

# ACT ONE

## SCENE I

*(A SECOND FLOOR BED SITTING ROOM AT THE END OF THE EIGHTIES DURING THE MEMORIAL DAY HOLIDAY IN THE HISTORIC DISTRICT OF NEW BEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS, OVERLOOKING THE FISH DOCK. PROPS USED: A TABLE, CHAIRS, SOME INDICATION OF A COOKING AREA, A WEIGHT, SOME STRING, A SHORT BENCH FOR THE GOAT MILKING SCENE. BEAR IN MIND WHEN READING THIS SCRIPT THAT STAGE DIRECTIONS HAVE BEEN KEPT TO A MINIMUM TO ALLOW THE ACTORS AND DIRECTOR THE FULLEST SCOPE.*

*THE CHARACTERS ARE ALL COLLEGE EDUCATED OR ABOVE. IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE, THEY ARE:*

*MOIRA, 38, BORN 1949 OF IRISH AND LATVIAN PARENTS, A COMPETENT, PRACTICAL WOMAN, WORKS HERE IN NEW BEDFORD FOR THE FISHERMEN, LONG TIME FRIEND OF ERIC. SHE ENTERED COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY IN THE FALL OF 1967 AND GRADUATED IN 1971.*

*GILBERT, 52, BORN 1935 OF RICH AND POWERFUL PARENTS, AN ENGLISHMAN, HER NEW FRIEND, A YACHTBROKER BASED IN BOSTON.*

*ERIC, 40, BORN 1947, VIETNAM WAR VETERAN, LIVING WITH HIS PARENTS IN PROVIDENCE, SCRAPING AN EXISTENCE MAKING SCRIMSHAW. HE ENTERED COLUMBIA IN THE FALL 1965 AND GRADUATED IN 1969.*

*AT RISE, GILBERT IS FOLLOWING MOIRA INTO THE ROOM.)*

Gilbert      So this is where you're having the party. For him? Why for him?

Moira        I've already told you....

Gilbert      Told me? You mean: sprung it on me.

Moira        Trouble is, Gilbert, you don't listen.

Gilbert      Oh yes, I do. I listened carefully in San Juan. Listened with shock and surprise.

Moira        If you'd listened earlier, you wouldn't have been so surprised.

Gilbert      Earlier? What do you mean? Earlier.

Moira        Before we left Antigua. Any time during the winter. Any time at all. Any damn time. You just paid no attention to anything but your job. What was I supposed to be doing all day? Sitting under a rock?

Gilbert      I didn't treat you that way.

Moira        It felt like it.

Gilbert      I'm sorry if it did. But you knew I had a job to do. That's why you rushed off with me at no notice flat. You could have stayed and thought about it if you were in two minds. Were you? Perhaps you were.

Moira        I didn't want to stay. You know that. But, I sure didn't expect this total absorption. You still haven't answered my question: what do you think I was doing all day, if I wasn't hibernating under a rock?

Gilbert      Well.....

Moira        Well?

Gilbert      Well. I suppose I don't know.

Moira        You don't damn well know. You ought to have known. I'm not just an adornment for your sex life.

Gilbert      Moira. That's a horrible thing to say.

Moira        No, it's not. It's the truth. You expected me to be available and dressed up and pretty and ready and willing to go out to dinner, to chat up your clients, be the perfect girl friend.

Gilbert      Since you say I haven't noticed, why not tell me what you were doing.

Moira About what?

Gilbert About this party for instance. Who IS Eric?

Moira a friend.

Gilbert a friend?

Moira don't keep repeating yourself.

Gilbert What sort of friend?

Moira From way back, from Columbia. You'd know if you'd listened.

Gilbert Yes. OK. You've established that. So, I didn't listen. Why won't you let me catch up?

*MOIRA I'VE GOT THINGS TO DO (LOOKS AROUND FOR GLASSES). ANYWAY YOU WEREN'T SUPPOSED TO BE HERE.*

Gilbert Got something to hide?

Moira No

Gilbert Then tell me about him

Moira No I won't. Not now. Later. Look, it was very nice of you to run me down from Logan, but you've got to get back for your dinner.

Gilbert You'd have been late if I hadn't.

Moira No I wouldn't. The bus would have got me here just fine.

Gilbert If you'd caught it.

Moira And if I hadn't, there's another and another and another. It's not your type of party anyway

Gilbert Besides you were sick - needed a ride.

Moira Sick? Hardly. Better now anyway.

Gilbert But, why did you have to have the party tonight?

Moira What's wrong with tonight?

Gilbert You knew I had to go to this Holiday Weekend brokers' dinner.

Moira That's precisely why. You go to your dinner, and I'll have my party. What would I have done in your apartment while you're out tonight? Sit under a rock waiting for you to come home?

Gilbert Why isn't it my type of party?

Moira it's the music that matters; it's what we talk about. Their working lives are very humdrum. Harry's the principal performer. He wears a business suit and sells washing machines in Sears during the day.

Gilbert He sings, or what?

Moira The usual. Sing to a guitar. His favourite is about a boy and a girl passionately in love but doomed to be apart because their parents are enemies. One's a rancher and the other rustles his cattle. A sort of Romeo and Juliet of the Frontier. For their final suicidal embrace, at the height of their passion, each impales the other on a dagger. They fall dying to the floor. Come to think of it, they must have made love standing up. Quite a feat with a dagger to the belly button.

*(GILBERT LOOKS AT HIS WATCH, GETTING BORED, NOT GETTING WHAT HE WANTS TO KNOW. THE DOORBELL RINGS)*

Moira That'll be the liquor. Could you go down and let them in?

*(GILBERT EXITS AND RETURNS A MOMENT OR TWO LATER WITH ERIC BUT NO LIQUOR)*

Eric I came early. I've got some good news.

Moira Oh, Eric, I thought you were the liquor.

Eric Disappointed?

Moira No, darling, not disappointed. Not at all disappointed. Just confused. You met Gilbert?

Eric Oh, that's what he looks like; but I wasn't expecting...

Moira Yes, I mean.... oh dear, what do I mean? Gilbert, this is Eric. Eric, this is Gilbert.

Gilbert It's nice to meet the bearer of good tidings. Good news, you said?

Eric It can wait.

Gilbert Would you like me to go out of the room? I could always go to the loo.

Moira Oh, don't be such a drag, Gilbert. You should be nice to Eric. It's his party.

Gilbert I don't understand.

Moira Well, I'm giving the party principally for Eric. Remember? He's..... he's going away, too.

Eric Am I? Oh yes, that's it.

Gilbert Got a new job?

Eric No, not exactly.

Gilbert What do you do right now?

Eric Well, I'm an artist, you know.

Gilbert Artist? No, I don't know. What's your line of art?

Eric Scrimshaw. Know what that is?

Gilbert Carvings on whalebone? I thought that was illegal.

Eric Well, sort of. But, there's so much scrimshaw about that my own activity is scarcely noticeable.

Gilbert You mean your livelihood depends upon breaking the law? Is that it?

Eric I'm not sure I look at it that way.

Moira You're supposed to be nice to my friends, Gilbert.

Gilbert So I am. I'm asking politely about his job. He can ask me about mine if he wants to. Just to oil the works, I'm a yachtbroker.

Eric Yes?

Gilbert Are your friends dumb, or something?

Moira I expect Eric doesn't know what a yachtbroker does. You might like to explain to him.

Gilbert Well, I work for myself. Just like you do, of course. We put yachts and people together. Not any old people, you know, because they're all pretty rich, and the yachts are run by professional skippers. One or two of them have helipads. What's your turnover, Eric?

Moira Oh.

Eric Turnover? What's that?

Gilbert I mean, how much money passes through your hands every year?

Eric Money? I don't know. I don't do it for money.

Gilbert Well, I do. Wouldn't be in the business otherwise. My turnover's in the millions, if you're interested, but I daresay you aren't. Art for art's sake, is it?

Moira Oh, really, Gilbert.

*GILBERT (TO MOIRA) JUST FEELING MY WAY, THAT'S ALL. (BACK TO ERIC) EVER TURN AN HONEST PENNY? NO OFFENCE MEANT, NOTHING PERSONAL, BUT YOU DID SAY YOUR SCRIMSHAW WAS ILLEGAL.*

Eric Yes I did. I mean, yes, it's illegal but that's a technicality. I don't go out there killing whales to get the whalebone.

Gilbert The judges say there wouldn't be robbers without fences.

Eric Well, I'm not a criminal, I'm just an artist. And, before that I was an officer in the Army. A very good officer, if you can believe that.

Gilbert Oh really? When.

Eric During Vietnam.

Gilbert That was a long time ago, wasn't it?

Eric It could have been yesterday.

Gilbert Why so?

Eric I was invalidated out.

Gilbert Saw active service? A hero, are we? I always like meeting heroes.

Eric No, as a matter of fact, I didn't.

Gilbert Didn't what?

Eric Didn't kill anyone. Spent a lot of time trying to, though.

Gilbert No? Then how did you get invalidated out? A bad case of piles?

Moira Oh, cut it out, Gilbert. Anyway, it's hemorrhoids in this country. And only women have them.

Gilbert Well, hæmorrhoids, then?

Eric No, fragging.

Gilbert Fragging? hæmorrhoids? piles? You're trying to confuse me.

Eric Fragging. Not very pleasant.

Gilbert Never heard of it. Something like bestiality? Bugging sheep is illegal where I come from but goats aren't, or maybe it's the other way round. Or, only in a churchyard. Come to think of it, goats are certainly illegal in this country. I know.

Moira Oh, we don't want to hear that goat story right now.

Eric I do.

Gilbert Well, it was just that my optometrist got run in by the cops for doing a nanny goat. *FRAGGING* her? At any rate, the cruiser thought he was. Filthy minded cops. He wasn't, of course.

Eric That's not very funny.

Moira No, it's not. I agree with Eric. And it wasn't fragging anyway.

Gilbert        Wasn't it? I thought you said it was. Anyway, we'll come back to fragging when I've finished my story

Moira         No, we won't. Gilbert, don't you think you'll be late for your dinner?

Gilbert        I was in the waiting room one day. The optometrist tore in late asking everyone if they knew how to milk a goat. He lived in the backwoods. He'd just bought a nanny in milk and she was going to get milk fever, because he couldn't milk her off. It so happens, I knew how to do it. So, I showed him.

Eric            I don't see what's wrong about that.

Gilbert        You think goats are milked like cows?

Eric            Yes, I suppose so. Three-legged stools, milk maids in bonnets. You see it all in the movies.

Gilbert        Armchair countryman?

Eric            I haven't lived on a farm, if that's what you mean.

Gilbert        Well, I have. I've done most things, and I can tell you cows and goats aren't milked the same way, and cows aren't milked the way you see them on the movies, either.

Moira         You're such a know-it-all, when you want to be, Gilbert.

Gilbert        Unlike the movies, you put your head in the side of the cow, and the cow leans, and you lean, and then the cow leans some more, and if you're not lucky, the cow wins. Goats are quite a different kettle of fish. Here, Moira, let me demonstrate.

Moira         I don't know what you're talking about.

Gilbert        Oh yes you do. Remember that party when I last told the story?

Moira         No, I don't.

*GILBERT        OH, SHE'S JUST BEING UNCOOPERATIVE. I'LL SHOW YOU WITHOUT MOIRA IF SHE HAS TO BE SO COY. YOU STRADDLE THE GOAT LIKE THIS. FACING AFT. (HE OPENS HIS LEGS AS THOUGH THERE WERE A GOAT BETWEEN THEM) THEN YOU PUT YOUR HANDS ROUND UNDER AND YOU GET HOLD OF THE UDDERS, NOT THE TEATS. YOU NEVER MILK A GOAT WITH THE TEATS. AND THEN YOU START MILKING. ONE, TWO, ONE, TWO, AND SO FORTH. A COW HAS FOUR TEATS. A GOAT ONLY HAS TWO UDDERS. RATHER LIKE HUMANS. (HE STRAIGHTENS UP, AND FACES ERIC)*

That's what the cruiser crew saw, and immediately jumped to the wrong conclusion. Something like that you got caught in? Fragging?

Eric            No.

Moira         Gilbert, in your wars, the officers shot their men from behind if they didn't go into action. In our war, the war that matters to us, the Vietnam War, the men bombed their officers, particularly the good ones.

Gilbert        Oh, you mean it was a kind of gruesome badge of approval?

Moira         No, I don't mean that. You're deliberately misunderstanding. The Vietnam War is a very serious business for us, even a quarter century later. A whole generation got marked by it. My generation.

Gilbert        All right then. What happened?

Moira         Eric's tent was blown up by a friendly grenade. A fragmentation grenade. Fraggged. He wasn't in it. A guest staying for the night was. A brother officer. Eric had to identify the body. From a scar on his finger. It showed up when he smoked a cigarette. White against the nicotine stain. There wasn't much else left to identify. The finger, I mean, not the cigarette.

Gilbert        Oh, I'm sorry.

Eric            I'm afraid I didn't have your stiff upper lip. I couldn't function after that.

Gilbert        No, I suppose not. Why did they do it? and who did it?

Eric            One of my men. They thought I was too tough. They didn't want to be killed the day before their tour of duty ended.

*(THE DOORBELL RINGS)*

Eric            I'll get it.

*(HE EXITS)*

Gilbert        A good looking young artist.

Moira         Are you going to go on?

Gilbert        Go on?

Moira         Being being so boring.

Gilbert        No, I wasn't.

Moira         What's got into you?

Gilbert        Nothing. I don't know what you're talking about.

Moira         Well now, if you can't see it, there it is. I'd better get on tidying the place up.

Gilbert        For your party for Eric?

Moira         For my party for Eric.

Gilbert        I didn't realise you were leading a double life.

Moira         I'm not.

Gilbert        Well, where does Eric fit in if he's not your other life?

Moira         He's just a friend. I told you.

Gilbert        But, look at it from my point of view. We spend the winter together in the Caribbean. Admittedly I'm working, working frantically. But I'm looking forward to a break - with you - in Boston - where we can settle in together. Try to have a baby again. Then, all of a sudden, I discover you're not looking forward to the same thing at all. You're thinking about Eric.

Moira         Only for tonight. Well..... I wish it were only for tonight. There could be a lot to go through.....

Gilbert        What do you mean? I'm getting more and more the impression that Eric's the reason you won't marry me.

*(ERIC BARGES THROUGH THE DOOR WHICH HAD SWUNG NEARLY SHUT. HE HAS AN UNOPENED CASE OF LIQUOR, AND VARIOUS ODDS AND ENDS ON TOP WHICH HE IS HOLDING DOWN WITH HIS CHIN. HE PUTS THEM DOWN)*

Eric            There.

Moira         Thank you, Eric.

Eric            Shall I start getting the bottles out? Where are the glasses?

*(SUITABLE ARRANGEMENTS ARE MADE TO COMPLETE THE DISPOSAL OF THE LIQUOR, POSSIBLY INVOLVING A FEW EXTRA LINES FOR ERIC AND MOIRA, TO BE FIGURED OUT BY THE DIRECTOR, DEPENDING ON HOW WELL HE WANTS ERIC TO KNOW HIS WAY ABOUT THE APARTMENT, AND MAKE GILBERT FEEL SUPERFLUOUS)*

Gilbert        I'd love to help you, but I've got to be in Boston tonight.

Moira         I'm sorry Gilbert. But, I suppose it's the best way.

Gilbert        Can I come and collect you tomorrow?

Moira         No. I've got my car here.

Gilbert I think I could combine it with some business just across the river in Fairhaven. Sure?

*MOIRA (SHE SHOUTS - HER ANGER IS NOT CALLED FOR BY GILBERT'S OFFER) NO, I DON'T WANT YOU HERE TOMORROW.*

*(SHE GOES OUT OF THE DOOR WITH HIM TO TAKE HIM TO HIS CAR. ERIC DOES SOME UNPACKING AND TIDYING, BUT MOIRA IS SOON BACK IN THE ROOM)*

Moira I'm sorry about his behavior, Eric.

Eric No problem.

Moira Well, it is for me.

Eric You want your new man to look good?

Moira Of course. But that's not what I meant. I sympathized with you.

Eric Then why not drop him, if he's such a bastard.

Moira Be reasonable.

Eric So he's such a paragon of all the virtues you can't drop him? Unlike the others?

Moira What makes you think Gilbert's so special to me? It bothers me that he has to enter into it. I'm just sorry for your sake that he was unpleasant to you.

Eric You're so kind to think of me, but you have to remember you just disappeared with him. You've never done that before.

Moira I've always seen other men.

Eric Yeah, I know, but it's always been different. The first thing you do is to introduce me.

Moira Well, I would have introduced Gilbert but he never came down here after the conference. The Law of the Sea conference. Remember? When I met him? He had to leave shortly afterwards for his charter business in the Caribbean.

*ERIC MAYBE. BUT I DON'T THINK SO. SOMETHING IS DIFFERENT THIS TIME. (PAUSE) YOU KNOW SOMETHING? - I NEVER KNEW WHY YOU KEPT ON COMING BACK TO ME.*

Moira Because I love you, darling.

Eric Oh, sure. So do I. But, level with me for once. Why?

Moira Well, you were just the sort of companion I needed. Close, very close, but not too close.

Eric That's great. But, it doesn't explain things.

Moira That's one of those mysteries.

Eric Please, Moira, this isn't the time to put me off. It really isn't.

Moira No, I suppose not. The short answer was that I could never get close to any man. You were the closest I ever got. Sex always got in the way.

Eric Sex? I thought that's why you regularly bolted.

Moira Yes, that's right. But, something always turned me off and I would start picking fights with the man.

Eric About sex?

Moira Oh no. That would have been too direct for me. No, I squabbled over other things down to how he ate his toast in the morning.

Eric It still doesn't make sense.

Moira Nor me. But I found a letter from my mother in a tin box my father left when he died last year.

Eric A letter? From your mother? Pretty formal to write to her husband?

Moira It was a very angry letter, threatening that she would take me away if he ever did it again.

Eric Did what?

Moira It didn't say.

*(THERE IS A LONG PAUSE, BROKEN SUDDENLY BY MOIRA)*

Moira I need someone to look after me when you're gone. I really do. It will be hard, very hard, after so many years. I need your blessing.

Eric My blessing? Same as with all the other ones?

Moira No. It's different this time.

Eric Different?

Moira Yes. I feel I've got to go forward.

Eric With Gilbert

Moira Well, kind of.

Eric Are you going to marry him?

Moira Maybe. It depends. You won't be there to come back to.

Eric No. Does that make a difference?

Moira Yes. I don't want to betray you in some way.

Eric Come on Moira, be specific. What do you want the blessing for? Or, who do you want it for? That bastard? All that business about milking goats. He was just out to trample on me.

Moira Try and swallow it.

Eric I can't.

Moira Eric.

Eric I can't bless someone I don't know.

Moira Not him. Me. It's me who wants the blessing, the goodwill, the loving wishes for the future, the release from guilt, if you like, knowing you understand.

Eric Do all that with him, Gilbert, that poisonous rat, in mind?

Moira I know he was awful. But, it's me. Not him.

Eric Is he going to move in here?

Moira Oh no, he can't do that.

Eric It's hard for me, too. Not a grieving chink between me and him. Seamless. And I don't know him, not like the others.

Moira I came back for you.

Eric No, you didn't. You came back because his Caribbean season is finished.

Moira How can you tell which reason is the right one? You just pick the one you find most painful. I came back for you, I tell you. To be with you, To say goodbye.



Eric           And then?

Moira          Suppose I married him...

Eric           You love him? That would be too much.

Moira          No.

Eric           Then why?

Moira          Women of my age get to know the window's about to close.

Eric           You mean you're pregnant?

Moira          No. I didn't mean it.

Eric           You're pregnant, so you need the money and the security.

Moira          Eric, I just did NOT say that.

Eric           Do you love me?

Moira          Yes. For twenty years.

Eric           How can I be sure?

Moira          What I've told you about my feeling for Gilbert.

Eric           Would you marry me?

Moira          No.

Eric           Why not?

Moira          The same reason we didn't marry for twenty years.

Eric           Oh that.

Moira          Before, there was always a possibility. Now that I know there's none, I might as well say what's in my mind. What I know about it, that is.

Eric           Which is?

Moira          That I've always loved you.

Eric           You said that already. Same here. But.....?

Moira          We would never marry.

Eric           Never? Ever? Under any circumstances?

Moira          You're pressing me.

Eric           Yes, I want to know. I want to know if there was ever hope; if things changed now, if there might be hope. Suppose I said I wasn't going to go, would you marry me?

Moira          It isn't relevant. You are, aren't you?.

Eric           But, if I weren't, you wouldn't?

Moira          But you are.

Eric           So, you were always lost to me. Always would be.

*(THE DOORBELL RINGS THROUGH THE NEXT LINE, THUS INTERRUPTING IT)*

Moira What's the good news?

Eric It'll do tomorrow. There'll be time enough then. I'll go and answer the doorbell.

*(ON HIS WAY OUT, HE STOPS, FACES THE AUDIENCE TO PLEAD WITH THEM FOR HELP)*

*WHY DID I ASK? IF I HADN'T KNOWN, I COULD HAVE LIVED IN HOPE. TELL ME I CAN UNSAY HER ANSWER AND MY QUESTION. TELL ME. OR MUST I TAKE THE CONSEQUENCES? (HE EXITS DOWN THE STAIRS)*

*MOIRA (THEN TURNS TO THE AUDIENCE HERSELF) I'VE JUMPED THE GUN, BUT I COULDN'T TELL HIM, COULD I? I COULDN'T HIT MY BEST FRIEND IN THE TEETH. COULD I? BUT, I REALLY NEED A CHILD. BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE. THE MISCARRIAGE STORY TOLD ME THAT.*

*ERIC (FROM DOWN THE STAIRS) HI HARRY. COME RIGHT ON UP. GOOD TO SEE YOU. (FADE OUT AS TWO PAIRS OF FEET CAN BE HEARD ASCENDING THE STAIRS)*

## SCENE II

*(THE SAME ROOM, IN SOME DISORDER, THE NEXT DAY)*

Moira How did you sleep in the end?

Eric I did. A bit. Not much. I'm not sure. Liquor doesn't always work well.

Moira It didn't last night?

Eric Not really. When drunk, I go off as soon as my head touches the pillow. Sometimes I sleep throughout the night, but sometimes, like last night, I wake up with a jolt almost immediately.

Moira And can't get to sleep again?

Eric Yeah, something like that. Do you still have the same experience? You used to, I remember.

Moira I don't drink so much, but when I do, Yes. Haven't you been given sleeping pills?

Eric Nope. This is the Northeast. I bet they give you what you want in California. Certainly pot.

Moira Yeah. Maybe.

Why didn't you sleep in my bed last night?

Eric I would have loved to.

Moira Then why not?

Eric Would you really have liked it? What about Gilbert?

Moira He wouldn't have known. Besides, men only care about penetration.

Eric Do they? Does this one? Anyway, his feelings weren't really the issue, were they.

Moira What do you mean?

Eric Closure is all that's left for us now.

Moira Wouldn't it have been a comfort?

Eric It would have put me face to face with all that you and I have never had, all these long years. I didn't want to have to suffer through that again.

Moira I'd have done it for you, whatever the cost. Me, Gilbert.

Eric Is that really true?

Moira Yes. But, I suppose I'm relieved I don't have to go through with the concealment.

*(PAUSE)*

Moira I'm in a jam. I want to give you a breakfast you'll like - the very best - but I don't know what you can hold down. Eggs? I've got some eggs. Scrambled? They ought to slither down pretty easily. Would you like that.

Eric It always used to be mackerel.

Moira Ugh, I remember that mackerel. I hated the smell.

Eric I know. It was the very best of weapons. The more you hated it, the more I wanted it. Anyway, those times are long gone.

Moira In any case, I don't have a mackerel. But, believe me, I would be willing to cook you one if I did, or if you could hold it down. Sounds as if you couldn't.

Eric No. I doubt it.

Moira No enthusiasm for scrambled eggs?

Eric No. I'm sorry to disappoint you. I really am.

Moira More vodka.

Eric Yes, I suppose so.

*(MIXES A DRINK)*

Eric What are you going to eat? Don't let me stop you.

Moira Don't worry. I don't feel so hungry. A meal's like an orgasm. You spend a great deal of time anticipating it, and then it's gone in a flash.

Eric That hurt.

Moira Oh, God... I hadn't meant...

Eric I'll get over it.

Moira I only meant I couldn't enjoy breakfast alone.

Eric Juice?

Moira When's the appointment?

Eric Tomorrow. The earliest they could fit me in after the Memorial Day holiday.

*(PAUSE)*

Why did you ask? You knew that.

Moira Yes. I did. There's no doubt, is there?

Eric About the drip? No.

Moira No. I didn't mean that. The cancer.

Eric No doubt.

Moira I don't know how these things work. Do they...? It's so drastic... do they give you the sentence in writing?

Eric or just: Stand in line there. You're for the grave, Next please, You're OK. Next please.

Moira Oh, Eric you can be so tasteless. I hate you when you're like that.

Eric Hate me? Well, yes, I got a letter. Want to see it?

Moira Check you're not lying? No, no, of course not.

Eric           The alternatives are quite simple: I go in on Tuesday to be wired up to the morphine drip, and die shuttling between agony and a vegetable. Or, I beat the sheriff to the port.

Moira          Why not hang on for a while?

Eric           And become incapacitated?

Moira          You don't know for sure.

Eric           I don't want to risk it.

Moira          I'd call it jumping the gun. Oh dear. I shouldn't have said that.

Eric           I'm counting on you to help me.

Moira          And you can. I like giving parties, so I didn't see why you shouldn't have a Wake if that's what you wanted to call it.

Eric           Is that all? I need you badly. It's the closure of our relationship.

*(PAUSE)*

                  And I need to know you're in safe hands. Who is this man who bullied me yesterday? I'd like to think he was right for you.

Moira          But I still don't see what's wrong with delay. You're thinner, it's true, but you don't seem to be much diminished yet. There could be a long way to go.

Eric           Drifting on alone knowing you and Gilbert.....?

Moira          I've always had other guys. You know that.

Eric           But this sounds different. If I delayed, would you give him up for a while?

*(PAUSE)*

                  I'm sorry. I'm really sorry I said that. I didn't mean it the way it came out.

Moira          It did sound like blackmail.

Eric           It wasn't meant to be. I was trying to point out a reality. If I decided to drag on, it would either poison the atmosphere between the two of us, or do you irreparable harm with Gilbert. A typical unhappy love triangle.

Moira          You could try. You might be wrong.

Eric           What's in it for me? A few extra weeks, probably painful weeks, possibly robbing me of my options. But, I don't get you.

*(PAUSE)*

Do I?

*(PAUSE)*

Today, I get closure on a beautiful Spring day.

*(A DOOR SLAMS DOWNSTAIRS)*

Moira          Who's that, I wonder. It can't be Gilbert. I told him to stay away.

Eric           If it is, I'm glad of that. I want to meet him properly.

*(GILBERT COMES INTO THE ROOM)*

Hi, Gilbert. Nice to see you again. Didn't realise you've already got a front door key.

Gilbert        I don't. The door was open. I just walked in.

Eric Well, Moira, do you believe that little story?

Moira Damn you, Eric.

Gilbert, what on earth are you doing here?

Gilbert Well, I decided the Fairhaven business was pressing, and so I thought I'd see you on the way there. Besides I want to check on you.

Moira Spy on me?

Gilbert No. Your health.

Moira My health? I didn't get drunk if that's what you mean.

Gilbert No, I didn't. After your miscarriage.

Eric Your miscarriage?

Gilbert Sorry if she didn't tell you - I thought you were old friends.

Moira Eric and I still have a little business to finish up. You're welcome to stay.

Eric When did you say the boat was coming?

Moira I didn't, but it's not until this afternoon.

Eric Oh. Why so late? I thought it was going to be this morning.

Moira The tides.

Eric So?

Moira Come on. A fisherman knows what he's fishing for. Bluefish run best at the turn of the tide. That's what you're after - bluefish.

Eric Oh. Anything else I need to know about bluefish?

Moira No, I don't think so. I've borrowed some suitable gear for you. When they run, they run, so you should have a stock of yarns about the last time when they ran.

Eric Oh. What sort of yarns? Technical ones? I might not be very good at that.

Moira Don't you remember when you got thirty or forty of them one day?

Eric No. I never..... Oh sure, yes. I remember that.

(PAUSE)

Line, please.

Moira Well, you couldn't eat forty bluefish, could you? So, you gave them away to some unsuspecting foreign boat, say, an English yacht, too polite to refuse.

Eric I don't understand.

Moira Well, even the English couldn't have eaten forty bluefish, could they, silly? Even a whole family of Brits. And there you were, your yarn goes on, stacking up Grace in heaven for your generous act which wasn't so generous after all. A version of our favorite sin.

Eric Which of the many?

Moira The sin of Ananias and Saphirah, of course, our very favorite.

Eric Does your boat man friend know the Acts of the Apostles well enough for that? Couldn't I have started the fishing trip this morning?

Moira Well, not really. You see I got the Fortuna brothers, who know perfectly well when to go fishing. There wasn't anyone else. It's a holiday, remember? Besides, they're having some sort of trouble with their big boat.

Eric What's that got to do with it?

Moira They're leak freaks. In other words, they don't like sinking. If their ship stinks of stagnant bilge water, they feel just fine. And, it usually does, I can tell you, but apparently, their boat's smelling sweet right now. Relief for everyone else, but they're hunting all over the place for the leak. It was as much as I could do to persuade them to come, even this afternoon.

Gilbert So, you're arranging a fishing trip?

Eric Yes

Gilbert Is Moira going with you? I've got that business in Fairhaven.

Eric No, she's not. And No, you're not leaving. I told you I'd like to get to know you.

Moira But you said, you wouldn't...

Eric I've changed my mind.

And what's all this about a miscarriage?

Moira I'm fertile. After all.

Gilbert I'm out of here. Another time, perhaps.

Eric There won't be another time. I'm committing suicide later today.

In about four hours.

On the fishing trip.

*INTERMISSION*

## ACT TWO

### SCENE I

Moira It's true

Gilbert Why? How? It's not my business.

Eric I have cancer of the stomach. Agent Orange probably. It's terminal. And if it were not terminal, I would die of cirrhosis of the liver.....

*(TO THE AUDIENCE)*

or of a broken heart.

At any rate, one way or another, I'm doomed.

Gilbert But, I still don't understand. Why would you want me, a stranger, around? Wouldn't you want to be with Moira, alone? You must know her well.

Moira That's what I feel. But, Eric doesn't.

Eric I told you, Gilbert, I want to get to know you. I want to feel Moira is in safe hands with you.

Gilbert That doesn't make sense. It looks as though you need an audience.

I'm sorry I said that. I should go.

How are you going to do it?

*(ERIC BRINGS OUT A SMALL PEARL HANDLED GUN, ALMOST A TOY)*

Eric With this.

Gilbert That's absurd. There are better ways. The mess.

Eric Any mess will be in the sea

Moira The fishing trip starts around two o'clock today when the tide turns, in about four hours,. Eric will sit on the rail, and shoot himself.

Gilbert And fall overboard?

Moira Yes.

Gilbert .....and what happens if he falls back into the boat?

Eric I've practiced it. I throw my body back as I pull the trigger.

Gilbert This is ridiculous, Eric. Even if you fall overboard, your body will come up in a few weeks. The police will be involved, suspicions of murder, even if the boatmen have already reported it, all that sort of stuff.

Moira You don't seem to be very interested in whether he commits suicide - only how.

Gilbert Oh, of course I think it's terrible to have terminal cancer, really terrible, I might die of it myself, I really understand.....

You see, I have given suicide a lot of thought. I'm older than you, nearer to death by some horrible lingering disease. I belong to the Hemlock Society. They've just put out a little handbook on how to do it neatly and efficiently without distressing the relatives. Some pills, alcohol, a plastic bag over your head..... I have it in Boston. I could fetch it.

Moira You mean, if you had cancer of the stomach, you'd commit suicide?

Gilbert I hope so. My courage might fail.

Moira .....and, of course, you'd be neat, clean and tidy about it, wouldn't you.

Gilbert Yes.....

but only for some terminal illness, that is, only if I am bringing forward an inevitable death by no more than the period of suffering between then and death. I couldn't justify suicide for any other reason.

*(TURNING TO ERIC) BUT YOUR METHOD. IT'S SO - HOW DO I PUT IT? - IT'S SO..... INELEGANT.*

Eric I've planned it this way; that's the way it's going to be. There's something romantic about dying at sea. And one advantage is that you don't get to see a hospital - I've seen too many holding my friends wired up to stainless steel and plastic, in agony, deformed, defaced, dismembered, disemboweled. If I shot myself right here, you'd have a disposal problem - your problem, not mine, it's true - but I would certainly be taken off to the hospital to be pronounced dead, and I just don't want that. Nor do I like the idea of waiting to suffocate with a plastic bag over my head. I want an heroic death, a manly death, a death at sea, in public, even if it's only out there in the harbor.

Moira It's useless, Gilbert. We've been talking about it for weeks on the telephone from Antigua.

Gilbert Oh, that explains the telephone bill. It's certainly not my place to be here.

Eric I told you it is. Sit down.

Moira You'd better do as he says.

Eric I want to get to know you.

I'm bored. Another three or four hours to go. Let's play a game. How about that, Gilbert?

Gilbert A game? I don't feel like it. I ought to be getting out of here.

Eric Why? Scared?

Gilbert I should go to the police.

Eric Not a priest?

Gilbert It's illegal. It must be illegal. Maybe not you, but me. Me and Moira. Oh, Moira, what are you doing?

Moira Being a criminal, I suppose.

*GILBERT WHY DRAG ME IN? (TO MOIRA) BUT, I CAN'T DESERT YOU? (TO ERIC) IF I STAY, I'LL BE HELPING YOU.*

Eric You already have. You're already in it up to your neck. I'm for a game. Lighten the mood a bit.

Moira Don't hurt him.

*ERIC NO, NO. OF COURSE NOT. (TO GILBERT) KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT THE MARTIAL ARTS?*

Gilbert Not really. I used to do judo, but that was years ago.

Eric Well, that's not so very different, except in outlook. You're much more polite in judo; what I practice has a lot to do with domination.

Gilbert Really?

Eric Shall I show you?

Gilbert I'm not sure I really want to know. Just now, I'm wondering why I'm here at all.

Eric To be shown the martial arts, of course. Get up.

*(ALL THE SPARRING IS TO BE DONE WITH THE MINIMUM MOVEMENT BY ERIC SO THAT GILBERT'S YELPS OF PAIN COME AS A SURPRISE. ERIC GETS UP, GOES ROUND THE TABLE TO WHERE GILBERT IS SITTING, TAKES HIS WRIST GENTLY, AND WITH ALL THE POLITENESS IN THE WORLD GILBERT GETS UP, TOO, BUT IT IS APPARENT FROM THE WAY HIS BODY LAGS BEHIND HIS WRIST AND HIS ELBOW IS NOT IN BY HIS WAIST, THAT HE IS LOSING THE INITIATIVE. TO MAKE THIS OBVIOUS, ERIC USES THE WRIST WHICH HE IS GENTLY LEADING TO TURN GILBERT AROUND TO FACE HIM - NOTHING FORCEFUL; IT'S JUST THAT GILBERT HAS NO ALTERNATIVE WITHOUT ASSERTING HIMSELF)*

Gilbert What do I do now?

Eric This is the first lesson. I didn't force you, did I?

Gilbert No.

Eric But, you didn't resist, did you?

Gilbert No, but...

Eric You didn't resist, because you couldn't resist.

Gilbert I could have done. But, I didn't want to. I'm polite. I'm English, you know. We have the most elegant manners.

Eric So, you would like to break off now?

Gilbert Why not?

*(HE STARTS TO REMOVE HIS WRIST FROM ERIC'S GRIP. BUT SOMETHING ERIC DOES QUITE IMPERCEPTIBLY MAKES GILBERT WINCE AND DESIST)*

Gilbert I'm not sure I appreciated that.

Moira I told you, Eric, don't hurt him.

*ERIC OF COURSE NOT. THAT WOULD BE LATER IN THE COURSE, BUT RIGHT NOW GILBERT IS JUST LEARNING THE BAREST FIRST STEPS. (GILBERT'S WRIST IS STILL HELD BY ERIC'S HAND) AREN'T YOU GILBERT?*



Gilbert Show me some more of your tricks.

Eric Certainly.

*(HE MAKES A SMALL QUICK MOTION WITH HIS HAND, THE MEREST FLICK, NO STRENGTH OR FORCE. THERE IS A SMALL CRACKING SOUND, AND GILBERT IS INSTANTLY KNEELING ON THE GROUND WITH THE PALM OF HIS HAND TURNED UPWARDS, THE BACK OF HIS WRIST TAKING SOME OF HIS WEIGHT)*

Gilbert Hell. That hurt.

*MOIRA ERIC. STOP. (RISING AND SHOUTING) I TOLD YOU: STOP.*

*(ERIC RELEASES GILBERT WHO LOOKS AT HIS WRIST, WORKS HIS FINGERS. NOTHING WRONG)*

Gilbert I don't think that's very funny.

Eric Oh, I'm so sorry. But, I see you're not hurt. I told Moira I wouldn't hurt you. I just wanted to get to know you. Remember? Have another dead tea bag in your water. Look after him, Moira.

*(GILBERT SITS DOWN AT THE TABLE)*

Eric So you've decided to stay, it seems?

Gilbert It's not like a road accident. Heroism, emergency, saintliness, agony, death, survival. Much clearer.

Eric I don't even look sick?

Gilbert That's right.

Eric And I'm going to do something illegal, as well? In any case, it used to be - death penalty for the attempted crime, and then a stake through the heart at a cross roads. Felo de se.

Gilbert Death penalty? Oh, of course.

Eric Aiders and abettors would be much more vulnerable. don't you think. So, why are you staying

Gilbert You told me to.

Eric Is that the only reason?

Gilbert No.

Eric Then what?

Gilbert I would be prepared to go to prison to defend your right to die as you want.

Eric That's pretty strong stuff.

Gilbert I disapprove of suicide itself because it's irreversible. An emotional upset, despair and so forth - they're reversible, so I disapprove of suicide there. But, in your case, you've been quite clear: your only choice is when. Not if.

Eric That's still not enough to justify you staying.

Gilbert Why not? You want me. At this juncture in your life, it would be unseemly to question why. But I may go to prison for the wrong reason - assisting your suicide, not defending your right to it.

*(TIME PASSES. GILBERT OCCUPIES HIMSELF ELSEWHERE IN THE ROOM. MOIRA IS BRAIDING ERIC'S HAIR. SCISSORS AND VODKA ARE TO HAND, PROBABLY ON A TABLE)*

Moira I can't get hold of it very well.

Eric Doesn't matter. Just braid it. I've got to have three braids. Remember. Three.

Moira Yes, I remember. One for me, one for your mother, and you won't say who the third is for.

Eric You still going on about that?

Moira Yes, I am. You ask me to do all these little personal things for you. You treat me like your closest friend. But, you hold out on me. I want to know. I want to know.

Eric Darling, I would never hold out on you. Never, never, never. You were the one who held out on me. Remember? You decided we would never be lovers.

Moira Me? You trying to say ME? When you were the one..... Come on, now. Who's the other braid for. The girl you could have it off with? Is that it. Is that it?

Eric I don't know why you're getting so upset. Suppose it were true? What about you? You never could stick to me - you always had to have someone else. As well.

*MOIRA (NOW FURIOUS) HOW COULD YOU? FIRST, YOU HAVE THIS NEED. YOU HAVE THIS NEED TO DOMINATE. YOU HAVE THIS NEED TO DOMINATE AND TO SHOW YOU DOMINATE. WHAT DO YOU DO? YOU START OFF WITH GILBERT, WHO DOESN'T KNOW A THING. OF COURSE HE DOESN'T. HOW COULD HE? YOU START OFF WITH MY MAN, AND YOU POP HIM ON THE FLOOR JUST TO SHOW WHO'S TOP DOG. YOU POP HIM ON THE FLOOR, BUT YOU DON'T JUST DO THAT. YOU SHOW OFF BY NOT BREAKING HIS ARM, NOT DOING HIM ANY SERIOUS HURT, NOT EXERTING YOURSELF ONE LITTLE BIT, WHEN YOU KNOW: JUST A SMIDGEN MORE AND WE'D HAVE HAD TO TAKE HIM TO THE HOSPITAL. THAT'S MY MAN YOU'RE HUMILIATING. THEN YOU HAVE THE NERVE TO TWIST THE FACTS AROUND ABOUT YOU AND ME. YOU CLAIM I DECIDED, WHEN IN FACT YOU COULDN'T - OR WOULDN'T - I NEVER KNEW QUITE WHICH. AND YOU START ALL THIS UP WITHIN A FEW HOURS OF THIS CRAZY SUICIDE.*

*(SHE SITS DOWN AND TRIES TO CONTROL HERSELF. SHE HAS MORE VODKA)*

Matter of fact you're right. I mean, I'm right. I mean we shouldn't fight. I can't bear you to go; I don't know what alternative to offer. I can't - even I can't - I can't wish this cancer away. It's logical what you're doing. Some of it is, but it's so hard. It has no heart, no anguish.

Eric No anguish? Little you know.

So, it's three braids, then?

Moira Have it your own way.

Do you want me to cut them off? It's very final.

Eric Yes, it is. But, yes, you must cut them off. Put a rubber band top and bottom so the braids don't unravel.

*(SILENCE FOR A WHILE AS MOIRA PUTS ON THE REQUIRED BANDS, TWO PER BRAID. THE AUDIENCE HEARS THE SCISSORS CUTTING THE BRAIDS)*

Moira I suppose they could grow back again. The hair, I mean.

Eric Such a short moment has gone by. Another three hours or so. How was it just that short moment ago?

Moira It's gone.

Eric But, remember it. That last moment before you cut the first braid was a moment further from death, even a moment further from your death. But, for me, it was a worse moment, because I surely have fewer moments, more countable moments, before my suicide.....

Moira .....which is voluntary

Eric Is it? I still have cancer. A cancer in my soul? a cancer in my body? I go in any case, whether I control my going or not.

Moira But, you have chosen to control your going. I had the same feeling about the passing moments when I had to go back to school. I was miserable. I didn't want to go. At a certain moment, I knew just how miserable I was, and then the next moment, I knew was more miserable. At that second moment, I wanted so badly to go back to the first moment because, miserable it might have been, but not as miserable as the second moment. No one waved a wand and said: *YOU DON'T HAVE TO GO BACK TO SCHOOL EVER AGAIN*. But, you could. Instead of going this afternoon, you could wait for the cancer to get you. Then, all of a sudden this miserable moment we have right now would cease to exist in a way it never ceased to exist in my school days. We could plan the afternoon; we could go for a walk. It's a lovely day.

Eric But, you forget. I can't bow out. It's not me. I have to be centre stage. Somehow, getting into that boat and going over the side will give me closure. I don't just mean the closure of death, but the peace of mind that comes from the closure of a painful problem.

Not only with cancer, but, much more important, with you.

*(TIME PASSES)*

*(GILBERT GETS UP FROM THE SOFA, WALKS ACROSS TO THE TABLE AND SITS DOWN)*

GILBERT *(TO MOIRA)* WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

Moira Here. This is for you.

*(SHE HANDS HIM A TIN BOX OF BAG BALM, AN OINTMENT USED BY VETERINARY SURGEONS.)*

Gilbert Oh. It's pretty. Thank you.

Eric It's from me. A parting gift.

Gilbert What is it?

Bag Balm. Bag Balm? I don't quite understand...*FOR MINOR CONGESTION OF THE UDDER.* Oh, I see: the goat.

Eric It's for you. A gift. In the jungle, it was the only thing to soothe insect bites. It works, you know. You might find it useful. For bites, I mean. Not for udders, yours or the goat's.

Moira Eric is giving away his precious personal items. It wasn't just a balm. For Eric it was symbolic. He wants you to have it.

Gilbert But, why me? I hardly know you, Eric.

Eric No, but I want to know you. It means something to me to give it to you. I want to go out in style, having made all the right connections.

GILBERT *SO, THAT'S WHY YOU'RE USING THIS, IS IT? (POINTING TO THE SMALL PEARL HANDLED GUN ON THE TABLE)*

Eric It's part of it.

Gilbert I hate to revert, but it's quite unlike anything I might have expected. To start with, do you really need me here? I don't belong. Then, well, it's presumptuous of me to say it yet again, but I would have thought you might have preferred to die in Moira's arms, in some.....

Eric ...tidier? ...tidier manner? Is that what you didn't want to say?

Gilbert Well, yes, I suppose I did. Some tidier way. Shooting's bad enough, but a sodden three-week-old corpse with a hole in it will cause endless trouble.

Moira That's just what he wants to do.

ERIC *(TO GILBERT)* IF YOU START INTERFERING, WE MIGHT PLAY ANOTHER LITTLE GAME.

Moira Oh Eric, you're such a drag. Do what the hell you want, but don't make us suffer for it. Particularly Gilbert. He's just an innocent bystander you've dragged in.

Eric Bystander? Father of your child?

Gilbert But I'm not.

Eric You might have been. Had any children before?

Gilbert I haven't been married.

Eric No, I think I knew that, but I can't imagine you've had a chaste life. Sixties. Columbia.

Gilbert What are you saying?

Eric I graduated from Columbia.

Gilbert I know. I mean, did you?.

*ERIC YOU KNEW? DID YOU NOW (PAUSE)*

Gilbert Moira told me. I was in England at the time. What was it all about?

Eric I guess you better ask Moira - later - it's a long story.

...or, were you homosexual?

Gilbert Oh no. I love women.

Eric That's what I would have thought. Had many women?

Gilbert A man like me? Well, what do you think? I'm not exactly impotent, you know?

Eric So, Moira's miscarriage only goes to show.

Gilbert It sure does.

Eric Do you like children?

Gilbert Like children?

Eric Yes, like children.

Gilbert I haven't had a chance.

Eric Not with any of the others?

Gilbert Well, they took care of things. I mean. I don't know what you mean. Must have done - with a man like me - or they would...

Eric ...have had babies, but they didn't of course, did they, because you weren't very fertile.

Gilbert Hell, what are you grilling me for.

Eric Just wondering what a good father you would be for my darling Moira's child. Right now, it doesn't look too promising, does it Moira?

Moira Why did you have to bring this up, Gilbert?

Gilbert I didn't. Eric did.

Moira No, in the beginning. When you blurted it out.

Gilbert I told you. I presumed he knew. He's your great friend. I'm just a bystander, as Moira said. I should go.

Eric There's something in it for you, too.

Gilbert In what?

Eric In my suicide, of course. Why do you have all those little books on the subject?

Gilbert All those little books? I don't..... I haven't got a collection..... You make me into some sort of freak. I've only got the one. The one book, I mean. And, it's not little anyway. I bought it for myself. I never dreamt I would be faced with someone else's suicide.

Eric Nevertheless. It's interesting. Isn't it? Interesting for you, I mean. Good case study material, wouldn't you say?

Gilbert Why do you have to assume an indecent interest in your suicide makes me stay?. I've got caught up in it, in every way. Not only for you, but for Moira, too. When your body floats to the surface with a hole in it, will she be wanted for murder?

Oh God. I hadn't thought. Will I be wanted for murder? This could be a triangle, me with the motive to get the girl. Have you thought of that?

Eric You're charmingly practical. Here I am giving away my personal possessions, even bits of my body, to those I love, and you have to start talking about murder?

*MOIRA (TO ERIC) HE HAS A POINT.*

Eric Then you'd better make sure I don't float, hadn't you.

Gilbert I'm glad I'm not an expert in this field, but don't they always float after a few days?

Eric Then you'll have to weight me down.

Gilbert Or you could commit suicide some tidier way.

Eric If you're anywhere around, and I die bloodlessly in this apartment, you might still be suspected of something criminal. If you're in this apartment, and I'm somewhere out in the harbor, you could scarcely have pulled the trigger, could you? Furthermore, the boat crew will have seen who pulled the trigger.

Moira I think I have a horse weight somewhere.

*(SHE GETS UP, GOES TO THE OPPOSITE SIDE OF THE ROOM, AND STARTS RUMMAGING IN THE BOTTOM OF A CUPBOARD)*

Moira Yes, here it is.

*(SHE DRAGS IT ONTO THE FLOOR. IT IS HEAVY)*

Heavy enough?

*(GILBERT GETS UP AND GOES OVER TO HER)*

Moira Oh, what a gruesome calculation to have to make.

*(GILBERT AND MOIRA START TO TALK IN LOW TONES. ERIC HAS LOST INTEREST SINCE HE IS A BOTTOM LINER IN COMMAND OF ABLE LIEUTENANTS. HE IS FINGERING THE BRAIDS OF HAIR ON THE TABLE. HE PICKS UP AN ENVELOPE AND ADDRESSES IT. THEN HE POPS A BRAID INSIDE. HE PICKS UP A SECOND ENVELOPE, ADDRESSES IT, TAKES A FOLDED PIECE OF PAPER FROM HIS POCKET, SLIPS IT IN, POPS A BRAID INSIDE, AND THEN SEALS IT. THEN HE LOOKS AT THE THIRD BRAID, CONSIDERS A MINUTE, PEN TO HIS LIPS, AND WRITES A SHORT NOTE. HE THINKS BETTER OF IT, SCREWS THE NOTE UP AND PUTS IT IN HIS POCKET. HE ADDRESSES THE ENVELOPE, AND SLIPS THE BRAID INSIDE. AS VISIBLY AS THE ACTOR CAN MANAGE, ERIC MAKES SURE THE LAST ENVELOPE IS HIDDEN BY THE OTHER TWO ON TOP OF IT. AFTER A WHILE, MOIRA NODS TO GILBERT AND STARTS RUMMAGING AGAIN. SHE COMES OUT WITH A BALL OF STRING. AGAIN THEY TALK TOGETHER IN LOW TONES. THEY MUST TALK IN THE SAME WAY THAT THE PRIEST USED TO SAY MASS IN THE OLD DAYS UP AT THE ALTAR, PRIVATELY, BUT AUDIBLY SO A FEW WORDS CAN BE MADE OUT BY THE CONGREGATION. IN THIS CASE, THE ACTORS CAN MAKE UP HOW THEY DO IT, BUT THE TWO PHRASES THE AUDIENCE MUST JUST ABOUT MAKE OUT ARE FROM GILBERT, MOIRA SIGNIFYING ASSENT TO THE FIRST AND SHAKING HER HEAD THOUGHTFULLY TO THE SECOND)*

*GILBERT .....NYLON, OR DACRON, NOT HEMP..... (MOIRA ASSENTS AND RUMMAGES, AND THEN WHEN SHE HAS FOUND SOMETHING AND SHOWED IT TO GILBERT) .....VERY THIN.....STRONG ENOUGH.....CUT THROUGH.....*

Eric What's going on? I'm being left out. It's my day, not yours. You can get together as much as you wish later, but not now.

Moira Eric, I'm sorry. It's some practical details.

*(GILBERT WALKS OVER TO THE SOFA CARRYING THE WEIGHT AND THE BALL OF STRING. HE STARTS PLAITING. THE LIGHTS DIM BRIEFLY TO SHOW THE PASSAGE OF TIME.)*

*ERIC (GETTING UP AND WALKING TO THE SOFA) WHAT'S THAT? GILBERT, WHAT ARE YOU DOING.*

*GILBERT PLAITING. (HE USES THE ENGLISH WORD, PRONOUNCED LIKE 'PLAITING') WHILING AWAY THE TIME.*

Eric I can see that.

Moira Eric, you haven't finished telling me what to do with your bits and pieces.

Eric Oh, no. Yes.

*(THEY SETTLE DOWN AT THE TABLE. FOR A LITTLE WHILE, THEY MUTTER TOGETHER, PUSHING BITS OF STUFF AROUND THE TABLE, WHILE GILBERT IS VISIBLY BRAIDING)*

Eric Oh, don't start that again.

Moira But, I must know. Who?

*(SHE TRIES TO GRAB THE PILE OF ENVELOPES, BUT ERIC IS FASTER, AND PUTS HIS HAND ON TOP SO THAT HER HAND MERELY LANDS ON TOP OF HIS)*

Eric Not so fast. You'll know in time. There's a note inside. I will have no means of stopping you knowing. Except that, when you know, I won't be there to know you know.

Moira Oh God, this is torture. Why does it have to go on so long?

Eric It will soon be over. You did your best to get the boat in the early morning. I suppose that's why they execute prisoners after breakfast, or at midnight, or something. The day time seems unnatural. It might even shake my resolve....

.....except that if it's not this way at 2pm on a fine Spring day...

Let's sing a bit. How about Alice's Restaurant ?

*(THEY SING A LITTLE, RATHER BADLY. QUOTES FROM THE SONG ARE IN SMALL CAPITALS. GILBERT REMAINS ON THE SOFA PLAINTING)*

*ERIC (ALONE) YOU CAN GET ANYTHING YOU WANT*

*MOIRA (MOIRA JOINS IN) AT ALICE'S RESTAURANT*

*WALK RIGHT IN, IT'S AROUND THE BACK*

*JUST A HALF A MILE FROM THE RAILROAD TRACK*

*YOU CAN GET ANYTHING YOU WANT*

*AT ALICE'S RESTAURANT.*

*(THEY LAUGH)*

Moira I always used to wait for the photographs. That bit to come around.

Eric Photographs?

Moira Yes the bit about the *TWENTY SEVEN EIGHT BY TEN COLOR GLOSSY PICTURES WITH THE CIRCLES AND THE ARROWS, AND A PARAGRAPH ON THE BACK EACH ONE, SAYING WHAT EACH ONE WAS TO BE USED AS EVIDENCE AGAINST US.*

*ERIC SAME AS COLUMBIA (ERIC COCKS AN EYE IN GILBERT'S DIRECTION TO SEE IF HE REACTS. GILBERT GOES ON PLAINTING)*

Moira .....and making him too immoral to *BURN WOMEN KIDS HOUSES AND VILLAGES AFTER BEING A LITTERBUM.* You remember we tried getting into an office singing Alice's restaurant? It wasn't a great success.

Eric Remember? Oh yes, I remember. But, we would have had to have been the same sex for it to work properly.

Moira Not quite. Remind me.

Eric *YOU KNOW IF JUST ONE PERSON DOES IT, THEN THEY THINK HE'S REALLY SICK AND THEY WON'T TAKE HIM. AND IF TWO PEOPLE DO IT, IN HARMONY, THEY THINK THEY'RE BOTH FAGGOTS AND THEY WON'T TAKE EITHER OF THEM. AND IF THREE PEOPLE DO IT, CAN YOU IMAGINE THREE PEOPLE DOING IT, WALKING IN, SINGING ALICE'S RESTAURANT, AND WALKING OUT. THEN THEY THINK IT'S AN ORGANISATION. CAN YOU IMAGINE FIFTY PEOPLE A DAY, FIFTY PEOPLE A DAY, WALKING IN SINGING A*

SONG, ALICE'S RESTAURANT, AND WALKING OUT. THEN, FRIENDS, THEY MAY THINK IT'S A MOVEMENT, AND THAT'S WHAT IT IS.

Moira I remember. And then Arlo Guthrie got everyone to sing, and swore at them for singing badly and then got them to sing again.

Moira and Eric YOU CAN GET ANYTHING YOU WANT

AT ALICE'S RESTAURANT

WALK RIGHT IN, IT'S AROUND THE BACK

JUST A HALF A MILE FROM THE RAILROAD TRACK

YOU CAN GET ANYTHING YOU WANT

AT ALICE'S RESTAURANT.

(THE SINGING PETERS OUT; SILENCE AS THEY PUSH MEMENTOS ROUND THE TABLE.)

Eric Gilbert, what are you doing? You're ruining our fun. Why didn't you sing with us? Not very friendly of you, I would say.

Well, come on, Gilbert. Are you dumb or something? Or, do you want to play another little game like the one we played last time. You liked that, didn't you?

Gilbert I'm plaiting.

Eric Baby clothes? To be a good father. I bet you'd play at being a good father, too. Drooling over the crib at your new born. Don't you think Moira?

Moira No.

Eric You mean, no baby to drool over?

Moira One way or another, I'm going to have a child.

ERIC GILBERT. NO BABY CLOTHES? SO, WHAT ARE YOU PLAITING? ARE YOU TRYING TO PULL MY PISSER, AS THE ENGLISH SAY? OR, MAYBE YOU DON'T THINK I HAVE ONE. (HE BEGINS TO LAUGH, AND THEN RUSHES OFF TO THE BATHROOM)

Moira I suppose he's gone to throw up. That's what it does to him now. Can't even keep his alcohol down, poor guy.

(SLIGHT PAUSE. THE TOILET FLUSHES)

ERIC (COMING OUT) I HEARD THAT. YES, I THREW UP. I RESENT YOU CALLING ME A POOR GUY, MOIRA.

Moira Sorry. It's just sympathy. You don't need to get so nasty with us.

(ERIC PASSES BY GILBERT ON THE SOFA)

Eric So, why are you plaiting that? In my time, too.

GILBERT WELL, YOU'LL HAVE TO KNOW SOONER OR LATER. I'M..... (MOIRA CUTS IN)

Moira Eric, don't bother Gilbert. He's a right to amuse himself if he wants. Come over here. There're still a few things to decide on.

Eric Now, now Moira. I'm not going to be deflected again. Out with it, Gilbert.

GILBERT (TO MOIRA) WHAT CAN I DO?

Moira Eric, why do you have to put us on the spot all the time. This is the worst day in my life. My closest friend is determined to go, and go in a way I find hardest to bear. I flip-flop between wanting to prevent you from doing it, and then I think: What's the point? It'll come to the same thing in the end only I will have made you bear the pain that I've got now by prolonging your suffering just to spare my feelings. So, I rattle round between thinking of myself, thinking of you, just not knowing what to do.

You decided how you want to go. We can't protect you from the consequences indefinitely. Gilbert, you'd better try it for size.

*(GILBERT GETS UP TO FACE ERIC. HE LOOKS AT HIM STRAIGHT IN THE FACE FOR A MOMENT. THEN HE TRIES THE PLAITED STRING TO SEE IF IT IS LONG ENOUGH TO GO ROUND ERIC'S WAIST)*

Eric I don't understand.

Gilbert You had the idea of weighting your body down. But, it was my idea, not Moira's, how to do it. We couldn't find any thick string. This is dacron, I think, so it won't rot, but your body will, and the string might just wear its way through. I thought that if I plaited the string, it would give it a bigger bearing area and it might just keep you down, instead of cutting you in half.

*(ERIC LOOKS OUT OF THE WINDOW)*

Eric You did say it was the Fortuna brothers you hired, Moira?

Moira That's right. Are they there?

Eric Yes. A small power boat's just coming alongside the dock. There's only one person in it, but I think it's José Fortuna. I wonder where his brother is?

*(MOIRA RUNS OVER TO THE WINDOW STAGE LEFT AND OPENS IT, STICKING HER HEAD OUT)*

*MOIRA HEY, WE'RE COMING. DON'T GO AWAY. (SHE WAVES, AND WE ARE TO INFER BY THE WAY SHE WAVES THAT THE BOATMAN HAS UNDERSTOOD HER)*

*(TURNING TO ERIC) SO, THIS IS IT. ARE YOU REALLY GOING TO DO IT.*

*(ERIC NODS)*

*THEN, WE'D BETTER GO. (QUOTING) COME WHEN YOU LIKE, STAY AS LONG AS YOU LIKE, GO WHEN YOU LIKE. BUT, FOR GOD'S SAKE, WHEN YOU DO GO, GO QUICKLY, THAT'S WHAT YOU USED TO SAY AT THE END OF A PARTY.*

Oh dear.

Gilbert, come along.

Gilbert Wait a minute. I have to go to the loo.

*(GILBERT LEAVES WHAT HE IS DOING ON THE SOFA, GOES TO THE BATHROOM)*

Eric He won't go away, will he?

*MOIRA I DON'T SUPPOSE SO. (SHE SITS DOWN)*

Eric I want to get it over with. In a way, I've left already. I might falter if I delay.

*MOIRA GO AHEAD THEN (SHE REMAINS SEATED)*

Eric But I need you. In this last decision..... but one..... I need you. Come on.

*(HE GOES OVER TO MOIRA AND PULLS HER TO HER FEET. SHE COLLECTS A FISHING ROD AND A SMALL PLASTIC BOX, THE KIND USED BY FISHERMEN FOR THEIR LURES)*

Eric Moira.....

Moira Yes.

Eric Moira, do you still need my blessing?

Moira For what I'm going to do? Yes.

Eric But he won't be a father.

Moira We'll have to see.



Eric But, I would... would have been...

Moira Darling, I know, but you couldn't... all these years...

Eric But, you didn't want, you didn't want to have a family with me. Now you do with him. It's hard to bear.

Moira I might have to be a single parent, but the window's closing. I'll be too old, soon. Besides, it's not as if you had a choice. Not now.

*(THEY EMBRACE. THEN SHE FOLLOWS HIM OUT OF THE APARTMENT)*

*(THE STAGE IS EMPTY FOR A SHORT TIME. THEN GILBERT EMERGES TO THE SOUND OF FLUSHING. HE LOOKS AROUND, AND SHOWS SURPRISE THAT THERE IS NO ONE THERE)*

Gilbert I thought they would wait.

*(HE GOES TO THE OPEN WINDOW TO SEE WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO THEM. THEN HE LOOKS BACK INTO THE ROOM)*

Oh, my God. They've forgotten the weight.

Oh well.....

Oh, no, that won't do. The police will certainly be asking questions if they find a body. Mustn't have that.

*(HE GATHERS UP THE WEIGHT AND THE PLAITED STRING FROM THE SOFA, AND STARTS TOWARDS THE DOOR)*

*(AS HE GETS TO THE OPENING, HE STOPS)*

This won't do. Someone might see me.

*(HE COMES BACK TO THE KITCHEN SINK, PUTS THE WEIGHT ON THE FLOOR, GRABS A PAPER BAG, AND SLIDES THE WEIGHT ACROSS THE FLOOR INTO THE BAG, PUSHING THE STRING AFTER IT. AS HE LIFTS THE BAG BY THE CARRYING HANDLES, IT ALMOST IMMEDIATELY BURSTS)*

Oh, fuck.

*(HE RUMMAGES AGAIN AND FINDS A PLASTIC BAG THIS TIME)*

I don't like plastic.

*(HE SLIDES THE WEIGHT AND STRING INTO THE BAG WITHOUT LOOKING AT IT; LIFTS IT, STARTS FOR THE DOOR)*

*(THE AUDIENCE SEES SOMETHING LIKE THIS ON THE OUTSIDE. IT DOESN'T MATTER WHAT IT IS, SO LONG AS IT IS INAPPROPRIATE. IT HAS TO LOOK LIKE THE NAME OF A LOCAL BOUTIQUE AND COULD BE) :*

COME

HELL

OR

HIGH-WATER

*(THE AUDIENCE HEARS HIM CLATTERING DOWN UNCARPETED WOODEN STAIRS)*

*(OFF STAGE)*

Moira. Moira

Moira. Stop. You've forgotten this.

*(SILENCE FOR A WHILE AS HE CATCHES UP AND HANDS OVER THE BAG)*

*(GILBERT COMES BACK ONTO THE STAGE, HE FACES THE AUDIENCE)*

*COULD I HAVE STOPPED HIM? SHOULD I HAVE STOPPED HIM? (SUDDENLY FURIOUS) BUT, DAMMIT! THEY HAD NO RIGHT TO MIX ME UP IN THIS. I SHOULD HAVE GONE TO THE POLICE STRAIGHT AWAY. SHOULD I? IT WOULD HAVE PROTECTED ME FROM A MURDER RAP. (HE LOOKS DESOLATE, INDECISIVE, LOST, AND THE LIGHTS SLOWLY FADE)*

## SCENE II

*BACK STORY DIALOGUE AT DOCK SIDE - FOR INFORMATION ONLY, NOT TO BE PERFORMED.*

GILBERT *I BROUGHT THE WEIGHT.*

MOIRA *WHAT WERE YOU DOING?*

GILBERT *GOING TO THE LOO, WHY DIDN'T YOU WAIT FOR ME?*

MOIRA *I THOUGHT YOU WERE FOLLOWING.*

*I CAN'T DO IT.*

ERIC *DO WHAT?*

MOIRA *ERIC, DARLING, I CAN'T COME WITH YOU.*

ERIC *DESERTING ME IN MY LAST WISH?*

MOIRA *NO. I MEAN YES. I MEAN I CAN'T DO YOUR WISH. IT'S TOO HARD. GILBERT, YOU GO WITH HIM.*

GILBERT *MY POOR MOIRA.*

MOIRA *NO I CAN'T. REALLY I CAN'T*

ERIC *I CAN GO ALONE, CAN'T I.*

JOSÉ *HI, MOIRA.*

MOIRA *Hi*

JOSÉ *ALL ABOARD?*

*(ERIC STEPS ON BOARD)*

JOSÉ *I'LL GIVE YOU A HAND, MOIRA.*

MOIRA *I'M NOT GOING. HE IS.*

JOSÉ *IS THAT MR DOW?*

MOIRA *YES*

JOSÉ *I THOUGHT IT WAS GOING TO BE YOU AND HIM.*

*(MOIRA DOESN'T ANSWER)*

JOSÉ *YOU KNOW HOW TO HANDLE A BOAT, MOIRA. I KNOW MR DOW HIRED ME, BUT I DON'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT HIM.*

ERIC *GILBERT HIRED YOU?*

JOSÉ *YES, MOIRA CALLED AND SAID SHE HAD A FRIEND WHO WANTED TO GO OUT FOR THE DAY. I GOT TO GO BACK TO MY BROTHER, SO I SAID MOIRA COULD TAKE HIM OUT WITHOUT ME.*

ERIC *I THOUGHT YOU HIRED HIM FOR ME.*

MOIRA *I DID.*

ERIC *I'M GETTING OUT OF HERE. I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON.*

*END OF BACK STORY AT DOCK SIDE.*

*(CLATTER OF FEET ON THE STAIRS - ITS OBVIOUSLY NOT JUST MOIRA. ERIC ENTERS THE ROOM FIRST, CLEARLY IN A FERMENT, THEN GILBERT FOLLOWED BY MOIRA)*

Eric So, what's been going on?

Gilbert Don't look at me. I don't know. Moira?

Eric The hell you don't know.

Gilbert No, I don't. First I knew I had hired a boat. Moira?

Moira Thought they'd suspect.

Eric Who? Who would suspect? Suspect what?

Moira Everybody knew you had cancer.

Eric What makes you think that?

Moira You keep quiet? You're about the most publicly neurotic person I know about your health.

Eric And so? Just assuming for a moment that I had said something.

Moira Anybody might be worried to take a terminal cancer patient out in a boat alone.

Eric You think so? And suppose I said I'd not said a word?

Moira I'd say that's not my Eric that's not. You keep quiet? Not on your life. Besides, if you've just canceled your suicide... can anyone cancel their suicide... if they're sincere? Are you sincere, Eric? Do you really want to kill yourself? Or, do you just want to pull me to shreds?

Gilbert That's a lousy thing to say.

Eric and what're you chipping in for? You and she were in it together.

Gilbert In what together?

Eric My murder.

Gilbert Gawd you're twisted.

Eric That's a nice thing to say to a dying man.

Gilbert You asked for it. I DID NOT KNOW THAT MOIRA HAD HIRED A BOAT IN MY NAME. GET IT ONCE AND FOR ALL?

Eric Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. How do I know you didn't know. After all, Moira is an honest woman. Are you disbelieving the love of your life?

Gilbert Shut up, will you?

Eric Yes, once I've got the truth out of the pair of you. Right now it looks as though you have to persuade me you weren't at least going to connive together to make sure I went. No competition without me. Right?

Gilbert Why didn't you tell me you'd done that, Moira?

Moira Why should I? Why should I confide to you what I feel about my friend of twenty years.

G sure you didn't want Eric dead. But he was going to die anyway - suicide or the cancer. Did you want to avoid talking to the police if it were suicide?

*(MOIRA'S HAND HAS BEEN ABSENTLY TOYING WITH ONE OF THE ENVELOPES CONTAINING THE BRAIDS. SHE PICKS ONE UP)*

Moira I'd forgotten about these.

Oh, I see. The third one's for you, Gilbert. To think I made all that jealous fuss for nothing.

*(GILBERT REACHES FOR HIS ENVELOPE BUT DOES NOT OPEN IT)*

Gilbert It's like a burlesque of Christmas presents.

Moira Or, Chinese fortune cookies. I hope the messages will be as banal. I'm afraid they won't be.

*(MOIRA UNFOLDS HER NOTE)*

Moira I don't understand.

*(GILBERT COMES OVER TO THE TABLE AND LOOKS OVER HER SHOULDER)*

Gilbert It's a letter from a hospital.

Moira Yes. I can see that. From the oncology department.

Gilbert Your hands are trembling. I can't read it.

Moira He didn't have cancer.

*(GILBERT TAKES THE LETTER, PUTS HIS OWN ENVELOPE BACK ON THE TABLE)*

Gilbert Dear Eric, I am very glad to tell you that your tests show conclusively that you do not have any malignancy in the upper GI. However, there appears to be a restriction in the esophagus which could account for your vomiting. I suspect it's Schatzki's Ring, a condition which is sufficiently troublesome to require attention, but is in no way life threatening. I have tentatively made an appointment for you on Tuesday after Memorial Day, hence the call from my secretary to catch you before the holiday. Would you please call my office to confirm that you will be there.

Moira Can you read the handwriting?

Gilbert I think so. Can you call them to say I won't be there?

*(SILENCE)*

Gilbert Of all the sick bastards

Moira Why didn't you say?

Eric I tried

Moira He might have, too, if you hadn't been so awful.

Gilbert Me? Awful?

Moira Yes. You. You weren't supposed to be here in the first place. Eric walks in with his letter of reprieve, sees you, you bully him, so he decides to say nothing. Then you cap it off by telling him about the miscarriage.

Gilbert I assumed he knew.

Moira None of his business. He loved me. And I loved him. You were just interfering between us.

Gilbert That's a bloody nerve. Me interfering? Nobody forced you to spend six months with me.

Moira But, the miscarriage. You used it as a weapon. Deliberately.

Gilbert Even if I did, why so important?

Moira It told him I was fertile. Could try again. Might succeed next time. And it was yours, not his. Rubbed his nose in it, you did.

Eric Yes, that's right.

Moira Nobody told you to speak. It's my turn now. You've made me go through the ringer with your story about having to beat the sheriff to the port, suicide to avoid a painful and humiliating path to exactly the same destination.

Eric You wanted to frame him.

Moira Frame him? For what?

Eric If I had blown a hole in my head in front of him in the boat out there in the harbour by now, what would the police consider?

Moira You're paranoid.

Eric You haven't answered my question. or Gilbert's.

Moira and I don't intend to until you've told me why you made this hideous pretence.

Gilbert Yes, why. I want to know, too.

Moira If you had the wit, you could guess part of the reason, Gilbert.

Gilbert Could I?

Moira Would you tell your lover's lover you were available again after all? Particularly the bully you turned into.

Gilbert me, bully? it was your lover who put me on the floor.

Eric you deserved it.

Moira you just keep quiet. I'll deal with my friend without your help. Gilbert behaved badly, but you've behaved even worse. You lousy hypocrite, you've dragged our hearts around like fish at the end of a line.

Eric I meant to commit suicide before I discovered your plot with Gilbert.

Moira there wasn't a plot.

Eric then why did you try to get him into the boat instead of you?

Moira I didn't.

Eric oh yes, you did. You backed out because you didn't want to be alone in a boat with a man with a hole in his head. You'd rather have someone else there. And you knew I needed an audience.

Moira that's piffle, hogwash. Are you telling me you wanted to commit suicide in any case?

Eric that's right.

Moira why?

Eric I couldn't bear losing you.

Gilbert If that's not recreational suicide, I don't know what is.

Moira that's a horrible thing to say.

Gilbert ending your life for a terminal condition. To avoid the needless pain and suffering. I would go to prison to defend that right. But, this is..... this is like recreational sex. He had a choice.

Moira I don't see anything recreational about it. You can't make a habit of suicide.

Gilbert and your friends pulls me into an affair which really has nothing to do with me. I stay on. Why do I stay on? I don't really know. Any other fool would have gone. Then I find you've been trying to trap me into being the boat with, as Eric so charmingly puts it, a man with a hole in his head. So, here I am, deeply into something which is absolutely not my business, facing criminal charges, the gallows.

Moira The electric chair..... besides, that's only for murder.

Gilbert .....all right, then, the chair. You're trying to enrage me with irrelevant details...

Moira You're enraged already..... taking it out on me because you were naive. High principle, you said, but it was just callousness.

Gilbert What do you mean? callousness.

Moira You didn't weep. You didn't stop him. You behaved like a service engineer.

Gilbert Service engineer?

Moira Yes. First, you offered the squeaky clean plastic alternative with a bag over his head, and some pills you said you could get or procure or look up or something. Then, when Eric didn't like that way, you switched services and made him a weight to go round his belly.

Gilbert You bitch. What you call the squeaky clean plastic alternative was for his sake, more sure, surrounded by his friends at the last. The weight was for your sake, to save you intrusive questions in your grief. I didn't stop him, because I couldn't stop him, and in any case I don't have a problem in speeding up an inevitable death by a few agonising days.

Moira So, if Eric had had cancer of the stomach, that's all right. But, if he was frustrated, depressed, he's got to go on suffering?

Gilbert I would never have helped if I had known it wasn't terminal cancer.

Moira Do you still love me, Eric? Enough to die for me, Eric?

Eric I almost did. You sound mediæval.

Moira mediæval?

Eric Yes. It always seemed to me pointless for the lady to require her lover to prove his love by a feat of valour which kills him. You always kept me at bay.

Moira I didn't. I loved you. I needed a baby. You couldn't oblige. Or, wouldn't.

Eric So you turned to the next available squire, I suppose.

Gilbert So, I'm just a squire, a buck, a stud. Is that it?

Moira No.

Eric And besides it's quite untrue about always wanting a baby by me.

Moira Even if I had, you couldn't.

Gilbert Couldn't? You said that before.

Moira Yes. Couldn't. He was impotent.

Eric You bitch. That was private.

Moira I'm fed up with you trying to make me responsible.

Eric You were. I was only impotent with you. Something about you, sort of squeaky clean, never let me forget... I don't know exactly why, but it was a fact.

Moira You lowdown lying evasive manipulator. You never said there were others.

Eric Why in the world would I do that?

Moira Honesty with the woman you professed to love.

Gilbert Not lovers for twenty years?

Moira Yes. You ask him why.

Gilbert Why?

Eric Why what?

Gilbert Why were you impotent?

Eric Ask her, she seems to be full of disclosure right now.

Moira He wasn't in his tent, because he was working over a Vietnamese woman.

Eric How do you know that?

Moira Deny it if you dare.

Gilbert You mean when his tent was fragged and the brother officer died?

Moira Yes. That's what I mean. Eric was out whoring. Betraying me.

Eric I never betrayed you. Not in spirit. It was a horrible war. Anyway, Gilbert, deliberate betrayal is worse than betrayal at the height of passion. Deliberate, cold-blooded, intentional betrayal. Moira, now it's your turn to ask him.

Moira What's he talking about?

Gilbert I haven't the slightest idea.

Eric Tell me where you met Moira.

Gilbert In New Bedford.

Eric That's not what Moira told me.

Gilbert What did she tell you?

Eric That you met in Boston. At a conference about the sea.

Gilbert Well we met there, too.

Eric Trying to conceal the truth without actually lying? You were a grad student at Columbia.

Gilbert Wrong man, I'm afraid.

Eric José said Moira had hired his boat for a man called Dow, you, that is.

Gilbert Well, yes. Good Norfolk family. I mean Norfolkshire England, not Virginia.

Eric Gilbert's not a popular American name, is it?

Gilbert How would I know?

Eric But Dow certainly is, isn't it? Particularly at Columbia. Dow Chemical. Agent Orange. Institute of Defense Analysis. I wouldn't be likely to forget someone called Dow working in the Office of Student Activities, now would I?

Gilbert But I'm English. I had nothing to do with Dow Chemical.

Eric Perhaps not, but you worked in the Office of Student Activities, and you know it. I never knew your first name, but I started thinking when we were singing Arlo Guthrie.

Moira Right man, I'm afraid.

Eric That's where you met and that's where you became lovers while I was fighting this filthy war.

And what did you do after the riots? Who did you finger? Me, for instance? To force me into the war?

Gilbert I didn't finger anyone. I had the police breathing down my neck. Photo after photo, just as Arlo Guthrie says. Who's this person? Who's that person? Besides, I was employed by the school, they paid me to be loyal to them, not to the students.

Moira Gilbert! So you were behind the mass of student expulsions!

Gilbert You could put it that way. But, what were you doing? An anti-war protester volunteering for the military?

Eric For the Army, don't forget.

Gilbert What difference does it make. You volunteered. You deserted your muckers.

Eric Muckers? What's that?

Gilbert Your fellow protesters, if you like.

Eric I volunteered for the Army because half of it was black, like our slum neighbours Columbia was dragging in the dirt.

Gilbert You could have waited for the draft.

*(THEY COME TO A STANDSTILL)*

Moira Get out, both of you.

Eric don't need your stud any more? What about the baby?

Moira I'm pregnant. I don't need either of you.

Gilbert you said you had a miscarriage.

Moira it wasn't true.

Gilbert then why...?

Moira I loved him, too. You knew I'd stopped having my periods, so I had to say something, one way or the other. If I told you I was pregnant, and by you, there is no way your pride wouldn't have seeped across and wounded Eric. I believed he was dying. I really did. I didn't want there to be any possibility, not even the slightest, of hurting him more. So, I told you there had been a miscarriage. But that didn't stop you using that, even that, to make Eric's life more miserable.

Now get out, both of you.

Eric Might as well, Gilbert. No future for you here.

Moira And you too, Eric.

Eric Come on, Gilbert. We'll go together. Arm in arm to continue our life of crime. Only I had twenty years of it and you only had six months.

*(THEY GET UP AND FOLLOW EACH OTHER OUT OF THE DOOR)*

Moira Men! Just a teaspoon of semen, that's all they are. *(TURNING TO THE AUDIENCE)* And what's so bad about being a single mother? Artificial Insemination Donor - or maybe even Harry might oblige. Hah! A.I.H. Artificial Insemination Husband, only it'll be Artificial Insemination Harry - same acronym. I don't even need to lie about it. A.I.H, I'll say, and everyone will know I had a husband. Remember Harry? the Sears floor walker, the one who sings sad cowboy songs? he's more my type. He'll keep me company... if I need it.

*(CURTAIN)*