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Behold A Pale Ryder

A Mystery in Two Acts by

Richard Davis, Jr.

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THE CHARACTERS

LYNN RYDER: She’s dead, but her spirit – whom the audience sees – has quite a bit to say. She’s not a murderer.

ROB RYDER: Lynn Ryder’s only son, somewhere in his twenties; he’s attracted to Maria Montoya, Martinez’ adopted daughter. Could be a murderer.

BETTE RYDER: Lynn’s daughter, late twenties, never married. She fights a growing romantic interest in Martinez. She could be a murderer.

JACKIE RYDER: Lynn’s daughter, younger than Bette. She’s got a drug problem, might be a murderer.

FREDERICO MARTINEZ: Lynn’s lover (while she was alive, of course). He’s wormed his way into the Ryder estate and is involved with both Bette and Maria. I said she was adopted. He may be a murderer.

MARIA: Martinez’ beautiful adopted daughter (it’s complicated). She toys with Rob, but falls for him. One problem: she could be a murderer.

DORSETT: The family’s estate lawyer. He comes out of the closet in a burst of confession. Might be a murderer.

SGT. JOHN BANNISTER: An officer of the law. His keen observation and ability to assess the clues reveals the murderer.

THE SETTING

The living room of the upscale Ryder home
Behold a Pale Ryder
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ACT I: SCENE 1

SETTING: The living room of the upscale Ryder home. An open coffin is on the upstage wall.

AT RISE: JACKIE, MARTINEZ, MARIA, DORSETT sit on sofas or chairs around the room, murmuring, eating the last of the food from plates in their laps. BETTE stands at one side of the coffin, gazing into it. Each has a cup of brewed tea. ROB has a glass of wine. LYNN sits in a chair just under her portrait on the upstage wall, but we can’t see her because ROB sits on top of her (Yes, in the same chair). BETTE crosses to UL archway exits, reappears with a tray of lemon slices, sugar, teaspoons, perhaps cookies as ROB rises, speaks. As HE takes a step left, HE reveals LYNN in the chair. HE leaves his plate somewhere, but keeps his glass, which HE raises in salute to his late mother.

ROB
My dear mother—

BETTE
A moment, Rob. (To DORSETT) Lemon?

DORSETT
Please.

HE takes tea bag out with his spoon, wraps string around spoon and presses it to drain liquid into cup.

BETTE
Maria?

MARIA
(Simply plops tea bag onto saucer) Just a bit of sugar, please.
And sugar for you, Jackie.

You remembered.

*JACKIE repeats DORSETT’s teaspoon ritual.*

My dear Mother...

*ROB holds glass aloft. DORSETT, BETTE, JACKIE, MARTINEZ hold teacups aloft. Beat.*


Rob –

*ROB*

No, no, it’s ok. Just that none of it sounds right to me. Let’s see: Mamasita?

Rob, stop.

*ROB*

Wait. Mummsie... Nah. British. How ‘bout Ma –?

Stop it.

*ROB*

Hey. That’s it. Ma. Ma, I hardly knew ya ...

I mean it, Rob!

Let him go. It’s all right.

Here’s to ya, Ma.

Rob, please stop.
ROB
I really can’t remember how I knew her, you know? What the relationship was.

MARIA
Lynn’s not your real momma?

ROB
When I was a kid, the situation was clear. I did bad stuff, she punished me. I did good stuff, she kissed me. But it was hardly a relationship... She smelled of cigarettes and whiskey. I loved those smells, still do. But, you know, she did slobber some...

BETTE
Oh, Rob.

LYNN
Whiskey always ends in slobber.

ROB
Now she’s dead, and I just want to get it right.

JACKIE
A little late, Robbie.

ROB
Yeah, you’re right. Late isn’t better than never in this instance, is it?

MARIA
Lynn’s not your real momma?

BOTH ignore MARIA.

MARTINEZ
(Answers ROB) It is if it makes you feel better.

ROB
You’re wrong. In fact, late is exactly the same as never in this instance.

MARTINEZ
Not if it makes you feel better –

JACKIE
Shut up, Martinez.

LYNN
Jackie, we don’t speak to others like that.
Lynn’s not your real –?

MARTINEZ

Excuse me, Maria. I have something to say.

ALL turn to HIM.

I know my beloved Lynn would like for us all –

JACKIE

Oh, crap. Here we go.

BETTE/LYNN

Jackie.

MARIA

Rob, is Lynn not –?

ROB

Yes, Maria, she is my real mother.

MARIA

Then why do you not know –?

MARTINEZ

I know that my beloved Lynn –

ROB

Martinez. Let’s don’t do this again.

LYNN

Let’s do. I like “beloved Lynn.”

MARTINEZ

I just had a few more remarks –

JACKIE

Two years!

BETTE

(Crosses to JACKIE) Jackie, don’t you start.

MARTINEZ

I know that my beloved Lynn –
No. Less than two. That twerp has known her less than two years! *(Shouts across the room to MARTINEZ)* Who told you to take over? You little creep!

LYNN
He’s pushy. But let me tell you he’s not little...

BETTE
Jackie –

JACKIE
She’s our mother, Bette! *Our* mother! How did he get to be in charge?

MARTINEZ
I am not in charge. *(Puts hands together as if to pray)* Truth is one. Paths are many –

JACKIE
Oh shut up. You’re not Hindu.

MARIA
*You* shut up. He loved your mother with all his heart!

JACKIE
He has no heart–!

ROB
Listen, can we calm down? We all love her ... loved her.

MARIA
What do you know about love? *You* ... you surface skater!

ROB
Why, Maria, are you angry with me?

MARIA
Your own mother. Surface skater.

ROB
Oh. You *are* mad. You know what? Surface seems to me the most reasonable place to skate. Where do you skate, dear? Beneath the surface? Above the surface?

MARIA
Don’t call me “dear.” *(Beat)* Anyway, you know what I mean.

ROB
No, I really can’t fathom your meaning.
OTHERS laugh.

Not funny.

MARIA

Because you don’t get it.

JACKIE

Oh, I get it. I just don’t think it’s funny.

MARIA

Um-hmm. You don’t get it.

JACKIE

Fathom means … understand.

MARIA

It’s a pun, dear. A fathom is a unit of length used mostly for measuring water depth. About 1.8 meters. That’d be six feet to you, Maria. Which is the perfect depth – if you know what I mean.

JACKIE

And you’re out of your depth, Jackie – if you know what I mean.

MARIA

Maria, stop.

MARTINEZ

Hey, I got her back.

MARIA

You did, and it was funny.

ROB

Am I supposed to be flattered?

MARIA

Yes, as a matter of fact, you are…

ROB

I love you, Jackie –

MARTINEZ

SHut up, Martinez! (To MARIA) And your potato salad is lousy! It’s called potato salad, Maria. Salad. Not potatoes and mustard!
MARIA
Oh really? And what dish did you prepare –?

JACKIE
Lousy!

BETTE
Jackie, stop! *(Crosses to JACKIE)*

MARIA
And if you’re so interested in your mother’s welfare, where have you been for the last year? I think you showed only for the reading of her will

JACKIE
Ok, that’s it!

*SHE breaks away from BETTE, starts for MARIA who sets for battle. LYNNE giggles: ROB intervenes.*

ROB
Whoa, Jackie. Easy. Eeeasyyy. Sit down, Maria.

MARIA
Let her sit. She’s the one who –

ROB
Sit down and calm down.

MARIA
Don’t you order me around!

BETTE
Can we please comport ourselves with a little –

MARIA
*(Over BETTE)* Ever!!!

BETTE
Dignity.

ROB
Maria, my dear, you may stand if it means so much –

MARIA
I’ll sit, thank you! *(Sits)*
(To MARTINEZ) Jackie’s just upset.

BETTE

So am I!

MARIA

Yeah, we noticed that.

ROB

We’re all upset.

BETTE

I understand.

MARTINEZ

Well, I don’t. I don’t understand anything. All this animosity.

MARIA

Odd that you would talk of animosity.

ROB

I was upset, not animos.

MARIA

What?

ROB

That’s not a word?

MARIA

No, I don’t think that’s a word. Animus maybe –

ROB

Here’s a word: jackass.

MARIA

Maria! I know you two like each other –

MARTINEZ

(To MARIA) So you really do like me?

ROB

Let me count the ways.

MARIA
ROB
Oh good. Go ahead. Count the ways.

MARIA
(Beat) Sorry. Can’t come up with anything.

MARTINEZ
(To JACKIE) You probably have an excellent reason for disappearing.

JACKIE
My absence is none of your business.

LYNN
She’s right –

MARTINEZ
For an entire year.

LYNN
...which is why I never told you the details, dear.

JACKIE
None!

MARTINEZ
Don’t be angry with me, Jackie. I love you. I wish I were in the coffin instead of her.

JACKIE
If wishing could make it so, Martinez. You would be in the coffin instead of her.

LYNN giggles again.

MARTINEZ
I guess your wish will come true. I’ll be there soon because I cannot – because I don’t want to – live without her. I want to be with her—

HE starts a cross to the coffin. MARIA intercepts HIM.

MARTINEZ
Daddy, don’t say that! Don’t even think it –

JACKIE
Let him say it. Let him think it.
MARIA
You horrible...person.

ROB
Let’s not be animos.

MARIA
What?

JACKIE
He said: You shut your fake eyelashes, interloper ass mouth.

MARIA
What?

JACKIE
Shut your fake eyelashes – !

MARTINEZ
Stop! Please stop. It’s ok, Maria. She doesn’t mean it.

JACKIE
Oh, I mean it all right.

BETTE
(Slams her hand on something) That’s enough!

BETTE
Bette –

MARTINEZ
No. It’s enough. I mean it. Our mother is lying there. And we all miss her. Let Martinez
miss her, too. He made her happy, Jackie. He made her laugh.

MARTINEZ
We’re all upset. We who loved her so much. Please, may we have a moment of silent
prayer? Each in his own way.

ROB
Yes, we may. But I think we’d better keep our eyes open.

JACKIE
What good’s that going to do? We’re surrounded by backstabbers.

MARTINEZ
He for whom Lord Vishnu is Uncle—
JACKIE

You said ‘silent.’

MARTINEZ

I wish to express—

BETTE

Silent is good, Martinez.

MARTINEZ

Certainly. (Looks off) May we have some music?

ORGAN MUSIC starts. LIGHTS CHANGE.

After a few beats, LYNN crosses down stage. OTHERS freeze in prayer.

LYNN

Do I look pale to you? Don’t answer. Of course I look pale. Why wouldn’t I? I’m dead as a doornail. And I wasn’t old, I mean I guess I was getting older. Fifty-eight before I was so rudely interrupted. But I can tell you, winding up dead surprised me because I was healthy – reasonably healthy – ate right, slept ok, exercised. I walked the beach two miles every day, gathering shells. They’re all over my house. ( Gestures over her shoulder) You ought to see my bedroom... my old bedroom. Shells everywhere. I’ve got a shell lamp, shell picture frame, shell jewelry box, shell – well, you get the point. I guess I was sort of a shell myself, of what I once was, you know. I still looked pretty good, but wrinkles had started cropping up, muscle tone had weakened. I started dying my hair. Worse than that, I started getting promotional junk from the AARP. Well. It’s not fun being at the upper edges of middle age ’cause you know it’ll only get worse until finally you slide into old age and then ... death. Somehow, I never got to the old age part. (Beat) Anyway, every shell I picked up reminded me how much of my youth I had wasted by pouting or by arguing or by saying ‘no’ or ‘Not tonight, I have a headache’ or whatever other bone headed thing I said to Jim – my late, patient husband – (Points to his picture on the upstage wall) – who, by the way, I expected to see on this side. But so far: nada. I’ll tell you more about that later. What was I thinking in those days? Couldn’t tell you. Probably careless at first, maybe angry for some silly reason or another and so withheld my affections to teach him a lesson. Young. You know. Days and nights stretching into eternity ... plenty of time ahead for making up, for making love and for... well, for everything. But it’s not true, you know ... time passes so fast, it ... that’s not right. Time doesn’t pass; it broad jumps. It overcomes us in huge gulps: I was a young girl, then a young woman, then a young mother. Then one day I wasn’t so young. Then I started having hot flashes – don’t get me started on that. Then I had arthritis, and I found myself at a loss when Jackie or Bette or Rob talked about new movies or music. I had no idea who or what they were talking about. But I had Jim, and we laughed about our ignorance and about the speed at which the world turned. But one morning I woke up, and ... Jim didn’t. I began walking the beach. Alone. But eventually I loved walking there. Seashore doesn’t care how old you are. Waves beat at my feet anyway; sea air teased my body as if I were a child, gulls danced in the blue sky for me. Ah it was lovely, so lovely... partly, I guess, because I knew time was running out. Lovely. Except on the days my
loneliness overwhelmed me. And it was on one of the lonely days I met Martinez. I was in a foul mood, slamming those shells into my little net bag, muttering about the AARP. He laughed out loud at me, and I threw a shell at him. Hit him on the ear. He started lecturing me about toxicity in sea creatures – something like that, but I wasn’t really listening. I was looking at the way his brown eyes twinkled. Anyway, two months later... (Leans forward; speaks sotto voce) I had the first orgasm I had had in six years. I was young again! Martinez. Bette said that I was relying on him too much. Said I didn’t know enough about him. I said “Darlin,’ I know all I need to know.” (Beat) Then something happened. I wound up dead. (Beat) Murdered, I think. And though it breaks my heart to say it, I think one of them... (Jerks her finger over her shoulder) did it, but I can’t be sure because I wasn’t paying attention. And there’s nothing I can do about it from this side. Curious on this side, by the way. So far there’s nobody here but me... (Starts to cross upstage; stops; turns) Jackie’s a pistol, isn’t she? I think there’s an ‘Amen’ coming, and I ought to respect it. (Crosses to her chair; sits) Do, you know. Respect Amens.

LIGHTS CHANGE; OTHERS break freeze.

Amen.

MARTINEZ

Amen.

MARIA

Bette, Jackie, Rob.

DORSETT

HE gestures to include MARTINEZ and MARIA; Maybe a hug or two.

All of you. I am so sorry. We’re going to miss her. (Abrupt shift) Gotta run. (Starts to cross off; stops; returns) We need to set a time to read Lynn’s last wishes.

As HE speaks, HE kisses BETTE, JACKIE, ROB and MARTINEZ. HE pauses, pats MARIA. As HE turns, MARIA holds his arm.

You mean her will?

MARIA

Yes, I mean her will.

DORSETT

Am I in it?

MARIA
MARTINEZ/LYNN

ALL look at MARTINEZ

MARTINEZ, Continued

You were, but I had you taken out.

MARIA

How could you? Daddy.

MARTINEZ

You’re not in her family –

JACKIE

How could you indeed? Dorsett, why the hell does he know what’s in my mother’s will? None of the rest of us know... (Beat; looks around) Right? (Beat; looks at ROB) Right?

ROB

Dorsett wouldn’t tell me a thing. And believe me, I prodded him.

DORSETT

If only...

BETTE

I have only the vaguest notion. Mom hated talking about it. Death and dying, wills, probate. All of it. Said she was too young to worry about all that. But when Daddy died, a change came over her, and she confided in me, but only in the most general terms. How do you know, Martinez?

DORSETT

I certainly didn’t tell him. Or anyone else, not even Robbie. I must point out, however, that Mr. Martinez – not Lynn – delivered the will to my office.

MARTINEZ

In a sealed envelope. With Lynn’s signature across the seal. Remember, Mr. Dorsett?

LYNN

I asked him to deliver it...

MARIA

You said Lynn –

MARTINEZ

I said Lynn gave it to me to deliver.
I have all legal copies of what we’ll call “the new will” in my safe.

The new will?

Some few changes.

What have you been up to, Martinez?

I gave her advice only when she asked.

I’ll bet you did.

She’s your mother, Jackie. She loves you. All of you. Anything to add, Mr. Dorsett?

I love you too, you little creep.

Just that she was pleased with the final product.

“Pleased” isn’t the right word.

You got her to talk about death?

I didn’t get her to talk about anything. She simply shared her concerns about her estate one night—

Are you in my mother’s will?

– in bed.

That I remember.
BETTE
We don’t need to know where you were.

MARTINEZ
Sorry, Bette. But it was an important part of our life –

JACKIE
That doesn’t mean we want to hear about you groping our mother –

MARTINEZ
(Crosses to BETTE; touches her arm) She remembered me, yes. A token of our friendship, of our love. I did love her, you know. She wanted to give me more than a token, but I wouldn’t allow it.

LYNN
Oh, you wanted more, Sweetie.

JACKIE
Is that true, Dorsett?

DORSETT
I had no idea that she spoke to Mr. Martinez, but if I had, it would have changed nothing.

MARTINEZ
I helped with some pesky details ...Nothing more.

ROB
The devil’s in the details...

BETTE
When would she have written a new...? How new is it?

DORSETT
Her wishes will be clear soon enough. There are a few legal curly-cues to straighten out –

ROB
What the hell are legal curly-cues?

LYNN
What indeed?

DORSETT
Some figures aren’t falling in line –

LYNN
Everything lined up in my copy!
Whose fault is that?

DORSETT
It’s no one’s fault exactly. Lynn may have overestimated...

MARTINEZ
It’s your job to estimate, isn’t it?

DORSETT
It’s my job to present an accurate report of assets, Mr. Martinez.

LYNN
I didn’t overestimate anything –

MARTINEZ
Lynn seemed to think everything was in order the night she...

JACKIE
The night she what, Martinez? The night she died? Did you help her change her will because you knew she was going to die?

MARTINEZ
We’re all going to die, Jackie. I was going to say the night she discussed her wishes with me.

Did she make changes that night?

BETTE
She did.

ROB
(Crosses to MARTINEZ) If I thought for one second you had anything, anything at all – to do with my mother’s death –

DORSETT
This will get us nowhere. I have been Lynn’s attorney for two years. She has never questioned my judgment nor the figures I presented. I am simply waiting for some ... new figures to line up, and to nudge them into place if necessary. I have nothing to hide, nothing to gain by misrepresenting her wishes in any way.

ROB
What the hell does that mean? What new figures?

ALL look at MARTINEZ.
I don’t think I like the way this conversation’s going.

It doesn’t really matter what you like, Martinez. If there’s confusion, let’s clear it up.

There’s no confusion --

We’ll do that by reading Lynn’s will.

Though the one change will probably cause some little consternation.

Bette hoped that Wednesday would be a convenient time. Seven o’clock. Anyone have a problem with that?

This Wednesday? No. No problem at all.

I bet not.

Will you be there, Maria?

Why should I? I’ve been taken out of the will by my dear father. Wait, that’s not right. Papa. Nope. Papasita. Dada –

Daddy? Popsie? Pa?


Pa, she hardly knew ya—

You’re right about that –

That’s quite enough, Maria.
JACKIE

I’ll be there. With bells on.

LYNN

So will I ... I think.

DORSETT

Good. We’ll do it here, in this room, so much more comfortable than my office. I’ve always loved Lynn’s taste in furniture. And in clothes.

LYNN

Thank you, darlin’.

DORSETT

Not so much in companions.

MARIA

What? What did he say?

MARTINEZ

I think he’s talking about us, dear.

DORSETT

Present company excluded, of course. See me to the door, Rob?

ROB

You’re not coming to the service?

DORSETT

Of course I am. I want to change into something more appropriate. Meet you all at the church.

JACKIE

I don’t like it that you know more about our finances than we do.

DORSETT

Trust me. I’m a lawyer.

Reaction from ALL.

Attorney humor. (Silence) Yes. Well.... Robbie?

ROB

Dorsie.
THEY cross off left. ROB throws an arm around DORSETT, looks back to check effect on others.

MARTINEZ
Is Rob...um...involved with Mr. Dorsett? I mean is he ... you know...

JACKIE
The word is ‘gay,’ Martinez. Gay. Are you afraid to say it?

MARTINEZ
No. Of course not. Is he ... um, you know ... gay?

BETTE
We’ve never discussed sexual preferences.

JACKIE
He could be. What does it matter?

MARTINEZ
It’s just that Dorsett seems ... you know...

JACKIE
Why is any of this your business?

He can’t be.

MARIA
Who can’t be?

JACKIE
Rob. He just can’t. He ... I –

ROB enters.

MARTINEZ
Yes. Well. Please let me know when it’s time to...move Lynn.

BETTE
Before you leave, would you be kind enough to take a picture?

MARTINEZ
Of course. (Picks up the cell phone) We can use the cell. Ok? Whose is it? (Checks it) Dorsett’s. He must have left it. He won’t mind.

BETTE
Rob, Jackie –
ROB

Oh, for God’s sake, Bette—

BETTE

Humor me. It’s the first time we’ve been together in a very long time. Jackie …

SHE reaches for her. JACKIE crosses to, stands on her right. Reluctantly, Rob stands to her left.

MARTINEZ

It’s got a delay setting. I can easily jump in –

JACKIE

Family only, Martinez.

LYNN

(As crosses to the group) Dead or alive.

BETTE

It’s ok, Jackie. Maria?

MARTINEZ joins the group. Very reluctantly.

MARTINEZ sets up the shot, hurriedly crosses to the group.

Say cheese.

Only BETTE says cheese, but all smile. We hear a click as the picture is taken. The image is projected on the upstage wall, so the audience can see the picture. ALL are in it except LYNN.

I’ll ask Dorsett to shoot you all a copy. (Beat)

MARIA

(To JACKIE) Think I’ll have a bite of my potato salad. (Crosses off)

JACKIE

Good. Someone’s got to eat it.

MARIA

It takes one to know one! (Exits)

JACKIE

What?
MARTINEZ
She’s not always on target with quips. I wish you could see a way to be kinder... (Gestures vaguely up right; crosses that way) I’ll be in my room...

JACKIE
Your room?

MARTINEZ
Yes. My room.

Martinez.

JACKIE
(Stops; turns to JACKIE) Yes?

MARTINEZ
I... I’m glad you made my mother laugh.

JACKIE
It was a pleasure – and it was mutual. She made me laugh too. Jackie...

HE opens his arms as if to hug her, starts to cross back to her.

MARTINEZ
Not quite that glad...

JACKIE
(Stops) Oh. Sorry.

MARTINEZ
Just... give me time.

JACKIE
I understand. I love you, Jackie.

MARTINEZ
You don’t even know me, you – Sorry. Sorry. I...Yes. Sorry. Thank you. Thank you. See you at the church.

JACKIE crosses off. MARTINEZ turns to cross off up right. BETTE’s line stops HIM.

BETTE
Were you drugging my mother?
MARTINEZ
(Beat; turns) If you mean was I helping her with the medications prescribed by Bill Welborn. Yes. I was. She had arthritis, high blood pressure, diabetes. And she preferred to take a hormone.

A hormone?

BETTE

LYNN

He’s clean. I would have noticed.

MARTINEZ
(Nods while LYNN speaks) I was on a similar therapy. It worked out for us, if you understand me.

Oh, I understand you. Very well.

BETTE

MARTINEZ
We both needed a little push. She loved intimacy –

LYNN

It had been six years.

BETTE

Stop.

MARTINEZ
(As crosses to her) And so did I – so do I. Still. (_touches her arm; SHE doesn’t move) If you’ll excuse me. (Turns; crosses up)

LYNN

Why, you little worm.

BETTE

All those drugs. If someone were to mention them to the police, mention how easy it would have been for you to...

MARTINEZ
(Turns back) For me to what, Bette? Are you accusing me of something?

BETTE

You don’t have many friends here.

MARTINEZ
I know that. Will you be my friend, Bette?
A long silence as they stare at each other.

MARTINEZ, Continued
I kept a very detailed chart of every drug I administered, though “administered” seems too clinical a term. I simply gave her the medication that she needed – the medication that Dr. Welborn prescribed – and noted every dose, every single inoculation in her journal. You should read it.

LYNN
He wouldn’t hurt me –

MARTINEZ
It’s on her night table, the one that doubles as a mini fridge for the insulin. You know the one I mean: the one on my side of our bed. Another clinical term, by the way – and an ugly one – is “autopsy.” I can’t bear to think of the procedure that ugly word defines, of how it carves from one whatever dignity there is in death, of how much Lynn feared that sort of desecration, even though she realized that she would no longer be an occupant of her dissected corpse.

BETTE
You don’t know what you’re saying –

MARTINEZ
Oh but I do. I know exactly what I’m saying –

BETTE
You don’t know how hard it was or why they did it –

LYNN
Bette—?

MARTINEZ
No. I don’t know how hard it was. I just know you all arranged one for your mother –

BETTE
They arranged one –

MARTINEZ
Whomever. But I do know why you – why they -- did it: distrust of me pushed them there. I hope the results bring them … and you … peace. I love you, Bette, but you know that. Good night.

MARTINEZ exits as SHE watches. Then SHE crosses down right.

BETTE
You love me?
LYNN

(Stands up center near her coffin) Bette.

BETTE turns to LYNN.

BETTE

(As crosses to where LYNN stands) Mother. I’m so sorry.

LYNN

(Holds out her arms) It’s ok. I wasn’t there.

BETTE crosses right past LYNN and stops at the edge of the casket. Her lines are delivered to the body in the casket. BETTE, of course, can neither see nor hear LYNN.

BETTE

I’m so sorry but I had no choice. I – I miss you... The autopsy was ...I miss you. You weren’t... Mother, it didn’t seem...

LYNN

(As crosses to; looks up at her portrait) What? Right? Didn’t seem right to me either.

BETTE

I just need you to know that I love you. God. They put too much make-up on you.

LYNN

(Crosses to casket, stands next to BETTE) Woo. Way too much.

LYNN/BETTE

Though I like the lipstick.

LYNN

Find out what happened, Bette.

BETTE

I love you. Momma.

SHE touches LYNN – the one in the coffin.

LYNN

Thank you, darlin’.

BETTE

Bye, darlin’.
LYNN
I need to know why I died, and I can’t seem to get any answers on this side. I can’t seem to get anything on this side … if this is a side. I thought I’d be able to walk through walls, maybe even scare people. But so far, nothing. I seem stuck in place. I’ve got to get on with it. And, Bette, I think it has to do with the way I died — (Turns; sees that BETTE has left) Bette? (Beat) There’s nothing here. No past, no future, no communication. Nothing. Just … nothing. It’s like a dial tone here. Bette? I can’t stay here. Help me get on with it. (Looks into the coffin) And I never wore my hair like that.

LYNN sighs, watches as MARIA and ROB enter. BOTH carry little plates of potato salad.

MARIA
You don’t have to taste it, you know. In fact, I don’t really give a damn if you like it or not.

(Tastes it) Whew. It’s … um...

ROB
Do you like it?

MARIA
Well. It’s … uh … simple –

ROB
Do you like it?

MARIA
I thought you didn’t care what I think.

ROB
You were rude.

MARIA
Was I animos?

ROB
Rude. In front of the others.

MARIA
Sorry. Wait. Haven’t I already apologized?

ROB
What do you mean “simple”?

MARIA
What?
The potato salad.

ROB

(Tries some; hides a grimace) Oh. Yeah. Yes. It’s simple and ... different. Quite different.

MARIA

Good different or bad different.

ROB

Um. What’s in it?

MARIA

Family secret.

ROB

You have secrets about potato salad?

MARIA

You have secrets about things.

ROB

What things?

MARIA

Jackie.

ROB

Let’s see here. I can tell from the color that there’s mustard in here...

MARIA

Ha. There’s no mustard in there.

ROB

No? Where does this deep yellow come from?

MARIA

I couldn’t say...

ROB

Aha. A secret ingredient.

MARIA

I don’t mean I wouldn’t say. I mean I couldn’t say. OK. There are no family secrets, no secret ingredients. Unless you consider mayonnaise and pepper secrets. I guess mayonnaise and pepper turn everything yellow. I don’t cook a lot. You hate it, don’t you?
ROB
I don’t *hate* it ... It’s just that ... um ... There’s only mayonnaise and pepper in this?

MARIA
And potatoes.

ROB
And potatoes. *(Puts it down)* Where did you...? How long have you had the mayonnaise?

MARIA
A while ... Does mayonnaise go bad? I don’t think mayonnaise goes bad. Does it? *(Tastes hers; puts it down)* Ew. It’s awful, isn’t it?

ROB
Potatoes go bad, too, you know.

MARIA
Ew. So it seems. *(Starts to cross off)* I’ll throw it out.

MARIA
Yes?

ROB
I didn’t mean to be rude, and I’m sorry about Jackie’s attitude.

MARIA
She suspects me of something. I don’t know what. Something.

ROB
She doesn’t suspect you of anything. She ... She misunderstands you. The potato salad’s another matter.

MARIA
Ho-ho. Where has she been for the last year?

LYNN
Don’t tell, Robbie.

ROB
I can’t tell you ... I’m not at liberty...
MARIA

Jail?

LYNN

Don’t tell, Robbie.

ROB

No. Of course not. I’m not at liberty...

MARIA

What do you think of me?

ROB

I think your father made my mother very happy this past year –

MARIA

That’s him. What about me?

ROB

You’re a good tennis player. Great legs.

MARIA

Really?

ROB

Really.

MARIA

Yours are too hairy.

ROB

I meant for getting around the tennis court. You beat me in straight sets.

MARIA

Actually, I’m not that good. You’re that bad.

ROB

Oh.... What do you mean “too hairy”?

MARIA

Too hairy. Like a monkey. Do you like me?

ROB

Not anymore.

MARIA

You said you liked me. What’s with you and Dorsett?
ROB
Why are you asking me these things?

MARIA
Can’t you just answer?

ROB
Apparently not.

MARIA
I’m asking because I dreamed about you last night.

LYNN
Careful. Danger.

ROB
Me? You did?

MARIA
Yes. Again.

ROB
Again? Oh. Well. Were we intimate...? Did we um...?

MARIA
No. We weren’t. Didn’t.

ROB
Good thing it wasn’t my dream.

MARIA
Why? Would you have told me to – *(Tries to imitate his voice from earlier)* – “Sit down, Maria”?

ROB
No.... Though I might have asked you to *lie* down.

LYNN
He’s a goner.

MARIA
You’re pretty sure of yourself, aren’t you?

ROB
No, I’m not. We’re talking about a dream ... well, not even a dream. It’s what I would have said if I had had that dream. Which I haven’t. But would certainly like to.
I’d have slapped you.

MARIA

ROB

You couldn’t have. Not in my own dream. And yes.

MARIA

And yes?

ROB

I like you.

MARIA

Oh. Really?

ROB

Oh. Definitely.

MARIA

So you’re flirting with me.

LYNN

Such insight.

ROB

You started it.

MARIA

Oh, really?

ROB

Oh, definitely.

MARIA

I think we’re repeating ourselves.

ROB

Oh, really?

MARIA

Oh, definitely. Tell me about Dorsett.

ROB

What about him?

MARIA

(Beat) Word is that you two are...
ROB

Are what?

MARIA

Together.

ROB

Things aren’t always what they seem.

MARIA

Is that a no?

ROB

Things aren’t always what they seem.

MARIA

You’re repeating yourself again.

ROB

Jackie has been in and out of rehab for the last year.

LYNN

I think we have a Bingo.

MARIA

Oh. Problems with alcohol?

LYNN

You’ve said enough, Robbie.

ROB

Problems with drugs. I’m surprised Mother didn’t tell Martinez.

MARIA

I guess she kept secrets.

LYNN

Unlike you, Robert.

ROB

Maybe. But she never talked to me about death and dying. Even when we were kids, she –

MARIA

I don’t know what you mean –

ROB

She talked about those things to Martinez.
They were close. What kind of drugs?

Prescription. Jackie is a registered nurse. Was a registered nurse.

Easy access.

That was part of the problem.

What was the other part?

So many questions. Let’s talk about you. What happened to Mrs. Martinez?

Who?

Your mother.

Oh. My mother. She died as I was born –

I’m sorry –

I never knew her. Dad – Mr. Martinez – and I wandered up and down the seacoasts: North and South America. Australia. Even Antarctica.

He never worked.

Our travels were his work. He was a biologist ... worked short-term contracts, special projects, mostly for the government, I think. Secret stuff that I never knew much about, something about marine toxicity. Anyway. He saved his money, sent me to private schools, then to college. He retired here, met your mother on the beach. I think she bopped him in the head with a seashell.

Left ear.
*Behold a Pale Ryder* by Richard Davis, Jr. Page 36

**MARIA** turns on **TANGO MUSIC**. A slow, sensuous tango plays.

**ROB**

That’s a lot about him, almost nothing about you. Where did you – ?

**MARIA**

So many questions. Do you tango?

**ROB**

I fake it pretty well.

**MARIA**

Then let’s tango.

**ROB**

Right here? Right now?

**MARIA**

Right here. Right now.

**ROB**

Let’s.

*THEY* dance a bit. The attraction between *THEM* builds.

**MARIA**

Where did I what?

**ROB**

Um. I forget what I was going to ask. You’re a good dancer.

**MARIA**

You’re quite ... adequate.

The dance should be choreographed so that it swirls around **LYNN**, even pauses in front of her as **ROB** and **MARIA** deliver lines.

**ROB**

First my tennis, now my dancing. But I’m not offended. One can’t do everything well. I make terrific potato salad.

**MARIA**

You’re very funny. Aren’t you?
ROB
Yes, I am. You’re very beautiful. Aren’t you?

MARIA
Yes, I am.

ROB
But not very modest.

MARIA
One can’t do everything well. You and your mother weren’t close?

ROB
She was a loving person.

MARIA
So I gather. But you weren’t close?

ROB
I loved her as a son ought to love his mother. Close? No, no we weren’t.

LYNN
I wanted to be closer, Robbie.

MARIA
Why not?

ROB
Questions again.

LYNN
He has too much of my mother in him for us to be really close.

ROB
She had too much of her mother in her for us to be really close.

MARIA
I like this music. It sweeps over me. Like a wave in slow motion.

ROB
Sappy metaphor.

MARIA
It’s a sappy simile.

ROB
Here’s another. I’m falling for you like a ton of bricks.
That’s a sappy cliché.

MARIA

Sorry.

ROB

*ROB holds her tighter. HE leans in to kiss her as THEY dance. SHE tries to avoid it, though not very strongly.*

MARIA

No...

Maria, you’re lovely.

ROB

*HE kisses her neck.*

MARIA

No. Rob, don’t.... Your mother...

ROB

She can’t see...

LYNN

The hell I can’t.

ROB

Besides, I don’t think she’d mind.

LYNN

Actually, I’m surprised. I worried you were a bit light in your loafers –

*ROB tries to kiss MARIA’s mouth. SHE breaks away, slaps his face. Beat. HE touches her face. THEY lunge into a kiss. SHE breaks away, crosses to the couch. HE follows, turns her to him. THEY kiss again. Then again. Enter MARTINEZ. LYNN rises.*

LYNN

Martinez!

MARTINEZ

Maria!

*MARIA and ROB disengage.*
Martinez – Daddy! It’s not – MARIA
I can explain everything – ROB
– what you think. MARIA
The hell it isn’t. LYNN
I know what you’re thinking. ROB
Oh, you do? And what is that? MARTINEZ
We were just – MARIA
Kissing obviously – ROB
Obviously kissing – MARIA
I really like your daughter – ROB
And I really like your son. Wait. That’s not right. MARIA
Right. I’m clearly not your son … ROB
A weak laugh; beat.

We were also having a conversation. MARIA
While you were kissing? MARTINEZ
Well … in between. Look, Martinez, I know this is awkward given the circumstances. (Looks at MARIA)
Death and … everything.

It was certainly an intense conversation.

Yes, it was.

(Directed to ROB) Quite intense.

How long has this been going on?

HE looks at his watch. HE and MARIA say their lines simultaneously.

Well. Just a few minutes –

Almost a year.

Almost a year? You never said anything to me.

So what? You didn’t miss anything if it’s been just a few minutes for you –

You know what I mean. I’ve had feelings for you for a long time, Maria. I just never said anything. I was afraid we might wind up being related or something.

That was never going to happen...

Sorry, love. You were just an old boy-toy.

Do you love each other?

Well, I ... you know …

It happened so quickly. We haven’t had time to ... you know …
ROB
You had a year.

MARIA
And you’ve had only a few minutes, poor fellow.

(To MARTINEZ) You see the problem.

ROB
Pardon?

MARTINEZ
She said why did you kiss her?

ROB
I heard her. (Beat) I kissed her because...

MARIA
You’re very nervous.

ROB
Yes, I am. Well. We’re standing here in front of your father, and I’m about to tell you for the first time that I love you and that I have loved from the first minute I saw you. Maria.

MARIA
You love me?

ROB
Yes. Do you?

MARIA
Do I what?

ROB
Why are you torturing me?

MARIA
I think so...

ROB
You think so?
You must be sure, child.

I do. I love you, Rob.

They embrace.

If he makes her as happy as you made me...

I can make her as happy as you made Mother...

(Beat) Then you have my blessing. It’s that simple. But you’re going to face some opposition. Jackie doesn’t like me. Bette doesn’t trust me –

I can handle Jackie. And Bette. Maria, I don’t want to push you into anything, but I do love you. And ... and I can handle anything my family throws my way – our way. OK? (Takes her arm)

Yes. Yes!

OK.

(Rob) Though it’s really you they have a beef with, not Maria. Sorry about my earlier comment. I don’t really think you had anything to do with mother’s death.

Thank you.

He loved her.

They will soon find I’m not a threat. I asked my beloved Lynn to leave me nothing should she die first, of course. Which she did.

Obviously.
ALL look to the casket. Enter JACKIE and BETTE.

MARTINEZ
She insisted that she leave me something, a modest ... gift.

LYNN
Well. One of us insisted. And I’d hardly call it modest, you little twerp.

MARTINEZ
I finally accepted only if she would accept a modest gift ... (Smiles) ...or two from me.

LYNN
Now those are modest. Shell picture frame, shell lamp.

Enter JACKIE, BETTE unseen.

MARTINEZ
I also insisted that she be in my will should I die first. Which I did not. Obviously.

Obviously.

JACKIE
Obviously.

ROB
Hi Jackie. I love Maria.

Have you lost your mind?

ROB
My heart, actually.

MARIA crosses to HIM; THEY embrace.

MARIA
Robbie, that’s so sweet.

JACKIE
I could easily throw up. Rob, she’s the enemy.

MARIA
Why don’t you go shoot up or something?
Maria!

ROB

What did you say?

JACKIE

Maria. Sit down and be quiet.

ROB

What did she say?

JACKIE

You’re telling me what to do again, Robert.

MARIA

For God’s sake, Maria. I told you that in confidence!

ROB

You talked to her about me?

JACKIE

She’s nobody important!

ROB

Uh-oh.

LYNN

Oh, Rob?

MARIA

(As turns to her) Yes?

SHE slaps his face; storms out.

ROB

Things are looking up.

JACKIE

What did I do? What did I say? Maria, come back here!

MARIA

(Off) Why don’t you...go make some potato salad?! (Beat) Monkey legs!

JACKIE

What?
Young love.

ROB
This hitting has got to stop.

BETTE
They’re coming for Mother. She once said that her husband carried her in – over the threshold – and that if it came to it, she wanted her children to carry her out.

MARTINEZ comforts her.

MARTINEZ
I’ll take the fourth corner. If it’s all right.

ROB
Yes, it’s all right.

BETTE
Please do.

MARTINEZ
Rob, I’ll speak to Maria for you.

ROB
What did I say?

THEY cross to, move the casket off.
LYNN remains.

MARTINEZ
Gently, gently.

LYNN
(Sits; speaks out) Just dump it. I don’t need it. God knows, I’ve dealt with enough – (Beat; shrugs; speaks out) Well. Interesting that I don’t need the shell to be ... to be whatever nut it is I am. It’s not that I’m afraid to see them burn the body; it’s more that I no longer have much interest in it.

As LYNN speaks, BETTE enters with a service cart, begins cleaning up. SHE also exits left, returns with a tray of half eaten food, which SHE places in cart. SHE never gets around to moving the service cart off.

Reminds me of a favorite pair of pajamas I once owned. They were soft and sweet, nestled against my body when I lay down. Then after too many washes, they got wafery and thin.
LYNN, Continued

And they lost their shape. But I kept wearing them because...well, because they were my favorite pajamas. Finally, though, I faced the truth: they were old, ugly, uncomfortable. I got rid of them and bought a lovely silk nightgown. It caressed me. I loved to spin in front of my mirror just to watch it swirl around my body. But now that body has been through the wash many, many times. This... *(Rises; spins on her toes)* Is a brand new silk nightie. Great feeling: I don’t need to sleep, I don’t have arthritis, I’m no longer old. In fact, I’m ageless. You’re going to love it. I’m going to love it even more, once I get this mystery solved and get past this ...celestial pause. Yes. Celestial pause.

*MARTINEZ enters. SHE turns to HIM.*

BETTE

What do you want, Martinez?

MARTINEZ

Ready for another round, Bette?

BETTE

You’re up to something. And I’ll figure out what it is.

You already know.

BETTE

No. I don’t. Suppose you tell me.

MARTINEZ

I’m strongly attracted to you. I think you’re attracted to me.

LYNN

Why you son-of-a-bitch.

BETTE

What?! Why you ... weasel. You ... you nasty little... you.... Mother’s been gone for only –

MARTINEZ

And if she were alive I wouldn’t be telling you this. I would never hurt her. Never. Sometimes when I talk to you, Bette, I put my hands in my pockets because I’m afraid they’ll reach out of their volition and touch you. I know my stock’s pretty low around here, and I’m not proud of my feelings, but I’m not ashamed either. I think of you every day …

*HE starts a cross to her. SHE backs away.*

LYNN

Kick him where I can’t, Bette.
MARTINEZ
I just want you to know how I feel …

BETTE
You’re insane. You’re – No. You’re not insane, are you? Just determined. Your meal
ticket’s gone, and now you think you can find another with me. I wouldn’t marry you if you –

MARTINEZ
Marry? I don’t want to marry you! You sound like your mother.

BETTE
My mother? What…?

MARTINEZ
She asked me to marry her. Several times.

LYNN
Three times!

BETTE
And you said no. Why? Was the pre-nup too unkind?

MARTINEZ
There was no pre-nup. She knew I would be fair, should I outlive her. Besides, there’s more
than enough money for every one of you. And that money is yours, not mine. I excluded
myself from her will, I excluded my daughter from her will, and I refused to marry her –

BETTE
But if you loved her –

MARTINEZ
The first time she brought up marriage, we were too new. She had been lonely, and she was
glad to have a companion and lover. I wanted her to take some time before we jumped into ...
anything.

BETTE
And the next time she brought it up?

MARTINEZ
I had already fallen for you –

BETTE
My god! You were sleeping with my mother and thinking about me?

LYNN
Kick him!
I’m not a perfect man. I –

BETTE
You’re a perfect madman!

MARTINEZ
I didn’t want it to happen, but every time I looked at you, I found something new to admire. The way you always use a single finger to push your hair behind your ear after it slips across your face.

BETTE
I know another use for a single finger, Martinez. Let me show you –

\textit{HE grabs her hand as SHE attempts to illustrate her meaning, holds it to his chest.}

MARTINEZ
The way you stand in the mornings – out there, on the veranda – legs apart, face into the sun –

BETTE
(Pulls her hand away, backs away from him) Legs ... Stop. Stop it.

MARTINEZ
Especially in your filmy white dress. The sun –

BETTE
Martinez, please stop talking.

MARTINEZ
Sorry.

\textit{HE crosses to her, pulls her into an embrace, kisses her.}

BETTE
You caught me off guard you ... you –

LYNN
So kick him!

MARTINEZ
Weasel.

BETTE/LYNN
Weasel.
BETTE
I hope you enjoyed that because that’s the only one you’ll ever get.

LYNN
Atta girl, Bette.

HE kisses her again.

BETTE/LYNN
Oh, my god.

SHE takes a step back to slap him, but HE pulls her into another kiss.

BETTE, Continued
You weasel. You ... you ... oh...

SHE kisses him as ROB enters.

LYNN
This is why I need to be able to walk through walls.

ROB
Bette?

LYNN
Rob, will you please kick this man—

ROB
Bette, what in God’s name are you doing?

BETTE
Losing my mind. You?

SHE exits. ROB follows, but comes face to face with MARIA. Beat. MARIA sniffs haughtily past Him.

ROB
Maria, I’m sorry …

MARTINEZ
Give us a minute, Rob.

ROB
I just want her to know—
MARTINEZ

Please. Let me talk to her.

ROB

Sure. OK.

MARTINEZ

Are you all right? Maria, I’ll be with the others … if you – you know – if you want to talk.

ROB exits.

MARIA

(HER voice, body language change) “You must be sure, child”? Is that what you said to me?

Maria, this isn’t funny.

MARIA

In fact, it’s sad. Where’s he going?

MARTINEZ

To be with the others, waiting for the morticians. Don’t you blow this.

MARIA

He said I’m not important. I’m sick of not being important –

MARTINEZ

He was nervous. I’m sure he meant you’re practically family, and that he could say anything
he wished in front of you. You are practically family, aren’t you?

MARIA

I don’t know. I hope so.

MARTINEZ

That was quite a passionate kiss I walked in on.

MARIA

Isn’t that what you want?

HE rises, crosses to door through which they’ve
moved the casket, looks out, closes door.

MARTINEZ

Yes, it’s what I want. And I want you to be very, very sure I get what I want.

MARIA

I know what I’m doing; don’t push me.
I won’t push you, but you be careful, Maria. Be very careful.

Don’t threaten me.

It’s not a threat. Yet. Don’t you forget who your daddy is.

Who’s your daddy?

Please don’t start that again.

Who’s your daddy?

Oh, for God’s sake, Freddy. (Sigh) I’m doing what you asked; please leave me alone.

Just so we’re clear: I didn’t ask, I demanded.

When this is over, I’m going to bathe and bathe and bathe –

Come here.

Stop it! Please, stop it!

OK. For now. Do this right, and you’ll be very rich. We’ll both be very, very rich.

I’m sorry you dragged me into this –
MARTINEZ
Don’t be sorry. We’re almost there. *(Grabs her arm)* If you want to feel sorry for someone feel sorry for me when I was having to sleep with that old woman every bloody night. Her taking those damn hormone pills. Have you any idea what I went through? Woman was insatiable.

MARIA
How much longer will this take?

MARTINEZ
That depends on how long it takes for you to get a marriage proposal.

MARIA
Playing dumb is like pretending not to know another language when everyone around you is speaking it.

MARTINEZ
*(Turns her)* All you have to do is play my sweet, innocent daughter. Sweet, Maria. Sweet!

MARIA
I’m trying.

MARTINEZ
You’re blowing it. You’ve alienated Jackie –

MARIA
You certainly haven’t endeared yourself to her –

MARTINEZ
And you’re in the process of alienating our meal ticket.

MARIA
Acting, acting, acting. I will take care of Rob.

MARTINEZ
Yes, I think you will. Apparently, he’s not gay.

MARIA
Apparently.

MARTINEZ
Makes me wonder what he’s up to.

MARIA
What do you mean?
MARTINEZ

Just be very careful. *(Beat)* Maria?

MARIA

What?

MARTINEZ

You’re not falling for him, are you?

MARIA

I’m doing what you ‘demanded’ I do.

*MARTINEZ

We hear a noise off.*

MARIA

What’s that? *(Crosses right; looks off)*

MARTINEZ

Maybe it’s your conscience knocking.

MARIA

I just don’t want you to have too good a time. I might get jealous. *(Turns her to him)* When this is over, I’ll –

MARIA

You’ll what? Return the pictures? Like you promised.

MARTINEZ

I’ll make you very rich.

MARIA

Will you return the pictures? Like you promised.

MARTINEZ

The very day you marry Rob.

MARIA

And there are no copies?

MARTINEZ

Once this is over, I have no need for copies. Or for you. But I don’t like the way things are going with you and Rob. I may need a backup plan. I’ve got too much invested to lose it all now.

MARIA

*(Turns away)* We won’t need a backup.
HE grabs her; turns her to him.

MARTINEZ
Be sure we don’t. I’ve kept my end of the deal. You keep yours.

MARTINEZ
Is that a threat?

MARTINEZ
I know a lot about you.

MARIA
Just remember, I know a lot about you. (Beat) Daddy.

MARIA
Maybe too much.

MARTINEZ
HE buries his hand in her hair; pulls.

MARTINEZ
Stop! You’re hurting me.

MARTINEZ
Don’t you ever threaten me. Ever.

MARIA
We hear ROB off. THEY move into a posture suggesting a father comforting his daughter as ROB enters.

MARTINEZ
Don’t cry, sweetie. You’re breaking my heart. I’m sure he loves you as much as you love him.

MARIA
Make him leave, Daddy.

MARTINEZ
Maybe you’d better—

ROB
Maria, I didn’t mean your weren’t important –

MARIA
That’s what you said.
ROB
I meant that I feel like I have no secrets from you. That I can trust you.

MARIA
I’m important to you?

ROB
Very. I feel comfortable around you.

MARIA
You do?

ROB
Yes. You’re like an old shoe.

MARTINEZ
Uh-oh.

SHE slaps him again, turns into MARTINEZ’s arms for “fatherly” comfort.

ROB
Man, she hit me again. Listen, this hitting business has got to stop.

MARTINEZ
The course of true love never did run smooth –

ROB
True love? What is it with you Martinez people? Maria’s kissing me one moment, hitting me the next. You’re sleeping with my mother and making out with my sister –

MARIA
(As spins out of MARTINEZ’s embrace) Making out with who? Bette?

MARTINEZ
I can explain all this … confusion –

LYNN
I’m an idiot. A dead one. But an idiot none-the-less.

MARIA
Martinez, you make me sick. (Slaps Martinez; exits)

MARTINEZ
Maria – !
She slapped you. Her own father. *(Beat)* You are her father, right?

Of course, I’m her father.

She called you “Martinez” –

She’s very upset –

I understand that, but why would she—

Mind your own business.

This is our business.

What the hell’s going on here? Who are you?

I loved your mother. I love your sister.

What?!!

Who are you?

You know who I am, Rob. I’m the man who made the last years of your mother’s life worth living.

I wish I could kick you.

You’re the man who’s been sleeping with my mother and making out with my sister.

And it wouldn’t be in the behind.
ROB

Get out of here. And take your daughter with you. Get out now.

MARTINEZ

I’m afraid I can’t do that.

ROB

There’s nothing to be afraid of. Get out.

MARTINEZ

You’re going to find out soon enough. I own this house.

ROB

What?

MARTINEZ

Your mother gave it to me.

LYNN

Is a promise made in orgasmic bliss binding?

ROB

You’re a liar. She wouldn’t. Dorsett would have told me.

MARTINEZ

You better call him.

LYNN

I’m an idiot.

ROB

*(Turns; says lines as exits)* Ma, I hardly knew ya...

LYNN

*(Follows ROB off)* If I could change it, I would. Rob. Damn.

FADE TO BLACK
ACT I: SCENE 2

SETTING: Same; early the next morning.

AT RISE: Set is dark. We hear the clinking of a tea cup on a saucer, perhaps other sounds that suggest drinking, but we see nothing. Then a light comes up through the up left archway leading to the dining room. Set is still too dark to see who’s in the living room, though we know someone is.

MARTINEZ enters; remains at edge of light.

MARTINEZ
(Punches a number into his cell phone)... And good morning to you, too. ... Yes, I realize that, but the early bird and all of that, you know. Is a realtor available? ... residential ... Thank you. Wait, wait. I prefer dealing with a female.... Hmm? ... Because I think women have a greater appreciation for things of beauty and for things of value. ... I suppose I am. I would even say I’m a hopeless romantic. ... No. no, I want to list a property. ...Yes, I can hold... (Hums quietly; waits) Hello ... repeat that, please ... Morales. Oh. Is that Senora. Morales or ... Ah. Hello, Senorita Morales... May I tell you have a lovely voice? ... Yes, I will. Benita. Please call me Federico –

WE hear the clinking of tea cup. MARTINEZ covers the phone with his hand; turns to sound.

Is someone there? ... Who’s there? Is that you --?

We hear a muffled gunshot as if through a silencer. We should also be able to see a flash of fire from the gun. MARTINEZ falls. BLACKOUT.

END OF ACT ONE
ACT II: SCENE 1

SETTING: Same.

AT RISE: LYNN is sitting in the chair SHE sat in at rise of Act One. MARTINEZ lies sprawled on the floor. SHE rises, crosses to MARTINEZ, leans over, gazes at HIM.

LYNN
Whoo, right in the forehead. Somebody around here is certainly on a killing spree. I have no idea who. But I can tell you that I never thought I’d live to see the day that a murderer … Wait a minute. I didn’t live to see the day, did I? Anyway, I have no idea who’s doing all this killing, though you’d think I would. I mean I’m dead. I should be able to know things. I should be able to … see things, you know? But I can’t. I can’t … Ah, I just don’t get it. (Beat) I especially wish I could see this … smooth talking jerk, so I could … I don’t know. Do something. Maybe kick him in his dead old tallywhacker.

SHE cocks her leg as if to do so, but doesn’t follow through. SHE crosses down.

But he never showed up here. In fact, no one has showed up here since I’ve been here. No one. I certainly hope this isn’t what eternity’s like. When I was alive and on the beach – the lovely beach – I sometimes wondered what being dead would be like, but even in my darkest moments “lonely” never entered my mind. Never. And I’ve always thought spirits – and that’s what I am, I suppose – I thought spirits could pretty much do as they pleased. Walk through walls if they wanted. But I can’t. I have to wait for someone to open a door for me before I can even enter a room. Dammit, I want to walk through walls. I mean, that’s the very least I’d expect. The very least.

SHE looks to stage right wall, then slowly crosses to it, tries to pass her hand through it, fails.

Solid. Unlike me.

MARIA enters up left, sees MARTINEZ. SHE screams. LYNN, startled, screams also.

BLACKOUT.
ACT II: SCENE 2

SETTING: Same; the following day.

AT RISE: ROB, JACKIE, BETE sit on one side of the room, MARIA on the other. LYNN stands up center. DORSETT is reading the will. Just before DORSETT speaks, BANNISTER enters unnoticed, stands in shadow.

LYNN
So. Here we are again. Relative peace and quiet, though I gotta tell you, it wasn’t that way yesterday. Whew. Cops everywhere. Dusting for fingerprint, putting stuff into little plastic bags, including three of my seashell coasters, by the way. Talking in whispers. Taking pictures of everything. Everything: tables, chairs, floor, Martinez … Well, of course they took pictures of Martinez, but … Anyway, they’re gone, and the reading of the will has commenced. Finally.

SHE points; crosses to fireplace.

DORSETT
...leaving assets of six million, six hundred thousand dollars –

Shockéd murmurs from ALL.

JACKIE/LYNN
Six million – ?

JACKIE
He robbed her blind!

LYNN
Wait a minute! I’ve been robbed! Martinez! (Looks towards heavens) Where the hell are you!!??

ROB
That can’t be her will –

DORSETT
It’s the will Mr. Martinez delivered to my office.

LYNN
You little worm.
ROB
That leaves at least 30 million dollars unaccounted for.

JACKIE
More than that.

LYNN
32 million, six hundred and fifty thousand!

DORSETT
Shall I continue?

JACKIE
No!

ROB/BETTE/LYNN
Yes!

DORSETT
...to be divided equally among my three—

BETTE
What about the house?

DORSETT
... among my three children—Robert, Jacquelyn, and Elizabeth.

BETTE
And the house?

DORSETT
As you know, Federico – Mr. Martinez – was awarded the house—

BETTE
Yes, yes, but he’s—

DORSETT
But. Because of his ... demise –

MARIA
His murder.

DORSETT
Because of his demise, the house and all its contents go to his adopted daughter –
Adopted?

LYNN

Nobody is as foolish as an old lady in love.

DORSETT

... Maria.

ROB

Oh my God.

JACKIE

We’ve been scammed! Just how long have you been his daughter?

BETTE

His confederate.

JACKIE

Was he sleeping with you, too?

DORSETT

I researched the adoption records. She was adopted – quite legally – just over two years ago. *(Checks his notes)* Twenty-six months ago.

ROB

Just before Martinez met Mother.

BETTE

The whole thing’s been a set-up.

JACKIE

We’ll tie you up in court for the rest of your life if necessary. We’ll fight—

ROB

What was all that crap about you and your dear Daddy wandering seacoasts?

MARIA

He did –

ROB

And your mother dying as you were born –

*Argument adlibs among ALL.*
She did –

DORSETT
However... Silence, please! (Beat) Miss Martinez has waived her rights to the house. It reverts to the estate and will be divided among the three of you.

ROB
Maria?

BETTE
(Crosses to MARIA) Thank you for our home...

JACKIE
For Crissake, Bette! She stole our money. Why would Martinez adopt an adult? (To ROB) I’ll tell you why: To help Martinez steal Mother’s money by marrying you! (In MARIA’s face) And she probably killed Martinez to have it all!

MARIA
I didn’t kill anybody.

JACKIE draws back as if to slap MARIA. ROB stops her.

ROB
She refused the house.

JACKIE
Of course she did! Why would she care about this place? She’s got – what – 30, 40 million dollars.

BETTE
Refusing the house was smart. Good business. Puts all the blame on Martinez --

MARIA
Where it belongs. I’m leaving here with nothing.

JACKIE
You’re a killer and a thief. I intend to prove it or see you as dead as your ... whatever he is! ( Shrugs free of ROB) Leave me alone! Wake up! She used you, big brother!

BETTE
(To DORSETT) We can find the money, can’t we? It ought to leave a trail deep and wide.
DORSETT
More difficult than you might think, especially if Martinez is the thief. He could have hidden it in a thousand ways. But, yes, I’ll find it … or most of it.

ROB
Most?

DORSETT
Not to worry. What I don’t find is insured by either the FDIC or SPIC.

JACKIE
Whatever that means.

DORSETT
It means don’t worry, I’ll take care of it.

MARIA
*(Calmly to BANNISTER)* Can I leave now?

BANNISTER
I’m afraid not.

*ALL look to BANNISTER.*

*(As crosses into the room)* Sgt. John Bannister… *(Shows his badge)* I let myself in. Hope you don’t mind.

MARIA
My flight leaves in two hours.

BANNISTER
Without you, I’m afraid. Sorry. *(Beat)* I’m pleased to find you all together. Save me the trouble of rounding you up…

JACKIE
What are we? Cattle?

BANNISTER
My, my. You’re quick to take offense… *(Checks his notes)* …Jackie. And you certainly have a bad temper. I wonder if you could get mad enough to murder someone.

JACKIE
Cute.

BANNISTER
Wasn’t meant to be.
JACKIE
I didn’t kill Martinez, if that’s what you mean.

BANNISTER
It’s half of what I mean.

MARIA
Look, I have nothing to do with this –

BANNISTER
Please sit… (Looks over his notes) Maria? Yes, Maria. May I call you Maria?

*MARIA sits.*

DORSETT
And the other half?

BANNISTER
Pardon?

DORSETT
You said killing Martinez is half of what you mean.

You’re the lawyer, Mr. Dorsett?

BANNISTER
That’s correct.

DORSETT
Lynn Ryder was murdered—

BANNISTER
I knew it –

BETTE
I knew it.

LYNN
I knew it.

BANNISTER
Poisoned.

ROB
Who...? What...?

BANNISTER
A marine snail.
A snail...?

BANNISTER
Genus Conus. Commonly called a cone shell. One snail carries enough venom to kill a dozen people. Painless way to go because the venom carries a strong analgesic.

LYNN
Martinez! He didn’t kiss me good night on the last ... He knew I was dying.

MARIA
Why is everyone looking at me? My father didn’t kill anyone.

JACKIE
Get off it! He’s not your father.

MARIA
He adopted me –

BANNISTER
Yes...

BANNISTER
(Checks his notes) Twenty-six months ... and ... let’s see... four days ago.

JACKIE
So the two of you could murder my mother and steal her money.

BANNISTER
Where were you when your mother died?

JACKIE
You think I’d kill my own mother?

LYNN
No, Jackie –

BANNISTER
It’s a simple question, but I’ll repeat it: where were you—

JACKIE
I was sick … in the hospital.

BANNISTER
Seacrest.
JACKIE
Yes.

BANNISTER
A rehab facility. You could come and go pretty much as you pleased. In fact, you checked yourself out … *(Checks his notes)* three days before your mother was murdered. Then you disappeared until the day before your mother’s funeral. Where were you during that week?

JACKIE
That’s not your business!

BANNISTER
I’m afraid it is my business. Tell me, do you have a key to the front door?

JACKIE
Of course I do.

ROB
If I might interject –

BANNISTER
Sorry, but you may not. I will speak to each of you in turn. And until I ask for your opinion, I prefer you keep it to yourself. Unless, of course, you wish to confess to murder.

JACKIE
And the theft of over 30 million dollars –

BANNISTER
When we find our murderers I’m sure we’ll have found our thieves as well.

BETTE
Murderers? Plural?

LYNN
Dearest Bette...

BANNISTER
And I am quite certain that I won’t need to look beyond this room.

BETTE
You’re accusing one of us of murder?

*ALL ad-lib objections.*
BANNISTER
Quiet! Now, we can do this right here according to my rules, or we can do it downtown. According to my rules. But we will do it. Every one of you is a suspect. None of you is accused. Yet. Are we clear?

General assent among OTHERS.

BANNISTER, Continued
Good. Miss Martinez, would you like to tell me what you and ... Mr. Martinez were up to?

MARIA
He coerced me into a plan to make money. The adoption was part of it.

BANNISTER
Go on.

MARIA
He knew he couldn’t waltz in, marry Lynn, abscond with the money. Lynn – and the rest of her family – he said, were too smart for that. So the idea was for him to get what he could without arousing suspicion – and without breaking the law – while I...

BANNISTER
While you...?

MARIA
While I ... seduced Rob. Once I was part of the family, I—we could work both fronts. He with Lynn, I with Rob. There would be no need to hurry. He saw an easy life for both of us. Then to our shock, Lynn died. Murder was not part of the plan. In fact, Martinez worried that his plan was in jeopardy. He did not kill Lynn Ryder.

Did you?

MARIA
I would never—

ROB
Maria, I hardly knew ya…

MARIA
I had no choice.

BANNISTER
Yes, yes. The pictures.
MARIA

You know about them?

BANNISTER

I know about them. I have them here. *(Taps an envelope)*

MARIA

Wonderful. Just wonderful.

ROB

Pictures?

BANNISTER

The pictures were clearly photo shopped …

MARIA

I know that, but that is my nude body, and I couldn’t face … It doesn’t matter. Before I knew it, I was in way over my head.

BANNISTER

Tell me, did you know Martinez had acquired the house?

MARIA

Apparently, he got greedy.

BANNISTER

So you didn’t know.

MARIA

No.

BANNISTER

Isn’t it true that he was an expert on marine toxicity?

MARIA

Yes, but he was a con man, not a murderer. I checked him out carefully. He went to great lengths to be sure we weren’t breaking the law. He wouldn’t do that and murder someone … I don’t think.

BETTE

You checked him out? What does that make you?

MARIA

I needed to be sure I didn’t commit any crimes –
JACKIE

Except murder and grand theft!

BANNISTER

You know something about toxicity yourself, do you not, Jackie? Is it Nurse Jackie?

Funny.

DORSETT

You needn’t answer, Jackie.

JACKIE

(To BANNISTER) You may call me Miss Ryder.

ROB

(To MARIA) What’s your real name?

MARIA

Maria –

BANNISTER

Montoya.

MARIA

Montoya. Do I need a lawyer?

I don’t know. Do you?

BANNISTER

I haven’t broken any laws.

MARIA

ROB

You broke a couple of hearts.

MARIA

I didn’t kill my... I didn’t kill Freddy. I was—

JACKIE

Of course! You were in love with him.

MARIA

Oh, shut up.
BANNISTER
Were you?

MARIA
Rob...

ROB
Were you?

BANNISTER
Maybe a fit of jealous rage led you to...

MARIA
He caught me at a desperate time in my life. I was not in love with him. I came to despise him.

JACKIE
Many murders are also committed in the name of greed.

MARIA
I did not kill him!

BANNISTER
Did you suffer a relapse … Miss Ryder? Could that account for the missing week?

JACKIE
I’m in treatment.

BANNISTER
Expensive?

JACKIE
You think I’d kill my mother to pay for treatment?

BANNISTER
Or drugs. Are you clean?

JACKIE
Yes, I’m clean.

BANNISTER
Easy to check, of course.

JACKIE
I’m a nurse –
MARIA
Who knows ways to disguise what you don’t want others to understand.

JACKIE
I’m clean. Unlike you.

MARIA
Everybody knows you hated Martinez.

JACKIE
I’m not real fond of you either, Maria. And you’re still living – existing, anyway.

DORSETT
Jackie, don’t say anything else.

JACKIE
I have nothing to hide.

BETTE
It’s time for you to leave, Mr. Bannister.

BANNISTER
You’re Bette, of course. You know, Bette, here’s an interesting statistic: Most victims are murdered by someone they know. And in a significant percentage of these cases, the murderer is a jilted lover or a disgruntled spouse. Did you have any sort of relationship with Mr. Martinez?

BETTE
You think I would kill my mother’s…boyfriend?

BANNISTER
I simply asked if you were in a relationship.

BETTE
I did not have a relationship with…Mr. Martinez.

BANNISTER
(Turns to MARIA) Do you agree with her, Ms. Montoya?

MARIA
You seem to know the answers to most of your own questions.

BETTE
Rob, did you say anything –?
BANNISTER

About what?

ROB

Easy, Bette. I’ve never even spoken to him before today.

BETTE

Then I’m not interested in hearing his theories.

BANNISTER

Let me tell you something. This is not a game. I will get to the bottom of this, and I will get to the bottom of your relationship with Martinez if it’s relevant to this case. Is that clear?

BETTE

Quite clear.

BANNISTER

Let me just offer a scenario. See what you think.

BETTE

I have nothing more to say without a lawyer present –

BANNISTER

I’m sure Mr. Dorsett will tell me if I overstep.

(To DORSETT) Dorsett?

DORSETT

Are you retaining me?

BETTE

Yes –

JACKIE

He’s an estate lawyer –

DORSETT

I’m a very good lawyer.

BANNISTER

I can’t prove anything, of course. So what could it hurt?

JACKIE

Sure. Entertain us.
BANNISTER
Thank you. So. We have the Ryder family. Reasonably happy group ... until the patriarch dies. Then cracks begin to appear. Daddy’s pet is caught sampling the drugs she dispenses to patients. She may, in fact, have shorted a patient or two –

JACKIE
That’s a lie!

BANNISTER
In fact, one of them may have died as a result –

JACKIE
That’s slander!

BANNISTER
It’s not slander. It’s gossip all over the hospital. And the subject of an ongoing internal investigation. But nobody can prove anything. Isn’t that right?

Dorsett?

DORSETT
He’s right.

JACKIE
Be careful, Bannister. My family has the resources to make your life very difficult.

BETTE
Jackie, stop.

BANNISTER
Actually, your family does not have the resources to make my life difficult. At the moment anyway. True, Mr. Dorsett?

DORSETT
I can provide you with a copy of the notarized will –

HE offers a copy.

BANNISTER
(Takes the will) Thank you. Notarized by yourself. Yes?

DORSETT
I am the family’s lawyer.
BANNISTER
And how long have you been the family’s lawyer?

DORSETT
I’m not sure that’s relevant –

BANNISTER
I am. You appeared – as if from nowhere – just after Lynn Ryder met Federico Martinez. Coincidence?

DORSETT
I suppose you could call it that if you wish. The truth is that those events are simply two of innumerable events that occurred in that time period.

BANNISTER
Which time period is that, Mr. Dorsett?

DORSETT
Why whichever one you’re making such an issue of, Mr. Bannister. And I didn’t appear – as if from nowhere. I appeared from the Yale Law School. The firm that employs me placed the Ryders on my client list.

BANNISTER
So. Coincidence.

DORSETT
If you insist.

BANNISTER
Back to my scenario?

DORSETT
Sure. It’s been an interesting tale so far.

BANNISTER
Thank you. In spite of the cracks, the family functions smoothly. Lynn Ryder begins taking long walks on the beach where she finds love: the marine biologist, Federico Martinez. Who just happens to have an interest in marine toxins. He quickly gains access to the bed of the fading beauty, Lynn. And his lovely daughter—

JACKIE
Daughter, my ass.
BANNISTER
Yes, her. His lovely… accomplice catches the eye of the only son, Rob. No one in the family trusts Martinez – except, of course, Lynn – but all are delighted with Maria – except, apparently, Jackie – because there seems to be a growing attraction between Rob and Maria. The attraction dispels the rumors of Rob’s interest in…other men, specifically Dorsett.

ROB
I deny that.

BANNISTER
Which? The attraction to Maria or the interest in other men?

ROB
(Looks at MARIA as HE answers) All of it.

BANNISTER
People who deny their sexuality are, in my opinion, fools. Do you agree, Mr. Dorsett?

DORSETT
I do, Mr. Bannister, though those who prefer small barnyard animals might best keep it to themselves.

BANNISTER
But you’ll agree that even those with less exotic tastes are often sitting ducks for blackmailers. Were you being blackmailed, Mr. Ryder?

ROB
Mr. Bannister, my sexuality is none of your business –

BANNISTER
Unless it’s relevant to this case.

DORSETT
Don’t say anything else, Rob.

ROB
But I will tell you that I would neither flaunt my preferences, nor would I lie about them… (Crosses to MARIA) …I would simply celebrate them. If I were in love with a beautiful woman, for example, I would be unable to lie about my passion as I gazed into her eyes...

HE takes her chin in his hand, forces her face to him.

…as I kissed her red mouth, as I danced a slow tango with her.

HE releases her. SHE collapses to the couch.
I’m not being blackmailed.

BANNISTER

And your interest in Mr. Dorsett?

ROB

Platonic.

DORSETT

Oh, alright. I’m gay. I’m gay, gay, gay. Want me to do a funny walk for you? Talk about interior design? Tell you how much I love Cher? I love her, ok?

ROB

Steady, Dorsie. Steady.

BANNISTER

And your interest in Rob?

DORSETT

Sexual. But he wasn’t – isn’t – interested. He did, however, become a friend, one I could confide in. And I did confide in him, told him everything.

ROB

Not quite everything. I’m ashamed to say that I led Dorsie – Mr. Dorsett – on in the beginning in hopes of learning whether or not Martinez was meddling with my mother’s will. He told me what he could, but he maintained lawyer-client confidentiality. I came to respect his integrity and became his friend. His platonic friend.

BANNISTER

Are you a jealous man, Rob?

ROB

No more, no less than most.

BANNISTER

Did you know that Miss Montoya and the late Mr. Martinez were lovers as well as partners in crime?

MARIA

We were not lovers!

ROB

(To MARIA) Partners in crime and partners in bed?
We were never lovers, Rob. I swear it. I hated him –

Enough to kill him?

SHE collapses in despair.

No. I couldn’t kill anyone.

Oh please. Where’s my violin when I need it?

Some men might kill someone they perceive as a rival. Tell me, Rob, are you capable of murder?

Why don’t I let you figure that out you for yourself?

I will, you know.

I’m counting on it.

So. The cracks slowly widen and deepen into crevices. Bette, to her horror, finds she’s increasingly attracted to Martinez –

That’s ridiculous.

It must have been hard to watch Martinez touch your mother, to imagine what went on behind her bedroom door –

I didn’t have to imagine. I could hear. Almost as if...

Almost as if he wanted you to hear? He may have. Could you hear too, Maria?
MARIA
I sleep downstairs. In the maid’s quarters.

JACKIE
Where you belong.

BANNISTER
Jealousy and betrayal are powerful motivators –

JACKIE
Shut up, Bannister. Make him shut up, Dorsett!

BANNISTER
So is anger. Really, this is quite interesting: Martinez and Maria are co-conspirators and possibly lovers. When she sees her lover kissing Bette, she decides that if she can’t have him – and the money, of course – nobody will.

MARIA
That’s not true!

BANNISTER
It may not be, but here’s what is: We’ve got two bodies, two murders, no weapons, though we know exactly what weapons were used thanks to a toxicity report in the first instance. And to an almost perfectly round hole in Mr. Martinez’s forehead in the second. And I’ve got... (Counts)...One, two, three, four, five suspects. Each with a powerful motive. This is going to be challenging. And interesting. (Beat) Might I have a cup of tea?

JACKIE
I think not.

BANNISTER
A brandy?

BETTE
I’ll fetch the tea service.

BETTE exits.

DORSETT
Five? Am I a suspect, Sergeant? Or did you miscount?

BANNISTER
I’m quite good with numbers, Mr. Dorsett.

DORSETT
If you had done your homework, you would know that I was out of the country when Lynn—
BANNISTER
Oh, I always do my homework, Mr. Dorsett. You were in Martinique with one … (Checks his notes) … Mr. Weston. Yes?

DORSETT
Yes.

ROB
Good for you Dorsie.

DORSETT
Well, you turned out to be unavailable.

BANNISTER
Perfect alibi. Tell me, did you handle the adoption details for Martinez and Maria?

DORSETT
I told you that I did not.

BANNISTER
But you knew someone in your firm handled the adoption. True?

DORSETT
It is not my firm. I simply work there, but yes, I recently learned that someone in the firm handled it. It’s a large firm with several specialties. It also happens to be the family’s firm. But one had nothing to do with the other as far as I knew.

ROB
You knew about the adoption?

BANNISTER
How long have you known Mr. Martinez?

DORSETT
(To ROB) As I said, I found out only recently. I planned to tell you, but it suddenly seemed unnecessary. Martinez was murdered and his – accomplice – refused her inheritance. I intended to tell you after the reading. (To BANNISTER) I had never laid eyes on Martinez before being introduced in this very room.

BANNISTER
So you didn’t know Martinez was a client of your firm? Simply another coincidence?

DORSETT
Come, come, Sergeant. It’s the largest firm in the state, one of the most prominent in the nation. Martinez chose well. It had nothing to do with me. And, as I said, it is the family’s firm.
BETTE returns with the tea service.

BANNISTER

Thank you. May I pour?

ROB

Not for me, thanks.

ROB pours a whiskey for himself.
BANNISTER pours tea for BETTE, MARIA, JACKIE and starts to pour for DORSETT.

DORSETT

None for me, either.

BANNISTER

On, but I insist. (Pours)

DORSETT

All right. Thank you. It is my drug of choice.

(HE watches the others prepare their tea.)

BANNISTER

You know, often it’s the silliest little details that trap a killer. For example, I once worked a case where the killer was uncovered by her love of pistachios. They dyed them red in those days – I have no idea why – and those red stains under her fingernails and one tiny little piece of shell in the victim’s hair did her in. Silly. As it turns out, shells played a central part in this case also.

BETTE

What has this case to do with pistachio shells?

BANNISTER

(Laughs) Sorry, not pistachio shells. A cone shell, a marine snail.

(HE watches as ALL go through their teaspoon, teacup rituals.)

More properly Genus Conus, the poisonous snail I spoke of earlier. The poison Martinez used to kill Lynn.

JACKIE

I knew it! That son-of-a-bitch.

LYNN

My god. How could I have been…
ROB
Oh, Mother…

LYNN
…so blind? So blind.

BETTE
He couldn’t, wouldn’t.

BANNISTER
Sorry, afraid he did. The poison is almost undetectable, but thanks to the autopsy you insisted on, I found one small anomaly and followed it up. Genus Conus.

MARIA
He could have been framed.

BANNISTER
That occurred to me. But it would take a rather large dose of the toxin to kill a human as well as an undetectable method of delivering it, and since we’ve already established that Martinez administered Mrs. Ryder’s insulin each day –

*JACKIE crosses to BETTE. THEY embrace.*

LYNN
Oh, I wish we were alive so I could kill him.

JACKIE
Oh my god… Mother.

ROB
(To MARIA) Apparently, he could kill someone, Maria. (Crosses to his SISTERS) Are you sure of this, Mr. Bannister?

BANNISTER
Very sure. One doesn’t buy this stuff on the open market, though it would have been quite simple for Martinez to get what he needed given his credentials and his interest in marine toxicity. (Glances at his notes) He was lead scientist on a government project called Sea Foam, which amassed quantities of the venom for … how to say? … classified uses.

BETTE
You knew this all along.

BANNISTER
Yes.
DORSETT
So you’re here to find who killed Martinez.

BANNISTER
Oh, I know who killed Martinez now.

JACKIE/DORSETT
Who?

BANNISTER
His partner from the start—

JACKIE/DORSETT
Maria!

BANNISTER
—who decided to kill Martinez after determining his scam was much too ambitious. Who realized it’s nearly impossible to hide 32 million, six hundred and fifty thousand dollars – that’s a very close estimate, give or take a few thousand – but not so difficult to hide two and a half million out of the larger sum. Especially when the 30 million would be found hidden in – I’ve always wanted to say this – in off-shore accounts. All laundered, though not thoroughly scrubbed, and all traced to Maria Montoya. Insurance, as Mr. Dorsett noted earlier, would cover the rest.

DORSETT
And the insurance company would heave a great sigh of relief at the recovery of the 30 million, I would guess.

JACKIE
Maria! I knew it!

MARIA
It’s a lie!

BANNISTER
No, it’s not a lie. You were a part of the plan all along, though you didn’t know it. Once his secret partner—

BETTE
Secret partner?

BANNISTER
Once his secret partner convinced Martinez to settle for the more modest sum, they set you up, Maria, to take the fall so they could share the two and a half million while everyone was delirious about the recovery of the larger sum. Not much money by some standards admittedly, but carefully scrubbed and well-hidden. In fact, that’s what happened to
BANNISTER, Continued
Martinez. With him dead, his confederate takes it all...as planned.

ROB
So Maria’s not...

BANNISTER
No, she’s not, but she could have spent a long time in jail except for one tiny detail ... (Takes a plastic baggie from his pocket and places it on a table) This.

DORSETT
What is it?

BANNISTER
I found it right there on the coffee table.

HE rises, crosses to down right chair, sits then holds out his arm as if pointing a gun.

And it was from here that the killer shot Martinez at very close range. Bang! Or rather pop. The murderer used a silencer, of course.

DORSETT
We’re dying to know. What’s in the baggie, Mr. Bannister?

BANNISTER opens the baggie, lifts a teaspoon from it, places it on the coffee table.

A teabag and a teaspoon.

BANNISTER
(Sarcastically) How exciting.

JACKIE
Yes, it is exciting, Jackie – Miss Ryder – because of the configuration of the two items. Notice how the teabag string is wrapped around the spoon. Who among you always wraps teabag and spoon like this?

DORSETT
You know that I do. The evidence is before you. (Points at his teaspoon)

JACKIE
(Beat) Ok, I do too. What does that prove?
BANNISTER

(Rises; crosses to tea detritus) By itself, nothing. (Reaches into the baggie again; pulls out a lemon slice) But when one adds the lemon slice, one can point to a single person. Do you agree, Mr. Dorsett?

DORSETT

I do, but let me repeat Jackie’s question. What does that prove?

BANNISTER

Quite simply it proves that you killed your partner, Martinez.

Ad lib from ALL.

DORSETT

(Laughs) It proves only that I had a cup of tea in this room... with everyone else in this room. Be very careful what you accuse me of, or I’ll have you in civil court so fast—

This is your cell phone. Yes?

DORSETT

(Reaches for it) Yes, I left it when I was last here—

BANNISTER

(Moves cell out of reach) In a moment. Yes, you did leave it, which struck me as odd...

Odd how?

BANNISTER

I wasn’t sure really, but in my line of work, my cell is an indispensable tool, one I would miss immediately. I thought it might be the same for lawyers. Yet you never missed it, never even asked about it—

DORSETT

I have two other cells, Mr. Bannister.

BANNISTER

Yes, that occurred to me, but by then it was beside the point because I already had you.

HE holds up Dorsett’s cell, which contains the picture MARTINEZ took earlier of the RYDERS along with MARTINEZ and MARIA.

Is this the picture Martinez shot of the family just before they took Lynn to the crematorium?
ALL gather round, look at cell. The picture flashes on the wall so audience can see it. All are there, except LYNNE, who, remember, did pose for the picture.

LYNN
Hmmph. Invisible. Best picture I’ve taken in years.

DORSETT
He must have used it to shoot the picture. Where did you get—?

BANNISTER
It doesn’t matter. What does matter is that this photograph, which, ironically, was taken with your phone—

DORSETT
Which I left it here by mistake—

BANNISTER
Which you left here deliberately…traps you.

DORSETT
Traps—? Why in the world would I deliberately leave my phone here?

BANNISTER
Why for the same reason you had a cup of tea as you waited for Martinez, whom you knew to be an early riser. If any of the others had risen first and found you here, you would have said you were here for your phone and having a cup of tea as you waited for someone to wake. It would have seemed perfectly logical. But things worked your way. Martinez rose first, and you shot him dead.

ROB
Dorsie?

DORSETT
He’s reaching, and I think I know why. May I speculate for a moment about where I think you’re going with all this?

BANNISTER
By all means.

DORSETT
That tea bag is from a second cup of tea you found on the scene. A cup that you connect to me because of the strings wrapped around the spoon. Correct?
BANNISTER

Along with the lemon slice. Yes.

DORSETT

You’re absolutely right. I did have two cups of tea, but I drank both earlier in the day. With all of these people as witnesses. *(Looks to OTHERS)* Does anyone remember me having a second cup of tea?

BETTE

I brought out the service. There are eight cups, but I don’t remember…I wasn’t paying much attention.

JACKIE

Who would even think to notice such a thing?

DORSETT

Exactly. Who would think to notice such a thing? We had more important concerns. Can anyone here say I did not have a second cup of tea?

Ad libs as ALL respond in negative.

BANNISTER

I can.

DORSETT

Really? I would love to know how.

BANNISTER

And I would love to tell you. I know because Martinez’ photo proves it. See?

*THEY gather round to look at cell phone image, which once again flashes on upstage wall.*

Look in the foreground. Five teacups, not six. One for each of you: Maria, Martinez, Bette. This one’s Jackie’s, that one’s yours. And there’s Rob’s wine glass.

DORSETT

So what? I must have placed the cup elsewhere, Mr. Bannister, though since this room has been cleaned, I can’t really prove that. But I don’t think I have to.

BANNISTER

*(As if noticing for the first time)* Yes, you’re right. It’s been cleaned. And when exactly did that happen?

BETTE

As soon as the police allowed it.
BANNISTER
After we left.

BETTE
Immediately, after you left. In fact, it was as you were leaving. I had started cleaning yesterday evening, but I was stopped by Martinez. I couldn’t get it cleaned soon enough.

BANNISTER
I have another photograph, this one taken by police photographers – and I should warn you: it’s graphic -- which I’ve set next to the other.

HE touches a button on the phone. ALL gather round the cell as we see two pictures on upstage wall. The first is the original from DORSETT’s phone. The second shows MARTINEZ sprawled dead. Teacups in the foreground in both pictures.

BANNISTER
Notice anything different?

JACKIE
Yes. There’s a dead body in it.

BETTE
(Turns away) Oh my god.

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