

The Will to Get Married

A Comedy in Three Acts

by

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Act One: Mail Order Groom (3m,3w)

The drawing room of the Radcliffe Estate outside Canterbury, England

Godbey, the frail, elderly head butler

Madame Radcliffe, the head of the Radcliffe estate

Jonathan Cates, a mail order groom

Jennifer, Mrs. Radcliff's beautiful, albeit recently deceased daughter

Lt. Ashley Dalrymple, a no-nonsense police officer

Sgt. Hodgkins, 20s, a bumbling oaf

Act Two: Dead Lovers (1m,2w)

An intimate restaurant

Wendell, a hen-pecked husband

Kathleen, Wendell's domineering wife

Sylvia, Kathleen's lover

Act Three: For the Love of Mr. Paradise (3m,3w)

The Apartment of George and Molly Paradise

Molly Paradise, a romantic

George Paradise, a yuppie lawyer

The Reverend Gervais R. Nippetuck, English vicar-turned-sex-therapist

Horace Aspinwall, an animated, amiable farmer from Alabama

Winifred, a frumpish, eccentric Jewish hag from Peoria

Muffin, a vivacious bimbo, and a 2nd year medical student at the local university

Mail Order Groom

SETTING: *The drawing room of the Radcliffe Estate, London England. A lavish staircase ascends to one side. The front door is at one end, and, at the other end, an offstage exit leading to the kitchen. An open casket is at center, adorned with flowers. We see the beautiful Jennifer Radcliffe, lying in peace. A decanter of wine sits on a small table downstage.*

AT RISE: *We hear organ music playing—a rather lively rendition of Nearer My God to Thee. After a moment, the music stops. Godbey enters from the kitchen, obviously upset, wiping his forehead. Godbey is the elderly and frail head butler, the epitome of British servitude, proper and impeccably dressed, all in black. Madam Radcliffe descends the staircase. A wealthy British capitalist, she has an air of pomposity about her. She is used to getting things her way, which is precisely what drove her first three husbands to early graves.*

Radcliffe

Ah, there you are Godbey, everything all set for the reception tonight?

Godbey *(Sighing)*

I certainly hope so, madam. Though I must admit, I've had a bit of a confrontation with the organist just now. I only felt that his particular rendition of the music was too....self-indulgent, shall we say? Oh, I did my best to encourage him to use a bit more discretion, to play at a tempo and style more conducive to a funeral setting.....but....well, he absolutely wouldn't hear of it!

Radcliffe

That's the trouble with you, Godbey. You have no grit! No fortitude! Why, if you were any kind of a man at all, you wouldn't have been working for me all these 27 years without so much as a single raise in pay!

Godbey

(Hanging his head in shame)

I'm sorry, madam. That was terribly thoughtless of me.

Radcliffe

By the way, Godbey... the reception is to begin at seven o'clock, promptly upon our return from the services. I won't tolerate any delays—no dilly dallying. Anyone arriving late for the services is to be turned away—forcibly removed, if necessary! I'll not have anyone making a mockery of my daughter's funeral by showing up at whatever time happens to suit his convenience.

(Doorbell)

Radcliffe

Ah, that would be the minister. He will be going to the chapel with me, in the Rolls.

(Starting up the stairs)

Please take care of the social amenities for me, will you, Godbey?

Godbey

(Starting for the front door as Radcliffe exits)

I always do, madam.

(Godbey opens the front door and instantly, Jonathan Cates enters. He is a handsome, sharply dressed young man. He bolts past Godbey, to a spot in Center of the room. He stand there for a moment, taking it all in, and then, Spotting the carafe of wine, heads toward it with all deliberate speed. He pours Himself a drink, much to Godbey's bewilderment.)

Godbey

Good afternoon. Won't you.....please come in?

Cates

Ah, thank you very much, my good man. I hope you don't mind if I indulge bit in your refreshments, here, but I think it's best that I do something to help calm my nerves for this afternoon, you know.

Godbey

That's quite understandable...uh, considering the circumstances, sir. I was rather distraught myself, when I learned of Jennifer's condition.

Cates *(Melodramatically)*

What?!? Don't tell me she's....ill?!

Godbey (*Bewildered*)

She...isn't anymore, sir.

Cates

Well, I am relieved to hear that. Just how bad was it?

Godbey

Bad enough. She's.....dead.

(Pause)

Cates

Did you say....dead?

Godbey

Quite dead.

Cates

Are you sure?

Godbey

Come again.

Cates

Well, I mean...she wouldn't just be... oh, I don't know....sleeping, or something?

Godbey (*Considering the possibility*)

Mmmmm.....no. No, not after nearly a week. We began to get rather suspicious after the fourth day when she still wasn't breathing.

Cates (*Angrily*)

And has anyone bothered to check on her condition the meantime?

Godbey

Well you needn't take my word for it.

(Gesturing toward the coffin)

You can see for herself, she's quite dead.

(Cates whirls around and spots the casket. He crosses to it, checks her pulse. Growing frantic, he searches for any sign of life, then pounds on

her chest in a futile effort to restore life. That being done, he straightens up, crosses toward Godbey, throwing up his arms, almost chuckling, it seems)

Cates

Well, I must give credit where credit is due. You have rendered a most accurate assessment of her true condition.

(Shaking GODBEY'S limp hand)

Please accept my humble apologies. You are right.

Godbey

I say, I don't actually believe that you *are* the minister.

Cates

Ah, see there? Right again! A most remarkable man!

Godbey *(Blushing)*

Well, that's really very kind of you, but...

Cates

(Slapping Godbey on the back)

Ah, think nothing of it. Think nothing of it! No. You see, you've quite correctly stumbled upon the fact that I am not a man of the cloth—though why you would have made that peculiar assumption is beyond me—but what you fail to realize, for some odd reason, is my true purpose for being here.

Godbey

Which is?

Cates *(Grandly)*

To enter into the bonds of holy matrimony.

Godbey

I beg your pardon?

Cates

Yes, you see, Jennifer and I are to be married later on this afternoon.

(A long pause, as Godbey slowly looks over at Jennifer lying in the casket)

Godbey

I . . . hardly think that's likely, sir.

Cates

You don't believe me?

Godbey

Well, it's just that . . . she's never mentioned anything of the sort.

Cates (*Gesturing toward the casket*)

Well, in consideration of her present condition, that's not at all surprising, now, is it!?

Godbey

But . . . sir! You can't be serious!

Cates

I most certainly am! I rented this suit this morning from a highly respectable fashion designer, expressly for the purpose of holy matrimony. How could I ever face them again if I were forced to take back the suit too early? Mmmm? What would I say? That my bride-to-be didn't hold out long enough to exchange vows of eternal devotion with her beloved? Why, I'd be the laughing stock of Piccadilly Circus! I'll not have them bandying about my name in an unflattering and haphazard fashion.

(Crossing to the casket and tossing off the flowers)

Now be a good sport about it and help me out with the body. We'll be arriving late at the chapel as it is.

(Cates attempts to wheel the casket out when Godbey, for the first time in his life, exerts himself by practically throwing himself on the casket)

Godbey

If you mean to say that you would actually consider proceeding with your plans, in spite of this tragic turn of events, then you, sir, are a verifiable lunatic, and I'm going to have to ask you to leave at once!

Cates (*Struggling to move the casket*)

I'm trying to leave, but you're standing in my way!

Godbey

Yes, I know, sir, but after all—this is a matter of life and death...and quite frankly, to intermingle the two can hardly be considered proper etiquette—even in the lower echelons of society!

(Cates and Godbey struggle with the casket, going around and around in a frantic circle)

Cates

You bumbling fool! Get out of my way!

Godbey *(Clinging to the casket for dear life)*

I'd die first!

Cates *(Stops, smiling mischievously)*

Do you mean that?

Godbey *(Growing fearful)*

Well, I.....I.....

Cates

That's really quite touching. It's a rare occasion when a man would lay down his life for a cause that's ... utterly lacking in any real significance whatsoever.

(Taking out a pistol and aiming it at GODBEY)

...but....if that's what you wish, I can certainly arrange it.

Godbey

Please, sir! I really must insist that you put that gun away at once. That can be a very dangerous weapon!

Cates

Oh, come now, come now! Don't exaggerate! Statistics show that only an infinitesimally small percentage of the population actually are assaulted with a deadly weapon!

Godbey *(In tears)*

Thank you. That's most encouraging!

Cates

Why, the chances of you getting your head blown to pieces and splattered all over these Victorian furnishings, are, uh....

(Taking out his phone, doing some quick computations)

Cates (*Cont*)

...let's see here....ah, yes—precisely 322,507 to one!

(putting the phone back in his pocket)

Godbey

Not meaning to belabor the point, but the odds don't exactly appear to be in my favor at this time.

Cates

(Furiously, threatening GODBEY with the gun)

Are you telling me I don't know how to operate a simple electronic device?

Godbey (*Terrified*)

No! No, no, no, no, no!!! What I meant was, uh.....given the fact that you're holding gun in my direction and threatening blow my head off, just might have a....slight tendency of....uh, altering the odds a bit? I uh, I could be wrong, of course. Yes! Yes, that's it—I must be mistaken.

(Whimpering)

I never was very good at arithmetic!

Radcliffe (*Offstage*)

Godbey? Godbey, is that you? What the devil is all that commotion going on down there?!

Godbey

That's Madam Radcliffe!

(Momentarily forgetting his predicament, he scurries about the room, trying to restore some semblance of order)

Oh, what am I going to do? How I am going to explain all this?

Cates

Ah, yes, Madam Radcliffe—the venerable lady and mistress of this estate...and I suppose she might voice serious objections to my having a loaded gun in her dainty little front parlor, aimed at her head butler.

Godbey

I'm afraid so, sir. She's always been rather conservative about these matters—not at all one to look lightly on this sort of thing.

Cates

You idiot! Did it by chance ever occur to you that I might have more than one bullet in this gun, and that if the situation called for it, I wouldn't hesitate to shoot you both and be done with it?

Godbey

Oh, yes, sir—that has definitely occurred to me, and I didn't mean to make light of your intentions. But...well, you just don't know Madam Radcliffe. She's the sort of person who would be apt to make quite a stink about it, if she were shot down in cold blood!

Radcliffe

(Entering from staircase)

All right, Godbey, I hope you have a fairly rational explanation for all of the....

(Spotting Cates)

What the devil?—oh, you must be the minister.

Cates

(Throwing up his arms in frustration)

Has my appearance changed so radically in the past few days that you should both mistake me for being a member of the clergy?!

(Godbey and Radcliffe exchange puzzled glances)

Am I wearing a collar? Am I totin' a Bible? Have I made any attempt whatsoever to steer your souls down the true and righteous path?

Radcliffe

I beg your pardon?

Cates

Perhaps I should take this opportunity to introduce myself. I am Jonathan Cates—soon to become a member of this charming scene of domestic tranquility.

Godbey *(Whispering)*

Jennifer's fiancé, mum.

Radcliffe

What? Jenny's dead!

Cates

Ah, yes, so I found out in the interim...but no matter!

(Searching his pockets)

Somewhere here I have an official document...that should....clear things up rather nicely....

(Pulling out paper after paper, discarding them haphazardly around the room and in the casket)

Ah! Here it is! This ought to clear up any misunderstanding you may have about the entire ordeal.

Cates (*Cont*)

(Handing Madam Radcliffe the paper, which she reads)

You see, Jennifer had known for some time that her death was imminent. Not wishing to die a spinster, and burning with a fervent desire to spend her final days in marital bliss, she engaged the help of our mail order firm.

Radcliffe

A...mail order firm?

Cates

Yes. We specialize in finding mates for those who, for one reason or another, are unable to do so themselves. I thought it best that I handle this case...personally.

Radcliffe

Well, you can't be serious about all this.

Cates

And why not? You can see for yourself, it's all duly authorized.

Radcliffe

Duly authorized! By who? You, I presume?

Cates

Naturally.

Radcliffe

Why, you could have easily forged her signature and concocted this entire scheme single-handedly!

Cates

Ah, but I have proof! I am perfectly prepared to establish the validity of my claim. Go ahead. Ask me anything! Better, yet, ask me something personal about Jennifer... something to which only those with an intimate knowledge of your daughter would possibly know the answer.

Radcliffe

Oh, this is utterly absurd!

Cates

Afraid of the truth?

Radcliffe

Oh, all right, all right. What was herfavorite brand of Cabernet Sauvignon?

Cates (*Triumphantly*)

Aha! I have no idea!!

Radcliffe (*Taken aback*)

Then you *are* a fraud!

Cates

I most certainly am not. If I *had* known what type of wine your daughter preferred, it would clearly have implicated me as one who had prior knowledge of her private life. As a mail order groom, I most assuredly would have no access to such privileged information. Therefore, due to my appalling lack of ability to submit any pertinent information, I think you should call a halt to your suspicions at once and instead, view my hitherto unorthodox claim as being fully legitimate.

Radcliffe

That's the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard!

Godbey

It, uh... it sounds logical to me, Madam.

Radcliffe

But... you can't marry someone who is dead.

Cates

And why not?

Radcliffe

Well, it simply isn't done. Not only is it wholly unethical, it's a gross violation of sanitary health codes.

Cates

No matter! The reputation of the Chastity Lost Marital Foundation is at stake here. The marriage must go on!

Radcliffe

I refuse to endure your insolence any longer. This whole thing is utterly ridiculous.

Cates

It certainly is! You're attempting to stand in the way of a legitimate business deal, and the earnest wishes of your dear, departed daughter. This is what she would have wanted. I, uh...I'm, sure Godbey here can attest to that

(Surreptitiously pointing his gun in Godbey's direction)

Godbey

Well, you know, Madam, Jennifer *was* prone to act impulsively on occasion.

Radcliffe

What, Godbey? You dare to contest me?

Godbey

But I think he has a point, Madam.

Radcliffe

That does it! Godbey, I hold you personally responsible for allowing this lunatic into my home, and I charge you with vacating him from the premises immediately.

Godbey

Now, Madam, let's not be overly hasty. After all, it does appear that Jennifer has signed her consent, and that...

Radcliffe

Do you actually believe that I would, for one moment, condone the marriage between my recently deceased daughter, and that of a total stranger?

Godbey

Perhaps not, but, I'd seriously consider thinking things over. Mr. Cates could be in the right, you know, and then where would you be? Without a leg to stand on, I should think.

Radcliffe

Godbey, you're through! I want you to pack your things and leave at once.

(Starts to exit)

I expect you to be gone before the guests begin arriving for the services.

(Stops and turns to Cates)

And as for you, Mr. Whatever-your-name-was... I expect you to be gone as well, or I shall summon outside help in forcibly removing you from the premises.

(She exits)

Cates

My, my, my, wasn't *she* mad.

Godbey

I don't understand it. How could you let her do this to me?

Cates

Oh, stop your blubbering. This is the best thing that could have happened to you.

Godbey

Sir?

Cates

Well, don't you see? Now that your position here is terminated, you're free to help me pursue my rightful place as head of this estate. Madam Radcliffe must be immediately disposed of.

Godbey

Do you mean, that...well, that is to say...would murder be your primary objective then, sir?

Cates

Right-o, Godbey, that's it! Why the mere thought of a bullet piercing her skull and ripping through whatever cerebellum she must have, it's...it's.... too much for me. I can't stand the sight of blood. You'll have to do it!

Godbey

Me, sir?

Cates

Well, yes. I mean, you really wouldn't expect me to do it, would you? ... being how squeamish I get, and all?

Godbey

I see no reason whatsoever that I should help you with your depraved undertakings.

Cates

Really? And have you forgotten that I have a gun and could very well shoot you if you don't do exactly as I say?

Godbey

No, sir, I have not forgotten. But if I must die, I shall die with dignity and grace, not for a moment forsaking the loyalty I have for the lady of this estate.

Cates

What loyalty? She's relieved you of your duties! She's stripped you of all honor! She's thrown you out on your spindly rump without so much as a "by your leave."

Godbey

No matter. I shall be loyal to the end.

Cates

Oh, Godbey, really! Your sentimental drivel is appalling!

Godbey

Be that as it may, I know my duty. Get on with it if you must.

Cates

Oh, very well, here goes.

(Cates aims the gun at Godbey's head)

Godbey

Oh, pleeeeeease, sir! I didn't mean a word I said about the pompous bitch! Abuse her! Abuse her daughter! Only let me live! I'm too old to die!

Cates

I say. Shouldn't that be..... too *young* to die?

Godbey

Well, quite frankly, I suppose it is, but I just knew you weren't going to believe that one.

Cates

Oh, I don't know. I'd say you couldn't be a day over.....sixty-eight.

Godbey

I'm afraid I am, sir.

Cates

Are you contradicting me?

Godbey

No, I'm not.

Cates

You just did it again!

Godbey

I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I just don't know what it is you want me to say, what you want me to do!

Cates

Well, for one thing, I can't stand it when people go around blubbering apologies all the time.

Godbey

Oh, I'm sorry, I—oh!

(Clamps his hand over his mouth)

I'm sorry, I'm sorry... I mean.....

Cates

That does it! Die, you slobbering nincompoop!

(Cates shoots Godbey, who falls behind the sofa in a thud. Cates calmly pours himself another drink. After a moment, Godbey's trembling hand appears from behind the sofa, Soon followed by the rest of him. He points an angry finger)

Godbey

You....bastard!

Cates

Please, Godbey. Try to control yourself.

Godbey

There were only blanks in that gun.

Cates

Yes, I know. Aren't I a little poop?

Godbey

Get out of here! Get out of here before I kill you!

Cates

Well, well, well. Aren't we the brave little man now.

Godbey

I must admit, without a gun, you seem more impotent to me than a neutered cocker spaniel.

Cates

Godbey, you amaze me. Do you really have any doubt that I could easily overpower you, even without a weapon at my disposal? That I could strike you dead with one solid blow?

Godbey

No sir, As pitiful as that may seem, I have no doubt of that whatsoever.

Cates

Good.

(Beat)

Now, then, Godbey. I need you and I would be willing to pay quite handsomely if you would help me achieve my rightful place as head of this estate.

Godbey

Oh, please, sir, I just can't.

Cates

What's the matter now?

Godbey

Well, it's just that... I've been her head butler for so many years, and we've always been on such good terms. I'm afraid this would put quite a damper on our relationship.

Cates

Ah, Godbey, there you again with your sickening sentiment. Priorities, Godbey. Where are your priorities? After all, what's more important—money? Or.....human life?

Godbey

Mmm, I see what you mean. Well, I suppose I could manage that.

Cates

Of course you could.

Godbey

But... you said there were only blanks in that gun.

Cates.

Yes. I lied. It's so hard to trust anyone these days.

(Placing the gun in Godbey's unsteady hand)

No, you see, only the first one...was a blank.

Godbey

I see, I see....and all I have to do is...pull the trigger?

Cates

Yes.

(Godbey inadvertently aims the gun at Cates. Alarmed, Cates lunges at Godbey to redirect the gun)

Well.... It would be helpful to aim first, but...yes, you have the general idea.

Godbey

You really think so?

Cates

A born marksman, I tell you!

Godbey

Well, I must admit, in my young days at Oxford, they told me I had the makings of a fine athlete, and I would have pursued it, too...but I decided instead to enter into domestic service.

Cates

You see there? What did I tell you?

Godbey

So I just.... Aim....and pull the trigger.

Cates

Brilliant! An uncontested genius! Call her down here at once!

Godbey

Yes, yes, all right.

(Crosses to the foot of the stairs, calling up)

Godbey (*Cont*)

Madam Radcliffe? Mum, would you be so good as to come down here for a moment? I have something to discuss that is of, uh.... grave importance.

(Looks to Cates for approval)

Cates

Oh, clever, play on words, Godbey, very clever. A somewhat primitive technique, to be sure, but, I suppose not altogether inappropriate for a murder plot.

Radcliffe (*Descending the stairs*)

Still here, I see. This had better be important.

(Beat)

Well? What is it?

Godbey

Well, it's like this, Madam. You see.... I'm terribly sorry, but I'm afraid I'm going to have to shoot you...if you don't mind.

(Aims gun at Radcliffe)

Radcliffe

Godbey, what's the matter with you? Put that thing away at once!

Cates

He doesn't have to listen to you. You gave him the sack. Remember?

Radcliffe

Have you both gone mad?

Cates

Shoot her, Godbey!

Radcliffe

Wait!

(Beat)

Now, then, Godbey....you....you didn't really take me seriously before, did you?—about terminating your position here? I couldn't do that to you. It uh...it just wouldn't be the same around here.

Godbey (*Touched*)

Really, Madam?

Radcliffe (*Encouraged*)

Why, yes! Yes, of course! In fact, just to show you there are no hard feelings, I'll even give you a raise in pay—effective immediately!

Cates

Sorry. We're not interested.

(Pause)

Godbey

Uh... just how much of a raise are we talking about here, Mum?

Radcliffe

Would I be too bold to suggest an additional... five hundred thousand pounds....per week?

Godbey (*Still pointing gun at Radcliffe*)

That's very generous of you, Madam.

Cates

Godbey! You can't really believe that, after attempting to shoot her down in cold blood, that she would not only rehire you, but give you a raise in pay that's roughly equivalent to...

(On his phone again)

2,300 times the average pay for an English butler?

Godbey

Put that way, sir, it does seem rather unlikely.

Radcliffe

Godbey, you've got to believe me—I'll try harder to be nicer to you than I have in the past.

Cates

You should have thought of that before.

Radcliffe

I didn't know he had a gun before.

Cates

Well, that's immaterial, really. Even if you weren't a royal pain in the posterior—which you are—I'm sure we would have been able to think up some other convenient rationale for committing the crime.

Radcliffe

But why, in God's name?

Cates

Because you're arrogant, you're a pompous clown, and you have an estate with an estimated market value of 240 million pounds.

Radcliffe

I should have suspected. But if it's my estate you're after, I think it only fair to warn you...it...it isn't worth nearly what you might think. The property value has fallen dangerously low in recent years. It's... it's a dreadful neighborhood, isn't it, Godbey?

Godbey

Well...the crime rate certainly has gone up lately, I'll give you that.

Radcliffe

Godbey, now listen to me. If he would use you to commit murder in order to acquire my fortune, what possible reason would he have for holding on to you, once I'm out of the way?

Godbey

Companionship?

Radcliffe

Godbey, be realistic. In all the years I've known you, you've never once been able to carry on an intelligent conversation.

Godbey

Oh I didn't mean that kind of companionship. I was suggesting that he might be....a uh, homosexual.

Radcliffe (*to Cates*)

Are you?

Cates

I...could be.

Godbey (*Hopefully*)

Can you prove it?

Radcliffe

Godbey!!

Godbey

Well, one can't be too careful. If his intentions are honorable, what kind of chance would that give me? I probably wouldn't live through the night!

Cates

Oh, all right, all right. I *am* a homosexual.

Radcliffe

Don't believe him Godbey! He's lying!

Godbey

Oh.... I.... well..... oh, oh forgive me, Mr. Cates, without any conclusive proof of your sexual orientation, I really can't take any chances. If you had anything at all—illicit pictures, perhaps... a device solely for the purpose of self-gratification anything!

Radcliffe

All right now, Godbey—quickly, give me the gun.

(Godbey lowers the gun and Radcliffe gently takes it from him)

Now then. Do as I say and no one will get hurt.

(Aiming gun at Cates)

Cates

Well naturally no one will get hurt. You really didn't expect me to entrust this idiotic boob with a loaded gun, did you?

(Takes a step toward Radcliffe)

Radcliffe

Stay there!

(Cates takes another step)

Stay there, I said!

Cates

Oh, give me that thing before you make a total fool of yourself.

(Cates rushes Radcliffe and the two struggle for the gun. The Gun goes off in Cates stomach. Everyone is stunned. Suddenly, Cates stands upright, smiling)

Cates (*Cont*)

Missed me!

(The two again struggle for the gun)

I told you there were.... only...blanks...in that gun.

Radcliffe

I don'tbelieve you.

(The gun fires again, this time into Radcliffe's stomach.

She looks down, blood oozing between her fingers)

Cates

By George, I think you're right. Now that I recall, I believe I did actually put one or two real bullets in there after all.

(Radcliffe drops lifelessly to the floor)

Godbey

You... you killed her!

Cates

Now, now, let's not be overly presumptuous.

Godbey

Then... she's still alive?

Cates

Well, no, to be perfectly frank, she is dead ... but let's not be so quick to point the guilty finger. It was Madam Radcliffe herself who pulled the trigger, you see—not I.

Godbey

You.... You don't mean...suicide?

Cates

Yes, I'm afraid so.

Godbey

But... she didn't even seem depressed lately.

Cates

You see what kind of a woman she was, hiding her pain and suffering from her butler to the very end.

Godbey

Shouldn't someone.... Say a few words?

Cates

What? And waste time on a pompous ass clown like that? There's work to be done.

Godbey

Yes, making arrangements for the body.

Cates

No, I mean collecting my inheritance. Godbey—lead the way to Jennifer's last will and testament.

Godbey

I must say sir, this may have been a complete waste of time. Having been witness to the will myself, I can attest to the fact that there is no mention whatsoever of a Mr. Cates from the Chastity Lost Marital Foundation—nor from any other place, for that matter.

Cates

Well, it may not have mentioned me by name, but we are to be wed. Surely there is some clause that mentions bequeathals to the...husband?

Godbey

No, sir. Not to my recollection.

Cates

What? Are you sure?

Godbey

Quite sure.

Cates

Well, fiancé then, I suppose.

Godbey

No, sir, no fiancé, either.

Cates

Uh... boyfriend?

No. **Godbey**

Acquaintance? **Cates**

Sorry. **Godbey**

Pen pal? **Cates**

I'm afraid not. **Godbey**

Cates
Oh dear. I'm afraid this is going to be more difficult than I had envisioned.

Godbey
Yes, particularly since we still have the body of the deceased.

Cates
Oh, that. I think it best we let the police handle all that.

Godbey
Do you really think that wise, sir? That is, what if the police were to suspect one of us to be the guilty party? Don't you think that possible, sir?

Cates
Possible? I'm counting on it. I'm going to tell them that you did it.

Godbey
I, sir?

Cates
Why, yes, of course. Don't you remember? Madam Radcliffe sacks you for gross incompetence and mismanagement of the affairs of the estate... and let's be honest, spending a bit too much time in the wine cellar?

Godbey

Well, I...

Cates

You somehow manage to find a gun and in a mad rage you fire once—twice—three times into her abdomen. Being the marksman you are, only one bullet manages to enter the victim, but no matter, it seems to have done the trick. Her lifeless body slumps to the floor. I happened upon the scene to pay my last respects to Jennifer, just as you are attempting to dispose of the body. I collect myself together and call the police.

Godbey

What makes you think the police will believe your story? It's your word against mine.

Cates

Don't be ridiculous. Whoever heard of a murderer phoning in his own conviction?

Godbey

You've said yourself you're demented. In that case, indicting oneself in the crime would be commonplace, I should think.

Cates

That's a very good point, Godbey. Luckily for me, I've never met a police officer yet who was able to solve a crime in any logical manner whatsoever.

(On his cell phone)

Yes, hello, I wish to report a murder. Can I describe him? Well.... he's getting on in years, gray, wispy hair—exceedingly frail....well, hell, would you rather I just give you his name? Yes, I'm speaking of course, of Mr. Godbey, head butler of the Radcliffe estates. I should add that he is in such a frenzied state that my own life is now in jeopardy. I don't know how much longer I can hold out. Please hurry. Thank you.

(Ends call)

That was the police, Godbey. When they arrive, I'd do my best not to look so guilty. First impressions, Godbey. They are vitally important.

Godbey

I don't have a thing to worry about. I'm not guilty.

Cates

You may have a hard time convincing the police of that when they arrive and find three dead bodies.

Godbey

Three? But... there are only two.

Cates

Oh, I'm sorry, Godbey, but apparently I failed to mentioned that little tidbit of news. You see, this is where we part company.

Godbey

Sir?

Cates

Well, it's not as if I didn't try—God knows I did my best—but now, after discovering the glaring omission of my name from Jennifer's will, it's... it's all rather too much for me to bear. It was, indeed my sole purpose for living, you understand. Without it, I see no reason to go on.

(Godbey, alarmed, rushes to pick up the gun and deposits it in the decanter of wine)

Godbey

You won't get out of it that easily!

Cates

You fool! Do you realize what you've done?

Godbey

Yes. I've rather cleverly prevented you from committing suicide.

Cates

No, you've ruined a perfectly good decanter of Sangria!

Godbey

Oh, I'm sorry, sir. But... I couldn't let you just... shoot yourself.

Cates

Shoot myself? Ha! Shoot myself? Is that what you thought?

Godbey

Well, yes. You mean, you weren't going to, uh...?

Cates

Of course not! As I've already mentioned, I can't stand the sight of blood.

Cates (*Cont*)

(Taking out a pill case)

In fact, my entire ancestral lineage have all shown an abhorrence to violence of any kind. They all saw fit to take their lives through more peaceful methods.

Godbey

You mean... *all* your ancestors committed suicide?

Cates

Mmm... yes, as near as we've been able to tell. Why, the very fact I am here at all is a fluke of nature. Coincidentally, my own mother did herself in just moments after I was born. I'm told she took one look at me ... and promptly strangled herself on the umbilical cord.

(Pops several pills in his mouth)

Godbey

What are you doing?

Cates

What any self-respecting Englishman would do. I am carrying on the family tradition!

Godbey

No, stop! You mustn't!

Cates

But I already have. There's nothing either of us can do about it now. I understand these pills take effect almost immediately.

(Godbey moans)

Oh, Godbey, get a hold of yourself. It wouldn't be at all fitting for me to remain alive. You could see what it would be like—each of us, in his own turn, accusing the other of the crime.

(Cates suddenly grimaces, holding his stomach)

Godbey

What is it?

Cates

Feeling dizzy! Must lie down!

(Cates practically leaps on the sofa)

Godbey (*Rushing to his side*)

Nooooo!!!!!!

Godbey (Cont)

(Godbey grabs one arm, trying to yank him to his feet)

Please! Just try, sir!

*(He manages to get him standing. Godbey awkwardly flaps
Cates arms about)*

Try, sir! Keep moving! Keep moving!

Cates

Godbey! Physical exertion only serves to accelerate the process. I'll die that much more quickly.

Godbey (Throwing him back on the sofa)

Oh! Keep still! Keep still!

Cates

Too late! Just remember what I told you about.... First impressions.

(Cates dies)

Godbey

(Looking about at the dead bodies)

Oh dear. This doesn't look good at all. But I've got to do something. Hide the bodies! Yes. That's it. Good thinking, Godbey. Get rid of the evidence.

(Godbey drags Radcliffe's body through the kitchen door. After a moment of silence, Jennifer sits up in her coffin. She gets up and crosses to the refreshment table. She pours herself a drink and stretches contentedly. Godbey reenters the room, sees Jennifer and screams)

Jennifer

Hello, Godbey.

Godbey

Miss Jennifer! I thought you were dead!

Jennifer

I got better.

Godbey

I must say, it's good to see you, again, although I don't claim to understand what is going on.

Jennifer

It's very simple, Godbey. As Momma became more and more insistent upon giving away her millions, I realized there'd eventually be nothing left for me. I made some rather discreet inquiries about what it might take to to

Godbey

To kill her.

Jennifer

To guarantee my inheritance, let's say. Unfortunately, Momma was beginning to suspect what I was up to, and was making arrangements to write me out of the will entirely. There was only one way to stop her. I had to pretend I was dead, just long enough to put my plan into effect while at the same time, not giving her any reason to change the will. And it worked! She's out of the way, and I'm going to inherit a fortune.

Godbey

How convenient.

Jennifer

Oh, Godbey, don't be such a spoilt sport. Can't you see—

(Doorbell)

Godbey

The police!

(Loud knocks on the door)

Jennifer

Don't worry. I'll talk to them. I'll keep them at the door until you get everything taken care of.

Godbey

Yes, yes—that's good. Just give me time enough to hid the body. Stall them.

Jennifer *(Crossing to door)*

Don't worry. I will.

Godbey

Don't let them in right away.

Jennifer

I won't.

(Opening door)

Yes, hello, officers! Come right in!

(Godbey, who has only managed to get the body part way out, moans and drops the body at the foot of the stairs. The Sergeant, a large, not-very-bright man with a cockney accent, and the lieutenant, a woman in plain clothes, enter. Jennifer points to Godbey)

There he is, officers. There's the man you want!

Lieutenant

Arrest that man, Sergeant.

Sergeant

Uh... which one, Mum?

Lieutenant

You see the man lying dead in a crumpled heap at the foot of the stairs, Sergeant?

Sergeant.

Uh huh.

Lieutenant

The other one, Sergeant. The other one.

Sergeant

Right!

Jennifer

Thank God you came when you did, Lieutenant. He was after me next, just as soon as he had disposed of his most recent victim.

Godbey

Please, officer, I realize this all must look rather suspicious, but... you must believe me. This man who lies before us was a ruthless killer. He already killed one member of this household, and if he hadn't eventually taken his own life, he would have picked us all off, one by one.

Sergeant

Taken his own life, says he. A likely story!

Lieutenant

And just who was this man supposed to have killed?

Godbey

Madam Radcliffe. She's dead.

Radcliffe (*From the top of the stairs*)

I'm afraid I'll have to disagree with you there, Godbey.

Jennifer

Momma?

Godbey

Madam Radcliffe! You're alive.

Radcliffe

Of course! A Radcliffe never goes down that easily!

Lieutenant

Will someone please explain what's going on here?

Radcliffe

It's very simple really. I intercepted Jennifer's plot to do away with me. I contacted Mr. Cates and offered to hire him at three times the going rate if he would agree to go along with my scheme, instead, but using blanks in his gun—not real bullets. That way, once she felt I was safely out of the way, she would conveniently reveal herself at the appropriate moment... and as you can see, she's done just that.

Lieutenant

Am I to understand you correctly, Madam, in that you had prior knowledge of a conspiracy to commit murder, and yet you stood by and did absolutely nothing?

Radcliffe

Well, I suppose that.....

Lieutenant

...and that, not only did you decide to take matters into your own hands, but this reckless, ill-conceived charade of yours has resulted in the death of an innocent victim?

Radcliffe

Why—no! No, I assure you, he's not dead. It's all purely theatrical. It was all just an act. Cates, tell them it was all just an act!

Lieutenant (*Feeling his pulse*)

This man's dead.

Radcliffe (*Heading toward Cates*)

What? Well, that can't be! Cates, come now, let's not carry things too far.

(Sergeant stands in the way)

Cates, you've earned your money!

Lieutenant

Sergeant, arrest this woman, as well.

Radcliffe (*Being handcuffed*)

Cates! It's not funny anymore!

Lieutenant (*To Jennifer*)

I'll arrange for someone to pick up the body. I hope you'll be all right until then?

Jennifer

I'll...try to manage as best I can. Thank you, Lieutenant.

Lieutenant

Very well. Good night then, Miss. Come on, Sergeant.

(They all leave and Jennifer closes the door. After a moment's Pause, Cates begins to laugh)

Jennifer

What's so funny?

Cates

Your mother! Thinking she could buy me off at three times the going rate.

Jennifer

Well what did you expect? She's always believed money is the answer to everything.

Cates

So what's going to happen to your mother now?

Jennifer

Oh, she's headed to the local sanitarium. There's very little that money can't buy.

Cates

Jolly good. I can just imagine the look on the doctor's face when your mother tells him how her only daughter staged her own death and hired a mail-order assassin in order to convict her mother of a murder that never even took place?

Jennifer *(Laughing)*

It will take some time to sort out *that* mess. In the meantime, I'll have control of Momma's finances and will conveniently siphon all of her billions into our account in the Caymans.

Cates

Let's not be too greedy. I think we could live quite comfortably on just a few hundred million pounds.

Jennifer

That's very thoughtful of you, Darling.

(Doorbell)

Cates

Who in the hell--?

Jennifer

Oh! I almost forgot. It's the minister, come to deliver my eulogy.

(Starts for the door)

Cates

But, we can't let him see you in your condition! He bound to think you ought to be dead!

Jennifer

Don't worry. I'll simply tell him that I'm feeling much better today and so there isn't any reason to go ahead with the funeral after all.

Cates

That's what I love about you, darling. You're so bloody cheeky!

BLACKOUT
Dead Lovers

SETTING: *An intimate restaurant. A white tablecloth adorns the table, on top of which sit a selection of appetizers and glasses of wine.*

AT RISE: *Wendell, a nebbish, 30-something taxidermist, and Kathleen, a beautiful but domineering young woman, are seated at the table. Wendell is impatiently reading the menu.*

Wendell

Do you think we could go ahead and order now, dear?

Kathleen

Oh no, Wendell. That wouldn't do at all. Let's just wait a little while longer.

Wendell

I think the waiter's given up on us. I haven't seen him around for the longest time.

Kathleen

I believe that mostly has to do with the way you were looking at him when he served us the most recent plate of hors d'oeuvres.

(Beat)

You see, Wendell, you have a way of looking at people sometimes that makes them think you're coming on to them, even if you're not.

(Chuckling)

Not that you ever could, mind you—come on to them, I mean—but how are *they* to know that? You must know that you're the reason my ladies bridge club stopped coming over on Wednesday evenings.

Wendell *(Sadly)*

Because I crawled under the table.

Kathleen

We didn't even know what you were *doing* down there. Not for the longest time!

Wendell

I got off to a very bad start.

Kathleen

Well, you're not to do the same thing tonight. Sylvia is my oldest and dearest friend.

Wendell

She's nearly an hour late.

Kathleen

Yes. Yes, she *is* late. As I recall, Sylvia always had a problem with that sort of thing. But she has a lovely personality.

Wendell

You don't need to convince me. I'm sure I'll like her. I like *all* of your friends.

Kathleen

Yes. Yes, you do, don't you? And without any encouragement from me.

Wendell

I rarely like anyone *but* your friends.

Kathleen

Wendell, you don't *know* anyone else but my friends.

Wendell

That's not exactly true. I became rather well acquainted with the milkman the Christmas before last.

Kathleen

But we don't even *have* a milkman. No one has a milkman anymore!

Wendell

That's what I told him, Kathleen. I said that he was an anachronism. I told him quite candidly: "Why can't we just pick up the milk at the store, while we're doing the rest of the shopping, like everybody else? What do we need you for?" and Kathleen, you should have seen his face. He was humiliated in the realization that he no longer performed a useful function in society.

(Beat)

That's when he stopped coming over. That's when he stopped giving me his ... special favors.

(Kathleen shoots him a look)

Sour cream at 50% off. Buttermilk for next to nothing.

Kathleen

Wendell, you need to get out of the house more often.

Wendell

I'm here now, aren't I?

Kathleen

Yes. Yes, you *are* here. When you learned you'd finally get the chance to meet Sylvia, it sure didn't take you long to decide to join us here this evening.

Wendell

Kathleen, you're not implying, are you, that my motives are in any way dishonorable?

Kathleen

Of course not, dear. Well, I mean, all my friends are lesbians anyway, so it hardly matters what *you* may have had in mind.

Sylvia (*Entering*)

Kathleen?

Kathleen

Yes?

Sylvia

Kathleen, it's me—Sylvia!

Kathleen

Don't be ridiculous.

Sylvia

Kathleen, I swear, it's me.

Kathleen

Sylvia? Sylvia, it is you! Oh, I'm sorry. It's just that... I hardly recognized you.

Sylvia

You haven't changed a bit!

Kathleen

Well.... I'm wearing a different dress.

(They both laugh, a little too loudly)

Sylvia

What about me, Kathleen? Do you think I've changed?

Kathleen

Yes. Yes, I *do* think you've changed. You've gained some weight, haven't you.

Sylvia

Oh, it's probably just this dress. It makes me look larger than I am.

Kathleen

Mmm, no, it's not the dress, Sylvia. It's you. You're simply bigger than you used to be. There's no getting around it.

(To Wendell)

You see, Wendell, Sylvia has always had some kind of... hormonal imbalance.

Sylvia

So... how long has it been since we last saw each other?

Kathleen

Oh, Gee, I don't know. What's today? Wednesday? Uh... this morning, I think—at the hairdressers.

Sylvia

Right, right. Well, great to see you again. So, Wendell, is it? I hear you're a taxidermist.

Wendell

Yes. Yes, I am. What's more, I'm proud of what I do. There is a small minority who think the work I am doing is unethical, but did you know, the precise opposite is true. My work helps to immortalize these creatures, and in so doing, provides a constant reminder of each animal's relevance to our fragile eco-system.

Sylvia *(Aside, to Kathleen)*

Uh... Kathleen. Is this really the guy you've been telling us so much about? I mean, are you sure it's really him?

Kathleen

Well, yes, of course. I ought to know my own husband.

Sylvia

But he's not at all like you described him. I mean, he's so ... boring.

Kathleen

You noticed.

Sylvia

And... not very good looking, either. Wouldn't you agree?

Kathleen

Well, I have always been more attracted to women than to men, so....

Wendell

Honey. Do you think we could order now?

Kathleen

Wendell, don't be tactless.

Sylvia

Oh, I feel terrible about keeping you waiting so long.

Kathleen

Well, I wasn't go to be rude or anything, but since you brought it up, we *have* been waiting for over an hour. I hope you have a good excuse.

Sylvia

Well, actually.... You know my husband, right?

Kathleen

Of course. The longevity expert who wrote "How to Live Forever?" What about him?

Sylvia

He died this afternoon.

Kathleen

Oh, goodness.

(Beat)

Well, anyway, you're handling it well.

Wendell

How did it happen?

Sylvia

Well, he went to get a new muffler installed this morning on the Buick. Although the sign clearly said “Technicians Only,” he entered the garage and got under the car to inspect the mechanic’s work. He’s so fastidious. When I got my medical checkup for my marriage license, I got a clean bill of health, but wouldn’t you know it? Harold refused to take the doctor’s word for it. He insisted on checking things out for himself.

Kathleen

Sylvia, need I remind you that a man is present?

(They both look at Wendell)

Sylvia

Yes. Yes, I think you *do* need to remind me that a man is present.

(They both laugh)

Kathleen

But about your husband.

Sylvia

Right. Well, this is the really funny part. Just as he positions himself under the car to inspect the muffler, the hydraulic system suddenly springs a leak, and the whole car comes crashing down on top of his head. KAPOWEE! He didn’t have a chance. Squished him flat as a pancake.

(Beat)

On the lighter side, I got the muffler for free.

Kathleen

Then it wasn’t a total waste after all.

Wendell

Not meaning to be forward, but... have you decided what to do with the body?

Kathleen

Wendell! She’s our guest!

Sylvia

No, no. It's all right, Kathleen. After all, you know what they say—life goes on!

Kathleen

No! Do they say that? Do they really?

Sylvia

Of course.

Wendell

Well, at least you have a good excuse for being late.

Kathleen

You know, Sylvia, that kind of reminds me of that time in home economics—you remember—Mrs. Reekee? Seventh grade?

Sylvia

Oh, yes. You mean when she'd take all of us girls into the broom closet, one by one, under the pretense of helping us with our homework, but then she'd ask us to pretend that she was a horsy? Which, come to think of it, didn't take too much imagination, as I recall.

Kathleen

Yes, that *was* funny. But actually I was referring to the time our semester project was due. Mrs. Reekee told us on Friday that the only excuse for not turning it in was death, and—well, she was just joking?—but then over the weekend, one of the girls dropped dead. Actually dropped dead! The doctors never did figure out what was wrong with her.

Sylvia

I know. I thought it was kind of funny.

Kathleen

You were always kind of close to her, as I remember.

Sylvia

Oh, sure. Once. That is, until I found out about her secret.

(Beat)

Her alleged 38 inch chest? Pulease! I had PE with her third period.

Wendell

Falsies?

Sylvia

Flat as a board!

Wendell

I hate it when that happens!

(Laughing)

Kathleen *(Ignoring Wendell)*

So anyway, do the kids know about their daddy yet?

Sylvia

No, I thought it best not to tell them.

Wendell

You mean ... ever?

Sylvia

You see, the loss of a parent can be a traumatic event to have to endure at that age. It's best they never find out. All the experts back me up on this.

Kathleen

Sure, but I mean, well .. won't they suspect something is missing when they come home and he's not there?

Sylvia

I'll tell them he's working late. Many's the time he came home from a hard day's work, reeking of wine and cheap perfume for some reason, long after the children had already gone to bed.

Wendell

You could always get another one. I did that once when my hamster died.

Kathleen

You know, Sylvia. I just happened to think of something. Isn't this your fourth husband to have died under suspicious circumstances?

Sylvia

Oh, I don't know. It's not like I actually keep track of that sort of thing.

Kathleen

Well, I'm pretty sure this makes four.

Sylvia

Yes, that seems to be right.

Kathleen

Mmm. Imagine that. None of *mine* have ever died.

Sylvia

What about Wendell?

Wendell

Me? But I'm not dead. Not at all.

Sylvia

Well anyway, I don't see anything unusual in having outlived all my husbands. It's a documented scientific fact that women live longer than men.

Kathleen

Oh, Sylvia, really. Do you think I don't know what you're trying to do here? I'm on to you, girl. Ever since that time in middle school when the girl with the falsies mysteriously disappeared, I've recognized a pattern. When someone is unable to bring you satisfaction, you simply do away with them.

Sylvia

No, Kathleen. They were all accidents.

Kathleen

Right. Like your third husband, Gunther. I suppose it was merely an accident that an air conditioner just happened to fall out of the third story window at precisely the moment he was walking past the building.

Sylvia

It could happen.

Kathleen

Admit it, Sylvia—it was you!

Sylvia

No! Kathleen!

Kathleen (*Strangling Sylvia*)

It was you! You did it! Admit it!

Wendell (*Intervening*)

Kathleen, please. If she is guilty, it's a matter for the courts to decide. We can't take the law into our own hands.

(The ladies laugh)

What's so funny?

Kathleen

It's a joke, silly.

Sylvia (*Trying to calm down*)

The air conditioner just happened to fall on Gunther's head!

Kathleen (*Laughing*)

Can't take the law...into our own hands! Priceless!

Wendell

Oh. I get it. Ha ha ha ha.

Kathleen

It's a game we play, Wendell.

Sylvia

Yes, and every time, a different victim.

Wendell

Well, you two really had me going.

Sylvia

I think it's time for a toast. Shall we?

Kathleen

To ... opportunities.

Wendell

Here, here!

(Sylvia spills her wine all over the front of Kathleen's dress)

Sylvia

Oh, Kathleen, I'm so sorry.

Kathleen

Not to worry. It's your dress, anyway. Remember? Excuse me just a minute.

(Kathleen runs off)

Wendell

(Mysteriously, in a Russian accent)

Excuse me, Madam, but I could not help notice you to be alone this evening.

Sylvia *(Also with a Russian accent)*

But I'm not. You saw the—how do you call it—“hot babe” I came in with.

Wendell

Then this woman—she is your...?

Sylvia

Seeester.

Wendell

What relief. I am thinking for moment you two were doing some—how to say—hanky panky.

(They both laugh)

So... what you think?

Sylvia

I believe she suspects nothing.

Wendell

How can you be so sure?

Sylvia

I with K.G.B. We know everything.

Wendell

I with K.G.B., too. How come I never see you around office?

Sylvia

More importantly, how come we both Russian, yet inexplicably we converse with one another in broken English?

Kathleen (*Offstage*)

Sylvia? Sylvia, can you come and help me out for a second?

Sylvia

Coming!

(To Wendell, in Russian accent)

Do not go anywhere, comrade, if you know what is good for you!

(Sylvia runs off. Light come up on ladies' room)

Kathleen

What was taking so long out there?

Sylvia

Huh? What do you mean?

Kathleen

Sylvia dear, I know what's going on. You spilled that drink on purpose.

Sylvia

W-w-why would I do that, Kathleen?

Kathleen

Why, so the two of us could be together, silly.

(She grabs Sylvia and kisses her)

Sylvia

Oh, right. Well, I guess that was clever of me, wasn't it.

Kathleen (*Seductively*)

Very...

(Kissing her)

Very...

(Kissing her)

...clever.

(Hands Sylvia a wash cloth)

Kathleen (*Cont*)

Would you mind helping me get the stain out?
(She throws out her chest)

Sylvia (*Nervously*)

Oh, well, gee, sure. Why not?
(She takes a few perfunctory swipes)

Kathleen

Sylvia! That kind of apathy is hardly what I would have expected from you. It almost seems as if—oh, Sylvia, don't tell me you've gone straight!

Sylvia

Bite your tongue!

Kathleen (*Seductively, getting close*)

You first!

Sylvia

Tease!

Kathleen

Well, anyway. It would be just my luck. Helene, down at Hair Today, Gone Tomorrow is giving me the brush off.

Sylvia

Isn't that just like her.

Kathleen

And what's more... I think that Wendell is having an affair.

Sylvia

Wendell?

Kathleen

I know, I know. It defies all logic. Still, though, I can't help but think that when you incessantly berate and emasculate a man, for ten years, day and night, that there isn't some small part of him that wishes he were with someone else.

Sylvia

That's why you suspect him?

Kathleen

Well, that, and Helene told me he was hooking up with some bimbo.

Sylvia

Well. She's hardly a *bimbo*.

Kathleen

How would *you* know?

Sylvia

Well, I mean...knowing Wendell, that wouldn't be his type.

Kathleen

But you *don't* know him. The two of you just met!

Sylvia

But he...he *seems* like a decent person.

Kathleen

He is *not* a decent person. He stuffs dead animals, for crying out loud. Besides, it's not just that. There are other things, like... well, he never smells like my Chernobyl Nights perfume anymore. He smells more like... like....

(Sniffs)

What are *you* wearing anyway?

Sylvia

Me? What do you mean? You mean, *me?* I'm not wearing anything!

Kathleen

What's the matter with you? I was talking about your sweater. Isn't that one of mine?

Sylvia

Oh, the sweater! Yes, I forgot to return it. Sorry about that.

Kathleen

It's all right. Anyway, I can assure you that the whole sordid story about Wendell is true, and I don't intend to put up with it another moment.

Sylvia

But, you don't even want him, do you?

Kathleen

What's that got to do with it? Do you think I want him off having a good time while I'm off having a good time? Don't be absurd.

Sylvia

So....what did you.... I mean, what are you going to do?

Kathleen

Well, I hate to give away my secrets, but, uh, if I were you... I wouldn't eat any of the appetizers.

(Sylvia runs out. Lights come back up on the table. Wendell is just about to take a bite of one of the appetizers.)

Sylvia

Wendell! No!!!

(She hits his hand and the appetizer goes flying)

Wendell

Sylvia, what are you doing?

Sylvia

Wendell. Tell me you didn't have any of the appetizers!

Wendell

Don't worry, Sylvia, there are still plenty left for you.

Sylvia

Oh, God! I'm too late. Wendell, now listen to me very carefully. How...do...you...feel?

Wendell

I'm fine, thanks. And you?

Kathleen

That's so sweet of you to be concerned, Sylvia.

(Yanking Sylvia aside)

What do you think you're doing? Do you want to ruin the whole thing?

Sylvia

I was just asking about his health.

Wendell

Hey, come on, you two. Let's finish off these delicious appetizers.

(Sylvia screams. Kathleen smiles)

Kathleen

An excellent idea, Wendell.

(She slides the dish to Sylvia)

Care for an appetizer?

Sylvia

Oh, gosh, not for me, thanks. I ate on the way over.

Wendell

Youate....on the way to dinner?

Sylvia

Yes. Compulsive eating disorder.

Kathleen

Oh, you poor dear.

(Viciously)

Have some.

Sylvia

Uh, well, sure—I guess I could have just one.

(She takes one and flings it over her shoulder)

Whoops! Darn it, anyway.

Kathleen

Have another.

Sylvia

Sure.

(Flings another)

Oh oh.

Kathleen

Try again.

Sylvia (*Same thing*)

Clumsy me!

Wendell

Boy, Sylvia, you weren't kidding when you said you had an eating disorder. It really must be in its advanced stages!

Sylvia

Say, I have an idea. Let's play a game. Kathleen, you remember the game we used to play in Mrs. Reekee's home room? It was called, uh...gossip...or something?

Kathleen

Oh, you mean the Telephone Game.

Sylvia

Yes, that's right—the telephone game!

Wendell

Oh, I think I've played that before. That's where one person starts off whispering something like "Beavers make the best live-in companions," and then it comes out at the end, something like "Gall Bladder surgery isn't for the faint of heart."

Kathleen

That's a good idea. Here, I'll start.

(Kathleen whispers something to Sylvia, who becomes frightened. She whispers to Wendell, who shrugs, and then whispers to Kathleen)

Well now, isn't that interesting. This is truly remarkable. The message I whispered to Sylvia was "If you say one more word to Wendell, I am going to kill you."

Wendell (*Chuckling*)

Boy, Sylvia, that wasn't even *close* to what you told me!

Kathleen

...and the message I got from Wendell just now was, interestingly enough—"She knows all about us, Wendell. She's planning to poison you!"

Sylvia (*Dropping her head on the table*)

Oh, God!

Wendell

Don't feel bad, Sylvia. Listening is a skill that takes time to fully develop.

Kathleen

What a great idea this was of yours, Sylvia. I'd forgotten how enlightening this game could be.

Sylvia

Wendell, I was trying to give you a message.

Wendell

I know, Sylvia, you just didn't get it quite right, that's all. You'll do better next time.

Kathleen

No, Wendell, what Sylvia is trying to say is that I know all about the affair you two are having.

Wendell

Oh. Well, then I see.... My plan was a success!

Kathleen

Your plan?

Wendell

Yes. I only pretended to have an affair with Sylvia to see if you still cared about me. And it worked. You want me!

Kathleen

You're an idiot, Wendell. It's not *you* I care about. It's *Sylvia*.

Wendell

Sylvia? But... she's a *woman*.

Kathleen

We've been seeing each other intimately for several years now.

Wendell (*To Sylvia*)

You never told me that!

Sylvia

It was only a youthful indiscretion... experimentation of the lowest order.

Kathleen

Hey!

Wendell

My wife is having an affair with my own mistress? Who'd have thought?

Sylvia

But, Wendell, there are more important things at stake here! Remember...the poison... in your appetizers?

Kathleen

Oh, that! Don't be absurd.

Sylvia

You mean ... it isn't true?

Kathleen

Remember? It's a game we play. Every time a different victim?

(Beat)

Well, all right, I'll prove it. Observe the hors d'oeuvres?

(Eating one)

See? No effect whatsoever.

Wendell

Sylvia, I could have told you Kathleen is simply not the murdering type.

Kathleen *(Brandishing a gun)*

Wrong as usual, Wendell, darling... I just first needed you both to verify my suspicions.

Believe me. Neither of you is walking out of here alive.

Sylvia

But, Kathleen, why?

Kathleen

I simply cannot endure the thought of my lesbian lover sleeping with a man—especially my own husband! I'm the object ridicule down at Hair Today Gone Tomorrow. Well, I can assure you of one thing—they won't be laughing anymore!

(She aims the gun at Sylvia, who screams. Suddenly, Kathleen grimaces, drops the gun, and holds her stomach. She convulses once or twice and then drops dead in a suggestive pose on top of the table)

Sylvia

Wendell, I think she's.....dead!

Wendell

It's about time.

Kathleen

Wendell, what are you saying?

Wendell

Well, I learned about her scheme from her hairdresser, Helene. There nothing much a \$3 tip can't take care of. So, while you two were in the ladies' room, I took the liberty of inserting a smidgen of strychnine in her Bruschetta Pomodoro.

Sylvia *(Disappointed)*

Oh. My favorite Italian entrée.

Wendell

Yes, but... I was just wondering...

Sylvia

Yes, darling?

Wendell

Would you mind terribly if we brought Kathleen home with us. Once I've stuffed her, she would look so enticing next to the fireplace.

Sylvia

That's a wonderful idea. In an odd sort of way, I will have achieved my ultimate dream of having both of you to myself!

(They kiss)

Wendell

(Sitting down, satisfied at last, Wendell takes out his napkin)

Oh, waiter! We're ready to order now!

BLACKOUT

For the Love of Mr. Paradise

SETTING: *The modest, yet well-kept apartment of Molly Paradise. A window is center stage. There are three doors, one to the kitchen, one to the bathroom, and one to the outer hallway. A sofa sits center stage.*

AT RISE: *Lights come up on George Paradise, a well-dressed, articulate man in his 30s who is currently sitting on the sofa, checking his messages. The doorbell rings. Molly, a 20-something, attractive woman, dressed in a towel, opens the bathroom door and peeks out.*

Molly

Oh, George, I think Dr. Nippetuck is here! Could you get that?

George (*Getting up*)

Yeah, sure.... for all the good it's going to do.

Molly

Honey, you promised to be nice. I told you I'd pay for the whole thing.

George

I know. I just don't see what good a sex therapist is going to do at this stage of the game.

Molly

Why not?

George

Well, I mean, for one thing....we're already divorced!

Molly (*Nonplussed*)

What's your point?

George

Molly, look—I have a different life now. I've got a great girlfriend, I've got a new apartment.... I've taken you out of my will, I posted my new status on Facebook, and told my friends basically that, uh, I never want to see you again!

Molly

That's what I mean, George. Our marriage just isn't what it should be.

George

Molly, you seem to have forgotten that this whole divorce thing was your idea.

Molly

You honestly didn't think that I could stay married to a man who thinks of me as some of floozy...a sleaze..

George (*Accusingly*)

Hey! I never used those words.

Molly

...bimbo...slut...

George (*Satisfied*)

I used those words.

Molly

Why George Paradise! I can't believe—

George

Molly, there's no point in arguing about it now. Isn't that what you're paying this guy \$400 an hour to listen to?

(Doorbell again)

Molly

Please, George.... Dr. Nippetuck is waiting. I've got to get dressed.

(She ducks back in and closes the door)

George (*Heading for the door*)

He's a sex therapist, isn't he? Nothing is going to surprise him. He'd probably be disappointed if you didn't answer the door stark raving mad naked.

(Horace Aspinwall, an amiable and animated farmer, in his 30s, is dressed in overalls with just one strap, a plaid shirt and cap. He seems to be in some discomfort)

Hi. Come on in.

Horace

Thanks ever so much. I was wondering if I could use your...facilities.

George

You'll have to wait until my wife is finished freshening up. It may be a while.

Horace

Women can be finicky creatures, for sure. My Winifred is proof of that, but uh, is it absolutely necessary I wait until your wife is finished?

George

It *is* customary.

Horace

Yes, and believe, me, I wouldn't even have asked, but...there is an element of urgency to my request. Do you think she'd consent if we each agreed to....to look the other way?

George

I could ask....but I have a feeling she wouldn't consider that much of an incentive. Please, have a seat.

(Horace shrugs and sits on the sofa)

I suppose my wife has told you I don't really believe in this sort of thing.

Horace

Mmm....no, she never mentioned a thing to me.

George

Anyway, I know Molly's had good things to say about you... and what you do, and Molly especially is looking forward to watching you in action.

Horace *(clearing throat)*

I tend to do this sort of thing from behind closed doors, as a general rule.

George

That's an interesting technique. Do you mean you'll actually be talking to us from the other side of a door the whole time, then?

Horace

Well, Ireally don't have too much to say ...

George

I see. So...you're suggesting that.... our superficial trappings just get in the way....you find it more insightful to just...listen.

Horace

Well, you caught me. ... it's true that once I did put my ear up to the door when Winifred was in there for an unusually long time, but I wasn't meanin' no disrespect at all, mind you. I was just curious.

George

Well, make yourself comfortable. I'm getting a drink. Do you need anything?

Horace

Oh, Lordy, no.... but thankee for your kindness.

(George exits to kitchen. Molly emerges from bathroom, fully dressed now. She sees Horace, who looks expectant)

Molly

Hello! So we finally get the chance to meet!

Horace

Howdy do, ma'am. Your feller is in the kitchen, case you're wonderin'.

Molly

You've met George, then?

Horace

Yes, and it was very hospitable of him to let me in.

Molly

Well, we weren't about to make you stand out in the hall!

Horace

You're too kind.

Molly

Maybe we should just get right to the point.

Horace

Yes, ma'am, I'd be ever so grateful.

Molly

I think....it really takes two.

Horace

If you are into that sort of thing, then by golly, bless ya, darlin'. But I think oneis more than sufficient.

Molly (*An epiphany*)

Oh, I see. So you're saying....I don't really *need* anyone else.

Horace

That's about the size of it.

Molly (*Getting enthusiastic*)

I can do it on my own.

Horace

Just as the good Lord intended.

Molly

Couldn't a partner, though, conceivably make things, more Satisfying in the long run?

Horace

Well, theoretically, I suppose another person in there with you could spice things up a bit, yes, ma'am... but, I personally ain't got no hankerin' to try it.

(Beat)

Molly

I'm curious. Have you been doing this for long?

Horace

On my own, you mean?

Molly (*Confused*)

Yes.

Horace (*Nonchalantly*)

Ever since I was two, I s'ppose.

Molly (*Impressed*)

A child prodigy!

Horace

My mother never thought so.

Molly

I would have thought she'd be proud of you!

Horace

Not at all. She expected it. Hell, she insisted!

Molly

Domineering old hag!

Horace (*Sadly nodding*)

Yeah. Bitch.

George (*Re-entering from kitchen*)

Oh, I see you've met Dr. Nippletuck.

Molly

You know, George, I can't help but wonder if this man is really who he claims to be.

Horace

Ma'am! I never claimed to be nothing but what I am!

George

Then you *are* Dr. Nippletuck.

Horace

Who?

George

Dr. Gervais R. Nippletuck. The renowned sex therapist?

Horace

Mmmm...well, uh, don't exactly ring a bell.

Molly

The sex guru who encourages his followers to tie their umbilical cords around tree limbs to arrive at a Zen-like ethereal plane of existence?

Horace

Mmmm....No, I's Horace Aspinwall, the chairman of the horticultologist society of Alabama?... and we's experimentin' with a new kind of organic fungicide.

Molly

Oh.

George

Well, thatthat's not even close.

Horace

Well, it's like this, see. Winifred and me....we's on vacation. I stopped off at the fillin' station to use their facilities, but the fella told me they was only for paying customers. Well, hell, I didn't mind that none, but I had just filled the tank, so, regrettably I poured out 3 gallons of unleaded premium all over the pavement. Unfortunately, as fate would have it, a passing motorist tossed out his lit cigarette, which landed smack dab in the middle of the pool of gasoline. Well, sir, I don't need to tell you what happened next. Kablam!!!! The whole place went up in a blazing inferno, the likes of which I ain't never seen. I hightailed it outa there like there weren't no tomorrow, when suddenly, it hit me!

Molly (*Concerned*)

You forgot Winifred!

Horace (*Annoyed*)

Aw, hell, no. I forgot my wallet! I started to go back for it, when there was Winifred, runnin' behind me, waving my wallet in her hand, and shouting something, I couldn't make out, but, maybe that's just as well. Anyway, she saved my wallet, that was the important thing. After I put out the fire on Winifred's head, I ran until I came to this here apartment building, and knocked on the first door I seen. I told Winifred to wait outside, and, here I am!

(Winifred appears at the window and raps on it)

Horace

Bless her little heart, that's my Winifred right cheer at the winder. Mind if I let her in? I'll make sure she don't track in no peat moss or grass clippins, like her usual.

George (*Exiting*)

I'll show her the way in.

Molly (*Shooting a glance at Horace*)

I'm coming with you!

(They both exit, leaving the door open. Horace shrugs and crosses to the window. He opens the window, letting Winifred awkwardly climb in. She is a frumpy, eccentric old Jewish hag, with smoldering hair and a partly Blackened face).

Horace

Winifred, what the hell are you doin' at the winder?

Winifred

Horace! Horace, I was worried! It was taking longer than usual....even for you. Are you finished yet?

Horace

Hell, I ain't even started.

Winifred

Well, take your time. This could be my lucky day. A man's been watching me. He followed me right into this apartment building.

(A man appears at the open door, unseen by Winifred. He is older, distinguished looking, with a briefcase. He speaks with a posh British accent and epitomizes the very worst of British pomposity).

Horace

This here fella that's been following you....is he medium height, middle-aged, gray hair, wearin' his Sunday best, and totin' a leather briefcase?

Winifred

Horace! You know what you are? You're a telepathic genius! We'll make millions!

Horace

Well that would be a God send, I'm sure, and I don't mean to cast no dispersions on your assessment of my psychic predilections, but I'm afraid you're about too sorely disappointed.

Nippletuck

I beg your pardon, but I saw that the door was open and I entered without receiving permission. However, don't expect me to apologize. It's something I rarely do. In fact, as a former Episcopalian vicar, I make it a habit to "rarely" do most everything. Abstinence is the key to a solid moral character and a robust cardiovascular system. Now then, are there any questions before we begin?

(Sitting at the table and opening his briefcase. Horace sees his chance and enters the bathroom)

Winifred *(Raising her hand)*

Yeah, I have a question.

Nippletuck

Yes, the charming woman in the floral print dress with the charred hair, go ahead with your question.

Winifred

I don't have the slightest idea what the hell's going on here.

Nippletuck *(Condescendingly)*

My dear, it is precisely for that reason that I have come here tonight.

Winifred *(Trying her best to understand)*

Ahhhhh.

Nippletuck

My only regret is that Prudence, my wife and faithful companion of 37 years, was unable to join us here this evening, as she is no longer able to venture out for any great length of time.

Winifred

Oh, is she ill?

Nippletuck

She's dead.

Winifred

That would do it.

Nippletuck (*Dreamily*)

Ah, time was, she would accompany me to my sessions, ostensibly as a casual observer, but then she would surprise us all by exhibiting more neurotic tendencies than all my other patients combined!

Winifred

It must have been a sight to behold!

Nippletuck

Ah that it was, that it was, but please, let us not dabble over meaningless sentiment. It's all for the best, due to the appalling abuse she suffered as a young girl.

Winifred

How horrible!

Nippletuck

Yes, and I'll never forgive myself for it. Well, shall we begin?

Winifred (*Shrugging*)

You're the doctor.

Nippletuck

Why don't we start by having you relate your most recent experience together.

Winifred

That's an easy one. He set me on fire.

Nippletuck (*Excitedly taking notes*)

Interesting. Interesting! Go with that.

Winifred

Go with that? Go with it *where*? I'm tellin' you flames were shooting out of the top of my head!

Nippletuck

You achieved radiance of the highest magnitude! Stupendous!

Winifred

It hurt like hell!

Nippletuck

Ahem...Well...perhaps I can counsel him that certain roleplaying games are to be enjoyed only by mutual consent.

(Molly and George appear at the closed window, rapping on it)

Nippletuck *(Annoyed)*

Are *they* to be joining us?

Winifred

Who knows? I never seen 'em before.

Nippletuck

Extraordinary.

(Crosses to the window and opens it a crack)

Excuse me! I must ask the two of you to carry on your shenanigans elsewhere. It's most disturbing. There are laws against peeping Toms.

George

Hey! this is *our* apartment. Do you hear me? *Ours!* Not *hers!*

Nippletuck

Get away from here at once or I shall be forced to notify the authorities!

(The doctor closes the window on George. George bangs on it furiously. Nippletuck closes the drapes in a huff and crosses back to the couple)

Nippletuck

What made him think that he and his wife live in *your* apartment, I wonder?

Winifred

Beats me, Doc... I don't even live here.

Nippletuck

I see! And how long have *you* been under the delusion that this is not your apartment?

Winifred

I've *never* felt that this was my apartment.

Nippletuck

Extraordinary! I don't think I've ever come across a more acute case of domicile-phobia. This truly must be in its advanced stages!

(Frantic banging on the door)

Winifred

I swear! I have half a mind to sell this place and go back where I belong—to Peoria.

(She crosses to the door and opens it, letting in Molly and George)

George

Hey, what's the big idea....locking us out?

Winifred

We really couldn't be disturbed. These are very sensitive issues we're dealing with here!

Molly

Look, Doctor Nippletuck, I presume? I think I can clear this up.

Nippletuck

You're not still going to claim that this apartment belongs to you and your husband, are you?

George

Oh, no, Doc.... it's not my apartment. I have another place with my girlfriend uptown.

Nippletuck *(Pointing to Molly)*

Then who might this be?

George

My wife.

Nippletuck *(Alarmed, to Winifred)*

And you let this woman and her husband carry on an intimate relationship in your apartment, knowing full well he has a concubine in a clandestine location?

Winifred *(Shrugging)*

Why not? They were having problems. It was the least we could do.

Nippletuck

And where were you when all of this was going on?

Winifred

Ohio.

Nippletuck

I see. So this man, obviously tiring of his superficial relationship with some barroom floozy uptown, took advantage of your absence out of state to come here and recreate what he once had

Nippletuck (*Cont*)

with his betrothed...to experience the proverbial sins of the fleshof wanton craving and illicit desire!

Winifred (*Shrugging*)

That's one way of looking at it, I suppose.

Molly

Look, Doctor. I called you here tonight because I thought you could help us. I came to believe that you would be able to resolve the marital problems that George and I are facing, and could help bring us together.

Nippletuck

I'm afraid you're asking the wrong person there.

George

But you're a psychologist!

Nippletuck

Ah, yes, psychology.... A pseudo science at best, which the more astute among us have disparagingly—yet not inaccurately—labeled the “Science of Common Sense.” I'm afraid a degree in psychology does little more than clutter the mind with meaningless rhetoric that cannot possibly be applicable to any real-life situation. I daresay the charming lady to my right would be as capable as I, of finding a solution to your marital dilemma.

Winifred

I'm sure I could, Doc. But right now, all I want to do is get my Horace out of the bathroom. We gotta get goin'.

(Knocks on bathroom door)

Horace, you finished in there?

(Pause. Another knock)

Horace, can you hear me? Horace?

(She gets down on one knee, to see into the bathroom)

Winifred (*Cont*)

Oh my God!

Molly

What is it?

Winifred

There's no keyhole for me to peep through!

George

Well of course there's no keyhole. This is the 21st Century, for Christ's sake!

Winifred

How am I supposed to see what's going on in there?

Nippletuck

Based on my considerable experience, we should probably expect the worst. Is his life insurance in arrears?

Winifred

Way to look on the bright side, Sweet cheeks!

Molly

We'd better call for a doctor.

(Molly crosses to window and opens it)

Nippletuck (*Peevishly*)

I'm a doctor!

George

A Ph.D. in psychology wouldn't help.

Nippletuck

Wouldn't hurt.

Molly (*Yelling out the window*)

Doctor! We need a doctor!

George

Molly, you can't get a doctor that way!

Molly

There's a medical school right across the street. They ought to be able to spare someone. In the meantime, George, take Winifred out the window and make your way over to the bathroom.

George

After you.

Winifred

I can't climb out that window. I have a fear of heights!

George

We're on the first floor!

Winifred

I've got a bad case. What can I say?

Molly

Just don't look down.

Winifred

All right. I'll give it a whirl.

(Winifred and George make their way out the window. The door bell rings. Molly answers it, revealing a young sexy girl, dressed in shorts and a halter top, chewing gum, and as we shall soon see, infectiously vivacious.)

Molly

Yes?

Muffin

Hi! Did somebody call for a doctor?

Molly

Yes, do you know one?

Muffin

I *am* one.

Molly

You're a doctor?

Muffin

Well...sort of. I'm a second year med student at the university, where this week, we're studying the medical-social phenomenon called "Those who play doctors on TV." It's well-known that the actor Robert Young, who played Marcus Welby, MD, on the 1970s series, actually diagnosed his friends' illnesses, and even wrote out prescriptions, while wearing the doctor's coat and stethoscope that he stole from the wardrobe department. He had them all convinced that he was a real doctor! It's a very popular course.

Molly

Gosh, I hate for you to miss it.

Muffin

Well, I did want to get there in time for the popcorn, but... I was on my way to class, and I heard someone call for a doctor.

Molly

Oh, that was me.

Muffin

Oh, was it? You have a lovely voice.

Molly

Oh, thank you. And that's a lovely top you're wearing.

Muffin

Don't mention it.

Molly

You mean "Thank you."

Muffin

No, I mean "Don't mention it." My boyfriend gave it to me just before running off with a two-bit tramp from Barcelona. It brings back horrid memories every time I lay eyes on it.

Molly

The tramp?

Muffin

The top.

Molly

Then why wear it?

Muffin (*Ashamed*)

It's the only appropriate outfit I have for med school.

Nippetuck

Ladies, please! Let's not lose sight of the emergency at hand...in spite of the fact that such trivialities can be building blocks in any successful relationship. We do have an ill person who is need of immediate assistance.

Muffin

Yes, of course.

(Beat)

Well?

Nippetuck

Well, what?

Muffin

What seems to be the problem?

Molly

That's what we were hoping *you'd* be able to tell *us*!

Muffin

Um...ok. Let's see... here....

(She wanders aimlessly about the room, trying to assess the situation)

Do you think that you could kind of... you know....give me a hint as to what I'm looking for?

Nippetuck (*Snorting*)

Amateurs!

Molly

A man went into the bathroom some time ago, and we haven't heard a peep out of him.

Nippetuck

Not even a "Thank you."

Muffin (*Rolling her eyes*)

Some people!

Molly

I know, right?

Muffin

So what seems to be wrong with him?

Nippetuck

There she goes asking *us* again! Frankly, I think you would have been better off with me and my PhD in psychology.

(The bathroom door swings open, and George and Winifred are awkwardly carrying an unconscious Horace into the living room)

Molly

Ah, doctor, I believe the patient is making its way out of the bathroom at this time.

Muffin (*Directing traffic*)

To your left...no, no, no...to your right... to your left...back up now....that's right....put him on the sofa. Careful, now.

(They lay out Horace on the sofa)

That's the way. Perfect!

Molly

Don't worry, George. We're in good hands now. This is Doctor....?

Muffin

Call me Muffin. I don't officially have my credentials yet.

George

So what's the verdict, Muffin?

Muffin

Well, uh... I don't think you should move him, unless you need the sofa for something really, really important. His condition is, like, unstable, or something.

Molly

Well, if his condition is that bad, then don't you think he should be in a hospital?

Muffin

That's the worst place he could be. 32% of people who go into those places never come out! You're much better off on the outside.

Molly

That makes sense.

George

Oh, sure, brilliant!

Muffin

Duh, it's not like I graduated or anything. I'm trying!

Molly

I think you're doing a fine job.

Muffin

It's my first case.

Nippetuck

I couldn't tell.

Muffin (*Entering a number on her cell phone*)

Excuse me a sec while I call my mother. She will be so proud. She has premonitions about this sort of thing.

George

Well, if your mother has premonitions like you say, then why isn't *she* calling you?

(Molly's landline phone rings)

Muffin

Gee! She's better than I thought!

(Answering phone)

Hello, mother?

(Beat)

You don't sound like my mother.

George (*Snatching the phone away*)

Give me that!

George (Cont)

Hello?

(Beat)

Oh, hi honey.

(Covering mouthpiece, to others)

It's my girlfriend.

(Into phone)

I know. Yes, this is Molly's number.

(Beat)

No, I *know* that wasn't Molly, that was a sexy brunette in a revealing top.....she just joined us... to...to check out the stranger in the bathroom! I'm... you what?? Whoa, wait! You can't break up with me over the....hello? Hello!

(Hangs up phone)

She called me a pervert.

Winifred

I always knew there was something strange about that man....the way he looked at me when he first came in...the way our eyes met. I could tell what he was thinking without him having to say a word. It was scandalous. And then ... he touched me.... gently at first.... but then, more passionately and uncontrolled!

George

I never laid a finger on her!

Winifred

Party pooper.

Muffin

Well you know, everybody, I hate to make it sound like I don't know what I'm doing, but this is a little out of my hands.

Nippetuck

Just as I suspected!

Molly

What do you mean, dear? What do you mean by "out of your hands"? Is it because you haven't graduated yet?

Muffin

No, I...

George

Is it because you don't have anyone to assist you?

Muffin

No, I.....

Molly

Is it because you don't have the proper training to assess his true condition?

Muffin

Because he's dead.

Nippetuck

Dead?

Molly

Did you say dead?

Muffin

Dead. Yep. Pretty sure.

George

Oh that's just great!

Winifred

Speak for yourself, fella. It's kind of a letdown for some of us here.

Molly

Really, George. It's not every day someone just up and drops dead on your living room sofa.

George

You just exude that "glass half full" kind of mentality.

Molly *(To Winifred)*

Excuse me, I know this must be hard, but what do you want to do with the body of the deceased?

Winifred *(Shrugging)*

How should I know? It's really none of my business.

Molly

But...your husband!

Winifred

Husband? What husband? He picked me up hitchhiking outside of Akron, Ohio three weeks ago.

(Sidling up to Nippetuck)

What are *you* doing tonight?

Nippetuck *(Flustered)*

W-What am *I* doing tonight? W-What have *I* got going?

Winifred

Need me to rephrase the question?

Nippetuck

I'd have to check my calendar.

Winifred

I can wait. Where am I going to go? We don't have a car anymore.

Nippetuck *(Checking his calendar)*

Well this is good news. Nothing's booked up!

Winifred

For the rest of the evening?

Nippetuck

For the rest of the *year!!*

Winifred

Sweet Jesus! Horace is looking better all the time.

Muffin

Even in his present condition?

Winifred

Especially in his present condition.

(Nippetuck and Winifred exit, arm in arm)

Muffin

Well, I have to get going, too, but if you need anything else, just give me a ring. I need the practice!

Molly

We definitely will.

Muffin (*Exiting*)

Bye!

Horace

Psst! Is the coast clear?

George (*To Molly*)

What?

Horace

Is she gone?

Molly (*To George*)

Who?

Horace

Winifred.

George (*To Molly*)

What about her?

Molly (*Cautiously approaching the body*)

Mr. Aspinwall?

Horace (*Jumping off the sofa*)

Yeeee hahh!

(Molly screams)

Sorry to scare you there, missy. I knew it would only be a matter of time before you figured out I weren't dead.

Molly

Mr. Aspinwall. You're alive!

George

Oh, thank God. Do you know what a hassle it is to dump a dead body off at the morgue? And the questions they ask.....so I hear.

Horace

Mister, you're all heart.

Molly

Really, George. Show some respect. I mean, after all, this is a miracle...uh isn't it?

Horace

Mmm, no. Not really. Ah, shoot, I sure hated to do this to you nice folks, but the truth is, I've been trying to dump that old biddy ever since I picked her up hitchhiking outside Akron, Ohio three weeks ago. Just couldn't seem to shake her.

George

I don't believe this!

Horace

I know how you must feel and I can't say I really blame you... but I think I can make it up to you.

George

What can *you* do?

Horace

Well, for one thing, I believe I can solve your marital difficulties and assure you of peace and happiness for the rest of your natural lives.

(Beat)

Ya gotta minute?

Molly

That's all it'll take?

Horace

Unless you include the question and answer session at the end. It's optional.

George

I really don't, uh....

Horace

Well...it all comes down to this:

(Grandly)

Life.....

(They look at him expectantly)

... is life.

(Pause as Molly and George exchange quizzical glances)

Molly

That's it?

Horace

Ain't it enough?

George

What does that even *mean*?!

Horace

It means that you have to live in the here and now and stop pursuin' the vision of love and romance that exists only inside your heads! Wake up, people!

George

Well, this is the most...

Horace *(Ignoring George)*

Oh, I will admit at one time that I myself even got down on my knees and prayed to the Lord God Almighty, night after night, to help me find my true love.

Molly

And what happened?

Molly

Grandma Humplebun really had a way with words.

Horace

“Stop waitin’ for the train that’s never gonna roll into the station,” says she. “Hop on the first train that’s not headin’ for New Jersey—get your ticket punched, sit back and enjoy the ride.

(Secretively)

Just don’t order the tuna casserole in the cafeteria car.

(Grandly)

Life is what it is. Ain’t nothin’ more.”

George

So, you mean...we’re supposed to just.... stay together because ... neither of us is... headed for New Jersey?

Horace

Is it really such a bad way to live?

Molly *(Shrugging)*

Well, I...

Horace

Don’t respond, dear. That was a rhetorical question.

Molly

Sorry.

Horace

Instead of wasting precious time trying to fall in love with people who will never bring you true happiness....not to mention those who break up with ya over the phone because you’re having a threesome in front of a dead man on the bathroom floor....learn to fall in love with mediocrity, cuz you sure as hell ain’t gonna find anything better than that in this world or any other.

Molly *(Gravely)*

Grandma Humplebun?

Horace

I believe you know the answer to that.

(George and Molly look at each other tenderly)

George *(To Horace)*

Don't you have someplace you have to be?

Horace

I'll be out of your hair in a minute. I's just waitin' for my date to show up.

Molly

Date? What date?

(Doorbell)

Horace

That'll be her now.

(Shouting)

C'mon in, darlin'!

(The door opens, and Muffin runs in, jumping excitedly into Horace's welcoming arms)

Muffin

Horace, it worked!

Horace

I told you it would, Pumpkin!

Muffin

I feel like celebrating.

Horace

I was hopin' she'd say that!

(Lights begin to fade, as he carries her out the door)

Muffin

Bye, you two. I hope you'll both "like" me on Facebook. It was my first medical case, and I've got 2,000 friends who are dying to know I'm a success.

Horace

I'm proof enough of that!

Molly *(Trying to be helpful)*

Well... at least no one actually died!

Muffin

I'll send you the bill in the morning.

George

Bill? What bill? You haven't done anything!

Horace

With a little luck, we will before the night's out.

George (*Running after them, shouting*)

Hey! Hey, I'm not paying good money for that sort of thing! Do you hear me? I'm not paying a cent! Not a single penny!!!

END OF PLAY