Characters:

Jeremy Marston
Diana Marston
Dominic Marston

Time:

The present

Place:

A large city
ACT ONE
Scene 1

Jeremy appears out of the dark, alone. He confronts us.

JEREMY
What are you doing here?
For that matter, what am I doing here?

Why have we all gathered in this large, oddly-shaped, strangely-appointed room with an eccentric lighting scheme and bad seating?

It’s because of the chaos, isn’t it? The chaos out there - beyond these walls? Chaos in the street, in our families, our offices and schools? Chaos here at home, in the homeland, as we now say. And other places, faraway, with ancient sand-covered names. Chaos, disorder, confusion. In every thing. In every place. But most of all, in ourselves.

So we come here trying to make sense of it. Hoping to get a glimpse - fleeting, yes - lambent, flickering, as from a sputtering candle - but a glimpse of the plan. Chaos transmuted to order.

Now that’d be worth seventy five dollars a ticket, wouldn’t it?

(Diana appears abruptly from the dark. As she does, we see, dimly, the suggestion of an apartment. There’s perhaps a chair or couch, and a table. It’s rather dark and dingy. She is dressed for cool autumn weather.)

DIANA
I came as soon as I could.

(She goes to him, takes his hand.)
Are you the only one here?

JEREMY
Dom’s here. He’s in the bedroom.

DIANA
(Dread)
... oh.
JEREMY
No, it’s all right. He’s - you know - we’re both on best behavior.

DIANA
I hope so.

(She takes off her coat, puts it down.)

JEREMY
Dad’s dying wishes - we can assume, anyway.
(As a father, wagging his finger.)
“Now boys, you behave after I’m gone.”

(Slight beat)

DIANA
Are you all right?

JEREMY
It’s over, that’s all. Journey’s end.
(She looks past him to the bedroom.)
I thought I’d give him some time.

DIANA
No, right, of course.

JEREMY
I didn’t think he’d even show up, actually, but he did. He’s been in there half an hour.

I’ve been trying to think if I should – I don’t know – call somebody ...

DIANA
Like who?

JEREMY
Someone to – you know ... deal with things.

DIANA
How about the hospital?

JEREMY
What for?

DIANA
They could send an ambulance.
JEREMY
He doesn’t need an ambulance.

DIANA
Well, I don’t know.

JEREMY
Funny, isn’t it. Who do you call? I never did this before.

(Beat)

DIANA
How did you hear?

JEREMY
He’s got that um - you know - that live-in. From Georgia.

DIANA
Oh right.

JEREMY
Svetlana or -

DIANA
(Overlapping)
No it’s -

JEREMY
(Overlapping)
Tatiana or -

DIANA
(Overlapping)
Tatiana! That’s right.

JEREMY
She called. Left a voice mail.

DIANA
You must have been - you were covering something tonight.
JEREMY
Mm. I checked my messages after the show. I’m in the cab going home, my head’s full of the play, I’m scribbling notes like mad with one hand, checking the voice mail with the other, and it’s like “Oh, your father’s dead.”

DIANA
Well he was sick.

JEREMY
It’s that one moment. Nothing prepares you for it.

DIANA
I just mean - it’s not a shock.

JEREMY
Shouldn’t be maybe but - I don’t know - it is, somehow.

DIANA
Funeral home.

JEREMY
What?

DIANA
That’s who you call.

JEREMY
At night?

DIANA
They must have some sort of all night ... you know - where they - so you can call and ... I mean, people die all night long, don’t they?

You want me call them?

JEREMY
Not yet. Let’s wait.

DIANA
Let me.

JEREMY
I want to go back in first.
DIANA
Let me take care of it, though.
Let me just be there. Please?

(Beat)

DIANA
How was the play?

JEREMY
Good. Interesting, kind of. Messy, but that’s all right. Gives me something to write about. Sometimes good plays can be a little dull, you know?

(Dominic enters.)

DOMINIC
Hello, Diana. Did you hear the news? Good plays are a little dull.

DIANA
Hello, Dominic.

DOMINIC
(To Jeremy)
What does that mean? That doesn’t make sense.

DIANA
(To Jeremy)
Are you going in?

JEREMY
I think I will.

DOMINIC
Good plays are a little dull?

JEREMY
(To Diana)
Please don’t call anyone.

DIANA
Just go ahead, go in.

JEREMY
I don’t want you calling them.
DIANA
I won’t. Go.

(Jeremy exits.)

DOMINIC
Call who?

DIANA
The funeral home.

DOMINIC
Ah.

Good plays are a little dull. Amazing.

(Beat)

DIANA
It’s good to see you.

DOMINIC
He wouldn’t dare put that in a column.

DIANA
I’m so sorry about your father.

DOMINIC
Are you?

DIANA
I am, yes.

DOMINIC
Well, he had a good life. Three score and twelve. Nothing to complain about. Actually seems like a good long time to me.

(Beat.)

DIANA
How’s the writing?

DOMINIC
Writing?

DIANA
Are you working on something?
DOMINIC
That’s depends. Define ‘working’. If you mean writing, as in putting words on paper, then no, I’m afraid I’m not.

DIANA
How about teaching. School must have started. At – where was it?

DOMINIC
Westchester Community.

DIANA
Right.

DOMINIC
I quit that. I gave notice at the end of last year.

DIANA
Oh, I’m sorry.

DOMINIC
I’m not. Too much time, too much energy. I couldn’t write.

DIANA
Of course not, no ...

DOMINIC
Besides, those who can, do; those who can’t, teach.

DIANA
George Bernard Shaw.

DOMINIC
Correct.

DIANA
He was a critic also, wasn’t he?

DOMINIC
Yes, but he gave that up. Kicked it. Went straight, wrote plays instead. Made of himself an honest man.

Why? Are you interested?

DIANA
In Shaw?
DOMINIC
In reading one of my plays.

DIANA
Of course.

DOMINIC
Are you sure?

DIANA
Of course, why not?

DOMINIC
(A nod to the bedroom)
What would he think?

DIANA
He wouldn’t care.

DOMINIC
Oh wouldn’t he? I remember a girlfriend of his in college, she offered to read a play of mine once. It got ugly.

DIANA
I wouldn’t have to tell him then, would I.

(Slight beat)

DOMINIC
I like the way you think.

DIANA
Send me one. Plain brown envelope. No return address.

DOMINIC
I’ll do better.

(He goes to a plain shoulder bag and produces a large manila envelope.)

DIANA
You come prepared.

DOMINIC
One never knows.
(She takes it, puts it into her purse. It stick out slightly. She shoves it in further.)

DOMINIC
So what do you think? Did the old man leave us anything?

DIANA
I don’t know.

DOMINIC
He didn’t have much to leave, cash-wise. It’s all real estate. This place, the island house.

I can’t remember the last time I was here. I used to come home on holidays, in college. Merry Christmas, welcome to wrath and indignation.

DIANA
You weren’t close to him, were you.

DOMINIC
Let’s just say I didn’t fulfill my early promise. It made a fool of him. All his belief in me, up in smoke. He hated that. It was the one unforgivable sin. Failure.

(Jeremy enters. He is putting his cell phone away.)

JEREMY
So that’s it. They’re going to send somebody over. (To Dominic) You don’t have to stay if you don’t want to.

DOMINIC
That’s all right. Doesn’t matter.

DIANA
Well I’m tired actually.

JEREMY
Go ahead then. (He kisses her) Don’t wait up.
DOMINIC
You can go too, actually.

JEREMY
No, I’m fine. I think I want to stay.

DIANA
Okay, well -

JEREMY
It’s all right. Really. Get to bed. I’ll see you in the morning. There’s nothing to do here.

DIANA
(To Dominic)
I hope we see you soon.

DOMINIC
Likewise.

(She gives Dominic a kiss on the cheek. Then to Jeremy.)

DIANA
Good bye. I love you.

(She kisses him on the lips. She gets her purse and goes.)

DOMINIC
Look at us. Family reunion.

JEREMY
It’s been too long.

You think?

DOMINIC
I do, yes

JEREMY
(Beat)
How’s the work?

DOMINIC
It’s all right.

JEREMY
What’s happening? Anything coming up?
DOMINIC
No.

(Beat)

JEREMY
But you’re writing.

DOMINIC
Of course. A writer writes.

JEREMY
Going okay?

DOMINIC
I’d say so. Pretty much.

JEREMY
That’s fantastic.

DOMINIC
Well, that and two dollars.

JEREMY
No but if you’re happy with it. I mean that’s what counts.

DOMINIC
I don’t know. Is that what counts?

JEREMY
Well, that’s what they say.

DOMINIC
I’ll have to remember that. I’ll put it in my journal.

(Beat)

JEREMY
What do you think we should do with the old place?

DOMINIC
I don’t know. You want it?

JEREMY
Are you kidding? I hate this rat hole.
(Dominic looks around as though for the first time.)

DOMINIC
It’s funny. I don’t really mind it.

JEREMY
You haven’t been here for fifteen years.

DOMINIC
No that’s true.

JEREMY
Even then you only showed up on holidays. Like presidential visits. Lights flashing, sirens wailing, traffic stopped, everyone holds their breath, tries to get a good look at you. Flashbulbs pop, shouts from the crowd. You smile and wave and then whoosh. You’re gone.

(Dominic ignores this, inspects the room.)

DOMINIC
It’s got to be cheap. The mortgage must be paid off.

JEREMY
Two years ago, actually.

DOMINIC
I think I might move in.

JEREMY
What about your place?

DOMINIC
My place?

JEREMY
Your place in Inwood.

DOMINIC
I’m not there anymore. I live in the Bronx.

(A slight beat)

JEREMY
Oh.
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DOMINIC
Yeah, it’s like saying you’ve got cancer.

JEREMY
I didn’t mean that.

DOMINIC
It’s very cheap.

JEREMY
Well, you’re welcome to take this place. I certainly don’t want it.

DOMINIC
Wouldn’t that be something. Me here. After all these years. Back home to roost.

JEREMY
I have to ask you something.

DOMINIC
What’s that.

(Slight beat)

JEREMY
Did you ... move him?

DOMINIC
What?

JEREMY
Did you move the body?

(Beat)

DOMINIC
What are you saying?

JEREMY
When we got here, Tatiana - I thought she had put his arms across his chest, like you do. Now they’re at his sides.

(Beat)

DOMINIC
What are you asking me?
JEREMY
It doesn’t matter, but I really thought his arms were crossed // when we ...

DOMINIC
If it doesn’t matter, then why are you asking?

JEREMY
I’m not imagining it.

DOMINIC
Why would you ask about something you already know and that doesn’t matter? That’s really you all over, Jer. Do you know that?

I have to ask you something I gave Diana a play of mine. She asked me for it. I didn’t see a problem, but now I do. I don’t want her to read it.

JEREMY
You gave it to her?

Yes.

JEREMY
Tonight?

Yes.

JEREMY
You brought a play with you tonight?

DOMINIC
It was in my bag. I grabbed it, I ran. I didn’t know it was in there. Then she asked me. I said, why not? I wasn’t thinking.

I’d like you to get it back.

JEREMY
Why don’t you get it back?

DOMINIC
I can’t do that.
JEREMY
Why not?

DOMINIC
I can’t. It’s embarrassing.

(Slight beat)

JEREMY
What’s the play about?

DOMINIC
That’s not the issue.

JEREMY
What is the issue?

DOMINIC
I made a mistake. Someone asks to read a play of mine, I lose control. I go all weak in the knees.

(Beat)

JEREMY
I’ll see what I can do.

DOMINIC
Thank you.

(Beat)

DOMINIC (con’t)
How long before they get here?

JEREMY
They didn’t say.

DOMINIC
I hope it’s not too long.

JEREMY
You can go if you like.

DOMINIC
No, I think I should stay, don’t you?

JEREMY
Not if you don’t want to.
DOMINIC
I think I should stay.

(Beat)

JEREMY
You know, I really think we can use this. The two of us. A new start.

DOMINIC
You think so?

JEREMY
I do. I mean, we’ve had our problems. But there was Dad, you know. And he’s gone now. We’re on our own.

DOMINIC
That’s a nice thought.

JEREMY
It’s an opportunity, really.

DOMINIC
That’s a very nice thought.

JEREMY
You don’t think so.

DOMINIC
No, I do. I mean, I know I can do it.

JEREMY
I see.

DOMINIC
I’m not saying you can’t. But let’s face it, what’s in it for you? You’ve got everything you could ever want. What’s the percentage in turning things around?

JEREMY
Well, you, I guess.

DOMINIC
Me?

JEREMY
You’re the percentage.
DOMINIC
Uh-huh.

JEREMY
You don’t believe me.

DOMINIC
Believe you? I believe everything.

So that’s it then. A new chapter.

JEREMY
Yes.

DOMINIC
Act Two, as we say.

JEREMY
Exactly.

(They look at each other as the lights fade.)
Scene 2

(Jeremy steps forward to us.)

JEREMY
Dominic was always the brilliant one. Dazzling, but unknowable. A shooting star. We’d wait, and watch, and without any warning he’d streak across the heavens and strike us dumb. Then he’d be gone.

As a boy, a younger brother, watching him – slack-jawed, amazed – I had no idea that might be his entire life, writ small. A blinding flash, then nothing.

(The lights have come up on a kitchen. Diana preparing a meal. She speaks as though she’s been trying to get his attention.)

DIANA
Jer.

(He turns, caught off guard.)

JEREMY
Sorry, what?

DIANA
The knife.

JEREMY
Sorry.

(He hands her one from a block.)

DIANA
Serrated.

(He gives her another.)
I don’t know where you go.

JEREMY
I’m sorry.

DIANA
I’m worried about you. You’ve been doing that again.

JEREMY
I’m sorry.
DIANA
What is it?

JEREMY
It’s nothing, really. Just ... thinking.

This smells great.

(He comes closer)

DIANA
It’s a ratatouille. Autumn Food.

(He moves to taste it.)

DIANA (con’t)
Not yet. Don’t touch. It has to cook.

(He retreats. Beat)

DIANA (con’t)
It took me years when my father died. It really did something to me.

JEREMY
Maybe that’s the problem. Maybe it’s not doing anything – I keep waiting to feel something. Nothing seems to hit. It all glances off.

DIANA
You’re in shock, that’s all. You’re numb.

JEREMY
I just keep thinking, oh, well, these things happen. That or I forget about it altogether. For a second, I’ll think he’s alive and I’m supposed to call him.

DIANA
It’s completely normal.
JEREMY  
It’s Dominic too, though. Do you realize I spent the entire night in that apartment with him? We haven’t spent the night under the same roof since I was in high school. I haven’t spent more than an hour with him for ten years. All of a sudden Dad’s gone and now here’s Dominic.  
He gave you a play of his.  
DIANA  
Yes.  

JEREMY  
Have you read it?  

(Slight beat)  

DIANA  
I haven’t had the chance.  

JEREMY  
I wish you wouldn’t.  

DIANA  
Why not?  

JEREMY  
It’s hard to explain. I just do.  

DIANA  
Well, I can’t just not read it. He gave it to me. I said I would.  

JEREMY  
He won’t care. People do that all the time. Someone gives you a play, they don’t expect you to actually read it.  

DIANA  
I had the feeling he expected me to, Jer.  

He’s a lonely soul, you know. I don’t think you appreciate that.  

JEREMY  
He’s not all that lonely.
DIANA
How do you know? You see him once a year, if that. You don’t know his life.

JEREMY
And you do?

DIANA
I think he’s trying to reach out.

JEREMY
To you?

DIANA
What’s wrong with that?

JEREMY
What about me?

DIANA
Maybe he’s tried and you don’t see it.

JEREMY
Did he say that?

DIANA
Is it true?

JEREMY
Did he say it.

DIANA
He gave me his play. That’s all I know.

(Slight beat)

JEREMY
Look, it’s hard to explain but - he actually told me to tell you not to read it. And he would say that, knowing I would never do it. Which means that he does want you to read it. Which means that you shouldn’t.

DIANA
I’m not following.

(Beat)
When we were kids, Dominic belonged to a secret club - it was out on the island. A secret club, with a secret clubhouse, secret passwords, secret rules, secret handshakes. Secret membership. He talked about it endlessly. We’d lie awake at night in our beds. He would torment me with the fact that I didn’t belong. Couldn’t belong. Because I didn’t know the codes. And I’d say I didn’t know the codes because I didn’t belong to the club - but if he let me in the club I could learn the codes. And he’d smile very pleasantly and say, “That’s right.”

I pleaded with him all summer, begged him, fought with him. Finally, it was autumn. October I think, this time of year. He gave in. Told me all the secrets. Taught me the handshake, showed me the secret map of where the secret clubhouse was located. He told me to go there and wait, and he would contact the other club members. And they would all meet me there, and there would be an induction ceremony. A secret induction ceremony.

So I went to the clubhouse. An abandoned hunting shack on the island at the edge of the marsh. I waited there all afternoon. It got dark. I got hungry, and cold. And finally I came home, slogging through the cold wet marsh in the black of night.

And there he sat at the dinner table. Not even a smirk. Nothing to give him away. Dad asked me where I had been all day, though I’m pretty sure he knew. Dom would have told him. They would have had a good laugh.

There was no club, obviously. Never had been. He’d been telling me about it all summer just for that one opportunity.

He’s a planner. He’s patient. He’s sees the whole picture, like a chess game. Always ten moves ahead.

(A slight beat)

DIANA

Tomato paste.

(He hands it to her.)
JEREMY
I love you.

(She smiles, but goes on working.)

DIANA
You love my food.

JEREMY
Dom used to say, the thing he wanted most - the hardest thing to do, the most dangerous and the most difficult, but the most brilliant and rewarding - would be to write something called the life-drama.

DIANA
The life-drama.

JEREMY
To figure out a way - and he admitted he didn’t know how, wasn’t sure he could do it - but he wanted to somehow write a kind of a script for actual people, and then get them to follow it. They wouldn’t know it, of course - that was the hardest part. They’d never go along if they knew he was the playwright and they were just characters in his drama, his life-drama.

But if he could - ...

Do you see what I’m saying?

DIANA
I love you too. Thyme.

JEREMY
Sorry?

DIANA
I need a pinch of thyme.

(They look at each other as the light go to black.)
Scene 3

Jeremy, to us.

JEREMY

There are no more opening nights in the theatre. Now there’s what we call press week. We critics come all week long, when we like, when it’s convenient. Theatres do their best to fill the seats - they give away free tickets to people in the know, such as my wife.

Whereby the plot thickens.

(Two theatre seats, facing us. Dominic is in one of them, reading a playbill. Diana enters.)

DIANA

Sorry I’m late.

DOMINIC

You’re not. I’m early.

(She sits.)

Nice seats.

DIANA

I’ve got connections.

(He offers her a playbill.)

DOMINIC

Program?

DIANA

Got one, thanks.

(She settles herself.)

DIANA (con’t)

I hope this is okay, calling you at the last minute. They never give any notice with these comps.

DOMINIC

What are we seeing?

DIANA

It’s the new Marcus Dunleavy. It opens tomorrow. Jeremy saw it last night. It sounds interesting.
DOMINIC
He liked it?

(Slight beat)

DIANA
I’m not supposed to say.

DOMINIC
He liked it. He loves Dunleavy. Dunleavy is always nice and messy. Gives Jer something to talk about in the column. Makes him indispensable. Good plays can be a little dull, you know.

DIANA
I take it you don’t like Dunleavy.

DOMINIC
Never met him.

DIANA
His work I mean.

DOMINIC
I don’t really, no.

DIANA
Why not?

DOMINIC
You really want to know?

DIANA
Maybe I should guess. Too messy for you?

DOMINIC
That’s part of it.

DIANA
It’s nothing like your work. But that’s all right, isn’t it? There’s room for everybody.

(Beat)

DOMINIC
You read my play.

(Beat)
DIANA
Yes. Jer told me not to, but it was too late. I’d already finished it.

I liked it. It was ... compelling and ... personal and ... I don’t know. Disturbing. But that’s intentional, obviously.

DOMINIC
Is it?

DIANA
Well, isn’t it?

DOMINIC
Intentional. Funny word. I don’t like intentions. They’re seductive. They’re a trap. You can have all the intentions you want. Get them all lined up, next thing you know you don’t have a play.

I know a playwright, she put it in the stage directions, ‘the audience will be angry in this play.’ I thought, why do I spend all this time writing plays when I could just tell people what I want them to feel? It’d be much easier.

(Beat)

DIANA
You know, I don’t know you very well. Jer doesn’t talk about you. I don’t know the history, whatever it is that, you know - ... whatever happened.

DOMINIC
The Rosebud?

DIANA
I’m sorry?

DOMINIC
Citizen Kane. Rosebud. The little sled. The seminal episode or event that illuminates character and motivates action. A little pat, don’t you think? All because of a sled? It’s not quite messy enough.

DIANA
I thought you didn’t like messy.
DOMINIC
I’m talking about life now. That’s what life is - it’s messy like it or not.

DIANA
Why don’t you give him your play?

DOMINIC
Who, Jeremy?

DIANA
Yes.

DOMINIC
Is that a rhetorical question?

DIANA
No.

DOMINIC
Why don’t I give him my play? You really want to know?

DIANA
Yes.

DOMINIC
Because I’m not interested in what he thinks.

(Slight beat)

DIANA
He should know about this Dominic. If this is what you ... if this is what’s really - ...

(Slight beat)

DOMINIC
Yes?

DIANA
He should know, that’s all. He should be aware.
You’re afraid he’s going to judge you. Is that it?

DOMINIC
He’s a professional judge. It’s what he does for a living.
DIANA
But not with you.

DOMINIC
Especially with me. I don’t hold it against him. That’s all he’s got, really: his opinion. He might as well put it to good use. But not on me, thanks anyway.

(Beat)

DIANA
Where have you sent it?

DOMINIC
The play?

DIANA
Yes.

DOMINIC
Nowhere.

(Slight beat)

DIANA
You mean, no one’s read it?

DOMINIC
Correct.

DIANA
Well you have to get it out there. Send it out. Shop it around.

DOMINIC
Any suggestions?

DIANA
What about here? NYStagecraft. Carolyn Sweeney would love it.

DOMINIC
I wouldn’t be so sure.

DIANA
Has she ever read your work?
DOMINIC
Well, I’ve sent it to her. Doesn’t mean she’s read it.

DIANA
I think she’d like it.

She’s an old friend of Jer’s, you know.

DOMINIC
College friends, I know. He directed her in something, I forget what.

DIANA
Well that’s a foot in the door, isn’t it?

DOMINIC
You’d think so, wouldn’t you. It doesn’t quite work that way.

DIANA
Well, someone else then. Some other theatre.

If you don’t let anyone read it, it’s never going to be produced.

DOMINIC
Oh, I don’t know. There are ways.

DIANA
Then I’ll give it to someone.

DOMINIC
No.

DIANA
Why not?

DOMINIC
No.

(Beat)

DIANA
When’s the last time you had a play produced?

DOMINIC
You’re assuming I ever did.
DIANA
Have you?

DOMINIC
It depends on how you define production. Jeremy and I once put on bed sheets and performed my own version of Julius Caesar in the living room. He was Brutus, I was Caesar. The audience loved it. Does that count?

DIANA
I don’t understand it.

DOMINIC
What’s there to understand? Lots of playwrights had to die before they had their plays done. Seneca. Buchner. Even Shakespeare. Troilus and Cressida had its first production in 1912. That’s over three hundred years.

DIANA
If you won’t let me do anything with it, why did you give it to me?

(Beat)

DOMINIC
I don’t know. An impulse.

DIANA
But if Jer read it // he -

No.

DOMINIC
But why not?

DIANA
Because I’m the brother and I say so.

DOMINIC
You make it sound like that’s a role in a play.

DIANA
It is. It’s the role of a lifetime.

(She looks at him as the lights go down.)
Scene 4

(Jeremy appears in his own light.)

JEREMY
As Dominic said, there was no cash in my father’s estate, only property. The apartment and a house on the island two hours drive from the city. Dominic hadn’t been out there for years. Not that he was forbidden. That wasn’t my father’s way. It was just ... an understanding, an unspoken agreement.

(Lights rise on the island house. A small, old fashioned bungalow. Daytime. Cold. They both wear coats.)

Dominic is entering, looking around.)

DOMINIC
It’s all different ...

JEREMY
It shouldn’t be. We didn’t change anything.

DOMINIC
(Indicating off stage)
Screens. Front porch.

JEREMY
Oh right, Dad put those up.

DOMINIC
Typical. They ruin the whole look.

JEREMY
He got sick of the flies.

DOMINIC
They’re ugly.

JEREMY
So I’ll take them down. It’s almost winter. They have to come down anyway.

Look, if you’re not interested ...

(Dominic still looking around.)
DOMINIC
I didn’t say that.

It feels small, though.

JEREMY
It is small. It’s a beach house.

DOMINIC
Smaller than I remember.

JEREMY
It’s quiet. Especially off season. You could write.

You know, people would kill for a place like this. A place to go, get away. Write, relax, whatever.

DOMINIC
Maybe I don’t want to relax.

(Beat)

JEREMY
I read your play.

DOMINIC
Did you.

Yes.

JEREMY
You sly dog.

DOMINIC
Last night.

JEREMY
You weren’t supposed to do that.

DOMINIC
It’s very disturbing.

JEREMY
Is it?

DOMINIC
I know it’s supposed to be.
DOMINIC
Not necessarily.

JEREMY
Well it is.

(Beat)

DOMINIC
I’m surprised at you, Jeremy, I really am. Aren’t you supposed to – you know – have perspective? Isn’t that your business? Critical distance and all that?

JEREMY
That’s not the point.

DOMINIC
We’re just the models, Jer. What’s the matter with you? It’s like a painter has models that // he uses as a –

JEREMY
This is not a painting and // you are not a –

DOMINIC
The painting’s not about the models …

JEREMY
Yes, thank you // I know that –

DOMINIC
And the play’s not about us. I’m not the playwright. You’re not the brother.

JEREMY
The brother who’s a theatre critic.

DOMINIC
I use what I have. Friends, colleagues. I do it all the time. You know that.

JEREMY
So you’re not contemplating suicide.

(Slight beat)

DOMINIC
Do I look suicidal?
JEREMY
I’m asking you.

DOMINIC
Jer, that’s the theme: how far will a person go? What will we do to get what we want? I know what it’s like wanting people to see my play. I know that feeling. They can hate it, get pissed off. Fine. Whatever. But they have to see it, listen to it. Listen to me.

So I use that. I use what I know and I take it to the - you know, the logical whatever. What if the only way to get them to listen were to kill myself?

That’s the play. It’s a construct. It’s an idea.

JEREMY
And I help you do it.

DOMINIC
It’s not you.

JEREMY
The critic, who’s not me, looks the other way while his brother the playwright, who’s not you, kills himself. The critic looks the other way because he wishes his brother were dead.

Is that what you think? I want you dead?

(Slight beat)

DOMINIC
It’s possible.

JEREMY
Dom.

DOMINIC
Under the right circumstances.

JEREMY
As in the play.

DOMINIC
Yes.
JEREMY
The one that’s not about us.

DOMINIC
Plays are made of possibility. That’s the raw material - dreams, alternatives, things not real. That’s the point of plays. What else are they good for?

(Slight beat)

JEREMY
Diana said you left the performance last week.

DOMINIC
I told her not to tell you.

JEREMY
You were loud.

DOMINIC
Is that what she said?

JEREMY
Were you?

DOMINIC
What if I was?

JEREMY
You announced to the lobby at intermission, just before your dramatic exit, that Marcus Dunleavy - and he was there, by the way, in the lobby - that he was a God damned fraud who was not competent to write anything more dramatically complex than a grocery list.

DOMINIC
I’ll take it.

JEREMY
You’ll take what?

DOMINIC
The house. You’re absolutely right. I should be here. I belong here.

(Lights out)
Scene 5

Jeremy, to us.

JEREMY

In this business, people are made fools of all the time. Actors make hash of a good play, comics fall flat, playwrights come off as shallow and insipid, directors as incompetent. To live and work in this world is to constantly risk being made be a fool— somewhere, somehow it’ll happen. All I ever asked was that it not happen to me.

The island house. Night. Rain

The three of them are having dinner.

DIANA

This is fantastic.

DOMINIC

Thank you.

DIANA

Don’t you think, Jer? Isn’t it good?

JEREMY

(Sincerely)

It’s very good, Dom.

DIANA

Where’d you get it?

DOMINIC

Which?

DIANA

The asparagus.

DOMINIC

I brought it from the city.

DIANA

You’re kidding.

DOMINIC

D’Agostino’s.
DIANA
Unbelievable.

JEREMY
Dom’s a good cook. He used to cook a lot, I remember. You used to cook for the whole family.

(They eat. Beat)

JEREMY (con’t)
I noticed the channel was starting to freeze.

DIANA
Yes, I saw that.

JEREMY
It hasn’t frozen over for years.

DIANA
I didn’t realize it ever froze.

DOMINIC
Oh sure. Used to be solid. You could walk right across.

DIANA
Well I hope it stops raining. It’s never going to freeze this way.

DOMINIC
It’ll freeze.

DIANA
Maybe. I hope so.

DOMINIC
It’s going to freeze, believe me.

JEREMY
Not if it keeps raining. She’s right.

DOMINIC
It’s going to freeze. Trust me. It’s a done deal.

(Beat)

DIANA
How do you like the house?
DOMINIC
It’s a good place to write.

DIANA
If you need any furniture, you can check the attic. There’s a trap door in the hallway ceiling. You just need to get the // stepladder and -

DOMINIC
Yes, I know. I spent the first eighteen summers of my life in this house.

DIANA
Of course, no, I ... 

DOMINIC
Eighteen summers. Not to mention weekends.

(Beat)

DIANA
Excuse me.

(She gets up and goes out stage right.)

DOMINIC
I hope I didn’t say anything.

JEREMY
Of course, no, she’s fine.

DOMINIC
Are you sure?

JEREMY
She’s tired. She hasn’t been sleeping.

DOMINIC
Nothing wrong I hope.

JEREMY
I don’t think so. Nothing I know of.
DOMINIC
You remember those summers, don’t you? Every one of them a lifetime. That’s what it’s like when you’re young, you know. Time goes slow. I used to wake up at dawn, sun coming over the ocean. I’d go out to the beach, watch it come up, watch the world wake up. I’d go swimming out past the second sandbar. Into the ocean. Out there you could really feel the swell of the ocean under you, all around. You’d start to understand where you came from, where you belonged.

I haven’t woken up at dawn for twenty years.

(Beat)

DOMINIC (con’t)
You two should come out again. Next weekend.

JEREMY
I can’t. I’m booked solid.

DOMINIC
Well soon, though.

JEREMY
I’ll see what I can do. It’s busy now. I’m seeing something almost every night for the next month.

DOMINIC
What about Mondays?

(Slight beat)

JEREMY
It’s possible. I’d have to check my calendar.

DOMINIC
So next time you’re free, then. Your next Monday. Dinner, here. The three of us.

(Slight beat)

JEREMY
All right.

(Beat)
DOMINIC
So when is that?

JEREMY
When is what?

DOMINIC
Your next free Monday.

JEREMY
I have to check my calendar.

(Slight beat)

DOMINIC
Well, you let me know.

JEREMY
I will.

DOMINIC
I want to see you though. Really.

(Beat)

DOMINIC
Do you - ? Am I missing something? Do you not want to come out?

You don’t want to come out, do you.

(Diana enters with a bottle of wine. She opens the bottle.)

DIANA
Who wants more wine?

(Beat)

DOMINIC
None for me.

DIANA
You should. It’s good for you.

DOMINIC
Bad stomach.
DIANA
  (Still pressing)
A little wine for thy stomach’s sake.

DOMINIC
I have a bad stomach. I wouldn’t sleep.

(She offers Jeremy some wine.)

DIANA
How about you?

JEREMY
I don’t think so.

DIANA
No?

JEREMY
I’m tired. I’m going to bed.

DIANA
You must be joking.

JEREMY
Why?

DIANA
It’s not even ten.

JEREMY
I want to be up early. I have work to do. Those screens have to come down.

DIANA
Why didn’t you say something? I wouldn’t have opened this.

DOMINIC
That’s all right, I’ll have some. I’ll take a pill.

(Beat)

JEREMY
Well, I’ll say goodnight.

(He stands.)
JEREMY (con’t)
(To Dominic)
If I don’t see you in the morning – we’ll, um – we’ll talk.

(He goes off stage right.

A long silence.

Diana hands Dominic the bottle. She pours him a glass. He removes a pill box from a pocket, takes a pill, swallows it with wine. Diana watches silently.)

DOMINIC
What?

DIANA
Don’t you realize this is important to him?

DOMINIC
What is?

DIANA
He wants us to be friends.

DOMINIC
Does he?

DIANA
I realize you like to ruin things for him, but not this, please.

DOMINIC
Is that what I do?

DIANA
Yes.

DOMINIC
Ruin things?

DIANA
Yes and you also answer everything with a question. “Is that what I’m doing? Is that what he wants? Is this what I’m thinking?”
DOMINIC
Do I really?
Sorry.
I must have learned that from my father. Throw it back on your opponent, he’d say. Make it their problem.

DIANA
Is that what I am? An opponent?
(Slight beat)

DOMINIC
Very good. You’re learning.

DIANA
Why can’t you do this for him? It’s not that much to ask.

DOMINIC
Maybe not to you. But how would you know?

DIANA
I’m married to him.

DOMINIC
I’m his brother.

DIANA
He wants to make you part of his life. And us to be friends. He loves you.
DOMINIC
He loves you too - and what do you get?


He’s not capable, not anymore. There was a time, yes.

You should have seen us - two kids, slamming in and out of that screen door, running on the beach, hunting frogs. Wrestling each other - struggling, furious, crazed. But so present, so immediate.

All gone. Lost.

DIANA
Talk to him.

DOMINIC
You’re not listening to me.

DIANA
I’ll leave you alone.

DOMINIC
No.

DIANA
He’s driving into town in the morning. He’s doing the grocery shopping. Go with him.

DOMINIC
No.

DIANA
You don’t need an excuse. Get up early. Do it.

(Beat)

DOMINIC
What if I’d rather be here?

DIANA
Don’t say that.
DOMINIC
Too late. I said it.

DIANA
You don’t want that.

DOMINIC
Don’t I?

DIANA
Please don’t do this.

(He takes her hand)

DOMINIC
I understand the problem. So do you.

DIANA
(Withdraws her hand)
Dom ... it’s not possible.

DOMINIC
What isn’t?

DIANA
None of it.

DOMINIC
None of what?

DIANA
I’m married.

DOMINIC
Of course.

DIANA
I love him.

DOMINIC
I know.

DIANA
You and I are friends. That’s what we are. We’re family.

DOMINIC
Are we?
DIANA
Dom, please ...

DOMINIC
I’m asking.

DIANA
Please.

DOMINIC
Is that all we are?

DIANA
Yes. It is. It’s all we are. All we’re going to be. It’s the only way.

(Beat. She takes his hand)

DIANA (con’t)
Don’t be sad.

DOMINIC
Is that what I am?

DIANA
Don’t be.

(She slowly moves in for a kiss. They barely touch. He moves away.)

DOMINIC
You’d better drink this. I wouldn’t sleep.

(He pushes the glass towards her. He goes out stage left.

She sits a moment, takes his glass, has a swallow. She re-corks the bottle, stacks the plates, flatware, glasses, and takes them out stage right.)
She returns. Her wine glass is left on the table. She has some more. She blows out the candles. A shaft of moonlight illuminates her. She comes downstage with her wine glass, looking out the window in the fourth wall. The sound of the surf rises.

She goes back to the table, puts her wine glass on it, goes out stage right. She returns shoeless, silent. She goes to her glass, drains it.

She goes out stage left.

End of Act One.
ACT TWO
Scene 1

Dominic’s apartment. Winter, daytime. Jeremy speaks to us.

JEREMY
Autumn passed, the holidays, winter setting in. A bad time for theatre, January. The tourists go home, the rest of you stay under the covers with a DVD. Present company excepted, of course. You want answers. So did I.

(Dominic discovered in his bathrobe.)

JEREMY
You’re not dressed.

DOMINIC
I was about to take a shower.

JEREMY
Well don’t let me stop you.

DOMINIC
That’s all right, it can wait.

JEREMY
I was in the neighborhood. I had a few minutes.

DOMINIC
It’s not a problem.

(Jeremy takes off his coat and comes in.)

JEREMY
Freezing out there. Walked down to the river. There’s ice on it, you know. You could almost walk to New Jersey.

DOMINIC
Coffee?

JEREMY
No, thanks.

DOMINIC
Something to eat?
JEREMY
I have a matinee at two. I can’t stay.

DOMINIC
Matinee?

JEREMY
Yes.

DOMINIC
What are you seeing?

JEREMY
Anxiety Attack.

DOMINIC
NYStagecraft?

JEREMY
Yes.

DOMINIC
You haven’t seen it?

JEREMY
I saw it when it opened. I’m writing a feature and I want to use it. An example, you know.

DOMINIC
Let me guess. It’s a little messy.

JEREMY
A little, yes.

DOMINIC
Well I’m glad you came by. You don’t come by often enough. The place is half yours, you know. You have a key. Let yourself in. Don’t be shy.

JEREMY
I don’t have a key.

(Beat)

DOMINIC
What do you mean?
JEREMY
I don’t have it anymore.

DOMINIC
What happened to it?

JEREMY
I threw it away.

DOMINIC
You did what?

JEREMY
I threw it away.

(Slight beat)

DOMINIC
Why would you do that?

JEREMY
It’s not my apartment. I threw it away when you moved in.

(Jeremy sits.)

JEREMY (con’t)
So, how are you getting on?

DOMINIC
Getting on?

JEREMY
The writing.

DOMINIC
The writing? The writing is slow, actually.

JEREMY
That’s too bad. It must be difficult.

DOMINIC
It’s no hay ride, no.

JEREMY
What about the play?
DOMINIC
What play?

JEREMY
The one I read last fall.

DOMINIC
Oh right.

JEREMY
Any luck?

DOMINIC
No. No luck.

JEREMY
Are you shopping it?

DOMINIC
Of course.

JEREMY
Where?

(Beat)

DOMINIC
The usual places.

JEREMY
Who’s idea was that?

DOMINIC
What idea?

JEREMY
Shopping it. Sending it out.

DOMINIC
What do you mean, who’s idea?

JEREMY
I thought you didn’t send things out anymore.

DOMINIC
Of course I do.
JEREMY
I thought you said you didn’t. I thought you gave that up. Didn’t you say that? I was sure you told me that.

Diana probably talked you into it, didn’t she. She was very enthusiastic about that play. Very positive. She told me you really ought to shop it.

That’s it. That’s how I know. She told me that you said you didn’t send out your plays anymore. Hadn’t shopped a play for years. That’s how I know that.

It was her idea, wasn’t it. To shop the play.

(Beat)

DOMINIC
It was my idea.

(Beat)

JEREMY
But no response.

DOMINIC
No.

JEREMY
None at all.

DOMINIC
Afraid not.

(Beat)

JEREMY
Why don’t you call them?

DOMINIC
Call who?

JEREMY
Whoever you sent it to.

DOMINIC
Why would I do that?
JEREMY
Get a response. Squeaky wheel.

DOMINIC
I’ll think about it.

JEREMY
I think you should.

(Long beat)

JEREMY
How’s the apartment working out?

DOMINIC
Very nice. Very comfortable.

JEREMY
It’s certainly lived in.

DOMINIC
Exactly.

JEREMY
(Looking around)
Could use some paint.

DOMINIC
You think?

JEREMY
Coat of fresh paint. Brighten things up.

DOMINIC
I like it this way. This is how I remember it.

JEREMY
I spent a lot of long adolescent evenings cooking up schemes how to get out of this place. Or at least give it a decent paint job.

I was trying to think, which bedroom did you take? The big one, the master bedroom, where they slept? Or maybe ours, the one we shared.

DOMINIC
Ours.
JEREMY
I knew it. I don’t know how. I just did.

DOMINIC
It made sense.

JEREMY
Of course. Sleeping in their room - I mean the place you were conceived and all. That can’t be right.

DOMINIC
I use their room for my office.

JEREMY
We used to sit in bed, at night, trying to listen. What were the grown ups doing out here? It was so frustrating, remember? Later on, a relief, of course. As time went on. That we didn’t have to hear.

What are you doing for money?

DOMINIC
I get along.

JEREMY
Diana said you quit your teaching job.

DOMINIC
Yes.

JEREMY
Last year.

DOMINIC
That’s correct.

JEREMY
So you’re not working.

DOMINIC
No, I’m not.

JEREMY
You don’t seem concerned.

DOMINIC
I’m not.
JEREMY
You’ll run out of money, won’t you? Eventually.

DOMINIC
That’s all right. I’m not worried.

JEREMY
I don’t want you going without. That wouldn’t be right. We are brothers, you know. As in, what’s mine is yours. Whatever you need, anything at all, you just ask.

You do know that, don’t you?

(Slight beat)

DOMINIC
I don’t need anything from you.

JEREMY
But if you did, you’d ask.

DOMINIC
I might. I don’t know.

JEREMY
You mean, you wouldn’t ask?

DOMINIC
I don’t know. I doubt it.

JEREMY
You really mean that. You wouldn’t ask.

DOMINIC
I wouldn’t ask because I wouldn’t need anything.

JEREMY
But if you did. In principle, I mean. In theory, you would say something.

Or maybe you mean - you’d just take it.

That’s it, isn’t it. That’s the real you. You wouldn’t ask. You’d take it.
DOMINIC

When you put it that way, maybe you’re right. Maybe I do need things and I don’t know it. That’s possible. Sometimes a person is the last one to know. He’s got this giant hole somewhere in his life, a big empty pit that needs filling, and he’s the last one to realize it. It’s so normal for him, he’s lived with it so long, he thinks, “Oh that pit, that’s always been there.” Maybe he likes it. It’s even possible he doesn’t want anyone filling it in. He might even resist if someone tried. He might fight them at first. They arrive with big trucks and bulldozers and what have you. And they start to fill the pit. A person like me might actually try to stop them. He might be afraid of what life is going to be like without the pit.

I’m the kind of person who likes things the way they are. Someone who’s gotten used to things in his life, good and bad. So if someone were to come along and try to change anything – that person would have a fight on their hands. They’d have to really want to fill up that empty pit. They’d have to make quite the effort. They’d have to really need it for their own sake. For their own purposes, whatever they might be.

You know the kind of person I’m talking about. We all know the type. Generous, sympathetic, selfless. They need to give. They find someone with a big empty pit and they need to fill it. It’s natural for them.

I’ll tell you what. Why don’t you take a look around. Maybe there’s something I need and I don’t know it. You could be the one to see it. Tell me where I need filling in. You knowing me so well, after all. Maybe you can spot it. At the same time, though, I want to ask you a favor. I’d like you to tell me if I’ve done something right. You know what I mean – if you come across anything that you can see is filling that empty space of mine, you tell me.
DOMINIC (con’t)
Because in my own mind, I have managed to do that. I was capable of it, when I put my mind to it. I became sensitive to my own needs. So keep your eyes and ears open and I believe you’ll come across something right here in this apartment - some bit of evidence. Be sure to let me know about that too. Because I do need positive reinforcement, you know. Same as anyone else.

Well? What do you say? Want to have a look?

JEREMY
I don’t think I have to.

DOMINIC
I’d like you to, though. I’ll take my shower. You let me know what you find.

(He starts to go.)

JEREMY
That’s all right, Dominic, there’s no need.

DOMINIC
And here I thought you wanted to help me. I must have gotten that wrong. You don’t want to help me. You just want to come in here and mess with my head. “If there’s anything you need, anything at all, you just ask.” You didn’t mean that, did you.

JEREMY
No, I didn’t.

DOMINIC
You were deliberately misleading me. That’s a trick you learned from our late, beloved father, isn’t it. Our dear old Dad.

JEREMY
Actually I learned it from you. You learned it from Dad.

(The light fades on them.)
Scene 2

(Jeremy remains in his own light.)

JEREMY

Those of you hoping for the obligatory scene of confrontation - the unfaithful wife, the wronged husband, tears and wailing, et cetera - I must tell you now this will not appear. No that it didn’t happen. It did. And was followed by the Expression of Regret, a week or two of Sulking, the Plea for Forgiveness, and the Final Reconciliation. All of which is a little neat to suit the purposes of this strange, messy little drama unfolding before you.

We leap over these moments of high yet all too tidy emotion, and land instead in the quicksand of ambiguity. That is to say: life.

(Lights rise on Diana coming out of the dark, towards him. She has a manuscript in her hand. They are in their apartment.)

DIANA

Are you working?

JEREMY

Just finishing.

DIANA

How’s it going?

JEREMY

Hard to say. Still getting my thoughts down. I’ll organize later.

DIANA

You like doing these features, don’t you.

JEREMY

More freedom, yes. I can deal with ideas, you know? Sink my teeth in.

DIANA

Maybe they’ll let you do more - if this one goes.
JEREMY
Maybe. I hope so.

What’s that?

DIANA
Oh, it’s - I found it under that pile of books in the bedroom. It’s Dominic’s play. I wasn’t sure what to do with it.

JEREMY
Keep it if you want. Doesn’t matter.

(Slight beat)

DIANA
You did read it, didn’t you? I’m forgetting.

JEREMY
I read it, yes.

DIANA
And?

JEREMY
I thought it was disturbing.

DIANA
So did I.

I think we should do something about it.

JEREMY
Do something how? Like what?

DIANA
I know I shouldn’t say this, it’s not ... well, I just shouldn’t, that’s all, but ... I read it again. I didn’t mean to. I was ... I just opened it up and took a glance and the next thing I knew, I ...

I couldn’t stop reading. It just sort of gets you. You want to know what happens. That’s what a good play is supposed to do, isn’t it?

JEREMY
You’re not exactly objective, though.
DIANA
I know that.

JEREMY
I’m not saying I am. I just -

(Slight beat)

DIANA
You do like it, don’t you.

JEREMY
Look, Dom’s very talented. I never said he wasn’t. But there’s nothing I can do, not even if I wanted to. And frankly I don’t really.

(Beat)

DIANA
Of course.

JEREMY
And it’s not because of - you know. I think I’m bigger than that. At least I hope so. I just don’t know people, that’s all - not in that sense.

DIANA
You know Carolyn Sweeney.

JEREMY
You mean to give it to her? Shop this play to her?

DIANA
Yes.

JEREMY
Diana.

DIANA
Why not? You put in a word, that’s all.

JEREMY
With Carolyn Sweeney.

DIANA
Yes.
JEREMY
I don’t know her well enough.

DIANA
No?

JEREMY
No.

DIANA
I thought you did.

JEREMY
Well I don’t.

DIANA
You did go to school with her.

JEREMY
Twenty five years ago ...

DIANA
And you were involved.

(Slight beat)

JEREMY
Did he tell you that?

DIANA
You were sleeping with her.

JEREMY
Jesus Christ.

DIANA
Weren’t you.

JEREMY
He doesn’t know anything about Carolyn Sweeney and me. He wasn’t there.

DIANA
No, but you told him. You bragged about it at the time. She was quite a catch apparently.

(Slight beat)
JEREMY
What is the point of this?

(Slight beat)

DIANA
If you talked to her, if you gave her the play, that would mean something.

JEREMY
No.

DIANA
No, it wouldn’t?

JEREMY
No, I won’t do it.

(Slight beat)

DIANA
Why not?

JEREMY
He put you up to this.

DIANA
No.

JEREMY
It was his idea.

DIANA
I haven’t spoken to him, Jeremy.

JEREMY
He planted the seed.

DIANA
I told you I wouldn’t speak to him and I haven’t.

JEREMY
I mean before. Then. He told you about Carolyn Sweeney.

DIANA
That had nothing to do with this.
JEREMY
Not that you could see, no.

DIANA
He happened to tell me. It was conversation.

JEREMY
But he’s good at that isn’t he. He buries it and you never know.

(Slight beat)

DIANA
It’s a good play. Someone should do it.

JEREMY
Fine, agreed. Someone should.

DIANA
And you won’t make a phone call.

He’s given up. He’s not sending it out himself. It’ll sit in his drawer. He’ll die with it sitting in the drawer.

JEREMY
Look, I’m sorry. It’s also ethics, you know? I can’t go shopping plays to people – especially people I know. How would that look? My own brother’s play? It’s bad enough it gets done. What if I’m the one responsible? How would that look when I go to write the review?

DIANA
You don’t even hear yourself.

JEREMY
No, I’m saying how would it look?

DIANA
No, you’re saying it’s bad enough that his play gets done.

That’s what you said.

(Beat)

JEREMY
Well, I don’t mean bad obviously.
DIANA
No? What do you mean?

He needs a reason to exist, Jer. It’s really that simple.

And I don’t think there’s anything wrong with calling her. I mean, you do think it’s good, right? You do believe someone should do it. You said so yourself. If you believe that, then why shouldn’t you say something?

(She offers him the envelope.)

JEREMY
I don’t need that.

DIANA
You have a copy?

JEREMY
I’m making a phone call. I’m not a delivery service.

(Lights out.)
Scene 3

Jeremy, to us.

JEREMY

The seeds he had planted, they were sprouting, as I knew they would. But so many - an ocean of tall grass, a forest. I was lost in it. I couldn’t see.

He was a comet, blazing across the heavens - dazzling, blinding, humbling.

(The island house.

Night. They are having dinner, as in Act One.

DIANA

What time is it?

JEREMY

About 7:30, I think.

DIANA

What do you think? Time to walk on the beach before we go?

JEREMY

I think so. Why not?

DIANA

Dom? You want to come?

DOMINIC

No, I should clean up.

DIANA

Don’t be silly.

JEREMY

You did the cooking.

DIANA

Come with us.

JEREMY

We’ll clean this up when we get back.
DIANA
Yes.

DOMINIC
All right.

JEREMY
What is it, low tide?

DOMINIC
Ebb I think. I’ll check.

(He goes off stage right)

DIANA
There’s a moon. I saw it coming up while I was making dinner.

JEREMY
Wait a minute.

DIANA
What’s wrong?

JEREMY
I can’t go for a walk.

DIANA
Why not?

JEREMY
I have to call Emma. The feature on Tobias Meek.

DIANA
Call her on the way home.

JEREMY
No, she hates cell phones. She won’t talk on them.
That’s all right. You go ahead.

DIANA
We’ll wait for you.

JEREMY
No, go ahead, really.

(Dominic enters)
DOMINIC
What’s the matter?

DIANA
He has to make a phone call.

DOMINIC
Go ahead, make it. We’ll clean up.

JEREMY
No really, it’s going to be an hour at least. You should go.

DOMINIC
You were right, it’s low tide.

JEREMY

DIANA
(To Dominic)
Well? What do you think?

(Slight beat)

DOMINIC
I think I’ll stay here.

DIANA
Oh don’t do that.

DOMINIC
I’ve got a cold coming on. I shouldn’t go out.

JEREMY
Dom.

DOMINIC
Seriously. I don’t feel well.

JEREMY
It’s not that cold. There’s no wind.

DOMINIC
I’m very comfortable right here. Thank you. Really.

(Beat)
Jersey
Okay, well, I’ve got to do this.

(He goes off stage right.

A long silence. She won’t look at Dominic.

Jeremy re-enters.)

Jeremy
Has anybody seen my Palm Pilot?

Diana
It’s in your overnight.

(He goes. She calls after him.)

Diana
In the inside pocket!

(Silence.)

Diana
If you’re going to do this, why do you stay? Why don’t you go to the city when we come out?

Dominic
If I’m not going to talk, you mean.

Diana
Yes.

Dominic
He asked me to. He invited me.

Diana
Do you accept every invitation?

Dominic
He wanted us all to be here. What am I supposed to say? He wants - you know ... this. Whatever this is.

Diana
He wants you to go with me.

Dominic
I can see that.
DIANA

On principle.

DOMINIC

Of course. What else?

DIANA

Well then why not?

(Beat)

I mean, you’re here aren’t you? You’re here with me now. What’s the difference?

DOMINIC

It’s not the same.

How so?

DIANA

It’s different.

How so?

DOMINIC

We’d be alone.

DIANA

We’re alone now, aren’t we?

DOMINIC

No.

DIANA

We’re alone right now.

DOMINIC

I don’t think so. If we were alone, really alone, it would be different. You know that.

(Beat)

DIANA

Come for a walk.

This is what it is now, Dom. This is how it’s going to be. We can’t go back to the other.
DOMINIC
Why not?

DIANA
You know why. We’ve talked about it.

DOMINIC
It’s funny, I never really believed you.

DIANA
Well, you should have. It’s over.

(Beat)

DOMINIC
I want to touch you.

DIANA
No.

DOMINIC
One touch.

DIANA
No.

DOMINIC
Why not? It’s nothing, not to you. It’s over.

One last touch.

DIANA
You’re dramatizing.

DOMINIC
I’m a dramatist.

One touch.

DIANA
And then?

DOMINIC

DIANA
Or my money back.
DOMINIC
Or your money back. Double your money.

(She goes to him, stands before him. She offers a hand. He takes it. Kisses it. Draws her closer to kiss her — but they hear Jeremy coming.

She pulls away and is crossing away from Dominic when Jeremy enters. He is speaking as he enters.)

JEREMY
She has to call me back so I —
(He slows for a half second, taking in this movement, then quickly picks up)
- so I thought I’d clean up. I thought you’d be gone.

DIANA
I was just leaving.

JEREMY
(To Dominic)
You’re not going?

DOMINIC
No.

DIANA
I’ll be back.

DOMINIC
Say hello to the moon.

DIANA
What?

DOMINIC
The full moon. Say hello for me.

(She goes.
Jeremy begins to clean up.)
DOMINIC
I do like the beach at night. A spring night. Something about it, I don’t know what. You stop to think, it’s all a cliche, really. Moonlight on water, sand and sea, the constant rhythm of the waves. You could never write that scene. Too familiar. But somehow when you’re there, it all makes sense. It’s never old, never tired. That’s it, isn’t it. Life is something new, always surprising. Doesn’t matter how many time you’ve been there, done it, seen it. It always comes off fresh. Unplanned. Spontaneous.

It wasn’t what you think.

JEREMY
What do I think?

DOMINIC
You’ve got her so nervous, she thought she had to walk away. There was nothing going on.

You don’t believe me?

JEREMY
Why should I?

DOMINIC
Well you did invite me. I’m here all the time by myself. I don’t need to come out with you, with the two of you. It was your invitation.

JEREMY
I wanted to tell you, I heard from Carolyn.

DOMINIC
Oh?

JEREMY
She liked the play.

DOMINIC
Oh really.

JEREMY
Very much. Thought it was very well done. Imaginative.

DOMINIC
Is that right.
JEREMY
Yes.

DOMINIC
Her word?

JEREMY
Yes.

She told me to thank you for letting her see it. She’ll make sure it gets mailed back to you.

DOMINIC
So this was on the phone.

JEREMY
Yes.

DOMINIC
You didn’t go see her.

JEREMY
It was on the phone. I called her.

(Beat)

DOMINIC
You liked her, didn’t you.

JEREMY
I liked her. She liked me.

DOMINIC
I remember. You used to talk about her.

JEREMY
I liked her, yes.

DOMINIC
Whatever happens to that. Those feelings, whatever that is, between two people. Where do you think it goes? Because I don’t.

Anyway.

Did you notice? The ice in the channel is breaking up. It froze, just like I said it would. And now it’s breaking up.
JEREMY
I saw it.

DOMINIC
I used to sit and watch it, way back when. Sitting on the bridge, all that ice floating by underneath. Big chunks of ice, big as a car some of them. Floating past, bobbing along. Jostling. Like a herd of animals.

It’s like watching a fire. Or a waterfall. You just keep watching, you don’t know why.

I saw an animal once, a deer. Trapped. Must have wandered out onto the ice, got caught out there as it started to break up. It tried to jump off, get to shore. Didn’t work. Slipped under the ice. Flailing away, scrambling up on its forefeet. Nothing worked. Kept sliding back, into the water, that icy water.

Unforgiving.

That’s the word, isn’t it. An unforgiving landscape. Pitiless nature. I watched it drown. Nothing I could do. Would have been suicide, going in after it. I watched it go under, one last time. I said good bye.

JEREMY
I remember that story.

DOMINIC
Do you.

JEREMY
You came home with it. You told us all about it. You were very sad.

DOMINIC
It was. It was very sad.

I think I’ll go have a look, though. It’s a wonderful sight -- moon light, the ice flow.

JEREMY
I thought you had a cold.

DOMINIC
Did I say that?
JEREMY
Yes.

DOMINIC
I don’t think so.

JEREMY
You just told Diana you had a cold.

DOMINIC
No, I think I’ll have a look. I’d like to see that ice flow. It’s the right time, the perfect night.

(He goes out, returns with his jacket.)

JEREMY
Dom.

DOMINIC
What.

JEREMY
Just – stay here. Don’t put me through this.

DOMINIC
Put you through it?

JEREMY
Yes.

DOMINIC
That’s an interesting way to look at it.

JEREMY
Just put the coat away.

DOMINIC
You’re going to have to do better than that, I’m afraid. I’m determined to go watch the ice flow. If you don’t want me to, you’ll have to stop me.

JEREMY
I think you made your point.

DOMINIC
My point? If what I wanted was to make a point, believe me, this is not the way I’d do it.
JEREMY
Take off the jacket.

DOMINIC
You’re repeating yourself.

JEREMY
Who cares what Carolyn Sweeney thinks. She’s one person. It’s her opinion. Now stop it.

DOMINIC
You’re losing the power of persuasion, Jer. If I were you, I’d be worried about that. It makes you seem ineffectual. Then again, maybe your heart’s not in it.

Maybe you hope I walk out that door. It would solve an awful lot, wouldn’t it.

I think you’re a little torn. And that’s hard because it really is entirely up to you.

What’s it going to be, Jer? Stay or go?

Good. I like that. A fast ending. Before you think it might be over, it already is. That’s a good play.

If you change your mind, though, I’m going to walk. You can always catch me if you hurry.

(He goes out. Jeremy doesn’t move.

Lights fade.)
Scene 4


Day. Late Spring. Warmish.

Diana waits, looking out over the water.

Jeremy enters with a small box under his arm. He sees her and stops. She doesn’t turn.

DIANA
It’s all right. Don’t apologize. I’m enjoying the day. It’s going to be bathing suit weather pretty soon.

(She turns to him)

Is that ...?

JEREMY
Yes.

DIANA
It always looks so small.

(She reaches for the box, he hands it to her.)

Heavy.

JEREMY
I got brass. I don’t know why. I guess I picked it out before I - before we decided to scatter them.

(She hands back the box.)

Sorry I was late.

DIANA
I said don’t apologize.

JEREMY
Well, thank you for letting me come out.

DIANA
You don’t have to thank me, Jer. I wanted to see you.

JEREMY
How’s the house?
DIANA
Lovely.

JEREMY
Enjoying it?

DIANA
It’s wonderful. The weather’s been so nice. I’ve been planting.

How are you?

JEREMY
I miss you.

(A long beat. She won’t hold his gaze. He puts down the box.)

JEREMY (con’t)
I’m doing the play.

(She looks up at him.)

DIANA
You mean, you got someone interested.

JEREMY
Yes. But I - ... I’m also directing it.

DIANA
You’re what?

JEREMY
I know.

DIANA
How did you - ? Why would you do that?

JEREMY
(With a shrug)
There wasn’t anyone else.

DIANA
Oh come on.

JEREMY
I interviewed people. I did. They all missed the point of the play.
DIANA
And what is the point?

JEREMY
Well, you did read it, Diana.

DIANA
I know what I think the point is. I want to know what you think it is.

JEREMY
Well, you’ll have to come see. We preview in the fall. NYStagecraft.

(Slight beat)

DIANA
I see. I thought Carolyn passed.

JEREMY
She did. Things changed.

DIANA
And she’s letting you direct.

JEREMY
She wasn’t going to but there was a sort of a bidding war and I had some leverage // so I -

DIANA
Wait a minute. There was a sort of a what?

(Slight beat)

JEREMY
They were fighting over it.

DIANA
Who was?

JEREMY
Well, first Carolyn calls me. She read the obituary, she wants to talk. I go in, she offers me the annex. Says we can do a workshop after Christmas. Which is very nice, but I start to think - maybe ... who knows? So I call a few people and by the end of the week People’s Theatre says I can have the upstairs space.
DIANA
The big one?

JEREMY
The big one. So we talk about that. It sounds good. Two days later the Drama Center offers us their downstairs space.

DIANA
The big one.

JEREMY
The big one. They have Matthew Broderick for the - uh - the brother role, the critic. They already sent him a script. He likes it.

DIANA
Wow. He’d be great.

JEREMY
But then Carolyn hears about this and she says okay, we can have the main stage, and we’ll open the season, only please - I owe this to her. And I say fine, but I direct.

DIANA
Wow.

JEREMY
And that’s showbiz.

DIANA
That’s really ballsy, Jer.

JEREMY
She was begging.

DIANA
That’s not what I mean.

(Beat)

JEREMY
Well, I do have some directing experience, you know.

DIANA
In college.
JEREMY
I was considered very promising.

DIANA
Yeah, I’ve seen the scrapbook. Miss Julie – with who was it as the psycho-sexually tormented heroine? Oh that’s right, Carolyn Sweeney.

JEREMY
She was very good.

DIANA
I’ll bet she was.

(Slight beat)

JEREMY
Anyway the play’s getting done. That’s what matters, right?

DIANA
I don’t know. Is it?

JEREMY
Well I thought it was.

DIANA
While he was alive – yes, of course. Not now.

(Slight beat)

JEREMY
I don’t follow.

(Slight beat)

DIANA
Jer, you do realize – I mean, the play is kind of obvious about ... certain things.

JEREMY
You mean like us.

DIANA
For example.

JEREMY
You never said it was a problem before.
DIANA
You never said you were going to do the play.

JEREMY
Well, things changed. What was I supposed to do?

DIANA
Hey, it’s fine with me. Do whatever you want. I don’t mind people seeing my part of it. But you do realize that people are going to see this – with him killing himself – they’re going to make the connection.

JEREMY
Going to? What do you think that bidding war was? Why do you think Carolyn called the same morning the obituary appeared? She’d already read the play. She knew what that meant.

That was the plan. His plan. Life-drama. He was his own protagonist, of course. I was just the messenger, bearing essential information. Fifth business. A clumsy but effective plot device.

DIANA
And that’s all right with you.

(Beat)

JEREMY
She’s doing the play.

(Beat)

JEREMY (con’t)
The other thing is – I thought I should tell you. I gave notice. I’ll finish out the season, that’s all. No more column.

DIANA
That’s brave.

JEREMY
Not really.

DIANA
What are you going to do for money?
JEREMY
I don’t know. Teach maybe. I’ve got savings. Who knows? Maybe I’ll direct plays for a living.

(Beat)

She goes to the box, opens it, lifts out the urn. Another beat.)

DIANA
I have to ask you something.

(Slight beat)

JEREMY
Yes?

(Slight beat)

DIANA
Did you know he was going to do it?

JEREMY
Of course not.

DIANA
You didn’t suspect?

JEREMY
Did you?

DIANA
No.

JEREMY
Neither did I.

(Beat)
DIANA
I thought about that lots of nights, cold spring nights in front of the fire. I kept thinking - the play, and us, all of it. The way it happened. It’s like you said.

Because everything else in the play -- everything that matters - it all lines up. Just like in life. It’s so amazing that he could write that - what? - almost two years ago, and then have it all match up. It’s just funny if that one little detail was different.

It does make sense, the way it is in the play - him wanting you to know. To give you the choice. A chance to stop him.

JEREMY
Well that’s the play, isn’t it. Plays are supposed to make sense. The real life fact is there wasn’t a choice. Not really. Because anything I did was going to lead to this - to losing you.

Isn’t that true.

DIANA
Yes.

(Beat)

JEREMY
So. What do you say? A little impromptu ceremony? A ritual scattering of the ashes?

DIANA
I don’t think so. Not for me. I’ve said my good byes.

(She hands him the urn.)

DIANA (con’t)

(She goes.

He is left with the urn as the lights fade.)
Scene 5

Jeremy alone.

JEREMY
You come for answers, but this is what you get. Nothing but questions.

Consider, for instance: Is this my play you’ve been watching, the one I wrote? Or is it Dominic’s, the one we’ve been talking about all evening?

Or is it someone else’s play? And I’m just a character, a string of words on the page, existing only in the mind of some other being, on some other strange, unknowable plane of existence?

And suppose the play is Dominic’s. How does it end? And how would you know the ending if you saw it? How does a person end a play in which he himself dies?

And so I realize, finally – that words cannot explain and there’s really nothing to say. I’m done talking. Life speaks for itself.

So should this.

(He goes as Dominic and Diana enter from opposite sides.)

DIANA
He told me not to, but I couldn’t help myself. I’m sorry.

DOMINIC
Oh, please ...

DIANA
But I like it.

DOMINIC
Did you?

DIANA
Very ... personal and ... I don’t know. A little disturbing, frankly. But you have must meant that.
DOMINIC

Not really.

DIANA

No?

DOMINIC

I don’t really mean things. You start to mean things and before you know it you don’t have a play.

(Slight beat)

DOMINIC

Did he read it too?

DIANA

No.

DOMINIC

Is he going to?

DIANA

I don’t know. I doubt it.

DOMINIC

Probably better that way.

DIANA

He should know about this, though. If this is how you feel.

DOMINIC

You think so?

DIANA

Of course. He has to know.

Are you afraid of what he’ll think?

DOMINIC

Of course not.

DIANA

Then tell him.

DOMINIC

I can’t. I put it all in the play. If he wants to know, he’ll have to read it.
(Slight beat)

DIANA
Do you mind me asking? Have you ever had a production of a play of yours?

DOMINIC
It depends on how you define production. He and I used to put on my plays in the living room. Our parents loved them. Does that count?

DIANA
I don’t understand that.

DOMINIC
Some people don’t have any luck.

(Slight beat)

DIANA
I’m going to give it to him. Is that all right?

DOMINIC
I wish you wouldn’t.

DIANA
Please.

DOMINIC
It’s only going to make things worse.

DIANA
Why did you give it to me?

DOMINIC
I don’t know. I just did.

DIANA
But if he read it // he could ... No.

DOMINIC
But why not?
DOMINIC
Because I’m the brother and I say so.

DIANA
You make it sound like that’s a role in a play.

DOMINIC
It is. It’s the role of a lifetime.

(Jeremy appears coming out of the audience, up onto the stage.)

JEREMY
Nice. Very nice.

DIANA
(Uncertain)
Yeah?

JEREMY
Absolutely.

DIANA
You liked the way I stayed on him like that?

JEREMY
Loved it.

DIANA
Yeah, it felt right.

JEREMY
Absolutely. Keep it.

(To Dominic)
How was that?

DOMINIC
It was okay.

JEREMY
Remember – you do love her. It’s not that you don’t. It’s never just manipulation.

DOMINIC
No, of course not. Is that what you got?
JEREMY
(Reassuring)
No, it’s just—don’t hold back, that’s all. You’re doing great. It’s all about sincerity.

Now listen, I talked to Matthew. We’re going to cut the direct address.

DOMINIC
Really?

JEREMY
We just felt we didn’t need it.

DOMINIC
He told me he really liked it.

JEREMY
Well, he thought he did, yes but ...

DOMINIC
Well if he thinks he likes it, isn’t that the same as if he does like it?

(Beat)

JEREMY
He’ll be fine. He won’t miss it.

DOMINIC
What about the transitions?

JEREMY
Just follow him. He’s got the whole thing down. He rehearsed it this morning.

(Dominic looks to Diana.)

DOMINIC
Well, I guess I can do it.

DIANA
It’s fine with me.

JEREMY
Okay, good. So listen. It looks great. You guys are totally ready. We’re done. See you at half hour.
(He goes.)

DOMINIC
Can you believe that?

DIANA
He’s just nervous.

DOMINIC
He’s nervous?

DIANA
It’s his first time. He’s never done this.

DOMINIC
Gee, you’d never know, would you.

(She collects her things.)

DIANA
He likes what you’re doing.

DOMINIC
He doesn’t even see what I’m doing.

DIANA
Josh, forget about it. It’s your performance.

DOMINIC
Yeah, well – somebody tell him that.

DIANA
You just do your thing.

DOMINIC
Yeah, right.

DIANA
We’re all going to be fine.

DOMINIC
What do you think about the direct address?

DIANA
I don’t know.

DOMINIC
What do you think Matthew said? I bet he’s pissed.
DIANA
Probably.

DOMINIC
I would be.

DIANA
I think Jer’s right, though. I don’t think the audience needs it, you know? In a funny way?

DOMINIC
I don’t think he even likes this play, that’s what I think.

DIANA
Are you hungry at all?

DOMINIC
Not really.

DIANA
I’m starving.

DOMINIC
I can never eat before first preview.

DIANA
I wonder if Jer’s hungry.

DOMINIC
Well, you go ahead. I’ve got to get home, do some yoga or something. Besides, you don’t need me.

(They kiss, friendly)

DOMINIC (con’t)
Just tell me I don’t suck.

DIANA
You don’t suck.

DOMINIC
Good bye.

(He goes. Jeremy enters.)

JEREMY
Where’s Josh?
DIANA
He was tired. He had to go home.

JEREMY
I had the feeling he was sort of upset.

DIANA
I don’t think so. Just nerves.

JEREMY
I know I’m hard on him. He’s very good, though. I hope he knows that.

DIANA
He went home to do some yoga.

JEREMY
What about you?

DIANA
I’m hungry, actually.

JEREMY
No I meant about the direct address.

DIANA
Oh I don’t care. It really doesn’t affect me.

JEREMY
No?

DIANA
I just have to come in faster, that’s all. It’s not a problem.

How’s Matthew about it?

JEREMY
He’ll be okay.

DIANA
In other words, he hates it.
JEREMY
In the long run, this is the right thing. He’ll be glad we cut it. It makes it too easy for him. And the audience. I don’t want to make it easy. I want people to think. I’m not going to serve it up on a platter. It’s difficult stuff - emotionally, intellectually. The more they work, the more they’ll appreciate it.

What?

DIANA
Nothing, I -

JEREMY
What?

DIANA
I just, I haven’t said anything because, you know: rehearsals. But now that we’re going up, I just wanted to say that I think you’re really amazing. Courageous, basically. And you’ve got a real, you know, artistic spirit. You really do.

JEREMY
Well, thank you.

DIANA
It can’t be easy. Working on this.

JEREMY
It is actually. It’s a beautiful play.

DIANA
No I mean - what it is. To you. The material.

JEREMY
It’s really not all that close, actually.

DIANA
You know you said that // but -

JEREMY
It’s the truth. He knew a lot of people in his life and, you know, a lot of people to base these characters on. It’s a work of fiction, that’s all. It’s a play. That’s really how I see it.
DIANA
And that’s your story and you’re sticking to it.

JEREMY
So you’re hungry.

DIANA
Starving.

JEREMY
Do you want to - um - ?

DIANA
I’d love to - ... um.

JEREMY
You know I deliberately didn’t ask you that until right now.

DIANA
Oh?

JEREMY
I don’t know what the rule is - but I sort of figured, not during rehearsal.

DIANA
That would be a good choice.

JEREMY
Also, I wasn’t sure you ...

DIANA
Mm. Me either. About you.

JEREMY
I thought I was pretty obvious.

DIANA
Yes, but I am playing your wife.

JEREMY
Ex-wife.

DIANA
I keep wanting to ask you if I’m - I don’t know - anything close.
JEREMY
You’re pretty close, actually. I wouldn’t get any closer.

DIANA
No?

JEREMY
Well, maybe for a second.
(They kiss.)

DIANA
Perfect.

JEREMY
Go ahead, get a table. I have to check the box office about some tickets. I’ll meet you there.

DIANA
Okay.

(They kiss again.
She goes.

He looks at us as if to say something. Then shrugs – whether to us, or to himself, it’s hard to say. He goes out.

End of play.)