Scene One

Early September, 1977. The front room of Stan and Abby's house. CHRIS, 12 years old, is reading a comic book. ABBY is on the phone.

ABBY He's ... I don't know ...

(glancing at Chris)

He's coming apart. He isn't sleeping, he won't eat anything I make him, he won't go outside, he doesn't want to play with his friends ...

(Pause.)

It all started after the est ... The training, the seminar ... No, it ... it wasn't like that. They do let you go to the bathroom — well, sometimes. There are scheduled ... It's hard to describe. Let me put it this way, after about ten minutes of being there, I felt *completely over* all the things that were bothering me going in. All my fears, my phobias, my anxieties, just completely — our trainer was just incredible. So compassionate. I mean, he, he had an amazing sense, almost a telepathic sense of exactly

STAN enters. Looking for something.

ABBY Mom, I have to go. I will, I will, I promise. Okay, bye.

(She hangs up.)

What are you looking for?

STAN Last Sunday's Form. Have you seen it?

ABBY indicates a stack of Racing Forms.

ABBY Is it one of those?

STAN No. I checked already.

ABBY Stan, there's something we need to discuss.

STAN What's that?

ABBY Chris starts school on Tuesday. Chris, honey, go watch TV in

the bedroom for awhile, okay? You can watch on the waterbed.

CHRIS exits.

So I was thinking, it might be best if he stayed with you. I don't want him to have to start late. And it doesn't make sense to enroll him in a school only to have to take him right out again and re-enroll him when this whole thing is temporary

anyway.

STAN What's temporary?

ABBY This. This is. Our separation.

(Pause.)

Isn't it?

(Pause.)

You said you needed time.

STAN Yes. I said —

ABBY — you don't love me anymore.

STAN I never said —

ABBY You did!

STAN I said: I don't *know* / if I —

ABBY And what-what are we supposed to do? Just sit around and wait

with the kids while you have the house to yourself and throw parties and women over / and pretend like we don't even

fucking exist!

On "fucking exist," ABBY throws a large stack of Racing Forms in the air, causing them to fall all over the room.

STAN Abby, calm down. It's nothing — you're completely ... It's

nothing like that!

CHRIS enters.

CHRIS Mom, Dad!

ABBY It's all right, sweetheart.

CHRIS King Kong is on TV.

ABBY Your dad and I need to talk for a minute.

CHRIS Dad, will you watch with me?

STAN In a few minutes, okay, kiddo?

ABBY Go and watch without us for a little while and then you can tell

us what happens.

CHRIS exits, making noises like King Kong.

ABBY Are you going to take him or not?

STAN I don't think I should. He needs his mother.

ABBY He needs you, too. He worships you.

(Pause.)

We'll have to explain why he's starting late.

(Pause.)

It would be a lot easier if you would just —

STAN All right. Chris can stay with me.

ABBY Are-Are you sure?

STAN nods.

If you really don't want to ... I can call the school and try to

arrange / something.

STAN You don't have to do that. It's better this way. Really.

ABBY All right, if you're sure. Thank you. You won't forget, will

you?

STAN Forget what?

ABBY To take him to school.

STAN No. What school is it?

ABBY Claremont. It's on College / Avenue ...

STAN I know where it is.

ABBY You'll pick him up, too, won't you?

STAN Yeah yeah, of course ...

Pause.

ABBY So what will you do while we're gone?

STAN I'm still figuring it out. I figured I'd hit the track next weekend.

I think the system is finally ready, Abby. I've been going over my results and if this data means what I think it means, it's

very exciting.

ABBY What does it mean?

STAN It means the system works. It means you and I are never going

to have to worry about money ever again. You want to hear

how I've done it?

ABBY Not ... not right now.

STAN Oh. Okay.

ABBY To be honest, it's a little hard getting worked up about it. You

do this, Stan. You cater the system to the existing results. You

manipulate the system to a single day of races, or week of races, and it appears as though you've won. Then you take it to the racetrack and it doesn't work. It never works.

Pause.

STAN I can never catch a break, can I? Jesus. What the fuck is wrong

with me?

ABBY That's just another racket. It's a game you're playing. You're

playing "The Victim." "Poor Me." "What's wrong with me?"

STAN According to Werner, life *is* a game.

ABBY Even if it is, you're not winning, Stan, you're stuck sitting on

the sidelines.

STAN That's why I have to change things.

ABBY You can only change things by not denying what you have.

Werner says, "Find the greatness in your life the way it is."

STAN I get that. But all the things that got me here are all lies. The

truth is: Life is meaningless. We're all going to die and

anything else is just fooling ourselves.

ABBY Does this have anything to do with your father getting

remarried?

STAN What do you mean?

ABBY Your mother called. She wanted to make sure we're still going

to the wedding.

STAN What did you tell her?

ABBY I said I wasn't sure.

STAN You told her —?

ABBY You expect me to go to my parents, / then come back ...

STAN I already told him we'd be there.

ABBY Make up an excuse if you want. But I'm not flying to New

Mexico just to / keep up ...

STAN My mom already bought the tickets.

ABBY I'm sorry, Stan, I just can't.

STAN Wait a minute. How are you getting there?

ABBY To my parents'?

STAN You're not driving, are you?

ABBY How else do you expect —?

STAN I thought your father was picking you up.

ABBY No. No. I'm driving myself.

STAN You're never driven on the freeway before, have you? What if

you and Deirdre get killed in an accident?

ABBY Then all your problems will be solved.

STAN *(brief pause)* That isn't funny.

ABBY I'm sorry. You're right, though, if I take the car, how are you

going to get around?

STAN No, we'll be all right. You should keep the car.

ABBY That's okay, I can drive my parents' car.

STAN You can't drive a stick.

ABBY I can learn. Besides, Petaluma isn't that big a place. You'll

need it more than I will.

STAN For what? No more job to go to.

ABBY But ... aren't you going to look for another job?

STAN Yes ... I am. As soon I figure things out.

ABBY

I still don't understand why you left Shaklee (pronounced

Shack-lee). They love you there.

STAN It's ... complicated.

ABBY If you were going back to finish your PhD, I —

STAN I can't do that.

ABBY You were so close.

STAN Face it, Abby. I just wasn't smart enough.

ABBY That's just another tape. Another "Poor Me." Fine. Fine. But

what are we going to live on?

STAN Can't you ask your parents for a loan?

ABBY Why can't you ask your mother for once?

STAN I'm ... I'm planning to. I just have to find the right ... You

know how she is.

ABBY Oh, God. You're going to make me go back to teaching, aren't

you? I can't do it, Stan. I can't face another principal and those teacher-parent conferences and Back-to-School Nights ... / Just

thinking about it makes me sick to my stomach.

STAN Abby. Abby. Abby, relax. We're going to be fine. You don't

have to go back to teaching. / I just need a little ...

ABBY I mean, it's not like we're still in our twenties. We can't just

throw away paychecks / on trips to Reno.

STAN I'll work it out, okay? I promise.

ABBY You won't talk to Steve about taking you back? I'm sure he

would. You've already put in so much time there.

STAN I know I have. I've wasted my life.

Pause.

ABBY I'm sorry I threw your Racing Forms on the floor.

STAN That's okay.

ABBY I just get ... I get so angry sometimes.

Pause.

STAN You don't have to go to the wedding.

ABBY No, it's all right. I'll go if it means that much to you.

STAN No. You shouldn't. Besides, what the hell is the old man

thinking? What is this, his fifth? The prick.

Pause.

ABBY Maybe you're right. Maybe we should make this a permanent

separation.

(Pause.)

I left the number on the fridge in case you need it. And there's some frozen dinners in the freezer in case you get hungry later.

Pause. STAN squeezes her arm gently. Pause.