

CHRISTINA

By
Marina Shron

CHRISTINA

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CHRISTINA

To my beautiful, broken, deeply loving family

Special Thanks to the Jerome Foundation and the Playwrights Center of Minneapolis. This play would not have existed without their support.

CHRISTINA

CHARACTERS

CHRISTINA, 13

NIKKI, 30s. Looks like an oversized baby.

LYNN, 40s

JOE, 40s

ENSEMBLE: NEIGHBOR, CAB DRIVER, WAITER, BARTENDER,
CHRISTINA'S CUSTOMER, CHILDREN IN SCHOOL, POLICEMEN,
CAT.

Place - New York City. Time – 1990s.

The Play was awarded the Jerome Fellowship in Playwriting and premiered at Soho Rep Theater in New York. Before its premiere, it was workshopped at Playwrights Horizons Theater in New York and Playwrights Center in Minneapolis.

CHRISTINA

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ACT 1
SCENE 1

Stage front we see the dining room of a wealthy Manhattan apartment. LYNN and JOE are dining. The cat sits on a vacant chair. Behind the family, upstage, and dangerously close to their immaculate domain, another area can be seen — a squalid room with no furniture except for a mattress on the floor. Someone's lying there, covered with a blanket. CHRISTINA is moving frantically around the upstage area, packing her belongings in an oversized backpack.

She approaches the mattress and pulls off the blanket, revealing the body of a naked man, in his 40s, underneath it. The man is dead. Christina folds and rolls the blanket and stuffs it in her backpack. She pauses near the mattress — leans over the body and strokes the dead man's face as though trying to memorize it by touch. Then she exits. Stage front, Lynn and Joe continue to eat. Now we can hear them speak, as if the sound was suddenly turned on.

LYNN. Can you imagine that? A small frog in a jar! An embryo of a baby... with such bulging eyes... in that silly aquarium. It was... ugly.

JOE. Lynn... this is not the day. It's our day. And I want us —

LYNN. To be happy? But I remembered seeing it today. If it were to be born... several weeks later... it would have been... a pink, soft, beautiful, little thing. It would be a baby. Somebody's baby... maybe mine.

JOE. Human beings are not born soft and pink.

LYNN. How do you know? How could you know?

JOE. I just do.

LYNN. What are they born like then? Tell me because I don't know.

JOE. Alive. They're born alive.

CHRISTINA

LYNN. And, that's all? Alive. I was alive once. But they took it away. My life. They removed it with the tumor. Look at me. My body is half-empty, like a suitcase one takes for a short trip.

JOE. Lynn, please.

LYNN. I'm sorry I ruined your appetite. Let's not talk about this anymore... *(Joe pours the wine silently. Lynn takes her glass.)* Let's drink to —

JOE. *(Raises his glass.)* Us.

LYNN. ...life. *(Beat.)* I need something simple, Joe. Something I can call my own.

JOE. You've got me. *(Lynn chuckles.)* To our anniversary. *(Joe raises his glass. They toast. The cat jumps on Lynn's knees. She strokes the cat's back, absentmindedly.)*

SCENE 2

Christina meets Nikki in the bar.

CHRISTINA. What's your name?

NIKKI. Nikki.

CHRISTINA. Hi, Nikki.

NIKKI. Hi, Baby.

CHRISTINA. Don't call me baby.

NIKKI. Why? Aren't you a baby?

CHRISTINA. No.

NIKKI. Yes. You are. You're a cute little baby. Want to have a drink with me?

CHRISTINA. Yeah.

NIKKI. *(Moves his glass to Christina.)* Take mine. *(Christina takes his beer and licks the foam with her tongue.)*

CHRISTINA. Are you a man or a woman?

NIKKI. You really want to know?

CHRISTINA. I don't care.

CHRISTINA

NIKKI. Me neither.

CHRISTINA. I think you're a man. Only you're fat.

NIKKI. I'm not fat. I've got no fat on me... You wanna touch me?
(*Christina pokes his belly with her finger.*)

CHRISTINA. It's hard.

NIKKI. See? It's all meat. It's the way my body grows. This way, and this way, and this way... all the ways, like a bubble.

CHRISTINA. Are you going to burst then?

NIKKI. I won't burst. I am a tough bubble... a meat bubble!

CHRISTINA. You are a weirdo.

NIKKI. Do you like weirdos?

CHRISTINA. I do, yeah. (*They look at each other.*)

NIKKI. What's your name?

CHRISTINA. Christina.

NIKKI. I saw you before, Christina.

CHRISTINA. Where?

NIKKI. Here.

CHRISTINA. I saw you too.

NIKKI. Cause I'm always here. I saw you with a guy... I didn't like him.

CHRISTINA. Why?

NIKKI. Too long. He only grows one way — this way.

CHRISTINA. He isn't growing anymore.

NIKKI. No? Still, he's lucky. I never screwed anyone in my life.

CHRISTINA. Why not?

NIKKI. Guess why.

CHRISTINA. Because you're fat.

NIKKI. I'm not fat.

CHRISTINA. Because you're a weirdo.

NIKKI. I'm always the one who gets screwed. (*Titters nervously.*) Do you think I'm pretty?

CHRISTINA. I don't know...

NIKKI. Do you think I look like a frog?

CHRISTINA. Why a frog?

CHRISTINA

NIKKI. Cause your friend said I look like a frog. He likes teasing people.

CHRISTINA. Not anymore.

NIKKI. Really? Where is he?

CHRISTINA. Dead.

NIKKI. That's funny.

CHRISTINA. Why is it funny?

NIKKI. How come he turned dead all of a sudden?

CHRISTINA. I don't know. *(He adds beer to her mug. She touches the foam with her lips, then licks her lips.)* We were just doing it... and he was on top... and he was just going to turn on his back... And suddenly somebody shot from the window. The bullet went right through his head... from here *(points to her forehead)* to here *(points to the back of her head)*.

NIKKI. Like a needle, huh? Sewn with a bloody thread.

CHRISTINA. That's how it looked, yes. How did you know?

NIKKI. I didn't. I have imagination.

CHRISTINA. I could have been killed too. It scratched me.

NIKKI. What?

CHRISTINA. The bullet. *(She raises the hair on her forehead showing a small scratch.)*

NIKKI. *(Looks close at the scratch.)* No... This looks like a bite.

CHRISTINA. Yeah... It bit me too. You know, I wanted to kiss him good-bye.

I saw it in a movie: the guy was shot, and the other guy, a policeman, kept kissing him on the lips — What's so funny?

NIKKI. You're funny. He was probably giving him CPR.

CHRISTINA. CPR?

NIKKI. He was trying to make him breathe!

CHRISTINA. Ah. It looked like a kiss.

NIKKI. So, you kissed him dead?

CHRISTINA. No, I didn't. He was too cold. Too dead.

NIKKI. So... you've got no place to go now? *(Christina shakes her head no.)* I've got a place.

CHRISTINA

CHRISTINA. Yeah?

NIKKI. It's small.

CHRISTINA. That's fine.

NIKKI. You wanna come with me?

CHRISTINA. Yeah.

NIKKI. You wanna fuck me?

CHRISTINA. I don't know... I can try.

NIKKI. It'll be nice if you do. Maybe I'll burst then. *(He bursts into laughter, and chokes on his beer. He coughs, his chin shaking and eyes bulging. Finally, he calms down.)* I thought you left.

CHRISTINA. No. I've got no place to go.

SCENE 3

Night. Lynn and Joe's apartment.

LYNN. It looks disgusting.

JOE. What? What are you talking about?

LYNN. The scar.

JOE. Well, if you ask me... It looks pretty sexy.

LYNN. Touch it then. Here is your sexy wife, in bed, next to you. Don't you want to touch her? *(Joe embraces Lynn.)*

JOE. You are cold.

LYNN. Feel it. I want you to feel it, the emptiness. The hole inside me... Can you feel it?

JOE. I feel your skin under my fingers. And it feels...

LYNN. How?

JOE. Familiar. *(They begin to make love. She suddenly pushes him away.)*

LYNN. You don't want me. I can see you don't want me!

CHRISTINA

SCENE 4

Still night. Nikki's apartment. Nikki and Christina sit on top of the bed, side to side, staring at the TV screen. The sounds of exaggerated moans, male and female, fill the room: Nikki and Christina watch porn.

NIKKI. They sure know how to do it.

CHRISTINA. They do, yeah.

NIKKI. Did your friend do it like this?

CHRISTINA. Kinda. *(Female moans swell.)*

NIKKI. And you? Can you do it like her?

CHRISTINA. I don't have tits like her.

NIKKI. I have tits.

CHRISTINA. *(Showing interest.)* You do?

NIKKI. You want to see?

CHRISTINA. Yeah... *(Nikki rolls up his shirt. Christina stares at his chest.)* Can I... touch them?

NIKKI. All right... but do it quickly. *(Christina touches his nipples with both hands.)*

CHRISTINA. Your nipples are hard. *(Nikki pulls away. The sounds of female moans, alternating with occasional male grunts in the background, intensify: the couple on the TV are approaching climax.)*
What's wrong?

NIKKI. Nothing. I feel like a woman when you touch there.

CHRISTINA. And here? *(She moves her hand across his stomach.)*

NIKKI. Here is fine. *(He stares at the screen again, his eyes widen... A triumphant orgasmic moan emanates from the TV.)* I could never do it like that... not in a million years.

CHRISTINA. Why? It's easy. *(She mimics the sound of the man's orgasm, with short labored breaths. She sticks her tongue out for a more convincing effect. She looks like a puppy on a hot day.)* Try it.

NIKKI. No. *(Titters.)* Can you touch me... there? *(Christina places her hand on his crotch.)* It feels good. I feel like a man when you touch there. Do you think I'm a man?

CHRISTINA

CHRISTINA. Sure.

NIKKI. Is it all right? Is it the way it should be?

CHRISTINA. It's fine. (*Quiet moans swell up again. It sounds like the woman on TV begins to arouse the man.*)

NIKKI. Your friend... he probably had a big cock?

CHRISTINA. Yeah.

NIKKI. Bigger than... his? (*The sounds of lovemaking intensify.*)

CHRISTINA. No. Not that big!

NIKKI. Bigger than mine?

CHRISTINA. I dunno... yours isn't hard.

NIKKI. Yes it is!

CHRISTINA. I can make it hard... If you let me touch your breasts again. (*Christina teases Nikki with her foot. Judging by the sounds, the man and the woman on TV are approaching orgasm again.*)

NIKKI. No way. What are you, a baby? (*Beat.*) You are a baby. (*Christina kicks him in the chest.*)

CHRISTINA. I can fuck your brains out.

NIKKI. I don't have any brains. (*The man and the woman on the screen climax again.*) Do you like to fuck?

CHRISTINA. It's okay. When you close your eyes. (*Nikki flips on his back and closes his eyes.*)

NIKKI. I can fuck you in my sleep. It's just as good... It's even better.

CHRISTINA. Sure. And it doesn't hurt then. (*She rolls up Nikki's shirt and touches his belly button.*) Your belly button is deep. It swallows my pinky.

NIKKI. I can come with my belly button.

CHRISTINA. No way. (*Nikki's face expresses concentration.*)

NIKKI. Did you feel it?

CHRISTINA. Yeah, I did. (*Quiet, muffled moans are heard in the background: the couple on TV are at it again.*)

NIKKI. They never stop, do they? (*He reaches for the remote control and clicks. The sounds disappear. It's quiet in the room, except for the rumbling in Nikki's stomach. Christina presses her ear to his belly.*)

CHRISTINA. What's there?

CHRISTINA

NIKKI. All kinds of junk. I eat too much... I eat everything. I could eat you.

CHRISTINA. You won't.

NIKKI. If I eat you and digest you, I'll be a happy man.

CHRISTINA. Why?

NIKKI. How do I know why? (*Nikki places his hand on Christina's head on top of his belly. He sighs — this time with deep satisfaction.*) I'm so glad your friend got killed. Now you can stay here. You'll be my woman. Will you stay?

CHRISTINA. Yeah. (*She stares at him with an innocent grin.*) Can I suck your nipple now?

SCENE 5

Joe is masturbating in the bathroom.

JOE. Come on, come on, little man... don't get soft on me... Get up, show a little character! That's right, hold it, hold it, we're almost there, almost... Damn. You little traitor. What shall I do with you? You deserve punishment. All right, let's not get upset. Let's try again... slowly... Time is on our side... Isn't it always? Hold it... hold it... Hold it I said! (*Pause.*) Bastard. You don't listen to me anymore... Why? You don't like me... Is that it? Big deal. I don't like myself. But you have to listen, like it or not. God... I don't even know why I'm doing this anymore... Why am I doing this? You don't know either. You want me to leave you alone. Funny.

I remember holding you like this forty years ago... And it felt the same then. No, not the same... Better. You shrunk, my friend, you know that? Not just you. The entire world shrinks when you grow up. It keeps withering... First, it shrivels down to the size of your body... then, a part of your body... a place on it still untouched. A secret spot. Not you, brother. Don't get excited, I'm not talking about you, no offence. No offence taken. But there, on my back... below my shoulder blades, I have it. My tender secret spot. The size of a penny... maybe smaller. I can't

CHRISTINA

see it, but I know it's there. Every time somebody touches my back... or looks at me from behind, it feels like a beam of light pierces my body. It fills me with joy. Unexpected joy. True, it's a good target for a bullet, too. I should really watch my back. (*Smiles.*) Ah. Now you're listening. Now you're really listening! Hold on, hold on, don't rush it, don't — I said — hold on!

SCENE 6

Bedroom. Lynn listens to the sounds of water flushing the toilet. Joe enters.

LYNN. Are you... OK?

JOE. Yes. Why?

LYNN. Well, you've been in there for quite a while.

JOE. A little constipation, that's all.

LYNN. I see. (*Joe gets into bed. Pause.*) You know... you can touch me... I'd like you to.

JOE. Thanks.

LYNN. I mean... I really want you to.

JOE. Thanks. Not now. (*Beat.*) It's not what you think...

LYNN. How do you know what I think?

JOE. It's just that I'm tired. Besides...

LYNN. Besides, you've already come. (*She turns off the light.*)

SCENE 7

Night. Nikki's room. Christina is eating take-out Chinese food. Nikki watches her. She finishes the food and throws the empty carton on the floor.

CHRISTINA

CHRISTINA. I'm full. (*Nikki giggles happily.*) You locked the door this morning.

NIKKI. I always lock the door when I go out.

CHRISTINA. I couldn't get out.

NIKKI. Somebody might come in. Steal something from me.

CHRISTINA. There is nothing to steal here.

NIKKI. Yes. There is. Touch me there.

CHRISTINA. I won't. You locked the door!

NIKKI. I always do! Everybody locks their door when they go out. Even if they have dogs. Even if the dogs make it on the floor — they still lock their door. And you are not a dog. You won't make it on the floor.

CHRISTINA. I will.

NIKKI. It'll stink. You won't want to stay in the room when it stinks.

CHRISTINA. I will. Give me the key.

NIKKI. No... Make it on the floor. (*Christina bites his ear.*)

NIKKI. You! Don't bite me!

CHRISTINA. And you don't lock me in! I wanted to go out! I was hungry.

NIKKI. I brought you food.

CHRISTINA. I don't want your food!

NIKKI. You ate it! What — What's this? (*Christina is silent.*) It's wet... The sheets are wet. Did you do this?

CHRISTINA. Yes. (*She crawls away from Nikki.*)

NIKKI. My cock is itching. (*Christina is silent.*) Rub it. (*Beat.*) Rub it with your lips. (*Beat.*) Don't bite it. Just rub it with your lips.

CHRISTINA. Will you give me the key?

NIKKI. You won't leave... will you?

SCENE 8

Evening. Lynn and Joe are dining. Lynn watches Joe eat.

CHRISTINA

JOE. (*Cutting the meat on his plate.*) You are not hungry?

LYNN. Not when I cook... The smell of food is enough to fill me up.

JOE. It smells good. Tastes good, too.

LYNN. I am glad you like it.

JOE. It's delicious. Taste it. (*He extends the fork with a piece of meat on it to Lynn. Lynn doesn't move. Joe's hand hangs in the air until he brings it back.*) How was your day?

LYNN. As usual.

JOE. What does that mean — as usual?

LYNN. You're annoying.

JOE. Am I? (*Beat.*) What's wrong?

LYNN. Nothing. (*She gets up and starts collecting plates from the table.*)

JOE. I haven't finished yet.

LYNN. Sorry, I thought you had. (*Joe takes Lynn's hand in his.*) Please, Joe! Don't try to help me.

JOE. Why? You want me to give up on you? We used to be happy, Lynn... remember?

LYNN. Yes. We used to be happy... And now we aren't.

SCENE 9

Nikki's room. The sounds of POLICE SIRENS wake Christina up. She sits up in bed. The sirens get silenced abruptly, as if the car has stopped next to the building. Christina glances at Nikki, who is breathing peacefully next to her. She picks up her clothes, quickly dresses, and tiptoes to the window facing the yard. She throws her backpack outside and climbs out the window onto the fire escape.

SCENE 10

Day. Lynn and Joe are in a restaurant, having lunch.

CHRISTINA

LYNN. Do I have a greedy look?

JOE. What?

LYNN. It's just that woman, in the subway... Can't get her out of my mind.

JOE. What woman?

LYNN. A woman with a little girl, her daughter. I guess, I was looking at her... at the girl, not the mother. So, she just turned her daughter's face away from me. Like she was a doll... the girl, I mean.

JOE. Crazy mother.

LYNN. Maybe it's something in my eyes... that scared her.

JOE. Just another crazed mother.

LYNN. Right. (*Awkward silence.*)

JOE. Look, there is a girl behind the glass.

LYNN. Yes. She's looking at us.

JOE. Yes. Or maybe, at the food on the table.

LYNN. She's cute. (*Christina enters the restaurant. She marches to the table next to Lynn and Joe and settles there. The waiter approaches her.*)

CHRISTINA. I wanna eat.

WAITER. Really? How about paying for your food?

CHRISTINA. First eat, then pay.

WAITER. Smart girl. But show me your money first. I want to be sure... OK? (*Christina reaches into her pocket and digs out some change.*)

CHRISTINA. I don't have more cash.

WAITER. Right. You have a credit card... You just left it at home.

CHRISTINA. No. My parents have a credit card.

WAITER. I'm sure they do.

CHRISTINA. I'm waiting for my parents... They should be here any minute.

WAITER. Really?

CHRISTINA. They know I'm waiting for them! (*Her voice shakes. Lynn doesn't take her eyes off Christina. The waiter notices that.*)

CHRISTINA

WAITER. Okay... You can wait for your parents. But if they aren't here in 10 minutes —

CHRISTINA. I want to eat. My parents will pay.

WAITER. Well... I think you want too much.

CHRISTINA. (*Turns to Lynn.*) I'm hungry.

LYNN. (*To the waiter.*) You can bring her food...

WAITER. But —

JOE. (*Quietly.*) She's lying, Lynn. I don't think she has —

LYNN. I know. (*To the waiter.*) We'll take care of the bill.

SCENE 11

Half an hour later. Christina is finishing her plate of French fries. Lynn and Joe watch her eat.

LYNN. Where do you live?

CHRISTINA. (*With her mouth full.*) Nowhere. I go from place to place. I like traveling.

LYNN. Do you travel with your parents?

CHRISTINA. No. They died. Long ago. I travel by myself.

JOE. Isn't it a little dangerous?

CHRISTINA. No. It's fun.

LYNN. How did your parents die?

CHRISTINA. My mother was an acrobat. She fell off the trapeze.

JOE. Was she killed?

CHRISTINA. No. But, she broke her spine. And she couldn't move after that. So she would just lie still all the time, and my father would just sit there and look at her and cry. She wouldn't say anything, only breathe. Then she stopped breathing one day. And my father's heart exploded.

LYNN. How old were you? You remember it so well.

CHRISTINA. I was small. But I remember things. When they died, I was alone in the house with them and I cried and cried... I was hungry. I

CHRISTINA

was almost dead myself. I almost stopped breathing. Then the police came and took me away.

LYNN. You remember this, too?

CHRISTINA. I do.

JOE. I hope they fed you?

CHRISTINA. Who?

JOE. The police. You said you were hungry.

CHRISTINA. They did. Yes. *(Pause.)*

JOE. So, you were brought up by policemen? Why not? Some people are brought up by wolves.

LYNN. Joe...

CHRISTINA. I wasn't brought up by a wolf.

JOE. I was kidding.

CHRISTINA. My parents loved me. They just died. *(She moves the plate away.)* I'm full.

LYNN. You can tell us more.

CHRISTINA. I'm full.

LYNN. Do you want some dessert? Maybe an ice cream.

CHRISTINA. *(Showing some interest.)* Ice cream? *(She looks at Joe.)* No. I have to go. *(Christina gets up.)*

LYNN. Wait! *(Lynn takes out a ten-dollar bill.)* Take it. You can buy yourself an ice cream. *(Christina looks at the money.)* Is this enough? *(Christina takes the money nonchalantly.)*

CHRISTINA. Thank you, ma'am. *(Joe takes out another bill and hands it to Christina.)*

JOE. Take this too. A donation for your travel fund.

CHRISTINA. Thank you, sir. Thank you so, so much... I will never forget you! *(Christina walks away. Lynn and Joe watch her go.)*

LYNN. Where do you think she will go?

JOE. Some place we've never been.

CHRISTINA

SCENE 12

Christina stares at the door of Nikki's apartment sealed with yellow police tape. Enter a woman with a dog.

WOMAN. You waiting for somebody?

CHRISTINA. Nikki.

WOMAN. He's not here... They took him.

CHRISTINA. Who?

WOMAN. The police. They said he killed somebody... Some junkie in the neighborhood... a few days ago... You didn't hear?

CHRISTINA. About what?

WOMAN. About the guy. He was shot through the head. They say he lived with a girl... underage... like you. The police want her for questioning. How do you know Nikki?

CHRISTINA. I don't.

WOMAN. He was a nice guy. Well, my dog liked him. Sniffed and licked him all over, like he was a sugar bun. (*Christina stares at her blankly.*) Nikki is gone, child. You better find yourself another place.

SCENE 13

Lynn and Joe are dining. Lynn is not eating. She watches Joe eat. Joe catches her staring and chews with increasing effort.

LYNN. How's the meat?

JOE. (*Swallowing.*) It's good. (*She keeps watching until he pushes the plate away with unfinished meat still on it.*)

LYNN. Are you finished?

JOE. Yes.

LYNN. I'm sorry I destroyed your appetite.

JOE. You didn't. (*Lynn starts clearing plates from the table.*)

LYNN. It's all such a burden for you... I admire your patience.

CHRISTINA

JOE. What exactly is the burden?

LYNN. Me. *(Lynn stops as she picks up a knife. She strokes the blade.)*

Strange... How long has it been since the surgery? A year?

JOE. A year and a half. *(Lynn continues to play with the knife. She shrieks.)*

LYNN. I cut myself!

JOE. It's a knife, Lynn. What did you expect? *(Joe gets up out of his chair. He takes a handkerchief out of his pocket and hands it to Lynn. She pretends she doesn't see it.)* I'm going out. I need some fresh air. *(Joe grabs his coat and walks out the door. Lynn keeps looking at her finger, mesmerized.)*

SCENE 14

The street is empty except for a cab parked at the curb. Joe approaches the cab and looks inside. The cabbie in the driver's seat is leaning back, his eyes closed. He's making short, moaning sounds... sounds of pain, or delight. Suddenly, he shrieks.

DRIVER. You...! I'll show you how to bite! *(The driver kicks something out of the front door... Christina rolls out of the car. The driver notices Joe.)*

DRIVER. Sir... You need a cab?

JOE. I thought you were busy.

DRIVER. You mean, her? Oh, no... that's just my girlfriend, you know.

CHRISTINA. I am not your girlfriend! You have to pay me!

DRIVER. Shut up, little bitch! You don't want me to call the cops, do you?

JOE. I don't need a cab.

DRIVER. You don't? Well...

CHRISTINA. *(To Joe.)* He didn't pay. *(The taxi drives off.)* He didn't pay. *(They look at each other.)*

JOE. I see. How much did he owe you?

CHRISTINA

CHRISTINA. Twenty bucks.

JOE. Not much. Your lip is bleeding. (*Christina wipes her lip, spreading blood and lipstick over her face. Joe takes a handkerchief from his pocket and gives it to Christina. She wipes her lips with it.*)

What did you do in that cab?

CHRISTINA. Nothing. (*She looks at Joe uncertainly.*) I can show...

JOE. No! You don't recognize me, do you?

CHRISTINA. (*Staring at him.*) No... Yes...

JOE. I saw you in the restaurant... this morning... You don't remember? I gave you money.

CHRISTINA. Oh yes, sir! Yes... You're so, so kind! (*She starts walking away. Joe watches her.*)

JOE. Listen. (*Christina stops.*) Where are you going?

CHRISTINA. (*Waves somewhere behind her.*) There.

JOE. Okay... I just thought... I want to invite you... some place.

CHRISTINA. What place?

JOE. I bet you haven't eaten anything since lunch?

SCENE 15

Lynn and Joe's apartment. Christina is eating. Her swollen lip makes it difficult for her to chew. But her hunger is stronger than the pain. She eats very fast. She eats some of the leftover meat from dinner. Lynn and Joe are watching her.

LYNN. Don't hurry. It's all yours. (*Christina slows down.*) What's your name?

CHRISTINA. (*Quietly.*) Christina.

LYNN. What? I can't hear you.

CHRISTINA. Christina.

LYNN. Christina. Beautiful name. (*Christina continues eating. Then she stops.*)

CHRISTINA. My lip hurts.

CHRISTINA

LYNN. I can see. It looks pretty bad. What happened to you?

CHRISTINA. *(Looks at Joe uncertainly.)* I... fell.

LYNN. I see.

JOE. *(Hesitating for a moment.)* I found her in the park. She was sleeping on a park bench. *(Christina looks at Joe.)*

LYNN. That's where you live? On the park bench? *(Christina is silent.)*
Finish your dinner. I'll run you a warm bath. I think you need it. *(Lynn walks out. Christina and Joe look at each other.)*

SCENE 16

Christina is in the bathtub, covered with foam almost to her mouth. She holds foam on her palm and looks at it. She takes it to her mouth, sticks out her tongue and licks the foam, completely delighted. Lynn enters.

LYNN. Are you okay?

CHRISTINA. I'm fine. *(She takes a long sniff.)* I like this smell.

LYNN. Smell? Oh, it's my night cream.

CHRISTINA. Smells so good. *(Lynn sits on the edge of the bathtub.)*

LYNN. You need help? I could scrub your back.

CHRISTINA. Thank you.

LYNN. You want me to?

CHRISTINA. Yes. Thank you. *(Lynn starts washing her back, slowly and carefully.)*

LYNN. What's this?

CHRISTINA. Where?

LYNN. On your back... Does it hurt?

CHRISTINA. No.

LYNN. Itch?

CHRISTINA. No.

LYNN. *(Looking closer.)* Looks like... little bites.

CHRISTINA. It's from termites. They live in the wood... But they are harmless.

CHRISTINA

LYNN. I see. (*She hesitates, then starts rinsing Christina's back. She does it a little longer than needed.*) You like to be washed?

CHRISTINA. Yeah.

LYNN. Did your mother wash you... when you were little?

CHRISTINA. Yeah.

LYNN. Do you remember your mother?

CHRISTINA. Yeah.

LYNN. What did she look like?

CHRISTINA. Like you.

SCENE 17

Lynn and Joe are in bed.

LYNN. She's really sweet.

JOE. Yes. (*Beat.*) I'll call the police tomorrow.

LYNN. Police?

JOE. There must be a place for kids like her. We don't want to throw her back on the street.

LYNN. Of course not. Why tomorrow?

JOE. The sooner the better... for her.

LYNN. Well, I thought —

JOE. What?

LYNN. So strange that you met her again... Strange coincidence.

JOE. Life is filled with coincidences.

LYNN. Right. (*Sighs deeply.*) You're right.

SCENE 18

Lynn's dream. A big soap bubble floats in the air. Christina sits inside the bubble, curling herself in a fetal position. Suddenly the bubble bursts. Lynn wakes up.

CHRISTINA

She taps Joe on the shoulder, and he wakes up with a start.

JOE. What happened?

LYNN. Nothing. I had a dream...

JOE. Dream? What dream? What did you see?

LYNN. *(Pause.)* Funny. I can't remember...

SCENE 19

A teen shelter. The room is empty except for a long ping pong table in the center. Two teenage boys are playing ping pong, slowly, without any sign of excitement. Christina watches the ball, bouncing from one side of the table to the other.

LYNN. I talked to your social worker... She is very nice. She promised me she'll find a home for you. *(Christina is silent.)* I left some candies for you. Do you like candies?

CHRISTINA. Yeah. *(Christina is watching the ball flying.)*

LYNN. I'd like to visit you sometime... Do you mind? *(Christina nods her head "yes" and then "no".)*

LYNN. You want me to bring you something... next time? *(Christina looks at her, then turns away without saying a word.)* Well... Till next time. Christina? Bye.

CHRISTINA. Bye. *(Lynn begins to walk away. When she's at the door, she turns back and waves at Christina. Christina waves back.)*

SCENE 20

Lynn fixes Christina's bed. She takes off the bed sheet. She holds it to her face, takes a long sniff. She buries her face in it.

CHRISTINA

SCENE 21

The same teen shelter. Christina plays ping pong with one of the boys. Lynn enters. Christina stops playing, and the player leaves. Christina approaches Lynn, who hands her an ice cream cone.

LYNN. So... How do you like it here?

CHRISTINA. It's fine. (*Crunch, crunch.*)

LYNN. What kind of things do you do here?

CHRISTINA. Eating.

LYNN. What else? Do you like your classes? Do you play with other kids? Do you talk to them? (*Christina is absorbed in her ice cream.*) It seems, you don't like it here very much?

CHRISTINA. It's okay. I won't be here long.

LYNN. What do you mean?

CHRISTINA. Today this woman came... to look at me.

LYNN. What woman?

CHRISTINA. She wants to take me, as her daughter.

LYNN. So soon. (*Lynn gasps.*) Did she... like you?

CHRISTINA. She said I am sweet. (*Lynn stands up and then sits down again.*)

LYNN. Did you like her?

CHRISTINA. (*Frowns.*) She's alright. I think she's loaded.

LYNN. Loaded? Well. I'm sure you'll make a great daughter for someone. I have to go now.

CHRISTINA. Yeah. (*Lynn exits. Christina finishes her ice cream cone, picks up a ping pong ball. She looks at it, bites it, and chews. Crunch. Crunch.*)

SCENE 22

Lynn and Joe stand in the middle of the living room.

CHRISTINA

LYNN. I want her... I know that! I was dreaming of her... Just the other night.

I remember it now... It was her. She was calling me... She was calling me her mother. She needs me! I could see it in her eyes... It was Fate that brought us together — What else could it be? Remember — the first time we met her? In that restaurant.

JOE. She was lying to us.

LYNN. She was begging us! She was crying for help: "Help me... help me! I need your help!" But we didn't want to listen! So selfish... And then we met her again.

JOE. I met her.

LYNN. Life gave us another chance. Maybe the last one!

JOE. I met her... She was giving a blow job to a cabbie. That's how I met her.

LYNN. What cabbie?

JOE. The cab was parked on the street. She was —

LYNN. You said it already.

JOE. I thought it's something you should know.

LYNN. (*Beat.*) I need her, Joe! My life will be complete... with her. My scars will heal. When I touched her... She's so vulnerable! I can protect her. I imagined it for a second, and then I knew it was right... it felt right... She is my child! She belongs to me! (*Beat.*) She belongs to me... Joe?

JOE. Are you sure... it's what you need? (Lynn embraces him. They stay in the embrace as the lights go off.)

END ACT 1

***THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS—
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