CLOSE TO HOME

BY

DONALD P. GAGNON
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THESIS

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CLOSE TO HOME

CAST OF CHARACTERS

ARTIE HARRISON. 26. An adjunct instructor of history at a nearby college.

IRENE HARRISON. 55. Artie’s mother. A housewife.

MICKEY HARRISON. 22. Artie’s brother.

DR. SERGE MORRISSETTE. 50. Mickey’s doctor.

JOE HARRISON. 55. Artie’s father.

THE TIME

The present. Fall.

THE PLACE

Living room of the Harrison home. Woonsocket, Rhode Island.


Scene Two. Harrison living room. Late that morning.


Scene Two. Harrison living room. That evening.
CLOSE TO HOME

ACT ONE

Scene One

SETTING: Interior of a middle-class household living room, furnished in tasteful, suburban 80's style. Piled about the room are boxes and assorted articles from the family's past; someone is preparing for a yard sale. Stairway along the back wall leads upstairs and out of sight behind wall. A piano downstage left, with perhaps a dozen framed photos along the top, mostly of Irene's parents and siblings. The set should suggest realism yet have an air of artificiality.

AT RISE: Morning. SOUND: A Chopin piano nocturne. After short section of the piece, we hear a CRASH, as if something delicate is breaking. BLACKOUT and MUSIC OUT.

A spotlight picks out ARTIE HARRISON, downstage. He is articulate and self-confident, maybe a bit too much so.

NOTE: When ARTIE exits a scene, he will remain onstage in this spot to watch the action.

ARTIE

(To audience)
I was going to begin with "Once upon a time," but it's been done.

(Lights up 3/4)
Besides, as you can see, this is no magic castle, I'm not wearing glass slippers, there's no happy ending--trust me--and there's only one fairy. That's right. Get it out of your system. Not that my choice of lifestyle has anything to do with anything that happens here. It's just a fact of life, one of those things you learn to deal with. Like death. You can turn your back on it, but it'll still give you a hell of a kick in the end. It's a burden, it's a blessing. Who cares? Make a decision. Turn right off the sidewalk and you're in the local Baskin-Robbins. Turn left into the street and the Good Humor truck runs you down. Choices. Republican or Democrat? Tomato or tomahto? You know, the big choices. We all make them eventually, don't we? Well, sometimes, which is what brings me here and you there. A choice, right? In this case, one made either
I love tragedy. Othello, oversized, passionate, historically relevant. Too relevant, especially for a middle-class family in middle-class Woonsocket, Rhode Island. People just can’t seem to help themselves.

(Lights up full)
I’d just brought my mother some flowers I’d gotten from some girl who could only speak German, at one of those roadside stands. Pink roses, Mom’s favorite. Life had been kind of rough for her lately, and I figured I could at least help make some things easier for a while, anyway—or for long enough. She looked...okay. Her own mother, my Memere Legere, had died less than a year ago, but the real blow came a bit later. Dad left us—her—about eight months ago under less than ideal conditions. He packed a bag, took a chicken sandwich from the refrigerator, wrote a short note and disappeared in a cloud diesel fuel exhaust at the Trailways terminal, all while Mom was taking a bath. Six months later, she had yet to make another chicken sandwich. She still seemed vacant, drained of...something. But that didn’t take away her ability to fight. In fact, I never thought I’d see her let a good fight go unfought. And this was a good one. It all began right here. Mom was getting up a yard sale, which wasn’t surprising. She was always getting rid of "unnecessary" things. She had done the same thing when Memere Legere had died.

IRENE HARRISON enters, busying herself with the clutter. She is dressed for housework, but her hair is done. She has large drop-cloths that she puts neatly over the furniture, tucking the corners under the cushions.

That’s Mom. Irene. The rest is up to you.

IRENE haltingly picks up the phone receiver, begins to dial, hangs up. A few seconds later, it rings and she answers.

IRENE
Hello? Who? I think you have the wrong number. There’s no Felicity here.

(Pause)
Same to you.

(Hangs up)

ARTIE
Where are the roses?
IRENE
Lying in state in the kitchen.
(Motions to dropcloth)
Here. Help me with this.

ARTIE
They can't be dead already. I just bought them last night.

IRENE
She must have been having a clearance sale.
(Phone rings again)
Tuck that in.
(Answers phone)
Hello? Yes, I'll get her for you.
(Puts receiver between sofa cushions)
Besides, they keep all the good flowers for themselves. Didn't you notice that in Austria last year?

ARTIE
I was too busy climbing mountains in search of Julie Andrews.
(Picks up receiver)
I'm sorry. You have the wrong number.
(Pause)
Same to you.
(Hangs up)
It was beautiful, though. Flowers everywhere. There must be a law. They grow everywhere. You could spread sauerkraut on the ground and hot dogs would bloom.

IRENE
Maybe you should put some sauerkraut in the vase. Would you tuck that end in, please?

ARTIE
(Ignoring her)
Don't you like them?

IRENE
(Tucking in the corner, with a loud sigh)
Yes, very much, but I'd also like to get all this mess ready for this weekend and I don't have time to worry about flowers and sauerkraut. It's been nice all week. Suddenly it's all cloudy. There is so much garbage in this house that I've got to get rid of.
(Holds up two crude, garish pot holders)
What do you think I could get for these?

ARTIE
Arrested, probably. What are they? I can't believe Dad would keep something like that.
(Untucks cloth when IRENE turns around)
IRENE
Pot holders. Your brother made them in second or third grade, I think. Don’t you remember?

ARTIE
Mom, I was thirteen years old and under a full frontal attack by puberty. Hormones on parade. I’m lucky I remembered my name.

IRENE
He was so proud of them, and they didn’t even match the kitchen.

ARTIE
In second grade he couldn’t even match his socks. Why should you expect him to grasp the concept of interior design?

IRENE
As if the kitchen hadn’t been the same green since he was born? He couldn’t ask his teacher? What are teachers for?

ARTIE
Certainly not to help students compare color schemes. Perhaps he should have brought home some swatches?

IRENE
I hate it when you talk like that. And tuck that back in. Pepere Legere would knock some sense into you.

ARTIE
Talk like what?

IRENE
You know. In the past minute alone you’ve been able to mention puberty, color schemes, interior design, and color swatches. It makes you sound like a fairy.

ARTIE
Yeah, well you throw like a girl. Come on. Saying "swatches" makes me sound gay? How about Mr. Boivin down the street? He likes to say "I’ll be darned." Does that make him sound like a pair of socks? Show me how I sound like a--what was the word?--fairy.

IRENE
I can’t talk to you when you sound like a fairy.

ARTIE
Sure you can. Just lisp.
IRENE
Stop that! I hate it when you say things like that. That’s how you sound that way, talking about lisping and designing. Talk like a man. Talk about trucks and sports. Talk about women.

ARTIE
Trucks and sports and women? That’s not men. That’s lesbians.

IRENE
You know what I mean. Women. Surely you notice them.

ARTIE
Talk about women? Okay. Did you see the fabulous brooch Jeannette Dolan wore to the theater last Thursday?

Be serious.

ARTIE
This was serious. It clashed, dear.

Artie! Stop that!

IRENE
Okay, okay. But denying things is like having annoying relatives--you can’t just make them go away. They hang around.

Not always.

(To audience)
Was she referring to Dad? Or Pepere, maybe? He died when she was only a girl. I guess she hadn’t gotten over it yet, though to hear her speak of him, he was a French-Canadian combination of Pope Paul VI and General Gabler.

(Untucks sofa cloth)

IRENE
Can we forget this for now? I’ve got a lot to get rid of around here, and I haven’t even gotten back the things that Lorraine borrowed yet. I wonder if she’s back from the hairdresser. Anyway, just leave me alone. Go get your mail. There’s another letter from that college.

ARTIE
Where?
In Arizona.

No, where's the mail.

Over on the phone table. What's going on with that college? That's the fourth letter you've gotten from them in the past few weeks.

Nothing much. I've just been corresponding with one of the history professors there, getting some information and advice on an upcoming project.

(Sorting through the mail)

Oh, look. Only one letter that doesn't belong to us today. Mr. Marchand must be taking his pills regularly.

Leave him alone. One day you'll be old and senile.

And Mr. Marchand will still be running down small children and delivering mail to the wrong address. Doesn't the U.S. Postal Service know that Mr. Marchand will not only deliver through rain, sleet and snow, but also through your prize flower beds and occasionally through a red light? Where did he learn how to drive? The Pony Express?

He's not that old. Not quite that old.

Come on. He couldn't hit the broad side of a city. He doesn't even drive. He aims.

(He smiles as he reads the letter)

What does it say?

Not much. He's just give me the information I was looking for.

What's the project?

I'm studying migration to the West. I've been working on it for a few months.
IRENE

Is it a political thing?

ARTIE

I teach history, not political science.

IRENE

Good. I don't like politics.

ARTIE

(To audience)

This from a woman who has refused to vote in the last twenty years. Like I'm surprised. Nixon was a liar who got caught. McGovern was a nobody. Ford was a figurehead. Carter was from Georgia. Reagan was a liar who didn't get caught. Mondale talked like a duck. Bush was a puppet. Dukakis couldn't even run his own state. Clinton? The jury's still out, but my guess is that whatever she doesn't like about him will have to do with his wife.

(To Irene)

You wouldn't want to read this one any more than my others.

IRENE

You're right. I've got my own project now.

(Tucks in cloth again)

I wish I had more time. Look. Your father's Jordan Marsh overcoat. Good Lord, he held onto this for a long time. Probably twenty years or so. Yes, that's about right, twenty years ago, because he bought it when we took you kids Christmas shopping in Boston, remember? We were downtown and he saw it in the window at Jordan Marsh. Do you remember that window display? It had that skinny Santa Claus that I thought was so tacky.

ARTIE

Everything was tacky in the Seventies. "Muskrat Love," for God's sake.

IRENE

You saw your father staring at the window and you came up behind him. You were almost screaming. "Buy it! Buy it!" We stayed outside and listened to the bell choir while your father went inside. You were so excited, and I didn't have a clue why. Then your father came out, wearing his new coat, and you started to cry.

ARTIE

Sure I did. He came out with this coat, and I thought he had gone in to buy the Santa Claus. Was I inconsolable?
IRENE
No, but I was uncontrollable. I thought it was so funny. I thought it was so cute.

(Caught up in her memory)
I thought everything was so cute. And now the coat is just as ratty as the man.

ARTIE
Hey, go easy.

IRENE
(Brushing him off)
I wish I had more time.

ARTIE
So why sell all this stuff now? Couldn’t you just hang onto it until something develops?

IRENE
Like what? Alzheimer’s disease? No, it’s got to go. I’ve got to get rid of it.

ARTIE
No, you don’t.

IRENE
Of course I do. I’ve been trying to get rid of everything, but I can’t. There’s always more. Look at this. His father carved this letter opener for him. It’s ivory. Your grandfather brought it back from Africa, or so your father said. He was quite a traveler, I understand. Your father never talked about him much. Africa, South America, Europe. The letter opener was for your father to open his father’s letters. That was really the only contact he ever had with him. He never stopped moving after that. Letters were the only contact your father had with him.

ARTIE
So this was all he had to remember his father by. I remember Dad telling me.

IRENE
It might just as well have been a knife, the way your father would suffer. Then the letters just stopped coming. Your father never used it after that last letter. But it was more than my father left me.
ARTIE
(Picking up the letter opener)
It's beautiful. And just as sharp as ever. I've still got the scar, and it's been ten years. Ouch. How old is this thing? You should keep it.

IRENE
No, it's got to go.

ARTIE
Why get rid of it anyway? Maybe Mickey would like it. You know how much he wants Dad back. It's something he could hold on to. Just like Dad did.

IRENE
(Suddenly serious)
Are you crazy? Give this to your brother? What do you think he's going to do with it? Press it in a diary?

ARTIE
What do you think he's going to do? Kill himself?

IRENE
Shh! Are you crazy? That boy barely survived that last accident. I will not give him the chance to come that close again.

ARTIE
You've got to trust him sometime.

IRENE
What if I want to hold on to it? God knows I'd like to get a handle on whatever life I used to lead. I don't want to get rid of it. So there.

ARTIE
Who says you need to? I bet Mickey would share.

IRENE
I've got to get rid of it.

ARTIE
(To audience)
I guess the only fight she couldn't win was a fight with herself. A stalemate was as good as it got.
(To Irene)
You cleaned out Mickey's things easily enough after he left. You practically left skid marks on the hallway carpet the day you sent him away.
IRENE
I didn’t send him away. Not because I wanted to. I had to. Besides, I didn’t know how long he’d stay at Oceanside, and I couldn’t handle seeing so much of him around here while he was there. He could have been there for years. Maybe he’s not ready for the outside world yet. I just don’t know enough about his...condition to decide what’s best.

ARTIE
How hard could it be to figure out? Think about the room he had there. Four walls of cozy cinderblock and a window so big he could practically see the sky through the atmospheric steel bars. It had all the charm of Alcatraz.

IRENE
(Stunned by the last comment)
It was the best I could do.
(Exits)

ARTIE
(To audience)
Maybe. We were never rich and she was thankful for what she could get until Memere died.
(Pause)
Before that, Mickey never went without. All his life, he got and got. When he was a baby, he got and got, but he never seemed to care. When he was a baby, he got the attention. Fair enough. That’s what babies do. It’s their job. But it didn’t stop there. When he was growing up, he got all the "right" friends. In high school, he got the awards, and without lifting a well muscled pinky. But he never seemed to care about making it. He didn’t even read the local sports pages, though his records and accomplishments practically jumped off the page on a regular basis. At times, it was hard to believe that I was the older brother by four years. He accomplished more than I ever did, and in less time, but it never seemed to affect him much until he was past it. Neither he nor Mom was very much interested in reading about his great feats. I guess for him it was due to his condition, though we didn’t know about it at the time. Even when he was at Oceanside, I don’t think he was aware that there was a world happening around him. It got worse when he was there, of course. He didn’t even know that another lawsuit had been filed against the place--unsuccessfully. No, he was never one to notice what was happening. The same floodlight that bathed him in success also illuminated his failures. As for Mom, notoriety was like a leper—to be avoided lest it make your family fall apart into little pieces. But for Mickey, I still lie awake nights.
Lights dim slightly as DR. SERGE MORRISSETTE enters, carrying a black bag.

MORRISSETTE
Artie, it’s not as if your whole family is sick. It’s just your brother.

ARTIE
It is not just my brother. You of all people should realize that. And why do you show up most when I want to see you the least?

MORRISSETTE
You never did come in for the counseling appointment I set for you. Perhaps it would help you through this difficult time. After all, your father ran away and your brother’s mind just kind of closed up shop, you might say. I don’t want to imply that these things are hereditary, but environment does play a big part in a person’s development. Genetics play a definite part, but they are not everything all the time. I would hate to see you develop some problem that would cause your mother further worry, wouldn’t you?

ARTIE
Problems? You mean like seeing imaginary psychopaths in my living room? It’s like living in Lourdes. My real analyst knows about these visions, you know.

MORRISSETTE
But this is not divine inspiration. It’s very real. I’m here because of you. You want me here. For what, I don’t know. I’d like to help you figure out why. What can I do for you?

ARTIE
Well, for starters, why don’t you go back to wherever you came from and give yourself, you’ll pardon the expression, a rectal examination?

MORRISSETTE
The resentment is palpable, Artie. This passive-aggressive behavior you demonstrate around me solves nothing. I only see you leading yourself to deeper trouble. You can do something about it, you know.

ARTIE
Yes, I do. The first thing I want to do is get you out of my head. Then I’ll untuck every dropcloth in Western civilization. Then we’ll talk, okay?
MORRISSETTE
Now, you know you'll never be able to get me out of your head. You mentioned Lourdes. Do you believe in miracles? Do you think that what these people see is real? It doesn't matter. What matters is that these people need to see something, to hear something. To know something. You need me, Arthur. You need something that answers your questions, that takes the blame. If I weren't here, well, you'd have to bear a lot more of the burden, wouldn't you? You'll never be able to get me out of your head or your life. Your mother has seen to that. It's all up to her now.

ARTIE
I certainly know you, since I created you. As if anything has ever been up to my mother. Who is relying on whom? But just wait.

MORRISSETTE
Why don't we both just do that? I'd prefer company, and I'd really enjoy the chance to help you in any way I can. You know, it frightened me when you said you wanted to give that dangerous implement to your brother.

ARTIE
The letter opener? Dangerous? Sure, to a ten year-old. Mickey is beyond that.

MORRISSETTE
Is he? Don't forget who the doctor is here. As much as you conjure me up to vent your frustrations upon, I really do know what's best for everyone. I don't think it's wise to give your brother the letter opener. Your mother was right, you know. He barely survived the last accident.

ARTIE
How could he have done that to himself accidentally? He didn't have access to anything dangerous, so he found another way. Your Oceanside henchmen weren't too cautious. Do you think that giving him that letter opener is going to make it any easier for him to do something to himself? We've got a whole drawer of hazardous butter knives in the kitchen. And I thought you were a professional.

MORRISSETTE
Do we not put children in cribs and playpens to keep them out of potential trouble? Do we not put fences around swimming pools in case of what may happen? We build jails for a reason. To prevent real trouble developing from potential trouble.

ARTIE
Mickey is not a criminal.
Neither is your mother. Give her some time. That's all she requires.

That's funny. Me too.

(Hears a noise from upstairs)
I'll be back. Give your mother the time she needs to do what she must.
(Exits)

Wait!
(Looks around, sees Morrissette is gone)
So do I let him out of his crib?

MICKEY HARRISON enters from upstairs. There is always a tentativeness in his actions. He is taller than Artie, but still looks younger, despite a weariness in his actions.

Hi, Mickey. Come down here and help.

But I don’t want--

Just come down. Come on.

(Resigned)

Where’s Mom?

(Enters, carrying a box. She has regained her composure, but she is noticeably nervous near Mickey)
Hello, Mickey. Be careful, now. Don’t break anything. I want to get as much as I can for your father’s things. God knows I can’t get anything else from him. Artie, did anyone call while I was in the garage?

Yup. Felicity called for her messages.

Who’s Felicity?
IRENE

Never mind.

ARTIE

No one called. Why?

IRENE

Just waiting to hear from Lorraine about my things. Look what I found. The wings from that holiday play you were in. Here, put them on.

(She hangs them on Artie's shoulders)

ARTIE

Do I look as silly as I feel? No, that's not possible. I look like an albino butterfly with a gland problem.

You looked so cute.

IRENE

Yeah, cute.

MICKEY

I wonder why Dad kept all these things? Maybe he knew how I'd turn out.

(Does a clumsy ballet move, and Irene takes the wings off in disgust)

Oh, you ruin everything. They held such nice memories...until now.

IRENE

You're more than welcome to sell these for as little as anyone offers, or less. Make up the loss on some of your other memories.

MICKEY

Can I put prices on some things? How about those shoes? They're not breakable.

ARTIE

Pal, I'd trust you with my last china cup. Why don't you price those books. Mark them at fifty cents.

IRENE

A dollar.

ARTIE

Fifty cents. Come on, you're trying to get rid of it all, aren't you? Or are you?
IRENE
Of course, but I want to make some sort of decent profit.

ARTIE
But you just got all of Memere Legere's estate. You don't need a profit, decent or otherwise.

IRENE
I never asked for all that money when she died. I didn't intend to be the only child to last this long. Good Lord, I had to put her in that home for the past three years, and even that didn't wipe out her savings. Who knew she had that much hidden away? Pepere never spent much. And just because she left it all to me doesn't mean we can start acting as if we have a lot of money.

ARTIE
But we have a lot of money.

IRENE
Artie...

ARTIE
(Realizing he's pushing it)
Okay, but since you've got it, what are you going to do with it?

IRENE
Put something away, and that's all you need to know. Mickey, mark those books at one dollar. This is not a game. I want to get something out of this yard sale except exhaustion.

ARTIE
But you are. Besides turning a ridiculous profit, you're also getting an angry neighbor, or have you forgotten?

IRENE
Lorraine? I think I took care of that angle.

ARTIE
I don't know. She's awfully particular about what goes on in her neighborhood. If she thought the neighborhood committee could stop you from attracting "undesirables" with this yard sale, she'd have a battalion of housewives armed with rolling pins blocking off the streets faster than you can say "Betty Crocker."
IRENE
She’s been pretty quiet. She knows she can’t stop this yard sale. Besides, now you know why I let her borrow so many things for the past few weeks. First my carpet sweeper, then my almost-best crystal bowl, then my food processor. I think she’d have borrowed Fluffy if Mr. Marchand hadn’t run over him. She still has one of my skillets, too. Oh well, I let her have my skillet, she lets me have my yard sale.

ARTIE
Ah. Playing the neighbor game.

MICKEY
We used to play games at Oceanside. That’s what they called them, anyway. Word games, puzzles. Not a lot of fun.

(To audience)
Tests, not games. To see where his head was. Hell, I could have told them that without relying on made-up tests. Or Lithium. Or Prozac. All he wanted was Dad back.
(To Mickey)
Well, the way you’re going, you won’t ever have to deal with those silly games again.

MICKEY
You think?

ARTIE
Mickey, look how much you’ve improved, and it’s only been two months. A month ago, you’d have been back upstairs with the covers pulled over your head at the mention of Oceanside. Now look at you. It’s great to see, isn’t it, Mom?

IRENE
(Uncomfortably)
Yes, Mickey. Very good. Of course, you may have done just as well if you had stayed there. We didn’t pay all that money for nothing, you know. Dr. Morrissette was very pleased with your progress there.
(Mickey is disturbed by the remark)
Well, you never know. Either way, you’re doing much better. Who knows what will happen now?

ARTIE
We know. The place for you is where people care about you. Hey, look at this. Did Dad ever show you his letter opener?

MICKEY
I remember this.
Take it. Keep it. Until Dad comes home.

But it's dirty. It needs to be cleaned. Why don't you play the piano a little bit? (Moves to take the letter opener)

I'll give you 20 bucks for it.

What?

You heard me.

I'll give you 20 bucks for it.

What?

You heard me.

(Pause)

Oh, go ahead and keep it. Just be careful. I mean, it's very delicate.

(To audience)

She'll try to get it back.

Why don't you play the piano, Mickey? I heard you practicing again yesterday. You sounded great.

Not like I used to.

Nothing's ever like it was. Go ahead. Mom?

Yes, please. Play something for us.

MICKEY goes to the piano and begins to play the nocturne we heard earlier, haltingly. After a couple of tries, he stops.

I'm...not sure.

You can do it. Mom, you remember, don't you?
IRENE
Oh, it’s been ages. I think I remember the fingering. Let’s see.

IRENE begins, and is very mechanical, but the notes seem to be there. She then takes MICKEY’s hands and places them properly.

See? Like this. Now.

MICKEY begins to play, better than before. IRENE and ARTIE watch in amazement as he gets carried away by the playing and music. They all know this would have been impossible a month ago. When MICKEY finishes, he is somehow more confident.

MICKEY
(Picks up the letter opener)
I’ll be down for lunch.
(Exits)

ARTIE
(To audience)
I know what you’re thinking. A sharp object. Is that wise? But look at it this way—even birds push their young out of the nest. Somebody had better start trusting him sometime, or he’d always rely on that somebody to do everything for him. Besides, look what he just did. He was learning how to fly. I just had to trust him. Right?

IRENE
Back to work. Price those books at a dollar. They’re hardcover. They’ll sell.

ARTIE
I just don’t understand why you’re doing this in the first place. If you feel so rushed, why not postpone this whole yard sale thing? Take some time. Practice your Chopin.

IRENE
Because, contrary to what you may have some people believing, your father is not coming home soon and your brother is not ready for Carnegie Hall. And this Indian Summer won’t last long. It’ll just get colder and drearier and I won’t be able to pay someone to take this stuff off my hands. Besides, I already advertised.
(To audience)
She already advertised. No wonder Dad left.

IRENE
(Holding up a brightly painted ceramic owl)
Look at this.

ARTIE
Hey, I've been wondering about that myself. My little psychedelic owl. I was hoping Dad had hung on to this.

You wanted this?

IRENE
I was so proud of it.

ARTIE
You should have tried your luck at potholders too.
(Pause)
Why do you keep looking at your watch?

Because I'm obsessive. Dr. Morrissette was right. I'd slam my head against the wall but the blood would clash with the drapes.

IRENE
Stop that! I won't have you making fun of your brother.

ARTIE
That's not what I'm doing. He's not as looney as you...as you think he is. Who knows why he tried to bash his skull in? It might have been a bad porkchop. You've seen the food there. Hell, I've tasted chili that could make you do a backflip.

He's sick.

IRENE
He's sick and tired.

ARTIE
Of what?
Everything. That's why he just lets life slide by. There's a whole world out there that he simply does not want responsibility for. He really truly thinks the best part of his life is over, as if life had passed him by while he was busy graduating from high school. Look what it's done to him so far. You couldn't get him out of bed for a week because "60 Minutes" did that report on runaway parents. Instead of dealing with it, he simply chose not to. You can avoid a lot of responsibility when you're hiding underneath a JC Penney comforter.

It's that easy, huh?

Yes. Now may I have my owl?

No. Your father ended up with it somehow, but you gave it to me. I'll do with it what I want.

If I gave it to you, then why is it in Dad's things now? Seriously, I'd like to take it with me.

Where?

To my room, where I promise to punish myself in the most disgusting manner possible if you don't give me my owl. Or worse, I'll go to Wayne's and you can clear out the rest of your disturbing memories by yourself. Jesus, you even trusted Mickey with the letter opener. What harm can come from me having my own owl back?

Don't try to threaten me by using that Wayne. It's just another excuse. Besides, I've noticed that you spent less and less time with him lately. What's the matter?

Nothing, except that I've decided to spend more time with you and Mickey. Wayne's not the only one who needs me now. I want to help Mickey, to encourage him to play the piano, to do something, anything. I'm not as insensitive as you think. In fact, someday I hope to be able to help everyone. When I grow up, I want to be Mother Teresa.
IRENE

Oh, don’t be so dramatic.

ARTIE

(To audience)
Okay, maybe I was a bit much, but did you see how she deflated when I talked about Wayne? Ha! And all this over a little ceramic piece of... stuff. It wasn’t valuable, not monetarily, anyway. But it belonged to me. I’d made it in arts class in seventh grade, hoping to surprise her. To please her. My, my how things change. I might just as well have brought her roses then too.

(To Irene)
You never did like this, did you?

IRENE

It’s purple and green.

ARTIE

Yup.

IRENE

And it’s an owl. An owl?

ARTIE

Yup.

IRENE

I was the only mother in that school whose son made a ceramic owl in crafts class. In Catholic school, mind you. The other children were making crucifixes and praying hands and little churches. What did you make? A pagan idol. I’m lucky I wasn’t excommunicated. I’ve been the favorite topic of discussion at every parish whist party ever since. St. Jude’s has never been the same.

ARTIE

Do you mean to tell me that all the priests and nuns at St. Jude’s have been holding conferences to discuss your maladjusted and frustrated atheist son for a dozen years now? Surely they’ve reached an opinion by now. The college of cardinals takes less time to choose a new pope! What are Father Tim and Sister Marie going to do? Send up smoke once they’ve come to a decision?

IRENE

I just want to know why you made an owl.

ARTIE

Because I thought you’d like it.
IRENE
I do. Just as much as I like these potholders. It should be the first thing to go. Well, right after your father's things.

ARTIE
No, it'll probably be gone first.

(Ignoring him)
IRENE
Okay, what next?

ARTIE
Why get rid of it now?

IRENE
I told you. Indian Summer, colder, drearier, remember?

ARTIE
Wait until spring.

IRENE
It takes up too much room. And effort. I'd just as soon get rid of it all.

ARTIE
But you don't have to. Don't you see? That's part of the problem.

IRENE
Now what? What have I done?

Phone rings, IRENE rushes to get it.

Hello?
(Pause, hangs up)
Exciting news about mortgage rates. I'd like some exciting news about what you think my problem is.

ARTIE
It's what we've all done. What everyone in the world does, or doesn't do. It doesn't matter. Mom, I know it's been rough. Whatever his reasons for leaving, I'm sure Dad will come back.

IRENE
After eight months? How do you know so much?

ARTIE
Because I know Dad. We're a lot alike.
IRENE
Except that you’re still here, and he’s God knows where, leaving defenseless chicken sandwiches homeless in America’s bus terminals. And I’m a stranger?

ARTIE
That’s not what I mean. It’s just that Dad and I have always shared similar viewpoints, insights. Remember how Dad and I would always laugh at the same jokes? You hated the Marx Brothers, but we’d practically break all the furniture from laughing. And books. We’d race to the mailbox, remember? Just to see who’d get the Book-of-the-Month Club selection first. That’s how I really tore my knee up that time. It wasn’t from falling off my bike. I didn’t want you to blame Dad. I was determined to get to that book first. I don’t even remember which book it was now, but it doesn’t matter. I just wanted to try to get the same thing from those books that Dad loved so much. It made me feel a part of him. I loved knowing that as we read the book, whoever got to it first, that we were seeing the same things, thinking the same thoughts. The knowledge I gained through Dad’s eyes, the very idea that we could share such a personal connection is what made me love him. It’s why I can understand him so well, because if I could see through his eyes, I knew he could see through mine. We shared a lot. He’ll be back.

(Affected)
Maybe, maybe. Finish that box. I’ve got to lie down. I’m very tired all of a sudden. And tuck in that corner.

ARTIE
What about the rest of this stuff?

IRENE
I’ll only be a short while. How long does Triple Strength Tylenol take to remove pain and anxiety, anyway? And if anyone else calls, I’m available. Unless they’ve got exciting news about mortgage rates.

ARTIE
Then I’ll call Felicity.
(Irene exits)
So what do you think? It’s not too late, right? Of course, I couldn’t tell her exactly how quickly time was running out. Hell, even a few hours could change everything. And
after all, I was doing it for her. I was determined that Mickey would not go back to that cinderblock hole again, and that he’d get all the support he needed, the environment he needed—and so would I. All I needed was a few more hours for all of us.

The phone rings and DR. MORRISSETTE appears. During his phone conversations with ARTIE, he simply speaks to ARTIE without using the phone itself.

Hello?

MORRISSETTE
Hello, Artie. Is your mother available?

ARTIE
I’m not sure. Listen, the folks over at Oceanside still haven’t filed the official release papers with the state, and I--we--were wondering when it might happen.

MORRISSETTE
Oh, I’m sure they’ll do it soon.

ARTIE
After all, Mickey’s been back for two months now and doing beautifully. Will you be coming to see him soon?

MORRISSETTE
Yes, soon. Is your mother available?

ARTIE
I think she stepped out, but I can pass on any information if you’d like me to. Do you think they’ll file the papers soon? I mean, they’re not holding things up on purpose, are they?

MORRISSETTE
I’m sure they’re not. May I speak to your mother?

ARTIE
Let me see if she left.
(Pause)
I’m sorry, she left. Can I have her call you?

MORRISSETTE
No. Tell her I’ll phone later.
ARTIE
That's okay. I’ll have her call you later. Goodbye.
(Hangs up, Morrissette exists)
He was keeping quiet about Oceanside. Again. Too quiet.
But my plans were in motion too. Just a few more hours.
(Unplugs the phone)

IRENE
(Offstage)
Artie? Who was that?

ARTIE
I don’t know, but they want a thin crust pepperoni and sausage.

(Blackout)
Scene Two

MICKEY enters, ARTIE and IRENE off-stage. He looks a little worn, shoulders a bit slouched and feet slightly shuffling. He looks through some of the boxes, pulling a few things out to inspect them, almost too thoroughly, as if he weren’t sure if these were really part of his life. Picks up the pot holders, smiles, then seems to deflate. He stuffs them in his pockets. Then he goes back to the boxes. He sees his father’s wool overcoat. He puts it on, as if trying to absorb the memories inherent in it. It is obvious this coat brings back good memories.

IRENE
(Enters quickly)
Artie, I’d—oh! Hello, dear.

MICKEY
(Quickly removing coat)
Hi.

IRENE
(Folding coat and replacing it)
Have you seen Artie? I was hoping he’d help me with more of this.

MICKEY
Haven’t seen him.

IRENE
He didn’t go over to Wayne’s, did he? He knows I don’t like him to be seen with that Wayne.

MICKEY
I don’t know.

IRENE
He probably went over to see that Wayne. I can’t believe he left you alone here. And I’m waiting for a phone call from Dr. Morrisette. He calls to ask how you’re doing, you know. I’m expecting him to call. Artie would tell me if he did, don’t you think?
MICKEY

Probably.

IRENE

Of course he would. It gets me so upset to think about that Wayne. Why does he always have to go over there?

MICKEY

(Tentatively)

I think Artie really...likes him.

IRENE

So? Does he have to go around town announcing it? Woonsocket is not such a large town. Why can’t he just avoid him? He’s not the greatest catch in the world. Artie could just stay here and at least try to date women. Women are not a disease, you know, so don’t let him try to change you.

I’m not worried about it.

IRENE

Oh.

(Sees Mickey becoming sullen)

Do you remember your father’s overcoat, too? You were very young when your father bought it.

MICKEY

I remember the skinny Santa, and Artie crying.

IRENE

(Uncomfortable now)

Well, if Dr. Morrissette calls, please let me know quickly. I’ll be making some lunch, or breakfast if you prefer. What would you like?

MICKEY


It’s up to you.

I don’t care.

IRENE

Ham and cheese. Grilled?

Sure. Okay.

MICKEY
IRENE
Fine. It'll be ready in about ten minutes. Is that okay?

MICKEY
Fine.

IRENE
Will you be okay here? Would you rather lie down? Or practice your piano? You were playing so beautifully, just like everything was okay again.

MICKEY
I’m fine.

IRENE
Good. I’ve still got to get my skillet back from Lorraine, but I’ll be right back. Please don’t touch anything here. Artie will help me.

MICKEY
Okay.

IRENE
Okay.

Exits. MICKEY reaches over to stroke the folded up coat, and the warmth returns. He closes his eyes and remembers. He goes to piano and plays the same Chopin nocturne we heard at curtain rise. Again he begins haltingly, then becomes almost virtuosic. Whatever is happening to MICKEY hasn’t happened in a long time. ARTIE enters, looking at his watch, sees MICKEY and stops and listens as MICKEY’s playing quiets down.

ARTIE
(To audience)
Isn’t it odd? Mickey and I always had distinctly different interests while we were growing up. I guess all brothers do, but it bothered me somehow. Not in the way that brothers are required by nature to bother each other, like always watching the TV show the other one didn’t want to watch, or telling Mom and Dad something they could have survived perfectly well without knowing, like who broke their original cast recording of Oklahoma! and hid the pieces under the sofa. What bothered me is that we rarely connected. He couldn’t force me to watch a football game on
TV and I could never get him to play GI Joe with me. He had to keep moving, couldn't maintain a presence in one room for more than a couple of minutes at a time, as if some hidden fuse were always ready to trigger. On the other hand, I could sit and read for hours. He had a fascination with Linda Moore, the prom queen. I had a fascination with being prom queen.

(Smiles)
But no matter our differences, we were always able to share private jokes, common memories of obscure events. It was a tenuous connection, to be sure. Like with Dad's overcoat. He remembers me crying. He doesn't know why, but he remembers.

(To Mickey) Hey, Mickey.

(Surprised) Oh, hey. I thought it was... I don't know. You caught me by surprise.

Remember this coat?

(To Mickey) Mickey

Yeah. Now Mom wants to get rid of it.

Mickey, Mom's not getting rid of anything. Don't worry. If anything leaves, it'll have to be under its own power.

Don't leave.

Now, Mickey...

Don't leave me alone, Artie.

Hey, hey, come on. Of course I wouldn't leave you alone. What gave you that idea?

Doesn't matter.
I-2-5

(To audience)

ARTIE

What could I do? He thought he knew what I was up to, but either way, he wouldn’t be left alone to deal with her. If Dad didn’t keep up his end of the bargain, the future would be a lot less certain for both of us. But I just couldn’t say anything yet. My choice, like Dad’s, apparently had yet to be made.

(To Mickey)

Hey, look.

Picks up some scrap paper that had been used for pricing.

You know what this means.

Hands some paper to MICKEY.

MICKEY AND ARTIE

Of course you know this means war!

They begin furiously folding the sheets into paper airplanes, and even MICKEY is giggling and chucking along with ARTIE.

ARTIE

The Cold War is over!

MICKEY

Back to the battlefield!

ARTIE sits on floor near sofa, MICKEY near the coffee table about six feet away.

No, that’s where Dad used to sit.

(To audience)

ARTIE

He remembers.

(To Mickey)

Yikes! That’s right. I was over here, at the Castle Broyhill.

MICKEY

While I protect Fort La-Z-Boy!

Ready?

ARTIE

Ready?

MICKEY
Three, two, one, bonsai!

MICKEY AND ARTIE

They let fly with a volley of paper airplanes, returning fire, giggling hysterically, and we see the years melt away. After a few volleys, MICKEY comes over and tries to crush all ARTIE's planes, and ARTIE goes after MICKEY's. They both collapse, laughing.

I win!

MICKEY

No, I win again!

ARTIE

No, no. I destroyed all of your air force.

MICKEY

No, no, no. Yours is destroyed too!

ARTIE

Curse you, Red Baron.

MICKEY

And your little dog, too!

ARTIE

(Pause) You're not leaving, are you? I can't be alone...here.

MICKEY

Don't worry, pal. You won't be alone.

ARTIE

Picks up salvageable planes, puts them in a box.

MICKEY

That's not what I asked.

ARTIE

(Smiles) You are coming along nicely.

(Looking into kitchen) Where's Mom?

MICKEY

Lorraine's.
Look.

ARTIE
Shows him the letter he received.

MICKEY
Reads the letter, a smile flickers then disappears.

Wow. That’s great, isn’t it? Assistant professor. That’s great.

ARTIE
Thanks. What do you think, Mickey? Should I take it?

MICKEY
You know me. Don’t ask me to make a decision.

ARTIE
Of course you can make a decision, if you want to. Just look at what you’ve done for yourself since you came home. You’ve done it all yourself. It’s all been up to you.

MICKEY
Yeah, but what if I should have done it another way? Maybe I’d be better now. I don’t know.

ARTIE
You can never know. But look what you’ve accomplished. You’re no longer tied to your bed with the shades pulled down and the covers pulled up. Take some credit.

MICKEY
What if I don’t make it? What if I do something stupid? Oceanside is just one stupid move away. I mean, not that it was so bad. Maybe I deserved it for what I did. It would be a lot easier there.

ARTIE
Then why aren’t you still there? Don’t let it happen again. Whatever happens, there is always something coming up right behind it, again and again. Something stupid happens, deal with it, but don’t let it carry you away.

MICKEY
But I’ve tried so much. I’m so tired of all this. I’ve tried to put it all behind me. I’ve tried. But that’s the problem, Artie. Everything is behind me. I was great on the football field in high school. I know I was. I could play the piano better than anyone in my class. But that changes. I couldn’t be a great college football player. There are too many people who are too much better at playing
piano in the real world. I’m not the best anymore. It’s no fun anymore. Why can’t I just keep that? Why do I have to leave it behind? Is it so wrong to want to hold on to something that made you happy? It can’t be. And it’s just not worth the effort anymore. I know what you’re trying to do for me. Thanks. Mom thinks she knows what’s best for me. Dr. Morrissette thinks he knows what’s best for me. And you do too. But as wonderful as you’ve been to me, Artie, what you want for me is no different from what they want. You want me to be the old Mickey. Well, I’m not the old Mickey. I’m just Mickey, and if that’s not the Mickey you want, I’m sorry. There’s only one of me. The one you’ve got.

ARTIE
We all try Mickey, and we’re all tired. Constantly and forever. But you can’t give up. You’ve got too much life left inside. You’ve seen the alternative. That’s no life.

MICKEY
But Mom wouldn’t send me back as long as you stay here.

ARTIE
It’s not for me to keep you here. That’s your responsibility. I wanted you home because that’s what I decided was best for you. You’re right. I do want something for you, just like Mom and Morrissette. But that doesn’t mean I want what they want. It wasn’t easy fighting Dr. Morrissette and Mom. Thankfully, Morrissette knew when he was getting into deep water. That hasn’t changed, but it’s your load to carry, whatever happens. So carry it. Carry it so far away it’ll never find you again.

MICKEY
But you’ll help me, right?

ARTIE
How would you feel about Arizona?

MICKEY
Moving there? With you and Wayne?

ARTIE
Shh! Yes. What do you think? Would you like to start all over again? You could be around people who don’t know the old you. You could be yourself and someone new both at the same time.

MICKEY
(His happiness disappearing)
Mom would never let me.
Even if she doesn't, I've still got a plan. You won't be alone.

ARTIE

Wait.

MICKEY

Looks into the kitchen. Satisfied, he unlocks the hall closet with a key taken from the lintel. He hauls out a black suitcase and places it on the sofa, looking into the next room and out the back window frequently throughout this exchange.

Sit down. Now look. I found this just a couple of weeks after I came home.

Opens suitcase, pulls out a few pairs of wrapped men's pajamas, new slippers and toiletries.

ARTIE

Oh God. How did you ever find this?

Looking for my scrapbook.

MICKEY

ARTIE

Mickey, listen to me. Listen to me!

Puts things back in suitcase, returns it to closet, locks the door.

Mickey, she loves you. She does. It's just that some things she can't handle. Some things just don't fit into her world. Like me. I don't fit either, pal. We're bananas in the chicken soup of her life. But just because we don't belong in her soup bowl doesn't mean we're not good anywhere else. Personally, I love bananas. I think they're great. I think you're great. I think we'd do great things together out there. But Mom prefers her fruit a little less noticeable. But we won't blend. We can fight back, Mickey, and if we're lucky, she'll only end up with a couple of ingredients missing from the whole recipe, or some sticky fingers. She loves you, she loves me, and she loves Dad
too. It doesn’t mean we can’t fight, but we have to know how, or she’ll never realize how much she loves us until it’s too late. And neither will we. That’s where the suitcase is from. Me. I put it there. It’s for you, for Arizona. For the fight. For the change to start again.

MICKEY
You put it there? Even so, I can’t fight. It’s not the losing, it’s the trying.

ARTIE
Let me show you how. I’ve been planning this move for months, for both of us. Watch me. I’ve been sneaking around behind enemy lines for quite a while, and I’ve even got a backup plan. You can use this suitcase, but to go to Arizona, not to Oceanside. It’s been two months and she hasn’t made a move yet. As long as someone can look after you, I think she’ll be able to deal with it.

Someone that’s not her.

MICKEY

Maybe. Maybe not.

ARTIE

I can’t fight.

MICKEY

Sure you can. You fought your way out of Oceanside. You fought Dr. Morrissette. He’s wanted you back there since Memere’s money came through. He can smell his profit again. But even Mom has held out this long, and it’s because of what you’ve been able to do for yourself. Accept it. You may not have known what you were doing, but you did it. She’s not strong enough to hold out against Morrissette, she knows about his reputation now. But having you here by yourself would conflict with her perfect little world that she wants to create. Something has to give, and unless we do something about it, that something would be you. She can’t reconcile either one of us. She honest-to-God believes that someday a beautiful woman will pass me by, the skies will clear and some great celestial orchestra will strike up the Wedding March. She believes the same way that another month or two or three or whatever in an institution will make you all better again. She wasn’t taught to deal with things the way they are. Pepere left no room for "different" in his house. There was a way things were supposed to be and that was it. It’s not her fault. At least not this part of it. Everyone knew Pepere had
problems. They just didn’t die with him. Her mind can’t accept us as we are, so it twists reality to fit us into the empty spaces in the puzzle. But we’ll never fit those empty spaces. Not her way. You can do what you want to. Repeat after me: "I can do it."

MICKEY

Artie, I don’t want--

ARTIE

Come on. "I can do it."

MICKEY

But I can’t do anything alone, and Arizona...

ARTIE

Don’t worry, Mickey. I won’t see you left alone here. (Looks at his watch) You’ll see.

MICKEY

(Pause)

Promise?

ARTIE

Promise. On my honor. As defender of Castle Broyhill.

MICKEY pauses for a moment, then turns to run upstairs. He stops, picks up JOE’s overcoat and then goes upstairs with it.

(To Audience)
I had never lied to Mickey. I never could. But time was no longer on my side. Mom was expecting to hear from Morrissette, and she might get nervous and call him. Time was closing in but I refused to see this turn into my first lie to my brother. You know, he may have been right. He may have been only one stupid mistake away from Oceanside. Only trouble is, it would have been my mistake.

IRENE

Entering from the kitchen, with a somewhat steely air. If she were an animal, she might be stalking her prey.

Sorry I took so long at Lorraine’s but she had something other than my skillet to give me.
ARTIE
What was it? A piece of her mind? She hates the idea of a yard sale, doesn't she? Too messy, probably. I actually saw her sweeping her front lawn the other day. Thank goodness her husband hid all the extension cords or she'd be out there with the Hoover upright.

Is that so?

IRENE
Yup. Roger was telling me that for her birthday, he's putting a Teflon coating on the cat. Easier cleaning.

You know what else she's getting?

ARTIE
Increasingly frigid, according to Roger. But that doesn't---

IRENE
This is what she's getting.
She drops an envelop in his lap.

What's she doing with my mail?

IRENE
It was in with hers yesterday. Mr. Marchand strikes again. In fact, without looking at the address, she opened it.

ARTIE
Roger really needs to find something to keep her occupied. Maybe he should coat her with Teflon.

IRENE
Really? I'd say she'll be very busy very soon, what with her new position as assistant professor of history at Arizona State.

ARTIE
(Pause)
Mom, please stop. Whatever you're thinking...

IRENE
I don't even know what I'm thinking! You tell me what I'm supposed to think. How many months have you been holding out on me? How long have you known?

ARTIE
I haven't signed anything yet. My options are still open. I'm just waiting to see if things--
IRENE
What can't you see? Granted, those pot holders were blinding, but even I can see what's happening. You're leaving too. You weren't going to tell me, were you? Thank God I don't have any chicken sandwiches made up.

ARTIE
That's not true! I haven't accepted the position yet. There's just too much going on here for me to pack up and leave right now. And I was planning on talking to you. Today. In fact, I--

IRENE
Just like your father! You were right. Just like your father. He left, and you're leaving too. Go ahead and run away. See if I care.

ARTIE
I've seen how much you care. It's sent Mickey over the edge of depression again and has driven your husband right out of his home. Show me how much you care.

IRENE
Don't you dare imply that everything was my fault! It's not decided what the rest of my life will be. I don't even understand what's been happening, so how could I have caused it? All I know is that you're running away just like your father did, and none of you care a damn about me.

ARTIE
It's nobody's fault. I do care, about Mickey too, in case you'd forgotten about him. I haven't jumped on the airplane yet, and I certainly haven't packed a suitcase yet either.

IRENE
Wait. What do you mean by that?

ARTIE
I mean this.

He goes to open the closet door, but stops short.

I mean packing your son off to some neo-fascist, pseudo-medical concentration camp where the nurses' favorite pastime is tag-team electroshock therapy. Do you want me to take it out? Or would you rather I climb in with it? Do you want me to pack the suitcase for you, or is it reserved for someone else?

IRENE
When did you find that?
ARTIE
I didn’t. Mickey did. And he was ready to believe the worst until I covered for you.

IRENE
How do you know it was the worst? Maybe it was the best. Maybe I was trying my best to help him.

ARTIE
Or maybe getting rid of him was the best way to help yourself. Is that it?

(Deflated)
IRENE
No, it’s not.
(Slumped into a chair)
I don’t know.

ARTIE
(To Audience)
That caught me by surprise. I was prepared for that full frontal assault and all I got was a disarmed militia in full retreat. But for some reason, I didn’t even feel as if I had won.

(To Irene)
You know how I feel about Mickey. I worked hard, got you pissed off at me, just to get him home. I couldn’t abandon him again. He needs more than just you and more than just me. He needs a reason to come out of his room, to put his shoes on and actually tie them. There’s got to be something solid under his feet so no one can yank the world out from under him again.

IRENE
(Pause)
Dr. Morrissette said that a little more time for Mickey at Oceanside might be the best thing for him.

ARTIE
You’re not listening. A little more time for Mickey at Oceanside would be good for Dr. Morrissette’s bank account. That place has been paying him off for years and you know it. The investigation is still going on. God, it’s like Iran-Contra.

IRENE
He said it’s the easiest way. And everyone gets investigated these days. It’s a status thing. God forbid anyone should investigate this family. We’d all be on a steady program of rubber walls and strained peas. Why should he lie anyway? He’s already made a lot of money from us.
"A lot" is not always enough. When did he start trying to get you to send Mickey back? And why did you hesitate? Why not ship him off with his new pajamas as soon as possible? Was it because you saw the improvement in Mickey after only a week out of the hospital? Couldn’t you even make up your mind about that?

I don’t know. Maybe. I just didn’t know what would happen if I--if things went wrong again.

So a few weeks ago, Dr. Morrissette, who released Mickey because he was "fine," calls up and all of a sudden, despite obvious improvement and what I can only term a mis­diagnosis, you consider sending Mickey back? Why did Morrissette want him back so soon? Did he make a mistake? Doesn’t all of this seem odd?

I’m not sure...

Right after Memere’s money came through. Right after you could afford the treatment again.

No, I don’t want to hear that--

Listen! It all makes sense, doesn’t it? Until you got Memere’s money in your hand, you were a financial lead balloon to Oceanside and Dr. Morrissette. No wonder no one objected too strongly when I tried to get Mickey released. Once your money ran out, what did they care if we signed him out of the program or not? It just freed up another lumpy mattress for someone who could afford it. But all of a sudden, here comes a truck full of cash and Morrissette jumps on it like a rat on cheese.

But it would be so easy if someone else could take care of Mickey.

I don’t think so. Sometimes we make things more difficult than they need to be. Someone here can take care of him.

How can I even face him now? He must think I’m horrible.
First of all, not facing it is what got us into this mess in the first place. Second of all, give him a little credit. He'll understand, with a little time and distance. I've got him convinced that I put the suitcase in the closet. I'll help him. We all will.

I can't help him. I need help with him. I'mterrified of him now. I think of him and all I see is a shadow of what he used to be. I can't tell what he'll do, even what I could say to him. He's surrounding me, and every way I turn all I see is this shadow.

Then you know how Mickey feels here.

Good Lord...

We'll be fine. Mickey has tried to get rid of his own shadows. Okay, so he tried to do it by bashing his head in the first time. That's what put him there in the first place. But now, he's trying the hard way, by sticking it out, by pushing himself.

When he was at Oceanside, at least I could see what was coming next, and I was far enough away that I could get out of the way before it ran me down. Since you brought him home, it's gotten harder and harder to just get out of the way. I can't live that way, but what choice do I have?

(Taking a deep breath)
What would you say if I told you I want to be responsible for him from now on?

It's not that easy. You and your college education and your future. Life is not a textbook, you know.

But I like to learn. We can both learn, together.

Do you know what's involved? Do you think it's been easy to live through the past year? Death, sickness, abandonment.

I just want what's best for everybody.
IRENE
Are you ready to deal with all of that? Thank God for Dr. Morrissette. I don't know what I would have done without him.

ARTIE
You could have tried.

IRENE
Don't be smart. Mickey isn't the only problem around here.

ARTIE
Wait, wait, wait. I don't want to get into what we don't need to get into. I want Mickey to come with me.

IRENE
I want what's best too. I'm a mother. You think I don't?

ARTIE
It's easy to hide behind a title.

IRENE
(Suddenly sensing a threat)
I just don't want to be held responsible.

ARTIE
Then just say it's nobody's fault and move on.

IRENE
I can't say that. It's someone's fault. When your father left, that's when it happened. This mother will not be held accountable.

ARTIE
What the hell do you think being a mother means?

IRENE
Don't you dare even think about trying to tell me. I don't want to be responsible for what's out of my control. I'm not the one who ran away from wife and children, or who tried to take my own life. And I am not the homosexual.

ARTIE
What does that have to do with anything?

IRENE
Maybe you should go to Oceanside. Maybe they could fix you.
ARTIE

Nobody in the world should be at Oceanside, with the possible exception of Dr. Serge Morissette, who should not only be made a permanent resident, but permanent laboratory rat.

IRENE

He was right! You're trying to take advantage of my situation. He told me to throw you out, but I hesitated. He was right. Any ties to the past have to go, he said.

ARTIE

That's why you're getting rid of Dad's things. This has nothing to do with "colder, drearier." Oh, how handy. You'd be free of any debt or responsibility. You could start all over again, as if nothing ever went wrong in your life, from your cheapskate parents to your crazy children. And he'd make all the decisions for you, for your money. Oh, the pieces fit perfectly now, just as you've always wanted. You could complete your little picture puzzle and end up with a happy little pastoral scene. Are you really going to let him do that for you?

IRENE

Maybe I am. Where would that leave you? In Arizona? All by yourself, without your brother or that guy you spend so much time with.

Actually---

IRENE

(Not hearing)

I should have listened. He'll be calling any minute now. In fact, I'm surprised he hasn't called yet. But watch what happens when he does.

ARTIE

I'm trying to help you, too. I want you to see--

IRENE

I see fine for myself, thank you. I see you're still a spoiled little child.

ARTIE

No, you still see me as a child, but I know better. I know enough to think for myself, and enough to realize that even this ridiculously ugly little owl has more significance than you can buy for thirty-five cents.

IRENE

You're right. Forty.
ARTIE
Are you sure you shouldn’t be checking yourself into Oceanside? We’ll send you postcards from Arizona--"Having a wonderful time. Wish you were sane."

IRENE
I’m not the crazy one! Do you think I’m going to let my mentally unbalanced son move two thousand miles away to live with homosexuals? Oh, I’m not the crazy one.

ARTIE
For God’s sake, he’ll hear you.

IRENE
(More quietly, but still raging)
My husband has run away, I’ve got one son on the edge of a nervous breakdown and the other babbling away about ceramic owls and Arizona. I sleep all of two hours a night, I have a yard sale to erase part of my life, and I’m still able to have a conversation with a normal person on good days.

ARTIE
I’m part of this deal too, you know, but that doesn’t mean I’m trying to sell off part of my life. I think it’s worth fighting for. For you too. There’s something about Dad I want you to--

IRENE
Yes, I know how you scraped your knee that time. Good for you.

ARTIE
I made my decision. Now you decide.

IRENE
Get rid of that Wayne and go out with girls.

ARTIE
I said I made my decision, not that you’d like it.

And why should I?

IRENE
It’s my life, not yours.

ARTIE
So you get angry with me because I try to save you from your own humiliation. It’s not my fault.
I was never humiliated by what I am, and I'm certainly not humiliated that I love Wayne. He's caring, intelligent, and he doesn't let others do his thinking for him. In fact, he's as anxious about this move as I am, including the part about Mickey coming with us. So whose humiliation is it? Mine or yours?

Both. I do what I have to do.

Not true. You don't have to do anything. There are always choices.

Not always.

Lights dim as MORRISSETTE enters ARTIE's mind again.

Boy, when it rains...

I understand what you're going through. You're harboring some lingering resentment, and I'm a handy target. Call me up whenever you need me. You feel guilt which you're unable to channel properly, so you project. In this case, onto me.

Get out of here. I've got enough on my mind, thanks to you. You've confused my mother so well that she'll only listen to what she wants to hear, and not what I'm really doing here. The whole idea of your psychological warfare is beyond her.

That's why I'm here. That, and no one seems to be answering the phone. I've been trying to get through for some time now, but there's no answer. Why do you suppose that is? I only bring it up because as a construct of self-directed guilt, you make me bring it up.

I knew you'd be calling.
MORRISSETTE
I knew you were facing some severe internal conflicts. Perhaps you could use some help.

ARTIE
I've had help. I came out of it smiling. What a great feeling to be able to tell the truth. But, of course, you wouldn't know about that. Stick with my mother. Maybe she's the one who needs help. Better yet, let her find a doctor with a real degree. You know, one you get at school, not through the mail. Mr. Marchand must have been your mailman too, because it seems you've missed a few lessons.

MORRISSETTE
You realize you're under severe strain, and that this perception may be brought on by more than fatigue.

ARTIE
Go annoy someone else. Oral Roberts hasn't heard voices in ages. Give him a ring.

MORRISSETTE
One can never be too sensitive in these matters.

ARTIE
One can try.

MORRISSETTE
I don't want to get your hopes up. Mickey may seem better, but I may find otherwise. I don't say this to frighten you, but to inform you. Think of it as cancer in remission. All appears well, but there's more to come.

ARTIE
Come on! That could happen to anyone. Why not check everyone who has a bad week into Oceanside? It might happen again, right?

MORRISSETTE
Your mother considers me the proper authority, and my experience backs her up. I would like to see the two of you agree upon something, but it would be a shame if what you did agree upon was, well, premature. Would it really hurt to trust me?

Would it really help?

ARTIE
IRENE
Bursting in, searching for the phone. Finds the cord unplugged. MORRISSETTE watches for a few moments, then exits.

What is this?

There’s more than just--

Tell me!

ARTIE
We do not need to go on as if we were not civilized. We’re all ladies here.

IRENE
Stop that! I think we do, and I will not take the blame either.

ARTIE
You never do. That’s the problem. No wonder Dad left.

IRENE
Don’t you dare say that! You’ve never had to deal with anything as difficult as I’ve had to.

ARTIE
Have you ever tried to tell your parents you’re gay? If I could have afforded it, I’d rather have shipped myself off to the Oceanside Treatment Center for the Professionally Incapable.

IRENE
I wouldn’t have told my parents anything like that. I’d change. I’d change.

Plugs the phone in, starts to dial.

ARTIE
You wouldn’t because you couldn’t. I remember you telling me about your father. Pepere this and Pepere that and none of it good. You were so poor you had to learn to play piano by ear. You were so poor you couldn’t afford a car. You were so poor that Pepere died young from working so hard.

IRENE
Yes! Being poor was good for us. We learned how to make do. You’ve been spoiled.
And Pepere didn’t want to spoil the child so he didn’t spare the rod.

It was for the best. He always knew what was best. He didn’t take the easy way out.

But he sure got out anyway, didn’t he?

What are you saying?

I don’t want to talk this way. I’m going over to Wayne’s. You can deal with the rest of this yourself.

Go on. Move to Arizona, but you’re not taking Mickey. I wanted to keep him here as long as I had help, but if you’re leaving I have no choice.

I’ll be back, but whether I take Mickey or not, you won’t be putting him in the bloody hands of that sociopath.

Run away, Artie. Run away, but I’ll still be here, and I’ll get what’s coming to me.

Yes. Yes, you will.

Turns to exit, stops. A man walks in slowly, wearing a long coat.

Hello, Artie. Hello, Irene.

Oh God.

Runs out of room.

Hi, Dad.

Throws arms around him as lights fade to black.

End of Act I
ACT TWO

Scene One

Spotlight up on Artie standing downstage.

ARTIE

When I was fourteen years old, I tried out for the school band. I played clarinet. "Played" may not be the right word. "Tortured" is more like it. But my best friend was in the band, and it seemed like a good out. Dad was always trying to help me find something I could be really good at, besides history tests. Mom would be happy because it was a supervised activity, Dad would be happy because I'd be out doing something and making friends, Mickey would be happy because I would actually be out of his hair, and I would be happy because I would actually be encouraged to make noise... which is exactly what I made rather than music. In brief, I was told my musical ability lent itself to a career in high-rise construction. Not in so many words, of course, because the band director was familiar with the sensitivity of children and skirted the issue by referring to my talent as "raw," and would I consider trying again next year? The next year, he described my playing as "rare." Translation: find a hobby, kid. So I did. But one positive thing I did learn from St. Jude's Great Clarinet Disaster of 1980 is that everyone deserves a second chance. So I resolved to give my mother one more chance now that Dad was home. I had always done so before, which is the only way I had managed to stick around the house for so long, when I should have been long gone. And if she blew it this time, I was determined that I wouldn't let myself in for the same disappointment ever again. Besides, Dad was back. I had personally saved Mickey from being sent back to Oceanside, and that's no cause for wailing and gnashing of teeth. It was great—for me. Mom, on the other hand, was in serious need of either some Alka-Seltzer or a priest or both. I'm sure she was glad to have Dad back, in the sense that it would be a lot more enjoyable to heap verbal abuse on the man when he's only a couple of feet away, rather than, say, in Guam.

MICKEY begins to play piano underneath ARTIE's speech.

Personally, I was ready for a tirade worthy of Khrushchev. Why not? I had planned all of this, and no detail went unconsidered. I had won.

Lights up on house, Artie walking in.
After about a half an hour, Morn was able to come out of the kitchen, though not without effort. Maybe that was a good sign too.

Joe on the sofa, looking through some of the boxes. Irene enters nervously, sits in the recliner, looking none too comfortable.

IRENE
Well? Are you going to sit there with your coat on all day? If you’re staying, you might as well take it off.

Am I staying?

IRENE
That’s up to you.

JOE
I know you’re upset. After eight months, I understand. Is there some way to start off on the right foot?

IRENE
Without tripping over it? I’m not sure.

ARTIE
(Dees the discomfort on both sides)
Dad, it is so good to have you back.

JOE
It’s great to see you too, Son. It’s good to see all three of you. Mickey, you play as beautifully as ever.

In response, MICKEY hits a wrong note intentionally and smiles.

ARTIE
Which is still at least ten times better than I play.

(Pause)
Let’s not go overboard right away. Why don’t Mickey and I leave you alone for a while? You just take some time. Come on, Mickey. They don’t need us just now. I’ll be in the garage, seeing if there’s any junk I still want to hold on to. Mickey?

MICKEY
I’ll be upstairs.

As he exits, looks at JOE, smiles, and runs upstairs.
JOE

Well, here we are again.
  (No response from Irene)
It's good to be back.

IRENE

(Coldly)
Is it as good to be back as it was to leave?

JOE

(Seeing that she's not going to give in easily)
No. The leaving was necessary. The coming back was voluntary.

IRENE

Well, your timing is much better coming back. I've got this yard sale Saturday.

Picks up the owl.

I guess it's my timing that's bad. I should have gotten rid of this junk years ago.

JOE

This isn't junk. It's full of memories.

Looks at a couple of the items.

It's junk.

IRENE

And this is the expensive stuff. The garbage I threw out.

JOE

Yeah, but I came back.
  (Smiles)
I hope that--

IRENE

Don't do this to me, Joe. You mean well? Okay, but I'm still recovering.

JOE

I'm back to stay. I hope I'm back to stay. That's up to you. All I can do is apologize and leave the rest to you.

IRENE

And after all that I've been able to accomplish without you.
JOE

What's that?

IRENE

Surviving.

JOE

Ah. We both know there's more to life than that.

IRENE

I'm not sure anymore.

JOE

I want to come back, Irene.

IRENE

So are you saying you need me? That you can't survive on your own?

JOE

People need each other in different ways.

IRENE

Who are you? Barbara Streisand? I'm suffering and you're singing show tunes. Do you know what's been happening around here? I've become the most popular charity in town. People have brought over enough soup and pies and breads since you left to keep several small nations from starving. Gifts, too. I could paper the house with the stationery I've received. Everyone is sympathizing with me, Joe. Me, the woman whose husband disappeared eight months ago. Me, with a house full of crap that can't begin to make up for what I lost.

JOE

I know.

IRENE

How?

JOE

I know.

IRENE

Just like Artie. Without a doubt, he knew that you'd be back, while I knew, without a prayer, that you wouldn't be. How do I know so little?

JOE

I thought you'd have figured it out by now. For the last eight months, I've been calling him. At Wayne's.
IRENE
I knew it. You should have heard the line of crap he was feeding me about the Book-of-the-Month Club. Of course I knew. I suspected, anyway.

JOE
But you didn’t say anything.

IRENE
And risk scaring you off again? Don’t get me wrong, Joe. I’m pretty sure I’m glad you’re back. But don’t get carried away. I’ve still got a lot to think about. Good Lord, so much. I’ve had so many questions. Why does Artie hate me? What do I do about Mickey? Why does Artie--What’s the meaning of life, for God’s sake?

JOE
Go ahead and ask him.

IRENE
If there’s one thing I don’t want to know, it’s Artie’s opinion on the meaning of life. He’ll prattle on for hours, and no matter what the answer is, I’ll get blamed for it. Now I know how Lizzie Borden’s mother felt.

JOE
Artie’s not your enemy. No one is. And it’s not three against one, it’s four together. That’s why I’m back.

IRENE
(Highly agitated)
I don’t want to deal with this anymore. I want to be settled again. I want to know that my own wall-to-wall carpeting isn’t going to be pulled out from under me.

JOE
I don’t think we got a guarantee on that carpet. But I’ll do the best I can. I’m back to stay. I’m needed here, and I need to be here.

IRENE
So why did you leave in the first place? Where have you been?

JOE
Which do you want me to answer first?

Both.
JOE

(Smiles)
I see. Well, let’s start with the easy one.

Begins rummaging through the boxes as he’s talking, so he doesn’t have to look at her.

I didn’t take the bus any further than Boston. Then I went across the street to South Station and took the train to Philadelphia from there. Cash purchase, no name needed, and a pair of glasses. That’s all it took for me to disappear. After a few weeks, another small cash outlay took me to Baltimore.

Pulls out a small globe from one of the boxes.

Whatever way the train ran, I let myself be carried along. But at one point, I wondered if what I found in Baltimore was enough. Can you believe I actually had to ask myself that question?

Spins the globe.

So with the money I had saved, I hopped another train, this time to Chicago. Do you know I had never been to Chicago in my life? The Water Tower, Marshall Fields, the Art Institute, the Cubs, all of it. I never had been there. Why not, I kept asking myself. And it hit me. Because I never had a reason to go there. Maybe because I was afraid of what wasn’t familiar, of what I didn’t know for sure. Anyway, that’s where I’ve been until now, until Artie convinced me that my family needed me. So I came back.

IRENE

You couldn’t figure that one out yourself?

JOE

I suppose I knew it all along. Of course I did. But look at all the places I could have ended up. Look how much I didn’t know. There’s a lot to choose from.

Spins the globe again.

How could I pass it all up? Why did I have to settle for the bottom of St. Charles Street in Woonsocket, Rhode Island? And then I realized it was too late to feel responsible only for myself. I care too much about what happens at the bottom of St. Charles Street. That’s why I’m back. I can’t run away from my responsibility. I tried.
IRENE
That’s why you came back.

JOE
My last talk with Artie really did it. When he talked about Mickey, about you--I found I was pressing the phone receiver to my ear so hard I could hear and feel the blood rushing. I didn’t know if I could come back, if it was too late. But when I heard that Mickey was better, and that you were--so unsure, Artie finally convinced me that there was still a home for me.

IRENE
(Impatient now)
That’s why you came back. Why did you leave?

(Pause)
JOE
Because I had never been to Chicago.

(Sarcastically)
IRENE
I’ve been making up the most ridiculous reasons in my head for eight months now, and I never came up with something that asinine. Am I the only sane one left? Why did you do it?

JOE
It’s not that easy. Look around. I can’t clean up all the details for you any easier than you can clean out the house for a garage sale. There are just too many...things.

IRENE
But Dr. Morrissette made sure I at least tried. You could at least try too. Try to explain this to stupid little me.

(Pausing, a strong effort to remain calm)
JOE
You certainly have tried to get rid of a lot. I haven’t seen a lot of this stuff since I had hair.

IRENE
And there’s a lot more already gone to the garage. If you think all this makes you feel old, you should have been here when I went through the attic.

Yes, I guess so.

IRENE
Why weren’t you?
I'm not sure if this is the best time. I promise you'll learn everything in time. My days of keeping secrets are over.

And some are impossible to hide. I suppose you know Artie’s running away to Arizona.

He’s not running away. It’s a teaching job, and he hasn’t really made up his mind yet.

He’s teaching here. Why does he need to leave?

You said it yourself. I don’t think he has to. He’s got a job here. No, he doesn’t have to go. Chicago, Arizona. They’re all the same.

Well, let him go. I mean, I hate the way he is. Maybe it would be easier on everyone if he went. Maybe he’ll change.

Does he know you feel this way? He has made a huge effort to bring this family back together, you can see that. But that doesn’t mean he’ll give up his own life for it. He would love to stay, but he needs something from you.

Why me, Joe?

Because he cares. He always has, and he’s put his own life on hold to help you understand and move on with your own. He’s been trying to tell you. You wouldn’t do it for me. You lost sight of the man behind the job, so I left. But I am not Artie. I had to come back. Artie doesn’t, and he’s leaving it up to you to decide what will happen.

If I fail?

You’ll still have one son around. That is, if Morrissette doesn’t get his way. But there’s time to talk about that, isn’t there?
IRENE
(Suspicious)
What has Artie been telling you?

JOE
This is one I could figure out myself.

IRENE
(Angry again) Don't listen to Artie. I'm the one that's been holding things together around here. Not Serge Morrissette, not Artie, and for the past several months, certainly not you.

JOE
Well, I'm anxious to see it for myself. It must have been very difficult. I'm sorry.

I know what I had to do.

IRENE
We all do what we feel is best--

JOE
So don't come waltzing back in here too sure of yourself. Sorry, Joe. You gave up that privilege when you left that chicken sandwich to rot.

IRENE
Yes, well I'm back now. We'll deal with Mickey together. There's nothing you could have done--

JOE
What if I have done something? Should I listen to you? If Dr. Morrissette really wants Mickey back, do you think I would stand in his way?

IRENE
I pray to God you would. And if you wouldn't, I would.

IRENE
The courts would laugh at you. Who would believe your devotion to your family when they hear about your little cross-country hike? You abandoned your family. You abandoned me.

JOE
So you know what it's like to be on the other side of the fence. For the sake of one small gesture, one good decision, you could keep both your sons near you. I came back. God knows if Artie would.
He'd really leave?

IRNE

JOE

Forever.

IRNE

With only this stupid owl to remember him by.

JOE

(Seeing some hope)

But it doesn't have to end that way. Show him you understand.

MICKEY comes halfway down the stairs, looking and listening to what's happening.

IRNE

We'll see. Thanks to this little plan you two cooked up, I'll be a bit preoccupied for some time. It's good seeing you're still alive, Joe, but maybe this isn't the best place to be right now. Please find someplace--

JOE

(Seeing Mickey)

Mickey, what are you doing down here?

MICKEY

(Coming down to him)

I'm sorry. I just wanted to see you. I mean, you're here. Can't I come down? It's killing me staying up there when you're down here.

(Pause)

You're not going away again are you?

Joe looks at Irene for her answer.

MICKEY

Please, Mom. I'll, I'll play the piano again. Please let him stay.

IRENE

Mickey, it's not that easy. I'm sure you're glad to see him again, but--

Please let him stay!

MICKEY
JOE

That’s up to your mother, Son. You’ve got to trust people. Sometimes the best thing isn’t the easy thing.

IRENE

I’ll be in the attic. (Gets up) Will you be staying? It’s up to you. I’ve got too much else to deal with.

JOE

Yes, I’ll stay. (Irene exits)

Someone’s got to make the decisions around here. I guess that’s what fathers do.

Then stay.

MICKEY

Hugs him.

(To audience)

What would I have done without Dad? Made me wonder why a man who was in such control of his emotions had to run away in the first place. It was the first time I ever remember him avoiding his fatherly duties. I mean, this was a man who wouldn’t miss a school parents’ night for the Second Coming. I wonder if I would have been better off if he had kept travelling, looking for his own happiness. All of a sudden, what had seemed like a good idea had become a potential disaster. I knew Mom wouldn’t send Mickey away as long as there was someone around to bear the burden, though I had my doubts for a moment or two. Suddenly here I was, part of a four-member crew sailing a suburban middle-class Titanic, and I began to wonder if abandoning ship was the best way to save my life. But even the smallest lifeboat can do some good when the ship goes down, and we were still afloat.

JOE and MICKEY in the living room. JOE finds one of the paper airplanes and tosses it. It drops hopelessly. Artie enters.

Crash and burn?

ARTIE

With the airplane or with your mother?

Either. Both.

ARTIE
JOE
No. I think we landed in one piece.

ARTIE
(Smiles)
I knew it. I know her. Mickey's safe, then. Thanks so much for coming home. It's great to have you back. How does it feel?

JOE
I feel...numb. How did the first astronauts feel when they landed on the moon? You're the history expert.

ARTIE
Well, one of them felt like playing some golf.

JOE
I guess I feel like an astronaut. Relieved I made it, but not out of danger yet. And a game of golf would be good and relaxing. It'll get better. I'm staying anyway.

ARTIE
(Sees the airplane Joe had picked up)
Remember those airplane fights?

He folds a new one and tosses it at Joe.

Fort La-ZBoy is still standing if you're interested. It's been reupholstered, but it's still standing.

JOE
And so is the family. That's good. I need some stability. We all do.

ARTIE
That doesn't sound like the old you.

JOE
It's the current me.

ARTIE
Where's the old you?

JOE
Retired.

ARTIE
I don't believe it. Stability is not the desire of the man who used to swim in the Narragansett River.
I was younger then.

ARTIE
That water was filthy to the point of being hazardous waste. God knows what you could have contracted in that cesspool.

JOE
At least the rats weren't too bad if you stayed south of the bridge.

ARTIE
Yeah, about a hundred feet upstream of the falls.

JOE
So I took some chances.

ARTIE
How about hitchhiking to New York?

JOE
Hitching a ride wasn't so dangerous in those days.

ARTIE
How about that business of the fireworks in the school gym?

JOE
(Laughs)
I was young.

ARTIE
You weren't young when you helped me and Mickey steal apples out of Mr. Lambert's tree. Remember, Mickey?

MICKEY
And I remember he had to practically pull you out of the tree when Mr. Lambert heard us one time.

JOE
You would have stayed all night, hiding in the branches.

MICKEY
You would have too.

ARTIE
Mickey starts to play the piano.
JOE

(Pause)

Maybe. Artie, listen. I know you wanted me back for a reason. Hell, I may have come back on my own, eventually. But I do need that stability now, so I’ve go to be honest with you. Though there are many reasons I came back, I did it for one reason in particular: this is my family. It’s all I have, it’s all Mickey has, and it’s all your mother has. But it’s not all you have, and I’m afraid you no longer want to be a part of it. You can go if you want to. I just hope you want to stay.

ARTIE

Of course I do. I want to so much. But you’re right. This family is not all that I have. I’m home free, you might say.

JOE

So you’re leaving. With or without your brother.

ARTIE

What makes you think that?

JOE

I know you. We know each other. The first time I heard you mention this new job I figured you would begin packing. I’ve understood everything about you since those days of stealing apples. I’d look up and see myself in the branches, always trying to go a little higher, reach a little further. We’d reach for it with the same ambition, Artie, the same arm. But yours was the one that always came down with the prize. You can do anything you want, Artie. You have no limits.

ARTIE

Except for the clarinet.

JOE

Okay, maybe one, but that’s all. That’s why your mother has always been so frightened. She’s not frightened of you. She’s frightened of your potential. She doesn’t want to be left out just because she can’t keep up.

ARTIE

Dad, I--

JOE

No, you were right. You’ve got so many possibilities. Besides, someone has to keep the loose ends from flying apart. Just promise me one thing.
ARTIE

Yes?

JOE

Don’t disappear. Give your mother the chance to show how she really feels.

ARTIE

That’s what I’m doing right now. I’m still waiting for her to make her move. But I won’t promise you more than that. I’ve given her chances all my life. It seems that’s been my one concern all along. Give her one more chance. And another and another, to the point where I didn’t feel able to simply act and let her live with it. The benefit of the doubt is a contradiction in terms. I won’t promise, Dad.

MICKEY hits a wrong note, looks frustrated and stops.

JOE

(I understand. It’ll work out. Doesn’t it always? And we’ll keep Mickey around, too.)

(Mickey gets up and comes over to them)

He’s improved so much. We can’t let him down now. We’ve got to stick together, right?

ARTIE

The Three Muscatels!

JOE, MICKEY, ARTIE

All for one and one for the road!

They laugh.

JOE

Come on, Mickey. Let’s go help your mother.

They exit.

ARTIE

(To audience)

When you’re young, you don’t realize how much you owe to grown-ups. Not until you touch the stove while their backs are turned, or you lean back in a folding chair, or you play with matches, or you don’t look both ways before crossing a street. I realized then that my father, in his own way, had just taken my hand to help me across the street.

MORRISSETTE

Enters.

I’m sorry to interrupt old home week. May I come in?
MORRISSETTE
But I'm not real. Psychological constructs can do many things, but dialing a phone is not one of them. This is very important for your brother's welfare, Artie. I've been trying to get in touch with your mother all day. There are some very important matters to discuss.

ARTIE
Like what? The monthly payment?

MORRISSETTE
Just a few things your mother is familiar with. This is regarding your brother's treatment. Now as I see it, I am the expert in these matters. No matter how you view my opinion, I would venture that an impartial panel would agree that I have more expertise in treating chronic depression than you have. Now I need to speak with your mother, and I'm afraid you may be suffering from guilt feelings from making such communication possible.

ARTIE
I'm sorry, doctor, but she's quite busy following your own prescription for shutting her family and her past out of her life. What do you really want?

MORRISSETTE
I'm afraid it's confidential. Try to appreciate my position. I've been treating Mickey for quite some time now, a lot of which is due to your father abandoning him.

ARTIE
He did no such thing.

MORRISSETTE
Whatever the term you use, the result is the same. Now he has barely had a chance to see Mickey since he returned. How expert are you on his state of health? What medications would you prescribe to improve Mickey's condition? Irene is much more familiar with the situation than your father is, so my professional integrity demands that I deal only with her at this point.

ARTIE
I've been just as involved as my mother has. There's nothing that I haven't been able to find out--or figure out.
MORRISSETTE
Is that so? You need to stop regarding me as a criminal, Arthur. Am I asking for anything other than what my experience has proven I deserve? Would you deal so lightly when another's life hangs in the balance? There are procedures, approved by the profession and approved by the state. Whatever your latent psychosis has done to cause you such resentment of me is for you to deal with. Your brother's best interests must be considered above all.

ARTIE
Jesus! No wonder the woman can't fight you. You're an expert in psychology, all right.

MORRISSETTE
I knew you'd understand.

ARTIE
You are the worst thing to ever happen to Mickey. When he stopped setting records, I thought he'd survive. When people started to call him "Whatsisname, the guy from that school" instead of Mickey Harrison, the football star, I thought he'd survive. The first time he locked himself in his room for a whole day, I knew he'd bounce back. But you. When you come around, I get scared.

MORRISSETTE
I'm sorry you feel that way. Especially since you are also in a state of severe confusion.

ARTIE
You ought to be locked away where you can never hurt anyone ever again.

MORRISSETTE
I'm not the one carrying on conversations with the empty air.

ARTIE
Forget it, Morrissette. Dad's back, Mickey's better, and Mom doesn't have to wipe Mickey out of her life. She can rely on Dad again. Boy, when I do a job, I do a job, don't I?
MORRISSETTE

(Increasingly angry, yet always controlled)
You think it’s money I’m after? I’m getting tired of your ridiculous claims now. And I’m getting tired of trying to figure out how to help Mickey when your actions are really what’s hurting him. Granted, I didn’t protest too much when he was released from Oceanside, but don’t think I didn’t have my reasons. And you think it was a question of finance? Where would that money have come from? I’ve been bribed and threatened before and you are an amateur. The real money belongs to your mother now, doesn’t it? Not to your father, but to your mother. She had to put up with her own martinet parents for years to get it, but she got it. And that’s not all she inherited from them. No, she got something much more personal, much more powerful. Some things are genetic, I’ve told you that. She got determination. Did she get intelligence? Well, they willed their money to her. She made sure of that. She’s not as dumb as some people may think. She just needs someone to help her along the way. Since your father abdicated his assistance six months ago, I was there to help. And for this you insult me.

ARTIE

You son of a bitch.

MORRISSETTE

Have you ever seriously considered treatment for your own troubles, son?

ARTIE

Don’t you dare call me that. Don’t you ever even consider calling me that again. You’re not good enough.

MORRISSETTE

What’s on your conscience? Surely there must be something. Let’s see. You’re leaving your unbalanced brother to an unstable mother and an insecure father while you and your homosexual lover move two thousand miles away. Could that be it?

ARTIE

I’m not leaving Mickey alone. Shut up!

MORRISSETTE

Could it be that you lied and tried to hide it from your mother?

ARTIE

Shut up!
MORRISSETTE

Or could it be that you gave your brother--your suicidal brother---a sharp object? And even worse, you gave him false hope. What's on your conscience?

ARTIE

You are. That I'm not knocking the crap out of you as we speak is sheer torture. What's on yours?

Nothing at all.

ARTIE

No, you just don't have a conscience. You haven't needed one. It would only get in the way of your financial success, wouldn't it? I know all about you. How many times have you been brought into court? At least three. In fact, that last time was a pretty close call, if I remember the documents correctly. Poor woman. To commit suicide only two days before she was going to testify against you.

MORRISSETTE

She was terribly distressed, as well as depressed. Poor woman was left alone in the world. In fact, how ironic that you should mention that tragic situation. She had a homosexual son too. Isn't that queer? Oh, I'm sorry. That's not what I meant, of course.

ARTIE

You are dangerous. Tell me, where did all her money go? Her husband had left her a lot of money, I think. Yet she died as a state welfare case. Isn't that queer?

MORRISSETTE

I'll be honest with you, young man--

ARTIE

Could you hold that thought for a moment? We'll need some witnesses.

MORRISSETTE

That's the point. Witnesses wouldn't help. They never have. In fact, I can publicly deny anything that you make up here in your head. Who would believe the rantings of an insecure, petulant homosexual over the professional opinion of a successful doctor? Try to take this into the real world and you'll see for yourself just how cozy a stay at Oceanside can be.

ARTIE

Don't threaten me. Amateur.
MORRISSETTE
And don’t you threaten me. I’ve got a very dear friend in
the state attorney general’s office. I saved his life once.
At least, that’s what he thinks, and he is so devoted. And
talented. He can work the most amazing magic tricks. My
friend can make ledgers disappear. He can make a month in
Singapore disappear.

ARTIE
Mickey’s life is in the hands of a criminal.

MORRISSETTE
Again, you’re wrong. Mickey’s life is in your mother’s
hands.

ARTIE
And you think you’ve got her in your back pocket. You think
she’ll do whatever you say. Well, thanks to this little
homecoming I’ve engineered, you may find differently. You
think she still has no choice? We’ll see.

No, you will.

ARTIE
You thought you picked your victims well.

MORRISSETTE
Not victim. Client. And the choice is hers. I refuse to
accept the blame for anything that goes wrong from here on.
I can’t do anything about it.

ARTIE
Oh, but I can, doctor. And I use the term loosely. With
the information I have, I could begin another investigation.
I’ve got some rather well placed friends also. Someone had
to write a pretty big check for that month in Singapore,
didn’t they? Was it an Oceanside check? No problem, it
came from somewhere.

MORRISSETTE
But it would require months, years of detective work. My
friend is thorough. And it would take such a lot of money
to pursue such a case. Your father has none, you have none,
or not nearly enough, anyway. Your mother, however, is
loaded, isn’t she? Water, water everywhere... Even if you
should find some money somewhere, remember that your brother
is still under my official supervision. Oceanside never did
complete those forms. That was no oversight. Your mother
can be so easily persuaded. It’s not very often one comes
across someone so determined and so easily, shall we say,
convinced?
ARTIE
Shall we say, psychologically raped?

MORRISSETTE
What she does is up to her.

ARTIE
You think that's not true, but I know that it is. If she knew what to do, she'd have done it by now. She's always avoided taking that step, because of us, because we let her off the hook. No more. I don't give a damn about what you got away with in the past, but get the hell out of this family.

But it's much too---

Get out of my head!

MORRISSETTE stops, slowly exits, looking back at ARTIE as he does. ARTIE slumps down on the sofa, shaken.

I knew he was wrong about my mother, but the really frightening part is that he was right about me. And was it his opinion, or in some way, did I already know? Why did I need to get out of town so quickly? Was I really running to something, or was I running away? No, I needed to give her that one final chance. Maybe I could stay around a little longer, as long as she was doing her best. Still, I needed to take care of one thing. As long as Mickey was still a patient at Oceanside, I'd never be able to get rid of Morrissette.

IRENE, MICKEY and JOE enter from upstairs, Joe and Mickey each carrying a box of clutter from the attic.

Mickey, do me a favor?

MICKEY
What?

ARTIE
Go upstairs. And could you wait up there for a minute or two? I need to ask you something. I'll be up real soon.

IRENE
Artie...?
ARTIE
Mickey, please go upstairs.

JOE
Maybe you should.

IRENE
What's this all about? Did Dr. Morrissette call?

ARTIE
Please, Mickey.

IRENE
You know something, Artie.

MICKEY
About what?

ARTIE
I don't know what you're talking about. Tell us.

IRENE
Is it about the call? I'll tell you about it later.

ARTIE
What was it about? Contracts, maybe?

IRENE
I said I'll tell you about it later. Mickey, go up to your room.

ARTIE
(Sensing victory, feeling he forced Irene into a corner)

IRENE
What's the matter with you? We'll discuss this later.

ARTIE
When it's quiet and everything happens silently in the dark? This is your son's life we're dealing with. It should be noisy. It's a matter of life and death. I can't believe how stupid I was. Do you like hearing that?

J OE
Artie--
ARTIE
No, Dad. I was stupid. I really thought that even she wouldn't go through with it if you were here.

JOE
You're not making much sense.

ARTIE
Sending Mickey back to Oceanside. She wants to get rid of him.

IRENE
I don't want any such thing. I let him come home, I didn't send him back first chance I got.

ARTIE
No, not first chance. Thank God Dad's back.

JOE
I can't believe she'd do that to your brother.

IRENE
When you wheeled your Samsonite out the door, you left me little alternative. Mickey understands. Why can't you?

JOE
I don't even know what's happening, but this is neither the time or place. Mickey, why don't you go--

IRENE
You're acting as if I enjoy this. It's no barrel of laughs handing your son over to an institution. You may not like this either, Joe, but it's for his own good. And it's legal.

JOE
You say that like something's already been done. I was talking about sending him to Oceanside in the first place.

IRENE
(Realizing she may have gone too far)
I couldn't stop what Dr. Morrissette had to do. Okay? That's the phone call I was waiting for. Mickey has not been released from Oceanside yet, just in case. That's what he was calling to tell me. Is that so terrible? I'm just...waiting to see what happens. There! Big deal. Now blame me for looking out for my own son!

ARTIE
No, you couldn't do anything anyway. Not without Dad. You couldn't have.
IRENE
Will you just relax? Nothing's been done. Even without the release, it's still not final. Dr. Morrissette still needs to hear from me. So there. It wasn't me, it was Dr. Morrissette. It's all his idea.

ARTIE
It was not! It was you! You're the one who won't end this all right now. Why don't you just say it!

MICKEY
Maybe I need to be put away. Maybe it's for the best.

Starts to go upstairs.

ARTIE
Wait, Mickey. Stay. It's not for the best. The best is here, in a family that cares about you. A hospital is not the best, especially not that hospital. Home is the best.

IRENE
Is that your personal opinion?

ARTIE
Ignores her, goes to box with paper airplanes in it, hands some to JOE.

Here.

JOE takes one tentatively, then reaches into the box and grabs a handful.

This is what they can't give you at Oceanside.

JOE and ARTIE enthusiastically take their usual places on the floor, then ARTIE stops.

Mickey?

MICKEY looks around, takes some of the planes, takes his spot on the floor.

ARTIE, MICKEY, JOE

Bonsai!

The airplanes begin to fly all over, the three laughing like kids. They keep the volley going through IRENE's speech.
IRENE
They’re crazy. How can I deal with this? Stop that!

She tries to get between them, but they keep at it.

Stop that! You’ll force me to do something! Don’t make me! I won’t be held responsible.

(She sees her words have no effect)
All right! All right, if that’s how you want it. Just remember, I tried to tell you. Don’t come crying to me for being a terrible mother. If anyone here ruined anything, it’s your fault.

MICKEY stops playing, but ARTIE and JOE continue. IRENE turns to ARTIE then JOE then MICKEY.

You did it! You did it! You did it! It’s your fault!

MICKEY can’t take the direct assault, draws his legs up and covers his head with his arms.

ARTIE
Mickey...

(Sees Morrissette again, watching smugly)

IRENE

(Smugly)
I knew this would happen. Look at him. You think I’m stupid. That’s why I had his bag packed. This proves I’m right.

(Mickey shudders)

ARTIE
Mom! No! Mickey, I’m sorry. I didn’t want you to think...Oh God, I’m sorry, Mickey.

MICKEY gets up and walks dazedly up the stairs, ARTIE rising to go after him.

Mickey...

IRENE
Leave him alone. You’ve made him crazy enough.

IRENE AND MORRISSETTE
If it weren’t for you, this wouldn’t have happened.
ARTIE
If it weren’t for me, he’d still be locked up in his dungeon at Oceanside.

IRENE
Well, he’s going back. He doesn’t deserve what’s happening around here.

ARTIE
He doesn’t deserve you.

IRENE
And you might have let me in on eight months of phone calls from your father. I’m going to call Dr. Morrissette.

ARTIE
Don’t you dare. You will stay here and watch what pays for his Singapore holidays. Here’s the real price. How do you count the cost of making this family function again? What have we paid? Can any money bring that back?

(To Morrissette)
I should never have let you get your sleazy, filthy hands on him again once he came back. Doctors are supposed to heal people.

JOE
Artie, it’s too late. I was too late.

MORRISSETTE
(Overlapping)
What your mother has done is completely up to her, young man. Do not blame me.

IRENE
See? He’s just as crazy as the other one!

ARTIE
(To Morrissette)
You’re crazier than I thought!

IRENE
I’m leaving.

Starts to go, ARTIE stops her. At this point, JOE can only watch.

ARTIE
Where are you going?

Picks up the globe, puts it in front of her spins it.
Here. Pick someplace you'd like to go. Let's say you had several thousand dollars of someone else's money to spend. Go ahead. Where would you go? Where would you hide? Chicago?

Joe, make him stop.

This is not my fight.


No.

Come on. Anywhere. Where do you want to go?

No!

Why not?

Because.

(As Irene tries to move away)

Who's running away now? Why won't you choose?

Because no matter where I pick, you'll use it against me for some reason or other. You just want to embarrass me. Let someone else do it.

(As Irene tries to move away)

Who's running away now? Why won't you choose?

Because no matter where I pick, you'll use it against me for some reason or other. You just want to embarrass me. Let someone else do it.

See? It's that simple. She'd rather let someone else do it.

What are you saying? That I can't make up my own mind?

I suggest you watch your step very closely, Arthur. You are quite a dramatic young man, but remember that Mickey is now only a breath away from being completely in my hands.
ARTIE
You’re absolutely right.

IRENE
Don’t get too smug. I know what I have to do, in spite of your dramatics.

JOE
(Quietly)
It’s my fault.

ARTIE
(Questioned)
It is spite! Can’t you see beyond yourself long enough to even realize why you’re putting Mickey through this? You’re punishing him to get at me, aren’t you? You couldn’t have worked out this arrangement too long ago. Don’t tell me it was because of the paper airplanes.

IRENE
Just yesterday, okay? Why do you think that luggage was ready to go? All I have to do is call and let Morrissette know it’s time and it will be all over. So you see, I just had to wait for the doctor to take care of the rest.

Phone rings, everyone stops. Another ring.

IRENE
It’s my fault.

JOE
It’s for the best.

IRENE
Goes to answer phone.

ARTIE
Rips phone out of wall before IRENE can get to it. To MORRISETTE.

I should kill you. I should kick your ass all the way to hell, you bastard.

IRENE thinks ARTIE is talking to her, and she backs as far away as she can.

ARTIE
As if Dad doesn’t have a say in this?
IRENE
Not according to the doctor. You abandoned us. And it’s already done, Joe. If I knew you were coming back, I might have done something differently, but Artie kept everything a secret. He could have told me. Blame him. You had abandoned us, and I had to rely on the doctor’s advice.

ARTIE
You mean his orders. This is all a big money-making scheme, and you fell for it because you refused to think for yourself. God, what did Pepere do to you? Is that why you let Morrissette take charge? Because you weren’t ever allowed to have your own ideas? Because Pepere chose your life for you? You trusted Morrissette over Mickey. Is it ever going to change? You’ve trusted a crook more than your own son. Trust Mickey. Trust yourself.

IRENE
What’s so wrong? Mickey went away once and you didn’t go into all these dramatics. I thought you wanted to help Mickey.

ARTIE
I do, but I’ve seen the kind of help people get at Oceanside.

MORRISSETTE
Be careful, Arthur. Mickey is still in my hands now.

ARTIE
Yes, Mickey is-
(Realizing what he’s forgotten)
Mickey. I did it for Mickey. I didn’t do it for me. I didn’t do it for you. I didn’t do it for anyone but Mickey.

JOE
Yes, you did. You did it for me. I needed to come home. You did it for Mickey. He needed someone on his side. And you did it for your mother.

IRENE
Don’t get carried away, Joe. I’ve been doing fine. It’s Artie that needs something, like a long rest.

ARTIE
God, even now she has to keep fighting. Stop before it’s too late.
MICKEY comes down quietly, wearing the overcoat, his hands are buried inside. While the argument continues, he moves to the piano and plays very quietly.

Just admit that you can make the right decision instead of doing it for spite. Think about Mickey. Forget about me.

IRENE

I wish I could.

JOE

You know you don’t mean that.

IRENE

This is a boy who rips phones out of walls. He’s crazy. Let him move. I don’t need him anymore.

ARTIE

You heard her, Dad. It was time to move on a long while ago, but I guess I was too much like her. I just couldn’t make the final decision for myself. The last chance was one chance too many. I’m sorry it took something like this to make me go.

MICKEY’s playing is becoming erratic and loud.

I’m sorry that you couldn’t let me do something for you. I’m sorry if you resent having your husband back. I’m sorry that life wasn’t perfect. I’m sorry that Pepere died and left you unable to live your own life. And I’m sorry that his life wasn’t even good enough for him to live.

IRENE

You’re sorry, all right. To think that Pepere--

MICKEY’s playing has now become cacophonous.

Mickey, please stop that!

MICKEY stops, then in the following silence, he slumps onto the keys with an off key result.

ARTIE
He goes to him, and MICKEY slumps into his arms, the coat opening and revealing much blood on his hands and abdomen.

Oh God!

What happened? Dear God!

He rushes to MICKEY, while IRENE stands, almost paralyzed.

MICKEY
(Almost a whisper)
I can't do it, Artie

ARTIE
Rushing to him.

Oh my God! Hang on, Mickey! Oh, God. Hang on.
(To Joe)
Get a towel, something. Call 911! Come on! Oh God, it's all over. How did you do this?

IRENE
I told you! I told you!

JOE
Where's the portable phone? Irene, where's the phone?

IRENE
In the den. It's your fault!

ARTIE
God, Mickey. Why?
(Pause)
Mickey? Come on, pal. Where's the letter opener? Was that it?

IRENE
What do I do?

ARTIE
Get some towels. Hold on, Mickey. Find some towels or something. Anything. It wasn't the letter opener. Please tell me it wasn't the letter opener.

He's cradling MICKEY, rocking back and forth.
Morn, get some bandages or towels or something! Oh God, it’s all over.

IRENE

I can’t. I can’t.

ARTIE

Mickey? Don’t worry, pal. You’ll come with me to Arizona. Everything will be fine. You won’t have to worry about a thing. Mickey? Why did you have to...We were home free. Right? Home free.

JOE

They’re on their way.

ARTIE

I trusted you, Mickey. Don’t let me down. Don’t let her win. Mickey? Mickey?

The body is lifeless.

That’s okay pal. You did it. You did it. You did it...

Lights fade to black.
Scene Two

Spotlight on ARTIE, downstage, packing a box.

The EMTs arrived about 10 minutes later. Along with the deep wrist and finger cuts were slashes all over his body. He had already lost a lot of blood before he came downstairs. The autopsy also showed a heavy dosage of his medication and some pain pills. He simply was not going back to Oceanside. And yes, it was the letter opener. But I had to trust him. The letter opener was one way. Were there other ways? Probably. Definitely. There are lots of choices.

Lights up on living room as ARTIE carries a box in and sets it down near the front door.

And I made mine as well.

Goes to the phone and dials. MORRISSETTE appears, but shows little reaction during the exchange.

Good morning, doctor. Sorry to bother you at home, but I just wanted to tell you goodbye, and to thank you for all you’ve done for us, especially Mickey. He’d like to express his appreciation too, but unfortunately he’s dead right now.

(Pause)

Why are you so angry? Yes, you have just lost a lot of money, I understand. I’ve just lost a brother. Are we even? By the way, my friend just spoke to your friend in the attorney general’s office. Seems that this bloody body was one too many. You’re front page news. That was a flattering photo, wasn’t it? You didn’t even look like a criminal. Best of luck during the investigation. I hope you get what you deserve. By the way, if you need testimony in court, I guarantee you can have mine. I’d be more than glad to tell the truth. And I wouldn’t think of mentioning your visit to Singapore. Besides, it’s already in the deposition.
Reacts as if MORRISSETTE hangs up on him. MORRISSETTE disappears.

Sore loser. But what did I expect? Not only did I lose Mickey, but I lost part of me. Sound corny? Real life can be that way. I wasn’t used to making mistakes, and this was one that I would never be free of. Arizona is not nearly far enough away to leave something like that behind.

(Pause)

It was my last memory of Mickey. And more than a memory, it was a reminder of my own failure. I never thought I would fail, you know. I thought it was only Mom, Dad and Mickey who could. I know better now.

JOE enters.

JOE

The arrangements are made. You should stay for a couple of days.

ARTIE

I should stay a lot longer. But it’s time to put this part of my life where it belongs--behind me. I guess that’s what Mickey thought too. I’m so sorry, Dad.

JOE

For what? For trying? That’s nothing to be sorry for. We all fail.

IRENE comes down the stairs, noticeably worn, but still edgy.

Some more than others.

ARTIE

That’s true.

IRENE

Please, don’t start. You know what I’ve been through. Why rub my face in it? Joe, what have I ever done to him?

Ask him.

JOE

IRENE

As far as I can tell, it’s because I thought his purple and green owl wasn’t a work of timeless art. It doesn’t matter.

JOE

(As Artie takes another box to the front door)

Ask him.
IRENE

Who knows? Maybe he’s as screwed up as Mickey is. Look who he’s in love with.

JOE

Irene.

IRENE

Is that it, Artie? Or is it because you don’t want anyone to be happy, since you’re not?

ARTIE

Fiddle-dee-dee. After all, tomorrow is another day.

IRENE

I guess that’s it.

ARTIE

Why do you insist that I’m unhappy the way I am? It makes you upset. It makes me ecstatic.

IRENE

Being attracted to other men makes you happy.

ARTIE

I’m glad that I can be attracted to other men. I’m glad that it doesn’t matter, and that I can live happily as I please, rather than under orders.

JOE

Please, let’s not fight. Let’s just clean up here.

ARTIE

This seems to be important to your wife. You want to know how it makes me happy. Let me tell you. I love it when I walk in the door and there are flowers on the table for me. I love it when he picks me up at work and we drive to the beach for a moonlight stroll. I love seeing him smile when I walk in the door.

IRENE

(Coldly)

Fag.

ARTIE

Ah, the magic word.

JOE

There is no reason for this. We just lost one of our sons.
ARTIE
Two. I’m leaving. And maybe you’re right, Dad. Maybe I didn’t do it for Mickey. Not just for Mickey. Maybe I did it for Mom all along, because I was afraid of what she would become after having to deal with this all alone for too long. I did it because I cared enough to think that she deserved another chance. And maybe I was wrong.

IRENE
I knew it.

ARTIE
When I’m gone you’ll see just what part of this family I really was. You may not see it now, but you will learn. I’ve learned the hard way. Now it’s your turn.

IRENE
That’ll be something to brag about, won’t it, Joe? I can see it now: "Our son’s running off with another man." I hope you’ll get married. What will you have on your invitations? "Don’t bother to come to the ceremony. It’s illegal."

ARTIE
You don’t have to worry about that. A marriage doesn’t need to be legal to be real.

IRENE
Don’t talk to me about marriage. I’ve been married for almost twenty-five years.

ARTIE
And you’re damn lucky Joe came along. But be careful. You drove him away once.

IRENE
How dare you?

ARTIE
I chose Wayne because of what he is, not because of what he isn’t. And certainly not because I was getting old...or pressured.

IRENE
My parents did no such thing.

ARTIE
Is that true, Dad? What really happened to Pepere?
JOE

(Finally uncontrollable)
Shut up! Both of you! I've been saying all long that this isn't my argument, hoping that saying it would make it true. Well look. Mickey is still alive. See? It doesn't work that way. He's dead, and if I'm part of this family, I'm part of this argument. I saw more consideration between total strangers in the train stations. Because each of you is so determined to make a point, I have to go through the rest of my life thinking "What if?" What if I had come home just one day earlier? What if Mickey were still alive?

(Pause)

Nobody's life is worth making a point. Do we have to lose someone else? This may not be my idea of happiness, but I belong here, and I'll be damned if someone is going to take away one bit more. We've lost too much already. I will hate myself for the rest of my life for what I did to this family, and I will take responsibility for Mickey's condition, but I will never know why you two have done this to yourselves! Are you a mother? What are you so afraid of that you have to eliminate your children from your life? Is it something they've done, or something they haven't been able to? And whose fault is that? Who ever told you that your mother and father were supposed to be perfect? You knew I wasn't perfect. Why couldn't you do the same for your children? Why aren't you able to forgive each other? This isn't about what's best for Mickey. Now it's no more than a fight to prove a point, and the most terrible thing about it all is that it didn't get proven. You've sacrificed your family for nothing. Please. Stop.

ARTIE

(Pause)
You're right. It doesn't matter anymore. I know I have control of my own life, and that should be enough.

Picks up the owl.

Funny you should still have this around, as much as you've made fun of it. I remember when I made it. Polishing, painting it. So many things to consider. What if no one likes it? But when I finished it, when I knew there was nothing else left to do it, all I could do was let go. I gave it to you. I can still touch it, repaint it, and even treasure it for what it taught me, or for what it means to me. But the only thing I feel like doing to it now is breaking it. Would you like that?

Acts as if he's about to throw it against the wall.

But would that do any good? No. Dad's right.
He puts the owl in one of the boxes.

You can do what you want with it. No more trying to make points. Too many things get broken. It's yours. It's all you'll have left of my stuff. But my life is my own now. I asked you just to show me that you didn't have to rely on someone else to pick and choose and bear the blame. What you showed me scared me. I'm scared of you, Mom. But it's my life now, respect what I am and what I've done. Otherwise, get out of my life and I'll decide whether I let you in again. My life. My decision.

IRENE
(Sarcastically)
I feel much better now, thank you. How about you? Have you accomplished something?

ARTIE
If you've understood. I won't open my veins just to get you to listen to me.

IRENE
Oh, I understand. I understand that you're ungrateful and hateful and I'm embarrassed to have you here.

JOE
Didn't you hear what I said? You don't know what--

IRENE
I know what I'm doing. I'm telling your son that no matter how independent he thinks he is, he'll always need us. I know I've never had to see a psychiatrist. Who's really got the problems here?

JOE
It's everyone's problem. There's enough blame for all of us.

ARTIE
I know what I'm doing. I'm telling your son that no matter how independent he thinks he is, he'll always need us. That's why I'm leaving. I have no chances left to give. I'm cutting off supplies. I've got my whole life ahead of me with nothing hanging over my head. Don't stand too close to her. Something is bound to drop eventually and I don't want you to go down with her. God, what your parents must have done to you.

He starts to leave.

I'll send for the rest of my things.
IRENE
You leave and you’ll be out of the will and out of the family. You don’t belong here anyway. You don’t fit.

ARTIE
Walking slowly toward her.

I don’t fit? I fit perfectly. Dad and I will always be in touch. We’ll always have that ol’ Book-of-the-Month Club bond. You think I’m making that up? He and I will always be available for each other. I don’t think that leaves me out of the family. Listen to yourself. You don’t even know if you want me to stay or go. Which is it?

IRENE
You’ll be out of the will. There! And all the relatives will think you’re crazy. Pepere would have kicked you out too.

ARTIE
The relatives know I’m not crazy, and that I’ve never been good enough for you, how every achievement of mine was met with a rousing yawn from my own mother. And they know that Pepere had problems of his own. Look at what I’ve done and look at where you’re headed.

IRENE
What are you saying about my father?

ARTIE
Mickey isn’t the only one who took the easy way out, was he?

IRENE
I don’t have to stand here--

ARTIE
And Pepere didn’t stand for anything either, did he? No questions with him, only rules. Easy answers. His. Isn’t that what you’ve told us?

IRENE
(Pointing to Joe)
His father left him too. You can’t blame it all on my side.

ARTIE
Yeah, well your father got out, and not by running away. Just ask Mickey how to do it. Sometimes all it takes is determination.
IRENE
It was an accident! An accident! Pepere didn’t---couldn’t do something like that on purpose! You liar! Your liar!

ARTIE
(Calmly)
I tell the truth, and the truth is that you are responsible for Mickey. Has Morrissette ever talked to you about the power of heredity? Genetics? Just where did Mickey get it from? Who did it come from? Whose side of the family? Where did he learn to cause such destruction?

IRENE
It’s not from my side of the family. Sometimes things just happen. It’s not my fault! It’s not my father’s fault. You liar! It’s nobody’s fault!

She collapses on sofa.

ARTIE
(Pauses)
You’re right. It wasn’t because of the letter opener, or the phone call, or Dad leaving. It just happened. I can’t believe you really said that.

(Pause)
I’m only sorry you waited so long.

He turns to pick up a box and leave.

IRENE
(To Joe)
He won’t leave. He can’t. He’ll be back. And then he’ll learn.

ARTIE turns around.

ARTIE
Goodbye.

JOE
(Embracing him)
Goodbye, son. Good luck.

IRENE
You come back here! Arthur! I’m not through with you yet!

JOE
Seems he’s through with you.
IRENE runs to ARTIE, starts clawing at the box he’s carrying. When she pulls out the owl, ARTIE drops the box, snatches the owl from her hand and throws it against the wall where it smashes with a loud crash. He picks up the box, snatches the covers off the furniture, then exits through the front door. IRENE sits, sobbing hysterically. JOE tucks the sheet in properly and sits down next to her, puts his arm around her. She shrugs it off and goes to the piano, but her playing is wildly off. Lights and piano fade out.

ARTIE

In a downstage spot, to audience, only the faint outline of the house showing behind him, with JOE sitting on the sofa, beginning to go through the boxes, IRENE off.

Dad handled it as well as could be expected. After Mickey was buried, Dad planted a garden in the back yard. And an apple tree. I hear from him now and then. He says she never fully recovered. Of course the garage sale was canceled. Now she doesn’t seem to want to get rid of anything. They have each other, and I guess that’s something. We all lost so much besides Mickey that day, and while I was able to move on, they couldn’t move at all. Like I said, no happy ending. But I suppose it could have been worse. Two of us survived.

ARTIE picks up a box, looks back toward the house, and walks into the darkness.

Curtain