

THE BAY OF FUNDY
AN ADAPTATION OF ONE LINE FROM
THE MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE:
She discovered that have, take, and keep were pleasant words

a story about America
set
in a city by the sea

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CHARACTERS

MAY

A woman in her early 50's. A middleclass Midwesterner who married up by accident and accidentally got seduced by her husband's old money. Perfectly lovely, elegant and vital, she carries off this affair with immense success, respected and admired by all in their community, where none of them suspects she is just a little middleclass Midwesterner, pretending to be someone and something she is not. Except: her husband knows she loves his money more than she loves him. And she knows he knows. But she just can't stop. She knows she should stop this affair, this decades long full court tilt social climb, she knows she should stop pretending...but she just can't. She doesn't want to. She has discovered that take, have, and keep are pleasant words.

PAUL

Take, have, and keep are not pleasant words for Paul. He grew up with them, watched them ruin his sister and brother, and now he has watched them ruin his wife. Well, Paul has a plan. It just might work. He's used to getting, and having, and keeping what he wants, after all, and he wants to keep his wife. Paul is a handsome man in his middle 50's, an Eastern Seaboard old family aristocrat with a huge shock of hair and a look that could blister paint right off the walls. Or charm it off, if he's in the mood. A fighter's sense of his body, alert, even at rest.

NANCY

A woman in her 40's. A little bit of a beagle about her, a shade too eager to please, too quick to judgment. Falls in love easily. She's madly in love with the way May carries off her affair with money, for instance. She thinks everything that May does with her money is just divine.

HANK

A man in his late 40's. A man who never asked questions of life, and so doesn't expect answers. He knows exactly what money is for: Keep the wolf from the door. Bring your kids up right. Live in a good enough house. Take pride in all the above. Play golf if you want to.

DEAD AND MYTHICAL CHARACTERS

There are some dead and mythical characters. They'll be doubled by the actors playing Paul, Nancy, and Hank.

SETTING

The dining room, stairway, master bedroom, and front doorway of May and Paul's stately home, in an American city by the sea.

Think opera set size for everything in this play. If a thing is mentioned, think of it as monumental, think of it as singular, think of it as existing in a world where its size represents everything there is to represent about it.

ACT ONE
SCENE * ONE

MAY

(Lights up on the front doorway of May and Paul's home. The front of the house may be represented with a white door and a column or two.)

May opens the door, and smiles graciously at the audience.

To the Audience.)

Hello, and welcome to my home.

(She opens the door wide, for them to "enter.")

If it looks familiar to you, it is almost identical to Tara, Scarlet O'Hara's plantation in *Gone with the Wind*. It's Greek Revival, which was the preferred architectural style in America in the 1800's because Greece represented democracy and liberty and most of all, freedom. Plantation owners, with no sense of irony whatsoever, adored the Greek Revival style. Please come in. All of you. Come in.

(She welcomes them into her home.)

Lights up inside the house, including on Paul, who is sitting in one of two Chippendale end chairs, reading a small well worn clothbound book.)

Here. My husband. And there—

My table.

(The light glows and goldens around her table.)

She smiles at the audience. It is a smile as melancholy and knowing as a smile can be.

To Paul.)

Paul? Are you hungry, Paul?

PAUL

(Looks up from his book.)

No.

MAY

You sure?

(Paul looks at her, exasperated, and goes back to his book.)

PAUL

I'm reading.

MAY

I see that.

(Back to the Audience.)

My husband is a professor. Greek mythology was his field. Funny the use of the word field, isn't it? As if your specialty were a hundred acres where people gave you money for what you grew. My husband was a sharecropper in the fields of Greek myth.

PAUL

Prometheus.

MAY

(To Paul)

What?

PAUL

I'm reading about Prometheus.

MAY

(To the Audience)

Prometheus is the one who steals fire from the Gods, gets chained to a rock, and gets his liver pecked out every day by an eagle.

PAUL

No. Heart. Not liver, heart.

MAY

(To the Audience)

You thought it was the liver, didn't you? I know I did.

PAUL

It's the liver in all the later versions, but in the earliest ones—it's his heart. The myth has changed, over time, in the telling.

MAY

(To the Audience)

He's so dedicated. Even though he's retired.

PAUL

And the Gods didn't chain him to the rock for stealing fire.

MAY

(To the Audience)

You're going to be surprised when you hear why they did it, I just know it.

PAUL

They chained him to a rock because of sacrifice.

MAY

(To the Audience)

Sacrifice. Of course! You're surprised, aren't you. I wish I were.

PAUL

In order to pray to a god back then you had to sacrifice an animal on an altar. Well, poor people were too poor to do that, so the gods refused to bless them. And because they weren't blessed, they stayed poor people who couldn't afford to get blessed. A vicious cycle, no end in sight.
Enter Prometheus.

MAY

(To Paul)

Is this when he steals fire from the Gods?

PAUL

No. Not yet. Prometheus says to the gods, all mortals want to be blessed but they can't afford it. Do you need the entire sacrifice? Couldn't you settle for say, half? Prometheus was a charmer, so the gods say, oh, yes, Prometheus, we're big enough to share. And so Prometheus butchers a calf and prepares it for sacrifice. But first, he does this. He shoves all the bones and gristle into the stomach, so it looks like a huge, mouthwatering mound of meat, and next to it he arranges the actual meat to look meager and unappetizing. And Prometheus says, pick. You are the Gods of Olympus, pick which half shall be your share.

Well. The Gods used to get the t-bones, the rib eyes, the filet mignon, now all they get on their altars is trash. It doesn't take them long to realize that they're getting a sacrifice that is not a sacrifice.

MAY

So he steals fire from the Gods, and—

PAUL

Not yet. Okay, so now the Gods are mad. They hate being tricked. But they agreed to the deal—they can't get the meat back. So they decide to make mankind choke on it. They take the gift of fire away so he can't cook the meat that he's stolen from them.

MAY

And now is when he steals the fire?

PAUL

(Nodding)

Now is when Prometheus steals fire and gives it back to man. And as the smoke from the cooking fires of man waft up into Olympus, as the smell of food they will never eat again fills the rarified air, Zeus lashes out in fury, and has Prometheus chained to a rock for all time. And commands that every day, an eagle will peck out his heart. And every day, it will grow back again.

MAY

(To the Audience)

He's a very good teacher, don't you think? He makes it all so—available. He got award after award for his teaching. And he never made more money at it than he would have if he *had* been a sharecropper. Which I think he would have enjoyed more.

(Okay, the book Paul's reading is probably the size of a normal book. So don't think impossibly large, opera set size for everything in this play. There are knives and forks that should be normal size. Also fish. They should be normal size too.)

To Paul.)

Would you have enjoyed it more, Paul?

PAUL

(He gives her a withering glance.)

Being a sharecropper?

MAY

I guess not.

PAUL

No. I guess not too.

(He goes back to reading.)

MAY

But you would have made money at it, Paul. You would have made money at anything you put your mind to do.

(To the Audience.)

Of course, Paul didn't go into teaching to make money. Just the opposite. My husband went into teaching because money had ruined everyone in his family, so he decided to try something else. Not that he took any less than his share of the family money, oh no, in fact, through a series of misunderstandings with his brother and sisters he *accidentally* managed to take it all. It wasn't Rockefeller money or Getty money or

Pillsbury money. It wasn't *famous* old money, but it was just as green and abundant and old.

And in the end the money *didn't* ruin him. His strategy worked. No, the money didn't ruin my husband. It ruined me.

(I bet it will be obvious what has monumental scale and what does not. Also, a few things change size, they—grow? No, that's for organic things, for things that are alive. These things are made things. They don't grow, but they need to appear bigger, and, because of the way the laws of our planet work, they probably have to be bigger to appear bigger.)

May has gone over to her table. She takes out a cloth and starts polishing it.)

I hadn't planned on being ruined by money. Who does? In fact I came from a nice Midwestern family that had planned on the exact opposite thing.

(May's mother arrives, carrying the silverware. She hands it to May.)

MOTHER

In the Midwest, wealth is a by product of clean living and hard working, and should a family accumulate a larger than anticipated or essential amount of it they should live exactly the same as they did before. The subject of money itself was a social taboo. The closest we got to talking about our money, in fact, in our family, was talking about the fact that nice Midwestern people didn't talk about it.

(Through her teeth)

Why are you talking about your money, dear?

MAY

This is my mother. She's a classic example of Minnesotan Revival. I say that because she is both an ideal example of her time and class, and additionally, she is, revived. By what agency, I have no idea, but my mother, who is dead, walks into my house whenever she pleases. And claims to be helping me.

MOTHER

If pushed, of course, I will admit it. We had money. But we weren't showy about it. It was quiet money. And it didn't ruin any of us and it wouldn't have ruined you.

(Mother goes off to get the plates. May starts setting the table. She puts the silverware at each place.)

MAY

Money can also ruin you if you have too little, but then people don't say money ruined you, they say you're poor.

(Mother returns with a stack of plates, hands them to May.)

If you are poor there is no such thing as the wrong kind of money, but if you have money there of course is.

(May looks at the plates.)

Mother, this isn't the china I wanted to use. I was going to use the Lowenstoff.

MOTHER

This was your grandmother's. Isn't it good enough for you?

GRANDMOTHER

(Grandmother enters.)

That was my wedding china. It's exquisite. And it meant something to me.

MOTHER AND GRANDMOTHER

We hope you're going to pass it on to Janet.

(Mother and Grandmother go off. May sighs, and sets the china out.)

MAY

All the women in my family believed there was a difference between good money and bad money. My grandmother was particularly proud of how good her money was. It was money that was careful, never used to show off. Never used to excess. Never used to shut people out, or wall people in. We had quiet middle class Midwestern money that middleclass Midwesterners are so famous for. The kind of money that, instead of ruining people, makes them somehow...nice. The type of money that the world has never seen before and probably never will again.

MOTHER

(Mother comes back with the silver bread and butters.),

It's hard to get a Midwesterner to talk about it, but in the Midwest, we know what money is for. We know what kind of house it builds, what kind of things should fill it. What's a house, after all, except a museum filled with things that are not museum quality.

(Mother hands the bread and butters to May and leaves.)

MAY

Maybe that's why I bought this table.

(She looks at her table. Now that it is set it is even more

heartbreakingly beautiful.)

Isn't it beautiful? How could anyone resist it? Just look at it.

(Lights focus like the first day of creation on her extraordinary antique mahogany table. You have never seen a table like it.)

You have never seen a table like it. It is somehow both ornate and elegant. It is monumental, just in its exquisite completeness. It is more like a priceless antique American mahogany table than any table you've ever seen.

(May lightly caresses the inlay on the table.)

This morning, over breakfast, my husband announced that he was selling it. I won't tell you what I said.

But then, Paul has always had it in for my table. Right from the start he knew about money, and I didn't. It seemed so innocent, so easy, so harmless, back then. Money, I mean. We had just gotten married, and I wanted something of museum quality to start the collection in my little museum. I was serving coffee at a charity auction, I was just a mousy little professor's wife one minute, and the next—I bought this table, and everything changed. Oh, Paul was furious. His brand new Midwestern wife had gone out and spent more on a table than he made in a year. In two years. In—well, you might as well know the truth. A hundred years. College professors made even less than they do now, but our joint checking account didn't exactly reflect that, and I spent his salary for more than a hundred years. It was the first year of our marriage, and I was desperate to impress Paul's family, and his colleagues, and most of all—myself. I wanted desperately to be who I was trying to be.

(May puts out the last piece of china. The table is completely set.)

I had an image of married life before I married into money and got ruined by it, before I bought this table and sold my soul. And what I thought marriage would be like was sunset on a perfect beach.

(She picks up an old scrapbook, opens it, unsticks a brochure from it. A brochure of the Bay of Fundy.)

A beach like the Bay of Fundy. Where the tide leaves a blanket of pink shells at your feet. And the sea is full of leaping and flying fish, overflowing with fish, standing room only with fish, and whales rush in and devour them, it's a banquet, and in the air, a million kitebirds dive down to join the feast. And I am holding my husband's hand. And he's holding mine. And we aren't hungry for anything else. We aren't hungry for anything else, but this.

(I imagine that the light will feel like the sun is indeed setting out over the back of the house, and there may be the sounds of the waves and the seashore.)

BLACKOUT

SCENE * TWO

PAUL

(May is standing, Paul is sitting. He's handing the brochure back to her.)

You want to go back to the Bay of Fundy.

MAY

Yes.

PAUL

You know we can't go back and you still want to.

MAY

Don't you?

PAUL

You can't step in the same river twice.

MAY

I'm not talking about a river, I'm talking about the Atlantic Ocean.

PAUL

Rivers, oceans. The same rule applies.

MAY

Don't you remember what it was like?

PAUL

Of course I remember. The kids were small. They held our hands. We still had the dogs. What were their names?

MAY

The children or the dogs?

(Paul glares at her. The paint may blister on the walls behind her, but May is untouched.)

Well, you should remember, you named them. The children. And the dogs.

PAUL

Did I?

MAY

No, that's right, I named the dog I gave you and you named the dog you gave me.

PAUL

Taj! The Taj Mahal!

MAY

And the other pup? You gave me the Taj Mahal—and I gave you? Paul? Tell me you haven't forgotten the name of the dog I gave you?

(He doesn't remember. Beat. She unfolds the brochure.)

She reads from it.)

“The Bay of Fundy has the world's greatest difference between high tide and low, a 53 foot high tide. These powerful tides act as a giant marine supermarket, catching and pulling in massive amounts of fish. Thousands of whales arrive daily to feed off this bounty.”

Remember what it was like? The tide went out so fast you could chase after it and not catch up. Of course, the signs said not to, the signs warned us that the tide would rush back in without warning and sweep us off our feet. Like a tsunami, the tide would come in at breakneck speed. But we ignored the signs. We chased after the water. We walked on the ocean floor.

PAUL

May, that's what a beach is. The ocean floor.

MAY

We were young and we were in love and we walked on the ocean floor.

(She holds the brochure out to him.)

Are you hungry?

PAUL

(Pause)

No.

MAY

You're sure?

PAUL

I'm sure.

MAY

(She pulls back the brochure.)

You used to be hungry all the time.

PAUL

I think I can be counted on to know if I'm hungry or not.

(Pause)

I suppose you're hungry.

MAY

Please, Paul.

PAUL

Your mythic hunger never stops.

MAY

It's not mythic.

PAUL

It's not an insult, the word mythic.

MAY

Yes it is. In this context, it most certainly is. But what it mostly is, I've come to understand—is forgetfulness. You're ruining our life out of forgetfulness. You've forgotten what it's like to be hungry.

PAUL

I haven't forgotten, May. I've made a choice.

MAY

The kind of choice only someone who isn't hungry anymore would make.

PAUL

Don't quote dime store philosophy at me, May. Did it ever occur to you I'm hungry for something else?

MAY

You're hungry for something that's the opposite of hunger.

PAUL

Of course it's not.

MAY

Then why does it feel that way? Why does what you want feel like the end of everything I want?

Let's go back to the Bay of Fundy. It's a banquet, a river of abundance, an ocean of—bounty, infinite bounty. Let's pick a date. Make some plans.

PAUL

Okay. Fine. I'll pick a date. We'll go after Janet brings the kids to visit.

MAY

That's not fair.

PAUL

It's absolutely fair. You're the one who turned Janet against me.

MAY

Is it my fault she swore she'd never step foot in this house again??

PAUL

Yes. You're the one who worked her into a frenzy over this.

MAY

And what you did to Jeff had nothing to do with her frenzy?

PAUL

You turned her against me. What kind of a mother does that?

MAY

And what kind of a father tells his only son—

(She stops. Takes a deep breath.)

No. I promised myself I would not talk about Jeff. I don't want to make you upset. You know what could happen if you get upset.

PAUL

It probably wouldn't kill me to talk about Jeff, May.

MAY

True. Maybe I'm the one it will kill.

(May carefully folds up the brochure.)

PAUL

Why are you making this so hard, May? Why is it so hard for you to accept? I've had enough.

MAY

Nobody's had enough. That's how you know you're alive. Because you haven't had enough.

(He grabs the brochure from her.)

PAUL

You want me to be hungry, May? All right. I'm hungry for this.

(He rips the brochure in half.)

I'm hungry for we can't go back. I'm hungry for a great heaping bowlful
of everything is different now and we can't. Go. Back.
BLACKOUT

SCENE * THREE

MAY

(May, Paul and their friends, Hank and Nancy, walk onstage holding their plates of food and their elegant crystal wine goblets, and sit down to dinner at the table.

There is now a centerpiece—a magnificent, very old silver epergne with a large center crystal bowl, and four smaller crystal bowls extended on arms. These bowls are filled with fruit—grapes and apples and pears and plums. All the bowls are in the shape of seashells, but not hit you over the head shells—classic, cut crystal suggestions of shells.

And...they are made of ice, not crystal. But only you and I know this at this point, and you only know this because you are hearing the stage directions. At this moment, when the lights hit them, they sparkle and look for all the world like museum quality crystal.

They have to visibly melt, later on, when the table, and the epergne grow—well, they don't grow, exactly, but they get bigger and bigger, and bigger, later on, in the play, they get monumental, not in front of our eyes, of course, but when we return to the dining room, each time, they get bigger. The melt water that runs from them will create a substantial current. An out of nowhere high tide.

I should also point out that May and Paul and their friends don't have any idea that the crystal part of the epergne is made of ice. That it has the capability of melting. They think the bowls are cut crystal. They KNOW they're cut crystal. Even after the crystal bowls begin to melt it will take everyone a long time to understand that they are.)

MAY

More fish, anyone?

HANK

I'd love some.

MAY

(She passes him the fish platter.)

I know I can count on you, Hank. You're hungry, and you're not shy about it. Did you know that Paul used to be hungry, like you?

PAUL

May, please.

MAY

He could have written a myth about his hunger—but he didn't. He said *that* myth had already been written.

(Hank takes some. May picks up the fish platter.)

Nancy? You've hardly had any--

HANK

(Mouth full.)

Our Nancy's got an appetite like a bird.

MAY

Don't you like it?

NANCY

Why wouldn't I? It tastes just the way I make it myself.

MAY

Really? How strange! I just got the recipe last month when Paul and I went to Paris.

NANCY

(Snorting.)

Oh, right, when you and Paul went to Paris.

(Hank kicks her under the table.)

They all eat. Nancy uses her napkin constantly to wipe up real or imagined drops of water or brush away crumbs, especially around Hank. She tends to caress the table, too, a little more than might be normal. She likes to run her fingertips across its polished, gleaming surface, and follow the contours of the pattern in the carved edge.

(She sees Hank's glass. She's horrified.)

Hank, oh, look, your glass is making a ring—how many times have I told you to be more careful with this table, Hank?

(She picks up his glass and frantically wipes under it.)

May, I keep meaning to ask, do you want to do both days in the jewelry booth at the rummage sale or do you want to branch out this time?

MAY

Oh, no, jewelry booth both days.

NANCY

That's what I thought you'd say. You're so good at it. We're sure going to miss you next year.

MAY

Miss me? Why?

NANCY

Well, when you move away.

MAY

Nancy, we just put the house on the market—

NANCY

Yes, but—

MAY

Who knows how long it will take to sell in this climate. Could take years. Some people are taking their houses off the market altogether.

HANK

I wouldn't do that. That would be a mistake.

PAUL

I have no intention of making that mistake, Hank.

MAY

No, he has no intention of doing that. All right. Jewelry booth next Friday.

NANCY

It's not next Friday, May, it's this Friday.

MAY

This Friday? Oh, what shame, I can't do it. Paul and I are going to the Bay of Fundy.

PAUL

May, please don't do this.

NANCY

But you always do the jewelry booth.

PAUL

May, stop it.

MAY

Paul and I went to the Bay of Fundy when the children were small. We were so happy then.

PAUL

Please, May?

MAY

So happy. Nobody was talking all the time about sacrifice back then. No. Everybody was happy. So we're going back. Sorry.
(There is a painful silence. Hank, who must have TMJ, because we can hear him chewing, has stopped chewing.)

NANCY

No. You're doing the jewelry booth. Like you did last year and all the years before.

MAY

But I just said--

NANCY

No. I'm not going to go through this again. Every year you do this. Every year at the last minute you say you can't run the jewelry booth because you're going on a trip, and so I beg someone to fill in for you, and they get a baby sitter or change their gynecological appointment, they upend their life, and then of course you show up, and it's humiliating, because whoever I've begged to fill in is standing there, and here you come, and you push them out of the way—

MAY

Nancy, I never push—

NANCY

You don't have to push, you push without pushing. You're so pretty, and you haven't had a bit of work done, and everyone knows it, and if you're wearing a scarf it just completes the outfit perfectly instead of drawing attention to the fact that you're wearing a scarf, which is the way it always does when I wear one.

MAY

Nancy, what are you talking about—

NANCY

Your money.

(Hank kicks her under the table.)

Your old, old money.

(Hank kicks her under the table.)

Stop kicking me, Hank! I know I'm not supposed to say it but I'm tired of not saying it. Everybody knows how old Paul's money is, it's so old it's practically prehistoric, and *that* is what pushes Martha or Sissy or me out of the jewelry booth.

PAUL

(Beat)

More fish, Nancy?

(Paul tries to pass her the platter.)

NANCY

I do not want more fish. What I want is for May to stop lying about the Bay of Fundy.

PAUL

Hank, you look like you could do with seconds.

(Paul passes the silver platter to Hank, who forks himself a whole fish, head and fins still attached, and puts it on his plate. Maybe the fish *are* monumental. Maybe they're huge.)

HANK

Have some fish, dear, okay?

NANCY

I don't want more fish!

HANK

That's our Nan, always eating like a bird.

MAY

Aren't you hungry, Nancy?

NANCY

Actually, as a matter of fact I am. I'm hungry for an honest answer. I'm hungry for—

HANK

NANCY!!

(Pause, as Hank glowers at her.)

If my little bird is suddenly so hungry, maybe she should eat some fish.
(He holds out the platter. Nancy, grimacing with resignation, takes it.)

She spears a huge fish with the fork and puts it on her plate.)

MAY

Oh, good, I'm glad you like it.

NANCY

OF COURSE I LIKE IT, it's MY recipe. I gave it to you last year, after you came over to our house and liked it so much you asked me for it.

MAY

No. You're mistaken. I got it the last time Paul and I went to Paris.

NANCY

(Overcome with frustration again.)

MAY! This is *my* recipe—all the recipes you say you get on your travels are mine! Of course, there's some truth in that, because next door to our house is just about as far as you ever do travel! You didn't go to France last year, or Bhutan the year before, or even San Francisco in the fall. You have not set foot outside a 25 mile radius since I've known you. It's not a secret, May, everybody knows it. But you keep pretending they don't.

(She's really screaming now.)

I'm sick of it. I'm sick of not being good enough to share your secrets when they aren't even secrets! And I am REALLY sick of eating food from recipes you got when you went BUT REALLY DIDN'T GO TO FRANCE!

(And in her anger, she slams the heavy two pronged serving fork with a thick handle, down on the table, near the edge.)

The edge of the table splinters, and breaks off.

There is a horrible stunned silence.)

Oh my God.

(May begins to hyperventilate a bit, from the shock if it.)

MAY

Paul. Paul. What's happened—PAUL!!!

NANCY

OH MY GOD!

PAUL

Jesus CHRIST!

(He goes to inspect the damage.)

NANCY

HANK! HANK!

(Hank runs to her side. Nancy holds up the chunk. It is big.
Almost a foot long, eight inches wide.)

IT WAS AN ACCIDENT, HANK!!!

(Hank takes the chunk from her and hands it to Paul.
Paul hands it to May.)

MAY

Oh. Oh no.

(Nancy hangs on to Hank like a drowning woman.)

NANCY

I was just eating dinner, like I always do, how did this happen to me!!!

MAY

Oh my, oh my, oh my.

(May sits down in her chair, bereft.)

PAUL

(In dismay over the damage.)

Jesus H. Christ.

NANCY

(Beginning to launch herself into hysteria.)

IT WAS AN ACCIDENT!!!!!!

(Already, the sea shell cut crystal bowls are beginning
to melt. I don't imagine that it is something the
audience can process just yet, however. They might
notice a little water on the table around the epergne.
I don't know what they'll make of it, though.

Nancy begins to wail, to keen, to sob, to scream.)

IT'S NOT MY FAULT—except maybe it is--this is always my place at
the table—maybe my plates have been too heavy. Maybe I have piled
the food too high. Maybe it IS my fault. May—IS IT MY FAULT???

MAY

(Lying with every fiber of her being.)

Of course not, Nancy. You were hungry. Being hungry is not your
fault. Anyone can see it's just a little...

(She's holding the huge chunk.)
...scratch. It's...hardly anything at all. It can be fixed.

NANCY
How can it be fixed! It's the end of the world!!!

HANK
Of course it isn't, it's just a table.

NANCY
Just a table!? Just a table!? Are you insane! Have you lost your mind?

PAUL
Now, Nancy, if May says it can be fixed--

NANCY
She's just saying that because it's the polite thing to say!

MAY
True, but it's still not your fault, Nancy.

NANCY
It was my fork! It was my food!

PAUL
You are our guest, we gave you that fork. We gave you that food.

NANCY
Stop it! I know what I've done. I KNOW WHAT THIS TABLE IS WORTH!

(There is a stunned silence.)

HANK
No you don't, Nancy. It's none of our business knowing that. Paul, we have absolutely no idea what this table's worth.

NANCY
I'm tired of hiding it from you! I KNOW WHAT IT'S WORTH. One of those men from Sotheby's who are always sneaking around trying to see it, one of them told me.

HANK
I told you to stop talking to them, sweetheart.

NANCY

I know but they're so desperate to see it! Just talking about it, their eyes get glazed, the way a man's eyes glaze over just before...yes, that sort of glaze. They beg me and I can't help myself! I sneak them in!

HANK

Nancy! Sweetheart! Why?

NANCY

I wait until May's working in the garden. Then I use a crow bar to get in through the side door. They look at the table, and they start to breathe really hard. Sometimes they sort of grab me but I know they aren't really grabbing me. And then...I usually look at the table too. The two of us look at the table. It doesn't take very long. Usually, after, they get very quiet and they leave. But one of them, after he grabbed me...he remembered I was there. And then he told me.

He made me guess first. I guessed the annual budget for the armed forces. No. The trade imbalance with China. Still too low. The national debt? No, he said, no. So he told me. It took my breath away. In my wildest dreams I never imagined...I couldn't imagine. What he told me.

(Nancy gets up, and walks around the table caressing it.)

It's one of a pair of tables made in 1835 from a single tree, the most perfect mahogany tree ever found in the Amazon. A tree with a name—the Red Mother, named because this tree was the central feature in a village of a tribe of Peruvian natives, who were all cut down in the raid that preceded the cutting down of this tree. The Red Mother, called this for her characteristic but exemplary red hue, was sent to America, where she was made into two matching tables each with 12 chairs, and two matching side boards, two matching breakfronts, and two small carving tables. All from this one, perfect tree.

These two perfect dining room sets were packed and placed on board a ship sailing for Liverpool in 1838, a special order for a Lord Harrington, who had two daughters of marriageable age, both of whom had expressed the desire for new world mahogany, no matter what the cost. The ship sank in a storm less than four days out. All hands were lost, naturally all cargo as well. Three days later, against all odds, one of the two tables was found standing upright on its legs, without a nick or scratch or blemish on a beach near Plymouth, washed ashore by the full moon tide. It was found by a young man who, taking advantage of the laws of salvage, carted it away and from its sale began one of the most lucrative furniture businesses of his day. It changed hands only twice, and belonged to the Gordons, of Philadelphia, for over 100 years, until Mrs. Mariah Gordon decided to punish her husband for his last and

most humiliating indiscretion. She demanded the table in the divorce settlement, and then immediately donated it to an auction for a local charity. A young professor's wife, volunteering at the auction, was seized by an uncontrollable hunger to be someone who sat down to dinner every night at a table that was perhaps the most important and valuable table in the world. When the bidding began, she left the small area where she was offering coffee and petitfours, and in a matter of minutes, and to the amazement of the assembled, and ultimately the entire antique collecting world--the table was hers.

And now I've ruined it!
(She breaks into fresh sobs.)

MAY
(Sits down at her place, calmly.)
Stop saying that, Nancy. It can be fixed.

NANCY
I watch Antiques Roadshow! I know what happens to the value when you repair something. It sinks! All the way down! This was a table that could swim, that could save itself, that could make it, upright, to shore! The American Miracle, that's what he called it. And I've destroyed it!

MAY
(May picks up the platter, smiling.)
Would anyone like some more fish?

NANCY
I'll never eat again! If I hadn't been eating this never would have happened!!!!
(And her wailing achieves new heights.)

PAUL
Hank? Maybe you'd better take Nancy home.

HANK
(Hank leaps up, happy to go.)
Good idea.

NANCY
I'll never be hungry again.

HANK
(He takes Nancy by the arm, and leads her off.)
Come on dear, let's go home, come on--

NANCY

(She stifles her sobs as best she can.)

Thank you, May...everything was perfectly delightful.

MAY

It was such...a pleasure having you.

NANCY

I don't know when I've had such a lovely...such a lovely...such a...

(She explodes into hysterical weeping. They're gone.)

PAUL

Anybody who didn't know you would think you're not upset.

MAY

I'm not upset.

PAUL

Nancy has just ruined the thing you love most in all the world and you're not upset?

(Pause)

Whatever you're hiding from me—go ahead, hide it. It won't get you anywhere.

MAY

I'm not hiding anything, Paul. You're the magician. You're the one who pulled the giant surprise rabbit out of his hat.

PAUL

It's not a surprise, May. We've been talking about selling the table for--

MAY

No, *you've* been talking about it. I just listened.

PAUL

Well you didn't listen very well.

MAY

And that makes you angry?

PAUL

Of course it makes me angry. It's worth half what it was this morning. If we'd just sold it before. But you wanted to sit and eat at it. And because you wanted that—

MAY

Of course I wanted to sit and eat at it, Paul. I was hungry.

(In a brief rage, he kicks a chair over.)

Be careful. It's not good for you to get angry. Remember what happens when you get angry?

PAUL

I wish to God you'd never bought the table, May. If you just hadn't bought it we...we...

MAY

You're saying, if I'd never bought this table, we'd still be happy?

PAUL

(Quietly)

Maybe.

MAY

You think the table ruined me, don't you?

PAUL

Don't you?

MAY

So it wasn't your money that ruined me, but the things I bought with it?

PAUL

Sometimes, all right, sometimes I think what our life would have been like without it.

MAY

Your money, or my table?

(No response)

You can't step in the same river twice, Paul. We don't get another life where you had the kind of money other people have and some other woman bought this table. Or maybe you want to step in a river where you married a different woman.

PAUL

I did marry a different woman. A woman who didn't care about my money.

MAY

Maybe I didn't change, Paul. Maybe your money did. It stopped being your money, and it turned into my table.

PAUL

(He touches the table.)

It's still money, May.

MAY

No, it's something—beautiful. It's something rare. It's the American Miracle, the table that survived a storm, that swam to shore, that—

PAUL

The money is still there.

MAY

No, not all of it. You said it yourself. It's worth half of what it was this morning.

(She touches the broken part.)

It's worth so much less now, in fact, that I'm sure you won't need to sell it.

PAUL

Oh, I see. You think, now I'll let you keep it.

MAY

We can't sell it now, it will have to be repaired.

PAUL

That's why you're not upset.

MAY

Fortunately I have the name of a restoration team who can fix anything.

PAUL

It can't be fixed. You know it. Everyone knows it. Even Nancy knows it.

MAY

First thing in the morning I'll give them a call.

(She gets up from the table, heads for the stairs.)

PAUL

We're not fixing it, we're selling it.

MAY

And then, in a year or two, who knows, maybe the value of the table will re-adjust itself. We'll talk about selling it then.

(May climbs the stairs, holding the chunk of the table in her hand.)

To the Audience.)
Here is the thing about having things.

PAUL
(Calling after her.)
No, May. Now. We're selling it now.

MAY
(To the Audience, ignoring Paul.)
Whether you live in a Greek Revival mansion or a more modest setting, every single thing you own needs taking care of. Needs protecting and preserving and repairing.
(She is in the master bedroom. She switches the lights on.

There is a single red gift box, from Saks Fifth Avenue, on the floor next to a 4 poster bed.

She gets on her knees, reaches under the bed, and pulls another red box out from under it. She opens it.)
And remember that your things are almost sure *not* to be museum quality. You are the curator of a museum full of non-museum quality things. Things that may have belonged to your mother and her mother before her. Things that you protected and preserved so you could give them to your children. So you may treasure these things.

(She pulls out more boxes from Saks from under the bed, opens them, looks inside them briefly, closes them. Puts them in some order that is clear to her on a pile next to the bed.)

Or, conversely, these things you treasure may be new things you bought last month at Saks. Or online at Neiman Marcus.

And what happens to you when you have treasure? When you treasure your treasure, it returns the favor. Your treasure makes you into a queen. An empress. On a good day, a little goddess.

(The pile is very high, there are many more boxes on it than one might rationally think would fit under the bed. So there is a monumental factor here, in scale. The individual boxes are normal size, but the pile will be monumental.)

And then you discover a sad, nasty truth. You discover that take, have, and keep, are pleasant words.

(Paul enters the bedroom. She ignores him, busy with her boxes. He watches her.)

PAUL

What are you doing?

MAY

Packing.

PAUL

But it's not time yet--I told you that when the house sold, we'd get someone in to pack.

MAY

And I told you I wanted to do it myself.

PAUL

We'll only take what's necessary—two sets of sheets, two sets of towels--

MAY

Two of everything. Yes. You made it very clear.

PAUL

Two of everything we *need*, May, not two of everything.

(She falters.)

You can't keep it all, May.

MAY

(She returns to her boxes.)

You've tricked me. I'm getting the gristle and bones in this marriage, and you're getting the meat. You're not sacrificing anything.

PAUL

You think this is easy for me?

MAY

I think it's not a matter of easy. I think you're so blinded by this idea of your "new myth" that you don't see what it's doing to me.

PAUL

You can't have it both ways, May. You say my money ruined you, fine. You should be happy about this.

MAY

People who are ruined cling to what has ruined them, Paul. They are endlessly hungry for it. That is what the definition of being ruined is. All right. You're selling the house. Fine. Sell it in this market. If you can. But I'll leave you if you sell my table.

PAUL

No you won't. I know you.

MAY

No you don't.

PAUL

I love you.

MAY

Then you love somebody you don't know.

PAUL

You don't get to erase my love like that. That's cheap and easy. I know you. I love you. And I know you love me.

MAY

If you know me, then you know. I will leave you if you do this.

PAUL

You can't want the table more than you want me, May. You can't.

MAY

A table is more reliable than you are, Paul. It won't suddenly change on me. It won't suddenly rear up on its hind legs and make me feel like a monster for who I've become.

PAUL

I never said you were a monster, May.

MAY

(She takes a tea cup out of a box.)

This china was my grandmother's. She was very insistent that it go to Janet.

PAUL

Your grandmother died before Janet was born.

MAY

To her granddaughter when she got one. That is the way these things are handed down, Paul.

PAUL

Fine, fine. Tell Janet to come. She can have it.

MAY

You know she won't come. I'll keep it for her.

PAUL

No.

MAY

Paul! You've got to let me save some of these things for her.

PAUL

Why?

MAY

They were my grandmother's. And before that they were her grandmother's. Women couldn't own land or property then, those were passed on to the men, but the ground the women stood on, the only things they could own, were their linen, their silver, their china. That's what women passed down. It means something, to pass them down.

PAUL

Janet doesn't care about those things. She's like you were, when you were young.

MAY

You don't know her at all. Your own daughter is a stranger to you. I'm a stranger to you.

PAUL

No you're not. I know you. And if you were on my side, if Janet saw that you wanted it too--

MAY

But I *don't* want it, Paul.

PAUL

Yes, you do. I know, in your heart, that you do.

MAY

You forgot to ask me about Jeff. Go on, ask me what Jeff wants.
(Once again, that paint blistering look. But May holds her own against it.)

PAUL

That's not fair, May.

MAY

Fair? Are we talking about fair, now? I seem to remember that fair was a word our son was particularly fond of using, the last time we saw him. I remember—

I remember him chasing after the tide when we went to the Bay of Fundy. Remember how brave he always was? How we called after him to stop, but he wouldn't stop? You were so proud of him, then. You would have given him anything you had. All he had to do was turn to you and reach out his hand.

(She stands, passionately, pleading, she makes a step toward him)

Paul, you can stop all this, we can go back to the way it was.

PAUL

It's too late.

MAY

Of course it isn't, all you have to do is take the house off the market, make a few calls—

PAUL

I don't want to, May.

MAY

Then you call Janet, you call Jeff, you--

PAUL

In your heart, May. You want this too.

(He walks off.)

May takes a Saks Fifth Avenue box, opens it, and puts the broken chunk of the table inside it. Closes the box. Puts the box on top of a pile of boxes.)

BLACKOUT

SCENE * FOUR

MAY

(May goes to the front door, opens it. She takes a step out. An elegant, rich breeze blows through her hair, ruffles her clothes. She takes another step. The light changes, it's golden, like sunset. Another step. Leaves blow across the stage, swirl in eddies around her. Another step. The wind gets stronger.

The light grows, the leaves are a whirlpool around her. She has brought a chair with her, and a small radio. She sits down.

(She puts on her driving glasses.)

Driving glasses.

(She turns on the radio. She may not exactly pantomime driving, but she indicates driving a little bit, and the wind blows her hair the way it does with the windows rolled down.)

The death of the only man I ever loved has made me careless. That is the line I say to myself, out loud, as I play the music loud, as I drive, never going further than a 25 mile radius, with the windows rolled down.

(She turns the music up so loud you can barely hear her as she says, three more times:)

The death of the only man I ever loved has made me careless. The death of the only man I ever loved has made me careless. The death of the only man I ever loved has made me careless.

(She turns off the radio.)

And then I drive home to my husband.

(The wind ends abruptly. She removes her driving glasses.)

The only man I ever loved is not exactly dead, by the way. Here is how to describe him.

(She gets up from her chair.)

Imagine—abundance. Imagine a supermarket, with a hundred foot high, mile long wall of perfect produce. And you're standing in front of the apple section. A hundred foot high wall of apples, fragrant and shining like giant juicy rubies of a thousand different hues.

Now, people like you and me, we've heard about this abundance but we've never seen it. It's hidden from us by an unseen, impermeable barrier that divides abundance from the world we live in day to day. It's true that once in awhile an apple falls down off this display, rolls through the barrier, and someone, rejoicing at their good luck, picks it up, and

eats it, and even though these apples are often bruised, or have already begun to decay, these apples are what we call luck. Windfall.

(The breeze is lovely, and the leaves swirl around her tenderly in the golden light.)

The only man I ever loved didn't have to wait for windfall. Not him. He just stuck his hand through the unseen barricade, and pulled out the perfect, round, ripe rosy next moment. He had a whole wall of perfect moments to pick from. It was a marvel to watch him. He took his time.

Watching him stand in front of the bounty made me think I could reach in there and pick out my own life too. Which was my mistake. Because I was just the bounty that he picked. I was carefully crafted, his desire had shaped and polished and crafted me. I was a museum quality thing.

(She sits back down in the chair. She starts driving again.)

But only for a moment, you see.

(She turns the music up. Suddenly, Mother appears in front of the car, wearing a spring coat, carrying her purse and a chair. May hits the breaks.)

MOTHER! What are you doing here!

(Mother puts her next to May, getting into the front passenger seat.)

Drive me to the bank. I want to check my safe deposit box. And stop talking about men and carelessness, it makes you sound cheap.

GRANDMOTHER

(Grandmother appears, wearing a pastel knit suit, gloves, and carrying her purse and a chair. She gets in the back seat.)

May, can we stop at Church's fried chicken? I get so hungry for their wings.

MAY

No, we can't go to the bank, mother, and even if we could, your safe deposit box is long gone.

MOTHER

We could visit your safe deposit box and I could pretend it was mine.

GRANDMOTHER

What about Churches? Wouldn't it be sweet of you to eat some Church's fried chicken and think of me and how much I used to like it.

MAY

No.

GRANDMOTHER

I came all this way because your mother said you were in trouble. That you needed my help. And now you can't go a little out of your way and eat some fried chicken for me?

MAY

There's no Church's in a 25 mile radius.

GRANDMOTHER

Oh. Right. The 25 mile radius thing.

MOTHER

But there is a bank just around the corner. With your private money in it, money that's not Paul's, that's all yours. Money and some stocks that were Nanna's, and then mine, and then became yours. So if you went and looked at it, it would be like I was looking at mine.

MAY

I spent most of it on ballet and art lessons for Janet and the piano so they could have piano lessons, Mom, there really wasn't all that much anyway.

MOTHER

But surely Paul had enough to spend on those things?

MAY

Yes, but after I bought the table, he...started watching what I spent.

MOTHER

That table, that table, it always comes back to that table.

GRANDMOTHER

Here's what *my* mother told *me* about money: your husband's money is your money. And your money is your money. Your husband had no business making you spend your own. That reminds me, is Janet getting my china?

MAY

I want her to have it, but—

GRANDMOTHER

Don't break my heart about that china, May. I used it only for special occasions and never put it in the dishwasher, I had Iva wash it by hand. I want it passed down. I—

MAY

Nana, it really isn't all *that* nice, you know.

GRANDMOTHER

What?

MAY

I'm just saying, I love it, because it was yours and because you loved it, but it's not a really rare pattern, not much of an antique, not valuable at all, so if Paul doesn't let me pass it on--

GRANDMOTHER

I can't believe my ears! When you were a child you were in love with my china! What has happened to you—"not much of antique!" What on earth does that mean! IT'S MY CHINA! I served meals on it that the whole family adored!

MOTHER

Don't get upset, Nana, she's just trying to rationalize it, so if Paul makes her give it up, she won't feel so bad. Right, May?

MAY

(Lying, of course)

Yes! Of course! I love your china, Nana.

GRANDMOTHER

Oh, you poor, poor thing. May, what your husband is doing, it makes me so mad I could spit. Let's poison him.

MOTHER

Mother, don't encourage her to be a complainer. What's done is done.
(Mother takes out a cigarette and starts smoking.)

GRANDMOTHER

I am not encouraging her. I merely suggested a sensible solution to an otherwise unsolvable problem. Or, let's back over him with the car.

MOTHER

STOP IT. This is the life she chose, and now, now that it has not turned out the way she wanted it, we should not encourage her to be a complainer.

MAY

(Turning on her mother)

Why are you so unforgiving! Why can't you show me some compassion! Some people don't choose!

MOTHER

You did.

NAN

True, I hate to side with your mother, but you did.

MAY

Okay, I did, I admit that, I did, but some people get ruined, when they make a choice, and then, when the moment comes when they need to make another choice, they don't know how, because that is the definition of being ruined. If they knew how to make the better choice, they would make it, and then they wouldn't be ruined anymore and need to make the choice in the first place, but once they are ruined, they have to, but the fact that they have to means, by definition, that they CAN'T.

GRANDMOTHER

May, my precious—you are not ruined. You are my granddaughter and my granddaughter is better than that. Buck up. Emily, put out that cigarette.

(Mother does.)

Take us back to your house, dear. And repeat after me. I am not ruined.

MAY

I am not ruined.

GRANDMOTHER

It would be careless to be ruined.

MAY

It would be careless to be ruined.

GRANDMOTHER

Good china must be washed by hand, yes, even if it isn't a rare pattern that is much of an antique, and linen must be spotted immediately after dinner, and wine glasses must never be left on the table afterward no matter how exhausted or drunk you are because the acids in the wine will etch the crystal. Each choice we make keeps our world from being ruined.

MAY

But Nana, I did all those things and it didn't save me.

MOTHER

The world is different, mother, than it was when you were May's age.

GRANDMOTHER

The world may be different but the pillars that hold it up are the same.

(May drives.)

The world may be different, but a woman whose house is in order knows who she is. She has firm ground beneath her feet. She has made the choice to know who she is.

(Fade to blackout.)

SCENE * FIVE

MAY

(The dining room table is twice the size that it was before. The chunk that is missing is like an eroded cliff, easy to see.

The epergne is three times its former size, and looks very much like a tall silver tree with four branches. The crystal shells are continuing to melt, and now it is clearly visible that they are.

The melting water is dripping down the table, a rivulet that is taking a path directly to the eroded gash in the table, then cascading down to the floor. It looks a bit like a waterfall, I think.

I imagine that the lighting will help make this read, and also make it remarkable and beautiful.

The fruit inside the bowls of the epergne has gotten larger as well.

A light change. May enters, carrying a huge platter of fish. She puts it down on the table carefully.

Then Paul, Nancy, and Hank enter, carrying their plates. They sit down at the table. Light change. Dinner is in progress.)

Some more fish, anyone?

HANK

Thank you, yes, please. You've outdone yourself this time, May.

MAY

It's my grandmother's recipe this time. Passed down from her mother. I hope you like it.

HANK

Oh, it's delicious, delicious.

(He takes some more, and eats for a second.)

Nancy? Nancy has something to say, don't you, Nancy?

NANCY

May? I just—I'm so sorry about the table, and Hank and I want to pay to have it fixed.

MAY

Thank you for the offer, but we wouldn't dream of it.

NANCY

Promise me you'll send us the bill, May. Have you called the restoration team?

MAY

Yes.

NANCY

Why aren't they here yet?

MAY

They are assembling the very best men they have and they'll be here as soon as they can.

NANCY

But every day they delay it gets worse—

MAY

There's a great deal of discussion about how best to accomplish the repair, Nancy. Surely you can understand. The table is worth more than any three developing countries. It's not something to be undertaken lightly.

NANCY

Yes, you're right. You're right.
(Nancy returns to her meal.)

HANK

And the other thing you wanted to say?

NANCY

(Nancy feverishly wipes away a smudge on the table with her napkin.)

About—about your...your trip the Bay of Fundy...I don't know why I made such a big deal about it, and I'm sorry.

MAY

Don't be silly, I was glad I was able to work the jewelry booth after all. We can always go to the Bay of Fundy later. Hank, more fish?

HANK

Absolutely.

MAY

(May gets up and walks over to him to bring him the platter—the table is too big to pass anything now.)
It's a pleasure cooking for you, Hank, you're always so appreciative.

NANCY

He's always so hungry.

HANK

Don't make me sound like a hog, Nancy.

NANCY

Well are you sure there's enough for THIRDS, Hank? Are you sure there's enough?

PAUL

Of course there is. Eat! May always makes sure there's enough. She's a marvelous hostess. Two guests or two thousand--she would never let anyone go away hungry from her table.

MAY

You used to have such faith in me.

PAUL

I will always have faith in you.
(They look at each other for a moment. Then the moment passes.)

HANK

Nancy—isn't there one more thing you wanted to say? Nancy?

NANCY

(And this is terribly hard for her.)
May, this fish is so delicious—and I am so h...h...hungry.

HANK

How hungry?

NANCY

I'm as hungry as two thousand guests. Do you think I could have some more?

(Nancy reaches for the fish, and overturns her water glass. The water spills, she tries to sop it up with her napkin, her shirtsleeves, anything. And of course, she begins to cry.)

Now look what I've done—

MAY

Don't be silly, it's just one little glass of water—

(May wipes the table with her napkin too, then wrings it into the glass. Nancy does the same thing. The glass overflows, there is much more water spilling on the table than there was in the glass.)

NANCY

Then why is there so much of it? Where is all this water coming from?

(Nancy starts sobbing again.)

HANK

Nancy, my little bird, you were doing so well.

NANCY

I know, but this water might hurt the table--

HANK

If you keep crying, we'll have to go home, and then you won't be able to sit here at the table...you won't be able to see it, or touch it...

NANCY

(Trying to stifle her tears.)

Okay.

(She bucks up.)

HANK

Good girl.

(Hank resumes eating.)

PAUL

What's that noise?

MAY

What noise?

(There is the faint sound of water rushing the way it does in the Bay of Fundy.)

NANCY

That's Hank, chewing. He's so hungry, he's worn out his jaw with chewing.

MAY

No, that's not it.

(They listen. Hank keeps chewing.)

Then we can all hear it. The rush of the waterfall created by the melt water from the epergne, augmented, as it splashes on the floor. Everyone looks at the drip, the splash, the puddle.)

Look at all that water. Hank, hand me a couple of your business cards. (Hank stops eating long enough to hand over a small stack of business cards.)

PAUL

You're retiring next month, Hank, what do you still need business cards for?

(May begins deftly fashioning a little masted boat with 3 or 4 business cards and perhaps a couple toothpicks.)

HANK

Retiring doesn't mean I'm not still doing business. Are you retired from the myth business, Paul?

PAUL

Greek mythology is not a business.

HANK

Just because you don't make money at it--

PAUL

I *did* make money at it, and it still isn't a business.

HANK

Power's the name of the game, Paul. Money's just for keeping score. Now, you were in the teaching business. That's the thinking-and-remembering-things-that-have-been-thought-and-remembered-before business, right? Are you retired from thinking and remembering just because you don't sit behind a desk at the university anymore?

PAUL

I'm working on a book.

HANK

I knew it! I can see the light on in your study, I can see it from Nancy's azalea beds.

MAY

Paul's working on a retelling of the Midas myth.

PAUL

(Another warning)

May, please stop saying it's the Midas myth. You know I'm working on a *new* myth.

HANK

Boy, did I want to be King Midas when I was a kid! But the myth needs work. It starts out happy—the Gods give him the golden touch. Ends badly—the Gods take it away.

PAUL

No, it ends happily.

HANK

The Gods take away his power to turn everything he touches into gold, don't they?

PAUL

That's the point of the myth, Hank.

HANK

Yep, ends badly, like I said. Glad you're rewriting it.

PAUL

Hank! When he tried to kiss his children they turned into golden statues.

HANK

That'd be an improvement over at our house.

(He laughs at his own joke. To Nancy)

Rosemarie would be a lot less work if she were gold bullion, wouldn't she? At least for the teen years. And a man could afford to send them to college that way! Solid gold children.

PAUL

Very funny, Hank. But Midas was starving. If everything you touch turns into gold, how can you eat? You get hungrier and hungrier, and the instant you try to eat something it turns into gold.

HANK

Well, you'd lose a lot of weight that way.

(Epiphany)

The Midas diet! We'll do a spin off from your myth book—The King Midas cookbook!

(Hank laughs at his own joke and continues eating.)

PAUL

I am writing a book about how to understand my choice in a classical context. It is not the Midas myth, it is an entirely new one.

HANK

Do you think there's a market for new myths, Paul? Isn't the myth business, by definition, about old ones?

PAUL

Well, if it makes it easier for you, you could think of it as a sequel to the Midas myth. What it was like for him, in the years after he asked for the golden touch to be taken away.

HANK

I'll tell you what it was like for him in one word: De--pressing.

PAUL

I believe there is a hunger for new myths, and that mine is one that people will recognize that they need. And I will, of course, donate all the profits I make from the book--

HANK

A-HA!!!!!! Profit! I rest my case. New myth or old, the myth business is still a business.

MAY

There.

(May launches the business card boat on the river, near the source. It quickly flows down the river and off the table, down the waterfall.)

There's quite a current, isn't there.

(May takes her fork and spoon—these might be a very large, monumental fork and spoon—and puts them along the path of the water, to channel the flow.)

Everybody, give me your napkin. This should channel the flow for awhile.

(She rolls up the napkins, and places them in a row to dam up the flow. Then she takes everybody's fork and spoon, and places them upstream of the napkins, to divert the flow into the napkins.)

There. That should do it.

May? NANCY

Yes, Nancy? MAY

(Scared)
It's coming from the epergne. NANCY

What? MAY

The shells are melting. The crystal sea shells are melting!
(She starts crying.) NANCY

(Everyone looks at them. It's obvious they're melting.)
But that's not possible, they're glass. MAY

Why is this happening!!!! NANCY

(She dips her finger in the water, tastes it.)
Salt. It's salt water. Here, everybody should taste this.
(She puts her goblet under the dripping epergne.)
Nancy, here, taste it.
(Nancy is now sobbing hysterically, Hank is consoling her. May offers Nancy the goblet, Nancy cries harder.)
Nancy, really, it's refreshing. Taste it. MAY

That is enough, May. PAUL

Enough what? MAY

Stop it. You're upsetting Nancy. PAUL

Nancy's perfectly fine. MAY

PAUL

She's crying.

MAY

She's sensitive. She likes to cry.

PAUL

No one likes to cry, May.

MAY

Some people do. Some people have a hunger for it.

PAUL

How would you know, you never cry.

HANK

I'll just take Nancy on home, then.

NANCY

No! I want to stay with the table.

HANK

You know if you cry we have to go, sweetheart. That's the rule. Let's go.

PAUL

Sorry, Hank, but maybe that's best.

NANCY

(Sobbing as she goes.)

I don't know when I've had such a lovely evening...thank you May...

(They are gone.)

Paul and May stare at each other.)

PAUL

You should be kinder to her. She's your only friend.

MAY

She doesn't need me to be kind to her, she needs me to be who I am.

PAUL

And who is that? Exactly?

MAY

I'm your wife. Stop taking Nancy's side.
(The sound of the dripping, running water increases.)

PAUL

All I'm saying is, you would never have been cruel to her before.

MAY

Well, Paul, look at it like this. I'm trying to change. I'm trying to be worthy of the man I love.

(Paul starts to say something. Paul touches her face, tenderly. Then he shakes his head.

The sound of the incoming tide grows and grows and grows.)

BLACKOUT

SCENE * SIX

GRANDMOTHER

(Lights up on May clearing the table after the dinner party. Nana walks on.)

Well? How did it go? Did they like the fish?

(She starts crumbing the table, helping clear the table.)

MAY

Everyone loved your recipe.

GRANDMOTHER

Naturally.

MAY

Dinner was going well. I was doing well. But then, the oddest thing happened. Your epergne started to melt.

GRANDMOTHER

Melt?

MAY

The cut glass crystal shells. They started melting. See?
(They both look at the epergne.)

Did that even happen to you?

GRANDMOTHER

Of course it never happened to me! Cut crystal can't melt! Glass is fused sand! It is practically eternal! It is elemental! It can't melt unless it's 2300 degrees Celsius in your dining room!

(Terrified)

Was it 2300 degrees Celsius in your dining room, dear? Is that how upset you are, and how determined your brute of a husband is?

MAY

And the world, too, Nanna. What mother said. It's a different world than it was when you were my age.

GRANDMOTHER

Does your husband imagine that the temperature will go down, if he gets his way about the table?

MAY

Yes. I think so.

GRANDMOTHER

Oh dear oh dear oh dear. Do you imagine that will happen as well?
(May says nothing.)

May, I was wondering. Do you really need this table? Oh, it is lovely. And it's true, a woman does need a table. To sit down to eat on, with her family. To gather them together for Thanksgiving, to celebrate birthdays, to serve the dishes friends have made and brought over after funerals. Why, in my grandmother's day people laid out their dead on their dining room tables. So yes, you need a table. But you don't need this specific table. Do you?

MAY

I agree with you, in theory, but I just can't stop change, I've tried and I can't. This table makes me safe. This table makes me who I am.

GRANDMOTHER

But May—this table you've put all your eggs in, that you've turned into your heart—I'm afraid for you, May, because when your husband isn't trying to sell it your neighbor is busy smashing or drowning it. You won't change, but the table's changing. I terrified for you May. You're going to wake up one morning, and that table will be gone.

MAY

But it will come back.

GRANDMOTHER

Maybe it will, but maybe it won't. What will you do then?

MAY

I have faith in my table, Nana. I believe that the table will always swim to shore and save me, no matter how fast or high the water comes.

BLACKOUT

SCENE* SEVEN

MAY

(Lights up on May, wearing her driving glasses, sitting on her chair in front of her front door, with her radio playing softly, driving.)

When I was a young married woman, I used to fill the extra hours doing volunteer work. It was what women of Paul's set did. You could serve on charity boards, read to children who were poor or old people who were blind, or help out at the hospital. I chose the hospital, and I've volunteered there ever since. And it was at the hospital that I fell in love with the only man I ever loved. He was having—don't laugh—a heart transplant. This meant he was constantly coming to the hospital for blood work and tests and adjustments. His chest had a door in it. I fell in love with the Tin Woodsman. I fell in love with a man who did not, in the strictest sense, know his own heart.

He should have died so many times. He did die, while I've known him, three times.

You have to be very lucky to have a good heart transplant. When the heart of someone young and healthy arrives on a silver platter, the waitress looks at all her orders—she has hundreds of hungry customers dying for that heart—and your name had better be on the top of the list. The only man I ever loved thought his name was on the bottom, but somehow, the day after he put in his order, they served him up a perfect match. I decided I could do a lot worse than fall in love with a man who could make an entire healthy heart materialize inside his chest, especially since the man I was married to had been carrying around a lump of coal in his and didn't even seem to know, let alone mind. So I fell in love with him. And everything that money had ruined in me started to change. Every time someone or something we love dies, it changes the entire world, in a way.

The last time the only man I ever loved died, I came back from the hospital, and threw my keys down on my table.

I heard a scratch. I felt it too. I felt it, right here.

(She indicates her heart.)

Now, I had never thrown my keys down on my table, because I had never been careless, I had never done anything that would cause a scratch.

I looked at the scratch. And I sighed. A sigh of relief. Such surgical precision, I thought, they have opened up the chest and once again operated on the man I loved, and at the same time they have removed

this entire table that was lodged inside mine. While my husband for years had had a lump of coal for a heart, I had a rare and important American mahogany table of early form, with wonderful rich red color and patina for mine. Not all my heart. But most of it. Thank goodness, a little fraction of my true heart was left.

And that tiny true part of my heart welled up like water inside me.

(She turns up the music, puts on her driving glasses,
and drives, yelling over the music.)

I was free of that table, my chest was beating with the rhythm of a heart that was my own, and the terrible fear that made me trust a table more than my own soul was erased, vanished, gone.

(She turns off the music.)

But only for a moment, you see. The table came back. Its beauty, or its size, or its worth, or my fear, gave it the strength to swim back to shore. Where it pushed my true heart aside, into a corner of my chest. I wasn't changed.

The next week I called the restoration team. When they were finished, no one but God could have told you that scratch had ever been there at all.

This time it's going to be a much bigger repair. I'm having trouble getting the restoration team to attempt it, no one's ever tried anything like it, they're frightened, I understand. But I know they'll come.

Paul says they aren't coming. Paul says the days when you called for help and it came are gone. But I say, this table's too important for them to ignore. I can't change. I need the table. And I still believe. I believe that help will come.

(She takes off her driving glasses. The wind stops. She
picks up the chair and the radio and goes inside.)

BLACKOUT

END ACT ONE