

ROBERT: Yes.

CATHERINE: You're sitting here. You're giving me advice. You brought me champagne.

ROBERT: Yes. *(Beat.)*

CATHERINE: Which means ...

ROBERT: For you?

CATHERINE: Yes.

ROBERT: For you, Catherine, my daughter, who I love very much ... It could be a bad sign. *(They sit together for a moment. Noise off. Hal enters, twenty-eight, semi-hip, clothes. He carries a backpack and a jacket, folded. He lets the door go and it bangs shut. Catherine sits up with a jolt.)*

CATHERINE: What?

HAL: Oh, God, sorry — Did I wake you?

CATHERINE: What?

HAL: Were you asleep? *(Beat. Robert is gone.)* What are you doing?

CATHERINE: You scared me, for Chrissake. What are you doing?

HAL: I'm sorry. I didn't realize it had gotten so late if I'd done for the night.

CATHERINE: Good.

HAL: Drinking alone? *(She realizes she is holding the champagne bottle. She puts it down quickly.)*

CATHERINE: Yes.

HAL: Champagne, huh?

CATHERINE: Yes.

HAL: Celebrating?

CATHERINE: No. I just like champagne.

HAL: It's festive.

CATHERINE: What?

HAL: Festive. *(He makes an awkward "party" gesture.)*

CATHERINE: Do you want some?

HAL: Sure.

CATHERINE: *(Gives him the bottle.)* I'm done. You can take the rest with you.

HAL: Oh. No thanks.

CATHERINE: Take it, I'm done.

HAL: No, I shouldn't. I'm driving. *(Beat.)*

Well. I can let myself out.

CATHERINE: Good.

HAL: When should I come back?

CATHERINE: Come back?

HAL: Yeah. I'm nowhere near finished. Maybe tomorrow?

CATHERINE: We have a funeral tomorrow.

HAL: God, you're right, I'm sorry. I was going to attend, if that's all right.

CATHERINE: Yes.

HAL: What about Sunday? Will you be around?

CATHERINE: You've had three days.

HAL: I'd love to get in some more time up there.

CATHERINE: How much longer do you need?

HAL: Another week. At least.

CATHERINE: Are you joking?

HAL: No. Do you know how much stuff there is?

CATHERINE: A week?

HAL: I know you don't need anybody in your hair right now. Look, I spent the last couple days getting everything sorted out. It's mostly notebooks. He dared them all; now that I've got them in order I don't have to work here. I could take some stuff home, read it, bring it back.

CATHERINE: No.

HAL: I'll be careful.

CATHERINE: My father wouldn't want anything moved and I don't want anything to leave this house.

HAL: Then I should work here. I'll stay out of the way.

CATHERINE: You're wasting your time.

HAL: Someone needs to go through your dad's papers.

CATHERINE: There's nothing up there. It's garbage.

HAL: There are a hundred and three notebooks.

CATHERINE: I've looked at those. It's gibberish.

HAL: Someone should read them.

CATHERINE: He was crazy.

HAL: Yes, but he wrote them.

CATHERINE: He was a graphomaniac. Harold. Do you know what that is?

HAL: I know. He wrote compulsively. Call me Hal.

CATHERINE. There's no connection between the ideas. There's no ideas. It's like a monkey at a typewriter. One hundred and three notebooks full of bullshit.

HAL. Let's make sure they're bullshit.

CATHERINE. I'm sure.

HAL. I'm prepared to look at every page. Are you?

CATHERINE. No. I'M not crazy. *(Beat.)*

HAL. Well, I'm gonna be late ... Some friends of mine are in this band. They're playing at a bar up on Diversey. Way down the hill, they're probably going on around two, two-thirty. I said I'd be there.

CATHERINE. ~~Great. As long as they're there.~~

HAL. They're all in the math department. They're really good. They have this great song you'd like it, called "1" — lowercase 1. They just stand there and don't play anything for three minutes.

CATHERINE. "Imaginary Number."

HAL. It's a math joke.

You see why they're way down the hill.

CATHERINE. Long drive to see some nerds in a band.

HAL. God I hate when people say that. It is not that long a drive.

CATHERINE. So they are nerds.

HAL. Oh they're raging geeks. But they're geeks who, you know, can dress themselves ... hold down a job at a major university ... Some of them have switched from glasses to contacts. They play sports, they play in a band, they get laid surprisingly often, so in that sense they sort of make you question the whole set of terms — geek, nerd, wonk, dweeb, Dilbert, paste-cater.

CATHERINE. You're in this band, aren't you?

HAL. Okay, yes. I play drums. You want to come? I never sing, I swear to God.

CATHERINE. No thanks.

HAL. All right. Look, Catherine, Monday: What do you say?

CATHERINE. Don't you have a job?

HAL. Yeah, I have a full teaching load this quarter plus my own work.

CATHERINE. Plus band practice.

HAL. I don't have time to do this but I'm going to. If you'll let me. *(Beat.)* I loved your dad.

I don't believe a mind like his can just shut down. He had lucid

moments. He had a lucid year, a whole year four years ago.

CATHERINE. It wasn't a year. It was more like nine months.

HAL. A school year. He was advising students ... I was stalled on my Ph.D. I was this close to quitting. I met with your dad and he put me on the right track with my research. I owe him.

CATHERINE. Sorry.

HAL. Look. Let me — You're twenty-five, right?

CATHERINE. How old are you?

HAL. It doesn't matter. Listen:

CATHERINE. Fuck you, how old are you?

HAL. I'm twenty-eight, all right? When your dad was younger than both of us he made major contributions to three fields: game theory, algebraic geometry, and nonlinear operator theory. Most of us never get our heads around one. He basically invented the mathematical techniques for studying rational behavior, and he gave the astrophysicists plenty to work over too. Okay?

CATHERINE. Don't lecture me.

HAL. I'm not. I'm telling you if I came up with one-tenth of the shit your dad produced I could write my own ticket to any math department in the country. *(Beat.)*

CATHERINE. Give me your backpack.

HAL. What?

CATHERINE. Give me your backpack.

HAL. Why?

CATHERINE. I want to look inside it.

HAL. What?

CATHERINE. Open it and give it to me.

HAL. Oh come on.

CATHERINE. You're not taking anything out of this house.

HAL. I wouldn't do that.

CATHERINE. You're hoping to find something upstairs that you can publish.

HAL. Sure.

CATHERINE. Then you can write your own ticket.

HAL. What? No! It would be under your dad's name. It would be for your dad.

CATHERINE. I don't believe you. You have a notebook in that

backpack.

HAL. What are you talking about?

CATHERINE. Give it to me.

HAL. You're being a little bit paranoid.

CATHERINE. PARANOID?

HAL. Maybe a little.

CATHERINE. Fuck you, HAL. I KNOW you have one of my notebooks.

HAL. I think you should calm down and think about what you're saying.

CATHERINE. I'm saying you're lying to me and stealing my family's property.

HAL. And I think that sounds paranoid.

CATHERINE. Just because I'm paranoid doesn't mean there isn't something in that backpack.

HAL. You just said yourself there's nothing up there. Didn't you?

CATHERINE. I —

HAL. Didn't you say that?

CATHERINE. Yes.

HAL. So what would I take?

Right? (Beat.)

CATHERINE. You're right.

HAL. Thank you.

CATHERINE. So you don't need to come back.

HAL. (Sighs.) Please. Someone should know for sure whether —

CATHERINE. I LIVED WITH HIM.

I spent my life with him. I fed him. Talked to him. Tried to listen when he talked. Talked to people who weren't there ... Watched him shuffling around like a ghost. A very smelly ghost. He was filthy. I had to make sure he bathed. My own father.

HAL. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have ...

CATHERINE. After my mother died it was just me here. I tried to keep him happy no matter what idiotic project he was doing. He used to read all day. He kept demanding more and more books. I took them out of the library by the carload. We had hundreds upstairs. Then I realized he wasn't reading. He believed aliens were sending him messages through the dewey decimal numbers on the library books. He was trying to work out the code.

HAL. What kind of messages?

CATHERINE. Beautiful mathematics. Answers to everything. The most elegant proofs, perfect proofs, proofs like music.

HAL. Sounds good.

CATHERINE. Plus fashion tips, knock-knock jokes. I mean it was NUTS, okay?

HAL. He was ill. It was a tragedy.

CATHERINE. Later the writing phase: scribbling, nineteen, twenty hours a day ... I ordered him a case of notebooks, and he used every one.

I dropped out of school. I'm glad he's dead.

HAL. I understand why you'd feel that way.

CATHERINE. Fuck you.

HAL. You're right. I can't imagine dealing with that. It must have been awful. I know you —

CATHERINE. You don't know me. I want to be alone. I don't want him around.

HAL. (Confused.) Him? I don't —

CATHERINE. You. I don't want you here.

HAL. Why?

CATHERINE. He's dead.

HAL. But I'm not —

CATHERINE. HE'S dead. I don't need any protégés around.

HAL. There will be others.

CATHERINE. What?

HAL. You think I'm the only one? People are already working over his stuff. Someone's gonna read those notebooks.

CATHERINE. I'll do it.

HAL. No, you —

CATHERINE. He's my father, I'll do it.

HAL. You can't.

CATHERINE. Why not?

HAL. You don't have the math. It's all just squiggles on a page. You wouldn't know the good stuff from the junk.

CATHERINE. It's all junk.

HAL. If it's not we can't afford to miss any through carelessness.

CATHERINE. I know mathematics.

HAL. If there were anything up there it would be pretty high-

order. It would take a professional to recognize it.

CATHERINE. I think I could recognize it.

HAL. *(Patient.)* Cathy ...

CATHERINE. WHAT?

HAL. I know your dad taught you some basic stuff, but come on. CATHERINE. You don't think I could do it.

HAL. I'm sorry. I know that you couldn't. *(Beat. Catherine angrily snatches his backpack.)* Hey! Oh come on. Give me a break. *(She opens the backpack and rifles through it.)* This isn't an airport. *(Catherine removes items one by one. A water bottle. Some workout clothes. An orange. Drumsicks. Nothing else. She puts everything back in and gives it back. Beat.)* You can come tomorrow. *(Beat. They are both embarrassed.)*

HAL. The University health service is, uh, very good.

My Mom died a couple years ago and I was pretty broken up. Also my work wasn't going that well ... I went over and talked to this doctor. I saw her for a couple months and it really helped.

CATHERINE. I'm fine. *(Beat.)*

HAL. Also exercise is great. I run along the lake a couple of mornings a week. It's not too cold yet. If you wanted to come sometime I could pick you up. We wouldn't have to talk ...

CATHERINE. No thanks.

HAL. All right.

I'm gonna be late for the show. I better go.

CATHERINE. Okay. *(Beat.)*

HAL. It's seriously like twenty minutes up to the club. We go on, we play, we're terrible but we buy everyone drinks afterward to make up for it. You're home by four, four-thirty, tops ...

CATHERINE. Good night.

HAL. Good night. *(Hal starts to exit. He has forgotten his jacket.)*

CATHERINE. Wait, your coat.

HAL. No, you *(don't have to)* — *(She picks up his jacket. As she does a composition book that was folded up in the coat falls to the floor. Beat. Catherine picks it up, trembling with rage.)*

CATHERINE. I'm PARANOID?

HAL. Wait.

CATHERINE. You think I should go JOGGING?

HAL. Just hold on.

CATHERINE. Get out!

HAL. Can I please just —

CATHERINE. Get the fuck out of my house.

HAL. Listen to me for a minute.

CATHERINE. *(Waving the book.)* You stole this!

HAL. Let me explain!

CATHERINE. You stole it from ME, you stole it from my FATHER — *(Hal snatches the book.)*

HAL. I want to show you something, will you calm down?

CATHERINE. Give it back.

HAL. Just wait a minute.

CATHERINE. I'm calling the police. *(She picks up the phone and dials.)*

HAL. Don't. Look, I borrowed the book, all right? I'm sorry, I just picked it up before I came downstairs and thought I'd —

CATHERINE. *(On phone.)* Hello?

HAL. I did it for a reason.

CATHERINE. Hello, Police? I — Yes, I'd like to report a robbery in progress.

HAL. I noticed something — something your father wrote. All right? Not math, something he wrote. Here, let me show you.

CATHERINE. A ROBBERY.

HAL. Will you put the fucking phone down and listen to me?

CATHERINE. *(On phone.)* Yes, I'm at 5724 South —

HAL. It's about you. See? YOU. It was written about you. Here's your name: CATHY. See?

CATHERINE. South ... *(She pauses. She seems to be listening.)*

HAL. *(Reads.)* "A good day. Some very good news from Catherine."

I didn't know what that referred to, but I thought you *(might)* ...

CATHERINE. When did he write this?

HAL. I think four years ago. The handwriting is steady. It must have been during his remission.

There's more. *(A moment. Catherine hangs up the phone.)*

"Machinery not working yet but I am patient."

"The machinery" is what he called his mind, his ability to do mathematics.

CATHERINE. I know.

HAL. *(Reads.)* "I know I'll get there. I am an auto mechanic who after years of greasy work on a hopeless wreck turns the ignition and hears a faint cough. I am not driving yet but there's cause for optimism. Talking with students helps. So does being outside, eating meals in restaurants, riding busses, all the activities of 'normal' life."

"Most of all Cathy. The years she has lost caring for me. I almost wrote 'wasted.' Yet her refusal to let me be institutionalized — her keeping me at home, caring for me herself has certainly saved my life. Made writing this possible. Made it possible to imagine doing math again. Where does her strength come from? I can never repay her."

"Today is her birthday. She is twenty-one. I'm taking her to dinner."

Dated September fourth.

That's tomorrow.

CATHERINE. It's today.

HAL. You're right. *(She takes the book.)*

I thought you might want to see it. I shouldn't have tried to sneak it out. Tomorrow I was going to — it sounds stupid now. I was going to wrap it.

Happy birthday. *(Hal exits. Catherine is alone. She puts her head in her hands. She weeps. Eventually she stops, wipes her eyes. From off a police siren, drawing closer.)*

CATHERINE. Shit.

Fade

Scene 2

*The next morning. Claire, splash, attractive, drinks coffee from a mug. She has brought bagels and fruit out to the porch on a tray. She notices the champagne bottle lying on the floor. She picks it up and sets it on a table. Catherine enters. Her hair is wet from a shower.*

CLAIRE. Better. Much.

CATHERINE. Thanks.

CLAIRE. Feel better?

CATHERINE. Yeah.

CLAIRE. You look a million times better. Have some coffee.

CATHERINE. Okay.

CLAIRE. How do you take it?

CATHERINE. Black.

CLAIRE. Have a little milk. *(She pours.)* Want a banana? It's a good thing I brought food. There was nothing in the house.

CATHERINE. I've been meaning to go shopping.

CLAIRE. Have a bagel.

CATHERINE. No. I hate breakfast. *(Beat.)*

CLAIRE. You didn't put on the dress.

CATHERINE. Didn't really feel like it.

CLAIRE. Don't you want to try it on? See if it fits?

CATHERINE. I'll put it on later. *(Beat.)*

CLAIRE. If you want to dry your hair I have a hair drier.

CATHERINE. Nah.

CLAIRE. Did you use that conditioner I brought you?

CATHERINE. No, shit, I forgot.

CLAIRE. It's my favorite. You'll love it, Katie. I want you to try it.

CATHERINE. I'll use it next time.

CLAIRE. You'll like it. It has jojoba.

CATHERINE. What is "jojoba"?

CLAIRE. It's something they put in for healthy hair.