

MEET CUTE MEDIUM

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CHARACTERS:

ELIZA: 30's, been on the dating circuit for too long.

JONAS: 30's, hope springs eternal.

SETTING:

Zoom meeting room

TIME:

Now

SYNOPSIS:

At the suggestion of friends, Eliza, slightly jaded and Jonas, eternally hopeful have agreed to try a Zoom speed date. They have ten minutes to decide if there is chemistry and it will go further. Things start to go awry when Jonas begins talking to himself.

Eliza's screen lights up. She's the first to sign on. She adjusts her lighting, trying it at different angles to see how she looks best. She checks her hair and lipstick on the screen.

ELIZA

(Talking to herself.)

What am I doing? Why do I let people talk me into these things? (A ping) "Once more unto the breach..."

Eliza perks up immediately and smiles. JONAS's screen lights up.

JONAS

Sorry. Am I late?

ELIZA

No. No. I just got here myself.

There is the discomfort that comes with being face to face on a computer with a stranger.

JONAS

Got your coffee?

ELIZA

(Holding up her cup.)

Got it. (Beat) Cream, no sugar

JONAS

(Holding up his cup.)

Black, three sugars.

ELIZA

Our coffees are incompatible. Not a great start.

JONAS

Speed Zooming. Whoda thunk!

ELIZA

I know, right? Ten minutes to get to know someone! Feels a little desperate.

JONAS

I say we make the best of it. How bad could it be?

ELIZA

For one thing, I can't *stand* seeing myself on this thing!

JONAS

I'm not wearing pants!

ELIZA

That is way too much information for a first meet.

He cups his ear and looks away.

JONAS

I can't hear you.

ELIZA

Are you talking to me?

JONAS

Sorry. What?

ELIZA

Is everything ok?

JONAS

Yeah. Yeah. I got distracted.

ELIZA

Seven minutes left and all I know is how you take your coffee and that you don't wear pants.

JONAS

Shorts! I'm wearing shorts. It was a joke!

ELIZA

Good to know.

Jonas cups his ear again.

ELIZA (CON'T)

Are you hard of hearing? (Louder) *I can speak up!*

JONAS

No. No. It's...when we know each other better I'll explain.

ELIZA

Ah! You're saving it for THE PURGE!

JONAS

The what?

ELIZA

Failed relationship, bad marriages, divorces; all that stuff. It all comes pouring out on the third date. If there is one.

JONAS

It does?

ELIZA

When was the last time you went on a date?

JONAS

A long time. What happened to getting to know someone in your own time?

ELIZA

If you've made it to a third date it means you must like each other, right?--it would be unfair to move forward to a *fourth* date until all the cards are on the table. The *fourth* date is usually...you know...when things gets...intimate.

JONAS

Uhuh. In other words...a defined timetable for...just about everything. (Cupping his ear again.)

ELIZA

You're doing it again!

JONAS

(Laughing)

I'm listening to the clock ticking! Our time is going fast. Tell me about yourself.

ELIZA

Perfect! I have a job interview tomorrow and I'm not very skillful at "embellishing" my successes and "reframing" my failures. Talking about myself with you will help. I'm open to any suggestions when I finish. I *really* need this job.

JONAS

WOW! You need to lighten up. No wonder she won't shut up.

ELIZA

She? Who? Do you have someone there with you?

JONAS

No! I'm sorry. I can't listen to both of you at the same time. Hold on.(Cupping his ear; turning away slightly and whispering.) She is. I know! I'm trying.

ELIZA

Uh, Jonas...I'm pressing Leave Meeting now--

JONAS

No, please! Don't do that! Let me explain!(Beat)Someone is talking to me.

ELIZA

You said no one was there!

JONAS

Not...here, exactly.

ELIZA

Oh my God! What were George and Marianne thinking when they suggested we meet?

JONAS

That we'd make a good match!

ELIZA

Did they know you had an imaginary friend? Listen Jonas, friends introduced us so I don't want to hurt your feelings but--

JONAS

OK. Ok. When I'm with someone that lost a...I...um... hear...promise me if I ask you this question you won't click off.

ELIZA

Fine. We only have four minutes left anyway.

JONAS

Did someone you love recently pass away?

ELIZA

Okay! That's it! I'm done--

JONAS

Your grandmother?

ELIZA

All you had to do was look on my Facebook page to know that. Or Instagram.

JONAS

I didn't. And I don't. Use Facebook. Or Instagram. Her name is...that can't be right. Bub. Bubble. Bumble bee?

ELIZA

Very funny! Bubbe? Please! Everyone that's Jewish has a Bubbe.

JONAS

I didn't know you were Jewish.

ELIZA

Eliza Rosenblum! What did you think I was?

JONAS

We're not allowed to give last names, remember?

ELIZA

George must have said something. Is this your shtick? You actually get girls this way?

JONAS

I wish it were. It's a nuisance. It started when I was a kid--

ELIZA

This has got to be the strangest date I've ever been on-- and believe me, I been on some real doozies. I went on a date with a guy that brought his *cat* with him. He put the carrier on the table and the cat ate with us. He ordered her the salmon special and talked more to her than he did to me.

JONAS

My dog eats dog food from a dish on the floor, and we rarely carry on an extended conversation. (Beat) Not even a smile? You seem a little jaded.

ELIZA

"Everyone seems normal until you get to know them."

JONAS

Sorry. (Hand to ear) Hang on. She won't stop talking!

ELIZA

Case in point! Do you really expect me to believe that my Bubbe is talking into your ear? (Beat) Okay. I'll bite. Ask her if I'm getting the job tomorrow.

JONAS

Whoa--she talks fast! (Listening) Uhuh. Really? Are you sure? (To Eliza) She says if you get it, don't take it.

ELIZA

What?

JONAS

She says you're working on something more important and--

ELIZA

My app? Ha! Good try! Marianne knows about my app. She must have told George about it and he told you--

JONAS

She doesn't want you wasting your time at a desk job.

ELIZA

Easy for her to say. She doesn't pay rent anymore.

JONAS

Hold on. (Hand to ear) She saying, "That's why I left you twenty thousand dollars." Peanut?

ELIZA

...Peanut? That was her nickname for me. How did? What else?

JONAS

She says her diamond earrings look good on you.

ELIZA

OH MY GOD! (Looking up) I used the money to pay off my credit cards. The interest was killing me. I'm so sorry Bubbe!

JONAS

She really believes in this app. What is it?

ELIZA

It's silly. It's a--a MATE-o-meter. You download the app and it comes with this special bracelet that you wear and it measures your heart rate, changes in body temp--stuff like that. I include a set of questions and it measures your functions while answering them. (Beat) That's an in-app purchase.

JONAS

So, basically a dating app?

ELIZA

Not to *find* a date--to help you decide whether you want *another* date. You both get a score and take it from there--or not. No more second guessing. It's all right there.

JONAS

Like after an Uber ride, when everyone gets rated?

ELIZA

Hopefully, more sophisticated, but...sort of, yes. Did Bubbe say anything else?

JONAS

That I'm a handsome devil and not to let me get away!

ELIZA

(Laughing)

She did not!

JONAS

I figured with her blessing I could *by-pass* the MATE-o-meter.

ELIZA

Bubbe is old world. Unless you're a doctor or a lawyer you're not even in the running.

JONAS

Does a dentist count?

ELIZA

Oh, God, NO! You're a dentist?

JONAS

I feel sorry for dentists. It's a *date*, not a root canal.

ELIZA

Wait a minute! You texted you were an electrician?

JONAS

I am. I'm an "electro" physiologist.

ELIZA

A cardiologist? You're a cardiologist!!!?

JONAS

Ouch! I think your Bubbe just broke into a tap dance. Women have a misconception about doctors. I'm paying off college loans, and will be for a very long time.

ELIZA

I'm in the same boat, only my boat is sinking.

JONAS

There's one problem with your app.

ELIZA

Which is?

JONAS

Why pay for something that's right in front of you? The eyes are the window to the soul. That's all the "data" anyone needs to know if there's chemistry.

ELIZA

So all my work is for nothing? Bubbe's wrong?

JONAS

I have a hunch your app might have medical uses. It could be used to help monitor people in my line of work.

ELIZA

You really think so?

JONAS

We could discuss it on our second date? Before THE PURGE!

ELIZA

What does Bubbe say about that?

JONAS

She went back to her card game. She has a full house.

ELIZA

Alone at last!

They laugh. A moment of real connection.

ELIZA (CON'T)

You do realize the second date requires cooking an entire meal?

JONAS

(Teasing her.)

It's a big commitment.

ELIZA

We get a whole hour before they throw us off.

JONAS

I think we can handle it. Do you drink wine?

ELIZA

Red.

JONAS

White. Thank goodness we provide our own!

ELIZA

(Holding up her coffee cup.)

We don't need any more beverage drama!

An alarm.

ELIZA

The one minute warning. When should we...?

JONAS

Tomorrow. I want to hear about your interview. And next time--

ELIZA

No Bubbe!

JONAS

I'll tell her to behave!

ELIZA

I'm going on a second date with a penniless cardiologist who talks to dead people. And to think I almost cancelled!

JONAS

"If you don't go, you won't know."

ELIZA

Bubbe always used to say that!

JONAS

I know. (Pointing to his ear) She's back. Thirty seconds left. (He looks away quickly) Tell me to shut up if I'm out of line, but how about we break with protocol, and maybe...meet in person for "THE PURGE"?

ELIZA

Bubbe's suggestion?

JONAS

Yeah.

ELIZA

She must really like you.

JONAS

I know she loves you, so I must be doing something right. What do you say? *No bracelet!*

ELIZA

You think I'm going to trust a potential "fourth" date to an app? No way! Like you said, it's all in the eyes...

The final alarm sounds. Both
their screens go black.

ELIZA (CON'T)

(To herself; smiling)

And I like what I see.

BLACKOUT

BENCHED - A One-Act Play for Two Women

CHARACTERS

Mary A woman in her 60s-70s, dour, prim, bitter.

Beth A woman in her 50s-60s, bubbly, friendly, fashionable.

(Ages stated within script may be modified, but the women should appear to be no more than about 10-15 years apart.)

SYNOPSIS

Two women with apparently not much in common meet by coincidence and find themselves opening up to one another. Do they have more in common than they realize?

Setting: A park bench.

Time: Present day.

(Lights up on the tired and clearly annoyed MARY. She sits on a park bench alone, maskless, fiddling through her purse, shooing "birds" away, fanning herself. After a few minutes to establish the scene, BETH enters wearing a nun's habit and a mask.)

BETH

Mind if I join you? *(removing mask)* I'm fully vaccinated and we're outside, so...

MARY

(Putting purse on other side, moving over) Of course. I'm vaccinated too. And you're not likely to lie, are you?

BETH

What? Well, no. Thanks. *(sighs)* It's a beautiful day. *(Takes sandwich out of small bag, breaks off a piece for "birds.")* Here ya'go. *(to MARY; sits)* I love birds, don't you? Especially Florida birds.

MARY

I despise everything about Florida, Sister.

BETH

Sister! Oh! *(Laughs)* I was at rehearsal. I'm only playing a nun. Good heavens! I'm like the opposite of a nun! *(laughs)* I may end up stripping with this heat. A nun stripping at the park! That would get some attention! *(eyes heavenward)* I promise, I've got clothes on underneath. *(Removes headpiece and fans herself.)*

(MARY resumes reading.)

BETH (CONT.)

Do you really hate Florida? It's paradise! The weather-

MARY

(a favorite complaint) The weather! Thankfully I went through menopause up north - I wouldn't have survived hot flashes down here. *(surprising herself)* I don't think I've said that out loud to another soul. Give me the mountains any day. Four seasons. A fire in the fireplace - an electric fireplace. Or gas. No doubt my husband would manage to blow us up.

BETH

I love a roaring wood fire. I'm more the stretched-out-naked-on-a-rug-with-my-man-and-a-bottle-of-wine kind of gal.

MARY

Mmm.

BETH

(Wistfully) Not that we've made love in front of a roaring fire. Not yet. He's in there. *(indicates)* Outpatient. I wanted to check on him after rehearsal but ...

MARY

Perhaps later.

BETH

Do you have someone in the hospital? Such a pleasant place for one, here by the park. Very peaceful.

MARY

(aside) It was.

BETH

I grew up in the mountains so I agree they're lovely. But Florida! The beach, the lakes -

MARY

(Closing her book) The mosquitoes, the love bugs, the palmetto bugs ... and yes. My husband's also in Outpatient. He'll probably be discharged soon. Perhaps now would be a good time to check-- *(starts to gather things but stops when Beth continues)*

BETH

They let me in but a doctor was talking to him, so I didn't interrupt.

MARY

Surprising.

BETH

I figured I'd have lunch before trying again. And I found you! What a nice surprise, meeting someone new.

(They resume activities - MARY takes her book back out; BETH eats a little of her sandwich.)

BETH (CONT.)

What I love about Florida really isn't Florida at all. *(can't help herself)* I found the love of my life here! Anything related to him, I adore by extension, if you must know.

MARY

If I must.

Benched - 4

BETH

I don't think I ever had it this bad. Never. We're like teenagers! It's amazing.

MARY

And unsettling, coming from a nun. (*They share a laugh.*) I apologize if I was short. I hope your "love" is okay. (*confiding*) I watch a lot of medical shows on TV so I always ask questions. My husband was a bit cavalier about the whole thing. Fortunately he has me to keep an eye on him.

BETH

Nothing serious, then?

MARY

(*rolls eyes*) With him, it's always something. Accident-prone. We've been married half a century and I could write a book about all the times I've had to take care of him. He's like a child, really. He gave up smoking years ago, but he drinks far too much.

BETH

(*dryly*) I wonder why.

MARY

He even rides a motorcycle.

BETH

I love riding!

MARY

They're death traps! And at our age? Not that I ever rode with him when we were young. Come to think of it, he started riding soon after we were married. (*surprised*) I'm usually more reticent with people I don't know. I'm usually more reticent with people I do know.

BETH

Maybe it's finally being out and about again. (*laughs*) Or the habit. Just call me Sister Beth. And you're--

MARY

Mary - more appropriate to your attire! You're easy to talk to. I know I can be a bit prickly.

BETH

Really. (*beat*) I'm just naturally curious about people, I guess. And happy. When people are happy they're friendlier, don't you think? Oh, I didn't mean to imply--

MARY

No problem. My husband says I'm easily offended, but he's wrong. As he is about just about everything! He gets on my nerves constantly but I don't get close enough to others to pay them any mind. I prefer my own company. Maybe it is the habit. I was raised Catholic. Perhaps my brain thinks I'm at confession.

BETH

That's easily remedied. (*stands and quickly removes outfit, under which she wears a simple but sexy sundress while humming loudly a striptease tune, which makes Mary laugh; sits.*)

MARY

Aren't you worried about sunburn? Or arrest?

BETH

(*laughs*) I wanted to give my guy something to think about while he's lying there. If you prefer your own company, I should go--

MARY

Stay. You remind me of our daughter. Of course you're much older. She's outgoing, too. (*pause*) I was cooped up inside for so long, this is nice. My husband works from home. Sometimes I have to just stand there waiting for him to get off the phone.

BETH

Maybe it's an ... important ... phone call?

MARY

To him? Doubtful. I watch TV, he works. On weekends, he rides. He's gone all day and sometimes into the night. (*gesturing*) "Go ahead! Knock yourself out. No thank you!"

BETH

I love riding, the wind whipping, (*suggestively*) my legs around him. At stoplights, people stare like they wish they were us. Squeezing my arms around him, pressing my brea-- well. You probably don't want to hear--

MARY

(*sniffs*) Certainly not. To each his own. I must say my husband's always in a good mood when he comes home from riding. (*Beat, then softer*) That's nice to see. (*Recovering*) I'm happier after not dealing with him all day.

(*They sit in silence for few moments.*)

BETH

So, you've been married 50 years? That's incredible!

MARY

Incredibly challenging. Under this dye job, I have the gray hair to prove it.

BETH

I'm envious of long marriages. Maybe there'll be a rash of divorces after the shutdown. Too much time together. I mean, if you're miserable. (*sighs*) What I wouldn't give to spend all that time with -

MARY

You're not married?

BETH

I wish.

MARY

Not living together, I hope. Call me old-fashioned but I still think that's wrong. Why buy the cow if you're getting the milk for free, if you ask me.

BETH

(*laughs*) I'm the cow in this equation? If I didn't love being milked, maybe I'd agree! In the abstract, I do agree. My parents were married forever but I don't think they were as happy as I am now, even with things as they are.

MARY

Marriage would change that.

BETH

I'd love the chance to find out.

MARY

I'm surprised you never married. You've still got your figure - as anyone can see in that get-up. And you're pretty ... in your own way.

BETH

Thank you? I was married. Now divorced.

MARY

Divorce is a sin that trades a short hell for a long one, if you ask me. Why hasn't Mr. Perfect popped the question?

BETH

It's complicated.

MARY

Something's wrong in paradise, if you ask me.

BETH

(lightly) But I didn't. I said it was complicated. He, um, is married.

MARY

I thought so. Men. Literally has his cake and eats it too. *(clucks her tongue in disapproval)*

BETH

First the cow, now the cake. Super.

MARY

You gave up a marriage to be with a cheater, what did you expect?

BETH

I didn't expect anything. But he wasn't the reason I divorced. My husband just quit. Years ago. I was a good wife and that's the God's honest truth.

MARY

(shakes head) Relationships are hard work.

BETH

I don't think they have to be. But I really tried. Two people exchange vows. If both don't keep showing up emotionally ... I said he quit but that's generous. He never really came to work.

MARY

Sounds like every marriage I know. Men are stupid and dense. Yours, mine. No doubt Mr. Perfect Cheater is too. My husband and I were never on the same page about most things, but we're still together.

BETH

And after 50 years, you're ... happily married?

MARY

What does that even mean? We share a daughter, a house, the checkbook. A bed. Sort of.

BETH

Are you still in love, though? I planned to do the "till death us do part" thing, until I decided that holding on, white-knuckled, all for the sake of appearances - why? Divorcing was one of the most honest things I've ever done. And now, to find passion! Real love. Sure beats just going through the motions.

MARY

Adolescent hormones, more like. I don't think "in love" cuts it.

BETH

(sad laugh) You sound like my ex. He'll never remarry. I suppose I may never either, but not by choice.

MARY

I've seen it a hundred times. You think Mr. Milkman's "in love" but he chooses not to be with you? Sounds fishy, if you ask me.

BETH

(tired of the phrase) Were you ever in love?

MARY

He made me laugh. But I soon tired of his jokes. I came to resent him. *(shakes her head)* I love the idea of him. He pays the bills and cooks. I clean up the kitchen - unless there's something on TV I want to watch.

BETH

(dryly) Sounds like bliss.

MARY

(shrugs) We're like everyone our age. What romance there was is over but we're not the kind of people who get divorced. Too embarrassing, announcing to the world that you failed.

BETH

Ouch. My husband and I did fail. You think I broke my vows but he broke his long before. (stands and paces) I was like a plant withering in the sun, even after the divorce. Then someone came along and poured water on me. How could I not respond? (sits) I didn't mean to pry. It's just... I'll never be married 50 years to the man I adore. May never be married to him at all. And you've been married 50 years to a man you don't love, apparently. It doesn't seem fair.

MARY

Fair. Love. I haven't thought about love in decades. I suppose you could say I'm "in love" with my comfortable, predictable life.

BETH

That's not enough for me. I don't expect you to understand. How could you? I don't understand it myself. Funny, though. Something drew me here. I felt an instant connection with you. Clearly not because we think alike.

MARY

The only thing we seem to have in common is that we're women.

BETH

Women with men.

MARY

I've only known one man in my life in the Biblical sense, sister. (They share a chuckle.) I was relieved to see that go. The touching, the smell. We're just roommates now. And perfectly content.

BETH

Thank God our "adolescent hormones" are still alive and well! (*pauses with a little "business" - feeds ducks, rummages in purse, etc.*) My husband was content. I tried to be sweet or sexy or smart enough for him to notice. Then the proverbial light bulb went off. It wasn't about me! He didn't want intimacy. Sounds like you're both happier without it too. And it works for you.

MARY

You're right. We found a way, despite a counselor's advice to the contrary years ago.

BETH

What advice?

MARY

(*frowns*) She made it sound like I was the reason things went sour! Said I was too negative! Why should I put a positive spin on things if it isn't positive? I just call it like I see it.

BETH

And?

MARY

She encouraged him to leave. Said we had a toxic marriage. The nerve.

BETH

But he stayed.

MARY

He'll always stay. I was a little worried then, but now? He's too old to do anything else with his life, not that he has that much imagination.

BETH

Are you sure?

MARY

Absolutely. He aged out of any ridiculous romantic notions long ago. Maybe the motorcycle's next. Such a foolish risk.

BETH

You still care.

MARY

He needs me. Although he did offer to buy me a place in the mountains.

BETH

So he acknowledges you're unhappy here.

MARY

He only brings it up when I get angry. He doesn't mean it. I do have a nasty temper sometimes. And yet he's still around.

BETH

Fifty years is a long time. Such history.

MARY

A history of me putting up with his selfishness. He even refuses to retire, says the job keeps him young. Other couples our age are going on cruises and getting a two-bedroom condo with separate bathrooms. My dream house. No more cleaning up after him.

BETH

What I wouldn't give to... I mean, I love what we have but I'll always want more.

MARY

If he's as hairy as mine is, you wouldn't say that. You should see the bathroom when he gets out of the shower! *(pauses)* I'm afraid you're destined to live alone. I feel sorry for you, Beth. I really do.

BETH

Don't. When we're together, it's perfection. And a little perfection goes a long way. *(grins)* Quite long.

MARY

(Shakes head, looks at her watch) I should probably check on my husband. *(stands)*

BETH

(stands also) I should go back, too. It's been nice talking with you ... mostly. *(They laugh.)*

MARY

(gathers her things) Onward and upward. Room 115, here I come.

BETH

115? But that's my--

(The women stare at one another for a beat.)

BETH/MARY

Connor?

(Blackout. Curtain.)

THE END.

PROPS

Park bench.

MARY should be dressed conservatively, but expensively.
A purse or bag, a book.

BETH wears black flats with a matching sundress, under a simple nun's habit and headpiece that can be removed quickly. A plain black bag to stuff her nun outfit in. A sandwich. For "business" perhaps a script - *Sound of Music, Nonsense*, etc. - that supports her play role.

Optional: Background sounds of water birds.

IF YOU KNEW

CHARACTERS

<u>SELMA:</u>	Sarah's daughter	58	Female
<u>SOPHIA:</u>	Sarah's daughter	54	Female
<u>SABRINA:</u>	Sarah's daughter	48	Female
<u>WENDY:</u>	Sarah's friend	76	Female

Place

Sarah's Home

Time

Anytime

SETTING: Home of deceased mother. Two chairs, love seat, coffee table, small table with drawer, empty brown box for packing affect.

AT RISE: Living room, no one on stage.

(Front door opens three women dressed in black or grey walk in, each holding a white carnation. One carrying Memorial Program.)

SELMA

This place feels warm.

SOPHIA

I can feel mama in the room.

SABRINA

It's her spirit.

(Puts Memorial Program on coffee table.)

SELMA

Don't tell me you still go to those hocus pocus meetings?

SABRINA

I won't but to answer or not answer your question, it's mythology.

SOPHIA

Mama said you were a reincarnation of our Great Grandmother, Margaret. She had an open mind, and a free spirit whatever that means. I don't think anybody is free.

SELMA

Yeah Sabrina, I also feel her spirit in the room. I will always miss mama's embrace. She would pull you right up against her. Wrap her arms around you, her cheek against yours and all her love would flow through you. She was so beautiful.

SABRINA

Mama always said, it didn't matter what we choose to do in life, but it was our job not to die before them. This is like a Greek tragedy. First papa and now mama. I guess they didn't trust us. Let me see if I can find us some water.

(MORE)

SABRINA (CONT'D)

(Exists to kitchen.)

SOPHIA

(Looks around)

Not much left.

SELMA

There's more to pack upstairs.

SOPHIA

What a wonderful service. I didn't know mama had so many friends. Listening to those stories mama was enjoying her life, it helped me. I mean I don't feel as bad now knowing we all lived so far from her.

SELMA

Those were her church friends. All her friends attended church. They had that connection. She spoke to me about them all the time.

SABRINA

(Returns with three plastic cups. Puts them on coffee table.)

Everything is packed up but I found these plastic cups, here's some water. You know I said hello to Mrs. Ferguson but didn't get a chance to speak with her. I remembered them having problems with their son. Whatever happened to him?

SELMA

Oh, you mean Eric the gay one, ask Sophia.

(Picks up cup and drinks.)

SOPHIA

(annoyed)

Oh please Selma.

(to SABRINA)

He's an attorney and doing very well. His parents are proud of him. You know I helped his mom through some tough times when he came out. His father took it the hardest.

SELMA

Life is not supposed to be like that.

(Puts cup down.)

SOPHIA

Selma *if you knew* someone you loved, cared about and they came out to you perhaps you might feel differently. You didn't know Eric. That family went through a lot. His mother said he gave up wrestling and with that a full scholarship; several colleges wanted him. He didn't want any problems with the team or the school once he came out. He focused on his studies and became an attorney. He's a kind human being. My family loved him.

SELMA

Mama raised us to have our own opinion, to stick to what we believe and I don't believe in that.

SOPHIA

Yes she did and she also taught us to keep an open mind about life. I didn't understand it then but I do now. I try to look at things from a different perspective. I've learned so much about myself and other people. I'm not as judgmental as I used to be.

SELMA

Maybe you have some of our Great Grandmother in you too. Open mind and free spirit. I have children to protect. We weren't raised like that.

SOPHIA

I wasn't as open minded and free spirit as you think. I remember coming home, crying while I prayed that none of my children would ever say those words to me. I felt like such a hypocrite. I just knew they were a good family going through a painful life event. I couldn't see myself not liking Eric any more just because of *that*.

SABRINA

(changes the conversation)

Oh! Wasn't that a funny story about mama at the exercise class? What's that lady's name, Wendy something?

(Picks up the Memorial Program.)

SABRINA (cont'd)

Here she is Wendy C. Whelan. Isn't there a ballerina named Wendy Whelan?

SOPHIA

I don't know, what story?

SELMA

You missed it, that's when you helped the lady and her daughter with the crying babies to their car.

SOPHIA

I did hear some of the laughter. So what was the story?

SABRINA

(giggles)

She and mama were at a fitness class, they were on their backs. When they brought their legs up, knees to their chest mama farted.

SOPHIA

Mama farted?

(breaks out laughing along with SELMA)

SABRINA

Yeah, well mama could not stop laughing and farted again. Some of the women were laughing so hard they peed a little. When they got up you could see the wet leotards. Hilarious! She left right after telling that story. She seemed to know mama so well. Mama never mentioned her to me, you?

SOPHIA

No, but she's going to stop by and drop off some books she borrowed from mama.

SELMA

(Opens desk drawer, pulls out an envelope.)

She never mentioned her to me either. What's this?

SABRINA

What's that?

SELMA

An envelope addressed to Charlie.

SOPHIA

Who's Charlie?

SELMA

Heck if I know.

(to SABRINA)

What do you think?

SABRINA

Maybe it's something we shouldn't read, you know something personal.

SOPHIA

Is it sealed?

SELMA

No.

SOPHIA

Then read it.

SELMA

(Takes letter out and starts reading.)

My Dear Friend and Love. There I said it, Love. Well I wrote it, we never said it to each other but we both know we did Love.

(Stops, raises her head and looks at them.)

SOPHIA

Go on.

SELMA

(Continues reading)

I thank you for coming into my life when I most needed a friend. Never thought it would be more than that. I know you felt the same. Though we gently kissed once, holding your hand while we sat on the sofa was more than enough to express our friendship and Love. Our conversations sustained me along with my precious girls. Though I lost my wonderful husband James so early in life, I've been blessed with a wonderful life. Thank you for being part of it. Love Sarah.

SABRINA

So mama had a lover.

SOPHIA

Maybe if we lived closer we might have met Charlie.

SABRINA

If mama liked or loved this guy he must be a good person.

SELMA

I don't know what to say. Why wouldn't she mention him to me?

(Puts the letter back in the envelope and leaves it on the desk. Looks into the open draw and pulls out more envelopes.)

SELMA (cont'd)

There are more envelopes in here. One with each of our names. Funny these are sealed.

(Hands them out, the DOORBELL rings. Stops them from opening their envelopes they put them down. SABRINA opens the door.)

SABRINA

Oh hello Mrs. Whelan, come in.

WENDY

(Hands books to SABRINA.)

Oh please call me Wendy. I borrowed these books from Sarah, wanted to give them back.

SABRINA

(Takes books and puts them down.)

We were just laughing about your story. Mama's fitness class, that was so funny. Please sit.

WENDY

You had to be there to know how funny it really was, I was one of those who peed a little.

(Sits down on sofa, they also sit.)

SELMA

Mama never mentioned you to us, yet you spoke so intimately about her. You seem to know her well.

WENDY

She never mentioned me?

SOPHIA

You look surprised.

WENDY

Well we sat on this very sofa and she talked about you girls all the time and your father, James. What a love story. I travelled a lot and so did Sarah.

SELMA

Wait a minute, mama travelled?

WENDY

Well through her books anyway.

SELMA

Oh, wasn't ready for another surprise.

WENDY

She could talk about places I've been to as if she had been there. I just thought she might have mentioned me to you.

SABRINA

How did you meet mama?

WENDY

(big smile)

I met Sarah while volunteering at a homeless shelter. I'll always remember her first hug. She pulled me right up against her, wrapped her arms around me, her cheek to mine. I felt as if I was hugged by an angel. She kept trying to get me to join her church. I told her I would just volunteer there. So we would go around town helping different organizations. She was so beautiful all the men wanted to talk to her even men several years younger than her. What a wonderful human being.

SELMA

You weren't part of her church?

WENDY

I'm not part of any church.

SELMA

You're not into religion?

SABRINA

Selma that's personal.

SELMA

It's just that I find it a little strange. Mama's friends were all from her church. They had that connection.

WENDY

That's okay. To answer your question no I'm not.

SELMA

What do you believe?

WENDY

I had to give up on religion in order to keep faith in God. I believe we are here to help one another through this journey that can be overwhelmingly painful as it is joyful.

SABRINA

I like that, I see why you and mama were friends.

SOPHIA

You could have kept the books.

WENDY

No, they needed to be back here besides it was important for me to meet you. Well I should be going, I am sure you have a lot to do.

(They all get up and she hugs each one and walks toward the door.)

SELMA

(Picks up cups to clear table.)

Oh, Mrs. Whelan, I mean Wendy maybe you can help us out. Mama left an envelope addressed to Charlie. Do you know who *he* is?

WENDY

(She looks at the others and back to SELMA.)

I'm Charlie.

SELMA

(Cups instantly drop from hands.)

Oh no!

SABRINA

Oh, *Wendy C. Whelan*.

WENDY

That was my Grandfather's name.

SOPHIA

(Goes to desk, picks up envelope and gives it to WENDY.)

Well then this envelope belongs to you. It wasn't sealed.

WENDY

(looks at envelope)

Maybe it was meant to be read.

(Walks to the door and turns.)

WENDY (cont'd)

Sarah was a wonderful person, she was my friend.

(She exits)

(They are left stunned. SOPHIA and
SABRINA pick up their envelopes.
SELMA just stands in place. SOPHIA picks
up SELMA's envelope and hands it to her.
She turns SELMA towards her and wraps
her arms around her cheek to cheek.)

FADE TO BLACK.

From Across a Crowded Room

*(MELANIE sits on a barstool, sipping a cocktail. She is wearing a cardigan and skirt.
NICK approaches, carrying a beer)*

Nick

(Referring to the barstool next to Melanie) Is this seat taken?

Melanie

I'm not sure.

Nick

It's a yes or no question.

Melanie

There *was* someone here. I'm not sure if he's coming back.

Nick

His drink is empty and he's left a tip. I think that's a pretty good indication that he's not coming back.

Melanie

You're probably right.

Nick *(Sits)*

I saw you from across the room –

Melanie

You're joking, right?

Nick

Excuse me?

Melanie

“I saw you from across the room and I couldn't help noticing that you were drinking alone.” It's what the last guy said. I was hoping you'd be more original.

Nick

You didn't let me finish. I was going to say that I couldn't help but notice that you had lipstick on your teeth.

(Melanie grabs a handkerchief from her pocketbook and wipes her teeth)

Melanie

It's no wonder that guy was looking at me funny.

Nick

He still should have asked you for your number. *I* definitely would have.

Melanie

Because you can appreciate me in spite of my flaws?

Nick

Because I really like the way you fill out that sweater.

Melanie

Typical bullshit male response.

Nick

Hey, I just figured that any girl who fails to take notice of the lipstick on her teeth would be confident enough in herself to hear the truth. I guess I was wrong.

Melanie

I am perfectly capable of hearing the truth.

Nick

Good, 'cause I've gotta tell you, your ass ain't so bad either.

Melanie

(Beat) On second thought, I believe this seat *is* taken.

Nick

Coward.

Melanie

Creep.

Nick

That wasn't the first thing I noticed about you, you know.

Melanie

Oh? Some other body part caught your fancy?

Nick

Yes, actually. It was your finger.

Melanie

(Flips him the bird) This one?

Nick

Close. The finger sporting the little gold band with the sparkly thing on it.

Melanie

Some would call it a diamond ring.

Nick

Tomay-to, tomah-to. It signifies some sort of attachment to another person...a symbol of devotion, I believe. Correct me if I'm wrong.

Melanie

You caught me.

Nick

It's kind of hard to ignore. Married?

Melanie

Is that your final guess?

Nick

I only get one?

Melanie

That's right.

Nick

Then that's my guess.

Melanie

I could be divorced. Maybe I never got around to pawning the ring.

Nick

I don't buy it. Everything about you screams married and bored.

Melanie

Well, there is that. (*Beat*) What else have you surmised?

Nick

I suspect that you're quite the little firecracker in the bedroom.

Melanie

Wouldn't *you* like to know.

Nick

Was that a question? Because, if it is, the answer is yes.

Melanie

It's another way of saying that you'll never find out.

Nick

You seriously underestimate my persuasive capabilities.

Melanie

Suppose you're right. Suppose somehow I become smitten by your charms. Imagine how disappointed you'll feel to discover that you can't handle me.

Nick

How do you know what I can or cannot handle? Maybe you couldn't handle *me*. Did you think of that?

Melanie

I think you'd say anything to get in my pants. (*Looks down*) Skirt. Whatever.

Nick

So, what makes *you* so special? What's the craziest thing *you've* ever done?

Melanie

The craziest thing?

Nick

Sexually speaking. C'mon, let's see if I can handle it.

Melanie

And why should I share that information with you?

Nick

I'm a stranger, for one thing.

Melanie

All the more reason.

Nick

But who better to tell all your deep dark secrets to than to someone who most likely will never see you again?

Melanie

So, if I told you that I once had sex on a bed of marshmallow crème, you wouldn't feel obligated to tell your friends?

Nick

Marshmallow crème?

Melanie

For instance.

Nick

No, I'd probably have to tell my friends about *that*. But really, what are the chances that we share the same acquaintances?

Melanie

I know a few people.

(Nick looks around the room)

Nick

Rocco, the waiter. You know him?

Melanie

Intimately.

Nick

Tell me you haven't slept with Rocco.

Melanie

What can I say? He likes what's on the menu.

Nick

And Lenny, the bartender?

Melanie

We occasionally mix it up.

Nick

The *maitre d'*?

Melanie

Oscar? Without reservations.

Nick

Those two college kids in the corner.

Melanie

I give them a passing grade.

Nick

The guy coming out of the bathroom?

Melanie

He's my number one guy.

Nick

Is there anyone here you haven't slept with?

Melanie

Well, there's you.

Nick

The monkey in the middle. Can I ask you something?

Melanie

If you must.

Nick

Why all these tasteless affairs? You have a man at home. Don't you love him?

Melanie

With all my heart.

Nick

Well, then, back to my question...

Melanie

I think the idea excites him. Sitting at home, he imagines me and my wantonness, my reckless abandon.

Nick

I would think he'd be excited by you as you are.

Melanie

Me as I am? I'm not much on my own. Not without all the bells and whistles...and whips.

Nick

Whatever it takes to keep the marriage alive, I guess. Whips, chains...

Melanie

...Great Danes. Some couples never get past the missionary position.

Nick

Sad, but true. So, my advice to you is; Don't give up the ship.

Melanie

Even when it's lost at sea?

Nick

Even when the sails are tattered and the boards have lost their luster.

Melanie

(Touched) A sweet sentiment. *(Beat)* You must be a philosopher...when you're not busy cruising the bars and annoying beautiful women.

Nick

A philosopher by day, a pirate by night. I'm always on the look-out for truth-seeking booty.

Melanie

Well, I like my pirates with patches. Can I just go ahead and poke out your eye?

Nick

What kind of story would that make? Picture me sitting around with my pirate friends, swabbing the decks, tossing back grog, shivering our timbers...telling tall tales of the high seas...and the conversation comes around to me. What should I tell them; that my ocular injury was the result of a run-in with a half-crazed, though fully magnificent woman?

Melanie

Why not?

Nick

They'd throw me out of the Pirate Guild; toss me out on my ear. No, I'd have to spin a yarn more remarkable than that, I think.

Melanie

I can't imagine you'd tell a lie. You've seemed so truthful up until now.

Nick

And you've seemed the poster-child for chastity. *(Pause)* You want my advice?

Melanie

Absolutely not.

Nick

You should take on a lover.

Melanie

Haven't you been listening to a word I've been saying? Men stand in line for a chance to take me to bed.

Nick

Not one-night stands. I'm talking about a man who treats you special...who buys you expensive things even when you may not deserve them...who tells you you're sexy even the next morning...a proper lover.

Melanie

You have someone in mind?

Nick

What's wrong with *me*?

Melanie

Let me count the ways.

Nick

I'm serious.

Melanie

Okay, well, for starters, you're absolutely insane.

Nick

I'm crazy, it's true. Crazy about you.

Melanie

That's horrible. Please stop.

Nick

Sorry, but I can hardly be held responsible for what trips across my tongue, not if I'm out of my gourd.

Melanie

I want no part of a man who's irrational.

Nick

Are you sure? I have plenty of parts to choose from. (*Beat*) Besides, you don't seem the type who would settle for normal. Can you deny that I'm not who you're looking for?

Melanie

(*Considers Nick*) You're not half bad.

Nick

I can be really bad, if you'd like.

Melanie

I have to confess that I am a bit curious

Nick

In the end I can promise you an evening you'll never forget.

Melanie

In the end?

Nick

Figuratively speaking.

Melanie

It would have to be something pretty terrific.

Nick

The moon is full. We could go to the beach.

Melanie

The beach in the moonlight. What do you imagine we'd do there?

Nick

Things lovers are liable to do.

Melanie

It sounds divine, romantic even. I can picture us now, our bodies glistening, salty with sweat...

Nick

Yes.

Melanie

...writhing to the rhythm of nature. I eagerly take you inside me. Unabashed. Unashamed.

Nick

Yes.

Melanie

Yes!

Nick

Oh, yes!!

Melanie

Although...

Nick

Yes?

Melanie

Sand makes me itch. And the waves make me nauseous. And the dunes are teeming with – what are those awful little creatures?

Nick

Crabs? Jellyfish? Seagulls?

Melanie

Hedgehogs.

Nick

I'll fend them off. They frighten quite easily.

Melanie

(Growls) My hero.

Nick

(Growls back) My temptress.

(They throw themselves at each other – kissing madly. Melanie pulls away, breathless)

Melanie

If you're planning on ravaging me on the beach, we'd need a blanket at least.

Nick

I'll stop at the store. There's one on the way.

Melanie

Be sure to stock up on marshmallow crème while you're there.

Nick

Anything else?

Melanie

Surprise me. Wow me. Thrill me.

(They are in a locked embrace. A baby cries offstage. The two deflate)

Nick

I'll warm up a bottle.

(Nick stands and crosses to the exit)

Melanie

Thanks. Oh, and Nick?

(Nick turns)

I liked that bit about sex on the beach, but it's a little late to call the sitter. Would you settle for love on a Tempurpedic mattress in the heart of suburbia?

Nick

I *did* promise you an evening you'll never forget.

Melanie

And I *am* quite the little firecracker in the bedroom.

Nick

(Smiles) I look forward to finding your fuse.

(Nick exits. Melanie stands and unbuttons the top two buttons of her sweater.)

Melanie

Trust me, sweetheart, you're halfway there.

(Melanie smiles. Lights fade to black)

Sweating Bullets

CHARACTERS

GREG MICHAELS

30's-40's. Risk-averse, worrier.

MARCI MICHAELS

30's-40's. Fun-loving, plucky spirit.

ANTHONY BUFACCI

50-60's. "Family" patriarch.

SUMMARY

A couple takes a getaway trip to a popular casino and find more excitement than they had bargained for.

Sweating Bullets

SCENE 1

(Lights up on a hotel room. GREG has his ear pressed against the door listening intently. He is holding a towel filled with ice to his cheek. He quickly crosses to the balcony window and cautiously peers out through the curtains. MARCI enters from the bathroom, drying her hair and carrying gift bottles of shampoo and conditioner.)

MARCI

Hey sweetie, how's your cheek?

(Marci inspects his cheek.)

Oh, good. Looks like most of the swelling has gone down.

(Marci puts the gift bottles on the bed.)

GREG

We're in big trouble. You realize that, right?

MARCI

Relax. I'm almost positive that Brad at the concierge desk said all sundries are complimentary. Shouldn't you be getting ready for dinner? We really should have made a reservation.

(Marci holds up a skirt on a hanger.)

And where's housekeeping with that iron?

(Greg crosses quickly to the door and looks through the peephole.)

I'm sure they'll knock when they get here, honey.

GREG

This isn't funny Marci!

(Marci sighs and sits on the bed.)

SWEATING BULLETS

MARCI

Okay, why don't you come sit down and tell me all about it. So what is it this time? Did we get our Celine Dion Tickets for the same night as Cirque Du Soleil? Or maybe we forgot to tell Ethan to freeze our newspaper delivery for the week? By the way, can we talk about why we even still get a...-

GREG

This is serious! I'm telling you, we got ourselves into a very dangerous situation here.

MARCI

And I'm telling you that this is supposed to be a relaxing getaway weekend. Doctors orders - spa treatments, umbrella drinks, *sun and fun* - remember?

GREG

Well that's going to be a little hard to do if I'm dead!

MARCI

Wow, really? *(recalls something)* Wait a minute - is this about that kid in the casino?

GREG

Yes! Yes, it is. And he was not just some kid!

MARCI

Looked like a kid to me.

GREG

Remember I told you that I recognized him from somewhere?

MARCI

Oh honey please, not this again. Everyone reminds you of someone. *(She pats his arm reassuringly)* It's a disease, honey, like ...lumbago.

GREG

I recognized him! I was sure of it. So while you were in the shower, I did some checking.

SWEATING BULLETS

MARCI

Of course you did.

(Greg takes a cellphone from his jacket and hands it to her.)

What do you think of this?

MARCI

Wow! You've got four bars! That is impressive.

GREG

Would you ...- look at the picture!

MARCI

(She glances quickly at the picture)

Okay, so what?

GREG

(He crosses back to door to look out peephole.)

So what? I'll tell you so what. *That* is the same guy from the casino. See the scar on his cheek? I knew he looked familiar.

MARCI

The kid you threw your drink on?

GREG

Spilled. Not threw, spilled. That's a very important distinction.

MARCI

Okay, so it's the same kid, what's the big deal? By the way, he hardly looks old enough to be in a casino, what is he, like fifteen?

GREG

The big deal is, that kid just happens to be none other than Joey Buffaci!

(Marci stares at him blankly)

Joey "The Kid" Buffaci? Son of Anthony "Big Tony" Buffaci, a-k-a "The Ear?" Head of one of the largest crime families on the east coast, who just happen to own this very casino?

SWEATING BULLETS

MARCI

(Beat) Really? "The Ear?" What kind of nickname is that?

GREG

I think you're missing the point.

MARCI

I think the point is that you are spending too much time watching the True Crime Network. I'm going to have to start using the parental controls.

GREG

Would you take this serious?!

(Marci crosses to him.)

MARCI

Okay honey, just take a deep breath, alright? So let's assume, just for the sake of argument that you're right, and "the kid" in the casino was actually this Joey ...Buttafuco ...-

GREG

Buffaci.

MARCI

What-ever.

GREG

And don't call him "the kid." Joey is very sensitive about his youthful appearance.

MARCI

So then why does he use it as his nickname?

GREG

You just have no idea how any of this works, do you?

MARCI

Guess not. Because I would think that you, of all people, would be ecstatic to have a brush with fame. And a mobster no less. Now you have a great story to tell all your buddies. I don't see what the problem is.

SWEATING BULLETS

GREG

I just spilled a drink on the son of the boss of the Carlino crime family! *That's* what the problem is.

MARCI

Oh, come on, so you spilled a drink - it was an accident. You spilled, he punched. I'm sure he's forgotten all about it already. It's over.

GREG

I don't think so. In fact, his last words as they were dragging him out of the casino were "*This ain't over!*"

MARCI

I'm sure it was just a figure of speech. Like "I'll be back" or whatever. He was just trying to save face.

GREG

(*Upset*) Marci, you don't get it! Guys like Joey Buffaci don't save face, they ... (*he can't think of anything*) delete face!

MARCI

Wow, you really are rattled.

GREG

(*Greg crosses to window.*)

Well I'm sorry - I'll try and think up something more clever while they're hauling my body to the landfill!

(*A knock at the door.*)

MARCI

Ah! That must be my iron. Now would you hurry up and get ready? "Sun and fun", remember? You are not going to let this ruin my once in a lifetime dinner at Le Bernadin. Assuming we can get even get a table, that is. Now go.

(*Greg reluctantly exits into the bathroom as Marci answers the door. She finds a well-dressed man in his fifties. He is smiling and wearing a fedora. He removes his hat.*)

SWEATING BULLETS

TONY

Excusing the interruption ma'am. My name is Tony Buffaci and I'm looking for uh...

(He takes an index card from his pocket and reads.)

...a Greg Michaels?

(Marci turns away to consider the situation. She then smiles at the thought of adventure and turns toward the bathroom.)

MARCI

(Sweetly) Oh, Greg? Honey? It's for you. *(She turns to Tony.)*
Won't you come in, Mr. ...-

TONY

-Buffaci. But please, call me Tony. I insist.

(Tony enters. Greg enters from the bathroom, partially dressed. He notices Tony, freezes, then runs back into the bathroom.)

MARCI

You'll have to excuse my husband, Mr. Buffaci...-

TONY

Tony.

MARCI

Yes -Tony -of course. It's just that ...well, he's been under a lot of stress recently. That's why we're here - doctor's orders.

TONY

You don't say? I'm sorry to hear that. I had something I was hoping to discuss with him.

(Marci holds up her finger to stop him.)

MARCI

Hold that thought, would you?

(Marci crosses to the bathroom.)

Greg? Sweetie? Can you open the door please?

(There is no answer.)

SWEATING BULLETS

Greg, Mr. Buf ...- uh, *Tony* would like to speak with you. I told him you're not feeling well, so he has graciously offered to come back.

(No response)

Like maybe tonight ...when you're *sleeping?* *(beat)* Alone.

(The door opens slowly and Greg emerges cautiously, carrying a toilet plunger for protection. Marci takes it from him.)

GREG

Mr. Buffaci, let me just say ...-

TONY

Tony.

GREG

Excuse me?

TONY

My friends call me Tony.

MARCI

He insists.

GREG

Oh, okay um, ...Tony, I just want to say that -well, what happened in the casino ...I assure you that uh...

(Tony raises his hand and cuts him off)

TONY

There is no excuse for what happened in the casino! Allegedly.

GREG

No, no - I didn't mean to suggest...

TONY

No excuse!

GREG

No, no - I guess there isn't.

SWEATING BULLETS

TONY

As a result of this alleged incident, my son has been banned from the casino, so it fell to me to come here on his behalf and deal with you man to man.

GREG

Oh, God...

(Greg closes his eyes and prepares for the worst. Tony takes an index card out of his pocket and reads it out loud, stiffly.)

TONY

On behalf of my son, Joseph Anthony Buffaci, and the entire Buffaci family, I would like to offer my sincere apologies for the incident that transpired recently in the Sandalwoods casino. *(Beat)* Allegedly.

(Greg slowly opens his eyes.)

GREG

I'm sorry, what?

(Tony flips to another index card and continues.)

TONY

My son's behavior reflected poorly on himself and his family and is not ... *(he has trouble)* "indicate-ive" of the values with which he was raised.

GREG

Oh, okay. Not where I thought we were going, but uh...-

(Tony flips to his final index card.)

TONY

I hope that you will accept this apology...

(Tony awkwardly extends both palms forward and turned up in a gesture of good faith.)

in the spirit of good faith with which it is intended.

(There is a moment of awkward silence.)

SWEATING BULLETS

MARCI

Well, that was lovely, Tony!

TONY

Really? You think so? I gotta admit, I don't have a lot of experience at apologizing.

MARCI

You don't say.

GREG

Marci!

TONY

So here's the deal. I took a look at the surveillance tapes from the casino and it was pretty obvious that this whole thing was an accident. It turns out you're just one of those freakishly uncoordinated kind of guys. No offense.

GREG

What? Oh, no - none taken. And yes, that's me. Freakishly uncoordinated. Isn't that right honey?

MARCI

Oh yes. He's like a baby giraffe just learning to walk.

TONY

Anyways, I sent Joey back home, so you won't have no trouble from him. Now all we gotta do is figure out how we are gonna make this square.

GREG

Oh, I don't think that will be ...-

MARCI

...-I think what my husband is trying to say is that we appreciate your generous offer. Isn't that right, sweetheart?

TONY

So you just name your price. Whatever you want -within reason, of course.

SWEATING BULLETS

(Greg looks to Marci for assistance but she shrugs to indicate he should handle it on his own. Suddenly, Greg gets an idea.)

GREG

You know, there is one thing I think would square the deal. For everyone.

(Greg goes to Tony and they have a private exchange.)

TONY

You sure? That's what you want? *(Greg nods)* Not a bad choice. I'll notify the bellhop on my way out.

(Tony offers his hand and Greg shakes it.)

(To Marci) Ma'am. It was a sincere pleasure meeting you both.

(Tony puts his hat on and exits. Greg quickly takes a suitcase from the closet and opens it on the bed.)

MARCI

So wait. After all of that, we're just leaving?

GREG

Oh we're leaving all right. But we won't be going far. I asked Tony if he might be able to use his apparently considerable influence to get us into the Presidential Suite up on the top floor. You know, I hear the view is great from up there!

MARCI

You didn't!

GREG

And, according to my new "goumada", Le Bernadin is on speed dial for 24-hour room service!

(Marci gives him a kiss on the cheek, which hurts.)

MARCI

Sun and fun, huh?

GREG

Oh yes, sun and fun indeed!

(They embrace and kiss as the lights fade.)

THE END

OPEN HOUSE

Cast of Characters

KAREN	Home buyer.
MARK	Home buyer.
MINDY	Real estate agent.

Plot Summary

A couple find the perfect home – with one catch.

OPEN HOUSE

(Lights up on a foyer. Mindy enters from the house, followed by Karen and Mark. Mindy is talking as she enters.)

MINDY

...and of course, you're only a short walk to the farmer's market and the downtown arts district. So, what do you think?

KAREN

What do we think? Why it's fantastic! Isn't it honey?

MARK

Absolutely. This is by far the nicest place we've seen.

KAREN

I love the walk-in closets and those beautiful bay windows, and I know little Timmy will go absolutely bonkers over that tree house in the back yard. I can't believe that it's actually in our price range.

MINDY

Yes, it's a great property and really checks off all the boxes of things you were looking for.

MARK

And you say those neon beer signs in the basement stay with the house?

MINDY

They do! In fact, all of the furnishings are included – what you see is what you get.

KAREN

Oh, I hate to even get my hopes up. We've put in three cash offers on other places but missed out on all of them. And they weren't nearly as nice as this place.

MINDY

It's definitely a seller's market. Prices are up 11% in the last quarter, and the average listing time has been cut to less than two weeks.

MARK

Less than two weeks? Wow -no wonder it's been so hard to find something.

MINDY

This property was listed three days ago, so if you're really interested, we'll want to make a strong offer quickly.

KAREN

(To Mark) What do you think? Do you want to go home and talk it over?

MARK

Oh, I don't know, I'd really hate to miss out on this.

(To Mindy)

Unless there's something we're missing? *(Joking)* I mean it's not sitting on top of a toxic landfill is it?

KAREN

Oh, Mark.

(Mindy laughs nervously)

MINDY

Oh no, nothing like that.

KAREN

And you don't anticipate any problems with inspections?

MINDY

Not at all. The previous owner was very conscientious about upgrading everything to code so we should be in great shape.

MARK

And no liens or title issues?

MINDY

We just finished a title search at the court house and it is clear and free, just waiting on ...

(Holding up two sets of crossed fingers)

the right new owners?

KAREN

(Takes Mark's hand)

Well I think you may have found them!

(Mindy becomes a bit nervous)

MINDY

Well that's great to hear. So there is one thing that I'm required to inform you about...

MARK

Oh no, I knew it. Sinkholes! Is it sinkholes?

KAREN

Mark, please.

MINDY

Let's talk a little bit about ...the neighborhood.

MARK

The neighborhood?

MINDY

Eden Estates has seen a lot of development in recent years, and that has brought in ...various ...new groups of people.

KAREN

Well we can assure you that we have no problems with that. We welcome and embrace diversity, don't we Mark?

MARK

Oh yeah, sure.

MINDY

Oh, I'm so glad to hear you both say that. You know, some buyers say that they are all for inclusion, but when it comes to their next-door neighbors ...well, I think you know what I mean.

KAREN

(Proudly) Our previous neighbors were an LGBTQ interracial couple, and we all got along wonderfully, didn't we dear?

MARK

Oh yeah, great. And I think one of them even had a disability.

MINDY

Well that's splendid! I'm starting to think that you really are the ideal family to make this your forever home.

(Mark and Karen share an uncomfortable look.)

MARK

So ...you wanted to share something with us about the neighbors?

KAREN

(Quickly) Not that it even matters, of course.

MARK

(Mark suddenly has an idea and looks to Karen)

Unless...

(Karen picks up on his thought.)

KAREN

Oh my God, they're not DeSantis supporters are they?

MINDY

Oh dear heavens no. In fact, they're a lovely couple -Larry and Wanda -and I'm sure you're all going to be the best of friends.

MARK

Okay...

MINDY

They do happen to be zombies though.

(Karen and Mark are stunned.)

KAREN

I'm sorry ...did you say ...zombies?

MINDY

Yes, that's right. Though, excuse me, I think they prefer the term "*reanimated life forms.*" Or "RLF's" for short.

MARK

How is that possible?

KAREN

I think what my husband means Mindy is that we thought that zombies, well, that they ...preferred to live in their own communities.

MINDY

Well that was certainly the case a few years ago. But recently, as people have become more enlightened and societal attitudes have begun to change, they've started to branch out and integrate more fully into society. Like the Mormons.

KAREN

(Uncertain) Oh ...sure. I guess that makes sense...

MINDY

The RLF movement has made great strides in recent years. In fact, they're holding a big parade over in Evanston next month.

MARK

Makes sense. I hear they're really good at marching.

(Mark holds his arms out in front of him like a zombie.)

KAREN

Mark!

MARK

Sorry.

KAREN

You'll have to excuse my husband Mindy. I think this is just a lot for us to take in.

MINDY

I totally understand.

KAREN

I mean, we certainly support the rights of everyone to live where and however they choose. And we do really love this house. It's just that ...- well, I wonder about potential safety concerns...

MINDY

That's totally understandable. But I can assure you that you'd be totally safe. The homeowners' association has installed security cameras throughout all the neighborhoods, and they require all resident zombies to maintain a 12-month supply of ...responsibly sourced meals.

MARK

Responsibly sourced meals? What does that mean?

MINDY

The RLF association has developed an international network of business partners that provide their members with a steady supply of healthy and organically harvested uh ...meals.

MARK

Huh. Kind of a "farm-to-table" concept, except that...-

KAREN

Mark...

MARK

So where do they get the uh, you know.

MINDY

Oh, the usual places –hospitals, mortuaries –and a few third world countries in Asia.

KAREN

So, wait. You said “all resident zombies?” Are there others?

MINDY

Only three or four families so far, though Eden Estates is an increasingly popular destination. They love the fact that there are no lakes or ponds in the development. Apparently, they aren’t very fond of water.

MARK

Yeah, I think I remember seeing that in a movie.

KAREN

And there haven’t been any ...incidents?

MINDY

Oh dear no. I mean, there was one small porch fire down at the end of the block a few months back and that freaked them out a bit, but overall, they have been beacons of the community.

MARK

(Nods in understanding)

Fire - bad.

MINDY

Yes, something like that. And so now of course, some residents keep tiki-torches on hand -just in case. “Zombie-zappers” they call them, though personally, I find that a bit offensive and totally unwarranted.

KAREN

Oh ...yes, of course.

MINDY

(Upbeat) No, by all accounts, they make ideal neighbors! Larry and Wanda held a wonderful Halloween party last year, and everyone had such a good time, watching them chase the neighborhood kids up and down the street. All in good fun, of course.

MARK

Boy, I bet Timmy would love that, wouldn’t he honey?

KAREN

(Uncertain) Um ...sure, I guess?

MARK

Do they ...talk?

KAREN

Mark – really!

MINDY

No, that is a perfectly reasonable question. Actually, Larry and Wanda are considered very high functioning –hardly any drooling at all –and they are wonderful listeners. But instead of talking in full sentences, say as you or I might, they prefer to communicate more through a series of grunts and vocalizations.

MARK

Yeah, I got an uncle in New Jersey like that.

MINDY

Unfortunately however, old prejudices die hard, and many people can't seem to see their way past those horribly crass stereotypes perpetuated by the media and Hollywood.

(More impassioned)

They are *not* mindless automatons whose only mission is to feed on human flesh! *(beat)* At least, not most of them.

(Becoming more theatrical)

I mean, they love their children, the same as us. And *"if you prick them, do they not bleed?"*

MARK

Actually, I don't think they do.

MINDY

They are responsible, contributing members of society and deserve our respect and compassion.

KAREN

Oh, of course.

(A bit uncertain)

Still, and I hate to even bring it up, but it does make me wonder about how they ...could potentially affect resale values?

MINDY

I don't think you have anything to worry about there. Attitudes are really changing as more and more open-minded people like yourselves are starting to embrace their zombie neighbors - metaphorically speaking, of course, I wouldn't suggest you actually ...-Anyway, Eden Estates is leading the way in supporting this revolution for awareness and acceptance.

KAREN

Well, when you put it like that... -

MINDY

And talk about curb appeal -Larry and Wanda have won the development's "Best Lawn" award for three months running!

MARK

You don't say?

MINDY

Oh yes. Zombies don't sleep of course, and they have boundless energy. So you'll see them out with their clippers and little tweezers trimming and plucking at all hours of the day and night.

MARK

Wow, that is impressive.

MINDY

Yes, especially when you consider that Larry only has the one arm. And they make a wonderful deterrent for vandals. Why, the neighborhood watch committee hardly even bothers to patrol the neighborhood -not so much as a stolen newspaper.

MARK

(nodding) I can see that.

KAREN

I guess that is ...somewhat reassuring. What about the neighbors on the other side?

MINDY

Oh, now there you are in for a real treat! His name is Vlad something or other and I think he's from ...is it Romania? Anyway, he's very exotic -he doesn't come out much during the day, but you'll see him strolling up and down the streets at night. A bit of an eccentric but an absolute delight!

MARK

Sounds interesting.

MINDY

All in all, I think this is the perfect place for your family. So take all the time you need. But in the interest of full disclosure, I do want to let you know that we have two other prospective buyers coming by this afternoon.

KAREN

Oh dear.

MINDY

So what do you think, ready to put in an offer?

(Karen turns to Mark and they seem to reach a decision. She turns back to Mindy and prepares to speak as - lights out.)

THE END

The Signposts of Providence

(Ellis, a teacher, sits in his office. He stands and calls off to an office worker)

Ellis

Connie, when Mrs. West gets here, please send her in, would you?

(Ellis goes back to his desk. Presently Hannah enters, knocking on her way in)

Hannah

Knock, Knock? Mr. Carter?

(Hannah spies Ellis and is startled, confused.)

Ellis?

Ellis

My God, Hannah, what are *you* doing here?

Hannah

I was about to ask you the same thing. *(Points to herself)* I'm Henry's mother. We had a meeting scheduled?

Ellis

You're Mrs. West?

Hannah

Apparently, I'm your Two O'clock.

Ellis

Imagine that. *(Points to the chair)* Please, have a seat.

(Hannah sits)

Hannah

Your last name...I should have recognized it earlier and put it together.

Ellis

Carter's a common enough name and I wasn't teaching when you knew me. Plus I'm a hundred miles from Medford. There's no way you could have suspected I'd land here. *(Pause)* So what's *your* story? What brings you to Providence?

Hannah

You wouldn't believe me if I told you.

Ellis

Try me.

Hannah

I stuck a pin on a map. Basically, that's it. A million towns to choose from...

Ellis

(Bogart-esque) Of all the gin joints in all the towns in all the world, you walk into mine.

Hannah

Casablanca. How appropriate.

Ellis

You really did that...with the pin and the map?

Hannah

(Shrugs) I had to move somewhere. This is just as good a place as any.

Ellis

And your husband was all right with that?

Hannah

(Clipped) Mr. West is no longer in our company. I'm sure he doesn't give two spits where we are.
(Catches herself) That's probably more information than I need to share.

Ellis

I don't mind listening.

Hannah

Yes, but I'm not so sure that I like talking...with you...this way...so candidly. *(Beat)* Maybe this isn't such a good idea.

(Hannah stands and briskly crosses to exit)

Ellis

Wait! What about our appointment?

Hannah

(Hannah stops) I'm sorry, Ellis. I really can't do this.

Ellis

I'm still Henry's teacher, Hannah. Whatever happened between you and me, I'm still that. And, as far as I'm concerned, there are still issues that need to be addressed.

Hannah

(Chews on the word) Issues.

Ellis

Pertaining to his behavior. Now, please, sit down. *(Beat)* Please.

Hannah

(Pause) Fine, I'll sit. For Henry's sake.

(Hannah returns to her seat and sits)

Ellis

Thank you. *(Pause)* Now let me start by saying that your Henry is a very bright boy.

Hannah

But?

Ellis

But his social skills are...how should I put this?

Hannah

Weak? Deficient? Non-existent?

Ellis

All of the above.

Hannah

He doesn't play well with others. He never has.

Ellis

That doesn't alarm you?

Hannah

It's frustrating at times, granted. Am I alarmed by it? What can I say? He's my son. I love him.

Ellis

Sure, you love him, but –

Hannah

There are no "buts", Ellis, that's how it is. Everybody's different, right? You're different. I'm different. It's what makes this world an interesting place to live in.

Ellis

I guess what I'm trying to say is a person needs a certain amount of social skills to navigate this world. Being different is simply not enough.

Hannah

He can tie his shoes...and he's fully capable of buying a loaf of bread at the store.

Ellis

But can he make friends? Get along with his boss? There's more to life than bread and shoes, Hannah.

Hannah

He has to be able to make choices. Is that what you mean?

Ellis

That is precisely what I mean.

Hannah

Good choices. Sometimes difficult choices.

Ellis

Exactly.

Hannah

Like knowing when to leave a woman and when to stay? (*Pause*) What - no sage advice?

Ellis

You're referring to me?

Hannah

I'm referring to *us*.

Ellis

(*Quietly*) What was done is done.

Hannah

That's it? That's your answer? "What was done is done"?? What does that even mean?

Ellis

It means that what we had was a long time ago.

Hannah

Let's talk about what we had.

Ellis

Why? Why are we even going there?

Hannah

Why? Because a part of me is still back there...in Medford...in that time and place...looking at the clock...and finally the calendar...wondering where the hell you ran off to! Is that so hard to understand?

(Ellis doesn't respond)

All this time...stuffing these feelings back inside. I swear to God, I told myself, if I ever ran into you again, I'd make you tell me. So, tell me. Why did you leave? I need to know.

Ellis

It's complicated.

Hannah

Walking away was complicated? Or never returning? Maybe that was the complicated part.

Ellis

Look, you have every right to be angry –

Hannah

Well, thank you. I'm so glad to have your approval.

Ellis

But I was a little angry myself.

Hannah

You? Angry? What could *you* possibly have been angry about?

Ellis

You really don't know?

Hannah

I'm serious, Ellis. I don't have a clue.

Ellis

Well then let me refresh your memory. Does the name "Carlos" ring a bell?

Hannah

Carlos? No. The only Carlos I know is – *(Suddenly enlightened)* Hold on.

Ellis

A-ha, so you *do* know who I'm talking about. It's all coming back to you now.

Hannah

This has something to do with the retreat?

Ellis

"Retreat". An interesting choice of words. Rendezvous may be more appropriate. Or tryst.

Hannah

Wait a minute. Are you suggesting - (*Dumbfounded*) Oh, you stupid, stupid man.

Ellis

(*Fiercely*) Not so stupid that I didn't see through your plans.

Hannah

My "plans". And what exactly were my plans?

Ellis

Like you don't remember.

Hannah

Humor me. My memory's a little foggy on this point.

Ellis

You betrayed me, Hannah. You ran away for the weekend with your Latin lover.

Hannah

Carlos.

Ellis

That's right – Carlos.

Hannah

Father Carlos. If you're going to drag his name through the mud at least have the courtesy to use the name the church gave him.

Ellis

(*Digesting this*) You were having an affair with a priest? Are you nuts?

Hannah

I would be if it were true. (*She shakes her head*) I was at a retreat that weekend, Ellis. I don't know where you got the idea that I wasn't. And, yes, Father Carlos was leading it. A *spiritual* retreat...not a secret Rendezvous.

Ellis

No. That can't be. I mean, if that's true –

Hannah

It *is* true.

Ellis

Then I made one of the biggest mistakes of my life.

Hannah

You'll get no argument here.

Ellis

You came back from your weekend away and you looked so happy. My God, you were absolutely glowing. And then later that evening I heard you on the phone. I heard the name "Carlos" and then something about a "wonderful weekend". I put two and two together and...

Hannah

And came up with sixteen. Math was never your strongest subject.

Ellis

All these years...my God, what I thought of you. And now you're telling me that I read it all wrong?

(Hannah nods "yes")

This changes everything. *(Pause)* But there *was* something, wasn't there, about the retreat? Something happened. I wasn't imagining that.

Hannah

You weren't imagining it, no.

Ellis

Can you give me a hint as to what it was?

Hannah

Look, you were right before. What was done is done.

Ellis

Hannah, please!

Hannah

I'm really not happy talking about this.

Ellis

But I'm asking you just the same. What was it about that weekend that put a glow on your face?

Hannah

(Finally) I had made an important decision. That's why I looked so happy.

Ellis

And you needed that spiritual setting to make it.

Hannah

I did.

Ellis

So tell me, what was it – this decision you made?

Hannah

Two decisions. There were two. The first one was that I decided I wanted to marry you. That one turned out to be a complete dud.

Ellis

And the second?

Hannah

The second one – that was more difficult. I was determined to have your baby.

Ellis

Another swing and a miss. So much for the best laid plans, huh?

Hannah

Oh you "swung" alright...and I definitely "missed"...my monthly...for nine months, to be precise.

Ellis

What are you saying? *(He studies her face. Stammers)* You mean – you? And me?

Hannah

That's generally how it happens.

Ellis

You were pregnant?

Hannah

Only just. And, against all odds, I decided to keep it.

Ellis

Why didn't you tell me?

Hannah

You didn't stick around long enough for me to tell you.

Ellis

You're right, I *am* stupid. I certainly was *then*. (*Pause*) So what was it – a boy? A girl? What?

Hannah

Do you really need me to answer that?

Ellis

You don't think I deserve to know?

Hannah

(*Overlapping*) For God's sake, Ellis -

Ellis

(*Overlapping*) I have every right -

Hannah

(*Cuts him off*) It's *Henry*, alright? Henry is your son.

Ellis

Henry? (*Beat*) Good God.

Hannah

Can you see the resemblance now? The chin? The eyes?

Ellis

(*He digests this*) Henry...sitting right there...in my classroom...this whole time. And me, without a clue. (*Pause*) Does he know? I mean, about me?

Hannah

No.

Ellis

Will you tell him?

Hannah

When the time is right, I suppose.

Ellis

That's probably best.

Hannah

(A long pause) Are we through here? I really should be going.

(She stands. He stands)

Ellis

Hannah, wait. Listen. I loved you once, and I know you loved me too. And I can't tell you how sorry I am for the mess I made. Sorry I didn't come to you when I had my suspicions. Regretful now that I walked away. I don't know how that would have changed things...if I had stayed...or what might have been. But it breaks my heart that I wrecked our chances to find out.

Hannah

Thank you for that.

Ellis

Now as far as Henry is concerned, don't pull him out of school. I know what you're thinking...how awkward this is. You're probably tempted to move on.

Hannah

It *has* crossed my mind.

Ellis

Please don't. I know I can't give him back these past 16 years, I realize that. But it doesn't mean that I can't still make a difference in his life...as his teacher, if nothing else.

Hannah

(Pause) Well, you do have one thing in your favor.

Ellis

Oh? What's that?

Hannah

He likes you.

Ellis

He said that? Really?

Hannah

He talks about you all the time. Says you're a good listener.

Ellis

Imagine that. *Me* – a good listener.

Hannah

Maybe some things *do* change.

(She offers him a weak smile, then crosses to the door)

Ellis

So, is that a “yes”? You’ll think about staying?

(She stops and turns to him)

Hannah

A “yes”? Oh, who knows? Would you settle for a strong “maybe”?

Ellis

I’ll take what I can get, Hannah.

(Hannah exits. Ellis sits and stares into space, contemplating)

Whatever *hope* I can get.

Lights Fade to Black