Charles Busch's

The Tribute Artist

A Samuel French Acting Edition

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THE TRIBUTE ARTIST was commissioned by Primary Stages and received its world premiere at Primary Stages (Casey Childs, Executive Producer; Andrew Leynse, Artistic Director; Elliot Fox, Managing Director) in association with Daryl Roth and Ted Snowdon at 59E59 Theaters in New York City on February 9, 2014. The performance was directed by Carl Andress, with sets by Anna Louizos, costumes by Gregory Gale, lighting by Kirk Bookman, sound by Jill BC Du Boff, music by Lewis Flynn, and wig design by Katherine Carr. The Production Stage Manager was Trisha Henson. The cast was as follows:

RITA . . . . . Julie Halston
ADRIANA . . . . . Cynthia Harris
JIMMY . . . . . Charles Busch
CHRISTINA . . . . . Mary Bacon
RACHEL (OLIVER) . . . . . Keira Keeley
RODNEY . . . . . Jonathan Walker

CHARACTERS

RITA

ADRIANA

JIMMY

CHRISTINA

RACHEL (OLIVER)

RODNEY

CASTING NOTE

The role of Jimmy requires an actor who can convincingly pass as a dignified, elegant older woman. It's not a broad campy impersonation. The story demands that the other characters believe that Jimmy is Adriana and it's important that the audience believe as well. Therefore, the actors playing Jimmy and Adriana must be generally the same height and weight. Christina and Rodney haven't seen Adriana in thirty years, so their memories of her can be somewhat vague, but there must be a realism in the new "Adriana" that they are meeting once again.

SETTING

The first floor of a four story townhouse in Greenwich Village

TIME

The Present

ACT ONE

Scene One

(The first floor of a four story townhouse in Greenwich Village. A front parlor with a staircase leading to the second floor. A pair of pocket doors separate this room from the entrance way. **ADRIANA**, *an elegant older woman is seated. She speaks with a slight but indefinable European accent.* **RITA**, *a seen-it-all younger woman, is wearing a bright colored couture gown that doesn't suit her at all. A chic feather boa hangs around her neck. She pours herself another glass of wine.)*

RITA. Can I take this dress? It's a great color for me. I'm a spring with autumn accents.

ADRIANA. Rita, my pet, that color could not be more wrong for you. And the cut. I designed that dress to be worn by a woman elegantly reed thin.

RITA. I have been often told that I have an aristocratic silhouette.

ADRIANA. By whom? No. You're of common clay; a quality highly valued in today's world. *(She shouts to* **JIMMY** *upstairs.)* What's taking so long? I want to see you in that gown! *(to* **RITA***)* Such innate refinement and delicacy. With those magnificent bones the child can wear anything.

RITA. But, Adriana, he's a man. Anyway, Jimmy's upstairs. He can't hear you. I'd like to try it on next.

ADRIANA. I don't think so. That gown would wear *you.*

RITA. I may lack refinement but I am a very big personality. That's how I sell apartments.

ADRIANA. And not too many from what Jimmy tells me.

RITA. It's the economy.

ADRIANA. Is that so?

RITA. It's the economy.

ADRIANA. Didn't Jimmy tell me that some website listed you as the worst real estate agent in Manhattan?

RITA. That is not true. I got one and a half stars out of four. That was about average. Jimmy!

ADRIANA. One and a half out of four. Doesn't sound encouraging. When the small coterie of women I designed for began dying off, I left the business.

RITA. It didn't hurt having a rich husband. My last two girlfriends worked for Amtrack. They got decent retirement benefits, but not enough to reside like exiled royalty.

ADRIANA. Is that how you think I live? Well, I was fortunate to have the means to retreat within the walls of this townhouse.

RITA. I bet you entertained a lot in your glory days.

ADRIANA. Between my husband's work with the United Nations and my career, there were weeks where we had a dinner party nearly every night. Nehru once sat in that very chair. *(with condescension)* And now you.

RITA. Enough with the digs. Adriana, I don't know why you've never liked me. Believe it or not, most people find me captivating.

ADRIANA. I don't dislike you. I hardly know you.

RITA. Come on. Jimmy's been staying here for years. And I'm always around.

ADRIANA. Two years.

RITA. More like four years.

ADRIANA. Has it been that long? But he's only here, for what, two weeks at most? And then not for another six months. For that I should consider you a *bonne amie*?

RITA. No, but do you have to be so nasty?

ADRIANA. I think you're confusing nastiness with a European sense of irony.

RITA. But it's always at my expense. Sometimes my feelings can actually be hurt.

ADRIANA. I didn't realize you were such a delicate creature.

RITA. Well, I am.

ADRIANA. I can see that. I shall try and temper my astringent manner. It was never my intention to wound you.

(She studies the way **RITA** *has wrapped the boa around her neck.)*

RITA. Well, maybe now we can relate to each other on a more…. What's wrong?

ADRIANA. It's just fascinating how that boa looked expensive until you put it on.

*(***JIMMY** *calls from upstairs.)*

JIMMY. *(offstage)* Are you ready?

RITA. We've been ready for an eternity.

JIMMY. Well, here I come!

*(***JIMMY** *comes down the stairs dressed, wigged and made up exactly like* **ADRIANA**. *He imitates her voice exactly. Slim and elegant, he looks very realistically female.)*

JIMMY. *(as* **ADRIANA***)* Well, Cherie, say something? Are you mute? *(referring to* **RITA***)* Tell that bourgeois cow to put down that boa. Everything she touches looks positively Fourteenth Street.

RITA. That's perfect! He's totally you!

ADRIANA. That is not me. I worked very hard with a renowned speech coach to erase any trace of an accent.

JIMMY. *(as* **ADRIANA***)* And, my dear, you were remarkably successful.

ADRIANA. I was.

JIMMY. *(as* **ADRIANA***)* You were. Anyone with a brain would assume you were born in Tallahassee. (*He drops the accent.*) This is a great wig. When do you wear it?

ADRIANA. Silly question. When I don't feel like doing my own hair. Want it? It's yours.

JIMMY. Thanks, but it doesn't fit any of my impersonations, and I don't wear women's wigs in real life.

ADRIANA. Well, you never know, said the widow.

JIMMY. What does that mean?

ADRIANA. You never heard that phrase? The widow is open to whatever life has to offer. Erotic or otherwise. So take the wig. *(matter of factly)* You're a gorgeous drag queen.

JIMMY. Adriana, please don't call me a drag queen. You know I hate that.

RITA. Here we go.

ADRIANA. Words, words, words.

JIMMY. I'm a celebrity tribute artist.

ADRIANA. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

JIMMY. I recreate legendary female performers. I'm an illusionist. I don't do this for fun. I'm a professional entertainer.

RITA. How long do we get the pleasure of your company this time? When do you have to go back?

JIMMY. I'm not going back.

RITA. It never works when you hold out for more money. You always buckle.

JIMMY. I didn't buckle. *(to* **ADRIANA***)* Is this from the sixties?

RITA. So why aren't you going back?

JIMMY. What am I on trial? *Witness for the Prosecution?* I was let go. Terminated. The Vegas finger.

RITA. They fired you after all these years? I can't believe it.

ADRIANA. There is no loyalty in this world.

RITA. But you're lauded for your Marilyn and your Pearl Bailey. I can't believe it.

JIMMY. Wouldja please stop saying that? Believe it. There is no longer any place for Jimmy Nichols in the Flamingo Hotel's Boys Will Be Girls Revue. I should have seen

the writing on the wall. Last year, both my Julie Andrews and Charo were cut. Finally, I was just left with Marilyn. She is my masterpiece but most of that Vegas crowd just thinks I'm doing Christina Aguilera. Everything's fallen apart since this new producer took over. He's a kid. He's forty years old.

RITA. The new producer – what's his name? Gary? Weren't you going with him?

JIMMY. Yeah.

RITA. And he still fired you?

JIMMY. Yeah.

RITA. You told me on the phone that the two of you were getting married.

ADRIANA. Married?

JIMMY. We went to the Fred Leighton store at the Bellagio and looked at rings. Little did I know he made the same promise to Jennifer Lopez. I mean the drag Jennifer Lopez, a skanky Mexican queen named Jorge. And it turns out Gary was also boffing the drag Katy Perry. I was totally blindsided. And it gets worse.

RITA. How does it get *worse*?

JIMMY. While I was onstage giving my final performance, Gary had the locks changed on the condo I was renting from him. I had to slip the handyman a hundred bucks to break the locks so I could get my things out.

ADRIANA. That's awful!

JIMMY. I still think, in his own way, Gary really loved me.

RITA. Oh, Jimmy, please.

JIMMY. Rita, you don't know Vegas. He had to make an executive decision. Audiences out there want impersonators who can do Rihanna or Beyonce. Liza and Cher are still in the show but, trust me, their necks will soon be on the chopping block. I'm finished. My expiration date is the same as the ladies I impersonate.

ADRIANA. That is a pity. From the video you showed me, you play women so convincingly.

RITA. Except for Jimmy, I find most drag misogynistic. *(unintentionally sounding like a braying, strident harridan)* Why must they all portray women as braying, strident harridans?

ADRIANA. You have a great empathy for women.

JIMMY. I was raised by my grandmother. I dunno.

ADRIANA. Did she want you to be a girl?

JIMMY. No. A gastroenterologist.

ADRIANA. Do you receive a form of sexual gratification from dressing in women's clothes? The soft fabrics? the close fitting garments?

JIMMY. No! This is just what I do best. Like juggling. You don't ask a juggler if he finds his balls sexually stimulating. Bad example.

RITA. He got into drag by accident and it's all because of me. Jimmy and I had a comedy improv act.

ADRIANA. *You* were on the stage?

RITA. Yes, Adriana. I was on the stage. When I met Jimmy I was doing stand-up.

ADRIANA. I can't see it. I've never found you remotely amusing.

RITA. I'll have you know I was nominated by the Manhattan Academy of Comedy Arts and Sciences as Outstanding Up and Coming Female Comic.

JIMMY. I was a makeup artist at the Shiseido counter at Macy's and I was going through a rough patch. I had just broken up with my boyfriend at the time. In retrospect I suppose I gave up on him too easily.

RITA. He burned all your clothes.

JIMMY. Yeah, well –

RITA. And then had *you* arrested for setting fire to the apartment.

JIMMY. Must you always focus on the negative? Anyway, Adriana, the point is I was sleeping on a friend's sofa who lived upstairs from a cabaret and sometimes I'd go downstairs and hang out at the bar and that's where I met *this* dame, holding forth over the cocktail onions.

RITA. And while we were enjoying our cocktails, we'd banter back and forth. Doing different character voices. We'd have the entire bar in stitches. Finally, the bartender suggested we do an act together. Fade out, fade in, we started doing Monday nights.

ADRIANA. And you were in drag?

JIMMY. I wasn't even playing female characters. I was always the guy in all of our sketches.

RITA. The thing is he just wasn't all that funny as the psychiatrist or the soft ball coach. I kept telling him the female celebrity impersonations he did for me afterwards privately were the gold.

JIMMY. So one night while we were doing our sketch about the line at the unemployment office, suddenly I became Mae West. *(as Mae West)* "Oh, how do I apply for an extension?"

RITA. It went over like gangbusters.

ADRIANA. I have no doubt.

JIMMY. We kept it in the act and then I added Katharine Hepburn. *(as Katharine Hepburn)* "Social security was taken out of my paycheck and by golly, I want those benefits!"

RITA. I'd be the woman behind the desk and I'd say "Miss Davis, I see here an opening for a food server at a health food restaurant."

JIMMY. *(as Bette Davis)* You bitch, I have far better things to do than stuff hummos in a pita. Pita, Pita, Pita!

ADRIANA. Oh, Bette Davis. She was once here for dinner.

RITA. Miss Davis, you are taking advantage of my good nature because I'm behind this desk.

JIMMY. *(as Bette Davis)* But you are behind the desk! You are! *(back to himself)* Bette Davis was here for dinner?

ADRIANA. I'll tell you about it later. Go on.

RITA. His impersonations became the act. At a certain point it became obvious that he didn't need me. And frankly, I'd had enough. I wanted to earn a living. I wanted credit cards. So I got my real estate license.

JIMMY. And then I got cast in a Vegas revue. I would never have dreamed I'd be there for a hundred years. And as a female impersonator yet. But I found that I could become these ladies. They're in me *(as Bette Davis)* and I just let 'em out.

ADRIANA. It's like Kabuki. No one ever coached you on how to be an American *Onnagata*?

JIMMY. I just knew how to walk in heels. But what do I do with this great gift that's completely unmarketable? I don't want to think about it now. *(as Vivien Leigh)* I'll think about it tomorrow. *(back to himself)* Or maybe the week after.

ADRIANA. Well, you had better make a plan soon. I don't know how much longer this house will be available.

JIMMY. What? Are you going away?

ADRIANA. I believe quite soon.

JIMMY. You feel strong enough to move? Where are you gonna live? Barcelona? Rome? Acapulco?

RITA. Jimmy, don't be dense. *(to* **ADRIANA***)* Adriana, what makes you think the end is near?

ADRIANA. Just a feeling. A good feeling.

JIMMY. The end? Gosh, I don't know what to say.

ADRIANA. Say "Nice knowing you."

JIMMY. I don't see you very often but I always look forward to coming here. You've been very sweet to me in your sulfuric acid kind of way. Your florist, not even a close friend but your florist, told you his female impersonator buddy needed a room in New York and you took me in. You took me in. You charged me rent and raised it twice in four years but you took me in.

ADRIANA. You're the only one I ever let stay here.

JIMMY. I'll miss you.

ADRIANA. Oh, don't look at me like that, Jimmy. It's wonderful having no family or friends to shroud me with false sympathy.

JIMMY. Did you just find out?

ADRIANA. You love the melodrama. It was nothing like that. A year ago I told all my doctors to rot in hell. They wanted to keep me alive to fatten up their bank accounts. Forty-two pills they had me taking. I threw them into the garbage. The great physicians must all assume I'm long dead. And everyone else for that matter. You're the only one who ever visits. I haven't stepped out of this house in months. Thank God for the computer. I was a fool to resist it for so long.

JIMMY. You email people?

ADRIANA. Of course not. Anyone worth writing to is in their grave. I use it to pay my bills. I do all my banking on the computer. Everything. I have a notebook upstairs in my desk; an old notebook held together with scotch tape and Band-Aids, filled with numbers and passwords. I don't even have to bother making out a will. No one to leave anything to. Haven't had a lawyer in years. Shysters all of them.

RITA. You don't have a will? So who gets this house?

JIMMY. Rita!

RITA. I'm in real estate. I ask these questions.

ADRIANA. I have no idea. The bank? Or someone might turn up. They usually do. And when I'm cremated I want my ashes tossed into the toilet and I hope someone gives it a good strong flush and sends me down to China.

RITA. You're a hard hearted woman.

ADRIANA. I created a Faberge egg around my heart from early childhood. Only once was there a crack in that egg. Only once did I allow myself to feel.

JIMMY. Your husband?

ADRIANA. No, it was not my husband. Rodney Ash.

JIMMY. Rodney Ash. I love that name.

ADRIANA. I gave it to him.

JIMMY. Were you very young when you met?

ADRIANA. I was in my fifties, but looked great. He was almost young enough to be my grandson. That was something new for me. My husband was quite a bit older than I.

JIMMY. Was Rodney in fashion?

ADRIANA. Beauty such as his will always be in fashion. We were having a call for female models. And this wonderful looking young man walked in the door. When I told him that we had no need for a male model, that I only designed women's wear, he replied "Then I have no need for you." Such arrogance in a young man with a grey stain around his shirt collar. By evening, the shirt came off. Then everything came off. Rodney Ash possessed the most exquisite loins of any man I've ever known.

JIMMY. Whatja say?

RITA. Loins. She said loins.

ADRIANA. He had a small tattoo of a scorpion hidden underneath his scrotum. Should have been a warning. Do you know the mark of a true killer? He enjoyed being found out. He'd be caught stealing and he'd grin. Grin with the teeth I paid for. The last time I saw him was about a year after he left me. It was at a concert at Carnegie Hall. He was escorting a retired Bulgarian contralto. Our eyes met and in that one moment, he knew that I forgave him. My husband had long before forgiven *me*. I made it up to him. I entertained his colleagues. I took great care of his beloved townhouse. There was only one thing I denied him. I could not abide his dreadful family. His dreary sister and her daughter.

JIMMY. Where were they from?

ADRIANA. Where were they from? Chicago? Wyoming? The one time they came to visit I thought I would go mad. That ever so nice slob of a peasant woman. And her awful homely little girl. His niece, Christina. She kept staring at me, like a demon child in a science fiction.

I said to her, "What do you want from me? Go away, Changeling. Scat." I made my husband promise I would never have to endure his repugnant relations ever again. And he kept to his word. That was their one and only visit. Yet in my dreams I still see that pale little face with its pig-like eyes and snout and blubber lips.

Scene Two

(A few hours later. Three in the morning. **JIMMY**, *still with the wig on, is asleep in one chair,* **RITA** *in the other chair.* **ADRIANA**, *is lying on the sofa.* **JIMMY** *awakes.)*

JIMMY. What time is it? Rita. Rita. Wake up.

RITA. What's goin' on?

JIMMY. We both conked out. I'm going upstairs. You going home? You can spend the night.

RITA. What time is it?

JIMMY. Three thirty.

RITA. I feel like I've been in a coma. I've gotta get out of this dress.

JIMMY. Shhhhh. She's asleep. *(sees her eyes)* Oh, you're not. I'm sorry. I hope we didn't wake you.

RITA. I don't know what she's talking about. I look great in this color.

JIMMY. Adriana? Something's weird. Adriana?

RITA. Oh God. She's not – Is she?

JIMMY. Stone cold. She died in her sleep. We didn't even know. We didn't even know.

RITA. Wow. This makes three. This is more than a coincidence.

JIMMY. What coincidence?

RITA. She's the third person to die in a room I was in without my knowledge.

JIMMY. I wouldn't spread that around.

RITA. Each time I was out cold. Anyway, Adriana is the only one I actually knew.

JIMMY. I'm closing her eyes. *(He does that.)* I thought death was supposed to be ugly. Darling, you look marvelous.

RITA. You know, I almost feel like crying. I'm gonna say a little prayer. A Hail Mary.

JIMMY. So what do we do now? You're the expert. Call the police? 911?

RITA. I can't believe she didn't make any provisions for the sale of this house. A property like this in the West Village, even in this condition, can go for at least twelve million.

JIMMY. Who will get the twelve million?

RITA. It'll be absorbed into some city or federal bureaucracy. I know you liked her but that was a crummy thing to do. She could have left you a little cash. You were very kind to her.

JIMMY. I saw her for two weeks twice a year. She didn't owe me anything. Not really.

RITA. If I could get my hands on this house, I could find a buyer like this. *(snaps her fingers)*

JIMMY. You could do that, huh?

RITA. Like this. *(She snaps her fingers again.)* If I sold this house , we'd split the entire thing fifty fifty. Six million for each of us.

JIMMY. How can we sell a house that's not ours?

RITA. What if Adriana lived a little bit longer, at least long enough to sell the house?

JIMMY. I do a great impersonation of her.

RITA. And it's not even necessary. No one's seen her for months. She has no relatives, no friends. She has no doctors.

JIMMY. No lawyer.

RITA. What about the cleaning girl?

JIMMY. She's doing a lousy job. I used to clean apartments. She's terrible. One phone call. Goodbye.

RITA. So *she's* out of the way. But in every movie where someone is posing as the heir to a fortune or their own twin sister, there's always some forgotten detail that trips them up.

JIMMY. You're right. You're right. And if it doesn't work in the movies, why would it work in real life? It was a stupid idea. Crime never pays.

RITA. But is it really a crime?

JIMMY. Impersonating a dead person? Yes. Forget it, honey. This house doesn't belong to us.

RITA. But who does it belong to? No one.

JIMMY. Forget it. So can I crash on your sofa until I figure out what I'm going to do?

RITA. Sure.

JIMMY. What *am* I going to do? Get into a Broadway show? I don't have an agent. I don't even belong to Actor's Equity. I don't exist. Even if I leave the business, what sort of job could I hope to find at my age? I have no savings. I'll never be able to get my name on a lease. Old and indigent. That's my fate. It's not an attractive one.

RITA. The way things are going, I'll be in the same boat. Destitute, homeless, swigging rubbing alcohol, Listerine, anything I can lay my hands on.

JIMMY. What did she say? She has a notebook with all her passwords in it? *(laughs bitterly)* She's handing us our future on a silver platter. But we don't dare touch it.

RITA. If only we had the guts to follow through on something like this, but we don't. We're small people, Jimmy.

JIMMY. If we only had the guts. If we only had the guts. We have the guts, Rita. We have the guts. Desperation gives you the guts. Why shouldn't we survive? Why shouldn't we know happiness? Why shouldn't we know luxury? We're not bad people. We've made bad choices. We've been stooges! We've been patsies! The fall guy. We deserve to live out our lives with dignity and respect and a healthy stock portfolio.

RITA. You're making me feel light headed and a little nauseous.

JIMMY. That's how you feel, Rita, that's how you feel when you're a winner. We're not losers any more. We've won! We've won!

RITA. Oh my God. Are we really going to do this?

JIMMY. We gotta think clearly. This is precisely the moment when the fatal error is made.

RITA. I'm sober as a judge and totally with you.

JIMMY. And, you're gonna have to remain sober if we're gonna pull this off.

RITA. Not even a glass of Chardonnay at Happy Hour. Just a Sprite with lime and bitters.

JIMMY. The first step is what do we do with Adriana? What do we do with the body?

RITA. Well, I guess the easiest solution is to cut her into pieces and disintegrate the remains with lye.

JIMMY. *(aghast)* That's the easiest? I couldn't cut her up. She was my friend and I've made a mess out of a rotisserie chicken.

RITA. I'm just saying –

JIMMY. I'm not sure this plan is bringing out the best in you.

RITA. Okay. Dismemberment is not an option.

JIMMY. We can't ever be in the position where we could possibly be accused of murder. The lady died of natural causes. That's our safety net. We need to call 911 and have them take her away, but they've got to think she's somebody else. We need to pin a fake ID on her. How many times in Vegas has someone offered to make me a fake ID? I never anticipate. That's my tragedy.

RITA. I have a fake ID.

JIMMY. You have a fake ID?

RITA. Yeah.

(She takes her wallet out of her bag and searches through her cards.)

JIMMY. She has a fake ID. I can't believe this.

RITA. Here. Look. Phyllis Robbins. New York State driver's license.

JIMMY. What are you doing with that? And who's Phyllis Robbins?

RITA. *I'm* Phyllis Robbins. Remember Antoinetta? Her cousin Ray makes these for a living. A Christmas present. A veritable work of art. But will it get past the police?

JIMMY. The lighting is hideous. Doesn't even look like you. And why is your hair slicked back like LBJ?

RITA. It was taken at a women's fest in P'town. Enough with the picture. With her hair pulled back, there's no reason she couldn't be Phyllis Robbins.

JIMMY. Last night, when I told Adriana this wig didn't fit any of my impersonations, she said "You never know, said the widow." She was planting the idea in my head. She wanted me to do this.

RITA. I think she did. I can hear her laughing. I never liked her laugh.

JIMMY. How long do you anticipate this whole thing should take? Selling the house.

RITA. With this location? Give me two months. One month if we take the first bid.

JIMMY. And when the dust settles and the checks clear, we report Adriana's death from somewhere in Europe. I do believe the south of France is quite lovely this time of year.

RITA. The plan is fool proof.

JIMMY. It's fool proof because it's simple. Can we just say it? We're geniuses.

RITA. We're geniuses, Jimmy.

JIMMY. Thank you, Adriana. Merci, cherie. Let's call 911.

Scene Three

(Several weeks later. Afternoon. **ADRIANA***'s niece,* **CHRISTINA***, and her fifteen year old grand-niece,* **RACHEL***, are seated on the settee.* **CHRISTINA***, once "the homely little girl" is now an attractive woman. Well, she'd be very attractive if hard knocks hadn't given her a perpetually troubled and suspicious expression.* **RACHEL** *is transgendered. She looks and acts convincingly like a boy and wants to be called "***OLIVER***".)*

CHRISTINA. There's something sort of wonderful when your worst nightmare becomes a reality.

RACHEL. Mom, please don't do this to yourself.

CHRISTINA. No, I'm trying to look on the bright side. My life has always been a rocky road of failure and frustration, except for you, Sweetie. Of course, my Aunt would try and steal my inheritance. It's perfect.

RACHEL. She's gonna be down any minute. She'll hear us. Mom, she's lived in this house for over forty years. She's probably convinced herself that she owns it. Anyway, I love Aunt Adriana with all my heart.

CHRISTINA. You met her seven minutes ago. You've got to toughen up. We live in a very harsh modern world.

RACHEL. You don't have to tell me that.

CHRISTINA. There are people everywhere who will stop at nothing to dupe us out of what is legally ours.

RACHEL. Mom, I hate when you get like this.

CHRISTINA. Well, the vengeful creature that you see before you is what the world has made of me. I am the product of my parent's negligence, my teacher's carelessness, your father's abandonment, my employer's exploitation and um – I'm sure there others I'm forgetting.

RACHEL. I'm grateful for that.

CHRISTINA. Sweetie, do you know why I have for years subscribed to the New York Times even though we live in Wisconsin and I can barely afford it?

RACHEL. I dunno. To keep up with the world?

CHRISTINA. So I could comb through the obituaries every day with the desperate hope that Aunt Adriana's name would appear and I could finally claim what is rightfully ours.

RACHEL. That is so creepy.

CHRISTINA. It is creepy. I'm creepy, but what's more creepy is that my Aunt would think she could perpetrate this fraud without my knowing. Like I'm such a moron.

RACHEL. You're projecting what's in her head. It's a complicated situation.

CHRISTINA. No. It's very simple. Uncle Lou willed this house to his only surviving blood relative; me. Me. But in a ridiculous clause, his evil widow could live here until her death.

RACHEL. Stop. Please. It's like you're stuck on "repeat."

CHRISTINA. I'll keep going until I get one hundred per cent sympathy from you. Aunt Adriana cannot under any circumstances sell this house. And that's precisely what she's trying to do. She's stealing my personal property. She's stealing your future! She is stealing our only hope for survival!

RACHEL. You're turning it into some kind of personal attack. This is so you. Dr. Beckerman says you're trapped in a web of misplaced emotion.

CHRISTINA. I'm grateful that you've found Dr. Beckerman and that he's been such a supporter of yours, but he's an asshole.

RACHEL. He's not an asshole. He's a cognitive therapist. He's helped me see that your misguided choices have severely impacted my life.

CHRISTINA. *(starts to cry)* Oh God.

RACHEL. Mom, stop it. I'm not blaming you. You acted out of ignorance.

CHRISTINA. I wanted to give my little girl pretty things. I thought even tomboys like to dress up occasionally.

RACHEL. But I'm not a tomboy. I'm a transman. That's just the way it is.

CHRISTINA. What can I say? I'm an ignorant hick. I wanted to believe you were going through a phase.

RACHEL. You wanted to believe. Dr. Beckerman says that's your fatal flaw.

CHRISTINA. *(vulnerably)* He says I have a fatal flaw?

RACHEL. I'm paraphrasing. He said you get fantasies about people and refuse to see them as they are.

CHRISTINA. You've got to admit, you've thrown a lot at me in the past couple years.

RACHEL. And I'm gonna continue to do that as I become more comfortable with myself. I'm not ruling out a touch of androgyny. I just might surprise you one day by wearing a skirt.

CHRISTINA. Really?

RACHEL. More like a kilt. There you go with this kind of pathetic hope. How long did it take for you to finally see that Daddy wasn't in love with you and hated me?

CHRISTINA. He doesn't hate you.

RACHEL. He thinks I'm a freak and you're a neurotic mess and he doesn't want anything to do with us.

CHRISTINA. I'm not the type who gives up.

RACHEL. With you that's not a good trait. Dr. Beckerman says you confuse tenacity with wishful thinking. He says this gets in the way of your being a friend to yourself.

CHRISTINA. All right. Dr. Beckerman isn't an asshole. *I'm* the asshole. *I'm* the asshole.

*(***JIMMY** *comes down the stairs dressed as* **ADRIANA***, holding a delicate necklace.)*

JIMMY. Here it is, Cherie. I found it. It was upstairs in my sewing room.

CHRISTINA. What is this?

JIMMY. The garnet necklace you loved so much.

CHRISTINA. I don't remember this.

JIMMY. The first night of your visit to New York when you were a little girl, we went through all my jewelry. And this garnet necklace was your favorite.

CHRISTINA. That absolutely did not happen.

JIMMY. And yet I remember it as if it were yesterday.

RACHEL. Mom, maybe you've blocked out that one happy memory. *(to* **ADRIANA***)* She does this.

CHRISTINA. You don't understand. I have total recall of every moment of that visit. Every minute of every day.

JIMMY. Did we have great fun?

CHRISTINA. It was a disaster. You were unforgivably cruel to a vulnerable ten year old girl, who came here to worship her fabulous Aunt.

JIMMY. Cruel to a child? *C'est impossible.*

CHRISTINA. You would have nothing to do with me. When Uncle Lou suggested you take me to the Central Park Zoo, you said I should *be* in the zoo. That night I overheard you telling Uncle Lou that I had pig eyes and blubber lips.

JIMMY. Pigs are treasured in France. *Les cochons.* But do take the necklace. I want you to have it.

CHRISTINA. You're not buying me off with a crappy garnet necklace.

RACHEL. Mom –

JIMMY. Oliver, darling, let her speak.

CHRISTINA. You can't fool me with your gracious Lady Bountiful act.

JIMMY. She accuses me of putting on an act.

CHRISTINA. I refuse to believe that you aren't perfectly aware that this house is not yours to sell.

*(***RITA** *fairly bursts through the front door, carrying a box of donuts.)*

RITA. I've got donuts! Vanilla frosted, chocolate and glazed! Hello, you must be Christina and you must be Oliver. I'm Rita Loffredo. I got here as soon as I could.

CHRISTINA. Rita Loffredo. The broker who tried to sell the house? I have nothing to say to you.

RACHEL. My mother's been under a lot of stress.

RITA. Christina, your Aunt is of an age where she needs to simplify her lifestyle.

CHRISTINA. I'm not interested.

RITA. She is finding it increasingly difficult going up and down those stairs with her hips, her knees and a prolapsed uterus.

JIMMY. I feel it falling right now.

RITA. I found a buyer willing to pay twelve million dollars for this property. It was a *fait accompli.*

CHRISTINA. Yeah, until his lawyer did a routine search and discovered that the house wasn't hers to sell.

RITA. It was a *fait accompli.* Twelve million dollars, Christina, is more than enough to amply provide both you and your Aunt with income for life.

RACHEL. Six million sounds great.

CHRISTINA. Uncle Lou willed this house to me so I could sell it and have *all* the income because he loved me. Yes. He loved me. And even though because of *her* I was forbidden to ever enter this house after the age of ten, he used to fly to Milwaukee once a year and treated me like a Princess.

RITA. It's not unheard of for you and your Aunt to make an agreement to merge your interests and sell the property.

CHRISTINA. Why should I share the money with her? She never expressed any interest in me.

JIMMY. Is it too late to begin now?

CHRISTINA. Oh, come off it.

JIMMY. *(sounding very Joan Crawford)* Christina, darling, I have made grave mistakes in my life. If I've hurt you, I would gladly cut off my hand.

RITA. Adriana, you're not yourself.

JIMMY. I'm so upset. I don't know who I am.

CHRISTINA. I don't know who you are either. It's been so many years. You're almost unrecognizable to me.

RITA. Age can make one almost unrecognizable. People used to tell me that I was the spitting image of Daryl Hannah. Look at me now. I've developed an almost masculine look.

JIMMY. That's what happens when one gets older. The genders become blurred. I tell you, without my wig and makeup, I…look like a man.

RITA. Observe closely and you'll see a moustache. She's dispensed with all depilatory treatments.

RACHEL. *(pointedly for her mother's benefit)* I could grow a moustache if I went on hormones.

CHRISTINA. This conversation should be between our lawyers, as soon as I find one…pro bono.

JIMMY. My darling, I don't want to beg for compassion but time is of the essence.

RACHEL. Oh, Aunt Adriana.

JIMMY. That's one of the reasons I wish to return to Europe.

CHRISTINA. We have to go.

JIMMY. In Europe perhaps I can be reunited with my great love; Rodney Ash. *(sounding a lot like Greta Garbo)* Rodney was the only one who broke through that Faberge egg I had created around my heart.

RACHEL. When was the last time you saw him?

JIMMY. More than twenty years ago.

RACHEL. Do you know how to find him?

RITA. There's always the Internet. She's surprisingly facile with the computer.

RACHEL. Maybe he's right here in New York. Mom, isn't there a compromise? Can't we split the money with her?

CHRISTINA. Will you *never* be on my side?

RITA. You have your health. That's more than your Aunt can say.

CHRISTINA. Oh yes, I'm very lucky. That ought to be my name. "Lucky." Let me show you the fruits of my good fortune. *(She digs into her bag, finds the folded letter and opens it.)*

RACHEL. Mother, don't.

CHRISTINA. Allow me to read you my annual Christmas letter.

RACHEL. Mother, please.

CHRISTINA. "To all who read this; It's been quite a year. I recovered from the torn tendon in my ankle and no longer have to wear the orthopedic boot. However, two days later, in frustration I kicked our broken refrigerator door and fractured my big toe. I am unable to heal myself physically, emotionally or spiritually. My son Oliver is as always the one bright shining light in my otherwise bleak existence. If you're wondering why I never mentioned I had a son, it's because until four months ago, he was my daughter who you have known as Rachel. Oliver has begun his transition to becoming the male he has always known himself to be. He has been my rock in these awful months since I was laid off at the beauty salon. We've had to severely cut expenses. First to go were our premium cable channels. HBO and Showtime. Then the DVR, then basic cable. While watching the Golden Globe Awards, the TV itself, a twelve-year-old Panasonic, blew out and I can't afford to replace it. Among other cost saving measures, I've stopped using any moisturizers and now my skin is feeling uncomfortably dry and leathery. My lips are forever chapped. In September, my best friend from work, Melanie, died after a long illness. She was

the sibling I never had. One day while she was dozing, I came across her journal. Perhaps it was wrong of me to read it but in one of her last entries, she wrote "My dying wish is that Christina would *not* pay me any more visits. She's so fucking depressing, terminal cancer is more fun." That's all the news for now. Happy holidays and may your next year be better than mine."

RACHEL. I can't believe you sent that out. You are so ridiculously fill of self-pity.

JIMMY. You must not speak to your mother that way.

RITA. Adriana, this is between them.

RACHEL. Her negativity is destroying our lives.

CHRISTINA. I'm trying to *save* our lives.

RACHEL. Don't try so hard. I mean, here we are in New York City. My first time here. Your first visit since you were ten, and there hasn't been one split second that you haven't been in a total rage.

CHRISTINA. Yes, I'm in a continual rage against this woman who is determined to cheat us.

JIMMY. But should that stop you from taking in a Broadway show?

CHRISTINA. This whole trip is on a credit card I can't hope to pay off.

RACHEL. Well, I'm not going back with you. I'm spending the summer in New York.

RITA. How are you planning on doing that?

RACHEL. I'm going to stay here.

JIMMY. What?

RACHEL. Aunt Adriana, you've got all these empty rooms upstairs. Can't I stay here, please?

CHRISTINA. Absolutely not. You're flying back with me Sunday night.

JIMMY. My darling, there's nothing I should like more than for you to spend the summer with me, but I could not allow you to disobey your mother.