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To my sisters Kelly and Katie Hoben.
Because they are the best and I am better because of them.

PRODUCTION HISTORY

DECKED! was originally produced by Theatre B (Colt Neidhardt, Executive Director), Moorhead, Minnesota, in November 2023. It was directed by Scott Horvik and the production stage manager was Cambria Larson. The cast was as follows:

CELIA ..... Monika Browne-Ecker
KIT ..... Skylar Steffan
LOU ..... Crystal Cossette Knight
KELSIE ..... Clare Lynch

DECKED! was developed in part through the new play-reading series with Pawling Theatre Exchange (now Connecticut Theatre Exchange) in 2019.

SPECIAL THANKS

Sully White, Jim Warren, Spencer D Christensen, Tracy Liz Miller and Kent Burnham of Connecticut Theatre Exchange; Brenny Campbell; Alisa Ledyard; Kelley McKinnon; Amy Fitts; Uma Incrocci; Carrie Wintersteen; Amy Wagner of A3 Artists Agency; Kelly Hoben; Shelley Hoben; and Sheffield Chastain.

CHARACTERS

CELIA
Midforties to early fifties.

KIT
Celia's daughter. Just over fourteen.
Then, later, between the ages of twenty-five to thirty.

LOU
Celia's sister. Born two years after Celia.
Looks young. Guileless…most of the time.

KELSIE
Kit's new stepmom. Late twenties to early thirties.

THE CAROLERS/CHOIR SINGERS/CHORUS OF ANGELS
Can be doubled by the actors who play Kit, Lou, and Kelsie. Or you can cast singers to handle all the music and musical transitions; it's possible to use voices from individuals who are never seen or recorded singing.

PLACE

A church. Celia's kitchen. Various alternate realities.

TIME

Present day.

NOTES ON THE TEXT

" / " is an indication for the next character to begin speaking.

[Bracketed dialogue] goes unsaid. It's just there to help you follow the thread of dialogue.

"…" with no other words is a cue that the character wants to respond but can't.

"Cice" is pronounced "seese." "Cile" is pronounced "seal." "Cici" is pronounced "see-see."

Direct Address: Some of Celia's (and Lou's) lines are "to audience." You may find more opportunities, and that's great! This type of direct address is meant to speak to individuals in the audience; it's not a general wash. Seek out the eyes of an individual and talk to them.

Pace: I know it's annoying when playwrights tell actors to go faster, but actors: You can and you must go faster. No space inside lines or between cues unless it is written. You can do it!

Some Truths: Lou is guileless. Brad is not entirely a dick. Celia really is dangerously depressed. Suicide is a legit concern. The same goes for Lou in her scene at the church.

The Duet: This section is meant to be shared between Celia and Louise. I encourage you to perform much of it in rapid-fire unison. I have *emphasized* language that seems more appropriate for one character or the other, but you may discover a division of lines that works better for your cast and production.

It might seem like Celia and Louise should hug before Lou leaves for good. I encourage you to resist that choice. See if you can have the intention to hug without physical contact.

References: If contemporary references become outdated, please contact the Author via Playscripts at playscriptsinfo@broadwaylicensing.com to request an update.

DECKED!

Celia, in a church. Occasionally, church bells chime.

CELIA. *(To Audience.)* It's two days 'til Christmas.

Chime.

One day until my ex-husband gets remarried.

Chime.

There is a severe winter-storm warning, I am unemployed, and my daughter has been snatched.

Chime, chime, chime.

Not really.
My daughter is at the rehearsal dinner of her father and his soon-to-be wife.
This church is the site of the wedding tomorrow.
The wedding tomorrow will represent the deciding factor in a long, ugly battle, and the newly betrothed couple will win custody of my daughter, my only family.
This is the stuff of tragedies.
I don't want to see anyone.
I don't want to hear anyone.
I don't want to talk to anyone.
Except you guys, of course.
Because I am in a tragedy and this is a soliloquy, and no one responds to a soliloquy.

A moment with the audience: Will someone respond?

What would Medea do, huh?
Well, I guess we know the answer to that.
What would Medea do if murder was not an option?
She would call on the gods, of course.
Or, in my case, God. Singular.
(Addressing God.) Hi…God. I'm Celia.

(To Audience.) Well, He knows that. Of course He knows that.
(To God.) I'm uh…
You gotta help me, God. Things are not good. It's one day until the Christmas Eve Wedding Spectacular—who does that? Like, that's kinda Your Day, amiright? What a couple of self-centered jerks. And in *this very place*. *This* church. My church. Okay, that's cheeky; I know I haven't been here in a while. A long while. My own wedding. My own wedding was here, did you know that?
(To Audience.) Of course He did.
(To God.) Of course you know—but still! Couldn't you have planted the idea of City Hall in the soft and stupid brain of my ex-husband and his very youthful bride? Couldn't you suggest that they exchange their vows on the shores of Hawaii? Santa Barbara? Lake Eerie?
It's hot in here, right? How do I get some air in here?
Um, a little help, Lord…? Perhaps I am getting bogged down in details. I don't really care about the location. *Please make this wedding go away.* I feel like I have suffered some rough and ugly holidays in my time, and I have bounced back, but this…this…I don't see how I'm bouncing back from this one. What, am I supposed to *decorate*? Make cookies? Sing songs?
I'm boiling! Mind if I crack a window?
I'm not giving my daughter up just like that. I need more time. I need a better lawyer. And money. Shit, I need a job—sorry! Okay. Here's a thought: We just reroute the whole thing somehow. I don't need a plague or anything. I don't want anyone to get hurt. Maybe send in the frogs, or beetles, or…a flood! Not the Noah kind. A minor flood. The freezing-pipe kind. Pipes freeze all the time up here. Small town, old church, severe-winter-storm-warning-with-freezing-temperatures is already in the forecast… You get what I'm saying.

Beat.

You get what I'm saying?
Oh Lord, this really is divine intervention. Because…it really is hot in here. And it's really cold out there. Y'know? Yeah, you know. Of course you know.
Okay… Bye-bye… Amen… Thanks, God.

She starts to exit.

(To Audience.) Do you think in the ancient Greek amphitheaters, the audience was yelling at the stage? It must have been a horror to watch Medea fulfill her fate. The chorus is warning her, all these other people are warning her, but she just won't listen. Do you think the audience was like, "HEY MEDEA!!! SMACK-SMACK! DON'T DO IT, DON'T DO IT!"?

Nah, probably not. It wouldn't be a very fun day at the theatre if Medea doesn't do a little damage.

(To God.) I'll uh…I'll crack those windows on my way out, God.

> *At the end of the monologue, music: a chorus sings a rousing holiday hymn. Perhaps a portion of "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing." The source of the music transitions to a recording playing in Celia's home. Celia is in her kitchen, decorating cookies.*

CELIA. *(To Audience.)* Cookie decorating. Totally innocent. You know how Hamlet's stepdad sits down to watch a play like nothing's wrong? Same thing. Just staying in and staying cozy cuz that is some cold, cold winter weather out there! No shopping, no parties. Definitely no weddings. This is the kind of night to hunker down, bake your cookies, and swallow them like they're your insecurities.

> *Kit enters in a crimson-red junior bridesmaid dress. Her hair has been professionally styled. She is lovely, but the dress and updo are a bit much.*

Don't you look pretty!

KIT. I look like an ornament.

CELIA. With a much slimmer waist.

KIT. Are you commenting on my body? Please don't comment on my body. It's offensive.

CELIA. To the ornament?

KIT. Dad just called.

CELIA. Oh yeah?

KIT. Yeah, you won't believe this—

CELIA. What?

KIT. The church flooded.

CELIA. Oh no!

KIT. Yeah, someone opened all the windows, and a pipe burst in the night.

CELIA. Oh, wow!

KIT. Why would someone open all the windows?

CELIA. I have no idea.

KIT. I mean, one window, yeah, like, if it was stuffy, sure, but *all* the windows?

CELIA. Yeah. In this weather…?

KIT. You'd have to be insane!

Beat. Celia controls her face.

CELIA. Well, maybe it's for the best. The weather is going to be terrible tonight.

KIT. Dad said they are moving everything to the school gym.

CELIA. What?

KIT. Yeah, the show must go on, you know…

CELIA. No! Yeah. Sure—the school gym… *(Possible snort-laugh-chuckle.)* That sucks.

They stare at each other.

KIT. Are you…happy?

CELIA. What? I'm fine.

KIT. You seem happy that a pipe burst and the wedding's in the gym.

CELIA. Um…no…I'm not… It's definitely not an ideal outcome.

KIT. Mom—

CELIA. What?!

KIT. Dad and Kelsie said I'm going to live with them.

CELIA. No you're not.

KIT. Why not?

CELIA. Because it's the law. Because it was decided in a court of law. And I don't feel like breaking the law tonight. In that way.

KIT. Mom, don't be mental—

CELIA. I'm not "mental"! You are requesting that I break the law.

And I am responding like the responsible law-abiding mother that I am.

KIT. They said they are going to win custody now.

CELIA. …

KIT. Like, something about a two-parent home. Like, stability, y'know? Mom?

CELIA. I'll go to court. And you can tell him that.

KIT. Mom, you don't have to go back to court. They don't want to go to court.

CELIA. …

KIT. They said it's up to me.

CELIA. It's not up to you.

KIT. Well, it's not up to you either. I'm over fourteen now, and so the judge will consider my preference—

CELIA. Your *preference*…?

KIT. Mom, listen, that school has a much better soccer team, and also, guess what.

CELIA. What?

KIT. They're going to do *Into the Woods* in the spring! And Kelsie is the choreographer!

CELIA. Yay.

KIT. Because, y'know, she's the high-school cheerleading advisor? She makes all their routines.

CELIA. No, I did not know. Isn't that fascinating?

KIT. Yeah, well, she said that it's going to be a big show and there will be lots of parts I could do—

CELIA. I didn't know you were even interested in musical theatre.

KIT. Well, you haven't asked.

CELIA. Oh, hey Kit, have you taken up any new interests? Like choreography? And Sondheim?

KIT. Sorry, were you hoping I'd follow in your footsteps and get my own PhD in Classics and Comparative Literature?

CELIA. Don't be silly, Kit, Mommy wants you to have a job someday.

KIT. I knew you were gonna be like this. You hate your life and you take it out on me.

CELIA. Don't speak to me like that—Look, kiddo, I'm sorry. I think it's great that your dad met Kelsie.

Maybe, if she can hide it from Kit, she makes a silent gagging face.

And I know they mean well, but you and I are doing okay, right? Are you unhappy?

KIT. It's not that…it's just… I know you're mad, but I'm not. I'm not mad at Dad, and I like Kelsie. She's really nice.

If she can hide it from Kit, Celia silently mimics "She's really nice." A car pulls up.

That's Dad.

CELIA. Oh, good—

Celia heads for the door. She's going to give him a piece of her mind.

KIT. No, don't…he's getting married. Just…I don't want him to come in. I'm just gonna—

CELIA. Yeah, of course.

Kit waves out the door to her dad. She slips on a coat, hat, and gloves during the following.

Merry Christmas.

KIT. Merry Christmas, Mom.

CELIA. Have a good time.

KIT. I will. You too.

CELIA. *(With edge.)* Oh, definitely. I am rocking around the Christmas tree tonight.

KIT. *(With an edge of her own.)* Or don't. Y'know? Don't have a good time! Curl up and read one of your dumb dead authors.

CELIA. Hey, back off—

KIT. You know you could go on a date or something.

CELIA. Excuse me?

KIT. Like dust off the old Match.com profile.

CELIA. Stop it.

KIT. You know what Tinder is?

CELIA. Where is this coming from? You can't talk to me like that!…What's Tinder?

Kit has the door open, about to exit.

KIT. Get laid, Mom! You are so uptight. And it might work better than that bottle of bourbon or those little blue pills!

Celia is stunned. Kit exits. The door slams shut.

CELIA. I am not uptight!

She throws a cookie—or the whole tin—at the door and gets out her bourbon and sleeping pills.

(To Audience.) I admit the drugs are not very Medea of me. They're a little more, what? Juliet? *(Pouring a hefty glass of bourbon.)* "Juliet-meets-George Bailey."

She pops a few pills and washes them down with bourbon. Suddenly the music stops and the lights go out. No power.

(From darkness.) Did the storm do that? Or the pills?

"Good King Wenceslas" can be heard. But not from the same radio source; it's live.

CAROLERS. *(Singing.)*
GOOD KING WENCESLAS LOOKED OUT
ON THE FEAST OF STEPHEN…

CELIA. *(From darkness.)* What the hell?

Knock knock knock.

(To Audience.) Lemme guess, it's Jacob Marley?

More knocking.

(To Audience.) Do ghosts knock before entering?

Knock knock knock. Sounds of Celia stumbling toward the door. Maybe she uses a flashlight.

Coming!

Celia opens the door to discover cheerful Christmas carolers.

CAROLERS. *(Singing.)*
…WHEN THE SNOW LAY 'ROUND ABOUT

DEEP AND CRISP AND—

Celia slams the door.

SINGLE CAROLER. *(Off.)* Bitch.

Beat. Knock knock knock.

CELIA. Oh, you've got to be kidding me—

Celia flings the door open. There stands Lou, fabulously attired, in her own way: a poofy nineties prom dress? Combat boots or Chuck Taylors? Or something else similarly incongruous with her dress. If possible, she has a guitar case. Upon seeing her, Celia screams. Lou screams in response.

LOU. Ahhhh! Oh, sweet heaven above, you scared me!

CELIA. Louise, I live here! You knocked on my door. What did you expect?

LOU. Do you always scream when you open the door?

CELIA. No, that was just for you, Lou.

LOU. Gosh, I feel so special. Can I come in?

CELIA. Please don't.

LOU. Why? You got big cookie-decorating plans? I'll help—

CELIA. I don't feel like…company. And the power is out.

Lights and music come on abruptly.

LOU. Oh! Look at that! Thank the little baby Jesus. Sure is cold out. Winter storm and all…

CELIA. Dear Santa, are you listening? I'm in no mood for Louise tonight—

LOU. That gymnasium wedding must be getting underway 'bout now, huh? Funny thing about the church flooding…

Lou breezes past Celia into the home.

CELIA. *(To Audience.)* Screw Santa Claus. I never believed in him anyway.

Entirely at home in other people's homes, Lou smacks Celia with a big kiss.

LOU. Hallelujah, it's good to see you! *(Helping herself.)* Ooh, cookies…

CELIA. *(To Audience.)* This is my sister, Louise. She's a singer/songwriter. Or she woulda been if she hadn't wasted all her talent.

LOU. I did not—[waste my talent.] Who're you talking to?

CELIA. The audience. I'm in a play, Lou. I'm in a Greek fucking tragedy.

LOU. What does that make me, the Chorus?

CELIA. You were not meant to enter.

LOU. *(Maybe with a mouthful of cookies.)* Then it's a pretty bad play, isn't it?

CELIA. It was actually going great. I felt the audience was really on my side. Possibly detecting my tragic flaw, but empathizing nonetheless. Eagerly awaiting my next move, crisis, fall, and their subsequent catharsis. All this for $49.95!

LOU. Cici, you don't look good.

CELIA. Louise!

LOU. I'm sorry! You know I'm incapable of lying.

CELIA. Are you also incapable of just shutting up?

LOU. No. I can shut up. I mean, I don't, but I can. Really, Cile, what is going on with your skin?

CELIA. It's easy to judge when you've looked twenty for the last twenty years.

LOU. It's not a competition, Cile.

CELIA. Thank God.

LOU. And this is not a play. This…is your life. I know, it's not what you thought it'd be, but it's no Greek tragedy. How many times do I need to tell you: You need a hobby. Take the focus off yourself a bit.

CELIA. I read. That's my hobby.

LOU. Oh yeah? What are you reading these days?

CELIA. The foreword to *King Lear*. Just the foreword, though. It's better than Ambien.

LOU. I was thinking something physical. Like dance aerobics or bird-watching.

CELIA. Dance aerobics? What is this 1989?

LOU. Well, what the—I don't know! Pick anything…cross-stitch, crochet, camping…just—a change of perspective, y'know?

CELIA. I tried the cross-stitch. And you were right. It really absorbed me. But it all looked like hell, so I went with Kentucky bourbon. Then sleeping pills, and then it's beginning to look a lot like Christmas…

If the bourbon bottle is visible, Lou confiscates it.

LOU. I'll be the first to admit that bourbon is heavenly, but moderation is godliness….

CELIA. Isn't it "cleanliness"?

LOU. That too. Kit's at the wedding?

CELIA. Yes, Kit is at the wedding.

LOU. Okay. Is that okay?

CELIA. Does it look okay? Is anything about this "okay"?

LOU. Can we not do that? Can we just talk? I rarely get to see you—

CELIA. Whose fault is that?

LOU. Well, I'm here now, and I'm trying to help—

CELIA. I don't want help. Did I ask for your help?

LOU. No, but I happen to be available. And you are a wreck. Your hair is greasy, your clothes are unwashed—you stink, Cici. Your house is messy, and your house is never messy. Your house is never even the suggestion of messy. And I'm guessing that Kit is with Brad—and Brad is with Kelsie—and you love Kit, but you don't love Brad, and you really don't love Kelsie, but Kit wants to be with Brad and Kelsie, and all of these clues have led me to the conclusion that you, *ma sœur*, are in a shitty Christmas way, and I took it upon myself, your beloved favorite sister / to call that a cry for help.

CELIA. Only sister. *(Once Lou has finished.)* You're wrong. I'm fine.

LOU. —to call that a cry for help.

CELIA. You're wrong. I'm fine.

LOU. You're not fine. You're talking about Greek tragedies, and I don't know much, Professor, but I know they don't end well… You're driving yourself down a destructive road. You are no good at

destruction; your strength is construction! You create things out of nothing! Whole books where nothing existed before!

CELIA. Lou, don't. Ever since I was laid off, I'm creating nothing out of nothing. My last manuscript was rejected by everyone.

LOU. Well, you're no stranger to rejection.

CELIA. And you're no stranger to insulting me.

LOU. I mean, you persevere. So, persevere! Take action. Do something.

CELIA. I did!

LOU. What?

CELIA. I flooded the church!

LOU. Which I still can't distinguish as prank or crime…

CELIA. I went to church last night and opened all the windows, so a pipe would freeze and burst, and then the wedding would be delayed, at least, and I wouldn't have to give up my only child.

LOU. Crime.

CELIA. You have to admit, it was pretty clever.

LOU. But the wedding is on. The Christmas Wedding—who does that?

CELIA. Yeah, I hear they just moved everything to the school gym, damn it.

LOU. That's right; I let them in.

CELIA. You! What were you doing at church?

LOU. Um, singing?

CELIA. You went to church to sing? By yourself? That's weird.

LOU. No—I'm in the choir. It's Christmastime? We're always there.

CELIA. And you sabotaged my plan?

LOU. I sabotaged your sabotage. And sabotage is not the action I'm suggesting.

CELIA. Why would you do that? You're supposed to be on my side.

LOU. I am on your side. I'm on your side when you're not committing crimes.

CELIA. That is some pretty weak loyalty.

LOU. Remember in college when you told Mom and Dad that I was smoking a lot of weed?

CELIA. That is not how that conversation went…

LOU. And then they stopped helping me with tuition?

CELIA. Ohmygod, they asked me. What was I supposed to do, lie?

LOU. No! Lying is wrong. Never lie. You were trying to do the right thing.

CELIA. I was!

LOU. And I get that now.

CELIA. Great.

LOU. But at the time I would've called it some pretty weak loyalty.

CELIA. OHMYGOD! *(Breath.)* Okay, fine. But why assist Brad? You hate Brad. I know you hate Brad.

LOU. I don't "hate" anyone.

CELIA. …

LOU. Yeah, I hate Brad.

CELIA. You really are incapable of lying aren't you?

LOU. Chronically honest. Is it totally annoying? It is, isn't it?

CELIA. *(To Audience.)* Just like Medea. First, I have to come to the realization that my husband is no good, and then I have to find out that everyone figured it out before me. It's idiocy squared. No wonder she went berserk.

LOU. That talking-to-no-one thing is not healthy.

CELIA. *(To Lou.)* So if you hate him so much, why would you fix his stupid Christmas wedding and ruin my life?

LOU. No, not ruining. The other thing, the opposite…helping! Salvaging! Reviving!

CELIA. The minute they get married, I'm losing custody.

LOU. I think you're losing custody anyway.

CELIA. What makes you say that?

Lou shrugs.

Did Kit talk to you?

LOU. And anyway, I know you can't see it this way, but while my

good deed put a small cramp in your holiday plans, it saved the day for many, many other people. Including Kit.

Celia narrows her eyes.

And that's the point, right? What's best for Kit?

CELIA. I don't know what to do!

LOU. How about a thorough shampoo?

CELIA. But the shower is all the way upstairs…

LOU. Hercules, you are not.

CELIA. It's Heracles…if we're going Greek.

LOU. We're not! I don't accept this self-pity. I have seen you survive so much worse.

CELIA. Yeah, Christmas always seems to sock it to me.

LOU. But you persist! You're a rock! You're a mighty, mighty rock!

CELIA. *(To Audience.)* All the pleading with me. Warnings. Saving me from myself… She would have made a really good Greek chorus. If there were more of her.

LOU. The chorus is a thankless role.

CELIA. What's to thank? I didn't ask for help! I asked to be left alone!

LOU. Well, I'm here anyway.

CELIA. Well, I don't want you.

LOU. Well, all you have to do is say the word and I'm gone—

CELIA. No, don't go! You're right. I've got to do something.

LOU. Yes!

CELIA. Something brave—

LOU. Something positive—

CELIA. Something life-changing—

LOU. Something non-criminal.

CELIA. Shot of bourbon?

LOU. Or an AA meeting? C'mon, I'll drive you.

CELIA. *(Perhaps to Audience.)* I shudder to think where that will get me.

LOU. I'm a great driver!

CELIA. I know a totaled Honda that would disagree.

LOU. Ah, Bessie. She was a gallant carriage. May she rest in peace.

They bow their heads in unison. Or maybe they make the sign of the cross.

CELIA. I think I'll pass, the weather and all…

She reveals a second bottle of bourbon and pours another shot.

LOU. I don't mean to be judgy, but the bourbon doesn't strengthen your custody case.

As Celia finishes her remaining sleeping pills:

And neither do the drugs.

CELIA. Oh, back off.

LOU. Please stop.

CELIA. *(Like young siblings do.)* Make me.

Lou squeezes her face in a mind-influencing effort.

LOU. It won't work when you're like this.

CELIA. What?

LOU. My powers.

CELIA. I do not concede that you have powers.

LOU. What? I have powers. You know I have powers.

CELIA. *(To Audience.)* I realize that the classic tragic hero often invites her own damning fate, but I have to ask. *(To Lou.)* What kind of powers do you have?

LOU. I plant ideas in heads.

CELIA. So do conservative news outlets if you're not careful.

LOU. I have powers!

CELIA. Prove it.

LOU. Dad's yoga practice.

CELIA. What about it?

LOU. I did that.

CELIA. You mind-tricked our father into taking yoga?

LOU. Yes.

CELIA. Twice a week at the YMCA?

LOU. Yes.

CELIA. No way.

LOU. I did! I know you know he made fun of yoga for years.

CELIA and LOU. "Bogus Yogus."

CELIA. So what, did you drop by every Tuesday and Thursday while he was sleeping and whisper motivational phrases in Sanskrit?

LOU. No! Just the initial idea. I caught him in a very open frame of mind, and I dropped in the idea. He tried it, he saw that I was right, and he developed remarkably limber hamstrings. Before he died.

CELIA. I'm gonna need a little more proof than that.

LOU. I told our cousin Dee to come out of the closet.

CELIA. You can't seriously be taking credit for Dee's sexuality.

LOU. Not her sexuality! Just her claiming it.

CELIA. This is ridiculous. You could just as easily say you planted the idea of a talk show to Kelly Clarkson.

LOU. I don't even know Kelly Clarkson. Ooh, but I wish I did! Talk about some *pipes*! I mean, I can sing, but Clarkson's voice can, like, speak to God.

CELIA. Try again.

LOU. Oh! I know! I told Mom to renovate: I said do the kitchen first, then attack the first-floor bathroom, and for the love of God, get rid of the country-themed family room.

CELIA. *(Fully believes.)* Louise! You're planting ideas in people's heads?

LOU. Yeah. But not planting—

CELIA. Are you qualified to do that? Who deems you qualified? You could really screw a person up.

LOU. No, it doesn't work unless it's for the good of humankind. And they're not my ideas. Think of it as "illuminating a truth that's already there."

CELIA. …but not to me.

Beat.

To me???

LOU. …

CELIA. You wouldn't.

LOU. …

CELIA. You couldn't. I'd block you.

LOU. Well, yes, I can be blocked. That happens from time to time. It's only effective when the idea is good and true, and the mind is receptive and healthy.

Beat.

CELIA. What are you saying?

LOU. No hidden meaning.

CELIA. I know when I'm being insulted.

LOU. How? "Good, true, healthy, receptive"…

CELIA. You're calling me mentally unwell. Mentally ill? Are you calling me mentally ill?

LOU. Of course not.

CELIA. So have you…?

LOU. What?

CELIA. Would you?…did you? You didn't. Lou?

Beat. Uncomfortable.

TELL ME!

LOU. I maybe, sorta, in a quiet, roundabout way suggested you leave Brad.

Beat.

CELIA. Did you really?

LOU. No. It wasn't quiet at all.

CELIA. Am I so weak I couldn't come to that conclusion by myself?

LOU. You weren't at your strongest back then.

CELIA. Well. Thanks.

LOU. You're welcome.

CELIA. *(To Audience.)* Here I thought I was a clear-headed, independent woman leaving Brad when it was all just sorcery and witchcraft.

LOU. It's not witchcraft!

CELIA. Sounds pretty witchy to me. You got some magic potions in your pocket too?

Maybe Celia stumbles.

LOU. Nothing as powerful as what you're already taking.

CELIA. Come on, give it up. I know you've got something in those pockets…

LOU. It's not smart to mix.

CELIA. So you do!

LOU. I'm warning you, Cee, it's dangerous.

CELIA. But *you* smoke it…

Celia is dizzy, sleepy, slurry.

LOU. Don't be silly. No one smokes anymore. It's all edibles. And, anyway, I haven't been drinking and popping sleeping pills. How are you even standing?

CELIA. Give it to me. I'm done, Lou. I'm done.

LOU. Celia? Listen carefully. It's a bad idea.

CELIA. Yeah, I know, that's kinda what I'm going for tonight.

LOU. You could die from mixing the wrong stuff.

CELIA. *(Nodding off.)* Yeah, yeah, I looked it up. It's fine.

LOU. There's no way that's true.

CELIA. You're right, I didn't look it up, but it *is* fine.

LOU. It's not fine.

CELIA. It's not. I know. But what if I did die? Would that be the worst thing?

LOU. What do you mean?

CELIA. *(Suddenly serious.)* I mean, maybe I should.

Lou studies her sister hard.

If dying was actually the best thing, for everyone, you'd support what was best, wouldn't you?

LOU. Well, yes, but we don't know that it's the best thing.

CELIA. I think we both know what we need to do next.

LOU. Uh-huh. Alright, sister Cice, but this is not my idea; this is your idea.

Lou hands Celia a small cookie.

CELIA. Yeah, my idea.

Celia eats the cookie in one bite, and promptly passes out.

LOU. *(To Audience.)* I totally planted that idea.

A foreboding church-bell chime. Lights out. Then…an angelic choral Christmas song. A slow reveal that Celia's kitchen is gone. The song fades out.

CELIA. Oh, man, I feel light as a feather.

LOU. High as a kite?

CELIA. Walking on air.

LOU. Facing death's door?

CELIA. Never felt more alive.

LOU. Interesting…

CELIA. The lights go out again?

LOU. Yeah, sheesh, what a night…

CELIA. Wait, did you clean my kitchen?

LOU. Sister, I love you, but no. Not tonight, and probably not ever.

CELIA. Did you get rid of my furniture? I don't see any furniture. Or walls…

LOU. Don't be silly; I didn't get rid of anything. I'm just focusing your attention elsewhere.

CELIA. Oh good. I prefer my attention *off* the furniture. And the clutter. And my life. And—it's pretty here. Am I dead? No! I can't be. I'm still me. I'm still talking. So I'm conscious. But something's different…this is really stunning. If this is death, I am better off dead.

LOU. Why do people always say that? Hey, look at this…

Bam! The interior of a cozy bookstore appears. Lou ushers Celia into a chair, maybe there is a table. Kelsie enters. She has been waiting in line at Celia's book-signing event. Tinny Christmas music is possibly playing in the background.

CELIA. What am I looking at? Who is that?

LOU. A fan.

CELIA. *(Uncomfortable accepting praise.)* Oh, gross.

Celia tries to hide. Louise moves out of the bookstore area and watches from nearby.

KELSIE. Oh my god, I can't believe it's you!

CELIA. Yeah, it's me.

KELSIE. I can't believe I'm here.

CELIA. Yeah, I can't believe you're here. Why are you here?

KELSIE. I just. I love this book. Your book. So much. And I heard you were doing this on Christmas Eve, which is just too perfect, y'know, based on the content. I mean, of course you know…I just. I love this book.

CELIA. Thank you.

Kelsie hands Celia a copy of the book and Celia signs it. If the book cover is visible, note that it's titled "Sincerely Celia."

KELSIE. I…it's been a bad year. For me. And this just, it gave me hope again. And I feel so stupid because I don't have words like the way you have words, like, all I can come up with is, "It gave me hope again," but it did. It really did. I haven't felt hope in…so long… and finally—I don't know… I have—I had—anxiety. Well, I still do, I guess, but it's better now… And I feel like I have you to thank. Is that weird? This is weird, right?

CELIA. No, that's really nice.

KELSIE. Okay. I just feel like a stalker, the way I know so much about you—or, I mean, I think I do. And that I just *relate*. Do people tell you this all the time? I bet people tell you this all the time. But I mean, *really*, I felt like you were writing for me, personally. Like, just me.

CELIA. Well, that's a little weird, I don't even know you.

KELSIE. I know! Right? It's totally weird. But we're from the same town. And we even went to the same school!

CELIA. Is that so?

KELSIE. Yeah!…so maybe it's just that. Maybe I just recognize the world you're writing from. But, I mean, I don't, like, read. I mean I read. I can read; it's just books are not how I spend my time.

CELIA. Books are my life.

KELSIE. I know! I mean, I don't know, but I can tell, and so, of course that's something we don't have in common, but someone gave me this book. Someone who knows I don't really read. My sister. My sister gave me your book, and she said, "You have to read this book. This book. Will change. Your life." And it did. It did change my life! More than that, it saved my life.

CELIA. Y'don't say?

KELSIE. It did. My sister is to credit, really. After you. After you, after your sister, really, since the book is kinda all because of her…

Kelsie cannot hear Lou's interjections.

LOU. Oh, pssh, I hardly did anything.

KELSIE. I mean that *dedication*? I was hooked at the dedication!

LOU. I love that dedication.

KELSIE. But then, the end…this, like, wisdom you come to in the end…I felt like I learned something. Something I already knew, maybe, but never in those words. I read it three times, I'm not lying. And even though so much of it made me cry—like out-loud-crying-with-sounds cry—at the end, I felt, I don't know, better. But better than better. Like you helped me get it all out. There's a word for that…

LOU. Exorcism?

CELIA and KELSIE. *(Not entirely in unison, but overlapping.)* Catharsis.

Celia hands Kelsie the book.

KELSIE. Yeah. So anyway. Thanks for the signature. And you know. Everything else. Merry Christmas.

Kelsie starts to exit.

CELIA. But what was it that you think you learned?

Beat.

KELSIE. You've got to live while you're alive. You've got to live.

Kelsie and the bookstore disappear.

CELIA. Bye?

Beat.

Hey, Lou? Lou, did you see a troubled young woman in my kitchen just now?

LOU. I would call that *emotional*, but yes, I saw a young woman.

CELIA. In my kitchen?

LOU. No, that was a book signing.

CELIA. In my kitchen?

LOU. No, the bookstore.

CELIA. Okay, that makes so much more sense. What?!

LOU. It's this thing that happens. It's going to happen again, so be prepared.

CELIA. She's coming back?

LOU. It won't be her next time.

CELIA. Who will it be?

LOU. I don't know, it's your life.

CELIA. You brought me here.

LOU. YOU brought you here. Remember? Your choice. I merely make suggestions.

CELIA. Yes. Yes, definitely my choice, but I've not been here before and it seems like you have.

LOU. Nope. I'm just really flexible in new circumstances. I'm great at an office holiday party. Or a baby shower, even if I don't know anyone there.

CELIA. Why am I so…so…

LOU. Aware? Mindful? Present?

CELIA. Sober.

LOU. Oh, yeah, that's just kind of the effect of this experience. It's like getting hit by a car. All of a sudden, it's just like—BAM! Clarity.

CELIA. But that girl, was she real?

LOU. Yeah, that really happened. Christmas Eve, eight years ago.

CELIA. She's a memory? A real memory?

LOU. Well, memories can be finicky. Fluid. And everyone's differ. If I showed you your memory of that event, it would look really different…if your memory of it exists at all. What you just saw was an accurate replay of a past event.

CELIA. But that was meaningful. I would have remembered that conversation. She was really special.

LOU. You'd be surprised what people hang on to and what they never really accept. You really did save that girl's life.

CELIA. Oh? How do we know? Are you going to take me back to Bedford Falls and show me a sad girl shaking on the sidewalk?

LOU. I'm not interested in watching someone die. That seems heavy-handed even for a tragedy, don't you think? I think the mere suggestion is more powerful.

CELIA. And you're suggesting that this girl—without the powerful influence of my never-even-a-little-bit-critically-acclaimed book—kills herself?

LOU. I'm saying the book was a part of something. Part of one path, a whole river of factors that led her to her current *living* reality.

CELIA. Okey dokey, *(A nickname.)* "Hocus Pocus," what else ya got for me?

LOU. That's not enough?

CELIA. No. I mean, that was nice. That was heartwarming—and I never use that word, let alone feel that word. But as sweet as that was, that was her experience, not mine.

LOU. But it wouldn't have been possible without you.

CELIA. It doesn't change anything.

LOU. Okay, let's look at another Christmas Eve. You want Past, Present, or Future?

CELIA. The future is when that hooded guy shows up, yeah? Let's stick with the past.

LOU. That first Christmas Eve after I left /

CELIA. Oh, don't—

LOU. Mom was so sad, and Dad—

CELIA. I don't want to rehash that Christmas. Never mind! Let's go back to the kitchen. I want my kitchen back!

LOU. And you. You tried so hard. You baked all those cookies by yourself. You decorated a tree for them. You *bought* a tree for them.

CELIA. What a disaster. / Hey, kitchen!

LOU. It wasn't though. It was…something. You made something out of nothing. And the next year—

CELIA. The next year they split.

LOU. And you stayed with Mom, so I went to Dad.

CELIA. Two of the shittiest simultaneous Christmases in history.

LOU. But then it started to get better. You got your first apartment—

CELIA. Oh! The tree with nothing on it!

LOU. You handmade those decorations for the first few years / Whaddaya call 'em?

CELIA. I was so broke. *(Once Lou has finished.)* Salt-dough.

LOU. Salt-dough! That's amazing!

CELIA. But they were so heavy the tree kept tipping over.

LOU. They were so *amazing* the tree kept tipping over! Then you met Brad. That was a good Christmas.

CELIA. It's hard for me to admit that under the current circumstances. But, yeah…

LOU. And you started hosting Mom and Dad—

CELIA. At different hours—

LOU. But eventually at the same time.

CELIA. Grandparenting: the great equalizer.

LOU. Cuz then came Kit.

CELIA. And that was maybe the best. Except it was the end of sleeping in.

LOU. I don't know. Even after Brad left, even after Mom and Dad died…you had some good Christmases. You did that. Without sleeping in. You made all those Christmases special. The baking, and the decorating, and the dough balls…I could never do all that.

CELIA. Anyone can make salt-dough ornaments, Lou.

Lou gives her a look.

They might not look cute, but—

LOU. Just accept it! You are better at Christmassing.

CELIA. You were always there.

LOU. I drop by when I can.

CELIA. Because I can't do it without you.

Beat.

LOU. I'm sorry.

CELIA. It's not your fault.

LOU. I feel responsible.

CELIA. For which part? My losing Kit? My failed marriage? My relentlessly aging face?

LOU. If I was there, I would have stopped that marriage.

CELIA. If you were there, there would've been nothing to stop. I wouldn't have stumbled from grief into Brad's open, manipulative arms.

LOU. I'm so sorry.

CELIA. Don't.

LOU. Cile—

CELIA. Don't—

LOU. Let's talk.

CELIA. I don't / want to.

LOU. I'm sorry I abandoned you.

CELIA. It's not your fault.

LOU. But I'm still sorry. And I suffer watching you suffer.

CELIA. I'm fine. Really. I just can't go there tonight. I can't.

LOU. Sure you can.

CELIA. No, Lou, it's too painful.

LOU. Well, that's a choice, Cile.

CELIA. No it isn't. Why would I choose pain?

LOU. …

CELIA. Why would anyone choose pain?

LOU. …

CELIA. If you know, just tell me. You don't have to do that "teach a girl to fish" shit.

A breath.

LOU. You use the pain to keep the past present.

Beat.

CELIA. Broad generalizations and alliteration. You sound like one of your pop songs.

LOU. I don't do pop.

CELIA. Pop.

LOU. No.

CELIA. Pop pop pop!

LOU. Folk. Grunge. Acoustic rocker chick. Gritty and poetic.

CELIA. "You use the pain to keep the past present"? No. Sentimental and contrived. All of this!

LOU. All of what?

CELIA. The sappy memories! Christmases past! Salt-dough! Trees, for god's sake. Can someone please tell me what the hell tinsel-covered trees have to do with the birth of Jesus? This night. Your visit. You. Nothing is real or genuine. Nothing matters.

LOU. You don't really mean that.

CELIA. You don't know what I don't mean! I know! I know what I mean when I say what I mean. I have nothing bright ahead, and the past doesn't make me feel better. It just proves that I haven't done shit! *Now can you please get me out of this place?*

LOU. Sure.

Bam! A grown-up Kit is on a date. Potential background Christmas music.

GROWN-UP KIT. I'm not having kids. I know this is only a second date, but I like to be up-front about it so, yeah: no. No way. My family was really fucked up. My dad is a narcissist just coming out of his fourth marriage. And I don't have a mom. I was very attached to my dad's second wife, but when they split, we didn't see her again. My real mom, my birth mom, committed suicide

on December 24 when I was fifteen. Yeah, I know. Not the most romantic topic, is it? Merry Christmas!
I had just told her I wanted to live with my dad, but there was no animosity. I just liked their big house and extra car and the high school I'd go to. I guess I wasn't surprised that she'd be upset, but no one thought she'd go on and OD.
And here we are! December 24. It just keeps coming around, doesn't it?
So, yeah. Relationships! Have been…challenging. But I have a great therapist. Really. I mean, I know everyone says that, but I do. She's the one who encouraged me to, you know, brush up my dating profile and give it a shot again. But by the look of masked horror on your face, I wonder if maybe this wasn't my best shot.
I'm gonna go.
Sorry. Tragically abandoned. Wildly flawed. Chronically honest.

Kit exits. A beat.

CELIA. What. Is. This. Horseshit! What is this???

LOU. That is your hooded guy.

CELIA. That was way worse than the hooded guy!

LOU. Yeah?

CELIA. Oh my god, get me outta here! I need to talk to Kit.

LOU. Ah, c'mon. That little premonition? That's just *one* ending. Not *the* ending.

CELIA. What team are you on? Team Real? Or Team Tripping?

LOU. You said it yourself: I'm not real, I'm contrived. "Nothing is real or genuine. Nothing matters."

CELIA. I didn't mean it.

LOU. Then you said, "I know what I mean when I say what I mean."

CELIA. Your memory is so annoying. Take me home!

LOU. But you got us here.

CELIA. *(Referring to substances.)* Because I took too much?

LOU. I warned you.

CELIA. Can I go back?

LOU. I don't know. It's not up to me. I think you have to be ready?

CELIA. Yeah, okay, I'm ready. I learned a valuable lesson and I'm ready to go back. I have to get my girl.

Nothing happens.

I want to go back! Take me back!

LOU. That's not something I can do!

CELIA. Where are those cookies…?

LOU. I don't know.

Pause as they regard one another.

I don't know, Cile.

But she cannot lie, and the cookies drop from inside her clothing to the floor. Celia and Lou take to the cookies.

/ I can't lie!

CELIA. You can't lie!

Celia rushes the cookies. Lou grabs for them. Celia evades.

LOU. Hey! Gimme!

CELIA. No!

They wrestle over the parcel of cookies, spilling at least some of them. Possible ad-lib following the two previous lines. Celia drops to her knees scrambling to salvage cookies, stuffs a few in her mouth.

LOU. What are you doing?! Are you trying to kill yourself?

Something registers in Celia. Beat. Lou smacks her sister in the face.

CELIA. Ow! Fuck!

LOU. That's right, fuck! Fuck you! Ya fucking fuck!

CELIA. Louise! Your language!

LOU. What? You can say fuck, but I can't?

CELIA. You *can* I guess, but you usually don't.

LOU. Well, you usually don't try to fucking kill yourself before my very eyes. What the hell! What the fucking shit damn hell?

CELIA. I'm sorry.

LOU. That's right you're fucking sorry. You call me over here—

CELIA. I didn't call you—

LOU. You fucking did. Lemme let you in on a little secret, Cile. All you have to do is *think* a call for help, and I hear you a million miles away, sister mine. And when I do, I am here. I am here! So don't pull this overdose shit with me. Do. Not!

A beat.

Is life not precious? Is it not? Tell me. Look in my face and tell me Life is not precious.

CELIA. I'm broke. I am utterly broke. I've been on unemployment for months now. Do you have any idea what that feels like? I'm *(Insert age of your production's Celia.)* years old. I'm a grown-up and a mother, and I can't even afford the heating bill. The cell-phone bill. The—oh god—the health insurance. My kid deserves better than me. I can't do it. And there is no one to blame but myself. I made the choices I made. I thought I'd be a writer. I thought, "I'm smart, I'll always have a job when I want one." Which, you know, only works when you're young and successful. Or old and really, really successful. I feel like a waste of…human…life.

LOU. So—I'm confused—you want to end it all? Or you want to go back? You can't do both.

CELIA. This is just a bad dream. I just need to wake up. Wake up wake up wake up!

LOU. No, Cile, you shouldn't force it. You go back when you're ready.

CELIA. Yeah, okay, I got it: I have to save Kit. I know. I understand.

LOU. I think there's more.

CELIA. If I got us here, I can get us back. I'm going to wake up!

LOU. You might, but…[you shouldn't until you've learned what you need to learn.]

CELIA. Something please wake me up!

Knock knock knock knock knock. As the sisters turn their heads toward the sound… Visual shift. They are back in Celia's kitchen, electricity on.

Kitchen! Sweet, sweet, filthy kitchen!

Knock knock knock knock knock.

LOU. Who the heck could that be?

CELIA. Who knows? All the ghosts are out tonight.

Lou opens the door and discovers Kelsie in an extraordinary white wedding gown. She is a vision. Lou screams as if she's seen a ghost. Kelsie deadpans.

LOU. Holy shipwreck! It's the Angel of God!

CELIA. No room at the inn!

Celia slams the door. A beat. From behind the door:

KELSIE. Hello?

CELIA. *(Harsh hush.)* It's *her*!

Compensating for the rude door slam, Lou opens the door.

LOU. *(Her warmest welcome, right in Kelsie's face.)* Deck the halls, hang some balls!

Still, Kelsie deadpans.

CELIA. *(To Kelsie.)* Sorry.

KELSIE. I don't think you are, but okay.

Kit appears from behind Kelsie.

She didn't have a key.

CELIA. What are you doing here? What's going on?

KIT. Mom.

CELIA. Shouldn't you be eating cake or something?

KIT. Mom, did you do it?

CELIA. Do what?

KIT. Did you open all the windows at St. Joseph's?

CELIA. Kitty-cat…

KIT. Oh my god. You did. You did this, didn't you? *(To Kelsie.)* I can't believe this.

CELIA. It was an accident. A purpose-accident.

KIT. What the hell is that supposed to mean?

LOU. *(Correcting.)* "Heck."

CELIA. I mean, yes, I opened a window. But I didn't really think it would flood the whole church.

KIT. ALL the windows!

CELIA. No…

KIT. Mom, a pipe burst. The church flooded! And the whole wedding was moved to the school gym next door. What kind of wacko opens the windows in December?

CELIA. It was hot.

KIT. What were you doing at church anyway?

CELIA. I go to church…

KIT. Since when?

CELIA. Since—Hey. What's it to you? I pray. Okay? I said some prayers. Some unfulfilled prayers.

KIT. Well, I said some prayers too, and they've been answered.

CELIA. Is that right?

KIT. I'm going to live with Dad and Kelsie. Starting now. *(To Kelsie.)* I'm gonna get some stuff.

Kit passes through the kitchen and disappears into her bedroom. A beat.

KELSIE. I'm Kelsie.

CELIA. Yes, I gathered. From the dress. Et cetera.

KELSIE. Hi, Celia. Do you go by Celia?

LOU. Cile. All her friends say Cile.

CELIA. Yes, Celia.

KELSIE. I'm sure I'm the last person you want to see right now.

CELIA. Pretty much. And ISIS. You and ISIS.

KELSIE. ISIS?

CELIA. The terrorists…

KELSIE. Wow.

LOU. Cile, say something kind.

CELIA. *(A mighty attempt.)* You seem really…sober.

KELSIE. I don't drink.

CELIA. At all?

KELSIE. Nope. Never had the urge.

CELIA. I hate you.

LOU. I'm gonna check on Kit.

Lou backs away but can't take her eyes off the two women before her.

KELSIE. Yeah, I figured. After you flooded my wedding? You know? *(Is she chuckling a little?)* It's not a super-easy way to start a marriage…or thing to explain to guests.

CELIA. But how did you know?

Lou freezes.

KELSIE. Oh, it was weird. Like Brad casually suggested it, and then it was like the idea was planted and we couldn't see it any other way.

CELIA. *(Possible slow burn to Lou.)* Is that so…?

Lou swiftly exits.

For the record, I didn't *flood* anything. That I opened some windows turned out to be unfortunate. And it had nothing to do with my feelings about you.

KELSIE. We could be nice to each other, you know? We could just decide that…

CELIA. Yeah, but I feel like eventually, the age difference would get in the way. I mean, do you even know the Backstreet Boys?

KELSIE. The boy band?

CELIA. Or call-waiting? Answering machines? Liquid Wite-Out?

KELSIE. I don't think it's that big of a deal. That I'm younger.

CELIA. Oh, go ahead and mention it, why don't you?

KELSIE. I have older sisters, so…[I'm comfortable having older friends.]

CELIA. I can't believe you're in my kitchen right now. Do you think maybe you're not real?

KELSIE. No, I think I'm real. *(Pause.)* Yeah, I'm real.

CELIA. Well, of course you would think you're real. Even if you were a hallucination. An illusion. A specter.

KELSIE. Are you okay? Are you maybe a little drunk? Or high or something?

CELIA. Definitely not. Much to my dismay, I had what I think was a near-death experience. Sobered me right up.

KELSIE. What, like, tonight?

CELIA. I'm not convinced you're real. Could you just, like, smack me in the face?

KELSIE. No. I'm not going to do that.

CELIA. Right. So, then, this is just a bad dream. Maybe I'll wake up having learned a really good lesson.

KELSIE. Maybe my being here *is* the lesson.

CELIA. You sure are ruining my fantasy that you'd be young and trite and stupid.

KELSIE. Oh, I'm sure I am all those things, but I'm also actually pretty likable.

CELIA. So, what, you guys told Kit that I "flooded" the church and that ruined her night, put her right over the edge, and she just had to move in with you tonight?

KELSIE. I don't think it ruined her night. She did the Chicken Dance. She caught the bouquet.

CELIA. And then she asked you to bring her here?

KELSIE. Well, she was ready to go. Brad had been drinking, so… *(Shrugs.)* She said she wanted to get some things. I think she feels—

CELIA. You have no idea!

KELSIE. I didn't—[mean to overstep.]

Kit enters, with a bag of things. Neither Kelsie nor Celia sees her. She hangs back out of sight, still as a statue. Lou is there too, also unnoticed.

CELIA. You think you know what she's feeling? You think you could do better? Like your home will be more fun and more fulfilling? You have no idea what you're in for! I am an actual parent! I cook things and care for things and I hold her when she cries and when she coughs and when she pukes. And she may look like a teenager, but that is my baby girl, and she is completely lost right now, and I'm her mother and I know when she needs space, but I

also know when she needs *me*. Teenagers are animals. They will eat all of your food, and lick your face, and then go to their dens and NOT TELL YOU SHIT. And I don't even care because I love her more than life itself.

Beat.

KELSIE. *(Not even bragging, just a fact.)* Kit talks to me a lot.

CELIA. I SHOULD HAVE FLOODED THAT PLACE LIKE NOAH'S ARC!

KELSIE. Thank you?

Celia slumps.

So.

CELIA. So. Kind of a weird wedding night you're having.

KELSIE. You're telling me. I don't think Brad even noticed that we left.

CELIA. He is such a dick.

KELSIE. Not all the time.

CELIA. *(A breath. A decision.)* So, the Chicken Dance, huh?

KELSIE. Yeah. My family's into all that.

CELIA. You have siblings?

KELSIE. I have two sisters.

CELIA. You're close?

KELSIE. Mm-hmm.

CELIA. That's nice. They were in the wedding?

KELSIE. Mm-hmm. In matching galoshes.

CELIA. Perfect.

KELSIE. I'm…I'm sorry about your sister, Celia. I read your book, so…

CELIA. It's… That's okay. It was a long time ago.

KELSIE. Yeah, but on Christmas Eve?

CELIA. Yeah, the weather was…really bad that year.

KELSIE. The holidays must be—

CELIA. Yeah. Holidays are tough. You read my book?

KELSIE. Oh my god. Yes. I have a signed copy. You signed my book!

CELIA. No—

KELSIE. Yes! Yes, you totally did! I have proof. In writing! I loved that book. Changed my life.

CELIA. Ya don't say?

KELSIE. Yeah. Yep. You wouldn't remember this, but we chatted a little at the book signing. Well, I, like, spewed all these words at you. But you must get that all the time.

CELIA. Mmm, no. I mean, back then, a few. But it's so much easier to hang on to the criticisms.

KELSIE. I guess I can relate. But why is that?

CELIA. Because it reinforces what we're already telling ourselves. You come at me with a compliment and I just don't have a file folder for that.

KELSIE. Maybe we should get each other file folders for Christmas.

CELIA. You're funny. Does Brad know my book changed your life?

KELSIE. Um, it never really came up. I didn't put it together that you were his ex for a long time. And then I was like, whoa!

CELIA. *(Snort-laughs.)* You should read the stuff I wrote about him.

KELSIE. I'll pass. I've had enough life-changing experiences for now.

Beat.

You know, I'm not going to take your daughter from you. I adore Kit, and she can come to us whenever she wants. But I know I'm not a mom to her, and I wouldn't even try. I have my hands full. I have a job, and a lot of changes, and…I'm pregnant.

CELIA. You…

KELSIE. Three months.

CELIA. I can't tell at all!

KELSIE. First pregnancy…

CELIA. Wow. Whoa. Wow… Congratulations?

KELSIE. Yeah, thanks, I'm really excited.

CELIA. How's Brad…?

KELSIE. Oh, he's excited too. You know. It is what it is.

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!



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