

Canaries in the Mineshaft

by

Alan S.Austin

Arizona Performing Arts
2641 E.Beekman Place,
Phoenix,
AZ 85016

602 508098

The play takes place in a privately owned cabin on the slopes of an exclusive Arizona ski resort. Stage left includes a fireplace, settee, sideboard and carpeted area. There is a staircase center left which leads to bedrooms upstairs. To the left of the staircase, there are French windows leading to a veranda which surrounds the cabin. Down right is a door to the garage underneath the cabin. Stage right there is a large kitchen table with chairs on the back wall, a stove, fridge, sink etc. There's a phone on a small table next to the fridge. The cabin has a cosy charm with elk antlers above the fireplace and elk and moose mementoes as the decor. The time is the early 1980's.

SCENE 1 EVENING - A STATE OF AFFAIRS

(The phone rings and the answering machine engages.)

VOICE 1

John? Joe here. I just heard back from the attorneys and your partners won't back down. You're responsible for the full amount. They maintain that this was part of the initial agreement when you bought into the practice. I'm sorry, I did my best. Give me a call at my home number.

(Phone clicks and the red message light goes on and off. Silence. There's the sound of dripping. A bucket has been placed centre stage to collect the drips from the ceiling. The phone rings again and the answering machine clicks into action.)

VOICE 2

Larch? Would you pick up please?

Louder

Larch! Pick up the phone. It's Dr. Fischer here.

(As if talking to someone.)

I wish he would get that hearing aid like I suggested!

(Loudly down the phone)

We've got a flat tire. I'm phoning you from Snake Ridge.

If you get this message, turn the heating on and tell Maria to make up another bedroom. Jimmy and his girlfriend should be there around five. Make sure there's food in the fridge. By the way, Bryan, my brother in law, didn't say what time he'd be there and I don't think he has a key. There's a severe weather warning...

(Phone goes dead. The red light switches off and on a bit faster.)

(A drip starts in another place and echoes the first. Pause.)

(Sound of key turning in lock. Enter Larch who stands in the doorway.)

LARCH

I never remember which side the damn light switch is on.

(He knocks into furniture, swears and fumbles. Finally he switches on the light.)

It's colder than a witch's tit in here. Better turn the boiler on. Damn. The roof's leakin' again. It was leakin' over there before. Now it's leakin' over here.

(He moves the bucket to the new leak.)

I don't know why the boiler's on the other side of the house. They built these places all wrong.

(He notices the phone.)

That means there are messages. Okay. What do I press? I ain't got my glasses. Oh yea, playback.

(He presses switch and listens to message.)

VOICE 2

Larch! Pick up the phone?

(Over the message)

LARCH

I picked it up. What's he doin' in Snake Ridge? That's miles away. Huh? Tell Maria? Okay. Another room.

(He speaks to the phone.)

I'll tell Maria.

(He hangs up and picks up the phone.)

I remember her number. 5632.

(He shouts down the phone.)

Maria? Hola. They need you to make up another bedroom.

Where? Hell, Doc Fischer's place of course.

(Pause)

How should I know? I just got the message. Si?

(Puts phone down)

Some of these people have trouble with basic English. We had the same thing in Nam. They could swear okay I'll tell ya. They darn sure knew how to say fuck you. Now, did I get the food? I can't remember.

(He goes to fridge and opens it.)

Yup. Bacon, beans, bread and beer. That's what we had in Nam.

(A doorbell sounds)

(He closes the fridge)

Tomorrow I got to repair those leaks. Oh yea, I got to turn on the boiler... that's right. Did he say Jimmy was coming? I think so. It'll be great to see young Jimmy... nice kid. And Bryan's coming too... he's strange. Not like his brother.

(A doorbell sounds again.)

Was that the doorbell ?

(A doorbell sounds again)

(Enter Eddie Fox S.R.)

EDDIE

The door was open. I'm lookin' for Doctor Fischer. I've got an appointment.

LARCH

He ain't here.

EDDIE

Don't I know you?

LARCH

Huh?

EDDIE

Larch? It's me, Eddie.

LARCH

I don't know you.

EDDIE

From The Nut Tree.

LARCH

Nut Tree? Hum. You're Eddie?

EDDIE

Yeah.

LARCH

You look different.

EDDIE

That's just because I'm wearin' a suit. This is a business call. So what are you doing here?

LARCH

What?

EDDIE

What are you doin' here?

LARCH

I work here. Doc pays me to look after the place when they're away. They're not here a lot. Christmas and Hannakey. The Jewish thing. They light candles.

EDDIE

Dr. Fischer told me he wanted to sell the place.

LARCH

Sell it?

EDDIE

Yeah.

LARCH

He ain't selling it. It belongs to his wife. Me and her brother were in Nam. We were both at Keh San....

EDDIE

I know, you told me all about Keh San over a few beers one night at the Nut Tree. Tell Dr. Fischer I'll be round tomorrow at 10:00. I'm ready to go and I think I've got a buyer.

LARCH

He's coming tonight. The whole family's coming tonight. I have to turn the boiler on.

EDDIE

Will you tell him I'll come round tomorrow at 10:00?

LARCH

Why don't you come round tomorrow?

EDDIE

Thanks. See you in the morning.

(Exit)

LARCH

Okay, I'll tell him you stopped by.

(Pause)

That was Eddie... from The Nut Tree. Too young for the war. Gotta check the food.

(Goes to the fridge.)

It's all here... the four Bs. Now... the boiler... gotta get some heat on... it's cold in here. It's in the wrong place... I told her that... a long time ago. You're putting the boiler in the wrong place.

(Exits.)

(Sound of a car parking beneath the cabin.)

SUSAN

(Off stage - sounds of laughter.)

Desist young man. Who do you think you are?

JIMMY

I am an American and don't you forget it. The land of freedom and opportunity. If it wasn't for us you'd be speaking German.

(Enter Susan with her suitcase.)

SUSAN

German?

(Enter Jimmy carrying bags.)

JIMMY

We saved your ass in World War Two.

SUSAN

Oh yes? And where were you in 1939, 40 and most of 41?

JIMMY

(In cod French)

Susan, my little English rose.. I don't care about ze war. I just care about your body.

SUSAN

And here I was thinking you were captivated by my mind.

JIMMY

I am ... and your body.

SUSAN

Where do I put my suitcase?

JIMMY

In the bedroom.

SUSAN

Am I supposed to sleep with you?

JIMMY

Naturellement.

SUSAN

What about your parents?

JIMMY

You cannot sleep wiz them. Only wiz me.

SUSAN

Would you be serious for a second? Won't they object?

JIMMY

Mom will have opinions but she won't say anything. Dad's pretty cool. So, there's time for a little hanky panky as you English call it. My darling...

(Jimmy grabs her and pulls her to him. She puts down her case and tries half-heartedly to resist. He kisses her. She breaks and sighs dramatically. He pulls her to the floor behind the settee. There's giggling.)

SUSAN

Oooh. You dirty Frenchman. How dare you?

JIMMY

For you I dare do anyzing.

SUSAN

Owhhhh! No... Jimmy... Jimmy...

JIMMY

I thought they were red...

SUSAN

Someone may come in.

(Enter Maria hearing Susan's cries.)

MARIA

Madre de dios..... Que pasa? You are raping this girl!

(She drops the sheets and flings herself at Jimmy)

You son of a cockroach. You disgrace to your mother's name. We women have enough of you men. You treat us like putas...

JIMMY

I'm not...

(He gets hit)

Ouch! What are you...?

MARIA

You gringos are all the same.

(Punching him)

Because we don't fight back, you think we cannot defend our honor?

JIMMY

But I'm not...

(She punches him again)

SUSAN

It's all right. He wasn't doing anything.

MARIA

(In Spanish)

An attack on one woman is an attack on all women.

(She hits him)

JIMMY

Ouch! Be careful or you'll break my nose.

MARIA

I break every bone in your body. You son of a...

SUSAN

Please! It's all right.

MARIA

Call the police.

SUSAN

No, please. We were just... playing... you know
girl... boy... friends?

JIMMY

My nose is bleeding.

MARIA

Madre de Dios! He was not raping you?

SUSAN

No. We are friends.

JIMMY

I'm bleeding. Will someone help me?

(Enter Larch)

LARCH

The boiler's working.

JIMMY

Larch! Who is this?

LARCH

Hey - Jimmy! How are ya?

JIMMY

This woman attacked me.

LARCH

Your nose is bleeding.

JIMMY

Larch, who is she?

LARCH

(Looking at Susan)

I've never seen her before.

JIMMY

No... the other woman.

LARCH

Who? Maria?

JIMMY

She attacked me.

LARCH

Maria, you have to make up another room.

JIMMY

I'm going to bleed to death.

SUSAN

I think there was a misunderstanding. We were just ...

MARIA

Perhaps I make mistake. I get you something for your nose. So sorry.

(Exits to bathroom)

SUSAN

I'm Susan.

LARCH

There's a leak...

JIMMY

Larch... this is Susan...

LARCH

Susan?

SUSAN

How do you do?

LARCH

Are you Australian? There were Australians in Nam.

SUSAN

I'm British. I'm a friend of Jimmy's.

LARCH

No, no British... they didn't fight with us. But the Australians did. Tough guys! Ya always wanted an Aussie at your back!

JIMMY

He's a bit deaf.

(Enter Maria with bowl)

MARIA

I'm so sorry. I thought you were...

JIMMY

I'm Jimmy. Doctor Fischer's son.

MARIA

I come to make up another bed. I new here. From Guatemala.

JIMMY

This is Susan, my girl friend.

MARIA

Very pleased to meet you.

LARCH

The boiler's at 78. There's a leak... in the roof. It was there but now it's here. Snow's melting. I'll have to get a bucket.

(Exits)

MARIA

I go do room. So sorry.

(Maria exits upstairs)

SUSAN

(Bursts out laughing)

What is this? Some sort of French farce?

JIMMY

You think this is bad? Wait till you meet the family.
I need a drink.

SUSAN

I'll look in the fridge.

(goes to kitchen and opens fridge door.)

Goodness... there's beer, bacon, bread and beans.

JIMMY

That's Larch. It's all he eats or drinks. Get me a
glass of water please.

(From outside)

BRYAN

Hello ... Helloo... Is there anybody ho-ome?

JIMMY

That's Uncle Bryan. I didn't think he was coming.

SUSAN

He doesn't attack people does he?

JIMMY

God, no. It's open Uncle Bryan.

*(Enter Uncle Bryan with bags
which he drops)*

BRYAN

You wouldn't believe it.

JIMMY

What?

BRYAN

It went pwep pwep pwep pwepepwepwepwep. It flew right in front of me. I stopped the car... and there it was... what a moment!

JIMMY

What?

BRYAN

It flew to this branch right in front of the headlights. Like it was showing off. Pwep pwep pwep. Absolutely incredible.

JIMMY

A bird?

BRYAN

A Western Screech owl.

JIMMY

Right.

BRYAN

Never seen one before. That makes my tally 962 species. Isn't that fantastic?

JIMMY

Uncle Bryan.

BRYAN

Yes?

JIMMY

This is Susan. She's from England... Oxford actually, the university. She's an exchange student. We're at Stanford together.

BRYAN

Delighted to meet you. I'm Jimmy's uncle. Why have you got blood on your shirt?

JIMMY

Just...an accident.

SUSAN

Pleased to meet you. You're an ornithologist?

BRYAN

A what?

SUSAN

I thought... you... birds...

BRYAN

Oh, no. Just a hobby. I'm in construction.

JIMMY

Uncle Bryan is the only sane person in the family.

BRYAN

That's not what your father thinks. Which part of England are you from?

SUSAN

Norwich.

BRYAN

Benjamin Britten country. Have you been to the Aldeburgh Festival? I want to hear all about Norwich. I better put my stuff upstairs. I am worn out. Is your Dad here?

JIMMY

I don't know which rooms are... no he hasn't arrived.

BRYAN

Never mind. I'll sleep with anybody.

(Exits with bags)

JIMMY

He's a little eccentric but highly intelligent. I don't know why he works in construction.

SUSAN

I like him.

JIMMY

Good, so do I. Just my father and mother to go... and my sister. They should have been here by now.

(Enter Larch)

LARCH

Got another bucket... for the drip. I think it's about here. It's stopped... dripping. That's strange. Oh Jimmy, someone's parked their truck out front. It's blocking...

JIMMY

That's Uncle Bryan's. The keys will be in it. Just move it, will you?

LARCH

Okay. Do you have the keys?

JIMMY

(loudly and slowly)

The keys... will be in... the truck.

LARCH

Don't shout Jimmy, I can hear you. Don't forget to tell your Dad about Eddie coming tomorrow at 10:00.

JIMMY

Who's Eddie?

LARCH

Eddie Fox. He's in real estate. Thinks your Dad wants to sell the place.

JIMMY

Sell? That doesn't sound right.

LARCH

I'll go and move the truck.

(Exits)

SUSAN

I need a drink.

JIMMY

I thought you didn't partake.

SUSAN

I'm nervous.

JIMMY

There should be some wine somewhere. Dad always has a stash.

SUSAN

I'll have a look around. Cherchez the booze...

(Maria enters)

MARIA

I make the beds. I Maria Anaqueretes from Guatemala. Your father Doctor Fischer give me the job. I so sorry. Give me your shirt. I wash it.

JIMMY

That's okay Maria. It was just a misunderstanding.

SUSAN

A bottle of wine? Twelve bottles! Not bad. Premier Cru classe. Can I open this?

MARIA

So sorry I hurt you. When I was young...

JIMMY

It's okay. I'm fine.

MARIA

Buenas noches senorita. I put extra sheets if someone have to sleep down here... hay muchas personas... si? I see you in the morning. Doctor Fischer ask me to make breakfast for everyone. Hasta Luego.

(Exit)

SUSAN

Well?

JIMMY

What?

SUSAN

Can I open this? It looks pretty expensive.

JIMMY

I don't drink the stuff. It gives me a headache. If there are twelve bottles, Dad isn't going to miss one.

SUSAN

Corkscrew?

JIMMY

Should be one in the kitchen drawer. That must be mom and dad now. I can hear the car.

SUSAN

Got it.

(Brandishes corkscrew)

JIMMY

Do you want me to do it?

SUSAN

No thanks Mr. Macho.

(Enter Carolyn Fischer)

CAROLYN

That damned Station Wagon. We were stuck on Snake Ridge for an hour with a flat tire!

JIMMY

Mom! Good to see you.

CAROLYN

God, you look so much... older.

JIMMY

This is Susan.

CAROLYN

I'm so sorry we weren't here to greet you. Glad you could make it. Jimmy told me how pretty you were and he wasn't exaggerating.

SUSAN

Thank you for inviting me. I was going to be on my own during the break.

CAROLYN

We're delighted to have you. In case Jimmy didn't tell you, John is Jewish and I'm Catholic so we get to celebrate everything. There's plenty of skiing and great walks. It's a beautiful area.

SUSAN

I'm sure I'll enjoy it.

JIMMY

Does Dad need help?

CAROLYN

No, he's fine. Larch is helping him. What about a drink?

SUSAN

I was just opening this bottle.

CAROLYN

Perfect. Jimmy, there's a bottle of vodka and other stuff in the back of the Station Wagon. Could you bring it up?

JIMMY

Sure.

(Exits)

CAROLYN

How do you like Stanford?

SUSAN

It's great but so big! You need a car just to drive around the campus. Are there some wine glasses?

CAROLYN

They're in that back cupboard.....

(Enter John carrying the cases)

JOHN

Ay-yay-yay....So this is the shiksa.

SUSAN

Excuse me?

CAROLYN

John...please!

JOHN

I'm Jimmy's dad. John Fischer. Pleased to meet you.

SUSAN

I'm Susan.

JOHN

I see you have good taste in wine.

SUSAN

Jimmy said it was all right to open it.

JOHN

It's a Margeaux Premier Cru classe, 1976. A reasonable year. \$250 a bottle. Help yourself. It will need to breathe a bit though.

(Enter Jimmy carrying box.)

JOHN

Your girlfriend has excellent taste in wine.

JIMMY

I didn't think you would mind if we opened a bottle. It's been up here for about five years.

JOHN

Why don't we all have a drink?

CAROLYN

I think I'll have a martini. Jimmy would you?

JIMMY

One martini coming up.

SUSAN

Shall I pour a glass of wine for you Dr. Fischer?

JOHN

Please call me John. I'll take these cases upstairs and be down in a minute. It will give the wine a chance to breathe, along with the rest of us.

(Exits)

CAROLYN

Was your trip all right?

SUSAN

Yes, thank you. Beautiful scenery. The view was stunning. So much space.

JIMMY

Here you are Mom. Shaken but not stirred.

CAROLYN

Just like me. But that's your father's fault. Thanks. Here's to a happy holiday. Compai!

(Enter Larch carrying supplies)

LARCH

Didn't need to buy any food Mrs. F. I filled the fridge.

CAROLYN

Thank you Larch. I don't know what we'd do without you. Please, just put those boxes in the kitchen.

LARCH

I have to tell the doc that Eddie's coming up to see him tomorrow at 10:00. Something about selling the cabin.

CAROLYN

Who's Eddie? Selling OUR cabin?

LARCH

Eddie's into real estate. Wore a suit and everything. Said he had to talk to the Doc about it.

CAROLYN

I'll ask John. It must be a mistake.

LARCH

Hope I didn't forget anything. Good to see you Mrs. F. Ya know, every time I see you, I think of Bob. Still miss him. A good officer.

CAROLYN

I miss him too.

LARCH

Shame he...

CAROLYN

Yes.

LARCH

Well, I'm goin' to The Nut Tree. Anyone feel like coming down?

JIMMY

Susan, would you like to go? It's the equivalent of the local pub. They have dancing and you can play pool. It's less than a five minute walk.

SUSAN

Sounds wonderful.

*(Puts down bottle of wine and
exits upstairs)*

JIMMY

We'll just unpack, change and see ya there.

LARCH

Good to see you Jimmy. Your girlfriend's real pretty. See you down there Mrs. F!

CAROLYN

I'm not coming down today Larch. Maybe tomorrow.

LARCH

Hey, there's a dance tomorrow. You like the line dancing and you're good at it. Bob always said "our Carolyn is wonderful at line dancing". He told me that...

CAROLYN

Thank you Larch.

LARCH

I'll see you in the morning. I have to mend the hole in the roof.

(He exits.)

(John descends the staircase)

JOHN

She seems very nice.

CAROLYN

I wish you wouldn't do the Jewish thing in front of guests.

JOHN

You like it when I call you Bubbala. When I'm at work, I have to talk like a doctor. When I'm at home I can talk any way I want.

CAROLYN

But she doesn't know us and you embarrassed Jimmy.

JOHN

No I didn't.

CAROLYN

Yes you did. What if every time you did your yiddish thing, I started in with all the Catholic stuff?

JOHN

Catholics don't have a language.

CAROLYN

Yes they do. What's Latin for "fix me another martini?" Where's Lian?

JOHN

Shit. Where is she?

CAROLYN

You didn't leave her at that gas station did you?

JOHN

She went to the rest room.

CAROLYN

Oh, no!

JOHN

She'd have phoned.

CAROLYN

Go check the car.

(John exits.)

(Jimmy and Susan enter)

JIMMY

Get ready for some real Americana down home hospitality.

SUSAN

Am I going to be warm enough?

JIMMY

With me around, you will be!

CAROLYN

We've lost Lian.

JIMMY

What do you mean you lost her? Jesus!

(Off stage)

JOHN

It's O.K. I found her. She fell asleep in the backseat under the blankets.

CAROLYN

Thank God. I was afraid we'd left her at the gas station when we got the tire fixed.

JOHN

She's out cold.

CAROLYN

Is she ill?

JOHN

I don't think so. She's just tired or been into my drugs again.

(John carries her into the room)

JIMMY

Hello little sister!

LIAN

Ehhhh.....errrrrrrrrr.....

Oh God I feel so tired. I think I'm going to be sick.

JIMMY

You've got to stop sniffing the white out sis. It's becoming a bad habit.

LIAN

Fuck off.

CAROLYN

Lian!! Watch your language.

JIMMY

Nice to see you too, little sister.

JOHN

Off to bed young lady. Carolyn, make her a hot drink and I'll give her something to relax her.

CAROLYN

What do you mean taking your drugs?

JOHN

We'll take about it later. She has had problems.

(Exits half carrying Lian)

JIMMY

Well... we're off to The Nut Tree to catch up with the locals.

CAROLYN

Have fun. Larch said there was a dance tomorrow. Maybe we could all go.

JIMMY

Sounds good. Bye mom. Don't wait up.

CAROLYN

I'll have to. Your Uncle Bryan said he was coming.

JIMMY

Oh sorry. I forgot to tell you. He's here. He went up to his room.

CAROLYN

Thank God. I worry about him. He can't seem to keep his mind on more than one thing at a time. I invited him to bring his girlfriend.

JIMMY

Well, he arrived alone. He's fine. Bye Mom.

SUSAN

Bye Mrs. Fischer.

(They exit)

CAROLYN

(She shouts up the stairs)

John! Could you check the other bedroom and see if Bryan's there. I need that drink.

(Opens the fridge)

God! Larch's idea of survival. Ah ice...

JOHN

She's out cold. She may have the flu. I checked Bryan's room and he's asleep.

CAROLYN

Do you really think she is on drugs?

JOHN

Yes...well, she was but I talked to her about it and thought it was settled. You need to talk to her as well. They open a bottle of my best wine and then they don't drink it. Well, I will.

CAROLYN

I'll talk to her when she gets up. I can't imagine what happened to change her so much. I wish she would confide in me more.

We'll have to go to the store in the morning. Larch has filled the fridge with his usual.

JOHN

Bacon, beans, bread and beer. The four B's. I'll phone Maria and get her to bring some eggs over for breakfast.

CAROLYN

He's losing it. Vietnam did something to his mind.

JOHN

He was pretty badly wounded.

CAROLYN

He said something about a real estate agent coming over in the morning. A man called Eddie?

JOHN

Umm.....

CAROLYN

Is he just inventing it?

JOHN

No.

CAROLYN

No?

JOHN

I asked him to come over and see me. I made some inquiries and he comes highly recommended.

CAROLYN

But... are you buying another cabin?

JOHN

No. I'm afraid we need to sell this one.

CAROLYN

Sell it? It's not yours to sell.

JOHN

I was going to discuss it with you yesterday but I couldn't find the right time.

CAROLYN

You can't sell this place. I inherited it from my father.

JOHN

I know, but there are a few problems with the practice.

CAROLYN

There are always problems with the practice. I run the office part time, remember?

JOHN

Serious problems.

CAROLYN

Oh that's even better. Serious problems.

JOHN

There have been some mistakes regarding medicare payments.

CAROLYN

So?

JOHN

(He hesitates)

I owe the Federal Government - at least they say I do - \$345,000.

CAROLYN

What?

JOHN

It's all a misunderstanding.

CAROLYN

\$345,000!

JOHN

They are demanding repayment by the end of the month.

CAROLYN

How can you owe them that much?

JOHN

The billing system. The girl in accounting made several mistakes.

CAROLYN

I don't understand.

JOHN

The government has been paying us for medicare patients but some of the codes were wrong and it turns out the patients weren't eligible. Nobody was keeping track.

CAROLYN

All right. All right. But you can borrow that amount while you're disputing the figures.

JOHN

I've tried. The bank won't lend us any more money. There's already a second mortgage on the house which I've been using to pay the kid's fees.

CAROLYN

What about the other partners?

JOHN

Their accounts were correct so they aren't responsible. They won't lend me any money. I've already asked them.

CAROLYN

Shit.

JOHN

It's just a temporary financial set back. We can make it all back and then buy a better cabin. Besides, this place is falling down.

CAROLYN

But it could take you months to sell this cabin.

JOHN

Eddie already has a buyer.

CAROLYN

Well thank you for discussing it with me.

JOHN

I didn't want to worry you.

CAROLYN

What an insult.

JOHN

It will all work out fine. I didn't want to spoil the holiday.

CAROLYN

Well you did.

(She pours herself another drink)

JOHN

I said I'm sorry. It wasn't my fault.

CAROLYN

Like your DUI. That wasn't your fault? Just bad luck?

JOHN

Every family has their problems. We've coped very well.

CAROLYN

John, I've always respected you. I think you're a wonderful doctor and really care about your patients. But sometimes you just.. make up things.

JOHN

What do you mean?

CAROLYN

Like last weekend. Remember? We had Bill and Janice over for dinner. We were discussing career moves...

JOHN

Yes.

CAROLYN

And you said you already had your membership in the American College of Surgeons.

JOHN

I've got one more examination to take.

CAROLYN

You're not a member John.

JOHN

I will be.

CAROLYN

Bill and Janice are our oldest friends. Why lie to them?

JOHN

It wasn't a lie.

CAROLYN

Yes it was. And now I find out you've been pretending we were coming here for a holiday when actually you've arranged to sell the cabin. This cabin was my dad's. He gave it to me in his will. How could you try to sell it without even asking me?

JOHN

It was a mistake. I should have discussed it with you. I just want the best for you and the children.

(Enter Bryan at the top of the stairs)

BRYAN

Carolyn, is that you?

CAROLYN

I'm here Bryan, are you okay?

BRYAN

No.

CAROLYN

What's the matter?

BRYAN

I don't feel very well.

CAROLYN

Here, sit down. Would you like John to check you out while I go and unpack?

BRYAN

Yes, thanks. Okay Doc?

(Carolyn exits)

JOHN

Sure.

BRYAN

Sorry to bother you John.

JOHN

No problem. Pulse is fine. I'll just get my stethoscope.

BRYAN

This is kinda awkward John.

JOHN

Do you mind taking your shirt off.

BRYAN

I wanted to talk to you about my friend.

JOHN

Breathe in. Out. Carolyn was hoping you'd bring your girlfriend with you this time. Heart's fine.

BRYAN

Well, you see John. It's awkward. My partner is a...guy.

JOHN

You're gay?

BRYAN

Yes.

JOHN

And Carolyn has no idea?

BRYAN

No, I don't think so. Bob and my dad ... you know... they were Army guys.

JOHN

I understand. Is your relationship long term?

BRYAN

We've been together for over five years. Chuck's a musician. Lately, he has been sick a lot.

JOHN

Can you be more specific?

BRYAN

He doesn't want to eat anything and he's lost a lot of weight. I'm worried about him. There's this thing going round.

JOHN

Are there other symptoms?

BRYAN

He gets a lot of infections and he just can't shake them off.

JOHN

Has he gone for any tests?

BRYAN

I don't think so.

JOHN

Have you been tested for the AIDS virus?

BRYAN

No.

JOHN

I think you should be. Just as a precaution. As soon as you get home.

BRYAN

So you think that if he has it, I have it?

JOHN

It's unlikely but it's better to be safe. At present it appears the disease is confined to the gay community.

BRYAN

What can I do to help Chuck?

JOHN

Nothing as far as I know. I'll phone some colleagues. In the meantime get some rest. You look worn out.

(Enter Carolyn)

CAROLYN

Safe to come in?

JOHN

He seems fine.

BRYAN

I'll just go and unpack.

(Exit Bryan)

CAROLYN

Is he all right?

JOHN

I don't know. I hope he's using condoms.

CAROLYN

What?

JOHN

Your brother's homosexual. His partner's sick.

CAROLYN

You've got to be joking. Bryan?

JOHN

That's what he told me. There's a disease going round the gay community called Aids. The immune system gets run down and then they catch all sorts of infections.

CAROLYN

Do you think I should sterilize the toilets?

JOHN

There is no evidence of transmission so far except through sex.

CAROLYN

My father and Bob will be turning over in their graves.

JOHN

I hope he uses condoms. Perhaps you could tell him. You're his sister.

CAROLYN

I can't.

JOHN

It might save his life.

CAROLYN

That's your job. Jesus, Mother of God...my brother's gay.

*(Goes to kitchen and pours
another drink)*

Put some music on or something. And not that classical stuff.

JOHN

You shouldn't drink so much.

CAROLYN

At least I didn't get a DUI. Any more spiel?

JOHN

You haven't eaten since this morning.

CAROLYN

I don't need you to tell what to do every five minutes.

JOHN

Nat King Cole?

CAROLYN

Put something seventies on.... I like that Gerry Rafferty recording.

JOHN

What's this? Prokofiev? Romeo and Juliet. Someone been educating themselves?

CAROLYN

Look Mr. Schmuck. We don't all have your la-di-da tastes. I am old enough to decide what music I like.

JOHN

No offense.

CAROLYN

You are so intolerant.

JOHN

I love you for sentimental reasons?

CAROLYN

That'll do.

*(Puts on the Prokofiev Dance of
the Knights instead by mistake)*

For God's sake. Funeral music.

JOHN

Something is wrong with the player. I can't seem to turn it down.

*(He turns the volume up instead
of down)*

CAROLYN

Turn the damned thing off.

JOHN

I'm trying.

(He succeeds)

The tapes are mixed up.

CAROLYN

This is supposed to be a break, a holiday, a celebration.

JOHN

Here's Nat King Cole.

CAROLYN

Please don't bother. I couldn't stand it.

JOHN

Have it your way.

CAROLYN

We're not selling the cabin.

JOHN

We have to.

CAROLYN

This cabin has been my home away from home since I was a girl. John, listen to me. We're NOT selling it.

JOHN

Carolyn, we don't have any choice.

CAROLYN

Oh, yes we do. I have a choice. My father left the house to Bryan and the cabin to me. That's what we both wanted.

JOHN

When I bought into the practice I put the cabin up as collateral.

CAROLYN

What?

JOHN

You signed the papers.

CAROLYN

I... don't ... re...

JOHN

I don't have any choice.

CAROLYN

But...that's not right!

JOHN

Maybe.

CAROLYN

You can't do this. I won't let you.

JOHN

We're supposed to be a couple. We're supposed to support each other.

CAROLYN

That's all I have ever done. I gave up my career as a nurse to support you, have children, keep house and work in your office part time.

JOHN

And we've had a good life.

CAROLYN

Good? Where did you get that idea?

JOHN

You never said you were unhappy.

CAROLYN

I never told you I was unhappy because I hardly ever saw you.

JOHN

I had to work. How do you think the mortgage gets paid? How do you think the school fees get paid? Do you think Stanford is cheap?

CAROLYN

Oh, yes John. You had to work, didn't you? All those conferences you had to go to.

JOHN

You want me to be a G.P. ? I was trying to better myself. The new house in Scottsdale?

CAROLYN

You've always lied to me John.

JOHN

That's nonsense.

CAROLYN

You think I don't know?

JOHN

Know what?

CAROLYN

When you came back from one of your "conferences", your suits stank of perfume.

JOHN

That's not true.

CAROLYN

I used to lie awake at night worrying. Shall I confront him? Shall I hire a private investigator? No, that's all so childish. Sometimes your clothes would have this weird bathhouse smell...like some sort of body cleanser.

JOHN

I don't know what you're talking about.

CAROLYN

I'm talking about fucking around.

JOHN

Look I may have... it was nothing serious... it was a long time ago.

CAROLYN

Not happy with the goy wife, John?

JOHN

I'm sorry. I should have told you. You just had Lian... there was nothing to it.

CAROLYN

Oh yes there was John. There was betrayal. I thought it was me, that I wasn't attractive any more so I spent more time on my appearance. And now you want to sell my cabin. The one thing I have that's my own.

JOHN

I'll make it up to you.

CAROLYN

I'm not selling it, I'm not signing anything and I'm not going anywhere. I'm standing up to you John. You know, I have even *thought* about getting a divorce.

JOHN

I still love you Carolyn.

CAROLYN

No you don't. You love your career, your classical music and your Mercedes. Dr. Fischer, the almost Member of the College of Surgeons.

JOHN

I think you should go to bed.

CAROLYN

A little night cap first. Just so that I sleep.

JOHN

You shouldn't.

CAROLYN

I shouldn't, should I? But it makes me feel better and guess what? I feel better already. It's a miracle. I'll report it to the Pope.

JOHN

Drink some water.

CAROLYN

Fuck off! Ooooo that sounded good. Fuck off!!

(Exits)

(John tidies up, pours another glass of wine. Shrugs his shoulders. Makes a phone call.)

JOHN

Maria. This is Dr. Fischer. We'll need eggs for breakfast in the morning. Can you get some from the store? Thanks.

(Goes to the player and plays the Prokofiev. Turns up the volume. Sits. Nods his head to the music. Pause.)

(Enter Jimmy and Susan)

JIMMY

Dad, having one of your musical moments?

JOHN

Yes... Sorry... a bit loud.

(Turns it down)

JIMMY

Where's mom?

JOHN

She went to bed. She wasn't feeling well.

JIMMY

Oh...

JOHN

Did you have a good time?

JIMMY

All the locals were there talking about the Feds looking into one of the old uranium mines.

JOHN

Uranium mines? I didn't know there were any around here.

JIMMY

Apparently there are. By the way, there's a dance tomorrow evening. The Ratchet Boys from Flagstaff. Mom will love them. Larch says they're really good.

JOHN

That sounds like fun.

JIMMY

I'm going to teach Susan to line dance so she can experience a real bit of Americana.

SUSAN

I am no dancer but I'll give it a go.

JOHN

Well, I'll leave you to lock up. Not that you need to round here. This roof is leaking.

JIMMY

Larch said he was going to repair it in the morning.

JOHN

Good night.

SUSAN

Wow. Did I offend him or something?

JIMMY

No. He was probably just a bit tired. Do you want some of that wine?

SUSAN

I've already had two beers and a glass of wine. That is honestly my limit. Otherwise I shall feel ill.

JIMMY

Tomorrow we ski. The barman said there was good snow on the north side. We could drive up there in the morning and check it out.

SUSAN

I've only skied once before.

JIMMY

I'll help you. Shall we go to bed?

SUSAN

Um...where am I sleeping?

JIMMY

With me.

SUSAN

Jimmy, I'm in your parent's home.

JIMMY

You want to sleep with me don't you?

SUSAN

Jimmy... it's just...

JIMMY

What?

SUSAN

I don't feel comfortable.

JIMMY

Why?

SUSAN

I know that this is going to sound really strange but I've never actually slept with anyone before.

JIMMY

You like me don't you?

SUSAN

Of course.

JIMMY

Were you parents really strict?

SUSAN

Quite the opposite. When I was sixteen they offered to put me on the pill if I was ready for sex. I said I wasn't and I still don't feel ready. I know... everything nowadays... is so...

JIMMY

I understand. We'll just sleep - together.

SUSAN

Actually I don't feel comfortable with that either.

JIMMY

Okay. Okay. Erhm... I'll sleep down here on the sofa. There are some sheets and blankets in the closet.

SUSAN

Are you sure you don't mind?

JIMMY

Of course I mind. No, really, it's okay.

SUSAN

I'll see you in the morning then.

JIMMY

The bathroom is on the left.

SUSAN

Thanks.

JIMMY

A kiss?

(They kiss)

SUSAN

Good night. I'm looking forward to tomorrow.

(Exits)

JIMMY

So am I... Shit!

(Makes himself a bed on the sofa)

ACT 2 SCENE 1

Morning. Jimmy is asleep on the sofa in his boxer shorts. There's a knock at the door.

MARIA

Hola. Es Maria.

(She comes in and the noise wakes Jimmy who jumps off the sofa)

(Maria screams)

Hay, por favor Senor!

JIMMY

(Startled out of his sleep)

What? Just sleeping. Please. Sorry. On the sofa.
Dormeo aqui.

MARIA

You don't sleep with your wife?

JIMMY

She not my wife. Girlfriend.

MARIA

Tu novia?

JIMMY

Si. I will get dressed.

MARIA

Yo entiendo.

JIMMY

(Dressing)

My parents are still asleep.

MARIA

No, Senor. I see your father... walking.

JIMMY

I didn't hear him get up.

MARIA

I have to make desayuno - breakfast.

(Looks in fridge)

Madre de Dios. I forgot to get the huevos. I go...

only fifteen minutes... I get the eggs.

(Exit in haste)

JIMMY

Well, at least I didn't get beaten up.

(Enter Lian half asleep and looking dreadful)

LIAN

I thought I heard someone screaming!

JIMMY

Maybe it's because you look like someone who just escaped from the Rocky Horror Picture Show.

LIAN

Funny.

JIMMY

It was Maria. She is supposed to cook breakfast but forgot the eggs.

LIAN

So, little brother had to sleep on the sofa. Little brother been a naughty boy?

JIMMY

Shut up. None of your business.

LIAN

Had a little girlfriend problem, did you?

JIMMY

If you want to know, Susan felt uncomfortable sleeping with me with mom and dad around.

LIAN

So... you haven't broken her virgin knot?

JIMMY

None of your business.

LIAN

You're blushing.

JIMMY

Lay off!

LIAN

Where did you pick her up?

JIMMY

She's from England.

LIAN

Oh lah di dah... talks like they do on P.B.S?

JIMMY

It's a nice accent.

LIAN

Got you turned on has it?

JIMMY

Why don't you get your breakfast? Open a tin of beans.

LIAN

Can't eat them. They make me fart.

JIMMY

Then make some toast or cook up some bacon.

LIAN

I thought we had a cook. Why do I have to do everything around here? My guess is you're still a virgin. You've still got that virginny look about you. What you need is an older woman. Like Mrs. Robinson in The Graduate.

JIMMY

What I need is for you to shut up.

LIAN

You've got blood on your shirt.

JIMMY

I got beaten up by Maria. She thought I was raping Susan.

LIAN

What a busy boy.

JIMMY

Let's change the subject. What are you up to?

LIAN

Ummmmm....

JIMMY

How's Holy Cross?

LIAN

The pits.

JIMMY

That bad?

LIAN

The place is run on paranoia and blackmail - two of the Catholic beatitudes if I'm not mistaken.

JIMMY

You've only got a semester left.

LIAN

What that place has done to my mind should be punishable by death. I brought up the Medicis and the Inquisition... I was told they weren't relevant.

JIMMY

At least they're teaching you to think.

LIAN

I don't want to go back there.

JIMMY

You have to. Dad won't let you leave.

LIAN

I can't take it.

JIMMY

How's your college application going? Dad wants you to go to Georgetown, doesn't he?

LIAN

Rejected.

JIMMY

But Dad will pay. You don't get rejected if you pay.

LIAN

Yes you do. I got rejected by everyone.

JIMMY

Not ASU?

LIAN

No... but... anywhere that counts.

JIMMY

Try U.of A. It's a good university.

LIAN

I don't think I want to go to college at all.

JIMMY

Don't be stupid.

LIAN

My life sucks. People suck. I need to get away.

JIMMY

It can't be that awful. Mom and Dad leave you alone.

LIAN

They've been getting on my nerves. All they ever to do is argue. I hate going to school and I hate going home.

JIMMY

One semester... only a few months

LIAN

The last few months have been bad enough.

JIMMY

Why?

LIAN

I can't talk about it.

JIMMY

What?

LIAN

I swore not to.

JIMMY

You murdered the Principal.

LIAN

If Mom ever found out, she'd kill me.

JIMMY

Mom is the gentlest soul you could ever meet.

LIAN

Not about this.

JIMMY

I can't imagine what it could be. Unless... you ...haven't joined the Mormons have you?

LIAN

Much worse.

JIMMY

The only thing I can think of is... you didn't get... did you?

(Lian nods)

That guy Pete, last summer. I thought you were a bit crazy about him.

(Lian nods)

You idiot, why didn't you take precautions? When is it due?

(Lian shakes her head and starts crying)

It's not... you had an ...

(She nods)

Oh my God!...When?

LIAN

3 months ago. Dad helped me. I told him and he said he understood and not to tell anyone. He didn't want my life to be ruined.

JIMMY

Mom doesn't know?

LIAN

No. She thought I had a bad case of the flu.

(Enter Bryan dressed for the outdoors)

BRYAN

Time for bird watching. I slept like a baby. Any breakfast? Where's Susan? I wanted to talk to her about Norwich.

JIMMY

Lian's going to cook some bacon and Maria's gone for the eggs... I'll go and see if Susan's up.

(Exits)

BRYAN

Cat got your tongue? Have you been crying?

LIAN

Nothing important. Just school.

BRYAN

Depressing stuff at the best of times. But you're nearly out of it, aren't you? And college is fun. You can be as free as a bird.

LIAN

Sure. I'll fry some bacon.

BRYAN

Did I tell you that I saw a Western Screech owl last night? Fantastic experience. Not the same as the Eastern... The Eastern sounds like a horse... Wheeeeeee...wheeeeeeee...Wheeeeeeee. I saw one in Texas. But the Western goes... pwep, pwep, pweppweppwepwep.

LIAN

There are lots of birds round here. Uncle Bryan, did you go to college?

BRYAN

Couldn't afford to and anyway, after your Uncle Bob was killed, and all the student protests, I didn't want to. That's when I went into the construction business. Of course, I had to take a couple of courses - quantity surveying - that sort of thing.

LIAN

There's so much pressure to go to college.

BRYAN

Go and have fun. Your dad's got plenty of money. He can afford it. Great bacon.

LIAN

I don't know.

(Enter Jimmy. He has changed his shirt)

JIMMY

She's coming down in a minute.

BRYAN

Well I'm off for a quick gander. Gander... goose... bird.... Lighten up you guys!

(Exit)

LIAN

So, how's sleeping beauty?

JIMMY

She's fine. Just mind your manners.

LIAN

Oh lah di dah.

(Enter Susan)

SUSAN

I hope I'm not late.

JIMMY

Susan, I want you to meet my sister, Lian.

LIAN

Hi. Pleased to meet you.

SUSAN

Jimmy tells me you're heading for college.

LIAN

Maybe.

(There's the sound of a hammer hitting the roof)

JIMMY

What the hell?

SUSAN

What's that?

JIMMY

I'll find out.

(Exits)

SUSAN

Probably fixing the roof. I noticed the buckets.

LIAN

The place has always had leaks.

(Hammering stops)

SUSAN

Jimmy says we should be able to ski.

LIAN

Maybe on higher ground. Snow's bad this year.

SUSAN

Is there any coffee?

LIAN

Not yet. I guess I will have to make some.

SUSAN

So what do you want to study?

LIAN

Haven't made up my mind. My math's good. What about you?

SUSAN

I'm on an exchange programme from Oxford.

(Re-enter Jimmy)

JIMMY

It's Larch. He's mending the roof.

LIAN

Should he be up there?

(Hammering starts again)

JIMMY

Dad probably told him to do it. You know Larch, he'll do anything.

LIAN

It's difficult to get in there. Isn't it?

SUSAN

I sweated blood.

LIAN

What are you studying?

SUSAN

P.P.E.

LIAN

What's that?

SUSAN

Philosophy, Politics and Economics.

LIAN

What sort of job can you get with that?

SUSAN

Lots. You get a pretty good view of what life is about.

(Enter Carolyn on staircase in dressing gown)

CAROLYN

What on earth?

JIMMY

It's Larch. He's mending the roof.

CAROLYN

Could you tell him to wait until after we've had breakfast.

JIMMY

Okay.

(Exit Jimmy and Carolyn)

SUSAN

There's a lot of reading.

LIAN

Most of what we do at school is just busy work. I'm literally just counting the hours to graduation.

SUSAN

You don't have exams?

LIAN

Just SAT.... Which is straightforward. I can't make up my mind about going to college.

(Re-enter Jimmy)

JIMMY

He's coming down. There's ice up there.

LIAN

When are you going skiing?

JIMMY

I think we should leave now. Want to join us? We can have lunch in the village. Then there's the dance at the Nut Tree tonight. We've got to teach Susan to line dance.

LIAN

Mum's the expert at that.

SUSAN

Are you sure I'll be able to learn it?

JIMMY

It's dead easy if you just follow everyone else. There must be some tapes. Here they are.... Urban Cowboy.

LIAN

Put it on.

(Jimmy and Lian line dance to the first few bars of music. They break down in helpless laughter.)

JIMMY

It's easy. On five. Start the music again. Follow Lian. That's it. 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8 Turn, clap..... Cha cha and then shimmy twice. You've got it.

(Enter Carolyn)

CAROLYN

Party starting a bit early?

JIMMY

Come on Mom. Teach Susan how to line dance for tonight.

CAROLYN

Now? Well, all right. Stand next to me and follow my feet. On five. Play Good Time. That's it. Step turn together clap. From the start again... Come on Lian.

(They dance and sing the words)

(Enter Larch)

LARCH

They say there's goin' to be a storm tonight.

(Above the music)

CAROLYN

What?

LARCH

There's goin' to be a storm tonight. I have to mend the roof.

CAROLYN

Come and join in Larch. You know how to line dance. We've got on Urban Cowboy.

LARCH

Hey, that's my song. "I do it and I don't know why. I do admit it but I think that I got somethin' rolling round loose inside, That was never screwed down tight. I don't know why I do it but I do it all the time".

(The music and dancing and clapping should move to a climax.)

(Enter John. Others continue to dance.)

JOHN

I leave you for five minutes and a party breaks out.

JIMMY

Mom's teaching Susan to line dance.

JOHN

Seems like she's doing good.

LIAN

Join in Dad.

JOHN

Too early for me.

(Enter Maria)

MARIA

I have the eggs. So sorry Dr. Fischer. I forget the eggs. Everybody is bailando. I like this. I do this dance. Ole. Very good.

(Above the sound of the music is the sound of ice cracking as on a glacier.)

JOHN

What the hell?

(Dancing stops. Jimmy turns the music off. They go onto the balcony)

JIMMY

It came from the north. Was it an explosion?

JOHN

It was like ice cracking off a glacier.

JIMMY

There are no glaciers round here.

MARIA

Maybe an earthquake.

JOHN

Very strange.

MARIA

I cook breakfast. We all go to dance this evening. Yes? More coffee? I cook more bacon and eggs. Hey Mr. Larch I not know you can dance. Very good for an old man.

JOHN

I'll have bacon and beans.

MARIA

No problema.

JIMMY

Have we got skis for Susan?

CAROLYN

There's a pile of ski stuff in the garage.

JIMMY

Susan, we'll have to fit you out with boots and skis.

MARIA

I make breakfast.

JIMMY

Come on down.

(Jimmy and Susan go to the garage)

(Lian starts to go upstairs)

LIAN

Susan, I'll try and sort out some clothes for you for the dance and for skiing.

(Susan off stage)

SUSAN

Thank you!

LARCH

Guess I'll get back to the roof.

MARIA

I tell you when breakfast is ready.

LARCH

I like bacon and beans and some bread. Bit early for beer. Don't want to fall off. It's icy up there. Bad weather coming in.

(Larch exits)

JOHN

Well, how are you this morning?

CAROLYN

Upset. What do you expect? I'm worried about Lian.

JOHN

She has had a few problems at school.

CAROLYN

What sort of problems?

JOHN

She turned up drunk at the Christmas dance.

CAROLYN

She's drinking and taking drugs? I had no idea. How stupid can you get?

JOHN

I had a long talk with her councilor. I think you need to talk to her about all of this including college.

CAROLYN

She mentioned a couple of rejections.

JOHN

She's been rejected by all the Ivy Leagues. Georgetown's out.

CAROLYN

But her work has always been good. She has a 4.2.

JOHN

This last semester has been very tough for her. I don't know whether to tell you.

CAROLYN

Tell me what? There's more? My daughter is doing drugs, drinking alcohol and didn't get accepted to a good university?

On top of which, you're selling the cabin and you owe over \$300,000 to the government. I can't think of anything else you can tell me that would be much worse.

JOHN

She got pregnant.

CAROLYN

Lian? Pregnant? My God!

JOHN

It's been sorted out.

CAROLYN

What do you mean, sorted out?

JOHN

I arranged for her to have a termination.

CAROLYN

Termination?

(Maria goes out singing)

You mean a fucking abortion.

JOHN

Yes.

CAROLYN

John. How could you?

JOHN

I knew you wouldn't be able to make the decision. A baby now would ruin her future.

CAROLYN

But you know what I believe. How could you?

JOHN

Last night you said I lied to you, I wasn't open. I've thought about it. Perhaps you're right. I wanted to be honest.

CAROLYN

You arranged for our daughter to have an abortion without telling me, you talked to her councilors, you knew she was out of control and now you want to be honest with me?

JOHN

Everything was difficult enough as it was...

CAROLYN

You remember about us don't you?

JOHN

That's why... I...

(Re-enter Maria)

MARIA

Something wrong with the gas. So you want two eggs?

JOHN & CAROLYN

No.

MARIA

No eggs.

JOHN

No eggs Maria... thank you. Coffee please.

CAROLYN

I'm appalled. I don't know what to say.

MARIA

Bacon for you Mrs. Fischer?

CAROLYN

No nothing. Thank you Maria.

(Re-enter Jimmy and Susan)

JIMMY

Got skis and boots. She's the same size as Lian.

(Enter Lian)

LIAN

Come and try this stuff on. Oh, and you'll need jeans and boots for tonight. Mom can we raid your closet?

CAROLYN

Sure, take what you want. I've got stuff in there going back forty years.

(Susan goes upstairs with Lian.)

JOHN

Let's talk this thing through. Let's do what's best for us all.

CAROLYN

Not now. Not now. I can't think.

JIMMY

You two all right? Isn't she a great girl?

CAROLYN

She's lovely.

JIMMY

She picked up line dancing just like that.

JOHN

So what are you going to do?

JIMMY

We thought we'd go skiing and then have lunch in the village and come back here...

have a bit of a rest and then get ready for the dance.

(Re-enter Bryan)

BRYAN

Would you believe it? I've seen fifteen species in the space of ten minutes. A pair of rough legged hawks, an acorn woodpecker - beautiful little bird, and three species of hummingbirds. Everything was popping out of the woodwork, so to speak.

JIMMY

Are you coming to the dance Uncle Bryan?

BRYAN

I don't think so. I've got two left feet although I can hum in tune. This afternoon I am going up on the ridge. Last year I saw a couple of eagles up there. I might see a condor if they haven't all been shot.

JIMMY

Why don't you meet us for lunch?

BRYAN

I'd love to. I'll walk over to Miner's gulch first and inspect the ravine. What time?

JIMMY

12.30 - The Nut Tree.

BRYAN

I'll see you there. I missed breakfast so I'll be starving.

MARIA

I get your breakfast. You want eggs?

BRYAN

Sure, thanks.

MARIA

I cook two eggs and bacon.

(Re-enter Lian and Susan)

JIMMY

You look great.

LIAN

Everything fits perfectly. And she's got boots and a hat for tonight.

SUSAN

*(In cod American singing song
from Annie get your Gun)*

"I'm quick on the trigger with targets not much bigger than a pinpoint, I'm number one... but my score with a feller is lower than a cellar. Oh, you can't get a man with a gun...

JIMMY

Oh I don't know about that. Yee Haw! You sure look cute for a little English girl.

SUSAN

That was a song from Annie Get your gun. Sorry... bad amateur dramatics. Played Annie Oakley at school.

(There's a knock at the door)

*(Enter Eddie. He is carrying
small case containing a
scientific instrument and a
briefcase of documents)*

EDDIE

Hi everyone. Eddie Fox. Have I come at the wrong time? Dr. Fischer here?

JIMMY

Hi. I'm Jimmy Fischer. Dad! Someone wants to see you. We're off to the slopes. Lian? Susan? We'll take our car.

CAROLYN

See you later. Lian, we have to talk. This afternoon.

LIAN

Okay. Sure, Mom.

JIMMY

We'll be back after lunch. Come on ladies.

(He ushers them through the door.)

JOHN

Hi. Thanks for coming. John Fischer.

JIMMY

Oh Dad. I've got to talk to you about school later.

JOHN

What about it?

JIMMY

Nothing big. I've just changed my major.

JOHN

You what?

JIMMY

I'm not cut out to be an engineer.

JOHN

So what are you going to do... medicine?

JIMMY

No, I'm going to change to History.

JOHN

History? What the hell can you do with a degree in history.

JIMMY

I don't know but I like it. I'll talk to you more about it later.

(Exit)

JOHN

Did you know about this?

CAROLYN

He never mentioned it. I'm surprised you didn't know about this. You seem to know everything else about our children without telling me.

EDDIE

Shall I come back later?

JOHN

No. I'm sorry. What a shlemiel. Thank you for coming. This is my wife, Carolyn.

CAROLYN

I want nothing to do with this John. Nothing at all. I'm going to change and go for a walk. I have to think about what to say to Lian.

(Exits)

JOHN

Fine. You do that.

EDDIE

I have another client...

JOHN

Please sit down. You said on the phone you had a buyer for the cabin.

EDDIE

I do but the buyer wouldn't agree to your asking price.

MARIA

I make the beds? Breakfast finish.

JOHN

Thanks Maria. I thought you said the asking price was fair.

(Maria exits to clean and comes back and forth occasionally doing her chores.)

EDDIE

Prices are holding steady in general but there are some problems with this cabin.

JOHN

Problems?

EDDIE

The inspection turned up some rising damp and dangerous mold and the roof needs to be fixed or replaced. Frankly the place is old. It needs to be renovated.

JOHN

But you said you had a buyer and that they were willing to pay cash.

EDDIE

Yes.

JOHN

So how much are they offering?

EDDIE

\$220,000.

JOHN

Oh, come on. You said we wouldn't go below \$300,000 and that was our final rock bottom price.

EDDIE

That was last week. Please, believe me Dr. Fischer I'm on your side. I have been negotiating all week.

JOHN

You're talking \$80,000 less than my bottom price. Look, I have to get a minimum of \$300,000.

EDDIE

Let me show you something.

(He goes to the case and gets out a Geiger counter)

I'm not sure how to work this thing. I just borrowed it.

JOHN

What is it?

EDDIE

It's a Geiger counter.

JOHN

Geiger counter?

EDDIE

You know the stream that runs past the cabin? It rises up on the hill about a mile from here. On the other side of the ridge there's an old uranium mine.

JOHN

So what does that have to do with the cabin?

(Enter Larch)

LARCH

I covered the holes with a tarpaulin Doc. Should keep out the rain. Need to buy some tiles. There's some rot up there. Little bit of cutting away and I'll have it fixed. Oh, hi Eddie. I told the Doc you waz comin'.

JOHN

Get the tiles Larch. Put them on the bill.

LARCH

What you got there, Eddie?

EDDIE

It's for measuring radioactivity.

LARCH

Oh I seen one of them up at the mine.

JOHN

Uranium mine?

LARCH

Yup, over the hill. About a mile. I go there every week.

JOHN

You go there every week?

LARCH

Yup. Good for your health. Every Sunday morning I sit up there in the mine for a couple of hours. Usually take a beer. I feel so much better after. Don't have all those pains from my wounds from when I was in Nam.

(Carolyn comes downstairs, walks between them to the door and says nothing. She turns looks at John, then goes out)

Bye Mrs F. Did I say something wrong?

JOHN

No, it's fine.

LARCH

Well I'm outta here to get those tiles. I'll fix the roof tomorrow morning. Bye Maria. You going to the dance tonight?

(Off stage)

MARIA

I have to have someone to look after the children.

LARCH

Well, maybe I'll see you there. Bye.

(Exits)

EDDIE

It's working.

JOHN

What is this about?

(As Eddie goes towards the front door the Geiger counter begins to blip)

EDDIE

There. Listen to this.

JOHN

It's radioactive?

EDDIE

'Fraid so. Listen when I got out onto the stairs.

(He goes outside and down the stairs and shouts. The blips increase.)

The piles. Where they hit the ground. It's a much higher rate of contamination.

JOHN

Contamination?

(Eddie returns)

EDDIE

It's because of the stream.

JOHN

Who knows about this?

EDDIE

Luckily not too many people. I found out by chance. There were some Feds in town and they were drinking in the Nut Tree and they said they were checking radiation levels.

JOHN

Feds?

EDDIE

Yes, EPA guys.

JOHN

The Feds are really messing with my life! Shit!
Does your buyer know?

EDDIE

I don't think so.

JOHN

They're paying cash?

EDDIE

That's what they said. I checked them out. They've got a bunch of investments. Cash is no problem.

JOHN

Eddie, I need to sell this cabin. So much depends on it.

EDDIE

I understand.

JOHN

What's the lowest you think they might offer?

EDDIE

My gut feeling says \$250,000. They would think it was a steal which it is but they don't know about the "problem".

JOHN

But you have to disclose everything don't you?

EDDIE

You never saw this Geiger counter.

JOHN

Thank you Eddie. You are going to save a family.

EDDIE

It is my pleasure Dr. Fischer. I'll bring around the papers in the morning to sign.

(He embraces Eddie)

JOHN

Do what you can.

ACT 2 SCENE 2

LATE EVENING. THERE IS A LIGHT ON IN THE KITCHEN. SOUND OF A STORM IN THE DISTANCE. BUCKETS PLACED TO CATCH WATER DRIPPING THROUGH CEILING FROM THE ICE MELTING.

*(Enter Lian in boots and hat.
She is out of breath)*

LIAN

Where's mother's stash? Here it is, cheap vodka. Ugh. Some Pepsi to disguise it. Cheers. Here's to the day I turn 21.

(Enter Bryan out of breath)

BRYAN

I'm too old for this.

(Notices the bottle of vodka)

You're not drinking are you? You're underage.

LIAN

I had to spend the whole evening sipping cranberry juice.

BRYAN

Pour me one will you?

LIAN

That was fun.

BRYAN

I can't believe I line danced.

LIAN

You were good.

BRYAN

Thanks.

(She hands him the drink)

Pepsi and vodka? Oh well, cheers! That barman was a nice guy.

LIAN

He was giving me the eye all night.

BRYAN

Me too! Have you seen my binoculars?

LIAN

Over there.

BRYAN

On my way up I thought I saw nighthawks. Have you got a flashlight?

LIAN

There's one in the garage. On the shelf at the back. Were they those birds flying around the lamp post?

BRYAN

Yes. The one I was intrigued by had a long tail. It might be a lesser nighthawk. Very rare. They moult at a different time than the others.

LIAN

How do you know all this stuff?

BRYAN

It's my hobby. Do you want to come with me?

LIAN

Maybe. You know, Mom and Dad aren't back and they left before us.

BRYAN

They didn't look too happy.

LIAN

I sensed trouble brewing. Mom was giving me dirty looks all night. She wants to speak to me. God knows what that's about.

BRYAN

I'll get the flashlight.

(Exits)

LIAN

I'll come with you. Hold on.

(Exits just as Carolyn comes through the door)

CAROLYN

I want to speak to you.

LIAN

Sorry mom, going bird watching with Uncle Bryan. We're looking for lesser nighthawks with longer tails. Bye....

CAROLYN

But.....

(She goes to the kitchen, gets glass, pours a drink. Adds Pepsi and winces.)

(She goes over to the player and puts on Nat King Cole's "When I Fall in Love". She sits on the sofa and cries)

(John appears at the door half way through the song)

JOHN

Where have you been?

CAROLYN

I went for a walk.

JOHN

There's a storm coming. I was worried.

CAROLYN

Don't worry. I won't mess your life up. I'll be your poster wife.

JOHN

You're depressed.

CAROLYN

Shall I pop a few pills doctor? If this is God's idea of a joke, he and I don't have the same sense of humor.

JOHN

It will all work out. We've got a buyer for the cabin.

Eddie's coming over with the papers tomorrow morning.
You can sign them and we can get back to our lives.

CAROLYN

I told you John. I'm not selling.

JOHN

You have to. We don't have any choice.

CAROLYN

This is where I grew up.

JOHN

It's falling apart.

CAROLYN

Larch can mend it. He's a wizard at fixing things.

JOHN

They've offered us \$240,000.

CAROLYN

But that won't even cover what you owe.

JOHN

I'll borrow the rest.

CAROLYN

From whom?

JOHN

I thought I would ask Bryan.

CAROLYN

No. NO. I will not be party to that.

JOHN

Carolyn. We have to sell it. There's something you
don't know. The cabin is radioactive.

CAROLYN

Radioactive?

JOHN

Eddie told me. He had a Geiger counter. There's contamination from the uranium mine up the hill. It comes down the stream. The foundation of the house is radioactive.

CAROLYN

I don't believe you. You're making this up.

JOHN

No, I'm not. It's all true. The people who are buying it don't know about the radioactivity.

CAROLYN

(Goes to kitchen and pours a drink)

For Christ's sake John. This is just some fucking way of getting me to sign away the cabin, isn't it?

JOHN

I promise you it's not.

CAROLYN

I don't believe you.

JOHN

I swear it's true.

CAROLYN

Oh, like you swore to love and honor me.

JOHN

Carolyn...

CAROLYN

Who was she?

JOHN

Who was who?

CAROLYN

The other woman.

JOHN

What the fuck does that have to do with what we're talking about?

CAROLYN

Exactly. By the way, was she a good fuck?

JOHN

I don't want to talk about it.

CAROLYN

Well, I do.

JOHN

She was an orthopaedic surgeon if you must know.

CAROLYN

How sexy can you get?

JOHN

We had a lot in common.

CAROLYN

I'm sure you did.

JOHN

It was a mistake.

CAROLYN

Was she married?

JOHN

Yes.

CAROLYN

To a nurse?

JOHN

Her husband was a businessman.

CAROLYN

Two orthopaedic surgeons sharing stories about bones.
How romantic.

JOHN

It's in the past. I can't change it. I've apologized.

CAROLYN

You Doctor Fischer are an ass...

(Enter Bryan and Lian)

BRYAN

We saw them both. The lesser and greater nighthawks.

LIAN

It was fantastic. They were wheeling around in the
light. The smaller one had a longer tail. It was
unbelievable.

BRYAN

The wing tips are less pointed.

LIAN

Suddenly they all vanished.

BRYAN

Probably the storm.

CAROLYN

I hope the tarpaulin stops ...

(Looks in buckets)

Nope. Where's Jimmy?

BRYAN

They were still dancing when I left.

CAROLYN

I hope they don't get caught in the rain.

BRYAN

I'm going to go to bed, I'm exhausted.

(The phone rings)

(John answers it)

JOHN

Who? Bryan, It's for you.

BRYAN

Nobody knows where I ...

(Takes phone)

Yes. Bryan Harris. He told you to call me? Okay, I'll get there as soon as I can.

CAROLYN

What's the matter?

BRYAN

It's my friend, my... partner. They've taken him to the hospital. I have to get back.

CAROLYN

You can't go now. There's a storm outside.

JOHN

Which hospital?

BRYAN

St. Joseph's.

JOHN

Just give me a minute.

(He pulls out a pocket phone book, looks up a number and dials.)

Bill? John Fischer here. Did you admit a patient by the name of ...

(Prompts Bryan)

BRYAN

Charles Roberts?

JOHN

Charles Roberts. He's a friend of my brother -in-law's.

BRYAN

Yes? What's his condition? Pneumonia... but he's stable. Good. Thanks Bill. I owe you a round of golf.

(puts phone down)

He's Okay. He's on a drip and responding.

BRYAN

Thanks John. This is all so upsetting.

CAROLYN

You can drive back tomorrow.

It's okay Bryan, John told me.

(She hugs him)

BRYAN

Thanks sis. I'll leave in the morning. Good night.

(Exits to room)

LIAN

Uncle Bryan's gay?

JOHN

Time you went to bed.

CAROLYN

This bottle of vodka's going down very quickly. Lian, you haven't been drinking have you?

LIAN

No mom. You know I don't drink.

JOHN

Lian. Go to bed.

LIAN

Okay! Good night.

(Exit)

CAROLYN

Did you know she was drinking?

JOHN

Yes, I talked with her counsellor at school. You don't exactly set a good example.

CAROLYN

My fault is it?

JOHN

So, are you going to sign the papers in the morning?

CAROLYN

No.

JOHN

We don't have any choice.

CAROLYN

The cabin means too much to me John.

JOHN

We could be sued and I would have to declare bankruptcy. I couldn't pay Jimmy's tuition, Lian would have to leave Holy Cross and we would probably have to sell the house.

CAROLYN

This rain's getting worse. You better go down to the Nut Tree and pick them up. Otherwise they're going to be soaked.

JOHN

But the papers...

CAROLYN

Would you go and pick up the kids? These storms can be dangerous. I'm not giving in this time.

JOHN

Damn you. It was your fault. You're in charge of the accounts for the office. You should have checked those medicare claims.

(Exits)

CAROLYN

My fault? My fault? You always blame me for everything! It was my money that put you through medical school or have you forgotten?

(Enter Bryan)

BRYAN

I just need a glass of water.

CAROLYN

God! He's done it again. I can never ever get through to him.

BRYAN

It's been a long day.

CAROLYN

He wants to sell the cabin, Bryan. Can you believe it?

BRYAN

I'm sorry to hear that.

CAROLYN

The girl in the office made a mistake, so now it's all my fault.

BRYAN

Is there anything I can do?

CAROLYN

Oh, there will be. He's going to ask if he can borrow money from you.

BRYAN

I'll help if I can. Dad always loved this place.

CAROLYN

I can't get through to him. I'm beginning to feel as if I've been married to a stranger.

BRYAN

All relationships have ups and downs.

CAROLYN

Am I so difficult to get along with?

BRYAN

I don't think so but then you always knew what you wanted.

CAROLYN

The last five years we've done nothing but fight.

BRYAN

You have a good life and great kids. John has been good to you.

CAROLYN

Oh, he does all the right things but I'm locked out. I spend my life trying to guess what he's feeling.

BRYAN

How much does he want to borrow?

CAROLYN

\$80,000 I think.

BRYAN

Christ.

CAROLYN

Could you do it?

BRYAN

My company is barely afloat. I'd have to borrow it.

CAROLYN

Then tell him NO. I remember when you and I would come up here when Dad and Bob were alive. We'd light the Christmas tree, go skiing, and dance at The Nut Tree.

BRYAN

Those were good times.

CAROLYN

I don't know what to do Bryan.

BRYAN

You will when the time comes. I hear John. I'm going to bed. Thanks for understanding about...you know.

(Exit Bryan. Enter John)

JOHN

I can't find them. They weren't in the bar. Well, are you going to sign?

CAROLYN

I've thought about it and the answer is NO. Oh and you are sleeping on the couch or... outside in the rain for all I care. Good night John.

(Exits)

JOHN

What? She'll come around and then we will be glad we got rid of this dump. What on earth has Larch been doing? There's another leak!! What a nightmare!

(Crack of thunder)

God, what have I done to deserve this? I know it's my own fault. I chose to marry a shiksa. My father warned me. My friends warned me. Everyone warned me. I'm exhausted. I need a glass of wine. Ah ha, one glass left. My best wine. And some music. Nat King Cole?

(Shakes his head and tosses it aside)

Urban Cowboy? No. Ah...Benjamin Britten. Storm. Oh, that's priceless.

(Puts on Benjamin Britten's 4th Sea Interlude. Storm)

(The sound of the storm and the music merge)

(He repeats a Hebrew prayer of atonement and looks as if he falls sleep.)

(The music stops, the rain continues as well as the sound of dripping.)

(Enter Jimmy followed by Susan)

SUSAN

I am absolutely soaked to the skin.

JIMMY

So much for taking shelter.

SUSAN

I'd better get these things off.

JIMMY

Dad? Didn't see you.

JOHN

Huh? Oh, you're back. Needed some space. Your mother's not well. Too much excitement or... vodka.

SUSAN

I saw some towels in the bathroom.

JIMMY

(Whispers to her.)

What am I going to do?

SUSAN

(Whispers to him.)

You'll have to sleep in my bed.

JIMMY

But... you....

SUSAN

We'll have to be very quiet. We don't want to wake anyone up.

(She kisses him.)

Shh... Take that wet shirt off.

(He complies. Sound effect of rain.)

ACT 3

Morning. John asleep on the couch. There's a knock on the door. A louder knock. John does not stir. Door opens and Maria walks in tentatively.

MARIA

Senor?

(She goes towards the couch)

Senor?

(John starts up as if out of a nightmare)

JOHN

Aaaaaaaa!!!!

(Maria starts back and stifles a scream)

MARIA

Perdoname, Senor.

JOHN

Maria!

MARIA

The door was not locked.

JOHN

(Recollecting himself)

No. I mean yes. Sorry. I'll put my trousers on. I don't remember asking you to come today.

MARIA

No Sir. I wish to speak to you Senor. You are a doctor and a good man. I come to ask your help.

JOHN

How can I help you Maria?

MARIA

I come from Guatemala from Antigua. With my husband and my son. It was a long journey. I was expecting a baby. We have to pay many men and walk far across the desert. The border guards come and we hide. My Raoul he says don't move and goes off so they chase him. They don't see me or my son. Next day I find the road and good people help me. I get to Tucson to the church but I cannot find Raoul. He is not there. I write many letters. I have not heard a word. I cannot ask the authorities. Could you ask them? That is his name.

(She gives him a paper)

That is his photograph. He has another son now ... born in America. A strong son. He would want to know this. If you could ask...

JOHN

I'll see what I can do Maria. If I find out anything I have your number.

MARIA

Thank you Senor.... Muchissmas gracias. God bless you.

JOHN

That's all right.

MARIA

Perhaps too I can help you.

JOHN

Help me?

MARIA

I clean the Nut Tree every day - tables, floor, toilets - and I see Mr. Fox there with his friends. They just think I stupid Mexican. They talk about your place. They very happy. They say government will give them much money because of radio actions. I don't understand radio actions. They say they going to buy your place very cheap then get much money.

JOHN

Radioactivity.

MARIA

Que?

JOHN

From the mine. Thank you Maria. Your information will help me and I will do everything I can to find your husband.

MARIA

Gracias Senor.

JOHN

Thank you Maria.

MARIA

De nada. Buenas dias Senor doctor.

(Exits)

(John tidies up the sofa)

JOHN

The little bastard. How stupid of me. I should have guessed something was up.

(He goes up stairs)

Carolyn?

(Knocks on door)

(Enter Jimmy at top of stairs)

JIMMY

Dad? Everything all right?

JOHN

Fine. Carolyn! Jimmy make some coffee will you?
Carolyn, Open the door.

(Door is unlocked and he exits)

(Enter Lian at top of stairs)

LIAN

What's the matter with everyone? It's a mad house.
Doesn't anyone sleep around here? By the way lover
boy the walls of the cabin aren't that thick.

JIMMY

Sorry.

LIAN

I can see how sorry you are from that grin on your
face.

JIMMY

Mmmmm.....

LIAN

Well? I am going to get dressed and go bird watching.

JIMMY

Bird watching?

LIAN

It's actually very exciting. Uncle Bryan says I'll see a lot more species early in the morning. So far I've seen 15. He lent me his book and his binoculars.

(Exits)

JIMMY

Mad house full of mad people.

(Goes down to kitchen)

(There's a knock on the door)

(Enter Larch)

LARCH

Morning young Jimmy. How are you?

JIMMY

I am absolutely fantastic.

LARCH

That sounds good.

(Looks in buckets)

Bit of water there. Better get that roof done. Nice sunny day. Warm for this time of year. I got the new tiles in the truck. Good dance last night. Your mum was a star. She's a dancer. Even ole Bryan was dancing.

(Enter Susan)

Morning Miss Susan. For a first timer you were doing well there on the dance floor.

SUSAN

Thank you.

LARCH

Well, I'll be getting my tools and on with the job. At least the ice has melted with that rain.

Not so slippery.

(Exit)

SUSAN

I hope we didn't make too much noise last night.

JIMMY

No, it was raining most of the night. No-one would hear.

(Enter Carolyn)

CAROLYN

Morning everyone. Coffee?

JIMMY

Just made it mom.

CAROLYN

That was good fun last night. You're a natural Susan. I can't believe that was your first time.

SUSAN

What? Oh, yes. I enjoyed it. The dancing...

JIMMY

We're making her into a regular American.

CAROLYN

There are plenty of good British bands you can line dance to as well. I was listening to one the other day which is perfect.

JIMMY

Who's that?

CAROLYN

Gerry Rafferty. This coffee's good. There's a tape of him over there. You can borrow it to practice.

SUSAN

I don't know him.

JIMMY

I'll put it on.

CAROLYN

It's too early Jimmy. You'll wake everyone up.

JIMMY

So what? Everyone needs waking up.

(Puts tape of Get it Right Next time)

CAROLYN

There are another couple of movements you can add, after the shimme. See... left to right.... Cross over. Bang your heel. Like this. "Cos if you get it wrong, you'll get it right next time... next time".

(Susan begins to dance and imitate Carolyn. Second verse they synchronize.)

Bang your heel now. Again. Great. "You'll get it right next time." Turn, shimme...

(Jimmy shouts his encouragement and turns up the music)

(Enter Lian)

LIAN

Hey, I know this.

(Third verse)

LIAN & CAROLYN

"Life is a liar, yeah life is a cheat. It'll lead you on and pull the ground from underneath your feet. No use complain', don't you worry don't you whine"

LIAN & CAROLYN & SUSAN

"Cause if you get it wrong, you'll get it right next time."

LIAN & CAROLYN

"You gotta grow, you gotta learn by your mistakes,
you gotta die a little everyday just to try to stay
awake"

*(They dance in perfect harmony
with each other)*

"When you believe there's no mountain you can climb"

LIAN & CAROLYN & SUSAN

"and if you get it wrong you'll get it right next
time. Next time."

JIMMY

Wow... Great job ladies.

(Sudden noise of hammering)

That's Larch. He's putting in the new tiles.

CAROLYN

That was fun.

LIAN

We ought to hire ourselves out. We could make money.
The Fischer Line Dancing team.

CAROLYN

I think it would be more appropriate if you graduated
from High School first. Which reminds me. I need to
talk to you.

LIAN

Mom. I'm going bird watching.

CAROLYN

I'll come with you. Get me my coat.

LIAN

All right but if we see any birds you have to be
quiet.

CAROLYN

Since when do children lecture their parents?

LIAN

I'm not a child.

CAROLYN

Let's go. What are we going to see?

LIAN

There's a pair of acorn woodpeckers and they are so cute. Somebody's got a feeder.

(Exit Lian and Carolyn)

JIMMY

Are you okay?

SUSAN

I'm fine. You're so lucky to have a beautiful place like this.

JIMMY

It's nice to get out of the heat of Phoenix in the summer.

SUSAN

You could fit my parents' place into this cabin twice over.

JIMMY

Dad works hard and orthopaedic surgeons get pretty well paid. Of course, he has my fees and Lian's to pay. Mom helps in the office.

SUSAN

My parents are schoolteachers. I'm the hope of the family. They've made a lot of sacrifices.

JIMMY

We're both very lucky. Well, what else would you like to do while you're here?

SUSAN

I've always wanted to see the Grand Canyon. How far away is it?

JIMMY

Only about 100 miles.

SUSAN

Only? That's half way between London and Edinburgh.

JIMMY

We can do the South Rim in an hour and a half from here.

SUSAN

Could we?

JIMMY

Why don't we spend the night in Flagstaff?

SUSAN

Sounds good to me.

(Knock at the door and Eddie enters with papers. There's hammering on the roof.)

EDDIE

Is your Dad in?

JIMMY

I'll get him.

JIMMY

Dad. The real estate agent's here.

(John off stage)

JOHN

I'll be down.

JIMMY

We'll get our stuff together.

SUSAN

Your parents won't mind?

JIMMY

Not in the least. They've got other things going on. Probably make it more peaceful for them.

SUSAN

I don't want to seem rude.

JIMMY

No problem.

(To Eddie)

He'll be right down.

(They exit upstairs)

EDDIE

Thanks.

(He looks around, rubs his hands and nods)

(Enter John)

JOHN

Eddie. Did you get all the papers?

EDDIE

Sure. Just need them signed. Then I'll be on my way. Check will follow once we're in escrow.

JOHN

There's an alteration I want to make.

EDDIE

What?

JOHN

I think we'll make it \$320,000. That's a nice sort of a compromise.

EDDIE

No. I've agreed the price. It was \$240,000

JOHN

I know Eddie but there's a small matter of the EPA. Compensation and all that. And there are matters such as disclosure. But I'm sure that can be worked out. Please feel free to use the phone.

EDDIE

No, no. That's fine. My client just wants the best price. \$320,000 will be fine. I'll just go back to the office and have the contract reworked.

JOHN

Good. Let's drink to that. A fair and equitable arrangement.

(He goes to kitchen and pours a drink)

EDDIE

A bit early for me. Of course, you understand we're all taking a risk.

JOHN

I do understand. I am sure we can all be discreet. There's my wife now...

(Enter Carolyn)

CAROLYN

She's impossible. I can't talk to her. Every time I start she just says shshsh... you'll disturb them.

JOHN

Carolyn, Eddie's here with the papers. We negotiated a new price of \$320,000. He'll have to re-do the papers and then you can sign. Okay?

CAROLYN

This is very difficult for me. Jimmy will be able to stay at Stanford?

JOHN

Yes.

CAROLYN

And Lian can finish Holy Cross?

JOHN

Yes.

CAROLYN

All right. I'll sign.

EDDIE

I'll wrap this up then and will send the new paperwork to you by tomorrow.

JOHN

You'd better have my attorney's name and number as well. I'll write it down. I'll keep him informed.

EDDIE

Right... well. We'll be in touch.

(Exit)

CAROLYN

He didn't seem very friendly.

JOHN

Just business. Thank you for changing your mind about signing.

CAROLYN

I thought about it a lot last night. The place doesn't seem worth the hassle. Clinging onto this place was just clinging onto the past. I've got to let go.

JOHN

Well, at least we can go forward now.

CAROLYN

I am going to spend some time down in Tucson. I'll go back with Bryan. There's some personal stuff I need to clear out of the house. I haven't been there since Dad died.

JOHN

That's fine with me. I'm on call all next week.

CAROLYN

It'll probably do us good... to be apart for a while. Get things sorted out. Now that Lian is about to leave for college I need to find something to do. Being a Doctor's wife and working part time in the office isn't a real career.

JOHN

It's up to you.

JIMMY

(Enter Jimmy with bag)

Mom, Dad I am going to show Susan the Grand Canyon. It should be beautiful in the winter.

CAROLYN

That sounds great.

(Enter Susan ready to travel)

Susan, I'm so glad you joined us. I hope you'll come back and visit us in Scottsdale.

SUSAN

I would love to. I've had a wonderful time. You have an idea of what America is like in your head, and then when you come here, it's so different.

JIMMY

Better say goodbye to Uncle Bryan. Uncle Bryan!

CAROLYN

Well stay in touch.

(Enter Bryan ready to leave)

BRYAN

I can't find my binoculars.

JIMMY

Lian had them. She went bird watching.

(Enter Lian out of breath)

LIAN

Uncle Bryan... you've got to come. There's a tree full of them.

BRYAN

Of what?

LIAN

Little yellow birds. They're singing.

BRYAN

In a flock? I can't think what they could be.

LIAN

They're very small... and they flit around. There's at least twenty of them.

BRYAN

Show me.

(They exit)

JOHN

Okay you two. Better get on your way while the weather's good. Nice to meet you Susan. I'm sorry we didn't get much of a chance to talk. Good luck at Stanford. Are you coming back to Scottsdale Jimmy?

JIMMY

Hadn't made any plans. Would you like to come to our house in Scottsdale for the rest of the break?

SUSAN

Sounds wonderful but I do have to get back to Stanford by next Friday. I am trying to earn some cash working in the library.

(Enter Bryan and Lian)

(Bryan is holding a dead canary in his hand)

BRYAN

A flock of canaries. Someone must have released them. They're dying of the cold and there's no food.

SUSAN

How odd.

CAROLYN

I don't know of anyone who keeps canaries, do you?

JOHN

No.

BRYAN

Nothing much you can do.

LIAN

Could we catch them?

BRYAN

No. Who would do that? Ah well...

LIAN

It was so weird. The bird just dropped out of the tree. I picked it up. I held it. I could feel it was alive and then it's head went back and it was dead. Like something left it.

BRYAN

Things happen.

(He puts the dead canary in the bin.)

It's time I got going.

CAROLYN

Bryan, I want to come down to Tucson with you. I have some stuff to sort out in the house. Is that all right?

BRYAN

Sure. I'll enjoy the company.

LIAN

Can I come as well? You promised to take me to Ramsey Canyon. I want to see hummingbirds. You said Arizona is the hummingbird capital of the world.

BRYAN

And so it is. Well don't just stand there. Get your stuff together. This bird is flying south.

JOHN

Thanks Bryan for looking after everyone.

BRYAN

My pleasure.

JOHN

I hope your friend Chuck is all right.

BRYAN

I do too. He's a talented man. He played for the Phoenix Symphony you know.

JOHN

Did he? What instrument?

BRYAN

Cello. God's instrument.

JOHN

That's true. Have a safe trip back.

BRYAN

Not a good week coming up.

JOHN

No?

BRYAN

Got to take my workers for their monthly trip to the strip joint and pretend to be one of the boys.

JOHN

That can't be fun.

BRYAN

I'm a good actor.

(Enter Carolyn and Lian with bags. Carolyn gives John his bag.)

CAROLYN

I presume you're not staying?

JOHN

No. I'll leave in awhile.

JIMMY

Well, we're off. Bye everyone.

SUSAN

Bye... and thank you

BRYAN

Come on. See you John. Have a good trip back.

LIAN

I've got the binoculars.

JOHN

Thanks Bryan.

CAROLYN

Bye John. I'll give you a call tomorrow after Lian and I have had a chance to spend some time together.

LIAN

Bye dad. Don't worry about school. I promise I'm going to study. I've decided I really do want to go to college.

JOHN

If I can afford it. Bye.

(Exit everyone)

(John goes to the settee. Puts on the Vivaldi. Turns it down low. Reaches for the phone. Dials)

Is that you? They're all gone. Carolyn's gone to Tucson with her brother and Lian. What about next weekend? Oh yea, I forgot it's your son's Barmizvah. When does your husband get back from China? Well, why don't we spend the following weekend in Palm Springs? There's that beautiful hotel - The Rainbow Inn. Friday the 18th? I'll see you there. By the way, while we're there I want to talk to you about some really good investments in North Scottsdale. A few of us are getting together to form a consortium. I am going to put \$300,000 in myself. Okay, I'll give you a ring from the surgery next week. Can't wait. Love you.

(Turns the music off and leaves. Sound of car pulling away.)

(There's a pause.)

(There's a shout of surprise and a thud. It's Larch falling off the roof.)

(Larch crawls in and gets to the sofa.)

LARCH

(He murmurs softly in pain)

Aaaaahhh.... Don't worry Bob... medic's coming. You'll be all right. Doc? Doc? He's hurt. There's a lot of blood. Doc? Where are you? There's nobody here. Everyone's gone. Where's the ...Doctor? They must 'ave forgotten us. Don't worry Bob, we'll be okay... we'll be okay. Maybe a little rest... a little rest... maybe a little rest.

*(Sound effect of ice breaking
off in the far distance)*

END

