

## Scene 4

*(Later that night. NORA is alone, in the living room. In the dining room, the others can be seen finishing dinner. She looks around, goes behind the books in the book cases and pulls out her pack of cigarettes. DAMIEN enters, watching her. As she turns, she jumps, startled.)*

NORA. Oh, Damien. I didn't know you were there.

DAMIEN. Clearly not. *(Beat.)* You're sneaking smokes, Nora. I am flabbergasted. And as a doctor I hope you don't expect me to approve.

NORA. I know it's ridiculous. I hardly ever do it—one or two a month—please don't tell Evan—

DAMIEN. Of course I won't.

NORA. Is he coming?

*(DAMIEN looks back toward the dining room, where EVAN and CHRISTINE are disappearing into the house.)*

DAMIEN. No, it looks like he's taking Christine off into his office. He is going to offer her a job, he needs a new assistant, apparently. He didn't tell you?

NORA. No. No, I'm so glad.

DAMIEN. Did you want to go outside and smoke that?

NORA. No, actually, I didn't want it that bad. *(Beat.)* Besides, if I go out back, he can see me from his office window.

*(She laughs a little. DAMIEN joins her.)*

DAMIEN. You have an entire secret life, don't you?

NORA. An occasional cigarette hardly amounts to a secret life.

DAMIEN. Cigarettes. Chocolates. Lovers.

NORA. I don't have a lover.

DAMIEN. You're holding something back about this Neil Fitzpatrick

NORA. I'm not.

DAMIEN. Nora—

NORA. Leave it alone, Damien. *(Beat.)* I'm sorry. Naturally you think something's bothering me, I'm acting so mysterious. When I should just relax. It's always such a relief to have just a minute with you alone, I shouldn't waste it on nonsense.

DAMIEN. You can waste it on whatever you like. If something's bothering you, I want to hear about it.

NORA. Just tell me everything will be fine.

*(She sits next to him, rests on his shoulder. He thinks about this.)*

DAMIEN. I wish I could.

NORA. Oh, Damien, is that the best you can do?

DAMIEN. No more lies between us, Nora. Time is too short.

*(She sits up, surprised at this.)*

NORA. What is that supposed to mean?

DAMIEN. It means, if you tell me your secret, I'll tell you mine.

NORA. You have a secret?

DAMIEN. A whopper.

NORA. What is it?

DAMIEN. You first.

NORA. *(Beat.)* No. You know quite enough of my secrets, I think.

*(She starts to go. He takes her hand, and holds it.)*

NORA. *(Continuing; a warning;)* Damien.

DAMIEN. Yes, Nora.

NORA. Is this your secret?

DAMIEN. I've told you time and again how I feel about you. There's nothing secret about it.

*(He kisses her palm.)*

NORA. Damien—

DAMIEN. Tell me to stop.

NORA. Stop.

DAMIEN. Say it like you mean it.

NORA. Damien. Please. The last thing I need right now is complication.

DAMIEN. That's hardly a no.

*(He kisses her. she kisses him back, for a moment, then stands, sudden, and moves away from him.)*

NORA. No. No. No.

DAMIEN. And yet, you still don't mean it.

NORA. I do.

DAMIEN. Then why don't you tell Evan? You've known for years—

NORA. I don't tell Evan, because you're his best friend, and it would kill him.

DAMIEN. It wouldn't.

NORA. Then why don't you tell him?

DAMIEN. *(Cutting:)* Because while I don't believe it would kill him, it would necessitate the end of our great friendship, and then I wouldn't be able to come over here and see you whenever I wanted. That's why I don't tell him. Now, tell me again, why you don't tell him.

NORA. I can't think.

*(DAMIEN stands, watching her. He sighs.)*

DAMIEN. Nora. What is it? You know, if you can't talk to Evan, you can talk to me.

NORA. That's not going to work now, Damien. I might have, a minute ago. But it's not possible, now, is it?

DAMIEN. Your logic is suddenly so Victorian.

NORA. Please don't joke about this.

DAMIEN. *(Annoyed:)* I'm not! You and I have a relationship—whether or not we ever— all of that aside. You are not merely his wife! And I have been your friend as well as his, for years. Tell me what you need, and I will help you.

NORA. All right. What if I needed you to do me a favor, like find a job, for a friend of mine?

DAMIEN. Your friend Christine has a job.

NORA. It's not her.

DAMIEN. This Fitzpatrick, the criminal, your "friend"?

NORA. Could you do it?

DAMIEN. Perhaps, but I'd expect to know a little bit more about him.

NORA. Is that all you'd expect?

DAMIEN. Oh, for god's sake—

NORA. *(Insistent:)* Would you expect anything else?

*(They consider each other, quite seriously.)*

DAMIEN. I suppose I would.

NORA. I suppose you would, too.

DAMIEN. Would that be so awful? Life is short. You're not uninterested. And I've been waiting a very long time, Nora.

NORA. How romantic.

DAMIEN. I tried romance, it didn't get me anywhere. I'd be happy to try it again.

~~NORA. My husband is in the next room.~~

~~DAMIEN. My car is in the driveway.~~

~~NORA. He is your best friend!~~

~~DAMIEN. Here we go again with the Victorian logic.~~

~~NORA. I am not going to talk to you about this anymore!~~

~~(She starts to go.)~~

DAMIEN. I am dying.

(She turns.)

DAMIEN. (Continuing:) Well, that got your attention.

(He goes to the bar, pours himself another drink.)

NORA. What do you mean?

DAMIEN. I mean: I'm dying. I don't know, actually, how to be clearer than that. So. I apologize for offending your honor. I just don't have as much time to waste as I previously thought I did. Finding out that mortality is knocking at the window makes one— a little more direct, on approach. At least it seems to have made me that way.

(He downs a scotch. She takes a step forward, toward him.)

NORA. Are you sure?

DAMIEN. I'm a doctor.

NORA. You don't seem—

DAMIEN. Like I'm dying? What do dying people seem like?

NORA. Don't make fun of me.

DAMIEN. I'm sorry. I know I don't seem to be dying. But I will, soon. What I have is very rare. Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis. Couldn't be more rare. That's the good news, hardly anyone gets this disgusting disease. The bad news is, everything goes, except your brain. Your legs. Your hands. Your voice. Your lungs. But you're still in there, alert, aware of every loss. I see it as a ironically metaphorical chastisement, God making a point about the death of

spirituality in a materialistic culture. When I bother to believe in God.

NORA. How much time do you have?

DAMIEN. Well, I've been sick for a while, to be honest. You're not the only one who can keep a secret. But the clock is ticking. I've enough time left for one last fling, that was my thought. I'm not so sure I'm interested in hanging around for the rest.

NORA. Does Evan know?

DAMIEN. Evan? Why would I tell Evan? I'm sorry. I didn't mean that the way it sounded, I just— don't know that Evan would know what to say. And generally speaking, I wasn't interested in his pity. So no. I didn't tell him. (Beat.) I'm not interested in your pity, either.

NORA. Then why did you tell me?

DAMIEN. Because I'm afraid.

end

(His fear suddenly surfaces briefly. She goes to him, and holds him. EVAN comes in and sees them. He stops, surprised. NORA stands, starts to move away, but DAMIEN again holds her hand.)

DAMIEN. (Continuing:) There you are, Evan. Your pretty wife was just playing confessor, letting me tell her all my sins.

EVAN. Oh?

NORA. He's been drinking. He doesn't feel well.

DAMIEN. What she says is the absolute truth.

(EVAN waits a moment, then.)

EVAN. Are you going to be able to drive?

DAMIEN. Oh yes. Alas, I'm nowhere near that drunk. I am only, unfortunately, drunk enough to be ridiculous.

(CHRISTINE enters, carrying a box, unaware of the tension.)

CHRISTINE. I'm not sure this is it, but this is the only one I could find—

(She looks around, worried at the tension in the room. NORA steps forward, takes the box.)