

STEPHEN: Try me.

MIKE: I have been.

STEPHEN: Try me!

MIKE: I'm tired, Stephen. I'm tired of saying I'm sorry all the time. I'm tired of tiptoeing through my life, because it might interfere with yours. I'm tired of being told what opera to like, what book to read, what movie to go to. I'm tired of being your father, mother, big brother, best friend, your analyst, your cheerleader.

STEPHEN: You left out lover.

MIKE: I haven't been your lover since the first night I said to myself, "Who is this person lying at my side, this stranger, who hasn't heard or held me since the last time it pleased him?" That's the night I should have grabbed you by the shoulders and screamed, "I don't want this, Stephen. I don't need just another warm body next to mine. I'm much too needy to settle for so little. Look at me. Love me. Be with me." Now I've waited too long. You weren't even sleeping. You were reading. Your friend was on your cassette player on your side of the bed. Maria Callas. You had your back to me. I had my arm around you. I was stroking one of your tits. I asked you how you thought I should handle Sarah—she was coming up to New York and wanted to see me. It was the first time since the divorce and I was scared. I'd hurt her in a way I was ashamed of. I really needed you and you just shrugged and said, "You'll do the right thing" and turned the page. I didn't stop stroking your tit, but you weren't the same person anymore. Neither was I. I kept my arm around you only because I was suddenly so scared. I was as alone as I must have made Sarah feel. I was holding on for dear life.

Bluff

BY JEFFREY SWEET

Emily, who left her family in California and moved to New York, has learned that her stepfather Gene (who is in New York on business) tried to seduce a woman in a bar earlier this evening. The scene takes place in Emily's apartment where she tells Gene she intends to let her mother Georgia know what he has been up to (Georgia, who is an alcoholic, is back home in California; she married Gene after her first husband, Emily's father and the love of her life, died in an accident). Emily, who has always had ambivalent feelings toward Gene and has pulled away from her mother, has been struggling to figure out what she wants to do with her life. In Gene's monologue, he confronts her with the reality of what will happen to Georgia if she finds out about his infidelities and divorces him.

To use as a monologue, leave out Emily's and Georgia's lines. Georgia is not actually in Emily's apartment but appears as a theatrical device. Emily is there with Gene and her boyfriend Neal.

GENE: Community property, etc. I go live in a studio apartment somewhere, and she—maybe she's able to afford holding onto the house, though I have my doubts.

GEORGIA: I'd manage.

GENE: But there she is, wherever she is. You've liberated her from me. And what is she doing?

EMILY: Doing?

GEORGIA: Doing?

GENE: Tell me what you see happening from here.

(Addressing this in GEORGIA'S direction, though he continues to talk to EMILY.)

Is she enrolling at the local college for a class in how to write a sonnet? Is she volunteering at the Friends of the Zoo, nursing a baby penguin? Or could she be strolling into the kitchen? Could she be opening the cabinet over the sink and pulling out a glass?

(Turning back to EMILY.)

And who's gonna tell her not to? Me? I'm decorating my new studio apartment. So who? You? You gonna find a sublet for this apartment, take a leave of absence from work, fly back to California? Monitor her vitamins? Or—no, I've got it—drag her out from L.A. and move her in with you?

EMILY: *(cornered)* She deserves better.

GENE: Well, she's not going to get it!

(A beat.)

And neither am I.

(A beat.)

You think because *you're* young enough to have choices—because, if you want to, you can change boyfriends with the seasons, or move to Seattle tomorrow. Or you can decide you've done your bit for that charity outfit, now you want to switch careers, maybe make some real money. Or you want to work for yourself, start a catering business or some damn thing, make a few other changes

you think for the better. But you live long enough, sweetheart, you go past the point where you can make those kinds of changes. And all that's left for you is to keep things going. Or try to.

EMILY: That's all that's left? Maintaining?

GENE: What do you think I've been doing with your mom? Sometimes coming home to scrape her up off the floor. Once in a while I get a call, from Noli or whoever—drop everything and run to the hospital. Stand by her bedside, look in her eyes and know that I'm not who she really wishes was there. Even after all this time. And only now and then do I see a little of what I thought I was marrying. You call what I do cheating. Jesus, what do you call what she's done? Who do you think left who? You worry about my passing the clap onto her. Last I heard, there are certain conditions for doing so, and those conditions haven't been a part of our life together for years. Or do you imagine there's much of anything left for me to share a bed with? But no, go ahead, kiddo, you make that call and punish me good. Get me tossed out of paradise. And once you've had that self-righteous thrill, put on your cap and figure out what you're gonna do next. Cuz if you think she can hack it by herself—Odds are next trip you'd make back wouldn't be for Christmas, but for a funeral.