

④

JOHN CHRISTINA MATT

24

Todd Kreidler

JOANNA. We haven't.

CHRISTINA. God that's a huge relief, Joey . . .

JOANNA. John wouldn't. He insisted we wait. There is no doubt I'm ready. I'll be back soon. Thank you for letting me use your car.

(JOANNA exits out the kitchen. TILLIE enters.)

TILLIE. What's he doing upstairs? He ain't staying overnight.

CHRISTINA. He's using the guest room to freshen up. If you could make sure he has clean towels and please, Tillie, stay on for dinner. Take the next day, the whole next week off. But please stay with us tonight.

(MATT enters from his study with something in his hands.)

MATT. What's this? Who was in my study? I found two dollars and twenty cents by the telephone.

CHRISTINA. Dr. Dentice made a call to his parents.

MATT. So he's not a freeloader . . .

TILLIE. Civil rights don't mean you trust everybody.

(TILLIE exits up the stairs.)

MATT. That's all we know about him. Who's this supposed doctor from Hawaii?

CHRISTINA. Joey says he—

MATT. Joey believes panhandlers use her dimes to ride the bus.

CHRISTINA. Matt . . .

MATT. I have Edie checking the AP and police files. We can't begin to think about this situation until we know something about the man. He told us absolutely nothing about himself.

CHRISTINA. They're both serious. They mean what they're saying.

MATT. They have no idea what the hell they're doing.

(JOHN enters from upstairs.)

JOHN. Excuse me . . . If I'm not intruding I'd like some time with you.

MATT. We'd like that.

JOHN. After meeting you both I've decided something and I mean for this conversation to stay between us. Joanna thinks our whole future is determined no matter what happens here today.

CHRISTINA. What you told us before isn't true?

JOHN. What we feel and our intentions are very true. But the marriage isn't set.

MATT. What are you trying to pull? You've told us you plan to be married. What's to misunderstand?

JOHN. Unless you two approve without any reservations at all, there won't be any marriage.

CHRISTINA. Why have you decided this?

JOHN. Joanna and I will have to face all the problems of any relationship plus many, many more. And we simply cannot get married if you're also going to be a problem.

MATT. How are we the problem?

JOHN. Your attitude. Yours and Mrs. Drayton's. See . . . I don't believe all happy families are alike. Happy families are very few. Your relationship with your daughter is precious. Yet I know she'll still marry me even if you both are against it. But if by marrying me she destroys her relationship with you, over time the loss will grow larger than love. Joanna doesn't understand . . . not having your approval will rip us all apart.

(The phone rings.)

MATT. Excuse me . . . *(Answering:)* Hello? Edie, could you hold on?

(MATT puts down the phone.)

JOHN. Don't misunderstand me. There's nothing I won't do to try to keep your daughter as happy as she was the day I met her. But if we don't have your approval we don't stand a chance of surviving. That's why I'm asking before I leave tonight for the clearest possible statement of what your attitude's going to be.

MATT. I appreciate that, Doctor. But it's almost in the nature of an ultimatum.

JOHN. Not quite. You'll still have Joanna either way. Thank you for letting me speak my piece.

CHRISTINA. Thank you . . .

(JOHN exits up the stairs. MATT returns to the phone.)

MATT. *(Into the phone:)* Edie? . . . Yes, yes, all of it. What did you find out? . . .

(CHRISTINA comes over to MATT and they share the earpiece to listen to the report.)

MATT. No . . . no, Edie . . . That's all right. No need . . . No, I can pick up a copy of Dr. Prentice's book myself . . .

CHRISTINA. Now we know why he's too shy to talk about himself.

MATT. Who'd believe him?

CHRISTINA. Our daughter's exactly the way we brought her up to be. Think a minute. We answered her questions and she listened to our answers. We told her it was wrong that white people are somehow superior to black or brown or red or yellow people. And that people who think that way are wrong—sometimes hateful, usually stupid, but always wrong. That's what we said. And when we said that to her, we didn't say, "But don't ever fall in love with a colored man."

MATT. Tell me something, Chris. And make this answer honest in your heart. When you imagined looking through Joey's wedding pictures, did it ever remotely—ever wildly occur to you that the man standing beside her would look like him?

(Beat.)

CHRISTINA. Never.

MATT. My goodness.

(The lights fade down on the scene.)

Scene Two

(The lights fade up two hours later on MATT and JOHN.)

JOHN. You were there? You were at the fight? You were there?

MATT. One of seventy thousand packed in Yankee Stadium. I was a reporter then, covering the fight. I'd like to say in my heart I knew Louis would win but Schmeling looked giant. Hitler's great Aryan. That night the devil wore purple trunks. We were all so damned scared. Everybody knew war was coming soon. Joe Louis fought for America that night.

JOHN. According to my grandmother's perch, the Brown Bomber was fighting for us.

MATT. He was fighting for everybody. You couldn't find a single true American—no matter what color—who didn't love Joe Louis.

JOHN. For one night thirty years ago.

MATT. You don't understand. Right before the bell, we all sucked in our breath. There were people in the stands too scared to watch.