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# Behold A Pale Ryder

A Mystery in Two Acts by

## Richard Davis, Jr.

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# Behold a Pale Ryder

by Richard Davis, Jr.

## 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.

BETTE

You remembered.

JACKIE

*JACKIE repeats DORSETT's teaspoon ritual.*

My dear Mother...

ROB

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

My mother. Ah...My mom. Momma. Dearest momma. Mommy dearest –

Rob –

BETTE

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

ROB

Rob, stop.

BETTE

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

ROB

Stop it.

BETTE

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

ROB

I mean it, Rob!

BETTE

Let him go. It's all right.

LYNN

Here's to ya, Ma.

ROB

Rob, please stop.

BETTE

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.

MARIA

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 –

JACKIE

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.*

MARIA

Not funny.

JACKIE

Because you don't get it.

MARIA

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

JACKIE

Um-hmm. You don't get it.

MARIA

Fathom means ... understand.

JACKIE

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.

MARIA

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

MARTINEZ

Maria, stop.

MARIA

Hey, I got her back.

ROB

You did, and it was funny.

MARIA

Am I supposed to be flattered?

ROB

Yes, as a matter of fact, you are...

MARTINEZ

I love you, Jackie –

JACKIE

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*)

BETTE  
(*To MARTINEZ*) Jackie's just upset.

MARIA  
So am I!

ROB  
Yeah, we noticed that.

BETTE  
We're all upset.

MARTINEZ  
I understand.

MARIA  
Well, I don't. I don't understand anything. All this animosity.

ROB  
Odd that you would talk of animosity.

MARIA  
I was upset, not animos.

ROB  
What?

MARIA  
That's not a word?

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

MARIA  
Here's a word: jackass.

MARTINEZ  
Maria! I know you two like each other –

ROB  
(*To MARIA*) So you really do like me?

MARIA  
Let me count the ways.

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.*

MARIA

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!

JACKIE

Bette –

BETTE

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, I thought. 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*) I do, you know. Respect Amens.

*LIGHTS CHANGE; OTHERS break freeze.*

MARTINEZ

Amen.

MARIA

Amen.

DORSETT

Bette, Jackie, Rob.

*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.*

MARIA

You mean her will?

DORSETT

Yes, I mean her will.

MARIA

Am I in it?

MARTINEZ/LYNN

No.

*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.



DORSETT

I have all legal copies of what we'll call "the new will" in my safe.

BETTE/JACKIE/ROB

The new will?

DORSETT

Some few changes.

JACKIE

What have you been up to, Martinez?

MARTINEZ

I gave her advice only when she asked.

JACKIE

I'll bet you did.

MARTINEZ

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

LYNN

I love you too, you little creep.

DORSETT

Just that she was pleased with the final product.

LYNN

"Pleased" isn't the right word.

BETTE

You got her to talk about death?

MARTINEZ

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

JACKIE

Are you in my mother's will?

MARTINEZ

— in bed.

LYNN

*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!

BETTE

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.

BETTE

Did she make changes that night?

MARTINEZ

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.*

MARTINEZ

I don't think I like the way this conversation's going.

ROB

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

LYNN

There's no confusion --

DORSETT

We'll do that by reading Lynn's will.

LYNN

Though the one change will probably cause some little consternation.

DORSETT

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

MARTINEZ

This Wednesday? No. No problem at all.

JACKIE

I bet not.

ROB

Will you be there, Maria?

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 --

ROB

Daddy? Popsie? Pa?

MARIA

Yes. "Pa." That's it. Pa.

ROB

Pa, she hardly knew ya--

MARIA

You're right about that --

MARTINEZ

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?

MARIA

He can't be.

JACKIE

Who can't be?

MARIA

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?

*MARIA joins the group. Very reluctantly. MARTINEZ sets up the shot, hurriedly crosses to the group.*

MARTINEZ

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.

JACKIE

Martinez.

MARTINEZ

(*Stops; turns to JACKIE*) Yes?

JACKIE

I ... I'm glad you made my mother laugh.

MARTINEZ

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.*

JACKIE

Not quite that glad...

MARTINEZ

(*Stops*) Oh. Sorry.

JACKIE

Just ... give me time.

MARTINEZ

I understand. I love you, Jackie.

JACKIE

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.

BETTE

A hormone?

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.

BETTE

Oh, I understand you. Very well.

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.

ROB

*(Tastes it)* Whew. It's ... um...

MARIA

Do you like it?

ROB

Well. It's ... uh ... simple –

MARIA

Do you like it?

ROB

I thought you didn't care what I think.

MARIA

You were rude.

ROB

Was I animos?

MARIA

Rude. In front of the others.

ROB

Sorry. Wait. Haven't I already apologized?

MARIA

What do you mean "simple"?

ROB

What?

MARIA

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.

ROB

Maria.

*SHE stops, turns.*

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...

Jail? MARIA

Don't tell, Robbie. LYNN

No. Of course not. I'm not at liberty... ROB

What do you think of me? MARIA

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

That's him. What about me? MARIA

You're a good tennis player. Great legs. ROB

Really? MARIA

Really. ROB

Yours are too hairy. MARIA

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

Actually, I'm not that good. You're that bad. MARIA

Oh.... What do you mean "too hairy"? ROB

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

Not anymore. ROB

You said you liked me. What's with you and Dorsett? MARIA

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.



MARIA

I'd have slapped you.

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...

Are what?  
ROB

Together.  
MARIA

Things aren't always what they seem.  
ROB

Is that a no?  
MARIA

Things aren't always what they seem.  
ROB

You're repeating yourself again.  
MARIA

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

I think we have a Bingo.  
LYNN

Oh. Problems with alcohol?  
MARIA

You've said enough, Robbie.  
LYNN

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

I guess she kept secrets.  
MARIA

Unlike you, Robert.  
LYNN

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

I don't know what you mean –  
MARIA

She talked about those things to Martinez.  
ROB

MARIA

They were close. What kind of drugs?

ROB

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

MARIA

Easy access.

ROB

That was part of the problem.

MARIA

What was the other part?

ROB

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

MARIA

Who?

ROB

Your mother.

MARIA

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

ROB

I'm sorry –

MARIA

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

ROB

He never worked.

MARIA

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.

LYNN

Left ear.

*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.*

No...

MARIA

Maria, you're lovely.

ROB

*HE kisses her neck.*

No. Rob, don't.... Your mother...

MARIA

She can't see...

ROB

The hell I can't.

LYNN

Besides, I don't think she'd mind.

ROB

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

LYNN

*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.*

Martinez!

LYNN

Maria!

MARTINEZ

*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*)

ROB

MARIA

Death and ... everything.

MARTINEZ

It was certainly an intense conversation.

ROB

Yes, it was.

MARIA

*(Directed to ROB)* Quite intense.

MARTINEZ

How long has this been going on?

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

ROB

Well. Just a few minutes –

MARIA

Almost a year.

ROB

Almost a year? You never said anything to me.

MARIA

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

ROB

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.

MARTINEZ

That was never going to happen...

LYNN

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

MARTINEZ

Do you love each other?

ROB

Well, I ... you know ...

MARIA

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.

ROB

(*To MARTINEZ*) You see the problem.

MARIA

So tell me, why exactly did you kiss me?

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?

MARTINEZ

You must be sure, child.

MARIA

I do. I love you, Rob.

*THEY embrace.*

LYNN

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

ROB

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

MARTINEZ

*(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 –

ROB

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)*

MARIA

Yes. Yes!

LYNN

OK.

ROB

*(Turns to MARTINEZ)* 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.

MARTINEZ

Thank you.

MARIA

He loved her.

MARTINEZ

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.

LYNN

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.

LYNN

Obviously.

JACKIE

Obviously.

ROB

Hi Jackie. I love Maria.

JACKIE

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?

ROB  
Maria!

JACKIE  
What did you say?

ROB  
Maria. Sit down and be quiet.

JACKIE  
What did she say?

MARIA  
You're telling me what to do again, Robert.

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

JACKIE  
You talked to her about me?

ROB  
She's nobody important!

LYNN  
Uh-oh.

MARIA  
Oh, Rob?

ROB  
*(As turns to her)* Yes?

*SHE slaps his face; storms out.*

JACKIE  
Things are looking up.

ROB  
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?

MARTINEZ

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.

MARTINEZ

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!

MARTINEZ

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 –

*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.

*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?

MARTINEZ

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.

MARTINEZ

I won't push you, but you be careful, Maria. Be very careful.

MARIA

Don't threaten me.

MARTINEZ

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

*HE crosses to her. SHE rises, backs away.*

Who's your daddy?

MARIA

Please don't start that again.

MARTINEZ

Who's your daddy?

MARIA

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

MARTINEZ

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

MARIA

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

MARTINEZ

Come here.

*HE grabs her, tries to kiss her. SHE shrugs away. SHE's crying.*

MARIA

Stop it! Please, stop it!

MARTINEZ

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

MARIA

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.

*We hear a noise off.*

MARTINEZ

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

MARIA

Maybe it's your conscience knocking.

MARTINEZ

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.

MARIA

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

MARTINEZ

Is that a threat?

MARIA

I know a lot about you.

MARTINEZ

Maybe too much.

*HE buries his hand in her hair; pulls.*

MARIA

Stop! You're hurting me.

MARTINEZ

Don't you ever threaten me. Ever.

*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.

ROB

Maria.

MARIA

Make him leave, Daddy.

MARTINEZ

Maybe you'd better—

ROB

Maria, I didn't mean you 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 – !

ROB

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

MARTINEZ

Of course, I'm her father.

ROB

She called you "Martinez" –

MARTINEZ

She's very upset –

ROB

I understand that, but why would she—

MARTINEZ

Mind your own business.

LYNN

This is our business.

ROB

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

MARTINEZ

I loved your mother. I love your sister.

ROB/LYNN

What?!

ROB

Who are you?

MARTINEZ

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

LYNN

I wish I could kick you.

ROB

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

LYNN

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

Whoa, 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, BETTE 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 –

*Shocked 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?

ROB

Nobody is as foolish as an old lady in love.

LYNN

... Maria.

DORSETT

Oh my God.

ROB

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

JACKIE

His confederate.

BETTE

Was he sleeping with you, too?

JACKIE

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

DORSETT

Just before Martinez met Mother.

ROB

The whole thing's been a set-up.

BETTE

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

JACKIE

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

ROB

He did –

MARIA

And your mother dying as you were born –

ROB

*Argument adlibs among ALL.*

MARIA

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.

BANNISTER

You're the lawyer, Mr. Dorsett?

DORSETT

That's correct.

BANNISTER

Lynn Ryder was murdered—

BETTE

I knew it –

LYNN

I knew it.

BANNISTER

Poisoned.

ROB

Who...? What...?

BANNISTER

A marine snail.

MARIA

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.

JACKIE

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?

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?

BANNISTER

I don't know. Do you?

MARIA

I haven't broken any laws.

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.

BETTE

*(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?

JACKIE

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.*

ROB, *Continued*

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?

MARIA

We were never lovers, Rob. I swear it. I hated him –

BANNISTER

Enough to kill him?

*SHE collapses in despair.*

MARIA

No. I couldn't kill anyone.

JACKIE

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

BANNISTER

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

ROB

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

BANNISTER

I will, you know.

ROB

I'm counting on it.

BANNISTER

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

BETTE

That's ridiculous.

BANNISTER

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

BETTE

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

BANNISTER

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

Bu 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 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.*

BANNISTER

A teabag and a teaspoon.

JACKIE

*(Sarcastically)* How exciting.

BANNISTER

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 libs 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—

BANNISTER

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...

DORSETT

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 LYNN, 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**