

PROOF
Copyright © 2001, David Auburn
AUDITION NOTES

SETTING

The back porch of a house in Chicago.



Character Descriptions

2 Females & 2 Males

Catherine – (F, 25). A college dropout, she has spent several years at home caring for her mentally ill father. Their relationship, although sometimes antagonistic on the surface, was sustained by strong mutual affection. Although she is a highly intelligent woman, she has no direction in life. Catherine is worried that she may inherit her father's illness, and the signs of mental instability are already there.

Robert (M, 50-60s) was a famous mathematician who has just died of a heart attack in his fifties. He is already dead when the play begins, but he appears in the first scene in Catherine's imagination and returns in two later scenes, which flash back to earlier years. Robert was a mathematical genius. When he was in his early twenties, he made major contributions to game theory, algebraic geometry, and nonlinear operator theory. While he was still in his twenties, Robert was afflicted by a serious mental illness, which dogged the remainder of his life. He became so incapacitated that his daughter Catherine had to stay at home to care for him. Robert had a deep affection for Catherine

Claire (F, late 20s-early 30s) is Catherine's twenty-nine-year-old efficient, practical, and successful sister. Unlike Catherine, she has inherited none of her father's erratic genius. Instead, she has made a career in New York as a currency analyst. Claire and Catherine have never gotten along well. Claire feels responsible for Catherine's welfare and wants her to move to New York, but Catherine resents what she sees as Claire's interference in her life

Hal (M, 28) is a twenty-eight-year-old mathematician who teaches at the University of Chicago. He also plays drums in a rock band made up of mathematicians. Hal is a former student of Robert's, whom he admires immensely, not only for the brilliance of his achievements in mathematics but because Robert helped him through a bad patch in his doctoral studies. Hal first met Catherine briefly four years earlier, and when he meets her again, he tries to make friends with her, and quickly becomes romantically involved with her.

Taken from ACT ONE - Scene 1

Night. During the scene, **Catherine** sits in a chair. She is twenty-five, exhausted, haphazardly dressed - eyes closed. **Robert** is standing behind her – but he now exists only in her memories and sad musings. He was Catherine's father. Rumpled academic look. Catherine is depressed. It is her birthday. She is always worried – about her father, about whether she has inherited his dementia...

CATHERINE. Nah. *(She drinks from the bottle. A long pull. Robert watches her.)*

ROBERT. I hope you like it. I wasn't sure what to get you.

CATHERINE. This is the worst champagne I have ever tasted.

ROBERT. I am proud to say I don't know anything about wines. I hate those kind of people who are always talking about "vintages."

CATHERINE. It's not even champagne.

ROBERT. The bottle was the right shape.

CATHERINE. "Great Lakes Vineyards." I didn't know they made wine in Wisconsin.

ROBERT. A girl who's drinking from the bottle shouldn't complain. Don't guzzle it. It's an elegant beverage. Sip.

CATHERINE. *(Offering the bottle.)* Do you -

ROBERT. No, go ahead.

CATHERINE. You sure?

ROBERT. Yeah. It's your birthday.

CATHERINE. Happy birthday to me.

ROBERT. What are you going to do on your birthday?

CATHERINE. Drink this. Have some.

ROBERT. No. I hope you're not spending your birthday alone.

CATHERINE. I'm not alone.

ROBERT. I don't count.

CATHERINE. Why not?

ROBERT. I'm your old man. Go out with some friends.

CATHERINE. Right.

ROBERT. Your friends aren't taking you out?

CATHERINE. No.

ROBERT. Why not?

CATHERINE. Because in order for your friends to take you out you generally have to have friends.

ROBERT. *(Dismissive.)* Oh -

CATHERINE. It's funny how that works.

ROBERT. You have friends. What about that cute blonde, what was her name?

CATHERINE. What?

ROBERT. She lives over on Ellis Avenue - you used to spend every minute together.

CATHERINE. Cindy Jacobsen?

ROBERT. Cindy Jacobsen!

CATHERINE. That was in third grade, Dad. Her family moved to Florida in 1983.

ROBERT. What about Claire?

CATHERINE. She's not my friend, she's my sister. And she's in New York. And I don't like her.

ROBERT. I thought she was coming in.

CATHERINE. Not till tomorrow. *(Beat.)*

ROBERT. My advice, if you find yourself awake late at night, is to sit down and do some mathematics.

CATHERINE. Oh please.

ROBERT. We could do some together.

CATHERINE. No.

ROBERT. Why not?

CATHERINE. I can't think of anything worse. You sure you don't want any?

ROBERT. Yeah, thanks. You used to love it.

CATHERINE. Not anymore.

ROBERT. You knew what a prime number was before you could read.

CATHERINE. Well now I've forgotten.

ROBERT. *(Hard.)* Don't waste your talent, Catherine. *(Beat.)*

CATHERINE. I knew you'd say something like that.

ROBERT. I realize you've had a difficult time.

CATHERINE. Thanks.

ROBERT. That's not an excuse. Don't be lazy.

CATHERINE. I haven't been lazy, I've been taking care of you.

ROBERT. Kid, I've seen you. You sleep till noon, you eat junk, you don't work, the dishes pile up in the sink If you go out it's to buy magazines. You come back with a stack of magazines this high - I don't know how you read that crap. And those are the good days. Some days you don't get up, you don't get out of bed.

CATHERINE. Those are the good days.

ROBERT. Bullshit. Those days are lost. You threw them away. And you'll never know what else you threw away with them - the work you lost, the ideas you didn't have, discoveries you never made because you were moping in your bed at four in the afternoon. *(Beat.)* You know I'm right. *(Beat.)*

CATHERINE. I've lost a few days.

ROBERT. How many?

CATHERINE. Oh, I don't know.

ROBERT. I bet you do.

CATHERINE. What?

ROBERT. I bet you count.

CATHERINE. Knock it off.

ROBERT. Well do you know or don't you?

CATHERINE. I don't.

ROBERT. Of course you do. How many days have you lost?

CATHERINE. A month. Around a month.

ROBERT. Exactly.

CATHERINE. Goddamn it, I don't –

ROBERT. HOW MANY?

CATHERINE. Thirty-three days.

ROBERT. Exactly?

CATHERINE. I don't know.

ROBERT. Be precise, for Chrissake.

CATHERINE. I slept till noon today.

ROBERT. Call it thirty-three and a quarter days.

CATHERINE. Yes, all right.

ROBERT. You're kidding!

CATHERINE. No.

ROBERT. Amazing number!

CATHERINE. It's a depressing fucking number.

ROBERT. Catherine, if every day you say you've lost were a year, it would be a very interesting fucking number.

CATHERINE. Thirty-three and a quarter years is not interesting.

ROBERT. Stop it. You know exactly what I mean.

CATHERINE. *(Conceding.)* 1,729 weeks.

ROBERT. 1,729. Great number, The smallest number expressible –

CATHERINE. - expressible as the sum of two cubes in two different ways.

ROBERT. Twelve cubed plus one cubed equals 1,729.

CATHERINE. And ten cubed plus nine cubed. Yes, we've got it, thank you.

ROBERT. You see? Even your depression is mathematical. Stop moping and get to work. The kind of potential you have –

CATHERINE. I haven't done anything good.

ROBERT. You're young. You've got time.

CATHERINE. I do?

ROBERT. Yes.

CATHERINE. By the time you were my age you were famous.

ROBERT. By the time I was your age I'd already done my best work. ***(Beat.)***

CATHERINE. What about after?

ROBERT. After what?

CATHERINE. After you got sick.

ROBERT. What about it?

CATHERINE. You couldn't work then.

ROBERT. No, if anything I was sharper.

CATHERINE. *(She can't help it; she laughs.)* Dad.

ROBERT. I was. Hey, it's true. The clarity- that was the amazing thing. No doubts.

CATHERINE. You were happy?

ROBERT. Yeah, I was busy.

CATHERINE. Not the same thing.

ROBERT. I don't see the difference. I knew what I wanted to do and I did it. If I wanted to work a problem all day long, I did it. If I wanted to look for information - secrets, complex and tantalizing messages - I could find them all around me: in the air. In a pile of fallen leaves some neighbor raked together. In box scores in the paper, written in the steam coming up off a cup of coffee. The whole world was talking to me. If I just wanted to close my eyes, sit quietly on the porch and listen for the messages, I did that. It was wonderful. ***(Beat.)***

Taken from ACT ONE - Scene 1

Night. During the scene, **Catherine** sits in a chair holding a champagne bottle. She is twenty-five, exhausted, haphazardly dressed - eyes closed. **Hal**, a student of her father enters behind her. He carries a backpack and a jacket, folded. He lets the door go and it bangs shut. Catherine sits up with a jolt...

CATHERINE. *(Startled.)* What?

HAL. Oh, God, sorry - Did I wake you?

CATHERINE. *(Annoyed.)* What?

HAL. Were you asleep? *(Beat.)*

(Robert is gone - Catherine stands moving away from him, still startled)

CATHERINE. You scared me, for Chrissake. What are you doing?

HAL. I'm sorry. I didn't realize it had gotten so late. I'm done for the night.

CATHERINE. Good.

HAL. Drinking alone?

(She realizes she is holding the champagne bottle. She puts it down quickly on the floor.)

CATHERINE. Yes.

HAL. Champagne, huh?

CATHERINE. Yes.

HAL. Celebrating?

CATHERINE. No. I just like champagne.

HAL. It's festive.

CATHERINE. What?

HAL. Festive. *(He makes an awkward "party" gesture.)*

CATHERINE. Do you want some?

HAL. Sure.

CATHERINE. *(Gives him the bottle.)* I'm done. You can take the rest with you.

HAL. Oh. No thanks.

CATHERINE. Take it, I'm done.

HAL. No, I shouldn't. I'm driving. *(Beat.)* Well. I can let myself out.

CATHERINE. Good.

HAL. When should I come back?

CATHERINE. Come back?

HAL. Yeah. I'm nowhere near finished. Maybe tomorrow?

CATHERINE. We have a funeral tomorrow.

HAL. God, you're right, I'm sorry. I was going to attend, if that's all right.

CATHERINE. Yes.

HAL. What about Sunday? Will you be around?

CATHERINE. You've had three days.

HAL. I'd love to get in some more time up there.

CATHERINE. How much longer do you need?

HAL. Another week. At least.

CATHERINE. Are you joking?

HAL. No. Do you know how much stuff there is?

CATHERINE. A week?

HAL. I know you don't need anybody in your hair right now. Look, I spent the last couple days getting everything sorted out. It's mostly notebooks. He dated them all; now that I've got them in order I don't have to work here. I could take some stuff home, read it, bring it back.

CATHERINE. No.

HAL. I'll be careful.

CATHERINE. My father wouldn't want anything moved and I don't want anything to leave this house.

HAL. Then I should work here. I'll stay out of the way.

CATHERINE. You're wasting your time.

HAL. Someone needs to go through your dad's papers.

CATHERINE. There's nothing up there. It's garbage.

HAL. There are a hundred and three notebooks.

CATHERINE. I've looked at those. It's gibberish.

HAL. Someone should read them.

CATHERINE. He was crazy.

HAL. Yes, but he wrote them.

CATHERINE. He was a graphomaniac, Harold. Do you know what that is?

HAL. I know. He wrote compulsively. Call me Hal.

CATHERINE. There's no connection between the ideas. There's no ideas. It's like a monkey at a typewriter. One hundred and three notebooks full of bullshit.

HAL. Let's make sure they're bullshit.

CATHERINE. I'm sure.

HAL. I'm prepared to look at every page. Are you?

CATHERINE. No. I'M not crazy. *(Beat.)*

HAL. Well, I'm gonna be late ... Some friends of mine are in this band. They're playing at a bar up on Diversey. Way down the bill, they're probably going on around two, two-thirty. I said I'd be there.

CATHERINE. Great.

HAL. They're all in the math department. They're really good. They have this great song, you'd like it, called "i" - lowercase I. They just stand there and don't play anything for three minutes.

CATHERINE. "Imaginary Number."

HAL. It's a math joke. You see why they're way down the bill.

CATHERINE. Long drive to see some nerds in a band.

HAL. God I hate when people say that. It is not that long a drive.

CATHERINE. So they are nerds.

HAL. Oh they're raging geeks. But they're geeks who, you know, can dress themselves ... hold down a job at a major university ... Some of them have switched from glasses to contacts. They play sports, they play in a band, they get laid surprisingly often, so in that sense they sort of make you question the whole set of terms -geek, nerd, wonk, dweeb, Dilbert, paste-eater.

CATHERINE. You're in this band, aren't you?

HAL. Okay, yes. I play drums. You want to come? I never sing, I swear to God.

CATHERINE. No thanks.

HAL. All right. Look, Catherine, Monday: What do you say?

CATHERINE. Don't you have a job?

HAL. Yeah, I have a full teaching load this quarter plus my own work.

CATHERINE. Plus band practice.

HAL. I don't have time to do this but I'm going to. If you'll let me. *(Beat.)* I loved your dad. I don't believe a mind like his can just shut down. He had lucid moments. He had a lucid year, a whole year four years ago.

CATHERINE. It wasn't a year. It was more like nine months.

HAL. A school year. He was advising students ... I was stalled on my Ph.D. I was this close to quitting. I met with your dad and he put me on the right track with my research. I owe him.

CATHERINE. Sorry.

HAL. Look. Let me -You're twenty-five, right?

CATHERINE. How old are you?

HAL. It doesn't matter. Listen:

CATHERINE. Fuck you, how old are you?

HAL. I'm twenty-eight, all right? When your dad was younger than both of us he made major contributions to three fields: game theory, algebraic geometry, and nonlinear operator theory. Most of us never get our heads around one. He basically invented the mathematical techniques for studying rational behavior, and he gave the astrophysicists plenty to work over too. Okay?

CATHERINE. Don't lecture me.

HAL. I'm not. I'm telling you if I came up with one-tenth of the shit your dad produced I could write my own ticket to any math department in the country. **(Beat.)**

CATHERINE. Give me your backpack.

HAL. What?

CATHERINE. Give me your backpack.

HAL. Why?

CATHERINE. I want to look inside it.

HAL. What?

CATHERINE. Open it and give it to me.

HAL. Oh come on.

CATHERINE. You're not taking anything out of this house.

HAL. I wouldn't do that.

CATHERINE. You're hoping to find something upstairs that you can publish.

HAL. Sure.

CATHERINE. Then you can write your own ticket.

HAL. What? No! It would be under your dad's name. It would be for your dad.

CATHERINE. I don't believe you. You have a notebook in that backpack.

HAL. What are you talking about?

CATHERINE. Give it to me.

HAL. You're being a little bit paranoid.

CATHERINE. PARANOID?

HAL. Maybe a little.

CATHERINE. Fuck you, Hal. I KNOW you have one of my notebooks.

HAL. I think you should calm down and think about what you're saying .

CATHERINE. I'm saying you're lying to me and stealing my family's property.

HAL. And I think that sounds paranoid.

CATHERINE. Just because I'm paranoid doesn't mean there isn't something in that backpack.

HAL. You just said yourself there's nothing up there. Didn't you?

CATHERINE. I -

HAL. Didn't you say that?

CATHERINE. Yes.

HAL. So what would I take? Right? **(Beat.)**

CATHERINE. You're right.

HAL. Thank you.

CATHERINE. So you don't need to come back

HAL. *(Sighs.)* Please. Someone should know for sure whether –

CATHERINE. I LIVED WITH HIM. I spent my life with him. I fed him. Talked to him. Tried to listen when he talked. Talked to people who weren't there ... Watched him shuffling around like a ghost. A very smelly ghost. He was filthy. I had to make sure he bathed. My own father.

HAL. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have ...

CATHERINE. After my mother died it was just me here. I tried to keep him happy no matter what idiotic project he was doing. He used to read all day. He kept demanding more and more books. I took them out of the library by the carload. We had hundreds upstairs. Then I realized he wasn't reading: He believed aliens were sending him messages through the Dewey decimal numbers on the library books. He was trying to work out the code.

HAL. What kind of messages?

CATHERINE. Beautiful mathematics. Answers to everything. The most elegant proofs, perfect proofs, proofs like music.

HAL. Sounds good.

CATHERINE. Plus fashion tips, knock-knock jokes - I mean it was NUTS, okay?

HAL. He was ill. It was a tragedy.

Taken from ACT ONE - Scene 2

Day time. An empty champagne bottle is on the table. During the scene, **Claire**, Catherine's elder sister is talking to Catherine, hoping to convince her to move to New York – Claire is convinced that Catherine is sick. Later in the scene, HAL will enter.

CLAIRE. Do you want to stay here?

CATHERINE. I don't know.

CLAIRE. Do you want to go back to school?

CATHERINE. I haven't thought about it.

CLAIRE. Well there's a lot to think about. How do you feel?

CATHERINE. Physically? Great. Except my hair seems kind of unhealthy, I wish there were something I could do about that.

CLAIRE. Come on, Catherine.

CATHERINE. What is the point of all these questions? *(Beat.)*

CLAIRE. Katie, some policemen came by while you were in the shower.

CATHERINE. Yeah?

CLAIRE. They said they were "checking up" on things here. Seeing how everything was this morning.

CATHERINE. *(Neutral.)* That was nice.

CLAIRE. They told me they responded to a call last night and came to the house.

CATHERINE. Yeah?

CLAIRE. Did you call the police last night?

CATHERINE. Yeah.

CLAIRE. Why?

CATHERINE. I thought the house was being robbed.

CLAIRE. But it wasn't.

CATHERINE. No. I changed my mind. *(Beat.)*

CLAIRE. First you call 911 with an emergency and then you hang upon them-

CATHERINE. I didn't really want them to come.

CLAIRE. So why did you call?

CATHERINE. I was trying to get this guy out of the house.

CLAIRE. Who?

CATHERINE. One of Dad's students.

CLAIRE. Dad hasn't had any students for years.

CATHERINE. No, he WAS Dad's student. Now he's - he's a mathematician.

CLAIRE. Why was he in the house in the first place?

CATHERINE. Well he's been coming here to look at Dad's notebooks.

CLAIRE. In the middle of the night?

CATHERINE. It was late. I was waiting for him to finish and last night I thought he might have been stealing them.

CLAIRE. Stealing the notebooks.

CATHERINE. YES. So I told him to go.

CLAIRE. Was he stealing them?

CATHERINE. Yes. That's why I called the police –

CLAIRE. What is this man's name?

CATHERINE. Hal. Harold. Harold Dobbs.

CLAIRE. The police said you were the only one here.

CATHERINE. He left before they got here.

CLAIRE. With the notebooks?

CATHERINE. No, Claire, don't be stupid, there are over a hundred notebooks. He was only stealing ONE, but he was stealing it so he could give it BACK to me, so I let him go so he could play with his band on the North Side.

CLAIRE. His band?

CATHERINE. He was late. He wanted me to come with him but I was like Yeah, right. **(Beat.)**

CLAIRE. **(Gently.)** Is "Harold Dobbs" your boyfriend?

CATHERINE. No!

CLAIRE. Are you sleeping with him?

CATHERINE. What? Euughh! No! He's a math geek!

CLAIRE. And he's in a band? A rock band?

CATHERINE. No a marching band. He plays trombone. Yes a rock band!

CLAIRE. What is the name of his band?

CATHERINE. How should I know?

CLAIRE. "Harold Dobbs" didn't tell you the name of his rock band?

CATHERINE. No. I don't know. Look in the paper. They were playing last night. They do a song called "Imaginary Number" that doesn't exist. **(Beat.)**

CLAIRE. I'm sorry, I'm just trying to understand: Is "Harold Dobbs" -

CATHERINE. Stop saying "Harold Dobbs."

CLAIRE. Is this ... person ...

CATHERINE. HAROLD DOBBS EXISTS.

CLAIRE. I'm sure he does.

CATHERINE. He's a mathematician at the University of Chicago. Call the fucking math department.

CLAIRE. Don't get upset. I'm just trying to understand! I mean if you found out some creepy grad student was trying to take some of Dad's papers and you called the police I'd understand, and if you were out here partying, drinking with your boyfriend, I'd understand. But the two stories don't go together.

CATHERINE. Because you made up the "boyfriend" story. I was here ALONE-

CLAIRE. Harold Dobbs wasn't here?

CATHERINE. No, he-YES, he was here, but we weren't "partying"!

CLAIRE. You weren't drinking with him?

CATHERINE. No!

CLAIRE. **(She holds up the champagne bottle.)** This was sitting right here. Who were you drinking champagne with? **(Catherine hesitates – she had been drinking with the memory of Robert – her father.)**

CATHERINE. With no one.

CLAIRE. Are you sure?

CATHERINE. Yes. *(Beat.)*

CLAIRE. The police said you were abusive. They said you're lucky they didn't haul you in.

CATHERINE. These guys were assholes, Claire. They wouldn't go away. They wanted me to fill out a report ...

CLAIRE. Were you abusive?

CATHERINE. This one cop kept spitting on me when he talked. It was disgusting.

CLAIRE. Did you use the word "dickhead"?

CATHERINE. Oh I don't remember.

CLAIRE. Did you tell one cop ... to go fuck the other cop's mother?

CATHERINE. NO.

CLAIRE. That's what they said.

CATHERINE. Not with that phrasing.

CLAIRE. Did you strike one of them?

CATHERINE. They were trying to come in the house!

CLAIRE. Oh my God.

CATHERINE. I might have pushed him a little.

CLAIRE. They said you were either drunk or disturbed.

CATHERINE. They wanted to come in here and SEARCH MY HOUSE-

CLAIRE. YOU called THEM.

CATHERINE. Yes but I didn't actually WANT them to come. But they did come and then they started acting like they owned the place - pushing me around, calling me "girly," smirking at me, laughing: They were assholes.

CLAIRE. These guys seemed perfectly nice. They were off-duty and they took the trouble to come back here at the end of their shift to check up on you. They were very polite.

CATHERINE. Well people are nicer to you. *(Beat.)*

CLAIRE. Katie. Would you like to come to New York?

CATHERINE. Yes, I told you, I'll come in January.

CLAIRE. You could come sooner. We'd love to have you. You could stay with us. It'd be fun.

CATHERINE. I don't want to.

CLAIRE. Mitch has become an excellent cook. It's like his hobby now. He buys all these gadgets. Garlic press, olive oil sprayer ... Every night there's something new. Delicious, wonderful meals. The other day he made vegetarian chili!

CATHERINE. What the fuck are you talking about?

CLAIRE. Stay with us for a while. We would have so much fun.

CATHERINE. Thanks, I'm okay here.

CLAIRE. Chicago is dead. New York is so much more fun, you can't believe it.

CATHERINE. The "fun" thing is really not where my focus is at the moment.

CLAIRE. I think New York would be a really fun and ... safe ... place for you to -

CATHERINE. I don't need a safe place and I don't want to have any fun! I'm perfectly fine here.

CLAIRE. You look tired. I think you could use some downtime.

CATHERINE. Downtime?

CLAIRE. Katie, please. You've had a very hard time.

CATHERINE. I'm PERFECTLY OKAY.

CLAIRE. I think you're upset and exhausted.

CATHERINE. I was FINE till you got here.

CLAIRE. Yes, but you -

HAL. *(From off)* Catherine?

CLAIRE. Who is that? *(A beat. Hal enters.)*

HAL. Hey, I -
(Catherine stands and points triumphantly at him.)

CATHERINE. HAROLD DOBBS!

HAL. *(Confused.)* Hi.

CATHERINE. OKAY? I really don't need this, Claire. I'm fine, you know, I'm totally fine, and then you swoop in here with these questions, and "Are you okay?" and your soothing tone of voice and "Oh, the poor policemen" - I think the police can handle themselves! - and bagels and bananas and joba and "Come to New York" and vegetarian chili, I mean it really pisses me off so just save it. *(Beat.)*

CLAIRE. *(Smoothly, to Hal)* I'm Claire. Catherine's sister.

HAL. Oh, hi. Hal. Nice to meet you. *(Uncomfortable beat.)* I ... hope it's not too early. I was just going to try to get some work done before the uh - if uh, if ...

CLAIRE. Yes!

CATHERINE. Sure, okay. *(Hal exits. A moment.)*

CLAIRE. That's Harold Dobbs?

CATHERINE. Yes.

CLAIRE. He's cute.

CATHERINE. *(Disgusted.)* Eugh.

CLAIRE. He's a mathematician?

CATHERINE. I think you owe me an apology, Claire.

CLAIRE. We need to make some decisions. But I shouldn't have tried to start first thing in the morning. I don't want an argument. *(Beat.)* Maybe Hal would like a bagel? *(Catherine doesn't take the hint. She exits.)*

Taken from ACT TWO - Scene 1

Day time. During the scene, **Robert** introduces **Hal** to **Catherine**.

ROBERT. Sorry, I'm rude. Hal, this is my daughter Catherine. *(To CATHERINE who is exiting.)* Don't go, have a drink with us. Catherine, Harold Dobbs.

CATHERINE. Hi.

HAL. Hi.

ROBERT. Hal is a grad student. He's doing his Ph.D., very promising stuff. Unfortunately for him his work coincided with my return to the department and he got stuck with me.

HAL. No, no, it's been - I've been very lucky.

CATHERINE. How long have you been at U. of C.?

HAL. Well I've been working on my thesis for -

ROBERT. Hal's in our "Infinite" program. As he approaches completion of his dissertation, time approaches infinity. Would you like a drink, Hal?

HAL. Yes I would. And uh, with all due respect ... *(He hands Robert the envelope.)*

ROBERT. Really? *(He opens it and looks inside.)* You must have had an interesting few months.

HAL. *(Cheerfully.)* Worst summer of my life.

ROBERT. Congratulations.

HAL. It's just a draft. Based on everything we talked about last spring.
(Robert pours a drink. Hal babbles.)
I wasn't sure if I should wait till the quarter started, or if I should give it to you now, or hold off, do another draft, but I figured fuck it I, I mean I just ... let's just get it over with, so I thought I'd just come over and see if you were home, and -

ROBERT. Drink this.

HAL. Thanks. *(He drinks.)* I decided, I don't know, if it feels done, maybe it is.

ROBERT. Wrong. If it feels done there are major errors.

HAL. Uh, I-

ROBERT. That's okay, that's good, we'll find them and fix them. Don't worry. You're on your way to a solid career, you'll be teaching younger, more irritating versions of yourself in no time.

HAL. Thank you.

ROBERT. Catherine's in the math department at Northwestern,
(Catherine looks up, startled.)

HAL. Oh, who are you working with?

CATHERINE. I'm just starting this fall. Undergrad.

ROBERT. She's starting in ... three weeks?

CATHERINE. A little more. *(Beat.)*

ROBERT. They have some good people at Northwestern. O'Donohue. Kaminsky.

CATHERINE. Yes.

ROBERT. They will work your ass off.

CATHERINE. I know.

ROBERT. You'll have to run pretty hard to catch up.

CATHERINE. I think I can do it.

ROBERT. Of course you can. *(Beat.)*

HAL. You must be excited.

CATHERINE. I am.

HAL. First year of school can be great.

CATHERINE. Yeah?

HAL. Sure, all the new people, new places, getting out of the house.

CATHERINE. *(Embarrassed.)* Yes.

HAL. *(Embarrassed.)* Or, no, I -

ROBERT. Absolutely, getting the hell out of here, thank God, it's about time. I'll be glad to see the back of her.

CATHERINE. You will?

ROBERT. Of course. Maybe I want to have the place to myself for a while, did that ever occur to you? *(To Hal.)* It's awful the way children sentimentalize their parents. *(To Catherine.)* We could use some quiet around here.

CATHERINE. Oh don't worry, I'll come back. I'll be here every Sunday cooking up big vats of spaghetti to last you through the week.

ROBERT. And I'll drive up, strut around Evanston, embarrass you in front of your classmates.

CATHERINE. Good. So we'll be in touch.

ROBERT. Sure. And if you get stuck with a problem, give me a call.

CATHERINE. Okay. Same to you.

ROBERT. Fine. Make sure to get me your number. *(To Hal)* I'm actually looking forward to getting some work done.

HAL. Oh, what are you working on?

ROBERT. Nothing. *(Beat.)* Nothing at the moment.

Which I'm glad of, really. This is the time of year when you don't want to be tied down to anything. You want to be outside. I love Chicago in September. Perfect skies. Sailboats on the water. Cubs losing. Warm, the sun still hot ... with the occasional blast of Arctic wind to keep you on your toes, remind you of winter. Students coming back, bookstores full, everybody busy. I was in a bookstore yesterday. Completely full, students buying books . . . browsing . . . Students do a hell of a lot of browsing, don't they? Just browsing. You see them shuffling around with their backpacks, goofing off, taking up space. You'd call it loitering except every once in a while they pick up a book and flip the pages: "Browsing." I admire it. It's an honest way to kill an afternoon. In the hack of a used bookstore, or going through a crate of somebody's old record albums - not looking for anything, just looking, what the hell, touching the old book jackets, seeing what somebody threw out, seeing what they underlined . . . maybe you find something great, like an old thriller with a painted cover from the forties, or a textbook one of your professors used when he was a student - his name is written in it very carefully ... Yeah, I like it. I like watching the students. Wondering what they're gonna buy, what they're gonna read. What kind of ideas they'll come up with when they settle down and get to work ... I'm not doing much right now. It does get harder. It's a stereotype that happens to be true, unfortunately for me - unfortunately for you, for all of us.

CATHERINE. Maybe you'll get lucky.

ROBERT. Maybe I will. Maybe you'll pick up where I left off.

CATHERINE. Don't hold your breath.

ROBERT. Don't underestimate yourself

CATHERINE. Anyway. *(Beat.)*

ROBERT. Another drink? Cathy? Hal?

CATHERINE. No thanks.

HAL. Thanks, I really should get going.

ROBERT. Are you sure?

HAL. Yes.

ROBERT. I'll call you when I've looked at this. Don't think about it till then. Enjoy yourself, see some movies.

HAL. Okay.

ROBERT. You can come by my office in a week. Call it -

HAL. The eleventh?

ROBERT. Yes, we'll . . . *(Beat. He turns to CATHERINE. Grave.)* I am sorry. I used to have a pretty good memory for numbers. Happy birthday.

CATHERINE. Thank you.

ROBERT. I am so sorry. I'm embarrassed.

CATHERINE. Dad, don't be stupid.

ROBERT. I didn't get you anything.

CATHERINE. Don't worry about it.

ROBERT. I'm taking you out.

CATHERINE. You don't have to.

ROBERT. We are going out. I didn't want to shop and cook. Let's go to dinner. Let's get the hell out of this neighborhood. What do you want to eat? Let's go to the North Side. Or Chinatown. Or Greektown. I don't know what's good anymore.

CATHERINE. Whatever you want.

ROBERT. Whatever you want goddamnit, Catherine, it's your birthday. *(Beat.)*

CATHERINE. Steak.

ROBERT. Steak. Yes.

CATHERINE. No, first beer, really cold beer. Really cheap beer.

ROBERT. Done.

CATHERINE. That Chicago beer that's watery with no flavor and you can just drink gallons of it.

ROBERT. They just pump the water out of Lake Michigan and bottle it.

CATHERINE. It's so awful.

ROBERT. I have a taste for it myself

CATHERINE. Then the steak, grilled really black, and potatoes and creamed spinach.

ROBERT. I remember a place. If it's still there I think it will do the trick.

CATHERINE. And dessert.

ROBERT. That goes without saying. It's your birthday, hooray. And there's the solution to our dinner problem. Thank you for reminding me, Harold Dobbs.

CATHERINE. *(To Hal.)* We're being rude. Do you want to come?

HAL. Oh, no, I shouldn't.

ROBERT. Why not? Please, come.

CATHERINE. Come on. *(A tiny moment between Hal and Catherine. Hal wavers, then:)*

HAL. No, I can't, I have plans. Thank you though. Happy birthday.

CATHERINE. Thanks. Well. I'll let you out.

ROBERT. I'll see you on the eleventh, Hal.

HAL. Great.

Taken from ACT TWO - Scene 2

Day time. During the scene, Hal and Claire question Catherine about a mathematical proof she says she wrote.

HAL. You wrote this?
CATHERINE. Yes.
CLAIRE. When?
CATHERINE. I started after I quit school. I finished a few months before Dad died.
CLAIRE. Did he see it?
CATHERINE. No. He didn't know I was working on it. It wouldn't have mattered to him anyway, he was too sick.
HAL. I don't understand - you did this by yourself?
CATHERINE. Yes.
CLAIRE. It's in Dad's notebook.
CATHERINE. I used one of his blank books. There were a bunch of them upstairs. *(Beat.)*
CLAIRE. *(To Hal)* Tell me exactly where you found this?
HAL. In his study.
CATHERINE. In his desk. I gave him the -
CLAIRE. *(To CATHERINE.)* Hold on. *(To Hal)* Where did you find it?
HAL. In the bottom drawer of the desk in the study, a locked drawer: Catherine gave me the key.
CLAIRE. Why was the drawer locked?
CATHERINE. It's mine, it's the drawer I keep my private things in. I've used it for years.
CLAIRE. *(To Hal)* Was there anything else in the drawer?
HAL. No.
CATHERINE. No, that's the only-
CLAIRE. Can I see it? *(Hal gives Claire the book. She pages through it. Beat.)* I'm sorry, I just ... *(To CATHERINE.)* The book was in the ... You told him where to find it . . . You gave him the key . . . You wrote this incredible thing and you didn't tell anyone?
CATHERINE. I'm telling you both now. After I dropped out of school I had nothing to do. I was depressed, really depressed, but at a certain point I decided Fuck it, I don't need them. It's just math I can do it on my own. So I kept working here. I worked at night, after Dad had gone to sleep. It was hard but I did it. *(Beat.)*
CLAIRE. Catherine, I'm sorry, but I just find this very hard to believe, Catherine.
CLAIRE. I wrote. The proof
CLAIRE. I'm sorry, I -
CATHERINE. Claire ...
CLAIRE. This is Dad's handwriting.
CATHERINE. It's not.
CLAIRE. It looks exactly like it.
CATHERINE. It's my writing.
CLAIRE. I'm sorry -
CATHERINE. Ask Hal. He's been looking at Dad's writing for weeks. *(Claire gives Hal the book. He looks at it. Beat.)*
HAL. I don't know.
CATHERINE. Hal, come on.
CLAIRE. What does it look like?
HAL. It looks ... I don't know what Catherine's handwriting looks like.
CATHERINE. It LOOKS like THAT.
HAL. Okay. It ... okay. *(Beat. He hands the book back.)*
CLAIRE. I think- you know what? I think it's early, and people are tired, and not in the best state to make decisions about emotional things, so maybe we should all just take a breath ...
CATHERINE. You don't believe me?
CLAIRE. I don't know. I really don't know anything about this.
CATHERINE. Never mind. I don't know why I expected you to believe me about ANYTHING.
CLAIRE. Could you tell us the proof? That would show it was yours.

CATHERINE. You wouldn't understand it.

CLAIRE. Tell it to Hal.

CATHERINE. **(Taking the book.)** We could talk through it together. It might take a while.

CLAIRE. **(Taking the book.)** You can't use the book.

CATHERINE. For God's sake, it's forty pages long. I didn't MEMORIZE it. It's not a muffin recipe. **(Beat.)** This is stupid. It's my book, my writing, my key, my drawer, my proof Hal, tell her!

HAL. Tell her what?

CATHERINE. Whose book is that?

HAL. I don't know.

CATHERINE. What is the matter with you? You've been looking at his other stuff, you know there's nothing even remotely like this!

HAL. Look, Catherine -

CATHERINE. We'll go through the proof together. We'll sit down - if Claire will please let me have my book back -

CLAIRE. **(Giving her the book.)** All right, talk him through it.

HAL. That might take days and it still wouldn't show that she wrote it.

CATHERINE. Why not?

HAL. Your dad might have written it and explained it to you later. I'm not saying he did, I'm just -

CATHERINE. Come on! He didn't do this, he couldn't have. He didn't do any mathematics at all for years. Even in the good year he couldn't work: You know that. You're supposed to be a scientist. **(Beat.)**

HAL. You're right. Okay. Here's my suggestion. I know three or four guys at the department, very sharp, disinterested people who knew your father, knew his work. Let me take this to them.

CATHERINE. WHAT?

HAL. I'll tell them we've found something, something potentially major, we're not sure about the authorship; I'll sit down with them. we'll go through the thing carefully -

CLAIRE. Good.

HAL. - and figure out exactly what we've got. It would only take a couple of days, probably, and then we'd have a lot more information.

CLAIRE. I think that's an excellent suggestion.

CATHERINE. You can't.

CLAIRE. CATHERINE.

CATHERINE. No! You can't take it.

HAL. I'm not "taking" it.

CATHERINE. This is what you wanted.

HAL. Oh come on, Jesus.

CATHERINE. You don't waste any time, do you? No hesitation. You can't wait to show them your brilliant discovery.

HAL. I'm trying to determine what this is.

CATHERINE. I'm telling you what it is.

HAL. You don't know!

CATHERINE. I WROTE it.

HAL. IT'S YOUR FATHER'S HANDWRITING. **(Beat. Pained)** At least it looks an awful lot like the writing in the other books. Maybe your writing looks exactly like his, I don't know.

CATHERINE. **(Softly.)** It does look like his. I didn't show this to anyone else. I could have. I wanted you to be the first to see it. I didn't know I wanted that until last night. It's ME. I trusted you.

HAL. I know.

CATHERINE. Was I wrong?

HAL. No. I -

CATHERINE. I should have known she wouldn't believe me but why don't you?

HAL. This is one of his notebooks. The exact same kind he used.

CATHERINE. I told you. I just used one of his blank books. There were extras.

HAL. There aren't any extra books in the study.

CATHERINE. There were when I started writing the proof I bought them for him. He used the rest up later.

HAL. And the writing.

CATHERINE. You want to test the handwriting?

HAL. No. It doesn't matter. He could have dictated it to you, for Chrissake. It still doesn't make sense.

CATHERINE. Why not?

HAL. I'm a mathematician.

CATHERINE. Yes.

HAL. I know how hard it would be to come up with something like this. I mean it's impossible. You'd have to be ... you'd have to be your dad, basically. Your dad at the peak of his powers.

CATHERINE. I'm a mathematician too.

HAL. Not like your dad.

CATHERINE. Oh he's the only one who could have done this?

HAL. The only one I know.

CATHERINE. Are you sure?

HAL. Your father was the most -

CATHERINE. Just because you and the rest of the geeks worshiped him doesn't mean he wrote this proof, Hal!

HAL. He was the best. My generation hasn't produced anything like him. He revolutionized the field twice before he was twenty-two. I'm sorry, Catherine, but you took some classes at Northwestern for a few months.

CATHERINE. My education wasn't at Northwestern. It was living in this house for twenty-five years.

HAL. Even so, it doesn't matter. This is too advanced. I don't even understand most of it.

CATHERINE. You think it's too advanced.

HAL. Yes.

CATHERINE. It's too advanced for YOU.

HAL. You could not have done this work.

CATHERINE. But what if I did?

HAL. Well what if?

CATHERINE. It would be a real disaster for you, wouldn't it? And for the other geeks who barely finished their Ph.D .s, who are marking time doing lame research, bragging about the conferences they go to - WOW - playing in an awful band, and whining that they're intellectually past it at twenty-eight, BECAUSE THEY ARE.

(Beat. Hal hesitates, then abruptly exits. Beat. Catherine is furious and so upset she looks dazed.)

CLAIRE. Katie. Let's go inside. Katie?

(Catherine opens the book and tries to rip out the pages, destroy it. Claire goes to take it from her. They struggle. Catherine gets the book away. They stand apart, breathing hard After a moment, Catherine throws the book to the floor. She exits.)