

The Three Great Loves of Christopher J. Tomaski

by
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THE THREE GREAT LOVES OF CHRISTOPHER J. TOMASKI

SETTING: An outdoor courtyard near an old house.
Late summer. A lawn table and chairs are near the house.

AT RISE: CHRIS TOMASKI, about 27 years old,
enters riding a girl's bicycle, much too small for him. He
wears a dark suit.

CHRIS

This sleepy little town, floundering in the last dead heat of summer. It seems so innocent, but it's a powerful magnet. Here I am again. There was a time when I was well-known here: "Smartest Kid Ever to Graduate from Golden High." After my father's accident, I became "Richard's Son, Sorry to Hear About Your Dad, How's Your Mother?" They never ask about him, I suppose because they already know the answer. He's the same. He's always the same, sitting in bed, staring, a complete look of shock upon his face. The doctors say he will never improve.

(CHARLOTTE enters. She wears a flowing white dress;
her face is very pale.)

CHRIS

Thanks to recent events, I have now become "Charlotte's Brother," though her name remains unspoken. They look through me, pretending I'm just another passerby. I suppose they don't know what to say or they're afraid of what I might blurt out. The result is that I have become invisible, just like Charlotte... The first time I saw her again was the day after the funeral. I came here, looking for The Answer. Her answer.

(He rides towards Charlotte, sees her, falls off the bike and
lays on the ground, stunned. She looks at him, then goes
to the door and knocks. No one answers. She knocks on
all the windows. She tries the locks. She exits and we
can hear her knocking elsewhere. Chris remains on the
ground, still stunned, until she returns. She sits next to
him and returns his stare.)

CHRIS

Charlotte? But... You're dead.

(She nods)

CHRIS

This is a very poor reflection on my sanity. It's... it's good to see you. You look... a little pale, but good. How are you?

(Charlotte shrugs but smiles. Chris untangles himself from the bike.)

CHRIS

You know, there's a certain expectation, when people die, that they... stay dead. Normally. But obviously, you are still dead, so I suppose, I mean, that they stay buried, which you're not. So, you can see my confusion... It would be natural, is natural, to feel this way. If it's not impolite, I have some questions. They seem important, maybe not in the light of the fact that is a highly unusual moment. But--

(Charlotte gently places her hand over his mouth. She kisses him on the cheek and shakes her head.)

CHRIS

Okay. We'll save the big questions for later. Which is completely unfair and shows great generosity on my part. I mean, to take your own life... It would have been nice if you'd left a note, to clarify... To be here and have you gone, the place just doesn't feel right. Even the shapes of the buildings seem wrong, the colors are off. I miss you.

(During this, Charlotte lies back idly on the grass and watches the house. Chris joins her.)

CHRIS

It sure was a great house. Remember when John and I bombed your tea party with water balloons?

(Charlotte smacks him playfully.)

CHRIS

Hide and seek in the attic? That stash of antique dresses you found? All kinds of treasures hidden up there.

(Charlotte is serious again.)

CHRIS

Mom couldn't possibly stay here, Charlotte. Not after Dad's accident.

(Charlotte gets up and knocks on the door again.)

CHRIS

There's no one home. The Goldmans are on a four week fishing trip in Canada. Mom sold it to them months ago.

(Charlotte seems upset, tries the door again. Chris gets up.)

CHRIS

It's locked. They're not here. Do you need to get inside to haunt the place? Great--my sister, Local Legend, soon to be a major tourist attraction.

(Charlotte tackles Chris. They wrestle, but he wins easily. She's mad, he laughs, but his mood suddenly changes and he jumps off.)

CHRIS

Jesus, I'm wrestling with the dead. This is bad. Very bad.

(Charlotte examines the bike.)

CHRIS

Your old bike. It was the one thing Mom still had that really said "Charlotte" to me. She said I could keep it. It's kind of sick, trying to pick out souvenirs to remember dead people. I'm taking it back with me to California. Lisa won't like it. She has a thing about bikes--her brother, you know. I'll keep it in the attic. I can picture you on it. Long ponytail flying behind you. Tassels hanging off the handgrips. I thought about buying some, to make it more complete, but... that might be going overboard.

(Charlotte hops on the bike and starts riding. She's weak and unstable.)

CHRIS

You can barely ride the thing. You obviously have no more use for it.

(Charlotte disagrees.)

CHRIS

See that's part of the deal. When you die, we get your stuff. That's the way it's supposed to be. It's mine now.

(Charlotte rides away, out of sight.)

CHRIS

Charlotte! Charlotte! Come back. That's my bike. Come back. Charlotte. (to audience) So she stole my bike. Her bike, but it's mine, really. We've been meeting here every day for more than a week now. She's begun to speak. Still doesn't say much, but she's demanding. A real pain in the ass. She won't answer any questions, but that's her right, I guess. I like coming here, just to get away from that deathtrap my Mom now calls home. I'm a horrible son. I don't help as much as I should with Dad. I don't mind feeding him. But the bathing, I just can't... He still looks so young, and we... we look an awful lot alike, and I can't help thinking that that will be me some day, soiling my diaper, waiting for someone to wipe the shit off me. He drools. The expression on his face is bad enough, but...

(LISA enters. She's casually dressed, about the same age as Chris.)

LISA

Thought I'd find you here.

CHRIS

I've become very predictable.

LISA

Yes.

(He goes back to staring at the house. She joins him.)

CHRIS

You managed to escape my Mother.

LISA

She's not so bad.

CHRIS

Yes, she is.

LISA

Okay, so maybe she's a little manic at times.

CHRIS

This is obviously not the way I intended for you to meet my family.

LISA

No... So is it working?

CHRIS

What?

LISA

Staring at your old house? You've been here constantly, for more than a week now. Have you found the answer?

CHRIS

Not yet.

LISA

What a shock.

CHRIS

I'm getting closer.

LISA

How much longer?

CHRIS

Hard to say.

LISA

What if there is no answer?

CHRIS

It wasn't an accident, Lisa. She didn't just come home, see a razor lying on the counter and say, "Hey, maybe I'll slit my wrists and see how long it takes me to bleed to death."

LISA

I know what you're going through.

CHRIS

Your brother was killed by accident, Lisa. No one has to suck up any blame.

LISA

It's not your fault.

CHRIS

Not completely.

LISA

Not at all.

CHRIS

If I have a little more time--

LISA

You don't. You have to start acting normal again.

CHRIS

What exactly do you mean by normal?

LISA

Not staring at this house all day. Talking to people. Eating and sleeping every once in a while. The whole town is whispering about you, the phantom, creeping around all night.

CHRIS

I don't care what they say.

LISA

It's hard on your Mom.

CHRIS

She'll get over it. They'll get over it.

LISA

Get away from here, from this house, from your mother, from your sister.

CHRIS

But she's--

LISA

I got your Mom to book us a flight back to California. It leaves tomorrow night at 7:30.

CHRIS

I can't.

LISA

Think about it. Think about it real hard, Chris.

CHRIS

All I've been doing is thinking. I'm not done yet.

LISA

You can think on the airplane. You can think in California.

CHRIS

You just can't stand to be here anymore.

LISA

Is that what you want to hear? Fine. It's true. It gets to me. The townspeople with their stares and whispers, your mother... don't get me wrong, she's... she's nice, but I don't know how much longer I can take it.

CHRIS

What should I tell her? "Sorry, Mom, I know your daughter's dead and your husband's a vegetable, but I have to get on with my life. Too bad yours is shot to Hell, but that's the breaks. See ya."

LISA

So what's your solution? To stare at this house and hang out with your mother?

CHRIS

I don't know. I mean, I should stay with her, I should help her. I have a responsibility.

LISA

She would make you crazy.

CHRIS

That's the danger of having a family. The distinct possibility that they will drive you insane.

LISA

And what about us?

CHRIS

This is not the time to make long-term decisions about our relationship.

LISA

Have you looked in a mirror lately? You're a wreck. You're on the edge, Chris, and if you stay here you're just going to get worse. You need to get away from here. If you're worried about your mom, I'll stay.

CHRIS

You go. You hate it here.

LISA

I hate what it's doing to you. What it's doing to us.

CHRIS

Just a little more time.

LISA

You have until tomorrow to decide, to decide about our future. Try thinking about that.

CHRIS

I have. A lot.

LISA

If you don't get on that plane tomorrow... We're both going crazy here, and I'm not going to just watch it happen.

(Lisa exits.)

CHRIS

So that was it. The Big Ultimatum. Is it fair? It doesn't matter, it's definitely real. I have considered trying to explain about Charlotte, but there are some things... People who spend their lives counting bird nests and analyzing hatching patterns are not prone to believing in ghosts. I can't ask her to stay here. She sees the clear insanity floating around my family and has the natural impulse to run away as fast as humanly possible. The fact that she stayed this long shows that she's clearly, madly, deeply in love with me. Which I consider a very positive sign.

(MONA enters carrying a picture album.)

MONA

Christopher. You've been here long enough. I've actually had a call from the Goldmans. You understand that there is no phone where they are, yet they still heard that you have been loitering in their yard, and they were a little concerned. I reassured them that nothing was going on, though I had to explain about your sister, which you can understand was very difficult for me, but they finally said it wasn't a problem. Christopher?

CHRIS

I heard you, Mother.

MONA

What are you doing?

CHRIS

Nothing. Staring. Thinking about this house.

MONA

It's not polite to stare.

CHRIS

At a building?

MONA

Fine. It's creepy. It's creepy to stare at a building every day, all day, for more than a week. People start to question your sanity. They think you're not bearing up well under the strain. They think you need professional help. I know you and your sister loved this house, but there was no choice. I had to move him. It was impossible to stay. Impossible.

CHRIS

Don't you ever miss it?

(Mona sits in a lawn chair.)

MONA

Sometimes. But life changed. In a flash.

CHRIS

Sure.

MONA

Have you seen your Father's upper denture? I looked everywhere.

CHRIS

It must have dropped out. It's always been loose.

MONA

I never noticed.

CHRIS

He'll be better off with a new one.

MONA

"Better off." It's like there's a little jury out there that judges the effect of every decision. "She was suffering, she's better off. You'd be better off if you put him in a home. Why don't you just let him, you'll be better off."

CHRIS

Who cares what people say?

MONA

You've been gone too long. You forget how it is here.

CHRIS

I see more clearly now. Distance helps.

MONA

The virtues of living beyond our myopic little cloud.

CHRIS

There are some advantages, yes.

MONA

Come here. Sit with me.

(She opens the photo album and he joins her, reluctantly.)

MONA

Here she is. The very beginning. Nine pounds nine ounces. I screamed and screamed. I expected to look down and see her wrapped in my guts, it hurt so much.

MONA (cont'd)

But she was so sweet, even then. Just one look was enough. That may have been our last peaceful moment together.

CHRIS

It's natural for mothers and daughters to fight.

MONA

(flipping ahead) Here's a good one. I didn't think I could actually make a pumpkin suit. Look at the smile on that girl. She was the cutest tricker treater in the whole town. As I recall, she threw up all night long because you challenged her to "chug" her entire bag of candy.

CHRIS

It seemed like fun at the time.

MONA

Her birthday party. Eight years old, with a whole yard full of friends. What a time we had. Pin the tail on the donkey, relay races. Though I remember an incident with you and your friends stealing birthday cake, leading to considerable tears. Look at the smile on that girl. Look how happy.

CHRIS

She was happy.

MONA

Here. (laughs, flips ahead) The smiles. Look at all the smiles. Look at the smiles on that girl. She was happy, Chris. Both of you were happy kids. She really was. Most of the time. At least an average amount. You kids fought, sure, but no more than normal. She was not--

CHRIS

I know. I was there, remember. She had a happy childhood.

MONA

That's all I'm trying to say. She's wasn't beaten, molested, abused, neglected, forgotten, abandoned, starved. We never laid a hand on her. We did a good job. Look at you. We treated you the same. You turned out fine.

CHRIS

No one blames you, Mom.

MONA

Of course they do. They can't blame your father, can they? They all watch Oprah and those other goons on television and look at me and wonder--"What did you really do to that little girl?" Well, I have proof. Look at these pictures. She was not unhappy. Here, look. Even in high school.

CHRIS

She was not happy in high school.

MONA

What are you saying? Look. Look at these.

(Chris steps away. Mona remains on the chair, flipping through the pictures, muttering to herself.)

CHRIS

And so it goes. Obsessed may be a little harsh, but anyone entering within a twenty-five foot radius is fair game for The Picture Album.

(Charlotte enters on her bike. The bike handles have streamers now.)

CHARLOTTE

Brother.

CHRIS

Hello, Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE

Do you have them?

CHRIS

Yes.

CHARLOTTE

Well?

CHRIS

It's just... it's kind of sick, you know.

(He pulls an upper denture out of his pocket and hands it to her.)

CHARLOTTE

To remember his smile.

CHRIS

He looks ridiculous.

CHARLOTTE

No one sees him.

CHRIS

What are you doing with all this stuff?

CHARLOTTE

For me to know and you to find out. What about my request?

CHRIS

The answer is still no.

CHARLOTTE

Take a risk.

CHRIS

Breaking rules doesn't give me a thrill.

CHARLOTTE

For me?

CHRIS

They won't throw you in jail.

CHARLOTTE

Baby.

CHRIS

Do it yourself.

CHARLOTTE

Too weak.

CHRIS

Then maybe it's something that shouldn't be done.

CHARLOTTE

Very important.

CHRIS

It's too dumb for me to attempt. I can steal from our family for you, but after that...

CHARLOTTE

I know a secret.

CHRIS

Which you refuse to share.

CHARLOTTE

I'll tell, if...

CHRIS

And you'll tell me what I want to know?

CHARLOTTE

I'll tell a secret.

CHRIS

Promise?

CHARLOTTE

Cross my heart.

CHRIS

Why don't I just go back and get the rest of Dad's teeth?

CHARLOTTE

I need something. Inside.

CHRIS

Stealing is wrong. Stealing from the Goldmans is very wrong. We don't even know them.

CHARLOTTE

It's important to me. And you. It's hidden.

CHRIS

I'm not going in there.

CHARLOTTE

Just help me.

CHRIS

You expect me to take pity on you? You have always expected people to be considerate of you, regardless of how you treat them. Maybe you're not informed about what is fair and what is unfair. What you're asking me to do is unfair. Withholding the information that you possess is unfair. You being gone, dead, unreachable, suddenly yanked from our lives, that is unfair.

CHARLOTTE

Chris.

(She puts her arm around him.)

CHRIS

All right. All right. All right. (he walks around the yard) We need a rock or brick or something.

(They search. Charlotte finds a brick, tries to lift it, but can only get it up a little way.)

CHARLOTTE

Help.

CHRIS

Perfect. I guess. Unless it makes too much noise. Hell, I have no idea.

(He picks up the brick and they walk around to the side of the house, out of sight. The sound of a window being broken.)

CHRIS (OFFSTAGE)

Son of a bitch.

Sounds of glass being cleared out of the window.)

CHRIS (offstage)

Go on. No, I am not coming with you. If whatever you want is that heavy it can stay there. No, I am not going. That's final. No possibility, understand?

(Chris reenters, holding his bleeding wrist.)

CHRIS

God, that stuff's sharp. I didn't even feel it. It cuts so quickly, and the blood flows, eagerly. Charlotte cut her ankle on some glass in the Creek when she was five. I carried her all the way to the clinic, about a mile. When I got there, her blood was all over me... I was the young hero, she the damsel in distress. That seemed to sum up our roles over the years. I was supposed to be there to rescue her... They made a big effort to keep glass out of the swimming hole after that, but I was walking along the Creek, last night, every night it seems, the water like a big, black, oily muscle. There was glass there again.

(Mona puts the album under her arm (she never puts it down) and walks over to Chris. She grabs his wrist.)

MONA

Oh, my God!

CHRIS

Mom.

MONA

Oh, God, please save my son. How long ago did you do it? Sit down, lower the pressure. It looks like you missed the vein. Oh, please, please. They warned me. It's almost contagious, suicide. Everyone in town is watching their kids. Everyone but me.

CHRIS

Mom, stop.

MONA

We'll get you to a doctor, don't worry. Wiesman. He can keep quiet. Don't die on me, Chris. You are my rock, you held us all together.

CHRIS

Mom, it's just a scratch. It's nothing.

MONA

What are you saying?

CHRIS

It was an accident.

MONA

You didn't do this to yourself?

CHRIS

Give me a break.

MONA

I know it's been a hard time for you.

CHRIS

I am not sending out a "cry for help."

MONA

You're sure?

CHRIS

You have nothing to worry about.

MONA

You're the one thing in my life that's worked out.

CHRIS

Untrue. The travel agency is booming.

MONA

It's of no consequence. Come here.

(She opens her arms for a hug. It lasts a long time, longer than he's comfortable with. Finally he breaks off.)

MONA

Thank you.

CHRIS

Anytime.

MONA

Please don't go.

CHRIS

I haven't decided.

MONA

You know how it is here. I'm walled off. I show them the pictures, but they still blame me. They won't drive me out of business, because I'm cheap. The bloodsuckers can't resist a bargain. But I'm isolated. I'm not asking you to stay forever. But I... I get all cooped up in that house, that dinky little house with your father there, always there. If I have someone to talk to, someone who understands... I really don't think I'm asking so much. At least consider it.

CHRIS

I will. I am. But my job--

MONA

Can be replaced. Can't you program computers out here? There must be a thousand places. You're young. I'm not asking you to commit your whole life, nothing like that. Very short term. In the long view, it's a drop, a speck of your time. For me, it would be a lifesaver.

CHRIS

And there's Lisa.

MONA

Lisa is a very nice young woman. I think she's very special. You two have been dating long enough to really know each other. But when someone loves you, they stick by you, no matter what. They don't issue ultimatums. They don't just walk out of your life. To leave, even to threaten, shows a complete lack of understanding and consideration. I don't want to seem harsh, but to leave, like that, would be evil.

CHRIS

She is not evil; she's looking out for me. She thinks... She sees what's going on around here, and she wants to protect me. She just doesn't know how. What she means to me, I can't--

MONA

She's had you to herself for two years and now she doesn't want to share you even for a short while, even when the need is dire.

CHRIS

You don't understand her at all.

MONA

I'm telling you what I see. Look, I need time with my son. I'll confess, I may even be a little desperate, but desperation is not a crime. You've been gone so long, you've missed so much of this whole ordeal.

CHRIS

I know. I'm sorry.

MONA

Don't be. It was not pleasant. It is not pleasant now. But it would be bearable if you were here.

CHRIS

I said I'd think about it.

MONA

You do that. Think about what's important. About responsibilities and obligations. Please.

(She takes out her picture album and starts thumbing through it. Chris gently strokes her hair.)

CHRIS

In some ways she's right. I have been detached, removed, self-insulated. Only a few ever manage to break through. But she's wrong about Lisa. Completely. Unlike the rest of us, she's actually capable of seeing the world beyond herself. I can't just let her go. She makes a difference in life.

(Lisa enters.)

CHRIS

Especially that first day, the day of the funeral.

(She holds his hand and they stare at the house.)

CHRIS

We left the cemetery and just wandered, in silence, by the Creek, through the town, and of course, ended up here.

LISA

So, this is where you grew up.

CHRIS

The site of many cuts, bruises, and triumphs welded together into the man standing before you.

LISA

There'll be a placque someday: "The Boyhood Home of Christopher J. Tomaski."

CHRIS

Right. I wish I'd had more money, so I could have bought the place when Mom sold it. Charlotte never forgave her for selling.

LISA

My family moved so much, we never got attached to a place. You're lucky, to have such a sense of belonging.

CHRIS

Not anymore, thanks to Charlotte.

LISA

The town will get over it. People forget.

CHRIS

Cranky Fenton killed his wife in 1962, but the police couldn't prove it. It was common knowledge. No one ever spoke to him again--he lived here twenty more years until he died. They don't forget.

LISA

Maybe your mom should move.

CHRIS

It doesn't work that way. No, Charlotte knew what she was doing.

LISA

Then let your mother shoulder the blame, if that's what has to happen. Stop looking for ways to take part of it for yourself.

CHRIS

You think that's what I want? You think I want to feel responsible?

LISA

Do you?

CHRIS

No. No. Definitely not.

LISA

Then let it go. Just be sad that she's gone. Spend your time missing her, not deciphering her.

CHRIS

It's not that simple. I called her that night. I talked to her just hours before, minutes before. I didn't hear anything in her voice. Don't you think I should have heard something? I shared happy tidings, an important secret. She seemed happy for me.

LISA

What secret?

CHRIS

We had a good conversation. Everything seemed okay.

LISA

Then it wasn't you.

CHRIS

What if I missed something? A catch in her voice, a tone...

LISA

Maybe you did. Maybe it's all your fault. Maybe what you told her is exactly the reason why she need to split herself open. Maybe. What are you going to do about it?

CHRIS

Good question.

LISA

I was thinking... Let's get out of here for a little while. I've never seen the Continental Divide, why don't we drive up there?

CHRIS

Now?

LISA

We won't be missed for a couple hours. All we talk about is Charlotte, all we don't talk about, all we think about is Charlotte. A little break might be good, provide some perspective, breathing room.

CHRIS

I... I don't think so. I'd rather just stay here.

LISA

Okay. We could stare at this house.

CHRIS

Good idea.

LISA

And think.

CHRIS

Quietly.

(They stare at the house in silence. Lisa removes a small squirt gun from her pocket. She very quietly squirts up in a high arc and a few drops hit Chris. He looks up at the sky.)

CHRIS

Might rain.

LISA

Yeah.

(They stare at the house again. She squirts him in the back of the neck.)

CHRIS

Hey.

LISA

Sorry.

(She squirts him again.)

CHRIS

Not funny.

LISA

Sorry. I was wrong. Very wrong. I didn't mean to disturb your concentration.

CHRIS

Just cut it out.

LISA

Of course. I don't know what I was thinking.

(She squirts him again.)

CHRIS

Lisa Paxton, do I need to confiscate that squirt gun?

LISA

Oh, no, Mr. Tomaski. It was an accident. It won't happen again.

(She squirts him, he comes after her. They wrestle for the gun. He finally wins and raises his arms over his head in triumph.)

CHRIS

The Victor. (squirts her) That'll teach you.

LISA

You're so immature.

(She takes out a small plastic bottle, opens the cap, and starts blowing bubbles.)

CHRIS

You're very well equipped.

LISA

Leave me alone, I'm busy.

(Chris pops the bubbles by shooting them with the squirt gun.)

LISA

Cut it out.

CHRIS

Take that, and that, and that. No one escapes the clutches of Tomaski. Except for maybe this one. Maybe we'll let this one live a peaceful life. (squirts it) Nah.

LISA

You're a brute.

CHRIS

Neanderthal.

(They kiss. A long kiss.)

CHRIS

Lisa...

LISA

What?

CHRIS

I... Nothing. (raises the gun) Pull.

(She blows more bubbles and he shoots them down. He turns to face the audience. She keeps blowing bubbles.)

CHRIS

I won't say that Charlotte was forgotten, but for a few moments she was not tops in my mind. Lisa thinks she sees everything that goes on inside me, and she's close, but... Sometimes I worry, because I don't see her in the same depth. She doesn't need a lot from me--commitment, consideration, kindness, love. I worry she's getting the poor end of the bargain, as far as we're concerned, and one day she'll suddenly realize the truth.

(Lisa exits. Mona lowers the picture album and approaches.)

MONA

It won't be so bad, if you stay here. The town won't be so harsh, self-righteous, united. Not if you're here. With me. The two of us are much harder to ignore than one.

MONA (cont'd)

You were so popular. They still remember your exploits, your glory. Trophies. They're suckers for trophies.

CHRIS

They've already forgotten.

MONA

Give them a chance. It hasn't been that long. You don't look so different.

CHRIS

I'm different.

MONA

They won't think so. You're still Chris Tomaski. I won't ask much of you, I promise. I can do everything for your father. Almost everything. I just need strength. That's all. Loneliness is the greatest killer of women over fifty. I read that. You wouldn't have to do anything.

CHRIS

I'd help out.

MONA

You were always good with your hands. Maybe you could fix the screen door in the back. It won't latch.

CHRIS

I could try.

MONA

There are a few other things. Minor things. It would be so good to see you working with tools in your hands.

CHRIS

Dad was the handy one. I'm Mr. Computer, remember?

MONA

You just need practice, that's all.

CHRIS

Sounds like you're looking for cheap labor.

MONA

No. No. That's not what I want.

CHRIS

I was just kidding. I don't mind.

MONA

So you'll think about it?

CHRIS

I'm thinking about it.

MONA

It would be right. For you to stay. Not forever, I'm not asking that... You were such a wonderful child. When you first went to kindergarten, I cried. Every day for months, I cried. My son, my darling son. I dreamt of a giant wind, pushing you back to our door.

CHRIS

I'm grown up.

MONA

But to lose touch. Contact. A phone call every week, slowly becoming once every two weeks. Soon maybe once a month. What does that leave me with? Memories? I'm too young to have a life made of memories.

CHRIS

I'll stay. I'll stay a little while.

MONA

I knew you would.

CHRIS

(to audience) And as quickly as that, I'm fucked. I've opened my big mouth and done it. It's the kind thing you can't just say, "Whoops, I had my fingers crossed, I didn't really mean it." I said it. I meant it. She's my Mother. I have one and only one, and she won't be around forever. If recent events have taught me one thing... She made it clear that she's not asking much. We understand each other. It won't be as bad as you think. It's not something that can be taken back. It's not that simple. There is difficult and easy and simple and insane. I don't know where this falls. It's not that bad, it won't be that bad. She's my Mother.

Lisa enters with a suitcase. She begins speaking, as if in the middle of a conversation.

LISA

It doesn't matter. None of it matters. Look, I brought your suitcase. Mine is already in the car. I packed your things, hoping... I'm an optimist. I thought that you would change your mind, that you would... Come with me. Let's go home.

CHRIS

What if my home is here?

LISA

Is it?

(Chris turns to the audience. Lisa sits on the suitcase.)

CHRIS

It's not that simple. Even to wish for it to be so is an exercise in self-deception. And I know. I have proved myself to be an expert in the field, continuously. But this is not the time. Blindness and forgetfulness lead to the wrong conclusions. Open. Ear, eye, mind. Open. For the briefest instant, the decision is made.

(Mona embraces Chris heartily. He returns it as best he can.)

MONA

To say what this means... I... You can have your choice of rooms. There's so much space now. Whatever will make you happy.

CHRIS

The guest room is fine.

MONA

But not right. You're not a guest. You're not a guest, you're my son. It'll be fine. You'll see. It'll be good. A time to remember.

CHRIS

I know. It'll be good.

(Charlotte enters. She looks horrible, exhausted. She drags a trophy, as if it's made of lead.

It's much too heavy for her to carry, apparently. Chris watches her, Mona does not notice, and she continues speaking despite the fact that Chris is staring at Charlotte.)

MONA

Maybe we could get away for a few days. We can have the nurse stay around the clock, just for a little while. We could go to Steamboat or Crested Butte. They're cheap this time of year. It would be fun. I think we could be allowed to have a little fun. How long has it been since we went anywhere together? I haven't had a vacation since before your Father's accident. What kind of travel agent never leaves town? We don't have to. Maybe you want to look up some of your old friends. We could go to Central City. For a couple hours. It's only a few miles.

(Chris walks over to Charlotte during Mona's speech.)

CHRIS

What the hell? That's what you've been after? This whole time you wanted one of my old math trophies?

CHARLOTTE

It's very special.

CHRIS

If you wanted a memento of me, I could have given you something better. How about an old shoe? I have other trophies, you know. You made me break into the Goldman's house for this? What was it doing in there?

CHARLOTTE

It was hidden.

CHRIS

By you? I have a very nice gash in my wrist, I shed blood for a fake bronze cup of relatively no significance.

CHARLOTTE

Untrue.

CHRIS

You're right. I'm sorry. You can have whatever you want. Take the Goldman's TV, their fish tank, whatever. Maybe some old crayons that we accidentally left behind.

CHRIS (cont'd)

It doesn't matter. But as I recall, we had a deal. I broke the window, and you are supposed to tell me your secret. A simple trade.

CHARLOTTE

A secret.

CHRIS

Why did you...

CHARLOTTE

A different secret.

CHRIS

What? No, no, no.

CHARLOTTE

A more important secret.

CHRIS

We had a deal.

CHARLOTTE

Take this.

(She tries to hand him the trophy.)

CHRIS

I don't want it. It's yours. You owe me, Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE

Take it!

(He reluctantly takes the trophy from her. The instant he touches it, Mona sees it also. She drops the photo album.)

CHRIS

I don't understand why you--

MONA

Christopher!

CHRIS

Yeah, right. Sorry, Mom. We'll go away for a day, get some fresh air, look at the mountains.

MONA

Where did you get that?

CHRIS

It's, uh... I found it. It's one of my old high school trophies, from the math club. I just... I found it.

MONA

Where? Where? That's not possible.

CHRIS

It was just here. In the yard.

MONA

Give it to me.

CHARLOTTE

Don't.

MONA

Did you hear me? Give it to me.

CHARLOTTE

It's not hers.

CHRIS

It's mine. I thought I'd keep it. A memento.

MONA

You have enough junk cluttering up your life. Give it to me. I'll take care of it. I'll dispose of it. It shouldn't be here.

CHARLOTTE

Why not?

CHRIS

Why not?

MONA

You're right. Things happen. It's insignificant. Unimportant. It could be any of a million trophies. You had so many. We were so very proud of you. It seemed that we couldn't turn around in the house without laying a hand on one of your fucking trophies.

CHRIS

Mom?

MONA

Cluttered. Cluttered. Everything in that house was so cluttered. All those trophies around. It's like we lived in some gleaming museum. A tribute to success. To trophies. So many that one would not be missed. You couldn't turn around without laying a hand on one of them.

CHRIS

Calm down.

CHARLOTTE

It was in the attic.

CHRIS

I found it inside. Upstairs. In the attic.

MONA

Why would you go there? You can't go there. The house is locked. You can't go inside.

CHARLOTTE

It was under a board, in the attic. Where no one would ever look.

CHRIS

It was hidden.

MONA

You couldn't find it unless you knew where it was. It's not possible. You don't know where it is. You'll never even look for it. There are so many. No one knows where it is. If someone finds it, they'll just throw it out. Years from now. It has no significance.

CHRIS

Why did you hide it?

MONA

Give it to me.

CHRIS

No.

MONA

Give it to me now. You are my son, my loving, wonderful son, who will always stick by me, who understands me, who will never leave me. Give me the trophy.

CHRIS

Tell me why.

MONA

It's not important to you. It's only important to me.

CHARLOTTE

I know.

CHRIS

Then you tell me.

CHARLOTTE

It's not my secret.

MONA

Please. Christopher.

(She tries to take it from him, but he eludes her. She circles him, he retreats.)

MONA

This is not dignified. Don't make me chase you. Give it to me.

CHRIS

What are you doing?

CHARLOTTE

Don't give it to her. Make her tell.

CHRIS

Why do you want this?

MONA

It's mine. Now. It belongs to me. It's very important. You don't need it. No one needs it.

(Chris trips and she's on him in a flash. They struggle for the trophy as Charlotte watches. Chris is stronger, but Mona is much more desperate. She bites him.)

CHRIS

Owww.

(He pulls her hair and wrenches away the trophy. He's on his feet, staying out of her reach. Charlotte sits on the grass and flips through the picture album.)

CHRIS

You bit me. You bit me.

MONA

I'm sorry. I... Son. Is one little trophy too much to ask? It's simple. Simple, simple, simple.

CHARLOTTE

Where's her picture album?

CHRIS

What?

CHARLOTTE

Ask.

CHRIS

Where's your picture album, Mom?

MONA

What?

(She looks around, frantic.)

MONA

Where is it? I had it. Where is it?

CHRIS

I know.

MONA

You're evil. Evil.

CHRIS

I can get it for you. I know where it went.

CHARLOTTE

I saw her do it.

CHRIS

Do what?

CHARLOTTE

I saw her.

CHRIS

Charlotte saw you.

MONA

No. No one saw. No one was there.

CHRIS

She saw you hide it.

MONA

I was careful.

CHARLOTTE

I saw her do it.

CHRIS

She saw you do it. She watched. Every blessed second. She was a witness.

MONA

No. She would never tell you. She didn't see. No one saw.

CHRIS

Why did you do it?

MONA

You'll leave me.

CHARLOTTE

Rightly so.

CHRIS

I won't.

MONA

It was there. I didn't even think about it. You couldn't turn around without laying a hand on one of those trophies. It was just there, in my hand.

CHARLOTTE

He turned his back on her.

MONA

He turned around and it was there, in my hand. I didn't think about it. It just happened. It just happened.

CHARLOTTE

Smack!

MONA

It was an accident. He looked so surprised. He never expected. He just said it and thought nothing would happen.

CHARLOTTE

He said, "I'm leaving."

MONA

"I'm leaving," he says. What? "I'm leaving you," he says. No good reason.

CHARLOTTE

He didn't love her. Simple as that.

MONA

You can't just leave. You have to explain. You can't just say it and expect that to be the end. It doesn't work that way.

CHARLOTTE

But that's what he wanted.

MONA

"I'm leaving," he says, and turns around. "I'll explain later."

CHARLOTTE

"I just can't explain it right now," he said.

MONA

The look on his face. Frozen. I didn't think I hit him that hard. He was so surprised. It just happened. I had no explanation.

CHARLOTTE

So she pushed him down the stairs.

MONA

The stairs. The door was open, it was right there. It took no effort. I hardly had to move him. He tumbled. Over and over and over. The bastard lies in a pile and stares up at me, that same expression on his face. Never blinked. I didn't expect... I thought...

CHRIS

You thought you killed him.

MONA

I didn't. It was an accident. He fell down the stairs.

CHARLOTTE

I saw.

MONA

No one was there. No one would understand. It was an accident.

CHRIS

Charlotte saw you.

MONA

No. She couldn't. Some things are just between a husband and wife. Some things. That's the way... Where's my photo album.

CHRIS

Give it to her.

(Charlotte takes out a picture for herself, then throws the album at Mona's feet. Mona quickly grabs it and hugs it to her.)

MONA

It wasn't my fault. She was a happy child. She had a good childhood. We didn't beat her, abuse her, hurt her. She was a happy child, I can prove it.

CHRIS

Go home.

MONA

Can I have the trophy?

CHRIS

No.

(He finds a brick and smashes the trophy to pieces.)

CHRIS

It's mine now. Go home.

MONA

You're coming?

CHRIS

Not now.

MONA

But you will.

CHRIS

I don't know.

MONA

You promised. You promised you would stay.

CHRIS

It's not--

MONA

You can't just leave me. You owe me--

CHRIS

Leave me alone! Go on. Go home. Go home.

MONA

I'll make you something nice for dinner.

CHRIS

That would be nice, Mom.

MONA

I'll be waiting.

CHRIS

Sure.

(Mona exits, hugging the picture album tightly. Charlotte starts to gather the pieces of the smashed trophy.)

CHRIS

What are you doing?

CHARLOTTE

It's mine.

CHRIS

Leave it.

CHARLOTTE

You shouldn't have broken it.

CHRIS

Charlotte. Leave it.

CHARLOTTE

It's mine. I went and got it.

CHRIS

Yes, you did...

CHARLOTTE
It was important.

CHRIS
Was it?

CHARLOTTE
Necessary.

CHRIS
I don't know. I don't know.

CHARLOTTE
You were too easy for her to trap.

CHRIS
That wasn't--

CHARLOTTE
The truth is important.

CHRIS
The look on his face.

CHARLOTTE
Understanding is important.

CHRIS
I never... The look in his eyes...

CHARLOTTE
She never forgot.

CHRIS
How could she?

CHARLOTTE
It couldn't be buried. Such a secret.

CHRIS
So that was it. I mean, the reason why... Your reason. It's a good one. I understand. I understand.

CHARLOTTE

Do you?

CHRIS

What I mean is--

CHARLOTTE

You're such an idiot. Are life and death so simple?

CHRIS

No, but--

CHARLOTTE

Just like that. You understand everything now. You never change.

CHRIS

Am I wrong?

CHARLOTTE

Yes.

CHRIS

But... it had to be.

CHARLOTTE

It was an old secret.

CHRIS

It was important, vital, festering.

CHARLOTTE

You don't understand.

CHRIS

I want to.

CHARLOTTE

Really?

CHRIS

More than anything.

CHARLOTTE

You can't stay here. She'll trap you.

CHRIS

I know. I'm leaving. I want to leave. I will leave.

CHARLOTTE

And go where?

CHRIS

With Lisa.

CHARLOTTE

Not much protection.

CHRIS

We'll be a thousand miles away.

CHARLOTTE

Guilt travels at the speed of light.

CHRIS

I'm not responsible. Not for him, not for her.

CHARLOTTE

And me?

CHRIS

I haven't decided.

CHARLOTTE

So wise.

CHRIS

I would love very much to suddenly say that I owe you nothing. The blame is clearly laid at Mother's feet. Let her have it. I go away with Lisa and think about you in my passing sad moments, which become less, year after year, because my life is so damn happy. But your timing..

CHARLOTTE

Lisa will not save you.

CHRIS

You hardly know her.

CHARLOTTE

I know you. You'll come back here. Mother will be more pathetic than ever.

CHRIS

I won't come back.

CHARLOTTE

Was Lisa the reason why you didn't come?

CHRIS

When?

CHARLOTTE

When I was in the hospital? Twice before. You called, but...

CHRIS

I... The first time, I didn't even know her. Hell, Dad was still... I didn't know what to say. No one knew what to say. "Well, hey, little sister, good to see you. By the way, why did you try to kill yourself? How were those pills? What did it feel like when they pumped your stomach?" I was broke, busy... I just didn't know what to say. I didn't want to look at you.

CHARLOTTE

I was a mess. Tubes. Two black eyes. Everyone always watching me.

CHRIS

It wasn't fun for anyone. I couldn't see you. I was so scared to see, I just... I should have come.

CHARLOTTE

Yes. I was so lonely. Worse than now. Now, I'm supposed to be lonely. But then...

CHRIS

I should have come.

CHARLOTTE

I missed you. Every day was horrible. You were the one person...

CHRIS

I know.

CHARLOTTE

It's not fair. To be so far away. Now, farther than ever. A chasm between us.

CHRIS

I don't know the answer.

CHARLOTTE

I know another secret.

CHRIS

Which you'll never tell.

CHARLOTTE

A different secret.

CHRIS

I've had my fill.

CHARLOTTE

About you.

CHRIS

Me?

CHARLOTTE

It's in your pocket.

CHRIS

I told you about that before... before we came out here. That night.

CHARLOTTE

No. This.

(She reaches into his pocket and removes a shard of glass.)

CHARLOTTE

Very nice.