“Now my heart turns this way and that, as I think what the people say. Those who shall see my monuments in years to come and who shall speak of what I have done.”

~Queen Hatshepsut, from an inscription on her obelisks at the Karnak Temple

“Well-behaved women seldom make history.”

~Laurel Thatcher Ulrich
CHARACTERS

CATE.................................................................A Scholar
SOPHIE..............................................................Her Ex
JUDY.................................................................Cate’s Mother
HATSHEPSUT......................................................A Pharaoh
CHARLES........................................................Sophie’s husband

PLACE

The United States, Egypt

TIME

The Present, and Various points in the Past
(A gay club in Vermont. Loud music blaring, strobe lights, etc. Cate is standing to the corner, watching other people carouse off-stage with a mixture of longing and scholarly detachment. Unseen, Sophie approaches behind her.)

SOPHIE
You know the state of Vermont has a zero-tolerance policy for wallflowers.

CATE
Huh?

SOPHIE
Didn’t you ever play tag when you were a kid? If you stay on base for the whole time it’s cheating.

CATE
I’m sorry I--

SOPHIE
Don’t be sorry. Just follow the rules. You’ve got to get up, move--

(She tries to get Cate into the spirit. Though Cate is clearly tickled by the attention, she resists out of embarrassment.)

CATE
I haven't drunk enough to forget what a bad dancer I am.

SOPHIE
You know what the solution to that is, don't you? Bartender!

CATE
Oh no.

SOPHIE
Oh yes!
CATE
This is going to be bad.

SOPHIE
Your mouth says no but your heart says--

CATE
I have to be careful when I drink.

SOPHIE
Why?

CATE
Depending on how I feel beforehand the alcohol will increase that mood exponentially.

SOPHIE
Uh-huh.

CATE
It's one thing if I'm in a great mood, if I'm out here to celebrate something. But if I'm the least bit frustrated or discontented, well--another drink and pretty soon you'll find me bawling my eyes out in a stall in the ladies room.

SOPHIE
That all sounds awfully complicated.

CATE
You’re lucky it’s not karaoke night.

SOPHIE
So given all this, why come out at all?

CATE
Meet people, I guess. Isn’t this how you do it?

SOPHIE
Beats hiding out in the ancient civilization section of Barnes and Noble.

CATE
How did you--?
SOPHIE
As a barista, I ought to admire the constant patronage of the Barnes and Noble café, but as a fellow starving college student I would think the daily $5 mochaccinos are making a serious dent in your federal loans.

CATE
I have a fellowship thank-you. Wait, you were watching me?

SOPHIE
Why shouldn’t I?

CATE
But you’re so--and I’m--

SOPHIE
What?

CATE
Look at me.

SOPHIE
One sec.

(Sophie proceeds to make various adjustments to Cate’s appearance—maybe undoing a ponytail, retying a scarf, untucking a shirt, etc. Maybe even applying a bit of lip gloss. This is kind of exhilarating and overwhelming to Cate. Once finished, Sophie steps back to inspect her work.)

Better.

CATE
Thank-you.

SOPHIE
So what in those books is making your nose so shiny?

CATE
Um...

SOPHIE
“Um....”
CATE

Egypt.

SOPHIE

The whole thing?

CATE

Well no... I’m. Writing my thesis on Queen Hatshepsut.

Who?

CATE

The female Pharaoh.

SOPHIE

Thought they were all guys.

CATE

All of the other ones were. I mean there are some Queens who a lot of people think may have called themselves Pharaoh, but she’s the only one who was actually any good at it.

SOPHIE

Uh-huh.

CATE

I mean, she ruled for like 20 years. Fucking epic. Like, Queen Elizabeth defeating the Spanish Armada kind of epic.

SOPHIE

So why haven’t I heard of her?

CATE

Technically she kind of stole the throne from her stepson, and then her own daughter died before she did. So when the stepson finally took over he was all bitter and went around destroying the records of her rule.

SOPHIE

What a fucker.
CATE
I know, right? There were no computers with back-up drives then. All he had to do was chisel away at the cartouches with her name on them and she was gone.

Shit, I’m doing it again.

SOPHIE
What?

CATE
You’re not supposed to talk about these kinds of things at bars.

SOPHIE
Says who?

CATE
I always do this. I find the one person with half a brain cell left and I completely talk their ear off and then, I'm totally making it worse by talking now aren’t, I?

SOPHIE
So stop.

(Sophie kisses her.)

Scene 1

(Cate’s apartment in Virginia. Eight years later. It has been decorated for a child’s birthday party with a theme from Disney’s Mulan.)

CATE
What do you mean, Maddy’s not coming?

SOPHIE
It wasn’t an easy decision.

CATE
But it’s one I would have liked to have been a part of. I thought I was throwing the birthday party.
SOPHIE

I’m not happy about it either.

CATE

Is Maddy okay?

SOPHIE

She’s fine.

(Cate goes to grab a phone list and begins dialing numbers.)

What are you doing?

CATE

Calling everyone on the phone tree. I don’t want them to show up and no one is here.

SOPHIE

I already took care of it.

(Cate puts down the phone.)

CATE

Is this what you do to Charles? Do you run his life like he’s a four-year-old as well?

SOPHIE

Please leave him out of this.

CATE

I don’t know--maybe Virginia Christians get off on that kind of thing. The whole “we are all God’s children” and the like.

SOPHIE

Excuse me?

CATE

That was uncalled for. I’m sorry. I’m just trying to figure out what is going on here and you’re not being very--

SOPHIE

If you give me a chance to speak, I will tell you.

CATE

Okay.
The floor is yours.

(Sophie glances about the room.)

SOPHIE

A *Mulan* party, really?

CATE

What’s the matter with *Mulan*?

SOPHIE

She’s not exactly a princess.

CATE

Her merchandise is grouped with all the rest of them at the Disney store.

SOPHIE

But she’s not a princess in the classical sense--she neither came from royalty nor married into it. Therefore, she is not a princess.

CATE

So maybe I want to encourage Maddy to have some more empowered female role models.

SOPHIE

Here we go.

CATE

All those twits--Snow White, Cinderella, Ariel. Their entire story lines are focused on getting a man. While all of the other girls in her village were sitting at home waiting for a good husband, Mulan was out saving China from a Hun invasion. Her story shows that girls don’t have to be defined by the traditional roles society has laid out for them, unlike those other Barbie dolls who are going to give Maddy unhealthy--

SOPHIE

Uh-huh--

CATE

--perceptions of herself that will do untold amounts of damage to her psyche when she moves into adolescence.

(Sophie rolls her eyes.)
This is important.

SOPHIE
She’s in kindergarten not Intro to Women and Gender Studies.

CATE
These kinds of self-esteem issues start now. It’s our job to protect her.

SOPHIE
You’re worried about Maddy wanting to wear pink but you have no problem with her being the village freak.

CATE
What are you talking about?

SOPHIE
I had a meeting with Maddy's teacher yesterday.

CATE
What kind of a meeting?

SOPHIE
An enlightening one.

CATE
Was there a conference?

SOPHIE
An emergency conference.

CATE
Why didn’t you call me? I would have called you.

SOPHIE
Are you going to let me finish?

CATE
Please.

SOPHIE
Ms. Riley was telling me what a great reader she is.
I know that...

SOPHIE
Always opening her mind to new subjects, whether it’s history, or art--

CATE
Is there a point?

SOPHIE
Or masturbation...

CATE
What?

(Sophie pulls a book out of her handbag and hands it to Cate.)

SOPHIE
A Kid’s First Book About Sex?

CATE
I’ve been wondering what happened to that--

SOPHIE
So you admit to introducing this book to Maddy?

CATE
She had questions. I wanted to give her honest answers.

SOPHIE
Ms. Riley discovered it in her desk during playtime.

CATE
I hope she found it very educational.

SOPHIE
I’m glad you find this amusing.

CATE
My apologies. Continue.
SOPHIE
Ms. Riley said Maddy has been sharing her knowledge with other children.

(Cate laughs.)

CATE
Oh boy--

SOPHIE
You think this is an appropriate topic for a six-year-old?

CATE
I wanted to give her a healthy view of her sexuality. We used to agree on this.

SOPHIE
There’s a difference between understanding her sexuality and flaunting it all over the playground.

CATE
It’s practically kindergarten gone wild.

SOPHIE
We’re not in Burlington anymore. People in Richmond aren’t as accepting of that kind of thing.

CATE
By “that kind of thing,” are we still talking about the book? Or does this have something to do with why Maddy’s teacher doesn’t seem to think it’s necessary to call me for conferences? I thought we were on the same side.

SOPHIE
I am on your side.

CATE
Doesn’t seem like it.

SOPHIE
I also think other parents should have a right to choose when to expose their kids to such knowledge. Do you really want to give those shrewish PTA moms more cannon fodder?

CATE
It wasn’t supposed to leave the house.
SOPHIE
You know what they say about the best-laid plans...

CATE
Next time when she comes over...I’ll talk to her about how there’s at home conversation and school conversation.

SOPHIE
It’s the whole subject that’s problematic. Charles and I believe--

CATE
What does he have to do with this?

SOPHIE
He’s my husband. We make decisions together.

CATE
How democratic.

SOPHIE
That negative, sarcastic sense of humor is what is going to alienate Maddy from the all of the other--

CATE
Come on--

SOPHIE
If you’re going to be so uncooperative I’m not so sure Maddy should be coming over here at all--

CATE
Excuse me?

SOPHIE
Since you obviously can’t even be trusted to execute a birthday party theme.

CATE
You wouldn’t.

SOPHIE
I could get an order from the court--say you are an negative influence.
CATE

I’d fight you.

SOPHIE

With what?

CATE

With--lawyers.

SOPHIE

I’m scared.

CATE

You even think about taking her from me and I swear--

SOPHIE

You’re not her mother.

CATE

Excuse me?

SOPHIE

You didn’t give birth to her.

CATE

I am her mother in every way that counts.

SOPHIE

Not by law.

CATE

Maybe not, but by law we did have a civil union.

SOPHIE

Which was dissolved.

CATE

Just because we dissolved it doesn’t mean it didn’t happen. We signed papers detailing rights for both of us so this wouldn’t happen.

SOPHIE

In Vermont. None of that holds up in Virginia.
CATE
Right. Because they don’t believe in gay people here.

SOPHIE
If you hate the place so much then why did you come here to begin with?

CATE
Maybe it had something to do with wanting to be near Maddy when Charles got a transfer. It certainly was bitchy of me to uproot my career in Vermont and throw away any hope I had of getting tenure because you wanted help with babysitting--

JUDY (off stage)
I’m coming to find the Birthday Girl!

(Judy enters the house carrying a cake. Looks around the room.)

CATE
Mom--

JUDY
Sweetie, Mulan isn’t a princess.

CATE
Nice to see you too.

SOPHIE
We had to cancel the party because--

CATE
Maddy’s sick.

JUDY
What?

CATE
She woke up with a terrible cold.

JUDY
Oh no!

(Judy puts down the cake and begins to head to a second bedroom.)

CATE
She’s at Sophie’s.
JUDY
Oh I see. (To Sophie) Is it serious?

SOPHIE
Hard to say.

JUDY
You should keep her in bed for the next few days.

SOPHIE
Planning on it.

JUDY
It’s disgraceful how unsanitary some of these school classrooms are. I was just watching report on 20/20--

CATE
Uh-huh.

JUDY
Don’t roll your eyes. If you’d taken more care to sanitize this house--

CATE
Anything else?

JUDY
There’s no need to get defensive.

CATE
I’m not defensive.

JUDY (To Sophie)
It’s that book she’s working on that’s getting her so upset. Apparently there’s some argument with the editor or publisher--

SOPHIE
I should probably go back and check on Maddy.

JUDY
Of course, dear. And may I just say I love that suit. Where did you pick it up?

SOPHIE
Ann Taylor.

JUDY (to Cate)
Why don’t you ever wear something like that? It would look so nice on you.
CATE
I’ll look into it.

JUDY
I keep telling her jeans and a t-shirt is no way for a University professor to dress. If you want the respect of students you can’t dress like a 19-year-old--

CATE
We get it.

JUDY
It’s a question of self-respect. Sophie dear, you understand what I’m talking about--

SOPHIE
You’ll get no argument from me.

CATE
Well now that we all agree I’m a failure at life--

JUDY
There’s no need to be so dramatic.

(Sophie’s phone rings.)

SOPHIE
I’ve got to take this.

JUDY
Let me know if you want me to bring over a pot of soup for Maddy while I’m in town--

SOPHIE
I will.

JUDY
Take care!

(Sophie exits.)

Such a nice girl.

Scene 2

(Cate’s living room. Several weeks later. Cate sits on the floor, typing furiously at her laptop. She is surrounded by a barricade of books, papers
and coffee cups. An attractive, middle-aged woman enters and surveys the scene dressed in full Pharaonic regalia.)

HATSHEPSUT
This place is disgusting.

CATE
I get plenty of criticism these days. I don’t need it from you.

HATSHEPSUT
You should get some slaves in here to help you.

CATE
Those are a bit hard to come by in this century.

HATSHEPSUT
So you're just going to work all the time?

CATE
That's the plan.

HATSHEPSUT
You're pathetic.

CATE
You’re imaginary

HATSHEPSUT
That’s your problem.

This is what happens when you work through the night. I used to do the same thing early in my rule.

CATE
So what did you do?

HATSHEPSUT
I started screwing my architect, Senenmut.

CATE
Are you going to be helpful or are you just going to antagonize me?
HATSHEPSUT
It’s your imagination. Is it my fault you keep glossing over my affair with him because it doesn’t fit the feminist narrative you’re trying to tell?

CATE
Look who’s talking, miss well-technically-the-legitimate-heir-to-the-throne-is alive-but-it’s-okay-because-I’m-actually-the-daughter-of-the-Sun-god-Ra. Christ, you were as bad as Karl Rove.

HATSHEPSUT
I had a purpose. You’re in denial.

CATE
I don’t want to highlight the affair with Senenmut because I don’t want it to be a Hollywood story. They make films about male leaders that stick to the politics--why can’t women have stories in which their romantic lives aren’t explored? You’re so much more than that.

HATSHEPSUT
Am I?

CATE
Men get to be brilliant, badass, and politically savvy. They get to have stories in which their spouses are just arm-candy. But with stories about female leaders, it’s always the man who is either the key to their success or their Achilles heel. He takes over the entire story. You could argue that Cleopatra was the first of the Ptolemies to learn Egyptian or that Nefertiti acted as regent after her husband died, but that’s not why anyone cares about them. In comparison, you’re more like Hillary Clinton. You’re not innately sexual. You’re defined by your intelligence and your strength.

HATSHEPSUT
So powerful women are devoid of sexuality? When you put it that way, I’m not interested in me.

CATE
You’re oversimplifying it.

HATSHEPSUT
You’re oversimplifying it.

CATE
How can I ever expect to things to change if I keep sticking to the same story--
HATSHEPSUT

Aha.

CATE

What?

HATSHEPSUT

You admit it’s a story. You admit your aim is change. Not truth.

CATE

I’m a historian. Of course I want truth--

HATSHEPSUT

*Your* truth.

CATE

What’s the difference?

HATSHEPSUT

There is no objective truth. Any time we relate a story we are putting on our own perspective. You know this.

CATE

Yeah, yeah--

HATSHEPSUT

So...how was the meeting you had with that lawyer of yours?

CATE

Fine.

HATSHEPSUT

Indeed?

CATE

She thought--if I ever have to pursue a case against Sophie--

HATSHEPSUT

When--

CATE

If--When. Whatever. She thought there might be some strategies I can pursue. Some--
precedents that might be helpful. She thought it might be a good idea for us both to sit
down with our lawyers and come to an agreement before things get out of hand.

    HATSHEPSUT

I must say I am impressed.

    CATE

Not that I think it will be necessary. Sophie was just upset that day--I doubt there’s
anything to worry about.

    HATSHEPSUT

Still, it’s prudent to keep a dagger in your robe. You never know when some
assassin is waiting to stab you in the back.

    CATE

That’s not a nice way to think.

    HATSHEPSUT

The world isn’t a nice place.

(The doorbell rings. Cate answers. It’s Sophie.)

    CATE

Hi.

    SOPHIE

I came to get Scrappy Dog.

    CATE

Scrappy Dog?

    SOPHIE

Maddy must have left him here when she was over last.

    CATE

Of course.

You look nice.

    SOPHIE

Thanks.
I mean you generally do.

On my way to church bingo.

Fun times.

A thrill a minute.

Sorry to barge in here like this. I feel like I’m interrupting your flow.

How is work?

The usual--my students are morons.

(Sophie laughs.)

And the book?

There you have it.

(Cate indicates the mess of papers on the floor.)

Judy mentioned there was some dispute with the publisher?

They want me to make the focus of the book a love-story between Hatshepsut and Senenmut. It’s relatable. Romantic.

I’m sure you love that idea.

They know best.

Right.
So do you have Scrappy Dog? I’m sorry but I’m kind of in a hurry.

CATE

Of course. Sit tight.

(Sophie takes a seat on a pile of unfolded laundry.)

Oh shit--

SOPHIE

No problem.

CATE

Back in a flash!

(Cate exits off-stage. Sophie absently begins leafing through Cate’s papers, stopping on a letter.)

SOPHIE

A grant to Egypt?

CATE (Off-stage)

What?

SOPHIE

I’m sorry I couldn’t resist.

Are you going to take it?

CATE (Off-stage)

I don’t know.

SOPHIE

It’s a great opportunity.

CATE (Off-stage.)

Maybe.

SOPHIE

You’ve always said you wanted to go.

(Cate returns bearing a worn, stuffed dog.)
CATE
Here you go, m’lady.

(Cate hands over the stuffed animal grandly. Sophie takes it and examines it.)

SOPHIE
Five barbies, two Zuzu hamsters, a scooter, and all she wants is this worn out thing.

CATE
Big shopping spree?

SOPHIE
We took her to FAO SCHWARTZ for her birthday.

CATE
New York?

SOPHIE
No, the one in Timbuktu. Yes, the one in New York.

CATE
When was this?

SOPHIE
Over the weekend. Quick flight in and out.

HATSHEPSUT
Deception.

CATE
Uh-huh.

SOPHIE
Is there a problem?

CATE
You didn’t say anything--

SOPHIE
It was my weekend. You’re telling me what I should be doing with my daughter on my weekend?
CATE
It’s that kind of crap that makes me think perhaps I should get my lawyer involved. I’ve spoken with her, you know--

SOPHIE
You don’t have to do that.

CATE
You don’t think I have a right to protect myself?

SOPHIE
I get it. You’re upset. But you know me--I’m impulsive.

HATSHEPSUT
Don’t fall for that.

SOPHIE
I wasn’t being respectful to you and I realize that now. There’s no need to bring lawyers in to complicate things.

CATE
I--guess not.

(After a beat, Cate starts folding some of her laundry.)

SOPHIE
FAO Schwartz--that’s worlds away from from our trips, huh?

CATE
I guess so.

SOPHIE
Like that time we hiked up Mount Washington.

HATSHEPSUT
She’s finding chinks in your armor.

CATE
You mean, the time when I told you that I wanted to take the train up the mountain but you made us climb?

HATSHEPSUT
There you go.
SOPHIE
It was a once in a lifetime opportunity.

CATE
I had asthma.

SOPHIE
You had an inhaler.

CATE
Never thinking about anyone but yourself.

SOPHIE
The drag races were coming through so all the hotels were booked.

CATE
Maybe if you’d thought to call ahead.

SOPHIE
You didn’t think about it either. We just kept driving and driving until we found that campground. But when we got there the sign said you had to have a trailer to camp there. And then you kind of mumbled something under your breath and presto! They let us in. What did you say to them?

CATE
I just said I was in the band.

SOPHIE
So bad.

CATE
Yeah, like one time in my entire life.

SOPHIE
And when we got in there was that miniature golf course with to-scale replicas of the world landmarks. Maddy couldn’t stop climbing up the pyramid.

HATSHEPSUT
You are not supposed to climb them.

SOPHIE
And the carousel that played Journey all night.
CATE
That’s not what it played.

SOPHIE
Yes it is.

CATE
No it isn’t.

SOPHIE
I think I would remember.

CATE
Well you obviously don’t because I remember specifically it was the soundtrack to “Yellow Submarine.”

SOPHIE
That’s right...

CATE
You don’t remember anything.

SOPHIE
Every time we would see someone with a dog afterward Maddy would scream “Hey Bulldog!” the entire trip home.

CATE
And six months afterward.

SOPHIE
That place definitely wasn’t in the AAA book. I wonder if it would still be there if we tried to find it again.

CATE
Doubt it.

SOPHIE
We were between dots on the map that night. I think someone must have put it there just for us.

CATE
They probably tore it down and put up a Wal-Mart or a subdivision. Nothing lasts.
SOPHIE
Except the pyramids.

HATSHEPSUT
Oh she is good.

SOPHIE
You should go to Egypt.

HATSHEPSUT
Could have used her in my war room.

CATE
But Maddy--

SOPHIE
She’ll be here when you get back. No lawyers required.

CATE
I didn’t mean to imply. It’s just--

SOPHIE
You love her. I get it.

HATSHEPSUT
And she also gets your daughter. How convenient.

CATE
I’ve never been away from her for more than two weeks.

SOPHIE
You have nothing to worry about.

CATE
But won’t you need help if I leave? Rides to dance class--

SOPHIE
Charles’s mother can help out with that.

CATE
I moved all the way to Virginia just to be near her. What will she say if I suddenly disappear?
SOPHIE
She’ll understand.

CATE
But--

SOPHIE
I don’t want to hear it anymore. You work hard. You deserve a break.

HATSHEPSUT
You’ll have a break when you’re dead.

CATE
Maybe you’re right.

SOPHIE
Of course I am.

CATE
Do you want me to get you something to drink? Coffee or--

SOPHIE
Bingo calls.

CATE
Oh yeah.

(Sophie holds up Scrappy Dog and waves his arm.)

SOPHIE
Bye, Cate.

(Sophie exits.)

CATE (To Hatshepsut.)
That worked out.

Scene 3

(Two months later. Charles and Sophie at the breakfast table. Charles sits at the table reading the paper. Sophie enters.)
Am I a horrible person?

A horrible person?

I don’t know what I’m going to do with her.

What’s the matter?

She won’t get up.

Why not?

She says she can’t go to school because her chakras aren’t properly aligned.

What does that even mean?

It means she’s being a manipulative little brat and making excuses.

That sounds a little extreme.

I thought with Cate being away Maddy and I could finally have some alone time but all she does is ask when her other Mommy is coming back because her other mommy always makes her pancakes with chocolate chip smiley faces in them and why don’t I make them. It’s only been three weeks and I’m already at the end of my rope with her.

She’ll come around.

When will she come around? When Cate’s influence sends her to therapy and she’s burning in eternal damnation?
CHARLES
You can’t let her get to you. Remember, she’s the child in this equation.

SOPHIE
Right.

CHARLES
Drink your coffee. I’ll handle this.

SOPHIE
I love you.

CHARLES
I love you too.

(He exits. She drains her cup of coffee and empties the rest from the pot. Realizing she has done this she contemplates dumping the some of it back into the pot but then decides against it. Charles reenters.)

SOPHIE
Well?

CHARLES
She’ll be down in five minutes.

SOPHIE
You’re fabulous.

CHARLES
Did you take all the coffee again?

SOPHIE
How did you do it?

CHARLES
I told her if she didn’t come down Scrappy Dog was going to be kindling for her S'mores.

SOPHIE
That’s terrible.
CHARLES
It worked.

SOPHIE
I just want everything to be perfect.

CHARLES
You’re making yourself a wreck.

SOPHIE
I love you so much.

CHARLES
Right back at ya.

SOPHIE
I know I’ve been...impossible for the past couple of weeks.

CHARLES
I haven’t noticed anything.

SOPHIE
It’s just...everything. With the church. And Maddy being a little brat.

CHARLES
She’ll come around.

SOPHIE
It’s just...

CHARLES
What?

SOPHIE
I’ve been going to church. I’ve been saved. But I still feel like something is gnawing at me. I feel like a fraud and I’m afraid all of those women are going to come in and judge me and send me back into hellfire.

CHARLES
Why would you say that?

SOPHIE
I’ve tried so hard--to build a righteous life for myself, you know?
CHARLES
You’ve done a great job.

SOPHIE
So then why does my daughter hate me?

CHARLES
She doesn’t hate you.

SOPHIE
I’m doing this for her. Everything is for her. This house, the church--you. I want her to have the best of everything.

CHARLES
She will.

SOPHIE
No matter what I do, she still thinks Cate does it better.

CHARLES
You know there’s a homosexual agenda at work here.

SOPHIE
Right.

CHARLES
It’s going to take a while to free Maddy of that.

SOPHIE
But how long?

CHARLES
You’re not having second thoughts, are you?

SOPHIE
Not about you. You’re wonderful. You--you’re like--a superhero.

CHARLES
All in a day’s work, ma’am.

SOPHIE
I mean when I met you--I didn’t know where I was. I was so low. And then you came. I don’t want to seem ungrateful for everything you’ve done for me.
CHARLES
You don’t still have feelings for her?

SOPHIE
Cate?

CHARLES
You know you can tell me.

(Beat.)

SOPHIE
I get confused when I see her. I think back to my other life. The person I was. Sometimes do I wonder if there is still love there.

CHARLES
That isn’t love. It’s a perverted version of love. It’s only love for people who don’t know what love is.

SOPHIE
Right.

(Charles takes Sophie’s hands in his and holds them tenderly.)

CHARLES
This is what real love looks like.

SOPHIE
But what if I can’t do it?

CHARLES
I believe you can. You need to do it for Maddy. There is a little girl there who is counting on you getting through this.

SOPHIE
But Cate--

CHARLES
I know there’s a part of you that still cares about her. But she is destroying you.

SOPHIE
Of course. You’re right.
CHARLES
You met when you were very young.

SOPHIE
I did. And she never wanted to grow up up. Everything was either sexist, or exploitative or whatever. She was so anti-everything she wasn’t for anything.

CHARLES
That’s not a way to live.

SOPHIE
So childish. Of course Maddy likes that. Playing all the time. She’s just a big child herself. It was fine being with her for a while. We had fun. Of course. But she wouldn’t evolve. Eventually I decided I needed to start living my life in a more productive way.

CHARLES
Right.

SOPHIE
But what if it’s not enough?

CHARLES
I don’t want to hear it. You’re going to get up, take a shower and clean yourself up and stop moping. You’re better than this.

SOPHIE
But what’s going to happen when Cate gets back in six months?

CHARLES
About that.

SOPHIE
What?

CHARLES
I got a call from the company.

SOPHIE
Is something wrong?

CHARLES
I got promoted.
SOPHIE

Really? That’s wonderful.

CHARLES

It’s in Indiana.

SOPHIE

Oh.

CHARLES

I know.

SOPHIE

When would you have to start?

CHARLES

Six weeks from now.

SOPHIE

That’s soon.

CHARLES

I’m sorry to do this to you. I know it hasn’t even been two years here.

SOPHIE

We always knew it was an a possibility.

CHARLES

You’re not mad?

SOPHIE

Of course not.

(They kiss.)

CHARLES

But what do we do about Cate?

Scene 4

(Hatshepsut’s Temple in De-el Bahri Egypt. Cate enters, dressed for hiking, sporting an oversized hat and a large water bottle slung
over her shoulder. As she walks, Cate rolls her eyes as the Egyptian tour guide enthuses off-stage.)

VOICE OF THE TOUR GUIDE
Of all the monuments Hatshepsut commissioned from her architect and lover Senenmut, this structure rivals the Greek Parthenon in terms of architectural elegance and harmony. Hatshepsut was so devoted to Senenmut that she gave him a special burial place in her mortuary temple. You could say they were the “Brangelina” of their time.

CATE
That’s just speculation!

(Hatshepsut appears.)

HATSHEPSUT
You’re still on that?

CATE
Could you keep it down?

HATSHEPSUT
You’re afraid the Japanese tourists are going to hear you talking to yourself?

CATE
Great attitude you have toward the people who are trying to preserve your memory. No wonder your history was erased.

HATSHEPSUT
At least I didn’t erase myself.

CATE
What’s that supposed to mean?

HATSHEPSUT
Nothing. Please go back to bickering with the kind plebeian who is giving us a tour of my monuments.

CATE
Do you think I shouldn’t have come?

HATSHEPSUT
I’ll stop talking now. Wouldn’t want to embarrass you.

CATE
It’s just like Sophie said. I’ve been working hard. I needed to get away.
HATSHEPSUT
Of course.

CATE
You think she’s cooking up some nefarious plot while I’m safely out of the way.

HATSHEPSUT
I know if I were in her place--

CATE
I’ve only been here month and I’m already jumping out of my skin. I didn’t think it would be this hard to be away from Maddy for so long.

HATSHEPSUT
They do tend to gnaw at our insides, don’t they?

CATE
I keep thinking about what’s she’s doing right now. What she’s eating, what she’s learning about in school. What stories she’s making up. Whether she’s having dreams or nightmares at night and all I want to do is hold her and sing her a bed-time story.

HATSHEPSUT
That’s taking it a bit far.

CATE
I came here to study and that’s what I’m going to do. This is all just in my head. I think something they put in those fava beans this morning must have gotten to me.

(Cate’s phone rings. She searches for it in her bag.)

HATSHEPSUT
You should really look into Skype. You can talk as long as you want for extremely low rates.

(Cate finds the phone and answers it without looking at the number.)

CATE
Mom, you can’t keep calling me like this. It’s costing a fortune for both of us.

Maddy? I didn’t mean to yell at you I thought you were Grandma calling.

Yes, I know that’s silly.
Are you okay? You know you’re only supposed to call this number in case of emergency.

I told you just a couple of months. I’ll be back before you know it.

Why, where are you going?

Indiana? When are you--?

I would never abandon you Maddy I love you--

I love you and I coming home and I’m so sorry that you would ever think--

Maddy? Maddy?

Damn signal. Fuck!

HATSHEPSUT

Something wrong?

CATE

I’ve gotta go.

(Cate exits.)

Scene 5

(Three days later. Cate’s living room. Judy and Cate sit on the couch.)

JUDY

I can’t believe what you’re telling me.

CATE

How many times do I have to say it before you will? They’re taking Maddy and moving to Indiana without telling me.

JUDY

There’s got to be something you’re leaving out.

CATE

Because that’s easier to wrap your head around? Maybe Maddy was just kidding when she called me crying from across an ocean.
JUDY
She’s just a child. It could have been a misunderstanding.

CATE
It was Sophie’s responsibility to make sure those misunderstandings didn’t happen while I was away.

JUDY
Have you tried calling them?

CATE
No more calling. No more waiting. My lawyer was right. I need to start taking action.

JUDY
But she’s--

CATE
What?

JUDY
I know you love Maddy, and so do I--

CATE
Right.

JUDY
But she’s not--

CATE
What?

JUDY
You know what I mean.

CATE
Tell me.

JUDY
Honestly, you’re being so--

CATE
I want to hear you say it.
JUDY
She’s not your child, after all.

CATE
There it is.

JUDY
I’m only stating the truth.

CATE
If it wasn’t for me there wouldn’t even be a child!

JUDY
What?

CATE
You heard me.

JUDY
That doesn’t even make sense.

CATE
None of it does. And yet...

JUDY
What are you talking about?

CATE
I would hate to ruin your image of dear, perfect Sophie. The sweet, pretty, well-dressed daughter you never had who would never get knocked up at a rave.

JUDY
You mean it wasn’t--?

CATE
Planned? No, it wasn’t planned. So she asked me to drive her to Planned Parenthood.

JUDY
She was going to--?

CATE
Yes.
JUDY and you convinced her not to--?

CATE Yes.

JUDY Honey, that’s--

CATE I know. I know. But then I fell in love with Maddy. She changed my life and made me a better person than I could have ever hoped to be. And she made me think that maybe--maybe I could have it all. Maybe this awkward, misassembled slob--

JUDY You were never--why would you think that?

CATE Don’t patronize me.

JUDY I’m not patronizing you.

CATE Please. Not today. Maybe in grade school, or high school. All those little digs. You think they don’t add up?

JUDY I’m sorry I didn’t realize--

CATE Anyway that’s not the point. The point is Maddy gave my life purpose, and hope, and direction. And I can’t let that hope just slip away. Not without a fight. And so I’m asking for your help.

JUDY I’m sorry for having a few reservations.

CATE Reservations?

JUDY It’s a big step.
CATE
Whatever my mistakes, is it fair that Maddy should have to pay for them?

JUDY
I don’t know...

CATE
They’re going to raise her to be closed-minded and afraid of the world. Either that or she’s going to end up acting out and have no one to talk to who understands her. Do you want that for her?

JUDY
Well, no...

CATE
I can win this. I just need the chance to prove it.

JUDY
But if you fail--

CATE
I can’t think about that.

JUDY
I’m not saying you give up completely, but hang back a bit more...

(Judy has begun fumbling with Cate’s mail. She stops on one envelope, opens it and finds a card accompanied by a letter.)

What’s this?

CATE
I haven’t checked my mail in a month. You tell me.

(But Judy’s attention has been completely absorbed by the content of letter.)

Still with us?

(Judy looks up.)
Scene 6

(One week after the events of scene 5. Outside of Sophie’s house. Cate enters, and rings the bell. Charles enters.)

CHARLES

Cate.

CATE

Been a while.

(Sophie enters.)

SOPHIE

Your mother’s on the phone she wants to know if we’re planning on taking your grandmother’s dining table when we move or if you want to leave it for your sister--

(She notices Cate.)

You’re supposed to be in Egypt.

CATE

Three-hour tour got out early.

(After a moment.)

CHARLES

I’d better not keep mom waiting.

(Charles exits.)

CATE

Is Maddy in her room?

SOPHIE

She has friends over. You want to break up their tea party?

CATE

Indiana, huh?

SOPHIE

How did you know?
CATE
Maddy called me. Wanted to know if I was planning on saying good-bye.

SOPHIE
You shouldn’t have had to find out that way. We were going to call you.

CATE
After I came back from Egypt to find no one is here? I guess you were kidding Maddy was going to be here when I got back.

SOPHIE
We didn’t plan it. Charles got an offer. They need to start immediately.

CATE
So that makes kidnapping okay?

SOPHIE
I would hardly call it kidnapping.

CATE
What would you call it?

SOPHIE
I am moving with my child because my husband got a better job opportunity. I don’t see how you come into it.

CATE
Really?

SOPHIE
You’re not her parent. Any visitation you got with her was at my discretion. I shouldn’t have let it go on this long.

CATE
The dissolution of our civil union says otherwise.

SOPHIE
That was written in Vermont. It’s not valid in Virginia.

CATE
My lawyer doesn’t seem to think so.

(Cate takes a file out of her bag.)
I wanted to give it to you in person.

SOPHIE

What’s this?

CATE

It’s a court order that says if you try to leave the state with Maddy, you’re going to face criminal charges.

SOPHIE

Do you really want to complicate her life at a delicate time such as this?

CATE

Good point. You make some excellent points. Up until about a week ago, I might have agreed with you. But then a little girl called me from thousands of miles away to tell me she was unhappy. And I also got this.

(She takes out the card we saw Judy reading in the previous scene.)

SOPHIE

What’s this?

CATE

You wrote it. It’s the note you sent when you returned the card my parents sent Maddy for her latest birthday. Shall I read it out loud? It says “please don’t have them send cards anymore signed ‘granny’ and ‘pop pop.’ They aren’t her grandparents.”

SOPHIE

They’re not.

CATE

They paid our rent and all of Maddy’s medical expenses for two years. I think they deserve better.

SOPHIE

I didn’t want to further confuse her.

CATE

Thoughtful.
SOPHIE
But what about Maddy? The pain a custody fight will cause her?

CATE
Somehow I don’t think this is about Maddy at all.

SOPHIE
Of course it is.

CATE
What I really think this whole move is about is that you and your husband don’t like it when the church ladies come up to you on Sundays and ask why Maddy has two mommies. Is this the final next step in your “religious conversion”?

SOPHIE
Why do you insist on mocking my faith?

CATE
I don’t care about your faith. It wouldn’t matter to me if you got into Christianity, or Orthodox Judaism, or Scientology. It’s just your flavor of the month.

SOPHIE
That’s not true.

CATE
It’s like in college. One day it was poly-sci. Then it was fashion merchandising. Then it was drama. One day it was guys. Then it was girls then it was guys again--

SOPHIE
But what if this is really it?

CATE
I hope it is. I sincerely hope Jesus fills up all of the gaps in your soul and chases all your demons away.

SOPHIE
So why won’t you let me move on?

CATE
Because I’m not one of them. Your new religion may say our relationship was a sin--doesn’t mean it didn’t happen. Not my problem if you can’t live with that.
(Cate goes to leave.)

SOPHIE
You have--no idea what you’re getting into.

CATE
I guess I’m going to find out. See you in court.

(Cate exits.)

Scene 7

(Cate’s living room. Months later. Cate enters carrying groceries and talking on the phone.)

CATE
Mom, I told you it’s going to be okay.

Yes, of course I’m getting sleep.

And I’m eating meals.

(She takes out a bag of Cheetos and stuffs some in her mouth.)

Full, nutritious ones. I promise.

The hearing was...it was fine. Yes, they brought out the sex book.

How do you think it went?

They interrogated me as to my intentions in giving it to her and then they asked if I ever let Maddy watch me having sex with other women.

I’m okay. It’ll be okay.

You don’t have to feel bad you couldn’t come.

Yes, the reporter called me too.

You can read about it in the newspaper.
No, Charles and Sophie haven’t let me see her yet. But the people from Lamda don’t think they’ll be able to hold out much longer.

Lamda Legal. The gay rights defense group.

Right.

When I do, I’ll tell her.

I’ll tell her.

Love you too.

(She puts down the phone. Hatshepsut appears.)

HATSHEPSUT

The thrill of battle.

CATE

Something like it.

HATSHEPSUT

The presses may assail you, the arrows may fly--

CATE

I will duck.

HATSHEPSUT

No, you withstand. You hold up your shield and you deflect. Then you reload. You reassemble your troops.

CATE

Great.

HATSHEPSUT

You’re not thinking retreating?

CATE

When you put it that way--

HATSHEPSUT

You care about that child?
More than anything.

HATSHEPSUT

There you have it.

CATE

But all of this...I knew they would fight for her but I never thought they would stoop to--

HATSHEPSUT

You should have heard the obscenities my enemies accused me of committing. There was one particular graffiti image depicting me as a half-woman, half-man penetrating Senenmut like a--

CATE

I’m not you. I can’t just let things like that roll off me.

HATSHEPSUT

This is war.

CATE

We’re losing.

HATSHEPSUT

So find a new strategy.

CATE

But I’m not her mother.

HATSHEPSUT

What did you say?

CATE

Technically, I have no blood ties.

HATSHEPSUT

And?

CATE

What legitimate claim do I really have?
HATSHEPSUT
I wasn’t the next line in the succession. But I knew the nation would be better in my hands than that of my toddler stepson. So I said whatever was necessary to win over the masses.

CATE
By convincing them you were the daughter of the sun god. Don’t think that’s going to work for me.

HATSHEPSUT
So you think of something else. Find your enemy’s weakness and exploit it to your own advantage.

CATE
I don’t want to play this game anymore.

HATSHEPSUT
What are you saying?

CATE
Maybe a normal life...maybe that’s what she needs.

HATSHEPSUT
You reward deception and slander--?

CATE
Maybe what they said isn’t true, but that won’t stop stop other people from forcing Maddy to deal with questions like that for the rest of her life. People asking why she has someone she calls Mommy who looks nothing like her, why she buys two Mother’s Day cards and has two phone numbers, two houses, two birthday parties--

HATSHEPSUT
Sounds spoiled if you ask me.

CATE
To have to live an entire lifetime divided on herself?

HATSHEPSUT
Children will always find some way to be unhappy.

CATE
But I never had to deal with anything like that--I had the Barbies, the cul-de-sac, the perfect family picture--who am I to deprive her of that?
HATSHEPSUT

Coward.

CATE

I’m a coward for wanting to spare her some pain?

HATSHEPSUT

Nothing was ever built without pain. When I reigned, I re-established trade routes, avoided wars, and ruled over the one of the most peaceful periods in Egyptian history. I also raised the calibre of building projects. Certainly, we may have occasionally lost a workman along the way--no reason to halt construction and scrap the entire vision. Did you see the obelisks I erected at the Karnak Temple? The biggest of the era.

CATE

Kind of ironic.

HATSHEPSUT

What?

CATE

As a woman—constructing the obelisks.

HATSHEPSUT

What do you mean?

CATE

They're phallic symbols.

HATSHEPSUT

It's a symbol of power.

CATE

That's it, then? You just adopt the misogynistic dress and language to keep yourself ahead?

HATSHEPSUT

You do what it takes.

CATE

But you failed.
HATSHEPSUT
Failed?

CATE
Despite your best efforts, they erased you from the records.

HATSHEPSUT
Perhaps because I didn’t strike back hard enough to win my enemies’ respect. No sense in going to war if you’re only going to use half your arsenal.

CATE
But--

HATSHEPSUT
If I could do it over, I might have had one of my assassins strangle my stepson in his cradle. Would have saved so much trouble.

CATE
So if I want to have a chance I have to become just as nasty as them. Doesn’t that make it all a waste?

HATSHEPSUT
If you consider surrendering now, it already is.

Scene 8
(Charles and Sophie’s house.)

CHARLES
We can’t keep stalling like this.

SOPHIE
Why not?

CHARLES
We have to let Cate see her. The courts made their decision.

SOPHIE
I refuse to accept it.

CHARLES
You don’t have a choice.
SOPHIE
She is a degenerate.

CHARLES
But we can always appeal.

SOPHIE
It would only take Cate two seconds to plant a seed of destruction in Maddy’s soul.

CHARLES
So we’ll have someone talk to her afterward.

SOPHIE
I don’t want Maddy telling some shrink all of the lies Cate has probably told her about me. About us. It’s just going to upset her further.

CHARLES
But what if--?

SOPHIE
I’ve been to shrinks. I know what they do. How they work. It will just make her feel crazy.

CHARLES
Not a shrink. A youth minister. Someone on our side.

SOPHIE
You don’t think I’m enough for her?

CHARLES
I think maybe we could use some help--

SOPHIE
You’re going to tell me how to raise my daughter?

CHARLES
She’s my responsibility too.

SOPHIE
I gave birth to her.
I know that.

SOPHIE
You can’t tell me what to do.

CHARLES
I’m not telling you what to do, I’m just suggesting--

SOPHIE
You’re suggestion is noted.

Sorry it’s just, the things Cate said--

CHARLES
I know--

SOPHIE
I love my daughter. And for Cate to tell the court I would have even considered--to suggest that I wanted to have a--

You didn’t believe her, did you?

CHARLES
Of course not.

SOPHIE
I would hate for you to ever think--

CHARLES
I know you.

SOPHIE
She’s dangerous.

CHARLES
I know you’ve been through a lot.

SOPHIE
You don’t. You have idea.
CHARLES
Fine. I have no idea. But I’m in this marriage too. I don’t like this either--I am very uneasy with how this decision was rendered. But maybe if you had told Cate about the move to begin with--

SOPHIE
Now this is all my fault?

CHARLES
At least then we might have been able to come to an agreement before taking it into court. I could have gone ahead to Indiana and not lost my promotion. Or I could have worked something out and delayed it. Now they’re furious with me.

SOPHIE
So this is all about your job. You don’t care about Maddy at all.

CHARLES
That’s not true and you know it.

SOPHIE
I don’t know what I know.

CHARLES
When we lower ourselves by engaging in deceit we are moving away from God. We must comply with the law for now and trust that good will triumph in the end.

SOPHIE
But what if the law is wrong?

(A knock at the door. Charles goes to answer it. It’s Cate. Sophie starts to get up but Charles gestures for her to stay put.)

CATE
Sorry I didn’t call. Am I interrupting?

CHARLES
About the visitation schedule--

CATE
Charles--

CHARLES
I know we’ve haven’t been very communicative--
CATE
That’s one way to put it.

CHARLES
But we’ve talked it over and believe we can all work something out. Come to an understanding together.

CATE
That’s great. It’s just with the whole you trying to take Maddy out-of-state while I was in a foreign country--

CHARLES
About that--

CATE
And not respecting the schedule the courts laid out--

CHARLES
What are you saying?

CATE
My lawyer thinks I can get full custody.

(Sophie gets up, incredulous. She and Charles stare at Cate, shocked.)

Scene 9
(Cate’s apartment. She’s been cleaning, vigorously and intensely, almost skipping with each step. Laundry is neatly folded into piles and the air has the faintest scent of Febreze. Cate is cheery, with her usual scraggly hair pulled back into a bandana. She is motivated, focused, and organized. Hatshepsut is lounging on the couch, not pitching in.)

CATE
Have you seen the Wuggles CD?

HATSHEPSUT
Excuse me?
CATE
You know--it’s the one with the people who sing like chipmunks--

HATSHEPSUT
How stimulating.

CATE
I want to have it playing when Maddy comes today.

HATSHEPSUT
I have not, not have any desire to see, a Wuggles CD. I’m sure there will be some other suitable vermin-themed children’s music to play.

CATE
But the Wuggles are her favorite.

HATSHEPSUT
What in the--?

(Cate has lifted up the cushions of the couch and Hatshepsut falls onto the ground. After ruffling through the cushions, she produces the CD and lifts it above her head in triumph.)

CATE
Aha!

HATSHEPSUT
My congratulations.

CATE
I’ve been trying to decide--chicken fingers or mac and cheese?

HATSHEPSUT
Both such nutritious and mouth-watering choices.

CATE
Chicken fingers have always been her favorite. So that’s what I made. But what if she decides she doesn’t like it suddenly? What if I make her something and she doesn’t like it and she decides she hates me?

HATSHEPSUT
I always had servants to worry about those matters. And if my daughter didn’t like something her whipping girl would see the sharp end of a reed.
CATE
I guess it will all be sorted out when she comes here.

HATSHEPSUT
So everything is perfect now.

CATE
You can’t just be happy for me?

HATSHEPSUT
Not when you’re blubbering about waggles and over-processed poultry remnants.

CATE
I thought you’d be pleased. We won.

HATSHEPSUT
The battle. The war is still raging.

CATE
And what are you what suggesting I do?

HATSHEPSUT
You’ve won a prize. Now take your prize and hide it where no one else will be able to steal it from you again.

CATE
You’re not suggesting I kidnap her...?

HATSHEPSUT
Why not?

CATE
It’s--wrong. For starters.

(Hatshepsut rolls her eyes.)

Not to mention illegal.

HATSHEPSUT
Laws of Men.
CATE
I’ve already been successful going about it the legal way--why would I want to jeopardize my position? That wouldn’t make any sense.

HATSHEPSUT
You think it’s all over now because you’ve forced your enemies’ hand? This will only make them wait for a better opportunity to strike when you least expect it. You must remove the temptation.

CATE
It’s over.

HATSHEPSUT
If it’s never over.

CATE
Whatever wrongs Sophie may have done to me--she’s still Maddy’s mother. She loves that girl just as much as I do--and when I think about how it felt when I was in Egypt and Maddy was being taken from me--I don’t want Sophie to go through that. I wouldn’t do that to her. I couldn’t.

HATSHEPSUT
She betrayed you.

CATE
We were together for two years. I can’t throw that away.

HATSHEPSUT
I made my stepson captain of my army. And was it enough for him? I thought because he was a rational, literate man that he would take pains to preserve my memory. Honor me as I had all of the previous pharaohs before me. But then it became inconvenient. He decided a smoother narrative was preferable to living with the truth. You need to take control of your own narrative so that you aren’t written out of it.

CATE
You’re wrong. They’re dropping Maddy over any minute now and it will all be fine, you’ll see--

(A knock at the door.)

There she is!
(Cate frantically sets about putting everything in place, removing the bandanna from her head and straightening her clothing. She goes to open the door, and then puts the CD in the CD player and presses play, and we hear cheery, kiddy music. She opens the door to find a distraught Charles.)

CATE
Hi.

(Charles says nothing. Cate searches his face.)

Where’s Maddy?

(Charles shakes his head.)

Charles--

CHARLES
Could you turn that off?

CATE
Where is she? If this is some kind of trick you’re pulling I swear to God--

CHARLES
They’re gone.

(Cate is speechless, standing motionless in the doorway as the kiddie music continues to play.)

CATE
What do you mean? They just took off?

CHARLES
Yes.

CATE
When?

CHARLES
A couple of days ago.
CATE
And you didn’t call the police?

CHARLES
I was afraid.

HATSHEPSUT
This is her champion?

CATE (to Hatshepsut)
Not helpful.

CHARLES
What?

CATE
Nothing.

CHARLES
Would you please turn that music off?

HATSHEPSUT
He’s right about one thing.

(Cate turns off the CD player.)

So why wouldn’t you call the police?

CHARLES
I thought they would be home by now.

CATE
Where did they go?

CHARLES
They were just going to visit her mother for the weekend--

CATE
Out of state? In what universe did you think--

CHARLES
That was only supposed to be until Sunday.
Have you tried calling her?

She’s not picking up.

What about Marie’s house?

I’ve left messages. Nothing.

Where are you going?

Maybe they’re still in the area.

Wait--

What?

I’m coming with you.

That’s not necessary--

She is my wife.

I can’t let anything happen to that little girl. She means the world to me. I just want her to be safe.

We’re taking your car.

**Scene 10**

(A roadside diner. Cate, Charles, and Hatshepsut sit at the table. Charles is on his cell phone.)
CATE

Anything?

(Charles hangs up.)

Damnit.

CHARLES

Why don’t you try?

CATE

You think she’s going to pick up for me?

CHARLES

Maybe she forgot her charger.

CATE

Or maybe she’s laughing all the way to El Salvador.

CHARLES

That’s no way to--

CATE

Forget it let’s just eat.

(She picks up her menu and buries her face in it.)

CHARLES

I used to love Cleopatra.

CATE

What?

CHARLES

When I was a kid. They used to show it on TV sunday afternoons. Had the biggest crush on Elizabeth Taylor.

CATE

Nice.

CHARLES

Kind of like that Hat-shu-set who you study.
How so?

Cleopatra--strong powerful Egyptian ruler.

Cleopatra wasn’t Egyptian. She was Greek. Well, Macedonian.

Really?

And she didn’t look like Elizabeth Taylor.

Then why--?

We only remember her that way because she slept around a lot. It’s not even fair to group her with ancient Egyptian history. She lived closer to our time than the time of the Pyramids. Even Queen Hatshepsut. They hadn’t built pyramids for almost 1,000 years when she took the throne.

Okay.

Hatshepsut ruled for nearly three decades in peace and prosperity. Cleopatra lost her empire to the Romans. If Hatshepsut was male, and was recognized for all her achievements she would be honored as much as King Tut and Ramses. She’d be fucking Napoleon. Or at least Eisenhower. But those kinds of stories aren’t interesting for women. You never see Hatshepsut portrayed in films starring Elizabeth Taylor. One of the major players has to be male in order for anyone to care.

What’s wrong with men?

I don’t have anything against men.

It’s just me, then?
I’m sorry about the way I might have dealt with you in the past. Believe it or not, I have nothing against you personally.

CATE

Really?

CHARLES

I can’t lie to you and say I agree with your lifestyle--

CATE

Now it comes out--

CHARLES

But we’re in this situation together and we have to try and work as a team. I’m just trying to get to know you. If something I said offended you I didn’t mean--

CATE

Of course you didn’t. You don’t mean to do anything. You’re a wonderful open-hearted Christian who just wants to make sure we all get into Heaven.

CHARLES

What does that have anything to do with--

CATE

Something falls outside your limited realm of understanding and you think it’s okay to make sweeping generalizations because it’s not relevant to you. Well it’s relevant to me. It’s very relevant to me.

(She starts to tear up.)

CHARLES

We’ve got to stay positive.

(Cate gets up from the table.)

I’ll be right back.

CHARLES

What if the waitress comes?

CATE

I don’t know--order the Meatloaf Mountain. I guess.
(Cate exits. Hatshepsut picks up the menu.)

HATSHEPSUT
I was thinking the Cheeseburger Royal might be more appropriate to my station.

(He turns and sees Hatshepsut.)

Who--?

HATSHEPSUT
I also thought the Marco Polo Chicken looked somewhat adventurous.

CHARLES
You--look like a--a--

HATSHEPSUT
A Pharaoh?

CHARLES
I need more coffee. I’m hallucinating.

HATSHEPSUT
Hallucination or a vision of the gods?

CHARLES
You are not God.

HATSHEPSUT
No one else has to know that. You could claim a prophetic vision--say you are bringing the world salvation.

CHARLES
That’s absurd.

HATSHEPSUT
You don’t wish to be a prophet?

CHARLES
I’m going crazy. I’m in the middle of nowhere. Cate hates me and I am trying to be the nice guy here. I even showed interest in you and all she does is respond negatively.
HATSHEPSUT
I used to try being nice to my adversaries and what did I get? Assassination attempts.

CHARLES
No matter what I say they always think I’m attacking them.

HATSHEPSUT
Some women take everything so personally.

CHARLES
Am I upset about this situation? Of course. But do you see me wallowing in self-pity? No: I am focused on taking action.

HATSHEPSUT
You would have made a wonderful general.

CHARLES
You think so--wait, why am I talking to you?

HATSHEPSUT
You are at the doorstep of revelation. Isn’t there a prophet in your religion who had to wrestle with an angel before he gained entry into the promised land?

CHARLES
I just wanted to have a regular life with the woman I loved. Didn’t seem like a lot to ask.

HATSHEPSUT
You think happiness in love carries no price?

CHARLES
When Sophie and I met--she lit up the room in a way that was so authentic. Open. She took to everything with such positive, infectious energy. She was different than anyone I had ever met. She would talk to you and it was like you were the only two people in the world. She seemed happy. I don’t know what I did to make her so--

HATSHEPSUT
Maybe it had nothing to do with you.

(Charles phone rings. He answers it.)
CHARLES

Sophie?

(Cate reenters and tries to ask who it is, but Charles shushes her.)

Yes, I’m still here.

Of course I still love you. Just tell me where--

So does He. Yes, I’m sure.

Hold on.

Scene 11

(A motel room in the middle of nowhere. Sophie stands next to the closed bathroom door, from which we can hear the sound of a young child crying.)

SOPHIE
You have to come out sometime. Eat something. Or don’t. See if I care.

Please. Just stop crying.

(After a beat, she abandons the door and sits on the bed. Hatshepsut appears.)

HATSHEPSUT
You could always try strapping her down and funneling the food into her throat through a hollow reed.

Used to work with my daughter.

SOPHIE
You’re not real.

(Sophie goes into her purse, takes out a bottle and pops a couple of prescription pills, hoping Hatshepsut will disappear, to no avail.)

You try and be a good mother, try to get your life together. Why can’t she understand that?
HATSHEPSUT
And you’d think the daughter you’re grooming to inherit your empire would have the
good sense to outlive you. Dynasties never turn out the way you plan them.

SOPHIE
I tried. I did everything I was supposed to and she still--

HATSHEPSUT
Children are bothersome as trophies go. You can’t explain to them how much you’ve
fought to bring them into existence. All they care about is having someone to gush
over them and coo at each inane giggle or musing.

SOPHIE
It’s impossible.

HATSHEPSUT
That’s why I thought I was doing the proper thing by bringing Senenmut into my bed.
My daughter loved him. I thought he would be a healthy influence as her tutor. I
reasoned that he could help me win her affection. But all it did was make my daughter
happier in his lap than mine.

SOPHIE
Didn’t it hurt that your daughter didn’t love you?

HATSHEPSUT
Of course. But I ought to have known better. After all, a pharaoh has to be God. Gods
haven’t the luxury to linger on such details. I should have been grateful--she performed
her ceremonial duties, maintained the public image of my reign. Senenmut ensured I had
her respect. To demand her heart as well might have been greedy.

SOPHIE
This was not supposed to be my life.

HATSHEPSUT
What did you want it to be?

SOPHIE
People have always told me what to do. What to want. Go to this college, raise this
child, attend this church. I’ve never known who I was. I have a right to find out, don’t
I? To grow. To move on.

HATSHEPSUT
Then move on.
SOPHIE
Everyone has betrayed me. Cate, Charles, the church.

HATSHEPSUT
So forget them. You don’t like some part of your history: erase it.

SOPHIE
Erase it?

HATSHEPSUT
My husband was inferior to me in every possible way. His vision for Egypt barely extended beyond his own reign--I had ambitions to reshape the entire region. For years I sat by and watched him squander my father’s achievements. I was my father’s true heir--so after my husband finally died I wrote my name across his few pathetic excuses for monuments and reset the record.

SOPHIE
But how can I erase my life?

HATSHEPSUT
You take control.

Commoners thought it would be amusing to mock my affair with Senenmut. I erased them. Senenmut built grand monuments in my name and then he became insubordinate after my daughter died. I erased him. Then there was the matter of my stepson. Tradition demanded he be my successor. I defied it and commissioned new edicts and murals naming my daughter my heir instead.

SOPHIE
Did you ever feel regret?

HATSHEPSUT
I erased it.

SOPHIE
But I’m not a Pharaoh. I’m not trying to shape an empire. I’m just trying to find the right path for me and my child. I feel like I’ve failed her and I don’t know how to fix it. I’m her mother--I should be able to fix it. I thought if I just trusted in the Lord--

HATSHEPSUT
All the suffering would end?
SOPHIE
Yes.

HATSHEPSUT
Go back and reread your religious epics: you have to let yourself be destroyed in order to truly be reborn.

SOPHIE
But what if--?

HATSHESUT
Indecision is weak. You can’t know the future. You have to make choice and own it.

Or if you truly wish to be a martyr, I’m sure there’s some lion’s den we can toss you into…

(Sophie moves to respond, but finds Hatshepsut has vanished. The crying from the bathroom returns.)

Scene 12

(The motel room, some time later. The motel room is pretty much unchanged, maybe slightly more disheveled. The one major change is silence—a ringing silence. A knock is heard at the door, and no one answers it. The key is turned and Charles and Cate enter into the partial darkness. A light switch is flipped. They enter the motel room, and as they mill around wade through a sea of clothes, food wrappers, and other junk.)

CATE
Anyone here?

(Charles notices a light coming from the bathroom door. He tentatively approaches it and slowly cracks the door open. Cate walks up to investigate. When she looks in the door, she lets out a scream. Charles enters the bathroom and returns with a drenched Scrappy dog in his arms. There might be some blood on it. The lights fade in a tableau of Charles and Cate in their opposite corners of the motel room.)

Scene 13

(Cate’s living room. Some weeks later. Judy enters, carrying a tray of tea and some soup.)
JUDY
I think it would be healthy for her too, Charles. But there is no getting through.

The people from the university keep wanting to know whether she’s going back to teach and she won’t give an answer.

She hasn’t worked on it in weeks. I don’t know what to tell that editor.

I appreciate your concern but you need to focus on yourself. You’ve just lost your wife and child--

I agree. If she does I’ll let her know.

You too. Take care.

(Judy waits a minute for a response, but receives none. She sighs, and puts the soup on the coffee table.)

That was Charles. You should call him--he’s worried.

(Nothing. Judy sighs and inspects the soup.)

I couldn’t find any potatoes so I used yams. I hope that’s all right. Gives it a nice orangey color. Like a marigold.

(Still no response. Judy goes to taste it.)

Still a bit hot. Maybe you should wait to let it cool.

(She looks into Cate’s room.)

You’re out of milk. I’m going to run to the store.

(Still nothing. Judy goes to grab her purse and her coat.)

Going on a hunger strike is not going to bring her back.

When I get back I want this to be gone. I mean it, young lady.

(After a moment, she exits. Hatshepsut enters, and stares at the soup. There is a rustling from Cate’s room. She emerges, worn

Egyptology 74
out, bedraggled. It’s clear she hasn’t showered or been out of doors in several days.)

HATSHEPSUT

Have you tried this?

(Cate ignores her and curls up on the couch.)

You’re fortunate. I didn’t have anyone volunteering to nurture me when my daughter died. No one who wasn’t a slave, at least.

You cannot imagine the sheer magnitude--I had plans for that girl. Plans that would have altered the entire course of Egyptian history. To think a child’s head-cold could be the downfall of an entire legacy.

(Nothing.)

Or perhaps it’s easier for me to think of her that way.

(Cate pauses for a moment.)

The sweet, precocious child that perished before she could know the sting of heartbreak or lash out against her mother. I’d like to think that she would have been on my side. That she would have understood everything I was trying to accomplish. She probably would have married my stepson out of spite and conspired with him in his erasure of my memory.

I should have joined a temple when my husband died and lived a peaceful, simple life as a priestess of Isis.

CATE

But that would be such a waste...

HATSHEPSUT

Why? I could have spared myself a lifetime of heartbreak. And most certainly have slept more.

CATE

Everything you built. Your temples, monuments--

HATSHEPSUT

But what’s the use? If no one knows I built them.
CATE
Maybe they didn’t know. But they mattered. You mattered. To me. If you had
known—you might have spared yourself the pain. But then you would have missed
the joy. You can’t just pretend something away because it’s painful.

HATSHEPSUT
No, you can’t.

Coda
(Seven years earlier. The parking lot of a women’s clinic Sophie
and Cate enter.)

CATE
Want me to come in with you?

SOPHIE
That’s okay.

CATE
Well, call me on my cell when it’s over.

SOPHIE
I’ll call a cab.

CATE
That’s ridiculous--

SOPHIE
It’s no big deal.

CATE
I’m not leaving you.

SOPHIE
God, are you serious?

CATE
This is a hard ordeal. You shouldn’t have to go through this alone.

SOPHIE
Or maybe I just don’t want to go through it with you!
That came out wrong.

It’s--

When I called--after all that we--

Right--

I didn’t think you’d agree to bring me.

Craig wasn’t able to--?

Craig?

He’s not the father?

God no. Why would you think of him?

He was the reason we broke up.

Oh yeah.

So who--?

A mistake.

Right.

That will soon be remedied.
CATE
Are you sure you don’t want to talk about it--?

SOPHIE
Don’t be such a fucking doormat. It’s pathetic.

CATE
You know what maybe you’re right. I should be home right now researching for my thesis. I should be chasing after people who love and value me. My grad assistant Sonja offered me tickets to see the Queen Hatshepsut exhibit in Boston.

SOPHIE
You should have gone.

CATE
She’s a lapdog. A trained poodle who follows me around and laps up everything I say. It’s unnerving.

What?

SOPHIE
Nothing.

CATE
You think I do that.

SOPHIE
If the sock-filled sandals fit...

CATE
I’m not some puppy dog that’s following you around because I’m lost and alone.

SOPHIE
That’s why you would randomly show up at my work with homemade muffins and leave stalker-ish messages on my voicemail?

CATE
If it bothered you so much you could have called me back and told me.

SOPHIE
I didn’t want to hurt your feelings.
CATE
By blowing me off?

SOPHIE
What do you want me to say? That we’re soul mates? You’re not my type.

CATE
I was your type at the club that night. I was your type for four months.

SOPHIE
And then I got tired of you.

CATE
Then why did you call me to come pick you up?

(Beat.)

SOPHIE
There was this special about Queen Hatshepsut on the History Channel.

CATE
Okay.

SOPHIE
It was about her early reign. Right after the death of her husband King Tut--

Tutmosis.

SOPHIE
You probably think this is silly.

CATE
Why would I think that?

SOPHIE
Because it’s your thing. You hate it when idiots like me blabber on without knowing their shit.

CATE
That’s not true--
SOPHIE
We used to play drinking games with your students’ term papers.

CATE
What did it say in the documentary?

SOPHIE
It was talking about how after her husband died, she had to decide whether or not to take over the throne or not. Everyone working against her. No precedents to go by.

CATE
She was phenomenal.

SOPHIE
That’s the thing. You never hear about how hard it must have been for her. Nights she must have stayed up late flipping out.

CATE
I guess she didn’t.

SOPHIE
But she had to have doubts. Moving into a great unknown. Without help. Or friends. I couldn’t do that alone.

CATE
You wouldn’t have to.

SOPHIE
You mean...? No.

CATE
Why not?

SOPHIE
A million reasons. What’s so good about me?

CATE
You’re beautiful--

SOPHIE
So what?

CATE
You’re daring. You’re so willing to try things--anything. Like that Ethiopian restaurant you took me to.

SOPHIE
You were going to the bathroom for a week.

CATE
Fiber’s important.

The point is, you get me out of my comfort zone. Out from the glow of my computer screen. You give me an excuse to keep my apartment clean--

SOPHIE
I don’t know.

CATE
I’m not saying it’ll be perfect. But if you go into that clinic we’ll never know.

SOPHIE
Things are so easy for you.

CATE
Me?

SOPHIE
You’re one of the most incredible people I’ve ever met.

CATE
You’re serious.

SOPHIE
First time I saw you in Barnes and Noble drinking those overpriced coffee drinks in that awful hoodie--you had such focus, such passion. I can’t even conceive of that.

CATE
But you’ve experienced so many things.--

SOPHIE
‘Cause I’m afraid to stand still. My parents are pissed off enough that I keep their tuition dollars by switching my major ever other minute. Can you imagine if they knew I
got knocked up and slept around with girls? They’d cut me off. I’m not brave: You are. If I thought for one minute I could be half as brave as you--

CATE
It doesn’t have to be that complicated.

SOPHIE
I don’t want to be like my parents. What if the kid doesn’t like me?

CATE
All we have to do is love her.

SOPHIE
You really believe that’s enough?

Yeah.

SOPHIE
I just want to stop running.

CATE
So stop.

(Sophie opens her mouth to object again, but this time Cate leans in kisses Sophie deeply, passionately. Sophie’s resistance falls away and she melts into Cate’s arms, nestling into Cate’s embrace like a child frightened by a nightmare.)

END OF PLAY