

**CRYING LAUGHING: AN EXPLORATION OF THE  
FUNDAMENTAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN COMEDY  
AND DRAMA AND THE OVERLAP BETWEEN THE TWO**

**Honors Thesis**

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
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## Abstract

When we think of theatrical plays, we tend to categorize them as either “comedy” or “drama”. Despite there being innumerable sub-genres, we usually recognize the core of the work as being either comedic or dramatic. Although there are obviously differences between these two overarching genres, there tends to be significant overlap between them. My thesis explores not only the fundamental differences between comedy and drama, but also this very overlap. To achieve this, I have written two plays, first workshopped in theater Professor Bill Cunningham's playwriting class last semester, using the playwrights' primary tools—plot, characterization, dialogue, and theme—and although one is “comedic” at its core and the other “dramatic”, I have sought to examine the link between the two. The first play is a modern comedy that deals with the absurdity of our relationships, and the invariable humor that arises as a result. The second is a period piece set in the 1800's, and its theme deals with what happens when our moral complacencies meet the sins of our past. Although the two plays are different in style, dialogue and even theme, I have sought to link comedy and drama in both works. In these plays, as in life, there is pain in humor and laughter through our tears.

To prepare for this project, I have closely examined the plays written by my favorite playwrights, including Neil Simon, Arthur Miller, and Sam Shepard. I have learned about the process of crafting a play both from these masters and in the playwriting class I had taken last semester, and have worked with the primary tools at the playwright's disposal to craft each piece. I found that workshopping my plays in that class to be a wonderful education in learning what works, what doesn't, and whether or not I am communicating what I want to say with each piece to an audience. I have been able to workshop my plays even further in conjunction with my advisor, Professor Peter Sampieri, as we have worked with actors who have helped read each scenes aloud. This has enabled me to tighten up each play considerably. On Thursday, May 11, I intend to put both my plays on their feet, in the form of a staged reading of each.

I will judge this project to be successful if I have created a community of shared experience within the audience. If they are able to recognize some of themselves in either of these plays, and if they can identify with both the humor and the pathos, I will consider my work to have been worthwhile.

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## Table of Contents

<i>Always</i> .....	1
<i>The Stranger</i> .....	99

# **ALWAYS**

*by*  
*Stephen Caliskan*

**CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS:**

**SULLY:** Bra salesman and part-time comedy writer/stand-up comedian. Witty, neurotic, cynical. Confident exterior, not-so-confident interior. Has a good heart.

**EMMA:** The script describes her as “sunshine incarnate”. She’s joyful, optimistic, upbeat. She’s the type of person who dots her “i’s” with hearts. She works as a professional paint watcher for Benjamin Moore.

**JACK:** Sully’s best friend. (They’ve known each other since the third grade.) He’s the definition of womanizer; always looking to score. He’s a bit of a cheeseball though, although he tries to hide it.

**ERNIE:** Emma’s uber-macho boyfriend. Picture Gaston from *Beauty and the Beast* come to life. Teaches at NYU. Likes deer-hunting, rock-climbing, and scotch. As if to complete the caricature, he’s a sexist.

**MOTHER:** Sully’s deceased mother who has come to haunt him. Nagging, kvetching, scolding. Wise. Wants the best for her son, believe it or not.

**JESSICA:** Sully’s first date. Valley-girl. A few tacos short of a combo platter, if you know what I mean. Cher from *Clueless* come to life.

**CHRISTINE:** Jack’s double date with Sully. Intelligent, smooth. Much too smart to be with Jack.

**WAITER:** Waiter in the restaurant of the double date. Confused as to Jessica’s ignorance of fine dining.

**WOMAN:** Walks by Sully’s bra kiosk at the mall. Doesn’t want to buy a bra and curtly lets him know.

*For Papa.*

## SETTING

The action takes place on the Upper East Side of Manhattan.  
The time is the present.

## ACT ONE

### Scene 1

*(AT RISE: "Twisted" by Annie Ross plays as the lights go up on the interior of an Upper East Side APARTMENT. A couch, coffee table, and armchair represent the living room, and a kitchen table and two chairs, further U.S., represent the kitchen area. The song fades, and we see SULLY and JACK, two men in their early thirties, seated on the far ends of the couch. SULLY is watching T.V. and Jack is flipping through a magazine, eating a sandwich.)*

SULLY

Let me ask you a question.

JACK

What?

SULLY

When they do lethal injections, why do they sterilize the needle?

*(Jack slowly looks up from the magazine.)*

JACK

What?

SULLY



No, I mean think about it—the guy's gonna die anyway, what do they even bother? Are they actually worried he's gonna get an infection? I mean at that point it's over, it's done—what do they care?

JACK

Can I ask *you* a question?

SULLY

What?

JACK

Why is this even in the running order of potential things to talk about?

SULLY

Better than a thirty-year-old college dropout reading *Glamor*.

JACK

Have you *seen* the hotties in this thing?

SULLY

Jack, get a *job*.

JACK

No job is better than your job.

SULLY

I hate my job...

JACK

Did you actually look your parents in the eye and tell them you're a bra salesman?

SULLY

I told them I was in the garment district—that's all they needed to know.

JACK

Can't you set me up over there?

SULLY

*No.*

JACK

Why not? Your job is every guy's *dream*! You don't even take advantage of it!

SULLY

Yeah, *you'll* take advantage of it and get me fired.

JACK

Sully, I *need* women—can't you understand that? They're my lifeblood, my driving force—I can't *survive* without women. It's a hopeless disorder.

SULLY

Don't worry—there's nothing wrong with you that can't be cured with some Xanax and a Louisville Slugger.

JACK

By the way, did I tell you—I met this chick the other day standing in line at the coffee place who was super hot.

SULLY

“Chick”? What are you, in tenth grade?

JACK

*(in a reverie)*

Tall, blonde hair, blue eyes...

SULLY

Who'd you meet, an S.S. Officer?

JACK

We're going out tonight. I'm taking her to that new place on 68th street—supposed to be real classy.

SULLY

Yeah, you're full of class. I bet you five bucks you order a chicken and an egg, just to see what comes first.

JACK

You know that was so funny, I forgot to laugh. What are *you* doing tonight?

SULLY

What do you think? I'm just gonna sit here and think about Lily...

JACK

Oh come on—you're seriously not over her?

SULLY

I can't help it, Jack—I *can't* get over her...

JACK

Come on, you should've by now—how long has it even been since you broke up?

SULLY

How long? Uh, let's see—what's today....Tuesday, Wednesday...about three years.

JACK

I can't even remember why you broke up in the first place.

SULLY

You know how hard it is to date your hygienist? You know how much pressure that puts on your brushing habits? I mean she'd just stand there in the bathroom watching me—it was too stressful.

JACK

Are you still going to your dentist?

SULLY

I have to—they're the only ones who'll take my insurance. I've been dreading my next cleaning. You know, we'll be inches away from each other, she'll have her hands in my mouth with all those sharp tools—it's a very dangerous situation.

JACK

You know, you think you're so smart, but I have you all figured out.

SULLY

Oh yeah?

JACK

Yeah. Everytime a relationship starts to get serious, you come up with some asinine excuse and run off with your tail between your legs.

SULLY

Oh, come on...

JACK

*(overlapping)*

No, I'm serious—remember Cynthia?

SULLY

Jack, the woman had facial hair.

JACK

Sully—

SULLY

*(overlapping)*

I'm serious! The light hit her at an angle, it was like looking at my uncle Al.

JACK

Ok, fine—what about Jessica?

SULLY

JACK

Oh come on—she was smart enough.

SULLY

Jack, she's the reason why they're directions on the shampoo bottle.

JACK

Sully—

SULLY

*(overlapping)*

She thought Soy Milk was Spanish for “I am milk”.

JACK

Sully, what would your mother say about all this?

SULLY

Why do you always bring up my mother!

JACK

I've known you since the third grade—when she was alive you actually managed to stay with a girl for longer than two days.

SULLY

Yeah 'cause she made me! If I broke up with someone, I'd be hearing about it for half a year. *(He imitates an older woman's voice)* “I liked that Cheryl girl! She had a nice personality! Why didn't you stay with Cheryl!” Sometimes I can still hear her voice...

JACK

See, you just made my point—when she was alive, she helped you with that stuff.

SULLY

Oh, come on...

JACK

She did! Didn't you notice she died around the same time you broke up with Lily? I mean sure, she got on your nerves, but she had an eye for picking winners, and you know it.

SULLY

I don't know. I just don't have any confidence anymore. Whenever I see a beautiful woman, you know I—I have the tendency to drool.

JACK

Well you need to get it back. Lily's gone, so just forget her. Which reminds me, I hope you're free tomorrow night too.

SULLY

*(with suspicion)*

Why?

JACK

No reason.

SULLY

Don't say—

JACK

*(overlapping)*

I set us up on a blind date.

SULLY

No! Are you insane—I hate blind dates!

JACK

Sully, I'm getting you out of this apartment even if it kills me.

SULLY

Come here, I wanna test that theory...

JACK

They're two great girls I met at the Knicks game—you'll love 'em.

SULLY

What were they, selling hot dogs?

JACK

Sully, just *trust* me, will ‘ya? It’s gonna be great.

SULLY

*(standing up angrily)*

You know what, no—I don’t need your help, Mr. Unemployed Skirt-Chaser—ok? I can meet a girl on my own.

*(Jack gives him a “yeah right” look)*

SULLY

What—you don’t believe me?

JACK

No yeah, sure you can...

SULLY

Then why the look?

JACK

What look?

SULLY

You gave me a look.

JACK

I didn’t give you a look.

SULLY

I saw a look.

JACK

I would know if I gave you a look.

SULLY

How do you know if you gave me a look?

JACK

I'm in charge of the looks my face gives.

SULLY

Yeah but sometimes your face gives looks involuntarily.

JACK

Are you saying I don't have control over my looks?

SULLY

I'm saying your looks don't always have control over when they're given.

JACK

So you're saying I don't know what's on my face?

SULLY

You have a crumb on your face from that sandwich.

*(Jack quickly wipes his face.)*

SULLY

See? You didn't know you had a crumb on your face.

JACK

Sully—

SULLY

Lower.

*(Jack wipes his face again.)*



SULLY

Little to the left—almost got it.

JACK

Look, are you gonna come or not?

*(Sully thinks it over. Then:)*

SULLY

Alright, fine, I'll go...

JACK

*(triumphantly)*

Yes! You will *not* regret this.

SULLY

Every time you say that I do. And by the way, although you may enjoy being unemployed derelict, I want your half of the rent *on* the table tomorrow—got it?

JACK

Yeah, yeah, don't worry, I will.

*(Sully gives him a "Yeah right" glance.)*

JACK

What's the look for?

*(The lights fade.)*

## Scene 2

*(“Twisted” resumes. The lights go up on a RESTAURANT, represented by a table and four chairs, as the song fades. JACK is seated at a table with two women, JESSICA and CHRISTINE, a WAITER in the midst of taking orders. Suddenly, Sully hurriedly enters the restaurant, walking over to the table. They all stand up when he gets there.)*

JACK

*(looking up)*

Well, now that we're all here...

SULLY

Hi, I'm sorry, it was bumper-to-bumper—*(to Jessica and Christine)*—Hi, Sully Lowenstein—nice to meet you.

CHRISTINE

*(shaking his hand)*

Hi, nice to meet you! I'm Christine.

JESSICA

*(Uber- "Valley Girl" voice)*

Hi, I'm Jessica! *(shakes his hand)* OMG, you are *so* tall! How tall are you?

SULLY

Uh, about 6' 4''.

JESSICA

*(slowly)*

Wait...that's six feet and four inches, right?

SULLY

Uh, yeah.

JESSICA

OMG, okay! I always mix up which comes first! *(laughs obnoxiously)*

SULLY

*(confused)*

Oh...

JACK

Well, now that the introductions have concluded, it's time to see who gets who!

SULLY

Well Jack, we're all gonna be at the same table, so—

JACK

*(quickly)*

I call Christine.

(  
*He quickly sits down next to her. Sully looks blankly at Jessica.*)

SULLY

Well that wasn't so hard...

*(He sits down next to Jessica. The Waiter goes over to him.)*

WAITER

And for you sir?

SULLY

*(glancing at menu)*

Uh, I think I'm just going to get the steak tips.

WAITER

How would you like them cooked?

SULLY

Uh, medium well is good.

WAITER

*(to Jessica)*

And for you ma'am?

JESSICA

Uhhhhhhh...*(flipping through the menu)* Ok—I don't want that, I don't want that, I don't want that...I *definitely* don't want *that*...

SULLY

*(to Waiter)*

Do you have another menu...?

JESSICA

Ok, you know what, I'll try this, I never had this before, I like trying new things—I'll have the tartar.

*(The Waiter stares blankly)*

WAITER

The—the what?

JESSICA

*(pointing)*

The tartar.

WAITER

You mean *tartare*?

JESSICA

Yeah, that.

WAITER

Ok. That will be out shortly.

*(He starts to leave but Jessica stops him.)*

JESSICA

Well-done.

*(The Waiter stares at her.)*

WAITER

What?

JESSICA

I want my tartar well done please.

WAITER

Uh...so tartare is raw beef...

JESSICA

*OMG*, I don't want it *raw*! What are you, like, trying to kill me or something?

WAITER

I'm sorry ma'am, but that's what tartare is, it's—it's raw beef cubes.

JESSICA

*(slowly, through gritted teeth)*

Bring-it-to-me-cooked-because-I-don't-want-to-die. Got it?

*(The Waiter stares at her blankly and then slowly backs away, confused.)*

JESSICA

*(to the table)*

OMG, these *waiters!* Am I *right?* I think I'm *right!*

JACK

*(to Christine)*

So—*(throat clear)*—you were saying before what you do?

CHRISTINE

I'm a research analyst for a Fortune 500 company.

JACK

Wow...

CHRISTINE

My job is basically to help manage the market research process by making sourcing decisions, overseeing project resources, and just generally being involved with the application of research findings.

JACK

*(to Sully, sotto voce)*

Hey, she's smarter than me...

SULLY

*(to Jessica)*

And what do you do?

JESSICA

Well, I *was* a dancer on tour, for like a long time.

SULLY

Really? For a musician, or...?

JESSICA

No, a strip group.

SULLY

Oh.

JESSICA

It was like, *so* much fun! Even my parents came to one of my performances.

SULLY

Gotta be proud...

JESSICA

But so I figured since I've done, like, a lot of modeling and stuff, why not try and be an actress?

SULLY

Naturally.

JESSICA

I mean like, how hard can it be? Am I *right*? I think I'm *right*!

JACK

Hey, that's perfect! Sully sells bras.

SULLY

*Jack...*

JACK

Sorry. He also does comedy on the side—he almost got a pilot on ABC once, so he's got a lot of connections.

SULLY

*(glaring at him)*

Well, I don't really have connections—

JESSICA

*(overlapping)*

OMG, that is *so* perfect! We could be like, acting buddies or something!

SULLY

*(faux enthusiasm)*

Ha ha, yeah...

JESSICA

*Am I right? I think I'm right!*

SULLY

I think you're right.

JESSICA

OMG, I knew it! *(laughs obnoxiously)*

SULLY

*(to everyone)*

You know what, I uh, have to go to the restroom, but I'll be right back. *(to Jack)* Hey, you want to come too, I think you said you had to go earlier?

JACK

I don't have to—

SULLY

*(overlapping)*

Why don't you come.

*(He grabs Jack by his suit collar, forcing him up.)*

JACK

You ladies behave yourselves while we're gone, huh?

*(Sully yanks him away from the table, and they leave. Jessica turns to Christine.)*

JESSICA

So what's your star sign?

*(Christine looks at her wearily. We see Sully and Jack at the other side of the restaurant.)*

JACK

Hey, this is turning out great—

SULLY

*(angrily)*

What did you do to me!

JACK

What's wrong?

SULLY

Something tells me we're not evenly matched here.

JACK

What are you talking about—Christine's great.

SULLY

Yeah Christine's great, and I'm sitting next to Cher from *Clueless*!

JACK

*(uneasily)*

What are you talking about? She's....smart.

SULLY

Jack, if she told me it was Sunday, I'd check two calendars.

JACK

Look, a blind date is a blind date—I didn't know you were expecting an astrophysicist.

SULLY

Jack, she can't *spell* astrophysicist. She must work for the Biden administration.

JACK

Sully, the whole reason you're here is to forget about Lily and have a good time—period, end of story. Now just relax, will 'ya—it'll be fine.

SULLY

Yeah it'll be fine for you, as always. And you know what, let me tell you something—when we go back, I'm sitting next to Christine.

JACK

Wait, no you're not.

SULLY



Yeah? Just watch me—

*(They jostle each other to get back to the table first. When they get there Sully fakes Jack out, pretending to go over to Jessica, but quickly sitting down next to Christine. Jack glares at him and sits next to Jessica as Sully smiles at him triumphantly.)*

JESSICA

OMG, you're just in time—we're discussing Ouija boards! Last night, I got in touch with this spirit who was like, super cute, from what I could tell.

SULLY

That was a good story.

JESSICA

Have you ever done a Ouija board?

SULLY

I don't...converse with anyone I can't see...

JESSICA

Well what do you do for fun?

SULLY

*(disingenuous)*

Oh I just, you know, like to walk my pet beaver.

JESSICA

OMG, you have a pet beaver?

SULLY

Doesn't everyone?

JESSICA

Aren't they like, super smart? I heard beavers are like really smart, like even smarter than humans.

SULLY

Well they're smarter than some humans...

JESSICA

Really?

SULLY

*(smiles)*

Take my word for it.

JESSICA

I ate a beaver once.

*(The table stares at her in stunned silence.)*

SULLY

Check, please!

*(The lights fade.)*

### Scene 3

*(“Twisted” resumes as the lights go up on Sully’s apartment. Jack is sitting on the couch watching T.V. and Sully is rushing around the room. The song fades.)*

SULLY

Have you seen my tie?

JACK

No, where did you last leave it?

SULLY

Why do people always say that? If I knew where I’d last left it, I’d be wearing it.

JACK

Do you seriously have a date with her?

SULLY

Regrettably.

JACK

I thought after dinner last week you said you never wanted to see her again.

SULLY

Yeah, then I started thinking about Lily. I just have to get her off my mind, you know...

JACK

A second date with Jessica—you must be pretty desperate.

SULLY

I am desperate. At this point I'd take anything—a rabbit, a monkey, anything. Preferably something with two X chromosomes. Will you help me find my tie?

JACK

Yeah.

*(He gets up and helps him look.)*

JACK

So where are you gonna go?

SULLY

Her place.

JACK

Hey, not bad...

SULLY

Yeah don't get your hopes up—I'll probably be thinking about Lily the entire time. Where is my *tie*?

JACK

Sully, will you forget Lily! What's the big deal? So she didn't like you, she hated your guts, she doesn't want anything to do with you—who cares?

SULLY

Thanks Jack. You could have given me some comfort, but instead you've given me so much more.

JACK

Hey, I call it like I see it.

SULLY

I'm just glad my mother's not here to see this. She'd beat me with her fists. *(angrily)*  
Where the heck is my—

*(He suddenly stops in front of Jack and stares at a tie Jack is wearing under his jacket. Sully glares at him angrily.)*

JACK

*(sheepishly)*

Oh, yeah, so I uh, forgot to tell you *(throat clear)* I—I met this chick at the bar the other day, and I'm gonna go to her place tonight—so I uh, I changed and borrowed your tie.

SULLY

Come here, I want to adjust it about ten inches...

JACK

*(taking it off)*

I'm sorry, I'm sorry.

SULLY

Oh, just keep it. It matches the red in your eyes.

*(Walks to the door.)*

JACK

Good luck!

SULLY

Thanks—I'm gonna need it.

*(He leaves and the lights fade.)*

## Scene 4

*(“Twisted” resumes as the scene changes. We see the interior of JESSICA’S APARTMENT, S.L—a couch, coffee table, and armchair representing the living room. SULLY enters S.R., approaching the apartment, when we suddenly hear a nagging, middle-aged woman’s voice, out of nowhere.)*

MOTHER’S VOICE

Where do you think you're going?

*(Sully stops walking, startled. He looks around. Nobody is there, so he starts walking again.)*

MOTHER’S VOICE

I said “where do you think you're going”? Don’t you respond when I talk to you?

*(Sully looks around panicked.)*

SULLY

*Mother?!*

MOTHER'S VOICE

This is so typical of you. I always have to tell you things three times before you listen.

SULLY

*(looking up at the sky)*

Mother—! Where are you?!

MOTHER'S VOICE

Since when do you care where I am? You only call once a year!

SULLY

Ma, will you relax!

MOTHER'S VOICE

Don't tell me to relax—all you do is tell me to relax! Now are you going to tell me where you're going?

SULLY

*(confused)*

I'm going on a date, okay?

MOTHER'S VOICE

In that shirt? I've told you a hundred times, you look bad in gray!

SULLY

Well this is what I want to wear!

MOTHER'S VOICE

Where's your tie? This is how you show up to a date—in a gray shirt and no tie? You're just like your father.

SULLY

*Ma!*

MOTHER'S VOICE

Don't "Ma" me! No matter how many times I tell you something, it's always in one ear and out the other! Who is this girl anyway?

SULLY

*(snapping out of it)*

Mother—where are you talking from?! I thought you died!

MOTHER'S VOICE

I asked you a question! I said "who is this girl"? Where did you meet her?

SULLY

I met her through Jack, okay?

MOTHER'S VOICE

How did you meet her? You can never give me a straight answer—I always have to pull teeth!

SULLY

Can you be quiet—this is her apartment!

MOTHER'S VOICE

I will not be quiet! Two and a half months in the delivery room, and this is how you treat me?

*(Sully goes to the door, closing his eyes and shaking his head.)*

SULLY

This can't be happening, this can't be happening, this can't be happening....

*(He rings the doorbell.)*

MOTHER'S VOICE

Oh, this is so exciting! What does she look like?

SULLY

*(Looking up at the sky)*

*Ma!*

MOTHER'S VOICE

Is she tall? She should at least be tall if you go dancing.

SULLY

Will you stop it—!

*(Jessica opens the door and Sully whirls around.)*

SULLY

*(Awkwardly)*

Oh–hi!

JESSICA

OMG, acting buddy! How *are* you??

SULLY

*(distracted)*

I’m–I’m doing good, how are you?

JESSICA

Fantabulous!! Me too!!

*(Sully follows her in.)*

MOTHER’S VOICE

Oh, she's an absolute doll–look at those high cheekbones!

*(Sully makes frantic gestures to shut her up, Jessica catches him, and he whirls around to her, forcing a smile. They go into the living room, where there are many in-progress paintings scattered about.)*

JESSICA

Do you want anything to drink, or–?

SULLY

Oh I–I think I'm fine, thank you.

MOTHER’S VOICE

Why is she dressed like a streetwalker?

*(Sully glares at the ceiling as they sit on the couch.)*

JESSICA

Are you all right?

SULLY

Oh, yeah, I just have this– this headache, that's all...

JESSICA

OMG! That totally sucks.

MOTHER'S VOICE

Oh, I'm sorry—am I *bothering* you?

SULLY

*(looking up to the ceiling)*

Yes!

JESSICA

What?

SULLY

Oh I uh—I was just asking if you painted all these?

JESSICA

Oh yeah, I sort of like, do a little painting on the side—it's just a hobby when I'm not modeling.

SULLY

Well I think they're lovely.

JESSICA

You do?

MOTHER'S VOICE

Ehh, they're alright.

SULLY

*(looking up, glaring)*

Yes, I do...

MOTHER'S VOICE

She's no Monet.

JESSICA

Thank you.

MOTHER'S VOICE

Ask her what her parents do for work.

SULLY



I'm not gonna ask her that!

JESSICA

What?

SULLY

Oh—I, uh—uh—was just wondering how you got into painting in the first place?

MOTHER'S VOICE

What kind of a stupid question is that?

JESSICA

Oh, when I was at San Jose State I was like an art major. I tried selling my paintings after school, but there were like, no takers.

MOTHER'S VOICE

I can see why.

SULLY

*(glaring at the ceiling)*

Well I think they're great.

JESSICA

You do?

SULLY

Yeah.

*(They slowly lean in to kiss.)*

MOTHER'S VOICE

What do you think you're doing?

*(Sully jerks away.)*

MOTHER'S VOICE CONT.

You just met this girl! What are you, some kind of casanova?

JESSICA

Are you alright?

SULLY

Yeah, I just, uh, you know—this—this headache....

JESSICA

OMG, do you like want an Advil?

SULLY

You know what—if you don't mind...

JESSICA

OMG, tots! I'll get one.

*(She gets up and goes into the other room. Sully immediately looks up at the ceiling.)*

SULLY

Alright, listen mother— I don't know where you're speaking from, I don't know what you're trying to do, but *go away!*

MOTHER'S VOICE

What are you getting so *mashugana* about? I can't talk to my son once in a while?

SULLY

I'll talk to you later, alright—can you please leave!

MOTHER'S VOICE

Later—always later! I'm always some kind of an inconvenience!

SULLY

*(gritted teeth)*

I'm just kinda busy right now—will you beat it!

MOTHER'S VOICE

What are you even doing with this girl? She's a complete imbecile!

SULLY

*Mother!*

MOTHER'S VOICE

You're lucky I'm not alive—I'd beat you with my fists!

*(Jessica comes back with the Advil and a glass of water.)*

SULLY

*(forcing a smile to Jessica)*

Oh, thanks.

JESSICA

*(giving him the Advil and water)*

Tots! I hope it goes away.

SULLY

*(glaring at the ceiling)*

Yeah, I really hope so too...

*(He takes the Advil and they lean in to kiss again.)*

MOTHER'S VOICE

What are you, gonna marry this girl?

*(Sully jerks up.)*

JESSICA

Are you ok?

SULLY

Oh, yeah—

MOTHER'S VOICE

This is my daughter-in-law? An unemployed painter?

SULLY

She's employed!

JESSICA

What?

SULLY

You know I uh—*(pretending to clutch his head)*—I think we're gonna have to do this another time...

JESSICA

Oh...?

SULLY

This migraine, it's just killing me...

MOTHER'S VOICE

Oh really?

JESSICA

Oh, ok, yeah—totally.

SULLY

Sorry...

*(They go to the door.)*

JESSICA

That's ok. I hope you feel better!

SULLY

*(hurridley)*

Thank you—I'll give you a call.

JESSICA

Ok, facts! Bye!

*(She shuts the door and Sully glares angrily at the sky.)*

SULLY

Oh, now you stop?

*(Silence.)*

SULLY

Hello? *(pause)* Hello?

*(The lights fade as Sully stands there in bewilderment.)*

## Scene 5

*(“Twisted” resumes as the scene changes. Lights up on Sully's apartment.)*

JACK

Sully, you are out of your mind...

SULLY

I'm not out of my mind—it was *in* my mind! The entire time!

JACK

Sully...

SULLY

Jack, I swear to you, it was her voice—as clear as day! And she wouldn't shut up—I made a total fool of myself! I was a consummate numbskull!

JACK

Sully, if you expect me to believe a story like that, you're crazy.

SULLY

*(pacing)*

I can't believe it—I'm hearing my deceased mother's voice! What am I, Norman Bates?

MOTHER'S VOICE

What do you think—I didn't hear that?

SULLY

*(to Jack)*

See! See! Did you hear that? Did you hear it?

JACK

Hear what?

MOTHER'S VOICE

Why should he hear it? I was talking to you!

SULLY

*(to the ceiling)*

Why are you talking to me? Where *are* you?

JACK

Who are you talking to?

MOTHER'S VOICE

Never mind where!

SULLY

Are you not hearing this?!

JACK

Sully, are you crazy?

MOTHER'S VOICE

Fine—you're so inconvenienced, I'll talk to you later.

SULLY

No, not later—*never!*

JACK

Sully!

*(Pause.)*

SULLY

Hello? Hello? *(pause)* See, now it goes away! You didn't hear any of that?

JACK

*(putting his hand on his shoulder)*

Sully—you need professional help.

*(Sully looks at him for a moment. Then:)*

SULLY

Yes. Yes! I need professional help.

*(The lights fade.)*

## Scene 6

*(Lights up. Sully is standing S.L. in a doctor's OFFICE. A DOCTOR enters carrying a manila folder.)*

DOCTOR

Well, everything appears to be normal from the CAT scan.

SULLY

*(shocked)*

What?

DOCTOR

No spots, no lesions, no aneurysms—absolutely nothing. Your brain’s totally healthy.

SULLY

The one time I go to the doctor *wanting* bad news, you can’t even give me any? You're a doctor, it’s your *job*!

DOCTOR

There is the possibility that this is purely psychosomatic.

SULLY

Psychosomatic? Are you—you’re saying I’m crazy?

DOCTOR

Not crazy—you just may have managed to will your mind into hearing a voice due to anxiety or stress.

SULLY

Well how do I *un-*will it? I have to go to work tomorrow!

DOCTOR

You need to target the source of anxiety in your life and try to alleviate it by focusing on other things.

SULLY

The voice is the source! Look, can’t you just give me a horse pill, lie to me, and say it’ll go away like a normal doctor?

DOCTOR

Sully, the cure is in your hands.

MOTHER’S VOICE

The man’s right—this is your own doing.

SULLY

*(to the DOCTOR)*

See! See! Did you hear that?

DOCTOR

Hear what?

SULLY

*(wearily)*

Oh never mind....

DOCTOR

Have a good day.

SULLY

Too late.

*(The Doctor leaves the room. Then:)*

MOTHER'S VOICE

Why are you wearing that terrible gray shirt again? I thought I told you to get rid of it.

SULLY

Will you stop talking about my shirt! I paid seventy-five dollars for it—I like it!

MOTHER'S VOICE

Seventy-five dollars on a shirt? Are you out of your mind? Just wait 'till your father hears about this...

SULLY

Mother—!

MOTHER'S VOICE

Then again, it doesn't surprise me—you always were lousy with your finances. Remember when your grandfather gave you twenty dollars for your birthday? And what did you spend it on? Bubblegum!

SULLY

Ma, I was twelve years old!

MOTHER'S VOICE



A twelve year old *yutz*. The man worked his whole life to be able to give his grandson twenty dollars, and then he blows it all on candy.

SULLY

Mother, why are you doing this? How come you're able to talk to me? *Where* are you even talking from?

MOTHER'S VOICE

Never mind where and never mind why. You'll find out soon enough.

SULLY

What? What do you mean? *(pause)* Hello? *(pause)* Helloooo!

*(Sully lets out a dejected sigh.)*

SULLY

Somewhere Freud is laughing...

*(The lights fade.)*

## Scene 7

*(Lights up on Sully who is standing in front of a kiosk in a mall, wearing a dorky bow tie. The kiosk is an elaborate but cheap-looking display consisting of women's brassieres. A WOMAN walks by.)*

SULLY

May I *(throat clear)* interest you in a brassiere?

WOMAN

No thank you.

SULLY

Are you sure? I got full-cups, half-cups, pushups, strapless...

WOMAN

*(overlapping)*

No thank you.

*(She walks away.)*

SULLY

Ok, yeah, sure, certainly, that's—that's no problem. Have a good day... *(to himself)* This is ridiculous. I can't even get women selling bras. I must be the illegitimate son of Kafka.

*(EMMA, a woman in her late twenties/early thirties, who is sunshine incarnate, comes up to Sully's stand. She stares at him, squinting. Sully stares back.)*

EMMA

Don't I know you from somewhere?

SULLY

Uh, I don't know. Do you?

EMMA

I definitely know you from somewhere.

*(Sully stands motionless as she stares at him for an uncomfortably long period of time.)*

SULLY

May I uh, *(throat clear)*, interest you in a brassiere?

EMMA

No, I'm trying to figure this out.

*(She stares some more until she suddenly gives a start.)*

EMMA

Yes!

*(Sully jumps back in surprise, knocking the whole display case down.)*

SULLY

Oh I'm—I'm so sorry—

EMMA

Oh, no, I'm sorry—

*(Sully scrambles to pick everything up, Emma trying to help. He slips on a few of the brassieres.)*

SULLY

No problem—it's no problem...

*(He puts them in place but then knocks them over and slips again.)*

SULLY  
No problem...

*(They finally gather everything together.)*

EMMA

Sorry...

SULLY

That's ok.

EMMA

You do comedy, right?

SULLY

Oh, yeah—a little, on the side...

EMMA

But weren't you on T.V.?

SULLY

Oh, yeah—once.

EMMA

Yes! That's it!

SULLY

Yeah, that must be it.

EMMA

You were really funny!

SULLY

Thank you—thanks.

EMMA

Yeah!

SULLY

*(extending a hand)*

I'm Sully Lowenstein, by the way.

EMMA

*(shaking it)*

Emma Always.

*(Sully stares at her, blankly.)*

SULLY

What?

EMMA

Oh, ha—*(nods, looks down)*—yeah I—I always get that a lot, uh—that’s my actual last name, “Always”.

SULLY

Oh, well that’s—wow...

EMMA

Ha, yeah.

SULLY

You know what, that’s a good name.

EMMA

Ha, really.

SULLY

No, I’ve never—I mean, that’s an original name, that’s a—an original name...

EMMA

Ha, thanks. You’re about the only person I’ve ever met who hasn’t made a joke about it.

SULLY

Really?

EMMA

Yeah, you know, it’s usually “has that *always* been your name?”—you know...

SULLY

*(smiles)*

Oh, yeah, yeah...

*(Pause.)*

SULLY and EMMA

What do you—

*(simultaneously)*

SULLY

Oh sorry, go ahead—

*(smiles)*

EMMA

No, no, you go—

*(overlapping)*

SULLY

Oh well, you know, I was just gonna ask what you do.

EMMA

Oh yeah, I uh—I'm actually what they call a professional paint watcher.

*(Sully looks at her, confused.)*

EMMA

I watch paint dry. Literally.

SULLY

You—you watch paint dry?

EMMA

Yep.

SULLY

That's—that's a thing?

EMMA

That's a thing.

SULLY

Huh. Wow.

EMMA

I know—people never believe me when I tell them. My job literally consists of staring at paint eight hours a day.

SULLY

Well, you got a name I've never heard of and a job I've never heard of—you're two for two.

EMMA

*(laughs)*

Ha, yeah.

*(Awkward pause, neither wanting to go. Then:)*

MOTHER'S VOICE

Go ahead.

*(Sully jumps, startled.)*

MOTHER'S VOICE

Ask her.

EMMA

*(to Sully)*

Are you okay?

SULLY

Oh, yeah I just uh—*(throat clear)*—I thought I heard something...

MOTHER'S VOICE

Of course you did, I just told you something—what are you, an idiot?

SULLY

*(through clenched teeth)*

No, I'm not an idiot.

EMMA

What?

SULLY

Nothing, nothing, uh...

MOTHER'S VOICE

Can't you see the woman likes you? What do you need, a written invitation? Ask her already!

*(Pause)*

SULLY

You know, this might—sound crazy but...would you, by any chance, like to grab a bite to eat after my shift?

EMMA

*(quickly)*

Yes! *(catches herself)* I mean, yeah, that's...sure.

SULLY

Great, that's—that's great.

EMMA

When do you get out?

SULLY

Uh, about an hour.

EMMA

Great, so I'll...meet you here, or?

SULLY

Uh, sure, sure. I'll be here.

EMMA

Great! See you in an hour I guess.

SULLY

See you in an hour.

*(She walks away.)*

SULLY

*(looking to the sky awkwardly)*

Gee. Thanks.

MOTHER'S VOICE

You're welcome. Now don't mess it up.

*(The lights fade.)*

## Scene 8

*("You Made Me Love You" by Harry James plays as the lights fade. The lights go up and the song plays quietly under the scene. Sully and Emma enter a PARK, represented by a park bench C.S. They are eating ice cream.)*

EMMA

...well, I literally open the new paint sample, stick a brush in, brush it onto some cardboard and time it with a stopwatch.

SULLY

How long does it take?

EMMA

Well, latex paint can take anywhere from forty minutes to an hour, but if it's oil based, six.

SULLY

Six hours?

EMMA

Yeah, I'm pretty much sitting there the whole day with those.

SULLY

So you're telling me you spend your entire day staring at a piece of cardboard?

EMMA

Staring at the paint *on* the cardboard.

SULLY

Who designed this job, the Marquis De Sade?

EMMA

It's not as bad as it sounds—it's actually pretty relaxing. Ooh let's go over there. I need a Vitamin D break.



*(She pulls his arm.)*

SULLY

A—a what?

EMMA

A vitamin D break. There's more sun over by that bench.

SULLY

Oh.

*(They come to the bench and sit down.)*

EMMA

Sometimes when I need a break at work I just come out here and sit on this bench. I take a Vitamin D break and then come back inside when the world's better.

SULLY

Well that's interesting.

EMMA

Look—aren't they so pretty?

SULLY

What?

EMMA

The leaves! *(pointing)* Look at them—all those reds and oranges and browns. It's like a waterfall of color!

SULLY

Huh, yeah. I never really noticed them before. I have allergies.

EMMA

I love this time of year—it should be fall every month. So when do you do your comedy?

SULLY

Well I kinda just do it on the side. I'm actually thinking about quitting.

EMMA

Really? Why?

SULLY

Well, I just don't think I'm...what's the word—good.

EMMA

I laughed when I saw you.

SULLY

So *you're* the one.

EMMA

It was funny! Especially the reference to your narcoleptic cat.

SULLY

Well that was true actually—he dozed off and fell right in his milk.

EMMA

Please don't quit. You can't—you're too funny.

SULLY

Well thank you. Maybe I won't.

*(Pause.)*

EMMA

What do you do for fun?

SULLY

For fun? Uh...I don't know. Watch T.V.

EMMA

*(fake surprise)*

You have time to watch T.V. when you're always *on* T.V.?

SULLY

*(modest)*

No, no—only *once*. What do you do for fun?

EMMA

Oh a lot of things.

*(Pause.)*

SULLY

Such as?

EMMA

Well, I like watching the sunset. I like looking for four-leaf clovers. I *love* looking for gasoline rainbows on the street when it rains.

SULLY

Huh.

EMMA

What?

SULLY

No, that's just—that's nice.

*(Emma smiles and takes a bite of ice cream.)*

EMMA

Mmm—this is really good!

SULLY

I know. You know, ice cream is so much better in a cup than in a cone.

EMMA

But the cone's more fun!

SULLY

Yeah but the cup is way more convenient—all you have to do is eat out of it. With a cone everything's dripping and dropping all over the place, your hands are getting sticky, and then the whole cone crumbles in your hands before you can get to the end.

EMMA

Ok, we'll meet in the middle—in the cup with a cone on top.

SULLY

Now that I'm in favor of. The cone just shouldn't be the ice cream's entire support structure—that's all I'm saying.

*(Emma laughs. Then:)*

EMMA

Well I, uh, have to get going unfortunately—I gotta go to my parents.

SULLY

Oh, ok.

EMMA

It's their anniversary, so...

SULLY

Oh really?

EMMA

Yeah, it's their fortieth.

SULLY

Wow, that's a—a long time to be with a person.

EMMA

I know. They really love each other. What about your parents?

SULLY

What about my parents? Well they've both passed now, but they uh, had twenty happy years of marriage.

EMMA

That's so sweet!

SULLY

Yeah, not bad out of fifty...

MOTHER'S VOICE

I heard that!

*(Sully jumps.)*

EMMA

Are you ok?

SULLY

Yeah, sorry—

MOTHER'S VOICE

That's your idea of humor?

SULLY

Sorry, I just got a sharp pain in my head...

EMMA

Oh no!

MOTHER'S VOICE

That's what I am to you? And after what I just did?

SULLY

Mother!

EMMA

Huh?

SULLY

Oh, nothing.

MOTHER'S VOICE

Ask if she wants to meet again.

SULLY

I will.

EMMA

What?

MOTHER'S VOICE

When? She's gonna leave now, and you'll never see her again! Don't be a putz!

SULLY

I just uh...wanted to ask if you wanted to maybe do something again some time?

EMMA

Sure!

MOTHER'S VOICE

That's the way.

SULLY

Oh, great!

EMMA

Do you want to come over for dinner tomorrow?

SULLY

Yes! (*cooly*) I mean, yes, yeah, that would, that would be great.

EMMA

I want you to meet my boyfriend! You two would get along great.

SULLY

You're—you're what?

EMMA

My boyfriend.

SULLY

Oh you—you have a boyfriend...*(Glaring at the sky)*...she has a boyfriend.  
That's terrific...

EMMA

He's a professor at NYU—he's like way smarter than me. You should meet him.

SULLY

*(deflated)*

Sure, yeah, wonderful...

EMMA

Yay! I'll talk to you tomorrow.

SULLY

*(faux enthusiasm)*

Okay...sounds good...

EMMA

Bye!

SULLY

Goodbye.

*(She leaves. Sully slowly raises his head to the sky, glaring.)*

SULLY

Gee, thanks.

MOTHER'S VOICE

Don't start with me. I can't let you lose the only normal woman you've ever been with.

SULLY

Don't start with *me*! I just humiliated myself...

MOTHER'S VOICE

Listen to me: that woman is your destiny. And I'm here to make sure you get her, boyfriend or not.

SULLY

Are you insane! I can't take a woman away from her boyfriend! I can't even get a girl selling bras! This is so demoralizing...

MOTHER'S VOICE

Will you just trust me? I'm your mother. I've been around longer than you, long enough to know not to let a good thing slip away. Just trust me.

SULLY

But I-

MOTHER'S VOICE

*Trust* me.

*(Pause.)*

SULLY

Fine, I'll do it.

**END OF ACT I**

**ACT II**



## Scene 1

*(Lights up on Emma's APARTMENT. A table stands in the corner with scotch on it, representing the living room area. A little further S. R. represents the dining room area. Sully is at the door, greeted by Emma and her boyfriend.)*

SULLY

Hello.

EMMA

Hi! Glad you could come. This is my boyfriend, Ernie.

SULLY

Hi, Sully Lowenstein.

*(ERNIE—a man resembling a rock—clasps Sully's hand like a vice and shakes it slowly.)*

ERNIE

Sully. What an interesting name. Is that your birth name?

SULLY

*(in pain)*

Yes.

*(Ernie releases his hand, and Sully clutches it to his chest.)*

ERNIE

Welcome to our humble abode. Would you care for a drink?

SULLY

I'm ok.

ERNIE

Come, now! No visitor of ours should have their thirst go unquenched.

SULLY

*(reluctantly)*

Alright.

ERNIE

Splendid. Will you excuse us Emma? It's time for male bonding.

EMMA

Oh. Ok...

*(She leaves obediently. Sully walks about the living room.)*

SULLY

You have an—interesting apartment.

ERNIE

Thank you. I designed it myself.

*(Ernie walks over to the table with the scotch and takes it off.)*

SULLY

The moose head is a classy touch.

ERNIE

Mmh? *(turns around)* Ah yes, Albert. I shot him with a 12-gauge. Got him right through the left coronary artery. I'm quite the marksman.

SULLY

Do you play pickleball weekends?

ERNIE

*(deadpan)*

Ha ha. No.

*(He walks over to Sully with the scotch.)*

ERNIE

Do you see this?

SULLY

Yes.

ERNIE

Do you know what it is?

SULLY

No.

ERNIE

Bruichladdich.

*(Pause.)*

SULLY

Gesundheit.

ERNIE

Bruichladdich. From Scotland. The strongest single malt scotch in the world. 184 proof, 92%. This one's from 1964. I have twelve bottles of them.

*(He goes back over to the table and pours two glasses.)*

SULLY

1964?

ERNIE

Would you like to hear a little story, Sully? I'd like to tell you a little story.

SULLY

Do I have a choice?

ERNIE

My father was a mountaineer in his native Scotland. The finest in the country. Mounted everything from Alps to Shetland ponies. One day, he and his belay partner—*(smiles)*—that's layman's terms for climbing partner—decided to reach the summit of Ben Nevis. Have you heard of this mountain, Sully?

SULLY

No, I'm from Hoboken.

ERNIE

Ben Nevis is the highest mountain in all of Scotland. It rises 1,345 meters above sea level. It's name is Scottish Gaelic for "mountain of venom". A formidable name, is it not?

SULLY

*(fake smile)*  
Enchanting...

ERNIE

My father and his partner left on March 4th, 1964. The day was cold and forbidding, much like my aunt Gertrude. As they were ascending the Eastern face of the mountain, they were set upon by a gang of bandits. They were hiding out in an *uamh*—that's Scottish Gaelic for cave—set a ways into the mountain. My father's partner was slain, so my father had to fend the bandits off single-handedly with nothing but a grappling hook. After he killed them, he did the ancient warrior's dance of victory.

SULLY

What's Scottish Gaelic for nutcase?

ERNIE

Once they were slain, he examined their corpses. Their knapsacks contained roughly \$800,000 in gold bullion, along with twelve bottles of Bruichladdich. My father was no fool, so he left the money and took the scotch.  
*(Ernie smiles and holds a glass out to Sully.)*

ERNIE

Salud.

SULLY

I don't...think so...

ERNIE

Come now Sully! If my father risked his life to obtain this bottle of Scotch, you can at least honor his memory and try a sip.

*(Sully slowly takes a sip. He jerks away, sputtering.)*

ERNIE

I'll concede it's a tad bold.

SULLY

*(coughing)*

A tad? This is paint thinner....

ERNIE

*(slapping him on the back)*

Come. Let us eat.

*(He pulls Sully into the other room, who's still reeling. Emma is sitting at the table.)*

ERNIE

My apologies for the wait, my sweetness. I'm afraid it was necessary. *(to Sully)* What is your occupation Sully?

*(They sit down.)*

SULLY

I'm a—a salesman of brassieres.

ERNIE

How fascinating.

SULLY

I also do comedy on the side.

EMMA

You have to see him perform sometime! He's hysterical.

SULLY

Well, I don't know about that...

ERNIE

I'd be delighted to. I myself am quite fond of humor.

SULLY

Emma told me you're a professor?

ERNIE

That is correct. I teach "Introduction to Marxism" at New York University. Standard freshmen course. We like to start them while they're young. I myself find the subject quite intellectually stimulating.

SULLY

I'm glad—I myself think you yourself should yourself.

ERNIE

I just finished a comparative analysis of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels for a research project. They were different men, but they had a distinct intellectual compatibility I find particularly fascinating. Although I can't precisely define what it was...Can you Sully?

*(Sully stares at him.)*

SULLY

No, but try giving either one of them a shave.

*(He laughs awkwardly. Ernie stares at him. He stops. )*

SULLY

So, uh, how did you two meet?

EMMA

Oh, it's a great story. You see, Ernie was—

ERNIE

With all due respect, Emma, your storytelling skills are atrocious. I'll tell it.

*(Emma looks down.)*

ERNIE

You see Sully, I was teaching at the university one day when a young woman approached me. I had never seen such an exquisite creature in all my life--so perfect in dress, facial composition, and physical anatomy. She explained she was taking a night course on the great Dutch painters-- Rembrandt, Van Gogh, et cetera--, and she needed help locating the art department. I then proceeded to lead her towards her point of destination, even though I hadn't the slightest idea where it was oriented. We circled the campus three times before I found it. When we arrived, I asked her if she would like to join me to see an interpretive dance performance of *War and Peace*. She accepted, and we haven't parted since.

SULLY

That was a...wonderful story.

ERNIE

I myself am quite fond of it.

*(He suddenly spits out his food.)*

ERNIE

Emma, this ham is a disgrace.

EMMA

Huh?

ERNIE

*(slams his fist on the table)*

An absolute disgrace! Did I not instruct you to take it out once it reached 135 degrees Fahrenheit exactly?

EMMA

Well I, I tried—

ERNIE

You don't try woman! You do! Why you've fried it to a shriveled crisp!

SULLY

*(trying to reassure Emma)*

Well I think it's good, actually.

ERNIE

Sully, you may enjoy eating insipid shoe leather, but I do not.

SULLY

You know, I uh, have to go to the bathroom.

EMMA

Oh, it's down the hall and to the left.

SULLY

Thank you.

*(He gets up quickly and goes into the other room. Once he's there, he looks up to the ceiling.)*

SULLY

What did you do to me!

MOTHER'S VOICE

*Now do you see? This is why you have to be with her—the man's psychotic!*

SULLY

Yeah, thanks a lot for getting me into this mess in the first place! Now I'm *convinced* I can't have her.

MOTHER'S VOICE

Well you have to get her! Were you even listening to him?

SULLY

Yeah I was, and now I'm terrified, no thanks to you! It's like having dinner with Ernest Hemingway!

MOTHER'S VOICE

Well you have to get rid of him!

SULLY

How? If he even gets a whiff of anything between us, he'll kill me with a poison tip spear, dismember my corpse, and then mail all the pieces to my relatives!

MOTHER'S VOICE

I told you once, and I'll tell you again: that woman is your destiny!

SULLY

Why does he talk in complete sentences? Who *does* that? I feel like I'm conversing with Hal from *2001*!



## MOTHER'S VOICE

Will you stop your kvetching! Are you even listening to me?

## SULLY

Mother, are you insane! I can't compete with him! He's busy writing dissertations on the joys of Marxism and—and moose hunting and drinking 60-year old hooch from his alpinist grandfather! I sit at home all day watching moths die.

## MOTHER'S VOICE

Sully, you need to do everything in your power to get her away from him. That's not a suggestion, it's a request!

## SULLY

Look, why is this even so important to you, huh? I mean, when you were alive you were like this with every girl I was ever with. What's so special about her?

## MOTHER'S VOICE

Look at you two! You're made for each other. When you're with her, you shut up for once—you actually listen to what she says!

## SULLY

You know what, I'm just gonna forget about this mess and try and get back with Lily or something...

## MOTHER'S VOICE

No you're not! You broke it off—there's no going back now. You broke it off with *every* girl you ever started to fall for, no matter how hard I tried. You were always afraid of committing.

## SULLY

Of course I was afraid of committing! I hate committing! It's so...committing!

## MOTHER'S VOICE

Son, it's time to grow up. When I was alive I never wanted anything more than to see you grow up into the man I knew you could be if you tried. But you have to try. It's time to try.

*(Pause)*

MOTHER'S VOICE

Now will you do as I say?

*(Pause)*

SULLY

Yes.

MOTHER'S VOICE

Yes what?

SULLY

Yes Mother.

MOTHER'S VOICE

Now there's a good son!

*(Sully reluctantly re-enters the dining room.)*

ERNIE

Ah, Sully. We were just about to have dessert. Homemade banana bread. I prepared it myself to ensure that the quality was beyond approach.

*(He glares at Emma.)*

ERNIE

Would you like some Sully?

SULLY

Oh, no thank you.

EMMA

I like mine with walnuts, but we can't have any in the house.

SULLY

Oh? Why's that?

EMMA

He's deathly allergic to them. If he's within a foot of a walnut he turns beat red.

SULLY

Oh.

ERNIE

I loathe walnuts. I despise them. If it were up to me I'd have every single one of them eliminated from the face of the earth. Fiendish nut.

SULLY

You know I, uh, was gonna ask you if you wanted to go out somewhere this Saturday. *(catches himself)* Uh, both of you, that is.

ERNIE

Regretfully I cannot. I'm going on a pheasant hunt with a few of my Navy Seal alumni.

SULLY

You—you were in the Navy Seals?

ERNIE

Just for a decade.

EMMA

I'm...free.

SULLY

Oh really?

EMMA

I mean I don't work Saturdays. *(to Ernie)* Of course, if that's ok with you?

ERNIE

I've no reason to object. You'd never make an ill-advised pass at my better half, would you Sully?

*(He playfully slaps him on the shoulder, a little too hard.)*

SULLY

*(clutching his shoulder)*

Of course not, don't be silly. I wouldn't want you to hit my other shoulder...

ERNIE

Splendid. Then it's settled.

SULLY

Great.

ERNIE

Just remember Sully: whatever you do to Emma, I do to you.

SULLY

*(fake smile)*

Thank you for that image.

ERNIE

*(smiles back)*

Anytime.

## Scene 2

*(Lights up on Sully's apartment. Sully is watching T.V. when Jack comes in.)*

JACK

Hey. Guess who I just chatted up at Katz's Deli.

SULLY

Who?

JACK

*(smiles)*

Twins.

SULLY

Twins?

JACK

Twins. Two co-eds from Columbia. They'd give Hugh Hefner a breakdown.

SULLY

What is wrong with you?

*(Jack starts to open his mouth.)*

SULLY

Don't answer that.

JACK

Hey, you ever get your head checked?

SULLY

*(standing up)*

You know, *(laughs)* it's actually kinda funny really—I made that up.

*(Jack stares at him blankly.)*

JACK

You what?

SULLY

I uh *(nervous throat clear)* made it up.

*(Jack stares at him like he's crazy.)*

JACK

Why?

SULLY

Oh it was just a, just a joke I had in mind—you know, in case I ever got another shot at a pilot.

JACK

*(utterly confused)*

Oh...

SULLY

Sorry about any—confusion or anything like that.

JACK

*(slowly)*

I admit I was a tad confused.

SULLY

Well, not anymore.

MOTHER'S VOICE

So you're going to let me do my job?

SULLY

I'm going to let you do your job.

JACK

Huh?

SULLY

Nothing.

JACK

Hey, how'd the date with that girl you met go? Good?

SULLY

I can think of another word.

JACK

What happened?

SULLY

She has a boyfriend.

JACK

She has a *what*?

SULLY

She has a boyfriend.

JACK

Are you serious?

SULLY

Yep.

JACK

Well what was he like?

SULLY

I think it's safe to say he has some unresolved issues.

JACK

Really?

SULLY

Yeah, I'd give him six years in Bellevue.

JACK

So I guess dating her is out of the question.

SULLY

*(going over to him)*

Well now that's what I wanted to talk to you about. What would you do?

JACK

Do?

SULLY

Yeah.

JACK

About what?

SULLY

Getting her anyway.

JACK

Woah, hey—even I draw the line at girlfriend snatching.

SULLY

Come on—I know you'd know how. Tell me how to make a girl fall for you instantaneously.

JACK

Are you out of your mind? Even if I did I wouldn't tell you! It's immoral!

SULLY

Hey, don't tell me about moral—remember in college when you cheated on your ethics test?

JACK

Oh, it was one question...

SULLY

Come on Jack—help me out here! Isn't it a tenant of friendship to aid the other party in times of need, no matter what the need is?

JACK

No.

SULLY

Well it should be!

JACK

Listen Mac—when it comes to the ladies I'm the best in the business, and I don't give trade secrets to you or anyone else.

*(Sully suddenly grabs him and slams him against the wall)*



SULLY

Listen Lothario. It's been six years since Lily. Six years without being hugged, squeezed, fondled, or kissed—except once at a family reunion when my Aunt Agnes had too much Pinot Grigio and face planted me, mistaking me for her deceased ex-husband.

JACK

What?

SULLY

Now, the woman of my dreams is being held captive as we speak by a whiskey-guzzling, elk-killing freak of nature who she's finally about to be rid of because you're about to tell me every single tip, trick, and hint you've ever acquired in your entire girl-laden, testosterone-fueled existence, so spill it and spill it now!

*(Jack stares at him.)*

JACK

Sorry, you're gonna have to repeat half of that.

*(Sully takes him back over to the couch, and they sit down.)*

SULLY

What-do-I-have-to-do?

*(They sit. Jack sighs.)*

JACK

Ok. First you take her by the hand, look her in the eyes, and say the following: "I've spent my whole life searching for someone. Someone who's good, someone who's pure, someone who's true. Someone who I'd come to love, cherish, and worship. Someone who'd remain by my side and I by hers, now and forever after. Someone like you."

*(Sully stares at him, entranced. Then, he leaps up.)*

SULLY

Yep, that'll do it. Thank you.

*(He runs out the door. Jack smiles and puts his feet up.)*

JACK

The best in the business...

### Scene 3

*("A Kiss To Build a Dream On" by Louis Armstrong plays as the lights go up on a RESTAURANT, represented by a table and two chairs. Sully and Emma sit across from each other. The song fades.)*

SULLY

Tarzan. How come he doesn't have a beard?

EMMA

I don't know. Huh.

SULLY

I mean think about it: the guy lives in the jungle his whole life, he never gets a haircut, so why would there be razor blades and a can of Gillette hidden behind a tree trunk?

EMMA

*(triumphantly)*

Jane brings it in from England!

SULLY

Case closed.

*(Pause.)*

EMMA

*(gesturing to a glass)*

I don't drink, so this will be interesting.

SULLY

Oh really?

EMMA

Yeah. I once had two Manhattan's at a New Years' Eve party and tried to mount the Wall Street bull and ride it to Mexico.

SULLY

*(gesturing to her glass)*

Do you think you can handle this?

EMMA

Not a chance.

*(She takes a big gulp.)*

EMMA

Mmm! This is really good!

SULLY

Yeah?

*(She takes another big gulp.)*

SULLY

You—you might want to slow down a bit. I mean especially if you don't—

*(She drains the rest of the glass. Sully stares at the empty glass.)*

SULLY

—handle it well.

*(A WAITRESS walks by and Emma gets her attention.)*

EMMA

Can I get a...*(skimming drink menu)* peach margarita?

*(The waitress nods and takes her glass off.)*

EMMA

Ernie never lets me drink. *(Imitating him)* "It is not fitting for a woman to consume spirits". I once ordered a glass of wine at a restaurant and he practically strong-armed it away from me.

*(Sully looks at her worriedly.)*

MOTHER'S VOICE

Ask her.

*(Sully looks up at the ceiling, then looks back at her.)*

SULLY

Emma can I...ask you something?

EMMA

Sure.

SULLY

Do you...like Ernie?

EMMA

*(confused)*

Of course I like him. Do you?

SULLY

Well to be honest...

MOTHER'S VOICE

Be honest.

SULLY

No. I don't.

EMMA

You don't?

SULLY

I don't.

EMMA

Why not?

SULLY

I don't know, it's just...*(pause)* I don't think he respects you.

EMMA

Of course he respects me! Why would I go out with someone who doesn't respect me?

SULLY

I don't know.

*(The waitress comes back with the margarita. It's huge.)*

SULLY

What does that come with, a diving board? That's insane...

EMMA

*(half to herself)*

I mean of course he respects me. Respect is the bedrock of any meaningful relationship. Everyone knows that. *(to Sully)* How do you know he doesn't respect me?

SULLY

Well for starters, he calls you 'woman'.

EMMA

Oh, he just does that when he's mad...

SULLY

Well what about the ham? I mean he looked like he wanted to strangle you because it was overcooked.

EMMA

Well I shouldn't have overcooked it...

SULLY

It was just ham, Emma!

MOTHER'S VOICE

Keep at it son.

SULLY

*(nods)*

I will.

EMMA

What?

SULLY

Look, all I'm saying is, you're someone I've come to respect, and I think you should be with someone who respects you too—that's all.

EMMA

Listen, I'd be the first to tell you Ernie has a lot of problems, ok? I mean, so he's impatient, so he loses his temper, so he's an unapologetic chauvinist—that doesn't mean he's a jerk.

SULLY

Emma, that's the definition of jerk. *(Pause)* Are you even happy with him?

EMMA

Of course I'm happy with him! What makes you think I'm not happy?

*(She chugs half of the margarita and then slams the glass on the table.)*

SULLY

No reason...

EMMA

I mean haven't you ever been in a flawed relationship before?

SULLY

Yes. Yes, as a matter of fact, I have. Her name was Lily. It's been six years since we broke up. I liked her a lot.

EMMA

Why'd you break up?

*(Sully debates whether to tell her.)*

## MOTHER'S VOICE

Tell her.

## SULLY

Because she didn't like me a lot. And I was afraid to commit to someone who wouldn't do the same for me. You know, I realized you can spend your whole life chasing a dream that won't come true. *(Pause.)* And then it's all over.

*(Pause.)*

## EMMA

Well I don't...I don't think Ernie's like that. I mean I think he likes me, even though he's...the way he is. I mean you can't change people.

## SULLY

*(leaning in)*

But you can change your response to people. You don't have to put up with it.

## EMMA

Look let's not...let's not talk about this anymore, alright?

*(Pause. Then:)*

## SULLY

Does Ernie like gasoline rainbows?

## EMMA

What?

## SULLY

Does he like gasoline rainbows? Does he like sunsets or four-leaf clovers or autumn leaves?

## EMMA

Can we *please* not talk about this anymore?

*(Pause.)*

MOTHER'S VOICE

I think you planted the idea in her head. Good work son.

SULLY

Thanks Mother.

*(Emma suddenly lets out a belch of colossal proportions. Sully stares at her, eyes wide.)*

EMMA

Excuse me.

SULLY

Great diaphragm control.

EMMA

Thank you.

## Scene 4

*(“A Kiss To Build To A Dream” resumes as the lights fade. Lights up on Sully’s apartment. Emma staggers in with Sully in tow, trying to support her. The woman is smashed.)*

EMMA

Woahh...

SULLY

Easy, easy...

EMMA

Woahhhh...

SULLY

What'd you do—swallow a liquor store?



EMMA

*(slurring)*

What are you talkin' about--I had a couple'a glasses...

SULLY

A couple of glasses? How 'bout a couple of bottles...

EMMA

Oh pa-lease...

SULLY

You shouldn't drive for a week.

*(He tries to take her to the couch. She sees a candle on the coffee table and tries to approach it.)*

EMMA

Oooh! Pretty candle!

SULLY

*(pulling her back)*

No! If you exhale near it, you'll blow up the apartment.

EMMA

I just need to lie down...

SULLY

Yeah, what do you think I'm trying to do--the inebriated tango?

EMMA

Can you stop the room please...I wanna get off...

SULLY

*(struggling to lay her down)*

Will you at least work with me here? It's like dragging around the Statue of Liberty.

EMMA

Woahhhh–

SULLY

Easy, easy, almost there...

*(He finally succeeds in laying her on the couch. He stands there for a second, catching his breath.)*

SULLY

There. No you just get some sleep...and I'll drop you off at AA in the morning.

*(He starts to leave but Emma grabs his arm.)*

EMMA

Wait–don't leave me.

SULLY

Don't worry–I told Jack you're seeing someone, he won't bother you.

EMMA

No, no, stay stay...

SULLY

Honey, it's two in the morning. I'd like to go to bed sometime this millennium.

EMMA

Just stay here ok...

SULLY

Why? I have to go to–

EMMA

*(yells)*

**STAY!**

*(Sully stares at her.)*

SULLY

Well now that you put it that way...

*(He sits down on the couch next to her.)*

EMMA

You're nice.

*(She puts her hand on his arm, petting it. Sully looks at her, debating whether or not to say something.)*

MOTHER'S VOICE

Say it.

*(Sully takes a deep breath.)*

SULLY

Emma.

EMMA

What?

SULLY

I have something to tell you.

EMMA

What?

SULLY

*(cringing while he says it)*

I've spent my whole life searching for someone. Someone who's good, someone who's pure, someone who's true. Someone who I'd come to love, cherish, and worship. Someone who'd remain by my side and I by hers, now and forever after. Someone like you.

*(Emma sits up, staring at him for a second. Then she bursts out laughing.)*

EMMA

Where'd you hear that?

SULLY

Uh...

EMMA

Is that like a bad poem from Playboy or something?

SULLY

*(disappointed)*

No, it was... written by a certain ex-friend of mine...

EMMA

I mean you don't actually mean that...

*(Sully stares at her. Her smile falls.)*

EMMA

*(softly)*

Do you?

*(Sully slowly leans in and kisses her. Her eyes widen. He breaks away, embarrassed.)*

SULLY

I'm sorry. I-I shouldn't have done that. *(Pause)* You don't have to stay here or anything. *(Pause)* And, you know, I totally understand if you never want to see me again. It's just that—

*(She suddenly lunges forward, grabs his face, and kisses him, and they both fall behind the couch. "Ain't That a Kick in the Head" by Dean Martin plays as the lights fade.)*

## Scene 5

*(The lights come back up on the apartment, the song still playing. It is the next morning. Sully enters and dances wildly around the room to the music, an ear-to-ear smile on his face. He suddenly looks at the ceiling, letting out a shout:)*

SULLY

I LOVE YOU MOTHER!

*(Jack slowly enters the room, staring at him in worried confusion. Sully sees him and the music stops abruptly.)*

JACK

Are you sure you got your head checked?

SULLY

Ah! Jackson!

*(He waltzes over to him, and gives him a big hug.)*

SULLY

You sir, are a miracle worker.

JACK

Huh?

SULLY

You know I'm ashamed to admit: I underestimated you.

JACK

Why? What happened?

SULLY

*(big smile)*

Your little line...

JACK

Oh no.

SULLY

Oh yes.

JACK

You didn't.

SULLY

Jack—

JACK

Sully!

SULLY

Listen! She admits she's in a lousy relationship, and she confessed to me last night that she wants out.

JACK

But what's her boyfriend gonna do when he finds out!

SULLY

Look: I have plans to go over there today, and Emma's going to tell her she wants out once and for all.

JACK

Are you crazy? You're gonna actually stick around while it happens?

SULLY

I told her I'd be there for moral support.

JACK

What about this guy? You said yourself he was a nutcase!

SULLY

*(firmly)*

I don't care, I'm taking a stand. She has to get out of this, and if he wants to tangle with me, then so be it. I'm gonna wear padding under my shirt and a cup just in case.

JACK

Sully, he's gonna kill you!

SULLY

I got it all figured out—I'm bringing him banana bread to get in his good graces. The man loves it.

JACK

You think banana bread's gonna placate this guy while you steal his girl?

SULLY

I'm not stealing. I'm borrowing on a permanent basis.

*(He goes to the door.)*

SULLY

Wish me luck.

JACK

Sully!

SULLY

What?

JACK

What would your mother say about this?

*(Sully turns around. He smiles.)*

SULLY

Something tells me she'd be behind me 100%.

*(He leaves. The lights fade.)*

## SCENE 6

*(“Maybe This Time” by Liza Minelli plays. The lights go up on Emma and Ernie’s apartment. Sully enters with a plate of banana bread as the song fades. Ernie greets him at the door.)*

SULLY

*(smiles)*

Hello there Ernie.

ERNIE

Hello Sully. Thank you for joining us on this sumptuous autumn day. It is sumptuous, is it not?

SULLY

Oh yes, sumptuous. Definitely sumptuous. It's the picture of sump.

ERNIE

You'll have to forgive my better half—she's still in the shower. The woman takes frightfully long showers. Our water bill has increased twofold because of her.

*(He goes over to the table and pours some scotch.)*

MOTHER'S VOICE

Are you nervous?

SULLY

Of course I'm nervous. I'm about to break up a relationship.

MOTHER'S VOICE

Don't worry—this was meant to be. You need to take his place once and for all.

SULLY

I don't know. Maybe I'm doing the wrong thing.

ERNIE

*(walking back)*

Sully.

SULLY

What?

ERNIE

Want to hear a joke?

SULLY

Sure.

ERNIE

Why did the woman cross the road?

SULLY

Why...?



ERNIE

Because a man told her to do so.

*(He chuckles to himself and downs the scotch.)*

SULLY

Yeah, I'm doing the right thing.

MOTHER'S VOICE

I told you. The man's a meshugener.

SULLY

*(to Ernie)*

Would you like some banana bread?

ERNIE

I wouldn't like some.

*(He walks over to him.)*

ERNIE

I would love some.

*(He takes a piece off the plate. He bites into it.)*

ERNIE

Mmm...Sumptuous...

SULLY

You like it?

ERNIE

I do indeed. There's a certain aftertaste I can't quite put my finger on...

SULLY

Oh yeah?

ERNIE

*(chewing)*

...what is it?... Is it nutmeg...? No....Oh! I have it! Walnuts!  
*(Sully's smile falls. His eyes widen. Ernie's smile falls.)*

ERNIE

*(panicked)*

Walnuts!

*(He turns bright red, keels over, and falls onto the floor, face down. Sully stares at him in horror.)*

MOTHER'S VOICE

Well. That's that.

*(Sully tries to say something, but all that comes out is a faint gurgling noise.)*

MOTHER'S VOICE

There you go. Now you can have Emma!

SULLY

Wha—!Are you—!Wha—!

MOTHER'S VOICE

What are you being so dramatic about?

SULLY

What am I being dramatic about! I just killed someone!

MOTHER'S VOICE

What are you talking about? You didn't kill anyone!

SULLY

Yes I did! I gave him banana bread! I didn't know it had walnuts in it!

MOTHER'S VOICE

So what?

SULLY

So what?! I can't believe this! I just killed a man!

## MOTHER'S VOICE

Oh, will you get a grip. Look on the bright side—now you can have Emma without a problem!

## SULLY

*Emma?! When Emma sees him like this, she's calling the cops!*

## MOTHER'S VOICE

So what? It was an accident!

## SULLY

You think the cops will believe that!

## MOTHER'S VOICE

Just tell them the truth!

## SULLY

*(panicking)*

I can't believe this—my life is over! In an hour I'll be making license plates in San Quentin!

## MOTHER'S VOICE

Oh, will you calm down!

## SULLY

*(angrily pointing to ceiling)*

This is all your fault! I can't believe I listened to you! This is all your—*(he hears something and gasps)*--she's coming!

*(He quickly goes to Ernie and slowly lifts him to his feet. He props him up against the table, leaning him on the edge.)*

## MOTHER'S VOICE

What are you doing?

*(Emma comes in.)*

EMMA

Oh hi! (*sees Ernie*) What is he doing?

SULLY

Oh he's just—he's just sleeping...

EMMA

Standing up?

SULLY

Well yeah—(*nervous laugh*)—doesn't everybody?

*(Ernie begins to slide down the table. Sully sees this and slides down the table with him. They both slide down to the floor and sit there. Sully smiles nervously.)*

EMMA

Are you...sure he's sleeping?

SULLY

Yeah! He just uh (*throat clear*) had a little too much Bruichladdich.

EMMA

*(coming over, worried)*

Sully, he doesn't look good.

SULLY

No, no—there's no need to—to closely examine or anything...

EMMA

Ernie?

*(She shakes him.)*

EMMA

Ernie!

*(She gasps, clasping her hands to her mouth.)*

EMMA

Oh my gosh!

*(Sully leaps up.)*

SULLY

Now Emma—I—I can explain...

EMMA

How did this happen?!

SULLY

It was an accident! The banana bread—

EMMA

Banana bread?!

SULLY

I brought banana bread and it had walnuts—

EMMA

You gave banana bread with walnuts?!

SULLY

It wasn't my fault! I bought it at Whole Foods!

EMMA

Oh my gosh! You killed him!

SULLY

Not exactly—!

EMMA

Oh, I can't believe it!

SULLY

It was Whole Foods! Don't worry, I'll write a customer complaint about this!

EMMA

*(coming towards him)*

You killed him!

SULLY

No!

EMMA

Yes! Yes you did! You know I don't like him and you wanted to go out with me, so you killed him!

*(She backs him into the corner.)*

SULLY

No! I swear it!

*(Suddenly Ernie makes a murmuring noise. Sully and Emma whirl around.)*

EMMA

Ernie?!

*(They run over to him. His eyes are still closed but he shakes his head back and forth.)*

ERNIE

*(slurring)*

Epin...

SULLY

What?

ERNIE

Epin...

SULLY

Epin? What?

ERNIE

Epen...

SULLY

Epen?

ERNIE

Epen...

EMMA

*(gasps)*

Epipen!

*(She runs over to a drawer, opens it, pulls out an Epipen, and runs back over to Ernie. Sully jerks away.)*

SULLY

Ah—I hate needles!

*(She jams it into his thigh and he jolts awake.)*

EMMA

Ernie!

*(He coughs and sputters.)*

EMMA

Oh Ernie! You're alright!

SULLY

Thank goodness!

EMMA

Are you ok?!

*(Ernie nods woozily.)*

EMMA

Oh, thank gosh!

ERNIE

Is that...*(coughs)* is that true?

EMMA

What?

ERNIE

Is that true? *(coughs)*

EMMA

Is what true?

ERNIE

I heard you say you don't like me.

EMMA

*(looking down)*

Oh...that...you—you heard that?

ERNIE

I did.

*(He slowly gets to his feet.)*

ERNIE

Is that true?

*(Emma looks at Sully. She looks back at him. Her face hardens. )*

EMMA

Yes. *(pause)* Yes it is.

ERNIE

Oh thank goodness...

EMMA



What?

ERNIE

*(going over to her)*

I've been waiting to tell you.

EMMA

Tell me what?

ERNIE

My heart belongs to another woman.

EMMA

What? What woman?

ERNIE

A student of mine at the university. Her name is Penelope. She has Marx's *Manifest der Kommunistischen* practically memorized! She's irresistible!

EMMA

Really...?

ERNIE

She's five foot eleven, 170 pounds, her hair a dark ember. She has a delightful bottom that, when you look at right, distinctly resembles a—

EMMA

*(overlapping)*

Ok, I'll see ya'.

*(She takes Sully by the arm and starts to leave.)*

SULLY

Emma—are you sure?

EMMA

Sully, he's the definition of a jerk.

*(They leave as Ernie stands there, thinking of sweet Penelope.)*

ERNIE

Oh, I wonder what I shall wear the next time I see her? Perhaps my brown cummerbund?

*("L-O-V-E" by Nat King Cole plays as the lights fade.)*

## Scene 7

*(The song fades as the lights come up on Sully's apartment. Sully, Emma, and Jack are bursting with excitement.)*

EMMA

They did?

SULLY

They did! They greenlit the pilot! It's a go, baby!

EMMA

*(jumping up and down)*

Oh, that's just wonderful!

*(She hugs him.)*

SULLY

I've always dreamed of this day! I can finally quit selling bras! I have a real job!

EMMA

Oh, I'm so proud of you!

SULLY

Goodbye tension, hello pension! Ha-ha!

JACK

Hey sorry to interrupt the festivities, but we're gonna be late here.

SULLY

Sorry, sorry, I'm coming.

JACK

*(grumpily)*

I hate blind dates...

SULLY

Don't you worry—you're gonna love this girl. I met her in the elevator at ABC.

JACK

That's what you always say...

*(They walk over to the door.)*

MOTHER'S VOICE

Son.

*(Sully jumps and looks at the ceiling.)*

EMMA

Are you ok?

SULLY

Yeah I'm fine—you guys go, I'll be there in a second.

*(Emma and Jack leave. Sully slowly walks over to the center of the room, looking at the ceiling.)*

SULLY

Yes Mother?

MOTHER'S VOICE

I've always dreamed of this day too. The day you finally became the man I always knew you could be.

SULLY

*(softly)*

Thank you Mother. *(pause)* Thanks for everything.

MOTHER'S VOICE

Sorry about the walnuts.

SULLY

Hey it's...no sweat.

MOTHER'S VOICE

Son, I'm going to leave you now.

*(Pause. Sully's face falls.)*

SULLY

What?

MOTHER'S VOICE

I'm going to leave you now. You won't hear me anymore.

SULLY

But...but I...

MOTHER'S VOICE

What?

SULLY

I...

MOTHER'S VOICE

You grew to miss me?

*(Sully looks down.)*

SULLY

*(quietly)*

Yes. Yes I did. *(pause)* I love you.

MOTHER'S VOICE

I love you too son. But just because you won't hear my voice, doesn't mean you won't remember it.

SULLY

But I don't...I don't want you to go. *(pause)* Do you have to go?

MOTHER'S VOICE

That's what people do son. They go. They fade away like the morning mist. *(pause)* They may go, but they leave a piece of their heart behind.

SULLY

Yeah. *(nods)* Yeah, I know.

MOTHER'S VOICE

Take care son.

SULLY

Mother?

MOTHER'S VOICE

What?

SULLY

You never did tell me where you're talking from.

MOTHER'S VOICE

Don't worry. You'll know someday. *(pause)* Remember: you may no longer hear my voice, but you'll still hear my words. Forever and always.

THE END

## Song Citations

Gray, Wardell/Ross, Annie. "Twisted." Prestige, 1952.

McCarthy, Joseph/Edens, Roger. "You Made Me Love You." Columbia Records, 1941.

Kalmar, Burt/Ruby, Harry/Hammerstein II, Oscar. "A Kiss to Build a Dream On."  
Decca, 1951.

Heusen, Van, Jimmy/Cahn, Sammy. "Ain't That a Kick in the Head." Capitol Records,  
1960.

Kaempfert, Bert/Gabler, Milt. "L-O-V-E." L-O-V-E, Capitol Records, 1964.

# **THE STRANGER**

*by*  
*Stephen Caliskan*

**CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS:**

**THE STRANGER:** A mysterious, taciturn loner. Doesn't say much, but when he does, you pay attention.

**RACHEL:** The town schoolteacher. Intelligent, well-spoken, haunted by her past. Torn by her love for both Tom and the Stranger.

**TOM:** Gawky, awkward, but intelligent. A man you can't help but love. In love with Rachel, jealous of the Stranger.

**JUDGE EARL BAKER:** A hard, brutal man who rules the town with an iron fist. Will keep the past under a lid no matter what the cost. Hates the Stranger's efforts to expose it.

**EILEEN:** Baker's wife. Gossipy, nosy, cheats on her husband. Hates the Stranger with a passion.

**SALLY:** Fearful, gossipy. Probably has a good heart.

**COURTNEY:** Gossipy and nosy. Conniving.

**OLD MAN:** An intelligent man with a sordid past. Knows the past will catch up to him sooner or later. Tries to train the Young Man in his dubious moral outlook.

**YOUNG MAN:** Naive, innocent. Looks up to the Old Man.

**DENNIS:** Son of Baker. He's nasty and dangerous, "the spitting image of his father", according to Rachel.

**MAN 1:** Town thug who tries to bully Tom.

**MAN 2:** Another town thug who tries to bully Tom.

**MR. ERICKSON:** Seemingly innocent but immoral. Cheats with Eileen.

**BARTENDER:** Runs the town saloon. Seemingly friendly, but a decidedly fearful man. Afraid of the Stranger.

**MAN:** Runs the General Store. Doesn't care about anything except his business. Afraid of the Stranger.



**CLERK:** Runs the town hotel. Doesn't care about anything except his business. Afraid of the Stranger.

**OLD WOMAN:** Seemingly friendly woman who wants nothing more than to sell her pies.

*“Nobody ever notices anything.”*

*–J.D. Salinger*

## SETTING

A small town somewhere in the Midwest.

Mid-1800s.

The set is abstract, with all buildings represented by simple furniture and hanging signs bearing their names, nothing more. This will allow location to be easily and fluidly changed.

## ACT ONE

### Scene 1

*(We hear the sound of a tumbleweed blowing in the wind. It's a lonely sound, a disquieting sound. "The Cattle Call" by Eddy Arnold begins to play. The lights go up on two women, SALLY and COURTNEY, who are washing their clothes in a WELL. The song fades.)*

SALLY

I told you, I don't know none. All I know is I saw Mr. Erickson and I saw Miss Baker, and both of them went into the schoolhouse and both of them went out.

COURTNEY

I think you know more that you're not disclosin'...

SALLY

If I knew anymore I'd tell you.

COURTNEY

I don't know why you don't go on ahead—you know I won't tell a soul...

SALLY

Now look—I said I saw them go in, and when they came out they were a little disheveled—that's all I know.

COURTNEY

Mm-hm, that's all you know. That there was more than you told me right off.

SALLY

You know we're friends, and you know she'd tear my eyes clean out of their sockets if I told a soul.

COURTNEY

Well you just told *me*...

SALLY

And I'm expectin' it to *stay* with you.

COURTNEY

*(mischievous smile)*

Alright....

SALLY

I mean it Court! She'd plain murder me, and you know it!

COURTNEY

Alright, I won't tell.

SALLY

You'd better not—I have to see her at the bake sale this afternoon.

COURTNEY

What I don't understand is what Mr. Erickson would want with a two-dollar street walker like Eileen for.

SALLY

Will you drop it Cort!

COURTNEY

Why? It's a logical question. Why he would spend an ounce of energy on her for—nice, married gentleman like himself. Don't he know she'll be off in a week? She never met a mattress she didn't take a likin' to.

SALLY

And to think Mr. Baker's perfectly blind to it! *(laughs)* Oh I'm just picturin' it—Judge Baker putin' on his black robes all dignified-like, while his wife's goin' to bed with the entire witness stand!

*(The two of them laugh uproariously, when suddenly MR. ERICKSON enters. They immediately stop laughing, and look down at their laundry.)*

ERICKSON

Mornin' girls!

COURTNEY

*(mock-innocent)*

Good mornin' Mr. Erickson.

ERICKSON

Nice day ain't it?

COURTNEY

Sure is...

ERICKSON

Hot too, ain't it?

*(Courtney stifles a laugh.)*

ERICKSON

Why, what's the matter?

COURTNEY

Oh nothin'—just thinkin' of all that heat....

ERICKSON

Humidity too. Never gets too hot in these parts, but I hear today's an exception.

COURTNEY

Mmm-hmm...

*(Pause. Courtney and Sally still look down. Erickson stands there awkwardly. Then:)*

ERICKSON

Well—good mornin' now!

COURTNEY

Good mornin' ....

*(He leaves. Sally immediately turns to Courtney.)*

COURTNEY

I'm sorry Sally, I just plain couldn't help myself...

SALLY

I've a good mind to tear you limb from limb....

COURTNEY

Oh, get stuffed Sally—you were thinkin' the same thing.

*(Pause as the women continue their laundry. Then:)*

COURTNEY

Ooh, I almost forgot—I have a juicy little tidbit for you...

SALLY

And what would that be?

COURTNEY

There's someone new in town.

SALLY

Why who is it?

COURTNEY

Some strange man's come in. I saw him ridin' in this morning.

SALLY

Ooh, a strange man—I like this already. What's he look like?

COURTNEY

He's tall, he's dark, and he's mighty handsome...

SALLY

I like this even better. How tall is he?

COURTNEY

He'd make Mr. Erickson look like a circus midget standin' next to him.

SALLY

Is he strong?

COURTNEY

I reckon so. He's got arms as big as grapefruits.

SALLY

Well I think a little introduction ought to be in order....

COURTNEY

Good luck. Mr. Allen said somethin' to him and he blew on past like he weren't even there.

SALLY

Well he must be shy in a strange town all by his lonesome. Maybe he needs a friend....

COURTNEY

If you're gonna meet him, *I'm* gonna meet him.

SALLY

If we can find him—he may just be passin' through for a day.

COURTNEY

Now Sally, whoever 'passes through' here for a day? You either stay here or you don't come at all.

SALLY

Maybe he'll break precedent, who knows? I heard a man come here some years ago, caused a heap of trouble.

COURTNEY

What happened?

SALLY

I don't know. I used to hear my mother always talk about it when I was a girl.

COURTNEY

Well what'd he do?

SALLY

I don't remember—I was only five or six years old. I'd ask my mother but talkin' to her's like talkin' to a doorknob.

COURTNEY

How *is* your mother?

SALLY

At this point, I'm just waitin' it out.

*(Pause. Then:)*

COURTNEY



We better swap spit and hit the road, or we're gonna be late.

*(They gather their clothes and leave. The lights fade.)*

## Scene 2

*(Lights up on the interior of a one-room schoolhouse. School children are sitting in class, with their teacher, RACHEL, at the front of the room.)*

RACHEL

Don't forget now: I want to see the nine rules of capital letters and their corresponding examples in each and every workbook next class. Are there any questions before I dismiss you?

*(No one raises their hands.)*

RACHEL

Alright—class is dismissed.

*(As the children file out, an unruly-looking boy of about sixteen, DENNIS, approaches Rachel.)*

DENNIS

I have a question, Miss Rachel.

RACHEL

*(not looking up)*

A question that couldn't have been asked a minute ago?

DENNIS

Well not exactly ma'am.

RACHEL

Mm-hm. And is this question pertaining to the nine rules of capital letters?

DENNIS

Well now it's just that. You see, I was wonderin' if your pretty little self might just happen to have a little after class time, to kind of help me with it and all.

RACHEL

If you'll forgive me for saying so Dennis, I have a most peculiar feeling this hasn't anything to do with your schoolwork.

DENNIS

Why now Miss Rachel, I would never—

RACHEL

*(looking up)*

That's precisely right—you would never. Because I would never allow it. If you're to continue attending my classes, then there is a student-teacher relationship that is duly expected and must be maintained. Am I clear?

DENNIS

But Miss Rachel—

RACHEL

I said “am I clear”?

*(Dennis abruptly turns around and exits wordlessly. Almost immediately, a tall, awkward man with a loud, straw hat enters, TOM.)*

TOM

Hi Miss Rachel.

RACHEL

*(tone changes)*

Why hello Tom! What brings you here?

TOM

Say could I trouble you just a moment? That is, if you ain't too busy or none—

RACHEL

*(smiles)*

Why you can trouble me anytime you like Tom. What's on your mind?

TOM

*(holds the hat in his hands, looking down)*

Well I was just uh, fixin' to ask you somethin'...

RACHEL

Oh?

TOM

You see I was wonderin' if you were goin' to the bake sale?

RACHEL

Well you know I always do. This town wouldn't have a scrap of revenue if it weren't for my peaches jubilee.

TOM

Miss Rachel, I told you time and time again, that there jubilee's the best I ever tasted.

RACHEL

*(mock-pride)*

Won first prize four years in a row...

TOM

And every bit deservin'. *(Pause, looks down.)* You see I uh....wanted to ask if uh....if you...*(laughs awkwardly)* sorry, I uh—I've never been too hot at this...

RACHEL

I'd be delighted to go with you Tom.

TOM

*(slowly looks up)*

You mean it?

RACHEL

I mean it.

TOM

Well now that's...that there's just perfect, just perfect! *(lets out a laugh)* Excuse me. *(suddenly formal)* Should I come here a half hour before?

RACHEL

That would be just fine.

*(Tom suddenly swoops in and gives her a peck on the cheek.)*

TOM

Sorry—I just plain couldn't help myself.

*(He runs out like a kid, and Rachel laughs. Suddenly, an imposing man of about fifty enters, JUDGE BAKER. Rachel immediately stops laughing.)*

JUDGE

May I have a word, Miss Rachel?

RACHEL

*(coldly)*

Is it about your son?

BAKER

Yes, as a matter of fact, it is.

RACHEL

I thought we'd been through this before.

BAKER

Yes we have, and it's worth goin' through it again. I assume you haven't even entertained the idea since the last time we spoke?

RACHEL

You'd assume correctly. In fact, the idea sickens me.

BAKER

And just why is that, may I ask?

RACHEL

You ought to know Judge—you run the whole town. Isn't that enough? You have to run me too?

BAKER

It's not about you. Can't you understand that? I'm not about to let you and I's past get in the way of the future.

RACHEL

Well now that's a great deal easier for you to say than me, isn't it Judge?

*(Baker stares at her a moment, then slowly walks over to her.)*

BAKER

I want to tell you a little something. My granddaddy founded this here town. I've been here my whole life. We built it up from prairie dust. My family caught this here town, and it wants to keep this here town. I'm not gonna be around forever—fact is, I don't even want to try. My son, however, he's just startin' out. He may be stupid, but he's the best I could do. And he needs someone to help him hold on to this town when I'm dead and buried. Someone like you.

RACHEL

To be perfectly frank Judge, I don't have a thimble full of care as to what you do with your family, now or ever.

BAKER

And all that dough you'd be fixin' to come into—that don't interest you either?

RACHEL

It doesn't interest me in the slightest. And if I were you, I would remind that boy of yours that as long as he is to be a student of mine, I'm to be his teacher—nothing more and nothing less.

BAKER

Are you uh...sure that's your final answer on this matter?

RACHEL

It's my final and it's my last.

*(Baker smiles vaguely and nods.)*

BAKER

Okay.

*(Baker turns around and starts to leave, but abruptly turns back.)*

BAKER

By the by, did a man come in here this morning to see you?

RACHEL

What man?

BAKER

Tall man, tan cowboy hat?

RACHEL

No. Why?

BAKER

There's a man come in this mornin' round quarter to six. Rode in on a white horse. He's been goin' around town and nobody seems to know who he is or what he is.

RACHEL

I've seen no such man. Whatever makes you think he'd come to me?

*(The Judge smiles.)*

BAKER

Sooner or later, every man comes to you.

*(He exits, and Rachel stands there in silence. The lights fade.)*

### Scene 3

*(Courtney, Sally, and ELIEEN BAKER are sitting adjacent to the GENERAL STORE, in the midst of raucous conversation. The town HOTEL is further U.S.)*

ELIEEN

*(laughing)*

It gets better—after he picks up all the feed he done spilled, he kisses her hand like she was the Queen of England!

*(They laugh.)*

ELIEEN

I tell you, if that feed didn't have a hog's picture on the front, he'd eat it himself.

COURTNEY

What would Miss Rachel ever want with an idiot like Tom for?

ELIEEN

I don't know, but she better watch her step—if it goes too far, she's liable to mess around and have a couple of half-wit children.

COURTNEY

Knowin' Rachel, she'd take to them anyway—she teaches a score of them every day in that ratty old schoolhouse.

ELIEEN

*(to Sally)*

Speakin' of which, I know you saw me come out there the other day.

SALLY

I don't know what you mean...

ELIEEN

Sally, I know good and well you saw me—now did you see who I was with?

SALLY

I told you, I don't know anything about that.

ELIEEN

Sally, you're lyin' like a rug on the floor—I know you saw the both of us.

SALLY

Well maybe I caught a *glance*...

ELIEEN

You caught more than a glance—you were peepin' like a chickadee. And you better not tell a soul, you and that mouth of yours.

SALLY

Why now Eileen, I wouldn't dream of it!

ELIEEN

You better not—Earl still thinks I'm goin' to sewin' circle Friday nights. If he knew I was with a man, he'd drag me into his courtroom so fast my nose would bleed.

SALLY

No Eileen, I said I won't.

*(Pause.)*

ELIEEN

Ooh, you know somethin'? This reminds me—this mornin' I saw a man I'd never seen before. I was walkin'—



*(She stops mid- sentence as a tall man dressed in all black and a tan cowboy hat enters. He walks wordlessly past the women, and into the store. They stare at him in silence as he goes past. The MAN behind the counter smiles friendly.)*

MAN

Howdy fella! I like the hat.

*(The STRANGER ignores him as he takes handfuls of match books out of a basket on the counter, putting them into his pockets.)*

MAN

You know it ain't too often somebody just wanders into our quaint little town to pay us a visit. What's your name, friend?

*(The Stranger stares at him coldly.)*

STRANGER

I ain't your friend.

*(The man stares at him as he walks wordlessly out of the store.)*

MAN

Hey—you know, you have to pay for those!

*(The Stranger walks past the women and leaves silently.)*

SALLY

Well he ain't too friendly...

ELIEEN

That's how I like 'em every once in a while. Shakes up the routine.

SALLY

Now Eileen, don't tell me your fixin' to mess around with *him*! Why he'll chew you up and spit you out.

ELIEEN

Some men are born to do that. See you girls.

*(She gets up and follows the Stranger into the hotel. The Stranger approaches the counter where a CLERK is seated behind.)*

CLERK

Can I help you?

*(The Stranger stares at him.)*

STRANGER

Room.

CLERK

Well, we got a room. Question is whether you got the dough.

*(The Stranger takes out a bill from his pocket and tosses it onto the counter. The Clerk stares at it a second, then picks it up in surprise.)*

CLERK

Well shoot, fire, and save the matches! You know what you got there? *(laughs)* That there's a ten-dollar bill from twenty years ago! They just don't print 'em like that anymore. Just what're you doin' with a hot-ticket item like this here?

*(The Stranger walks past him to a room.)*

CLERK

*(shouting after him)*

Now wait just a minute—I'm gonna need some ones with that!

*(Eileen follows the Stranger into the room.)*

EILEEN

Howdy stranger.

*(He turns around. Eileen smiles and flirtatiously walks over to him.)*

EILEEN

You know, it's not everyday a tall, dark, handsome fella with a cute little hat just wanders into our quaint little town uninvited. *(Pause.)* Did anyone invite you?

*(Pause.)*

STRANGER

Nope.

EILEEN

But you came anyway?

STRANGER

Yep.

EILEEN

Well I just so happen to think it was fate that brought you here...here to me.

STRANGER

Does your husband know you're here?

*(Eileen looks at him funny, smiling.)*

EILEEN

Now how do you know I have a husband?

STRANGER

He's only the biggest name in this quaint little town.

EILEEN

You two are already acquainted?

STRANGER

I guess you could say that.

EILEEN

Well don't you worry your handsome self—he won't bother us one bit...

*(She leans in.)*

STRANGER

Does Mr. Erickson know you're here?

*(She pulls away and glares at him.)*

EILEEN

What makes you think I care?

STRANGER

Only so many cats you can bathe at a time before they start clawin' you.

*(She glares at him in silence. Then she turns around and storms out of the room. The Stranger watches her, a slight smile playing about his lips.)*

## Scene 4

*(The hotel and general store "buildings" are moved away, and the lights come up on the town SALOON, represented by a bar counter and a few tables and chairs. An OLD MAN and a YOUNG MAN are seated at the bar having beers.)*

OLD MAN

Do you recognize the fact that each and every thing we think, say, and do will be accounted for? *(Pause.)* Do you understand that? I mean do you truly *comprehend* it? *(Pause.)* Do you realize that, merely by being born, we have all taken a solemn vow, stating that each and every thing we partake in thereafter will be relentlessly avenged? It's an inexorable fact, an immutable bylaw of the universe, and one that we cannot now or ever escape, try as we might. Everyone we have ever wronged, slighted, mistreated, or maligned will receive just compensation in due time—you can be sure of it. It is a promise—a fierce, unyielding promise, impossible to evade. And although we spend our entire lives running from it, we're only running from ourselves, running from each other. The full nature of our culpability will be painstakingly revealed, and when the smoke clears, there will be only a gaping chasm where a life had been. *(Pause.)* Nothing in life is hidden—only ignored.

*(Pause.)*

YOUNG MAN

Well—I'll have another beer.

OLD MAN

Drink up m'boy, drink up. It's all you can do.

*(Suddenly, the Stranger enters.)*

YOUNG MAN

Who in the blue blazes is that?

OLD MAN

I don't know.

*(The Stranger goes up to the BARTENDER. They stare at each other for a moment. Then Bartender takes a glass and slowly pours a beer. As the Stranger goes to drink it, the Bartender grabs his hand.)*

BARTENDER

That'll be uh, ten cents.

*(The Stranger stares at his hand, and the Bartender slowly takes his off. The Stranger sips the beer as Judge Baker stands in the doorway, watching this.)*

OLD MAN

I'll say—he sure looks awfully familiar.

YOUNG MAN

What, you know 'em?

*(The Old Man squints at the Stranger intently.)*

OLD MAN

Nah—can't be.

YOUNG MAN

Who is it?

OLD MAN

Beats me.

*(The Stranger is still drinking as Baker slowly walks over to him.)*

BAKER

Son, I wanted to talk to you.

*(The Stranger looks at him silently.)*

BAKER

Just uh, what're you doin' here?

STRANGER

Just what do you care?

*(Pause.)*

BAKER

Son, I'm gonna give it to you straight—I don't much care for you.

*(Pause)*

STRANGER

Do I bother you, judge?

BAKER

Yes, as a matter of fact you do.

STRANGER

I haven't done anything.

BAKER

That's just it—you haven't done anything.

STRANGER

Then why the dislike?

BAKER

*(angrily)*

‘Cause we have a nice, law-abiding town here, and a nice, law-abiding community. We don’t like some two-for-nickel cowboy comin’ in outta the blue and kickin’ up dust.

STRANGER

Just what dust have I kicked up?

BAKER

You know good and well what. Not payin’ for anythin’, goin’ around town being ornery to some of the nicest people on this planet.

STRANGER

Funny—you're the only one who's even mentioned money to me.

BAKER

That’s ‘cause they’re scared to, and you know it! Well I'm not. *(Walks right up to him.)* As a matter of fact, I'm givin’ you exactly twenty-four hours to get outta this town and go back to wherever it is you came. And if you're not out by then, I'll have you thrown out so hard, you won't be able to get that cowboy hat back on. You hear me?

*(The Stranger faintly smiles.)*

STRANGER

It’ll be over by then.

*(Pause.)*

BAKER

What’s that supposed to mean?

*(The Stranger gets up and walks wordlessly out. Baker glares at him as he leaves.)*

## Scene 5

*(The Bar disappears and the Schoolroom is wheeled on. Rachel is alone in the schoolroom grading papers when there is a knock at the door frame—Tom is standing there.)*

RACHEL

*(smiles)*

Why Tom! Come on in.

TOM

*(walking over shyly)*

Well hello now Miss Rachel.

RACHEL

Now Tom, you know you can call me Rach.

TOM

*(shy smile)*

Well okay—Rach. How are you?

RACHEL

I'm doing a heap better now that you're here...

TOM

Well! *(laughs)* Well that there's perfect, just perfect!

RACHEL

Ready for the sale?

TOM

As long as you got them peaches jubilee!

RACHEL

*(correcting his grammar)*



*That peaches jubilee.*

TOM

*That peaches jubilee—sorry ‘bout that.*

RACHEL

Right over here...

*(She picks up a pie plate of jubilee off the desk, taking a scoop with a spoon.)*

RACHEL

*(handing him the spoon)*

As a matter of fact, I’d like you to be the first one to try it.

TOM

Oh well now Rachel, you know I can’t—

RACHEL

*(overlapping)*

I want you to be. If you don’t like it, it’s going right in the ashcan, no two ways about it.

TOM

Well, if you’re insistin’...

*(He takes the spoon, eats the bite, and does a comic take of euphoria.)*

RACHEL

Well...?

TOM

*(mouthful)*

Miss Rachel—

RACHEL

–Rach.

TOM

–Rach–this here’s finer than frog hair split four ways! Whoo-*ee*!

RACHEL

*(mock proud)*

I reckoned so...

TOM

Mmm-*mmm*! That there’s first prize, guaranteed!

RACHEL

First prize or no prize...

*(She stands up.)*

RACHEL CON’T

Ready?

TOM

Yes ma’am. *Ah!*

RACHEL

What’s wrong?

TOM

I done left my cookies!

RACHEL

Your cookies?

TOM

My cookies! I spent an hour and a half on ‘em too–would it be awfully inconvenient if I run back and get em’?

RACHEL

Why of course not–I’ll be right here.

TOM

I'll come straight back!

RACHEL

Don't rush now—I'll be here.

*(He runs out of the schoolroom. Rachel sits back down and goes back to her papers, when suddenly, Dennis enters. Rachel looks up.)*

RACHEL

*(confused)*

Dennis? What're you doing here?

*(Dennis shuts the door.)*

DENNIS

I thought he'd never leave.

RACHEL

Dennis, what are you doing here?

*(Dennis shuts the shade and locks the door. He turns to Rachel and smiles.)*

DENNIS

Oh nothin'—just here to visit the prettiest girl this side of the Rio Valley.

RACHEL

I don't understand—?

DENNIS

Nothin' to understand. Just wanted to have a little one-on-one with my school teacher here.

*(He slowly walks over to her. Rachel stands up.)*

RACHEL

*(coldly)*

Dennis—what are you doing?

*(He keeps walking.)*

RACHEL

Did your father put you up to this?

*(Dennis reaches the desk and Rachel moves away.)*

RACHEL

Dennis, I thought I'd made my intentions perfectly clear to both you and your father—

*(They begin to circle the desk.)*

RACHEL

—You are my student and I am your teacher—do you hear me?

DENNIS

Oh I hear you—I just ain't too fond of what you're sayin'. See that's one thing my father taught me—there are two types of people in this world: the givers and the takers. The givers are suckers and the takers are makers...

RACHEL

Dennis, you'd better leave right this instant, do you hear me? Tom'll be here any second—

DENNIS

*(laughs)*

That half-wit'll be fumblin' with his cookies for an hour and a half.

*(They meet at the same side of the desk and Dennis grabs her by the dress.)*

RACHEL

*(shouting)*

Dennis! What are you—

*(He grabs both her arms tight.)*

RACHEL

*(trying to wrench away)*

Dennis, will you stop—!

DENNIS

*(tightening his grip)*

No, I don't think I will...

RACHEL

Dennis, you're hurting me—!

DENNIS

Well now sometimes love's mighty painful, ain't it?

RACHEL

*(squirming)*

Dennis, stop it—!

*(yelling)*

*Dennis, I said stop it!*

*(He tears the side of her dress off as she tries to free herself.)*

RACHEL

*TOM! TOM!*

*(He grabs her and slams her up against the chalkboard.)*

RACHEL

*HELP!*

*(Suddenly, the door is kicked open, smashing against the wall. The Stranger is standing there. Dennis whirls around.)*

STRANGER

Maybe you didn't hear the lady?

*(Dennis stares at him, a shade less confident.)*

DENNIS

Now you can just get lost mister—this ain't none of your business.

STRANGER

I'm making it my business.

*(He slowly walks over to them, and Dennis lets Rachel go.)*

STRANGER CON'T

I didn't know you taught after hours, Rachel.

*(Rachel doesn't say anything.)*

STRANGER CON'T

Why'd you come back to school Dennis?

*(Dennis glares at him.)*

STRANGER CON'T

To learn a lesson? Is that it?

DENNIS

Not from you I don't.

STRANGER

When I think you need a lesson, you'll get it—whether you ask for it or not.

*(He grabs Dennis by the throat, and slams him up against the chalkboard. Rachel leaps out of the way.)*

STRANGER

Now let's just see what we have for our little lesson today. Miss Rachel—any thoughts?

*(Rachel is silent.)*

STRANGER

I've got one—how about a course on decency, civility, and manners?

*(He slams Dennis' head against the back of the chalkboard.)*

STRANGER

Learn anything yet?

*(Dennis gasps for air.)*

DENNIS

*(gurgling)*

Okay, okay!

*(The Stranger throws him to the ground and kicks him in the rear, landing at the door. He crawls out, clutching his throat. The Stranger looks at him a moment, then walks over to the door. He stops and turns back to Rachel.)*

STRANGER

Judge was right. This town is the friendliest place.

*(He exits. Rachel stands there a moment, catching her breath. Tom comes in with a plate of pathetic-looking cookies.)*

TOM

Sorry 'bout that, I plain forgot to take 'em out. What happened to your dress?

RACHEL

Nothing.

TOM

Are you alright?

RACHEL

Yes Tom, I'm fine. Let's go.

*(She picks up the jubilee and leaves with Tom, who stares at her in bewilderment. The Stranger is standing by the door, watching them go out. As they're leaving, Eileen slowly walks around the corner.)*

EILEEN

You must think you're a pretty big man, huh?

*(Pause.)*

STRANGER

The biggest.

*(Eileen glares at him as he walks away. The lights fade.)*

## Scene 6

*(The entire town is congregated outside, behind picnic tables full of things such as quilts, baked goods, assorted hardware, and household items. Everyone is in good spirits. Tom and Rachel are behind a table, Rachel talking to Sally.)*

SALLY

Just one little scoop?

RACHEL

Oh, alright.

*(Sally excitedly takes a spoonful of Rachel's peaches jubilee, and moans with delight.)*

SALLY

Miss Rachel—if that don't win first prize, I'll change my name to Mary Jane and move to Alaska.

RACHEL

I certainly hope not—you'd plain freeze to death.

SALLY

You know I heard Alaska's got so much ice, you wouldn't believe. Enough to fill everyone's glass in the country.

RACHEL



Oh?

SALLY

Nothin' but big, long pieces of ice for miles and miles. Can you imagine that?

RACHEL

I believe I could.

SALLY

Well I can't. I mean, can you just *picture* it? Nothin' but ice and seals and them big—what do you call them?—some kind of bear—

RACHEL

Polar bears?

SALLY

Yes! They're the ones—polar bears. Nothin' but polar bears and ice and no one to bother you. No troubles, no one to reckon with. Just all peaceful-like.

*(She leans in, confidentially.)*

SALLY

Between you and me: this here's a nice little town, but I'd give ten years of my life to get away from it.

*(Suddenly, Baker approaches the table.)*

BAKER

Excuse me ladies. Rachel, do you happen to know where that man went?

RACHEL

*(coldly)*

What man?

BAKER

You know good and well what man. One with the hat.

RACHEL

I don't know.

BAKER

You right positive you don't know?

RACHEL

Why don't you ask your son?

*(Baker glares at her, then leaves. Sally stands there awkwardly.)*

SALLY

*(quietly)*

Well I uh—I guess I'll be on my way now.

*(She puts her head down and turns around.)*

RACHEL

I reckon word's spread already, now hasn't it Sally?

*(Sally slowly turns around.)*

SALLY

I don't know what you mean—

RACHEL

*(overlapping)*

You know perfectly well what I mean.

*(Sally looks down.)*

SALLY

*(quietly)*

No. *(Pause.)* No I don't.

*(She turns around and leaves.)*

TOM

Whatever *did* happen to your dress Rachel?

RACHEL

Somebody wanted it more than I did.

TOM

What do you mean?

RACHEL

Oh, let's not talk about it Tom—you make me too happy.

TOM

I—I make you happy?

RACHEL

*(smiles)*

Yes, as a matter of fact you do.

*(Tom looks at the ground, flustered.)*

TOM

Shoot.

RACHEL

What?

TOM

I don't know, I...*(Pause.)* Well now just what could make you happy 'bout me? You *know* I ain't nothin' but a hog farmer.

RACHEL

Well you're the cutest, sweetest hog farmer I ever did see.

*(She kisses him on the cheek. He smiles from ear to ear.)*

TOM

Well now that there's perfect—just perfect!

*(Rachel laughs. Suddenly, Tom's smile fades.)*

TOM

Did that uh...

*(Pause.)*

RACHEL

What Tom?

TOM

Did that man have anything to do with your dress and all?

RACHEL

What man?

TOM

That man everyone's been talkin' about.

RACHEL

No Tom, he didn't. *(Pause.)* In fact, he had something to do with making sure more of it didn't come off.

*(Tom's face grows serious.)*

TOM

That boy—the one I done seen always tryin' to talk to you—did he?

*(Pause.)*

RACHEL

Yes he did Tom, but it's alright now.

TOM

*(angrily)*

Boy, I tell you—if I ever get my hands on him, I swear I'll—

RACHEL

*(overlapping)*

You don't have to Tom. The man handled it.

TOM

Well I could've handled it too, if only I'd been there and all.

RACHEL

Don't worry yourself Tom—

TOM

Well I could've! I'm not dumb or somethin' like everyone says and all!

RACHEL

I didn't say you were dumb.

TOM

Well I ain't!

*(Pause.)*

RACHEL

I know that Tom. You're smarter than all the men in this town put together. Believe me.

*(She slowly leans in to kiss him, but the Stranger walks up to the table. Rachel jerks away.)*

RACHEL

Can I help you?

STRANGER

Yeah. Give me a cup of that there, will you?

*(Rachel scoops out a cup of jubilee while Tom eyes the Stranger with deep suspicion. Rachel hands the cup to the Stranger. He takes it, shaking a few peaches into his mouth. He smiles slightly.)*

STRANGER

Here's to year five.

RACHEL

You mean first prize?

*(The Stranger nods.)*

RACHEL

Now how'd you know this'll be my fifth year?

TOM

*(coldy)*

You have to pay for that.

*(The Stranger reaches into his pocket and lays a quarter on the table. He tips his hat to Rachel and walks away. Rachel watches him leave, with something in her eyes that just could be mistaken for longing. Tom, however, is staring at the quarter.)*

TOM

This here quarter says 1827. That's twenty years ago.

RACHEL

Let me see.

*(She looks at it.)*

RACHEL

*(curiously)*

Well I'll be...

TOM

Now it ain't even worth none. *(Pause.)* I don't like that man.

RACHEL

What do you mean?

TOM

I don't like him.

RACHEL

Why?

TOM

I don't know why—I just don't. He makes my skin curl up.

RACHEL

Well he seems fine to me.

TOM

Not to me he don't.

*(The Stranger enters again, S.R. He walks by a table where an OLD WOMAN is selling pies.)*

OLD WOMAN

Why good afternoon there! May I interest you in a pie?

*(The Stranger looks at her as if she were a bug.)*

STRANGER

No.

OLD WOMAN

You right sure about that? Come right out of the stove this mornin', pipin' hot.

STRANGER

Nope.

*(He starts to walk away.)*

OLD WOMAN

I'll let you try a bite for nothing?

*(He turns back to her.)*

STRANGER

I wouldn't eat it if it was the last thing on this earth.

*(The Old Woman's smile falls as he walks away. He goes over to the wall of the schoolhouse and leans against it. He begins to light matches. He lights them one after the other—he lights them, then immediately blows them out. Rachel looks up and sees him. She turns hurriedly to Tom.)*

RACHEL

Excuse me Tom.

TOM

Huh?

RACHEL

I'll be right back, just watch the table.

TOM

Where you going?

RACHEL

I'll be right back, okay?

*(She walks over to The Stranger. He blows out a match and looks at her.)*

RACHEL

I never thanked you properly for what you did earlier. You didn't have to do all that. You hardly even know me.

*(The Stranger starts to turn away, but Rachel grabs his arm. He looks down at her hand and she slowly takes it off.)*

RACHEL

What do you want?



STRANGER

Want?

RACHEL

*(nodding)*

Yes, want.

STRANGER

How do you mean?

RACHEL

You know what I mean. Why you've hardly been here a day and you've got the whole town at each other's throats.

*(The Stranger looks at her.)*

STRANGER

It doesn't concern you. You've done enough.

*(Rachel stares at him.)*

RACHEL

Where are you from?

STRANGER

Nowhere.

RACHEL

Where are you going?

STRANGER

Somewhere.

*(Pause. Then:)*

RACHEL

I give up. You seem like an intelligent man to me. That's most uncommon in these parts. Just why you're not even the least bit revealing as to what you're fixing your intelligence on, is beyond me.

*(Pause. Then:)*

RACHEL

You grow up here?

RACHEL

Yes, I grew up here. I've seen this town go from bad to worse, along with the majority of its residents. I've seen people drift in and out of my classroom like tumbleweeds, none of them applying the knowledge I've tried so hard to impart. *(Pause.)* I've seen a lot. And the more I see, the less I'm sure of. Like you, for instance.

*(The Stranger tips his hat.)*

STRANGER

Ma'am.

*(He walks away. Rachel stares at him. Back at Tom's table, two men walk up to it.)*

MAN 1

Well, now. If it isn't ol' half-wit. How you doin' half-wit?

TOM

May I-I interest you in some peaches jubilee?

MAN 1

I said "how you doin' half-wit?" You don't hear too well?

*(Rachel sees this and rushes over.)*

TOM

Do you want some uh *(throat clear)* peaches jubilee?

MAN 2

Smells like catnip. *(he takes a bite, then spits it right back out)* Tastes like it too.

RACHEL

Can I help you gentlemen?

*(One of the men shoves her away.)*

TOM

*(confused)*

How...do you know what catnip tastes like?

*(The men advance on him.)*

MAN 2

Just what do you mean by that?

TOM

Oh uh, nothin', why I just meant—

MAN 2

You tryin' to be funny, half-wit?

TOM

Well no, I—

RACHEL

Leave him alone!

*(She tries to stop them, but they shove her away.)*

MAN 2

*(Grabbing his shirt)*

Let's see how funny you can be with that hat shoved down your throat, huh?

*(He smacks Tom in the face and he crumples to the ground, knocking the jubilee over. Man 1 kicks him in the gut. The Stranger suddenly enters. He steps up behind the men and they whirl around. They see his stature and stumble back, clumsily bumping into the table and falling to the ground. The Stranger walks towards them, and they scramble around, still on the ground. He kicks them in the rear and they splay onto the ground.)*

STRANGER

He who kicks man when down, falls over on feet.

*(Rachel rushes down to Tom.)*

RACHEL

Oh Tom! Tom are you alright?

*(Tom staggers up.)*

TOM

Yeah, I'm fine.

*(He suddenly whirls to the Stranger in anger.)*

TOM

I could've handled that by my lonesome, Mister!

RACHEL

Why Tom—!

TOM

I don't need none of your stinkin' charity!

RACHEL

Why now Tom! The man just saved your life, and this is how you thank him?

*(The Stranger turns around and walks away.)*

RACHEL

What's gotten into you? I'm thoroughly surprised.

*(Tom sits down in despondency.)*

TOM

I'm sorry Rachel. It just eats me and all.

RACHEL

What does?

TOM

How I can never take care of myself or none. It's right humiliatin'...

RACHEL

Tom, not everybody can take care of themselves all the time. Believe me, I know. *(She stares off into space.)* I know what it's like to have the whole world against you. I know what it's like to have all four walls closing in, and no way out. I know what it's like...

*(Suddenly, we hear a loud roar.)*

BAKER'S VOICE

*WHO WAS IT!*

*(Baker storms in. He marches right up to Rachel, and yells in her face.)*

BAKER

*(yells)*

Was it you!

RACHEL

Now just who do you think you're hollering at!

BAKER

*(grabs her shoulders)*

Was it?

RACHEL

*(jerking away)*

What are you talking about?

*(He holds up a rusty Sheriff's badge, shoving it in her face.)*

BAKER

You put this on my desk?

*(Rachel holds her hands up to her face and gasps loudly. She stares at the badge, motionless.)*

BAKER

Was it you, you two faced-little tramp?

*(Rachel stands there, frozen in an awful memory. He goes to the center as people look from their tables with horror.)*

BAKER

Which one of you cowardly sidewinders did this? Which one? *ANSWER ME!*

*(Everyone just stares in shock.)*

BAKER

Now I want you all to listen to me, and I want you to listen good! There've been a lot of lies goin' around this here town! Lies about things that are dead and buried, never to return! Don't think I don't know it, 'cause I do! Now do I have to dig it all back up again and shove it in your faces? *DO I?*

*(The Stranger slowly walks in. Baker sees him and slowly walks over towards him.)*

BAKER

*(quietly)*

You. You did this.

*(He walks right up to him.)*

BAKER

I oughta have you shot.

*(The Stranger holds his ground.)*

STRANGER

*(quietly)*

Come now Judge. Don't tell me you're fixin' to make the same mistake twice.

*(We hear wind chimes softly begin to play. Baker looks at the Stranger with surprise and then anger. He swings his fist, but the Stranger punches him in the stomach. The townspeople gasp. The wind chimes stop. Elieen suddenly comes running up to him, pushing him away.)*

EILEEN

Don't you hurt him, you dirty coward!

*(She bends over to help Baker who's doubled over.)*

STRANGER

This ain't none of your business Eileen. Just go on back to Erickson.

*(Eileen runs at him but Baker catches her and throws her to the ground. The townspeople gasp.)*

EILEEN

Earl, what are you—

BAKER

He may be a coward, but he sure ain't a liar Eileen.

EILEEN

What are you—

BAKER

*(yells)*

You shut your mouth! I ain't no blind man!

*(He turns to Stranger, nodding his head.)*

BAKER

You're right. My wife's a grade-A strumpet. But don't be so quick to call the kettle black now, Mister. *(He raises the sheriff's badge.)* Where'd you get this?

*(The Stranger slightly smiles and walks away. Baker glares at him in fury. Mr. Erickson coyly comes over to Baker.)*

MR. ERICKSON

Now Judge, you know I don't know nothin' about—

BAKER

*(smiles)*

It's alright Jake. If I punished every man who touched my wife, there'd be none left.

*(He playfully slaps him on the cheek and helps Eileen up.)*

BAKER

Come now Eileen. Go on home and rest 'fore your next bout.

*(She glares at him and angrily storms off, shoving Erickson as she goes by.)*

BAKER

Now if y'all excuse me, I think it's high time I had a little heart-to heart with our magnificent Stranger.

*(The lights fade and we hear the sound of the tumbleweed.)*

## END OF ACT I

## ACT TWO

### SCENE 1

*(Lights up on Sally and Courtney who are washing their clothes at the well.)*

COURTNEY

*(holding up a shirt)*

Why look at this! It's ruined!

SALLY

How?

COURTNEY

I'd done pricked my finger sewin' that patch cloth for the sale this mornin', and it was as if a dam burst. Blood was drip, drip, droppin' on my blouse and I hardly even noticed it. I thought it'd come out in the wash.

SALLY



Now Courtney, you know blood don't come out just like that. You should'a taken soap to it the minute you saw it.

COURTNEY

Well it's just too bad you weren't there to tell me that, now isn't it?

*(She scrubs it a bit then throws it down in exasperation.)*

COURTNEY

Blood never comes out. Even when you think you've scrubbed out the last of it, there's still a faint mark where it was.

*(Pause.)*

SALLY

*(trying to change topic)*

I love that, don't you?

COURTNEY

Love what?

SALLY

The wheat.

COURTNEY

The wheat?

SALLY

Look at it! Why it's like someone took a blanket of gold and draped it over the land.

COURTNEY

I never thought too much about it.

SALLY

*(smiles)*

When I was little my mother'd race me in the wheat field. She'd say "On your mark, get set, go!", and we'd race from one end to the other. We'd spend an hour doin' just that. People'd pass us by and all and look at us like we was just plumb nuts. *(laughs)* I always liked it though. *(Pause.)* You know sometimes I get the urge to do it again?

COURTNEY

Do what?

SALLY

Go racin' again. Can you believe that? (*laughs*) I mean can you just picture me haulin' off and racin' through the field by my lonesome? Why they'd mail me to the nuthouse in a box marked "Urgent".

COURTNEY

Oh Sally...

SALLY

I sure do miss them races. Wasn't a care in the world could stop me.

(*Pause.*)

COURTNEY

Speakin' of nuts, that Stranger's liable to get himself killed with the way he's actin'.

SALLY

Let's not talk about that...

COURTNEY

You think he's crazy or somethin'?

SALLY

I reckon he's saner than the rest of us. That's just the problem.

COURTNEY

I mean does he even now what kind of tree he's barkin' up? If he keeps up like this much longer, he'll be hung from it.

SALLY

Oh Courtney, let's not talk about this.

COURTNEY

I mean where'd he even get it from in the first place?

SALLY

Courtney—

COURTNEY

How could he have laid his hands on it? It's impossible!

SALLY

*(urgently)*

Sally, *must* we pursue this horrible trend of thought?

COURTNEY

Yes! Yes we must! Why a man comes in outta the clear blue sky to our nice little town and shoves somethin' like that in your face, and you just want to ignore it?

SALLY

It's *safer* to ignore it Courtney! Why if Judge Baker even *heard* us talkin' like this, he'd plain lose his wits, and you know it!

*(Eileen has stealthily entered in the midst of this.)*

EILEEN

Having a pleasant conversation girls?

*(Sally and Courtney whirl around.)*

SALLY

Eileen! You can't just scare us like that! Why I almost jumped a mile and a half!

EILEEN

Oh now you don't like to be scared, do you? *(She slowly walks over to them.)* Well isn't that just awfully convenient. How'd you think I felt this afternoon?

SALLY

Now Eileen...

EILEEN

You think I was just bubblin' with good humor after being humiliated like that in front of the whole town?

SALLY

Now you know we're awfully sorry about it.

EILEEN

Oh I bet you're awful sorry. So sorry you couldn't have helped me stand my ground? What little ground I got left?

COURTNEY

We *are* awful sorry Eileen.

EILEEN

Well then seein' as you're awful sorry, would it be *awful* trouble to tell me just which one of you spilled the beans?

SALLY

What beans?

EILEEN

*(angrily)*

Which one of you told him about Erickson?

SALLY

Tell who?

EILEEN

The stranger! Who else?

COURTNEY

Now Eileen, you know neither of us told nobody!

EILEEN

Then how'd he know?

COURTNEY

I don't know!

EILEEN

Lyin' tramp—

*(She raises her hand to slap her when Sally steps in.)*

SALLY

Eileen we didn't tell a single soul, and that's the plain truth! Now stop acting crazy!

*(Eileen glares at them.)*

EILEEN

*(quietly)*

That stranger's got to go. You know it and I know it. And if Earl doesn't do it, I'll kill him dead myself.

*(She turns around and storms off. The lights fade.)*

## SCENE 2

*(Lights up on the Stranger who is on his way to the saloon. Rachel is following behind, and she taps him on the shoulder. He slowly turns around and she recoils a bit. They stare at each other for a second, and then:)*

RACHEL

Where'd you get it from?

*(The Stranger doesn't answer.)*

RACHEL

*(louder)*

Where did you get it from?

STRANGER

Get what?

RACHEL

You know what! *(Pause. Softly:)* Where did you get it from?

STRANGER

How does it matter?

RACHEL

It matters to me! *(Pause.)* It's important. It's very important.

STRANGER

Why is it important? He's long dead and buried.

*(The soft wind chimes we heard earlier begin to play. Rachel stares at him, white.)*

RACHEL

How do you know that?

*(The Stranger looks at her gravely.)*

RACHEL

*(afraid)*

Why are you here?

STRANGER

To set things right.

RACHEL

How do you know about him?

*(The Stranger doesn't answer.)*

RACHEL CON'T

Did he know you?

*(He doesn't answer.)*

RACHEL CON'T

I am dead sick and tired of your silence!

STRANGER

This doesn't concern you Rachel. Your part was finished a long time ago.

RACHEL

It *does* concern me!

STRANGER

No it doesn't. It concerns me and the Judge.

*(The wind chimes fade.)*

RACHEL

Are you going to—

*(She catches herself. The Stranger slightly smiles.)*

STRANGER

An eye for an eye, huh?

*(She looks down. The Stranger takes out a matchbook and begins lighting matches one after the other, then blowing them out. Rachel looks back up.)*

RACHEL

Why do you always do that?

STRANGER

Do what?

RACHEL

*(pointing)*

That.

STRANGER

You don't like it?

RACHEL

No. It makes me uneasy.

*(The Stranger shrugs.)*

STRANGER

I don't know. Nervous habit.

RACHEL

*(snorts)*

You? Nervous?

*(The Stranger blows out the last match.)*

STRANGER

Everything burns sometime.

*(He starts to leave but Rachel catches his arm.)*

RACHEL

Where are you going?

*(He slowly looks down on her hand and she slowly takes it off.)*

RACHEL

I...

*(She looks down.)*

RACHEL

I think I'm falling in love with you.

*(The Stranger looks her straight in the eye.)*

STRANGER

Please don't. You'll be sorry.

*(He walks towards the saloon as Rachel watches him.)*

### Scene 3

*(The Old Man and the Young Man are sitting in the bar having a drink when the Stranger walks in. They look at him as he walks by. The Bartender smiles nervously when the Stranger approaches the counter.)*

BARTENDER

Mighty fine weather, eh?



*(He pours a beer for the Stranger.)*

BARTENDER CON'T

I love this time a' the year. Trees startin' to lose their leaves. Sky as blue as a cow's eye. Cool breeze come evenin'. Yessir, I do love this time.

STRANGER

Nice time for a killin'.

*(The Bartender's smile falls.)*

BARTENDER

A—a what?

*(The Stranger sips his beer as Baker walks in. He walks slowly over to the Stranger and the Stranger slowly turns around.)*

BAKER

Where'd you get it son?

*(The Bartender quickly turns around and scurries into the corner.)*

BAKER

I said where'd you get it?

*(The Stranger doesn't answer.)*

BAKER

Son, I want you to listen to me right good. I don't know who you are or what you want. Truth is, I don't much care. *(Goes right up to him.)* But I'll tell you what I do care about: you talkin' and you walkin'. You're gonna tell me where you got that badge, and then you're gonna turn around and go back to wherever you came from.

STRANGER

Why should I leave? I haven't done anything.

*(Baker looks at him a moment, then chuckles to himself.)*

BAKER

You uh....by any chance heard of a prairie snake?

*(The Stranger doesn't answer. Baker walks over to a chair.)*

BAKER

It's a breed of rattlesnake common in these parts. They hardly come to town, but if you wander off say two, three miles, you're liable to run into some.

*(He sits in the chair and reclines.)*

BAKER

They're kinda funny though. See, 'cause folks say they warn you with their rattle, but that ain't the truth. The truth is, they don't shake that rattle 'til it's too late. It ain't a warnin'. It's a reminder that the end has come.

*(He leans forward in the chair towards the Stranger.)*

BAKER

But you know somethin'? A prairie snake bite won't kill you. Shoot, all you need is a Barlow knife and some ammonia. You just break the skin, dig out the poison, sprinkle some ammonia, and you're a new man. So it's not the bite that done kills folks. It's the shock. Most folks can't hardly believe they've been bit by a rattlesnake, and they drop dead on the spot.

*(He slowly stands up and walks back over to the Stranger.)*

BAKER

*(quietly)*

Which brings us to you. *(big, fake smile)* You're fixin' to give this town a dose a' cold hard shock it just plain can't afford. And for what? *(Pause.)* 'Cause you want to go diggin' up past that ain't none of your concern. *(Pause.)* So you're gonna tell me where you got that badge and you're gonna tell me right now.

*(The Stranger slowly stands up and looks him in the eye.)*

STRANGER

*(softly)*

Tell me somethin' Judge. Do they have prairie snakes down in Buzzard Creek?

*(The wind chimes begin to play. Baker's smile slowly falls. He glares at the Stranger with hate.)*

BAKER

*(quiet fury)*

You're finished.

*(He glares at him for a moment longer and then turns around and storms out. The wind chimes fade.)*

STRANGER

He who hides his faults plans to make more.

*(He slowly leaves the bar. The Old Man and the Young Man, who have been watching this, go back to their beers. The Young Man shakes his head.)*

YOUNG MAN

Just what's eatin' that judge? Ever since that stranger's been here, somethin's been eatin' him every hour, one bite at a time.

OLD MAN

Probably himself.

YOUNG MAN

Probably that wife of his.

OLD MAN

*(sternly)*

I said probably himself.

*(Pause. The Young Man is startled by his brusqueness.)*

OLD MAN CON'T

I assume you know what happened here son, some years back? 'Bout twenty or so?

YOUNG MAN

Shoot, I weren't hardly here to see it. Tomorrow's my twenty-first.

OLD MAN

Do you wanna hear it?

YOUNG MAN

Shoot, why not.

*(The Old Man takes a sip of beer. Then:)*

OLD MAN

'Bout twenty years ago there was a group of Injuns down near Buzzard Creek.

YOUNG MAN

*(eyes wide)*

Did you say—

OLD MAN

*(overlapping)*

They had land in the next territory, but it went some ways into ours. Baker wanted to mine down there, mine for silver. Said he had a claim to it, but that was fiddlesticks. He tried to force a couple'a 'them head Injuns to sign something, some paper that would'a' turned that land over to him. Bein' smarter than they look, them Injuns flat-out refused. Well now, that steamed ol' Baker pretty good, and he was all set to take a couple'a' men with Spencers down there and wipe 'em clean out. Now that was back when Baker was just judge. We had another sheriff, and he tried to stop him. Well now that got Baker madder than a wet hen, so he took out a revolver and shot him dead. Told everyone an Injun had done it. *(Pause.)* So, Baker went down to the creek, and wiped out every single one of 'em. *(He stares straight ahead.)* Only one other man helped him do it. Rest of the town were more than happy to lend their Spencers on account of all that land, but they were too yellow to pull the trigger themselves.

YOUNG MAN

Who was the man?

*(Pause.)*

OLD MAN

Me.

*(The Young Man looks at him in shock.)*

YOUNG MAN

You...you what?

OLD MAN

*(turning to him)*

You heard me. I didn't want to do it, I didn't like to do it, but I had to do it. You don't know Baker when he's steamed—he would've blown me and my wife to smithereens just like he done blown that sheriff. No one else would do it, and he would'a' killed the next man who said no.

*(Pause. The Young Man is quietly shocked.)*

YOUNG MAN

What happened then?

OLD MAN

Injuns got the message straight and direct, that's what happened then. Never bothered us again. Fact, I ain't hardly seen an Injun within ten miles of this town in twenty years. And I don't blame 'em. *(Pause.)* You see son, I believe there's a face in the universe. A face so great and so wide, gargantuan in proportions. And we spend all of our lives trying to outwit it, trying to cheat it, trying to circumvent it. But nothing, absolutely nothing can yield its gaze. *(Pause.)* Least of all a man.  
*(The lights fade.)*

#### SCENE 4

*(Lights up on the schoolhouse. Rachel is sitting behind the desk with a book, gazing at it. Tom appears at the door with a large pail.)*

TOM

Miss Rachel?

*(She doesn't answer.)*

TOM

Rach?

*(She looks up, startled, dropping the book.)*

RACHEL

Oh, sorry Tom.

TOM

May I come in?

RACHEL

Yes, of course.

*(Tom enters, struggling to carry the pail.)*

TOM

D'you mind if I put this down?

RACHEL

Of course. Why what is it?

TOM

Hot water.

*(He sets it down next to the desk.)*

TOM

I soak the feed with it 'fore I give it to them hogs. Softens it up.

RACHEL

Oh.

TOM

What're you readin'?

RACHEL

Oh, just a poem I'm partial to.

TOM

What is it?

*(Rachel picks the book back up.)*

RACHEL

*(reading)*

"He clasps the crag with crooked hands; close to the sun in lonely lands,  
ring'd with the azure world, he stands. The wrinkled sea beneath him  
crawls; he watches from his mountain walls, and like a thunderbolt he  
falls."

*(Pause. She slowly puts down the book.)*

TOM

Huh.

RACHEL

*(gazing at it)*

I've always liked it. I don't know why.

*(Pause. Then:)*

TOM

Miss Rachel—

RACHEL

Rach.

TOM

—Rach. What is he doin'?

RACHEL

Who?

TOM

That man.

RACHEL

*(Rachel's face changes.)*

I don't know. *(Pause.)* I really don't.

TOM

He's still here and all. Baker told him to leave, and he's still here.

RACHEL

I know.

TOM

What was that thing?

RACHEL

What thing?

TOM

That thing he done left on Baker's desk. What was it?

RACHEL

*(softly)*

I don't know.

TOM

Then how come you was as white as a ghost when you done saw it?

*(Rachel doesn't answer.)*

TOM

Rach.

*(He gets closer.)*

RACHEL

What?

TOM

Do you...

RACHEL

What?

*(He looks down.)*

TOM

You like him better than me, don't you?

RACHEL

Oh, Tom—

TOM

It's okay. You don't have to pretend. I done see the way you look at him and all.



RACHEL

Now Tom, you know I—

TOM

Shoot, I would too. He's bigger than me, smarter than me, better than me. Shoot, I'm a drop of water and he's the whole ocean.

RACHEL

*(softly)*

That's not true Tom.

TOM

Shoot, I'd give ten years of my life for ten minutes of bein' him, instead a' me.

RACHEL

You don't want to be him, Tom. He's seen too much. *(Pause.)* You have to believe me.

*(Rachel touches his hand. She slowly gets up, gently pulls him towards her across the desk, and kisses him. Suddenly, Eileen appears at the doorway. She folds her arms and smiles smugly.)*

EILEEN

Well now isn't this just perfect.

*(Rachel and Tom whirl around. Eileen snorts and slowly walks over to them.)*

EILEEN

If it ain't backwards Tom and forwards Rachel, suckin' face while the whole town's goin' to ruin.

RACHEL

*(angrily)*

What do you want Eileen?

EILEEN

*(faux sweetness)*

Nothin' much. I just want to know why this stranger's got everyone in this town in a twist except for you.

RACHEL

What are you talking about?

EILEEN

You know perfectly well what I'm talking about. You saw him flash that little relic this afternoon just like the rest of us. Everyone else is scared stiff. Everyone but you.

TOM

Why Eileen—

EILEEN

*(shoving him out of the way)*

I know you got somethin' cookin' under them bleached curls, somthin' you and I both know won't do this town a lick of good.

RACHEL

Oh really? May I so inquire as to what that would be?

EILEEN

You want to let him run his course. Whatever it is he's plannin' on doin', you want him to do it, and you want him to do it right quick. *(leans into her face)* 'Cause you and I both know you want it to happen. You want amends to be made, but you don't have the macaroons to do it yourself.

*(Rachel snorts ruefully.)*

RACHEL

*(quietly)*

The irony's as thick as pea soup, now isn't it Eileen? Your husband started this mess. This stranger's gonna finish it. And there isn't a thing you can do about it. *(Pause.)* That scares you, doesn't it Eileen? That scares you stiff.

*(Eileen glares at her with hate. She spits at her, turns around, and storms out. Tom watches her leave.)*

TOM

I don't like her.

*(Rachel laughs and puts her arms around him.)*

RACHEL

Well now you like me, now don't you? If you say no, you'll plain break my heart.

*(Tom blushes.)*

TOM

Oh now Miss Rachel—that there's perfect—just perfect!

*(Rachel laughs as the lights fade.)*

### Scene 4

*(Lights up outside the schoolhouse. Rachel is leaving. As she walks past it, Baker steps out from behind with a revolver in his hand.)*

BAKER

Where is he Rachel?

*(Rachel whirls around. He slowly walks towards her.)*

BAKER

I said where is he?

RACHEL

*(coldly)*

I don't know.

BAKER

Don't gimme that. I ain't seen him for an hour.

RACHEL

Isn't that just what you wanted? He's probably gone.

BAKER

*(shakes his head)*

No he ain't. I can feel him. You can feel a man like that. Clings to you like cold water.  
*(Rachel sees the revolver and her eyes widen)*

RACHEL

What's that for?

BAKER

What do you think?

RACHEL

*(angrily)*

Why you can't! Haven't you learned anything after all these years?

BAKER

Where is he Rachel? I know you two are of one mind when it comes to this little predicament of ours. I don't what he's plannin' to do, but it'd shock me none if you was plannin' it with him.

RACHEL

Don't be absurd. Why I've never even met the man in my life. I've known him just as long as you have.

BAKER

How do I know that? I seen you talkin' to him plenty.

RACHEL

I said I don't know him! Now just what are you going to do with that?

*(She points at the revolver.)*

BAKER

I know you're sore about the past Rachel. But it's just that: the past. There's no use ruein' over what's over and done with.

RACHEL

*(quiet bitterness)*

Well that's just terribly convenient a sentiment, now isn't it? It must be quite advantageous to forget the past when you've managed to wipe those who stand in your way clean out of it.

BAKER

You shut your mouth.

RACHEL

Why you see people as nothing more than paper, that's all! Scraps of paper upon which you scribble your ugly purposes and then crumple them up and throw them away!

BAKER

*(getting closer to her)*

I said shut your mouth.

RACHEL

And then you expect me to marry your son, a boy made in the spitting image of his father, so the paper-crumpling can continue?

BAKER

You just watch it there now Rachel. I'm warnin' you.

RACHEL

Watch what? Watch you crumple up another one? Watch you kill the second man with even a semblance of a moral compass to stumble upon this rotten town, just as you killed the first?

*(Baker slaps her hard across the face with the back of his hand. She falls to the ground, giving a gasp. He looms over her.)*

BAKER

It's alright. *(Pause.)* I understand why you don't understand. I understand you bein' stubborn'. *(Pause.)* It ain't your fault—it's in your blood. *(Pause.)* I'm gonna kill that stranger the same reason I killed your daddy: they both never did learn when to let things go.

*(Rachel tries to get up but is dizzy. Eileen suddenly rushes in.)*

EILEEN

I found him Earl. He's back in the saloon.

*(Baker turns around and rushes off. The lights fade.)*

## Scene 5

*(Lights up on the saloon. The Bartender's behind the counter and the Old Man and Young Man are at their usual table, having beers. The Stranger is standing facing the doorway when Baker walks in, revolver in hand.)*

BAKER

I thought I told you to leave.

STRANGER

I thought I said I wasn't.

*(Baker turns to everyone else.)*

BAKER

Clear out.

YOUNG MAN

I didn't finish my beer.

BAKER

*(shouts)*

I said clear out! All of you.

*(The Old Man, Young Man, and Bartender all scramble out the door. Baker turns back to the Stranger. He slowly raises the revolver. They stand there for a moment staring at each other.)*

STRANGER

*(softly)*

Ain't you done your share of killin' for one lifetime?

BAKER

You have exactly two seconds to tell me just who you are, or else you can join the rest of 'em.

*(The Stranger looks him in the eye.)*

STRANGER

I'm the one.

BAKER

The one what?

STRANGER

I'm the one. *(Pause.)* Most people are two people, but no, not me. I'm just one. *(Pause.)* One. The loneliest number of all.

BAKER

Quit talkin' and start tellin'. Where are you from?

STRANGER

Where are any of us from?

BAKER

I said where are you from?

STRANGER

The wind brought me here. Just swept me right along. *(Pause.)* The wind is a funny thing, ain't it? You don't see it, but you know when it's come. You can feel it. *(Walks slowly towards Baker.)* You can feel it in your bones.

BAKER

Don't come any closer.

*(The Stranger slowly pulls out a piece of paper from his coat.)*

BAKER

What's that?

STRANGER

*(reading off it)*

"Claim of Buzzard Creek. Dated July 4th, 1827—"

*(Baker's face turns white.)*

BAKER

Where'd you...where'd you get that—

STRANGER

"I, the undersigned—"

BAKER

*(shouts)*  
Don't read that!

STRANGER

"I, the undersigned, shall forfeit said territory—"

BAKER

I said don't read it!

*(He cocks the hammer of the revolver. We hear it click. The Stranger and the Baker square off, motionless.)*

STRANGER

Don't worry. I'm not gonna read it. *(Pause.)* I'm not gonna read it, because you're gonna eat it.

*(We hear the wind chimes. Baker looks at him confused.)*

BAKER

What?

STRANGER

Eat it.

*(The Stranger slowly walks towards him. Baker slowly walks backwards, the revolver hand trembling.)*

STRANGER

Eat it.

*(He's close to him.)*

STRANGER

Eat it.



*(He reaches the paper out and tries to force it in Baker's mouth who jerks away. The wind chimes grow louder.)*

STRANGER

Eat it.

*(He presses it to his mouth. The wind chimes blare.)*

STRANGER

Eat it.

*(Baker backs out the door.)*

STRANGER

Eat it.

*(We hear a loud gunshot. The wind chimes stop. Baker falls back into the room through the doorway, falling face-first onto the floor, covered in blood. The Stranger slowly lowers the paper.*

*He puts it back in his coat and stares at Baker's body for a moment. He then takes out a match, lights it, blows it out, and drops it on Baker. The Old Man slowly re-enters the room. He looks at Baker's body, then looks at the Stranger, nodding his head.)*

OLD MAN

That's right son. That's the old justice. That's what's been missing from these parts. Old justice.

*(The Stranger stares at him.)*

OLD MAN

Man was rotten, vicious, conniving. Spiteful. Evil like him comes but once in a century.

*(The Stranger looks him in the eye.)*

STRANGER

Those words sure come easy to you, don't they old man?

*(The Old Man looks at him, confused.)*

OLD MAN

What?

STRANGER

You didn't hear me? Now don't tell me them ears don't work half as good as that mouth.

OLD MAN

I'm not sure I uh—(*throat clear*)—follow you son.

STRANGER

Why'd you do it old man?

*(The wind chimes start again. The Stranger starts to walk slowly towards him. The Old Man backs away.)*

OLD MAN

Do what?

STRANGER

Buzzard Creek. Twenty years ago.

OLD MAN

Now wait just a minute...

STRANGER

You assisted our late, great Judge Baker.

OLD MAN

*(panicking)*

You...you don't know what you're...

STRANGER

Twelve silver dollars, wasn't it? Something you neglected to tell your protégé in your little speech earlier...

*(The Stranger backs him into a corner. The wind chimes blare.)*

OLD MAN

*(losing breath)*

You...you don't...

STRANGER

Blood money. Every nickel of it. I hope you're satisfied.

*(The Old Man collapses face-first onto the table, then slides down to the floor, next to Baker. The wind chimes stop. The Stranger looks at him. He then takes out a match, lights it, blows it out, and drops it on his body. He turns away.)*

STRANGER

The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves.

*(He stands there motionless. Suddenly, we see the shadow of a revolver on the wall. Eileen slowly, motionlessly enters, aiming it at the Stranger's back. She walks up to him, and is about to pull the trigger when Tom walks by the doorway, carrying his pail. He sees Eileen and enters, throwing the hot water on her. Eileen lets out a scream and drops the revolver. The Stranger whirls around as she drops to the floor. The Stranger looks at Tom and slightly smiles, nodding.)*

STRANGER

Thanks kid.

*(He goes over to the door and starts to leave. Tom looks at Baker and the Old Man with wide eyes, and then looks at the Stranger.)*

TOM

What happened? What did you do?

*(The Stranger turns around.)*

STRANGER

I never did anything.

*(Pause. He turns back around and leaves. We hear the tumbleweed blowing in the wind, followed by "The Cattle Call." The lights fade and so does the song.)*

THE END

## Song Citation

Owens, Tex. "The Cattle Call." Cattle Call, RCA Victor, 1963.