

Transit

Shorts Plays by

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Dedicated to
anyone who has ever changed
buses, planes, trains, clothes, sheets,
discs, diapers, minds, sides, lanes, schools,
money, plans, underwear, or names.

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Minute Rice

Characters:

Margaret—late 20s, dressed in all black, wearing a convincing brunette wig until otherwise indicated.

Henry—late 20s, also dressed in all black, wearing a convincing mustache until otherwise indicated.

Priest—early 60s, wearing a Catholic collar and vestment.

Setting:

an old warehouse on the highway that has been converted into an evangelist cathedral

Margaret: Good evening, Father!

Priest: Hello there. You must be—

Margaret: Margaret! And you must be puzzled to bits about why we asked you *here* of all places.

Priest: I must say, I've never performed a wedding in an Evangel Cathedral...

Margaret: Isn't it a trip? I think it used to be a CarMax warehouse. Did you see the 10-foot, glow-in-the-dark Jesus in the youth hostel?

Priest: From several miles away, in fact...

Henry: Well, put your Papal mind to rest, Father; I'm Catholic as Jan Tetzl!

Priest: Hello there...

Henry: (grabbing and shaking his hand) Henry Elvis Hoffa. Call me Hank, if you like.

Priest: And you're Catholic, *Hank*?

Henry: Oh, sure thing, Father. Baptized Joseph Boudreaux.

Priest: Alright...

Margaret: I hope you don't mind the venue, Father. I'm allergic to incense, see—

Henry: Allergic to salvation, more like. (exaggerated whisper) I've got to be up front with you, Father; Maggie here is Episcopalian. I know, I know! But I also know I can help her. I can't give up on her, Father, 'cause I'm a sinner, too, but, sure as the Pope's dinner, God didn't give up on me. No, no, he didn't. And I truly think—no, I *believe* that this sacred union between me and Margaret will help me save her heathen soul, Father. Now, can you deny me that?

Priest: Actually, yes. That isn't quite how we do this, Henry—

Henry: You're worried she's a lesbian, aren't you? Believe me, Father, there's not a blessed virgin bone in her body; girlfriend loves the sack! But I love her, Father, I do, and Christ loved the whores just the same as everyone else, didn't he?

Priest: (appalled) Henry, really—

Henry: I know, I know, but look at that face, Father—(Maggie pouts and bats her eyelashes.) She's just dripping with Saint Clare, isn't she? We'll get her baptized ASAP—swear to God—just as soon as we're settled in, but for now—

Priest: I don't think you under—

Henry: What if we promise to go to mass twice a week?

Priest: No.

Henry: Fast on Fridays?

Priest: No.

Henry: Ten Hail Marys?

Priest: No, Henry—

Henry: What if we tattoo the catechisms across our—

Priest: That's enough, really—

Henry: We'll give up pot for Lent!

Priest: Henry! Stop!

Henry: We'll persecute Protestants!

Priest: No!

Henry: We'll restore the monarchy to the Church!

Priest: No!

Henry: We'll have seven children!

Priest and Margaret: No!

Henry: (pants slightly from overexertion) Look, Father, we need to get married tonight, right here, right now. (pants more) How about a fifty?

Priest: (pauses) Fine. (Henry slaps a fifty dollar bill into the Priest's hand.)

Margaret: (throwing her arms around the priest's neck) Oh, thank you! Thank you so much, Father— (She kisses him on the cheek; he freezes, and she recoils slowly) Oh... Sorry... That's not... OK, is it?...

Henry: (aside to Priest) What did I tell you? *Libidopalian*...

Priest: (rigidly) If we're going to do this, I'd prefer that we get on—

Henry: Right you are, Father!

Margaret: Couldn't agree more!

Priest: So then. Do you have any witnesses?

Henry: Um, no.

Priest: No?

Margaret: No. We didn't have time to write a fourth character into the script, see... Oh, unless you count Bill, I guess!

Priest: Script? *Bill*?

(Margaret and Henry squint into audience, as if at tech. booth. Father watches them and follows suit.)

Henry: (calling up the booth, waving) Alright up there, Bill?

Margaret: (also calling, waving) Thanks so much for helping out!

Henry: (to Father) That's another reason we chose this place, Father. They've got crazy effects.

Priests: I'm sorry... Effects?

Henry: Oh, not that transubstantiation isn't cool and all; don't get me wrong! But these guys have pyrotechnics!

Priests: (alarmed) Pyro—

Margaret: Don't worry, Father. It shouldn't be too different from all the smells and bells you're used to. Just a little more... *neon*.

Priest: I don't think I'm prepared for—

Henry: So, then! As you said, Father, let's do this thang!

Priest: Now, just one second... I'm not sure I know what I'm—

Margaret: He's right! God, Henry, we almost forgot the script!

Priest: Could you try not to—

Henry: Jesus Christ! You're right!

Priest: —swear?

(Henry and Maggie go into the audience and dig behind, presumably, a "pew" and pull out a giant trash bag that takes two to carry. Henry crosses himself as they approach the bewildered Father again at the altar.)

Henry: (to Maggie, handing her a script) For you. (to himself, tucking a script under his arm) For me. (to Father, handing him a script) For you!

Margaret: There we go! All set!

(They open their scripts and stare at the Father expectantly. He, meanwhile, stands awkwardly, holding the script like a dead fish. Beat. Slowly, he opens the script to page one and begins:)

Priest: Dearly beloved...

Henry: (exaggerated whisper) I thought we cut that part?

Margaret: Why would we cut that part?

Henry: We don't have the time for all these formalities, Maggie—

Margaret: Hey, who's the Catholic here, pal?

Priest: Excuse me.

(They look up at him.)

Priest: (Again, he holds the script like a dead fish) What exactly is... *this*?

Margaret: Nothing less than our entire married life!

Henry: We don't have time to explain, Father.

Margaret: And anyway, that would ruin the ending.

Henry: True.

Margaret: Long story short, we don't have much time left, Father—

Priest: Oh, heavens! I had no idea—

Margaret: Save your condolences! Now is a time for celebration!

Henry: We've scripted out a full, robust—

Margaret: —abridged—

Henry: —married life to play out, here, now, this very instant. The passion, the sorrow, the triumphs, the trials, the—

Margaret: —rattling of Henry's unnecessary ad-libbing.

Henry: *Perhaps*, Margaret, if you'd taken the time to listen to my revision proposals, I wouldn't have to ad-lib to make the script flow smoothly, but as it were—

Margaret: *As it were*, we're 45 seconds behind schedule, Henry! Which reminds me, Father, could we bother you to be our timekeeper? (hands him a stopwatch before he can respond) You'll find I've made notes in the left margin of your script; the red-ink notes are our time goals for each scene.

Priest: And the green ink?

Margaret: Oh, those are emotive notes. Since we couldn't hire a director. Just a few tips and tricks to enhance your line delivery. Which is not to say that I don't think you can't manipulate language, Father; I'm sure you're a real wordsmith in the pulpit. But we've written you in to play a few side roles for us—

Henry: —so that you won't get bored—

Margaret: —and we couldn't be sure of which roles you'd take to and which wouldn't come so naturally. So, for instance, in case you don't know how a fifteen-year-old boy would feel—

Henry: —Oh, I'm sure he knows how a fifteen-year-old boy would—

Priest: (clears his throat) I'm sure I can follow along.

Margaret: Oh, thank you, Father! And thank you again for keeping an open mind. I know this is all very out of the ordinary for you, but, as I mentioned, our time is, well, waning—

Henry: —and waning, and *waning*, and *waning all the more*, the more you talk,
Margaret. Father, if you don't mind, let's pick up with that bit at the end of those gushy vows—

Margaret: *Gushy?*

Henry: Margaret! The time!

Margaret: Oh, fine! I swear, men just cannot deal with their emotions—

Henry: (talking over her) And Father, could you call out the technical cues as well? Our man Bill up there has worked one to many rock-and-roll Eucharists in this place, and I'm afraid he's gone deaf in one ear. We meant to print him a script with all the cues, but (leaning in) *Margaret* couldn't do without page numbers and scene divisions and all that OCD bullshit in our own copies. I swear, she would've color-coded the text if I hadn't put my foot down, Father. And all those little digits and asterisks and spaces start to add up at the printer's! We had to pay by the page, and—

Margaret: Oh, and I suppose that these laminate covers that you just *had to have* had nothing to do with the final cost of the scripts. And what *asterisks*, Henry? Page numbers and scene divisions don't call for *asterisks*. There's not a goddamn *asterisk* in the whole script unless maybe *you* put a goddamn ast—Oh, sorry, Father.

Priest: (awkwardly) Yes, well...

Henry: Look, let's just get on with this.

Margaret: Yes, let's just go.

Priest: (doubtful of their love) You're sure?

Margaret: Of course, Father! We're in love!

Priest: Of course... (opening his script hesitantly) Do you, Henry—

Henry: Ahem. Father. The technical cue.

Priest: Oh, yes. (shouts to Bill) Cue spotlight. (Sudden, blinding spotlight on the trio. The Priest squints painfully while the other two assume the typical clasped-hands wedding pose before him.) Do you, Henry—

Margaret: Wait!

Henry: What now, Maggie? (She scurries out into the audience to fetch a large trash bag from behind the same "pew" where she found the scripts earlier. She plunks it down at center stage, and from it, she pulls a veil and a bowtie, which she and Henry put on, respectively.) Oh yes.

Priest: Props, too, I see.

Henry: Well, why not go all out?

Margaret: Don't get jealous now! We've got goodies for you in there, too, when your other roles pop up!

Priest: Oh good. Shall we then?

Henry: Yes, and quickly, Father. *Very* quickly.

Priest: (to Margaret) Do you—

Margaret: I do.

Priest: (to Henry) Do you—

Henry: Me, too.

Priest: I now pronounce you—

Henry: Blah, blah. I think we all know what comes next. Skip to scene two.

(Henry lunges atop Margaret.)

Margaret: Yes, yes, YES, YES, yes-yes-yes-yes, YES! YES!

Priest: (flipping ahead to catch up) Oh my.

Henry: Oh baby, oh baby, OH BABY!

Priest: Oh dear. (consulting his script, trying not to watch, hoping to distract them into another scene) You're sure you don't want to go back? You wrote in a lovely reception—

Margaret: YES! YES!

Priest: Well, OK, but the cheese platters would've been—

Margaret: AAA-AAAH!

Priest: *Really*.

Henry: Whoa-oh-oh-OH!

Priest: (fumbling with the stop watch) I, er, feel like you've run a bit long on this scene—

Henry: (looks up briefly) Long, eh? Well, you know what they say about Catholic boys, Father. (He winks.)

Margaret: (pushing Henry off of her) He's right, Henry.

Henry: Jesus, Maggie, you always drop out of that scene early!

Margaret: Well, we can't dick around all day, Henry!

Henry: (to Priest) Thanks a lot.

Margaret: Scene three. Cue Bill would you, Father?

Priest: Ahem. Scene three! (The lights go red.) Uh-oh. (He consults his script.) Scene three: "The Honeymoon is Over." Oh dear...

Margaret: (ripping off her veil) What do you mean you didn't *have time* to take out the garbage? When you're in the apartment... and you leave... you have time to take out the garbage!

Henry: (picking at his bowtie and finally disarding it violently) You want to talk about time, Maggie? You want to talk about *taking the time*? You won't even take two seconds to change the goddamned toilet paper roll.

Priest: (in response to the swear) Really, Henry, could you watch your lang—

Henry: How you manage to plow through *a roll a week* is beyond me anyway, but you could at least take the time to—

Margaret: Oh, I *plow*, do I? I *plow*. At least I plow for free. At least I don't plow on a fucking five-hundred dollar tiller/lawn mower! (Priest crosses himself when she says "fucking.") We're newlyweds, Henry! We're poor!

Henry: We needed a mower!

Margaret: A mower, yes, not a Zamboni. That thing is a beast! The kids next door think you're the ice cream truck!

Priest: Ha-ha! (Henry shoots him a look.) Ahem. Pardon me.

Henry: Well, excuse me, Miss Organic Yogurt. Miss \$3.99-a-Cup Yogurt! Heaven forbid I suggest we buy Yoplait like everyone else! *May God smite me down* if I even *think* that maybe we should try the store brand for seventy cents less. No, no! You have to have yogurt from milk from cows that eat grass that hasn't been sprayed with pesticides. Hell, you'd probably flip shit if you found out that the farmer who owns the cows had used bug spray at summer camp as a child. And yet, only with yogurt. Only

yogurt merits a rebellion with you, Margaret. We drive five miles to a different grocery store just to buy your fucking yogurt. (Priest crosses himself again.)

Margaret: Yogurt doesn't cost as much as a lawn-mower, Henry.

Priest: (closing his script) Now, really, let us not forget—

Henry: I don't know, Maggie—over time. Over time, that \$20.00 a week plus the cost of all the toilet paper we have to buy—

Priest: —wealth is not in earthly things.

Henry: (aside to Father) Earthly things like that 6-week paid (does air quotes) “sabbatical” in Barbados, eh, Father?

Margaret: I'm sorry, who ad-libs too much?

Henry: Sorry! Jesus! (fumbles with script; then, reading:) I hate you!

Priest: Now, really...

Margaret: I hate you more!

Priest: Oh, heavens! (consulting script; then, to Bill) Scene four!

(Lights dim as Margaret and Henry quick-change into bathrobes from their prop bag, pink and blue respectively. Then, soft yellow light rises to suggest morning. Henry and Margaret hurry offstage in opposite directions.)

Priest: Uh... I... I'm, uh, I'm not sure I understand my line here...

Margaret: (leaning on from offstage) Crow.

Priest: Pardon me?

Margaret: *Crow*. Bill couldn't find his rooster track, so we need you for sound effects.

Priest: And you want me to crow?

Margaret: CROW!

Priest: (startled) Cock-a-doodle-do!

Margaret: (coming onstage) Morning.

Henry: (coming onstage) Morning. (Pause) Sorry.

Margaret: Ditto. (Pause) You want eggs?

Henry: Sure.

Margaret: Scrambled OK?

Henry: Sure. (She pulls a frying pan and a small yellow carton from the bag.) What is that?

Margaret: Egg substitute. Cholesterol-free.

Henry: I thought you asked me if I wanted eggs.

Margaret: This is eggs. Made from eggs anyway.

Henry: Don't we have any real eggs?

Margaret: Hank, real eggs have so much cholesterol. And with all the shrimp you eat—

Henry: Maggie, two eggs in the morning isn't going to kill me.

Margaret: But with all the shrimp you eat, too—

Henry: When do I eat shrimp, Maggie? You certainly don't cook it for me, and you don't let me get it when we go out. Not like we ever go out anymore...

Margaret: Cooking at home is less expensive than eating out, Hank.

Henry: Real eggs are less expensive than that shit in the carton, Maggie.

Margaret: You swear too much.

Priest: I agree.

Henry: You nag too much.

Margaret: Fuck you!

Henry: Oh, *I* swear too much?

Margaret: Look, do you want eggs or not?

Henry: Yes, I want *eggs*. No, I do not want that runny, piss-colored glop from the carton.

Margaret: Fine!

Henry: Fine!

Margaret: Speaking of eggs...

Henry: What? What else about the fucking eggs, Maggie?

Margaret: I'm—(She looks at the Priest, then up at Bill.) I'm!—(Looks again at the Priest.) Father, your cue! Please!

Priest: Oh! Cue the spotlight!

Margaret: (as blue spotlight rises) I'm pregnant.

Henry: What? Now? How? Who? (sinister) The maintenance guy...

Margaret: No, dumbass, you.

Henry: Me?

Margaret: You!

Henry: Me...

Margaret: You...

Henry: Us... (Pause) I love you.

Margaret: I love you, too.

Priest: If I may just—quickly! I promise, quickly—but, why haven't you written in more... *nice* moments like this one?

Margaret: (realization) Yeah... Yeah, Henry, why haven't we? And, furthermore... (evaluates the spotlight on her) Henry, why is this spotlight blue?

Henry: Uh, how should I know? Bill's the light tech—

Margaret: Tell me you didn't... (flipping ahead in her script) *Henry Elvis Hoffa, you conniving fuck!*

Priest: (crossing himself) Margaret, PLEASE!

Margaret: (poking Henry in the chest) We (poke) decided (poke) on a (poke) girl (poke). A *girl*, Henry, a little *girl* to name after my mother!

Henry: Of course we did, Maggie. I know that—

Margaret: Oh, you do? You know that, do you? Then why is my act two, scene one entitled “It’s a Boy”?

Henry: Hell if I know; *you* printed up the scripts—

Margaret: Right, Henry... OK...

(Margaret pulls a pillow out of the bag and stuffs her shirt reluctantly.)

Margaret: (reading flatly) The doctor called.

Henry: And?...

(She smiles, forcedly.)

Henry: HOT DAMN! A BOY! (He high-fives the Priest.)

Margaret: (reading very obviously, choppily from her script) Calm-down, Daddy; we’ve still-got-two-months-to-go.

Henry: But a boy! A BOY! Let’s build a nursery. Let’s build a sandbox. Let’s build a treefort and a baseball diamond and a weight room—

Margaret: First, let’s-get-dinner.

Henry: Dinner, yes, of course. A *steak* dinner! And potatoes! (Rubbing her stomach) Steak and potatoes for my BOY!

(He moves to rub her stomach, but she slips away.)

Margaret: Steak and potatoes? I’m a vegetarian, Henry, for godssakes! I’ve let you have your editorial liberties; let me have my dietary ethics!

Henry: If you start in about trophic levels again, Margaret—

Priest: She's right, you know, Henry. Not to mention, today's a Friday, and—

Henry: Enough! Fine! Skip the steak and potatoes.

Margaret: Thank you. So then. Act two, scene five. Scene *five*? You gave the potatoes *two scenes*?

Henry: (sadly) It was a twenty ounce steak...

Priest: (reprimanding) On a Friday, Henry!

Henry: Cue scene five!

(The red lights return. Margaret stuffs another pillow in her shirt. Henry pulls a bag of chips from the bag.)

Margaret: I said barbeque.

Henry: You said salt and vinegar.

Margaret: When have I ever said salt and vinegar and meant salt and vinegar?

Henry: You've never said salt and vinegar before.

Margaret: Exactly. Never! What makes this time different?

Henry: (retreating) Fine.

Margaret: Where are you going?

Henry: To get barbeque.

Margaret: You're leaving?

Henry: To get barbeque potato chips, yes.

Margaret: You're leaving me?

Henry: What?

Margaret: (breaking down) You're leaving me, you don't want me anymore, I'm too fat, I'm not pretty, I'm not sexy, you don't love me, you don't want me, you don't love our daught—(rolls her eyes) *son*... you don't love our son, you don't want our son...

Henry: (reaches out to her) Oh, Margaret—

Priest: (reading ahead, tries to stop) I wouldn't—

Margaret: (hostilely) Don't touch me! (Henry pulls away and throws the potato chips into the air as he attempts to escape. The Priest catches the bag.)

Priest: Ooo...

Henry: Honey—

Margaret: Don't "honey" me! You don't understand! You can't possibly understand! "Honey," you say. "Oh, honey," as if you know a damn thing, "Honey." (realizes her craving for honey) Honey... Honey, Henry! Honey, you're brilliant! Honeybuns! (orgasmic) Oh, honeybuns...

Henry: Honeybuns! (He scurries to the bag, pulls out a honeybun, a plate, and a fork. He gives it to her and high-fives the Priest again. Meanwhile, the Priest has opened the bag of potato chips and begun snacking on them, watching intently.)

Margaret: Oh, honey, thank you! This is perfect, absolutely per—what is this?

Henry: A fork.

Margaret: A fork.

Henry: Yes, Maggie, that's a fork.

Margaret: Do you know how sensitive I am right now?

Henry: Well... Yes, actually, I've noticed—

Margaret: No, dipshit, I mean physically—how physically sensitive I am? My boobs feel like balloons stuffed with thumbtacks.

Henry: Yes... Yes, you've told me... And your back and your feet and your neck and—

Margaret: Yet you decided that prongs were the most reasonable utensil for my mouth? My mouth, Henry. Do you ever think about my mouth? You never kiss it anymore. You never listen to it anymore. My mouth is sensitive, too, Henry!

Henry: Uh, Father, how are we on time?

Priest: (caught up in the action, licking his fingers as he reaches for his discarded script) Oh, I, um, goodness—

Henry: Nevermind. Let's just skip ahead. Act three?

Margaret: But we never got to my fudge ripple and hot wings scene!

Henry: Hot wings, eh? Who's the heathen carnivore now?

Margaret: I'm pregnant, Henry! I need more protein!

Henry: (shaking his head) And on a Friday... Tut tut...

Margaret: Fine! Act three. (flipping through her script) Oh! This is you, Father!

Priest: (flipping ahead) Oh?

Margaret: (pulls a baseball cap out of the bag and plunks it on his head.) Oops! (takes it off, and puts it on again backwards) There! You're our son! Of course, in the *original* script, you were our *second* child—

Henry: Yeah, yeah, blah, blah. Anyway, all you need to do is stand here and look awkward (positioning the Priest at stage left then returning himself to Maggie at stage right), and we'll be over here to do the rest. So then... (clears his throat) Oh, come on, Mags. Boys will be boys.

Margaret: (pulls a dirty magazine out of the bag) Not my boy! (disgusted) I mean, look at it, Henry... Really, look at it... (He looks.) Don't look at it!

Henry: (gestures to Priest) He's fifteen years old, Maggie... What do you expect?

Margaret: (glancing at Priest disapprovingly) Oh, I don't know... He could've at least had the decency to use the Internet so I wouldn't have to find it under his bed...

Henry: Maybe if you'd stop making his bed for him...

Margaret: Henry, my bed-making is not the issue here.

Henry: I don't know, Maggie. Maybe this, this magazine... Maybe he's trying to tell you he's an adult now... Maybe he doesn't want you to make his bed anymore. Maybe he doesn't want you to pack him an apple and a pocket-pack of Kleenex for school every day. Maybe he doesn't want you to fold his underwear anymore, Maggie (Priest nods.); really, what fifteen-year-old wants his mother touching his underwear? (Priest shakes his head.)

Margaret: Well. Maybe I should just stop feeding him, too. Maybe I should stop caring for him altogether. Maybe I should stop *caring* about anyone at all.

Henry: That's not what I—

Margaret: Oh, don't cry to me, Mister! I don't *care* anymore. (She turns to leave.)

Henry: Where are you going?

Margaret: Out.

Henry: Out where?

Margaret: I don't know, Henry. *Out*. I don't *care* where. I don't *care* at all.

Henry: What about dinner?

Margaret: Oh, fuck you! Who are you, Ward Cleaver? Make Easy Mac, make oatmeal, make *toast* for godssakes...

Priest: *Really*, is the swear necessary?

Margaret: (disregarding him) Brilliant, Father, really brilliant, but did you see those notes I told you about? They're there in the green ink, remember? Maybe we could try that scene again, only this time, you try to look more angst-ridden, you know, "misunderstood," as they say. Just real quick, let's start again, from Henry's line—

Henry: Maggie, you know we don't have time for this—

Margaret: No, no, the line is "Boys will be boys, Mags."

Henry: No, no, Maggie. We need to move on.

Margaret: Henry, what's the point in doing a thing if you're not going to do it right?

Henry: What's the point is starting a thing if you're not going to finish it?

Priest: Both notable perspectives.

Margaret: (pulls out a chair from offstage) Just pull over.

Henry: What?

Margaret: You want to move on; let's move on. Page one-eleven. "Just pull over."

Henry: Oh, um, thanks, Maggie. Father, could you grab that chair—(He gestures offstage. Father pulls out a chair for him while he flips ahead in his script. Eventually, he and Maggie sit side-by-side, Henry to stage left of Maggie.)

Margaret: (impatiently) *Just pull over.*

Henry: I don't need to pull over, Margaret.

Margaret: But you're lost, Henry.

Henry: I'm not lost. I'm taking a shortcut.

Margaret: Your shortcut has put us an hour and a half behind schedule!

Henry: I think your schedule is the real problem here... Why do we always have to go by a schedule? Why can't we ever be spontaneous? Impetuous? Whimsical?

Margaret: Oh, ha! Your idea of whimsical is a side of pasta salad instead of sweet potato fries at KFC!

Henry: That's not true, Margaret.

Margaret: That is true, Henry!

Henry: They don't even have sweet potato fries at KFC, Margaret.

Margaret: Oh well, I wouldn't know, Henry, because, unlike you, I value my blood's ability to flow freely, and I don't eat three times the daily recommended cholesterol intake—

Henry: Margaret, I swear, if you start in about the egg substitute again...

Margaret: You won't even try it! You won't even mix it with a real egg yolk!

Henry: Margaret, enough.

Margaret: Henry, pull over.

Henry: I will not pull over, Margaret.

Margaret: I have to pee, Henry. Pull over.

Henry: You *always* have to pee.

Margaret: Well, *sorry*.

Henry: I swear, if you ask for directions in there...

Margaret: (breaking from the script; to Priest) You see, Father, he's completely anti-direction! Be they road directions or stage directions—

Priest: A man needs direction in his life, Henry—a vocation, if you will—

Henry: I feel like we're running long—

Margaret: Goddamn, Henry, why can't you ever talk about your problems? (Henry begins flipping ahead.) It's *OK* to feel aimless. It's *OK* to lack direction. (clasps his hands in hers) We're *married* now, Henry; I can help you find the direction you seek—

Henry: (in outrage at script) What the hell is this?

Margaret: (pulling back) What?

Henry: Act four, scene one. Looks like I'm not the only one who took a little editorial liberty.

Priest: (looking ahead at Act IV) Oh dear. God help us.

Margaret: Oh, Henry, if you'd take the time to read the scene, you'd see that, in the end—

Henry: We're never going to get to the end if you don't stop badgering me about my "direction" in life.

Margaret: Fine! Then read the scene, Henry!

Henry: Fine! (reading) What? (sinister) The maintenance guy?

Margaret: This isn't my fault. You can't please me anymore, Henry. You don't even try. You don't talk to me anymore... You don't even look at me. You don't do anything. You just sit there... and scratch...

Henry: (scratching himself through his pants pocket) I do not scratch.

Margaret: You're scratching now!

Henry: Well, at least I'm scratching my own crotch, Maggie. At least I'm not running off with the goddamned refrigerator repair man...

Margaret: Maybe if you'd fixed the refrigerator...

Henry: You wouldn't let me touch the refrigerator!

Margaret: Because you broke the sink!

Henry: I did not break the sink!

Margaret: Oh?

Henry: Oh!

Margaret: Then how did the sink break, Henry?

Henry: Cheryl. (confused, breaking from script) Cheryl?

Margaret: Who?

Henry: Cheryl!

Margaret: Your secretary?

Henry: You're not the only one who can have an affair, Maggie! (realizes what she was trying to tell him earlier; breaking from script) Ohh... Very diplomatic, Mags. But Cheryl? Really? I would never—

Margaret: Henry, you're ruining the pacing of the scene.

Henry: You're not the only one who can have an affair, Maggie!

Margaret: Why, you... All this talk about scratching your own crotch... But how did she break the sink? (He smirks.) No... (He laughs.) No! In the kitchen? On the counter?

Henry: And she made me biscuits afterwards!

Margaret: I knew I smelled flour on you!

Henry: They were good biscuits, too, Maggie. Real good.

Margaret: I hate you.

Henry: I hate you more.

Priest: Ooo, lovely parallelism to the wedding night scene!

Henry: Yes, really, Maggie. And the bit about the biscuits—clever, clever!

Priest: Clever indeed.

Margaret: (pleased with herself) Thank you, thank you.

Henry: Look, Mags... I know I seem hasty at times, but... you know I just want to get to the end, right babe? You know I'm just eager to go... all the way with you?

Margaret: I know... I just wish we had time to savor these moments, Henry—(Spotlight blinks three times. All three of them squint up at Bill.)

Priest: But apparently, you don't.

Henry: Oh, shit! We've got to wrap this up. Bill has to be out of here in ten if he's going to meet his editing deadline.

Priest: Editing deadline?

Margaret: Evangelists don't just let *Catholics* get married in their sanctuaries, Father.

Henry: Bill agreed to be our techie on the condition that we'd let him film the whole spiel and use the footage as an advisory video for their youth group here.

Margaret: I believe it's going to be called, "Heathens at Play." It's part of a whole anti-Catholic curriculum; should be riveting.

Priest: Well! I don't know quite how I feel about—

Henry: Oh, boo hoo, Father. They'd make the same movie with puppets if they didn't have live action knocking at their door. We need to get a move on!

Margaret: (flipping furiously through her script) Yes! Now, we're on the home stretch here, Father, and we've written you in again at the end, so keep an ear out for your cue, OK?

Priest: (bumbling) Right...

(They flip through the script. Henry takes a sweater vest and a driving cap out of the bag and dons them. Margaret takes out large glasses, which she puts on, and lipstick, which

she smears on her lips and teeth. She also pulls out a banana pudding cup and a spoon. They reset their chairs from the car scene.)

Margaret: Honey? (Pause) Honey?

Henry: What?

Margaret: You coming to Bingo tonight?

Henry: What?

Margaret: Bingo.

Henry: What?

Margaret: BINGO.

Henry: The Beatles are dead, Maggie. Get hip with the times.

Margaret: Not Ringo—I said “Bingo!” Oh, forget it. You say *I* should get hip... *You* need a hip. I’m not the one who can’t even sit down without help...

Henry: I can so!

Margaret: You cannot.

Henry: I’m sitting now!

Margaret: But how’d you get there?

Henry: I... I... I forget...

Margaret: Do you want the last of my pudding?

Henry: What?

Margaret: Pudding, Henry! Do you want the last of my pudding?

Henry: Maybe. What flavor?

Margaret: Banana.

Henry: Sure. (She spoon feeds him.)

Margaret: Good?

Henry: Mmm. Mmm-hmm.

Margaret: More?

Henry: Mmm-hmm. (She spoon feeds him more.) Delicious. (She laughs.) What? (She cackles.) What's so funny?

Margaret: At last!

Henry: What?

Margaret: I got you, Henry! I got you at last! This isn't pudding at all!

Henry: It isn't?

Margaret: It's egg substitute! (Against his will, Priest finds this immensely endearing.)

Henry: Dammit, Maggie!

Margaret: But you liked it!

Henry: I couldn't taste it!

Margaret: Oh, Henry...

Henry: Oh, Maggie...

Margaret: We're old...

Henry: We're *old*.

Margaret: I think it's time...

Henry: Is it? Already?

Margaret: Don't you think so?

Henry: I guess so. (Pause) Thank you, Maggie.

Margaret: Thank you, Henry.

Henry: I love you.

Margaret: I love you, too.

Priest: (as Maggie pulls out a cup and a small vile. She empties the vile into the glass.)
Oh, that's a beautiful ending!

Henry: Cheers.

Margaret: Cheers. (She goes to take a sip.)

Priest:(reading ahead) Wait!

Henry: Father?

Priest: (pointing at this script) That's poison!

Margaret: Right. Like "Romeo and Juliet." Only minus the happy dagger because we don't have time to clean the mess...

Priest: But you can't—! (She drinks.) No! (Henry kisses her.) NO! (They gag dramatically and die on the ground.) No! NO! Nooo! (He drops his script and begins to wail.)

Henry: (from the ground) Psst. Psst, Father.

Priest: Henry? Henry, you're alive!

Henry: Father, your line.

Priest: What's that?

Henry: Your line, Father.

Priest: What?

Henry: (gets up, picks up the Priest's script, flips to the end and points) Your line! We're in a hurry, Father, please; stick to the script!

Priest: (puzzled) Dearly beloved, we gather here to celebrate the life of these people, Margaret and Henry... (They jump up and dust themselves off quickly)

Henry: (shakes the Priest's hand) Fantastic!

Margaret: Brilliant! The ad-libbing sounded so genuine there at the end, Father. I would've loved to have heard you go on, but time is so tight.

Henry: (calling up to Bill) That's a wrap, Bill! Best of luck with your heathen video! (The lights dim.) Father, you were marvelous, really marvelous. (takes out his wallet) Look, you've already got my only fifty, but, uh, here's a twenty for a good word in with God and an abbreviated confession.

Priest: Confession? What? I... I don't understand.

Margaret: We're felons, Father. (pulling off her wig to reveal shockingly red hair) Check fraud. We're up to nearly six billion, but as of two days ago, the authorities have us pegged.

Henry: Well, (peeling off mustache) they have Henry and Margaret pegged...

Priest: You mean... You're not?—

Henry: (shakes the Priest's hand) Joseph Boudreaux, remember? But, damn, Father, they were our most genuine aliases... We never hauled in more than we did as Henry and Margaret.

Priest: Oh?

Margaret: They were passionate... aggressive... and crafty—wow! I've never been so crafty as I was as Maggie.

Priest: So I've seen... The egg substitute.

Margaret: They could've had such a future... (fondly) That pesky Henry... He would've found his direction at last, Father! I know he would have! (She begins to cry. Henry comforts her.)

Henry: God, he was an aimless, impatient bastard, wasn't he? But I sure did love him...

Priest: Wait, then, the ad-libbing... All the bickering between scenes... That was—

Henry: Scripted, yeah. Maggie and Hank are still *cons*, after all, fundamentally. (to Maggie) By the way, you pulled off the baby boy bitch-out like a pro!

Margaret: Well, (sniffles) I had Maggie to help me...

Henry: But, hey, don't worry about us, Father; we'll be OK. We're leaving for Canada tonight, and we're changing our names, of course...

Margaret: We only wanted to have one last stunt as Maggie and Hank...

Henry: We could never *really* get married, what with the license and the signatures...

Margaret: Even in Canada. Too risky. Canadians can be tricky, Father.

Henry: Alannis Morissette.

Margaret: Tricky.

Henry: Celine Dion.

Margaret: *So* tricky.

Henry: But at least we had this, Father. Thank you.

Margaret: So much.

Priest: Well, I, uh...

Henry: But hey, Father—that confession, if you don't mind; we've got to run before long. There's a funeral coming in any second now, and we've a deal with the hearse to pick us up to take us to the border. Quite a ways, I know, but who would stop a hearse? I see you're speechless. That's OK. We often silence *ourselves* with our genius. Now then. (He kneels and crosses himself) Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned; it has been fourteen years since my last confession; I wrote 527 fraudulent checks for a total amount of 3.6 billion dollars; ten Hail Marys and five Our Fathers? Sounds good. Amen. (Sound of sirens) Holy shit, we've got to run!

Priest: But—

Margaret: Oh, don't worry, Father. I got us the other 2.4 billion, and I don't need to confess.

Priest: But Maggie—

Margaret: —was actually more of a universal Unitarian. What self-respecting descendent of Henry the Eighth would decline a prime slab of beef? *I'm* the Episcopalian. (blows him a kiss as she and Henry run off.) Kisses!

END

An Ode to the Days of Bears on Chains

Characters:

Bill—late-20s, pleasant though not overwhelming-interesting demeanor, dressed casually

Martin—Bill's lover, late-20s, darkly good-looking, dressed by a nicer standard of "casual"

Edward—early-30s, pleasant demeanor, generically dressed

Setting:

a city bus coming from the airport in Little Rock, Arkansas

Bill: So, only the Romans?

Martin: Only the Romans.

Bill: You're sure?

Martin: Only the Romans.

Bill: But really? As in Paul? As in the Apostle Paul? As in the Apostle Paul and his letter to the Romans?

Martin: I don't know. I don't know, Bill. I grew up Episcopal. We don't read the Bible.

Bill: Then how do you know—

Martin: My aunt's a priest.

Bill: What?!

Martin: My aunt's a pr—OK, either you wield the Baptist stick or you don't.

Bill: No, I know, that's just—A woman? Really? I mean, no, really, that's fine... I guess... I just—Whose idea was that? A female priest?

Martin: A female priest who has biblically proven your vicelessness, yes.

Bill: Fine. OK. Fine. Yes. (brief pause) Women preach. (brief pause) Only the Romans. (brief pause) This isn't going to work.

Martin: Why not? Only the Romans, Billy, swear to God!

Bill: (in response to swear) This definitely isn't going to work!

Martin: Ah! Fine! Swear to what then? Clinton?

Bill: What?

Martin: Clinton, I don't know. Who can Arkansans swear to?

Bill: *Clinton?* Yes, please, let's bring up the philandering democrat playboy of Little Rock to my Red born-and-bred mother! "Hi, Ma! I'm gay. Now let's discuss politics with my lover while we enjoy these fine biscuits!"

Martin: Your *lover?* How *vivid*. I wish I'd known. I would've packed my pink chiffon robe and leather panties.

Bill: (sighs) You know I don't know the lingo... What, then—boyfriend? Partner? *Companion?*

Martin: Companion! Jesus Christ, Billy, I'm not a seeing-eye dog.

Bill: That's Christ Jesus, Martin, and don't swear.

Martin: Fuck you! Don't tell me what I can and can't say!

Bill: I didn't mean to—

Martin: Can I say fuck? May I profane, here, on a city bus, 15 blocks from your mother, or does her swear-dar pick up expletives, too?

Bill: This is *not* going to work.

Martin: It would work just fine if you'd pull that bottle of anointing oil of out your ass.

Bill: (palms the air, "talk-to-the-hand"-style) That's Pentacostals. We're Baptists.

Martin: Shame. If you were Pentacostal, we could just tell her that all of this was snake-handling.

(Silence. Martin smiles. Finally, Bill smiles.)

Martin: Ha!

Bill: Ha. Really though, tone it down a little. Please?

Martin: OK, OK. (pauses; laughs to himself)

Bill: What?

Martin: You did talk-to-the-hand.

Bill: What? When?

Martin: Just now.

Bill: I did not.

Martin: You did, too.

Bill: I didn't.

Martin: You did. You better watch out. You might wake up witty and stylish tomorrow.

Bill: Ha-ha.

Martin: No, really. You might get your very own sitcom with a whiny redhead.

Bill: OK, Martin.

Martin: You know what?

Bill: What?

Martin: I don't understand, Billy. You don't pop your collar. You don't write for Elle. You don't inflect up at the end of your sentences, or host a show on Bravo. You don't

buy organic, or take pilates. You don't even iron, Bill; you don't always shower. You drink Lemon-Lime Gatorade, you won't touch wine, and you're actually afraid of poached eggs.

Bill: They're slimy.

Martin: You go to church, for godssakes! You're a pharmacist! You have gray temples, chewed cuticles, and a hefty spare tire, compliments of the Wendy's late-night drive-through. *You put me on a city bus in Little Rock, Arkansas because you're too cheap for a taxi, Bill.*

Bill: What's your point?

Martin: Based on what your mom *thinks* she knows, you're not even *half* gay!

Bill: So?

Martin: So, *what's the problem?*

Bill: I sleep with men.

Martin: Man. One man. Me.

Bill: But one man is the whole salty lot of Sodom and Gomorrah to her, Marty.

Martin: What?

Bill: In the Bible—Sodom and—

Martin: Episcopal, Bill. Book of Common Prayer.

Bill: To her, one man might as well be, I don't know—little boys. Cancer patients. Goats.

Martin: Goats?

Bill: I honestly think that goats would go over better than this will.

Martin: Goats. Wow. (pensive pause) I miss those days.

Bill: What days?

Martin (musing to self): Well, no. Not miss, per se, but... envy. Covet. I covet those days.

Bill: What days, Martin?

Martin: The goat-fuck days.

Bill (in disbelief): What?

Martin: The goat-fuck days. Greece. When a man or a woman or a frisky, feisty livestock could just live and love as they felt fit. Phallic statues. Wine. Wild dances to Dionysus. The goat-fuck days, Bill.

(pause)

Bill (quietly appalled): That is completely obscene.

Martin: I know, I know, but—

Bill: No, that is FOUL, Martin. With a goat? Ah! With a woman? Martin! Ew! Profoundly—EW!

Martin: No, no! Jesus, no! *I* wouldn't, but who am I to say that another man can't? You know, goat consenting.

Bill: I... I have no words for you right now—

Martin: Shit, Billy; all I mean is, I miss the days when men could be men, you know, however, with whomever...

Bill: With *whatever*...

Martin: *I don't want to sleep with goats, Bill!* I want to sleep with you. I don't know... Hail the Phallus!

Bill: This is NOT going to work.

Martin: Fine, fine. Bad example. How about the days of bears on chains?

Bill (weary of this): What?

Martin: Elizabethan England. Shakespeare. Dirty, sexy, thick and heavy. Men in skirts and bears on chains!

Bill: How about now, Martin? How about the days of right now, when we're nine blocks from telling my mother, "Happy Valentine's Day, Ma; I'm everything you never

wanted me to be.” How about these days, Martin, when everything I was ever taught goes against everything that I really am, and all I’ve got to help me is a potty-mouthed goat-fucker who wants to dance to Dionysus with bears on chains! You may as well be Harry Potter; she’s going to hate you! She’s going to hate me!

Martin: Only the Romans, Billy! Chapter something, verse something, whatever book it was; it was written to the Romans! Christ was a Jew, Easter started as a festival to Pagan goddess Eostre, and I’d have to HIT your mother with the Koran to make it as violent as she wants it to be! If the fucking fish literally, actually, flesh-and-blood *swallowed* Jonah, then only the Romans can’t be gay!

Bill: Poignant, Martin, but Simba from the Lion King is a Satanic symbol in my mother’s house. This is not going to work.

Martin: Listen to me, Bill. People are people. Some people are mostly good, like you, and some people are mostly bad, like me and you mother. But nobody is all one or other, so who’s to say what’s right? You’re a Hallmark card, Billy. You’re a dull, churchy, anti-fop pharmacist who gives peppermints to small children and goes through all of this bullshit on Valentine’s Day just to give your mother flowers. Valentine’s Day. Today is *Valentine’s Day*, Billy. We could be in Barbados. We could be at Del Monico. Hell, we could be with each other, *in love with* each other, today, every day, without taking a goddamned city bus with oily windows and a flatulent driver to stall for time before we let Arkansas, God, the world, and your mother see our *shameful, sullied* lifestyle. Honestly, Billy! It’s Valentine’s Day, dammit! And we’re in *Arkansas* when we don’t have to be! If that’s not enough, then what is?

(long pause)

Bill: This is it.

Martin (suddenly terrified): Oh fuck.

Bill: What?

Martin: This isn’t going to work.

(Edward gets on the bus as Bill and Martin get off.)

Bill: At least I’m not fucking goats, right? (notices Edward, looks away)

Edward: Billy?

Bill: Hey! Edward!

Edward: Billy! What're you doing in town?

Bill: I'm, uh, visiting Mom for Valentine's Day.

Edward: Fantastic! How is Miss Sylvia?

Bill: Good, good. Real good.

Edward: You still into pharmaceuticals?

Bill: I am. How about you? Did you ever write that play?

Edward: Sure. One or two.

Bill: Great. Well, I should probably—

Edward: You two know each other?

Bill (awkwardly): Oh! No. Yeah. This is... Um, this is... Martin. My... My friend, Martin. Martin, Edward. Edward... Martin.

Edward: Hey there.

Martin (disappointed; shaking Edward's hand): Hey, Edward. Nice to meet you.

Edward: What're you guys, like, old fraternity brothers?

Bill: Yeah! Yeah, we are... Kind of... a really... *small* fraternity...

Edward: I never went Greek myself. I mean, *too much* brotherhood can be a little... you know...

Bill: Hail the Phallus.

Edward: Yeah...

Bill: (lying, overcompensating) Yeah, really, we're more like uh, dart buddies. Yes! Darts. Martin and I, we... We, um... We play darts together.

Edward: Darts, eh? Hey, like your Pop!

Bill: Darts! Yes. Darts, like Pop. I mean, wow, I thought ol' Grandpop was good in his day, but... Martin, here. Whoa. You should see him, Edward, really... He's... he's a beast. With darts, I mean.

Edward: Your ma had a pretty mean throw, too, didn't she, Bill? Your Grandpop taught her?

Bill: Oh yeah, Mom's a sure bulls-eye... She's going to flip for some new competition...

Edward: How nice for Miss Sylvia. (to Martin) So you're as good as all of that?

Martin: Apparently.

Edward: And what about you, Bill? You throw even half as well as your mama?

Martin: (aside) Not as straight as you'd think.

Bill (hastily): I'm alright. But Martin. Wow. Barely even has to practice, this one. Really. Yeah. But, hey, we should really get go—

Edward: So, what do you do, Martin? Besides mess around with this guy, I mean.

Martin: I fuck goats.

(Bill's face falls. Edward stares at Martin. Awkward pause. Bill, forcedly, laughs. Edward laughs. Martin, sourly, laughs.)

Edward: Fantastic! Hey, good to see you, Billy. And nice to meet you, Martin.

Martin: Same to you, Edward. (looking at Billy in disappointment, but speaking presumably to Edward) And happy Valentine's Day.

END

Baby Steps

Characters:

Jill—college sophomore; riding home to the funeral of an influential high school with her childhood best friend, Brody, who had the same teacher. Jill and Brody attend the same college, but do not see each other often. Jill should sit in the passenger seat.

Wini—Jill's college roommate and current best friend; attending the funeral to support Jill. Wini and Brody have met only just prior to this scene. Wini should sit in the middle of the backseat.

Brody—the driver; too cool for anyone else.

Setting:

Brody's car, on the way to the funeral.

Wini: A. Go.

Jill: Aladdin.

Wini: Too easy.

Jill: What's wrong with easy?

Wini: Don't *start* easy. We should challenge ourselves through M at least.

Brody: I didn't know people actually did this.

Jill: You never did this? You totally did this. *We* did this.

Brody: I guess we did, but we were like, seven.

Jill: We definitely did this past seven.

Brody: When?

Jill: When? Whenever. Wherever. On the bus. On the monkey bars. In church—Oh! Remember when we played on Easter Sunday, and we chose health vocabulary as the category—(to Wini) That was *too dirty*, and Brody and I were *too cool*.—We immediately got stuck ‘cause we were what—What, Brode? Ten? Nine?—Ten, I think. Definitely past seven, but young enough that we were just in our first-ever health class. We got through like, A for abstinence and B for breasts, and C was Brody’s, and finally he yelled “CERVIX!”

Wini: No!

Brody: No.

Jill: Wait, wait—there’s more: The priest had just gotten to the resurrection, so the angel had just told Mary Magdalene that the tomb was empty, right. Well then Jesus shows up, and the verse is like “So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said—“ and I forget what Jesus actually said, but Brody definitely yelled “CERVIX” at that exact mo—

Brody: I don’t remember that.

Jill: What?... You remember that.

Brody: I don’t.

Jill: You do. But fine; you’ve still definitely played this game. We played all the time in your mom’s station wagon.

Wini: My mom had a wagon. Did you guys ever sit in the backwards back seat?

Jill: Oh, *always*. We’d dip our fingers in our Snack Packs and write on the back window in pudding.

Wini: That’s a little disgusting.

Brody: That’s a lie. I never did that.

Jill: OK, right. My family just started calling you Tapioca on a whim.

Wini: Tapioca!

Brody: Thanks.

Jill: *Tap for short.*

Brody: Enough.

Jill: What's with you?

Brody: Enough, Jillian.

Jill: Fine. Enough. So, Wini, A... A... A... Look what you did, Brody; I'm stuck on A. Wini, you go.

Wini: The Aristocats.

Jill: *Right.*

Wini: Um... Alice in Wonderland.

Jill: Nice.

Brody: Could we play a cooler car game?

Jill: There are cool car games? B, Wini. Go.

Brody: Cooler than this.

Jill: Like what?

Wini: Bedknobs and Broomsticks.

Brody: Like Six Steps to Kevin Bacon.

Jill: Is cooler than the alphabet game?

Brody: Cooler than the Disney version of the alphabet game.

Wini: Bambi.

Jill: Have you ever wondered how Kevin Bacon feels about Six Steps to Kevin Bacon?

Brody: No.

Wini: Oh! Beauty and the Beast! How could I have forgotten—

Jill: I wonder if he feels crowded. I mean, *everyone* is six steps from him.

Wini: C—easy; Cinderella.

Brody: I bet he feels *awesome*.

Jill: D—easy; Dumbo. E...

Brody: Easy—The Emperor's New Groove.

Jill: You're playing?

Brody: No; let's play Six Steps.

Jill: Why Kevin Bacon?

Brody: Why not?

Jill: No, but really, why? Isn't he famous for Footloose? Why Six Steps to the guy from Footloose?

Wini: F...

Jill: Easy—Fantasia.

Wini: The Fox and the Hound.

Brody: Fine. Ferngully.

Jill: Not Disney.

Brody: What?

Jill: Ferngully wasn't Disney.

Wini: Really?

Jill: Nope.

Brody: Then, Fievel Goes West.

Jill: Also not Disney.

Brody: I hate this game.

Wini: It doesn't seem to like you either.

Jill: You're not very good at it anymore.

Brody: It's lame. Six Steps to Kevin Bacon is—

Jill: —also lame. It's a lame/lame situation; it's *car games*.

Wini: How far are we now?

Jill: Not so far.

Brody: Too far.

Jill: About an hour more.

Wini: An hour? And the service is at noon?

Jill: It's visitation; it's a drop-in from noon until four. We should make it by one.

Wini: Oh. I thought you wanted to go to the service.

Jill: Well...

Brody: Don't.

Jill: I'm not.

Wini: What?

Jill: The service is tomorrow—

Brody: *Don't*.

Jill: I'm *explaining*, not *complaining*. The service is tomorrow, but Broderick needs to get back to campus.

Wini: Oh.

Jill: For a *party*.

Wini: *Oh.*

Brody: *Stop.*

Jill: What?

Brody: “For a *party.*”

Jill: Yes, Broderick, for a party. You told me you had to get back for a party on Saturday night. Have your plans changed?

Brody: Enough with the “Broderick” bullshit.

Jill: Um, that’s your name, dear.

Brody: *Enough.* Just... play your little game.

Jill: Fine. G. A Goofy Movie. H...

Wini: Hercules.

Brody: At least Six Steps is about real people.

Jill: The Hunchback of Notre Dame.

Brody: How long does this last?

Jill: Um, 26 letters.

Brody: Fuck you.

Jill: Geez. Fine. Six Steps. Who do we start with?

Brody: *Anyone. Anyone.* That’s the beauty. We are *all* only six steps from Kevin Bacon. Which means we’re all only *seven* steps from each other. All of us. Actors, athletes...

Wini: I... Inspector Gadget.

Jill: I thought we said no live action.

Brody: ...musicians, politicians...

Wini: Oh, right. Animation only. The Incredibles.

Jill: Disney/Pixar—Nice.

Brody: ...important people.

Jill: Is *that* why you like Six Steps?

Wini: J—easy; Jungle Book.

Brody: I like feeling close to important people.

Wini: K...

Brody: K—Kevin Bacon.

Jill: I guess I feel like the people I'm close to *are* important people.

Wini: Aww.

Brody: I mean *real* important people.

Wini: L...

Jill: And Kevin Bacon is a *real* important person?

Brody: Yes.

Jill: Why?

Brody: He's famous.

Jill: For Footloose.

Brody: He's still famous.

Will: L...

Jill: Do you even like Footloose? Have you even *seen* Footloose?

Brody: Who cares if *I've* seen Footloose? *People* have seen Footloose.

Jill: What people?

Brody: *Important* people.

Jill: Like who?

Brody: Like Kevin Bacon!

Jill: So Kevin Bacon is important because he's seen his own movie?

Wini: L—easy; The Lion King. The Little Mermaid. Lady and the Tramp.

Jill: *Nice*.

Brody: Why are you pushing this?

Jill: What am I pushing? *You're* pushing the Six Steps to Kevin Bacon game. Really, do you hear yourself? You are flipping shit about the *Six Steps to Kevin Bacon game*.

Brody: Why won't you play?

Jill: Why won't you play the Disney alphabet game?

Brody: Because it's lame. It's unimportant.

Jill: It's a *game*.

Wini: M—

Jill: Mary Poppins.

Wini: Animation only.

Jill: But they jump into the chalk drawing. And we let Bedknobs and Broomsticks by earlier.

Wini: True. But should we have? We still have an hour on the road; we should challenge ourselves at least until—

Jill: "M." We're on M. Mary Poppins. Anyway, we can start again with 80s rock ballads when we finish with Disney.

Brody: OK, *no*. We can't.

Jill: OK, you have *not* seen Footloose; Kevin Bacon is all about 80s rock ballads.

Brody: *Shit, would you SHUT UP? This is stupid. This is juvenile. Play a game, fine, but play a game that doesn't make you sound like first-graders! You sound like fucking first-graders!*

(silence)

Wini: So, M...

Jill: To whom?

Brody: What?

Jill: We're the only people in the car. Who can hear us sound like first-graders?

Wini: M, M, M...

Brody: That's not the point.

Jill: What is the point?

Wini: M is for...

Brody: *Maturity. Grow up. This Neverland bullshit is fine when you're seven, but we're adults now, Jillian; we live in live action. Cartoons don't matter, OK? Connections matter.*

Wini: Mickey Mouse!

Jill: Connections to *Kevin Bacon*?

Brody: *Connections to important people!*

(silence)

Jill: (quietly) Do you think this is open casket?

Brody: How the fuck should I know? I haven't even thought about this lady since tenth grade.

Wini: Minnie Mouse also.

Jill: Oh, bullshit, Brody; you wrote your honors college admissions essay about her.

Wini: Mickey and Minnie had movies, right?

Brody: Why do you know about my admissions essay?

Wini: Surely they did...

Jill: Because we used to *talk*, Broderick. You actually used to *speak* to me, remember, once upon a time.

Wini: Mickey and Minnie...

Brody: What the Hell—"once upon a time." You still think you're a fucking unicorn. You're twenty years old, Jill.

Wini: Minnie and Mickey...

Jill: What's *with* you today?

Wini: Mickey...

Brody: Fuck off.

Wini: ...and Minnie.

Jill: No, Brody, what happened? Did your frat brothers find out that you used to play hand bells in the church choir? Or maybe your Gamma Phi booty call found out about your Alpha Chi?

Brody: Just *fuck off*, Jill.

Jill: No, no, really, *Broderick*, what's up your butt this morning? You couldn't find a protein smoothie flavor that matched your polo? Or, uh-oh, did your beer gut start to ooze out around your precious washboard? Or hey, did your mother call to remind you that the teacher that *taught you to read* in the tenth grade had passed away, and you remembered—however fleetingly—that *once upon a time*, you were a skinny, dyslexic chess player, and you were *happy*?

Brody: FUCK OFF, JILL!

Jill: And go where? Where did *you* go, Brody? Somewhere between our pillow forts and our lollypops and this morning, you got drunk, you got lost, and you fell into your goddamned mirror!

Brody: Nevermind. Play your game. Answer your fucking play date. I'm on a completely different level than you are.

Wini: Jill, did Mickey and Minnie have movies?

Jill: Oh! *A different level.*

Brody: *Yes.* A level above pillow forts.

Wini: Just TV cartoons then?

Jill: Well, wherever you are, you're all you can see, and I feel sad for you; I really do, because what I can see of the view from where you are is *shit*.

(silence)

Wini: I think they had movies...

Jill: (explodes) *WHAT HAPPENED?*

Brody: I ROSE ABOVE THIS.

Jill: WHAT IS THIS?

Brody: YOU! I ROSE ABOVE YOU!

(silence)

Jill: I see. OK. You rose above this. On your cashmere wings, and your rub-in bronzer, and your steroids—all your pills—*on all your goddamned tiny pills, you rose above this.* Am I “this”? Is “this” me, these letters, this alphabet, this woman who’s about to put in the ground? Is “this” the day we met in first grade remedial reading? The day you cried because I learned to spell your name before you did, or the day you cried because we graduated high school with honors because of this woman that just died? Am I “this,” Brody? Then you’re “this,” too. You *were* this, at least, and you were happier. But fine. Rise above. Get as high and as high-and-mighty as you can. But when you fall, when you crash onto your cold, broken, empty reflection, remember that you had a cushion. “This” was your cushion. You had a soft place to land.

Brody: I don’t want your fucking pillow fort.

Jill: Then I hope Kevin Bacon can catch. (pause) M—Mulan.

Wini: And... and anything “Mickey.”

Jill: Or “Minnie.”

Wini: Right... N—The Nightmare Before Christmas.

Jill: O—Oliver and Company.

Wini: P—Pinocchio. Pocahontas. Peter Pan.

Jill: Pete's Dragon. And anything "Pooh." Q...

Wini: Anything "Quack Pack."

Jill: What?

Wini: Huey, Dewey, and Louie—the Quack Pack.

Jill: They had movies?

Wini: Sure.

Jill: R—The Rescuers. Robin Hood.

Wini: S—Sleepy Beauty. Snow White. The Sword in the Stone.

Jill: I love that movie.

Wini: T—Tarzan.

Jill: Toy Story.

Wini: I love *that* movie.

Jill: No kidding. Tom Hanks was excellent.

Wini: Tom Hanks is always excellent.

Jill: True. Forrest Gump. Philadelphia.

Wini: Big. Apollo 13.

Jill: Apollo 13...

Wini: What?

Jill: Wasn't Kevin Bacon in that?

END

An Elegy for Ham and Eggs

Characters:

Debra—young middle-aged wife and mother; wearing curlers, a lush bathrobe, and a green “mud” exfoliating face mask.

Karen—young middle-aged wife and mother; wearing pajamas, but far less conspicuously dressed than Debra; Debra’s neighbor and best friend.

Setting:

a cemetery at 11:30 on a Tuesday night

Debra: This is ridiculous. This is ridiculous, dangerous, and probably illegal. Dear God, Karen, is this illegal? I’m a teacher. I’m a teacher and a mother and a proud member of the Daughters of the American Revolution, Karen, and I don’t want to be found—

Karen: Hush!

Debra: What?

Karen: You’re sure none of the kids followed us?

Debra: No, Karen, none of our children followed us to the cemetery at 11:30 on a Tuesday night.

Karen: OK. (Opens her purse) Look.

Debra: Is that... Is that Edmund?

Karen: Yes.

Debra: Karen, why is the hamster is your purse?

Karen: I need to kill him.

Debra: What?

Karen: He's hurt. He can't move. I think his little legs are broken.

Debra: How does a hamster get a broken leg?

Karen: I vacuumed him.

Debra: You *what*?

Karen: He got out of his cage when I wasn't looking, and I thought he was mold behind the couch. So I vacuumed him.

Debra: Mold?

Karen: You know... fuzzy mold... like on dish rags...

Debra: You vacuumed the hamster.

Karen: And now he can't move. But he's still alive. He still makes noises when he sees Nicholas, so Nick keeps poking him... And when he still doesn't get up, Nick puts him in his ball and rolls him around...

Debra: Poor Edmund!

Karen: I know! And poor Nick! I didn't have the heart to tell him that...

Debra: ...you vacuumed the hamster?

Karen: ...that Edmund was hurt.

Debra: And now you want to kill him.

Karen: I want to put him out of his misery.

Debra: In the cemetery?

Karen: I don't know... I want him to have a noble resting place. He's been a good hamster... A smart hamster... Sometimes I swear, he's smarter than Nicholas.

Debra: The hamster is smarter than your son? (Points into her purse) This hamster?

Karen: Sure. Once, when Nicholas and Edmund were playing, Nick started to put Edmund's little foot in the outlet, but Ed bit him just in time.

Debra: (into purse) Dear God, Ed. I'm impressed you lasted this long.

Karen: I just think he deserves more than a shoebox in the mud under the treefort, you know?

Debra: So you want to kill and *bury* the hamster?

Karen: Yes. Well, no. Not tonight.

Debra: What?

Karen: Nick has to see him first. Otherwise, I'll spend the next three weekends making "Have You Seen Edmund?" flyers.

Debra: So we're not burying Edmund.

Karen: We are.

Debra: So we are burying Edmund.

Karen: Just not tonight.

Debra: Karen, why are we in the cemetery? Why am *I* in the cemetery in my nightie and slippers?

Karen: Well, I can't just maim him... I don't want Nick to find him bloody or mangled... I want to kill him clean.

Debra: Clean like how?

Karen: I want to drown him.

Debra: Dear Lord, Karen! And the bathtub wouldn't do?

Karen: I don't know how much noise he's going to make! I don't want Edmund to squeal and wake up Nick and have him find...

Debra: ...Mommy drowning the hamster.

Karen: Yes, Debra. I'm a cold-blooded hamster killer. I've hated him from day one, and now his number is up. Please—I love this little guy. I just don't want him to hurt any more.

Debra: But why the cemetery, Karen? There's no water.

Karen: (pulls pickle jar full of water out of purse) I brought this jar...

Debra: You're going to drown the hamster in a *pickle jar* in the *cemetery*? *Why am I in the cemetery, Karen?* Why couldn't you do this in the backyard or the basement? Why couldn't you wait until tomorrow when I take the kids to school? What the Hell is your problem?

Karen: I want you to do it!

(Pause)

Debra: What?

Karen: I want you to do it, OK? I want you to drown him. I thought if I showed you that I mean to respect him, maybe you'd feel more humane about the whole ordeal and agree to—

Debra: —kill your hamster? Karen. Seriously.

Karen: I can't!

Debra: I can't either!

Karen: But he's family to me!

Debra: Well, he's *neighbor* to me! I'm not killing that hamster.

Karen: I can't kill him, Debra.

Debra: Then don't kill him!

Karen: But I can't watch him suffer!

Debra: Then you shouldn't have vacuumed him!

Karen: I need you to do this for me.

Debra: Karen, look—I'm having a hard enough of time with the *moral* support here.

Karen: Debra... I would do this for you.

Debra: Oh my God, Karen! I do not care! I'm not going to kill Edmund!

Karen: But I gave you a kidney!

Debra: I don't care if you gave me a—What? No, you didn't.

Karen: But I would!

Debra: What? But—why would you say that? I mean, honestly—a kidney? What, did you think I'd just buy that? Like I'd just accept that I'd had kidney surgery and *thank God*, my noble friend Karen been there when I needed an organ?

Karen: (thrusts purse at Debra) Kill him!

Debra: (pushes purse back) No!

Karen: Kill him!

Debra: No!

Karen: KILL HIM, DAMMIT!

Debra: (drops purse) SHIT!

(Simple flicker-lighting effect to suggest a hamster scurrying off stage)

Karen: Edmund!

Debra: He bit me!

Karen: He's cured!

Debra: Nothing like near death to put the spring back in your step...

Karen: We've got to find him!

Debra: Karen. No.

Karen: Why?

Debra: Because I've had enough. Because *Edmund* has had enough.

Karen: But Nick!

Debra: Nick would kill that hamster eventually.

Karen: He would not! Why would you say that?

Debra: Well, the outlet incident, for one...

Karen: Look, just because Nicholas is curious—

Debra: Curious, yet not as smart as the hamster.

Karen: Hey!

Debra: Your words!

Karen: Look, if you would've just killed the hamster when I asked you—

Debra: Maybe if you hadn't played the fictitious kidney card—

Karen: Maybe if you cared at all about Edmund—

Debra: The hamster was fine! Maybe if you hadn't flipped out over a little post-traumatic lethargy... Maybe if you'd given the little guy some time to heal in peace... Maybe if you hadn't brought me and my robe and my face mask and my hot rollers to the cemetery in the middle of the night... Maybe if you hadn't *vacuumed the hamster!*

Karen: I thought he was mold!

Debra: Who vacuums up mold?

Karen: You didn't have to come in your hot rollers.

Debra: You threw rocks at my window at 11:15, Karen. You threw rocks, and I came to the window, and there you were, spasm-ing in my backyard, standing in my daughter's sandbox for Godssakes, spasm-ing for me to come out. I thought you were *dying*, Karen. I thought you were being robbed or you were dying. I didn't think I had time to primp.

Karen: That's ridiculous. Why would I throw rocks at your window if I were being robbed?

Debra: Because the burglars cut your phone line.

Karen: But why wouldn't I ring the doorbell?

Debra: Because you didn't want them to see the lights come on next door and take Nicholas hostage to keep us at bay.

Karen: But why wouldn't I have Nick with me? Why wouldn't Stuart have come, too?

Debra: Because you and Stuart knew you couldn't all get out unnoticed, so he hid Nick in pantry and stood guard in that nook between the washer/dryer and the backdoor with your D.A.R. honorary member shotgun while you slipped out to get help.

Karen: You came up with all of that between your bedroom and the backyard?

Debra: No, I came up with all of that between my back door and the backyard. At first, I thought you were dying.

Karen: But why—

Debra: I thought your stomach hurt again, like that night when your appendix ruptured... I thought you didn't want to wake Stuart this time because he got so upset that night... because the emergency surgery reminded him of when the... when you lost the... when God took the...

Karen: Oh.

(Silence)

Debra: I'm sorry about Edmund.

Karen: I'm sorry about all of this.

Debra: I'm lucky to have you.

Karen: We're lucky to have each other.

(They hug. Flicker-lighting effect suggests Edmund's reentry and his climb up Debra's nightgown.)

Debra: (begins smacking herself and continues to do so through the following sequence)
AH! AH!

Karen: What?

Debra: It's in my nightgown!

Karen: What's in your nightgown?

Debra: It's *climbing up* my nightgown!

Karen: What is it? Edmund!

Debra: Get it out!

Karen: I hope it's Edmund!

Debra: Well, *me too, Karen*, because God knows what it is if it's *not* Edmund—AH!
Get it! Dammit, Karen, don't just stand there! Help me! Get it! KILL IT!

Karen: No!

Debra: (still smacking self) KILL IT!

Karen: STOP!

Debra: Kiii-iiill it!

Karen: NO!

Debra: AH!

(Flickering light stops. Debra stops smacking herself. Both woman look at the ground below Debra's feet. Debra steps away.)

Karen: Edmund...

Debra: Little rat...

Karen: How could you?

Debra: Karen, the rodent was in my nightgown.

Karen: He was probably cold... He's not used to the outdoors...

Debra: Yeah, who brought him here?

(They stare at the implied Edmund on the ground.)

Karen: What do we do now?

Debra: Well, he isn't maimed...

Karen: Miraculously...

Debra: Look, how would *you* respond to a rat in your nightie?

Karen: He isn't a rat... He *wasn't* a rat...

Debra: Well, you can take him back for Nick to find. No "Have You Seen Edmund?" posters, like you said.

Karen: Yeah... I guess so...

Debra: What, Karen? You wanted me to kill the hamster. I killed the hamster.

Karen: This just isn't how I wanted him to go...

Debra: Well, he did. He's gone. Now why don't you pick him up so *we* can go.

Karen: Pick him up?

Debra: If you think I'm touching that hamster—

Karen: He was just in your nightie; what harm could he do to your hands—

Debra: I mean it. I won't do it.

Karen: Fine! Fine... But... where should I put him?

Debra: What do you mean?

Karen: Where do you carry a dead hamster?

Debra: Well, you carried a *limp* hamster all the way here in your purse next to your compact and your little bag of Goldfish crackers and that little pacifier you carry in honor of...(Silence. Profound change of mood.) Karen, I'm so sorry—

Karen: I can't.

Debra: Honey, it's almost midnight.

Karen: No. No, Debra, I'm sorry. I mean, I really can't.

Debra: What? What's wrong?

Karen: I can't take him home.

Debra: Karen...

Karen: I need to bury him.

Debra: Karen, this... I don't mean to make jokes, honestly, but... This is a hamster—

Karen: I know. I know, I promise... I know I sound ridiculous, but... (She begins to cry.) I didn't even get to bury her, Debra. I never rocked her or heard her cry... I never fed her or changed her or smelled her soft little smell... I sometimes wish that I had gotten to see her, just *see* her for a moment at least... I wish I could have seen whether she had my nose or Stuart's cleft chin. I wish I could have counted her toes and felt her little hands fold around my finger (She sobs.) I wish I could've named her, I wish I could've buried her, I wish I could've shown somehow that I had loved her, that I still love her, that I will always love her, even though she... even though I...

(She cries into Debra's embrace.)

Debra: She knows, honey. She knows that you loved her. She knows that you *love* her. (after a few moments; sincerely, solemnly) But this is a hamster.

Karen: (wiping her eyes) I know, I know...

Debra: But you want to bury him?

Karen: No. No, I want to *lay him to rest*.

Debra: OK. (Pause) Honey... You know that this... the hamster... This won't fix it. It might help for now, but it won't fix it. You know that... Karen?

(Mood shifts again, back to lighter banter. Karen is conflicted between her ridiculous devotion to the hamster and the parallel between the hamster and her miscarried baby.)

Karen: I should have thought to bring his roly ball. Or his tiny igloo. I can't bury him like this... so bare... so vulnerable... Maybe... No.

Debra: What?

Karen: The pickle jar.

Debra: Why not?

Karen: It's a pickle jar!

Debra: It's a kosher burial!

Karen: It's a pickle jar!

Debra: It was your idea!

Karen: It's inhumane!

Debra: It's inhuman!

Karen: But it's Edmund!

Debra: You wanted to drown him in the pickle jar, Karen! Actually, you wanted *me* to drown him in a pickle jar—

Karen: We put this jar's contents in egg salad, Debra. I cannot bury Edmund in this jar.

Debra: Karen, honey, I want to understand this; I want to help, OK, but this... This is a hamster. Edmund is a hamster, Karen. Not a child. Not a little girl, Karen. Not your little girl.

Karen: I know. I know, but... If Edmund's death could do this much... I mean, if Edmund's little life could mean *this much*... How much must my little girl have meant in those two trimesters? How much must she have done... in me... in the world, without even seeing me, never knowing the world? If I can believe that... (half laughs through her tears.) that a *hamster* truly lived, then I *know* that my baby lived, tenfold. And if I can believe that I gave my child life, any life at all... maybe *I* can live again.

Debra: (adjusting her bathrobe) Well... Edmund certainly has lived... This evening alone, he probably saw more than most hamsters would in a lifetime...

Karen: Maybe not. I found him in my shower once.

Debra: Edmund!

Karen: I can't pickle him, Debra. Glass is so... so expository... and cold...

Debra: Then what? What else is in your purse? Tissue? Envelope? Maxi pad?

Karen: Honestly, Debra. A Maxi pad?

Debra: I'm trying, Karen.

Karen: He needs a new home, Debra. Something cozy... something warm... something familiar, that he would feel like he could nestle up in... (She stares at Debra's robe.)

Debra: What? (Pause.) What? (Revelation) No! Karen... OK, honey, I want to help, but Peter gave me this robe for our first anniversary... He bought it from the hotel where we stayed on our honeymoon... I wore it to continental breakfast on the morning after we first—(Karen begins to snifle.) Wouldn't Edmund prefer a blanket from home?

Karen: He seemed pretty comfortable in that robe.

Debra: Karen...

Karen: You know I wouldn't ask if I didn't feel that I absolutely had to do this, Debra! I don't know why, but I don't think I have to know why.

Debra: But it won't—

Karen: I know it won't fix it forever... But it might fix it for tonight...

Debra: But—

Karen: Debra—

Debra: Karen—

Karen: Please. (Debra sighs, but nobly derobes. She shivers and winces as Karen picks up Edmund with the robe and wraps him into a terrycloth ball.) I thought we could bury him beyond that next hill. Near that beautiful old tree where the doves nest in the spring...

Debra: Pigeons.

Karen: What?

Debra: That tree, in the spring, those birds, they're not—nevermind. It's late. It's still a ways to the tree. Shall we?

Karen: Yes. Let's do it.

Debra: Let's do it!

Karen: It's time.

Debra: It's time!

Karen: But first—Debra?

Debra: (sighs) Yes, Karen.

Karen: I just feel like... we should pray...

Debra: For the hamster?

Karen: For... Well, I mean, yes, for the hamster... Or at least say a few words.

Debra: And when you say "we"—

Karen: I mean you.

Debra: Of course.

Karen: I'd love to do it myself, but I could never get through it with dry eyes.

Debra: Of course. (Debra takes robe-swaddled Edmund from Karen and awkwardly finds a gentle resting spot for him nearby. Karen kneels, crosses herself, and folds her hands, so Debra, incredulously, follows suit. She clears her throat and begins:) Well. Edmund. Dear Edmund. What can we, well, I... what can I say about... Edmund? Ahem. He was... small, and... furry... curious, apparently... He was a whiz on the wheel. I mean, I never saw him, but I can speculate, I mean... I can attest that those prickly little toes could move...

Karen: (loud whisper) A personal story.

Debra: What?

Karen: Tell a personal story.

Debra: I... I remember when Edmund moved in next door... I remember how Nick sipped his juice box and ate pretzels at my kitchen table with the kids while Stuart snuck Edmund in through the back porch next door because—well, because Karen had accidentally put the Edmund #1 in the washer/dryer—no more hamsters, Karen. Enough Edmunds already, honestly.

Karen: (teary-eyed) Not now. Go on.

Debra: (at a loss) Edmund was a good pet and... and a good... listener. He never... interrupted, or... spoke harshly of anyone...

Karen: So true!

Debra: He lived a good life... A whole four months—

Karen: —three months—

Debra: —A whole three months, and... and not a moment wasted. He had a good heart... and a bad leg, but you know, that wasn't his fault—

Karen: Go on.

Debra: And he... he forever left his mark on Karen and her family... On their lives... On their spirits... And on my robe... Amen?

Karen: Amen.

Debra: Amen.

Karen: Thank you. Thank you, Debra. Truly.

Debra: Oh, well... Any time.

Karen: (rising, brushing the dirt off of her knees) Shall we?

Debra: (rising) Karen, I have to know that you know this won't change anything.

Karen: (seriously) I know. But sometimes silliness is the sweetest sentiment. Especially for children. (They begin to walk off to find the tree under which to bury Edmund.) So we don't have a shovel, but the soil is pretty loose, and I figure since you have those tough chalk-dust, paper-cut, recess-duty teacher hands...

END

Felice

Characters:

Gregory—male, early-to-mid-30s, appears to have dressed hastily upon a rude awakening.

Felice—the Sun-Maid raisin girl; has a fair complexion and dark hair, wears a white shirt with blue trim around the sleeves and an offensively large red bonnet. She stands in the Sun-Maid raisin sale display, which resembles the backdrop of the Sun-Maid raisin boxes, and hugs a tray of plastic green grapes.

Stewart—male, early 30s, appears to be stuck in his college fraternity days.

Betty—as in Crocker; appears to be in her early-to-mid-40s, dresses like a housewife from the 1970s.

Speaker: the Shop-A-Lot Savings intercom voice; could be done by the actor playing Stewart or Betty, as long as they use an affected voice.

Setting:

Shop-A-Lot grocery store, aisle 11, in the wee hours of a Friday morning. Upstage right is juice. Upstage left is cake mix and icing. Downstage left is a large Sun-Maid raisin display where we find our heroine.

(Scene opens with the sound of a shuffling foot steps. Dim, greenish lighting reveals Greg upstage center, in an inside-out navy blue sweatshirt and otherwise unremarkable clothing. He should probably have on sandals with socks, and his hair should definitely stick up on one side. He carries his shopping basket slowly towards downstage center, stopping soon to examine the juice selection to his right. Eventually, he holds Welch's in one hand, Juicy Juice in the other. He is visibly torn.)

Greg: (finally distraught with the situation) Goddammit!

Speaker: (immediately; Greg jumps at the sound.) Attention Shop-A-Lot shoppers, do we have a deal for you! Delicious Sun-Maid raisins for just \$2.99 a bag with your Shop-A-Lot Savings card! Check out aisle eleven for even more discounts! And as always, thank you for shopping at Shop-A-Lot!

Greg: (looks up at the very prominent “aisle eleven” sign above him. He puts both juices back on the shelf and looks downstage left, where Felice sits poised, surrounded by various Sun-Maid products) Raisins... (He picks up a bag of Sun-Maid raisins, oblivious to Felice, but quickly rapt by her image on the raisin box.) So happy... She looks so happy... (Another customer enters from up stage right and approaches him from behind.)

Stewart: Greg?

Greg: (again, jumps at the sound; drops the raisins) Jesus, Stew.

Stewart: Hay-zoos, yourself, pal. You look terrible.

Greg: Yes, well. (He retrieves the raisins from the floor and puts them in the shopping basket.)

Stewart: Hey, we’ve got a little wager going on down at Sharky’s tonight, if you’re game. (He holds up his grocery items: beer and corn nuts.) Corn-nut-eating contest. My money’s on Julio, but about half an hour ago, at the end of round three, Chuck had him beat by two bags. (notices how distracted Greg is) Hey, where have you been anyway? We don’t hear from you for weeks, and now... (leaning to look into his basket) Now... Now, you’re checking out the Sun-Maid raisin girl... (when Greg doesn’t respond...) Hey, how’s your own little mama, man? I called to ask about the baby on Monday night, but no one picked up the—

Greg: (in reference to the Sun-Maid raisin girl) She looks so happy...

Stewart: Who does?

Greg: Great. Good. That’s good. Good to see you, Stewart. Hey, I should go. Jenny’s three days past her due date, and home’s a little... well. But, yeah, I need to get snacks for Dina, healthy stuff... juice and shit... Except hey, did you know juice isn’t healthy anymore? Some high fructose something-or-other, I don’t know... But raisins... I think these are OK... Yeah, raisins... God, I hate these things... But if Dina likes them... I got to go, Stewbie.

Stewart: (concerned) Right... Greg, if you and Jenny need me to watch Dina at all until the new baby comes, I mean, really, just call, man. I do more than shots these days, I

swear; I can watch a kid (chuckles; Greg rolls the cart downstage another few feet, distractedly.) No, really, Greg, if I can help out in any way—I know your brother came into town for a while, but he left last weekend, yeah? So really, if you need anybody to take Dina to school, or run errands, or shit, man, I can do dishes if you need me to—

Greg: She ate Dina's chocolate egg.

Stewart: What?

Greg: My brother, like you said, he just came in for a while from Germany, and he brought Dina one of those hollow eggs, you know, little toys inside and shit. But yeah, Jenny dropped Dina off at school and... I guess she must've just gone home and *lusted* for the fucking egg, Stewbie, I don't know. She called me at the office *four times* just to ask if I thought Dina would mind!

Stewart: (awkwardly, fumbling for what to say) Wow... Yeah... I hear that those pregos can get pretty crazy—

Greg: And I told her yeah, I thought she would mind, but then she—goddammit, Stew, she actually went back to Dina's school and *got her out of class*, and when Dina said no—you know, not like defiantly, but like “No, Mommy, I want my chocolate egg”—Jenny went home, and... she ate the goddamn egg, Stewbie! She ate it anyway!

Stewart: She stole candy from the baby?

Greg: So Dina comes home that afternoon and she wants her chocolate egg, so Jenny cries, so Dina cries, so Jenny cries more, so, fuck! Her emotions, Stew! So, goddammit, she wakes me up like half an hour ago, and she tells me that Dina “shouldn't be eating chocolate eggs anyway,” because—she actually said this, Stew—she said, “Dina's too fat,” and she goes on about how the other kids are going to start making fun of her, and blah, blah, blah. And you've seen Dina, Stew; she's solid, you know, but she's healthy. She's healthy, isn't she? Isn't she healthy?

Stewart: (awkwardly) Well, yeah, I mean, I'd say so—

Greg: But Jenny... God, she's just sensitive 'cause this fucking girl scout came by a few weeks ago, and when Jenny only bought one box of Tag-Alongs, the little teal bitch asked her why-not-two-boxes-since-she's-already-so-fat. But she's *pregnant*, Stew! I mean, of course, she's fat! Anyway, she sends me to the fucking Shop-A-Lot at fucking four o'clock in the morning on a Thursday to get “healthy snacks” for Dina, and... I don't know what to do, man. I don't know. They just cry; all they do is cry, and I don't know what to do... Raisins. Raisins are healthy, yeah?

Stewart: (pauses in horror at the situation) Yeah. Yeah, man. Look, call me, OK? I'm off on Fridays, so call me anytime tomorrow... Or, well, today. It's Friday now, Greg... Hey, get some rest, OK?

Greg: (not looking up; again distracted by the Sun-Maid raisin girl) See you. Sorry about the corn nuts.

Stewart: (patting Greg's shoulder, then exiting down stage right) Right...

(Greg crosses back up the juice. He pulls down Juicy Juice again and examines the label.)

Greg: 100% juice... Then what the fuck is this corn syrup shit—

Felice: Eat delicious Sun-Maid raisins!

Greg: (not looking up) Yeah, yeah, aisle eleven...

Felice: Eat delicious Sun-Maid raisins!

Greg: (comparing Welch's again) Juice... Juice used to be good for you... Fruit juice... When I was six, I drank fucking fruit juice, and I'm OK...

Felice: Mmm! Nature's candy!

Greg: (looks up suddenly, as if at store intercom) What?

Felice: Mmm! Nature's candy!

Greg: (gasps and pulls both juice bottles into his chest, as if for protection. He looks bug-eyed at Felice and begins to approach her slowly, side-stepping down the aisle) *What?*

Felice: Eat delicious Sun-Maid raisins!

Greg: (drops juices) Holy shit!

Felice: Mmm! Nature's candy!

(Greg leans in slowly to poke her, then does.)

Eat delicious Sun-Maid—

Greg: (terrified, looks around frantically) What is this?

Felice: (in polite response) Raisins.

Greg: (now mesmerized) You... You're speaking...

Felice: Eat delicious Sun-Maid raisins!

Greg: (fumbles in his shopping basket for the bag of raisins he picked up moments earlier, drops the whole basket in his haste, picks it up again, pulls out bag, compares it to Felice) You! You've got to be kidding...

Felice: Mmm! Nature's candy!

Greg: (pauses, realizes his situation) I need to go home... (begins to go off up stage left)

Felice: Have a grape day!

Greg: (pauses, completely perplexed) Same to you...

(Greg shuffles off stage left. Felice watches him go with widening eyes, and as he steps out of sight, she scowls at her surroundings, scowls down at her tray of grapes, and spits on them potently just as Greg hurries back on from stage left.)

Greg: Holy shit, you really are—

Felice: (with a start, wiping spittle from her mouth, smiling ferociously again) Eat delicious Sun-Maid raisins!

Greg: (in response to her spitting) Whoa!

Felice: (covering desperately) Mmm! Nature's candy!

Greg: You're real! You're the actual sun-maid from the raisin box, but you're... Only, just now, you—I can't believe I'm talking to the—but shit, you just spit on the—

Felice: (with great anxiety) —EAT DELICIOUS—

Greg: (surprised and tickled at her) —“Delicious” to the point of salivation, I see—

Felice: (cutting him off frantically, with furtive glances down into her tray of grapes) MMM. NATURE'S CANDY.

Greg: (goading her) Yeah, where's Nature now, when her little nougats are in such a *sticky* situation?

Felice: Eat delicious—

Greg: (incredulous) I just saw you spit on the raisins!

Felice: Made from the premium grapes of Kingsburg, California!

Greg: Did you hear me? *I saw you spit on the raisins!*

Felice: Made from the premium *grapes* of Kingsburg—

Greg: Fine, I saw you spit on the *grapes*!

Felice: (defiant, as if saying “Fuck you.”) Eat delicious Sun-Maid raisins!

Greg: (cheekily) No thanks. I don’t like the little rabbit turds anyway.

Felice: (as if saying, “Fine. Your loss.”) Mmm. Nature’s candy.

(Greg puts down his shopping basket upstage and approaches her suspiciously. He looks behind himself quickly, as if he expects an ambush. He looks up and down. He picks up several Sun-Maid products around her to look behind them. Felice just smiles and hugs her tray of grapes.)

Greg: What is this anyway?

Felice: (as if, “Whatever do you mean?”) Eat delicious Sun-Maid raisins!

Greg: No, enough of that... (gets up in her face, inspecting her) Is this like a school project?

Felice: (still smiling throughout, as if saying “No”) Mmm. Nature’s candy.

Greg: Girl Scout fundraiser?

Felice: Nature’s candy.

Greg: Sorority hazing?

Felice: Nature’s candy.

Greg: Weird, wholistic, nature-loving church mission trip?

Felice: Nay—.

Greg: Community service?

Felice: —ture’s candy.

Greg: (suddenly fearful) Fuck, this isn’t that show with the hidden camera where they put the “Invisible Fish” sign next to an empty aquarium and watch you make an ass of yourself, is it?

Felice: Um, nature’s candy.

(Greg backs away slowly and takes in his surroundings. Lights could flicker here to suggest what is also shown on Greg’s face: Suddenly, aisle 11 isn’t so ordinary as we may have thought. Greg pauses to think, again feeling the fatigue he had forgotten in the excitement of Felice’s first address.)

Greg: You know, I have a little girl. She’s a lot younger than you, but she loves raisins, too. Yogurt-covered ones. She does some crazy shit; I mean, not *crazy* crazy, but just, like little kids do. Anyway, as far as raisins go, Dina—that’s my little girl—actually strung together the raisins from one of those tiny boxes to make a necklace for her mom. (He laughs to himself.) Only she lost it in her dollhouse and forgot to give it to Jenny for about a week or so, and Jenny was only just pregnant again then, so you know, she’d puke over anything. So Dina brings out the necklace for Jenny, and Jenny thinks at first that it’s bugs, like that it’s bugs on a string, not raisins, ‘cause they were really hard and sticky by then, and well, Jenny starts vomiting. So Dina cries, so Jenny cries. (He frowns.) In the end, Jenny yelled at Dina for going into her sewing basket. God, I asked her to be sure to put away that fucking sewing basket; Dina could’ve stabbed herself in the eye...

(He snaps out of his sleepy memory, and looks up at Felice.)

Felice: Eat delicious Sun-Maid raisins!

Greg: Right. My point: My little girl loves raisins, but even she doesn’t pull this kind of shit.

Felice: Eat delicious Sun-Maid raisins!

Greg: And obviously, what with the spitting at all, you’re not *actually* all that into raisins, so—

Felice: Mmm! Nature’s candy!

Greg: No, no, come on now. What’s this all about?

Felice: Mmm! Nature's candy!

Greg: Yes, OK, but who put you up to this?

Felice: Made from the premium grapes of Kingsburg, California!

Greg: Has Shop-A-Lot got you out here?

Felice: Mmm! Nature's candy!

Greg: Surely not at four o'clock in the morning...

Felice: Eat delicious Sun-Maid—

Greg: Enough! Jesus! I'm buying the raisins, OK? (realizes he abandoned his shopping basket and retrieves it) But really, is this your job?

Felice: Eat delicious—

Greg: Stop it! I saw you spit on the fucking grapes; you can drop this bullshit façade! Look, I know we don't know each other, but they say strangers make the best confidantes, right? It's OK. I...(lowering his voice) I hate my job, too. You know what I do? I'm an *orthodontist's assistant*. (nodding) Yeah, like the old women in kitty-cat scrubs who make molds of your overbite and paint the glue on your teeth; that's me. Middle-schoolers and lite rock, 8 hours a day, 5 days a week. There. But it pays the bills, you know, and we've got Dina and this new one on the way... And Jenny... (He sighs.) Jenny wants to have more... two more... Two more pregnancies... (He drifts into anguished silence.)

Felice: (after a moment, startling him) Mmm! Nature's candy!

Greg: Do you have a quota to meet? You've said that already!

Felice: Eat delicious Sun-Maid—

Greg: Cut it out! You'd be so much better off if you'd just admit that you hate those things!

Felice: Eat delicious—

Greg: No! Listen, I mean it! You can tell me! I hate my job, too, OK? All that saxophone music and acne...

Felice: EAT DELICIOUS—

Greg: (gets up in her face) SHUT UP!

Felice: —SUN-MAID RAISINS!

Greg: I SAW YOU SPIT ON THE GRAPES! YOU PROBABLY CAN'T EVEN KEEP DOWN A FUCKING BANANA CHIP; YOU'RE SO SICK OF GODDAMNED DRIED FRUIT! YOU HATE RAISINS!

Felice: (breaks smile) SHHHH!

Greg: (immediately jumps back at her change in demeanor) Whoa!

Felice: (immediately resumes smile; whispers through teeth) Please! They'll hear you!

Greg: (looks around; leans in to her) Who? (Felice points frantically at her tray of grapes. Greg looks down at them.) The grapes?

Felice: (affirmatively) Eat delicious Sun-Maid raisins!

Greg: The grapes will hear me?

Felice: (urgently) Eat delicious Sun-Maid—

Greg: The *grapes* on that tray... will *hear* me?

Felice: (with bulging eyes) EAT DELICIOUS SUN-MAID—

Greg: What's that bonnet laced with—

Betty: (swaggering in from stage left with a glass of alcohol in each hand) The grapes are bugged.

(Felice stiffens at the sound of a new voice, then relaxes slightly, perhaps rolls her eyes, when she sees Betty. Greg jumps at the sudden new presence.)

Greg: What?

Betty: They're bugged. Wired. So that we can hear her in the back.

Greg: I'm sorry, *what*?

Betty: (as if to an infant) The grapes... (She picks one out of Felice's tray.) ...are bugged (She taps it. It emits the staticky feedback of a microphone.)

Greg: (stares at her for a moment, stares at the grapes... Poor Greg is very tired.) And who are you?

Betty: (sipping one of the two glasses, running a finger down the side of his face) Ha! Who am I? Don't be coy, Greggy.

Greg: How do you know my name?

Betty: How could I forget? (takes another sip) After all those years we partied together...

Greg: *Partied* together?

Betty: Last I remember, you were in a cowboy hat, and I was in a silky, milky, little butter crème—(She pushes him to the ground and straddles him, always balancing her drinks; Felice yelps. Betty takes her time getting back up.) Oh, shut up, Felice.

Greg: (stumbling back to his feet) Felice?

Felice: (affirmatively; pissed off at both of them, but still smiling) Eat delicious Sun-Maid rais—

Betty: (rolls her eyes at Felice) Oh, enough with the goddamned raisins! You know our security here is shit. We're not in the Beverly Hills Cavier-and-Meth market, Felice; this is a Shop-A-Lot Grocery. We don't even have video surveillance in this dump. (knocks the tray of grapes from Felice's embrace and kicks it. Felice gasps and covers herself as if naked.) Talk already! (She toes the overturned tray.) No, really, Felice; the output from this tray is so bad, we were picking up one of those godforsaken lite rock radio stations before Greg here blasted through with his "fucking banana chip" monologue. (Felice hesitates.) Talk! (Felice shakes her head no, still smiling tensely. Betty groans and kicks the tray again.) Taa-aalk, you bonnet bitch!

Felice: (visibly makes a decision, then suddenly explodes) What the fuck is all of this, Greg? I have a job to do!

Greg: How do you know my—

Felice: *I* don't call up *your* boss and tell him that you bad-mouth overbite molds and kids with acne!

Greg: (so confused) I'm sorry; *who* are you?

Felice: (sighs) I'm Felice.

Greg: I'm Greg.

Felice: I know.

Betty: How quaint.

Felice: (to Betty) What are *you* doing here anyway?

Betty: (takes another sip as she rubs up on Greg) Well, they wanted to send the Jolly Green Giant, but when I heard that *sexy* voice come through the monitor, I told the rent-a-cop back in security that *I'd*—

Greg: Security?

Betty: (sips) Mm-hmm.

Greg: *You're* a security guard?

Felice: She's a—

Betty: —*lieutenant*, in fact. Why? Do you like women in uniform?

Greg: You're not wearing a uniform.

Betty: That's not all I'm not wearing.

Felice: Betty!

Greg: As in Ford?

Betty: (appalled) As in Crocker! You *really* don't remember me?

Greg: Betty Crocker? Hold on, like from the cake mix?

Betty: (toasts self) In the French vanilla flesh, baby.

Greg: You can't be serious...

Felice: Your sixth birthday party. Western-themed. Your mom made a butter crême cake.

Greg: How do you know that?!

Felice: I was there, too.

Greg: Whoa, whoa; *you* were at my sixth birthday party?

Felice: In the goody bags.

Betty: More like in the trash bag.

Felice: That one kid ate me!

Betty: Who? Timmy Phelpson? He put you up his nose!

Greg: Timmy Phelpson—holy shit!

Betty: Even Greg here threw you out; all he wanted was the kazoo and the Snickers fun-size. And *me*.

Felice: Don't start.

Betty: He wanted me. He *loved* me. They all did. They couldn't wait to get a fingerful of this rich butter crème.

Felice: Well, who doesn't love a cheap, quick fix?

Betty: (stung) Fuck you!

Felice: Whore!

Betty: Prude!

Felice: That's "dried plum"!

Betty: What?

Felice: What?

Betty: I called you a prude.

Felice: Oh... I thought you said "prune"... I have to call them "dried plums" now... Better consumer response... Buyers think of old people's bowels when they hear "prune"...

Greg: Could one of you please tell me what's going on?

Betty: What's to tell, Greglybear? We work in product placement.

Felice: *I* work in product placement.

Betty: (facetiously) What's that, Fleecy? Oh, OK, you *don't* want me to cover up your blatant defamation of your product? 'Cause I could just rig up this tray again lickety-split and—

Felice: Oh, blah blah, Betty. Fine. (to Greg) *We* work in product placement.

Betty: (sips) That's my girl.

Greg: Your girl?

Felice: (flatly) Greg, this is my mother.

Greg: No!

Betty and Felice: (sourly) Yes.

Greg: (to Betty) But you can't be more than what, 28, 29?

Betty: (smiles, sips) If you say so, big boy.

Felice: Oh yeah, 30 going on 90.

Betty: (chokes on her sip) Fuck you!

Greg: No way.

Felice: But they discontinued her in 1979. That's why you don't recognize her.

Betty: (in outrage) Oh, Jolly! Jolly Green Giant! Clean up on aisle 11!

Felice: Shit! Fine! Sorry! (recites) She's 29, and "she's Betty Crocker, goddammit; she knows what guys want."

Betty: (sips) Good girl.

Greg: *What* is going on?

Felice: (obviously) I'm the Sun-Maid raisin girl.

Greg: And you're Betty Crocker. (suspiciously) And a supermarket security guard...

Betty: Speaking of... I seem to have forgotten my nightstick... Think I could borrow yours—

Felice: Betty, please!

Greg: (He begins shuffle away upstage, looking fearfully back at them as if they may follow.) Well, hey, nice to have met you both... again... but, I've got my raisins now, so... I'm just gonna— (He pauses and glances into his shopping basket. He picks out the bag of raisins and says to Felice...) Shit, you didn't spit on *these*, too, did you?

Felice: (reacts violently) SHHH!

Betty: (in mid-sip) THEY CAN'T HEAR YOU ANYMORE, FELICE!

Felice: You're *sure* that tray's dead?

Betty: I think *I* would know how to lay out a tray.

Greg: What's the big deal anyway?

Felice: Um, I spit on the grapes.

Greg: Yeah...?

Felice: I *defamed* my grapes, Gregory, and you saw me. Don't you know what that means?

Greg: Um, no.

Felice: Don't you know who you are?

Greg: Um... Greg.

Felice: And?

Greg: And... I have a daughter... and a crazy wife... and I'm an orthodontist's assistant... and...

Felice: AND?

Greg: And I'm losing my mind in a grocery store...

Felice: You're a potential *customer*, Gregory!

Betty: Jesus, *calm down!* I told you (pulling a flask out of her dress), I can cover for you...

Felice: Oh, I'm sure. Just like you covered for me in 1970. Thanks a bunch for that one, by the way.

Betty: (after a swig; hostilely) You're welcome, *by the way*, and I mean that. You *needed* to be discontinued in 1970, sweetheart. You were *fat*.

Felice: (embarrassed) I was not!

Betty: Um, you were.

Felice: (defensively) I was big-boned.

Betty: You were rounder than your dear little muscadines, honey.

Felice: (desperately) But that fucking girl scout... (to Greg) She was making trail mix or granola bars or, I don't know—camp-out snacks for her troop... So here she was, looking through the mixed nuts, and here I was, right here, a bag of raisins—perfect for trail mix! So finally, she looks my way, and I give her my biggest, brightest “Eat delicious Sun-Maid raisins” smile... And she picks me up, she looks me over, and she says—she actually says this aloud in the supermarket to her troop leader—“Look, Ms. Mary! The Sun-Maid raisin girl's fat!”

Greg: (sincerely) Kids can be mean...

Felice: Yeah... (sad pause, then suddenly) So I kind of gagged her with my grapes.

Betty: I believe the exact phrase was, “Suck on these.”

Felice: ANYWAY! They *brought me back*, which is more than I can say for a certain fruitcake I know—

Betty: Blah, blah, blah.

Felice: (awkwardly)—and they brought me back a little bit... slimmer.

Betty: Ha!

Felice: (a little sadly) They thought maybe I wouldn't have the stamina to, you know, *snap* again, what with my being so small... under this big, yellow sun all day...(gestures to the display behind her)

Betty: (slithering in, right up into his face) But that's not a family trait, remember, Greglybear. *I* have plenty of stamina.

Greg: (smelling alcohol thick on her breath) Yet not enough breath mints—(sniffing) Is that cooking sherry?

Betty: (covering her mouth, recoiling) *No*.

Greg: No, that's cooking sherry. (distracted, going into his head) Jenny stopped letting me buy beer when she had to quit drinking for the pregnancy, and, damn... I wasn't much of a drinker before, honestly... But when she started in with the mood swings, and I remembered *last* time, before Dina, when she'd cry for eight hours and then laugh uncontrollably as soon as I started to fall asleep—

Betty: (dramatically, to reclaim his attention) I can't stand these lies between us, Greg. I'm not really a police officer. I'm a hopeless lush. They're afraid I might try to slip back onto a box and make a complete ass of myself—but what an ass that would be, eh, Greglybear? Now I'm bound to the security tower where they can keep an eye on me. They only let me come out to see Felice from time to time. Maternal needs, you know. (takes a sip from one glass, then the other)

Felice: (to no one in particular) This is my life.

Greg: (to Felice, puzzled) But you always look so *happy*...

Felice: You know I'm not even allowed to freckle?

Greg: What?

Felice: I sit out under this big sun, *all* day, *every* day, and I'm not even allowed to—no, I'm *explicitly prohibited*, by contract, to tan, burn, or freckle.

Greg: But why?

Felice: The consumers have spoken.

Greg: And they don't like freckles?

Felice: Not with their raisins.

Betty: Well, obviously, honey—the only thing that looks worse than a fat girl is a fat girl with freckles!

Felice: I wasn't fat!

Betty: Or maybe a fat girl with acne... (becomes enamored with her drink)

Felice: Or maybe a housewife with no etiquette! Or maybe... (sinister) a burnt-out tart of an icon who's no longer hip to the times! Big can be beautiful now, Betty! Look at all the Latinas in entertainment! When's the last time you made it to the check-out lane anyway? Magazine covers aren't just for pasty whores like you anymore.

Betty: (after a moment, lifting her attention at last) Oh shit, Felice, were you talking? (Felice sighs.) What's that? Flabby past still got you down? I blame myself, you know. I shouldn't have let you drink so much juice as a child! (drinks away her pseudo-shame)

Greg: (again dumbfounded at juice controversy) *Really?*

Felice: You could stand a little less *juice* yourself, you know.

Betty: How can you talk to your mother that way?

Felice: You mean since you're so nurturing and maternal?

Betty: (defiantly) I'm as domestic as they come!

Felice: Oh, sure, you can bake a cake, but—dammit, Betty, I was practically *weaned* on crème sherry!

Greg: (remembering, dreading) Oh, no... *Weaning...*

Betty: (defensively) You always slept well, didn't you?

Felice: *No*, actually, I always wet the bed, remember?

Greg: (with increasing desperation) *Bed-wetting...*

Betty: (disgusted) Oh. Right. I always let your father deal with that... He was much better with spills...

Greg: Your father?

Felice: The Brawny Man.

Greg: No way!

Felice: (flatly) Yes way.

Greg: But I always thought he was...

Felice: (thinking back in awe and disgust) God, he was crazy... He *worshipped* absorbency, and not just paper towels.

Greg: Meaning?

Felice: Meaning he probably would've worn diapers himself if they'd come in flannel. He didn't bother to potty-train me until I was *seven*.

Greg: (terror) Oh, no, *potty-training*...

Betty: Tracey was kind of a freak, wasn't he?

Greg: His name is *Tracey*?

Felice: *He* had nothing to do with it! *You* were always hugging the toilet whenever I needed to go!

Betty: (genuine anger) Nothing to do with it? Who do you think drove me to the bottle, Felice?

Greg: (cracking up; totally exhausted and in his head) Bottles... Bottles and binkies... Fucking binkies that fall between the couch cushions... And diapers... Ugh, loaded fucking diapers full of strained-banana shit... And *teething*... Oh man, teething on my baseball glove, on the coffee table, on our wedding album... And *crying*... Dear God, and *nagging*... Nagging, all the time, nagging and nagging, and I'm-too-tired, and I-have-a-headache, and Let's-have-another-one-honey, and fucking *snack*-buying at four o'clock in the morning... I go to work, I go through three fucking pairs of latex gloves per patient because all the *coconut lip gloss* makes my fingers too slick to finish cementing in little Jessica's permanent appliance... And little Chandler doesn't want little Jessica to see me fit him for his night retainer, so I have to fucking stay late, only to get home to a wife who aches in muscles I don't even have, and a daughter who isn't fat goddammit, and when I finally get to sleep, they wake me up... to buy *raisins*... at the *Shop-A-Lot*... at *four o'clock in the morning*! (revelation) I've got to get out.

Betty: (feeling the alcohol) Good idea, Greglybear. What say you and I go beat some eggs together?

Felice: He's married, Betty. Back off.

Greg: (doesn't hear them) I've got to leave.

Betty: For the love of fucking funfetti frosting, Felice. You need to loosen up. I hope they discontinue you again, and this time for good. Then you can throw down with your old lady in the watchtower! (aside to Greg) Not *so* old, mind you!

Felice: Not such a lady, either.

Betty: (raises her glass) Cheers! (empties one glass; nearly goes into a back walkover in a vain attempt to get any remaining drops)

Greg: Whatever happened to juice anyway? I used to *love* juice... (shakily) I'm leaving. (He leaves his shopping basket on the floor and heads for upstage left.)

Betty: (stumbling to the floor) So soon? Well, call me if you ever want to lick the bowl, Greglybear. (She passes out entirely.)

Greg: (to no one in particular) Good-bye.

Felice: Greg, don't!

Greg: (somewhat absently, as he leaves) You should quit your job, Felice.

Felice: Don't leave your wife, Greg!

Greg: (coming back on slowly) What?

Felice: Please don't leave your wife.

Greg: (coming back on slowly) How... How did you—

Felice: Don't go. Don't leave your family.

Greg: I... um... OK...

Felice: Do you know why I'm here?

Greg: You sell raisins.

Felice: Sure I do, *now*. But I used to be a kid, Greg, just a little kid like any other, who ate dirt and glue, and skinned her knees. (ironically) I was a girl scout, actually.

Greg: God, those cookie brats get everybody...

Felice: I'm here now because I have to be. My father... (She takes a deep breath.) Greg, my father cheated on my mother with Mrs. Butterworth and yielded the illegitimate Coppertone sunscreen baby.

Greg: What? The *Brawny Man*?

Felice: As Betty always says, "Some men like it moist and rich; some like it blonde and sticky."

Greg: I always thought he was gay.

Felice: Me too, actually.

Greg: Overcompensation, I guess.

Felice: But he could've made amends, Greg; he could've cleaned up after himself! Like Betty said, he was good with spills... But he didn't bother. He just left. He left us—he left *me*—and then Betty got, well (She looks at Betty passed out on the stage)... a little too into her rum cake recipe.

Greg: No kidding.

Felice: He left the Coppertone baby, too, and that skank Mrs. Butterworth hasn't made shit since Splenda hit the shelves. So I got this gig to support us. Me, Betty, and that blonde little brat—(tangent) God, Greg, she's *already* letting dogs take off her clothes whenever they want. Like mother, like daughter, I guess.

Greg: Your father put you in this position?

Felice: (nodding) He got scared, I guess. Or bored maybe, I don't know.

Greg: He didn't tell you why he left?

Felice: He didn't even tell me good-bye. He didn't even tell me about the affair himself, Greg; he just packed up one night, and I woke up the next morning to find Betty sitting in his empty closet, cuddling with a bottle of gin and the one ratty flannel shirt he'd left behind. (shaking her head in disbelief) No apology, no explanation... I haven't heard from him since. (choking up) I can't tell you how many times we've been in the same shopping cart, and he won't even look at me...

Greg: Really?

Felice: No one looks at me! They look at the bonnet and the sunshine and the big fucking smile, but they never look at *me*. They see *fiber*. They see cookies, or trail mix,

or the celery sticks with peanut butter that their daddies used to bring on fishing trips, or the fruit cake that my fucking mother promoted but never baked! They see all these wholesome family memories, Greg, memories that I never had, but they don't see *me*, and I can't blame them, because if they did, they'd see that *delicious* Sun-Maid raisins are really just the shriveled, sticky, goddamn meal ticket for the most fucked up family in product placement!

Greg: Felice, I'm so sorry... I thought *I* had problems at home...

Felice: (irritated at him) Don't leave your family, Gregory. What's the big deal anyway—a few mood swings and a new diaper on the way? You're scared to raise another baby. You're bored with your job. You're sick of your wife's attitude. Why don't you *talk* to your wife?

Greg: Because she throws her shoes at me when I try to talk to her, Felice. She tells me to come back when *my* ankles are swollen up as thick as my thighs, and then she throws her shoes at me.

Felice: Where's your daughter during all of this?

Greg: I don't know... Playing... Stringing up a box of you to make necklaces for her crazy-ass mother...

Felice: (stifling anger) Who's raising the little girl, Greg?

Greg: I—I guess I am, Felice, but how can I when her mother's always— (She starts to untie her bonnet.) What... What are you do—

Felice: You think lite rock gets old? Try this on for size. (She forces her bonnet onto his head, scrambles out of the Sun-Maid display, and forces him into her place.)

Greg: Um. Eat delicious Sun-Maid raisins?

Felice: (standing back to look at him) I could leave you there, and they wouldn't even know. I could leave you there, and traipse around as I pleased, and all of them in the backroom—they *wouldn't even notice*. (taking a step closer, beginning to approach him slowly) I'm in deep shit, Gregory, because *I* spit on the raisins and *you* shot off your mouth about it, and here shortly, they're probably going to send out the Jolly Green Giant to clean up Betty's mess and haul me off to the back room, but *I* don't have to be around for it. Because I'm just a bonnet! (thumps the bonnet on his head, wheels around to pace off again) My whole life is bonnet bondage, Gregory, and as long as they've got the bonnet, they can twist up whatever's underneath to meet their consumer needs. (wheels around again and get up in his face; said rapidly) *I could leave* and come back in two weeks, six weeks, nine months, and you'd be there, but you'd look like me 'cause they'd

fuck with you until you were nothing but the bonnet, too. This business makes you what they want you to be and then throws out what you really are. This business is what I do because *I don't even know* what I really am, *who* I really am, because I had no fucking family to form me. The business is what the world is like, Greg, and if you don't raise your children, this cut-throat, material world will, and they'll end up as nothing more than bonnets, facades on display, with no substance, no defense, nothing to say when they're grabbed at and used up except—

Greg: Eat delicious Sun-Maid raisins.

Felice: (pauses as if “point made”) Don't leave your little girl, Greg. Go home. Go to sleep. Talk to your wife in the morning.

Greg: Eat delicious Sun-Maid raisins.

Felice: (exhausted) Ha, yes, do that, too.

Greg: (urgently) Eat delicious Sun-Maid raisins!

Felice: Yeah, ha-ha, Greg, but this is more serious than that—

Greg: (panicking) Eat delicious—

Felice: Oh! Shit! (snatches the bonnet off his head) Sorry... I didn't realize it would affect you so quickly...

Greg: How did you know, Felice?

Felice: I see a lot from where I sit, Greg. You'd be surprised how many fathers almost lose it over Juicy Juice.

Greg: (as Felice gets back into her bonnet) I don't *want* to leave... I just... I don't know how to go back. I don't know how to go home anymore, Felice. It's a war zone... It's a big bloody battlefield where estrogen takes no prisoners...

Felice: Except maybe your wife and daughter.

Greg: But all they do is cry! They cry and cry, and I can't stop it! I can't fix it! Goddammit, I just want to fix it, but I can't! I can't do anything right!

Felice: I bet you're their hero, Greg, and you don't even know.

Greg: (wearily) But, Felice... I'm such a fuck-up... I can't get down to the knots in Jenny's back, I can't cut Dina's sandwiches into perfect little stars “like Mommy does,” I

can't fold the towels properly, I can't differentiate between dessert spoons and soup spoons in the spoon drawer... I can't have the foresight to tell my brother to bring back two fucking chocolate eggs from Germany so that my ravenous pregnant wife doesn't have to steal from our child... (exhausted) I can't even find healthy snacks, Felice. When the fuck did juice become evil?

Felice: *I'm healthy. You found me.*

Greg: Actually, you kind of harassed me until I noticed you.

Felice: Actually, I'm pretty high in sugar.

Greg: (frustrated at his quest for healthy snacks) What?!

Felice: Calm down! I'm healthy, OK? I'm better than corn nuts anyway.

Greg: Corn nuts... (laughs to self) Oh, Stewart.

Felice: There's your alternative, Greg. What would you rather go home to: a few tough weeks with a loving family... or corn nuts?

Greg: I just feel like such a failure, Felice.

Felice: She probably uses a cookie cutter for the sandwiches.

Greg: What?

Felice: Your wife. She probably makes the stars in Dina's sandwiches with a cookie cutter.

Greg: We have cookie cutters?

Felice: Check the drawer under the oven.

Greg: There's a drawer under the oven? How do you know these things?

Felice: Betty Crocker's my mom.

Greg: (looking at the pile on the floor that is Betty, considering Felice again) Do you really think they'll discontinue you?

Felice: Nah. They'll reprimand me, sure. They'll make me over to fit the latest consumer survey's ideal of raisininity. Hell, if *you're* any indication of my market, maybe they'll send me back in a ratty sweatshirt and dirty socks.

Greg: Anything's better than that bonnet. (looks at the bag of raisins in his hand, then back down at Betty on the ground) What about her?

Felice: She'll be fine... They'll mop her up... They always do...

Greg: (awkward pause, Greg picks up the discarded shopping basket) Thank you, Felice.

Felice: (suddenly shy) Go home to you wife, Greg.

Greg: I'm sorry about your family.

Felice: I'm happy about yours.

Greg: I wish I could help.

Felice: Well, you know, (gesturing to the raisins in his shopping basket) you're helping our stock anyway.

Greg: I guess I should... get back to them...

Felice: (gathering her tray of grapes) I guess I should get back to—

Both: Eat delicious Sun-Maid raisins.

Greg: Well...

Felice: (resumes her stance and smile) Have a grape day!

Greg: Yeah, thanks, Felice... Same to you...

Felice: (back to where she began) Eat delicious Sun-Maid raisins!

(Greg carries his basket towards upstage left, stopping next to the juice. He picks up the Juicy Juice again.)

Greg: Shit, I'm getting this for *me*! (He exits upstage left.)

(For a few moments, Felice stands in silence, hugging her tray of raisins, frozen in her smile. Suddenly, Betty stirs on the floor. Felice takes no notice of her at first, but, with elaborate comic effort, Betty manages to rouse herself and stand. She looks around, perhaps for Greg. She starts to stumble off, but suddenly looks back at Felice, who flinches at her disdainfully.)

Felice: (as if, “What now?”) Eat delicious Sun-Maid raisins.

(Betty stumbles to a shelf on the aisle and picks up a container of her own brand chocolate icing. She opens the container, and with her pinkie finger, begins to make tiny dots of chocolate on Felice’s frozen cheeks—freckles.)

Felice: Betty, what the—Mom, stop that—What are you—

(Betty stands back at last, satisfied, and takes a dramatic, comically-sensual fingerful of icing for herself.)

Betty: No one tells my girl what to do.

END