you to forgive me! No. (His voice rises.) So you'll publish your book and punish us all, and a reporter will call me for a comment! (His voice choking.) And I will say, "No comment." (Furious.) I will keep saying it until I die! "No comment!" (Lyman exits. Silence. Brooke is shaken. She has not seen this Lyman, this side of him, directed at her. Silda finally picks up Lyman's empty tea cup, and deeply smells the residual booze in it. She breathes deeply.)

SILDA. God. I love that smell, that vapor, if I could just live in that scent, I'd be happy. I'd never need to take a drink again, I'd just breathe it in. (Blackout.)

End of Act One

ACT TWO

Scene 1

Some hours have passed.

It is night.

The fireplace glowing. Silda is asleep on the sofa, a throw covering her. Brooke and Trip alone in the living room. They are drinking whiskey. Trip is reading the manuscript, and Brooke is pacing, anxious, making herself known.

TRIP. (Finally, exasperated with her, stops reading.) I could make us a sandwich. You haven't eaten since breakfast.

BROOKE. (Brightly.) Oh god. Not really very hungry, actually.

TRIP. You're not supposed to not eat, Brooke. (Beat, a sigh.) I was looking forward to all that strange food at the country club. Crab legs. A whole roast pig. And then there's suddenly like pad Thai and rellenos. Crazy mix.

BROOKE. I think I have successfully demolished Christmas Eve. (Looking toward her parents' bedroom.) They've been in there far too long.

TRIP. (Smiling.) Preparing the attack.

BROOKE. (A tense smile in return.) How can you stay so neutral on this?

TRIP. Who said I was neutral? I just said I'm still absorbing it all.

BROOKE. So you support me?

TRIP. I didn't say that, did I? Look, I haven't read the whole thing from start to finish, but enough. You (probably) have the right to publish anything you like, pretty much about anyone, whether it's decent or cool or not, and they have the right to push back whether that's decent or cool or not.

BROOKE. You're like Mom. It's like you learned chess in her womb and are playing against yourself and everyone else is only a pawn.
TRIP. (He stares at her, amazed.) What do you want? For me to say “Oh boy sis — sure — art comes before life”?
BROOKE. No. That’s the worst kind of oversimplification.
TRIP. (Grinning.) But you sort of think it does. And so, you have to accept the consequences of “art over life,” which in this case is likely to be losing the trust of the people you love, for the sake of these opinions, these bewildering portraits of these people who seem totally unrecognizable to me.
BROOKE. Well, maybe your powers of observation ...
TRIP. (Over her.) Let me finish, since you wanna know. (Beat.)
Opinions: You turn Henry into a saint of the seventies, all patchouli and innocent questioning and reacting to the stultifying opressiveness of these Wasplified GOP zombies in the other room — and it just seems to me that maybe he was really, really sick and fucked up and needed a lot of help, and was hanging out with mad bombers at the very least. I mean, Christ, I was five when this happened and reading it made ME feel guilty. But Mom and Dad: you think they don’t blame themselves?
BROOKE. They let him go. They weren’t helping him, they kicked him out —
TRIP. But — did they let him go? Or did he just fly off in rage and fury? It seems you’re looking for an apology, well, maybe they have apologized and you just haven’t noticed it. (The last is said very emphatically.)
BROOKE. An apology? You don’t write a book because you want apologies, Trip, you write a book because of who you are — a person who writes books — the only obligation I have is to myself. To write it. Well, that’s as far as it goes. I am not a publicist, I am not a hagiographer, I am a writer and this is my flawed version of what happened. I did not come here to be emotionally blackmailed and censored by two people who lived very public lives and then hid in the desert.
TRIP. (Smiling, maybe, but not friendly.) A: Don’t really need the lecture on what a writer is, and B: It’s just a story! A story you have told yourself and will now share for fame and money and —
BROOKE. Please don’t say I’m doing this for money, okay — I have no interest in money, you know that.
TRIP. (Laughing.) Yeah! Because you’re rich. Even if you don’t take a cent from them, which is not strictly true, because they paid for the fancy hospital in Cambridge where you camped out for six months —
BROOKE. I wasn’t camping —
TRIP. You’re rich, you’re smart, absurdly white, Ivy League, New York, and your parents are rich and you know it —
BROOKE. And what about you? What are you, a Zapotec Indian?
TRIP. (Simple.) The difference between us is, I don’t use my sixteen dozen different little sicknesses for gain. (Beat.) You do. It’s just who you are. You think being a depressive makes you special? Guess what, being depressed makes you banal. And in your case, hard. Not easy to be with.
BROOKE. That’s not fair.
TRIP. Fair? Well. Neither is Love & Mercy: A Memoir. And I worship you, I totally do, I love you. But this is true. What I am about to say. Suck it up and take it. And don’t interrupt. (Serious.) Because you had a breakdown, you actually believe you have earned a free pass here. Because you couldn’t function, you didn’t care to eat or brush your teeth or wash your hair or even pretty much speak, and even at a point looked like you might follow Henry down the trail to off yourself — you think this entitles you to present a picture to the world of two people who failed in every possible context, as citizens, as parents, as humans.
BROOKE. (Choked, tight.) You figured all this out, did you? Dr. Wyeth? When you weren’t busy cooking up Jury of Your god-damn Peers?
TRIP. (A smile.) You wanna be a little bitch about my TV show, Brooke? At least, at the very least, have the decency to watch it first, okay? You think you’re not like anyone else on Oprah?
BROOKE. Don’t talk to me like Mom talks to Silda.
TRIP. (Very sharp.) Mom talks to Silda like she loves her. And — as for my being like Mom — listen, you’re as hard as fucking Stalin, and as good at chess as anyone I’ve ever known, and you didn’t get that from Lyman.
BROOKE. Look, I accept that you can’t recognize our parents as I have written them, that time changed them, so why can’t you accept that I’ve been as honest as I could in depicting events that you weren’t really aware of as a little kid?
TRIP. (Overlap.) I never said you were being dishonest. Let me ask you a question: Did you give Silda the manuscript while you were working on it? Because I can smell her tone a mile away. And if I can, you bet that Mom can too.
BROOKE. (Defensive.) Yes, I did. She was there for a lot of it.
TRIP. Yeah, she sure was, which she uses like a goddamned baseball bat to hit Mom and Dad with how crappy they were to Henry. What do you think Polly is gonna do to her sister when she realizes that Silda was goddamned Deep Throat for you?

BROOKE. I needed someone else's eye to —

TRIP. (Over her.) Brooke, I'm just saying that you've made the story better and added a lot of very specific detail to show you as the victim. You and Henry. That doesn't mean you're a liar.

BROOKE. Then please, please, Trip, just back me up. They listen to you before all others. Really. If you just said, "It's okay, it's okay," in that way you have. Because I'm not going to back down, I won't do it and they're going to have to learn to live with it. (Beat.) Please, Trip.

TRIP. (Grimacing.) So, wait. Here are my assignments for Christmas: I have to get Mom not to send Silda out onto an ice floe like some Eskimo, which will be her first instinct, and also get them to give you their blessing to publish a book, which paints them as right-wing sociopaths whose ideology destroyed their children's lives? Who am I? Rudolph the goddamned reindeer? (She suddenly laughs. It's that thing where siblings shift out of the real tension they're locked in and become kids again. Trip is grinning.)

BROOKE. (Suddenly pissed at her.) You do have a shiny nose.

TRIP. I am sooo rolling a joint. (He proceeds to do this. Expertly.)

BROOKE. You don't understand this depression thing because you don't have it. (There is a moment. He looks at her. He nods. Expertly rolling the joint through the following.)

TRIP. Yeah, that's what all depressives say. How would you know what I have and don't have? How? You have your head so far up your own butt, you wouldn't notice if I were covered in killer ants and being strung to death right in front of you.

BROOKE. Don't say that.

TRIP. I mean, it's true! Oh, we joke about you not watching my show but it's what I do, I make TV shows, it's part of my life, my life. (Laughs, rueful.) There are some things you don't know about me. I was impotent for a year, I developed an unhealthy relationship to sleeping pills and kicked it cold turkey. I dated a Russian woman almost twice my age and loved her. I take flying lessons and I happen to have read almost every book written about the Civil War.

BROOKE. You take flying lessons?

TRIP. Just because I am wasting my goddamned Stanford-Berkeley education making ironic and cheerful TV shows, doesn't mean I'm not very, very much filled with despair. Nobody who takes pleasure as seriously as I do could possibly be happy. Don't you know that? (Beat.) Look at me: I don't take my romantic life at all seriously. I am probably a sex addict. I don't want kids because it's far too easy to fuck them up, and our parents call me every time they need help with their email or cell phones, and I am presiding over them getting older and parts are gonna start falling off of them and you haven't even noticed that Dad has a little invisible hearing aid which he is too vain to discuss — and they are the only people aside from you and Sleeping Beauty over there — (Nods toward Silda.) — that I have ever really, really loved, and you're half-insane and vaguely suicidal. Silda is entirely insane and incapable of taking care of herself, and I can feel myself turning into Hugh Hefner. Welcome to the end of the goddamned Golden State. I am California! And California is not happy! (Beat. Finished rolling, he offers her the joint.) Have some.

BROOKE. (Taking a hit.) Thank you. And I am not "vaguely suicidal."

TRIP. (Suddenly pissed at her.) Well, you could have fooled me, Brooke! What is it? Isn't it revenge enough that everyone worries about you all the time?

BROOKE. I hate that people worry about me —

TRIP. (Over her laughing.) No, you don't! Come ON! You love it! You had to add this book to it.

BROOKE. But you told me I had to get back to work! You said it was up to me, that "nobody was waiting for the next Brooke Wyeth novel." And that I had to change that! I had to force myself on the world.

TRIP. I said that to get you moving again. To get you writing. But not this. Besides, I thought you should write a good goddamn play that nobody would ever go see!

BROOKE. (Snaps.) You think I should put it in a drawer, don't you? Wait until they're gone! Jesus, just say it if that's what you think!

TRIP. You want me to tell you what to do?

BROOKE. God, yes. Please! Please tell me what to do, I'll listen.

TRIP. You never listen to anybody, but okay. (Flat.) If you're going to go ahead, do it without apology or drama, close your eyes and go for it — and if you're not, do it with grace and humility, how's that? I don't know! (Beat. Suddenly really mad.) Just quit torturing everyone and looking at me like a lost border terrier, fuck!

BROOKE. Stop trying to make it harder for me.