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*Have a Nice
Doomsday*
An End of the World Comedy
by
Kevin McGovern

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Have a Nice Doomsday

by Kevin McGovern

CAST OF CHARACTERS

4W / 5M

NEIL MONROE: *A reasonable man trying to live a reasonable life, most unreasonably.*

JOANN MONROE: *Neil's wife; a life-loving good soldier.*

GARY UNDERWOOD: *A principled but hard-driven man, to offer the euphemistic description.*

DEIDRE UNDERWOOD: *Gary's wife; a durable woman with a desire to enjoy life, an occasional challenge as Gary's wife.*

STEVE WINKLER: *An earnest young man with good intentions, weak eyes and strong concerns.*

SHELLEY MEADOWS: *Steve's fiancée; a pink rose with the requisite thorns.*

FREIDA WINKLER: *Steve's mother.*

MAX HIRSCHFIELD: *Neil's friend and former coworker.*

A YOUNG MAN: *Soon to be The Eternal Light Society's Employee of the Year.*

SCENE

An American middle-class suburban home.

TIME

Later than you think.

SCENE BREAKDOWN

ACT I: *Early afternoon on Thanksgiving Day.*

ACT II: *Scene 1; A little later that afternoon.
Scene 2; Late that evening.*

ACT III: *Scene 1; The next day.
Scene 2; Two days later.*

Have a Nice Doomsday
by Kevin McGovern

ACT I

SETTING: The suburban middle-class home of Neil and Joann Monroe, modest but nice. Dominating STAGE RIGHT: a dining area with a table winged out to full size. At STAGE LEFT: a living area, with a couch and a couple of chairs around a coffee table, before a television (facing upstage), some lamps. UC is the front door, UR the entrance to the kitchen, and between this and the door, a window admitting an outside view. UL, beyond a coat closet is a hall entrance into the rest of the house and at SL, an alcove to a basement entrance. DC: a phone on a small table. The dining table is adorned with a tablecloth and place mats.

AT RISE: NEIL is standing at the phone with the receiver to his ear, waiting, as JOANN enters from the kitchen with a stack of plates. NEIL glances around to see JOANN setting the plates on the mats.

NEIL

I'll help you with that...

JOANN

It's all right.

JOANN exits back to the kitchen as NEIL hangs up.

NEIL

There's no answer anyway.

JOANN

(Calling from kitchen) What was that?

NEIL

(*Louder*) I said there's no answer. They must be on their way.

JOANN

(*Entering with silverware, napkins*) Satisfied now?

NEIL

(*Beat*) That depends on your definition.

JOANN

(*Setting silverware, etc.*) The nerve of them, leaving you with nothing to worry about.

NEIL

I like to have information, that's all.

JOANN

Honey, I've got plenty of stress for both of us. Why don't you try to relax for both of us, okay?

NEIL

(*As JOANN crosses to UL to hall, exiting*) I guess you don't think it's possible they could've been considering a change of plans.

JOANN

(*Calling in*) Nope.

NEIL

Why not, exactly?

JOANN

(*Returning with a becoming autumn-hued centerpiece*) Because Deidre knows what would happen if she had planned a Thanksgiving dinner for six weeks and anyone thought of not coming at the last minute.

NEIL

What about Gary?

JOANN

(*Setting centerpiece on table, positioning, primping it*) Gary is irrelevant. In social situations, the woman has control.

NEIL

I'm glad you have this figured out.

JOANN

Major social events focus the mind. (*Standing back and surveying*) What do you think?

NEIL

(Looking, nods) Very nice.

JOANN

(Playfully “disappointed”) Considering the source, that's a gush I suppose.

NEIL

What do you want me to say?

JOANN

Well—you could say...My, darling!—that new tablecloth you bought sets off that dinnerware so beautifully...!

NEIL

Didn't we cover that under “very nice”?

JOANN makes a “crazy” face, grabbing at NEIL's neck, and HE smiles, taking her hands and holding them.

NEIL, *Continued*

Will you take it easy? Everything is going to be great.

JOANN

I know, but Neil, do me a favor and act a little happy and excited when everybody gets here...?

NEIL

(Chuckling) I am happy and excited...

JOANN

Well make an extra effort to let it show, okay? *(Giving the table a final primp)* These are our two best old friends and our two best new friends and I want today to be something special for all of us.

NEIL

It will be. Trust me. I'm a sloppy sentimentalist.

NEIL's attention returns to the television.

JOANN

If that means you don't do it well, I have to agree. *(Noting HIM, and looking to the television)* Why don't you turn that up?

NEIL

You said it was bothering you.

JOANN

(Exiting to kitchen) I said I didn't think it was conducive to a holiday mood, but if you're going to have it on, there's no point in trying to read lips.

Getting the television remote, NEIL brings up the audio.

NEWSPERSON'S VOICE

...other reports coming in now from observatories in South America, Europe and Japan, all confirming the asteroid's course. One which will, according to agreed-upon calculations, bring it across the Earth's orbital path at a close enough range to make collision at least a possibility; perhaps, it is beginning to appear, a strong one. Joining us now from the Kitt Peak National Observatory in Tucson, Arizona...

JOANN has come back in, and NEIL, having noticed HER, has brought the television down again.

JOANN

You can watch it.

NEIL

There's nothing new to hear. What I already know isn't going to help my digestion as it is.

JOANN

(Pulling a chair out at the table to sit down) Dear, do you want to have an argument about this or is it my imagination?

NEIL

I don't want to have an argument. I don't understand why you don't seem to be concerned at all about what's happening; it's an intellectual puzzle to me.

JOANN

I don't know. Maybe my memory is just better than yours. Remember the big meteor shower that was supposed to dazzle everybody last month? If they'd predicted a lot of sleepy people with stiff necks, they'd have been right.

NEIL

I know, but do you hear what they're saying about this...?

JOANN

Neil, these news channels are on twenty-four hours a day—they have to fill the time with *something*. *(Massaging the back of her neck)* Next week they'll be ruining Christmas by telling us how much cholesterol there is in eggnog.

NEIL

You look tired already. Why don't you take a break and get dressed? I'll watch the food.

JOANN

You have to do more than watch it.

NEIL

I'll take care of it. Go on. *(As JOANN rises)* You're not hosting a convention of gourmands, you know. Max comes closest, and as much as he enjoys eating, I don't imagine he has much time to dwell on the quality of the food.

JOANN

(Crossing UL) Mr. Hirschfield was your idea; you can settle up for whatever happens with him.

NEIL

You're gonna love Max. He's got a story for every day of his life.

JOANN

As long as he doesn't have any about this one. *(Pausing to gesture toward kitchen—)*

NEIL

(Watching television) Baste.

JOANN raises a mild thumbs-up, and exits into the hallway. NEIL uses the remote to bring up the television audio again, watching intently.

INTERVIEWEE VOICE

...were recording observations as long as a month ago, but it was thought that, uhm... perhaps there was no need to release the information unless and until an impact situation seemed to be forming as a real possibility...

NEWSPERSON'S VOICE

To avoid panic if it wasn't necessary—?

INTERVIEWEE VOICE

Well, yes, and to avoid a lot of premature speculation, which would have served little purpose...

NEIL

(Over audio) Served little purpose. These guys must all live alone.

The doorbell rings. Responding, NEIL turns off the television, and goes to the door and opens it, pleased to see GARY and DEIDRE enter.

NEIL

H-e-y-y-y-y...!

GARY

Hey-y-y, how ya' doin', pal?

NEIL

(Shaking hands with GARY) O-h-h, it takes a little longer to tell these days. Hi, Deidre—

DEIDRE

(Hugging with NEIL as GARY closes door) Hel-lo, sweetums; how's my baby been—?

NEIL

Pretty much the same; just trying to behave—

DEIDRE

Oh well you cut that out now—!

NEIL

(Waiting for coats) So how are you guys? Doing okay?

GARY

(Calling up a “light tone”) Yeah; yeah. Doing great.

NEIL

(Observing GARY, chuckles) Say, you couldn't help me out here and sound a little merrier than that, could you? *(Taking coats)* I've been put in charge of good cheer today. If we're not all acting like the Von Trapps on grass, I'm responsible.

DEIDRE

Oh he'll loosen up, Neil. It was cold in the car, wasn't it, dear? *(Getting comfortable)*

GARY

(Also sitting) W-well, it's nice and warm now, Dee. Did you notice that? I did.

Observing, NEIL betrays a slight sense of something being amiss, but renews his smile, going to the closet with the coats.

NEIL

At least you didn't get hit by any asteroids coming over.

DEIDRE

Oh what garbage.

NEIL

That's Jo's opinion too. I was trying to call you two for a second opinion but you were too brave for me.

GARY

We didn't figure you'd changed *your* plans...

DEIDRE

Is everybody else still coming?

NEIL

Nobody's indicated otherwise. Steve and Shelley were going to announce their engagement today!—I hope this isn't a bad omen for them. I don't think I was supposed to tell you that, either. Oh well. Two bad omens. Who wants a drink?

DEIDRE

(Eyeing NEIL "provocatively") Got anything...strong and sweet?

NEIL

(Playing back) Mmmmm—I can manage.

DEIDRE

I'll bet you can.

NEIL

(Exiting to kitchen) Gary, I'm going to steal your wife, if that's okay.

DEIDRE

(Calling) Oh, just make him an offer, Neil. He's very reasonable. *(Smiling to see JOANN, who has just entered UR)* Well hi, girlfriend! *(Rising)*

JOANN

Hi! Happy Thanksgiving! *(Meeting DEIDRE for a hug)* Hi, Gary. You look great!

GARY

Thanks. You, too.

JOANN

You guys better be hungry. I've got a turkey out there that must have died from obesity.

DEIDRE

I'm going to eat something—!

GARY

And me without a camera.

*As DEIDRE's mood is interrupted
JOANN takes notice,*

NEIL

(Calling from kitchen) Jo? What happened to the sherry?

JOANN

(Calling back) I used some of it.

NEIL

(Stepping in with a mostly drained bottle) Some of it? There's about a glass left here.

JOANN

We have more wine, dear.

NEIL

(Noticing something out window) There's Max. Say, Gary, would you mind pulling your car up a little farther? We're gonna need some more room out there.

DEIDRE

I told him to pull up farther.

GARY

(Rising) No. You asked me if I thought I was up far enough and I said yes.

DEIDRE

Which meant: I don't think you're up far enough.

GARY

O-o-h-h, I forgot to read your mind again. Sorry.

*GARY exits to outside, leaving a slightly
tense room, and a quietly controlled
DEIDRE.*

DEIDRE

Neil... would you mind getting Gary's jacket for me. I need the car keys out of his pocket.

Exchanging a quick look with JOANN, NEIL goes into the closet, comes out with a set of keys, walks over and hands them to DEIDRE.

DEIDRE

Thank you.

DEIDRE exits to outside. NEIL turns and looks at JOANN, who is looking back.

NEIL

What...is going on here?

JOANN

I was going to ask you! Did something happen?

NEIL

I don't know, but man, this has been since they walked in the door...

JOANN

I talked with Deidre yesterday and she sounded fine. Do you think they didn't want to come?

NEIL

Well then why not say so? They can always be honest with us, Jo. They know that.

JOANN

So what do we do?

NEIL

(Thoughtful beat) Leave it alone. That's my vote. You know how they are, Jo. They flare up about things, they forget about it five minutes later. If we get involved, we...might make it worse than it is.

JOANN

Neil, if anything happens to ruin this day...

NEIL

Honey, everything is going to be fine. Don't worry.

The doorbell sounds. NEIL opens the door and MAX enters, wearing a dress coat and bearing a bottle of wine, GARY and DEIDRE coming in behind HIM.

NEIL

Max! Glad you could make it; happy Thanksgiving!

MAX

Is it Thanksgiving already? I was hoping you were throwing me an un-retirement party.

NEIL

Y-yeah—all that rest and relaxation must be killing you. He still thinks he can bluff me.

MAX

If this is bluffing, I'm the Mississippi Gambler. (*Presenting the bottle*) Chardonnay. It called out to me—unless the Chablis was throwing its voice.

NEIL

(*Taking wine*) A-a-h, reinforcements. Dee, we're saved. (*Exiting to kitchen*)

MAX

(*Observing JOANN, smiling*) If you aren't Joann, I'll be terribly disappointed.

JOANN

Hi. I've heard so much about you, too.

MAX

I'll daringly take that as a compliment.

JOANN

(*Gesturing to the OTHERS*) This is Gary and Deidre Underwood...

MAX

I met them coming in; we're old friends already.

JOANN

Make yourselves comfortable. I'll try not to be a negligent hostess but I've got a bird out here that could drink a camel under the water table. (*Exiting to kitchen*)

MAX

(*Toward JOANN*) Well first things first! (*As HE, GARY and DEIDRE find seats*) Don't you love Thanksgiving? People coming together in a timeless spirit of warmth and friendship to eat until they explode. There's something so American about it.

GARY

I *heard* you knew how to appreciate a good meal, Max.

MAX

(*To DEIDRE*) You married a man of euphemism. I eat too much is what he's saying.

GARY

N-n-o no no. Anyway, this is the one day when an appetite comes in handy, right?

DEIDRE

So Neil was saying you're retired?

MAX

Speaking of euphemisms.

GARY

What is "retired" a euphemism for?

MAX

Being declared obsolete.

DEIDRE

Oh it can't be that bad.

MAX

I don't know how you're supposed to get used to it. Every day you got up and went to a productive job. Now you get up and look out the window. The only decision you can make is which window.

DEIDRE

You just have to learn how to use the time in different ways now. Are you married?

MAX

I was. For twenty-nine years, to the best job God ever did on a woman. When she passed on, I was sure nobody could ever replace her, and damn me, I'm always right.

NEIL

(Entering with a glass of wine) Is he bellyaching out here? Come on, Max—you used to cheer *me* up at the office. *(Handing glass to DEIDRE)*

GARY

I'll switch with you, Max. It'd be great not to have to work.

DEIDRE

Oh listen to this. He never stops working!

MAX

(To GARY) What do you do?

GARY

I've got my own business. Underwoods? Home and garden supplies...?

The doorbell rings as JOANN is coming out of the kitchen, and SHE goes to open the door.

MAX

Oh—that's right. You're the Underwood in the sign—

GARY

That's me.

MAX

You look different in person. Not so flat.

JOANN

Hel-lo-o. Come i-in...!

*STEVE and SHELLEY enter, all smiles.
MAX rises; GARY as well.*

JOANN

How are both of you...?

SHELLEY

Great, great.

JOANN

Everybody, this is Steve and Shelley. (*Hellos exchanged*) This is Deidre, Gary, and Max.

SHELLEY

(*Removing her coat*) My, what a nice home you have.

JOANN

Thank you.

NEIL

Thank Steve. (*Taking coats*) Right, buddy?

STEVE

All I did was paint some walls. Not that I didn't do it well, thanks to my fabulous backhand.

NEIL

Steve painted this whole house after we moved in. (*Goes to closet with coats*)

DEIDRE

Really?

Some GUESTS drift back to their seats.

STEVE

Too much credit. I had plenty of help from the owners; anyway, they just needed somebody cheap.

JOANN

O-h-h, but good, too—!

NEIL

And who doesn't talk about what a great tennis player he is while he's working. We got two out of three. (*Winking to STEVE*)

STEVE

I just happened to mention that Shell and I were an invincible doubles team. They decided they had to prove us wrong.

SHELLEY

Which they haven't done yet, just for the record. And because there's no point in being good if you can't brag about it.

Above some chuckles, a siren issues from outside, drawing some attention as it intensifies a little, then passes.

DEIDRE

Oh my. Somebody ate too fast.

STEVE

More likely a car accident if you want my guess.

GARY

Why do you say that?

STEVE

I'm not a nervous driver, but I'll tell you...we were almost lucky to make it over here.

SHELLEY

Oh, honey, don't exaggerate...

STEVE

What do you mean, exaggerate? You saw it too—!

NEIL

Saw what?

STEVE

People were uhm...just driving crazy. Speeding, running red lights; somebody passed a stopped car on a berm...

DEIDRE

You'll see stuff like that all the time.

STEVE

I know, but...this was different. It's hard to describe.

SHELLEY

That's not what spooked me, though. It was all those people standing outside looking at that...thing in the sky...

NEIL

(Grabbed) What thing? You mean the asteroid...?

SHELLEY

I guess that must be what it is...

GARY

Wait a minute. You mean you can see it?

STEVE

Yeah—barely. It's just a little white dot. *(Looking at window; stepping to it)* Here—maybe you can, uhm...

GARY follows STEVE to the window with interest; NEIL, concernedly curious, gives a look to JOANN and steps to the window also and looks where STEVE is pointing, GARY looking also, the two exchanging words.

JOANN

(To OTHERS in the room) How could you see it during the day?

DEIDRE

(Shrugging) You can see the moon during the day...

SHELLEY

He said, do you think people are getting worked up about this? I said *I* don't know...

DEIDRE

Why get worked up? What's going to happen is going to happen; that's my philosophy.

JOANN

(Observes DEIDRE) Since when?

DEIDRE looks back at JOANN as GARY comes back from the window and STEVE moves toward the door.

GARY

Hey, everybody, we're gonna go take a look at this thing for a minute...

STEVE and GARY start to exit outside as MAX rises.

SHELLEY

Steve, don't take people outside; we're going to eat...

STEVE

He just wants to see it, hun. We'll be right back in.

STEVE exits behind GARY as NEIL heads for the door.

JOANN

Neil—?

NEIL

(Pausing with a shrug) I'll be right back in. I'm curious.

NEIL exits, and JOANN and SHELLEY observe each other as MAX steps for the door.

MAX

I'm not that curious but I'm starting to feel lonely. *(Exiting)*

SHELLEY

(Mildly exasperated) All right. I'll drag fearless leader in and the rest of the squad should follow. *(Exits)*

DEIDRE

(Rising; setting glass down) Maybe we should've planned a cookout, huh? *(Crossing for door)* Well, come on. Let's all be curious.

JOANN

You know, I am. Not about dots in the sky, though. *(DEIDRE stops, waiting)* What's going on between you and Gary?

DEIDRE

(*Beat*) Not much lately. Answer your question?

JOANN

(*Beat*) No.

DEIDRE

(*Beat*) It's a little lengthy for right now, buddy. I'll write you a letter. Or maybe a book.
(*Crosses DS for her glass*)

JOANN

Dee, where did this come from all of a sudden? We were at the lake in August for five days and there wasn't a problem in sight. You two seemed as happy as...*you* two!

DEIDRE

(*Picking up glass*) We have our better days. That and a little bit of acting goes a long way.
(*Draining remaining wine*)

JOANN

So who has the act been for? Us?

DEIDRE

Why should we depress you with our problems?

JOANN

If you can't depress your friends, who *can* you depress? Come on, Dee—you know us too well.

DEIDRE

(*Pause*) Jo, do you ever wonder how well you know anybody?

STEVE enters from outside, looking preoccupied, followed by the OTHERS; as DEIDRE takes her glass into the kitchen, STEVE turns on the television, and OTHERS join HIM to watch.

NEWSPERSON'S VOICE

...that you are now seeing. We have received independent reports from the Palomar observatory in California, and the Smithsonian observatory at Cambridge, both offering estimates of the size of the object, at anywhere from one hundred to three hundred miles in diameter...

The television audio "plays low" under the dialogue.

STEVE

Look. They've got a shot of it.

SHELLEY

Is it that close?

GARY

No. It's that big!

DEIDRE comes back in.

NEIL

They're using a telephoto lens. It's probably a million miles away.

DEIDRE

What are we doing? Watching TV?

GARY

Do you see this?

DEIDRE

Yeah, I see it. Let's eat.

STEVE

Neil, do you mind if I use your phone?

NEIL

No. Go ahead.

STEVE goes to the phone, picks it up and punches as SHELLEY steps near to HIM.

SHELLEY

Who are you calling—as if I didn't know.

STEVE

I just want to see if she's all right, Shell.

SHELLEY

Why wouldn't she be?

STEVE

Are you kidding? With all this going on?

SHELLEY

Nobody's as worked up about it as you are...

STEVE

You wanna bet? Check out the guy next door.

NEIL's attention is caught by this as SHELLEY glances once toward the window.

SHELLEY

What about him?

STEVE

He's loading everything in his house into the biggest SUV I've ever seen. *(As NEIL drifts to the window to look next door)* Mom? It's Steve. How are you doing? *(A slightly irritated reaction)* I don't know, Mom. That's why I called. *(Pause)* She's not?

SHELLEY

What's wrong?

STEVE

Hazel isn't coming over. What, Mom? *(Listens, then to SHELLEY)* She doesn't want to go out. *(Into phone)* So what are you going to do? *(Pause)* Mom, you can't do that...

SHELLEY

What's she going to do?

STEVE

(Lightly mocking) "Open a can of tuna, I guess..."

JOANN

Well does she... *(STEVE and SHELLEY observe)* Does she want to come over here? We've got plenty of food.

STEVE

(Back to receiver) Mom, how would you like to come over here? *(Beat)* To the Monroes' *(Pause)* No, it wouldn't. They just invited you. *(Pause)* Okay. I'll pick you up. *(Pause)* No, it's okay. I'll be there in, I don't know—fifteen, twenty minutes— *(Pause)* That's okay, if you're not ready, I'll wait for you. *(Pause)* Okay. Bye now. *(Pause)* Bye, Mom. *(Pause)* Mom. I'm hanging up now. *(Hangs up, regards JOANN and NEIL)* I'm sorry. Her friend's not coming over; she'd be there all by herself—

JOANN

It's fine, Steve; she's more than welcome...

NEIL

Sure. It's just another plate.

STEVE

(Getting his coat) Well...I should be back in half an hour or so.

SHELLEY

Do you want me to go with you?

STEVE

Oh—no. I'm being rude enough already; you stay here.

As STEVE is bundling up to exit, and GARY trying some other television channels.

NEIL

Dinner postponed half an hour, folks.

DEIDRE

You'll be hearing from my stomach's attorneys.

MAX

If we watch this nonsense for half an hour, nobody will be able to eat.

JOANN

I agree. Put on a parade or something.

GARY

I hope your second choice is asteroid coverage. That's all we got here.

NEIL

You're kidding.

GARY

I wish. Look.

OTHERS gather toward television, looking.

JOANN

That's the two people who were covering the Macy's parade, isn't it?

NEIL

I wonder how they got that shot of the asteroid behind them like that?

SHELLEY

Her coat is so pretty.

DEIDRE

I'd take the hat off and shoot it, though.

The phone rings. NEIL answers it.

NEIL

Hello. *(Beat)* Hello, Frank. *(Pause)* W-we're going to eat soon. What are you going to do? *(Beat)* Why would I be kidding? *(Pause)* Yes—we've all been watching it on TV. *(Listens, growing puzzled)* The mountains? Why? *(Pause)* A tidal wave? Frank... *(Interrupted, listens dutifully, somewhat perplexed)* Frank...what if you go to the mountains and then it comes down there? *(Pause)* No, I'm not trying to make you crazy...! *(Still listening, disengages emotionally from conversation)* Okay, well...thanks for the offer, Frank, but I think we'll take our chances here...uh-huh...good luck to you, too. *(Hangs up)*

JOANN

What's he doing...?

NEIL

He's, uhm... “heading for high ground.” He thought we might want to join him

JOANN

Oh no. He's not dragging Sandy and the kids out to the middle of nowhere, is he?

NEIL

N-no, he's driving them, apparently.

GARY

You know, maybe it wouldn't be a bad idea for *us* to make some contingency plans here.

GARY crosses to window to look out.

DEIDRE

For what?

GARY

For whatever might happen.

DEIDRE

Nobody *knows* what's going to happen.

GARY

That's the point. What if the utilities went out? What if there was no way to get food?

JOANN

There's enough food in that kitchen to get us through another ice age.

MAX

We're all going to be fine. You have my word on it.

NEIL

You sound like you're still closing deals, Max.

MAX

Listen. Once, when I was in the army, I was kissing a girl in a bar when her boyfriend – who also happened to be my sergeant – walked in to finish getting drunk. If the world survived what happened then, believe me...it'll survive this.

*Regarding MAX in some contemplation,
NEIL looks back to the television with the
OTHERS.*

NEIL

I'm sure you're right, Max. I'm sure you're right.

ON-AIR VOICE

(“Coming up” at the silence) ...are alerting National Guard units to be ready to respond to any civil or natural emergencies that may result from what now appears to be the likelihood of collision with this stellar object. Viewers are advised to tune to your local TV and radio stations for instructions or recommendations concerning your area...

END OF ACT I

ACT II, SCENE 1

SETTING: The Monroe home.

AT RISE: There is no one in sight but there is a sound of knocking at the door, a pause, then more knocking. NEIL enters from the basement alcove, goes to the door and opens it. STEVE enters, with his mother, FREIDA.

NEIL

Hi—come in. I'm sorry; how long were you knocking?

FREIDA

Since our fingers got too sore from ringing the bell.

STEVE

Mom...

FREIDA

Am I exaggerating? I said this must be how they work you up an appetite. Break in and you get a free drumstick!

STEVE

We thought maybe the bell had gone out.

NEIL

(Waiting for coats) N-no, actually, we had. Everybody's in the basement.

STEVE

(Beat) What for?

NEIL

W-well, it's hard to explain and harder to believe, so we're probably farther ahead if we just leave it alone.

FREIDA

Well...as I was saying to Steven, I didn't want to impose on you people...

NEIL

(Going to closet with coats) O-h-h, it's no imposition(!).

FREIDA

But I have this friend, Hazel. And if you knew Hazel, you'd know how badly I need friends. We've got a nice little dinner planned; small and simple; enough of everything for two people, right? So I'm heating the oven and I get a call from guess who. She says she doesn't want to go out because of this comet or whatever it is. Her daughter's driving in. Don't ask me what they're going to do—sit there and hold hands?

STEVE floats toward the basement entrance to venture a look down.

NEIL

Would you like a drink of something?

FREIDA

Oh—maybe just a glass of water. (*NEIL starts toward kitchen*) Put some scotch in it. (*Pausing, HE registers the new request, exits*) So I said, Hazel, nothing is going to happen. She says, yes, it is, they said so on television. I said, if you see giant ants eating people on television, do you grab a can of bug spray and climb up on the roof? But that's Hazel. If the weather person says it's going to rain, and the next day it's sunny and beautiful, she'll still sit inside holding an umbrella on her lap. (*NEIL returning with drink; handing it to HER*) She's one of those people that if you didn't love her, you'd kill her. You know what I mean?

DEIDRE

(*Loudly, from basement*) Big enough for *what...?!*

NEIL

(*Pause*) I can only imagine.

DEIDRE enters from the basement, followed by GARY and the OTHERS.

GARY

Big enough for all of us to hole up in. For a little while.

DEIDRE

(*Stopping, as OTHERS collect*) Gary. There is no place for people to sleep. There's no way to keep food. It's chilly...

GARY

Would you rather be up here when that thing hits?

DEIDRE

Something is going to hit in about ten seconds...!

GARY

(*Indicating television*) They said people were doing this right now—!

DEIDRE

They said some people are doing it but that it's dumb because there's no way to predict what's going to happen. You always hear what you want to hear!

STEVE

What are we talking about?

SHELLEY

Eating in the basement, I think.

FREIDA

Eating in the basement—?!

GARY

I didn't say anything about eating in the basement. Will everybody stop putting words in my mouth?

MAX

Why, may I ask, are we wasting all this energy? Nothing is supposed to happen until tomorrow which it probably won't anyway and even if it does, why should it spoil today, and am I mistaken or is there a new person in the room?

STEVE

Everybody, this is my mother, Freida.

*There are general greetings to FREIDA,
who sends around a smile.*

MAX

(To FREIDA) I'm Max. Have we managed to ruin your appetite?

FREIDA

You'd have to try a lot harder. I'm starving.

MAX

That reminds me. So am I. For God's sake, let's eat.

*Everyone gathers toward the table as
JOANN and DEIDRE head for the
kitchen.*

NEIL

(To JOANN) Do you want me...?

JOANN

No—you just get everybody seated.

NEIL

Okay. Uhm... (*Observing OTHERS, waiting around the table*) Everybody sit down.

People sit; STEVE and SHELLEY seated next to each other.

FREIDA

You and my husband would have gotten along. He used to call himself an energy-efficient worker.

NEIL

Life's as simple as you make it.

GARY

So when did you ever make life simple? (*To OTHERS*) If there are twelve sides to something, he'll find thirteen.

NEIL

(*Smiling*) Fourteen. Thirteen's an unlucky number.

JOANN and DEIDRE start making trips in with food, water, etc.

MAX

So tell me, how did you two get to know each other much too well?

NEIL

Well actually, Gary and I met through the girls. Who... (*To JOANN, presently nearby*) originally knew each other from college, right?

JOANN

(*Nodding*) From the times we were sober...

SHELLEY

How did you meet in college?

JOANN

My gosh, you want me to remember that? When I think about it now, it seems like we were just friends from the first day.

MAX

The irony of great friendships. You can seldom remember when they even began. It's like your bond with that other person was always just there. Which maybe it was. Who knows?

FREIDA

You sound like a romantic, Max.

MAX

Everybody winds up either a romantic or a cynic. I think you see more from the high road.

SHELLEY

If you're a romance expert, I know somebody who could use a few lessons.

STEVE

Attention, everybody. I am now about to pay for not wanting to go out and sit by a dark lake in the middle of the night.

SHELLEY

It wasn't the middle of the night, and it wasn't dark. There was a big gorgeous moon out—that was the point.

STEVE

You could see the moon from my house. *That* was the point.

DEIDRE

You two sound married already.

SHELLEY

Uh-oh...news leak. *(To STEVE)* Maybe we better make our announcement while it still is one.

STEVE regards SHELLEY, as JOANN and DEIDRE are finishing, bringing out the turkey, and everyone else observes STEVE.

STEVE

Yeah...uhm... *(Glancing around at the OTHERS, decides to go ahead, and rises, with a touch of tentativeness)* Well... *(Clearing throat, as JOANN and DEIDRE attend also)* Shelley and I just wanted to announce our engagement... *(Pauses at positive exclamations, some clapping)* Which is happening unofficially today, and officially next week, when I can get a ring.

STEVE sits down, to a few more claps.

SHELLEY

Why he has to be so technical I don't know.

STEVE

I'm not technical. I'm poor. And not in a hurry to get thrown out of a jewelry store.

NEIL

Can't get a bank loan 'till Monday, right, Steve?

MAX

Or hold one up.

FREIDA

If only that was a joke.

STEVE

Mom...

FREIDA

I'm not saying anything. But if I did, it would just be what I've said before: That it might make a little more sense to wait until you had a career with a little more future to it than painting houses, that's all.

STEVE

I'm going to find a better job, mom.

SHELLEY

(Some underlying irritation?) It's not like we're getting married tomorrow...

FREIDA

I'm not saying anything. But if I did, it would be that married life is hard enough under *good* circumstances and what's the big rush anyway?

MAX

Life is always hardest when you're young, but it's also when you're strong and can take it. The system works; don't worry.

As JOANN and DEIDRE get seated and everyone is ready to start, the phone rings. NEIL gets up to answer it.

FREIDA

I'm not saying anything. I'm just saying what I would be saying if I was saying it, that's all.

NEIL

(Answering phone) Hello. *(Beat)* Hi, Frank. What's up? *(Mildly apprehensive)* That depends. *(Listening, grows perplexed, as OTHERS look over)* A runoff ditch? Where? *(Listens)* Who did? *(Pause)* Why? Where's everybody going? *(Listening)* They are—?

JOANN

What's going on?

NEIL

He says all the stores are opening—!

JOANN

(*Surprised*) Where?

NEIL

Everywhere, sounds like...

GARY

They are—?

GARY is prompted to thought as NEIL returns to the conversation.

NEIL

Frank—what am I supposed to do, leave and help you now? We're sitting down to dinner here. (*Pause*) Well I'm sorry, but... (*Interrupted, listens, as GARY rises and comes over to the phone*) Well why don't you just stay put for now? You're probably as safe in a runoff ditch as anywhere else, as long as it doesn't rain... (*Listens, noticing GARY*) Frank, somebody else wants to use the phone here. Look, call me back if you get hungry and I'll send some sandwiches, okay?

NEIL hands the receiver to GARY, who clicks it off and starts to punch.

FREIDA

So we're missing the big pre-asteroid sale?

MAX

It's the end of the world. Who has time to liquidate?

NEIL

(*In some thought*) He said there are a million cars out. Some people are driving like lunatics. He got run off the road.

SHELLEY

That's like what we were seeing. Only...

STEVE

Only worse.

JOANN

What are they all doing—?

NEIL

He said he thinks some of them are heading out of town. The supermarkets are swamped, though—!

GARY

(On phone) Hello, is Jeff there, please? *(Pause)* Gary; his boss at the store. *(DEIDRE has looked over, taking interest, as OTHERS look over also or talk with each other in "low" voices)* Jeff? Gary. Say, kiddo, how would you like to earn some double time? *(Pause)* Well—I need somebody to go in and open the store for me. *(DEIDRE showing some surprise and disbelief)* No; no kidding! Everybody's out buying; it's a gold rush! *(DEIDRE rises to go to phone)* Uh-huh...well listen, would a cut of the day's take change your mind? Say ten percent? *(Pause)* Okay—how's twenty sound?

DEIDRE brings her hand down on the phone cradle, cutting off the call, and looks incredulously at GARY.

DEIDRE

How's a shot of Thorazine sound? What are you doing?

GARY

I have to get the store open; this is the business opportunity of the decade!

STEVE, looking curious, gets up to go to the television.

DEIDRE

Are you out of your mind? It's Thanksgiving. That boy has plans with his family!

GARY

What kind of plans does a nineteen-year-old ever have with his family? If I was him I'd go for the money—!

DEIDRE

I'm sure you would, Gary. But there are other things in life besides making money, even if you don't know it.

SHELLEY gets up to join STEVE, who has turned on the television.

GARY

That's not fair, Dee. What gives you the right to talk to me that way?

DEIDRE

Why not give it a shot? I've tried every other way—!

GARY

We started that business together. It's for both of us. You know that!

DEIDRE

I didn't know that that damned store was going to elope with you!

STEVE

(Watching television) Hey, this is for real. People are mobbing stores—

NEIL

Where? *(Stepping over to see)*

STEVE

Everywhere. It's on the national news. Look.

GARY

(To DEIDRE, gesturing to the television) See?!

DEIDRE

Gary—you sell home and garden supplies. What do you think?—that people are going to say, well, the Earth is doomed—I better get those peony bushes in shape—?!

JOANN

(Entreatingly, standing at table) The food's going to get cold, everybody...

GARY

Fine. Let's eat. *(Going back to table)*

DEIDRE

He didn't get what he wanted so now he's going to pout...

*STEVE turning off television and
returning to table with OTHERS.*

GARY

I am not pouting and why don't you let something die for once?

DEIDRE

Oh who started this today? Me? We're driving over here and they're talking about that stupid asteroid on the radio, and I say – meaning nothing by it –

GARY

Meaning nothing by it.

DEIDRE

Meaning nothing by it!—Boy, it could come right down on top of us. And you know what he says? Only if we're lucky!

GARY

Does it actually surprise you that I'm in a rotten mood after three days of tireless effort on your part to put me there? Oh, how can I go to a dinner party? I feel awful. I haven't slept in a week. Maybe coming to bed once in a while would help!

DEIDRE

I don't have to go to bed. I know what the ceiling looks like.

GARY

Well by now you must have a pretty good idea of whatever's outside the kitchen window at two in the morning, too.

DEIDRE

How do you know what I'm doing at two in the morning?

GARY

Do you think *I* can sleep with you roaming the house like a ghost looking for its car keys?!

FREIDA

She's not looking for car keys. Something is troubling her very deeply.

GARY

Thank you for your expert assessment of our marriage, which you happen to know nothing about.

FREIDA

It looks like I know more than you do. She can't sleep and the problem is how it affects you.

STEVE

Mom...

FREIDA

Enough with the mom. It's a nice word but you're wearing a hole in it. (*To GARY*) She's not trying to hurt you, she's trying to communicate, but you're not listening.

GARY

Communicate how? By telepathy? Hurt goes both ways. Women could see that if they didn't automatically side with each other.

JOANN

Women don't automatically side with each other.

GARY

Yes you do.

SHELLEY

No we don't.

MAX

(*Standing*) Please. May I say something? This is an odd situation that's come up, and it's affecting us in odd ways. May I suggest that we'd all feel better if we did something normal and enjoyable. Such as going ahead with the wonderful meal and the nice day we had planned.

STEVE

Planned (?). (*EVERYONE looks*) Who planned this? A last meal with cranberries and stuffing? It's different, anyway.

SHELLEY

(*Regarding STEVE*) Honey? Is something wrong?

STEVE

Is something wrong? The answer to that is kind of obvious, isn't it?

SHELLEY

They just have to warn people, Steve. It'll be okay. (*To OTHERS*) Right?

MAX

Certainly. Eat. You'll feel better.

STEVE

What is that, chicken soup astronomy? Did you hear how big that thing is? We could all be dead tomorrow.

MAX

And if we don't eat, we *won't* be dead tomorrow?

JOANN

Listen, everyone. Why don't we just enjoy dinner and then worry about this later if we have to, okay?

NEIL

Yes, and keep some perspective, too. You know, a hundred miles across is big, but it could miss us by a hundred *thousand* miles.

STEVE

Very good, Neil. That's probably what the dinosaurs were thinking right before they became gasoline.

FREIDA

Who said a hundred miles? I heard somebody say it was as big as France...

GARY

France? Who said that?

FREIDA

(Shrugging) Somebody on TV this morning.

GARY

It couldn't be that big. Maybe they said it could *destroy* France...

FREIDA

Why would they say that?—to make everyone feel better?

DEIDRE

(To GARY) Why do you always have to win an argument? She knows what she heard!

GARY

Anybody can make a mistake—!

DEIDRE

Except you!

GARY

Don't flatter me, Dee. I married you, didn't I?

DEIDRE observes GARY, hurt. SHE rises and heads for the closet, GARY is immediately regretful.

GARY

Honey, I'm sorry. I didn't mean that...

MAX

(Gesturing in "surprise" toward the table) Why, look! Here's some food here! Why don't we eat it? I'll start, okay? *(Putting something on his plate)* B-o-y, it looks good...!

JOANN moves to DEIDRE as SHE heads for the door with her coat.

JOANN

What are you doing? You're not going to leave (?)—

DEIDRE

(Upset, trying to hold together) I have to...

JOANN

Where are you going to go?

DEIDRE

(Putting on coat) I don't know. The bargains are booming all over town; maybe I can get a good deal on a bottle of sleeping pills.

As DEIDRE exits to outside, JOANN turns to GARY.

JOANN

Well what are you going to do?

GARY

What do you want me to do?

JOANN

Are you just going to let her leave?

GARY

I apologized, didn't I? This is just another one of her little performances, Jo.

JOANN

I'm gonna have a monologue or two for you when I get back. *(Going to closet)*

NEIL

What are you doing?

JOANN

(Getting her coat, putting it on) What does it look like I'm doing?

NEIL

Losing your mind. We have a house full of people here...!

JOANN

Good! Get Little Joe and we'll raise the barn!

NEIL

Joann—!

JOANN

Neil, she is going to do something to herself!

NEIL

Why do you think that?

JOANN

You heard her say she was going to buy sleeping pills...!

NEIL

She's been having trouble sleeping...(!)

JOANN

Is that what you think she meant?!

NEIL

What do *you* think she meant?

JOANN

(Exasperated) What do men have ears *for*?

FREIDA

Keep their hats from slipping down...

GARY has turned on the television; as JOANN exits, NEIL goes to the closet, while STEVE appears thoughtful, somehow troubled.

MAX

I vote with Neil. The woman is not going to take sleeping pills.

SHELLEY

How do you know?

MAX

(Exhausted beat) Well for one thing, if the world's going to end tomorrow, why waste a bottle of pills?

NEIL

(With two jackets) Gary.

NEIL tosses a jacket to GARY, who, turning, catches it, as STEVE rises and goes to the telephone.

GARY

Where are we going?

NEIL

Where do you think? I can't let her go out there alone and if I'm going with her, you're going with me.

NEIL heads out, followed by GARY, as STEVE starts to make a phone call. NEIL stops at the door, to regard everyone with frustration.

NEIL

Everybody eat!

NEIL exits with a slam. People observe each other. MAX resignedly starts putting his food back on serving plates.

STEVE

(Into phone) Hello. Is Vicky there, please? *(Beat)* Yes.

SHELLEY's attention is brought to STEVE, as FREIDA observes MAX.

FREIDA

What are you doing? I thought you were hungry...?

MAX

How can I eat now? They're not here. It would be like I broke in and stole their food.

SHELLEY rises and drifts over to STEVE as HE begins to have a phone conversation.

STEVE

Hello—Vicky? It's Steve Winkler. *(Listens)* Yeah...I guess it has been. Listen, Vicky, uhm... *(With an uncomfortable laugh)* You're gonna think this is funny, but... *(Sternly interrupted, listens)* No. Maybe not. Well, listen, the thing is, uhm...do you remember when we...it-splay...? *(Listening)* Uh-huh. Well, uhm...I made a couple of...remarks, I guess... *(Pauses, nodding)* Yes, I do... *(Listening contritely)* I know. *(Pause)* I—I know it was. *(Pause)* Well, you know, it, it's a very pretty nose, actually. In its own...distinctive way. Vicky, I uhm... *(Beat)* Well, I just...I guess I just wanted to call and say that, uhm...*(Searching a bit)* Well, I always felt that the way we parted...well, that it didn't represent either the best of myself or, or the overall quality of the relationship we had, and...well, I...guess that I just wanted to... tell you that. *(Listening a long moment)* It probably is. *(Listening)* I probably am. *(Pause)* Well...uhm...good-b—

Cut off, STEVE looks at the receiver. HE hangs up, starts to turn, and is slightly surprised to see SHELLEY – who has been listening in growing disbelief – standing near, observing HIM. SHE then adopts a quaint face, “smiling”.

SHELLEY

Hello.

STEVE

Hi. (*Smiling self-consciously*) So. Are we eating?

SHELLEY

No. We're explaining. Who's Vicky?

STEVE

(*Gazing at HER*) Oh! (*Beat*) Uhm. (*Shrugs*) Just an old friend.

SHELLEY

(*Nodding, thinking*) I need better definitions of "old" and "friend."

STEVE

Oh well uhm. . .you know. She's nobody. She's uh...she was a girlfriend I had. At one time. Before I met you.

FREIDA

Two weeks before.

STEVE

Mom...

FREIDA

I didn't say anything.

FREIDA gets up and drifts to the window.

SHELLEY

A girlfriend. You called an old girlfriend?! Now?!

STEVE

Well, Shell, I just...felt kind of bad about something that happened between us, and...well, under the circumstances, I...well I just felt like I needed to...get it off my chest, that's all...

SHELLEY

Oh. I see. And did you consider that whatever was on your chest possibly felt less unpleasant than *my tearing it out is going to?*

STEVE

Well there's no reason to blow this out of proportion, now...

SHELLEY

Blow it out of proportion?! Steven Winkler. On the day of our engagement, you called an old girlfriend!

STEVE

Well that's not a fair attitude to have about it...

SHELLEY

It's not—?!

STEVE

Well no! You know I love you, Shell, but...well this is not exactly your typical day and all. I mean, I don't think the world is actually going to end, but on the off, off chance that it does, a guy doesn't want to go with any regrets, you know? And besides, it's not like...

STEVE leaves off, appearing as though there is more to say but thinking better of saying it.

SHELLEY

(Beat) Not like what?

STEVE

Well it...well it's not like we...actually announced that we were engaged today. We announced that we were *getting* engaged. Technically, there's a difference. I mean, you'd hate to have to live on it, but there it is—!

SHELLEY

Technically a difference? What are you talking about?

STEVE

Well—nothing! I'm just saying that...well if we're having a fight, you're using something that didn't actually happen, and...that's an illegal maneuver, darn it!

SHELLEY

(Observing STEVE with some sort of growing discomfort) You said you wanted to get engaged.

STEVE

I do!

SHELLEY

Then why doesn't it sound that way all of a sudden?

STEVE

I don't sound that way—

SHELLEY

Yes you do...

FREIDA looks on, coming back to the table to sit down.

STEVE

Shell, you're missing the point.

SHELLEY

What's the point?

STEVE

The point is ... *(Leaves off, wavers in some frustration, thoughts shifting, feelings coming into focus)* Well I guess...well—honestly, Shell, getting engaged right now...it was sort of three-quarters your idea, you know? I'm all for it! The idea, I mean. But...if we *did* wait a little while longer, until I was making more money—

SHELLEY

We said the money didn't matter. We talked about this...

STEVE

I know, but...maybe we...didn't talk about it enough. Shell... *(A more upbeat tack)* Wouldn't it be great if we could really start off on the right foot? With a real engagement ring, for starters! Not the cracker jack number I'm going to have to insult your finger with.

SHELLEY

I don't care about a ring.

FREIDA

(Offhandedly) You might care about eating...

SHELLEY

(Set off, turning to FREIDA) Oh...will you please...shut...up!

FREIDA freezes, and STEVE looks at SHELLEY with shock as SHE puts a hand up to her mouth.

MAX

Eat something, I said. *(Getting up)* We'll all feel better.

FREIDA observes SHELLEY, stunned, and SHELLEY appears flustered, almost surprised at herself.

SHELLEY

I'm sorry. I didn't mean that.

STEVE

Mom, it's all this stuff that's going on; everybody's crazy...

SHELLEY

I don't know what I'm saying; I don't know what I'm doing...

STEVE

Nobody does.

SHELLEY

But will you please stop trying to ruin my life?

STEVE

(Stares at SHELLEY, then reels) O-o-h-h n-n-o-o-o...

FREIDA

(Rising) I'm not trying to ruin your life. I just want what's best for you kids.

MAX is drifting over to the television to see what is happening.

SHELLEY

You want what you think is best for us. There's a difference, and you could live on it. In a mansion!

FREIDA

Listen. You don't know what it's like to go through every day trying to decide which bills to pay, which doctor you need the most this month, how to stretch what's left in the refrigerator until some more money comes in. You never went through that.

SHELLEY

And you did. Because somebody let you have your own life, even if it wasn't going to be perfect! *(To STEVE)* And you. The least you could do is be better than she is! The two of you fretting and fawning over each other all the time—I can't stand it anymore! Why don't you give me a call when you're old enough to date girls? You should be able to afford a diamond mine by then! *(Turns and storms out UL)*

STEVE

(Calling) Shelley...!?

STEVE looks at FREIDA, sighs expressively and goes off after SHELLEY, passing MAX at the television. MAX glances on in that direction, as FREIDA sinks into a chair at the table, dazed emotionally, perhaps reflecting some. MAX looks over at HER, looks back to the television, which is playing almost inaudibly. HE finds a chair behind HIM and sits, glances over at FREIDA again, then gazes toward the television.

MAX

So. Mrs. Winkler. How's everything with you?

FREIDA

(Sighing) O-oh...I haven't been eating very well lately.

MAX

Me either. *(Pause)* Decent weather we've been having.

FREIDA

A little cool for me.

MAX

(Nods slightly, pausing a beat) They say we might get mass global destruction.

FREIDA

(Pause) Good. *(Getting up)* We need some.

FREIDA exits UL. MAX sits alone, observing the television, watching empty. In a moment, HE idly raises the remote and brings up the audio, to watch languidly.

A WOMAN'S VOICE

...and you are seeing now, an exclusive offer, today only on Video Shopper's Showcase, this beautiful sapphire asteroid pendant, for only twenty-nine ninety-five; and to update our information there, we have only nineteen of these items – that is only nineteen – remaining...

END OF ACT II, SCENE 1

ACT II, SCENE 2

SETTING: The Monroe home, night.

AT RISE: It is dark, except for light coming in from the kitchen. JOANN, in night clothes, is at the table, putting food into plastic containers. On the couch, STEVE (not particularly obvious at this point) is sleeping, nestled under a sheet and couple of blankets. NEIL enters at right, wandering a bit, also in a robe. HE sees JOANN and walks toward HER, SHE noticing HIM.

JOANN

(A bit tiredly) Hi.

NEIL

(Absently, taking in the scene) Hi... (Stopping, observing the table with mild incredulity) How long has all this been sitting out...?

JOANN

Since about one o'clock today, if I can remember back that far.

NEIL

(Reacts in mystified humor as HE begins to help HER) How could it have just been sitting out here all this time?

JOANN

Well, let's see. It took us half the afternoon to find Deidre and bring her back. When we got back here, Shelly was locked in the bathroom and wouldn't come out. Steve's mother was so upset, he left to get her blood pressure medicine; somebody stole his car and you had to go get him. By the time you got back, Shelley was fighting with Freida and I was trying to keep Gary and Dee from going for the kitchen knives. I don't know how long it took us to get everybody separated and calmed down, and then we had to figure out a sleeping arrangement that wouldn't trigger any homicides during the night. On the whole, we're lucky we're not scraping this stuff off the walls.

NEIL

Well...save every crumb of it. The stores are picked clean.

JOANN

Why are people doing that?

NEIL

They don't know. They're just scared.

JOANN

They're scared. They should have to deal with getting into the bathroom tomorrow morning.

NEIL

Well, I still think it made sense to stay together right now. No telling what's going to happen out there...

JOANN

Where is everybody, again...?

NEIL

Shelley and Deidre are in the spare bedroom. Freida is in our bed, and find some earplugs because she snores like jets coming off an aircraft carrier. Max took a blanket and went somewhere.

JOANN

Doesn't he have a sleeping bag?

NEIL

Gary took both of those to the basement.

JOANN

Who's the other one for? (*NEIL flashes HER a sour grin*) Oh Neil. It's too chilly down there...

NEIL

He shouldn't be alone. Anyway, all the good beds are taken.

JOANN

What is it supposed to accomplish? If we're at ground zero, it won't matter if he's *under* the basement.

NEIL

The asteroid's a good excuse. He's really hiding from his marriage, don't you think?

JOANN

I tried talking with Dee but I was in over my head.

NEIL

I don't even know how to approach Gary about it. Sticking your nose in this might be like trying to help hornets build a nest.

JOANN

Maybe they need counseling...

NEIL

Or a good divorce lawyer.

JOANN

(With surprised objection) Neil—!?

NEIL

(Beat) What?

JOANN

(Looks to the couch, back to NEIL) Honest to God. Will you please?

NEIL

Okay. It's late. I'm sorry.

JOANN

They're our friends. Don't you care what they're going through?

NEIL

Of course...!

JOANN

Well act like it, then—!

NEIL

More acting lessons. Act this way. Act that way. You know, one of us should have an Oscar by now...

JOANN

All right; I'm sorry. But, Neil, if they do fall apart, I just don't want a share of the blame. Okay?

NEIL

Yes. Perfectly. *(Regards HER, thinking, as SHE finishes with her containers)* What's bothering *you*—maybe that's what we should be talking about.

JOANN

We are talking about it. Too loudly. *(Stacking some containers)* I feel bad for Dee, that's all. She is a good, good friend. *(Picks up stack, taking it into kitchen)*

NEIL

She's my friend, too. *(Fills some more, calls to HER)* So is Gary. What about him?

HE finishes, seals the last container, starts stacking them as JOANN comes back in, pulls a chair out at the table and sits down with a hint of weariness, NEIL observing.

NEIL

That's an interesting answer.

JOANN

(Pause) It's different for him. That's all.

NEIL

(Pause) How?

JOANN

(Beat) A woman invests more in a relationship. If it fails, she loses more.

NEIL

She loses more? On what planet in what galaxy?

JOANN

Oh, save your energy, Neil. Getting an argument out of me tonight would be like squeezing milk out of a cactus.

NEIL

(Observes HER, picks up containers) Boy. If Gary wasn't right.

NEIL exits to the kitchen. JOANN is unmistakably annoyed, drumming her fingers on the table, as some moving noises travel in from the kitchen. NEIL enters with a glass of milk, pauses at the window to look out. JOANN glances around at HIM, turns forward again.

JOANN

Right...about...what?

NEIL

(Looks around at HER, turns) Too late. *(Coming to table, to sit down)* I found a nice juicy saguaro out back.

JOANN

You know you can't say something like that and then refuse to discuss it.

NEIL

Oh. In other words, now that you're annoyed, we're going to talk, right? That's what Gary was right about. Women are – I'm sorry, dear – stuck up.

JOANN

Gary's arrogance is part of the problem.

NEIL

Of course *he* has to be causing the problem...

JOANN

I didn't say he was the whole cause of the problem, did I? Men don't listen. That's another problem.

NEIL

Should I be keeping a list here?

JOANN

(Frustrated beat) How did Gary come to have those sleeping bags he brought?

NEIL

He and Deidre were talking about going camping some time.

JOANN

Dee doesn't really have any interest in camping; she told me so herself. But *he* bought sleeping bags...

NEIL

He saw them on sale. They were nice bags and he figured he'd better grab them now or they'd be gone.

JOANN

He thought about everything but asking her, didn't he?

NEIL

That's not fair. Gary's a little impulsive and he's got some old-fashioned attitudes, but he's not a bad guy.

JOANN

Of course he isn't. *(Reflecting)* He's human, that's all. The problem is, that's enough. Life is big. Love is hard. You let yourself forget how much work it takes. *(Beat)* God, it takes work.

NEIL

(Studying HER with interest a moment) Kind of like figuring out the point of this conversation. If there is one.

JOANN

(Regards NEIL, and ponders something restlessly) Do you know what I think happens to some marriages? They get sick and they don't even know it. There are no symptoms yet. Little differences have started to take on more significance. Little slights and annoyances have started to fester. There's anger in the air. But it's all under the radar. Nobody says anything. Maybe nobody wants to "start trouble," or that's how they're rationalizing it to themselves, anyway. So you've got these two people tip-toeing around this growing mass of bad feelings, pretending everything is okay, until that one little thing—that one wrong remark or disagreement—finally happens, and boom!--The whole pile of fireworks goes up--!

NEIL has begun to smile gently and perceptively.

NEIL

(Sing-song) I-I u-n-d-e-r-s-t-a-a-n-d t-h-i-s... *(Observes JOANN)* It's not them. It's us! You think we're going to become like them! Is that it?

JOANN

(Sighs, tired, thoughtful) Oh, Neil. I'm ready to start screaming, and I don't know if it's nutty friends or asteroids or...bad hats on parade anchors. *(Beat)* We have a good marriage. I know that.

NEIL

(Beat) And?

JOANN

(Beat) I don't know. *(Beat)* Sometimes I just wonder if it's...*too* good. Don't you?

NEIL

(Puzzled, nearly amused) No. Good is good. Isn't it?

JOANN

(Flustered beat) Yes. Yes! But what *is* good? *(Getting up, needing to think, move around some)* Never fighting? Is that good? Neil, we never really fight. Do you realize that? I mean, in almost ten years of marriage, we have never had a good, honest, wall-shaking, send-the-dishes-flying...

NEIL

Dishes are expensive. What do you want, dear? We get along.

JOANN

Oh, nobody gets along this well! *(Preoccupied for a second by a siren sound outside the window)* We're happy all the time. Our friends love us. What are we, the Stepford Couple?

NEIL

No, just a happy one. That can happen, you know. (*JOANN ponders, unsatisfied*) This is what you're thinking about with everything else that's going on? Come on, Jo, it's just an emotional diversion or something. Free-floating stress looking for something to latch on to. Don't you think?

JOANN

(*Irritatedly*) No. That's not what I think. And as crazy as I am right now, I don't need psychoanalyzed. This is emotion, Neil; an actual emotion that I am having, right now. People have emotions! (*Reproaching herself somewhat as NEIL observes HER*) I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm tired, and I'm... (*Dropping to her chair*) I'm just tired.

NEIL

(*Very thoughtful pause*) Tired of what? That's the question, maybe.

JOANN

(*Beat*) What do you mean?

STEVE is stirring on the couch. NEIL and JOANN take a momentary look toward him, then regard each other.

NEIL

I mean, I can't figure out why my personality has started to bother you so much when it's the same one I've always had. Jo, if I think real hard, I can even remember a time when you seemed to like it. Remember when you'd call me "Professor Then-Again," and we'd both laugh?

JOANN

I still like it. And I love you. And I'm not complaining! (*Difficult pause*) I just wonder sometimes how much simpler life might be if we didn't have to do all this *thinking* so much about everything all the time. That's all. But that's me.

NEIL

(*Toying*) So thinking about things is a problem. Should I think about that, or would that add to the problem?

JOANN

When it stops you from having fun--*that's* when it's a problem. Like last summer—when I finally talked you into going on that nature walk...

NEIL

You were right about the nature walk; I had a good time.

JOANN

When you weren't worrying about everything! Snakes, animals, having enough water...

NEIL

You show me somebody who doesn't worry about snakes and I'll show you a liar.

JOANN

What about the rope bridge? *It* didn't have fangs.

NEIL

I am not taking the rap for the rope bridge. You didn't want to go across that thing either.

JOANN

Not if you didn't...

NEIL

Oh come on; the *guide* said it wasn't safe...!

JOANN

He said it was old and tricky to cross.

NEIL

“Old” meant “falling apart” and “tricky to cross” meant “are you people crazy?”

JOANN

But what about what you give up, too? Like that view from the top of the ridge that we never looked out at together?

NEIL

Yes. And also that exquisite experience of falling into the ravine together on the way back. (*Watching JOANN fluster some, smiles a bit, as STEVE is stirring on the couch*) Jo, it would have been easy not to care. All I had to do was not love you so much.

JOANN

(*In a moment, after shooting HIM an “annoyed” glance*) Oh, you're a dirty fighter...(!)

NEIL

(*Smiling, considering*) If we ever come to a rope bridge again, we'll go across even if the guide gives us last rites, okay?

JOANN looks at NEIL, and returns a hint of a smile, moving her hand over onto his on the table, as STEVE is sitting up on the couch.

JOANN

(*Noticing STEVE*) Steve, I knew we'd wake you up if we tried hard enough.

STEVE

Oh. It's all right. *(Yawning)* I was having a bad dream anyway. *(Looks around a moment)* Oh, hell, it wasn't a dream. What time is it?

NEIL

It's after eleven. *(Rising, to stretch)*

STEVE

(Observing himself) Look at this. Why am I sleeping in my clothes? I'm gonna look like Columbo in the morning.

DEIDRE drifts in from the hall.

NEIL

I might have an old pair of pajamas you can wear.

STEVE

That's all right. The way I look matches the way I feel now.

DEIDRE

This sounds like a fun party. Can I jump in?

JOANN

Don't tell me we woke you up too.

DEIDRE

That would be difficult; I haven't been to sleep.

NEIL

Not at all?

DEIDRE

Will you tell me how anybody is supposed to sleep with every damned ambulance and cop car in this town wailing its siren? *(Drifting to window to look out)*

JOANN

What's going on anyway?

STEVE

(Picking up his glasses off the coffee table to put them on) People are raising hell.

NEIL

What kind of hell?

STEVE

The real McCoy. Drinking, fighting, tearing things up, burning things down, etcetera. I was watching it on the news earlier.

JOANN

They should be ashamed of themselves.

DEIDRE

Oh, I don't know. Maybe we should be ashamed of *ourselves* for missing all the fun. Is there any more of that milk if you guys don't mind?

JOANN

In the refrigerator. There's orange juice, too. (*Louder toward DEIDRE as SHE exits to kitchen*) And a whole turkey dinner if you're hungry.

JOANN gets up to drift toward NEIL, who has drifted toward SL, nearer to STEVE.

NEIL

Well, good night, Steve. Don't worry about the wrinkled duds—they should get a good pressing in the morning.

JOANN

Oh Neil, that isn't funny...

NEIL

I thought I was supposed to relax more?

JOANN

I didn't say to relax good taste.

NEIL

She's just worried about more guests dropping in.

JOANN

This is not funny. (*To STEVE*) Is this funny?

NEIL

(*Pecks JOANN on the cheek*) I'm going to bed.

As NEIL exits to the basement, JOANN shakes her head at HIM, gives STEVE's shoulder a reassuring touch.

JOANN

Good night.

*STEVE returns a little smile and nod.
JOANN exits UL as DEIDRE returns from
the kitchen with a glass of juice.*

DEIDRE

What were they arguing about...?

STEVE

Hm? Oh. I don't think they were really arguing; just kind of...blowing off steam.

DEIDRE

(Crosses to a chair near the couch to sit down) My mistake. One has a tendency to view things in the context of one's own experience.

STEVE

Tell me about it.

DEIDRE

Like I need to. You're a mess.

STEVE

And that's just the outside.

DEIDRE

What happened with you two, anyway? When I left today, you were engaged. When I got back, you were engaged in battle.

STEVE

I don't know. We're not engaged in any manner now, I guess. Probably the one positive thing that the imminent destruction of planet Earth has accomplished.

DEIDRE

Like you mean that. *(Taking a sip of juice)*

STEVE

I don't know what I mean. I'm either relieved or suicidal and too numb to tell. *(Getting up, drifts to window)*

DEIDRE

My God. I have to get at least three drinks in me before I get this depressed. It was a fight, that's all.

STEVE

I know. But why does she have to pull so hard? I want to get married. She knows that. It's like she doesn't trust me. Or the relationship. Or something.

DEIDRE

Well, that's something you might as well know about women, Steve; they can be pretty determined when they've set their sights on something. Then again... *(Pausing perceptively)* She'd have to have something to pull *against*, too. Wouldn't she?

STEVE observes DEIDRE. A siren sound from outside tugs at his attention momentarily. HE drifts back toward DEIDRE, tapping a finger to his chest.

STEVE

A victim of lousy timing. That's what I am. You're twisted in knots to begin with over the biggest decision of your life, and that's when the blasted apocalypse has to strike!

DEIDRE

Yeah, those darned apocalypses—they really throw off your day.

STEVE

(Sits on couch) You know, today, when I was getting ready to pick up Shelley, and all the news about this had started to... *(Leaving off, reflecting)* Well I started to have this crazy thought. It wouldn't get out of my head! And it was something like... Steve, why don't you forget about all this? – the dinner, the engagement, everything! – and just take off and... I don't know – have fun! Go out and enjoy yourself like there's no tomorrow, just in case there isn't! Wasn't that despicable of me?

DEIDRE

(Shrugging) Of you and about a billion other people, probably.

STEVE

(Pondering more) But what really scared me... was the thoughts that *those* thoughts led to. Like realizing what a huge responsibility commitment is, in a way I'd never realized it before. It was like, if I can't give myself to Shelley for one day, at a time when she probably needed me the most, then how can I do it for the rest of my life? And what does that mean? That I don't really love her? I just stared at myself!

DEIDRE

Steve, first of all, the rest of your life isn't likely to resemble this particular day very much.

STEVE

I know, but...

DEIDRE

Look. Let me save us some grief here. What you are feeling – doubts, fears, indecision – they're nothing different from anything that anybody ever felt to some degree before getting married. You're just mistaking it for something unusual— probably because of all this other crap that's been happening. And I better add this. If you're letting what's going on between

DEIDRE, *Continued*

my husband and me reinforce your apprehensions, that's another mistake you shouldn't be making.

STEVE

How long have you two been married?

DEIDRE

Almost twelve years now. Give or take a thousand. Hard to believe?

STEVE

No. It's easy to believe. *(Beat)* You certainly seem to care about each other...

DEIDRE

(Beat) After what happened today?

STEVE

(Considers) Because of it.

DEIDRE

(A thoughtful beat) Okay, so I'm wrong. I hope you have a wonderful marriage just like ours. And don't keep any guns in the house.

STEVE

And as for me, the end of the world is just a convenient alibi. The truth is, I'm chickening out, right?

DEIDRE

Don't count your chickening-outs before they've happened. I think you've just got a lot of living to do, Steve. The universe isn't perfect. You have to get used to it, is all. *(Studying HIM)* I'll give you an example. Would you mind taking your glasses off for a minute?

Observing HER for a moment, STEVE reaches up and removes his glasses, and DEIDRE surveys HIM.

DEIDRE

I knew it. Did you know you're better looking without glasses?

STEVE

(Regarding HER a moment) I, uh...never thought about it much...

DEIDRE

You are. I mean...you're good looking with them on, too! — but... *(Taking HIM in some more)* You're particularly striking without them. *(Shrugging)* So. See what I mean?

STEVE

(Ponders, nodding slightly) No.

DEIDRE

You're stuck with having to wear glasses to see, even though you look better without them. So what's fair about that? Nothing. But things don't have to make sense. They're just the way they are. See?

STEVE

(Nodding) Very insightful. You should be a philosopher. *(Starting to put glasses back on)* Or an optometrist.

DEIDRE

Wait! Don't put them back on...

STEVE stops, observing HER, as SHE smiles a bit.

DEIDRE, *Continued*

Haven't you been listening? You're better looking with them off.

STEVE

(Observes HER, then laughs slightly) Well...you look better with them *on*, so uhm...

As STEVE moves the glasses upward, DEIDRE rises, comes to the couch, moves his hand down again and sits on the couch close to and facing HIM, with a smile.

DEIDRE

Does this help?

STEVE

(Pausing in surprised uncertainty, looking HER up and down) Uh...yeah. I suppose. But...
(Brings glasses up again)

DEIDRE

(Taking glasses from STEVE's hand) Why don't you... *(Putting glasses on table)* leave them off for now?

STEVE

(Observing her action) Well...actually, uhm...

DEIDRE

O-h-h...just for a little while. Please? I like you this way. What are you so nervous about all the time?

STEVE

(Nervously) I'm, I'm not nervous...

DEIDRE

I'm not going to bite you. *(Beat)* Unless you want me to...

STEVE

Deidre, I think we should go to bed. I mean...! *(A desperate pause)* Y-you know... individually...

DEIDRE

(Plucking something from STEVE's collar) Can I ask you something?

STEVE

(Wary pause) I suppose so...

DEIDRE

It's a hypothetical question.

STEVE

Okay...(?)

DEIDRE

If you knew that tonight *was* the last night of the world...what would you want to do...right now?

STEVE

What difference does it make? It's not the last night of the world. I mean...probably.

DEIDRE

A-a-h-h, but how do you *know* that? *(Bringing a foot over to touch STEVE's leg)* Imagine...just imagine...that all of the pleasure and fun that you ever can, and ever will, experience in your life has been limited to this brief window of opportunity...this last few hours of citizenship in the material world.

STEVE

Deidre, I don't mean to be rude, but...this doesn't seem appropriate...

DEIDRE

Good. I must be doing it right, then.

STEVE

What if your husband walked in here...?

DEIDRE

He'd have to wait his turn.

STEVE

I think you're scaring me now.

DEIDRE

Life is scary, Steve. But it's a good kind of scary. It lets you know you're alive—and dying at the same time. (*Pulling closer to HIM*) Having to make decisions we don't know how to make. Never knowing when to sacrifice and when to give in. How do we deal with the darkness and uncertainty? (*Getting very close, stroking his hair*) It's a terrifying existence we're born into, Steve. And what do we have to comfort us...but each other?

STEVE

Deidre, we cannot do this, now. (*SHE kisses his ear*) You're married and I'm engaged. Well...almost engaged. As soon as I can get the ring, which will probably be next week... (*SHE kisses his neck*) Or as soon as I can get out and do some shopping around, maybe compare prices and find something I can... (*Watching HER lean toward HIM*) I can...

DEIDRE kisses STEVE on the lips. A moment passes, and SHE pulls back, and regards HIM with passionately dwelling, waiting eyes.

STEVE

Maybe I'll wait a couple of weeks.

As SHE leans in to kiss HIM again, HE meets HER, kissing HER back.

END OF ACT II, SCENE 2

ACT III, SCENE 1

SETTING: The Monroe home, morning.

AT RISE: STEVE and DEIDRE are lying together on the couch, under covers, nude (it is implied), HIS arm lying down over HER. From the basement entrance comes the sound of a door opening. NEIL peeks up, out of the alcove, to look around. Slowly, HE begins to emerge.

GARY

(Calling from basement) Neil? What's it look like?

NEIL

(Stepping farther into room, looking around, calling back) It's just what I feared.

GARY

What?

NEIL

The house was destroyed, and somebody came and built an exact duplicate!

DEIDRE is beginning to stir awake.

GARY

Very funny. Do you think it missed us?

NEIL

I don't think anything happ— *(Seeing scene on couch)* happ... *(Absorbing scene, and reacting with controlled panic)* H-h-a-a-a-p-p-y-y-y N-n-e-e-e-w-w Y-e-a-r-r-r...!

GARY

What did you say? Neil—?

NEIL

(Quick to call down alcove) Don't come up, Gary!

GARY

What's wrong?

NEIL

I think I saw something—!

DEIDRE is sitting up, groggily, pulling a blanket around herself.

GARY

What?!

NEIL

I'm not sure. It looked like a flash, I think— (*Seeing DEIDRE, panicking anew*) Whoa!— yeah! A big one! Stay down there! (*Crosses quickly to HER*) What are you doing?!

DEIDRE

What am I doing? What time is it?

NEIL

It's time for somebody to get murdered!

DEIDRE

Mmmm, good. (*Yawning, looking about*) Where?

NEIL

Oh, Jesus, Deidre. . . !

STEVE

(*Stirring*) Hhmmm...don't worry, Mom, the bus'll wait... (*Suddenly seized by realization, bolts upright, fully awake, and looks around in alarmed dread*) Oh my God!

NEIL

Shhhhhhhh! (*Shooting another nervous glance toward the alcove*) Get up and get your clothes on! Both of you! Now!

DEIDRE is standing and wrapping a blanket around herself, as STEVE peers around anxiously.

STEVE

Neil? Do you uhm, see any clothes anywhere...?

NEIL

You don't know where your clothes are?!

STEVE

Well, off the top of my head, no...

DEIDRE

My golly, Neil, there *was* a shortage of space last night...

NEIL

Not between your ears!

GARY

(Calling up) Neil—?

NEIL

(Reacting, stepping to alcove) Yeah?

GARY

Is there somebody else up there?

DEIDRE

Oop! *(Picking up her empty glass from the coffee table)* Didn't take my glass back. *(Starting for kitchen)*

NEIL

No! Just talking to myself! Bad habit! *(Seeing DEIDRE exiting)* Deidre—! *(Exasperated, turns attention to STEVE, who is standing and wrapping himself with a sheet)* All right; what are we looking for? *(Begins searching around)* Shirt, pants, underwear; a condom, I hope—!

STEVE

I didn't do anything with my clothes; she must have put them somewhere...

NEIL

Maybe she sent them out to be cleaned so you'll look good at the funeral! Steve, why did you do this in my house...?!

STEVE

(Finding his glasses, putting them on) We'd have looked pretty funny on the lawn.

NEIL

(In exasperation) Shut up and help me look—!

STEVE

(Looking here and there as SHELLEY enters from UL) I don't know what to say, Neil. It just happened.

NEIL

You think *I'm* your problem? What are you going to do if Shelley finds out that you slept— *(Seeing STEVE looking past HIM, and glancing around and seeing SHELLEY, looks back to STEVE)* —on this couch by yourself, all night, agonizing over what happened between you two and wondering how you'd ever make it up to her! *(Giving SHELLEY another look, and clearing his throat)* Good morning.

SHELLEY

(Studying STEVE, looks at NEIL, then back to STEVE, absorbed) Good morning...

NEIL

(Looks back and forth between STEVE and SHELLEY, tense) Excuse me. *(Continues to look about the room, more “casually”)*

STEVE

(Nervously self-conscious) Good morning, Shell.

SHELLEY

Good morning. *(Studies HIM again, reserving a specific reaction, but something suggests an unhappy future)* Did you get warm last night?

STEVE

Hm? *(Nervous pause)* Oh! *(Regarding himself, lifting arms once, “smiling” at HER)* Yeah! Sure did...

SHELLEY

(Nodding) Funny. I was a little chilly.

DEIDRE enters from kitchen, carrying a wadded-up pair of pants in one hand, coming down next to STEVE.

STEVE

Were you?

SHELLEY

Uh-huh. *(Noticing DEIDRE)*

STEVE

(Beat) You should've gotten more covers...!

SHELLEY

It looks like they were all down here. *(To DEIDRE)* Did you get warm too?

DEIDRE

Sweltering. *(Offering STEVE the pants)* Sweetie, these are yours. I wouldn't put them on yet; they were in the freezer.

SHELLEY gazes at STEVE as HE looks at the pants, then obligingly takes them.

SHELLEY

Sweetie?

DEIDRE

It's just a loose term of affection.

SHELLEY

I know what it is. *(To STEVE)* So what are those? Sweetie.

DEIDRE

(Beginning to search around for clothing) They're his pants.

SHELLEY

(Observes STEVE) Why were your pants in the freezer?

STEVE

(Beat) My pants?

SHELLEY

Yes!

STEVE

In the freezer?

SHELLEY

I think we have the question nailed down.

NEIL takes an apprehensive look toward the scene, as DEIDRE gets down to look under the couch, and STEVE thinks like lightning.

STEVE

I was getting a stain out.

SHELLEY

You were what?

STEVE

Y-yeah—See, we were having something to eat? And I spilled a little gravy on my pants, and we tried to dab it out but no go, right? *(DEIDRE has found her dress under the couch, is standing up with it)* And I thought, well, why not freeze it, and in the morning maybe it'll brush right out! You know—like dried mud? *(SHELLEY observes DEIDRE shaking her dress out)* Figured it was worth a shot, anyway...

SHELLEY

Why was your dress under the couch?

DEIDRE

(Regarding SHELLEY) Oh. *(Smiling)* I didn't want to get any stains, so I just ate in the nude.

SHELLEY

(Observing STEVE) Steven. You have five seconds to tell me what happened here, and it better not be *close* to what I'm thinking!

STEVE

(Observes SHELLEY for a moment, more serious) All right. Time for the truth, I guess.
(Pause) Shell...the pants were in the freezer...to kill body odor.

SHELLEY

(Beat) Pardon me?

GARY, peeking his head up from the basement, enters, exploring, looking toward the television.

STEVE

I've never mentioned this, but uh...I have a tendency to get a little gamy after a while? And well, not having brought a change of clothing for all this, of course, I was just hoping that refrigerating my clothes would help to keep them a little fresher; though...frankly, it's going to be a losing battle unless there's still a laundromat in business around here!

GARY crosses to the television and turns it on.

SHELLEY

(Smiling, overly pleasant) O-h-h, well—I wouldn't worry too much about it, dear, because I really don't imagine that people will find that nasty old stale clothing smell too offensive next to *the odor of your rotting corpse*—!

SHELLEY lunges at STEVE, grabbing his neck, HE defending his airway and stumbling back, the two going down; DEIDRE and NEIL dash to break up the wrestling match. NEIL pulls SHELLEY up, and away.

NEIL

(Amid the previous) Hey! Hey! Now that's enough!

As DEIDRE helps STEVE up, seeing if HE is all right, and GARY is fixed on the television, SHELLEY tries to calm herself to speak.

SHELLEY

Steven Winkler. I know you're a man, but this is abusing it! I lay in bed last night with tears... well, maybe not actual tears, but my eyes were definitely moist! And here you were, tearing a small rift in our relationship a mile wide with your spiteful maliciousness!

DEIDRE

He wasn't *that* malicious, honey.

SHELLEY

(*Noticing an oblivious GARY watching the television*) Well what do you think of this?

GARY

(*Eyes staying glued*) I don't like it at all.

SHELLEY

What do you think we should do about it?

GARY

I think we should get in the basement *now*.

JOANN enters from UL.

SHELLEY

(*Exasperatedly*) Fine. Get in the basement and take Antony and Cleopatra here with you. I'm leaving! (*Storming out UL, passing JOANN*) For good!

JOANN

What—?!

SHELLEY

(*Pausing, to JOANN*) I said I'm going home!

JOANN

Why?

SHELLEY

Of all the stupid questions!

SHELLEY exits, leaving JOANN gazing about in bewilderment, as the OTHERS are joining GARY at the television.

NEIL

Where is this coming from?

GARY

I haven't heard them say. It's got to be in this hemisphere because it's daylight.

NEIL

What are we going to do?

GARY

I say we get downstairs. Take some food, maybe some light bedding. And a radio...!

NEIL

Okay. Well—I guess rounding people up should be my job. You and Joann can get food together, okay?

JOANN

Can Joann ask a question? What happened with Shelley?

GARY exits to the kitchen as MAX enters from UL, his head tilted to one side.

NEIL

She's upset.

JOANN

I can see that (!). About what?

NEIL

(Preoccupied, calling to kitchen) No frozen stuff, Gary!

GARY

(Calling back) Gotcha!

NEIL

(Seeing MAX) Max... *(Noticing his condition)* What's wrong with your neck?

MAX

I thought I'd try looking at things from a different angle. How do you people stay clean with such a small bathtub?

NEIL

(Crossing toward MAX) Can you help me? We have to round people up and get some things together.

MAX

Where are we going?

NEIL

To the basement. *(Passing MAX to exit to hall)*

MAX

Goody. Dampness. *(Following NEIL)* Just what I need.

JOANN sees GARY entering with some containers of food – a crumpled shirt atop them – to set them on the table. SHE begins to work along with HIM, though still ruffled.

JOANN

Gary, there's canned stuff too, and some empty containers in the cupboard. I have to go talk to Shelley...

GARY

Are there any boxes around? It'd make stuff easier to carry. *(Picking up crumpled shirt)*

JOANN

Boxes? Uhm...look out back on the porch... *(Watching as GARY walks to STEVE and DEIDRE with the shirt)*

GARY

(Offering shirt to STEVE) Hey—is this yours by any chance? It was in the blender.

STEVE

(Disarmed pause) Oh...yeah. *(Accepting shirt)* Thanks. *(Laughingly polite)* Darn washing machine was broken...!

GARY gives STEVE a look up and down. HE takes in DEIDRE the same way, then crosses UR, exiting to the kitchen, watched by JOANN, who looks at STEVE and DEIDRE, then crosses DS to them, regarding them both with troubled curiosity.

JOANN

And why, by the way, are you two standing here wearing bed sheets?

A CRASH sounds from the kitchen.

STEVE

(Suddenly alarmed) Low wind resistance—!

STEVE runs UL as GARY bolts from the kitchen, chasing STEVE, who disappears into the hall, GARY after him.

DEIDRE

(Calling sharply) Gary—!

JOANN

(Shocked) Deidre—?!

DEIDRE

(At a loss) Jo—it's a long story...

JOANN

Since eleven o'clock last night? Never mind! If I have to deal with one more thing, my brain will explode!

STEVE runs back in; GARY chasing HIM.

DEIDRE

(Yelling) Gary! Wait—!

DEIDRE grabs GARY as HE passes, swings HIM around to a halt as STEVE makes it into the kitchen, and JOANN exits.

DEIDRE

Leave him alone!

GARY

I will! After I kill him!

DEIDRE

I did half of it...!

GARY

Well that half belonged to me!

GARY tries to bolt again, as DEIDRE grabs HIM and holds HIM back.

DEIDRE

Gary! Stop! It was me!

GARY

(Halted again, observes HER) What?

DEIDRE

(Pause) It was my fault. *I came on to him!*

GARY

(Observes HER stunned for a moment) You came on to him?

DEIDRE

(Beat) Yes. Yes!

GARY

What do you mean, you came on to him?

DEIDRE

I don't know how many ways I can say it, Gary. He was a little boy. I was a candy store. The door was open. That's all.

GARY

(Confounded pause) That's all. *(Reeling somewhat)* You seduced a kid? In our friends' house?

DEIDRE

(Flustered beat) Well if you have to put it that way...!

GARY

Oh for the love of... *(Beat)* Why?

DEIDRE

(A long, sober pause) How do I know why? Maybe I wanted to feel close to somebody again in case it was the last chance I had. Maybe I wanted to see if you'd even care—!

GARY

Have you gone completely nuts? Why wouldn't I care?

DEIDRE

I don't know. There's no profit in it, for one thing.

GARY

(Exasperated beat) Dee, what are we at war about here? Will you please give me a hint? We have worked so hard to have a little success in life. And here it is. And just when we should be enjoying it together a little bit, you decide to lose your mind and start pushing me away like this!

DEIDRE

Push you away. As though I could even make enough contact with you to *do* that, you mean? It just took you ten minutes to notice what happened here! Why? Because you're too busy with *important* things. Like running from rocks!

GARY

There's only one rock. It's a hundred miles wide. But that's the Deidre solution, isn't it? Deal with reality by pretending it isn't there!

DEIDRE

Whatever is going to happen today, there isn't a thing you can do about it, Gary. But you're not happy unless you're fighting monsters—!

GARY

I'd be happy to share the responsibility once in a while, if you were ever interested! (*Gesturing to HER and couch*) Like *this*, for example. Do you realize how stupid this was, on top of everything else? I mean, what if you... what if you caught some kind of a...

DEIDRE

(*Incredulous*) A disease? From Steve? Oh for God's sake, Gary. The only thing you could catch from Steve is virginity, probably. (*Plopping to couch, wearily*)

GARY

That's not the only thing. Unless there's a perfect method of contraception I haven't heard about.

DEIDRE

Actually, there is.

GARY

And what's that?

DEIDRE

Already...being...pregnant.

GARY observes DEIDRE a stunned moment.

GARY

You're pregnant? (!)

DEIDRE

Funny time for it to come up, isn't it?

GARY

How long?

DEIDRE

Until I have the baby. *(Takes a glance at GARY)* Three months.

GARY

Three months?!

DEIDRE

Probably closer to two and a half. That's about as often as we make love now so it's pretty easy to pin down.

GARY

Were you going to tell me about this at some point?

DEIDRE

I was thinking about it.

GARY

Mary rode to Bethlehem.

DEIDRE

Well what was I going to do? Throw a net over you while you were running out the door to the store so I could hit you with the good news? We can't have children; they're too expensive, aren't they?

GARY

I never said that. You know I want to have kids!

DEIDRE

Oh sure. As soon as they're cost-efficient. But that's my problem. One glass of wine and a couple of jokes and my timing goes right out the window...! *(Voice breaking)*

GARY is suddenly aware of something deeper, more painful coming from her.

GARY

Dee. *(Sitting on the couch, facing HER)* Do you really think my reaction to this would have been anything but joy?

DEIDRE

(Observes HIM a moment) Are you happy about it?

GARY

Of course! And you were afraid to even tell me?

DEIDRE

(Beat) Well how did I know how you'd react?! After that argument we had last year, tossing our silly ultimatums at each other and me making that remark about maybe having a baby on my own--!

GARY

I knew you didn't mean that.

DEIDRE

(In a moment, "laughs" sadly) Oh, Gary. *(Beat)* Gary...do you have any idea how...*terrifying* is it to live with someone who's as certain of everything as you are?

GARY

Certain? What am I certain of? Except of how careful you have to be in this world, Dee. How hard you have to work; how hard you have to plan...

DEIDRE

I know. I know, Gary. I've met that fear you carry around inside. And I've heard all about your dad, and what losing everything did to him. He was a good man, and he had bad luck. It happens. It's life. But, Gary, if we wait until everything is perfect and nothing bad can ever happen before we start having ours, we'll never have it! It's passing us right now. Can't you see it? That's what I'm looking at outside the kitchen window. Our life passing by.

GARY

We'll stop looking and start living it, baby. Right now. I never meant to do this to you.

SHELLEY enters, noticing the scene, sullenly, going to closet.

DEIDRE

I know. *(Still emotionally jumbled)* I didn't mean to screw up either, but we both seem to be so good at it...!

GARY

(Smiling a bit) We have to have something in common, don't we?

SHELLEY

Don't mind me; just pretend I'm not here. Oh, I'm sorry—you already did that, didn't you?

DEIDRE

Shelley. *(Rising)* It was my fault. Be mad at me, not Steve.

SHELLEY

Mad at you? I'm grateful! Every woman should have a friend like you to stop her from ruining her life. *(Obtaining her coat, putting it on)* It must've taken some effort, too. I can't get near him but you laid him out quicker than a New York undertaker.

DEIDRE

He didn't know what he was doing. He was just trying to...deal with his feelings...

*GARY goes back to the kitchen as
FREIDA enters from UL.*

SHELLEY

Oh, that's good. Why don't you tell me he was practicing for the honeymoon? Maybe I'll believe that too. *(Beat)* I'm just glad the truth came out. I knew he didn't want to get married, but it might have been years before I figured out he didn't even love me.

FREIDA

Honey, you're so wrong about that. Nobody will ever love you as much as my Steven does.

SHELLEY

Motherly wisdom. *(To DEIDRE)* Why don't you tell her what a loving boy her son *is*?

FREIDA

What are you talking about?—the couch thing?

SHELLEY

(Observes FREIDA with some surprise) He told you about it—?!

FREIDA

I asked him why he was walking with his face on the floor; he had to tell me something...

SHELLEY

(Darkly amused, putting on gloves) You seem to be taking it well...

FREIDA

(Shrugs) Everybody makes mistakes...

SHELLEY

(Halting in mid-glove) Mistakes?!

STEVE enters UL, dressed.

FREIDA

You know, I'm surprised you're acting this way...

SHELLEY

I'd be surprised at *you* if I could be surprised at anything at this point.

FREIDA

So there weren't enough sleeping places last night. What's the big d—...

FREIDA leaves off as SHE notices DEIDRE, giving HER a study, growing more cognizant.

SHELLEY

And I almost married into this family. Thank you, hand of God.

As JOANN enters UL, FREIDA observes STEVE.

FREIDA

What happened here?

STEVE

(Halting, uncomfortable) Well...like I said...

FREIDA

(Heating) You said...the two of you spent the night on the couch together and that you might have been “overly friendly”!

SHELLEY

He was. *(Gesturing to DEIDRE)* Meet Lee Friendly. *(Turning to leave)*

FREIDA

(Looks at STEVE, stunned) Stand there while I find something to kill you with.

JOANN

(Stopping SHELLEY) Where are you going? You don't even have a car (!).

SHELLEY

I've got legs.

JOANN

Shelley, it is dangerous out there...!

SHELLEY

I wouldn't stay in this house with him if we were surrounded by space aliens with cookbooks and portable grills!

SHELLEY storms out of the house, JOANN deciding to go after HER. FREIDA turns back to STEVE, as GARY enters from the kitchen with more food.

FREIDA

I hope that you're crazy and not just an imbecile, because insanity can be cured. What do you mean, jeopardizing your engagement to that wonderful girl for a fling with some whore—?!

GARY hears this, registering a flat, disagreeable reaction.

STEVE

You know, I hate to keep bringing this up, but darn it, we're not engaged yet—

FREIDA

Say that again and I'll tear your eyebrows out!

GARY starts to steam. Out the window, JOANN is catching up with SHELLEY, trying to talk with HER; DEIDRE observing this.

STEVE

Well I'm—I'm just a little tired of being made the villain here when I'm not responsible for all of this—!

FREIDA

(Thumbing toward DEIDRE) Don't worry; I'll get to her—!

GARY is crossing to FREIDA and STEVE, to come behind FREIDA.

STEVE

I'm not talking about her. I'm talking about... *(Hesitating, but then finding courage)* ...you.

FREIDA

(A stunned pause) Me?

GARY

(Smiling slightly, "polite") Excuse me. *(FREIDA turns)* Did you just call my wife a whore?

FREIDA

(Looks from GARY to DEIDRE, then back to GARY) Yes. *(Addressing STEVE again)* I'm responsible for this?!

GARY has a flatly unbelieving reaction, looks at DEIDRE, who looks back.

STEVE

Well not for last night, but... (*Mustering courage*) Yesterday...when you started again about us not being ready to get married? Well, mom, you're entitled to your opinion and all, but... well when you're taking a big step like marriage, it doesn't exactly help for somebody to be so negative all the time, and anyway, that announcement was a very important thing for Shelley, and...well, when you think about it, maybe her happiness should have come first...

GARY

Excuse me. (*FREIDA and STEVE attend*) My wife is not a whore.

FREIDA

I'm sorry— (*Indicating DEIDRE*) Is this what nuns are wearing now?

GARY

How would you...like to be wearing a nice new arm cast for Christmas?

FREIDA

(*Intimidated none*) If you're planning on laying a hand on me, buddy boy, throw it a going-away party first.

DEIDRE

Gary...?!

GARY

What?

DEIDRE

What are you doing? Threatening an old lady?

GARY

I'm defending you!

DEIDRE

Oh, that is so sweet, darling, but could you do it in a way that doesn't involve prison time? The doctor says I'm going to be giving birth and I might need somebody to drive me to the hospital.

*JOANN is bringing a teary-eyed
SHELLEY back in the door as MAX and
NEIL wheel in a portable cot from the
hall.*

STEVE

(*To DEIDRE*) Did you call my mother an old lady?

DEIDRE

I'm sorry— (*Indicating FREIDA*) Is this what twenty-five looks like now?

FREIDA

Why don't you shut up?

DEIDRE

Why don't *you* shut up?

MAX

Why don't you *all* shut up?!

EVERYONE is silenced, observing MAX, who takes another step into the room, sending a look around.

MAX, *Continued*

All right. Enough is enough. (*To DEIDRE*) First of all. You. Go put some clothes on. You're making *me* cold. (*Observing the other three as DEIDRE gathers up her dress and leaves*) What is wrong with you people? At a time like this you have to invent problems? (*Looking at FREIDA*) Mrs. Winkler. You're a very good mother with one fault. You do your job a little too well. (*To STEVE*) You. You love her but you're not sure if marrying her is the right thing to do yet. Do you think you ever will be sure? Nobody has invented a machine for looking into the future, and if they did, you wouldn't want one. You have to become a man some time. Stop ducking the draft. (*To SHELLEY*) And you. Everything would be all right if he didn't care so much about his mother. Don't you know what that means? He'll care about you that way too. He'll care about your children. He'll read to them. He'll see a sad face and ask what's wrong. In this world, caring too much is the last problem any of us have. (*Experiencing himself with some irony*) Listen to me. Max's bargain wisdom warehouse. Come on down for our big Armageddon Day sale.

MAX turns back to NEIL, and the two begin to talk as GARY returns to the kitchen. FREIDA drifts toward JOANN to exchange some words with HER, as STEVE regards SHELLEY, then takes a contrite step toward HER.

STEVE

Shell...

SHELLEY

Steve...doesn't say anything right now.

STEVE

(*Pause*) I have no idea what it was going to be anyway.

GARY is finishing a last trip out of the kitchen, placing cans, containers and accessories and a foil-wrapped turkey into boxes on the table.

GARY

All right; this is all we can practically take, I think.

JOANN

Why don't we just wheel the refrigerator down?

MAX

This cot is going to be enough work.

NEIL

(Turning cot experimentally) We're gonna have to get somebody behind it...

MAX

Fine. I recommend a young person without a stiff neck.

SHELLEY is drifting about, partly preoccupied by her own thoughts, seeming to grow discomfited.

GARY

What about first aid supplies?

FREIDA

First aid? What are you expecting? Somebody's going to get a piece of asteroid in their eye?

GARY

We don't know how long we might be down there. We have to be prepared.

FREIDA

If we're going to be down there that long, you better forget the first aid and bring a bathroom!

As it becomes apparent that SHELLEY is crying, people observe her, STEVE with particular concern.

STEVE

Shell...?

SHELLEY

(Glancing to STEVE, tries to be dismissive) I'm all right...

STEVE

Shell, I'm sorry. About everything.

SHELLEY

It's not that.

STEVE

What is it, then?

SHELLEY

(Frustrated, crying out) Everything!

STEVE

(Pauses, perplexed) O-k-a-y, that would have been my second guess...

SHELLEY

(Sniffing) Oh, Steve, it's just that...well my life was supposed to be starting today, and now it might be ending instead. What are you supposed to do with that, "take it in stride" or something? I don't have that much stride! I mean, this isn't disappointing; it just plain sucks!

STEVE

Our lives aren't going to end today...

SHELLEY

But what if they do? My whole life – every beautiful dream I had, everything I always looked forward to – it'll all be gone like it never existed. Not only didn't I get engaged...I didn't get married, I didn't have children...I didn't have grandchildren...!

MAX

(Helping with cot) Had a busy day planned, didn't she?

FREIDA

Maybe we shouldn't joke right now.

SHELLEY

O-o-h-h, I don't even care about dying! It's just the thought of... *(Awful pause)* still being single when it happens...!

MAX

Just think how ironic this is going to be later when we're all still here.

GARY

What if we're not still here?

MAX

Then it'll be *more* ironic.

As people continue the moving job, STEVE is impelled to some serious thought, and, making a decision, looks at SHELLEY.

STEVE

Shell?

SHE looks at HIM, and HE reaches and takes her hands, compelling HER to face HIM more directly.

STEVE, *Continued*

I want to ask you something. Okay? (*SHE waits, receptive*) After all that's happened today...after everything...do you think that you would...still want to marry me?

SHE gazes at HIM, wondering, and intrigued, and finally, finds the answer in her heart.

SHELLEY

Yes.

STEVE

(*Pause*) Then let's do it. Right now.

OTHERS stop; look.

SHELLEY

(*Slightly flummoxed*) What?

STEVE

(*More confidently*) Let's get married. Even if it's just for today, and I sure hope it won't be.

SHELLEY

What do you mean...get married—?

STEVE

Shell, this has all been my fault; the fear, the avoiding, the playing games. If this is our last day together, you have to know I really loved you, and this is the only way I can prove it.

FREIDA

(*Stepping in, somewhat between SHELLEY and STEVE*) Excuse me. (*Smiling toward SHELLEY*) The news is good; it's insanity after all. (*To STEVE*) What in hell are you talking about? Who is going to marry you? Do you see a minister in this room?

STEVE

We'll have to find one...

FREIDA

Find a minister. Why not? With millions of people preparing to die, the clergy should have nothing but time on their hands!

The doorbell rings. ALL look toward the door, and exchange looks with each other.

JOANN

(To NEIL, apprehensive) Who would that be?

NEIL

I don't know. If it's someone selling life insurance, tell him his business model needs work.

JOANN

I'm not answering it! (NEIL observes HER, then crosses toward door) Neil—!? *(HE stops, regarding HER)* You don't know who it is...!

NEIL

True. I thought I might find out by opening the door.

GARY

I don't know if I'd do that, Neil. Things are going crazy out there.

JOANN

It could be looters—!

NEIL

Politely ringing the doorbell to ask if they can loot us?

JOANN

(Flustered) Well...(!)

JOANN looks around, steps to table and picks up a long-pronged serving fork and offers it insistently to NEIL.

JOANN, *Continued*

Here. Just in case.

Observing the fork, NEIL takes it, holds it up and studies it in his hand, gives JOANN a quasi-rankled look, and steps to the door and opens it. Standing there is a smiling, neatly groomed YOUNG MAN, earmuffs donned, wearing a coat and tie under an overcoat, and carrying a stack of booklets.

YOUNG MAN

(Pleasantly, stepping inside a bit) Good morning, sir! How are you today?

NEIL

(Gazing, unsure how to react) U-u-h, t-h-a-t's a good question. Can I help you...?

YOUNG MAN

The question is, can I help you? Folks, I'm from the Eternal Light Society, and we're out today telling everyone the good news about God's word. You know, the Lord's love and mercy are always with us, even at a time like this. You might say, especially at a time like this...

NEIL

Uhm... Thanks; that's good to know, but...we're a little busy right now... *(Touching the door suggestively)*

YOUNG MAN

I know, sir, and believe me, I don't intend to take much of your time today. But just let me say, that this is the wrong time to turn away the word of the Almighty. Can you honestly say that you would be ready to meet him today—?

NEIL

Actually, we're trying not to find out... *(Urging departure again)*

DEIDRE

Excuse me. *(Stepping up)* I'm, uhm...curious about something. You couldn't perform a marriage, could you? I mean, is that covered in your...training or whatever?

YOUNG MAN

(Stopped, unsure how to react) Oh. *(Beat)* Uhm...

STEVE

That's right. *(Observes the YOUNG MAN, points)* You're a clergyman. I mean technically. Right?

YOUNG MAN

(At a loss) Well...no... *(Beat)* I'm from the Eternal Light Society. We're out today spreading the good news about God's word...

DEIDRE

(To OTHERS) He's holding scripture in his hands and it's the end of the world. I say close enough.

STEVE

(Looks at SHELLEY) Shell?

SHELLEY

(Slightly befuddled) What? He can't marry us...

GARY

I don't know. If you say "I do" in front of witnesses, doesn't that basically do it?

JOANN

Do what? You need a license.

FREIDA

You need a church!

MAX

You get married in your hearts. The rest is wearing funny clothes and eating too much.

STEVE

(To SHELLEY) The votes are in. What do you say?

SHELLEY

(Observes STEVE, overwhelmed) This is up to me?

STEVE

It always is. Shelley Meadows, will you marry me?

SHELLEY looks at STEVE, then slowly, softly smiles at HIM with the subtle, certain depth of love, and laughs slightly, though glad.

SHELLEY

What will we do for a honeymoon?

STEVE

(Smiling; glad) Maybe they'll let us have the bridal cot.

STEVE extends his hand to SHELLEY, SHE taking it, as NEIL closes the door and DEIDRE leads the YOUNG MAN farther into the room.

DEIDRE

This is Steve and Shelley; they'd like to get married. Can I take your coat...?

GARY

Whatever we're going to do, we have to do it pretty fast, folks—

THE YOUNG MAN, somewhat bewildered, puts down his booklets and slips off his earmuffs and overcoat.

YOUNG MAN

I don't really know how to perform a wedding...

DEIDRE

O-h-h, ask them if they take each other, throw in some dearly beloveds and a couple of amens; you'll be fine.

JOANN

(To NEIL) So we're actually doing this?

NEIL

I just live here.

SHELLEY

(Starting to fret) Oh, how can I get married, though? My parents aren't even here...

STEVE

That's okay, hon; we'll tell them all about it—

SHELLEY

Well that's not enough...!

DEIDRE

Could we send them a picture—?

STEVE

There's an idea. Does anybody have a camera?

JOANN

We have one. I'll get it. *(Starting to exit)*

FREIDA

What about music?

JOANN

(Pauses, and in a moment, shrugs) I'll get the pipe organ, too. *(Exits UL)*

GARY

(Giving the television a look) We don't have time for music.

FREIDA

You can't have a wedding without music! What are you, an atheist?

SHELLEY

Who's going to give me away?

STEVE

Shell, let's not sweat the details. This is gonna be content over form, okay?

FREIDA and DEIDRE are lining up some dining chairs as NEIL takes a look at the television, distracted by other thoughts.

SHELLEY

Oh, Steve—*somebody* has to give me away...!

MAX

(Smiling a bit toward SHELLEY) Well... *(Stepping toward HER as SHE observes HIM)* The world's a stage...and I guess it's time for me to admit that from now on, I'll be playing the fatherly role.

SHELLEY

(Regards MAX with a smile, warmly appreciative of his offer) You're a little *like* my dad, Mr. Hirschfield.

MAX

(Offering his hand for HER to take) Not enough, I'm sure. But I'll do my best.

DEIDRE

Can we turn that TV off?

GARY

No—let's turn it down but leave it on, okay? I want to see what's happening.

DEIDRE directs MAX and SHELLEY into the kitchen, as JOANN enters UL with a camera, and STEVE approaches NEIL.

STEVE

Neil...I know it's short notice, but...I'd be honored if you'd be my best man.

NEIL

(Observes STEVE, accommodating but also preoccupied somehow) Y-yeah—that's fine.
Uhm...Steve...

JOANN

(Interrupting) Who's taking pictures? *(Offers the camera to NEIL, who observes it and takes it)* And... *(Taking a kazoo out of a pocket)* If you want music...this is it.

GARY

What is that? A kazoo?

JOANN

Old Girl Scout issue. *(Offering it to GARY)*

GARY

(Taking, looking at kazoo) I used to love these things.

JOANN

Music it up, maestro.

DEIDRE

We're ready to begin, everyone.

JOANN sits with DEIDRE and FREIDA in the chairs, turned toward STEVE, NEIL and the YOUNG MAN at center stage. DEIDRE gives GARY, standing opposite, a commencing gesture, and HE starts to "play" the bridal entrance on the kazoo. MAX walks SHELLEY in from the kitchen, and down to join STEVE, as everybody smiles, and GARY turns to look at the television. SHELLEY joins STEVE. GARY continues to kazoo, turns back to see people observing HIM, and stops. HE takes the kazoo out of his mouth, stands appropriately.

YOUNG MAN

(Realizes his cue, resolves to give it his best shot) Dearly beloved...uhm...we are gathered here today to join this man and this woman in holy matrimony. *(Pauses awkwardly)* That's all I know, folks.

GARY

That's enough. Get to the vows. (*Looking back at television*)

YOUNG MAN

(*Nodding, regarding STEVE*) Do you...? (*Sends an inquiring look and gesture, memory failing*)

STEVE

Steve.

YOUNG MAN

Do you, Steve...take...? (*Eliciting help from SHELLEY*)

SHELLEY

Shelley.

YOUNG MAN

Do you, Steve, take Shelley...

NEIL

Ex—excuse me...

The ceremony is halted, as everybody looks at NEIL. HE sends some glances here and there, and continues a bit self-consciously.

NEIL

Isn't there, uhm...isn't there a part where you ask if uhm...anyone has any objections to the marriage?

OTHERS stand dumb, as JOANN, sensing "trouble," rises, to go over to NEIL.

DEIDRE

Why do we need that? Who has any objections?

NEIL

(*Pausing*) Well... (*Shrugs*) Somebody might. Who knows?

JOANN

(*Stepping next to NEIL with an urgent smile*) I think we'd best keep moving along here. Time and all...

NEIL

You know, maybe I shouldn't say anything...

JOANN

(Through a clenched-teeth smile) You...shouldn't.

STEVE

(Ambivalently interested) Well...if you have something on your mind, Neil...maybe we should hear it...

JOANN

No. You don't need to hear it. Please take my word on this...

NEIL

Well...I guess I just wanted to say... *(As JOANN stews in disapproval)* Marriage is...well you know, it's a serious, sacred thing. Always; under any circumstances. If you don't treat it that way...then you demean its very purpose.

MAX

Deeply inspiring. And your point is?

NEIL

Well...I guess it's just that... *(To STEVE and SHELLEY, trying for some tact)* Steve, Shelley... you two weren't even engaged yet. And...well, you spent last night and this morning fighting, and now here you are, getting married to...to prove something to each other...?

DEIDRE

Neil, it's not the drafting of the Constitution. They just want to be married in case the world ends.

NEIL

But if the world *doesn't* end, they'll still be married, right?

FREIDA

So what?

NEIL

So what if it's a mistake after all? Look, I doubt I'm the only one who's noticed that these two probably still have some issues to iron out...

DEIDRE

Married couples always have issues to iron out. Gary and I need a steamroller—!

MAX

What are we arguing about? It's a fake marriage anyway; they can get a fake divorce.

FREIDA

Get a divorce—?!

MAX

What? I'm trying to help...!

FREIDA

By telling them to get a divorce? Maybe they should try to work it out first!

MAX

They can work it outside! What do I care? I'm losing my mind here!

JOANN

(Angrily to NEIL) Will you look at what you're doing?

NEIL

I'm just trying to be helpful—

JOANN

No you're not—you're having a good time! It's your mind playing that stupid what-if game again—!

NEIL

(Resentment sparked) What...if...you stopped thinking that your way of dealing with things is always superior to mine—?

JOANN

I act superior to you? That's actually what you just said? As though this entire quasi-functional, pseudo-symbiotic, plastically wonderful relationship of ours could exist for five minutes if I didn't give in to you on *everything*?!

NEIL

As though this what couldn't what if what?

JOANN

Oh, that's right—pretend to be confused now. *(Pointedly, to some OTHERS)* That's an evasion technique, see? Very effective...

NEIL

Jo, what are you talking about? We discuss everything.

JOANN

Sure we do. And then we always do what you want to do!

GARY

Guys, I'm not sure we have time to settle more than one interpersonal crisis here—

JOANN

Well this is my house, Gary, so if we do only settle one interpersonal crisis, guess which interpersonal crisis it's going to be?!

NEIL

This whole shindig was mainly your idea and I said it was fine—!

JOANN

Sure, because you didn't really care one way or the other. But when you dig your heels in on something, buddy, they stay dug.

NEIL

I don't dig my heels in on things.

JOANN

Of course you do, but you do it in ways you don't think people see because *you* don't see them.

NEIL

I what but I what what?

JOANN

When we were shopping for this dinner, I suggested getting some other kind of meat besides turkey, didn't I? And we “talked” about it until I gave in and we got turkey. For one reason. *You* like turkey!

NEIL

Never could I imagine the issue was that vital to you. Besides, everybody has turkey for Thanksgiving. Everybody likes turkey.

JOANN

Oh, they do (?). Everybody likes turkey. Well now that you're actually listening and it doesn't make a bit of difference, would you be interested in hearing *my* position on turkey?

MAX

She's got a position on turkey. Now I can die.

JOANN

I hate it. Yes. Yes! I said it and I'll say it again. I...hate...turkey! I don't mean I'm not particularly fond of it. I'm not saying it isn't my first choice if there's a nice piece of veal on sale. I am talking about a loathing so deep, dark and intractable that Edgar Allen Poe couldn't have described it on hallucinogens! What genius first had the idea of actually eating a turkey? Somebody who was looking for a good, tasty piece of Styrofoam and had to settle for the next best thing? But everybody wants turkey. It's Thanksgiving, so we have to have turkey. It's what the pilgrims ate, isn't it? They were Puritans; they *liked* suffering! But every year, thanks to these dead people and their depressing wardrobe, I have to go to the store, and walk

JOANN, *Continued*

past juicy sirloin, and succulent lamb, and melt-in-your-mouth smoked ham, and buy a turkey. And then consume the state's electrical supply trying to cook the god-awful thing--basting it until my arm gets numb, and knowing that even if I wind up in the hospital with ladle elbow, that obstinate piece of bird-like food substance will *still* be dry! You pour water on it with a hose and it's dry. You feed fluids into it with an I-V and it's dry. Turkey is so dry, there should be a desert named after it! If the dam bursts, and the flood waters are washing the town away, everybody yells, "Swim for the turkey!" And no matter how much of it you manage to force and cram and wash down your throat, you can *never* eat it all. And then, for two weeks, the nightmare continues. Turkey casserole. Turkey croquettes. Turkey soup. Turkey ice cream! I hate turkey! I hate the man who invented turkey! If I ever find the evil laboratory where turkey is stitched together out of chicken parts and road kill and jolted to life with electrical kites, I'll plant a bomb under it and make a creamed turkey surprise the world will never forget! (*Grabbing the turkey off the table*) And I'm starting with this one!

NEIL

(*In disbelief*) Jo, what are you doing?

JOANN

A service to humanity! I dressed this thing and now I'm going to bury it! Deep in the ground! Where no one will ever taste its sandpaper-y flesh!

GARY

That's food! We're going to need it—!

JOANN

We'll eat Slim Jims and candy bars! This turkey is dead meat! And so is anybody who tries to stop me!

JOANN bolts into the kitchen with the turkey, and most of the OTHERS break and run after HER, shouting pleas and admonitions—leaving STEVE, SHELLEY, and the YOUNG MAN. STEVE and SHELLEY exchange a look, and STEVE addresses the YOUNG MAN.

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