

SIDES - Set A

Begin —

(Claire moves across the room and sits in the chair by the desk.

After a moment, Julian speaks quietly.)

JULIAN. I shouldn't have brought her up, Claire. It was insensitive. I apologize.

(Pause.)

CLAIRE. I just ... This is a very difficult time right now.

JULIAN. Retiring, you mean.

CLAIRE. Not only that. The fact is ... we got a call from Becky.

JULIAN. You did?

CLAIRE. Three nights ago. A few minutes past midnight — we were both asleep.

(Pause.)

She said she has something to tell us. Something we have to hear. She wants — no, she *needs* — to see us.

JULIAN. Well, that's wonderful.

CLAIRE. Is it?

JULIAN. It sounds like she's had a change of heart.

CLAIRE. Out of the blue? After twelve years of absolute silence?

JULIAN. Did she give you any idea...?

CLAIRE. No, none at all. And she wouldn't answer my questions, any of them — where she's living, *how* she lives, what she's been doing all this time. "Please, *tell* me something," I said. But she kept repeating, "I don't acknowledge your right to ask." As if she was reading from some kind of script. *(Looks up at Julian.)* She's flying in tonight from — I don't *know* where, and coming to the house. At eight o'clock. Howard's terribly upset, he can't understand why, after all this time —

JULIAN. I sympathize, Claire. Speaking —

CLAIRE. You *sympathize*?

JULIAN. Of course. As a parent myself.

CLAIRE. It's not the same. Becky's our flesh and blood.

(Julian says nothing.)

We survived, Julian. Not every couple would have. It took us a long time, almost destroyed our marriage ... but we accepted her absence. Found peace, even, of a kind.

JULIAN. But isn't it —

CLAIRE. What does she *want*?

JULIAN. Claire, isn't it possible she has good news?

CLAIRE. *(Sharply.)* How can it be good news? *(Growing increasingly upset.)* How can it be anything but *catastrophic*? What is she going to *accuse* us of—?

JULIAN. Whatever she has to say — at least you won't have to live with the doubt any more. You'll know. Isn't —

CLAIRE. I don't *want* to know, don't you understand? Not any more—! *(Covers her face with her hands.)*

(After a moment, Julian speaks quietly.)

JULIAN. A few nights ago I was sitting on the balcony of my suite, looking at the stars — the few still visible through the haze of light. And a moment of ... I couldn't quite identify the feeling, let's call it *terror*, took hold of me suddenly. The horrifying things Paul's told the world about me — is it possible that everything he says is the truth? What if I ... *(Shakes his head.)* The moment passed, thankfully. I can't deny that in so many ways, I'm a mystery to myself. And I accept it, for now. But it's our deepest expectation, isn't it, that someday all mystery will come to an end?

(A silence, then Claire looks up at Julian.)

CLAIRE. Julian ...

(Pause.)

Did you...?

JULIAN. What?

CLAIRE. You said ... you have employees who find things for you.

JULIAN. Yes, I do.

(Pause.)

CLAIRE. Did you have them find my daughter?

JULIAN. I'm sorry I mentioned her, Claire, I —

CLAIRE. Do you know what she's going to tell us?

(Pause. Julian shakes his head.)

JULIAN. I have no idea what she wants to say to you.

CLAIRE. Is that the truth?

JULIAN. Yes, of course.

— End

(A moment, then Claire gestures apologetically.)

CLAIRE. Thank you. I'm sorry. It's just such a coincidence that —

JULIAN. She didn't tell me, you see.

(A moment.)