

(SCENE: Sunrise. The bedroom of a cozy, working class home on Staten Island. In bed lies a man, MICK, in his boxer shorts, his clothes crumpled in a heap where he dropped them only a few hours before. His breathing is fitful. He coughs now and again. A woman, CELESTE, sits in a rocking chair at the bedroom window, humming quietly to her sleeping infant. Although they are young, both the woman and the man have tired faces, as though they have been enduring some ongoing tragedy. After a few moments, the woman exits to the other room to put the child in his crib. When she returns, the man stirs.)

Production note: For the sake of rhythm throughout, I've used the convention of the double backslash to indicate where a responding actor should interrupt the other character's monologue.

MICK:

(hoarsely)
Who...what?

CELESTE:

Shhh. Go back to sleep.

MICK:

I need to be up. (beat) What day is today?

CELESTE:

It's your day off.

MICK:

No such thing.

CELESTE:

It's raining again. They can't expect you to keep digging in weather // like this.

MICK:

(sitting up)
Where are my car keys?

CELESTE:

Haven't seen 'em.

MICK:

Throw me my pants.
(He finds the keys, pulls on his pants, and exits, shirtless, into the bathroom. After a few moments, he returns wiping his armpits with a washcloth.)

CELESTE:

(trying to be light)
I fell asleep nursing Michael again. What time did you get in?

MICK:

The usual.

CELESTE:

Sure it wasn't later?

MICK:

I was too beat to notice.
(Beat)
How's the kid?

CELESTE:

Out like a light. You wanna look in on him?

MICK:

Let'm sleep.
(He coughs)

CELESTE:

But he's so cute layin' there in his new crib.
(MICK doesn't respond. He coughs again.)
That cough of yours is getting worse.

MICK:

It's fine.

CELESTE:

Here. Take some of this.
(She holds up a bottle of cough syrup)

MICK:

That'll knock me out. I gotta keep a clear head.

CELESTE:

Next time maybe I should throw the 20 bucks out the window.

(Beat)

Say, Mick?

MICK:

Ya?

CELESTE:

When I called Frank last night he said you'd left around 11:00.

MICK:

Maybe you didn't hear him right, all that construction noise.

CELESTE:

I heard him.

MICK:

Traffic was a bitch on the Verrazano. Musta been an accident.

CELESTE:

(under her breath)

Or something.

MICK:

What's that?

CELESTE:

(They've had this conversation before.)

I wasn't spying on you. I just like to know where you are, that's all.

MICK:

It's too early for the third degree, Celeste.

CELESTE:

I know you're under a lot of stress, but I never see you anymore. Is there something you want to tell me...//?

MICK:

No.

CELESTE:

Comin' in at 3:30 in the morning // without...

MICK:

(cutting her off)
It's not what you think.

CELESTE:

I'm not an idiot.

MICK:

(snapping)
I never said you were.
(recovering)
C'mere.
(MICK grabs her behind the neck and makes her look
at him, convincing.)

Did I ever say you were?
(Their eyes lock. MICK seems to be trying to tell
her something, but does not have the words. CELESTE
breaks first.)

CELESTE:

I left a message for Frank this morning, told him you
were staying home sick.

MICK:

Why'd you go and do that?

CELESTE:

You need your rest.

MICK:

Ya? And what about the others? Who am I to get special
treatment? Where's my phone? I'll blame it on your post-
partum...whatever.

(Beat)

Get me some coffee, huh? I better get a move on.

(CELESTE exits while MICK looks for his cell phone.
When he's sure she's gone, he pulls a card from his
pants pocket, and dials the number.)

(Leaving a message)

Um. Ya. It's me, Mick. (coughs) 'scuse me.

(beat)

Since you're not there, I'll just say this: I been thinkin' and the thing is, I do want to see you again. I mean, if that's all right with you. I'm gonna be in midtown around 10:30, so I'll call you when I get in.

(CELESTE reaches the threshold, and catches the end of MICK's conversation. MICK has just hung up as she enters with a tray of coffee, catching him off guard.)

MICK:

Thanks, baby.

(grabbing the cup too quickly and drinking)
Oh...hot.

CELESTE:

You want more sugar?

MICK:

(MICK goes to put on a fresh shirt.)
All this ash in my throat, I can't taste nothin'.

CELESTE:

I know you like it real sweet.

(She takes the cup and, while MICK's back is turned, pores in half the bottle of cough medicine and hands it back to him.)

How's that?

MICK:

Smells like cherries.

CELESTE:

It's a new gourmet flavor.

MICK:

Geez. Look at the time.

CELESTE:

(imploring)

Can't you even sit for a minute, for cryin' out loud?

(MICK obeys and sits back down, while CELESTE watches him with interest. A few silent, awkward moments.)

CELESTE cont...:

So. What've got to say for yourself?

MICK:

What do you mean?

CELESTE:

We never talk any more. Isn't there somethin' you got to say to me?

MICK:

(He's at a loss.)
Good coffee?

CELESTE:

Forget it.
(Beat. Then carefully.)
Mick? What's it like in the pit?

MICK:

(The question is like a slap.)
Why the sudden interest?

CELESTE:

It's what you do.

MICK:

I thought you didn't want to hear nothin' bad. Thought all the negative talk might hurt the baby.

CELESTE:

That was before, when I was still pregnant...//

MICK:

(over her)
Load a bullshit and you know // it.

CELESTE:

They done studies on the subject.

MICK:

Whatever. It is what it is.

CELESTE:

Stay home today, Mick. Stay home with me and little Michael.

MICK:

I told you, I can't.

(coughs)
Shit.

CELESTE:
Your son's nearly four weeks old, you've barely even
looked at him.

MICK:
What do you want from me anyway?!
(The medicine starts to take hold. Throughout the
rest of the scene, MICK is like an injured animal,
as he fights to resist the progressing effects of
the antihistamine.)

CELESTE:
I want you to pick him up, hold him in your arms for
once.

MICK:
(MICK suddenly stands and slaps his thighs. His
jeans emit a thick, gray dust.)
Look at that! I come home every night covered in the
stuff. It's under my skin, up my nose. No amount of
water's ever gonna wash it off. I'm toxic.

CELESTE:
(Gently)
Stay home, baby. Stay home and we'll talk.
(She inches closer to him.)

MICK:
I gotta get outta here, before it rubs off on the two a
yous.

CELESTE:
(She moves to stand in front of him.)
Let it rub off on me. I don't mind. Honest.
(CELESTE opens her robe. MICK stands looking at her
with a mixture of sadness and desire. And although
the sight of her moves him, he is unable to respond.
After a few agonizing beats, he turns his eyes from
her.)

MICK:
It's too soon. Cover yourself up.

CELESTE:

(Suddenly, with vitriol)
Who is she, Mick? You want to tell me? Or don't you have the balls.

MICK:

What?

CELESTE:

Is she some trashy little volunteer, slinging food in the mess?

MICK:

Keep your voice down.

CELESTE:

Or...or...some skinny college student with a thing for firemen?

MICK:

Stop it, I said! I don't want anyone else. I'm happy with what I got.

CELESTE:

You're lying.

MICK:

When did I lie?

CELESTE:

You look me in the eye and tell me where you were last night!

MICK:

I told you, I was stuck on the bridge.

(coughs)

I gotta sit down, my heads startin' // to spin.

CELESTE:

Don't think you can get out of it that easy.

MICK:

I got no spit left in my mouth.

CELESTE:

That's what lyin' does.

MICK:

Give me a drink of something, will ya?

(CELESTE brings him the mug. As she hands it to him, their fingers touch and there is a moment of shared tenderness, which is broken when he goes to take a sip. He drinks, puts the mug down, and wipes his hands on his pants.)

MICK cont.:

All right. I do got something to tell you, but it's not gonna be easy to hear.

CELESTE:

I'm listening.

MICK:

I did meet someone...//

CELESTE:

Oh God, I knew it.

MICK:

Now hold on. Lemme finish.

(CELESTE claps her hand over her mouth and continues listening.)

It was about two weeks ago. It'd been a long day and we were about to knock off, when Kelly—big guy. You met him at the Memorial Day picnic—Kelly called out that he'd found...somethin'. (Beat) Somethin' with a wedding ring attached.

(coughs)

Now I never told you this before 'cause you said you didn't want to know, but when we find things—anything remotely...human—we give it a proper removal.

CELESTE:

(tentatively)

What's that?

MICK:

A full casket. The whole deal.

(Continuing his story)

It's not like I hadn't been through it a dozen times before. But somethin' about that little finger inside that big empty box kinda struck me as, you know, peculiar. So when they started in with the taps, as we were shoulderin' it out, I...I...

(coughs)

CELESTE:

Say it, baby. Go on...

MICK:

I started...laughin'.

CELESTE:

Laughin'?

MICK:

Real quiet at first, but then I got louder. I knew it was disrespectful, but Christ in heaven help me, I couldn't stop myself.

(beat)

Couple of the guys tried to shut me up, but that only made it worse. All I kept picturin' was this angry little finger tellin' Osama and his towel heads exactly where they could stick it.

(He makes the high sign)

CELESTE:

(whispers)

Jesus Christ, Mike.

MICK:

That's what I kept saying to myself. Over and over and over. But you know what, Celeste? After what's happened, I'm pretty sure there ain't nobody up there listenin' to us nohow.

CELESTE:

(crosses herself)

Don't say that.

MICK:

No, I mean it. There I am, laughin' away like some jackass with everyone starin', when I feel this woman's hand on my arm. "Michael," she says, 'cause she seen my name on my badge, "would you like to take a walk?" Real...tender like. So I go with her. We don't say much. Mostly talk about the weather. But just bein' with someone who wasn't *there* that day seems to make me feel better. When it's time to go, she slips me her number. "You call me," she says. "Wherever. Whenever." Like that.

(There is a long pause as MICK looks at CELESTE helplessly. She starts to say something, but he stops her.)

She's a psychiatrist.

(Beat)

I didn't want to mention it in case you'd think I was some lunatic.

(Yawns)

CELESTE:

I would never.

MICK:

No? That's not all.

(beat)

Christ I feel like I could put my head back down.

(He continues)

Last night when I was coming home there wasn't a car on the road. I'd had a coupla beers with the guys, so I had the windows rolled down. The night was real clear and peaceful like it was on that morn...

(Beat)

The last thing I remember is pullin' out my Easy Pass and waking up on the bridge.

(Beat)

I'd gotten out of my car and was standin' at the railing, lookin' down.

(CELESTE quietly moves to sit beside him on the bed and catch his lolling head to her breast.)

I scared myself.

(He lets her comfort him.)

CELESTE:

You're all right now.

MICK:

I don't want to die.

CELESTE:

I know.

MICK:

(He is drifting off as he speaks.)

We got the call after the first tower was hit. We were first to respond. We shoulda...been there...but there was an accident...on the Verrazano...and everything was backed up.

(yawns)

We got stuck in traffic, is all...

(He is asleep)

CELESTE:

(She is rocking him like a child.)

Sh. Hush now. Try and sleep. And when you wake up, I want you to tell me everything. And me? I'm just gonna keep on listening...

(Lights fade. END OF PLAY.)