

GAME FACE

LR Penn

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ACT I**Scene 1**

(Music: "Tell the Truth" performed by Otis Redding. COLE and JANICE are standing with their guests, BRYCE and DEANNA, in the living room of their suburban home in New Jersey. Each of them is holding a cocktail glass. The living room has a couch and coffee table. There is a remote control device on the coffee table. Stage left is COLE's office, which has a desk and a chair and is dimly lit. COLE is dancing.)

BRYCE

Get down, Cole! I can tell you are feeling the holiday spirit tonight.

COLE

And why shouldn't I? They announced the year end bonuses this week and let me tell you it looks like it's going to be a very merry Christmas.

BRYCE

Hey congratulations! I'm sure it's well deserved.

COLE

Yeah and it's not just the bonus. It seems like everything is coming together for us. We got the house remodeled. The kids are doing great in school. And even Janice! Look at that smile; like a cat that just caught a canary.

(to JANICE)

That Prozac finally kicked in, right Hon?

JANICE

Actually it's not Prozac dear. It's generic fluoxetine. Only eleven cents a pill at Walmart.

COLE

Well whatever it is, it's great to see you looking like your old self again. Seems like you were stuck in that black hole for a while there. But now you're feisty as a young colt, as upbeat and full of zip as ever.

JANICE

Yes I guess it was a rough decade or two after the kids were born. But now I've got Dr. Marshall and my generic fluoxetine, and my exercise regimen, and my graphic design course. I'm just a bundle of energy.

COLE

Too bad there isn't a generic Dr. Marshall that only costs eleven cents an hour. She's costing me about eleven cents a second. But that smile on your face is worth every penny. And you look great too, Hon. Six months ago you were all just skin and bones. So how about a holiday toast? Take it, Janice.

(They all raise their glasses. COLE is looking at DEANNA's backside. DEANNA is looking at BRYCE. BRYCE is looking at JANICE. JANICE is looking at the audience.)

JANICE

Well here's to Walmart and generic fluoxetine and Dr. Marshall.

DEANNA

And here's to the holiday season. Let's hope everyone finds exactly what they want under the Christmas tree.

BRYCE

And here's to love and friendship. As close as we've been this year, let's try to be even closer next year.

COLE

And here's to a little adult fun. For once the kids are out on the town and we've got the house to ourselves. So let's party down!

BRYCE, DEANNA, and JANICE

Hear! Hear!

(They touch glasses and drink.)

JANICE

Since you're in such high spirits, perhaps this would be a good time to remind you that Mums is coming in next week.

COLE

Next week? You said she's coming for Christmas! Christmas is like three weeks away.

JANICE

She's very lonely. We haven't been down there since the funeral.

BRYCE

The funeral?

COLE

Don't you remember, at the beginning of the season, I had to miss the Packers-Saints game?

(puts his glass on the coffee table)

BRYCE

I'm so sorry. I mean, about the death. About the game, too, I guess. Who is it that you lost?

COLE

Vera's old man.

BRYCE

Your father-in-law? Janice's dad?

JANICE

He's referring to my mother's second husband, not my father.

COLE

Oh and get this! You want to know what killed the old geezer?

BRYCE

How did he die?

COLE

He was...

JANICE

Cole, I think we decided that was a confidential family matter?

COLE

Oh yeah.

(to BRYCE)

I'll tell you later.

(to JANICE)

So she's going to be here for like three weeks?

JANICE

Probably until New Year's.

(COLE puts his index and middle fingers to his temple and closes his thumb, as if shooting himself in the head.)

JANICE

Oh he's only joking. Cole's relationship with his mother-in-law couldn't be better.

COLE

(to BRYCE, in a low voice)

Unless maybe she moved to the Solomon Islands. But what's the chance of that?

(to JANICE)

And where's she gonna sleep? We turned one bedroom into an office for me

(gestures stage left)

and the other guest room is now a

(adding air quotes)

graphic design studio.

JANICE

She said she'd be fine on the couch. And do I detect a note of disapproval with regard to my new work space? You're not making fun of my efforts to pursue a career, are you, Cole?

COLE

Of course not. I am one thousand percent supportive of all your artistic and professional aspirations.

(to BRYCE)

You should see the Christmas card Janice designed this year. It's the best one yet. You're gonna love it. So Bryce, you wanna get a look at my new office?

(winks)

BRYCE

Sure.

(COLE ushers BRYCE into his office, stage left. He carefully closes the door behind them. JANICE and DEANNA examine each other.)

JANICE

(sitting on the couch)

That's a beautiful blouse, Deanna.

DEANNA

Thanks, and I love that skirt. Wonderful fabric. Was it very expensive?

JANICE

No, it was on sale. Cost next to nothing.

DEANNA

Sounds like you got a real steal. I guess you're a very good shopper. Is it that you know what you want and you know where to get it? Or do you just browse around, and when you see something you like, you grab it?

JANICE

Usually I...

DEANNA

And it really shows off your figure. I don't know how you stay in such great shape. I hate to think what my body would look like if I were your age and had two kids. How do you do it?

JANICE

Well it helps to be unemployed. I take a different exercise class every day of the week. You should come with me some time. It'd be fun.

(Lights up stage left. COLE opens a desk drawer and takes out a hand mirror, a vial of white powder, and a razor blade. He sits down, pours some of the white powder onto the mirror, and uses the razor blade to divide it into four lines. He stands up, takes a dollar bill from his pocket and hands it to BRYCE.)

DEANNA

Oh yeah? What do you do on Tuesdays? Tuesday afternoons are good for me.

JANICE

(gives DEANNA a look)

Tuesdays? On Tuesdays I usually go to hot yoga.

DEANNA

Hot yoga, huh? Do you do that in the nude?

JANICE

In the nude? Uh, no. Though I suppose you could find a place where they do.

DEANNA

Sounds pretty sweaty.

JANICE

Oh yes, it's an extraordinarily cleansing experience. Very cathartic.

DEANNA

Cathartic, huh?

JANICE

Do you think you'd like it? I could give you a call before I go.

(JANICE and DEANNA continue to converse. DEANNA is still standing, and JANICE remains seated on the couch.)

COLE

Cheers, buddy.

(BRYCE sits down and puts his glass on the desk. He rolls up the dollar bill into a tube, and uses it to inhale a line into each nostril. Then he stands up and hands the dollar bill to COLE.)

BRYCE

Thank you, sir. This Dougie's stuff?

COLE

Got a new source.

(sits down and uses the dollar bill to inhale a line of white powder into each nostril)

BRYCE

I can tell. Excellent quality, Cole. Where'd you get it?

COLE

(takes a cell phone from his pocket and scrolls through several screens)

It's a long story but the bottom line is I struck gold right in Bayonne, New Jersey. Check this out.

(COLE shows the cell phone to BRYCE.)

BRYCE

(raises voice)

You bought coke from a naked black chick?

COLE

You wanna keep your voice down?

BRYCE

(lowers voice)

Oops. Sorry.

COLE

This is Adele. Remember I was late last Monday? Well this is the reason why.

BRYCE

I take it she's for hire.

COLE

Mmm hmmm. This girl does things that Janice has never even heard of.

(COLE scrolls to another screen and shows the phone to BRYCE.)

COLE

And how about this one? Marguerita. She's from Colombia.
 (inhales through his teeth)
 Tell me that doesn't take your breath away. Oh I can't wait to taste that.

(COLE scrolls to another screen and shows the phone to BRYCE.)

COLE

And what about this sweet little strawberry blonde? I swear to God she looks younger than my daughter. But they're all eighteen plus. The place is totally legit.

BRYCE

Legit?

COLE

Well it ain't exactly a Girl Scout troupe we're talking about here and it ain't cookies that they're selling but this guy Reynaldo runs a real tight operation. Paying off the cops, no doubt. He's this Puerto Rican guy but he's real polite and intelligent and well groomed. Very conversational. And no bullshit. Anyway he offered me a line while I was waiting and I ended up buying half a gram and I wish I had gotten a lot more. Plus his prices are better than Dougie's. And he says he can get anything. Anything!

BRYCE

Where'd you find him?

COLE

Just looking around online. He's got a website and everything. Really got his shit together. So you coming with me on Monday?

BRYCE

I don't know.

COLE

Come on! Did you get a look at those fine bitches? Plus I need the company. The neighborhood's a little sketchy and I don't like walking around by myself with a big wad of cash bulging in my pocket.

BRYCE

I'll think about it.

COLE

You better think about it, boy. How old is Miss Deanna?

BRYCE

Thirty-four. Why?

COLE

Thirty-four. And how long you think it's going to be before she takes your ass off the market?

BRYCE

She has made reference to the concept of marriage on one or two occasions.

COLE

Made reference? Dude, she's already figured out how she's going to redecorate that guest room for the baby. My point being, you better get in as much fucking as you can before it's too late.

BRYCE

Well you're married almost twenty years. Doesn't seem to be slowing you down.

COLE

Yeah but once you tie that knot it's a whole new ball game and everything becomes much more difficult.

BRYCE

So why don't you just keep it at home? You've got a beautiful wife.

COLE

Variety is the spice of life, my man. And I don't like feeling as if I'm living in a cage.

(puts his phone in his pocket)

All right. We better get back out there before they start wondering what we're up to.

JANICE

Or we could get together on a Monday night while the boys are watching their football.

DEANNA

That's an idea.

(BRYCE enters the living room while COLE lays out and snorts another line, then puts his supplies away in the desk.)

JANICE

How do you like Cole's new office, Bryce?

BRYCE

Looks fantastic. And very professional. Do you want to show me...?

JANICE

Deanna and I were just wondering. What do you boys actually do on those Monday nights when you're supposed to be watching football?

(COLE enters the living room. Lights down stage left.)

BRYCE

Better that you don't know! I tell ya, we get so wasted!

COLE

Bryce!

(draws the tip of his thumb and index finger across his own lips as if zipping them shut)

Zip it!

BRYCE

You'll have to come over some time and find out for yourself.

JANICE

Maybe I'll just do that.

COLE

You wouldn't like it, Hon. We use a lot of swear words.

JANICE

No I wouldn't like that. And I wouldn't want to sit there and watch that silly game. But I could hang out in the kitchen and talk to Deanna.

DEANNA

I'm too afraid to be anywhere near them once they've been drinking and they've been watching all that violence and they got their hormones all riled up.

JANICE

You can't be scared of them, Deanna. They're like wild dogs. They can smell the fear. And that's when they attack.

BRYCE

Do you want to show me your new office, Janice?

JANICE

I would, but it's not quite ready yet. Cole's getting me a new pc for Christmas, so we'll have the ribbon cutting ceremony after that.

BRYCE

(to COLE)

I thought that pc was supposed to be a surprise.

JANICE

Cole doesn't like surprises.

BRYCE

I mean a surprise for you.

JANICE

Cole doesn't like surprises for anyone. He says it's bad for the financial markets.

(to COLE)

Isn't that right, dear?

COLE

Exactly, Hon. What we need is rock solid stability. You gotta keep everything under control. You let things get out of control and the train jumps the track. But why are we standing around talking when we should be moving and grooving?

(COLE picks up the remote control device from the coffee table, presses a button on it, and puts it back down on the coffee table. Music: "Who's Making Love" performed by Johnnie Taylor. COLE approaches DEANNA and takes her hand. She manages to put her glass on the coffee table before he pulls her stage right and begins dancing with her, holding her close and maneuvering her aggressively. BRYCE and JANICE look on. JANICE puts her glass on the coffee table. BRYCE sits next to JANICE on the couch and, when COLE starts to speak, they begin their own unheard conversation. COLE is primarily facing stage right while DEANNA is primarily facing stage left and keeping an eye on BRYCE and JANICE.)

COLE

De-AN-na! Looking good girl! Good enough to eat.

DEANNA

Careful, Cole. I bruise easily.

COLE

Oh! Such a delicate young flower. But you sure know how to shake those hips.

DEANNA

You think so?

COLE

I know so. You are one fine piece of talent. Could make a man go and do something crazy.

DEANNA

Crazy like what?

COLE

Crazy like forget who he is and get himself in a whole lot of trouble.

(glances over his shoulder at JANICE)

DEANNA

Forget who you are? And what exactly is that?

COLE

Huh?

DEANNA

You got a real wild streak, don't you, Cole? But what I need is some of that stability you were talking about. What I need is someone quiet and reliable, like Bryce.

COLE

Oh Bryce has a wild streak; you just gotta dig down deep enough to find it.

DEANNA

That's what I've been worrying about.

(The unheard conversation between BRYCE and JANICE turns serious. BRYCE is asking her something, and JANICE is repeatedly telling him no. JANICE shakes her head and mouths the words "no" and "I can't." BRYCE becomes increasingly upset, on the verge of tears as he pleads with her, almost down on his knees.)

COLE

So when is that deadbeat gonna make you an honest woman?

DEANNA

I don't think he can ever make me an honest woman, but he could make me a happy woman. And you could probably answer that question better than I can. He spends more time with you than he does with me.

COLE

We get together once a week.

DEANNA

Oh I think the bromance is stronger than that. Wasn't that your car I saw outside Bryce's house on Tuesday? What did you two have a sleepover date?

COLE

What car? When?

DEANNA

A Toyota Sienna. Around three o'clock on Tuesday.

COLE

There's a lot of Toyota Siennas in this town.

DEANNA

A cranberry red Toyota Sienna with a Glenfield High lacrosse team bumper sticker.

COLE

Hmm.

(pause)

DEANNA

License plate EXK439.

COLE

Actually, that's the car Janice usually drives.
(turns away from DEANNA and looks at BRYCE and JANICE)

(MICHAEL enters, upstage stage right, and stops.)

COLE

Hey what are you guys talking about that's so serious over there?

(MICHAEL attempts to cross stage left without his presence being noted.)

COLE

Whoa! Just a second!

(COLE grabs MICHAEL by the arm.)

COLE

We got a lacrosse star in the house! Michael, have you met Deanna?

MICHAEL

She was here at Thanksgiving.

COLE

Right you are! Boy's got a head on his shoulders. I tell ya this kid's a shoo in at Princeton. With his grades and his athletical ability, I tell ya he's a shoo in.

(JANICE and BRYCE stand up and cross to MICHAEL, COLE, and DEANNA.)

MICHAEL

Somebody's drunk.

JANICE

He hasn't seen your report card.

BRYCE

(still looking disconsolate)

Hey, Michael.

COLE

Home before his sister. That's a switch.

MICHAEL

How ya doin', Bryce? Everything OK?

JANICE

Can I fix you something to eat?

MICHAEL

No thanks, Mom. I'm kinda tired. I'm just gonna hit the sack.

(MICHAEL kisses JANICE good night affectionately.)

MICHAEL

Good night, Mom. Good night, everyone.

JANICE

OK, you get some sleep. We'll turn the music down.

(MICHAEL exits stage left.)

JANICE

Cole?

COLE

Kid sure can kill a party.

(End of scene.)

Scene 2

(Music: "Hound Dog" performed by Big Mama Thornton. VERA is lying on the living room couch. The living room, upstage, is dimly lit. There is a suitcase next to the couch. The kitchen, downstage, has a table and two chairs. On the table are three cups, a coffee machine, and a newspaper. COLE enters stage left, wearing a business suit, carrying a shoulder bag, and looking groggy. He puts down the shoulder bag, pours himself coffee, sits down at the kitchen table, and starts to read the newspaper. Lights up upstage. VERA looks around, gets up off the couch and approaches the kitchen table. She is wearing a full length flannel nightgown and a nightcap.)

VERA

(cheerful, loud)

Good morning, Cole.

COLE

(startled; sputters into his coffee, spilling some)

Where in hell you come from?

VERA

I was sleeping on the couch.

COLE

I didn't see you when I came in last night.

VERA

Not surprised to hear that. You could barely walk. And you woke me up when you tripped over my suitcase and fell on your face. You enjoy your Monday Night Football?

COLE

It was all right. Sorry if I disturbed your repose. You sleep OK otherwise? That couch wasn't too uncomfortable for you?

VERA (cont'd)

me about all the atrocities that he had witnessed, and all the wild adventures that he had when he was on leave. He was such good company. I knew he had a bad heart, but I didn't think it was that weak.

COLE

You know we veterans don't enlist in the army just for the purpose of collecting war stories in order to amuse you with the horrors that we have endured on your behalf.

VERA

So why *did* you go to Desert Storm? Because you had a burning desire to see Kuwait?

COLE

I went to serve my country.

VERA

You mean to protect U.S. oil interests? To keep Exxon and Haliburton in the black? Or did you think that you could come home and pass yourself off as some kind of war hero and win the heart of a foolish and impressionable young woman?

COLE

Hey, what can I tell you? Chicks dig uniforms. So I take it you've had enough of North Carolina, huh?

VERA

I like North Carolina fine. The problem is I'm lonely down there. It's very hard. I lost my husband and my cleaning lady in one day. I never understood what he saw in her. She was Mexican, couldn't even speak English. And very unattractive, with terrible skin and a body shaped like a water balloon. She looked like an award winning squash at the county fair. Plus she had one eye that didn't move. Her right eye would be looking at you and the other would be staring off into space. It was really creepy.

COLE

He was desperate. He complained all the time that he wasn't getting any. So did you know about them?

(JANICE enters stage right, wearing a sweatsuit, and removes her running shoes.)

VERA

Of course.

(slowly, with emphasis)

A woman always knows.

(piercing look)

But I let it slide. I guess it was selfish of me. I was

VERA (cont'd)

just glad that he wasn't pestering me. She did a good job on the place, too. And she didn't charge much, either. I guess she was getting some fat tips from Horace, though.

COLE

Sounds like you miss the old coot, despite his peccadilloes.

(JANICE crosses to the kitchen area.)

VERA

We had a wonderful vacation planned.

JANICE

Don't upset yourself, Mums.

VERA

Did you have a good run, dear?

JANICE

Very refreshing. A bit nippy, though, at least for the first six or eight miles.

COLE

I find that's often the case at dawn in December.

VERA

Horace was going to show me Bangkok and Saigon and then we were going to Bali and Australia. Fourteen weeks. I guess it's lucky we hadn't bought the tickets yet.

COLE

You could still go by yourself.

VERA

(gives COLE a dirty look)

Hmmm.

COLE

Or with a tour group or something.

VERA

To be herded on and off a bus like a farm animal for three months? With a bunch of people I don't know? Sounds like Dante's tenth circle of hell.

COLE

Just an idea. Anyway, it's lovely chatting but some of us have to keep our noses to the grindstone and make sure the rent gets paid around here.

(stands up, takes a gulp of coffee, and puts his cup down on the table)

COLE (cont'd)

Gotta run or I'll miss my train. You ladies have a wonderful day.

(COLE kisses JANICE on the top of her head, picks up his shoulder bag, and exits stage right. VERA pours two cups of coffee.)

VERA

"Go by yourself!" What an asshole!

(VERA puts a cup of coffee in front of each chair. JANICE sits down and moves COLE's cup aside.)

JANICE

He means well, Mums.

VERA

No he doesn't. He just wants to get rid of me. Oh Janice! Why couldn't you listen to me and ditch that douche bag before it was too late?

JANICE

I was in love.

VERA

In love my ass. I blame your father. If he hadn't been so strict you wouldn't have been dying to get out of the house. And you would have realized that not all men have to be neo-Nazi totalitarian dickheads.

JANICE

You're really exaggerating, Mums. That is not fair to Cole or to Papa.

VERA

I still remember the toasts from his best man and his brothers at the wedding. It was all very tongue in cheek, but the bottom line message was that he was a tyrant to his family and a selfish, spoiled, ruthless, narcissistic bastard.

JANICE

That's just because he's the oldest. He was always the strongest and smartest of the kids, and they viewed him as an authority figure.

VERA

And I never told you about the earful I got from his cousin Dennis. It seems that Cole attempted to rape his wife, along with many another breach of social etiquette.

JANICE

There's a longstanding feud with Dennis' side of the family.

VERA

Well I can see why!

JANICE

Cole says Dennis is just jealous because they're not as well off as we are. Obviously it was a mistake to invite him to the wedding. But Cole gets along great with the rest of his family.

VERA

Oh really? How often do his brothers and sisters come to visit?

JANICE

Well...never.

VERA

That's because they can't stand being in the same room with him.

JANICE

That's because they have their own lives. And we have *our* own family, with two gorgeous, happy, healthy children. In addition to which he's an excellent breadwinner.

VERA

Yeah that's how he's kept you trapped and destroyed your chance to develop your own talents.

JANICE

Cole may have his flaws, but we have a lot of shared goals, and in many respects he's a model husband. I feel as if I'm very lucky to have him.

VERA

You mean you're lucky because he doesn't physically beat you? This man has made you miserable for the last twenty years.

JANICE

It's called major depressive disorder, Mums.

VERA

It's called being stuck with a lousy husband. Believe me, I know. Look. The kids are almost out of the house, Janice. So this would be a very good time to think about leaving him behind and starting a new life for yourself.

JANICE

And go where?

VERA

You could come to North Carolina.

JANICE

But North Carolina is so far away. And it's so hard to get to.

VERA

It's not hard to get to once you're there. And I'm so lonely now. I don't even have a maid any more.
(sits down)

JANICE

So why'd you fire her if you knew about it all along?

VERA

I don't know, Janice. For some strange reason I just don't feel as if I can trust her any more. Who knows what she'll get up to next? Plus, I realized that whenever I saw her, it would remind me of Horace and how he died. Not to mention that schvuggy eye of hers. I guess I can just clean the house myself. But how am I going to find a new guy?

JANICE

You could try the internet.

VERA

The internet! On the internet I'll find some con man who comes over and murders me, then chops me up in pieces and puts me in a plastic trash bag. There's a lot of empty woodlands around there. They won't find that trash bag for fifty years.

JANICE

What a pleasant thought. You do know that susceptibility to depression is something you can inherit from a parent?

VERA

And meanwhile his girlfriend will assume my identity and take all my money out of the bank. Not that I have so much money. I wish I had more money. I'd go buy myself a boy toy.

JANICE

Mums!

VERA

Yeah, you're right. I'd probably get bored with him after a month. It'd be a good month, though. After all, I put up with Marcus for thirty years and he was boring as mud.

JANICE

Hey that's my father you're talking about. Papa was just quiet. And maybe kind of stern, too. He took everything a little too seriously.

VERA

Janice, let me give credit where credit's due. It's true: your father was practically a saint, a very religious man. He worked like a dog his whole life, just to support his family. But let's face it, he was a total dud, a complete drag to hang around with. The guy never cracked a smile. That's what made me appreciate Horace. Horace was a real live wire. He knew how to have fun. I guess you could say they both died with their boots on, one working, the other getting it on. But, given a choice, I think Horace would have been a better role model for you. Your father lived a life full of repression, and he thought it was going to buy him everlasting peace and tranquility. Well, as far as I'm concerned, you gotta be a real chump to suffer through a miserable earthly existence waiting for your immortal soul to be rewarded in the afterlife. Please don't tell me you're still buying into that crock of shit. All that censorship and self-denial - it doesn't save anyone's soul. It destroys the soul, and puts you in a really bad mood. That's why you need to set yourself free, Janice. It's time to spread your wings! You could do so much better.

JANICE

Mums, Cole and I have created a wonderful home together, that we've just finished renovating. We have two perfect children, good friends, all kinds of modern comforts and conveniences, everything we could possibly ask for. And for me personally I have never been more active, never felt better adjusted, and never been more optimistic about the future.

VERA

You can't bullshit a bullshitter, Janice. And you can't convince me, just because you love your kids and you can afford to remodel the house, that you are happy and satisfied being married to that man. You were always Daddy's little girl when you were growing up. Father knows best, you thought. Sure. Why wouldn't you? He was so big and smart and strong and self-confident. Just like Cole. But it's time you finally started listening to me. Your whole life you've tried to be a good girl just like your Daddy taught you. I thought you would have figured out by now that he was selling you a lot of propaganda. It's a nice story with a happy ending but the problem is it doesn't prepare you for real life, because real life is a beautiful experience but it's not some movie that you sit and watch and laugh at the funny parts and cry at the sad parts and then feel good when it's over. That's not how it works. And sometimes it gets dirty, mean, and nasty. So

VERA (cont'd)

take your pick. You can try and be like your Daddy and live your life in a fantasy world, dreaming about the kingdom come. But if you want to live in the real world you can't just be the selfless, giving, nurturing, caring Mary Mother fucking Madonna that you were brought up to be 'cause you're just gonna be used and stepped on and treated like dogshit. If you want to find yourself some happiness out there in the real world then you have to go out and grab it, and you might even have to be a little dirty, mean, and nasty yourself.

JANICE

I'm working on it, Mums. I really am. And please watch your language.

VERA

I'm almost sixty-five fucking years old. I don't have to watch my language any more.

JANICE

Well there are innocent children in this house.

VERA

Jesus fucking Christ! This is the twenty-first century, Janice. And in the twenty-first century every man, woman, and child with internet access has officially lost whatever innocence they ever had.

(End of scene.)

Scene 3

(Music: "Something's
Mighty, Mighty Wrong"
performed by The
Impressions. VERA is
sitting at the kitchen
table, scrolling through
pictures on her cell phone.
There is a telephone on the
table.)

VERA

Oh I don't think so.
(scrolls)
I'm not that old.
(scrolls)
You couldn't find a picture where you didn't look
psychotic?
(scrolls)
Oooh! Way too fat!
(scrolls)

JULIA

(enters stage right wearing jeans and a
backpack, with her hair in a ponytail)

Hi Grandma.

VERA

Oh hello, Julia.
(puts cell phone on the table)
How was school today?

JULIA

School was great. We had a pop quiz in math class and I
think I only got one wrong. And in biology we learned
about cellular genetics and DNA transmission. And in
language arts we finished reading an ancient Greek play
called *The Agamemnon*.

VERA

Did you like it?

JULIA

I thought it was very well written but it doesn't have a
happy ending.

VERA

Yeah, tragedies are like that sometimes. People say they
want to get what they deserve, but when they do, it isn't
always pretty.

JULIA

But at least it wasn't very long. And in French we were conjugating verbs that end in -ir: venir, to come, mourir, to die, salir, to soil, and mentir, to lie. Je mens, tu mens, il ment, nous mentons, vous mentez, ils mentent. N'est-ce pas?

(laughs)

VERA

Oui oui, mademoiselle. Not me. But everyone else does.

JULIA

Oui, c'est vrai.

VERA

Well it sounds as if you accomplished a great deal.

JULIA

And everyone's getting really psyched for the football game Friday. It's a big rivalry. Do you think you'll go?

VERA

I doubt it, but...

JULIA

Well I have to hurry because I need to drop off my books and I have chess club today.

(removes her backpack as she begins to cross stage left)

VERA

Well don't let me...

(The telephone rings.)

VERA

I'll get it.

(picks up phone)

(JULIA exits stage left.)

VERA

Hello.

COLE

(offstage)

Vera?

VERA

Speaking.

COLE

(offstage)

Is Janice there?

VERA

Oh I'm fine, Cole. Thanks for asking. And how are you?

COLE

(offstage)

Good. Is Janice there?

VERA

No, I'm sorry, Janice isn't here right now.

COLE

(offstage)

You know where she is?

VERA

I believe she has her zumba class.

COLE

(offstage)

Oh yeah? What time did she leave?

VERA

Some time after lunch. She said she had some errands to run. You could try calling her cell phone.

COLE

(offstage)

I think I'll do just that. Thanks for the tip, Vera.

VERA

Glad to be of help.

COLE

(offstage)

But you tell her to call me as soon as she gets home.

VERA

I sure will. Anything else I can do for you?

COLE

(offstage)

Yeah, how about you sh...Never mind. See you later.

VERA

(hanging up phone)

I'll be looking forward to that.

(Two honks of a car horn.)

YOUNG MAN

(offstage)

Hey Julia! Let's go!

(VERA crosses stage right and peers through a window in that direction. JULIA enters stage left heavily made up, wearing a sequin top, high heels, and ostentatious earrings, with her hair up.)

VERA

That's your chess club? Is your chess club affiliated with some kind of terrorist organization?

(turns from the window to face JULIA)

JULIA

Oh that's just my ride.

VERA

Well look at you. Where does this chess club meet, at the Copacabana?

JULIA

You have to dress for success, Grandma. Could you remind Mommy that I'll be late for dinner? After chess club, I'm working at the coat drive.

VERA

Oh that outfit should fit right in over at the homeless shelter.

(Two honks of a car horn, louder.)

YOUNG MAN

(offstage)

Yo Zulu.

(ululating war cry)

Rock and roll, little Mama.

JULIA

Gotta run.

(exits stage right)

VERA

Innocent young child, huh?

(crosses to the table, picks up the cell phone, scrolls, winces)

Ooh! No way, Jose.

(scrolls)

Ruggedly good looking? That's ruggedly good looking? You gotta be kidding me. That's ruggedly ugly.

(End of scene.)

Scene 4

(Music: "Tell It Like It Is" performed by Aaron Neville. JANICE and BRYCE are in bed, in each other's arms, in BRYCE's bedroom. They are sitting up, supported by pillows. On each side of the bed, a cell phone is sitting on a side table. JANICE is shaking her head.)

BRYCE

What's wrong, Janice?

JANICE

I promised myself that that this wasn't going to happen again.

BRYCE

There are some promises that are better off broken.

JANICE

Perhaps you're right. I still can't believe I finally had the nerve to do it. That was so delightful, even better than last time. I feel as if I'm floating on air. I wish that I could stay here just like this forever.

BRYCE

Oh Janice I wish that you would! These Tuesday afternoons together are everything I'm living for. You've become the most important part of my life. Please say that you'll come stay with me. We'll be so happy together.

JANICE

You want me to just pack up and tell the kids I'm moving to Bryce's house? I'm not sure how that's gonna go over. That would make for some Christmas.

BRYCE

All right. We can wait until after Christmas. And you don't have to move in here. We could run away together. I'd go anywhere so long as it meant that I could be with you.

JANICE

No, Bryce. This can never happen again. We've gone on a wonderful adventure together, exploring each other's body and soul. And I am truly happy that we've had this opportunity to get to know each other more intimately. I want to thank you, Bryce, for being so patient with me, so understanding. It's a gift that I will always cherish.

JANICE (cont'd)

Dr. Marshall told me that I needed to take some risks in order to find fulfillment, and I am so glad that we've done this crazy thing and allowed ourselves to become emotionally close.

BRYCE

So how can you cut me off, Janice? We're already beyond the point of no return. We need to be together forever so our love can continue to grow. Can't you see that?

JANICE

No I can't. Because Dr. Marshall also warned me that, even though I should try and let myself go, I needed to remain cautious and in control of the situation and not engage in behaviors that I judge to be self-destructive.

(JANICE disentangles herself from BRYCE, with difficulty.)

JANICE

So it's a fine line, and I'd have to say that we've really crossed that line, and if we allow ourselves to become even more involved then the situation will become that much more dangerous.

BRYCE

Don't you care about me, Janice? You said that you needed me. To help you transform yourself. Remember just today you were saying you that real life is a beautiful experience but...

JANICE

I know I said a lot of things. And I can assure you that I really do care for you, Bryce, and all of the warmth and emotional support you have given me have made my feelings stronger. But I'm afraid of what might happen if I were to care for you any more than I already do.

(Music: "Wooly Bully" performed by Sam the Sham and the Pharaohs.)

BRYCE

Who is it that keeps calling you? I wish you had turned your phone off. That song was really messing up my concentration. It's as if somebody is here with us, watching us in bed.

JANICE

That's a little kinky, Bryce.

(looks at her cell phone)

But that's just Cole's ring tone.

BRYCE

Do you think he'll be suspicious if you don't answer?

JANICE

I'll just tell him I went to roller derby practice after my zumba class.

BRYCE

Is it difficult for you to lie to him?

JANICE

You gotta do what you gotta do. Actually I find it to be amazingly easy. It's like deceiving a small child.

BRYCE

Maybe we should just tell him the truth. Isn't that the most ethical way to handle it? I have a feeling that things would work out for the best if we just admit to him that we're in love with each other.

JANICE

He would want to kill you.

BRYCE

(shakes his head, entirely doubtful, laughs)

No!

JANICE

You see, you're not married, Bryce, and you don't have the same responsibilities that I do. You don't have any children. You don't know what it's like to feel as if the choices that you're making might destroy your whole family. And maybe one day you will be blessed with children. Deanna's a lovely girl and the two of you could make a beautiful home together.

BRYCE

But I'm not in love with Deanna. I'm in love with you! Deanna doesn't know me the way that you do. She sees me as a means to an end. She's only with me because I fit into her plans. Don't you understand I need to be with you? That's the only way I can feel whole. Everything else is wretched. Without you, all I have is misery.

JANICE

I would love to come back here, Bryce! These have been the most pleasurable moments I can remember. This is the most exciting thing...except, now that I think about it, maybe the time I dropped into Corbet's when I skied Jackson Hole. That was sick.

(waves her arms)

I was so sure I was gonna wipe out. I thought there was no way I was gonna make that landing. This is definitely way

JANICE (cont'd)

up there, though. But the point I'm trying to make is that the ecstasy we have shared, even though it has thrilled me to the core of my being, is merely a fleeting moment of passion. And the ethereal emotions that we feel will never last if they have no foundation in a stable, healthy home environment. So how can you ask me to simply abandon my husband, to renege upon the commitments that I have made to him?

BRYCE

Because he's not worthy of your fidelity. If I told you some of the things he's done, some of the things he's told me, you'd realize that you can't possibly stay with him. He has been...

(JANICE puts her hand over BRYCE's mouth.)

JANICE

Don't go there, Bryce. This romantic interlude of ours has been pure joy, a bonding of our minds and bodies and spirits. Let's not ruin that with ugly accusations and recriminations. Let's remember this relationship as purely positive, as a secret excursion into bliss that we will share deep in our hearts until the day we die. But that's also why we need to stop. Because if we go on, we'll be doing irreparable damage to both of our lives, as well as the lives of others. And I'm not going to allow that to happen. I'm sorry, Bryce. But I know this is the right thing to do and so I have no choice. And our feelings for each other will live forever, even if we never again consummate them physically.

BRYCE

But don't you see I can't live without you? Without you my life has no meaning.

(Music: "Wooly Bully" performed by Sam the Sham and the Pharaohs.)

BRYCE

Cole again?

JANICE

Yeah. I should probably call him back soon.

(Music: "Torn Between Two Lovers" performed by Mary MacGregor. BRYCE picks up his cell phone and looks at it.)

BRYCE

Oh my God! Now he's calling me. I better answer. I always answer when he calls my cell.

(into phone)

Hello?

COLE

(offstage)

Hey buddy, what you up to?

BRYCE

Who me? Nothing.

COLE

(offstage)

Oh yeah? 'Cause I was in your neighborhood and I was thinking I should drop by and say hi. Unless you're busy or something.

BRYCE

Busy? I'm not busy.

(cups hand over cell phone microphone and whispers to JANICE)

It's Cole. He says he's coming over!

COLE

(offstage)

All right. I should be there in five.

JANICE

(whispers)

Say you're going out.

BRYCE

(into phone)

But I'm going out.

COLE

(offstage)

Oh yeah? Where you going?

BRYCE

Where?

(JANICE points to her teeth.)

BRYCE

I'm going to brush my...

(JANICE mouths the word "dentist.")

BRYCE

I mean to the dentist. That's it. I'm going to the dentist.

COLE

(offstage)

All right. I'll just hang out a couple of minutes.

BRYCE

(cups hand over cell phone microphone
and whispers to JANICE)

He's coming anyway!

JANICE

(whispers)

Tell him you left already.

BRYCE

(nodding, still whispering to JANICE)

But I'm already...

(shakes his head; into phone)

But I'm already in the car, Cole.

COLE

(offstage)

Who are you talking to?

BRYCE

Huh?

COLE

(offstage)

Who are you talking to?

BRYCE

Oh I always talk in the car.

(yells)

Hey learn how to drive, you idiot!

COLE

(offstage)

What?

BRYCE

Not you, Cole. Some people don't know how to drive,
y' know?

COLE

(offstage)

Listen. Have you seen Janice?

BRYCE

(high pitched laugh)

Why would you...

(laughs)

Why would you ask me that?

COLE

(offstage)

Can't seem to reach her. I was trying to track her down. Thought maybe you ran into her.

BRYCE

Doesn't she have her rhythmic gymnastics class on Tuesdays?

COLE

(offstage)

You mean with the hula hoop?

BRYCE

Yeah when they jump through it and toss it in the air.

COLE

(offstage)

Is that really a sport?

BRYCE

It's in the Olympics. Oh I like the ribbon. When they throw it up in the air, do a back flip, and catch it before it lands. That is so cool!

COLE

(offstage)

Puts me right to sleep. But I wouldn't want to dampen your enthusiasm; I can tell you're a big fan. Speaking of which, you know what next week is?

BRYCE

No. What?

COLE

(offstage)

Cowboys-Giants.

BRYCE

Dallas-New York? On Monday Night Football? Frickin' excellent!

COLE

(offstage)

And guess who's gonna be there.

BRYCE

You got tickets! Frickin' excellent!

COLE

(offstage)

No I don't have tickets. It's in Dallas.

BRYCE

So you're watching here, right? I mean...at my place. So who you bringing?

COLE

(offstage)

I'll give you a hint. They'll be the ones with the cowboy boots and the pompoms and the little white short shorts.

BRYCE

Oh, you mean...

COLE

(offstage)

That's right. The DCC, baby!

BRYCE

The DCC! Frickin' excellent!

COLE

(offstage)

Yeah, frickin' excellent.

(End of scene.)

Scene 5

(Music: "Another Brick in the Wall" performed by Pink Floyd. COLE, MICHAEL, and JANICE are in the living room. COLE is standing; MICHAEL and JANICE are sitting on the couch.)

COLE

We're just worried about you, Son. You picked a really bad time to go into a tailspin. You're in your junior year. This is when your grades most matter for your college applications. And now this!

MICHAEL

It wasn't such a big deal. Everyone's just making a big deal out of it.

COLE

Well pardon me, but a suspension from school is a big deal. You're going into self destruct mode and we're not going to just stand by and watch you destroy your own future. Not after you've worked so hard to get where you are today.

JANICE

What was it that made you so angry with Coach Miller?

MICHAEL

He was picking on these guys in the gym class, a couple of guys who are really nerdy and effeminate and uncoordinated. And he started raggin' on them, like he always does. Yelling at them for not keeping up, and making fun of them, and saying everyone would have to do extra laps because of them. So then everyone in the class started jeering at them and calling them faggots and Kevin Burke said he was gonna kick their asses after class. So I said to Kevin "Leave 'em alone, you fucking asshole," but Coach thought I was talking to him.

JANICE

Michael, that's terrible language!

COLE

So it was really just a misunderstanding. Why don't we...?

MICHAEL

No it wasn't a misunderstanding because he *is* a fucking asshole.

JANICE

Michael I don't want you to speak that way, and certainly not in this house.

COLE

Son, you're gonna have to clear the air.

MICHAEL

There's no way to clear the air because that's the atmosphere in that hellhole. It's completely poisonous and the teachers make it that way and the kids do too. There's supposedly all this school spirit but that's a total crock and it's just a giant social hierarchy with people taunting and stepping on whoever's underneath them.

JANICE

But you and Julia have been so happy there.

MICHAEL

We tried our best but I'm telling you it's just a rotten toxic environment with a lot of miserable spoiled brats. And Julia is getting involved with this clique of really mean girls and you should be worried about her because they're a nasty group with a lot of dirty little secrets and it's a really bad scene that she ought to be staying away from. They're superficial and phony and cruel. And the guys they hang out with are even worse. They're all into drugs and sex and alcohol. They're a bunch of jocks and everything is just another sport for them. It's all about how drunk they can get and how stoned can they get and how far can they get with how many different girls. Every last one of them is on a giant macho man ego trip and they don't even have the imagination to conceive of the possibility that there's any other way to be.

JANICE

But Julia has lots of nice friends. What about Beth and Scott?

MICHAEL

Yeah when's the last time you saw Beth or Scott? She can't be seen with them because nice, conscientious kids like them are considered to be losers. Plus they're the same age as she is so they can't drive. She only wants to hang out with the kids in my class or - better yet - seniors.

COLE

Your mother and I have complete faith in Julia. She's an honor roll student who's extremely popular and has involved herself in a whole bunch of projects that the college admissions committees are gonna just eat up. I only wish that her older brother had the same level of dedication and studiousness and community involvement - not to mention some room for improvement when it comes to grooming and hygiene, projecting a positive can-do attitude, and showing some respect for your elders. And what about the weirdo degenerate dopers I see you hanging around with?

MICHAEL

I'm talking about Julia, not about me. Look. She's a great kid and I love her with all my heart. But she's at this stage where she's very susceptible to peer pressure. And she sees this group of kids who are trying to act real grown up and everyone thinks they're so cool and that's how she wants to feel about herself so she would do anything to get in with them. I hear the way she talks and it's like the most important thing in the world to her and I don't want to see her get hurt. I don't want her to have anything to do with these assholes.

JANICE

Michael please don't use that language. I'll speak to her about it.

COLE

Well as far as I can tell Julia's doing great in school and she's doing great after school. It seems to me you're spending a lot of time worrying about other people's problems when what you should be doing is straightening out your own. Is there any way to get it through your thick skull that these are pressing, time sensitive issues that we need to deal with right now? Are you forgetting that this is your lacrosse coach we're talking about? The spring season is just around the corner. So by the time preseason practices start...

MICHAEL

I don't want to straighten things out with Coach Miller. Coach Miller is a pig. You want to know what Coach Miller does in gym class?

(stands up and walks downstage)

He lines up all the girls in the front row and tells everyone to touch their toes.

(crosses back and forth, stage left then stage right)

Then he walks along the row, staring down their shirts and making comments under his breath about their breasts.

COLE

Michael, do you think you could take just one minute to put aside your sociopolitical outrage and righteous indignation – justifiable though they may be – in order to focus on your own future, on your own goals? Coach Miller has made it very clear to me that you will be captain of that team next year. Or at least co-captain. And he's your biggest fan. You've said it yourself. He gives you all the playing time you want.

MICHAEL

(returns to COLE and JANICE)

Can't you hear what I'm saying to you? I don't want to play for Coach Miller.

JANICE

Michael, does any of this have to do with that squabble you had with Kate?

MICHAEL

I didn't have a fight with Kate.

JANICE

So what were you two crying about?

COLE

She looked like sheer hell when she left on Sunday. You weren't beatin' on her, were you?

MICHAEL

This has nothing to do with her.

COLE

That's not what we think. Michael, I think you're just upset because you and Kate are going through a bit of a hard time. Now trust me once you two work things out you'll be looking at everything in a whole new light.

MICHAEL

There's nothing to work out.

JANICE

Michael I love Kate. Your father and I think she's a wonderful girl. But if the time has come for you two to go your separate ways, there are plenty of other fish in the sea. Especially for such a handsome and intelligent young man as yourself.

COLE

Son, I know exactly how you feel. If something were to come between me and your mom I'd go crazy out of my mind and the only thing I could think about was how I could destroy whatever had come between us. Everything else would go straight out the window until I had accomplished that mission. But you and Kate aren't bound to each other with a sacred vow of fidelity, like your mom and me, so the chivalrous thing for you to do is to step aside and give her the space she needs. I know how those teenage hormones are, and I know right now it feels like the end of the world. But maybe she'll come back, once she's had a chance to play the field. And believe me, even if she doesn't, I know you'll be able to find the strength to move on. What about that Pritchett girl?

MICHAEL

Kate and I are fine.

COLE

What's her name, Chelsea? Remember we went to their pool party last summer. She was wearing that tankini.

MICHAEL

I'm not int...

COLE

She looked pretty darn nubile, boy! Definitely got a few curves in the right places. And she was checking you out! Her father's loaded, you know. Bet she's got those braces off by now, maybe even moved up to a D cup. I mean, don't get me wrong, Kate's a very pretty girl; but you have to admit she is a bit deficient in the mammary department.

JANICE

Cole! Is it really necessary...?

COLE

Well he brought it up. And this is no time for beatin' about the bush. This here is a crisis situation.

MICHAEL

Brought it up? I was talking about Coach Miller. And I know it's hard to believe but, in spite of her diminutive breast size, Kate and I are fine. We both know what we're doing. That's not the problem. The problem is that school and the rotten students and the worthless administration and the know nothing teachers and that dirt bag Coach Miller.

COLE

Son, just listen to what you're saying. You don't like your school. You don't like your lacrosse coach. You don't like your fellow students. You've broken up with your girlfriend for no apparent reason. Your grades are falling because your teachers are no good and you've lost interest in your studies. You've completely lost your way. I mean, if you don't care about your girlfriend's teats, what do you care about? Now what your mom and I need to hear from you is a straightforward plan that you can commit to, laying out how you're gonna pick yourself up and pull yourself out of this slump. Starting today, young fella!

MICHAEL

(shrugs)

I don't have a plan. It is what it is, you know? I can't change the world.

COLE

Maybe not, but you sure can change yourself. And if you can't come up with a plan, I'll give you one. I think maybe it's time to strike out in a bold new direction, before it's too late. What you need is to be out there in

COLE (cont'd)

the countryside, where you're surrounded by trees, rolling hills, and fresh air. With no females around to get all hot and bothered about. You want to escape from a toxic environment? I got just the place. It's called Sexton Academy.

MICHAEL

Sexton Academy! Ma!

JANICE

I don't want Michael going away for the rest of his high school.

COLE

It's only a year and a half and it isn't that far away.

(to MICHAEL)

But it's far away enough that you'll be able to clear your mind, set some goals, and free yourself from all the distractions that are causing you problems around here. So I'm gonna make some calls and see if I can't get you in there for the second semester.

(to JANICE)

And I'm sorry, dear, but I don't think it would be such a bad idea to cut those apron strings. Too much coddling can have a serious deleterious effect upon the development of a young man's character.

MICHAEL

Too much coddling! That place is a third rate military academy.

COLE

Well it made a man out of me.

(End of scene.)

Scene 6

(Music: "The Payback"
performed by James Brown.
COLE is sitting on the
couch in BRYCE's living
room, with his feet on a
coffee table. He is
looking downstage as if
watching television. There
is a remote control device
on the coffee table.)

COLE

Bryce, get your butt out here! Here they come!

BRYCE

(offstage)

Be right there.

(enters stage right carrying two drinks
and a bowl of popcorn)

COLE

Oh my God! There she is!

(stands up, pointing, and walks
downstage)

She's my favorite.

(BRYCE puts the two drinks and the bowl
on the coffee table.)

COLE

Where's your damn remote?

(COLE turns upstage and picks up the
remote control from the coffee table.
He turns back and points the remote
downstage, then presses a button on
it.)

COLE

Here I'll pause it for you. Check it out. The skinny
blonde one with the long legs.

(COLE walks downstage and examines the
television screen, eyes bulging, from
an apparent viewing distance of
approximately four inches.)

COLE

Get a load of those hip bones. I looked her up online.
Her name is Linda. She gave an interview in which she
professed a deep belief in Jesus Christ our Lord and said
that she's saving herself for marriage. This here is the

COLE (cont'd)

last twenty-two year old virgin in America. No wonder her crotch is so perfectly formed. There ain't never been a cock up in there. Just look how tight those shorts are.

(bites the knuckle of his own index finger)

Holy fucking shit! You can see the crack. I swear to God! I can see the crack of her twat!

(COLE returns to the couch, sits down, and puts the remote on the coffee table. BRYCE walks downstage, stops, and moves his head back and forth as if examining a television screen close up. COLE removes a small vial from his jacket pocket and opens it, watching BRYCE closely.)

BRYCE

I guess if you use your imagination.

(COLE pours some of the contents of the vial into one of the drinks. He encloses the vial in his fist.)

COLE

Imagination my ass! I can see those pussy lips quivering. They're talking to me, begging for my dong.

(picks up the remote control with his free hand, points it downstage, and presses a button)

Here, let me back it up for you.

(presses a button on the remote control)

OK. Now watch it in slow motion.

(COLE presses a button on the remote and puts it down on the coffee table. Then he pours a bit more from the vial into the drink and swirls it with his finger. Then he closes the vial and puts it back in his jacket pocket.)

COLE

There. You see?

BRYCE

If you say so.

(BRYCE returns to the coffee table, picks up the remote control, points it downstage, presses a button on it, and puts it back down.)

COLE

If I say so? Well I'm sorry, Bryce. I guess you'll get a better view of that snatch next time she asks you to shave it for her, but, for the time being, I'm afraid this is the best we can do. Damn!

(stands up and picks up both drinks)

OK here's a toast.

(COLE hands BRYCE the spiked drink.)

COLE

To Linda and the entire Dallas Cowboy Cheerleader squad.

(COLE and BRYCE touch glasses and drink. COLE downs his drink. BRYCE takes a small drink and makes a face.)

COLE

Slug it, you wimp!

(BRYCE finishes his drink and they both put their glasses on the coffee table.)

COLE

Attaboy!

(walks downstage, looking at the television screen)

Oh baby! This is gonna be a great night. You know what I love?

BRYCE

(sits down on the couch)

The split. You told me. You love it when they all jump up in the air together and come down doing the split.

COLE

Yeah, that too. But this is the step I really love.

(COLE performs a dance consisting mostly of pelvic thrusts and simultaneous movements of his elbows forward and back.)

COLE

That is so hot, am I right? It's like they're fucking ya, you know what I mean?

BRYCE

I think so.

(moves his head left and right in order to see the television screen behind COLE)

COLE

(glances at the television screen)
 Sorry if I'm blocking your view of the beer commercials.
 (returns to the couch and sits down)
 You seem a little grumpy, Bryce. How's it going with you
 and Deanna.

BRYCE

There's been a little tension lately.

COLE

Tension in your dick?

BRYCE

Uhhh, more like tension in the air. I asked her what she
 wanted for Christmas, and you know what she said?

COLE

Maserati? That's on the top of my list.

BRYCE

No, she already has a car.

COLE

So do I, but I'd still...

BRYCE

"A ring would be nice." That's what she said. "A ring
 would be nice."

COLE

Oh I know a guy on forty-seventh street who'll cut you a
 real sweet deal. Don't buy it in New Jersey. This guy's
 prices are half what anybody else will charge you. An
 Israeli dude, with the Yamaha, the daddy burns, everything.
 Cash only. His diamonds are all smuggled and stolen, but
 they're top quality. And excellent workmanship too. You
 want his number?

BRYCE

Yeah, well, the thing is...

COLE

Not quite ready to take the plunge?

BRYCE

It's just that...

COLE

You got other fish to fry?

BRYCE

Well I didn't say that...

COLE

But you are frying some other fish, aren't you?

BRYCE

What?

(picks up his glass and examines it)

How'd I get so wasted?

(puts the glass down)

COLE

Well that's great. This is just what I told you you had to do. Diversify operations. So who is this mystery woman?

BRYCE

What woman?

COLE

This other fish you been fryin'. What's her name?

BRYCE

Her name? Linda. Her name is Linda.

COLE

Linda? Same as my cheerleader girl? Well that's quite a coinkydink. So what are you so down in the dumps for? This Linda giving you a hard time?

BRYCE

I can't really talk about it.

COLE

Oh I understand. This is one of them clandestine type relationships.

BRYCE

Zackly. It doesn't bear up under discussion.

COLE

She has other commitments, this Linda? A married woman, perhaps?

BRYCE

You can see. Upmost discretion.

COLE

Utmost discretion. But that's what your buddy Cole is all about. Strictly confidential. Remember when my pc at work got spammed with porn and it kept locking up and it was just one pop up after another and I had that big presentation but the keyboard wouldn't do shit and all I could do was turn it off but all my slides were in there?

BRYCE

You had some nasty stuff on there, Cole.

COLE

You think? I was shittin' bricks.

BRYCE

You were pretty hysterical.

COLE

I sure was. But you came in and cleaned it up for me and got my slides out. You sure saved my ass that time. And you were loyal to me. You never told a soul.

BRYCE

I hated that company.

COLE

Everybody hates that company. They pay good money, though.

BRYCE

Not for informational technology, they don't.

COLE

So you were smart to leave, go out on your own. Got yourself a nice little racket here. Get to work from home, plenty of leisure time to do with as you see fit.

(stares straight ahead and shifts his
jaw back and forth)

But what I'm gettin' at is that this conversation is strictly between us. Nothing you say will ever leave this room. So tell me. Why'd you do it, Bryce?

BRYCE

Do what?

COLE

Fuck this guy's wife.

BRYCE

She was neglected by him so she was sad and lonely and I just wanted to comfort her.

COLE

Now do you know this guy?

BRYCE

Who? Linda's husband? No.

COLE

Never met him?

BRYCE

Wouldn't know him from Adam.

COLE

His name's Adam? Linda and Adam, huh?

BRYCE

Is an expression. I wouldn't know him from Adam. Oh man!
(puts his hand to his head)
I don't feel so good.

COLE

So you're gonna have to break it off? Is that what you're so upset about?

BRYCE

I can't break it off. I'm just so in love with her, Cole.

COLE

But she wants to break it off?

BRYCE

I've said too much already.

COLE

Oh I understand. This is a real sensitive personal issue. Well you and Janice seem to have gotten quite close lately. Maybe you could talk to her about it.

BRYCE

(starts crying)

That's just the problem. She won't even talk to me about it.

COLE

Oh no! Did you two have a fight?

BRYCE

Well not really a fight. Just a disagreement.

COLE

Oh well let me give her a call and the three of us can work this thing out right here and now.

BRYCE

No, no, no. You can't call her now.

COLE

Why not? What is it, Bryce? You know she told me about it?

BRYCE

Told you about what?

COLE

About the affair.

BRYCE

What affair?

COLE

Between you and her.

BRYCE

With Janice?

COLE

She said she was here last Tuesday.

BRYCE

Tuesday?

COLE

And the Tuesday before that.

BRYCE

She told you...

COLE

Of course she told me. Honesty's the best policy, right?

BRYCE

Honesty's the best...Yeah. I'm so tired.

COLE

I'm not mad or anything. You've always been a good friend to me, Bryce. You and me, we been through a lot together - at work, here, out on the town. All those Tuesday morning train rides when we're both totally hung over from gettin' blotto the night before. So I don't want to make a big deal out of it. All I'm asking...I just want to know how it happened.

BRYCE

How what happened?

COLE

C'mon, Bryce. Try to keep up. You know. Your Tuesday afternoons with Janice.

BRYCE

I don't know how it happened. It just happened. I mean you were so busy with your work and your involvements with other women. And she was feeling as if her life was empty and unfulfilled, you know. So she wanted to break out of that box and try something daring and exciting. And I wanted to help her.

COLE

So you were just trying to help.

BRYCE

Yeah, I was just trying to help. I didn't know I was gonna fall in love with her.

BRYCE (cont'd)

(points to the television screen)

Hey the game's...going.

(BRYCE leans his head against COLE's shoulder with his eyes closed.)

COLE

But you never told Janice about those involvements, did you Bryce?

BRYCE

No I would never do something like that.

COLE

No. You would never betray me like that.

BRYCE

No. Course not, Cole.

COLE

No. Of course not. I mean, you'd fuck my wife, though.

BRYCE

She's so beautiful.

(COLE edges away from BRYCE on the couch and BRYCE continues to lean against his shoulder, at a more acute angle.)

COLE

She is. Janice is still a strikingly attractive woman.

BRYCE

I'm just so in love with her, Cole.

(crying)

I can't help myself. I mean, you know, I love you too. I don't know what to do. I'm crazy about her. All I do is think about her. And you've got the kids. It's such a mess. But I just can't live without her.

COLE

Shhh. It's OK. You won't have to.

BRYCE

No?

COLE

You go to sleep now.

(COLE stands up and BRYCE, who was leaning against his shoulder, falls awkwardly to a prone position, banging his head. COLE takes a pair of latex gloves out of his jacket pocket and puts them on.)

(End of Act I.)

ACT II**Scene 1**

(Music: "Every Breath You Take" performed by Sting. Lights are dim. VERA is sleeping on the living room couch, barely noticeable. A suitcase is lying on its side next to the couch. Stage left, in COLE's office, there is a desk and chair. COLE enters stage right. He crosses stealthily, trips over the suitcase as he passes the couch, and somersaults to the ground.)

COLE

(groans)

(VERA picks her head up and looks around.)

COLE

(low voice)

That fucking suitcase again!

(VERA lowers her head as COLE picks himself up, kicks the suitcase out of the way, and continues stage left through the door to his office. COLE crosses to the desk and opens a drawer as VERA gets up, puts the suitcase back where it was, tiptoes to the office door and peeks in. VERA is wearing a full length flannel nightgown and a night cap. COLE takes a vial in a small plastic bag from his jacket pocket and puts it in the desk drawer. He quickly closes the drawer, turns, and crosses to the office door. VERA quickly turns away from the office, leaps over the back of the couch, and again assumes a prone position. COLE stops abruptly, feeling in his jacket pocket. He returns to the desk, opens the desk drawer, removes two latex gloves from his pocket, and puts them in the drawer. VERA raises her head and peeks over the back of the couch.)

(COLE closes the drawer and crosses to the office door. VERA quickly lowers her head. COLE crosses stage right, trips over the suitcase as he passes the couch, and somersaults to the ground.)

COLE

(groans)

Son of a bitch!

(COLE picks himself up and exits upstage. VERA gets up, tiptoes to the office, crosses to the desk, and opens the desk drawer. She takes out the latex gloves, then takes out the plastic bag containing the vial and holds it up to examine it.)

(End of scene.)

Scene 2

(Music: "Santa Claus" performed by Sonny Boy Williamson. MICHAEL's bedroom has a desk, a bed, and a chest of drawers. COLE is rummaging through an open desk drawer. He closes the drawer, opens another one, looks inside, then closes that one. He turns to the bed and lies down to look underneath it.)

COLE

Ah huh!

(COLE reaches under the bed, grabs something, and starts pulling. He is holding one tube of a large hookah with four tubes that he gradually drags out from under the bed. COLE opens the bowl of the hookah, looks inside, and closes it.)

COLE

Where'd you put it you little motherfucker?

(rises to his knees and lifts the mattress to look underneath it)

Snake in the grass. The product of my own loins!

(stands up, opens the top drawer of the dresser, and starts rummaging around)

Just wait 'til I catch up with you, you little fuck. You are so dead.

MICHAEL

(enters stage right and crosses toward COLE, stopping several feet away)

What do you think you're doing?

COLE

You know what I'm doing.

(closes the top drawer of the dresser, opens the next one down, and starts rummaging through that one)

MICHAEL

What are you looking for?

COLE

You know exactly what I'm looking for. And if I don't get it back you're gonna be very sorry.

MICHAEL

(crossing to COLE)

Get out of my room.

COLE

(stops rummaging and turns to MICHAEL)

Oh was it *you* that made the last mortgage payment? This is *my* room, which you are permitted to occupy out of the generosity of my heart. Only I'm not feeling very generous at the moment so you can just get the hell out of my way.

MICHAEL

These are my personal belongings.

COLE

Your personal belongings, huh?

(turns and extends his hand toward the hookah on the floor)

That you've been using to conduct illegal activities under my roof?

(MICHAEL attempts to close the dresser drawer and COLE shoves him down onto the bed.)

MICHAEL

You're a bully. A bully and a sadist.

COLE

Michael, I'm not really looking for your good opinion at the moment. I'm looking for what you took, you thieving ingrate. So you can make this process a lot more pleasant if you just give it back to me or tell me where it is. Otherwise, I will continue to search for it until I find it.

(continues to rummage through the drawer)

MICHAEL

What is it that you think I stole, Dad? Drugs? Cocaine? Grandma told me you were into a lot of heavy drugs.

COLE

Well I guess she should know. But the available evidence (points to the hookah) suggests that she's got the wrong guy.

MICHAEL

She said that you take a lot of hard drugs. And she also said that you've been cheating on Mom, sneaking around behind her back. And that it's been going on for years.

COLE

Oh please! You know my mother-in-law hates my guts. That's just a lot of crap. The woman's a compulsive liar. If you believe one word that crazy old bitch has to say about me, you're even stupider than you look. Did you happen to notice any of my gin on her breath while she was fabricating those lies? I guess I'm gonna have to take that senile, snooping drunk and kick her ass out on the street.

MICHAEL

And I've talked to Bryce about it too.

COLE

(closes the dresser drawer, opens the one below it, and starts rummaging through it)

Oh really? And what did he have to say?

MICHAEL

He didn't deny it.

COLE

"He didn't deny it." Bryce would never confirm a single one of her slanderous remarks about me. That much I can guarantee.

(sinister laugh)

(MICHAEL looks at COLE with disgust.)

COLE

What are you looking at, you little putz?

MICHAEL

He said he had serious ethical problems with the disrespectful way you were behaving toward Mom and that he was going to speak to you about it.

COLE

"Serious ethical problems." Give me a fucking break. I could tell you a thing or two about your friend Bryce would make your hair stand on end.

MICHAEL

I hate you. I hate you for what you've done to my mother. She's a talented creative artist and you've turned her into your servant. You stifled her and repressed her and made her miserable, forced her into the role of a suburban soccer mom, turned her into someone she doesn't want to be, someone that she despises.

COLE

How dare you? I treat that woman like a goddess. She has never had to lift a finger to do a lick of work since the

COLE (cont'd)

day we got married. Do you have any idea how much money I am shelling out for her psychotherapy and her fitness regimen and her graphic design courses?

MICHAEL

You sucked all the joy out of her life and used me and Julia to keep her prisoner.

COLE

You know I have listened to quite enough of your holier than thou bullshit, you sleazy little pothead. I have fed you and clothed you and put a roof over your head for your entire life. And this is the gratitude I get? You turn around and steal from me and think you can get away with it? You conspire against me, denigrate me to my friend, and spread rumors about me taking drugs and cheating on my wife. You have the unmitigated gall to question my authority in the house that I own, that I'm paying for off the sweat of my back. You got a lot of fucking nerve.

MICHAEL

You're a self centered male chauvinist pig. You've done everything in your power to destroy Mom's spirit and turn her into a Stepford wife and now you want to turn Julia into a Stepford daughter and turn me into a Stepford son. You think you can use your money to run this house like some kind of fascist dictatorship where you tell everyone what to do but you get to do anything you please. Well you're not going to get away with it, not if I can help it.

COLE

Oh! Big shot, huh? You've turned into a real big talker. Yeah you just keep running your mouth, Mike. You go ahead and bitch out your lacrosse coach, the guy who made you a star. You go ahead and trash the school where you've been perfectly happy Mr. Ra Ra Ra "Go team!" for the last three years. You go ahead and criticize your sister and her friends when she's a straight A student and one of the most popular kids in her class. You go ahead and warn your mother that she's being turned into a drugged automaton just when she has finally succeeded in shaking off a serious mental illness. You go ahead and call your father a fascist and make all kinds of wild accusations against a man who's a pillar of his community, who has dedicated his life to building this home and safeguarding the welfare of this family. Yeah you're real good at seeing all the problems with your sister and your father and your mother and everyone around you. But what you're not very good at is taking a long hard look in the mirror and figuring out who's the biggest fuck up of them all.

MICHAEL

At least I don't...

COLE

So let me tell you what I see when I look at you. I see a guy who had it made in the shade. Write your own ticket. Any college in the country. Any college in the world for Chrissake! And all you had to do is not fuck it up. But nooo! You piss off your lacrosse coach and then just bail on the whole team. You bring home C's on your junior year report card. You decide not to run for class office. You refuse to go to the SAT practice course I paid for. Talk about crash and burn! You're just throwing it away with both hands. And what about Kate? You had the most gorgeous girl in the school. Everybody loves her. Everybody. But you had to blow that too, huh? What? Was she too conventional for you? Not artsy fartsy enough? Or is it that you didn't have enough time for her? Well of course not! You have much more important things to do. You're too busy smoking pot and going to see cult films with a bunch of alienated, pseudointellectual freaks.

(slams the dresser drawer closed,
kneels down, opens the bottom drawer,
and starts rummaging through that one)

I'm sorry. I just don't get it. And then you sit there and criticize the way I've handled the relationship with my wife. I'll tell you what. Maybe after you've created twenty years of harmonious conjugal bliss, maybe then I'll listen to what you have to say. But until that time I think you better shut your mouth, boy. I don't want to hear it.

MICHAEL

I'm seventeen years old and I have a right to my opinions and a right to express myself and there's nothing you can do about it.

COLE

That's true enough. You're seventeen years old. And if you've decided to ruin your life, there isn't a hell of a lot I can do to stop you. But it ain't gonna be in my house, buddy. We'll see if they can straighten you out down in Pennsylvania.

MICHAEL

There's no way I'm going to Sexton. Mom said she didn't want me to go there.

COLE

Oh yeah? Well I guess you got it all figured out, wise guy. So you just go ahead and go crying to your Mommy that Daddy's being mean to you and Daddy's some kind of drug fiend sex addict Nazi child molester jihadist or whatever other bullshit your Grandma has been planting in that little brain of yours. Yeah you go tell her how you don't want to be sent away. You're gonna find out in a hurry who

COLE (cont'd)

calls the shots around here. You're gonna find out what happens when you bite the hand that feeds you, dog.

(COLE slams the dresser drawer closed, stands up, and hovers over MICHAEL, who is still sitting back on the bed.)

MICHAEL

Are you done? Can you please get the hell out of my room now?

COLE

First you're gonna have to empty your pockets.

(End of scene.)

Scene 3

(Music: "Dear Doctor"
performed by The Rolling
Stones. In JANICE and
COLE's bedroom, JANICE is
lying in bed. She is
completely under the covers
from head to toe.)

COLE

(offstage)

Janice! You ready?

(enters stage right, wearing a dark
suit)

Janice! It's 'bout time to go, Hon.

(COLE looks around the room at eye
level until his gaze rests upon
JANICE's outline in the bed. He
crosses to the bed and stands over her,
then pulls the covers off her face.)

COLE

Well what the hell happened here?

JANICE

I can't. I just can't, Cole.

COLE

You have to, Hon. We have to be there.

JANICE

You don't understand. You've never had a day like this in your life. There are black clouds closing in on me on every side, and I can just feel myself slipping down and there's nothing I can do about it.

COLE

Janice, the kids are all dressed up in their Sunday best. When you see them you're gonna be so proud of them. You're not gonna let them down, are you? You can't let them see you like this. Not after you've come so far.

JANICE

That's why I need to stay right here in this bed.

COLE

Come on, Honey. You can't be thinking of yourself at a time like this. You have to be there by my side. After all, this is my best friend that I've lost. And I'm sure you'll want to be there to give Deanna your support in her time of need.

JANICE

Deanna's gonna be there?

COLE

Of course Deanna's gonna be there! Everyone we know is gonna be there. And they're expecting you to be there. What are they gonna think if you pull a no show?

JANICE

I don't care what they think.

COLE

No, of course not. I don't either. Who cares what they think? I don't give a rat's butt what they think. But here's the thing.

JANICE

What?

COLE

OK here's my point. The thing is...The thing is that Bryce would want you to be there. That's the reason you have to go. We have to do it for his sake. Isn't that right, Hon?

JANICE

Cole it's just that...You see, the problem is...What I mean is...

COLE

What, Honey?

JANICE

I don't know. I can't help thinking that there was something we could have done to prevent it. I feel as if it was my fault.

COLE

That's ridiculous, Hon. You have to accept that there are some things that are just in God's hands. Think of all the drugs they found in that autopsy.

JANICE

But that's what I'm saying. Just the fact that he was taking all those drugs and that he could do that to himself means that he must have been in terrible emotional pain. Why couldn't we see that and do something to prevent it?

COLE

Well I'd have to say he was definitely in a lousy mood while we were watching the game. Like I told the cops, no fun to be around at all. But you see, Honey, probably the reason he was hooked on all them hard drugs is that he was psychologically depressed, which is why he done himself in in the first place. It makes me glad that you were able to

COLE (cont'd)

find Dr. Marshall and your generic fluoxetine before a similar tragedy befell itself upon our family.

JANICE

But he'll be lying there. Accusing us.

COLE

Accusing us of what? We didn't do nothin'!

JANICE

I can't look at him. I can't look at him, Cole. Don't make me look at him.

COLE

You don't have to, Hon. You don't have to go up to the casket. We'll get you a seat in the back. And it's easy. You'll see. You can cry as much as you want and then you just wipe your eyes and sniffle and then what you say to everyone, what you say is "He's in a better place now." That's all there is to it. You can do this, Hon. I know it.

JANICE

I can't. I just keep...Maybe I should call Dr. Marshall.

COLE

Come on, Janice. You were fine at your daddy's funeral. Remember what we said then? It's just the cycle of life.

JANICE

But he was old. And Bryce was so young.

COLE

Yes but his time had come. The Lord calls us when he sees fit.

JANICE

That's a load of bull.

COLE

Well I know that and you know that, but it's still comforting to say, don't you think? Plenty of people die young. What about your hang gliding instructor? He wasn't even thirty when he crashed.

JANICE

Poor Gerald.

COLE

And that couple you went helicopter snowboarding with who got caught in that avalanche down in Chile?

JANICE

You're not making me feel any better!
 (pulls covers over her head)

COLE

Well aren't you glad you didn't go with them? You see, my point is that stuff happens, Hon. It's all a part of life. But you can't just roll up in a cocoon and give up. Think of your mom's maid. Now if Consuela, who basically screwed her boss to death, can turn around and show up at his funeral with her husband and four kids, with the guy's wife on the other side of the casket staring her down, then what's your excuse? Not to mention that she lost her job and her old man gave her a black eye. Remember when the police detective told your ma they had translated her statement and Consuela didn't realize he was dead for twenty minutes? Oh my good Lord!

(laughs)

And then she tried to get him dressed but he rolled onto the floor!

(laughs)

Now I ask you. Wouldn't you just love to be a fly on that wall?

(COLE pulls the covers back down from over JANICE's face.)

COLE

You gotta admit, Horace's funeral was a real laugh if ever there was one. All them Nelson Rockefeller jokes. He came. And he went.

(laughs)

And Vera standing there stone faced, trying to give Consuela the evil eye but not knowing which eye to look at, and cursing a blue streak about canceling the trip to Bali. Tell me that whole scene didn't strike your funny bone.

JANICE

It was humiliating! It was shameful and humiliating for everyone involved.

COLE

Well yeah. But Hon it's just a matter of how you look at things. OK, think of it this way. It's one more Christmas present that you won't have to buy.

JANICE

I already got him one.
 (starts crying)

COLE

(looks at his watch)

All right, Janice. I've had enough of this. You are a strong woman. Remember after Julia was born you kinda had

COLE (cont'd)

a nervous breakdown and fell into a deep postpartum depression? But you pulled yourself out of it, didn't you Hon? And even though you felt like dog meat on the inside, you maintained a positive attitude and you cooked and you cleaned and you shopped and attended them PTA meetings and all kinds of social events and school functions. Which is to say that you continued to fulfill your wifely duties and - irregardless of your temporary emotional discomfort - you always had a big smile for me and the kids. Well that's what I need from you today, Hon. And I know you can do it, and you know you can do it. It's just a matter of sheer force of will. That's all it is. All right, so now on three, we're gonna get you sittin' up. Ready?

(COLE grasps each of JANICE's hands in his.)

COLE

One. Two. Three. Go!

(COLE pulls JANICE upright to a sitting position and the covers fall to her waist. She is wearing a black dress.)

COLE

There we go! All right, now let's get a look at that beautiful smile.

(JANICE attempts a broken, toothless grimace.)

COLE

Yeah, that's my girl! That's what I'm talking about. Put on that game face.

(End of scene.)

Scene 4

(Music: "Crumblin' Down," final chorus, performed by John Mellencamp. The kitchen has a table, a chair, and a cabinet. JULIA's bedroom, stage left, is unlit. It has a bed, a desk, and a chair. MICHAEL is lying on the bed. JULIA enters stage right wearing a backpack and speaking on her cell phone via the microphone on the phone's hands free headset. She takes a bowl and spoon from the kitchen cabinet and places them on the kitchen table.)

JULIA

He said "This is what I get for having a crush on a sophomore."

(takes off her backpack and places it on the kitchen chair)

Yeah I know what he was doing. I said "No," so that makes me immature. Still, I feel bad that he said it.

(takes a can of whipped cream from the cabinet)

No I'm not!

(shakes the can of whipped cream; whispers)

With Scott.

(sprays a huge mountain of whipped cream into the bowl; raises voice)

At his parents' house. Oh my God we were so nervous. Everything went wrong. His little brother walked in on us!

(shakes the can and sprays more whipped cream on top of the mountain)

Well it still counts.

(takes a bottle of chocolate syrup from the cabinet)

It doesn't matter how many seconds. Everything was in the right place!

(shakes the bottle of chocolate syrup)

No the earth definitely did not move. I didn't really feel anything. I was too distracted by everything that was going on.

(squirts a generous coating of chocolate syrup over the mountain of whipped cream)

I am not! And it's not as if you're so experienced.

(JULIA picks up the spoon. During the pauses on her side of the conversation, she eats small spoons of whipped cream.)

JULIA

But y'know Scott was so sweet to me, and he was so in love with me, and Tommy...

(pause)

Because he's immature and he's a real nerd and a total brown nose kiss ass grade grubber and he does whatever his parents tell him to do. I mean I don't really want to go out with a sophomore. It's like Tommy says, "He's all right, but he can't hang." You know he let Tommy cheat off him on the algebra final?

(pause)

Yeah but Tommy is just so aggro.

(pause)

It was when he gave me a ride home from Vicki's party and...

(pause)

Yeah, I know, right? Used to be we couldn't go anywhere unless we had a parent to take us there and back. Unless you're like Beth and you want to ride your bike for miles and miles all winter long through the ice and snow. Although once Michael got his license...

(pause)

Sexton? He totally hates it. He says it's like Nazi Germany. They made him cut his hair.

(pause)

Like three weeks now. I got a text from him yesterday. He says he can't stand it and he wants to run away.

(pause)

Yeah Kate's really upset. She talks to him like three times a day and then she comes and asks me about him. So anyway we were parked...

(pause)

On Crestmont.

(pause)

I didn't notice anyone around us. I mean it was really dark, though. At first we were just messing around and taking some selfies. But then he got really grabby.

(pause)

I just told him I didn't want to.

(pause)

He kind of apologized. He said "It's just that I'm not used to being rejected."

(pause)

No, he's still interested. He was like begging me to send him some more pictures.

(pause)

Well I sent them on Snapchat so he couldn't keep them but then I got a screenshot notification so I told him I wasn't going to send him any more.

JULIA (cont'd)

(stops eating; pause)

Partly.

(pause)

Just the top.

(pause)

He promised he wouldn't.

(pause)

I haven't seen any pictures of Megan.

(pause)

Well they're not on my phone, so they're not on everyone's.

(pause)

No I don't want to see them.

(pause)

Well then Megan is an idiot and Kevin Burke is a total scuzball. I don't think Tommy would do that. He is kinda weird, though. He keeps asking me for a pair of panties.

(pause)

That's what I said, I said I'll buy one for you. But what he wants is *my* panties, *my used* panties.

(pause)

Well...if I knew he was going to invite me. But not in his car. Do you think he might take Alicia? She would kill to go with him.

(resumes eating)

Wait. Why would you tell Donnie that Alicia is hoping for a promvite from him? I don't think she is.

(pause)

Oh you're right! She would accept 'cause she knows Tommy's got his eye on me and she wouldn't take the chance. But otherwise she'll just wait and see if Tommy's gonna invite her. Stacy you're a genius!

(pause)

If it works? Anything you want.

(pause)

Sure. I'll go with you. We'll have a spa day.

(pause)

All right. Tell me what Donnie says.

(JULIA puts the spoon in the bowl and presses a button on her cell phone. She crosses stage left and removes the earphones of her headset as she enters her bedroom, which is unlit. Lights up stage left, in the bedroom. MICHAEL, who is lying on her bed, swings his feet to the floor and sits up as she enters. He has a crew cut. The bed is so oriented that MICHAEL is facing stage right. JULIA is downstage from MICHAEL, so that neither she nor the audience can see the right side of his face.)

JULIA

(screams)

What are you doing here?

MICHAEL

Great to see you too, Jules. I came in here 'cause there's all this stuff all over the place in my room.

JULIA

Oh yeah. Grandma has pretty much moved in there. But I mean what are you doing back in New Jersey?
(puts her cell phone and headset on the desk and sits on the desk chair adjacent to the bed)

MICHAEL

It's a long story, but the bottom line is I hate that place and so I took off.

JULIA

So you're coming back to Glenfield?

MICHAEL

Actually, my current plan is to move to California.

JULIA

You're running away to California? Mom and Dad are gonna freak. Won't they try and stop you?

MICHAEL

What are they gonna do? Have me arrested?

JULIA

But where are you gonna stay? How are you gonna live?

MICHAEL

I have a little money saved up. And there's a place I can stay in San Francisco, at least for a while. So what's going on around here? You keeping an eye on Kate? How's she doing?

JULIA

She's a mess. She keeps asking me about you even though she talks to you all the time. It's a little weird. I get the feeling she just wants to talk to me 'cause it makes her feel closer to you. You been to see her yet?

MICHAEL

I was gonna wait a little. I'm not sure I want her to see me like this.

JULIA

(laughs)

It'll take months for that hair to grow out. She won't care.

MICHAEL

No, I mean...Hey. Wanna smoke a joint?

JULIA

Sure, I guess. Mom could be home any second.

(MICHAEL removes a metal case from his pocket, opens it, and takes out a hand rolled cigarette and matches.)

MICHAEL

Just a couple of hits. So how's my friend Beth doing?
(puts the joint in his mouth, lights it, and takes a drag)

JULIA

She's the same. I haven't talked to her that much. We only have one class together this semester.

(MICHAEL passes the joint to JULIA and she takes a drag.)

MICHAEL

(exhales)

I remember on your fifteenth birthday, when Mom and Dad were getting you a new bike. Beth found out about it and she snuck over here with two big bags full of accessories and made me help her install everything so it would all be ready to go the minute you got your gift. I couldn't believe it. She just kept pulling out one after another: a basket and a light and a kickstand and a bell and a mirror and reflectors and a big unbreakable lock and chain with a lifetime guarantee. Even a personalized license plate. She was so excited about it.

(JULIA exhales and passes the joint back to MICHAEL.)

JULIA

I haven't ridden that bike in like a year.

MICHAEL

And how's Scott doing? He still trying to get back together? Or did he finally give up?

(MICHAEL takes a drag and passes the joint back to JULIA.)

JULIA

Poor Scott. I'm trying to find him a new girlfriend.

MICHAEL

(exhales)

Poor Scott is right. I remember when he took you out on your first real date. He got here early and you made him wait in the living room for like forty minutes.

JULIA

I was getting dressed!

MICHAEL

But Mom and Dad were just torturing the poor guy. He was wearing this brand new leather jacket but it was pretty warm in the house and he was sittin' on the couch and sweating bullets. So Mom made him take off the jacket and it still had the store tags on it so Mom cut 'em off. And Dad says "What'd you do that for? He probably wanted to return it after the date."

JULIA

He still wears that jacket. He thinks it makes him look like Marlon Brando in *The Wild One*.

(JULIA takes a drag on the joint and passes it back to MICHAEL.)

MICHAEL

And he was holding this beautiful bouquet of a dozen pink long stem roses, but he was throttling the poor flowers, just squeezing them to death. He was holding them so tight that he cut his finger on one of the thorns. So Mom tried to get the roses out of his hand so she could bandage his finger and put them in some water. But Scott absolutely refused to let go of those flowers. There was one and only one person who was going to get that bouquet out of his hand. And meanwhile Dad's asking him what his intentions are, and Scott tells him that his intention is to go see a movie. Poor Scott. He's a smart guy, though.

(MICHAEL takes a drag on the joint and again offers it to JULIA, but she waves him off.)

JULIA

Yeah, book smart anyway. Are you trying to make me feel guilty? 'Cause if you are, you're doing a really good job.

MICHAEL

(exhales and extinguishes the cigarette in the metal case)

I'm just saying that Scott and Beth are friends you can count on, who have your best interests at heart. Y'know

MICHAEL (cont'd)

it's a real big world out there, and most of the people in it don't give a shit about you. It's full of people who are just looking to use and abuse you. So if someone really cares about you, it's not something to take lightly.

JULIA

But you broke up with Kate. She really cares about you.

MICHAEL

I had to break up with her. For her own sake.

(closes the metal case and puts it back
in his pocket)

So who are you hanging out with lately, if you don't see Beth and Scott? Who was that on the phone?

JULIA

Stacy.

MICHAEL

Stacy Gildebrand? What does she have to talk about besides her latest manicure?

JULIA

We were talking about the prom.

MICHAEL

The prom, huh? Didn't I hear about some New Year's resolution where you were gonna spend less time socializing and more time cracking the books?

JULIA

Oh. Yeah, that was kinda for PR purposes. That's when Daddy was saying if I still have straight A's when I get my license he might buy me a new car.

MICHAEL

A new car, huh? You mean you won't have to beg him to let you borrow that old Toyota Sienna, like me? Well that would keep you happy.

JULIA

It sure would!

(turns and reaches for her cell phone)

You wanna see...

MICHAEL

Wait a minute. Is this the senior prom we're talking about? Are you going? You're just a tenth grader. Quite a coup! Who are you going with?

JULIA

I think Tommy is probably going to ask me.

MICHAEL

Tommy Vreeland, "the most illest white boy at Glenfield High," at least according to Tommy Vreeland?

JULIA

(shrugs)

MICHAEL

Y'know they got a contest going, Tommy and Kevin Burke.

JULIA

What kind of contest?

MICHAEL

I think Jimmy Mack is doing it too; Jim MacFarland, Corey's brother. But he's way behind. And some other guys.

JULIA

What kind of contest?

MICHAEL

You know. How many girls they can screw. They have a private Facebook page where they send in the proof or the testimony of witnesses or pictures or whatever. They have official judges and everything.

JULIA

Oh yeah. I...I know. I heard about that. Why do you ask?

MICHAEL

I was just wondering if you knew.

JULIA

Oh yeah. I heard about that.

(stands up)

Could you move over, Michael? I think I need to lie down for a minute. I don't feel so good.

MICHAEL

(lies back down on the bed, on his right side, and shifts stage left, to the far side of the bed)

Oh I should have warned you. This pot is really strong.

JULIA

(lies down on the edge of the bed with her back to MICHAEL)

I don't think it's the pot. It's just my stomach. I think I ate too much whipped cream.

(shifts position)

Could you hold me, Michael?

(MICHAEL puts his arms around JULIA from behind.)

MICHAEL

Sure, Jules. Don't worry. Miggy's here.

JULIA

(starts crying)

MICHAEL

What's the matter?

(MICHAEL raises his head and looks over JULIA's shoulder.)

MICHAEL

Talk to me, Jules.

JULIA

I feel like I'm trying to swim across a river, and I'm swimming as hard as I can, but the current is really strong, and I just keep swimming so I don't drown. But I feel like, even if I make it to the other side, I don't know where I'll be, 'cause that current just keeps dragging me downstream.

MICHAEL

You'll make it, Jules. Just don't go over the falls.

JULIA

I need a boat.

MICHAEL

How about an airlift? I'll send in a chopper.

JULIA

But you're abandoning us.

MICHAEL

I have to go, Jules. I don't belong here.

(JANICE enters stage right carrying a gym bag)

JULIA

But I'm ruined, Michael. I'm going to be a total laughingstock!

(JANICE puts her bag on the kitchen table and looks at the bowl of whipped cream and JULIA's backpack.)

JANICE

Julia?

(enters JULIA's room, gasps, and backs out of JULIA's room; faces downstage)

JANICE (cont'd)

Julia! Aren't you supposed to be at your debating society meeting?

JULIA

It ended early, Ma.

JANICE

Julia I'm now realizing that this is a conversation that we should have had earlier on, but when you start
(clears her throat)
seeing someone seriously there are a number of important issues that you and I need to discuss.

JULIA

(gets out of bed and starts waving her hands through the air as if to clear the room of smoke)
But I'm not seeing anyone seriously, Mom.

JANICE

Well pardon me, Julia, but who is that person lying in your bed?

JULIA

It's Michael, Ma.

JANICE

Michael who?

MICHAEL

You don't remember your own son?
(swings his feet out of the bed and stands up at the side of the bed)

JANICE

My own...
(enters JULIA's room)
Michael! What are you doing here?

(JANICE approaches MICHAEL and hugs him. As they hug, MICHAEL turns to his left so that he is facing downstage.)

MICHAEL

There was all this stuff all over the place...

JANICE

What happened to your hair?

(JANICE backs away from MICHAEL and examines his face. A large black eye is now visible on the right side of his face.)

JANICE

I barely recognized...
(gasps)
What happened to your eye?

MICHAEL

I got beat up, Ma.

JANICE

Who beat you up?

MICHAEL

Some of the kids at school.

JANICE

Why would they do such a thing?

MICHAEL

I got beat up because I got caught with another student.

JANICE

Caught with another student! Doing what?

MICHAEL

I'm gay, Ma.

JANICE

(gasps)
That's awful!

MICHAEL

(looks down and shakes his head slowly)
That's what I was afraid you were going to say. I guess I was hoping...

JANICE

No, I mean that's awful that you got beat up for being gay. But it's good that you came back home. I'm sure you'll find some nice boys here.

JULIA

I doubt it.

JANICE

Julia, have you been burning that incense again?

JULIA

Yeah, it smells good, don't you think, Ma?

JANICE

Smells a little like skunk to me. But if that's what's in these days...

(VERA enters stage right with a handbag over her shoulder, crosses to the kitchen table, and eats a scoop of JULIA's leftover whipped cream.)

JULIA

How was your synchronized swim class, Mom?

JANICE

It was wonderful. The team's making excellent progress. Although I did swallow a lot of water today.

VERA

(enters JULIA's room sniffing the air)
I guess this is where the action is, huh?

MICHAEL

Hi, Grandma.

VERA

Michael, it's great to see you back. Give Grandma some sugar.

(VERA hugs MICHAEL and whispers into his ear.)

VERA

You're gonna hook me up with some of that shit. Right, Michael? Smells killer.

(steps back and looks at MICHAEL's face; gasps; raises her voice)
What happened to your eye?

JANICE

Michael is gay, Mums.

VERA

And that's like a side effect? The hair too?

MICHAEL

I hope you're not disappointed in me, Grandma. I know it comes as a big shock.

VERA

I'm not surprised at all. Of course you're gay. Anyone with a father like yours would be ashamed to be a heterosexual male. Your grandfather was gay, too, you know.

JANICE

Cole's father had six kids!

VERA

Not Cole's father. Your father.

JANICE

Papa was the straightest man who ever lived!

VERA

Think about it, Janice. The man was a workaholic, a religious fanatic, and a total control freak. It was all about repression. Every minute he had to push down his illicit urges and redirect them into socially acceptable activities. That's why he never touched a drop of alcohol, for fear it might unleash the demons.

JANICE

I don't believe it.

VERA

The poor man spent his whole life running away from who he was. You're the same way, Janice. It's like you and your exercise classes. Trying to fill up a yawning chasm of unfulfilled desire. And boy was he lousy between the sheets! So uptight! Like squeezing water from a stone. It's a miracle you were ever conceived. We really know how to pick 'em, now don't we? I guess the basic problem is these husbands never come as advertised.

JANICE

What's that supposed to mean?

JULIA

I know exactly what she means. I'm never getting married. I hate all men.

JANICE

Don't say that, Julia. Your friend Scott is such a nice boy.

JULIA

Scott is a total drip. He really gets on my nerves.

JANICE

Well nobody's perfect, dear. And the point is that, despite his imperfections, Grandma stood by my father through thick and thin. You make your bed and you lie in it. That's what being an adult is all about.

VERA

Yeah I suppose you could look at it that way. But then again, Janice, you're not the only one with a fitness program. Grandma had a fitness program of her own back in the day.

JULIA

What were your sports, Grandma?

(COLE enters stage right, carrying his shoulder bag. He puts his shoulder bag on the kitchen table and uses his finger to scoop up several mouthfuls of the whipped cream. Then he picks up the bowl and laps up the whipped cream with his tongue, leaving a residue of whipped cream on his nose.)

VERA

Oh I had me some dedicated, highly skilled personal trainers, the kind with them washboard abs and tight little buns. Those boys used to give me a long, hard full body workout 'til I had to beg 'em to stop, if you catch my drift.

(winks at JULIA)

(COLE crosses to the entrance to JULIA's room.)

VERA

Hey Cole! Speak of the devil. What's that white stuff hanging off your nose?

(COLE wipes his finger across the whipped cream on his nose, looks at his finger, and puts it in his mouth.)

JULIA

Ooh! Gross!

COLE

It's just whipped cream. Well what do we have here, a family powwow? Shouldn't we be mobilizing some of these resources toward the preparation of dinner? Matter of fact, I think I smell something burning.

(COLE kisses JANICE on the top of her head.)

COLE

(to JANICE)

How was your Tae Kwon Do today, dear?

(to MICHAEL)

And what are you doing here? You out on winter break already? Hey that new hairdo looks real sharp. And you got yourself a nice shiner.

(to JANICE)

I told you Sexton would toughen him up.

JANICE

Cole, we need to get him out of that school. He got beat up there.

COLE

What is this? You're not going AWOL, are you?

MICHAEL

I don't belong at Sexton, Dad. I'm gay. I'm dropping out of school and moving to San Francisco.

JANICE

San Francisco! But...

COLE

(simultaneously)

Of course you belong at Sexton. It's the answer...What'd you say? You're gay! Well you had me fooled. My son. Queer. A homosexual. Although actually, looking back, it makes a whole lot of sense. In fact, that explains quite a bit.

JANICE

Cole, aren't you going to stop him from running away?

COLE

My son, a homosexual. Seventeen years trying my best to bring up my sole male heir and here he turns into a limp wristed fudge packing pansy ass high school dropout! Well at least we raised one of them right.

JULIA

If Michael gets to drop out, I want to drop out too.

COLE

Don't be ridiculous, Julia. You're doing fantastic in school. You've got straight A's, a great group of friends, and lots of terrific extracurricular activities. And remember what I told you: you keep it up and, by the time you're a senior, you'll be cruising to school in your shiny new convertible with the top down. Just picture it: waving to them losers on the school bus as you go by, your hair blowing in the wind; and then you pull into the school parking lot, with all the boys whistling at you, everyone taking photos and videos of you in your new car. How great would that be? What more could you want?

JULIA

I don't want anyone taking photos and videos of me. I hate that school and everybody in it. The guys there are a bunch of fucking pigs. I'm never going back there.

(starts crying)

JANICE

Julia, what kind of language is that to use?

COLE

(to MICHAEL)

COLE (cont'd)

Do you see what a bad influence you've become?

(to JANICE)

I tell you, Janice, he has poisoned his own life and now he's trying to poison ours as well. You know what?

(to MICHAEL)

Now that I think about it, shipping your homo ass out to San Francisco sounds like an excellent idea. Saves us the tuition. Saves us a lot of shame and embarrassment. I think there's even a bottle of Wesson oil in the kitchen we could give you as a going away present. There isn't enough room around here anyway.

JANICE

But Cole...

VERA

What a complete jerk you are! What kind of father...?

COLE

And speaking of how crowded this place is, Vera, I think I'm going to have to ask you to start packing up your suitcase as well. You've overstayed your welcome by a good six weeks, Grandma. I'm paying the mortgage on this house and I want you out.

VERA

Don't worry, Cole. Even if I stay here, I won't be getting in your way.

COLE

Oh yeah? How's that?

VERA

Because you're gonna be in a federal penitentiary.

COLE

What are you talking about?

(From her handbag, VERA takes out a plastic bag containing a vial with white powder in it, which she dangles in front of COLE's face.)

VERA

Recognize this? It's the vial you put in your desk on the night of December seventeenth, the night your friend Bryce died.

(takes a sheet of paper from her handbag)

And here are the results from the lab tests: gamma hydroxybutyrate, GHB. It's a date rape drug, a Mickey Finn. The same drug they found in Bryce's system.

COLE

Let me see that.

(COLE grabs the plastic bag and sheet of paper out of VERA's hands and exits stage right.)

VERA

Look at him scurrying off like a big fat rat.

MICHAEL

But Grandma, he just took the evidence and now he's gonna destroy it.

VERA

What do you think I am, stupid? That was just a vial with some baking soda in it. The real vial with his fingerprints all over it is safe and sound. I just wanted your mother to see who her husband really is.

JANICE

Are you trying to say that Cole...?

VERA

I'm sorry, Janice, but you married an asshole and he's made your life miserable for the last eighteen years. And now he's gone and killed his best friend. So let's call the cops and turn him in.

JANICE

I suppose that's the only right thing to do. But I don't want Cole to go to prison. He's my husband and the father of my children. And if Cole's in jail, what are we going to live off? We'll lose the house.

VERA

That's all right. You can come and live with me in North Carolina. Everything is very inexpensive down there.

JULIA

Do they still have the Ku Klux Klan down there?

VERA

Of course not.

JULIA

But what about that white supremacist who killed everyone in the church?

VERA

That was *South* Carolina. And there are crazy people everywhere. You have to be crazy just to live in New Jersey.

MICHAEL

That's why I'm going to California.

VERA

You don't think there are crazy people in California?
That's where they all come from.

MICHAEL

But isn't North Carolina the state that passed all those
anti-gay laws?

VERA

The bathroom bill? They repealed that...mostly. And
besides, were you planning to start wearing a dress and
using the women's bathroom, Michael?

MICHAEL

(long pause; shrugs)

I might.

VERA

So what do you say, Janice? I've got plenty of room. How
about we sick the cops on him?

JANICE

But Mums, if Cole gets sent up the river, who's going to
pay for the kids to go to college?

MICHAEL

But I'm not going to college. I'm not even going to finish
high school.

JANICE

Oh yes you are! You need to get yourself a good education.
But college costs a lot of money, a lot more than Cole
would get paid for making license plates or working on the
chain gang.

(to VERA)

So it's simply not a viable option, Mums. Because if Cole
gets thrown in the slammer, how is he going to support us
in the style to which we have become accustomed?

MICHAEL

Doesn't he have plenty of savings, plus a whole portfolio
of stocks in his brokerage account?

VERA

He'll blow it all paying for a defense attorney.

JANICE

And think of the disgrace the scandal would bring to the
whole family.

JULIA

Doesn't matter to me. My reputation is already shot.

JANICE

I suppose I could try to get a graphic designer job.

VERA

You can always dream, my dear. Stranger things have happened.

JULIA

We're gonna be paupers!

COLE

(enters stage right and crosses to JULIA's room, wiping the palms of his hands against each other)

Well OK then. Two less mouths to feed, Janice. Life will finally be back to normal around here.

(JANICE, VERA, MICHAEL, and JULIA turn toward COLE and cross their arms over their chests.)

COLE

What? What are you looking at me for? You don't believe the old bat, do you?

JANICE

I'm afraid I'm going to have to divorce you, Cole. I can't very well live with a murderer. Think what a bad influence *that* would be upon the children.

COLE

But Janice! Look, I'm not saying I did anything, but if I did it was completely your fault. How can you blame me for what happened when you were the one who was screwing around behind my back?

MICHAEL

You were having an affair with Bryce?

JANICE

Only twice. And I did end it.

(to COLE)

For the sake of our family, Cole. But you see, Dr. Marshall said that I needed to be more adventurous.

COLE

Your skydiving classes weren't adventurous enough for you?

JANICE

I think Dr. Marshall meant emotionally and sexually adventurous, which is not something you get from plummeting

JANICE (cont'd)

toward the earth's surface at a rate of acceleration of thirty-two feet per second per second. I mean, jumping out of an airplane certainly gets the adrenaline pumping, but it doesn't make you feel naughty. And I liked feeling naughty. It was really fun.

VERA

That's my girl! I knew there was some spirit left in you.

COLE

But what about your sacred vow of marital fidelity?

VERA

Marital fidelity! Hey how's Adele doing, Cole? You seen Marguerita lately?

MICHAEL

Yeah, what about those phone calls to prostitutes you made on your cell?

COLE

Prostitutes? That's a lot of bologna.

MICHAEL

No it isn't. Grandma showed me all the pictures and messages on your phone. Why don't we take a look right now?

(MICHAEL steps toward COLE and extends his arm. COLE slaps MICHAEL's hand away with the back of his own hand.)

COLE

Get the hell away from me! I thought you were leaving, you little fairy.

(to JANICE)

Honey, my point is that here you are criticizing me for trying to come up with a solution to a problem when you should be apologizing to me for the act of unfaithfulness that created the problem in the first place.

JANICE

Well I do apologize but I was extremely sexually dissatisfied, dear, and Dr. Marshall said...

COLE

But you weren't sexually dissatisfied until you started taking your depression pills. It was just a side effect of that Prozac.

JANICE

Not Prozac. Generic fluoxetine, dear. And it wasn't until my depression began to lift that I even realized how

JANICE (cont'd)

dissatisfied I was. But I was faking it for years before I started taking the medication.

COLE

But why would you...?

JANICE

To support your ego, dear. You know you think you're such a stud. But, fluoxetine or no fluoxetine, I don't think there are many women who can achieve orgasm when a semi-erect penis is inserted into their vagina for three minutes.

JULIA

Ma!

JANICE

I'm sorry, Julia, but I think you've reached a stage where you need to understand about these things.

(to JULIA, MICHAEL, and VERA)

And with zero foreplay, I might add.

VERA

Especially if you're hung like a squirrel.

COLE

What do you know about it?

VERA

I know plenty, you pindick.

(to JANICE)

I told you not to marry this sleazy bullshit artist.

JANICE

(to COLE)

And the whole time I'm just thinking about how you're going to fall asleep on top of me when you're done, worrying that I'm going to be crushed or suffocated. After all, you are not exactly slender, Cole. So I can assure you it is not a very pleasurable experience.

COLE

All right, cut. I have heard quite enough. Honey, you can discuss your frigidity issues with your therapist, not in the middle of a family gathering at which your mother and children are present. Let's get to the bottom line here. Janice, the sad truth is that Bryce took those drugs and Bryce did himself in because you told him that you weren't going to see him any more. And I think what you need to remember is that the reason you ditched him in the first place was to keep your family together. So unless you want to feel as if Bryce hanged himself to death in vain...

VERA

(removes a pair of latex gloves from her handbag)

Oh Cole! Aren't these the gloves you used to kill Bryce?

COLE

Give me those, you old hag!

(COLE grabs the gloves out of VERA's hand.)

COLE

These need to be properly disposed of.
(exits stage right)

VERA

What a dork.

JANICE

Michael, if we were to move with you to California, would you be willing to live at home and go back to high school?

MICHAEL

I guess so.

JULIA

We're moving to San Francisco? Should I start packing?

VERA

Janice, do you have any idea what the real estate market is like in San Francisco? North Carolina is so much more livable. And what about earthquakes? And the public schools out there really suck. You lose about five IQ points per year.

JANICE

(smiling)

Mums, we're not...going...to fucking...North...Carolina. OK?

VERA

OK, fine, if that's the way you feel about it. But how are we going to find any heterosexual men out there? Have you thought about that?

JANICE

I think for the time being we might be a lot better off without any heterosexual men. Look what those brutes have done to his face.

(to MICHAEL)

Come on, Michael, let's find something to put on that eye.

(JANICE and MICHAEL enter the kitchen and exit upstage. VERA and JULIA follow them into the kitchen.)

JULIA

I think the whole world might be a lot better off without any straight men.

VERA

Don't say that, Julia. You'll find that they can come in very handy.

JULIA

Not for me. I'm a lesbian now.

VERA

Julia, listen to your grandmother. You're gonna be all right. Maybe you just have to lower your expectations a little. Because if it's a human being you're looking for, they all come with flaws. That's just our nature.

JULIA

But I have lowered my expectations, at least what I expected of myself, and I don't want to do that any more.

(VERA and JULIA start to walk upstage.)

VERA

Well that's OK too. It just makes the road a lot tougher.

JULIA

But Grandma, I've made such a fool of myself. I'm ashamed to tell you how stupid I've been.

(VERA and JULIA stop walking as VERA turns back to face JULIA.)

VERA

Of course you did something stupid, Julia. You're sixteen years old. But that's fine. Because you have to use your mistakes and learn from them. That's what growing up is all about. Your mother and I, when we were your age, we just followed the rules. You know where that gets you? Into a rut that you don't know how to get out of. But you can't just roll up and die. You have to be more resilient than that. Everyone has to face some adversity in this life. Look at your mother now. She just realized that her whole marriage has been a complete farce, the consequence of a disastrous error of judgment on her part. But she's ready to pick herself up and strike out on her own. Look at your father. He just committed the most heinous crime known to mortal man. Seems to be taking it right in stride. Look at your brother. He just found out that he's despised by his own father; for the rest of his life, he's

VERA (cont'd)

going to feel like an outcast among certain sectors of our society. But he's courageous enough to try someplace new, a place where maybe he'll feel like he belongs. And look at me. I was just informed that my daughter and grandkids, who are everything in the world to me, are about to move three thousand miles away. OK. I'm gonna go sell my house and move out there with you. Now does that help to give you at least a little bit of perspective on your problems?

JULIA

I guess so. But it's just that this boy has some rather compromising pictures of me.

VERA

Oh really? Well what did I just say? You're only sixteen years old, Julia. And I can assure you the district attorneys around here take the child pornography laws very seriously. He shows anyone those pictures, they'll lock him up and throw away the key.

JULIA

Really?

VERA

How about you give me his parents' phone number and I'll give them some free legal advice? Plus a little piece of my mind while I'm at it.

JULIA

I feel better already, Grandma.

VERA

OK so stop your whining. We're all gonna get a fresh start, Julia. You're a beautiful young woman with the world at your feet.

(VERA and JULIA continue to walk upstage.)

VERA

Just don't try to be something that you're not. And don't take yourself so damn seriously.

COLE

(enters stage right, crosses to the entrance to JULIA's room, then looks around)

Where did everyone go?

(raises voice)

Janice! When's dinner?

VERA

(turns back to face COLE)

Janice is leaving, Cole. Everyone is. So it's all yours.
You've got plenty of room now.

(VERA and JULIA exit upstage. COLE
looks around, bewildered.)

(End of play.)

APPENDIX I
CAST OF CHARACTERS

COLE Male, early to mid 40s
 Janice's husband, Michael and Julia's father
 heavy set, irascible, nimble, hedonistic

JANICE Female, approximately 40 years old
 Cole's wife, Michael and Julia's mother
 relentlessly upbeat, wide eyed, mercurial

VERA Female, early 60s
 Janice's mother, Cole's mother-in-law
 cynical, pugnacious, sly

BRYCE Male, late 30s
 Friend of Cole and Janice, Deanna's boyfriend
 sincere, spineless, goofy, naive

MICHAEL Male, 17 years old
 Son of Cole and Janice, Vera's grandson
 long haired, altruistic, angry

JULIA Female, 16 years old
 Daughter of Cole and Janice, Vera's granddaughter
 saccharine sweet, callow, impulsive

DEANNA Female, 34 years old
 Bryce's girlfriend
 scheming, flirtatious, frustrated

APPENDIX II
SYNOPSIS

Game Face is a two-act comedy with a running time of approximately two hours. In the opening scene, COLE and his wife JANICE are hosting their friend BRYCE and his girlfriend DEANNA for a pre-holiday celebration at their home in New Jersey. COLE boasts of the financial prosperity, academic success, and emotional well being that he and his family have achieved, but also invites BRYCE (aside) to snort cocaine and visit a brothel. DEANNA hints to COLE that she believes BRYCE and JANICE are having an affair. JANICE's mother VERA, visiting for the Christmas holiday, advises JANICE to leave her husband. JANICE and BRYCE rendezvous at BRYCE's house. JANICE and COLE's son MICHAEL, a junior in high school, cautions his parents that the school is not providing a healthy environment for himself or his sixteen-year-old sister JULIA. COLE visits BRYCE, drugs him, elicits a confession, and does him in, staging the death as a suicide. VERA observes COLE hiding the drugs in his office and appropriates them. COLE, believing that MICHAEL is the one who stole the drugs, sends him away to a military academy. One month later, in the final scene, MICHAEL has taken an unauthorized leave from the military academy and returned home. He alerts JULIA to the possibility that she is being misused and humiliated by her boyfriend; now both children want to drop out of school. MICHAEL tells his parents that he is gay and he is running away to San Francisco. COLE says good riddance and informs his mother-in-law that she, too, has overstayed her welcome. VERA produces COLE's drugs, and convinces the family that BRYCE did not commit suicide but rather was murdered by COLE. She urges JANICE to call the cops and relocate the family to her home in North Carolina. Instead, JANICE decides to divorce COLE and move to California with MICHAEL and JULIA.

