

PERUSAL SCRIPT

# What Really Happened

A play by  
**Eric Samuelson**



Newport, Maine

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## **WHAT REALLY HAPPENED**

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## **CAST OF CHARACTERS - 2m 2w**

The play is best performed with four actors: two male and two female

### **RICH**

(In addition, the actor playing RICH also plays:)

GALLERY OWNER

JUSTIN

### **PRIEST / JEROME**

### **CATH**

(In addition, the actor playing CATH also plays these other female roles.)

BETS

CELESTE

DOCTOR

### **JACKIE**

(Note: The changes from character to character should be done with great clarity and precision, but with a minimum of stage movement and costuming. Also, note that I mark an interrupted line with a double dash. An ellipsis should signify a pause, the line trailing off, a new thought.)

## **AUTHORS NOTE**

“What Really Happened” was written in the summer of 2000, in London. I was directing a Study Abroad program in London, and the sounds of the city were so intoxicating—It was produced in 2001, at BYU. Lesley Larson directed. It starred Robert Gibbs as the Priest/Jerome, Jeremy Selim as Rich, Susanna Florence as Jackie, and Susan Keller as Cath. (Fantastic cast, actually) — *Eric Samuelsen*

**WHAT REALLY HAPPENED** a play by Eric Samuelsen 2m 2f. Simple Setting. Contemporary Costumes. 80 minutes. This play is about language—no not that kind (although there is some of that in it)—it is about how we use words to avoid feeling, to deny existence, to mask truth. It is also about what we are willing to do to feel that we belong ... to someone, to a group outside of ourselves, to a place, even, while not really belonging to ourselves. There is a stark, disconnected feeling to every relationship in the play. Quite a comment on our modern society—the things we reason ourselves into to doing. A young couple moves to the big city. But that’s not What Really Happened... First produced in a student production at BYU in 2001. There is also a recording of the reading at a Sunstone Symposium on the webpage. Mature language and situations. **ORDER #3258**

SUNSTONE SYMPOSIUM LINK: <https://www.sunstonemagazine.com/what-really-happened-a-new-play-by-eric-samuelsen/>

**Eric Samuelsen** taught at Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio before joining the faculty at Brigham Young University in 1992. He became head of the Playwriting program at BYU in 1999. He has also taught as an adjunct faculty member in the Religion department. He retired from BYU in 2012.

As a playwright, Samuelsen has had twenty-seven plays professionally produced in Utah, Indiana, Louisiana, New York, and California. Some of his plays include *Gadianton*, which has seen three professional productions across the country, *A Love Affair with Electrons*, *Family*, *The Plan*, and *The Way We're Wired*. He is resident playwright at Plan-B Theatre Company in Salt Lake City, who has designated their 2013-14 season a 'Season of Eric, including productions of six plays.

He is a member of the Playwrights' Circle, and the Dramatists Guild. He is three-time winner of the Annual Award in Playwriting offered by the Association for Mormon Letters (AML) and he became president of AML in 2007. In 2013 the organization awarded him the Smith Pettit Award for his lifetime work as a playwright. He has been a staff writer for the on-line satirical magazine *The Sugarbeet*. He was also featured in the book *Conversations with Mormon Authors*, edited by Chris Bigelow. He is a noted Ibsen translator, and has also published scholarly articles on 19th and 20th century Scandanavian Theatre, and more recently, on LDS drama and film. He blogged at [Mormoniconoclast.com](http://Mormoniconoclast.com). Eric died in September of 2019 after a long battle with many illnesses. This has left a huge hole in the Theatre Community within, and outside of, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

# WHAT REALLY HAPPENED

## ACT ONE

### **FIRST CONVERSATION**

**JACKIE:** O my Jesus, have mercy, forgive me my sins, save me from the fires of hell, even one such as I, most undeserving thy mercy. O my Jesus, have mercy, forgive me my sins, save me from the fires of hell. O my Jesus, save me from the fires of hell. O my Jesus, save me. Save me. Save. Me.

*(She exits, without a glance at RICH and CATH. They don't acknowledge her either.)*

**RICH:** What really happened was—

**CATH:** See what really happened was—

**RICH:** See what it really was that happened was...how do we start this?

**CATH:** It was...what really happened was...

**RICH:** Pretty simple.

**CATH:** Good. Yes. There's no sense making too much of this.

**RICH:** It's really very simple.

**CATH:** Deceptively simple.

**RICH:** Deceptively...We met. We meant something to each other for a time.

**CATH:** We still do. That hasn't changed.

**RICH:** No, of course not. If you needed me, I'd still come running.

**CATH:** As I would with you.

**RICH:** Friends. Still.

**CATH:** Of course.

*(Brief comfortable pause.)*

**RICH:** We were both from small towns. Maybe that's where we should start.

**CATH:** That's right. We weren't sophisticated people, not city people, not by nature.

**RICH:** Good. Yes.

**CATH:** We went to church.

**RICH:** Every Sunday. Well, most—

**CATH:** We were both virgins in high school.

**RICH:** As for gay people... I'd heard that's who you beat up in the locker room. You didn't... 'befriend.'

**CATH:** *(Laughing.)* If you even knew any. See, that's it. We were both...innocent.

**RICH:** Right.

**CATH:** We only moved to the city because we got jobs in the city, because that's where our jobs led us.

**RICH:** We were easily intimidated.

**CATH:** That's so true.

**RICH:** I mean, I got to the city, and it was so big. Noisy. Well, intimidating.

**CATH:** I wasn't as intimidated as you were.

**RICH:** No, that's right.

**CATH:** At first it was. Frightening. I thought every guy I met was a rapist. Every...well, ethnic minority, now you don't want to stereotype, but—

**RICH:** You hear stories.

**CATH:** I'm not prejudiced, really. But there weren't many...“ethnic minorities...”

**RICH:** Black people.

**CATH:** No. Right. In my home town. So every time I saw one, I thought: ‘mugger.’

**RICH:** I'm not proud of that. But it's true.

**CATH:** But I got over it quicker.

**RICH:** It took awhile for me to feel comfortable just leaving the apartment.

**CATH:** But you'd work with people...

**RICH:** That's who you met first, the people you worked with. And they were nice enough.

**CATH:** They'd invite you out with them.

**RICH:** Go to bars. I could do that; we have bars at home.

**CATH:** And we got in with this crowd.

**RICH:** Upscale. Cappuccino people, I'd call 'em. Latté people. Starbucks... I mean, where I'm from, it's just coffee, right, Maxwell House, Folgers—

**CATH:** Educated, sophisticated. I mean, so were we, but—

**RICH:** We'd be at parties, and people would talk about, I don't know, Proust, say. Or Duchamps.

**CATH:** Or Derrida.

**RICH:** And you'd have to pretend you knew what they were talking about. Not, of course, that my profs at good old State U didn't ever mention Derrida...

**CATH:** Quite the contrary.

**RICH:** It's one thing to pass a class. It's quite another to be able to casually drop...educated bon mots into a conversation. That's an art form.

**CATH:** They'd all gone to the same prep schools. Well, it turned out mostly they hadn't, but they'd fool you.

**RICH:** People spent a lot of time fooling each other.

**CATH:** You got good at that.

*(Con conversationally.)*

‘I agree, really I do. I think that about Heidegger. Well, what was it you said about him? I agree with that.’

**RICH:** ‘Well, just think of the ways Foucault, I mean, just Foucault, has changed the way we look at the world. I mean just think about it.’

**CATH:** ‘I'm so impressed with her work.’

**RICH:** ‘A giant, really, he is. A giant.’

**CATH:** ‘So true.’

**RICH:** It wasn't so hard, once you got the hang of it. The trick was to never disagree.

**CATH:** And to let them do most of the talking. But, of course, you'd have to hold up your end.

**RICH:** ‘I think it was the Talking Heads third album that really convinced me—’

**CATH:** ‘The Mark Rothberg exhibit, at the Tate? What can I say: life changing.’

**RICH:** ‘I think that's probably the only Godard film I haven't—’

**CATH:** *(Laughing merrily.)* ‘That is so true!’

**RICH:** And we went along that way for awhile. And I'd see her. You.

**CATH:** We had some of the same friends, we went to some of the same parties.

**RICH:** We met, I mean, like, officially ‘met’ at an art gallery.

**CATH:** It was an exhibit by Bets.

**RICH:** Your friend from high school.

**CATH:** Not really. I knew Bets in high school, but we were in very different circles then; we weren't friends then. But when I got to the city, I'd heard she was in town, and I called her, dying of homesickness one day, and it turned out she was as lonely as I was.

**RICH:** She had this exhibition.

**CATH:** What I loved about Bets was her courage. She was going to be an artist, and she'd just gone ahead and done it, moved and started painting, and absolutely nothing was going to stand in her way. And she got this gallery to exhibit her work.

**RICH:** Anyway, I saw Cath there. I'd seen her before, but I don't think we'd ever talked.

**CATH:** We hadn't.

**RICH:** You were over by that one painting, the blue one.

**CATH:** *Nude ascending a rope ladder.*

**RICH:** Her work was this sort of neoprimitivist pomo abstract stuff. Really stunning.

**CATH:** I'd actually modeled for it.

**RICH:** You told me that later. It wasn't like I recognized you in it. Not then.

**CATH:** Not initially.

**RICH:** No. Later, I could. Just the angle of your face and neck, sloping down to your shoulder. Ear, cheek, neck, collar bone. I loved to look at it.

**CATH:** You bought it.

**RICH:** I bought it for you.

**CATH:** For you. I mean, you still have it.

**RICH:** Okay.

**CATH:** Don't try to pretend that you. . . it drives me crazy when you...

*(Catches herself.)*

Anyway, the party. Most everyone there was either gay or sort of faux-French pretentious.

**RICH:** I can't even remember what I was doing there.

**CATH:** You brought a date.

**RICH:** That's right.

**CATH:** You left her talking to that one guy.

**RICH:** I did. I remember now. A guy with a goatee. And then, Jerome—

**CATH:** We're not gonna go there.

**RICH:** No, sorry.

**CATH:** *(Short awkward pause.)* So anyway, you came up to me.

**RICH:** I did. And I said, 'hi.'

**CATH:** 'Hi.'

**RICH:** And I had absolutely no idea what to say next. Everything else I could think of sounded dumb. 'Have we met?'

**CATH:** 'I don't think so.'

**RICH:** Dead end. Or: 'Do you come here often?'

**CATH:** 'Not really.'

**RICH:** See what I mean? ‘Can I buy you a drink?’

**CATH:** ‘The drinks here are free.’

**RICH:** Ouch. ‘I find you very attractive, and I would like to get to know you better.’

**CATH:** ‘The feeling is not mutual.’

**RICH:** So instead I just stood there, feeling as stupid as I probably looked.

**CATH:** ‘Hi.’ That’s all he’d said, and then he stands there looking uncomfortable. And then Bets came over.

**RICH:** If she hadn’t come over that exact second, none of this would have happened.

**CATH:** No question.

**RICH:** I mean, five more seconds and I was sunk. I was already floundering.

**CATH:** But Bets did come up, and she says ‘Cath, can you believe this?’ And she hands me another drink, and she says ‘I brought you another drink to celebrate.’

**RICH:** So I put two and two together, and I go ‘you must be the artist. I can’t tell you how amazing this is.’

**BETS:**! Thanks!

**RICH:** I’m just blown away by it. Your use of color, the overpainting, the composition. I mean, it feels so despairing, and yet somehow I’m not in despair.

**BETS:** He didn’t say that. If he had, Cath would never have taken up with him afterwards.

**RICH:** It’s the kind of thing I wish I’d said. Thought about it afterwards. Instead: I’m just blown away by it. The colors, it’s just...wow.

**BETS:** You know, that may be the most sincere thing anyone’s said to me tonight.

**RICH:** Look, I don’t know much about painting. I’m not a critic or anything. I’m just stunned. It’s like...words fail me.

**BETS:** After listening to critics all night, it’s good to meet someone inarticulate.

*(They laugh together.)*

**RICH:** Hey, that’s me. You want tongue-tied, I’m your man.

*(Holds out his hand.)*

Rich.

**BETS:** Bets. This is my friend Cath.

**RICH:** We’ve met.

**BETS:** And he smiled at me. And I liked him. I liked his enthusiasm. He didn’t seem jaded or bored or like he was trying too hard. Just a nice guy who really liked my work.

**RICH:** And here I am talking to Bets, and who I really wanted to meet was the friend.

**CATH:** Me. It was okay. Bets was all involved with Jerome then.

**RICH:** She still is.

**CATH:** *(Making a face.)* Jerome.

**RICH:** We both hate Jerome. And he was over talking to—

**CATH:** Don’t. Not yet.

*(A pause.)*

Anyway, pretty soon the gallery owner comes over.

**GALLERY OWNER:** Bets, darling, there’s someone you must meet.

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<sup>1</sup> In production, Cath turned, and on the turn, put on a hat, became Bets that quickly.



**BETS:** In just a second.

**GALLERY OWNER:** Not in a second, darling, now. This very moment.

**BETS:** At least let me finish my drink.

**GALLERY OWNER:** Bets, darling. Do you see that man? In that hideous, what is that, a polo shirt? He's made a small fortune on some dot com nonsense and he adores new artists and he is *this close* to pulling out his checkbook and buying the whole In the Forest series.

**BETS:** Wow. Sounds like I'd better go guys.

**RICH:** Hey, business before pleasure.

**CATH:** Go, Bets. Make a sale.

**RICH:** Good luck.

**BETS:** Thanks! Nice to meet you.

**CATH:** And Bets was off. And there we were. Alone.

**RICH:** But the ice had been broken. We could talk about the paintings, and we could talk about Bets. And I got her phone number and got back to my date. I was there with a date; did I say that?

**CATH:** You did.

**RICH:** And that's how it started.

**CATH:** He called me the next day, and we went out to lunch two days later. And it sort of went on from there.

**RICH:** And that's how it started.

**CATH:** But that's not what I want to talk about.

**RICH:** No.

*(Tone shift.<sup>2</sup>)*

### ***FIRST INTERLUDE***

**CATH:** *(Rapturously.)* The city.

**RICH:** In the city!

**CATH:** Looking up. The energy, the pulse, feel air shimmering with tautness, the buhdadadadada<sup>3</sup> hammering rhythms, buhdadadadada, buhdadadada, jackhammer, cell phones; car alarms, sirens. Hands jabbing, karate blow punchtalking, honk, curse, shoulder aside, 'what' 'fuhgeddit' 'go' 'one eight twelve.'

**RICH:** Staccato exhaustion.

**CATH:** Tops of buildings swaying with nervous eroticism.

**RICH:** Look down, kick a curb, go, go, gray grime, hot dog wrappers, faces, faces, black and hispanic and threatening, back down, don't meet eyes, bounce, jounce, corner to corner. Wallet in right front pocket, hand jammed over it. Scan scan, eyes in back of my head. Overload, overdose, OD on smells, city textures. Yap yap terrier city, gnaw at my ankle and wrists. Teeth like needles, feel it grip you.

**CATH:** The city. Buhdadadada. Every face a rapist.

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<sup>2</sup>This could be indicated in a number of ways, with perhaps something as simple as a light change, or perhaps with music and some kind of choreography. Emphasis on language, though.

<sup>3</sup>This should be said in a staccato rhythm, like a jackhammer or machine gun.

**RICH:** Every face a whore.

**CATH:** Feel the energy in my loins, in my womb, birthing.

**RICH:** Soot and grime and sludge, don't meet eyes, wallet in the front pocket, right hand jammed on top.

**CATH:** Birthing sky and energy and shame and rhythm.

**RICH:** Intoxication.

**CATH:** I'm drunken. I'm beaten.

**RICH:** Shove, shoulder, nudge, bump.

**CATH:** Specks of sky over swaying buildings, the tops of buildings impossibly distant.

**RICH:** Yap and pimp and pop.

**CATH:** I've been raped by the city. I'm in love.

**RICH:** A dull ache in my left ankle, from a bone bruise sustained in a collision with an elderly Korean's wingtips.

**CATH:** Buhdadadada. The pulse. The pounding.

**RICH:** A sharp pain in my left shoulder blade, from when an Italian looking guy in a brown jacket shoved me aside trying to catch a cab.

**CATH:** Buildings sway. Thick at the top.

**RICH:** Two jammed fingers, slammed against a subway turnstile.

**CATH:** Even my bra feels confining.

**RICH:** Twice in three hours, elbow smack, lamp post and mailbox, tingling to my fingers.

**CATH:** Why didn't anyone tell me?

**RICH:** I can't say I wasn't warned.

**CATH:** Why wasn't I told?

**JACKIE:** (*Interrupting, intrusive, but quietly so.*) Paint on canvas.

**RICH:** (*Suddenly notices her.*) No. It's how we felt, how it was for us.

**JACKIE:** Paint on canvas, Richard. Nothing more.

**RICH:** No.

*(Sudden shift.)*

**JACKIE:** O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended you and I detest all my sins, because I dread the loss of heaven and the pains of hell, but most of all because they offend you, my God, who are all good and deserving of all my love I firmly resolve, with the help of your grace, to confess my sins, to do penance and to amend my life.

*(Lights quickly down on her. Sudden shift back.)*

**SECOND CONVERSATION**

**RICH:** So.

**CATH:** Right.

**RICH:** It wasn't my fault. It's important that we all understand that.

**CATH:** Of course.

*(Pause.)*

The first three weeks or so were a bit complicated.

**RICH:** I'd brought a date to Bets' opening, and she was someone from whom it was sometimes difficult to extricate myself.

**CATH:** It was complicated.

**RICH:** It was. We wanted to see each other.

**CATH:** We really did.

**RICH:** I knew there was something about you. More than just background and shared interests.

**CATH:** Exactly.

**RICH:** Though those were, of course, important. A relationship needs to be built upon a foundation of compatibilities and harmonious value systems.

**CATH:** I agree. <sup>4</sup>[That's also not enough, though, of course].

**RICH:** [No, I didn't mean to imply that it was].

**CATH:** [I know you didn't.] And honesty. Absolute honesty.

**RICH:** Yes. Complete trust and honesty. But also a certain...magic. Don't you think?

**CATH:** Oh, there was definite magic. Chemistry.

**RICH:** Right. Attraction.

**CATH:** Well. We had all that. For quite awhile.

**RICH:** Yes indeed. We need to remember that, you know. What we had and what it meant.

**CATH:** There's been enough water under the bridge, I think.

**RICH:** Surely so. By now. Anyway. A lot of what we had going, and we really did have something going, but a lot of it, I think, has to do with background.

**CATH:** We were both virgins in high school, and even beyond high school.

**RICH:** We attended church regularly. We competed in science fair projects, and were involved with student government.

**CATH:** I was on the debate team.

**RICH:** I swam, and played football. So when we met, there was that common ground.

**CATH:** Different high schools, of course. Different states, even.

**RICH:** But common ground nonetheless.

**CATH:** Small town kids, exactly.

**RICH:** And I had a date from whom it was difficult, sometimes, to extricate myself, but I did finally succeed.

**CATH:** With my help.

**RICH:** With your help. Over a period of about three weeks.

**CATH:** I had a job in advertising. I was an associate account manager.

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<sup>4</sup>These bracketed lines should have a different quality, sotto voce, private.

**RICH:** I worked for a company that designed web pages.

**CATH:** I liked that about him. I've always been attracted to creative people.

**RICH:** And I've always been attracted to practical people.

**CATH:** And fear. Bordering on panic. Fear.

*(Pause.)*

**RICH:** But that's not...why do we have to dwell on...can we keep it positive, please, for once—

**CATH:** No. I think we should—

**RICH:** Here we were. In this city. Together, with shared values and backgrounds, united by, okay, fear, but also hope.

**CATH:** And sexual compatibility.

**RICH:** *(Pause.)* I'd rather not dwell on—

**CATH:** I think it would be wrong of us to...discount—

**RICH:** I wasn't tryin...Do you realize how that sounds?

**CATH:** And there you go again, like you're trying to *deny*—

**RICH:** I'm not trying to *deny* anything, I just think that there's a classy way, a classier way to put things and this —

**CATH:** There was a certain level of animal attraction from the outset, born of our shared feelings of...of...and it doesn't—

**RICH:** Whatever. Okay? Have it your way.

**CATH:** You want to pretend that we never—?

**RICH:** I'm not trying to deny... Okay, look, this is very simple. Let's go back to basics, not complicate things. It's really very simple.

**CATH:** Yes, it is.

**RICH:** We were a couple.

**CATH:** In every sense of coupleness, or couplehood.

**RICH:** Keep it simple. We were a couple. And we meant a great deal to each other.

**CATH:** We did.

**RICH:** And we saw a great deal of each other. For weeks. Months.

**CATH:** We were An Item.

**RICH:** Yeah.

**CATH:** *(Sudden intensity.)* And we never hurt anyone, we were *meant* for each other, we were *meant* to be together, it was *beautiful* what we had, and if anyone got hurt it wasn't us, our fault... it wasn't, we wouldn't hurt a ...

*(Catches herself.)*

[Sorry].

**RICH:** [It's okay.]

**CATH:** I'm sorry. You must think I'm a complete...

*(Pause.)*

**RICH:** It's okay.

**CATH:** Anyway, it was only a few weeks after Rich moved in with me, that we met Justin and Celeste.

**RICH:** They lived down one flight down from us.

**CATH:** They were so...everything we weren't.

**JUSTIN:** Welcome all, come on in! Let me get your shoes.

**CELESTE:** Love what you've done with your hair, Cath. So winsome.

**JUSTIN:** I hope you like these hors d'oeuvres.

**CELESTE:** Fresh crab's a little out of season, but Justin found this wonderful place.

**JUSTIN:** Cocktails?

**CATH:** Confidence. They were just so confident.

**JUSTIN:** So he comes up to me, and his eyes are just dancing. He's on something, right? And he's got a knife.

Well, of course, I wasn't about to hand him my wallet. Who did he think he was dealing with, anyway? And so I said to him, I'll make you a deal, buddy. Put down the knife, walk away, I'll pretend this never happened.

**CATH:** What did he say?

**JUSTIN:** He gave me this look, sort of confused, like that's not what's supposed to happen. I mean, it's understood, right? You hold someone up, he gives you his wallet. There's an etiquette here, which I was ignoring. Finally, he just shrugged. And walked away.

**CATH:** That's amazing.

**JUSTIN:** No big deal. Hey, you haven't even started your paté.

**CELESTE:** Justin, you're terrible. Your stories.

**JUSTIN:** Just trying to tell 'em something.

**CATH:** I don't know if I could do that.

**JUSTIN:** Do what?

**CATH:** A guy with a knife. And to...bluff my way out of it.

**JUSTIN:** What, because you're a chick?

**CATH:** No. Well, maybe, in part.

**JUSTIN:** It doesn't matter. You could do it. What does he know, you could be packing.

**CATH:** Packing. . . ?

**JUSTIN:** Heat. You know.

**CATH:** I don't. . . if I could...

**JUSTIN:** Sure you could. It's a matter of attitude.

**CELESTE:** Your stories, Justin. The big bad gunslinger.

*(She laughs affectionately.)*

**JUSTIN:** Okay. Whatever, maybe I'm a little...I mean, it's not that dangerous, the city, movies, TV make it sound like, you know. A place fulla wise guys, guys on the make, hustlers. Tony Soprano in every storefront. It's just a place.

**CELESTE:** It's really very safe.

**JUSTIN:** But. You guys aren't from here. So. Basic survival lessons. You live in the city, you have to think like the city thinks, breathe like the city breathes. You're new. You'll learn.

**CATH:** They became our closest friends.

**JUSTIN:** Here's the thing. Rich, Cath. We feel really close to you guys.

**CELESTE:** We do. And we don't want you to think less of us.

**JUSTIN:** And we've really thought about this. Whether or not to tell you.

**CELESTE:** There's something about you two. A kind of innocence.

**JUSTIN:** Makes us just wanna hug you both, protect you.

**CELESTE:** What am I saying, though. Of course you'll understand. It's foolish of us to misjudge you.

**JUSTIN:** Here's the thing. See, we're married.

**CATH:** All right...

**RICH:** Really, we did assume that...

**CATH:** Living in the same apartment...

**JUSTIN:** No, see, you don't get it. Not to each other, that's the thing.

**CELESTE:** Ben is...well, it's difficult with Ben. He keeps hoping we'll reconcile, and I feel so protective of him. He's like you two, really. Innocent, and hurting. I just can't bring myself to...cut off all hope for the poor man.

**JUSTIN:** And my wife, well, fuhgeddaboutit. Tam met Leah and I was out of the picture. But she can't get on Leah's insurance; no recognition of domestic partner stuff in this state, thank you very much. So she stays on my insurance, until she gets a job with decent bennies, which could be awhile. So we're still married.

**CELESTE:** And Ben and I...well, of course we can't just end things completely.

**JUSTIN:** Tuesdays and Thursdays, she's with him. I'm fine with it. And Tam and I have had a couple of auld lang synes ourselves, if you get my drift. You'd be amazed what you can learn from a dyke.

**CELESTE:** Justin.

**JUSTIN:** That's what she calls herself.

**CELESTE:** We have guests.

*(Notices CATH's face.)*

I'm so sorry. I can see it in your faces. This is a shock to you.

*(Pause.)*

**RICH:** No, of course not.

**CATH:** Not in the slightest.

**RICH:** Really, we're not as naive as you seem to think we—

**CATH:** We're friends. That's all that matters.

**RICH:** Seem to think we just...fell off the turnip truck, or—

**CATH:** We're friends.

**RICH:** Of course. I feel the same way.

**CATH:** And we did.

**RICH:** That's really true. It was only...unsettling...for a few moments. Just initially.

**CATH:** You have to understand. Rich and I, we aren't from the city. We're from...we were both virgins in high school, for instance.

**RICH:** But we really liked Justin and Celeste. Their lifestyle...choices...didn't matter.

**CATH:** If we went around judging everyone whose lifestyle was different from our own...

**RICH:** That's exactly the point.

**CATH:** Besides. They liked us. We were friends.

**RICH:** Right. Friends.

**CATH:** And then, one day, we stopped by, no, he stopped by, Justin did, alone.

**RICH:** It was a Tuesday.

**CATH:** That's right.

**RICH:** And he really took us into his confidence.

**CATH:** Justin? Would you like something? White wine? A beer?

**JUSTIN:** A beer'd be great. Thanks.

**CATH:** It's great to have you over.

**JUSTIN:** Tuesdays are tough.

**CATH:** And I'm sure it was true. For all his sophistication, I'm sure Tuesdays were difficult for him.

**JUSTIN:** Anyway, listen. Here's the thing. I was gonna, you know, lead up to it subtly, but that's not really my style. Let me just lay it out for you, see what you think. Understand: we're still friends, no matter what you say.

**CATH:** It was a startup.

**JUSTIN:** See, I've got an interest memo from the CEO of Westridge, that's ten million minimum in sales, the first year alone. And two VCs, I'm not kidding, pledged up to fifteen, nine and six, cover startup costs. But. Just initially. I'm talking nothing more than rental for office space, some broad to answer phones. Deposits. So when VCs come callin', we've got something to show em, something more than some guy's walkup living room. You hear me? A front desk, a PC, maybe a Leroy Neiman print on the wall. Those kinds of costs. So. I'm talkin' to a few people, friends. Ground floor. I'm talking a guaranteed return on your investment one thousand percent plus.

**CATH:** Wow.

*(Pause.)*

Rich?

**RICH:** Gosh.

*(To audience.)*

Nothing damages a friendship quicker than lending someone money.

**CATH:** I think we were both pretty leery.

**RICH:** I told him, we'd have to think about it, of course. But I did have some savings.

**CATH:** Besides, this was Justin.

**RICH:** And Celeste. Our new best friends.

**CATH:** Our friends.

**RICH:** And I did have some savings. Some.

**CATH:** The risks were low, the potential returns high.

**RICH:** I like to think we behaved prudently.

**CATH:** I still think so.

*(They both nod.)*

## **SECOND INTERLUDE**

**RICH:** And we are bound, and we stand before the altar.

**CATH:** And we see the moonsign necklace of the shaman.

**RICH:** Onyx and jade and obsidian.

**CATH:** And we stare down.

**RICH:** See the dark red stain in the earth by the altar. And the elders of the tribe await.

**CATH:** Keening dithyrambs herald the sacrifice.

**RICH:** The shrieking chorus invoking ancient gods.

**CATH:** We're warned. Of paths to hunt and to avoid.

**RICH:** Rites of fertility and purification.

**CATH:** When stars and sun speak and what they tell the priests.

**RICH:** And all the time, they shimmer above us, shining like silver.

**CATH:** They descend from the heavens. Their hands are stretched out.

**RICH:** Light all around them. Glinting silver cutting through the dusk.

**CATH:** Bow to them.

**RICH:** Genuflect, bow.

**CATH:** The altar, stained with the blood of offerings.

**RICH:** Clasp our hands. Can it be true?

**CATH:** Their hands shining through the gloom. Bow to them. Bow.

**RICH:** Light palm pressure on my brow. Mumbled words. A benediction.

**CATH:** Our blessing. And now we stand before the altar. Initiates.

**RICH:** Wash-ed new by their consecration.

**CATH:** Their light bathes us. Gloom and twilight dispelled.

**RICH:** Born anew in their light.

**JACKIE:** Born! That's wonderful, you were born anew. My God.

**RICH:** We were, that's how it felt.

**JACKIE:** (*Shakes her head violently.*) Remember, O most loving Virgin Mary, that never was known that anyone who fled to your protection, implored your help, or your intercession was left unaided. Inspired with this confidence, I turn to you, O Virgins of virgins, Mother. To you I come, before you I stand, sinful and sorrowful. O Mother of the Word Incarnate do not despise my petition, but in your mercy hear me and answer me. Amen.

*(Short pause.)*

Remember, O most loving Mary ever Virgin.

**PRIEST:** Bless you, my daughter.

**JACKIE:** Bless me, my father.

**PRIEST:** You must have finished your penance by now.

**JACKIE:** No. No.

**PRIEST:** Your sin is forgiven. I'm sure of it.

**JACKIE:** It can't be, it can't ever be, never on this earth.

**PRIEST:** I'm concerned about you.

**JACKIE:** You heard my confession. You know what I did.

**PRIEST:** I did hear your—

**JACKIE:** So you know. Remember, O most loving Mary ever Virgin—

**PRIEST:** Would it help you if I heard it again? Would that help you?

**JACKIE:** (*A pause.*) Yes. Please, yes.



**PRIEST:** Come with me.

***THIRD CONVERSATION***

**RICH:** So. Where were we?

**CATH:** Justin and Celeste. Well, Justin.

**RICH:** And his investment opportunity.

**CATH:** Which we...well, we did it. Handed over our savings.

**RICH:** Both of our savings.

**CATH:** Rainy day money.

**RICH:** Just in case money.

**CATH:** That was hard.

**RICH:** But of course, we did the right thing. We knew we had.

**CATH:** Of course.

**RICH:** And we grew closer.

**CATH:** We'd be at a party. Or just home, watching a movie we'd rented.

**RICH:** And we'd look at each other. And maybe just smile.

**CATH:** Sharing a smile.

**RICH:** Knowing we were together. Knowing things were as they should be, that everything was right between us.

**CATH:** We didn't even have to talk, some of the time. A look, and then he'd take my hand, and pull me out of the chair. And we'd kiss. Stroll into the bedroom.

**RICH:** I knew what you were thinking, even.

**CATH:** Me too.

**RICH:** And we'd talk.

**CATH:** And fight. Over the stupidest things.

*(Instant tone shift, they're in the past, and furious.)*

**RICH:** Okay, look, I like having my CDs in a certain order.

**CATH:** That's just OCD, Rich.

**RICH:** Say I'm in the mood for John Coltrane. You know? And that mood could pass. Quickly. And if I have to search through the entire stack of CDs to find John Coltrane, I absolutely guarandamntee you that the John Coltrane mood will be long long gone.

**CATH:** You've got maybe every John Coltrane CD ever. Buddy Rich, Miles Davis, Herbie Hancock—

**RICH:** A specific one, is what I'm saying, a particular session, sometimes you're in the kind of mood where only that will—

**CATH:** You are so full of shit.

**RICH:** Oh. I am. Great. I'm full of shit, because I happen to like a certain order, a certain—

**CATH:** ONE CD, that's all I did, take out ONE PAULA COLE CD, which *I own*, and and and move it—

**RICH:** You put it *after* Coltrane.

**CATH:** They both start with C!

**RICH:** Cole comes *before* Coltrane alphabetic—

**CATH:** You *are* a lunatic.

**RICH:** Cole comes *before*—

**CATH:** Fine fine fine, I'll put my CDs over there, and you can put yours in nice alphabetical—

**RICH:** Look at this! You even put *Dakar* BEFORE *Blue Train*. And *First Meditations* after—

**CATH:** You need me, I'll be at the laundromat.

**RICH:** Come back here, we need to resolve—

**CATH:** I'm outta here.

**RICH:** You can't just walk out—

**CATH:** Watch me.

[And everything's suddenly fine again.]

**RICH:** Okay, so we had our little squabbles.

**CATH:** Spats. Really. Tiffs.

**RICH:** We were lovers. And lovers quarrel.

**CATH:** And then, make up.

**RICH:** And you were just so adorable when you get mad.

**CATH:** That is so sexist.

**RICH:** You'd have this little frizz of hair that would, you know, it would come down on your forehead. And you'd sort of toss it back, flip your head back a couple of times first, and then you'd get really irritated and sweep it back with your hand.

**CATH:** (*Grinning.*) You can be such a pig.

**RICH:** And you'd wear my tee shirts. Way too big for you, and you looked so cute.

**CATH:** You make me sound like Doris Day.

**RICH:** Well, I just...we really had something.

**CATH:** Yeah. We did.

**RICH:** And we'd spoon in bed together, Sunday mornings, the Times all spread out over the comforter.

**CATH:** And you'd take the book review. Which you know I love.

**RICH:** And we'd watch news shows together. McNeil Lehrer.

**CATH:** And share an espresso.

**RICH:** Sweet times.

**CATH:** Yeah.

**RICH:** Sweet.

(*He sighs.*)

And then it would come up again.

**CATH:** (*Sudden transition.*) What are you gonna do?

**RICH:** I don't know.

**CATH:** Look at this, did you see this?

**RICH:** I saw it.

**CATH:** All this...do you SEE what she WROTE?

**RICH:** I read it.

**CATH:** I mean, this is blackmail. This is, like, moral and spiritual blackmail.

**RICH:** I know.

**CATH:** And you are letting her do this to you.

**RICH:** Well...I mean, what am I supposed to—

**CATH:** You can...stand up to her.

**RICH:** Okay, so, I stand up to her, and I say...

**CATH:** What, how hard is this, you say: leave me alone, leave her alone, me, leave us both alone, that's what you say.

**RICH:** I can't, I just...how can I?

**CATH:** You are not going to wuss out on me.

**RICH:** Wuss out. Who says anything about—?

**CATH:** Rich, this is serious. She's destructive. She is, she's trying to damage, to wreck—

**RICH:** I know all that.

**CATH:** She's destructive.

**RICH:** I know.

**CATH:** Rich, this is not our fault, this is not your fault. She made choices. She needs to live with the consequences of those—

**RICH:** It's my fault, Cath. You can't just pretend that—

**CATH:** It is NOT your—

**RICH:** It is, of course it is. I mean...I was there. Right? I mean, it's my...I was part of the whole.

**CATH:** She's a threat. She's trying to destroy us. That selfish little bitch is only thinking of her own—

**RICH:** I really wish you wouldn't call her that.

*(Pause.)*

I really wish you wouldn't.

**CATH:** You do not talk to me that way.

**RICH:** I'm trying to see this from both sides.

**CATH:** How dare you *presume* to speak to me that way.

**RICH:** I'm sorry, I just—

**CATH:** I will call her whatever I feel like calling her.

**RICH:** I know, I meant—

**CATH:** You do not *correct* me.

**RICH:** I'm trying to see her side.

**CATH:** She doesn't have a side, Rich. Not if you want...not if WE mean anything. She doesn't *get* a side.

**RICH:** I...I—

**CATH:** I hate her.

**RICH:** I know you do.

**CATH:** I wish she were dead. Honest to God. I wish a bus would...I think of her, smashed on the pavement. I would love that.

**RICH:** Cath, she...there was a time when she, meant—

**CATH:** You're taking her side. That vicious, spiteful little bitch and you're taking her side.

**RICH:** I'm not.

**CATH:** You'd better not be.

**RICH:** No.

**CATH:** You better choose, then. The bitch or me. You better make a choice. You give in to her...this note shit. This whole Godinvoking guilt trip she's on. You even think of...we're finished.

**RICH:** I know that too.

**CATH:** If we're not already finished. If she hasn't already—

**RICH:** No. We're together. My commitment is to you.

**CATH:** Completely?

**RICH:** Completely.

*(Pause.)*

I hate her too.

**CATH:** *(Pause.)* All right then.

**RICH:** But those moments were really few and far between.

**CATH:** Oh, yeah. Basically, we were doing great.

**RICH:** Absolutely.

**CATH:** Doing great.

*(Pause.)*

**RICH:** She was someone who once...meant a lot to—

**CATH:** Don't.

**RICH:** No.

*(A pause.)*

But she *was*, actually, someone who—

**CATH:** No.

**RICH:** *(Pause.)* She was someone...from whom it was, sometimes, difficult, to extricate oneself.

*(He looks at CATH for approval. She nods.)*

My date. At the gallery. When Cath and I met.

**JACKIE:** *(Looks around at paintings, looking hunted.)* I don't get any of this.

**JEROME:** Hello there.

*(JACKIE ignores him.)*

Hi.

**JACKIE:** I'm with someone.

**JEROME:** So am I.

*(Making conversation.)*

Remarkable, aren't they?

**JACKIE:** Paint. On canvas.

**JEROME:** Quite so.

*(Holds out his hand.)*

Jerome.

**JACKIE:** *(Ignores him.)* I don't get it. I'm not against paintings, I like art, I just want them to look like something.

**JEROME:** You're a critic.

**JACKIE:** I'm with someone.

**JEROME:** Then that someone is very fortunate.

**JACKIE:** What?

**JEROME:** To be with someone so obviously au courant.

*(She looks at him, puzzled. He explains.)*

Paint on canvas.

**JACKIE:** That's all it is.

**JEROME:** Precisely. An experiment in form.

*(Gestures out.)*

Look at them.

**JACKIE:** At who?

**JEROME:** Buyers. Parvenus. Seeking some kind of content, meaning. A label. Bets' work is decoration, nothing more. I can say that, and I'm sleeping with her.

**JACKIE:** Who are you?

**JEROME:** Jerome, as I said.

*(Looks at her critically.)*

And you're with someone. Who?

**JACKIE:** *(She points.)* Him.

**JEROME:** And how delightful. The peasant conversing with my little Bets.

**JACKIE:** Richard. His name is Richard.

**JEROME:** Of course it is. Can I get you a drink?

**JACKIE:** No.

**JEROME:** Perhaps in a bit, then.

**JACKIE:** *(Shaking her head.)* Look, I don't want to do this.

**JEROME:** Converse?

**JACKIE:** Any of it. Be here, talk to people like you. Have a drink. Talk about paintings. No.

**JEROME:** It is dreadful. I quite agree. We could find a place. A coffee shop. Richard could join us.

**JACKIE:** Don't...agree with me.

**JEROME:** Or not, as you prefer.

**JACKIE:** Leave me alone.

*(JEROME smiles.)*

Really. Just go, okay.

*(He stays, amused. She shakes her head in disgust. Looks over.)*

Who's he with now?

**JEROME:** That tedious high school friend of Bets. I believe her name is Kate, or Cath, or something equally middle American. From one of those states that begins with a vowel.

**JACKIE:** What are you talking about?

**JEROME:** Paint on canvas.

**JACKIE:** Why is he talking to her? I want to leave.

**JEROME:** It's an opening. You're supposed to meet and mingle.

**JACKIE:** I don't want to.

**JEROME:** No one does. That's the appeal.

**JACKIE:** I don't get it.

**JEROME:** What's to get? Take any sort of market. Grocery stores; that's mundane enough. Do you like them?

No. Nor do I. Shopping carts, with wobbling wheels. Traipsing up and down corridors, looking for where they keep the cheeses. But one must from time to time. Well, this is how one sells paintings.

**JACKIE:** I know that.

**JEROME:** Of course you do. I do apologize; I lapse into the worst banalities periodically.

**JACKIE:** I don't want to buy a painting. I don't want Richard to buy a painting. I don't want to go...out.

**JEROME:** No. Quite so.

**JACKIE:** Stop agreeing with me!

**JEROME:** Never again.

*(Looks around.)*

I see your date returning. I'd best get back to mine. It was a pleasure meeting you, Ms. Paint on Canvas.

**JACKIE:** Go away.

*(RICH returns.)*

Richard, let's get out of here.

**RICH:** Yes. Okay. In just a sec.

**JACKIE:** I hate this, I hate talking to these people, why did we come?

**RICH:** It's kind of exciting, though, isn't it?

**JACKIE:** It has nothing to do with us.

**RICH:** No.

*(Pensively.)*

No, I suppose not.

**JACKIE:** You got that woman's phone number.

**RICH:** Which woman?

**JACKIE:** That one. Talking to the artist woman.

**RICH:** Cath. Talking to Bets.

**JACKIE:** You got her phone number.

**RICH:** Uh. Potential client. I gave her my business card. They're redesigning their web page.

**JACKIE:** I didn't see you give her your business card.

**RICH:** Jackie, stop it. This was fun. And the boss has been asking us to be a bit more proactive. From a sales standpoint.

**JACKIE:** I want to go.

**RICH:** Yeah. Okay.

**CATH:** Afterwards, Jerome told us all about her.

**RICH:** I remember that. I don't think he knew that she and I...

**CATH:** He knew.

**RICH:** No, I don't think he—

**CATH:** Trust me. Jerome knew.

**RICH:** Well, maybe.

**CATH:** And he was so polite, of course.

**RICH:** Jerome is never polite.

**CATH:** Courteous.

**RICH:** I'll give you that. He can be so amazingly rude, and always with such impeccable courtesy.

**CATH:** We don't like Jerome.

**RICH:** But the thing is, there he is. Telling us all about this weird neurotic he met at Bets' opening. And it was Jackie.

**CATH:** He was right too. Weird neurotic.

**RICH:** Well. She had cause.

*(Pause.)*

**CATH:** You're taking her side again.

**RICH:** Sorry. I suppose I am.

*(Pause.)*

### ***THIRD INTERLUDE***

**CATH:** Void. Limbo. Cessation of thought.

**RICH:** I am me, I am aware of me. Cogito ergo. Sum. I know I am and even when that me that knows me hurts, the fact that I'm aware of pain helps ease it.

**CATH:** Horrifying. Not being. Horror.

**RICH:** Think of awareness suspended. No. Ended. No.

**CATH:** Blackness. Not continuing.

**RICH:** The emptiness yawning ahead of me. Void. Limbo.

**CATH:** I touch, I feel, I taste, I know it is I who touch and taste.

**RICH:** Imagine it ending. No more. Anything. Not even an awareness of endingness.

**CATH:** Panic, searching. Pull back from the edge.

**RICH:** Anything's better than nothing. Anyone's better than me not existing.

**CATH:** Touch. Taste. Touch you, taste you.

**RICH:** Cling to your lifeline, back from the edge.

**CATH:** One day it will end. But not yet.

**RICH:** Not while I still can touch. Taste.

**CATH:** Grasp, grasp, cling.

**RICH:** I'm so alone. I need to not be alone.

**CATH:** I need. Therefore I am.

**RICH:** I want. I am.

**CATH:** Nothing. No, not to be born. Not to be faced.

**RICH:** I am. And nothing else matters.

***FOURTH CONVERSATION***

**CATH:** What really happened, what really and truly happened, is that we met. And we were together.

**RICH:** There was someone else, too.

**CATH:** But she didn't matter. Ultimately.

**RICH:** But there. She was there.

**CATH:** Not to me. Neurotic bitch. Jerome was right about her.

**RICH:** We don't like Jerome.

**CATH:** No. But sometimes he's right. She doesn't matter. To me.

**RICH:** To both of us. Still. She was there. Someone...from whom, it was difficult, at times, to extricate oneself. But I did. Finally. And that's what really happened.

***END ACT ONE***<sup>5</sup>

***21 pages in Act Two***

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<sup>5</sup> Or not. The show can be done with or without an intermission—if you decide to use one, here's where it fits.