

~~DEP. I'm used to it. (Pause.) It's a watch.~~

SUSAN. Good thinking.

(Re-enter PAUL with PHIL and JANICE, bearing gifts.)

BEN. Ah, here it comes. O.K., guy, hand it over and face the music.

PAUL. Me?

BEN. You know what they say about presents—lovers first. Theirs are always the worst. Friends later. Theirs are always greater.

Begin

PAUL. Do they say that? I don't know. Happy birthday. (Gives SUSAN gift.)

SUSAN. (Surprised by coolness.) Thank you. (Starts to open it.)

PAUL. I should explain this, by the way. I thought I'd get something really special this year and . . . there's these places midtown you never hear about. At least, I never did. They're shops, right, stores, like they sell things, but. Like where I found this thing. All they sell there is ancient Chinese treasures and you have to make an appointment to even get in the place. So . . . you're like the only customer. It's incredible. You get inside and you're in a different world. It's completely quiet. You can't hear any sounds from the street and all the stuff is under glass cases like a museum and the lady that shows you around says things like "Now here's an unusual little figurine . . . very rare Tang Dynasty, perhaps you'd like me to take it out for you." I mean, that's what I call shopping. Do you like it? (SUSAN holds up figurine of a horse. It has an opening in its back.)

SUSAN. It's beautiful.

PAUL. Isn't it nice? Genuine Ming Dynasty. There's only about twenty of them in the world. That's what the lady said. They were only for the royal family. That's why I thought it was a nice idea. What they'd do is if the Emperor had a son that died before he was old enough to rule they'd crenulate the body and put the ashes in that hole in the back and then they'd bury the whole works. I guess that's why they're so rare. But listen to this. This is the great part. It's shaped like a horse because they had this belief that the horse would take the child's spirit on a ride where it'd see its whole life passing by . . . the life it would have had if it hadn't died. And that way it could go to its final resting place in peace. At least that's what the lady explained.

~~BEN. Jesus, guys, this must've cost you back a few pennies.~~

PAUL. ~~Oh, yeah.~~ But like I said, I wanted to get something really

special and I think I got a pretty good deal. They were asking ninety-seven thousand, but I got 'em down to ninety-three. Not bad.

~~PAUL. Still, I had to sell the business, all the editing machines, the office equipment, the lease on the building, and I had to cash in my stocks and take out all my savings, but I finally scraped it all together.~~

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SUSAN. Paul . . . ?

PAUL. I just thought it was worth it. We need something in this apartment for all the ashes. The unborn embryos. Isn't that what they do after they take 'em out. Don't they burn 'em, or did you have one of those guys that just pops it in a baggie and into the trash can . . . ?

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PAUL. You mean you don't like it after all that?

SUSAN. Paul, is this for real?

PAUL. Is what for real?

SUSAN. This. (The horse.)

PAUL. Oh, yes. That's for real. . . . I thought you meant the embryo and I was going to ask you about that because it seems to have slipped your mind.

SUSAN. Is that what this is all about?

PAUL. I just thought it might be worth bringing up.

SUSAN. Who told you? Selina?

PAUL. Oh, is that what's important? Who told me? It wasn't you, that's for sure. And it's a pretty goddamn weird thing to find out about from someone else. That your wife had an abortion six months ago and didn't bother to tell you about it. I guess I must just be one of those naturally curious people because when I found out it made me want to know all kinds of things, Susan. Like just what the fuck has been going on in our life? All these wonderful little human dramas going on under my nose and I didn't know a thing about it. Was it mine?

SUSAN. Yes.

PAUL. Why didn't you tell me?

SUSAN. Paul, I don't know. I really don't know. I meant to. I wanted to.

PAUL. I see. Anything else, or is that sort of the full explanation?

SUSAN. I don't know anything else. I didn't mean not to tell you.

PAUL. That's very illuminating. That really makes me feel like this is something we can work out. I mean, what are we, Susan? Remind me because it's getting kind of vague in my mind. Are we married? Something like that? Is there some kind of unique relationship here? Something that might be worth looking into? Are you saying you didn't tell me because it isn't an interesting fact, or it's just not a very important thing for me to know about? Or it's an unpleasant topic of conversation or it's none of my business? I mean, what is this shit???

SUSAN. Stop it . . .

PAUL. SUSAN!!!!

~~PAUL. [REDACTED]~~

PAUL. GET OUT!!!

~~PAUL. [REDACTED]~~

PAUL. ~~GET OUT!!!~~ (BEN retreats. *Quiet.*) It hurts, Susan. It just hurts. All this silence between us. All this unknown stuff. You know how much I want a kid. You know that. I mean what've I been doing for the past three years? Running my ass off building up a business—working twelve hours a day? Am I supposed to have been doing that for the deep satisfaction it gave me? Do you think I'm a mental defective or something? I mean, at very worst I thought this was all some kind of weird test I was going through—some bizarre nest-building ritual to prove I was worthy of fertilizing your eggs. That was the only way I could look at it and still feel marginally sane. . . .

SUSAN. I don't believe this. Are you saying you did everything you did so I'd let you make a baby? Is that what you're saying? Because if it is . . . well, nice to know what you're keeping me around for. Thank you.

PAUL. Susan, you know that's not what I meant.

SUSAN. All I know is it's a pretty shitty thing to lay on me. Nobody forced you to do anything you didn't want to do. So what's this thing like it's all been some kind of terrible ordeal? Jesus, Paul, what's the matter with you? You are allowed to enjoy it, you know. There's no law that says you have to feel terrible about it. You earned it, for God sake. You deserve it. And I'm proud of you, babe. I really am. I just want to see you be happy with it.

PAUL. But why didn't you say anything?

SUSAN. (*Quiet.*) Paul. I like what we have. I guess I just don't want anything to change it all.

PAUL. And telling me would have changed it all.

SUSAN. I don't know. Wouldn't it?

PAUL. Well, if it would, then what the hell is it we have that's so great?

SUSAN. Oh, so now we have nothing . . .

PAUL. Well, tell me, Susan, what do we have? Tell me what we have . . .

SUSAN. Everything you've done. Everything I've done. Everything we've got. It's all nothing? None of it means anything to you? My God, Paul, how you must be suffering.

PAUL. We really hate each other, don't we?

SUSAN. Babe, I don't hate you. I just don't understand why we always make everything so complicated for each other. Hasn't this been a good time? I mean, I was under the impression we were more or less happy. In fact, I was even thinking if Greg and Francine get divorced we'll be the longest couple of all our friends.

PAUL. Except for Doug and Maraya.

SUSAN. That doesn't count. They're not married. Shit!

PAUL. What?

SUSAN. I'm smoking. (*They smile.*)

PAUL. I don't know what it is, Susan. I mean, yes, I want all this. Sometimes. Sometimes I'm really amazed it's me that's doing all this. There's been whole weeks when I went around thinking, "Hey, this is a pretty good deal. I'm happy." I mean, this is it, right? This must be it. I must be happy. But then one day I'll come home, I'll go in there and try to get comfortable, read or something, and for some reason I just can't concentrate. Try to watch TV, can't even manage that. So I start walking around the apartment and I see all the stuff we have. All this stuff. And I start thinking about what we do to get it. You pick up a little box and go click. I tape together pieces of film. Presto. We have everything we want. We're so good at doing these little things that make us able to have all this stuff, but we can't get it together to have one stupid little baby. Us. The two of us. Together. Doesn't that ever seem strange to you? You know, sort of intuitively wrong? Absurd. Something like that?

SUSAN. No, Paul. I'm sorry, it doesn't. The only thing I find strange is the way I keep feeling like I have to have a baby to be enough for you. I mean, what if I decide a baby isn't as important to me as a lot of other things? What happens if I decide that all I want is you? And our life together? And our work? I mean, couldn't that be enough? Paul. (*Pause.*) Paul. Paul, answer me. Am I enough for you without a baby? (*Pause.*) I see. And you wanted to know why I couldn't tell you.

PAUL. I don't know. I don't know. Why didn't you say something

before this?

SUSAN. Maybe I didn't want to know what I just found out. Well, Paul, I'm sorry. I'm sorry you feel so badly about your accomplishments because I'm feeling pretty good about mine and I can't see any reason why I shouldn't. Doug starts doing well, you laugh about it. You think it's funny. You do well and suddenly it's wrong. I don't get it. You can't have it all ways, babe. We're not children anymore. You have what you have. If you want it, keep it and stop making excuses for it. And if you want to be a saint, go back and dig outhouses for the Nglele.

PAUL. Oh, boy.

SUSAN. What?

PAUL. We're in a lot of trouble, aren't we?

SUSAN. I guess we are.

PAUL. So now what?

SUSAN. I don't know. Should we be talking about this now?

PAUL. No. Let's go out and have a great time with Ben and Janice and Phil.

SUSAN. All right. We'll talk about it now. What are we going to do?

PAUL. I don't know.

SUSAN. Well, we're going to have to do something, aren't we?

PAUL. Like a divorce, you mean?

SUSAN. Is that what you want?

PAUL. Do you?

SUSAN. Well, I hadn't exactly been thinking about it a whole lot. Not today. Are you serious?

PAUL. Isn't that what's going on here? Can you think of anything else we could do?

SUSAN. Well, well, happy birthday.

PAUL. I meant it to hurt, Susan.

SUSAN. Yes. We'll call a lawyer in the morning.

PAUL. Lawyer? (Pause.) O.K.

SUSAN. Fine.

PAUL. Jesus. (Plane flies over. They look at each other. Blackout.)

END

SCENE 8

Slide: 1979. The cabin, winter, snow outside. Early evening. Open pot-belly stove with fire. Old couch with crochet-square afghan cover-

ing in. PAUL. (Pause.) ...
 sits on couch. SUSAN showing slides on wall from projector with a carousel. Slide of DOUG and MARAYA and three children standing proudly in front of construction firm's office building. Then the carousel is at an end leaving white square on wall.

PAUL. Wait a minute. Go back. Let me see the last one again. (SUSAN backs up to DOUG and MARAYA and family.) Doug and Maraya. He shaved off his beard.

SUSAN. Yeah, a couple of months ago. That's his office. I used it for background on a job. (Turns the lights on.) I think he's a little upset you haven't been in touch.

PAUL. It's the first time I've been back east.

SUSAN. You could've called. Written a letter.

PAUL. Hey.

SUSAN. What?

PAUL. This is real nice. I'd sort of forgotten. Well, I hadn't forgotten, but I hadn't remembered with total accuracy, if you know what I mean.

SUSAN. I think I know what you mean.

PAUL. So you actually went and bought this place.

SUSAN. Yeah, nostalgia. I got a good deal. The Pearsons let me have it cheap because we'd been married here. They're sentimental.

PAUL. Opportunist.

SUSAN. How come you haven't been in touch with anyone? Selina was asking about you. Gary and Linda. Even Lawrence. You hiding in San Francisco?

PAUL. No, I just . . . it didn't feel real until the divorce came through. I don't know. I just didn't want to think about all that.

SUSAN. Who's Edie?

PAUL. Edie? (SUSAN exits into bedroom, keeps talking.)

SUSAN. (Offstage.) Yeah. I called you in San Francisco a couple months ago and someone called Edie answered the phone.

PAUL. Oh. She never said anything.

SUSAN. (Offstage.) What?

PAUL. I said she never said anything.

SUSAN. (Offstage.) I didn't tell her who I was.

PAUL. More secrets, huh?

SUSAN. (Offstage.) Who is she?

PAUL. Just a woman I'm seeing.