

Scene 1

At rise: The lights come up on an empty living room. The room itself is well-kept and comfortably furnished in an unremarkable middle-class style. There is a sofa, armchairs, end tables, etc., and a sideboard upstage C., which also serves as a bar. On the centre of the sideboard is a framed photograph of a young woman. Presently, the sound of someone descending a staircase is heard. Soon after, CHRISTINE slowly enters, carrying a medium-sized suitcase. She places the suitcase in the middle of the room and stares at it for some time. At last overcome with emotion, she drops to the floor, clutching the suitcase to her body and attempting to stifle her cries. Moments later the sound of someone entering through the front door is heard.

TOM
(off)

Hello?
(beat)
Hello?
(beat)
Anyone home?

CHRISTINE immediately attempts to regain her composure. She seats herself on the sofa, placing the suitcase by her side, and wipes her eyes with her hands. Moments later, TOM enters the room. CHRISTINE remains motionless.

TOM

Oh, you are here. Didn't you hear me?

TOM fixes himself a scotch from the bar on the sideboard.

TOM

Don't know why I said "anyone" come to think of it, since it could only be you.

(beat)

CHRISTINE

Quite.

(beat)

TOM

Yes, well it's um...just one of those things one says, I suppose.

TOM picks up his glass and begins to cross to CHRISTINE.

TOM

Funny how these habits sort of—

TOM suddenly he notices the suitcase. He stops in his tracks. There is a pause.

TOM

What's that?

(beat)

CHRISTINE

That?

(beat)

That is exactly what it looks like, Tom. It is a suitcase. Ceci est un valise.

TOM

Thank you for clarifying. And may I ask what it's doing there?

(beat)

CHRISTINE

Coming with me.

TOM

I rather gathered that. I meant...why?

CHRISTINE

Isn't it obvious?

TOM

Not necessarily. Why don't you try me?

CHRISTINE

What a waste of breath that would be.

TOM

Not if it changed your mind.

CHRISTINE

Let's not, shall we?

TOM

Why not?

CHRISTINE

Because there's nothing to say.

TOM

Well, if you didn't want to talk then why didn't you just go?

CHRISTINE

Because...

TOM

Why sit here waiting for me?

(beat)

CHRISTINE

Because I'm not the kind of person who runs away from their responsibilities, that's why.

TOM

No...just me, apparently.

CHRISTINE

I face things.

TOM

So if you're not running just yet, then let's talk.

(pause)

CHRISTINE

And what is it you want to talk about, exactly? The weather? The rising sea levels? The war in Afghanistan? *Your day?*

TOM

Us, of course.

CHRISTINE

And what on earth would we gain in doing that?

TOM

Well, for starters...how about some understanding.

CHRISTINE

How about we don't.

(beat)

TOM

Try...for me?

CHRISTINE

Best not to pick at scabs, don't you think?

(beat)

Besides...I haven't the will.

TOM

Yes...that's more to the point, isn't it? That's what's at the root of all this. You've let it beat you. You've admitted defeat.

CHRISTINE

Oh, what the hell do you expect?

TOM

Expect? I expect you to fight, that's what I expect. I don't expect you to just roll over and play dead.

CHRISTINE

For Christ's sake, Tom, don't you understand, I already *am* dead!

TOM

Oh, stop being so ridiculous! And stop talking like that. Honestly, I can't...I don't understand you. It's as if you've...cloaked yourself in defeatism. It's like a...a shroud you've wrapped yourself in.

(beat)

And if you're so bloody good at facing up to things, then it's about time you acknowledged that you've got the rest of your life ahead of you and you can't go through it playing the perpetual bloody victim all the time.

(pause)

CHRISTINE

Can't I? So what would you say I am, then?

TOM

What?

CHRISTINE

What am I, if not a victim?

TOM

You're someone who has a choice. A choice between giving in to the vagaries of life or fighting back and trying to make something of it.

CHRISTINE

"The vagaries of life"? Is that what you're calling it now?

TOM

I didn't mean it—

CHRISTINE

My God, it didn't take you long to trivialise it down to something bite-size and chewable, did it?

TOM

All I meant was—

CHRISTINE

Oh, I know exactly what you meant. But I'm sorry, I'm afraid I can't hide the ugly truth behind pat phrases and quaint adages. Good God, next you'll be telling me "When life hands you lemons..."

TOM

Now you're being flippant.

CHRISTINE

Me?

TOM

Yes. You know damn well what I was saying. And since you bring it up, I'm not asking you to make lemonade, I'm asking you to stop chewing on them.

CHRISTINE

Oh, very clever. Very...pithy.

TOM

Very bitter.

CHRISTINE

Yes...that's right, I am bitter, Tom. I'm very bitter. And I make apologies for it. Why would I when I have every reason in the world for feeling bitter?

(beat)

TOM

You don't have to be.

CHRISTINE

I know I don't *have* to be. No one's born bitter. It's something acquired over time. It's one of the benefits of experience.

(beat)

TOM

Look, all I'm asking you to...you just need to pull yourself up out of this. To make something of what's left.

CHRISTINE

And what might that be? What exactly do we have left now?

(beat)

TOM

Us.

CHRISTINE

Ah...that word again.

(beat)

CHRISTINE (Cont'd)

The problem is...there's a you and a there's a me, but I don't believe that there is an "us" anymore.

TOM

Of course there is. There is if you want there to be...if you're willing to fight for it.

CHRISTINE

Goodness, all of this fighting. Where do you get the energy?

TOM

Figure of speech.

CHRISTINE

Yes, well...figuratively speaking, I've hung up my gloves. The fight's over.

TOM

It's not, I'm afraid. It's just beginning.

CHRISTINE

It is for me.

TOM

But...that's because you can't get out of your own way long enough to even think straight. You've let this...it's locked you down...it's like you're...you're paralyzed. How can you possibly know how you feel about us – about me – when you won't even allow yourself to feel?

CHRISTINE

I sometimes wonder if there ever was an "us."

TOM

Oh, for God's sake!

CHRISTINE

In the beginning, I suppose. But looking back...

TOM

Always looking back.

CHRISTINE

What was it?

(beat)

What was it really?

(pause)

TOM

I thought it was love.

CHRISTINE

Yes, exactly. I'm sure I did, too.

TOM

It was for me.

CHRISTINE

But I wonder now if it was really just...a close approximation?

TOM

A what?

CHRISTINE

Because it's all so new, isn't it, when you're young? So how are you supposed to know?

TOM

You don't *know* it, you feel it.

CHRISTINE

Yes, but how do you know what you're you feeling? How do you know if it's the real thing or...or just something close to it? How do you know the difference? I mean, you're young and everything's new, and...then one day you meet someone and you find yourselves attracted to each other, and you share things in common and you make each other laugh and feel special and important in ways you'd never felt before, and it's all rather like being a little drunk. And while it's all still heady and intoxicating, you find yourselves making all kinds of plans and commitments for the future, and you're so caught up in it all that you don't even notice the buzz wearing off. It all becomes a blur of years and events, of birthdays and anniversaries, highs and lows...a lifetime. And you never stop to re-examine it...not really. Because it's done. And you're scared to. So you don't.

(beat)

Not until something...

(pause)

TOM

So...this was all a great mistake, was it?

CHRISTINE

I'm...I'm not saying that.

TOM

Sure as hell sounded like it.

CHRISTINE

No, it's not...I'm not...that's not what I meant.

TOM

Then what?

CHRISTINE

Just that...perhaps that's how it is for everyone. Perhaps that's all it is. We all get drunk on emotion and stagger down some path together thinking we've found love, when all along it was just...a close approximation.

(beat)

TOM

Even if you were right – and I'm not saying you are – but even if that is all it is...then surely that's the best you can hope for, isn't it – to get that close?

CHRISTINE

Yes...I suppose it is.

(beat)

Back to your lemons.

TOM

Oh, for Christ's sake, Christine, you're talking like some lovelorn bloody teenager. Of course the sparks don't last. They never do – not for anything. It's what's left behind, that's important. Two people building a life together, making something meaningful out of it all.

(beat)

CHRISTINE

Two.

(beat)

TOM

Now.

(beat)

CHRISTINE

Yes.

(pause)

TOM

I can't bring her back, Christine.

CHRISTINE

Oh stop it, will you? Stop it with these stupid bloody platitudes! Stop trying to sound like you're the one who's being rational and realistic when we both know nothing could be further from the truth.

TOM

Of course I am.

CHRISTINE

You're not! You are not! You know damn well you're not!

TOM

(calmly)

Christine, I am dealing with this in the only healthy way that a person can.

CHRISTINE

(incredulous)

Healthy? *Healthy*? What in God's name is *healthy* about any of this? There is no *cure* for this. It's all a fucking cancer!

(pause)

TOM

Susan's life is over. Ours are not. The only *healthy* way for us to move forward from this is to accept what has happened, to forgive what has happened, and to move on.

CHRISTINE

Ah, yes...and *there* it is. There's that great, lumbering pachyderm that follows us around from room to room, the one's that's pushing me out of my own home, and the one that's blocking my view even as we speak.

TOM

It's just a word.

CHRISTINE

If only it were.

(beat)

CHRISTINE (Cont'd)

Instead it's everything.

(pause)

TOM

I've told you before, it's the only way.

CHRISTINE

It's your way. And it's a million miles from mine.

TOM

Is this how you want to be for the rest of your life...broken?

CHRISTINE

I don't have a choice.

TOM

Of course you damn well do!

CHRISTINE

I don't. It was taken away from me. He took it...on that day. And now I'm forever changed. And it doesn't matter what you say or what I do or how many years go by, it'll always be there...it's a permanent damage, Tom, whether you like it or not.

TOM

No one's saying it hasn't changed things – of course it's changed everything. But you've got to adapt to change. There is no other way.

CHRISTINE

Perhaps there isn't. But there is more than one way of adapting, and I don't know what the right way is, but it sure as hell isn't yours.

TOM

There is nothing wrong in forgiveness.

CHRISTINE rises from the sofa and erupts with sudden fury.

CHRISTINE

There is when you're giving it to the man who murdered your own child!

(pause)