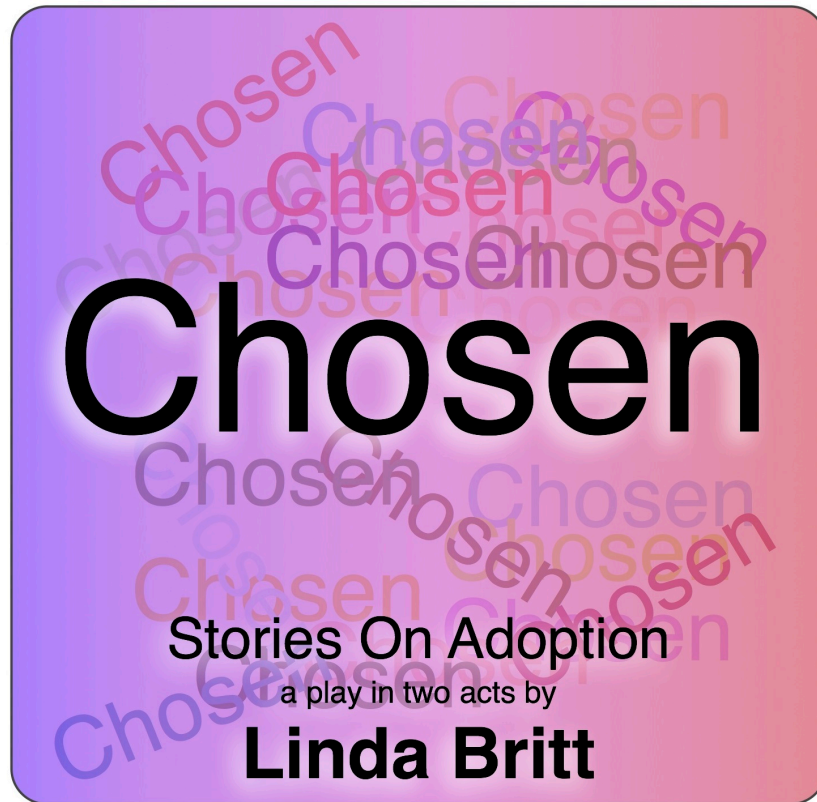


PERUSAL SCRIPT



Newport, Maine

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Chosen: Stories On Adoption

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NOTE: The monologues in this play can be performed for solo competition and other public performance only upon application to Leicester Bay Theatricals.

Cast of Characters: 15F 10M

(The show has been done with as few as 17 performers. Doubling of roles is possible.)

ACT ONE

Tableau One

LORI, 30s married to MICHAEL

MICHAEL, 30s married to LORI

FELICIA, age 45, – prop: letter in an envelope

ERIC, 30s, – prop: baseball mitt

TOM, age 16, – prop: cel phone

Tableau Two

KRISTINA, age 14 – prop: “Cinderella” storybook

STEPHANIE, 40s – prop: NONE (important that there is nothing)

MARILYN, 60s – prop: a stack of unopened birthday cards, tied up in a pretty bow

ANDREA, age 16 – prop: notebook with pencil

Tableau Three

CAROL, 30s – prop: FOUR stickable package bows

TREVOR, 20s, – prop: a sheaf of papers stapled together

PETER, age 14 – prop: math book, calculator, pencil, paper or comp book

MELANIE, 40s – prop: several baby onesies

ACT TWO

Tableau Four

SEAN, aged 10 – prop: two photos, one of Mom and one of Dad

CATHARINE, 50s – prop: Chinese language book and stool

CHARLIE, 60s – prop: wearing a sport jacket and holding a certificate

KELSEY, 30s – prop: unopened foil-wrapped condom

CYNTHIA, age 52 – prop: ‘missing child’ (young teen) poster w/tape on it

Tableau Five

DAWN, 40s – prop: Operating audio device with an mp3 of a girl child singing a Nursery Rhyme. (Or a device faked with an SFX cue)

RON, age 20 – prop: a printed snapshot, or a device with a picture of a boy

SUSANNA, 30s – prop: thick photo album with pic of baby girl on front, also possibly lettered “Natasha”

Tableau Six

ANDY, 30s – prop: NONE (important that there is nothing)

ELIZABETH, age 16 – prop: scrapbook, card, stool

GRACE, 30s, married to DAVID – prop: life-sized, blanketed doll as baby

DAVID, 30s, married to GRACE

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Note: The play is meant to be staged in tableaux. The actors enter in small groups, and form each tableau on the stage. The staging of each individual tableau can be flexible. An example from the first tableau: The first group of actors enter. Lori and Michael stand together, holding hands. Felicia, in *My Other Child*, holds a letter in her hands addressed to “Carl.” Eric, in *Born to be a Dad*, sits on a stool and holds a baseball mitt. Tom, in *No Big Deal*, is texting on a cell phone. They are placed around the stage according to light instrument availability. Each actor in turn moves to stage center, performs the monologue, and then exits. When the stage is empty, the next group of actors enters.

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Prior to ACT I, the following graphic is projected on a screen. Projections can also be used to introduce each tableau.

“In 2001, there were 127,407 domestic adoptions in the U.S. These included adoptions out of foster care, relative adoptions, step-parent adoptions, and infant adoptions. In the same year, there were 19,647 international adoptions. According to the U.S. Census of 2000, 2.5 percent of all children living in U.S. households were adopted, or slightly over two million. These are a few of their stories.”

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CHOSEN: STORIES ON ADOPTION a play by Linda Britt 15f 10m. about 100 minutes. Contemporary costumes, Props. (*Perfect for Professional, Amateur, College/University groups*) What would you do if you found out at age 45 that you were adopted? If you found yourself pregnant and alone at age 19? What if being a dad had been a dream of yours since childhood, but circumstances prevented it? What happens when adoptees meet birth parents? “*Chosen: Stories on Adoption*” features 23 monologues about adoption, sensitively told from the perspectives of adoptees, birth parents, adoptive parents, foster families, and more. **ORDER #3044**

LINDA BRITT is a Maine playwright who has had plays produced on both coasts. Recent works include “What If...”, “I Smile, Of Course, and Go On Drinking Tea,” and “Chosen: Adoption Stories,” along with her ten-minute play “If Only in My Dreams”. Her current project is a series of monologs focusing on immigration.

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ACT I

TABLEAU ONE:

Enter, LORI, MICHAEL, FELICIA, ERIC, TOM

•• About Us ••

LIGHTS up on LORI and MICHAEL, 30s, holding hands

LORI and MICHAEL: Hi!

LORI: Our names are Lori and Michael, and we have a happily ever after story that is only waiting for one thing to make it complete... a child.

MICHAEL: Thank you for reading about us and taking the time to get to know us. We know this must be a difficult time in your life, and we are so grateful that you are considering us as the family for your child.

LORI: Michael and I met in the Peace Corps. We became close friends while serving in Bolivia. When we returned to the States, that friendship turned into something deeper and wonderful.

MICHAEL: We knew when we got married that we wanted children. We built our lives around that future. But after a miscarriage, Lori was told she would never be able to carry a baby to term.

LORI: We were of course sad about that. But we saw it as a message... that we weren't meant to grow our family that way, and that adopting a child would be the perfect way to complete our story.

MICHAEL: We can't promise extravagance for your child, if you choose us. What we can promise is a comfortable home, a healthy environment, unconditional love, and a wonderfully supportive extended family, with grandparents ready to spoil their grandchild.

LORI: Please... help our happily ever after story come true.

(They bounce happily off-stage, still hand in hand.)

•••

•• My Other Child ••

LIGHTS up on FELICIA, 45, holding a letter, in an envelope

FELICIA: I have three children. My husband knows this. My mother and dad know this. My brother knows this.

But my children don't.

My daughters have an older brother out in the world. He is their full brother, the result of a lapse in judgment when Ted and I were not quite eighteen.

Only Ted's mother wanted us to keep the baby. Everyone else firmly believed the right thing to do was to give him away to a loving family who would give him everything he could ever need, so that Ted and I could continue our educations. They were right, I'm sure.

Except now, twenty-eight years later, I don't think I should keep this secret any longer. And I don't know how my children will forgive me when I tell them.

My youngest, Phoebe, just turned eighteen. She and her sister have both been smarter than I was. I've preached to her and Miranda for years about responsibility. How can I confess to them how irresponsible I was?

How can I explain to my son that I wasn't willing to sacrifice my education to keep him? Or even delay it? It sounds so selfish now. When I was eighteen, it seemed so altruistic. Ted and I were doing a good thing, giving our baby to a childless couple.

It seems different now.

I've written a letter to him. When I think about him, I call him Carl. If we had kept him, his name would be Carl, so the letter begins "Dear Carl."

But that's not his name.

When I'm brave enough, I will take the letter to my mother and ask her to send it to his parents. She's the one who found them, through an attorney friend who lived in another state. That's all she would tell me, that and that my baby would be loved and well taken care of.

But I'm not brave enough.

I'm afraid my children won't forgive me. I'm afraid my daughters will never look at me the same way. I'm afraid my son won't answer the letter, won't want to meet his sisters, won't want anything to do with the birth parents who gave him away.

Ted tries to reassure me, but he's leaving this decision to me.

Next week it's my forty-sixth birthday. I'm not getting any younger.

Perhaps, for a birthday present, I can ask my children for forgiveness. All of my children.

(She opens the envelope and begins to re-read her letter as the LIGHTS fade. She exits.)

•••

•• Born to be a Dad ••

LIGHTS up on ERIC, 30s, on a stool with a baseball mitt

ERIC: I was born to be a dad. I always knew that. When I was little, I used to play with my sister's dolls. I would dress them and give them their pretend bottles and burp them on my shoulder, just like I'd seen my mom do with my little brother.

I was also born gay. I always knew that, too.

I won't bore you with the story of how much fun it was to grow up gay in a Catholic community. My mom accepted the fact that I was gay when I was sixteen, my dad two years later. Things got easier after that.

Fast forward to my thirties. I met Andrew, the love of my life, when I was thirty-one. It was one of those movie moments... we met each other at a party, connected instantly, I asked if he'd go out with me on Friday, he said he didn't want to wait that long, how about tomorrow.

We had a commitment ceremony about a year later, invited our friends and family. It was beautiful. We bought a house together, with a back yard big enough for a little garden. There was one room that was perfect for a nursery.

I wasn't foolish enough to think it would be easy to adopt a baby. But I was cautiously optimistic. Andrew and I were fortunate enough to have good jobs, secure incomes, great family support, and good enough senses of humor to handle the stupid comments we were likely to hear.

And we live in a progressive state. Progressive enough, anyway, that judges here aren't removing babies from their lesbian mothers because they might grow up to be gay. Progressive enough that it's not illegal for gay parents to adopt.

Of course, I understand the fear. Who wouldn't be afraid their children might be gay? If anyone understands what gay kids go through when they're growing up, it's me.

Not sure, though, how everyone knows that it's an absolute guarantee that straight parents will raise only straight children.

(Pointing to himself with a sly chuckle)

Just ask *my* mom and dad.

Andrew and I called the two local adoption agencies. One of them immediately told us that they "don't work with gay parents." We thought for a brief moment about calling back and lying about who we were. The director of the second agency was very nice, and said we were welcome to fill out a profile, but, and I quote, "to be honest, the birth mothers who come to us want their babies to go to a family with a mom and a dad." So we could apply to adopt, but we wouldn't be chosen. She advised us to call the state human services department. "There is a much better chance for you with them."

We called them. They told us most waiting children were teenagers. I think that must be their idea of a joke... who in their right mind would give a teenager to brand-new parents? We called other agencies around the state. We were told that if we were willing to take a special-needs child, our chances would be greater. We didn't think we were ready for that, either.

Time was passing. Avenues seemed to open up to us, and then turn into dead ends.

We decided to try to become foster parents. And as soon as we started looking, we found an agency that said right on its home page that they will work with gay and lesbian parents, and that foster care can lead to adoption. We applied... and several months later a two-year old boy named Nathan came to stay with us.

That was six years ago. Seventeen months ago, our adoption of Nathan became legal and permanent.

(Beat)

I'm a dad.

Andrew and I are now looking for a little brother for Nathan.

(He smacks his hand into his mitt. He walks offstage.)

•••

•• No Big Deal ••

LIGHTS up on TOM, 16, texting on a cell phone

TOM: I really don't get what the big deal is. So I'm adopted. So what. My life is good, I have two great parents, a little brother, my life is totally normal. I graduate from high school in a couple of years, and then I'll be heading to college. I have no desire to meet my "birth parents." Hey, you know, what they did was their business. So they made a mistake. I sure don't want anybody checking up on me twenty years from now for some stupid mistake I made. So I'm pretty sure they don't want to hear from me. So let it go, already.

(He goes back to texting full-time, wandering off stage as the LIGHTS fade.)

•••

TABLEAU TWO:

Enter, KRISTINA, STEPHANIE, MARILYN, ANDREA

•• In the System ••

LIGHTS up on Kristina, about 14, storybook in hand (hopefully noticeably "Cinderella")

KRISTINA: I was in the system for a long time. You know. The system, the foster care system.

Before that? I guess it wasn't good. I don't remember much.

I've had four different foster moms. Foster families, I guess, but mostly I remember the moms.

I stayed with the first one until I was six years old. Then she had to give me back because she got sick and couldn't take care of me any more. I remember being sad when they took me away. Her name was Naomi.

After Naomi, I lived with Eleanor. She had grandchildren she babysat during the day, and me, and another foster kid, Amy. Amy was older than me and she ended up running away from Eleanor. I don't know why. Eleanor wasn't mean. She just didn't pay much attention.

After Eleanor came Theresa. Look, I know it's not easy taking in foster kids, because, you know, it just isn't, and foster parents aren't given that much money, but in all the time I lived with her, I never had anything that was mine. Like clothes. I mean, it didn't have to be new clothes. You can get shirts for 99 cents on Wednesdays at the Salvation Army. But I never got to go shopping and pick out something I liked. She had her own children, two daughters, who gave me their hand-me-downs. But they never fit me.

I felt like Cinderella before she met the prince.

But now I live with Vicky and Todd. When they took me in it was like... well, it was like they WANTED me. And I have my own room and a big brother named Tyler. Last summer, we took a family vacation! A. Family. Vacation.

Vicky and Todd have filed adoption papers. I'm going to have a forever family!

(She clutches the storybook to her, and runs offstage. The LIGHTS

change.)

•••

•• The One Good Thing ••

LIGHTS up on STEPHANIE, 40s. She is hesitant.

STEPHANIE: So, okay, everyone says I'm a screw-up. I don't know, maybe I am. I dropped out of high school. I work at crappy jobs for crappy pay. I been with a lot of different guys and most of them treated me like crap too. I'm living with a guy now, though, Sam, he's probably the best boyfriend I ever had. We been together three months now. We got an apartment down on Front Street near the grocery store. So far he's paid his part of the rent.

I haven't talked to my mom since she kicked me out of the house when I got pregnant. Said she wasn't gonna raise nobody's bastard kid. I ain't seen my dad since he left when I was five.

I stayed with my boyfriend for a while but he didn't want nothin' to do with the baby, so when I got bigger he dumped me. I ended up in a shelter. This social worker hooked me up with this lady who said I should give up my baby for adoption. Said a nice family who couldn't have kids on their own would take real good care of it.

What was I gonna do, you know? I had nothin'. That lady told me the family would pay for me to go to the doctor and for the hospital bills. I figured, yeah, why not, I mean, what could I give my baby? I mean I woulda loved it, sure, treated it better than my mom treated me, but I didn't even have a job or a decent place to stay.

I didn't hold the baby after I had it. The nurse wanted me to but I didn't. She said, "Stephanie, do you want to hold your baby boy?" and I said, "it's not my baby" and I wouldn't even look at it.

But it was the right thing to do, you know, giving it away. It was. He's a lot better off. And that family, you know, I bet they're really happy they got a baby. He's all grown up now, probably in college or something.

You know, that was the one good thing I done in my life.

(She turns from the audience hoping she's right as the LIGHTS fade. She exits.)

•••

•• Grandmother by Proxy ••

LIGHTS up on MARILYN, around 60 years old, with a stack of unopened birthday cards, tied up in a pretty bow

MARILYN: I became a grandmother seventeen years ago. And I haven't seen my granddaughter since the day she was born.

My daughter wasn't that young when she got pregnant... seventeen. Too young, of course, but almost an adult. But she wasn't ready for that kind of responsibility. A lot of women aren't ready for that even when they're older. I'm not sure I was ready, and I was 26 when Alana--that's my daughter--was born.

Alana wanted to keep her baby. She begged me to let her keep it. But I knew that if she did, I would be the one to raise it. And maybe it was selfish of me to say no. Alana hasn't gotten over it yet.

Her boyfriend, he wasn't a bad kid, but he wanted her to have an abortion. He didn't want anything to do with any baby, and he was mad at her for getting pregnant (like he didn't have any responsibility in that), and he just thought she should get rid of it. But Alana said abortion was wrong, and that was that.

"What about adoption?" I said to her. "Think of your future. You want to go to college. You want to make something of yourself. What kind of future will you have if you're tied to a baby day and night?" She said she wanted to keep her baby, and that she could do it. So I told her I wouldn't help her. I told her she would be alone, and that I wouldn't support her financially. That was hard, you know? Telling her she would be alone? What kind of mother does that?

She cried and cried over losing that baby. I held her and let her cry, then told her we could find a really nice family for the baby, and that if she loved it, she should do what was best for it.

So I called these really nice people at an adoption agency, and they were very kind. They treated Alana like a princess, you know, with a lot of respect. And they showed us all these files with pictures of couples that couldn't have babies and wanted to be parents. There were all sorts of people... doctors, professors, business people. Alana picked out a couple... she was a teacher, he was a store manager. They just sounded so nice, and there were pictures of their house and the room that would be the baby's room. And they were willing for it to be an open adoption, so that we could meet them, and they could meet us, and they would send us pictures of the baby as it grew

up, and that made Alana feel a lot better, knowing she could watch her baby grow up, even if it was from a distance.

The time came for the baby to be born. It wasn't a hard delivery, really, no harder than most. And Amber was born. That's what Alana wanted her to be called. And after the birth the nurse handed the baby to Alana, who held her and cried, and told her that she loved her, then handed her to April, Amber's new mom.

And that was the last time we saw her.

April and Jack changed Amber's name to Tiffany. They sent pictures of Tiffany to Alana for the next four years at Christmastime. We would sit and pour over the pictures, wondering at how much she'd grown, how beautiful she was, how much she looked like Alana. And we sent presents to Tiffany each year on her birthday and at Christmas.

Then the pictures stopped coming. The cards we sent to Tiffany were returned unopened. We called the agency... there was nothing they could do. It was a promise, not a contract. We haven't heard from her or from her new parents for thirteen years.

Alana hasn't had any more children. She probably never will. She went to college for a while, but never graduated. She's working in a dead-end job and hasn't had a stable relationship. She thinks about Amber... Tiffany... every day.

I don't have any other grandchildren, and probably never will. And looking back, I don't know if what I did was the right thing to do. I hope Tiffany has a good life with her adoptive parents. I hope she's happy and healthy and well-adjusted. I do. I just have this ache sometimes where my granddaughter ought to be.

(She begins to untie the bow as the LIGHTS change. She exits.)

...

•• **Dear Mother? Love, Andrea** ••

LIGHTS up on ANDREA, 16, laying on her stomach, DS, as if on her bed, a notebook and a pencil in her hands. She attempts to write.

ANDREA: "Dear... Mother? Mom? Birthmom? Dear... woman who abandoned me at birth, or, alternately, sought a loving home for me when you couldn't take care of me? Dear... Susan?"

It's me, Andrea. Maybe you remember me better by the name you gave me, Nicole?

My mom said... I mean my adoptive mom, of course, she said you named me Nicole, but she'd always wanted a daughter named Andrea so that's what she calls me. Maybe you always wanted a daughter named Nicole. But Nicole's my middle name now. Anyway, it's me. You do remember me?

Well, of course you remember me. Having a baby and then giving it away aren't things you just forget, right? I mean, that's a pretty big deal.

Not that I'm a baby any more. I turned sixteen last month. I guess you know that, though. I've always imagined that you were sixteen when I was born, and that's why you didn't keep me. I haven't even had a boyfriend yet, you know, a boyfriend that stayed my boyfriend for more than a week or so. So I'm not going to be having a baby any time soon.

Was that the reason you gave me away? Because you were sixteen, I mean? Or fifteen or seventeen or something like that? I can understand that, if that's the reason. My mom said you gave me away because you wanted me to have a better home than you could have given me. So if you were, like, fifteen or something, it makes sense that you wouldn't keep me because, like, I can't even imagine how hard it must be to be a mom at my age.

So, you know, if that's the reason, that's okay. And it probably is the reason. I mean I've thought of other reasons, but I don't much like thinking about them. The worst is that you just didn't want me.

But I try not to think that. I mean, if that were the case, you would have just gotten rid of me before I was born, right? Because it's not that hard to get an abortion. I know because my friend Katie had one last year. So if you didn't care about me, you could have just done that and then I wouldn't be here now wondering where you are and what you're doing and why you never write me any letters.

So you must care about me. Or at least you did once. And I like to think you still do, out there, somewhere.

The thing is... and I don't want to sound ungrateful or anything, and I mean, my mom is a good mom and most of the time we get along okay, and everything... but the thing is, sometimes it's hard being adopted. It's hard because I don't know anything about you, and sometimes I have to write things in school about my family, and of course I write about my adoptive family, but in the back of my mind you're always there. And I could write about you and my real family, but I would just be making stuff up. Like... I don't know anything about my real father. Was he your boyfriend? Did you love him?

See, I have this fear that he was just a guy you hooked up with and then he didn't want anything to do with me. Not that I'm judging you for that but I hate the idea that my own father didn't want anything to do with me. Or worse, maybe you were raped and then you couldn't stand to have a reminder of your rapist around. That would be me. Andrea Nicole, product of a rape, daughter of your attacker.

Not that I would blame you if that's what happened. I wouldn't want me around either, if I were you. Like, probably you'd look at me and see him, maybe, and how awful would that be? Even if he was just a hook-up, or even your boyfriend, why would you want me around to remind you of something that happened sixteen years ago? I don't even like to be reminded of things I did last year.

I mean, I didn't do anything terrible last year. Not that what you did was terrible, I mean... of course if you were raped that was terrible but you didn't do it...

I'm so bad at this! I just wanted to say I don't blame you for giving me away. I just wish I knew why.

So, what I did last year? As I said, it wasn't terrible, but I cheated on a math test. I didn't mean to, really, but there was my notebook on the floor, open, and there was this question on the test I didn't know the answer to, and conveniently there in the notebook were some notes about the question, so I sort of looked. And then I got caught and my teacher gave me an F and told my mom and she was so mad! And she said never cheat and I said I didn't know what made me do that.

Did you ever cheat on a test? I mean, maybe it's genetic, like blue eyes or something. Maybe that's why I'm not good in math, because my mom is, my adoptive mom, that is, and so maybe the reason I'm not is that you didn't like math either. That would explain some things. Don't worry, though. I learned my lesson, and I won't do that again. Cheat, I mean.

You probably never cheated, though. Not on a math test, anyway.

This is probably way more information than you wanted. If you wanted any information at all. Look, I just... I just hope you'll write back to me someday, and maybe we can meet. Of course you've already met me, I guess, but I don't remember meeting you. And it would mean a lot to me to know that you really did love me sixteen years ago or, that at least you don't hate me for being here, in the world I mean. Even if you don't want to meet me again I'd like to know that. And if you don't want to have anything to do with me after all, I want you to know that I totally understand and I won't bother you any more.

I hope you write me back and let me know if you loved me, like my mom said you did. Not that I think she would lie to me but she might just be trying to make me feel better, so if I heard it straight from you it would be easier to believe that you did.

So if I hear from you, that will be great. If I don't... well, I just want to say thank you for being my first mom.

Sincerely... wait... love,

Your daughter,

(She signs the page with a flourish.)

Andrea Nicole!

(The LIGHTS fade and she slips offstage.)

...

TABLEAU THREE:

Enter, CAROL, TREVOR, PETER, MELANIE

•• You Never Know What You're Going to Get ••

LIGHTS up on CAROL, early 30s, there are four package bows stuck on her hair.

CAROL: I always knew I wanted to be a mom. When it didn't happen biologically, my husband and I thought it would be wonderful to adopt. I told everyone, my friends and family. Most of them were really excited for me. My best friend Angie was planning to throw a baby shower for me when the time came.

Then my mom weighed in. "Carol," she said, "I don't think that's a good idea. When you adopt, you never know what you're going to get."

(She removes a bow from her hair.)

Now, that's true. You don't. When you adopt, you get some information... more for some situations and less for others. You get as much family history as is available, the medical records of the birth mom, usually. They have to tell you if she used drugs or alcohol, if they know. But you still don't know what you're going to get.

(She removes a bow from her hair.)

"Mom," I said. "Tell me something: Did Grandma know what she was going to get when she was pregnant with Uncle Walter?"

Walter is residing in the federal prison in another state on drug felony charges, his 11th arrest.

(She removes a bow from her hair.)

"And what about my cousin Rhonda? What guarantee did she come with?"

Rhonda was born with a congenital heart defect, and died before her fourth birthday.

(She removes a bow from her hair.)

"You must remember your friend Annie's little surprise when her twins turned out to be triplets?"

A lovely surprise, no doubt, but unexpected.

"Not to mention my own brother. Did you have any idea Rick would grow up to be gay?"

My mom was silent.

(She smiles.)

You see, you never know what you're going to get.

(She begins to replace the four bows in her hair; then the LIGHTS start to fade as she exits.)

•••

•• You Can't Prove Anything ••

LIGHTS up on TREVOR, 20s, a sheaf of papers stapled together

TREVOR: You can't prove I'm the father.

Okay, so it's true I was on shore leave when she said she got pregnant, but we only did it that one time, and she wasn't the only girl I was with that week. I'll bet money I wasn't the only guy she was with, either.

Look, if I sign the papers, that means I'm saying I did it, that I'm responsible. My skipper says I should sign. They call it "Termination of Parental Rights." I guess she's gonna give the kid up for adoption.

But like I said, how do they know... how do I know it's mine? I just don't believe it is. So I'm not gonna sign. Besides, it says if I don't sign, after a while they'll terminate the rights anyway.

You can't prove anything.

(He rips the papers in two, stomping off as the LIGHTS fade.)

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•• Chosen ••

LIGHTS up on PETER, 14, seated on the floor, doing homework(Math), figuring things out on a calculator, writing deductions in a comp book or on a piece of paper.

PETER: From the beginning I've known that I am adopted. It was never a secret; it was part of my identity growing up. I didn't know what it meant when I started using the word: "I'm 'dopted! My mommy and daddy chose me 'cause I'm 'dopted!"

It's hard to explain to someone who isn't adopted what it feels like when you're told you're special because they chose to adopt you. I mean, sure, great, tell me I'm special... but because I'm adopted? Adopted kids everywhere just want to be normal, like every other kid.

What it comes down to is that when you tell me I was chosen, I can't help but think, yeah, but that means someone "unchose" me first.

So tell me you love me. Tell me you feel lucky to have me in your life. Tell me I'm special because I can juggle or because I can wiggle my ears or because I can rattle off 19 digits of Pi.

(He uses his pencil tip to 'count' the number of digits he has figured.)

But don't tell me I'm special for being adopted.

(LIGHTS fade. He exits.)

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•• The Phone Call ••

LIGHTS up on MELANIE, 40s – several baby onesies are at her feet

MELANIE: After six or seven years of trying to get pregnant, visits to multiple doctors, prayer, folk remedies, fertility drugs, developing a first-name relationship with my ultrasound technician, not to mention pretty much killing our sex life by rigidly sticking to an intercourse schedule determined by the day of the month and the results of those ultrasounds, my husband and I decided to adopt.

Not that we thought it would be easy. Friends of mine had been on a waiting list with one agency for three years without even a nibble. But I figured, you know, there might be a toddler or older child out there who needed a home, and I knew there was room for such a child in my home and in my heart, so I started calling adoption agencies.

International adoption? Sure, we'd consider that. A bi-racial child? Why not? Hispanic or half-Hispanic? Absolutely.

The cost? Prohibitive. But we would find a way. We wanted... desperately... a child. And the director of the agency I called even encouraged us to apply for a baby. "There are babies out there," she said. "There are birth mothers who are looking for a family

just like yours."

So we put together an "adoption resume." This consisted of a description of ourselves, and photos of us doing all kinds of fun things in beautiful places; photos, I might add, that were staged just for this resume. Photos of us. Photos of us with the dog. Photos of us being fun and active. Did we really go cross-country skiing in our back yard? Well, yes. Just once. Just for this photo. But by God, if some birth mother wanted her baby to go cross-country skiing, we were ready and willing.

So we sent in our resume, and then we waited.

About two months later, the social worker called. A birth mother in Texas had chosen our resume, and wanted to talk to the adoptive mom. Would I be willing to talk to her?

No pressure, right? I mean... what was she going to ask me? What if I had all the wrong answers? What if I asked her stupid questions? What if I got so tongue-tied I wouldn't make any sense and she would hate me and we'd never get another chance?

The social worker, Sandy, told me that the birth mother, whose name was Carmen, would be more nervous than I was. And that it wasn't a test and I shouldn't be worried.

She was lying through her teeth, but I said I would talk to Carmen.

You know, you can say, well, what did you have to lose? And the answer is, everything. I had everything to lose.

So Carmen called me. And the call was awkward and strange. It's kind of like a job interview, I guess. And in the end it seemed more like she was trying to tell me why I should choose her baby rather than me trying to convince her that I was the right woman to be her baby's mom.

That was the beginning of a four month wait... it was April, and the baby was due in August. We didn't know if it was a boy or a girl... and it didn't matter. We picked out names for both, just in case.

I talked to Carmen regularly...I learned more about her life than I really wanted to know. She was married with two children. Her husband had left her, but he was still in her life. She didn't say as much but it sounded like they were still sleeping together. It was a struggle to get by. She and her children had moved in with her parents, who didn't like her husband. She couldn't handle another child. She didn't have the financial resources... but she especially didn't have the emotional resources. Her husband knew of her decision to put the baby up for adoption, and he was perfectly fine with that.

She would call me late at night, I think when she was having doubts about her decision. I mean, think about it... she already had two children. She knew what it was like to carry them for nine months, to give birth to them and nurse them and take care of them and what it was like to have them hold her fingers with their little fists. And she had made the decision to give this baby to me. And so we would talk.

Carmen's baby, my baby, was due within the week. On Wednesday our dining room was filled with baby stuff... clothes, car seats, a high chair... all borrowed the night before from our friends whose baby had outgrown them. Those things covered the floor when the phone rang.

It was Sandy, the social worker. She first asked if my husband was home. He wasn't. She asked if anyone else was nearby. No one was. Then she said, and I will never forget these words, "I have some very bad news."

I knew of some birth mothers who had changed their minds at the last minute. It had happened to my friend Debby from grad school. I braced myself for what was coming next.

"Carmen's at the hospital. The doctors can't find a heartbeat for the baby."

I sank to the floor.

(She kneels on the floor.)

My baby, whom Carmen named Angel, was stillborn two days later. He was buried in Texas.

And now what do I say when people ask me if I have children?

(She gathers the onesies and just stares at them in her hands. The LIGHTS fade slowly, maybe leaving a special on the onsies, before or after they drop from her hands again.)

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End Act I

19 pages remaining in Act Two