

"Proof" - Claire

Start

CLAIRE. I'd still like you to come to New York.

CATHERINE. Yes: January.

CLAIRE. I'd like you to move to New York.

CATHERINE. Move?

CLAIRE. Would you think about it? For me?

You could stay with me and Mitch at first. There's plenty of room. Then you could get your own place. I've already scouted some apartments for you, really cute places.

CATHERINE. What would I do in New York?

CLAIRE. What are you doing here?

CATHERINE. I live here.

CLAIRE. You could do whatever you want. You could work, you could go to school.

CATHERINE. I don't know, Claire. This is pretty major.

CLAIRE. I realize that.

CATHERINE. I know you mean well. I'm just not sure what I want to do. I mean to be honest you were right yesterday. I do feel a little confused. I'm tired. It's been a pretty weird couple of years. I think I'd like to take some time to figure things out.

CLAIRE. You could do that in New York.

CATHERINE. And I could do it here.

CLAIRE. But it would be much easier for me to get you set up in an apartment in New York, and —

CATHERINE. I don't need an apartment, I'll stay in the house.

CLAIRE. We're selling the house. *(Beat.)*

CATHERINE. What?

CLAIRE. We — I'm selling it.

CATHERINE. WHEN?

CLAIRE. I'm hoping to do the paperwork this week. I know it seems sudden.

CATHERINE. No one was here looking at the place, who are you selling it to?

CLAIRE. The University. They've wanted the block for years.

CATHERINE. I LIVE HERE.

CLAIRE. Honey, now that Dad's gone it doesn't make sense. It's in bad shape. It costs a fortune to heat. It's time to let it go. Mitch agrees, it's a very smart move. We're lucky, we have a great offer —

CATHERINE. Where am I supposed to live?

CLAIRE. Come to New York.
CATHERINE. I can't believe this.
CLAIRE. It'll be so good. You deserve a change. This would be a whole new adventure for you.
CATHERINE. Why are you doing this?
CLAIRE. I want to help.
CATHERINE. By kicking me out of my house?
CLAIRE. It was my house too.
CATHERINE. You haven't lived here for years.
CLAIRE. I know that. You were on your own. I really regret that, Katie.
CATHERINE. Don't.
CLAIRE. I know I let you down. I feel awful about it. Now I'm trying to help.
CATHERINE. You want to help now?
CLAIRE. Yes.
CATHERINE. Dad is dead.
CLAIRE. I know.
CATHERINE. He's dead. Now that he's dead you fly in for the weekend and decide you want to help? YOU'RE LATE. Where have you been?
CLAIRE. I —
CATHERINE. Where were you five years ago? You weren't helping then.
CLAIRE. I was working.
CATHERINE. I was HERE. I lived with him ALONE.
CLAIRE. I was working fourteen-hour days. I paid every bill here. I paid off the mortgage on this three-bedroom house while I was living in a studio in Brooklyn.
CATHERINE. You had your life. You got to finish school.
CLAIRE. You could have stayed in school!
CATHERINE. How?
CLAIRE. I would have done anything — I told you that. I told you a million times to do anything you wanted.
CATHERINE. What about Dad? Someone had to take care of him.
CLAIRE. He was ill. He should have been in a full-time professional care situation.
CATHERINE. He didn't belong in the nuthouse.

CLAIRE. He might have been better off.

CATHERINE. How can you say that?

CLAIRE. This is where I'm meant to feel guilty, right?

CATHERINE. Sure, go for it.

CLAIRE. I'm heartless. My own father.

CATHERINE. He needed to be here. In his own house, near the University, near his students, near everything that made him happy.

CLAIRE. Maybe. Or maybe some real, professional care would have done him more good than rattling around in a filthy house with YOU looking after him.

I'm sorry, Catherine, it's not your fault. It's my fault for letting you do it.

CATHERINE. I was right to keep him here.

CLAIRE. No.

CATHERINE. What about his remission? Four years ago. He was healthy for almost a year.

CLAIRE. And then he went right downhill again.

CATHERINE. He might have been worse in a hospital.

CLAIRE. And he MIGHT have been BETTER. Did he ever do any work again?

CATHERINE. No.

CLAIRE. NO.

And you might have been better.

CATHERINE. *(Keeping her voice under control.)* Better than what?

CLAIRE. Living here with him didn't do you any good. You said that yourself.

You had so much talent ...

CATHERINE. You think I'm like Dad.

CLAIRE. I think you have some of his talent and some of his tendency toward ... instability. *(Beat.)*

CATHERINE. Claire, in addition to the "cute apartments" that you've "scouted" for me in New York, would you by any chance also have devoted some of your considerable energies toward scouting out another type of —

CLAIRE. NO.

CATHERINE. — living facility for your bughouse little sister?

CLAIRE. NO! Absolutely not. That is not what this is about.

CATHERINE. Don't lie to me, Claire, I'm smarter than you. *(Beat.)*

CLAIRE. The resources ... I've investigated —

CATHERINE. Oh my GOD.

CLAIRE. — if you WANTED to, all I'm saying is the doctors in New York and the people are the BEST, and they —

CATHERINE. FUCK YOU.

CLAIRE. It would be entirely up to you. You wouldn't LIVE anywhere, you can —

CATHERINE. I hate you.

CLAIRE. Don't yell, please, calm down.

CATHERINE. I HATE YOU. — *(Hal enters, holding a notebook. Claire and Catherine stop suddenly. Beat.)*

CLAIRE. What are you *[doing here?]* ... *(She looks at Catherine. Hal is nearly speechless. He stares at Catherine.)*

HAL. How long have you known about this?

CATHERINE. A while.

HAL. Why didn't you tell me about it?

CATHERINE. I wasn't sure I wanted to. *(Beat.)*

HAL. Thank you.

CATHERINE. You're welcome.

CLAIRE. What's going on?

HAL. God, Catherine, thank you.

CATHERINE. I thought you'd like to see it.

CLAIRE. What is it?

HAL. It's incredible.

CLAIRE. What IS it?

HAL. Oh, uh, it's a result. A proof.

I mean it looks like a proof. I mean it is a proof, a very long proof, I haven't read it all of course, or checked it, I don't even know if I could check it, but if it is a proof of what I think it's a proof of, it's ... a very ... important ... proof.

CLAIRE. What does it prove?

HAL. It looks like it proves a theorem ... a mathematical theorem about prime numbers, something mathematicians have been trying to prove since ... since there were mathematicians, basically. Most people thought it couldn't be done.

CLAIRE. Where did you find it?

HAL. In your father's desk. Cathy told me about it.

"Proof" - Robert #1

and I did it.

~~If I wanted to work a problem all day long, I did it.~~

~~If I wanted to look for information - secrets, complex and
rationalizing messages - I could find them all around me: in the air.
In a pile of fallen leaves some neighbor raked together. In box
scores in the paper, written in the steam coming up off a cup of
coffee. The whole world was talking to me.~~

~~If I just wanted to close my eyes, sit quietly on the porch and
listen for the messages, I did that.~~

~~It was wonderful. (Beat)~~

Start

CATHERINE. How old were you? When it started.

ROBERT. Mid-twenties. Twenty-three, four. (Beat.)

Is that what you're worried about?

CATHERINE. I've thought about it.

ROBERT. Just getting a year older means nothing, Catherine.

CATHERINE. It's not just getting older.

ROBERT. It's me. (Beat.)

CATHERINE. I've thought about it.

ROBERT. Really?

CATHERINE. How could I not?

ROBERT. Well if that's why you're worried you're not keeping up with the medical literature. There are all kinds of factors. It's not simply something you inherit. Just because I went bughouse doesn't mean you will.

CATHERINE. Dad ...

ROBERT. Listen to me. Life changes fast in your early twenties and it shakes you up. You're feeling down. It's been a bad week. You've had a lousy couple years, no one knows that better than me. But you're gonna be okay.

CATHERINE. Yeah?

ROBERT. Yes. I promise you. Push yourself. Don't read so many magazines. Sit down and get the machinery going and I swear to God you'll feel fine. The simple fact that we can talk about this together is a good sign.

CATHERINE. A good sign?

ROBERT. Yes!

CATHERINE. How could it be a good sign?

ROBERT. Because! Crazy people don't sit around wondering if

they're nuts.

CATHERINE. They don't?

ROBERT. Of course not. They've got better things to do. Take it from me. A very good sign that you're crazy is an inability to ask the question, "Am I crazy?"

CATHERINE. Even if the answer is yes?

ROBERT. Crazy people don't ask. You see?

CATHERINE. Yes.

ROBERT. So if you're asking ...

CATHERINE. I'm not.

ROBERT. But if you were, it would be a very good sign.

CATHERINE. A good sign ...

ROBERT. A good sign that you're fine.

CATHERINE. Right.

ROBERT. You see? You've just gotta think these things through. Now come on, what do you say? Let's call it a night, you go up, get some sleep, and then in the morning you can —

CATHERINE. Wait. No.

ROBERT. What's the matter?

CATHERINE. It doesn't work.

ROBERT. Why not?

CATHERINE. It doesn't make sense.

ROBERT. Sure it does.

CATHERINE. No.

ROBERT. Where's the problem?

CATHERINE. The problem is you are crazy!

ROBERT. What difference does that make?

CATHERINE. You admitted — You just told me that you are.

ROBERT. So?

CATHERINE. You said a crazy person would never admit that.

ROBERT. Yeah, but it's ... oh. I see.

CATHERINE. So?

ROBERT. It's a point.

CATHERINE. So how can you admit it?

ROBERT. Well. Because I'm also dead. (*Beat.*) Aren't I?

CATHERINE. You died a week ago.

ROBERT. Heart failure. Quick. The funeral's tomorrow.

CATHERINE. That's why Claire's flying in from New York.

End

ROBERT. Yes.

CATHERINE. You're sitting here. You're giving me advice. You brought me champagne.

ROBERT. Yes. *(Beat.)*

CATHERINE. Which means ...

ROBERT. For you?

CATHERINE. Yes.

ROBERT. For you, Catherine, my daughter, who I love very much ... It could be a bad sign. *(They sit together for a moment.*

Noise off. Hal enters, twenty-eight, semi-hip clothes. He carries a backpack and a jacket, folded. He lets the door go and it bangs shut. Catherine sits up with a jolt.)

CATHERINE. What?

HAL. Oh, God, sorry — Did I wake you?

CATHERINE. What?

HAL. Were you asleep? *(Beat. Robert is gone.)*

CATHERINE. You scared me, for Chrissake. What are you doing?

HAL. I'm sorry. I didn't realize it had gotten so late. I'm done for the night.

CATHERINE. Good.

HAL. Drinking alone? *(She realizes she is holding the champagne bottle. She puts it down quickly.)*

CATHERINE. Yes.

HAL. Champagne, huh?

CATHERINE. Yes.

HAL. Celebrating?

CATHERINE. No. I just like champagne.

HAL. It's festive.

CATHERINE. What?

HAL. Festive. *(He makes an awkward "party" gesture.)*

CATHERINE. Do you want some?

HAL. Sure.

CATHERINE. *(Gives him the bottle.)* I'm done. You can take the rest with you.

HAL. Oh. No thanks.

CATHERINE. Take it, I'm done.

HAL. No, I shouldn't. I'm driving. *(Beat.)*

Start "Proof" - Hal #1

CATHERINE. It's okay. (*Uncomfortable beat.*) I'm sorry about yesterday. I wasn't helpful. About the work you're doing. Take as long as you need upstairs.

HAL. You were fine. I was pushy.

CATHERINE. I was awful.

HAL. No. My timing was terrible. Anyway, you're probably right.

CATHERINE. What?

HAL. About it being junk.

CATHERINE. (*Nods.*) Yes.

HAL. I read through a lot of stuff today, just skimming. Except for the book I stole —

CATHERINE. Oh, God, I'm sorry about that.

HAL. No, you were right.

CATHERINE. I shouldn't have called the police.

HAL. It was my fault.

CATHERINE. No.

HAL. The point is, that book — I'm starting to think it's the only lucid one, really. And there's no math in it.

CATHERINE. No.

HAL. I mean, I'll keep reading, but if I don't find anything in a couple of days ...

CATHERINE. Back to the drums.

HAL. Yeah.

CATHERINE. And your own research.

HAL. Such as it is.

CATHERINE. What's wrong with it?

HAL. It's not exactly setting the world on fire.

CATHERINE. Oh come on.

HAL. It sucks, basically.

CATHERINE. Harold.

HAL. My papers get turned down. For the right reasons — my stuff is trivial. The big ideas aren't there.

CATHERINE. It's not about big ideas. It's work. You've got to chip away at a problem.

HAL. That's not what your dad did.

CATHERINE. I think it was, in a way. He'd attack a question from the side, from some weird angle, sneak up on it, grind away at it. He was slogging. He was just so much faster than anyone else

that from the outside it looked magical.

HAL. I don't know.

CATHERINE. I'm just guessing.

HAL. Plus the work was beautiful. It's streamlined: no wasted moves, like a ninety-five-mile-an-hour fastball. It's just ... elegant.

CATHERINE. Yeah.

HAL. And that's what you can never duplicate. At least I can't.

It's okay. At a certain point you realize it's not going to happen, you readjust your expectations. I enjoy teaching.

CATHERINE. You might come up with something.

HAL. I'm twenty-eight, remember? On the downhill slope.

CATHERINE. Have you tried speed? I've heard it helps.

HAL. *(Laughs.)* Yeah. *(Beat.)*

CATHERINE. So, Hal.

HAL. Yeah?

CATHERINE. What do you do for sex?

HAL. What?

CATHERINE. At your conferences.

HAL. Uh, I uh —

CATHERINE. Isn't that why people hold conferences? Travel. Room service. Tax-deductible sex in big hotel beds.

HAL. *(Laughs, nervous.)* Maybe. I don't know.

CATHERINE. So what do you do? All you guys. *(Beat. Is she flirting with him? Hal is not sure.)*

HAL. Well we are scientists.

CATHERINE. So?

HAL. So there's a lot of experimentation.

CATHERINE. *(Laughs.)* I see. *(Beat. Catherine goes to him. She kisses him. A longer kiss. It ends. Hal is surprised and pleased.)*

HAL. Huh.

CATHERINE. That was nice.

HAL. Really?

CATHERINE. Yes.

HAL. Again?

CATHERINE. Yes. *(Kiss.)*

HAL. I always liked you.

CATHERINE. You did?

HAL. Even before I knew you. I'd catch glimpses of you when you

visited your dad's office at school. I wanted to talk to you but I thought, No, you do not flirt with your doctoral adviser's daughter.

CATHERINE. Especially when your adviser's crazy.

HAL. Especially then. *(Kiss.)*

CATHERINE. You came here once. Four years ago. Remember?

HAL. Sure. I can't believe you do. I was dropping off a draft of my thesis for your dad. Jesus I was nervous.

CATHERINE. You looked nervous.

HAL. I can't believe you remember that.

CATHERINE. I remember you. *(Kiss.)* I thought you seemed ... not boring. *(They continue to kiss.)*

End

Fade

Scene 4

The next morning. Catherine alone on the porch, in a robe. Hal enters, half-dressed. He walks up behind her quietly. She hears him and turns.

HAL. How long have you been up?

CATHERINE. A while.

HAL. Did I oversleep?

CATHERINE. No. *(Beat. Morning-after awkwardness.)*

HAL. Is your sister up?

CATHERINE. No. She's flying home in a couple hours. I should probably wake her.

HAL. Let her sleep. She was doing some pretty serious drinking with the theoretical physicists last night.

CATHERINE. I'll make her some coffee when she gets up. *(Beat.)*

HAL. Sunday mornings I usually go out. Get the paper, have some breakfast.

CATHERINE. Okay. *(Beat.)*

HAL. Do you want to come?

Start "PROOF" - Hal #2

CATHERINE. No! You can't take it.

HAL. I'm not "taking" it.

CATHERINE. This is what you wanted.

HAL. Oh come on, Jesus.

CATHERINE. You don't waste any time, do you? No hesitation. You can't wait to show them your brilliant discovery.

HAL. I'm trying to determine what this is.

CATHERINE. I'm telling you what it is.

HAL. You don't know!

CATHERINE. I WROTE it.

HAL. IT'S YOUR FATHER'S HANDWRITING. (*Beat. Pained.*) At least it looks an awful lot like the writing in the other books. Maybe your writing looks exactly like his, I don't know.

CATHERINE. (*Softly.*) It does look like his.

I didn't show this to anyone else. I could have. I wanted you to be the first to see it. I didn't know I wanted that until last night. It's ME. I trusted you.

HAL. I know.

CATHERINE. Was I wrong?

HAL. No. I —

CATHERINE. I should have known she wouldn't believe me but why don't you?

HAL. This is one of his notebooks. The exact same kind he used.

CATHERINE. I told you. I just used one of his blank books. There were extras.

HAL. There aren't any extra books in the study.

CATHERINE. There were when I started writing the proof. I bought them for him. He used the rest up later.

HAL. And the writing.

CATHERINE. You want to test the handwriting?

HAL. No. It doesn't matter. He could have dictated it to you, for Chrissake. It still doesn't make sense.

CATHERINE. Why not?

HAL. I'm a mathematician.

CATHERINE. Yes.

HAL. I know how hard it would be to come up with something like this. I mean it's impossible. You'd have to be ... you'd have to be your dad, basically. Your dad at the peak of his powers.

CATHERINE. I'm a mathematician too.

HAL. Not like your dad.

CATHERINE. Oh he's the only one who could have done this?

HAL. The only one I know.

CATHERINE. Are you sure?

HAL. Your father was the most —

CATHERINE. Just because you and the rest of the geeks worshiped him doesn't mean he wrote this proof, Hal!

HAL. He was the best. My generation hasn't produced anything like him. He revolutionized the field twice before he was twenty-two. I'm sorry, Catherine, but you took some classes at Northwestern for a few months.

CATHERINE. My education wasn't at Northwestern. It was living in this house for twenty-five years.

HAL. Even so, it doesn't matter. This is too advanced. I don't even understand most of it.

CATHERINE. You think it's too advanced.

HAL. Yes.

CATHERINE. It's too advanced for YOU.

HAL. You could not have done this work.

CATHERINE. But what if I did?

HAL. Well what if?

CATHERINE. It would be a real disaster for you, wouldn't it? And for the other geeks who barely finished their Ph.D's, who are marking time doing lame research, bragging about the conferences they go to — WOW — playing in an awful band, and whining that they're intellectually past it at twenty-eight, BECAUSE THEY ARE.) *(Beat. Hal hesitates, then abruptly exits. Beat. Catherine is furious and so upset she looks dazed.)*

CLAIRE. Katie.

Let's go inside.

Katie? *(Catherine opens the book and tries to rip out the pages, destroy it. Claire goes to take it from her. They struggle. Catherine gets the book away. They stand apart, breathing hard. After a moment, Catherine throws the book to the floor. She exits.)*

Fade

"Proof" - Robert #2

CATHERINE. Yes. I'll still be close. I can come home whenever you want.

You've been well — really well — for almost seven months. I don't think you need me here every minute of the day. (Beat.)

ROBERT. This is all a done deal? You're in.

CATHERINE. Yes.

ROBERT. You're sure.

CATHERINE. Yes.

ROBERT. Who pays for it?

CATHERINE. They're giving me a free ride, Dad. They've been great.

ROBERT. On tuition, sure. What about food, books, clothes, gas, meals out — do you plan to have a social life?

CATHERINE. I don't know.

ROBERT. You gotta pay your own way on dates, at least the early dates, say the first three, otherwise they expect something.

CATHERINE. The money will be fine. Claire's gonna help out.

ROBERT. When did you talk to Claire?

CATHERINE. I don't know, a couple weeks ago.

ROBERT. You talk to her before you talk to me?

CATHERINE. There were a lot of details to work out. She was great, she offered to take care of all the expenses.

ROBERT. This is a big step. A different city —

CATHERINE. It's not even a long distance phone call.

ROBERT. It's a huge place. They're serious up there. I mean serious. Yeah the football's a disaster but the math guys don't kid around. You haven't been in school. You sure you're ready? You can get buried up there.

CATHERINE. I'll be all right.

ROBERT. You're way behind.

CATHERINE. I know.

ROBERT. A year, at least.

CATHERINE. Thank you, I KNOW. Look, I don't know if this is a good idea. I don't know if I can handle the work. I don't know if I can handle any of it.

ROBERT. For Chrissake, Catherine, you should have talked to me.

CATHERINE. Dad. Listen. If you ever ... if for any reason it ever turned out that you needed me here full time again —

ROBERT. I WON'T. That's not *[what I'm talking about.]* —

CATHERINE. I can always take a semester off, or —

ROBERT. No. Stop it. I just — the end of the MONTH? Why didn't you say something before?

CATHERINE. Dad, come on. It took a while to set this up, and until recently, until very recently, you weren't —

ROBERT. You just said yourself I've been fine.

CATHERINE. Yes, but I didn't know — I hoped, but I didn't know, no one knew if this would last. I told myself to wait until I was sure about you. That you were feeling okay again. Consistently okay.

ROBERT. So I'm to take this conversation as a vote of confidence? I'm honored.

CATHERINE. Take it however you want. I believed you'd get better.

ROBERT. Well thank you very much.

CATHERINE. Don't thank me. I had to. I was living with you.

ROBERT. All right, that's enough, Catherine. Let's stay on the subject.

CATHERINE. This is the subject! There were LIBRARY BOOKS stacked up to the ceiling upstairs, do you remember that? You were trying to decode MESSAGES —

ROBERT. The fucking books are gone, I took them back myself. Why do you bring that garbage up? *[Knocking, off. Beat. Catherine goes inside to answer the door. She returns with Hal. He carries a manila envelope. He is nervous.]*

ROBERT. Mr. Dobbs.

HAL. Hi. I hope it's not a bad time.

ROBERT. Yes it is, actually, you couldn't have picked worse.

HAL. Oh, I, uh —

ROBERT. You interrupted an argument.

HAL. I'm sorry. I can come back.

ROBERT. It's all right. We needed a break.

HAL. Are you sure?

ROBERT. Yes. The argument was about dinner. We don't know what to eat. What's your suggestion? *[A beat while Hal is on the spot.]*

HAL. Uh, there's a great pasta place not too far from here.

ROBERT. NO!