

[Shakespeare reference]

By

Paul Donnelly

2439A Holomua Place
Honolulu, HI 96816
paul@pauldonnellyplays.com
(808) 465-0602

Cast of Characters

Michelle Pearson, 34. Sister of the bride.

Nicholas Pearson, 24. Her brother.

Wilma Daly, 55. Nick's assistant.

Edward Pearson, 61. Their father.

Caroline Pearson, 59. Their mother.

Diana Pearson, 32. Edward's current wife.

Gregory Bayliss, 34. A former flame of Michelle's.

Setting:

The great room and grounds of a bed & breakfast inn
near the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Time:

Mid-September. 2006.

Synopsis

[Shakespeare reference] follows the unexpected couplings and uncouplings, across generations and genders, among the bride's family at a Virginia hunt country wedding. Think *The Philadelphia Story* meets *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

For Frank

“... but not as much as tomorrow.”

[Shakespeare reference]

Act 1

Scene 1

Setting:

The “great room” of a bed and breakfast inn near the Shenandoah Valley. The downstage area contains an imaginary expanse of picture windows offering a panoramic view of the Blue Ridge Mountains. The furnishings are elegant and comfortable.

There is an entrance from the outside world DR. A gated hallway UR leads to a kitchen and the owner’s quarters. A staircase U.C. leads to three bedrooms and two baths on the second story. A door UL leads to the master suite with an en suite bathroom and hot tub.

At rise:

Thursday. Mid-September. Brilliant afternoon sun streams into the empty great room.

A pitcher of lemonade, a plate of cookies, and six clean glasses sit on the dining table. Two used glasses sit on an end table.

Silence.

From the second floor we hear the unmistakable sounds of a couple (1M, 1F) enjoying an interlude of intimacy. Giggling and slurping and cooing gradually build to moaning and calls upon the deity.

As they do, we hear a car approach up a gravel driveway and come to a stop. We hear the car’s doors open and shut. The unseen couple hears none of this.

At a point somewhat short of full coitus, we hear the doorbell DR. The happy couple does not. The doorbell is rung a second time. The couple stops abruptly. The doorbell is rung a third time with greater urgency.

Silence.

A loud knock on the front door.

A disheveled and somewhat panic-stricken NICHOLAS PEARSON appears at the top of the stairs, wearing a pair of boxer briefs and struggling to conceal his excitement.

A louder knock.

NICHOLAS crosses to the door.

NICHOLAS

Hello?

MICHELLE (from off)

Hello?

NICHOLAS

Michelle?

MICHELLE

Nick?

NICHOLAS

Yes.

MICHELLE

Is there a secret password?

NICHOLAS

No.

MICHELLE

Then would you please open the door?

NICHOLAS

Oh. Right. (he unlocks and opens the door)

MICHELLE (entering)

Thank you. (a quick peck on his cheek) Did I wake you? (before NICHOLAS can answer) At quarter past two? You're amazing. You could always nap. One more source of my relentless envy. It's bad enough you're prettier.

NICHOLAS

Don't start.

MICHELLE glares at him.

NICHOLAS

What?

MICHELLE

The correct response is “Oh, but I’m not.”

NICHOLAS

But that’s not true.

MICHELLE (a glance to his shorts)

That must have been quite the dream.

NICHOLAS (blushing and covering)

Michelle!

MICHELLE

Oh please. It’s been on twenty-five story billboards.

NICHOLAS

That’s different. That was a job.

MICHELLE

“I was getting paid for it” isn’t always the best defense.

NICHOLAS

You were supposed to be here by noon.

MICHELLE

I was on a plane at six a.m.! On the plane! Not rising. Not arriving at the airport. Seated on the damn plane. And yet here I am arriving in the cradle of the Confederacy after two in the afternoon. ... I used to think the problem with public transportation was the public. Things have gotten so bad lately that it has become the transportation.

NICHOLAS

When have you ever taken public transportation?

MICHELLE

What is the Delta shuttle but the Mega bus with wings? Why are there no cars out front?

NICHOLAS

I assume you have bags.

MICHELLE

Shouldn't you throw on a bit more cover? We don't want Bambi or Thumper getting over-stimulated

NICHOLAS

What?

MICHELLE

I was commenting on the rustic surroundings. You used to be able to keep up.

NICHOLAS

It's gorgeous, isn't it? Amazing how rich the colors are in person.

MICHELLE

It's the Discovery Channel come to life. (a beat) Would you go get dressed?

NICHOLAS

Right.

MICHELLE

Unless you need to finish. I can always get the bags myself.

NICHOLAS pauses, considers a response, then continues up the stairs and off.

MICHELLE goes to the table to pour herself a glass of lemonade. She notices the two used glasses and does the math. A smile of malicious glee flickers across her face. SHE pours herself a glass of lemonade and takes in the view with a new pleasure.

NICHOLAS returns wearing shorts, sandals, and a logo-less t-shirt.

NICHOLAS

Shall we?

MICHELLE

There's no rush.

NICHOLAS

Don't you want to get settled? Freshen up? You must be feeling grimy after the flight and the drive.

MICHELLE (suddenly a belle)

Why aren't you a dear to be so concerned? But I believe I am just fine. I can't think of anything I would enjoy more, at present, than takin in this lovely view. Although I do find myself longing for a mint julep.

NICHOLAS

And to think, a career in fashion has deprived the world of your Ma Joad.

MICHELLE

I'm glad I didn't wait until I was 40 to discover that I wasn't meant to do Pirandello in 60 seat basements for companies that were having a good night when the house broke into double digits.

NICHOLAS

If you still miss it, why not go back?

MICHELLE

I lack the one necessary quality.

NICHOLAS

Dedication?

MICHELLE

A capacity for self-delusion. Besides this family couldn't support two superstars. I'd have been miserable playing Eric to your Julia.

NICHOLAS

Instead you're a bit like Frankenstein to my monster.

MICHELLE

Have you seen the blushing bride?

NICHOLAS

I had dinner with Audrey and Ken last night.

MICHELLE

Just the three of you?

NICHOLAS

And mom.

MICHELLE

How was that?

NICHOLAS

About what you'd expect. I mean, I guess it's a good thing.

MICHELLE
You guess?

NICHOLAS
He's just so ...

MICHELLE
Boring?

NICHOLAS
More ...

MICHELLE
Narcoleptic?

NICHOLAS
Stalwart. But she really does seem happy.

MICHELLE
Very "ah sweet mystery of life, at last I've found you"!

NICHOLAS
Oh my god! Have you seen the dress?

MICHELLE
I'm the maid of honor. I was at two fittings.

NICHOLAS
How could you let her...?

MICHELLE
Mom was there shooting me "the look" every 30 seconds. My tongue was a scarred stump by the time we were done. Every time she came out of the dressing room she looked a little more like a homecoming float.

NICHOLAS
It did seem like a lot of skirt.

MICHELLE
It really does look like it could be tissue paper and chicken wire when she gets it spread out. And then she had to top it with balloon sleeves. Come hell or high water, she was going to be the princess for once in her life!

NICHOLAS
Given the competition, you can see why she feels she has to try so hard.

MICHELLE

Ah the travails of the troubled middle child. The thing is, she's in terrific shape. Why work that hard for something and then cover it up?

NICHOLAS

You've just summed up the secret of my success.

MICHELLE

I mean, god forbid, I ever find myself traipsing up the aisle last, it's going to be in a Vera Wang column or something that's stretched tight across my hard earned abs.

NICHOLAS

And your groom can gaze adoringly down the aisle and think, "Here comes a 15-year-old boy with PMS. I must be the luckiest man alive."

MICHELLE

Keep your fantasies out of it.

NICHOLAS

Sad to say, my fantasies all involve Ben Affleck. And have since high school. I've been very faithful.

MICHELLE

How pedestrian. Not that I asked.

NICHOLAS

I hope to god I never meet him. I won't be able to look him in the eye.

MICHELLE (noticing a change in his demeanor)

What?

NICHOLAS

It's still weird to think that might actually happen.

MICHELLE

There's a lot of good buzz.

NICHOLAS

Ack!

MICHELLE

I'm not just saying that. And people say things to me without knowing you're my brother.

NICHOLAS

That's great.

MICHELLE

Isn't it?

NICHOLAS

It's like a constant weight. Or a thickness in the air. It was easier when I was a pretty airhead having his picture taken in his underwear. Pout. Smile. Pout. Cash the check. Looming above Times Square in briefs was so ridiculous it wasn't even embarrassing.

MICHELLE

You have no future as an object of pity.

NICHOLAS

Not even self-pity! It's just weird to think ... it doesn't seem real ... by New Year's I will either be the world's most conspicuously over-promoted failure, which will be embarrassing ... and will mean there's nothing left for me but "Dancing with the Stars" and rehab ... or I will be on the way to being an honest-to-god movie star. Which is a dream come true, of course ... but who ever knows how to cope with that?

MICHELLE

As long as I never hear you speak of paying your dues ...

NICHOLAS

So, you want a future star to carry in your luggage?

MICHELLE

This obsession with my luggage isn't healthy. Or is there something you're hot to borrow?

NICHOLAS

You're impossible.

MICHELLE

Perhaps a spot more of this tangy, lukewarm lemonade. (placing her glass with the two used glasses) Or perhaps not.

NICHOLAS

Suit yourself.

We hear a car come up the driveway and pull to a stop.

MICHELLE (picking up one of the used glasses)

I take it this frosted coral, isn't Wilma's?

NICHOLAS gazes back coolly, but doesn't respond.

MICHELLE

Although I wasn't expecting lipstick.

We hear the car's doors open and shut.

NICHOLAS

If you're hot for fishing, you should really try the lake.

We hear a key in the front door and WILMA DALY enters, dressed for a morning of golf.

NICHOLAS

Hey Wil.

WILMA

Hey boyyo.

NICHOLAS

Wilma, you remember my sister Michelle ...

WILMA

Of course.

MICHELLE

Nice to see you, again.

NICHOLAS

So, how was it?

WILMA

It wasn't exactly Palm Desert. But it was good to be out in the air.

MICHELLE

Golf?

WILMA nods.

MICHELLE

Did you play alone?

WILMA

I went with three boys from the wedding party. They invited Nick ...

NICHOLAS

Can you imagine?

MICHELLE

You could have finessed it. You do have “a genius for endearing physical comedy.”

WILMA

I didn't like that one. That “genius” bit for a first picture was just setting him up for a fall.

MICHELLE

When a boy steals a scene from Holly Hunter and Marcia Gay Harden, there are probably plenty of people who would push.

NICHOLAS

So I mentioned that Wilma played ...

WILMA

And they felt they had to invite me. We did okay. I didn't lower the level of play appreciably.

NICHOLAS

How much did you win?

WILMA

It was a true friendly game. It is funny to see guys that young so pleased with themselves for hitting in the mid-80's.

NICHOLAS

And you?

WILMA

I managed to double bogey on 8 and bogey on 5 and 14. I got it up to an 81 without raising any suspicions.

NICHOLAS

And, of course, you trotted out a few Scarlett Johansen stories.

WILMA

Just because I don't act doesn't mean I don't know how to hold an audience.

MICHELLE (to NICHOLAS)

Couldn't you have caddied?

NICHOLAS

I've seen the way she talks to caddies. And drivers. And desk clerks.

That's only on your behalf.

WILMA

MICHELLE smiles.

NICHOLAS

What?

MICHELLE

The idea of my baby brother with his very own personal assistant.

NICHOLAS

Not to mention agents and managers ...

MICHELLE

It's all the advantages of a mother with none of the withering disapproval.

WILMA

I thought your mother was kind of interesting.

NICHOLAS

Nicely complex, with woodsy undertones.

WILMA swats him.

WILMA

How do you want to divide up the powder rooms?

MICHELLE

What's the issue?

WILMA

Have you been upstairs?

MICHELLE

I just got here.

We hear another car approach.

NICHOLAS

Lunch must be done.

WILMA

We have three bedrooms but only two bathrooms.

MICHELLE

I'd much rather share with the woman who threw a golf game than the man who travels with more styling products than I do.

The front door is again unlocked and opened to admit EDWARD PEARSON, a usually robust man of 61, who is uncharacteristically subdued.

MICHELLE

First one voted off the island, again?

EDWARD

There's a restorative dose of vinegar!

EDWARD and MICHELLE embrace warmly.

EDWARD

Will you survive three days of standing demurely in the background?

MICHELLE

It's what I do for a living. It will be nice not to be responsible for what's going on in the foreground.

EDWARD

Your mother and sister have planned a grand occasion.

MICHELLE

It certainly brought out a bougie side of mom, didn't it?

EDWARD

It's good to see your mother take such pleasure ...

MICHELLE

In anything?

EDWARD

A little vinegar goes a long way.

MICHELLE

Where's Diana?

EDWARD

Haven't you seen her?

MICHELLE

No.

EDWARD

She wasn't invited to lunch.

MICHELLE

Ouch.

EDWARD

She must be napping. (He pokes his head into the master suite) She must be out exploring the grounds. (to NICHOLAS) Did she tell you where she was off to?

NICHOLAS

Not a word.

EDWARD (to WILMA)

A good morning on the links?

WILMA

Yes, thank you.

EDWARD

If we hadn't been booked for lunch with the Carpers I'm sure my wife would have been pleased to join you.

MICHELLE

When did Diana take up golf?

EDWARD

Oh. No. Excuse me. I meant your mother. (to WILMA) Caroline golfs. It's her one vice. (to NICHOLAS) And how was your morning?

NICHOLAS

Chill. Very chill.

MICHELLE snorts.

WILMA

Good boy! We need you in fighting trim for next week.

NICHOLAS

There's nothing Vanity Fair can throw at me that I can't handle.

MICHELLE

Annie Liebovitz can be appallingly creative.

NICHOLAS

No tub of milk for this flavor of the month.

EDWARD

Your celebrity is contagious. I have a whole new undergraduate following since word got out that I'm Nick Pearson's father.

NICHOLAS

I'm sorry, does that embarrass you?

EDWARD

Good lord, no! It tickles me. Are you enjoying yourself?

NICHOLAS

Some.

EDWARD

So my son supports himself handsomely with work he enjoys, how could I be more pleased?

NICHOLAS

Really?

EDWARD

Am I usually given to irony?

MICHELLE

Besides, disapproval and disappointment are mom's departments.

EDWARD

I think you need to try a little harder for a different tone.

Sound of yet another car.

MICHELLE

Who?

EDWARD

Your mother.

MICHELLE

I thought she was staying at the hotel.

EDWARD

She is.

MICHELLE
Then why ...

EDWARD
I believe she wanted to see you.

MICHELLE
Un-hunh.

EDWARD
It's not really so unnatural.

NICHOLAS
So let's get on those game faces!

This time there is a knock at the door.

MICHELLE
I've got a Franklin for everyone who doesn't move.

NICHOLAS
I can't be bought.

MICHELLE
Candy-assed momma's boy!

NICHOLAS opens the door to admit his mother, CAROLINE PEARSON, an intense woman of 59. SHE is dressed in late counter-culture elegant and wearing a bit more make up than usual. She is carrying a bridesmaid's dress in a large plastic sleeve.

MICHELLE (delight incarnate)
Mom!

CAROLINE
Hello dear. (a quick peck on NICHOLAS's cheek) And hello dear! (embraces MICHELLE) Car trouble?

MICHELLE
Plane trouble.

CAROLINE
Oh dear, I'm so sorry. You're here now and that's what matters. I was so afraid you'd gotten lost.

MICHELLE

Audrey's directions were quite thorough.

CAROLINE

That hasn't always been enough. (handing off the dress) We thought you might want to have this here.

MICHELLE

Yes. Good idea. Thanks.

WILMA

May we see?

MICHELLE looks to CAROLINE.

CAROLINE

Yes, of course.

MICHELLE (removing the dress)

Ta da!

NICHOLAS (amazed)

Wow. That's really nice.

CAROLYN shoots him "the look."

NICHOLAS

I mean ... you don't expect much of a bridesmaid's dress ... under the best of circumstances ...

WILMA

That is really lovely.

EDWARD

It is, isn't it? (to Caroline) You and Audrey have done a wonderful job across the board.

CAROLINE

Thank you,

MICHELLE

Yes. You should see the way it hangs when I have it on. The drape is lovely. The simplicity will frame Audrey nicely.

CAROLINE

What color is Diana wearing?

EDWARD

Oh ... Well ... I'm afraid I have no idea.

CAROLINE

It's touching how some things never change.

MICHELLE

I should run this upstairs so it doesn't get wrinkled.

NICHOLAS

Need a hand?

MICHELLE

I've got it. Which room is mine?

WILMA

Left at the top of the stairs. I'm in the middle and Nick is at the other end of the hallway.

MICHELLE

Be right back.

CAROLINE

Do you have a steamer?

MICHELLE

I'm wearing a \$60,000 cocktail dress to the rehearsal dinner. I have every portable garment care appliance known to man with me.

NICHOLAS

Then you'll have to get your luggage yourself. I don't do upper body work on Thursdays.

The sound of yet another car.

CAROLINE

Will the price tag be hanging from the dress?

MICHELLE

Excuse me?

CAROLINE

I can't help finding that level of ostentation completely distasteful.

MICHELLE

I'm borrowing the dress. Gordon Henderson is doing me a huge favor.

NICHOLAS
Is my T-shirt okay?

CAROLINE
It's fine. I prefer it when you aren't a walking billboard.

NICHOLAS
Feel the fabric.

CAROLINE
That's very nice. What's the expression? What do people say? ... "Like butter"?

NICHOLAS
Notice the seams?

CAROLINE
There aren't any, are there?

NICHOLAS
That's a very expensive illusion.

CAROLINE
How expensive?

NICHOLAS
Didn't cost me a thing. I got it on a shoot.

MICHELLE
It's a hard knock life.

NICHOLAS
It retails for thirteen ninety-five.

CAROLINE
That seems reasonable.

MICHELLE
He means one thousand three hundred and ninety-five dollars.

CAROLINE
He does not!

CAROLINE looks to NICHOLAS who nods.

CAROLINE
That's ridiculous.

MICHELLE

I don't disagree.

CAROLINE

It's not just ridiculous, it's obscene. It's disheartening to think that I have failed to imbue the slightest moral compass in two of my children.

MICHELLE

Thank god Audrey shops at Wal-Mart, eh?

EDWARD (to WILMA)

It makes one nostalgic for bear-baiting, doesn't it?

CAROLINE

Don't tell me you find this acceptable ...

EDWARD

We have extravagant children. I don't see their vulgarity as a crime against humanity.

CAROLINE (to MICHELLE)

I guess I should be grateful that you're making an effort to look nice for Audrey's rehearsal dinner.

DIANA PEARSON appears at the top of the stairs. Her hair is wet and she is wrapped in an oversized bath towel. She is carrying her clothing.

EDWARD (surprised)

Diana?

NICHOLAS (panicked)

Diana!

MICHELLE (to NICHOLAS)

Diana?

DIANA

Hello everyone. Sorry to make such an entrance.

WILMA and CAROLINE exchange a look of doubt.

DIANA

I didn't realize everyone was back. I was having a little soak and I lost track of time.

EDWARD

We have a Jacuzzi in the suite.

DIANA

Nicholas was sweet enough to share some bath salts and I couldn't use them in the Jacuzzi. I'm so glad to see you made it Michelle. Everyone was so worried.

MICHELLE

And here I am. (to NICHOLAS) Will wonders never cease?

The coin drops for WILMA who glares at NICHOLAS.

WILMA

God in heaven.

A light comes on behind the gate to the owner's area. GREGORY BAYLISS, the proprietor, emerges from the kitchen. He unlocks the gate and steps into the great room.

MICHELLE gasps.

GREGORY

Good afternoon, all. Has the missing sister arrived? (HE sees MICHELLE and falters) Oh my god. I see ... I see you made it ... that everyone is here. Oh my god ... Michelle?

MICHELLE (as if physically struck)

Greg? ... How? ... You? ... This is ...

NICHOLAS

I take it you two crazy kids have met.

MICHELLE (fiercely)

Benvolio.

NICHOLAS

What?

MICHELLE

Benvolio, you idiot. Benvolio!

NICHOLAS (looking at GREGORY)

Oh my god. It is.

Yes. GREGORY

Oh boy. I didn't realize ... I would have warned you ... NICHOLAS

It doesn't matter, Nick. MICHELLE

No? GREGORY

Ancient History. MICHELLE

What am I missing here? EDWARD

For god's sake, would you just shut up. CAROLINE

EDWARD is too startled to respond.

Wow. GREGORY

Wow. MICHELLE

Let me get that for you. CAROLINE (moving to rescue the dress)

MICHELLE surrenders the dress without acknowledging CAROLINE.

You look good. MICHELLE

You look great. In fact, you ... GREGORY
“... doth teach the torches to burn bright!
It seems (you) hang upon the cheek of night
As a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear –
Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear!
So shows a snowy dove trooping with crows
As yonder lady o'er her fellows shows.

GREGORY (con't)

The measure done, I'll watch her place of stand
And, touching hers, make blessed my rude hand.

(HE takes HER hand)

Did my heart love till now? Forswear it, sight!
For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night.

CAROLINE, NICHOLAS, and WILMA smile and
applaud.

EDWARD

Well done!

MICHELLE (pulling her hand away abruptly)

You can go straight to hell.

MICHELLE turns on her heel and charges to the
window DL.

The others endure a moment of awkward silence
and strained glances.

DIANA (finally)

Excuse me. I'm going to get dressed. (to EDWARD) I'm sure I'll need help with a
zipper or something.

SHE exits to the master suite UL.

EDWARD (haplessly exiting)

Right. Excuse me.

WILMA

I need to change as well. Excuse me. (exits up the stairs)

CAROLINE

Nick, do you want to show me Michelle's room so I may hang this dress?

NICHOLAS

Upstairs. End room on the left...

CAROLINE

Nicholas.

NICHOLAS

Yes?

I could use a hand.

CAROLINE

Nick, go!

MICHELLE (without turning back)

Right.

NICHOLAS

CAROLINE and NICHOLAS exit up the stairs.

I'm sorry.

GREGORY

I have no doubt.

MICHELLE

I didn't mean ... anything ... any harm.

GREGORY

Not meaning things is a bit of a personal hallmark, isn't it?

MICHELLE

Michelle ...

GREGORY

I have to say this renews my respect for the dark forces of the universe. Just when I thought this godforsaken weekend couldn't possibly get any more hellish, you appear.

GREGORY

Can I try to explain?

MICHELLE

I'm sure you can. I'm sure you have a vast repertoire of self-serving excuses and well-rehearsed explanations.

GREGORY

Michelle, please ...

MICHELLE

Besides, after 12 years wouldn't it seem rather belated and beside the point?

GREGORY

I'd like to hope not.

MICHELLE

Well then I guess I'm here to pluck the feathers.

GREGORY

You seem a bit more Dorothy Parker than Emily Dickinson.

MICHELLE

Although, despite your best efforts, I'm not a suicidal alcoholic.

GREGORY

That's a little harsh.

MICHELLE

Tell you what? Let's keep this completely in the present. I'm a guest, you're the innkeeper. Period.

GREGORY

I don't think ...

MICHELLE

So, Mr. Bayliss, is there a registration form I need to complete?

GREGORY

Okay. Yes. I have the form here.

GREGORY goes to a sideboard or secretary.
MICHELLE sits at the table. GREGORY brings a form to her. HE sets the form and a pen on the table. SHE takes a pen from her purse and starts to complete the registration form. He stands waiting.

MICHELLE

Yes?

GREGORY

I need to run your credit card, if I may.

MICHELLE

Of course.

SHE takes a card from her purse and hands it to him. HE runs it through a box attached to his phone. Upon receiving approval, HE returns the card.

GREGORY

Thank you.

MICHELLE

You're welcome. (SHE hands him her completed registration form) If you ever attempt to make use of that address or phone number, you will wish you had never been born.

GREGORY

Duly noted. (handing her keys) The round key opens the front door. The square key unlocks the deadbolt. The door will lock automatically; the deadbolt has to be locked manually.

MICHELLE

Got it.

GREGORY

Breakfast is generally available from 7:30 to 9:30. If you would like to make other arrangements, please let me know by six the previous evening.

MICHELLE

Thank you.

GREGORY

Check out will be by 11 a.m. on your date of departure, unless other arrangements are made in advance.

MICHELLE

Thank you.

GREGORY

A housekeeper will be in to freshen the guest rooms between 11 a.m. and two p.m. daily. Again, unless other arrangements are made in advance.

MICHELLE

Thank you?

GREGORY

I hope you enjoy your stay. Please let me know if there's anything I may do to make your visit more comfortable.

MICHELLE

Would that include allowing me to slit your throat with a rusty blade?

GREGORY

We do have an S&M weekend package in March that you might enjoy. I could mail you a brochure.

MICHELLE (after a long beat)
So this is what you do?

GREGORY
I also have a restaurant up toward Staunton.

MICHELLE
Quite the entrepreneur!

GREGORY
I make a living.

MICHELLE
How did you end up running a bed and breakfast?

GREGORY (after a beat)
It belonged to my in-laws.

MICHELLE (after a beat)
Well. I believe I'll head upstairs and set my hair on fire.

GREGORY
This is a smoke-free facility. Please don't disable any of the smoke detectors. There are fire extinguishers under the sink in every bathroom.

MICHELLE does not respond.

GREGORY
If you'll excuse me, I'm going to get this room cleared.

MICHELLE does not respond.

GREGORY places the lemonade pitcher and glasses, both used and unused, on a serving tray and carries them off to the kitchen. HE returns with a cloth and begins wiping down tables and generally straightening the room.

MICHELLE (after a beat)
Doesn't your housekeeper do this room?

GREGORY (after a beat)
Good afternoon.

GREGORY exits into the family quarters, locking the gate behind him.

MICHELLE considers and rejects heading upstairs. SHE finally turns and walks out the front door.

Not long after the door closes, NICHOLAS creeps down the stairs.

NICHOLAS

Michelle? Michelle, are you here? (after glancing around the room he calls back up the stairs) All clear.

CAROLINE (coming down the stairs)

I'm sorry to be so anxious, but I know that whatever I say will be the wrong thing and this just isn't the time for that.

NICHOLAS

I don't think there is a right thing ...

CAROLINE

So he's the one who broke her heart.

NICHOLAS does not respond.

CAROLINE

And she hasn't managed to recover in 12 years?

NICHOLAS

I didn't say that.

CAROLINE

You didn't have to.

NICHOLAS

Isn't that whole construct a little soap-opera-ish for someone of your austere sensibilities?

CAROLINE

We would all do so much better if you and Michelle would believe that I do want you to be happy.

NICHOLAS

We'd all be doing so much better if that was true.

DIANA emerges from the master suite, followed by a very tentative EDWARD.

DIANA

I've got club soda if we need to get rid of any bloodstains.

CAROLINE

No evidence of that. But it's a comfort to know that it's handy.

EDWARD

So Michelle and that young man have a history?

CAROLINE

It's amazing that women as different as Diana and myself would be smitten by the same razor-sharp intellect.

EDWARD (to NICHOLAS)

I'm sure you know the story.

NICHOLAS

I know that if there is any aspect of her history that Michelle would like discussed, I'm sure she'll bring it up herself.

CAROLINE

I must be heading back. Audrey and Ken and I have to meet with the organist at the church at 4:15. I only stopped by to drop off Michelle's dress.

EDWARD

I'm sure she would have been very appreciative it hadn't been for this little surprise.

CAROLINE (shaking Diana's hand)

Diana, Audrey and Ken so look forward to seeing you at the rehearsal dinner. I am sorry about the confusion with the invitations. I don't know how that "Denise" got though. I've double checked the place cards for tonight and for the reception on Saturday to be sure they're correct.

DIANA

These things happen all the time don't they? With so many details to manage for a wedding, I'm happy to be listed as Mrs. Edward Pearson if that would be less confusing.

CAROLINE

Lovely.

EDWARD (embracing CAROLINE warmly)

Hard to believe isn't it? Actually seeing one of ours settle down ...

WILMA (coming down the stairs)

So, what's the story with the stud muffin?

NICHOLAS (taking her by the arm)

Why don't we talk about this later...

DIANA

He is a cutie, isn't he? These Pearson kids always do well for themselves ...

DIANA slides her arm through NICHOLAS's. HE reacts as though her hand had a live electrical charge.

Sound of a key in the front door. MICHELLE enters carrying a small overnight bag and a laptop. The sight that greets her is EDWARD with his arm around CAROLINE affectionately and NICHOLAS with WILMA on one arm and DIANA on the other.

MICHELLE

I bet Alice hated every second in Wonderland. (indicating her luggage) There's plenty more where this came from.

DIANA

Couldn't Mr. Bayliss get that for you? He got ours when we arrived.

MICHELLE

I guess I'll have to ask Nick to help out instead. You're always happy to fill in, aren't you Nick? Do your bit when the regular guy isn't around ...

NICHOLAS (bolting for the door)

Happy to help out!

NICHOLAS exits.

WILMA

I can give him a hand.

MICHELLE

You don't have to.

WILMA

I don't mind. (to Diana) I need to do a better job of keeping my eye on him.

MICHELLE

Thanks.

CAROLINE

Are you going to be okay?

MICHELLE

A little jolt to the equilibrium. I'll be the giddy bridesmaid again by dinner tonight.

MICHELLE starts suddenly, startled by a thought.

CAROLINE

What is it?

MICHELLE (panicked)

He's not coming to the wedding, is he?

CAROLINE

No, he is not.

MICHELLE

Good. Then I'll be fine.

CAROLINE hugs her tightly and exits.

EDWARD

I should see if Nick and Wilma need a hand.

MICHELLE

Relax, Dad. There isn't that much. We should all conserve our strength. (SHE gives him a peck on the cheek as she starts up the stairs.) Send the Sherpa on with my luggage.

MICHELLE exits.

EDWARD turns from the stars to stare at DIANA's back. SHE continues glaring out the window and does not turn back to him.

Lights fade to BLACK.

End of ACT 1, scene 1.

[Shakespeare reference]

Act 1

Scene 2

Setting: A wooded copse on a rise just off a hiking trail at the edge of the property. It offers a view of the property's lake

At rise: Thursday night. Or Friday morning, since it is just after midnight.

NICHOLAS, dressed appropriately for hiking, and MICHELLE dressed at least somewhat suitably for the outdoors enter arm in arm.

NICHOLAS

What DO you think she told that poor man about you?

MICHELLE

I don't know. But he's clearly terrified.

NICHOLAS

Maybe he's just a nervous person? Sibling balance? He's as tightly wound as Ken is lethargic. Did you see how he was shaking during his speech?

MICHELLE

I didn't hear a word of his speech. I was too worried about getting through mine.

NICHOLAS

You were great. Funny without being rude. A little touching at the end. You actually made mom tear up.

MICHELLE

I don't know who was more relieved at the end of it, me, mom, or Audrey.

NICHOLAS

You do PR for a living!

MICHELLE

It took me nearly twenty hours to come up with those four minutes.

NICHOLAS

I liked the bit about how Ken must be really special because you thought she'd never share a room again after sharing a bedroom with you for so long.

MICHELLE

Give me a template, I can fill it in.

NICHOLAS

And what was the Shakespeare?

MICHELLE

For the longest time I was planning to just get up read Sonnet 116 and sit back down.

NICHOLAS

“Let me not to the marriage of two minds admit impediment ...” That would have been fresh and novel.

MICHELLE

It was that or wishing them luck because she had no experience with a happy marriage growing up. Then I caught those lines at the end of 115, “Love is a babe, then might I not say so, To give full growth to that which still doth grow?” And ... boom! ... I had my theme. May your love always grow.

NICHOLAS

So the worst of it's behind you. All you have to do Saturday is march up the aisle and march back down again.

MICHELLE

As long as Ken's brother doesn't pass out from having to walk next to me.

NICHOLAS (pointing)

So this is the famous lake ...

MICHELLE

More of a pond, isn't it?

NICHOLAS

A very large pond. (a beat) Is there someone swimming in it? ... Is that ...

MICHELLE (turning away)

Of course it is. Of course. (pulling NICHOLAS behind a tree) don't let him see us!

NICHOLAS (peering around the tree)

He's getting out.

NICHOLAS turns away suddenly.

MICHELLE

What?

NICHOLAS

He wasn't wearing a suit. First time in my life that wasn't something I wanted to see.

MICHELLE

Whatever I did to offend the gods, I wish I had enjoyed it more.

NICHOLAS

I'm sorry.

MICHELLE shrugs.

NICHOLAS (after a beat)

Was he your first?

MICHELLE

Greg?

NICHOLAS nods.

MICHELLE

No. Not really ...

NICHOLAS

What does that mean?

MICHELLE

The first to matter?

NICHOLAS

Oh.

MICHELLE

It ain't all rapture in the moonlight from the get go!

NICHOLAS

Amen to that.

MICHELLE

The first was Danny Leyton.

NICHOLAS

He was kind of a doofus.

MICHELLE

The obligatory prom night give up. Two not quite drunk enough virgins having at it. Then college was mostly drunk hook ups. Some better than others.

NICHOLAS

What about ... (gestures toward the lake)

MICHELLE

We were in that summer rep. *Romeo and Juliet*, *Where's Charlie?* and *All My Sons*. May through September.

NICHOLAS

You were wonderful.

MICHELLE

You were twelve!

NICHOLAS

And, thanks to you, I'd already seen enough terrible theater to know how good you were.

MICHELLE

I looked young enough and I could speak the verse and I was wildly, madly, deliriously in love with Benvolio. I could channel that ... which was a good thing, since Romeo and Paris couldn't keep their hand off each other. It would have been enough to drive poor Juliet to suicide.

NICHOLAS

And you still carry the torch?

MICHELLE does not respond.

NICHOLAS

Why him? I mean he's nice looking, but you've had that by the dozen.

MICHELLE

"By the dozen"?

NICHOLAS

Hello. It's me. Nick ...

MICHELLE

I loved him. It's not rational, but it's also not complicated.

NICHOLAS

What happened?

MICHELLE

He just disappeared.

NICHOLAS

It's not like he went into a Witness Protection Program. Audrey found him.

MICHELLE

Don't plant that thought.

NICHOLAS

Not deliberately. She wouldn't have wanted to run the risk of your getting any sympathy or attention on her big weekend.

MICHELLE

Nice save.

NICHOLAS

So what happened with the Lad of the Lake?

MICHELLE

Disappeared. Poof. Vanished. The tour ended. I came home. He went home. We were going to go to New York together to look for an apartment. He called and said, "I'm sorry. I've had to change my plans. I won't be coming to New York. And I can't continue seeing you." I laughed. I thought he couldn't be serious. I was in for more than a summer tour by that point.

NICHOLAS

I remember you went into this terrible funk. It was my eighth grade year.

MICHELLE

You always know the right thing to say, don't you?

NICHOLAS

No. All I meant was that Audrey started college right before you came home so it was just you and me in the house that year. Then you went to New York anyway.

MICHELLE

And haven't looked back ...

NICHOLAS

'til now?

MICHELLE shrugs helplessly.

MICHELLE

I'm ... he ... I will admit it's got me ...

NICHOLAS

What?

MICHELLE

It's embarrassing is what it is. I didn't do schoolgirl crushes when I was a schoolgirl.

NICHOLAS

It seems like you've been given an opportunity ...

MICHELLE

I'm not sure I want to take romantic advice from a man who ... who could ...

NICHOLAS

What?

MICHELLE (arms crossed)

With our stepmother ... (she giggles)

NICHOLAS

See, you can't even get it out.

MICHELLE

Still, she is married to Dad.

NICHOLAS

Didn't you ever pine to do O'Neill?

MICHELLE

Evidently not as much as you! I never thought you'd be mom's avenging angel!

NICHOLAS

That never crossed my mind. For all my quirks, I can honestly say that mom has never entered my mind during sex.

MICHELLE

What about the plain fact that she's married...?

NICHOLAS

Not my vow.

MICHELLE

Or that she's a woman!

NICHOLAS

I had noticed.

MICHELLE

You're the one with the Ben Affleck fantasies. I've met Noah, and Eric, and two Justins ... I doubt Wilma was hired to keep you away from young women ...

NICHOLAS

Why is everything "either/or" with you? Why can't you learn to embrace the "and"?

MICHELLE

Where in god's name did you read that?

NICHOLAS

Yes. I like men's bodies. I like the things men can do with their bodies and things I can do with those bodies. When I close my eyes and imagine, it is poor ole Ben, or some grip, or some man I saw jogging. But that doesn't mean I don't like women's bodies at all. It's different. Less intense. Sometimes it takes more concentration, but it can still be fun with a woman.

MICHELLE

Aren't you the last romantic!

NICHOLAS

So when Diana came on to me this afternoon, I didn't put up a fight.

MICHELLE

You're a mess.

NICHOLAS

Actually, I'm not.

MICHELLE

How can you say that?

NICHOLAS

Jeez, when did you become your mother's daughter?

MICHELLE

What?

NICHOLAS

You seem to want me to be darker or more complicated or less happy than I am. Am I supposed to be as dark or complicated or miserable as you? Because I'm not. I'm not very deep or responsible, maybe, but I'm happy most of the time. Why? Because I'm not embarrassed by my appetites and I have what it takes to get them filled.

MICHELLE stares at him.

NICHOLAS

Am I wrong?

MICHELLE

There are things that shouldn't be said out loud.

NICHOLAS

I don't take anything that isn't offered freely.

MICHELLE

I hope you pay Wilma what she's worth.

NICHOLAS

You'd have a better time this weekend if you'd go after what you want.

MICHELLE

It's not what I want anymore.

NICHOLAS

You still want answers.

MICHELLE

It really doesn't matter anymore.

NICHOLAS

If it ever did, it still does.

MICHELLE

You really have to stop memorizing greeting cards.

NICHOLAS

You can be as quippy and dismissive as you like. The fact is you are dying to know why that man dumped you.

MICHELLE

No. I'm not.

NICHOLAS

Michelle, please!

MICHELLE

I have learned not to ask questions unless I really want to know the answers.

NICHOLAS (after a beat)

Fair enough.

MICHELLE (peering through the trees)

He's gone. Look at the moonlight on the lake. So still. Like he was never there. I envy that.

NICHOLAS

The lake knows he'll be back.

MICHELLE

We should get you a book agent. You could be the one-man death of the new age.

NICHOLAS

Not if we slap a shirtless picture on the cover.

MICHELLE

That's going to fail you some day.

NICHOLAS

How likely is that?

MICHELLE

I said some day.

NICHOLAS

Then I'll write my autobiography and fill it with old shirtless pictures.

MICHELLE

Hunh. Will you tell the truth?

NICHOLAS

Sure. The problem is the truth just pisses people off. I can't ever be the great the gay icon because I won't renounce women completely. Activists are like parents. They only want you to be happy if what makes you happy is what they want for you.

MICHELLE

I heard her complaining for six of the nine months and eleven days, so I can't even say you were adopted.

NICHOLAS

At least I was facing the right way when I finally came.

MICHELLE

It figures, doesn't it, that Audrey was the good daughter even in the womb.

NICHOLAS

Hey!

MICHELLE
What?

NICHOLAS
She's going to be happy.

MICHELLE
Really?

NICHOLAS
I think so. So try being happy for her. For this weekend, at least. You can fake it for a weekend, can't you?

MICHELLE
But it's not just for a weekend. Soon I'll have to pretend to love her children.

NICHOLAS
Yes, you will. So you might as well start developing those muscles.

MICHELLE
For that I am going to need to be rested.

NICHOLAS
Come on then.

MICHELLE
Think you'll finally be able to sleep?

NICHOLAS
Probably not. You?

MICHELLE
Not a chance.

NICHOLAS
Well let's get to the tossin' and turnin' 'til the bright new day dawns.

MICHELLE
Does anyone actually enjoy a wedding?

HE puts his arm around her shoulders and leads her off as lights fade to BLACK.

End Act 1, scene 2.

[Shakespeare reference]

Act 1

Scene 3

Setting: The wooded copse as in scene 2.

At rise: Friday night, late but not yet Saturday morning.

The copse is empty. Peaceful. DIANA's voice pierces the night's peace.

DIANA (from off)

Nick! ... Goddamnit Nick wait up! ... NICK!

NICHOLAS, dressed casually as he had been the night before comes hurtling up the path into the copse. Unfortunately, in his haste he trips over a root and falls with quite a clamor. He immediately tries to leap to his feet, but his ankle won't support him and he tumbles to the ground again. Wincing, he scrambles along the ground trying to conceal himself in the underbrush.

DIANA, still dressed for dinner, comes pounding up the path in a rage.

DIANA (spotting NICHOLAS)

There you are! ... What the hell? What the hell are you doing?

NICHOLAS doesn't respond, but scrambles to keep her at a distance.

DIANA

For god's sake ... why are you being like this?

NICHOLAS

I can't ... we can't ...

DIANA

You could. We did,

NICHOLAS

Once was fine. If in questionable taste. ... But more would be ... creepy.

DIANA

And who says you get to decide that on your own?

NICHOLAS attempts to stand.

NICHOLAS

Well not with him in the house!

DIANA

I'll go back for a blanket ...

NICHOLAS limps a step or two before going down.

DIANA

I thought you were supposed to be a good actor. (Their eyes lock.) Are you really hurt?

NICHOLAS

I tripped. ... My ankle ...

DIANA

Let me see ...

NICHOLAS (scrambling away)

You've seen ...

DIANA

I want to make sure you haven't broken anything ...

NICHOLAS

When did you get your nursing degree?

DIANA

I taught kindergarten for four years. I'm a whizz at helping clumsy little boys with their "owies."

NICHOLAS (still scrambling)

There's nothing here you need to kiss and make better!

DIANA

HOLD STILL! (turning his ankle) Does this hurt?

NICHOLAS

No.

DIANA (flexing his foot)

How about this?

No. NICHOLAS

How about this? DIANA (running her hand up his thigh)

Diana! NICHOLAS

GREGORY enters from the lake side of the cove.
HE is wrapped in a towel, still damp from his swim.
He is carrying a pair of shorts.

Is everything okay folks? GREGORY

HE sees NICHOLAS on the ground with DIANA's
hand up the leg of his shorts.

Oh. ... Excuse me. GREGORY

No! ... Wait ... please ... NICHOLAS

DIANA stands and turns away.

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to ... GREGORY

You didn't! NICHOLAS

Are you okay? GREGORY

I fell. Twisted my ankle. NICHOLAS

Can you stand? GREGORY

NICHOLAS shakes his head.

GREGORY

Have you tried ...

DIANA

Repeatedly.

GREGORY

Do we need to have you checked out? There's an emergency room in Staunton ...

NICHOLAS

Dear god, no! I just twisted it. I just need a few minutes

GREGORY

Let me give you a hand back to the house.

NICHOLAS

You don't have to ...

GREGORY

What kind of host would I be to leave you lying on the ground?

DIANA

Makes me wish I'd thought to turn my ankle.

GREGORY

That's very flattering, Mrs. Pearson. ... Give me your hand.

GREGORY helps NICHOLAS to his feet.

DIANA

Can you really not walk?

NICHOLAS attempts a halting step or two, but is clearly in too much pain to walk back to the house. HE sits again.

DIANA

Your ankle was fine!

NICHOLAS

You were groping the wrong leg.

DIANA (an appraising glance at GREGORY)

Perhaps.

GREGORY (putting an arm around NICHOLAS)
Let me help you up ...

NICHOLAS
My mother is going to kill me if I'm on crutches for the wedding.

As GREGORY heaves NICHOLAS to his feet, the towel begins to slip from his waist. GREGORY grabs for the towel and NICHOLAS begins to teeter. GREGORY grabs for him and the towel starts to slip again. GREGORY pulls NICHOLAS in close to him to catch the towel.

GREGORY
Mrs. Pearson ...

DIANA
Yes?

GREGORY
Would you please tighten my towel? Just tighten it. So I don't drop Nick.

DIANA
I don't know ...

GREGORY
Excuse me?

DIANA
Watching you two I'm starting to understand why men like lesbian porn.

NICHOLAS (really angry)
Diana, for god's sake!! Now!

DIANA
All right. All rights. Keep your shirts on. (running her hands over GREGORY's back)
Them that got shirts ...

GREGORY (taking a step away)
Never mind, Mrs. Pearson!

DIANA
Stop. I'll fix the damn towel.

MICHELLE, again dressed suitably for hiking, enters along the path. She stops abruptly. The sight that greets her is GREGORY embracing NICHOLAS while DIANA holds his waist from behind.

SHE gasps and turns to run away.

NICHOLAS

Michelle! Wait!

GREGORY (miserably)

Michelle? No ...

MICHELLE stops, but does not turn back to face them.

NICHOLAS

Michelle ... I may be ... well, I guess there's lots I'm capable of ... but you know, you KNOW I wouldn't do this ... what this must look like ... to you. You know that, Michelle. ... You do.

MICHELLE turns to face them.

MICHELLE (to GREGORY)

Wouldn't that particular sandwich work better if you were facing Diana?

GREGORY

Michelle ...

NICHOLAS

I fell ...

MICHELLE

Come on then, I'll walk you back to the house. I'm sure (gesturing to GREGORY and DIANA) these two can find a way to use a moonlit night.

DIANA smiles.

GREGORY

Not a chance.

DIANA's smile fades.

GREGORY

Do you have to be so cruel...?

MICHELLE

I beg YOUR pardon?

GREGORY

Even if you're not ... if it's too late ... the memory of what we had deserves better.

MICHELLE

You smarmy, sanctimonious prick! Who the hell anointed you protector of the sacred memory? You're the one who violated my trust ...

DIANA

Much as I love being in the middle of the Pearson family soap opera, I'm not up to this after spending three days trying not to slap Audrey silly.

MICHELLE

Don't you want to take Nick back with you?

NICHOLAS

No!

MICHELLE

Or are you one of those "I never do anything twice" gals?

DIANA

Whatever I may be, I'm not one of those "gals" who takes more than a decade to give up on a lost cause. 'Night all.

DIANA exits down the path.

NICHOLAS

Well, not just a third wheel, but a flat tire.

MICHELLE and GREGORY are staring at one another and do not respond.

NICHOLAS

Maybe I should just crawl back to the house.

MICHELLE

What's stopping you?

NICHOLAS

Wouldn't that be just a little too "Christina's World"?

GREGORY

Wait.

GREGORY finds a sturdy stick in the brush, breaks it off to the right height and hands it go
NICHOLAS.

Here you go.

GREGORY

HE helps NICHOLAS to his feet. NICHOLAS takes a few tentative steps and discovers that, while it's still painful, he can get around with the stick.

Thanks. ... I'll be off then ...

NICHOLAS

You will if you know what's good for you.

MICHELLE

GREGORY and MICHELLE watch NICHOLAS hobble off. As it becomes clear that he is long gone and well out of sight, it also becomes clear that they cannot make themselves look at one another.

Insert banter here. (a beat) No?

MICHELLE (finally)

MICHELLE starts to exit.

Wait.

GREGORY

You're going to come up with banter?

MICHELLE

No.

GREGORY

GREGORY picks up his shorts and pulls them up under the towel. When the shorts are well in place, he removes the towel and drapes it over his shoulder.

There.

GREGORY

MICHELLE

Such becoming modesty. Or did you figure you could run more quickly in the shorts?

GREGORY does not respond.

MICHELLE

Running being your specialty.

GREGORY

I ... ah ... it's ... I ...

MICHELLE

I was really hoping for one of the sonnets.

GREGORY

Nothing that happened ... Nothing was like ... was why ... you might think ...

MICHELLE

And how exactly would you know what I think ... about anything! ... since we haven't had the slightest contact since you rudely and abruptly dumped me. (SHE brushes her hands in a gesture of contemptuous dismissal.)

GREGORY

You don't know a thing about my life or the choices I had to make ...

MICHELLE

Are you blaming me for that?

GREGORY

No. ... But now I'm standing here doubting every one of them. ... I saw you yesterday and I see you now and nothing seems like it was worth that sacrifice. ... But I can't regret ... and I would never want to resent ... Oh my god. This is the worst moment of my life. The worst. ... I can't ... there's no right ...

GREGORY sits on the ground in frustration. HE isn't going to let himself cry, but it's a struggle.

GREGORY

Why did I think I could handle this? Why didn't I just tell Audrey we were booked for the weekend?

MICHELLE

So you did know!

GREGORY

Of course. Truth?

MICHELLE

It would make a nice change.

GREGORY

I had to go and get a copy of R&J from the library. I didn't know that speech. I memorized it last week. I haven't been able to see or read or think about Shakespeare since that time ... since I called you for the last time. All of Shakespeare would only lead me back to you ... and that would have killed me.

MICHELLE

Then why did you make the phone call? Why dump me so rudely?

GREGORY doesn't respond.

MICHELLE

Why dump me at all?

GREGORY (after a long beat)

I had broken up with Robin before I left for the tour.

MICHELLE

That's enough. That's fine. I get the full picture.

GREGORY

No you don't.

MICHELLE

Oh please.

GREGORY

No ... please ... hear me out ...

There is a pain, an earnestness to his plea that stops her.

GREGORY

Please ...

MICHELLE

Go ahead.

GREGORY

Neither one of us knew she was pregnant.

MICHELLE (after a beat)

I might buy that you didn't.

GREGORY

She didn't tell me 'til I got back home. She was almost seven months along. She thought about putting the baby up for adoption.

MICHELLE

One could make that choice

GREGORY

I thought there was only one right thing I could do.

MICHELLE

Have a conversation with everyone whose life would be affected?

GREGORY

Marry her and raise our baby. Be responsible for the consequences of my actions.

MICHELLE does not respond

GREGORY

It has turned out to have one big up among the many downs.

MICHELLE

Then I'm happy for you.

GREGORY

The marriage was awful. We were miserable. The only stroke of luck I had was that she ran off with one of her dealers so I had no trouble getting full custody of Emma.

MICHELLE

Who must now be ...

GREGORY

She'll be twelve on the tenth of November.

MICHELLE

I don't. ... I can't. ... I don't know what to do with that piece of information.

GREGORY

I couldn't talk to you again. I knew my resolve would crumble. I did love you. ... I still do.

MICHELLE (turning on him furiously)

Fuck you.

GREGORY

No ...

MICHELLE

How can you ... you had the unmitigated balls to make all those decisions for me ... they weren't just for you and Robin and the spawn ...

GREGORY

Please don't ...

MICHELLE

And with a quick trip to the library and a dewy-eyed pledge of eternal love ...you think ...

MICHELLE stops. THEIR eyes meet. Suddenly she grabs and kisses him. Explosively. A dozen years of mutual longing and regret and anger and confusion find furious physical expression on both sides.

MICHELLE (after a beat)

Well, that solved nothing ...

GREGORY does not respond.

MICHELLE

This would be the time for you to add something.

GREGORY

It's ... I ...

MICHELLE

I suppose, "For stony limits cannot hold love our, and what love can do that dares love attempt" was too much to hope for.

GREGORY

I am so relieved and grateful ... (he is shivering)

MICHELLE

Are you that cold?

GREGORY shakes his head.

MICHELLE

Greg?

GREGORY

I ... You have no idea ... how much ... (he is overcome)

MICHELLE

That's about the best answer you could have given.

THEY embrace again, a bit more tenderly. Then GREGORY begins to really sob.

MICHELLE is discomfited, but stands her ground. His weeping eventually tapers off to a sigh.

MICHELLE

Wow. That was ...

GREGORY

Have you got a tissue?

MICHELLE

Sorry, I wasn't expecting ...

Their eyes meet. Despite his best efforts not to, GREGORY begins to weep again.

MICHELLE

Um ...

HE tries to pull it together. And fails.

MICHELLE

You're going to think the city has made me hard ...

HE shoots her a puzzled look through his tears.

MICHELLE

But a little of that goes a long way.

HE struggles to control his breathing.

MICHELLE

Are you still ticklish?

GREGORY

Yeah.

MICHELLE takes a step toward him.

GREGORY

No! Please, no ...God NO! ... I'll stop. I'll stop!

HE composes himself. They smile at one another. They are relaxed in one another's company for the first time since before the break up.

SHE looks at him expectantly.

GREGORY

I don't think I should try to talk. Yet. It will only ... (HE takes a deep breath.)

MICHELLE

Words I never thought I'd say: I get how I might have had it easier.

GREGORY looks toward her, but still doesn't try to speak.

MICHELLE

For a while I hated you. Really, really hated you. Hate's a great motivator and it's a lot easier to live with than grief or longing.

GREGORY

I sure never hated you. And I had to tamp down missing you, regretting my choices ... really, really hard. I couldn't let myself wonder how you were or what you were doing or what you had for breakfast every single day ... nope. Couldn't do that ... much. And, well, there is a kind of wonder to realizing that you are reading *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie* for the 481st time and that's really okay. And I'm proud to have a daughter who loved *The Stinky Cheese Man*.

MICHELLE

I don't suppose she'd be charmed by being read to in French from *Jalousie*?

GREGORY

She's going on 12, she's not charmed by much anymore.

MICHELLE laughs to herself.

GREGORY

What?

MICHELLE

I imagined my competition in many ways, but never in diapers.

GREGORY

You never had competition. Ever. Still. ... I chose a responsibility ... and I honestly never dreamed ... But here you are ... (his composure begins to crack again.)

MICHELLE

Steady!

GREGORY (after a deep breath)

Is there any chance ... we could...

MICHELLE

Y'know, there just might be.

GREGORY

Shall we head back ...

MICHELLE (nodding)

We're not going to advance the cause standing out here all night.

GREGORY takes her hand shyly. They smile at one another.

GREGORY (composure wavering)

I still can't really believe ...

MICHELLE (tickles him)

How about now?

GREGORY

Oh my god. ... No ... stop ...

Lights fade as MICHELLE chases him down the path toward the lodge.

End Act One.

[Shakespeare reference]

Act 2

Scene 1

Setting: The great room. Nearly 8 a.m. Saturday.

At rise: The great room is filled with slashing beams of unforgiving morning light.

The gate to the family area is locked and the area is dark. The table and sideboard have been set for breakfast, but no breakfast has been served.

DIANA, made up and ready for day, but wearing a robe, sits at the table. EDWARD is standing at the gate.

EDWARD

If he had simply said breakfast would be available at 8 it wouldn't have been a problem.

DIANA

Maybe he's one of those people who is always late ...

EDWARD

Poor way to run a business.

EDWARD paces. DIANA fidgets. EDWARD opens the front door.

EDWARD

Not even a newspaper.

DIANA

Would you really want to read the Hooterville Tribune?

EDWARD

Maybe we should give up on this and go grab coffee at the hotel.

DIANA

You are hopeless.

EDWARD

That was a reasonable suggestion.

DIANA

By what standard? We will get plenty of Audrey and her mother later today, we don't need to see them one minute earlier than necessary. I don't think I could listen to Audrey sniveling and apologizing and taking full responsibility for putting us someplace we couldn't even get a cup of coffee. "It seemed so nice when I checked it out." (lip quivering) "It has a good reputation in town."

EDWARD

It's a shame Michelle missed that. You might have had a moment of bonding.

DIANA

She's not wrong about everything.

WILMA (coming down the stairs)

STILL no coffee?

EDWARD

I'm afraid not.

WILMA

It wouldn't be so bad if we couldn't smell it!

NICHOLAS appears at the top of the stairs in the sweats and t-shirt in which he slept. Or in which he spent the night in bed without sleeping much. He is favoring his injured ankle.

As he begins to hobble down the stairs he sees WILMA and attempts to walk normally. This is a bad idea. His ankle gives way which leads to an elaborate fall with several false recoveries down the stairs and around the great room. Objects and furniture are threatened and restored. He flops around the room, trying desperately to maintain his sangfroid while attempting to recover his balance with the unforced sweetness and loopy awkwardness of a young Buster Keaton.

WILMA, DIANA and EDWARD are startled and alarmed by his unstately progress around the room.

NICHOLAS finally come to rest in a chair opposite DIANA at the dining table.

NICHOLAS (calmly)

So, has anyone seen Michelle?

WILMA

What have you done?

NICHOLAS

I seem to have twisted my ankle.

WILMA

When?

NICHOLAS

Just now ... on the stairs.

WILMA just looks at him.

NICHOLAS

Well ... I might have twisted it last night.

WILMA's gaze doesn't waver.

NICHOLAS

Walking. I went out for a walk and tripped over a root. Or something. (to DIANA) Right?

WILMA's gaze shifts to DIANA.

DIANA (unfazed)

I didn't see a thing. He was on the ground when I found him.

A light comes on behind the gate. GREGORY appears in pajama bottoms and a sweatshirt.

GREGORY

I am so sorry. I'm so very, very sorry.

WILMA

Just get the coffee out here. You can grovel later.

GREGORY

I have bagels with cream cheese or jam or butter or margarine. And danish, from Newton's not a grocery store.

EDWARD

If you know what's good for you, you'll be out here with coffee now.

GREGORY unlocks the gate disappears into the kitchen and returns quickly with a carafe of coffee, a sugar bowl, a

ramekin with packets of Equal and Splenda, and several creamers on a tray.

GREGORY

I have cream, skim, and 2% milk ...

WILMA

Black, please.

GREGORY

I can also get decaf ...

WILMA

Why?

GREGORY (serving her coffee)

Ma'am.

EDWARD

Which is the 2%?

GREGORY

In the center.

WILMA

Thank you.

EDWARD prepares a coffee with two sugars and a splash of 2% milk.

GREGORY

I'm so sorry ... I'm not usually ...

DIANA

Did you say you had bagels?

GREGORY (exiting to the kitchen)

Yes, ma'am.

EDWARD (handing DIANA the coffee)

Diana.

DIANA

Thank you.

Coffee? EDWARD (to NICHOLAS)

Sure. I can ... NICHOLAS

Don't stand! NICHOLAS starts to stand.

Black with just a little sugar, please. EDWARD & WILMA (simultaneously)

GREGORY returns with a tray of bagels and pastries.

Once everyone has had breakfast, I hope you're planning to head into town to check out the antique shops. We're known for our antiquing! GREGORY

There's a toaster on the sideboard. EDWARD begins to prepare a bagel with cream cheese.

It holds six. Wilma? GREGORY

Yes, thank you. EDWARD

Could I try one of those pastries? WILMA

How's the ankle? NICHOLAS

Were you there, too? GREGORY (putting the pastry tray in front of him)

I came down the path after he fell. GREGORY

Nature is dangerous, especially after dark. Would you happen to have an ace bandage? NICHOLAS

GREGORY

If I don't we can pick one up at CVS.

NICHOLAS

If I stay off it today and wrap it tonight, I should be fine for the wedding.

EDWARD (to WILMA)

What do you take on your bagel?

WILMA

Just a little butter, please. (to NICHOLAS) Let me see the ankle.

NICHOLAS

Wilma ...

WILMA

The ankle.

NICHOLAS

This really isn't ...

WILMA

Now.

NICHOLAS shoots out his injured leg, grimacing.

WILMA

That's quite a range of colors. A complete fall foliage tour. A few more purples ...

NICHOLAS

I don't need ...

WILMA

You need to be very, very quiet.

NICHOLAS is silent.

DIANA

Wow.

WILMA (to GREGORY)

Would you mind getting me a towel?

GREGORY

No, ma'am.

And a pillow.
WILMA

Yes, ma'am.
GREGORY

And an ice pack.
WILMA

GREGORY exits.

EDWARD places a bagel with cream cheese at DIANA's place and sits at the table himself.

Thank you.
DIANA

Wilma?
EDWARD

I'll take it. I don't need to go hungry on his behalf.
WILMA

GREGORY returns with a pillow and towel.

Thank you.
WILMA

I'm afraid I don't have an ice pack.
GREGORY

Think you could manage to put some ice cubes in a large plastic bag? We have to get the swelling down to get him into shoes for tonight.
WILMA

GREGORY exits

WILMA moves a chair in front of NICHOLAS, places the pillow on the chair and the towel on the pillow. SHE lifts NICHOLAS's injured ankle gingerly onto the pillow.

WILMA sits at the table and SHE, DIANA, and EDWARD eat their bagels and sip their coffee.

GREGORY returns with a large freezer bag full of ice cubes.

Thank you.

WILMA

WILMA places the bag over NICHOLAS's ankle and he winces.

WILMA

Sorry. You are going to have to keep weight off until I can get a doctor in to take a look at it.

DIANA

Of course.

WILMA

Do you happen to know any good local orthopedists?

GREGORY (shaking his head)

I've got a great pediatrician.

WILMA

Well that's a start. See if he or she can recommend an orthopedist.

The phone on the desk rings.

DIANA (to WILMA)

If that's the pediatrician, I'm going to be scared of you!

GREGORY (answering the phone)

Birch Creek of the Blue Ridge. ... Hello, Mrs. Pearson. ... I don't see her right here. ... Let me get her.

EDWARD (starting for the stairs)

Which room is hers?

GREGORY

She's not there.

NICHOLAS smiles.

DIANA

Of course not!

GREGORY (exiting)

Excuse me.

WILMA

Dear god, do none of you people ever sleep alone?

GREGORY returns, followed by MICHELLE, who is, yes, wearing the top to the pajama bottoms he is wearing.

DIANA

I'm going to gag.

MICHELLE

Good morning all. It's a lovely morning, isn't it? I hope everyone slept well. (picking up the phone) Hi mom. ... Good morning ... I am so sorry. I overslept. ... Don't wait for me. I'll meet you at the beauty parlor. I'll be there by 10, I promise. ... Oh no. ... Oh mom, I'm sorry. ... No, Audrey never mentioned ... well yes, I should have been there at 8 for breakfast like I promised. ... I'll hurry. I promise, I'll be there by 9:15. ... Well no, aren't we having make up done later? ... Then I'll look like a total hag in the picture, think of it an extra gift to Audrey. ... Mom ... Mom! The longer I stand here listening to your lecture, the later I will be. ... You'll have hours and hours to harangue me before the wedding, so let me go now so I can get there. Right. ... Would you like to say hi to Daddy? ... (shocked) You would? ... Okay. ... (holding out the phone) ... Daddy.

EDWARD

Hello. ... Yes. I did. I heard her ... You know how she gets. ... No, I don't like her tone either. ... We should all be willing to do what it takes to make this day special for Audrey. ...

GREGORY holds up a coffee cup and MICHELLE nods and mouth "Black."

EDWARD

No, you shouldn't be expected to keep track of every little detail. ... You know she doesn't mean the harm she does. Usually. ... Now there's no need to let this cast a shadow on the whole day. ... Audrey is going to be beautiful. Michelle and the other bridesmaids will be lovely. The mother of the bride will be gorgeous. Especially if she doesn't let the bride's older sister get under her skin. ...

GREGORY hands MICHELLE coffee. SHE kisses him and mouths "Thanks."

EDWARD

Yes, it is difficult. ... We'll be at the church for pictures by 2:30. ... Goodbye, Caroline.

DIANA

2:30!?! The flippin' wedding isn't until six, how many pictures are they going to take?

MICHELLE

Don't ask. I'm in trouble because I'm not there so they can take pictures of the bridesmaids leaving the hotel to go get their hair done. Something neither Audrey nor my mother ever, EVER mentioned to me.

NICHOLAS

Go ahead and throw me under the bus. If she hears I might be there on crutches she'll be in such tizzy it will take the focus off you. As long as she has something to be outraged about the object is secondary.

WILMA

You were doing better when you were being quiet.

EDWARD (exploding)

That's enough out of all three of you. You will stop this selfish, mean spirited sniping for the rest of the day. Audrey is entitled to her happiness and your mother is entitled to a little respect. Nothing they are asking is onerous or difficult. So help me god, if any one of you does anything else to upset Caroline or make this day less than wonderful for Audrey you will have to answer to me.

MICHELLE, NICHOLAS, DIANA and GREGORY sit in stunned silence. WILMA turns away and allows herself a small smile.

EDWARD (still furious)

Excuse me. I need some air.

EDWARD crosses quickly to the front door and exits.

GREGORY takes MICHELLE's hand.

MICHELLE

So much for afterglow.

DIANA (standing and crossing to the master suite)

Excuse me.

DIANA exits.

WILMA

Can you help me find an orthopedist?

GREGORY

Of course. How about this ... I'll run you in to the hotel then you won't have to park and I can probably get us there a little more quickly ...

MICHELLE

Sure. (Kisses him lightly) Wait, I'm going to want to have my car there so I can make my break whenever I need to.

GREGORY

I'll still go ahead and swing by Dr. Currin's office. Then we won't have to wait for his office to return a call ... which might take longer.

WILMA

That sounds reasonable. We need someone out here as soon as possible since he needs to be at the church by 2:30.

NICHOLAS nods.

GREGORY

I'll get right on it. I'll go throw on some clothes and clean up this mess when I get back.

MICHELLE

I'm going to grab a quick shower and prepare to face my doom.

One more kiss and HE exits toward the kitchen while SHE heads up the stairs.

WILMA

I'm going to finish getting dressed.

NICHOLAS

Okay.

WILMA

Keep your leg up.

NICHOLAS

I will.

WILMA

You are not to move ...

NICHOLAS

No.

WILMA

Not to budge ...

NICHOLAS

Right.

WILMA

I want to find you in this chair with your leg up when I get back.

NICHOLAS

You will.

WILMA

All right, then. I won't be long.

WILMA exits up the stairs.

After a moment, NICHOLAS tries to reach the coffee carafe and finds, to his frustration, that he can't.

DIANA enters. She has dressed quickly and not for the big day. She is carrying a man's windbreaker.

DIANA (sheepishly)

There's still a little bit of a chill in the air. He went out without a jacket or sweater ...

NICHOLAS nods and DIANA exits out the front door.

NICHOLAS considers lowering his leg, then thinks better of it. He sits gazing longingly at the coffee just out of his reach as lights fade to black.

END of Act 2, scene 1.

[Shakespeare reference]

Act 2

Scene 2

Setting: The great room. That night. After the wedding.

At rise: The great room is dark, save for a single table lamp and the moonlight that pours through the windows.

We hear a key in the door SR. WILMA opens the door to admit NICHOLAS who is leaning quite heavily on a snazzy antique cane.

WILMA flips on lights as NICHOLAS makes his way haltingly into the room.

Oh damn. NICHOLAS

What? WILMA

Stairs. NICHOLAS

I see WILMA

How'm I gonna get up them? NICHOLAS

Slowly. WILMA

NICHOLAS glares at her.

WILMA
Although probably not as slowly as you'll be coming down them in the morning. When the pain meds have worn off, you're really going to feel that ankle.

NICHOLAS
Whoever said you were an angel of mercy was lying through his teeth.

WILMA

No one has ever said I was an angel of mercy.

NICHOLAS

Then they've all been right. (admiring his cane) Maybe Annie Liebovitz can do something with this cane.

NICHOLAS attempts to strike a debonair pose while twirling the cane. WILMA grabs him as soon as he starts to fall.

WILMA

Oh no you don't!

Lights come up in the family area and GREGORY opens the gate.

GREGORY

Wedding winding down? ... (sees WILMA holding NICHOLAS) ... Need a hand?

WILMA

I think Mr. Astaire is ready to retire for the evening.

GREGORY

Looks like you enjoyed the wedding Nick.

NICHOLAS

Yeah. Even if the bride looked like seconds from the Macy's Parade.

WILMA

Nick ...

NICHOLAS

Oh come on ... Weren't you surprised the groomsmen didn't have guide ropes?

WILMA (guiding him to the stairs)

Save your good material for Michelle.

When they reach the stairs, NICHOLAS does a take from the stairs to his ankle to the cane to his ankle and back to the stairs.

NICHOLAS

Nope. This isn't going to work.

WILMA

What?

NICHOLAS

I can fall down, no problem. But I don't have any idea how to fall up.

WILMA

Well I'm not carrying you.

NICHOLAS turns his back to the stairs.

NICHOLAS (to WILMA)

Would you hold this, please?

WILMA takes the cane. NICHOLAS attempts to sit, holding the bannister. HE can't quite get all the way down. As he attempts to stand, he lurches too far forward. GREGORY jumps to his side and catches him before he can fall.

NICHOLAS (in GREGORY's embrace)

Again tonight?

GREGORY

Shut up, Nick.

NICHOLAS

Right.

GREGORY tosses NICHOLAS over his shoulder like a sack.

GREGORY

Let's get this over with.

WILMA

Are you sure ...

GREGORY nods and carries NICHOLAS up the stairs.

NICHOLAS

Thank god the paparazzi are missing this.

GREGORY reaches the top of the stairs with NICHOLAS and stops.

Um... . . .

GREGORY

Let me get the door!

WILMA

WILMA follows up the stairs.

Bathroom first!

NICHOLAS

Probably a good idea. (to WILMA) Leave that in the bedroom. I'll take him from here.

GREGORY

Thank you.

WILMA

GREGORY exits to the bathroom with NICHOLAS.

As WILMA returns without the cane and starts down the stairs, we hear the familiar sound of tires on gravel, doors opening and closing and eventually the sound of a key in the lock of the front door.

MICHELLE, still in her bridesmaid dress, enters followed by DIANA. They are each carrying a bottle of champagne.

Ladies!

WILMA (not quite masking her surprise)

Nick down for the count?

MICHELLE

I have to hope so.

WILMA

He's always been a lightweight ...

MICHELLE

He's not much of a drinker, but it didn't take much with the pain meds.

WILMA

DIANA (holding up her champagne)

Think your honey would mind if I tossed this in the fridge?

MICHELLE

Is the gate open? (sees that it is) Oh. I'll take them both.

DIANA (handing Michelle the champagne)

Thanks.

WILMA

A better person wouldn't ask

MICHELLE stops.

MICHELLE

See, you're becoming like family.

DIANA

My condolences.

WILMA

What brought you ladies back together?

MICHELLE

It was a silver Mercury Grand Marquis, I believe.

WILMA waits.

DIANA

Edward couldn't tear himself away. And I couldn't stand another second.

MICHELLE

Poor Audrey didn't want it to end.

DIANA

She'll never get to wear that dress again!

MICHELLE

Don't count on that.

WILMA

Halloween?

MICHELLE

You really have caught the family spirit. No, I predict that there will be lots of renewing of their vows. Maybe not every year, but at least every five years.

DIANA

There's something to look forward to.

MICHELLE exits to the kitchen.

WILMA

Seems like a waste to rush back.

DIANA

Oh?

WILMA

Between his ankle and the meds Nick won't be of much use to you tonight.

DIANA

Longest coitus interruptus ever.

WILMA

And it doesn't matter at all that you are married to his father?

DIANA

Take that up with Nick. You're his nanny, not mine.

WILMA

I don't get complicated relationships.

DIANA

Have you ever seen his work?

WILMA

Of course. I've even seen a rough cut of the new one.

DIANA

Not Nick's. Edward's.

WILMA shakes her head.

DIANA

I saw his show at the Hirschhorn before I met him. Might have been better if it had gone the other way. Monumental arching strips of bronze formed into these maze-like structures. They're huge and solid and delicate and ethereal all at once. And the process is both tedious and miraculous. He makes the originals in clay, then makes a latex mold from the original, then pours wax into the mold, then builds a ceramic shell around it. The shell is buried in sand and filled with molten metal. When the metal cools it's sanded and treated with chemicals to create the finish.

WILMA

Okay. But what's holding you now.

You'll laugh.

DIANA

I won't promise not to.

WILMA

We took a vow.

DIANA

WILMA shoots her a skeptical look.

DIANA

I won't give his family or mine the satisfaction of not seeing this through to the end. I hung on through the prostate cancer, the chemo and radiation. I'm hanging on through the heart condition. I'll hang on through whatever else comes along. But I'll be the widow when the obituaries get written.

WILMA

I wouldn't bet against you.

MICHELLE returns with one of the bottles of champagne in a silver cooler and two glasses.

MICHELLE

I thought I'd leave this for you so we could lock the gate. I guess Greg went for a swim. He must have gotten tired of waiting.

WILMA

No ...

DIANA

I'm gonna get out of these shoes and take a walk!

MICHELLE

Don't. Just don't.

GREGORY appears at the top of the stairs.

GREGORY (smiling)

You're back!

MICHELLE is puzzled, but unable to keep from smiling back.

MICHELLE

Yeah. Finally.

I was helping Nick get to bed.

GREGORY (coming down the stairs)

Of course.

DIANA

You survived?

GREGORY

Best of all, there will be hundreds of pictures of me in this dress next to Audrey as a Homecoming Float.

MICHELLE

THEY kiss.

Was the dress really that bad?

GREGORY

Ladies?

MICHELLE

In every detail.

DIANA

WILMA nods reluctantly

For us?

GREGORY (referring to the champagne)

This is for Wilma and Diana. Ours is in the fridge.

MICHELLE

I like the way you think! Good night, ladies.

GREGORY

Don't you want to hang up the dress?

DIANA

Nope. I look forward to seeing it in a crumpled heap on the floor.

MICHELLE

GREGORY smiles. All three women look to him.

GREGORY

Not in ten thousand years would I have a public response to that. ... Shall we? ...
I'm going to leave the gate unlocked. So please help yourselves to anything you might
like in the kitchen. I have chips and cheese and nuts and soft drinks.

WILMA

I thought the gate was to protect your little girl's privacy ...

GREGORY

Emma is staying with my folks tonight.

MICHELLE

Was she home yesterday?

GREGORY (nodding)

I broke two cardinal rules last night.

MICHELLE

Oh?

GREGORY

I've never ... entertained ... one of our paying guests before. And I never entertain when
Emma is home.

DIANA

She nearly twelve. Do you think she doesn't know that you shunt her off to her
grandparents so you can ... "entertain"?

GREGORY

As you say, she's not quite twelve. I hope it's something she doesn't think about much.

Eye rolling and head shaking by all three women.

GREGORY

Not sex. I'm sure she thinks about that. Some. I meant my particular sexual
experiences. I hope she doesn't think about that much.

WILMA

You have a point.

DIANA

Most days I still can't imagine my parents having sex.

GREGORY

Michelle?

MICHELLE

It was a hard topic to avoid when I was twelve. It was being shouted about so much. That was about the time he moved from faculty wives to graduate students. Isn't it funny how as some men get older their women get younger.

DIANA

Yeah. It's hilarious.

WILMA

So, Nick was two?

MICHELLE

Yeah. That's why the fun went on so long. They didn't divorce until Nick started high school.

WILMA

I often wonder why people who can't stand each other keep having children. Why block every possible escape?

DIANA

Could be hope springing eternal.

GREGORY

Everything about having children ... is more complicated than you can possibly imagine. I love Emma like ... it's just ... it's an actual physical sensation ... but most of the time I'm hoping that the stuff I'm messing up doesn't really matter or is somehow repairable.

WILMA

I'm sure you do fine.

GREGORY

You haven't seen comedy until you've watched a well-meaning single dad try to explain menstruation to his ten-year old daughter.

DIANA

Okay, I am not coming on to you at all. I really mean this ... you are the bravest man I have ever met.

GREGORY

We survived that. But I will never forget the look of mortification on her face when I had a white rose, a heart-shaped balloon and a cake to celebrate her menarche.

All three women have deeply pained expressions.

GREGORY

I didn't know. It was suggested in more than one article!

MICHELLE
Have you ever read a sex manual?

GREGORY
What?

MICHELLE
Have you ever read so much as a single word of advice on how to make love?

GREGORY
No. Is it that obvious?

MICHELLE
Yes!

GREGORY (wounded)
Really?

MICHELLE
You are spontaneous and natural and confident. You're a joy in bed. Be the same kind of parent.

GREGORY
It's hardly the same!

MICHELLE
Of course not. But I have to believe you'd both be having a better time of it if you'd relax and just trust your instincts more.

GREGORY
There's so much more at stake.

DIANA
So your secret sauce is not caring?

GREGORY
That's not what I meant. At all.

MICHELLE
We were just on our way out ...

GREGORY
Right. Good night ladies.

HE takes her hand and they start off.

GREGORY (as they exit into the kitchen)
“A joy in bed” hunh?

MICHELLE
You may not use that as a blurb.

And they are off.

DIANA (after a beat)
Champagne?

WILMA
Actually, I’m going to step into the kitchen and see if he’s got a beer. I’m not really the champagne kind.

DIANA
Amen to that! Mind if I join you?

WILMA
Come on.

As WILMA and DIANA exit into the kitchen, we again hear the familiar car on gravel, doors opening and closing, followed by a key in the front door.

CAROLINE opens the door for EDWARD and moves him slowly into a chair.

EDWARD
Thank you. And thank you for driving me back.

CAROLINE
You’re welcome. ... Well, it’s clear our little angels have been through here.

EDWARD
Why do you say that?

CAROLINE
No one in the room and every light blazing. (She begins turning off some lights.)

EDWARD
I don’t know what came over me so suddenly.

CAROLINE
We should have gone to the hospital. You could be having a stroke.

EDWARD

I'm feeling much better now. Really.

CAROLINE

You should see Martin as soon as you get home.

EDWARD

Martin retired about three years ago. A Dr. Nordal, who is about Nick's age, took over the practice.

CAROLINE

Well you should see whomever as soon as you're back in Columbus.

EDWARD

Have a seat for a moment. You don't have to be rushing back for anything.

CAROLINE (sitting)

No. Not a thing.

EDWARD

That was quite an evening, wasn't it?

CAROLINE

It was.

EDWARD (spotting the champagne)

And isn't' this thoughtful?

CAROLINE

Are you sure that's such a good idea? With how you were just feeling?

EDWARD

One quick toast. How often will we be celebrating one of our children getting married?

CAROLINE

If I were a betting woman, I'd say we've just had the one and only occasion.

EDWARD

Then I think the mother and the father of the bride should permit themselves a private observance.

CAROLINE

Oh don't open a bottle ... that seems a bit much.

EDWARD (struggling with the cork)

These damn things ... damn. Damn!

CAROLINE holds out her hand. EDWARD glares, ready to take offense, then thinks better of it and sheepishly hands over the bottle.

EDWARD

I was no better at this when I was younger, was I?

CAROLINE

No, you were not. (She struggles with the cork) Humph. I was better when I was younger.

EDWARD

Nonsense.

CAROLINE

At getting these damn corks out, anyway. (handing him the bottle) I don't think we're going to be having this tonight.

EDWARD struggles more aggressively with the cork.

CAROLINE

Really. There's no need ...

EDWARD is grimacing and perhaps a bit red-faced.

CAROLINE

I should be getting back, anyway ...

With a last heroic effort EDWARD finally dislodges the cork.

EDWARD

There!

CAROLINE (handing him the glasses)

Champagne it is.

EDWARD pours both glasses and hands one to CAROLINE.

EDWARD

To the mother of the bride, who, truth be told, is lovelier now than when she was the bride.

CAROLINE

When did you become such a silly man?

CAROLINE drinks without clinking glasses.

EDWARD

I was a fool, that's for damn sure.

CAROLINE

Let's leave all the doors shut, the lids on and the scabs unpicked, shall we?

EDWARD

I didn't expecting coming down the aisle with Audrey to be so moving. I don't remember feeling so proprietary when she was born. When any of them were born.

CAROLINE

Better late than never?

EDWARD

Can that be true?

CAROLINE

I wouldn't know.

EDWARD

You know what else was awfully nice?

CAROLINE

Nick dancing with the flower girl. He's so good with children. It really is a shame.

EDWARD

No ...

CAROLINE

Oh but it is ...

EDWARD

I'm sure Audrey will be a baby machine. We'll have plenty of grandchildren and Nick will be the world's best uncle. But was awfully nice was dancing with you.

CAROLINE

It wasn't as awkward as I thought it would be.

EDWARD puts his glass down and begins humming. HE takes CAROLINE's glass, pulls her to her feet and takes her in his arms.

HE is humming "They Can't Take That Away From Me." He hums and murmurs nonsense syllables until he gets to:

EDWARD

"The way you haunt my dreams. No, no, they can't take that away from me ..."

CAROLINE (breaking away)

They can't take away what you've thrown away on your own.

EDWARD

And what would I have to do to earn it back?

CAROLINE

What?

EDWARD

It still feels natural to have you in my arms.

CAROLINE

You have a wife

EDWARD

To the degree that I do, she's right here.

CAROLINE

You are legally married to that young woman.

EDWARD

That can be changed.

CAROLINE

Don't change it on my account.

EDWARD

We can be comfortable. Grow older together ... more gently with fewer pressures. ...
And the old nonsense won't be a problem ...

CAROLINE

Stop.

EDWARD

Between the prostate, the hypertension and propanol ...

CAROLINE

What does that have to do ...

EDWARD

Our problem was always that I was so much more ... interested ... and now that won't be a problem.

CAROLINE

That's lovely.

EDWARD

What?

CAROLINE

Now that you need a nurse instead of a lover, I'll do fine. That's very flattering.

EDWARD

No!

CAROLINE

No?

EDWARD

I've come to appreciate all that we had.

CAROLINE

Hooray for you.

EDWARD

I realize we may need to give this some ... time ...

CAROLINE

No. We don't.

EDWARD

Caroline ...

CAROLINE

I don't love you.

EDWARD

Of course you do!

CAROLINE

This has been a very nice night. Don't spoil it. Don't spoil the memory of it.

EDWARD

I ...

CAROLINE

No. Anything you could possibly say would only be humiliating and ridiculous. Don't embarrass yourself and don't embarrass me, please.

EDWARD looks at her. Considers several responses and ultimately lapses into a long, pained silence.

EDWARD

And that's it? This is how we leave it?

CAROLINE

I have no need to hurt you, but I don't want to say anything that will encourage you ... even slightly.

EDWARD (after another awful pause)

Shall I walk you to your car?

CAROLINE

I need a moment. ... I'm going to go upstairs first to use ...

EDWARD

Of course.

CAROLINE

I can see myself out. The door will lock behind me.

EDWARD (after a beat)

Yes. It will.

CAROLINE

Excuse me, then

CAROLINE starts up the stairs.

EDWARD

Caroline ...

CAROLINE (without looking back)

Good night, Edward.

EDWARD sits. HE stands. HE is wounded. HE is offended. As HE reaches resigned, he turns and exits L into the master suite.

A beat.

An embarrassed WILMA and a stunned DIANA enter from the kitchen UR.

WILMA

I'm sorry.

DIANA

He's an ass.

WILMA

It's poor form to criticize someone else's spouse ... but the evidence would seem to point in that direction.

DIANA

I realize I don't have much right to be offended ... that doesn't mean it doesn't hurt.

WILMA

I'm sorry. (a beat) Another beer?

DIANA

No, thanks. I don't need for my thinking to be less clear at this point.

WILMA nods.

DIANA (looking toward the master suite)

But I'm not ready to ... (looking up the stairs) ... but I'm sure not ready to ...
You don't happen to smoke?

WILMA

No. Sorry.

DIANA

I'm going to get some air.

WILMA

In those shoes?

DIANA

I won't go far. I'll be careful. (starting for the front door) I won't try to walk and think at the same time.

WILMA

Do you have your key?

DIANA

What?

WILMA

The door will lock behind you

DIANA

Right. ... Shit. Michelle let me in ... and Edward has our key. I didn't bring one ...

WILMA

Here. Take mine.

DIANA

Thanks. ... You really are *everyone's* nanny, aren't you?

WILMA (shrugs)

It's a living.

DIANA exits out the front door.

WILMA (after a beat)

I believe I will have another beer.

WILMA gathers DIANA's empty bottle and takes it with her own to the kitchen.

EDWARD emerges from the master suite and looks up the stairs. HE pours himself a glass of champagne and waits.

HE is startled to see the light go off in the kitchen and exits hurriedly back to the master suite. WILMA just misses him as she returns from the kitchen with a fresh beer.

CAROLINE emerges from the hall upstairs and starts down the stairs. She is a little taken aback to see WILMA.

CAROLINE

Oh. Hello.

WILMA

Hi.

CAROLINE

I suppose I shouldn't be surprised to see you. You're staying here, after all.

Yes. WILMA

While I ... did you hear any CAROLINE

I was in the kitchen. WILMA

Oh. CAROLINE

With Diana. WILMA

Oh no. ... (a take from the kitchen to the master suite) ... is she ... CAROLINE

She went out for a little fresh air. WILMA

That's understandable. The poor girl. CAROLINE

Karma's a funny thing. WILMA

No. We were divorced before they met. CAROLINE

I might have heard that somewhere. WILMA

This day had been enough already. I truly didn't need that. CAROLINE

A splash of champagne? WILMA

Yes. Thanks. How about you? CAROLINE

I have a simpler palate. WILMA (holding up her beer)

WILMA pours CAROLINE a glass of champagne.

CAROLINE

Thank you.

WILMA

We should have some sort of toast.

CAROLINE

I don't know about a toast, but I'd love to propose a new wedding tradition.

WILMA

I'm for it sight unseen

CAROLINE

The wedding trip shouldn't be taken by the bride and groom ...

WILMA

But by the mother of the bride?

CAROLINE

Exactly. For about four years in this case. I realize it's my fault since I raised them, but I am sick to death of my children. (She winces)

WILMA

What?

CAROLINE

I was expecting a bolt of lightning or the ground to open and swallow me whole.

WILMA

I don't think it's an unusual sentiment ...

CAROLINE

We're not supposed to say it out loud. But there it is. I'm sick to death of their bickering. I'm sick to death of their suspicions and resentments. Their memories of slights that never occurred or that are recalled out of all proportion.

WILMA

The two on one dynamic is pretty clear.

CAROLINE

When they were children, Edward used to call Michelle and Nicholas "Micholas" as if they were a single entity. And to this day, their bond drives Audrey to be needy and controlling because she's so conspicuously excluded. And I can't admit to them that Audrey is a total pill and I can't admit to Audrey that Michelle and Nicholas are selfish and shallow. But they're my children and we know from fiction and non that the bond is sacred and eternal. ... I'm not sure four years will be long enough.

Can I tell you something? WILMA

Sure. CAROLINE

I've only be working with Nick for six months, but you see a lot pretty quickly as a PA. WILMA

Oh dear. CAROLINE

No. He's a joy. He's an authentically grounded and good-hearted person. A little hedonistic, perhaps, but there isn't a speck of real meanness in him. That wouldn't be true if he hadn't been raised well. And I would be willing to bet that most of the credit for that doesn't go to Edward. WILMA

No.. CAROLINE (smiling)

You should do that more. WILMA

What? CAROLINE

Really smile. WILMA

What? CAROLINE smiles again. Then turns away, embarrassed.

I feel silly. (smiling again) And now I can't stop. WILMA

That's a good thing! WILMA

I don't see you walking around grinning like an idiot. CAROLINE

WILMA
You don't look like an idiot.

CAROLINE
That's a weak evasion.

WILMA
Guilty as charged. I'll give it a try.

WILMA smiles. It is not a great smile.

CAROLINE (laughing)
That was dreadful.

WILMA tries a variety of progressively more extreme and grotesque "smiles" until CAROLINE is helpless with laughter.

CAROLINE
Oh my god. The children wouldn't believe this. Headline news: Caroline Laughs.

WILMA
I knew Greta Garbo's last PA. Greta Garbo's last PA was a friend of mine. And you, Mrs. Pearson are no Greta Garbo!

CAROLINE
That's true. And I'm sick to death of being alone.

WILMA
Well then, to hell with Garbo.

CAROLINE
There's our toast. (raising her glass) To hell with Garbo.

WILMA touches her beer bottle to CAROLINE's glass. After they toast, CAROLINE falls back laughing again. WILMA smiles with real radiance as lights fade to BLACK.

End of Act 2, scene 2.

[Shakespeare reference]

Act 2

Scene 3

Setting: The great room. Sunday. 7:30 a.m.

At rise: The gate to the kitchen is open and the area is lit.

GREGORY is setting out a casserole on a chafing dish.

WILMA, dressed for the day, comes down the stairs.

Making amends for yesterday?
WILMA

Good morning.
GREGORY

Yes, good morning.
WILMA

And no. I had planned this since I knew everyone would be travelling today.
GREGORY

WILMA pours two cups of coffee.

Yesterday was out of character on so many levels.
GREGORY

You could say that.
WILMA

EDWARD enters from the master suite.

Morning all.
EDWARD

Let me get out of your way.
WILMA

I'm in no rush.
EDWARD

GREGORY

As I recall you don't have a flight to catch.

EDWARD

Although I will have to rescue my car.

GREGORY

Oh?

EDWARD

I had a fit of vapors and Caroline was kind enough to drive me back here.

GREGORY

Are you feeling better?

EDWARD

Physically.

WILMA

All done!

WILMA starts to exit with two cups of coffee.

GREGORY

Nick still not up to the stairs?

WILMA

What? ... Oh no. No, we want him hobbling up and down as little as possible!

WILMA exits up the stairs. EDWARD prepares coffee for himself and DIANA.

EDWARD

2% still in the middle?

GREGORY

Yes, sir.

WILMA (knocking on a door)

Nick.

NICHOLAS (from off)

Yeah?

WILMA (from off)

I brought your coffee.

EDWARD

Quite a spread this morning,

GREGORY

An improvement on yesterday's performance?

NICHOLAS (from off)

Really?

EDWARD

That isn't something you ask the young lady's father.

GREGORY is mortified

WILMA (from off)

Of course.

NICHOLAS (from off)

Thanks.

EDWARD

I was making a joke.

NICHOLAS (from off)

Would you mind putting on my dresser?

EDWARD

If you ever feel the need to score points with "the father" try finding his feeble attempts at humor funny instead of terrifying.

NICHOLAS (from off)

I'm almost done here and I don't trust myself to carry it.

WILMA (from off)

Will do.

GREGORY

Yes, sir.

SOUND of a door opening upstairs.

EDWARD

I'm at that sad time of life where the only people I intimidate even slightly are strangers.

GREGORY has no idea how to respond.

SOUND of a door closing upstairs, followed by WILMA's appearance at the top of the stairs carrying one cup and saucer, which she takes into her bedroom.

EDWARD

Evidently only southern women are trained in the fine art of conversation.

GREGORY

My needlepoint's not so hot either.

EDWARD laughs. GREGORY joins him relievedly.

MICHELLE enters down the stairs. SHE is dressed for travel and carrying one small carry-on.

EDWARD

Well, daughter ...

MICHELLE

Yes, "father"?

EDWARD

Thing could have gone much worse, eh?

MICHELLE

You could say that.

WILMA comes down the stairs carrying her cup and saucer.

WILMA

Forgot the Splenda!

EDWARD

That's funny.

WILMA

What's that?

EDWARD

Caroline takes Splenda in her coffee.

WILMA

Will wonders never cease.

EDWARD

So concerned with all natural this and non-GMO that, but okay with artificial sweetener.

WILMA

Women! Y'know.

WILMA exits back up the stairs and to her room.

EDWARD takes two coffees to the master suite.

This is a moment for which MICHELLE and GREGORY are not prepared.

GREGORY (finally)

Do you have time for a little breakfast?

MICHELLE

No, thank you. (a beat) Maybe a cup of coffee?

GREGORY pours and hands her a cup of black coffee.

MICHELLE

Thank you.

GREGORY

What time is your flight?

MICHELLE

Eleven..

GREGORY

So early ...

MICHELLE

I didn't know ... I thought I'd be desperate to get away.

GREGORY

Sunday morning. No traffic. The airport is only about 45 minutes ...

MICHELLE

I have to turn in the car and get a shuttle to the terminal.

Another painful silence.

GREGORY

I hate for you ... I wish we had more time ...

MICHELLE

I know.

GREGORY

Could you stay a few extra days?

MICHELLE

I came straight from Fashion Week to the wedding. My office is in shambles.

GREGORY

Could you get a later flight today?

MICHELLE

I don't ... I wish ...

GREGORY

Give us some time after the others have cleared out ...

MICHELLE

I want ... but ...

GREGORY (suddenly)

I love you.

MICHELLE

I love you, too.

GREGORY

Wow.

MICHELLE

What?

GREGORY

I thought that was going to be more of a struggle.

MICHELLE

Why should it be hard to say when it's true?

GREGORY smiles.

MICHELLE

But I have a board meeting at six tonight.

GREGORY

You have a board?

MICHELLE

Oh no. No, I'm a two-person shop. But I'm with this little group ... we get designers to donate business clothes for women trying to find work. Thoughtful Threads. We work with a couple of shelters.

GREGORY

That sounds very ... worthwhile.

MICHELLE

It is, but there's so much politics ... and we may have two or three new designers interested after Fashion Week, but we have to make sure we don't alienate any of those already on board.

GREGORY

We have plenty of women who need that kind of help here.

MICHELLE

But I don't have ten years' worth of connections here.

NICHOLAS appears at the top of the stairs. HE is dressed casually and not expensively. His hair has been toweled dry but not styled. HE is leaning heavily on the cane and, as HE starts down the stairs.

MICHELLE and GREGORY are coiled, ready to leap as they watch him. When he reaches the bottom of the stairs without incident they relax perceptibly.

NICHOLAS

I feel like the Nick Pearson before picture come to life.

HE hobbles to the table and sits.

NICHOLAS

No Wilma?

MICHELLE

Would you like some breakfast?

You don't have too ...

NICHOLAS

What would you like?

MICHELLE

A total head and body transplant. But I'd settle for something high carb and some juice.

NICHOLAS

MICHELLE presents him with a plated danish while GREGORY places a glass of orange juice in front of him.

Thanks, guys.

NICHOLAS

GREGORY and MICHELLE don't especially want to continue with NICHOLAS in the room.

NICHOLAS(miserably)

I can't believe there are people who actually do this to themselves regularly. I mean, I know plenty, but ... Am I interrupting something?

GREGORY nods.

It's okay, Nick.

MICHELLE

WILMA (from the top of the stairs)

I thought I heard Chester on the stairs.

The others are too young to get the reference

WILMA (coming down the stairs)

Let that be a lesson. When the joke dies, don't explain it just move on. (to MICHELLE)

Sorry.

I've been making him breakfast since breakfast was heating a bottle.

MICHELLE

Are you packed?

WILMA

Yup.

NICHOLAS

WILMA

Then you won't have to be going back upstairs?

NICHOLAS

Not as long as I can use a bathroom down here.

WILMA

Then I'll go get your bags.

GREGORY

No you won't!

WILMA

Only because of the ankle. Believe me, he usually carries his own luggage.

GREGORY

No, what I should have said was may I get Nick's luggage?

WILMA

You don't have to.

GREGORY

Humor the rube in me.

WILMA

Okay then. Thank you.

GREGORY exits up the stairs.

NICHOLAS (after a moan)

God. Are you sure that doctor wasn't a vet or something?

WILMA

A vet would have shot you and put us all out of your misery.

MICHELLE

I really have to get going ...

NICHOLAS

Booked the early get away before you knew ole Benvolio was here, eh?

MICHELLE is silent.

WILMA (reading the situation)

Nick ...

NICHOLAS
What? (Sees MICHELLE) Oh. ... I'm sorry.

MICHELLE
I'm fine.

NICHOLAS
Did he ...

MICHELLE
No. I ... we haven't figured out what's next ...

NICHOLAS
You were supposed to get answers, not more questions.

MICHELLE
Could you see me living here?

NICHOLAS
Well ...

MICHELLE
Go ahead. Tell me what you think.

NICHOLAS
It would be Green Acres without the laugh track.

WILMA
You didn't ask me ...

MICHELLE
Please, you're the sanest one here.

WILMA
Looks can be deceiving. Don't be too quick to throw away love. Life can get lonely later on...

MICHELLE
Well that was not helpful at all!

GREGORY appears at the top of the stairs with
NICHOLAS's luggage.

NICHOLAS
To be fair, he's a lot cuter than Eddie Albert.

Are you sure you two aren't twins?
GREGORY (NICHOLAS's bag is heavy)

Wow. Do I look that bad?
NICHOLAS

MICHELLE smacks the back of his head.

OW! ... I'll even say I'm older, just please don't hit my head again.
NICHOLAS

DIANA emerges from the master suite carrying a large sketch pad with EDWARD hot on her heels. Both are dressed for travel.

Now don't make a big deal of this ...
EDWARD

Look!
DIANA (handing the pad to MICHELLE)

Wow. These are different.
MICHELLE

They're brand new.
DIANA

Bet you didn't expect this to be a productive weekend?
MICHELLE

EDWARD shrugs.

Look at this one ...
DIANA

Wow.
MICHELLE

Let me see, already!
NICHOLAS

MICHELLE shows him the pad.

NICHOLAS

Wow is right. This is really new stuff. It's like you took some of those basket weave spheres and blew them up to show what's inside.

EDWARD

I had no idea you knew my work that well.

NICHOLAS

Some day you will all stop underestimating me!

DIANA (opening the pad to a different page)

Look at this one. It's hard to tell if it's exploding or blooming!

MICHELLE

These will be interesting to cast.

EDWARD

They will actually be easier than the closed spheres.

DIANA sits, overcome.

NICHOLAS

Are you okay?

DIANA

You don't live with him. You don't know ...

MICHELLE

What?

DIANA

These are the first sketches he's done in years. Three years at least.

MICHELLE

Well spin you around and call you Lazarus.

EDWARD

I couldn't sleep last night. We carry the pad out of habit. I thought, might as well doodle a little.

MICHELLE

Are you going to be okay to drive without sleep?

EDWARD

Diana does most of the driving.

DIANA

Although I didn't sleep much either.

EDWARD

What?

DIANA

I knew if you saw that I was awake you'd stop. I spent most of the night pretending ... I was just too excited to sleep.

EDWARD takes DIANA's hand and for a moment no one speaks.

MICHELLE

I really have to get going!

GREGORY

You can't just ...

DIANA

Oh I'm sorry ... I interrupted.

GREGORY

We can have ... we have to give it time.

MICHELLE

No.

GREGORY

No?

MICHELLE

No, I can't have this conversation now. I mean not with an audience.

GREGORY

So you'll call me after your meeting tonight ...

MICHELLE

It might be late.

GREGORY

I'll be up.

CAROLINE appears at the top of the stairs.

Mom? NICHOLAS (dumbfounded)

EACH PERSON in the room has his or her own moment of confusion and recognition as CAROLINE descends the stairs in silence.

Mom? MICHELLE (finally)

Good morning. CAROLINE

Oh. My. God. NICHOLAS

MICHELLE and NICHOLAS exchange a look. Then both look to WILMA. Then back to one another, then to CAROLINE.

No. NICHOLAS

CAROLINE and WILMA exchange a look during which a decision is made.

Yes. CAROLINE

CAROLINE walks to WILMA and takes her hand.

Yes. WILMA

Yes. CAROLINE

God in heaven. EDWARD

DIANA

I have to give you credit. That's the topper ... for a competitive weekend.

MICHELLE (to DIANA)

If he was sketching things exploding last night, I can't wait to hear what he sketches tonight!

GREGORY (to MICHELLE)

See, life can be as eventful here as in the city.

MICHELLE

She visits me in New York and you in L.A., but picks Bupkus Virginia to come out.

NICHOLAS

I always say your first time should be a felony. Mine was.

CAROLINE

We don't need to exchange those sorts of confidences.

NICHOLAS

That's the downside of a lesbian mother. She doesn't want to hear what you have to say on so many more levels.

EDWARD

That certainly explains ...

CAROLINE

Careful. It gets you off the hook for nothing.

DIANA

Well we have a long drive ahead. (as she starts for the master suite) Let's finish packing. ... Edward?

EDWARD

Right. Excuse me.

DIANA and EDWARD exit.

MICHELLE

I thought you had your hands full with Nick, I don't know why you'd want to take on another one of us!

GREGORY

Would you care for some breakfast?

CAROLINE

I'd really like to get back to the hotel and get into some fresh clothes.

NICHOLAS (to MICHELLE)

Kind of odd to see your mother at breakfast in the same clothes she was wearing last night.

MICHELLE

Kind of odd that she's the last of us to try it...

CAROLINE

That's enough out of both of you.

EDWARD enters somewhat sheepishly, followed
by an unhappy DIANA

CAROLINE

Just in time to say goodbye.

EDWARD

Not quite.

CAROLINE

Oh?

EDWARD

Our car is back at the hotel ...

CAROLINE

Yes. Well. That seems a lifetime ago doesn't it?

WILMA (to GREGORY)

May we all leave our bags here and come back for them?

GREGORY

Of course.

DIANA

I could stay here and finish packing.

WILMA (looking directly at DIANA)

I think we should all go. (to NICHOLAS) You're up to it, aren't you?

NICHOLAS

Sure. For the first time in my life, I can't wait to see Audrey!

EDWARD

Then we'll see you later.

MICHELLE (hugging him)

No. I really have to catch my flight. But I look forward to coming to Columbus for an opening!

DIANA hugs MICHELLE, which startles her, but which she eventually returns.

DIANA

And we look forward to having you.

WILMA (hugging MICHELLE)

Don't throw away a chance for happiness just because it has taken you by surprise.

MICHELLE

I won't. (hugging CAROLINE) I'll see you both in L.A.

CAROLINE (smiling again)

Yes. You will.

WILMA

Shall we?

WILMA, CAROLINE, EDWARD and DIANA start for the front door.

NICHOLAS (hugging her)

I got nothin'.

MICHELLE

I'll see you in L.A ...

NICHOLAS (a familiar refrain)

... Not if I see you first.

THEY hug more tightly.

NICHOLAS

Take heart, next time I'll be the center of attention as the Good Lord intended.

Another embrace and he follows the others off.

MICHELLE comes toward the picture window and waves.

GREGORY approaches her tentatively and takes her hand. SHE lets him.

We hear the car doors slam and two cars start and two cars proceed down the gravel driveway. And long after the cars are clearly gone, MICHELLE

and GREGORY look out the window rather than facing each other.

GREGORY

Would you like to come back for Thanksgiving?

MICHELLE

And meet the folks?

GREGORY

I've met yours.

MICHELLE

And meet your daughter?

GREGORY

You could stay and meet her today.

MICHELLE shakes her head.

GREGORY

She'll be crazy about you.

MICHELLE

She has had you all to herself for how many years? I will be an intruder, an interloper. Poaching on her very private preserve.

GREGORY

You have no idea how hungry she is for a mother.

MICHELLE

Maybe. But, she's not my issue. And if you just wanted a mother for Emma I'm sure there have been local candidates lined up around the block ...

GREGORY

But we've both ... for ten years ... that suggests something pretty powerful ...

MICHELLE

In those ten years we have built very different lives.

GREGORY

And that can't change?

Honestly?
MICHELLE

GREGORY nods.

MICHELLE
I could see myself here keeping house and making dinner and correcting Emma's homework for three days, Greg. On day four, I think I would hang myself.

GREGORY
You wouldn't have to keep house.

MICHELLE
I'm not built to hang on like Diana or to jump impulsively like ... of all people ... my mother. I've worked hard to build a life ... and I really do love it. And I need to go back to it.

GREGORY
What about the connection we have ... that we've re-established?

MICHELLE
I think we should be grateful that we've had the very rare opportunity to heal old wounds.

GREGORY
We can have more.

MICHELLE (shaking her head)
I couldn't ask you to give up your life here and come to New York.

GREGORY
Not yet ...

MICHELLE
Not for at least six years?

GREGORY
Yeah. Probably.

MICHELLE
Turning this into something where we schlep back and forth two or three times a year would just be prolonging the inevitable.

THERE is a long silence between them.

MICHELLE takes his hand. HE lets her.

GREGORY

You should probably go. You don't want to miss your plane, after all.

MICHELLE

Greg ...

GREGORY (stepping away)

I'll be all right. I have to be. But not right now.

MICHELLE

I've got to get my bags.

GREGORY nods without facing her.

MICHELLE hurries up the stairs. GREGORY turns to face out the window. SHE returns quickly and struggles trying to get all her bags down the stairs.

MICHELLE (stopping at the foot of the stairs)

I'm going to go now.

GREGORY (softly)

Please don't.

MICHELLE

What?

GREGORY (more strongly)

Please don't go.

MICHELLE picks up her bags and heads out the front door.

GREGORY turns his back to the window.

We hear a trunk open and close. Then a car door. Then the car starts and finally proceeds down the gravel driveway.

GREGORY stand for a long time. Lights fade to black as he starts toward the gate to the family quarters.

End of Act 2, scene 3.

End of play.