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# **Campaign Strategy**

by

**Lynn Snyder**

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# Campaign Strategy

by Lynn Snyder

## **CHARACTERS:**

ALYSSA; *early 40s, director and speech writer on the Tony Bridge for Congress campaign*

WYMAN; *middle 40s, literature professor, engaged to Alyssa*

BRENDA; *early 40s, media director on the Sara Fielding for Congress campaign*

JEFFREY; *early 40s, campaign manager on the Sara Fielding campaign*

ERIN; *early 50s, special events director on the Sara Fielding campaign*

TONY'S VOICE ON ANSWERING MACHINE\*

TV ANCHOR (Voice Over)\*

\*NOTE: *The actor who plays JEFFREY can be Tony's Voice on the answering machine in ACT I; SCENE 1 and the TV Anchor in ACT II: SCENE 3.*

## **SETTING:**

A congressional district in the San Francisco Bay Area. Minimal representational settings for Wyman and Alyssa's house, Brenda's house, the Sara Fielding for Congress campaign headquarters, and the Tony Bridge for Congress campaign headquarters.

## **TIME:**

The mid-1990's; the campaign season before the mid-term elections

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**ACT I; SCENE 1**

*(AT RISE: ALYSSA and WYMAN cuddle after making love on a mattress in the bedroom of their new home, which is largely unfurnished. There are stacks of books and a CD player on the floor, a CD cabinet filled with tapes, a telephone, and two cell phones. Clothes spill out of suitcases. A CELL PHONE RINGS. ALYSSA starts to get out of bed.)*

Don't!  
WYMAN

What!  
ALYSSA

Don't answer it.  
WYMAN

It's my phone!  
ALYSSA

You forgot.  
WYMAN

Oh! We aren't—  
ALYSSA

You did. You forgot.  
WYMAN

But what if it's—  
ALYSSA

I knew you wouldn't honor our agreement.  
WYMAN

I'm not going to answer it.  
ALYSSA

I don't know why I even thought you could keep your—  
WYMAN

ALYSSA  
Look! I'm not answering the phone.

WYMAN  
But you want to!

ALYSSA  
No, I don't.

WYMAN  
You think I can't tell?

ALYSSA  
I don't care who's calling. I don't want to know.

WYMAN  
I'll bet.

*(CELL PHONE RING CONTINUES.)*

ALYSA  
It's ringing. I'm not answering. Look!

WYMAN  
And you'll see. The world won't end.

ALYSSA  
You're right, Darling. The world won't end. *(CELL PHONE RING OUT)* Does our agreement include not checking our messages?

WYMAN  
I thought you didn't want to know!

ALYSSA  
You don't miss a trick, do you?

WYMAN  
Go ahead. Check your messages.

ALYSSA  
No.

WYMAN  
I've been looking forward to it, our day off, to buy furniture for our house.

ALYSSA

So have I. What I like best is starting from scratch, no plan, buy whatever strikes our fancy.

WYMAN

As long as it's not right-angled, cold or severe or super modern.

ALYSSA

Definitely not severe, cold or right-angled. Gentle shapes. Comfortable.

WYMAN

Warm colors.

ALYSSA

Gold and rust and maybe...burgundy.

WYMAN

Mmmmmm.

ALYSSA

And beautiful wood. Walnut. Rosewood. Teak.

WYMAN

Teak?

ALYSSA

Doesn't teak have lovely swirls?

WYMAN

I think that's walnut.

ALYSSA

Or red oak.

WYMAN

Red oak sounds nice. We can shop for a couple of hours and then go to the Waterfront Grill for lunch.

ALYSSA

We won't get into the Waterfront Grill without reservations.

WYMAN

I made reservations.

ALYSSA

You never think to make reservations.

WYMAN

You won't be able to say that again.

ALYSSA

You made reservations!

WYMAN

And you didn't answer the phone.

ALYSSA

This is a turning point!

WYMAN

Calls for a celebration!

ALYSSA

Put it on, Sweetheart!

*(WYMAN puts a CD of "Blue Tango" on the CD player. CD MUSIC IN. THEY do a serious tango until the LAND LINE RINGS. THEY ignore it for a few beats.)*

WYMAN

You're going to answer that.

ALYSSA

I'm not taking any calls.

*(ANSWERING MACHINE PICKS UP.)*

WYMAN'S VOICE

*(On answering machine)* Hi. Leave a message for Wyman or Alyssa, and we'll call you back.

TONY'S VOICE

*(On answering machine)* Alyssa! It's Tony Bridge. I'm running for re-election to Congress as an—

ALYSSA

*(Snatching up the phone)* Tony! I'm here! Did you say you're running for... *(Listens)* That's wonderful! I was hoping you... *(Listens)* Well, I haven't made a firm commitment... *(Listens)* Uh-huh. Right. Uh-huh. Well, sure. Yes. Of course, I would! I'd love to! *(Listens)* Can we make it tomorrow? Wyman and I are going... *(Listens)* Yes. I understand. *(Listens)* Yes, I can do that. No, it's all right. I'll see you there. *(Hangs up)* Tony Bridge is running for re-election as an Independent. He wants me to—

WYMAN  
You answered the phone.

ALYSSA  
It was Tony Bridge!

WYMAN  
You answered the phone!

*(ALYSSA turns off the music. MUSIC OUT.)*

ALYSSA  
Tony Bridge is running for re-election!

WYMAN  
No meetings. No phone calls. No outside world. This is our day, together. Furniture. Waterfront Grill. Warm colors. It doesn't mean anything to you.

ALYSSA  
That's not—

WYMAN  
Our day. All day. Just the two of us.

ALYSSA  
But it was Tony—

WYMAN  
Shopping for our new home.

ALYSSA  
You wanted Tony to run for re-election. You signed the petition to draft him.

WYMAN  
I didn't sign it.

ALYSSA  
The draft petition. You did!

WYMAN  
You signed. I didn't.

ALYSSA  
You said you were going to—

WYMAN

I decided not to.

ALYSSA

What!

WYMAN

We had an agreement about today.

ALYSSA

You didn't tell me you decided not to sign.

WYMAN

We would have had one of those exhausting arguments. I run four miles on the treadmill, I'm not as tired as I am after an argument with you.

ALYSSA

Tony voted against the war. He sponsored a clean-air bill, a renewable energy bill. He's for universal health care, higher pay for teachers, everything we care about! You said he should run for president.

WYMAN

That was before he burned his political bridges. You can't vote against God and win an election in this country.

ALYSSA

He didn't vote against God. He voted to protect the constitutional separation of church and state.

WYMAN

For most Americans, if you want to take God out of the Pledge of Allegiance you're against God. And he was the only one in the entire United States Congress.

ALYSSA

Except for the ones who skipped the vote.

WYMAN

Because they knew it would be political suicide. Tony lost the Democratic primary to Sara Fielding, because he's an Atheist. And he'll lose in the general election for the same reason.

ALYSSA

Protecting the separation of church and state doesn't mean he's an Atheist.

WYMAN

No. But he is, which is okay with you and me but not with most Americans. You mean, he's not going to admit it?

ALYSSA

He'll say what he said last time. A candidate's religious orientation is a private matter.

WYMAN

That's saying he's not only an Atheist but too cowardly to admit it.

ALYSSA

It's a principled stand. He took it and won two years ago.

WYMAN

There was no viable opposition in the last race. This time, we have right-wing, evangelical Earl Raltson who will make a big point of having God on his side. Sara Fielding wants you as her media director. Take the job. Forget Tony Bridge.

ALYSSA

I'm going to be Tony's media director.

WYMAN

Let's talk about it, okay?

ALYSSA

I told him I would do it.

WYMAN

What!

ALYSSA

Just now.

WYMAN

You decided without even—

ALYSSA

I'm meeting him in about an hour.

WYMAN

Not today!

ALYSSA

He's already late, getting into the—

WYMAN

Just like that! You trash our day together as though it's—

ALYSSA

Tony's late, getting into the race. We have to move fast to get caught up.

WYMAN

We, meaning you and Tony Bridge. But we – you and I – are getting married in a few months. We've just bought a house, and we don't have time to furnish it. We don't even have a bed to sleep on.

ALYSSA

And we have the nerve to enjoy ourselves so shamelessly on a mattress, on the floor.

WYMAN

I don't enjoy sleeping on a mattress on the floor.

ALYSSA

You put on an awfully good act.

WYMAN

Yeah...well—

ALYSSA

We need Tony Bridge in Congress.

WYMAN

He'll lose. And split the Democratic vote, so Sara will lose too. Which leaves us with evangelical, right-wing Earl Ralston in Congress.

ALYSSA

Tony will win most of the Democrats away from Sara Fielding, take the Independents and some moderate Republicans.

WYMAN

You're a political pro, Aly! Come down to earth!

ALYSSA

The campaign to draft Tony collected more than three hundred thousand dollars on the internet, before he decided to run.

WYMAN

Three hundred thousand dollars is less than the Republicans spend on a dinner party for the rich, to collect millions. You were offered a job on Sara Fielding's campaign. Take it.

ALYSSA

I'm going to be Tony's media director and speech writer.

WYMAN

Media director and speech writer.

ALYSSA

Until the campaign gets enough money to hire someone else to write speeches.

WYMAN

He won't get enough money. Sara will get middle-income money. Ralston will get serious money. Tony will get leftover nickels and dimes from the disgruntled losers. You're going to work two jobs for Tony Bridge, when you could work one for Sara, who has a chance of being elected.

ALYSSA

I can't work for Sara, hoping that Tony wins. I couldn't live with myself if I didn't try to get him re-elected.

WYMAN

You might as well not be living with me if you do. The kind of hours you'll be working for Tony's underdog campaign, we'll never see each other.

ALYSSA

When you were writing your book, I could have disappeared, and you wouldn't have noticed.

WYMAN

It might have taken me a couple of days but eventually—

ALYSSA

Seriously—

WYMAN

I dedicated that book to you, because you inspired me to start it, to keep writing it and to finish it. Don't ever disappear on me, Aly.

ALYSSA

Not a chance, professor. I couldn't live without you.

WYMAN

Then, tell Tony Bridge you're going to work for the candidate who won the primary, and he should support her instead of dividing the party.

ALYSSA

I can't, Sweetheart. I want him to run.

WYMAN

Okay. But I'm voting for Sara.

ALYSSA

You wouldn't!

WYMAN

Trust me. I will.

ALYSSA

You agree with Tony on all the issues!

WYMAN

Except running in the face of certain defeat and taking the Democratic candidate down with him. We need to talk, Aly. Call Tony and tell him you can't meet him until tomorrow.

ALYSSA

I'm not going to change my mind. We'll shop tomorrow.

WYMAN

I teach two classes tomorrow, but of course you forgot about that.

ALYSSA

Then, the next day.

WYMAN

By that time, Tony Bridge will have taken over your life.

ALYSSA

It won't be that bad.

WYMAN

It'll be worse.

*(ALYSSA exits to bathroom. SOUND OF SHOWER.)*

WYMAN

He's a traitor!

ALYSSA

*(Off)* What?

WYMAN

Tony Bridge.

ALYSSA  
(*Off*) What!

WYMAN  
Both of you! Traitors to the Democratic Party.

ALYSSA  
(*Off*) I can't hear you.

WYMAN  
Maybe we should postpone the wedding.

ALYSSA  
(*Off*) What?

(*WYMAN hurls their pillows at a wall; gets dressed. ALYSSA enters.*)

ALYSSA  
What did you say?

WYMAN  
Nothing.

ALYSSA  
Tell me what you—

WYMAN  
Maybe we shouldn't get married.

ALYSSA  
Because I'm working for Tony Bridge?

WYMAN  
You don't have time to get married. You don't have time for me.

ALYSSA  
You want to cancel the wedding?

WYMAN  
Postpone it, give it some thought.

ALYSSA  
This is the second time you've said that.

WYMAN  
Well, maybe—

ALYSSA

We've been living together for six years! If you don't know by now—

WYMAN

We fight a lot.

ALYSSA

No more or less than most couples.

WYMAN

More. And you always win.

ALYSSA

I win about half the time.

WYMAN

More like three-quarters.

ALYSSA

If you don't want to marry me, cancel the wedding.

WYMAN

I said postpone, not cancel.

ALYSSA

I'm saying cancel. Every time we have a little fight, you—

WYMAN

Little! We plan a day together, and it's just a meaningless, little—

ALYSSA

You know I didn't mean it that way.

WYMAN

If you want to cancel the wedding, go ahead.

ALYSSA

I don't want to. You do.

WYMAN

You made the arrangements. You have all the contact numbers.

ALYSSA

They're in the two-drawer filing cabinet, under "wedding." You can't miss it. It's the only file folder under "W" in the two-drawer filing cabinet.

WYMAN

The two-drawer filing cabinet is yours.

ALYSSA

I'm giving you permission to open it.

WYMAN

Just like that.

ALYSSA

You don't think I'm going to beg you to marry me. I love you more than any man I've been with but if you—

WYMAN

All seven or eight of them.

ALYSSA

Oh, forgodsake!

WYMAN

Are you having an affair with Tony Bridge?

ALYSSA

What!

WYMAN

You're a free spirit. I don't know everything you do or whom you do it with. You've just made a totally irrational decision. Tony can't win re-election as an Independent, and he'll take the Democratic candidate down with him. What he's doing is destructive and self-indulgent. But you're willing to give up a job on the Fielding campaign to work for this guy. It doesn't make sense!

ALYSSA

Unless I'm sleeping with him? That's the most—

WYMAN

Go to your meeting. Forget it.

ALYSSA

The only file folder under "W" in the two-drawer filing cabinet. Cancel the wedding.

WYMAN

We can talk about it at dinner. I'll change the lunch reservations to dinner.

ALYSSA

We've talked. We're not getting married.

WYMAN

We're mature, intelligent people. We can—

ALYSSA

Why did I have to fall in love? Life was so easy when the only problem I had with men was that I couldn't fall in love with any of them.

WYMAN

I'll change the reservations to dinner.

ALYSSA

Too late. The wedding's off.

WYMAN

We can walk on the pier before dinner and talk.

ALYSSA

Or get a room at the Waterfront Motel and have a quickie before dinner.

WYMAN

You're a difficult, shameless adorable woman and I love you.

*(THEY kiss.)*

## END OF SCENE

## ACT I; SCENE 2

*(AT RISE: BRENDA'S house. BRENDA is on a ladder, painting the living room dark green. The DOORBELL RINGS.)*

BRENDA

Go away! *(The BELL RINGS insistently. SHE shouts.)* I'm not here!

JEFFREY

*(Off)* It's Jeffrey, Honey!

BRENDA

*(Climbing down)* Don't Honey me!

*(SHE opens the door, threatening to paint JEFFREY'S face.)*

JEFFREY

Whoa! Hey! What the...? (*HE grabs her wrist; wrests the brush from her hand.*) Do you want to be media director on the Sara Fielding campaign?

BRENDA

I said, go away!

JEFFREY

Media director! Sara Fielding campaign!

BRENDA

Don't call me, Honey!

JEFFREY

You can have the job.

BRENDA

We had a date for dinner, last night.

JEFFREY

Last night?

BRENDA

Who did you have dinner with, instead?

JEFFREY

Are you sure we had a—

BRENDA

I was sitting here in my new dress until eight o'clock. Didn't you get my messages? Of course, you got my—

JEFFREY

I'm trying to tell you something. The media job on Sara Fielding's campaign is open.

BRENDA

Alyssa's your media director.

JEFFREY

It was tentative. She turned it down to work for Tony Bridge.

BRENDA

Tony Bridge isn't—

JEFFREY

He's running as an Independent. Don't you watch the news anymore? Read newspapers?  
(*To the green walls*) What are you doing in here?

BRENDA

Making it look like the bottom of the ocean, and don't ask me why I want to live at the bottom of the ocean.

JEFFREY

You've got the job, Bren.

BRENDA

As your second choice. I told you I wanted to be media director, as soon as Sara hired you as campaign manager.

JEFFREY

Alyssa's done a lot of campaigns.

BRENDA

So have I.

JEFFREY

And you're good.

BRENDA

But not as good as Alyssa.

JEFFREY

Just as good but not as tough.

BRENDA

That shouldn't give her an edge with a campaign manager who says he loves me. Or are you still in love with her?

JEFFREY

I never was in love with Alyssa.

BRENDA

The affair on the Densinger campaign.

JEFFREY

Convenient. We both knew the affair would end when the campaign was over.

BRENDA

Convenient?

JEFFREY

I was getting a divorce. She had just split with whomever she was living with, and there we were.

BRENDA

But you must have had some feeling for each other.

JEFFREY

We liked each other very much. Still do. Alyssa and I are good friends. But we both knew it wasn't the love of our lives.

BRENDA

I don't see how you can just walk away, like that.

JEFFREY

My mom walked out of our lives one day when I was sixteen. Left a note: *I'm not good at being a wife and mother. It's best for all of us if I move on.* Succinct, to the point, no maudlin rambling about how much she loved us. I cried for a week, then tore up her pictures, trashed every present she ever gave me and wrote her off. We never heard from her again.

BRENDA

Never?

JEFFREY

No idea where she went.

BRENDA

But that's...this the first time you've told me anything so personal. I thought your mother had died.

JEFFREY

People talk too much about themselves. Take the job, Bren. We haven't worked on a campaign, together.

BRENDA

Talk to me, Jeffrey. Trust me.

JEFFREY

To do what? Commiserate with me because my mom left? I wrote her off. That's it. If you don't want to be media director, I'll get someone else.

BRENDA

I left messages on both of your phones. Where were you? You must have had dinner with someone.

JEFFREY  
The new campaign field rep.

BRENDA  
You met the field rep for dinner.

JEFFREY  
Right.

BRENDA  
What's his name?

JEFFREY  
His name?

BRENDA  
Maybe I know him from another campaign.

JEFFREY  
Ken Jones. You want his number, here. Call him, ask him if he met me for dinner.

BRENDA  
I wasn't going to—

JEFFREY  
Take it. Ken Jones. Write it down.

BRENDA  
I don't—

JEFFREY  
I'll write it for you. Here. Call him.

BRENDA  
I'm not going to call him.

JEFFREY  
What is this? I don't pry into your life. I don't grill you.

BRENDA  
I wish you would.

JEFFREY  
No, thanks. I don't own you. I'll get someone else for media director.

BRENDA

Of course, I want the job. (*Hugs him*) I was afraid I would never see you again.

JEFFREY

Hey. I'm sorry about last night.

BRENDA

I love you! I want to be with you.

JEFFREY

I'm here. You're the media director! Let's go to bed and celebrate.

BRENDA

Hold me, Jeffrey. (*HE does.*) I love you.

JEFFREY

You only love me for my contacts.

BRENDA

Your contacts and your kissable neck. (*Kisses him*) We're going to win, Jeffrey. Sara will go to Washington, and if she asks us to go with her—

JEFFREY

I don't talk victory until I start seeing favorable poll numbers.

## END OF SCENE

## ACT I; SCENE 3

(*AT RISE: The same, a few days later. BRENDA, ALYSSA, ERIN at lunch.*)

BRENDA

(*To the wall*) I'll repaint it white, now.

ERIN

Make Jeffrey paint it.

BRENDA

Yeah, sure.

ERIN

Threaten to leave him, if he doesn't.

BRENDA

Get real, Erin.

ERIN

If you threaten to leave him, he'll realize he's in love with you.

ALYSSA

Don't threaten unless you mean it.

ERIN

Don't threaten unless he thinks you mean it.

ALYSSA

No. Unless you mean it.

ERIN

Such a good girl. Everything above board, unless you're working for a candidate who won't admit he's an Atheist.

ALYSSA

Tony's position is that a candidate's—

ERIN

We know Tony's position. (*Mocking*) A candidate's religious orientation is a private matter.

ALYSSA

And your candidate would agree. Sara never would use an opponent's religion in a campaign.

BRENDA

I thought we agreed not to talk politics, until after the election.

ERIN

(*To ALYSSA*) But if Sara is asked about her religion, she answers the question. She doesn't dance around it with cheap evasions.

ALYSSA

(*To ERIN*) You may think that a principled stand is a cheap evasion but your candidate doesn't and neither do the voters of this congressional district, which, if you recall, elected Tony to congress two years ago.

BRENDA

If we can't resist political arguments, we'll have to suspend our regular lunch date until after the election.

ERIN

(*To ALYSSA*) Two years ago, Tony won the Democratic primary. He wasn't poised to run as an Independent and split the Democratic votes.

BRENDA

Erin! For the sake of our how many years of friendship?

ERIN

Okay. Sorry.

BRENDA

For the sake of our many years of friendship, let's honor our agreement and change the subject. Should I threaten to leave Jeffrey or not?

ERIN

Do it. You're not getting what you need from him. What do you have to lose?

ALYSSA

Your pride and dignity.

ERIN

Neither of which will keep you warm on lonely Sundays and holidays.

ALYSSA

If I know Jeffrey, he'll call your bluff.

BRENDA

And you do know him.

ALYSSA

Bren! You can't be jealous of my casual affair with Jeffrey, seven or eight years ago.

BRENDA

I'm jealous of your breezy way with men. Giving them up is so easy for you.

ALYSSA

That was before Wyman.

ERIN

Who is going to vote for Sara.

BRENDA

(*To ALYSSA*) He is?

ERIN

I saw his name on the university faculty donor list.

ALYSSA

It's not a secret.

ERIN

It must cause friction.

ALYSSA

No more than your working for a pro-choice candidate must cause friction with your Catholic husband and with your own faith, for that matter.

*(ERIN stops eating.)*

BRENDA

Erin! What?

ERIN

I've lost it.

BRENDA

Lost—

ERIN

My faith. I keep trying to get it back, but it's no use. I can't forgive priests, exploiting children for sex and those bishops! Covering up for them.

ALYSSA

But you go to Mass.

ERIN

Ben doesn't know. Which means I'm a hypocrite, just as you always suspected.

ALYSSA

I never said—

ERIN

But I am! So, it's a toss-up, whether I'm doomed to eternal damnation by hypocrisy or by working on a pro-choice campaign.

ALYSSA

Eternal damnation!

ERIN

According to Ben.

ALYSSA

He's not serious.

ERIN

Ben is always serious. He was born a middle-aged penitent. He would divorce me, if we weren't Catholic.

ALYSSA

But if you don't believe in eternal damnation, anymore, you're not going there.

ERIN

Just because I've lost faith doesn't mean there's no hell.

ALYSSA

That is what it means. All it has going for it is that people believe it. You can't go to a hell that doesn't exist.

ERIN

I don't know for sure that it doesn't.

ALYSSA

Trust yourself.

ERIN

I wish I still had faith. I miss it. That's hard for Atheists like you and Tony Bridge to understand, but—

*(BRENDA taps a spoon on her glass.)*

BRENDA

Don't go there, Erin. One more step and we're back to politics.

ALYSSA

Which is right where we belong. Go for it, Erin. Let off steam.

ERIN

No. Brenda's right. No politics until after the election. How's Julie doing in art school?

BRENDA

Exciting news! The school is submitting one of her paintings to the Crane Gallery Emerging Artists Competition.

ERIN

Congratulations!

BRENDA

If she gets in, her painting will be in a show with top artists from around the country.

ERIN

Let's drink a toast to Julie.

*(THEY raise their wine glasses.)*

ALL

To Julie!

BRENDA

And she's moved in with her boyfriend.

ERIN

You've got an empty nest.

BRENDA

I'm so happy for her, it doesn't feel empty. I'll get the dessert.

*(BRENDA collects plates.)*

ERIN

Can we help?

BRENDA

*(Off)* No. It's all ready. *(Exits)*

ALYSSA

Some people turned up at one of our rallies, holding signs that said, We Pledge Allegiance Under God. When Tony started to speak, they tried to drown him out by reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. If they hadn't made a run for it, there would have been a bloody fight.

BRENDA

Who are they?

ALYSSA

That's what I'd like to know.

ERIN

Ralston people.

ALYSSA

I don't know.

ERIN

Who else?

ALYSSA

We have two opponents in this race.

ERIN

You aren't suggesting—

*(BRENDA enters with dessert.)*

BRENDA

Chocolate mousse!

## END OF SCENE

## ACT I; SCENE 4

*(AT RISE: Sara Fielding For Congress campaign kickoff. From offstage; BACKGROUND PARTY NOISE.)*

WYMAN

So, what does this make me, a traitor?

BRENDA

Alyssa's the traitor. If Earl Ralston wins because Tony splits the Democratic vote, I'm not sure I'll come to your wedding.

WYMAN

I'm not sure I will.

BRENDA

Oh!

WYMAN

Kidding.

BRENDA

I should be grateful to her. I wouldn't have this job if Alyssa had taken Sara's campaign.

WYMAN

You've known Alyssa twice as long as I have. Why would she work for a candidate who can't win and is going to split the party?

BRENDA

The greater the challenge, the more Alyssa likes it.

WYMAN

We think we know someone.

BRENDA

The older I get, the less certain I am of anything.

WYMAN

You don't get older, Brenda. If anything, you look younger than ever.

BRENDA

Thank you, Wyman.

WYMAN

Anyway, our candidate is now launched, albeit with cheap champagne.

BRENDA

Is it that bad?

WYMAN

It doesn't matter. I don't like champagne. I don't know why I took it. Do you want some more?

BRENDA

I like it, which I suppose doesn't say much for my taste.

WYMAN

Take mine.

BRENDA

You sure you don't want even a sip?

WYMAN

Not even. Go ahead. Honestly, I haven't touched it.

BRENDA

I believe you. I don't see a single germ.

WYMAN

Germs are afraid of me.

BRENDA

Me too. I never get sick. Well, you know...

WYMAN

The occasional...

BRENDA

Touch of something. Flu.

WYMAN

But never very bad.

BRENDA

Couple of aspirin.

WYMAN

Plus will power. Be firm.

BRENDA

Let it know who's boss.

WYMAN

Germ. Get lost, if you know what's good for you.

BRENDA

A single mother can't afford to get sick.

WYMAN

How's Julie doing these days?

BRENDA

Better. Terrific. Except that she tries to shut me out of her life. But you don't want to hear about that.

WYMAN

Sure, I do.

BRENDA

This is a party. You're here to have a good time.

WYMAN

I'm an introvert. Introverts aren't supposed to have fun at parties. Tell me.

BRENDA

She says I don't trust her, and I call so often because I'm afraid she's shooting up.

WYMAN

Are you calling to find out if she's shooting up?

BRENDA

I suppose I am. She says she's out of the drug scene for good, but how can I be sure?

WYMAN

You can't, but you have to believe her, until and unless you have a good reason not to.

BRENDA

Easy for you to say. A few years ago, she overdosed and ended up in the hospital. How's that for a good reason?

WYMAN

That was then. Life changes faster for them than it does for us. If you don't trust her, you undermine her, and that makes it hard for her to trust herself, which could drive her back to old patterns.

BRENDA

Say that, again.

WYMAN

If you don't—

BRENDA

No! I got it! Why couldn't my therapist make it that clear?

WYMAN

He studied Freud and Jung instead of Shakespeare and James Joyce.

BRENDA

How's Daniel?

WYMAN

He's okay. Sometimes, I think I'd like to get custody, but I don't think Alyssa would want that.

BRENDA

She's never wanted children.

WYMAN

Loves her work. Thrives on it.

BRENDA

Even with all the trouble I've had as a single mom, I'm glad I had a child. But maybe Alyssa's such a good media director because she isn't distracted by the worries of child rearing.

WYMAN

I'm sure you're as good a media director as Alyssa.

BRENDA

My boyfriend doesn't think so.

WYMAN

Jeffrey?

BRENDA

He doesn't think much of me, at all. Forgets about dinner dates, comes over at one in the morning for sex. I should slam the door in his face, but what do I do? Melt in his arms.

WYMAN

I doubt he's coming over just for sex. Jeffrey's the kind of guy who attracts a lot of women.

BRENDA

I do better blow jobs.

WYMAN

Don't demean yourself, Brenda.

BRENDA

I don't have to. Every man I fall in love with does it for me. I'm so stupid, I wonder how I ever learned to read and write.

WYMAN

You may be temporarily trapped with the wrong guy, but you're not stupid.

BRENDA

All right, then. Insane.

WYMAN

No more so than anyone else, in love, which, by its nature, is an insane state of being.

BRENDA

A strange description of love from a man on the verge of getting married.

WYMAN

Good thing life is so strange, or no one would write literature, and I couldn't earn a living, teaching it. You're neither stupid nor insane, Brenda. Thinking that you are is what makes you vulnerable to the wrong men. If you believe you're attractive and smart, which you are, they wouldn't forget dinner dates.

BRENDA

I'm going to fire my therapist and hire you. You're wonderful, Wyman.

WYMAN

If I can't be the life of the party, the least I can be is wonderful.

ERIN

*(Enters)* This is my, what? Fifth kickoff. Sixth? Every other one was a huge success. People were jazzed! Raring to go! This one feels flat.

BRENDA

It's a good kickoff, Erin.

ERIN

Good isn't enough. Good isn't a winner.

BRENDA

It's great! Isn't it, Wyman?

WYMAN

Lots of noise. The place is packed.

ERIN

Crowded. Not packed.

BRENDA

Well, people can move.

ERIN

At the best ones, they can't. A kickoff needs to be jam packed, and a half hour into it, something has to click.

WYMAN

It clicked. I heard it.

ERIN

You're a darling. I hope you aren't spying for the Bridge campaign.

WYMAN

I wouldn't know how. I'm here to support the candidate who I think can beat Earl Ralston.

ERIN

Tell me how Alyssa justifies working against her own party.

WYMAN

She thinks she can convince Democrats and even some Republicans to vote for Tony.

ERIN

You don't believe that.

WYMAN

What does a lit professor know? You're the political pros.

BRENDA

Alyssa thinks she can wave her magic wand and change the world.

ERIN

Once she makes up her mind—

WYMAN

A free spirit.

ERIN

You wouldn't love her any other way.

WYMAN

I don't know about that. I better get back to my ivory tower and prepare for my nine o'clock seminar. I have to be on my toes. Graduate students. Very sharp.

BRENDA

I'm sure you're way ahead of them, Wyman.

WYMAN

Thank you, Brenda. It's still clicking, Erin

*(ERIN hugs him. WYMAN exits.)*

ERIN

How did Alyssa get such a sweet man?

BRENDA

He joked about not marrying her if Earl Ralston wins.

ERIN

It might not be a joke.

BRENDA

Not marry her because of an election!

ERIN

No. Because she won't let him feel he's in control. They'll get married but it won't last.

BRENDA

You don't really think that.

ERIN

She's told us about their fights. Alyssa won't let him feel that he's in control.

BRENDA

Ben isn't in control in your marriage.

ERIN

But I let him think he is.

BRENDA

Alyssa never would play that game.

ERIN

And she thinks I'm a hypocrite, because I do. But she'll find out the hard way. And if she's going to lose him to anyone, it might as well be to you.

BRENDA

Me...!

ERIN

I saw you and Wyman together.

BRENDA

We were just—

ERIN

He was flirting with you.

BRENDA

I didn't—

ERIN

You too.

BRENDA

What!

ERIN

Flirting.

BRENDA

I wasn't!

ERIN

It's not the first time. My New Year's Eve party last year.

BRENDA

Everyone kisses everyone on New Year's Eve.

ERIN

Usually just once, at midnight.

BRENDA

We didn't—

ERIN

It's okay. I'm telling you, sooner or later, he's going to leave her, anyway!

BRENDA

No! Wait a—

ERIN

Wyman is attracted to you.

BRENDA

But, not...I've always been afraid to talk to him. A professor.

ERIN

You're smart enough to talk to anyone.

BRENDA

He seems to think so.

ERIN

You are.

BRENDA

Stop! This is—

ERIN

We're just putting everyone's cards on the table, Alyssa style. Jeffrey can't give you what you want. Alyssa can't give Wyman what he needs. That leaves you and Wyman, who happen to be attracted to each other. Nature! Taking its course.

BRENDA

No, Erin! No!

ERIN

Okay.

BRENDA

You don't mean I should...he's Alyssa's man!

ERIN

Until she loses him.

BRENDA

They're getting married!

ERIN

It won't last.

BRENDA

Erin! Wait! Okay, we're not on the best terms with Alyssa, right now, but you and Alyssa and I—

ERIN

I know! You and Aly are my closest friends. But that doesn't change the fact that—

BRENDA

Alyssa has been there for me, Erin.

ERIN

For me, too. But—

BRENDA

The time Julie took off with that rock singer, and I didn't hear from her for a week. Alyssa was there for me. You too but she—

ERIN

I want her marriage to work. I just don't think it will. And I see you, trying to convince yourself that Jeffrey loves you or will love you, but what you face, at the end of most days, is a terrifying void.

BRENDA

Tell me about it.

ERIN

Jeffrey takes your love and gives you crumbs in return.

BRENDA

And I pounce on them like a hungry squirrel.

ERIN

You deserve someone much better.

BRENDA

If I'm so deserving, why do I always come up short?

ERIN

You choose the wrong kind of man.

BRENDA

That's what Wyman said! He said that if I thought better of myself, I wouldn't be vulnerable to the wrong men.

ERIN

Sweet, reliable and wise.

BRENDA

Alyssa loves him! She's going to marry him!

ERIN

I try to help her, and I get contempt for my efforts. Maybe Wyman is intellectually committed to equality between men and woman, but he won't live with a contract that binds him to it.

BRENDA

Reliable, wise and decent.

ERIN

Nice old-world feeling to that word.

BRENDA

Decent? No one uses it anymore.

ERIN

It sounds very comforting to me.

BRENDA

I won't make a play for Wyman! I couldn't do that!

ERIN

No. Don't make a play for him. But he could be faculty fund-raising coordinator on the university campus.

BRENDA

Fund-raising—

ERIN

The Fielding campaign needs someone to coordinate faculty fund-raising.

**END OF SCENE**

## ACT I; SCENE 5

*(AT RISE: WYMAN and ALYSSA'S house. WYMAN dances to "Blue Tango" with an imaginary partner. At first, HE doesn't see ALYSSA enter.)*

ALYSSA

You must have finished your article.

WYMAN

Hey! Hi! Yeah, finished it, sent it out for review and gave a political speech.

ALYSSA

A political—

WYMAN

In my capacity as faculty fund-raising coordinator for the Sara Fielding campaign.

ALYSSA

As...who?

WYMAN

I collected two-thousand dollars, which, granted is not serious money these days, but for a novice—

ALYSSA

You're...faculty fund-raising coordinator?

WYMAN

I never thought of myself as someone who could coordinate fund raising. Bet you didn't, either.

ALYSSA

How did you—

WYMAN

It's one of those things extroverts do, people with polished social skills who have easy rapport with other people, and you don't think I have that.

ALYSSA

You don't think so, either.

WYMAN

Brenda asked me to be faculty fund-raising coordinator.

ALYSSA

Brenda!

WYMAN

I was surprised, too. And flattered.

ALYSSA

I'll bet!

WYMAN

I might have a whole range of political organizing skills, rusting away.

ALYSSA

You have all the qualities you need to be the successful literature professor that you are.

WYMAN

But maybe that's not all. Okay, I write scholarly articles, read by a few scholarly people. But what if I have, you know, charisma and didn't even know it? What if I have the, whatever it is, magnetism to get people to donate money? If I do anything to keep Earl Ralston out of Congress, I could be affecting thousands, millions of people in this country and all over the world.

ALYSSA

How will you have time? What are you going to give up? Teaching, grading papers or writing articles?

WYMAN

Fit it in. Other people do. You always say, we can't expect democracy to work if people don't get involved.

ALYSSA

And you decided to take it to heart by helping to defeat my candidate.

WYMAN

It's not about defeating your candidate. I want to keep that congressional seat Democratic. Sara can beat Earl Ralston. Tony can't.

ALYSSA

When did Brenda—

WYMAN

What would you say if I wanted Daniel to live with us?

ALYSSA

Wait a min—

WYMAN

When he starts high school.

ALYSSA

You never wanted Daniel to live with you.

WYMAN

Maybe I don't give myself credit for being as good a father as I could be.

ALYSSA

You weren't a bad father. You don't happen to have strong parental instincts. There's no law that says you have to, and it's not wrong. It's just who you are.

WYMAN

Who says I don't have strong parental instincts?

ALYSSA

You! On our second date. You said you didn't want children to begin with. Janet talked you into it, but you didn't want any more.

WYMAN

Maybe I was wrong about that, too.

ALYSSA

In addition to what else?

WYMAN

I've restricted myself to such a narrow playing field.

ALYSSA

So now, you want more children.

WYMAN

I don't know.

ALYSSA

And you want to be a political fund raiser. Is that in addition to or instead of being a literature professor?

WYMAN

You can't take this seriously, can you?

ALYSSA

I'm trying.

WYMAN

By mocking me.

ALYSSA

I didn't mean—

WYMAN

No! You wouldn't mean to be condescending, because it's impolitic, and a consummate political pro like you weighs her words judiciously.

ALYSSA

I walk in here at one in the morning—

WYMAN

Thinking I would be tucked securely in bed...on our mattress on the floor, where I'm expected to be. Good old predictable Wyman, right down there on the floor where he's supposed to be.

ALYSSA

What is it, Wyman? What happened?

WYMAN

I gave a little speech at the Faculty Club about how important it is to support Sara Fielding, and people came up with their checks, told me how good the speech was. It took me about half an hour to write that speech. It takes half a year for me to write an article.

ALYSSA

Maybe you should run for public office.

WYMAN

She said, chuckling to herself.

ALYSSA

I'm not chuckling!

WYMAN

You're too cool to laugh outright.

ALYSSA

I don't laugh at you! When have I ever...tell me what's wrong, Wyman. It's late. I'm tired. I have to get up early for a press conference.

WYMAN

Haven't you ever wanted a baby?

ALYSSA

No.

WYMAN

Never? Most women—

ALYSSA

You don't want us...to have a baby.

WYMAN

It's natural for two people to want—

ALYSSA

We don't care what's considered natural for other people. I don't want children. Neither do you.

WYMAN

It's different, now that Daniel is older. He's starting high school. I don't want to cut myself off from every facet of life except teaching literature.

ALYSSA

Let's talk about it some other time. I'm going to bed.

WYMAN

Aly?

ALYSSA

What.

WYMAN

I don't know.

ALYSSA

You want to cancel the wedding.

WYMAN

No.

ALYSSA

You do.

WYMAN

I do not.

ALYSSA

The contact information is in the first drawer of my file cabinet, under W.

**END OF SCENE**

## ACT I; SCENE 6

(AT RISE: BRENDA'S office at Fielding campaign headquarters. JEFFREY enters with newspaper.)

JEFFREY

N.O.W. endorsed Tony Bridge.

BRENDA

I know.

JEFFREY

On the front page! (*Reading newspaper*) National Organization for Women endorses Tony Bridge for Congress!

BRENDA

I saw it!

JEFFREY

Good! Great! You saw it. But you didn't see it coming!

BRENDA

Tony has a stronger position on abortion.

JEFFREY

Sara and Tony are both pro-choice!

BRENDA

Tony says it's absolutely the woman's choice, and there should be no federal or state laws against it. Sara's stand is more moderate. She would—

JEFFREY

I know Sara's position on the issue. We should have a story about prominent pro-choice women who support Sara's position.

BRENDA

I'll try to get one.

JEFFREY

You should have had it by now. Where are your sources?

BRENDA

I have sources.

JEFFREY

Talk to them. Sara has a solid, mainstream pro-choice position that allows for some regulation. Your job is to spin Sara's position so it looks better than Tony's.

BRENDA

Say it! Alyssa—

JEFFREY

You're saying it! And you're right. Alyssa's got stories all over the place, practically every day. I haven't seen anything on Sara in two days.

BRENDA

There was a story yesterday on her stem cell research speech at the hospital workers union.

JEFFREY

Not on the front page.

BRENDA

I don't decide what goes on the front page.

JEFFREY

It's your job to write such a compelling story that it gets on the front page.

BRENDA

Sara's moderate positions on the issues aren't as flashy as Tony's radical ones.

JEFFREY

Spin them so they are or convince the media people that they are or both or for godsake, something!

BRENDA

If you want someone else for this job—

JEFFREY

No. I don't want—

BRENDA

You do, but she happens to be working for one of our opponents.

JEFFREY

I didn't mean—

BRENDA

I know what you meant!

JEFFREY

Let's have dinner, tonight. I don't have any meetings. We can—

BRENDA

I can't. I'm busy.

JEFFREY

What do you mean, busy?

BRENDA

As in, otherwise occupied.

JEFFREY

With whom?

BRENDA

What!

JEFFREY

Who are you—

BRENDA

Don't pry into my personal life. You might start thinking you own me.

JEFFREY

Why won't you have dinner with me anymore?

BRENDA

I don't have time.

JEFFREY

You have to eat.

BRENDA

On the run, on the phone.

JEFFREY

We can go to the new Italian place. Four star. Getting rave reviews.

BRENDA

You complain about my not getting Sara on the front page, and you want me to waste time having dinner with you.

JEFFREY

I want to see you.

No. **BRENDA**

Just...no? **JEFFREY**

**BRENDA**  
Succinct. To the point. No maudlin explanations.

**JEFFREY**  
You're doing a great job. I'm nervous about the polls, that's all.

**BRENDA**  
Sara is still ahead of Tony in the polls.

**JEFFREY**  
By a smaller margin than last week. And Earl Ralston is outspending both of us.

**BRENDA**  
And you think that's because I don't get a story on the front page every day.

**JEFFREY**  
No! I didn't mean to—

**BRENDA**  
I'm busy, Jeffrey.

**JEFFREY**  
Wait. Listen to me.

**BRENDA**  
You have three minutes.

**JEFFREY**  
Bren—

**BRENDA**  
Three minutes.

**JEFFREY**  
I...I don't always say and do what I mean...what I really feel. Sometimes, I say or do things that are even the opposite of what I feel. If I like a woman too much, I get scared and send the wrong signal.

**BRENDA**  
I suppose you expect me to be flattered.

JEFFREY

You're not seeing someone else.

BRENDA

You're not as hard an act to follow as you may think.

JEFFREY

The campaign field rep.

BRENDA

Yes. I'm screwing the twenty-four year old field rep. Your three minutes are up, Jeffrey. I need to make some phone calls.

**END OF SCENE**

**ACT I; SCENE 7**

*(AT RISE: BRENDA'S house. Evening. WYMAN hands her a large red rose.)*

WYMAN

There was a woman on the corner selling these. I've never seen such a perfect red rose. I couldn't believe it was real.

BRENDA

It's gorgeous!

WYMAN

I shouldn't have come over like this.

BRENDA

I'm happy to see you.

WYMAN

I was going to call. I couldn't find my cell phone, so I was in a phone booth, a block away, trying to get up the nerve to call you. I would put the quarters in, start to dial, then put down the receiver, take back my quarters and stand there, staring at the phone.

BRENDA

I can't tell you how many times I've done that.

WYMAN

Not you!

BRENDA

Believe me.

WYMAN

A guy started shouting at me, pounding on the door, with this threatening look. You can't blame him.

BRENDA

He's a bully. He should be pushed and pummeled to the ground. No one should shout at you.

WYMAN

That's sweet. You don't want anyone to shout at me.

BRENDA

You're so gentle.

WYMAN

Too gentle, according to some people.

BRENDA

A quiet, inner strength that surprises and infuriates bullies.

WYMAN

Well, this time, I shouted back. I didn't pummel him to the ground, but I stood my ground. You should have heard me. If that had happened a week ago, I would have apologized and crept away. I'm a new man, Brenda.

BRENDA

Don't be too new. There aren't many like you. There aren't any like you.

WYMAN

I was afraid if I called, you would say, no.

BRENDA

No! To you? How could I—

WYMAN

I was afraid.

BRENDA

You didn't really think I wouldn't want to see you.

WYMAN

I wasn't sure.

BRENDA

After what happened, yesterday?

WYMAN

That kind of thing happens to guys like Robert Redford. Not me.

BRENDA

Robert Redford couldn't hold a candle to you.

WYMAN

No, wait a min—

BRENDA

You don't realize how appealing you are. You let the academician hide your charm.

WYMAN

Why do I think we've had this conversation, before?

BRENDA

At the Fielding kickoff, only the roles were reversed. You told me that I chose the wrong men because I didn't have a high enough opinion of myself. I took your advice seriously.

WYMAN

You might be going too fast for me.

BRENDA

Love sets its own pace. It doesn't stop to ask whether this is the right time and place.

WYMAN

Very inconsiderate of it. Worse. Arrogant. So sure of itself.

BRENDA

With its track record, who can blame it?

WYMAN

You didn't say...love!

BRENDA

I missed you.

WYMAN

I missed you, too, but I didn't plan to come back. I thought yesterday was a kind of one-lunch stand that we would tuck into nostalgic memory, and then...I don't know. I saw this perfect red rose.

BRENDA  
It wasn't a one-lunch stand for me.

WYMAN  
You make me so happy, Brenda.

BRENDA  
You make me happy, too.

WYMAN  
But let's not...because I still—

BRENDA  
Love Alyssa?

WYMAN  
Yes.

BRENDA  
Of course.

WYMAN  
I might be falling in love with you, but I still—

BRENDA  
It's all right. She doesn't...suspect anything, does she?

WYMAN  
When Alyssa works on a campaign, she doesn't see or hear much of anything else. How about Jeffrey?

BRENDA  
You've replaced him.

WYMAN  
That's too fast.

BRENDA  
It sets its own pace.

WYMAN  
All rational minds would say this can't happen.

BRENDA  
Then, what are we doing?

WYMAN

Ask a rational mind.

BRENDA

I was so in love with him, I climbed the walls if he didn't call. Now, I hate myself for loving him.

WYMAN

I won't let anyone hate you, not even you. (*Kisses her*) I've never felt so good about myself. I've just given a lecture on heroes and antiheroes in modern literature that was pure poetry. I'm not usually a scintillating lecturer. There is foot shuffling during my lectures. There are yawns. Occasional naps are taken. Elaborate, focused doodling in the margins of notebooks is rampant. Not this time. Rapt attention! You should have seen them!

BRENDA

I want to come to one of your classes.

WYMAN

A woman like you can have any man she wants. I can't believe you want a dry, boring academician.

BRENDA

You're not dry or boring.

WYMAN

No charm. No pizzazz.

BRENDA

If a poetic lecture on heroes and anti-heroes isn't pizzazz!

(*The DOORBELL RINGS. BRENDA glances out a window, whispers.*)

BRENDA

Shhh! It's Jeffrey! I'm not going to answer.

WYMAN

Jeff—

BRENDA

Shhhh! (*Kisses him*)

**END ACT I**

**OPTIONAL INTERMISSION**

## ACT II; SCENE 1

*(AT RISE: Late night. Tony Bridge campaign headquarters.)*

JEFFREY

Hey, Aly!

ALYSSA

Jeffrey!

JEFFREY

Don't shoot! This isn't a Watergate break-in.

ALYSSA

Come in. I thought everyone in the world was asleep by now.

JEFFREY

I figured you were the one person who wasn't. How's it going?

ALYSSA

You don't think I'm going to tell you!

JEFFREY

No more than I would. This is a friendly, nonpolitical call.

ALYSSA

There's no such thing these days.

JEFFREY

Care for a drink?

*(HE takes a bottle of Vodka from a paper bag.)*

ALYSSA

Would I ever!

JEFFREY

Straight from the bottle. Remember?

ALYSSA

Sitting in the car! Before we went into our favorite expensive restaurants!

JEFFREY

Because we liked five-star cuisine, and we were too cheap to pay for the drinks.

*(JEFFREY opens the bottle. THEY pass it back and forth as dialogue continues.)*

ALYSSA

We were right. Good food is worth the price, but hiking up the price of a simple vodka and tonic is unethical.

JEFFREY

And immoral! Here's to the happy days, when we thought we could change the world.

ALYSSA

Is that a dig at my still thinking I can by working for Tony Bridge?

JEFFREY

Honestly, it wasn't. If he had won the primary, I would be working for him, too.

ALYSSA

It's hard to believe that Democrats would turn against him on that Pledge of Allegiance issue. God didn't get into the Pledge until 1954.

JEFFREY

Putting him in isn't scary. Taking him out is, and anyone who tries must be an Atheist, who would deprive them of heaven.

ALYSSA

So, if you're not trying to steal campaign secrets, you must have come because you can't find anyone else, willing to drink vodka straight from the bottle.

JEFFREY

What kind of car does Wyman drive?

ALYSSA

Toyota. Why?

JEFFREY

A white Camry? Four door?

ALYSSA

Yes.

JEFFREY

It's in front of Brenda's house or was, about half an hour ago.

ALYSSA

Brenda's!

JEFFREY

The lights were on. I heard voices, but when I rang the bell, no one answered.

ALYSSA

What are you—

JEFFREY

His car is in front of her house, Aly.

ALYSSA

Wyman doesn't own the only white Camry in the world.

JEFFREY

Right. (*Offering the bottle*) Another shot?

ALYSSA

He's doing this fund-raising job on your campaign.

JEFFREY

Brenda isn't involved with fund-raising.

ALYSSA

What are they...what is he—

JEFFREY

Not analyzing Shakespeare's tragedies, I'll bet.

ALYSSA

Wyman and Brenda! That's impossible!

JEFFREY

Okay.

ALYSSA

Brenda and I...she wouldn't—

JEFFREY

Then, you have nothing to worry about.

ALYSSA

Brenda and Erin and I share the most intimate confidences.

JEFFREY

If she wants the guy, she'll do what it takes and use what she knows.

ALYSSA

Wants the guy!

JEFFREY

For whatever reason.

ALYSSA

Wants my...Wyman wouldn't—

JEFFREY

You work longer hours than she does. You aren't home much these days. If Wyman is lonely, Brenda can be very good at fixing that.

ALYSSA

She would not do that!

JEFFREY

Okay.

ALYSSA

Wyman and I are...if he started seeing another woman, he would tell me.

JEFFREY

Hey, Aly. It's me.

ALYSSA

He would! I would tell him if...but neither of us...Brenda is in love with you!

JEFFREY

Which is why she's trying to make me jealous.

ALYSSA

Using Wyman to...don't be—

JEFFREY

You haven't heard of that tactic? Right. Brenda just invented it.

ALYSSA

Why would she—

JEFFREY

Because she can't get across to me any other way. Don't ask me why I'm afraid to let her know I care for her. It's a complicated, boring story.

ALYSSA

It's always complicated and never boring.

JEFFREY

Stop them, Aly.

ALYSSA  
Why don't you?

JEFFREY  
She won't talk to me.

ALYSSA  
If she's just playing politics with you—

JEFFREY  
Political games can get out of hand.

ALYSSA  
Tell Brenda that you love her. Ask her to marry you. That would stop them.

JEFFREY  
She won't talk to me except about campaign business. If she had opened the door tonight she would have slammed it in my face.

ALYSSA  
I'll kill him!

JEFFREY  
That's better.

ALYSSA  
Both of them!

JEFFREY  
Except that homicide's messy and time-consuming, and you might end up in jail.

ALYSSA  
How long has this—

JEFFREY  
What's the difference if it's four days or fourteen? He's your guy!

ALYSSA  
I don't know! Is he?

JEFFREY  
Unless you let him go. Move on. You and I used to pride ourselves on that, didn't we? Easy come, easy go. Show me a glitch, and I'm out of here.

ALYSSA  
Not with Wyman!

JEFFREY

Then, stop them.

ALYSSA

What if he's in love with her?

JEFFREY

You'll let him go?

ALYSSA

If he doesn't love me—

JEFFREY

They're having a fling, Aly, a romantic explosion. He's angry and lonely. So is Brenda. Solution? Hop into bed. You and I have been that route. If you let it happen, he'll think you don't care. And even if they only stay together for a month, it can do a lot of damage.

ALYSSA

He knows how much I love him.

JEFFREY

No one knows anything, for sure. About most things, least of all, love. Get in their way, Aly!

ALYSSA

Tony is speaking at an eight o'clock breakfast meeting, and I haven't finished writing his speech!

JEFFREY

Then you better work fast.

ALYSSA

There are hundreds of white Camrys! You don't know who was in there with her. It could have been the TV you were hearing.

JEFFREY

Right.

ALYSSA

It would serve your purpose to distract me right now.

JEFFREY

Don't be distracted. Be smart. Be cool. Stop them dead in their tracks!

*(JEFFREY exits. ALYSSA picks up her cell phone. LIGHTS UP on BRENDA, at home, in bed. Her bedside PHONE RINGS. SHE turns on light, finds the phone.)*

BRENDA  
Hello.

ALYSSA  
Congratulations!

BRENDA  
What!

ALYSSA  
Julie! A finalist for the emerging artists show at Crane Gallery.

BRENDA  
Alyssa?

ALYSSA  
I just now saw it in the paper. I'm so proud of her, and you must be over the moon!

BRENDA  
Well, yes...but it's...do you know what time it is?

ALYSSA  
No. I'm still working. Omigod! I didn't realize how late...I woke you.

BRENDA  
Of course, you—

ALYSSA  
Both of you. I'm so—

BRENDA  
Both? No. I—

ALYSSA  
You and Jeffrey.

BRENDA  
Jeffrey isn't here.

ALYSSA  
You haven't split up?

BRENDA  
Yes!

ALYSSA

You have!

BRENDA

I mean, no! I don't know!

ALYSSA

You don't know if you've split up?

BRENDA

Alyssa! It's one o'clock in the morning!

ALYSSA

Then, I'm sorry I woke you and whoever is there.

BRENDA

No one else is here.

ALYSSA

I was afraid if I didn't follow up on this right away, it would get lost in tomorrow's usual campaign craziness. Listen. Julie needs to be careful. I know Larry Crane. He is very sensitive to negative publicity. If he finds out that Julie had a relationship with a drug dealer and was arrested on a drug charge—

BRENDA

Julie isn't negative publicity. All of that was years ago! She hasn't had anything to do with the drug scene in years!

ALYSSA

As long as no one comes out of the woodwork to haunt her.

BRENDA

Who? No one—

ALYSSA

That pimp she lived with in L.A.

BRENDA

Los Angeles is over, finished! Years ago! Julie is a different person, now. She doesn't have anything to do with those people.

ALYSSA

Ed Berse was and still is a big time drug dealer. He came up here, looking for her once, didn't he?

BRENDA

Julie never wanted anything to do with him. He exploited her at a time when she was very vulnerable.

ALYSSA

And she was right to brush him off, the old Casanova. But a guy with that size ego doesn't take rejection easily.

BRENDA

You don't think he would try to...he isn't here, is he?

ALYSSA

Ed is one of those people who turns up wherever he needs to be.

BRENDA

What are you saying?

ALYSSA

That she needs to be very careful. Ed Berse could jeopardize her chance to be in the show. Besides, he's dangerous.

BRENDA

Dangerous?

ALYSSA

You don't want to be on the wrong side of this guy.

BRENDA

You don't...Alyssa!

ALYSSA

I just want Julie to be aware—

BRENDA

You don't...know Ed Berse?

ALYSSA

He thinks he owes me a favor. I told you about that.

BRENDA

No!

ALYSSA

I'm sure I did. I covered his trial on a rape charge when I was a reporter, and I tracked down a witness whose testimony played a large part in getting him acquitted. Of course, I wasn't trying to do any favors for Ed, but he thinks he owes me. He tried to give me money. I'm sure I told you about Ed.

BRENDA

He thinks he owes you?

ALYSSA

I found the witness. I was just being a reporter. I wasn't—

BRENDA

He thinks he owes you a favor?

ALYSSA

Yes.

BRENDA

Aly!

ALYSSA

He said I can call on him any time, and he'll be there for me.

BRENDA

You've known Julie since she was eight years old! You came to her high school graduation. She loves you!

ALYSSA

And I love her.

BRENDA

This is her big chance.

ALYSSA

That's why I called as soon as I...because I didn't want to wait until tomorrow, when I might forget.

BRENDA

I never would do anything to hurt you.

ALYSSA

I hope not.

BRENDA

*Never! (ALYSSA waits.) Alyssa! Jeffrey and I did not split up.*

ALYSSA

Good.

BRENDA

We...we're going out for dinner. A new Italian restaurant!

ALYSSA

Ah!

BRENDA

Five star!

ALYSSA

Five star! That says something, doesn't it?

BRENDA

We're working things out.

ALYSSA

I'm happy for you.

*(ALYSSA ends the call.)*

BRENDA

Alyssa!

*(LIGHTS DOWN on ALYSSA. BRENDA hesitates only a moment and punches in another number on her handset. LIGHTS UP on WYMAN, at home, asleep. His PHONE RINGS. HE puts on a light and answers the phone.)*

WYMAN

Hello.

BRENDA

You told her!

WYMAN

Huh! Brenda?

BRENDA

She's going to take it out on Julie! Sabotage her chance of getting into the Crane gallery art show!

WYMAN

I didn't...she's going to do what?

BRENDA

She called me just now. She knows!

WYMAN

About—

BRENDA

Yes! Call her! Tell her that nothing happened, that we got together to talk about Fielding campaign issues. There never was any—

WYMAN

Hold it a second. Alyssa called you just now and threatened to—

BRENDA

She didn't actually come out and...I don't have time to go into it, Wyman. But it was a threat.

WYMAN

I don't see how she could know. I did not tell her.

BRENDA

Well, she knows, and you have to tell her that nothing happened between us.

WYMAN

I'm a rotten liar. If she confronts me, I'll tell her the truth and we'll talk it out.

BRENDA

No! You can't tell her!

WYMAN

Alyssa and I don't lie to each other.

BRENDA

You fuck me behind her back and tell me you can't...my daughter's future is at stake! Maybe her life!

WYMAN

Listen, Brenda—

BRENDA

She's still at Bridge headquarters. Go and tell her.

WYMAN

I don't know how she found out, but Alyssa wouldn't take it out on Julie.

BRENDA

She would.

WYMAN

I know her! She wouldn't!

BRENDA

You love her, so you can't see how vicious she can be.

WYMAN

I love her, and she has plenty of faults, but she isn't vicious.

BRENDA

You don't know anything.

WYMAN

I know I've done something very stupid.

BRENDA

You mean being with me.

WYMAN

It all happened so fast.

BRENDA

It didn't happen at all. That's what you need to say, because if Alyssa gets in Julie's way...

*(Pause.)*

WYMAN

What?

BRENDA

Nothing.

WYMAN

What Brenda? If Alyssa gets in Julie's way?

*(BRENDA ends the call. LIGHTS DOWN on BRENDA. WYMAN immediately calls ALYSSA. LIGHTS UP on ALYSSA, in her office; her CELL PHONE RINGING.)*

ALYSSA

*(Answering the phone)* Hello.

WYMAN

Hi. I thought you were on your way home.

ALYSSA

Now, you know, I'm not.

WYMAN

You're not going to stay there all night.

ALYSSA

I might.

WYMAN

Okay if I come there?

ALYSSA

No.

WYMAN

I don't like you to be here alone, so late at night.

ALYSSA

What do you care?

WYMAN

Because I love you.

ALYSSA

You're having an affair with Brenda.

WYMAN

I'll be there by the time you finish the speech.

ALYSSA

I don't want you to come here.

WYMAN

I have to see you.

ALYSSA

Don't come here, Wyman. I won't let you in.

**END OF SCENE**

## ACT II; SCENE 2

*(AT RISE: ERIN'S office at Fielding campaign headquarters.)*

ERIN

You don't know for sure! There were ten finalists, and only four of them got into the show.

BRENDA

If Alyssa hadn't told Larry Crane about Julie's past, she would have been one of them. You've seen her paintings!

ERIN

I think they're brilliant. So do you but—

BRENDA

So do her instructors at school.

ERIN

But they didn't pick the winners and you don't know why she wasn't chosen unless you ask the judges.

BRENDA

You don't want to believe Alyssa could be that vicious.

ERIN

I can't blame her, unless I know she had something to do with it. I don't know. Neither do you.

BRENDA

I hope she and Wyman tear each other apart.

ERIN

They might.

BRENDA

Let's turn this election around and win it. Tony Bridge started a chapter of American Atheists at the University of Oregon, when he was an undergraduate there and another chapter when he was in law school at the University of Michigan. He was also on the national American Atheists board of directors for two years, until he ran for Congress the first time.

ERIN

You know that Sara won't use a candidate's religious beliefs against him.

BRENDA

The Fielding campaign isn't going to leak the story. Ben will do that.

ERIN

Ben!

BRENDA

Through that little newspaper he reads, Worshipper's Weekly. If Worshipper's Weekly runs it, the mainstream press will have to pick it up. Not only do we outmaneuver the opposition, you redeem yourself in Ben's eyes and bypass eternal damnation.

ERIN

Lucky me. We'd have to run this past Jeffrey.

BRENDA

Why?

ERIN

You're saying we should do this without telling Jeffrey?

BRENDA

Keep it simple.

ERIN

But you're living with Jeffrey, now.

BRENDA

Which doesn't mean I have to consult him on every decision I make.

**END OF SCENE**

**ACT II; SCENE 3**

*(AT RISE: BRENDA'S house. Morning. BRENDA enters in bathrobe, carrying a tray with two mugs of coffee and two glasses of orange juice. SHE opens the front door, picks up a newspaper, opens it.)*

BRENDA

Omigod!

*(SHE turns on the TV, which faces upstage.)*

TV ANCHOR, *Voice Over*

*...shot three times. The congressman had parked his car in his driveway and was walking toward his house at about 2 a.m. Apparently there were no witnesses to the shooting. Congressman Bridge was an Independent candidate for re-election to the seat he has held for one term as a Democrat. There are no suspects in the case, but police think that recent newspaper stories, citing Bridge's association with American Atheists, may have prompted the assassination.*

*(BRENDA turns off TV, sits down with her head in her hands. JEFFREY enters in bathrobe.)*

Bren! What? JEFFREY

Tony Bridge was shot! BRENDA

What! JEFFREY

Assassinated! BRENDA

Tony...! When? JEFFREY

Early this morning! BRENDA

*(JEFFREY turns on the TV. BRENDA turns it off.)*

Why did you— JEFFREY

Don't turn it on! BRENDA

Huh! JEFFREY

Leave it off. BRENDA

I want to see! JEFFREY

*(JEFFREY turns on the TV; TV ANCHOR VOICE resumes.)*

TV ANCHOR, *Voice Over*

*...a controversial figure—*

*(BRENDA turns off the TV.)*

JEFFREY

Leave it on!

BRENDA

I know what happened. I'll tell you what happened.

JEFFREY

I want to see—

BRENDA

I can tell you what happened!

JEFFREY

Why don't you want me to—

BRENDA

*(Blocks the TV)* I never thought—

JEFFREY

Let me—

BRENDA

Please! Don't!

JEFFREY

Bren, what—

BRENDA

I didn't think anyone would...omigod!

JEFFREY

I'm here. It's okay. I'm here.

BRENDA

I didn't think they would kill him!

JEFFREY

Who? Do you know who—

BRENDA

I thought it would destroy any chance he had of winning, but I didn't think—

JEFFREY

It probably was some religious fanatic who read those stories about Tony's association with American Atheists. Why can't we watch the news?

BRENDA

We should have known!

JEFFREY

Who should have known what? Sit down, Honey.

BRENDA

You know what I am, Jeffrey?

JEFFREY

Here. Just—

BRENDA

Don't touch me!

JEFFREY

What—

BRENDA

Help me, Jeffrey!

JEFFREY

I'm trying!

BRENDA

I can't believe I loved and cared for and raised a child!

JEFFREY

Bren! Honey, tell me what—

BRENDA

That I had the compassion, the moral, whatever it takes to raise a child! I don't have it! I'm a—

JEFFREY

I don't know what you're—

BRENDA

I'm a murderer, Jeffrey!

JEFFREY

You didn't kill him!

BRENDA

We could win! Sara could win the election on the back of—

JEFFREY

If she does, it won't be because she wanted him to be shot! That isn't her fault! Or yours or—

BRENDA

I can't do this anymore!

JEFFREY

Do what?

BRENDA

*Anything! (JEFFREY reaches out for her.) No! Don't touch me! He's dead, Jeffrey! Tony Bridge is dead!*

JEFFREY

Sit down, Bren. Sit here, next to me. I won't touch you. Okay? I'll just be here. I'll just sit here, or I'll sit over there. Do you want me to sit over there?

BRENDA

No.

JEFFREY

What do you want me to do?

BRENDA

I don't know!

JEFFREY

Your coffee's cold. I'll get you another—

BRENDA

I don't want anything.

JEFFREY

Tea.

BRENDA

No.

JEFFREY

Okay. We'll just sit here, together.

BRENDA

Don't say anything.

JEFFREY

I won't say anything.

BRENDA

Drink your orange juice. You need orange juice in the morning.

JEFFREY

You do, too. You drink a little orange juice, too.

BRENDA

I don't want any.

JEFFREY

Okay.

BRENDA

But you drink yours.

JEFFREY

All right. I'll drink mine.

BRENDA

There are croissants in the—

JEFFREY

I'll get you one.

BRENDA

No! For you!

JEFFREY

I'm okay. I'll get you something. What do you want?

BRENDA

Nothing! Nothing!

JEFFREY

Okay. I'll just be here. Tell me if you want anything.

BRENDA

I want to be a good person. And don't tell me I am.

JEFFREY

All right. I won't tell you.

BRENDA

You don't mean it when you say you love me.

JEFFREY

Yes, I do.

BRENDA

These past couple of weeks...all this talk about love.

JEFFREY

It isn't talk. I mean it. I love you. I want to marry you.

BRENDA

That's...absolutely out of the question.

JEFFREY

You don't want to marry me?

BRENDA

You don't know anything about me.

JEFFREY

I know enough to love you.

BRENDA

You know practically nothing.

JEFFREY

Not everything, I'm sure, but enough.

BRENDA

There are things about me that are going to surprise you.

JEFFREY

And vice versa.

BRENDA

They'll make you wish you'd never met me.

JEFFREY

I'll take my chances.

**END OF SCENE**

**ACT II; SCENE 4**

*(AT RISE: A week later. The same. Noon. BRENDA and ERIN at lunch.)*

BRENDA

I'll have to tell Jeffrey sometime.

ERIN

Don't get on a guilt trip. Someone else might have leaked the story about Tony, if we hadn't. The facts were there for anyone to find.

BRENDA

But I found them, and we used them, and a religious fanatic killed him.

ERIN

We won't bring him back to life by breaking our promise to keep it between us. Ben is the only necessary exception, and he's entirely trustworthy. I haven't even told my confessor.

BRENDA

I thought you didn't go to confession anymore.

ERIN

I've started again.

BRENDA

You've gone back to the church.

ERIN

I'm trying.

BRENDA

Then, you'll have to tell the priest what we did.

ERIN

We did it before I went back to the church.

BRENDA

Does that matter?

ERIN

I'm not asking.

BRENDA

Erin, we're monsters.

ERIN

There's no way we could know that—

BRENDA

Did I do it because it was my job or to get back at Alyssa?

ERIN

It was your job, our job, to win the election. And we got our candidate elected to Congress. Not only will Sara be an excellent congresswoman, we saved the country from Earl Ralston. You're going to Washington with Jeffrey, on Sara's staff! Start your new life, Bren. Leave the past behind.

BRENDA

I want to be completely open with Jeffrey.

ERIN

Alyssa style.

BRENDA

All right. Alyssa style.

ERIN

Look how that worked out.

BRENDA

They'll get back together. You're wrong about them, Erin. They'll get married and stay married. They'll fight again, and it will end by locking them closer together. Wyman never could love anyone else.

ERIN

You wouldn't rather be with him than with Jeffrey. (*BRENDA doesn't answer.*) Would you?

BRENDA

I wish I could love a sweet, dependable man like Wyman. But he never turned me on the way Jeffrey does. Jeffrey has the right character defects for me. Go figure.

ERIN

Alyssa must have some of the right ones for me. Furious as I am with her sometimes, I miss her.

BRENDA

You can have lunch with her.

ERIN

Not if she told Larry Crane about Julie's drug connections.

BRENDA

You don't think she's going to admit it, if she did.

ERIN

The odd thing is, I think she would admit it.

BRENDA

I don't know how we do it.

ERIN

What?

BRENDA

Love. Politics. Anything.

**END OF SCENE**

**ACT II; SCENE 5**

*(AT RISE: WYMAN and ALYSSA'S home. ALYSSA enters. )*

WYMAN

Hi. I got your message.

ALYSSA

I thought you had a class from eleven to noon.

WYMAN

I canceled it. It's good to see you.

ALYSSA

I said I would leave the key on the kitchen counter.

WYMAN

I wasn't worried about finding the key. Where have you been staying?

ALYSSA

Jeffrey's apartment. He moved in with Brenda.

WYMAN

Good.

ALYSSA

A healthy attitude, since you can't have her.

**This is Not the End of the Play**  
**Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes**