

CLASSIC SIX

A Play in Two Acts

By

Leigh Flayton

Contact Info:
Leigh Flayton
245 E. 35th St., 8E
New York, NY 10016
917.548.5298
leigh@leighflayton.com

CHARACTERS

FRANCES "FRANKIE" NOLAN (22 & 47): A young woman from a working-class background who wants to be a journalist.

FRANK MCGUIRE (50 & 75): A writer from Brooklyn, married to Patricia, now living in New York City.

PATRICIA "OFFIE" LOWELL (47 & 72): A PR maven married to Frank.

CHUCKIE (22): Frances's boyfriend in 1993.

MARTIN (50): Frances's boyfriend twenty-five years later. He can be played by the same actor who plays Chuckie.

SETTING

ACT ONE takes place over the course of the 1993-'94 school year in the McGuires' Classic Six in Manhattan. ACT TWO takes place twenty-five years later in the same apartment.

ACT ONE: FALL 1993**Scene One**

(It's early morning on a bitter-cold autumn day in New York City.)

(FRANCES, 22, is asleep in the small maid's quarters stage right off the large, well-appointed kitchen, which takes up the rest of the stage.)

(FRANCES is blanketed by several covers and, when she finally emerges from bed, she is wearing a knit hat and gloves, a bulky sweater, jeans and socks. It's so cold she slept in her clothes.)

(FRANCES's room contains the bare minimum: a twin bed, a chest of drawers, a closet, and a desk on which sits a word processor.)

(An ARGUMENT can be heard in the nether rooms and reaches of the Classic Six apartment. It's hard to make out what's being said – the words are muffled at the moment – but the argument is moving closer.)

(We soon see who has been fighting: FRANK, still in his robe and pajamas, and PATRICIA, dressed to the nines and ready for the workday, bolt inside the kitchen, causing FRANCES to sit upright, startled, in bed; it's literally a rude awakening. It takes her a moment to realize what's going on, but when she does, she listens intently.)

(FRANK is being harangued by his wife, but he calmly descends on the coffee maker and pours himself a cup. It seems like he's used to this.)

PATRICIA

I make a hell of a lot of money, Frank! A hell of a lot of money! I don't want to have to deal with any of this crap when I get home.

(FRANK tries to hand his wife the mug, but she doesn't take it; she's too busy gesticulating in anger. FRANK shrugs, sips the coffee himself,

then places it on the counter and pours another to try again to serve her.)

PATRICIA - CON'T.

You get to sit here all day, working on your *puff pieces*, while I'm out scratching for a living...

(FRANK chuckles at this but remains quiet.)

PATRICIA - CON'T.

... to support this family and keep you in Sherry-Lehmann and Ascot Chang!

(FRANK, tickled, offers this new mug to his wife. Still, she doesn't take it. He holds it for a moment then puts it on the counter in front of her. Now, she takes it and turns her back to him as he does the same.)

(FRANK puts on his readers and turns to the stack of newspapers on the table: *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *New York Post* and *Wall Street Journal*.)

PATRICIA - CON'T.

And then on to those insufferable dinners and cocktail parties you insist we go to where blah, blah, blah... it could kill a person. I'm depleted, Frank. Depleted. So, when I come home, I just want the trains to run on time. Is that too much to ask?

(FRANK still doesn't engage, which drives her crazy. He's engrossed in the papers, or at least he's pretending to be.)

PATRICIA - CON'T.

You play squash, you go to lunch... and even the simplest tasks... you don't even try to make my life just a tiny bit easier. How do you think that makes me feel?

FRANK

Angry?

PATRICIA

Oh, you're a smug one, aren't you? What I wouldn't give for just a sliver of your selfishness.

(FRANK looks at the *New York Post*.)

PATRICIA — CON'T.

(grabbing for it)

Give me that. Would you just cancel it already? My god!

(FRANK lets her tear the paper out of his hands.
He moves away from the stack and starts writing a
grocery list.)

FRANK

I'm thinking pork chops tonight. How does that sound?

PATRICIA

(ignoring him)

And you're a *freelancer*, for god's sake, with all the time
in the world.

FRANK

Come on, Offie. What are we even talking about?

PATRICIA

Whoever heard of a 50-year-old freelancer?

FRANK

If that's what you're going to call me, then at least be
honest. I'm a *New York Times*-bestselling freelancer.

PATRICIA

Spare me. One best-seller in how many years?

FRANK

I've only written one book, so that's a pretty good record
if you ask me.

PATRICIA

I didn't. And it was about an *actor*, Frank. An actor! And
lest we forget the lipstick you put on that pig.

FRANK

Later a studio head. A titan of industry. At the time...

PATRICIA

He was a pedophile.

FRANK

Later. But at the time...

PATRICIA

He was *always* a pedophile.

(off his silence)

And you call yourself a reporter... how did you miss that one, Frank? You missed it clean.

(almost under her breath; almost)

And got lucky no one decided to hold it against you...

FRANK

Thanks to you, my love... you know, I marvel at how you never miss an opportunity to remind me of that.

PATRICIA

You're just lucky I'm so very good at what I do.

FRANK

And always able to find a way to diminish my greatest success in this life. It's truly amazing.

(off her dirty look)

After marrying you and fathering our dear boy, of course. The apples of my eye.

(FRANK mugs at her for a moment then turns back to his list.)

PATRICIA

Just fix the damn clocks, would you, please?

FRANK

I can't believe we're arguing about this.

PATRICIA

The VCR says one thing, the bedroom another and the microwave yet another. Is it really too much to ask for all the damn clocks to keep the same damn time?

(PATRICIA gestures toward FRANCES's door.)

PATRICIA – CON'T.

Have her do it. Or do we have to invite yet another stranger into our home so they can handle what you can't?

(In the maid's room, FRANCES finally tiptoes out of bed. She moves closer to the door in an effort to hear better. She's shivering the whole way.)

FRANK

Keep your voice down.

PATRICIA

(louder than ever)

Just ask her to do it if you're incapable. Or can't be bothered.

(PATRICIA walks toward FRANCES's door and considers it a moment.)

FRANK

Offie...

(PATRICIA gives her husband a look then knocks, startling FRANCES.)

PATRICIA

Frances? Are you up? Wakey wakey eggs and bakey!

(FRANCES steps back from the door so her voice seems farther away.)

FRANCES

(faking a yawn)

Be right there! I just woke up.

(PATRICIA looks at FRANK: The kid heard their whole argument. FRANK shrugs. PATRICIA smirks.)

(Meanwhile, FRANCES rushes to put on even more layers than she slept in, then grabs her winter coat from the closet.)

FRANK

So, pork chops?

PATRICIA

The clocks, Frank. Just fix the fucking clocks.

(FRANCES comes through the door and joins them in the kitchen. PATRICIA gives her a big, fake smile and sing-songs her hello then turns her attention to the newspapers.)

PATRICIA — CON'T.

Good morning.

(When FRANK talks to FRANCES, his old school Brooklyn accent comes out a bit more, along with

his playfulness. But when he addresses PATRICIA, the accent and mischief go into hiding.)

FRANCES

Good morning.

FRANK

How was last night? Was it a hot date?

FRANCES

It wasn't a *date*.

FRANK

No?

FRANCES

It's not dating if he's your boyfriend, Frank.

FRANK

I did not know that. You truly do learn something new every day. Thank you, Frankie.

PATRICIA

(still looking at the paper)

Can we please call her Frances? It's far less complicated.

FRANCES

I actually prefer Frances.

FRANK

Then Frances it is.

PATRICIA

(deadpanning)

Glad that's settled.

(FRANCES blows on her gloved hands and rubs them together for warmth.)

FRANK

Did the heat go out again?

FRANCES

It's OK.

FRANK

Why didn't you tell us? It must be freezing in there.

FRANCES

I didn't want to wake you.

PATRICIA

(eyes never leaving the paper)

Don't be a dolt. We can't have you freezing to death.

(to FRANK without looking at him)

Would you take care of that today, too, please? We can't have a dead.. *nanny* under our roof.

FRANK

(to FRANCES)

Yes. Promise.

FRANCES

Thanks.

PATRICIA

It's going to be a brutal winter.

(re: FRANCES, again without looking)

We'll need her to get a flu shot. Frank, see to it that she gets a flu shot, would you please?

FRANK

Yes, Dear.

(winking at FRANCES)

OK, so, today... I'll need you to pick up a few things at Gristedes. And the dry-cleaning and then you'll have to take Gus to the vet. That's at two. Shots. Poor guy. Also, don't forget Greer has tennis after school, and I'd like that transcript as soon as you can wrap it up.

FRANCES

I should be done this afternoon.

FRANK

Great. Oh, and check all the clocks. In the bedrooms, my office... make sure they all say the same time.

(playfully and surreptitiously gesturing to PATRICIA)

Apparently, they've gone rogue. Now, go see if Greer's up. And make sure to walk Gus before you leave.

FRANCES

OK, but... I was gonna ask...

(FRANCES looks at PATRICIA, who is at least pretending to read and not to listen.)

FRANK

What's up?

FRANCES

(re: PATRICIA)

It can wait. It's just...

(conspiratorially)

... that part about the *daughter*?

(PATRICIA starts to pay attention but tries to not show it.)

FRANCES — CON'T.

About how she, you know...?

FRANK

The Prozac?

FRANCES

Yeah.

FRANK

We're not going to write about that.

(FRANCES is relieved.)

FRANK — CON'T.

Not necessary.

FRANCES

I feel sorry for her.

FRANK

Me, too. We'll leave her out of this one.

(FRANCES beams at FRANK; he's still the hero she thinks he is. PATRICIA, meanwhile, tosses the paper on the counter and makes to leave the kitchen. On her way out...)

PATRICIA

I want steak tonight. Black and blue. Can you handle that? Either of you?

(PATRICIA exits and disappears into the nether regions of the apartment while Frank updates his grocery list.)

FRANK

(calling after her)

Whatever your heart desires, my blushing bride.

(FRANK smiles at FRANCES and gives her a playful shrug. FRANCES chuckles.)

FRANCES

You're really good at getting people to talk.

FRANK

That's my job. It'll be yours, too, once we get you out into the world of the Fourth Estate.

(PATRICIA can be heard in another part of the apartment yelling at her son.)

PATRICIA (OFFSTAGE)

Stop whining. Just tell your father to fix the clocks so your alarm goes off tomorrow, alright?

FRANK

(to FRANCES)

Seems the little prince has risen. Maybe you can go rescue him?

FRANCES

I'll do my best.

FRANK

Sorry about all the noise this morning.

FRANCES

I didn't hear anything.

(FRANCES half-smiles and makes to leave while FRANK continues reading the paper and nursing his coffee. But she hesitates.)

FRANCES — CON'T.

Oh, Frank?

FRANK

Hmm?

FRANCES

Am I allowed? When you're away this weekend? Can I ask my boyfriend over? I want to make him that dish you taught me.

FRANK

(beaming)

The tenderloin?

FRANCES

Yeah. Would that be OK? He wouldn't stay long and I'd clean everything up. You wouldn't even know we were here.

FRANK

Of course. This is your home, too. At least 'til June.

(softly)

Just don't mention it to Offie. She's skittish about strangers in the apartment, so it's better if she doesn't know, OK?

FRANCES

Of course. Thank you.

(FRANK goes back to his coffee and papers and FRANCES bounces offstage, to where PATRICIA went, into the bowels of the apartment.)

FRANCES — CON'T. (OFFSTAGE)

(shouting)

Greer! Are you ready? I'm gonna walk Gus then it's time to go!

(FRANK smiles, pleased with himself and his largesse.)

PATRICIA (OS)

Please don't yell, Frances. No yelling in the apartment.

(FRANK rolls his eyes but smiles just the same.)

(BLACKOUT)

End scene.

SCENE TWO: A FEW DAYS LATER

(FRANCES is in the kitchen, putting the finishing touches on the dinner she's making for her boyfriend CHUCKIE. She sings along to the song on the portable radio on the counter: "If I Ever Lose My Faith in You" by Sting.)

(The table is set with Frank and Patricia's upscale place settings for two.)

(The doorbell rings and FRANCES disappears into the foyer to answer the door. We hear her OFFSTAGE CONVERSATION with CHUCKIE, taking place deep inside the apartment.)

(With CHUCKIE, FRANCES's Brooklyn accent comes out a lot more than it did in the first scene with FRANK and PATRICIA.)

CHUCKIE (OFFSTAGE)

Wow! This is all that and a bag of chips!

FRANCES (OS)

Told ya.

CHUCKIE (OS)

Can you imagine living here?

FRANCES (OS)

Well, I kind of do.

CHUCKIE (OS)

I mean for real. Show me their bedroom.

FRANCES (OS)

Chuckie...

CHUCKIE (OS)

Come on! I want to see where rich people get it on.

FRANCES (OS)

You can see Greer's room. He's got the new Nintendo. But you can't play it. We need to be respectful.

CHUCKIE (OS)

He has Nintendo in his room? What's he, like, ten?

FRANCES (OS)

Eleven.

CHUCKIE (OS)

Spoiled much?

FRANCES (OS)

He's a good kid. Takes after his father..

CHUCKIE (OS)

The mother's a real bitch, huh?

FRANCES (OS)

Come on, we shouldn't be back here.

(Their conversation muffles, but Sting can still be heard singing about faith for a few beats before FRANCES leads CHUCKIE into the kitchen and turns off the radio.)

(CHUCKIE is a little rough around the edges and would like nothing more than to be the baddest boy in a popular boy band. He looks out of place in the Classic Six; he takes everything in as though he might be casing the joint. But he tries to seem chill.)

FRANCES — CON'T.

... and here's the kitchen.

CHUCKIE

So I gathered, using my dope powers of deduction. Are you impressed?

FRANCES

I spend a lot of time in here. Frank's teaching me to cook. I make dinner two or three nights a week. Usually just for Greer and me, coz they go out a lot.

CHUCKIE

Cool.

FRANCES

She has a lot of work dinners and cocktail parties and stuff. Sometimes they host and I get to meet all kinds of famous people. Like, you know who was here the other night? Matt Lauer!

CHUCKIE

The *Live at Five* guy?

FRANCES

Yeah. Frank did a story on him once. I guess they're friends now.

CHUCKIE

La di da.

FRANCES

Stop it! It's fun. You should be happy for me.

CHUCKIE

It's not like you actually *meet* any of 'em. Or hang out.

FRANCES

I see them. And sometimes they introduce me.

CHUCKIE

When you're doing the dishes and they cut through here to use the crapper. In your *bedroom*!

(CHUCKIE grabs her and gives her a quick kiss.
She playfully turns him away.)

FRANCES

You're such a dolt.

CHUCKIE

What's a dolt?

FRANCES

What's it sound like? Anyway, I'm just saying it's a lot of work. Between taking Greer to school and doing all the shopping and errands and then picking him up again. And transcribing Frank's interviews and doing research. But it's so worth it. I mean, I'm learning a ton.

CHUCKIE

Cool.

(FRANCES can tell he really doesn't think this is all so cool.)

FRANCES

You think so?

CHUCKIE

Yeah. But I'm not gonna lie. It sounds like you have a crush on the guy. And that's so not cool.

FRANCES

Ew, Chuckie! He's like 50. And besides, he's married.

CHUCKIE

So?

FRANCES

To someone who'd probably kill me if she thought I was having sex with her husband.

CHUCKIE

Then you better not be.

FRANCES

Puh-leaze. That's not gonna happen. You know what, though?

(whispering)

I don't think she likes him very much.

CHUCKIE

But you do.

FRANCES

He's just, really smart and, like, nice to me. I've never known anyone like him.

CHUCKIE

Sounds like a crush to me.

FRANCES

It's not. I swear. OK, Dummy? Come here. Have a seat. Tell me about work. How's the site?

(CHUCKIE takes a seat at the table and FRANCES wraps her arms around him from behind his chair.)

CHUCKIE

Good. Still a ways to go, though.

FRANCES

That's good, isn't it?

(CHUCKIE shrugs.)

FRANCES — CON'T.

Well, you have a job. At least for as long as it takes to build. So that's good, right?

CHUCKIE

Don't start.

FRANCES

I didn't say anything.

CHUCKIE

You were about to.

FRANCES

I wasn't. Honest.

(CHUCKIE escapes her arms and wanders around the kitchen, checking things out. He opens a cabinet and looks inside. He opens the refrigerator and stares at its contents for a moment.)

FRANCES — CON'T.

What are you doing? Get outta there.

CHUCKIE

I'm just looking.

FRANCES

Look but don't touch.

(CHUCKIE comes up behind her and kisses her on the neck. It's fun playing grown-ups and pretending this might be their life.)

CHUCKIE

(teasing)

I can touch you, though, right? Even though I'm not *Frank*.

FRANCES

Come on. Don't be jealous.

CHUCKIE

I'm just kidding. You know that. And I know you wouldn't fuck an old guy like that.

FRANCES

Just let me cook here, OK? Go sit down.

(But CHUCKIE sees a note on the counter, which he picks up and reads.)

FRANCES — CON'T.

What are you doing? Chuckie!

CHUCKIE

(reading)

Frances? They call you Frances?

(FRANCES tries to take the note away from him.
But he reads it aloud and plays keepaway.)

FRANCES

Give me that.

CHUCKIE

(reading in a phony upper crust accent)

My dearest Frances...

FRANKIE

It doesn't say that!

CHUCKIE

Ooh, here's where it gets really dramatic...

(reading more, same accent)

...don't forget to pick up dog food and go to the pharmacy.
There's a package there for Offie. Who's *Offie*?

FRANCES

It's a nickname.

CHUCKIE

What does it mean?

FRANCES

I don't know. Gimme that.

(But he continues keeping it out of her reach.)

CHUCKIE

Offie. Greer. Lot of weird names around here. You want to be called Frances?

(FRANCES shrugs, not unlike we've seen FRANK do a bunch of times. Then she successfully grabs the note and puts it in her pocket).

CHUCKIE — CON'T.

Next they'll be calling you Muffy or Buffy or something ridiculous like that.

FRANCES

I like Frances. It's mature. Professional.

CHUCKIE

You're a babysitter.

FRANCES

I'm a research assistant. For a successful author. He was on the *New York Times* best-seller list, you know.

CHUCKIE

You told me he was fired from *The Post*.

FRANCES

He resigned. In protest. The new owner is an Australian or Republican or something. But being a best-selling author? That's a big deal. And besides, it's less confusing. With him being Frank and me being Frankie.

CHUCKIE

Why didn't he change his name?

FRANCES

Chuckie...

CHUCKIE

I'm just saying. Doesn't seem fair if you ask me.

FRANCES

Nobody's asking.

(CHUCKIE retakes his seat at the table.)

FRANCES — CON'T.

You want some wine?

CHUCKIE

Got any beer?

FRANCES

Wine is better with what I'm making.

(FRANCES labors over trying to uncork the wine bottle.)

CHUCKIE

You need help with that?

(off her struggle)

My money's on the bottle, Babe.

(After this bitter battle, she finally manages to pull the cork. CHUCKIE claps when she finishes. She pours him a glass.)

FRANCES

Then you'd be a loser, Babe. This here's *Sauvignon Blanc*.

CHUCKIE

La di freaking da!

FRANCES

Would you stop with that?

(CHUCKIE goes to sip the wine, with his pinky finger raised and everything, but she puts her arm on his and stops him.)

FRANCES — CON'T.

Wait! You have to let it breathe.

(off CHUCKIE)

Let it air out a bit.

CHUCKIE

That's what Frank tells you to do?

FRANCES

Yeah, that's what Frank tells me to do. And he's right.

(They square off for a moment — is this worth starting a real argument over? CHUCKIE waits a beat then relents.)

CHUCKIE

Has it breathed enough now?

FRANCES

Yeah. Go ahead.

CHUCKIE

You sure?

FRANCES

Just drink the friggin' wine, Chuckie.

CHUCKIE

There's my girl! Was worried you were getting all Lady Di on me or something.

(He takes a sip.)

FRANCES

You like it?

CHUCKIE

It's good. Alive. Like, breathing. It's got lungs.

(off her)

No, seriously. It's good. Not as good as beer, but OK.

(FRANCES goes back to cooking and CHUCKIE takes another sip of wine and looks around like he could get used to this.)

CHUCKIE — CON'T.

Maybe I should change my name, too.

FRANCES

Charles is very distinguished.

CHUCKIE

Charles? Charles is a dick. I was thinking more like *Chuck*.

FRANCES

From Chuckie to Chuck?

CHUCKIE

Call me Chuck. Much more *classy*, don't you think?

FRANCES

Here. Eat.

(FRANCES serves him a plate.)

CHUCKIE

What is it?

FRANCES

Pork tenderloin with a white wine, sour cream and Dijon mustard sauce. It's made with the same wine we're drinking. Isn't that cool? Taste it.

(CHUCKIE tastes it and he likes it.)

CHUCKIE
(playing)
Yeah, it's *pretty* good.

FRANCES
Whaddya mean pretty good? It's delicious.

CHUCKIE
It is. I'm just teasing. Aren't you gonna eat? Sit down.

FRANCES
Yeah, but first...

(FRANCES takes a book of matches out of her pocket and lights the candles.)

CHUCKIE
Ooh, I like that. Sexy. Come here.

(FRANCES leans over and kisses CHUCKIE, then she makes herself a plate and takes a seat at the table. She pours herself a glass of wine and holds up her glass to clink with his.)

FRANCES
Cheers, *Chuck*.

CHUCKIE
Cheers, *Frances*. You know, I could get used to this.

FRANCES
Me, too.

CHUCKIE
It's fun, you cooking for me like this.

(They eat for a few moments in silence.)

CHUCKIE — CON'T.
So, the kid's alright?

FRANCES
Greer?

CHUCKIE

Greer. What a dick name.

FRANCES

He's a little kid, Chuckie.

CHUCKIE

Yeah, with a dick name.

FRANCES

He's sweet. I think he's scared of his mother. But then everyone's scared of his mother.

CHUCKIE

Even you?

FRANCES

Most definitely me.

CHUCKIE

That doesn't sound like you. What does she do again?

FRANCES

She has her own PR firm. Public relations. And does...
(making air quotes)
... *crisis management*.

CHUCKIE

What's that?

FRANCES

So much for your powers of deduction, MacGyver. It's exactly how it sounds. She manages crises.

CHUCKIE

Getting rich assholes out of trouble?

FRANCES

Just because they're rich doesn't mean they're assholes.

CHUCKIE

Uh, where we come from, it does.

FRANCES

There are plenty of assholes where we come from, too.

CHUCKIE

True. Just a different breed of asshole. But *crisis management*? People pay for that? How many crises can a person have?

FRANCES

Crises.

CHUCKIE

Don't be a dick.

FRANCES

That's how you say it. It's plural.

CHUCKIE

I don't give a fuck. It sounds ridiculous.

FRANCES

Whatever. It's right.

CHUCKIE

It's *right*...

(CHUCKIE throws his utensils on his plate.)

CHUCKIE — CON'T.

I don't know about all this...

FRANCES

What?

CHUCKIE

This isn't where we're from. It's fun to play and all, but it's not real.

(FRANCES looks down at her plate and doesn't respond.)

CHUCKIE — CON'T.

Aren't you gonna say something?

FRANCES

What do you want me to say?

CHUCKIE

You tell me.

FRANCES

What if I want better than where we're from?

CHUCKIE

You mean better than me?

FRANCES

(unconvincingly)

That's not what I said.

(FRANCES puts her hand on his forearm.)

FRANCES — CON'T.

It's just... for what I want, I have a lot of catching up to do, you know? I was so lucky to get this job. And they're gonna help me. You realize the doors they can open?

CHUCKIE

And then what?

FRANCES

And then I don't know.

CHUCKIE

I mean, and then what about you and me?

FRANCES

This has nothing to do with you.

CHUCKIE

That's what I thought.

FRANCES

Chuckie...

(FRANCES rises from the table and runs them each a glass of water from the sink.)

CHUCKIE

What?

(FRANCES doesn't respond.)

CHUCKIE — CON'T.

What's with all the quiet, Frankie? Talk to me. I feel like you haven't, like, really talked to me, since you graduated. Did something happen?

CHUCKIE — CON'T.
(looking around)

Besides all this?

(When the glasses are filled, she places them on the table and retakes her seat.)

FRANCES

It's like, my whole life... Manhattan's a beacon, you know? We spent our whole lives in Bay Ridge, like in a lighthouse, and a strobe light's been moving around in the dark, shining a light on all the other places we could be. But if we don't go beyond the lighthouse, if we don't leave Bay Ridge, then we'll never know what's out there. I wanna know what's out there. Don't you?

CHUCKIE

I'll go back to school, OK? I'll get my degree if that's what you want.

FRANCES

You don't have to...

CHUCKIE

I shouldn't have dropped out; I know that now. But the money is so good. I can't make this kind of money anywhere else. And if I get in the union? I'll be made in the shade.

FRANCES

You should do what you want. What's right for you.

CHUCKIE

That doesn't sound like you. And it doesn't sound good for me.

(FRANCES takes another sip of wine while he watches her. Then, after a beat...)

CHUCKIE — CON'T.

You know what you should do? Call the *National Enquirer* and tell them what dicks they are.

FRANCES

What are you talking about?

CHUCKIE

Anyone with this kind of money? An apartment like this? They have to be involved in shady shit.

FRANCES

Chuckie...

CHUCKIE

You wanna be a journalist? Write one of those books, like *Mommie Dearest* or something. Bet you can make a lot of money, with all their fancy friends and stuff.

FRANCES

They're not famous like that. And I'm not gonna do that. I'm not gonna do anything like that.

CHUCKIE

Well, then, don't cry to me when they don't do shit to help you and you're back in Brooklyn. And not the cool part, neither. You really think they're gonna help you?

FRANCES

Yeah.

CHUCKIE

What? *Offie's* gonna call her good friend Matt Lauer and tell him to hire you?

FRANCES

That's ridiculous.

CHUCKIE

That's what you're after, isn't it? That's why you're here babysitting that little dick.

FRANCES

Matt Lauer isn't gonna help me become a journalist.

CHUCKIE

Whoever then. What makes you think they're gonna help you?

FRANCES

Because that's the deal.

CHUCKIE

You have a contract?

FRANCES

No.

CHUCKIE

What do those old babysitters do now?

FRANCES

They're not in the business.

CHUCKIE

Neither are you.

FRANCES

Not yet. Look, they did this for different reasons.

CHUCKIE

Like what?

FRANCES

I don't know. For a chance to live in New York? For a job while going to grad school?

CHUCKIE

What did they do to help them? After?

FRANCES

I don't know!

CHUCKIE

Then how do you know that's *part of the deal*?

FRANCES

Because they said so.

CHUCKIE

What'd they say?

FRANCES

Would you just stop?

CHUCKIE

You should fuck them before they fuck you. That's all I'm saying. That's how it works.

FRANCES

This is my grad school, OK? J-school, which I could never afford without going into debt up to my eyeballs. I'm not here to be a babysitter with a college degree.

CHUCKIE

Good luck with that.

FRANCES

We'll see.

CHUCKIE

Yes, we will, *Frances*.

FRANCES

That's right, *Chuckie*. God, why do you have to be such a dolt? Why can't you be happy for me like a normal boyfriend?

(CHUCKIE takes another sip of wine, then drains the glass and holds it out to FRANCES to refill, which she does. Although she's really hurt.)

CHUCKIE

I'm just looking out for you. Once you're gone, they're never gonna think of you again. You're just the help.

FRANCES

Oh yeah, and what am I to you?

CHUCKIE

You're my girlfriend since the 9th grade. Does that mean nothing to you anymore?

(FRANCES puts her head in her hands.)

CHUCKIE — CON'T.

I'm just being honest. I don't want you to be taken advantage of by these people.

FRANCES

Maybe I won't be. Maybe they are what I think they are.

CHUCKIE

And what's that?

FRANCES

Good.

CHUCKIE

I'm totally taking the under on that. How much you want to bet?

(CHUCKIE sticks out his pinky finger to make a bet, but FRANCES rises and takes his plate away from him. He protests.)

CHUCKIE — CON'T.

Hey, I'm not finished. It's really good. I like it.

FRANCES

Well, I'm finished with you.

CHUCKIE

Come on. Don't be mad. We're just talking here.

FRANCES

I want you to go.

CHUCKIE

Come on, come back here. Sit down with me.

FRANCES

I said I want you to go.

CHUCKIE

No way.

FRANCES

Way. Get out.

CHUCKIE

Are you shittin' me?

FRANCES

I am most definitely not shittin' you.

CHUCKIE

I thought we were gonna have sex in their bed? That's the reason I'm here, right?

FRANCES

You see? That's how different we are, Chuckie. That was never gonna happen. You really think I'd do that?

CHUCKIE

The old, *real* Frankie would do that in a heartbeat.

FRANCES

You're vulgar, you know that?

CHUCKIE

I'm vulgar?

(swirling his arms around)

You know what's vulgar? This. This is vulgar. And how sucked in you are. How do you not see that?

FRANCES

I don't want to see you anymore. Go.

(CHUCKIE rises, reluctantly, and slowly makes to leave. But he's a bit in shock.)

CHUCKIE

You mean now go or forever go?

FRANKIE

(sticking out her pinky)

I'll take the latter on that.

CHUCKIE

You're freaking serious? After all these years? Just like that you're gonna break my heart?

(He's standing but he's not moving.)

CHUCKIE — CON'T.

You're gonna regret this, Frankie.

FRANCES

My name is Frances.

CHUCKIE

You better be sure because if I leave, *Frankie*, you won't hear from me again. Ever. So be good and sure.

FRANCES

Promise?

CHUCKIE

Alright?

FRANCES

Got it.

CHUCKIE

I'm out of here. But if I hear you're sleeping with that old guy, I swear to god..

FRANCES

Just go. Once and for all.

(He takes a long look at her but she won't make eye contact.)

CHUCKIE

Good luck living in make-believe, *Frances*. You're gonna need it.

(And then he's gone. FRANCES takes a moment and a deep breath, exhales, then rests against the kitchen table and blows out the candles.)

(BLACKOUT)

End scene.

SCENE THREE: A FEW MONTHS LATER

(FRANCES sits at the desk in her bedroom, taking notes and stopping and starting a microcassette recorder, which she uses to transcribe FRANK's interviews – these being pre-digital recorder days and all. It's a tedious endeavor.)

(She is dressed in layers and a wool hat. The heat's out again. But she rests her slipper-covered feet on the desk, comfortable and settled in her space.)

MALE VOICE

(on the recorder)

So we had to let her go... she was troubled. And trouble, if you know what I mean. Way too hot.

(This voice and another male voice on the tape share a short – yet conspiratorial – laugh. FRANCES, concerned by what she just heard, rewinds and plays this bit again.)

MALE VOICE – CON'T.

(on the recorder)

So we had to let her go... she was troubled. And trouble, if you know what I mean. Way too hot.

(FRANK appears in the opened doorway of her room. He flinches when he hears what she's listening to and interrupts...)

FRANK

Knock, knock.

(Now she flinches. He's surprised her. She shuts off the recorder but stays in her reclined position.)

FRANK – CON'T.

Didn't mean to scare you. It's almost time to get Greer. Just want to give you head's up.

(FRANCES doesn't look at him.)

FRANK – CON'T.

Frances?

FRANCES
(finally)

Uh-huh?

FRANK
Did you hear me? It's 3:30.

FRANCES
OK...

FRANK
And Patricia wants more cough drops, OK? Frances? Hello?

FRANCES
(staying put, though)
Is that you?

FRANK
Huh?

FRANCES
On the tape.

(She looks at the transcript notes in her hand.)

FRANCES — CON'T.
(reading)
So we had to let her go... she was *troubled*.
(finally looking at Frank)
Is that you laughing?

(FRANK half-heartedly shakes his head no. FRANCES
puts her feet on the floor and leans toward him.)

FRANCES — CON'T.
He's talking about his assistant. Who he fired for being
too attractive, which is probably the only reason he hired
her in the first place.

FRANK
Yeah, we're not gonna include that.

FRANCES
We?

FRANK
It's not relevant. To the story.

FRANCES

He *fired* her. For being *hot*.

FRANK

That's not the story. It doesn't matter. Doesn't matter...

(FRANK walks inside the small room. He thinks about sitting on the bed but decides against it. There isn't anywhere for him to sit so he kind of just looms about while trying to shrink at the same time. It's not like him to be in this space and it's awkward. He shivers at the cold.)

FRANK – CON'T.

Look, sometimes people say things they don't mean... they're just talking... happy to be listened to... you've heard of stream of consciousness? That's what you get for being a good interviewer, right?

(Unbeknownst to FRANCES and FRANK, PATRICIA, in her robe and carrying tissues – she's home sick – wanders into the kitchen and heads toward the refrigerator. When she realizes FRANK is in FRANCES's room, though, she moves closer to the doorway and listens to their conversation, careful to not be discovered.)

FRANCES

But you're writing a profile. This is part of that.

FRANK

(lowering his voice)

Look, I feel sorry for the girl. I really do. But I need to focus on the story I'm hired to write. In this case, it's a no-big-deal profile about a celebrity and his new job as a talk show host. Not his assistant. Not his family or personal life. It's not an expose.

(There's a long beat while FRANK tries to think of a new approach.)

FRANK – CON'T.

Look, are you learning? Is being here, working with me, giving you valuable experience?

FRANCES

Of course, but...

FRANK

And I trust you're happy that I let you have friends over when we're out of town?

FRANCES

Yes, you've been very nice...

FRANK

And drink my wine?

(off FRANCES, who looks at him like,
How do you know that?)

I know my wine. It's expensive stuff. Did you really think I wouldn't notice?

FRANCES

You've been very *generous*...

FRANK

So, what's the problem?

(FRANK moves over to the door and closes it. PATRICIA, pissed off at what she's heard and the fact that she can't hear any more, stays for another beat then does what she came to the kitchen to do – get the orange juice out of the refrigerator and pour a glass.)

FRANCES

You told me journalism is meant to *comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable*.

FRANK

That's right... but I'm in a different place right now. You see that, right? Jesus, why am I explaining myself to you?

(PATRICIA replaces the OJ in the fridge and looks once more toward the door to FRANCES's room. Then she takes her glass and exits the kitchen back into the depths of the apartment, sneezing into a tissue as she goes, which she hopes they didn't hear. They didn't.)

FRANCES

Sorry, I know you miss the paper. It's just... sometimes I think I'm learning the wrong things. Or in the wrong ways.

FRANK

You're learning reality. An incredible life lesson if you ask me.

FRANCES

But this speaks to character; you're writing about who he is.

(FRANK comes closer to her, which he means to be engaging but might not seem that way to FRANCES even though he's smiling. FRANCES looks at the door; she's uncomfortable that it's closed.)

FRANK

Listen to you. *It speaks to character.* That isn't something you'd have said, let alone thought, when you first walked through our door. I'm impressed.

(FRANCES is a bit flattered and also more than just a bit aware of his intention to flatter. Again, she looks at the door.)

FRANK — CON'T.

Look, journalists aren't the morality police, OK? We're neither judge nor jury. We just tell a story.

(FRANK senses her unease and, realizing his mistake, opens the door, looking into the kitchen to make sure no one is there.)

FRANCES

So there's no obligation? Or responsibility?

FRANK

In every story, in all reporting, you make choices. What's relevant? What pushes the story forward? What really matters? You can never tell the whole... of anything. Especially in a magazine...

FRANCES

Puff piece?

(Ouch.)

FRANK

Just because something's mostly positive doesn't mean there isn't some truth or gravitas to it.

FRANCES

What happened to her? The assistant?

FRANK

There's only so much I can do...

FRANCES

But you were *laughing*.

FRANK

I was staying on the side of my subject so he'd continue talking, OK? If I had told him what I really thought? That he's a pig and a predator? There'd be no more story. He would shut it down and then where would we be?

FRANCES

But you're a reporter.

FRANK

Who is meant to be impartial. Who isn't meant to judge.

FRANCES

So he gets to behave like this? His whole life? He's a star, so everyone's gonna let him get away with it?

FRANK

Look, you're from Bensonhurst, right?

FRANCES

Bay Ridge.

FRANK

Right.

(referencing himself)

Park Slope, but not fancy Park Slope like today. That's why I, we hired you. We wanted to expose Greer to people like us. You and me. We wanted him to know something of the world I came up in, OK? That's why we hire girls from my alma mater and not Offie's. State schools. Not Ivy League.

FRANCES

What does that have to do with this?

FRANK

If you stay in Bay Ridge, you have your own conflicts you need to navigate. Things you have to do that maybe you don't want to. *In the neighborhood* kinds of things, right?

FRANK — CON'T.

But here? In the city? In journalism? These are epicenters for certain situations... *choices*.

FRANCES

You can still stand up for things. And stand for things. Didn't you say you became a writer because of your great Irish crusaders?

FRANK

Yes, but let's be realistic... I'm not in a position at the moment...

FRANCES

They stand for things. That's why you're a journalist. And why I want to be one.

FRANK

Look. Look at your old boyfriend, what's-his-name?

FRANCES

Chuckie?

FRANK

Right, Chuckie. Chuckie from Brooklyn works in construction, right? He's a construction worker? He's making some money. He's rising up in the world. Trying to get in the union?

FRANCES

Yeah. So?

FRANK

Do you think everything he's asked to do is on the level? Above board? On the old up-and-up?

FRANCES

Chuckie's an honest guy.

FRANK

I don't doubt he is. Or is most of the time. Or tries to be. But there is no way that he, or his bosses, or the developer or contractor or whoever he comes in contact with, isn't cutting corners over here, or stiffing someone over there. In this city? Come on. That's life. And as you evolve, or grow into bigger places... the dilemmas? The stakes? They get higher. And if you're gonna live in the real world? If you're gonna really compete?

FRANK — CON'T.

(giving up)

Ah, you'll find out soon enough.

FRANCES

Seems I already have.

FRANK

God, I miss being a kid. The idealism is so, so...

(blowing a chef's kiss)

The world makes you bloody, Frances. To accept that is to accept reality. It's the only thing you can do. And you can take that to the bank.

(FRANCES rises and puts on her coat.)

FRANCES

I have to go get Greer. I don't want to be late.

FRANK

You have to understand. You're a smart girl. It's a tough business.

FRANCES

I should walk Gus before I go. Excuse me.

(FRANK moves closer, blocking the doorway a little.)

FRANK

Look, journalism isn't about saving people.

FRANCES

I guess it depends on which people we're talking about. I gotta go, Frank. Can you please fix the heat? It's too cold to sleep in here anymore.

(FRANCES skooches by him and exits. FRANK looks around her room. He sees her transcription notes on the desk and takes a look through the pages. He then looks through her desk drawers and notices more copies of his transcribed interviews in a stack of manila folders — he picks up the stack and carries it out of the room.)

(BLACKOUT)

End scene.

SCENE FOUR: WINTER 1994

(PATRICIA sits at the kitchen table while FRANCES clears the dishes after the dinner they just had together. PATRICIA is relaxed and an entirely different person from who we saw in the first scene. She's even drinking a beer!)

PATRICIA

So on the first date, he told me his entire life story from birth till college and then, on the second, which was dinner at some godforsaken hole-in-the-wall that I was afraid of but was all he could afford so I decided to find charming, he told me every single thing that had happened from graduation up until that night.

FRANCES

That's epic!

PATRICIA

It was exhausting. But he was the first person in his family to go to college and get out of Brooklyn, blah blah blah, so it was a big deal.

FRANCES

He never asked you anything about yourself?

PATRICIA

Not a single thing.

FRANCES

What is wrong with them?

PATRICIA

If you ever find out, make sure to let me know. I've spent a lifetime trying to figure that out.

FRANCES

They're still like that, you know. I can't even begin to tell you some of the dates I've been on. So self-centered.

PATRICIA

Since time immemorial, my dear. Just wait till you get older. They get worse.

FRANCES

They really are from Mars...

PATRICIA

Don't be trite, Frances. You can be many things – any number of things – but never trite.

FRANCES

I'm just trying to be nice. Isn't that your author?

PATRICIA

You don't have to be *nice* to me. And you don't have to remind me when I sell out, either.

FRANCES

Sell out? That book was a huge success.

PATRICIA

That depends on what your definition of success is, doesn't it?

FRANCES

Sorry, I didn't mean anything.

PATRICIA

And stop apologizing, for god's sake. What is it with you young women? It's exhausting! All you ever say is sorry, blah, blah, blah, sorry. Where in the world did that come from? Say what you want about the women of my generation but at least we don't say sorry about things we're not the least bit sorry about.

FRANCES

I know. It's like a habit.

PATRICIA

It's *like*, not the worst one.

(FRANCES opens the fridge to help herself to a beer. She grabs the bottle opener off the table and cracks open her beer.)

PATRICIA – CON'T.

Help yourself, Frances.

FRANCES

I will. Thanks.

PATRICIA

And do the dishes later. Come here. Sit down.

(PATRICIA holds up her beer to toast with FRANCES.)

PATRICIA — CON'T.

I'm a one Corona woman. Two at the most. Three I'm under the table. Four I'm under the host.

(PATRICIA clinks her bottle against FRANCES's.)

FRANCES

That's hilarious.

PATRICIA

Ode to a martini. Dorothy Parker.

FRANCES

Who's that?

PATRICIA

Oh, Frances, if you're going to be a writer you need to know Dorothy Parker. We have her biography in the library. I suggest you read it.

FRANCES

OK.

PATRICIA

She was a true wit. Sharp. Acerbic. Didn't suffer a single fool. And didn't protect any, either.

(PATRICIA toasts herself on that last comment and takes a sip.)

FRANCES

Cool. I'll definitely read it.

PATRICIA

(teasing)

Cool. Now please take a seat. You're making me nervous moving around all over the place.

(FRANCES does as she's told and very happily retakes her seat across from PATRICIA.)

PATRICIA — CON'T.

Where was I?

FRANCES

Frank never asked you any questions and he only talked about himself.

PATRICIA

Right. Thank you. It's nice to have someone around here who pays attention to me. I'm actually incredibly interesting, you know, even if Frank is the shinier object.

FRANCES

That's not true.

PATRICIA

Oh, please. I don't need you to try to make me feel better.

FRANCES

OK, but Greer does, too. Pay attention to you...

PATRICIA

Only because he's terrified... What about your mother? Does she terrify you?

(FRANCES shakes her head no.)

PATRICIA — CON'T.

Now there's a ringing endorsement!

FRANCES

My folks are fine, but living here, with you guys? It makes you realize there are so many different ways to be. Like, growing up? We always had dinner at 5:30. On the dot. But here? You don't eat till 7 or 8 sometimes.

PATRICIA

That's quite an example, Frances.

FRANCES

It's why I want to be a journalist. To see how other people live. I mean really live. To inhabit them and their lives. To *understand*.

PATRICIA

I don't find other people all that interesting...

FRANCES

How can you say that?

PATRICIA

Very easily. I just did. But you are more than welcome to disagree with me. I'll allow it.

FRANCES

One summer, my parents took us to Amish country...

(PATRICIA rolls her eyes but FRANCES keeps going.)

FRANCES — CON'T.

It was a big deal because we didn't really take vacations. There are six of us. Six kids.

PATRICIA

Hell. On. Earth.

FRANCES

Right? So we piled into the family truckster...

(off PATRICIA)

... station wagon... anyway, I remember meeting an Amish girl with my name. Frances. She was selling pretzels at a farmers' market and she had my birthday. The same year and everything. I wanted to know all about her; how she was and wasn't like me... what she thought, what she was allowed and wasn't allowed to do. I wanted to know what separated her from me. Would you believe I still think about her? After all this time. Do you have anyone like that? Who sticks in your mind?

(PATRICIA seems moved by what FRANCES just said and thinks for a moment.)

PATRICIA

Bobby Kennedy.

FRANCES

Bobby Kennedy?

PATRICIA

I had just graduated from college and was lying around at home, in Connecticut, day after day, and then he was killed. Like everyone else I was transfixed; I couldn't stop watching the damn TV. And then I couldn't take it anymore so I came into the city with my father. He went to work and I hobbled about... I did this for a day or two and then I decided I would get a job. Within a week I was working at Edelman, a PR agency, and it changed the entire

PATRICIA — CON'T.

trajectory of my life. If Bobby hadn't been shot, I would have spent that summer going to dances, dating stuffy local boys who all worked in finance like my father...

(playfully holding her nose at this)

... and I sure as hell never would have gone out and made a life for myself. Everything would have been different so, yes: Bobby Kennedy.

(raising her beer, again)

To Bobby.

FRANCES

(raising hers, too)

To Bobby.

(PATRICIA takes a sip as if by doing so she is paying homage to this memory and its meaning.)

FRANCES

So, then what happened? With Frank?

PATRICIA

Oh. We had those two dates and then we were engaged. Within six months. Married in nine. And we've been living ever-so-happily in wedded bliss ever since.

(PATRICIA cracks herself up with this.)

FRANCES

I wouldn't think you'd be someone to get married so fast.

PATRICIA

No?

FRANCES

You just seem so...

PATRICIA

Careful, Kid... I sign your paychecks.

FRANCES

You just seem so *practical*.

PATRICIA

Let me share a little secret with you. Sometimes, a man will make a decision about you, and it seems you don't have much of a choice in the matter. I think that's what happened with me. With Frank. He decided he wanted me, for

PATRICIA — CON'T.

whatever reason he thought he believed at the time, and there probably wasn't anything I could do to stop him.

FRANCES

That's kind of romantic.

PATRICIA

I don't know about *that*. But the funny part? When I think about it? He wanted to be a journalist, and talked about it incessantly, and yet he never asked me any questions. Never took the time. Some journalist. He was probably afraid of the answers.

(PATRICIA snorts. FRANCES just stares — kind of awed by the fact that they're having this conversation. Like peers.)

FRANCES

Why did you marry him?

PATRICIA

Surely, he has some redeeming qualities. But what the hell did I know? Women just kind of got married. And stayed married. Not like today.

(off FRANCES, who makes to say something but stops)

What?

FRANCES

Nothing. Sorry.

PATRICIA

Stop with the sorry and ask. The offer won't last long. I promise you.

FRANCES

Really? It's OK?

PATRICIA

Don't be exhausting.

FRANCES

OK. Um. So, what does Offie mean?

PATRICIA

You've lived with us, for what? Four months?

FRANCES

Five.

PATRICIA

Five months and you're just asking now? Frank hasn't told you?

(off FRANCES's no)

Good for Frank for a change. Well, my father, may he rest in hell, never wanted children. He couldn't be bothered. But my mother was quite a bit younger and she prevailed. Anyway, he called me *Offspring*. Rarely, if ever, used my actual name.

FRANCES

Offspring?

PATRICIA

Offie for short. I don't like it at all, mind you, but Frank loves it. Thinks it's hilarious. He and my brother are the only ones who call me that.

FRANCES

You have a brother?

PATRICIA

Investment banker. Very successful.

FRANCES

What did your pop call him?

PATRICIA

James.

FRANCES

That's weird.

PATRICIA

Totally weird.

FRANCES

What about Greer?

PATRICIA

What about Greer?

FRANCES

Where does his name come from?

PATRICIA

My mother's maiden name. I wanted to give him a normal name, but Frank likes what he thinks are fancy things, so...

(FRANCES is wide-eyed at this.)

PATRICIA — CON'T.

Oh, come on. Surely, you've noticed Frank isn't really the easygoing, down-to-Earth guy from Brooklyn he wants people to think he is?

(re: their surroundings)

He loves all this! Which is fine, what with all of us containing multitudes and all that. But sometimes I think I shouldn't have gotten married. I'm still not sure I'm the marrying kind. Never get married, Kid, you hear me? OK, my turn.

FRANCES

For what?

PATRICIA

A question.

FRANCES

Really?

PATRICIA

You've got nothing to hide, right? Ok, here's my little question. Ready?

FRANCES

Ready.

PATRICIA

Frances?

FRANCES
(so excited)

Yes, Patricia.

PATRICIA

Can we trust you?

FRANCES

Huh?

PATRICIA

We've let you into our lives, into our home... with Greer...
Can we trust you?

FRANCES

Of course. Why would you even ask that?

PATRICIA

How can I not?

FRANCES

Have I done something to...?

PATRICIA

(interrupting)

While you've been here, you've been exposed to some
sensitive information, wouldn't you say?

FRANCES

No.

PATRICIA

No?

FRANCES

I don't know what you mean.

PATRICIA

Oh, come off it. You can be honest with me. Think about
what I just told you, about my marriage.

FRANCES

What about it?

PATRICIA

Do you tell your friends about us?

FRANCES

No!

PATRICIA

Did you tell your boyfriend? I know he came for dinner one
time.

FRANCES

We broke up.

PATRICIA

I overhear things, too, you know. This apartment is big, but it's not that big. Did you tell him about us? Show him things? Be straight with me; don't be obsequious.

FRANCES

I don't know what that means.

PATRICIA

It means an obedient, groveling, sycophantic *servant*. You're not a servant, are you?

FRANCES

No.

PATRICIA

So, let me repeat: Can we trust you?

FRANCES

Patricia, I swear.

PATRICIA

Frank trusts you. I don't know why.

FRANCES

You don't?

PATRICIA

I don't trust anyone.

(off FRANCES)

Don't look at me with your 'that's sad' face. I actually find it very helpful. In life.

FRANCES

What could I even do to you? If I tried?

(PATRICIA just looks at her.)

FRANCES — CON'T.

I admire you so much...

PATRICIA

That's just something you'll have to live with, I suppose.

(laughing and taking the edge off)

Well, the good news is I can't imagine there's much of anything that would be of interest to the outside world. And I do think you're an upstanding person, relatively

PATRICIA — CON'T.

speaking, who has been kind to my son. So, at the very least, I thank you for that.

FRANCES

Thank you.

PATRICIA

I'm thanking you.

FRANCES

Yes, right. You're welcome.

PATRICIA

But you have been privy to a lot. Family conversations. Frank's interviews. It goes with the territory, living with us. You have to realize that. And I hope you'll be responsible, and loyal, when you leave.

FRANCES

Of course I will!

PATRICIA

And keep what you know to yourself. We take a very big risk every time we let someone through our door. And let's face it, how you came to us? Very cunning.

FRANCES

Cunning?

PATRICIA

You just happened to be at that alumni dinner...

FRANCES

It was my job!

PATRICIA

Knowing Frank would be there, receiving an award...

FRANCES

I worked catering while considering grad school...

PATRICIA

Knowing we'd be hiring a new nanny soon. How long had you been keeping tabs on us?

FRANCES

I don't see how...

PATRICIA

Had you been asking the other girls about us?

FRANCES

Patricia, it never occurred to me to be anything but a good...

PATRICIA

A good what?

FRANCES

Assistant. Nanny. Whatever you needed me to be.

PATRICIA

Good. That's good. I believe you; I do. And I know you'll prove my belief in you to be well-founded. But just in case...

(PATRICIA rises and ambles over to the counter, where there are some manila folders, similar to the ones FRANK saw in FRANCES's desk drawer in the previous scene. PATRICIA peruses one, removes a piece of paper and places it on the table. She takes a pen, too, and repeatedly clicks the nib open and shut.)

PATRICIA — CON'T.

I want you to sign this.

FRANCES

What?

PATRICIA

It's an NDA. A non-disclosure agreement. It means you promise to never discuss what you hear or see during your time with us with anyone else. Very standard practice. I trust you understand why this is important to me.

FRANCES

You want me to sign it?

PATRICIA

Yes. It's really not a big deal, as long as you remain trustworthy, which I know you will.

(FRANCES looks at PATRICIA and then at the NDA. PATRICIA holds the pen out to her.)

PATRICIA — CON'T.

This will go a long way toward making sure we're all on the same page. Moving forward. It's like a pre-nup before the wedding; people do it all the time to make sure everything's on the level. On the up-and-up.

(FRANCES, not really having any say in the matter, waits a beat, then takes the pen and signs the paper. PATRICIA takes the paper from her and puts it back in the folder, which she tucks under her arm.)

PATRICIA — CON'T.

Good girl. Easy breezy. Well done.

(re: FRANCES's beer)

Why don't you finish that and get started on the dishes? The guys should be home soon.

(FRANCES looks at her beer and, confused by what just happened, slams it.)

PATRICIA — CON'T.

You don't have to rush, Silly!

(FRANCES wipes her mouth with the back of her hand and starts putting dishes from the sink into the dishwasher.)

PATRICIA — CON'T.

I'm going to take a bath then off to bed. Make sure Greer's bookbag is ready for the morning, OK?

(PATRICIA rises from the table and hands FRANCES her empty beer bottle.)

PATRICIA — CON'T.

And make sure to rinse this before putting it in the garbage.

(PATRICIA heads for the door.)

PATRICIA — CON'T.

Thank you for dinner. And the company. I had a nice time. Didn't you?

(FRANCES just looks at her but doesn't respond through her shock.)

PATRICIA — CON'T.

Sleep tight.

(PATRICIA exits the kitchen. FRANCES goes to rinse her beer bottle but looks at it a moment instead. Then she walks over to the trash can and dunks it in there. Defiant.)

FRANCES

Offspring...

(She leaves the rest of the dishes in the sink and turns out the kitchen light.)

(BLACKOUT)

End scene.

SCENE FIVE: SPRING 1994

(FRANK stands in FRANCES's bedroom doorway, facing FRANCES, who is in a summery dress, seated cross-legged and barefoot on her desk, taking notes that he dictates.)

FRANK

And make sure to get the pesto and penne and that should do it. And two Tuscan loaves so we have extra. And remember I have the Spacey interview tomorrow, so you'll be able to get started on that right away. Oh, and one more thing.

(motioning to her bare feet)

Do you mind? Socks, maybe?

(FRANCES lets her legs and feet dangle over the side of the desk.)

FRANK — CON'T.

Offie wanted me to mention... this is the time when, traditionally, those who've been in your position tend to kind of check out. Spring is in the air, there are only a few weeks before the end of the school year... it can be hard to keep going.

(FRANCES makes to say something but thinks better of it.)

FRANK — CON'T.

Look, I'm not criticizing you. You're doing a good job. I'm just pointing out that I know it's tough to stay motivated. To remain focused going into the home stretch. So I want to be clear, and tell you that how these next few weeks go will determine what we'll be able to do for you...

FRANCES

What?

FRANK

We'll talk before you leave. At that time, you can tell me your top choices, the pie-in-the-sky and, as long as there's no conflict of interest, we'll see what we can do. Sound good?

FRANCES

But I thought...

FRANK

What?

FRANCES

There's no guarantee?

FRANK

Frances, we might be able to open a door or two, but you're going to have to walk through it yourself.

FRANCES

Yes, I know, but...

FRANK

But what? I can't guarantee anything. That's up to you.

FRANCES

But I thought...

FRANK

What?

FRANCES

Never mind.

FRANK

Don't worry. Everything will be fine.

(turning to go)

Oh, Gus hasn't been out since this morning so take him out before you go, OK?

(FRANCES rises to her feet, slowly, and it dawns on her that she might just have been bamboozled. That happened so fast. She musters all the courage that she can.)

FRANCES

Wait. Frank?

FRANK

Hmmm?

FRANCES

You're saying you'll decide when the school year ends whether I'm worth it to hold up your end of the bargain?

FRANK

I wouldn't use quite that language.

FRANCES

What language would you use?

FRANK

Look, the arrangement is for you to work with us for an entire school year... we're not there yet. We'll discuss this in earnest when you're there.

FRANCES

I work *for* you. Not *with* you. I'm your employee.

FRANK

Yes, and as my employee, I pay you a salary..

FRANCES

Offie pays me..

FRANK

(ignoring this)

... and provide room and board in exchange for certain specified duties. Household, childcare..

FRANCES

And as your assistant. That's what I'm putting on my resume. Research, transcription, correspondence, not babysitting, grocery shopping and dog-walking.

FRANK

And for those services, and the fulfillment of those duties, we will be happy to help however we can in the pursuit of your intended job choice following your time with us. Isn't that what you understood when you came to work here?

FRANCES

Yes.

FRANK

Then I don't see a problem. Do you?

FRANCES

Not if it's what you say.

FRANK

Then we're on the same page. So don't look so worried.

(But she does look worried.)

FRANK — CON'T.

We don't own a business, Frances. We can't just hire you in perpetuity. Next year, Greer will be old enough to go to school with his friends. We won't need any more babysitters.

FRANCES

Patricia owns a business.

FRANK

You want to work in PR?

(off her no)

OK, well, I don't own a newspaper, magazine or publishing company, so I can't hire you... You don't trust me, do you?

(FRANK reconsiders his position in the doorway and decides to take a seat on her bed, which he's never done before. He leans back and makes himself comfortable, making FRANCES largely uncomfortable.)

FRANCES

(avoiding eye contact)

No. I do.

FRANK

That doesn't sound very convincing. I'll ask it another way: Do you trust me?

FRANCES

(reluctantly)

Yes.

FRANK

So, when this is all over, we'll part as friends, right? You, me, Offie... we'll be happy for the time we had together?

FRANCES

And Greer. Uh-huh.

(FRANK seems less comfortable at the mention of his son's name and sits upright, putting his hands on his knees.)

FRANK

I don't know that I believe you. What's going on? Did something happen?

(FRANCES shrugs a FRANK shrug.)

FRANK — CON'T.

It's the NDA, isn't it? I told Offie that wasn't necessary, that you're a good person. But you know how particular she is, always dotting Is and crossing Ts. Sorry if that was awkward. But it was just to keep things on the up-and-up. For you as much as for us, understand?

FRANCES

I didn't realize I was a crisis she needed to manage.

FRANK

Is that what you think? Nah... come here. It's OK.

(FRANK holds up his arms, inviting FRANCES to hug him. She does not want to join him there.)

FRANK — CON'T.

It's been nice having you here. I should have told you that a long time ago. You've become part of the family; don't you know that? Come here. We're gonna take care of you.

(FRANCES slowly walks toward him. FRANK pats the bed next to him and motions for her to sit, which she does, slowly and reluctantly. It's awkward.)

FRANK — CON'T.

Trust me, Frances... don't you trust me?

(The song "If I Ever Lose My Faith in You" by Sting begins to play as FRANK holds FRANCES's chin in his hand and looks like he might lean in to kiss her.)

(BLACKOUT)

End Scene.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO: TWENTY-FIVE YEARS LATER

Scene One

(FRANK, now 75, shuffles onto the bare stage. He stands in front of the curtain and a podium that has a bizarre, freemason-like seal affixed to it. A spotlight seeks to find him; FRANK adjusts to its glare before starting his speech. There's a phantasmagorical look and feel here – although the audience may not know it, this isn't real.)

FRANK

(pretending to hear applause)

Thank you, thank you very much. You're too kind.

(pretending the applause has died down)

And thank you for being here tonight. It is a great honor to receive the Walter Duranty Award for Excellence in Journalism. In appreciation, I will do what I have wanted to do for a very long time. I will tell the truth.

I'll start with a confession. I have been complicit. I am an accomplice. For years, I fed the gluttonous, deplorable beast that is our ever-degrading culture; I continually stood by as it devoured and poisoned and debilitated any chance for a just and righteous society. And now, there isn't anything I can do to change the past and make things right.

As a result, I have guilt, and I try to assuage my guilt by practicing the dark art of self-flagellation. This is for naught, however, for when night comes – and I find myself alone during the hour of the wolf – I dream of cockroaches; headless, airborne, beer-guzzling hordes of cockroaches. In this, my night-terror landscape, they pinch and bite and scream, rendering me panicked and sleepless, with no one and nothing to console me. Least of all myself.

But these nightmares are far from my greatest fear. No, that is reserved for you seeing me, once and for all, for what I've been. Revelation. Exposure. Naked.

This dread consumes me. The panic of being laid bare in the manner in which I should have exposed so much and so many is the peak of what one might call delicious irony. Well, this irony is not lost on me.

But I am not alone. For decades, all of us stood in rooms like this one, with those at the highest echelons of society, knowing they were predators and criminals and charlatans and rapists, yet we aided their success and abetted their wealth, grateful for the scraps they granted us and our hurting profession.

We should have known. Some 2,500 years ago Plato foretold that, one day, democracy would give rise to a tyrannical leader filled with "false and braggart words." And here we are. We knew him to be just so yet, still, we enabled him. And we enabled those who gave him – and continue to give him – voice, by rubbing elbows, by not condemning. We couldn't have hurt ourselves more by doing nothing.

But now, each night, I take my punishment. And just before the insects of the order Blattodea infest my dreams, I say a silent prayer: *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.* But I know this prayer won't be answered. What I have done and haven't done is unforgivable. What I have done and haven't done has not only empowered unrighteousness, it has fostered and fomented it, too. And I am too weak to confess my sins.

Instead, I will accept your award, even though I deserve nothing but exposure and shame. But I cannot bear to bring that upon myself, so I will not say these quiet things out loud. Rather, I will sprinkle praise upon my colleagues-in-arms while offering a meager rebuke of some of our milder trespasses so that you might think me forthright and deserving. Then I will thank my wife and my son, who know the truth about me, but in their faithfulness – or mortification – will not bring themselves to speak of it.

So, tonight, with feigned humility, I will bow my head and accept your applause, all the while waiting for the hour of my exposure or death, grateful for whichever comes first, and what I hope will be, at last, sweet relief.

Until then, my life is a question Sylvia Plath once asked in a poem: *Is there no way out of the mind?* Plath was able to commit suicide in 1963. What a lucky woman.

(Blackout.)

End scene.

SCENE TWO: 2019 - LATER THAT NIGHT

(We are inside FRANK and PATRICIA's living room, back in the Classic Six. The room takes up the entire stage. Three exits lead to different places: one to the front door; the other to the bedrooms offstage; and the last one toward the kitchen, now in the back of the apartment.)

(We hear muffled OFFSTAGE voices as a key works to unlock the front door.)

FRANK (OFFSTAGE)

I still can't get over it.

PATRICIA (OS)

Yes, it was quite a shock.

FRANK (OS)

Such a nice surprise.

(FRANK and PATRICIA lead the way inside for FRANCES, now 47, and MARTIN, FRANCES's partner. When they enter the apartment, FRANK takes everyone's coats as they chitchat on their way into the living room. FRANCES looks around, taking it all in.)

MARTIN

We could have helped with the books and the cake..

PATRICIA

No, no, no, they're bringing everything by later. There's nothing for us to do. I'm just sorry Greer isn't here. He would be so happy to see you, Frances.

FRANCES

How is he?

PATRICIA

Good, good. Living in London. Married to an English woman. *Phoebe*..

FRANK

She's lovely.

PATRICIA

She's *fine*. A little cold, but then she's posh so that comes with the territory.

FRANK

You don't say?

(FRANK gestures jokingly at FRANCES – look who's talking? – but FRANCES only half smiles and turns away.)

PATRICIA

(ignoring her husband)

Anyhoo, where were we?

FRANK

We were telling Frances and...

(motioning to MARTIN)

Michael?

MARTIN

Martin.

FRANK

Right, right. Martin. We were telling Frances and Martin what a surprise it was seeing them tonight.

PATRICIA

After all this time; what a thing. To just turn up like that. Out of the blue.

MARTIN

I've heard quite a lot about you.

PATRICIA

Not all horrible, I hope?

MARTIN

Not *all*... Francie's time with you, *here*, was seminal.

PATRICIA

Was it? How does it look to you, Frances? More or less the same?

(FRANCES looks around, considering PATRICIA's question.)

PATRICIA — CON'T.

We haven't changed much at all.

FRANCES

It just seems a little smaller.

PATRICIA

Well that's typical, don't you think?

FRANCES

It doesn't loom as large. That's what I mean.

FRANK

(re: the coats)

I'll put these away.

(to PATRICIA)

Why don't you get them a drink?

PATRICIA

What do you think I am? A heathen who would allow our guests to suffer from thirst? Of course, I'll get them a drink. Don't you worry!

MARTIN

It's so nice of you to invite us over. I imagine you weren't expecting company tonight.

(FRANK disappears into the back rooms. PATRICIA heads toward the bar.)

PATRICIA

It's not every day we get to see one of our old *charges*... and out of the blue, just like that!

(surveying the bottles)

So, what can I get you? Calvados? Cognac...?

FRANCES

Got any scotch?

PATRICIA

Ooh, look at you.

FRANCES

What?

PATRICIA

It just takes some getting used to seeing you...

FRANCES

As an adult?

PATRICIA

As a peer.

FRANCES

Well, I guess that's better than an indentured servant.

PATRICIA

Oh, Frances. Really?

(FRANCES shrugs, seeming more like her 22-year-old self than the middle-aged woman she is now. MARTIN motions to her to settle down.)

PATRICIA — CON'T.

Is that how you saw yourself back then?

(FRANCES doesn't answer.)

PATRICIA — CON'T.

Well that's just silly. We adored you when you were here. Especially Greer. Martin, did you know that Frank taught Frances how to cook?

MARTIN

I didn't. She's a terrific cook, though.

PATRICIA

She became quite serviceable in the end. If memory serves.
(to FRANCES but without looking at her)
How do you like your scotch?

FRANCES

Smoky.

(PATRICIA contemplates her myriad bottles and chooses one.)

PATRICIA

Don't you have expensive tastes? Just like Frank. Neat?

(FRANCES nods but PATRICIA doesn't see her.)

PATRICIA — CON'T.

Hmm?

FRANCES

Yes, neat.

PATRICIA

Martin? Can I interest you in a tot of scotch?

MARTIN

That'd be great. Thanks.

(PATRICIA starts pouring their drinks and FRANCES and MARTIN take their seats.)

PATRICIA

Of course. Sit. Please. People always make me nervous when they hover and loom about. Like vultures ready to pounce and pick my brain. Isn't that a horrible expression? Why in the world would I let anyone *pick my brain*? I get that all the time from young people; can we meet so I can pick your brain? I never say yes, mind you. So, Martin? Did I hear you say you work in television?

FRANCES

He's a producer on *The Lens*.

PATRICIA

Is that a network show?

MARTIN

Amazon.

PATRICIA

Ah, the belly of the beast. I'm always stunned to remember network shows no longer exist.

MARTIN

Barely, anyway.

(PATRICIA hands them their drinks, then carries her own and takes a seat.)

MARTIN — CON'T.

(looking at his scotch)

Francie has the same glasses.

PATRICIA

The Riedels? We've had those for years.

FRANCES

You gave these to Frank for Christmas in '93. You had me giftwrap them.

PATRICIA

How in the world do you remember that?

FRANCES

(to MARTIN)

I had never stepped foot inside a Williams-Sonoma before. I bought these for myself the moment I could afford them.

PATRICIA

Like I said, expensive tastes... I imagine you got that from living here.

(joking to MARTIN)

And a touch of *Single White Female*, am I right?

(FRANK rejoins them. He looks at PATRICIA:
Where's my drink? She turns her back so he has to pour one for himself, which he does; a very large pour.)

PATRICIA — CON'T.

(to FRANK but not directly)

Martin is a producer on one of those investigative TV shows. Isn't that interesting?

FRANK

Uh-huh.

PATRICIA

What kind of *investigations* do you do?

MARTIN

The usual, I guess.

FRANCES

Tell them what you're working on now.

MARTIN

Oh, it's a horrible story... all around.

FRANCES

Tell them.

MARTIN

You may have heard of it. Five or six years ago, a college professor was shot and killed. Upstate. There were no clues, suspects, nothing. His wife was pregnant and gave birth two months after the murder. So sad. The trail was cold for years.

FRANCES

Turns out the murderer was a former student.

MARTIN

With whom he had a *thing*.

PATRICIA

A *thing*?

MARTIN

She claimed he had taken advantage of her... she essentially confessed in a Me Too group chat on Facebook.

FRANCES

She killed him. Bought a gun, learned how to shoot and POW! Pre-meditated.

PATRICIA

How awful. How did he *take advantage* of her?

MARTIN

Sex. What else? She said it was 'semi-consensual but very confusing.'

PATRICIA

What does that mean?

MARTIN

When she was arrested, she said she suffered from PTSD. Said he doomed her, causing anxiety and trust issues... she couldn't sustain relationships...

PATRICIA

Oh, dear god...

FRANCES

What? You don't think that's a *thing*?

PATRICIA

Rape is a thing. Assault is a thing... *semi-consensual but very confusing*? I don't know what that means. I can't take

PATRICIA — CON'T.

that seriously, especially if it results in killing someone.

FRANCES

Different people have different thresholds for..

PATRICIA

For what?

FRANCES

For what constitutes abuse. To them.

PATRICIA

Yes, but to go kill someone? There's no excuse for that.

MARTIN

In any event, my team broke the story.

PATRICIA

Well, bully for you, I suppose.

FRANCES

Some might say he deserved it. The teacher.

MARTIN

Francie...

FRANCES

You can understand the anger.

PATRICIA

Yes, anger is a very powerful motivator. But channel it somewhere for god's sake. Make use of it.

FRANCES

It festers...

PATRICIA

But don't *kill* somebody.

MARTIN

I don't think anyone is advocating that.

PATRICIA

I should hope not...

MARTIN

Anyway, I guess a moral of the story is sometimes we get to do good work. In media. Right, Frank?

PATRICIA

What's good about that story?

MARTIN

We helped solve a murder and bring a killer to justice. Sad as the whole thing may be.

FRANK

If it bleeds it leads will never go out of style.

PATRICIA

Oh, look who's here. I was wondering when you were going to join us.

FRANK

(ignoring her)

Which is both a blessing and a curse.

FRANCES

How is that a blessing?

MARTIN

The human appetite for stories of power, violence, revenge...
(motioning to FRANK)
Keeps us in business, right?

PATRICIA

And a curse?

MARTIN

Because the human appetite for these stories has remained unchanged since the beginning of time.

FRANK

Since we slithered out of the primordial ooze.

MARTIN

And anything to save a besieged industry, right?

FRANCES

Ah, yes. The full Machiavelli. Absolves everyone of everything, doesn't it? So convenient.

(FRANCES walks toward the bar to help herself to more scotch.)

PATRICIA

Help yourself, Frances.

FRANCES

I will. Thank you.

FRANK

(to FRANCES)

Let me get that for you.

FRANCES

Please. Don't bother.

(FRANCES hesitates before pouring, though, having noticed something on the bookshelf.)

FRANCES — CON'T.

That's new.

(FRANK, PATRICIA and MARTIN turn to see what she's looking at. It's a state-of-the-art atomic clock.)

PATRICIA

The clock? It's atomic. Never tells the wrong time. I love it so much I can't even begin to tell you.

(FRANCES chuckles.)

PATRICIA — CON'T.

Why is that funny? You're a silly one, aren't you?

FRANCES

The clocks. You were so upset.

PATRICIA

What are you talking about?

(to FRANK)

What is she talking about?

(FRANK looks like he wishes he could hide in his drink. FRANCES, meanwhile, tops off her scotch then retakes her seat by MARTIN and never answers PATRICIA.)

(MARTIN reaches for FRANCES's hand and she squeezes it for a moment but doesn't hold it. FRANK remains standing.)

PATRICIA — CON'T.

I have to say, it was so nice seeing you tonight. And not just because you were the only people there who weren't so old you might have keeled over and died right in the middle of Frank's speech...

FRANK

Patricia...

PATRICIA

But also because I had wondered what happened to you, Frances. When you left. But then I kind of forgot... You know how that goes? Time gets away from us.

FRANCES

I never forgot about you.

PATRICIA

How nice. Isn't that nice, Frank?

FRANK

It's nice to hear.

PATRICIA

If it's any consolation, we don't keep in touch with any of Greer's old babysitters.

FRANCES

Wow. You sure know how to make a girl feel special.

MARTIN

Francie's said she learned everything she needed to know about life right here. With the two of you.

PATRICIA

Well that should count for something.

FRANCES

I said *from* them. Not *with* them. There's a difference.

PATRICIA

Is there?

FRANCES

With implies complicity. *From* indicates separation.

PATRICIA

From also means a starting point.

(thinking)

And with... is most often a willing participant.

FRANK

Never mind semantics. Can we just say it's nice to see each other again after all these years? You look very well, Frances. I'm happy to see that.

(FRANK holds up his glass. MARTIN raises his, too, but FRANCES doesn't.)

FRANK — CON'T.

To Frances. Welcome home.

(As he says this, they all drink, awkwardly, but FRANCES doesn't. PATRICIA doesn't want to, but for now she's keeping up appearances.)

MARTIN

Hear, hear!

(to FRANCES)

Who says you can't go home again?

(MARTIN says this rhetorically, but FRANK is animated for the first time since they came through the door.)

FRANK

Ah, Tom Wolfe! Honorary member!

MARTIN

Pardon me?

FRANCES

Frank became a writer because of his favorite Irish journalists. The crusaders.

FRANK

My fighting Irishmen!

FRANCES

Jimmy Breslin...

FRANK
From Queens...

FRANCES
... Pete Hamill...

FRANK
Brooklyn; like me.

FRANCES
And, to a lesser extent, Wolfe.

MARTIN
Why lesser?

FRANCES
Because he wasn't from a borough and therefore not truly worthy.

FRANK
You remember? I'm so glad you remember! God, that makes me feel good.

FRANCES
Yes, but this was never my home, so it doesn't apply here.

(This takes the wind out of FRANK's sails.)

PATRICIA
Yes, she was only here a short time.

FRANCES
Nine months. Not that long. Not that short.

FRANK
Wolfe's dead now... and Breslin... almost everyone gone.

(FRANK retreats back into his funk.)

PATRICIA
Anyhoo, on a slightly more comedic note... Frances, you must tell us what you've been up to all these years, besides marrying this lovely man. Any children?

(FRANCES shakes her head no; it's clearly an uncomfortable subject.)

MARTIN

We're not married. We only met a few years ago. And Francie doesn't believe in marriage, much to my chagrin.

PATRICIA

(mostly to herself)

Lucky Frances...

FRANCES

(quickly changing the subject)

You said Greer is doing well?

PATRICIA

Wonderful, wonderful... as far as we know, anyway. He's not the most communicative person. We see him at Christmas, sometimes, but he's not one for the phone or chit chat.

FRANCES

I've seen him a few times. Over the years.

PATRICIA

You have?

FRANCES

Here and there.

PATRICIA

I didn't know that. Frank, did you know that?

(FRANK shakes his head no.)

FRANCES

Actually, Martin and I had a lovely lunch with them a while back. Greer and Phoebe. When we were in London.

PATRICIA

(disingenuously)

How nice!

MARTIN

I had a shoot there. Francie joined me.

PATRICIA

Just wonderful.

FRANCES

Phoebe is lovely.

PATRICIA

Isn't she, though?

(PATRICIA nurses her drink, sulking about this.)

PATRICIA — CON'T.

He's rather busy. Greer. Very successful.

(to MARTIN)

Runs a hedge fund.

MARTIN

Yes, he told me.

PATRICIA

Oh, right. Sorry. Must be the scotch getting to me.

(PATRICIA takes another sip of her drink then looks at FRANK for help and he tries to rejoin the living.)

FRANK

So, how did you know about tonight's *festivities*?

FRANCES

Martin is on the board. You have him to thank for your award.

MARTIN

Well, not entirely...

FRANCES

(to FRANK)

He nominated you.

PATRICIA

Isn't that something?

FRANK

Well that's nice to hear! Thank you, Martin.

MARTIN

Frankly, I don't know who's more deserving. Your career... resigning before Murdoch took over the *Post*...

FRANK

I couldn't stick around for that...

PATRICIA

He had integrity.

MARTIN

... to your *celebrity work*...

FRANK

I was just trying to stay alive... in the game...

PATRICIA

And resourcefulness.

MARTIN

... then on to some of the hardest-hitting exposes in recent years. And the books?

PATRICIA

It was a natural progression, wasn't it, Frank?

FRANCES

And long overdue, perhaps?

PATRICIA

(pointedly to FRANCES)

He made it back to where he always should have been.

FRANK

Thank you, Patricia. I like to think that's true.

(He gives his wife a wan smile, but she quickly turns away.)

PATRICIA

It's also the time we're in. Different eras herald different... what's the word I'm looking for?

FRANCES

Justifications?

PATRICIA

I was thinking more like opportunities.

FRANK

I'll put on some coffee.

FRANCES

No, you should stay, Frank. The conversation's just starting to get interesting.

(But FRANK ignores her, exits and heads toward the kitchen. After he's gone, FRANCES rises and walks around the room, once again taking it in.)

FRANCES — CON'T.

You had a lot of parties in here.

PATRICIA

Sure did.

(to MARTIN)

Frank likes to entertain. Not so much anymore. I don't. Who wants to be bothered with blah, blah, blah small talk all the time?

FRANCES

They always looked like fun.

PATRICIA

We still have parties from time to time. You'll have to come next time. Save us from all the dinosaurs we're surrounded by these days.

FRANCES

I didn't spend a lot of time in this room. It always made me feel...

PATRICIA

How?

FRANCES

Like a guest.

PATRICIA

I'm glad you were comfortable.

(But that's not what she meant. FRANCES keeps wandering and PATRICIA tracks her while trying to not look like she's tracking her.)

MARTIN

(to PATRICIA)

Francie said you owned a PR agency?

PATRICIA

Still do, but it's very different now. At least my involvement is. It's no longer the days of the PR maven, you know. That ship sailed eons ago.

MARTIN

But you're still involved?

PATRICIA

They'll have to pry it from my cold dead hands. These days I spend most of my time with just a few exclusive clients; my hard-luck club.

FRANCES

(air-quoting)

Crisis management.

PATRICIA

Those being sued for this or being accused of that. There's an endless stream of resentment out there, let me tell you... I just don't understand it. What do you expect from people? Get up, dust yourself off and move on. That's what I was taught and that's what I always did when there was a hardship somewhere. I think that's the only way to go, don't you? Even though everyone has a god-forsaken platform these days to say whatever the hell they want and blame everyone else for this or that. The rest of us be damned!

(MARTIN listens politely but FRANCES is lost in thought, looking at the books and photographs placed among the bookcases. She picks up a book and looks at the cover.)

PATRICIA — CON'T.

What are you doing over there, Frances? Come where we can see you.

FRANCES

Just looking at the Dorothy Parker.

PATRICIA

Ah, *What Fresh Hell Is This?* She's always been one of my favorites... you can borrow that if you like. It's a wonderful biography.

FRANCES

Yes, I've read it.

PATRICIA

Well bully for you.

(to MARTIN)

Good taste, that one.

(FRANCES realizes PATRICIA doesn't remember their conversation about Parker all those years ago and returns the book to the shelf.)

PATRICIA — CON'T.

So where did you wind up, Frances? In what field? I always felt so sorry we couldn't help you as much as we wanted to.

(to MARTIN)

Too many conflicts, what with Frank and I both working in media to some degree... everywhere you turned there was a conflict. We were always mindful of that. Ethics and whatnot. I'm sure Frances has told you that?

(turning to where FRANCES stands)

But didn't we help with grad school? I seem to remember something about Columbia.

FRANCES

Uh-huh.

PATRICIA

That's right. We were your reference.

FRANCES

Yes, you were *one* of my references. Thanks again. So kind.

PATRICIA

I'm glad we were able to do that for you. Did you go to the journalism school?

FRANCES

I got a master's in history.

MARTIN

Now a Ph.D.

PATRICIA

Well isn't that something, Dr...?

FRANCES

Nolan.

PATRICIA

Right. Nolan. I wouldn't have taken you for a historian.

MARTIN

She's a professor. Tenured.

PATRICIA

Well, good for you!

FRANCES

I've always liked history. No matter how long it takes, it tells the real story and holds everyone accountable. Eventually...

(PATRICIA makes the same snorting sound she made earlier as FRANK rejoins them.)

FRANK

Coffee's on. Whenever you're ready.

(No one responds. There's a bit of silence until MARTIN breaks it.)

MARTIN

Frank, I really enjoyed your speech tonight.

FRANK

Well that's nice to hear.

MARTIN

Especially the part about your sister. I mean, the moment it recounted wasn't very nice, per se, but I like how you spoke about it.

FRANK

That look of disgust when I told her I was publishing again: *Another book?* I can still see her face. No one in my family ever cared, or understood, what a big deal it was... that I got where I got.

(PATRICIA airplays a tiny violin.)

FRANK — CON'T.

Patricia doesn't know what it's like to have to carve out a place for yourself in this world. Another life. So often at the mercy of others.

PATRICIA

Oh, please. We've all heard your sob story a million times about you and your bootstraps.

FRANK

God, you're a mean woman.

PATRICIA

(ignoring him; saying to MARTIN)

I've had obstacles, too, you know. Try building your own business, especially in this town. And as a woman? The level of bullshit one needs to endure, or overlook, is criminal, let me tell you. Although Frank knows a thing or two about *overlooking* things, don't you, Frank?

(to FRANCES)

And you, too, Frances. You worked for him. You know.

(But FRANCES doesn't bite. For now.)

MARTIN

(back to FRANK)

It's remarkable, though, isn't it? How you can spend your entire life working and finally draw praise from all kinds of serious people, but what really matters? At the end of the day? Those who knew you before your success. Old friends... family members...

FRANK

I never cared what anybody else thought but them.

PATRICIA

Oh, that's horseshit.

FRANK

It is not horseshit.

PATRICIA

You love every accolade, every drop of attention you get. From anyone, really.

(to MARTIN)

Frances never told you what a sucker Frank is for adoration? From any and all comers?

FRANK

I'm not saying I don't like a little attention. I'm human, aren't I?

PATRICIA

I don't know. Are you? Sometimes I'm not so sure. Like, maybe the seemingly charming, old school Irish guy from Brooklyn is really nothing but a world-class, phony wolf in designer clothing. What do you have to say about that?

(No one finds her funny, except FRANCES, who barely tries to conceal a laugh.)

FRANK

Jesus, Patricia. Would you stop already? You're embarrassing no one but yourself.

(PATRICIA smiles to herself, content with her comments.)

FRANK — CON'T.

(back to MARTIN)

I'm just saying that recognition doesn't matter as much as when it comes from those who went before.

FRANCES

Where did I fit in?

FRANK

Huh?

FRANCES

In your world. Back then. Did I matter?

FRANK

Of course you did.

FRANCES

Really? You cared what I thought? About you and your work?

FRANK

It mattered a great deal. You were my protégé.

FRANCES

(incredulous)

Is that how you saw me?

PATRICIA

(to FRANCES)

Is that why you came tonight? To see if you had an effect on us? To ask if you mattered?

MARTIN

(interrupting)

We came because I'm on the board and I asked her to come.

FRANCES

Martin...

MARTIN

Truth be told, she wasn't sure she wanted to see you again...
I had to talk her into it. Didn't I, Francie?

PATRICIA

Why would you give one whit, after all this time, what we
thought of you twenty-five years ago?

(Everyone is silent. Then, PATRICIA rises from
her chair and stands behind it, gripping its
shoulders.)

PATRICIA — CON'T.

I'm finding this all a bit unnerving, if you want to know
the truth.

FRANK

It's alright...

PATRICIA

Why are you here?

FRANK

Patricia!

PATRICIA

(ignoring him; to FRANCES)

Answer me.

FRANCES

I wanted to see you.

PATRICIA

Why?

FRANCES

I've been curious.

FRANK

That's human nature... it's OK.

PATRICIA

As long as it's not some vindictive exercise, I really
don't care. I might even say it's mildly entertaining.
Until it's not.

FRANK

What would she have to be vindictive about? We're all friends here, right?

FRANCES

Friends?

PATRICIA

I don't know about friends.

FRANCES

We were never friends.

PATRICIA

Why are you so angry, Frances? What do you think we did to you?

FRANCES

Why do you think I'd be angry?

PATRICIA

You tell us.

FRANCES

I don't believe you don't know.

PATRICIA

You know what? Your coyness is insufferable..

FRANK

Patricia..

PATRICIA

Here are the facts, OK? We employed you for one school year; we paid you, provided room and board, and gave you an invaluable education. At the foot of the master. It was a mutually beneficial arrangement that we both agreed to. The same one we had with several other young women before you. We owed, and owe, you nothing.

(to MARTIN)

We did right by her. We really did.

FRANK

Patricia, please!

PATRICIA

And if anything was so horrible, or if we treated you so badly, you could have left. At any time. No one was forcing you to stay.

FRANCES

You are absolutely right. I stayed of my own volition. I finished the job and stayed till the end.

PATRICIA

That's right. You did. Now let's discuss why you came to us in the first place, shall we?

FRANK

We don't have to get into all that...

(PATRICIA looks at FRANCES.)

FRANCES

Go on.

PATRICIA

You came to gain an advantage; a little quid pro quo, if you will. You work for us and do a good job? We'll hook you up through one of our various and sundry contacts. Isn't that why you showed up on our doorstep all those years ago? So bright-eyed and adoring? A little nothing from nowhere, enamored with her fellow Brooklynite, her hero writer, and wanting him to help her get a leg up?

FRANK

That's enough!

PATRICIA

Well, there it is. The truth as it's been all these years. You want to hold us responsible for I don't know what, yet you came here with your own plan to make more of yourself, to get ahead, by using us. Isn't that right?

(FRANCES doesn't say anything.)

PATRICIA — CON'T.

(to MARTIN)

That's what they all did, and what they do — they still do. It's OK. It's the way of the world. But now? I rest my case. And propose that we move on from this dreadful conversation. It's giving me a migraine.

(Another moment of silence.)

FRANCES

You want to know why I stayed?

PATRICIA

Not really, but sure, go ahead. Knock yourself out.

FRANCES

Because I always wondered... I wanted to know if you knew.

PATRICIA

Knew what for god's sake?

FRANCES

Now who's being coy, Offie?

PATRICIA

I don't respond to that anymore. And I honestly have no idea what you're referring to.

FRANCES

Did. You. Know?

PATRICIA

Did. I. Know. What?

FRANCES

You know what I'm talking about.

PATRICIA

I don't know what you're trying to accomplish...

FRANCES

I know you knew.

MARTIN

OK, Francie, that's enough.

FRANCES

I'll say when it's enough.

PATRICIA

Frances, you have no reason to harbor any ill will toward us... we did right by you. In the end.

FRANCES

Did you?

PATRICIA

Maybe not exactly what you wanted but we did help you.

FRANCES

(to FRANK)

Did you?

FRANK

You may not believe me, but I have thought about you. Many times over the years. Even thought about getting in touch.

PATRICIA

(incredulous)

Oh, Frank.

FRANCES

You did?

FRANK

Yes. But I was afraid. And now I would like to hear what you have to say. Whatever it is.

(PATRICIA reacts to this but doesn't say anything.)

FRANK — CON'T.

Please. Have your say.

PATRICIA

Frank...

FRANK

It's OK. We should hear it. I've been waiting a long time..

PATRICIA

(interrupting)

What he actually wants to know is if you've come here to blackmail us. With your *investigative reporter* boyfriend, to whom I'm sure you've told all our dirty little secrets. Is that what we're doing here? Come on. Let's go there already if that's where we're going.

(FRANCES remains quiet.)

PATRICIA — CON'T.

Let's take the gloves off, shall we? We know you made copies of Frank's transcripts, OK?

PATRICIA — CON'T.

(off FRANCES)

Don't look at me like that; we owned the desk drawer you kept them in, alright? They were ours, but we let you keep them rather than making it into a *thing*. We decided to trust you.

FRANCES

No you didn't!

PATRICIA

To trust you to do right by us like we had by you. We knew you knew everything; all about the secrets Frank chose to keep and how he kept quiet when he shouldn't have. You're not telling us anything we didn't always know.

(MARTIN moves closer to FRANCES as FRANK backs away from PATRICIA and turns his back to them.)

PATRICIA — CON'T.

And we knew also that you had all kinds of thoughts in your pretty little head about ratting us out for all the horrible things you thought we did to you. Why do you think we had you sign that NDA, which, just so you know, is enforceable in perpetuity? It never ends, in case you were wondering about that niggling little inconvenient fact. So, if you came here tonight to try to extort or bribe us, or whatever you think you're doing, it's not going to work. We will sue you into financial oblivion and, let me tell you something: We will win.

FRANCES

Oh, I don't doubt it. You always do, don't you? No matter the cost, or the crisis, you always win.

(PATRICIA goes to the bar to refresh her drink. But she decides against it and leaves her glass on the bar.)

(MARTIN stands next to FRANCES and puts his hand on her arm.)

(PATRICIA looks at the atomic clock.)

PATRICIA

I bought this clock, Frances, because it's the most reliable thing in my life. It's the only thing I can count on. My very own Big Ben; a perfect timepiece to watch over

PATRICIA — CON'T.

me and remind me that everything passes and fades, and only time itself — and *myself* — presses on. If you just let enough time pass you can endure anything... I certainly have.

(She turns to FRANCES.)

PATRICIA — CON'T.

We have thought about you over the years. We were terrified of what you might do. Reveal. And here we are. Is that what you came to hear? Are you happy now?

(The doorbell BUZZES, startling everyone.
PATRICIA goes to answer it and disappears. On her way out...)

PATRICIA — CON'T.

How's that for saved by the bell, huh?

(When PATRICIA is out of earshot...)

MARTIN

Why don't we all take a breather, OK? Just let's everyone take a break. I, for one, could use the bathroom.

(FRANCES points the way to MARTIN without saying a word.)

MARTIN — CON'T.

You OK?

(FRANCES nods and MARTIN heads OFFSTAGE, leaving FRANCES and FRANK alone.)

FRANK

Before you say anything, I want you to know that I really am happy to see you, and to know you're doing well.

FRANCES

You don't know how I'm doing.

FRANK

You're right. So, how are you?

FRANCES

(ignoring his question)

I've often wondered how it would feel to be back here.

FRANK

And?

(FRANCES doesn't answer.)

FRANK — CON'T.

Frances... I'm so sorry for any harm that was done... truly sorry. We... I didn't mean to hurt you.

(FRANCES doesn't answer. It's quiet for a moment.)

FRANK — CON'T.

It feels good to tell you that.

FRANCES

This ain't about you, Frank.

FRANK

I know. I'm sorry.

FRANCES

And I didn't come here to let you off the hook.

FRANK

I wouldn't expect you to.

FRANCES

But I didn't come to give you hell, either. There's no need for that now.

(He looks disappointed.)

FRANK

Then why are you here?

FRANCES

For me... I want to let it all go.

(re: the apartment)

This. Once and for all. It's taken up too much space in my life for too long.

FRANK

I would like that, too. For both of us. I've been... *troubled*..

FRANCES

You've been troubled?

FRANK

You have to understand, that was a very difficult time for me. Patricia and I... our marriage... the things she did for me... I could never live them down.

FRANCES

That's no excuse...

FRANK

I know. I know that now. But at the time? She loathed what I'd become. And so did I.

FRANCES

And what was that, Frank? How would you describe what you'd become? And what you think that meant for me?

(FRANK approaches her, moving slowly and standing a few inches before her. He reaches out to touch her face.)

FRANK

It was only a kiss, wasn't it? Please say it was only a kiss.

(MARTIN rejoins them in the room. FRANK backs away from FRANCES.)

MARTIN

What'd I miss? Everything OK in here?

(FRANCES nods and turns away. PATRICIA rejoins them now, too, carrying the leftover cake/box that was just delivered from the event.)

PATRICIA

Those dinosaurs are so sweet... and pathetic. They sent over a bunch of leftover books – and cake. We'll let you eat cake! Frank, where's the coffee? Our guests must be so caffeine-deprived!

(sighing)

Never fear, I'll get it. Let's continue celebrating our glorious reunion, shall we? Is everybody happy?

(PATRICIA stalks off toward the kitchen. FRANK makes to follow but FRANCES holds up her hand.)

FRANCES

I've got it. Stay.

(As FRANCES follows PATRICIA toward the kitchen, the stage revolves to reveal the set in Act One: the maid's quarters, now a storage room with little to no method to the madness – a bunch of papers and books; the word processor FRANCES used off in a corner; and an old rocking chair resting amidst the general detritus of FRANK's career. The kitchen features more modern appliances but essentially looks the same.)

(PATRICIA gathers coffee mugs from cabinets and places them on a large serving tray on the counter when FRANCES joins her in the kitchen. But PATRICIA's back is turned and she doesn't see who it is.)

PATRICIA

Let's not rush back out there, shall we?

FRANCES

No need. We have all the time in the world.

(PATRICIA turns and sees it's FRANCES.)

PATRICIA

I thought you were Frank.

FRANCES

No such luck. Just little old me.

PATRICIA

How delightful.

(FRANCES takes in the kitchen, where she spent so much of her earlier time here. PATRICIA continues with the mugs, coffee and plating pieces of cake. FRANCES doesn't help; she just watches.)

PATRICIA – CON'T.

Why do I feel like Tony in *West Side Story*, about to get popped in the playground? Come and get me, too, Frances. Come and get me, too!

FRANCES

You always were funny, in a mean and spiteful kind of way.

PATRICIA

Mean and spiteful is my brand. It's good to know I haven't lost my touch.

FRANCES

(re: the kitchen)

Everything looks the same.

PATRICIA

We're actually thinking of putting it on the market. *Downsizing*. Frank thinks it will help him feel less isolated. He hasn't been well, you know. For years. He's been shut down. Fatalistic.

FRANCES

That's too bad.

PATRICIA

I'm not saying that to elicit any sympathy, by the bye.

FRANCES

You wouldn't let me sympathize even if I wanted to, which I don't.

PATRICIA

See how well we know each other? And here you were worried that we'd forgotten about you.

FRANCES

You know what I just realized? I'm the age now that you were when I lived here.

PATRICIA

Really? Well, Kid, I bet life looks a bit different to you now, doesn't it? Perhaps a bit more complicated?

FRANCES

Well, for one thing, you don't scare me anymore.

PATRICIA

Are you sure about that?

FRANCES

You scared the hell out of me back then.

PATRICIA

I scared the hell out of everyone. You all got used to it, though, didn't you?

FRANCES

Eventually.

PATRICIA

That's too bad. But I was *decent* to you, wasn't I?

(off FRANCES)

Would you believe I honestly don't remember? That was a very difficult time for me. Us. There were so many large and small reasons that I can barely remember anymore. Perhaps you bore the brunt of some of that.

FRANCES

I was never afraid of anyone after you, so at least something good came of it. Helped me on my so-called ladder of success.

PATRICIA

Is that really how you remember me? Scary?

FRANCES

More like angry.

PATRICIA

I was angry. Still am. Totally pissed off. Life is some tough stuff, and it's hard to make amends with yourself let alone anybody else.

FRANCES

What do you need to make amends with? Or whom?

(PATRICIA considers her a moment.)

PATRICIA

It's just a figure of speech.

FRANCES

Is it?

PATRICIA

Right now it is. Yes.

FRANCES

You know something, Patricia? You were who I wanted to see tonight.

PATRICIA

Oh, lucky me!

FRANCES

Seriously. I just... I always wondered if you knew.

PATRICIA

Just come out and say it already, would you?

FRANCES

Will you tell me?

PATRICIA

You could be asking any number of things. Really. In the course of a lifetime.

FRANCES

I'm asking... about *Frank*.

(PATRICIA stops what she's doing and looks long and hard at her.)

PATRICIA

That's a rather large category, isn't it?

FRANCES

Patricia... we're just two women here.

(PATRICIA is just now realizing what FRANCES has been trying to say.)

PATRICIA

No...

FRANCES

Yes.

(There's a long beat between them. PATRICIA is stunned. She takes a seat at the table and rests her head in her hands.)

PATRICIA

Why didn't you tell me?

FRANCES

What should I have said?

PATRICIA

What you're saying now.

FRANCES

I was twenty-two. Your employee. A stranger in your house.

PATRICIA

That doesn't mean...

FRANCES

And you didn't trust me. I was incidental. Expendable. What would you have done?

PATRICIA

I don't know. I'm sorry to say but I don't know.

FRANCES

Did you know?

PATRICIA

I don't know. I honestly don't know. But why now? Why did you wait so long?

FRANCES

Because I can. *Now.*

PATRICIA

It took twenty-five years?

FRANCES

It takes a long time to allow yourself to know the truth. And then? When you finally accept the thing you've done everything in your power to reject? Everything to ignore or brush aside? Then there's nothing you can do but let it in, and try to figure it out, but not let it own you. Or destroy you. Then what? You know what happens next? Then you have no choice but to act; even if it's just for you. But I'm lucky. Lucky for me, things... *times* are different now.

PATRICIA

I'm glad about that.

FRANCES

Me, too... And I can tell you.

PATRICIA

Frank... he's come a long way...

FRANCES

Yes, I've followed along as he morphed into a paragon of justice and virtue.

PATRICIA

Maybe that's the best we can hope for? Any of us? To come *some way*?

FRANCES

Maybe...

PATRICIA

So, now what?

FRANCES

I haven't decided.

PATRICIA

But you're here.

FRANCES

Uh-huh.

PATRICIA

It's been a long time. Many lifetimes ago.

FRANCES

And yet it feels like yesterday. To me. Funny how that happens.

(PATRICIA rises and returns to the coffee tray.)

PATRICIA

Well, there's nothing I can do to stop you from doing what you will. But I am sorry. I like to think I would have... that I might have *done something*... helped somehow.

(PATRICIA lifts the serving tray and motions to FRANCES to get the door for her, which she does.)

PATRICIA — CON'T.

The NDA won't hold up in court, so do what you must. I won't come after you.

FRANCES

I know.

(PATRICIA pauses at the door.)

PATRICIA

I don't know what else to say. But I won't fight you. I think we've all had just about enough.

(re: returning to the living room)

Shall we?

(FRANCES looks toward the maid's quarters – her old bedroom.)

FRANCES

I'd like a minute. If you don't mind.

PATRICIA

Take your time.

(FRANCES moves toward her old bedroom. PATRICIA halts to say one more thing before exiting the kitchen.)

PATRICIA – CON'T.

Frances? I know you won't believe me but, for some reason I can't explain, it is good to see you. And that's the truth, which, as the saying goes, will set you free.

(PATRICIA stands still and watches as FRANCES walks inside her old room. Then she changes her mind about going back to FRANK in the living room. She quietly returns the tray to the counter and watches after FRANCES.)

(FRANCES enters her old room and takes it in as MUFFLED VOICES, as though from the past, are heard emanating from beyond deep inside the Classic Six. Unbeknownst to FRANCES, PATRICIA makes her way slowly toward the maid's room, too.)

(The kitchen and rest of the apartment fall away, revealing FRANK and MARTIN, now quiet and in low light, in the living room. FRANK slumps in a chair while MARTIN stands by the bookcase and touches the atomic clock.)

(FRANCES takes a seat in the rocking chair and doesn't mind when PATRICIA joins her. PATRICIA walks toward FRANCES and holds out her hand.

FRANCES pauses a moment, then takes PATRICIA's
hand as the light slowly turns to dark.)

(Blackout.)

END OF PLAY