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WHERE DID WE GO WRONG?

A Comedy in Two Acts

by Verna Safran
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SETTING:

A Condominium in Miami, Florida

TIME:

Forty years after Woodstock

CHARACTERS:

Ethel Schatz (Mom); a sensible woman over 60

Henry Baskin; her lover, about 65. A perceptive man with long hair and a beard, a remaining tribute to the 1960’s

Sandra; Ethel’s conservative daughter from Chicago

Joe; Sandra’s husband of five years

Frederika Summerfield; Ethel’s neighbor, a widow and comfortably well-off political activist. A bundle of energy at age 60

Randy McDougal; a 50 year old middle-aged beach bum. A hefty, good-natured gentleman of Irish descent
ACT I; SCENE 1

(AT RISE: A light, comfortable condominium in Miami, Florida. The décor bears a sense of reminiscence without appearing garish; every possession, every object a treasured memory from the guitar in the corner to the upright piano to the cut-glass compote on the side board. A terrace with a view of the beach draws the warmth of the sun and ocean into this home created by two people, ETHEL (MOM) and her lover, HENRY which stands as a reflection of the summation of their simple but well-lived lives. ETHEL is sweeping objects from the tops of furniture into drawers to give an impression of instant neatness. SHE looks the place over with a critical eye.)

MOM
(Anxious but not harsh) Henry – I want you to empty the ashtrays and get your pipe out of here. Sandra and Joe will be here any minute.

(HENRY enters wearing a tie which he does not usually wear.)

HENRY
So? Is your daughter such a fussy housekeeper?

MOM
That’s not the idea. I don’t want them to find out –

HENRY
What, that I still smoke?

MOM
No, you know better than that. About us! Did you take care of the mailbox?

HENRY
Covered my name with masking tape.

MOM
Brilliant. You can take the tape off after they leave. (Scoops letters off the table) Oh! These letters addressed to you! Hide them!

HENRY
Under the sofa cushions! Va, va, va, voom! (Pause) Boy, if I knew it was gonna be so much trouble, I would never have fallen in love with you!

(DOORBELL RINGS)
Oh! They’re here!

So? Answer the door.

Wait! Your cufflinks!

What about my cufflinks?

You’d better take them off the night table.

How will it look – they walk in the door and they see me coming out of the bedroom.

You’re right. Wait till I serve the coffee and cake. Then sneak in the bedroom and remove the cufflinks on the sly. You’re a genius. I love you.

(DOORBELL RINGS again. ETHEL crosses to door.)

(With a deep breath, opens door) Hello! Sandra darling (Kisses her daughter) – what an attractive suit. And Joe (Giving JOE a hug) – you’re looking healthier than usual.

Thank you. Where can I put my umbrella?

You brought an umbrella to Florida?

Wanted to make sure of good weather. You know, when you bring your umbrella, it never rains!

(Taking umbrella and placing it in the hall closet) Sorry I asked.

MOM
Sandra, Joe – this is my friend, Henry Baskin.

JOE

Hi. Nice of you to come over.

HENRY

To what? Ah, yes.

SANDRA

(Shaking HENRY’s hand) How do you do? Mom spoke about you in her letters.

HENRY

Oh, did she? That was nice of her. I thought maybe I was unspeakable.

MOM

(With a quick reprimanding glance at HENRY) Don’t mind the mess. You didn’t give me much notice. I thought you were taking your vacation in California, and then you call me out of the blue.

SANDRA

I wanted to surprise you.

MOM

When you’re gonna surprise me next time, I’d appreciate a little advance warning.

SANDRA

I didn’t want you to fuss. Anyway, your apartment looks lovely. But don’t you find it a strain keeping up such a large place at your age, Mom?

MOM

No, I enjoy it. It keeps me busy. Anyway, a condominium isn’t much work.

SANDRA

But what do you do when something needs repairing?

MOM

Oh, Henry’s very good at that sort of thing. Mr. Fixit, I call him. He’s always willing to “come over” and give me a hand.

SANDRA

I see. Do you live nearby, Mr. Baskin?

HENRY
Yes, err, quite nearby. Right in this building, in fact.

SANDRA

Oh, that’s convenient.

MOM

Just look at this old clock Henry fixed for me.

SANDRA

Oh, yes, I remember that clock. It used to be in your bedroom.

MOM

Right. It was a wedding present to me and your father. Hadn’t worked in years. Since your father died. But Henry started monkeying around with it, and presto! – Keeps perfect time!

SANDRA

I have a sentimental attachment to that clock. It’s the one Dad used to teach me to tell time. Big hand, little hand, all that.

MOM

Henry’s daughter has also admired the clock.

SANDRA

Oh? Has she!

MOM

Sandra. Why don’t you put a few cups on the table? I have some coffee perking. *(Exits to kitchen)*

*(Sandra opens the wrong cupboard)*

HENRY

*(Pointing to the other side of the sideboard)* The cups are over there.

SANDRA

Well! You certainly know your way around here.

HENRY

As if it were my own. My place has the exact same layout as your mother’s. Here, I’ll get the napkins and the silverware.

SANDRA

What sort of work do you – that is, did you – do, Mr. Baskin?

HENRY
Very good work. Accurate, prompt, efficient…

SANDRA
I’m sure. But what was your profession?

HENRY
I used to be a civil engineer for the city of Philadelphia.

SANDRA
Ah. Civil Service. That means you have quite a sizable pension?

HENRY
Yes, it does, you clever girl. But why think about money? Aren’t you young people supposed to be fun-loving and devil-may-care?

SANDRA
I’m not a teenager. I’m a responsible married woman!

(ETHEL enters with a tray of coffee and strudel)

MOM
Coffee is served. Try the strudel. I made it myself.

JOE
May I use your bathroom?

HENRY
Down the hall to the left.

MOM
No! Don’t go in the bathroom!

JOE
I beg your pardon?

HENRY
I think he’ll be all right in there.

SANDRA
Mom, Joseph is quite used to going to the bathroom by himself.

MOM
That’s not what I meant. Henry, don’t you have to go somewhere?

HENRY
No, I washed up before I came.

MOM

Not the bathroom. Somewhere else?

HENRY

Somewhere else? You trying to get rid of me? Where else could be the somewhere else?

MOM

Take a guess. Just off the cuff……?

HENRY

Oh, yes. You’ll excuse me, Sandra?

SANDRA

Certainly.

HENRY

(To JOE) Here, I’ll show you where it is.

(HENRY and JOE exit to the hallway)

MOM

Well, what do you think of him, Sandra? Good-looking, isn’t he!

SANDRA

Rather different from father, don’t you think?

MOM

You bet he is! Not that I ever had anything to complain about with your father – but with Henry – for the first time in my life I’m having fun!

SANDRA

That’s wonderful. Do you think it’s going to get serious?

MOM

Oh, it’s plenty serious right now.

SANDRA

Oh, Mom, you mean you’re planning to get married?

MOM

Hush! Here he comes. I can’t talk about it now.

(HENRY enters wearing cuff-links)
HENRY
Well, what have you two got up your sleeve?

MOM
Nothing. What have you got up your sleeve?

HENRY
Only cufflinks.

(THEY laugh at their private joke)

MOM
Well, let’s eat. Dig right in. Make yourself at home.

SANDRA
Uhm…Do you have any soy milk?

MOM
What’s wrong with regular milk?

SANDRA
Cholesterol. Bad for the heart.

MOM
In my day, we were so glad not to go hungry, we ate whatever we could get. We had a theory – not eating could lead to starvation.

SANDRA
Oh, you worry me so, the way you don’t take care of yourself, Mom. It’s bad enough you don’t keep kosher, but you don’t have to eat garbage!

MOM
What’s this about keeping kosher?

SANDRA
Didn’t I tell you? Joe and I take our religion very seriously. Oh, I know you didn’t really have time for that sort of thing, what with working in the business and all. And taking care of your health? Well, you didn’t take time for that either and from what I can see, you still don’t. But the ancient dietary laws still have a great deal of validity. They knew – the rabbis knew – about cholesterol.

HENRY
I’m curious. Where does the Talmud mention cholesterol?

SANDRA

Not mixing milk and meat? They knew!

(JOE enters from bathroom)

JOE

Hello again! I borrowed some of your after-shave lotion. I hope you don’t mind. But tell me, why do you—?

MOM

Sit down! Have some coffee and cake, Joe.

(JOE takes a seat at the table, removes a Yarmulke from his pocket and places it on his head. HE says prayers over the food)

JOE

Baruch atah Adonoi…Melach ha olam –

HENRY

(Whispering to ETHEL as JOE prays) At least they didn’t become born-again Christians.

MOM

(To HENRY) Bite your tongue. You want some sugar for your coffee?

JOE

Oh, no – no sugar for me, thanks. It can lead to hyperglycemia.

MOM

I got some artificial sweetener I took from MacDonald’s.

JOE

No, no. Nothing artificial. Cyclamates can give you cancer

MOM

Listen, if you want me to, I’ll fix you something else.

SANDRA

(Poking at the cake as if it were poison) No, when I’m in someone else’s home, I try to eat whatever is put in front of me.

(Pause)

MOM
Well, how are things with you?

SANDRA
We bought a washer and a dryer.

JOE
We bought a new car – a Volvo – and a 52” plasma TV!

MOM
I meant, when I asked how are things with you, not how are things with you, but how are things with you? Are you still working, Sandra?

JOE
She sure is. They made her the head nurse of the department. And after she gets her degree in Hospital Administration, she’ll be making more money than I do!

MOM
No plans to raise a family yet?

SANDRA
Not right away. We want to get really settled first.

MOM
But you’ve been married for five years.

SANDRA
There are still a lot of things we don’t have. We want to buy a house, for instance. We have to be practical, you know.

MOM
Yes, that’s what you’re always telling me. (Pause) Wouldn’t you like some coffee?

SANDRA
No, thanks.

SANDRA & JOE
Too much caffeine.

HENRY
I’d like some. And what sort of work do you do, young man?
SANDRA
Joseph is in information management.  (HENRY looks blankly) Computers. He designs programs for computers.

HENRY
Ah, computers.  (To ETHEL) I never know how to talk to someone who’s in computers. I’m afraid he’d rather talk to his computer than to me.  (To JOE) Uhm, what do you do in your spare time?

JOE
Nothing.  I don’t have any spare time.

HENRY
You don’t do anything but computers?  (Pause) And what brought you down to Florida?

JOE
We took the Delta Airlines excursion flight.

HENRY
No, no – I meant, what is the occasion of your visit?

JOE
We’re on vacation.

MOM
That’s nice, you both got your vacation at the same time.

JOE
Well, I –

SANDRA
(Abruptly cutting JOE off) Yes, we both did. Lucky, the way it worked out.

HENRY
Yes.  Well, I suppose you’re planning to lose some of your hard-earned money at Hialeah?

SANDRA
Hialeah?

HENRY
The racetrack.

JOE
We don’t believe in gambling.

HENRY

Oh. I guess that leaves out the dog races, too.

SANDRA

Dog races? How barbaric!

JOE

Sandra is president of the Chicago chapter of the Animal Rights League.

HENRY

Hmmm. You’re vegetarians, then?

SANDRA

Definitely.

HENRY

Kosher vegetarians?

SANDRA

Of course.

HENRY

Isn’t it hard to find a hotel that caters to kosher vegetarians?

SANDRA

Oh, we’re not planning to go to a hotel. We thought we’d stay here.

MOM

Here? But you can’t stay here!

SANDRA

Why not?

MOM

There’s no room!

SANDRA

Didn’t you tell me you had a sofa bed in the living room?

MOM

Yes, but –

SANDRA
Well, then!

MOM
But you didn’t tell me you were coming. I’m not prepared for – overnight guests.

HENRY
How long were you planning on staying?

SANDRA
Our vacation is for two weeks.

HENRY & MOM
Two weeks!

SANDRA
You won’t have to fuss over us. After all, we’re family.

MOM
Don’t you have any friends you could stay with? You’d have much more fun with people your own age…

JOE
We don’t really have very many friends…

SANDRA
We have Myrna and Sidney.

JOE
They’re really your friends, not my friends.

MOM
Why don’t you visit Myrna and Sidney?

SANDRA
They live in Seattle.

MOM
You don’t know anybody in Miami?

SANDRA
Just you.

(ETHEL stands and begins clearing the table)
JOE

Is there... some kind of a problem?

MOM

No, well, yes... it’s just that I haven’t been feeling too well lately, and—

SANDRA

All the more reason. You shouldn’t be alone when you’re sick. I’ll be able to help you out. (To JOE) Come on, Joe, help me bring in the suitcases. (THEY exit)

MOM

Suitcases yet! What are we gonna do?

HENRY

I’ll go to a motel.

MOM

A motel! With all those prostitutes!

HENRY

Prostitutes cost extra, darling. I’m on a budget.

MOM

But the linens might not be clean. All those homeless people moving in and out....

HENRY

Hey, for two weeks, I’m homeless, too. Don’t knock it! Anyway, if you’re so worried, why don’t we tell your daughter the truth?

MOM

Oh, you don’t know my daughter! She’s so conservative!

HENRY

She’s got to learn about life sometime. And I don’t think she’s gonna learn from Joe. (SANDRA and JOE enter with suitcases)

HENRY

Here, let me give you a hand with those bags.

JOE

That’s okay. We’ll just put them in the hall closet.

MOM
(Quickly motioning to HENRY) Henry will do that! (SHE grabs the bag in JOE’s hand and passes it to HENRY then takes one from SANDRA) Why don’t you and Sandra step out on the terrace over there and enjoy the view while I straighten up. Or maybe you’d like to go for a swim?

SANDRA
Joseph doesn’t like ocean swimming. He only likes lake swimming. He was knocked down by a wave when he was a little boy.

JOE
Might as well go out on the terrace. We have to get a suntan, so people will know we’ve been to Florida.

SANDRA
I have my bathing suit right here in my valise. I’ll slip into it and meet you on the terrace.

(JOE exits to the terrace as SANDRA exits to the bathroom to change. HENRY returns from placing suitcases in the hall closet and sits.)

MOM
Well, this is quite a pickle.

HENRY
We’ll make the best of it. How long can two weeks last?

MOM
A little more than a lifetime.

HENRY
We’ll manage.

MOM
What do you think of Joe?

HENRY
Who?

MOM
Joe. You know. Sandra’s husband.

HENRY
Oh, him. I think he’s an old fuddy-duddy.

MOM
Old fuddy-duddy? He’s at least thirty years your junior!

HENRY
Okay, so he’s a young fuddy-duddy. Why do you ask?

MOM
I wonder if Sandra is happy.

HENRY
Probably not. Do you think she wants to be?

MOM
Of course. Doesn’t everyone want to be happy?

HENRY
No. Some people find other things more important.

MOM
What could be more important than happiness?

HENRY
Lots of things. Money. Security. Or, perhaps Sandra is looking for un-happiness. Who knows? Kids are funny. They have weird values.

MOM
Of course, I can’t tell her what to do –

HENRY
Even if you did, I doubt if she’d listen.

MOM
Still, she is my daughter, and if she needs my help –

HENRY
If she needs your help, she’ll ask for it.

MOM
Not Sandra. She never asks for anything.

HENRY
Except soy milk.

MOM
That was quite unnecessary.

HENRY
But you’ve been saying yourself how stuffy she is.

MOM
I never said she was stuffy! And even if I did – that doesn’t give you the right to say so! Only I have the right to criticize my daughter, not you. You’re not her— Oh, see! We’re quarreling already. It’s because they’re here, and you’re going away…

HENRY
This will be our first separation since we met – over a year ago.

MOM
Maybe you’ll appreciate me more afterwards.

HENRY
I appreciate you right now! Come here, you delicious babka, you sweet little strudel, you!

(ETHEL and HENRY embrace affectionately. SANDRA, carrying her bathing suit, and JOE enter from the terrace catching them in mid-kiss.)

SANDRA
(Sternly) Mother?

MOM
(Quickly breaking away) Yes, dear? Back so soon?

SANDRA
It’s much too hot to sit in the sun and I’m feeling too tired from the trip to do anything else. I’d like to take a nap. Do you mind if I pull out the sofa bed?

MOM
Well, I don’t know. We weren’t planning to – I mean, where would we…?

SANDRA
Just for a little while…

JOE
Sandra has C.F.S. Chronic Fatigue Syndrome.

SANDRA
(Starting to lift one of the cushions) Don’t trouble yourself. I can handle the cush –
(ETHEL goes for cushion too late and SANDRA sees the hidden letters addressed to HENRY)

SANDRA
What are these? (Looks at mail) They’re all addressed to Henry Baskin – at this address! What does this mean? (Turning to ETHEL with letters in hand) Mother, tell me the truth! I feel as your daughter I have the right to know. You and this – Henry – are living together, aren’t you?

HENRY
Cat’s out of the bag.

SANDRA
(Shocked) Oh, Mother! How could you? (SANDRA replaces the cushion, sits and clutches her stomach) Oh! My ulcer! Look what you’re doing to me! You’re trying to kill your daughter!

(LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK)

ACT I; SCENE 2

(AT RISE: Same, several minutes later. SANDRA has brought their suitcases into the living room and is throwing her bathing suit into the valise with great vehemence.)

JOE
Sandra…. What are you doing?

SANDRA
I’m leaving. I’m not staying here another day.

JOE
But we haven’t asked them yet about the – you know?—

SANDRA
I would rather go to a bank. There’s only one way to explain her behavior. She’s getting senile.

JOE
Then maybe she’ll forget she lent us the money, when she lends us the money….?

(MOM AND HENRY enter from convening on the terrace)

MOM
What’s going on? You’re leaving?

SANDRA
Yes, we’re leaving. Where did I put our umbrella?

MOM
It’s in the hall closet. *(Retrieving the umbrella)* But why? You just got here.

SANDRA
Yes, and we’re going back on the next plane. To stay here would be giving tacit approval to your…your living arrangements.

MOM
Look, Henry and I were just discussing the situation and, well, why can’t we talk this over sensibly?

SANDRA
We talk a different language, you and I.

MOM
Yes, but Henry can translate.

SANDRA
I’m not interested in anything Henry has to say.

HENRY
Joe – before you go, let me show you the swimming pool.

*(HENRY beckons to JOE to leave the ladies alone)*

JOE
Oh, yeah. Okay. You’ve got your own swimming pool? This is like belonging to a health club! I always wanted a swimming pool…

*(HENRY and JOE exit)*

MOM
I think you might have hurt my Henry’s feelings.

SANDRA
*Your* Henry? That’s just the point! He’s not *your* Henry!

MOM
What – you know something I don’t?

SANDRA
Didn’t your religion teach you anything? You’re living in sin!

MOM
Darling, I wish you would try to understand.

SANDRA
What’s there to understand? You’re going through some sort of second childhood – you’re deluding yourself!

MOM
I’m not at all deluded. I love Henry. I really do.

SANDRA
But does he love you?

MOM
If he doesn’t, he certainly gives a good imitation.

SANDRA
Then, why doesn’t he marry you?

MOM
Because I don’t want to get married.

SANDRA
You? I don’t believe it! Marriage was good enough for me, but it’s not good enough for you!

MOM
Sit down. Don’t distress yourself like this.

SANDRA
Distress myself? My mother turns into a crazy, irresponsible no-good-nik— Don’t I have a right to be upset? How could you do this to me, mother, after all I’ve done for you.

MOM
After all you’ve done for me? What did you do for me?

SANDRA
I took those piano lessons you wanted me to take, I wore those goddamn braces you put on my teeth. I went to the summer camp you made me go to – and I never got my clothes dirty! *(Cries)*

**MOM**

Yes, you were always a good girl, Sandra.

**SANDRA**

Then why don’t you – just as a favor to me – get married? Don’t you know how much joy it would give me to see you in a wedding gown?

**MOM**

Who, me? Heck, no! We’ve both been married once. What do we need to get married again for?

**SANDRA**

The same reasons you got married before.

**MOM**

To tell you the truth, Sandra, *you* were the reason I got married before. *(Rolls her hands out over her stomach)* There’s no chance of that happening now.

**SANDRA**

But a man and a woman should make a commitment to each other.

**MOM**

We have. He moved his piano in here.

**SANDRA**

A legal commitment.

**MOM**

It’s impossible. And impractical. I just don’t seem able to communicate with you, Sandra. You don’t listen to me.

**SANDRA**

All right. I’m listening.

**MOM**

I find Henry very comfortable to wake up to in the morning…

**SANDRA**

*(Covering her ears) I don’t want to hear it!*
MOM

*(Removing SANDRA’s hands from her ears)* Wait. I want you to see the whole picture.

SANDRA

Even just a little part of the picture makes me sick.

MOM

Don’t you want your mother to be happy?

SANDRA

Of course I do, Mom – that’s the main thing I want for you, is that you should be happy.

MOM

Okay. I consider myself a very lucky person that Henry should come along to brighten the last years of my life. There’s an archaic word you don’t hear too often nowadays that describes him. That word is “Kindness.”

SANDRA

It sounds like he would make a perfect husband.

MOM

Frankly, I would rather keep him as my lover.

SANDRA

I know. You feel guilty about Pop. You’re afraid Pop wouldn’t approve of your getting married again.

MOM

That’s part of it. But that’s not all of it.

SANDRA

*(With a patronizing tone)* Well, I suppose it’s nice that you have a companion. I don’t suppose it can be anything more than that – at his age.

MOM

What do you mean?

SANDRA

Well, certainly at your time of life – the hormones – well, to put it bluntly, the old libido – kind of grinds to a halt, doesn’t it?

MOM

Says who?
SANDRA
You mean you still – ?

MOM
Whenever we feel inclined. And we do feel inclined.

SANDRA
But isn’t it bad for your health?

MOM
Bad for your health? Baloney! What could be bad about something that feels so good? I hope I’m not shocking you.

SANDRA
Oh, no, no. (Pause) Mother…How long have you known Henry?

MOM
How long? A year and a half.

SANDRA
A year and a half?! That’s not long enough. That’s not enough time to decide if he is marriage material or he is not marriage material.

MOM
Please. Don’t talk about marriage. It’s out of the question.

SANDRA
Why?

MOM
We have our reasons.

SANDRA
What are they? I would like to hear them.

MOM
To tell you the truth – we can’t afford it.

SANDRA
You mean you’re saving up for a big wedding?

MOM
Saving? Why should we save? I’m just learning how to spend! You see, darling, there are certain financial considerations –

SANDRA
Exactly! If you don’t marry – if you’re just – shacking up – he could walk out on you any minute, and you wouldn’t be able to get any alimony or financial support.

MOM
Don’t worry, Henry’s not going to walk out on me.

SANDRA
How can you be sure? Maybe you should sign a pre-nup.

MOM
Don’t be ridiculous. Since there’s not going to be any “nup,” why should we sign a pre-nup?

SANDRA
Okay, then – what you need is a cohabitation agreement. To protect your interests.

MOM
What, you got a lot of friends who are lawyers? You want I should pay a lot of money to a lawyer, to create a lot of unnecessary paperwork?

(HENRY and JOE enter)

JOE
Hi. What’s for dinner?

SANDRA
Dinner? Have you forgotten? We’re leaving!

JOE
Do we have to go right away?

MOM
You might as well stay for dinner, you haven’t had a bite to eat.

SANDRA
Well. . . .

JOE
They have a swimming pool, Sandra. No waves! Tomorrow morning I’m going swimming.

SANDRA
Tomorrow morning? Do you think I’d stay overnight in this – this house of ill repute?

    JOE

It’s okay. Henry’s going to a motel.

    HENRY

I thought maybe after Ethel explained things to you, you’d change your attitude.

    SANDRA

Yes. My mother explained it to me. It’s a marriage of convenience. Or rather, a non-marriage of convenience.

    HENRY

That’s right. You can blame it on Uncle Sam. We’d have to pay more taxes if we tied the knot. And this way, we get to keep our own assets. My ass sets over here, her ass sets over there—

    SANDRA

I still don’t like it. I mean – what will the neighbors say?

    FREDDIE (O.S.)

Hello! Anybody home?

    HENRY

They’ll say, “Hello, anybody home?”

    MOM

That must be Freddie.

    SANDRA

Freddie?

    MOM

(Going to the door) From downstairs.

(MOM opens the door and a lively FREDERIKA SUMMERFIELD enters)

    FREDDIE

Hi. Did you see my letter?

    HENRY

What letter?

    FREDDIE
They printed my letter to the Editor in The Miami Herald.

MOM
Oh, congratulations! What was this one about?

FREDDIE
The homeless problem. Doesn’t your heart go out to all those homeless families who have no idea where they’re going to sleep tonight?

HENRY and JOE
Yes. It certainly does.

FREDDIE
In case you didn’t read it, I’ve got a copy of it with me. Oh! You’ve got company!

SANDRA
(Indicating HENRY) Yes. This gentleman is here fixing my mother’s plumbing.

FREDDIE
Ha! You bet he is! Henry I’ve met before. You I didn’t meet.

MOM
My daughter Sandra and her husband Joe are visiting from Chicago. Sandra and Joe, meet our neighbor, Frederika Summerfield. Freddie for short.

JOE
(Rising) I didn’t expect you to be female.

FREDDIE
Neither did my mother. So she called me Frederika – named after Frederich Engels, you know.

JOE
The ball player?

FREDDIE
No, the author of —

MOM
The author of best-selling “how-to” books. (Gestures to FREDERIKA not to elucidate) Would you like some coffee cake, Freddie?

FREDDIE
No thanks, darling, I’m going to a meeting.

SANDRA

A meeting?

FREDDIE

To try to get better health care for seniors in the hospitals. I’m a Gray Panther, you know.

HENRY

You and Sandra ought to have a lot in common. She’s an animal lover.

(SANDRA turns away)

FREDDIE

Maybe you’d like to sign my petition—

SANDRA

No, thank you. I don’t sign petitions.

FREDDIE

You don’t?

SANDRA

I don’t want to jeopardize my career.

FREDDIE

I don’t see how it would do that. But all right. You’re entitled to your opinion. Or, you’re entitled to have no opinions, as the case may be. (To JOE) How about you, darling?

JOE

We’re not residents of Florida, so I don’t suppose our signatures would be valid—

FREDDIE

Oh, this is a national campaign! We’re having a demonstration in Washington next month.

JOE

Well, I’d – I’d have to think it over.

FREDDIE

I see.

JOE

Don’t get me wrong. I used to be an activist.
FREDDIE

(As if he’s broken a leg) What happened?

JOE

Well, I could see that the realities of power were such that none of those movements were actually going to go anywhere and that basically nothing is fundamentally going to change.

FREDDIE

Ah, but that’s exactly when activists are needed the most!

MOM

Won’t you sit down for a minute, Freddie? They can start the meeting without you.

FREDDIE

Well, just for a minute. I don’t want to disturb you. I can see you kids are just getting settled in.

SANDRA

No, as a matter of fact, we’re just leaving.

FREDDIE

You can’t leave now! I’m giving a party tonight. I came to invite you all!

SANDRA

Well, I don’t know –

FREDDIE

This your first husband, honey?

SANDRA

Yes. That is, well, yes.

FREDDIE

You needn’t be shy about it. I’ve had three. Each one worse than the last. But at least Mr. Summerfield left me some money.

SANDRA

Oh?
FREDDIE
I don’t think I’d ever get married again, though. Not unless I could find a sweetie-pie like Henry here. How’d you catch such a doll, Ethel? I got such a crush on him – better not leave us alone too much! (To SANDRA) She knows I’m only kidding. She and Henry are the most terrific friends a person could have. Most women – once they catch a man – they turn their backs on their single friends. But not Ethel. I worship the floor she walks on – which also happens to be my ceiling. Hey, Ethel – you got a real cute daughter. How long have you been married, sweetheart?

SANDRA
Five years. Almost six.

FREDDIE
No kids yet?

SANDRA
No, not yet.

FREDDIE
Well, that’s a blessing. (Rising) Listen, I really must go. But why don’t you all come down later, around seven o’clock? I want you to meet a new friend of mine. Ahmed Aziz, from Palestine. (SANDRA coughs hysterically) You really ought to get out in the sun more while you’re here, darling. You don’t’ sound very healthy to me at all. (Exits)

MOM
Let me put your bags away – again. At least until tomorrow.

SANDRA
I suppose you – you tell people you’re married?

MOM
No – I wouldn’t tell a lie! Lying is a sin!

SANDRA
What – if you don’t mind my asking…What do you tell people?

MOM
I don’t tell them anything. They never ask.

SANDRA
Hmmph. I can imagine what they’re thinking.

(A KNOCK at the door)

MOM
(Relieved by the interruption) Come in!

(RANDY MCDougAL enters carrying a large piece of driftwood)

RANDY
Good evening, one and all. Ah, we’re having company, I see.

SANDRA
Good grief, it’s turning into Grand Central Station.

MOM
It’s my daughter, Sandra, the one from Chicago, and her husband, Joe. This is our dear friend and neighbor – Randy McDougal.

RANDY
Pleased, indeed. (Switching the driftwood to the other arm to shake hands) Hey, I brought you guys a present. (To SANDRA and JOE) Or maybe you’d like it – as a souvenir of Florida! (Places driftwood on the coffee table for every one to admire)

SANDRA
Might be a little difficult to pack. What is it, exactly?

RANDY
Driftwood. Isn’t it beautiful? “Where order in variety we see; and where, though all things differ, all agree…” Alexander Pope. The only Pope I pay much attention to.

SANDRA
What do you do with it?

RANDY
Nothing. You just look at it. What do you think?

SANDRA
I – uh – I have no opinion of it whatsoever.

HENRY
Nice hunk of wood, Randy. Sensual. Almost sybaritic.

RANDY
I’m afraid your daughter-in-law doesn’t appreciate it.

HENRY
What do you expect? The kids today are so pragmatic. If it doesn’t make money, forget it.

MOM
RANDY
No, I don’t want to intrude. Well, maybe I will have just a wee bit of that cake.

MOM
Help yourself.

RANDY
(Crossing to the table for some cake) You know Ogden Nash’s little verse about money? “Money, money, money, I’m not necessarily one of those who think thee holy. But I often stop to wonder how thou canst go out so fast, when thou comest in so slowly.” It was also Ogden Nash who said, “No couple can be incompatible, if he has an income, and she is pattendable.”

(SANDRA and JOE are visibly disturbed by the last phrase)

SANDRA
You must be an English teacher.

RANDY
Ah, there’s nothing English about me, my lady! No, I used to be a supervisor in a steel plant in Pittsburgh.

SANDRA
Used to be?

RANDY
Yes. Me plant was closed down, so I took early retirement. That was ten years ago.

SANDRA
I see. And, uhm – what are you doing now?

RANDY
I tried to get into some training program for a new line of work, but they all thought I was too old. So here am I, a playboy at the age of fifty. I figure since I’ve got over a quarter of a century ahead of me, I might as well develop the practice of loafing into a fine art.

SANDRA
And may I ask why you came down to Florida?

RANDY
Oh, it’s quite simple. Because of the clemency of the weather, you see, you don’t need to buy so many clothes. *(Turning to JOE)* Say, young feller, do you like to fish?

**JOE**

Well, I don’t know. I’ve never tried it, actually.

**RANDY**

How ‘bout going fishing with me tomorrow? I’ve got all the gear you might need, and it’ll take your mind off your troubles.

**JOE**

We’re going to leave tomorrow.

**RANDY**

Well then, leave the day after. It’s not every day you have the opportunity to take lessons from an expert angler like myself.

*(SANDRA shakes her head with disapproval)*

**JOE**

Yes, I will. I think that would be super.

**RANDY**

*(Switching attention to ETHEL and HENRY)* Which reminds me. The purpose of my stopping by is to ask you if you might like some of the fish I caught this morning, to have for your supper.

**SANDRA**

What kind is it?

**RANDY**

I’m not sure, but from the size of it, I think it might be a whale. Seriously, it’s red snapper – most enjoyable *(Pinching Sandra’s cheek)* when it’s fresh! I could use a hand in carrying it over here, as a matter of fact.

**JOE**

I can help.

**RANDY**

*(To HENRY)* What do you say? Is fish for dinner all right with the in-laws?

*(HENRY looks at SANDRA)*

**SANDRA**
I suppose so. *(Pause, then to RANDY)* Mr. McDougal – we’re not really in-laws, you know.

RANDY

You’re not?

SANDRA

My mother and Mr. Baskin are not married.

RANDY

Is that a fact! And all along I thought they were. *(Pause. HE frowns, then brightens)* Well then, I shall have to call you out-laws!

*(RANDY exits with JOE following. There is an uncomfortable silence as SANDRA, HENRY and ETHEL remain seated)*

SANDRA *(Rising)* I’ll finish clearing the table. Do you have a dishwasher?

*(SANDRA crosses to the table and picks up the tray just as HENRY rises)*

HENRY

Yes, she does. Me! *(HENRY takes the tray from SANDRA and Exits into kitchen)*

MOJM

What’d I tell you? He’s a peach.

SANDRA

Mother, where did you meet that Mr. McDougal?

MOM

I don’t remember. I think Henry met him at a Great Books discussion group. They were discussing “Lost Horizons.”

SANDRA

Figures. *(Pause) Look, Mother, I can’t tell you who to associate with –

MOM

With whom to associate. If you’re going to be old-fashioned, I wish you would mind your grammar.

SANDRA

With whom to associate. I just don’t like to see you falling into bad company.
MOM
What bad company?

SANDRA
First of all, that woman – Frederika.

MOM
Oh, I thought you would like her. She’s a foam rubber heiress.

SANDRA
She’s what?

MOM
A foam rubber heiress. Her late husband, Mr. Summerfield, held the patents on Styrofoam products and left them to her. She’s rolling – or perhaps I should say – bouncing – in money.

SANDRA
Yes, but she’s crazy. She’s absolutely off the wall.

MOM
But you don’t even—

SANDRA
And this Randy person…

MOM
Why, what’s wrong with him?

SANDRA
Can’t you see he’s nothing but a beach bum?

MOM
Randy is the salt of the earth.

SANDRA
The salt of the earth? Well, there I’d have to agree with you. (Looking at the driftwood) He certainly is cheap.

MOM
How can you say that? You don’t even know him.

SANDRA
I don’t think I want to. (Pours a glass of water for herself)
MOM
Randy is a very cultured person. And he’s a terrific guy. The other night, he made us a luau. You know, a Hawaiian feast. The food was delicious – Henry played his guitar – we all sang – we had such a good time – and we didn’t even have to smoke any pot.

SANDRA
(Slowly turning to MOM) Mother! You’re not into the drug scene, are you?

MOM
Don’t be ridiculous. Now, listen to me. My friends are my friends, and I want you to be polite and show them respect.

SANDRA
Very well. I’ll say no more about it.

MOM
You promise?

SANDRA
I promise. Not a word.

(MOM’s CELL PHONE RINGS)

MOM
Excuse me. (Answering) Hello? (Short pause) Oh! How are you? (Pause) Of course we’d love to play tennis with you – but not tomorrow. My daughter and her husband are visiting. The one from Chicago. (Pause) I don’t know when. I’ll give you a buzz. (Pause) What? (Pause) Oh, yes, we’ll be at Freddie’s party tonight. See you later! Take care. (Snaps the phone shut) That was the couple from next door – Sadie Levine, who lives with Roger Gilmore. You’ll meet them at the party.

(SANDRA drops her glass. BLACKOUT)

ACT I; SCENE 3

(AT RISE: The same, later that evening. JOE and HENRY enter boisterously, having just come from the party downstairs. As they enter MUSIC can be heard from the party.)

JOE
Sorry I made you leave the party. I just couldn’t stand that music. I mean Tony Bennett! Come on!
HENRY
You didn’t make me leave. I wanted to leave anyway. I got tired of making small talk. How about a game of chess?

JOE
No, thanks. You’d beat me. I don’t plan ahead very well.

HENRY
How about a drink, then? We got some nice Scotch.

JOE
Okay.

HENRY
How do you take it?

JOE
On the rocks. (Sighs)

HENRY
May I ask you something? I don’t mean to pry – I just get the impression that this is more than a vacation for you. I get the impression you had to come here for some reason.

JOE
What gave you that idea?

HENRY
I don’t know. When I was a young married, the last place I’d think of going for a vacation was to my parents.

JOE
There’s no keeping anything from you, is there? I might as well tell you. Everyone’s going to find out sooner or later. I’ve just been fired.

HENRY
Oh? When did this happen?

JOE
Two weeks ago.

HENRY
Then you don’t work at that big corporation–
JOE
Magnacon? No, not any more. I took my job too seriously. I suggested some improvements in procedure. They let me go.

HENRY
That’s too bad.

JOE
Not really. I hated it.

HENRY
But why didn’t you tell us this news before?

JOE
Sandra felt we had to keep up appearances.

HENRY
Well, what are you going to do now?

JOE
Don’t know. Get another job, I guess. (Sighs) In this economy, it won’t be easy.

HENRY
(Gives JOE a glass with scotch, proposing a toast) L’chaim. And may you be happier in your next job than you were in the last one.

JOE
Thanks. (THEY toast; JOE looking perfectly miserable)

HENRY
Listen. Cheer up. In life it’s not what you do; it’s what you are that counts.

JOE
Do you really think so?

HENRY
I know so.

JOE
I feel like such a failure.

HENRY
How can you be a failure? There’s no such thing as being a success or a failure. There are people who learn from their mistakes, and there are people who don’t.
JOE
What can I learn from this? Not to do a good job? Not to care? To have as my goal in life being half-assed and keeping my mouth shut?

HENRY
You could learn…what it is you really want to do.

JOE
Yeah, right. What does it matter? We can’t always do what we really want to do.

HENRY
If you don’t believe you can, then you never will. What makes you kids so goddamn bored so goddamn soon?

JOE
What’s there to get excited about?

HENRY
Beauty – Truth – Wisdom – at your age I had a few ideals!

JOE
Idealists either starve or they get shot. I don’t want to do either.

HENRY
What an attitude! So you’re just going to go along with The Establishment – working for The Corporation – on a treadmill to oblivion?

JOE
What else can I do? I mean – within the limits of the law?

HENRY
I dunno. That’s a mighty big question, too big to address at this time of night. I might have some ideas for you, Joe. But let’s talk about them tomorrow when I get back, when we can both give them our full attention.

JOE
You’re still going to a motel?

HENRY
Yes, I think it would be best. Sandra seems to be rather upset by my presence here.

JOE
Oh, don’t pay any attention to Sandra.
HENRY
You mean you don’t disapprove of our “living in sin”?

JOE
Not at all! I think it’s great, if you can get away with it, old boy! (Slaps HENRY on the back)

HENRY
I beg your pardon?

JOE
I’ve never met an honest to goodness dirty old man before. More power to you, if you know what I mean! (Gives HENRY a playful jab in the ribs)

HENRY
God! Scratch a puritan and you find a goddamn lecher every time!

What did you say?

JOE
I said I’m leaving. It’s about that time.

HENRY
But now that the jig’s up, so to speak, there’s no need to keep up pretenses on our account!

HENRY
It’s not so much a question of pretenses – more of – privacy. (HENRY takes a small overnight bag from the closet) If anybody wants me, I’ll be at the Paradise Inn Motel. It’s right down the block. I’ll be back for breakfast. (Exits)

(JOE shrugs then pours himself another drink. HE looks at the collection of books in the bookcase)

JOE

(SANDRA and ETHEL enter from the party, still in a celebratory mood)

MOM
Hello! We’re back! Where’s Henry?

JOE
He left. Went in search of the Bates motel.
MOM
Oh. I miss him already.

JOE
He said he’d be back for breakfast. Well, you two seem to have had a good time at the party.

SANDRA
We had a wonderful time! Guess what? We met a real-life, honest-to-goodness millionaire! Did you see that pinky ring he was wearing?

JOE
I don’t think he got that pinky ring by being honest-to-goodness. What was his name, anyhow?

SANDRA
Sal. Salvatore Caputo. Wasn’t he interesting? I’ve never met a really rich person before.

JOE
That doesn’t make him interesting. Just rich. Did he happen to say how he made his money? Hhhhh?

MOM
I think he owns a few hotels.

SANDRA
A few hotels? He owns the biggest hotels in Miami – plus a few more in Las Vegas and Atlantic City!

JOE
You don’t say.

SANDRA
And he has invited us to go out with him in his sailboat tomorrow!

JOE
Us? I’m going fishing tomorrow. I thought you knew that.

SANDRA
So I’ll go myself. I can take Mom along as a chaperone.

MOM
Leave me out of it. It’s getting late. I think I’ll turn in.
JOE
What did you tell him?

SANDRA
I said I’d let him know.

JOE
Oh, yeah? Well I’m gonna let you know something. I want you to put your wedding ring back on, right now! You think I didn’t notice you took it off when you were talking to that bozo?

MOM
There are fresh towels in the linen closet. You want me to pull out the bed for you?

SANDRA
No, don’t bother. The commercials say ‘So easy even a child can do it.’ I’m sure Joe can figure it out.

JOE
Thanks. Always with the knife right between the ribs.

MOM
She doesn’t mean it. (Brief, awkward pause) Okay, I’ll say goodnight. I hope you’ll be comfortable here. Even though it is rather crowded.

SANDRA
Now, listen, Mom. You were always writing, “When are you coming to see me, when are you coming to see me?”

MOM
That’s what a mother is supposed to say in her letters. I never dreamed you’d actually do it. Goodnight. Sleep well.

SANDRA
The same to you. I’ll pray for you.

(ETHEL starts to respond, pauses, thinking better of it, then exits)

JOE
(Obviously upset, rummaging through the suitcase) What did you do with my pajamas?

SANDRA
I didn’t do anything with your pajamas.
JOE
They’re not here.

SANDRA
Maybe you didn’t remember to pack them.

JOE
You were supposed to be doing the packing!

SANDRA
What are you, a child – I have to do everything for you?

JOE
Is it too much to ask that you should pack my pajamas?

SANDRA
I suppose you forgot your toothbrush, too.

JOE
Oh my god, you didn’t put in my toothbrush?

SANDRA
You were the one who wanted to come along. I was going to come down here alone.

JOE
So this is how you get back at me. Why are you so full of spite, Sandra?

SANDRA
(Nearly hissing) Spite? Spite? I am certainly not spiteful! I am a sweet, loving, kindhearted woman! Only it’s all wasted on you!

JOE
Then why did you marry me, Sandra?

SANDRA
You fit all the specifications. You had a good job, you came from a good family, you’d gone to a good college, and you were presentable.

JOE
Is that it?

SANDRA
You had good health habits, and you got along with my cat.
JOE
I see. And now that I don’t have a job, I’m not quite as presentable? (No response) Jeez, you’d be happy with a robot!

SANDRA
Maybe that’s what I’ve got!

JOE
Always with the underhanded remarks.

SANDRA
You never let me express my real feelings.

JOE
You don’t have any real feelings to express!

SANDRA
You’d be surprised! You’d be very surprised!

JOE
All right, surprise me!

SANDRA
(Looking him over) Tuck your shirt in.

(JOE pulls out his cell phone and hits 411)

JOE
Miami, Florida. (Pause) I need the number for the Paradise Inn Motel. I’d like to reserve a room!

(BLACKOUT)

ACT II; SCENE 1

(AT RISE: The following morning. SANDRA is just resetting the fold-out sofa bed. SHE is wearing a housecoat over her negligee. ETHEL is offstage in the kitchen.)

MOM (O.S.)
(Calling) Did you two sleep all right last night? That sofa might be a little lumpy.
SANDRA

*(Calling to MOM in kitchen)* I slept fine. I have no idea how Joe slept. He didn’t spend the night here.

MOM

Where is he?

SANDRA

He said he was going to the Paradise Motel.

MOM

*(Entering with a tray of juice, waffles and syrup)* Why?

SANDRA

No, not the “Y” – the Paradise Motel.

MOM

Who, Henry?

SANDRA

What?

MOM

This is beginning to sound like “Who’s on First?”

SANDRA

What does that mean?

MOM

Stop avoiding the issue. Why didn’t your husband stay here last night?

SANDRA

Oh, we had a little argument.

MOM

*(Clearing her throat)* Sandra – I’ve been meaning to ask you, but I’m not sure how to put this tactfully – *(handing her a glass of orange juice)* Have some orange juice – uhm – how are you and Joe getting along?

SANDRA

Me and Joe? Oh, we’re getting along.

MOM

So, what was the argument about?
SANDRA
We have some issues about money. It’s kind of a hard time for us right now.

MOM
Could you use a little extra to tide you over? Here, I’ll write you a check. (Goes to desk drawer and pulls out checkbook)

SANDRA
No, I don’t want—

MOM
(Writing check) I know how it is. I was a Depression baby myself. (Rips out the check, hands it to SANDRA) Take it! (SANDRA takes the check and puts it in her purse without saying anything) There’s something else, isn’t there? Sandra, is there anything wrong with your – you know – physical relationship?

SANDRA
Mother! What a dreadful question!

MOM
Is it the question that’s dreadful, or the answer? I’ve always found women are only unwilling to discuss their sex life if it’s bad.

SANDRA
You’re right. It’s pretty awful.

MOM
I kinda thought so. I always suspected a lot of girls get married because they’re afraid of sex and they know their husband will protect them from it.

SANDRA
Mother!

MOM
I shouldn’t have let you get married so young. You two became grownups before you even had a chance to enjoy your youth.

SANDRA
But mother, it’s you and Dad I wanted to please –

MOM
Me and Dad? What about pleasing yourself? I knew things would turn out badly when you went all through adolescence and didn’t rebel against us. You never even talked back to me once!
SANDRA
You wanted me to rebel?

MOM
It’s only normal. (Pauses then appraising SANDRA) Maybe if you bought another nightgown? And maybe if you two smoked a little weed one night? You could put it in your brownies. Or bran muffins...?

SANDRA
Maybe you should mind your own business!

MOM
Ha! Look who’s talking!

(The front door opens and JOE enters carrying a newspaper. HE appears tired and bedraggled.)

JOE
You should lock your door.

MOM
Morning, Joseph. Care for some waffles?

JOE
No, thanks. I’ve already had breakfast. Bacon and eggs.

SANDRA
Bacon? You had bacon?

JOE
Sorry, I couldn’t find a kosher Denny’s.

(JOE sits at the table and buries his face in the newspaper)

MOM
I wonder what’s keeping Henry. He’s usually up at the crack of dawn.

SANDRA
Don’t you mean “Who’s” keeping Henry?

JOE
(Without lifting his head) That’s my Sandra.

(HENRY enters with a picket sign that reads “CHILL! DON’T DRILL”)
MOM
Ah, there he is.

HENRY
Good morning, all! Wonderful turnout on the picket line this morning.

SANDRA
Mr. Baskin! Where have you been?

HENRY
Demonstrating at City Hall in favor of alternative energy.

Before breakfast?

SANDRA
You have to get up very early in the morning to get a jump on the greedy grabber-uppers who are trying to ruin the environment. “Foil Big Oil! ““Chill! Don’t Drill!”

HENRY
Hang up your picket sign, Henry, and have some waffles.

Ah, waffles! (Sits at table) And how are you young people this morning? You should have been out there on the picket line, kids. You’ve got to inhabit this polluted planet long after we’re gone.

SANDRA
We have other things to do with our time. Besides, we feel that people are more important than ideas.

HENRY
Yeah, but if this country doesn’t get some ideas pretty soon, there might not be any people left. (Enjoying the waffles) Mmmm! Delicious! You can’t beat homemade waffles! (Frowns, looking at JOE) Joe. You know the funniest thing? I thought I saw you buying a paper this morning in the lobby of the Paradise Inn Motel.

MOM
Henry, come into the kitchen a minute. I need your help with something.

(ETHEL takes HENRY by the arm; HENRY grabs another waffle as ETHEL pulls him towards the kitchen. As THEY exit, SANDRA watches JOE chewing on a pencil)
SANDRA
What’s in the newspaper?

JOE
News.

SANDRA
Thanks. What’s in the news?

JOE
(Removing the pencil from his mouth) Oh, murders, assassinations, tensions in the Middle East, epidemics in Africa, public officials found guilty of stealing millions – you know, same old stuff.

SANDRA
Have you checked the “Help Wanted”?

JOE
What do you think I’m doing now?

SANDRA
Anything?

JOE
Nothing. Oh, wait a minute. Here’s something. What did I do with my cell phone? (JOE searches his pocket for his cell phone, finds it and dials the number. HE pauses waiting for someone to answer on the other end, then) Hello. I’m calling in reference to the ad you have in The Herald for a counselor to work with disturbed children. I feel I understand disturbed children, having lived around disturbed adults most of my life. The way I look at it – anyone who is not emotionally disturbed in this society just hasn’t been paying attention (Pause) Oh. It’s already filled. Okay. Thank you. (JOE closes the cell phone and, dejected, crosses out the ad with a pencil.)

SANDRA
I better go get dressed.

JOE
No, wait, Sandy. (Stands, crossing towards SANDRA) Can’t you see we need to get through this? – Give me a kiss and cheer me up. (Pulls HER towards him)

SANDRA
(Pulling away) Joseph! They’re right in the next room!
JOE
So? Why can’t you just loosen up a little? Take life as it comes. Like Henry.

SANDRA
Oh, don’t mention Henry!

JOE
What is it, precisely, you don’t like about him?

SANDRA
What’s there to like? With the beard and the long hair – somebody should tell him The Sixties are over!

JOE
He seems pleasant enough.

SANDRA
But what do we really know about him – what sort of family he comes from and things like that? He might have a jail record a mile long, for all we know. No, I don’t like it. I don’t like it one bit. At any moment he could just up and leave her.

JOE
So, she could leave him, too. It keeps them both on their toes.

SANDRA
My mother is too old to be on her toes. At his point in her life, she should be comfortable, she should be provided for, she should be secure! I’m not saying she has to marry a millionaire, but somebody – substantial – and a little bit better looking.

JOE
You mean like Salvatore Caputo?

SANDRA
Yes, only Jewish.

JOE
Why don’t we stop worrying about your mother and start worrying about us? Sandra, what would it take to get you back in bed with me?

SANDRA
Just get a job. That’s all I ask.

JOE
I’m just a great big security blanket to you, aren’t I?
SANDRA
Not so great and not so big.

JOE
You think you can say anything you want to me and I’ll have to put up with it, don’t you?

SANDRA
You did make a few promises when we got married, you know.

JOE
So did you. Remember the one about “for richer or for poorer”?

SANDRA
I never thought it would be for poorer and poorer and poorer.

JOE
(Grabbing his raincoat and umbrella from the closet) Well, that license isn’t worth the paper it’s written on.

SANDRA
Where are you going?

JOE
Back to Chicago.

SANDRA
Joe! You wouldn’t do that to me, would you? Humiliate me in front of my mother?

JOE
Is that all you care about? You don’t care about losing me? All you care about is your goddamn respectability?

SANDRA
Take your stupid raincoat off. You know you can’t go anywhere without any money.

JOE
You’re right. (Sits down sadly) Being married is getting mad and wanting to leave the house and realizing you have no place else to go!

SANDRA
Clever. If we had a dollar for each of your clever sayings…
JOE
Okay! I haven’t any money. That gives you a hold over me, doesn’t it? And that’s the way you like it, isn’t it? God forbid you should ever lose control for a minute, be vulnerable for a minute – you might find out what love is all about – but then, you’d lose out on power. Okay, you’ve got me. But just you wait. The very first chance I get, I’m gone!

SANDRA
Just like that?

JOE
Yeah. Just like that. I’m tired of being treated like your puppet.

SANDRA
Well, I’m tired of being demeaned and ignored. I want some romance in my life! I’ve made up my mind, Joseph. I want a divorce!

JOE
Okay, you can have one. But I’m warning you. I’m gonna sue you for alimony!

SANDRA
You wouldn’t!

JOE
Oh, wouldn’t I! You wanna talk bottom line, let’s talk bottom line!

SANDRA
I’m calling my lawyer!

JOE
(Picking up the newspaper) Yeah, well, maybe you can find a better one in the classifieds. (Seeing something in the newspaper) Oh my god!

SANDRA
What is it now?

JOE
The airport is closed.

SANDRA
What?

JOE
It says here on Page One – There’s been a terrorist alert – some old lady was found at the airport with suspicious looking face powder in her carry-on luggage. So the airport is closed.
SANDRA

For how long?

JOE

Until further notice. (Reading) Also, there’s a tropical depression forming in the Gulf. I know what they mean. I’m feeling tropically depressed. And the gulf between us is getting wider every minute.

SANDRA

The airport is closed. You mean we’ve got to –

SANDRA and JOE

(Together) Stay here!

(SANDRA and JOE turn their backs to one another as ETHEL and HENRY enter carrying an ice chest, two backpacks, a large flashlight and a camp stove. THEY attempt to reach the door unobtrusively)

HENRY

(Whispering) Maybe we should leave them a note.

SANDRA

(Noticing) What’s all that stuff you’ve got there? Where are you going?

We’re running away from home.

MOM

Henry and I are going camping.

SANDRA

Camping? How?

MOM

In a camper, how else? Look out the window down there. (SANDRA and JOE cross to the window and look out) See that sweet little S.U.V.?

SANDRA

Yes?

MOM

Well, that’s our “home away from home.” We thought you two needed a real vacation together – so you can use our apartment while we’re gone.
HENRY
“Afoot and lighthearted, I take to the open road: Healthy, free, the world before me; the long brown path before me, leading wherever I choose.” Walt Whitman.

JOE

SANDRA
In my opinion, Nature is a slum.

HENRY
You prefer the comforts of home, I take it.

SANDRA
I certainly do. Personally, I don’t feel that roughing it builds character. It just builds calluses.

MOM
Now pay attention. I have a few things you’ll need to know before we go. These plants I water every day, and here’s the key to the mailbox. Just hold all our mail. If anything goes wrong such as plumbing or air conditioning, call Building Maintenance. The number is right on the refrigerator. My cell phone number is there, too. And of course Freddie or Randy will be glad to lend you anything you might need.

JOE
How long will you be gone?

MOM
About a week. Do you think that’ll be enough time?

SANDRA
Enough time for what?

MOM
For you to work things out. (ETHEL and HENRY put on their backpacks) Do you have the sleeping bag, dear?

HENRY
It’s in the van.

SANDRA
One sleeping bag?
HENRY
We were brought up on Ernest Hemingway.

MOM
(To HENRY)  Give me a hand with the ice chest, sweetheart.

(ETHEL and HENRY pick up the ice chest and head towards the door. JOE steps forward opening it)

JOE
Goodbye. Have a good time.

MOM
We will. You try to have a good time, too. (Kisses JOE then sets down her end of the ice chest, crossing back to SANDRA and kissing her goodbye as well) Take good care of each other.

HENRY
(Shaking JOE’s hand) And try to figure out whether living together without a marriage license is worse than dying together with one.

(ETHEL and HENRY pick up the ice chest one again and head out the door. JOE closes the door behind them. HE turns towards SANDRA. There is an awkward silence. JOE crosses to the table and once again buries his face in the newspaper as SANDRA picks up the sprayer and begins watering the plants. Suddenly THEY stop, turn towards one another and look aghast.)

(BLACKOUT)

ACT II; SCENE II

(AT RISE: One week later, about 6:00 AM. The apartment is much neater. HENRY’s guitar has been put away and there are no newspapers lying about. There is one change in the room. On the table near the sofa sits a framed photograph of a cat. A few moments after lights up, JOE and RANDY enter carrying the catch from an overnight fishing trip. It is obvious the two men have developed a rapport between them.)

RANDY
The first thing you’ve got to get through your head, me boy, is that it’s not your fault! It’s not your fault any more than it’s my fault my steel plant was closed down.
JOE

(Stashing his gear) I could have done things differently. I could have kept my mouth shut and acted more corporate.

RANDY

You acted according to your nature.

JOE

The thing of it is, I can’t seem to get on my feet again.

RANDY

That’s not your fault either.

JOE

It’s not?

RANDY

Oh, it’s the American Dream, and all – that if you’re rich you’re some kind of a genius, and if you’re poor there’s something wrong with you. Did it ever occur to you there might be something wrong with a system where only three percent of the population makes over a hundred thousand a year, and over half live below the poverty line?

JOE

But there are still fortunes to be made – you hear about them all the time.

RANDY

Sure you do. They’ve got to keep the dream alive, after all. So every few weeks they have an interview on the TeeVee: (As both the Interviewer and the person being interviewed) Question: “And how did you make your first million at the age of only twenty-three, Mr. Rodney Smartass?” Answer: “I saw a need and I filled it.” Question: “And what was that need?” Answer: “I saw that some young men were attracted to older women, be it a mother fixation or simple perversion – and so I started an escort service where by young men could purchase the sexual favors of little old ladies.” Question: “And you called it…?” Answer: “I called it OLE (O-lay) which stands for “Old Lady Escorts.” “Cool.” Question: “And so within only one year you made two million dollars and started a whole new service industry which now has franchises all across the country. Tell us – How does it feel to have so much money in your pocket you can’t sit down properly?” Answer: “It feels great! But what feels the best is knowing that I am performing a valuable service for mankind. My business has taken the bag ladies off the street and made respectable whores out of them.”

“Congratulation, Mr. Smartass – you have shown us that even in the 21st Century, in the middle of a recession, it is possible to fulfill the American Dream.”

JOE

(Laughing hysterically) Old lady escorts! That’s not a bad idea!
RANDY
Seriously, there are two things I’ve a mind to do – if I had the capital. One is to open a bookstore. It would be a used bookstore, y’see – antiquarian, in fact. I don’t care for all these standardized emporiums like Barnes and Ignoble or Borders on Boredom.

JOE
That’s a marvelous idea. I could see you doing that, Randy, I really could. You think it’s too early for a scotch?

RANDY
It’s never early enough.

JOE
(Opening the liquor cabinet and preparing the drinks) And what’s the other thing?

RANDY
Ah, the other’s not even worth mentioning, being as I haven’t got the wherewithal, and am not likely to have it in this lifetime.

JOE
I’d also like to be in my own business.

RANDY
What’s keeping you from it?

JOE
Starting a new business is awfully risky.

RANDY
Maybe you haven’t noticed, but it’s awfully risky getting out of bed in the morning.

JOE
My wife wouldn’t like it.

RANDY
What – your getting out of bed in the morning?

JOE
No, no, starting my own business. Which reminds me – where is she? (Calls) Sandra! (No response. HE crosses to the kitchen) She’s not in the kitchen –

RANDY
She could of run down to the store.
JOE
Sandra doesn’t run to the store. She sends out for things. *(Calls again)* Sandra? *(Checks the bedroom)* That’s odd – she doesn’t seem to be here.

RANDY
Maybe she went down to see Freddie for some reason. Her number’s there by the phone. *(JOE dials the number)* I’m sure it’s nothing to worry about.

JOE
*(A short pause)* There’s no answer.

*(JOE crosses to the hall closet and looks inside)*

RANDY
What are you looking in the closet for? Your wife doesn’t go hiding in closets, does she?

JOE
Wanted to see if her suitcase was still there. It is.

RANDY
You’re not thinkin’ she’d take off without you?

JOE
She might. *(Pause)* Randy, our marriage is in deep trouble.

RANDY
Sorry, I can’t help you out there. I have no experience in the matter. I’ll go put the fish in the freezer.

JOE
*(Calling out to RANDY)* Maybe I should call the police.

RANDY
*(Returning with a note)* I don’t think that’ll be necessary. She left a note.

*(RANDY holds the note out to JOE)*

JOE
Not – not suicide!

RANDY
No, here – read it yourself.
JOE

(Reading) “Joe, I have gone with Mrs. Summerfield to spend the night at the homeless shelter where she is a volunteer. She said she thought it would be an educational experience for me. See you in the morning.”

(Looks up from note, then back at note, then back up again)

Homeless shelter. This doesn’t sound like Sandra.

RANDY

Ha, ha! Freddie’s done it again!

JOE

Done what?

RANDY

Found another cause.

JOE

The homeless?

RANDY

No, Sandra. (At that moment the front door opens and SANDRA and FREDERIKA enter)

Well, if it isn’t herself! You’re an early riser.

SANDRA

And you’re an early drinker.

(RANDY tips his glass to SANDRA as JOE hides his)

RANDY

(Turning to FREDERIKA) And a good morning to you, me lady.

SANDRA

I need some coffee.

JOE

Coffee? With caffeine?

SANDRA

Yes. Is there a problem?

JOE

No problem. I’ll make you some. (To FREDERIKA) Would you like a cup, Freddie?

FREDDIE

That would be lovely dear. No sugar. Just black.
(JOE exits to kitchen)

RANDY
I used to be an early riser myself. But once a night is all I can manage now.

SANDRA
Mr. McDougal!

JOE
(Looking in from the kitchen) What’s the matter?

RANDY
I just told your wife a joke. That is, I tried to.

JOE
(Coming further into the room) Big mistake. Sandra has absolutely no sense of humor. It’s one of the secrets of her success. While others are taking time out to laugh, she’s concentrating on the bottom line. (Returns to the kitchen, then calling) You want a cup, too, Randy?

RANDY
No thanks. The scotch will do me just fine.

JOE
(Returning with two cups of coffee, handing the first to FREDERIKA then crossing with the other to SANDRA) Well, Sandra, how was your night with the homeless? Getting a little sample of what it’ll be like when we split up?

SANDRA
That’s not funny! (SHE drops onto the sofa, sobbing) It was horrible!

JOE
Sandra! (JOE sets the cup on the table and sits next to SANDRA comforting her)

SANDRA
There was this woman – she could have been my mother – a widow, with one daughter – but the daughter got leukemia – Mrs. Anderson, her name was – Mrs. Anderson spent all her money on doctors and the daughter died anyway, and there she was.

RANDY
Makes you thankful you’ve got a roof over your head, don’t it?
SANDRA
It does. Oh, it does! I just wish there was something I could do! It just makes you feel so helpless!

FREDDIE
There’s always something you can do, if you’ve got the courage.

SANDRA
Oh, you old-time Lefties. You’re so out of touch. Don’t you see your dreams have failed?!

FREDDIE
No, it’s you who is out of touch. The people who had the dreams back then were murdered and persecuted and fired from their jobs or bought out. But the dreams did not fail.

(Suddenly the lamp near the window tips over)

SANDRA
Joseph! Can’t you be more careful? These are my mother’s things, accumulated over a lifetime!

JOE
(Righting the lamp) I didn’t knock the lamp over. Must have been the wind.

SANDRA
The wind? This is Florida, you airhead – not Chicago. (Crosses to the open window) Oh my god, look how dark the sky is getting.

FREDDIE
That tropical depression’s been gaining power all week. Better turn on the telly. Get the news.

(JOE crosses to the television and hits the on button but nothing happens)

JOE
Nothing.

FREDDIE
Humph! The cable’s down. It’s okay. I’ve got my I-pod

(FREDDIE pulls her I-Pod out of her purse as the WIND HOWLS)

SANDRA
(Looking outside once again) It’s starting to rain.
JOE
Shhh!

FREDDIE
(Sharing the report) Hurricane warnings are out. (Pause) Travel advisory is in effect.

SANDRA
Hurricane? Oh, no! I hope my mother and Henry are all right!

JOE
Nice of you.

SANDRA
What?

JOE
Nice of you to include Henry.

SANDRA
Don’t start with me, Joseph! This is an emergency! (To FREDERIKA) What do we do?

JOE
Close all the windows and lock them. Then we’ll get some masking tape and paste it across the windows, on the diagonal… (Crosses to buffet drawer) Ah, here’s some tape! Right in the silverware drawer, as one might expect in this house.

SANDRA
How do you know so much about hurricanes all of a sudden?

JOE
I saw “Key Largo” three times on Turner Classic Movies!

RANDY
Well, you seem to have a bonafide professional on board. (To FREDDIE) Would you like me to assist you in the securing of your abode, Mrs. Summerfield?

FREDDIE
Oh, that would be so sweet of you! Of course, I can hammer a few boards in place myself, but frankly, hurricanes terrify me, and I’d welcome your company.

JOE
What about your apartment, Randy?
RANDY
Oh, I don’t live in this development. I live in the trailer park further down the street. And if
God wants my trailer for any reason, he can have it with my compliments. *(Opening the door
for FREKERIKA)* Have you read Frederich Engels on the housing question, Mrs.
Summerfield?

FREDDIE
Of course. He foresaw this whole business of co-ops. I’m thinking of writing a sequel to it.

RANDY
I’d love to hear all about it.

*(RANDY closes the door behind them)*

JOE
What a prince of a guy.

SANDRA
Oh, sure. He’s a great role model. Pretty soon, when and if you grow up, you can become a
beach bum like him and live in a trailer.

JOE
*(Closing the window and securing it)* I hear a vehicle pulling up.

SANDRA
Oh, what a great time for another one of their crazy neighbors to come calling. You get the
door. I’ll go shut the windows in the bedroom.

JOE
Here, take the masking tape with you. And remember, on the diagonal.

SANDRA
Whatever.

*(SANDRA exits to the bedroom just as the front door opens and HENRY enters, supporting
ELTHEL who is limping)*

JOE
Ethel! Henry! Welcome home! We were beginning to worry about you!

HENRY
We were beginning to worry about you! Figured you’d never been through a hurricane
before.
(HENRY assists ETHYL towards the sofa as JOE shuts the door)

JOE

What's wrong, Ethel? You're limping!

HENRY

She twisted her ankle.

SANDRA

(Entering from the kitchen) Mom! Are you all right?

MOM

I think the cliché is “Right as Rain.” But at this moment that doesn’t seem too appropriate.

(HENRY helps ease ETHYL onto the sofa and then gets a chair to prop of her foot)

SANDRA

(Preparing for the worse) How did it happen?

MOM

We were having a picnic, when it started to pour. So we gathered up all the stuff and started back for the van. But I slipped and fell in the mud.

SANDRA

You should see a doctor.

MOM

I will, I will. As soon as I get better. You know how I hate doctors. But believe me, I was in good hands. Henry made me a bandage out of the tablecloth and then he carried me for pretty nearly a mile. I didn’t know he was so strong!

(SANDRA looks at HENRY, forcing the words from her mouth)

SANDRA

Thank you.

HENRY

For what?

SANDRA

For taking care of my mother.

HENRY

She happens to be the woman I love.
SANDRA
As do I. (Pause) I trust then, Mr. Baskin, that you have noticed my mother is a very pretty woman?

HENRY
(Smiling at MOM) Well, yes, I would say I have noticed and I must say I have excellent eyesight.

SANDRA
And what would you say if I told you that other men find her attractive, too?

HENRY
I’d say they’d be foolish not to.

MOM
Sandra, what are you getting at?

SANDRA
I saw how that Salvatore Caputo was looking at you, when we were at Freddie’s party, Mother.

MOM
I thought he was interested in you.

HENRY
Evidently, he’s interested in the ladies, plural.

SANDRA
He kissed her hand, and said he couldn’t wait to see her again.

HENRY
Is that so?

MOM
Sandra?

HENRY
I’ll soon put a stop to that!

SANDRA
You could put a stop to it by marrying my mother!
HENRY
(Pulls out his cell phone) Less drastic measures may prove effective. I have his number right here in my cell phone.

SANDRA
Oh, Mr. Baskin – I wouldn’t tangle with him. He’s a very powerful man.

HENRY
(Punching in the number) Have you ever heard of the Golden Gloves amateur boxing competition in the Bronx? Well, I was the champion in 1969! (Pausing for an answer) Hello. May I please speak with Mr. Salvatore Caputo? (Pause) He’s not? Where is he? (Pause) For how long? (Pause) I see. (Shuts the cover on his cell phone, returning it to his pocket) Mr. Caputo is out on his sailboat. I’ll scuttle the scoundrel later.

MOM
Sandra, what is the meaning of this?

SANDRA
The meaning of what?

MOM
Sandra?

SANDRA
Oh, all right! I wanted to make Henry jealous, so he would –

MOM
Would what?

SANDRA
So he would marry you!

MOM
Again with the marriage business! How long are you going to keep nagging me about that? I’ve tried to appeal to reason, to your sense of higher ethical values…

HENRY
Ethel, maybe you have been appealing to the wrong values.

(HENRY whispers something in ETHEL’s ear. SHE smiles and whispers something back)
MOM
Oh, yes. *(Nodding to HENRY who crosses to the cabinet and retrieves a metal box)*
Henry reminded me. There’s something I wanted to show you, Sandra, while you’re here.

HENRY
 *(Handing the metal box to ETHEL)* Well, now, I think I’ll go rustle up some lunch.

*(HENRY exits to the kitchen)*

SANDRA
What’s in the box?

MOM
In this box I keep all my valuable papers – I keep it right there in the cabinet next to the piano. Now, in this box is where I keep my will and our insurance policies and bank books.

SANDRA
Oh, don’t talk bout things like that, Mom. You’re not going to die.

MOM
Yes, I am going to die – sooner or later. And I want you to know what I have planned. I wrote the same thing to your sister, Brenda.

SANDRA
Mom, I wish you wouldn’t…

MOM
Please. Listen to me. This is important. All my money is divided equally between you and Brenda. I know you’re better fixed than she is, but I wanted your children to have equal advantages.

SANDRA
That’s very generous of you, mother.

MOM
Now, one of the documents in this box is the pension policy from your father’s business. If I get married, you can rip that up, because I’ll lose that pension money.

SANDRA
Oh. I didn’t realize that.
MOM
Wait. I’m not through yet. There’s something else you didn’t realize. In the event I should get married, naturally, my will and my insurance policies change…and the condo and the silverware and everything else naturally goes to my husband.

SANDRA
Naturally. (Pause) What did you say?

MOM
My husband? Henry. And he, of course, would do the same for me. In getting married at this age – you have to look ahead and think about possible sickness. We wouldn’t want the other person to be stuck with the medical bills.

SANDRA
But what about Medicare? Doesn’t that take care of the medical bills?

MOM
Humph. Also in the metal box is a blue and white booklet listing all the various types of nursing services that Medicare does not cover. It’s filed under “W” for “Worthless.” Now, like I was saying…I would turn everything over to Henry in the event of our marriage – because like it says in the ceremony, “forsaking all others” and that’s what I would have to do, of course. And besides, it’s the law.

SANDRA
(Grasping the gravity of the situation) Yes, of course.

MOM
I’ll put the box away now. I just wanted you to know about it before you left.

(ETHEL starts to rise, JOE quickly takes the box from her, returning it to the cabinet)

JOE
Sandra, don’t you think we ought to leave will, I mean, well enough alone?

MOM
But, Sandra, darling, if my getting married means so much to you, I’ll think over what you said. Because I wouldn’t want to deprive you of the pleasure of seeing your mother walk down the aisle in a white dress – even though I’d probably wear lavender.

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