

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 pasta 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 back 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.