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TOO OLD TO CRY

A COMEDY BY
SEAN DAVID BENNETT

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Too Old to Cry

by Sean David Bennett

CAST OF CHARACTERS

DOREEN HAMILTON and **DENISE GRIFFITHS**; *twin sisters, mid-sixties and played by the same actress*

ARTHUR FERGUSON; *mid-to-late 60's*

LORIN HALLIDAY; *39*

ERIC RIDER; *age 31*

ROBYN HARRIS; *age 30*

SETTING

The play is set in Kenwood Manor, a Long Island suburb, and in Mill Valley, Marin County, CA.

ACT ONE

Scene One: Kenwood Manor, N.Y., and Mill Valley, CA. - A spring evening.
 Scene Two: Kenwood Manor, the following Wednesday morning.
 Scene Three: Kenwood Manor, later that evening.
 Scene Four: Kenwood Manor, Several months later, late morning
 Scene Five: Kenwood Manor, later that afternoon.

ACT TWO

Scene One: A Condominium in Mill Valley, several days later.
 Scene Two: Montage: Mill Valley, San Diego and Kenwood Manor - The following week.
 Scene Three: Kenwood Manor, An afternoon in May.
 Scene Four: Kenwood Manor, later that evening.
 Scene Five: Kenwood Manor, the next morning

(TECHNICAL NOTE: As conceived, the play was written with a separate downstage right playing area for the delivery of monologues between scenes, in order to provide for costume changes, but directors should feel free to place the monologues wherever they feel they will work best.)

TOO OLD TO CRY

Is dedicated to my sister

JOAN SUSAN HOLOHAN

And to my agent

ANN FARBER

*With deep appreciation for her persistence
in getting me to write a comedy*

Too Old to Cry
by Sean David Bennett

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

Kenwood Manor, N.Y., and Mill Valley, CA. – A Spring evening

The setting is the first floor of ARTHUR FERGUSON'S condominium, a hodge-podge of modern, practical, and very bad design. The living room and kitchen are one large space, partially separated by a counter, on which sits a phone, a vase, and stacks of notebooks and papers. Two bar stools are on either side of the counter. Further upstage is a half-open, gate-leg table with four folding chairs, two of which are open and two of which are stacked against the rear wall. It, too, is covered with books, papers and unopened mail. Close by the table, a large hallway leads to an unseen front door, stage right, and a partially visible staircase, stage left, which goes to the two second-floor bedrooms. Downstage, left, two French doors open on to the garden. Bookcases are to the right and left of a bay window which also looks out on the garden. In the center of the living room is a leather sofa, flanked on one side by a comfortable reading chair and lamp, and on the other by a spacious rocking chair. Downstage right is a table and a chair, which are not part of Arthur's apartment.

(AT RISE: The set is dark, except for the downstage right table and chair, where Doreen enters, wearing a light-colored pants suit, dialing a cell phone. Upstage, on the counter in Arthur's apartment, a telephone rings. Arthur, dressed in pajamas and bathrobe, comes down the stairs. In the dim hallway light, he trips and drops the papers he is carrying.)

ARTHUR

(Picking up the phone) Damn it to – Hello!

DOREEN

Hello. Is this the Ferguson residence?

ARTHUR

I'm not telling you. Damned telemarketers— *(HE slams down the phone, turns on a lamp, crosses to retrieve his papers as DOREEN redials. His phone rings a second time.)* Hello!

DOREEN

Hello, Arthur – Arthur Ferguson?

ARTHUR

(Turning on another lamp and fussing with his papers) Madame, I warn you: I have caller I.D. and I am reporting this call. Do you know what time it is?–

DOREEN

I'll bet you can't guess who this is, Arthur –

ARTHUR

No, nor do I give a damn and stop calling me by my first name.

DOREEN

Would you prefer *Buddy*? It is *you*, isn't it? – Buddy Ferguson –

ARTHUR

No one has called me “Buddy” since I learned to pee standing up.

DOREEN

You gave yourself away with that remark, Buddy. Hello all the way from your home town.

ARTHUR

I *am* in my home town. Who is this?

DOREEN

I mean your old home town. Don't you recognize my voice? It's Doreen.

ARTHUR

I don't know any Doreens.

DOREEN

Doreen Hamilton, from Mill Valley – You took me to the junior prom.

ARTHUR

That marketing firm of yours has given you wrong information, young lady. The person I escorted to the senior prom was not named Doreen Hamilton. Her name was Denise Griffiths.

DOREEN

I know that, silly.

ARTHUR

No, you do not. Before you make your next call, look at your script. You distinctly said your name was Doreen Hamilton.

DOREEN

It is. I mean, it was – Hamilton is my married name. Denise is my twin sister and, if your hearing wasn't failing, you would have heard me say you took me to the *junior* prom.

ARTHUR

Mill Valley High School had a Junior Prom? When was this?

DOREEN

Junior year, grouchy – Oh, I knew I shouldn't have called. You don't even remember giving me my first corsage.

ARTHUR

Yellow roses?

DOREEN

You *do* remember.

ARTHUR

I remember sending them to all the girls in school. (*Thinking*) Doreen, you say? Doreen Griffiths? But didn't we call you something else? If I remember correctly—

DOREEN

Arthur, don't you dare go there.

ARTHUR

—*Woodgie!* That's what we called you. Little Woodgie Griffiths – Hello, Woodgie

DOREEN

How can you remember that awful nickname and not remember me?

ARTHUR

I remember you, Woodgie. Are you forgetting I was in love with you?

DOREEN

You were not. It was just a silly school-boy crush—

ARTHUR

It certainly was not. I even remember the first song we danced to – (*Sings*) “*Yes, I'm the great pre-ten-hen-der, Yes, I'm the great...*”

DOREEN

That's right – you took me in your arms and waltzed me right past Warren Wahl –

ARTHUR

—And all your other boyfriends: Drew Martin, Jack Hornback, Fred Coyne—

DOREEN

And then you asked the band to play that silly song that almost got us thrown out –

ARTHUR

(*Sings*) “*Baby, let me bang your box, Baby, let me play your eighty-eight....*” That's when you tripped and fell.

DOREEN

I did not trip. You dropped me.

ARTHUR

I did not.

DOREEN

You did so. You were trying to dip me and, instead, you sprained my ankle.

ARTHUR

I *did* dip you. I held you by the waist, raised my arm in the air, and said, “Here comes my Gene Kelly Maneuver.” I spun you around—

DOREEN

And you *let go*.

ARTHUR

You were heavier than I expected.

DOREEN

I couldn’t ride my bike all summer.

ARTHUR

Woodgie Griffiths – So, he’s gone to his Maker, has he?

DOREEN

Who are you talking about?

ARTHUR

The poor fool who married you. I think you said his name was Henderson.

DOREEN

Hamilton — Yes, unfortunately my husband suffered a heart attack four years ago.

ARTHUR

Did you say four years ago? May I ask, then, why it took you so long to call? A year, or two, I can understand. But waiting four years to call around and see if any men your age are still—

DOREEN

Arthur Ferguson, I am not calling you because I’m — Denise brought your name up the other day, and we both wondered if you were dead. I bet ten dollars you were.

ARTHUR

In that case, who did you expect to answer the phone?

DOREEN

Did I say I *hoped* you were dead?

ARTHUR

Would any other information help to put your mind at ease—? For instance, do I still have my tonsils – or has my pubic hair turned gray?

DOREEN

As a matter of fact, there *is* another reason I called. I’m flying to New York next week on my way to Germany and staying at the San Moritz. I thought perhaps we could meet.

ARTHUR

Germany, eh — Business or pleasure?

DOREEN

Nobody goes to Germany for pleasure, Arthur— I buy antiques on consignment.

ARTHUR

That must be lucrative where you are – replacing everyone’s antiques when their homes burn to the ground

DOREEN

It is lucrative – and great fun, too: watching the Donner party and roasting its young over the flames. How long has it been since you were home?

ARTHUR

I haven’t been to California in years. I don’t fly. Besides, I *am* home. I’m in my pajamas.

DOREEN

But, it’s only seven-thirty. Oh, my *God!* I am *so embarrassed*. Here I am, inviting you to dinner and I don’t even know if you’re *mobile*. (*Beat*) You’re not in a wheel-chair, are you?

ARTHUR

No, Woodgie, I am not. Nor do I use a walker. I’m in my pajamas because some years ago, the Obama Administration moved New York to the east coast, and it’s going on eleven here. As far as my physical condition is concerned, I can assure you – and your sister – all the important parts of me function magnificently.

DOREEN

What *ever* gave you the idea I would be interested?

ARTHUR

Aren’t you?

DOREEN

Buddy Ferguson – you and I are both of an age where –

ARTHUR

No, we are not. *One* of us may need reading glasses and a sleeping bra, but I assure you, Denise –

DOREEN

Doreen, Arthur— the sister you dropped. (*No response*) Hello? Arthur, are you there?

ARTHUR

Yes, Woodgie, I’m here. I thought you might want to ask me the same question I just put to you. In any case, the answer is no.

DOREEN

No? You mean, you don't want to have dinner with me?

ARTHUR

No, as in "neither am I married." I've been a widower for five years.

DOREEN

Oh — *Oh!*

ARTHUR

Is that an expression of condolence?

DOREEN

(Flustered) Yes, of course. I'm terribly sorry to hear of your loss. *(Beat)* Where exactly is Kenwood Manor— Upstate or near the city?

ARTHUR

—Long Island — Close to the Hamptons. When are you coming to New York?

DOREEN

I'm taking a red-eye Tuesday night. I thought Wednesday, if you're free—

ARTHUR

I'm sorry, Wednesdays are a bit awkward. How's Thursday? We could have dinner.

DOREEN

Thursday night, I have a ticket to see *Wicked*. Is Friday good?

ARTHUR

Friday, I have a dinner engagement with my editor. Saturday—?

DOREEN

I fly out Saturday. Oh, I wish I'd called sooner. I'd so much have enjoyed seeing you again.

ARTHUR

Then we'll make it Wednesday. I can change my plans. As a matter of fact, I've a better idea. Instead of meeting you for dinner, why don't I drive in Tuesday and bring you out here? You can stay with me and save money on a hotel. Perhaps, one afternoon, we can take a ride over to the Hamptons. What say you?

DOREEN

It's a lovely idea, but—

ARTHUR

Then it's settled. What time does your flight get in?

DOREEN

Not so fast, Arthur. Before I say yes, I'd like to know – and I expect a truthful answer – will I be safe?

ARTHUR

Do you want to be?

DOREEN

Now, Arthur, you have to promise—

ARTHUR

We'll have such a good time. The past four years can't have been much fun for you, especially if you're like me – getting into bed, feeling all those lumps and creases under the covers and wondering if they're from the sheets or the snoring body lying next to you –

DOREEN

Arthur Ferguson, I am hanging up the phone. *(Beat)* Why am I not hanging up this phone?

ARTHUR

Because you know it's true. Furthermore, all those books on "Aging Gracefully" or "Sex and Senility" are a bunch of crap, wouldn't you agree? What we're looking for is a good fuck.

DOREEN

Whoever said you were good?

ARTHUR

You did.

DOREEN

No, Arthur. That was Denise.

END OF SCENE

SCENE TWO

Kenwood Manor – The following Wednesday morning.

(Downstage left, ROBYN, facing out, is speaking into a cell phone.)

ROBYN

Of course I haven't been drinking, Spencer. It's ten-thirty in the morning... Ocho Rios was different. And that was because you kept pouring drinks into me like you were trying to put out a fire... What do you mean, *start* one? ... Spencer, do you want me to tell you about the accident or not? ... It happened right at Exit 63, where Carl and Nancy live... The school bus put on its signal to change lanes – but that's when the sailboat sped up and they collided ... Well, of *course* the sailboat was being towed. How much have *you* been drinking?... No, the sailboat is fine. It sailed right over the school bus.... Yes, Spencer, that was a joke. The only injuries were on the school bus ... No, I haven't informed their parents....Because it was a

ROBYN, Continued

bus load of seniors on their way home from a matinee of “*Phantom of the Opera*.” They’re parents are probably all dead.

(Lights cross fade to ARTHUR’S apartment, where LORIN is stretched out on the sofa skimming the pages of a hard-cover book and popping grapes into his mouth from a bowl on the coffee table beside him. HE wears an open shirt, sweater and slacks.)

LORIN

(To himself) Oh, that is so Joan Didion. *(HE looks at the back of the book)* It is Joan Didion. *(Takes his glasses off and squints)* Of course, it’s Joan Didion. She looks just like the queen.

ROBYN

(Entering) Who does?

LORIN

(Holding the cover for her to see) Isn’t she the image of Queen Elizabeth? The real one, not Helen Mirrin.

ROBYN

I don’t see the resemblance. To me, she’s always looked more like Donald Rumsfeld.

LORIN

(Taking another look) Maybe around the eyes – But she’s a much better writer. So, have you come to have a peek at the prospective bride?

ROBYN

I haven’t been invited. Have you?

LORIN

No, I’m here because your father asked me to return another overdue book to the library for him. I’ll be going as soon as it opens, so I won’t have a chance to meet her either.

ROBYN

(Points to papers on coffee table) And those? Are you two still working on the proofs for my father’s new book?

LORIN

We finished those last weekend. *(Caught)* Oh, hell –

ROBYN

Really? And what have the two of you been doing since then?

LORIN

Must you ask so sweetly? I find it extremely intimidating.

ROBYN

Didn’t I make it clear to both of you that we’re working under time constraints?

LORIN

Robyn, I'm fine with anything you decide. It's your father who keeps putting it off.

ROBYN

He hasn't read the papers at all, has he?

LORIN

He started to but ever since he exhumed Wonder Woman and her magic handcuffs –

ROBYN

Bracelets – And don't make excuses for him. My father's capable of doing that on his own.

LORIN

I'm not making excuses—

ROBYN

What do you call it? Covering up? Stretching the truth?

LORIN

I guess you could say lying but – if you'll notice – I have my fingers crossed.

ROBYN

Don't bother. I don't know how it was in your family, but in this one we lie to one another all the time. It's the only way my father and I can stay friends.

LORIN

Don't be angry. I'm doing all I can to get him to sign them. I have a suggestion, though.

ROBYN

Forge his name?

LORIN

How else can I be expected to see his bills get paid on time? And we'd get away with it, too. No father, not even Arthur, would ever send his middle-aged daughter to the pokey.

ROBYN

I have it from very good sources that I still look like I'm in my mid-twenties, except when I first get up in the morning. Now please, Lorin, you've got to help me get his signature on those papers. It's far too important to allow him to go on stalling.

LORIN

He knows. but in fairness to him, you've seen the way he comes home from the cemetery some Wednesdays. He doesn't say a word for hours – just lets his grief carry him to another world.

ROBYN

He needs to fight it. That's why you have to help me. My father needs closure. We all do. And speaking of stalling, the library's been open for hours. (*Mussing his hair*) Confess, sweetie, you're here to get a view of your competition. You could even be planning to kill her for taking my father away from you. If she does.

LORIN

I have plenty of other authors to baby-sit.

ROBYN

Not one of whom means as much to you as Daddy Dearest.

LORIN

Even if there is a kernel of truth in what you're saying, if your father ever found the right partner, I'd be delighted. I'm too old to be his chief cook, bottle washer *and* editor. Let's hope this one can at least type.

ROBYN

She probably can't. My father says she owns her own business and travels all over the world, buying antiques on consignment.

LORIN

Do you suppose she's planning on adding him to her collection?

ROBYN

At their age, she's probably looking to consign herself to him.

LORIN

Serve him right - Men who prefer women never appreciate life until it's taken from them.

ROBYN

Don't you find it peculiar? My father hardly ever talks about his childhood. Then, suddenly, this mysterious woman from his high school days steps through the mists of time, casting such a spell over him he rushes out and buys himself a new suit from Kohl's.

LORIN

-Which is not to say he didn't need a new suit from Kohl's, or Goodwill? I wonder how she expects to sweep him off his feet when they're the same age.

ROBYN

I don't wish to shock you, dear, but theirs is a small number of women – myself, for example – who, regardless of age and circumstance, never lose their power to captivate?

LORIN

Captivating? We know so little about her, we don't even know if she's cordial – or civil. All your father's told me is that she's over twenty-one. And she's unencumbered. That could mean anything from she doesn't wear a pace-maker to she still has her own teeth. She can't be all that smart, either – giving up a ticket to see *Wicked*.

ROBYN

Let's hope she at least has Medicare, in case my father plans to sweep *her* off *her* feet.

LORIN

You really think your father would consider marrying again?

ROBYN

Lorin, some people enjoy being married, my father needs to be.

LORIN

Just as long as your father doesn't expect me to give up my apartment and move into the spare bedroom to look after both of them. What if she's deaf? I hate yelling at old people. "Use a spoon for the soup, dear, not a fork. That's it – Right in front of you. That's the spoon." So, if you haven't come for a preview of "*The Ethicist's Bride*," *why are you here?*

ROBYN

I told my father that if he'd straighten things up a bit, I'd cut some flowers and put them in a vase, so the poor old thing won't feel as if she's staying in a college dorm.

LORIN

I thought of doing the same thing myself, (*Looking around*) but then I thought about it again. Maybe he left it this way to see if she does floors and windows before he proposes. Well, I'm off. Call me tonight and let me know whether to listen for wedding bells or police sirens.

ROBYN

Bye, dear.

(LORIN exits, as ROBYN straightens the sofa cushions, removes the bowl of grapes, then finds scissors and exits through the French doors. A moment later, ARTHUR and DOREEN enter through the hallway. ARTHUR carries DOREEN'S suitcase, a cosmetics case, and a laptop case. HE is wearing his new suit)

ARTHUR

(Entering) Well, here we are. Let me put these down and fix us a drink. *(Drops cosmetics case)* Oops.

DOREEN

Not for me just yet. *(Taking cosmetics case)* I'll just see that everything's still in good shape.

ARTHUR.

Certainly seems to be. Much better than I expected. *(SHE glares)* Just a little joke, Doreen.

DOREEN

Thank you. *(Beat)* Your apartment is very nice, Arthur. In a masculine – *nomadic* sort of way

ARTHUR

Thank you. Please make yourself comfortable.

DOREEN
(Beat) That's a lovely lamp—

ARTHUR
Thank you again.

DOREEN
I was going to say—

ARTHUR
Yes?

DOREEN
I – Denise has something similar in her living room.

ARTHUR
Does she?

DOREEN
Yes. She does.

ARTHUR
We seem to be experiencing another awkward moment. Wouldn't you agree?

DOREEN
I suppose we are. But where does one start – after all these years—

ARTHUR
Usually at the beginning, – but since you and I were here before Adam and Eve –

ROBYN
(Entering with a bunch of cut Irises) Hi, Daddy Dearest. I hope you don't mind if I take some of these for the office? Hello, you must be Denise. I've heard so much about you.

DOREEN
Denise is my sister.

ARTHUR
Doreen Hamilton, my daughter: Robyn Harris.

ROBYN
My mistake. How nice to meet you, Mrs. Hamilton.

DOREEN
Thank you, and please call me Doreen.

ROBYN
I shall. My father's already corrected me.

DOREEN

I meant please call me by my first name. I'm delighted to meet you.

ROBYN

I'm happy to meet you, too.

ARTHUR

And now that you have—

DOREEN

Arthur, please give us a moment to get acquainted. Your father tells me you're with the public defender's office, but he didn't mention you were married.

ROBYN

I am, and I'm not. That is, I am an attorney, but my husband, Spencer, and I are separated.

ARTHUR

Temporarily—Robyn and Spencer are in couples therapy. Together.

ROBYN

Dad! Must you? Spencer and I met working for the same law firm in Manhattan. Our married life consisted of commuting between Kenwood Manor and Vesey Street, reading briefs and toting up billable hours. Dinners were reserved for planning courtroom strategy. I found being a corporate lawyer a very poor substitute for living.

ARTHUR

Of course, this was back in the days when Robyn aspired to make a living wage instead of attempting to exist on what other lawyers would consider pocket change. Three years of law school at Boston University and now, thanks to all the pro bono cases she accepts, my dear, impractical daughter is owed money by half the battered women on Long Island.

ROBYN

I manage – and I've told you before, I find the work I do now far more interesting than what I did at Spencer's firm. I wake up in the morning feeling that maybe *I'm* more interesting, too – possibly even necessary. Who else is there for these women to turn to?

ARTHUR

Their husbands, their boyfriends – their drug dealers. And just how is it you and Spencer can afford the time and money for therapy, when I can't? And how many more sessions before you realize you don't need therapy? You just need to be married. Happily. To each other.

ROBYN

We go to therapy because, unlike you, we believe we have room for improvement. Since you bring the subject up in front of your guest, may I remind you that Spencer's firm is picking up the tab? And as long as Spencer keeps taking me to expensive restaurants and ordering fine wines after our sessions, I intend to keep going until he retires.

ARTHUR

Your mother and I never needed therapy – and Spencer’s a decent enough sort, isn’t he?

ROBYN

Oh? When did you change your mind about Spencer? (*To DOREEN*) The first time they met, my father begged me to reconsider Spencer’s proposal. His exact words were, “You know, sweetheart, he’s never going to make anybody’s short list for the Supreme Court.”

DOREEN

Arthur, you didn’t—

ARTHUR

I asked him about his background and he told me the truth. I knew immediately he wasn’t cut out for the law.

ROBYN

Spencer happens to be a very good lawyer, even if he does have a few gray moments now and then. He’s cautious and thorough and very bright. What’s more, when I can pry a brief out of his hands, he’s fantastically inventive in bed. So much so, I really don’t care how he behaves out of it. (*Blushing*) Do you have children, Doreen?

DOREEN

Three boys – Actually, middle-aged adults who call me mother. – And I’m about to become a grandmother again, my fourth. I so enjoy having little children around me.

ROBYN

Is that why you looked father up after so many years? I hope you didn’t expect to find him still wearing his Peter Pan costume. It needed letting out – and he’s forbidden to wear it on the expressway. His driving has proven to be enough of a distraction for other motorists.

DOREEN

As far as I could tell, your father’s driving hasn’t changed since he was in high school.

ROBYN

Get to know him better and you’ll find he hasn’t either.

ARTHUR

I never should have talked your mother out of giving you up for adoption.

ROBYN

I agree. She should have allowed me to go live in a Petri dish with my real father. Daddy Dearest, have you looked at the legal papers I sent over? (*To DOREEN*) I’ve been trying to secure my father’s signature on some legal papers I sent him back when he had shoulder-length hair. I’ve begged, I’ve pleaded, and now I’m considering having him water-boarded. Don’t be surprised to find me on my father’s doorstep every morning until I get his signature.

ARTHUR

You’ll call first?

DOREEN

Why is that necessary?

ROBYN

Don't be alarmed, Mrs. Hamilton. Whatever primitive perversions are going through my father's head, he's hardly capable of acting on them.

ARTHUR

That is not so, you little –I asked you to call first out of simple consideration for you. I may look forever young and dashing, but I could go at any time. I wouldn't want you to be the one find my body. (*Kissing her cheek*) I want all your memories of me to be pleasant ones.

ROBYN

Now you think of that? It was lovely meeting you; I hope I'll see you again while you're here.

DOREEN

I'd like that very much. Perhaps, if you're free for lunch tomorrow –

ROBYN

That would be lovely. I'm so glad you've come. My father's always needed another playmate closer to his age. (*SHE exits*)

DOREEN

Your daughter is charming, Arthur, and so much like you.

ARTHUR

She isn't anything like me. She couldn't possibly be – We have different parents.

DOREEN

And she also manages to give you back as good as she gets. But you must find those papers and sign them. A father-daughter relationship is so special.

ARTHUR

Adversarial, you mean. Now, where were we? Why don't I fix us a drink and you can tell me all about yourself, beginning with why you went to the senior prom with Howie Greene instead of me.

DOREEN

You didn't *ask* me.

ARTHUR

I would have, once I'd saved the money. All senior year I worked two jobs to take you.

DOREEN

You worked two jobs to pay for gas for that big old Buick of yours – so you could chauffeur all your girl friends, including Denise, from one end of Marin County to the other.

ARTHUR

It was a Pontiac, and I'll have you know I owe a large portion of my success with women to that car. At thirty-seven cents a gallon, that Pontiac saved me a fortune in motel bills.

DOREEN

Buddy Ferguson, do you really believe a mature, sophisticated woman would be interested in hearing all about your teen-age debaucheries? And Why wouldn't I be angry after Denise came home and told me she was going to the prom in my place?

ARTHUR

I only asked Denise because you'd already accepted Howie Greene

DOREEN

Howie did ask me – He asked me five times – but I didn't say yes until Denise came home and said – Oh, that sneaky, slimy – my own sister.

ARTHUR

All you left me with was a Memorex Moment.

DOREEN

A what?

ARTHUR

You know: when you try to get as close as possible to the real thing. That's the only reason I took Denise to the prom.

DOREEN

You took her to make me jealous?

ARTHUR

What did you expect me to do – Ask for your photo and buy a tube of KY?

DOREEN

Just wait till I get my hands on her.

ARTHUR

Be careful. She could cite you for elder abuse.

DOREEN

We're twins, remember? In fact, she's younger than me.

ARTHUR

By what – Six minutes? Can we move on, now? Tell me about your marriage to little Benjamin Hamilton. Am I right in thinking he was the black tennis player who claimed to be descended from one of the founding fathers?

DOREEN

Benjamin was white, Arthur. I'm white. Our three boys are white. Benjamin played goalie on the hockey team.

ARTHUR

I remember now. His teammates used to pummel him with their hockey sticks whenever the other side scored— Little fellow, with big lumps on his head. You don't suppose his proposal was the result of a concussion? No, I suppose not. As a matter of fact, I consider little Ben to be a very lucky man. I always thought you were the most beautiful girl in Marin County.

DOREEN

Now you tell me – In the *past tense*?

ARTHUR

Doreen, most of what we have to tell each other is going to be in the past tense.

DOREEN

I know you're right, but I'm having trouble compressing a whole lifetime into the sort of brief paragraphs you skip over in the obituaries because you're looking for someone else's name.

ARTHUR

You needn't start at the beginning, you know. Start wherever you like and, if you forget something, you can always go back to it. Only, since we're a bit old for games, we should make it a rule that we only tell one another the truth.

DOREEN

Not to be rude, Arthur, but can you actually *do* that?

ARTHUR

Touché. Oh, what a terrific visit we're going to have. So many memories to share –

DOREEN

That lime-green Pontiac of yours with the white-walled tires—

ARTHUR

Good old, hot-to-trot Denise – little Benjamin—

DOREEN

Why do you keep referring to my late husband as “little Benjamin”?

ARTHUR

—As opposed to Big Ben? All goalies are small. Not that it matters – as long as he could please you.

DOREEN

(Laughing) Screw you, Arthur.

ARTHUR

Would you like to? After all I'm probably the last man from our class who is still standing erect – you may take that any way you like.

DOREEN

Oh, I'm so glad I you're still the twisted, mind-in-the-gutter adolescent I remember from school. Did you know, you have the distinction of being the first pervert I ever met?

ARTHUR

My mother said the very same thing the day I was born. The nurse brought me to her wearing a trench coat and sticking out from my diaper– Well, not to brag, but you can ask Denise–

DOREEN

You have a very high opinion of yourself.

ARTHUR

So did your sister. What's she been up to the last three hundred years?

DOREEN

Denise owns a business in Mill Valley, too, like I do.

ARTHUR

And I suppose she, too, eventually settled down – although I find it hard to imagine Denise raising children.

DOREEN

Apparently, neither could God, so he sent her husbands instead.

ARTHUR

More than two? (*SHE nods*) Three? (*SHE holds up three fingers on each hand*) Six? Six husbands? Does she know that or did she meet them all in some kind of rehab – not that anyone ever had to force himself on Denise. So what kind of business is she in – hunting and gathering? – Or did all these men have bounties on their heads?

DOREEN

Denise owns a telephone answering service.

ARTHUR

Still putting her mouth to good use, is she?

DOREEN

Arthur! Denise is still my sister and, actually, she's quite successful. She – specializes –

ARTHUR

Doctors, lawyers? You're shaking your head, which means only one thing – and that's too preposterous.

DOREEN

She still has a very young *voice*, Arthur. It's not as if she goes on TV, like Dionne Warwick.

ARTHUR

So, she runs a phone sex service?

DOREEN

Denise is very modern—You know that—

ARTHUR

Modern, indeed. She runs a phone sex service.

DOREEN

Must you put it that way? She's free spirited, outgoing — Oh hell, she runs a phone sex service. There—Satisfied?

ARTHUR

What's the number?

DOREEN

Don't you dare— She'd have my head. Let's talk about something else – ok?

ARTHUR

Certainly. I remember now what I wanted to ask you. Did the funeral home charge for a full-sized coffin for little Ben?

DOREEN

(Giggling) He was cremated. Buddy, if you intend to continue in this fashion—

ARTHUR

I do – most definitely.

DOREEN

Then may I please have that drink? A splash of vodka with lots of ice — And if you intend to ask any more questions about my late husband, please omit the sexual innuendos. You're making my marriage sound prurient.

ARTHUR

It wasn't? I'm sorry. I would have thought, what with all you must have learned from Denise – Come to think of it, what she might still be teaching you—

DOREEN

I hardly need Denise to teach me what to do in bed. *(Catching herself)* That's not what I was going to say—

ARTHUR

What a strange remark for a mature, sophisticated woman to utter—boasting of your sexual prowess when we're merely becoming reacquainted. I assure you, my vague curiosity in your connubial experiences was aroused solely by an instinct for self-protection.

DOREEN

Protection – From *me*? Why, you—

ARTHUR

From what you might have brought with you – Unintentionally, to be sure, but nevertheless—

DOREEN

What goes on in that perverted mind of yours? What possible disease do you imagine me to be carrying?

ARTHUR

I never said you were diseased. I would trust to your innate sense of decency to have mentioned it if you were. I'm much more concerned about whether or not you may have a condition I read about last month in *Scientific American*, one that is spreading through the senior community like one of your California wild fires. I'm speaking of *Widow's Itch*.

DOREEN

Widow's what? I've never heard of such a thing.

ARTHUR

Last month's issue devoted a very long article to it. It was called "Is Free Love Corrupting the Elderly?"

DOREEN

You're making this up. There is no such thing.

ARTHUR

Ah, but I assure you there is. Apparently it develops in early widowhood when the surviving partner, finally free of all marital obligations, begins to notice that, aside from the occasional pinch on a bus or in an elevator, he or she is no longer being touched. Imagine: thirty-five years of always doing it with the same person— and in the same position, of course – Suddenly nothing—nothing but feelings of loneliness and despair as, watching one's body parts atrophy, the victim reaches out for anyone – of any persuasion –

DOREEN

Do you seriously expect me to believe a word of this?

ARTHUR

I speak of it simply to comfort you, and in hope that you may avoid the very nasty effects *Widow's Itch* visits upon certain mature, sophisticated women – and men. Apparently, the disease affects certain bio-rhythms and can set off hormonal imbalances. Women frequently require surgery to unclog their G-spots. As for men – poor men – a game of golf can practically kill them. Standing under the hot sun, their blood vessels until, just as they're

ARTHUR, Continued

about to sink a three-foot putt, their scrotums burst. As you may know, there's very little to be done in such cases other than to sew the scrotum back up again and hope for the best. Sadly, there is, as yet, no cure on the horizon to prevent these poor souls from humping, humping, humping. I've no wish to alarm you, Doreen, but – from the sound of your voice –

DOREEN

There's nothing wrong with my voice – or with me. I saw my doctor only last week and he never said anything at all to me about Widow's Itch.

ARTHUR

He would have had no reason to – unless you're overly promiscuous. You're not, are you?

DOREEN

I most certainly am not – And I don't believe a single word.

ARTHUR

Scientists have already documented several thousand cases of elderly, yet premature deaths-

DOREEN

Premature – but nevertheless happy, I presume?

ARTHUR

Deliriously so —

DOREEN

I know I'll regret saying this, but – Well –You've hardly changed at all since Mill Valley. A few extra pounds, maybe, but you still have that silly smile and those mischievous big brown eyes. I recognized you the minute I got off the plane.

ARTHUR

How strange – I would never have recognized you.

DOREEN

Oh? I guess I have changed – grown older, I mean.

ARTHUR

Not older, lovelier. Surely, you know by now that there are only one or two women in any given age – you, for instance – whose loveliness and beauty cry out to be captured in stone or on canvas by the greatest of artists. I'm truly happy to see you again

DOREEN

I don't know what to say – I –

ARTHUR

Why say anything? (*SHE looks away*) I didn't mean to embarrass you. So, did marriage to little Benjamin turn out to be all you hoped it would?

DOREEN

I think so. Ben was a true family man. He lived for his boys. Of course he lived for me, too. We were great friends all through our marriage – until the boys grew up and we found ourselves alone – like two strangers sharing the same park bench, with no one to introduce us. The people we were when we first met weren't sharing the bench with us, either. (*Beat*) Just now, when I said we'd had a happy marriage, I wasn't being truthful. A few years before his death, I mentioned to Ben that I'd been giving some thought to a separation. I'd already gotten it into my head to open a little shop. Ben didn't say anything, but I saw the hurt in his eyes and, at once, I realized why: He'd devoted so many years to providing for the boys and me, it had never occurred to him that the day would come when we would want to leave. I never meant to hurt Ben. I was truly fond of him.

ARTHUR

– Which isn't quite the same thing as saying you loved him – or that you *still* loved him?

DOREEN

Yes. We went on the same for a while, but after I opened the shop, we spent even less time together. Then, one Christmas, the boys chipped in and bought us an electric organ. Ben loved music, but he wasn't a very good musician. He could play the theme from "*The Third Man*" and that stupid song from "*Cats*," but the way he would change organ stops nearly drove me crazy: Banjo, French horn – even Hawaiian guitar. I tried to never criticize, but—

ARTHUR

I have a picture of this tiny little man – with great big lumps on his head—Tell me, did his legs reach all the way down to the pedals, or did you need to get him extensions?

DOREEN

Arthur, I'm trying to have a serious conversation with you, and you keep making me laugh.

ARTHUR

That's because it's funny – how many widows right now do you suppose are comfortably sipping vodka and discussing their dead husband's organs? Shall I freshen this?

DOREEN

You mustn't ever quote me – but it *was* sort of funny— Until his birthday came around and he bought himself a Karaoke machine. Ben's singing was a sort of cross between Tiny Tim and Louis Armstrong. It cost me a fortune in ear plugs. One Sunday afternoon —Oh, I don't think I should tell you – What I did was simply awful. We were at home this one Sunday afternoon. Ben was singing and playing away, and I was on the couch with a pounding headache. I couldn't bear to listen to another note, but instead of doing the sensible thing, like getting up and moving to another room, I blurted out, "Ben, please not so loud. Someone might hear you."

ARTHUR

Which he correctly interpreted as other than a sign of approval—

DOREEN

It was the single, most painful moment in our marriage. Ben got up and, without a word, went out the garage and stayed there all afternoon and evening. He wouldn't even come in for dinner. But, honestly, if someone we love is making a fool of himself, shouldn't we spare him the embarrassment?

ARTHUR

His — or yours? Tell me it wasn't the night he had his heart attack—

DOREEN

This is so awkward. I felt guilty about what I'd said, you see, that I went out to the garage—

ARTHUR

—And promised him a good time. Lo and behold, fifteen minutes later, he was dead. I'm surprised the Mill Valley District Attorney didn't arrest you for murder.

DOREEN

Is that all you can say?

ARTHUR

No — It also occurs to me to be somewhat envious: what with little Benjamin's heart attack coming three hours after he did. The only better way to go would have been if he'd—

DOREEN

Buddy, don't you dare say what you're thinking. There are times when your jokes are completely inappropriate.

ARTHUR

I disagree. Anyone our age, intending to grow even a day older, had damned well better have a sense of humor. How else are we to be expected to deal with our impending decrepitude?

DOREEN

Decrepitude? Is that how you see me?

ARTHUR

I've already told you how lovely you are, and I mean it. It's how I see myself. This place, for example — This isn't remotely what I would call a home. A home is a big, old, sprawling place — with kids sliding down banisters — and neighbors you can actually see and say hello to; a place where you've hardly unpacked before your wife comes and tells you she's expecting your first child. Then, two years later, your second. A boy.

DOREEN

I didn't know you had a son. Tell me about him. He must be the same age as one of my boys.

ARTHUR

David was in the service. He died three years ago in Afghanistan.

DOREEN

Oh, Arthur. I'm so sorry — How awful for you and Robyn. How simply terrible. I had no idea. Why didn't you say something?

ARTHUR

I don't know. I couldn't tell you on the drive out because — I — I don't like to think about—

DOREEN

What happened? How did he—? I'm sorry. You don't need to tell me.

ARTHUR

He stepped on one of those — That's why I can't really talk about it. I don't allow myself to see him —

DOREEN

I can't even begin to imagine—

ARTHUR

The problem is — I *do* see him. His curly, brown hair hanging over his ears — I see him stepping on that — improvised explosive device, they're called — the last thing I see is his eyes. He looks so angry — (*Beat*) The day he left for the service, he stood right where you are now. My wonderful son, all grown up, wearing his uniform— Neither of us knew what to say. Then David put his arm on my shoulder and said, "Dad, I want to do this." My boy had such a fine sense of honor. I knew he meant the twin towers. (*Beat*) My life has gone by so quickly, I never saw the pages flying off the calendar. One day, we're driving the kids to school, the next they're driving us to our doctor's appointments. We moved in here and Marion went off one day for a routine checkup. She was completely calm when she told me. We made plans, of course, family visits we wanted to make— but I felt like my life was ending. Of course, that didn't happen until those two officers knocked on the front door. (*Beat*) I visit Marion's and David's graves on Wednesday. That's why, when you first called—

DOREEN

Oh, Buddy — Why didn't you say something? I could have changed my ticket. Today is Wednesday— Would you still like to go? I could stay here and change out of my travel clothes. When you get back, I'd like to take you to dinner and hear more about Robyn and Marion — and especially David. We'll order a great big bottle of wine and wax nostalgic about Mill Valley, or anything else you'd like.

ARTHUR

I just stood here. Then I began to shake. The words were out of my mouth before I knew what I was saying. I did the same thing to David that you did to Ben. I screamed right in his face, "You great, big, stupid fool. There are other men — men meant to do this. Why do you...." I thank God I never finished that sentence.

DOREEN

It is so hard to reason with a child, but I'm sure David knew what was in your heart.

ARTHUR

Perhaps — But I don't have my son any more, and I don't know what world I'm living in. I keep moving between past and present. I can't seem to fathom a future without him. (*Beat*) I should have taken his gun from him and shot off his kneecaps.

DOREEN

Good Lord, that's a terrible thing to say. What if your aim isn't any better than your driving? (*Giving his arm a squeeze*) That was a joke, dear. It was my turn, you know. Everything is so different today. The world has changed so much since we were young. Remember when we thought all we had to do to bring about change was remove a bra or burn a draft card? You know, I was one of the first people in Mill Valley to protest Vietnam — Back in nineteen — Oh, the year doesn't really matter.

ARTHUR

You can say the year, Doreen. We're the same age—

DOREEN

Nineteen forty-five was such a wonderful year. The war ended — we were born—

ARTHUR

Forty-six—

DOREEN

Nineteen forty-five, Arthur. We were in the same grade. What sign are you?

ARTHUR

Gemini.

DOREEN

And I'm Sagittarius. So, you see? I was born December Seventh, and you were born in June. There's less than six months between us.

ARTHUR

Except, my sweet, December, 1945, comes before May, 1946. That makes you older.

DOREEN

What? I'm *older* than you?

ARTHUR

I'm afraid so. Do take that look off your face, Doreen. Many mature, sophisticated women have boy toys. (*Laughs*). Do you remember the summer we skipped school and took the bus into San Francisco to see a revival of *From Here to Eternity*?

DOREEN

How could I forget? My father told me not to see you anymore after he found out.

ARTHUR

—Because I took you to the city to see a movie?

DOREEN

–Because you took me to the city to see *that* movie.

ARTHUR

Why didn't you tell him the truth? That movie was *your* idea.

DOREEN

How would that have helped?

ARTHUR

You're older than me. All I knew was I could buy two movie tickets, a large bag of popcorn, and two cokes and still have change from a ten-dollar bill. We did have a crush on one another back then, didn't we?

DOREEN

Just a tiny one. Of course, I got over mine – And I'm sure you did, too.

ARTHUR

To the extent that one ever forgets a first love. (*Pulling her toward him and kissing her.*) I've waited a very long time to do that. Mind if I do it again? (*This time, HE gives her a slightly longer kiss.*)

DOREEN

(*Breaking away, slightly*) I knew this was going to happen. I knew it, I knew it, I *knew* it.

ARTHUR

You didn't seem to mind.

DOREEN

Are you surprised? I was simply hoping I might have shown a little more restraint.

ARTHUR

Doreen, it was just a kiss. Do I look to you like someone who goes around screwing little old ladies?

DOREEN

Didn't anyone ever tell you good things come to those who wait?

ARTHUR

Forty years isn't enough? If memory serves, I recall we had all kinds of fun when we were kids.

DOREEN

We *did* – But not in bed. You're speaking to the wrong twin. What have you been drinking?

ARTHUR

This? Ginger ale. You're not supposed to drink alcohol if you're taking Viagra.

DOREEN

What on earth are you taking that for? *(Rising)* Arthur Ferguson, don't go jumping to any conclusions. It's a bit early in the day to go in search of friends with benefits.

ARTHUR

What?

DOREEN

That's what my grandchildren call "hooking up." What we used to call "going steady."

ARTHUR

Your grandchildren are having sex? How old are they?

DOREEN

Old enough to be having sex. *(Crosses and kisses the top of his head)*

ARTHUR

Good for them. A toast to your grandchildren.

DOREEN

Wipe that smirk off your face. We barely know one another.

ARTHUR

Who just said it's a different world today? Haven't you learned anything from your grandchildren?

END OF SCENE**SCENE THREE****Kenwood Manor – Later that evening.**

(Light rise on the downstage playing area that is not part of the set. A phone is ringing on stage while, off right, we hear the sounds of a vacuum. DENISE enters, wearing a robe and with her hair in a towel.)

DENISE

(Speaking to someone offstage as SHE enters) Bubblebutt, can't you hear the phone ringing? It could be a customer. Turn off the vacuum and go do something else – dust. *(SHE picks up the phone, answering it in a husky voice)* Good evening, "Dynamite in Denims." This is Denise. How may I help you? ... Natasha? Yes, she's free. What credit card would you like to use? ... 5512 ... uh-huh. Got it. Expiration date? One minute please. *(Almost a whisper)* This is Natasha ... Oh, hello there ... Can I guess what you're doing? Why, that would depend. Are you alone? ... In that case, no I can't. And I'll bet you can't guess what I'm doing, either... *(Back to her first voice)* I'm sorry. That credit card didn't go through. Sorry, we don't accept Discover Card.... What do you mean, "What are you supposed to do now? Get dressed and pay down your credit cards."

(Lights cross-fade to ARTHUR who enters from the hallway in his condo, followed by DOREEN. HE turns on a light and crosses to the liquor tray.)

ARTHUR

What can I fix for you?

DOREEN

Very, very, very little vodka and loads of ice.

ARTHUR

Two vodkas on the rocks coming right up.

DOREEN

Arthur. You said you'd only have one glass of wine with dinner and, instead you had four.

ARTHUR

Two.

DOREEN

Four. Are you trying to kill yourself? Surely, your doctor must have told you not to use alcohol when he gave you those pills.

ARTHUR

I bought them online.

DOREEN

You're not serious. My God, you could be taking anything – talcum powder – or rat poison.

ARTHUR

I'm pretty sure it's the right stuff. Either that, or there's an extraordinarily beautiful woman in the room.

DOREEN

Now, Arthur, remember your promise. You promised me I'd be safe.

ARTHUR

And you will: women your age can't get pregnant.

DOREEN

That's not what I meant – and you know it.

ARTHUR

Relax, Woodgie. The only chemicals floating around in me are from the wine I had at dinner. I didn't take any of those pills. I only said that to tease you. *(Hands drink to her)* Here you go, Woodgie. Chug-a-lug.

DOREEN

I'm not going to chug-a-lug.

ARTHUR

Why not?

DOREEN

If you really haven't taken those pills, there isn't any need, is there? Why, may I ask, didn't you take them?

ARTHUR

They're right upstairs. Would you like me to go and see if I can find them?

DOREEN

Not while I'm still angry with you. After you left, I went on the internet and googled Widow's Itch. It's not even in Wikipedia. So then, just to be sure, I called a doctor friend in San Francisco who'd never heard of it—

ARTHUR

Someone you're dating?

DOREEN

No, silly – a woman doctor. In fact, you know her.

ARTHUR

I don't know any doctors on the west coast, unless you're talking about someone we went to school with. Who?

DOREEN

(Flustered) Oh, her name isn't important.

ARTHUR

Oh, yes it is – or you wouldn't have said it wasn't. Tell me.

DOREEN

I'd rather not say, if you don't mind.

ARTHUR

That's ridiculous: you bring up a person's name, tell me I know them, but won't say who it is.

DOREEN

She's one of my best friends – and you always used to make fun of her.

ARTHUR

Was one leg shorter than the other? And did she have a moustache?

DOREEN

I'm not answering.

ARTHUR

Not a full moustache – a teenager's cross between fuzz and stubble?

DOREEN

Is your idea of a nostalgic evening one where you tear the flesh off old friends?

ARTHUR

Nostalgia is from the Greek. It means to remember with sadness – not cruelty. One thing I know for certain: she never set foot in my Pontiac.

DOREEN

You're just trying to get the name out of me and that is not going to happen.

ARTHUR

(Crossing to the French doors) Oh-oh-kay. Have it your way. Your plane leaves Saturday?

DOREEN

What are you doing?

ARTHUR

(Locks the French Doors) Locking you in until you help me find our high school yearbook.

DOREEN

Promise not to be mean if I tell you? *(Getting no response)* Oh, hell— Nymphia Papaganopoulos.

ARTHUR

I remember Nymphia— Tall girl with no breasts. Tell me, do her parents still feed her raw fish – and do they still keep her chained up in a cage at night?

DOREEN

Didn't you hear me say Nymphia is one of my closest friends?

ARTHUR

It was I who suggested the cage to her parents – one night during a particularly full moon, when I heard her howling—

DOREEN

Stop it. Nymphia is a truly brilliant woman. She even put herself through medical school.

ARTHUR

How— as a specimen?

DOREEN

(Over him)—And now she's one of San Francisco's leading plastic surgeons.

ARTHUR

You're saying it was a career choice? She wasn't forced?

DOREEN

What *ever* made me think you'd mellowed with age? I'll admit, back in school, Nymphia may have been a tiny bit —

ARTHUR

Grotesque?

DOREEN

You know, Arthur, people do change. Not you, necessarily – but *other* people. And Nymphia has transformed herself dramatically.

ARTHUR

She would have had to – either that or risk a hunter's bullet.

DOREEN

You're incorrigible. I am not going to listen to another word unless you freshen my drink.

ARTHUR

You brought her name into the conversation.

DOREEN

You're the one who said she slept in a cage.

ARTHUR

And I'm right: Who keeps a thing like that in a bassinet? (*As DOREEN fumbles in her purse*) What are you looking for? You don't still smoke, do you?.

DOREEN

I never did. I was looking for a mint. The only girl in our class who smoked was Estelle Weingarten.

ARTHUR

I remember Estelle. Now she *was* tall—much taller than Nymphia. Where do you suppose she is today?

DOREEN

(*Rising, crossing to book case*) Edward lives in Big Sur.

ARTHUR

Edward who?

DOREEN

Estelle Weingarten. Estelle is Edward now. She's changed her name, along with a few other things. (*Browsing one of the book cases*) I don't see any of your books on these shelves.

ARTHUR

I keep them in my study. Down here, I only have books people are likely to recognize. This is not a world where anyone but God and his angels read books about ethics.

DOREEN

I do.

ARTHUR

Really? More than one?

DOREEN

Yes, Arthur. I even enjoyed a sentence or two.

ARTHUR

Which did you like most?

DOREEN

(Stuck) Oh, I don't know. I guess the one about ethics and mathematics –

ARTHUR

Pi in your Face? That's incredible. I don't know anyone besides my editor who managed to get through that.

DOREEN

Well –

ARTHUR

I see. I still don't.

DOREEN

I got through *most* of it, Arthur – And I meant to pick it up again right after I finished *The DaVinci Code*, but it's not exactly bedtime reading, is it?

ARTHUR

You use books to put you to sleep? *My* books?

DOREEN

Doesn't everybody? Only your books are much too thought-provoking. You – of all people – Who would have expected you to be writing books about ethics? *(SHE hiccups)* Or anything else, for that matter? I often wondered what became of you after Princeton, but I never expected you to be I writer. I didn't even know you could. You – of all people

ARTHUR

There's a cleaver in that drawer over there, if you're looking to cut deeper.

DOREEN

It's your fault. You shouldn't let me drink so much. Anyway, there it was – staring me right in the face: "The Down Side of Morality" by Arthur Ferguson. Right in the window of that old bookstore by the bus stop. I went in, bought a copy and brought it home to show to Denise. I didn't think she'd ever stop laughing.

ARTHUR

I *do* apologize for enabling you with your drinking habit – Had I known what a vicious tongue you had – but how could I? – Not having seen you since Marilyn Monroe sang Happy Birthday to Jack Kennedy? Come back and sit down.

DOREEN

I prefer standing. I have a crick in my neck.

ARTHUR

(Rising) Where?

DOREEN

(Rolling her head) Here. No, there.

ARTHUR

(Going to her, pressing his hands against the back of her neck) Here?

DOREEN

Right there. Oh, that's lovely. You have such warm hands. What a nice way to end such a depressing day.

ARTHUR

I thought we were having a fine time.

DOREEN

We are. It's just that it's all so hopeless. Seeing you again – My father never liked you –

ARTHUR

I *know* that –

DOREEN

But compared to Ben – Oh, poor, little Ben—

ARTHUR

Your father preferred me to Benjamin Hamilton?

DOREEN

Doesn't that make you feel so *sad*? Poor little, teeny-weenie, itty-bitsy Ben – Great big you – medium-sized me—

ARTHUR

Here. *(Beat)* Give me your hand. *(As she hesitates)* You needn't be afraid. —Didn't I say you'd be safe?

DOREEN

Did you really think that would *please* me, Arthur?

ARTHUR

It was meant to relax you. Here— hold out your hand. That's it. Open your fingers and close your eyes.

DOREEN

Why are you going to do?

ARTHUR

Shh. Mustn't say a word—I'm not going to do a thing. You are. You're going to separate your fingers, like this—open them wide apart — Now, let the past slip through them.

DOREEN

—As easily as that? I'm not sure I like this exercise, Arthur. What if it's happiness that slips through?

ARTHUR

Be patient and wait for it to come around again. What else can one do? In any case, time passes and the fingers open by themselves. Come, let me show you upstairs. (*Leading her to the staircase*) I've given you the master bedroom.

DOREEN

Isn't that where you sleep?

ARTHUR

I'll be right across the hall in the spare room. I thought you'd be more comfortable in a queen bed than a twin.

DOREEN

You didn't have to do that. You know, Arthur, you really turned out to be a very sweet man. Just promise me, if you find you're not comfortable in the study—

ARTHUR

Yes?

DOREEN

I am not that kind of woman. (*Pulling him to her and kissing him*) I mean, I try not to be.

ARTHUR

(*As THEY ascend the staircase*) We'll see.

END OF SCENE

SCENE FOUR
Kenwood Manor – Several months later, late morning

(LORIN, in sweater and slacks, crosses downstage right and addresses the audience.)

LORIN

I knew Marion long before Arthur. We met at Weight Watchers. We hit it off immediately and began going to all kinds of classes: Sailing, Indian Cuisine, Origami. That's where she first learned of her illness – Origami class. She couldn't see where to fold the seams. At first, we thought it was her glasses – *(Beat)* After she gave up driving, I'd take her shopping and help her home with her purchases. That's how I met Arthur and Robyn and, of course, David. I convinced Arthur to change publishers and became his editor. For reasons I still can't figure out, I love him as much as I did Marion, and I loved her very much. I was there so often, Marion insisted I become an official member of the family. *(Beat)* Her parents were from a small village in Slovakia. *Familia Interruptus*, you might say. The concept of family was important to Marion. One day, she said, "Just knowing you'll be here to look after Arthur is such a – what did she call it? – a *bracha*. *(HE shows his neck chain)* She gave me this. The Hebrew word is L'Chaim – Life. I wear it every day, but I don't think it works – maybe because I'm not Jewish. But, honestly, it doesn't seem to have done all that much for them, either. Still, you never know. And if it helps with Arthur—

(Lights cross fade as DOREEN and ARTHUR enter carrying bags of groceries.)

DOREEN

Now I remember— I wanted to buy Tilex.

ARTHUR

What for? You said you were making dinner. You don't use it in your cooking, do you?

DOREEN

No, silly. Robyn and I just think this place could use a thorough spring cleaning.

ARTHUR

When did you talk to Robyn?

DOREEN

We've been in touch ever since my first visit. If we lived any closer, we'd be great friends. .

ARTHUR

You've been talking to each other without my permission?

DOREEN

Without your *what*?

ARTHUR

You know what I mean: without my knowledge. What on earth do you have to talk about?

DOREEN

Besides you? Worlds and worlds – Can you believe it?. In fact, we have a surprise for you.

ARTHUR

I hate surprises. I demand to know what the two of you are up to.

DOREEN

You what? What happens next? Do you stamp your foot like Rumpelstilskin and ask for my firstborn? The surprise is that Robyn and Spencer are coming to dinner tonight. She's making a Caesar's Salad from scratch and I'm going to prepare one of my special Italian dishes – Chicken Cacciatore.

ARTHUR

I wanted this evening to be just the two of us. I thought we might go to that little bistro on the cove; the one we went to on your first visit. Call back and say our plans have changed.

DOREEN

I can't do that.

ARTHUR

Couldn't you at least have asked me before you go inviting company over?

DOREEN

Robyn and Spencer aren't company – They're your family. And Robyn hinted she may have something very important to tell you when she gets here.

ARTHUR

She can send me an email. .

DOREEN

I'm not going to cancel. It would be rude.

ARTHUR

Not to Robyn – She's my daughter. I'll call her and tell her I have the flu.

DOREEN

You'll only upset her if you do that. Besides, my Chicken Cacciatore recipe was given to me by an Augustinian Monk, with whom I toured the Duomo in Milan. It contains ingredients known only to him and Saint Augustine. But, if you're not in the mood for company, I can always use the reservation you made to take *them* to the Cove Bistro. I am not cancelling.

ARTHUR

And just what am I supposed to do this evening?

DOREEN

Stay home and nurse your cold.

ARTHUR

You would actually leave me here and go to dinner with people you hardly know?

DOREEN

I do know Robyn and, after tonight, I'll also know Spencer

ARTHUR

But tonight is special. I thought, after what happened this morning –

DOREEN

What happened this morning?

ARTHUR

You don't remember our shower this morning? I even got down on my knees—

DOREEN

I remember you on your knees, but it wasn't because – (*Beat*) – Oh, you mean –

ARTHUR

Yes, I asked you to marry me.

DOREEN

I'm sorry, dear – I thought you were joking. The way you always do.

ARTHUR

You thought I was *what*?

DOREEN

One minute, you make up a silly story about a school bus and a sailboat colliding on the expressway – next, you're grabbing your soap-on-a-rope and shouting, "Let's get hitched." That's why it went completely out of my head.

ARTHUR

Strange, what a woman chooses to forget.

DOREEN

No stranger than what a man will do to make her forget. And so typical: first you're joking, then you're serious, then you're joking again.

ARTHUR

I've never been more serious about anything in my life. I'm asking you to marry me.

DOREEN

Dearest, do take that look off your face. I can't say "yes" just like that. We'd have to talk first.

ARTHUR

We are talking—

DOREEN

A serious conversation – First, I want to tell you I’m deeply moved—

ARTHUR

Stop right there – Your next word begins with “B,” doesn’t it? As in “but”—

DOREEN

Buddy, this is my fourth trip to see you and, in all this time, you haven’t once made an effort to visit me in Mill Valley.

ARTHUR

You know I don’t fly.

DOREEN

That’s just an excuse. There are other ways to travel. You’ve never met my boys, or any of my friends.

ARTHUR

I have every intention of meeting your boys. I already planned on inviting them to the wedding. If, by friends, you’re referring Nymphia Papaganopoulos, all that’s needed to win her over is coax her down from her tree with a big bag of peanuts. As for Estelle Weingarten who, incidentally, had a big crush on me, too –

DOREEN

Maybe *he* still does —

ARTHUR

How can you make jokes in the middle of a serious conversation?

DOREEN

You do it all the time.

ARTHUR

Estelle Weingarten won’t be a problem. We’ll invite both of him – her – As for anyone else, I don’t care. They aren’t you. What can they possibly tell me about you that I don’t already know and love?

DOREEN

That’s where we differ: I believe people *can* be known by the company they keep. Having met Robyn and Lorin doesn’t mean I really know you. You and I can say anything to one another and expect it to be believed. But if we’re going to take this relationship further—

ARTHUR

Of course we’re taking it further. What did you think — we were just fucking around?

DOREEN

No, that is *not* what I thought. I simply don’t know that I want to marry again. I told you Ben and I had a good marriage. We did. Our friends thought of Ben’s and my marriage as the

DOREEN, *Continued*

gold standard, because it all seemed to be so genuine and good. And it was good. But good isn't great. There were times when we were bored with each other. There were times when we knew what the other person was going to say and so we only half-listened. No, that isn't true. Ben always listened. But I didn't. I couldn't. I didn't have his patience. I wanted more than polite conversation – I wanted him to hear the music I was hearing, but he couldn't. After a few years, I couldn't hear it, either.

ARTHUR

There's no need to say anything more, then. I understand.

DOREEN

No, you don't. You have the same look Ben did, the day I asked him for a separation.

ARTHUR

Perhaps, it's you who doesn't understand. The look on your husband's face was probably there because he felt the same thing when you asked for a separation as I do now – a feeling that losing you would cause a devastating, irreparable loss in my life.

DOREEN

That's sweet of you to say, Arthur, but –

ARTHUR

Be quiet, Doreen, and listen. In the late afternoon, especially once Autumn has arrived, and the sun begins to set earlier in the day, I find myself staring out those windows, humming that old Peggy Lee song, "Is that all there is?" The shadows stretch themselves to prepare for the coming night and, as they grow larger, I see myself growing smaller. "Yes, Arthur," I tell myself, "That's all there is." I can't decide whether to go out for a quiet dinner on my own, or to invite Lorin over, or to call up Robyn. I hate imposing on other people, so most of the time I don't have dinner. I just go upstairs and read until I fall asleep.

DOREEN

Lorin and Robyn would never think you were imposing. For heaven's sake –

ARTHUR

Older people always impose on the young. We express our views so adamantly, and we never take the time to listen to theirs. I do it all the time and it's so unfair. The only reason our children stay friends with us is because we taught them good manners. "Respect your elders," we tell them, but we never give them one damned good reason why they should.

DOREEN

That simply isn't true – at least not for me. My boys, my grandchildren – nothing seems to take place in their lives unless I'm there. Soccer games, birthday parties— I even have to go to my granddaughters' sleepovers. Dearest, you've suffered two heavy blows. You can't expect things to go back the way they were. That place doesn't exist anymore. But in time – If you let someone else in –

ARTHUR

Someone like who?

DOREEN

I haven't said no, have I? Would I have said we need to talk if I was going to turn you down?

ARTHUR

You and I have always loved one another. You know that, don't you?

DOREEN

Yes – in a way – I suppose we have – but we did marry other people.

ARTHUR

And they were happy marriages. Despite your reservations, you wouldn't have stayed married to Ben all those years if there'd been any really difficult problems. And I adored Marion. But I lost her. She went from me, like a petal that darkens and falls from a rose. I watched her go, helpless to do anything but watch each petal fall to the ground. When you phoned me, I felt a joy I hadn't experienced in years. I suddenly realized that seeing one rose perish was no excuse for not going in search of another. (*HE kisses her*) Can you understand now why I wanted this evening to be for just the two of us? I even had my own surprise planned for after dinner. I went to Blockbuster and rented "*From Here to Eternity*." And for a change of pace, I also took out "*Carnal Knowledge*." Now I *know* Spencer would enjoy either film, but Robyn would find them both completely boring. She doesn't enjoy movies.

DOREEN

That's not true. Meryl Streep and "*Sophie's Choice*" are her two favorites. And we both think Johnny Depp has a cuter butt than Brad Pitt. (*Looking through grocery bag*) Oh, no. Arthur, would you mind looking to see if we left a bag of groceries in the car?

ARTHUR

We didn't. Why?

DOREEN

Are you sure?

ARTHUR

Positive: I am not in the habit of spending two hundred dollars on groceries and then leaving them sit in the car. Did you forget something besides Tilex?

DOREEN

I was positive –

ARTHUR

Does this happen often?

DOREEN

Does *what* happen often?

ARTHUR

If you're starting to forget things maybe you shouldn't be using the stove.

DOREEN

Don't be ridiculous. I didn't think about Tilex until we were home. What I forgot was the—

ARTHUR

The what? Is it bigger than a breadbox, or smaller than your brain?

DOREEN

I'm not going to tell you if you speak to me in that tone of voice.

ARTHUR

Don't be embarrassed by feeble-mindedness. Tell me.

DOREEN

I most certainly will not.

ARTHUR

Would you like me to get someone to stay with you this afternoon while I'm at the cemetery?

DOREEN

That is not going to be necessary.

ARTHUR

But what if it is? I'd never forgive myself if you were to wander off and not be seen again. How would I explain it to Denise? What would I do if she came here?

DOREEN

Why would she come here?

ARTHUR

To take your place like she did at the senior prom. I really don't think I'm up to another Memorex moment.

DOREEN

Please just lend me the keys to the car. I'll run back to the store myself.

ARTHUR

Drive? You want to drive *my* car in *your* condition? You'll get lost.

DOREEN

I have driven all over Europe—

ARTHUR

I'm sorry, but I can't allow it. You might wind up in the Bronx or, God forbid, New Jersey—

DOREEN

I'm quite capable of finding my way to the supermarket and back. And I do not forget things.

ARTHUR

If you don't, then there isn't any need to go to the store, is there?

DOREEN

Cooking is such a treat for me, especially making one of my favorite dishes. I thought it would please you to have a simple family dinner –

ARTHUR

So like a woman. Break a man's heart and then expect him to forgive you because you *cook* for him —

DOREEN

I did no such thing. Didn't I just say I wasn't turning you down – yet?

ARTHUR

Yet? You could change my whole life by changing one little letter in that word –do you realize that? But not only can I not get you to say yes, I can't even get you to say whether or not you feel anything at all for me. When was the last time you told me you loved me?

DOREEN

I've never told you I loved you. But I do—

ARTHUR

Why didn't you say so?

DOREEN

I just did.

ARTHUR

I don't mean now. This morning, when I proposed and you jumped out of the shower and left me with a –

DOREEN

Broken heart?

ARTHUR

—Among other things. Not a word to me – not one single word. A woman your age should at least be grateful when she's proposed to –

DOREEN

Oh, be still. Before I got out, I kissed your ear. Like this. (*SHE blows in his ear*) And I said, "Thank you." Now who's forgetting?

ARTHUR

(*As SHE continues blowing in his ear*) That tickles. Stop it or I'll—

DOREEN

You don't even know what real tickling is.

ARTHUR

Oh, yes I do.

DOREEN

Do you ever stop when I ask?

ARTHUR

I'm warning you— *(THEY begin to tickle each other)* Now, are you going to tell me, or not?

DOREEN

(Falling onto the sofa) Tell you what?

ARTHUR

(Landing on top of her) What you forgot at the store—

DOREEN

The chicken.

ARTHUR

What about it?

DOREEN

I forgot to buy it. Now, get off of me.

(SHE shoves him to the floor, but HE pulls her down on top of him.)

ARTHUR.

Ha-ha-ha- ha-Ha- Is that what the good monk taught you? How to make Chicken Cacciatore without the chicken? Chicken, chicken, Chicken— Doreen forgot her chicken –

DOREEN

(Hitting him with a sofa pillow) Will you stop? Please say you'll let me borrow the car—

ARTHUR

No way. I'll pick up a chicken on my way home from the cemetery.

DOREEN

You'll forget.

ARTHUR

Doreen, I'm not the least bit like you. I remember things.

DOREEN

That's it –

ARTHUR

That's *not* it.

DOREEN

Arthur, you put down that pillow or else I'll –

ARTHUR

You'll what?

DOREEN

Get off me this minute, or I'll scream.

ARTHUR

Go ahead.

DOREEN

I warned you. Help— *Help*

(ROBYN stands at the threshold of the French doors.)

ROBYN

Dad. What the hell are you doing?

ARTHUR

(Struggling to rise slightly) Oh, hi, sweetie. We were just talking about you—

ROBYN

In what language – Braille? You're worse than children, the two of you.

DOREEN

I'm so embarrassed, Robyn. Under normal circumstances, I'm hardly ever found rolling on the floor with any of my other friends. I mean, I *am* a bi-ped.

ROBYN

I believe you but, as a friend of my father's, you're still suspect. I suppose if it were raining, you'd both be outdoors splashing in puddles. Since it isn't, what are your plans for the afternoon? Playing Doctor and Nurse?

DOREEN

No. My father already caught us at that and he was quite angry.

ARTHUR

I'll say he was. He never returned my stethoscope. Now, give us a break, Robyn, or we won't have you and Spencer to dinner this evening.

ROBYN

We can't join you. That's what I drove over to tell you. I've just received a call from a corporal who was with David that night. I'm meeting Spencer in an hour and we're driving to Philadelphia to meet with him. He has something he wants to tell us.

ARTHUR

What's his name? How did he find you?

ROBYN

Peter something – I've got it written down. He wouldn't go into the details over the phone, but he was there and saw the whole thing. He says David was set up.

DOREEN

Set up how?

ROBYN

Doreen doesn't know, does she?

DOREEN

Know what? Did something happen to David before he died?

ARTHUR

We don't know what caused David to leave his barracks that night. They were supposed to be confined to quarters. Robyn thinks there may have been some sort of incident and she's asked the army to investigate.

ROBYN

Robyn has asked—? Are you telling me you've changed your mind again?

ARTHUR

No, I am not. I just don't understand why you have to go rushing into things. Why didn't you call me the minute you heard from this man?

ROBYN

I did. You didn't answer.

DOREEN

We were out shopping.

ARTHUR

Either we do things together or not at all. How do you know you're not the one being set up this time?

ROBYN

How *can* I know unless I talk to him? The guy's thinking of enlisting again. We have to get a statement from him before he does that, or we might not get anything out of him. What are you afraid of?

ARTHUR

I'm not afraid of a damned thing. I just don't see why it can't wait a few days. I could drive down with you and meet this man. I'd have a chance to make up my own mind about what he has to say. Why do you always decide things on your own – and then confront me with your decision in front of a perfect stranger?

DOREEN

(Turning away) Thank you for that, Arthur.

ROBYN

Didn't you just ask Doreen to marry you?

DOREEN

He told you?

ARTHUR

I apologize, Doreen. I didn't mean to imply –

DOREEN

You didn't imply a thing, Arthur. For once, you were perfectly clear.

ARTHUR

It wasn't what I meant to say. I'm sorry.

DOREEN

Go to hell – or go to the cemetery, Arthur, like you were planning. Before you go, though, answer just this one question: was Marion a perfect stranger when you proposed to her?

ARTHUR

(Falling to his knees, speaking in a child's voice) Please forgive me. You know I love you.

DOREEN

Oh, get up, you big baby. Go upstairs and change that shirt. It's filthy.

ARTHUR

Who's going to notice at the cemetery?

ROBYN

Dad, will you please just go? Give us a moment to recover from your grace and good manners. I thought my news would please you. Now I don't care. Just go. *(ARTHUR exits)*

DOREEN

It's just as well you can't come to dinner. I can't guarantee the conversation will be pleasant – if I'm still speaking to Arthur.

ROBYN

I just wish he had a tiny clue how tiresome it is to watch him get in the way of his own happiness. Will you accept his proposal, do you think?

DOREEN

I don't know. There's still so much we don't know about each other.

ROBYN

Oh, don't let that stop you. I've been around him over thirty years and I can't really say I know him. In fact, he surprised me just this morning when he told me it was the second time he'd proposed to you.

DOREEN

But that's not true, unless he's thinking of when we were in third grade. He went up to my father and asked if he could marry me. When my father said, "Over my dead body," Arthur asked him how long he'd have to wait.

ROBYN

That sounds like my father.

DOREEN

Robyn, I'm very fond of Arthur, but I'm not as impetuous as he is. I don't know that I see this as a wise move for either of us. I said yes once before to someone I loved, and it didn't turn out as I expected. I'm not at all sure I want to make that mistake again.

ROBYN

Do you mean that? You think marrying father would be a mistake?

DOREEN

I'm afraid I do. I'm sorry. I mean, I could be wrong – I just don't know. Whatever I decide, it's been such a pleasure getting to know you – I'd still like the two of us to stay friends.

ROBYN

I'd like that, too. But if you turn father down, it's not very likely, or is it? Anyway, take care. Look at the time. I was due back at the office a half hour ago. I've got to run. (*As SHE exits, SHE bumps into ARTHUR who has returned*)

ARTHUR

I just have one question for you, Doreen. Do you still want me to buy a chicken?

END OF SCENE**SCENE FIVE****Later that afternoon**

(*Downstage right, ERIC RYDER stands, holding a mobile phone to his ear and doing pushups and other exercises while HE speaks.*)

ERIC

Hello – Is this the condo association? ... Good. My name is Eric Ryder. With a Y..., I know I'm not on your list of tenants.. I'm Denise Griffiths' roommate ... What do you mean,

ERIC, Continued

roommates aren't allowed? How else do you expect me to help her with her business? What business? What business is that of yours? ... I know nothing about any condo regulations and I could care less. I'm calling about something important,,, We just came home from shopping and saw a big "Season's Greeting" sign over the condo entrance. Mrs. Griffiths and I want it taken down immediately. Christmas is a religious holiday. You don't put up "Seasons Greetings," you hang mistletoe and wreaths and you decorate the manger... So what. Let them object, I know places where the mangers have live animals, even a live Baby Jesus. No, I am *not* Bill O'Rielly. I told you what my name was.

(Lights up on ARTHUR's Apartment, DOREEN is preparing salad. A door slams.)

DOREEN

Who's there? – I'm warning you, I have a knife in my hand and I know how to scream.

LORIN

Hello, again – Sorry if I startled you.

DOREEN

Do all Arthur's friends have keys to his home?

LORIN

I'm not aware he has any, aside from you. He gave me a key, but it wasn't a token of friendship. That would damage our master-slave relationship. I have it so I can come and go without disturbing his writing. I've finished his monthly bills. All he has to do is sign and mail them – except for the one to the condo association. He's late again this month, so I'd appreciate it if you'd tell him I said to walk it over to the office and not put it in the mail.

DOREEN

I'm writing it down. Do you spell Lorin L-O or L-A-U-R-?

LORIN

It's spelled with an "O." I never spell it the other way unless I'm going out in drag.

DOREEN

Oh? *(Beat)* Oh – I see. I've just made a fresh pot of coffee. Would you like some while you wait for Arthur?

LORIN

Black, please. Where is he, by the way?

DOREEN

Arthur may be a little late, today. After the cemetery, he's stopping off to buy a chicken.

LORIN

What is *wrong* with that man? The condo association isn't going to let him keep a chicken –

DOREEN

It's for dinner, silly.

LORIN

Of course – Silly me. An edible one. Oh, I almost forgot— Congratulations.

DOREEN

Arthur told you, as well?

LORIN

He sure did. We have no secrets from one another. We go way back. Of course, not as far as you and he.

DOREEN

Thank you for that, dear.

LORIN

Arthur was so excited. He said it was the first time he'd ever done anything like it.

DOREEN

Isn't he forgetting about Marion?

LORIN

Oh, he would never have proposed to Marion in the shower. He made it sound so romantic: The two of you scrubbing each other's backs and then him getting down on his knees—

DOREEN

There's no need to go any further, Mr. Halliday. I was *there*.

LORIN

I'm sorry if I embarrassed you. Even though part of me sees you as my replacement, I'd still like us to be friends once you take over for me.

DOREEN

Lorin, I wouldn't dream of taking over for you. I don't know very much about ethics.

LORIN

That's not a problem. As you know, Arthur has his own standard of morality,

DOREEN

And another thing: I can *not* type.

LORIN

Oh, I'll still be around to do all that. Your task will be to see that Arthur eats properly and takes exercise. He can be stubborn, especially about exercise, but you just have to stand your ground. Of course, getting him into bed at a decent hour will be so much easier for you than it's been for me. Frankly, Arthur much prefers women.

DOREEN

As opposed to what, Mr. Halliday?

LORIN

Well, you know. As much as I care about Arthur, and bend over backwards for him, I know I'm no substitute for the real thing. So, will you live here or in Mill Valley, do you think?

DOREEN

I haven't –

LORIN

Of course, you could always become bi – as in bi-coastal – If someone could only get him to fly. Marion told me they used to fly all the time. Robyn says it's all in his head, and I agree, but as I keep telling her, “Robyn, it's still his head.”

DOREEN

Did you know Marion well?

LORIN

Oh, yes. We were great friends.

DOREEN

What was she really like? Arthur has her on such a high pedestal –

LORIN

Marion was just like me – always putting herself in the middle of things. The last thing she would have wanted was to be placed on a pedestal, or for Arthur to go on mourning the way he does. She'd be delighted to know he had you in his life. Marion was the sort of person who considered us all to be linked together – a chain of love, Losing her was so hard for all of us, especially David. After all, it was his mother. Damn – I can't believe I did that again – referred to that beautiful woman as *it*. Marion was never an “it.” Never —

DOREEN

Was her death the reason David enlisted?

LORIN

I've always thought so. A great silence came over this house once she was gone. Their three faces had the sort of pain you see in children when their little hearts have just been broken. My mother is forever saying, “The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away.” Not here. All the good Lord has done here is take. Marion's and David's deaths left Arthur with nothing. He needs him to come out from behind the past, instead of watching reruns of *From Here to Eternity* and reading books like “*The Year of Magical Thinking*.” It's as if he wants to make the past his future. Has he told you he and I have a ten dollar bet on which of us will go first?

DOREEN

That's silly. Why would the two of you even make such a bet?

LORIN

It may be silly to you but the HIV fairy takes it very seriously.

DOREEN

I'm sorry. The what?

LORIN

You know – The Angel of the Lord that goes around giving HIV to everyone.

DOREEN

I had no idea. I never even thought to ask Arthur about his—

LORIN

That's okay. How many of us go around saying to people we've just met, "Hello. Do you have a fatal illness?"

DOREEN

But you and Arthur made a bet—? Arthur and *you*—? Arthur and —?

LORIN

We did. But, as I keep telling Arthur, "It's not over until big, obese Brunhilde with her spear and helmet catches it – and if it's sexually transmitted, how's that going to happen?"

DOREEN

Oh, *dear*. I wish I'd known sooner. When was he going to tell me?

LORIN

My mother also says, "There's a time and a place for everything." Don't you just want to slap people with a saying for everything? As far as looking after Arthur, just follow the three F's: Feed him, you know what, and forget him— And see he doesn't buy chickens he can't eat. (*Exits*)

(DOREEN ascends the staircase. After a moment, ARTHUR enters with grocery bag.)

ARTHUR

(Calling) Hello, Juliet – my little hell-cat. Your tiger Romeo is home.. *(No response)* Sorry I'm late. I met an old friend in the cemetery parking lot, Margery Mason. *(Silence)* Did you hear me?

DOREEN (Off)

Yes, Arthur. There's nothing wrong with either my memory or my hearing. What kind of tiger are you this afternoon? Still in your stripes or have you changed to polka-dots?

ARTHUR

I wasn't gone that long, Doreen. Margery is a dear old friend. Marion and I often used to have dinner with Margery and her husband Stewart, before he was murdered.

DOREEN (Off)

Arthur, I'm not interested in listening to another one of – Dear lord – Murdered by whom?

ARTHUR

Margery— She was aiming for his mistress, but she's a bit wall-eyed. If she'd turned her head down and to the right, she would have had a clear shot.

DOREEN (Off)

What sordid people you know.

ARTHUR

It isn't sordid, Doreen – It perfectly normal. Long Island is full of complicated people living complex lives which often have convoluted and bizarre consequences.

(DOREEN enters and places an armload of clothing on the back of the rocking chair.)

DOREEN

(Glaring at him) I certainly hope so.

ARTHUR

Take Margery and her boyfriend, for instance – They just happened to be staying at the same motel in Massapequa as Stewart and his mistress: They bumped into each other at the ice machine. The papers called it, "Gunfight at the Drainpipe Motel." Margery's only been out on parole a week and she looks terrible. She was never a pretty woman to begin with but now looks like an overweight Robin Williams trying to be Popeye, except her hair is in a duck's tail and four of her front teeth are missing.

DOREEN

(Exiting upstairs) I'm not listening.

ARTHUR

Oh, and she has the most awful initials tattooed across her midriff: "W. A. E." Stands for Women Against Everything, she says. She was going to show me the entire list, but I begged her not to remove her jeans in the cemetery parking lot. I think it will be years before she's ready to resume her place in Kenwood Manor society. *(As DOREEN enters with another armful of clothes)* Say, isn't this an odd time to be doing laundry?

DOREEN

(Exiting upstairs again) I'm not doing laundry. I'm leaving.

ARTHUR

(Following her to the hallway) You're what?

DOREEN (Off)

I'm leaving. I have another engagement.

ARTHUR

You have another engagement and you're just remembering it now?

DOREEN

Yes – as you've so kindly pointed out to me, I tend to forget things.

ARTHUR

An engagement with whom?

DOREEN

Why does that matter?

ARTHUR

It matters because you are packing and leaving here on the very day I asked you to marry me.

DOREEN

A proposal which you undoubtedly had the temerity to broadcast to the entire world before I'd even given you an answer.

ARTHUR

You're wrong. I haven't let anyone hear the tape – it's right here, if you'd care to see it. That's the other reason I'm late. I had to stop at Fotomat.

DOREEN

Arthur! I am going to strangle you with my bare hands.

ARTHUR

Don't get upset. I was only joking – about the pictures

DOREEN

What?

ARTHUR

And there isn't any recording. Now what's all this nonsense about you leaving?

DOREEN

I've already told you. I have an appointment –

ARTHUR

With whom?

DOREEN

A young exchange student from Turkey.

ARTHUR

A man?

DOREEN

Yes, a man. Call me old-fashioned but I still prefer the opposite sex.

ARTHUR

I'm not following any of this.

I'll bet you aren't –
DOREEN

Where did you meet him?
ARTHUR

On Craig's List. He pays for his studies working for an escort service.
DOREEN

His studies in what— Geriatric care?
ARTHUR

I prefer to think of it as geriatric nurturing.
DOREEN

Not a word of this is true, is it?
ARTHUR

What difference does that make? All you need to know is I'm not marrying you. In fact, I doubt I'll ever see you again.
DOREEN

What did Robyn say to you after I left?
ARTHUR

Your daughter's visit has nothing to do with my decision, you – you *cad*.
DOREEN

Cad? What an odd turn of expression. What is going on? I leave to buy a chicken and come back to find you packing – just when we were getting along so famously—
ARTHUR

People who get along “famously” – as you put it – don't lie to one another about their sexual escapades.
DOREEN

What escapades? For the past three years, until you came along, I hadn't slept with another woman.
ARTHUR

And we both know why *that* was, don't we? When did you plan on telling me you were gay?
DOREEN

(Laughs) You couldn't tell by looking?
ARTHUR

No, Arthur, I could not. I would never have known if Lorin hadn't been here and told me.
DOREEN

ARTHUR

Doreen, tell me: Is that the funniest thing you've ever said— or what?

DOREEN

Don't pretend, Arthur. I know all about the two of you.

ARTHUR

You mean, Lorin and *I*?

DOREEN

Lorin and *me*—

ARTHUR

Fine: Lorin and *me*. I don't know what he told you, but I can assure you— Doreen, Lorin was *David's* friend. They had a special relationship. *They* were partners.

DOREEN

What a shameful thing for you to try and do –

ARTHUR

I had nothing to do with it. Either you're born that way or you're –

DOREEN

Shifting blame to your poor, deceased son. How can you write on ethics when you haven't the morals of a United States Congressman?

ARTHUR

What has any of this to do with morality?

DOREEN

I am on my way home to have an AIDS test.

ARTHUR

Oh, my God. If only I'd known— What are your symptoms? Are you secreting anything?

DOREEN

Am I supposed to be secreting anything?

ARTHUR

Why ask me, for heaven's sake? I don't know anything about that damned disease—

DOREEN

(Picking up a vase from the counter) That's exactly what I expected you to say. Arthur Ferguson, don't you dare to contact me ever again. *(SHE aims the vase at him and just misses. It shatters on the floor.)*

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO**SCENE ONE****A condominium in Mill Valley, CA**

(Lights rise on ARTHUR downstage right.)

ARTHUR

Every widow in Kenwood Manor seemed to know when Marion died. I was nearly buried alive under all their sympathy cards. I'd open my door to find endless casseroles dishes and shepherd's pies lining the walkway. That first winter, in the middle of an ice storm, I looked out the window to see this tiny, frail old thing – close to a hundred years old – lashed to her walker and scraping snow off my Buick. Said she was the little match girl and threatened to set fire to herself if I said "no." Another sent me a check for twenty-five dollars: her Monday night bingo winnings. Wanted me to take her to dinner since she could no longer cook. I did take a few of these women up on their offers. Got out my blue blazer, grey slacks, red tie, and went off, whistling Cole Porter tunes: "Night and Day," "You're the Top." One after another – women whose names I couldn't remember— Let alone their illnesses. So much frenzied activity and all I accomplished was to miss Marion even more.

(Lights up DENISE'S CONDOMINIUM in Mill Valley, CA. The condominium is only slightly different from ARTHUR's. ERIC, in T-shirt, cut-offs and an apron, is busily vacuuming the living room area, as a woman's voice calls out.)

DENISE (Off)

I've told you every day for the past week, we don't take Discover card.

ERIC

I think someone's coming—

DENISE (Off)

Not if he keeps calling and trying to use the wrong credit card, he isn't.

ERIC

Not the guy on the phone. Someone's coming up the walkway.

DENISE (Off)

If it's that jerk from the condo association, I want to speak him.

(A much bedraggled, perspiring ARTHUR, carrying a bouquet, enters.)

ARTHUR

Surprise!

ERIC

I'll say. Who are you?

ARTHUR

I'm sorry – I must have the wrong apartment. All these places look alike, don't they?

ERIC

They're supposed to. Why else would anybody buy them?

ARTHUR

Perhaps you've a point there –

ERIC

What do you want? If you're from the condo association, you go right back there and tell them "Happy Holidays" isn't going to work, either. Why can't you people understand Christmas is sacred – like Easter and Mother's Day?

ARTHUR

I'm not from your condo association. My name is Arthur Ferguson. I just got off a plane from New York. I'm looking for a friend. Obviously, this is the wrong house.

DENISE (Off)

Who's at the door, Bubblebutt? Is it that little bastard from the Condo Association?

ERIC

No, just some old guy.

ARTHUR

Screw you.

DENISE (Off)

Screw you, Eric. Don't you dare speak to me that way. Who's at the door and what does he want?

ARTHUR

Tell Amy the Amazon I'm looking for a friend of mine—I'd ask you where she lives if I could remember her name – and if I thought you were on speaking terms with your neighbors.

ERIC

You don't know her name?

ARTHUR

Her married name –.

ERIC

Or her address? If you don't know either one, how do you expect to find her?

ARTHUR

She married a soccer goalie right after high school, and now he's dead.

ERIC

Who's dead?

ARTHUR

Her husband— She didn't change it back, you see. She kept her husband's name, and I don't remember it. I should know it because I was in high school with them both. Unfortunately, at this very moment—

ERIC

What are their first names?

ARTHUR

It's Benjamin. Thank you so much. Benjamin Hamilton.

ERIC

The black tennis player? I just watched him play in the Forest Hills Open on TV.

DENISE (Off)

Bubblebutt, tell whoever it is to go away and close the door. We're losing all the air conditioning.

ARTHUR

I'm not talking about a tennis player – I'm looking for Ben Hamilton's wife, Doreen.

ERIC

Doreen Hamilton? She lives next door—But she's not home.

DENISE

(Entering) Who the fuck was at the— Oh, hello— Who are you?

ARTHUR

I'm Arthur— Arthur Ferguson. I haven't changed that much in a week, have I?

DENISE

I don't know. Have you?

ARTHUR

Why haven't you returned my phone calls and emails? And what have you done to your hair?

DENISE

What emails? Are you the guy who wants me to take Discover Card?

ARTHUR

If you're still angry because of the last time we were together—

DENISE

The last time we *what*? I never saw you before in my life – and what's wrong with my hair?

ARTHUR

I liked it better the other way.

DENISE

What other way? Look fella— I don't know what your problem is and I don't give a flying fuck if it's treatable. Wait— What did you say your name was?

ARTHUR

Arthur Ferguson. You stayed at my home in New York—

ERIC

I think I know that name.

DENISE

(To ERIC) You can't remember a damned thing, can you? How many times do I have to tell you? He's Arthur Ferguson, my sister's—Oh, my God. You're Arthur. Arthur Ferguson. How did you get here? I thought you didn't fly

ARTHUR

I did, too, but with the right drugs, you can do anything. Look at him. Now, I flew three thousand miles just to see you — only to find you're shacking up with Joe the Plumber.

ERIC

My name isn't Joe the Plumber, it's Eric Rider.

ARTHUR

I'll bet it's Rider. I demand to know what's going on. If I'd known this was the kind of man you preferred—

DENISE

Arthur, I can explain—

ARTHUR

Don't bother. I knew I should have told the taxi to wait. You're just like your sister.

DENISE

I *am* my sister. I'm Denise. Doreen is in the hospital. She has an infection.

ARTHUR

She does not. Call her and tell her to check herself out. People our age sleep with one another all the time without catching diseases. *(To DENISE)* Are you telling me the truth — because you don't look like Denise — You look like Doreen.

ERIC

They're twins.

ARTHUR

I know that but, with a brain full of Valium, I can only absorb so much.

DENISE

I really am Denise, Arthur. Would you like to see my driver's license?

ARTHUR

I would never have recognized you. You look so different.

DENISE

You expected one of us to grow older and the other wouldn't? Just how the hell old do I look?

ARTHUR

You look fine— Just fine. You're older, that's all.

DENISE

Of course, I'm older. I'm fifty-three.

ARTHUR

You're *how* old?

DENISE

I'm your age.

ARTHUR

You are not. You're older.

DENISE

I most certainly am not.

ARTHUR

Doreen is.

DENISE

She was born before me.

ARTHUR

Not that much, she wasn't. Oh-h-h, I get it. Beach Blanket Bozo here doesn't know your real age, does he? In that case, keep your driver's license in your purse – and if you really want to look fifty-three, either don't wear Spandex or keep pushing everything down and to the back

DENISE

Queer. Doreen told me about the man you're sleeping with. You're nothing but a homosexual lecher

ERIC

(*Stepping back*) Huh? Your sister flies across country to be with *him* and he sleeps with both sexes? You can *do* that? Why didn't you tell me?

DENISE

I was going to tell you on your birthday.

ARTHUR

Do you mind if I sit down for a moment? (*HE sits and in the lotus position between the two of them*) When in California, do as the natives— (*HE chants*) Ohh-umm—paahh—dummm—

ERIC

Is this guy crazy or what?

DENISE

Arthur, stop that ridiculous chanting and get up.

ARTHUR

There's no need to shout. You'll destroy the calm of the moment. (*HE resumes chanting.*)

ERIC

Hey, you— Buster— How would you like it if I went inside and called the police?

ARTHUR

I'd like that very much.

DENISE

Arthur, will you please get up off the ground and stop making a scene?

ARTHUR

No.

DENISE

Why not?

ARTHUR

I'm afraid – I'm very afraid –

DENISE

—Of what? You don't need protection from either one of us.

ARTHUR

I know that. I need protection from me. Look at me – a man who has been drinking Valium and Zanax cocktails for the past seventy two hours – so I could board a plane to come here – to surprise the woman I love - who isn't even here and who could be dying, for all I know.

ERIC

She isn't dying. It's just a woman's thing— You know, like – feminism.

ARTHUR

On top of everything else I've been through, I just let my taxi go, in the trunk of which are the notes for my new book, along with my laptop. And is that the worst? Of course not— I sent

ARTHUR, Continued

my assistant on to the hotel with our luggage and I'll never, ever see him again because, thanks to all the drugs I've taken, I forgot the name of the hotel. And now, here I am, about to pass out on this hot pavement, sitting between Charles Atlas and Jayne Mansfield.

DENISE

Arthur, you're getting all stressed—

ARTHUR

Stressed? I would give my left testicle for a panic attack. Ohhmmm-meeee-paaaaah— dohhhhhh— *(To himself)* Once upon a time, there was a little boy named Arthur – a good little boy, who said his prayers every night before going to bed. Then, alas, he grew up – and sent God away – until the day .he decided to board a tiny little flying machine along with five hundred other suckers. Scared out of his wits, he asked God to come back. He begged him – Why? So that he could sit in a fetal position for six and a half interminable hours until the fucking thing got back down out of the sky. And when the plane touched down safely, little Arthur thought that God had answered his prayers. But you know what God's answer was? "Screw you, little Arthur. Screw you."

END OF SCENE**SCENE TWO****Montage: - Mill Valley, San Diego and New York, about a week later.**

(Lights up on all FIVE ACTORS, holding cell phones and facing upstage, except for ROBYN, who stands apart from them, downstage right, in full light, facing front.)

ROBYN

I thoroughly understand the board's position, Mr. Cartwright, and I agree completely with your decision to enter and investigate, especially in light of the fact that a putrefying corpse exudes a pungent and malevolent odor. But no matter how urgent you considered the need to dispose of the body, the state considers evidence tampering to be a very serious offense. You should have at least requested an autopsy before claiming, without a single feather, that the animal found in my father's apartment was a chicken.

(DENISE and LORIN, speaking on their phones, turn to face the audience.)

DENISE

Hello, Eric?

LORIN

Denise – How nice to hear from you.

DENISE

You little shit. Why are you using Eric's cell phone? Put him on this instant.

LORIN

There's no need for hostility, Denise. Didn't you know Eric went both ways? He wasn't taking steroids just for you, Sweetie

(THEY turn upstage as ARTHUR and ERIC, speaking into their phones, face front.)

ARTHUR

Lorin? Thank heavens you called. Why didn't you tell me you were going away on holiday?

ERIC

(Making the sound of a buzzer) Bzzz. Wrong. Guess again,

ARTHUR

I most certainly will *not* guess again. I don't play games with strangers.

ERIC

That's not what I hear.

ARTHUR

Let me speak to Lorin this minute. Where are you? Where's Doreen?

ERIC

We're all in San Diego on our honeymoon. Lorin sleeps in the middle.

(THEY turn upstage as ROBYN faces front.)

ROBYN

Dad, pick up. *(Beat)* Damn it, Dad, pick up the phone. You're being sued. Will you pick up?

(SHE turns upstage as DENISE and LORIN face front.)

DENISE

Lorin, let me speak to Arthur.

LORIN

He isn't here. He took the scenic route back to New York.

DENISE

He's *driving*?

LORIN

For heaven's sake, Denise. Homeland Security would never permit that. He took Greyhound.

DENISE

Will you speak up? It sounded like you said Greyhound.

LORIN

I did.

DENISE

You didn't try to stop him? Why didn't you go with him?

LORIN

On *Greyhound*? I wouldn't wish that on anybody— No matter how angry I was with them.

(THEY turn upstage as ARTHUR and ERIC face front.)

ARTHUR

Hello, Lorin?

ERIC

He's not here. He and Doreen have gone off to the spa.

ARTHUR

What spa? What are you talking about? Where the hell are you?

ERIC

I told you. We're at the Del Coronado. We have the Ménage-a-trois Suite. Where are you?

ARTHUR

I just got home and all hell has broken loose. Tell Lorin I must speak to him immediately. I can't find my checkbook, my car battery's dead, and my condo association is suing me.

ERIC

What for?

ARTHUR

I don't wish to discuss it.

ERIC

C'mon, Arthur. I'm family now. Lorin says, when we get back to New York, we'll be over to see you every day. We'll be like the three musketeers— Only different. Doesn't matter what the rest of the world thinks, Arthur – family is family. Tell me why you're being sued.

(THEY turn upstage as ROBYN faces front.)

ROBYN

Dad, call me when you get this message. The association wants to evict you and now that Spencer is moving back in, there won't be room for you in my apartment, and – Oh, never mind. Just call me.

(SHE faces upstage as ARTHUR and ERIC face front.)

ERIC

So, what about the chicken? You leave it sitting there on the barby, as the French say?

ARTHUR

I forgot to put it in the freezer and it began to smell and my neighbors had the association break in to my apartment to see if I was dead.

(THEY turn upstage as DENISE and LORIN turn to face the audience.)

LORIN

Yes, I let him go Greyhound. Do you know a better way to cure fear of flying? And as to stealing Eric from you, Denise – Eric was ready for a change, that's all. Now he wants to come back and see you.

DENISE

After sneaking off with you and leaving me with a message on Facebook the whole world could see?

LORIN

He forgot your email address. But, he misses you. I do, too.

DENISE

He does?— Really?

LORIN

Eric is crazy about you.

DENISE

Then what the hell is he doing with you?

LORIN

He's crazy about me, too. What's so hard to understand? One of you, and one of me would make anyone happy. Feel free to borrow him whenever you like.

DENISE

Did I just hear you right? Are you suggesting we *share* Eric?

LORIN

Why not? Eric's not the kind to settle down. He's more the long weekend, porn-and-poppers kind of guy.

DENISE

That's true. He bores easily.

LORIN

But he hates summers in Mill Valley because of the fog, and he refuses to spend winters in New York. If we can keep him shuffling from coast to coast, he'll never have the chance to get bored. And think of all the frequent flyer mileage we'll get. Denise, can you hold? I've got another call. Hey, Bubblebutt—

(DENISE turns upstage and ROBYN faces front.)

What did you just call me?
ROBYN

Robyn?
LORIN

Lorin? Who's Bubblebutt?
ROBYN

I don't think I should tell you.
LORIN

I'll bet he's some trashy thing you picked up in the Tenderloin.
ROBYN

He most certainly is not Tenderloin trash. He was given to me by Doreen's sister, Denise.
LORIN

Given to you— like a present?
ROBYN

More like a loan. Most of the time he lives with Denise, but Arthur stayed there while Doreen was in the hospital, so we – it's very complicated. Ask *your father* to explain it all to you.
LORIN

He left to visit Doreen and stayed with *Denise*? Are you saying he mixed them up? Oh, my God – Please – pretty please – put him on the phone. I need to speak to him immediately
ROBYN

(As lights go out on ROBYN and LORIN, they come up on ARTHUR and DOREEN.)

Doreen, I love you—
ARTHUR

I love you, too, Arthur, but didn't we just hang up? What did you forget?
DOREEN

I didn't forget anything. I missed the sound of your voice, that's all.
ARTHUR

Well, dearest, you're just going to have to wait. I'll be there a week from Saturday.
DOREEN

What am I going to do all by myself until then?
ARTHUR

DOREEN

Anything you like, as long as it *is* all by yourself.

END OF SCENE

SCENE THREE

Kenwood Manor – An afternoon in May.

(DOREEN is alone on stage, downfront right.)

DOREEN

God has so many ways to let us know he's still around. The day after I arrived in Rome, I found both pieces I'd been commissioned to buy. I didn't want to turn around and come back home, so I booked motor coach tour to the north – the greatest mistake in all my years of travel. Imagine driving through Tuscany with forty-nine Presbyterian church-women from Los Altos, all singing hymns. At meals, minute and graphic details of each woman's latest medical procedure were shared. I now know more about ceramic hip replacement than they teach at Johns Hopkins. But it wasn't hymn-singing or miraculous cures that brought me closer to my Higher Power. That happened because the bleeding had started again. We were boarding a gondola in Venice, on our way to the Piazza San Marco. I felt some moisture and thought one of the women had splashed me, but we all know Presbyterians aren't that playful. I stayed aboard the gondola, doing my best to avoid a million dive-bombing pigeons while I indulged in self-pity. My new suit was a mess, thanks to those effing pigeons, so I gave it to the chambermaid at the hotel. There's no sense in having anything dry-cleaned in Italy.

(Lights up on the apartment. ARTHUR enters, carrying luggage and a large package.)

ARTHUR

You know, you could have left a few things in Italy for the other tourists to buy. Or do you intend importing the entire country, one visit at a time?

DOREEN

(Entering behind him) There was no reason you had to carry everything in one trip. Why does every man your age have to go around pretending he's another Clint Eastwood?

ARTHUR

Don't you dare compare me to Clint Eastwood. He's old enough to be my father. *(The large package slips out of his arms and falls to the floor, with the sound of breaking glass)* Damn—I should have listened to you.

DOREEN

But – you didn't. Give it to me before you do any more damage. *(Shaking the box)* Maybe the store will be nice enough to take it back.

ARTHUR

Why should they? It's not their fault.

DOREEN

And it isn't mine.

ARTHUR

It most certainly is. You should have had the package shipped.

DOREEN

How could I? It was a gift for you.

ARTHUR

—For me? In that case, I hope you had it insured.

DOREEN

I didn't pay that much for it. It was on sale.

ARTHUR

How clever you are – practicing frugality in these troubled times. What with the rate of exchange falling and the real estate market where it is—

DOREEN

Arthur Ferguson, are you calling me cheap?

ARTHUR

In what sense?

DOREEN

I only said it was inexpensive so you wouldn't feel bad. It's a vase I bought in Venice to replace the one I threw at you.

ARTHUR

Thank you. Now I have two broken vases. Any chance they're a matched pair?

DOREEN

No, dear. The one I bought you was hand-blown.

ARTHUR

The one you threw at me was priceless.

DOREEN

I know antiques, Arthur. That vase was not priceless or I would never have thrown it.

ARTHUR

It held great sentimental value for me. It was one of the last purchases Marion and I made together.

DOREEN

Oh, dear— I'm sorry. I had no idea.

LORIN

(Entering through French doors with a small bouquet) Don't let him fool you. He and Marion bought it at a garage sale Laura Macready had before she disappeared into assisted living. I know because I was with them. Hi, sweetie. These are for you.

ARTHUR

This close to the Hamptons, garage sales can be every bit as costly as an auction at Sotheby's.

DOREEN

Thank you, Lorin – for the flowers, and for sparing me another one of Arthur's stories.

ARTHUR

If I were going to make something up, would I bring Marion's name into it?

DOREEN

Yes, Arthur. You absolutely would.

LORIN

Anyone who believes you, would probably believe medical reports on Kim Jong-Il.

ARTHUR

It so happens, we paid a small fortune for that vase. You know very well, Lola Macready's whole life was centered around money.

LORIN

Now that's true, Doreen.

ARTHUR

Lola worked almost fifty years at the same brokerage house on Wall Street. In fact, when she reached her fiftieth, they were planning on making her an honorary Lehman Brother. But she moved to Goldman Sachs. She was a woman who could always read the writing on the wall.

LORIN

The writing on the wall of Wall Street.

ARTHUR

(Not to be put off) Lola had that vase especially made, you know.

DOREEN

No, I didn't know

ARTHUR

—By a group of inter-racial nuns in Eritrea. It was meant to hold her husband's ashes—

LORIN

That's not what Lola told me. She said they were blind lady sumo wrestlers in Osaka.

ARTHUR

Sadly, a year after she had it made, she and Armentino divorced.

DOREEN

Armentino?

ARTHUR

Her husband – He, too was a *small* man, like Ben—

LORIN

Who?

DOREEN

—My late husband who, in Arthur's mind, grows tinier and tinier with each passing day.

ARTHUR

I can still feel her stare. Lola could look quite menacing with her teeth in. I went to move Marion's wheelchair to another part of the driveway, but Lola had already reached down and put on the brake.

LORIN

Lola *could* move quickly, Doreen, despite her size. She played left field for the Kenwood Manor Seniors.

ARTHUR

And she holds the record for most stolen bases. As Lorin says, she was a big woman. When the other players saw her coming, they naturally got out her way. Anyhow, to make a long story short –

DOREEN

Oh, Arthur – please don't.–

ARTHUR

I begged Marion not to go over our budget, but she was as determined to purchase that vase as Lola was to sell it.

LORIN

Even if it meant cutting back on her medicines— Sorry, Arthur. But I paid for that vase with the forty-five cents change I got from Lola after I bought her Bunny-Ears casserole dish.

ARTHUR

Are you sure?

LORIN

I'm positive. You only had a ten dollar bill and you were afraid to give it to Lola because you thought she might run into her house and lock the door. So, Doreen, I hope you didn't have to spend all your time in Italy on business.

DOREEN

No, but I almost wish I had. I spent a week touring northern Italy with forty-five female religious fanatics – Presbyterian females, to be exact..

LORIN

What a pity they weren't Episcopalians. At least they drink.

DOREEN

Having just one male on the tour would have been a blessing. Left on their own devices, this group did nothing but bicker. I was seated at breakfast with these two annoying women who criticized each other constantly. "Florence, have something besides pasta. Remember your heart," and "Verna, that makes three cups of coffee. What if they don't have a ladies' room in the Vatican?"

ARTHUR

That's not as far-fetched as it seems, Doreen. Aside from Pope Joan, what would be the need?

DOREEN

Well, Pompeii was built before the Vatican, and it has ladies' rooms.

ARTHUR

It had women, too.

DOREEN

Why didn't Eric come with you?

LORIN

He's home packing. He's flying out to San Francisco tomorrow. He'll be on your flight. It's a little surprise for Denise. He hasn't told her he's coming.

DOREEN

Oh, dear—

LORIN

What? I thought you liked Eric.

DOREEN

Of course I do. I always have. It was I who introduced him to Denise.

ARTHUR

Are you making this up?

DOREEN

Honestly, Arthur. Why would I make it up? The day after Ben's heart attack, Denise began pushing me to meet new people. You know how she is about lighting a fire under people.

ARTHUR

My God – when you told me you had little Ben cremated, I didn't think you meant that it was Denise who lit the match.

DOREEN

Arthur, I had a very, very nice service for Ben –

ARTHUR

Where – on your patio? And what did you use for an urn – a pickle jar? You're worse than Lola Macready. *(Sings)* "Baby, let me light your fire – Baby, let me light your fire—"

DOREEN

Will you please not go on? I cried for hours after the service was over.

ARTHUR

The memory of your last time together wasn't of consolation to you?

DOREEN

You callous, sarcastic—

LORIN

What happened the last time you were together with your husband?

ARTHUR

It was a play-off between "*Last Tango in Paris*" and "*Brief Encounter*." You still haven't told us what you did with the little fella's ashes.

DOREEN

They were placed in an urn by the undertaker. All I remember is that the top didn't fit properly. I couldn't get it closed once I'd opened it.

LORIN

What did you open it for?

DOREEN

To say good-bye – privately, I mean.

ARTHUR

Did you get a response, or did a Genie appear and grant you three wishes?

LORIN

And thus, Doreen met Eric. All three of her wishes were the same as mine would have been.

DOREEN

That is not how I met Eric. I was home working on my taxes when the doorbell rang. I opened it and voila: there he was. He had the most adorable smile and he was wearing the cutest pair of short pants.

ARTHUR

I see. He was a boy scout.

DOREEN

He was a U.P.S. driver – but he was irresistible and turned out to be every bit as precocious as you were at his age.

ARTHUR

In my prime, I never once went around sleeping with older women. I've only done that lately. I don't believe you and I refuse to listen to another word.

DOREEN

Would you like me to tell you on which cheek he has a tattoo of Cupid? With the cutest wink.

LORIN

Pity about the bow and quiver, though—Eric claims the artist was distracted.

DOREEN

I can believe that.

ARTHUR

You're disgusting, both of you. You're like the people I used to read about in Newsday who went to those sordid parties at Studio 54. Liza Minnelli and Halston, Bianca Jagger and—

LORIN

—Andy Warhol. What wonderful times those were. No wonder we all need therapy to stay in the now.

DOREEN

Speaking of the present, Lorin, are you certain about Denise and Eric? Even though she's my sister, she does have her dark side.

LORIN

True, but at least she can tell a friend from a duck. Anyway, there's nothing to worry about. We've made an agreement about sharing Eric. We're each going to have him for six months out of the year but, As Denise pointed out, since he plays for both sides, we're going to allow him long weekends off so he can stay in practice. Are you really going home tomorrow?

DOREEN

I am. I have all these appointments Denise made for me. Doctors, dentists—

LORIN

In that case, why don't we take you out to dinner tonight?

ARTHUR

It's a nice idea, Lorin, but I think we'll take a rain check – maybe just defrost something in the freezer.

LORIN

Are you kidding? No self-respecting third-world country would accept the food in your refrigerator. And why should Doreen cook on her one night here? We'll pick you up at six-thirty, have a quick dinner someplace and then you can come back here and we'll go home and watch "Dancing with the Stars."

DOREEN

We'll see you later, then. (*SHE kisses his cheek and LORIN exits*) He is so sweet and he takes such good care of you. (*Shakes broken vase box*) No need to open this now. It's in pieces.

ARTHUR

I truly am sorry. How can I make it up to you?

DOREEN

(*Laughing*) You can start by getting that leer off your face. You're as randy as a schoolboy.

ARTHUR

(*Kissing her*) I've really missed you this time. Perhaps when I get back, then—

DOREEN

You're going someplace?

ARTHUR

It's Wednesday.

DOREEN

I'm sorry. I almost forgot. How is Robyn coming along with the investigation?

ARTHUR

It's in limbo for the moment. She and Spencer flew to St. Kitts for a second honeymoon of sorts. Incidentally, I called Denise after you told me what happened in Venice. She says it isn't true and you're perfectly find. You made it all up because you've found somebody else.

DOREEN

Why would she say such a thing? You didn't really call Denise, did you?

ARTHUR

I was concerned. I reached Denise on her business line. You're absolutely right: she does have a young voice on the telephone. If I didn't know who I was speaking to, I might have given her *my* credit card and had a much better morning. Where did you meet him?

DOREEN

Where did I meet *whom*? Arthur, I do *not* pick up men.

ARTHUR

I'm sorry, I was forgetting Eric. I should have said boys.

DOREEN

If this vase wasn't already broken –

ARTHUR

I'm just trying to get you to smile and put away that brave face you've been wearing since I met you at the airport. That's it. Come sit down— I'd like nothing better than to sit here and hold you forever.

DOREEN

I'd like that. I'm sorry if my call upset you yesterday.

ARTHUR

It did, but only for a moment – until I reminded myself nothing in the world would ever be found get up there without your permission.

DOREEN

Damned right, Buster. Thank you for making me laugh.

ARTHUR

Shall we just sit quietly for a couple of moments? Then I'll carry your bags up to the bedroom and move my things into the spare.

DOREEN

Why? I'm only here for one night. Wouldn't you rather—?

ARTHUR

I thought you might be more comfortable—

DOREEN

Without you holding me? All I could think of was coming back to you— There's just one thing— I hate to ask but, before you picked me up at the airport; you didn't take any Viagra or that other stuff, did you?

ARTHUR

Well, I—

DOREEN

Arthur—

END OF SCENE

SCENE FOUR
Kenwood Manor – Later that evening.

(Downstage right, ERIC is speaking on the telephone.)

ERIC

What time do you get in to JFK, Denise? ... That early? No, that's okay.... All we're doing tonight is going over to Arthur's to watch an old war movie. I'll probably fall asleep... I think it's called "From Here to There," or "From Here to Someplace." – Something like that. I wanted to stay home and watch "Dancing with the Stars" but Lorin insisted. Anyway, it's with Burt and Debbie Reynolds and it's one of Arthur's favorites.... She wasn't married to Burt Reynolds? But she was in the picture, right?....Deborah who? Wasn't she Lassie's mom on TV? Okay, I'll see you tomorrow... Of course I can find JFK. I wish you'd flown back with me three months ago so we could have gone to Fire Island.... I know, but you could have asked Edward Winegarten to put your dog to sleep. He offered the last time it bit him

(Lights cross-fade to ARTHUR's living room, where DOREEN and ERIC are seated on the sofa. ARTHUR is in his reading chair, with a remote control in his hand. LORIN is slicing a pound cake at the counter.)

ARTHUR

Is that, or is that not, the greatest war movie ever made?

LORIN

It's a great love story, but I don't like Pearl Harbour movies. We always get the crap beat out of us.

ERIC

But that's the way it was, right? I mean the whole Viet Nam thing sucked, didn't it?

DOREEN

Just for clarification purposes, Eric – No, never mind. I can help you, Lorin, as soon as I untangle myself from your friend here. *(SHE removes his arm from behind her)*. There, sit still and be a good boy and I'll let you know when it's time for your next feeding.

LORIN

Eric Ryder – You were touching both of us – not just me?

ERIC

How many times do I have to explain? I have a wide stance – like what's-his-name.

ARTHUR

What exactly were you trying to do with my fiancée, Mr. Ryder? Sir?

ERIC

Let me explain. You know the beach scene, where the waves are crashing over them while they make love? Well, I was sitting between Lorin and Doreen and I had this fantasy – about being in the middle –

DOREEN

Don't go getting angry, dear. Remember the first time we saw "*From Here to Eternity*," and what you did with your Raisinets?

ERIC

It's not as if we didn't know each other from before. Lorin started it. He kept rubbing his knee against my leg and I got excited.

ARTHUR

Let me see if I've got this. Lorin gets you aroused, so you reach for the nearest little old lady in the room—

LORIN

Who's next? Arthur?

ERIC

C'mon, Lorin. You know how it is with women.

DOREEN

I don't think Lorin will find that a plausible explanation, Eric. Go back to where you had a wide stance —

ERIC

Why would I be interested in Arthur? He's a man. (*As LORIN marches off into the kitchen*) Lorin, I meant that as a compliment. Nobody expects Arthur and Doreen to fool around the way we do – or Denise

ARTHUR

Why should we break something just to please you?

ERIC

Exactly, you don't need to experiment. You love one another.

DOREEN

God, you really are young. How do you know that each time we do it, it *isn't* an experiment?

ROBYN

(*Entering*) Sorry I'm late. We knew the jury wouldn't be out long so we all decided to wait around. I must say, you all look so cozy – like a pride of lions. I wish I'd thought to bring along fresh meat.

LORIN

We're just going to have dessert. Would you like coffee or tea?

ROBYN

Tea, please.

DOREEN

Robyn, that dress is stunning. You look just like a Vogue model.

ROBYN

Thank you. It's my closing statement dress. You know the old joke "How do you get to Carnegie Hall?"

LORIN

Practice, Practice—

ROBYN

And how do you get to an all-male jury? Cleavage, Cleavage. I leaned so far over into the jury-box when I was making my summation; the foreman's glasses fogged up. And my client was found not guilty. Daddy Dearest, I've some great news. You and I are going on a road trip next week.

ARTHUR

Oh?

ROBYN

We're flying to Washington next Thursday. We have a meeting with their lawyers.

ERIC

Is the condo association still hounding your father about that dead chicken?

ROBYN

It's about David. The army has agreed to meet with us informally next week.

ARTHUR

This Thursday? That's awfully sudden, isn't it? Are you prepared?

ROBYN

Of course I'm prepared. Spencer has even offered to go with us.

ARTHUR

It's nice of Spencer to offer, but this really isn't the sort of case he has experience with?

ROBYN

We're going to need all the help we can get, and Spencer thinks he may be able to interest his firm in supporting us.

ARTHUR

But, Robyn — have you considered —?

ROBYN

Okay, dad— What is it? Why are you stalling?

ARTHUR

I am not stalling. For one thing, I don't know if I'm free next week. I'm going to have to look at my calendar. I seem to recall a luncheon engagement with Margery Mason on Thursday—

DOREEN

The woman who shot her husband at some motel? What on earth for?

ARTHUR

Poor Margery— Her new teeth still aren't ready and she's been stuck at home for weeks, eating baby food. She's asked me to find someplace where she can pick the food apart with her hands.

ROBYN

Dad, this is way more important than having lunch with some murderess.

ARTHUR

What do you mean? *You* do it all the time –

ROBYN

The army's agreed to a preliminary investigation. There's no way we can get out of this meeting.

ARTHUR

Can't you ask for a postponement?

ROBYN

Why in the world would I do that? After all the time it's taken us to get this far?

ERIC

You don't stop a war because of one fallen soldier. My dad used to say that.

LORIN

Huh? Eric, why are you still back with *From Here to Eternity*?

ERIC

No, but I'm thinking about it. You told me David was a hero – and we just sat here and watched a whole bunch of them get killed. Heroes don't get killed without somebody doing something. If we just sit around and do nothing, who's left to win the war?

ROBYN

Thank you, Eric. I hope you were listening, Dad. You know as well as I do, David didn't just walk out of his barracks that night and accidentally step on a mine.

ARTHUR

Nobody is sure what happened that night. Not even that man you went to see in Philadelphia.

ROBYN

He said David was in a confused state when he left. He was running from someone –

DOREEN

Running from – from what?

LORIN

I can tell you. It all started because of the letters David and I wrote to one another. We couldn't say everything we wanted to in a phone call, so we wrote – sometimes just silly private jokes. He had a nickname for me. He called me "Whaley." I have no idea why – little details get lost, the longer you're apart. But I was "Whaley" and he was "Boze." Not Bozo, because he was only half insane: "Boze" (*Beat*) I don't remember which one of us made the mistake first, but we began signed our letter, "Love, David" or "Love, Lorin." Stupid, stupid, stupid – but we weren't thinking. I wrote it on the bottom of a funny postcard I sent to him and he left it on top of his laptop where this guy in his company saw it. He asked David about the postcard and began teasing him. Most of the other guys in his company didn't care, but there are always those few. It went on for months. A couple of times it got physical. The guy wouldn't let him alone – all because of my stupid mistake.

ROBYN

Lorin, sweetie, please don't blame yourself like that –

LORIN

Nothing would have happened if I hadn't written that one stupid word. Love. Oscar Wilde says "Each man kills the thing he loves." Well, he should know, he's the expert. One stupid four-letter word. I've never said this before, Robyn, but if you really want David's killer, he's right here in this room. Maybe I should be happy that your father's too self-involved to see that his son gets justice.

ARTHUR

What is it you both want from me? Wasn't it enough to have to let those two officers come to see me? To have them standing here, in this room, telling me things my brain could never let in? Isn't it enough that I can't fall asleep at night or wake up in the morning without remembering – and seeing bits and pieces of my son put into a body bag?

ROBYN

(Softly) He was murdered, Dad. Your son – my brother – was murdered. He didn't just trip and fall on that device – he never even saw it. He was running from someone, looking over his shoulder, not at where he was headed. Whoever the person was chasing him, he has to be found and brought to justice. What don't you understand about that?

ARTHUR

(Turning away from them) Stop pushing me – Just *stop*. I don't *care* who it was. I don't— *Did you hear me? I don't care.* I don't have my son anymore and nothing either of you does or says can bring him back to me. I care about my son, not the man who destroyed him. I don't give a crap if he's caught. What will his sentence be: seven years – three? How does that help *me*? Whoever he is, he's already thrown his soul into the inferno. I don't care what happens to such a person. I can't.

LORIN

And you never will – not as long as you keep going to the cemetery and trying to turn David's and Marion's graves into your own private Garden of Eden. What exactly does planting bulbs or pulling up weeds do for you? You can't find either of them – or talk to either of them – because they're not where you want them to be. They're locked away in the deepest recesses of your heart and you have blindly, stupidly lost the key. Or maybe you threw it away so they couldn't interfere with your distorted sense of reality. Better to keep hurting yourself – and Robyn – and me that come to terms with your grief. I call that plain and simple arrogance.

ARTHUR

My son is with me every moment. Do you hear me? Every moment – and that's where he'll be for as long as I live. I don't *want* this stupid case to go forward. I don't. I want to protect my son's name, which neither of you seems to care about. At least when Christ was crucified, *His* Father was able to raise him up and keep him by His side. I can't do that. I can't put the pieces of my son back together. All I can do is to protect his name. I will not have that taken from him. Today, he's called a hero, even the army calls him hero. But dealing with the military is not like defending one of your crazy little housewives in the Suffolk County District Court. You don't know what you're letting yourself in for.

ROBYN

Damn it, Dad. Why couldn't you just say you didn't trust me?

ARTHUR

I *do* trust you and I know what a good attorney you are, and I love you – with all my heart. But you're going up against a system that, if you lose, will be forced to destroy your brother's name. Not because they want to, but because they have to – to protect the system. Whether it's the Armed Forces, or a political party, or a PTA group, the system must be protected at all costs. The system cares only about itself: protecting itself, enlarging itself, destroying any other system or thing that could threaten it. I don't want your brother's death labeled a case of aggravated assault or anything else they may choose to come up with. I don't want anyone claiming he brought it on himself. I won't have it. David was a soldier and a brave one. I will never permit anyone to say one word against my boy. It would be like killing him a second time.

DOREEN

But if it can save some other man's son—?

ARTHUR

I don't care. I had one son. One. Do you understand?

DOREEN

But it isn't right, Arthur—

ARTHUR

What isn't right? Who are you to tell me what's right and wrong? You have three sons. I had only one. Why couldn't it have been one of yours?

L.ORIN

Jesus, Arthur –

DOREEN

(Turning to go) Will you all please excuse me?

ARTHUR

(Moving towards her) Doreen, I was only – It was a bad choice of words –

DOREEN

Don't you come near me.

ARTHUR

Doreen, please—

DOREEN

Stay away from me, I said. Lorin, I'll only be a few minutes. Then, could you drive me to the station?

LORIN

Sure. Maybe you should go out on the terrace for a few minutes, Arthur.

ERIC

Yeah. The lady's asked you to leave.

ROBYN

Dad, just give Doreen a few minutes. Go now.

(ARTHUR looks from one to the other and sees THEY are united against him. HE exits thru the French doors.)

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