

**THE EXCEPTIONALS**

by Bob Clyman

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## CHARACTERS

GWEN	30s; a mother; quick, brittle, anxious and high-strung
ALLIE	30s; a mother; feisty, irreverent, subversive
TOM	30s; Allie's husband; gregarious, seemingly confident but sensitive to slights
CLAIRE	40s; extremely bright, enigmatic, strategic

Setting: The site of a donor insemination research program for 'exceptional' children and their parents. The scenes take place in either the Director of Parent Services' office or the adjacent waiting room. There are two chairs, a love seat and a coffee table in the waiting room. In the office, a desk, a chair, and a mirror along one wall.

Time: The foreseeable future

Note: The use of back slash (/) marks towards the end of a line signifies where the next character speaking should interrupt.

If a back slash precedes an ellipsis (/...) at the end of a line, the interruption should come in as quickly as possible after the last word but not interrupt it.

If a line ends with an ellipsis but no back slash, the lack of a full stop suggests that the character is implicitly pointing toward some completion of his thought. In many of those instances in the character might have asked something to the effect of, 'Do you know what I mean,' if he had completed the sentence.

If an ellipsis takes place within a speech rather than at the end of it, it means the character has interrupted himself to pursue a different thought.

If the word or words immediately preceding an ellipsis are in parentheses, the character does not actually say those words. I am simply trying to clarify, when it might otherwise be ambiguous, what the character would have said if he had completed the sentence.

**ACT ONE**

(A LIGHT COMES UP ON CLAIRE, DOWNSTAGE. SHE ADDRESSES AN AUDIENCE)

**CLAIRE**

So imagine someone just created an exceptional new kind of rose. They're only available at a special place, and you can only take home a few at a time. But when you plant them, they transform your garden completely. 'There couldn't possibly be a more beautiful garden,' you think, but soon you're back to get a few more, and then a few more, and each time your garden is that much more beautiful. Everyone you know drops by to marvel. They ask if it's all right to take a few cuttings, and of course you let them, because there can never be too much beauty in the world. Even the bees are smitten by these roses. They hover for hours, longing for a chance to pollinate them. Sunlight seems to linger just a bit longer on them at the end of the day. And there don't seem to be as many weeds now. It's as if they've receded to make way for this glorious profusion of fragrance, color and beauty.

(SLIGHT BEAT)

I like to talk about roses, because even the word conjures up visions of a better, more exceptional world. What about the word 'exceptional' ... is there really such a thing? Some people will tell you there isn't ... that everything's a matter of taste, but I think those people aren't being honest. We all know 'exceptional' when we see it ... and once we have, we can never really be happy with anything less.

(AS LIGHTS GO DOWN ON CLAIRE, A CONCENTRATED LIGHT COMES UP ON GWEN, MID-THIRTIES AND CONSERVATIVELY DRESSED. SHE IS SITTING TENSELY AND APPEARS TO BE WAITING. AFTER SEVERAL BEATS, MORE GENERAL LIGHTING REVEALS SHE IS IN A WAITING ROOM. ALLIE, MID-THIRTIES AND MORE CASUALLY ATTIRE, HAS JUST ENTERED AND IS STANDING NEAR THE DOOR, PURSE SLUNG OVER HER SHOULDER AND A DUNKIN DONUTS STYROFOAM CUP)

**ALLIE**

(AFTER A COUPLE OF BEATS)

Hi. You waiting to see Margo?

**GWEN**

Yes.

**ALLIE**

Me too. That new assistant what's her name said for me and my husband to be here at 10.

**GWEN**

You must have heard her wrong ... my appointment's for 10.

**ALLIE**

She probably forgot to write one of us down. You just checking out places, or have you used them before?

**GWEN**

We picked the donor for our son here. Ethan.

**ALLIE**

Great name. How old is he?

**GWEN**

Five.

**ALLIE**

Really? Same with Michael. He your only so far?

**GWEN**

Yes.

**ALLIE**

Tom and I are thinking about a second, but there are some issues. Is your husband coming?

**GWEN**

Ex-husband.

**ALLIE**

Oh, I'm ...

**GWEN**

It's fine. Trust me.

(ALLIE TAKES A SOMEWHAT CRUMPLED PIECE OF PAPER FROM HER PURSE AND SMOOTHS IT OUT BEFORE HANDING IT TO GWEN)

You like any of these?

(CLAIRE LOOKS AT HER FOR CLARIFICATION)

Names in case the next one's a girl.

**GWEN**

Isn't that something you and your husband / should ...

**ALLIE**

What do you think about Sarah?

(BEAT. GWEN STARES BLANKLY)

If it's a girl. Tom refuses to talk about names. He's afraid of getting too attached in case something happens. He started freaking out with Michael the moment we put a deposit down on the sperm. I said to him, 'Tom, you can't be attached already, the donor's barely had time to zip up his pants.'

**GWEN**

(SMILING WEAKLY)

Huh.

**ALLIE**

He thinks I can't understand, because I didn't have a brother that was only two when he drowned.

**GWEN**

I can't even imagine what that would be like.

**ALLIE**

It wasn't like anything ... Tom wasn't born yet! How can a fully grown man still be grieving over something he never went through in the first place, it doesn't make sense?!

**GWEN**

Obviously you know the circumstances / a great (deal better)...

**ALLIE**

(A SUDDEN FONDNESS)

Although I don't know ... there's actually something very ... 'Tom' about it.

(SLIGHT BEAT)

He should be here any second ... he just had a really important job interview.

(SHE KNOCKS ON WOOD. GWEN SMILES, THEN REACHES INTO HER PURSE, TAKES OUT A PROFESSIONAL JOURNAL AND FLIPS TO A PARTICULAR ARTICLE)

**ALLIE**

Looks technical ... is that for work?

**GWEN**

(BARELY ACKNOWLEDGING THE QUESTION)

Umm.

**ALLIE**

Are you a scientist?

**GWEN**

Yes.

**ALLIE**

What's it about?

**GWEN**

Like you were saying ... it's technical.

(GWEN TURNS BACK TO THE ARTICLE, AS ALLIE STARES AT HER)

**ALLIE**

Are you in Platinum?

**GWEN**

(SLIGHT BEAT)

Why?

**ALLIE**

You are, aren't you? Margo said only the top two percent of the moms here get picked / for Platinum.

**GWEN**

If I were in Platinum, I don't think Margo would want me to discuss it. The mothers in Platinum are part of an important study.

**ALLIE**

I don't mind telling you which group I'm in.

**GWEN**

Do you know anything about research? In a well designed study, no one in the study is supposed to discuss it. Just saying you're in the study could skew the results.

**ALLIE**

Boy, some of those tests were hard.

**GWEN**

Did you understand what I / just said?

**ALLIE**

How the fuck do I know what 'shallow brooks are noisy' means?

**GWEN**

I don't know how to be any / clearer.

**ALLIE**

Although I think I aced that one with all the inkblots that look like penises?

**GWEN**

Would you / please stop ... ?

I'm teasing you.

**ALLIE**

Why?

**GWEN**

I know we just met, but you remind me of Mt. Vesuvius a couple of seconds before it blew. I'm only trying to help.

**ALLIE**

By teasing me?

**GWEN**

That's what I do with Tom whenever he gets tense.

**ALLIE**

Has it ever worked?  
(SLIGHT BEAT)  
I just think when you're in a waiting room, and somebody asks you nicely, / the least ...

**GWEN**

Hold that thought.  
(REACHING FOR HER CELL PHONE, SHE READS THE MESSAGE WITH  
OBVIOUS DISPLEASURE)

**ALLIE**

Your husband?

**GWEN**

Yeah, you want me to read it to you?

**ALLIE**

I don't think he'd / appreciate ...

**GWEN**

'Traffic on the Thruway.' Like name me a time since the Middle Ages there wasn't.

**ALLIE**

I should probably get back / to my ...

**GWEN**  
(SLIGHT BEAT, THEN INDICATING HER JOURNAL)

No problem ... I have a book. I never go anywhere without a book.

**ALLIE**

(ALLIE REACHES INTO HER PURSE AND PULLS OUT A PAPERBACK BOOK WITH A BRIGHT PINK COVER. GWEN STARES AT IT IN DISBELIEF, THEN RESUMES READING)

I just finished 'Rogue' by Danielle Steele. The plot was okay, but the sex stuff was nowhere near as ... you know the one I mean ... by Cassie Edwards?

**GWEN**

Uh-huh.

**ALLIE**

Isn't she terrific?

**GWEN**

I've never even heard of Cassie, whatever you said her / name was.

**ALLIE**

I'll bet you read a lot to Ethan.

**GWEN**

I try to.

**ALLIE**

Michael's subject is math.

**GWEN**

(TRYING TO GET BACK TO HER WORK)

Really?

**ALLIE**

He probably gets that from me.

**GWEN**

Uh-huh.

**ALLIE**

It takes me two seconds max to work out the tip in a restaurant.

**GWEN**

Huh.

**ALLIE**

(BEAT)

So what do you leave, 15, 18 ... as a tip?

**GWEN**

It depends ... I don't / know.

**ALLIE**

20, if the service was really great?

**GWEN**

I guess.

**ALLIE**

Make up some amount your dinner just cost. I'll tell you for 15, 18, figure the tax / is ...

**GWEN**

What is your / point?

**ALLIE**

Since you're asking, I really don't like being patronized.

**GWEN**

How was I patronizing you?

**ALLIE**

(POINTING AT GWEN'S JOURNAL)

'It's technical?'

**GWEN**

You don't think you're being a little too sensitive?

**ALLIE**

I'll bet you'd be pretty upset if I was in Platinum too.

**GWEN**

Why would I care what group / you're in?

**ALLIE**

I mean, if I'm in the top two per cent, the standards / must not ...

**GWEN**

I don't believe in judging / people (based on ) ...

**ALLIE**

Well, I / am.

**GWEN**

You are not.

**GWEN**

(BEAT, AS SHE STARES AT ALLIE BEFORE SUDDENLY FLARING)

Why isn't that assistant at her desk?!

(SLIGHT BEAT)

This could never have happened when Olive was here. If you and I had shown up at the same time, Olive would have asked one of us to wait in the atrium.

(SLIGHT BEAT)

No, Olive ran a tight ship. She would have never created this kind of chaos and then abandoned her post.

**ALLIE**

(SLIGHT BEAT)

Have you ever run into another mom in the waiting room like this?

**GWEN**

No.

**ALLIE**

In the parking lot?

**GWEN**

You're the first mom I've seen since I joined the program.

**ALLIE**

I don't think it's a mistake. Did you get a certified letter saying to be here at 10 and plan on staying all day?

**GWEN**

Don't worry, Margo's going to walk in here and get this whole thing straightened out.

(LOOKING AT HER WATCH, UNCERTAINLY)

I mean, they can't just kick us out ... this is a longitudinal study. They have five years of data on Ethan. As long as our daily logs are in by the end of month ...

(SLIGHT BEAT. THEN, WITH DIFFICULTY)

I'm sorry if I ... sounded like I was patronizing you.

**ALLIE**

We're good.

(SLIGHT BEAT)

Must be cool being a scientist. I could never sit still that long. What've you got, a Ph.D.?

**GWEN**

Yes. Well, except for my orals.

**ALLIE**

What happened?

**GWEN**

You know ... life.

**ALLIE**

Gotcha.

**GWEN**

Not that I've ever let it stop me. There's a lot you can do with a Master's Degree in molecular biology. Like teach.

**ALLIE**

What do you teach?

**GWEN**

(SLIGHT BEAT)

Earth science.

**ALLIE**

(SENSING GWEN'S EMBARRASSMENT)

Truthfully, I have no idea how I made it into the study.

**GWEN**

Well, picture the way a bell curve slopes down approaching a line in both directions. For every person all the way on the right, there's got to be another person all the way ... I mean in general, not you / in particular ...

**ALLIE**

You mean the asymptote.

(SLIGHT BEAT)

The line those slopey things approach at either end? Some people say 'a ... symp ... tote,' but I never pronounce the 'p'

**GWEN**

I always pronounce the 'p.'

**ALLIE**

It's a free country.

(SLIGHT BEAT)

Margo's always ragging at me to go back to school, because according to the scan they did, my genes have a ton of potential, even though I hide it pretty good.

**GWEN**

You should definitely take her up ... the program will pay your tuition.

**ALLIE**

Half the classes are after Tom gets home, and I'm busy making dinner.

**GWEN**

That's just an excuse. Margo's right ... someone in Platinum who can't be bothered to finish college ... there's a word for that.

**ALLIE**

Incongruous?

**GWEN**

(FINDING IT HARDER TO HIDE HER SURPRISE AT ALLIE'S VOCABULARY THIS TIME)

No, waste.

**ALLIE**

You ever have shit like that come out of your mouth, you've got no idea where it came from?

**GWEN**

I had a student once ... your exact situation, and I told / her , 'The best ...'

**ALLIE**

Shit! Did I remember to knock on wood right after I mentioned his job interview?

**GWEN**

I think so.

**ALLIE**

Thank God. You're Catholic, right?

**GWEN**

What makes you think that?

**ALLIE**

Call it a hunch. I'm basically an atheist, but I believe there's a force in the universe that unless you remember to knock on wood, you're totally fucked.

(BEAT)

Truthfully, I only joined this study because of all the things they cover we could've never afforded for Michael. Just the medical benefits, but then getting to send Michael to Hill Crest, this school that costs maybe 20, 30 grand, and that's just tuition ...

(FINDING IT HARDER TO CONCEAL HER ANXIETY)

... I mean the amount it costs to buy your kid a frigging soccer uniform these (days)... and now with Tom out of work ... they can't kick Michael out, just because I flipped Margo a little attitude ... she was saying how the Platinum donors here have to agree to get a vasectomy after 24 kids.

**GWEN**

There's a perfectly sound mathematical reason.

**ALLIE**

I said it sounded to me like something a psychotic child dictator would make people do.

**GWEN**

Anything higher than 24 creates an unacceptable risk that two children from the same donor might accidentally meet.

**ALLIE**

And?

**GWEN**

Well, if one was a boy and the other a girl, they would be brother and sister.

(SLIGHT BEAT, AS ALLIE WAITS FOR HER TO CONTINUE)

Right?

**ALLIE**

Still with you.

**GWEN**

So ... let's say they happen to meet at a party. They've each had a little too much to drink ... do I really need to explain this to you?

**ALLIE**

So they go and have sex? It took a lot more than one brother and sister to create Mississippi.

**GWEN**

Even if they're perfectly normal, the odds of a defective baby, because each of them has a copy of the same rare ... why are you making me prove it's better not to have incest? I'll bet once you decided to use a donor, you only looked at programs where the donors were carefully screened, and when it comes to being rigorous, this program has the highest ... even men who clearly tested Platinum were weeded out if the scan found another defective / gene ...

**ALLIE**

I think it's the 'weeding out' part that makes me uneasy.

**GWEN**

98% of the mothers here can't get into Platinum, so their child won't be like Ethan or Michael ... how is that any different?

**ALLIE**

That's the problem, it isn't. Tell me you don't have any qualms about this whole 'Uber-sperm' Platinum thing.

**GWEN**

Did somebody put a gun to your head and make you join the program? This is the first serious attempt to study exceptional, donor-inseminated children, and personally I feel grateful that Ethan and I have the privilege / of playing a part.

**ALLIE**

(HAVING TUNED OUT SPEECH ALREADY, ALLIE REACHES TO CHECK A TEXT MESSAGE),

Fantastic. 'I'm still in traffic.' Tom should get a job teaching people how to text their wife so in case a terrorist reads it, he won't have a fucking clue where they are.

**GWEN**

(A COUPLE OF BEATS)

I was just wondering ... since we both have appointments at 10, would you mind letting me go first?

**ALLIE**

Kind of.

**GWEN**

I'm just a little nervous, that's all.

**ALLIE**

They're not gonna kick Ethan out of the program. If anyone should be nervous, / I'm ...

**GWEN**

Your husband isn't even here yet.

**ALLIE**

So I'll start without him.

**GWEN**

It's always better to start together when you're a couple.

**ALLIE**

They have research on that?

**GWEN**

Who knows when he'll even get here?

**ALLIE**

He's probably less than / five minutes ...

**GWEN**

(ABOUT TO LOSE IT)

Fine, if you really need me to say it ... please?

**ALLIE**

(BEAT)  
Okay.

**GWEN**

Thank you.  
(GWEN RESUMES READING HER ARTICLE)  
Now was that so hard?

(BEFORE ALLIE CAN RESPOND, THE OFFICE DOOR OPENS. ALLIE AND GWEN ARE CLEARLY SURPRISED TO SEE SOMEONE OTHER THAN MARGO ENTER THE ROOM)

**CLAIRE**

Hi, my name is Dr. Lindstrom, please call me Claire. Ill be meeting with you today.

**GWEN**

What happened to Margo?

**CLAIRE**

She won't be in.

**GWEN**

Is everything all right?

**CLAIRE**

(SLIGHT BEAT, AS SHE LOOKS AT GWEN WITH A MIXTURE OF CURIOSITY AND SURPRISE)  
Of course. I was expecting a Tom?

**ALLIE**

He's stuck in traffic.

**Claire**

(GESTURING TOWARDS HER OFFICE)  
Shall we?

**GWEN**

You want to see us together?

**CLAIRE**

For a bit.  
(AS ALLIE AND GWEN START TO FOLLOW HER, CLAIRE POINTS TO ALLIE'S EMPTY, STYROFOAM COFFEE CUP)  
Did you want to leave that?

(ALLIE GOES BACK FOR IT, SEES THERE IS NOWHERE TO PUT GARBAGE AND TAKES IT INTO THE OFFICE. UNABLE TO SEE A PLACE FOR GARBAGE THERE EITHER, SHE SETS IT NEAR HER ON THE DESK. CLAIRE HAS ALREADY STARTED)

How's Ethan feeling ... I understand he's out today?

**GWEN**

A little cold ... my sister's watching him. His school called you about a cold?  
(CLAIRE HAS BEGUN TO FOCUS ON ONE OF THE TWO LARGE FILES ON HER DESK)

Is that all Ethan?

**CLAIRE**

(FLIPPING THROUGH PAGES)  
I guess it beats paying a 14-year-old to talk on the phone.

**GWEN**

What does?

**CLAIRE**

Having your sister watch him.  
(HER EYES LINGERING ON SOMETHING)  
Things a little better between you?

**GWEN**

Why, what does it (say)... I don't remember telling Margo ...  
(AS MUCH TO ALLIE)  
We're just very different, that's all.

**CLAIRE**

Takes more after your mom?  
(SLIGHT BEAT)  
Considering how close you were with your dad.  
(TO ALLIE)  
You don't mind, do you?  
(BEFORE ALLIE CAN SHRUG, CLAIRE IS BACK TO GWEN)  
At least it was quick.  
(SLIGHT BEAT)  
Aneurysm, right? I see the anniversary's coming up.

**GWEN**

Next week.

**CLAIRE**

No surprise he collected model trains. Your father.  
(SLIGHT BEAT)

Since Ethan does.

**GWEN**

Oh, I (see) ... yes.

**CLAIRE**

(SLIGHT BEAT, THEN TO ALLIE)

Anything you need to say, or can we start?

**ALLIE**

I'm good.

**CLAIRE**

(TO BOTH OF THEM)

A few months ago the team completed its first major analysis of the data.

**GWEN**

Really?

**CLAIRE**

Nothing we didn't expect, but ...

(TO GWEN)

... you've done enough research yourself, Gwen ... I'm sure you remember how excited ... when your data didn't merely confirm ... they exceeded ...

**GWEN**

I certainly do.

**CLAIRE**

(INCLUDING ALLIE)

Remember, these are only trends, not definitive / results.

**GWEN**

No, I understand.

**CLAIRE**

As with any longitudinal / study ...

**GWEN**

That's exactly what I was telling her.

**CLAIRE**

(SLIGHT BEAT, AS SHE THROWS A MEANINGFUL GLANCE AT GWEN)

Five years ago, the team began to develop a new model, based on the research, for unlocking the full potential of a child's mind. With each new discovery, the team refined the model a little more, until it became so precise we were able to create an actual school.

I've spent these past five years preparing for the day we'd be ready to start taking students ... and now we are.

(SLIGHT BEAT)

A lot of people will be paying close attention and judging us, so we've had to be particularly selective in choosing our first group of children, and ... with so many outstanding children to choose from, and since we'll only be taking 12, unfortunately ... as I'm sure you can understand ... we were only able to include the most exceptional in our current group of finalists, which includes Ethan and Michael, so whatever happens next, they each deserve a round of applause for getting this far.

**GWEN**

(SLIGHT BEAT)

I'm speechless.

**CLAIRE**

Before we can make our final / decisions ...

**GWEN**

Is that why I'm here?

**CLAIRE**

Why you're both here.

**GWEN**

I'm not in trouble?

**CLAIRE**

No. Should you be?

**GWEN**

No.

(SLIGHT, AWKWARD BEAT)

**ALLIE**

I'm fine with the school Michael's in now.

**CLAIRE**

It's an excellent school, but even ... what's that name they have for the track he's in?

**ALLIE**

Triple G.

(TO GWEN)

They have three tracks at Michael's school.

**CLAIRE**

If a child tests smarter than a loaf of zucchini bread, he's automatically in the 'gifted' track. Then there's the 'gifted, gifted' track if he's average ...

**ALLIE**

The kids in Triple G are smart.

**CLAIRE**

But still a couple of 'G's' short of Michael.

**GWEN**

It's the exact same thing with Ethan at Bryce.

**ALLIE**

Where I went to school, they only had two tracks ... 'normal' and 'retarded' ... worked for me. Look, I know the work isn't always as challenging, but Ms. Edie tries ... there's a whole shelf of books just for Michael, and he's finally starting to make friends.

**CLAIRE**

Friends like that are fine, but he needs peers, and they aren't peers.

**ALLIE**

(SLIGHT BEAT)

I know.

**GWEN**

Same with Ethan ... nice school but no peers.

**CLAIRE**

(HANDING GWEN AND ALLIE SEVERAL TYPED PAGES)

This is only an overview. Dr. Vorsiff will explain everything after lunch.

**GWEN**

Dr. Vorsiff wants to meet with us?

**CLAIRE**

I'd be misleading you if I didn't say a number of slots are already filled.

**GWEN**

Oh. Well, as long as Ethan ... how many?

**CLAIRE**

A few of those children, you might as well throw out your computer and replace it with them, but we need the right blend. It's like an orchestra. Even if the best musicians in town all played the cello, you wouldn't want to hear Beethoven's 9<sup>th</sup> played / only by ...

**GWEN**

(MORE SHARPLY THAN INTENDED)

I know what a blend is. So if Ethan isn't a cello, what is he?

**CLAIRE**

A flute.

**GWEN**

Why a flute?

**CLAIRE**

Why is Michael another flute? Why is Emma Harris a clarinet?

(AS IF ABOUT TO EITHER PONDER OR ANSWER THIS, CLAIRE TURNS TO ALLIE INSTEAD)

Any news on Tom?

**ALLIE**

I'm not even getting a signal.

**CLAIRE**

I need some time alone with Gwen anyway. Would you mind waiting out there?

(ALLIE STARTS TO EXIT, AGAIN FORGETTING HER EMPTY COFFEE CUP. CLAIRE LOOKS AT THE CUP, GIVING ALLIE A CHANCE TO REMEMBER, UNTIL ALLIE IS AT THE DOOR)

And taking that cup with you?

(ALLIE TURNS BACK, LOOKS AT THE CUP, THEN UP AT CLAIRE)

Thank you.

(ALLIE GETS THE CUP, EXITS TO THE WAITING ROOM AND THEN OUTSIDE TO WAIT FOR TOM, AS THE SCENE IN OFFICE BEGINS)

**GWEN**

So when you're choosing ... I assume you also take their mothers into account?

**CLAIRE**

I'm not sure / I ...

**GWEN**

Children take their lead from us ... the sort of books we read ...

**CLAIRE**

Is your / point ... ?

**GWEN**

I'm just saying if one parent reads novels by Cassie Steele ...

**CLAIRE**

Who?

**GWEN**

Cassie Steele.

**CLAIRE**

I think you may be mixing up Cassie Edwards and Danielle / Steele ...

**GWEN**

All I know is the cover was so pink it nearly blinded me.

**CLAIRE**

(CLAIRE OPENS GWEN'S FILE AND FLIPS PAGES)

Try not to think of this as a competition. I mean, in a way it is ... in a way that's exactly what it is ... but if you think about the orchestra as a whole ...

(HAVING FOUND WHAT SHE WANTED)

It's Pete, right? Your ex-husband ... you call him Pete?

**GWEN**

Right?

**CLAIRE**

I was going over the sign in sheets from school, and it looks like you dropped Ethan off two Mondays in a row.

**GWEN**

Pete had to miss a weekend ... something with his girlfriend's family in Seattle.

**CLAIRE**

Doesn't he get to swap?

**GWEN**

If he asks. You're not saying I should force Ethan on him?

**CLAIRE**

No, but if Pete pulls away, how you will ever find time for yourself?

**GWEN**

That weekend the train museum had a special exhibit. Ethan loves all those Pullman cars from the twenties ... the brass railings and walnut panels ... if you could've seen his eyes ... how could any mother need more than that?

**CLAIRE**

I see ... still not dating.

**GWEN**

I really don't see what this / has to do with ...?

**CLAIRE**

On the last questionnaire, you thought you were ready, and that was six months ago.

**GWEN**

I can't just snap my fingers, I'm not 25.

**CLAIRE**

No, and at your age you can't afford to waste six months. You're still an attractive woman ...have you tried the Internet?

**GWEN**

I'm not looking that kind of thing.

**CLAIRE**

I don't know what stories you've heard, but there are plenty of discreet services these days for busy, professional women who want a dignified alternative to being fondled in a club. I'm wasting my breath, aren't I?

**GWEN**

About that.

**CLAIRE**

(SLIGHT BEAT)

While we're pausing, when you asked me earlier about Margo, and I didn't really answer, you may have guessed I didn't want to get into it in front of Allie, but the truth is we had to let her go.

**GWEN**

Let her go?

**Claire**

Don't think it was easy. Dr. Vorsiff and I go all the way back with Margo, but she ran Parent Services ... she supervised Olive and was accountable for her work, so when we discovered the damage Olive nearly caused by ignoring procedures ... what choice did we have but to let both of them go?

(SLIGHT BEAT)

It might surprise you, but in all my years, I've never known a single Platinum donor by his actual name. Your donor for instance has always been C2 to me as he is to you ... conversely, if C2 ever needed to ask a question about Michael, he'd've said 'how is C2 hypen 17?' Because the right to privacy for both ... which is why we have the procedures, right?

**GWEN**

I'm not really sure which procedures / you've ...

**CLAIRE**

In return for their 'donations,' if you will, we have allowed these exceptional men the unique opportunity to remain informed about their offspring by sending them monthly reports. No personal details, of course, and Olive's job was to scrub each report for anything that could possibly identify ... then to ask the parent to read it over carefully just to be sure. Once the parent gave it back to her, all Olive had to do before mailing it off was proof it one last time herself, which she must not have considered important (enough) ... which is how one of the mothers was able to take a flash memory card ... you know, those things some people use to record their own voice instead of writing a letter ... and slip it between two pages ...

(CLAIRE REMOVES A FLASH MEMORY CARD FROM BETWEEN TWO PAGES IN ETHAN'S FILE AND SHOWS IT TO GWEN)

... they're about yay big ... so when C2 opened the latest report on Ethan, he would have found this recording you sent him.

(CLAIRE GOES TO THE DOOR AND OPENS IT)

Still no Tom? Gwen's going to get herself some soup and come back in an hour.

(AS GWEN STARTS TO SPEAK, CLAIRE STOPS HER)

Not until you've had soup. If you go less than a mile on Durant, there's a cute little place called 'Grist for the Mill' ... their tomato basil is the best.

(GWEN SEEMS FROZEN BUT THEN SUDDENLY EXITS WITH A BRISK, PURPOSEFUL STRIDE. CLAIRE GESTURES FOR ALLIE TO SIT)

**CLAIRE**

So, did you have a chance to look at / those ...

**ALLIE**

Before we get to the school, can I bring something up?

(SLIGHT BEAT)

Tom and I think it's time for another child.

**CLAIRE**

Allie, that's wonderful.

**ALLIE**

Michael's been begging us for over a year.

**CLAIRE**

The team will be thrilled.

**ALLIE**

Tom and I would love ...

(KNOCKING ON WOOD)

... a little girl. My sister Beth says she took a ton of potassium, or Bree and Angie might've turned out to be Bruno / and ...

**CLAIRE**

(TRYING NOT TO SEEM TOO DISMISSIVE BEFORE SHIFTING)

Umm ... the new donor catalogue just came in ... did you and Tom want to look today?

**ALLIE**

Right now his job situation ...

**CLAIRE**

Understood.

**ALLIE**

(KNOCKING ON WOOD AGAIN)

... which may be about to change, but until he actually has / something ...

**CLAIRE**

If you're worried about the money, we're completely / behind you on ...

**ALLIE**

(WITH SHARPER INTENSITY)

I just don't want to cause any problems here for Michael.

(SLIGHT BEAT)

Please don't take this ... Tom adores Michael. He just feels maybe this time we should choose a donor from one of your other groups ... someone who's more, you know ... average.

**CLAIRE**

'Average.'

**ALLIE**

Truthfully, if it was up to Tom, we'd adopt.

**CLAIRE**

Even though you're still perfectly capable / of having ... ?

**ALLIE**

And I want that, but doesn't it seem kind of selfish when he can't ... and I agree with him that adopting ... every time I hear some kid got left in a dumpster, but I can't help it, I still want my own.

(SLIGHT BEAT)

When my mom died, all my friends were there for me, but it's my sisters that got me through. Even now, just knowing I can call Janet or Beth, I feel safer, so if anything ever happened to me and Tom / ...

**CLAIRE**

You'd want Michael and his sister to have what you ... no, I / understand.

**ALLIE**

Janet's dumber than a box of hair, but she's still my sister, so even if our new donor guy's more like / Janet ...

**CLAIRE**

It isn't quite that simple. The world has changed since you had Michael. Mothers have gotten a lot more particular. Five years ago, you could have found half a dozen Toms in our Silver catalogue, but nowadays ... and it isn't just here. Nobody's taking average ... there's no demand.

**ALLIE**

(POINTING TO THE FILE)

You have it in there Tom is dyslexic?

(CLAIRE NODS)

It didn't get picked up till high school, so he grew up assuming he was retarded. When the lady who did the testing told him he's dyslexic, Tom broke down and cried. He said it wasn't fair having whatever she just called him on top of being retarded.

(A SMALL CHUCKLE FROM CLAIRE)

Cut to 12 years later ... Tom just found out he's sterile ... so we wind up here, and Tom picks up that brochure on how great you are at keeping people with any genetic defect who want to donate from slipping through, so he flips the page to see who you're calling defective, and right near the top is dyslexia.

(NOTICING CLAIRE GLANCE AT HER WATCH)

I know the idea when we started ... if we ever decided to have more kids ... as long as Michael was doing okay, and we wanted to keep him in the program ... do you understand what I'm asking?

**CLAIRE**

I think you're asking if you refuse a platinum donor this time, will Michael be terminated from the program.

**ALLIE**

Will he?

(INDICATING CLAIRE'S WATCH)

I know we're supposed to be talking about the new school, but if you're just gonna toss Michael out, / there's no point ...

**CLAIRE**

I'm still not clear ... I can see why Tom wants a donor who's average like him, but is that / what you ... ?

**ALLIE**

Not like him ... like us. I know I test like a major geek, but those scores aren't me.

**CLAIRE**

Granted you're a little rough around the edges, but forget the scores ... your genetic scan was one of the most exceptional / any of ...

**ALLIE**

If I have all this potential laying dormant, shouldn't some of it be awake by now?

**CLAIRE**

'Lying' dormant.

**ALLIE**

There, you see.

**CLAIRE**

What I see is someone who knows 'lying dormant' is right but prefers to say it wrong.

(SLIGHT BEAT)

Personally I think Tom deserves a world of credit. Some husbands, just the idea of a donor ...

**ALLIE**

So if it means that much to him ... ?

**CLAIRE**

I understand, but what about you ... as Michael's mother ... don't you think a little sister who's more like him / would offer ...

**ALLIE**

That's what I said to Tom, but he feels very / strongly ...

**CLAIRE**

I know what Tom feels, it's all I keep hearing ... what I don't understand ...

(SLIGHT BEAT)

I realize you only joined this study for ... 'practical' reasons. You're different from the other moms. They all take their children to foreign films and tell them fruit is a dessert. You have a rebel streak, and personally, I find that appealing, but you and I aren't booking a cruise, and if you're telling me, as a mother, you'd be willing to deprive your second child of the same advantages Michael ... just so she can match up better with Tom / ...

**ALLIE**

(SHARPLY)

You have no idea how what it's like for Tom. He has so much love to give, but when he's with Michael ... he feels smaller ... so if he's just gonna wind up feeling he doesn't measure up again ...

**CLAIRE**

I understand how Tom must (feel) ... Michael does that to people. Did his teacher tell you the problem he's having in groups?

**ALLIE**

That's not his / (fault)... ...?

**CLAIRE**

I'm not saying it / is.

**ALLIE**

Ms. Edie loves breaking the class into small groups and letting them compete to see which group can figure some problem out first. And I get how that could be fun, except the kids in Michael's group just sit with their thumbs up their butts while Michael solves it, and the kids in every other group know they're going to lose, so they give up and start screwing around, which really pisses Ms. Edie off ... she's always saying, 'I can't blame Michael for being so smart,' but I know she does.

**CLAIRE**

It won't take him long to figure out if he just pretends to get a few answers wrong ...

**ALLIE**

He already has.

**CLAIRE**

I wonder who he gets that from?

(BEAT)

Do you really want to make him go through what you did in school?

**ALLIE**

(SLIGHT BEAT)

What am I supposed to do with that? You think it doesn't kill me to see him act like he's interested, the same way I did, when he's bored out of his frigging mind, or I don't kick myself, because if anyone should know how to help him, but I don't have a fucking clue? No one's invited him over to play in months ... and this is with the program. What's gonna happen to Michael if you kick him out?

**CLAIRE**

I'm not saying we will. It's not like there's a policy ... we haven't needed one. You're the first parents to ask us for a second baby who isn't as smart as the first. What I do know is by the time we decide, every slot for the school will be full, so I guess I'm saying ... and believe me, I really don't mean this as a threat, although I suppose you could take it as one ... Michael could end up with nothing.

(AFTER A BEAT, TOM ENTERS)

**TOM**

Sorry, you wouldn't believe the traffic ...  
(HE NOTICES CLAIRE)

**CLAIRE**

You must be Tom. I'm Dr. Lindstrom ... Claire.

**TOM**

What happened, did Margo get canned?

**CLAIRE**

Unfortunately, I'm not at liberty / to ...

**TOM**

Hey, nothing's forever ... especially now with the whole world going global.  
(HE DROPS A BAG WITH SOME DONUTS ON HER DESK AND BEGINS  
PUTTING THEM ONTO PAPER PLATES. WHILE HIS MANNER  
SUGGESTS A GOOD-NATURED, EXPANSIVE SALESMAN, THE  
PRESSURE OF HIS SPEECH SUGGEST HINTS AT SOME UNDERLYING  
ANXIETY)

Does Bavarian Crème work for you? Margo loved / Bavarian ...

**ALLIE**

You stopped for donuts?

**TOM**

Before my interview ... is that okay?

**CLAIRE**

Since we're starting a little late ...

**TOM**

I know ... you think they could shut down just one lane on the Thruway instead of two, since nobody's ever working on either. Maybe you can tell me ... has anyone ever found a gene for religion? Right before my interview, I'm flipping through a magazine, and it turns out a light goes on deep in somebody's brain when he's feeling connected to God, which I've never personally, so if it only happens to some people, what if there's a gene / that ...

**CLAIRE**

There isn't.

**TOM**

Sorry ... way too much coffee.

**CLAIRE**

But it's an interesting thought.

**TOM**

It's yours ... I've got a dozen more just like it. Some guy told me he tries to come up with at least one new idea whenever he's stuck in traffic ...he learned that in anger management.

(NOTICING ALLIE'S EXPRESSION)

What?

**ALLIE**

The interview?

**TOM**

(TO CLAIRE)

How much do you know about calibration devices?

(CLAIRE GESTURES 'NOT VERY MUCH')

Let's say you bought a piece of electrical equipment two years ago, and lately ...

(QUICKLY TO ALLIE)

... this'll just take a minute ...

(BACK TO CLAIRE)

... the readings seem a little off. A good calibration device tells you by how much, so you can adjust, but what if your calibration device is off too? I've seen low end devices that were less accurate than the equipment they were trying to calibrate.

**CLAIRE**

Interesting.

**TOM**

Yeah, well you try doing it 15 years. So it was either keep doing it another 15 and hope I can save enough to retire early like Joe / is doing ...

**ALLIE**

His old boss.

**TOM**

... or be proactive and do something now.

**CLAIRE**

So leaving was your decision?

**TOM**

Well, not exactly ... I was let go, but Joe's a pretty astute reader of men, and he said my non-verbals were coming through loud and clear. Of course it doesn't take long to start missing the paycheck, so when this headhunter called about Murphy and Finn ... better product line, big hike in pay ... of course I've done my homework, I know exactly what

this guy needs, so I start right in, and he's loving it. I'm only penciled in for 30 minutes, but it's been 50, and I'm still on a roll, when halfway through a sentence I stop, because it's suddenly clear ... so I tell him, "Look, Murph" ... that's what he asked me to call him ... 'Murph' ... "I could do this job in my sleep and still make you money, but hearing myself aloud, I know coming on board at this juncture would be a colossal mistake. If I don't take stock of my life and figure out what I really want, I probably never will." So Murph leans back and starts telling me how after his wife divorced him, he drank a fifth of scotch a day, ignored his person hygiene and started keeping a loaded gun in his desk, until his sponsor made him take a personal inventory, which looking back was the single most important thing he ever did.

(BEAT, A LITTLE THROWN BY THE LACK OF REACTION)

And truthfully, I'm not terribly sanguine about where the calibration industry is going in this country. Don't be surprised if you wake up one morning, and the entire concept has been shipped overseas. But if you want to think 'big picture' ... for every guy who's standing there with a pink slip saying life isn't fair ... that's maybe four guys in Mexico who finally have a job ... you know what I mean?

**CLAIRE**

I think so. I'm just not clear ... while you're figuring this out ... how you plan to pay your bills. Allie hasn't worked since Michael, and now with a second child ... true, we've been able to help with medical insurance and certain / other ...

**TOM**

Aren't those covered by your grant?

**CLAIRE**

Yes ...

**TOM**

Then why did you say that like we're asking for a handout?

**CLAIRE**

That's not what / I ...

**TOM**

We're perfectly capable of paying for our own medical insurance.

**ALLIE**

How?

**TOM**

(THROWN BY HER QUESTION)

What do you ...? The same way any family ... we just would.

(TO CLAIRE)

Nobody's destitute here. My cousin installs commercial carpeting, he throws me a little work ... I'm helping another guy build a deck ...

(BACK TO ALLIE).  
... did you tell her what we want to do different this time?

**ALLIE**  
Claire said it isn't that simple. All the donors are ...  
(LOOKING TO CLAIRE FOR SUPPORT)

**CLAIRE**  
It's just the market, Tom.

**TOM**  
Then we'll go somewhere else ...like we agreed.

**ALLIE**  
She said it's the same everywhere else.

**TOM**  
So what are you / saying?

**ALLIE**  
I don't know! Maybe if you'd been here on time, / I wouldn't ...

**TOM**  
What was I supposed to do, stand up and walk out in / the middle?

**ALLIE**  
No, just have your great epiphany at the beginning instead of waiting 50 / minutes.

**TOM**  
My what?

**ALLIE**  
Your great ... reve / lation.

**TOM**  
I know what a fucking 'epiphany' is. I just don't know whose benefit you're using a word like 'epiphany' for!

(TO CLAIRE)  
Believe me, she'll be a lot less chichi during the make up sex tonight.

**ALLIE**  
Do you think Claire finds that funny?

**TOM**  
I just met the woman ... I haven't a fucking clue what she / finds funny ...

**ALLIE**

I'm still curious how we'll get lettuce once all the farmers in Mexico starts retooling for all the jobs in calibration / that are going to ...

**CLAIRE**

You know these issues always stir up / a lot of ...

**TOM**

(STILL TO ALLIE)

We had an agreement!

(BEAT)

Michael's amazing, but I thought we agreed one amazing kid is hard enough.

**ALLIE**

Maybe we need to try harder.

**TOM**

Did I miss when someone decided we're not good enough anymore?

(TO CLAIRE)

My dad ... you gave him a hammer, a few nails and some scrap wood, he could build you a house. You had a question about American history, just ask my dad ... and wherever he picked that stuff up, it wasn't reading, because it turns out he was dyslexic like me ... and what I think you're saying ... if my mom came to you and said she wanted a kid like my dad, you'd've told her, 'Sorry, we don't make that kind of kid anymore.'

**ALLIE**

I know we agreed at home, and maybe it's the best decision for us ... I just don't know if Michael ...

**TOM**

You think he's gonna care the baby isn't a genius? He'll be the older brother ... he's the one that's supposed to be smart.

**ALLIE**

What about when his sister gets a 'C,' and her teacher tells her, "Stop saying you tried. No sister of Michael ... ?"

**TOM**

Her teacher can't say that if she's adopted. Some kid who actually needs ... and don't look at me like what we agreed at home suddenly matters again.

**ALLIE**

Why are you bringing up adoption, after all the frigging hours it took us to finally agree we / weren't going ... ?

**TOM**

Oh, so now if we agreed on something at home, it suddenly matters again?

**ALLIE**

I can't believe ...

(ALLIE STOPS, AS GWEN ENTERS)

**CLAIRE**

I thought I said an hour.

**GWEN**

I know, and I was halfway to that place with the soup when I suddenly remembered something important about the thing you were saying before.

**CLAIRE**

It couldn't wait until after lunch?

**TOM**

(TO GWEN)

We're pretty much done in here anyway.

**ALLIE**

What do you mean?

**TOM**

What else is there to talk about?

**ALLIE**

We haven't even gotten to why she wanted / us here.

**GWEN**

First, you tell us there are only a couple of slots ... so of course I'm trying especially hard to make a good impression, but then you blindsides me by bringing up that other thing, and you won't let me explain, so I'm driving, my mind's going over and over, and she's in here, probably getting treated with kid gloves, and I don't think that's fair.

**CLAIRE**

Actually, Gwen, I don't see how I could have been any fairer. I thought bringing it up before lunch, you'd have time to regain your composure and decide what you'd like to say instead of just reacting like ... well, this.

**GWEN**

(SLIGHT BEAT)

Right.

(TO ALLIE AND TOM, AS SHE TURNS TO GO)

Sorry for the interruption.

(GWEN LOOKS AT HER WATCH)

Why don't we make it an hour and 10 minutes, so you get all of your time.

(GWEN EXITS)

**CLAIRE**

(AFTER A COUPLE OF BEATS)

Try something with me. Imagine ... just as an exercise ... the two of you never got married ... never even met. Allie, why don't you go first? One day you're at a party and a celebrity ... pick one you've always wanted to meet ... comes over to talk with you. Naturally, you're nervous, but when you look at your watch, you've been talking for hours. Everyone else is gone ... even the host is gone. You open the door to leave, but instead of the street, you find yourselves in a bedroom with a single lit candle, and you start to make passionate love. Which celebrity did you imagine?

**TOM**

What?!

**CLAIRE**

Obviously, you are married, and Allie would never consider ... what I'm trying to get at / with this exercise ...

**TOM**

Do you have some uncle that got you this job?!

**ALLIE**

(AS TOM TURNS TO HER)

Don't look at me, / I didn't know ...

**TOM**

What did you tell her about our sex life?

**ALLIE**

Nothing.

**TOM**

If you don't like something, you should be telling me / instead of ...

**CLAIRE**

You're both making this much too complicated. Allie ... can you tell me who it was?

**ALLIE**

(SLIGHT BEAT, AWARE OF TOM)

What if it wasn't someone specific?

**CLAIRE**

Then pretend it was someone specific, and tell me him.

**ALLIE**

(BEAT)

All right, put down George Clooney.

**TOM**

I can't believe you just said that.

**ALLIE**

Why, you never said Angelina Jolie was hot?

**TOM**

Not like that, / I didn't.

**ALLIE**

I never asked you to name the sexiest person you / could think of ...?

**TOM**

Right, and I said you ...

(TO CLAIRE)

... but she said 'no, it has to be a movie star' ... meanwhile I'm trying to drive ... there's a fucking blizzard, and she's got this feral / expression ...

**ALLIE**

It was not feral...

**TOM**

(TO ALLIE)

... so finally I said, 'Angelie Jolie, are you satisfied,' just to make you stop.

**ALLIE**

And I said 'George Clooney' just to make her stop.

**TOM**

Except when I said it, we were driving home from a movie that Angelina Jolie was in. I can't help if she was the last face I saw.

**ALLIE**

Actually, the last face you saw was Brad Pitt, how come you didn't pick ...?

(TO CLAIRE)

Can I change to Brad Pitt?

**TOM**

So when I joke about make-up sex, it isn't funny, but it's okay for you / to ... ?

**CLAIRE**

Can anyone guess the point of my exercise?!

(BEAT)

Every woman needs a man to father her child, but how does she know which man? The one who writes beautiful sonnets to her on her birthday but has blotchy skin? The one who pulled her out of a half-frozen lake once and made soup to keep her warm but showed pictures of her naked to his friends? Whoever she chooses, he will be flawed, which is how it should be. She may even truly love this man, and I say thank God for that. It won't do her any good to mope around waiting for George Clooney to send her flowers, because he won't, and yet whenever I ask a woman to try this, she almost always pictures him ... but ... and here's my point ... she doesn't want George Clooney. She may think she does, but what she really wants is his genes.

**TOM**

(AFTER A COUPLE OF BEATS, TO ALLIE)

Why are you looking like that?

**ALLIE**

Like what?

**TOM**

Like anything she just said makes any sense.

(BACK TO CLAIRE)

Do you have a husband, kids, because don't see any pictures / on ...?

**CLAIRE**

Try to stay with me, Tom. Allie loves you ... she has since the two of you were in high school, and she wanted to have your children, but, no one's fault, it wasn't to be, so now her instinct ... if it has to be a stranger ... is to go after the choicest, most exceptional, Platinum genes, so your daughter / can have ...

**TOM**

She agreed!

**CLAIRE**

To what, Tom?! Let me guess ... it was a long week, the two of you were relaxing over wine, and something you said made her laugh ... she wanted to please you ... then another glass of wine ... you said 'adoption' ... 'average' ... she said 'when you put it that way ... maybe I've been too this or too that' ... but the thing is, Tom ... that isn't what she needs.

**TOM**

And you're more qualified than I am to know what that is?

**CLAIRE**

Apparently. You keep wanting to make it personal. Do you feel betrayed every time she ovulates? Well, the need I'm describing has about as much to do with you / as that.

**TOM**

(TURNING TO ALLIE)

That's it. I'm not going to sit here / and ...

**ALLIE**

She's right.

(BEAT)

I'm sorry. I never cared what kind of child ... 'as long as he had all his fingers and toes,' remember? ... but once I found out we could choose, and his life would be better ... things would come easier ... I couldn't say, 'No, I want him to struggle like us' ... and neither could you.

**TOM**

(CONCEDING)

I know.

**ALLIE**

And it's not like the first time we held Michael, I was thinking about his genes. He was special, because he was ours. Just getting to take him home and love him / was ...

**TOM**

I understand all that, / Allie ...

**ALLIE**

Let me say this!

(SLIGHT BEAT)

He didn't have to do anything special for me to love him, but then he started to, and I'm sorry ... I never thought I could love him even more because of that, but I did. I do. Sometimes I just sit there watching him play, and I feel ... like I've been invited into this special room where nobody else can go.

**CLAIRE**

(SLIGHT BEAT)

Tom, if Michael could choose the kind of sister ...?

**TOM**

Michael's five. The only thing he should be choosing is the kind of ice cream / he ...

**CLAIRE**

I'm just asking if he could choose, / what ... ?

**TOM**

I don't care!

(TO ALLIE)

All I keep hearing is what you want ... what Michael ... how come nobody's asking me what I want? Why is everyone acting like there's something wrong with wanting a kid who's a little like me?

(SLIGHT BEAT)

A couple of months ago I was asking Michael why he never plays with some toy I bought him. First thing he does is take me to this website about a group that's trying to have the toy recalled because of some tiny magnet a two-year-old choked on and died. Then he showed me how to recognize all the lead from the way light hits the paint, and I'm thinking, 'Jesus, it's a fucking toy' ... but he was right. And it's not like he was all prissy ... the hardest part was how patient ...

(SLIGHT BEAT)

Another time he asked me for help with his homework. The kid's five, I couldn't believe he was already learning to multiply fractions. I said, 'Lucky for you, your old man still has a few things in his tool kit,' and I showed him a nifty little shortcut ... it felt great. Then I found out the homework was from months ago ... he was actually learning quadratic equations ... he only asked me to be nice.

**ALLIE**

Tom, he's the same with / me.

**TOM**

I'm his father, it's not the same! I worshipped my dad, but now I'm the dad, and I love Michael, I really do, but I hate this feeling ... like he got gypped winding up with me.

**CLAIRE**

Tom ... I know this isn't easy. There's a lot to figure out ... the kind of family you want ... whether to turn down that job you / interviewed ...

**TOM**

I already did.

**CLAIRE**

And I heard that, you're taking stock ... but to turn down a job with benefits when you have a wife ... a child ... a second child ... no leads ... no irons in the fire ... ... nothing one might be tempted to call an actual plan ...

**TOM**

(FURIOUS, TOM STANDS)

You think I'm nothing, don't you?

**CLAIRE**

No, Tom. The only reason I can say these things is I have more faith in you than you do.

(TOM STARES AT HER, THROWS A GLANCE AT ALLIE, THEN EXITS.  
ALLIE STARTS TO GO AFTER HIM)

Let him go. Wait half an hour, then call him.

**ALLIE**

This isn't a game.

**CLAIRE**

No, and he's not a baby, stop trying to protect him.

(CLAIRE POINTS TO THE PAGES SHE GAVE ALLIE EARLIER)

I know you're upset, but Dr. Vorsiff needs to meet with you today. When you speak to Tom, ask him to be here by one.

**ALLIE**

There's no point even mentioning the school after what / just ...

**CLAIRE**

Just get him here ... Dr. Vorsiff will handle the rest. He has a wonderful way with the fathers, and once he explains / why ...

**ALLIE**

I don't care how 'wonderful,' Tom's not going to agree just / because ...

**CLAIRE**

Technically speaking, I'm not sure he has to. Your signature should be enough.

**ALLIE**

(BEAT)

If you're suggesting ... Tom's my husband ... I would never / do (anything) ...

**CLAIRE**

Oh, for Chrissake ... he's an adult. Michael's an exceptional child, but he's still a child, and he needs a mother, so start acting like one. Instead of obsessing about Tom, why don't you think about the word 'mother' and decide what it means to you.

(END OF ACT ONE)