

**PARADISE**

excerpt

**BETTY:** What I don't understand—

*[STU, her husband, appears.]*

**STU:** What are you drinking, Robbie?

**ROBBIE:** Nothing. I'm not drinking these days.

**BETTY:** You're not drinking?

**ROBBIE:** I'm trying to... cleanse.

**BETTY:** What I don't understand is—these people—they were, what, Jehovah's Witnesses?

**ROBBIE:** I think they were Pentecostals.

**BETTY:** Is there a difference?

**ROBBIE:** Of course there's a difference.

*[She places the cheese board in front of ROBBIE. He glances at it uneasily.]*

**BETTY:** Well, I don't pretend to be an expert.

**STU:** They were itinerant preachers.

**ROBBIE:** I think they were from the neighborhood.

**BETTY:** Whatever. Quiet, Stu. But clearly they weren't Catholic.

**ROBBIE:** No.

**BETTY:** Well, then, why haven't you decided to become a Jehovah's Witness or whatever? Why decide to become a Catholic?

**ROBBIE:** I'm not deciding to be a Catholic. I've always been a Catholic.

**BETTY:** Not visibly so.

**ROBBIE:** I mean I was raised Catholic.—Could you move that away from me?

*[He indicates the cheese board.]*

**BETTY:** Have you given up cheese as well?

**ROBBIE:** It's the knife. I have a horror of knives.

**BETTY:** Since when?

**ROBBIE:** Always. To some extent. Well, I mean it's grown on me. Lately.

*[She moves the cheese board. She looks at him a moment in consternation.]*

**BETTY:** You should never have moved out there. You should never have left New York. It's unhealthy. I said so at the time.

**ROBBIE:** Usually the country is considered healthier than the city.

**BETTY:** Only by people who live there. And they can't be expected to know better. But explain this to me. This spiritual enlightenment—this—

**ROBBIE:** You're making fun of it.

**BETTY:** I'm only trying to understand.

**STU:** Betty, leave him alone if he doesn't want to talk about it.

**BETTY:** He brought it up.

**ROBBIE:** I don't mind talking about it. I want to talk about it. But not if you're going to treat it as—I don't know—trivialize it.

**BETTY:** Yes. I'm sorry. I don't mean to. I just want to make sure I understand what you're saying. You've had some kind of—change of heart.

**ROBBIE:** No. I want a change of heart. I want—my heart to change.

**BETTY:** But why? You have a perfectly lovely heart.

**ROBBIE:** No, I don't. That's what I'm trying to explain.

*[Beat.]*

**BETTY:** So you feel that—becoming a Catholic—or, I'm sorry, being a Catholic—will in some way make you feel better.

**ROBBIE:** It's not a matter of feeling better. It's— What I'm trying to describe—is a kind of spiritual state. A state, I think, that it isn't possible to live in. At least not for me. Anymore. Or maybe for anybody. I don't know. Maybe we're not meant to live—without God. Do you believe in God?

**BETTY:** *[taken aback]* Well, I mean— I believe in—something. In a force. In a spirit. I'm not saying some old guy with a long beard. But I believe in—well, let's call it the universe.

**STU:** Everyone believes in the universe, Betty.

**BETTY:** You know what I mean. *[to ROBBIE]* Well, of course. Everyone needs something to believe.

*[Silence. ROBBIE shakes his head. In the other scene the movie has ended. Music plays under the closing credits.]*

**BETTY:** Then what? Explain it to me.

**ROBBIE:** I want a loving heart.

**BETTY:** A loving heart?

**ROBBIE:** Yes.

**BETTY:** And you feel you don't have one?

**ROBBIE:** No, I don't. Not at all. I don't love at all. It's been a long time—since I've felt anything of the kind.

**BETTY:** What do you mean?

**ROBBIE:** I mean my heart is—devoid of love.

**BETTY:** That's simply not true.

**ROBBIE:** It is true. I don't love you, for instance.

*[She stares at him.]*

**ROBBIE:** I mean, I enjoy you. I find comfort in you. I'm happy—or happier—sometimes—when I'm with you. But I don't love you. Not really. I don't love anybody.

*[Beat.]*

**BETTY:** I wish you'd have a drink.

**ROBBIE:** I don't want one, thanks.

**BETTY:** I want you to have one. Stu, get Robbie a drink.

**STU:** Betty, if he doesn't want a drink, he doesn't—

*[BETTY stands up abruptly, looks at ROBBIE.]*

**BETTY:** This worries me, Robbie. I mean, quite apart from the fact you're one of my oldest friends and I would have thought that was based on some kind of mutual—affection—love, as it were—if I'm not speaking too loosely. But I mean quite apart from my personal feelings—hurt or not, that's not the point—quite apart from that—I feel that something's wrong here. Like you're having some

kind of breakdown. There's something that's not—holding together here. And I can't help feeling, as I said before, that it was a mistake to move out to that godforsaken—

**ROBBIE:** I had to leave New York.

**BETTY:** I don't understand why—unless it's part of what I'm talking about. Unless, really, as far back as that—this thing—whatever it is you're going through—was starting.

**ROBBIE:** I've been going through it a long time.

*[Beat.]*

**BETTY:** Who are your friends there, Robbie? Who do you talk to?

**ROBBIE:** I don't talk to anyone, really.

**BETTY:** Except traveling preachers. What about your family? Are you in touch with them?

**ROBBIE:** I can't deal with my mother anymore. Since my father died.

**BETTY:** What about your sister? Do you talk to her?

**ROBBIE:** She's dead.

*[Silence.]*

**BETTY:** She's dead?

**ROBBIE:** Yes. She's dead.

**BETTY:** I don't understand. How can she be dead?

**ROBBIE:** She just is. She's dead.

**BETTY:** When? When did she die?

**ROBBIE:** Six months ago.

**BETTY:** Six months ago?

**ROBBIE:** More or less.

**BETTY:** But— But— What happened?

**ROBBIE:** She killed herself.

**BETTY:** She—

**ROBBIE:** She slit her wrists.

*[She stares at him.]*

**BETTY:** Robbie, how many times, would you say, over the past six months, have you and I seen each other?

**ROBBIE:** I don't know.

**BETTY:** Maybe half a dozen? And talked on the phone several more times.

**ROBBIE:** I haven't really kept track, but—

**BETTY:** And in all that time, you never said anything about this? Unless I missed it? Did I? Did I miss something?

**ROBBIE:** I guess I didn't think it worth mentioning.

**BETTY:** Not worth mentioning? Because it wasn't important?

**ROBBIE:** I didn't think there was—a point—in talking about it.

*[She sits and stares at him, shakes her head.]*

**BETTY:** I don't know what to say. I simply don't. *[beat]* Robbie, listen to me. I want you to listen very carefully. I—

*[A buzzer sounds.]*

**BETTY:** Oh, shit!

*[She jumps up.]*

**ROBBIE:** What?

**BETTY:** Well, this is awkward.—Stu, will you go get it?

*[STU goes.]*

**BETTY:** Jesus, every time I do this it's a disaster! I wish I had known—well, any of this. Any of this stuff you've been—spilling—before I—

**ROBBIE:** What's the matter?

**BETTY:** I have to confess—and I feel like an idiot now—I invited someone else to dinner. I mean, for you.

**ROBBIE:** For me?

**BETTY:** I thought you two might—hit it off.

**ROBBIE:** A set up?

**BETTY:** My last! Ever!

*[He starts to get up.]*

**ROBBIE:** I don't think I can meet any new—

**BETTY:** Oh, just sit tight, Robbie, for God's sake, and let me think.

**ROBBIE:** No, really, Betty. I can't be—exposed to—anyone now. I can't be— with people.

*[She slops some wine into a glass and slams it down in front of him.]*

**BETTY:** Will you please have a drink? Look, Robbie, you're not leaving now. Not till we've talked about this. I'll get rid of him somehow—or we'll— Drink it, please—and just wait. We'll—

*[STU comes in with CARLOS, a reasonably handsome Latino man about 40.]*

**STU:** Robbie, Carlos. Carlos, Robbie.

*[CARLOS hands BETTY a bottle of wine.]*

**CARLOS:** Something smells good!