

WHAT REALLY HAPPENED  
BY  
©2009  
Benjamin R. Smith

Submitted to the graduate degree program  
in English and the Graduate Faculty of the  
University of Kansas in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master's of Fine Arts.

Paul Stephen Lim  
Chairperson\*

Paul Stephen Lim

James B. Carothers

Delores Ringer

November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2009  
Date Defended

The Thesis Committee for Benjamin R. Smith certifies that this is the approved Version of the following thesis:

WHAT REALLY HAPPENED

Committee:

Paul Stephen Lim  
Chairperson\*

Paul Stephen Lim

James B. Carothers

Delores Ringer

Date approved: November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2009

# **What Really Happened**

---

A full-length play in one act

Benjamin R. Smith

©Nov. 2009

Benjamin R. Smith  
15710 SW 190th St.  
Rose Hill, KS 67133  
316.258.7810  
speedreaderbrs@hotmail.co

“Whatever happens to you has been waiting to happen since the beginning of time. The twining strands of fate wove both of them together: your own existence and the things that happen to you.”  
~Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*

Cast of Characters:

Sarah Berkeley:	(Mid to late teens) Youngest daughter of George Berkeley, by Jordan.
Marcus Kirby:	(Late forties) A writer in residence at the Berkeley home. African American.
Tracy Madison:	(Late thirties) A teacher turned book editor.
Jordan J. Berkeley:	(Forties) Wife of George Berkeley. Biological mother of Sarah. Stepmother to Emily. In later scenes she is married to Kirby.
Cora Platz:	(Mid sixties) The housekeeper.
Emily Berkeley:	(Mid twenties) Eldest daughter of George Berkeley, by his first wife.

Set:

Study in the Berkeley house/ Kitchen of the Berkeley house/ Tracy's cell/ The Berkeley boathouse. AUTHOR'S NOTE: The set may be minimalist or realistic depending on the budget of the production. The majority of the action takes place in the study and kitchen so these two rooms should be the focus of playing space. The designer must keep in mind that scene changes are rapid in this production and often coincide with costume changes.

Period:

Present and recent past.

## ACT ONE

Set: Though much simplified, there are four acting areas on stage. Two rooms in the house—the kitchen with chopping block, stools and entrance L as well as the study with a small couch with coffee table, sideboard with bottles and bar service, desk with chair, entrance R. Glass doors UC. Below the kitchen is an area meant to represent a boathouse which has been modified as a guest cottage. R of boathouse is TRACY'S cell. It is small and has toilet, and prison cot. There are a great many books everywhere in every space. Lighting effects should be used in place of walls to separate the four locales and superfluous props should remain at a minimum.

At Rise: There are sounds of a rainstorm as lights come up on the kitchen of the Berkeley home in Long Island, New York and on TRACY'S cell. It is late December. TRACY is sitting in his cell reading, he is in prison blues. SARAH sits at the kitchen table. She is very pretty and perpetually shoeless. She reads a book, one of a stack of books piled high on the kitchen table. On the table in front of her are the remains of lunch—half a sandwich, some chips, and a carton of milk. She turns the page, frustrated with her book. She puts it down and rubs her temples. EMILY enters from [R], slowly. She is dressed casually, in summer clothes. SARAH closes her eyes, shaking her head.

SARAH:

Go away.

(EMILY walks up beside her and brushes her fingers over the back of the book. There is the sound of a car approaching in the storm. EMILY lingers only a moment longer before exiting [L]. MARCUS enters through the kitchen door carrying a messenger bag. He folds up his umbrella and stands in a puddle beside the kitchen entrance from outside. He shakes out his coat and hangs it on a hook. He is in his early fifties, a distinguished looking man, casually professional. He carries a backpack.)

MARCUS:

Hey, sport-o.

SARAH:  
What happened? How'd it go?

MARCUS:  
Fine.

SARAH:  
How's he doing?

MARCUS:  
Holding up. Is J.J. home?

SARAH:  
Went shopping with Cora.

MARCUS:  
She say what's for dinner?

SARAH:  
(Putting the book down.)  
Can it, okay? He's worse, isn't he?

MARCUS:  
(Shrugging.)  
Prison's not therapeutic, Sarah.  
(Walking over and picking up one of the books.)  
*The Count of Monte Cristo*. Thinking of busting him out?  
(Opens the book and reads the fly leaf.)  
Oh, it's one of the ones he sent you.

SARAH:  
I told him my brain just needed a rest.

MARCUS:  
(Sifting through the books on the table.)  
*Sun Also Rises, Tender Is The Night, Their Eyes Were Watching God*.  
(Taking up a piece of paper.)  
What's all this for, Modern American Lit.?

SARAH:  
I'm trying to get a head start on the spring semester. It's not bad. It's about revenge.

MARCUS:  
Always liked this one the best. The way the identities of the character shift but you always know... you *always* know it's Edmund Dantes.

(He takes a few books out of his backpack.)  
I took the liberty of asking him to recommend a few more for you.

SARAH:  
(Looking at the titles.)  
*Scaramouche.*

MARCUS:  
There you go, you can read two French Romances in a row.  
(Reading a title as he passes it over.)  
And Oscar Wilde and...

SARAH:  
(Grabbing a book.)  
*Peter and Wendy.*

MARCUS:  
(Taking out his notepad.)  
He has the privilege of books. Quite a lot of them in his cell. Philosophy, religion, books on art and of poetry... mostly Dickenson...

SARAH:  
He sent me a book of proverbs for my birthday in August.

MARCUS:  
Here?

SARAH:  
Emily forwarded it to me at school.

MARCUS:  
How are you holding up?

SARAH:  
Fine, I guess.

MARCUS:  
You can talk to me. I won't put it in the book.

SARAH:  
Yes, I remember one of them, one of the proverbs, I mean. I memorized it.  
““You often meet your fate on the road you take to avoid it.”

MARCUS:  
(Jotting in his notepad as he talks.)



What is it about that boathouse? First Emily, then you. J.J. says Cora's afraid to go out there. And there's not a book on the shelf in the library. We're bound to find you out there, the smell of burning brains thick in the air, your charred and mangled body buried under an avalanche of Aristotle, Plato and Socrates.

(Putting the notepad away.)

SARAH:

Why did you want to write down the proverb?

MARCUS:

What? No I was just writing about all the books he sends you...

SARAH:

Why?

MARCUS:

Shows he's still a nice guy, I guess. Shows he still cares and he's not a monster. That's sort of what the book is about, showing that he never really was a bad man. I guess, I guess, that's the thing I want to show. A man can go to jail for a heinous crime like he did and still... still send a kid boxes of books from prison. Still love a woman. Still be a good friend.

SARAH:

I wish I could visit him.

MARCUS:

He doesn't like visitors. Not since she... stopped coming.

(EMILY stands as though about to exit.)

SARAH:

I remember the last time I saw him. It was in the courtroom. They made him stand and then they said where he was going and how long he'd be there. He just took it quietly. Emily wasn't there. She couldn't sit and listen. I don't think anybody could blame her.

(EMILY exits.)

MARCUS:

She never missed a visit, though.

SARAH:

Is that what people do when they're in love, Mark? They... they sit and look at each other through plated glass, longing to be closer until...

MARCUS:

I wouldn't know what people in love do.

SARAH:

Did they let you in with the tapes this time?

MARCUS:

(Nodding.)

This morning. About time, too. My shorthand is terrible. His is better, of course, but then if he writes down his own interview notes for me, why not just make him write the whole damned book?

(He opens his backpack.)

SARAH:

He doesn't want to write the book.

MARCUS:

I know, I was just...

(He takes out his tape recorder and an envelope.)

He gave me this to give to you. Said for you to read it when you're alone.

(He passes it across the table. She takes it, doesn't open it.)

You know, you look more and more like your mother every day...

SARAH:

I do not!

MARCUS:

Except when you get that look on your face. That practiced, taciturn look... that's pure George. Emily could do it too. I remember one time when she was little she scraped her knee and she refused to cry, even though you could tell she was in horrible pain. Just set her brow and...

(He chuckles.)

SARAH:

Nobody likes to be told they look like their parents.

MARCUS:

Why not? Your mother's very pretty. I should know, I married her, for that among other reasons. And your father wasn't unappealing, even in his later years.

SARAH:

J.J. says I look like Emily.

MARCUS:

That's not entirely false. Emily and you... well, she was a different kind of pretty. Sort of an unkempt, wild thing. You're...

SARAH:

Ordered, calm, cool... all the things I wish I weren't. She had fun, didn't she?

MARCUS:

Yes.

SARAH:

And it was because she lived without really planning anything, wasn't it?

MARCUS:

Yes.

SARAH:

I suppose it wouldn't hurt to break a rule now and again. When no one is looking.

(Taking the milk carton from the table and drinking from it, ignoring the already used glass.)

If I am pretty, it won't last, why get attached?

MARCUS:

I hate it when you're so blatantly pessimistic...

SARAH:

What you call pessimism I call rationality.

MARCUS:

May I?

(Points to the milk carton. SARAH passes it. MARCUS takes a long swig. As he does so, SARAH looks at the tape recorder on the table.)

SARAH:

Anyway, Emily also had lighter hair, and she was taller, and her face...

MARCUS:

The face is the same. Don't let anybody tell you different. You okay? It's difficult to let go of some people. Why are we sitting here talking when you obviously want to listen?

(Indicates the tape recorder.)

SARAH:

I thought you didn't like people reading fragments of a book before it was...

MARCUS:

(Takes a tape out of the bag.)

This book is different.

(He feeds a tape from a case into the recorder. He presses play. As the recorded voice starts MARCUS finishes his line, overlapping.)

Just sit and listen. It'll be like he's here instead of cooped up in that grey little cell

(TRACY stands, puts down his book, paces.)

MARCUS (RECORDED):

November, 12, 2009 first interview with subject T.R. Madison.

TRACY (RECORDED):

(Clearing his throat.)

They're letting you use tapes finally?

MARCUS (RECORDED):

Yes. I had to promise not to let you keep any overnight. They're apparently afraid you'll hang yourself with them.

(They chuckle.)

TRACY (RECORDED):

Okay. So what are we talking about today?

MARCUS (RECORDED):

How about what happened the day we all met?

TRACY (RECORDED):

Why? You were there.

MARCUS (RECORDED):

So were you. In your own words...

TRACY (RECORDED):

You're not going to take anything out of context, I hope?

MARCUS (RECORDED):

Our contract states that you'll have final approval...

TRACY (RECORDED):

Yes, yes, skip it. I'm just... stalling, I guess.

(The tape recorder fades out to be replaced by TRACY and the lights go dim on the kitchen so that we can see SARAH sitting and watching. MARCUS moves to TRACY in the cell. The confined space is as personable as can be allowed, given

the restrictions of prison life. A chair sits in the middle of the room, [L] are a commode and a sink. Crumpled sheets of paper litter the floor. TRACY is in the chair a notebook on his lap, he is writing. He is dressed in prison blues and looks a bit rough around the edges, sickly. Prison is not treating him very well. He sits in the chair, his arms folded, looking at the MARCUS.)

I'm writing myself a lot these days.

MARCUS:

Oh?

TRACY:

(Standing. Moving.)

It's crap mostly. Nothing you might want to use. Cut-rate fiction is my bag these days. I guess it always was, really. You ever write fiction?

MARCUS:

(Taking the chair.)

Ha ha. No. Some people wish I'd say I had, though.

TRACY:

Hmm?

MARCUS:

No.

TRACY:

Well, you should try it. More control, not only can you analyze but you can manipulate. Make things turn out the way you think they ought to.

(MARCUS displays his wristwatch to TRACY.)

Okay... okay. I know, ticking clock. Don't get pushy though.

(He takes out a cigarette from a pack. He doesn't light the cigarette, he has no matches.)

It was only out of a burst of wild generosity that I decided to participate in this... This invasion of my privacy.

(He turns in time to see EMILY entering the boathouse just beyond the bars of his cell. Throughout the next few lines she wanders idly and finally sits to look into the murky waters of the unseen boat slip.)

MARCUS:

Are you thinking about how to start or are you thinking about the girl?

TRACY:

Do you get all your information from the ether or are you just a good guesser? Yes, I miss her, Mark.

(Shakes his head.)

There are some people who never really grow up, or grow old... Like lost children.

MARCUS:

You loved her.

TRACY:

Yes, very much. I like to think she felt the same way. She must have, right? Visiting an old man like me in prison... Anyway, that's not what you want me to talk about today, so...

MARCUS:

If you want to talk about Emily...

(MARCUS is respectfully silent. TRACY delivers the next few lines with simple calm sarcasm. EMILY exits.)

TRACY:

You want a true crime book, a nitty-gritty, what it was really like, what really happened in my own words. What has being in love got to do with it?

(He chuckles.)

What was it you said that first day? "Keep the book closed." Well the book is closed, Mark. My book is closed. I got no more life to live, not since she's...

(His breath catches.)

Nobody bothered to tell me, you know. I didn't find out until a week afterward. The prison library doesn't get the papers regular and...

MARCUS:

We called. We tried to...

TRACY:

(Stands, gathers his resolve.)

So, I should just get comfortable then? Ha, that's a laugh. How can you get comfortable in prison? Problematic any place really—for me, I mean. Never really been comfortable anywhere... No, wait, that's not true... I can think of a few instances where I was really, truly, unbearably comfortable... Say, that's a nice opening line...

(Chuckling. Sound effect: Two children laughing.)

When was it? The last time I felt comfortable? Hmm, well, let's see, I was sitting on my front porch watching my son on his big wheel, pedaling around, laughing like kids do...

(He digs in his shirt pocket and produces a photograph.)

You know that laugh, that pure beautiful laughter that doesn't recognize the problems of the world.

(Pointing to the two children in the photo.)

Yeah, that's Chris... And that's his sister, Tiffany. I never showed you this, did I?

(MARCUS shakes his head and takes the picture. TRACY turns as he looks at it. Sound effect: The laughing children continue...)

Yeah, that was the last time I got comfortable. I got so comfortable I closed my eyes and just basked in that feeling—that feeling that God was in his heaven and all was right and good and tax deductible... And that's when it happened. I heard it before I saw it.

(Sound effect: children's laughter stops.)

First the car and then... It was a kind of sound like something being dropped from a great height... Yeah, I didn't even have to open my eyes to know...

MARCUS:

I know this story is hard to tell, Tracy. But it does help people to understand...

TRACY:

Understand? Do you really think they want to understand, Mark?

MARCUS:

I'm sorry.

TRACY:

The police, they said they never found the driver. I'd given them the license number and... well, I knew somehow. But I didn't want to think. It hurt too much to think. Every time I thought I'd feel heat radiating from my brain causing my head to ache and my eyes to water.

MARCUS:

Then the divorce...

TRACY:

My wife and I tried, or I should say, "I tried." It was a second, only a second that I'd closed my eyes, but she could never forgive me. We went to grief counselors and shrinks. Her trying to forgive, me trying to let go of that heat in my brain, that monstrous thought I couldn't let myself think. (Pause.) Very few marriages survive the death of a child. I forget the actual statistic... something like three in four break up.

(Taking out the picture once more to look at it.)

He'd be about thirteen now. (Pause.)

MARCUS:

Then your wife left.

TRACY:

Took Tiffany with her. I didn't fight it. I felt I deserved it for letting it happen. As if I could have stopped it, Mark? It was my fault and not my fault all at once.

MARCUS:

And the drinking started then.

TRACY:

It was the only thing that made the heat go away. It put that unthinkable thought in a little cask at the back of my head and wrapped it in an insulation of stupor... still there but so quiet I could only hear it whining faintly when things were unnaturally quiet. It was a month or so after that, I showed up for school, Scotch on my breath, the parents complained and I was let go... As I should have been. Schools these days are zero tolerance for a reason. Kids are impressionable in those ages... high school... Well a lot of them are, some of them are just plain rotten, I'll concede. But, I don't really remember many of the rotten ones. No. It's the good ones that stick with me the most.

MARCUS:

What did you teach again?

TRACY:

(Smiling.)

American History and Civics, Remedial English in the summers—when no one else could be found—I coached the baseball team.

MARCUS:

You wish you could live in those moments more than any other moments of your life, don't you?

TRACY:

Yeah, I liked teaching. Being a teacher. Educating. Once I'd done it a few years, it was what I felt I was always meant to do. And I had Kim and the kids, and thinking back on it, I remember being worried all the time about bills and making ends meet and thinking life could always be better but... No. I didn't realize just how good life was until it changed.

MARCUS:

You were dismissed.



TRACY:

No reprimand, or warning, or probation... just, “pack your shit and get.” So I did. Worked here and there over the months until over a year had gone by. In a gas station for a while, then construction, then this and that... never very long. I couldn’t cut it half in the bag all the time.

MARCUS:

What changed you?

TRACY:

Then one night I was half way through a bottle after spending the day repaving roads. That’s a job, Mark. That burning smell of hot tar gets into your skin so you can still smell it after you scrub for hours and in the night you dream of paving roads and heat. It was the smell of heat, I think. Day in, day out, I was dishing out that hot black liquid heat and watching it bubble and sizzle reminded me there was something locked away in that back room of my mind. Some thought I’d forgotten. I remember the moment. I had the bottle in my hand, I’d tipped it and heard the clink of the glass mouth against the cheep plastic cup I was drinking out of, and I stopped... Just stopped.

MARCUS:

What was the thought?

TRACY:

They’d found who’d done it. They had to have.

MARCUS:

Why couldn’t you have thought that when it happened?

TRACY:

I didn’t want to think it because it meant recognizing something.

MARCUS:

What?

TRACY:

Recognizing that there was someone so cowardly in the world and yet so powerful that they could make my son, what had happened to my son, what had happened to my family, what had happened to me  
INSIGNIFICANT!

MARCUS:

Tracy.

TRACY:

No! IT WAS NOT FUCKING INSIGNIFICANT! CHRIS MATTERED! MY FAMILY MATTERED! And there it was that heat again, exploding with a force exponentiated by staying so long casked. And that's when I capped the bottle. No twelve-step, no promise keepers... I just capped it, click, and put it away.

MARCUS:

It still angers you, then, doesn't it?

TRACY:

(Shrugging.)

That's how my memories are. They can become real almost. Like I'm time traveling. Where was I?

MARCUS:

You quit drinking.

TRACY:

Yeah. Is that odd? Just to stop like that? I do a lot of odd things, or things oddly, I guess. Like the cigarettes. I've never smoked. I can't stand the smell, it nauseates me. But I always have one of these little coffin nails in my hand it seems. Or I suck on one 'til it falls apart. Lots of odd behavior... you can put it in your book, in the David Copperfield section. (Exhales.) So, that was when I decided I was gonna do something. I was gonna find the son of a bitch. So I went about it. It was like the information was just waiting to be found, made me think God was egging me on. "Go," he seemed to say. "Be my wrath." There was no voice of God, no need for it. Just ten seconds at a computer in the DMV and I knew who and where.

MARCUS:

What remained was how.

TRACY:

I was intent to wait until doomsday but, ha ha, there it was one day. Again, a gift from God. You, the other man author, the one fucking the trophy wife at every stolen moment. You needed an editor. And I...

MARCUS:

Alcoholism never appears on a resume.

TRACY:

I was sober, though. As a judge. So, I started in new manuscripts, working diligently and with great facility. It was only a few months before I was noticed. Called up to that oversized office, so clean you could tell

he was seldom in it. Even if I hadn't had a good reason to hate him, I would have still disliked him.

MARCUS:

Him. You keep saying him. Say his name, Tracy.

TRACY:

I don't want to. (Changing the subject.) So, there was an interview and a description of the situation that would have made you laugh to hear it. He said you were "distracted from your pressing obligation to his firm" and that my duty was to "direct your focus."

MARCUS:

He must have known then.

TRACY:

Yet he didn't care. He didn't care about anything, it seemed. All he was to me was an objective, so it was easy to see him as just a paper person. Unreal. Unfeeling. Un-invested in humanity. So, that was it. I ended up in his house with you. Through what I thought was God's providence, I found myself in the boathouse adjacent to that den of iniquity. That lousy, stinking, big, expensive, damned, beautiful house. Interrupting a game of "tennis", taking the little one from her books, and...

MARCUS:

And the bigger one, out driving like a maniac, as was her habit.

(Lighting goes down on the cell and MARCUS moves to the study. TRACY is left in the same limbo lighting that SARAH has been in. The lights come up on the study. SARAH pulls her hair back to suggest a flashback. The study is large, complete with easy chair, couch, a coffee table, a desk, a sideboard and books. It is a bright and cheerful room. [UC] a French door leads out of the study to boathouse and tennis courts. The study is more functional than fashionable. On the coffee table are the remnants of a sandwich and an open bag of potato chips. SARAH is in one of the easy chairs, slumped down and reading a book while munching potato chips. MARCUS enters from [R]. He is good looking and athletic, though closer to fifty than he likes to admit. He crosses to the desk, looking for something.)

JORDAN:

(Off.)

Mark? Mark! Hurry up! Where are you?

MARCUS:

In the study. I'm looking for my tennis things. Has anyone seen my notebook?

(SARAH shifts in her seat, digging in the cushions behind her. She produces the notebook and clears her throat. MARCUS picks up a duffle bag and a racket from beside the desk, turns and sees his notebook held in the air. He crosses and snags it, tossing thanks over his shoulder as he moves to exit.)

Thanks, squirt.

SARAH:

Don't mention it.

MARCUS:

(JORDAN enters from [R]. She is a pretty woman in her early thirties.)

Found it. Let's go.

JORDAN:

Is she still... Sarah Ann Berkeley! You're not still sitting inside on a nice day like this.

MARCUS:

Oh, let her alone. It's summer. Kids can lounge about in the summer.

JORDAN:

(Moves bag of chips out of SARAH'S reach.)

You rush upstairs and get into a pair of shorts and come play tennis. You sit there eating those chips all day you'll get fat and the boys won't want to look at you come fall. God... I swear.

MARCUS:

Move on. Move on. I want to get in a few sets before he's done unpacking.

JORDAN:

Before who's done unpacking?

(SARAH takes this opportunity to retrieve the bag of chips. TRACY moves to boathouse, pulls out a suitcase, unpacks.)

MARCUS:

J.J., I told you three days ago. George reminded us over dinner last night. The amanuensis!

JORDAN:

What the fuck is an amanuensis?

MARCUS:

Look it up. My god, and you a publisher's wife... I'm two months past deadline and George has taken the liberty of hiring me a secretary. He arrived late last night. He's unpacking. Now come on, we've got an hour before he said he'd hit, and I need to get in all the fun I can.

JORDAN:

Oh, drat. Cora! Cora!

CORA:

(Off.)

What!

JORDAN:

Don't shout across the house like that. Come here!

CORA:

(Off.)

Why don't you come where I am? And as for shouting...

JORDAN:

Fine, don't come!

(CORA enters. She is an older woman, the housekeeper.)

CORA:

Too late. What are you hollering for?

JORDAN:

I needed to set another place at dinner for Mister... Mister?

MARCUS:

Madison.

JORDAN:

Yes, Mr. Kirby's amanuensis...

CORA:

Mr. Kirby's what?

JORDAN:

Look it up.

CORA:

(Icily, looking at MARCUS and then explaining to JORDAN.)  
You mean the secretary? Mr. Berkeley told me a week ago.

(She crosses and takes the bag of chips from SARAH.)  
Get dressed and do something constructive.

SARAH:  
Why is everyone picking on me? I'm reading. I'm expanding my young mind. Leave me alone!

CORA:  
Heavens to Mergatroid! A bright June morning outside, you're wasting it with a book...  
(Exits.)

JORDAN:  
You see, a second opinion... go outside!

SARAH:  
Blah.  
(Sticks out her tongue.)

JORDAN:  
When your father gets back I'll tell him what a bum you're being.

SARAH:  
Fine.

JORDAN:  
Why are you being so... so... Mark, what's the word I want?

MARCUS:  
Sedentary?

JORDAN:  
No. Closed. You've been very closed this morning. You love to come out and play tennis with Mark and me. Or go swimming with Emily. Oh, speaking of which, what's happened to her? Where is she?

SARAH:  
Out driving.

JORDAN:  
Figures. Her and her cars. She goes, it'll be in a Jaguar going 120 into a bridge abutment.

SARAH:  
Only 120?

JORDAN:

A joke? Yeah! Oh, you are still my daughter after all? I thought some witch had come and left me a changeling.

(She rushes over and tickles her daughter. SARAH giggles.)

SARAH:

Stop. Stop! Ha ha ha.

JORDAN:

Get off your fatty tissue and go outside. You've been in this room so long you're starting to stick to the furniture.

SARAH:

I like this room.

JORDAN:

Well, that's all well and good. But what if Mark wants to do some work?

SARAH:

Mark, do you want to do some work?

MARCUS:

I have fifty minutes before all I will be doing for the rest of the summer is work. Let's go, J.J.!

JORDAN:

Okay. Okay!

(Kisses SARAH'S hair.)

Oo-oh, wash your hair.

(JORDAN exits. She and MARCUS are heard giggling and talking as they leave R. SARAH stands, puts her book on the table and walks around to the back of the chair. She leans forward over the back of the chair, her hair dangling into the natural seat playfully. EMILY sneaks through glass doors.)

EMILY:

Don't bend over the chair that way. If you're going to sit in it, sit in it. Otherwise stand up straight.

SARAH:

Where've you been?

EMILY:

I told you I was going for a drive.

SARAH:

I know that, but what was the destination, the objective, the purpose? Why? Why did my big half-sister get in her car this morning, so wretchedly early and drive away?

EMILY:

Whimsy. Why are you still inside?

SARAH:

To annoy mom.

EMILY:

Where is J.J.?

SARAH:

With her boyfriend, playing tennis.

EMILY:

I wish you wouldn't joke about it that way.

SARAH:

Well, the only person anyone should try to keep it from is me and if I know what's to prevent us from talking about it?

EMILY:

True. My mother would have said something about Emily Post right now, but I just don't have the energy to care anymore. What'cha reading?

SARAH:

Marcus Aurelius, *The Meditations*.

EMILY:

Sometimes I think aliens did something to your brain one night and made you weird like this. My God, when I was your age it was Nancy Drew and The fucking Boxcar Children.

SARAH:

And look how you've turned out...

EMILY:

Cynic.

SARAH:

Hedonist.



EMILY:

Are you even old enough to know what a hedonist is?

SARAH:

No, but I'm old enough to have a sneaking suspicion that you are one.  
(EMILY walks to the door, looks out, around, sees the coast is clear. She moves UC to glass doors. She takes a bag of weed out of her pocket and a book from the shelf as she talks. Upon opening the book we discover that is hollowed out to allow for a small marijuana pipe. TRACY continues to move about the boathouse, changing his wardrobe.)

EMILY:

That almost sounds like something a clever person would say. So, have you been spying out the window at him at all? What's he look like?

SARAH:

Spying out the window at whom?

EMILY:

You're no fun sometimes. We both already know the answer is yes. So spill. Is he everything you imagined and more?  
(She produces a lighter and begins filling the bowl. SARAH looks up from her book to see what her sister is doing.)

SARAH:

Oh, so there was an objective to your morning run. Went to meet your connection? Can I smoke a bowl?

EMILY:

Sure.  
(Holding out the pipe.)

SARAH:

Can I have a whiskey with it?

EMILY:

(Taking the pipe back.)  
No.  
(Lighting and inhaling.)  
You always ask that and the answer is always no.  
(Passing the pipe to SARAH.)

SARAH:

What's to stop me?

Me. EMILY:

SARAH:  
(Inhaling and coughing slightly.)  
You're not my mother.  
(Passing the pipe.)

EMILY:  
True. But I could always tell on you.

SARAH:  
And I could always tell on you.

EMILY:  
Go ahead.  
(Inhaling.)  
I don't care if I get into trouble. That's what separates me from the girls.

SARAH:  
You should have that screen-printed on a tee-shirt.

EMILY:  
(Inhaling some more.)  
I'd rather have it embroidered on my panties.

SARAH:  
Double toke, foul.  
(Holding out her hand for the pipe. EMILY relinquishes it.)  
Yep, definitely a hedonist. So, explain it to me again, why in the world is pot all right, but whiskey isn't?

EMILY:  
(Walking around the sofa, like she's lecturing-- but with an illegal smile.)  
Because one is universally illegal, which I don't advocate... and the other is only legal to responsible individuals over the age of 21... that makes sense to me, for the most part. Besides. It's easier to maintain when you're just high... drunk and high, people will notice and I still don't trust you not to squeal on me to Cora or Daddy if someone should ask, "Whose been drinking my porridge?"  
(SARAH passes the pipe after having several tokes.)

SARAH:  
You're a hypocrite.

EMILY:

(Taking a hit. Passing it back.)

Yes, indeed, sister, dear... but I'm an authority figure as well.

SARAH:

No, you're not. Daddy is.

EMILY:

(She moves to sit on the edge of the desk.)

Daddy doesn't care what we do. Didn't even care when I dropped out of college. Since I've been home, I've been basking in the glory of my laziness. Tell me, do you think I should go out and get a job, or should I ride this quarter-life crisis of mine on into my thirties.

SARAH:

That's a long time to ride it. Do you honestly think you can milk six years out of a quarter-life crisis?

EMILY:

If I can't I can shift into an artistic brooding period. "Father, I can not take this stifling house anymore. I must escape... to Europe... Spain!"

(Begins dancing U to French doors.)

Oh, what I'd give for a nice sandy beach and a Spanish hunk to share it with.

SARAH:

Why Spanish?

EMILY:

Because I don't speak Spanish. And if I'm going to let a man into my life I'm going to make sure I don't understand a word he's shouting at me when he's angry.

(Basking in the sunshine for a moment.)

Oh, it's a beautiful day. I'm swimming, that's for sure.

(Returning to her original thought.)

You know that's the problem with relationships. Sooner or later the man realizes he's right about something and just won't shut up about it. That's what's so attractive about the concept of the Latin lover... that and a huge uncut cock.

SARAH:

Emily, not in front of the children.

(Indicates self.)

EMILY:

Oh, children. What exactly does he look like?

SARAH:

Your mind is like a pinball machine sometimes. You never know what's going to light up.

EMILY:

Spill.

SARAH:

I'm not telling.

EMILY:

Creep. Hmm, to dream of a secretary. Odd, I got so used to thinking of secretaries as women in their 60s with lots of cats.

SARAH:

How do you know he hasn't got lots of cats?

EMILY:

Daddy called him "driven" at dinner. You know what that means.

SARAH:

Not really.

EMILY:

Neither do I, but it sounds like something worth investigating.

SARAH:

Still influenced by Nancy Drew, huh?

EMILY:

Who else should I be influenced by?

SARAH:

I don't know. I'm sure there's some scandalous literature out there that was written just for you, Emily.

EMILY:

Hmm. When you come across it, let me know.

SARAH:

Why don't you try looking for it yourself?

EMILY:

Blah.

(Shaking her head.)

I'd rather have a listen to his terribly sexy voice again. You've been playing over and over and over again on the answering machine all weekend long, I've grown accustomed to it.

(She goes over to the desk and finds the answering machine; she plays the message. TRACY is dressed in business casual for flashback. He recites the message from the boathouse.)

TRACY:

(RECORDED or SPOKEN from the boathouse.)

Yes, hello, Mr. Kirby. This is Tracy Madison. I've been given this number by our publisher, Mr. Berkeley. I understand it is your private extension. Anyway, I will be up to the house on the 12th. I'll be arriving late, so don't wait up. I understand I'm going to be staying in the guest house. Thank you for sending the key. So I'll spend most of the following morning unpacking. Let's say 2 o'clock we can begin work as instructed? I look forward to meeting you and everyone else. Goodbye.

(Sound effect: BEEP.)

EMILY:

He sounds gruff and manly, "chip on his shoulder" type, and at least twice your age, honey. But that can be alluring, I must concede.

SARAH:

Oh, shut up.

EMILY:

Oh well, I guess he's ugly then, eh?

SARAH:

No he—He's not.

EMILY:

So you have been spying! Well, aren't we a budding bunch of adolescent hormones? So do tell... No wait. Nevermind, it's not proper to lead you on when you haven't got a chance.

SARAH:

Who wants a chance with him? I just said he's not ugly. That doesn't mean...

EMILY:

(Crossing to SARAH.)

Well in that case, I won't have to work too hard to jump on this grenade and protect my dear little sister from perverts, mad dogs, lepers, and Irishmen, then?

(Tugging at her clothes.)

Not that you'll need much protecting dressed like that.

SARAH:

Shut up. All I said was that he sounded interesting and I happened to catch a glimpse of him this morning and he didn't look ugly. I have not been playing the message over and over and over again. You have! And personally I don't want anything to do with him.

(TRACY exits boathouse, L.)

EMILY:

(Moving back to the window.)

Why do you say that? What if he's handsome and witty and reads funny books and likes to sit around in his pajamas?

SARAH:

Gross! He's old. Besides, maybe he doesn't wear pajamas?

EMILY:

I wonder if he'd like to go swimming with us?

SARAH:

Non-sequitor. Us? I never said I'd go...

CORA: (off)

Is something burning?

SARAH:

(Handing her the pipe.)

Shit.

(SARAH jumps as does EMILY. They hurriedly try to cover up the fact that they have been smoking pot, ditching the pipe and using this or that to fan the air. EMILY sprays perfume. SARAH ends up on the couch with her book beginning to read aloud from the meditations as EMILY joins her and feigns deep concentration in the "recitation," responding to CORA'S calls half heartedly.)

SARAH:

“Number 64. In every pain let this thought be present, that there is no dishonor in it, nor does it make the governing intelligence worse, for it does not damage...”

CORA:

(Off.)

Where is everybody?

EMILY:

We’re in the study, Cora. Keep it down, will ya? Sarah’s reading to me from Marcus Areolas.

SARAH:

“..the intelligence either so far as the intelligence is rational or so far that it is social.”

(Whispering.)

Its Marcus Aurelius, dumbass.

EMILY:

Whatever. Who is he again?

SARAH:

He was the emperor of...

(CORA enters from kitchen with TRACY in tow. She sniffs.)

Rome. “Nature has not so mingled the intelligence with the composition of the body, as not to have allowed thee the power of” circumcising, er um, “circumscribing thyself and of bringing...”

CORA:

Sarah, is something burning in here?

SARAH:

I don’t smell anything.

EMILY:

You might be developing a tumor, Cora. Smelling things is an early sign.

(CORA makes a face and seeks out and finds the pipe, still smoldering. She holds it up to the girls, who have absolutely no idea what it could be. She walks over to the bookcase, picks out the hollowed book and returns the pipe to its proper place before she ushers TRACY in.)

CORA:

Oh, you! Mr. Madison, this is Miss Sarah and this is Miss Emily.

SARAH:

Hello.

EMILY:

Wow, ain't you a square jawed comic book character come to life.  
(Curtsy.) How do you do, sir?

CORA:

(A bit flustered.)

I'm sorry about her. If they're bothering you, give me a yell. Like I said earlier, Mr. Berkeley says you're to have total authority over anyone and anything in this room of the house.

TRACY:

They seem harmless enough on the surface. I will be sure to call, though. Thank you, uh... I'm sorry, I've forgotten your name.

CORA:

Corrina Platz. They call me Cora. Dinner is at seven. Do you want me to fetch Mr. Kirby?

TRACY:

It was my understanding he'd be waiting for me when I came in.  
(Checks his watch.)  
I'm not too early, I don't think?

SARAH:

No, you're on time. He's just too busy playing tennis with mother.  
(CORA exits.)

TRACY:

Oh. Well, um. I'm Mr. Madison, or actually just Tracy is fine.

EMILY:

(EMILY extends a hand to him.)

How do, pard? You're not bad at all. Did you pack any trunks?

TRACY:

(Ignoring her hand and breezing past her to the desk.)

No. I didn't, actually.

EMILY:

Ooh, icy. Maybe he's got one on both shoulders.

TRACY:

Got one of what?



EMILY:

Sisterly banter, private joke. You understand of course, don't you Mr. Kent.

TRACY:

Madison.

EMILY:

Your name is what I say it is until I say otherwise.

SARAH:

Just ignore her. It's what I do.

EMILY:

No you don't you just pretend to. Just like you pretend you understand that crap you're reading when you haven't got anymore of a clue than I do.

TRACY:

(Checking the back of the book as he passes by SARAH.)

Marcus Aureoles, huh? Stoic Philosophy required reading in summer school?

SARAH:

I'm not in summer school.

EMILY:

She's just naturally spooky. The other day it was something about a guy named Anus.

SARAH:

Anieus!

EMILY:

Whatever. Anyway he was all bent out of shape because he was down to his last Trojan or something.

TRACY:

No, he was the last Trojan.

EMILY:

Ewe. That's an image. Anyway, I was expecting someone more disappointing to walk through the door... I can't imagine why.

TRACY:

Sorry to disappoint you by not being disappointing.

EMILY:

You're quick, too; let's hope not in all things.

(TRACY takes out a cigarette and sticks it into his mouth.

EMILY grabs it and breaks it in half.)

Naughty.

SARAH:

What she means to say is, we don't like people to smoke in here.

TRACY:

I don't smoke.

(TRACY walks over to the desk taking out another cigarette and putting it in his lips. EMILY follows, hovering.)

Is this where he works?

EMILY:

Hmm? Oh, yes. When he's ignoring everyone altogether and not just me and Sarah. How do you like the boathouse? Personally, I love it. It's nice and cool. I slip out there sometimes on hot summer nights. I used to sneak boys out there and go skinny-dipping in the slip.

TRACY:

(To SARAH.)

Playing tennis, you said...

SARAH:

Yes.

EMILY:

Alright, have it your way, we can talk about Mark. Have you read his books?

TRACY:

Mr. Berkeley gave me the list and I spent the whole week last week with them.

EMILY:

You ever write anything?

TRACY:

Ha. No. Never anything worth publishing at least. My stories left people wanting. But, English is my native tongue, and I've a great affinity for it.

EMILY:

Sarah, you hear? He talks funny, like Marcus Areolas. You think daddy will let you keep him?

SARAH:

Oh, shut up.

TRACY:

Actually, Marcus Aurelius most probably spoke Latin. What she was reading was a translation into the English.

EMILY:

You say that like it should matter to me. It's almost annoying. So you're what a book editor looks like? Funny, I always imagined sweater vests, spectacles, and forty extra pounds.

(Taking a magnifying glass off the desk.)

Where do you keep your red pen?

TRACY:

I use green. Much more friendly. And I'm not here to edit as much as motivate. The book is three weeks from its new deadline, and from what I hear three months from being finished.

SARAH:

Hah!

TRACY:

Scoffing?

SARAH:

No, just laughing at the line of bullshit you've bought. Three months? He's barely started, mom's been keeping him so busy.

TRACY:

Busy?

EMILY:

Laying pipe.

SARAH:

Emily!

EMILY:

Sarah's mother is... well, she's very free and easy. In a lot of ways J.J's been my worst influence.

TRACY:

You have a habit of letting things drop like that. It's, e-hem, none of my business.

EMILY:

Too true. But its fun to be in on the scandalous.

(She comes very close to TRACY examining him through the glass.)

How old are you anyway? Thick hair, no grey, lots of lines though...

(She pokes his mid-section.)

Not quite gone to fat. If it weren't for your attitude I'd approve of you. Uh-oh.

(She has stopped at his wedding ring. She stands and hits him lightly on the shoulder.)

Hopeless. You're just plain hopeless. Married!

TRACY:

Do I have to flip a coin to decide which one of you goes to get our esteemed writer? Or would one of you volunteer the other?

SARAH:

I nominate Sherlock Holmes. She's wearing shoes and the path to the tennis court murders my bare feet.

TRACY:

I accept the nomination. Congratulations, miss.

EMILY:

Fine, you can have him all to yourself for now, Sarah.

(Handing TRACY the magnifying glass.)

If you can get her to go upstairs and take a bath, I will fall madly in love with you despite your somewhat surly tone.

(Exiting.)

As will, I'm sure, every dame and damsel in the castle keep. And the lady exits.

(TRACY turns back to the desk and begins examining the books and papers, taking care not to move anything.)

SARAH:

(Pretending to read her book.)

Not even going to try, huh?

TRACY:

(Turning slightly.)

Huh? Oh. Go take a bath.

No. SARAH:

Okay. TRACY:

So, you got kids? SARAH:

TRACY:  
(Distracted.)  
I don't mind if you stay, but could you be quiet, please?  
(SARAH makes a face at TRACY'S back. She shuts her book  
and then, thinking it through before hand, chucks it at  
TRACY.)  
Hey! What was that for?

Being rude. SARAH:

I... TRACY:

SARAH:  
So you're married. You have kids? A dog? House? Car? Mortgage? 401k?  
What's your wife do?  
(TRACY rubs his back and picks up the book.)

TRACY:  
You shouldn't treat books like that. Or people, for that matter.

SARAH:  
Are you upset because you're being made to wait, or is it for some other  
reason?

TRACY:  
Never you mind.

SARAH:  
Emily was just trying to be friendly in her way.

TRACY:  
And now you're just trying to be friendly in yours?  
(Holding up the book.)

SARAH:

Yes.

TRACY:

You just through the proverbial book at me...

SARAH:

Well, consider it my way of lashing out for attention. That's what my analyst calls it.

TRACY:

Your analyst... How old are you?

SARAH:

16. I'll be 17 next month. So you going to tell me about yourself or do I have to throw another book?

TRACY:

(Cracking a smile.)

Okay, tell you what, I'll answer all of your questions if afterwards you go upstairs and take a bath.

SARAH:

Oh, one of those logical guys, huh?

TRACY:

Not logical, just practical. Deal?

(SARAH extends her pinky. TRACY hooks it in his. TRACY delivers this list directly to her face.)

Divorced, actually. I wear the ring because the divorce wasn't my idea. I have one daughter, a little older than you. She lives with her mother in never Neverland. No dog, sadly. No house, so no mortgage. A meager savings, a beat up old Toyota and a dilapidated IRA. My ex-wife is a kindergarten teacher. I believe those are all the answers to all of your questions, right?

(They are very close.)

Uncomfortable, yet?

(SARAH unhooks her finger and slides out of the chair, exiting quietly. She turns at the door to find him turning back to the desk. As she is looking at him, MARCUS enters through French doors. He is winded and sweaty, dressed in a tennis outfit carrying a racket. Through the seen he plays with the racket balancing imaginary tennis balls and bouncing them idly.)

SARAH:

Sorry I threw the book.

(She turns and runs smack into MARCUS.)

MARCUS:

Whoops! Traffic jam! Sorry.

(Crossing to TRACY.)

Don't be upset. It was just a really good match. I couldn't leave J.J. in the middle of it.

(EMILY and JORDAN enter; JORDAN carries MARCUS'S dufflebag.)

JORDAN:

Especially with me winning, huh? You forgot your clothes.

TRACY:

It's quite alright.

SARAH:

(Feeling awkward.)

I was... Shower.

(She exits [L].)

EMILY:

Oh? Mommy, can I keep the able Mr. Madison? Your wife won't mind, will she?

TRACY:

So, Mr. Kirby, it is a pleasure.

MARCUS:

Mark, please. Everyone calls me Mark. And you, please tell me I don't have to call you Mr. Madison all the time? Or do you think I'll need that kind of authoritarian nomenclature to get in line?

TRACY:

Not at all. I'm just the one making sure you're up early every morning and adhering to a schedule. Tracy is fine.

MARCUS:

He sounds like someone I'm not going to like very much.

JORDAN:

Yes, what are his qualifications anyway?

EMILY:

I like him.

MARCUS:

(He moves to the sideboard, unlocks it and pours himself a short whiskey.)

Well, in that case I'm sold.

JORDAN:

So, I'm still in the mood. Emily, tennis?

EMILY:

Um... actually, I was thinking about a swim.

JORDAN:

You're on.

EMILY:

(To TRACY.)

Sit by me at dinner?

TRACY:

Why should I do that?

EMILY:

Cause I asked you to.

MARCUS:

And don't be misled. Invitations around here are seldom less than orders, especially where that one is concerned.

JORDAN:

She's terribly spoiled. I blame it on the housekeeper. The housekeeper blames it on me... There's just no fixing her.

EMILY:

Why fix what ain't broke?

MARCUS:

Cutting away from the happy families routine, you're to be my new editor. Do you understand what that job entails?

TRACY:

Mr. Berkeley gave me a rough outline. He said you fought tooth and nail to keep your old editor.



JORDAN:

Bridget was a saint.

MARCUS:

Yes, and I loved her dearly, but no matter how much I begged, George wouldn't agree to the new contract. Though she was worth every penny. But don't worry. George has told me all about you; I think you'll work out fine. And you're cheap, that's good.

EMILY:

All about him? And here you've been letting Sarah and me think he was mysterious this whole week. So let me guess, former college dean caught with a student and discredited.

MARCUS:

I thought you two were going to swim.

JORDAN:

Oh, Mark's keeping secrets. Now I'm interested. What exactly is your background, Mr. Madison? I haven't asked that already, have I?

TRACY:

Actually you have. I just didn't.

MARCUS:

He didn't answer you because it's none of your business. Unlike me, he's kept the book closed on the events of his life, an admirable feat, sir.

JORDAN:

Mark must have his little secrets to feel important. Marcus Kirby, if you don't spill, I'll let Cora come in here and clean.

(The women laugh and exit. After a moment, EMILY re-enters.)

EMILY:

Wouldn't dream of leaving my new found hero without asking this simple question. Tell me, Samson, how'd you get the small one to...

TRACY:

I threatened to tell on the two of you for the pot. Now am-scray, I and the author have a book to write, and less than a month to write it in. No distractions.

(He points to the door. EMILY makes a pouting face as she walks to the door.)

EMILY:

The field is given up for now. But you're missing out, Professor, don't worry, I'll make sure you catch a glimpse of me in a bikini.

(Exits.)

MARCUS:

Pot?

TRACY:

I was a school teacher. I can smell it from a mile away.

MARCUS:

Well, you're wrong in threatening to tell on them. Their father isn't the sort to punish. Things are pretty free and easy around this household. Not that I'm complaining.

TRACY:

So I've heard from them. Is it true you're sleeping with...

MARCUS:

Yes, but it's in poor taste to bring it up after we've only just met.

TRACY:

I'm sorry...

MARCUS:

Ha ha. You're an apologizer. I like that. Means you're easier to fuck with than Bridget was. I'm sorry, would you like a drink?

TRACY:

No, thank you.

MARCUS:

Hmm. When it's said in that tone of voice, it gives you a whole new depth of character. How long?

TRACY:

Almost a year.

MARCUS:

What step? Oh, never mind. It doesn't matter. You don't mind if I have another do you? I almost don't trust a recovering alcoholic; he's a man who can't moderate his habits so he cuts them off entirely. Addiction is like a forest fire, if you don't let the small ones rage occasionally...

(He drinks.)

You're in for a big one eventually.

TRACY:

You sound like you're already writing a book about me.

MARCUS:

I might just try. I research every new character and much to my surprise I've found little out about you. You are a conundrum. And I don't like admitting that I've been conundrummed. That's why I wanted them out so that I might be the first to hear your tale.

TRACY:

Do you think I have a tale to tell?

MARCUS:

Yes. I do. Nobody is so eager to please as you are without having something to hide. But don't worry, you are allowed your secret. It must be a dozy to guard so closely. Whatever it was, I'm looking forward to working with you because of your past misfortune. You wear it like an invisible badge. It makes you the type of person well suited to edit my work. You'll know when to ask questions, what questions to ask, and how to ask them frankly. Nothing is so offensive to me as a person who feels they have to put things delicately.

(MARCUS mimes a spike.)

TRACY:

From you that's a compliment, I suppose. I've read your books. Heart wrenching stuff.

MARCUS:

My life was shit.

TRACY:

Yet, you manage to write with such humor. And you live on the north shore in another man's house.

MARCUS:

Drug addiction, petty crime, prison, and a Pulitzer... such a resume offers me a quaintness of character that livens up dinner parties. I wasn't kidding though, about keeping the book closed, that's smart. Once you show people who you are you're stuck being that person for the rest of your life. Look at me for instance. Am I what you expected? Do I look like some punk who learned to write in Rehab? No. I'm an award-winning writer, I have highly influential friends, I would go so far to say that I am a happy well-adjusted member of the *nouveau riche* who uses such pretentious terms with great dexterity. A black man in East Egg, dining with the white folks drinking aperitif and all the while everybody knows

what I was and how I got to where I am. It's no secret I once had a severe problem with drugs. Clean over a decade now and they still read the books and they still see a junkie. I'm the black William Burroughs, only no Ginsberg.

(He moves to the desk and boots up his laptop. He hands TRACY a bundle of paper.)

Don't you dare let George or me or anyone get the stories out of you. Nothing's worse than letting the entire world know exactly who you are, and how you felt, and what you did... They'll eat you alive from the inside out and never accept the fact that you've changed.

TRACY:

Dark, menacing.

MARCUS:

Yes, we are, my boy, we are. Now, on to the work hence to be known as "Untitled: Kirby: Number Seven."

(The lighting dims as TRACY moves down to his prison cell, he takes off his jacket and shirt so that he is in his undershirt and blue pants. He picks up the sheets of crumpled paper from the floor. EMILY enters boathouse and stands close to the bars of the cell, wearing a bikini, she sits down by the water, reflective. TRACY reads the papers and then crumples them up again, tossing the balled-up paper to the floor. MARCUS, dressed in original costume, joins him, sits, listens.)

MARCUS:

I remember her being a bit more flirtatious.

TRACY:

She was brazen, unapologetic about it, perfectly playful and disarming. I would have been able to resist if she'd been anything more or less than what she was.

MARCUS:

You're right. Who could get what it was about her?

TRACY:

She wasn't the kind of girl the world would get.

MARCUS:

Neither is Sarah, now that you mention it.

(The sound of the tape recorder clicking. The lighting shifts to the kitchen. MARCUS goes back to the kitchen where

lights come up on SARAH, her hair down again; she has entered and stopped the tape.)

Why'd you stop it?

SARAH:

Are you going to write about me?

MARCUS:

Well, I...

SARAH:

Why'd you bring me up with him? Why'd you have to talk about me?

MARCUS:

He likes talking about you.

(Indicates book.)

Other than me, you're the only other person he's got now. J.J. can't... Well, you know, she still can't forgive.

SARAH:

But you could forgive? Why? Why could you forgive?

(MARCUS shrugs. Hits fast-forward on the recorder. Hits play.)

TRACY:

(Lights fade on the kitchen. TRACY stands and clears his throat. Changing the subject, picking a book up off the cot. EMILY is still on the other side of the bars. She reaches her hands through as if to touch TRACY who steps out of her grasp, almost absent-mindedly.)

I used to think I read a lot. Now, boy o' boy, I read three books a night sometimes. Time. I got time in spades now that I don't sleep.

(EMILY exits.)

MARCUS:

(Slowly joining TRACY in the cell.)

What are you...?

(Points to the book.)

TRACY:

*The Sun Also Rises.*

MARCUS:

(Nodding.)

I've seen that one around the house.

TRACY:

She's reading it?

MARCUS:

For class. Don't worry, every list you give me, I buy them on my way home. Or, if I don't, the next day she's driving into town and coming back with boxes full of... Well?

TRACY:

Well, what?

MARCUS:

Why that one?

TRACY:

(Shrugging.)  
Because of the last line.

MARCUS:

Oh?

TRACY:

(Looking at EMILY.)  
"Isn't it pretty to think so." Jake says it to Brett after she laments the great time they would have had together "if only..."  
(Tosses the book aside.)  
Course she'll hate it.

MARCUS:

Hate it?

TRACY:

She likes things with definite morals, definite heroes, definite... Sarah is very much an optimist, you know.

MARCUS:

I disagree.

TRACY:

You don't look at her from the right angle through the prism... These days Sarah needs heroes. Sarah needs happily ever after. She needs those French romances and those Italian Comedias that end with marriages... It's for her.

MARCUS:

Hmm? What? What's for whom?

TRACY:

The story I'm writing. I just realized... It's right up Sarah's alley. It's one of those screamers, one of those wonderful lies where everyone achieves the happiness they pursue... what are you writing?

MARCUS:

(Looking up from his notebook.)

Never you mind. So its coming along, then; the story, I mean?

TRACY:

I don't know. I'm sort of falling in love with a story I haven't really written. May never even write.

MARCUS:

A story that takes place in the land of should?

TRACY:

(He smiles and laughs.)

No. What are you talking about?

MARCUS:

Whenever you write about what should have happened, what might have been, that's a story from the land of should. I call fiction stories gifts from the land of should. Life never works out, Tracy.

TRACY:

I suppose you're right. I mean, that's sort of the theme of things, isn't it? Happily ever after is all so much bullshit!

(He chuckles, almost drunkenly.)

You can shout and scream and beg and plead with the heavens but... uh-huh, there is nobody up there to even listen to, let alone answer, you. You can pray for someone to make your unnatural life a natural one, but you're Shit Out of Luck, pal! Things don't work that way. But, oh, that hope, THAT FUCKING HOPE... You know I think there's a reason that was in the bottom of Pandora's box. It's the worst disease of the lot... so dense it sank to the bottom. It stays alive in you, that hope does, and oh, DAMN IT! It's excruciating. You convince yourself that you're fighting a good fight that will have resolution and that one day you will see an end to your suffering. "For those of you who bear great things..." I listen to lines like those and I feel like vomiting. I feel like I've learned something, though, from all of it, something has been added to me. I am more than I was before... I am smarter now. Not more intelligent, mind you. I have some sort of new sense, I'm a step further away from ignorance than I

once was. "To be conscious that you are ignorant is a great step to knowledge."

MARCUS:

"To repeat what others have said, requires education; to challenge it, requires brains." Mary Pettibone Poole said that, I think.

(The two men share a smile and TRACY Moves to the desk and takes a sheet from the pad of paper. He tears slowly and then lets the pieces fall to the floor. MARCUS almost moves to stop this, but keeps his distance.)

I'm rambling, huh? Well, we began right off, that very minute. You booted up and showed me forty-three pages. Yes, that was how little you had of it. Forty-three pages, a lot of notes and scratched out outlines, yes, but actual book... it wasn't even a quarter done. Not by a long shot. But you... you are talented and I...

MARCUS:

(Becoming comfortable once again.)

You were rousing...

TRACY:

We had three more chapters outlined and typed up before six o'clock. I cleaned up the room a little...

MARCUS:

A regular Felix Unger.

TRACY:

...peeked over your shoulder now and again. Then I told you to hit the print button and go upstairs. I wanted time alone to edit.

MARCUS:

This was when she...

TRACY:

(Holding up a hand.)

You want to write it or let me tell it? There is something nice about working in solitude, behind a closed door, in a big old room like that. It was like there was a smell to the house, or a certain way the light filtered through the windows... It made me want to hide.

(The lighting shifts from the cell to the study. Soft music plays on the stereo. TRACY puts his white shirt back on, goes to study. His back is to the hall door; he is marking pages with a green pen. This time MARCUS sits in the cell, apparently making notes. EMILY enters the study. She is in



a flattering cocktail dress. On a hanger she carries a jacket, tie, and clean shirt. She stands quietly for a moment watching him work and listening to the music. She starts playing with his hair. The next two lines are delivered simultaneously.)

EMILY:

You like Chopin?

TRACY:

(Startled. Standing.)

Jesus...

(EMILY giggles.)

You've got a very nasty habit of sneaking up on people.

EMILY:

I'm light-footed, it's not intentional.

(She lays the clothing over the back of the easy chair. She twirls, modeling her dress.)

You like?

TRACY:

Very elegant.

(Indicating jacket and tie.)

Aren't these my things?

EMILY:

I took a liberty of going out to the boathouse and getting them for you. You don't mind, I hope. After all, you did say you didn't want to be disturbed until dinner and that meant nobody could tell you that we're dressing up tonight.

TRACY:

Dressing for dinner... I had no idea people still stood on such ceremony.

EMILY:

Well, we don't, usually... But Cora insisted that, as you are a new guest in the house and we are your hostesses, we must put on a show for you. Mind you she didn't ever do such a thing for Marcus. Not that he would have stood for it. He'd rather stand everybody up and go to MacDonald's. You don't mind, do you?

TRACY:

Which thing? Having a show put on for me or having some girl rummaging through my closet without my permission?

EMILY:

Afraid I'd steal something? Or find a skeleton, perhaps?

TRACY:

Normally, I'd make a fuss. But as making a fuss won't mean anything to you...

EMILY:

(Playing with his hair some more.)

You must think you know me so well and that I'm a terrible spoiled little rich girl, whose daddy bought her all her good grades in school and kept trouble from the door with cut checks, huh?

TRACY:

Miss Berkeley...

EMILY:

Ahh, see... "Miss Berkeley," that means I'm in trouble with the principal. You even have that stern look on your face the principals have when kids've been caught doing something they oughtn't. You going to call my parents or administer a spanking right here? Shall I assume the position?

TRACY:

Go in to dinner.

EMILY:

Don't get mad, "Mr. Madison"—I'll call you that, if you like—Getting mad is a sure sign that I'm winning.

TRACY:

Winning? Are we playing a game?

EMILY:

Oh no, it's more like a war without casualties or collateral damage. I fire a flirtation, you counter with a dismissal...

TRACY:

What about that dismissal?

EMILY:

The one about going on in to dinner?

TRACY:

That's the one.

EMILY:

It's not proper for a young lady to go to the table without her escort. Take off your shirt.

TRACY:

What?

EMILY:

(Moving to the clothing on the chair.)

Your shirt; take it off. I brought you a fresh one.

(Taking the shirt and draping it over her arm, turning back to find him standing resolutely clothed.)

Is this the part where you chide me and call me an intrusive, willful, headstrong girl?

TRACY:

Such adjectives had crossed my mind.

(She moves over and unbuttons the top button of his shirt.

He grabs her hand, forcing her to pause.)

What happened to boundaries? When did girls become so forward?

EMILY:

Oh, we didn't as a sex. I'm just a rogue woman. Most girls are decades behind me in being forward. (Pause.) You going to twist my wrist or let go?

TRACY:

I'm thinking...

EMILY:

(Taking her hand back.)

Dirty thoughts, I hope.

(Unbuttons the rest of the buttons.)

TRACY:

You know, I am capable of managing buttons on my own.

(He turns away from her, she pulls the shirt down over his shoulders to take it off.)

EMILY:

I'm sure you are. But this is more fun. When was the last time you let a woman undress you?

(He takes off the shirt. She takes it and gives him the fresh shirt to put on. He manages to button it all by himself as she fetches the tie.)

TRACY:

So what is this? You see a puppy in a pet shop window or a pair of Prada shoes in a department store...

EMILY:

Or an editor coming up the path from the boathouse. I'll admit it is a bit like that, yes. I assure you though, Mr. Madison, I have every good reason for trying to seduce you. Now, let me do the tie.

(She tosses it over his head and begins tying it. Tracy tucks in his shirt.)

TRACY:

Is this a seduction?

EMILY:

If you have to ask, it's a dead giveaway that you've spent a long time without being seduced.

(Finishes tie. Retrieves jacket. TRACY shrugs into it.)

There.

(Brushing his lapels with her hands.)

You know, you really should get a lint-roller for this thing. Oh, don't look so differential...

TRACY:

Miss Berkeley...

EMILY:

Stop talking to me like I'm some unruly pupil. I'm a pretty, intrusive, willful, headstrong girl, trying very hard to get you to like me. I'll not be deterred.

(She sets him down in the easy chair.)

I'm one hell of an opponent.

TRACY:

I can see that.

EMILY:

(Straddling him in the chair.)

This is how I'll always win arguments, you know?

TRACY:

Is it?

EMILY:

Just leaning in, like so, and kissing a man, like so...

(She kisses his neck. CORA enters with a bell.)

CORA:

Dinner is... Oh, my...  
(She exits.)

EMILY:

Served, I think, is what she was going to say.  
(EMILY moves to leave but TRACY holds her by the wrist and pulls her back gently.)

TRACY:

Why do you want me to like you so badly?

EMILY:

Hmm?

TRACY:

You said you had a good reason for wanting to seduce me... Might I hear it?

EMILY:

No. To quote Oscar Wilde, because I know you're one of those men who likes people who can quote things topically, "The very essence of romance..."

(She moves in as though to kiss him on the lips.)

"Is uncertainty."

(She pulls back from the kiss, teasingly.)

TRACY:

I'm being serious.

EMILY:

I know, it's your big problem. Life is trivial comedy, Mr. Madison. Even the sad parts.

(She pulls him by the hand towards the hall but just before they are about to exit, there is a pop as the lighting shifts to kitchen. SARAH is at the door watching the storm out the window. MARCUS has joined her in the kitchen and is switching tapes. TRACY and EMILY are left in a soft comfortable embrace.)

SARAH:

I remember that dinner. The five of us, sitting laughing, having a good time. He really did fit here.

(EMILY and TRACY exit [R].)

Is it wrong to not think of your own home as a home but more as a... a club? To not have a family but a group of people with whom... with whom living without might make you insane? That was how I thought of it all along. Nobody belonged here because they were born here, no they came here, they searched this place out, us, our group and we accepted them...

MARCUS:

You've just described an orphanage.

SARAH:

No, not so depressing... This house is more like the tree. Hangman's tree. You know where the lost boys lived? Of course, I never liked the fact that only boys could be lost. Why weren't they the lost children? Why weren't there lost girls too?

MARCUS:

You were talking about the dinner.

SARAH:

He wasn't there. Daddy, I mean. Of course, that wasn't rare. He often wasn't there. But, thinking back on it, that was the first dinner where the chair was just an empty chair to me. There was no one out there in the world that should have been filling it. Nobody was missing. In fact, that was the last time I felt that way, you know? After that it wasn't long before Tracy was missing. Then Emily went missing... How many more empty chairs am I going to have to face? Mark, I...

(CORA enters [L] carrying groceries which she puts on the table. She shakes out an umbrella and takes off a scarf and her overcoat. JORDAN is close behind, also carrying groceries.)

CORA:

Brrrr!

JORDAN:

God damn it! I hate winter!

CORA:

(Taking the sacks and putting them on the kitchen table.)

Well, you all could have just as easily spent it in Florida.

(She stops.)

But then again, you sold that place.

JORDAN:

Florida is where old people go to die. I'm not old yet.

(Walking over and kissing MARCUS.)  
Hey, hubby.

MARCUS:  
Hi.

JORDAN:  
Cora, what's for dinner?

CORA:  
You know perfectly well, you just helped me pick the...

JORDAN:  
Tell Mark and Sarah.

CORA:  
(Speaking to SARAH.)  
Venison.

MARCUS:  
Where the heck did you get deer meat?

SARAH:  
Road-kill?

JORDAN:  
The butchers. Apparently they've always had it and Cora never thought to buy you some. Now we're going to have some tonight and tomorrow she's going to teach me how to make jerky out of it.

MARCUS:  
Swell!

CORA:  
Get out of the kitchen, everybody.  
(They linger.)  
Go on! You want dinner at a reasonable hour I need space to cook it.  
Good Lord, who's left the milk out?  
(She sniffs it, pours a little into a glass and sips it, then she puts it in the fridge.)

JORDAN:  
Well, that's not all.  
(She sets her grocery bag on the table and draws out a nice bottle of aperitif.)  
I thought maybe you'd let me get you drunk tonight?

MARCUS:

(Chuckling.)

Well, ain't that sweet? What's the occasion?

JORDAN:

No occasion. I just, you've been so busy lately. I thought maybe you and I could take the night off? Maybe the day tomorrow? With Sarah home for the holidays... it'd be nice to do something as a family.

CORA:

You can do something as a family right now, the whole lot of you, get out of my kitchen. Scoot, scoot, scoot!

(MARCUS and JORDAN are scooted. SARAH takes a seat on the stool. A soft light comes up on the boathouse where TRACY and EMILY enter.)

I suppose you can stay, darling. Just don't move about. Read your book and keep out of the way.

(CORA goes over and begins unpacking the groceries as MARCUS and JORDAN get comfortable in the study, MARCUS unscrewing the bottle while JORDAN turns on the music. They end up on the sofa together. TRACY and EMILY re-enter boathouse [L], they are dressed in their dinner clothes, EMILY is a little giggly from drinking. There is a playful walking chase around the boathouse. SARAH seems to look at TRACY for a moment and then she presses the tape recorder button.)

TRACY: (RECORDED)

When I discovered who'd... done it. Oh, God. Everything came tumbling down. Went up in smoke. All of this story, all of these things, all of these people...

(CORA tenses, turns off the recorder and goes back to preparing dinner.)

CORA:

He sounds sick.

SARAH:

(Opening the envelope taking out the note.)

New books. And he sends his love to everyone...

CORA:

Why the hell does that black bastard have to write about us? Why the hell can't he just let it...



SARAH:

I'm sorry?

CORA:

That's what he is. I don't care anymore who hears me. It doesn't matter how loud or quiet I am anymore. I bit my tongue when Mr. Berkeley brought him in to the house. His books made money and it was good for him to be around a stable home. But then Aggie... she died and that woman came in and took over like a pain in my ass so big and it wasn't no time it seems before he was prancing around here like lord and master...

(She picks up the tape recorder as if to smash it. SARAH stops her. SARAH takes the recorder and cradles it.)

SARAH:

Don't... I like hearing Tracy. I like hearing him talk about Emily. And those things you're saying. Mark has been better for us than Daddy ever was.

CORA:

Not my place, is it?

SARAH:

Nobody's place. It's life, get used to it or get out.

CORA:

(Pinching her tear ducts, speaking evenly.)

He talks about Emily, does he? What sort of things does he say?

(In the boathouse, TRACY and EMILY begin necking.)

SARAH:

He talked about that first night. The one before...

(CORA holds up a hand.)

CORA:

I've got to fix dinner.

SARAH:

The next tape, Mark said that's the one where...

CORA:

Don't play it in here.

(SARAH nods taking up the letter. She opens a drawer and takes out a fire starter. She lights the letter on fire and puts the ashes on the empty plate on the counter. CORA turns watching the paper smolder.)

What was that?

SARAH:

A secret.

(SARAH takes tape recorder and moves from kitchen to boathouse. CORA exits. Once SARAH enters the boathouse, JORDAN and MARCUS exit. SARAH starts tape recorder. TRACY shoves EMILY roughly onto the floor of the boathouse.)

TRACY: (RECORDED)

When I discovered who'd... done it. Oh, God. Everything came tumbling down. Went up in smoke. All of this story, all of these things, all of those people...

(SARAH watches the lovemaking in boathouse. She stops the tape. There is a slight freeze before lighting shifts and TRACY and EMILY break, TRACY exiting [R], EMILY moving up slowly for her entrance through the glass doors. MARCUS sits at the desk in the study, typing. EMILY enters, her shoes in her hand, her hair mussed, wearing the cocktail dress. She tries sneaking buy MARCUS)

MARCUS:

Nice try, small fry.

(Turning.)

Oh, I'd never thought I'd see the day; the mighty Emily doth take the walk of same.

EMILY:

There's no shame. I just... I just didn't want to wake anybody up. You're up pretty early.

MARCUS:

He got me up. You got to hand it to him, he means what he says about work ethic.

EMILY:

So, he's...

MARCUS:

Went to get coffee. We've been working for thirty minutes before he thinks coffee might help my progress. That should have clued me in that his mind wasn't entirely focused.

EMILY:

Well, um, I'm going to go and... Coffee sounds good right about now.

MARCUS:

Don't keep him too long.

(EMILY moves into kitchen as TRACY enters [L] in polo shirt. He has a coffee service. EMILY stops him and pours herself a cup. She and TRACY have a moment. JORDAN enters the study from [R], dressed in a kimono, her hair mussed from bed. She sneaks up behind MARCUS and kisses his ear.)

JORDAN:

Good morning.

MARCUS:

Good morning, yourself.

JORDAN:

How long you been up?

MARCUS:

Since five.

JORDAN:

Five!

MARCUS:

He's...

(EMILY moves off [L]. TRACY enters study carrying coffee on a tray. EMILY comes back on again with some fruit, which she begins eating.)

TRACY:

Couldn't find where they keep the sug...

(JORDAN quickly adjusts her kimono.)

...ar. Good morning, Mrs. Berkeley.

JORDAN:

Mr. Madison.

MARCUS:

Well, this is awkward.

JORDAN:

Just came in to check on things. I see you've found your way to the kitchen.

TRACY:

Yes.

JORDAN:  
Sleep well?

TRACY:  
Soundly.  
(Pause.)  
Um, if there's nothing else...

JORDAN:  
Right, work work work... I'll see you two at lunch, then.  
(Exits [R].)

MARCUS:  
Party pooper.

TRACY:  
(Serving coffee.)  
There's plenty of time for that when you've put in your eight hours. If it's any consolation, I understand why you're behind on this book.

MARCUS:  
(Sniffing TRACY.)  
Did you shower this morning?

TRACY:  
Sorry?

MARCUS:  
I distinctly recall buying that perfume for someone's birthday last month.

TRACY:  
Judging?

MARCUS:  
None of my business. That doesn't stop the housekeeper. I swear that woman gives me dirty looks every time I pass by her. She caught us, once, you know... Nearly had a stroke. A sambo and the mistress of the house... just not her generation's cup of tea, don't you know?  
(EMILY moves from kitchen back into study, eating her fruit.)

TRACY:  
Maybe it's just the infidelity that bothers her and race doesn't have anything to do with it.

MARCUS:  
So the infidelity bothers you, then, does it?

TRACY:  
Again, none of my business.

MARCUS:  
Oh, you're no fun.

EMILY:  
Hey.

TRACY:  
(Startled.)  
Jesus!

MARCUS:  
Speaking of infidelity...  
(Turning back to his computer.)

EMILY:  
Can I have some more coffee?  
(She helps herself.)  
So what's your story? How does somebody get your job? Daddy said something about you teaching at a prep-school.

TRACY:  
Yes, I was a teacher.

EMILY:  
And you were canned?

TRACY:  
Asked to resign.

MARCUS:  
A whiff of scandal on the man, that's always a comfort to me. Don't you talk about yourself too much. This might develop into a relationship.

TRACY:  
How are you coming?

MARCUS:  
Eight chapters outlined in an hour. That's eleven all together.

EMILY:

Coffee break?

TRACY:

I'll relent. You can take a break if you want, Mark.

MARCUS:

In a few minutes.

EMILY:

He's so focused.

TRACY:

You'd be surprised how simple it is to motivate a writer. You just sit most of them down and they'll remember just how much fun it is.

EMILY:

(She leans in close to TRACY, almost melding her body to his.)

Sounds like you've written yourself.

TRACY:

I tried. I loved it dearly but...  
(Moving away.)

EMILY:

No talent?

TRACY:

Other things took priority.

EMILY:

And now, you edit.

TRACY:

And keep the distractions out... Speaking of which...

(He turns her around and starts pushing her out [R].)

"Out damned spot! Out I say!"

EMILY:

You can't hide in here forever.

(She leans in and kisses him full on the lips. MARCUS turns around just in time to see the kiss. After a moment the kiss ends and TRACY pushes her out. In the boathouse SARAH begins changing into summer wear.)

MARCUS:

So, something did happen last night.

(Turning from the computer, standing, stretching, getting some coffee.)

She's right, you know. You keep resisting her it'll only get worse.

TRACY:

Ha ha. You speak from experience?

MARCUS:

When I first came up, as per George's invitation, she was about nine.

TRACY:

Nine. You've lived here that long?

MARCUS:

No. First, she was only nine about...

(Looking at his watch.)

TRACY:

Hardy har har.

MARCUS:

Her mother was still alive. You never saw such a happy family. However, young Emily was blessed with an inexhaustible appetite for attention. When she'd wear out her parents, she'd skip down the path to the boathouse and pester me. I ignored her, just like you're trying to do.

TRACY:

How'd that work out?

MARCUS:

I spent more hours on the beach picking seashells out of the sand than I did at the typewriter. Luckily, I was younger and more capable when it came to all-nighters. So, that explains why the two of you seemed to disappear after dinner last night. "All the perfumes of Arabia cannot sweeten this little hand. Oh ho ho!"

TRACY:

Answer my question. How long have you lived here?

MARCUS:

I wouldn't say I have "lived" here very long at all. I've been a regular houseguest over the past fifteen years. And I've watched him and his.

TRACY:

So, you're saying I'm going to end up picking seashells by the seashore, huh?

MARCUS:

Oh, no. As last night can attest, she's got something else entirely for a young buck like you to do. And the other one is oh so fascinated with you.

TRACY:

Huh?

MARCUS:

Well, they're competing for your attention at least. With George, our host, the beloved patriarch, in absentia you're a natural surrogate, don't you know?

TRACY:

I've been meaning to ask. Where is he?

MARCUS:

Haven't seen him since day before last. Not unnatural though.

TRACY:

For him to be this invisible?

MARCUS:

He often goes missing for days on end, sudden calls of business or, I hope occasionally pleasure... No reason to worry, though. The upside to being wealthy is being able to disappear when you wish. Maybe he read an article about Belize, or Algiers, or Borneo and decided to pack a toothbrush and a blonde? Maybe there's been a panic in Tokyo that's affected his holdings in this or that...

TRACY:

Without even telling his wife?

MARCUS:

Why would he? He doesn't care and neither does she.

TRACY:

So, does he know about you and...?

MARCUS:

(Shrugging.)

Probably.



TRACY:

You are shameless.

MARCUS:

(Turning back to his computer.)

Well, I have to be. I write autobiographical non-fiction. If I don't indulge in the shameless, criminal, obscene, and profane my books don't sell. Where's the fun in reading about an average life lived averagely?

TRACY:

So this is all going to be in a book someday?

MARCUS:

Why not? It doesn't mean anything to the people involved. George, least of all.

TRACY:

So you mean it's a loveless marriage.

MARCUS:

What is it with people and labeling things... Loveless marriage, marriage of convenience, one night stand... the point is I'm here, she's here; it's as simple as sex.

TRACY:

So he doesn't love her, and you don't love her...

MARCUS:

She's not the kind of woman who expects to be loved, in fact, she'd probably find it offensive...

TRACY:

What if she decided to divorce him, Or if he divorces her.

MARCUS:

(Shrugging.)

That won't happen. George wouldn't allow it. For George, I think the whole marriage is a matter of ownership, putting on the air of privilege, and it was a strategic advertising move, showing them his ability to move on, slay the Dragon...

TRACY:

Dragon?

MARCUS:

Oh, I forget, you're new. George's first wife killed herself.

TRACY:

Oh, I didn't...

MARCUS:

He married J.J. within a month.

TRACY:

You say it so flatly.

MARCUS:

They're simple facts to be stated simply. Anyway, George married her to move on and shut everyone up. I'm sure there was something sexual to it, at least in the beginning, but then the bloom was off the rose, and Sarah came along... And his small, independent publishing firm merged with this one, and incorporated that one... life went on for George, and it still does. If he knows about J.J. and me, he's fine with it. Just another dragon.

TRACY:

If he doesn't know?

MARCUS:

Then he's blessed with ignorance.

(Pause. Marcus types.)

So, Emily...

TRACY:

Emily?

MARCUS:

A little scattered, spoiled, spastic... but something tells me she's really hoping you'll make a move.

TRACY:

Me?

MARCUS:

Don't act so surprised. You're not bad looking. Besides, she's never gone for the young and the restless type...

TRACY:

Changing the subject... How long have you lived here?

MARCUS:

Oh, I've come and gone from this house a few times over my career. He used to let me have the boathouse during the summers. I wrote the whole of my second book out there, George insisted. Then I got a place in Manhattan and tried the married life... that fiasco became my fifth book, which I wrote, once again in the boathouse. This time, George was never around and his pretty, new, young wife Jordan kept sneaking down to talk to me about how bored she was and wouldn't I like to take her to the movies, or play tennis, or go for a sail. You know, I was born in the Bronx. I lived in the projects until I was 19 and suddenly, I was sailing on Long Island Sound once a week. It was three months before she moved me out of the boathouse and in here. George made not a sound.

(SARAH has entered quietly from the deck, her hair is up. She is carrying a book and has been attempting to sneak it onto a shelf without being seen. MARCUS notices her.)

Hello, little interloper.

SARAH:

I'm not here.

TRACY:

No bounding about? No noise? What's the matter with you?

SARAH:

I'm just dropping off...

(TRACY grabs the book.)

TRACY:

*Three Theban Plays.*

MARCUS:

I've been meaning to have a serious talk with her.

TRACY:

All three of them, or one in particular? I especially like...

SARAH:

Antigone.

MARCUS:

Ooh, she's a lost cause.

SARAH:

I was reading it by the pool.

MARCUS:

Sunning, this early? Good Lord, the sun is up!

SARAH:

Well, I did some laps while it was still dark and then, well, have you ever read a book when the sun is just coming up? I mean, you can't really watch the sunrise, but the light, the glow, the warmth, you can feel it, sort of growing. I don't know, I just, kind of, liked it.

MARCUS:

And since when have you been getting up for sunrises? You've stayed in bed 'til lunch almost all summer.

SARAH:

I... I woke up. Bad dream. I couldn't get back to sleep. I thought I'd go down to the boathouse to see if Tracy was up and might want to go for a walk but...

MARCUS:

But Tracy wasn't in the boathouse was he?  
(Wiggling his eyebrows.)

TRACY:

So, did you like how it ended?

SARAH:

Huh?

TRACY:

Antigone. Did you like the ending?

MARCUS:

What's not to like? Everyone dies.

SARAH:

I... Well, I don't know. I wish she could have lived. She should have lived.  
(CORA enters kitchen from [L] in car coat.)

TRACY:

Hmm, I've had students older than you who've never even made it through the first ten pages. I'm impressed.

MARCUS:

Encouraging her? She should be out eating ice cream with pimply senior boys who want to get to second base with her.

SARAH:

Shut up, Mark.

MARCUS:

I'm sorry, honey. For some reason, our dear Tracy's presence this morning is making me think dirty thoughts aloud. And I don't mean to pick on you. But your mother worries about you.

SARAH:

Then why doesn't she talk to me about it?

MARCUS:

She does. You just don't listen to her because you think she's a bimbo.

SARAH:

I do not think that.

MARCUS:

Funny, she thinks you do. Your mother is very insecure. If you two would just communicate, it would save me a lot of nodding and emotional cheerleading drills.

TRACY:

How long have you been on break?

MARCUS:

Well, uh... I don't know. I've been typing... Good Lord, chapter twelve is outlined, how did that happen?

(Cora enters, she is in a car coat.)

CORA:

Oh, there's the coffee service. I came in and started brewing for breakfast and then I couldn't find it.

(Looks at the tidy room.)

My, have you been busy.

MARCUS:

Said a clean workspace helps keep a positive flow to the day.

SARAH:

And he's apparently right.

CORA:

Well, can I take this away with me? They'll be wanting it at the breakfast table.

MARCUS:

Is that a call to breakfast?

CORA:

(Curtly.)

I'm about ten minutes from it.

MARCUS:

You think I can run upstairs and have a shower beforehand, Trace?

TRACY:

I think I can let you go. I need to go over your outlines anyway; I'd like to do it without getting food all over them.

SARAH:

What are we having?

CORA:

Fruit salad, soft-boiled eggs, and I picked up some croissants on the way up.

MARCUS:

Yum!

(Exits.)

CORA:

(To SARAH.)

Aren't you all bright and sunny this morning? You've been outside? Dear me, I do hope this becomes routine. You know, I used to show up every morning when she was younger and she'd already be up in the kitchen watching cartoons on the little television I have in there, in her school uniform waiting for me to drive her...

SARAH:

I can't wait for school to start again.

CORA:

Of course, she doesn't need me anymore now that her big sister is home to drive her. Well, that coffee is probably done by now, and I have to dish out the fruit salad...

TRACY:

Oh, Cora. I don't know who to talk to about this, but, something in the boathouse... well, there's this odor.

CORA:

Probably an opossum that died, we had one nest out their last spring. I'll take care of it right away, All it takes is a broom from the gardener's shed and a garbage bag... I'll be back in time to pour the coffee.

(CORA exits out glass doors. SARAH puts the book on the shelf and picks another one.)

SARAH:

Do you like my mother?

TRACY:

Uh, I haven't really talked to her...

SARAH:

From what you've seen. Do you think, do you think what she's doing with Marcus is... do you think it's okay?

TRACY:

Do you?

SARAH:

When you and your wife got divorced, how did your daughter react?

TRACY:

She was sad. She knew it wasn't her fault though.

SARAH:

Whose fault was it?

(...)

I'm sorry, I'm prying again.

(She looks out the door and then takes a step closer to him.)

It wasn't your fault though, was it?

TRACY:

I...

SARAH:

(Another step, very close.)

You didn't cheat on your wife, I mean. Emily, she was joking about it last night at dinner, but... You didn't do anything wrong, did you?

TRACY:

You're a little close, aren't you?

SARAH:  
(Taking a tentative step back.)  
I don't think I'd want to know, anyway.

TRACY:  
It was because of my son...

SARAH:  
Son?

TRACY:  
He was...  
(He is cut off by CORA, entering from [L], still in her car coat, dragging a broom behind her, disoriented and pale.)  
Jesus...

SARAH:  
Cora, what's wrong?  
(Cora trips and catches herself on the chair, the head of the broom coming so that it is visible to the audience. There is a slightly brownish-red smear of blood in the bristles.)

TRACY:  
Oh, my God, there's blood. Are you hurt, what hap...

CORA:  
It's him... it's him...  
(SARAH staggers back slightly as TRACY sits CORA in the chair.)

TRACY:  
What are you...?

CORA:  
George—Mr. Berkeley. He's under the boathouse. He's dead.  
(The lights cut out and there is the sudden sound of tape wash, amplified heavily. Police radio chatter and suddenly in the darkness the red and blue flashing lights illuminating the boathouse. Police chatter continues through blackout and intermission. END OF ACT ONE.)



## ACT TWO

(The police chatter segues into the noise of the winter storm. The characters in the boathouse exit with the exception of TRACY. SARAH stares at the recorder a bit and then picks it up, stands and walks over to the kitchen where lights have come up on CORA is at the counter putting the finishing touches on dinner. SARAH looks out at the storm.)

Say it's s'posed to be worse tomorrow.

(Pause.)

Sometimes you girls remind me of your father. The way you get quiet and it's like the weight of the world is on you. Emily she... Well, dinner's about ready you can go and get them, tell them it's in the kitchen tonight.

SARAH:

I never got to see what he looked like up close.

CORA:

Huh? Who, dear?

SARAH:

Dad, when you found him, I had to stay in the house the whole time. I didn't even see them take him away in the van. I assume it was a van. I assume there was a black bag and all the things you see on T.V.

CORA:

What you want to go and dredge up a memory like that for?

SARAH:

Part of me, that first morning, wanted to go and see. After he'd left, I almost crept up to the boathouse to see what had happened to daddy... I didn't want to believe it.

CORA:

Stop.

SARAH:

And Emily, they didn't even have the casket open. It's almost like she never died because I never really saw her dead.

CORA:

Well, dinner's served. I... I'll go and tell them. Move your books, dear.  
(Exits. SARAH presses play on the tape recorder.)

TRACY (RECORDED):

“All came tumbling down.”

(SARAH stops the tape.)

SARAH:

Tell him. Why don't you tell him? (Pause.) There's no reason to keep it secret anymore.

(SARAH exits. TRACY moves to cell, puts on his blue shirt and begins doing isometric exercises. EMILY re-enters boathouse in cocktail dress, she drifts into the cell a bit. A buzzer sounds and TRACY moves to the back of the cell facing the wall, grabbing a pack of cigarettes and putting one in his mouth. MARCUS enters with his backpack. TRACY moves to talk but MARCUS holds up a hand, takes out the tape recorder and presses a button.)

MARCUS:

Strict orders from Sarah. I'm supposed to get everything on tape.

TRACY:

(Speaking into recorder.)

Hello, kid.

MARCUS:

She also wanted me to give you this.

(Produces an opened envelope. TRACY takes out the paper.

And, after reading it, tears it up.)

I thought teachers discouraged note passing?

TRACY:

I haven't taught in six years.

MARCUS:

I would beg to differ. She was reading one of the books on your list last night when I made it back. Dumas. You know she's decided to become an English teacher, of all things.

(Shrugging.)

So, she says “Hi.” You look like hell.

TRACY:

Still not sleeping.

MARCUS:

Dreams?

TRACY:

(Indicating EMILY who moves from the sink past TRACY to study MARCUS. MARCUS doesn't see her.)

Yeah, she wakes me up.

MARCUS:

The way you say it, it's like she's here.

TRACY:

Memories can be almost tangible sometimes. She's always in that cocktail dress... You know the one?

MARCUS:

She seldom dressed up like that. Do you think we can talk about the actual crime today?

TRACY:

Why? The court did all that. Established timetables and whatnot...

MARCUS:

You'd met him in the city at his office. After putting your name in for the job, you had come up with the intention of killing him.

TRACY:

I was cool and calm. Polite.

MARCUS:

To this man who had killed your son.

TRACY:

Yes, I smiled and acted grateful for the job he'd given me. I even told him about the tragedy. He glossed over it, expertly, I thought, at the time. Perhaps he didn't even make the connection.

MARCUS:

And then you changed your mind.

TRACY:

When I discovered it wasn't him who was driving the car...

MARCUS:

What?

TRACY:

Forget it.

(He waves a hand.)

MARCUS:

Answer for the tape, please.

TRACY:

I can't talk about this.

MARCUS:

What would you like to talk about today, Tracy?

TRACY:

How has she been dealing with...?

MARCUS:

(Turns his back on TRACY so that TRACY may change into polo shirt once more and move to study.)

Fine, I'd suspect. Accidents happen, she knows that. If you're asking if any of us are seeing ghosts... I'd have to say no. But Sarah misses you and her, and I have to say, I do too. Working is just working now. And there are fewer interruptions...

(JORDAN has entered the study, she is dressed casually. She pours herself a drink and moves to look out the glass doors.)

TRACY:

No more picking seashells? (Sighing.) You walk into a house and you meet a girl who provokes you in such an unashamed way. Then it gets complicated.

(Lighting shifts, SARAH enters the study, putting her hair up, and lies on the couch. JORDAN is still at the window, drinking. Through the window can be seen the flashing lights of police cars. Car doors slam, engines start and then drive away as police lights fade. JORDAN drinks. TRACY enters from kitchen.)

JORDAN:

They were a bit hard on me, I thought.

TRACY:

Yes.

JORDAN:

(Turning.)

I'm sorry, I thought you were Mark.

(Turning back.)

TRACY:

I can get him, if you...

JORDAN:

I'm not interested in the money. That's what everyone always thought. Half his age, blonde, perky tits...

TRACY:

I... Uh...

JORDAN:

I know, you didn't say anything. Nobody ever has to. You want a drink?

TRACY:

Yes, actually.

(Walks over and pours a single shot with ice. He picks it up, but does not drink. As Jordan talks TRACY sees SARAH, thinks she is asleep, and covers her with a blanket.)

JORDAN:

I hadn't seen him in days, not since that dinner when he told us you were coming. He barely lived here, you know? I didn't even know he'd spent the night in the house. Wouldn't have...

(EMILY enters, dressed casually. The room is awkward. EMILY sees TRACY with the glass, walks over, takes it, drinks it down. MARCUS leaves cell.)

EMILY:

Almost clairvoyant. So...

(To JORDAN.)

Did you and Mark kill him? Sorry, I didn't mean to...

JORDAN:

It's no time to be funny, Emily.

EMILY:

Well, what do you want me to say?

(MARCUS enters to stand in the doorway [R].)

"Sorry you lost your husband, my father..." but hey it's not like he was someone we'll all miss.

MARCUS:

That's enough of that, Emily.

EMILY:

You two going to get married now?

MARCUS:

That's enough.

EMILY:

I'm sorry, Mark. God, I thought they'd never leave. All that, "where were you?" and "where were you?" Jesus, fucking cops, right?!

JORDAN:

Yeah, "fucking cops," right. Something we can all agree on. Pour me one of those, will you, Emily?

EMILY:

Sure—

TRACY:

Me too.

(Pause. She hands JORDAN her drink and then, slowly, hands TRACY his. TRACY looks at his drink as they all stare at him. He drinks it down, crosses and puts the glass upside-down on the sideboard. EMILY nods.)

EMILY:

Well, he fell off the wagon and got right back on again. I'm not sure how to feel about that.

MARCUS:

Don't take it too hard, Tracy. They have to suspect someone.

JORDAN:

Yes, Mr. Madison. We, we don't think for a moment that you had anything to do with... You hardly knew George.

EMILY:

(Sitting and stroking SARAH'S hair.)

Poor kid.

SARAH:

I'm fine.

EMILY:

You want to go to bed?

SARAH:

I'm fine here.

EMILY:

Well, I'm going to bed. Come on, you and me can bunk in together tonight.

SARAH:

Where? In the boathouse? Would you have done it had you known about it?

(Pause.)

EMILY:

What? You spied on us!?

JORDAN:

Well, this conversation just went from awkward to extremely uncomfortable. Mark?

MARCUS:

Yes, um, well. Goodnight. Sarah, come along.

SARAH:

I'm fine here!

(She is adamant and it causes a few of them to tense.)

MARCUS:

Of course you are, sweetheart. You move when you're good and ready.

SARAH:

I'm glad he's dead!

JORDAN:

Sarah!

MARCUS:

She's just upset, it's natural.

SARAH:

Of course, I'm upset! I'm not sorry, though. I'm not sorry.

(Crying. EMILY moves and holds her.)

EMILY:

It's okay, baby.

SARAH:

He was no kind of father. No kind of anything. Just a face and a name...

(She looks at TRACY.)

Don't parents sing to their children? Read them bedtime stories?

EMILY:  
I remember reading you stories, honey. And J.J. loved singing you lullabies when you were little.

MARCUS:  
But he didn't.

TRACY:  
I can't take this. I need to go to...

SARAH:  
Don't leave.  
(She grabs his sleeve as he passes the couch and he stops and stays.)

TRACY:  
It's okay. It's alright.  
(JORDAN moves over to pat SARAH.)

JORDAN:  
Goodnight, baby. Goodnight, all.  
(Exits [R].)

MARCUS:  
Picking seashells... goodnight.  
(Exits [R].)

EMILY:  
Um, well, I'm sure you'll want to straighten up a bit before...

SARAH:  
(To TRACY.)  
I won't tell.  
(They both pause and look at SARAH as she straightens up on the couch.)

TRACY:  
Huh?

EMILY:  
Tell what, baby?

SARAH:  
I just wanted him to know.  
(Looking at TRACY.)



I've known all the time and I didn't tell them.

TRACY:  
Tell them...?

SARAH:  
The police.

EMILY:  
Tell the police, what?

SARAH:  
(Tearing over as she talks.)  
You were teasing me all week and, well, you were right. And I hated you for it. And I was up late and watching the boathouse. I-I wanted to be the first to see what he looked like... And daddy walked out to meet him...

EMILY:  
W-What...

SARAH:  
And then they went around the boathouse and then there was shouting. I could hear it over the waves. And then Tracy came around the house alone and... I imagine I thought daddy had just walked off down the beach but... I swear, Tracy, I won't tell. I won't.

TRACY:  
(Growing slightly pale.)  
... What is it you think you saw?  
(SARAH is silent. EMILY watches her as she slowly begins to rock on the couch.)

EMILY:  
Sarah. Sarah!  
(SARAH whips around and looks at her.)  
Go upstairs, please.

SARAH:  
I didn't tell because I know he couldn't have. Wh-why would he?

EMILY:  
Yes. Yes, now go upstairs and brush your teeth and go to bed.  
(EMILY helps her off the couch and out the door.)

SARAH:  
(Pausing in the door, looking back at TRACY.)

I won't tell. He—He didn't do it. I know he didn't. Even though he wanted to. I know he didn't.

(Exiting. EMILY and TRACY are alone and silent. TRACY stands very still. EMILY walks over to the bookcase. She begins picking out books and flipping them off the shelves onto the floor.)

EMILY:

You know, I hate to read. We have books in almost every room except mine. Daddy tried to get me to... It never took, though.

(Silence. She throws a book at TRACY'S feet.)

Why did you lose your job at the school, Tracy?

(We begin to hear children laughing once more.)

TRACY:

Drinking.

EMILY:

And you started drinking because?

TRACY:

I lost someone.

EMILY:

(EMILY moves to liquor and takes a bottle.)

All this Greek...

(Another book falls.)

and Latin...

(And another.)

Sarah, she goes for it like she's got a sweet tooth and it's pure sugar. I never liked the stories, though.

(She ends up at the liquor cabinet, she takes a bottle and begins drinking from it.)

You lost someone. So? You're not the only one. Mom died when I was 13.

TRACY:

I didn't murder him.

EMILY:

Of course you didn't, why would you?

(Sound of screeching tires. Children's laughter stops.)

TRACY:

Because the license of the car that killed my son was registered to him.

EMILY:

Your son died in a car accident?

TRACY:

He was playing in our front yard. I was watching him and then...

EMILY:

I told him, I told him someone would come... You bastard.

TRACY:

I didn't know he wasn't driving.

EMILY:

I told him someone would have seen. Someone...

TRACY:

I didn't know it was you.

EMILY:

(Taking another pull at the bottle.)

I'd been drinking. I remember it was a bright day. And then there was a sound, like something being dropped from a great height.

(She almost collapses. TRACY steps forward as if to catch her but she recovers by herself. She walks down to stand against the back of the chair. She looks him in the eye.)

Daddy said, when I got home, daddy said... Oh, God, I wanted to die.

TRACY:

He said he'd take care of it...

EMILY:

(Pause.) So, he went down to the boathouse to meet you that evening...

TRACY:

He didn't know my son was the one. I mean, he knew about my son, but he didn't make the connection. I didn't know it was you. Not 'til... He told me—

EMILY:

Sarah said she heard shouting?

TRACY:

I don't remember shouting. I don't remember talking. I remember his face, and words. From them I've drawn... Oh, Emily, I can't remember...

EMILY:

Try.

(She throws the bottle at him. He sidesteps. If it shatters he will pick up the shards. If it doesn't, he will pick up the bottle and look at it.)

TRACY:

I'm not sure I even wanted to kill him, just wanted him to see my face. To see who I was and that I was a real person. I wanted to show him what he'd done to my life. And, h-he thought I wanted money. Like I was here to... blackmail his daughter. (Pause.) That's when he came at me. And then I moved aside and he fell and hit his head. (Pause.) I—It didn't register all at once. First the word daughter, then the sound, then I panicked...

(SARAH enters kitchen from [L], hair down. Sits at table.)

EMILY:

And Sarah saw the whole thing.

TRACY:

I...

EMILY:

I'm sorry. I'm so, so, so sorry.

TRACY:

Stop.

EMILY:

Oh, God! And last night, in the boathouse... Sarah was right, you... you bastard!

(She attacks him, trying to claw his face. He catches her wrists.)

TRACY:

Stop!

EMILY:

You knew? You knew all along... and you and I.

(He pushes her back a bit harder than intended, she falls.)

TRACY:

It was easier when I thought it was him. I... I don't know why I had to...

(She stands and slaps him, she runs off through French doors. TRACY follows. There is the sound of the tape recorder stopping. SARAH, in the kitchen, takes the tape out

of the recorder as lights fade on the study. SARAH stares at the tape a moment and then proceeds to destroy it, tearing the tape from the cassette housing. CORA enters from [R] and closes the French doors. She is in a housecoat, it is very late. She watches the tape being destroyed and then walks off to get the tea kettle.)

CORA:

I couldn't sleep either. Storms always do that to me. Well, I find hot tea with a lot of milk helps...

(MARCUS and TRACY re-enter boathouse and then cell.  
TRACY puts on his blues shirt.)

SARAH:

What the fuck is wrong with them?

CORA:

One's a convicted felon, the other's a whore for a good story who has to have venison instead of beef for God only knows what reason. Lived all my life on the shore and I've never understood rich intellectual types. No offense to present company intended.

SARAH:

My family is fucked up.

(Lights up on boathouse. EMILY enters boathouse from [L], in her cocktail dress. TRACY moves to her, shoves her. She smacks him, he grabs her, holds her close, begins unzipping her cocktail dress.)

CORA:

You said it. I just cook and clean and discover dead bodies and go home at five when the weather isn't bad like it is tonight. Driving home yesterday was torture, I tell you.

(Picks up the ruined tape.)

He sends you those lists cause he cares, I suspect. Killed your father, but loved your sister and cares about you... think he sends his own daughter books? He's got one, hasn't he?

SARAH:

His wife... ex-wife, they live out in California.

CORA:

And prison's not the kind of environment to take a young girl to, is it?

SARAH:

If I were his daughter I'd see him.

CORA:

Why? You got nothing to say to him that'd help.

SARAH:

Why do accidents have to happen sometimes the way they do?

CORA:

My father, he was a Bible-thumper, he used to say that everything happens in accordance with the wants and wishes of the Almighty. Now, what God's plan is, nobody can say, but it's all for the best.

(Pause.)

SARAH:

(Massaging her temples.)

Thank you, Cora. That's very helpful.

CORA:

I think it's a load of malarkey, but that's what my father used to say.

SARAH:

What do you say?

CORA:

I say, call me when the kettle's ready.

(Marcus enters from [R]. Cora exits [L].)

SARAH:

He dreams of you.

TRACY:

"Arms, and the man I sing, who, forc'd by fate,  
And haughty Juno's unrelenting hate,  
Expell'd and exil'd, left the Trojan shore."

(He releases EMILY and turns back to join MARCUS in the cell.)

I went there to kill him...

MARCUS:

But you say you didn't, that it was an accident.

(EMILY exits.)

TRACY:

And so was my son and had I fought in court, and they'd dissected things, they would have found her and taken her and put her in a place like this.

MARCUS:

When you were put in here she cried.

TRACY:

For a whole year?

MARCUS:

There were bright patches. After she'd see you, mornings she was leaving to come and see you.

TRACY:

She sent me a piece of wedding cake.

MARCUS:

She told us about that. Jordan wasn't at all pleased.  
(Picking up his book bag.)

TRACY:

Still as simple as sex?

MARCUS:

It never was, now that I look back on it.

(MARCUS exits. Lights shift. SARAH is alone in a small patch of light in the kitchen. A sound of a tea kettle building to a whistle. She walks off and the whistling stops. CORA enters just as SARAH pours the hot water into the mug.)

CORA:

You don't want any?

SARAH:

No. I don't want to sleep.

CORA:

This house, I swear, it gives me the willies at night. Never did that before.

SARAH:

Too many Dragons.  
(MARCUS exits.)

CORA:

Dragons?

SARAH:

Bad memories.

CORA:

What are you talking about?

SARAH:

Something Mark said about daddy.

CORA:

Get some sleep. Try at least. For me.

(CORA moves to exit but runs into MARCUS. They sidestep each other. CORA annoyed, MARCUS amused.)

MARCUS:

She's never going to like me, is she?

SARAH:

She says it's the venison.

MARCUS:

Right.

(Noticing the ruined tape.)

You know, I keep transcripts...

SARAH:

Then you've got no reason to be mad. (Pause.) Mom asleep?

MARCUS:

Why are you still up?

SARAH:

I don't like to sleep.

MARCUS:

Why not?

(EMILY enters boathouse in her cocktail dress. She has an apple. TRACY enters his cell.)

Thinking of Emily, huh?

SARAH:

I was here that day. It was before the end of summer and she and I had spent the whole time laughing by the pool like we used to, getting tans. It had been a year. She'd come clean about what had happened.



EMILY:

College and I didn't mix. But I found the late nights worked well for me. Being far away from here, on my own, free. Excess. That's the one word description.

SARAH:

She wouldn't stop. You could tell, even when she was in one of her quiet moods, you could tell it was eating at her.

EMILY:

One night, I'd gone home with a boy. I forget his name. We kept the party going, the two of us, through the night and into the morning before I managed to pull myself away.

(She takes a step from the boathouse into the cell.)

SARAH:

It got better when read her the books he sent, sometimes. *Gone With the Wind*, *Catcher in the Rye*... and sometimes, even though she was always thinking about him and where he was... It was almost like she was working her way back to happy again.

MARCUS:

Happiness... Emily and Tracy, they're both of a breed...

SARAH:

Huh?

MARCUS:

Thinking more to myself... Sorry. But, Happy, I'm sure Tracy would say, is something you don't work towards, or even realize you are until you're not anymore. There's a proverb or something he'd quote...

TRACY:

"Everything of importance has been said before by somebody who did not discover it."

SARAH:

Well, the thought that happiness is only available in reruns, that's got to be written somewhere by someone. There's nothing new that isn't old. Meet the old boss same as the new boss, the more things change...

MARCUS:

What is it about his voice?

SARAH:

Huh?

MARCUS:

You have a fascination, what is it?

SARAH:

I don't know. All I know is I like listening to him. When I read, I imagine his voice.

MARCUS:

Tell me about that day...

SARAH:

You mean, Emily?

MARCUS:

She left early in the morning.

SARAH:

I even got up to have breakfast with her.

MARCUS:

What did you have?

SARAH:

Toast. Just toast, she made coffee too. And she was happy. Smiling, singing morning songs, looking pretty for him.

(In the boathouse we hear EMILY humming, happily.)

She even smelled nice. I wonder if that perfume is still in her room. I'd like to send it to him if it is.

MARCUS:

Breakfast and then she left?

SARAH:

A hug, a see you tomorrow, and then the car speeding off.

(The sound effect of screeching tires is heard once more.)

MARCUS:

I wish I'd have been up to have breakfast with you two that day. Seen her like that, that one last time.

SARAH:

Why do bad things happen like that?

MARCUS:

I...

SARAH:

Don't give me that "God's will" line. Why did all this shit have to rain down on us? All these dreadful accidents, all this pain? What purpose does it serve?

(MARCUS is silent, reflective, watching SARAH. She picks up a book from the table.)

So what's so great about Gatsby?

MARCUS:

Nothing. That's the whole point. We're all suckers for the American Dream.

SARAH:

That damned happiness we pursue...Its bullshit, the purest shiniest grade A crap-olla ever devised. No matter how many zeros you have after one on your bank statement you're not going to find and hold happiness very long in this life. Perhaps that's why so many people give themselves over to a higher power and a belief in a paradise after death.

MARCUS:

Life happens, kid. Sometimes it happens a whole lot and there's not much you can do but grin and bear it. Maybe there is a God, maybe not.

SARAH:

Would you say God is a happy person? If God exists, that is...

MARCUS:

I don't know. I'm tired. I've got a lot of work to do tomorrow.

(Rising.)

What was in the note he sent you?

SARAH:

Something about a person caught in a snow storm. After great pain a formal feeling comes "After great pain, a formal feeling comes..."

(EMILY stands.)

MARCUS:

Why'd you burn it?

(SARAH looks puzzled.)

Cora told J.J.

SARAH:

This is the hour of lead... Remembered, if outlived..."

(EMILY exits.)

MARCUS:

Try to go to sleep, kid.

(Tussles her hair. Exits.)

SARAH:

Goodnight, Mark.

(Taking up the tape recorder, holding it close.)

I wonder if you're awake too... haunted by memories; intangible things that belong to us and no one else; that only we can see.

(TRACY is writing a note on a pad.)

EMILY:

When it happened I wanted to just die, you know that? There was a part of me that just wanted to run the damned car off the road. But, call me a coward...

TRACY:

You were just a kid. Who can blame you for being scared?

EMILY:

You could.

TRACY:

I can't. Not anymore.

EMILY:

(Indicating pad.)

Passing notes?

TRACY:

Responding. You want me to read it?

(He unfolds the paper and reads it. As he reads, EMILY walks around the bars to enter the cell.)

Holding on to things we've lost proves moot after so much time. Yet I can't help but cling to the memories of her and wish her real at times. And in remembering there is something left of her and that something I cannot betray or punish anymore. What purpose does vengeance serve? What purpose does love serve? Why do bad things happen to good people? These are human terms for emotions that don't factor into the everyday occurrences of life. Good, bad, noble, ignoble, deserving and undeserving don't matter to the cold that freezes, the flood that drowns, or the winds that topple the houses on the Plains of the world. Everyday, I search for meaning and fail to find it, but I live on nonetheless. Hope springs...

(EMILY stops TRACY'S reading by interrupting him.)

EMILY:

If we'd have just met, and there had been no accidents... would... would you and I have. Would it have happened, what happened between us?

TRACY:

I don't know.

EMILY:

You should let her come see you.

(TRACY shakes his head.)

No hope, Professor?

TRACY:

I remember walking into that house. Knowing you'd be in it. Knowing what I'd do and how I'd feel.

EMILY:

You couldn't?

TRACY:

No. You were too, unique.

EMILY:

And then later... when the house was asleep. Was I a kid then?

(EMILY walks forward reaching out her hand and putting it on TRACY'S chest. He puts his over it as she leans in and brushes her lips over his and then pushes him back roughly. TRACY reacts to the sudden violence with slightly more violence, gripping EMILY and throwing her against the bars of his cell. After a moment TRACY withdraws from the clinch as if stung. EMILY untangles her hands from the bars and comes down. He moves away from her, sits, is very still, looking out into the darkened prison. She moves to exit. TRACY turns, reaching out a hand.)

TRACY:

Say something.

(EMILY is silent. TRACY reaches out to her but she doesn't respond.)

EMILY:

Malarkey. Life is trivial comedy, Mr. Madison. Even the sad parts.

(We start to hear the sound effect of a blizzard and the howling winds of a winter storm, as we see pools of light on

JORDAN and MARCUS in the study, CORA in the kitchen, SARAH in the boathouse, and TRACY in the cell. Everyone is cold in this cold winter.)

SARAH:

"This is the hour of lead, remembered if outlived..."

MARCUS:

"As freezing persons recollect the snow--"

JORDAN:

"First chill..."

CORA:

"Then stupor..."

SARAH:

"Then the letting go."

(The pools of light fade as each person speaks his or her last line, leaving only the last pool of light on TRACY in the cell. As this final pool of light starts to fade, the sound effect of the winter storm likewise fade. And in the darkness, we hear the same happy laughter of the child that we've heard before.)

**END OF PLAY**