several days I guess...perfectly still... motionless.... cold grey white stone-cold, drained of color of heat of life. **[Beat]** I stood. I studied her face, eyes closed, mouth relaxed into a mask of... absolute... serenity. **[Beat]** She'd planted the lavender around her, the rosemary, the Russian sage... and the chairs...here, there, a gathering of empty blue chairs as witnesses...

**Long beat**

I folded my wings around her. **[Beat]** I held her. **[Beat]** And then I let her go.

**There's a slow fade as Philips stands, completely alone, isolated in the fading light, then...**

**Blackout**

**End of play**

January 2012