

RED HOT MAMAS

A Comedy in Two Acts

by

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CAST OF CHARACTERS (4 male, 3 female)

- ABBY ADAMS.....44, a graphic artist and adjunct professor
- DAN CASEY.....44, an advertising executive, Abby's husband.
- SARAH CASEY.....64, Dan's mother, a "proper" lady with a problem
- CLAUDIA ADAMS.....65, Abby's mother, a free spirit.
- PETER MASON.....60, Sarah's AA sponsor.
- RUSS NEARY.....63, a gentleman caller, looking for mate.
- STAN WALKER.....62, a gentleman caller, looking for love.

The Setting

The home of a successful well adjusted married baby boomer couple in any contemporary city. The play can be localized by using the names of sports teams associated with the city selected for the setting of the play.

The Time

The present.

Playwright's Note: While the audience is being seated and prior to curtain rise, it is suggested that a series of slides be projected somewhere in the theatre on a darkened wall. The slides will depict "family" in all of its wonderful diversity from cradle to grave. The pictures need not be professionally shot; in fact, pictures from ordinary albums will work best. To give the play regional appeal, the photos should include shots of recognized personalities in each production location. Photos of families of national prominence can be included as well. The point is to depict family in a variety of forms--past and present, rich and poor, known and unknown, traditional and non-traditional. No narration or music should accompany the slides. A continuation of this slide show will also be very useful during the transitions between the play's many scenes. If a slide presentation is not possible, music should be used during transitions between scenes.

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ACT I, SCENE I

SCENE: LIGHTS COME UP SLOWLY on four people huddled around a fresh grave site. ABBY ADAMS, 44, and DAN CASEY, 45, her husband, are supporting two older women, their mothers: SARAH CASEY, 64, and CLAUDIA ADAMS, 65. Dan and Abby are a vibrant middle-aged couple who are living in the luxury of the empty nest. Their mothers are remarkably attractive, active and articulate, but not prepared emotionally to live out their "golden years" alone. Sarah is, on the surface, a prim and proper "lady"; Claudia is much more of a rebel and seemingly independent, but she is as unsure and frightened about her future as Sarah. The gathering is burying Sarah's husband, which makes her a widow like her counterpart, Claudia. It is late in the day. The light is soft; doves can be heard mourning in the background.

DAN (to Sarah)

It's time to go, Mom.

SARAH

Not yet; just a little longer, please.

DAN

It will be dark soon. We have to go.

What am I going to do? SARAH

We're going to take you home-- DAN

My home? SARAH

(Dan looks to Abby for help.)

No, our home. Some friends will be there--your friends. ABBY

There will be food and drinks. DAN

Drinks? Did someone say, "drinks?" CLAUDIA

Mother! ABBY

This is so awful. SARAH

It doesn't last; you'll get over it--*him*--sorry. CLAUDIA

I'll never get over him; how can you be so cruel? SARAH

She was trying to help, Mom. She's been through this herself. DAN

I know--*twice*. SARAH

Which is why I know you'll get over it--him. Damn! CLAUDIA

Dan, take Mom and you two go ahead. We'll catch up. Your mom just needs a few more minutes to say good-bye. ABBY (giving her mother a look)

(Dan nods, takes Claudia's arm and they start up the path away from the grave.)

SARAH

Oh, Abby, I don't know what I'm going to do.

ABBY

You'll do fine; you'll see. And you're not by yourself. You have us.

(On the word "us", Sarah clutches Abby's arm and pulls close to her as the LIGHTS COME DOWN SLOWLY. SLIDE SHOW RUNS DURING TRANSITION.)

ACT I, SCENE II

A FEW WEEKS LATER

SCENE: LIGHTS COME UP SLOWLY on SARAH and ABBY in Abby's kitchen where they drying and putting away dishes. Sarah is finishing up a glass of red wine.

SARAH

Henry did *everything*, you know. Maintenance on the house, paid the bills; took care of the gardening and lawn. Looking back on it, all those years, I think I was nothing more than a drinking companion and social secretary.

ABBY

You were more than that.

SARAH

What more?

ABBY

You were his support system.

SARAH

Support system! I wanted to be his *wife*.

ABBY

Sarah, Henry never would have gotten . . .

SARAH

Where he is today without me?

ABBY

What I meant was that . . . Henry wouldn't have been such a success if he hadn't had you at his side.

SARAH

Oh, I don't know. I think Henry would have been a success regardless of *who* was at his side. He was driven. Worked himself to death you know; even after he retired. And for what? (A beat.) I don't think he even knew his son, nor Dan him. They had this superficial man-to-man kind of relationship based on how the Red Sox or Bruins or Celtics were doing. (Substitute names of local teams.)

ABBY

Men are big on superficial. It keeps things nice and simple.

SARAH (filling her wine glass)

And we women are always so straightforward.

ABBY

Sometimes too much so. Other times not enough . . . which I suppose men find confusing.

SARAH

We have to keep them on-guard. (A beat.) I have something . . . to share with you; shall I give it to you straight?

ABBY

The last time you did that you told me you why I shouldn't marry your son.

SARAH

And you know how sorry I am about that?

ABBY

That I married him?

SARAH

No! You know better than that. I'm sorry to have been so--wrong about you. You're perfect for Dan, and I had no idea that . . . *we'd* get along so.

ABBY

Since that's the case, I suppose you can be straightforward.

SARAH

So you can take it like a man?

ABBY

I'll try not to.

SARAH (sips her wine, then)

Very well, then . . . I think what it comes down to--is that after living with superman for so many years, I'm not at all equipped to handle . . . things on my own.

ABBY

What things?

SARAH

Oh . . . *life*.

(She starts to break.)

ABBY

Sarah, what is it?

SARAH

Oh, Abby, I'm . . . so frightened; I'm lonely. I'm in that huge house all by myself; the walls echo with silence; then there are noises at night; it's so . . . empty and cold. I'm afraid of growing old all alone and dying all by myself, miserable and unloved. (Tries to smile.) Just that.

(Abby goes over and embraces her.)

ABBY

You're *not* alone.

SARAH

No, not right now.

ABBY

You're always welcome here, you know that.

SARAH

Yes, I know, on Sundays for dinner?

ABBY

Anytime.

SARAH

For dinner?

ABBY

No, not for dinner; I mean, yes, of course for dinner, but . . . more than that.

SARAH

More . . . ?

ABBY (thinking)

Yes! You're welcome here more--than just for dinner. You're welcome to . . . stay with us.

SARAH

To *stay* with you?

(She studies Abby as Abby thinks.)

ABBY
Yes, you're welcome here.

SARAH
For dinner.

ABBY (straining)
More than dinner . . . if you need us. We're family, and family matters.

SARAH
How much *more* do you mean?

ABBY (struggling)
Do I have to *say* it?

SARAH
Not unless you want to.

ABBY
Okay, I'll say it. You're welcome to . . . *stay* with us for as long as you like.

SARAH (evenly)
How about for as long as *you* like?

ABBY
You're welcome to stay here . . . permanently.

SARAH
To move in with you?

ABBY
Yes! To move in. To live with us permanently. (A beat.) The last thing I--*we*--want is for you to feel unloved, unwanted.

SARAH
Dan would have a fit.

ABBY
No, he wouldn't. We've talked about this--just last week. (A beat.) The kids are gone. We have two vacant bedrooms and a bath. You'd have space for your things, a place to make your own.

SARAH
I've already had an inquiry about my house; I could sell and help with your mortgage.

ABBY

Keep the money; our mortgage is practically paid; the kids are through school. Things are just . . . very comfortable for us right now. And I think it would be wonderful if you and Dan could--reconnect.

SARAH

You mean *connect*. I don't think we've been connected since he stopped nursing.

ABBY

Okay, connect. My dream is for you and Dan to *appreciate* each other. Isn't that something you'd like to do?

SARAH

It's my dream, but I don't know if either one of us knows how to connect. There are *things* he doesn't know. And I'm sure that are any number of things in both of our histories that we can't or refuse to forgive each other for. Just little hurts and minor tragedies that are buried somewhere in our collective pasts. I'm sure that's why we don't get along even now after so many years.

ABBY

Those are the very things you should deal with. You don't have to keep fighting now. You and Dan are all that's left of your nuclear family.

SARAH (thinks, then)

Abby, I know you mean well, and I really appreciate what you're trying to do. But if I know anything about my son, it's that he left home soon as he was able, and he never came back. And I'm certain that he left, even if unconsciously, to get away from me. To put us in the same house together again after all these years . . . well, I just don't know.

ABBY

Dan will be fine. I told you, we've already discussed this.

SARAH

And he agreed to it?

ABBY

In . . . principle.

SARAH (breaking)

I don't know what to say; I'm so grateful! I've been so depressed and lonely.

ABBY

You're not alone.

Thank you. Thank you!

SARAH (finishing her wine)

Get your things. I'll drive you home.

ABBY

You don't have to do that.

SARAH

I wouldn't dream of sending you out by yourself in this condition?

ABBY

What condition?

SARAH

At this hour, I mean.

ABBY

(Sarah crosses to Abby; she is a little unsteady from the wine.)

ABBY

You'll need to make a list of what needs to be done, what you want to keep, what you can get rid of, what you want to bring with you.

(They embrace as the LIGHTS BEGIN TO FADE.)

You'll tell Dan the wonderful news?

SARAH

Yes, as soon as I get back.

ABBY

I'm so happy.

SARAH

So am I--are--we--us.

ABBY

How do you think Dan will take it?

SARAH

I think he'll be . . . *very* excited.

ABBY

A family again. How wonderful!

SARAH (exiting)

(LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK. BEGIN
FAMILY SLIDES.)

ACT I, SCENE III

LATER THAT NIGHT

SCENE: LIGHTS COME UP SLOWLY on ABBY and DAN CASEY, 48, her husband, a no-nonsense advertising executive. They are in the master bedroom; Dan is sitting in bed reading; Abby is sitting in front of her dressing table brushing her hair. There is a door stage right leading to their bath.

DAN
Can I do that?

ABBY
I don't think you have enough hair.

DAN
For you?

ABBY
If you'd like.

DAN
I'd like it very much.

ABBY
I think I would too; it makes me feel close to you.

(He crosses to her, takes the brush and begins stroking her hair.)

ABBY
Feels good.

DAN
Your hair is like long strands of the finest silk.

ABBY (touching his hand)
I bet you tell all the girls that.

Not anymore.

DAN (touching her shoulder)

Dan--

ABBY

And your skin has the incredible softness about it.

DAN

Honey--

ABBY

And you have all these marvelous curves and crevices--

DAN (slipping a hand inside her gown)

Dan . . . please!

ABBY

What's wrong?

DAN

Nothing. Nothing is wrong! (A beat.) Why does something have to be wrong?

ABBY

Nothing has to be wrong. I was just being affectionate. We have all this time to ourselves now; we can be spontaneous; we make love in the middle of the living room if we want. Our lives are our own again. The kids are on their own, finally. For the first time in 20 some years we don't have company in the house. It's heaven. So believe me--*nothing* is wrong! (A beat.) With me. Is something wrong with you? Or us?

ABBY

No, it isn't that something is *wrong*; it's just that . . . I don't know. Sometimes it seems lonely around here; I mean, I go to my studio and work here all day by myself; you get to go an office full of people. You have human contact. I don't. I think I actually miss the patter of little feet around here, the phone ringing, the activity. There was something vital and reassuring about all that *living* going on around us.

(Dan turns her to him.)

DAN

Tell you what: I'll call more often. I'll get you on every telemarketing contact list in the country. I'll hire you a nanny. You'll beg for mercy.

ABBY

I don't want that. I want--*meaningful* contact with another human being. Someone who's important to me.

DAN

I'm another human being. Aren't I important?

ABBY

Of course you are. But, Honey, you're not always here. And sometimes when you're working on a campaign, you're not even here when you are here.

DAN

Abby, stop this right now! I hate it when you do this.

ABBY

When I do what?

DAN

What you're doing. You're trying to tell me something without telling me what it is that you're trying to tell me. (A beat.) Honey, I'll do anything to make you happy, but you have to let me know what you want. Don't talk in circles. I don't understand the female code.

ABBY

There's no *code*! I'm just trying to tell you that it's a little lonely around here--with everybody gone. Don't you ever feel it? Don't you sense the emptiness, the silence?

DAN

Well, yeah, I do--sometimes. Sometimes I miss the--what'd you call it: "the patter of little feet?" The mid-level of insanity that kept us all from going crazy. But life is a series of compromises; we're free to be crazy now ourselves, to do whatever we want, whenever we want. And a little solitude is the price we have to pay for our freedom. That's not such a terrible price.

ABBY

You loved having the kids around--even when they were grown. Admit it. It made you feel important and in charge of something, responsible.

DAN

Yeah, I enjoyed it; they're great kids. But it was time for them to go; I think all of us were hanging on to some extent. Them for fear of leaving and us for fear of not having them around. But it was the right thing; Now they're fine and so are we. At least *I* thought we were.

ABBY

No, you're right. Of course we are. It's just that--I have something to tell you.

DAN
Something to tell me?

ABBY
Yes, some . . . *news*.

DAN
News?

ABBY
Stop repeating everything I say. *I* hate it when *you* do that!

DAN
Sorry! (A beat.) News, you said?

ABBY
Yes, news. But I'm not sure how best . . . to phrase it.

DAN
I don't like the sound of this one bit.

ABBY
Don't get defensive. You haven't even heard it.

DAN
Give it to me straight, bottom line, no bullshit.

ABBY
That's not the way women communicate.

(Dan throws the brush aside, runs to the bed, leaps in and pulls the sheet over his head.)

ABBY
What are you doing?

DAN
Hibernating!

ABBY
Don't you want to hear the news?

DAN
I've already heard enough to make me realize I *don't* want to hear it.

ABBY
You're being childish.

DAN
You're being evasive.

ABBY
You're hibernating and *I'm* being evasive! Right!

DAN
I just don't want to hear any damn news!

ABBY
Well, you're going to hear it anyway.

DAN
Please, no! (Covers his ears). Blah! Blah! Blah! Blah! Blah! Blah! Blah! Blah!

(She waits and goes on when he stops.)

ABBY
You know how you just admitted that you missed the patter of little feet around here?

(He looks out from the sheets suspiciously.)

DAN
What?

ABBY
The pitter-patter of little feet? You just said you missed it.

DAN
I said I missed the patter, not the pitter. I don't miss the pitter.

ABBY
And you said you'd do *anything* to make me happy.

DAN
Almost anything.

ABBY
You didn't say almost; you said "anything."

DAN

I meant almost.

ABBY

Too late!

DAN

What's this all about, Abby?

ABBY

Well . . . it looks like we're going to have a little addition to the family.

DAN

What? Oh my god!

ABBY

Let me finish?

DAN

Oh my god!

ABBY

Dan! There's more.

DAN

What more could there possibly be?

ABBY

Quite a lot actually.

DAN

Are you sure?

ABBY

Oh, I'm sure all right.

DAN (groping)

Starting over!

ABBY

In a sense.

(He drops the sheet, dazed.)

ABBY

You haven't heard everything.

DAN
How long have you known?

ABBY
Not that long . . . just since this evening.

DAN
I can't believe it! (A beat.) It's cool; it's incredibility cool. (Now concerned.) But--you're 45--

ABBY
Forty-four!

DAN
Okay, 44. Still . . . will you be okay?

ABBY
I'll be fine; I think you'll need to adjust more than me.

DAN (excited)
We need a name! Boy or girl--do you know?

ABBY
Girl--*woman*.

DAN
Felicity! How about Felicity? It means happiness. Or Vera, a variation of veracity which means truth.

ABBY
That doesn't quite fit in this case. I was thinking about . . . Sarah?

DAN
After my mom?

ABBY
More or less; a *lot* more than less.

DAN
That's so sweet of you. (A beat.) Does she know?

ABBY
She knows!

(Crosses and hugs her tenderly.)

DAN

God, it almost makes a man feel immortal . . . imagine a new life in the world.

ABBY

Honey, it's not *new* life we're dealing with here.

DAN

What?

ABBY

Just keep holding me, okay?

DAN

Okay. But what do you mean, "not new life?"

ABBY

That's what I want to explain.

(He starts to push her away.)

ABBY

Keep hold of me!

DAN

You're not pregnant?

ABBY

No, not pregnant.

DAN

Then what's this business of the patter of little feet around here?

ABBY

They're not *that* little.

DAN

How little are they?

ABBY

Hold me!

DAN

How little, Abby?

ABBY

About the size of your mother's.

DAN

What? Oh my god!

ABBY

The pitter-patter of little feet in our house is going to be coming from the feet of your very own mother who I have invited to move in with us. (Silence.) Honey, you're squeezing me too hard now. Honey, that hurts. (A beat.) Dan! Let go!

(She breaks away; he stands motionless and speechless.)

ABBY

Honey?

(He tries to speak, but can't.)

ABBY

Say something.

DAN (struggling)

You . . .you . . .

ABBY

Yes, go on. You can do it.

DAN

You. Mother. Here. Live. Us. Together.

ABBY

Yes, all of us here together--a family. The way it should be.

DAN (snapping out of it)

The way it should be? The way it *should* be! My mother in Anchorage and me in Key West is the way it should be for chrissake! You invited my mother to come live with us?

ABBY

And she accepted; she's thrilled. She's always felt as though she failed you as a mother; that's why you ran off at such an early age and never came back. She wants to be your mother again--for the first time.

DAN

Abby, this isn't some Disney movie; this is our *life*!

ABBY

She's your mother, Dan.

DAN

I'm 48 years old; I don't *need* a mother. Is this all a bunch of female idealism to combat the dissolution of the American family?

ABBY

It's *not* female idealism. It's about accepting responsibility for your loved ones.

DAN

You have no idea what you've done, Abby. My mother is a controlling wench that will make every effort to take over this household and make us both miserable. She's only happy when she knows somebody is more miserable than she is. And that somebody is usually me.

ABBY

You're overreacting.

DAN

How could you do this without talking with me?

ABBY

We did talk about it.

DAN

When?

ABBY

Last week.

DAN (thinks, then)

Last week? (A beat.) Last week! Now correct me if I'm wrong, but didn't we decide during that discussion that having *either* of our mothers move in with us was the last thing on earth that we wanted.

ABBY

I think nuclear holocaust was actually last on the list.

DAN

Not on mine!

ABBY

Dan! She's alone, frightened and lonely. And she's your mother.

DAN

That's not my fault.

ABBY

We have plenty of room.

DAN

You want company: I'll find someone else. I'll get a person off the street. I'll take in a drug lord; we can take in foster kids. Any person in the world other than my mother. Now that's not being too selective, is it?

ABBY

Dan, she needs us.

DAN

But we don't need her!

ABBY

That's the funny thing about need: we often don't need those who needs us most. But that doesn't mean we abandon them.

DAN

In this case it does.

ABBY

Stop it; you don't mean that. I know you love your mother.

DAN

Of course, I love my mother, Abby. I can't help but *love* her; she's my mother. But I don't *like* her very much. She opinionated, inflexible and she will start trying to "raise" me, again! Because she thinks she failed the first time.

ABBY

Just give her a chance; I don't think you've done that in your whole life.

DAN

Jesus! (A beat.) She's a Republican, Abby, and I can't imagine myself living with *any* Republican.

ABBY

She's only a Republican because your father was; once she begins to think for herself she may lighten up. Besides, in another ten years we could very well be Republicans ourselves.

DAN

Oh my God. Do you really think so?

ABBY

Happens all the time. But, this isn't about politics; it's about family. And it's about time you recognized that you have one.

DAN

You are my family.

ABBY

I'm also your mate. We chose to be with each other. Your birth family is different; none of us have a choice about who our parents are; we just have to accept them the way they come. Your mother needs us right now; maybe she won't stay; maybe she won't be able to stand us, but it's important for her to know right now that we're here for her, that she isn't alone, that she won't be farmed out to some elderly care facility where she will have no assurance whatsoever that she is wanted or even loved. (A beat.) Would you want me to end up in one of those places?

DAN

No, of course not, our kids would never . . .

ABBY

Let that happen to one of us?

DAN

No . . . the kids would never let that happen to one of us.

ABBY

So we have to open our hearts and our home to your mother.

DAN

Only if she'll open her mind.

ABBY

No conditions. It isn't likely she's going to change her politics are anything else now.

DAN

I swear I don't know how you do it--turn such an emotionally charged issue into something based purely on logic. What can I say? That I want my own mother to be alone and unhappy? Of course I don't want that. I want her to be happy and fulfilled . . . but does it have to be *here*? Couldn't she be just as fulfilled somewhere else? Say in the Gulag?

ABBY

Honey, don't you see . . . you--we are where she finds happiness now. We're all she has left. She never built a life of her own outside of your father's work and interests. If we can help her do that, she will *want* to go out on her own again. She has her health; she's secure financially; there's a whole world out there for her to explore, but she needs an safe haven, a place where she knows she can come back to.

DAN

You don't know my mother; she an arranger not an explorer.

ABBY

I'm a woman, and I know her well enough to know something about the fear she must be feeling about being alone and about how much she needs us right now. And I have a feeling that under her veneer of respectability lurks a woman just waiting to experience the world.

DAN

I hope it's just not our world she wants to experience.

(They embrace.)

DAN

When is this all going to happen?

ABBY

Sooner than you think; she's already had an inquiry about the house, ; it could be sold in a week. (A beat.) There's just one more thing . . .

DAN (disgustedly)

She wants a cat?

ABBY

No.

DAN

Thank god. (A beat.) What else?

ABBY

My mother . . . I want you . . . to tell her.

DAN

Why me? She' your mother.

ABBY

She likes you.

DAN
She doesn't like you?

ABBY
She doesn't *approve* of me; you know that.

DAN
You don't approve of her either.

ABBY
There's a difference.

DAN
What difference?

ABBY
You wouldn't understand.

DAN
Because I'm a man?

ABBY
Frankly, yes.

DAN
How did you ever get to be such a sexist?

ABBY
Oh, I learned from a master.

DAN
So, you want me to do your dirty work for you?

ABBY
Well, I wouldn't put it like that?

DAN
How would you put it?

ABBY
I just don't want to fight--that's all.

DAN
With me or her?

ABBY

Either of you. And since this is . . . such a *sensitive* issue, I think she'll have much less of an emotional reaction if she hears it from you, who she likes, rather than from me for whom she holds such little regard.

DAN

God, I love it when you talk like that!

ABBY

Well then, would you be so kind as to communicate this information to her in my stead?

DAN

Yes. Yes!

ABBY

Mother and I, as you have undoubtedly surmised, don't do well with emotional issues.

DAN

Emotional issues? What, you think your mother will be upset about us taking *my* mother into our house to live and leaving her out there to fend for herself in a world that is at *best* indifferent to the elderly?

ABBY

Could you possibly find a little more positive way to phrase it than that?

DAN

I'll do my best. (A beat.) But I don't like it one bit.

ABBY

You're a love.

(She starts to exit.)

DAN

Where are you going?

ABBY

To take advantage of the middle of the living room floor . . . while we still can. Are you coming?

DAN

Now you're talking my language.

(Dan jumps out of bed, grabs her hand and they run for it. LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK. SLIDES BEGIN TO RUN.)

ACT 1, SCENE IV

THE FOLLOWING MORNING

SCENE: LIGHTS COME UP SLOWLY on DAN and CLAUDIA. They are seated at the kitchen table drinking coffee from large pottery mugs. Claudia is dressed casually in a jogging suit and sneakers. Her hair and nails are done up nicely; she is a picture of health and vitality.

CLAUDIA

So what you do hear from the kids?

DAN

They're fine--back in the country and all.

CLAUDIA

Spare me the details.

DAN

That's it, really. No details. Europe was great, but they're glad to be back. (A beat.) Bradley loves the coast Amy says she has "met" someone, whatever that means.

CLAUDIA

Dan, when a woman says she has "met" someone, it means she met someone *significant*.

DAN

A significant other?

CLAUDIA

Well, no, not necessarily *that* significant. Although it *could* turn into something more significant than the significance attached to the initial meeting. Otherwise she wouldn't have told you that she met someone significant at all.

DAN

I see. It's some kind of obscure female code.

CLAUDIA

It's nothing of the kind. It's just having a knack for knowing what someone is saying when they don't say it directly.

DAN

I see--like asking, "Do you have any salt?" When what you mean is: "Why the hell isn't there any salt on the table?" And the very fact of the salt's absence says, "We're smart enough to be health conscious in this household." Something like that?

CLAUDIA (stares, then)

Did Bradley find work?

DAN

Yes, waiting tables until he "makes" it.

CLAUDIA

Makes what? A living?

DAN

No, a living is what waiting tables is all about. That obviously isn't his goal.

CLAUDIA

Then explain to me again what it is that he has to make?

DAN

He has to work hard, never give up on his dream, and be willing to accept never being recognized for his true talent.

CLAUDIA

I don't understand. What was that Master's degree all about?

DAN

It was about . . . learning. About learning what was really important to him. Brad learned that business is not what he was about.

CLAUDIA

I see. This is all some kind of obscure *male* code then.

DAN

No code; just one of life's lessons.

CLAUDIA

An expensive lesson.

DAN

Not if it keeps him from being miserable in a job he's not suited for.

CLAUDIA (reflects, then)

So how long will it take for him to make it?

DAN

A week. A month. A year. Maybe a decade. You have to persevere--and get lucky.

CLAUDIA (thinks, then)

Different world. I guess I just don't understand kids anymore--even Abby, *especially* Abby. I never understood why she had this compulsion to work, and then why she didn't get a "real" job when she did go to work. Must be something in the genes.

DAN

Mom, Abby's not a kid--

CLAUDIA

Maybe not to you!

DAN

And she has a *real* job that she's damn good at. It's a blessing that she's been able to work at home. She was always here for the kids; we never had to farm them out to some child care facility where we wouldn't know how they were really being treated.

CLAUDIA

Oh, I know, and I know she never would have let them out of her sight if she thought they'd be mistreated. (A beat.) I just think it's unfortunate that she doesn't have those kinds of feelings about her own mother.

DAN (stung)

What?

CLAUDIA

You heard me. I said that Abby would have no qualms about putting me into a facility where she would have no idea of how I was being treated.

DAN

That's not true.

CLAUDIA

Isn't it?

DAN

No!

CLAUDIA

Then what will happen to me as I get older? What will happen when I can't drive? Or if I get ill? What if I'm just lonely?

DAN

You're being ridiculous. You're still attractive, active; you could marry again.

CLAUDIA

Never! I won't bury another husband. I'm through with external emotional attachments; I just need a little *companionship* from time to time. That's all.

DAN

We'll when the good times are over, don't worry, we'll see that you're cared for!

CLAUDIA

"See that I'm cared for." What does that mean, exactly?

DAN

Just that . . . we'll see that you're--taken care of.

CLAUDIA

God, that sounds like you'll have me taken out and shot--"taken care of!" But *you* won't do it?

DAN

Shoot you?

CLAUDIA

Take care of me. (A beat.) *Take care of me the way you're taking care of Sarah!*

DAN (quietly)

Oh . . . so that's what this is all about.

CLAUDIA

Of course that's what it's about! You think Sarah didn't call me gloating as soon as she found out?

DAN (thinks, then)

Well don't take it the wrong way. (A beat.) I had you come over this morning so we could talk about it.

CLAUDIA

What's left to talk about now?

DAN

You. About where you fit into all this.

CLAUDIA

Very well: where do I fit into all this?

DAN

Probably not where you think.

CLAUDIA

Where do *I* think I fit into "all this" as you call it?

DAN

That you're the odd one out; that you're not part of the circle.

CLAUDIA

The family circle?

DAN

It's actually a little more like the Ringling Brothers.

CLAUDIA

Oh, just spare me the details; I can see this is painful for you. Sarah told me everything.

DAN

No she didn't. In spite of what she says, my mother doesn't *know* everything.

CLAUDIA (turning away, breaking)

I just can't believe you would allow this. Abby yes, but not *you*. (A beat.) What do you expect me to do now?

DAN

I don't expect you to do anything.

CLAUDIA

Except get by--on my own. How do you think it makes me feel to know that you want her with you but not me?

DAN

It's not like that, Mom. We *do* want you . . .

CLAUDIA

Abby doesn't! You have no place for me in your perfect world. Go ahead and have me shot why don't you?

DAN

Nobody's going to be shot! (Thinks, then.) Now let me finish. I didn't call you here to tell you about Sarah; I knew you'd hear about that soon enough. I called to--to . . . tell you that you're welcome here too. We want--*both*--of you here--with us.

CLAUDIA

What?

DAN (hugs her)

You're family, and in this family we take care of each other. Or at least that's something we're going to learn to do.

CLAUDIA

Abby will have a fit.

DAN

No she won't; we've discussed this. She's okay with it. She knows we'll *all* have to adjust, make sacrifices, give some ground, maybe be less critical. We can learn to get along. What's 40 years of discontent?

CLAUDIA

Closer to fifty.

DAN

Doesn't matter; war's over. Time to negotiate for . . . what do the diplomats call it?

CLAUDIA

A lasting peace.

DAN

Exactly. A lasting peace.

CLAUDIA

You're not going to have me shot then?

DAN

Not as long as your healthy.

CLAUDIA

I don't know what to say.

DAN

Say . . . yes.

CLAUDIA

Only if you *really* want me.

DAN

We *really* want you--you and *my* mother. We want our family to be together again for better or worse. Just like a marriage.

CLAUDIA

Why? Why are you doing this?

DAN

I don't know. All I know is that it's not right for you or my mother to be alone when there's no good reason for it.

CLAUDIA

Abby and I don't get along, you know that.

DAN

I've noticed a certain--uneasiness--in your relationship with your daughter.

CLAUDIA

Dan, there are serious . . . issues.

DAN

You two are too much alike, and nobody can stand to see their faults mirrored in someone else, especially their own child. That's your major problem.

CLAUDIA

Well aren't you the wise one?

DAN

Look, Mom and I don't have what could be termed an exemplary relationship either. But I want her with us anyway, same as Abby wants you with us. We'll just have to put on the hip boots and wade through the crap as best we can.

CLAUDIA (reflects, then)

This is a blessing. I've been so lonely and afraid since Patrick--William--no, Patrick died. You know what I mean.

DAN

I know what--just not *who*.

CLAUDIA

Doesn't matter.

DAN

Not to me.

CLAUDIA

Where will you put me?

DAN

One of the kids' rooms; we'll have them decorated to suit you. You can bring some things. There's a separate bath for that end of the house.

CLAUDIA

This is just so wonderful! A family again. (A beat.) Where's Abby? I just want to hug her!

DAN

She's out jogging. You go on home and start thinking about what you want to do. I'll surprise Abby with the news when she gets here. She wanted to tell you herself of course, but sometimes . . . circumstances dictate behavior.

CLAUDIA (leaving)

Okay. Okay. I'll call Sarah too. We'll have to flip for Amy's room. And I'll sell that damn barn I live in. God, I'm so excited. Thank you! A family again. Thank you! Thank you!

(She exits.)

DAN (baffled)

You're welcome.

(LIGHTS COME DOWN SLOWLY. START SLIDES FOR TRANSITION.)

ACT 1, SCENE V

A FEW MOMENTS LATER

SCENE: LIGHTS COME UP SLOWLY on DAN seated at kitchen table. He's scanning the morning news. ABBY enters in running attire, gets a pitcher of juice from the refrigerator and sits down with him.

Well, how'd she take it?

ABBY

Actually . . . pretty well.

DAN (thinks, then)

You're kidding.

ABBY

No, not kidding. She's . . . delighted.

DAN (smiling)

Delighted?

ABBY

Ecstatic!

DAN

You didn't tell her?

ABBY

Didn't have to. My mother told her.

DAN

Oh, god. I should have known. (A beat.) But she's okay with it?

ABBY

Oh no, not okay. She was crushed, in agony all night.

DAN

But you just said she was ecstatic.

ABBY

ABBY

Don't do this to me.

DAN

Like you didn't do it to me?

ABBY

This is too important for pay back! We're talking about our marriage now, Buster.

DAN

No, we're talking about our mothers, Miss--Idealism. And they're *both* family, like it or not.

ABBY

My mother does not even belong to the family of humankind! She lives in her own world of rebellion, where she's perfectly free to do whatever she wants, but everyone else has to play by the rules. Her rules!

DAN

Not everybody. Just you.

ABBY

Well that's not fair! And I won't stand for it.

DAN

Abby, she's your mother. And she's no less afraid of being alone and dying all by herself that is my mother. We can't offer our hand to one and not the other.

ABBY

But my mother is independent; she's secure; she has friends, her club, a support group. She's still vibrant and attractive. She could remarry.

DAN

She won't do it; I already suggested that; she refuses to bury another husband, and I don't blame her for not wanting to do that.

ABBY

She has friends!

DAN

That's not the same as family.

ABBY

But she doesn't *need* us; your mother does.

DAN

She needs us, Abby. I saw it in her eyes; I could hear it in her voice. (A beat.) She puts up a good front, but she scared half to death. Maybe you're not close enough to her to recognize what she needs.

ABBY

I don't like her, you know?

DAN

I know that. But you love her.

ABBY

I *have* to love her; she's my mother. (A beat.) Haven't we had this conversation before?

DAN

Last night. (A beat.) We'll all be together--family. The way it *should* be.

ABBY

Did I say that?

DAN

Your argument was quite eloquent.

ABBY

Then I guess I can't get out of it.

DAN

And leave me here alone with the two of them? No way!

ABBY

Dammit. I hate it when logic backfires on you.

DAN

It's a terrible thing when you fall victim to your own ideals.

ABBY

Tell me about it.

DAN

Just did.

ABBY

Some times you do the right thing for all the right reasons and you ruin your life anyway.

Life's crucible.

DAN

God help us all.

ABBY

If He has any sense, He won't come anywhere near the place.

DAN

When does the fun begin?

ABBY

I'd say that since they'll probably be operating on the tenants of squatter's rights, we'll see them in here before the week is out.

DAN

Oh god. (A beat.) You know . . . you're right, nuclear holocaust doesn't sound all that bad to me right now.

ABBY

(LIGHTS COME DOWN SLOWLY as they embrace. TRANSITION SLIDES BEGIN.)

ACT I, SCENE VI

A FEW DAYS LATER

SCENE: LIGHTS COME UP SLOWLY on CLAUDIA and SARAH in a spare bedroom. A few framed prints are scattered about, and Claudia is dressed for work in jeans and cotton blouse; Sarah is wearing a dress, heels and seems ready to serve in more of a supervisory capacity. Sarah is sipping from a glass of white wine.

CLAUDIA

So. What will it be dear? Take your pick of the rooms. I'm completely flexible.

SARAH

Oh no, I think you should choose. After all, you'll be sort of like a sister to me now . . . an *older* sister, so you get first choice.

CLAUDIA

Oh, I don't think age at our age makes any difference. Do you, really?

SARAH

Well . . .

CLAUDIA

And since they asked *you* to move in with them *before* they asked me, you probably already had your mind set on which room you wanted.

SARAH

Oh no. I haven't given it a second thought.

CLAUDIA

So you really don't have a preference then?

SARAH

Now, I didn't say that.

CLAUDIA

Then you *do* have a preference?

SARAH

My preference is unimportant; what's important is that we get started off on the right foot in this new life of ours. I realize we've had our differences in the past; and that's why I want to let you take the room of your choice.

CLAUDIA

Well, I certainly appreciate your generosity, Sarah, but to tell you the truth, I'd be a lot more comfortable if we just flipped for it. What'd do you say?

SARAH

Flipped for it? In what way?

CLAUDIA

A coin.

SARAH

Well, I've never been that high of gambling.

CLAUDIA

The stakes aren't really all that high, and we're both going to come out winners.

SARAH

Why don't you just go ahead and take the room you prefer?

CLAUDIA

Here's what I'll do. I'll select the room that I think *you* want, and I'll take the other one.

SARAH

If that's what you're going to do, then I should just go ahead and select; that way you won't feel bad if you make a mistake.

CLAUDIA

I won't feel bad

SARAH

Then I will go ahead and select. (A beat.) But--I'm going to select the room that I think you don't want.

CLAUDIA

Fine.

SARAH

Okay. Here goes. I . . . think that you don't want . . . Amy's room.

CLAUDIA

Now why would you think that?

SARAH

Well, it's so . . . feminine for one thing.

CLAUDIA

Feminine?

SARAH

Isn't it?

CLAUDIA

Yes it is, but I thought as soon as I hung a few of my voluptuous Renoir's--

SARAH

Voluptuous?

CLAUDIA

Just a few, very tasteful, but--full of life, if you know what I mean.

SARAH

Claudia, please. (A beat.) Then you *do* want Amy's room.

CLAUDIA

I told you I don't *care*. It's just that I thought with the southeasterly exposure, the morning sun might bother a late riser like yourself.

SARAH

Am I a late riser?

CLAUDIA

I guess it's relative. But from where I come from anything after 9:00 is late.

SARAH

Where *do* you come from?

CLAUDIA

Originally, you mean?

SARAH

I suppose that's what I mean?

CLAUDIA

Well, originally, I'm from the same place as you--crawled out of the slime and muck of some antediluvian swamp.

SARAH

Well, in any case I never get up before 10:00. And the sun actually rises above the window by then and is much less of a bother. But that's beside the point because I'm giving *you* Amy's room.

CLAUDIA

You don't have to do that; the truth is, I'd prefer to have Bradley's room.

SARAH

No, I don't believe you. You're just being nice. No one in their right mind would prefer that room. So I'm taking it.

CLAUDIA

I see your point. But you *really* want Amy's room, and I really want Bradley's.

SARAH

I wouldn't be happy in Amy's room now, knowing that you were unhappy in Bradley's.

CLAUDIA

I'm happy either way. Now let's stop this nonsense and do the sensible thing.

SARAH

That's exactly what I'm trying to do. Now if you'll excuse me, I have so unpacking to do, now that I know where I'll be situated. (She starts off.) Danny! Put my things in Bradley's room.

(Claudia turns to put a nail in the wall as the
LIGHTS COME DOWN. BEGIN SLIDES.)

ACT 1, SCENE VII
END OF FIRST FULL DAY
SCENE: LIGHTS COME UP on DAN and
ABBY in their bedroom. Abby is sitting in
bed staring straight ahead, senseless and
dazed. Dan is undressing after a long day at
the office.

DAN

Sorry, I'm so late honey; Tanaka San was in town, and I just couldn't break away. Those Japanese expect to be shown a good time, and I suppose for the money they spend on us they should get it. Still, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to leave you here with them so long on the first full day. I'm sure it was no picnic, and I really am sorry. (A beat.) So . . . how'd it go?

him

(Abby cocks her head slightly and stares at
with a vacant expression.)

DAN

About as well as could be expected? (A beat.) Right?

(No response from Abby.)

DAN

No problems, I guess?

(She gives him a hard look.)

DAN

Anything I should know about?

(Silence.)

DAN

Okay. (A beat.) Say on a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate this first day? (A beat.)
You don't have to speak; just show me with your fingers.

(Abby holds up her middle finger but doesn't
speak.)

A one, huh?

DAN

(Shoots him the bird with the other hand.)

Two! (A beat.) Could have been worse.

DAN

(She lowers one hand and shakes her head very emphatically.)

Back to one.

DAN

(Abby nods.)

I thought so.

DAN

(He begins to pace around the room while thinking out loud.)

Can I safely assume in this instance that one is at the *lower* end of the scale?

DAN

(Abby stares at him incredulously.)

Great! (A beat.) So, otherwise, how was your day?

DAN

(SARAH enters, passes silently through the bedroom and exits into the bathroom off the master bedroom. Dan just stares at her.)

What's this? (A beat.) Did my mother just go into our bathroom?

DAN

(Abby doesn't answer. Dan moves to the bathroom door.)

Mom!

DAN

I'll be right out.

SARAH (off stage)

What . . . ?

DAN

I can't hear you with the water running.

SARAH (off stage)

What are you doing in there?

DAN

(After a moment Sarah reenters.)

SARAH (passing through)

What do you think I'm doing in there? (A beat.) Would either of you like to join me for a nightcap?

(Sarah exits. Dan storms to the bathroom where we HEAR A GOOD DEAL OF RUMMAGING ABOUT. Then Dan enters the bedroom with a set of dentures soaking in a glass of water.)

DAN

Teeth. Teeth?! What the hell is going on, Abby? And--and . . . (exits to bathroom and returns with hot water bottle, an assortment of tubes, and a vaginal insertion device of some kind.) this! What the hell kind of female paraphernalia is this? And more importantly, what is it doing in *our* bathroom?

(Abby pulls the sheet up over her head.)

Talk to me Abby!

DAN

(Sheet shakes, negative.)

Did we make a *big* mistake?

DAN

(Sheet shakes, affirmative.)

What now?

DAN

(Sheet shrugs as CLAUDIA enters and passes through to the bathroom.)

DAN

Claudia! What are you doing? Why are you going in there?

CLAUDIA (offstage)

Just a minute, Dan. I can't hear you with the water running.

DAN

That's our bathroom. You have your own. Claudia!

CLAUDIA (reentering and exiting)

No, I *don't* have my *own* bathroom!

(Dan hurries to the bed and climbs under the sheets with Abby. He takes the teeth and female contraption with him.)

DAN

What does she mean she doesn't have her own bathroom? She has her own bathroom!

(Sheets shakes, negative.)

DAN

Yes, she does! Overthere. Where her room is.

(Sheets shake again, negative.)

DAN

Dammit, Abby! *Speak* to me!

ABBY

No, she doesn't have her own bathroom! *Neither* of them does. They both have the *same* bathroom and they refuse to share!

DAN

Refuse to share?

ABBY

Yes--anything!

DAN

What are they--four-year-olds?

ABBY

It all started because they didn't get the right room.

DAN
Whose *teeth* are these?

ABBY
Then it escalated when they found out they had to share a bath.

DAN
And what the hell is this thing?

ABBY
They've been *at* each other all day.

DAN
I mean, what it's *for*?

ABBY
Thank God they finally reached a point where they weren't speaking at all. (A beat.) I would have gone mad.

DAN
Is it some kind of cleansing device?

ABBY
Ahhh! Don't put *that* in *there*! For god's sake those are my mother's teeth.

DAN
I didn't know your mother had dentures.

ABBY
Well there's a lot more you don't know!

DAN
And a lot I don't want to know, but it looks like I'm going to find out . . . everything!

(They drop the sheet. The hot water bottle and tubes all tangled around Dan's head and neck.)

DAN
Now tell me what's going on so I can help.

ABBY
Nobody can help! It was a stupid idea. I can't believe we were so idealistic. How can a simple good-hearted gesture turn into such a nightmare? (A beat.) Maybe we can have them committed? Or shot? Didn't my mother say we could shoot her?

DAN

Abby! We can't shoot her.

ABBY

You weren't here; you went off to work. You're going to LA for a week. You don't know what it was like. I was stuck here all day with them--Godzilla and Gorgo in my home--struggling for supremacy. It all started the day they moved. First it was all too sweet; that's how they got the rooms screwed up--trying to be nice. Your mother took the room she didn't want because it was, in her judgment, the less desirable of the two. The upshot of it all was that your mother ended up with the room she didn't want and the one my mother would have preferred because your mother didn't want my mother harboring any resentment about the room assignments. So now they're both harboring resentment against the other because neither of them got what they wanted. And all in an effort not to offend the other. It's good-heartedness gone awry.

DAN

Let me get this straight . . .

ABBY

There's no way to get it straight!

DAN

But--but . . . why are they using *our* bathroom?

ABBY

I told you. Because they refuse to *share*!

DAN

But they *are* sharing, not only with each other but with us too! And one full bath isn't being used at all.

ABBY

I told them that; they won't listen to reason. They want what they want; it's a matter of principle, they say. All they want is a little understanding, they say. Nobody understands them, they say. We really don't want them here, they say. Nobody wants them, they say. They're all alone, they say.

DAN

They say. *They* say! It's not for them to say. By god we're going to get this straightened out before another day goes by. You shouldn't have to put up with such nonsense.

ABBY

I have no intention of putting up with it.

DAN

Good for you.

ABBY

I've already made inquiries about office space.

DAN

What?

ABBY

I'm looking for office space. I want to work outside the home. Like you!

DAN

But you love working at home.

ABBY

Did! Not anymore. I can see that it would never work with them here. They'd never leave me alone; I wouldn't get any work done and I'd end up terribly frustrated and depressed. I'd end up not being able to stand my own mother.

DAN

You already can't stand your own mother.

ABBY

Then I'll end up not being able to stand yours either.

DAN

Then we'll have something else in common. (A beat.) Look, you don't have to leave. They'll have to adapt to our environment; this is our home, your workplace. They have to understand that. We'll . . . talk about it--right now--before another day goes by. (A beat.) Get them in here. Call them. Tell them we're meeting in the kitchen right now for a--a . . .

ABBY

Family council.

DAN

Yes, tell them that. Tell them we need to set up some . . . rules. Tell them I'm the head of this household. Tell them to meet me in the kitchen. Tell them I want to discuss rules.

ABBY

Rules?

DAN

Yes, you know--rules. To live by.

ABBY

You want me to tell them we're going to impose rules that they're going to live by?

DAN

Damn straight! Tell them!

ABBY

You tell them.

DAN

Me? Why should I tell them?

ABBY

Because a man's home is his castle. His kingdom. His domain. It's yours to rule. (A beat.) You alone rule the roost; you are the cock-of-the-walk. Master of all you survey. Is it not so, your excellency?

DAN

Well . . .

(Abby meets him center stage, hands him the soaking dentures, the hot water bottle, tubes and insertion device.)

ABBY

Here is your scepter, your crown (places water bottle on his head) and the implements you'll need to put some teeth into the law of the land. (A beat.) Go to big boy, and let me know how it turns out.

(LIGHTS COME DOWN SLOWLY
EXCEPT FOR A SPOT on Dan. SLIDES
START AS LIGHT FADES ON DAN.)

ACT 1, SCENE VIII

SAME NIGHT A FEW MINUTES LATER

SCENE: LIGHTS COME UP on DAN, ABBY, SARAH and CLAUDIA in the kitchen. Sarah, Claudia and Abby are seated at the kitchen table. Dan is at the counter preparing a pot of coffee.

Coffee? Does everyone want coffee?

DAN

It's 10:30, Dan. Nobody wants coffee.

ABBY

Let me handle this, Honey.

DAN

Fine.

ABBY

So, who would like a cup of coffee?

DAN

Not me.

ABBY

No, thank you, Dan. I'd be up for hours.

CLAUDIA

Mom?

DAN

I'd prefer a brandy.

SARAH

In your coffee?

DAN

In a snifter . . . without the coffee.

SARAH

DAN

I brewed a fresh pot.(A few beats.) Well, I'll have a coffee.

ABBY

Then *you'll* be up for hours.

DAN

I've never minded late hours. The hours are quiet, full of poetry and the dark magic of the night.

CLAUDIA

Dan, that's beautiful.

SARAH

Danny has a way with words.

DAN

Knock off the "Danny" shit, Mom!

SARAH

Which he sometimes fails to use.

ABBY

Oh fearless leader, your subjects are wondering why you've called us here.

DAN

We need to talk. All of us . . . honestly and frankly about--

SARAH

Brandy?

DAN

No, not brandy.

SARAH

You said I could have some.

DAN

You can, Mom. Honey, would you get my mother a brandy?

(As Abby searches for the brandy the phone rings and Dan answers the kitchen extension. Abby pours Sarah's brandy.)

DAN

Hello . . . who . . . Muffy? (He looks at Claudia.) There's a *Claudia* Adams here, no Muffy. No, she can't come to the phone right now.

CLAUDIA

I can come to the phone!

DAN (to Claudia)

Is your name, "Muffy?"

CLAUDIA

I'm known as Muffy in some circles.

DAN

Who is this? (A beat.) Harold who? What do you want, Harold. Okay, Hal. What do you want, Hal? I know *that*, but I told you, Muffy--*Claudia* can't come to the phone. No, I'm not her father. I'm her--she's my . . . never mind. I'll tell her you called. I *am* relaxed; we're just in the middle of something here. It's okay; okay, okay, good-bye.

(He hangs up and looks at Claudia.)

DAN

Who the hell is, Harold?

ABBY

Dan!

CLAUDIA

Hal.

DAN

What?

ABBY

You're exceeding your authority.

CLAUDIA

It's all right. His concern for me is very sweet. (A beat.) Hal is a man I'm seeing, Dan.

DAN

Well why haven't I seen him?

ABBY

Because he's seeing her, not you.

DAN (to Abby)
Have you seen him?

ABBY
He's not seeing me.

SARAH
I've seen him.

DAN
He's seeing you too!?

SARAH
No, I saw him while he was seeing, Claudia.

DAN
I see. (A beat.) What does that mean in female terms, "seeing?"

SARAH
That the relationship is purely . . . physical.

DAN
What?

CLAUDIA
Oh, it's physical all right, but far from pure. I enjoy Hal's company immensely. He treats me like a lady.

SARAH
Treat a lady like a tramp, and a tramp like a lady. He certainly knows the score.

CLAUDIA
What he knows is the difference between a lady and a broken down booze hound.

DAN
Jesus! (A beat.) Honey, can you give me a little help here?

ABBY
I think we're getting off the subject.

CLAUDIA
I thought getting off was the subject.

ABBY

Mother! Must you be so crass?

CLAUDIA

Absolutely not! But sometimes I find it a great deal more utilitarian to express myself in the vernacular rather than with the eloquence with which my speech is most often associated.

SARAH

A hussy putting on airs. I told you; don't say I didn't tell you.

DAN

Enough! (A beat.) I called you here to discuss the . . . bathroom tissue.

ABBY

Issue.

DAN

Yes, the bathroom *issue*.

SARAH

The bathroom tissue is an issue as well.

CLAUDIA

Isn't it though. Dan have you never heard of Charmin?

DAN

Of course I've heard of Charmin; I wrote a campaign for the stuff--it's cottony soft, double-ply, scented, absorbent, and strong. Very strong.

SARAH

Exactly.

CLAUDIA

So why are we using sandpaper instead of Charmin?

DAN

Because it's my bathroom! I'll put corn cobs in there if I want.

ABBY

No you won't And it's *our* bathroom.

DAN

That isn't the point.

SARAH

Then get to it. I'm exhausted.

DAN

Get to what?

ALL THREE

The point!

DAN

Okay! (A beat.) The point is: you two have a bathroom which circumstances dictate that you share. So start sharing and use any damn tissues you please. But stay out of ours. Is that clear?

SARAH

You expect us to *share* a bathroom?

DAN

Is that asking too much?

CLAUDIA

We have very different personal habits.

SARAH

What it comes down to is: Claudia isn't at all tidy.

CLAUDIA

And Sarah has a serious obsessive-compulsive disorder. The only thing she can't keep track of is the empty bottles she leaves all over the house.

SARAH

I beg your pardon!

DAN (to Abby)

Honey, feel free to intervene at any time.

ABBY

Let's just try to concentrate on the physical living arrangements. Can we agree on that? (They agree.) Okay. (A beat.) There are some physical limitations here that we all have to live with. Now, Mom, how do you feel about the *room* arrangements?

CLAUDIA

They suck.

SARAH

Now I doubt that Mr. Churchill himself could have expressed it any more eloquently than that.

CLAUDIA

Sarah, how do you feel about the room assignments?

SARAH

I have to admit that I find them less than desirable.

CLAUDIA

What'd I say?

ABBY

So neither of you is happy.

CLAUDIA

I didn't pick my room.

SARAH

I was just trying to do the right thing in giving you the room I wanted. Is it such a crime to be nice to people?

ABBY

No, it's no crime, but sometimes it can lead to problems. But in this case the problem can be easily resolved by exchanging rooms.

SARAH

I would never ask Dan to do that.

ABBY

Dan doesn't matter.

DAN

I don't matter.

ABBY

What I mean is: Dan will be glad to move you both again if that will make you happy.

SARAH

I don't know about "happy."

CLAUDIA

Would you settle for--less miserable?

DAN

I guess you have to start some place.

ABBY

Okay then. *That's* settled. Dan will move both of you tomorrow.

DAN

Under one condition: I want everyone to stop trying to be so nice to each other. It just leads to misunderstanding and resentment.

SARAH

Then we shouldn't be nice to one another?

DAN

Only if the motivation for being nice comes from a genuine feeling of good-heartedness and not from a feeling of just not wanting to hurt someone's feeling or of not wanting to be eventually resented. We should all be . . .

ABBY

True to our true feelings.

DAN

Exactly.

SARAH

My true feelings are that I can't share a bathroom with--that woman.

DAN

That doesn't count.

CLAUDIA

And my true feelings are that if I leave my cologne out on the counter--that woman will drink it.

ABBY

Mother!

CLAUDIA

Those are my true feelings!

SARAH

Danny, are you going to let her talk to me like that?

DAN

Honey . . .

(PHONE RINGS. Dan answers.)

DAN

Hello . . . who . . . there's no "*pumpkin*" here--

CLAUDIA

I'll take it in my room.

(Claudia exits.)

DAN

Pumpkin will be right with you.

SARAH

Dan, are you going to let that--that--*hussy*--treat me like this?

DAN

I don't have any idea of *what* I'm going to do. (A beat.) Honey . . .

(LIGHTS COME DOWN.)

END ACT I

RED HOT MAMAS

by

Dave Christner

ACT II, SCENE I

A WEEK OR SO LATER

SCENE: LIGHTS COME UP SLOWLY in the kitchen. PETER MASON, 60, an AA sponsor is seated at the table and sipping from a mug of coffee. The table is filled with empty liquor bottles. DAN enters, carrying suitcase. At first Dan doesn't see his visitor.

DAN (entering)

Honey, I'm home.

PETER

Redneck foreplay.

DAN

What?

PETER

An old joke . . .

DAN

I don't get it.

PETER

No wonder.

DAN

Who the hell are you?

PETER (extending his hand)
My name is Peter; I'm an alcoholic.

DAN (puzzled)
A man called Peter?

PETER
But I'm no saint. I'm a drunk, black sheep of my family, but I've managed to stay sober for . . . seven years, four months, three weeks, seventeen hours and (checks his watch) 36 minutes. (A beat.) Didn't catch the name.

DAN
My name is Dan; I'm--an advertising executive.

PETER
That explains it.

DAN
Does it?

PETER
The liquor.

DAN
You lost me.

PETER
I once was lost too, but now am found. (A beat.) Do you believe in a Higher Power, Dan?

DAN
Abby!

PETER
I know the scenario, seen it a hundred times. High powered account executive. Lots of stress. Tight schedules. Deadlines. Competition. Expectations to entertain clients; show the boys a good time, a night on the town. Liquor flowing freely. Man falls prey to the demon; no wonder.

(Dan looks at empty bottles and finally puts it all together.)

DAN
Was that my liquor?

PETER

I consider it a privilege to have gotten rid of it for you. No thanks is required.

DAN

You *dumped* my liquor?

PETER

Sure as hell didn't drink it, although I wanted to. That's why I had to dump it.

DAN

Who are you?

PETER

That's not important, Son. Who are *you*?

DAN

Dan Casey is my name; I *live* here; I own this house. And I want to know what you're doing here--drinking my coffee, dumping my liquor, trespassing on my property and stretching the limits of my basic good nature.

PETER

Ah, Casey, you're the son then?

DAN

I'm the son *now*! And I want to know the hell's going on?

(SARAH enters.)

SARAH

Oh, Danny, you're back. Welcome home. I see you've met Peter; he's an alcoholic.

DAN

So I've heard.

PETER

Black sheep of the family.

DAN

You told me.

PETER

Damn proud of it too. Without me the rest of the family would look pretty damn sorry, Son. Pretty damn sorry!

SARAH

Dan, I'm an alcoholic too.

DAN

What?

SARAH

It's true. Your own mother--an alcoholic. Please don't think badly of me. (A beat.) Peter is my sponsor from AA, sort of a guide, a confidant and crutch to lean on when things get rough. They *do* get rough.

DAN

You're serious.

SARAH

I have never been more so. I went through detoxification while you were away; a week of many horrors, but now I'm alcohol-free for the first time in years and the world is a very different place. Even so, I'd kill for a drink this very moment. (A beat.) Did you know your father was an alcoholic?

DAN

No . . .

SARAH

No, he wasn't Or "no", you didn't know?

DAN

I didn't know; I didn't know very much about Dad at all.

SARAH

You know he enjoyed a cocktail.

DAN

We *all* enjoyed a cocktail.

PETER

Nothing wrong with that--if you can handle it.

SARAH

Your father and I couldn't. And it only got worse when he retired. That's all we did together for the last few years. By the time we finished cocktails and our nightly bottle of vintage wine with dinner neither of us could have talked even if we'd wanted to, which we didn't. (A beat.) It was so insidious the way our social drinking turned into a habit and then that habit into an addiction.

DAN

I had no idea. I mean, I knew you *drank*, but I didn't know it was problem.

SARAH

Neither did I. Until I moved in here. (A beat.) Claudia saw me for the--lush--that I really was, and I don't have to tell you that she didn't mind pointing out my faults. Classic case of denial on my part, but *she* wouldn't be denied. She knew the pattern because she started drinking more after the loss of her first husband, but she came out of it because she realized life was better without it. For me, it wasn't. And I would have denied it was a problem for God knows how long if she hadn't have been so--true to her feelings--and, as much as I hate to admit it, so right. Dear Claudia . . .

DAN

That's why you dumped my liquor?

PETER

Can't keep the stuff in the house with an alcoholic.

DAN

But it's my house.

PETER

It's also your mother. And she's going to need all the help she can get--more than I can give her.

DAN

Twelve-year-old Scotch right down the drain.

PETER

Along with some damn fine wine. Used to be quite the connoisseur myself.

SARAH

No brandy. I'd already gotten to the brandy.

PETER

And Vermouth.

DAN (picking up a small bottle)

Bitters too . . . came to a bitter end.

SARAH

So did the olives.

DAN

The olives?

Made me *crave* a martini.

SARAH

How much do you drink, son?

PETER

Not much.

DAN

Drink or two a day?

PETER

Not even.

DAN

A cocktail to help you relax.

PETER

Sometimes. What is this?

DAN

The door's wide open.

PETER

It's just social. I can take it or leave it. What door?

DAN

That's how it starts. First it's social, then you take a drink to relax, then you can't relax *without* it. That's when the problem starts.

PETER

I don't have a problem! At least not a *drinking* problem.

DAN

Listen to your Higher Power, son.

PETER

I *don't* have a problem!

DAN

Yes, you do; you have me.

SARAH

You're my mother!

DAN

And that's not a problem?

PETER

I see your point.

DAN

Do you ever feel like you *need* a drink, son?

PETER

Right now!

DAN

(There is a KNOCK at kitchen door.)

Come in!

DAN

(RUSS NEARY, 70, enters. He is nice looking, well-groomed and smartly dressed, and has an air of confidence about himself.)

We don't want any!

DAN

Any what?

RUSS

Whatever you're selling.

DAN

I'm not selling anything. (A beat.) I'm Russ Neary

RUSS

Are you an alcoholic?

DAN

Not anymore. Is this a meeting?

RUSS

Yes.

PETER

No! We're just . . . talking. (A beat.) What do you want . . .

DAN

Russ. RUSS

Yes, Russ. What is it that you want? DAN

Claudia. RUSS

Claudia? DAN

Are you going to repeat everything I say? RUSS

No, I'm not. You want to see Claudia. DAN

Don't they all? SARAH

Do you have an appointment? DAN

No, a date. Do I *need* an appointment? RUSS

My name is Peter; I'm an alcoholic. PETER (rising)

Sarah. Me too. Claudia is my sister. SARAH

Your sister? DAN

In adversity. SARAH

Thought you said this wasn't a meeting. RUSS (to Dan)

It's *not* a meeting. We're just taking care of a . . . family matter. DAN

Would you like some coffee, Russ?

SARAH

Please. Black two sugars.

RUSS

Two sugars?

SARAH

(Sarah goes to make more coffee.)

All right. *One* sugar.

RUSS

How 'bout a Sweet and Low?

SARAH

Fine, Sarah. Whatever you say.

RUSS

So, you have a date with Claudia?

DAN

That's right.

RUSS

I don't think she's here.

DAN

She doesn't have a problem with alcohol; no reason she should be.

RUSS

Claudia's addiction isn't to alcohol.

SARAH

Don't start, Mother!

DAN

Never mind the coffee, Sarah. I can see this isn't a good time.

RUSS

I'm having a good time.

PETER

RUSS
Just tell Claudia I dropped by.

DAN
I thought you had a date.

RUSS
Not a date per se; we have an open ended kind of arrangement.

SARAH
I can imagine whose end it is that's open.

DAN
Mother! For chrissake, stop it!

SARAH
He must have just been passing through the neighborhood and caught her scent.

DAN
What has gotten in to you?

SARAH
I don't know, but I'm beginning to enjoy it.

DAN
Well, don't forget: Claudia's the one that made you realize you were a drunk.

SARAH
Which is exactly why I have an obligation to make her realize that she's a slut!

RUSS
I think I'll just run along to tell you the truth. Be sure and tell Claudia I dropped by.

PETER
You don't have to go.

DAN
I'll tell her Russ . . . ?

RUSS
Neary.

DAN
Dropped by.

(Russ exits.)

DAN

Okay, Pete! She's sober! Now what the hell do I do with her?

SARAH

Danny, you don't have to *do* anything. Just be here for me when I need you.

DAN

I'm here, Mom. We're all here; that's what this is all about, but I think you're being a wee bit critical of Claudia.

PETER

Wonderful woman!

DAN

You know, Claudia?

PETER

Not yet.

SARAH

And I want to feel useful; I want to help around the house.

DAN

Fine. I know I don't run the vacuum enough to suit Abby, and I *hate* cleaning the toilets.

SARAH

I want to cook, not clean toilets.

DAN

Mom, cleaning toilets is useful, and in your case, the product you'll be dealing with isn't all that much different that what you produce when you're cooking.

SARAH

I want to cook for you!

DAN

Cook? You're going to cook!

SARAH

Some of the time.

DAN

But Mom . . . cooking was *never* your strong point.

SARAH

I was drunk; I couldn't even read the directions. It wasn't my fault.

PETER

She needs a *purpose*. It can't be that bad.

DAN

Stay out of this, Peter; we're talking about cooking not drinking.

PETER

Give her a chance.

DAN

You don't have to eat it!

PETER

She needs to be of practical use.

DAN

Jesus! (A beat.) Okay, you want to cook: cook. What else?

SARAH

I want a cat. (Dan rolls his eyes.) Okay, I just need your support. And no more liquor in the house. I can beat this thing, but I need help, every day, from now on.

PETER

And not just from us.

DAN

We'll help, Mom. Whatever it takes. But do you *have* to cook?

(They embrace as the LIGHTS COME DOWN to END THE SCENE. SLIDE SHOW BEGINS AND RUNS THROUGH TRANSITION TO NEXT SCENE.)

ACT II, SCENE II

LATER THAT NIGHT

SCENE: LIGHTS COME UP on ABBY and DAN sitting up in bed. Both are staring straight ahead, dazed.

DAN

My mother wants to cook.

ABBY

I caught my mother smoking in her room today.

DAN

She's a *terrible* cook--dangerous!

ABBY

Tried to hide it, but I smelled the smoke.

DAN

I think that's one of the reasons I left.

ABBY

Stuffed a lighted cigarette under her pillow.

DAN

Did you ever wonder why my dad was so thin? Why he never had to fight middle-age spread?

ABBY

Practically caught the place on fire.

DAN

I don't think he had a decent meal for 30 years.

ABBY

I don't know what to do with her.

DAN

No wonder we ate out all the time.

ABBY
How can she be so stupid?

DAN
One night the whole family got sick.

ABBY
Doesn't she know what it's doing to her health?

DAN
Threw up all night. Not just me--all of us.

ABBY
I can't watch her every minute.

DAN
Rescue squad took the lot of us to the hospital.

ABBY
I can't help what she does somewhere else.

DAN
Salmonella! She left a hollandaise sauce out on the kitchen counter all afternoon.

ABBY
We have to set some limits.

DAN
We lost Dad there for a minute; she actually killed him.

ABBY
I don't know what's gotten in to her.

DAN
Had to jump start his heart.

ABBY
She knows the risks.

DAN
Sent a jolt of electricity that could have lit up Manhattan.

ABBY
She's just doing it to irritate me.

DAN
Came back to life heaving his guts out in the ER.

ABBY
I won't allow her to smoke in this house.

DAN
Mom in the kitchen is an awful thing to see.

ABBY
I think God is punishing me.

DAN
I feel like Job.

ABBY (turning to look at Dan)
I don't know what I did to deserve such a mother.

DAN (turning to look at Abby)
Neither do I.

(LIGHTS COME DOWN to END THE
SCENE. SLIDES BEGIN.)

ACT II, SCENE III
A FEW DAYS LATER

SCENE: LIGHTS COME on ABBY in the kitchen. She is drying and putting away some dishes when CLAUDIA enters dressed in tight jeans and a white T-shirt with a scarlet A Plus on it. Abby looks at her, shakes her head and turns away.

Go ahead . . . say it.

Say what?

What you're thinking?

What am I thinking?

That she's not actually going out dressed like *that*!

Well, you're not are you?

I most certainly am.

Mother . . . is that Shalimar?

Isn't it just divine?

CLAUDIA

ABBY

CLAUDIA

ABBY

CLAUDIA

ABBY

CLAUDIA

(Abby shakes her head, goes to Claudia, grasps her by the shoulders like a child but before she starts her lecture, she catches the scent of something.)

ABBY

CLAUDIA

ABBY
My Shalimar?

CLAUDIA
I just . . . borrowed a little.

ABBY
How do you *borrow* perfume?

CLAUDIA
Dab a little here, some there. I should have asked; I'm sorry.

ABBY
I can't believe you.

CLAUDIA
I'll replace the bottle when you run out. (A beat.) Personally, I don't see why we can't share.

ABBY
Replacing the bottle is not the point. I just can't understand why you would do such a thing.

CLAUDIA
Darling, I'm 72: I need all the help I can get.

ABBY
You don't need help; I'd have to hire an accountant to keep track of all the men that come sniffing around here.

CLAUDIA
It's the Shalimar.

ABBY
Well, Shalimar never did that for me!

CLAUDIA
It helps to exude a certain . . . love for life as well.

ABBY
Is that what you call it?

CLAUDIA
What do you call it?

ABBY

Well, if I remember correctly, when I expressed such a "love for life", you referred to it as a promiscuous streak.

CLAUDIA

Only because I was concerned for your welfare.

ABBY

Which is exactly what I'm concerned about!

CLAUDIA

Your welfare?

ABBY

No, yours.

CLAUDIA

I thought you were more concerned with your Shalimar.

ABBY

I concerned with your welfare the same way you were concerned about mine.

CLAUDIA

But you were a child.

ABBY

I was 18 . . . when I started to spread my wings.

CLAUDIA

If it was only your wings you were spreading, I wouldn't have been so concerned.

ABBY

I could vote!

CLAUDIA

You could also be abused and hurt.

ABBY

So can you. Now!

CLAUDIA

I won't allow myself to be abused, and I'm too smart to be hurt.

ABBY (thinks, then)

What's the story with the T-shirt?

CLAUDIA

A colonial tale of unmitigated passion.

ABBY

I know that. Where did you find such a thing?

CLAUDIA

College Hill Bookstore. (Use local store.) It's all the rage with the literary community.

ABBY

A very hot item, I'm sure.

CLAUDIA

Wouldn't you like to know?

ABBY

Do you have any idea of how *ridiculous* you look?

CLAUDIA

To whom?

ABBY

Everybody! A grandmother in blue jeans . . .

CLAUDIA

You know I think genes are the problem, but not the ones I'm wearing; I think it has more to do with the ones of mine that you're carrying. Maybe we're too much alike for our own good. What do you think?

ABBY

I think . . . you look ridiculous; that's what I think.

(DAN enters and takes a double-take when he sees Claudia.)

DAN

Jesus! Claudia, you look great!

ABBY

Oh, Dan, for God's sake!

DAN

What!?

ABBY

She's looks like a hussy.

DAN

Yeah, but a great one. (A beat. Then to Claudia.) A plus, huh?

ABBY

Get it?

DAN

Yeah, I get it. The—red badge of her age.

ABBY

Wrong literary classic.

DAN

Okay! Hawthorne. I get it! (A beat.) What's wrong with you?

ABBY

Why does something always have to be wrong with me?

DAN

I don't know!

ABBY

Well, I'll tell you what's wrong with me—

DAN

Good!

ABBY

It's *not* good!

DAN

It's good that you're going to tell me! (A beat.) So, tell me!

ABBY

All right. For 10 minutes I'm trying to explain to my mother how ridiculous she looks all made up like a teenager, and what do you do but come in and tell her she looks great! *That's* what's wrong!

DAN

Honey, when you're 72, I hope you look as great as your mother looks right now. (Sniffs.) And is that Shalimar?

Oh, for God's sake!

ABBY (walking out)

Honey! (To Claudia.) What was that all about?

DAN

Genes, I think.

CLAUDIA

You have her jeans?

DAN

No, she has mine.

CLAUDIA

Oh.

DAN

I'll go speak with her; this really wasn't your fault. (A beat.) Do me a favor.

CLAUDIA

Sure.

DAN

Say hello to Stan . . . no . . . Russ when he gets here. I'll be right back.

CLAUDIA

(Claudia exits. Dan sits down and picks up a newspaper. There is a KNOCK at the door.)

DAN

It's open.

(STAN WALKER, 70, enters. He is very attractive, charming, rich and self-assured.)

DAN

You're not Russ?

DAN

Never have been. (Extends his hand.) Stan Walker's the name. I've come for (checks a news clipping) Claudia.

STAN

Stanley Walker.

DAN

Stan. STAN

Mind if I call you Stanley? DAN

Suit yourself. If the foo shits . . . STAN

What? DAN

Never mind. STAN

Was it a joke? DAN

Not a very good one. STAN

Have we met before? DAN

Now? STAN

Yes. DAN

No. STAN

I didn't think so. (A beat.) Stan Walker? DAN

Stanley. STAN

Of course. And you're here for Claudia? DAN

The one and only. STAN

DAN
Your one and only?

STAN
You never know.

DAN
Sit down, Stanley; Claudia will be here directly. She's attending to a little family matter, if you know what I mean.

STAN
Don't have the slightest idea.

DAN
Coffee?

STAN
Why not--black, no sugar.

DAN
Ah, a real man.

STAN
So I'm told.

DAN
So, Stanley, how'd you and Claudia get together.

STAN
We didn't--haven't--yet.

DAN
I don't understand.

STAN
Who the hell does? Country's going to hell in a hand basket.

DAN
No, you misunderstood what I don't understand. (A beat.) What I don't understand is what you're doing here if you don't know Claudia.

STAN
I came here to get to know her--if you know what I mean.

DAN

Well, yeah, I think I do, but how did you get in a position to get to know her?

STAN

The personals.

DAN

Claudia ran an ad in the personals?

STAN

Saves time. And the bar scene is a total drag. And believe me, there's something to that old adage about "beauty being in the eye of the beer holder." I've made some real mistakes in my--wanderings. Of course, I'll admit women make mistakes under the influence too. That's why the personals are so useful. And Claudia sounds great! Tell me: Is her ass as cute as she says it is?

DAN

What?

STAN

Say on a scale of 1 to 10?

DAN

Look, Stanley, I don't want to discuss Claudia's *ass*.

STAN (thinks, then)

Tits?

DAN

No!

STAN

You're kind of sensitive. What's she to you?

DAN

I'm more interested in what she is to you.

STAN

Look, we're both guys, right? Male he-persons of the masculine gender. You know the score.

DAN

I'm not keeping score! Look, Stan--

Stanley. STAN

Stanley, look . . . what do you do anyway? DAN

What do I do when? STAN

Every day. DAN

Spend some time at the track. Have a few cocktails. Go fly fishing. Enjoy the companionship of attractive women. Follow baseball. Basically, I do what I damn well please. STAN

Are you single? DAN

Widowed and I have no plans to change my status with the pickings out there beings so far from slim. If you know what I mean? STAN

Well, there you have it! DAN

Have what? STAN

Why I can't allow you to see Claudia. DAN

What are you, her father? STAN

No, she's my . . . DAN

Mother!? STAN

In-law. DAN

STAN

Look, sorry about the ass thing, but hey, I'm just responding to the ad (looks at news item).

DAN

Let me see that! (Reads, then.) What's this--HPTW?

STAN

Height proportional to weight; it's a code.

DAN

And this--SA?

STAN

Sexually active.

DAN

Great! (Reads.) *S&M*?!

STAN

Single and mature. Relax.

DAN

Okay, that's more like it. (Reads, then.) What about this--GLA?

STAN

You don't want to know.

DAN

Then why did I ask?

STAN

Great little ass.

DAN

Claudia! Jesus! Can you believe that?

STAN

No, that's why I'm here. Had to see it for myself. But my intentions are completely honest, even if, hedonistic. Same as Claudia's. We're both looking for some very simple pleasures.

DAN

Do you really think it's that simple?

STAN

At your age: no. At ours it is, and that's a blessing.

DAN

A blessing?

STAN

That comes with the wisdom of having lived a few years longer than you have. It's not magic, and I'm probably not any smarter than you are, but there are things I know that you don't--and won't accept--because human nature seems to have us programmed to learn things the hard way--for ourselves. I was no different. (A beat.) But now, I look out and see that the road behind me is more than twice as long as the one that lies ahead, and at this point in my life, I know better than to waste a moment of time doing something that I don't find fulfilling.

DAN

Such as chasing women?

STAN

Yeah, that, and flying kites with my grandchildren and walking my dog and working for a cause that I believe in.

(Dan shakes his head and is thinking when there is a KNOCK on the door.)

DAN

Come in!

(RUSS NEARY enters. He is carrying a bouquet of flowers.)

DAN

Russ . . . ?

RUSS

Neary.

DAN

I know. (A beat.) Russ Neary . . . Stanley Walker.

RUSS

My pleasure.

Pleasure's all mine, I'm sure. STANLEY

Don't count on that. DAN

I've come for Claudia. RUSS

Take a number. DAN

What? RUSS

Stanley's come for Claudia too. DAN

Quite a woman. RUSS

I'll take your word for it. STANLEY

You've got my word on it. RUSS

And I'll accept it as coming for a man of honor. STANLEY

Let's not get carried away. (A beat.) I think I'd better get the object of your desires in here and let her straighten this out. Claudia! DAN

Yes? CLAUDIA (off stage)

Your gentlemen callers are here! DAN

Did you say, "callers?" CLAUDIA (entering)

That's what I said. DAN

RUSS
Hello, Claudia.

CLAUDIA
Russ, dear, how good to see you. (Turns to Stan.) And you must be . . .

STAN
Stan Walker.

CLAUDIA
Of course, Stan. What a pleasure. (A beat.) Did you meet Russ?

STAN
That wasn't nearly as pleasurable.

DAN
What'd I tell you!

CLAUDIA
And my son-in-law, Dan?

STAN
Oh, yes. Dan and I had *quite* a little chat.

CLAUDIA
Man-to-man?

STAN
Very much so.

CLAUDIA
And how are those Red Sox doing? (Use name of local team.)

STAN
Claudia, some men have more interesting things to talk about than sports.

CLAUDIA
Is that so? Such as?

STAN
Women!

CLAUDIA
Well, I wish I'd have been here for that conversation.

You were!

STAN

Oh. (A beat.) Would I have been flattered?

CLAUDIA

Absolutely--

STAN AND DAN

--not!

DAN

Really. (A beat.) Well, it looks as though I've run into something of a scheduling problem; I'm terribly sorry.

CLAUDIA

Looks like you could use a social secretary.

DAN

Or a better memory.

CLAUDIA

Memory's the second thing to go.

STAN

The second?

DAN

Master plan. That way you can't remember what it is you're missing.

STAN

Good plan.

RUSS

What's your plan, Claudia? I hope you aren't going to disappoint either of these gentlemen.

DAN

(As Claudia ponders her dilemma, SARAH enters through the kitchen door. She is wearing a blue chambray dress with matching red belt and heels. She looks great.)

CLAUDIA

Sarah, how good to see you.

DAN

Don't even think about it!

CLAUDIA

Sarah, these are my dear friends, Russ Neary and Stan--

STAN (he's interested)

Walker.

CLAUDIA

Walker, yes. This is my--sister--Sarah Casey. Sarah we were just going out for dinner and perhaps to. . . .

STAN

See the Renoir display at the museum.

SARAH

Really? How nice.

STAN

Are you interested in the French impressionists, Sarah?

SARAH

Oh, yes, they've always been my favorites. I'm *particularly* fond of Renoir.

STAN

Yes, Renoir! His voluptuous nude bathers made quite an impression on me as a young man.

RUSS

Me too! I was always fascinated with how their thighs seemed to follow you around the room.

STAN

Why don't you join us, Sarah?

SARAH

Well, I . . .

STAN

You wouldn't even have to change; you look *wonderful* just the way you are.

SARAH

I do? In this old thing.

DAN

Mom.

SARAH

It is very tempting. I don't get out much.

DAN

Stan--

STAN

Stanley.

DAN

Stanley!

STAN

Tell me, Sarah, how do you feel about lobster?

DAN

Stan! That's my mother you're talking to.

SARAH

I don't drink, you know.

STAN

And I don't dance. So if you don't ask me to dance, I won't ask you to drink.

CLAUDIA

Come on, Sissy, join us?

DAN

Sissy?

SARAH

Oh, why not? I need to add some zest to my life.

DAN

Mom!

SARAH (exiting)

Just let me freshen up. I'll be right back.

CLAUDIA

Well, things have a way of working out now don't they?

DAN (to Stan)

I want her home by 11:00!

(LIGHTS COME DOWN. SLIDES BEGIN.)

ACT II, SCENE IV
LATE THAT SAME NIGHT
SCENE: DAN is pacing across the kitchen
floor while ABBY sips from a mug of coffee.

DAN

Where the hell are they? I told that Stan guy 11:00 o'clock. What time is it?

ABBY

Almost 3:00.

DAN

Three?!

ABBY

Almost.

DAN

Dammit, they just don't listen. I gave *specific* instructions for him to have her back here by 11:00. I left no room for misunderstanding. *Eleven* I said! You heard me.

ABBY

I didn't I hear you; I was in my studio.

DAN

If you'd have been here, you would have heard me. Eleven, I said. Plain as day.

ABBY

I'll take your word for it.

DAN

So where are they?

ABBY

I don't know.

DAN

I didn't like this Stan--Stanley--right off. He was all charm and wit; seems to have a ton of money. Driving a goddamn Lexus. Nice looking. Self-confident. I *hate* guys like that.

ABBY

Success does terrible things to people.

DAN

Doesn't it though. (A beat.) I'd better call the police.

ABBY

And tell them that your mother is staying out too late?

DAN

The guy could be an ax murderer for all I know.

ABBY

Did he *look* like an ax murderer?

DAN

They never do.

ABBY

Did he have an ax?

DAN

Not *with* him! What, you think they carry axes around with them?

ABBY

No, but I do think that maybe you're overreacting.

DAN

Obviously, you're a lot less concerned about your mother's well being than I am with mine.

ABBY

Now, how did you come up with a conclusion like that?

DAN

Well . . . there you are calmly sipping a cup of mocha Java when your mother could be out there chopped up in pieces somewhere!

ABBY

So you think this Russ Neary is an ax murderer too?

DAN

I think that's a very real possibility.

ABBY

Well! Our mothers certainly know how to pick'em, don't they?

DAN

Dammit, Abby, I have a legitimate concern for the welfare of my mother and you're making a mockery of it. You obviously don't have as much to worry about because your mother has--

ABBY

Because my mother has what?

DAN

Been around, if you know what I mean?

ABBY

Oh, I know what you mean, all right. You think your mother is Mary Poppins or maybe Snow White?

DAN

No, but I don't think she has . . . your mother's vast experience in these areas.

ABBY

What areas?

DAN

Those of a sensual nature.

ABBY

I got news for you, Sonny, boy. Your mother knows the ropes. You just haven't been here when she carries on with her sponsor from AA--what's his name?

DAN

Peter Mason?

ABBY

He's the one. I think they've become rather attached, if you know what I mean.

DAN

Petey and my mother; I don't believe it. Their relationship is purely professional, I'm sure.

(From OUTSIDE WE HEAR A CAR PULL UP. It stops, DOORS OPEN, there is LAUGHTER, LOUD TALK, HIGH-PITCHED SQUEALS. Then the car drives

away, and there is a ruckus at the door as a search goes on for keys. Finally we HEAR THE DOOR OPEN.)

Don't be too hard on them.

ABBY

(SARAH and CLAUDIA enter, pretty drunk and dressed in each other's clothes. Dan notices *something* is different, but can't immediately put his finger on it.)

Sarah, look . . . the kids waited up for us.

CLAUDIA

(Both laugh.)

How sweet.

SARAH (suppressing her laughter)

Well, *what* have you got to say for yourselves?

DAN

Only that . . . we had one hell of night!

CLAUDIA (starts out seriously)

So far!

SARAH

You're drunk!

DAN

Just a wee bit tipsy.

CLAUDIA

Mother you can't drink.

DAN

Oh yes I can!

SARAH

She had a momentary lapse; she needed it.

CLAUDIA

ABBY

I can't believe you let her.

CLAUDIA

I had nothing to do with it. She talked Stan into dancing, and he talked her into drinking.

DAN

Well you are both in *very serious trouble!*

CLAUDIA

Hear that, Sarah. We're in *trouble.*

SARAH

Oh, no, I'm *way* past the point of getting in trouble. Why I haven't had a period *for 15 years!*

ABBY

Dan, this isn't a good time. Maybe tomorrow at dinner.

DAN

Mom, I told you 11:00 o'clock.

CLAUDIA

No, Dan, you told Stan--

SARAH

Stanley.

CLAUDIA

Stanley, 11:00 o'clock.

SARAH

Dear Stanley. And he tried to bring me home then, but I wouldn't hear of it. The night was so young.

DAN

Well we have been worried sick; (to Claudia) your daughter hasn't slept a wink. You could have been killed or in some terrible accident for all we knew.

ABBY

Or chopped up by an ax murderer.

DAN

I was getting ready to call the police.

SARAH

The police! We didn't break any laws did we Claudia?

CLAUDIA (thinks, then)

I don't know about you, but for the antiquated laws of this state . . . I might have.

(More laughter.)

DAN (to Sarah)

That's it. You're grounded!

SARAH

I'm *what*?

DAN

You heard me--grounded.

(Uncontrollable laughter.)

SARAH

Did you hear that, Claudia? I'm grounded!

ABBY

Don't laugh, Mom. So are you!

CLAUDIA

Sarah, our children have just *grounded* us.

(Hysterical laughter.)

DAN

And Mom, I don't want you seeing Stan--

ABBY

Stanley.

DAN

Goddammit! It doesn't matter! I don't want you seeing--that man--again.

CLAUDIA (to Sarah)

Don't worry, Honey, I think you wore him out anyway.

DAN

Now go to your rooms both of you, and just . . . think about what you've done. We'll discuss this further tomorrow at dinner--when you have your wits about you.

SARAH

Don't forget . . . I'm cooking.

DAN

Jesus! Just go . . .

SARAH

Vegetarian we're having, but no wine. Gotta go straight . . . for straight arrow Peter.

(Sarah and Claudia stagger off arm in arm laughing and whispering together. Dan watches them for a long time then turns to Abby.)

DAN

Did my mother have on your mother's T-shirt?

ABBY

And jeans!

(LIGHTS FADE SLOWLY TO BLACK.
SLIDES BEGIN.)

ACT II, SCENE V
THE FOLLOWING EVENING
SCENE: LIGHTS COME UP SLOWLY in the kitchen the following evening. CLAUDIA, ABBY and DAN are seated at the kitchen table. SARAH is cooking, busying herself at the range and sink. Things are a little tense still from the night before.

SARAH
Don't wait on me; serve it while it's hot.

(Dan picks up a bowl of something and sniffs it.)

DAN
What's this shit?

ABBY
Dan!

DAN
I want to have *some* idea of what I'm eating.

ABBY
Well, would you please rephrase the question?

DAN
What this . . . shit?

CLAUDIA
Dan, that's no way to treat your mother.

DAN
What'd you make, Mom? Looks real . . . yummy.

SARAH
It's a vegetarian dish called Wheat Soy Varnishkas; it's made with soy grits, buckwheat oats and bulgur.

DAN
Great! Has anybody ever eaten it before?

SARAH
Don't be silly. Of course they have.

DAN
And lived to tell about it?

SARAH
To a ripe old age. Longevity is what vegetarian cooking is all about.

DAN
Well, it works for the animals anyway.

SARAH
Try some.

(Dan just stares at it.)

CLAUDIA
I'll have some!

(Dan passes the bowl, and Claudia serves herself.)

ABBY
Me too. It looks wonderful. (Under her breath.) Dan!

DAN
Soy grits and buckwheat oats?

SARAH
And bulgur.

DAN
Right. Don't want to forget that bulgur.

(Claudia and Sarah dig in and begin chewing.)

DAN
How is it?

(They chew and nod and try to smile and chew and chew some more.)

Chewy.

ABBY

Definitely . . . chewy.

CLAUDIA (nodding)

Mom, maybe you shouldn't . . .

ABBY

(Claudia signals she is okay and keeps chewing and trying to swallow. Finally she points at her glass of water which Dan hands to her. She gulps it down and gasps for breath. Abby gulps down a glass of water too.)

Everything okay?

SARAH

Seems to be a little chewy.

DAN

That's what molars are for.

SARAH

If you still have them. I'm sorry, Sarah, but those grits are giving me fits.

CLAUDIA

(Claudia exits.)

Sarah, did you soak the bulgur to soften it?

ABBY

In what?

SARAH

I'd better check on my mom. Excuse me.

ABBY

(Abby exits.)

Well, how do you like that?

SARAH

DAN

I haven't touched the stuff.

SARAH

You know what I mean. (Takes a seat across from Dan.) Well, I'm not afraid to try something new.

DAN

That was certainly the case last night.

SARAH

Dan, I'm your mother, not your daughter, and I don't need a lecture.

DAN (picking up the bowl)

And I don't need this, (picks up the bowl) but out of common courtesy to you, I'm going to give it a try.

(Sarah takes a bite first and begins to chew. She chews and chews and finally manages to swallow with great difficulty while Dan watches.)

SARAH

God, those poor girls.

DAN

It doesn't look half bad.

SARAH

It's not. It's *all* bad.

DAN

You shouldn't have tried something new.

SARAH

I wasn't even drinking!

DAN

Face it, Mom: Cooking is an art, and you're no artist.

SARAH

But I so much want to be.

DAN

It doesn't matter.

SARAH

It matters! You left because I couldn't cook.

DAN

I did not!

SARAH

Most boys run *home* to their mom's cooking; not you, you ran off and never came back!

DAN

I didn't run off.

SARAH

What do you call it?

DAN

I just . . . left.

SARAH

Same thing! As soon as you were able you went off to play somewhere else, then to school, to work, then to camp, anything to get away . . . from me. Only kid I ever saw who *insisted* on going to summer school. And once you left for college, you *never* came back.

DAN

Mom, it wasn't the cooking.

SARAH

I know that. But I don't know what it was. I never knew.

DAN

It's just that things were . . . difficult. I think maybe you tried too hard to be a good mom.

SARAH

All I ever wanted was to love you.

DAN

I know that.

SARAH

I don't understand what happened.(A beat.) It was me wasn't it?

DAN

Mom, you don't have to do this.

SARAH

I didn't know exactly know *how* to love you; I just knew that no child of mine would ever feel unloved.

DAN

And I didn't. (A beat.) But it was just *too* much. I didn't know what to do with that much--attention. It was stifling.

SARAH (a little lost)

I swore to myself on the day you were born that you would never know the kind of . . . rejection I experienced.

DAN

I don't understand. What rejection?

SARAH

It doesn't matter.

DAN

Yes, it does. *What* rejection?

SARAH

Mine.

DAN (gently)

Go on.

(He moves beside her.)

SARAH

My mother ran off with her lover when I was five-years-old. Deserted us. Left me alone with my father.

DAN

I thought your mother died.

SARAH

She did for me, at that moment..

DAN

But what about the accident? There was no accident?

SARAH

There was an accident . . . 10 years later. By then I didn't need a mother, not her anyway.

DAN

Your mother abandoned you?! (A beat.) You should have told me.

SARAH

There was no reason to tell you. It doesn't matter now anyway.

DAN

It *would* have! Maybe I would have understood better; maybe I would have done things differently.

SARAH

Water under the bridge.

DAN

Mom, it matters! It puts things in context; it gives me a picture of who I am and why I'm the kind of person I am. It clarifies a family portrait that was all murky and out of focus. (A beat.) Tell me about the accident, everything about it.

SARAH

What's to tell? (A beat.) My father went to bring her home; her lover had left her, so she wanted to come home, and even after ten years, he forgave her and was willing to take her back. I never understood why. We were fine; I'd learned to live without her. She didn't have to come back! (A beat.) On the way back from Denver is when he ran off the road. (A few beats.) You know the rest.

DAN

Yeah, I know the rest . . .

SARAH (breaking)

I didn't even want her back; she wasn't my mother; she was an embarrassment to me. I wanted *her* dead, but not Daddy!

DAN (embracing her)

Mom, it's okay. It wasn't your fault. You were 15; you couldn't have known.

SARAH

I *hated* her! She *left* me!

DAN

You should have told me.

SARAH

It didn't concern you.

DAN

But it *did*! Don't you see? (A beat.) By smothering me with a love you never got, you drove me away. I didn't know what to do with all your . . . attention--

SARAH

Not attention! Love!

DAN

Mom, it was overwhelming; I felt like a freak and had to get away. I didn't know that's what I was doing at the time; I was just a kid, but over the years, looking back on it, I figured it out, but what I didn't know--the thing I couldn't figure out--was why you were so much more loving than anybody else's mother. Now I know.

SARAH (a revelation)

All I ever wanted was to love you.(A beat.) And that's why you left!

DAN

I didn't know that's what I was doing at the time.

SARAH

Oh, god . . . !

DAN

You didn't know either. It's okay; it's okay.

SARAH

I never wanted you to be unhappy with me--not then, not now.

DAN

I'm not unhappy with you, Mom.

SARAH

You were last night; you grounded me.

DAN

Forget that!

SARAH

I can't. I made you unhappy.

DAN

I'm not unhappy.

SARAH

You *look* unhappy.

I'm sad . . . not unhappy.

DAN

What's the difference?

SARAH

The sadness is for you.

DAN

I've taken away your freedom.

SARAH

No you haven't.

DAN

I won't do anything that makes you unhappy.

SARAH

Oh, Mom . . . stop it. I'm free; I'm happy. I'm just not . . . as much of a son as I ought to be. I want to make for that; I want to make *you* happy.

DAN (breaking)

Does that mean I can have a cat?

SARAH (thinks, then)

Yeah, that's what it means: You can have a cat.

DAN (smiling)

(Abby suddenly enters in a huff.)

Did you see that?

ABBY

No. What?

DAN (covering)

Mother! She just left with a man.

ABBY

What?

DAN

Russ?

SARAH

No. ABBY

But she's grounded! DAN

Peter? SARAH

No, not Peter. ABBY

Went right out the front door? DAN

Right out--like a rocket. ABBY

Wasn't Stanley? SARAH

I thought Stanley was yours. ABBY

I did too. SARAH

And you told her she was grounded? DAN

Must have been Harold. SARAH

Yes, I told her! ABBY

What'd she say? DAN

Her exact words? ABBY

Yes. DAN

"Bug off, Mother."	ABBY
"Bug off, Mother?" She said that?	DAN
Those are her exact words.	ABBY
Oh that Sissy does have spirit!	SARAH
What shall we do?	DAN
I don't know . . . bug off?	ABBY
	(LIGHTS COME DOWN. SLIDES RUN DURING TRANSITION TO NEXT SCENE.)

ACT II, SCENE VI

SCENE: LIGHTS COME UP SLOWLY ON ABBY. She is talking on the phone with the local police department.

ABBY

Yes, that's right . . . missing persons. Two of them . . . my mother and my mother-in-law. They're missing together--as a team. Well . . . Claudia Adams, my mother, is 72 and about 5'6" with brownish hair and eyes. The last time I saw her she had on jeans and a white T-shirt with a scarlet A+ embroidered on it. Sarah Casey, my mother-in-law, is 68, about 5'2" and has grayish hair. I don't have any idea what she was wearing, if anything! My mother's car is gone so I assume they're in it . . . a pink Cadillac Coup Deville with vanity plates . . . My Life. Yes, well I think that maybe that's where the problems lies as well.

(DAN enters and rushes to Claudia.)

ABBY

My husband just came in . . . yes, that's Sarah's son, Dan Casey. No, I kept my maiden name; what difference does it make? Okay, yes, thank you, thank you. We'll be here.

DAN

Any word?

ABBY

Nothing.

DAN

What happened?

ABBY

They just up and left. Poof and they were gone, both of them. I came down from the studio at five, looked around, didn't see either of them so I checked their rooms. Some clothes were strewn about, their suitcases and toiletries were all gone, and they were nowhere in sight. Took my Shalimar too. Can you believe that?

DAN

Didn't they even leave a note?

ABBY

It's not a suicide; they; just ran off.

DAN

But why?

ABBY

I don't know! Yes, I do. No, I don't. I do know Mother was upset about being grounded.

DAN

It was just temporary.

ABBY

Not about the time limit. The grounding itself.

DAN

She was laughing about it!

ABBY

Yeah, when she was drunk. When she sobered up, she didn't think it was nearly so funny.

DAN

But we have to have . . . *some* sense of order around her, don't we?

ABBY

Order is okay. I think she was offended by you--*us*--trying to impose some kind of *control* on her life.

DAN

I didn't think it was that big of a deal.

ABBY

It wasn't to us. (A beat.) Still I don't understand why *your* mother would go. (A beat.) Did she say anything to you?

DAN

Nothing about running away.

ABBY

What *did* she say?

DAN

Oh, family stuff. Female talk. It was all convoluted and irrational.

ABBY

Tell me what she said.

DAN
It was nothing.

ABBY
Dan, tell me what she *said*.

DAN (thinks, then)
It's a difficult thing to explain; I mean, what she told me is very hard to comprehend and at the same time it makes everything else in our history so much more comprehensible.

ABBY
Explain.

DAN
Her mother abandoned her when she was five-years-old.

ABBY
What?

DAN
Ran away with a man, her lover. Abandoned my mom and her father; *that's* why Mom was raised by her aunts. (A beat.) I never knew.

ABBY
Then there wasn't an accident?

DAN
There was an accident. Ten years later, and it killed both of them. Her mother's lover left her for another woman, and Mom's father wanted her back. They were on their way home from Denver when he went off the road.

ABBY
Good God!

DAN
Mom was only 15 when it happened. Her mother was already dead as far as she was concerned.

ABBY
She must have been filled with feelings of guilt and adolescent rage--

DAN
And abandonment.

ABBY

None of which a child could fully understand.

DAN

She had this . . . family secret buried so deeply buried within herself that she didn't think it could damage anybody else. (A beat.) But it did! She loved me too much, and because I had no idea of where all that love was coming from, I couldn't love her enough.

ABBY

So her secret led to her being abandoned all over again . . . this time by you.

DAN

If she'd just told me! I didn't know she was living in such pain.

ABBY

That's probably why she drank.

DAN

Family secrets.

ABBY

Hurting everybody all these years.

DAN

Yeah. (A beat.) I feel like a heap of her Wheat Soy Varnishkas. And I think she ran away so I wouldn't be disappointed with her.

ABBY

With her what?

DAN

Her behavior. Her cooking. Her alcoholism. All of it.

ABBY

Are you?

DAN

I'm not disappointed; I'm *appalled*, but I want her back here. That's just . . . stuff to work on. I want her home. This is where she belongs.

(They embrace. Phone rings. Abby answers.)

ABBY (into phone)

Yes, this is she . . . good, where . . . no sign of them. . . . yes, all right, thank you. (Hangs up phone, then to Dan.) They found the car.

Where?
DAN

Abandoned on the expressway.
ABBY

Abandoned? What does that mean?
DAN

They don't know, but . . . there was no sign of foul play.
ABBY

Blood!?
DAN

God, you are such a pessimist!
ABBY

They're out there all alone.
DAN

And I miss them so much!
ABBY (breaking)

I do too, Baby.
DAN (holding her)

(There is the SOUND OF A CAR outside, a DOOR SLAMS and then VOICES.)

Thank you, Officer.
CLAUDIA (off stage)

We'll take care of your car, Ma'am. Don't worry about a thing.
OFFICER (off stage)

She's only worried because you called her, "Ma'am."
SARAH (off stage)

(The car drives off. CLAUDIA and SARAH enter, a little hesitantly, but in high spirits.)

Well, we're back!

CLAUDIA

Damn you!

ABBY (breaking)

(She races over and embraces her mother.)

ABBY

Don't you ever do that to us again.

(Dan tucks Sarah under his arm.)

DAN

You gave us quite a scare.

SARAH

I guess we're in some *real* trouble now.

DAN

No, you're not in trouble. You're in our . . . no, you're in *your* home. And we want you here.

SARAH

If we didn't believe that, we wouldn't have come back.

CLAUDIA

That and because we really had no place else to go.

SARAH

And no place else we wanted to go. (A beat.) But we need to talk rules.

CLAUDIA

No, no rules, except to respect each other's right to live a full and bountiful life.

DAN

Meaning what?

CLAUDIA

Meaning simply that we want to *live*! To live what's left of our lives unencumbered by petty conventions imposed on us by our children or a society that has no idea of how precious life is to . . .

SARAH

The elderly?

CLAUDIA

Mature individuals.

SARAH

I like that much better, Dear.

CLAUDIA

So, my children, can you live with us *living* with you or would you rather we just crawled off somewhere and died?

DAN and ABBY

No!

SARAH

We'll die soon enough as it is. But until that day comes your mother and I have decided not to allow any ridiculous rules to limit our capacity to enjoy life!

ABBY

And we won't make any; I promise you that. Just be with us here, where you belong.

DAN'

And to hell with conventions! Family is family. That's all that matters.

(All gather for a group hug. The PHONE RINGS. Sarah answers.)

SARAH

Hello . . . Amy . . . yes, we're just *fine*. Yes, he's right here . . . (Now to Dan.) Your daughter . . . she says she has, "news."

DAN

News!?! . . . Abby!

(BLACKOUT)