

MOTHER, MAY I

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A Play in Two Acts

by

Dylan Brody

**Winner of the 2005 Stanley Drama Award for Playwriting**

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MOTHER, MAY I

A SAD COMEDY IN TWO ACTS

By

DYLAN BRODY

Cast of Characters

ELLEN GRUNMAN:	Mother of two adult children
PAUL GRUNMAN:	Husband of Ellen
DANIEL GRUNMAN:	Adult son of Ellen and Paul
FRANNY GRUNMAN:	Adult daughter of Ellen and Paul
SARAH CANNERLY:	Girlfriend of Daniel

Scene

The tasteful, upper-middle class home of Paul and Ellen Grunman in Boston.

Time

A couple of weekends ago.

ACT I

Scene 1

SETTING:

A nice, modern condo decorated neatly in neutral tones. The living room area leads directly into the dining room area in contemporary fashion without separating walls or doorways. White walls display innocuous bits of cheerful artwork in tasteful, unobtrusive frames. Furniture upholstered in creams and beiges offers ample, comfortable seating. Matched dining room chairs surround a dining table all in stained wood.

A doorway Stage Left leads off to the kitchen. A door Up Right leads out of the unit into the wide world beyond. A stairway Up Center leads to bedrooms that are never seen.

AT RISE:

PAUL sits at the edge of the sofa organizing a huge stack of magazines. He stops what he's doing for a moment to take off his glasses and focus toward the ceiling as he shouts . . .

PAUL

Ellen!!

ELLEN

*(off)*

I'm in here!

PAUL

I -- Yeah. I know where you are. I was going to ask you for something.

*(ELLEN appears in the doorway from the kitchen, drying her*

*hands on a dishtowel.)*

ELLEN

Already? What time is it?

PAUL

It's after five.

ELLEN

Scotch or Irish?

PAUL

I don't care. Do we have Jamesons? Could you put some over ice for me?

ELLEN

That sounds wonderful.

*(As she moves to pour the drinks she continues. PAUL goes back to organizing the magazines.)*

When is he getting here? Wasn't he supposed to be on the four-thirty?

PAUL

He has to stop somewhere. Probably buying a bag of pot.

ELLEN

Oh, Paul. Why would you say that?

PAUL

I'll bet it's a lot harder to fly with it now, since nine eleven.

ELLEN

He's going to have his girlfriend with him. Do you remember what he said --

PAUL

Sarah.

ELLEN

Right.

*(She delivers a drink to PAUL and sits beside him)*

*sipping her own. They sit in silence for a moment, drinking while he does the magazines.)*

Did you turn off the --

PAUL

Franny said we use the drone of NPR to drown out our interior monologues. It makes her crazy. She turned it off.

ELLEN

And went upstairs?

PAUL

Yeah.

ELLEN

That's a riot.

PAUL

Hilarious.

ELLEN

I won't put it back on.

PAUL

You can if you want.

*(He puts the organized magazines into a rack beside the couch.)*

*The phone rings. PAUL makes no move to answer it at all. ELLEN leaps up and runs to answer it as if he might beat her to it.)*

ELLEN

I'll get it. I've got it. Here we go!

PAUL

Alright. I'll be here.

ELLEN

*(into the phone)*

Hello? . . . Hi, sweetie. I thought you were going to be on the four-thirty -- . . . Oh! Okay. I don't understand. Where are you calling from? This connection is -- . . . Really? A cell phone? Whoo-hoo. Isn't that something!?

*(PAUL winces. ELLEN does not see him wince. She sighs.)*

. . . No, Honey. I didn't mean anything at all by that. I just -- . . . No. I just think that's a riot that you have a cell phone. Like there might be some phone call for you so important that if you missed it . . . What? . . . oh. Alright. I'll see you in a few minutes then. I can't wait to see you. I love you.

*(She hangs up and turns to PAUL.)*

He's on his way. He said he had to make a stop somewhere on the way.

PAUL

What'd I tell you?

ELLEN

You don't know that.

*(PAUL shrugs, opting out of the debate.)*

Do you think we should have things planned?

PAUL

You mean like our retirement?

ELLEN

No, you big silly. I mean like activities. For the kids. While they're here.

PAUL

I suspect tension and family dynamics will be enough to keep everyone occupied.

*(She slaps his arm playfully as punishment for being naughty.)*

*FRANNY descends from upstairs carrying a laptop computer and a hardcover book under one arm.)*

ELLEN

I think that's so funny, the way you carry that computer around with you all the time.

FRANNY

Why?

ELLEN

Oh, I don't know. It's just - Paul? Doesn't it remind you of when she used to carry that blanket around with her?

PAUL

What blanket?

ELLEN

You know! With the poodles.

FRANNY

She's talking about the one I had when I was two. The one I loved that she threw out.

ELLEN

Oh, for Pete's sake, Franny. You can't still be angry with me for that. It was thirty-eight years ago. And I warned you that it wasn't a good idea to take it to the playground. It was your decision.

FRANNY

I was two years old, Mom. And you didn't tell me that if I brought it with me you were going to throw it out.

ELLEN

It was filthy. You dragged it around on the asphalt and through the sandbox and it was just . . . blech!

FRANNY

And certainly there would have been no way of, say, washing it.

ELLEN

I wasn't going to put it in the machine with our clothes. You should've seen it! Oh, it was just disgusting. Paul, tell her.

*(PAUL puts his hands up  
and shakes his head,  
staying clear of the  
whole thing.)*

ELLEN (CONT'D)

And in those days, you didn't just run the washing machine to wash one item. We were always so worried about electricity and how much it would cost . . .

FRANNY

Have you ever heard of a hand wash, Mom? Would it even -- Never mind.

ELLEN

Oh, honey. I know you loved that blanket. But you don't understand. I didn't even want to touch it. It was really, truly horrible. Just filthy and muddy and --

FRANNY

Forget it, Mom. I said never mind. It just doesn't matter.

ELLEN

I really am sorry. I know. It's just one of the many ways that I failed you as a mother. Mea culpa. Mea culpa.

FRANNY

Oh, for Christ's sake, Mom. Don't do that.

ELLEN

What? What did I do, now?



*(FRANNY pours herself a glass of scotch over ice.)*

PAUL

Is that scotch?

FRANNY

Yeah. Were you saving it for something?

PAUL

I didn't know you drank.

FRANNY

Not often.

PAUL

Huh.

FRANNY

When's Daniel getting here? Wasn't he supposed to be on the four-thirty train from the airport?

ELLEN

He had to make a stop. Your father thinks he had to stop and buy some marijuana.

FRANNY

He always was smarter than me.

ELLEN

Oh, I think he was just guessing. Isn't that right, Paul?

FRANNY

I meant Daniel.

*(PAUL laughs)*

ELLEN

What? What did I miss?

*(FRANNY sits down at the dining table and opens*

*up the laptop. She sets her drink down on a coaster.)*

PAUL

Are you using a coaster?

*(With her focus on the screen she lifts the glass, holds up the coaster and then puts it back. PAUL has not looked at her.)*

PAUL

Honey? Are you using a coaster?

FRANNY

Yes, Dad. I held it up so you could see.

PAUL

I wasn't looking.

FRANNY

Of course.

*(PAUL sighs.)*

PAUL

Is this gonna be --

*(The doorbell rings. FRANNY looks to the heavens in gratitude. ELLEN runs to the door. Nobody else makes a move.)*

ELLEN

I'll get it. Hold on! I've got it. It's probably Daniel and Lisa.

Sarah. PAUL

Okay. Okay. ELLEN

*(She pulls open the door to admit her son, DANIEL and his girlfriend, SARAH. Each carries a heavy-looking bag hung on a shoulder strap. Each wears a winterish coat.)*

ELLEN  
Welcome, welcome, welcome, my dears. You must be Sarah!

*(She plants a kiss on the startled woman's cheek and then reaches to take DANIEL's bag. He hands it over.)*

ELLEN (CONT'D)  
Come on in. You must be exhausted. How was your flight? Sarah, Daniel can show you where you two will be staying. It used to be his bedroom a long, long time ago but now it's sort of a guestroom and when we don't have guests I use it as an office and a sewing room. It's just up the stairs and to the right.

*(She wraps DANIEL in a hug and kisses him a little too long and intensely on his cheek for anyone to feel comfortable. Left standing awkwardly for a moment, SARAH shrugs and heads for the stairs.)*

ELLEN (CONT'D)

Oh! As long as you're going up why don't you take Daniel's bag, too, just so it's not in the way down here.

*(After half-a-moment's hesitation, SARAH retrieves the second bag. She hefts it onto her shoulder and, staggering under the weight heads for the stairs.)*

*FRANNY gets up to help her carry the bags.)*

FRANNY

Let me give you a hand there, Sarah.

SARAH

Thank you. Franny, right?

FRANNY

Uh-huh. We spoke on the phone once. I asked for Daniel and you thought I was trying to sell long-distance service.

SARAH

I remember. Sorry about that.

FRANNY

Not a problem. Pretty soon you're gonna wish you'd been right.

SARAH

Huh?

FRANNY

It's our family motto. Long-distance: Significantly better than being there.

*(Carrying one bag each, they disappear up the stairs. PAUL sets the*

*stack of carefully  
organized magazines  
aside and moves to greet  
DANIEL with a warm  
embrace.)*

PAUL  
Heya, kiddo. How was the flight?

DANIEL  
Not bad.

PAUL  
Good. Good. And how're you?

DANIEL  
I'm alright. You?

PAUL  
I'm fine. I'm fine. Okay. Well. It was good seeing you.

*(They both laugh lightly  
at the meaningless  
little joke.)*

ELLEN  
Paul!

*(PAUL shrugs and goes  
back to his seat. He  
sips the drink.)*

ELLEN  
I made your favorite for dinner.

DANIEL  
Oh. Good. What's my favorite?

*(PAUL laughs.)*

ELLEN  
You silly!

DANIEL

Seriously. I have no idea what you're saying you made.

ELLEN

Your favorite! Potato latkes with sour cream and breaded pork chops.

DANIEL

Nice. Culturally flavored but not at all kosher.

ELLEN

It's your favorite meal. Isn't it?

DANIEL

Um. Okay.

ELLEN

Well, it used to be.

PAUL

Ellen.

DANIEL

Okay.

ELLEN

Do you want something else?

DANIEL

No. No. That sounds fine.

ELLEN

'cause I can make whatever you want. I won't be upset if you --

DANIEL

Mom, it's fine. Pork chops is fine.

ELLEN

If you don't want the pork chops, you should be able to fill up on the --

PAUL

Ellen. He said it's fine. Please. Stop obsessing over the food.

ELLEN

I'm not. I'm not. I just thought it was his favorite and now it turns out --

DANIEL

It's fine, Mom. It all sounds fine.

ELLEN

You look thin.

DANIEL

I'm fine.

ELLEN

No. I didn't mean -- you look fit. You used to be so skinny. You remember, Paul?

PAUL

Uh-huh.

ELLEN

I used to be so worried every time I saw you. Now -- you look healthy. Doesn't he look good Paul?

PAUL

Uh-huh.

ELLEN

You're all grown up.

DANIEL

Yeah. That'll happen when you're pushing forty.

ELLEN

How are your teeth? Do you go to the dentist regularly?

DANIEL

They're fine.

*(She reaches for his mouth.)*

ELLEN

Let me look at your teeth.

DANIEL  
Don't touch my face, Mom.

ELLEN  
I just want to see --

DANIEL  
Seriously.

PAUL  
Ellen. Don't infantilize.

*(ELLEN shrugs and gives up the attempt, though there is nothing in her manner to suggest that she admits to any wrongdoing at all, merely tolerance of her son's quirky refusal to let her paw at his face.)*

ELLEN  
Can I pour you a drink? Franny's having scotch. Isn't that funny?

DANIEL  
Um.

PAUL  
Why is that funny?

ELLEN  
I don't know. I just remember when she used to yell for us to come help her tie her shoes. And now she's drinking scotch. It just struck me as funny.

DANIEL  
Uh. Yeah. Maybe a drink'd be good.  
*(He goes to the stairs and shouts up to SARAH.)*  
Sarah! I'm gonna start drinking down here. You want anything?



SARAH

*(From upstairs)*

Yeah! Please. Whatever you're having. I'll be down in a second.

DANIEL

Everything okay up there?

SARAH

It's all fine.

DANIEL

Is my sister hitting on you?

*(FRANNY and SARAH appear at the top of the stairs and descend to join the family.)*

FRANNY

I wasn't hitting on her. We were talking about you behind your back.

DANIEL

Excellent.

ELLEN

What does that mean, "Is my sister hitting on you?"

*(ELLEN brings a drink to DANIEL who must then go to the bar himself to pour one for SARAH.)*

PAUL

Ellen.

ELLEN

'cause when I was younger, "hitting on someone" meant, you know, coming on to them, making a pass.

PAUL

Ellen, how many times do we have to --

FRANNY

Don't worry, Dad. I've gotten used to it.

DANIEL

*(bringing a drink to  
SARAH)*

I told you about this. Right?

SARAH

I thought you were kidding.

ELLEN

What are you all talking about? Is this a joke about me?

*(FRANNY sighs.)*

PAUL

Not exactly. No.

FRANNY

I'm gay, Mom. We have this conversation every four or five months.

ELLEN

Don't be silly, honey. If you're gay, why do you keep going out on dates with all those men?

FRANNY

Because a few weeks from now you forget that I'm gay and set me up with someone.

ELLEN

You remember that music teacher from Connecticut? What was his name?

FRANNY

He's a composer. And his name is Darwin.

ELLEN

Do you still see him?

FRANNY

We e-mail from time to time. But I'm not going to date him anymore. I like women. I date women. I sleep with women.

ELLEN

Why would you say something like that?

FRANNY

It's true, Mom. And I keep saying it 'cause I keep hoping some day it will sink in. So far, though . . .

ELLEN

So far, what? You want to try being gay, that's fine with me. I don't judge. I just want my kids to be happy.

FRANNY

Oh, yeah. That's what you want.

ELLEN

What does that mean? What is that supposed to mean?

PAUL

Is anybody getting hungry?

ELLEN

Don't change the subject, Paul. I want to know what Franny meant by that.

PAUL

Just . . . can we not do this? Can we just --

SARAH

I love these photographs over here. Who took these? Did one of you take these?

ELLEN

Those were taken by a man. Oh, what was his name? He had aspirations of being a fashion photographer and he thought I was very beautiful. Can you imagine that? What a riot. This was back in -- what was it, Paul? -- The early seventies some time.

PAUL

June. '73. Phillip Corseman.

SARAH

Phillip Corseman? Phillip Corseman took these?

ELLEN

I think he was really secretly in love with me.

*(SARAH laughs.)*

PAUL

I'm not sure about that.

*(SARAH and he share a moment of eye contact and what seems to be a private joke.)*

SARAH

He had an exhibit at MOCA last spring in L.A.

PAUL

I missed it when it was in Boston, but I've heard that he's doing things with the texture of shadow and light --

SARAH

Some of them, you don't even know what the subject is at first. You're looking at shapes and contours and it takes a minute to adjust to his vision. It's just gorgeous stuff.

PAUL

Did you read in the New Yorker --

SARAH

Yes! Yes! I loved that quotation about needing new eyes to see things differently.

PAUL

"I try to provide new eyes, not just new perspectives. Until a person can actually see things in a new way, he'll continue to think things remain exactly the same."

SARAH

Did he really want to work in fashion?

PAUL

He really wanted to make a living with his camera. It's rough being a young artist in a country that loves entertainment and fears art.

SARAH

Nice.

ELLEN

You can ask Daniel about that. He knows what that's like.

*(She tousles DANIEL's hair lovingly.)*

SARAH

What?

DANIEL

So, Franny. Are you seeing anyone now?

*(FRANNY chuckles.)*

PAUL

What do you do, Sarah? Something in film. Yes?

SARAH

Yes. Exactly. I'm in development.

PAUL

Right. Daniel told me that. On the phone. I have no idea what that means.

ELLEN

What do you want to be doing?

SARAH

What?

ELLEN

Are you a cinematographer or -- I don't know. I just can't imagine you want to live in Hollywood and work at the photomat or whatever your whole life.

(SARAH laughs.)

PAUL

Ellen, I don't think that's what that means.

SARAH

I don't -- I'm not a film developer. I work in development. I develop motion pictures. For Warner Brothers.

ELLEN

Oh! Isn't that exciting. Is it the same process?

SARAH

Is what the same process?

ELLEN

Well, I mean, whether you're developing still photos or rolls of motion picture film, it's pretty much the same thing, right? Dark room? All those smelly chemicals.

SARAH

Oh! No! That's so funny. No. I forget that people outside the industry don't know the nomenclature. Development is the process of developing the scripts. I work with writers to make their scripts better. Or at least more marketable, or more shootable or whatever. It's part of the creative process. It's not a technical job.

PAUL

Oh! That sounds really interesting.

SARAH

I love it. I started as a reader when I first got to L.A. I thought it was just going to keep me going while I learned how to direct. But at this point I love what I'm doing and it looks as though I may wind up getting a producer credit on one of our projects later this year.

ELLEN

Then you might be able to help Daniel out, huh?

DANIEL

Mom.

SARAH

What do you mean?

ELLEN

I don't know. Show some of his little scripts to someone. Help him make them better so he can --

DANIEL

Seriously. Mom.

SARAH

Ellen, I don't think you --

ELLEN

I know. I know. I can't help it. He's my son and I just want to help in any way I can.

PAUL

Ellen, that's really not appropriate.

FRANNY

Hey! Mom! Maybe you could set him up on a date with that agent you put me together with last year.

ELLEN

Very funny.

PAUL

Daniel has an agent. Doesn't he? Don't you?

DANIEL

Yes. Yes, I do.

ELLEN

Oh! Well why don't you ask him to help you --

DANIEL

Her.

ELLEN

Whatever. Okay. Why don't you ask her to help you sell some of your scripts?

DANIEL

Mom, can we not --

FRANNY

Is that your professional advice, Mom? You think Daniel should maybe ask his agent to help him sell some of his scripts?

*(FRANNY pours herself a second glass of scotch.)*

ELLEN

Sure. I mean, isn't that what she's supposed to be doing anyway? It just pains me so much to see someone with as much talent and skill as Daniel has, working away . . .

SARAH

Ellen, have you seen any of --

DANIEL

Sarah, did we bring any pot with us?

ELLEN

Oh, Daniel. I wish you wouldn't use that stuff.

DANIEL

I know you do, Mom.

SARAH

Sorry. No. Remember, you got all paranoid when we were parking at the airport and left it in the glove compartment.

PAUL

I thought you were stopping to pick some up on the way from the airport.

DANIEL

No. No. I had -- there's someone I had to stop off and talk to about something.

SARAH

My boss's ex-wife actually. She has a place on Burroughs Drive.



ELLEN

Oh! I went to a function at a house on Burroughs once. House. An estate. With gardens and -- oh, it was just a riot -- it was like something out of a Victorian romance, you know? Cinderella. Something. Just this huge place with landscaping and a wide cobblestone driveway. You remember that place, Paul? You remember that party?

PAUL

Yes. Yes, I do.

ELLEN

I wore a black dress with spaghetti straps. I felt just like Audrey Hepburn. But that house. It was just absurd. I don't know why anybody would need that many bathrooms. And there was a swimming pool. A full sized, Olympic swimming pool down underground below the garage so they could swim in winter. You remember that night, Paul?

PAUL

Uh-huh.

ELLEN

I was talking to a man for about half-an-hour about how dismal I thought the educational system was and how opposed I was to the governor's proposed cuts and then it turned out -- you remember this, Paul?

PAUL

Oh, yes.

ELLEN

It turned out it was the Lieutenant Governor that I was talking to. But I don't think he was offended or upset or anything by it. He was a very nice man.

SARAH

Wow. What kind of a function was this? Was it a political thing?

PAUL

They were presenting me with an award for some work I did with the National Endowment for the Arts.

ELLEN

Oh! That's right! I think I have a photo of us, somewhere, accepting the award if you'd like to see it.

PAUL

Or, you know, you could go into my study and look at the actual award.

ELLEN

Isn't that nifty? I just think it's silly and wonderful that they would give Paul this big award just for doing what he loves to do anyway. You know? I mean, it's not as if he made any big sacrifice. But there they were. All these important people recognizing us for his contributions.

SARAH

That's very cool. You know, there's a big scene in Daniel's --

DANIEL

What was that, Dad? Two years ago?

ELLEN

And the funniest thing was, it was this huge gala affair, you know, with the caterers walking around with trays full of mini crab cakes and everything -- this huge estate, very hoity-toity -- and then the award they give him is this chintzy little Plexiglas thing on a stand like you could order at your local trophy shop. You know? They might as well have presented him with a mug that said, "world's greatest art supporter."

PAUL

It was really something of an honor for me to get the award.

SARAH

I'll bet it was. What did you do with the NEA?

ELLEN

The oven!

*(She jumps to her feet  
and exits for the  
kitchen.)*

FRANNY

Sometimes she has an uncontrollable need to identify and then locate a household appliance.

*(They All laugh.)*

PAUL

I did some traveling around the country doing write-ups on some exhibitions and installations for them. It was part of the effort to undo the damage done by the far right during the Maplethorpe controversy.

SARAH

Very cool.

PAUL

As long as we have a minute here --

FRANNY

Oh, for Christ's sake.

PAUL

Do you guys need any money? Is everything okay?

SARAH

Are you --

DANIEL

We're fine, Dad. We can manage.

FRANNY

You're unbelievable.

PAUL

What? I'm just trying to --

FRANNY

I was talking to Daniel.

PAUL

You know we're always here if you need us. Right?

DANIEL

Yeah. Yeah, I know.

PAUL

We hate the idea of you struggling by, hand-to-mouth, paycheck-to-paycheck.

FRANNY

You much prefer the thought of them living comfortably from Channukah-to-birthday.

PAUL

I think you're projecting there a little bit, Franny.

FRANNY

I don't think you even know what I'm saying, Dad.

SARAH

I know I don't. Daniel, should I be helping your Mom in the kitchen?

DANIEL

Um.

FRANNY

Don't be scared, Sarah. I'll tell you what I'm talking about. They wield financial assistance like a weapon. It's so ingrained in their behavior that Dad considers it an act of hostility that I do temp jobs for a living and don't accept gifts from them.

PAUL

You really think that?

DANIEL

Seriously, though. We're okay.

PAUL

Okay. Good. But if you do need anything, you don't hesitate to ask, okay?

*(PAUL moves to refill his drink, finds the bottle empty. He shouts.)*

Honey?! Do we have any --

ELLEN

*(off)*

I've got my hands full here. Can you --

PAUL

*(loud)*

Okay. Okay. I've got it.

*(HE exits toward the  
kitchen.)*

FRANNY

Are you kidding me, Daniel?

DANIEL

What do you want me to do, Fran? Seriously. I'm just trying to get in a little visit here so that they can stop talking about coming out to see me in L.A. Let 'em get a little fix of their son so they don't obsess over the distance. Do we have to turn it into a big weekend of revelations?

SARAH

You haven't told them anything, have you?

*(DANIEL shakes his head  
sheepishly.)*

How long?

DANIEL

Five years.

FRANNY

Can you believe this? Can you believe him?

SARAH

Does Franny --

FRANNY

I know. I know everything. But I make it a policy not to out anybody about anything.

DANIEL

Right. So what was all that about with Dad?

FRANNY

All what?

DANIEL

"You are unbelievable!" All that.

FRANNY

I just -- I'm sorry. I just blurted that out.

SARAH

Boy. This is . . .

FRANNY

Why don't you just take some money from him and be done with it, for god's sake?

*(DANIEL laughs.)*

SARAH

I don't get it. Why is that funny?

DANIEL

He could write me a check and then he'd feel better, but I'd have to listen to the ridiculous lecture.

SARAH

What lecture?

DANIEL

The one about needing to earn a living so that I don't have to rely on my writing for money. It's a whole "corruption of the purity of the art" thing.

SARAH

He worked with the NEA. How can he object to people being paid for their art?

FRANNY

Not people. Just us. We can't win.

DANIEL

It's true. Really. If we're broke, we get money and the lecture. But tell 'em about a project one of us has sold and they lose interest in a matter of seconds. It's all very depressing. Just once I'd like to hear Dad say, "I'm proud of you, Kiddo. Congratulations."

FRANNY

Can you imagine that? I can't even hear it coming out of his mouth.

DANIEL

Or even, just, "Good work." I'd like to hear that.

*(ELLEN enters from the kitchen with a big bowl full of salad in one hand and a serving plate of latkes in the other.)*

ELLEN

Franny, would you be a doll and bring out the pork chops?

FRANNY

Sure. They're Danny's favorite, aren't they?

ELLEN

Always have been.

DANIEL

I don't know where that comes from.

*(FRANNY chuckles as she goes.)*

ELLEN

Your father ran down to the corner to pick up more Jameson's.

DANIEL

I would've gone.

ELLEN

It's just as well. It gives me a minute to talk to you. Are you guys okay?

SARAH

We're alright, Mrs. Grunman.

DANIEL

In our own peculiar way.

ELLEN

I know you are, sweetie. I just mean. . . is there anything you need? Don't tell your father I said this, he gets very -- well -- just, do you need any money or anything?

DANIEL

We're fine, Mom. Really.

*(ELLEN kisses him on the cheek and then pats his face patronizingly.)*

ELLEN

You know that we love you and we're here for you if you need anything, right?

DANIEL

Yeah. Yeah. Thanks. I know.

ELLEN

Okay. Alright.

*(She puts her hands up as if she's surrendering to the police.)*

If you say you don't need anything, I won't keep pushing. You just let me know if you do need anything. Okay? Because I hate to think of the two of you living in --

SARAH

Daniel, you have to --

*(FRANNY emerges carrying another big serving plate, this one filled with breaded pork chops.)*

ELLEN

Your father could have timed his trip to the liquor store a little better.



SARAH

Everything smells wonderful. At some point you have to teach me how to make those potato pancakes.

ELLEN

Oh, they're so easy. The key is to own a food processor. Do you have a food processor?

SARAH

I do.

ELLEN

Because if you need one, I could --

DANIEL

Mom, we have a food processor.

ELLEN

Okay. Okay.

*(They All take seats  
around the table but  
nobody moves to take any  
food.)*

You said, "we." Are you two living together?

DANIEL

I told you this, Mom. Sarah moved in six months ago.

ELLEN

Of course. Right. And the place where I send - when I send you things. That's not the same address you used to have. Right?

FRANNY

That's correct.

DANIEL

The same address I used to have when?

ELLEN

That time I came out to visit you. In Culver City. You remember? That awful little apartment that looked out on the street with all the trucks? And that tiny kitchen with the old tile and the stained grout everywhere? You remember that visit, Daniel? You said we could stay with

you and then you used that fold out couch in the living room and we had to sleep on that lumpy futon in your bedroom until we found a hotel? And we were so --

DANIEL

No. You haven't seen my place.

ELLEN

Sometimes I have the feeling you don't want me to come visit you.

DANIEL

Don't be silly.

FRANNY

He just doesn't want you to see where he lives.

*(SARAH laughs.)*

ELLEN

What? Why is that funny? Honey, you know I wouldn't judge you.

*(FRANNY laughs.)*

SARAH

I suspect our place is much nicer than that place was.

ELLEN

I'm sure it is, Susan. I expect you maintain an excellent home.

DANIEL

Sarah.

ELLEN

What?

SARAH

You haven't come out to the Coast since -- what? -- six years ago?

ELLEN

Seven. We had a wonderful visit. Remember, Danny? We took you to that place on the beach and I had the lobster salad?

DANIEL

Oh, yes, Mom. Your lobster salad. That's what I remember from the visit in which you called my home a hovel, made me spend three consecutive days watching you and Dad get sloshed in a hotel bar and asked me twenty times how I could continue to live in a city that has no soul. The lobster salad that you ate made a real impression on me.

ELLEN

I don't know why you're so angry. I thought we had a lovely time.

*(PAUL enters from the kitchen with a bottle of Jameson's Irish, peeling off a winter coat. He puts the bottle where it belongs and heads back toward the kitchen carrying his coat.)*

PAUL

It's colder out than I'd realized. I walked down to the corner. My fingers are all stiff.

DANIEL

Good story.

*(PAUL goes into the kitchen for a brief moment.)*

ELLEN

Very funny, Daniel.

*(PAUL returns without his coat.)*

PAUL

You didn't have to wait for me. I'm touched. That's very . . . polite.

*(He pours himself that long-awaited second drink and joins them at the table. He immediately begins serving himself. ELLEN and DANIEL do the same.)*

FRANNY

Don't be intimidated by the way we eat, Sarah. Our dinner hour is a three-minute span in which nobody bickers or takes pot shots.

SARAH

Nice.

PAUL

She's exaggerating.

DANIEL

It's true. Sometimes the bickering continues.

ELLEN

Daniel.

PAUL

But seriously, Sarah. You might want to reach in and start grabbing food before it's gone.

ELLEN

Paul. Stop that. Don't you listen to them, Susan. If you don't want to rush, you don't have to. We don't have to behave like locusts.

SARAH

I'm sure I'll be fine.

ELLEN

I told you that you can call me Ellen, didn't I?

SARAH

What?

ELLEN

You called me Mrs. Grunman before.

SARAH

Oh. I don't -- I'm sure you did. I'll try to remember.

ELLEN

Thank you.

SARAH

And you can call me Sarah.

ELLEN

What have I been calling you?

SARAH

Susan. Intermittently.

ELLEN

Who's Susan?

SARAH

I have no idea.

ELLEN

Me neither. Isn't that a riot?

PAUL, DANIEL AND FRANNY  
(*simultaneously*)

Hilarious.

(BLACKOUT)

Scene 2

LIGHTS UP

Later. The dining room area is now unlit. FRANNY, DANIEL and SARAH hang out in the living room. DANIEL and SARAH drink coffee from mugs. FRANNY dangles a teabag into her mug of hot water, waiting for it to be properly steeped.

On the coffee table in front of them, a plexiglass award has the appearance of a classy, modern sculpture.

DANIEL

Well. So far I feel this is going very well.

FRANNY

Wait 'til tomorrow.

DANIEL

You think?

SARAH

What happens tomorrow?

FRANNY

The longer we're all together the more the craziness squeezes out around the edges. How much did Danny prepare you for this?

DANIEL

Daniel.

SARAH

Dan -- oh. Danny and Franny. I can't believe I never --

DANIEL

Yeah, yeah.

FRANNY

Seriously. Did he give you any idea what you were walking into?

SARAH

Half of it.

DANIEL

What are you talking about? I told you all about them.

SARAH

Them, yes. You, no.

DANIEL

I know what?

SARAH

What?

DANIEL

I know what? What do I know?

SARAH

I have no idea what you're talking about.

FRANNY

What did he not tell you, Sarah?

SARAH

He never told me that he had these lies going.

DANIEL

Omissions.

SARAH

Omissions? For Christ's sake, Daniel. They keep asking you if you're doing all right.

DANIEL

They can't help that.

FRANNY

She's right, Danny. You can call it whatever you want. You've got a whole lot of lying going on.

DANIEL

Well, you know what, Fran? I'm not as strong as you. I can't handle it. The disappointment, the dismissal. I can't do it.

SARAH

I'm not sure I understand what you're --

FRANNY

Daniel's the favorite. He doesn't want to give that up.

SARAH

I don't understand why they'd be disappointed. I don't get this at all, Daniel.

DANIEL

Dad. Dad would be disappointed. I don't think mom would understand at all. It's all -- it's too far outside of her experience. She can't see anything beyond its relationship to her.

SARAH

Oh, stop it. She's not that bad.

FRANNY

No. She is. He's right. It's like the story of the three blind men touching an elephant. A blind man at the front of the elephant would feel its trunk and say, "An elephant is like a big, rough fire hose." A blind man behind the elephant might touch its tail and say, "An elephant is long and slender like a bull whip." My mom would touch the elephant's leg and say, "I'm good with animals. You see how it likes me? I thought about becoming a veterinarian. When I was in college a dog trainer had a crush on me once."

DANIEL

Man, I wish I'd written that. That's perfect.

FRANNY

My therapist says that's why she can't remember that I'm gay. She can't imagine herself being gay; she can't see herself in the story so it's just not possible for anyone else to be.



DANIEL

But Dad . . . he'd just find ways to belittle everything, make it seem like I've sold him out, let him down. I don't think I can take that.

SARAH

I don't see that at all. He loves you, Daniel.

DANIEL

Well, yes. In his way, he does. But the only way he knows how to do that is to support the futility of my efforts. When I'm depressed, when I'm broke he adores me. You heard what he said before. If I need anything, he's always there for me. If I need anything.

SARAH

Oh, come on. That's not what he means.

DANIEL

Yeah. Yeah, it is.

FRANNY

He doesn't know it. But, yeah. It is.

DANIEL

You haven't told them about the book deal yet.

FRANNY

I don't have the contract yet. I don't want to jinx it.

SARAH

Oh, yeah! Daniel was telling me. How's that coming together?

FRANNY

The contract should be in my email tomorrow. It was supposed to get here today but I got a message from Denise that she wanted to fix something.

SARAH

Well good luck with that. It sounds --

*(ELLEN comes downstairs  
in a bathrobe.)*

ELLEN

Everyone's still up.

DANIEL

It's only nine o'clock according to our internal clocks.

ELLEN

That's because of the time difference.

FRANNY

Yes.

ELLEN

And you? You're not on L.A. time.

FRANNY

No. I'm just awake.

ELLEN

I used to be able to stay up like that. In college I remember once I stayed awake all night long to finish a term paper and then in the morning I went to a swim meet. I was never the strongest swimmer on the team, but I tried hard. That's what's important. You have to do your best. Even if you never get anywhere. You have to try your hardest. You remember that. You kids remember that. Always do your best. That way you can be proud of what you've done even if it's just - you know - flipping burgers or developing film or whatever. You do your best and then you can be proud of it.

DANIEL

Okay, Mom.

ELLEN

I'm thirsty. I just came down for a glass of water.

FRANNY

And the dispensation of advice.

ELLEN

That's just a bonus that I get tonight. Usually when I'm thirsty there's nobody down here to talk to. Sometimes I turn on the TV for a few minutes before I go back up to bed.

SARAH

Do you want to watch some television, Mrs. Grunman? We can go upstairs.

ELLEN

No thanks. I'm fine. Are you kids alright? Can I get anyone anything while I'm in the kitchen?

DANIEL

We're fine, Mom. We're all doing fine.

ELLEN

Well, you just let me know. If there's anything you need . . .

FRANNY

Of course.

*(ELLEN heads into the kitchen.)*

SARAH

Wow. It's like a mantra.

DANIEL

What is?

SARAH

"If there's anything you need . . ."

DANIEL

Did she say that? I didn't even notice.

SARAH

Maybe 'cause I'm not in it all the time.

FRANNY

Did you notice that she's still stuck on the film-developing thing?

DANIEL

It's like selective Alzheimer's.

*(ELLEN comes back out of the kitchen with a glass of water.)*

ELLEN

Sometimes I watch a little bit of the Letterman show. I don't think he's very funny. Do you think he's funny?

DANIEL

I sometimes --

ELLEN

Sometimes I like the top ten list. But sometimes they're just stupid and I don't understand them.

DANIEL

Do you ever watch --

ELLEN

For the most part, I think television is just abysmal these days. You remember Upstairs Downstairs? When PBS had that? On Masterpiece Theater. I think that was the last show on television I really liked. Alistair Cook would do that little introduction like in the old days and then you'd be following all these intricate little separate stories, the wealthy people living in the big rooms and all the servants "back stairs" they used to call it. I thought that was just nifty. The writing and the accents. Just a riot. Can you imagine? Just ringing a bell and someone would bring you what you wanted. And all those servants scurrying around saying, "Yes, ma'am. Right away, Ma'am." Do you remember that?

SARAH

Was that on the show you're talking about or --

ELLEN

Well, goodnight. Don't stay up too late. I think Daddy wants to do a whole brunch spread tomorrow morning.

*(And with that she is gone up the stairs with her glass of water.)*

DANIEL

Do you think she's noticed that she's the only one who calls him Daddy any more?

FRANNY

How could she not have noticed? She's such a good listener.

*(Sarah picks up the award and turns it in her hands, examining it lightly.)*

SARAH

This is very cool.

DANIEL

I know. It makes me crazy the way she belittles it.

FRANNY

I don't know why --

DANIEL

And makes it her own at the same time. It's incredibly --

FRANNY

Seriously. Why does that bug you so much? It's not *your* award.

*(They sit in silence for a few moments, sipping their hot drinks.)*

SARAH

I think you should both just tell them everything tomorrow.

FRANNY

What?

SARAH

What's the worst thing that could happen? You tell them about the book deal and Denise and all of that. And Daniel, you tell them about all the --

DANIEL

Why on earth should we do that?

FRANNY

If I tell them about Denise, they'll want to meet Denise.

SARAH

So?

FRANNY

So, I'm not as cruel to the people I love as Danny is. I don't want her to have to put up with weekends like this one.

SARAH

It's not as bad as you imagine it to be, Franny. For you and Daniel there's all sorts of history and accumulated anger and tension. For me, this is all just good fun.

FRANNY

Good fun?

DANIEL

Are you kidding me?

SARAH

Absolutely. That little monologue on the way back from the kitchen that started out about Letterman and then turned out to be about how she wanted someone to bring her a glass of water? That was brilliant.

FRANNY

Oh!

SARAH

You didn't --

DANIEL

Me neither. God you're good.

*(He kisses her on the mouth.)*

SARAH

Seriously? Neither of you saw that?

DANIEL

I just thought she was dithering. It never occurred to me that she was asking for us to --

FRANNY

She wasn't asking. That's just it.

SARAH

Nope. Not asking. Just fantasizing. Wouldn't it be nice if someone said, "yes, Ma'am" and brought her a glass of water 'cause she was thirsty.

DANIEL

Huh. Man. I have to keep you around all the time.

SARAH

Yes. You do.

DANIEL

You're so much smarter than I am.

SARAH

Yes. I am.

FRANNY

I don't think I've ever heard him say that about anyone.

SARAH

So, does that mean you'll take my advice?

DANIEL

What advice?

SARAH

About tomorrow. At brunch. Everybody comes clean.

DANIEL

Not a chance in hell.

SARAH

Franny?

FRANNY

As René Descartes said, just before completely disappearing, "I think not."

DANIEL

That's funny.

FRANNY

Thank you. Good night. I'll be here all week. Try the veal.

*(SHE heads upstairs.)*

*(DANIEL helps SARAH to her feet and leads her toward the stairs.)*

SARAH

You know, until you start acting like a sane person, you're going to forfeit the right to make fun of your parents' insanity.

DANIEL

Who made this rule?

SARAH

I just did.

DANIEL

You're awful strict, Miss Cannerly.

SARAH

That's right, Daniel Grunman. Now you get up to your bedroom without one more word.

DANIEL

I'm goin'. I'm goin'.

*(They exit up the stairs and . . .)*

*(BLACKOUT)*



END ACT I

ACT II

scene i

LIGHTS UP.

FRANNY, ELLEN and DANIEL sip coffee at the dining room table -- now from proper table-setting coffee cups with saucers. SARAH helps PAUL clear the table of brunch dishes.

DANIEL

It's funny. This is the kind of brunch I remember from when we used to visit grandma and grandpa.

FRANNY

Except there's no pumpernickel. We've got the bagels and lox and everything but we don't get the pumpernickel and grandpa's lecture about how chewing the crusts is better than brushing your teeth.

PAUL

*(collecting serving plates)*

If you want I can do the lecture. "Eighty-nine years old and only one cavity. You know why? Pumpernickel! That's why. You chew the crust, it cleans your teeth. Like Crest. You know why they call the toothpaste Crest? To make you think of crust. That's why."

DANIEL

Thank you, Dad. But it's not really the same unless you spit little bits of whitefish when you do it.

SARAH

Should I be wrapping the left over tomato and onion and putting it in the fridge or --

ELLEN

Just throw it all out, sweetheart. It's not going to keep long and I don't see a use for it in the next day or two.

*(A bell sound from her computer brings FRANNY's head around sharply.)*

*She moves quickly from the table to the coffee table where the machine waits, lid open, for her attention. ELLEN reacts to the sound.)*

What was that? Did anyone else hear that?

DANIEL

Franny has e-mail.

ELLEN

And it makes that sound? It sounded like a doorbell.

*(FRANNY reads through the e-mail, scrolling down through the message.)*

SARAH

How's it look?

ELLEN

Every time someone sends you a message it makes that sound?

FRANNY

I've been waiting for . . .

*(She stops talking, still reading.)*

PAUL

Are you okay, kiddo?

FRANNY

God dammit. Yeah. Yeah, I'm fine. Just more waiting. I thought this thing was gonna be resolved.

DANIEL

No contract?

FRANNY

Not yet. It should be so easy. It's a ghost gig, for Christ's sake.

ELLEN

What does that mean? Am I the only one who doesn't know what she's talking about?

PAUL

She's - you're waiting to hear about a job. Yes?

*(FRANNY nods. She blows  
air out between her lips.)*

ELLEN

When did this happen?

FRANNY

It's happening right now. Only I thought it was going to be finished happening right now. I hate this part.

DANIEL

Everyone does.

FRANNY

I don't want to wait for phone calls or negotiate contracts. You know? I just want to write. That's all I want.

DANIEL

I know. But the rest of it . . . That's all part of the job.

PAUL

This is what I've been telling you, Franny. Both of you. If you find something that pays your bills, then you're free to really just write. Then you don't have to think all the time, 'Am I selling this piece fast enough?' 'Am I writing to the marketplace?'

DANIEL

Dad. Don't.

PAUL

I'm not telling you what to do. I'm just saying. You've been out there in Los Angeles for -- what -- ten years now?

Twelve? And you're just too good a writer to be out there trying to get work by sucking up to mouth-breathing salesmen who know how to talk fast and pitch well.

SARAH

Actually, Mr. Grunman --

ELLEN

Paul. You promised you weren't going to do this.

*(PAUL covers his mouth with his hand in an indication of guilt and remorse for what he's just said.)*

DANIEL

What's happened, Franny?

*(FRANNY shakes her head, as though she's not going to answer and then it all blurts out.)*

FRANNY

They don't want to give me anything up front. It's ridiculous. They've got a half-a-million dollar contract for the book, 'cause this idiot knows how to sell a book but he doesn't know how to write a book. They want me to write it for him. They picked me. They said they want me to do it. It's gonna be a six month project. But they don't want to give me a god-damned paycheck until they're satisfied with a draft. So not only do I get nothing to live on, they want to contract in this rolling-horizon line for when I do get paid. So essentially they're asking me to do it on spec.

DANIEL

Do you want --

ELLEN

Aw, honey. I'm sorry. I hate to see you this upset. Is there anything you need? Do you want to do the job?

FRANNY

What? Yes. Why would I not want the job?

ELLEN

Paul? You know what I'm saying. Right?

PAUL

If she wants that, she'll ask.

FRANNY

Oh, Christ. No. I don't want that. I don't need your money. Okay? We have enough money. I just wanted to get this thing sorted out today.

PAUL

What kind of a book was it going to be, Fran?

FRANNY

It's still in play, Dad. Can we not put it in the past tense yet?

PAUL

Sorry.

FRANNY

It's - I wasn't really going to tell you about it until the deal was in place.

ELLEN

Why on earth not?

FRANNY

*(shrugging)*

It's Tommy Morgenthal's autobiography.

ELLEN

I know that name.

FRANNY

He was in the news a lot last year. He's the guy who blew the whistle on Magra-dot-com when they were manipulating stock prices.

ELLEN

Oh! Yeah. I remember NPR did a piece on how that all happened. Do you remember, Paul? We heard it in the car that afternoon when I got a cramp in my calf and had to wear sneakers with my black skirt. I don't think I could work in the dot com world. I mean, I'm sure I could learn the technology and all that, but I don't think I'd want to work with all those young, cut-throat go-getter types. It's all "dog-eat-dog" this and "survival of the fittest" that. I don't like that. I'm not comfortable with it.

PAUL

And they need you to write the book for him?

FRANNY

Yeah. And they threw around all these great numbers about what I'd be paid for it . . . they started at twenty thou and then they didn't balk when we said thirty-five. But now they're giving me this crap about not paying until delivery and that's just not how it works. They have their deal. They know they've got the money and the publishing deal.

ELLEN

Oooh! And if that gets published then you can get into the Writers Guild like Daniel. Right? Isn't that what you're in, Daniel? The Writers Guild?

FRANNY

um . . .

DANIEL

Yes. I'm in the Writers Guild but --

ELLEN

You remember how excited you were? You called me all excited 'cause you were getting into the Writers Guild and then it turned out that they *had* to let you in 'cause you'd written one episode for that awful little show on television? What was it called? Small World or something. And you didn't care. You were still all bubbling about it and you wanted me to watch it when it was on and I couldn't even sit through the whole episode it was just so dumb. But you were just thrilled! I guess getting into that guild was really important to you 'cause you just couldn't

stop saying how happy you were about it. You remember Paul?

PAUL

Ellen.

DANIEL

That was a big deal at that point, getting into the Guild.

ELLEN

And if this book gets published then you get in, too. Is that right, Franny?

FRANNY

No, Mom. This is a ghost writing gig. I won't be getting credit on it.

ELLEN

Oh, That's a shame. Isn't that a shame, Paul? You should ask them to give you credit.

FRANNY

And getting into the Guild requires the sale of a screenplay or a TV show.

ELLEN

Oh. I thought you could get in if you had a book published.

FRANNY

No. No.

*(beat)*

And I've already had two books published.

ELLEN

Oh! Right. Of course you have. I'm sorry. I don't think of those as real books.

DANIEL

Mom.

SARAH

I loved the one you sent me, Franny.



FRANNY

Thanks.

SARAH

I ordered the other one through Amazon.com but it hasn't arrived yet.

FRANNY

Daniel doesn't have a copy?

SARAH

He . . . oh. Daniel?

DANIEL

I gave my copy to my agent. I sort of thought, if she liked it . . .

FRANNY

Are you serious?

DANIEL

Is that okay?

FRANNY

I don't know. Sure. I mean . . . it's great. Thank you. Really? Yes.

PAUL

I have a question.

DANIEL

I have an answer. George Washington.

PAUL

That -- That's funny. But it doesn't answer my question.

DANIEL

Okay. But the answer came first, so the question must be wrong.

PAUL

Who's "we"?

FRANNY

What?

PAUL

You said "we." A bunch of times. They offered ten thousand and then "we" asked for twenty or whatever.

FRANNY

Twenty and thirty-five.

ELLEN

Your father's right, though. Who was "we?"

FRANNY

I have -- I have someone helping me with the negotiations.

ELLEN

Wait. No. No. There's more to it than that. Because when I asked if you needed us to support you while you did the book, you said, "we have enough money."

DANIEL

Ah, yes. You did. Didn't you?

FRANNY

This you remember? You can't remember I'm a published author but you can remember what pronoun I used in a passing remark?

ELLEN

Woo-hoo. "Published author." I think Susan and I make up about twenty percent of your readership.

FRANNY

Sarah.

ELLEN

What?

FRANNY

Stop calling her Susan. Please. Her name's Sarah. And I'm Franny, your gay daughter, the professional writer, who's had books and stories and articles published. And "we" is me and Denise, the woman I live with whom I've never mentioned because I don't want you to ask us over for dinner and then spend an evening calling her Doris and trying to get her opinion on what sort of men you should be introducing me to.

ELLEN

You have a roommate? Are you having trouble making the rent? Because you know, if you need us --

PAUL

Ellen. That's not what she's saying.

ELLEN

Oh. Then I don't understand.

FRANNY

Denise is my girlfriend, Mom. For eight months. And we've lived together for three. She works at Langworthy Associates Literary Agency as an assistant but she's getting bumped up to a full agent's position on the first of the year.

ELLEN

Oooh! You should ask her if she can get the people at her company to read some of your writing.

FRANNY

Denise is representing me, Mom.

ELLEN

I don't understand. I thought she was just an assistant.

FRANNY

She is. But she's working as my agent and then she'll bring me in as a proper agency client when --

ELLEN

Oh, I think that's just nifty the way you kids all hang out together and help each other out that way. You know, I used to do some voice-over work for television commercials and radio and I had a friend who worked at William Morris Agency who said, "Oh, I can get your tape into the right agent there," and I said, "that'd be great!" But then she took it in and I waited patiently and finally I called her about six months later but she didn't work there any more and when I called her at home she said she'd done everything she could.

FRANNY

Wait a minute. I don't understand --

PAUL

First of all, she wasn't really a friend, Ellen. That was Bobby Lambert's girlfriend Tamara Genest and she offered to take your tape in because it was easier and less embarrassing than having to listen to it in the middle of a party.

ELLEN

Well, sure. We weren't close. But still. I think she liked me. Remember? She asked me for my pesto recipe. Oh! I don't think I ever sent it to her. I should do that. I'll do that. I'll type it up tomorrow and send it off. I can't imagine what she must think of me.

PAUL

Yes, Ellen. I'm sure she's been holding on to that pesto resentment since 1976.

ELLEN

You think that's why she never did anything more with my tape?

*(PAUL sighs.)*

DANIEL

I had no idea you did voice-over stuff.

ELLEN

Oh, yeah! It paid really well, but I never got enough work to make anything real out of it.

FRANNY

Wait a minute. I remember this.

ELLEN

Do you?

FRANNY

You had -- you did one thing. You did one line for the tag of a commercial for something Uncle Morty was working on. And then you sent out, like, fifty copies of the tape of your line.

ELLEN

It's a very competitive business, voice over.

FRANNY

You said, "Some restrictions may apply," or something.

ELLEN

I said, "Valid only at participating locations. Call your local retailer for details." See that? I still remember my line. Isn't that something? Sometimes I still think about getting back into that business.

*(PAUL winces.)*

FRANNY

You -- Back into that business? What are you talking about, Mom? You had one line in nineteen seventy-five. That'd be like me saying that I'm going back into ballet.

ELLEN

Don't be silly, dear. You were never a dancer.

FRANNY

I had a tu-tu when I was nine.

*(DANIEL laughs.)*

ELLEN

I don't know that you could really call that "going back into" ballet. But if you want to take a dance class or something, you know your father and I will always support you if you ever --

DANIEL

Okay. Enough. Stop that. Stop this. Look. Franny. If you want me to, I can have my agent put in a call for you and get this thing closed and done. Denise'll have to split her commission on the project, but at least you'll have the money in your pocket and be able to get down to work.

SARAH

Carla's amazing. She intimidates fifty-year-old producers.

ELLEN

Is that a good thing?

SARAH

It's exactly what you want in an agent.

ELLEN

Oh. Alright.

FRANNY

I think we'll be able to work it out, Danny. Thanks. As long as I can resist the urge to fire off an ultimatum to these idiots at Morgenthal's office.

DANIEL

Yeah. That's what the agents are for. So that we can just all get along and pretend we love one another while they do all the hardcore stuff on our behalf.

SARAH

So, Daniel. Now that Franny's told us about Denise and the book deal . . .

DANIEL

Very funny.

ELLEN

Why is that funny? I don't get it.

DANIEL

It's nothing, Mom.

PAUL

Is there --

DANIEL

Really. It's nothing. Not anything.

*(DANIEL'S cell phone rings.)*

ELLEN

Is that more I-mail?

FRANNY

E-mail, mom. Seriously. You should know what e-mail is.

DANIEL

No. That's my phone.

*(He fishes it out of his  
pocket and speaks into it.)*

Grunman.

ELLEN

Whoo-hoo! Look at the big shot with the phone call in his pants.

PAUL

Ellen.

DANIEL

Hey, Carla! We were just talking about you. What goes on?

*(He moves away from the  
crowd and puts a finger  
in his open ear to be  
able to fully focus on  
the phone call.)*

ELLEN

I think that's just a riot the way people carry their phones around with them now all the time. I remember when we didn't even have answering machines. If you were at home you could get phone calls and if you were out you just had to assume that anyone who wanted to talk to you could call back later.

SARAH

Yep. Welcome to the twenty-first century.

DANIEL

*(into the phone)*

No. I'm in Boston. I haven't seen e-mail, haven't checked voice mail.

SARAH

You don't have a cell phone, Mrs. Grunman?

ELLEN

I do. But it's only for emergencies. And I don't carry it around with me.

PAUL

Does he have something in the works?

SARAH

Always.

FRANNY

Denise still thinks she's going to be able to close this thing today. Wouldn't that be great? If I could make enough to cover --

ELLEN

Of course it would, Honey. And then, how long would you have to write this thing for Tommy Hilfiger?

SARAH

Morganthal.

ELLEN

What?

SARAH

She's writing for Tommy Morganthal. Not for Tommy Hilfiger. Tommy Morganthal pumped up the price of internet stocks. Tommy Hilfiger jacks up the price of polo shirts.

ELLEN

Of course. Morganthal. Thank you, Susan.

*(SARAH, FRANNY and PAUL  
sigh.)*

DANIEL

*(into the phone)*

On the new one? No. We don't have to give in to their pressure just 'cause they say they want the thing. Everybody wants the thing. We're in the power position, here and I don't --

PAUL

Is this something big that he's dealing with over there?



SARAH

Just some contract stuff.

ELLEN

Shouldn't his agent know how to deal with that herself?

SARAH

She does. But she doesn't always know what he wants.

DANIEL

*(into the phone)*

Okay. No. Now it's your turn to listen. Tell him I see no reason to put a second show on his network when I'm getting no support at all on the show he's already got. Remind him of the numbers at the end of last season, remind him that we've got a second run on USA right out of the box on this thing regardless of who takes initial broadcast and then - Exactly. Exactly right. And tell him he's not going to get this one unless . . .

ELLEN

Boy, isn't that something! He sounds like a real go-getter, doesn't he?

SARAH

He works pretty hard to keep on top of things.

PAUL

Wait a minute. Wait a minute. I mean, I don't mean to be eavesdropping, here, but it sounds like he's talking about real, big league stuff, there.

DANIEL

*(into the phone)*

Okay. Stop. Wait a second. This is ridiculous. If he's gonna play that way, tell him I'll go elsewhere with TIME ON MY MIND. 'cause I've got other offers and -- no. No. Fuck that. I love him, and I love working with him, but the changes in time slots are making me nuts and I'm tired of Warner Brothers dicking me around just 'cause they think they can. They ordered another thirteen episodes. That's great. But it doesn't mean I owe him everything I write from now on. So here's how we're going to do it: Tell him you're going to have me throw TIME ON MY MIND to someone else if he keeps this up and tell him you'll make it happen if he doesn't play ball. Then I can talk to him,

smooth things over and get him to give us everything we want. We'll keep the same time slot; we'll get the additional on-air promotions I've been wanting. I'm telling you. All you have to do is go at him like you're ready to play hardball and I'll be able to get him to go with us on all of it. All right? Just fucking trust me on this. Put me in the position to be adorable and reassuring and it'll work out fast and fine. Let me know. I have to go. I'm at my parents' place.

*(DANIEL hangs up the phone to realize that EVERYONE is staring at him.)*

SARAH  
Everything okay?

DANIEL  
Yeah. It's . . . It's . . .

SARAH  
Jason?

DANIEL  
Yeah. But we're gonna be able to work it out. Carla will take the ball downfield for me.

SARAH  
Good.

PAUL  
What was that?

ELLEN  
I don't like that language, Daniel. Not on a business call.

DANIEL  
No?

ELLEN  
No. If you talk like that, people aren't going to want to hire you any more.

DANIEL

*(chuckling)*  
Is that right?

FRANNY

Jesus Christ, Mom. Seriously.

ELLEN

What?

DANIEL

That was my agent, Mom. She's not in a position to hire me.

ELLEN

Well, still. It's not right. She won't be out there hustling to get you work if you --

DANIEL

Hustling to get me -- Alright. This is ridiculous. This is --

SARAH

You know what, Daniel? I don't think this is the right time. I was wrong. Or maybe I was right, but not now. Don't do this as a way of --

PAUL

I don't think it's like that.

ELLEN

What? You don't think what's like what?

PAUL

I don't think . . . I don't think he needs his agent to be hustling to get him work. Is that right, Daniel?

*(DANIEL nods. He slumps down onto the couch.)*

DANIEL

Oh boy.

PAUL

What'd you sell another full season of, Danny?

DANIEL

P.B. and Speed.

ELLEN

P.B. and Speed? That awful cop show on television with all the car chases and gunfights and everything? I think I tried to watch it once. But I --

PAUL

Ellen.

ELLEN

What? What did I say now?

DANIEL

Yes. Yes. That's the one.

PAUL

And you work for that show? You sell episodes to the networks or something?

DANIEL

Or something. Yes.

*(Pause.)*

FRANNY

Daniel.

DANIEL

It's my show.

ELLEN

What do you mean "your show?" It's . . . oh, what's his name? That handsome fellow who used to be on --

DANIEL

No. I'm not on it. It's my show. I created it. I'm the Executive Producer. I pitched it and I sold it and then I wrote the pilot and then I wrote all but four of the first twenty-two episodes.

PAUL

I see.

ELLEN

Oh, that's just silly. How would you know how to do all of that? You've never done anything like that before.

DANIEL

Well . . . actually, I have. I mean . . . that was the first one I sold on a pitch like that. But I was able to because we'd already done two seasons of The Foster Firm.

ELLEN

The Foster Firm? Wasn't that a movie?

PAUL

I saw that movie.

DANIEL

Yes. See . . . yes. I sold the screenplay and then when the movie did well I sold the TV rights. And I did most of the writing for that at the beginning, too.

PAUL

You wrote that? That was a good movie.

DANIEL

Huh. Really?

PAUL

Yeah. Why do you sound so shocked by that?

DANIEL

'cause I let you read the screenplay when I was still calling it "an untitled drama" and you told me not to show it to anyone.

PAUL

Oh, I did not. Did I? I don't remember that at all.

DANIEL

I was twenty-four and I'd just finished it and I mailed it to you. And then, a week later, you called me and you told me that you'd read it and you thought I had a good ear for dialogue, but I wasn't telling a proper story and that I

shouldn't show it to anyone 'cause that was the sort of script that could really ruin a career.

PAUL

What an awful thing for me to say. Did I really?

ELLEN

Oh! I remember that script! That was the one with all that maudlin stuff with people sitting on bleachers in the rain.

DANIEL

There was one shot of people on bleachers in the rain during a montage. Yes.

ELLEN

And all I could think was, wouldn't their pants be getting all wet?

PAUL

Oh. Yeah. I do remember that script. That turned into a really good movie.

DANIEL

And now it's your turn to sound shocked.

PAUL

Oh, come on. You know it's not like that. It's just -- you're doing very well for yourself out there in Hollywood, aren't you?

ELLEN

That doesn't mean anything, Paul. You know what they say about show business. One day you're up, the next day . . .

FRANNY

There you go, Mom. That's why Bob Newhart still keeps his accounting license up-to-date.

ELLEN

I'm just saying. Daniel, I hope while you're working on that dumb P.B. and Speed show you're socking some money away for a rainy day.

DANIEL

Absolutely typical. Only in my family do people say, "This too shall pass," when they hear that things are going well.

ELLEN

Okay. Very funny. But if I can just give you one little bit of advice Mr. Executive Assistant?

DANIEL

Producer.

ELLEN

Mr. Producer Assistant? Listen to your mother. I know what I'm talking about on this. I'm glad you're working, and it's great that you're doing so well. But don't put this P.B. and Speed show on your résumé. Nobody likes that program.

*(DANIEL and SARAH laugh  
aloud at this.)*

FRANNY

Mom, what exactly makes you think you know what you're talking about on that?

ELLEN

Any time they talk about it on NPR it's always, "So much violence" and "Such bad role models."

DANIEL

Yes. And yet, number one or two in the time slot consistently.

PAUL

I suppose out in Hollywood that's the sort of thing people would congratulate you for.

ELLEN

Just 'cause it gets good ratings doesn't mean that anybody really likes it.

FRANNY

Actually, what it means is that a lot of people really like it.

ELLEN

Oh! A lot of people. A lot of people. A lot of people think Bob Hope is funnier than Jack Benny. What do a lot of people know?

*(FRANNY, having no response to this, stops dead, stares for a moment and then goes to her computer. She picks it up, closes the lid and takes it upstairs.)*

PAUL

So . . . you're doing really well. Right? There's good money in that, when you create your own show.

DANIEL

Yeah. Yeah, there is.

ELLEN

Well my point was just that if you use that kind of language with people all the time, nobody will want to work with you.

SARAH

I really don't think you need to worry about that, Mrs. Grunman. A lot of people want very badly to work with Daniel.

PAUL

Yeah. That's how Hollywood works, isn't it? Once you're successful you can behave like as much of an asshole as you want to and people still want to be part of your team.

DANIEL

When was I an asshole? What are you talking about? 'cause I said "fuck" on the phone to my agent, I'm an asshole?

PAUL

I don't know how you can be comfortable in that venal, soulless . . .

ELLEN

Paul.



PAUL

Sorry.

SARAH

The truth is, Daniel has a reputation for being great to work with. He's not a screamer. He's not a lunatic. He writes well and he writes fast and he puts together a great staff and crew to support the efforts.

ELLEN

A reputation? If you're such a big shot with such a big reputation, how come you're still just an assistant producer?

SARAH AND DANIEL

Executive.

ELLEN

You told me producer.

PAUL

Executive Producer, Honey. That's -- very high up on the totem pole.

ELLEN

That's just ridiculous. If he's so high up, why does Susan still have to develop film for a living?

DANIEL

Sarah.

ELLEN

What did I say?

SARAH

Jesus!

DANIEL

It's amazing, isn't it? Every conversation is like an hour on a tilt-a-whirl.

SARAH

*(a bit sharply)*

I don't develop film, Mrs. Grunman. My name is Sarah and I'm in script development at Warner Brothers.

ELLEN

Oh! Aren't they the one's you said . . . they ordered another thirteen episodes from you. Is that right, Daniel?

DANIEL

Yes. Yes, that's them.

ELLEN

Well, if Sarah already works there, maybe she could put in a good word for you with the people there who hire writers.

PAUL

Ellen.

DANIEL

I'm starting to think maybe we should just fly home today so I can oversee this deal in person.

SARAH

No. It's okay. I'm okay. Sorry. I freaked out a little bit there.

ELLEN

Oh, honey. Are you okay now?

SARAH

Yeah. Yeah. I'm all right. I'm sorry about that.

ELLEN

About what? If you freaked out, you did it very quietly.

*(SARAH begins to speak  
but PAUL gives her the  
signal that says, "let  
it go."  
Ellen finds the trophy  
on the coffee table and  
picks it up)*

Who left this silly thing out?

SARAH

I was looking at it last night. I don't think it's silly at all.

PAUL

Thank you, Sarah.

ELLEN

That's very kind of you to say. But we keep it back in Paul's office with all his other chochkies and doo-dads.

DANIEL

Mom, please. It's not a chochkie or a doo-dad. It's a huge prestigious award.

PAUL

Daniel. You don't have to do that.

DANIEL

Well, someone has to. And you're obviously not going to.

PAUL

Don't displace your anger. That can only hurt people's feelings. If you want to confront your mother, confront her about the thing that's bothering you.

ELLEN

What does that mean?

DANIEL

I am, Dad. This bothers me. This -- Why doesn't this bother you?

*(Paul shrugs)*

PAUL

I'm just saying. If you're upset about the way she talks about your TV show or how you handle your business, that's your battle and you can make your choices. This. . . this is my battle to choose or not.

ELLEN

Battles? Everything's battles now? Paul, does it really bother you that I'm not afraid to say they gave you a crappy little maquette?

*(Paul shrugs it off, shaking his head)*

DANIEL

How can you say that?

ELLEN

Oh, come on, Daniel. Look at this thing.

*(She picks it up and  
shakes it by the topmost  
piece)*

It's not as if we're talking about some --

*(The figurine falls  
apart, the base coming  
loose and falling  
noisily to the floor)*

-- There! You see? It's not even well made.

*(Paul winces)*

DANIEL

Now will you say something? For god's sake, Dad. She broke your award! She was waving it around to prove that she was right to belittle it and she broke it. Doesn't that make you even a little bit angry?

PAUL

Don't do that, Daniel.

DANIEL

Me? What am I doing?

PAUL

If you want me to defend you, ask me to defend you. Don't make this about --

ELLEN

Daniel, if you're really upset about this, I can get the trophy fixed.

DANIEL

That's not the point, Mom.

ELLEN

I didn't know your father's little award meant this much to you.

DANIEL

It's not *little*, Mom. It was given to him by -- why won't you tell her, Dad?

*(To Ellen)*

This was a huge thing. That Dad earned.

*(To Paul)*

You know you're angry. You have to be.

PAUL

I'm not -- The thing I'm angry about -- If I start getting defensive about this I'm just going to start saying things that . . . You know what, Daniel? Let it go. Displaced anger isn't going to do anyone any good.

*(He puts up his hands and offers his closed-eyed gesture of repression, this time directed as much at himself as at anyone else.)*

ELLEN

You see, Daniel? Your father's not angry about anything. I don't know why you should be upset.

PAUL

That's not actually what I said.

ELLEN

Oh, don't be silly, Paul. What have you got to be angry about?

*(beat. Then, Ellen drops the pieces of the award into a small trash basket with a thump.)*

PAUL

Phillip Corseman was in love with me.

ELLEN

What? Don't be silly, Paul.

PAUL

I'm very, very serious. Phillip Corseman wasn't in love with you. He was in love with me. And you took that away from me.

ELLEN

Oh.

*(beat)*

Were you in love with him?

PAUL

I don't know. I never got to find out. He did that photo session with you to prove to me that he could handle it that I was married, that he could get along with you even if we . . . And you kept flirting with him and coming onto him until he was just too uncomfortable and he had to . . . he couldn't . . .

ELLEN

You've been mad at me about this for thirty-eight years?

SARAH

Wait. What'd he just say?

PAUL

Forty-two. It was forty-two years ago. He was . . . beautiful.

ELLEN

Well, I don't know what you expect me to do about that now.

PAUL

*(chuckles)*

I don't either. A very smart woman once told me that forgiveness can't begin until we give up our hopes for a better past.

SARAH

Daniel, did you have any idea at all that your father--?

DANIEL

No, but. . . I don't know. I don't find myself overly surprised.

ELLEN

Was that very smart woman me, by any chance?

PAUL

No. I'm sorry. It wasn't.

ELLEN

Oh. Oh, well. Still. Whoever she is, she's very smart and I think she's right.

*(Paul nods)*

PAUL

Yeah.

ELLEN

And I forgive you.

*(Paul crumbles a bit.)*

DANIEL

You forgive him? What are you forgiving *him* for?

ELLEN

For being angry at me all this time and not saying anything. Keeping it all bottled up like that. And then letting it out at me all of a sudden like this when I already feel guilty about that stupid trophy -- well that was just hurtful.

*(Paul retrieves the broken pieces of his award from the trash and begins playing with them at the table, trying to reassemble them)*

Paul? You knew what I was saying, didn't you, Honey?

PAUL

Yes. Yes, I did.

ELLEN

Do you want me to get that fixed for you? I can take it out tomorrow if you really want me to.

PAUL

I can do it.

*(FRANNY reenters. She picks up on the shifted vibe in the room, sees what her father is doing at the table.)*

FRANNY

Wow. What'd I miss?

ELLEN

Nothing, really. Your father's trophy broke and Daniel got very upset about it but I think he's okay now.

DANIEL

Where were you?

FRANNY

I was sending an e-mail.

SARAH

Oh, Franny! You didn't.

FRANNY

I got inspired. Watching Daniel on the phone like that. That was inspiring. I don't think I'm assertive enough about my deal-making.

*(Paul sets down the broken pieces of his award on the table and turns his focus to his daughter)*

DANIEL

Franny, no. I was talking to my agent. She's there to buffer me from the --

FRANNY

No. I think it'll be good. I know they want me to do the job. I just said that they have to make a decision and put up or shut up.



ELLEN

Oh, honey! You didn't. You see what happens when you pretend to be a big shot, Daniel? Now you've probably ruined your sister's chances of ever getting this big writing job.

DANIEL

Okay. Yeah. You know what? Sarah, can you call Trinity and ask her to set up a flight for us this afternoon?

ELLEN

Who's Trinity?

SARAH

That's his assistant.

*(SARAH goes to the phone and dials. Her conversation on the landline phone takes place quietly upstage during the following.)*

PAUL

I'm sorry to hear that.

DANIEL

I know.

PAUL

I really wanted this visit to be different. I was going to behave myself and not say mean things about L.A. And I thought . . .

DANIEL

*(shrugs. He shrugs a lot like his father does.)*

I know, Dad. It's okay. But . . . you know. I did what I had to do. I wasn't flying out to see you guys. I was flying out to do this thing for Sam and his ex-wife.

PAUL

The stop you made on the way from the airport?

DANIEL

Yeah.

PAUL

I see.

DANIEL

Seeing you guys was just a little bonus. Giving you the chance to meet Sarah. You know.

PAUL

I think I do. Yeah.

ELLEN

Oh! I didn't realize that. I thought you were actually coming out to see us.

DANIEL

No. No. I just figured, as long as I had to make the trip it would be a good opportunity to see you so that . . .

PAUL

So that what?

DANIEL

So that you'd stop talking about coming to visit me. But I guess it doesn't matter now.

SARAH

Can we make a three-fifteen?

DANIEL

*(checking his watch)*

Yeah. Yeah. Book it.

*(The computer makes its bell noise and FRANNY goes to look at it.)*

ELLEN

Are you saying we're welcome to come visit you, now?

DANIEL

Yeah. Yeah, why the hell not? I look forward to hearing what a riot all my bathrooms are, how absurd it is that I

hired someone to do my living room and how ridiculous it is for me to have a swimming pool with a waterfall.

FRANNY

Aw, crap.

*(She covers her eyes with the heels of her hands for a moment to repress.)*

Why am I so stupid?

DANIEL

Lost the gig?

FRANNY

Yeah. They said they have someone who'll do it for them for no advance.

PAUL

Oh, that's too bad, Honey. But, you know. You can't win them all.

FRANNY

I know. But I was really looking forward to that big payday.

*(ELLEN moves to the couch and puts an arm around her daughter.)*

ELLEN

Are you and Denise alright? Do you need help? 'cause if you're in trouble . . .

SARAH

*(hanging up the phone)*

We're booked for this afternoon, business class -- nothing left in first. And there was a problem at the house but they took care of it.

DANIEL

What kind of a problem?

SARAH

The pool guy left a valve open and it flooded the tennis court. But they've got the flow stopped and they're cleaning up the mess now.

ELLEN

That's just silly. You don't have a tennis court.

DANIEL

Yes. Yes, I do. In fact, you know what? Who organized the magazines?

FRANNY

Dad did.

DANIEL

Okay. Sarah, they'll be alphabetical. Find the August issue of Home and Garden, wouldja?

ELLEN

Why do you do that, Paul? You know I like to have them from most recent back to oldest.

PAUL

I know. I know. I do it alphabetically.

ELLEN

I don't know why we even get Home and Garden. I never read it any more.

*(ELLEN holds FRANNY around the shoulders as the younger woman weeps into her sweater sleeves. SARAH opens the appropriate magazine and brings it to ELLEN.)*

SARAH

There you go. This page and the next are all our house. This is the tennis court that just got flooded.

ELLEN

I can't look at houses right now. My daughter needs me.

DANIEL

I'm just trying to show you, Mom, that I wasn't lying or making believe. I really do have a --

ELLEN

Daniel! I swear to god, you are the most selfish, self-involved person I know. I have to take care of my daughter. Can't you see that Franny is in crisis right now? It's not always about you.

DANIEL

Um. Yeah. Okay. We'd better get going if we're going to make the three o'clock flight. I'll just . . .

*(He heads up stairs with SARAH right behind him.)*

PAUL

Seriously, Franny. Were you counting on this gig for your bills or whatever?

FRANNY

I was just really looking forward to having a project and making a little bit of money . . . not having to take any temp jobs for a little while. You know?

ELLEN

I know. It's not a good climate for artists right now. Whenever there's a conservative administration it happens like this. Remember how it was, Paul, when Nixon was President and all those artists' co-ops started closing down? We had that string quartet sleeping on our living room floor for two months.

PAUL

They weren't a string quartet. They were a folk singing group.

ELLEN

And that one man -- what was his name -- he kept trying to get me to try L.S.D. and finally I told him, I said, "I think life is enough of a trip all on its own," and he thought that was just the funniest thing. He couldn't stop laughing.

PAUL

Yeah. He was tripping, Ellen.

ELLEN

Oh, he was not. In our house? I don't think so. I would've known.

PAUL

He was on acid all the time. You didn't think it was odd that he had pet names for each of the tuning pegs on his dulcimer?

ELLEN

I thought he was just eccentric. You really think he was on drugs?

*(SARAH and DANIEL come downstairs carrying their suitcases. They go to the front door. Daniel sets his down and crosses back to his father.)*

DANIEL

Okay. I'm going.

*(They shake hands and do little, warm hugs with their left arms.)*

PAUL

Alright, kiddo. Good luck on that television show.

DANIEL

Luck. Thanks. You know, I'd love it if you watched it from time to time . . . let me know . . . you know, just what you think or whatever if you watch a whole episode.

PAUL

Oh, come on. You're making big money out there. I'm sure you're very proud of yourself. What do you need my approval for?

*(DANIEL shrugs.)*

Alright. Have a good flight. Don't hesitate to call if you need anything. You know we love you and we're always here if you need us.

DANIEL

Yeah. Yeah. You know what? Is it okay for me to call if I don't need anything?

PAUL

Well sure. I mean, I don't know what we'd talk about . . .

*(He laughs as though he's made a little joke and then squeezes his son in a last hug.)*

DANIEL

Alright, Mom. I'm going, now.

ELLEN

Okay. It was great to have you. I wish you could stay longer.

DANIEL

Really, really can't.

ELLEN

I know. You have to go take care of your tennis court.

DANIEL

Yeah. Franny. I'm sorry about . . . you know. And I didn't get to meet Denise.

*(FRANNY waves him off, still half-buried in her mother's shoulder.)*

Yeah. Okay.

ELLEN

We're here and we love you if you need anything.

*(Without releasing FRANNY, she waves to him.)*

SARAH

Bye, Mrs. Grunman, Mr. Grunman. Thanks for having us. I made the bed upstairs so you don't have to worry about that.

ELLEN

Fly safely. It was just terrific to meet you.

*(PAUL throws SARAH a nod and a sad smile, laced with sympathy. DANIEL and SARAH exit.)*

PAUL

Well. Alright then.

ELLEN

I think that went very nicely. Don't you, Paul? That Sarah seems nice. Shame they had to leave early like that. But I think she liked me. I think we really hit it off. Don't you think?

PAUL

Does anyone mind if I put on NPR? I feel like I haven't heard any news in ages.

ELLEN

I think that's a marvelous idea.

*(PAUL turns on the radio and the soothing drone of NPR's WEEKEND EDITION begins to play.)*

FRANNY

Why can't it ever just be easy? Why can't I ever just write and not have to worry about rent and phone bills and --

PAUL

You know what? Why don't I write you a check so that you can have a little bit of time off just to work on your own stuff?



FRANNY

I can't ask you to do that, Dad.

PAUL

You don't have to. Let me do this. It would make me feel good.

ELLEN

That's right, Honey. Is that okay? Will you let your father and me do this for you? As a present to us.

*(FRANNY, still weepy and sniffly, nods her consent. THE LIGHTS begin to FADE . . .)*

PAUL

And then we can talk about how you can find a way to earn a living that will support your writing. Because you can't do your best work when you're thinking about money and sales. Writing isn't about that. Art isn't about that. It has to be about the process and when your livelihood is at stake suddenly it's all about the product. You can't be a writer when you're worried about being a producer.

ELLEN

That's right. We used to know a fellow, what was his name Paul? He used to say he was a writer, but he was a movie producer and he'd never actually written anything. We met him for dinner once at a restaurant on the lower east side in Manhattan where they made the most wonderful curry. I don't remember the name of the place. This was before you and your brother was born. We used to go out and do things all the time. You remember, Paul? How much fun we used to have? How much are you making that out for? What do you need, Franny? Just name a number. You know we love you, right? And we don't care how many book deals you screw up or how many times you go broke and need to come to us for help. You're our little girl and we adore you. Okay?

*(She pushes hair away from FRANNY's red, watering eyes.)*

. . . TO BLACK

END