

SIDE 1

Catherine Mondague

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IN THE NEXT ROOM OR THE VIBRATOR PLAY

MRS. GIVINGS. Wait a moment.

START

Elizabeth, when the milk comes in, can you feel any love for the child?

ELIZABETH. I try not to think of love. I try not to think of Henry Douglas.

MRS. GIVINGS. Of course. Do you want more children, Elizabeth? That is a tactless question, you don't need to answer, forgive me, sometimes I say whatever is in my head. I want more children and my husband desperately wants more children but I am afraid of another birth, aren't you? When I gave birth I remember so clearly, the moment her head was coming out of my body, I thought: Why would any rational creature do this twice, knowing what I know now? And then she came out and clambered right onto my breast and tried to eat me, she was so hungry, so hungry it terrified me - her hunger. And I thought: is that the first emotion? Hunger? And not hunger for *food* but wanting to eat other *people*? Specifically one's mother? And then I thought - isn't it strange, isn't it strange about Jesus? That is to say, about Jesus being a man? For it is women who are eaten - who turn their bodies into food - I gave up my blood - there was so much blood - and I gave up my body - but I couldn't feed her, could not turn my body into food, and she was *so hungry*. I suppose that makes me an inferior kind of woman and a very inferior kind of Jesus.

STOP

ELIZABETH. Hmm.

MRS. GIVINGS. Oh, dear, they said you were very religious, that must have sounded -

ELIZABETH. I *was* very religious.

MRS. GIVINGS. Oh - I'm sorry, I -

ELIZABETH. I thought of Jesus while I was giving birth, like you. But I wasn't thinking about why was He a man. I was thinking, please save me Jesus. And He did. Now why He didn't save my Henry I don't know, so I stopped believing in Him.

SIDE 2

Dr. Givings & Catherine

START

Dr. Givings turns to his wife.

DR. GIVINGS. Was your hand on his cheek?

MRS. GIVINGS. It was.

DR. GIVINGS. I see.

MRS. GIVINGS. And do you mind very much?

A pause, he considers.

DR. GIVINGS. It is odd – for some husbands such things end in a screaming match or even in death, one hand on a cheek. It has come to mean an absolute thing: the end of a book, those dreadful Mrs. Bovary books – but how can it be absolute when there are so many shades and degrees of love? Lady novelists like for it to be a tragedy – because it means that the affair mattered, mattered terribly – but it doesn't, it needn't.

MRS. GIVINGS. The writer of Madame Bovary was not a woman.

DR. GIVINGS. He was French, which is much the same thing.

MRS. GIVINGS. You dare to make a joke about the French – at this moment? Most men would be – pale with rage!

DR. GIVINGS. Pale with rage, exactly, in a sentimental novel. My point is: this is not the end of the book. You made a mistake, that is all. The treatment I gave you made you excitable. It is my fault. A hand on the cheek, these are muscles, skin, facts. It needn't mean that one is preferred absolutely, or that one isn't loved. So why then jealousy? My darling, I don't mind.

MRS. GIVINGS. Oh.

I had hoped that you would mind.

She stomps out of the room.

Dr. Givings is left there, alone.

DR. GIVINGS. Catherine?

He follows after her.

MRS. GIVINGS. Don't talk to me tonight, don't talk to me tomorrow! I will take breakfast in my own room!

A door slamming.

A song on the piano.

STOP

START

DR. GIVINGS. Do you think it's escaped my notice that you haven't breakfasted with me for five days running?

MRS. GIVINGS. Breakfast is not a very romantic meal. I decided to skip it.

DR. GIVINGS. Is every meal supposed to be romantic?

MRS. GIVINGS. I do not enjoy you silently reading your scientific journals while I eat my toast.

DR. GIVINGS. You prefer grand passions over toast? My God, woman, we are married, a man needs to be quiet at least once a day.

MRS. GIVINGS. So I'll be quiet then! HERE I AM! QUIET! QUIET AS A MOUSE!

Mr. Daldry enters the living room.

MR. DALDRY. What a beautiful winter garden – sorry, am I interrupting?

MRS. GIVINGS. No. We were just discussing breakfast. You know, in Italy they hardly eat breakfast. Just a little bit of sweet cracker to dip in very strong coffee. They eat something light to recover from the great passions they spent during the night. Better to skip breakfast and move onto lunch, a great big lunch, when the the silence isn't quite so loud, no the silence is not quite so deafening at lunch.

DR. GIVINGS. How do you know about biscotti?

MRS. GIVINGS. Mr. Irving told me.

DR. GIVINGS. I see.

MR. DALDRY. I know nothing about biscotti. I like ham and eggs for breakfast, sausage too. A big breakfast is important for one's energy, Mrs. Givings. I have once heard it said that small women should eat large animals. You ought to eat a bit of meat for breakfast, some bacon, or some sausage.

MRS. GIVINGS. Oh, I have plenty of energy, Mr. Daldry. I don't need to borrow energy from a cow. I have so much energy I do not know what to do with it, you see.

MR. DALDRY. Mmmm.

Annie sticks her head in the living room:

~~ANNIE. We're ready for you, doctor.~~

DR. GIVINGS. Will you excuse me.

MRS. GIVINGS & MR. DALDRY. *(an approximation of)*

Oh, yes, certainly.

Dr. Givings enters the operating theater.

He is distracted.

He puts the vibrator on Mrs. Daldry's torso.

MRS. DALDRY. Dr. Givings?

DR. GIVINGS. Yes?

MRS. DALDRY. Is something wrong?

DR. GIVINGS. Oh – terribly sorry. I am distracted.

He moves the vibrator.

Meanwhile, Mr. Daldry and Mrs. Givings sit.

He moves towards her.

MR. DALDRY. Mrs. Givings. I – don't always know how to converse – in a drawing room. I –

He tries to kiss her.

She slaps him.

MRS. GIVINGS. Mr. Daldry!

DR. GIVINGS. Here? Is this better?

MRS. GIVINGS. What can you be thinking of?

MR. DALDRY. You said about your energies. I thought –

MRS. GIVINGS. You insult me.

MR. DALDRY. You have no idea how I long for a woman of energy. My wife is so tired, she is so tired, all the time.

MRS. GIVINGS. How dare you speak ill of your wife in my presence. Go. Please.

MR. DALDRY. Will you have the goodness to tell Mrs. Daldry to meet me at home, I will send a carriage for her.

Mrs. Givings nods.

He leaves.

She goes to the door of the operating theater and hesitates there, sinking down, upset.

STOP

Mrs. Givings exits.

Annie helps Mrs. Daldry get dressed.

START

MRS. DALDRY. Well.

ANNIE. Well, then.

MRS. DALDRY. I suppose we could – continue with my Greek lesson.

ANNIE. Oh, yes. I believe we left off with the early Greek philosophers. Thales thought the earth was suspended on water, floated there, and he thought that all magnets had souls because they moved towards one another.

MRS. DALDRY. I can well believe that magnets have souls. When I look into dark eyes, like magnets, I am moved, unaccountably. You have very dark eyes, like magnets – has any man ever told you so?

ANNIE. No man has told me much aside from: pass the clamp.

MRS. DALDRY. They should Annie, they really should. What ever happened to Thales?

ANNIE. He never married. His mother told him he should marry and he said: It's too early. And when she pressed him again, ten years later, he said: It's too late.

MRS. DALDRY. And you? Why have you never married?

ANNIE. One day, I woke up, and it was too late.

MRS. DALDRY. I see. Annie, I have been thinking. I wonder whether I could purchase one of these instruments for home use. The doctor is so busy, and I really feel I'm almost better. My color has returned, and I wake up in the morning and feel hopeful. I could use it only as required, when, for example, I have trouble sleeping, as I often do, and I can't very well call on the doctor past midnight.

ANNIE. Well – it might be dangerous for home use, because of the potential for electrocution, but I will ask the doctor. You know he is very open to inventions.

MRS. DALDRY. I would be too embarrassed to ask.

ANNIE. I will ask for you.

MRS. DALDRY. Good-bye then, Annie.

ANNIE. Good-bye.

MRS. DALDRY. Thank you, Annie.

ANNIE. For what?

MRS. DALDRY. For the Greek lesson.

Mrs. Daldry exits.

Annie washes her hands.

She looks at the vibrator, thinks of using it on herself, thinks better of it, puts it away.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Givings is lying on the sofa in the living room.

MRS. DALDRY. Are you quite all right, Mrs. Givings? Your color looks off.

MRS. GIVINGS. I am not myself.

MRS. DALDRY. Is there anything I can do?

MRS. GIVINGS. No, thank you.

Mrs. Daldry, did you dream of love from a young age?

MRS. DALDRY. Yes.

MRS. GIVINGS. And what did you think it would be like?

MRS. DALDRY. I thought it would be – never wanting for anything. Being surrounded and lifted up. Like resting on water, for eternity.

MRS. GIVINGS. And is that what you have found in marriage?

MRS. DALDRY. There have been moments of rest. But as it turns out, the earth rests on air, not on water, and the air can feel very – insubstantial – at times. Even though it is holding you up, invisibly.

MRS. GIVINGS. Yes.

MRS. DALDRY. Do you mind if I play your piano?

MRS. GIVINGS. Oh, please do.

*Mrs. Daldry plays the piano, full of longing.
From off stage, the baby cries.*

MRS. GIVINGS. Excuse me.

STOP

SIDE 5

Elizabeth Monologue

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IN THE NEXT ROOM OR THE VIBRATOR PLAY

MRS. GIVINGS. I think I should die of sorrow, in your place.

ELIZABETH. Die of sorrow? A mother of two cannot die of sorrow.

MRS. GIVINGS. But how do you go on, after?

ELIZABETH. My mother told me to pray each day since I was a little girl, to pray that you borrow everything, everyone you love, from God. That way your heart doesn't break when you have to give your son, or your mother, or your husband, back to God. I prayed Jesus, let me be humble. I borrowed my child, I borrowed my husband, I borrowed my own life from you, God. But he felt like mine not like God's he felt like mine more mine than anything.

God must have this huge horrible cabinet – all the babies who get returned – and all those babies inside, they're all crying even with God Himself to rock them to sleep, still they want their mothers. So when I started to feel something for this baby, for your baby, I thought no, take her back God.

When I first met her all I could think was: she is alive and Henry is not. I had all this milk – I wished it would dry up. Just get through the year, I thought. Your milk will dry up and you will forget. The more healthy your baby got, the more dead my baby became. I thought of her like a tic. I thought – fill her up and then pop! You will see the blood of my Henry underneath. But she seemed so grateful for the milk. Sometimes I hated her for it. But she would look at me, she would give me this look – I do not know what to call it if it is not called love. I hope every day you keep her – you keep her close to you – and you remember the blood that her milk was made from. The blood of my son, my Henry. Good-bye, Mrs. Givings.

MRS. GIVINGS. Good-bye, Elizabeth.

Elizabeth nods.

Mrs. Givings touches Elizabeth's elbow.

Elizabeth pulls away and exits, to the nursery.

STOP

SIDE 6

Leo & Catherine

IN THE NEXT ROOM OR THE VIBRATOR PLAY

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MRS. GIVINGS. Thank you.

But Elizabeth is out the door.

Mrs. Givings, alone.

She moves toward the operating theater.

The door-bell rings.

It is Leo.

MRS. GIVINGS. You have made quite a mess of things for Elizabeth.

LEO. I know. I'm sorry. I've come to say good-bye.

I'm moving to Paris.

MRS. GIVINGS. When?

LEO. Tomorrow.

MRS. GIVINGS. Take me with you.

LEO. Are you out of your mind?

MRS. GIVINGS. You are surprised? It was you who seduced me!

LEO. What?

MRS. GIVINGS. All that talk of women, two thirds done, that was me, you were talking of me, were you not?

LEO. I was talking of paintings. I -

MRS. GIVINGS. No one has ever spoken to me of those things before. Of beauty - of prostitutes, of - my God, of Italy. How could I have misunderstood your intentions? I'm in love with you.

LEO. Oh, dear Catherine I am afraid I cannot love you. If there is any type to whom I am attracted - it veers toward women with doe eyes. And your eyes are more - they are more - thin - the light bounces off them rather than into them. And I cannot see your soul hovering here, where I would like to. Your soul is locked somewhere inside your body, so I cannot see it. Another man could perhaps bring your soul outside your eyes but it's not me, I'm afraid. I do care for you though.

MRS. GIVINGS. Try. Try to bring my soul out - to here. If you look into my eyes - see - I will try.

Are you bringing another woman with you?

IN THE NEXT ROOM OR THE VIBRATOR PLAY

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LEO. No - I am going alone.

Don't you see? It is Elizabeth who I love.

MRS. GIVINGS. Elizabeth?

LEO. Yes.

MRS. GIVINGS. Oh - I see nothing, I understand nothing - my God, Elizabeth.

LEO. Yes. And she doesn't care for me, not at all, I told her of my affections on our walk and she slapped me. No - I will go to Paris alone. I am married to my solitude.

MRS. GIVINGS. I can be your solitude. I will be quiet as a mouse. I understand solitude, I am very lonely.

LEO. I do not understand your loneliness, Mrs. Givings. You have a child, a husband - a home!

MRS. GIVINGS. Yes. I am very ungrateful. I am sure that God will punish me.

She tries to embrace him.

LEO. No. You do not love me. You only think you do. You love your husband. He is a good man. Good-bye, now.

He kisses her hands.

MRS. GIVINGS. Elizabeth is in the nursery. If you wish to say good-bye to her.

LEO. I can't bear to see her. Just give her this, won't you?

Leo kisses Mrs. Givings on the cheek.

Come visit me in France. I promise you - you'll love the paintings.

He leaves.

She goes into the operating theater.

She plugs in the vibrator.

She puts it to her private parts but she is too sad for it to work.

She cries as it hums along.

Dr. Givings enters.

DR. GIVINGS. My dear, what on earth are you doing?

MRS. GIVINGS. *(howling)* I am alone.

