

Swimming Up the Sun
By
Nicole J. Burton

A full-length play

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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 racial and 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 physical telephones in phone conversations.

Time and Settings

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

The set is divided into 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.

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 led to a kaleidoscope of relationships with one dark secret at its center.

Description of Scenes

Act 1: Searching For My People

Act 2: Reuniting

Act 3: Blending Families

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/Aramaic)

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

(At rise, the stage is divided into two, the Beach at the Edge of Time, where non-realistic scenes take place, and the Earth, where realistic scenes occur. Scenes can bleed between the two areas.

Chairs, a table, and boxes are 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. We 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!

No!
EVE

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.

EVE (CONT'D)
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 “wurzel-wurzel-wurzel!”

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?

(MORE)

NICKI (CONT'D)

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.

JAMES

Hi!

NICKI

Hi!

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.

NICKI

Thank you, they're lovely.

She sighs, then he sighs.

JAMES

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

NICKI

I'm sorry.

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

They segregated you?

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. So how do we get this birth certificate?

NICKI

I have to go to England for an interview.

JAMES

I'll go with you.

NICKI

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

JAMES

You will come back?

NICKI

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

(looks at news clipping, silence)

What if I can't find them? God, I can't stand 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 the little kids up on wooden crates so the crowd could see them. They
were looking for field hands and maids. It's all in the language.

She jumps down.

JAMES

When I was in high school and just around, girls got pregnant but they kept their kids. I
never heard of anyone... giving their baby up, maybe a sister or an auntie took them in...

NICKI

Really?

JAMES

Never. It made life but it wasn't a deal breaker. 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 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.

NICKI

How do you know?

JAMES

I know.

He hugs her but she pulls away.

NICKI

I could be your sister.

JAMES

You are not my sister!

NICKI

You don't know that.

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.

NICKI

No, he does not.

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?

NICKI

No.

OFFICIAL

So why now?

NICKI

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

OFFICIAL
What do you expect to find?

NICKI
People who look like me.

OFFICIAL
Why is that important?

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

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

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

OFFICIAL
Because?

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

OFFICIAL
Do you like the States?

NICKI
Yes.

OFFICIAL
Better than England?

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)

(MORE)

SOCIAL WORKER (CONT'D)

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

And how is it with your birth mum?

SOCIAL WORKER

It's up and down, I won't lie.

NICKI

What about your adoptive family?

SOCIAL WORKER

They're 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 I have 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 other 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. 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.

NICKI

I'm Pippa Wright *Minson!*

JAMES

Get outa here!

NICKI

I should go back...

JAMES

You should.

NICKI

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

JAMES

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

NICKI

(bent over with stomach cramps)

Ow!

JAMES

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

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.

NICKI

But what if...

JAMES

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

NICKI

(gazing in the mirror)

My kin.

JAMES

You want me to come with you?

NICKI

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

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.

(MORE)

MOO (CONTD)

(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. Ow.

(holding her stomach)

"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
(pause)
I was born July 25th, 1956, and adopted. My birth mother's name is Eve Wright and I have reason to believe you may be my birth father.

Nicki crosses her fingers.

PHILIP
(pause)
What did you say her name was?

NICKI
Eve Wright.

PHILIP
And how old are you?

NICKI

Twenty-five.

(silence)

PHILIP

How did you get my name?

NICKI

A friend.

PHILIP

Who?

NICKI

My mother.

PHILIP

You spoke to Eve?

NICKI

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

PHILIP

Was I there?

NICKI

No, your father was. She didn't say anything, she bought a spool of thread.

PHILIP

What else did she say?

NICKI

Look, can we meet?

PHILIP

Well...

NICKI

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

NICKI crosses both fingers.

PHILIP

(pause)

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

NICKI

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

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 shocked. Nicki flips the notebook page and dials again. Phone rings.

MOO

(Offstage)

Are you finished, lovey?

NICKI

Almost.

Enter the Wrong Eve, whisking eggs in a mixing bowl. Northern accent.

WRONG EVE

Hello?

Nicki speaks quietly so Moo can't hear.

NICKI

Hello.

WRONG EVE

Yes?

NICKI

I'm trying to reach the former Eve Wright.

WRONG EVE

Yes, that's me. Who's this?

NICKI

You don't know me. I live in the U.S., and I'm visiting relatives. My name's Nicki Burton.

WRONG EVE

Yes?

NICKI

I was born in Nottingham July 25th, 1956, and I have reason to believe you may be my birth mother.

Nicki crosses her fingers.

WRONG EVE

(without missing a beat)

Oo, that couldn't possibly be the case.

(five second silence)

NICKI

I'm looking for Eve Langston Wright of Nottingham...

WRONG EVE

(matter-of-factly)

Oo, I'm Eve Ellsworth Wright of Prudhoe-on-Tyne. Sorry.

Wrong Eve exits. Nicki's turn to stare in shock.

Moo enters.

MOO

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

NICKI

He... didn't remember me... but we're meeting up Tuesday.

MOO

Oh, lovey, I'm so proud of you. I have a good feeling about Philip. Skip the other one.

PHILIP exits.

NICKI

I rang already.

MOO

(arms crossed defensively)

And what did *she* say?

NICKI

It's the wrong Eve Wright.

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 sighs and folds up the wrong papers.

NICKI

Wrong middle initial. I never dreamed there'd be two women with the same name! 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? And I won't be around forever...

NICKI

Cue the bleeding violins!

Silence. Moo drinks and smokes.

I'm sorry. You've done more than most mums...

MOO

And less.

NICKI

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.

She grabs the jacket.

NICKI

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

(fighting for it)

It's mine! I love you, Moo.

MOO

You'd be a fool not to.

Nicki packs her suitcase.

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 at 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 in the cradle. Touches her heart. Speaks with a mock Midlands accent.

“Nothing ventured, nothing gained.”

Moo kisses Nicki.

MOO

“Fortune favors the brave,” lovey.

They exit.

ACT 2: REUNITING

Philip enters, places a photo of his wife and children on his desk. Nicki enters and they shake hands.

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. How did you find me?

NICKI

My adoptive mother...

PHILIP

The one in Norwich?

NICKI

Yes but she's from Nottingham. My parents told me I was adopted and that my father's family had a Jewish haberdashery in Nottingham. I tried finding it before but I didn't have your name.

PHILIP

So...

NICKI

So, Moo, that's my adoptive mother, she wrote me out of the blue saying your shop was still there and the name was Minsons. 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. But I was here last week as well.

He realizes she's been shadowing him.

PHILIP

I see. So you went to the shop...

NICKI

And I got your phone number. A social worker told me I should use an “intermediary” to make first contact but I'm only here another week. I couldn't stand waiting.

PHILIP

Do you know where Eve is?

NICKI

I thought I did but I don't.

They speak their inner voices.

We're talking.

PHILIP

Yes, we're having a normal conversation.

NICKI

We're not staring.

They stare.

PHILIP

No, we're not staring. Is she really mine? She has the Minson hairline...

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 Aunt Rosie.

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

Twenty-five years.

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, but it was respectful.

NICKI

It wasn't... forced?

PHILIP

Heavens, no!

NICKI

(relieved)

Good!

PHILIP

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 months later. It was awkward, I was already engaged to marry someone else. I told my Dad and we gave her some money and it was never mentioned again.

(pause)

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

Silence as NICKI takes in this unexpected truth.

NICKI

You... didn't know Eve named me after you, Pippa?

PHILIP

No! Why did you change it?

NICKI

I was renamed like a sailing vessel changing hands. But Moo said me my father's name was probably Philip because Pippa's short for Philippa.

Philip take in this truth. Moo enters and watches from the Beach.

Your name's not on my documents so "Pippa" was Eve's clue to my paternity. And I was like Dickens' foundling Pip in *Great Expectations*. When Moo and I were out together, just the two of us, she'd slip her arm through mine and say, "What larks, Pip, old chap, what larks!" She's the only person who ever called me by my real name. Would you like to see some photos?

PHILIP

Yes indeed.

Nicki lays photos and documents on the desk.

NICKI

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

PHILIP

Alan's my middle name.

NICKI

Spelled A-L-A-N?

(Philip nods. Nicki smiles)

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

Philip picks up the family photo and studies it.

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

I do.

PHILIP

My Dad's family came from Russia around 1900. Dad changed our name from Minsky to Minson in '43 to make us sound more English. His mum, my grandmother, kept a market stall till she was 87. 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.

Nicki takes notes.

PHILIP

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

Philip examines his lost child's documents.

What's this?

NICKI

My adoption order. And this is my birth certificate. I just got it a few years ago. Do you have to get back to work?

PHILIP

No, I told my assistant you were coming, and my wife dropped by this morning hoping to bump into you. I told her right after you rang, I'll tell my children too. I'd like you to meet them. I can't undo the years... but we can move forward best we can.

He picks up the birth certificate

This address, that's the pub, where Eve lived! Do you want to see if we can find her?

NICKI

Now?

PHILIP

Why not?

Nicki gathers up her papers joyfully. Philip moves to the Beach where he watches as Eve enters the Earth. She and Moo eye each other warily. A phone rings. Eve speaks in a clipped London accent.

NICKI

Hello?

EVE

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

(pause)

...but I am curious. So we should meet if we can arrange it. I have to be careful, my husband doesn't know. When are you leaving?

NICKI

Day after tomorrow.

EVE

Then it will have to be tomorrow. Where?

NICKI

Um, the Miss Selfridge Coffee Shop?

EVE

Fine. How shall I know you?

NICKI

Um...

EVE

What will you be wearing?

NICKI

Oh. A beige linen jacket. How will I know you?

EVE

I shall wear a black jeans jacket. 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
Two in the afternoon?

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

Angela, Eve's daughter, enters.

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

Eve hangs up abruptly and she and Angela exit.
Nicki's left waiting. Eve re-enters, the phone rings again.

EVE
It's me again. I waited till my daughter left but she came back... I almost died. Are we set?

NICKI
Yes, tomorrow at two at the 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 hangs up. They both hold aching stomachs.

NICKI
Oy.

Nicki exits. Eve tries on a sparkly T-shirt then 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. Puts on her jacket, makes a mean face in the imaginary mirror downstage. Applies lipstick. Eyes closed, she gathers herself, nervously holding her stomach. Moo smooths Eve's hair. On the Earth, Eve sits at a table in the Miss Selfridge Coffee Shop and lights a cigarette, 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

Eve? Nicki.

Nicki sits.

EVE

How was the Tube?

NICKI

Crowded.

EVE

Warm today.

They stare at each other and speak their inner voices.

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

NICKI

She's younger than Moo. Her hair's like mine. Do we look alike? I can't tell. She's my mother my mother my mother...

EVE

This is a mistake.

They resume their outward conversation.

NICKI

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

EVE

No thanks to him. What else did he say?

NICKI

He said by the time you told him you were pregnant, he was engaged to someone else...

EVE

A Jewish girl.

NICKI

Was she?

EVE

Of course.

NICKI

He said he paid your expenses?

EVE

It wasn't like that.

Silence. Eve folds her arms without elaborating. It was the Fifties, puritanical, I never fit in. David Lodge wrote a good novel called *How Far Can You Go?* When I read it I thought that's exactly how it was - sex and guilt, and guilt and sex. Then a baby. 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. Philip was from a conservative Jewish family, the eldest son. His mother would have died rather than have him marry me, so yes, his family paid the bills but I never heard from him, ever. He abandoned us completely. When you were born, I thought, "There lies a perfect stranger."

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

NICKI

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

EVE

So: good discipline? I never had much discipline. I always think of you on your birthday.

NICKI

I knew it!

EVE

You're twenty-five. I have a friend whose 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

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

NICKI

I've seen them. In Florence. I lived in Italy when I was a teenager.

EVE

Curious. My husband goes to America on business, sometimes I go too. I've been to Virginia, North Carolina, Washington, D.C., and New York. Once we all went to the seaside in North Carolina.

NICKI

Where?

EVE

Nag's Head, it's a very untamed beach.

NICKI

I've been there many times. When were you there last?

EVE

Let's see. We were there for the big fireworks two summers ago.

NICKI

Two years in July... I was there! I was there!

EVE spills her water, much mopping up.

We could've passed each other on the beach!

EVE

I suppose. How do you spend your time? Do you work? You're not married, are you?

NICKI

No, I have a boyfriend, James. I write for the government and I'm also a playwright with a small company.

EVE

Do you act?

NICKI

At times, but writing's my true love.

EVE

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

NICKI takes in the first complement from her mother.

NICKI

Thank you... I'm thinking about going back to school to 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! I have one daughter who writes and one who paints. The other one prefers business like her father.

NICKI

You were an art student.

EVE

Yes, I went to 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. Some years later I was engaged and we were going to get married and... well, 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?

NICKI holds her stomach.

EVE

Yes. When Angela was four, I met Thomas and he fell for both of us. After we married, we had two more daughters. Angela writes; Juliet's the painter. Marianne likes business.

NICKI

You kept her.

EVE

Things were different when I had you. Then I was married, what was I supposed to do? Sit down at dinner one night and say, "Thomas, girls, I have something very important to tell you?"

Silence. Nicki's turn to look away disappointed.

I could give you a friend's address. Perhaps we could write to each other? Get to know each other?

NICKI

I'd like that. What time was I born?

EVE

Why do you want to know that?

NICKI

I want to get my horoscope done.

EVE

How appalling, you believe that nonsense? It was morning, eleven, I don't remember.

NICKI

How old were you?

EVE

Twenty three.

NICKI

So now you are?

EVE

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

NICKI

May I take your picture?

EVE

No! I look absolutely dreadful in photographs.

(pause)

One of my daughters took some pictures that aren't as hideous as usual, I'll send you one.

(checks the time)

I have to go. Will you walk me out?

They stand and Eve straightens Nicki's collar and smooths her shoulders.

You look as if you had a nice middle-classish upbringing? Something in brown wool would look good, keep you warm in those fierce American winters. I'll write to you.

Eve hugs Nicki.

NICKI

I'll write back.

They exit in opposite directions.

ACT 3: 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, who fetches drinks. Eve enters and listens from the Beach.

PHILIP

I'm so sorry about your mum's death. Had she 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. My Dad died years ago from cancer but I still think about him.

JAMES

I think about my Mom too.

PHILIP

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

NICKI

I can't...

PHILIP

It's Passover...

NICKI

My Dad's upstairs. We're having dinner tonight with Moo's old friend then Daddy's driving us to London tomorrow. It's impossible...

PHILIP

You could bring him?

NICKI

Philip, I can't! I just buried my mother...

PHILIP

I'm sorry...

NICKI

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

JAMES

Another time.

NICKI

I'm so torn. I want to come but...

PHILIP

James is right, another time.

NICKI

If it were just us, no question. Please tell me how everyone is.

PHILIP

The children are five and three, growing and happy. I brought this for you.
(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 never told her husband about me.

PHILIP

That must be difficult.

NICKI

She does write 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)

I'm afraid we need to...

Philip drinks up.

PHILIP

Promise you'll come stay next time? Promise?

NICKI

I promise.

PHILIP

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

Philip shakes James' hand, hugs Nicki, and exits. James struggles to finish a large glass of beer.

JAMES

I can't finish this...

NICKI

I told you, order "a half pint," silly, not "a glass!" We have to meet 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

So 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 Letter 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, does Tiller Girl/Radio City Music Hall Rockette dance warm-ups and watches over Nicki.

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. I love it. 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. Even though I'm your secret.

EVE

It has to be that way.

NICKI

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

Eve topples out of the pose. Nicki switches sides in Tree Pose. Eve tires to resume but wobbles and falls.

EVE

Nicki, I like you. But I cannot help but resent, and that's not quite the right word, I don't know what is... But I resent your intruding into my privacy. Except that I understand completely your need to search and hopefully discover.... 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

So we can never talk about the past?

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

EVE

They said I'd forget you.

NICKI

Well, I didn't forget you and you didn't forget me!

EVE

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

NICKI

Why? It might be good for you... bottling it all up...

EVE

I won't do it!

NICKI

I remember you leaving.

EVE

That's impossible. You were only a baby... You couldn't possibly...

NICKI

Babies have feelings. I do remember...

EVE

You had a mother, another mother...

NICKI

... I cried and cried and cried.

EVE

I can't do this!

NICKI

And I was so angry she wasn't you.

Eve rolls up her yoga mat, finished.

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

Nicki grabs Eve.

EVE

It's not possible.

NICKI

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

EVE

I'm very private 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 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.

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

EVE

I won't write either.

(five more beats)

NICKI

Fine.

Nicki exits. Eve returns to her art, making 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 Eve's ear, and exits. Angela, Nicki's younger half-sister, enters.

ANGELA

We're finished... that's it.

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?

ANGELA

We're supposed to be saving for the States.

Angela pours some wine.

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 21!

EVE
Ancient.

ANGELA
You don't understand.

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

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

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

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

EVE
Quite.

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

EVE
Where will you go?

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

EVE
I think it's all about cars in America.

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

Angela kisses Eve.

EVE
Angie... wait.

Eve takes Angela's hand.

I'm knackered.

ANGELA

Have you really, really made up your mind?

EVE

What did I just say?

ANGELA

Well, I might know someone...

EVE

One of Dad's friends?

ANGELA

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...

Pause as 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

Seriously? You had a baby? Before me?

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

ANGELA

And he still dumped you?

EVE nods.

What a bastard.

EVE

They were all bastards.

ANGELA

Who's this 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" with you. Got any other kids around, any Greeks?

EVE

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

ANGELA

Why?

EVE

Today you have birth control and 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 wasn't going to get stuck my whole life in the Midlands. I'd already been to Art College, 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

Washington, D.C. She's a writer. She likes to travel. She sends me letters, sometimes.

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?

EVE

Yes!

ANGELA

Why would she want to help me?

Eve caresses Angela's hair and embraces her.

EVE

Perhaps you can help each other.

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, the arrangement of the room in which I stand?

NICKI

If I said all I wanted was a life together. Yes, 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.

EVE

Anything?

NICKI

Anything.

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.

NICKI

James...

ANGELA

Mum shared her secret with me 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 became 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. I hope one day she'll tell Dad and we can tell our sisters, they would find this very intriguing. It's strange you should have to discover your real parents as well.

(MORE)

ANGELA (CONT'D)

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. 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 her husband?

JAMES

No. But a new sister's something else! Take her picture to work, show her around.

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

Jeez, you both 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.)

I got the application... for the immigration lottery, the one on the radio.

JAMES

A lottery?

NICKI

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

JAMES

Come here...

Nicki sits in his lap.

Don't get me wrong, when you found your parents, baby, I thought, this is great, she's got her family and we can move on. I didn't foresee sisters, and brothers and... God know who...

NICKI

She's my sister. She's already part of my family.

JAMES

I know that. But I thought you'd meet then we'd have closure and then we could live happily ever after.

NICKI

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

JAMES

This is really complicated...

NICKI

Oh, tell me about it! ...Did you say "happily ever after?"

JAMES

Yes.

(tears a strip of paper)

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

(wraps it around her finger)

NICKI

Wait, that's the form!

JAMES

Marry me before more relatives show up!

NICKI

Ha-ha. Yes! I will.

Angela jumps up on her chair.

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

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

Look!

ANGELA

Congratulations! I had my day out at the American Embassy. It was a hundred and fifty pounds sterling 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

She 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

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

They leaf through the annotated album together
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 one 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 Mum and I 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 while I was growing up.

NICKI

Brrr, in the North Sea?

ANGELA

(swimming motion)

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

NICKI

What a lovely image.

ANGELA

And bloody freezing!

NICKI

My uncle Neil used to pay me to swim in the Channel with him in Brighton in 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 uncle and aunt. My father was in the Royal Air Force so we moved all over 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 and self-centered but she took good care of us. Sewed our dresses, made us dollies, and she's a fabulous cook. We went to good schools. Of course, she's very arty and took us to so many galleries and plays when we were young we got sick of it. What was growing up like for you?

NICKI

I have an older brother and a younger sister. I'm closer to him than my sister, I don't know why. She's adopted too. Maybe because he and I both went to boarding schools because we moved so much. At home I was always chasing after him, riding bikes, climbing trees, swimming. We had an old river cruiser we'd take up the Thames in the summers. It wasn't much of a holiday for Moo but I loved being on the river. She died three years ago.

ANGELA

You must miss her. I can't imagine losing Mum. What about your Dad?

NICKI

He was a good provider, an engineer. He's a good man but married to his work and his work is secret so we didn't see much of him growing up. How about your Dad?

ANGELA

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

NICKI

So why's she afraid to tell him?

ANGELA

I wouldn't say afraid... well, maybe. She's always been super-secretive. I suppose you're the reason 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 every night.

Angela places the doll in Nicki's arms.

NICKI

To keep while you're traveling?

ANGELA

No, yours to keep.

NICKI

But she's *your* dolly...

ANGELA

Mum made her when I was very young, and she named her "Pippa."

NICKI

"Pippa?"

ANGELA

I never went to bed without her so in a funny way we grew up together. After she told me about you, a lot of things began to make sense.

Silence. Angela closes her suitcase, ready to leave.

NICKI

It's a big country out there, Sister. Send me the occasional postcard?

ANGELA

Promise.

Angela kisses Nicki and Pippa the Doll and exits. Nicki places the doll in the Red Cradle and resumes writing. Eve enters, paints, and mails Nicki a letter.

EVE

Heard anything?

NICKI

She's in Florida now. 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 book that Nicki opens.

EVE

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

NICKI

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 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

What will I understand?

(silence)

Eve sends another package.

EVE

Peter Brook's *Theatrical Casebook*.

NICKI

Thank you. What will I understand when I'm a mother?

(pause)

EVE

That we can't stop thinking about our children. Even when they're grown. We want them to be happy and safe. Your play is very intriguing. I know nothing about the Environment but I'm sure it will be a huge hit in the West End!

NICKI

Thank you. She's in Baton Rouge now, 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. We're... looking forward to seeing you when we come to England next month...

EVE

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

Nicki packs her suitcase. Angela enters.

NICKI

Hey, we're finally going to see her!

ANGELA

I have bad news, I'm sorry. She's got breast cancer. She's going in for surgery this week...
(takes Nicki's suitcase)

NICKI

What?!

ANGELA

She didn't even tell Dad. She went off on a painting trip to Italy and came back and said, "I'm having surgery tomorrow, dear." 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 is 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 her good vibrations.

NICKI

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

ANGELA

I don't think so.

NICKI

But 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 to stay with Philip tomorrow, taking the morning train, then down to Brighton to see the cousins so I'm not sure we'd have time to see Eve.

NICKI

I'd make time.

ANGELA

I'll give Mum your love and the books.

Angela takes a package from Nicki and exits.

JAMES

I hate it when you beg.

NICKI

She's ashamed of me.

JAMES

She's sick.

NICKI

She's hiding! Bastard!

JAMES

That's how she is.

NICKI

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

JAMES

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

NICKI

I can't wait to leave London.

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

PHILIP

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

NICKI

I'd love to!

JAMES

On horses?

PHILIP

They're very gentle...

NICKI

James is not really a rider...

JAMES

I think not.

PHILIP

You sure?

JAMES

Oh, so sure.

PHILIP

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

JAMES

No, no. You enjoy. 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. I'm fine now, no need to worry.

NICKI

But you look so healthy. I've been wanting to visit, it's not your fault I haven't come. I keep waiting for Eve to, you know, tell her husband.

PHILIP

I'm sorry.

NICKI

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

(silence)

She's still traumatized, from what happened. I see it in her paintings. My sister showed me some, full of dark, marauding devils and satyrs, and blond-haired women fleeing dark-skinned men. Full of fear and shame. Not all of them but some.

PHILIP

You *are* your mother's daughter.

NICKI

I wish you'd tell her that!

(silence)

PHILIP

You like to ride, don't you?

NICKI

Yes, always did.

PHILIP

Perhaps you get that from me. Did you know Philip means "lover of horses?" That's how Averill and I met, riding. Now our daughter Becca show jumps. In fact, Becca's a better rider than the both of us.

(silence)

NICKI

I've started exploring Judaism.

PHILIP

Have you?

NICKI

Ha-ha. Yeah. It's a tough nut to crack. For one, it's in a foreign language with a different alphabet, and two...

(pause)

PHILIP

Two?

NICKI

I have the stain of the non-Jewish mother.

PHILIP

Averill converted when we married.

NICKI

Did she?

PHILIP

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

NICKI

I think so.

PHILIP

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

PHILIP winks at her.

NICKI

Ha-ha. Perhaps.

They dismount at Philip's home and he looks around.

PHILIP

They're out in the field feeding the ponies. James is photographing. 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. And 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.

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

I'm glad you're feeling better.

EVE

I don't have what you want.

NICKI

Yes, you do. I know 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

I don't. You keep calling me to your side.

(pause)

NICKI

I know. I can't help it. I've always wanted to know you, you're my heart's desire...

EVE

It's not possible, what you want...

NICKI

Anything is possible!

(silence)

I wish we could walk the streets of Amsterdam together. See the old Dutch Masters at the Rijkmuseum. I wish we could argue in cafes over books and plays and have mother-daughter days. I wish you'd brush my hair...

(covers her mouth)

I didn't mean to say that!

(pause)

I wish we could visit Greece together.

Eve puts on the scarf Moo gave her.

I've never been...

EVE

You should go.

(pause)

I wish I were free.

NICKI

Let's swim together.

They face the sun and swim.

EVE

I wish I could say, "Darling, I have something very important to tell you..."

NICKI

You can!

EVE

I wish...

NICKI

What do you wish? Tell me what you...

A crying baby breaks the dream's spell.

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. Nicki phones Eve

NICKI

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

EVE

(quietly)

Why are you calling me? 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 disappoint me.

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

I'm not blackmailing you. I'm trying to have a relationship. Don't you know the difference?!

Eve tries to get away but Nicki pulls and pushes Eve.

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.

Nicki pushes Eve away.

Joke: Why do birth mothers float? They're hollow inside.

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.

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 baby gonna tell everybody I know.

Nicki snuggles with them. James holds the baby's hand.

Look at these hands. Piano player for sure.

NICKI

I pray for her.

JAMES

You don't have to.

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

I have her face, her hair, her taste in art and books. I love my sister. Why are we so alike and so different?

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

NICKI

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. What's his name?

Dead Philip puts his arm around Nicki.

NICKI

Miles. People ask, "Which father died?" I 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.

Minsons Superior Lace. God bless, sweet child.

Dead Philip kisses her and goes to the Beach, avoiding Eve who is sketching. Nicki folds the lace into a prayer shawl, says a blessing, and wraps it around her shoulders. She practices reading Hebrew.

NICKI

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

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

JAMES

It doesn't matter that I'm not Jewish?

NICKI

Our synagogue's full of mixed marriages.

(pauses)

Miles already comes to Torah for Tots and one day, I hope, he'll be bar mitzvah, a real Jewish boy.

JAMES

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

NICKI

This is my heritage. I want to be part of this thing.

JAMES

"This Thing?"

NICKI

Half the blood coursing through my veins has been Jewish for... this is the year fifty... five thousand something. I got separated from my community and now I'm reconnected and I want to understand...

JAMES

How will things be different?

NICKI

They won't be! We already go to services, sometimes, not all the time. We light candles on Friday nights. That won't change. When Miles is older, he'll go to Hebrew school. I'll learn about the different holidays, take classes.

JAMES

If nothing's going to change, why are you doing with all this ritual stuff... the shawl, the *mikvah* bath, the chanting... every day...

NICKI

I'm practicing my Torah portion!

(silence)

I'm not planning on becoming Orthodox and putting on a wig.

JAMES

I know why. So they can't put you out.

NICKI

It's a journey. You're right, I want to be legit, but I also want to know what being Jewish means when it whispers to me. Maybe I'll like it, maybe I won't like it but I have to find out for myself.

JAMES

What about Miles and me?

NICKI

Do you go to church?

JAMES

You know I don't.

NICKI

Would you mind if I took our son to church?

JAMES

No.

NICKI

So then think of synagogue as church without bacon. You've been there, they're friendly.

JAMES

I'm the only black guy in the room.

NICKI

Is that what this is about?

JAMES

No.

NICKI

There are other black members, not a lot but...

JAMES

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

NICKI

Our son is black and he's a Jew. That's his blood. He follows a long tradition of blacks and Jews getting together.

JAMES

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

NICKI

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

JAMES

And no one's going to touch my penis, or his?

NICKI

What?! No! There are no penises involved. This is about *my* conversion. Miles is already circumcised like his Daddy and if he wants to go through a ceremonial pricking...

JAMES

Don't even say that!

NICKI

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

James puts on his kippur but it's not secure.

JAMES

Fine. How do you make this thing stay on?

Nicki clips it and kisses him.

NICKI

You're a mensch. A really good guy. What?

JAMES

I have a feeling if I'd said no...

(a forced smile)

“Nothing ventured, nothing gained.”

NICKI

“Fortune favors the brave.”

Before the congregation, Nicki completes her Torah reading.

NICKI

... 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.”

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

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 choose Sima as my Hebrew name. It means “Treasure” in Aramaic, because all of you are my treasure.

Nicki folds her prayer shawl. Angela enters and Eve hands 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

We love Noddy, thank you. I'm taking him to England this winter. He's never been.

ANGELA

Never?

NICKI
Nope. I felt I had to exile myself...

ANGELA
You will tell her you're coming?

NICKI
No.

ANGELA
At least send her your dates.

NICKI
No, we're better apart. That's all there is to it.

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. It warms the heart and cools the sting.”

NICKI
You too? We're not meant to be together.
(pause)

Nicki jots a note and mails it. She joins Angela at sea's edge.

ANGELA

Oh my God!

NICKI

And where's this North Sea we hear so much about?

Nicki plunges in the water, ecstatic.

Whoa! 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! Kick! Keep swimming.

ANGELA

I can't breathe...

North Sea Ninjas! Woo-hoo!

NICKI

I wish I were free.

EVE

I'm getting out.

ANGELA

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

EVE

Me too. Towel!

NICKI

Towel! Hoodie! Towel!

ANGELA

Eve steps forward.

EVE

"Darling, please don't be angry. I had to, you understand? I'm so very, very sorry..."

A phone rings.

ANGELA

What?

EVE

I told him about Nicki.

NICKI

What?

EVE

And I told the girls. They all know.

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

She told him! She told him! She told him!

Nicki and Angela dance ring-around-the-rosie.
The ensemble packs up their picnic. Eve's cancer
returns in her spine and she walks a little
gingerly. Nicki brings Eve a cane. 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 package is for you.

Nicki opens a small package. It's a golden
hairbrush. She gently brushes Eve's hair.

NICKI

Will you get chemo?

EVE

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

NICKI

Sorry. Your hair's still lovely and thick.

Nicki brings coffee and they drink.

EVE

I know you're Jewish now...

NICKI

And you're Catholic...

(Eve acknowledges with a shrugs)

EVE

To each his own. But 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 stands to brush Nicki's hair.)

Giving you away was the worst thing I ever did in my life.

(pause)

I'm so glad you came back to find us.

(pause)

I never thought I'd say that, but I'm free. Thank you.

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

Relinquishment.

ANGELA

Before the mountains and the valley...

NICKI

And the sea...

EVE

(joyful)

His face is like the Sun!

Was the Mystery!

NICKI

Exalt. Blackout.

THE END

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