

(SHE answers it. DWIGHT crumples.)

JEAN: (To the phone.) Hello? Jean speaking. (To DWIGHT.) It's Hermia. She needs a ride home.

DEVELOPING IN A DARK ROOM

BY JOSEPH CATALFANO

CHARACTERS

MEREDITH (mid-30s), a soon-to-be-divorced woman in a relationship with a rising political candidate; MARK (late 30s), her ex-husband, suddenly seeking custody of their mysteriously mute son

SCENE

An affluent suburban home

TIME

The week before elections

(MEREDITH opens the door to MARK.)

MEREDITH: (Surprised.) How did you find me?

MARK: You're dating a pretty high-profile political candidate. Everyone knows about the great David Glass around here. You weren't that tough to find.

MEREDITH: Why are you here?

MARK: I have some news you might want to hear in person.

MEREDITH: I thought we were speaking through our lawyers from now on.

MARK: I think you'll want to hear me out.

MEREDITH: I don't think I—

MARK: Five minutes.

(SHE hesitates, then walks into the living room. MARK takes a few steps in after her.)

MEREDITH: I'm not talking without my lawyer.

MARK: Did he advise you not to talk to me after my last visit? He seemed pretty anxious to prevent a scene.

MEREDITH: You have three minutes.

MARK: A reporter called me this morning, wanting to talk about you.

MEREDITH: What did you say?

MARK: He left a message asking me to call him back but I think we both know why he's calling. We could be on the front page of tomorrow's paper if I pick up the phone, but I doubt your new boyfriend wants us to hang our dirty laundry out in the town square a week before the election.

MEREDITH: So you're here to blackmail me?

MARK: It doesn't have to be this difficult.

MEREDITH: After thirteen years of marriage and having a child together it's come to this?

MARK: I came home that night and you two were just gone. Vanished. Thirteen years with a person and you think you know her.

MEREDITH: What about a husband who stops coming home to you at night? When did I stop being enough for you?

MARK: We've been growing apart for years. We were different then.

MEREDITH: And when did this happen?

MARK: You want me to get out a calendar? We could never see eye-to-eye on anything.

MEREDITH: Including how to deal with our son.

MARK: We need to move forward and stop looking back at what we can't fix.

MEREDITH: We never really tried to fix anything. We stopped speaking to each other after Jesse stopped talking.

MARK: People change and sometimes there's no reason or logic to it. You start to want different things out of life. You just move on.

MEREDITH: What about Jesse? Why do you suddenly want custody?

MARK: He's my son and I can provide a stable life for him.

MEREDITH: And I can't? You just gave up on us—walked out and stopped coming home.

MARK: I always provided for you both.

MEREDITH: You gave up on your son.

MARK: (*Irritated.*) How dare you. We took him to two psychologists.

MEREDITH: You can't just hand your child off to someone and hope they take care of the problem. You can't put him on medication and walk away.

MARK: That's not what we were doing.

MEREDITH: I didn't see you give up your job. Instead, you gave up on me and found someone else.

MARK: I don't have to listen to this: I have a right as a father—

MEREDITH: You should have exercised that right when he was waiting for you at the door and you never came home.

MARK: Oh, c'mon.

MEREDITH: Is she worth it?

MARK: What?

MEREDITH: Just tell me: When you didn't come home, was it her?

MARK: Look—all you want to do is blame someone, and I'm not—

MEREDITH: I'm still your wife—

MARK: On paper. Stop this constant badgering, blaming, accusing, everything. It doesn't get us anywhere and it doesn't help Jesse either.

MEREDITH: I want to know why his father wants to walk back into his life after being gone for so long. What happened? Do you suddenly feel guilty for all the times you weren't there for him? Has it just occurred to you that maybe Jesse stopped talking when you stopped caring?

MARK: He understands the pressure I was under.

MEREDITH: He's 12 years old, Mark. How do you know he understands when he doesn't talk to you, or me, or anyone?

MARK: I'm all for responsibility but when is it my turn to make myself happy?

MEREDITH: It's all about you, isn't it? (*MARK doesn't answer.*) Then let it go. Both of us. We're starting over here.

MARK: Is he getting professional help?

MEREDITH: When he stopped talking we put too much pressure on him. We were all over him. I'm trying something new.

MARK: You mean that camera hanging around his neck?

MEREDITH: He takes it everywhere with him.

MARK: That's the crazy artist talking, not a professional doctor.

MEREDITH: You never try to understand.

MARK: And you think that's healthy? You think that's the answer? Some cheap old camera?

MEREDITH: If he starts developing pictures he could start communicating again. It's better than medication or doctors who want to hook him up to machines or get into his head.

MARK: You're obviously not thinking clearly anymore. I have to return a phone call.

MEREDITH: Before you pick up the phone, think of your son. For once—try to think about someone besides yourself. I think you're here because of her. Or to relieve yourself of some guilt.

MARK: I'm done here.

MEREDITH: Do you really want to expose him to this kind of attention if this gets into the papers? That would be pretty careless for the loving father.

MARK: You should have thought about that before you moved in with a politician. This could drag out for months, maybe years. Or we could end this within a few days. It's your call.

MEREDITH: Got out.

(MARK opens the door and leaves. MEREDITH slams the door after him. SHE holds back tears.)

ECSTATIC STATES

BY JULIANA FRANCIS KELLY

CHARACTERS

MATTIE JOYCE (30s to early 60s), a Spiritualist medium; THE GHOST OF COLONEL JAMES HARVEY BLOOD (30s to mid-50s), a nineteenth-century Civil War hero who, after the war, abandoned his respectable job and family to live with Mrs. Victoria C. Woodhull, a Spiritualist medium who ran for President of the United States in 1872

SCENE

MATTIE'S home office in Lily Dale, a declining Spiritualist community in upstate New York

TIME

The present

All morning, MATTIE, running low on money, has been trying to straighten out her finances. Her attempts, however, have been thwarted by a series of visits from increasingly disruptive ghosts, all of whom have had some connection to the great nineteenth-century trance medium Victoria C. Woodhull.

MATTIE: (On phone.) Account summary. Account . . . no . . . Go back. Account summary. (Beat.) Oh, hi there—[actually didn't want to talk to a person today, I just wanted the machine voice to tell me my balance.

(Sound of spectral gunfire; MATTIE looks distracted.)

Ooh, that um, credit protector program sounds really great but—

The ghost of radical reformer and Civil War hero COLONEL JAMES HARVEY BLOOD crashes on, unarmed, disoriented, in the heat of battle. HE sings as HE fires five shots from his rifle.)

BLOOD: The stars above in Heaven now are looking . . . kindly . . . down.

BANG!

MATTIE: (On the phone.) Gotta go!

SHE bangs up the phone.)

BLOOD: Old John Brown's body is a-mouldering all around. (BANG) Old John