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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*

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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, vroom! *(Pause)* Boy, if I knew it was gonna be so much trouble, I would never have fallen in love with you!

(DOORBELL RINGS)

MOM

Oh! They're here!

HENRY

So? Answer the door.

MOM

Wait! Your cufflinks!

HENRY

What about my cufflinks?

MOM

You'd better take them off the night table.

HENRY

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

MOM

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.)

MOM

(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.

JOE

Thank you. Where can I put my umbrella?

HENRY

You brought an umbrella to Florida?

JOE

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

HENRY

(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, we just had coffee. Would you like some?

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 pattrtable."

(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!

JOE

What did you say?

HENRY

I said I'm leaving. It's about that time.

JOE

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

Hmmm. Erich Fromm. Krishnamurti. Plato. Martin Buber – I always wished I had time for Philosophy.

(*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.

SANDRA

Before breakfast?

HENRY

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!"

MOM

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

HENRY

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?

HENRY

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

Camping. Gee. That sounds like fun. Maybe we ought to try that sometime, Sandra. Head for the great outdoors. Commune with Nature.

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 ETHEL 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 ETHEL 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 about 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