

Before Midnight

Celine crawls out of bed and heads across the room toward her bag. Celine picks up.

CELINE

Hi sweetie - are you okay? Are you in London? Oh! Oh, already?

(listens)

Oh, no, we found it. Uh, we'll mail it tomorrow morning.

(listens)

Yeah. Ohh, they miss you, too. I'll kiss them for you. Okay, I'll tell him.

Good luck with your mom -I love you too. Bye.

Celine hangs up. Jesse gestures for the phone are again ignored.

CELINE (CONT'D)

He's fine. He says he'll call you from Chicago when he lands.

JESSE

Why can't I talk to him? That's twice you've done that. C'mon, you could have just handed me the phone. You know I want to talk to him.

CELINE

Well, he didn't have time to talk -he said they were boarding.

JESSE

And what'd he forget? What was that?

Jesse glares.

CELINE

His science project. But we'll mail it tomorrow. It'll be fine.

JESSE

You shouldn't have said that about his mom.

CELINE

What? What did I say?

JESSE

"Good luck with your mom."

(Laughs)

I mean, come on –

CELINE
It means nothing.

JESSE
It means something. It does.

CELINE
Alright, I even made a joke the other day that his mom and I should try to settle it in one big mud wrestling contest.

JESSE
Mud wrestling? You said that?

CELINE
And he laughed. He might have more of a sense of humor than you do. Come on.

JESSE
We just talked about that. When you say bad things about his mom, what he hears is bad things about himself.

CELINE
Well, I didn't say anything bad about his mom. I made a joke; it's as much on me as it is on her.

JESSE
Well you're right. I know, I know, I know. Just why conjure it up at all, you know?

Jesse gets up out of bed and goes across the room, goes to Celine's purse and turns off her phone.

CELINE
I didn't do anything, it's all coming from her towards me. Okay, she hates me; yes, I fucked her husband a long time ago. Or should I say, he fucked me?

JESSE
Yeah, right!

CELINE
It's nobody's fault if his mom is a drunk and abusive psychologically.

JESSE
Don't say that!

CELINE
I mean, it makes me sick that he has to be with her, but I guess judges assume that women have the mother instinct. She has the mother instinct of Medea!

Jesse goes to the bathroom and washes off his face.

JESSE
Medea, huh?

CELINE
Yeah, after all, it is a Greek myth.

JESSE
It's actually a play by Euripides, but –

CELINE
A woman killing her kids to punish her ex-husband? That's basically what she's doing, she's hurting him to get to you.

JESSE
No, she's making my life hell through him, that's what she's doing. You know, sometimes, you say things that just go too far.

CELINE
And now you're putting this shit on me about Henry?

JESSE
What shit? What're you talking about?

Jesse takes off his pants and returns to the bed. Celine immediately begins putting on her top and gets up.

CELINE
Let me tell you what I'm talking about: the moving to Chicago and giving up of my life. Now that you mention that Henry needs you, how do you think that makes me feel? I'm miserable! Alright? How can I take that job now? Tell me!

JESSE
Okay.

CELINE
Tell me. I'll feel too guilty! Nono-no-no-no!

JESSE
Look, look. That's a choice you're making, to look at it like that, alright?

CELINE
It is in the nature of women to be the nurturah.

JESSE
The what?

CELINE
Nur-tchur-yer.

JESSE
The nurturer?

CELINE
Okay, I can't even say that fucking word!

Celine walks across the room, sits on the couch, and turns on her phone again.

CELINE
I read on the fridge at work – you know those magnet words that people make sentences with? Someone had put together, "Women explore for eternity in the vast garden of sacrifice."

JESSE
(Laughs)
Wow! That's a sure sign from God!

CELINE
Yeah. That line is so damn true and it's been for ten thousand years. But that's enough! Okay. I don't want to be one of these women. Like marriage is important to gays or contraception to women rights - it's the same with giving up my hopes, with the millions of women that have had to give up their hopes. I am not going to do it. This is bigger than me. This means more than me.

Jesse bursts into applause.

JESSE
Wow! Bravo! The Nobel committee is taking note. I'm just - hold on a second, I'm gonna alert Sweden, okay? I mean, it must be a full-time job carrying that much feminine oppression.

CELINE
It is.

JESSE
You suffered so much growing up in middle-class Europe! I mean, the agony in the trenches of the Sorbonne in the post-feminist era. I can't imagine.

CELINE
You're an asshole! Swear on our kids that you didn't fuck that lady from the bookstore. Emily. Swear to me you didn't fuck that Emily girl. And I'm not jealous because I'm not the jealous type but I just wanna know, be a man and admit the truth.

JESSE

I am giving you my whole life, okay? I've got nothing larger to give. I'm not giving it to anybody else. If you're looking for permission to disqualify me, I'm not going to give it to you. I love you and I'm NOT in conflict about it. But if what you want is a laundry list of all the things about you that piss me off, I could give it to you.

CELINE

Yeah - I want to hear.

JESSE

Okay! Well, uh, let's start at number one - okay, number one, you're fuckin' nuts, alright? You are, good luck finding somebody else to put with your shit for more than like 6 months. But I accept the whole package, the crazy and the brilliant. I know you're not going to change, and I don't want you to. It's called accepting you for being you.

CELINE

Yeah okay, I asked you a question. If, while I was carrying the double stroller down the stairs and getting ass-raped in Pigalle, you fucked that little Emily Bronte girl?

JESSE

Ok I don't know. Emily... what Emily? What are you even talking about?

CELINE

The one who wrote the nice emails about Dostoevsky? "Oh Jesse, you're so right, "The Grand Commander" is the deepest passage of all Russian literature."

JESSE

If you're asking me if I'm committed to you, the girls, and the life we've built together, the answer is a resounding YES.

CELINE

So you DID fuck her! Thank you very much.

JESSE

Do I ever ask you about the time you went to go visit your old boyfriend after his mother died? No. You want to know why? Because I KNOW the way that your fucking French ass works, and I guarantee that you at least blew that guy, but I also know that you love me, okay? I'm okay with you being a complicated human being! I don't wanna live a boring life where two people own each other, where two people are institutionalized in a box that others created – because that is a bunch of stifling bullshit.

Petrified, she exits.

Jesse sits alone waiting for her to return.

Enter Celine.

She walks in, sets her room key down.

CELINE

You know what's going on here? It's simple - I don't think I love you anymore.

She exits.

Jesse sits there, gazing from the cold cup of tea, to the door, to the full glasses of wine, to the rumped, empty bed. Celine doesn't come back.