

Sliding into Seniorhood

A Play in One Act

by Kim E. Ruyle

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Cast of Characters

<u>MATT</u>	Male, 50s; devil-may-care industrial-organizational psychologist with a sensitive side. Walt's son.
<u>VALERIE</u>	Female, 40s; confident and presumptuous neuropsychologist and professor. Sherry's niece.
<u>SHERRY</u>	Female, 60s; recently retired high school Spanish teacher; determined to succeed in first community theatre acting experience.
<u>WALT</u>	Male, late 60s – 70s; retired professor of Latin American history and resident of Nob Hill Manor; refined and nattily dressed.
<u>BONNIE</u>	Female, 60s; a legend in the local community theatre scene; vivacious, provocative, and at times outrageous; an open book.
<u>EDDY</u>	Male, late 60s – 70s; retired plumber and Nob Hill Manor resident where he relishes a well-deserved reputation as a lothario.
<u>AIRPORT ANNOUNCER</u>	Offstage voice announcing flights over intercom.
<u>STAGE MANAGER</u>	Offstage voice prompting actors over intercom.

TIME: Present day; January – April timespan

PLACES:

- 1) **Detroit Sky Club**, Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport.
- 2) **Nob Hill Manor**, senior living facility, Twin Cities.
- 3) **Theatre Thalia**, community theatre, Twin Cities.
- 4) **Gulf View Resort**, clothing optional naturalist resort, Florida.

Synopsis

The paths of six intriguing characters intersect as they navigate the unpredictable and challenging twists and turns of aging. On the slide into seniorhood, they encounter relationships and experiences, some painful, some sensual, and some just downright silly. When all is said and done, will they find that life has left them with anything more than simple memories?

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Sets

The stage is a composite of four compact minimalist sets. The first three sets are stationary. The fourth set is placed before the final scene.

Center Stage

1. Detroit Sky Club Two small tables, chairs, and a bar. On display, a board of flight arrivals and departures and sign displaying *Detroit Sky Club*.

Stage Right

2. Nob Hill Manor A sterile lounge with a card table centered in the room, and a couple of chairs. There is signage or other indication of the facility, *Nob Hill Manor*. Additional items, e.g., bland artwork and a potted plant, might reinforce the lounge setting.

Stage Left

3. Theatre Thalia Two small dressing tables facing downstage. When seated at their dressing tables, actors are looking into and through imaginary mirrors so they're facing the house. There is a racy poster or other signage referring to a production of *Calendar Girls*.

Apron or Down Center Stage

4. Gulf View Resort One or more chaise lounge chairs and a potted palm or other items to depict a Florida poolside setting.

Notes on Timing of Scene Changes

Except for final scene which requires some placement, scene transitions should be nearly instantaneous by shifting lighting from one set to another.

Scenes	When the Action Occurs, Suggested	Set
1; 4; 7; 10; 13; 17	Sunday evening; January 6 th	Detroit Sky Club
2; 5; 8; 11; 14	Sunday afternoon; January 27 th	Nob Hill Manor
3; 6	Tuesday evening; January 29 th	Theatre Thalia
9	Tuesday evening; February 19 th	Theatre Thalia
12	Wednesday evening; February 20 th	Theatre Thalia
15	Thursday evening; February 21 st	Theatre Thalia
16	Saturday morning; February 23 rd	Nob Hill Manor
18	Saturday morning, April 20 th	Gulf View Resort

SCENE 1

SETTING: Detroit Sky Club.

TIME: About 9 p.m. on a snowy Sunday evening in January.

AT RISE: VALERIE sits at a table studying an iPad as she nurses a drink. Her coat is draped over a chair. A carry-on bag is on the floor beside her and her purse is on the table. MATT enters carrying a briefcase and has a computer case slung over a shoulder. He stops to consult the flight schedule, then goes to bar, turns with a drink and looks around. He selects the table adjacent to Valerie and places computer and briefcase on a chair and then removes his coat which he drapes over the back of same chair. He sits in another, sips his drink and looks around, his gaze settles on Valerie, and he studies her intently. Then, more intently.

MATT

Valerie? Is it really you?

VALERIE

Uh, yes. Do I know you?

MATT

Oh, my god! It's really you.

VALERIE

I'm sorry.

MATT

(Excitedly rises with drink and takes a seat at Valerie's table.)

It's me! Matt!

VALERIE

I'm not sure –

MATT

Matt! It's Matt.

(VALERIE just shakes her head, no recognition.)

Really? You're going to pretend you don't recognize me?

VALERIE

We've met?

Really?

MATT

What?

VALERIE

Oh, god. You're still pissed. I am so sorry. Really. I wish there was something I could say...

MATT

VALERIE

(Relaxing a bit.)

It's OK. I think you've got me confused. Pretty sure we've never met.

MATT

Met?! We were married for eight months!

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 2

SETTING: Nob Hill Manor resident lounge.

TIME: Sunday, mid-afternoon, three weeks later.

AT RISE: WALT sits at a card table staring at a chessboard which is next to chocolate cake spiked with a single unlit birthday candle. Paper plates, plastic cutlery, and a book of matches are nearby. He clinches an unlit pipe in his teeth as he slowly moves one chess piece, then another. EDDY, wearing nothing but slippers, boxer shorts, and an open bathrobe, pads silently into the room, stands behind Walt, and observes the imaginary chess game in progress.

EDDY

I like the horse.

WALT

(Startled but doesn't take his eyes off the chess board.)

Knight.

EDDY

What about it?

WALT

It's called a knight.

EDDY

(Looks around the sunlit room.)

It's three in the afternoon. You're losin' it man.

WALT

(After a quick glance.)

Why don't you put some clothes on and let me teach you some chess?

EDDY

My medal.

WALT

What?

EDDY

You seen it?

WALT

You mean your *medallion*? It's so big – not really a medal.

EDDY

Medallions are veal.

WALT

You wear it like jewelry.

EDDY

Maybe pork. Medallions are meat.

WALT

OK. OK. It's a medal, then. Where'd you leave it?

EDDY

(On "Where'd.")

Beef or pork. Always meat.

WALT

(Turns and stares at Eddy's bare chest.)

Where'd you leave it?

EDDY

Uh, bed post, most likely.

WALT

Narrows it down.

EDDY

Ladies don't like it bangin' against their rear end or belly when we're, you know...

(Spreads his robe and does a couple of hip thrusts.)

'Sides, it's a weight hangin' 'round the neck.

WALT

Heavy lies the crown.

EDDY

It's a *medal*.

WALT

Brass is heavy, I guess.

EDDY

Bronze, not brass.

WALT
I'm impressed. Plumbers know their alloys.

EDDY
Where the hell...

WALT
Think.

EDDY
Maxine gave it to me.

WALT
She your last conquest?

EDDY
A medal, see. For my performance.

WALT
But which was the last bed post?

EDDY
Ol' gal's grateful.

WALT
Of your attention.

EDDY
That I can still get it up.

WALT
Will you put on some clothes?

EDDY
I know! What's her name at the end of the hall? Uses a walker.

WALT
You're referring to Mrs. Maxwell? Betty Maxwell?

EDDY
Yeah, Betty. Right after lunch.

WALT
With the walker?

EDDY

Yeah, we hooked up after lunch. First, she eats a hearty meal. Turkey and mashed potatoes. Some apple cobbler. Then we get down to business.

(Spreads his robe and spins in a circle.)

And now... Now she's sleepin' like a baby.

WALT

Well, there you go.

EDDY

Ol' gal nods off after every meal.

WALT

Uh huh.

EDDY

Guarantee it. Sleepin' like a baby.

WALT

Mystery solved.

EDDY

Yeah. Betty's bedpost.

(EDDY scampers to exit. WALT returns his attention to the chess board. EDDY returns momentarily wearing a gold medallion on a chain around his neck, bathrobe still open, and takes a seat.)

WALT

Like a baby?

EDDY

Ol' gal's not my favorite, but I'm a giver.

WALT

A real humanitarian.

EDDY

I'm a freakin' Albert Switzer.

WALT

Schweitzer.

EDDY

How 'bout you? Wanna help me service these gals?

WALT

You're totally inappropriate, you know? Really. Who is servicing whom?

EDDY

Whom? You're askin' *whom?* Ya don't hafta be a professor in here.

WALT

It's a valid question.

EDDY

Guy's gotta take what he gets. 'Sides, my view, the ladies 'preciate it. It's win-win. I get all the trim I want down the hall. Maxine, Dottie, Alice, even Betty with the walker. And I'm glad to share.

WALT

A real team player, aren't you?

EDDY

Tossin' my bread on the water.

WALT

So, you're not looking for reciprocity?

EDDY

The hell you talkin' 'bout, professor? I'm jes talkin' 'bout trim.

WALT

Trim is a nautical term, Eddy. As an ex-naval officer, I would prefer you use the word correctly.

EDDY

The hell you mean?

WALT

Trim. A balanced load to achieve the correct waterline.

EDDY

What is it, man? Johnson need a little starch? It's OK. It happens. And these gals don't mind goin' downtown to get the blood flowin'.

WALT

You don't know me.

EDDY

I can still get it up three, four times a day long as I don't eject.

I was in the Navy.

WALT

I fake it.

EDDY

Lots of ports. Lots of ladies.

WALT

The ejection'. I fake it. They never know, and I got, you know, lotsa energy.

EDDY

I get it. You've got stamina.

WALT

Yeah! That's it. Stamina.

EDDY

WALT
(Stares at Eddy long moment, considering.)
 Eddy, have you seen my...? Have you seen my butt?

EDDY
(Shocked to upright. An awkward pause.)
 Damn. I never figured you for –

WALT
 Listen to what I'm saying!
(EDDY waits.)
 You like bronze?

Uh.

EDDY

WALT
 Bronze propellers?

EDDY
 OK.

WALT
 I've got twin propeller screws tattooed on my rear end.

EDDY
 No shit?!

WALT

Honest to god. A propeller screw tattooed on each butt cheek.

EDDY

Yeah? Let me see!

WALT

Bronze propeller screws.

EDDY

Twin screws. My god!

WALT

Yes. Used to say they were to drive my torpedo home.

EDDY

Your torpedo?!

WALT

I was in the Navy. So, don't think you can tell me about the ladies.

EDDY

Hell, Walt. You're my new hero.

WALT

I know about the ladies.

EDDY

No. I believe it. A guy don't draw propellers on his ass not knowin' the ladies.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 3

SETTING: Theatre Thalia dressing room.

TIME: Early evening, two days later; just prior to the second rehearsal of *Calendar Girls*.

AT RISE: SHERRY enters carrying a script. She sets it on a dressing table and, facing the house, looks into an unseen mirror. She unbuttons her blouse, opens it wide to reveal a low-cut strapless bra. As she turns side to side checking herself in the mirror, BONNIE enters, pauses to grin.

BONNIE

Why don't you let those honey globes out? Let 'em see the light of day.

SHERRY

(Startled, pulls her blouse around her and plops into chair.)

I feel fat.

BONNIE

Yeah, well next to you, I'm a hippo, yet I love the way I look. Explain that.

SHERRY

(Looking down to study her own figure.)

No puedo explicarlo.

BONNIE

In English, damn it. This is a theatre, not your Spanish class. Get in character.

SHERRY

Sorry.

BONNIE

And stop apologizing for everything.

SHERRY

When will we have to practice without clothes?

BONNIE

Rehearse! You practice the piano. In here we rehearse. And you can take your clothes off tonight, you want to.

(Grinning, unbuttons and seductively removes her blouse.)

Want me to light the way?

SHERRY

You want to take your clothes off?

BONNIE

All good actors are exhibitionists at heart.

(Twirls her blouse before hanging it on a chair.)

Might be highly introverted, but we're all just looking for an excuse to take off our clothes.

SHERRY

God. Not me.

BONNIE

What do you think acting is? It's all about vulnerability. You get on the stage and bare your soul. You let go of yourself. Your ego. Shed your skin. Doesn't matter if you have clothes on or not. When we're on the stage, we're all naked. Totally exposed.

SHERRY

It's so –

BONNIE

Liberating! Like going to a nudist camp.

SHERRY

Right. And I suppose you've –

BONNIE

Every spring! A naturalist resort in Florida. Perfect training ground for an actor. I go when I have a break between shows, usually in April. Work on an all-over tan and practice my vulnerability.

SHERRY

Really? I'd be mortified.

BONNIE

Why? Cause you think you somehow wouldn't measure up? Look. Go into any Wal-Mart and round up shoppers. Old ones. Fat ones. Thin ones... as if you could find a thin shopper in a Wal-Mart. Grandfathers. Grandmothers. Teachers. God, so many teachers. Teachers love to get naked. You'd fit right in.

SHERRY

Not teachers.

BONNIE

Don't teachers shop at Wal-Mart? Strip all those Wal-Mart shoppers of their clothes and sprinkle them around a sunlit pool, some palm trees in the background. There you have it. A bunch of naturalists relaxing in the sun. You won't see George Clooney or Scarlett Johansson.

SHERRY

It sounds so –

BONNIE

Homogenous, what it is. Sure, you've got some variety. But stripped of clothes, we're all pretty much equal. Arms, legs, bellies. Dicks and tits and butts. Lots of butts.

SHERRY

I couldn't.

BONNIE

You could! Come with me! In April, after our show. I promise. You won't feel fat.

SHERRY

You have to take off... everything?

BONNIE

You're a total smoke show. Not that anyone would be overtly staring, but in that crowd, you'd be Venus. Aphrodite with a towel.

SHERRY

You can cover up with a towel?

BONNIE

To sit on. The only required accoutrement. Can't be parking a bare ass on a poolside lounge chair.

(Circling to study Sherry up and down.)

Yeah! Sherry the Smoke Show!

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 4

SETTING: Detroit Sky Club.
 TIME: Continuing from Scene 1.
 AT RISE: VALERIE and MATT are seated.

VALERIE
 We've met?

MATT
Really?

VALERIE
What?

MATT
 Oh, god. You're still pissed. I am so sorry. Really. I wish there was something I could say...

VALERIE
(Relaxing a bit.)
 It's OK. I think you've got me confused. Pretty sure we've never met.

MATT
 Met?! We were married for eight months! Long time ago but you can't have totally blocked it. I guess I have thickened up a bit.

VALERIE
(Now amused.)
 No. You've definitely got me confused.

MATT
 Henry Hall? Western Michigan U?

VALERIE
 No.

MATT
 Kalamazoo? 1987?

VALERIE
(Considering. Now really amused.)
 1987... In 1987, I was 13.

MATT
But your sisters! Veronica and, uh, ...

VALERIE
I have a brother.

MATT
Victoria! Vee! All your names start with V.

VALERIE
(Tossing back a laugh.)
Well, my brother's name is Victor.

MATT
Really?!

VALERIE
Yes. Really.

MATT
Amazing. But you're the image... You've really aged well.

VALERIE
Well, I guess I have a doppelganger then. And maybe I'm not as old –

MATT
But your name *is* Valerie?

VALERIE
Life is full of coincidences.

MATT
OK. Well, I feel like an idiot.

VALERIE
You're telling me... You really thought –

MATT
Yes. I did.

VALERIE
Mmm. You know... I thought –

MATT
Oh, hell. I'm sorry. I wasn't coming on.

VALERIE

No. I guess you weren't.

MATT

(Disappointed, stands to leave.)

Well, I'll let you get back to...

VALERIE

You don't have to leave.

(Grinning and gesturing to the vacant seat.)

Join me. My flight's delayed.

MATT

Mine, too.

(Quickly moves his stuff to Valerie's table and sits back down.)

You're not going to Shanghai, are you?

VALERIE

God, no. Paris.

MATT

Lucky you.

VALERIE

I guess.

MATT

Damn Detroit weather.

VALERIE

Not as cold as Minneapolis, but more snow.

MATT

You're from Minneapolis?

VALERIE

Mmm.

MATT

I grew up there.

VALERIE

And now?

MATT

Bowling Green, Kentucky. I'm Matt. Nice to meet you.

VALERIE

Nice to meet you, Matt. I'm ... well, you know.

MATT

Yes, Valerie. My long-lost college girlfriend. Her twin, anyway.

(Clinking glasses.)

Weird. I still think of her as my girlfriend instead of my wife.

VALERIE

Mmm... I nearly hit a deer near there. Long time ago. I was driving my Camry.

MATT

You hit a deer in Kalamazoo?

VALERIE

Bowling Green. *Nearly* hit a deer. Didn't you say you live in Bowling Green?

MATT

You've been to Bowling Green?

VALERIE

Passing through. Road trip with a boyfriend.

MATT

Oh. A boyfriend.

VALERIE

(Amused at his disappointment. Warming up.)

Long time ago.

MATT

Oh, that's good.

VALERIE

Good?

MATT

Well, yeah. I mean... Good that it was a close call. You know, good that you didn't hit the deer.

VALERIE

Mmm.

MATT

I've had some close calls, too. Wisconsin's the worst for deer. Don't you think?

(Shifts in his seat as VALERIE just grins.)

So, you live in Minneapolis. And what do you do?

Psychologist. VALERIE

I – O?! MATT

Uh...? VALERIE

I – O psychology? MATT

Oh, no. Neuro. VALERIE

Neuropsychology. Very cool. Cutting edge stuff. MATT

I think so. VALERIE

Well, that would have been too weird. MATT

What? VALERIE

I'm an I – O psych. MATT

OK. VALERIE

Yeah. Would have been weird if you were an I – O psych, too. MATT

And what's weird about I – O psychology? VALERIE

Not weird. Just another coincidence, I guess. Anyway... MATT

(Awkward pause.) VALERIE

So... Bowling Green...

MATT

What's really weird, I went to Bowling Green State for grad school. It's in Ohio.

VALERIE

Hypersensitive to weirdness, aren't you?

MATT

Uh...

VALERIE

What's weird about Bowling Green for grad school?

MATT

Oh. Well, it's in Ohio. I mean, I went to Bowling Green, Ohio, for grad school but ended up living in Bowling Green, Kentucky.

VALERIE

Not weird. Your destiny. For you, there's something about Bowling Green.

(Beat.)

You teach?

MATT

No, but I'll bet you do. Or research.

VALERIE

Both. Professor. U of M.

MATT

I knew it. You have a professorial air.

VALERIE

What? Stuffy?

MATT

What? No! No, no. Uh... *cerebral.*

VALERIE

You mean that as a compliment?

MATT

(Dallying and looking her up and down.)

Well, don't really know you well enough to comment on your appearance.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 5

SETTING: Nob Hill Manor resident lounge.

TIME: Continuing from Scene 2.

AT RISE: WALT and EDDY sit a table.

EDDY

Your torpedo?!

WALT

I was in the Navy. So, don't think you can tell me about the ladies.

EDDY

Hell, Walt. You're my new hero.

WALT

I know about the ladies.

EDDY

No. I believe it. A guy don't draw propellers on his ass not knowin' the ladies. Hey, Maxine and Dottie'd get a kick. Let's go show 'em those tattoos!

WALT

Take it down a notch, will you? Can't we be gentlemen?

EDDY

I's a plumber. Never said I was no gentleman.

WALT

All this catting around, it gives your life meaning?

EDDY

Now you're gonna get all philosophic?

WALT

(Shakes his head, takes moment, turns pensive.)

Eddy, do you have kids?

EDDY

Six. Believe it? All shit heels. Shit heels and pricks.

WALT

I've never seen them in here. Visiting.

EDDY
 Robby's the worst.

WALT
 What about grandkids?

EDDY
 Six kids poppin' 'em out. They gotta bunch a miniature shit heels runnin' around, jes like 'em.

WALT
 You know them? Your grandkids?

EDDY
 Robby stole my truck, he was sixteen, and plowed it into a Jag.

WALT
 Was he hurt?

EDDY
 Big parking lot at a movie, one a those with bookoo screens.

WALT
 A cineplex. Or is it multiplex?

EDDY
 Big parking lot and the Jag parked all to itself mile away from the theater. The owner, poor dumb bastard, thought it'd be safe out there. *No asshole gonna be puttin' a ding in my door.* Didn't count on Robbie. Little shit. Drunk as hell, and drives my truck straight on a beeline, you know. Head on in a goddamn parking lot. Totaled the Jag. Messed up my truck.

WALT
 I've only got two.

EDDY
 Trucks or Jags?

WALT
 Two kids. Never see my son. My daughter lives nearby with her kids. Two grandkids. Nearby, but still, almost never see them.

EDDY
 Yeah, well...

WALT
 It really bothers me. How are they going to know me? What does my daughter say about me?

EDDY
Kids. Whatcha gonna do?

WALT
But what's more important?

EDDY
Important than what?

WALT
Than our kids? More important than our grandkids?

EDDY
Damn, Walt. Soundin' like a wussy ol' grandma 'stead of a badass sailor, propellers on his –

WALT
You know who they are, don't you?

EDDY
Know who? *What?*

WALT
Your kids are *you*. Your kids. They're the way you live on. In the future. Your DNA. Your values. Your stories. Everything that you pass on to your kids. Your kids are your ticket to the future. Don't you think about that? Think about the future? Think about your legacy?

EDDY
Robby. The little shit's got my boat parked in his driveway.

WALT
You don't think about it?

EDDY
The boat?

WALT
Your legacy? You and I, we're not going to be around much longer.

EDDY
(Stands, shakes his head, and makes as to exit.)
Well, thanks, Walt. You know, you're one helluva motivational speaker.

WALT
Eddy!
(EDDY pulls up short and turns around.)
Come have a piece of birthday cake.

EDDY

(Sporting a big grin, moves to take a seat.)

Now you're talkin'.

EDDY

(WALT begins to cut the cake but stops as EDDY grabs his hand.)

Hold on professor. Gotta light the candle.

(WALT reluctantly leans back while EDDY lights the candle.)

Well. Go on then. Blow the sucker out.

(WALT blows out the candle and serves a piece of cake while EDDY rises and dances a little jig singing an improvised line or two of a birthday jingle before sitting down to tuck into the cake.)

WALT

(Studies EDDY who gobbles cake.)

Did you serve in the military?

EDDY

'64 I was in Nam. Semper Fi.

WALT

Our paths might have crossed. 1964, I was on a ship just offshore.

EDDY

Change the subject, will ya? Ya wanna talk about Nam, I'm gonna go see Maxine.

WALT

My grandkids don't know about my service. They don't really know me at all. I was a professor. I wrote books. Won awards. Thought I made a difference, but...

EDDY

(Finally takes a moment to consider Walt's dilemma and sadness.)

Show 'em your propellers!

WALT

What?

EDDY

Hell, yeah. Impress with the kiddies with those twin screws on your butt.

WALT

No. That's not –

EDDY

(Jumps up to gesture.)

Yeah! Grandkids braggin' you up at school! Give 'em a picture for show and tell! Lookit my grandpa! Those grandkids 'll be center of attention. You'll be talk of the playground!

(WALT just stares, uncomprehending.)

You got propellers on your ass. What else you need?

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 6

SETTING: Theatre Thalia dressing room.

TIME: Continuing from Scene 3.

AT RISE: SHERRY sits at dressing table. BONNIE stands beside her.

SHERRY

You can cover up with a towel?

BONNIE

To sit on. The only required accoutrement. Can't be parking a bare ass on a poolside lounge chair.

(Circling to study Sherry up and down.)

Yeah. Sherry the Smoke Show! Hey! You should bring that new guy with you. What's his name? The professor.

SHERRY

Oh, god. Walt. No way.

BONNIE

Walt a bit uptight, is he?

SHERRY

No. We're not...

BONNIE

What?

SHERRY

Some issues. I don't know. He's got issues.

BONNIE

What issues?

SHERRY

All I can say, my *dislike* of Che Guevara doesn't equal his *hatred* for Che Guevara.

BONNIE

Che Guevara?

SHERRY

Everything was fine until a couple days ago. He brought up Che Guevara, a favorite topic. You know, Walt's specialty is Latin American history. Even wrote a book to, "*debunk the legend of a Marxist troublemaker who is largely responsible for the ongoing squalid state of Latin America.*"

SHERRY (CONT.)

(Becoming animated.)

Anyway, I made the mistake of saying that you don't have to like his Marxist philosophy to respect his leadership ability. Oh, my god! He looked at me like I'd just shit in his soup bowl.

BONNIE

The hell?

SHERRY

You get it, don't you? I wasn't saying I liked the guy or agreed with his politics. But Walt is so damn intractable. He wanted me to exhibit the same burning hatred for the revolutionary that he feels.

BONNIE

That's not respect. You're a thoughtful adult and entitled to an opinion. Weren't you telling me the guy was respectful? Yeah. Those were your exact words. "*Walt is such a gentleman. So suave. So respectful.*"

SHERRY

I'm not supposed to care, right? It's not supposed to hurt. I mean we've only been seeing each other a couple of months, but...

BONNIE

He can't get past this?

SHERRY

He sent me an email. Said he'd like to take a break.

BONNIE

By email? What an asshole. But no worries. It'll be a snap to find a couple of fellas to take to the nudist camp. It's best we have guys along. Keep all the other meat twinkies from sniffin' round.

SHERRY

Walt would never go anyway. He'd be self-conscious of his propellers.

BONNIE

What propellers?

SHERRY

No. He made me promise.

BONNIE

Yeah. Promise what?

SHERRY

Uh, he's got tattoos.

BONNIE
Propeller tats?

SHERRY
The man graduated Annapolis.

BONNIE
So, what's the big deal?

SHERRY
Deal is, the propellers are on his rear end.

BONNIE
Oh, my god! That's rich! A suave, cultured professor with ass tats.

SHERRY
Big bronze propeller tattoos. One on each butt cheek. I guess he was quite a lady's man when he was in the navy.

BONNIE
One in every port.

SHERRY
But now he's just so... So stiff.

BONNIE
Sounds like a dream.

SHERRY
Inflexible. Stubborn. A proud, pompous, narcissistic prick.

BONNIE
Well, much as I'd like to get a look at his tats, I'll give some thought to some guys we might invite to go with us.

SHERRY
Don't get your hopes up. You haven't convinced me that getting naked will improve my acting, and I can't think about anything but this show right now. I really want to break free, you know? To let loose and nail the part. Or, at least, not embarrass myself. But I'm really in over my head.

BONNIE
Pippi's a good director. You'll do fine.

SHERRY
You know her birthday's the same day as our cast party. We should all chip in and get her something.

BONNIE

(Picks up the brochure from dressing table.)

How about a spa day? I was just checking out this new place on Nob Hill Boulevard.

SHERRY

What's it cost? A spa day.

BONNIE

Let's see... Ninety bucks for a Swedish massage.

SHERRY

How about a facial?

BONNIE

(Wicked grin and suggestive gesture.)

Oh, I love facials.

SHERRY

What's it cost?

BONNIE

Also, ninety bucks. OK, they got something they do with hot rocks. It's one twenty.

SHERRY

Is there a discount for a package? You know, a manicure, massage, facial?

BONNIE

Oh, oh! Here we go! They do vaginal rejuvenation!

SHERRY

Oh, god. You're awful. Pippi would be mortified.

BONNIE

Wow. Nine hundred and ninety bucks.

SHERRY

We could get a nice cashmere sweater.

BONNIE

Cashmere sweater's nice. A cashmere cooz, even better.

SHERRY

Get real. If the entire cast chips in, we could do a really nice sweater.

BONNIE

Says it's minimally invasive. Like some guys I know.

SHERRY

Please, just stick to the basic services.

BONNIE

No. Listen to this. They *traumatize the vagina to build scar tissue*. You hear that? Vaginal traumatization.

SHERRY

Please put that away. I'll poll the rest of the cast about a gift. Right now, I need to concentrate on the rehearsal.

BONNIE

Traumatization for the vag. Isn't there an app for that? Craig's List or Tinder, maybe.

SHERRY

Bonnie, please. I can really use your help. I'm completely out of my element here. The audition was just a lark. I came on a dare and didn't dream I'd get a part. I wasn't even trying.

BONNIE

Ha! That's the way it goes. You were relaxed.

SHERRY

Last night, I stunk up rehearsal. I can see, Pippi's thinking she made a mistake in casting me.

BONNIE

First piece of advice, learn your lines and get off book soon as possible so you can free your brain to just be in the moment. To react. The best actors never really act. Everything is a reaction.

SHERRY

I'm not sure –

BONNIE

Don't act. React! That's not a cliché! If you're not trying to remember your lines, you can concentrate on what you're feeling. You'll be able to emote. If you're thinking your character's thoughts, you'll react. Naturally.

SHERRY

The lines I can learn, but –

BONNIE

It's finding the right emotional state. Remember what I said about vulnerability?

SHERRY

You think I'm not feeling vulnerable? I'm scared to death. I don't need to feel more vulnerable. I need confidence.

BONNIE

The reason you're scared is because you're protecting your ego. That's not vulnerability. When you let go of the ego, that's when you get confidence. You'll grow two wings.

SHERRY

Wings?

BONNIE

It's the great paradox of acting. With vulnerability comes confidence. That's how an actor flies straight. So, listen to what I'm saying. Embrace vulnerability. Drop the damn ego so you can become your character. If you're in character, you just react to your cues. It's not really acting! It's reacting.

SHERRY

You make it seem so easy. So natural.

BONNIE

Just like getting naked. What could be more natural?

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 7

SETTING: Detroit Sky Club.
TIME: Continuing from Scene 4.
AT RISE: VALERIE and MATT are seated.

MATT

Well, don't really know you well enough to comment on your appearance.

VALERIE

Can't be too bad if you married me in a former life.

MATT

Definitely attractive. *Very* attractive.

VALERIE

(Again, clinking MATT'S raised glass.)

Thanks.

MATT

So, you're into the brain? Dorsal lateral prefrontal cortex. Basal Ganglia. All that good stuff.

VALERIE

Supposed to impress me?

MATT

No...

(Coy smile.)

Maybe.

VALERIE

Mmm.

MATT

And the Four Fs. You know, for survival. Uh, fight, flight, feed, and, uh... Fool around.

VALERIE

(Leaning in, quietly.)

Fuck.

MATT

What?!

VALERIE

Not enough to fool around. You have to... *Fuck.*

MATT

Oh.

VALERIE

For survival. I think that's from Sarpolsky, the Four Fs.

MATT

(Enjoying this.)

Fuck. For survival. Yeah.

VALERIE

Survival's more than breathing. It's also about passing along our genes.

MATT

No, I get it. I'm all about survival. Survival in all four dimensions.

VALERIE

Not a very rich life if you're only surviving. You want to do more than survive, don't you? What about self-actualization?

MATT

I prefer a partner.

VALERIE

I said self-actualization, not self-gratification.

MATT

That's exactly what I mean. What I want. Survival. With a partner. In all four dimensions.

VALERIE

You're missing my point...

(Beat and a smile.)

No. You get it, don't you? You're choosing to ignore my point.

(MATT responds with a shrug and big smile.)

PA ANNOUNCER

(Off.)

For those passengers waiting on the departure of Flight 853 to Paris. Estimated departure is now eleven oh five p.m.

VALERIE

Couple more hours.

MATT

(Gulps his drink and stands.)

Time for another glass. What're you drinking?

VALERIE

I've already had two.

(Fails to suppress a smile as MATT just shrugs.)

Bourbon. Straight up.

MATT

Bourbon! You go, girl.

(MATT goes to bar. VALERIE pulls a compact from her purse, checks herself out. Musses her hair a bit. Reaches into her blouse and plumps her breasts. MATT returns momentarily. When he sits down, they clink glasses again.)

VALERIE

So, what about me do you find attractive?

MATT

I said *very* attractive.

VALERIE

Very?

MATT

You don't believe me?

VALERIE

Biologists say attraction is based on the anticipated quality of progeny produced by a coupling.

MATT

Wow.

VALERIE

I'm a bit past my prime.

MATT

Or just coming into it.

VALERIE

Not for producing progeny.

MATT

But for coupling.

VALERIE

I take it your cortical coupling region is well developed.

MATT

Pretty normal size, I think.

VALERIE

I'm talking about the brain.

MATT

Oh.

VALERIE

We'd have to place you in an F-M-R-I scanner to know for sure.

MATT

So, what you're saying... Uh... A guy only wants to fool around with...

VALERIE

Nubile.

MATT

Okaaay...

VALERIE

Child-bearing.

MATT

Wait. Aren't humans different?

VALERIE

Different?

MATT

From animals?

VALERIE

Their brains are.

MATT

So, humans can fool around for the pure enjoyment?

VALERIE

Sure.

Animals don't?

MATT

Generally, no.

VALERIE

Too bad for them.

MATT

Yes.

VALERIE
(Failing to suppress a smile.)

Married?

MATT

Divorced.

VALERIE
(Big smile.)
But not from you. Not in a previous life.

No. Guess not.

MATT

What did you do?

VALERIE
(Awkward pause.)

Do? When?

MATT

You said you were sorry. When you first came over.

VALERIE

Oh, yeah. I was a shit.

MATT
(Uncomfortable.)

We were young, and I was thinking with my pecker.

(VALERIE waits.)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 8

SETTING: Nob Hill Manor resident lounge.

TIME: Continuing from Scene 5.

AT RISE: WALT and EDDY sit at table.

EDDY

(Jumps up to gesture.)

Yeah! Grandkids braggin' you up at school! Give 'em a picture for show and tell! Lookit my grandpa! Those grandkids 'll be center of attention. You'll be talk of the playground!

(WALT just stares, uncomprehending.)

You got *propellers* on your ass. What else you need?

WALT

I'd like to think they'll remember me... For me.

EDDY

(Aside. On "remember.")

I got shit on *my* ass.

WALT

How *will* we be remembered, Eddy?

EDDY

You're too serious, man.

(A beat to study sulking WALT. Slowly sinks back into seat.)

Easy goin'.

WALT

What?

EDDY

Remembered. Me. I'm easy goin'. Easy goin' and a giver.

WALT

Generous.

EDDY

Ask Maxine. Ask Dottie! Guarantee. Those gals sleep with a smile and dream 'bout ol' Eddy.

WALT

That's something, I guess.

EDDY

(Aside.)

Propellers on your ass. Should have a medal for that.

WALT

We're put here for a purpose. You believe that?

EDDY

Was a damn good plumber.

WALT

Mastery and accomplishment. Gave you a sense of pride. I can appreciate that.

EDDY

Gave me a boat, what it gave me.

WALT

Rewards from an honorable trade.

EDDY

Just a single screw.

WALT

One propeller's all you need.

EDDY

Love that boat. Chris-Craft Commander. A 35-footer. Three-fifty horse inboard.

WALT

Very nice.

EDDY

Single screw. Stainless steel, not bronze. Banged lotsa broads on that boat. Caught lotsa fish.

WALT

What was it that made you most happy?

EDDY

Toss up tween the fish and the broads.

WALT

No. I mean, what was most fulfilling? Was it the labor? Earning it? The pursuit of a goal? The ownership? Was it what you *did* with it? The fishing and, uh, the entertainment? Did it buy you respect?

Oh, man. What're ya doin'?

(Beat. Heavy sigh.)

You wanna know the truth, Walt?

I'm asking.

Memories.

What you're saying –

I got memories!

That's a good answer.

Damn right. What else we got we're old farts? Nothin' but memories. Propellers tattooed on wrinkled butt cheeks, what they getcha? Givin' Betty with the walker a good poke, what's it get me? I tell you, it ain't for me I do it. I do it for her. So, I get anything out of it, it's just knowin' I done my part to make an ol' gal satisfied. But what do I really got? Nothin' but memories.

Now who's getting philosophical?

For a smart guy, you're dumber than a box a hammers.

(A beat as WALT studies Eddy.)

Anyways, what're your memories?

Being recognized. For my teaching. Publishing.

Who's gonna remember that, you're gone?

Exactly. That's what I'm asking.

Well, hate to say it, but maybe you humped the horse.

WALT

I what?!

EDDY

Like screwin' the pooch. Only bigger. A horse. Damn sight bigger than a pooch. And ya humped the horse. Cause it's your whole life we're talkin' 'bout. It don't get bigger than your life.

WALT

I'm not sure –

EDDY

Your life, man! Life's nothin' if ya don't make no memories. So, ask yourself. What're people gonna remember 'bout you?

(WALT just sadly shakes his head.)

I made lotsa memories. Customers rememberin' ol' Eddy, the plumber, smile on my face. My other smile – my butt crack – grinnin' at 'em over my belt when I got my head under their sink.

WALT

They remember your smile.

EDDY

Their smile. They remember I made *them* smile. Ya gotta connect. Relate. Like I do with the ladies. If your kids are shit heels, not much you can do. Ya can't make nobody like you. But you can be a likeable. Maybe ya think it's better to be respected than be liked, but I gotta tell ya, it's no excuse for being a smartass son-of-a-bitch.

WALT

That's how you see me?!

(*Jumps and paces. Indignation gives way to regret. Sits again.*)

That's how you see me?

EDDY

Thinkin' ya gotta be respected. That's bullshit. How ya make other people feel. That's the thing. Stop thinkin' 'bout yourself. Sorry. But since you're askin'...

WALT

What about you? Your boat? Your boat was for you.

EDDY

No. See. You don't get it. Dint buy the boat for myself.

WALT

That doesn't ring true. Everything people do is basically selfish. A case can be made that all altruism, at its root, is self-serving. You bought a boat so you could fish and entertain the ladies. Saying you didn't buy it for yourself, it's not authentic.

EDDY

The hell I know 'bout authentic?

WALT

Are you always just acting?

EDDY

Hell, who's *not* actin'?

WALT

So, we're all just playing a part?

EDDY

Now you got it.

WALT

Do the parts choose us, or do we choose the parts?

EDDY

Goddamn it, Walt. I don't know how to talk to you. You got the propellers on your ass, I give you that. But your head. Your head's clogged with grease and hair. A goddamn greasy hairball 'tween your ears, and you need someone run a snake through there.

WALT

I'm just trying to understand what makes us different. Same age, more or less. Both served our country. Both of us with kids and grandkids. Have I been inauthentic? Am I a fraud?

EDDY

Makes no difference. It don't. You ask some good questions, but some a your questions ain't for shit. What's real? What's fake? Who's actin'? Who ain't? Don't matter. None of it.

WALT

OK. What's a good question?

EDDY

What're people gonna remember about you?

(As WALT reflects, grows increasingly maudlin.)

I know ya got some memories. And that's OK. That's good. But what memories your kids got? Your grandkids? How'd ya make them feel? Do they even like you?

(Beat.)

Those. Those are the questions.

(WALT slowly nods his head, puts his head in his hands. EDDY fondles his medal, uncomfortable, as WALT sinks into depression. EDDY stands, paces a bit considering Walt's apparent heartache.)

WALT

(Finally responds, choking a bit.)

I don't know.

EDDY

What?

WALT

I don't know what they remember. But I'm pretty damn sure they don't like me.

EDDY

(Removing medallion from his neck and hanging it on Walt.)

Cheer up, man. Ain't fittin' for a man with propellers on his ass to be mopin' like a jellyfish. You want the kiddies to like you, you might even try smilin'. Fire up those propellers, man! Get outta that chair and off your ass! Go make some memories.

WALT

(Recovers a bit. Takes a moment to study the medal.)

Thanks Eddy.

EDDY

Now I gotta go see Maxine. Give her a memory.

(EDDY exits as WALT studies the medallion a moment until...)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 9

SETTING: Theatre Thalia dressing room.

TIME: Three weeks following Scene 6, evening of tech rehearsal.

AT RISE: SHERRY sits at a dressing table fussing with makeup.
BONNIE enters.

BONNIE

What are you doing? I don't think you need that tonight. It's tech. Costumes only.

SHERRY

I know. But makeup tomorrow night. Right? Just want to figure it out. I think I need...

BONNIE

(Jumps in, applies Sherry's makeup during ensuing conversation.)

Here. Let me in there.

SHERRY

Thanks.

BONNIE

You've got the foundation going...

(Beat.)

So, what's going on with Valerie and her new friend?

SHERRY

She's coming to the dress rehearsal tomorrow night.

BONNIE

Valerie's coming? And Pippi's OK with that?

SHERRY

She said we could invite a few family members so we get a feel for an audience. Didn't she?

BONNIE

I guess.

SHERRY

Wait. Isn't it OK? Should I—

BONNIE

Relax. It's fine.

SHERRY
 Because I could call –

BONNIE
 God! You've got nice skin.

SHERRY
 She's bringing her new guy to the opening.

BONNIE
 Your Spanish student, right?

SHERRY
 Matt.

BONNIE
 Do you and he *habla español*?

SHERRY
(Rapidly, with the fluency of a Spanish teacher.)
Hablan español. ...No lo sé. No lo he visto –

BONNIE
 Damn! Sorry I asked.

SHERRY
 Matt. I haven't seen him since high school. Valerie says he's...

BONNIE
 What? A chip off the old man's block? He got ass tats, too?

SHERRY
 A project.

BONNIE
 What's that mean?

SHERRY
 I love Valerie, but...

BONNIE
 We need some shadow on the jawline. You love her but what?

SHERRY
 She's a perfectionist.

BONNIE

Like someone else I know.

SHERRY

No. I'm not.

BONNIE

Right. You obsess about everything. Your character. Your lines. The blocking. Every detail has to be perfect. You know, don't you, that nothing on the stage is ever perfect. And that's what makes live theatre so delicious.

SHERRY

That's different.

BONNIE

And you totally suck up to Pippi.

SHERRY

I do?

BONNIE

Total suck up.

SHERRY

I just want to get it right. The role. My character.

BONNIE

And your makeup. Everything's got to be just right. You know, a little self-criticism is OK. Not saying you've got to be self-satisfied, but look at you.

SHERRY

(Snapping her head around to look in the mirror.)

What?!

BONNIE

(Laughing.)

See what I mean?

(SHERRY turns with a look of chagrin. Gentle chiding follows.)

You do obsess. My god! The tits and ass of a 30-year-old. It doesn't make sense that you're constantly self-deprecating.

SHERRY

It's just –

BONNIE

The ego, what it is. Your debut performance and there you are, nailing it on the stage. You need to stop stressing. Let it go.

(Beat.)

Some of us got boobies kissing our knees. And you're the one obsessing...

SHERRY

I don't try to change other people.

BONNIE

So... What? Valerie does?

SHERRY

I never even considered trying to change Walt.

BONNIE

Yeah. Well, tats are hard to remove.

SHERRY

His opinions.

BONNIE

So, Matt is like his old man. An opinionated ass.

SHERRY

Everyone's got opinions. With Matt, it's something different. Valerie's just so... How much do you overlook in a relationship? How much do you excuse?

BONNIE

Like burping and farting?

SHERRY

View about politics. Religion. Money. You know...

BONNIE

Who cares about that? Views about sex, that's different... We're getting close, girl. Let's see about those pouty lips.

SHERRY

(Takes the lipstick.)

Thanks. I think I've got this.

BONNIE

So what? She doesn't like his politics?

SHERRY

She says they're intellectually compatible. But maybe that doesn't extend to emotional compatibility. Emotional intelligence. That's her obsession. It's a freaking fetish.

BONNIE

That's the professor in her. Are they sexually compatible? That's the question.

SHERRY

You can't treat a significant other as project.

BONNIE

What's he like? Wait! You still haven't met the new boyfriend?

SHERRY

Not since high school. He was... curious, I guess. A good student.

(VALERIE appears at the entrance.)

BONNIE

Oh, my god. Look who's here.

VALERIE

Sorry to interrupt.

SHERRY

Sweetie! What are you...? Dress rehearsal isn't until tomorrow night.

VALERIE

(Approaches, embraces Sherry.)

I know. Matt and I are having dinner around the corner, and he wanted to stop in to ask you something.

BONNIE

(Rising and moving off to the side.)

Bring him in!

VALERIE

You were talking about him.

SHERRY

He's here?

(A KNOCK, a beat, then MATT sticks his head through the door. SHERRY'S eyes go wide. BONNIE stares, a knowing smile.)

MATT

Miss Miller. Hi. May I come in?

(SHERRY simply nods. VALERIE and BONNIE look on as MATT, a bit overcome with the visage and his memories, and SHERRY share an awkward moment.)

MATT

¿Señora Miller, cómo está,?

SHERRY

How are you?

MATT

Fine, thank you.

SHERRY

Muy bien, gracias.

BONNIE

Looks like we got us a high school reunion.

SHERRY

I'm sorry. Bonnie, you know my niece, Valerie. And this is Matt. Bonnie is a wonderful actor.

MATT

Nice to meet you.

STAGE MANAGER

(Off. PA announcement.)

Thirty minutes. Full costume, please. Thirty minutes.

BONNIE

(Begins unbuttoning her blouse.)

Time to get out of these clothes.

SHERRY

Hold on, Bonnie.

(Excoriating Bonnie with her eyes before turning to Matt.)

Valerie said you wanted to ask me something.

MATT

Well, the thing is... My dad would like to come with us on opening night. I bought him a ticket.

BONNIE

Sweet.

SHERRY

Oh. Well, of course. That's his decision.

VALERIE

He's really changing, Auntie.

MATT

He read Valerie's book and –

VALERIE

I've been coaching him.

MATT

Both of us. That is, Valerie's been coaching both of us. And, well, the thing is, Dad would really like to reconnect.

BONNIE

Wow! Sounds like quite a three-way you've got going there with your dad.

(Absorbing a withering look from SHERRY.)

Sorry, but just want to say. I hope he does come. Your dad. I'd like to meet the man. Maybe get a look at his... his trademark.

MATT

Trademark? What's his trademark?

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 10

SETTING: Detroit Sky Club.
TIME: Continuing from Scene 7.
AT RISE: VALERIE and MATT are seated.

VALERIE

You said you were sorry. When you first came over.

MATT

(Uncomfortable.)

Oh, yeah. I was a shit.

(VALERIE waits.)

We were young, and I was thinking with my pecker.

VALERIE

Peckers don't have brains. It's all upstairs.

MATT

The pecker cortex.

VALERIE

Mmm. So, you got married for the wrong reasons.

MATT

Reason. Just one.

VALERIE

Men and women get together for sex, but that's not enough to keep us together.

MATT

So, what is?

VALERIE

Reason to stay together?

MATT

Yeah.

VALERIE

Kids. Security. Common interests. Just avoiding the inconvenience of splitting up.

MATT

It can be a lot more than an inconvenience.

VALERIE

The biggest is intellectual compatibility.

MATT

That's it, huh? The reason to stay together.

VALERIE

Intellectual compatibility covers a multitude of flaws.

MATT

Not when you're nineteen.

VALERIE

It only lasted eight months?

MATT

Once the bloom was off, the prospect of an entire life together was terrifying.

VALERIE

There are biological reasons for monogamy.

MATT

(Raises glass again with a smile.)

But not for you and me.

VALERIE

(Pauses, amused, then clinks his glass.)

Now you are coming on to me.

MATT

We've got two hours.

VALERIE

And you're plying me with alcohol.

MATT

With intellectual compatibility.

VALERIE

So, are you speaking from your cerebral cortex or from your pecker cortex?

(Beat as they share a smile.)

What made you choose psychology?

MATT

I – O psychology.

VALERIE

OK. What made you choose *industrial – organizational* psychology?

MATT

Started with clinical psych. I think I was just trying to figure out my dad.

VALERIE

Daddy issues?

MATT

He always seemed so angry. No reason for it. He had a good job. Good family. But he was never... He was just pissed at the world. I don't know. Pissed at me.

VALERIE

Were you a handful? As a kid.

MATT

Not really. Good student. OK athlete. A bit of mischief, but nothing serious. But I sure as hell pissed him off.

VALERIE

Everyone's behavior makes sense to them. For your dad, being pissed at the world – being pissed at you – must have made sense.

MATT

(Becoming reflective, disconsolate.)

My fourteenth birthday. Mom made me a cake. I wasn't having a party. We weren't doing anything special. And that was OK with me, but the thing is, I wanted a piece of that cake when I got home from school. You know, before dinner. Since it was my birthday, my mom agreed and cut me this huge slice of chocolate cake.

VALERIE

And a glass of milk.

MATT

Oh, yeah. You're from Minnesota, you've got to have your milk. Anyway, I sat on a kitchen stool – we had this island, kind of a bar in the kitchen – and I sat on a stool at that bar and I... I just tore into that cake.

(Sad chuckle, then very somber.)

My dad walked in and saw me wolfing down that cake – keep in mind, I was just fourteen. One look at me stuffing my face, and he walked over and backhanded me. Right in the mouth. Knocked me backward off the stool.

VALERIE

Oh, god.

MATT

He was always big on table manners.

VALERIE

Chew with your mouth closed.

MATT

Sit up straight. Pass the food before you dig in. Please and thank you. Chewing with your mouth closed was a... for him, it was a religious tenet.

VALERIE

Knocked you off the stool?

MATT

No shit. Mom yelped, but she couldn't really say anything except, *Ooooh, honey.*

VALERIE

She was concerned for you.

MATT

(A beat, then oozing with pain, almost losing it.)

She was talking to my dad.

VALERIE

Ooh.

MATT

I thought – I guess I thought – by studying clinical psych I might get some insight.

VALERIE

But you switched to I – O?

MATT

A practicum. Junior year. I was facilitating group therapy at a juvenile detention facility.

VALERIE

And you got your eyes opened.

MATT

Peeled open. Wide open. This fourteen-year-old kid had torched his house. Intentionally. Used gasoline and...

(Choking up just a bit.)

God, I wish I hadn't seen photos from the scene. Burned his mom and sister to a crisp. Goddamn kid just sat there in the group session, showed absolutely no remorse.

(Feeling his pain, VALERIE reaches over to tenderly lay her hand on Matt's cheek, leans in, comforts him with her eyes.)

MATT (CONT.)

I was sitting there trying to stay composed, but I was remembering myself at that age, thinking back to when I was fourteen. I guess getting knocked on my ass as a kid. I don't know. I was still smarting. That wound was still fresh.

VALERIE

Still is.

MATT

So, I was sitting there listening to this kid. And it was all I could do to keep from jumping up to knock *that* little shit backward off his chair and onto his evil little ass.

VALERIE

(Gives Matt a final tender stroke on the cheek, then leans back.)

Takes a special breed to do clinical. Some disorders... I couldn't do it either.

MATT

(A moment to regain emotional control, manages to shift gears.)

What's it like, then? A neuropsychologist. I guess you don't have to get messy, cutting into brains. Slicing them up.

VALERIE

Oh, I slice them up all the time, but not with a knife. It's mostly computer imaging on live brains.

MATT

Exploring the mysteries of the pecker cortex?

VALERIE

No lack of mysteries in the brain. Mostly I explore reward and attention networks.

MATT

(Showing renewed interest with a grin.)

Well, you've got my attention.

VALERIE

And emotions. People describe emotions as feelings. But they're more than that. They're physical. Physical changes. Changes in the brain. Epinephrine. Cortisol. A complex cocktail of hormones flooding the brain, speeding up your heart, your breathing, dilating the pupils.

MATT

I can feel my pupils dilating as we speak.

VALERIE

You've got 85 billion neurons between your ears. When some of them fire, you experience pain. Others, you experience pleasure. Imagine when we fully understand the dynamics.

MATT

Dilated, aren't they? And feel! My heart rate's definitely elevated.

VALERIE

(Valerie gives just a bit of a grin but maintains earnestness.)

You're incorrigible. But really, Matt, it wouldn't hurt for you to consider...

MATT

What?

VALERIE

Emotions drive episodic memories.

MATT

Uh huh.

VALERIE

The experiences we remember from childhood are those that were highly emotional. Positive or negative. A new bike underneath the Christmas tree. Getting knocked off a stool.

MATT

Uh huh.

VALERIE

When we recognize and label our emotions, it can help us control them.

MATT

(Considering, a bit frustrated.)

You sure you're not a clinical psychologist?

VALERIE

Oh, god. I'm sorry. I get started talking about the brain. It's just... You know, if you're really interested in the Four Fs, if you want to understand fight and flight –

MATT

And don't forget. Tell me again, what's the fourth F?

VALERIE

To understand any of the Fs, understand emotions. Anyway, for me it's all so fascinating.

MATT

The fifth F. *Fascinating!* Can you see how you've stirred up my emotions?

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 11

SETTING: Nob Hill Manor resident lounge.

TIME: Continuing from Scene 8.

AT RISE: WALT sits. EDDY stands.

EDDY

(Removing medallion from his neck and hanging it on Walt.)

Cheer up, man. Ain't fittin' for a man with propellers on his ass to be mopin' like a jellyfish. You want the kiddies to like you, you might even try smilin'. Fire up those propellers, man! Get outta that chair and off your ass! Go make some memories.

WALT

(Recovers a bit. Takes a moment to study the medal.)

Thanks Eddy.

EDDY

Now I gotta go see Maxine. Give her a memory.

(EDDY exits. WALT turns the medal in his hand and studies it. MATT enters holding a gift, pauses to consider Walt.)

MATT

What's that? Birthday present?

WALT

(Startled, rises quickly and excitedly moves to give a hug.)

Matt!

(MATT holds out the birthday present at arm's length to preclude physical contact. WALT slowly takes gift, stares at his son.)

I didn't know you were coming.

MATT

Last minute trip.

WALT

Well, it's really good to see you. Come sit down.

(WALT and MATT take seats. Awkward pause.)

WALT
How are you?

MATT
Happy birthday.

WALT
Thanks

MATT
Fine.

WALT
Would you like some cake?

MATT
(Studies the cake. Give a sardonic chuckle and wags his head.)
Really? Chocolate birthday cake?

WALT
Don't like chocolate?

MATT
You're kidding, right?
(WALT, puzzled, has no clue.)
That's OK. No cake. Just open your present.

WALT
You didn't need to.

(WALT tears the wrapping off to reveal a hardcover book. He examines the cover, expressionless, inscrutable. MATT looks intently but unsuccessfully for any visible reaction.)

MATT
Well?

WALT
(Reading the title.)
From Torment to Bliss: The Neuroscience of Emotions.

(WALT looks up, confusion clouding his attempt at a smile.)

MATT
Signed by the author. Take a look.

WALT
(Opens the book to read an inscription.)
For Walt, on your birthday. With appreciation for the life you've lived and for the son you've given to the world. Best wishes. Valerie.
(Looks to Matt, confusion clouding his expression.)
For the life I've lived?

MATT
Hang on to that, Dad. Author could be famous someday.

WALT

Is this...? It is! How do you know her?

MATT

Long story. But I heard you're seeing Aunt Sherry.

WALT

Oh. Well, we...

MATT

That's OK. When you're ready you can tell me all about it. So, how have you been?

WALT

I've been... Actually, I was just thinking about you.

MATT

Yeah. Thinking what?

WALT

Wondering how you're doing. Thinking about my kids. My grandkids. I was wondering, what stands out for you when you think about your childhood?

MATT

Really? Want to dive right into my childhood? No small talk to warm up?

WALT

When you think about me, what do you... What are your thoughts?

MATT

OK... Well, the neuropsychologist would say I'm most likely to remember experiences that generated a strong emotion. It could be positive, like winning the eighth-grade spelling bee. But it could be negative, too. Like getting knocked on my ass on my birthday that same year.

WALT

That spelling bee! I was so proud of you.

MATT

Were you?

WALT

Of course, I was.

MATT

Huh.

WALT

Academics. School was always easy for you.

MATT

You think I haven't had to work for it?

WALT

What?! No, that's not what I mean. Of course not.

MATT

God. I paid my own way. Earned every step. Every degree.

WALT

And I'm proud of you for it. What I meant was...

MATT

Yeah...

WALT

You've always been so damn smart. Even as a little guy. Reading before you were in kindergarten. You loved to study about dinosaurs. And such an encyclopedic memory.

MATT

Well... Encyclopedic?

WALT

When you were five or six, you used to stay up late and listen in when your mother and I had guests over. You'd be hiding around the corner in your pajamas. Wanted to hear what the adults were discussing. I knew you were there, and I'd wait for the opportune moment to bring up the topic of dinosaurs.

MATT

I did love dinosaurs.

WALT

And Dr. Morgan, the university president. He was over one evening, and I told him, go ahead. Ask the boy anything about dinosaurs.

MATT

Guy with the lazy eye.

WALT

He was already anticipating your PhD and planning a tenure-track position for you. I was so damn proud, Matt. Still am. Anyway. That's something I think about.

(Beat.)

What about you?

MATT

Here's a good one. Third grade. You gave me baseball mitt. All the boys were playing baseball at recess, and I was the only kid who didn't have a mitt. I asked you for one, but you said no.

WALT

Back then... Was I still in grad school? Well, I don't know, but money was tight.

MATT

Yeah, I guess it was, but Mom must have intervened, really guilted you, because next day at recess, I looked up to see you striding across the playground. I didn't see the mitt you were holding because I was looking at your face and thinking: Oh, no! What did I do to make my dad mad enough to stomp across the playground and whip my ass in front of my friends?

WALT

I never did that.

MATT

No, you didn't. You marched right up to me and thrust a baseball mitt in my face. Said nothing, just turned on your heel and marched off the playground. What a mix of emotions that created. So happy to have a new baseball glove but feeling like shit that I'd made a problem for you.

WALT

I don't know if you can understand the kind of pressure I was under.

MATT

Yeah. Probably right. Know what else?

WALT

I get it. I was hard on you.

MATT

On everyone. We're standing in line for a slide at the water park. Noah's Ark in Wisconsin Dells. I was about ten. And a bunch of rambunctious college kids, three or four of them, decide to cut the line. You told us to stay put and you walked over. God, you had such authority. You were so... so steady. Calm. You walked over and told them matter-of-factly, *Sorry, kids, you need to take it to the back of the line.* I was scared shitless they'd get in your face. Or worse. But there's something about the way you carry yourself. They responded as if you were ten feet tall and wearing a police uniform. Such authority.

WALT

I always say –

MATT

Civilized society runs on respect.

WALT

Exactly.

MATT

I learned that from you. And a lot more. I've been thinking a lot about you, too. Thinking about how much you and I are alike. In fact, I had an epiphany of a few weeks ago.

WALT

Really?

MATT

Yeah. We can both be opinionated assholes.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 12

SETTING: Theatre Thalia dressing room.

TIME: The evening following Scene 9, an hour before dress rehearsal.

AT RISE: SHERRY enters and begins doing a series of warm up exercises. She stretches, touches her toes, rolls her neck around, and then begins making faces, inhaling through nose, blowing out through her lips, shaking her head, and making exaggerated animal sounds – she is neighing like a horse when BONNIE enters. SHERRY quickly takes a seat.

BONNIE

Giddy up, cow girl.

SHERRY

(Shaking off embarrassment.)

You going to help me with my makeup again?

BONNIE

Whatever you need, Smoke Show.

(Taking adjoining seat and beginning to apply Sherry's makeup.)

Third week of April work for you? Gulf View Naturalist Resort. I'll book reservations. Flights will be crowded because it's tail end of spring break but we shouldn't have a problem getting accommodations at the resort. You don't have to pack much except –

SHERRY

Ay dios! You're serious! As intriguing as it sounds, I don't want a sunburned bum.

BONNIE

Live a little. Make a memory. We'll use it to develop. To dig deep inside. To hone our craft.

SHERRY

Well, I've found my both of my wings now, and thank you for that. I'm experiencing both vulnerability and confidence. So, maybe I don't need to go to Florida to hone my craft... *desnuda.*

BONNIE

You disappoint me, Smoke Show. But you still have a couple of weeks to decide, and I'm betting your curiosity will eventually kick your timidity in the ass.

SHERRY

(Beat to study BONNIE'S whimsical expression.)

Did you sign Pippi's birthday card?

BONNIE

And sealed it with a kiss. What color's the sweater?

SHERRY

Sweater and a matching scarf. Kind of a light maroon. Cashmere. Really nice.

BONNIE

(Teasing.)

The teacher's pet.

SHERRY

(Earnestly.)

I'm just grateful. She's helped me so much. You, too. Really, Bonnie. I don't think I could have made it through rehearsals without your coaching.

BONNIE

I never coach another actor unless they ask for it. And – hey! Where's my gift, then?! Allow me to reiterate. A little time in the sun in your birthday suit would be the cherry on top of your theatre experience. That would be a gift to both of us.

(VALERIE appears at the door holding a bouquet of flowers.)

BONNIE

Oh!

(Jumps up, quickly snatches the flowers, and exits.)

Let me take those.

VALERIE

What was that about?! Auntie! Those flowers were for you.

SHERRY

Thank you. They looked lovely.

VALERIE

Are you excited?

SHERRY

Just a little nervous. But tech went well. Pippi says we're ready.

(Beat.)

Did you bring Matt?

VALERIE

To the opening tomorrow. He's coming with Walt and Walt's friend.

SHERRY

He already has a new friend?

VALERIE
A male friend.

SHERRY.
Oh.

VALERIE
Walt and I have had some very fruitful conversations.

SHERRY.
So now you have two coaching projects. Matt and his dad.

VALERIE
What did you decide? About Walt. Are you ready to give him another chance?

SHERRY
Why are you the one asking? It's not like him to wimp out. If serious, he wouldn't relegate –

VALERIE
He's not wimping out.

SHERRY
Walt can be a narcissistic prick and he's nothing if not self-confident. Has he really recruited you as his ambassador? Why does he feel the need to go through my niece? He can't call me himself?

VALERIE
Oh. That's all on me.

SHERRY
What a surprise. Is it your goal to redefine his character? Walt is not a chickenshit. Don't turn him into one.

VALERIE
(Sitting and adopting tone of a pandering therapist.)
You're frustrated.

SHERRY
And dress rehearsal starts in less than an hour.

VALERIE
Talk to him, Auntie. He's really making progress. Changing.

SHERRY
(Mimicking Valerie's condescending, honey-coated tone.)
Valerie, why are you interfering?

VALERIE

Some things need to be said. And some things might be hard for you to hear.

SHERRY

I think I've heard it all. He's already educated me on all manner of political, economic, and social viewpoints.

VALERIE

Walt now realizes – through our coaching conversations – he realizes that he doesn't always have to be right. He knows... He accepts that he might not always be right.

SHERRY

That's hard to hear?

VALERIE

He does have a pet aversion.

SHERRY

I don't have a pet.

VALERIE

He wouldn't be able to tell you this...

SHERRY

Oh, I can't wait. Tell me what?

VALERIE

He doesn't know I'm here, and I know he wouldn't feel comfortable talking about it.

SHERRY

I'm all atwitter, but get to it. I've got to dress.

VALERIE

Since he's changing... Maybe you... It's a small thing. Walt is very sensitive to chewing.

SHERRY

Chewing?!

VALERIE

It's a psychological aversion –

SHERRY

To chewing?! A chewing aversion?!

VALERIE

The sound of chewing.

SHERRY

And you felt compelled to tell me this?

VALERIE

It's deep-seated and something Matt has had to deal with, too.

SHERRY

So psychological aversions run in the family.

VALERIE

No, no. I'm not saying that. But this has created issues between Matt and Walt.

SHERRY

Well, Valerie, they're fortunate to have you as a coach to deal with such traumatic issues.

VALERIE

Well, like I said, he doesn't know I'm here. And I'll leave you with this. Walt will be here tomorrow evening, and I believe he will want to talk with you after the show if that's OK.

SHERRY

If he does, I will avoid chewing at all costs.

VALERIE

I really hope you two can work things out. He really wants that. And, you're so –

SHERRY

What? Accommodating?

VALERIE

Compatible. Intellectually compatible.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 13

SETTING: Detroit Sky Club.

TIME: Continuing from Scene 10.

AT RISE: VALERIE and MATT are seated.

VALERIE

To understand any of the Fs, understand emotions. Anyway, for me it's all so fascinating.

MATT

The fifth F. *Fascinating!* Can you see how you've stirred up my emotions?

(Pause to study each other. Grin turns into serious interest.

Reaches over and lays one finger on her hand.)

How long have you lived in Minneapolis?

VALERIE

(Returning interest, studying finger on her hand, leans in just a bit.)

My whole life.

MATT

I grew up there.

VALERIE

You said that. You didn't study at the U of M? It's great for psych studies.

MATT

Had to get away from home. My dad. I was eighteen and, well, you know...

VALERIE

Establishing your independence.

MATT

What about you?

VALERIE

My brother and I were raised by my Auntie. Aunt Sherry. I had lots of freedom. Didn't feel the need to leave. So, for better or worse, my entire academic experience has been at U of M.

MATT

Your Aunt Sherry?

VALERIE

Mmm.

MATT
OK.

VALERIE
(Awkward pause. Gives just a bit of distance.)
You want to know why.

MATT
Just making conversation.

VALERIE
I lost my parents early and don't really remember them. My brain has fabricated some memories, I guess. But I know better. So no, I don't really remember them.

MATT
I'm sorry.

VALERIE
Drunk driver.

MATT
Damn.

VALERIE
Yeah. What about your parents? Are they still with you?

MATT
Mom passed a couple of years ago. She required lots of care, and it was too much for my dad. They moved into an assisted-living retirement complex in Apple Valley. Now my dad – like you, he was a professor – well, he hates living there and I'm not sure what he's going to do.

VALERIE
A pissed off professor. Imagine.

MATT
History prof. Latin American history. Long retired but still full of piss and vinegar.

VALERIE
Hasn't mellowed in his old age?

MATT
Actually, he really softened toward Mom. There at the end. But with others. With me. The old man's still as rigid as... You ever meet anyone who's always got to be right?
(Beat. Reflecting. Almost an aside.)
His birthday's coming up. I really should pay him a visit.

VALERIE

Mmm. You really should. If I had a father, I'd never miss the chance. Well, I'm assuming my father would never be abusive. Cantankerous, maybe. But testiness, I can overlook.

MATT

So you think.

VALERIE

Never having had a father figure... I think that's fucked with me.

MATT

How so?

VALERIE

No. That's not... I'm not really fucked up. I just feel... I've got this void, you know, like my life is not complete and can never be complete because I missed out on that father-daughter relationship.

MATT

You should talk with my sister. I don't think she's any closer to my dad than I am.

VALERIE

Mmm. What's her relationship like with men? Is she married?

MATT

More than ten years. Couple of kids. Seems happy.

VALERIE

Maybe your dad has something to do with that. With her stability.

(MATT shakes his head, not comprehending.)

Having no father, I don't think I ever really learned how men and women are supposed to relate.

MATT

You're relating pretty damn well with me.

VALERIE

Maybe you're not giving your dad enough credit.

MATT

Let me think about that. And you? What about your aunt?

VALERIE

Oh! She's the best. She's been a mother to me in every way, and I love her dearly. She gave me... She made precious memories. Auntie's all about kith and kin. Togetherness. Making memories with loved ones. She's retired now and just taken up a new hobby. Get this. She took an acting class at The Guthrie and just got cast in a community theatre production. It's so cute.

MATT

That's great. I love the theatre. Maybe what my dad needs. A theatre hobby.

VALERIE

It's going to be so adorable to see her up on the stage playing a character. It's a production of Calendar Girls.

MATT

Pretty racy. Gets to take off her top.

VALERIE

Guess I shouldn't be surprised she's taken up acting. It must be kind of a natural transition from performing for students to performing on the stage.

MATT

What? She was a teacher?

VALERIE

High school Spanish.

MATT

Muy interesante. Cual escuela?

VALERIE

St. Louis Park.

MATT

No shit?

(Recognition dawns. Stands. Paces. Sits again, about to explode.)

Don't tell me your aunt is Miss Miller!

VALERIE

You went to St. Louis Park?

MATT

Miss Miller. Oh god, you look like her! Now I see it.

VALERIE

God. This is surreal.

MATT

Maybe that's why...

VALERIE

What?

No. Nothing. MATT

You can't do that. VALERIE

No. I was just thinking. Remembering. MATT

Remembering? VALERIE

Your aunt. Miss Miller was pretty special. MATT

Still is pretty special. Why? VALERIE

Why, what? MATT

Was she special? VALERIE

Well, uh, she was a great teacher. MATT

And? VALERIE

No, you don't want to hear this. MATT

Are we intellectually compatible or not? VALERIE

I was just thinking. I kind of had a thing. MATT

For my aunt?! VALERIE

She had a major role in my... MATT

VALERIE
 What role? In your Spanish education?

MATT
 Yes.

VALERIE
 And?

MATT
 It wasn't her fault.

VALERIE
 Oh, god. What are you saying?

MATT
(Sighs deeply, dives in.)
 We had a field trip to Chicago.

VALERIE
 With my aunt?

MATT
 The Spanish club.

VALERIE
 So?

MATT
 She stayed in an adjacent room.

VALERIE
 You're lying.

MATT
 No, she didn't do anything wrong. I guess I did. Not really. We were going to go swimming in the hotel pool... And... Uh... I was fooling around with a girl, you know, kind of chasing her.

VALERIE
 A girl. Not my aunt.

MATT
 No! Yes!
(VALERIE getting impatient with the halting delivery.)
 She had a key to Miss Miller's room. I guess they were sharing. I chased her into the room, and Miss Miller was in there... You know, getting ready... The first live woman I ever saw naked.

You are a shit.

VALERIE

Yeah.

MATT

So, you've been fantasizing about my aunt for, what, 30 years?

VALERIE

I guess.

MATT

Unfuckingbelievable.

VALERIE

Yeah.

MATT

And you were thinking, what? That's why you recognized me?

VALERIE

No. Well, maybe. Miss Miller, in my mind – now that I think about it – bears a striking resemblance to Valerie.

MATT

To me.

VALERIE

To my Valerie. My ex. And, sure, to you, too.

MATT

You really are an ass.

VALERIE

Why? It was all subconscious. You don't have fantasies?

MATT

Did you see me naked?

VALERIE

You naked? What?!

MATT

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 14

SETTING: Nob Hill Manor resident lounge.

TIME: Continuing from Scene 11.

AT RISE: WALT and. MATT sit.

MATT

In fact, I had an epiphany of a few weeks ago.

WALT

Really?

MATT

Yeah. We can both be opinionated assholes.

WALT

(Feels it like a knife to the heart, responds sadly with slight groan.)

So... What? You came on my birthday to... What?

MATT

No. No. I don't mean it like that. It's more about me than you. I've been growing in self-awareness. Credit Valerie. And as I've been learning about myself, I guess I've considered how we're alike in a lot of ways. Not all bad. It's not. We're alike in some good ways, too...

WALT

Are we?

MATT

Yeah. We're both flawed, but we share more than faults. Like you, I'm opinionated but generally respectful. Of everyone, but especially respectful of women.

WALT

(Reflective, another groan.)

I don't know. Lately... It's good you're respectful. But... I've been falling short with...

MATT

What?

WALT

With Sherry. You're so right. I can be an opinionated asshole.

MATT

You know she was my high school Spanish teacher? She's amazing.

WALT

She mentioned that.

MATT

Valerie says you've been seeing each other for a couple of months. Getting serious?

WALT

Sometimes... Sometimes she chews with her mouth open.

MATT

Table manners! Jesus Christ. Is that going to derail it for you? You can't you get past it?

WALT

It's more than that.

MATT

Are you intellectually compatible? That's the question.

WALT

I think I humped the horse.

MATT

What?! Goddamn it, Dad. What are you talking about?

WALT

I am an opinionated asshole. Even Eddy thinks so.

MATT

Who's Eddy?

WALT

The civilized world runs on respect. I couldn't even follow my own rule.

MATT

You don't have to be an asshole. Read Valerie's book. Damn it, Dad. Talk to her. Talk to Valerie. Nothing she likes better than a project.

WALT

A project?

MATT

Yeah. I guess I've become her project. She loves to coach. Sometimes it's a bit much, but I've been learning to lose my ego. To embrace vulnerability. I think I'm becoming less an asshole.

WALT

Eddy's right.

MATT

Who the hell is Eddy? And listen. What I hear, Sherry thinks you're damn near perfect.

WALT

No, I think not. I have been opinionated. An opinionated asshole.

MATT

You don't have to be. We don't have to be. I've been practicing mindfulness. Labeling my emotions. Reframing. Learning what emotional intelligence really means. Valerie's teaching me that. You and I, we have some rough edges, but those can be polished.

WALT

Rough edges...

MATT

And you've got lots of enviable traits. Some of them I've inherited. What about work ethic?

WALT

I know you work hard.

MATT

Got it from you. And if you think I'm bright, where do you think that came from?

WALT

Well...

MATT

Genes, Dad. I got some good genes.

WALT

Your mother –

MATT

Was compatible.

WALT

I don't –

MATT

Intellectually. You were compatible.

WALT

Yes.

MATT

She was bright, but you're brilliant.

WALT

No.

MATT

I've never known you to lie. I'm awed by your intelligence. Your productivity. I'll never measure up.

WALT

Patently false. You –

MATT

And the way you carry yourself. The confidence. Authority. An officer with a straight back and, I don't know. You've got something. A force that just... Propels you.

(WALT gives soft chuckle, then turns sentimental.)

I learned so much from you, but that... That authority... I don't know.

(WALT shows increasing sentimentality.)

I was a kid, and sometimes you let me tag along when you had a night class. You thought I wasn't paying attention, but I was. I'd sit in the back row and watch, so proud of you up there bringing history to life. God, you were so into your stories. So engaging. You set a bar I knew I'd never reach.

(MATT chokes up a bit as WALT begins to silently weep.)

WALT

Oh, Matt. You're a far better man.

MATT

What I remember most, I remember how you were with Mom. Yeah, you were kind of hard on me at times, but nothing I couldn't handle. I'm probably a better man for it. But you were so tender with Mom.

(Breaking down, joins WALT who's weeping openly.)

If I ever get married...

(WALT stands. MATT follows. They embrace for a long moment.)

EDDY enters and surveys the scene before interrupting.)

EDDY

So whaddya think a the ol' man's propellers?

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 15

SETTING: Theatre Thalia dressing room.

TIME: The evening following Scene 12, a few minutes after opening night curtain call.

AT RISE: Lights up on an empty dressing room. SHERRY bursts through the door in her *Calendar Girls* costume, skips to the center of the room, twirls around a few times with extended arms, celebrating the performance. BONNIE enters and is immediately swallowed up in a hug.

SHERRY

Is it always like this?

BONNIE

Nothing quite like opening night.

VALERIE

(Knocks and enters while speaking. Carries a bouquet.)

Decent in here?!

(Dances on her tiptoes and squeals.)

Wonderful! Bravo!

SHERRY

(Releasing Bonnie, grabs Valerie and spins around in a hug.)

You brought more flowers.

BONNIE

(Attempts to take the flowers, and there's a brief tug-of-war.)

It's OK! Flowers after the curtain are nice. Just going to set them aside so the don't get squished 'tween your bosoms.

VALERIE

(Reluctantly releases bouquet. BONNIE sets it on dressing table.)

You were terrific! Both of you!

BONNIE

Your Aunt Sherry is a star in the making. Sherry – starlet and Smoke Show!

SHERRY

I think the audience enjoyed it.

BONNIE

Of course, they did.

VALERIE

May I bring in your other fans?

SHERRY

Matt and Walt? Men really shouldn't be entering the women's dressing room.

BONNIE

Like hell! Send 'em on in!

(VALERIE spins and exits before Sherry can respond.)

SHERRY

Well, this is going to kill the mood.

BONNIE

Want me to leave?

SHERRY

No! Stay!

BONNIE

Was hoping you'd say that.

(VALERIE enters followed by bouncing, sprightly EDDY. MATT follows sporting a playful smile. SHERRY and BONNIE look toward the door, but it's a moment before WALT appears and pauses before fully entering; he wears a look of apprehension.)

EDDY

(Gestures creatively.)

Come on, man! Propel yourself in here and check out these hot chicks!

BONNIE

(Stepping right up and extending a hand to Eddy.)

I'm Bonnie. And who might you be?

EDDY

(Ignoring the hand, extends arms, and BONNIE accepts a hug.)

Your biggest fan! I loved it when you were laying on the table with no clothes! But didja have to hide behind the marmalade?

BONNIE

Don't like marmalade?

EDDY

Prefer muffins and buns. I'm Eddy. Can I buy ya a drink?

VALERIE

Maybe we can all go out for a drink.

SHERRY

We're still in costume.

MATT

Right. Let's give you some time to get changed. But I want to say, Miss Miller, you were wonderful.

BONNIE

Why don't Eddy and I step out a minute? Give you a chance to... You know...

(BONNIE takes EDDY by the hand, and they exit as BONNIE throws Sherry a knowing glance. An awkward pause follows.)

SHERRY

Well?

VALERIE

(A beat to look to WALT who remains mute.)

I think Walt wants to say something.

WALT

I enjoyed the performance. You're very talented, Sherry.

(SHERRY gives a wan smile and a nod.)

VALERIE

I think what Walt wants to say –

SHERRY

(Jumping in with a scowl at Valerie.)

I can start. When I got your email, Walt, it hurt. More than I expected. I thought we were a pretty good match. But after the hurt, I became angry –

VALERIE

There are stages to grief –

SHERRY

(Interrupting with a Shut your god damn mouth! glare.)

I became angry because I didn't get the same respect from you that I gave to you. You talk a lot about respect, but, you're a bullshitter. You don't respect those whose opinion differs from yours.

WALT

You're right. I was wrong and I apologize.

VALERIE

Walt's on the road to greater self-awareness –

SHERRY

I love you, Valerie, but your interference goes beyond the pale.

(Turns her attention to Walt as VALERIE and WALT open their mouths but fail to speak.)

Here's my suggestion. I'll get through this show. Three weeks. Afterward, I'll give some thought to it and give you a call to let you know if I'm interested in seeing you again. Or, it might be a few weeks after our final curtain. I'm considering taking a little trip with Bonnie to celebrate. But either way, I will give you a call. You and I will talk, but just the two of us.

VALERIE

That sounds fair.

SHERRY

And Valerie, please butt out.

WALT

(Takes a moment to study Sherry, and then turns to Valerie.)

Yes, Valerie. Please butt out.

(VALERIE recoils. A beat before turning back to Sherry.)

Sherry, I'm ashamed of my behavior. I'm so sorry. I feel like shit. For the past several weeks, I've been... on a journey, I guess. You know, I've always studied the past, the decisions and actions of people who lived in the past. But the pain I caused you, I felt it, too, and it's been a catalyst for me. So, now I'm turning my focus inward and looking to the future rather than the past. Maybe you and I will have another chance. I don't know. But either way, I'm keeping to this journey. Please let me be the one to reach out when I'm ready. I hope we have another shot, but whatever happens, I do wish you happiness. I really do.

(Extends hand and shares a moment with SHERRY who acknowledges with a nod and wistful smile.)

Now, I'm going around the corner to find Eddy and have a drink if anyone wants to join us.

(WALT spins, exits without hesitation as VALERIE, bewildered, looks after him. She looks to Sherry, then to Matt.)

VALERIE

OK, then. Shall we go?

MATT

Listen, I'll catch up with you in a few minutes at Rathskeller's around the corner.

(VALERIE hesitates, a moment of concern, then exits.)

Miss Miller –

SHERRY

Sherry.

MATT

Sherry. You're amazing.

SHERRY

Valerie tells me you're pretty amazing, too.

MATT

Butt out? That was brilliant!

SHERRY

So, you're thinking she's... Do you also think she's intrusive?

MATT

She really gets on with my dad. At least, she did.

SHERRY

And you?

MATT

She's smart.

SHERRY

Yes, she is.

MATT

And so are you. You played your role to perfection.

SHERRY

Thank you. That's quite a compliment.

MATT

Some plays have scripts so strong that you can cast almost anyone. Not this one. The sight gags can't carry it. It only works if the actors make us feel the pain. The tenderness. The warmth. And you gave us all of that. Your timing, your gestures, your inflections. The diction. The volume. Everything was spot on.

SHERRY

Matt, you're quite insightful about the theatre.

MATT

Maybe there's such a thing as theatrical compatibility.

(Awkward smile. Shuffles his feet to move a bit closer.)

We never talked about what happened on the school trip to Chicago.

SHERRY

(Relaxed, smiling, takes step to close the distance.)

But you talked about it with Valerie. She told me.

MATT

She dragged it out of me. It wasn't my finest moment.

SHERRY

I'd forgotten all about it.

MATT

God. Not me.

SHERRY

Really? I hope the memory hasn't haunted you.

MATT

It has... in a good way.

(They share a moment just looking at each other.)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 16

SETTING: Nob Hill Manor resident lounge.

TIME: Saturday morning two days after opening of *Calendar Girls*.

AT RISE: WALT sits, studies chess board while EDDY, half-dressed and sporting medallion, moves excitedly around the table.

EDDY

It's Florida, man!

WALT

She knows you for less than an hour and extends an invitation like that?

EDDY

I know how to connect with people. And, Bonnie's a good judge a character, what she is.

WALT

She does know a character when she sees one.

(MATT enters, ad libs greetings, and takes a seat. EDDY continues to move energetically around the room.)

EDDY

Did he tell ya? Sherry and Bonnie are goin' to a nudie resort in Florida in a couple a months. Ya gotta help me convince your ol' man to make nice with Sherry so he gets an invitation, too.

MATT

Sherry's going?

EDDY

What Bonnie said. And I'm goin', too.

WALT

I am not going to a nudist resort.

MATT

Sherry's full of surprises. Pretty adventurous.

EDDY

Pretty hot, what she is.

MATT

Dad, I understand you don't want to go to a nudist resort, but I hope you don't give up on her. She's smart. She's interesting... And I don't think she feels the need to counsel everyone.

WALT
Like Valerie, you mean?

MATT
A therapist. It can wear on a guy.

WALT
She's been a big help to me.

MATT
I'm glad for you. Keep at it, Dad.
(Standing.)
I just came by to say goodbye. I've got to hit the road, get back to Bowling Green.

EDDY
'Fore ya go, help me convince the ol' man.
(Turning to Walt with creative gesturing.)
Make some memories, man! Relax in the whirlpool. Take some wrinkles outta the kiwis. Let 'em hang out, get some sun.

WALT
I think my time's better spent out with my grandkids, Eddy. Remember, you're the one who told me to create memories for others.

EDDY
Yeah, well, we can create some great memories for the nudie gals down in Florida.

WALT
(Turning to Matt.)
Nice to see you more often now you're seeing Valerie.

MATT
Yeah, it is. And glad you're going to spend some time with the grandkids. They'll like that.

WALT
Will they?

MATT
Feels like we're finally becoming a family. You and I reconnecting. And you seeing the grandkids.

WALT
(Standing to give Matt a hug.)
Son, I'm sorry it took me so long. What your mother always wanted. Wish she could be here now.

MATT

I miss her, too. Maybe one day I'll be so lucky to find a such a partner.

(Gives Walt a final hug.)

A partner in all four dimensions. See you, Eddy. Bye Dad.

(MATT exits.)

EDDY

What'd he mean about the dimensions?

WALT

I'm not sure.

EDDY

Hey, Walt. Let me ask ya somethin'. Think it'd be bad form to wear my medal at the nudie resort?

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 17

SETTING: Detroit Sky Club.
 TIME: Continuing from Scene 13.
 AT RISE: VALERIE and MATT are seated.

VALERIE

Did you see me naked?

MATT

You naked? What?!

VALERIE

Subconsciously. Or did it bubble up to your consciousness when you saw me sitting here? Did you see my naked aunt sitting here? Your naked ex-wife?

MATT

No! No, please don't make more out of this than it is. I loved your aunt. As a teacher.

VALERIE

God.

MATT

Sure, I used to fantasize about her. Guess I still do sometimes. But I loved her. As a teacher. She was the best.

VALERIE

Was she the only high school teacher you saw naked?

MATT

I'm not that guy, Valerie. Not a weirdo.

VALERIE

No?

MATT

No. Really. Nothing perverted about it. Just a happy accident. For me, I mean.

VALERIE

(Takes a moment to consider. Manages to shrug it off.)

I guess not. This is just... Just surreal.

(Pauses to reflect, consider Matt. A bittersweet smile.)

So, I guess Aunt Sherry gave us both some memories.

Yeah. MATT

Yeah. VALERIE

So, what about us? MATT

Yes. What about us? VALERIE

MATT
You strike me as the adventurous type. Not one to let an opportunity pass. Want to make our own memories?

VALERIE
(Chuckling and showing interest.)
You really are something.

Well, here we are. MATT

Are you married? VALERIE

No. Of course not. MATT

But you're soliciting me as a surrogate for my aunt? VALERIE

You think too much. MATT

Intellectual compatibility. VALERIE

Destiny. MATT

I don't really believe in that. VALERIE

I don't, either. MATT

So, what do you propose?

VALERIE

Another drink!

MATT

(MATT doesn't wait, heads for the bar while VALERIE checks herself in her compact, gives her head a shake, quickly plumps her breasts, and pinches her cheeks. MATT returns with new drinks.)

VALERIE

(Playfully.)

What do you think another drink is going to do?

MATT

(Clinks her glass.)

Lubricate our intellectual compatibility.

VALERIE

Put me to sleep on the plane.

MATT

That's not a bad thing.

VALERIE

I guess not.

MATT

Know what else is good for sleeping?

VALERIE

Fooling around?

MATT

Not enough to fool around. According to you, for survival we –.

VALERIE

(Playfully.)

Really?! My god, you don't really think...

MATT

There are private showers in the back.

(VALERIE tosses back a laugh.)

Why not?

VALERIE

Because. I don't want you thinking about my aunt while running wild with your pecker cortex.

MATT

(Reluctantly chooses to play the gentleman.)

OK.

(Long pause as they stare at each other intently. MATT resigns, reaches over, puts his hand on hers.)

OK.

VALERIE

(A beat considering.)

Private showers?

MATT

(Snapping to attention.)

Yes. In the back.

VALERIE

What about our stuff?

MATT

We take it back with us.

VALERIE

(Beat.)

You go first. Give me a couple of minutes.

(MATT stands, kisses her, a quick kiss. Starts to retrieve his stuff then turns and gives a longer kiss. He grabs his stuff and dashes off. VALERIE drains her bourbon. Checks herself out in her compact mirror. Smiles and shakes her head.)

VALERIE

I must be crazy.

(VALERIE stands, grabs her stuff and starts to head off but pauses for the announcement.)

PA ANNOUNCER

(Off.)

For those passengers waiting on the departure of Flight 853 to Paris. The departure time has been moved up and is now ready for boarding at Gate 32. Flight 853 for Paris, now boarding at Gate 32.

(A moment of indecision as VALERIE looks left and right, moves toward showers, stops and reverses to head for the exit, stops and turns to look in the direction of the showers.)

MATT

(Rushes back in wearing only pants and undershirt.)

I heard.

VALERIE

Guess it wasn't to be.

(MATT and VALERIE embrace and kiss.)

MATT

You have to go?

VALERIE

I'm speaking at a conference tomorrow afternoon. Yes, I have to go.

MATT

Yeah.

VALERIE

Come with me?

MATT

I'm expected at one of our factories in Hangzhou day after tomorrow.

(Beat.)

The weekend! Bowling Green. Or, Minneapolis!

VALERIE

(Grinning.)

Even Kalamazoo.

MATT

Hey! How about here at the Sky Club? Yeah! We can check out the showers.

VALERIE

(A beat to take it in, delighted by his boyish enthusiasm.)

You know, maybe we really are intellectually compatible.

(They smile, slowly kiss, a kiss that goes on and on until...)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 18

SETTING: Gulf View Resort.

TIME: A Saturday morning in April, a couple of months after opening night performance of *Calendar Girls*.

AT RISE: Lights up to reveal poolside setting. BONNIE and EDDY, both wrapped in towels enter. Eddy bounces with anticipation. BONNIE has his arm and studies him, amused and adoring.

EDDY

Hey, darlin'! Let's get rid a these towels!

BONNIE

Hold on, tiger. We need to ease them into it.

EDDY

You think he'll do it? Take the plunge?

BONNIE

Long as Sherry goes through with it. I told her, bring a warm towel but leave the wet blankets at home.

(SHERRY, wrapped in a towel, timidly emerges from the darkness and pauses to share a grin of anticipation with EDDY and BONNIE.)

SHERRY

(Calling off.)

¡Ven a mi! ¡El hombre mas hermoso del mundo! ¡Ven al sol! ¡Ven a mi!

(MATT, also wrapped in a towel, hesitantly emerges from the darkness and moves face-to-face with Sherry.)

BONNIE

Hey, Smoke Show. Hey, Boy Toy! How you kids feeling? Ready to get naked?

EDDY

Yeah! Let's make some memories!

MATT

(Staring into Sherry's eyes.)

Mi Corazon. Estoy listo. Ready to make some memories. Some new memories.

SHERRY

(Intimately close, lips almost touching.)

Vulnerability. Nakedness. And memories. What could be more natural?

(SHERRY and MATT share a kiss. BONNIE and EDDY look on in amusement for a moment and then give each other a kiss. After a moment of kissing, they stop and ALL FOUR look one to another expectantly.)

MATT

Let's do this!

(ALL FOUR dramatically drop their towels as theatre goes dark.)

(CURTAIN)

(END OF PLAY)