

fade. Transitional aurora. End of "Where It Went." After the lights have faded and "Where It Went" is over, we begin Scene Seven, which is entitled ...

STORY OF HOPE

Music fades. Sound of a car approaching, idling. A car door opens, then closes. Sound of car leaving. Sound of fancy-shoed footsteps in snow approaching. Doorbell. Lights up on a woman standing on the front porch of a small home in Almost, Maine. She carries a suitcase and a purse. Note: The actor playing the man must be short or thin. This is crucial to the magic of the story. "Story of Hope" is a story of loss, and a physical manifestation of loss in the man is key — lost height [again, this is best!], lost weight — because this man is literally half the man he used to be because he has lost so much hope. You'll be surprised by how magical and heartbreaking and funny this scene is when the physical manifestation of the man's loss is crystal clear.

MAN. *(From off.)* Just a minute ... *(The lights come on in the house; then a porch light comes on. A man who is not the man he used to be answers the door a bit cautiously. Nine o'clock at night is, after all, the middle of the night. He's in pajamas and a bathrobe. He enters and stops cold. He knows this woman.)*

WOMAN. *(Fast and furious; so absorbed by what she has to say and by what she has come to do, that she really doesn't take in/look at the man.)* I know this isn't going to be very easy, but I was just out there all alone in the world, and I got so scared, because all I could think about was how I had no place in this world, but then I just outta nowhere realized that there was one place in this world that I did have, and that was with you, so I flew and I took a taxi to get to you, I just had to come see you, *(Finally really looking at him.)* thank God you're — ... *(The man is not who she thought he'd be.)* Oh — ... Wait — ... I'm sorry. You're not — ... I'm — ... *(Checking to make sure she's at the right place.)* This is the house — ... I'm so sorry — ... Does Daniel Harding live here?, I'm looking for Daniel Harding.

MAN. You're // looking for —

WOMAN. Looking for Daniel Harding, yeah. He *lives* here. I thought. But ... (*Off the man's confused state, realizing.*) ... oooh ... he doesn't, does he? Ooh. I am so sorry. (*The woman gathers her bags, preparing to leave.*) I'm so embarrassed. "Who is this woman and what is she doing here?" (*Beat.*) I just honestly thought he'd be here. I always thought he'd be here. Always. (*Beat.*) Do you know him? Big guy, big tall guy. Played basketball, all-Eastern Maine, center? *Strong*. Do you know him? // Hockey, too? > (*NOTE: If the actor playing the man is not short, but thin or average, please use these lines: Do you know him? Big guy, big strong guy. Wrestled? Heavyweight? All-Eastern Maine? Strong? Do you know him? // Played hockey, too? >*)

MAN. Well ... —

WOMAN. Oh, don't even answer that. That was — . I know that's a horrible question to ask a person who lives in a small town, as if everybody in small towns knows everybody else, agh!, can't believe I asked that. I don't live here anymore, but when I did, I hated it when people assumed I knew everybody in town just because it was small. It was worse than when they'd ask if we had " ... plumbing way up there?" 'cause, you know, people in small towns really don't know each other any better than in big towns, you know that? I mean, you know who you know, and you don't know who you don't know, just like anywhere else. (*Beat.*) I'm so sorry to have bothered you. I was just so sure — . When his parents passed away, he kept the house, I heard. He lived here. He stayed here, I thought. He was one of the ones who stayed. (*Beat.*) I didn't stay. I went away.

MAN. Most people do.

WOMAN. Yeah. And I guess he did too. I never thought he would. I guess I lost track ... You gotta hold onto people or you lose 'em. Wish there was something you could keep 'em in for when you need 'em ... (*Trying to make light, she "looks for him," and "finds him" in her purse.*) Oh, there he is, perfect! (*She laughs. Not much of a response from the man. Beat. She starts to go; stops.*) Boy it's cold. I forgot.

MAN. Yeah. (*Beat.*)

WOMAN. (*Starts to go. Stops.*) I can't believe — ... I took a taxi here. From Bangor. (*Say, "BANG-gore." Bangor is Maine's third largest city, pop. 31,000. It is one hundred and sixty-three miles south of Almost, Maine.*) To see him.

MAN. (*Beat. She took a taxi one hundred and sixty-three miles.*) That's far.

WOMAN. Yeah.

MAN. That's a hundred and sixty-three miles.

WOMAN. Yeah. This place is a little farther away from things than I remember.

MAN. Why did you do that?

WOMAN. Because I could only fly as close as Bangor and I needed to get to him as fast as I could.

MAN. Why?

WOMAN. Because I want to answer a question he asked me.

MAN. Oh?

WOMAN. The last time I saw him, he asked me a very important question and I didn't answer it, and that's just not a very nice thing to do to a person.

MAN. Well, that's bein' a little hard on yourself, don't you th//ink?

WOMAN. He asked me to marry him.

MAN. Oh. (*Beat.*) And you ...

WOMAN. Didn't answer him. No. (*The man whistles.*) Yeah. And that's why I'm here. To answer him. (*Beat. Then, realizing she probably ought to defend herself.*) I mean, I didn't answer him in the first place because I didn't *have* an answer at the time. I mean, I was going to *college*, and then ... the *night* before I'm about to go off into the world to do what I hope and dream, he asks me, "Will you marry me?" I mean, come on! I was leaving in the morning ... What was I supposed to do?

MAN. I don't know.

WOMAN. (*Defending herself.*) I mean, I *told* him I'd have to think about it, that I'd think it over overnight and that I'd be back before the sun came up with an answer. And then I left. Left him standing right ... (*Where the man is standing.*) ... there ... and then ... I didn't make it back with an answer before the sun came up or ... at all.

MAN. That sounds like an answer to me.

WOMAN. No! That wasn't my answer! I just ... went off into the world, and that's not an answer, and I think — ... (*Little beat.*)

MAN. What?

WOMAN. I think he thought I'd say, "Yes."

MAN. Well, a guy's probably not gonna ask a girl that question unless he thinks she's gonna say, "Yes."

WOMAN. I know, and ... I'm afraid he probably waited up all night, hoping for me to come by, and I just want to tell him that I know now that you just can't do a thing like not answer a question like the one he asked me, you can't do that to a person. Especially

to someone you love.

MAN. (*Taking this in.*) You loved him?

WOMAN. Well — . I don't know if — . I mean, we were kids. (*She considers. Then, honest and true:*) Yes. I did. I do. (*Beat.*) I feel like I dashed his hopes and dreams.

MAN. (*This speech is not an attack. It's more of a rumination — one that doesn't do much to make the woman feel better.*) Oh, come on. You give yourself too much credit. He was young. That's all you need to get your hopes dashed: Be young. And everybody starts out young, so ... everybody gets their hopes dashed, and besides ... I don't think you really *dashed* his hopes. 'Cause if you *dash* somebody's hopes — well that's ... kind of a nice way to let 'em down, 'cause it *hurts* ... but it's quick. If you'd have said, "No," *that* woulda been "dashing his hopes." (*Beat. Maybe a little pointed here.*) But you didn't say, "No." You said nothin'. You just didn't answer him. At all. And that's ... killin' hope the long, slow, painful way, 'cause it's still there just hangin' on, never really goes away. And that's ... kinda like givin' somebody a little less air to breathe every day. Till they die.

WOMAN. (*Taking in this very unhelpful information.*) Yeah ... (*Beat. Then, at a loss:*) Well ... thank you.

MAN. For what?

WOMAN. (*Considers; then, honestly:*) I don't know. (*She starts to leave.*)

MAN. (*After a beat.*) Goodbye, Hope.

HOPE. Goodbye. (*Stopping.*) Agh!, I'm so ... sorry to have bothered you ... It's just, I was all alone out there in the world with no place in it, and I realized what I'd done to him, to Danny, and that with him was my place in the world — ... Wait ... (*Realization.*) You called me Hope. How did you know my name? (*The man gently presents himself — maybe removes his glasses — and the woman recognizes him: He's Daniel Harding.*) Danny!?

DANIEL. Hello, Hope.

HOPE. (*In a bit of a spin.*) Danny ... I didn't // rec — >

DANIEL. I know.

HOPE. I didn't // rec — >

DANIEL. I know.

HOPE. I didn't even // recognize you!

DANIEL. I know.

HOPE. You're so ...

DANIEL. I know.

HOPE. ... small.