

WHOLE AGAINST THE SKY

a play by

PAUL DONNELLY

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

Linda Rheingold Bonner Dalton, Jack's sister, early forties

Greg Dalton, her husband, early forties

Dennis Sinclair, Jack's lover, then ex-lover, mid-forties

Jack Rheingold, late thirties

Mrs. Rheingold, his mother, mid-late sixties

Colin O'Boyle, his lover after Dennis, twenty-six

Setting

Act I: Mostly Mrs. Rheingold's house.
Cincinnati, Ohio.
Early April, 1993.

Act II: Mostly Jack & Colin's apartment.
Washington, DC.
Late April, 1995.

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**For Nalty,
"All I'll ever be
I owe you ..."**

**Once the realization is accepted that even between the
closest human beings infinite distances continue to exist, a
wonderful living side by side can grow up, if they succeed
in loving the distance between them which makes it
possible for each to see the other whole against the sky.**

- Rainer Maria Rilke

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WHOLE AGAINST THE SKY

ACT I

Scene 1

At rise:

A bare stage. LINDA is alone DR. GREG is C, facing her on one knee. DENNIS is also C facing JACK, who is alone DL. LINDA and JACK stare into the house.

LINDA

It seems like such a simple question ...

GREG & DENNIS (in unison)

Will you marry me?

JACK

This is not like him at all.

LINDA

Keep in mind, I have not seen him in a year and a half. Maybe more.

JACK

But he's obviously not joking.

LINDA

Not since the day he left to run up to Von's for fabric softener sheets. I guess I should have told him if they didn't have Bounce, I'd settle for Cling-free.

JACK

I never expected something like this.

LINDA

I went through the missing person report and the sleepless nights.

JACK

He is the most sane, controlled, rational man I've ever known.

LINDA

Finally, I had to get away.

JACK

Intimately.

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LINDA

What started out a weekend became a move to San Diego.

JACK

Where does something like this come from?

LINDA

Then one afternoon, as I'm dashing in off the beach at La Jolla ...

JACK

One knee, a ring ...

LINDA

Who do I run smack into?

JACK

... the whole bit.

LINDA

I couldn't speak. I couldn't breathe. I could only stare. He said:

GREG

Hey there.

LINDA

That was it.

GREG

Hey there.

LINDA

"Hey there?"

JACK

It was so out of character!

LINDA

Mouth wide open, bug-eyed, I must have been a vision.

GREG

Can I buy you a drink?

JACK

I guess I love him.

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LINDA

I have to be at work by three. I'm already running late.

GREG

After work?

JACK

I guess.

LINDA

How about breakfast? (GREG's eyes light up.) Tomorrow morning. I'll meet you somewhere tomorrow morning. For breakfast.

JACK

It's comfortable.

LINDA

I don't know what possessed me. I guess I thought time to think was going to help.

JACK

That should count for something.

LINDA

That's when he struck. Breakfast. Before I could get to any of the speeches I'd rehearsed. Before I could even ask any of the questions. There at a booth in a coffee shop at 8:30 on a sunny Tuesday in May, he opens with:

GREG

Will you marry me?

LINDA

What? How could you possibly ...

GREG

I figured I needed something bigger than "I'm sorry." .

JACK

I don't want to hurt him.

GREG

Will you? Marry me

JACK

And he kneels, Kneels! there, eyes just sparkling.

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LINDA

I do ... wha ... how could you even ...

JACK

Radiant with expectation ...

DENNIS

Will you marry me?

LINDA

What the hell? Yeah, I will.

JACK

Oh, honey. No. I'm sorry, but no.

BLACKOUT.

End of Act I, scene 1.

WHOLE AGAINST THE SKY

ACT I

Scene 2

Setting: The den of Mrs. RHEINGOLD's home.
Thursday evening, near midnight.

At rise: LINDA is alone on a sofa, reading contentedly, when JACK bursts in. He is dressed formally and eating Double Cream Oreos by the handful directly from the bag.

JACK

Well don't you look cozy. I don't think you ever looked so cozy when you lived here.

LINDA

Am I going to have to reach all the way over there for my tea.

JACK

I believe I hate you more at this moment than I have ever hated another person on this planet, Keith Barnes included.

Linda

I guess that takes care of "how was dinner?"

JACK

Which you missed because of the only flight you could have gotten? There being no possible way you could get a flight that would get you here in time for the rehearsal dinner?

LINDA

She brought it, didn't she?

JACK

What about me? What about my needs?

LINDA

You should've brought Dennis.

JACK

Don't be vulgar. Besides, I was specifically told not to.

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LINDA

Really?

JACK (nodding ruefully)

And I came anyway. This is especially sad since she truly doesn't give a good goddamn whether we're here or not. Would you believe there is no milk in this house?

LINDA

They did send us invitations.

JACK

Wait! WAIT! When did you become so all fired accommodating? "They did send us invitations?" Is that really how you want to learn your mother is getting married? By mail?

LINDA

It's not like it was a surprise.

JACK

So I'm the only one who was hurt she didn't call?

LINDA

If I needed to nurse grudges I wouldn't have wasted \$600 on airfare. I can brood at home for free. (a joke) Dear god, why are we here?

JACK

Hmmm. I wish "low self-esteem" wasn't such a cliché. These would be so much better with milk. Want one?

LINDA

No, thank you. If she has to make him the center of the universe to be happy, then I say more power to her.

JACK

Did you stumble across a 40 year old bottle of Milt-down or have you been dipping into Psycho's pharmacy?

LINDA glares at HIM.

JACK

What?

LINDA

Do you really need to snipe at Greg?

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JACK

I'm sorry.

LINDA

I'll bet.

JACK

We're never going to get through this if we turn on each other.

LINDA (after a beat)

Okay. I'm going to let that one go. But you take another shot at Greg and I'll clobber you. And I won't care where we are.

JACK

Perhaps we shouldn't sit together in church tomorrow. Ya never know when I'm going to feel puckish.

LINDA

It's been thirty-some years and I still think we should've left you in the orphanage and taken a little girl like I wanted.

JACK

Instead, you got the best of both worlds.

LINDA

Did you just open that bag?

JACK

Don't worry, I've got four more upstairs. And lots of M&Ms, plain and peanut. Help yourself. Oh, and 8 pints of Ben and Jerry's.

LINDA

Do you run 60 miles a day or what?

JACK

No, darling. I don't touch this crap at home.

LINDA

So, how was dinner?

JACK

He's a member of the Christian Coalition and the NRA. I was the only person in the room who didn't listen to Rush Limbaugh this morning.

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LINDA

Ouch.

JACK

No, "ouch" is the n-word. A word one doesn't hear in civil discourse back east. At all. Ever. Just hearing it is like a slap. I forget that here in the heartland folks toss it about with such an astonishing je ne sais quoi. It's amazing I don't have whiplash. This vast expanse between the coasts which my people call "the scary part in the middle" is even scarier up close and personal than viewed from a distance.

LINDA

And the food?

JACK

I wouldn't know. I wonder if she has instant milk anywhere?

LINDA

You wouldn't?

JACK

What?

LINDA

Instant milk!

JACK

Desperate times, desperate measures.

LINDA

You did the right thing, you know?

JACK

Whatever do you mean?

LINDA

Letting it all go. Not taking them on. It wouldn't have changed any minds and would have upset mom.

JACK

God love ya. In thirty-seven years I have picked up a few social skills. And some kind of word must have been gotten out. No one asked why I wasn't married.

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Yooo-hooo!
MRS. RHEINGOLD (from off)

The blushing bride returns.
JACK

Well there you are at long last.
MRS. Rheingold (entering)

Hi, Mom.
LINDA

Where did you get THOSE?
MRS. RHEINGOLD

On my way in from the airport this morning ...
JACK

If I had had any idea I would've gotten in milk. And those should be on a plate.
(to Linda.) I'm glad you've had the chance to change into something comfortable.
MRS. RHEINGOLD

No. This is what I've had on all day.
LINDA

Oh. I hope you had a sweater or a jacket. That blouse looks like it might be chilly on a plane.
MRS. RHEINGOLD

Well these are much too dry without milk. I hear some Cherries Garcia calling. Would anyone else like some ice cream?
JACK

No, thank you.
MRS. RHEINGOLD

I'll pass on the ice cream, but did you say you had M&M's?
LINDA

Sure do.
JACK

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LINDA
Why don't you bring back a bag?

JACK
Plain or peanut?

LINDA
Surprise me.

JACK
Mom?

MRS. RHEINGOLD
Nothing for me. Thank you.

JACK exits

MRS. RHEINGOLD
Do you think it's because he's a man?

LINDA
What's that, mom?

MRS. RHEINGOLD
That he can eat that junk and not gain weight?

LINDA
I don't know. Whatever it is, it's a secret he hasn't shared with me.

MRS. RHEINGOLD
You look just fine.

LINDA
Thanks. But freedom isn't the only thing that requires eternal vigilance.

MRS. RHEINGOLD
Let me tell you it doesn't get any easier ...

LINDA
Oh goody. So, am I allowed to see your dress before the service?

MRS. RHEINGOLD
There's not all that much to see. It's tea length, cream colored. The sleeves are bit fuller and flouncier than I usually wear, but Ken said he didn't want me in anything too tailored. What about you?

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LINDA

I brought two, a navy halter with a matching jacket and a green knit.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

I hope those will be warm enough. This isn't San Diego.

LINDA

I'm sure I'll be fine.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Were you going to wear your hair up or down?

LINDA

This is how I've worn my hair for all occasions for the last 25 years.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Well, I've got an appointment with Moira at 10 and she's holding the appointment after mine. Now don't take this the wrong way, but would you please, please let me treat you to a 'do?

LINDA (after a beat)

Sure. Thanks. If you'll swear to me that everyone will adhere to one condition.

JACK returns with a 1 lb bag of M&M's and a pint carton of Cherries Garcia from which he is spooning ice cream enthusiastically. HE tosses the bag of M&M's to LINDA.

JACK

Here you go.

LINDA

Thanks.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Are you eating that out of the carton?

JACK

It's the handy single serving size. Very convenient.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Did I miss Ohio's first earthquake?

JACK

No.

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MRS. RHEINGOLD

So every single dish in this house and for miles around has not been smashed?

JACK

No.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Then you march right back into the kitchen and put that ice cream in a dish.

JACK

Mother.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

I don't care how much you eat. But I do insist that you eat it from a bowl. You will not eat directly from a container as long as you're in this house.

JACK turns on his heel and exits.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

If I didn't know better I would swear he'd been raised by wolves. What was your condition?

LINDA

She can put up what's here, but she is not to cut it. I don't want a change. I don't want something smart or perky or au courant. I don't want something "appropriate for my age." I want to return home with the same hair I had when I left.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Moira would never do anything against your wishes.

LINDA

All right then. Since neither of us ever got to push bridesmaids around, I guess you're entitled.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Please don't misconstrue a simple offer.

LINDA

I'm not. I appreciate it. Thank you. (SHE tears open the bag of M&M's.) If I pour these into my left hand and eat them with my right do I get around the container rule?

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Don't be snide. There's nothing unreasonable about common civility.

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JACK returns with his ice cream in a bowl and a second empty bowl.

JACK

Quick, pour those in here before the wolves are slandered.

LINDA

Too late. If I eat enough of these my dress decision will be made for me. These are not knit-friendly.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Did you not get enough to eat at dinner?

JACK

I was too excited to eat.

MRS. RHEINGOLD looks extremely skeptical.

JACK

This is kind of a big deal. It's not every day a guy finds himself at his mother's wedding.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

I must say I'm feeling a little giddy myself.

JACK

Perhaps because you love this one?

LINDA (a warning)

Jack ...

JACK

That wasn't a criticism. It's obvious you love him.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Yes. I do.

JACK

And it's not a state secret that you and dad weren't exactly passion's darlings.

LINDA

Care for an M&M?

JACK

Not that you didn't give it a game try.

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LINDA

Don't you want to eat that ice cream before it melts?

JACK

And you were certainly the best parents two angry, disappointed people could have been.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

And to think we forgot to ask you to give a toast.

JACK

It struck me as odd that no one outside of Ken's family has a role in this little enterprise.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

That's because they all still live here.

JACK

And there you have it, geography is indeed destiny.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

I didn't realize it would cause so much offense.

JACK

No, really it's a relief.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Good.

JACK

I'll never have to worry about being asked to call him, "dad."

MRS. RHEINGOLD

No, you won't.

A phone rings.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Now who on earth could that be?

LINDA

Could be Greg, he wasn't home when I called earlier.

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MRS. RHEINGOLD

Of course.

LINDA

And he's not good with the time difference.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

It's really not that difficult if he'd only stop and think for a moment.

The phone rings, again.

JACK

Shall I get that?

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Excuse me. (SHE exits.)

One more ring, then silence.

LINDA

Maybe there's something in the air?

JACK

What?

LINDA

Or maybe she secretes some kind of tension producing pheromone?

JACK shrugs and plunges back into HIS ice cream.

After a beat, LINDA begins to hum or whistle "It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas."

When JACK recognized the melody, HE stops eating and smiles at HER. When SHE finishes a verse, LINDA gestures for JACK to join in. HE does.

Lights fade to BLACK as JACK and LINDA continue humming/whistling "It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas."

End ACT I, scene 2.

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WHOLE AGAINST THE SKY

ACT I

Scene 3

Setting: A bare stage.

At rise: Lights up on GREG.

GREG

I've heard that women who've had babies don't remember how much labor hurts until they're pregnant again. I guess that's how anyone has more than one. I know it's true about slitting your wrists. You forget how much it hurts until you try it a second time. It really hurts like a son of a bitch. I'm in awe of anyone who can pull it off. Cut that deep. Pull that hard. It's not as easy as you'd think.

See, about a quarter of the time I feel terrific. Soaring. Indestructible. I buy things. New model cars. Time shares. I start things. I get married.

Another quarter of the time I feel ... normal. I feel in the world. I respond. Bad things make me sad. Or angry. Good things make me happy. My feelings come from somewhere.

But fully half the time, I am struggling for my life.

I don't like the term "depression." Sounds too passive. I can live with "despair." I guess I do. For weeks at a time the urge is constant. I think what saves me is not having the energy. Still, every time I cross a bridge. Every moment I'm behind the wheel of a car. Standing at a curb watching traffic whiz by. Every waking moment is a moment of choice. Solitary. I don't mean to shut people out, but how do I explain? How can I think that anyone would believe me, never mind understand what it's like?

Linda and I made our only trip east for Billy's funeral. I never met Billy, never knew anyone with AIDS. We went for Jack. Billy had been sick for a long time and really sick -- thin, Jack said, and confused, legs so sore he couldn't walk -- for most of his final year. They had assembled quite a pharmacy. I was already squirreling pills before we came east, but at Jack's I grabbed some really good stuff: two kinds of morphine and percocet, and darvoset.

Shortly after we got back home, I went camping for a few days. I had the pills. I took the pills. I did throw up. But not everything. And not right away. I blacked out, a coma actually. The exposure came closer to getting me than the pills.

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When the hikers found me, I'd been out close to two days. I didn't have any I.D. on me, on purpose. But the labels on the pill bottles had Billy's name and address. So they called Jack, back east, from the emergency room. He called Linda.

It really broke her. She was so mortified she wouldn't let him come out. I had gone way up the coast. She had to drive seven and a half hours by herself to get to the hospital.

I think it would have made all the difference if I could have told her why. But I couldn't give her the only answer I had. How could I say to her, "because I just couldn't try my wrists again"?

BLACKOUT

End ACT I, scene 3.

WHOLE AGAINST THE SKY

ACT I

Scene 4

Setting: The RHEINGOLD den, three hours after scene 2.

At rise: LINDA is alone again, staring vacantly into space and picking distractedly at her bowl of M&M's. JACK enters, thoroughly disheveled.

She's finally asleep. JACK

Mmmm. LINDA

I said she's finally asleep. JACK

Yes, you did. Is Dr. Snyder gone? LINDA

Yeah. JACK

He never ages. LINDA

What? JACK

Dr. Snyder. He never looks older. We've been seeing him for what? -- 30 years? -- and he doesn't look much different than he did the first time I saw him. He must have started balding young. LINDA

I am exhausted. JACK (sitting)

You certainly pitched right in. LINDA

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JACK (shrugs)

A reflex. (a beat) What happened to you?

LINDA

Everything seemed under control. Nothing worse than a spectator when you're trying to treat someone in serious distress.

Jack stares.

LINDA

I'm not one for a busman's holiday?

JACK

It's odd that she's the last, isn't it? .

LINDA

The irony wasn't lost on me.

JACK

I'm sorry.

LINDA

Why?

JACK

The suddenness and all.

LINDA

Yes. I remember. I have to stay for the funeral, don't I?

JACK

Yeah. You probably should.

LINDA

I don't have anything to wear, y'know. I don't think the navy halter or the green knit will work.

JACK

There will be time to shop. I'm not about to wear a tux to a morning service.

LINDA

Will it really matter if I'm not there?

JACK

You know it will.

LINDA

Do you remember who was at Billy's service?

JACK

No. Not really. No. But there weren't the same kind of scorekeeping opportunities

LINDA

At least she didn't have to watch hers.

JACK

Die. If we're going to be snide, let's at least have the courage of our convictions.

LINDA

I did not mean it that way.

JACK

I'm not sure it works as a competitive event. "We're here at 1801 Glen Haven Lane for the widowhood Olympics! Only one contender in the distance event, but the competition is fierce in the mortality sprints!"

LINDA

That's not what I meant at all.

JACK

Okay.

LINDA

Think we should call Dad?

JACK

That will be a weird one: "Hi Dad. You haven't been working a voodoo doll lately, have you?"

LINDA

Would you like me to call him?

JACK

That might be the best idea.

LINDA

He'll probably be more authentically sorry than either of us.

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JACK

I'm not disputing the point, but why do you say that?

LINDA

I think he really wants her to be happy. He's a schlub, but he doesn't have a mean bone in his body.

JACK

Something that has never been said of either of us. Or did you mean that we don't want her to be happy?

LINDA

I can't speak for you.

JACK

You?

LINDA

You really want to know?

JACK

I'd rather know than guess.

LINDA

I don't think it matters to me one way or the other. I wouldn't do anything to make her unhappy or to interfere with her happiness, but her being unhappy doesn't particularly distress me.

JACK

I wish it mattered more. To me.

LINDA

Are you going to call Dennis tonight?

JACK

That can wait. I guess at some point I'll have to let him know that I'm not coming back Sunday.

LINDA

How angry would you be if I asked Greg to come out?

JACK

That's droll.

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LINDA

What?

JACK

He doesn't do weddings, but he does funerals?

LINDA

No. That's not it. By the time all the arrangements get made, I bet the funeral won't be 'til Tuesday. I don't want to be stuck here that long without him.

JACK (not carefully enough)

A week is a long time.

LINDA (shrugs)

He's heading into a patch ...

JACK

I'm sorry for that. I am. But then maybe you should be back in San Diego with him.

LINDA

Did it ever occur to you that I'm going to need his support?

JACK

I had no idea you were so attached to Ken.

LINDA (starts to leave)

Good night.

JACK

You can just hop down from that high horse, missy.

LINDA

Look, Greg is a fact of life. He's not going away because I don't want him to.

JACK

That's fine, you keep him. Just keep him away from me.

LINDA

You could have a little compassion.

JACK

After the way Billy struggled ... for him to ... Do you have any idea what a violation that was?

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LINDA

For me then.

JACK

I try.

LINDA

God damn it! He has never meant you a bit of harm.

JACK

Isn't that a comfort! Do you think mom meant to drive you away with all that nonsense after Alan died? Was that her intention?

LINDA

No.

JACK

And I can't help but think that if you had forgiven her you might have been in the bedroom with me and Dr. Snyder. Being her daughter and a nurse and all.

LINDA

All right ...

JACK

And lest we get too lost in pondering my disloyalty for not bending over and taking whatever poor, whacko Greg hands out, in that dark time some twenty years ago who joined you at Skyline Chili for Thanksgiving dinner?

LINDA nods at him.

JACK

Even though he was only a junior in high school and still living at home?

LINDA (smiling at the memory)

And you sent notes to the McCauley's, and Aunt Chessie, and Aunt Enid and Uncle Albert, and Aunt Joyce and Uncle Edgar telling them all precisely why you would not be home for Thanksgiving dinner, because you knew she wouldn't tell them the truth. You were my scout, my trouper, and my only ally in my darkest hour. Stick with me now. Greg's got his troubles, but I love him. And, yes, he loves me. Really.

JACK does not respond.

LINDA

Jack?

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JACK

You know what's so strange?

LINDA

I don't know. Do I?

JACK

Here's Greg with all these drawbacks--let me finish--you have a dozen reasons to bail and it doesn't even cross your mind. Why? Because, what ever it means to you, you love him. Now, Dennis is bright and considerate ...

LINDA

Oh dear ...

JACK

But, I don't love him.

LINDA

Did you think you did when you moved in with him?

JACK

I don't know. When he suggested living together, I thought "why not?"

LINDA

I never realized you were so malleable.

JACK

I didn't want to be alone anymore.

LINDA

Oh.

JACK

And I like him. I enjoy his company. I thought it would be enough.

LINDA

I'm sorry.

JACK

I've been in love and I don't love him.

LINDA

And you can't force it when it's not there, anymore than you can help it when it is?

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JACK

I know that nothing will ever be like it was with Billy, but how it is with Dennis isn't enough. .

LINDA

What are you going to do?

JACK

Let it drag on for years until we're living one of those Strindbergian horrors.

LINDA (nodding)

As long as you're happy.

JACK

Sometimes I think I was happy for a time and that's all the happiness I get.

LINDA

It was such a short time.

JACK

It was such happiness.

LINDA

I could have done the wedding, Jack. I don't know if I can do this.

JACK

What do you mean?

LINDA

The wedding was going to be happy and superficial. This brings everything roaring back. A horrible thing has happened to her, but I can't go to her side like you did. I can't get to auto-pilot. I saw her in that bed and I just wanted to shake her and yell, "See! See! See how it feels!"

JACK

I know.

LINDA

I watched Alan fall from that drain pipe. It was a stupid, juvenile stunt, but he didn't deserve to die for it.

JACK

Why have I lived my whole adult life away? So she couldn't get at me the way she got at you.

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LINDA

I'm glad you could learn from my sterling example.

JACK shrugs.

MRS. RHEINGOLD enters. SHE is subdued, but clear-eyed and alert. HER hair may be slightly awry. She is wearing an elegant robe over her nightgown.

LINDA

Mom?

JACK

Hey, you should be in bed ...

MRS. RHEINGOLD

I wasn't sleeping.

JACK

No.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

I was in a half-fog for a little while, but then I was just tossing and turning. I heard voices so I knew I wasn't the only one awake.

LINDA

But you should be ...

MRS. RHEINGOLD

I guess I'm too much of an elephant for even Dr. Snyder's elephant tranquilizers. (LINDA and JACK are unsure how to respond.) If you're not going to grant me a few brave little jokes this could be more unendurable than it needs to be.

JACK

I'm sorry.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

I've seen too much in my life to fall apart all at once. Stay clear of me after the funeral when there are no more public performances. (She does a little regal wave.) There's a great deal to be said for putting on one's game face.

JACK

Is there anything we can do?

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Tonight? MRS. RHEINGOLD

Or after? JACK

Perhaps a glass of wine. MRS. RHEINGOLD

Are you sure you should? LINDA

Excuse me? MRS. RHEINGOLD

The potential interactions ... LINDA

I can imagine worse things than dying in my sleep. MRS. RHEINGOLD

Let me get you a glass. LINDA

Thank you. I'm afraid I'm much too stuffy to drink it directly from the bottle. MRS. RHEINGOLD

Where will I find ... LINDA

There should be a bottle of white Bordeaux in the 'fridge. MRS. RHEINGOLD

Jack? LINDA

Yes? JACK (jumps)

Anything for you? LINDA

Oh. No, thanks. You want me to go? JACK

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No, I'll get it. LINDA

Are you sure? JACK

Absolutely LINDA

Fine. Great. JACK

If I put a pot of decaf on, will you have some? LINDA

Sure. JACK

Do you have decaf, mom? LINDA

Yes. The beans are in the freezer. The bags are all labeled. MRS. RHEINGOLD

I'll be right back. LINDA

Take your time. JACK (dryly)

LINDA exits.

Poor Jack. MRS. RHEINGOLD

Excuse me? JACK

Always drawing the short straw ... MRS. RHEINGOLD

No ... It's not ... JACK

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MRS. RHEINGOLD
Do you think she's happy?

JACK
Excuse me?

MRS. RHEINGOLD
Linda. In life? In her marriage?

JACK
Sometimes. As happy as people are. She still likes her work. She says she loves Greg.

MRS. RHEINGOLD
You doubt it?

JACK
No. I just don't see how it's possible.

MRS. RHEINGOLD
And you? Are you happy?

JACK
I'm not sad anymore. Does that count?

MRS. RHEINGOLD
I want you children to be happy. I really do. I'm sure it hasn't always seemed that way.

JACK
We're fine. Don't worry about us tonight.

MRS. RHEINGOLD
I know you didn't like Ken.

JACK
Mom ...

MRS. RHEINGOLD
His views were a little narrow. But he filled a room with his vitality.

JACK
I ... I ... don't have any idea what to say.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Who does? "I'm sorry." How many of those before I take the revolver out of my purse?

JACK

You don't ...

MRS. RHEINGOLD

A gift. With lessons and time on a range. I've become quite proficient.

JACK

I'm patting you down before we leave the house tomorrow.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

It's not a real danger. Once I had it out, I wouldn't know whether to turn it on the room or on myself.

JACK

It passes, you know. The numbness.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Is that a threat?

JACK

I'm just trying to help you be prepared.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Spare me the wisdom of your vast life experience.

JACK

Excuse me?

MRS. RHEINGOLD

I know you've had friends die and you're trying to make some kind of equation. Meaning, I have no doubt to be helpful.

JACK

Mom?

MRS. RHEINGOLD

I don't have the strength to be gentle.

JACK

When did you?

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MRS. RHEINGOLD

In my day, young men also saw their friends die. But it was in combat and they didn't speak about it endlessly.

JACK

Why are you attacking me?

MRS. RHEINGOLD

I am merely trying to nip in the bud any false analogies between your life experience and mine.

JACK

You know so little about my life ...

MRS. RHEINGOLD

It's become fashionable to equate hedonistic coupling with real marriage. I just want to be clear that I'm not having it here tonight.

JACK makes several efforts at speaking.

JACK (quietly, levelly)

I hope this is more excruciating for you than you can begin to imagine.

JACK exits.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

He must get that thin skin from his father.

MRS. RHEINGOLD begins carefully straightening the room.

LINDA returns with a glass of wine.

LINDA

Here you go. No need to go thirsty while the coffee brews.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Thank you.

LINDA

Where's Jack?

MRS. RHEINGOLD

He left.

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LINDA (confused)
Did he go to bed?

MRS. RHEINGOLD
I wouldn't know. He didn't say.

LINDA
Oh.

There is an awkward silence between them as
MRS. RHEINGOLD sips her wine.

LINDA
Is there anything I can do?

MRS. RHEINGOLD
I don't think so. Not tonight. I might ask you to run some errands with me
tomorrow.

LINDA
Of course. (a long beat) This must be a terrible shock, mom.

MRS. RHEINGOLD
I imagine it would be difficult to prepare for one's fiancé having a heart attack and
dying the night before one's wedding. At least his car hit an empty school yard
and not a crowded school bus.

LINDA
Hate to bust your bubble, but you're not going to drive me off as easily as Jack

MRS. RHEINGOLD (with sudden sincerity)
Why couldn't we have been that car together? Why am I still breathing when
there's no longer any reason to?

LINDA
I don't remember why. You just do.

MRS. RHEINGOLD
How fortunate I am to have such worldly-wise children!

LINDA
Look ... You've had a horrible shock.

MRS. RHEINGOLD
I'm sure your coffee must be ready by now.

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LINDA

I'm sorry, mom, I really am. This is just awful. It was clear how much you loved him, and he you. And the unspeakable timing ...

MRS. RHEINGOLD

We didn't even get to say good-bye. Nothing to be done for it, I guess.

LINDA

Jack and I have both been through this, y'know, we could help if you'd let us.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

I'm sure you mean that to be somehow comforting.

LINDA

Not that anything's going to help for a while.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Thank you. And thank your brother for me. I'm sure I'll be quite all right. Good night.

LINDA

Mom?

MRS. RHEINGOLD

There will be as much to do tomorrow and as many people around as if there were to be a wedding. Hairdressers appointments still to keep. I would like some time to myself.

LINDA

Good night, then. Please let me know if there's anything I can do. Wake me if you need anything ...

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Thank you.

LINDA

Even if it's just not to be alone.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

That's a great comfort, but I'm sure I'll be quite all right.

MRS. RHEINGOLD exits.

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Well shit.

LINDA

SHE sits and drains the glass of wine.

JACK enters with two mugs of coffee.

JACK

Black with sweetener?

LINDA

Yes, indeed! Thanks. (taking a sip) Did Snyder tell you what he gave her?

JACK

She's got a 'script for Xanax, but I don't know what was in the shot. Why?

LINDA

Trying to figure out why it didn't put her out.

JACK

I don't think her theory was so far off. She has the thickest hide in Christendom.

LINDA

Why haven't we inherited it?

JACK

Would you want it? Would you want to be leading her life?

LINDA

I wouldn't mind a touch of her confidence.

JACK

Well, I have bad news for you.

LINDA

Yes?

JACK

I'm leaving tomorrow morning.

LINDA

You can't be serious.

JACK

Serious as a heart attack.

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LINDA (disapproving)

This whole business is lots more amusing when mom's out of the room, isn't it?

JACK

As a matter of fact.

LINDA (after a beat)

Jesus! You bear her mark. Prickly. Rigid. Unyielding. You know what she's going through.

JACK

No. I have no idea what she's going through. Someone whose life has been an endless roundelay of hedonistic couplings couldn't imagine what real loss is like.

LINDA

That's harsh.

JACK stares at her waiting for the other shoe to drop.

LINDA (as it does)

Oh no. Did she

JACK (nods)

And yet you think I should stay?

LINDA

Yes, I do.

JACK

Why?

LINDA

You can't forgive Greg. You can't forgive mom ... It's going to get lonely up there on Olympus.

JACK

Half an hour ago you couldn't forgive her enough to be at her bedside, but now that it's in your interest, now that you want me to stay so you're not left here alone, now you're the chief spokeswoman for the Little Sisters of Mercy.

JACK starts to exit.

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Where are you going?
LINDA

To pack.
JACK

You're really going to do this?
LINDA

You know what's interesting?
JACK

What?
LINDA

This may be the least difficult thing I've done in my life.
JACK

Can't wait to get home and give Dennis the old heave ho?
LINDA

Looks like I'm not the only one who's my mother's daughter.
JACK

JACK tips his head and exits.

LINDA sits on the sofa, staring forward in disbelief as lights fade to BLACK.

End ACT I, scene 4

WHOLE AGAINST THE SKY

ACT I

Scene 5

Setting: A bare stage.

At rise: Lights up on DENNIS.

DENNIS

It's probably not healthy. Probably? I know it's not healthy. I know I can't ever let on or, dear god, let him know. I have to be really careful, to make sure I stay in control, but the truth is I can't stand not being with him. My life can now be broken into two parts, Being with Jack and A Sort of Dull Ache. And I mean being in the same room with him. Preferably touching him. Holding him. Stroking his hair. I'm left desolate when the contact is broken. If I didn't know he was pee shy, I'd have trouble letting him go to the bathroom alone.

He'd go berserk if he knew. And he'd be right, but there it is. The one remaining unmentionable lapse, obsession. The crime of feeling too much. I didn't choose this intensity or will it. I've certainly never felt anything like it. It's a miracle in a way, I know a kind of euphoria that a more measured love would never provide.

I knew even before I did it that the proposal was going to be a debacle, but I couldn't stop myself. It seemed like the only way to bring anything like what I really feel to the surface. I thought the black tie would help. And New Year's Eve would give it a sense of occasion.

I guess the only way to sustain the miracle is to keep it in, keep it mine. It's funny, the only way this kind of love can last is if no one knows it's there.

BLACKOUT

End ACT 1, scene 5.

WHOLE AGAINST THE SKY

ACT I

Scene 6

Setting: A gate in the east terminal of San Diego's Lindbergh Field. A week after scene 4.

At rise: GREG is standing by a bank of seats across from a gate. HE is holding single red rose. He is animated and fidgety, easily distracted by the crowd passing by.

LINDA enters, weary and disheveled. SHE spots HIM first, stops and watches HIM until HE notices HER.

Greg? LINDA (softly, to herself)

When HE sees HER, HE stands or stands still and smiles broadly. SHE crosses to HIM quickly.

Welcome home! GREG

LINDA
Thanks. And thanks for coming all the way up to the gate.

GREG
Sure. Glad to. Are you okay?

LINDA
No. I don't know. I think I will be now that I'm here. And you're here. Just let me hold you and feel that you're here and you're real.

GREG
I may be about 5 pounds more real than I was when you left! Left to my own devices I'm not a steamed vegetables and whole grains kinda guy.

LINDA
Thank you. Thank you. Thank you for being here.

GREG

Sure. Where else would I be?

LINDA

Nowhere. After the last week I guess I don't trust anything to go right, y'know?

GREG

Hey, you're home now. I'm gonna make it better. I promise.

LINDA

Swear to me, if I ever say I'm going anywhere near my mother again you will tackle me and hold me on the ground until the fit passes.

GREG

Scout's honor. I've got no problem with that one!

LINDA

And you brought me a flower! A rose. Thank you. You don't know how much I needed it to be like this. Thank you.

GREG

Hey, you want to just have a seat and chill for a few minutes? It'll be a while before your luggage gets to that carousel thing anyway ...

LINDA

Sure. That's a good idea.

THEY sit on an airport waiting room sort of seating unit.

GREG

It was pretty rough, hunh?

LINDA nods.

GREG

But you don't want to talk about it?

LINDA

You mind?

GREG

We gotta make a deal.

LINDA

What?

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GREG

If you're not going to talk about it, you can't think about it either. You don't do yourself any good brooding and pondering and whatever else it is that you do while not saying a word about what you're thinking.

LINDA

Sometimes it's hard to put into words.

GREG

Then you're probably not going to get anywhere thinking about it either.

LINDA

Without sounding like an idiot.

GREG

Nope. You have to take my deal. No thinking about it if you're not going to talk about it and tell me what you're thinking.

LINDA

Then it's going to be easier not thinking about it at all.

GREG

I hope you're not waiting for an argument from me.

LINDA

How?

GREG

Erase it. You're here not there. Leave what happened there, there. Send it back on the 2 o'clock plane!

LINDA

If you had been there ...

GREG

But I wasn't ...

LINDA

You'd understand.

GREG

What makes you think I don't understand? I bet I've got a pretty good read. You're going to be here in body and there in spirit for weeks, if I let you. And I really think that will be even less fun for you than it will be for me.

LINDA

Greg!

GREG

Look, babe, can you change anything that happened?

LINDA

No.

GREG

No matter how hard you think about it? No matter how you worry every detail to shreds?

LINDA

I said no.

GREG

Then what's the point?

LINDA

I don't know. The thoughts are just there.

GREG

Push them out. With thoughts of here and now and tomorrow and next week ...

LINDA

Y'know, when I'm feeling low, these Captain Sunshine phases of your's can be as exhausting as the Doctor Doom spells.

GREG

Don't go turning on me! This is exactly how it doesn't have to be. If you didn't leave the family poison back in Ohio, at least leave it here at the airport. Don't bring it home with you. Don't bring it into our house.

LINDA

Do we still live in the same house?

GREG

What?

LINDA

Sometimes when you're at your perkiest, you get a little impulsive. You've had a week, do we still live in the same house?

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GREG

Yes we still live in the same house. Once that happened. You weren't all the crazy about the apartment I moved us out of anyway. I thought it would make you happier moving closer to the beach.

LINDA

I'm sorry. It was a sweet thought. And a very nice apartment. Would have been nicer if it hadn't tripled our rent.

GREG

Didn't I work two jobs like I promised?

LINDA

For a few months.

GREG

Well, those seven-day, seventy-five hour weeks would have exhausted anyone!

LINDA

Probably.

GREG

And didn't I let you pick the next place?

LINDA

Yes.

GREG

So, see, it all worked out fine in the end and we got to live in that really nice apartment for almost six months! You shouldn't act like nothing ever works out. Things work out most of the time. Here.

LINDA

Okay.

GREG

Okay what?

LINDA

Okay anything. Okay everything. The one thing I do not want to do is pick a fight with you.

GREG

All right. Now I feel like you're really coming back to me.

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HE hugs HER. SHE continued leaning up against HIM.

LINDA

Our deal is I can think anything as long as I say it out loud, right?

GREG

Sure.

LINDA

Okay then, I'm terrified.

GREG

Of what, babe?

LINDA

You're all I have in this world. You're it. Are you up to that? Can I depend on you?

GREG

You bet. No more of the old stuff, I promise. I'll be here. I'll stick around.

LINDA

I hope so.

GREG

Hey. I love you. I know that hasn't always stopped me from being stupid. Real stupid. But none of that came out of not loving you. Knowing what it does to you ... did to you, I could never be that selfish again.

LINDA

Okay.

GREG

But you gotta be here, too. Your head has to stay here. We gotta be here for each other, y'know?

LINDA

Okay.

THEY sit holding each other in silence for a few beats.

LINDA

It's really good to be home. Really, really good.

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GREG

Think we should go check on your luggage?

LINDA

Yeah. Good idea. (as THEY are standing) Which car did you bring? Did you have a chance to get my front-end alignment checked?

GREG (walking downstage)

C'mere ...

LINDA (following HIM)

What?

GREG

Lemme see, is this the window you can see the parking lot from?

LINDA

Greg?

GREG

It sure is! C'mere ...

HE puts a hand on HER shoulder as SHE stands in front of HIM looking off.

GREG

Okay now, look at the parking lot. Third row over. Coming away from the terminal go the first light post. Okay, go four cars beyond. Facing this way.

LINDA

The black Infiniti?

GREG

Yup.

LINDA

What about it?

GREG (pressing keys into HER hand)

It's your's. Welcome home!

LINDA turns and stares at HIM, with more curiosity than anger.

GREG

You're welcome? (a beat) Ask me how. C'mon, ask me how and you'll feel better.

LINDA

Somehow I doubt it.

GREG

I quit my job!

LINDA (right on the edge)

Well that explains how we can afford a forty thousand dollar car. We'll use your unemployment checks to cover the payments. Why did I ever worry?

GREG

Wait. You're a step ahead and on the wrong road. I'm doing something else.

LINDA

You're not dealing again, are you?

GREG

Talk about lack of faith! I haven't dealt in ... oh, fifteen years. (LINDA glares at HIM.) All right. But I really haven't dealt since we got married.

LINDA

That had damn well better be true.

GREG

It is. It is. Really. Sheesh. You're not taking this very well!

LINDA

What are you doing now?

GREG

I'm working for the Infiniti dealer. I'm selling cars! It's perfect. It's what I was born to do. I was wasted trying to work in an office. I love this. C'mon, admit it, I was born to schmooze.

LINDA (beaten)

You were born to schmooze.

GREG

This is something I'm good at. I'm great with people. I have a gift for sales. In my first week, I already almost sold two cars.

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LINDA

That's sounds wonderful. I'm sure this will be the answer for you.

GREG

You bet. It just feels so right.

LINDA

Look, I'm really tired. Can we, please, get my luggage and go home?

GREG (as THEY begin walking off)

Sure, babe. But you gotta drive it home. Until you actually drive it, you won't believe how good it can be.

LINDA

I may not believe it even then.

GREG

You're such a worrier! Wait 'til the commission checks start rollin' in. And wait 'til you see the look on people's face when you pull into the staff parking lot in ...

BLACKOUT

End ACT I, scene 6.

WHOLE AGAINST THE SKY

ACT I

Scene 7

Setting: A bare stage.

At rise: JACK is alone.

JACK

Sometimes I wish I could talk about Billy without it making people so uncomfortable. I've learned to edit. He's dead, but that doesn't mean he's gone from my life. I feel suffocated by this gauzy wrap of silence.

From the very start we were one of those mutually inclusive, all I'll ever need is you, kind of couples. We absorbed one another. We were us, whole and complete and separate from the rest of the world.

And now that they're all I have, I really need to talk about the memories ... to honor them, to keep that much of him alive. The strangest things stay with you. Stupid as it sounds, the worst moments with Billy, the times I really lost it while he was still alive, were the parking tickets. I came to see the parking tickets as god's way of giving the blade a little extra twist.

I got a parking ticket at an expired meter on our block. Why was I at an expired meter on our block? Because I had run home on my lunch hour, as I did every day, to bring in his lunch and make sure he took the right meds. I didn't think I'd need more than twenty minutes, so I only put a quarter in the meter.

Unfortunately, this was the first day his legs failed him completely, the first time I found him lying on the bedroom floor in his own ... It took me more than twenty minutes to calm him down and clean him up and clean the rug and throw on a load of laundry. So, take me out and shoot me and burn the worthless corpse, I forgot about the parking meter!

I got another ticket for parking too near an intersection while I was walking him across the street to his doctor's office. It was the closest space I could find, it was just before the wheelchair but long after he could walk half a block unescorted.

I got one for \$50 for ignoring some restriction in a commercial area because I finally parked illegally, after spending 25 minutes looking for a legal space, so I could run into this little Greek carry-out he liked and pick up some kind of falafel burger or something. He was in a middle eastern phase. He had a long chinese phase. And a regrettable pizza phase. Tomato sauce is a bitch to clean on the rebound.

See, eating had become so difficult for him that anytime he expressed an interest in any kind of food you better believe that food appeared. He used to say that since he ended up tasting everything twice he wanted to really enjoy it going down.

What's my theme here? That I was struggling, really struggling, to do everything I could for Billy and keep my head above water in the rest of life. I was doing my very best, and not only did he just get sicker and more miserable, but all I had to show for my pains were the fucking parking tickets!

"The Day Jack Snapped," then I'll stop. The first time he got sick I swore to him, SWORE to him that whatever else happened, I would make sure he got to die at home. Of course that was before the dementia, and the neuropathy, and the incontinence. We, me and the visiting nurses, were changing his ... diaper ... eight and ten times a day. Some nights he would get confused and forget he couldn't walk and get up to go to the bathroom and fall and soil his ... diaper ... while lying on the bedroom floor as I slept away in our bed. I tried to keep up, but sometimes I was so exhausted I didn't feel him stir in time. I couldn't even keep him clean, never mind comfortable or well. He finally got so dehydrated I had to put him in the hospital. At the advice of his doctor and the hospital social worker, I moved him from the hospital directly to a nursing home.

Re-hydrated and getting much better care, he rallied a little. Enough to want to come home. He was really insistent. For a few days I kept explaining how much better off he was ... there. One night I was getting ready to leave and I hugged him, but when I went to kiss him he turned his head away. I pulled back, but kept holding him. When he finally turned back to face me, there were tears just streaming down his cheeks as he said, "What did I do? Why don't you want me to come home?"

And I thought, "Fuck you, god. Fuck you with a cheese grater. I do not deserve this. This is just plain over the line."

And to Billy I said all the right things and I stayed another hour and he was much better when I left. I, on the other hand, was a wreck. I couldn't tell you how I held it together to get one foot in front of the other to get to the car.

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There was enough light in the parking lot that I could see it from halfway across the lot. Not the car. The vile little pink rectangle on the front window. And I let out a howl and fell to my knees. I can't tell you quite what came after that. Evidently I "troubled deaf heaven with my bootless cries" for several minutes at a high volume and with great expressiveness.

One of the nurses we really liked came up to me as I was winding down and put her hand on my shoulder. "Mr. Rheingold," she said, "would you like to come in and lie down for a few minutes?" I shook my head. "Are you talking to anyone about what you're going through?" (shakes his head) "You really need to. Some of the social workers here are quite good. I could steer you to one of the good ones. Or someone in private practice, if you have the insurance." I nodded.

And what did I say? "Billy didn't see any of this, did he?" "No. His window faces the side street."

I assured her I'd be just fine. That I'd go home and get some rest and get a referral from my insurance company. When I walked up to the car, in the private nursing home's private parking lot, I discovered that the pink rectangle on the windshield was only a promotion for a local video store.

Lights fade to BLACK.

End ACT I, Scene 7.

END ACT I.

WHOLE AGAINST THE SKY

ACT II

Scene 1

Setting: JACK and COLIN's apartment. Nearly noon on a Saturday, two years later.

At rise: In the darkness we hear the immortal Shirley Bassey's cover of "Never, Never, Never." Loud. Lights come up to reveal COLIN alone in the apartment, vacuuming. HE is dressed for a morning of domestic chores and has the CD player cranked to be heard over the vacuum.

MRS. RHEINGOLD enters and approaches the apartment somewhat tentatively. Hearing the music stops her cold for a few beats. As the song continues, COLIN becomes progressively less engaged in vacuuming and more engaged in mouthing the lyrics. By the time Ms. Bassey reaches:

You make me laugh,
You make me cry,
You make me live,
You make me die for you.
You make me sing,
You make me sad,
You make me glad,
You make me mad for you.

COLIN will have shut off the vacuum, picked up an attachment to use as a "mic" and built to full-fledged lip synching.

Hearing the vacuum go off emboldens MRS. RHEINGOLD to approach the door. SHE knocks toward the end of:

I love you, hate you
Love you, hate you
But I want you
'til the world stops turning.

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COLIN is startled by the knock and reflexively turns the vacuum back on. HE immediately realizes HIS error, shuts off both the vacuum and CD player and goes to the door.

COLIN

Just a sec. (opening the door) Did you forget your keys? (seeing MRS. RHEINGOLD)
Oh! Excuse me. May I help you?

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Is this Mr. Rheingold's residence?

COLIN

Yes, it is.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Is he in?

COLIN

No, he's not.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Oh.

COLIN

Is there something I can help you with?

MRS. RHEINGOLD

I am his mother.

COLIN

Oh?

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Yes?

COLIN

Well ...

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Yes?

COLIN

Was he expecting you?

MRS. RHEINGOLD (pushing past him into the apartment)

No. My visit is a bit of a surprise.

COLIN

Oh. Would you like to come in? He should be back ... (checks HIS watch) ... soon. He was only going to the gym and to run a few neighborhood errands.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Thank you.

MRS. RHEINGOLD has lots of luggage.

COLIN

Here, let me give you a hand with those.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Thank you.

MRS. RHEINGOLD steps into the apartment and allows COLIN to bring in all the luggage. MRS. RHEINGOLD rifles through her purse and produces a five dollar bill which SHE offers to COLIN.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Thank you, so much.

COLIN

Oh no, ma'am. Thank you, but I couldn't ...

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Please ...

COLIN

No, really ...

MRS. RHEINGOLD

I would feel so much better ...

COLIN

I don't think it would be a good idea.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

And why not?

COLIN

Well ... I don't think ... ah, Mr. Rheingold ... would like it.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Then it can be our little secret. Mr. Rheingold doesn't have to know everything, does he?

COLIN

It's really not a good idea ...

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Please. I would feel so badly if you didn't ...

COLIN (finally)

Thank you.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

You're welcome. (after a few awkward moments) I don't mean to hold you up ...

COLIN

That's okay. I'm almost done.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

This room is immaculate.

COLIN

Thank you.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Is this how you make your living?

COLIN

No, ma'am. I'm a waiter.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

How admirable.

COLIN

Ma'am?

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Holding a second job shows industry. We'd live in a better world if more young people were industrious.

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COLIN

There's a spare bedroom. Maybe I could put your things back there?

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Have you finished in there?

COLIN

Yes, ma'am.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Perhaps I could be out of your way while you finish up..

COLIN

Sure. I guess. (Picking up HER bags) Back this way.

MRS. RHEINGOLD follows HIM off. COLIN returns almost immediately, shaking HIS head. HE resumes vacuuming. HE glances back toward the hall and becomes somewhat perturbed. HIS vacuuming becomes more animated

MRS. RHEINGOLD returns, watches HIM for a moment, then tries unsuccessfully to get HIS attention with little waves. COLIN finishes vacuuming and bends to shut off the vacuum. As soon as HE does, MRS. RHEINGOLD speaks, startling HIM.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Excuse me.

COLIN(gasps)

OH MY GOD! Sorry. You gave me a start ...

MRS. RHEINGOLD

I'm sorry.

COLIN

I'm not used to people sneaking up on me. I mean, I'm used to being alone while I'm cleaning.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

I'm sorry. I was just wondering if you knew if Mr. Rheingold had any guest towels. I've been traveling since very early this morning and would dearly love to freshen up.

COLIN

Sure. They're in that small closet next to the guest room

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MRS. RHEINGOLD looks at HIM expectantly.

COLIN

Oh. Why don't I go get you some towels?

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Thank you.

COLIN returns quickly with a washcloth and hand towel.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

These are lovely. All this embroidery! There's hardly anyplace to actually dry your hands. I don't suppose he would have anything less ... anything simpler.

COLIN (coolly)

Why don't I see?

MRS. RHEINGOLD

I don't mean to be any trouble.

COLIN

Not at all.

COLIN returns less quickly with a plain terry washcloth and a plain terry hand towel of different and uncomplimentary colors.

COLIN

Sorry, there's a lot of embroidery back there.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

These will do just fine. Thank you.

COLIN

You're welcome.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

You'll excuse me?

COLIN

Of course.

MRS. RHEINGOLD exits.

COLIN busies himself packing up the vacuum and putting it away.

JACK approaches the door briskly. He juggles a gym bag, a week's dry cleaning and shirts for two, a bottle of wine, a Starbucks Coffee bag, and a small sack of books as he digs out his keys and unlocks the door.

JACK

Hi sugar.

COLIN

Hello. (a kiss) Here, let me get some of this.

JACK

The shirts would probably be best, and the dry cleaning ...

COLIN

Sure. Got it. ... What's in the bag?

JACK

It's finally warm enough for Second Story to have sale tables out on the sidewalk!

COLIN

Oh goody!

JACK

What?

COLIN

Am I going to regret letting you out unsupervised?

JACK

I didn't even spend \$20!

COLIN

Since when was money an issue? Where are we going to put them?

JACK

I'll find places.

COLIN

That's reassuring!

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JACK

It's always a treat to come home to the spawn of Martha Stewart and Ilsa, She-Wolf of the SS.

COLIN

I don't know, Martha might kinda work with thigh-boots and a whip.

JACK

My own Tom of Finland with a touch of chintz?

COLIN

Who?

JACK

Never mind.

COLIN

What?

JACK

Clearly before your time.

COLIN

You need a new obsession.

JACK

You're resigning?

COLIN

That remains to be seen.

JACK

What?

COLIN

Is there something you forgot to mention this morning?

JACK

I don't want to play this game.

COLIN

Were you expecting company?

JACK

No.

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COLIN doesn't move.

JACK

What?

Sound of a toilet flushing.

JACK

What was that? I mean I know what that was. Who's in there?

COLIN (matter-of-fact)

Your mother.

JACK

What?

COLIN

Your mother.

JACK

That's not funny!

COLIN

You're preachin' to the choir, babe.

JACK

You're not kidding?

COLIN

Oh no, Mr. Rheingold. Not a bit. And, just for the record, she thinks I'm the maid.

JACK

Please be joking.

COLIN

She tipped me for bringing in her luggage.

JACK

Luggage?

COLIN

Lots of luggage. I earned the five dollars.

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JACK
Oh god! What is she doing here?

COLIN
Like I would know?

JACK
I want to die.

MRS. RHEINGOLD (entering)
Jack!

JACK
Mom?

MRS. RHEINGOLD
Hello, dear

JACK
To what do we owe the honor?

MRS. RHEINGOLD
Don't you think a visit is overdue?

JACK
Unannounced?

MRS. RHEINGOLD
A mother assumes she's always welcome.

JACK
So I see.

MRS. RHEINGOLD
Perhaps we should wait and have our conversation after this nice young man is done and can go home.

JACK
This nice young man is home.

MRS. RHEINGOLD
Oh?

JACK
Colin lives here. This is our home.

MRS. RHEINGOLD
I'm sorry, I had no idea.

JACK
No.

MRS. RHEINGOLD
It's really not something to be ashamed of.

COLIN
WHAT?

JACK
Where did that come from?

MRS. RHEINGOLD
Why else would you keep it a secret?

JACK
It's no secret to anyone who's a part of my life.

MRS. RHEINGOLD
Was this an adoption?

JACK
Excuse me?

COLIN
So that's where the age thing comes from!

JACK
Not now. Please.

COLIN
Right. Sorry. You know what's really wrong here?

JACK
What's that?

COLIN
We can't get married, but we still have to deal with mothers-in-law.

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MRS. RHEINGOLD
It cuts both ways.

JACK
Whatever do you mean?

MRS. RHEINGOLD
I don't get grandchildren, but I still have to put up with mother-in-law jokes.

COLIN laughs. HE stops when HE realizes HE is the only one laughing.

COLIN
Sorry. I thought it was funny.

JACK
Clearly.

COLIN
Well. I hear a shower calling. I think I'll just ...

JACK
I think that's a swell idea.

COLIN
Mrs. Rheingold, it's been ... something ... meeting you.

MRS. RHEINGOLD
Oh. I'll still be here when you get out. I expect to be here for some time.

JACK
I beg your pardon?

MRS. RHEINGOLD
I intend to stay with you for some time.

COLIN
That would explain the luggage.

JACK
From out of the blue?

MRS. RHEINGOLD
I thought the element of surprise would work in my favor.

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JACK
Why?

MRS. RHEINGOLD
It worked for Greg with your sister.

JACK
Oh god!

MRS. RHEINGOLD
She admits that if he hadn't "ambushed" her they would never be married.

JACK
I don't even know how to respond to that.

MRS. RHEINGOLD
You could say, "Mother, welcome to my home."

JACK
When you barge in unheralded, uninvited, and ...

MRS. RHEINGOLD
I'm your mother, not the Fuller Brush Man.

JACK
Oh, I've got a firm grasp on that distinction. There's a possibility the Fuller Brush Man might have something I need.

MRS. RHEINGOLD
You seem like a respectful young man. Do you speak to your mother this way?

JACK
Ooooooh.

MRS. RHEINGOLD
What now?

JACK
That was your biggest tactical error yet.

MRS. RHEINGOLD
Why?

JACK
Do you want to take this or should I?

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COLIN

I haven't spoken to my mother since the day I turned 18.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Did she give some particular offense, or are you merely a slave to fashion?

COLIN becomes very still. JACK puts a hand on HIS arm.

COLIN

It's okay. My parents divorced when I was 8. My father was gay. My mother was bitter. Very bitter.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Surely you can see she had some right to be?

COLIN

Certainly. If Jack ever came home and announced he had found the girl of his dreams, I would murder him in his sleep.

JACK

We're in the clear on that one.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

But I still don't see your mother's transgression.

COLIN

My father was diagnosed with AIDS in 1985 when I was sixteen. He barely made it a year. He was in the hospital the last seven weeks. It was harrowing. Mom did everything she could to make it worse. He had limited visitation: every other weekend, two non-sequential weeks in the summer, and half-a-day on my birthday. She would only let me visit the hospital when he had custody. She hated him so much she couldn't even see that I existed.

JACK

You don't have to ...

COLIN

So I only saw him every other weekend, even while he was really sick. His timing was bad. He died on a Thursday. Custody would have started the next day. I hadn't seen my father in twelve days when he died.

JACK

You really don't have to

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COLIN

I hated her with my whole heart and soul that day and I have hated her with my whole heart and soul every day since. I knew it was useless to fight, too late to get anything that could matter, so I kept it all to myself. The day I turned 18 I left her house at 12:01 am and I left a note that made it clear I would never be back.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

It sounds as though you may have done her a favor.

COLIN

Could be. I saved the big news. I never bothered coming out to her.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Sparing her?

COLIN

I thought I should have sex with a man and be sure that I liked it before I made any grand pronouncements. (a beat) Now that we've paid this little visit to my very favorite topic, I really need that shower.

JACK

Good idea.

JACK takes COLIN's hand for a moment as HE passes to exit.

COLIN (after a beat)

Thanks.

JACK releases COLIN's hand and HE exits.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

He's rather intense, isn't he?

JACK

What are you doing here?

MRS. RHEINGOLD

We never were much for chit-chat, were we?

JACK

What are you doing here?

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Moving in.
MRS. RHEINGOLD

Ha. Ha. What are you doing here?
JACK

That wasn't in jest.
MRS. RHEINGOLD

I'll have you committed first.
JACK

That would be worth the price of admission!
MRS. RHEINGOLD

Oh really?
JACK

I can afford much better legal representation.
MRS. RHEINGOLD

So you're not destitute?
JACK

Far from it.
MRS. RHEINGOLD

Then I can recommend any number of lovely hotels ...
JACK

No, thank you. Although, I hadn't factored in ...
MRS. RHEINGOLD

Colin.
JACK

Colin. I had no idea you were ... sharing your life with someone, again. If I had known I might have gone to your sister's first. But I'm here now, so I may as well stay and see how things play out.
MRS. RHEINGOLD

Mom, hear me, this is out of the question.
JACK

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MRS. RHEINGOLD
Would you really put me out?

JACK (after a long beat)
What is this really about?

MRS. RHEINGOLD
We haven't enjoyed one another in a very long time.

JACK
No.

MRS. RHEINGOLD
But we did, once.

JACK does not respond.

MRS. RHEINGOLD
When you and Linda were children.

JACK
We were fed and clothed ... and we weren't beaten.

MRS. RHEINGOLD
Don't be facile. I loved you children very much and you knew it. I will grant that, as I became lost in my own disappointment, I began to find everything disappointing. What love I felt was expressed awkwardly, if at all. But I have always loved you. I love you today. I want to make it possible for you to love me again, too.

JACK
Ball's in your court.

MRS. RHEINGOLD
It will take time. And proximity. At Christmas I remembered something you said after the rehearsal dinner. "And there you have it, geography is indeed destiny."

JACK
Hoist on my own petard.

MRS. RHEINGOLD
Sally and Ken Jr. and Audrey all made an effort to make me feel a part of their family. And they were lovely, including me in everything. But every family event with them made me more aware of what I don't have with you and Linda. I knew the only way to set things right was to move closer ...

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JACK

Closer maybe, but not in!

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Well not permanently ...

JACK

How long did you have in mind?

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Until we find our footing. Until we are connected again ...

JACK

Connect with this. Your little program shows enough arrogance and presumption to prove that nothing has changed that would make you welcome in my life. This geriatric Barney act, "I love you, and you love me, and we're a happy family," doesn't impress me for a second.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

You have certainly inherited all my sharpness.

JACK

You have read me right in one regard. I can't just put you out. You would never have put me out.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

No.

JACK

Unless, of course, Ken had not died. Then he would have put me out and you wouldn't have stopped him.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

We'll never know, will we?

JACK

You've gone to a lot of trouble to come here, I can't ignore that. You're welcome to stay tonight. But I will need to consult with Colin before offering more than that.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

That way Colin and Ken can be the villains and we'll never have to be responsible to one another.

JACK

You can leave now if that's not acceptable. Not throwing you out tonight is not the same as inviting you to stay.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

I understand.

JACK

You'll have to fend for yourself for dinner. Colin and I have plans. There are several very nice restaurants within a few blocks. I'll mark them off on a map for you. I think we have a menu for some kind of delivery service if you'd prefer that.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

I'll decide that later.

JACK

That's fine.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Don't let me interfere with your day. I'm going to go in to do a little unpacking. (a look from JACK) Just a little.

JACK

There's space in the closet, if you need to hang anything.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Thank you.

JACK

And the top two drawers of the dresser are empty.

MRS. RHEINGOLD approaches JACK and kisses his cheek gingerly. HE neither pulls away nor responds. They look at each other for several beats, then MRS. RHEINGOLD exits slowly. HE remains still as lights fade to BLACK.

End Act II, scene 1.

WHOLE AGAINST THE SKY

ACT II

Scene 2

Setting: A circular rack of women's swimsuits.

At Rise: LINDA is working her way around the rack. HER hair is cut in a very flattering style. While subtle, HER makeup and accessories also contribute to a more deliberate, "put together" look.

LINDA

Why is it, no matter how many you already own, you have to have a new bathing suit to take on vacation? I'm sure I'm not the only one ... Waiting until the last minute may be less universal. We leave in two days and I'm working two twelve hour shifts between now and then.

My husband is taking me to Hawai'i. (a small laugh) There was a time when that would not have been good news. I'm still not used to the idea that it is. There's a well entrenched reflex that makes me suspicious. That makes me wonder when I'll get the bill and what form it will take. (She is very still.) It's such a miracle to look up for the other shoe and see only sky. Day after day.

You wouldn't think it could be so hard to adjust to happiness. That's an odd thing to be complaining about, isn't it? Let me be absolutely clear, this way is a whole lot better than the other. I just wish it wasn't so disorienting.

The next time someone says to you, "money isn't everything" or "money can't buy happiness," smack 'em. Really. Just give them the flat of your palm. Because they're giving you fertilizer. It's manure I used to spread myself. It's a defense you put up when you don't believe you'll ever have money. If know you can't have something, you can't allow yourself to believe it matters.

Let me tell you, money matters. Money is everything. Greg and I are living proof that money can too buy happiness. Two years ago, I couldn't have been much more miserable. Today, I'm surrounded by more happiness than I can absorb. What's the only difference in our lives? We didn't have money then and now we do. That change changed everything else. It has even modulated his mood swings. I don't know what stronger proof there can be. It's not something I want to believe. I know how shallow I sound. But I can't deny the truth of my own experience, can I?

Lights fade to BLACK.

End ACT II, scene 2.

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WHOLE AGAINST THE SKY

ACT II

Scene 3

Setting: JACK and COLIN's apartment, a little after 1 am.

At Rise: The apartment is dark. COLIN and JACK approach in formal wear, ties undone and shirts mostly unbuttoned. JACK opens the door, COLIN precedes HIM in and turns on a lamp to provide soft illumination. JACK approaches HIM and THEY kiss.

COLIN
I'm really glad I took tonight off.

JACK
I'm really glad you took tonight off.

COLIN
Who knew a political dinner could be fun?

JACK
Perhaps you'll believe me in the future? I'll warn you when it's a matter of dreary obligation.

COLIN
Okay.

THEY kiss again.

JACK
May I have this dance?

COLIN
That would be nice.

COLIN removes his jacket and kicks off his shoes while JACK selects a CD, puts it in the player and turns the volume down. JACK slips off his jacket and kicks off his shoes crossing back to COLIN. The music is a lush orchestral cover of Gershwin's "Embraceable You." THEY dance well together.

JACK
You are so beautiful.

COLIN

I'm on to you, y'know.

JACK

What do you mean?

COLIN

You're just saying that so I'll sleep with you.

JACK

Please don't tell me it isn't going to work!

COLIN

Has it failed yet? (JACK smiles and shakes his head.) Besides my dazzling beauty, what do I contribute to the household?

JACK

I bet "youth" is not the answer you're looking for.

COLIN (pummeling HIM playfully on the chest)

You are just horrible!!

JACK takes hold of COLIN's wrists and pulls him into a full-blown clinch. As THEY heat up, THEY begin pulling one another's shirts off without parting lips.

A light comes from off and MRS. RHEINGOLD appears behind them.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Oh! Oh, dear. Excuse me.

JACK tenses, COLIN peers over his shoulder.

COLIN

Good evening, Mrs. Rheingold.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

I am so sorry. I was just on my way to the bathroom and I saw the light ... I'm sorry.

JACK (without turning to face HER)

It's okay, mom. Just go on where you were going.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Of course. Good night. Excuse me. (and SHE is off.)

JACK freezes.

COLIN
Come on now.

JACK
I'm sorry.

COLIN
It's really no big deal.

JACK shuts off the music.

COLIN
I guess we're done dancing.

JACK
She won't stay in the bathroom the rest of the night.

COLIN
It's bad enough you let her stay. You don't have to let her ruin this ...

JACK (insincerely)
Of course not.

COLIN
We can lock the bedroom door. She'll need an ax to get to us. Not that I don't think she carries one, but at least we'll have some warning if she has to break down the door.

JACK smiles.

COLIN
Come on. I'll show you some more mounts I learned as a bike messenger.

COLIN leads JACK off as lights fade to BLACK.

End Act II, scene 3.

WHOLE AGAINST THE SKY

ACT II

Scene 4

Setting: A bare stage.

At Rise: DENNIS, older and worn, is alone on stage.

DENNIS

I don't know why people speak of "the end," as though it was an event. It's never a matter of (snaps HIS fingers) and it's over. Maybe it was for Jack, I really don't think so. He did too much planning for one thing. When he told me he was moving out, he meant that day. He had another place rented, a furnished one. All he had to take that first night were his clothes.

I have an Irish friend who uses a lovely expression, "like a hammered-sheep." That was me for ten days or so, all day, everyday, I was a hammered-sheep. Then I became a miserable failure. After about two months Rose asked me, "Aren't you furious? Don't you hate him? I haven't heard you say a word against him." And I hadn't. Because it hadn't occurred to me to be angry. "He left because I wasn't good enough" fit my sense of the natural order of things.

People got the sequence wrong when they said that I drank because I missed Jack. If drinking didn't exactly make me miss him, then it unleashed the need to act on missing him. Three or four nights a week I was getting blasted and going to his new apartment and standing in the bus stop across the street looking up at his windows. I wasn't looking to see anything in particular. I just watched the lights go on or off. It sort of spoiled things if I actually saw him. It was better just seeing the light in the windows. I don't think that was stalking exactly. I never contacted him. Never asked for anything. Never expected anything.

After a couple of months, Rose told me I could get my drinking under control, I could get into a rehab, or I could get out of her life. I knew she was right and I stopped. I can't imagine what she would have said if she had known everything I was doing. Jack moved after six months, into the place he has now, and started seeing Colin a few months later. It's a really good thing Rose got to me before then. I don't think my getting drunk, lurking out front, and watching him bring Colin home would have been good for anybody.

Lights fade to BLACK.

End ACT II, scene 4.

WHOLE AGAINST THE SKY

ACT II

Scene 5

Setting: JACK and COLIN's apartment, a little after 8 am.

At Rise: The dawn's early light, as it were. A slightly bleary and totally disheveled COLIN, enters wearing only a pair of ratty old running shorts. HE goes to the front door and brings in a newspaper, which HE rifles through quickly and sets down before heading off to the kitchen.

MRS. RHEINGOLD enters as noisily as possible. Seeing no one in the living room SHE calls out.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Hello?

COLIN (from off)

Just a sec. I'm starting the coffee. Maid. Cook. Love slave.

MRS. RHEINGOLD takes the front section of the paper and begins to read. COLIN emerges from the kitchen.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Good morning.

COLIN

Good morning.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Is Jack up?

COLIN

Not yet. But if I haven't lost my touch he will be soon. I'm making a whole pot of coffee, so you're welcome to a cup if you drink it.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Thank you, I do.

COLIN

Great. But don't get too attached to that paper. You can keep the front page and definitely the real estate listings, but I'll need Outlook, Style, Arts, Book World, Metro, and, believe it or not, Sports. The Sunday ritual chez Jacques et moi is to spend the morning in bed with coffee and the paper and each other.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

That sounds cozy.

COLIN

I told Jack if that ritual were altered even slightly this morning I would be the one packing ...

MRS. RHEINGOLD

By all means, carry on. I want to be a part of his life, I don't want to alter it.

COLIN

Yeah, right.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Aren't you chilly?

COLIN

Nah. This is more than I usually wear around the house.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

You have a very well-developed physique, but aren't you wasting it on me?

COLIN (posing)

Thanks. I got the butt from my years as a bike messenger. It can't last forever, but so far it's holding up.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Oh thank god! You're the bottom!

COLIN spins and stares at HER, too amazed to speak.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

I was so hoping I could find out without having to ask. Or are you one of those couples where everyone does a little bit of everything.

COLIN

Well, you did your research. I'll give you that.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Whether this is going to work out to be pleasant or unpleasant, there are two mistakes you shouldn't make. Don't take me for a fool and don't think that there's much that shocks me. I did not walk through the past sixty-eight years with my eyes shut. Now go put on a robe before that gooseflesh becomes permanent.

COLIN exits to the bedroom, MRS. RHEINGOLD to the kitchen.

COLIN returns in a robe, as MRS. RHEINGOLD enters with a tray containing two mugs of coffee, spoons, a creamer and a sugar bowl.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

How nice you had this all set up. Saved me the uncertainty of "Who takes cream? Who takes sugar?"

COLIN

Not to worry. He's the cream in my coffee.

As COLIN starts off, MRS. RHEINGOLD begins pulling sections from the paper.

COLIN (returning)

Oh. Thanks.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

I think everything you wanted is there.

COLIN

Great. Thank you.

MRS. RHEINGOLD (as HE starts off)

I worked with AVOC.

COLIN

Excuse me?

MRS. RHEINGOLD

AIDS Volunteers of Cincinnati. For three years.

COLIN

Really?

MRS. RHEINGOLD

I liked it very much. I felt useful. I don't have much of a bedside manner, but I could organize events and I could move things through the system.

COLIN

I have no doubt you could. What drew you to ...

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Billy.

Billy?
COLIN

Jack's late ...
MRS. RHEINGOLD

I know who Billy was.
COLIN

I started with AVOC when I realized how sick he was.
MRS. RHEINGOLD

Does Jack know/
COLIN

No. It would almost spoil it in a way. Don't you think?
MRS. RHEINGOLD

No.
COLIN

Oh well. Too late for regrets.
MRS. RHEINGOLD

What made you stop?
COLIN

When Ken came along ... It wasn't a good fit.
MRS. RHEINGOLD

Yeah.
COLIN

You should take that tray in before your arms break.
MRS. RHEINGOLD

Right. Thanks.
COLIN

MRS. RHEINGOLD watches COLIN exit as lights fade to
BLACK,

End ACT II, Scene 5.

WHOLE AGAINST THE SKY

ACT II

Scene 6

Setting: JACK and COLIN's apartment. Monday night, after dinner.

At rise: COLIN is in the living room fidgeting and finishing a cup of coffee.

MRS. RHEINGOLD (entering)

Well that was fun for a change! Took me back to my mother's house or Aunt Chessie's at Thanksgiving. Remember what a big deal it was to finally be old enough to be allowed to help with the dishes at Thanksgiving?

JACK enters, nodding.

MRS. RHEINGOLD (to COLIN)

We really had all the children in the family hoodwinked for years with that one! And the older ones kept their mouths shut because they knew as the younger ones moved up they'd be let off the hook. It was all great fun though wasn't it?

JACK

It wasn't so bad. All the cousins splashing around. Petrified of breaking anything, but we all still managed to come away soaked.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Killed two birds. Not only did the dishes get done, it kept them occupied for an hour. This was back when everyone still smoked. So all the adults could have their coffee and a cigarette in peace while the kids did the dishes.

COLIN

That does sound like fun.

JACK

It was.

COLIN

Both my parents were only children, so I was usually the only child around for holiday stuff. Or anything else for that matter. When the older relatives started dying off and mom and dad got divorced we'd do stuff with people from mom's office or our church. It was never awful. I don't hate the holidays, I just don't trust that anything about them will last from one year to the next.

JACK

I like the stuff we do now, with friends.

COLIN

Sure. But it's hell finding kids to do the dishes.

JACK

I thought that's why those of us who don't cook are kept around.

COLIN

Your poor mother got the worst of the deal tonight then. Helping cook and helping clean up.

JACK

You let her help you cook? You? You let someone trespass into your kitchen?

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Oh. I didn't realize I was intruding.

COLIN

That's all right. Really.

JACK

What?

MRS. RHEINGOLD

I stuck my nose in and saw the pile of apples and how busy Colin seemed with the potatoes and the stock and the sauces. So I asked if the apples were for a pie.

COLIN

And without turning back I said yes. By the time I turned around she had half the apples peeled and cored. It was too late for my speech, and throwing a fit seemed excessive.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

So, in my blissful ignorance of house protocol, I kept right on with the apples. And rolling out the crust.

COLIN

Didn't you notice the difference? Why am I asking? Of course you didn't!

JACK

What? What difference? It was good. It's always good.

COLIN

Your mother did a lattice crust across the top of the pie. I always do a crust the covers the whole top of the pie. You didn't see that?

JACK

I guess my mind was elsewhere.

COLIN

For a change! I never had the patience to stop and figure out the lattice crust. Your mother showed me the braiding.

JACK

Well that's just great! God knows, I was never a willing student in the kitchen. Isn't it just miraculous that you two have found each other?

MRS. RHEINGOLD

When is your next night off, Colin?

COLIN

Thursday.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Well, I hope you and Jack will let me take you out to dinner Thursday night. Someplace really, really nice. So I can begin to express some of my appreciation for your hospitality.

JACK

Thursday?

MRS. RHEINGOLD

I'll be happy to take you out before then. But I would really like the opportunity to treat the two of you.

JACK

Not 'til Thursday?

MRS. RHEINGOLD

That's what you said, isn't it?

COLIN

Yes ma'am.

JACK (to COLIN)

Thursday?

COLIN

Hey, it's your call to make.

JACK

Thanks. Sure, mom. Thursday would be great. I know we both really appreciate the offer.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Well good. I'm looking forward to it already. I want you to put your heads together and pick someplace really wonderful.

JACK

Oh we will.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Then I'm going to say goodnight and thank you for a lovely meal.

COLIN

You're welcome.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

I'm sure you two need a little time alone together.

JACK

Good night, mom.

MRS. RHEINGOLD (exiting)

Good night.

JACK

Well maybe we should just draw up the papers and let her adopt you.

COLIN

What could I do? I turn around and she's halfway through the apples!

JACK

It's too perfect. You can make up for both of us! Be the son and the daughter she's always wanted!

COLIN

Jack!

JACK

She amuses you. You want to learn what she has to teach. It couldn't more clearly be a mutual adoration society.

COLIN

Are you jealous?

JACK

Are you stupid? Am I jealous? You have laughed with her more and pleased her more in three days than I have in the last twenty years. Why would I be jealous?

COLIN

I'm sorry.

JACK

And?

COLIN

And what?

JACK

Can you tone down the love fest a little? For me?

COLIN

What do you want me to do?

JACK

You don't have to push her through a window ...

COLIN

Throw mamma through a pane?

JACK (glaring)

I hope you continue to find this amusing over time.

COLIN

Sorry.

JACK

I don't need my face rubbed in just how chummy you two are, okay?

COLIN

Okay. I'm going to be working the next two nights. That should give you plenty of time alone with her to do what needs to be done, right?

JACK

Sure.

COLIN

'Cause no matter how well she and I get along, she still doesn't belong here.

JACK

No.

COLIN

And you don't have to worry. She'll be fine, she's a tough old bird.

JACK

Believe me, that I know. It's something else you two have in common.

THEY are both still for a moment.

COLIN

You want some more coffee?

JACK

No thanks. I'm going to turn in. Catch the ten o'clock news.

COLIN

I'll be right there. I'm going to grab a last cup and clean out the carafe.

JACK

Fine.

THEY exit in different directions as lights fade to BLACK.

End ACT II, scene 6.

WHOLE AGAINST THE SKY

ACT II

Scene 7

Setting: A divided stage. JACK's office, represented by a desk and swivel chair is L. Two empty chaise lounges of the sort found around swimming pools are DR. Tuesday, early afternoon in Washington/late morning in San Diego.

At rise: JACK enters the office, ponders a moment, picks up a phone and begins to dial. As he finishes dialing a portable phone between the chaises begins to ring. A very wet GREG dashes on, grabs a towel from a chaise and begins drying himself as HE answers the phone.

GREG

Yo. It's your dime, how you gonna spend it? (JACK, momentarily startled does not respond.) Hello? (a beat) Hey, listen, this isn't one of those TTY/TTD things, so if you're deaf you're wastin' both our time.

JACK

Greg?

GREG

Yeah. And this is?

JACK

Jack.

GREG

Jack?

JACK

Jack Rheingold. Your ... Linda's brother?

GREG

Oh, Jackie! Hey, bro. How the hell are you? I can't even remember the last time we heard from you. How the hell have you been?

JACK

I'm well, thanks.

GREG

You still bonkin' that kid?

JACK

I'm still with Colin.

GREG

Well, I guess that's what I meant. My hat's off to you.

JACK

Listen, Greg, I'm at work so I have to keep this short. Is Linda around?

GREG

Well, as it happens Jack, she isn't.

JACK

Oh.

GREG

About three months ago the hospital switched to twelve hour shifts. She works 3 a week and she's workin' one today.

JACK

Will I be able to reach her tomorrow?

GREG

Well, as it happens, you won't.

JACK

Oh?

GREG

Nope. I'm takin' her to Hawaii for two weeks and we leave tomorrow.

JACK

Hawaii?

GREG

Yep.

JACK

For two weeks?

GREG

It's a day you thought you'd never see, isn't Jack? It's okay, Jack. I didn't know these times were in the cards either. Sales agrees with me, Jack. Yes, it does. It's not high-tech, it's not trendy, it may not even be entirely respectable, but it suits me. And it can't be much worse than the law.

JACK

Well, no. I guess not. As long as you enjoy it. And you're successful.

GREG

Oh, I'm successful. Your sister is being well taken care of. I know that hasn't always been the case, but it's the case today. And she and I both live in today. You and Calvin ...

JACK

Colin.

GREG

Sorry. You and Colin oughtta come on out and see us. See how good we've got it now.

JACK

Sure, Greg. Maybe we'll talk about it after you and Linda get back.

GREG

She'd really like that Jack. Did you need her for something in particular? (a beat)
Jack?

JACK

Oh. Ah. No. No, I just called to check in. You know.

GREG

I'll let her know you called.

JACK

Great. Thanks. And have a great trip.

GREG

Thanks, buddy. I'm sure we will. Later?

JACK

Right. Bye. .

Lights fade out, first on GREG, then on JACK.

End ACT II, scene 7.

WHOLE AGAINST THE SKY

ACT II

Scene 8

Setting: JACK and COLIN's apartment. Friday morning.

At rise: JACK is alone in the living room rifling sullenly through the paper. There is an empty Tortilla Chip bag at his side.

COLIN bustles in from the kitchen with a cup of coffee.

COLIN

You want another cup?

JACK

I'm all right, thanks.

COLIN

That was fun, wasn't it? Last night? Surprisingly?

JACK

Sheer delight.

COLIN

You have to give her credit.

JACK

Yes, I do.

COLIN

She's a good sport.

JACK

Yes, she is.

COLIN

Weren't you worried when she said she wanted us to take her dancing?

JACK

I was concerned. But she was quite the belle of the ball, wasn't she? Badlands will never be the same. For me, at any rate.

COLIN (picking up the Tortilla Chip bag)

What's this?

JACK
Breakfast.

COLIN
Breakfast?

JACK
Breakfast.

COLIN
You ate an entire bag of Tortilla Chips for breakfast?

JACK
Yes.

COLIN
Why would you eat a whole bag of Tortilla Chips for breakfast?

JACK
We were out of Nacho Cheese Doritos.

COLIN
Oh for god sake! What is this about? A bag of Tortilla Chips for breakfast!

JACK
I wanted something ... quick. They were there. One lead to another. There are only ninety or so in a bag.

COLIN
Jack?

JACK
I guess I don't know how to handle my mother insinuating herself into every aspect of our life. She helps you cook. She cleans up. She does the bars. Maybe I liked it better when my life was here and she was back in Cincinnati.

COLIN
Well?

JACK
And maybe I'm just a little ... unsettled? thrown off balance? ... by the intensity of your bonding with my mother.

COLIN
That's not fair.

JACK

No! Not fair is you prodding and dropping all these little hints, "This can't go on forever" "When already?" when we're alone. But around mother, it's "Look honey, your mother showed me how to put a lattice crust on my apple pies" and "Oh Rachel, you are too much!" This is hard enough!! How am I supposed to deal with your mixed signals?

COLIN

There are no mixed signals! My wanting her out has nothing to do with her. It's not right that she's here. Period. The fact that I might be able to enjoy her or learn from her ... or just treat her civilly, doesn't mean she belongs here! She has to leave, but because you ask her to, not because I drive her away ...

JACK

What makes you such a big fan of my mother?

COLIN

Why wouldn't I be?

JACK

You haven't spoken to your mother in years!

COLIN

I have a specific problem with my mother, not a pathological dislike of middle-aged women.

JACK

My mother is well beyond middle-aged.

COLIN

What?

JACK

I'm middle-aged!

COLIN

Now, you're being persnickety.

JACK

What does it mean if not around the halfway point?

COLIN

Then the people we have loved most were middle-aged between fifteen and twenty-one, weren't they?

JACK

Touche!

COLIN

This is not about scoring points. It shouldn't be a battle. Not between us. Is there some reason it has to be?

JACK

I feel like I'm left hanging out to dry. I feel you pushing me but not supporting me.

COLIN

You want me to be nasty to her? What would that accomplish?

JACK

Nothing. But you could be a little less enthusiastic. It's ... I don't know ...

COLIN

Look, we are in complete agreement. She doesn't belong here.

JACK

No ...

COLIN

But it has to matter enough to you, for you to find a way to tell her to leave.

JACK

It does, goddamnit!

COLIN

You don't have to be cruel. But you have to find a way to send her away. You. Not us. Not me. You.

JACK

It's not easy. I rehearse the speeches. I plan it out. I come in full of resolve. And as soon as I start to speak the resolve evaporates. She starts to seem, of all things, fragile. And I start to imagine having all this stuff I have always wanted. Asking her to leave starts to seem like throwing away any chance at getting some of the things I've missed. I want that kind of family, too.

COLIN

You can live in some Norman Rockwell fantasy or you live here with me, but you can't have both. You can lose both, but not have both.

JACK

Look you smug little son-of-a-bitch! ... Just because it was easy for you, doesn't mean it's easy for everyone.

COLIN is very still.

JACK (after a beat)
Oh god, Colin, I'm sorry ...

COLIN
Don't.

JACK
Colin ...

COLIN
I think you should go to work now.

JACK
No ...

COLIN
I wouldn't want to keep you.

JACK
Please

COLIN
That one can't be taken back. Go to work.

JACK
Colin ...

COLIN
I need some time.

JACK
I didn't mean ... it just popped out ...

COLIN
It would really be best if you would just go to work.

JACK
Will you be home

COLIN
It's Friday, I work 'til one.

JACK
I'll wait up.

COLIN
Suit yourself.

JACK (gathering his jacket and briefcase)
Ok then, I guess I'll be going.

COLIN nods.

JACK hesitates, then goes to COLIN and kisses his cheek.

JACK
I love you.

COLIN
That's not the issue.

JACK (exiting)
I'll see you tonight.

COLIN (nodding)
'Bye.

COLIN picks up the Tortilla Chip bag as lights fade to
BLACK.

End ACT II, scene 8.

WHOLE AGAINST THE SKY

ACT II

Scene 9

Setting: JACK and COLIN's apartment that evening.

At rise: Lights come up to reveal MRS. RHEINGOLD alone in the apartment, vacuuming.

JACK enters, returning home from work. Hearing the vacuum slows his approach for a few beats.

MRS. RHEINGOLD doesn't hear his keys or the door open. JACK watches her impassively until SHE sees him.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Whoops! Oh my. I didn't hear you come in.

JACK

No.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

I wasn't expecting you for another little while.

JACK

No?

MRS. RHEINGOLD

How was your day?

JACK

Hellish.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Why is your hair wet?

JACK

I stopped at the gym on my way home. I thought a swim might clear my head.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

And they don't have hair dryers at your gym? They don't have towels? You need to be out on the street with your hair wet?

JACK

It's only a few blocks away.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

I was out earlier. It's chilly. It's damp. You think you're too old to catch a cold?

JACK

Do I want to know what you're doing?

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Vacuuming.

JACK

Clearly. Why?

MRS. RHEINGOLD

I was cleaning up in my room a little. It seemed like the least I could do. (No response from JACK.) I thought, while I have the vacuum out, why not take care of out here. Save Colin some trouble tomorrow. (No response from JACK.) He has to work so late tonight and again tomorrow night.

JACK

I am aware of his schedule.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

I thought I'd try to lighten his load a little.

JACK

You want to do something to really lighten his load?

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Certainly.

JACK

Then start packing.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

That was a jest with a nasty edge.

JACK

It wasn't meant in jest.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Jack?

JACK

This can't go on.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

You don't really want to take your bad day out on me.

JACK

That is not what I'm doing!

MRS. RHEINGOLD

There is really no need for this. We are having a lovely time together. All three of us!

JACK

It's six days overdue.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Does Colin know you're doing this?

JACK

LEAVE COLIN OUT OF IT!

MRS. RHEINGOLD

I have tried not to interfere or intrude. I have only tried to be helpful where I could. I thought we were all getting along quite splendidly.

JACK

It has been like waltzing around a high tension wire. I can't believe you're not as stressed out as we are.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

I certainly don't mean to be a source of stress. I simply want to be a part of your life again.

JACK

What you want isn't bad. If I didn't want some of it myself you wouldn't have been here this long.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

It's going to take more than a week ...

JACK

No. If it's going to happen at all, it's going to happen some other way.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

But it won't!

JACK

Maybe not. But you are not staying here another night.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Why are you doing this?

JACK

No, see, this is my home. Mine. I don't have to explain. You barged in here uninvited nearly a week ago. I guess it's hard to wear out your welcome when you were never welcome.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

You don't mean that.

JACK

I'm not saying you could never be welcome, but this visit is over.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Why so abruptly?

JACK

It's time for you to leave. Period. Like you used to tell me, "Because I say so."

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Be careful throwing this away so lightly.

JACK

There is nothing light about any of this. What you want is a good thing, how you're going about getting it is all wrong.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Does that really matter if a good thing comes of it?

JACK

Yes. I can't let a good thing cost me the best thing.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

But Colin and I are getting along very well ...

JACK

I'm not interested in a debate. I'm only interested in carrying your luggage to the elevator.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

When did you come to this decision?

JACK

Shall I call you a cab?

MRS. RHEINGOLD (after a beat)

Once I decide where I'm going. I certainly have more pride than to stay where I'm held in such inexplicable contempt.

JACK does not respond.

MRS. RHEINGOLD
I hope I have better luck at your sister's.

JACK
You can't go there.

MRS. RHEINGOLD
Excuse me?

JACK
You can't go to San Diego.

MRS. RHEINGOLD
I'm not sure that's up to you.

JACK
They're not there.

MRS. RHEINGOLD
Excuse me?

JACK
They're in Hawaii. Greg took Linda to Hawaii for two weeks.

MRS. RHEINGOLD
That's something she has certainly earned. I can't stay until they return?

JACK
Out of the question. Is there some reason you can't go back to Cincinnati?

MRS. RHEINGOLD (after a beat)
Have you ever been lonely, Jack?

JACK
What?

MRS. RHEINGOLD
Lonely? Utterly alone? Miserable? Desolate? (a beat) After Billy died? Weren't you terribly lonely then?

JACK (shaking his head)
No.

MRS. RHEINGOLD
I know that can't be true.

JACK

I was mostly numb after Billy died. For a long time after. No, I didn't know from lonely until after I moved out on Dennis. The failure with Dennis was proof positive that Billy was it, that I was never going to be able to love again. That was as lonely and desolate as I've ever felt.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Mine was direct. When Ken died I plunged from a world that was full to a world that was empty. I haven't been able to get my footing back since. Ken's been gone two years and I still can't seem to quite catch my breath. I dress every morning and I eat at meal times, but nothing, none of it, means anything to me. I thought I might find that with you or with Linda. Meaning. And I have been less lonely here.

JACK

I'm sorry, mom. I'm so sorry, but that just doesn't matter. It can't ...

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Don't take that from me. Please.

JACK

I have to.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

Don't do something for which you'll only be sorrier and sorrier ...

JACK

I do remember Thanksgiving at Aunt Chessie's, y'know, and Grandma before she got feeble. I love Colin ... beyond all measure, but I miss the larger life that a family can have ... This was stupid and wrongheaded, just showing up, but also brave. I respect your courage. And I think we can have what you're looking for, eventually. Even so ... this is not easy, but it's right. You can't stay here any longer.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

I have never begged, Jack. You know I have never begged...

JACK

Then don't. Not now when it will do you no good.

MRS. RHEINGOLD (after a beat)

I see. You are not to be moved.

JACK

No mom. Not on this.

MRS. RHEINGOLD starts off, then turns back to face him.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

I mean this, I truly do, I hope with all my heart that no one ever spurns you in your time of greatest need.

JACK

If the only way I can have relationship with you is to let you stay tonight, I'll pass. If you ever decide we can try it some other way, I'll be here.

MRS. RHEINGOLD

You go right ahead and sit by the phone waiting for my call.

SHE exits to the spare bedroom.

JACK is still for a beat, then seems to deflate. HE begins to wearily pack up the vacuum as lights fade to BLACK.

End ACT II, scene 9.

WHOLE AGAINST THE SKY

ACT II

Scene 10

Setting: JACK and COLIN's apartment, around 4 the next morning.

At rise: JACK is sound asleep on the sofa. COLIN enters wearily. HE flips on an overhead light, sees JACK, immediately flips off the light and switches on a lamp. HE studies JACK impassively until JACK stirs and begins to waken.

Oh. You're home. JACK

I'm here. COLIN

What time is it? JACK

A little after four. COLIN

Slow clean up? JACK

Not particularly. COLIN

Oh. JACK

COLIN (shrugs)
I didn't expect to find you waiting up for me.

JACK
I didn't expect you to drift in after four. I thought we were going to talk ...

COLIN
No, not that I recall.

JACK
Colin ...

What? COLIN

Are you hungry ? JACK (a beat)

What? COLIN

JACK
You must be hungry. How about you sit down ... put your feet up ... I can put on a pot of tea ... Maybe get us each a slice of that apple pie ...

Jack ... COLIN

JACK
You want a sandwich or something, instead?

Jack ... COLIN

JACK
Yes?

COLIN
Stop. Okay? Just stop. It's 4 am. I'm shot. I'm done in. I don't have the energy ... for ... whatever this is going to be. Besides, we'd only end up waking your mother.

JACK
I doubt that ...

COLIN
History would suggest ...

JACK
I don't think she'll hear us at the Mayflower.

COLIN
Excuse me?

JACK
She's gone.

COLIN
Really?

JACK

I asked her to leave and she left.

COLIN (a beat)

You want a medal?

JACK

No ... but I'll take a little slack.

COLIN

Go right ahead. Take up all the slack you can find. Make a noose with it for all I care.

JACK

You don't mean that.

COLIN

Oh?

JACK

I'm sorry I said a cruel, stupid thing ...

COLIN

So am I.

JACK

But it was said in the heat of a bad moment ... It was not some thoughtful reflection of my deepest feelings ...

COLIN

But of all the things you could have said ,,,

JACK

I know ...

COLIN

You think I don't have buttons? I'm a regular keyboard on legs! You could have brought up the money thing: "You'll get a say in who lives here the day you're paying half the mortgage." Or, "Why would a guy who finished second in his class at Michigan law end up with a guy who got his GED at 22? Must give amazing head!" Nope. Just not ugly enough. You picked up the big gun, buddy. And you shot a bull's eye.

JACK

What else can I say? What can I do ...

COLIN

I don't know, Jack. Maybe nothing.

JACK

What does that mean?

COLIN (a long beat)

I came back figuring I could crash on the sofa. But, since she's gone I can use the guest room for tonight.

JACK

No. No, you cannot. No.

COLIN

Oh really?

JACK

I'll stand in the hall banging pots until you come out or the Siprelle's call the police.

COLIN

What in the hell would that accomplish?

JACK

I'm not going down that slope without a fight! And ... Listen ... Goddamnit, what I said was not unforgivable!

COLIN

No. It wouldn't have mattered at all if it hadn't come from you.

JACK

I'm sorry, Colin. But that's how it goes sometimes. That's what the good parts cost.

COLIN

I know. And now I have to decide if they're worth it.

JACK

Of course they are!

COLIN

To me.

JACK
Colin

COLIN
What?

JACK
Listen ... (sighs) ... Have you ever heard me say a word against Billy?

COLIN
No.

JACK
Do you think I'd let anyone?

COLIN
No.

JACK
Well let me tell you, life with Billy was never a month in the country, even before he got sick. He was as selfish and inconsiderate and pig-headed as he was sweet and funny and exhilarating. But, if I had walked out the first time he really hurt me deeply or the hundredth time he disappointed me, I would have lost more than I could ever measure.

COLIN
Jack ... that's great. It really is. For you. But I'm not Billy. And I'm not you.

JACK
Do you love me?

COLIN
Jack ...

JACK
Answer the question. Do you love me?

COLIN (a long beat)
Yes.

JACK
And I love you and that's what matters. Granted, it's a hell of a lot easier to remember that some days than others.

COLIN
How do you know when it's enough?

JACK
Hindsight.

COLIN
Excuse me?

JACK
Hindsight. You only know it's been enough, you can't know in advance whether or not it will be. Day to day you just have to believe ...

COLIN
Then maybe my problem is that it's too much.

JACK
No.

COLIN
No one but you could have sucked all the air from the room with a single sentence. I don't even know how to describe how awful it was. I don't ever, ever want to feel that way again.

JACK
I don't ... I won't ... Colin, please ...

COLIN
You didn't mean to this time ...

JACK
No.

COLIN
So it's not you, Jack. I have to decide this for myself. Yes, I love you. I love you so much I truly can't stand it. And I need some time ... some distance ... to figure this out.

JACK
NO. Colin, I'll do anything. Name it. Change anything ...

COLIN
That's not the answer Jack.

JACK
We can only build a life together ... together.

COLIN
I need to be able to breath.

JACK

I will not stand by while you just walk away from me. ... When I say I love you, I'm saying the thing that's at my core. Don't walk away and leave me hollow.

COLIN

When I say it ...

JACK

"It"?

COLIN

I love you. ...It means so much it frightens me. I don't want anyone to matter that much. I can't ... I don't want to disappear into you, into us.

JACK

Not disappear into, be a part of.

COLIN

I'm not feeling the difference.

JACK

You have to ...

COLIN

Because you do?

JACK (a long beat)

Because I need you to.

COLIN

And I want to, Jack. I'm not sure I need to end this. Us. The good parts. But I need to work it out for myself. And if it's going to work at all, you need to let me. If I can't sleep in the guest room, then I will have to go crash with Christian or Molly. Okay?

JACK

No. It's not okay at all. Not for a minute. (a beat) But go ahead.

COLIN

Thank you. (a beat) And good night.

JACK

Good night. (as COLIN reaches the hall) Colin ...

COLIN turns to face JACK , who thinks better of what HE was going to say.

JACK
I'll see you in the morning.

For the first time in the scene, COLIN relaxes slightly.

COLIN exits.

JACK watches after him long after he's gone.

Lights fade to BLACK.

End ACT II, Scene 10.

End of Whole Against the Sky.