ACT I

Scene 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.

BEVERLY
(Jokingly; mimicking her Mother) Gracie dear, language.
GRACE
Mocking my Mother: original.

BEVERLY
Splash 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
(Peaking 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 breathes 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
(Word 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