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by

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## **Synopsis**

It's summer and it is hot in rural Kansas, as both temperatures and tempers rise at Diana's childhood home. The three children of Burt and Wanda have come home to help their parents celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary and in doing so, rediscover exactly why they were happy to leave home. Wanda, a loving mom but passive aggressive, is eager to bring her family together and celebrate the marital milestone while Burt is more interested in planning for his upcoming fishing trip - and getting a few choice verbal jabs in at the kids. Diana's saving grace during the week? Spending some time with her old high school boyfriend who has returned home and is eager to rekindle their relationship. But things like party preparation, family dinners, sharing a joint with grandma and even a little romance all abruptly come to an end when Burt unexpectedly dies - leaving a grieving widow and confused children to sort out their feelings and a few family secrets.

WANDA – mother of three children, wife to Burt

BURT – fishing and old school country music enthusiast, husband to Wanda and father of three children

DIANA – Wanda and Burt’s youngest daughter, a college professor

BEAU – Their middle child, a high school teacher

VICTORIA – The eldest daughter, an advertising copywriter

GRAMMY – post-stroke, very elderly mother of Burt

TOM – Diana’s high school boyfriend and divorced businessman

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

(The lights come up on a two-story family home in Mulvane, Kansas. Downstairs, we see an eat-in kitchen with backdoor, living room and entrance foyer, while upstairs we see a neat and clean guest bedroom and, across the hall, a very cluttered and messy bedroom with many, visible locks on the door.)

It is afternoon, in the kitchen WANDA and DIANA are baking cookies. BEAU is with them, drinking a beer in the kitchen. They are all casually dressed for a hot Kansas summer day; WANDA has a dish towel slung over her shoulder. We see BURT the entire first half of the scene, messing with lures, fishing poles, limb lines and fishing line from an array of tackle boxes scattered around the coffee table in the living room. As the lights rise, we hear faint old country music, perhaps some Haggard or George Jones, coming from the radio near BURT, it fades as the dialogue begins...)

WANDA: So, I told your father that he hadn't taken me anywhere except that damned lake and fishin' cabin for years! We never take vacations anywhere – I haven't seen New York City or Paris and the only reason we get up to Kansas City is because his cousin's there. But no, it's to Grand Lake we head every month, summer and winter. Same lake, same barbecue restaurant on the trip into town, same stop at Wal-Mart for worms and chicken hearts so he can go fishin' every single time. I have had it. So, I told him this summer would be different.

DIANA: Well, it is your 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary, you should do something special.

WANDA: Special. You're damn right we should do something special. Do you know where that man took me last year for our anniversary?

DIANA: Oh, God, do I want to know?

BEAU: It's a beaut. Wait for it -

WANDA: He took me to up to Wichita and to Cracker Barrel. Bought me biscuits and gravy for breakfast. Couldn't even take me for lunch so I could have chick'n'dumplin's, oh, no. He had to get back to town so he could mow the lawn that day. Cracker Barrel!

DIANA: Well, it sounds like he owes you a party, then.

WANDA: Yes, he does. If I didn't love that man... well, anyway, 50 years is a big deal and we're having a party next weekend whether that old grump wants to or not.

(WANDA smiles at DIANA and gives her a hug.) Honey, I'm so glad you came down to

help us get ready for the party and you're staying for a whole week instead of just a quick visit. It will be so nice to have all you kids together at home.

DIANA: And then, after the party, you're leaving for the lake?

WANDA: Unfortunately, yes. He's been at it with those tackle boxes and limb lines for a week already. Won't help me pick out a cake for the party, but I think he just spent \$200 on a new, fancy fishin' reel. And we're going for two weeks instead of just one – that's my punishment ... oh wait, I mean my *trade-off* for getting to have the party. Lord, help me.

DIANA: We'll go to the bookstore before you leave and I'll treat you to some books for your ordeal, sound good? You can set on the deck and read.

WANDA: That sounds wonderful, honey. Did you bring a copy of your last book with you? I'd love to see it.

DIANA: Yeah, I brought a couple with me, but I didn't think anyone would really want to read it – it's about, you know, adult learning theory and how to best work with returning adults in the college classroom. I wrote it and can barely stand to read it; I doubt anyone outside of education would be able to take it.

WANDA: Well, it might not be my cup of tea, but I'm gonna read every page because my little girl is an author!

DIANA: Well, remember, it's a textbook. You'll probably be the only person that does read every page, if you do. I know my own students won't!

BEAU: Oh, good Lord, don't get me started about students. It is summer and I've escaped all the little bastards and all of their whining, hormones and chaos for three glorious months. (BEAU downs some more beer.) So Mom... When is Victoria getting off work and coming up? She said she was going to have one of her friends at the agency make the invitations and get them printed there in Oklahoma City, right? We need to get them mailed.

WANDA: It's just a formality, honey, don't worry. We don't have that many friends and they all already know about the party. I think Tori just wanted to do something to help. She should be here soon, actually, with those invites. And when she does, y'all better be ready to help me clean. This house has gotta be spotless by next Saturday!

BEAU: (Stands and raids the fridge for another beer) Yes, Ma'am!

WANDA: Your poor grandmother's room is the worst. I swear that old packrat won't let me even run the vacuum in there. She thinks it stirs up dust instead of sucking it up. Who wants to help Grammy out-

BEAU and DIANA (Interrupt together) Not "it!"

(WANDA swats at both of them with her dish towel and laughs.)

WANDA: Victoria's job it is!

(BEAU and DIANA high-five each other before DIANA grabs a soda from the fridge and joins him at the table. WANDA takes a sheet of cookies from the oven and sets the sheet on a cooling rack on the table near them. WANDA sits between her two children.)

DIANA: So, guys, how is Grammy doing? I saw her in the kitchen when I got home last night, but she just waved at me and kept snapping beans. Haven't seen her since.

BEAU: A little worse. She's failing, obviously- she's 95. Doesn't talk much anymore, she has trouble ... well, finding the words she wants since the stroke, I think. So, she just doesn't say much. Blood pressure spikes sometimes and her feet swell up and one of us runs her to the doctor. That's about it, though. You know, she still drives into town each week to the beauty shop? Scares the shit out of all of us until she gets back home. And I think her hair gets blacker every visit, although I don't know who she thinks she's kidding. Oh, and she's recently started using about a quart of lotion every week ...

WANDA: (overlaps) ...we were worried she was drinking it at first ...

BEAU: ...but I think she's just trying to hold off death with over-hydration...

WANDA: *Beau!*

BEAU: Oh, and she's added more locks to her door since you were home last!

DIANA: (laughing) How many are we up to now? Seven? Eight?

(A very chic and well-dressed VICTORIA enters from screen door in the kitchen with her designer purse, suitcase and phone in one hand and a handful of envelopes and invitations to the party in the other. The three at the table rise to greet her, ad-libbing, with hugs and kisses. She sits at the table and stuffs envelopes and applies stamps through the next few minutes of conversation.)

WANDA: (Looking over an invitation) Tori, these are beautiful! Did you really make these?

VICTORIA: Well, I wrote the invitation copy but one of our creative directors at the agency did the art and a friend at the print shop we use printed them for me. Pretty cool, huh?

WANDA: (Kisses her on the top of the head) They are perfect, honey, just perfect.

VICTORIA: So, you were talking about the locks on Grammy's door? I think it's eight, right on last count? Plus, last time I was here she said she's figured out a way to jam a flathead screwdriver in-between the door and the frame. She thinks it makes it harder to push the door in. So the boogiemer can't get her, I guess. I swear someday –

BEAU: I know, she won't come down for dinner and we'll have to borrow a canon to blast the fucking door off the hinges to get inside for her lubed-up corpse. I swear to God with all that lotion she'll just slide right out of the coffin once we put her in it. (WANDA swats BEAU playfully while trying not to laugh with the others. BEAU chuckles then sobers.) I do hope there's never an emergency; I don't know how we'd get to her in time.

(BURT begins to stir in the living room. He rises and makes his way to the kitchen.)

VICTORIA: What I want to know is what the old woman does when she has to pee? Can you imagine unlocking eight locks, screwing with a screwdriver and then getting to the toilet in time with a 95-year-old bladder?

(They laugh. It's interrupted when BURT enters.)

BEAU: Hey, Dad.

(BURT ignores the greeting.)

BURT: When's supper, Wanda?

WANDA: I don't know yet. We're just getting ready to start cooking. I wanted to finish up these cookies first. Want one?

(WANDA slides a cookie onto a paper towel she quickly snags from a roll on the counter and hands it to BURT. He takes a big bite and nods approvingly.)

BURT: Not bad, girls. (He grabs another off the cookie sheet.)

VICTORIA: How's the fishing trip prep coming, Dad? Got all the limb lines ready and tagged?

BURT: Yep, I've been trying to untangle some 15-pound line that your brother managed to fuck up last year. I swear that shit is as fine as a frog's hair split four ways.

BEAU: You want some help, Dad?

BURT: Not from you, you're the one who fucked it up in the first place. We need to use it to catch some perch to bait the limb lines with. This year, we're catching the big one – I'm not losing him like we did last year. (Turns to complain at BEAU.) God damned idiot, who takes the dip net out of the boat on a fishin' trip? We had him, Tori, he was there when we pulled up to him on that limb line, in the boat. He was just beautiful, pissed off and swimming in circles on the end of that line – he weighed so much he almost had the whole tree bowed over into the water. And dumbass over here, he took the dip net out to swat a spider away from the ladder and left it on the dock before we left to check the lines. No dip net! That son-of-a-bitch was a hundred pounds, I guarantee you, but there wasn't no getting him in the boat without a dip net.

DIANA: Now, Daddy, wouldn't a hundred pounds be some kind of crazy record for Grand Lake? It can't have been that much, can it?

BURT: It sure as hell could have been! We fought that damn fish for an hour without a dip net. I had my arm in its mouth up to my shoulder! Been a helluva lot easier with the damn dip net.

BEAU: I know, Dad, I know. I left the dip net on the fucking dock and the big one got away...

BURT: I finally had a chance to catch one as big as the one my Dad did, but no dip net. I got a dip stick for a son, but no dip net. (BURT laughs at his own joke.)

BEAU: God dammit, shut up about the fucking dip net. I've heard about nothing but the fucking dip net for the past year. I'm sorry, Dad. I'm fucking sorry. It's just...I didn't think about it... fishing isn't my thing.

BURT: That's for sure. Little *thez-BE-uns* don't like to get their hands dirty.

(THE SIBLINGS all react with disgust and fatigue to the obviously-tired insult.)

VICTORIA: Dad, are you really going to start that again? Beau is a very good drama teacher, all the kids at the Mulvane high school like him. You should be proud of him.

BEAU: Yep, Dad, and it's thesPian, not thesBian. The first actor was named Thespis, we take the nickname from him...For the millionth time.

BURT: *Thez-BE-un*, thespian, lesbian, it's all the same. Bunch of queers running around in tights singing.

BEAU: Yep, that's me. Sorry, I left my tights in the dryer this morning or I'd have them on for the family dinner tonight.

BURT: See? Just like I said, a *thez-BE-un*.

BEAU: Funny, Dad. And, you know what? It's just as hurtful at 40-years-old as it was at 14. You know the term thespian has nothing to do with being gay.

BURT: Oh, I'm sorry, then – should I just say lesbian?

BEAU: Not a woman, Dad, still can't be a lesbian. Try as you might to label me that way. Sorry, but I'm not a part of the LGBTQ community. Straight guy that likes Shakespeare and teaches drama. I know it's hard to understand ...

BURT: LBGT what? Is that some funny gay code you're talking in?

BEAU: Look it up, you old bastard. God...Sorry, Mom, I gotta get out of here for a while.

(BEAU kisses his mother on the cheek and exits out the kitchen door).

BURT: I don't know what his problem is; I was just trying to joke around with him, Wanda. Boy has got no sense of humor. Must be your fault there cause it ain't mine.

WANDA: You were a bit tough on him, Burt—

BURT: (Ignores WANDA) Diana! Speaking of jokes, I have one for you. See if you're smart enough to figure it out since you've been in school for the past 20 years and all.

DIANA: (Sighs, but lets it go) Okay, Dad, hit me.

BURT: What do you call a fish with no eyes?

DIANA: Um...a cavefish? So maybe a Neanderthal fish? I have no idea. What do you call a fish with no eyes, Dad?

BURT: (Hisses) Ffffssssshhhhh!

WANDA: He thinks he made that up, but I swear I saw it on some television show.

BURT: Funny, isn't it? And I did make it up, thank you very much.

(BURT grabs a last cookie and leaves to return to his tackle boxes in the living room, repeating Ffffssssshhhhh! over and over and chuckling to himself as the lights fade to black.)



## ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

(They are in the living room the next day. WANDA, VICTORIA, BEAU and DIANA are relaxing and visiting. DIANA has a laptop on her knees while BURT is wrapping limb lines around short pieces of wood -2x4s- to organize them. GRAMMY is in the kitchen the whole scene thumbing through a book or magazine.)

WANDA: What are you doing on that computer, Diana? I thought you were taking some time off of work.

DIANA: Oh, I am. I'm ready for the fall semester already. But, I had a student with a concussion this past semester and it was really tough for him to finish the last two weeks' of classwork. I gave him an incomplete and he turned in a paper last night. I thought I'd grade it real quick here for him.

VICTORIA: An incomplete? Wow, you're a nice teacher. I remember asking for one once. Yeah, that didn't work out so well for me. My only C on my entire transcript.

DIANA: I'm fairly lenient; life does get in the way of school sometimes. And I always tell my students that I'll start with grace and then we'll go from there. They usually get it. But, there's always the one who tries to take advantage of the fact that I offer that grace. And they are generally very unhappy that they don't have a good grade at the end of the semester, but what can you do? I refuse to hold their hands, they know when things are due, it's on the syllabus.

BEAU: (Joins her) It's on the syllabus! Oh, God, let's not talk about them today? I just want to drink a beer, forget all about the teenagers I teach and all the freaking drama. You have it made; at least college kids can handle their booze and hormones a bit better than my high schoolers. Drama, drama, drama.

VICTORIA: Well, drama *is* what you teach!

BEAU: Very funny. But, I kinda like your idea, Di. Start with grace and go from there. Nothing specific so you can make choices about each situation individually. Cool.

DIANA: I need to apply it to my whole life...start with grace. Go from there. It could be my new mantra.

BEAU: Or just your new mantra whenever you come home to this crazy-ass place.

WANDA: Now, Beau, it ain't all that bad, is it?

BEAU: (Looks over at BURT who is studiously ignoring the conversation.) Sometimes. Yes.

WANDA: Beau...(Sighs) I am sorry, sweetheart.

BEAU: It's okay, I'll survive. I always do. Maybe I'll start with grace and go from there.

(BEAU winks at his sisters.)

VICTORIA: So, tell me about the fishing trip this year, Dad. Going after any of those spoonbills so you can get me some good caviar?

BURT: Oh, no, I'm not gonna turn my fish over for someone else to process and harvest the roe. They keep track of the spoonbill population all over the lake by offering that free processing. It's like Big Brother. No, I'm gettin' old but I think I can still handle whacking and filleting a catfish or two.

WANDA: Remember the 40-pounder you caught that one year? Good Lord, I didn't think you'd ever put that poor thing out of its misery.

BURT: (Looks concerned) I hope I never have that big a struggle with a fish again. I wish my old fishin' buddy, Larry, hadn't broken his hip a coupla years ago. I sure miss him helping out with the whacking.

DIANA: I've missed the fish-whacking story, somehow, what happened?

BURT: That Goddamned thing was so big that I couldn't just use a butcher knife and a hammer whack to sever its spine quick like we usually do and ...well, I like to be humane about it. I don't want to filet it while it's alive and can feel things. That's just not sportsmanlike. I tried three times and the poor son-of-a-bitches spine and neck was just so tough – it was suffering so I grabbed the chainsaw out of the shed real quick and finally got the head off. I've never seen a fish that hard to get the head off of in all my 70-some years. Ugly old bastard, too, looked like something the dog'd been hiding under the porch.

DIANA: Damn, Dad. A chainsaw?

BURT: Yeah, he was an ugly, tough old bastard but he was good eatin' wasn't he, honey?

WANDA: I suppose. Tasted just like every other catfish I've ever eaten.

BURT: It did not, it was mellow. Very sweet.

BEAU: Yeah, bottom feeders are generally really sweet – it’s all the shit and crap they eat off the bottom of the lake that does it.

BURT: You wouldn’t know, boy, I don’t think you’d know a good fish if you caught one.

BEAU: It’s your thing, Dad. I live in landlocked Kansas; I get my fish at Red Lobster. Already killed and cooked. But, thanks.

DIANA: Ooohhh, Red Lobster. Maybe Tom and I will go there tonight for dinner. Thanks for the idea, big brother.

BEAU: My pleasure. So... you and Tom. Again. Haven’t you been there and done that already?

VICTORIA: Yeah, literally?

DIANA: Very funny. He’s moved back to Mulvane to take over his dad’s business now that his folks have retired and he divorced that girl he married right after college. I told him I would be staying here at home for a week; he offered to take me to dinner. No big deal. It’ll be fun.

BEAU: I bet.

DIANA: We were just stupid kids when we dated back in high school, Beau. It’s been almost 20 years since we split up. I just want to get to know him again as an adult, I am not expecting anything romantic.

BEAU: (Suggestively) Who said anything about romance?

DIANA: Old maid professors don’t have romances or one night stands either, before you even suggest it, big brother. I think I’m past all that. It’s just me, my books and my students from here on out. And I think I’m okay with it.

BURT: So, Diana, how *are* things in school? Aren’t you finished yet? You’re almost 40-years-old after all.

(BEAU starts to defend her, but holds his tongue and opts to play on his phone instead of participate in the conversation.)

DIANA: Very funny, Dad. You guys are on a roll today. Seriously, though... Things are good. I’m on tenure-track and should be a full professor before I’m 45. Oh, and I’m working on another textbook for educators who work with adult learners and those returning to college after a long break –

BURT: But you're still playing school! When are you going to get out there and get a real job, like Victoria? One that really pays the bills! Tori...What was that TV commercial you did, honey?

VICTORIA: Oh, um Angus County. It's a premium steak product, solely from Angus cattle sourced right here in Kansas. All natural, harvested humanely, you know the drill. It's actually a good product. You know I don't eat much red meat, but I'll even eat one of these steaks. Well, I had to eat them so I could write about them at least— we did point of sale, B-to-B brochures and a Web site -

BURT: And the commercial! What was it? “The succulent - ?”

VICTORIA: (Mock cowboy voice) Angus County. The succulent indulgence. Rustle up some tender goodness for your family tonight.

BURT: (Laughs) Now that is some good stuff! Good stuff.

VICTORIA: It's cheesy as hell, Dad, but it won us a \$2 million client, so I'm not going to complain and I'm certainly taking all the credit I can. It's not quite as intelligent as the books you write, Diana. But, being cheesy always was my specialty while you were the brains.

DIANA: Well, it's not exactly on the TV, but my last textbook is being used by 25 universities that train educators. I'm pretty jazzed about that.

BEAU: (Looks up from his smartphone) That's awesome, Di. I still can't believe you're teaching at Wichita State. My baby sister, all grown up and a Doctor at our own alma mater!

BURT: Bullshit! She's not a doctor – she can't operate on folks or pull teeth.

DIANA: (Sighs, she's obviously tried this before) It's different, Dad, you know that. It's a Doctor of Philosophy. A PhD. Think of it as me being a Doctor of thinking, or teaching.

WANDA: A “doctor of thinkology” like in the Wizard of Oz!

BURT: (Waves them off dismissively) Those who can, do. Those who can't teach. And they are usually dumbasses that have no clue about the real world.

WANDA: Now Burt -

BEAU: Dumbass?!

(BURT chuckles at their outrage. Ad-libs around the room for a moment as DIANA's siblings defend her.)

DIANA: (Slams her closed laptop onto the coffee table) Stop! Everyone stop! (She stands and glares at her father) I really wish you would open your eyes once in a while and see the real me, Dad. I'm a fantastic teacher and an expert in my field!

BURT: Dumbasses that are too scared to leave the security of school to go to work...

DIANA: (Yells) That's DOCTOR dumbass to you, old man!

(Everyone is stunned at her outburst, including DIANA. DIANA leaves the room and enters the kitchen, slams a few pots on the stove and starts dinner. There are a few moments of silence before GRAMMY makes a decision, stands and walks into the living room.)

GRAMMY: (Hoarse) Burt. (He doesn't hear her right away.) Burt!

BURT: (Surprised, he leaves his lures and treasures to walk to her by the kitchen door) What is it, Mama? Are you all right?

GRAMMY: Burt. You... you be nice. Be nice to the kids.

BURT: (Somewhat chastised) Okay, Mama. I will. I love you, Mama.

GRAMMY: You, too.

(GRAMMY hugs BURT, nods and goes back to her book at the kitchen table. BURT watches her for a moment. BEAU returns to his phone and BURT returns to his tackle boxes as WANDA joins DIANA and the lights fade to black.)

### ACT ONE, SCENE THREE

(The lights rise on WANDA, GRAMMY and DIANA in the kitchen later that evening. They are finishing up dinner and setting the kitchen table. VICTORIA is napping on the sofa in the living room. BURT and BEAU are just outside the screen door of the kitchen.)

WANDA: (Looks out the kitchen door.) What on the Lord's green earth are they doing out there?

DIANA: I believe that Daddy is trying to teach Beau how to cast with a jig. Apparently, Beau has agreed to come down to the lake and try bass fishing with Dad this summer. I am not exactly sure why, to be honest.

WANDA: Well, I know Burt felt bad about earlier today. Maybe they are making up. You know that manly bonding over worms and dead fish thing. I think it's sweet of your father.

DIANA: I predict it will end badly. Very badly.

(GRAMMY comes to look out the door, too. After a moment, DIANA and WANDA get back to work.)

BURT: (Offstage) Now, pull the line with this hand, right...flick it back over your head and then ...yes! That wasn't bad, Beau. You might catch some bass this summer for us. Your Mom likes bass much better than catfish, you know.

BEAU: (Also offstage) Thanks, Dad. This is kind of fun, actually.

(The conversation continues offstage, while GRAMMY watches and the other two women listen nervously.)

BURT: Now, it might catch funny on the grass, but reel it in...real slow....yeah, that's it... on the water, it's gonna slide all smooth, just remember it's jerky here cause it's on the grass. ...Okay, let's try it again, see if you can get it all the way over to the shed.

BEAU: All right. ...Hey, I made it to the shed...Oh *shit!*

(The women inside all freeze and look at the back door, afraid of what may happen. WANDA and DIANA move to look out the kitchen window.)

BURT: Reel it in! Reel it in! Quick, boy!

BEAU: I'm reeling, I'm reeling...oh shit,oh shit, oh *shit!* Oh, my God, Dad! What do I do?

BURT: Uh....keep reeling it in, gently, though. We don't want to hurt it.

BEAU: Oh, God, there it goes! Oh, *shit!*

BURT: (Begins laughing, GRAMMY is still at the door and she joins him, chuckling.) Well, at least you caught *something!*

BEAU: But it's Mrs. Johnson's cat! What are we going to do? Look! I'm almost out of line! Oh my *God*, Dad. Her cat is going to have the lips ripped out of it and she's going to kill me!

BURT: Hold on...let me cut the line...Hold it...Steady....There! (Goes back to laughing.)

BEAU: Dad! This isn't funny. There's a cat out there with a jig hooked in its mouth!  
(Pauses and listens to his dad laughing.) I suppose it kinda was like the ultimate cat toy,  
dragging across the backyard like that.

(BEAU gives in and laughs along with him, the women inside snicker and quietly laugh,  
too.)

BURT: (Still chuckling) You finally...hooked one...Beau!

BEAU: I caught a cat...fish!

BURT: (Still winding down from laughing so hard.) Well, I think we're done here. Your  
Mama probably has dinner just about ready, too. Why don't you go warn Mrs. Johnson  
and I'll clean up our tackle, here?

BEAU: Sounds good, what should I tell her?

BURT: I always find the truth to be the best, Beau.

BEAU: All right. A little honesty and a lotta groveling. Here I go.

(After a moment, BURT comes in with a tackle box and a fishing pole. He puts them by  
the living room door.)

GRAMMY: Think...the cat...will be okay?

BURT: Yeah, it'll be fine. Don't tell Beau, but I caught one of Aunt Gert's cats the exact  
same way when I was a kid. It might have a torn-up lip, but it'll heal just fine. Once the  
jig falls out and it comes home, I'll take it to the vet if need be.

DIANA: I haven't seen anything as funny as that cat streaking across the lawn with that  
line – and Beau freaking out – in a very, very long time.

BURT: (Walks up behind WANDA and hugs her from behind) So, what's for dinner, I'm  
starving.

WANDA: I've got the cookies we made for dessert with ice cream. And we made us  
some fried chicken, mashed potatoes and gravy and some fried green tomatoes. And  
there's sweet sun tea brewin' on the front porch, unless you want a beer.

BURT: What kind of gravy, not that brown stuff you make sometimes from the package?

WANDA: Nope. Big family dinner calls for homemade white gravy.

BURT: With lots of pepper?

WANDA: Yep!

BURT: Point me to my seat!

(WANDA points, BURT and GRAMMY sit while DIANA goes to call VICTORIA to dinner, ad-lib. BEAU enters through the front door with TOM and they enter the kitchen, DIANA following.)

BEAU: Look who I found outside, everyone!

(The FAMILY ad-libs greetings, GRAMMY and WANDA rising to give TOM hugs. Some laughter and teasing about the “catfish” BEAU caught.)

DIANA: Well, let me get changed and we can head out. Two minutes!

WANDA: Oh, no! You two should stay here; we all need to catch up with Tom, too. Tom, darlin’, you’ll stay now won’t you? I made my famous fried green tomatoes! You used to love them when you were a kid, remember?

DIANA: Um, Tom?

TOM: Yeah...sure, Wanda. I’d love to stay.

(DIANA glares at him but goes to a cabinet and pulls out dishes and silverware for the two of them. She places them on the table, downstage. WANDA and BURT sit upstage and begin a quiet conversation about the food as the younger generation talks downstage. GRAMMY sits somewhere in the middle.)

TOM: (Leans over to her) I’m in the doghouse already, aren’t I?

DIANA: Yep.

TOM: What was I supposed to say? I was trapped. Your parents are scary.

DIANA: Yep.

TOM: Are you going to be mad all night?

DIANA: Yep.... Well...No. I just needed to get out of here. I don’t know why I agreed to stay here this week when I could just drive home every night, but it was important to my mom. So, save me?!

TOM: (Chuckles) Already? It’s only been two days!

BEAU: Trust me, she needs out. Me, too, now that I think of it. Take me with you guys.



VICTORIA: Beau, you know you promised you'd stay here while I was in town *and* you promised me a Star Trek marathon tonight. You're not going anywhere. Besides, (glances to see if WANDA is listening, she is not, but no one notices GRAMMY is listening in) I brought the you-know-what for when everyone else is in bed.

DIANA: The what?

BEAU: (Mimics taking a pull off a joint and then presses a finger to his lips) Shhhhh!

DIANA: Ah. Gee thanks for including me.

BEAU: You're too much of a goody-two-shoes and you know it.

DIANA: Shit. Yeah, I am. Just don't get caught, because I don't want to hear about it all week.

VICTORIA: They haven't caught me yet. How else do you think I get through all my weekend visits home?

WANDA: What was that, Victoria?

VICTORIA: Nothing, just telling Tom that I'm lucky enough to come home for quite a few weekends.

TOM: It...um...sounds like a good time.

(BEAU and VICTORIA snicker. GRAMMY smiles at her plate.)

BURT: So, Tom, what are you doing back in Mulvane? I thought you were married and working back east.

TOM: Let's see: since I saw you last, I've gotten my Master's degree, gotten married, gotten divorced and run two different printing companies. Now I'm back re-learning the ropes from my folks so I can take over their business here in town. Guess I've made it full circle, Burt.

WANDA: Well, I'm glad you're back. I know you're parents are, too. Your mama said to me just last -

BURT: So, Tom, I have a joke for you.

TOM: (Looks from BURT to WANDA, confused) Okay, hit me.

BURT: Tell me, what do they call a fish with no eyes?

TOM: Um. Blind?

BURT: Nope.

TOM: A Flathead?

BURT: Oh, good guess! No it's – Fffssssshhhhh!

(The family collectively groans as BURT laughs out loud. VICTORIA motions to BEAU for the mashed potatoes as BEAU shakes his head.)

WANDA: Oh, Lordy, that's the fourth time I've heard that today.

BURT: It's funny.

WANDA: You stole it! (Turns to TOM) He stole it from that TV show, the one with the cute gay guy who used to be a kid actor. The one who plays a ladies man.

BURT: He's not a fairy, I keep telling you –

WANDA: Yes, he is.

TOM: Yeah, he actually is, Burt.

BURT: He kisses women!

BEAU: Um, Dad, I hesitate to jump into this conversation because I'll just be called a thesbian again, but – Dude's gay. He's even married to another guy and I think they have a kid.

BURT: Nah, you can tell he likes kissing that sexy brunette-

BEAU: It's called acting, Dad. You know the classes that I teach? Yep. He is gay.

BURT: Well, that's just gross then, all of it. The acting stuff, the men, that whole lifestyle just makes me sick.

BEAU: And here we go again...Pass the gravy, please, Tori?

VICTORIA: Sure! It's not really a lifestyle or choice, Dad. People are born gay.

(BURT doesn't answer as he eats but makes a disgusted sound.)

VICTORIA: No, seriously. They estimate about 10 percent of the population is gay.

BURT: I don't get it. Ten percent of people just up and decide they are gonna be gay?

DIANA: Well, Dad, they don't *decide* to be gay.

BURT: Of course they decide to be gay, why else –

DIANA: Holy shit... Well, when did you make the decision to be straight, Dad?

BURT: Well...I didn't! That's ridiculous; I'm not a homo, so there's no decision.

DIANA: Exactly.

(There is silence as BURT absorbs what DIANA has said. We watch the family eat for a moment or two, while TOM reaches out to DIANA and shows some affection. A thinking BURT is annoyed but not quite sure if or how he was just beaten. )

BURT: Tom, I have another one for you –that is if you haven't gone all soft and liberal on us since you left Kansas to live back east and you'll get all offended.

TOM: Hate to tell you, Burt, but I've been a soft liberal my whole life. (Shrugs.) Living in this state, I'm used to it, so it's pretty hard to offend me. Go ahead.

BURT: Okay, what is black and bubbly and scratches on glass?

TOM: Um...

DIANA: Dad! Oh my God! Tom, don't even try.                    ALL: (ad-lib protests)

BURT: What? It's a funny one; you even used to think it was funny when you were a little kid! Before you got all sensitive and thinking you're so smart, you would laugh and laugh.

DIANA: Until I was about five, Dad. Then I grew up. I made African-American friends in school and realized that racist bullshit was just...bullshit. I don't want to hear that crap and no one else does either. It's not 1920 anymore; the KKK is not burning crosses in yards or ...

BURT: Hey, the KKK did a lot of good back in the day.

BEAU: Oh, good God! I need another beer. Anyone?

TOM: God, please, yes.

(BEAU rises and gets two beers from the fridge, handing one to TOM on the way back to his seat.)

BURT: You wouldn't know, you weren't there. If a man wasn't taking care of his family, if he was drinking his paychecks or not doing what he was supposed to do – the KKK would go in and take care of his family and make him get on the straight and narrow. They weren't just after black people, that's not what I saw as a kid. It's all a myth.

DIANA: Well, then you must've seen a very special KKK, because I've never seen, read or heard anything about that side of the organization. Ever.

BURT: Well, you would know, of course. *Doctor*. Bunch of damn Democrats. No idea how I raised a whole family of Democrats.

(There is a slight, uncomfortable pause in the conversation while ALL continue to eat.)

WANDA: So... Tom and Diana, where are you two going tonight?

TOM: The movies. I'm going to try to talk her into that new spy movie that just came out.

DIANA: And I'm going to try to talk him into the new Nicholas Sparks tearjerker.

BEAU: Better take some tissues, buddy, I bet I can guess which one you're gonna be stuck with. I was forced to see it last weekend and you have my condolences. It sucks.

TOM: As long as there's popcorn, I'm generally pretty happy.

(BURT finishes his meal and rises.)

BURT: Well, back to my tackle box. I just 'bout got everything organized, cleaned out and ready. *Ladies*. Tom.

(BURT leaves for his sofa while BEAU takes the slight hard, wordlessly throwing his napkin on the table and exiting out the kitchen door, mumbling ad-lib about the missing, hooked cat. TOM helps DIANA clear a few plates and they place them on the kitchen counter, staying so they can talk without the family overhearing. VICTORIA, GRAMMY and WANDA finish eating.)

TOM: So, I see your family hasn't changed since we were in high school. The only difference is your dad has yet to give me the "wear a rubber, boy" lecture tonight.

DIANA: Oh, God, did he used to do that?

TOM: Every. Fucking. Time.

(THEY laugh.)

DIANA: Sorry, guess Mom never told him I was on the Pill. Now that I rethink that, I am sure Mom would never have told him. That I'm still alive is proof.

TOM: That I'm alive is better proof. ...Seriously, Diana, how is it going with him? When I came up Beau was planning an escape tomorrow night with some girl on the phone – and then what the fuck is up with the KKK crap?

DIANA: God, I have no idea, that was messed up. He's still a racist and can't see the world has moved on for the most part. But...yeah, he was hitting Beau pretty hard all day, although they did try to have some bonding time before dinner. It actually went well. My turn on the firing line was earlier. Tori, once again, is off the hook. You know, I really don't know if I can make it a whole week with them. God damn, I am a college professor, I have two textbooks in publication. I'm an expert in the pedagogy of adult learners and by God, I feel like a fucking two-year-old when that man opens up his vitriol on me. And the old bastard probably doesn't even know what vitriol is...or care.

TOM: Are you okay? We can leave now, if you want.

DIANA: Yeah, let's get going. I'm fine, though. Just like I normally am when I'm at home: half homicidal and half suicidal.

TOM: You'll let me know when the balance tips one way or another?

DIANA: I promise.

TOM: Good, I would like to know when it's in my best interest to run.

(THEY share a small laugh.)

DIANA: Run. Run quickly!

TOM: All right, then, let's go!

(TOM takes her hand and he and DIANA run, laughing, into the living room, where DIANA grabs her purse and they exit through the front door, noisily. Everyone at the table stops to watch them leave, surprised. BURT ignores them in favor of his lures.)

WANDA: Well, I guess they were ready to leave.

VICTORIA: Yeah, I'm sure they don't want to miss the movie.

WANDA: I'm sure they are just trying to get away from your Daddy. I swear that man could start an argument with an empty house.

VICTORIA: And yet you're celebrating your 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary with him this week.

WANDA: Never said I wasn't a glutton for punishment.

(WANDA and VICTORIA begin to clear the table as BURT reaches over to the radio and turns up the volume, we hear George Strait singing The Fireman. BURT sings along as we go to black.)

#### ACT ONE, SCENE FOUR

(BEAU, in a tee-shirt and sweatpants, is sitting alone on the sofa, on his smartphone, smiling at whatever or whomever he sees on the screen. After a few moments, VICTORIA, similarly dressed, comes quietly down the stairs to join him.)

BEAU: (Holds out a beer to her) Are they all asleep?

VICTORIA: (Takes it) Everyone but Diana, she isn't home yet. It's late for her, doesn't she go to bed at eight or nine, usually?

BEAU: When she's here? As early as she can manage. I don't know about the rest of her life. She lives 20 minutes away and I've lost touch with her, to be honest.

VICTORIA: (Pulls a joint out of a pocket and lights it) That's too bad, you know we've all really gotten out of touch in the past few years.

BEAU: It's because Dad is an asshole and no one can stand to be around him for extended periods of time. And Mom is completely passive aggressive. I wish I didn't live practically around the corner from them sometimes. (BEAU watches VICTORIA take another pull from the joint) Are you planning to share that at some point?

VICTORIA: Yeah, sorry. (They begin passing it back and forth. Unnoticed by them, GRAMMY has left her bedroom and begun the journey downstairs.) Beau, I am sorry Dad is so awful to you. I don't get it. It seems to get worse as he gets older, too.

BEAU: He never goes after you. Just me. Sometimes Diana.

GRAMMY: (Enters. Again, she struggles to talk well) He... has his... reasons.

VICTORIA: (Attempts to hide the joint) Grammy! What are you doing down here?

GRAMMY: I ... smelled ... the grass. Can I join...you, two?

BEAU: (Grins and opens a beer for her. It takes her a moment or two longer than a younger person to get to them and sit.) You most certainly can. Here, start with this.

VICTORIA: So, exactly how is it that you know what marijuana smells like, Grammy?

GRAMMY: (Takes the joint and expertly takes a hit before passing it along) I was young...once a long time. A long... time ago.

BEAU: Were you a hippie, Grammy?

GRAMMY: Oh, no. You're thinking Woodstock...and the anti-war...people protest...protest-ing. I was older...settled...by then. A lot... of us... professors...we smoked it in the...Fifties. We called it reefer back then...not weed...Not flower kids...no children. Flower children. We were... the Beat Generation.

BEAU: Ah! Yeah, Kerouac, Ginsberg.

GRAMMY: Yes.

VICTORIA: I always forget you were a teacher. It must run in the family – you, Beau and Diana. I'll probably try to teach in a few years, too – the pace of advertising agencies is exhausting. I'm already tired.

GRAMMY: English Lit. For 40 years... takes a lot of weed to... to get through finals week. (BEAU and VICTORIA laugh)... lots...and lots of weed.

VICTORIA: Grammy -?

GRAMMY: Yes, honey?

VICTORIA: Can I tell you something? You can't tell Dad. He'd be...crazy.

GRAMMY: I'm in my nineties, I barely ...can think of what I had for ... breakfast. I won't ...I won't remember to tell Burt. (THEY all chuckle.)

VICTORIA: I just can't tell anyone else and I wasn't going to bother you, you know, since your stroke. Mom says not to bug you, so. . I wanted to talk to you, like we used to talk all the time, but you're ... different now.

GRAMMY: (Points to her head) Here? Maybe. (Points to her heart) Here? Not different at all...just old. Slow. (She takes another hit and smiles) This is helping some, though.

VICTORIA: (Takes a deep breath) Okay, here goes, but you two can't tell Mom and Dad. .... I am living with someone.

GRAMMY: Good for...you.

BEAU: I'd congratulate you but my Spidey sense is detecting a "but" in all of this ...

VICTORIA: Not a "but" so much as an "and..."

BEAU: Okay, then..."and..."

VICTORIA: And, it's Jamie from work. That art director I've mentioned before.

GRAMMY: How nice, honey.

BEAU: Not so fast, Grammy, there's still a "but" hiding somewhere. (THEY all giggle.) You know what I mean, though. Spill, Tori. What is it? Are you pregnant or something? You shouldn't be smoking this shit, if yeah.

VICTORIA: Nope. Not pregnant, never will be, at least not with Jamie. She is a she. A woman. I'm with a woman. I'm a lesbian. And my dad's a total homophobe! (Starts laughing.)

GRAMMY: That...could be...a problem.

BEAU: (Giggles, too) My perfect sister is a lesbo, a lezzie, a big ol' dyke, a carpet licker – no, wait for it! A carpet muncher!

VICTORIA: Hey, that's enough, smartass. I'll hear it all from Dad if he ever finds out. I expect full support from you on this, thesbian boy.

BEAU: If you ever call me that again, I will take your beer. And hide it. Or I would if I didn't think you could still kick my ass. Hey, maybe that was my clue when we were kids...you kicked my ass regularly.

VICTORIA: You deserved it, it had nothing to do with the fact that I –

BEAU: -that *you* are a carpet-munching lesbian and you are Dad's fucking favorite. Oh, God, feel that glorious irony! I would pay good money to see the look on his face when you finally tell him. You little lying lesbo and carpet muncher! Munch, munch, munch, munch, munch, munch, munch! God damn, I'm hungry. Did we ever order that pizza? I have the munchies! (Starts to giggle uncontrollably at his own bad joke. After a moment, GRAMMY and VICTORIA both join in.)

GRAMMY: Tori, come...here. (VICTORIA goes to GRAMMY) I...love...you. And, if you ...love Jamie? Then I love her, too.



VICTORIA: Thanks, Grammy. I love you! (The two women hug.)

BEAU: Hey, I want in on this! (He practically tackles the two women) I love you, guys. And I promise not to out you to the folks. Ever. You lesbo.

GRAMMY: Me, too... Won't out you.

(After the hug and realizing it's almost burned through, BEAU puts out the joint in a beer bottle.)

BEAU: God damn, I'm hungry... So...My sister. A lipstick lesbian...what is Jamie? A bull dyke?

VICTORIA: (Throws a pillow at his head) You're starting to sound like Dad, asshole. But, to answer your question ... No. She's a lipstick lesbian, too. (Takes a swig of beer.) Best thing? We're both the same size. My wardrobe doubled when she moved in.

(BEAU high fives VICTORIA.)

GRAMMY: And that's the best thing? Victoria?

VICTORIA: No. The best thing is that I love her. And she loves me.

GRAMMY: Love is always the most important thing, Victoria. Your father tends to ...forget that.

BEAU: Damn, either this was some really good shit and I'm hallucinating, or your speech is much better when you smoke weed, Grammy.

VICTORIA: You know, he's right –

GRAMMY: Hmm, maybe I should smoke it more...often.

VICTORIA: I'll hook you up whenever you want, Grammy. Just let me know.

GRAMMY: I will. If I ... remember. (They all chuckle.)

BEAU: Well, ladies, joint is gone, beer is gone and I'm getting sleepy. How about you?

VICTORIA: I could sleep. I could also run into Wichita for some pizza. Does anyone else want pizza? Ooooh, we can text Diana and ask her to bring some home with her?

GRAMMY: No pizza for me. I...I am enjoying my little ...um...

BEAU: Buzz?

GRAMMY: Yes, my buzz. Haven't smoked any grass...since...I was 60, at least. Will you help me upstairs, Tori?

(GRAMMY and TORI head upstairs while BEAU cleans the living room up a bit.)

VICTORIA: (Once they arrive at her room) It was so good to talk to you, tonight. Next time, let's try to stay up longer, maybe even invite Diana along.

GRAMMY: Diana? Smoke a ...joint? Never happen.

VICTORIA: Okay, well, then Grammy, what do you need tonight? Can I get you a glass of water or anything?

GRAMMY: Not a thing...I'm going to sleep. And Tori?

VICTORIA: Yeah?

GRAMMY: I'm really sorry that I'm...not always...me, anymore.

VICTORIA: I love you, Grammy. And I'm glad you were you, tonight. I needed to talk to someone and I'm really glad it was you. (They hug and kiss each other's cheeks) Sweet dreams.

GRAMMY: Sweet dreams, honey.

(VICTORIA walks to her room, offstage, while GRAMMY locks herself in and goes to bed. BEAU settles in on the sofa and turns off the light. The stage goes dark and after a few moments we hear keys and see the front door opening. BEAU covers his head with a blanket. DIANA turns a light on in the entry. TOM grabs her and kisses her, easing her against the wall just inside the living room.)

DIANA: (After a few moments) We probably shouldn't be doing this. At least not here...Tom? Tom!

TOM: (Mumbles into her neck and continues kissing her as the conversation continues...)

DIANA: No. Seriously, Tom. This house is full of my crazy family, just waiting to catch us. Besides, it's our first date.

TOM: Di, we dated for two years in high school. We've known each other since we were kids. For Christ's sake, we're adults and besides, if you have forgotten, it's not like we haven't done this before. A lot. We were teenagers. I remember...very vividly...(More nibbles)

DIANA: (Starting to give in) But.. but... It's not our third date. Aren't we supposed to wait for the third date? That's the new rule?

TOM: We're both pushing 40-years-old, Diana, I don't think the third-date rule applies. It's not like we're still kids.

(TOM begins to steer her in the direction of the sofa. DIANA redirects him to the stairs.)

DIANA: Oh, hell no, not down here.

(THEY tussle a bit, DIANA moving away and TOM trying to move her to the sofa. TOM laughs at their play.)

DIANA: SHHHHH! Tom, we can't down here and... Oh, Christ, Grammy is just across the hall from my old room. She'll hear us!

TOM: She can *hear*? (He resumes kissing her neck.)

DIANA: (Punches him in the arm) I don't have a door lock. She might even walk in on us.

TOM: (Stops and pauses to think) Nope. Thought that mental image might have a negative effect on my libido, but it most certainly did not.

DIANA: Damn.

(TOM resumes his attempt to literally kiss her into submission.)

TOM: Diana...

DIANA: (Thinks) Oh, fuck it, let's go.

(THEY head upstairs quietly, step into DIANA's old room where TOM closes the door pushes an old desk chair up against the doorknob and turns the lights off with a grin.

Downstairs, BEAU sits up from a pile of disheveled blankets on the sofa. He is grinning. He pulls out his cell phone and dials; we see its light brightly.)

BEAU: Tori. It's me. Yes, I'm calling you from downstairs. No. No, I don't have any pizza. Um, no, I'm not coming upstairs... Tori... just listen! You aren't going to believe what the little bookworm is doing right now. Yep. Just 10 feet away from Grammy's room. (Pauses to hear the response) Oh, yeah. I am so going to give her shit tomorrow...

(The lights fade on BEAU as he ad libs softly. Upstairs, we hear a soft rhythmic sound coming from DIANA's room. There's no visual nor is it over the top, but it is an unmistakable, subtle sound.

We see GRAMMY stir, turn on her bedside light and the lights come up in her room. She looks around, confused at the noise, then heaves herself from bed and shuffles carefully to the door, muttering. While the noise continues, GRAMMY slowly unlocks one lock after another finally finishing by pulling the screwdriver from the doorknob and opens the door with a satisfied flourish – just as the noise stops. Frustrated, she begins muttering again, shuts the door soundly and begins to put the locks to right again as the lights fade to blackout and ACT ONE ends.)

## ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

(It is about a week later. BURT is sitting, once again, on the sofa organizing his array of tackle boxes, poles, limb lines and lures. He sits still in the middle of chaos as the rest of the family scurries around him, cleaning and decorating for the big anniversary party. Old-school country and western music is on the radio, WANDA is standing on a chair dusting the crown molding and light fixtures, BEAU and DIANA are busily organizing knick-knacks, books and magazines on shelves. VICTORIA is sitting on the floor, apparently constructing a banner to hang up while GRAMMY sits alone in the kitchen, absent-mindedly arranging the same vase of flowers over and over.)

WANDA: Oh Lordy, it's hot. Hotter than a whorehouse on the Fourth of July kinda hot.

VICTORIA: Well, then turn the air back on, Mom!

WANDA: No, not while we're cleaning and stirring up dust, it'll just circulate it and put it right back where we swiped it off.

BEAU: Oh, good night, she's turning into Grammy.

WANDA: I'm not; get back to your dusting. Behave, young man.

BEAU: Yes, Ma'am!

(THEY continue at their jobs for a few moments.)

WANDA: So, Diana, tell me all about you and Tom? You've been out almost every night this week together –

BEAU: Yeah, what is up with that? When did you two get back together?

DIANA: We've been seeing each other just this week, don't get all excited everyone. We're not back together. It's been more than 20 years since we split up and he's freshly divorced. I'm not really sure that makes for a good long-term prospect, to tell you the truth. But, it's been nice.

VICTORIA: When did he move back again?

DIANA: Around Easter. We've been in contact for ages online, just keeping up with each other, careers and our friends from high school. But, I hadn't seen him for years before Monday night.

BEAU: And you saw a *lot* of him that night, too!

(BEAU and VICTORIA share a glance and a laugh, while DIANA glares.)

DIANA: Anyway...it's nice. Comfortable. I like him. We'll see.

WANDA: It's just a shame he's staying with his folks right now and you're here, you two haven't had a chance for much time alone.

(VICTORIA and BEAU snort with laughter, DIANA can't help but join in.)

DIANA: It's...um...it's fine, Mom. If we needed room to hang from the chandelier or really make some noise I think the 20-minute drive to my place in Wichita would be just fine. But, we're fine. It's not like we're a couple of kids anymore.

BURT: Never liked him.

DIANA: What? I thought you liked Tom! You're always nice to him.

BURT: He's a boy; boys are only after one thing.

DIANA: Dad! At this point of my life, *I'm* only after one thing. He's not a boy and I'm in my late 30s, I think I've figured sex out by now. Besides, it's not like we haven't done it before.

BEAU: Yeah, lots and lots.

(BURT gives her a startled look.)

DIANA: C'mon, Dad. We went out for two years in high school. What did you think we were doing, holding hands?

BURT: Well, now I really don't like him.

DIANA: Tom says you always used to threaten him when we went out.

BURT: Yeah, well, I thought it worked.

DIANA: Sorry! It didn't. Then or now.

WANDA: Well, if you ask me, it's time one of you three settled down and had kids. Diana, you go right ahead and have fun with Tom. Make me some grandkids, will you?

BURT: Just not under my roof!

BEAU: (Whispers) Too late!

(VICTORIA and DIANA snicker. )

BURT: Beau! Don't talk about your sister like that! She would never disrespect her mother and me -

WANDA: Now you two, we're not fighting, we're getting ready for the party. We only have today and tomorrow to finish cleaning this house and get ready. Beau, get over here and help me take these curtains down so I can wash them.

(BEAU complies. BURT is silent for a few moments then...)

BURT: Why aren't any of you three married? I mean, I guess Tori here is married to her job as successful as she is, but I don't see why you two aren't married. It's not like teachers work a lot, you have plenty of time to date and find someone.

WANDA: Oh, good Lord, when I said I wanted grandkids, I didn't expect the gerbils to begin running on those wheels in your brain again. The kids are fine. Lots of young folks don't get married so young as we did, Burt. They wait for good jobs, a solid career -

DIANA: Tenure.

BEAU: To get our shit together.

WANDA: Right, they do that before finding someone. It's not like when we were kids and had to get married so we could get out of our parents' houses and from under their thumbs. Hell, we were really just children when we got married - it was barely legal!

BURT: (Smiles at WANDA then scrutinizes the kids.) I just don't get it. What's wrong with these kids that they can't find someone?

VICTORIA: Well, this might be a good time for me to make an announcement.

WANDA: (Eagerly) Oh, good news, I hope! What is it Tori?

(BEAU looks at VICTORIA in concern and shock.)

VICTORIA: I'm living with Jamie, the art director I told you I was dating. From work. Jamie moved into my place a while ago.

BURT: You got married and didn't tell us?

VICTORIA: Oh, God no, I'm not getting married. Ever. And neither of us want kids. But, we're happy. We're thinking about getting a dog.

BURT: Well... that's good, I guess. (He pauses and plays with a lure.) Get a German Shorthair Pointer, best huntin' dogs ever. Came here from Europe when -

ALL: --Clark Gable introduced them to America.

VICTORIA: We know, Dad. We've heard the story. A Shorthair is on the list. We'll probably get a rescue dog, though.

BURT: A what?

DIANA: Never mind, Dad. Victoria! I'm so happy for you! Aren't you, Beau?

BEAU: Yeah, sis, proud of you. Way to live in sin!

VICTORIA: Hey, just part of my plan to finally make you two look good.

(THEY laugh.)

BURT: So, Diana, if Tori isn't having kids, then it's up to you to give your Mama a grandchild. You're not getting any younger, maybe you should settle for Tom.

DIANA: How about we say "settle down with Tom" instead of "settle for" him? He's a pretty amazing guy; I don't think any woman would be settling to be with him.

BURT: Divorced. Damaged goods.

DIANA: Okay, well, I'll just see if I can find a nice random stranger to procreate with. Maybe that will make you happy?

BURT: Whatever blows your dress up, darlin'.

WANDA: Burt! That's nothin' to say to your daughter!

(BURT just shakes his head and goes back to his lures.)

BEAU: (After a short pause) I'm seeing someone. Not that anyone cares.

BURT: What's his name?

WANDA: *Burt!*

DIANA: Christ on a bike, Dad!

BEAU: *Her* name is Chelsea –

BURT: One of your students, then? I read somewhere that queers were all pedophiles –

BEAU: And she teaches over at Rose Hill High and lives kinda about half way in-between here and there. She's a few years younger than me; she's from Oklahoma and has a cat that hates me. We've been going to the movies some and we've got tickets to see some summer theatre in Wichita next month. We like to listen to music and grade



papers together. We text a lot when we're apart and send each other funny pictures. Sometimes we just sit and watch TV together..It... It's really nice.

VICTORIA: You're blushing! Everyone *look!*

BEAU: (Hides his face) No, I'm not. Stop.

DIANA: Wow. You really like this one, don't you?

BEAU: Yeah, I think she might be the one. Finally.

BURT: She knows you teach the-*a*-ter?

BEAU: Of course, she came to our spring play. My kids love her; she brings them doughnuts when she comes by.

BURT: And she knows all about the *thez-BE-un* thing?

BEAU: Does she know Thespis was the first actor, yes, I think so, she's all college-educated and everything, Dad.

BURT: No, no, no, I mean that you're a queer, a fairy, a homo? She's okay with marrying a gay? What, does she like women or something?

BEAU: Oh, my God. For the last time, I am not gay. I am a straight, red-blooded American man that likes to fuck women. And I *really* like to fuck this one, so much so I'm thinking about marrying her. What do you think about that, *Dad?*

BURT: Well, *son*...I really think you need to tell her you're a gay *thez-BE-un*. (Laughs.)

BEAU: You know what? You are the biggest piece of shit father ever. All my friends have great dads, but no, I get stuck with you, you grumpy, critical, ignorant fuck of a bastard. God, I wish I wasn't a part of this crazy-ass family!

BURT: Well, you know what? You're not the only one, sometimes I wish you'd never been born, boy, all you give us is grief!

VICTORIA: Dad! That's not fair!

BURT: You stay out of this, you're the one child that never gave me any trouble, Victoria, don't start now that you're living in sin! (Turns to BEAU) But you, if you can't be respectful and act right, then you can leave. Go back to your thesbians and little plays. Play and pretend – I can't believe we paid for college for you to go to work and *play*.

BEAU: Dad, I am a teacher. I –

BURT: Those who can, do, those who can't, teach. You know that. You can't do anything right, so you teach.

BEAU: Why can't you see that I am a good man –

BURT: You are a waste of skin.

BEAU: No, I won't let you do this to me, not anymore – I'm through letting you do this to me. You know what? When Chelsea and I have kids, you'll never fucking see them. I won't let you treat her or our kids the way you've always treated me.

BURT: Good. You're a waste of my time. Always have been. And you need to be out of my house by the time I get back.

(BURT exits to the kitchen where he grabs a beer from the fridge and leaves via the screen door. BEAU leaves via the front door, quickly followed by VICTORIA and DIANA, who snags her bag and a set of keys on the way. We hear a car start shortly after. WANDA sits on the sofa, obviously distressed.)

A few moments later, BURT comes back in and sits down with his mother, playing with a flower or two.)

GRAMMY: Go talk to her.

BURT: I can't. We're both too angry.

GRAMMY: Then don't talk...Go.

(BURT sighs, rises and heads for WANDA in the living room. He crosses to his radio/record player and puts on an LP, George Jones singing He Stopped Lovin' Her Today. He holds out a hand to WANDA and she sighs but takes it, rising to step into his outstretched arms. THE COUPLE fall into an obviously-familiar and romantic two-step around the living room as the lights fade to black.)

## ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

(The lights come up on DIANA's bedroom, she and TOM are in bed, panting and a little giggly and obviously just finished making love. GRAMMY can be seen, asleep in her bedroom, as is BEAU on the downstairs sofa. The anniversary banner VICTORIA worked on earlier is hung on an upstage wall.)

TOM: (Rolls off of DIANA towards upstage and sits up, smiling) Wow.

DIANA: Yeah.

TOM: That was so amazing I almost asked you to marry me right when I –

DIANA: (Swats his arm) Shhhh!!! They'll hear you! (softly, still a bit breathless) To tell you the truth, that was so amazing I would have said yes. (She takes a moment to catch her breath) You know, you're much better at that than you were in high school.

TOM: Years of practice since then. Mostly on my own in recent years, mind you - nevertheless years of practice, my dear. But, thanks, I think.

DIANA: (Sits up, stretches, then notices something on the nightstand) Oh, shit.

TOM: What? What's wrong?

DIANA: Well, we should probably talk about this. (She picks up a condom in its wrapper and tosses it to him.)

TOM: Oh, shit.

DIANA: Yep.

TOM: Well, we... We weren't thinking straight, were we? It was late when the concert let out and...I had a few beers... then when we got back...and...and...

DIANA: (Grabs her robe and gets out of bed to pace) And we're morons, that's what. Do you realize in the two years we dated in high school – as irresponsible kids – we never had a pregnancy scare? Now, we're adults and...oh, good Lord. Dad's right, I am a dumbass sometimes.

TOM: (Follows her after slipping on his trousers) No, you're not. Diana, you have got to stop letting that man into your brain, into your thoughts. He's wrong, you know that? As long as he and your mom keep convincing you that you're nothing, if they keep you mentally beaten down, then you still need them. If you are an amazing, self-confident and independent woman – you no longer need them. It absolutely kills them when they aren't needed. That's my theory, anyway.

DIANA: Keep me beaten down? Well, he does make me feel like a little kid. A little kid that as my darling Daddy would say just "screwed the pooch."

TOM: (Snickers) I think one of us should be insulted. Look, Di...I'll tell you what, in the morning we'll run to a pharmacy out of town so the gossips won't see us, and we'll pick up that emergency contraception whatever stuff that I hear about on the news all the time.

DIANA: (Laughs) “Whatever stuff?” You’re not exactly instilling a lot of confidence in me. But...we could do that.

TOM: I’m hearing an unspoken “but.” ...am I missing subtext here? I’m not good at guessing, Di, you gotta tell things to me plainly. I’m a guy. And I’m a divorced guy, so that means I’m also a single guy again. As a subspecies, we’re not good with subtext.

DIANA: (Deep breath) What if we don’t.

TOM: Don’t?

DIANA: Don’t go to a pharmacy. Just...what happens, happens. We are both nearly 40, neither of us have kids. We both want kids, right?...so...what if we just...wait and see?

TOM: (Echoes her deep breath) Yes.

DIANA: Yes?

TOM: Di, this is gonna sound nuts but, dammit, you’re right, I’m nearly 40 and I gave up a lot when I married my ex-wife. She wanted a career and money and the right address and no kids. I thought she was worth it, but now I look back and I wish we’d had kids. Hell, Di, I’ve always wanted to have children. I - I suppose I should just tell you all of it now. Celia and I...Celia became pregnant twice in the seven years we were together. She didn’t want children, so she...she took care of it. If it had been only my decision, I would be a father now. This is crazy and irresponsible and there are about a million things wrong with what I’m about to say...But, if we have ... I guess the right word is “conceived” tonight, because we fucked-up like a couple of teenagers, I would - That is...yes... please, let’s have the baby. You don’t have to promise to marry me or spend the rest of your life with me – but...

DIANA: Whoa, slow down, that’s a lot to absorb, Tom. I... I was just thinking out loud...(Pauses, looks at him for a long moment) Okay.

TOM: Okay. So...No running out-of-town for morning-after stuff?

DIANA: Nope.

TOM: We’ll just see what the universe has planned.

DIANA: (Another deep breath) Yes.... Holy hell, did we just sorta decide to have a baby?

TOM: I think we did.

DIANA: This is crazy, you realize that?

TOM: It's insane, but I loved you in high school and ... this week, it's been incredible. I...I do love you, Diana. I don't think I ever stopped.

DIANA: I've always had feelings for you, too. I'm just not ready to ...to ...So... we're both insane?

TOM: Well, you're the one from the crazy-ass family, you tell me...

(DIANA glares at him and he realizes his joke wasn't a good idea.)

TOM: I was just trying to lighten the mood...it didn't work. Shit, that didn't take long, I'm back in the dog house already, aren't I?

DIANA: Yep.

TOM: I notice you say "yep" when you're angry. So, a lot.

DIANA: Yep.

(TOM approaches DIANA and tentatively wraps his arms around her from behind. DIANA appears to relent a little.)

TOM: So...how long do you think I might have to stay here? In the dog house?

DIANA: (In attempt to be seductive) Oh, I think maybe 10-20 years of *hard, hard* labor is the appropriate sentence.

TOM: (Snorts)

DIANA: Okay, so I'm not good at pillow talk, or out-of-bed pillow-type talk. Whatever.

(They laugh and share a kiss.)

TOM: What I really want to know is what I have to do to be sentenced to life?

DIANA: That had better not be a proposal, Tom –

TOM: Only if you want it to be.

DIANA: I'll let you know.

(They return to kissing and the bed. Tom pulls the covers over their heads and we see the condom package get tossed onto the downstage side of the bed, before...they are interrupted by a scream from their mother, WANDA, offstage.)

WANDA: Burt! *Burt!* Someone call an ambulance, Daddy's not breathing!

(THEY all begin to climb out of beds, dress haphazardly, scamper up the stairs, as needed. In the chaos, we hear ad-libs of "Calling 911 now!" "Dad!" "Someone do CPR!" and others as we fade to black at the sound of a siren.)

There is a lengthy blackout with the sound of just a siren and its fade-out, almost long enough to make the audience uncomfortable and rustle.)

### ACT TWO, SCENE THREE

(Silence in the blackout. We hear the front door being unlocked. Someone turns on the light in the entryway. Slowly, as if moving through water, ALL except BURT file into the room, disheveled, stunned and worn looking. Some are still half-dressed in pajamas, others in street clothing. BEAU is practically holding WANDA upright. VICTORIA is doing the same for GRAMMY as they enter.)

Nothing is said as the family members all head for bed, TOM and DIANA hugging WANDA before they ascend the stairs together and go to bed. GRAMMY and WANDA follow them, arms around each other for support. WANDA turns to her offstage bedroom and GRAMMY settles into her room, locking all the locks.

After a few moments watching their exits, BEAU and VICTORIA move to sit on the sofa. After a moment, BEAU realizes his father's tackle box is in front of him. He picks up a lure to look at and begins to cry. VICTORIA hugs her brother and they cry together as the lights again fade to black.)

### ACT TWO, SCENE FOUR

(A few days later. The lights come up on the small family, dressed for the funeral. DIANA is missing, but TOM is leaning against the wall a bit apart from the others. GRAMMY is preoccupied, digging in her purse. WANDA is fussing over BEAU and his face as he finishes putting on his suit. )

BEAU: Mom. Seriously. Leave it. (Swats her hand away from his face) MOM!

WANDA: You don't want to go to your father's funeral looking like you never wash your face, do you? Let me get it!

(WANDA again moves to touch BEAU.)

BEAU: Mom, it's a zit. People get them when they are stressed. I've been home with you people for more than a week. I qualify. I *earned* this zit. Stop – stop it!

WANDA: Just stand still...

BEAU: Leave it!

WANDA: Let me get it for you... What if you meet someone special at the service? You don't want ...

BEAU: (Incredulous) Um, meet someone. MEET someone? At my dad's funeral. Good Lord, woman, you've lost your mind. Besides, I told you, I'm seeing someone.

WANDA: Just let me...

BEAU: *Mom!*

WANDA: Just let me...

BEAU: *Mom! No!*

(BOTH are distracted as DIANA comes noisily hopping down the stairs on one high heeled foot.)

WANDA: (Turns to DIANA as a relieved BEAU pulls away from her) What is the matter with you? It's your Daddy's funeral today. Goodness, Diana, can't you act like a normal member of the family, just for today?

BEAU: (Laughs) Normal member of the family? That's a good one, Mom.

(BEAU sits on the sofa and takes a swig from one of the many beer bottles scattered there along with one of their father's tackle boxes. DIANA begins navigating the room on one foot, looking for her shoe.)

DIANA: I just don't want to ruin my hose, Mom. Dad would want us to all look pulled-together today, so I gotta hop. Now Beau, where did you hide my damn shoe?

(BEAU looks innocent and has some more beer. VICTORIA chuckles and DIANA follows. WANDA suddenly loses her temper.)

WANDA: *How* can you all laugh and joke on a day like today? Beau, put down the fucking beer. Diana, act like an adult for once in your damned life! Victoria, don't encourage them. Grammy ... Grammy! C'mon, let's get moving. Let's go! (Stops on her way to the door) You children! You always treated the dog better than your father (BEAU groans). It's true, and you know it. Your father was a wonderful man. A wonderful man.

BEAU: Wonderful, my ass. When exactly was he wonderful? When he was yelling at me or when he was criticizing me? Fuck, I missed it!

WANDA: You're lucky to have had him in your lives as long as you did. So, try to pull it together and show proper respect for the man who gave you life –

BEAU: That's about all he gave us. Life. I guess he did give us hell on a regular basis, too.

WANDA: Beau! I never – That man... he...he...

BEAU: (Obviously on the tipsy side of sober and growing agitated) He gave us life, I know, I know. What do you estimate that took, then, Mom? About five minutes of work for each of us? Wait, don't tell me, he spent the thirty minutes after you fucked telling you exactly how you did it wrong?

VICTORIA/WANDA: What?!?!?

DIANA: Beau!!

(SILENCE reigns. Everyone stares at BEAU.)

BEAU: (Oblivious, toasts with his beer bottle) Fucking man. I'm sure he criticized fucking, too. He sure as hell did everything else. Now that I think about it, I bet that's why you went with a closed casket, right?

(ALL look confused. WANDA shakes it off and moves toward BEAU.)

WANDA: Beau, let's put down the beer and go. I wish you hadn't picked this morning to become a damn drunk. Baby, I swear I don't know what you're talking about ... a closed casket?

BEAU: It's 'cause he'd bitch that we'd screwed up the funeral if he could see! (Laughs at his own joke)

WANDA: That is enough, young man. Stop it! I loved your father! He was a wonderful man. A wonderful, wonderful man. A great man.



BEAU: He was a great ass!

WANDA: Beau, stop it, right now!

BEAU: Cared more about his fishin' than you, or me, or any of us!

WANDA: (Growing angry) We were lucky to have him. ... You were lucky to have him!

BEAU: Don't go insulting genetics by comparing it to luck, Mom. There's no luck in being related to that bastard...

WANDA: Stop it, just stop it! Beau, you have no idea what he did for you, for me.

BEAU: I know what he did to me, gave me a case of low self-confidence and a one-way ticket to years in therapy. That's what my great, wonderful father did for me! How lucky was I to have Burt as my loving daddy...

WANDA: Shut *up!* He wasn't your father, Goddammit! Beau, he wasn't your father...

(Again, stunned silence, as all turn to a flustered WANDA.)

WANDA: I screwed up, all right? *Me*. Not him. The short version is: He forgave me and he raised you as his own. We were both lucky he was such a wonderful, forgiving man...

BEAU: (Advances on WANDA, backing her into the coffee table and sending tackle boxes, lures, bobbers and other items flying, she stumbles and he grabs her arm, shaking her.) What?! Forgiving??!! "Forgiving," that's bullshit. That is complete and total bullshit. He may have forgiven you, but he never forgave me! (Pauses a moment to think, then gives WANDA a further, angry shake as she begins to cry.) Why didn't you tell me before? That fucking man beat me down from the moment I could form complete sentences – both Diana *and* me - and *now* you decide is the best time to tell me why he hated me? How about when he wouldn't chip in for college and I had to turn down fucking Harvard? Or when he would tell my girlfriends I was gay because I sang in choir and liked the-a-ter? OR...

WANDA: (Overlapping) Shut up, shut up, shut up, shut up (Repeats until BEAU stops ranting and lets her go – walking away still angry – as she fades off into another stunned silence from the group).

(A moment or two passes. GRAMMY, shell-shocked and oblivious, is applying more hand lotion. BEAU opens another beer from a cooler near the wrecked coffee table and downs it quickly.)

DIANA: (Timidly) Um.... Mom? What about -

WANDA: You were his. He just never felt he could really be sure.

DIANA: Ah. Well, that makes some things clearer – makes sense, I guess.

(BEAU chucks the empty beer bottle at the fireplace, shattering it. There is a tense silence before WANDA approaches him, unsure.)

BEAU: (Looks up) Who -?

WANDA: I'll answer all of your questions later tonight. Now, let's just ... survive the next few hours.

(BEAU visibly tries to pull himself together, turns to his mother and after a moment's hesitation, envelopes her in a big hug.)

BEAU: I forgive you, Mom. Even if he didn't. I promise ... I promise ... I don't know. I just don't know, Mom...

WANDA: You don't have to know. Not yet. Just...be.

(They hug again. VICTORIA stands and straightens her skirt then gently coughs.)

VICTORIA: Not that they can really start without us, but if we leave right now, we won't be late.

(VICTORIA takes GRAMMY by the hand and leads her outside. WANDA and BEAU follow, hand-in-hand, BEAU a bit unsteady on his feet. DIANA, still partially shoeless, shoos them on when they look back at her.)

DIANA: Go ahead, I'll find my shoe and Tom and I will come in his car.

(WANDA and BEAU both look around, shocked to notice TOM still leaning against the wall by the kitchen door. TOM gives them a guilty grin and waves. WANDA seems to want to say something to him, but BEAU pulls her out the door. TOM and DIANA are alone, it is quiet for a moment except for the noise she makes searching for her shoe.)

TOM: (whistles) Holy shit.

DIANA: Yeah. Holy shit.

(DIANA drops to her knees and fishes her shoe out from underneath the sofa.)

DIANA: Got it! Damn, Beau. I know it was him.

TOM: And somehow I think you're going to let him get away with this one. Free pass?

DIANA: Oh, yeah. Total free pass.

(DIANA sits on the sofa to put on her shoe. TOM joins her, first holding her hand and kissing it, then kissing her. They sit quietly for a moment.)

DIANA: Thanks for sticking around after you realized my family was crazy.

TOM: I've come to the conclusion that all families are crazy, it's just varying degrees of crazy ...

DIANA: Well, mine wins.

TOM: I'll give you that. Diana, I –

DIANA: I think I know what you're going to say and...not right now, Tom, please. I can't make any decision right now. I can't even think. It's all too much. I don't know even what to think or do. And I might be pregnant. I'm happy about the prospect, I can't wait to find out and that itself scares the crap outta me. My dad is dead and I have no idea how to feel about that. Grammy isn't taking it well at all, she's completely shell-shocked, I think. I'm not even sure she knows today is her son's funeral. My whole family is falling apart. And...fuck...Beau? Wow, Beau is a mess, my mom is hurting –

TOM: You're hurting.

DIANA: Yeah. I guess I am, too. It makes me wonder if I've just been using you these past weeks in order to survive this crazy fucking family. No, wait, that's not exactly right, use isn't the word I want to ...dammit, I want us to stay together, I do, I'm just overwhelmed...

TOM: Diana, let me just say this –

DIANA: Tom ... I just don't know what to think. I just don't know what to think.

TOM: You're in pain, you're hurting. It's okay-

DIANA: I just want to be fair to you.

TOM: Diana, it's okay. Use me until the pain goes away. Then maybe all that will be left is ... me.

(DIANA is left a bit speechless by his offer. THEY embrace and exchange a kiss.)

TOM: Well, I'll give you a moment. I'll pull the car around, okay?

DIANA: (Nods, teary-eyed) Thanks.

(DIANA sits on the sofa for a moment as TOM leaves, before rising to go straighten the fishing poles leaning against the wall and puts a few loose lures and bobbers back into the one of the open tackle boxes scattered around the coffee table.)

I remember this lure, Dad. This is the one your dad bought for you at that old resort on Grand Lake, what was it? It had the fancy restaurant and hotel but then it had fishing cabins and the heated docks. You always talked about going there with Grammy in the winter after your dad died and then you went to Vinita for some chicken fried steaks together...Ginger Blue? I think that's the name. Ginger Blue.

God, this lure must be nearly 70 years old. You were, what? 72?

Wow, 72-years-old and you still hadn't learned a thing about people, about human nature, about kindness. I have always wondered what happened to you to make you act this way. Why on earth you could be so cruel? It couldn't have just been Beau and that whole...thing. I think it goes beyond that, beyond Mom cheating on you, beyond you raising Beau as your own son. Tom's right, you liked to beat us down and I think he's also right that you like us that way. Insecure, defeated, feeling stupid – so we need you and you can feel like you're still in charge somehow. Is that it?

They say that cruelty begets cruelty. I don't know if that's true – if it is then Beau, Tori and I have broken the cycle. Despite your best efforts we've all become intelligent, educated, well-read, responsible...clever...kind...progressive adults. You didn't defeat us.... In the end.

I had thought, earlier this week, that if Tom and I have a baby and if we do stay together – that you and I were going to have to have a serious come-to-Jesus meeting about your behavior. I don't want that anger...that level of criticism...that type of hatred and prejudice around my children. We can't have that conversation now. I don't have the chance to talk to you. To figure our relationship out. Together. I have to do that, now, on my own. Without you here.

I don't really know how to rebuild our relationship when we can't see each other, but I guess I have to try.

I said to you once that I always tell my students, we'll start with grace and go from there.

So, here it goes – I forgive you, Dad. I may never forget, but I forgive you.

Yeah, we'll go from there, Dad.

(DIANA crosses to her father's record player, turns it on and starts He Stopped Lovin' Her Today, by George Jones. She listens for a moment before picking up another of his larger lures off the coffee table and slowly exiting through the front door, upstage, turning off the lights as she leaves and the lights fade to black.)

CURTAIN