A Whole New Echelon of Love

Characters: (in order of appearance)

Courtney, 15

Liz, 44, mother of Courtney, Harvard history professor

Guy, 45, Liz’s husband, father of Courtney, adjunct professor of history, would-be novelist

Polly, 38, sister of Liz

Leo, 70, father of Liz and Polly

Beck, 40, Polly’s best friend

Arturo, 35, a Harvard history professor

Rainey, 65, Leo’s girlfriend

Setting:

The well-appointed living/dining room of a beautiful townhouse in Cambridge, MA. Everything looks tasteful, but not overly luxurious or expensive. Large modern art canvases/exhibition posters hang on the walls, Oriental rugs cover the floor. There’s a fireplace with a mantel. The dining table is covered with a tablecloth. Late day sun streams in through a large window on a lovely autumn afternoon. As the play progresses, the light dims until it’s dark outside. A front door is stage right. Upstage right is an exit to a kitchen which can be partially seen. The dining area has a sideboard as well as the large table. The usual couch, chairs and coffee table define the living room. Stage left a hallway leads to unseen upstairs bedrooms and bathrooms.

ACT I

AT CURTAIN:

COURTNEY, in shorts and t-shirt, lounges in an oversized chair, bare legs draped over the side. She’s texting on her phone and reacting to what she’s reading.

LIZ enters, in tight dress, heels and jewelry. She carries a plate of hors d’oeuvres and places it on a coffee table within Courtney’s reach. The girl immediately leans over to take a piece.

LIZ

Uh-uh. Wait until the guests get here.

COURTNEY

What guests? It’s only Grandpa and Aunt Polly. And probably Beck—is he coming?

LIZ

I assume so. He’s always with her, like they’re married or something.

Liz fusses, straightening things as

she talks.

COURTNEY

I like Beck. He’s funny.

LIZ

I didn’t say I didn’t like him. I just think Polly ought to go places on her own once in a while. They both should. [beat] You could get off your rear end and help me, you know. I have decorations to put up.

COURTNEY

[not moving]

I thought Aunt Polly was coming over early to help you.

LIZ

When has my sister ever been early for anything? She’ll be late to her own funeral. [to herself] She’s *years* late to her own wedding.

COURTNEY

Mom! That’s mean!

LIZ

[shrugs]

A little bit. But not meaner than things you say.

COURTNEY

That’s different. I’m a teenager.

Liz looks out the window at the

falling leaves.

LIZ

God, I’ve always loved the fall. Change is in the air. Everything’s starting up again.

COURTNEY

It only seems that way to you because you’re a teacher. For students it’s like, “Ugh. Nine more months to get through until I can do what I want to again.”

LIZ

Oh, Courtney. You know you’re always excited for the beginning of a new school year.

COURTNEY

For five minutes. Then I remember, “Oh, right, this is just like last year only with more homework.”

GUY enters from the kitchen, putting on a jacket. He seems frazzled.

GUY

Okay, I’m going out to get the [realizes Courtney is in the room] . . . stuff.

LIZ

Thanks honey. Don’t worry. I’m sure it’s nothing.

Courtney’s ears perk up at their cryptic conversation.

COURTNEY

What’s nothing?

LIZ and GUY

Nothing!

COURTNEY

O-kay.

LIZ

If you must know, I need a few things for . . . menopause issues.

COURTNEY

(grossed out)

Oh, God. Shut up! La-la-la-la-la-la-la!

That’s the response Liz hoped for. The following conversation is done quietly with hand and facial gestures instead of all the words.

LIZ

Um, maybe you shouldn’t go to our regular . . . place.

GUY

No? It’ll take me longer if I have to go to . . . .

LIZ

I know, but the pharmacist here knows us . . . .

GUY

And I might run into . . . .

LIZ

If anyone saw you, they’d think . . .

GUY

Right.

LIZ

And there’s so little chance anyway . . . .

GUY

Maybe we should wait ‘til after the company leaves.

LIZ

I’d rather get it over with so I can stop thinking about it.

He nods and heads for the door.

LIZ (cont’d.)

You know what? Get two while you’re there.

GUY

I don’t want to have to go back.

COURTNEY

[listening the whole time]

Is Dad robbing a drugstore?

LIZ

Oh, Courtney, mind your own business.

COURTNEY

Well, what’s so important you have to go out for it now, right before the party?

LIZ

Toilet paper.

GUY

[partly over her]

Shampoo. [beat] And toilet paper.

COURTNEY

Menopause toilet paper. Fine, don’t tell me. That way I won’t be an accessory to the crime.

Guy opens the door to leave. POLLY

is standing there, just about to ring

the doorbell. She’s much less

dressed-up than her sister. In fact,

she looks pretty rumpled, in clogs

and pants that appear to be pajama

bottoms, a raincoat thrown over

them. She carries a small wrapped

gift and a huge tin of popcorn.

GUY

Polly! You’re here!

He bends down to give her a cheek

kiss which she returns.

GUY [cont’d.]

Polly’s here!

He quickly exits past her, hoping she

won’t ask any questions.

POLLY

Where are you going, Guy? It’s almost four o’clock! [to LIZ:] Where’s he going?

LIZ

Come in! Come in! I thought you’d be here an hour ago.

POLLY

I’m sorry. I couldn’t get the car to start again.

Polly gives Liz a kiss and hands her

the popcorn tin and gift. Liz sticks the tin under an end table and the gift on the dining table. Polly heads

for Courtney. Liz goes briefly into

the kitchen and returns with a small

vase of flowers which she puts on

the dining table.

POLLY

Hey, Court. Haul yourself out of that chair and give me a hug.

Courtney does.

COURTNEY

[sniffs]

Are you wearing perfume? Or . . .

Polly takes off her raincoat to reveal

an oversized, colorful print shirt and

a string of inexpensive beads.

Everything clashes.

POLLY

Oh, no. That’s air freshener. I had to spray the car. Beck found this stray dog that had been skunk-sprayed and he wanted to take it to the animal shelter . . .

COURTNEY

[backing away]

And you let him use your car?

POLLY

Well, he couldn’t use *his*. Anyway, the upholstery is already shot in my car, so—

Liz picks up the raincoat from the

sofa where Polly dropped it, hangs it

in a closet.

LIZ

Oh, Polly, you have to get a new car. That piece of junk isn’t going to make it through another Boston winter.

POLLY

It has to hang on at least one more year. My rent went up again. Somerville’s getting as expensive as Cambridge. I might have to move farther out. Malden or Woburn or someplace.

LIZ

Woburn? God, you might as well move to New Hampshire.

POLLY

[noticing Courtney’s clothes]

You know it’s not summer anymore, right? Aren’t you chilly?

COURTNEY

No.

LIZ

[just noticing Courtney’s clothes]

You’re wearing shorts? It’s October. And your grandfather’s coming over. Go upstairs and change into something more suitable.

COURTNEY

How should I know what’s suitable?

LIZ

You should know because you’re fifteen years old and you’re not an idiot. Really, Courtney. Put on some nice pants, or God forbid, a dress. It won’t kill you.

Courtney shuffles toward the stair

exit.

COURTNEY

I wish I was in college like Justin. He can walk around naked and you wouldn’t even know it.

LIZ

The perks of an Ivy League education: It bankrupts your parents *and* you can walk around naked without their knowledge.

Polly sees where Liz has hidden the

popcorn tin. She sets it on the coffee

table next to the fancy appetizers,

opens it and takes a handful,

dropping kernels on the floor. Liz is

not pleased.

COURTNEY

If I put on something nice, I’m doing it for Grandpa, not you.

LIZ

Fine. I promise not to take any pleasure in it.

POLLY

You didn’t say where Guy was going.

LIZ

We needed a few things at the last minute. You know . . . toilet paper. . .

Courtney has exited, but peeks back

in.

COURTNEY

And there was a shampoo emergency too.

LIZ

Go upstairs!

Courtney exits. Polly excepts the

explanation, continues scarfing down popcorn. Liz notices what Polly’s

wearing. Polly sees Liz noticing.

POLLY

What?

LIZ

Nothing!

POLLY

I’m not suitable either? You know I won’t wear high heels. They’re a torture device invented to keep women from outrunning sleazy men.

LIZ

It’s not the shoes I mind. Well, not as much as . . . [motions to the whole outfit.]

POLLY

For God’s sake, I’m at my sister’s condo celebrating my father’s retirement—it’s not a Christmas party at the White House.

LIZ

Do you even have any better clothes? Is this what you wear to work?

POLLY

I’m a therapist for Social Services, Liz. It’s less threatening to my clients if I look like my life isn’t perfect either.

LIZ

That’s a novel excuse for wearing your pajamas outdoors. Does it please your patients to think you’re living in your car?

POLLY

[still eating popcorn]

Clients.

LIZ

What?

POLLY

You said “patients.” They’re clients.

LIZ

Whatever. Your hands are all greasy now.

Liz picks up a paper napkin from

the coffee table and hands it to Polly.

POLLY

Thanks.

Polly wipes her hands and mouth on

the napkin, crumples it up and

throws it on the table. Liz picks it up.

Polly keeps eating.

LIZ

You seem to be starving. Have an appetizer instead of all that salt and butter.

POLLY

They do look pretty on the plate. But I’ll just have the popcorn—it’s my favorite food group.

LIZ

I know, but . . . haven’t you eaten anything today?

POLLY

I skipped lunch. I’ve got all this paperwork to fill out so I can actually get paid for my job.

LIZ

Ugh, don’t tell me about paperwork. I have fifty-two papers to grade by Monday morning.

POLLY

Well, that’s different.

LIZ

Why is it different?

POLLY

Because you teach at Harvard and they pay you a quadrillion dollars to grade fifty-two papers. I have to shake down Medicare to get the eighty bucks they owe me for convincing a woman whose husband just died not to swallow a whole bottle of Xanax.

LIZ

Okay, you win. You have the worst job. I don’t know how you do it.

POLLY

I love my job. Sometimes. More or less.

She finally puts the lid on the popcorn.

LIZ

Anyway, we need to get the table set and the decorations up before Daddy gets here which should be in (checks her watch) about twenty minutes.

POLLY

Is he walking over? Is that safe? I could go pick him up.

LIZ

He can’t see well enough to drive, but he’s fine walking—I got him one of those white sticks. [beat] Could you put up the banner? It’s in that bag.

POLLY

I don’t mind driving over—

LIZ

He *likes* walking. Believe me, he’ll be aggravated if you pick him up. Besides, I need your help here . . . and I want to talk to you.

Polly finds the banner and hangs it

across the window. It says, HAPPY

RETIREMENT. Meanwhile Liz goes

to the kitchen and returns with

several helium balloons which she

ties to the back of a dining chair.

POLLY

Whata you want to talk about?

LIZ

You know, just . . . you’re my sister—I like to talk to you. [beat] How many are we at table? Oh, I just realized your shadow isn’t attached.

POLLY

My shadow? [Looks behind her.] Are we pretending you’re Wendy and I’m Peter Pan?

LIZ

*Beck*. I assumed he was coming with you, but actually it’s just as well if—

POLLY

He’ll be here. He wanted to stop and get you some flowers.

LIZ

Oh, no. *Flowers*?

POLLY

Some people’s reaction to a thoughtful gift might be, *That Beck is so considerate*. But, *Oh, no, he’s bringing me flowers!*—that works too.

LIZ

I’m sorry. He *is* considerate. It’s just that . . . well, Beck always does everything in such a . . . *large* way. The last time he brought me “flowers” it was more like a bush. When the thing finally died I had to put it through the wood chipper before I could throw it out.

POLLY

I’m *so* sorry that my best friend in the world, who’s been my rock since my freshman year in college, who’s scraped me off the bathroom floor after too many idiotic breakups to remember, sometimes gives you gifts that are large and inconvenient.

LIZ

Oh, don’t get your back up. You know I like Beck. It’s just that . . . well, I worry that you spend so much time together, it keeps you from . . . it keeps you *both* from . . .

POLLY

From what? From being lonely and miserable? You’re right! Why didn’t I think of that?

LIZ

Why can’t we ever just have a normal conversation without you getting mad at me?

POLLY

We could do that, just as soon as you stop telling me what to wear, what to eat, and who my friends should be.

LIZ

I’m your older sister, Polly, and our mother is gone. Someone has to help you!

Liz exits to kitchen.

POLLY

I don’t need your help, Liz. I’m thirty-eight years old and you’re not my mother, thank God. I’m old enough to *be* a mother.

Liz returns with a stack of dishes

and silverware.

LIZ

That’s the point.

POLLY

Oh, no. Please, Liz. Let’s not go there today. I’m really not in the mood.

LIZ

[setting the table]

Fine. Would you get the cloth napkins out of the credenza?

POLLY

The *what*?

LIZ

The credenza. The highboy. The *sideboard*. [She points to it.]

Polly goes and gets the napkins.

POLLY

Lotta fancy names for a big ugly piece of furniture.

They set the table together, quiet for

a few beats.

POLLY

You brought out seven plates. There are only six of us.

Polly hands Liz the extra plate and

Liz cradles it for a moment, then

sets it back on the table.

LIZ

You know I never want to hurt you, Polly.

POLLY

Okay.

LIZ

I only tell you things for your own good.

POLLY

I know you think so.

LIZ

You would be such a *wonderful mother*!

POLLY

Oh, fuck.

LIZ

You have no idea how much you’d love your child, Polly.

POLLY

Fuckety fuck fuck fuck!

Polly heads back to the popcorn.

LIZ

It’s a whole new *echelon* of love you’ve never known before!

POLLY

It’s a whole new “echelon” of money I don’t have. And time I don’t have. And relationship with a man I don’t have.

LIZ

That’s why I’m saying if you spent less time with Beck, you’d have more time to find a *real* partner.

POLLY

Liz, I don’t want a “real” partner. It’s too much work. And I certainly don’t want to spend time *looking* for one.

She’s shoveling in the popcorn.

POLLY [cont’d]

What does that even mean? Trolling OK Cupid? Hanging out at some sports bar? [shudders] I tried that in my twenties. At best it was boring; at worst it was humiliating. No, I’ll stick with Beck, thank you very much.

LIZ

You can’t spend your entire adult life hanging around with a gay man, Polly.

POLLY

Sure I can.

LIZ

He can’t fulfill all your needs!

POLLY

Beck and a vibrator—I don’t need more than that.

LIZ

Would you please stop gorging yourself on that popcorn? We’re eating dinner soon.

Polly jams the lid on the tin. Liz,

on hands and knees, picks up

dropped kernels from the floor.

LIZ [cont’d.]

What if Beck finds a man he wants to be with and you’re not part of the picture anymore?

POLLY

He’s found lots of men over the years. They don’t last. I do.

LIZ

Sometimes I think you’re in love with him.

POLLY

Of course I’m in love with him. Just because we don’t have sex with each other doesn’t mean we don’t love each other.

Courtney can be heard clomping

downstairs.

LIZ

I’m telling you, Polly, having children is the best and proudest thing I have ever done in my life.

Courtney enters, dressed in a very

short skirt and form-fitting top,

maybe high boots—a rather

suggestive outfit for Grandpa’s

party.

COURTNEY

Do I smell roast *cow*? You *know* I’m not eating meat anymore! You never listen to me!

LIZ

Grandpa likes pot roast. I bought you some—

COURTNEY

I’m making myself a salad for dinner, whether you like it or not!

Courtney storms off into the

kitchen.

LIZ

. . . Lettuce.

COURTNEY

[off]

Unless you forgot to buy me arugula *again* this week.

LIZ

[Several beats.] Of course, not every moment will be perfect.

POLLY

Look, I love your children, even when they’re being dickwads, and I’m thrilled that they’re the fulfillment of your dreams, Liz, I am. But I like my life the way it is. I don’t need to get up four times a night to suckle an infant in order to feel needed. Believe me, I’m pretty much a wet-nurse all day long.

LIZ

You can’t compare a child with one of your . . . “clients.” Children give as much as they take! Maybe not when they’re fifteen—I admit that. But, oh my God, when they’re little! You walk into their room in the morning and they’re standing there crying in their crib, and the minute they see you they start to laugh and make those little gurgley noises. No one ever loved you more—and you’ve never loved anyone else that much either. They’re your whole world and you’re theirs. You hold that unbelievably soft skin next to yours and smell that fragrant little head—

POLLY

And that pissy little diaper.

LIZ

You have this misguided idea that a baby is a saddle on your back, some kind of . . . vampire-like parasite that sucks everything out of you. But it’s not true. A child adds meaning to your life—and joy! The first time they bring you burnt Mother’s Day toast with half a jar of jelly on top, the second grade play when they’re blueberries and they actually remember their lines, when they’re voted Star of the Week in fifth grade even though they flunked the spelling test—those are the moments when you suddenly realize that little squalling lump has turned into the most adorable

LIZ [cont’d]

wiseass, and you have a front row seat to watch what happens next. You *made* this perfect, ridiculous, appalling, wonderful human being!

[Beat]

POLLY

Courtney was Star of the Week?

LIZ

Go ahead and joke, Polly, but I’m afraid you’ll regret it later.

POLLY

I won’t.

LIZ

You’ll never read your favorite books to your child, you’ll never laugh at his silly jokes or watch her piano recital. You won’t take her for her first haircut, and you won’t help him pick out a tuxedo for the prom.

POLLY

Oh, he’d never let me do that anyway. Is he going with a girl or a boy?

LIZ

The love you have for a child, and, yes, the fears you have for them too—the emotions are so intense! How can you give up the chance to love someone more than you’ve ever loved anything in your life?

POLLY

Why are we talking about this again, Liz? The moment is passed! I’m old, I don’t have a partner, and I’m not having a baby! Can’t you *please* just let it rest?

LIZ

It’s *not* too late. If you only knew—

POLLY

Our mother died when I was fifteen, Liz. I was Courtney’s age. And Mom had her children young—she wasn’t thirty-eight years old, like I am. I’m not going to abandon a child the way that I was—

Polly chokes up and can’t finish her

sentence. Liz hugs her from behind.

LIZ

Oh, sweetheart, I know. I was twenty-one, but it was terrible for me too.

POLLY

But you weren’t at home anymore. You had your own life already. It hurt so much, I didn’t think I’d be able to keep on living.

LIZ

But you did, Polly. We both did. And we’re not sick. We’re not Mom. Look how healthy Dad is at 70. Except for the macular degeneration, you’d think he was ten years younger. And we’ve got *his* genes too! Don’t make your decision based on something so arbitrary.

Polly breaks away from her sister.

POLLY

Why are we still talking about this? I’m not married. I’m not even dating anyone. And I have no intention of becoming a single mother. Plenty of my clients are in that boat, and I know how hard it is to row it with one oar. [beat] Don’t you have anything to drink around here?

Liz exits to the kitchen while Polly

continues pulling herself together.

Liz comes back with a tray of glasses

and two bottles of wine, puts it on

the coffee table.

LIZ

Red or white?

POLLY

Which is more expensive?

LIZ

Red.

POLLY

I better have the white. Can’t afford to get used to good stuff.

Liz pours a glass of wine for Polly.

She starts to pour one for herself,

then reconsiders and doesn’t.

LIZ

Now that you’re lubricated, I have something to tell you. Please don’t get mad.

POLLY

What now? It gives me heartburn when you introduce a topic that way. “Please don’t get mad, even though I’m about to say something insulting and infuriating.”

LIZ

The way you eat gives you heartburn.

POLLY

Just tell me.

LIZ

I invited someone to the party today.

POLLY

[gets it immediately]

The seventh plate. I should have guessed.

LIZ

The department just hired him. American History, like me, but I’m Eighteenth Century and he’s Late Twentieth—

POLLY

No, Liz.

LIZ

He’s a year or two younger than you, but—

POLLY

No, no, no, no, no, no.

Polly goes to get her coat from the

closet. Liz is on her heels.

LIZ

What are you doing? You can’t leave—it’s Daddy’s party! Just let me tell you about Arturo.

POLLY

*Arturo?* I could strangle you right now.

LIZ

Arturo Fortunato—isn’t that a beautiful name!

POLLY

[a little interested]

Italian? From Italy?

LIZ

Italian from California. His father has a winery in Napa. He got his Ph.D. at Stanford and then got a job there too—he’s so smart. And when this opportunity came up at Harvard, he decided to try something different.

POLLY

What’sthe difference between Stanford and Harvard? One has more intellectual assholes than the other?

Polly throws the raincoat over a

chair. Liz picks it up and hangs

it back in the closet.

LIZ

You know, you’re a reverse snob, Polly. Just because he’s intelligent and has money, doesn’t mean he’s somehow inferior to the bartenders and Uber drivers you seem to favor. I’m telling you this guy is a catch.

POLLY

He sounds dreadful.

LIZ

He’s *perfect*.

POLLY

If he’s so perfect, why isn’t he married already? I can tell you—he’s commitment phobic.

LIZ

Well, see, you have *that* in common already!

POLLY

Does he know this is a set-up?

LIZ

Of course not. He hardly knows anyone in Cambridge, and I invited him to join us for a little family party. He has no expectations.

POLLY

Good. And you shouldn’t either because this fairy tale of yours does not have a happy ending.

COURTNEY

[enters, eating a salad]

Beck’s coming up the sidewalk. He’s bringing a tree or something.

Liz and Polly go to the door, open

it. The first thing we see are branches

coming in, then BECK behind them.

The bouquet, comprised of branches

of fall leaves and colorful flowers, is

lovely, but enormous. Beck, too, is

large: tall, big-chested, bearded. He

thrusts the bouquet at Liz.

BECK

Take this, would you? I need to run back out and get the lasagna.

LIZ

You didn’t need to—

She doesn’t know what to do with

the bouquet. After trying a few

spots she puts it on the fireplace

mantel where it blocks a painting

and scrapes the ceiling.

LIZ

Where does he *get* these?

POLLY

His friend, Allen. He does flowers for the restaurant.

LIZ

And funerals, I’m guessing.

Beck is back with an enormous

lasagna pan. He kisses Polly on

the cheek.

BECK

I’m not late, am I?

POLLY

No. Daddy isn’t here yet. Thanks for the flowers.

LIZ

You didn’t need to bring food, Beck. Dinner’s in the oven.

BECK

I know, but I thought Court might like this. I’m trying out some new vegetarian entrees this week and I’m getting good feedback on this one.

COURTNEY

Ooh! What is it?

BECK

Lasagna noodles with tiny Portobello mushrooms, baby asparagus, baby spinach, and fresh mozzarella lightly topped with a cinnamon-basil pesto sauce.

COURTNEY

[overcome]

Oh my God! That sounds amazing!

LIZ

No cows were killed, but apparently a lot of babies gave their lives.

Courtney gives him a cheek kiss, takes the pan and exits to the kitchen.

LIZ [cont’d.]

So, the restaurant’s doing well?

POLLY

Oh, didn’t I tell you? Beck’s opening a second place in Fresh Pond.

BECK

Hoping to get it up and running before Christmas. Good spot. Lots of foot traffic.

LIZ

That’s amazing. Did you ever think you’d be so successful when you opened that tiny little place in Somerville years ago?

BECK

Yeah, I was pretty sure.

LIZ

Huh.

POLLY

The man has never lacked for confidence.

Beck sees where Liz has put the

bouquet. He moves it to a spot on

the floor at the base of the fireplace

where it looks great.

BECK

Too big for up there. [beat] So, how’ve you been, Liz? Busy as always?

POLLY

She’s been *very* busy trying to find me a husband again. Some smarty-pants Italian bozo is due here any minute straight from the vineyards of Napa, clutching his Phd in one hand and a bottle of Pinot Grigio in the other.

BECK

[scolding]

*Liz*.

LIZ

Don’t act like I’ve committed a felony. I just want to give Polly one more chance before it’s too late.

BECK

Too late for what?

They both stare at him.

BECK [cont’d.]

Oh, *that*. Broken record, Liz.

LIZ

Oh, damn you both. You egg each other on, don’t you? You sit around eating cinnamon-pesto lasagna and making fun of “breeders” who’ve sacrificed fine dining in order to cater to the unrefined palates of small children.

BECK

[looks at Polly]

I don’t *think* we’ve ever done that, but it does sound like fun!

POLLY

Yeah, let’s get on that.

LIZ

[to Beck:]

I blame you, partly.

BECK

You blame *me* because Polly’s not married?

LIZ

Yes! The two of you are always together. And you don’t even *look* gay. I mean, men who might be possibilities for Polly see you with her and it looks as if she’s already taken.

POLLY

Oh my God, I didn’t think of that! I bet you’ve scared off *droves* of eligible men.

BECK

I’m sorry, Pol. I’ll gay myself up more next time we’re out in public.

Beck and Polly giggle through

the following exchange.

BECK [cont’d.]

Maybe a mesh t-shirt that shows my nipples.

POLLY

Sleeveless, of course, And rainbow socks that can only be seen when you cross your legs in a particularly feminine manner.

BECK

I could get one of those shirts that says, “Save a Horse—Ride a Bear!”

POLLY

No, no, get the one that says, “Hairy Queen!”

Now they’re really convulsed.

LIZ

I give up.

POLLY

Oh, I wish you would.

COURTNEY

[off]

Grandpa’s coming!

LIZ

Be quiet now!

Liz goes to the door, as Polly and Beck stifle giggles. LEO enters.

He’s 75, but walks erect and looks

younger. He carries a white cane but

isn’t using it.

LIZ

Daddy!

LEO

Lizzy, my girl. Good to see you. [They hug.] And where’s my baby?

POLLY

Right here, Daddy.

They hug and kiss—he is well-

loved. Courtney comes from the

kitchen, greeting him similarly.

LEO

Courtney, sweetheart, take this cane and stash it someplace. I don’t need it. I just flash it around so I can cross Mass. Ave. without getting run down by some hungover Harvard kid.

Courtney puts the cane in the closet.

Leo obviously has trouble seeing and

looks at people out of the sides of his

eyes.

BECK

Hey, Leo, congratulations on your retirement.

They shake hands. Leo takes off his

jacket and Liz hangs it away.

LEO

Thank you, Beck. You know, I woke up one day and thought, what the hell—I’ve got better things to do with my time than haggle over the price of some damn SUV.

LIZ

Of course you do. I got you some audiobooks. Elmore Leonard and Tom Clancy. You like mysteries, don’t you?

LEO

No offense, honey, but I found an even better use for my time. Say, wait’ll you see what they gave me at work.

POLLY

Did they give you a party, Daddy?

LEO

Sure. Just in the office. A platter of cold cuts and somebody made cookies. Buttonheimer Ford does not go all out for a celebration. At the Christmas party we get a couple six-packs and a sheet cake from the Stop and Shop.

LIZ

But they got you a gift? They should have. You’ve worked there almost fifty years.

LEO

Forty-eight, all of ‘em boring as hell. I musta sold a couple thousand cars off that lot, and now I can’t even drive one. [beat] Anyway, look what they gave me!

He holds out his arm to show them

a watch.

LIZ

A watch? That’s traditional.

POLLY

Nice, Daddy.

LEO

Not just any old watch. Listen to this.

Leo pushes a button and an auto-

mated voice, loud and annoying,

says, “Time: Four-fifty-three p.m.” Polly looks a bit deflated.

LEO

I can’t see a regular watch, but this one I can *hear* what time it is.

LIZ

What a thoughtful gift!

POLLY

Sure is.

Beck makes some affectionate

gesture towards Polly.

BECK

Wanna give him your present, Pol?

LIZ

Oh, let’s wait on presents. Guy isn’t back yet. Sit down. Daddy, Beck, what’ll you have to drink?

They sit. Courtney has already taken

over the comfortable chair, but Liz

ousts her from it so Leo can sit there.

LEO

You got a beer, honey?

LIZ

Of course. Courtney, run out and get your grandpa a beer.

She does, but without energy.

BECK

I’ll have a glass of the red, thanks. Where *is* Guy, anyway?

Liz pours the wine and sighs. She’s

tired of this lie already.

LIZ

Oh, he’s getting . . . toilet paper.

POLLY

He’s been gone an awfully long time. Where did he go to get it?

COURTNEY

[from kitchen]

As far away as possible. They don’t want the neighbors to know we use it.

Liz passes the appetizer plate around.

LIZ

Appetizer? These are your recipe, Beck. The radish, avocado and brie toasts.

BECK

That’ll be in the cookbook, except I’ve tweaked it a bit by adding a little fresh sage.

LIZ

You’re doing a cookbook too? Polly, you never tell me anything!

POLLY

I would have, but you kept me so busy contemplating my lonely, pathetic future, I forgot there was good news to share.

Leo presses the watch button

Again. “Time: Four fifty-six p.m.”

LEO

Huh, only three minutes passed. It seemed like more. [He glances toward the door. Beat] So, how’s my grandson doing at Princeton? Talk about a caterpillar turning into a butterfly!

Courtney enters with beer, laughs.

LEO [cont’d.]

I remember when all he wanted to do was play those dumb video games. Shoot at people and blow things up.

COURTNEY

Now he just plays Beer Pong.

LIZ

He does not! He’s already talking about declaring a major. He seems to be leaning toward Economics.

POLLY

What? I thought it was going to be art. His drawings are wonderful—

LIZ

Oh, Polly. How many people make a living with art? He needed something more substantial. A man can’t count on his wife being the breadwinner.

COURTNEY

Whoa! Glad Dad wasn’t here to take that direct hit.

LIZ

[flustered]

Obviously, I wasn’t talking about. . . I didn’t mean . . .

BECK

I bet you miss Justin, don’t you, Liz? Your firstborn out of the nest?

LIZ

You mean, do I miss the mountain of filthy clothes on the floor of the laundry room? Do I miss his ravenous friends descending on my kitchen like seventeen-year locusts? Do I miss the resounding beat of the Painful Gloryhumpers resonating through every room in my house?

COURTNEY

Yeah, she misses him. Last week I caught her sobbing over his soccer cleats.

LIZ

My allergies were acting up!

COURTNEY

She hid them in the bottom drawer of her bureau in the bedroom—

LIZ

How did you—

COURTNEY

--like the bones of some saint.

Watch: “Time: four fifty-eight p.m.”

POLLY

Are you waiting for something, Daddy?

LEO

Can’t tell ya. It’s a surprise. A good one too.

LIZ

What kind of surprise?

LEO

I’ll tell you this much, your mother would be very happy about it. Very happy.

The rest of them are a bit unsettled

by that news. The doorbell rings.

Leo jumps up.

LEO [cont’d.]

That’s my surprise!

LIZ

Oh, dad, I think it’s—

Leo gets to the door before Liz who’s behind him. It’s ARTURO with two bottles of wine, red and white. He’s wearing a beautiful suit.

LIZ

Oh, Arturo! Come in! Come in! This is my father, Leo Frankowski.

LEO

Who are you?

LIZ

Arturo works with me in the history department, Dad. He’s new to town and I thought he’d enjoy meeting a few people.

LEO

*Us*?

LIZ

Yes, *us*.

ARTURO

[hands her the wine]

From my father’s winery, Fortunato Estates. A Zinfandel and a Pinot Grigio.

Polly and Beck share grins.

LIZ

Oh, how wonderful! I’ll open them.

Liz leads him inside. Leo follows,

looking back at the door. Polly and Beck stand, reluctantly, for

introductions. Courtney doesn’t.

LIZ [cont’d.]

Arturo, this is my sister, Polly. My *younger* sister. *Much* younger, in fact.

They nod hello and shake hands.

Arturo takes in her outfit.

LIZ [cont’d.]

And this is her . . . *friend*, Beck. Beck is a chef and he’s very . . . [she’s not sure how to describe him in order to get the point across.]

BECK

[shakes hands]

I’m very gay, even though I don’t look like it.

Courtney explodes with laughter.

LIZ

And that’s my youngest—Courtney.

COURTNEY

Hey.

Courtney salutes from across the

room and Arturo nods to her.

LIZ

Let’s open the white, and save the red for dinner. Would you like some, Arturo? We’re just waiting for my husband to get back. He had a few errands to run, but he should be back any minute—

Watch: “Time: Five-oh-two, p.m.”

Arturo looks around to see where

that came from.

POLLY

Daddy just got a new talking watch as a retirement gift.

ARTURO

Interesting. And what was it you did for a living, sir?

LEO

Sold Fords to Kennedy’s. Get it?

Arturo doesn’t. His sense of humor

is not well-developed.

LEO [cont’d.]

Fords? Kennedys? Both presidents?

LIZ

It’s a joke Daddy likes to tell. He sold Ford cars at a dealership here in Cambridge, and the Kennedys all went to Harvard. So, Fords to Kennedys.

ARTURO

Ahh. [He still has no idea what they’re talking about, or maybe he just doesn’t care.]

COURTNEY

Grandpa, the lady in your watch sounds like Siri at sixty.

LEO

Who’s Siri-at-sixty?

LIZ

She means the voice on the iPhone. That helps you when you need help.

LEO

A telephone voice that helps you? Like the Samaritans? I don’t need that.

They all sit. Arturo takes his wine.

Liz looks tired.

POLLY

She means the voice in your watch sounds mechanical. Robotic. Not very human.

LEO

Well, that’s true. Seems like the person telling you time’s passing you by should sound kinder, or at least funnier.

Polly looks pleased.

ARTURO

Aren’t you having any wine, Liz?

LIZ

Oh, I will, in a little while. I’m sure it’s fabulous.

BECK

Has your family has been in the wine business for a long time?

ARTURO

Five generations. We have the best vineyards in Napa, the richest soil, ideal temperatures, the perfect amount of rainfall.

POLLY

People don’t really smash the grapes with their feet anymore, right? Like in that “I Love Lucy” episode. I mean, I’m sure they don’t. It’s just whenever I think of making wine, I remember Lucy and Ethel . . . their hair tied in bandanas and their . . . pants rolled up . . .

ARTURO

[aloof]

There are a few vineyards which use people for some of the crushing, but it’s not a game for tourists.

POLLY

I didn’t mean . . .

ARTURO

Fortunato uses a mechanical crusher.

POLLY

I’m sure that’s more efficient and . . . sanitary.

BECK

What’s your favorite wine you produce?

ARTURO

Well, the Pinot Grigio, of course, and the Bordeaux blends are excellent too.

BECK

I’m no wine expert—my sommelier does most of the ordering. I’ll tell him to get some of the Fortunato Bordeaux. I’m always on the lookout for an interesting blend.

POLLY

He talks a good “Bordeaux blends,” but he’s as likely to drink box wine at home.

Arturo disapproves.

BECK

She’s got me there. Never been a wine snob. [realizes what he’s said.] Not that I think you are!

ARTURO

When you have a good product, you’re proud of it.

BECK & POLLY

Yes. Sure. Of course.

LIZ

So, anyway, here you are, Arturo!

ARTURO

Here I am.

POLLY

Liz tells me you’re in the history department too. And your specialty is Twentieth Century, I think she said.

ARTURO

My particular interest is in the political, social and cultural history of technology, particularly as it applies to the infrastructure of markets.

POLLY

Uh-huh. I know what each of those words mean separately, but—

LIZ

But Polly loves learning new things, don’t you?

ARTURO

And what is it you do, Polly?

POLLY

I’m a therapist. Social worker, really, but mostly I counsel people. Mostly poor people. Desperate people. Sad people.

ARTURO

Oh, dear. That sounds difficult.

POLLY

It’s pretty much impossible.

BECK

She’s very good with the desperately sad. She’s stopped me from jumping out a window half a dozen times.

POLLY

And Beck keeps me from filling my pockets with rocks and wading into the Charles River.

LIZ

They’re kidding. They like to be dramatic.

BECK

[theatrically]

We are each other’s rafts on the stormy, bottomless sea of life.

POLLY

The catchers in the rye of suburban Boston.

Courtney has been scrolling on her

phone as usual, but responds with

laughter or a snort when Polly or

Beck say amusing things.

LIZ

These *two*. You have to get used to their bizarre sense of humor.

ARTURO

I see that.

Watch: “Time: Five-oh-seven p.m.”

LIZ

Daddy, what the hell do you keep checking that watch for?

LEO

I told you, it’s a surprise.

LIZ

Well, it’s a little . . . annoying. I mean, you know, *loud*.

LEO

What time are we eating dinner anyway? I’m getting hungry.

LIZ

The roast is almost done, but I want to wait for Guy to get back. I thought he’d be—

LEO

I’m gonna go use your phone. Okay?

LIZ

Of course, Daddy. My cell is over there—[points to an obvious spot for it]

LEO

I’m going in the kitchen. I need privacy.

Leo exits.

COURTNEY

You ask me, Grandpa’s got a hot date.

LIZ

Don’t be ridiculous, Courtney.

POLLY

Well, what *is* going on with him?

LIZ

I have no idea. Arturo, I’m sorry. You must think we’re an odd family. I’m sure yours is much more traditional.

ARTURO

In some ways. I’m one of six children, all boys.

COURTNEY

Six boys! Shoot me now.

ARTURO

When we’re together we roughhouse quite a bit.

LIZ

Roughhouse?

ARTURO

You know. We wrestle each other. Knock over some furniture. All in fun, of course. We’re a very physical family and all quite strong. Even my father—he wrestles with us too. A few years ago he threw my older brother, Frederico, through a window.

LIZ

Oh, my God!

POLLY

Does your mother wrestle too?

ARTURO

Of course not.

POLLY

I guess she’s busy bandaging the wounded and picking up the furniture.

LIZ

It sounds like you come from an exuberant household, Arturo. High-spirited.

ARTURO

Yes. I find I miss them, being so far away.

LIZ

I’m sure you do. I hope you’ll think of us as a kind of surrogate family.

ARTURO

Thank you.

POLLY

Do you drink a lot?

LIZ

*Polly*!

ARTURO

What?

POLLY

I mean, with all that wine around all the time, you’d think—

The doorbell rings again and Leo

rushes from the kitchen to answer

it, bumping into things on the way.

LIZ

Daddy, be careful!

LEO

It’s her!

Leo flings open the door. There

stands RAINEY. In her mid-60s,

Rainey dresses 25 years younger.

She’s a bit unsteady on her platform

heels and has a strong South Boston

accent. LEO reaches out and pulls

her inside.

LEO [cont’d.]

Finally, my surprise has arrived!

No one knows what to make of this

“surprise.” Liz, Polly and Beck

stand.

RAINEY

I’m sorry I’m late. I got so lost driving here. Until I met Leo I didn’t have occasion to come into Cambridge and I’m still not used to all this traffic. It’s a good thing you called me, sweetheart, or I’d still be driving in circles.

On “sweetheart,” the rest of the

group looks shocked. When Leo

kisses Rainey they become

immobile.

LEO

So, this is my fam-damily. My girls, Liz and Polly—

As they’re introduced, they

approach and politely shake

hands with Rainey.

LEO [cont'd.]

My granddaughter, Courtney—over there. And this is Beck—he’s kinda like Polly’s pretend-husband or something. And . . . I forget who that guy is—he’s not usually here.

RAINEY

So nice to meet you all, finally. I’m Rainey.

LEO

Get this. Her name is Lorraine Day and they call her Rainey. Get it? Rainey Day?

RAINEY

I’m used to it, but it still slays Leo.

LEO

Hasn’t been one rainy day since I met this lady. [He kisses her again.]

LIZ

Well, come in, Rainey. Let me take your coat.

Liz takes the coat, displaying a

rather revealing outfit beneath.

Everyone gravitates to the sitting

area again.

LIZ

Would you like a glass of wine, Rainey? This is a special bottle my friend Arturo brought us from his father’s vineyard in Napa.

RAINEY

Oh, sure. I’ll drink anything. *Arturo*! You must be Italian.

ARTURO

That’s my heritage, yes.

RAINEY

I went to Venice with my sister a few years back. Oh my God, we loved it. All those little bridges everywhere. Wine and pasta for dinner every night—the hell with our diets! The water was kinda smelly though.

ARTURO

I’ve never been to Venice. My family is from the Naples area.

RAINEY

Really? I heard it said, “See Naples and die!” Is it really that gorgeous? I bet it is.

ARTURO

Well, I’ve actually never been there either.

RAINEY

Oh, you should go! Myself, I’m of Irish extraction and I’ve been to Dublin twice. Leo’s going with me next time and we’re gonna rent a car and drive all around up to Connemara to see the little ponies and everything.

POLLY

Really? Daddy, how did you and Rainey meet?

RAINEY

Oh, it’s a good story.

LEO

I met her at the YMCA. My lucky day! My lucky Rainey Day!

RAINEY

In the swimming pool, of all places. And I don’t look my best in a swimming suit, I will admit.

LEO

Hey, you looked damn good to me!

LIZ

I didn’t know you went to the Y, Daddy. The one in Inman Square?

LEO

Hell, no. I don’t go here in Cambridge. Too fancy-pants. I go to the one in Revere.

BECK

That’s where you grew up, isn’t it?

LEO

Correct, and I still got friends there. My old friend, Mike Hannigan, called me after his wife died. He was kinda lonesome and he wanted to get together. Well, I can’t drive there, of course, so he comes in and gets me. It was his idea we go to the Y once a week. We use the pool for an hour or so and then go get a roast beef sandwich at Kelly’s. Like old times.

LIZ

And you met Rainey . . . when?

LEO

Oh, probably two months ago, right honey?

RAINEY

It was so funny. I don’t swim laps—I just do my aerobic exercises in the shallow end. So, I guess Leo didn’t see me doing my leg lifts—

LEO

This was one occasion when being half-blind was a blessing!

RAINEY

--and he comes swimming down the lane and smacks right into me!

LEO

Bam! She was doing these leg kick things and I bowled right over her.

RAINEY

I didn’t see him coming. I went under and swallowed about a gallon of that nasty chlorinated water!

LEO

No permanent damage done, thank God, but she was sputtering quite a bit, so I helped her get out.

RAINEY

I’m so clumsy on those stairs where you have to pull yourself up. I was embarrassed about the whole thing, but Leo was very sweet. He sat on a bench with me until I caught my breath.

LEO

We got to talking while we were sitting there. [They gaze at each other.] And that’s the story.

The others don’t know what to say.

RAINEY

Now I’m invited to Kelly’s Roast Beef afterwards too.

POLLY

Wow. Well, that’s really nice. I’m glad you and Dad . . . enjoy each other so much.

LIZ

Dad didn’t even let us know you were coming today!

RAINEY

Yeah, he wanted to surprise you. He’s big on surprises, you know.

POLLY

He is?

RAINEY

[looks at Leo]

So, you gonna tell ‘em or what?

Just then the front door bursts open

and Guy flies in, out of breath,

carrying a smallish bag, obviously

not toilet paper. Liz jumps up,

everyone turns to look at Guy.

GUY

Oh, everyone’s here. Hello. I’m sorry it took me so long. I had to go some distance to find the . . . these . . . things.

Courtney rolls her eyes. Liz runs to

Guy and grabs the bag from him.

LIZ

[flustered]

Thank you, Guy, for . . . I’ll just go and . . . oh, this is Arturo and that’s Rainey . . . they’ll explain it all to you. I’ll just run upstairs and put this . . . [looks at the bag]

COURTNEY

Toilet paper.

LIZ

--in the . . . bathroom.

Liz quickly exits upstairs. Arturo

comes over to Guy with hand

extended.

ARTURO

You must be Guy. I’m the new hire in the history department. Arturo Fortunato.

GUY

Oh, right, the wine guy. Nice to meet you.

RAINEY

And I’m Rainey. I’m Leo’s . . . [looks to Leo and decides:] friend.

GUY

Oh.

LEO

We’ll explain it to you when Liz gets back.

ARTURO

[to Guy]

I understand you’re a history professor too, is that right?

GUY

Yes. Well, no, not exactly. I mean, I met Liz in graduate school when we were both getting our Ph.Ds, but I’ve gone in a slightly different direction with mine.

ARTURO

Ah. I understood you were teaching.

GUY

Well, I have a couple of adjunct jobs, one class at Northeastern and one at B.U. Make a little extra cash.

COURTNEY

“Little” is right.

POLLY

Courtney!

COURTNEY

I’m just saying, it’s not fair. He has to grade as many papers as Mom does.

GUY

I’m writing a novel, you see, so I don’t want all the extra pressure that goes with an academic career. You know, the committees, the research papers, all that. Saving my energy for the book.

RAINEY

That’s so exciting! What’s it about?

GUY

Well, it’s about a family in which the husband . . . is writing a novel.

RAINEY

Oh.

LEO

[to Polly:]

What’s your sister doing up there anyway? I have an announcement to make.

POLLY

You do?

LEO

Yes, I do, and I’m not getting any younger. [He hits his watch which announces: “Time: five forty-four p.m.”] It’s getting late. Anybody else hungry?

BECK

I’ll go check on the roast.

COURTNEY

Wait! Here comes Mom. I wanna hear Grandpa’s announcement.

Liz enters, looking pale, walks

to the middle of the room. Guy,

nervous, holds one of the helium

balloons in his hand, almost hiding

behind it.

LEO

Okay, now that we’re all here. [He clears his throat.] As you all know, I’ve been waiting twenty-two years to find another woman as good as your mother. And here she is. Rainey and I are getting married.

They’re shocked, but everyone

except Liz and Guy react with grace,

shaking Leo’s hand, hugging

Rainey, giving congratulations.

Liz doesn’t move. Guy keeps his

eye on her.

POLLY

[obviously shaken]

Wow, Daddy, you really surprised us. Well, let’s all raise a glass, shall we?

Polly takes a glass of wine to Liz,

who drops it on the floor.

POLLY [cont’d.]

Liz, what—

LIZ

[wails]

*I’m pregnant*!

Guy pops the balloon. Liz falls to the

floor in a faint.

CURTAIN

ACT II

AT CURTAIN: Liz lies on the couch, propped up by

pillows. Guy has pulled over a

dining room chair and sits near Liz’s

head, arranging a washcloth over her

eyes. Polly brings her a glass of

water and perches on the sofa next to

Liz. Courtney hovers behind the

couch, uncertain what to think. The

others are farther away, talking

amongst themselves. It’s dark

outside now.

POLLY

Here, sweetie, drink this. You’re probably dehydrated.

Liz pushes the glass away and whips

the cloth off her eyes, throws it at

Guy. She sits up more and Guy props

pillows behind her.

LIZ

I’m not dehydrated—I’m fucking *pregnant*!

COURTNEY

Mom!

GUY

Calm down, Lizzie. It’s okay. We’ll deal with it.

LIZ

[sitting up]

No, *I’ll* deal with it. I’ll deal with three months of nausea, and then I’ll deal with waddling around like a stuffed turkey in a muu muu. And that’s not even the hard part. Then I’ll have to deal with a *baby*!

Liz flops back into the cushions.

COURTNEY

I’ll be a big sister. Which could be . . . kinda cool.

LEO

[to Rainey]

Well, I guess she stole our thunder, huh?

RAINEY

[to Leo]

Oh, who cares? This is so exciting! I’m gonna be a grandmother!

ARTURO

[to Beck]

This is really too bad. She was very well-respected in the department.

BECK

[to Arturo]

She’s pregnant, not dead.

ARTURO

You don’t understand how academia works.

BECK

So, it’s still 1950 in academia?

LIZ

How could this have happened? I’m menopausal! I thought it was a desert in there! I wasn’t even worried about it. Those ancient eggs were supposed to be petrified rocks by now!

COURTNEY

Gross.

LIZ

Jesus Christ, *I’m pregnant*!

Liz sits up and grabs the popcorn tin,

stuffs kernels in her mouth.

POLLY

I know you weren’t expecting this, Liz, but it’s not a tragedy. You adore your kids. Remember what you told me? About the whole new echelon of love?

LIZ

For *you*, not for me! I want to be an aunt now. I want to give you wise advice about lactation and hemorrhoids. I don’t want to *be* lactating and *have* hemorrhoids.

Too much information for Courtney.

She goes to stand with her grandpa.

COURTNEY

Hey, Grandpa. So, congratulations and everything.

LEO

[arm around her]

Thanks, sweetie pie. It’s a lucky day all around, isn’t it?

COURTNEY

I guess so.

RAINEY

I’m so happy for your family.

Courtney picks up Polly’s full wine

glass from the table.

COURTNEY

Hey, let’s drink a toast to the new baby!

LEO, RAINEY, BECK

No!

Beck removes the glass from her

hand.

GUY

I bet it happened Labor Day weekend at Emma’s wedding. That hotel on the water in Chatham. Where we saw the seals and whales—

LIZ

*Sperm* whales, apparently. Headed right towards me.

POLLY

I can’t believe you’re not happy about this, Liz! Remember the Mother’s Day toast and the blueberries in the school play? Remember when Courtney was Star of the Week?

GUY

Courtney was Star of the Week?

LIZ

Toast and blueberries are fun the first time around, but it’s a paltry diet when you’re my age.

POLLY

But you’ll get to laugh at his jokes and take her for a haircut. And what about that prom thing? The tuxedo.

LIZ

Do you know how much it costs to rent a tuxedo? And you pay extra if you take it back covered in beer and puke.

POLLY

Come on! You’re the *best* mother. I know Justin and Courtney think so, even if they don’t say it very often.

COURTNEY

God, Mom’s losing her shit over there. What is her damage?

POLLY

You even mothered me, Liz!

LIZ

Which means I’ve been a mother since I was 21-years-old. Enough already. I don’t want to love anybody else that much. It’s too intense. It’s too exhausting. There’s not enough of me to go around.

GUY

I know it won’t be easy, sweetheart, but—

LIZ

*Easy*? No, that’s one thing it will not be. First the shitty diaper years, then the pitiful shrieking in the middle of the night years, followed by the nose-picking and projectile vomiting years, after which you segue into puberty when their feet smell, their armpits stink, and they can’t listen to a word you say without rolling their eyes at your unbelievable stupidity. And then—[suddenly she bursts into tears]—then they go off to college and don’t even take your phone calls or send a brief text message when you try to communicate with them. As soon as they become interesting people, they’re done with you!

Liz sobs and Guy tries to comfort

her. Polly is stunned.

GUY

He’s only been there six weeks, Lizzie. He’s having fun! We’ll get him back!

LIZ

[wails]

*I’m pregnant!*

BECK

[to Courtney]

What do you think about having a new sibling?

COURTNEY

It’s weird. I didn’t think it could happen. I mean, God, Mom’s so old. But I always kind of hated being the youngest kid. It was like, “Here’s our brilliant son, Justin, and oh yeah, that other one’s here too.”

BECK

Well, you obviously don’t remember the day you were born when your mother kept screaming, “I got my girl! I got my girl!”

COURTNEY

She *did*? [beat] It would be fun to teach stuff to a little kid, to give her the inside scoop on the Liz And Guy Show. I could give her pointers on making them laugh so they forget they’re mad at you—I have a gift for that.

BECK

I don’t doubt it.

COURTNEY

Do you have brothers and sisters?

BECK

Older brother, younger sister. The brother I don’t see too often, but my sister—love her to pieces.

COURTNEY

Yeah?

Watch: “Time: six-oh-two p.m.”

LEO

*Six*! It’s six o’clock already. No wonder I’m starving.

RAINEY

I could eat a little something.

BECK

That roast’ll be falling apart by now. Court, help me bring out the food.

Beck and Courtney exit to kitchen.

LIZ

I’m up for tenure this year, Guy! How can I do *that* like *this*?

GUY

You’ve done it before. You wrote your thesis when Justin was a baby.

LIZ

In half-hour intervals while he napped. It was hellish. I’d fall asleep over the computer. I took time off with Courtney because the colic was so bad, and that set me back. I could have been tenured earlier, but I didn’t mind the delay. I took time to care for my children, and I’m glad I did. But now it’s *my* turn. I had my kids young so there would be time later to do what *I* wanted to do. You’re living out your dream—I want mine too!

GUY

Since when is my dream being an adjunct professor?

LIZ

Writing your novel, I mean. Having the time to do that.

GUY

Right. The novel.

POLLY

Since when is your dream getting tenure? That’s a really boring dream, Liz. Dreams should be a lot wilder and more fun than *that*. A dream should be, like, moving to Dubrovnik and working on a fishing boat . . .

LIZ

A *fishing* boat? I get seasick on a whale watch.

POLLY

. . . or becoming a Zen monk and living in a monastery in Katmandu.

LIZ

I’m sorry my dream isn’t exotic enough for you, Polly. But it’s my dream! Becoming a Harvard professor is the final objective of everything I’ve worked for. I’m not throwing it away now. [beat] I’m not doing this, Guy. I’m not doing it again.

POLLY

Oh, Liz.

GUY

I know this is a shock, Lizzie. It is for me too. We don’t have to decide this minute.

LIZ

I *have* decided. That’s that.

Guy looks dejected, reaches for

the popcorn, eats.

POLLY

I know you, Liz. If you don’t have this baby, you’ll regret it later.

LIZ

No, I won’t. I’m a feminist. I own my own body. I don’t have to have a baby if I don’t want to.

POLLY

Of course you don’t *have* to, but . . . you’re also a woman who loves being a *mother*.

LIZ

I love it and I hate it. It’s a job you can never stop doing—no vacation days, no sick days, no excuses, no end to it. God, Polly, I would think you, of all people, would understand that. You don’t even want to do this *once*!

POLLY

[beat] Okay. You’re right. I’m sorry. It’s your decision.

LIZ

Yes, it is.

Beck and Courtney enter with

platters and bowls of food which

they put on the table. People pick up

plates and begin to fill them.

Polly gets up and walks over to

join Beck and the others.

POLLY

[to Beck, overheard by Arturo]

She’s talking about an abortion.

ARTURO

Good for her. She doesn’t need a squalling infant this late in the game.

BECK

For somebody who comes from such a big, fabulous family, you’re kind of down on the bambinos, aren’t you?

ARTURO

Never saw the upside to kids. They consume all the oxygen in the room. I need a serene lifestyle. I need to be able to think.

BECK

Thinking is overrated. Doing is a lot more fun.

ARTURO

I’ll admit being an uncle has its moments—all you have to do is throw a ball around with them for half an hour and they adore you. But inevitably they get cranky and start putting their dirty hands all over your clothing. Pick me up! Feed me! That’s it—I’m done. [beat] I’m sure Polly feels the same way, don’t you? You’re not a fan of the tiny tots either.

POLLY

Just because I don’t have children doesn’t mean I don’t like them. I’ve never been in a position to have a child—

ARTURO

And neither is your sister. You don’t approach your tenure year with a baby hanging on your tit.

Polly glares at him, but then begins

to laugh.

POLLY

Do you know why you were invited over here today?

ARTURO

I imagine as a gesture of goodwill toward a new hire in the department.

POLLY

Not entirely. You’re here as a potential husband and, more importantly, sperm donor for me. Not at *my* request. I’ve told Liz repeatedly I didn’t need her matchmaker services, but two hours ago when she still worshipped the idea of motherhood, she believed that the best outcome for the two of us involved making beautiful babies together. The penniless social worker in pajama pants and the baby-hater in his Brooks Brothers suit. Why wouldn’t that work out?

ARTURO

It’s Hugo Boss.

POLLY

You’re ridiculous.

Rainey has made up a plate of

food and takes it over to Liz who’s

been lying back on the couch while

Guy, forlornly pets her head.

RAINEY

[to Guy:]

You better go get yourself some beef roast before Leo eats the whole thing. [hands Liz the plate.] I made up a plate for you, honey.

LIZ

That was thoughtful of you. Thank you, Rainey.

RAINEY

If it’s okay with you, I’ll sit here a little while and get to know my new step-daughter.

GUY

I’ll stay with you too—

LIZ

No. Go away, Guy. Please. You’re sitting so close to me, I can hear your heart breaking. Stop eating popcorn and fill up your black hole of disappointment with potato salad.

Guy, hurt, gets up and goes. Rainey

sits on the end of the sofa. Liz tries

to eat a few bites, but eventually puts

the plate down.

RAINEY

What’s he so sad about? Thought he was done being a daddy, huh?

LIZ

Just the opposite. He’d be happy to have six, like the fighting Fortunatos. But I’m done being a mommy. It takes too much . . . of everything. I can’t do it again.

RAINEY

Oh.

LIZ

Do you think that’s wrong? Are you anti-abortion?

RAINEY

Oh, no. Every woman has to make that decision for herself. I guess I’m just surprised. I mean, you’ve got two great kids already—not that I ever met the oldest, but Princeton! Wow. And that Courtney’s full of beans, isn’t she?

LIZ

These days she’s a pain in the ass, if that’s what you mean.

RAINEY

Oh, sure she is, but I love that age. I taught high school for thirty years. In my experience it’s the pains-in-the-ass that are the most interesting in the long run.

LIZ

Our mother was a high school teacher too—she taught history.

RAINEY

I know. Leo told me all about her. I think that was the first thing he liked about me—I seemed like somebody he already knew. I taught English, plus I coached the drama club. [She laughs.] You get the doozies in drama club.

LIZ

Courtney just auditioned for the part of Rizzo in “Grease” at her high school.

RAINEY

She’s a drama kid! I shoulda known. And she’s perfect for Rizzo—she’s got that spark.

LIZ

She does, doesn’t she? Do you have children, Rainey?

RAINEY

No, we never did. My husband, Tommy, didn’t want ‘em. He was a little . . . high-strung. Didn’t want the aggravation.

LIZ

Did you want children? I’m sorry, I’m being nosy.

RAINEY

No, no. You can ask me anything. I’m part of the family now. I did want them at first, but then my students kind of filled-up that space. It was okay.

LIZ

But . . . do you regret it now?

RAINEY

Being honest? Yes, I do. After Tommy died young, well, fifty, but that seems young now, I was kind of mad I didn’t have a family. I woulda liked some babies, and I sure wish I had grandkids now. [She looks at Liz’s stomach, wistfully.] Maybe someday your Justin and Courtney will think of me like that. If it’s not too late. [beat] Did you make this lasagna stuff? It’s really good!

LIZ

No, that was Beck. He’s a chef.

RAINEY

Really? [whispers] He’s so good-looking! Is he Polly’s boyfriend?

LIZ

In a way.

RAINEY

Lucky her!

Leo comes over to them, kisses

Liz on top of the head.

LEO

You feeling better now, honey? I guess that was quite a shock, huh?

LIZ

It was, Daddy. It is.

LEO

I guess you thought that barn door was closed! But it’s a good surprise, right? For me it’s the icing on the cake. I get my Rainey and a new grandbaby too.

RAINEY

Sweetie. [She shakes her head at Leo, but he doesn’t understand.]

LEO

What?

LIZ

Daddy, I’ve decided not to keep it.

LEO

Not to . . . ? What does that mean?

RAINEY

Leo, sweetheart—

LEO

An *abortion*?

Liz flinches at the word, but nods.

LEO

Why in God’s name—

LIZ

Daddy, I’m old. Babies take so much time. . . and I don’t have that much time left anymore.

LEO

What are you talking about? You’re not old. *I’m* old and I’m starting over. I’m taking another lap around the track. In fact, I feel ten years younger since I met Rainey!

LIZ

Well, I can assure you, having a baby is *not* going to make me feel ten years younger. I’m already ten years older than the other *old* mothers.

RAINEY

Leo, honey, Liz has to figure this out for herself.

LEO

Okay, okay, but at least give it a little time before you decide for sure. It’s only been . . . [he presses his watch which says, “Time: six-thirty-six p.m.”] Not even an hour! Live with it a little bit. You got time!

LIZ

It doesn’t feel like it. Every time you press that watch, it’s a reminder of how quickly one minute turns into another. *Six-thirty-six. Six-thirty-seven. Get going! You just lost another minute!* One hour to the next, another day, another week, another year.

Polly and Beck approach Guy who’s

slumped in a chair.

POLLY

[to Guy]

Are you okay?

GUY

Oh, sure. You know. It’s not my call. It’s not my body. . . I’m not the one . . . [He chokes up and begins to cry, quietly.]

POLLY

Oh, Guy!

GUY

I wish I *was* the one who carried the baby. I’d do the hard work! I would! I’d like to know what it feels like to grow a life inside me . . .

BECK

You love being a dad, don’t you?

GUY

[pulling himself together]

You have no idea. I don’t know why men are so afraid of it—it’s the best thing I’ve ever done. In fact, being a father is the only thing I’ve ever been really *good* at. I’m a crappy teacher—even after all these years, I get so anxious before class I have to meditate for ten minutes or I throw up. My teacher evaluations say things like, “Seems to know what he’s talking about. Unfortunately, we don’t.”

POLLY

Well, that’s because you’d rather be working on your novel than—

GUY

I threw it out.

POLLY

You . . . What?

GUY

The novel I’ve been picking at for the last fifteen years. It was boring and asinine. I threw it out.

BECK

After fifteen years?

GUY

Putting that thing through the paper shredder was a relief, let me tell you.

POLLY

But, Guy . . .

GUY

I’ve started writing poetry and I love it. It’s so . . . *short*.

BECK

Does Liz know you’ve stopped working on the novel?

GUY

No. She’ll be disappointed. She liked telling people her husband was writing a novel. It made up a little for being married to an adjunct professor.

POLLY

Liz doesn’t care about things like that!

GUY

No? Then why’s she so taken with Julio Gallo over there? Who wouldn’t want to live at the corner of Harvard and Zinfandel?

POLLY

Well, *I* wouldn’t, for one. And neither would Liz. She had her eye on him for *me*, which was a bigger mistake than getting pregnant.

GUY

[to Beck:]

What about you, Beck?

BECK

What about me?

GUY

I guess you’re like Polly—you never wanted kids.

POLLY

Beck, have a child? He’s so busy with the restaurants and the cookbooks—

BECK

I *do* want children. I think about it all the time.

POLLY

[shocked]

What? I’ve never heard you say that before.

BECK

I don’t say it around you—you’re so anti-kids.

POLLY

I’m not anti-kids! I just don’t like people telling me I *should* have them. It’s never seemed like a practical option to me, but just because *I’m* not having them, doesn’t mean I don’t think other people should.

BECK

Well, obviously it’s not going to happen for me either, but I think about it sometimes. What it would be like to be someone’s father.

POLLY

You’d be a wonderful father.

GUY

There’s nothing else like it, Beck. Not even close.

POLLY

[almost to herself]

I hear it’s a whole new echelon of love.

Courtney has been talking to Arturo.

COURTNEY

What? She’s not! She didn’t say that to me!

ARTURO

Polly said so. Right, Polly? Liz is having an abortion.

POLLY

You told Courtney?

BECK

What is wrong with you?

COURTNEY

Mom! [She runs to her mother.]

ARTURO

I thought it was good news!

Polly and Beck approach Arturo,

and escort him, forcefully, to the

door.

BECK

I wouldn’t serve your rancid wine to a pack of thirsty dogs.

POLLY

Time for you to go back to the Late Twentieth Century!

Arturo exits, huffily.

COURTNEY

Arturo says you’re having an abortion, but you’re not, are you?

Everyone gathers near Liz.

LIZ

Courtney, you don’t understand what having a baby would mean for me—

COURTNEY

Bambi isn’t just *your* baby. She’s my sister, too!

LIZ

*Bambi?*

COURTNEY

That’s what I’ve been calling her in my head. Isn’t it cute?

LIZ

It’s not necessarily a girl, you know.

COURTNEY

Okay then, maybe . . . Bumbo for a boy.

LIZ

Oh, Lord.

COURTNEY

Just for a nickname! I want us to have a baby. Please, Mom. Please!

LIZ

Honey. . .

COURTNEY

I won’t be such a brat. I’ll help you with the baby! And I’ll be a good influence on her too. I promise. I’ll be the best big sister in the world!

LIZ

Courtney, this is not your decision.

A phone buzzes.

LIZ [cont’d.]

Oh, that’s my phone. Would you get it, Guy?

Guy picks up phone.

GUY

It’s a text from Justin. [hands her the phone.]

LIZ

[reads]

“Sorry I’m missing Grandpa’s party. Love it here but miss all of you. XO, Justin.” He remembered!

GUY

Of course he did.

COURTNEY

I wish he was here. He’d be on my side in this baby thing.

Leo presses the watch. “Time: six-

fifty-one p.m.” But the watch gets

stuck and continues to announce the

time over and over. It changes to

“Time: six-fifty-two p.m.” and then to 6:53, 6:54, etc., the minutes advancing much too quickly. Leo

keeps pressing it, trying to stop it.

LIZ

Daddy, stop that thing!

LEO

I’m trying! It won’t. It just . . .

People walk away, cover their ears.

The watch continues to squawk.

LIZ

You keep hitting it on!

LEO

I’m trying to get it—

RAINEY

Can I help you . . . ?

POLLY

Oh, that thing is awful!

LIZ

Daddy, please! I can’t stand it!

Leo grabs the thing off his wrist and

throws it on the floor, but it keeps

talking. Finally Beck stomps on it

until, at last, it’s quiet.

LEO

Well, that’s that.

LIZ

Oh, my God. Thank you, Beck. You are my hero.

POLLY

Mine too, but it has nothing to do with the watch.

Polly drops to one knee in front of

Beck.

BECK

What are you doing?

POLLY

I’m proposing to you. Beck Nelson, will you be the father of my child?

LIZ

*What?* Are you trying to make me feel guilty? You don’t want a child!

POLLY

[to Liz:] I don’t want a child by *myself*. And I don’t want a child with that Italian wrestling idiot. But, of course, I want a child! I want what you take for granted, Liz. I want a Justin! I want a Courtney! I just didn’t see a way to do it before. And now I do. [to Beck:] So, will you, Beck? Will you be part of my life forever in this great, enormous way?

BECK

I always intended to be with you forever, Polly. So, let’s make us a baby.

Polly stands and they embrace,

Beck lifting her in the air.

RAINEY

That’s the most romantic thing I’ve ever heard.

COURTNEY

Not that romantic. Beck’s gay.

RAINEY

Oh. But then—

LEO

You know how it’s done, right? I mean, Beck, you’d have to—

POLLY

Don’t worry about it, Daddy. We can figure out the technical aspects.

GUY

I think it’s beautiful. And brave. I wish you two the best of luck.

Some hand-shaking and embracing.

LIZ

It does seem kind of perfect, now that I think of it.

GUY

I’m quitting my job!

LIZ

What is happening to everyone?

GUY

Time’s passing. I’m sick of wasting it doing something I hate. If I stayed home and took care of the baby for the first few years, and you could concentrate on your career, would you have it? Raising the kids, I know it’s been hard sometimes, but it’s also been such a great part of our lives—and now we can have more of that!

LIZ

Guy, be reasonable. I know you don’t like teaching that much—

GUY

I despise it. I loathe it. It makes me sick to my stomach.

LIZ

But, we still need the money you’re bringing in. Justin just started college and before long Courtney will be . . .

COURTNEY

I’ll get a job! In six months I’ll be sixteen. I can save money for college!

LIZ

Let’s all calm down here. These are pipe dreams—

GUY

They’re not!

COURTNEY

Could I get a job waiting tables at your restaurant, Beck? A few nights a week? I’d even wash dishes!

LIZ

Have you ever washed a dish in your life?

BECK

Court, when you turn sixteen, if you still want it, there’ll be an apron with your name on it.

COURTNEY

Yes!

GUY

When the baby’s a little older we’ll find a daycare and I’ll go back to work. Maybe by then I’ll figure out something I like doing.

LEO

Maybe you can sell Fords down at Buttonheimer’s! I got connections.

GUY

Believe me, it would be a step-up from teaching Survey of World History from Mesopotamia to Donald Trump.

LIZ

I feel like you’re all ganging up on me. I can’t think!

POLLY

[quietly]

If you had this baby, and Beck and I had a baby, they’d be almost the same age. Baby cousins. They’d grow up together. We’d be old mamas together.

Liz stands and embraces Polly.

LIZ

I always wanted that.

COURTNEY

I know!

Beck finds Polly’s gift for Leo

and hands it to him.

BECK

Leo, you should open this. It’s from Polly.

Leo opens it. It’s another watch,

but instead of speaking, this one

sings.

LEO

It’s another watch! [puts it on]

POLLY

This one’s kinder. Try it, Daddy.

Leo presses it. It sings, “It’s seven

o’clock in the evening!” They all

laugh and applaud.

LEO

Makes it almost fun to have the time tick by.

Polly hugs him.

LIZ

All right. Okay. [beat] Okay.

They all turn to look at her.

LIZ [con’t.d]

But I am *not* naming this child Bambi or Bumbo!

GUY

Really?

LIZ

(joyfully)

*I’m pregnant!*

Joy on all faces. They mob her.

CURTAIN

Courtney plus Polly getting pregnant plus Guy saying he’s quitting teaching convinces Liz.

Polly’s gift: a singing watch.