

THE BEACH HOUSE

Daniel Neller

CHARACTERS

Helen, a middle-aged woman

Ian, a middle-aged man

Julia, a young woman

1.

A table and three chairs. A kitchen.

Ian, a middle-aged man, sits at the table, very still.

Sound of a door opening and closing. Helen, a middle-aged woman, enters.

HELEN: What are you doing home?

IAN: What are you doing home?

HELEN: I have a headache. What are you doing home?

IAN: I had a doctor's appointment.

HELEN: Did you?

IAN: You didn't know.

HELEN: I didn't know. I'm going to lie down.

IAN: I need to tell you something.

HELEN: Now?

IAN: Yes.

I've had a few of these appointments. I'm not well. I had some tests. A colonoscopy. An ultrasound. A chest x-ray.

I have cancer.

It's bowel cancer. That's where it started. But it's spread. They can't remove it. They can't treat it.

I don't—have—very long.

HELEN: Are you just telling me this now?

IAN: I hoped I wouldn't have to.

HELEN: 'Hoped you wouldn't have to.'

IAN: I apologise.

HELEN: I'm your wife.

I'm your wife!

My God in heaven!

Are you in pain?

IAN: Yes.

HELEN: Where?

IAN: Stomach. Chest. Back.

HELEN: For how long have you been in pain?

IAN: A while.

HELEN: 'A while'? You didn't say. My God in heaven.

'Long'?

IAN: What?

HELEN: 'Long'?

IAN: I said a while.

HELEN: No, 'long'—

You have—

You said—

IAN: It's impossible to say. Could be a year. Could be two.

Could be less.

HELEN: I can't understand what you're telling me.

IAN: You can.

HELEN: What?

IAN: You can. It's what I'm telling you. It's what I'm saying.

HELEN: You're in pain, what can I do?

IAN: There's nothing you can do.

HELEN: Why didn't you tell me? Why didn't you tell me?

IAN: I'm telling you now.

HELEN: It's not good enough, Ian!

IAN: I know. I apologise.

HELEN: Two years? They don't know that. They can't say that.

IAN: It's the likelihood. It's not exact. But Helen—or less.

HELEN: What?

IAN: Or less.

HELEN: I can't hear this.

IAN: I'm sorry.

HELEN: I can't hear it. Stop apologising! You, are the one who is sick. You, you are handling this, in your—

Usual—

Little—

Stupid—

Bloody way.

Well you can handle it how you want.

What do I do?

Do you want me to hold you? Is that what you want?

IAN: Sit down at the table. Will you, please? We have to organise some things.

HELEN: Oh, don't—

IAN: Starting with Julia.

HELEN: I hadn't thought of Julia. What is wrong with me? I hadn't thought of Julia.

IAN: It's the shock. I just told you.

HELEN: My God. Oh my God, she loses ...

Oh my God. Julia!

IAN: I want her to go.

HELEN: I can't stand this! Do you not want me to hold you, or touch you, or—

IAN: Why?

HELEN: Why? Because you have this—and I'm your wife.

IAN: Thank you. We don't do that.

HELEN: We do do that. What are you talking about?

Let me.

She puts her hands on his shoulders; he does not move.

She puts her forehead on the back of his head. Then she puts her lips there. Nothing is happening. She moves away.

Silence.

IAN: I want her to go.

HELEN: She might not want to go.

IAN: I want—no, I know. I know that. That's why I want to limit the information we give her.

HELEN: Well, what information? What is the information? I don't have the information. No-one has the information.

IAN: The timeframe.

HELEN: That's not fair to her.

IAN: It is fair to her.

HELEN: Lie?

IAN: I need your cooperation in this. It's not a lie.

HELEN: It is a lie.

IAN: It's withholding information.

HELEN: And she asks ... ?

IAN: 'They don't know.'

HELEN: You just said they do know. Do they know?

IAN: Not exactly. Not a date. We know, I mean you and I know, and they know, that it's a year or two.

HELEN: Or less ...

IAN: But 'they don't know' is enough: we get her there. Then she's there. Then we deal with this, I deal with this, and if the time comes—

And if she wants to come back—

HELEN: *If* she wants to come back? What world are you living in?

IAN: This is how I want to do this! Do I get to do this how I want to do it?

HELEN: Not if it involves me lying to our daughter.

IAN: It's not lying.

HELEN: Ian, you are in a different world. You're entitled to be. But you can't let her go off under false pretences.

IAN: I will not have, her giving up this opportunity, for this.

HELEN: It's about giving her a choice.

IAN: She will not see it as a choice.

HELEN: I agree.

IAN: So don't give her a choice.

HELEN: Ian. Seriously. Why didn't you tell me?

Pause.

IAN: I wanted to be sure. I was hoping it wasn't what it is.

HELEN: But the possibility. I mean, the possibility. I mean that's the kind of thing people share, isn't it?

IAN: Probability.

Pause.

HELEN: Then what are we? I mean, we're not a marriage.

IAN: Well, you say that from time to time.

HELEN: This proves it, doesn't it?

IAN: We took the vows. We raised the kid.

HELEN: And then?

IAN: What do you want? What do you mean 'and then'? What do you want from me? Sex?

HELEN: I haven't, no.

You have.

IAN: Have I?

HELEN: We can.

Well talk to me! Talk to me! What do you want from *me*?

IAN: I think it's been fine, actually. We raised a child. We have ... (*he indicates the house*) We have the beach house.

HELEN: Things.

IAN: Julia?

HELEN: Apart from Julia.

IAN: Things. Yes things. Yes: things we bought and built and fixed up and made a life in. Things.

I think it's been fine. I'm sorry you feel otherwise.

HELEN: Don't do that, Ian.

IAN: You feel otherwise.

HELEN: So do you. You don't think it's fine. It's not fine.

IAN: Well it'll be over soon.

Pause.

I shouldn't have said that.

HELEN: Jesus. Jesus, Ian!

IAN: Do you still have a headache?

HELEN: Why?

IAN: There are some things we need to sort out.

HELEN: Like what?

IAN: Life insurance.

HELEN: What about it?

IAN: It's there. It'll pay off the house.

HELEN: Jesus Christ.

IAN: Julia, we've discussed.

HELEN: I haven't agreed about Julia.

IAN: I need you to do this for me.

HELEN: Ian, she'll resent you.

IAN: No she won't. Maybe she will. But she'll resent me—and she *should* resent me—if I make her give this up.

HELEN: You're not making her give it up.

IAN: I need your support in this. Can I have this one thing? I'm not asking for much. I'm asking for this.

HELEN: You should be asking for much. You should bloody well *be* asking.

IAN: What should I be asking for?

HELEN: A wife!

IAN: It's not your fault; but it's too late for that.

That—no. That came out wrong. Helen, this is the thing that I want:

Everyone should get on with things.

This? This is mine. It's not yours. It's not hers. Right? It's mine. And it will pass. I mean, it will take its course. I appreciate what you're doing. I shouldn't have said—half the things I've said today. I don't mean them. I'm trying to get through my list.

HELEN: What list?

IAN: Of things we need to talk about.

HELEN: Oh, well, I have a list too.

IAN (*pause*): Go on.

HELEN: One: You're my husband. Two: I care about you. Three: Throw away your list—this is not about lists! Four: I don't want this to happen to you. Five: No. It's not too late. Six: Let me touch you. Let me hold you. Let me sleep with you. Ian? Let's sleep together. Let me help.

IAN: I want to.

HELEN: Do you? I know.

IAN: Do you?

HELEN: I suspect.

IAN: You don't respond.

HELEN: There's nothing to respond to.

IAN: Then why do you suspect?

HELEN: I assume.

IAN: Why don't you initiate?

HELEN: Why don't you?

IAN: I just said I want to. You said you know that I want to. Why don't *you* initiate?

HELEN: I just said that I want to.

IAN: No. You didn't.

HELEN: I'm initiating, aren't I?

IAN: Do you *want* to?

HELEN: I just said 'let me sleep with you'!

IAN: Do you *want* to?

HELEN: Yes!

IAN: Because I'm sick.

HELEN: No. Not just because you're sick.

IAN: Sympathy.

HELEN: What's wrong with sympathy?

IAN: Nothing. It's proper. It's the right response.

Do you still have your headache?

HELEN: Why do you keep asking me that? Yes, I still have it.

IAN: I want to.

HELEN: Ok.

IAN: Even though you have your headache.

HELEN: Ok.

IAN: Because I have a right to be selfish, don't I? Because I'm sick.

Here.

HELEN: Here?

IAN: We've done it before.

HELEN: A long time ago.

IAN: It's all a long time ago.

HELEN: It's not—convenient, is it?

IAN: No.

HELEN: Here then.

He holds out his hand. She takes it. They hold hands. He watches her. She looks at him, then doesn't. Looks again; and away.

Eventually, she lets go of his hand.

Silence.

IAN: Julia.

HELEN: I'll try.

He stands.

IAN: You should take something.

He leaves.

2.

Helen and Julia, a young woman.

JULIA: He said don't tell me.

HELEN: (*nods*)

JULIA: That's—

Yes, but—

That's because it's not for sure.

HELEN: No. That's not why. He doesn't want you not to go.

JULIA: !

HELEN: I know.

JULIA: Wow.

HELEN: But—that's him, isn't it?

JULIA: So ...

HELEN: Yes. No. It is. It's for sure. It's as for sure as they can make it.

I'm sorry.

Silence.

JULIA: Where is he?

HELEN: At the hospital.

JULIA: Why aren't you with him?

HELEN: He doesn't want me there.

JULIA: Why? Is everything alright?

HELEN: Well ...

JULIA: Apart from—yes—the obvious. Stupid. Are *you* alright?

HELEN: Darling: I'm not the one you should be worried about.

JULIA: Dad.

HELEN: No. Well, of course. But you. Yourself.

JULIA: I'm fine. What?

HELEN: Take your time.

JULIA: I will. I know. It's fine.

I'll move back home. That's easy. Shifts, I think—don't you? We do shifts. He shouldn't be alone now, should he?

HELEN: Julia—

JULIA: No, I know. I know. But at the same time, every minute counts.

The beach house!

HELEN: What about it?

JULIA: It could be ...

HELEN: Oh—yes. It could.

JULIA: The last time.

Silence.

HELEN: I want you to do something for me.

And don't—

I want you to consider going.

JULIA: What?!

HELEN: He's not wrong. It's what you always wanted. It's what we always wanted for you.

JULIA: You told me, against his wishes, because you knew I would want to stay.

HELEN: No, I told you, against his wishes, because I thought you should know the truth.

Now you do.

I'm saying you should consider it. You don't have to decide straight away.

JULIA: I have decided.

HELEN: It's what he wants, Julia.

JULIA: No it isn't. Of course it isn't. He wants me here.

HELEN: You shouldn't assume you know what he wants.

JULIA: You shouldn't assume you know what *I* want. What do *you* want?

HELEN: I want you to go.

JULIA: No you don't.

HELEN: !

JULIA: I'm right, though.

HELEN: Maybe you should go anyway.

JULIA: This is really insulting. You can tell him you tried. Is that what this is about?

HELEN: That's not what this is about.

JULIA: Why *did* you tell me?

HELEN: Because I thought you should know the truth.

JULIA: Why else?

HELEN (*pause*): Because I don't want you to go.

JULIA: Thank you.

HELEN: Because I want to go myself.

JULIA: What?

Mum, what?

Mum!

HELEN: I was leaving him.

Yes. Can you believe it?

It's true.

When I came home, he wasn't supposed to be here.

Nor was I.

I was only home to pack. I had someone waiting in a hotel.

I had to pretend. Said it was a headache. The timing was—well—God's cruel joke, I suppose.
Or punishment.

I'm sorry. I'm sorry to be telling you like this.

JULIA: This is a joke. *This* is a joke.

HELEN: No.

JULIA: Why?

HELEN: It's not working.

JULIA: Ok ...

HELEN: I know this is a shock. You have a right to be angry. I hope you can—

JULIA: Why are you telling me this?

HELEN: It's the truth.

JULIA: Yes. So?

HELEN: That's why I'm telling you. I'm trying to be honest. I'm trying to do the right thing.

JULIA: Now?

HELEN: Yes now. Yes. Always. Yes. Now.

JULIA: No. Not always.

HELEN: What do you mean?

JULIA: You know what I mean.

HELEN: No I don't. What do you mean? You're angry.

JULIA: I am angry.

HELEN: You have a right to be.

JULIA: Thanks. That's not why I'm angry.

HELEN: What is not? Why? Why then?

JULIA: Oh, Mum ...

HELEN: Why?

JULIA: Because you should have done this a long time ago!

HELEN: What?!

JULIA: Of course you should. If we're being honest.

HELEN: Julia! Why do you say that?

JULIA: 'It's not working.' Of course it's not. Everyone knows that. Everyone can see that.

HELEN: Who everyone? Who? Our friends? Who are you talking about?

JULIA: That would be terrible, wouldn't it?

HELEN: Who then?

JULIA: Me. Me. You don't like each other.

HELEN: That's not true.

JULIA: Why then? Why leave?

HELEN: ...

JULIA: You don't like him. Fine. Points for honesty. Who was waiting?

HELEN: ?

JULIA: In the hotel. Who was waiting?

HELEN (*pause*): Graeme.

JULIA: Who's Graeme?

HELEN: From work. You've met him.

JULIA: From the Christmas party?

HELEN: Yes. Why do you look like that? What about him?

JULIA: He's a bit ... I don't know ... sleazy, isn't he?

HELEN: He's not sleazy!

JULIA: Not sleazy, just ... gross. Not gross. He thinks he's funny.

HELEN: He is funny. You don't have to like him. I'd like you to like him.

JULIA: Why?

HELEN: Because otherwise it will be awkward, won't it?

JULIA: What will?

HELEN: You know—occasions.

JULIA: What are you talking about? Are you talking about after Dad's gone?

HELEN: No! What are *you* talking about?

JULIA: You're not—no. You're not *doing* this?

HELEN: I thought I made that clear.

JULIA: You didn't. You're not.

HELEN: Sorry; what are we talking about?

JULIA: You're not leaving him.

HELEN: Who?

JULIA: Dad!

HELEN: Yes.

JULIA: No. Not now.

HELEN: Yes. Yes, I think that I am.

I can't tell him this and then stay.

JULIA: No! You can't! That's why you don't tell him this! *Tell him this?* What's wrong with you? *Have you told him?*

HELEN: No. Not yet. But I will. Of course I will.

JULIA: Why?

HELEN: Because it's the truth.

JULIA: So?

HELEN: Well—I owe him that, surely.

JULIA: Oh, is that what you owe him?

HELEN: It's part of what I owe him.

JULIA: He's dying.

HELEN: Well, exactly.

JULIA: You want his last ... He's dying! You want his last days or weeks or months to be—

HELEN: Not *want*.

JULIA: A betrayal.

HELEN: No.

JULIA: Yes.

HELEN: No. A betrayal is what it would be if I didn't tell him.

It is a *kind* of betrayal.

No; it's the breakdown of a marriage. It happens. It happens every day. You either deny it or you confront it honestly.

JULIA: It's the breakdown of a marriage *plus*.

HELEN: What's the 'plus'? Because he's sick? That's timing. It's luck.

JULIA: No, your sleeping with another man is the plus.

HELEN: Who says I'm sleeping with him?

JULIA: Aren't you?

HELEN: No.

JULIA: Why not?

HELEN: Because I'm married.

JULIA: Are you trying to make my head explode?

HELEN: What do you mean? We haven't slept together.

JULIA: Then—really? Then what's the problem? Nothing's happened.

HELEN: Plenty has happened.

JULIA: But nothing's actually *happened*.

HELEN: Not in that way. No. But—

JULIA: Great. Then you can draw a line under it. Yes, you can. I'll help; I'll move back home. It never happened. Mum: you can't do this now. Maybe a year ago; maybe six months. But not now. Now you have to let it—

You and Dad—

It has to come to its natural end now.

HELEN: It had come to its natural end.

JULIA: Well, then you missed it. Ok, not by much. But you missed it. Bad luck.

HELEN: We'd be living a lie.

JULIA: No, *you* would be. But Mum—you *have* been.

HELEN: I know I have. And it's been terrible.

JULIA: I know. I know it has. And I'm sorry.

But this is for Dad. *This* is what you owe him.

HELEN: Would he want this? Would you? Not to know?

JULIA: Absolutely.

HELEN: No, that's too quick. You're too quick to answer that.

JULIA: But he won't know, will he? He won't know what he doesn't know. Please don't tell me you suddenly believe in an afterlife.

HELEN: I don't.

JULIA: Then he won't know.

HELEN: But in a funny way that's the point, isn't it?

JULIA: No, the point is he can have the truth, or he can have his family. He can't have both. Which do you think he needs right now?

HELEN: Even if it were that simple—which it's not—things have been said.

JULIA: What things? You said you hadn't told him.

HELEN: Not to him.

JULIA: To who? Oh.

HELEN: Stop looking like that. Do you think I've liked all your boyfriends?

JULIA: Yes, you pretty much have.

HELEN: Then—fine. Then do me the courtesy of speaking about Graeme with respect.

JULIA: Ok. Fine. I'm sorry.

Pause.

He's not not funny, he's just not as funny as he thinks he is.

HELEN: I don't disagree with that.

Silence.

JULIA: So see him.

HELEN: What?

JULIA: See Graeme. See him when you want to see him. When you want to see him, I'll be here.

HELEN: Oh, Julia.

JULIA: I'm serious. I'll cover for you.

HELEN: How's that going to work?

JULIA: We'll make it work. For Dad.

HELEN: Oh, this is for Dad?

JULIA: Yes. It is. And for me, too. I won't pick up the pieces, Mum. No; you stay. If you want me to stay, you stay too.

You can have what you want. But quietly. For Dad, everything stays the same. Or I'll go, Mum, I swear I will. I'll go just like he wants me to.

HELEN: Julia—

JULIA: I'm serious. You want me, you get him. That's how it works.

We're a package.

And we're going to the beach house, by the way. We're walking on the beach. You'll hold his hand. You'll share his bed. Because we're a family, right? So we keep it together.

We keep it together till the end.

3.

Julia and Ian.

JULIA: Pathetic.

Cruel.

An insult. A slap in the face.

IAN: Come on.

JULIA: What 'come on'? What? Is it not? Is it not? What is it then?

I'm not a child.

What do you think I am? How did you think this was going to be ok? How was I not just going to feel just like a massive sense of betrayal, and guilt, and just fucking rage at you if it happened while I was over there?

IAN: Don't swear in front of me, please.

JULIA: Fuck you. Fuck that. Fuck fuck fuck, Dad!

Pause.

IAN: It's unlikely there'll be no warning.

JULIA: What does that mean?

IAN: When it happens. It's unlikely to just happen. I'll get sick first.

JULIA: Why are you telling me that? Oh God, Dad. Jesus.

IAN: You can come back.

JULIA: I'm not coming back because I'm not going.

IAN: I'd like you to go.

JULIA: How am I supposed to take that? Hey? How am I supposed to think about that?

IAN: Think about it however you want. But go.

JULIA: I don't understand you. I don't get it. I want to be here. Don't you understand that? Don't you *want* that?

IAN: No, I don't want that.

JULIA: Why not?!

IAN: Because some of us have to think about the future.

JULIA: You have a future.

IAN: I mean beyond that.

JULIA: Well, *that's* not over yet.

IAN: It is. It almost is. Mum told you that, didn't she?

JULIA: Yes.

IAN: Then it is. We have to come to terms with it. You have an opportunity. It's not replicable; it's one-off. Bad timing—fine. But there it is. I couldn't forgive myself if you stayed.

JULIA: I couldn't forgive myself if I left.

IAN: You'll get over that, Julia. You're young.

JULIA: And you're cruel. Cold and old and cruel.

IAN: So be it.

JULIA: No apology then.

IAN: For what?

JULIA: Lying to me.

IAN: I never did.

JULIA: You wanted to.

IAN: No I didn't. I was prepared to. I owe you an apology. But not for that.

I wanted to be here for longer.

JULIA: I wanted that too.

IAN: I only wanted to do one thing.

You.

I didn't factor this. Didn't plan for it. You have a certain horizon; then it snaps back. What are you supposed to do when that happens?

JULIA: I'm not a project, Dad.

IAN: There's nothing wrong with projects. Projects are good. Planning is good. You should learn that. I wanted to teach you that.

You are, you know. You are a project. You're what I'm supposed to do.

The timeline has changed, that's all.

It turns out that to see you right I have to let you go. In fact, I have to *make* you go.

JULIA: You can't make me go.

IAN: That's the problem. You can make this harder for me. If you choose to.

Silence.

JULIA: What's going to happen to you?

IAN: When?

JULIA: When you get sick.

IAN: I am sick.

JULIA: When you get—really sick. You know what I mean.

IAN: I don't know. Why are you asking me that?

JULIA: I don't believe you don't know. I think you do know. I think you asked for every detail. In fact, I think you took notes.

Am I right? Did you sit there taking notes?

IAN: Yes, I took a few notes.

JULIA: I knew it. They tell you you're dying, and out comes the notebook.

IAN: So what, I like to remember things.

JULIA: So what did they say?

IAN (*pause*): It doesn't matter what they said.

JULIA: Tell me.

IAN: No.

JULIA: Tell me.

IAN: I don't want to.

JULIA: Because you think I can't handle it.

IAN: You shouldn't have to handle it.

JULIA: Yes I should. Because it's happening. And we're not immune.

IAN: Why do you insist on making this harder than it is? Why do you need me to rub your nose in it? It's happening. It's happening whether you're here or not. And if you're here, it

means you're not there, and if you're not there, it means I don't know whether you ever got there, or anywhere.

JULIA: Thanks.

IAN: I didn't mean it like that. I want to see you on a good track. This is not unusual, Julia; I'm a father. I was so happy when you got in—because you were.

JULIA: So what's going to happen?

IAN: I don't want to discuss it.

JULIA: Well I do.

IAN: Well what do you think's going to happen? I have cancer.

JULIA: So what does it do?

Tell me!

IAN: Things shut down.

JULIA: And? What does that involve?

IAN: Discomfort.

JULIA: Pain.

IAN: Yes, that too.

JULIA: What else?

IAN: Fatigue. Shortness of breath.

JULIA: What else?

IAN: Fever. Disorientation. Delirium, sometimes. Towards the end. Not always.

That's enough. This is not your problem.

JULIA: What if I want to make it my problem?

IAN: I won't let you.

JULIA: God, Dad. It is unusual, you know. For a father. Not to want his family by his side.

IAN: So be it.

JULIA: No, I get it. You want to die with nice dreams. 'She's alright. Everything's good.' But that's not *me*, is it? That's not the actual me. Some future me; some idea in your head.

Why don't you want the real me here?

I'm telling you now. I will not miss what might be the last time at the beach house.

IAN: No?

JULIA: No.

IAN: Then let me tell you something. If you're there, I won't be.

Pause.

JULIA: You wouldn't do that.

IAN: I would. I will.

JULIA: I don't believe you would do it.

IAN: Then I would invite you to think about who I am and whether I usually keep my promises.

JULIA (*pause*): Then I'm begging you not to do it.

IAN: It's for your own good.

JULIA: No. No, no. This is not what you think it is. You think this is like, the good father, who is responsible, and who knows what's best for his child.

This is not that. Do you understand me? This is wrong. This is just absolutely wrong.

Speak to me! Why are you like this, you cold-hearted, sad, cold man?

IAN: I've spoken, Julia.

JULIA: You've spoken. Yes. You speak, and it shall be.

Well say something else! Your words are not enough.

You *will* not do this. Now *I've* spoken. Do you understand? You *will* not do this to me.

IAN: Go. As planned, please go.

JULIA: Mum wants to leave you. Did you know that? Did any little part of you know that? Could anyone actually be surprised?

IAN: ...

JULIA: Sorry.

Dad.

Dad.

IAN: I'm supposed to rest now.

JULIA: Dad—

IAN: I don't mind. Really. She should (*leave me*).

JULIA: You do mind.

IAN: Nope. Is there someone else? You seem to know all about it.

JULIA: No. There's not.

IAN: You're lying. I wonder who it could be? I don't suppose you'll tell me?

JULIA: There's no-one else.

IAN: I always knew when you were lying to me, Julia.

I have to go and rest.

JULIA: You weren't supposed to know.

IAN: Oh, I know. I get that.

JULIA: Don't just walk off! Don't do that!

IAN: Julia: it's fine. Honestly. I sort of knew anyway.

JULIA: They haven't slept together.

IAN: Oh, I thought there wasn't anyone else?

JULIA: They haven't slept together.

IAN (*pause*): Good-oh, then.

I have to go and rest now.

Don't worry, poppet. Thanks for coming round.

4.

Ian and Helen.

HELEN: He's kind.

IAN: Say more.

HELEN: How are you feeling, Ian, are you alright?

IAN: Say more.

HELEN (*pause*): He cries in movies.

IAN: What kind of movies?

HELEN: If I'm honest—too many kinds.

IAN: But in comparison with someone who doesn't cry in movies?

HELEN: Or ever else.

Yes. It's nice.

Ian, you're not well. I can see.

IAN: Go on.

HELEN (*pause*): His hands are warm.

IAN: You've touched his hands.

HELEN: Of course. We've held hands.

IAN: At movies.

HELEN: And at other times.

And he doesn't plan everything. He lets things happen.

And I like his eyes. He notices things.

IAN: What kinds of things?

HELEN: Little things. About me. About the world.

IAN: Why are you telling me this?

HELEN: You asked me to.

IAN: Why are you indulging me?

HELEN: What do you want from me, Ian?

IAN: I want you to keep going.

HELEN: I don't want to. And I don't believe you're feeling well.

IAN: It's not sexual.

HELEN: No.

IAN: Why not?

HELEN: I'm married.

IAN: That's very proper of you.

HELEN: Julia thinks that means it's less bad.

IAN: We know better.

HELEN: Yes.

Silence.

IAN: I'll leave. I'll go to the beach house.

HELEN: You don't have to do that.

IAN: I know. But that's what I'll do.

HELEN: Ian, what's wrong?

IAN: I have cancer.

HELEN: I mean what's wrong now?

IAN: Nothing, except I have cancer.

HELEN: You're not going to the beach house. That's silly. It's far from a hospital. You'll be in and out.

IAN: You can stay here.

HELEN: I don't want to stay here.

IAN: Why not? It's not this house you hate.

HELEN: I don't hate you, Ian ...

IAN: You can stay here.

HELEN: No. I can't. But you can. And Julia will stay with you.

IAN: Julia can stay here if she wants. I won't be here.

HELEN: She told me about your ridiculous conversation. Why are you torturing her?

IAN: Who should I be torturing?

HELEN: Stay here. Enjoy the company of your daughter. I'll support you in any way I can.

IAN: Maybe I don't want your support. Maybe it would be an insult.

HELEN: Ian, sit down, will you? Where are you going?

IAN: At what point do you think you earned the right to tell me what to do? Was it when you took up with someone else? Was it when you lied to me about it? Was it when you switched off on our marriage?

HELEN: What does that mean, 'switched off on our marriage'? Ian, please, you look pale. Sit down.

IAN: Not at this table. Not here.

HELEN: I'm very sorry. Ok? I did the wrong thing. For once! I knew I wouldn't get away with it. I'm sorry God gave you cancer to punish me.

IAN: I wish you believed that, actually. I really wish you believed that.

HELEN: So do I.

IAN: Let's draw a line under this. Can we, please? Things happened; we're both at fault. We agree it can't go on. There's Julia, so it's been worth it—hasn't it?

You can't say that it hasn't.

But it's over now.

I'm going to the beach house, because I want to look at the sea. And because—

Because I can't look at you.

HELEN: I won't be here!

IAN: It doesn't matter. This is your house. I won't die under a bedspread you chose.

HELEN: (*laughs*)

IAN: Why are you laughing?

HELEN: Ian—did I not choose the bedspread at the beach house too?

IAN: I'm leaving.

HELEN: Don't go.

IAN: You don't get it, do you? There was a contract. There was a plan. There was an act of God—fine. But there was also an act—of you.

Do you think there were never women?

Do you think there was never a woman I could have ... made friends with?

HELEN: Was there?

IAN: I don't know! Because I didn't look.

HELEN: Maybe you should've.

IAN: I didn't know I was allowed to.

HELEN: You weren't allowed to. Did you want to?

IAN: No, actually.

But you did.

HELEN: I didn't *want* to. I wasn't *looking*. But there was nothing left. Can't you see that?
Except the contract. *Except* the plan. And just—going on.

Can't you see—going on—it's like dying, in a way?

IAN: Not really, no.

Pause.

HELEN: Sorry. Not like dying.

IAN: Helen, I'm going.

HELEN: I didn't mean that.

IAN: We'll sort out the house and the finances. We'll sort out everything.

HELEN: Don't do that.

IAN: Someone has to.

HELEN: No. No-one does.

IAN: I'm going. I'm hungry. I'm—

Ian falls.

HELEN: Ian!

She goes to help him. He pushes her away.

IAN: Leave me.

HELEN: Let me help you.

IAN: Leave me!

He pushes her away again, violently.

HELEN: Don't be so stupid.

IAN: Don't touch me.

HELEN: You need help.

IAN: Leave me alone.

Pause.

HELEN: Get up.

Ian moves to get up. Helen pushes him back down.

He tries to get up again; she pushes him back down.

He tries again; the same thing happens.

Pause.

IAN: Be with him. If you want. If that's what's stopping you. Have him here.

And sleep with him, for God's sake. Sleep with *someone*.

I give you my blessing. Is that what you want?

Will you let me up now?

HELEN: Do you think that's what I want? Do you think I want your blessing?

IAN: Helen I don't know what you want ...

HELEN: He's gone, by the way. He's called it off. He thinks I should stay with you, actually. Thinks it's cruel to leave a man who's dying. He's right of course. But I still argued with him. Tried to make him stay. Told him it wasn't *that* cruel. But of course it is.

IAN: You're still leaving.

HELEN: Yes, I'm still leaving. Because I wasn't leaving for him. I was leaving *you*. Can't you understand? That's why I can't stay in this house, even if I did choose the bedspread. I'm leaving you, not choosing him. It's not attraction, it's ...

IAN: Repulsion.

Yes, I do get it. I really do.

Will you let me up?

HELEN: Will you let me *help* you up?

He reaches out a hand. She helps him up. He sits at the table. Silence.

IAN: What I want—

HELEN: Yes?

IAN: Stay.

Pause.

HELEN: Why?

IAN: Because we're married.

HELEN: That can't be the reason. That can't be the reason, Ian!

IAN: Why not?

HELEN: It's not enough.

IAN: We took vows.

HELEN: No. You're heading in the wrong direction.

IAN: There's Julia. There's our history. It's a long time.

HELEN: But I already know these things. There's nothing there I didn't already know.

I did it anyway.

What's the real reason?

God damn it, Ian. Say it. Say the real reason.

IAN: I'm going to die.

Pause.

HELEN: Thank you.

Say more.

IAN: Helen ...

HELEN: Say more, please.

IAN: Things will shut down. They are shutting down. And I can't stop them.

HELEN: Keep going.

IAN: You can't stop them either.

HELEN: But?

IAN: I want you there.

HELEN: When?

IAN: When I lose control.

HELEN: What's going to happen?

IAN: I don't want to talk about it.

HELEN: I know you don't.

IAN: They say nausea. Vomiting.

HELEN: And?

IAN: Pain. Incontinence. Eventually ... you can get confused.

HELEN: My love.

IAN: I don't want you to see that. I don't want Julia to see that.

But—

God damn it! *Fuck!*

I need you—

I need you to—

Want—to carry me.

Do you see? That's what I need you to want.

HELEN: I had an affair. It wasn't sexual, but it was real. What do you want to do about it?

IAN: What do you want me to want to do about it?

HELEN: Murder him, of course.

IAN: Ok. Then that's what I'll want.

They share a small smile.

HELEN: And Julia.

IAN: What about her?

HELEN: Ian: we have to say what we want now.

JULIA (*off*): No.

Julia enters.

HELEN: How long have you been there? Were you listening to us?

JULIA: If we're saying what we want, then I'll go first.

I want to go.

HELEN: Why?

JULIA: Why? Because he told me to, over and over again.

HELEN: It's not what he wants, Julia.

JULIA: I know. But it's what I want.

HELEN: It's not what I want, either. It could be the last time at the beach house. It could be the last time we're properly together as a family.

JULIA: But it's not, is it?

HELEN: What do you mean?

JULIA: It's not the last time. You don't get it. It's not that I want to go. It's that I can't stay. The beach house! Do you know what it's been like at that beach house the last few years? Come on, Mum. We barely hold it together! We're acting; we're doing what a family does.

No: the last time it was real was a long time ago.

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HELEN: It can be different.

JULIA: Mum—

HELEN: No, Julia, listen, ok? I hear you. I do. And we take responsibility, don't we? We get it. But the timing—it's all wrong. This time; this can be the *real* last time. I think you'll regret it if you go, I really do. I don't want that for you.

JULIA: Or for you.

HELEN: Or for him.

JULIA: Then let him say it.

HELEN: Ian.

JULIA: No, let *him* say it. Not with your prompting. Let him speak.

If he tells me to stay then I'll stay.

HELEN: Ian, please.

JULIA: Mum!

Pause.

IAN: Go.

Julia kisses him. He holds her. She holds him. Neither will release.

HELEN: No-one wants this. For God's sake. Tell her to stay. Tell her!

Julia releases him, and leaves. Silence.

HELEN: It's not what she wanted. It's not what you wanted, either.

IAN: I know what I want.

HELEN: Do you?

IAN: I want to go to the beach house.

HELEN: It's your choice. You'll do what you want to do.

IAN: I know what I want to do. I want to strip the wallpaper. Paint. I want to pull out the bathroom and start again.

HELEN: Ian, you're sick. You can't possibly do any of that.

IAN: I know. That's why I need you to come.

You'll come, won't you?

He holds out his hand. She looks at it. The end.