

Swimming Up the Sun
By
Nicole J. Burton

A full-length play

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Synopsis

At age 22, the playwright set out to find her English birth parents, a Jewish father and a mother believed to be an artist. The adventure leads to a kaleidoscope of relationships with one dark secret at its center.

"A funny, sometimes bittersweet story that pulls us in and holds us as a traveler clutches a suitcase."

Adapted for the stage from Burton's book, *Swimming Up the Sun – A Memoir of Adoption*.

Cast size: 8 actors; 6 female; 3 male.

Nicole Burton - Bio

Nicole Burton's plays include *Swimming Up the Sun*, *Fred & Frieda*, *Dirty Questions*, *Last Call at the Marble Bar*, and *Starman*, *Wish Me Luck*. They've been produced at venues as diverse as the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, MetroStage, Source Theater, the University of District of Columbia, House of Ruth Homeless Shelter, Oak Hill Youth Reformatory, and the U.S. Capitol.

Her publications include *Swimming Up the Sun: A Memoir of Adoption*, excerpted in several anthologies; *Starman*, *Wish Me Luck* and *The Memory Club of America*, two plays in the anthology *Short Stuff; Ten-to-Twenty Minute Plays for Mature Actors*; and *Southwest Remembered* (screen treatment), an award-winning documentary on urban renewal in the Nation's Capitol. She is a member of the Dramatists Guild, Playwright Forum, and the Northern Virginia Playwrights Circle. She is also the publisher of Apippa Publishing Company.

***Swimming Up the Sun* Production & Development History**

Swimming Up the Sun is adapted from my book, *Swimming Up the Sun: A Memoir of Adoption*, published in 2008.

The play has received several readings, at the American Adoption Congress Conference in Denver, CO, and at Playwrights Forum 2 (Shirley Serotsky, director) in Washington, D.C., in 2012 and 2013. In 2014, it was a semi-finalist in the Source Theater Festival in D.C. The play has not yet been produced.

Cast of Characters

NICKI	English adoptee and writer (25)
ANGELA	Nicki's half-sister, raised by Eve (21)
EVE	Nicki's birth mother, an artist (50)
PHILIP	Nicki's birth father, a Jewish businessman (50)
MOO	Nicki's adoptive mother, a homemaker (60)
JAMES	Nicki's African-American boyfriend/husband, a musician (30)

With double casting of all the principal characters except Nicki, one or two additional actors can play:

ROGER NICKI's adoptive father

OFFICIAL

MRS. HALL Adoption agency social worker

CANON INGLES Anglican churchman

RABBI

SHOP ASSISTANT

WRONG EVE

Casting and Staging

I love inclusive casting, actors of different ethnic backgrounds, gender orientations, and physical abilities. All characters are English except James but please don't overdo the British accents; less is more when you have enough.

Pacing should allow audiences time to grasp the surreal world of adult adoptees. Actors may dispense with real telephones in phone conversations.

Time and Settings

Time: 1985 through 2000 (except part of Scene 1 in 1956)

The set has two playing areas: The Beach at the Edge of Time where imaginary scenes take place, and the Earth where realistic scenes take place, for example, in British offices and homes; the Miss Selfridge Coffee Shop; and the Washington, D.C. apartment of Nicki and James.

Glossary of Pronunciation

Nottingham– NOTT-ing-um - English city in the Midlands

Norwich – NOH-ridge – English city in East Anglia

Ledbury – LED-buh-ry – English town

Gloucester – GLOSS-ter (gloss as in the paint) - English county

Roughton's – ROW-tuns (row as in argument) – haberdashery store

Derby – DAR-by – Midlands county

simpatici – sim-PA-ti-chi - sympathetic, soulmates (Italian)

Brusly – BROO-ley – Suburb of Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Josef Mossef – YO-sef MO-sef – NICKI's Polish great-grandfather

Sima – SEE-ma – woman's name (Hebrew)

Traditional Hebrew blessing:

Y'varechecha Adonai V'yish'm'recha.

Ya'er Adonai panav eilecha vichuneka.

Yisa Adonai panav eilecha v'yasem l'cha shalom.

(May God Bless you and guard you.

May the light of God shine upon you, and may God be gracious to you.

May the presence of God be with you and give you peace.)

1950's Party Music Suggestions

“Come And Go With Me,” The Dell Vikings

"Rock Around the Clock," Bill Haley & His Comets

“Long Tall Sally,” “Tutti Frutti,” or anything on the debut album, “Here's Little Richard”

“Twenty Flight Rock” by Eddie Cochran

“Be-Bop-A-Lula” or “Jezebel” by Gene Vincent

“Move It” by Cliff Richard

“Boomerang” by The Echoes

ACT 1: SEARCHING FOR MY PEOPLE

(The stage has two areas, the Beach at the Edge of Time, where non-realistic scenes take place, and the Earth, where realistic scenes occur. Scenes bleed between the two areas.

Chairs, a table, and boxes create simple furnishings. The Beach may be delineated by a yellow floor cloth and seagulls. Between the Beach and the Earth is a Red Cradle, a shrine and repository for all things relinquishment.

Eve, Nicki, and Angela enter and face the audience. Eve places placards around her daughters' necks; Nicki is "LOST" and Angela is "KEPT." Angela holds a handmade doll. Moo enters.)

NICKI

I'm "Lost."

ANGELA

I'm "Kept."

EVE

I couldn't go around leaving babies all over the place.

NICKI

I'm her secret.

ANGELA

She discouraged questions.

NICKI

I was told, hoped it was true:

(fingers crossed on both hands)

Mother, artist; Father, Jew.

I'm Eve's eldest daughter.

ANGELA

I'm... I'm...

NICKI

I'm "Chosen."

(awkward laugh, pause)

I was claimed as in Treasure.

ANGELA

I was surrendered as in War.

NICKI

Angela rocks her doll.

It was a very bad patch. Ow...

EVE

(holds her stomach)

I was cherished and loved.

ANGELA

I was loved.

NICKI

I was loved...

Moo links her arm through Nicki's.

"What larks, Pip old chap, what larks."

MOO

...but I was haunted. The Earth, this Earth, is my adopted world. This is my adopted mother, and this Beach at the Edge of Time, is a ghost kingdom where my people live. This is my other mother. I live a bifurcated life, a double life in a world with two suns... see...

NICKI

Nicki makes two circles with her fingers in the sky and looks from one to the other.

...two mothers, two fathers...

Stop! You had a real family.

EVE

NICKI

Ow...

(her stomach hurts)

It's complicated. "Relinquishment" is not a metaphor, and you know "Shame" is not a figure of speech.

EVE

The past is over!

NICKI

We are the past.

ANGELA

How could you remember? You were only a baby.

NICKI

I'm human, I remember.

EVE

No.

NICKI

Yes!

Nicki and Angela put their placards in the Red Cradle. Nicki exits. Young Philip and the ensemble enter the Earth, dancing to 1950's pop music such as "Rock Around the Clock" by Bill Haley and the Comets, or "Come And Go With Me" by The Dell Vikings, or maybe "Long Tall Sally" by Little Richard.

Eve and Philip dance, kiss, and exit together. Philip soon returns and dances with someone else. Eve enters, visibly pregnant, and pulls Philip aside.

EVE

Philip...

PHILIP

Hello-ello.

EVE

It's yours.

PHILIP
Ha-ha! You're joking.

EVE
Do I look as if I'm joking?

PHILIP
Eve. Ha-ha!

EVE
(grabs him)
Philip. What are we going to do?

PHILIP
We?

EVE
Yes, you and me.

PHILIP
How do I know...

EVE
You, bastard! I know and I'm telling you, you are the father.

PHILIP
See that girl, she's my fiance'...

EVE
What?

PHILIP
We're going to be married, in three weeks. I haven't see you in months.

EVE
Her?

PHILIP
You have to deal with this. Here...

Philip gives Eve some money, takes his fiance's hand, and they exit. The partying ensemble shuns Eve. She hides to give birth amid dance music and laughter. We hear Eve's birth cry.

Ahhhh!

EVE

Eve emerges with a swaddled baby. The music stops and the ensemble closes in menacingly, arms outstretched. They want her baby.

ENSEMBLE

Unworthy, unwanted, undesirable, undeserving. Unfit.

EVE

No.

She tries escaping with the baby but they won't let her out.

ENSEMBLE

Surrender, sacrifice. Don't be selfish.

EVE

I can't...

ENSEMBLE

No husband, no future, no life.

EVE

No life?

ENSEMBLE

For neither bitch nor bastard, bastard nor bitch.

EVE

No learning or loving? No leaving Nottingham?

ENSEMBLE

Never. Unless...

EVE

Yes?

ENSEMBLE

Give her a real family, a married mother and a father, with a future. Your freedom for her freedom.

(they chant)

Nothing nowhere never: Nottingham. Nothing nowhere never: Nottingham!

EVE

No!

Eve impulsively hands her baby to an ensemble member. They quickly encircle the baby. Eve tries to see her but they exit with the child. Long pause.

In the beginning was the catastrophe. They said we couldn't have a life together. They told me I'd forget. They said it would be as if it never happened. They lied.

Eve exits. Moo, Nicki's adopted mother, and Roger, her adopted father, enter the Earth.

MOO

Darling, you didn't know...

ROGER

It's my fault, it's my fault we can't have more children...

MOO

It was the war, radar radiation.

ROGER

What about adoption? There are lots of babies needing proper homes.

MOO

Adoption?

The ensemble member brings the swaddled baby to Moo who takes her in her arms.

ROGER

Look, darling. She's a sweet little thing.

MOO

But where's her mother?

ROGER

You be her mother. "Coo-coo-coo..."

MOO

What happened to her?

ROGER

Her mother couldn't keep her. Look at those big eyes “wurz-el-wurz-el-wurz-el!”

MOO

I don't want our boy to be lonely like I was... I don't want him to be “a lonely only.”
(long pause)

ROGER

Watch this...

ROGER leans into the baby's face and presses
noses.

“Wombat!” Ha-ha, she's smiling.

MOO

You are silly. All right...

(kissing the baby)

She's wonderful.

ROGER

We're very lucky.

Moo and Roger exit happily. Nicki enters the apartment she shares with her boyfriend James in Washington, D.C. She looks at herself in an imaginary mirror, downstage center. She takes a news clipping from her pocket and reads it. Eve enters the Beach, places a flickering candle in the Red Cradle, and tries to commune with Nicki.

NICKI

“Happy birthday to me, Nicki
Happy birthday to Pippa
Happy birthday to whoever I am...”

(staring in the mirror)

Eve? I see you behind my eyes, I see you, I feel you in my heart. Come in, please, Eve. I have big news.

Nicki waves her arms above her head like antennae. Eve also raises her arms trying to receive the message.

I'm coming to find you. I said I would. Are you really an artist? Because I'm a writer, so we're artists together. Is my father really a Jewish businessman named Philip? Are you alive? Hello? Come in, please!

James enters, carrying a guitar case.

Hi!
JAMES

Hi!
NICKI

He dances with her and sings a verse of “*Gonna Tell Everybody I know*” by Keb Mo.

JAMES
“It's no secret, I don't care
Gonna shout it out everywhere
I love my baby, up down high or low
Well I love my baby gonna tell everybody I know.”

Nice earrings.

He kisses her.

Thank you, they're lovely.
NICKI

She sighs, then he sighs.

JAMES
I know there's nothing I can do...

I'm sorry.
NICKI

JAMES
We're not going to fight this year. If you want to go to dinner, we'll go to dinner. If you don't...

(he sighs)
...we can stay here... and *grieve*.

NICKI
Maybe it would get my mind off it. You're so sweet.
(climbs into his lap)

The best.

JAMES
There you go.

NICKI

There's something I've been keeping from you...
(takes out the clipping)

JAMES

What? Someone else?

NICKI

No, silly! You're my one and only.
(they kiss)

JAMES

You're pregnant?

NICKI

Heavens, no. Here goes...

Nicki gives him newspaper clipping to read.

JAMES

“British Government Opens Access to Birth Certificates for Adult Adoptees.” It’s the answer to your prayers, baby! Goodbye, Bad Birthdays!

NICKI

It says I can get my birth certificate.

JAMES

Fantastic!

NICKI

Yeah, terrific.

(bending over double)

Ow...

JAMES

What?

NICKI

I don’t think I can do it...

James brings her gently before the imaginary mirror.

JAMES

See this young lady. On our first date, she said, “I’m adopted and I want to find my birth parents.” Your birth certificate’s going to have names and addresses on it...

Nicki looks in the mirror.

NICKI

It's one thing to want, it's another to walk into the unknown...

JAMES

You have to do this. I'll help you.

NICKI

At boarding school because they put me in with the darker girls, the Liberians and the Catholic girl from Mexico.

JAMES

You were segregated?

NICKI

We didn't mind. We were in the attic away from the headmistress's bedroom. She was a beast and she had the sharpest hearing in the world. I knew my people were out there and one day I was going to find them.

JAMES

I used to *wish* I was adopted.

NICKI

I hate it when people say that. You don't know what you're saying.

JAMES

I know what's like to feel different. I never know what to expect when I came home. One time she'd slit her wrists...

NICKI

Oh, my God, you never told me that.

JAMES

I went as far away as possible for college. I left three weeks early and stayed in a flophouse motel till the dorm opened.

NICKI

Oh, sweetheart...

JAMES

Funny place: quiet during the day but hellish noisy at night. So how do you get this birth certificate?

NICKI

I have to go to England for an interview.

JAMES

Want me to come?

NICKI

What they're going to ask me? Is it pass/fail?

JAMES

You will come back?

NICKI

' course, I will, silly. This is my home.

(looks at news clipping, silence)

What if I can't find them? God, I can't stand thinking about that!

JAMES

You won't know till you try.

NICKI

What if they don't like me?

JAMES

Why wouldn't they like you? You're adorable.

He kisses her then she pulls away.

NICKI

They gave me away...

JAMES

Well, there's that...

NICKI

You know why they say “put *up* for adoption?”

She climbs up on a chair like a slave on the block
and turns slowly so James can see her.

They used to put little kids up on wooden crates so the crowd could see them. They were
looking for field hands and housemaids. “Put up.” It's all in the language.

She jumps down.

JAMES

When I was in school, a few girls got pregnant but they didn't go away, they kept their kids. I never heard of anyone giving her baby up, maybe a sister or an auntie took it...

NICKI

Really?

JAMES

Never. It made life harder but it wasn't a deal breaker. It's not... like that with black folks. Heritage of slavery, I guess. It always seemed like whites make a big deal about "out of wedlock."

NICKI

It's a big deal where I'm from. If I search for my birth parents, and I find them, my adoptive parents may totally freak out.

JAMES

Why?

NICKI

It's disloyal to search.

JAMES

Get out of here!

NICKI

They *are* my only family.

JAMES

No, you have me. Your mom's in Italy, I never met her. Your dad's in Germany, I met him one time. You're not a close family, I hate to break it to you.

She curls up in a ball on the sofa and rocks.

NICKI

Every time I think about telling them my stomach hurts.

JAMES

So don't.

NICKI

(pause)

What if my birth parents are dead?

JAMES

Why would they be dead? You're only twenty-five!
(silence)

NICKI

Maybe my father raped my mother?

JAMES

Oh, for God's sake!

NICKI

It happens, maybe that's why... she didn't keep me...

JAMES

There are a lot of reasons she couldn't keep you...
(pause as he searches for some)
Maybe your father was already married. Or her parents disapproved of him.

NICKI

They always told me, my father was Jewish and my mother was not and that's why they couldn't marry. I'm mixed. My grandmother used to say, "You're not blood." My adopted grandmother. I didn't like her.

JAMES

In America everyone's mixed. I'm Creole, that means I'm Black, Cajun, Cherokee, and Irish.

NICKI

But you know that and you know their faces, I know nothing...

JAMES

You know your birth mother's name and your given name and soon you'll have a real birth certificate.

James takes her to mirror.

From the minute I saw you, I said, "Who's that girl? I want to know her."

NICKI

I wanted to know you too.

JAMES

We're meant for each other.

How do you know? NICKI

I know. JAMES

He hugs her but she pulls away.

I could be your sister. NICKI

You are not my sister! JAMES

You don't know that. NICKI

JAMES
(taking the newspaper clipping)
Find out! 'cause a man like me, fine as I am, does not come along every day.

She kisses his hand.

No, he does not. NICKI

JAMES
You need to go kick some British butt. Mon cherie.

She looks at herself and him in the mirror, holds
the article, and nods.

Maybe they're just like you?

NICKI
You think they love reading and writing and swimming?

JAMES
Music and dancing? We know they like snuggling...

NICKI
Maybe I'm a "Mini-Her?"

JAMES
Or a Mini-Him, or both. They couldn't be complete strangers, you're kin.

NICKI

I never stop thinking about them. I have a homing instinct.

JAMES

Beam her up, Scotty. She's coming home.

NICKI

Yeah. Beam me up. It's time.

Nicki puts the news clipping in the Red Cradle. James exits. Sound of an airplane landing. Nicki enters a British government office for an adoptee screening interview. The interviewing Official may be offstage. Eve passes on the Beach. Nicki senses her nearby.

OFFICIAL

The British Child Adoption Act requires that adult adoptees born before 1975 requesting a copy of their original birth certificate be screened for emotional stability. So before granting your request, I must ask some questions. Why do you want to trace your birth parents?

(silence)

You must answer.

NICKI

I'm curious.

OFFICIAL

About?

NICKI

Why wouldn't I want to trace them? They're my kin

OFFICIAL

(rustle of papers)

I see you have an adoptive brother and sister. Did you have a good upbringing, given the ups and downs of family life?

NICKI

Yes, very good.

OFFICIAL

No drinking, drugs, divorce?

No. NICKI

So why now? OFFICIAL

Because the law changed. I can get my real birth certificate. NICKI

What do you expect to find? OFFICIAL

People who look like me. NICKI

Why is that important? OFFICIAL

Wouldn't it be important to you? NICKI
(rustle of papers)

I see you live in the United States. When did you move? OFFICIAL

My adoptive family emigrated when I was in high school. NICKI

Because? OFFICIAL

My father's job. He's a radar engineer and he got a job working for an American company. NICKI

Do you like the States? OFFICIAL

Yes. NICKI

Better than England? OFFICIAL

NICKI
Well, I... I come back to visit.

OFFICIAL
Whom do you visit?

NICKI
My cousins, and my aunt and uncle.

OFFICIAL
Often?

NICKI
No. I mean, when I can. It's expensive to come.

OFFICIAL
Plan on moving back?

NICKI
No.

(more rustling of papers)

Is that a problem?

(silence)

OFFICIAL
Your birth father's name may not appear on your original birth certificate because he probably wasn't present at your birth. The address on your birth certificate could be where your mother lived at the time or it could be fictitious.

NICKI
May I see my birth certificate?

OFFICIAL
I don't have it.

NICKI
I beg your pardon?

OFFICIAL
You request it at Records downstairs. They'll mail it.

NICKI
To Washington? I'm here. Can't you at least give me the address on it?

OFFICIAL
I don't have it.

NICKI

You could get it. I could call you next week...
(silence)

OFFICIAL

If you search, you may find one or both of your birth parents are dead.

NICKI

What?

OFFICIAL

I'm simply preparing you for possibilities

NICKI

Why would my birth parents be dead? I'm only 25.

OFFICIAL

What would you do?

NICKI

What would you do?

(pause)

When can I order my birth certificate?

OFFICIAL

When I sign this form.

(pause)

What you know about your birth parents?

NICKI

They're both from Nottingham. My father... well, they said, my father was Jewish, a haberdasher, and my mother was an artist.

OFFICIAL

Ha-ha. An artist?

NICKI

Yes, an artist.

(papers rustle and he writes)

OFFICIAL

Take this slip downstairs, they'll collect the fee. Here's my card and the phone number of your agency. There might be a Guardian Ad Litem report prepared by the social worker.

(she takes them)

Call me if you get close, I'll send a caseworker. Saves everyone's feelings that way.
Questions?

Nicki shakes her head. She's relieved to pass "the test" to get her original birth certificate. The Social Worker at the adoption agency enters and shakes Nicki's hand.

SOCIAL WORKER

A Nottingham girl, welcome, welcome. Take a seat. May I get you a cup of tea?

She brings two mugs and they drink.

NICKI

Thank you.

SOCIAL WORKER

Not at all. I did some research after you rang and I have good news and bad news. I'll give you the bad news first. I'm afraid your adoption file was destroyed in a flood ten years ago. Before I came.

(lowering her voice)

I'm very, very sorry. I'm an adoptee myself. Sometimes it's "a flood," sometimes, "a fire." They didn't take very good care of our records...

(resuming her tone)

But here's the good news. The log book survived and from it I can tell you quite a bit.

NICKI

So you have something?

SOCIAL WORKER

Indeed I do.

Social Worker hands Nicki a yellowed index card.

This was our registration before we began automating. You already know your birth mother's name, Eve Wright, and your given name, Pippa, from the adoption order?

Nicki nods. Social Worker reads her notes.

You were born at Nottingham City Hospital on July 25th in 1956. The following day you went with your mother, Eve, to the Balmoral Convalescent Home and you were there together from July 26th to August 11th. You were collected from The Hollies, 8 Maperley Road, on August 25th, your date of placement. The Hollies was a so-called "mother-baby home" run by the town authority but the log book shows your mother wasn't at The Hollies, you were there alone.

NICKI

We spent two weeks together, Eve and me?

Social Worker nods. Nicki is stunned.

SOCIAL WORKER

No one told you that?

(Silence. Nicki shakes her head)

I think someone intervened in your case because someone paid for two weeks' convalescence for you and your mother and that didn't happen often. Your birth father perhaps? Your mother was twenty-three when she had you, did you know that?

(Nicki shakes her head)

And something else. Your mother wasn't known to this agency until a week after your birth. I'd say you were a concealed pregnancy.

NICKI

A what?

SOCIAL WORKER

A concealed pregnancy. Usually young women made plans to relinquish their babies before birth but sometimes they kept them secret and didn't contact us till the hospital referred out. I can't be sure but the late date is a sign.

NICKI

That she kept me secret?

She nods and picks up Nicki's adoption order.

SOCIAL WORKER

May I? It took four months to process the order, and that's about right. The law requires a child be at least six weeks old before formal application can be made.

NICKI

In case she changes her mind?

(SOCIAL WORKER nods silently)

If he gave her money for a convalescent home, why didn't they marry and keep me?

SOCIAL WORKER

What do you know about him?

NICKI

He's Jewish and his family ran a Nottingham haberdashery but I don't know his name, except his first name may Philip because she named me Pippa.

SOCIAL WORKER

Pippa, that's a nice name. The only haberdashery I can think of is Roughton's on Derby Road. I don't know if they're Jewish or not. You might try talking to someone in the Jewish community.

NICKI

Have you searched?

SOCIAL WORKER

Oh, yes. I got my birth certificate the first moment I could. I found my birth mum and together we found my birth dad. I have two half-sisters and two half-brothers. I even have aunts and uncles!

NICKI

How is it with your birth mum?

SOCIAL WORKER

Up and down, I won't lie.

NICKI

What about your adoptive family?

SOCIAL WORKER

Fine. Bit shaky at first, but everyone's getting used to everyone else. Reunion's not a cure-all, but I'll say this, what a difference it makes to know my family! I feel so much more... grounded? I used to feel as if I was floating all the time. So no regrets, none at all. You've applied for your birth certificate, right?

(Nicki nods)

It's too bad you can't get it right away. Do you have plans?

NICKI

I've got an appointment to talk to Canon Ingles at St. Peter's Church. He married my adoptive parents and my adoptive mum said his wife sat on my adoption board. I thought I might be able to shake some information from them. He was a friend of the family.

SOCIAL WORKER

Good luck. Don't be surprised if you hear another school of thought, though, people who say you should leave it alone, be grateful for what you've got. If you meet someone from the Old School, know they mean well but pay no attention to what they say. I know why you have to search. I know why it's important, very important. Good luck.

She hugs Nicki. Nicki meets with Canon Ingles, an old church gentleman.

CANON INGLES

I'm glad you like our new stained glass windows. We're very proud of them. Very proud. They were quite expensive. Now tell me, how is your dear mother?

NICKI

She lives in Italy. My parents are divorced.

CANON INGLES

Italy, my goodness! I remember your grandfather, very respected. The crowd spilled out of St. Peter's Church into the square for his funeral.

NICKI

Canon Ingles, I'm looking for information...

CANON INGLES

Look at our spectacular brasses! Donated from a Norman church from the early eleven hundreds. We're planning to allow rubbings but the brasses can get damaged...

NICKI

...about my adoption!

CANON INGLES

I beg your pardon?

NICKI

I told you, my adoptive mother said you knew my birth mother Eve Wright.

CANON INGLES

Heavens, why would she say that?

NICKI

She said you knew both my families.

CANON INGLES

Dear oh dear, so long ago...

NICKI

Twenty-five years.

NICKI confronts him silently.

I'm not going. Till you tell me.

CANON INGLES

I once met your birth mother's family. My wife was on the committee. Your mother wasn't a Nottingham girl, no, no, been here to school, art student.

(MORE)

CANON INGLES (CONT'D)

I told her parents about a convalescent home, doesn't exist anymore. Wonderful idea, adoption. Without it, the baby suffers.

(whispering)

Your father's people were Jewish...

(takes her hand)

Nothing to worry about, dear. You were a special case, from two good families, no criminals, nothing nasty.

NICKI

Do you know where she went after she had me?

CANON INGLES

Who's that, dear?

NICKI

My mother.

CANON INGLES

Italy, you say?

NICKI

No, my birth mother. What happened to her?

CANON INGLES

I.. I.. I seem to remember she married and went abroad. Heavens, look at the time!

NICKI

I'd like to talk to your wife...

CANON INGLES

She's out I'm afraid...

NICKI

But I saw her...

CANON INGLES

She's gone now.

NICKI

I'll come back tomorrow...

CANON INGLES

She won't remember, you must be going. I'll show you the garden on your way out. We have such lovely gardens in England...

Canon Ingles firmly guides her to the exit. Nicki finds and enters a synagogue where she encounters a Rabbi.

NICKI

Good afternoon. I'm looking for someone.

RABBI

Yes?

NICKI

He... he was uh... Twenty-five years ago he had a local Nottingham haberdashery and he's Jewish.

RABBI

What's his name?

NICKI

Philip something.

RABBI

And the name of the shop?

NICKI

I don't know.

RABBI

Is he a member of this synagogue?

NICKI

I don't know.

RABBI

Any synagogue?

NICKI

I know he's Jewish.

RABBI

Miss, there are thousands of Jews in Nottingham. I'm sorry, I can't help you.

Nicki enters the British Registry Office in London.

She pages through big black public marriage registry books, searching by date for a record of her birth mother's possible marriage.

NICKI

October, November, December, 1956. If she married in England, I'll find her...

She looks in the second and third volumes, running her finger down one column and up another.

January, February, March, 1957. April May June. I must be thorough...

She searches the pages.

Somewhere in these volumes is Eve's married name.

She pages through the fourth volume.

July August September 1957. She would marry, wouldn't she? After giving up a baby? She'd marry and have another baby. That's what I'd do, have another baby

She pages through the fifth volume.

October November December 1957. A chance to do it over. Maybe I have brothers and sisters...

She continues searching. Deep in this volume, she finds what she's looking for.

Here she is! Here she is! I found her!

She writes down the record and returns home with her suitcase. James enters.

James, I found her!

Nicki shows him her notes.

JAMES

"December 1957, Eve Wright marries Brian Goodall, Tyne River Police." This is her?

NICKI

Yes! I ordered her marriage certificate and I got her number from the Newcastle phone book!

JAMES

Let's call.

He reaches for the phone.

NICKI

No! Not yet! I have to plan what to say. I may only get one chance.

JAMES

How about, "Hello, Eve? James Jackson calling from Washington, D.C. My fiance would like to talk to you?"

An official brown envelope flies in.

NICKI

Wait! It's my birth certificate! Oh, my God. Oh my God. You open it.

He opens it and she looks over his shoulder.

He's not there. His name's not there.

She takes the certificate lovingly. JAMES looks at it too.

There is an address...

JAMES

You have the phone number. Why don't you call?

NICKI

I hate talking on the phone, and it's long distance, and it's...

They make dinner together.

JAMES

Why don't you call and get it over with?

NICKI

I wonder if I look like her?

JAMES

Of course you do!

NICKI

Don't laugh if I tell you something.

JAMES

You can't tell someone not to laugh.

NICKI

In my high school graduation picture, I wore an Afro wig.

JAMES

What?!

He doesn't laugh.

NICKI

I look like Angela Davis.

They eat dinner.

JAMES

You thought you were black?

NICKI

No, but everything was different when I got here in '68. Everything, clothes, food, the way you talk... and the only people who made sense to me were the Black Poets. I loved them. Nikki Giovanni, Sonja Sanchez, Amiri Baraka, Don L Lee. They spoke to me. Their struggle for identity. I wanted an identity. I'm a half breed.

JAMES

Don't call yourself that, you're pure You.

NICKI

I never met another Jew till I came to America.

JAMES

Didn't your parents explain?

NICKI

Moo just said her father didn't like the Jews because they were his competition in the wholesale clothing business. They were clueless.

JAMES

Why didn't you ask them?

NICKI

I couldn't. You're not allowed to talk about your past. Once I was playing basketball and someone on the court said, "Jews don't eat pork." I thought, "There are other Jews? And they have a special diet?" It was very confusing because I knew about Anne Frank, I knew if I'd been born 300 miles south and twelve years earlier, I knew what Hitler would have done to me. What I couldn't figure out was what being Jewish had to do with being given away? And Moo said I was swarthy like a gypsy. The gypsies in the marketplace were actually the only people I saw who looked like me so maybe I was a gypsy, not a Jew!

JAMES

Were you attracted to me because I'm black?

NICKI

When I saw you that day at rehearsal.

(shrugs)

I liked you as soon as we met.

Moo enters, looking terrible. Her clothes are disheveled and her head is bandaged. Moo sends Nicki a blue airmail letter.

MOO

Darling Nicki, Darling I'm sorry for the miscommunications. I know you're angry...

NICKI

I'm not angry. You're out there, living your life... if you call that living.

MOO

I've been through hell. That awful car crash, you have no idea. Being a widow in Italy is terrible. They treat you like a servant.

Moo takes a long drink and a drag on a cigarette. Anyway, I'm back in England now. I have a little county-council flat in Norwich. I've an extra bed, it's perfect for visitors...

Silence. Nicki and James continue to eat.

I went to Nottingham last week.

(smoking, coughing, pause)

Your real father's shop's still there. It's called "Minsons" on Upper Parliament Street.

NICKI

What?

(silence)

What did you say?

MOO

Your real father's name is Philip Minson. Come see me, lovey, I'm all alone. I do miss you.

Moo arranges her apartment. Nicki shows the letter to James.

I'm Pippa Wright *Minson!* NICKI

Get outa here! JAMES

I should go back... NICKI

You should. JAMES

But my job? I'm still new, I can't up and... NICKI

This is a family emergency! Your mother may not last. You should be on a plane tonight! JAMES

Ow! NICKI
(bent over with stomach cramps)

No, no, no-no-no-no. JAMES

James brings Nicki in front of an imaginary mirror downstage.
You're going back to England to find your father and your mother, then we're getting engaged. End of story.

But what if... NICKI

You won't know till you try! These are your blood kin... JAMES

My kin. NICKI
(gazing in the mirror)

You want me to come with you? JAMES

You're so good. No, I need to do this myself. NICKI

JAMES

I'm with you no matter what you find. Unless you're my sister...

NICKI

(scribbles a letter)

Dear Moo, I'm coming over, details to follow.

She sends the letter flying to Moo and packs her suitcase. James hovers.

JAMES

Okay, your flight's booked. You taking these papers? Do they drive on the right or the left side of the road?

NICKI

Um, left.

JAMES

You will come back, won't you?

NICKI

Of course, silly.

James hands her money.

(resisting)

No. I'm going to me 'omeland!

JAMES

Take it.

James insists. Nicki takes the money.

A month's a long time. I can meet you?

Nicki kisses him.

NICKI

No. "She who travels farthest, travels alone."

Nicki finishes packing. James exits. Nicki enters Moo's flat with her suitcase. Moo hugs her, takes her bag. Nicki is shocked by her mother's appearance.

MOO

Oo, lovey, you're really here! It's bitter cold outside today.

(mock Midlands English accent)

“Nothing between us and Siberia, aye?” Make yourself comfy. The loo’s down there.

NICKI

What happened to you? Moo, you look... There’s all over the bathroom floor...

MOO

A little tumble... it’s nothing.

Moo hands Nicki a postcard.

Look what my neighbor gave me. Remember the Pearly King and Queen? How they sew pearly buttons all over their costumes and parade up Bow Bells for charity? I'm no Londoner but I always loved the Pearly Kings and Queens. They're brave old souls.

(pause)

Like us, aye, lovey? What about a nice cuppa?

Moo props the card up and serves tea.

Milk and sugar? So glad you've come, we've always been *simpatici*, haven't we?

NICKI

Yes. Yes we have.

MOO

Everyone's dying to meet you at the pub. And look what I got you...

MOO gives NICKI a leopard-print coat, a thrift store find.

Let's see it on.

Nicki models it. It actually looks quite good.

Oo, you're a tasty bundle!

NICKI

It's lovely, thank you.

Nicki sips her tea.

Moo, you know what you said in your letter, about my birth father's shop?

MOO

Top of Upper Parliament Street, I know Nottingham like the back of my hand.

NICKI

Why didn't you tell me before? You knew I was searching.

(silence)

Don't say you didn't remember.

MOO

Your brother and sister won't answer my letters...

NICKI

Do you blame them? Running off like you did? You just left us.

(silence)

You should have told me about Minsons years ago.

MOO

And you would have gone straight to him, and her! Then what would happen to me?

NICKI

So who told you? Because his name's not on any of my papers.

MOO

I don't remember.

(Moo smokes in silence)

Your father and me went to Minsons' shop right after we got you. We wanted to see if we could see him or your grandfather, anyone. So we could tell you someday. He wasn't there but your grandfather was.

NICKI

Did you say anything?

MOO

Oh, no.

(conspiratorially)

I bought a spool of thread.

NICKI

What did he look like?

MOO

An older man, Jewish.

NICKI

What was the shop like? Was anyone else there?

MOO

Just a haberdashery but well thought of in Nottingham. I'd seen someone and that's what was important.

NICKI

Why?

MOO

So you could know where you came from, silly.

Moo stubs out her cigarette. Silence.

NICKI

Upper Parliament Street, evidently.

(pause)

Will you take me there?

MOO

To Minsons?

NICKI

Will you come with me?

Moo pauses, then takes Nicki's hand.

MOO

'course I will, lovey.

They don coats. Moo puts on her mock Midlands accent. Nicki dawdles.

Coom on, duk! It's right up here.

NICKI

I feel a bit sick.

MOO

We'll go in and you ask for Philip Minson. If he's there, I'll nip over to the pub so you can have a private chat. You haven't lost your nerve, have you?

(slipping her arm through Nicki's)

Coom on, duk... Y've nuthing to be afraid of. We've just coom t'buy soom thread.

They see the blue and white shop sign that reads, "MINSONS".

Minsons! There t'is! Just as it's always been.

NICKI

"Minsons: Fabrics, Linens, Curtains. Home of the Minet, Superior Lace Curtains."

MOO

“Nothing ventured, nothing gained.”

NICKI

“Fortune favors the brave.”

Shop Assistant enters, holding a bolt of fabric
and scissors.

SHOP ASSISTANT

May I help you?

MOO

We're looking for Philip Minson.

SHOP ASSISTANT

He's not here, he's up at the factory. May I help you?

NICKI

I really need to speak with Mr. Minson.

MOO

Perhaps you have a phone number?

SHOP ASSISTANT

I'd be happy to ring him...

(reaching for the phone)

NICKI

No! I'd rather have the number, if you don't mind.

SHOP ASSISTANT

Certainly.

Shop Assistant writes the number on a flyer.
Nicki reads it as they leave the shop.

NICKI

“Minsons of Nottingham. For Quality Fabrics and Custom made Curtains, browse through
the LARGEST RANGE OF FABRICS IN THE MIDLANDS.”

That's my people.

Moo slips her arm through Nicki's.

MOO

“What larks, Pip old chap, what larks.” So proud of you.

Moo and Shop Assistant exit. Nicki returns to Moo's apartment and smokes a joint, contemplating the phone number and phone.

MOO

(offstage)

Yoo-hoo!

NICKI

Damn it!

Nicki pinches out the joint and sprays some air freshener. She flicks on the TV and lies on the sofa. TV sounds. Moo enters.

I thought you were going to the pub...

MOO

No one there, no one worth talking to. Cheaper to drink at home.

Moo pours a drink and lights a cigarette. Holding onto the back of a chair, she does tap-and-kick warm-ups, like a Tiller Girl or Radio City Music Hall Rockette.

You should ring him.

Nicki motions for Moo to get out of the way of the TV.

NICKI

I can't see the telly.

MOO

I know you. You've got to call, you want to call.

NICKI

Stop killing yourself with those cigarettes.

MOO

Chalk and cheese, don't change the subject. What about a sherry?

NICKI
I don't want a sherry.

MOO
You'll be in a bad mood till you call.

NICKI
He might not want to talk to me...

MOO
But you're so close.

NICKI
I don't know what to say...

MOO
You'll think of something. "Nothing ventured, nothing gained," "Fortune favors the brave."

NICKI
"When in doubt, don't," "Fools rush in."

MOO
But "Love conquers all!"
(kettle whistles)
That's my kettle. You're a brave soul, lovey. It's what you came for.

NICKI
I came to see you.

MOO
' course you did. I'll be in the kitchen. Sure you don't want a sherry? What about a Valium?

NICKI
No!

MOO
All right, all right.
(conspiratorially and affectionately)
Break a leg, lovey.

Moo exits. Nicki jots down some talking points.

MOO
(offstage)
Everything all right?

NICKI

Fine.

(holding her stomach)

Ow. "She who hesitates is lost."

Nicki dials, phone rings.

Philip Minson, please.... Nicki Burton.... A private matter.

Moo enters.

MOO

Only make the one call today...

NICKI

I'm on the phone!

MOO

Don't call her.

Philip enters and answers the phone.

PHILIP

Hello?

NICKI

Go!

PHILIP

Hello?

Moo exits. Nicki reads but sounds spontaneous.

NICKI

Hello, my name is Nicki Burton. I live in the States and I'm visiting Norwich for a few weeks...

PHILIP

Yes?

NICKI

I was born July 25th, 1956, and adopted.

(pause)

My birth mother's name is Eve Wright and I have reason to believe you may be... my birth father.

Nicki crosses her fingers, tense, breathless.
Philip freezes, like a deer caught in headlights.

PHILIP

(long pause)

What/did/you/say her name was?

NICKI

Eve Wright.

Philip struggles to take a breath.

PHILIP

And/how/old/are you?

Nicki struggles to breathe too.

NICKI

Twenty-five.

(silence)

Philip takes two, deep audible breaths. He is a
man who is sinking into his past.

PHILIP

(whispers)

How did you get my name?

NICKI

A friend.

PHILIP

Who?

Philip realizes no one is listening and speaks
normally.

NICKI

My mother, actually.

PHILIP

You spoke to Eve?

NICKI

No! My adoptive mother. She says you're my birth father. She visited your shop.

Philip holds his chest, stressed.

PHILIP

Was I there?

NICKI

No, your father was.

It gets easier to talk and the story tumbles out.
She didn't say anything, she bought a spool of thread.

Philip can hear himself breathing, slowly
adjusting to being found. He's in a new reality.

PHILIP

What else did she say?

NICKI

Look, can we meet?

PHILIP

Well...

(long pause)

They both breathe into the pause. Philip takes her
hand. Something is about to happen. Nicki
pushes into the breach.

NICKI

I can stop by, on my way to London. Say, eleven-thirty Tuesday?

(long pause)

PHILIP

All right.

Philip lets go of her hand. He is recalculating,
recalculating.... A daughter, from another
lifetime.

I'll... I'll give you... the address of my office...

NICKI

I know where you are. In the Nottingham Lace Market.

Nicki begins to feel triumphant. The shadow of guilt begins to fall over him.

PHILIP

You've gone to some trouble to find me...

NICKI

Yes. I'll see you Tuesday.

PHILIP

Right then...

NICKI

Bye-bye!

PHILIP

Goodbye.

Philip is so shocked, he cannot move.

MOO

(Offstage)

You finished, lovey?

NICKI

Almost.

Phone rings and the Wrong Eve enters, briskly whisking eggs in a mixing bowl. She has a Northern accent. She and Nicki face each other.

WRONG EVE

Hello?

NICKI

I'm trying to reach the former Eve Wright.

WRONG EVE

That's me.

NICKI

My name's Nicki Burton. I live in the States. I was born in Nottingham July 25th, 1956, and I believe you may be my birth mother.

Nicki turns her back terrified and crosses both fingers.

WRONG EVE

(without missing a beat)

Oo, that couldn't possibly be the case.

(long pause)

Nicki swings back around to face her, hyperventilates. This is impossible!

NICKI

Eve Langston Wright of Nottingham?

WRONG EVE

(matter-of-factly)

Oo, no, Eve *Ellsworth* Wright of Prudhoe-on-Tyne. Sorry.

Wrong Eve exits. It's Nicki's turn to be rigid in shock. She holds her chest, panting. Moo enters.

MOO

What did he say? What/did/he/say?

Nicki holds her hand up as she catches her breath, as if she's been running a race.

NICKI

He... didn't remember me...

Her breathing begins to return to normal. She's a little dizzy.

We're meeting up Tuesday.

MOO

Oh, lovey, I'm so proud of you.

Moo hugs Nicki.

I have a good feeling about Philip. Skip the other one.

PHILIP exits. There's a long pause as Nicki recovers her equilibrium. She looks around the room as if she's been transported into a new dimension. Recalibrating, recalibrating...

NICKI

I'll take that sherry, now, if you don't mind.

Moo pours and hands her a glass. Nicki drinks.

I already rang her.

MOO

(arms crossed defensively)

And what did *she* say?

NICKI

It's the wrong Eve Wright. Wrong middle initial.

MOO

What?

Moo grabs the papers in front of Nicki.

You've got her marriage certificate! Birth certificates for her children! How can it be the wrong Eve Wright?

Nicki folds up the wrong papers.

NICKI

Never dreamed there'd be two women with the same name.

Nicki finishes her sherry.

You're safe.

MOO

For now. You'll find her, and that'll be it for me.

NICKI

Moo, honestly! Why do you help me if you don't want me to find them?

MOO

Who else would help you?

NICKI

Oh, cue the bleeding violins!

MOO

I won't be around forever...

Silence. Moo smokes and drains her glass. She hates these feelings, losing her daughter, not being a good mother...

NICKI

Sorry. You've done more than most Mums...

MOO

And less.

A long honest look passes between them. Nicki pours Moo a little more sherry. They clink glasses and drain their glasses together.

NICKI

And who could replace you? You drink too much, smoke too much, and your clothes would frighten the dead.

(Moo gasps)

MOO

After I gave you that nice leopard-y jacket? I'll take it back.

Moo grabs the jacket.

NICKI

No, you won't. It's mine! Give me it!

They fight for the jacket, giggling and coming closer.

It's mine! I love it.

(pause)

I love you, Moo.

MOO

You'd be a fool not to.

Nicki packs her suitcase. Moo watches.

What you going to wear to meet Philip?

Moo holds up the leopard jacket next to Nicki.

Looks lovely with your tan skin...

NICKI

Not for the first meeting ...

Nicki puts on a beige linen jacket and shuts her suitcase.

... but I'll carry it for luck.

Nicki picks up the leopard jacket and places the Pearly King and Queen postcard keepsake in the cradle. Nicki touches her heart as she says goodbye and speaks with a mock Midlands accent.

“Nothing ventured, nothing gained.”

Moo kisses Nicki. Moo knows the stakes are high.

MOO

“Fortune favors the brave,” lovey.

They exit. Philip enters, places a photo of his wife and children on his desk. Nicki enters. They shake hands. It’s the first time they’ve ever met.

PHILIP

Please sit down.

Philip guides her to a chair. He goes to sit behind the desk but changes his mind and sits in a chair close to her.

This only happened once in my life.

(pause)

How did you find me?

NICKI

My adoptive mother...

PHILIP

... in Norwich...

NICKI

She's from Nottingham. She told me my real father's family ran a Jewish haberdashery in Nottingham. I tried finding you but I didn't have your name...

PHILIP

So you...

Nicki’s teeth chatter and she feels cold.

NICKI

So... Moo, my adoptive mother, wrote me out of the blue saying your shop was still there and the name was Minsons.

(pause)

That's the first time... I heard your name.

PHILIP

And you went there?

NICKI

... before I rang...

PHILIP

I thought you were in Norwich?

NICKI

I was here as well.

Philip slowly realizes she's been shadowing him.

PHILIP

So... you went to the shop...

NICKI

They gave me your phone number. A social worker said I should use an "intermediary" but I'm only here another week. I couldn't wait.

PHILIP

Do you know where Eve is?

NICKI

... I thought I did.

Nicki shakes her head. They really look at each other and speak their inner voices.

We're talking.

PHILIP

Yes, we're having a normal conversation.

NICKI

We're not staring.

Nicki gives Philip a little smile. They stare, falling in love.

PHILIP

No, we're not staring.

Philip gets up and looks her over closely.
Is she really my daughter? She has the Minson hairline...

Nicki looks closely at Philip.

NICKI

His nose and eyes are like mine. His hair's curlier... nice. His hands are mine. His skin is dark, that's where I get my color. His mouth... not mine. O, but his eyes, they're the ones behind mine in the mirror!

PHILIP

She looks like my Auntie Rosie.

(pause)

I left her.

NICKI

We're just having a normal conversation.

PHILIP

We're not staring.

NICKI

Not at all.

They resume their outward conversation.

PHILIP

I don't remember a lot about Eve.

NICKI

They said she was an art student.

PHILIP

That's right. And her parents ran a pub, gosh, I haven't thought about that pub in...
(pause)

Nicki is shocked. Barely breathing. Beats pass.
She catches her breath. When she can, she speaks.

NICKI

Twenty-five years.

(awkward pause)

PHILIP

It was outside the city. I used to fetch her Friday nights, we'd go to the movies. It wasn't a great romance, your mother and me...

NICKI

You didn't forced her...

PHILIP

No!

Nicki is relieved.

No, it was definitely mutual attraction. We dated, a few months then we broke up, I don't remember why, she started going out with a friend of mine or I with a friend of hers... I didn't know she was pregnant till she wrote me. It was awkward, I was already engaged to marry someone else. So I told my Dad and... we gave her some money and, well, it was never mentioned again.

NICKI

It.

(pause)

PHILIP

I'm sorry I forgot about you till you rang, I'm really sorry.

Nicki's gutted.

NICKI

You probably don't know... she named me after you, Pippa.

PHILIP

Why did you change it?

NICKI

I was renamed, like a sailing vessel changing hands. Moo told me my father's name was probably Philip.

Moo enters and watches from the Beach. Nicki acknowledges her.

Your name's nowhere on my documents, so "Pippa" was Eve's clue to my paternity. I was like Pip, Dickens' foundling in *Great Expectations*. When Moo and I were out together, just the two of us, she'd sometimes slip her arm through mine and say, "What larks, Pip, old chap, what larks!" She's the only one who ever called me by my real name.

They sit quietly together remembering as with a death, like sitting *shiva*.

Would you like to see some photos?

Philip nods. Nicki lays photos and documents on the desk.

Moo had them. That's me as a baby... that's my brother holding me, he's five years older. His name's Alan. He's their biological child. They couldn't have more.

PHILIP

Alan's my middle name.

NICKI

A-L-A-N?

(Philip nods. Nicki smiles)

...That's my mother and father, Moo and Roger.

Philip picks up the family photo and studies it carefully, especially the man who raised his daughter.

PHILIP

He looks like a nice man, your dad.

NICKI

He is. Tell me about your family...

PHILIP

Well... we're Jews on both sides.

NICKI

We.

PHILIP

Yes, you're one of us. We weren't *very* religious, we went to synagogue, not all the time but regularly. My mother and grandmother kept kosher if you know what that means...

Nicki opens her notebook and takes notes.

PHILIP

Dad's family came to England from Russia around 1900. He's the one who changed our name from Minsky to make us sound more English. My grandmother kept a market stall till she was 87. Oh, she was tough, but she loved you with that same toughness. You would have liked her. My daughter Rebecca's named after her.

NICKI

... Rebecca Minsky.

PHILIP

That's right, she's your great-grandmother. My mother's side is originally from Poland. Her grandfather was Josef Mossef, a Warsaw butcher. I'm afraid those relatives disappeared during the war, at least, no one would talk about it.... Dad and I started Minsons together.

Philip examines his lost child's documents.

What's this?

NICKI

Adoption order, and this is my birth certificate. I only got it a few years ago.

(pause)

Do you have to go back to work?

Philip shakes his head.

PHILIP

I told my assistant you were coming.

(pause)

My wife even dropped by this morning hoping to bump into you.

(silence)

I told her right after you rang, I'll tell my children.... I can't undo the years... but we can move forward best we can.

Philip picks up Nicki's birth certificate. After staring at it for a few beats, he sees something.

That's it. That's the pub!

NICKI

What?

PHILIP

Where Eve lived!

(pause)

Let's go see if we can find her.

NICKI

Now?

Philip gathers her papers and hands them to her.

PHILIP

Why not now?

He squeezes her arm. She is grateful of his support. Philip goes to the Beach as Eve enters. Eve and Moo eye each other. Phone rings. Eve speaks in a clipped London accent.

EVE

I got your letter. The first thing I want to say is... I don't want to get involved in your life...

Nicki crumbles.

...but I am curious. So we should meet if we can arrange it.

(pause, whispering)

I have to be very careful. When are you leaving?

NICKI

Day after tomorrow.

EVE

It will have to be tomorrow. Where?

NICKI

Um... how about ... the Miss Selfridge Coffee Shop.

EVE

Fine. How shall I know you?

NICKI

Um...

(pause)

EVE

What will you be wearing?

NICKI

Oh. A beige linen jacket.

Nicki's stomach pains stab.

How will I know you?

EVE

I shall wear a black jeans jacket.

Eve's stomach hurts too. This could be a very physical scene.

I have blondish hair. I'm not very tall, are you tall?

NICKI

... About normal.

EVE

You live in America.

NICKI

Yes, I'm visiting... relatives.

EVE

What time? Should we meet.

NICKI

Um... Two in the afternoon?

EVE

I shall only be able to stay an hour, I have to pick up my husband at the airport...

Eve's daughter enters.

ANGELA

Mum, Dad didn't leave a check! What am I supposed to do?

Eve jumps and exits with Angela. Nicki's left.
After a pause, the phone rings. Eve re-enters, frazzled.

EVE

I waited till my daughter left but she came back... I almost died. Are we set?

NICKI

Two tomorrow at Miss Selfridge Coffee Shop, Oxford Street.

EVE

Right.

NICKI

So you have a daughter?

EVE

I have three daughters. I never told anyone. It's difficult hearing from you but since you've gone to the trouble, we should meet.

Eve walks away.

NICKI

Oy.

Nicki exits. Eve tries on a sparkly T-shirt in the imaginary downstage mirror. She changes to a plain one that Moo hands to her. Eve brushes her hair, puts on a shiny necklace, tries necklace in, necklace out of her shirt. She puts on her jacket, makes a mean face in the mirror. Applies lipstick. Eyes closed, holding her stomach, she is terrified. Moo smooths Eve's hair.

Eve sits at a table in Miss Selfridge Coffee Shop, lights a cigarette and drinks water. Nicki enters, wearing the beige jacket and a pretty skirt. She spies Eve who's pretending not to look around.

MOO

"Nothing ventured," lovey.

Moo exits. Nicki sits. They stare at each other and speak their inner voices.

EVE

She looks exactly like him, she doesn't look a bit like me... I'm going to be sick...

Eve doubles over her stomach. Nicki gets up and walks around Eve, fascinated.

NICKI

She's younger than Moo... Her hair's like mine... Do we look alike?

(staring at Eve)

She's my mother... my mother!

EVE

This is a mistake.

Nicki sits. They begin their outward conversation.

NICKI

Philip helped me find your address. He said... you'd done well for herself.

EVE

No thanks to him.

(silence)

What else did he say?

NICKI

By the time he knew you were pregnant, he was engaged to someone else...

EVE

A Jewish girl.

NICKI

He didn't say that.

EVE

Of course.

(silence)

NICKI

He paid your expenses.

EVE

It wasn't like that.

Long silence as Eve folds her arms without elaborating. Nicki waits. Eve eventually relents.

It was the Fifties... puritanical... I never fit in. David Lodge wrote a good novel called *How Far Can You Go?* I thought, that's exactly how it was - sex and guilt and guilt and sex, then a baby.

(pause)

I wasn't promiscuous but I always had boyfriends, was always falling in love. Sensual. I was far happier in the Sixties, I can tell you....

Silence. Eve smokes. Nicki waits.

Philip was the eldest son from a conservative Jewish family. His mother would have *died* rather than have me marry him, so yes, his family paid the bills but I never heard from him. Ever. He completely abandoned us.

(silence)

When you were born, I looked at you and thought, "There lies a perfect stranger."

Eve stubs out her cigarette and looks away. She lights another, offers Nicki the pack.

NICKI

No, thanks. I quit a few years ago. I was a hopeless fiend.

EVE

So: good discipline. I never had much discipline.

(silence)

I always think of you on your birthday, July 25.

NICKI

I knew it.

EVE

You're twenty-five. I have a friend. Her daughter has the same birthday and I always give her presents. Once she asked me, "Eve, why do you remember my birthday?"

NICKI

You give her presents, on my birthday.

Eve doesn't notice Nicki's feelings.

EVE

And I make pilgrimages. Last year I went to the frescoes of Fra Angelico in Florence.

NICKI

I lived in Italy... I've seen them.

EVE

Curious.

(silence)

My husband goes to America on business sometimes. We took the children one summer to the seaside.

NICKI

Where?

EVE

North Carolina.

NICKI

Was it Nag's Head?

EVE

How do you know?

NICKI

When were you there?

(Eve thinks)

EVE

Two years ago. For the big fireworks.

NICKI

Two years ago July... I was there! We could've passed each other on the beach!

EVE is rattled and knocks over her water. Much mopping up.

NICKI

Here let me...

EVE

No, I've got it. Stop!

(she finishes mopping. silence)

How do you spend your time? Do you work? You're not married.

NICKI

I have a boyfriend. I write for a government agency. I'm a playwright as well for a small company.

EVE

Do you act?

NICKI

Sometimes. But writing's my true love.

EVE

You'd do well in the movies with looks like yours. You'd stand right out from the back row.

Nicki accepts the first complement she's ever received from her mother.

NICKI

I'm thinking about going back to school... finish my degree. In literature.

EVE

I *love* American literature! Not so much the colonials, but Emerson, Whitman, James, Wharton, I couldn't live without them....

(pause)

(MORE)

EVE (CONTD)

Of my three daughters, one writes, one paints, and the other prefers business like her father.

Eve obliviously drops these bombs.

NICKI

You were an art student.

EVE

Yes. London Art College. I didn't finish my program but I've painted ever since, probably not very well.

NICKI

Did you ever work... you know, a job?

EVE

Not really.... I had you and.... It wasn't a very happy patch in my life.

(silence)

... a few years later, I was engaged...

(ironically)

...to the love of my life. We were planning to get marry then he left me for someone else. I was pregnant again and I told myself, "Eve, you can't go around leaving babies all over the place," so I kept her, my daughter Angela.

NICKI

You kept her.

EVE

Yes and when she was four I met Thomas and he fell for both of us. We had two more daughters. Angela writes. Juliet's the painter. Marianne likes business.

(silence)

I could give you a friend's address. We could write...

(pause)

Get to know each other....

(silence)

NICKI

The agency told me we spent two weeks together at a convalescent home. Were you waiting for Philip to come? Did you think about changing your mind?

(silence)

Did you know I spent the next two weeks in a house run by the town authority called The Hollies. Waiting.

(silence)

(MORE)

NICKI (CONT'D)

Did you ever come... check on me there?

(silence)

EVE

I don't know anything about that.

NICKI

When was I born?

(silence)

What *time* was I born?

EVE

Why do you want to know that?

NICKI

I want to get my horoscope done.

EVE

You believe that nonsense? How appalling!

(silence)

It was morning, eleven... I don't remember.

NICKI

You were twenty three, so now you are...

EVE

Age has never been important to me. I had my forty-ninth birthday Monday.

NICKI

Can I take your picture?

EVE

No! I look absolutely dreadful in photographs.

(silence)

One of my daughters took some that aren't too hideous... I'll send one.

Eve checks the time and stands.

I must go.

Nicki stands. In silence, Eve straightens Nicki's collar and touches and smooths Nicki's shoulders.

This is the first time she's let herself touch her daughter since she relinquished her, twenty-five years ago. Eve tries to squash her feelings but it's hard.

You look like you had a nice, middle-classish upbringing...

(silence)

Eve's inner thoughts break through.

She's alive.

(To Nicki)

Something in brown wool perhaps, to warm you in those fierce American winters.

(pause)

Things were different when I had you. Then I was married. What was I supposed to do?

Nicki's inner thoughts.

NICKI

A brown wool jacket! To keep me warm!

EVE

I'll never leave you again.

As Eve tries to leave, Nicki holds Eve tightly.

NICKI

Don't go... not yet.

Eve breaks away and exits.

ACT 2: BLENDING FAMILIES

Solemn bells ring as a black paper airplane flies across the stage. Nicki and James enter dressed in black. Philip enters and embraces Nicki, and shakes hands with James in a hotel bar. Eve enters and listens from the Beach.

PHILIP

Had your Mum been ill?

NICKI

She was a drinker.

PHILIP

I'm so sorry.

NICKI

We were close, in our way.

PHILIP

She'll watch over you, be sure of that. My Dad died years ago from cancer but I still think about him.

JAMES

My Mom's long gone, I think about her all the time.

PHILIP

That's right. When we think about them, they keep an eye on us, that's what I believe. Will you come meet Averill and the children this time?

NICKI

I can't.

PHILIP

But it's Passover...

NICKI

My Dad's upstairs. We're having dinner tonight with Moo's best friend and Daddy's driving us back to London tomorrow.

PHILIP

You could bring him?

NICKI

Philip, I just buried my mother!

PHILIP

I'm sorry...

NICKI

I can't have my Dad meet you right now and I can't dump him, not after all he's done, the funeral, everything. They'd been divorced for years.

PHILIP

Another time.

NICKI

I want to come but...

JAMES

Philip's right, another time.

NICKI

If it were just us, of course we'd come. Please tell me how everyone is.

PHILIP

The children are five and three, growing and happy. I brought you this.

(hands her a photo)

Business is tough but we manage. And your life together, are you happy?

NICKI

Yes.

PHILIP

You're taking good care of her?

JAMES

Of course.

PHILIP

Will you see Eve ?

NICKI

I don't know. She didn't answer my letter and I can't call her. She hasn't told her husband.

PHILIP

That must be difficult.

NICKI

She writes to me.

PHILIP

That's good. I'm afraid I'm not much of a correspondent but I'm always thinking of you, I just can't put pen to paper, don't know why. I'm not much of a father for a writer...

NICKI

You have other qualities.

(checking the time)

We should ...

Philip drinks up and stands.

PHILIP

Promise you'll come stay next time?

NICKI

I promise.

PHILIP

Bring her back soon, James. We never know what tomorrow brings.

Philip hugs Nicki, shakes James' hand, and exits. James struggles to drink an enormous glass of dark beer.

JAMES

I can't finish this.

NICKI

I told you, order "a half pint," silly, not "a glass!" We're meeting Daddy and Anne at the bar in five minutes.

JAMES

Damn foreign country.

NICKI

What?!

James exits. Eve enters in yoga clothes. Nicki and Eve each unroll mats.

The yoga sequences are vigorous and choreographed (poses listed are suggestions only.) The routine may begin with partner poses, rowing, pushing away and pulling together. A phone rings.

EVE

Are you in London? What are you doing?

NICKI

Yoga.

EVE

I imagine you're quite health conscious. I do yoga myself. Listen, I'm afraid I can't see you at the moment, my daughter's going back to Oxford and I'm terribly busy.

Nicki takes Warrior 1 pose, angry. Eve takes the same pose.

While you're here, though, do see the exhibit of the old Spaniards at the National, it's superb. I sent you a novel last week, by the way, *The Wanderer* by Alain-Fournier. If you haven't read it you should have done by age seventeen!

NICKI

You won't see me?

(no response)

Nicki rolls up her mat and lays it out at home. Takes Warrior 2 pose. Eve positions a Red Post Box on stage and mails Nicki a letter and a silk scarf and some drawings in a tube. She returns to her mat in Warrior 2. Dead Moo, dressed in black dance clothes, does Radio City Music Hall Rockette/Tiller Girl warm-ups and watches.

EVE

These line studies are from Regents Park. Thanks for your letter. You sound good. I think of you with affection. One day I'll write a proper letter.

Eve switches to the other side of Warrior 2 then Warrior 3. Nicki puts on the scarf and hangs up Eve's art. She mails Eve a letter then takes Warrior 3.

NICKI

Thanks for the lovely scarf. Also your art. You must have loads of patience for all that detailed drawing.

They switch to opposite sides of the pose, facing each other in Tree Pose.

I like sharing with you. Though I wish I wasn't your secret.

EVE

It has to be that way.

NICKI

I'm writing my adoption search as a Toastmasters speech, my icebreaker. Would you like to read it? I changed names, of course.

Eve topples out of the pose. Nicki switches sides in Tree Pose. Eve tries again but wobbles and falls.

EVE

Nicki, I like you. But I cannot help but resent, that's not quite the right word... I resent your intruding into my privacy. Except that I understand completely your need to search and hopefully discover... but I would *not* like to read about that search.

Nicki's turn to fall out of the pose. They both take Mountain Pose with mudra hands.

NICKI

We can never talk about the past?

Nicki and Eve continue yoga. Dead Moo approaches Eve with curiosity, possibly trying a yoga pose herself.

EVE

They told me I'd forget.

NICKI

Well, I didn't forget. You didn't forget me, did you?

EVE

Of course, I didn't. We can't talk about it.

NICKI

But why? You know, bottling it all up can't be good...

EVE

I won't do it!

NICKI

I remember when you left me.

EVE

That's impossible.

NICKI

It's true.

EVE

You were only a baby. You couldn't possibly...

NICKI

Babies have feelings, and I do remember.

EVE

You had a mother, another mother...

NICKI

... I cried and cried and cried.

EVE

I won't do this!

NICKI

I was angry she wasn't you.

Eve rolls up her yoga mat.

Don't go. I'm sorry, I don't want anything. I have a job, I have a life, I have money...

Nicki grabs Eve.

EVE

No.

NICKI

I just want to be friends. You said yourself, things are different now...

EVE

I'm a very private person and I intend to stay that way.

Eve pulls away. Nicki rolls up her mat in frustration. Eve reaches out to touch her but Nicki growls at her and pulls away.

I'll never leave you again.

NICKI

You're crazy. I'm glad I didn't grow up with you. I'm not writing to you anymore. That's it.

Nicki moves away. Eve follows and they make physical contact for ten beats, leaning in, back-to-back, Eve even holds her.

EVE

I won't write either.

(five more beats)

NICKI

Fine. Finished!

Nicki exits. Eve works on a large, angry painting with black and red paint. After Eve finishes, Dead Moo drapes a glittery blue shawl around Eve's shoulders, whispers in her ear, and exits. Angela, Nicki's younger half-sister, enters.

ANGELA

We're finished. Done!

Eve drapes the shawl gently over the cradle, dons a baseball cap, and draws on the angry painting. A mother-and-child study take shape.

EVE

Boyfriend not obeying instructions again?

ANGELA

We're supposed to be saving for the States.

EVE

You can't mold people to your will. You can try but you'll be disappointed.

ANGELA

I can't wait forever, I'm twenty-one!

Ancient.

EVE

You don't understand.

ANGELA

I do, you want to go to America and he's frittering away his lolly when he said he'd save.

EVE

There's no future here. Job situation's pathetic even with a degree and the weather's miserable.

ANGELA

Hear-hear. It's not that we don't want you to explore...

EVE

It's not about exploring, it's about *living*.

ANGELA

Quite.

EVE

When I have five or six hundred pounds, plus airfare, I'm gone.

ANGELA

Where will you go?

EVE

New York, New Orleans, California. We were going to buy a van... I suppose I'll sort out public transport.

ANGELA

I think it's all about cars in America.

EVE

Then I'll buy a secondhand car. G'night, Mum.

ANGELA

Angie, wait.

EVE

Angela kisses Eve.

EVE

Eve takes Angela's hand.

I'm knackered.

ANGELA

Have you really, really made up your mind?

EVE

What did I just say?

ANGELA

...because, I might know someone...

EVE

One of Dad's friends?

ANGELA

No. But you must keep it secret...

EVE

You and your secrets!

ANGELA

You must *promise*.

EVE

Eve waits. Angela relents, crosses her heart.

ANGELA

Cross my heart and hope to die if I tell a lie. What?

EVE

When I was about your age...

Eve wraps herself in the blue shawl.

ANGELA

Stop torturing me!

EVE

I gave a baby up for adoption.

ANGELA

Ha-ha.

EVE

He wouldn't marry me. I had no choice...

ANGELA

What are you talking about?

EVE

You can't tell anyone, especially not your father.

ANGELA

You had a baby? Before me? Seriously?

Eve nods.

Dad doesn't know?

Eve shakes her head.

What about Granny?

Eve shakes her head. Angela gasps.

You didn't tell your own mother?

EVE

I couldn't.

ANGELA

She would've helped!

EVE

I know. I told one friend and then I told your biological father...

ANGELA

And he still dumped you.

EVE nods.

EVE

Bastard.

ANGELA

So who's this person in the States?

EVE

Your sister.

ANGELA

What? You're blowing my mind!

EVE

Nice to think I still can.

ANGELA

If anyone can, it's you. Have you met her?

Eve nods.

When?

EVE

A few years ago.

ANGELA

A few *years* ago? ' course, everything's "private." Got any other kids around, any Greeks?

EVE

Don't be rude. It had to be secret.

ANGELA

Why?

EVE

Today if you get pregnant, you can keep the baby or have an abortion, it's up to you. My whole life would have been over, and not just mine, hers as well. We were ruined. At least that's how it looked at 23...

Eve smokes.

My parents had the pub, my granddad worked in the mines. I had no intention of getting stuck my whole life in the Midlands. I'd already been to Art College in London, I was getting out.

ANGELA

What's her name?

EVE

Nicki.

ANGELA

Who's her father?

EVE turns away.

Look, you dropped this bombshell...

EVE

Philip! I knew him from high school. Another bastard.

ANGELA
Has Nicki met him?

EVE
This is not a carte blanche into my private life!

ANGELA
Has/she/met/her/father?

EVE
Yes!

ANGELA
What's she like?

EVE
Discrete.

ANGELA
Mum, what's she like? Have you got a picture?

EVE
No. Well, somewhere. We have to be *extremely* careful...

ANGELA
What's she do? Where's she live?

EVE
She lives in Washington, D.C. She's a writer too. She likes to travel. She sends me letters.

ANGELA
Can I read them? Is she English or American? How did she get there?

EVE
I'll give you her address and she can tell her own story.

ANGELA
Does she know about me?

EVE
In broad strokes.

ANGELA
She knows you have three other daughters?

Yes!

EVE

Why would she want to help me?

ANGELA

Eve caresses Angela's hair and embraces her.

Perhaps you can help each other.

EVE

Nicki enters. Eve mails her a letter.

If I said I love the sculptures of Donatello and the novels of the great Russians, and Faulkner and Bashevis Singer and Dickens... If I said Greece was in my soul and the Greek language moves me as no other... If I could quote Hopkins and too much Eliot, doesn't that tell you more about me than the color of my eyes, the shape of my legs, or the arrangement of the room in which I stand?

NICKI

If I said all I want is a life together, yes, I want to know the color of your eyes, the shape of your legs, the scent of your skin. I don't care which books you love as long as you love books. Of course, I'll take anything.

Anything?

EVE

Anything.

NICKI

Angela mails Nicki a letter and jumps up on a chair. Initially, she holds a frame around her face and smiles like the enclosed photo. Eve resumes painting.

ANGELA

Dear Nicki - Who the hell is this? I know it's bizarre, but I'm Angela, your half-sister. And this situation only occurs in soap operas.

James...

NICKI

ANGELA

Mum shared her secret, partly because my parental situation is also strange...

NICKI

James!

James enters. Nicki shows him Angela. Eve exits.

JAMES

Holy cow!

ANGELA

... and partly because I'm considering moving to the States.

Nicki and James pull up chairs and listen as Angela's audience.

I'm the product of a love affair between Mum and a professor. After she was pregnant, he left to marry another woman.

Nicki and James look at each other and boo loudly.

This time, she told her parents and they helped her and when I was four, Mum married Thomas, an eligible bachelor.

JAMES

Yes!

ANGELA

They met through friends in a little seaside town where we lived in a stone cottage. I know that sounds like a fairy tale but it's true! Mum and Thomas had my sisters, Marianne and Juliet, they're eighteen and sixteen, and they're your sisters too.

NICKI

Yay!

ANGELA

I'm the only one who knows about you and Mum wants it kept that way.

Nicki and James boo.

At least for now. One day, I hope she'll tell Dad and we can tell our sisters, they'd find this very intriguing. It's strange you should have to discover your real parents as well. Mum refused to tell me anything about my birth father so I was forced to take the pose of a detective. I found out he is the University President living not one mile from our house!

JAMES

Whoa, Bessie!

ANGELA

I know, I don't want to meet him though. He and Mum were together *seven years* before he dumped her. I have a father, it's Thomas. As for you and me, I don't want to intrude, you must be honest.

Nicki claps.

I just graduated from London University in French and German. I'm looking for a proper job but with millions unemployed, England's hopeless so I'm saving to travel around America, it's been my dream forever. Would you give me some entry tips? You are English, aren't you? I look forward to hearing from you.

Angela jumps down and sits in her chair.

NICKI

Do you think Eve's going to tell?

JAMES

Nope. But a new sister, that's something! Take her picture to work, show her around.

Nicki gazes at the photo. JAMES picks up the envelope and examines it.

Jeez Louise, you have the same handwriting. Oh baby, don't cry...

NICKI

I'm so happy! My sister!

NPR Morning Edition theme music. Nicki waves a paper form in the air.

Her application... for the immigration lottery, the one on the radio. You said we should help her.

JAMES

A lottery?

NICKI

"You gotta play to win." I already love her, we talk on the phone, we write letters...

JAMES

Baby, come here.

Nicki sits in his lap.

When you found your parents, I thought, great. Now you've got your family, everything's straightened out, we can move on. I didn't expect... sisters and brothers and nieces and nephews and...

NICKI

She's part of my family.

JAMES

I know. But I thought... I thought you'd get closure, and we could live happily ever after.

NICKI

Closure?! What makes you think I wanted "closure?" I've had "closed" my whole life. I want "opensure!" That's not even a word but it should be.

JAMES

This is complicated.

NICKI

Tell/me/about it!

(pause)

Did you say "happily ever after?"

JAMES

I did...

James tears a strip of paper wraps it around her finger.

...as in, "Will you marry me and live..."

NICKI

Wait, that's the form!

JAMES

Marry me before more relatives show up!

NICKI

Ha-ha. I will.

Angela jumps up on her chair.

Oh, she's back! Tape me up, baby. Tape me up.

James tapes her paper ring and Nicki shows it to Angela.

Look!

ANGELA

Congratulations! My day out at the American Embassy was a hundred and fifty quid so you know it's serious. I have to use my visa soon so I could pop over October, if that's convenient? I'm so happy about you and James. Save me a place among the bridesmaids.

Angela gets down from her chair.

JAMES

Your sister did not score a Green Card!

NICKI

She's coming! She's coming...

Angela arrives with a suitcase, maybe into a spotlight. Nicki and Angela meet for the first time, dressed alike in red sweaters and gray jackets. They hold hands and stare for ten beats.

ANGELA

You're the spitting image of Mum.

NICKI

Am I?

ANGELA

God, yes!

Angela circles Nicki, and Nicki touches Angela's hair. James clears his throat.

NICKI

May I present my beloved?

JAMES

Welcome to America, Sister.

James hugs Angela, carries her suitcase home, and exits. Angela hands Nicki a tissue-wrapped photo album.

ANGELA

I had to plunder the shoeboxes. Mum hates having her photo taken.

They leaf through the annotated album as Angela narrates.

Told you, spitting image. That's her at your age.

NICKI

Wow. Is that you in your pram?

(Angela nods)

So cute.

ANGELA

This could be you but it's Mum. Here's Thomas, looking uptight on the beach.

NICKI

I love the beach.

ANGELA

Me too. Here's our cottage where we lived before she met Thomas. We still keep it for weekends. It's on the North Sea. The beach is a stone shingle. Mum swam almost every morning when I was growing up.

NICKI

Brrr, in the North Sea?

ANGELA

(swimming motion)

She'd swim up the glimmering carpet of stars the sun laid on the water. She called it, "swimming up the sun."

NICKI

What a lovely image.

ANGELA

And bloody freezing!

NICKI

My uncle Neil paid me to swim in the Channel with him in Brighton in the winter. Brr! I always did it for the money though.

ANGELA

Is that where you grew up, Brighton?

NICKI

No, that's where my cousins live and my aunt and uncle. My dad was in the Royal Air Force so we moved all the time.

ANGELA

This is Juliet and Marianne. There's Granny, that's Eve's Mum. This one's taken in Greece. Mum loves Greece, we all do. Your own family album, at last.

Nicki hugs Angela.

NICKI

What was it like growing up with her?

ANGELA

She's not the huggy-lovey type. She can be moody, bit self-centered, but she took good care of us, sewed our dresses, made us dollies. And she's a fabulous cook. They sent us to good schools. ' course, she's very arty, and we went to so many galleries and plays growing up, we got sick of it. What was your growing up like?

NICKI

I have an older brother and a younger sister. I'm closer to him than her. She's adopted too. He and I both went to boarding schools because we moved so much so at home, I was always chasing after him, riding bikes, climbing trees, swimming. My family had an old river cruiser we took up the Thames in summers. Not much of a holiday for Moo but we loved it, living on the river. Moo died three years ago. I really miss her.

ANGELA

I can't imagine losing Mum. What about your Dad?

NICKI

He's an engineer. He's a good person, a good provider, but he was married to his work growing up, and his work is secret, you know, Cold Warrior. Between boarding school and that, I didn't see much of him. We're closer now. I think I appreciate him more in my ripe old age! What about your Dad?

ANGELA

He's a proper English gentleman. Grew up wealthy, butlers, that kind of thing. Then he went into the family textile business but he's a culture-culture at heart, he can't help it, so he was really attracted to Mum. She's such a boho. They're a funny pair but it works.

NICKI

So why's she afraid to tell him?

ANGELA

I wouldn't say she's afraid. Well, maybe. She's always been super-secretive, super private. I suppose you're why.

She takes a doll from her suitcase.

I want you to have my dolly. Mum used to tuck her in beside me and kiss us both good night.

Angela places the doll in Nicki's arms.

NICKI

To keep while you're on your American odyssey?

ANGELA

No. She's yours.

NICKI

But she's *your* dolly...

ANGELA

Mum named her "Pippa." She made her when I was very young.

NICKI

"Pippa?"

ANGELA

In a funny way we grew up together. Lots of things are starting to make sense now.

Silence. Angela closes her suitcase, ready to leave.

NICKI

It's a big country, Sister. Don't forget to send me a postcard.

ANGELA

I promise.

Angela kisses Nicki and Pippa the Doll and exits. Nicki rocks the baby and resumes writing. Eve enters, paints, and mails Nicki a letter.

EVE

Heard anything?

NICKI

She's in Florida. I sent you my new play. What are you working on?

Nicki tries to see Eve's art but Eve shields it. Eve mails her a wrapped book that Nicki opens.

EVE

The best cookbook ever. Our favorites are Mishmishiya Chicken, and Orange & Almond Cake. Where she is now?

NICKI

Don't know. When things are good, she sends me postcards, and when they're not, nothing.

EVE

She's like that.

NICKI

I'm sure she's having the time of her life.

Nicki puts the dol in the cradle and assembles a manuscript on the floor.

EVE

When you're a mother, you'll understand.

Eve sends Nicki a package.
These books are by Patrick Leigh Fermor, tremendous travel writer.

NICKI

Understand what?

(silence)

Eve sends another package.

EVE

Peter Brook's *Theatrical Casebook*.

NICKI

Thank you for the books. What will I understand?
(pause)

EVE

Worry. That we can't help thinking about our children. Even when they're grown. Even when we're working. We want them to be happy and safe. We want to...

(MORE)

EVE (CONTD)

stop their hearts from breaking... stupid, really. Your new play is intriguing. Knowing nothing about the Environment, I'm sure it will be a megahit in the West End!

NICKI

She's in Baton Rouge, actually Back Brusly [pronounced Broo-ley], not Brusly proper, mind you, Back Brusly, on the bayou. She's waitressing in a fancy French restaurant, got that French degree working for her. And she's dating a Californian. I'm... looking forward to seeing you in England next month...

EVE

Yes, I look forward to seeing you and meeting your James.

Nicki packs her suitcase. Angela enters.

NICKI

We're finally going to see her!

Angela takes the suitcase.

ANGELA

I have bad news, I'm sorry. She's got breast cancer. She's going in for surgery this week.... She didn't even tell Dad. She went off on a painting trip to Italy and came back and said, "By the way, I'm having surgery tomorrow." She's like that. I'm already in London to take care of her.

NICKI

Oh.

Enter James, the three meet in a London cafe.

JAMES

How's Eve? Did the surgery go well?

ANGELA

She's wobbly but better each day.

NICKI

Is there some way I can help?

ANGELA

Keep sending good vibrations.

NICKI

Perhaps by the end of our visit we could meet up?

ANGELA

Don't think so.

NICKI

But why? I'm only here every few years. Couldn't I at least call?

ANGELA

Awkward, with everyone around.

JAMES

(takes Nicki's hand)

Tell her we're sorry and wish her a speedy recovery. We're going to Nottingham tomorrow to stay with Philip tomorrow, then down to Brighton for the cousins so I'm not sure we'd have time.

NICKI

I'd make time.

Angela takes a package from Nicki.

ANGELA

I'll give Mum your love and the books.

Angela exits.

JAMES

I hate it when you beg.

NICKI

She's ashamed of me!

JAMES

She's sick.

NICKI

She's hiding!

JAMES

That's how she is.

NICKI

Why does she send her favorite recipes and her paintings and travel books and refuse to ever see me?

JAMES

I don't think it has anything to do with you.

NICKI

How can you say that? It has everything to do with me.

JAMES

I know your mother. I haven't met her but I know her and she's not going to change.

NICKI

I hate London. I'm not coming back again.

JAMES

She plays games with you.

NICKI

I'm not playing.

James kisses Nicki.

JAMES

She doesn't see how it affects all of us.

NICKI

Selfish to the core.

JAMES

At least we'll see your father.

Sounds of train brakes, doors slamming as they arrive in Nottingham. Enter Philip in riding gear. Train whistle. Philip hugs Nicki and greets Jim.

PHILIP

Hello-ello! The others are out riding. Would you like to take a ride this afternoon?

JAMES

On horses?

PHILIP

They're very gentle...

NICKI

James isn't really a rider but I'd love to!

PHILIP

You sure?

JAMES

Very sure.

PHILIP

Then make yourself at home. The dogs will keep you company till we get back. You don't mind being abandoned?

JAMES

No, enjoy yourselves. Tally ho!

James takes pictures as Philip and Nicki mount
"horses" on stool. James exits.

NICKI

This is perfect. Thank you.

PHILIP

It is lovely isn't it? Beautiful countryside.

(looking at countryside, perhaps projected)

I've had a few health problems since I saw you last, a heart attack and a stroke...

NICKI

But you look so healthy...

PHILIP

... I'm fine now, no need to worry.

NICKI

I've been wanting to visit, it's not your fault I haven't come. I keep waiting for Eve.

PHILIP

For what?

NICKI

For her to tell her husband, come out of the closet! It's frustrating.

PHILIP

I'm sorry.

NICKI

I wish you could tell her that. It might help.

(pointed silence)

(MORE)

NICKI (CONT'D)

She's still traumatized, you know. It's in her paintings. My sister showed me some with marauding devils and dark-skinned satyrs, and blond-haired women hiding terrified. Full of fear and shame.

PHILIP

You *are* your mother's daughter.

NICKI

You should tell her that!

(silence)

PHILIP

You like to ride, don't you?

NICKI

Always did.

PHILIP

Perhaps you get that from me. Philip means "lover of horses." Riding's how Averill and I met, and now our daughter Becca show jumps. She's a better rider than both of us.

(silence)

NICKI

I've started exploring Judaism.

PHILIP

Have you?

NICKI

Yeah. Ha-ha. It's a tough nut to crack.

PHILIP

How so?

NICKI

For one, it's in a foreign language with another alphabet, and two...

(pause)

My non-Jewish mother.

(silence)

You won't talk about that, will you?

PHILIP

I'm sorry.

NICKI

End of the road. No one will talk about anything. Why didn't you marry her?

PHILIP

I was already...

NICKI

I know that. But something changed, I came into existence, I was real. I *am* real. You didn't want to believe her, you didn't want to inconvenience yourself. Or have people angry with you. I get that. So you dumped us?

PHILIP

It wasn't quite...

NICKI

Yes, it was! We've paid a terrible price.

PHILIP

I'm sorry.

NICKI

What are you sorry for? What aspect of our experience has penetrated your first-born male mantle? I think Judaism wanted us outcasts to crumble to dust and blow away. We didn't blow away. We were pushed.

PHILIP

You think I should talk to her.

NICKI

Yes, I think you should apologize. With specifics. From the heart. That's what I'd want.

PHILIP

I'll have to think about it.

NICKI

Don't wait too long. "We never know what tomorrow brings."

Philip nods.

PHILIP

You could convert, you know. Averill converted when we married.

NICKI

She did?

PHILIP

We're Reform. The children go to Hebrew School, we observe holidays. Do you and James want children?

NICKI

I don't know. Maybe.

PHILIP

Perhaps you'll bring us a grandchild on your next visit.

PHILIP winks at her.

I will think about Eve.

They dismount at home and Philip looks around. They're in the field feeding the ponies. James is taking pictures. Come on, I'll show you to your room.

Philip brings Nicki's suitcase to the guest room.

I hope you'll be comfy.

Philip exits. Lights dim. The clatter of dishes and dinner chatter fade to quiet at bedtime. Nicki, in a bathrobe, tiptoes and gazes at a gallery of family photos, perhaps projected.

NICKI

Young Philip in a black beret, what a familiar face! And this handsome young man in swim trunks, is this my father? Look at the Polish sisters in their party dresses, their dapper husbands in bowler hats. Who's this elegant lady with the bee-stung lips? Dare I claim them? I shall photograph them like a spy.

Nicki photographs the photographs in the moonlight and returns to her bed.

To sleep in my father's house...

(closing her eyes)

I am falling asleep in my father's house.

Nicki dreams. Sounds of the sea. Eve enters the Beach and rinses a paintbrush in a jar of water.

EVE

I don't have what you want.

NICKI

You do.

Eve sets up a still life with Pippa the Doll, the Pearly King and Queen card, and a candle on Red Cradle, and paints.

EVE

No, I don't. I have nothing. You just keep calling me to your side.
(pause)

NICKI

I can't help it. You're my heart's desire.

EVE

It's not possible.

NICKI

Anything is possible!

(silence)

We could walk the streets of Amsterdam together. See the old Dutch Masters at the Rijkmuseum. We could argue in cafes over books and plays, and have mother-daughter days. I wish we could visit Greece, I've never been.

Eve puts on the scarf Moo gave her.

EVE

You should go.

NICKI

I wish you'd brush my hair... I didn't mean to say that.

EVE

I wish I were free.

NICKI

Yes you can be. Let's swim.

They face the sun and swim together.

EVE

I wish I could say, "Darling, I have something important..."

NICKI

You can! Wait for me.

A crying baby breaks the dream's spell.

I'm coming, lovey.

Nicki picks up her baby from the cradle back in her apartment. Angela enters with her baby. They admire each other's children. Eve brings gifts to Angela and takes her grandchild in her arms, ignoring Nicki.

EVE

Do you let your mummy sleep at night?

ANGELA

Now we're through that breast-feeding debacle, what a nightmare.

EVE

I shall not be a boring grandmama. When you grow older, we'll go on walks. I'll read you proper English stories and teach you to paint. Your mother will be too busy working to make potato prints and dollies but I will.

ANGELA

Thanks a lot!

EVE

Be good to your mummy, she's the only one you'll get.

Eve kisses Angela's baby and gives her to Angela. A phone rings.

NICKI

Eve, next time you come see Angela, will you stop in Washington?

EVE

(quietly)

Why are you calling? A visit is out of the question. There isn't time and you know the situation with my husband...

NICKI

It's been/ten/years.

EVE

I love you and I gave you Angela...

NICKI

She's not you.

EVE

You ask too much.

NICKI

I'm holding your grandson.

(silence)

You are such a disappointment.

Eve angrily delivers a letter. Nicki puts the baby
in the Red Cradle.

EVE

Number one, do not phone me for emotional chats, it's not the thing, and number two... I
am a private person. I will not be emotionally blackmailed.

Eve tries to leave but Nicki grabs her.

NICKI

This isn't blackmail. I'm trying to have a relationship. Too bad you don't know the
difference! It's come here/go away/come here/go away. When you visit Angela, you kill
me. You slay me! Well, you won't treat my son the way you've treated me. I've had
enough. I wish you gone. Joke: Why do birth mothers float? They're hollow inside.

Nicki pushes Eve away. Eve retreats to drawing
and smoking. Enter James, who picks up the
baby and sings the second verse of "*Tell
Everybody I Know*" as a lullaby and dances with
her.

JAMES

*In the evening, in my bed,
I hear voices in my head
They say, never, never ever let them go,
Well I love my babies gonna tell everybody I know.*

James holds the baby's hand.

Look at these hands. Piano player for sure.

NICKI

I'm praying for her.

JAMES

I don't know why.

NICKI

So I can be free.

JAMES

She doesn't know what she's missing.

Nicki gathers all her adoption artifacts, letters, artwork, and books and puts them in the Red Cradle.

NICKI

You right about that. Why are we so different?

Dead Philip enters the Beach wearing all black.
Clears his throat.

No! You never saw him!

Nicki brings Dead Philip the baby to hold. He coos at him.

DEAD PHILIP

I saw the picture you sent. Hello-ello? I was in Jamaica negotiating a deal for lace curtains. Massive heart attack. My cousin Danny said I looked very tanned and rested but it was the Caribbean. He's a lovely little chap. He looks just like his daddy. What's his name?

Dead Philip puts his arm around Nicki.

NICKI

Miles. People are going to ask, "Which father died?" and I'll say, "The one I'm named after, no, not the one I grew up with, the other one, my Jewish father, my olive-skinned..."

DEAD PHILIP

Never-can-find-his-keys father.

NICKI

I should have spent more time with you.

DEAD PHILIP

I should have come to visit you.

NICKI

Thanks for the ride.

DEAD PHILIP

Thank you for finding us. It doesn't matter you were an accident of birth, you're part of me and though we only spent a few days together, I do love you.

Dead Philip hands the baby to James and gives Nicki some lace fabric.

DEAD PHILIP

Minsons Superior Lace. God bless, sweet child.

Dead Philip kisses her and goes to the Beach, avoiding Eve who is sketching.

NICKI

I don't suppose you...

Nicki folds the lace into a prayer shawl, says a blessing, and wraps it around her shoulders. She practices reading Hebrew.

Kaved et-avicha ve'et-imecha
lema'an ya'arichun yameycha.

After I convert, I'll be as Jewish as anyone born to it. And that's that.

JAMES

It doesn't matter I'm not Jewish?

NICKI

No. Our synagogue's full of mixed marriages. Miles already comes to Torah for Tots and one day, he'll be bar mitzvah and a real Jewish boy.

JAMES

Even though his daddy isn't A Real Jewish Boy?

NICKI

You said you didn't care. This is my heritage. Half the blood coursing through my veins has been Jewish for... five thousand something years. I got separated and now I'm reconnected and...

JAMES

How will things be different?

NICKI

They won't! I already go to services, sometimes, not all the time. I light candles on Friday nights. When Miles is older, he'll go to Hebrew school. You said you didn't care. And I'm going to continue to study and classes...

JAMES

So why are you doing with all this ritual stuff... the shawl, the *mikvah* bath, the chanting... the Hebrew every day...

NICKI

I'm practicing my Torah portion for the B'nai mitzvah. I'm not planning on putting on a wig and becoming Orthodox. I'm the same person I always was.

JAMES

You're doing this so they can't put you out.

NICKI

Yes! I want to be legit, but I also want to make my heritage meaningful to me.

JAMES

I don't know.

NICKI

Do you go to church?

JAMES

You know I don't.

NICKI

If I went to church, would you mind if I took our son with me?

JAMES

No.

NICKI

So, think of synagogue as church without bacon.

JAMES

When I come with you, I'm the only black guy in the room.

NICKI

Is that what this is about?

JAMES

No.

NICKI

We have other black members, not a lot...

JAMES

It's not about that. I don't want something dividing us.

NICKI

Our son is black and he's a Jew. He's in a long tradition of blacks and Jews getting together.

JAMES

I don't know why I'm fussing...

NICKI

Because you love us. You want us to be a family and I want that too. I promise I'll consult with you every step of the way.

JAMES

No one's going to touch his penis?

NICKI

What? No!

JAMES

Because I heard...

NICKI

No penises involved. This is about *my* conversion. Miles is circumcised like his Daddy and if he wants to go through a ceremonial pricking...

JAMES

Don't say that!

NICKI

... later in life, that's up to him.

James puts on a kippur. It slips off.

JAMES

How do you make this thing stay on?

Nicki clips it and kisses him.

NICKI

"Fortune favors the brave."

Before the congregation, Nicki completes her
Torah reading.

... al ha'adamah asher-Adonay Eloheycha noten lach.

“Honor thy father and thy mother that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.”

Eve observes from a distance as Dead Philip
places his hand on Nicki's head and blesses her.

DEAD PHILIP

Sima bat Fishel v' Havah, Sima daughter of Fishel and Eve.

Y'varechecha Adonai V'yish'm'recha.

Ya'er Adonai panav eilecha vichuneka.

Yisa Adonai panav eilecha v'yasem l'cha shalom.

NICKI

I chose Sima as my Hebrew name. It means “Treasure,” because all of you are my treasure.

Nicki folds her prayer shawl. Angela enters and
Eve passes her some children's books for Nicki.
Angela brings Nicki a wrapped gift and the
books.

ANGELA

Happy birthday! I brought Miles some Noddy books.

NICKI

Ta very much. I'm taking Miles to England this winter, he's never been.

ANGELA

Never?

NICKI

Nope. Felt I had to exile myself...

ANGELA

You will tell her you're coming?

NICKI

Nope.

ANGELA

At least send her your dates.

NICKI
We're better apart.

ANGELA
Don't punish her.

NICKI
I'm not punishing her. It's what she wants.

ANGELA
Then send her your dates, as a pressie to me.

NICKI
It's *my* birthday.

ANGELA
You sound just like her.

NICKI
I do not.

ANGELA
Come on.

Angela goes to the Beach. The ensemble enters to picnic seaside. Sounds of children, seagulls, waves, Northern voices. Dead Moo enters.

DEAD MOO
"Forgiveness is a funny thing..."

NICKI
Not you too.

DEAD MOO
"... It warms the heart and cools the sting."

Nicki groans and mails a note, then joins Angela at sea's edge.

ANGELA
Oh my God, it's freezing!

NICKI
Where's this North Sea we hear so much about?

Nicki plunges in the water, ecstatic.

O! Lovely...

ANGELA

No, it's not!

NICKI

Yes it is!

ANGELA

It's freezing!

NICKI

No it's not...

EVE

Yes it is

NICKI

It's lovely after you go numb!

Angela jumps in and squeals. They swim together.

EVE

They're so lucky.

ANGELA

Oh, my God!

NICKI

Kick! Keep kicking!

ANGELA

I can't breathe...

NICKI

North Sea Ninjas! Woo-hoo!

EVE

I wish I were free.

ANGELA

I'm done.

EVE

I wish I could say, “Darling, I have something important to tell you...”

NICKI

Me too. Towel!

ANGELA

Towel! Hoodie!

Eve steps forward.

EVE

Darling, don't be angry. I had to. I'm very sorry...

A phone rings.

ANGELA

You what?

EVE

I told him about Nicki.

ANGELA

What did he say?

EVE

This is not a carte blanche into my private life.

ANGELA

Mum!

Eve takes her first free breath.

EVE

Your father is a saint.

NICKI & ANGELA

Woo-hoo! She told him! She told him!

Angela grabs Eve and Nicki and they dance ring-around-the-rosie. The ensemble packs up their picnic, Angela helps.

NICKI

What did he say? You can tell.

Eve tries to avoid Nicki's focus but Nicki gently insists.

EVE

He said... "I'm only sorry you felt you had to keep it from me... all these years."

Nicki hands Eve a cane. Eve's cancer has returned in her spine and she walks gingerly downstage. Nicki gently washes Eve's hair over a sink.

EVE

Ow. Stop!

NICKI

Sorry, all done.

Nicki dries Eve's hair with a towel.

EVE

That's for you.

Nicki opens a small package, a golden hairbrush, and she uses it to gently brush Eve's hair.

NICKI

Will you get chemo?

EVE

No. Maybe radiation. It's all through my spine. Ow, stop pulling!

NICKI

Sorry. Your hair's still lovely and thick.

EVE

I know you're Jewish now...

NICKI

And you're Catholic.

Eve acknowledges with a shrug.

EVE

To each her own. Do you have "faith?"

NICKI

I talk to God, if that's what you mean. Do you talk to God?

EVE

I pray, if that's what you mean. It's rather frightening. Death. So Terminal.

Eve wraps the blue sparkly shawl around herself
and brushes Nicki's hair.

Giving you away was the worst thing I ever did in my life. I'm so glad you came back to
find us. I never thought I'd say that. My heart is free.

NICKI

You were my heart's desire.

EVE

I woke with the full moon in my eye. The heavens are blue and sparkly tonight. Possibly I
thought of you at some moment every day of your life, how could I not?

Eve, Nicki, and Angela hold hands facing
downstage. The ensemble joins the line holding
hands though Eve refuses to hold Philip's hand
and takes Dead Moo's hand instead.

NICKI

In the beginning, before the Catastrophe...

EVE

Giving you away.

ANGELA

Before the mountains and the valley...

NICKI

And the sea...

EVE

(joyful)

His face is like the Sun!

NICKI

Was the Mystery!

Exalt. Blackout.

THE END

During bows, Dead Moo may try to organize a Tiller line.