

The Promise

Three act drama thriller

by

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SETTING

An apartment flat, one dining/living room with a rectangular table, one chair on each side. An open kitchen in the background, separated from the dining/living room by a sideboard filled with cookbooks. The dishes are stashed in the sink, an open milk carton and a microwave meal lay on the counter. Next to the entrance door are two large garbage bags which are tied up, plus a third one next to these which is untied and filled to the top with litter. Next to the dining/living room is the small bathroom; a toilet, sink, cabinet, mirror. The kitchen and the bedroom are connected to the bathroom. The bedroom isn't visible, it goes off the left, offstage.

ACT I

Scene 1

We see BEN coming from the bedroom into the living/dining room. He goes over to the table, produces a pack of cards from his pocket and sets it on top of the table. He sits, starts mixing the cards, lays them on the table again. He waits, stares absently, is daydreaming, smiles unconsciously. The doorbell rings and he goes over to the door, looks through the spy and then opens the door. He spreads out his arms to welcome his guest and in comes PHIL. They embrace, pat each other's backs rather stiffly. BEN indicates that PHIL should come in and seat himself at the table. PHIL is holding a bottle of wine.

BEN

Come in, come in. Glad that you could make it. Please, have a seat.

PHIL

Am I too early?

(Goes over to the table, waits, looks around the apartment.)

BEN

No, no, I was just setting out the cards.

PHIL

Good. I must warn you though, I haven't played in a while.

BEN

Neither have I. Neither have I.

PHIL

(Holds up the bottle.)

Do you want me to open this?

BEN

What kind is it? Oh don't tell me. I won't look at the label.

(Goes into the kitchen, open a drawer and gets a corkscrew.)

Let's see if I've still got it.

(Taps his nose with his index finger, takes the bottle from PHIL.)

PHIL

(Embarrassed.) Oh...I don't think we'll be needing that.

(BEN inspects the cap screw and laughs.)

PHIL

I'm not what one would call a connoisseur...

BEN

Don't worry. I haven't had a red in years. Probably all the same...

(Lays the corkscrew on top of the sideboard.)

PHIL

(Apologetic) I bought it down at the gas station. I was kinda in a hurry...

BEN

Anderson's?

PHIL

Yeah.

BEN

He's got the best. Honestly. Had to buy some dinner last week, ran down there and voila! Had my Chicken Terriaki ready in two minutes. I never saw the use of those things.

(Gestures to the old microwave.)

Too loud. But, I must say, they do come in handy.

PHIL

Yes.

BEN

Come on, have a seat. I'll just fetch the glasses.

(Goes into the kitchen, searches for wineglasses. PHIL takes his place on the left side of the table.)

PHIL

Thank you again for the invitation.

BEN

(Still searching.) I was happy that you accepted. I guess we'll have to go with water glasses. You don't mind, do you?

PHIL

No, no. Any glass is fine.

BEN

Not really. See...

(Comes back with two water glasses, puts them on the table, unscrews the cap, pours.)

...it's actually very important. There's a whole list of things to do before it even touches your glass; Decanting the wine, letting it breathe and blossom, sniffing the cork - when there's one to sniff.

(Lifts the screw cap, holds it beneath his nose, closes his eyes.)

You try and imagine the perfect fragrance to meet the scent you've just taken in, you ponder on the depth and bouquet that it transcends, you let it settle a little more.

After all the sniffing and palavering, you pour the red into the appropriate glass - but, just a bit.

(Takes his glass, closes his eyes.)

You take another sniff, then a tiny sip and let it swirl and tumble along your tongue.

You see the shape of its body: if it's voluminous, heavy, dark, cold, warm, passionate, sweet, too sweet, sharp, too sharp, slender, light or perhaps a little too mellow. So many factors...Then you swallow. You register the way it says goodbye to your tongue. Has it left completely, too soon or is it still lingering gently or heavily in your mouth? So many facets...

(Opens his eyes, looks into his glass.)

Each wine has its glass, according to its body, weight and color and so on and so forth.

(Beat.)

Comforting, in a way.

(PHIL holds up his glass, lets the wine circle.)

When you've poured the wine, some let it circle, although you'll always be able to detect the versed from the novice...

(PHIL stops circling.)

One can circle and make portraits of all the liquors in the world. But wine...Wine is for the nose, tongue and your imagination only.

(Raises his glass at PHIL.)

To all the nonsense in this world! Cheers!

PHIL

(Raises his glass.) Cheers. To your health.

(PHIL takes a sip, BEN downs the wine in one go, contorts his face.)

BEN

Oh God. That was even worse than I thought!

(Laughs, pours himself another full glass.)

(PHIL looks concerned as he watches BEN take large sips.)

BEN

I just can't play cards when I'm clear headed. That's all. Never could. Always lost.

(Takes another large gulp.)

PHIL

What do you want to play?

BEN

Don't care. You choose.

PHIL

Okay. Lets see...How about a round of poker?

BEN

Got to be more than two players, don't you think?

PHIL

Sure...What about rummy?

BEN

Nah...too girlish, feminin. My wife always played it with her girlfriends, as did my grandmother with hers.

PHIL

Scat?

BEN

Nah...I've never been drunk enough for that.

PHIL

That's really all I've got. I could teach you though...

BEN

How about we just leave the cards aside for a minute.

PHIL

And?

BEN

Talk. Get to know each other.

PHIL

Sure.

(Lays the cards aside.)

What do you want to know?

BEN

Let's see....You said you were married.

PHIL

Yes. Still am.

BEN

That's good.

PHIL

(Shifts uncomfortably.) Soon, it'll be fifteen years.

BEN

You married young.

PHIL

Twenty one. Melissa just turned eighteen.

BEN

That's young.

PHIL

We knew we loved each other the minute we met.

BEN

That's nice.

PHIL

Yeah, it was...

(Pause.)

BEN

I'm a little disturbed...

PHIL

If it's about the age, she was younger than I was, but -

BEN

No, not because of that. That's nothing. Nowadays, at least. I was just wondering where she is? Your wife.

PHIL

She's...not here.

BEN

(Smiles.) Yes. I've noticed.

(Beat.)

I met you out in the hallway, I think it was about a month ago. We got talking and you replied to my question as to whether you were moving in with your family that it was just you and your wife. A couple of weeks went by, but I only saw you come and go; carrying groceries up, the garbage down. I figured I'd not set much store by it, since its none of my business. But now that we're here, I thought - why not just ask?

(As Phil doesn't answer...)

If you don't want to talk about it though, I'd understand.

PHIL

No, it's fine. It's just...

(Beat.)

Did I really say that? My wife and I?

BEN

I'm afraid so.

PHIL

Must be the habit. I never really referred to myself as just me. Myself, full stop. Always her and me. Mrs. and Mr. Kramer...

BEN

I think you need a bit more of this.

(Gestures to the bottle.)

(Beat.)

I was just curious. You really don't have to go into it.

PHIL

(To himself.) My wife and I...

BEN

If you're wondering where my dear wife is at, she's just in the other room.

(Gestures towards the bedroom.)

PHIL

I hope I'm not keeping you up?

BEN

No, no. She always goes to sleep at an early hour. No worries.

PHIL

And we won't wake her up?

BEN

Believe me if anyone can sleep, then it's my Doris. She slept right through an earthquake. Nearly tore our house in two. Didn't seem to bother her though. (Laughs.)

(PHIL reaches for the bottle and pours himself more wine, drinks.)

BEN

So how do you like the apartment? Is it a two bedroom?

PHIL

One and a half.

BEN

(Jokingly.) What's the half stand for? The storeroom?

PHIL

(Dryly.) No, I think they counted the kitchen in as well. It's slightly larger than the other room. It's more than enough though.

BEN

That's exactly what we were thinking when we came here. Small and practical.

(Beat.)

We used to own a house. Four bedrooms, two baths. With a nice patch of green in the back: an apple tree, plum tree, some raspberry bushes...It was idyllic. Peaceful. But then we thought: why not? Try something different. A change of place and space.

PHIL

When did you move here?

BEN

About a year ago. We thought it might be exciting to move back to the city. More people. More to see. High rents for less space.

PHIL

I wasn't sure if I wanted to stay in the city. Too many people, too much noise. But in the end, I was just glad that I had found a place...that was affordable.

(From the bedroom one can hear loud moaning, a female voice.)

PHIL

(Looks back towards the bedroom.) I think we might have wakened her. Maybe I should leave?

BEN

No, no. I promise she didn't hear a word. Sometimes she talks in her sleep.

PHIL

Oh, I see.

BEN

Just relax. She's absolutely fine.

PHIL

Okay.

(The moaning increases, ending in a single hollow cry. One can hear the voice begging, repeating what seems to be the word 'please' over and over again, yet the cry seems contained, dull.)

PHIL

(Alarmed.) I think I should really get back up to my flat.

BEN

It's nothing. Just a bad dream.

(The moaning continues, becoming louder, pleading, desperate.)

PHIL

Maybe you should go see if everything's alright?

(He gets up.)

BEN

Believe me, it's nothing. Just sit back down. It'll be over in a minute.

PHIL

But she seems to be in pain...

BEN

Yes, I know.

(The voice cries out in agony and pain, louder and louder.)

PHIL

Don't you hear? She seems to be calling out to you. You're not going to go look?

BEN

No, that won't be necessary.

(PHIL looks anxiously towards the bedroom, one can see his worry turn into panic.)

BEN

It's alright. Please just sit back down. I promise it will be over soon. There's no need to worry.

(BEN gets up walks towards the bedroom.)

But if it calms you, I'll check on her quickly. Be right back.

(BEN goes into the bedroom, OFF. Phil is still standing, he looks towards the room, biting his fingernails. The voice subsides into silence. PHIL'S posture relaxes, he turns and sits down again. BEN reenters the room, sits back down. PHIL'S worried look eases up, BEN appears to be out of breath.)

PHIL

(After a moment.) You're so...calm. How often does this happen?

BEN

Every night.

PHIL

Every night! I really don't know what to say...

BEN

There is really nothing to say.

PHIL

I'm sorry.

BEN

For what?

PHIL

For whatever reason lies behind that cry.

BEN

We're all in pain. Not many of us get the chance to channel it. She's not aware of her nights, but her dreams are well aware of her. The subconscious never sleeps, never shuts down to rest.

(Pause.)

PHIL

Have you consulted someone about her condition?

BEN

No. Not anymore.

PHIL

Maybe, it would help...They say talking can be quite...relieving.

BEN

(Angrily.) Who says that? Who told you that?

(Gets up.)

One of those analysts who pretend to listen, who pretend to care?

PHIL

I don't know, I didn't mean to overstep, I just thought you may have -

BEN

- I've seen them come and go...We both have. Five individual analytical minds, and yet it remained the same. They were all the same.

"First consultation's free", they reeled off on cue. They listened, as if there was nothing to gain and therefore there was no need to invest any warmth. No heart. Didn't do a goddamn thing, those minds. Just sat there and stared. Stared at me and my wife. Smiled, when it was appropriate to smile, tapped on their clipboards when they were bored, referred to someone I'd never heard of, whenever they felt insecure or exhausted. And in the end they all came up with nothing other than: "We'd need to take a more exact look at that." As if on cue.

(Beat.)

One of them passed us on. Said, that he'd refer us to someone more suitable, more specialized in our type of case. Were we not stimulating -not interesting enough? Our family, our life, our loss?

(Beat.)

I never asked, we never went back.

(Beat.)

It's all the same...They're all the same. We're better off without them.

PHIL

I'm sorry.

BEN

(He resurfaces slowly. He smiles.)

Stop saying you're sorry. It's like you're one of them.

PHIL

(Gets up.) I'd probably better get going...It's late. And I wanted to...start unpacking the rest of my stuff early tomorrow.

BEN

No, no. Please...Please sit. Have another one. It's only, what?

(Looks at his watch.)

Nine thirty, for heaven's sakes! You can't be tired yet?

PHIL

Actually, I'm...

BEN

I must have something more upbeat in the kitchen...wait!

(Gets up, hurries into the kitchen.)

I know we have it somewhere...

(He rummages hastily through the cupboards, a pack of flour falls onto the counter and bursts open.)

Damn!

PHIL

Do you need a hand?

BEN

No, just stay where you are, I'll be right with you.

(He leaves the flour as it is, goes on looking through the other cabinets.)

There you are! Gotcha!

(BEN comes back with an old bottle of rum, PHIL hesitates, then sits down again.)

BEN

I knew she was hiding it somewhere. Look at her...Saved her. She's still perfectly intact.

(Beat.)

(Mischievously.) She has no idea...

PHIL

Who has no idea of what?

BEN

My wife, Doris. See, back then, we both said we'd ban all kind of liquor, any kind of alcohol from our home. But this one here, never made it to the bin.

PHIL

My wife and I never really drank at home either. Except when we had guests. After a while, you even forget how it tastes...You forget to miss it.

BEN

Well this one here, trust me - you'll never be able to forget her after you've taken a sip.

PHIL

Why is the rum a she?

BEN

(Laughs.) I...I honestly have no idea! Sounds more risky, secretive maybe...

PHIL

Wouldn't you want to save her for...a special occasion?

BEN

More special than this? Honestly? I think I'd never be able to try her again if I had to wait for that to happen.

(Laughs, goes to fill PHIL'S empty glass with the rum.)

Maybe just before I kick the bucket...That would be a special occasion, huh?!

(He gives PHIL a manly pat on the back, then goes over to fill his own glass and sits down.)

But who knows when that will be....

PHIL

(Smiles, takes a sip.) I suppose only God.

(BEN looks up, his countenance changes from light to sinister, he stares at PHIL, who doesn't notice. He's looking at his drink, whirling the rum in the glass, taking sips.)

I think we had a similar one at home...Not as good, of course, but I remember the flavor, the sting. We used it for desert...Tiramisu, I think it was.

(BEN stops staring, downs his rum.)

BEN

(Coolly.) Maybe it is getting a little late.

PHIL

(Perplex.) Did I say something wrong?

BEN

No, no. I just think it's late...and you said you wanted to get up early tomorrow. We should call it a night.

PHIL

Okay. Yes, we'd better.

(Gets up, puts down his glass, hesitates.)

If it's because of the reference - I really didn't mean to compare your rum with an ordinary, cheap one.

BEN

(Smiles.) It wasn't about the rum. I'm just tired, that's all. Let's call it a night.

(He gets up, starts ushering PHIL towards the door.)

You're welcome to visit anytime soon, though. Anytime.

PHIL

(Hastily.) Thanks again for your invitation. It was real nice. Maybe I'll get to meet your wife next time?

BEN

Only, if I get to meet yours.

(Phil stops.)

I was just kidding. No need to fret. All in good time. All in good time.

(BEN opens the door, PHIL stand in the door frame, reaches out his hand for BEN to shake.)

PHIL

Have a good night. And, thanks again...

(BEN looks at PHIL'S hand, takes it, then pulls PHIL in for a hug.)

BEN

No - thank you. Thank you.

(PHIL pats him on his back, they part, PHIL walks out OFF. BEN closes the door, turns around, looks at the ground, seems overwhelmed. He leans against the door, suppressing the oncoming inner wave. The stage lights fade to dark, leaving the apartment in the dark. The spotlight is set on Ben.)

Sulky Biscuits. That's what we named our dog.

We sent our kid off to college and then it was just us again.

I was confused and detached. She got nervous and insecure. Jittery, then absent. I didn't recognize her. Everything seemed to be upside down, nothing to hold on to. We never thought of holding on to each other. It never really occurred to us. We're both not that type. Not all that talkative. Except of course when Aaron was home. We'd get real chatty, lively, funny. Most of it was fun. Good parents, most people would say. We had a good time. He gave us reason. Purpose. We were very proud of him. Top of his year group. A real charmer. Friends would come over after school and my wife would cook or bake them something. The house would smell warm and inviting. The kids and I would watch a game or they'd just hang out.

(Beat.)

I miss him. He'd only just moved out and it felt like he'd been gone for good.

(Stage light turn back on. Out of the bedroom comes DORIS, his wife. She is wearing a long nightgown, her feet are bare, her long silver hair is braided all the way down her back, a few rogue strands frame her narrow face. She walks a few steps, stops, glances around the apartment, confused. BEN looks up, sees her, quickly wipes the tears from his face.)

Scene 2

BEN

You're up. Did I wake you?

(DORIS sits down, takes the place where PHIL sat.)

DORIS

I think I forgot to turn off the stove. Did I forget to turn it off?

BEN

No, the stove is off.

DORIS

Are you sure? I could have sworn it was still on. I went to bed and kept thinking: what if it's still on?

BEN

No, love. We checked before you went to bed. We did it together, remember?

DORIS

It would be awful to leave it on. All that heat.

(Gently circling the rim of PHIL'S glass with her middle finger.)

BEN

Do you want me to check?

DORIS

I think we left it on.

(BEN goes over to the kitchen, stands by the stove.)

BEN

It's off. It's been off the whole time. See?

(Doris doesn't look.)

DORIS

Who was the boy?

BEN

Which boy?

DORIS

Your guest. The one that was here before. The boy.

(Stops circling the rim of the glass.)

BEN

That was Phil Kramer from 40F.

DORIS

Too many apartments in this building.

BEN

He's very nice. He seemed nice. You'd like him.

DORIS

Too many tenants.

BEN

He has a kind spirit, I can tell.

DORIS

Too many floors.

BEN

But I wonder what happened to his wife.

DORIS

Too many stares.

(Beat.)

BEN

Do you want some tea? Warm milk with honey?

DORIS

No, I'm not thirsty.

BEN

Are you hungry? I could make you something. It would just take a minute.

DORIS

No. I'm not hungry.

(BEN goes over to the table, sits across from her.)

BEN

I'm sorry if I kept you up.

DORIS

I couldn't sleep anyway. I heard you laughing. You had a good time?

BEN

It was nice.

DORIS

What was so funny?

BEN

What do you mean?

DORIS

You laughed. What was the joke?

BEN

There was no joke. Just two guys who had a bit too much.

DORIS

I thought we'd gotten rid of it. Said we wouldn't touch another drop.

BEN

I found her. She was back in the cabinet. I was looking for some...sugar. I thought, just this one time...

DORIS

You broke it. Our promise.

BEN

It was just a bit. A glass. It's already wearing off.

DORIS

Broke it. Didn't care.

BEN

I'm sorry.

DORIS

Too late.

BEN

I know.

(Beat.)

DORIS

Is he coming back?

BEN

Who?

DORIS

The boy. Your drinking buddy.

BEN

He's not my drinking buddy and he's clearly not a boy anymore. Must be in his late thirties, early forties.

DORIS

He sounded a lot younger. Insecure. Boyish.

(Beat.)

So is he coming back?

BEN

I don't know. He seemed unnerved with the sounds that kept coming from...the bedroom.

DORIS

The bedroom? What noises?

BEN

He heard you.

DORIS

Heard me? Doing what?

BEN

It happened again.

DORIS

I don't know what you're talking about.

(Beat.)

I thought we agreed not to talk about it anymore.

BEN

We did. I'm sorry.

DORIS

Stop saying you're sorry. You sound like one of them.

BEN

I'm -

(Beat.)

Are you sure you don't want anything?

DORIS

No, I'm fine.

BEN

You haven't eaten in a while. I'm starting to worry.

DORIS

I lost it. My appetite. That's all.

(Beat.)

I don't think it's coming back.

BEN

It will. Eventually.

DORIS

I'm not thirsty either. It all just...disappears.

BEN

Not for long, dear.

(Beat.)

DORIS

How long do you think we have to wait?

BEN

Not much longer now. I'm trying to fix it. I'm on it.

DORIS

That's what you always say and then there's still a leak. It won't stop: the pipe under the sink, the washer, the shower hose, everything just keeps...leaking.

BEN

Not this time.

DORIS

So much unfinished work.

BEN

I'm not going to let this one slip.

DORIS

Promise.

BEN

I promise. You know I'll do it. You know.

DORIS

I know.

(Beat.)

I'm tired. I'm going to bed.

BEN

I'll be right with you. I'll just clean up here.

DORIS

Oh, just leave that for now. You must be tired. Come to bed. It's late.

BEN

I'll be right with you.

(DORIS goes off into the bedroom. OFF. BEN is still seated, he looks after his wife, towards the bedroom. He takes the glass that PHIL left on the table and downs the leftover rum. He takes the glasses and the bottles and goes into the kitchen, empties the wine into the sink. He takes the pack of flour and puts it back into the cabinet. He looks at the rum, unscrews the cap, holds it over the sink, then stops, puts it down. He closes the bottle and hides it in the back of the cabinet. He stands in front of the sink, his hands resting on the rim. He looks down the drainage outlet, stares. Down, down, down. One can hear the sound of water dripping, dripping, dripping.

Aaron went to college close by, but back then it felt as if he'd moved to the end of the world. Just...disappeared.

It's strange that after so many years together, my wife and I couldn't find a single thing to talk about. It was all silence and cutlery against ceramic after he was gone. I bet other families go through the same kind of transition. It probably takes a while. We thought we'd get used to it.

When we became parents, we had no idea what we were getting ourselves into. Hell, we were overwhelmed! A sudden miracle, after so many years of trying and eventually...giving up.

Now, I suppose it's finding our way back into life. Step by step.

(BEN turns off the light in the kitchen, walks towards the bedroom, turns off the light in the living/dining room.

BEN OFF.)

(Blackout.)

ACT II

Scene 1

(One can still hear the dripping of water in the silent darkness, drip, drip, drip. Then, a rattling of a door knob is audible. Someone is trying to break in. The front door opens, the light of a single flashlight enters the apartment, followed by two other flashlights. The door is closed gently. One can detect three burglars who are all dressed in black, wearing dark ski masks. The flashlights start scanning the apartment, trying to spot something of value. One of the burglars trips and falls.)

BURGLAR 1

(Suppressed.) Fuck! Fuckfuckfuckfuck!

BURGLAR 2

(Hissing.) Shut the fuck up, you moron! Get up!

BURGLAR 1

(Hissing.) I can't see!

BURGLAR 2

That's the fucking point! Use your damn flashlight!

BURGLAR 1

It's out! The battery's dead!

(BURGLAR 2 goes over to BURGLAR 1, flashes the light straight in his face.)

BURGLAR 2

This light enough? Now get the fuck up!

(The living/dining room light is turned on. BURGLARS 1 and Burglar 2 freeze instantly in their movement.)

BURGLAR 1

Fuuhuck! We're trapped!

(BURGLAR 3 flashlight on B1 and B2.)

BURGLAR 3

You goddamn wish you were...Now get a move on. This is taking far too long. Turn the flashlights out and take off the bloody masks.

BURGLAR 2

But then they can see our faces! Identify us!

(BURGLAR 1 nods.)

BURGLAR 3

What you idiots think the neighbors will do when they see three guys in full gear stumbling around in the dark?

(Gestures towards the window/audience.)

BURGLAR 3(Continued)

Stop acting like amateurs!

BUGLAR 2

But we are amateurs!

BUGLAR 3

Then pretend to be pros! You've seen others do it before.

BUGLAR 2

Only in the goddamn movies!

(BUGLAR 1 nods.)

BUGLAR 3

Great. I should have left you at home.

BUGLAR 2

God knows why you took us along in the first place. You live right above the guy. Why not just...I dunno...knock him out and have done with it!?

BUGLAR 3

Cause I don't do that. No violence. Besides, I can't have my eyes and ears everywhere, now can I? This way the job gets done much faster. Six hands carry more than two.

BUGLAR 2

Yeah that seems about right.

(BUGLAR 1 nods.)

BURGLAR 3

Now start...stealing!

(BURGLARS 1,2,3 take of their masks, BURGLAR 2&3 turn their flashlights out.)

BURGLAR 2

But if we get caught, I'll blame this on you!

BURGLAR 3

If we ever find something worth stealing...

BURGLAR 2

What do you mean?

BURGLAR 3

Look at this place. Fucking mess...

BURGLAR 1

Maybe we've broken into one of those...messy homes?

BURGLAR 3

Na, it's not...littered enough for that.

BURGLAR 2

There's got to be something!?

BURGLAR 3

Something but nothing more than that. This place is empty. Vacant. Like someone's about to move out. This is temporary.

BURGLAR 2

But you said - no you promised - this guy had class and plenty of valuable shit stashed in his place for us to take and make into money. Buy us our shit. You owe me, brother. You know, you still owe me.

BURGLAR 3

I never said that! I said the guy looked wealthy. Like, from afar. The way he dressed, the way he spoke. Well-mannered and stuff. Who knew he was a fucking minimalist.

BURGLAR 1

Yeah. All minimal and shit.

BURGLAR 2

Now listen. I'm gonna go into the bathroom and see if I can at least get me something outta there. Anything. Vicodine, Xanax, hell, I'll go for Aspirin. And you two go look elsewhere. And as soon as I'm done, I'm outta here. To hell with you! But you still owe me, man.

BURGLAR 3

Do what you want but take this one with you.

BURGLAR 2

I'm no fucking babysitter!

BURGLAR 1

Hey! I'm still here!

BURGLAR 2

Yeah well, you might as well be elsewhere.

BURGLAR 3

Okay. You go look in the bathroom, I'll take the kitchen and you, you go stand over there and...try not to trip over your own feet.

(BURGLAR 1 wants to protest but then simply nods.)

(BURGLAR 2 goes into the bathroom, snoops through the medicament cabinet above the sink, looks at the inscriptions on the pillboxes, then pockets them. BURGLAR 3 goes off into the kitchen, opens the draws, tries to make as little noise as possible. He opens one of the draws and produces a framed picture. He inspects the frame to see if its valuable, is just about to pocket it, when he notices the people portrayed in the picture. He stares at the picture, motionless. BURGLAR 1 goes off towards the bedroom, looks back and then enters the bedroom carefully. BURGLAR 1 OFF. The stage lights fade, the spotlight is on Burglar 3.)

BURGLAR 3

Waste of time. All those years. Comradeship, love. He said it got too cold for him around here...He said he was afraid of turning into something he couldn't recognize any longer. A monster, that would stare back at him and never let go of him again.

I asked, if he thought I was turning into a monster too but he said no. Worse. I asked what this worst was and he answered: him. I was becoming like him. An enemy in close reach. An easy target. I'd lie next to him and wonder why he had chosen someone like me. Loved someone like me. Fucked someone like me. How long had he been planning to leave? A year? A month? Two years we had been together. Filled a home, shared a

life. We smoked, drank, laughed, fought, cried our hearts out. Touched, warmed, felt, explored bodies.

The rush. Silence. Love. When did it end?

(Beat.)

(The stage lights switch back on. B2 returns from the bathroom, stands in the living/dining room, then goes over to B3.)

BURGLAR 2

Are you done there? I got me some fine stuff outta there. Look! Painkillers, relaxants and even some Aspirin! Not much but...What the matter with you?

(BURGLAR 2's still staring at the picture.)

BURGLAR 3

Fuck. I know this guy.

BURGLAR 2

Yeah, man. You live above the dude. Knock knock, moron. Now come on. Let's get outta here. Hell knows why he's not up, with us around.

BURGLAR 3

No, I mean -

(Suddenly BURGLAR 1 can be seen storming out of the bedroom, stumbling and falling to the ground. His body's shaking, his eyes are wide open, as if he just witnessed pure horror.)

BURGLAR 1

(Screams.) Run! Fucking madhouse! Run!

(BURGLAR 1 gets up, races past BURGLAR 2&3, out the front door. B1 OFF. BURGLARS 2 and 3 look after him, then at each other. BEN exits the bedroom carrying a baseball

bat, slowly moving towards the living/dining room. B2 and B3 immediately pull their masks over their head. B2 pockets the framed picture. B2 and B3 head towards the front door, turning off the living/dining room light on their way. BEN stumbles into the living/dining room, holding the bat up, occasionally swinging into the dark.)

BEN

(Roaring into the dark.) I know you're here! I'm not afraid of you! Get out before I make you!

(BURGLAR 2 hurries off. OFF. BURGLAR 3 stops at the front door, looks back at BEN, then hurries away. OFF. The door stands wide open, BEN reaches the light switch, turns it on. He lowers the baseball bat, wipes his forehead, takes deep breaths. He shuts the front door, looks around.)

BEN

They're gone. You can come out now.

(Doris enters, her hands folded tightly before her chest. She slowly enters the living/dining room.)

DORIS

Are you sure?

BEN

Yes, I'm sure. It's okay. We're safe.

DORIS

Look at this place! Look what they've done!

BEN

Burglars. Two, possibly three.

DORIS

Did they take anything?

BEN

There's nothing here to be taken.

DORIS

Of course there is! My cookbooks, the silver cutlery...

BEN

They're still here. Look. All thirty-nine of them. And the set...it's long gone. Sold it.

DORIS

Oh, yes. Of course.

(Doris goes over to the sideboard with the cookbooks, sits down before it and lets her hand glide over the row of books. BEN goes into the bathroom, looks into the cabinet, then returns to DORIS who is still staring at and touching the backs of the books.)

BEN

It seems they just took the meds.

DORIS

Do you remember when I used to cook?

BEN

Probably some junkies out for a kick. Bad neighborhood.

DORIS

I loved to cook. Baking, I never really enjoyed that much. Even though, you all praised my cinnamon cake so much...

BEN

They won't be coming back.

DORIS

The chocolate walnut cookies...

BEN

They seemed scared out of their minds.

DORIS

Roasted chicken, cauliflower with cream sauce and boiled potatoes. You guys loved it. Even the cauliflower.

(Beat.)

I never got through trying them all...the recipes.

BEN

I don't think we'll be needing to call the police, since they didn't really take anything...

(DORIS gets up, looks at BEN.)

DORIS

You have to end it. You can't go on like this forever.

BEN

I know. It's not going to be forever. I'm on it.

DORIS

This has to be over soon. Before anyone finds out.

BEN

I know.

DORIS

You should've locked the door.

BEN

I did!

DORIS

Bolted it?

BEN

(Guiltily.) I'm sorry.

DORIS

It's too late.

BEN

I know. I'm sorry.

DORIS

Don't say that. You know how you sound...

BEN

I will get him to come down here again. And then, I'll do it. Promise.

DORIS

Don't make a promise if you can't keep it.

BEN

This time it's different.

DORIS

That's what you said last time. I'm counting.

BEN

I'm...-

(Beat.)

Do you want something? A glass of water at least?

DORIS

No, I'll just...stay here.

BEN

You can really go back to bed. It's okay. They're gone.

DORIS

No, I'd like to stay...here. Just for a while. You go. I'll be right with you.

(BEN looks at his wife, as she sits and leans against the sideboard, touching the backs of the cookbooks, tracing the letters. Ben walks up to her, reaches out his hand to touch her head, a strand of hair, then retracts his hand.)

BEN

Goodnight, then. See you in the morning.

DORIS

Do you want me to make some pancakes tomorrow?

BEN

You don't need to. I'll just...

DORIS

Chocolate chip...or with maple syrup. You liked both. Scrambled eggs with toast and butter...Porridge with strawberries...although you never like that...ate it because I told you to...made you.

(BEN walks towards the bedroom, leans the baseball bat against the table. He looks back at DORIS.)

Maybe I'll make a stew for lunch...a hearty meal for my boys...Desert, maybe a flan...tastes like pudding...it did. It did.

BEN

Goodnight, love. Goodnight.

(Switches off the light to the living/dining room. DORIS sits in the dark, stops speaking, BLACKOUT. BEN OFF.)

