

ACT IScene 1

*SCENE: The Walker Household, Los Angeles, late June, 1953. A pleasant little suburban home. The kitchen and backdoor entrance is center-stage, the bedroom to stage-right, the living room and front door to stage-left.*

*AT RISE: GRACE WALKER, mid to late 30s or so, pretty for her age, hair tied back in a bun, apron on, is alone on stage her hands are in the sink washing dishes.*

*The door is practically thrown open by her husband, BEVERLY WALKER, a bespectacled academic Brit in his late 30s; he comes in coated in sweat stains, there is perhaps a twig sticking out of his hair. He takes a deep breath and grabs a towel from the counter and wipes himself down with it.*

GRACE

Did you trim the hedges or play in the sprinklers?

BEVERLY

Lord almighty it's hot outside.

*He takes a seat at the table. She takes note of which towel he's chosen to pick up.*

GRACE

Bev, that's one of my good towels.

BEVERLY

It's a towel for God's sake.

GRACE

It's a good towel for God's sake.

BEVERLY

(Re: the now sweaty towel)  
Not anymore.

GRACE

Did you at least get the hedges trimmed?

BEVERLY

I was trimming the hedges when I started to think...

GRACE

Oh God...

BEVERLY

We're a relatively wealthy suburban couple it's about time we hired landscapers.

GRACE

You seriously wanna be one of those couples that has landscapers?

BEVERLY

Think of it this way: you're damn picky about the hedges, I'm a terrible gardener.

GRACE

You could just use those ph.d brains of yours to learn.

BEVERLY

The mind is not infinite Grace. Every man has his limits.

GRACE

Yours being hedges?

BEVERLY

Exactly.

GRACE

Well, regardless of how you feel about yard-work can you teach yourself to get cleaned up? The Dodsons are coming over at 7.

*He gets up and pulls open one of the drawers, then another, and another -- searching.*

BEVERLY

I was thinking Charlotte Dodson might like me better this way. I think she'll find it very masculine.

GRACE

Masculine?

BEVERLY

Sure, I bet she likes them hot and sweaty.

*GRACE splashes him with the dishwater.*

GRACE

You are such a fucking...

BEVERLY

(Jokingly; mimicking her Mother)  
Gracie dear, language.

GRACE

Mocking my Mother: original.

BEVERLY

Splashing me with dishwater: uncalled for.

*They laugh; Beverly continues to look, a bit more frantic.*

GRACE

What are you looking for?

BEVERLY

I can't remember where the bloody hell I put those goddamn...

GRACE

(A blatant lie)

I don't know what you're talking about.

BEVERLY

You've hidden them haven't you?

*Beverly gets to work looking around the house for them.*

GRACE

You're going to have to quit one of these days.

BEVERLY

Says who?

GRACE

Well, just a hunch but I figure breathing smoke into your lungs might kill you.

BEVERLY

Something kills us all eventually, doesn't it?

GRACE

And you'd prefer it to be a cigarette wouldn't you?

BEVERLY

Well, I certainly don't want it to be something dreadful like an airplane crash or a public lynching.

GRACE

Not funny.

BEVERLY

Come Grace, it's not right to deny a man the right to smoke.

GRACE

"A man will always fight harder for his interests than his rights."

BEVERLY

(He smiles)  
Napoleon?

GRACE

You tell me Professor.

BEVERLY

Your education seems to be coming along splendidly.

GRACE

I could do without your pop quizzes.

BEVERLY

Look, you're the one who wanted to do some reading.

GRACE

"The root of education is bitter, but the fruit is sweet."

BEVERLY

(With confidence.)  
Ah, Socrates.  
(She shakes her head.)  
Plato?  
(She chuckles.)  
This is a trick question isn't it? No one ever said that did they?

GRACE

It was you my dear... Aristotle.

BEVERLY

That was my third guess.

GRACE

Gee looks like the only person here who needs brushing up is you, Professor Walker.

BEVERLY

Well, you caught me. 8 years of higher education and all I've ever been is a dirty rotten cheater.

GRACE

(Playfully, in character)  
Well, you can always apply for "extra credit".

BEVERLY

(He wraps his arms around her  
playfully.)  
Extra credit, do tell.

GRACE

(Very in character)  
Come to my office in three hours time and make a woman  
out of me with your over-educated mind and body.

BEVERLY

(With a twinge of Shakespeare.)  
Oh, t'would be an honor to bed a woman of such  
sophistication and education as you.

GRACE

(She grabs his shirt, the height of  
their romantic scene.)  
Oh take me now.

*Beverly stifles a laugh but doesn't manage to hold  
it in, Grace joins in. They let go of each other.*

BEVERLY

Bravo Elizabeth Taylor.

GRACE

(Bowing)  
I try.

*He goes back to searching the cabinets.*

BEVERLY

Now, could I *at least* have a hint?

GRACE

That would defeat the purpose of hiding them from you.

BEVERLY

You're getting very good at this.

GRACE

Practice makes perfect.

BEVERLY

Why do you do this to me?

GRACE

Because you need to break a bad habit, I can't stand  
all the ash you leave on the floor ... mostly because  
it's fun to watch you look.

BEVERLY

You are an evil woman.

GRACE

I think it's a sign that you should give up and come have some lunch.

BEVERLY

I believe the great Sun Tzu once said "Never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy."

GRACE

It was Winston Churchill, but Sun Tzu is close enough.

BEVERLY

Must you? You've already stolen one thing from me. Must you now also take my dignity?

GRACE

You are such a drama queen.

BEVERLY

(He drops to his knees with dramatic schmaltz)

I am a creature of habit Grace, forgive me.

GRACE

All right, now you're just being ridiculous.

*She brings the sandwiches to the table. Beverly looks absolutely stumped.*

BEVERLY

Come on, if not for me do it for the Dodsons, if I don't have a cigarette within the hour I'll be rabid by the time they get here.

*BEVERLY, sparking an idea, and heads to the bedroom to search.*

GRACE

I think you'll survive. Besides, you like a good challenge every now and again. We'll finally get to see just how charming you can be without tobacco.

BEVERLY

(Peeking his head out.)

Oh-ho-ho don't bite your tongue on that one. I am charming, I mean: look at me.

*He gives a charming smirk, she looks wholly unamused.*

GRACE

You look like a sweaty middle aged out of practice literature professor turning his house upside down for a pack of cigarettes.

BEVERLY

Grace, I'm desperate.

GRACE

It's called addicted.

BEVERLY

(Drama; again)

You're right. What else is there to do? I'm a worthless cigarette addict with no hope in this world.

(Gearing up the Drama)

"If I must die I will encounter darkness as a bride,  
And hug it in mine arms."

*Beverly "stabs" himself with an invisible knife and falls to the ground beside the bed. Grace applauds.*

GRACE

Well, well, well, you're a man of many talents.

*Beverly, on the floor, spots something under the bed and disappears under it.*

GRACE

(No response)

Bev? Bev?

*BEVERLY shoots up from under the bed, cigarette pack in hand.*

BEVERLY

Aha! There you little devils are.

*He re-enters the room lighting the cigarette. He sits down and drops the box on the table. He breaths in a deep, satisfied, smokey, breath of relief. Grace looks on with disapproval.*

BEVERLY

What? I found them fair and square.

GRACE

You know I don't like it when you smoke in the house.

BEVERLY

Well, I suppose we bought that fancy fucking thing for nothing?

GRACE

Would it *kill* you to call it an air conditioner?

BEVERLY

Probably.

*Grace sets two sandwiches down on the table for them, she reaches across and grabs a cigarette and holds her hand out for his lighter. BEVERLY takes in the hypocrisy, the irony, he relishes it.*

BEVERLY

"Breathing smoke into your lungs will kill you", Grace.

GRACE

All right give it a rest.

BEVERLY

Your hypocrisy is as fascinating as it is amusing.

GRACE

Why don't you just eat your sandwich, smoke your cigarette, and worry about your hedges?

*She snatches the lighter from him and lights her cigarette.*

BEVERLY

I thought you quit.

GRACE

And when's the last time I did what I was supposed too?

BEVERLY

You married me, didn't you?

*They chuckle. They attend to their sandwiches.*

BEVERLY

Ida and Leonard are having a party next weekend, they want us to pop by.

GRACE

You didn't say yes did you?

BEVERLY

Well, what else have we got to do?

GRACE

You know how I feel about parties.

BEVERLY

Leonard says Ida thinks you don't like her.

GRACE

That's crazy.

BEVERLY

Is she wrong?

GRACE

I am very friendly.

*Beverly stifles a laugh.*

GRACE

We're not going.

BEVERLY

Well, if you're so bloody friendly what could possibly go wrong?

GRACE

Do you want to go?

BEVERLY

Of course I don't. But, people are starting to notice we're... recluses. We've only lived here six months and we've already got a reputation.

GRACE

Oh, I see what this is about.

BEVERLY

What are you talking about?

GRACE

You're worried about what Arnold said aren't you?

BEVERLY

Worried about... worried... *no!*

GRACE

Bev, you need to relax. As far as anyone knows or cares you and I are married, in love, and very very normal.

BEVERLY

That's the thing Grace, normal people go to their neighbor's fourth of July get-together. They bring a side-dish and knock back a few drinks over nonsensical talk about work and children. Even if they can't stand them. It's just... custom.

GRACE

(She scoffs)

Custom...

BEVERLY

Believe me I don't like it anymore than you do.

GRACE

Fine we'll go mingle amongst the normal-folk.

*GRACE takes the newspaper and opens it up. She waits, then puts it down.*

GRACE

Speaking of mingling...

BEVERLY

Oh dear.

GRACE

My Mother wanted to know if she could stay here a few days.

BEVERLY

What?

GRACE

She's coming to for Arnold's charity Gala.

BEVERLY

Grace, that's this weekend.

GRACE

Yeah...

BEVERLY

Well, when the hell did you plan on telling me this?

GRACE

Now. Now was when I planned it.

BEVERLY

Why would you bring her here?

GRACE

It was her idea not mine. She wants to spend more time with me. She sort of invited herself over actually.

BEVERLY

She's aware that I live here too, isn't she?

GRACE

She called while you were at work yesterday. She was going to stay in a hotel but she heard the hotel was desegregated and she refuses to stay there.

BEVERLY

Unbelievable.

GRACE

She'll be here on Thursday.

BEVERLY

Today's Sunday that's five days from now.

GRACE

And he's good at math too!

BEVERLY

You've got to be joking.

GRACE

I wish I was.

BEVERLY

The gall of that woman. Barging in on my home uninvited, unannounced, un-

(He stops himself short and lights another cigarette)

You know she's probably coming to raid my drawers for evidence that I'm a fag so she can get me carted off to jail.

GRACE

You say that like she's some kind of conniving...

BEVERLY

Are you saying she's not?

*GRACE freezes a moment. She gets up to start clearing the plates.*

GRACE

(Abruptly changing the subject)

We'll have to share the bed for the weekend until she's gone. And you're going to have to fix the sink in the guest bedroom before she gets here.

BEVERLY

Done, consider it done.

GRACE

I will not have any sulking from you. Or any of your dumb jokes while she's here.

BEVERLY

I know, I know the drill.

GRACE

You know she's only suspicious because you talk as though she's brain dead.

BEVERLY

You're right, I certainly don't give her enough credit.

GRACE

Four days. Four days of your very best acting.

BEVERLY

I'll try my best. I'm not making any promises though. She wants to scuffle then scuffle we shall.

GRACE

No, no, no absolutely no scuffling with my Mother. And you know, you could do to be a little nicer to her.

BEVERLY

Golden rule Grace, do unto others as they do unto you. I'm just trying to make sure I reciprocate verbatim.

GRACE

Will you at least try? For me.

BEVERLY

For you.

*GRACE starts the washing up, BEVERLY examines her a moment.*

BEVERLY

Is everything all right?

GRACE

Nothing, what would give you that idea?

BEVERLY

You hate it here don't you?

GRACE

No, it's just...

BEVERLY

Just what?

*She puts the dishes down.*

GRACE

Did I ever tell you about Jimmy Peterson?

BEVERLY

Who?

GRACE

Guess not.

BEVERLY

What about him?

GRACE

He was...

(She stops short.)

He was my...

BEVERLY

(On the edge of his seat)

Oh come on, now you have to tell me.

GRACE

He was my...

*She waits. Building the anticipation.*

BEVERLY

Spit it out for Christ's sake the suspense alone will kill me.

GRACE

He was my boyfriend in High School.

BEVERLY

You never told me about this.

GRACE

For good reason.

BEVERLY

What do you mean? I mean, obviously you didn't take to the fellow but...

GRACE

No, I didn't.

BEVERLY

Why do you mention him?

GRACE

(Beat.)

You asked if something was bothering me and...

BEVERLY

What about him is suddenly bothering you?

*She freezes. BEVERLY sees the newspaper. He smiles evilly. GRACE gets at the ready. He springs from his seat. They wrestle for the newspaper, he gets it from her.*

BEVERLY

"James Peterson to run for office of Mayor."

(He pauses.)

I knew the name was familiar.

(He looks to Grace)

Well, that's lovely he's running for Mayor. What's the problem?

GRACE

So what nothing. I saw his name it reminded me of him, that's it.

BEVERLY

You wouldn't bring it up if you didn't have a reason to.

GRACE

Clearly I don't want to talk about it.

BEVERLY

Why'd you bring it up then?

(GRACE is silent.)

I'll prod all night if I have too.

GRACE

He lives here. What if I... see him?

BEVERLY

What would be so bad about that?

GRACE

Clearly you never had this problem.

BEVERLY

What problem?

*She sits down.*

BEVERLY

Grace, come on, tell me.

GRACE

My parents wanted me to marry him. And I guess there was some kind of arrangement going on that no one told me about and eventually he proposed and... I said no.

BEVERLY

Oh boy.

GRACE

You see the problem?

*Beverly waits, thinking it over.*

BEVERLY

He tipped you off didn't he?

GRACE

What are you talking about?

BEVERLY

He's the reason you figured it out. You had a relationship with a man, who you clearly had fond enough feelings for to feel bad for rejecting. But, when it came down to it, you couldn't do it. And now here we are. Grace, that's a very special person in the life of a homosexual. That person that helps you to the inevitable truth.

GRACE

All right, genius, you've figured it out. Now can we just drop it?

BEVERLY

Look, it's not as bad as you're making it out to be.

(Examining his picture in the paper)

And he looks like a nice enough fellow.

(He sparks an idea)

You should call him.

GRACE

What? Under no circumstances-

BEVERLY

Think of it as a form of closure. A testament to your new life.

*He picks up the phone, she hits the receiver.*

GRACE

Bev, *this* is my life. Pretending to be married, playing housewife. Not exactly something I want to go around sharing.

BEVERLY

But you still want to see him.

GRACE

I don't want to see him and he doesn't want to see me. All he is to me is an empty meat-bag I held hands with for two years and all I am to him is a prude who never wanted to kiss.

BEVERLY

*Two years!?*

*GRACE throws her hands in the air and walks away.*

GRACE

Why do I tell you anything?

BEVERLY

Grace, I promise you'll feel better if you just talk to him. Just once. Look into the eyes of the man who started it all and never look into another man's eyes as long as you live.

GRACE

How do you know?

BEVERLY

Excuse me?

GRACE

How do you know I'll feel better?

BEVERLY

(He clams up)

I... I don't know. For sure, at least.

GRACE

Who was your tip-off?

BEVERLY

We are *not* having this discussion.

GRACE

Oh, someone of your intellectual stature probably didn't need one. You probably had your own psychological wiring figured out by the time you were 13.

BEVERLY

Who's to say I didn't?

GRACE

Yeah, I don't buy it.

BEVERLY

No, no, no, no. Do not deflect away from your problem by making this my problem.

GRACE

If it's such an important person just tell me. Who is she?

BEVERLY

This isn't funny.

GRACE

You said it yourself.

BEVERLY

I don't have to do this.

GRACE

My God you were *born* to be a college professor.

BEVERLY

I'll go get cleaned up for tonight.

*He starts off she cuts him off.*

GRACE

I'm not feeding you another meal until you tell me.

BEVERLY

You say that like I'm some incompetent buffoon who can't...

*Her gaze gets the better of him. She is right, as usual. He surrenders and sits back down.*

BEVERLY

Her name was Sybil.

GRACE

I remember Sybil, you brought her to the Hamptons one summer.

BEVERLY

Wanna know why?

(Beat.)

We were engaged.

GRACE

You were *engaged*?

BEVERLY

I'm not proud of it.

GRACE

What happened?

BEVERLY

(Lying.)

She died.

GRACE

No she didn't.

BEVERLY

No she didn't.

(He waits)

I called it off. We were only engaged for two weeks. It wasn't fair to her, wasn't fair to me. We would have both been miserable.

GRACE

I can't imagine you asking a girl to marry you.

BEVERLY

I got her a ring and everything. And it really hurt when she threw it in my face.

GRACE

You felt bad?

BEVERLY

No, it caught me in the eye.

*He smiles, she smiles back. Silence a moment. The phone rings. They let it ring as they silently decide who will answer it. Grace picks it up.*

GRACE

Walker Residence .... Mother, how are you?

*BEVERLY disgusted goes to the bedroom where he disappears into the bathroom.*

GRACE

What do you mean? .... Canceled? .... Oh, Mother what a shame. .... Oh, what was your idea? .... Tonight? .... That's... so soon. .... No, I understand it's just that Beverly... .... Yes, we're still married. .... Yes, he's still teaching. .... No, it's not a problem it's just... short notice. .... Do you want Bev to pick you up from the airport? .... No, I didn't think so. .... Fine, we're both fine. .... I can't wait either. .... It has been a while. .... Listen Mother I've got to go. .... Love you too, goodbye.

*GRACE hangs up the phone and takes a deep breath. She goes to one of the cabinets and covertly searches around in it. She pulls a box of cigarettes hidden in there and takes one; she lights it. She takes a moment.*

*BEVERLY comes out of the bathroom, shaving cream covering his face.*

BEVERLY

Grace have you seen my...

GRACE

Your razor is in the cabinet under the sink.

BEVERLY

What'd your Mother say?

*GRACE waits. She takes a drag of the cigarette.*

GRACE

Her flight got canceled.

BEVERLY

It's almost too good to be true.

GRACE

As a solution she's just boarded a flight here. She'll be joining us for drinks with the Dodsons.

*BEVERLY stands in shock a moment.*

BEVERLY

(Nonchalant)

Well, if you need me I'll be holding my head under water for the next 10 minutes. Arrange for my body to be sent back to England, harass UCLA until they open a new wing of the library in my name, tell my Mother I love her ... oh, and keep the old girl away from whiskey at the funeral, makes her drowsy.

*BEVERLY disappears back into the bathroom. GRACE smiles. The lights go down.*

## SCENE 2

*Beverly is in the bedroom, half dressed, alternating between two ties in frustration. Grace comes out of the bathroom putting in earrings. She stops short when she sees his state.*

GRACE

Beverly, what are you doing? The Dodsons will be here any minute.

BEVERLY

Which tie should I wear?

GRACE

What does it matter?

BEVERLY

The other day I overheard a few of my students talking. They said I dress... "*faggish*".

GRACE

What?

BEVERLY

My tie. They said I wore a faggish tie.

GRACE

And?

BEVERLY

Well, it's just... remember, Harold? He was a literature professor, wonderful fellow. One of his students started talk that he dressed faggish. Two days later Harold stops showing up at the University, practically drops off the face of the Earth like he never existed. Next thing I know I'm reading an article in the morning paper about a respected UCLA literature professor being locked up for "Un-American Activities". All on a few faggish style choices.

GRACE

Would you stop saying faggish?

BEVERLY

Do I dress faggish to you?

GRACE

Bev, I wouldn't know.

BEVERLY

Grace, I read that article thinking that I could have just as easily been Harold the literature professor. One wrong tie and I'm going to be shipped off to prison, or a madhouse, or a secret island in Southeast Asia that Eisenhower goes to on the weekends to torture fags and communists.

GRACE

You're out of your mind.

BEVERLY

Please... for me can you at least try and pretend to understand long enough to pick a tie. It'll take you two seconds of your very best acting.

*Grace takes a moment. She surveys the ties.*

GRACE

The red one.

BEVERLY

(Putting on the tie)

Was that so hard?

GRACE

There's really no need for you to be this paranoid.

BEVERLY

Paranoid? I'm being very practical.

GRACE

They're not going to send you to jail over a tie.

BEVERLY

Happened to Harold, might as well happen to me.

GRACE

That's absurd.

BEVERLY

You don't get it Grace. As far as everyone else is concerned women are good for two things: Aesthetic appeal and child bearing. Provided you can do one of the two things the world couldn't care less who the hell you're spreading your legs for. But men? We start screwing the wrong gender and suddenly we're sacrilegious fairies sent from hell to corrupt America's children. Grace, they're cracking down. There's a goddamn witch hunt starting for fags and communists and I am not getting burned at the stake over which ties I choose to wear.

GRACE

Well, at the end of the day it's the designer's fault, I mean it's their...

BEVERLY

Grace, I'm serious.

GRACE

Bev, all I'm saying is that being paranoid isn't going to do you any good.

BEVERLY

Everyone's paranoid Grace. Didn't you hear? The communists are on their way right now to desecrate our churches and overthrow the government.

GRACE

You want to get socked in the face before the night's over don't you?

BEVERLY

If it means I never have to see your Mother again... please: sock away.

GRACE

My Mother is not that bad.

BEVERLY

Oh please. If anyone's pulling for me to get carted off to jail it's her.

GRACE

That's not true.

BEVERLY

Then how the hell do I get her to like me?

GRACE

You don't; you just smile, be polite, and hope for the best.

BEVERLY

And the best is maybe she'll have the decency to say "Thank you for your hospitality Beverly, it was a pleasure" like a normal human being.

GRACE

I'm sure she likes you just fine she's just...

BEVERLY

(Mostly to himself)  
The demon spawn of Satan in disguise.

GRACE

(Hitting him over the head)  
Bev, that's my Mother you're talking about!

BEVERLY

Just because she's your Mother doesn't mean I owe her a thing.

GRACE

This isn't about owing her anything. This is about what a husband does. He puts on his best tie, smiles, kisses her on the cheek and says "lovely to see you again".

BEVERLY

The least "faggish" tie.

GRACE

What happened to not saying "faggish"?

BEVERLY

What's the matter with it?

GRACE

It's offensive.

BEVERLY

Everybody says it.

GRACE

Bev, you of all people should know.

BEVERLY

Why are you so touchy all of the sudden?

GRACE

Touchy? Bev, doesn't it matter to you that that word gets tossed around as a means of belittling you and everything you...

BEVERLY

Grace, I really prefer not to think about that.

GRACE

You know what your problem is?

BEVERLY

What? That I'm too acrimonious? That I'm cranky and morose and should know better?

GRACE

Don't strain your vocabulary, Professor.

*She leaves the room towards the kitchen, trying to drown him out, she starts setting up the cheese plate. He follows her.*

BEVERLY

Grace, there's no need for name calling.

GRACE

Name calling? Let's talk about name calling.

BEVERLY

Sure, let's talk about what happens when people start calling us heretics and criminals.

GRACE

Is that what you think?

BEVERLY

Well, I'm mostly just trying to wrap my head around what on Earth I've done that's got you so wound.

GRACE

What you've done? Of course, this has to be your fault because there's no way I could have feelings independent of something you've done.

BEVERLY

Well, forgive me I'm just curious as to what the damn problem is.

GRACE

The problem is that you don't care.

BEVERLY

What the hell are you talking about?

GRACE

Are you happy being married to me, Bev? Is this what you really want?

BEVERLY

Of course not. So what?

GRACE

So, you and I are living a lie and you need to stop pretending you're happy that way.

BEVERLY

I am happy! I AM FUCKING ELATED!

GRACE

When do you plan on taking anything seriously?

BEVERLY

What are you my bloody wife?

GRACE

(Beat.)

Yes!

*They take a step back a moment. A deep breath from both of them.*

GRACE

I just want to know what's bothering you.

BEVERLY

Who said anything was bothering me?

GRACE

This is how you deflect. You make jokes. You always have, as long as I've known you.

BEVERLY

That is not true.

GRACE

You deflect with crass jokes and big words because you don't know how to face your problems.

BEVERLY

Is that so?

GRACE

Bev, at your own Father's funeral you said, "Old cocker's never looked better than in his death mask."

BEVERLY

That was a very good impression of me.

GRACE

And afterward you disappeared for three days. And I can't imagine you would do that on a whim. But, I knew better than to go looking for you because it became clear that you had just run out of jokes. And God forbid you let anyone help you.

BEVERLY

Did it occur to you that I didn't want your help?

GRACE

Bev, I was about ready to find you at the bottom of a river. Did it occur to you that it was terrifying when you ran off? That I thought I'd never see you again?

BEVERLY

I didn't know you felt that way.

GRACE

You know how hard it is to watch your best friend suffer like that knowing he won't let you help? Because he's too busy trying to fool people with dumb jokes.

*BEVERLY suddenly goes back to the bedroom and starts looking around. GRACE follows him.*

BEVERLY

Look I won't be having any of this touchy-feely stuff. Not now, not tomorrow, not as long as I am still breathing and conscious enough to remind you of this declaration every time you try your luck at it.

GRACE

It's not healthy to keep things bottled away like this.

BEVERLY

I'm not bottling anything away. I am simply avoiding it all together.

GRACE

You can't run from your problems forever.

BEVERLY

Really? Try me. Oh wait, *you did*. And then you married me to run away from *your* problems.

GRACE

So now this is my fault?

BEVERLY

You could have married Jimmy Peterson. You could have said yes. And who's fault is it that you wanted to hold out? And for what? What the hell did you think you were holding out for? Me? I think you've made it very clear that I'm not worth it.

GRACE

Don't spin this. Don't spin this and make me the bad guy.

BEVERLY

I'm not trying to. I just want to be clear that after all this time you picked today to tell me that I was the thing you held out for, only to berate me because I'm not a "good husband". Well, I'm sorry I'm a disappointment to you.

GRACE

Is that what you heard? Because that's not what I said.

BEVERLY

You didn't have to.

GRACE

Don't play the innocent party. Because I know for a *fact* you didn't call off your engagement for me. You

GRACE  
called it off so that you could go back to fucking boys  
in a bathroom stall and-

BEVERLY  
What's the matter with that?

GRACE  
So, why do this? Hm? Because it would be a fun little  
scene study, because you could have some woman that  
would cook for you while you got to keep playing the  
closet fag?

BEVERLY  
I don't want to have this conversation with you right  
now.

GRACE  
When's good for you?

BEVERLY  
You don't want to do this? Fine. Go try your luck at  
being 30 and unmarried.

GRACE  
Yeah, well, you wouldn't last two days without me and  
you know it.

BEVERLY  
You know what? Maybe. Maybe you're right. Or maybe this  
was a mistake and maybe we should have both stayed in  
our lanes where we belonged.

GRACE  
Are you suggesting we should have just faked  
it? Married some losers we didn't like, fucked them,  
pretended to love them, had children with them, and  
acted like everyone else? You said it yourself we'd  
have been miserable.

BEVERLY  
I don't know about you but I'm already bloody miserable  
as you so duly noted.

*Silence. BEVERLY is still looking for something.*

GRACE  
What the hell are you looking for?

*BEVERLY comes out from under the bed; fuming. She  
knows damn well what he's looking for. As he  
continues to look GRACE goes to the cabinet in the  
kitchen and produces the pack of cigarettes. She*

*returns, holds them out to him, he doesn't see them at first. His eyes fall on them. He looks at GRACE, he snatches the box. He waits.*

BEVERLY

Grace, you know you're like a little sister to me.

GRACE

I'm older than you.

BEVERLY

Why do you do this to me?

*(Beat. No answer.)*

Do you want me to apologize?

GRACE

It would give you too much credit to ask you for an apology. Because that would fix everything, right? Like it usually does?

BEVERLY

We shouldn't be doing this right before company comes over.

GRACE

You're probably right.

*He goes to her.*

BEVERLY

Let's... let's just...

*He doesn't know what to say. The doorbell rings.*

*Beverly stays in the bedroom to finish dressing. Grace starts for the door, Beverly starts to say something when she goes to the door. She stops short at the front door, she takes a deep breath and straightens herself out. She puts on her best smile and opens the door. CHARLOTTE and HENRY DODSON walk in, they rival Grace and Beverly as the picture perfect American couple, tall, good looking, perfectly happy.*

GRACE

Charlotte, Henry, welcome.

CHARLOTTE

*(Giving the standard double cheek kiss)*

Grace, darling, pleasure to see you again.

GRACE

Henry, how do you do?

HENRY

Fine, thank you. My wife and I must thank you for inviting us over.

CHARLOTTE

Where's your husband gotten off too?

*Beverly strides in.*

BEVERLY

Sorry about that, Grace always said I'd be the one who was late to my own home.

*Beverly and Henry shake.*

HENRY

Beverly.

BEVERLY

Henry.

*Beverly takes Charlotte's hand and kisses it.*

BEVERLY

Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE

Beverly.

GRACE

How's your newborn?

CHARLOTTE

Jerry? Oh he's an angel. Either I'm getting better or babies are getting more well behaved. Five months old and already sleeping through the night.

BEVERLY

Wow.

GRACE

How nice.

HENRY

We do have to thank you two for getting us out of the house. I was going a little stir crazy.

BEVERLY

I guess going out the backdoor every once in a while isn't enough, huh?

*Silence, they all know what he means but don't want to address it. Grace bursts out laughing like it was a joke.*

GRACE

My husband! Always making jokes.

*Charlotte and Henry politely join in on the laughter. Grace gives Beverly a look.*

CHARLOTTE

In any case we can only stay an hour or two. We'll really need to be getting back to Jerry.

GRACE

Didn't you hire a sitter?

CHARLOTTE

Well... Martha's a doll but... she's...

HENRY

She's been... dressing different lately. And she's reading that Kerouac fellow.

BEVERLY

Is she?

CHARLOTTE

It's probably nothing. Teenagers these days, but still...

*Silence again.*

GRACE

Please, sit, both of you.

*They do.*

GRACE

Darling, would you fix our guests drinks?

BEVERLY

Certainly. Henry? Charlotte?

CHARLOTTE

Nothing for me, Beverly.

HENRY

Do you still have that 1938 Johnny Walker I gave you?

BEVERLY

Say no more. Be right back.

*He goes to the kitchen and starts fixing the drinks. Eventually, he pours himself a few shots.*

GRACE

(Sitting down with them)  
I should tell you both my Mother will be joining us tonight.

CHARLOTTE

Oh, how nice.

GRACE

She's coming into town for Arnold's Charity Ball.

CHARLOTTE

How sweet you've invited her to stay with you.

GRACE

(A blatant lie)  
Well, Beverly and I are always happy to have her.

CHARLOTTE

(Beat.)  
So, Grace, when can we expect to set up a date with the little ones?

GRACE

What?

CHARLOTTE

You and Beverly are planning on having children aren't you? The clock is ticking.

GRACE

Well, we've been considering it.

HENRY

You know I never thought myself the kind of man to settle down with a family but... the moment you see your first born it's...

CHARLOTTE

It's just enigmatic, there's nothing quite like it...

HENRY

You know what I heard, I hear Ida Prescott just found out she's infertile.

GRACE

Infertile?

CHARLOTTE

Such a shame. I mean, some people are not fit to be Mothers but Ida Prescott is not one of those people. Such a wonderful sweet woman. I mean, what's she supposed to do now?

*Silence.*

GRACE

Well, I can't imagine where my husband got off too. Excuse me a moment.

*She goes to the kitchen, she catches Beverly in the middle of his third shot. He stops short.*

BEVERLY

I can explain.

GRACE

What the hell is wrong with you?

BEVERLY

You expect me to get through a night with them *and* your Mother *sober*?

GRACE

I can't leave you alone for two minutes.

BEVERLY

I'll be good I promise.

GRACE

Well your track record so far tonight is less than stellar.

BEVERLY

Oh, come on, I couldn't resist.

*(Looking into the living room.)*

God, just look at the two of them. Do you think she knows?

GRACE

Look at her she's miserable.

BEVERLY

I tell you he's a new man since he started fucking that other woman. It's like he sucks the life out of every woman he has and then moves onto his next prey. Look at the bastard he's practically glowing.

GRACE

I'll not have you making sly jokes about it in front of them.

BEVERLY

Why not? Lord knows they're too stupid to figure it out.

GRACE

It's not them I'm worried about.

BEVERLY

What's the matter?

GRACE

Are we considering having children?

BEVERLY

What?

GRACE

Charlotte Dodson wants to know.

BEVERLY

(Beat.)

Oh my God, are we?

GRACE

Well, you know what they say: Nothing in life is free.

BEVERLY

Well... Jesus Christ, what are we supposed to say... I mean... Can we even conceive a child?

GRACE

Oh course we can you idi-

(She stops cold and thinks it over.)

Oh my God, can we?

BEVERLY

What are we going to do? What are people gonna say if we don't want children. I mean, what are people gonna think?

GRACE

It's been five years for God's sake what must people already think?

BEVERLY

Do you think they know?

GRACE

I don't want to think about this right now. Let's just... avoid the subject.

BEVERLY

That's your plan? Just don't talk about it?

GRACE

We're pretty good at not talking about things.

*The doorbell rings.*

BEVERLY

Good God, is that her?

GRACE

It's her or Jesus Christ himself.

*She makes for the door. Beverly follows her out and hands Henry the drink which he places on the table.*

GRACE

That must be my Mother. Oh you two will love her, she's a doll.

*Grace goes to the door, she opens it her Mother, HARRIET, enters and hugs Grace.*

HARRIET

Gracey, darling. What a pleasure to see you again.

GRACE

Mother it has been far too long.

*Harriet examines the house. Charlotte and Henry rise to greet her.*

HARRIET

I love what you've done with your home. So quaint. And who might these two be?

GRACE

Mother, these are our neighbors Charlotte and Henry Dodson. Charlotte, Henry, this is my Mother Harriet Randolph.

CHARLOTTE

How do you do Ms. Randolph?

HARRIET

Oh, please darling, "Mrs". Still happily married.

HENRY

(Shaking her hand)  
My, my, after all these years?

CHARLOTTE

Where is your husband?

HARRIET

He's spending the weekend sailing with my son and his family.

(A sharp tone change)

Where is that pile you call a husband?

BEVERLY

Harriet, the pleasure really is all mine.

*He holds out a hand, she ignores it, he drops the hand.*

HARRIET

Mrs. Randolph, thank you very much.

BEVERLY

(Half-whispered to Grace)

Of course, why should I call my Mother-in-law by her first name, preposterous.

*Grace elbows him.*

GRACE

How was your flight, Mother?

HARRIET

I tell you the seats on those airplanes get smaller and smaller every day.

BEVERLY

Or maybe you're just...

GRACE

Changing tides I suppose.

HARRIET

Certainly.

*Silence. Charlotte and Henry retreat a little, sensing some tension.*

HARRIET

Well, I've been in your house less than five minutes and your dear husband has already forgotten his manners.

BEVERLY

Might I take your bags, Mrs. Randolph?

HARRIET

You can do that, right Beverly?

BEVERLY

Excuse me?

HARRIET

Just making sure. I know how you academics are with physical tasks.

*Without a word, Beverly takes the bags to the bedroom. He stops in the kitchen and looks around for his lighter. Harriet produces a bottle of wine and hands it to Grace.*

HARRIET

For you and your husband. The finest Champagne in New York.

GRACE

This is very kind of you Mother but...

HARRIET

Grace, it's the least I can do for you.

GRACE

What's the occasion?

HARRIET

Well, last we spoke there was a grandchild in the future.

GRACE

Mother, I said Beverly and I were *thinking* about it and...

HARRIET

And it's happened? No need to say it Grace, a Mother knows! This is so exciting. I remember how elated your Father and I were when I first heard your brother was on his way. Grace, you will soon know what it really means to be a woman.

CHARLOTTE

Oh, Grace, why didn't you tell me?

HENRY

Congratulations, you must be so excited.

GRACE

I don't know what to say.

HARRIET

Well, say you'll open it and we can celebrate.

*Grace freezes.*

GRACE

I'll go do that.

*Grace goes to Beverly in the kitchen, he has just found the lighter.*

BEVERLY

Now we're hiding my lighter? What's next my lungs?

GRACE

(Handing him the bottle)

Will you open this please?

BEVERLY

(He takes it)

Where'd this come from?

GRACE

A gift from my Mother.

BEVERLY

What's the occasion?

GRACE

That's what I said.

BEVERLY

(Beat.)

So, what's it for?

GRACE

(She hesitates)

She thinks I'm pregnant.

*He pops the cork, champagne shoots out onto his chest then stops.*

BEVERLY

(A little too loudly)

What!?

(Re: his soaking tie.)

Shit.

*He puts the bottle down. She grabs a towel and starts cleaning him off, he starts to whisper.*

BEVERLY

What the hell gave her that idea?

GRACE

I spoke to her on the phone last week, she says it's her "maternal instinct" and...

BEVERLY

Her what?

GRACE

What are we going to do?

BEVERLY

(He thinks a moment)

You'll have to have a miscarriage.

GRACE

For God's sake Bev I'm not *actually* pregnant.

BEVERLY

A fake miscarriage!

HARRIET

(From the living room)

Everything all right in there, Gracey?

GRACE

Everything's fine, Mother.

BEVERLY

My fault entirely Mrs. Randolph.

*Harriet believes them, especially  
Beverly. Beverly grabs his tie to take it off.*

BEVERLY

(Re: The tie.)

God, it's ruined.

GRACE

Guess what else is ruined num-nuts?

BEVERLY

There's gotta be something you can say.

GRACE

It's hard enough faking straight married woman -- now you're asking me to fake devastated, almost-Mother of a baby that died in the womb? Reminder: you're not married to Elizabeth Taylor.

BEVERLY

Oh have a little faith in yourself love.

GRACE

Easy for you to say.

BEVERLY

Well, we can't tell her the truth.

GRACE

Well, we can't just avoid the subject all together now can we? Now that it's out there people will... expect things from us.

BEVERLY

You said it yourself we're good at not talking about things.

GRACE

That was before my Mother was trying to throw us a god damned party about it.

BEVERLY

This is it. It's over.

GRACE

Bev, let's not...

BEVERLY

We're fucked. Do you realize how *fucked* we are?

*A pause.*

GRACE

What if I was infertile?

BEVERLY

What?

GRACE

What if we told them I was literally incapable of having children? After all it's at least not a *blatant* lie.

BEVERLY

Grace you're brilliant.

GRACE

We went to some specialist, he gave us the bad news, oh well, we're both devastated.

BEVERLY

And what the hell does your Mother know about baby-making science in the first place? Not even her maternal instinct can argue with that one. And the way that woman gossips in two weeks time the entire country will know.

GRACE

And by then I very well could be over the whole ordeal.

BEVERLY

(In character)

Oh but it was very hard for the both of us to contend with.

GRACE

(She gets into it too)

Oh but at the end of the day it was love that got us through it.

*In school-play fashion he whisks her into his arms, she grabs him tightly at the nape of the neck. It's very romantic.*

BEVERLY

Pure passion that guided us.

GRACE

Love and our admittedly dastardly plan.

BEVERLY

Oh dear, you are evil. Pure goddamn evil.

GRACE

(Dramatic shmaltz abounds)

Oh, how lucky I am to be married to such a smart, sensible, and attractive man.

BEVERLY

(Playing along)

And how fortunate I am to be married to a woman as strong, clever, and with such resolve as you. Mrs. Walker you are an alluringly vicious woman.

GRACE

Oh, and you Mr. Walker.

*They're enjoying their little scene but the act gets to them. Smiles fade, they take a step away from each other. It's just not as fun as it used to be.*

GRACE

You really should change the tie.

BEVERLY

Fine I'll go put on the fag-  
(He stops short.)  
I'll go put on the *other* tie.

*He heads for the bedroom to change ties. Grace takes a deep breath, she opens up the bottle of wine and returns to the living room.*

CHARLOTTE

Where's your husband gotten off too?

GRACE

He spilled a drink on his tie. He can be very clumsy sometimes.

HARRIET

Oh, I can't believe that. Just "sometimes"?

*Beverly returns.*

BEVERLY

Sorry about that I...

GRACE

Oh, I was just telling her about how clumsy you are.

BEVERLY

Oh yes, slippery fingers I've got.

HARRIET

It's not the only thing.

*Beverly takes the bottle and pours the wine.*

HARRIET

Beverly, I do like that tie.

BEVERLY

Do you? Grace picked it out. Full of good ideas this evening isn't she?

HARRIET

Should have known God forbid you could have picked it out yourself.

*He passes the champagne around.*

HENRY

You must be excited to be a Father Beverly.

BEVERLY

(He shares a glance with Grace, she  
shakes her head)

Uh... very.

HARRIET

My husband was like you at this time. So damn nervous,  
but he turned out all right. I'd like to say the same  
for you.

BEVERLY

You are too kind.

GRACE

So, Henry, you're a psychologist. That must be  
exciting.

HENRY

Well, the hours are long, the work can be depressing,  
but the pay is good and healing broken minds is quite a  
bonus.

BEVERLY

It sounds grim.

HENRY

I mean sometimes we have to use methods that are less  
than... well... methods that are not quite dinner  
conversation.

GRACE

Oh?

HENRY

Electroshock therapy is a common one. You strap an  
unruly patient to a slab and send ten thousand volts  
through their...

CHARLOTTE

Darling, that's hardly appropriate conversation.

HENRY

Of course, my apologies everyone.

BEVERLY

(A few words starting to slur)  
Fascinating. So, presumably you've seen people... *die*?

GRACE

(Quietly to BEVERLY)  
Bev, don't.

BEVERLY

I'm just curious. After all, death isn't always the worst thing that can happen to someone.

CHARLOTTE

(Desperately avoiding the topic)  
Beverly, you're still teaching at UCLA, right?

HARRIET

Yes, how is the horribly fashioned depraved world of academia going?

BEVERLY

Wonderful as a matter of fact.

GRACE

He won't say but he's been promoted to the head of the Literature Department.

HARRIET

Literature, really? Grace, didn't you study literature?

GRACE

I did.

HARRIET

A lot of women in the literature department, Beverly?

BEVERLY

A fair amount I'd say, why?

HARRIET

Oh, just wondering. I always found that so curious about literature, lots of female students and lots of male professors.

BEVERLY

Are you trying to insinuate something Mrs. Randolph?

HARRIET

No, no of course not. It's just something I've always noticed.

GRACE

(Trying to avoid conflict)  
Mother, where *did* you find this champagne?

BEVERLY

I must say Mrs. Randolph I don't like your tone.

HARRIET

And I don't like that you're married to my daughter but we're both just going to have to live with it aren't we?

BEVERLY

(Quietly)

Hopefully not for long.

*Grace stomps on his foot when Harriet isn't looking. Beverly groans through the pain and gives Grace an angry look.*

HARRIET

My Grace, your husband gets more irreverent every time I see him.

BEVERLY

Well, you only bring out the best in me, Mrs. Randolph.

*He digs inside his jacket pocket and produces a cigarette which he lights.*

HARRIET

You still smoke I see?

BEVERLY

They'll have to kill me before I stop.

HARRIET

With any luck...

GRACE

Can the two of you at least *pretend* to be civil?

HARRIET

Tell him that.

BEVERLY

Believe me darling I'm trying my best.

GRACE

Beverly, really!

(Quietly to Charlotte and Henry)

Charlotte, Henry, I'm very sorry about this. This is exceedingly unusual.

CHARLOTTE

Oh, it's no trouble. I'm sure it's just a quick spat.

HARRIET

So, Grace, I'm assuming the two of you are attending the Charity Gala on Saturday.

GRACE

Of course, we wouldn't miss it for the world.

HARRIET

I always like to support charities where I can. I mean what else am I supposed to do. And all those poor children in England and France. I mean, no one ever talks of the toll war takes on the civilians.

GRACE

I couldn't agree more, Mother.

CHARLOTTE

It's truly a shame the United States doesn't do more.

BEVERLY

(Words completely slurred)

To be fair though I suppose it's better to be a starving orphan in London than to be in a dustbin in Germany.

*Heavy silence a moment. Everyone averts their eyes and shifts in their seats uncomfortably.*

GRACE

Bev, Jesus...

BEVERLY

What? Tell me I'm wrong.

HARRIET

It's because he teaches philosophy. He's a natural pessimist.

BEVERLY

Well, then where's your excuse for being a shrewd?

HARRIET

I can't believe you want this man to raise your children, darling, really.

BEVERLY

You know, if you've taken issue with me Mrs. Randolph I'd very much like to know what on Earth I did to upset you.

HARRIET

Oh, dear, Beverly, I think your attitude requires no introduction nor explanation.

GRACE

Mother really.

BEVERLY

What is it about me, Mrs. Randolph? Hm? Is it because I'm an academic, because I'm not man enough for your daughter or are you just so consumed by evil that you can't bear the sight of my happiness.

HARRIET

Well, I can't imagine someone who teaches Literature and preaches the work of heretics and loonies anything but a...

BEVERLY

Oh that's what this is about then? Well, I suppose now that the game is up the next logical step is for me to desecrate your house with red paint screaming "Long live Stalin!"

GRACE

Bev...

BEVERLY

(Standing and raising his glass)

I propose a toast! To our beautiful unborn child that you will have absolutely no stake in raising. Our child that will be blessed by a resounding lack of your company. Our child who will be raised in an environment entirely void of your materialistic, prodding, narcissistic, bull-shit. Thus you will never see them on birthdays, holidays or... come to think of it you're not invited to the birth. My child will be raised without your influence and I should think he or she will be very very happy.

*He downs the entire glass and sits in his seat. **Silence.***

GRACE

Maybe champagne was a bad decision.

HARRIET

It's all right darling. Sometimes men need to have their fits of decomposition. It's perfectly natural. Your Father was known to have them too every now and again.

CHARLOTTE

Of course. He's just... blowing off steam.

*He rises.*

BEVERLY

If you'll excuse me a moment, ladies, Henry. I think I'd rather go play in traffic.

*BEVERLY goes out the front door onto the porch where he sits on the steps and smokes another cigarette. Henry rises.*

HENRY

Would you like me to go check on him, Grace?

GRACE

Yes, thank you, Henry.

*Henry goes outside and joins him on the porch.*

GRACE

He's not usually like this.

HARRIET

Really? I find that hard to believe he seems such a natural at being rude. It's the British you know. It's a mystery how they're so highly regarded as being so prim and proper. They're practically raised to be inconsiderate. Almost as bad as the Asians.

GRACE

Mother, about the baby.

HARRIET

Have you given any thought what you're going to name her yet? You should choose for her something simple like Emily or Jane.

GRACE

Mother, I don't know how to tell you this.

HARRIET

Tell me what, darling?

*GRACE waits. There is something she wants to tell her, she wants to very badly.*

END OF EXCERPT