

The Critic and His Wife

by Stuart Spencer

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.

DOMINIC

You think?

JEREMY

I do, yes

(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 rathole.

(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.

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?

DOMINIC

Yes.

JEREMY

Tonight?

DOMINIC

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)

JEREMY

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 -

DOMINIC

No.

DIANA

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.

(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.

JEREMY

Yes.

DOMINIC

You sly dog.

JEREMY

Last night.

DOMINIC

You weren't supposed to do that.

JEREMY

It's very disturbing.

DOMINIC

Is it?

JEREMY

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 life time. 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?

I've watched you all weekend. You and him. You're like the sea and the shore. You're the sea. You throw yourself against him. You fall back. You do it again. You fall back. It keeps going that way. Never stops. I know what it's like, believe me. I did the same thing. I tried.

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

Perfect. Perfect timing. You go ahead.

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)

JEREMY

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.

DIANA

How so?

DOMINIC

It's different.

DIANA

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

Then, nothing. Nothing at all. Guaranteed.

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 cliché, 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 times 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

A spit of sand. Water nearby.
Distant seagulls.

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)

You go ahead. Ritualize. Good practice for a director.

(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 ...

DOMINIC

No.

DIANA

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.)

Okay. Good. Well. How about Angelo's? It's close.

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.)