

Cold
Cassy Hite

Characters:

Erica Tollman: early 30s, Canadian, aspiring artist, small (especially in contrast to William and Allie), dresses in older fashions (70s, 80s, 90s), never wears a bra, pretty but reserved about it, used to ice skate until she got a knee injury, cannot speak Spanish

William Johnson: Erica's newly ex-boyfriend, handsome in a more guarded way, tall but not very broad, business higher up, always wears a shirt and tie, can speak French and Spanish

Allie Elis (formerly Tollman): Erica's sister (five years younger), athletic figure, former Olympic figure skater, effortlessly beautiful

Lisa Tollman: Erica's mother, never seen by the audience (only a voice through the telephone), she sounds very motherly and always has a hint of concern in her tone, was an aspiring figure skater in her youth

Setting:

The city of Madrid, Spain. Present day. Scene I takes place in Erica's relatively empty studio apartment. Scene II takes place in a café in the city at an outdoor café table. Scene III takes place in Erica's same apartment, but it is coming along in decor due to the passing of time.

Scene 1

ERICA's empty studio apartment. There are two doors. One leading in from the hall and another on the opposite side of the room leading out to a terrace. There is a kitchen area near the terrace door marked by a counter with a couple stools. There is not much in the room besides a bed on the floor by the terrace door and a stack of boxes near the hall door. It is silent for a moment. ERICA bursts through the door coming from the apartment building hallway. WILLIAM comes following close behind.

ERICA: you have got to be kidding me? You really think that now is the time to blame me for not paying enough attention to you? Oh god, William. I'm so sorry that my lack of attentiveness led you to cheat on me after we just moved to a different country together!
(she is yelling and puts extra emphasis on the words: got, attention, and country).

WILLIAM: no no no babe, I'm not saying that it's your fault (*he steps towards her, but she pulls away from him*). I'm just saying you have been kind of cold during the whole moving process... (*he awkwardly scoots onto one of the stools*).

ERICA: (*she has opened a box on top of the "bedroom" stack and is riffling through it, she faces away from William*) Kind of cold? (*She pauses to think about the accusation and then turns to WILLIAM*) You idiot! I've been stressed out of my mind. You really believe that I would have moved to another country with you if I didn't have any interest in this relationship? (*WILLIAM is silent for a moment. Unsure if he should respond or not, he looks at her perplexed. ERICA makes an overexaggerated eye roll before going back to the box*)

WILLIAM: Well no. I mean. (*he stands up and walks across the room so that he's about 5 feet from her. Her back is still towards him*) I guess I hadn't thought about it? (*He looks to ERICA for a response, but she is not paying any attention to him, continuing with the box*) Hey what are you looking for anyway?

ERICA: Not that it should really matter to you but I'm looking for my dad's blanket. I thought I packed it in with the others, but I guess I must have put it somewhere else.

WILLIAM: I can help you look?

ERICA: (*looks up at William and makes painfully direct eye contact until she's done talking*) I don't need your help. Like I said before I don't know why you insisted on coming back with me. My mind is already made up. I'm not just going to be pushed around by you because I thought you were it. I thought you loved me. What an idiot I was.

WILLIAM: (*Takes a step closer to ERICA. She flinches slightly but does not move away from him*) Erica, I do love you. It's not that black and white. If you would just let me explain my side of the story you would-

ERICA: Can't you just let me be mad? You've been the perfect guy for the last seven years of my life. I'm not used to you being the one who fucks up. That's me. And you're usually the one who solves my problems, not creates them. I don't want to hear you out right now. Right now, I don't want to hear you out ever. But I know that I will. So just let me have right now. Let me not want to touch you. Or look at you. Let me keep reminding myself that you cheated on me with your fucking secretary (*he tries to interrupt but she puts up a finger*). Let me finish. I put *everything* into this. It feels like you gave up on me, after we've only been here for what? A week? We JUST moved out of the hotel and into the apartment. I feel lost. And the fact that you expect me to just forgive you, makes me feel like nothing. I didn't just move here for you. I'm not going to let you walk all over me because you think I need you. I don't

WILLIAM (*steps so he's just out of reach of ERICA but close enough to her that when he breathes her hair moves*) I know you don't.

ERICA: No. Don't do that. Don't take my side. You already picked your own. (*she won't look at him now. There is a long pause. WILLIAM is trying to decide if he should touch her, this is visible to the audience but not to ERICA*) You should go.

WILLIAM: Just hear me out. I can't leave here knowing that you probably won't want to see me again.

ERICA: (*turns to him, bewildered*) Will, I didn't say that! I'm not just going to walk away from this like you did. Just give me... some time. I don't know, a week? We can meet for coffee or something? After I sort everything out. I just need some time, okay?

Everything was fine before we came here. I just don't know what's happening. You have to understand.

WILLIAM: I do. (*he pauses*) I know everything seemed fine before, but I felt like a distance kept growing between us. By the time we got here I was so lonely... and I was just looking for company. I never thought it would (*he stops but ERICA doesn't respond. Her hands have stopped moving through the box. She stands frozen. He places his hand on the bridge of her back for a moment before he turns towards the door*) I'll see you in a week then (*he speaks as he walks towards the door to the hall*) I'm so sorry I put you in the position Erica (*he pauses at the door for a short moment before he exits*).

ERICA: (*stands still for a moment staring at the door to the terrace*) I know. (*she speaks quietly in the empty room. She picks up the top box and places it on the mattress. She sits next to the box on the bed. The stage goes black*).

Scene 2

It is one week later. A café is created on the stage by use of a backdrop and the sounds of a hustle bustle street in the background. ERICA sits at an outdoor table with an umbrella, it is open above her. The light is focused to the center of the stage where she sits with a mug held firmly in both her hands. Her phone begins ringing. It is her mother, Lisa. Erica is visibly not excited to answer the call but does nonetheless. Throughout the scene the annoyance in her voice continues to grow.

ERICA: Hey mom.

LISA: Honey, you sound tired.

ERICA: Thanks, mom. I'm sure I probably am. (*she pauses, waiting for her mother to apologize. When it's obvious that she won't she speaks up again*) What's up?

LISA: Your sister called me last night and told me that you and Will broke up. What happened honey? Did you guys get into another argument about having kids? I was just saying to Carol the other day that if it weren't for Allie quitting her skating career to become a mother I probably wouldn't have any grandchildren. How horrible would that be!

ERICA: No, that's not it.

LISA: What was it then? Dispute over your close living quarters? Maybe he didn't like something you painted?

ERICA: (*makes a look of pure confusion and disgust*) Nope. Believe it or not I let him have opinions mom. (*she thinks for a second*) I'm actually at a café waiting for him right now!

LISA: So, Allie was wrong?

ERICA: yeah! Well, no. Not exactly. We're meeting to talk things out.

LISA: Well what do you need to talk out? The last I saw you two you still seemed to be crazily in love. If I do recall correctly all of your friends were making bets about how long it would be until William proposed!

ERICA: (*swallows hard*) yeah, well that's not exactly in the cards for right now okay?

LISA: Why not? Erica don't you want to spend the rest of your life with this man. Why can't you just embrace the idea of settling down? Starting a family? Are you having-

ERICA: He cheated on me, mom! (*the annoyance that was present in her voice crescendos despite her being in a public setting. She immediately catches herself and takes a deep breath. Silence comes from the other end of the line*)

LISA: (*takes a deep breath*) Come home.

ERICA: (*shuffles in her seat*) I've dreamed of living in Europe since high school. Art history really does something to the imagination. I don't want to just abandon that. I did it. I'm here. (*William walks into the outdoor patio, but ERICA doesn't notice him*) The apartment is coming along okay. I found a job. I'm not going to let a *boy* ruin this for me.

LISA: Coming home isn't accepting defeat at the hands of William. It's realizing that you need to be around your family more than you need to be working on a hobby in a foreign country.

ERICA: Mom, the fact that you say that just proves... (*she pauses*) If I were Allie. And I moved across the world to follow my dreams. Would you even question it? For a single moment, would you? (*she is practically yelling now*)

LISA: (*silent for a moment*) Well if she were moving to compete, or for a coach I guess I would... (*she trails off*) that's different. That would have been different.

ERICA: Mom, just because I'm not doing what you wanted me to do. What you wanted to do. How does that make it different? I can't get into this with you right now. I know you think that pursuing my art career is ridiculous. But I... I don't care. It's my life. It's not yours.

LISA: Erica what career do you mean? Your art is amazing? But you can't do anything with that. How naïve can you be? I hear you talking about this and it's all so juvenile.

You need to come home where we can figure this all out together. You know you always have a job at the store. But I want more than that for you. I don't want you to devalue yourself and your capabilities like that. How do you expect anyone to take you seriously? Especially in Europe, Spain. You don't speak Spanish! And Will, he's such an up and comer. Maybe his affair was a way of saying that he wants someone whose orientations are more professional. I wouldn't blame him-

(LISA continues to talk but it's muffled on in the background, a similar sound to the waa waa waa's of the adults in The Peanuts. ERICA is staring straight ahead. Clearly bewildered and furious. She hangs up the phone and goes back to her mug. She takes a moment to compose herself. Since he watched this go down, WILLIAM gives her a moment).

WILLIAM walks into ERICA's view.

WILLIAM: Hey E

ERICA: *(her phone starts ringing. She looks to see that it's her mother. She silences the phone. She sounds defeated)* Hey Will, how are you doing? *(he goes to answer but she interrupts)* Actually I just have to ask you one thing. Was it me? *(WILLIAM pulls out a chair and sits down as she talks)*

WILLIAM: Was what you?

ERICA: Was I the problem? Did I push you away? *(her voice catches and it becomes harder and harder for her to get the words out)* Did you cheat on me because of me?

WILLIAM: *(looks shocked. He puts his hands on the back of hers resting on the table)*

Please don't blame yourself for this. It was my mistake. Regardless of whatever I felt like was happening I should have come to you. I shouldn't have been so stupid to seek attention from someone else.

ERICA: *(she's crying now, but too stubborn to act like she is)* I just don't get it. I thought we were fine. I thought everything was fine. Moving was supposed to bring us together. Not tear us apart. What happened? *(her phone starts ringing and she ignores it again)*

WILLIAM: Like I said before it felt gradual for me. You'd been distancing yourself from me for a while, E. Even back at home. You paid less and less attention to me when we were alone. Got wrapped up in your pieces. *(he pauses thinking. He looks at her face. She looks miserable, tear streaked cheeks and runny eye makeup)* I'm not blaming you. I was lonely.

ERICA: Because I made you feel alone. *(ERICA's phone buzzes on the table once more, this time without a ring just an incessant buzzing. She doesn't press it to stop so it rings all the way through. A moment passes. It starts to ring again.)*

WILLIAM: Do you want to get that?

ERICA: I think I've heard enough about how much of a fuck up I am for today. You know I don't know why I'm surprised? She always loved you. Maybe more than me. You're so much more like them than I am. Everything comes so easily for everyone else in this family. Even being alone... I guess maybe that sets you apart *(digging)*. *(pause)* I'm sorry, I didn't mean that. Or I didn't want to mean it anyway. This conversation seemed like such a good idea until like 10 minutes ago. Word reached my mom and she called

to check on me, or to pretend to check on me anyway. Asked me to move home. She acted like this is my own fault. Like she understood where you were coming from.

Because what I've been so difficult? That much is clear to me now. (*she gets up from the table*)

WILLIAM: Where are you going?

ERICA: I was thinking a walk to clear my head might be nice. We can postpone our chat again (*she wipes frantically at her eyes. Her phone begins to ring again. WILLIAM reaches down and silences it for her*)

WILLIAM: Or I could come with you?

ERICA nods. WILLIAM puts some money down on the table for her drink. He puts her phone into her purse. He leads her off the stage (can beckon to hold her hand) End of scene.

Scene 3

ERICA's apartment. A couple weeks have passed. There are few boxes remaining in the stack by the door. The décor is still minimal, no box frame has been placed under the mattress. There is now a hanging plant by the terrace door. Some notebooks scattered on the counter. A small table is in the center of the room. ERICA sits at the table with a set of pens and a notebook. She is scribbling away vigorously. Her phone starts ringing and she ignores it. The sound fades away. Moments later there is a knock on the door. ERICA gets up from her table in an automatic way. Still looking over at her papers as she is opening the door. ALLIE stands at the entrance.

ERICA: (*gasps. Tries to pull herself together. Pulls ALLIE in for a big hug*) Allie! I can't believe you're here. (*she pulls away from the hug*) Wait, what are you doing here?

ALLIE: (*in an excited, maybe fake sounding tone*) I just wanted to surprise my sister!

(*she laughs and sighs*) I've been saving up vacation time at work.

ERICA: I'm so glad to see you.

ALLIE: Me too, I feel like I haven't seen you in 15 years. We have so much to catch up on.

ERICA: Of course, yeah come in. (*She beckons her sister into the living area*) Can I get you anything? Where's your bag?

ALLIE: Oh, I'm in a hotel up the street. I figured you didn't you wouldn't want me here crowding up your place.

ERICA: Oh. Right. Yeah. Is it as small as you expected? (*she looks around the room, embarrassed*)

ALLIE: (*there is a somewhat awkward silence*) Come on I didn't mean anything by it. I figured you wouldn't want your sister turning up unannounced.

ERICA: (*laughs*) Haven't you already done that part? Really Al, you can cancel your room. There's plenty of space for you here.

ALLIE: Oh thank god, I cannot remember the last time I slept alone in a room. Between Lucas and Emily I hardly ever get a moment alone with my thoughts.

ERICA: How is the little booger?

ALLIE: Oh Lucas? He's great (*the two share a hefty laugh*) No but Em's really talkative now. Getting into everything. Leaving her was really hard, but I needed to see my sister. (*she takes ERICA's hand*) how are you?

ERICA: I'm okay (*ALLIE shoots her a skeptical look*) Really! I'm doing much better. Will and I. We've talked everything through. We're not getting back together. At least not for now, but there's no bad blood. He's been helping me with my Spanish. (*phrase in Spanish?*) (*laughs*)

ALLIE: I don't just mean how are you and Will. How are *you*?

ERICA: Al, I don't know what you mean. Really, I'm good.

ALLIE: It's just I've been talking to mom recently and she thinks-

ERICA: Are you serious Al?

ALLIE: It's just if you came home you wouldn't have to be alone.

ERICA: I'm not alone? It's pretty clear you've been talking to mom. Why can't she just stay out of it? Let me be by myself, for once.

ALLIE: I just don't understand. Why stay here when you have so much for you at home?

ERICA: Like what? A dead-end art career. A useless degree. Or you mean a job at her shop?

That's not so much Al, that's nothing.

ALLIE: Yeah at least here you have a tiny apartment and a boyfriend who cheated on you (*not meant to be mean. Comes off pointed, but said out of genuine concern*)

ERICA: Are you serious?

ALLIE: That didn't come out how I-

ERICA: I can't believe that the two of you are ganging up on me with one of you across the fucking ocean! I shouldn't feel guilty for having my own life.

ERICA's phone starts ringing. It's WILLIAM.

WILLIAM: Hey E. Before you say anything I've got news. (*there is a pause*)

ERICA: Okay? Go on.

WILLIAM: It's your mom. (*ERICA and ALLIE lock eyes*) Lucas called me. He said Allie's phone is dead and you weren't answering yours. (*ALLIE starts fuddling through her bag for her phone*) She was in an accident. (*The two of them grab hold of each other. The rest of what is says fades out*) You have to get together a bag to fly home. I'll meet you two at the airport. I ordered you a car, it's on its way now.

The stage goes black. End of scene.