

Playing House

by

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Cast of CharactersJEFFREY:

41

ANNIE:

35

Place

Manhattan

Time

Early Morning

Setting: A large townhouse in New York City.

At Rise: Jeffrey is seated on a single sofa when Annie enters the front door.

JEFFREY: Where have you been?

ANNIE: Out!

JEFFREY: I must have called you---

ANNIE: I know you called me, I saw that you called me.

JEFFREY: ...You were drinking?

ANNIE: Everybody's latching on to me, like I'm some kind of, of, of prostitute. Clinging! Yanking! No more! I'm fed up with all of you. I'm not some punching bag you each take a turn hitting. I'm not some old maid that should be forced to cook and clean, and do laundry, and make dinner, and do the kid's homework and comfort you each time you have a splinter in your toe. No! I've had enough of it. You don't love me. The kids don't love me. I'm just some woman everybody uses for their own selfish needs. Well, not anymore bucko. I'm not for sale! Don't look at me like I'm talking gibberish. What are you gonna do? Huh? You gonna give me the whole, "That's not true Annie, the kids and I love you more than life itself." Horseshit! It's time I love myself. I've given up my life for you and the kids. My life is drained from me. Vultures, sucking out my soul, day in and day out, until there's nothing left to drain, nothing left of me...

ANNIE goes into liquor cabinet.

JEFFREY: What are you doing?

ANNIE: What does it look like I'm doing?

JEFFREY tries to stop her.

ANNIE smacks him across his face.

How dare you?! All the years I've given over to you, so you can get your law degree! What about my life? Have you seen it, Jeffrey? (beat) I went out there tonight looking for it and guess what I found? Didn't take me long. I see. I see now. Everything. Clearly.

SHE drinks.

It was like an out of body experience. I got to float over my past and witness my life as if for the very first time.

ANNIE (cont'd): I felt bad for that girl. For that lost pretty girl. She was young and vibrant, full of life. Nothing could get in her way because the world was full of possibilities, but then...I met you, and I fell in love with you Jeffrey, I really did...I was living in magic, but you see, magic is only a trick that disappears and doesn't last forever. I forgot about me because I was so obsessed with you, and in many ways I became you...making sure you went in the right direction, being there for you during your studies, sacrificing so much of myself for what I thought was something greater than me...HA!...what a joke, us...your dreams became my dreams, but my dreams never became yours...having kids was just about the worst idea either of us could have ever imagined---

JEFFREY: Annie! Don't talk about our children that way! I won't have it!

ANNIE: Oh, shut up damn it! What the hell do you know about it, anyway...you, with your "meetings" and "travels". You wouldn't have any idea what to do with those kids if they were all yours and yours alone!

JEFFREY: I've cut my schedule and I've been spending more time home, isn't that what you wanted?

ANNIE: You've done so with such bitterness, it pains you to even touch me, let alone make love.

JEFFREY: I haven't the slightest idea---

ANNIE: Don't play yourself, Jeffrey. For once in your life, open your eyes! Don't you see what's happening?

JEFFREY: What are you talking about?

ANNIE: I'm talking about divorce.

JEFFREY: Divorce?

ANNIE: You're a lawyer, shouldn't take you long to get those papers drafted.

JEFFREY: Anne, you've had too much to drink---

ANNIE: Stop covering everything up! Truth! Truth! Where is the truth? We've been playing house and I don't want to play anymore. I want my own life back!

JEFFREY: Your own life? (singing)...Your own life. You can't just pick up and go. (beat) Who the hell do you think you are?

ANNIE: Do you love me?

(pause.)

Like when we first fell in love...do you still love me like that?

JEFFREY: I've loved you more now than I ever have in all my life.

ANNIE laughs her head off.

JEFFREY leans on the back part of the couch.

You could laugh. It's fine. I understand you.

ANNIE: You don't understand a damn thing about me. I've been non-existent for far too long. You forgot me. Admit it...you forgot all about me.

JEFFREY: I haven't forgotten about you, Annie.

ANNIE: I am no one.

JEFFREY: Please, stop saying that.

ANNIE: I am no one!

JEFFREY: Let's make you someone.

ANNIE: Make me someone? You just don't make me someone, like I'm some fictional character in a novel, okay? I'm a real human being and I've achieved nothing with my life!

JEFFREY: What is it that you want, Anne? ...Tell me...talk to me...

ANNIE: Nothing I imagined is anything like what we have become. I hate my kids, they're driving me mad, I hate them with an abnormal passion. A mother is not supposed to hate her children. What kind of a person am I, to feel that way? We've spoilt them, they've become rotten and spoilt, they've no idea in how to look after themselves. Pathetic. If I had have known better...

JEFFREY: We can't just throw them out Anne, they are our children.

ANNIE: Do you feel it, too? Tell me the truth.

JEFFREY: I'm ashamed to say that I'm not around them enough to know how they act. I haven't seen them act as badly as you have been claiming. Perhaps I don't know them enough... I love them, like any father loves their children, but I don't know - I don't know so much about --

ANNIE: And is that normal, for a father not to know his children?

JEFFREY: No.

JEFFREY pours himself a drink.

ANNIE sits on the couch.

ANNIE: So, what are we supposed to do? Are we going to continue living a life we don't want?

JEFFREY: Well, I asked you, what is it that you want?

ANNIE: ...I don't want you anymore, Jeffrey. I don't want the kids anymore, either.

JEFFREY: Where the hell is all this coming from?

ANNIE: Time! It's time...time keeps ticking and if we listen closely, sooner or later we hear what it's saying.

JEFFREY: And what is it saying?

ANNIE: It's saying that I am leaving you and the kids.

JEFFREY'S temper rises.

JEFFREY: And just how long do you think you will last without me and the kids?

ANNIE: Well, that's a very good question, because tonight I really had plenty of time to finalize my thoughts.

JEFFREY: Christ! You must be fucking kidding me?!

ANNIE: I've had these feelings now for, oh, I don't know, years and it's sort of like having all the pieces to a puzzle, and one by one, slowly, little by little, they come together and give you a picture and tonight, tonight I've seen the whole picture.

JEFFREY: I will never let you leave.

ANNIE: Ha! What will you do Jeffrey, tie me down in chains?

ANNIE pours herself a drink.

JEFFREY: That's enough drinking!! I'm taking you to get help! I've had enough of this bullshit with you, you think it's been easy for me? Slaving away at that Godforsaken job? Defending clients I know for certain are as guilty as the crimes they have committed. You don't see anymore past your own two eyes. Not once have you ever asked me about my burdens. Not once! Years and years have gone by---

ANNIE: If you aren't happy, LEAVE---

JEFFREY: Even now you won't LISTEN---

ANNIE ignores him.

JEFFREY: ANNA!

ANNIE: I am done Jeffrey. I look at you and I despise you. No one asked you to take criminal def---

JEFFREY: Shut up! Shut up!! Shut up!!!

(dead silence)

JEFFREY paces, runs his fingers through his hair.

...This is not the life I've wanted, either...

ANNIE: ...When did you know?

JEFFREY: ...I knew after I won my first case.

ANNIE: ...You never told me.

JEFFREY: ...I couldn't tell you. How could I tell you? After everything we sacrificed? You expect me to just spin around and flip our lives completely over?

ANNIE: So, what? We didn't have kids then.

JEFFREY: So, it's my fault!

ANNIE: If you knew you weren't happy---

JEFFREY: Instead we celebrated it, didn't we? Remember? My first big case...we went downtown and drank until we couldn't even stand...I wasn't celebrating...I was running, I was running as far away as I damn well could, to forget all about that man...Aw, that horrible man! You know what happened, not one year later?? The man I defended, Gene Walzer, killed again...and I'm to blame. Don't you see, Anne, I have blood on my hands and its stain can never come off. Oh, she was such a beautiful woman, mid-twenties, green eyes, light brown hair and so innocent looking...murdered, because of me...but I won, you see? And somehow, taking care of you, buying us this house, having children together, my darkness was justified. I was too far into the pit to ever come out and regain my breath. (beat) It's a day I'll never forget, because it was the day that I changed forever...who I was, who I wanted to be, you aren't the only one playing house, Anne...I've been choking ever since

ANNIE: How can you have gone on?

JEFFREY: I told you, I was obsessed with making you happy. I wanted to make enough money so that I could support you and give you the life you always dreamed of, was I wrong?

ANNIE: But this isn't the life I want anymore, Jeffrey, I don't think it ever really was.

JEFFREY: I never asked you to stop acting.

ANNIE: I don't want to talk about it.

JEFFREY: No! You want truth then let's have some fucking truth. Why did you quit?

ANNIE: I got pregnant!

JEFFREY: And why was that a death sentence?

ANNIE: Because I am a mother, something you will never know about.

JEFFREY: I pushed you, I encouraged you---

ANNIE: It's all too late now, isn't it?

JEFFREY: You had no right to walk away.

ANNIE: Yes, I did. At that time, I did.

JEFFREY: And you really want to walk away from me and the kids?

ANNIE: Absolutely.

JEFFREY: And go where, do what?

ANNIE: Start over. Make a new life for myself. (beat) At some point---

JEFFREY: Stop, stop, you sound incredibly insane.

ANNIE: On the contrary, I feel as though I've just been cured and released from the looney bin, so there.

ANNIE glares at JEFFREY.

JEFFREY: So, there. Annie, look at me and tell me with all the truth you have in you, that you honestly wish to leave...

ANNIE walks up to JEFFREY.

ANNIE: I wish to leave and I am leaving.

JEFFREY: What will we tell our children?

ANNIE: Mommy's starting a new life.

JEFFREY: But what will we tell them, damn it?!

ANNIE: We tell them that I need to spend some time away, in order to be myself again. We'll tell them that it isn't their fault, but that I needed to go.

JEFFREY: And when they ask me when you will come back?

ANNIE: One day...but, not as a mother...as a friend.

JEFFREY (statement): A friend.

ANNIE: Yes.

JEFFREY: Are you doing this to drive me into madness?

ANNIE: This is about me, Jeff.

JEFFREY: I ought to kill you.

ANNIE: You should...it's probably easier.

JEFFREY gets a drink.

JEFFREY: Never in my life.

ANNIE: I'm going upstairs to pack and I'm leaving tonight.

JEFFREY: Did you say tonight?

ANNIE: I did.

ANNIE goes upstairs.

JEFFREY watches her.

JEFFREY cries.

END OF PLAY