

ACT 1 SCENE 1

LEIGH, CHARLOTTE, and JAY are on a cliff overlooking crashing waves. JAY stands in the middle holding an urn. The day is bright and sunny despite the cold.

JAY

Fuck, it's freezing out here.

LEIGH

Jay, do we really want to throw Mom down there? We don't even know if this is the right spot.

JAY

This is the nearest place where we can see the ocean. Besides Leigh, it was your idea.

CHARLOTTE

I don't know why they need to be together, Mom and Dad weren't exactly *resting in peace* when they were alive. *(beat)* Thank God the house finally sold.

JAY

You think there's any food there?

CHARLOTTE

Unless you want peanut butter and jelly for dinner.

LEIGH

Who knew there were so many ways to make a peanut butter sandwich.

JAY

Peanut butter and banana.

CHARLOTTE

Peanut butter and honey.

LEIGH

Peanut butter and hot sauce.

JAY

Oh, gross! *(smiling)* Remember that pizza with the pears?

CHARLOTTE

(bittersweet) She forgot the salt in the dough.

JAY

It tasted like cardboard.

LEIGH

I thought it was okay.

CHARLOTTE

God, she was so loaded when she did that.

LEIGH

They were for her anxiety, Charlotte. You can't just for one minute, have a little respect, a little integrity—

CHARLOTTE

Oh, like the *respect* she gave us when she—never mind.

LEIGH

When she what, Ari? When she what?

CHARLOTTE

Should I start calling you by *your* middle name, *Calliope*?

LEIGH

You could have taken off work to help plan the memorial.

CHARLOTTE

Despite what you may think, not a whole lot of people can just walk in off the street and teach trapeze.

LEIGH

So graduating college isn't as important? Jay and I have lives too.

CHARLOTTE

I never said you didn't. Anyway, you did a good job.

LEIGH

That's not the point.

CHARLOTTE

Don't start--

JAY

What are we gonna do with the gun?

CHARLOTTE

The gun?

LEIGH

You think it's still in Dad's safe? Remember when we were kids—well, I guess you weren't a kid Char—and he tried to teach us to shoot cans in the back yard?

CHARLOTTE

(bittersweet) Mom wanted to learn too.

JAY

She called us her troops. Remember that iced tea she drank?

LEIGH

Of course I do. It was always in the fridge. She even made it over Thanksgiving.

CHARLOTTE

(beat) Let's do this. My toes are freezing off.

LEIGH

Fine, but I hope this is the right spot. You go first Char, you're the oldest.

CHARLOTTE

Okay. *(she takes the urn)* Um...

JAY

Char...

LEIGH

Ari, if you can't think of anything nice to say--

CHARLOTTE

No, I *(feeling a panic attack coming on)* Actually...I'm not feeling well. I'll see you guys at home.

LEIGH

What?!

JAY

Wait a minute.

CHARLOTTE

I'll make meatloaf, okay? Mom's favorite.

JAY

Don't go, please.

CHARLOTTE

Just tell Mom I love her, okay?

CHARLOTTE starts to leave.

LEIGH

Tell her yourself! Charlotte, you can't just go. Charlotte!

CHARLOTTE exits.

JAY

Just let her go, Leigh

LEIGH

Why didn't you do something?

JAY

Like what? *(handing her the urn)* Here.

A beat.

Leigh sighs.

She reaches into the urn and throws a handful of ash.

JAY throws a handful of ash.

They pass the urn back and forth until it is empty.

JAY

Bye, Mom.

(A beat)

JAY exits.

LEIGH, alone, holds tightly to the empty urn.

LEIGH

Bye, Mom. Love you.

Lights fade out.

ACT 1 SCENE 2

The Ashton family home later that day. CHARLOTTE enters the front door with two paper bags full of groceries. It's been a long journey home.

CHARLOTTE

Hello?

LEIGH and JAY

In here!

CHARLOTTE enters the kitchen.

LEIGH and JAY sit at the table with a deck of cards.

They are playing WAR.

They each have a glass of wine.

LEIGH

Aces! oh, what, what!

(she does a victory gesture)

JAY

Nooo! *(he slumps over the table in mock defeat)* dammit.

CHARLOTTE

I think I got everything.

JAY

Cool. Leigh made bruschetta.

CHARLOTTE

I didn't know you cooked.

The oven timer goes off.

LEIGH

I do. Could you grab it Char, I've got to shuffle this deck.

CHARLOTTE does so, placing the tray on the stove.

JAY

(to CHARLOTTE) She's killing me. *(to LEIGH)* You rigged it!

LEIGH

I did not. Fate is on my side plus, you suck.

JAY

Thanks, Leigh.

LEIGH

No prob.

JAY

(to Leigh) I'm gonna destroy you this time!

CHARLOTTE

I bought potatoes too. And peas. I got them with onions. I couldn't remember if Mom liked them that way or not. Leigh, do you remember?

LEIGH

Yeah. With onions. *(a peace offering)* Good choice. I'll start the potatoes. Mashed?

CHARLOTTE

Yeah, thanks.

(flipping through her mother's cookbooks) I can't find the meatloaf recipe...

LEIGH

I think it's in *The Joy of Cooking*. I have it in my suitcase. *(beat)* I borrowed it from her last time I was here.

LEIGH exits

CHARLOTTE begins peeling potatoes.

JAY

What can I do?

CHARLOTTE

Help me with these.

JAY pours wine for CHARLOTTE.

He begins to expertly peel a potato with a knife.

JAY

You think Mom would like that we're doing this?

CHARLOTTE

Yeah, sure.

JAY

You okay?

CHARLOTTE

Mom made this every year on Dad's birthday.

JAY

Right up until he died.

CHARLOTTE

I was just thinking...there was this one year...you were about six. She made you wear a bowtie. (JAY pulls self-consciously at his non-existent collar) You kept pulling at it, like that.

JAY

What happened?

CHARLOTTE

He showed up half an hour late making some excuse about a translation he had to finish. But Mom knew. She could smell the whiskey on him. You could practically see the lipstick on his collar.

JAY

What'd she do?

CHARLOTTE

Cut him a slice of cake and told him that next time he forgot our phone number, maybe he could forget our address too. She didn't really mean it, though. She never did.

JAY

Wow. I don't remember that.

CHARLOTTE

You were little.(beat) Mom put lipstick on me, and Leigh wanted to wear some too but only if she could put it on herself. She got it all over her face, this bright pink...mess.

LEIGH enters with the cookbook.

LEIGH

You took my room?

CHARLOTTE

Oh, yeah. Mine's freezing

LEIGH

Why didn't you ask?

CHARLOTTE

It's no big deal. You can sleep in Mom's room.

LEIGH

You're kidding me, right?

CHARLOTTE

Okay, we can both sleep in your room. There's an air mattress in the closet.

LEIGH

That's not the point.

JAY

I'll sleep in Mom's room. Leigh, you can take mine, okay?

LEIGH

You don't live here anymore, Ari.

JAY

Neither do we.

LEIGH

Fine.

CHARLOTTE

Did you find the recipe? (*Leigh hands it to her*) Great, can you start it please? I'll make the sauce.

CHARLOTTE pours ketchup and brown sugar into a bowl.

LEIGH takes a carton of eggs out of the fridge.

She pours herself more wine and eyes the pile of mail on the table.

LEIGH

Look at all this. You'd think this was more than a week's worth.

CHARLOTTE

Leigh, could you help, please?

LEIGH

Just a minute. (*beat*) A letter from Juliette.

CHARLOTTE

Who?

LEIGH

Her sorority sister. The red head at the memorial.

CHARLOTTE

Right. It was nice that she came.

LEIGH

Ooh. Here's one from John. (*reading*) *Dearest Natalie—*

CHARLOTTE

Don't read it.

LEIGH

Are you that virtuous?

JAY

You're not even curious?

CHARLOTTE

It doesn't belong to us.

LEIGH

It's sweet. (*beat*) He says something here about carpenter ants.

JAY

He is the exterminator.

LEIGH

I saw some in my room.

CHARLOTTE

A lot?

JAY

They probably just want to get in where it's dry. When I went to wilderness camp with Dad we learned about bugs.

CHARLOTTE

Do either of you have John's number?

JAY

Let's eat first. We'll call tomorrow. There's nothing we can do right now.

CHARLOTTE

I just want to be sure this isn't a problem.

LEIGH

It's not a big deal, Ari.

CHARLOTTE

You're the one who asked him to advise us on the sale—

LEIGH

Because I thought we could use the help. Have you ever sold a house before?

CHARLOTTE

I'm saying, he's the one to call if—

LEIGH
But not during dinner. Did I go?

JAY
What?

LEIGH
To wilderness camp?

JAY
No. You had a game.

LEIGH
Soccer or softball?

JAY
I don't know, Leigh. Does it matter?

LEIGH
I'm just trying to figure out when you and Dad went to wilderness camp without me.

JAY
We didn't go *without* you.

LEIGH
Was Charlotte with you?

JAY
No.

LEIGH
What about Mom?

JAY
No, Leigh.

LEIGH
How old were you?

JAY
I don't remember. It's not a big deal.

CHARLOTTE
Well, it's been a long day. Blaine just got off work. I should call him before he goes to bed.

LEIGH
What about dinner?

CHARLOTTE

Save me some. I'll have it tomorrow.

LEIGH

Second time today.

CHARLOTTE

What?

LEIGH

You're just doing a lot of walking out today.

CHARLOTTE

You didn't seem to want me there.

LEIGH

Oh, nice, put it on me. Just because you feel guilty--

CHARLOTTE

I feel guilty?

LEIGH

You don't visit. You're never here. We practically had to drag you out here. And don't tell me you were teaching. The last time we saw you was Dad's memorial and even then you were barely present. I saw Blaine more than I saw you.

CHARLOTTE

Can we talk about this later?

LEIGH

We're talking about it now.

CHARLOTTE

I'm sorry I couldn't stay, alright. I am.

LEIGH

Nobody forced you to leave. It wasn't suicide, you know. Mom. I know that's what you think.

CHARLOTTE

With that many pills in her stomach, what else am I supposed to think?!

LEIGH

Accidents do happen, you know. She just took too many. There would have been a note...if she'd done it on purpose there would have been a note.

CHARLOTTE

Good night, Leigh.

LEIGH

(shouting after her) You never want to talk about anything!

CHARLOTTE exits.

JAY

Did you really have to go there?

LEIGH

Sorry...

BLACK OUT.

ACT 1 SCENE 3

The kitchen. Late afternoon. JAY sits at the table eating a bowl of cereal and reading the paper. CHARLOTTE stands at the window drinking coffee. LEIGH looks through the cupboards, pulling out vases, bowls, and mugs, one after the other.

LEIGH

Where are the bowls? The ones Mom used for paints, where are they?

JAY

They're probably in the shed. Don't worry about it.

CHARLOTTE

Let me know if you find them. I'd like one.

LEIGH

You can't eat off them. What are you going to use it for?

CHARLOTTE

I'll put my keys in it. I don't know, I'll figure something out.

LEIGH

I'd like to use them for my inks. Anyway, they're a set. They should go together. Mom made them to go together, that's why they fit inside one another.

CHARLOTTE

So you think you're entitled—

JAY

Nobody's entitled. Everything in the house goes to all of us.

CHARLOTTE

If she'd had a will we wouldn't have to do this.

LEIGH

Maybe if you were more sensitive—

CHARLOTTE

Don't talk to me about sensitivity, okay?

JOHN enters. He has just done an inspection of the house, including the outside property. He is in his fifties, wears suspenders, a plaid flannel shirt, and jeans. He is solid and a bit rough looking and going grey, although he still has a spring in his step.

JOHN

Well, I'm about done.

JAY

What's the damage?

JOHN

Well it's not good, I'll tell you that. Natalie-- I mean..your mother... truly did not heed my warnings.

JAY

Your warnings?

JOHN

Yes, well, in an old house like this one, what with the wood dampening in the winter and particularly with you so far off the road and in what you might call a forest, although I'm certain any park ranger worth his salt wouldn't call it that...

LEIGH

We're not that far off the road.

JOHN

You're far enough, and it makes you a likely candidate for wasps, spiders, ants, earwigs, any number of small crawling creature. I'm sure you've noticed that. And what with the wood piled up in the back the way it is--

JAY

I chopped that for her last summer. I thought she'd use it this fall, but--

JOHN

Oh, it's not your fault, son. A woodpile's a woodpile, nothing harmful in that in and of itself. It's just the nest you want to worry about.

CHARLOTTE

(horrified) The nest?

JOHN

And with it so close to the house, I'd imagine that's how they've been coming in. It's that or those trees hanging overhead--maybe even both--*(almost apologetically)* I did tell Natalie, I mean your mom, that those branches needed to be trimmed back but...

CHARLOTTE

What kind of damage do they do? Do they eat it?

JOHN

Not these beauties. They make tunnels and galleys in the wood, can really hack it up, although it's a neat job, clean, smooth as the globe.

JAY

What do we do now?

JOHN

If there's a nest in the house as I suspect there is--and I can do some detective work around that, drill a hole in the afflicted areas, to try to find their route. The thing is...

JAY

What?

JOHN

You should let the Stephenson's know. They haven't signed any papers yet. They're free to back out any point before they do that. And now that there's an infestation...

CHARLOTTE

You think they won't want the house anymore?

JOHN

They might be less likely to take it now. Since they weren't aware of the infestation when they made the agreement, and if you take care of it and don't tell them and there's a problem later. You...you could end up in legal trouble. I don't know what they're going to do. I just...want you to be prepared for all the possibilities. In any case I can put some pesticide around the perimeter, move the woodpile away from the house. Killing the nest will require pouring some pesticide in the interior walls. I don't have that equipment with me now, but we can set up a time. *(beat)* I'm sorry. I should have insisted I take another look at the house.

JAY

She was stubborn. It's not your fault.

(beat)

LEIGH

How well did you know her?

JOHN

We both lived in this town for a long time and I used to see her around with you kids. We went on a few dates. After your father passed, of course. I'm sorry about what happened to him.

JAY

Thank you.

LEIGH

Your letter made it sound like you knew her better than just a few dates. What happened?

JOHN

Couldn't quite keep up, I suppose. *(beat)* Let me know when you'd like me to start the procedure. You'd need to be out of the house for it. Maybe a day or two. So consider that. In the meantime, give the Stephenson's a call, or I can do it if you like.

CHARLOTTE

I'll make the call.

JOHN

Alright. Well, keep me informed. I'm going to look a few more places before I go and I'll send over an estimate. You have my number. Call if you have any questions. If you need anything.

LEIGH

We will.

JOHN

Jay. Charlotte. You all take care.

(They shake hands)

JOHN exits.

A beat.

LEIGH

We could keep it. The house, I mean.

CHARLOTTE

That's a good one.

LEIGH

I'm not joking. We only have until the New Year anyway, right? That's not very long to move everything out. Wouldn't it be easier to just keep it?

CHARLOTTE

We don't even know if they're backing out yet.

LEIGH

He sounded pretty certain to me.

CHARLOTTE

It's just a possibility, he said—

LEIGH

He said we have to pour poison into the walls—

CHARLOTTE

He has to do that either way!

LEIGH

Yeah, but if we keep the house then he can wait to do it until after the break when none of us will be here.

CHARLOTTE

Except that I live the closest, so I'll be the one getting the calls at three in the morning if

anything goes wrong.

LEIGH

Nothing will go wrong. Just think about it. We don't have to have the money—Mom left us all enough.

CHARLOTTE

We don't even know how much it's going to cost to get rid of the ants. Or anything else that we find out needs repairing in the meantime. Like you said, we only have about a week to move out. We don't have time to be fucking around.

LEIGH

What is your problem?

CHARLOTTE

My problem is that, once again, you're not thinking realistically.

LEIGH

Our mother just died. Excuse me if I'm not gung-ho on selling off the place where she raised us.

CHARLOTTE

Let's not drag this out.

LIEGH

Who said anything about *dragging it out*? Jay, did I say anything like that?

JAY

Right now we have a sale going forward. Even if that doesn't happen, mom left the house to all of us. We all have to agree about what to do with it.

LEIGH

You talk about it like it's a stray cat.

JAY

Even if we kept it, what would we do with it?

LEIGH

We'd keep it for us, Jay. We'd have it for us. I thought you, at least, would agree with me. I'm going for a run. I'll see you later.

CHARLOTTE

Leigh, we're not done here! Jay, a little help?

LEIGH exits.

JAY

I'm going to pack.

JAY moves to the living room.

CHARLOTTE follows him.

CHARLOTTE

Jay?

JAY

I can't do this anymore.

He starts emptying the bookcase.

CHARLOTTE

Do what? What are you talking about?

JAY

You know exactly what I'm talking about. Pick sides! It's impossible! You're like...wild animals!

CHARLOTTE

But I'm right. *We're* right.

JAY

It doesn't matter if we're right. Try to be nice for once, see what happens.

CHARLOTTE

(miming taking a knife out of her heart) You want your knife back, or should I clean it first?

JAY

Seriously Char, you're harsh.

CHARLOTTE

On a scale from 1 to ten—

JAY

Stop it! Stop bitching and do something useful, help me with these books or, I don't know, take inventory or something. Just try please, for me, to get along.

CHARLOTTE

I can't.

JAY

You cross a half inch thick piece of wire and *literally* fly through the air every day and *this* is too hard?

CHARLOTTE

She hates me.

