

## **Jigsaw Confession**

By David Lohrey

### **Characters**

DENNIS HENDRICKS: Thirty-seven years old. Looks his age, if not older. Son of JOSEPHINE and LAWRENCE.

LISA COLE: Early thirties. Recently engaged to DENNIS. Practical. From the West Coast.

JOSEPHINE HENDRICKS: Late middle-aged. A once-attractive woman who has grown steadily less sure of herself.

LAWRENCE HENDRICKS: An elderly man of indeterminate age. Retired academic, recently Chancellor of the State University.

CHRIS ANDERS: In his thirties. Physically fit; light-hearted.

### **Scene**

The play opens in suburban Chicago. It is the present. There are numerous flashbacks which take us to other places and times. Locations are more indicated than represented realistically.

### **Time**

Now and at various times over the past thirty-five years.

## **ACT I**

### **Scene 1**

SETTING: The Present. Early afternoon. In the attic of DENNIS' father's house. The room is half-finished, and used strictly for storage. There are boxes, an old folded rug, a couple of trunks, a discarded dresser, two stuffed chairs, a tall lamp.

AT RISE: DENNIS and LISA have just arrived. They both quickly appear defeated by the heat, the dust, and disorder. They have come to work, and are dressed accordingly.

DENNIS

Look, I really don't think we have very much time before Chris gets back. Why don't you start over there?

LISA

It's really hot up here, Den.

DENNIS

Why don't you go through that old dresser? I'll be right back.

LISA

Bring up my water, will you? The air is thick.

DENNIS

Maybe I can find a fan.

(HE goes out)

LISA

(Sorting through some things)

There's all kinds of stuff in here. Den. DEN.

DENNIS

(Reentering)

Here. Use this.

(Hands a garbage bag to LISA)

LISA

Not terribly ceremonious. Just dump it?

DENNIS

I'll go through it all later.

LISA

Your mother must have kept every piece of mail she ever received. There are letters addressed to you here too.

DENNIS

I found a small fan.

LISA

That's odd. What are your old letters doing here?

DENNIS

My mother insisted on reading my letters to dad. They all ended up here after she died.

LISA

And there must be hundreds of letters from your father.

DENNIS

He wrote ever day: Letters, poems, death threats. It'll need an extension cord. Writing came easy for him.

(HE leaves)

LISA

(Reading)

5 July 1976. "Dear Den, Found your letter here on our arrival and am glad that all goes well. I am astounded about Yale. You must feel like a whirly gig, first no, then yes, then no, now yes! I shall be curious to talk to you about it all next fall."

DENNIS

(Reentering)

I don't think I can do that again. You're right, it must be over eighty up here. Shit.

LISA

What's this? You never told me about Yale.

DENNIS

I got in, but couldn't get financial aid. It's a long story.

LISA

You needed financial aid?

DENNIS

Here, look, just dump it. Like this. We'll never get out of here, if you're planning to read all this crap.

LISA

You could have gone to Yale? I never knew that.

DENNIS

Coulda, shoulda. But I didn't.

LISA

(Begins to read again)

Here's one from the Cipriani Hotel, Venice. The Cipriani? I've heard of that.

DENNIS

"At home, I live as a pauper; abroad, like a prince." You knew my father.

LISA

Not really, and I've never figured out your relationship.

DENNIS

Welcome to the club.

LISA

His handwriting's so precise. And the closing: "As ever, father." Seems so formal really, don't you think?

DENNIS

My father was a very frightened man.

LISA

What?

DENNIS

I was just thinking. I had a friend once who said that. I must have been about eleven. My friend said, he said: "Your father always looks afraid." The funny thing is, I was afraid of him. I only think now how perceptive my little friend was. My father was a very frightened man.

LISA

He probably meant frightening. Imposing. Impressive.. That's how I remember him.

DENNIS

And that's how he wanted to be seen.

LISA

His memory was phenomenal. You can't deny that.

DENNIS

I deny nothing. He just couldn't fool Nathan, my little friend from Madison Elementary.

LISA

Here:

(SHE reads)

"Italy really does have more art than it can afford to have and keep up, but I can't think of any solution to the problem. The older and more fragile it becomes, the more

money is needed. I suppose, in the long run, much of it will have to perish and leave only a legend of the lost, golden land of the arts." Now that really sounds like him. Remember how irate he became when they tried to stop the restoration of the Sistine Chapel?

(Silence)

Den?

DENNIS

Yeah.

LISA

These letters may be publishable.

DENNIS

Maybe, but they don't really explain....I want to get out of here before Chris arrives. And I'd like to find that book.

LISA

It'll take hours to go through it all.

DENNIS

Just bag all that junk. Look for any pictures, and his stamp collection, the letters, stuff like that. I'll try to find the manuscript.

LISA

Well, these look like escrow papers or something. Old tax receipts. The light could be better.

DENNIS

We'll leave all that for Warren.

LISA

And tons more letters. Looks like they are to Josey. No, some more to you.

DENNIS

They all go in the same bag.

LISA

(Taking up a letter)

Dennis, listen to this.

DENNIS

I've read them.

LISA

"We went out to see Dun Aengus...."Did I say that right?

DENNIS

I don't know. I've never been there.

LISA

You don't have to have been there to know how to pronounce it.

DENNIS

I said I don't know, Lisa.

LISA

(Reading)

"Dun Aengus: the largest and best prehistoric, round fort in Europe. Of course, there are other prehistoric remains, but we only did this one; and that entailed a four mile drive in a pony car, and then a longish and stiff walk up a hill over all that broken granite." Oh, Den, get this. This sounds just like your dad: "Why prehistoric people wanted to live in so dreadful a place I have no idea."

DENNIS

I don't see why not, he lived here.

LISA

(Finishes the passage)

"...unless something or somebody on the mainland terrified them."

(Slight Pause)

Your father, he was so alive. I wish I had known him then.

DENNIS

If I could see past all the shit, you know, see him as a man...I'd be the first to admit it. He could have written captions for the National Geographic.

LISA

This is impossible, Den. What am I supposed to do with all this?

DENNIS

If they're receipts, save them. Otherwise just throw it all in the bag.

LISA

Look at this. This box is packed full, but the papers have been all ripped up. What are they?

DENNIS

Well, I don't know, unless they're my old school papers.

LISA

It looks like whole pages were torn into quarters. The pieces are about the same size. See?

DENNIS

Just throw them out. We've got enough stuff as it is.

LISA

No, but listen to this: "I was ready for a vacation. I ha--." The line just ends. That's where he tore the page.

DENNIS

What makes you so sure my father wrote that?

LISA

Who else? Your mother didn't write, did she?

DENNIS

Not that I know of.

(OFF: A door slams downstairs)

CHRIS

(OFF)

Yoo-hoo.

LISA

We're up here in the attic.

DENNIS

(Lowering his voice)

Here we go.

CHRIS

(Off)

Anyone home?

LISA

COME ON UP.

(To DENNIS:)

What's that supposed to mean?

DENNIS

I've had enough of "Aren't we one big happy family."

CHRIS

(Off; he starts up the stairs)

If you're indecent, and I hope you are, save some for me!

DENNIS

(To LISA:)

Just don't encourage him.

(CHRIS enters)

LISA

(To CHRIS:)

No, no: it's quite safe.

DENNIS

Unfortunately.

CHRIS

One disappointment after the other.

LISA

Little surprised to see you.

CHRIS

Caught you, didn't I?

DENNIS

Yeah, we weren't expecting you.

CHRIS

I came for my things. And to pick over Lawrence's belongings.

LISA

What do you mean?

CHRIS

I'm moving out. Lock, stock, and cuisinart. I've got a van out front.

LISA

We thought you were staying.

DENNIS

Don't you have a lease?

CHRIS

I do, or I did.

DENNIS

That's what Warren told us.

CHRIS

Actually, I have to go over there to sign a waiver. I'm giving it up.

LISA

Really? What will you do?

CHRIS

Listen: I've gotten a lot done in the last few years, believe it or not.

LISA

Where will you go?

CHRIS

I'm moving out to San Diego.

LISA

Why would you do that?

DENNIS

What on earth for?

CHRIS

I lived here to be close to your father. Now that he's gone, well, I never really liked this house, and besides that...I don't know. It's time to go.

LISA

Good for you.

DENNIS

Unbelievable.

CHRIS

The king is dead, long live the queen! I've been dying to say that.

DENNIS

Go for it. It's only my father.

LISA

(Changing the subject.)

You'll be all right then? You know anyone in San Diego?

CHRIS

Yeah, I have a few friends out there. I might even do some teaching, if there's anyone left interested in classical literature.

LISA

I'm sure you'll find a school that offers Latin.

DENNIS

Absolutely.

CHRIS

I wouldn't be too sure.

DENNIS

Now you really sound like my father.

CHRIS

He insults me. So, what about you two? Set a date?

LISA

Sorta. In the fall. We're not sure. We haven't announced.

CHRIS

(A beat)

Well, I don't want to keep you from your rummaging. Although, there's really not much up here besides the heat.

DENNIS

You'd be surprised. I left a lot of stuff up here during my wanderings.

CHRIS

Larry said.

DENNIS

What's that supposed to mean?

CHRIS

He just commented on the fact that you used his house as a sort of base.

DENNIS

"Used." He said that?

CHRIS

It's no biggie.

LISA

(Changing the subject)

Chris?

CHRIS

Lisa?

LISA

When did you and Lawrence first meet?

DENNIS

What?

LISA

I was just wondering.

CHRIS

He was out riding his stallion on the heath, in a great black cape. And then suddenly there was lightning.

DENNIS

Do you mind?

CHRIS

Yeah. No. No, listen, the meter's ticking. If you need me for anything, just holler.

(CHRIS exits)

DENNIS

I'd like to get some work done.

LISA

I get the feeling he was good for your father.

DENNIS

No doubt about it. Just not especially good for my mother.

LISA

Oh, Denny, I'm sorry. You know I didn't mean that.

DENNIS

Everything was always good for Larry. Well, she set herself up, can't deny that, but dad really had a way, like he was blessed or something, you know? And it made my mother insane.

LISA

There are all these letters from your father. Didn't she ever write?

DENNIS

She was a caller. A late-night caller. Or, it'd be at six in the morning. Any hour, and it didn't matter what I was doing.

LISA

She must have been incredibly lonely. Oh, Den, I wish I had known her. I'm sure it wasn't easy taking care of two men, especially you and your father. You're both so critical. I feel sorry for her. I really do.

DENNIS

She would have enjoyed having a daughter. She would have liked you. She needed an ally.

LISA

You always use the word "improbable" to describe your father's relationship with Chris. But what about your parents? How would you describe theirs?

DENNIS

Before Chris came along?

LISA

I don't know. Are you saying everything was fine before?

DENNIS

They had been in love.

LISA

Had they? How do you know?

DENNIS

How? I felt it. I saw them...I can picture them together.

LISA

Until Chris came along?

DENNIS

Right.

LISA

But there were others? He wasn't the first.

DENNIS

First what, Lisa?

LISA

Boyfriend. I don't know.

DENNIS

It was kept from me.

LISA

When you were too young? I mean, when you were little?

DENNIS

Chris was the first name. The first face. I think he was the only one, but I don't know. I didn't want to know.

LISA

But now you do? Is that why we're up here?

DENNIS

Not exactly but, yes, I suppose so. That's part of it.

LISA

Here, these fit together. I need some tape.

DENNIS

Let me see.

LISA

No, like this. You have to hold them together.

DENNIS

Perhaps it is a manuscript.

LISA

Maybe a novel of some kind. No, I'm serious. I think your father was writing a book. Maybe his memoirs or something.

DENNIS

It could be anything. It looks like it was done on father's ancient typewriter. Single-spaced.

LISA

So you agree it's his?

DENNIS

His what?

LISA

His autobiography. I don't know. It could be a novel. But why tear it all up?

DENNIS

It's gotta be a book or something. There are hundreds of pieces.

LISA

Isn't it exciting?

LISA

It's like found art.

DENNIS

A short story maybe.

LISA

Too many pieces. No, it has to be a novel or...

DENNIS

...a collection of stories.

LISA

Could be.

DENNIS

Are you going to piece them back together?

LISA

You've got to be kidding. Although...

DENNIS

Make the reader find the story. Call it "The Jigsaw Confession."

LISA

Sort of shuffle up your own story. Not a bad idea.

DENNIS

They'll print practically anything nowadays. Why not this? Okay, here's another: "It was a handsome ship, the we--...-senger list was dazzling..."

LISA

The weather. Sounds like: It was a handsome ship, the weather...blah, blah. Passenger, Dennis, I think that's "the passenger list was dazzling."

DENNIS

It doesn't ring true. He wouldn't be caught dead on a cruise. Let me see. "There were jus--...almost all the actors I admired most...quiet at first, but the second da--..." Day; it's D-A. The Y must be torn off.

LISA

This is fun.

DENNIS

"...but by the second day...was pure glamour as far as I was conc--..."

LISA

Concerned.

DENNIS

Yeah, right.

LISA

Now that sounds like your father. "Pure glamour": That's something he would say.

DENNIS

Okay, we'll keep them. If nothing else we can number them and use them as a game.

LISA

Maybe this is his novel, Den. When do you think he worked on it?

DENNIS

He wrote a lot while recuperating from his first collapse.

LISA

That was just before we met.

DENNIS

Right.

LISA

But he never said anything to you about it? That's odd.

DENNIS

Not really. He never talked about what he was working on. He believed that talking was a lazy form of writing, or something like that. "Put it on paper." That was his motto.

CHRIS

(Off; playful, Southern accent)

Get the shotgun, Pa, I hear intruders up here.

(Enters. Holding a framed photograph)

No, listen, Den, I forgot to give this to you.

(Handing it to DENNIS)

In case you can't tell, it's your father.

LISA

Oh, Chris!

DENNIS

Boy, I don't think I'd like to be photographed in the nude.

LISA

(Taking the picture for a closer look)

He's got something on, hasn't he?

DENNIS

(To CHRIS:)

It's yours? I mean, you did the photography?

CHRIS

Believe it or not. Larry let me use the art department's darkroom on the weekends.

LISA

He looks content.

DENNIS

(Takes another look)

What a pose. You captured him all right.

CHRIS

I thought you'd want to have it.

LISA

Thank you, Chris.

(SHE kisses CHRIS; nudges DENNIS)

DENNIS

Thanks.

(Goes to shake hands.)

CHRIS

You mean I only get a kiss from her?

(Comically puckering up)

These Hendricks.

(To LISA:)

Does he make you beg, too?

LISA

Are you kidding? I make him.

DENNIS

He really changed after he met you.

CHRIS

You always say that.

DENNIS

He wouldn't have posed like that for mother, I can tell you that.

CHRIS

I get the feeling he always wanted to.

DENNIS

What's that supposed to mean?

CHRIS

The way I imagined him with your mother.

DENNIS

Yeah?

CHRIS

He always made it sound so strained, so cold.

DENNIS

After he met you.

CHRIS

That's not what I heard.

(Lights fade on ATTIC, and come up on a hotel room in Dublin, Ireland, where LAWRENCE and JOSEPHINE are vacationing. It is fifteen years earlier.)

LAWRENCE

(Speaks loudly toward bathroom.)

So far, at least, the trip is fine. Wouldn't you agree?

JOSEPHINE

(From the bathroom:)

I can't hear you, Lar.

LAWRENCE

Of course, Dublin is very much English in construction. But unlike London it doesn't exist solely for the tourists.

JOSEPHINE

(Sticking her head out of the bathroom door)

What are you saying?

LAWRENCE

I'll have to write Dennis.

JOSEPHINE

Good idea.

(JOSEPHINE returns to the bathroom)

LAWRENCE

The people actually look Irish, as one would expect, of course. I love the redheads. And it's true: you just don't find as many people back home with really black hair. Thank God there are not as many of the pug-dog types as we had anticipated.

JOSEPHINE

(SHE sticks her head out again.)

That's you, Lar. Not me.

LAWRENCE

After the Italian beauties, who wants to look at squat Irish peasants? Although, I'm beginning to think they've become extinct.

JOSEPHINE

Let's hope not, dear, they make marvelous waitresses.

LAWRENCE

This coffee is despicable. It reminds me of the bad old days in England.

JOSEPHINE

I told you to order tea.

LAWRENCE

It really could and should be dishwater.

JOSEPHINE

(Head out again, this time wrapped in towel)

Don't forget to tell Den about the Castle. You didn't send a postcard from there, did you?

LAWRENCE

Wasn't that lovely country?

JOSEPHINE

(SHE steps out)

The lake was absolutely gorgeous.

LAWRENCE

We really ought to have stayed a day or two longer.

JOSEPHINE

Better not say too much about the good time we're having, Lar. He'll feel left out. Tell him about the broken clutch.

LAWRENCE

I'd like to know why the hell you can't get a Fiat with automatic.

JOSEPHINE

I'm sure he'll find the whole thing vastly amusing, as you would, if it hadn't happened to us.

LAWRENCE

It'll give him a chance to laugh at the old man.

JOSEPHINE

He'll feel included. Tell him about the gorse.

(As JOSEPHINE reenters bath.  
LAWRENCE reads from a letter:)

LAWRENCE

(Reading as he writes)

Why has no one ever told me about gorse before? It may be a pest and a weed and a prickly bush only useful for hedges; but it is solid with bright, rich, old gold and yellow blooms; and I am strung out on it, I love it so much.

LISA

(Continuing, from a letter she holds in her hand:)

"Heather is nothing. Give me gorse any day, and the hills blaze with it here. The wild foxglove along the roads, huge hedges of wild fuchsias, dank meadows full of wild, yellow iris, little ones I don't even know the names of. The rhododendrons are at their peak, purple - only gone wild; but in the gardens great masses twelve feet high of pinks and white and deep red."

LAWRENCE

Dennis has never liked traveling the way we do.

JOSEPHINE

We shouldn't leave him there alone.

LAWRENCE

I don't see how we could travel like this with him along.

JOSEPHINE

Your letters make a big difference; it's good of you, Larry, it really is.

LAWRENCE

He's probably turned the house into a commune.

JOSEPHINE

He's young; you hold it against him.

LAWRENCE

If the electric bill is anything like it was last summer, there's going to be war.

JOSEPHINE

Oh, he had a few college friends over. Let it alone. Did you finish your letter?

LAWRENCE

You're dripping; go comb your hair.

JOSEPHINE

What is it?

LAWRENCE

I don't like being judged.

JOSEPHINE

Don't be ridiculous.

(SHE reenters the bathroom)

LAWRENCE

It's that smug combination of sexual hedonism and lefty asceticism. I don't see how we could have raised such a fucking Puritan.

JOSEPHINE

(Off)

It's not been easy being the son of the Dean of Students.

LAWRENCE

I have to apologize? What's he going to do when I make Chancellor? Kill himself? I tried to get him a job this

summer in the library. You know what he told me? "I won't work for five dollars and sixty-five cents an hour."

JOSEPHINE

(SHE comes out)

Yes. You could have worked harder to send him away. You're good with a phone.

LAWRENCE

You tell me who to call for ten thousands dollars, because that's the kind of tuition we're talking. Ten grand. And that's just for starters.

JOSEPHINE

All right, Lar, you don't have to get excited.

LAWRENCE

First it's Spanish in Guadalajara, next it's détente and he's got to go to the Soviet Union. If I indulged him, we'd be back to camping by Clear Lake.

JOSEPHINE

(SHE goes to him)

Maybe that wouldn't be such a bad idea.

LAWRENCE

Come on.

(Pulls away)

Why the hell would I spend that kind of money when he doesn't have any idea what he wants? The goddamned university is full of kids just like him. What are his interests? Do you know they're serving cappuccino now in Ackerman Hall? They come to eat. We might as well install a salad bar in the research library.

JOSEPHINE

How do I look?

LAWRENCE

You've got lipstick on your front tooth.

(As LIGHTS FADE on the hotel room,  
DENNIS, LISA, and CHRIS reappear)

DENNIS

What's that supposed to prove?

CHRIS

Your father was unhappy and wanted a new life.

DENNIS

That's funny. I was there and that's not the way I remember it.

(Many years; JOSEPHINE and LAWRENCE are house hunting.)

JOSEPHINE

Larry? Oh, come look, darling. Hurry! I want you to see something.

DENNIS

(To CHRIS:)

My father was in love with my mother.

JOSEPHINE

Lar? Lar, darling? Where are you?

DENNIS

My mother adored him.

(LAWRENCE appears)

JOSEPHINE

Honey, hurry!

LAWRENCE

What is it, dear?

JOSEPHINE

(Standing at the window)

Look! Aren't they sweet? I can't believe it. They're adorable. The mother just flew away. Oh, Larry, I love it, don't you? Don't you think it's perfect? I can't get over how bright it is! I don't want any drapes. It's so sunny!

DENNIS

I don't believe it was all a charade.

CHRIS

Is that what you remember or what your mother told you?

JOSEPHINE

We'll be happy here, Larry. Don't you think? We'll be able to afford it. You do like it, don't you?

LAWRENCE

(HE walks past JOSEPHINE. To  
CHRIS:)

My wife is suing me for divorce.

(Suddenly a shift. Thirteen years  
ago. JOSEPHINE and LAWRENCE are at  
home. Only they are visible)

JOSEPHINE

What do you do?

LAWRENCE

I'll move my things out, if that's what you want.

JOSEPHINE

Your things! What are your things, Larry? The fireplace?

LAWRENCE

I can take a suitcase tonight.

JOSEPHINE

The raincoats. I suppose you'll want those. You put them  
up.

LAWRENCE

The house is yours.

JOSEPHINE

"The house is yours." "The house is yours."

LAWRENCE

Jo, don't let's argue.

JOSEPHINE

But, you've had your boy here. What does he think about all  
this?

(SHE goes out and reenters,  
carrying a pair of underwear)

Give him these. You always liked them.

LAWRENCE

Josey, stop it.

JOSEPHINE

I have no use for them.

LAWRENCE

Listen, Jo, you've got to listen.

JOSEPHINE

What do you do?

LAWRENCE

I'd better call Denny. I don't want to leave you here alone.

JOSEPHINE

How many boys have you got?

LAWRENCE

Jo, shut up.

(JOSEPHINE walks out of the room)

I mean, for Christ's sake, Jo, this is not something new. Why are you punishing me now?

JOSEPHINE

(SHE walks through the room carrying a large bundle of dresses, stockings, more underwear and things)

Don't call our son. I don't want any men in this house. I want you out. Get out.

(Exits out the patio doors)

LAWRENCE

I'd like to know why the histrionics all of a sudden.

JOSEPHINE

(Returns from the patio, empty-handed)

I had lunch today with Robin and Katrina.

LAWRENCE

Ah, the women getting together.

JOSEPHINE

Go to hell.

(SHE goes off, back to the bedroom)

LAWRENCE

So, the ladies put you up to this? After twenty-some years you need advice on how to deal with your husband. I wish to hell you wouldn't go running to the henhouse every time we have one of our whatever-they're-called.

JOSEPHINE

(Reenters, carrying more clothes)

I've needed a psychiatrist is what I've needed. But if I had done that, we wouldn't have been able to travel together.

LAWRENCE

(As JOSEPHINE goes out to the patio)

Do you mind telling me what you're doing?

(JOSEPHINE is back)

What the fuck are you doing?

JOSEPHINE

Get away from me.

LAWRENCE

What are you doing with your clothes?

JOSEPHINE

Washing them. I'm disinfecting them. There isn't any bleach, so I thought I'd use chlorine.

LAWRENCE

(As LAWRENCE goes out to look)

Don't tell me you put that crap in the pool.

(HE comes back in)

JOSEPHINE

I don't know what you had him put on. Now I can't wear anything.

LAWRENCE

You're insane. You are certifiably insane.

JOSEPHINE

What's his name?

LAWRENCE

What difference does it make?

JOSEPHINE

Funny, that's what I've always said.

LAWRENCE

Chris.

JOSEPHINE

Christopher.

(Pause)

I've spent 25 years looking for the right combination to make my husband happy. How could I have known that his pleasure lay in having a boy's cock thrust up his rectum. Bravo, Christopher!

(LAWRENCE suddenly hits JOSEPHINE hard in the face)

LAWRENCE

I asked you to stop. I told you. But you don't listen. You do not listen. You never do. I already told you I'd move. This is unnecessary. Totally uncalled for. But do you listen? No, you refuse to listen. You refuse. You refuse to listen.

JOSEPHINE

I'm listening.

(Return to the present)

LISA

(To DENNIS:)

I remember: He beat her up. You told me. Your father hit her. She was afraid to be around him?

DENNIS

But, see: that's just it. She wasn't afraid. She hadn't acted out of personal conviction. She never said to him, you know, "I hate you and never want to see you again." He hadn't hurt her that much. She wasn't angry in that helpless, passionate way. She had been emotionally out of control for so long, really desperate, and when he hit her, when he finally let her have it, she moved out of her desperation. She suddenly became clear, almost maddened by a new-found coherence. And I remember her saying to me rather quietly, "Your mother cannot live with a man who would strike a woman." It was a remarkable statement,

because I realized then that my father had already become a stranger to her. He really did knock some sense into her.

CHRIS

(To LAWRENCE:)

Well, aren't you pleased? You said you'd be happy.

LAWRENCE

I'm pleased. I never said I'd be happy.

CHRIS

(To LAWRENCE:)

Well, why not? I am. I'm ecstatic.

(Tries to embrace LAWRENCE)

LAWRENCE

Come on, will you?

CHRIS

(Goes after LAWRENCE)

I'm very happy.

LAWRENCE

Stop it.

CHRIS

Why are you merely pleased?

LAWRENCE

You can't study history and remain happy.

(LAWRENCE walks out)

CHRIS

(Shouting after him)

OH, THAT'S MARVELOUS. IT IS MEANT TO BE FUNNY, ISN'T IT?

LISA

Sometimes there's love without passion, Den.

DENNIS

Is that what you think?

CHRIS

Your father was in love with me. Can't you accept that?

DENNIS

You really believe that, don't you? At first my daddy was straight and everything was all right, but then he came out, and I just couldn't cope?

CHRIS

I like that tone. No wonder your father wanted to get away.

DENNIS

I think it rather more likely that you are the reason he stayed away.

CHRIS

Oh, now, that's really hysterical.

DENNIS

You mean hilarious. Hysteria is an affliction of the heart, not an expression of amusement.

CHRIS

You'd have to be hysterical to believe that I caused your family's disintegration. You think you're the only one with memories? I mean, look at you: whatever it was between you two or, to be more precise, not between you, goes way back, long before my entrance onto the scene.

DENNIS

My father told you that?

CHRIS

More or less.

DENNIS

That's how he saw it?

LAWRENCE

(To CHRIS:)

I found a ham in the microwave. A whole ham, uncooked. She doesn't get dressed until noon, if that. And Dennis? I was having new faculty in for cocktails, and he walks in, looking like a delivery boy, grabs a few crackers from the serving plate, and knocks the rest off on to the table. Not a word. We haven't talked in years, and she can't finish a sentence. She's incoherent.

CHRIS

He was numb, Dennis. He was desperate.

LAWRENCE

(To CHRIS, the Gods, to the room:)

I PAID EVERYDAY OF MY LIFE FOR WORKING HARD.

CHRIS

Your father, Denny.... The pressures were killing him.  
Your mother, the University..

DENNIS

...me?

CHRIS

He needed an outlet.

DENNIS

What gave you that idea?

CHRIS

He told me. We were having an affair, you know.

(JOSEPHINE and LAWRENCE's living  
room. More than 10 years earlier.  
It is late.)

LAWRENCE

For crying out loud.

JOSEPHINE

And you do?

LAWRENCE

You haven't the foggiest idea...

JOSEPHINE

But of course you do.

LAWRENCE

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

JOSEPHINE

You'd let them take over. They'll eat you alive.

LAWRENCE

You don't know a damned thing about it.

JOSEPHINE

I can see when someone's after my husband's job.

(DENNIS enters)

LAWRENCE

Don't you think that I might just know a little more about this than you do? I have been in meeting all week, I was with the trustees for three hours this morning, the board met yesterday: I don't want to take this with me to the faculty club.

DENNIS

Hi.

JOSEPHINE

Hello, darling.

LAWRENCE

Hey. You up?

DENNIS

No. Uh, you sorta woke me. You all right, mom?

JOSEPHINE

Aren't you are a sensitive boy. You must have heard your father shouting.

LAWRENCE

It's after midnight, Jo.

JOSEPHINE

Did you go out, dear?

DENNIS

No, I've got a lot of work to do.

JOSEPHINE

Where's your friend?

DENNIS

She's got exams.

JOSEPHINE

I thought since you're used to sleeping together, you'd like to have her stay here.

DENNIS

What?

JOSEPHINE

If I tried to make you feel more comfortable, maybe you'll come home more often.

DENNIS

I live here.

JOSEPHINE

I don't want you to feel a stranger in your own house.

LAWRENCE

I think we'd better go to bed.

JOSEPHINE

I don't want you to blame me for making you feel unwelcome.

DENNIS

OK.

LAWRENCE

It's going on one. I have to get up in the morning.

DENNIS

I'm going to have some juice.

JOSEPHINE

Den, see if there's any wine left over.  
(DENNIS exits to kitchen.)

LAWRENCE

I think you've had enough.

JOSEPHINE

Are you ashamed of loving me?

LAWRENCE

Listen, Jo, I've just about had enough for one night. So, I'm asking you nicely, would you come to bed? I'm exhausted.

JOSEPHINE

No, that's not it. You're ashamed of not loving me.

LAWRENCE

I'm not going to be drawn in. Dennis needs his rest, too.

JOSEPHINE

Nighty, night.

LAWRENCE

If you can bring yourself to think of someone else for a change.

(LAWRENCE exits)

DENNIS

(Reenters, carrying two glasses of juice.)

Where's dad?

JOSEPHINE

Bed.

DENNIS

What?

JOSEPHINE

Bed. Bed. What else? He went to bed.

DENNIS

You've been to the club?

JOSEPHINE

Dennis, I said I want a glass of wine.

DENNIS

I thought you weren't going to drink.

JOSEPHINE

Your mother doesn't need advice.

DENNIS

Mom, what's going on?

JOSEPHINE

They're trying to destroy your father, and he's going to let them. In the morning, they'll be sitting at his desk. I warned him. He calls me a pidgeon head.

DENNIS

Oh, come on, mom, he doesn't think that.

(LAWRENCE reenters unseen)

JOSEPHINE

Everything I've experienced came first in my dreams. I dreamt that your father would die and he has, years before anybody else even noticed.

LAWRENCE

For God's sake, Jo, would you come to bed?

JOSEPHINE

(Looking around as if for the first time)

I hate this house.

LAWRENCE

(Mocking.)

"I hate this house." "I hate it." "I hate it."

JOSEPHINE

And I don't give a shit what you do.

LAWRENCE

That's it. Let Dennis hear.

JOSEPHINE

There you are. Use your son.

LAWRENCE

Go on. Why shouldn't he hear his mother? "Shit!" "Fuck!" I have to listen to it. Why not bring Dennis into our bedroom? You'd like that, wouldn't you? That'll give you something to hate. Watch the old man? Is that what you want? You can turn everything to shit.

JOSEPHINE

There'd be nothing to see.

DENNIS

What's happening, dad?

LAWRENCE

Your mother's been drinking.

JOSEPHINE

He doesn't say why. He doesn't say why. "Your mother's been drinking."

LAWRENCE

You're missing the point.

DENNIS

What is the point, dad?

LAWRENCE

It is the dropped strawberries. The thinly-veiled derision. It is discussing the construction of the medical center, which I stated explicitly I did not want mentioned to faculty.

JOSEPHINE

I wanted to share my opinion.

LAWRENCE

You don't know fuck all about architecture.

JOSEPHINE

Your father, Dennis, your father positively thrilled everyone tonight with his new theory, his theory...what was that you called it, Lar?

LAWRENCE

Jo, would you go to bed? Go to bed.

JOSEPHINE

The driven mind versus the idle mind. Of course, big shot here possesses the former. We know that from the fact that he was still a virgin when he entered graduate school. An idler, on the other hand, can be found slugging his way through school in his mid-twenties.

LAWRENCE

We were not discussing family.

JOSEPHINE

That was your expression, was it not? I wouldn't want to misquote you.

LAWRENCE

Den, we were talking with Bill and Janice Rosenthal about their son, Michael, who is threatening to drop out one semester short of graduation.

DENNIS

You really are a big shit.

JOSEPHINE

You know how your father likes to commiserate.

LAWRENCE

Your name did not come up.

DENNIS

I think dad's right. Let's go to bed.

JOSEPHINE

I'm lonely. Don't you want to keep your poor ol' mama company?

DENNIS

Do something! You're not lonely, you're bored. You'd be more productive if you stayed off the stuff!

JOSEPHINE

How has being sober made you more productive?

LAWRENCE

If you won't listen to me, you should listen to your son.

JOSEPHINE

I've had enough of your shoulds.

(To DENNIS:)

I don't like the way I am treated by the men in my life. I have done more than enough in my life, buster, which happens to include producing you. At least your father once loved me.

DENNIS

A minute ago you said he was dead.

JOSEPHINE

I said I am a widow. There's a difference.

DENNIS

Whatever that's supposed to mean.

JOSEPHINE

Sentiment. Your father has sentiment, but he does not know love. Love is too common. Too elemental. But, you already know that. A son would know what it is not to have a father's love.

(SHE exits)

LAWRENCE

My feelings for your mother have nothing to do with how I feel towards you.

DENNIS

What are your feelings for mother? I'm going to bed.

(Return to the attic. The PRESENT)

LISA

(To DENNIS:)

Is that what it was like? Is that what you were like?

DENNIS

What is it supposed to illustrate? My father's weariness?

LISA

Your mother's helplessness? Your coldness?

DENNIS

My coldness? My coldness?

LISA

Is that what it was like, Dennis?

DENNIS

I don't know.

LISA

You were there.

DENNIS

I said I don't know. I don't know. Are you deaf?

CHRIS

He needed an outlet.

DENNIS

And you were the outlet? Thanks a lot. You chased him.

CHRIS

To hell I did.

DENNIS

You stalked him. I'm not saying he wasn't...inclined that way, whatever, but you hunted him down.

CHRIS

Sure. Like I had nothing better to do than looking after an old man.

DENNIS

No, like you needed an old man to take care of you.

(In LAWRENCE'S office at the university. LAWRENCE is working at his desk.)

INTERCOM

There's a Christopher Anders here to see you. He says it is urgent.

LAWRENCE

Concerning?

INTERCOM

That's just it, sir, he refuses to say; a complaint of some kind against an unnamed member of the Humanities Department.

LAWRENCE

Tell him he'll have to make an appointment with his Academic Dean.

(CHRIS walks in, without being admitted.)

INTERCOM

I'm terribly sorry, sir, I'm afraid he walked right past me. Would you like me to call campus security?

CHRIS

I have to talk with you. I need to talk to you.

LAWRENCE

You are perfectly free to do so, young man, but I'm afraid you are going to have to see your Academic Dean.

CHRIS

A mutual friend gave me your name.

LAWRENCE

Oh? A student? You are a student here, are you not?

CHRIS

I am. My friend knows you from the La Salle gym. He said you go by the name Lorenzo.

INTERCOM

I've got security on the line, Chancellor.

LAWRENCE

That won't be necessary. Our young friend seems to have found the right place. Thank you.

CHRIS

I want to file a grievance against Professor Calabria for defamation.

LAWRENCE

Calabria?

CHRIS

Guido Calabria. He's an assistant professor. He teaches Greek and Etruscan history, but he's in the humanities department.

LAWRENCE

Yes. Yes, I remember him. Sit down, please. Please, have a seat. You're a humanities major, then, I take it?

CHRIS

Classics; although, it's really a double-major. I'm interested in Greek philosophy.

(Pause)

I don't know why I have to listen to his snide comments. I'm really sick of it. Especially since this is a university where you'd think people would be enlightened.

LAWRENCE

I think I can do without the editorializing. What exactly did Professor Calabria say?

CHRIS

Okay. Exactly? He said: "One can usually measure the depth of a homosexual relationship by the length of the active partner's erect penis." Here, I wrote it down.

LAWRENCE

Remarkable.

CHRIS

There's nothing funny about that.

LAWRENCE

No, no, no, it's not that, at all. I just find it astonishing to discover an instance of wit so refreshingly expressed. At a university campus, it's rare.

CHRIS

The assumption that the depth of gay relationships can be measured by the length of one's prick is an expression of homophobic malice.

LAWRENCE

(Suddenly interested)

Such a solemn creature. And a classics major, you say. Have you never read Aristophanes?

CHRIS

No. For me, it's always been Greek tragedy, Roman comedy. I don't think the Greeks are funny.

LAWRENCE

It's been a long time since I've read the classics. I seem to remember something about the barbarians at the gate, or was it the wolf at one's door? Which may we say fits you, wolf or barbarian?

CHRIS

Strictly speaking? According to Herodotus, he who knows his Greek can never be thought a barbarian, and as you hardly look as though you were hungry, it would be ludicrous to speak of there being wolves at your door. Unless of course

you were speaking metaphorically. You aren't starving, are you, Chancellor?

(Pause)

Excuse me, Dr. Hendricks, I mean no disrespect, but I didn't come here just to talk. That man oughtn't to be allowed to get away with what he said.

LAWRENCE

What would you have me do?

CHRIS

I don't know. There must be procedures.

LAWRENCE

Procedures? Against coarse minds? My, my, my, aren't we enjoying an easy life.

CHRIS

You make it sound as if I have no recourse, but there are discrimination policies.

LAWRENCE

There are. Of course there are, but you barge right in, making demands. Wouldn't these "procedures" you speak of apply equally, say, to the apprehension of intruders? If we are not to have discretion...

CHRIS

I want what is fair. Why should I just sit there and take his abuse?

LAWRENCE

Let me ask you, have you spoken about this to Professor Calabria?

CHRIS

No.

LAWRENCE

Everybody's afraid of confrontation. There was an instructor here at the university - we won't mention names - who was known for coming late to class. The department chairperson in order to avoid a scene decided to solve the problem by having all the teachers punch a timeclock. Now, if you've spent any time at a university, you'd know how absurd that really is.

CHRIS

What happened?

LAWRENCE

There was a rebellion. I had the entire department in here, demanding that this guy - the instructor - be held accountable. Nobody in this country wants a confrontation. Nobody wants to play the role of the heavy.

CHRIS

He wouldn't apologize. He doesn't even know what he was saying.

LAWRENCE

Things have come to unfortunate pass when our professors no longer know what they are saying.

CHRIS

Why are you giving me all this? I thought you were here to help.

LAWRENCE

But surely it is for me to decide in what way. What concerns me at the moment is the question of motivation. You've already satisfied me on the matter of Professor Calabria's; you said he doesn't know what he was saying. I am now wondering about yours.

CHRIS

How do you mean?

LAWRENCE

A point of clarification, if you will. Am I to understand that this concern of yours is based on a matter of principle, or are you seeking personal redress? That is, do you, uh, did you feel that Professor Calabria's remarks were directed at you personally...

CHRIS

No, no, no.

LAWRENCE

...Or, are you taking it upon yourself to speak for an as yet unspecified group?

CHRIS

He said it to the class. I was offended, as were others.

(LAWRENCE looks at CHRIS. CHRIS looks back.)

LAWRENCE  
(Quickly looks away)

And...

CHRIS

What?

LAWRENCE  
I was saying...asking...I was going to ask what it is you want?

CHRIS  
What I want?

LAWRENCE  
Yes, everyone wants something. What do you want?

CHRIS  
I know it's too late, but I'd really like to drop his class.

LAWRENCE  
What are the assignments? You've had your mid-term, I presume.

CHRIS  
There's the final and a term-paper.

LAWRENCE  
If you obtained a passing mark at the mid-term, I think an incomplete can be arranged. You can stop attending his class right away.

CHRIS  
That's just it, I didn't turn in the mid-term. It was a take-home essay. Two, actually.

LAWRENCE  
Did you have an excuse? You seem bright enough...

CHRIS  
I just don't have anything to say.

LAWRENCE  
That never stopped anyone else before.

CHRIS

(Suddenly stands)

I thought you'd be willing to help. I don't see it as a personal problem.

LAWRENCE

Let me put it to you this way: Are you trying to improve matters in the area of homosexual rights, or do you wish to become known for having tried?

CHRIS

You're tripping. I don't have to go through all this. There's a Gay and Lesbian Student organization I can go to.

LAWRENCE

You said you were interested in philosophy. Socrates would be disappointed.

CHRIS

Yeah, well, look where it got him. He was tried for corrupting the youth of Athens.

LAWRENCE

Ah, the youth. Yes, well, we mustn't have that. Although I would say the young are more a corrupting influence in our society than a corrupted one, wouldn't you agree?

CHRIS

In what way?

LAWRENCE

In every way, my dear boy. Although I am speaking strictly of males, of course. We know women are always victims.

CHRIS

(Suddenly bursts out laughing)

That's very funny.

LAWRENCE

I couldn't agree more. How old did you say you were?

CHRIS

Is that relevant?

LAWRENCE

I sincerely hope not.

CHRIS

What's that supposed to mean?

LAWRENCE

I'll speak with your Professor Calabria. Perhaps an emergency drop can be arranged.

CHRIS

What must I do?

LAWRENCE

Let me give you my number.

CHRIS

I can get the campus operator.

LAWRENCE

I'd prefer you to use my private line.

**END OF ACT**

**ACT II**

**Scene 1**

SETTING: A small Left Bank hotel in Paris

AT RISE: Evening. CHRIS stands behind LAWRENCE, whose shirt is off, inspecting his back. CHRIS has finished trimming LAWRENCE'S hair.

CHRIS

You need electrolysis.

LAWRENCE

Too expensive.

CHRIS

It's not that expensive. You could write it off.

LAWRENCE

I should think not.

CHRIS

I don't see why the IRA would mind.

LAWRENCE

It's doubtful that they would. You're thinking of the IRS.

CHRIS

Same difference. You know, terrorists.

LAWRENCE

Arbitrary bombings. Yes, they do share a general attitude of kill. What do you see back there?

CHRIS

Mole hairs, long black...oooh, here's a white one, old man.

LAWRENCE

Even on one's back. Nature is relentless.

CHRIS

How's that? Hurt?

LAWRENCE

One at a time, please. Isn't it strange how men are expected to restrict the growth of their gray to two rather distinct areas of the cranium?

CHRIS

Then we shall gather up your aged hairs and plant them where they belong.

LAWRENCE

I fear you shall run short, in which case I would appear distinguished only in profile.

CHRIS

Dream on, dear, you have enough here, and in your nether regions I might add, to do both your temples proud.

LAWRENCE

I suppose my vanity can stand it.

CHRIS

There's even enough to add a proper beard.

LAWRENCE

You do have a cruel streak.

CHRIS

You've got blackheads, too.

LAWRENCE

Well, don't just stand there, do something.

CHRIS

From this perspective, Chancellor, you fail to impress.  
Hand me a tissue.

LAWRENCE

What I need is a good steam bath.

CHRIS

I'll give you a steam bath.

(The hotel room disappears. It is again the attic. The PRESENT. The sound of a phone ringing fills the stage, then stops abruptly.)

LISA

And that's when your father got the call? He was...

DENNIS

No. Well, not actually, according to the story. Not just then. It was a little later. Chris was in the shower.

(In the same Left bank hotel. Evening. LAWRENCE, dressed for dinner, is on the phone. In the background can be heard CHRIS, who is showering.)

LAWRENCE

Yes. What the hell was she doing way out there? Oh, Christ. For God's sake. Yeah, yeah. Well, I don't see how. Was no one with her? Jesus Christ.

CHRIS

(Sticks his head out from the bathroom)

Your turn!

LAWRENCE

(Waves him off; into phone:)

I know. Yes, of course. It sounds just like her. Oh, yeah. No, we're fine. No, fine. Yes, of course, I will, Dennis. No, I'm...I don't know what to say.

CHRIS

(Shouting from bathroom)

I feel refreshed. Must we dress tonight, or do you think I can get away with wearing my pullover? Larry?

LAWRENCE

(Cupping receiver)

Be quiet. I'm on the phone with Dennis.

CHRIS

Big kiss from his step-mama.

LAWRENCE

(To CHRIS)

Would you be quiet? Josephine's been in an accident.

(Back to DENNIS on phone)

Yes, I'm here. Yes, yes. No, I was just telling Chris. I will, Dennis. It will be a few days. Yes, at least. I'm afraid so. Try to .manage, and I'll be in touch with your aunt. Oh, she is? Good. I should hope not. No, no, don't bother about that. No, you're coping splendidly. I'm very sorry, but I can't say I'm terribly surprised. Are you? No, it can't. No, no. I didn't say that. Yes, we'll see you soon. Right. Right. Bye, now.

(He hangs up; to CHRIS.)

Jo has been killed in an automobile accident.

(As the LIGHTS FADE on the hotel room, the attic reappears. It is the PRESENT.)

LISA

The way you and your father tell it, you'd think the accident happened to you.

DENNIS

It had gotten so bad....

LISA

What had?

DENNIS

The drinking.

LISA

That even death was preferable. You weren't too generous with your choices, you and your father, were you? You couldn't think of an alternative?

DENNIS

What could I do? I had nothing to do with it.

LISA

That's not what Chris says.

DENNIS

Chris doesn't know anything about it.

LISA

Well, he knows what your father told him. I know what you've told me. I wouldn't exactly call you and your father objective observers.

DENNIS

Nobody said we were.

LISA

Chris was trying to explain...

DENNIS

He wasn't even there.

LISA

You and your father are so alike. Poor Larry.

DENNIS

My father had a natural flair for martyrdom.

LISA

Poor Dennis.

DENNIS

What was Chris trying to explain?

LISA

Why your father couldn't take it anymore.

DENNIS

Well, Chris would have special insights into that.

LISA

Why do you blame him for preferring Chris? I know it was hard, Den, but you should have talked.

DENNIS

Believe me, I tried.

(A few days after the funeral, in the livingroom of LAWRENCE'S house. A late evening dinner party.)

LAWRENCE

We certainly did move around on this trip.

CHRIS

We started off in Switzerland at my insistence.

LAWRENCE

With a brief stopover in London.

CHRIS

As far as I'm concerned Vienna was the high point.

LAWRENCE

I was appalled by the prices.

DENNIS

In London?

LAWRENCE

London. In France. But anything seemed fairly decent after Switzerland. A cup of consommé runs about two dollars in Zurich, so you can imagine where it goes from there.

DENNIS

Mother always loved Switzerland.

LAWRENCE

Zurich is a desolatingly unattractive, gray city.

CHRIS

I liked it.

LAWRENCE

This will be my last venture into Switzerland for a very long time, if not forever.

DENNIS

I'm sure you wrote and said you were able to do a lot of work.

LAWRENCE

I was able to photograph in the Landesmuseum, which is a hodgepodge kind of place: rooms, altarpieces, things, etc.

CHRIS

All beautifully displayed.

LAWRENCE

It is well done, but most of the work there is totally provincial and on the clumsy side. We'll see what they say in the department when I bring back my slides.

DENNIS

(To CHRIS:)

You said you fell for Vienna?

CHRIS

(Hums the theme song from "The Third Man")

Does that answer your question?

LAWRENCE

Just give us the cue, and we break into song. Needless to say, we did not run into Harry Lime.

DENNIS

But you had coffee with Joseph Cotton?

LAWRENCE

After the war, you couldn't go anywhere in Europe without hearing that goddamned song. It popularized the zither forever.

CHRIS

Perhaps it's time to freshen drinks? Dennis, a bit more wine? Larry?

(Exits to kitchen)

LAWRENCE

I'm glad you came.

(LAWRENCE stares down at DENNIS' stockinged feet.)

DENNIS

Well... No, I'm happy to be invited. It's nice to see you... both of you.

(Noticing his father's gaze)

What is it?

LAWRENCE

You must have gotten that from your mother.

DENNIS

What?

LAWRENCE

She used to take her shoes off... kick them off really, whenever she could, and it didn't matter whose house she was in. Come to think of it, I suppose women as a whole used to do that. Now men do.

(Slight pause)

I'm truly sorry about your mother, Den.

DENNIS

I don't know, dad. Wasn't it inevitable?

LAWRENCE

Was it? When you get to be my age, Den, you have to think of the future. I would like to be able to say that I have not just lived, not merely survived, but...

DENNIS

Triumphed?

LAWRENCE

Nothing merely inevitable. I want to remain a positive force, not some drifting toward oblivion.

DENNIS

That's a noble goal, dad. It really is.

LAWRENCE

I'd like to be able to say that I have few regrets. Your mother...

DENNIS

Dad, you needn't...

LAWRENCE

No, no, no. Regret is what killed her, Den. Your mother lived in the past.

DENNIS

That's one way of looking at it.

LAWRENCE

How do you see it then?

DENNIS

Let's not do this, dad. I mean, why?

LAWRENCE

You're like your mother. She used silence to gain position.

DENNIS

Yes, and look where it got her.

LAWRENCE

And you blame me for that?

DENNIS

Words were always your weapon. She had the right to choose hers.

LAWRENCE

Don't ever think she didn't know how to inflict pain.

DENNIS

Tell me about it. She knew how to exact revenge, but, dad, I was rather hoping you didn't invite me here just to build your case against mother.

LAWRENCE

You think I wronged her?

DENNIS

You feel you didn't?

LAWRENCE

She's dead. I know I wasn't driving.

DENNIS

Fair enough.

LAWRENCE

I tried.

DENNIS

No. No, dad, you are not to blame and I do not blame you, but don't say that. That you tried. You didn't. You didn't try. Any more than I did. Look, dad, I know it's hard to believe, but you've got to trust me: I do not blame you. That's an amazing thing coming from a member of this family, I know, but as far as I'm concerned, it's finished. It's over.

LAWRENCE

If only it were that simple.

DENNIS

But I feel I owe it to mom, at least... at least I don't want to help you turn this into your wound.

LAWRENCE

I asked her if she wanted me back.

DENNIS

How you want credit for trying to save her.

LAWRENCE

If she had asked, I would have gone back to her.

DENNIS

The good emergency room doctor you see yourself as, but dad, I was there, and I don't remember seeing you.

LAWRENCE

She only had to ask.

DENNIS

I blame her actually. She could have made her life into a hobby, toyed with it, pretended that it mattered, instead of pretending that you loved her.

LAWRENCE

She did not want my help.

DENNIS

But she let it go, let herself go. I don't blame you, dad, but don't ask me now to give you credit for trying.

LAWRENCE

I would have done anything to avoid hurting your mother.

DENNIS

Isn't it a little late for you to pretend to mourn?

LAWRENCE

Cruelty becomes viciousness in the weak.

DENNIS

An aphorism?

LAWRENCE

An observation. It is not becoming.

DENNIS

If you have to feel guilty, take the blame for that.

LAWRENCE

I accept responsibility for hurting you, Dennis.

(Pause)

By the way...

DENNIS

Yeah?

LAWRENCE

I'm curious. What did she tell you?

DENNIS

When?

LAWRENCE

You said you spoke. I don't know.

DENNIS

Gosh, I'm not sure. It was a mish-mash. She was drunk. I was tired.

LAWRENCE

I'm curious.

DENNIS

You once said curiosity is unmanly.

LAWRENCE

Since when do you remember anything I say?

DENNIS

I've always listened too carefully, dad. That's the problem. Anyway, there's nothing to be curious about. You know the way she was.

LAWRENCE

Yes, of course. But still: did she mention me? Did she talk about us? I'd like to know.

DENNIS

Dad, she was on one of her tirades.

LAWRENCE

Must you be impertinent?

DENNIS

She was being unpleasant.

LAWRENCE

What did she say about me?

DENNIS

Why do you care? Let it alone.

LAWRENCE

I'd like to. I really would. She died so quickly, and I wonder: did I owe her something? I would like to have heard from her. I envy you that.

DENNIS

She said to watch your weight. Nobody likes a fat fag.  
(Pause)

JOSEPHINE

(Appears, sipping a tumbler of  
white wine)

Do you know what a homosexual is? Dennis? Dennis, are you there?

DENNIS

Yes. Yes, I'm here.

JOSEPHINE

I asked you a question.

DENNIS

What? What? Look, mom, I don't have time for this.

JOSEPHINE

A homosexual is a man who loves another man in the same way a real man loves a woman.

DENNIS

Okay. Now what?

JOSEPHINE

Did you know that?

DENNIS

No. No, mom, I didn't know that. Thanks for telling me.

JOSEPHINE

Your father, Dennis, your father, in case you didn't know, has many friends who are homos.

DENNIS

Yes, I know.

JOSEPHINE

He used to bring them to the house when I was out.

DENNIS

One time. I heard, one time, mom.

JOSEPHINE

What?

DENNIS

One time. He did that one time. That's what you said. Don't change the story.

JOSEPHINE

Don't be naive. I hope he didn't introduce you to his friends when you were a little boy. Did he do that, Den?

DENNIS

No.

JOSEPHINE

What did he do? You can tell me.

DENNIS

Nothing. Now, will you get off it. Drop it. I'm getting sick of listening.

JOSEPHINE

Did he ask you to shake hands with any strange men while mommy was out buying moon pies for your school lunch?

(JOSEPHINE disappears; there is a pause)

LAWRENCE

Your mother had a whim of iron.

CHRIS

(CHRIS reenters, carrying drinks, etc.)

I had been looking forward to seeing you again, Dennis, but obviously not under these circumstances.

DENNIS

Yes, I was just saying how long it's been.

CHRIS

(Offering DENNIS a glass of white wine)

Better not tell your father, but it's German. I love it.

DENNIS

Thank you. It's very nice.

LAWRENCE

Dennis, I wish you wouldn't. I think you've had enough.

DENNIS

I've had two glasses.

LAWRENCE

You've been drinking from the moment you came into the house.

DENNIS

What are you talking about?

LAWRENCE

You drink far too much for someone your age.

DENNIS

I scarcely drink at all. Is this some kind of joke?

CHRIS

If there's anyone around here who has a drinking problem, it's you, Larry.

LAWRENCE

Would you tend to your business? I'd like to enjoy a decent meal for a change.

(CHRIS exits)

DENNIS

That wasn't necessary.

LAWRENCE

I just don't like to see you drinking, that's all.

DENNIS

Well, it doesn't matter, but...

LAWRENCE

If it doesn't matter, don't argue.

DENNIS

I just want you to know that I don't drink. I mean, hardly ever. You all right?

LAWRENCE

Yes. No. I've had some abdominal pain. I didn't feel all that well on the trip. Chris took us to some far out places. We even went to a McDonald's.

DENNIS

How'd you like it? Their fries are pretty good.

LAWRENCE

I tried to get one without onion. They didn't know what the hell I was talking about. Not a soul spoke a word of English, or anything resembling German for that matter. They were all Turks.

DENNIS

Every American needs to go to McDonald's at least once a year to experience the real world.

LAWRENCE

Yeah? Well, I've been to the Third World. It doesn't work.

DENNIS

Glad to be back?

LAWRENCE

I can only buck my Calvinist work ethic so long and then I become uncomfortable with too much leisure. Obviously, I will never be able to collapse happily into any real retirement. Fortunately, I can always involve myself in projects - and do.

DENNIS

I've got a project for you.

LAWRENCE

Oh?

DENNIS

Yeah. I think I'd like to go back to school. Maybe you could help me.

LAWRENCE

This is not the time for starts.

DENNIS

No, I mean finish up my course work, and then I thought I'd write my dissertation.

LAWRENCE

Why don't you consider law school?

DENNIS

Come on. We've talked about this before.

LAWRENCE

Law will force you to focus. Discipline yourself. Think about the particular.

DENNIS

I love history.

LAWRENCE

Take your masters and be happy. If you stay in history, you'll be marvelous at that, but you'll never contribute a damned thing.

DENNIS

Why do you say that?

LAWRENCE

Studying history: it's like using a compass. First you have to set the point and from there you draw the perimeter. You stake out a territory. If you don't know where the sharp end goes, or each time you set it in a different spot - however slightly off - an entirely new world will emerge. You haven't got time for that.

DENNIS

I think I could do it in three years, maybe four, tops.

LAWRENCE

Look, the best you'd do is some junior-college. You'd end up teaching high-school drop-outs and living in the suburbs.

DENNIS

Boy, you don't give me much credit.

LAWRENCE

Den, you're bright, but not all that bright.

DENNIS

How bright does one have to be?

LAWRENCE

Bright enough to win an argument without being rude.

DENNIS

Who's insulting whom?

(Pause; DENNIS takes a sip.)

LAWRENCE

You enjoy that wine.

DENNIS

Not that much. Well, yeah: what's that got to do with it?

LAWRENCE

Let's face it, kid. You want money.

DENNIS

Here he comes. The great epitomizer. You serve me wine, I accept, and that's supposed to mean that I want money. That's what I get for bringing it up.

LAWRENCE

(Stands to leave)

You'll do whatever you want anyway. I need my head examined for arguing with either you or your mother.

(As LAWRENCE exits, DENNIS aims his finger at LAWRENCE'S back and pulls the trigger)

(In the attic. The PRESENT.)

CHRIS

Why didn't you?

DENNIS

Huh? What?

CHRIS

Shoot. Pull the trigger. The bastard wasn't doing you any good. Walk away.

DENNIS

I tried.

CHRIS

Tried? When?

DENNIS

You know. I haven't lived here for years. He had to beg me to come home.

CHRIS

I remember. I lived through your "adolescence."

DENNIS

You? What do you know?

CHRIS

I lived here! You think I don't know? You think you're father was at a loss for words?

DENNIS

What words? I never bothered you.

CHRIS

I don't believe you. Calling on your parents' anniversary, but not on your father's birthday. I was right here. You never left us alone.

DENNIS

I forgot his birthday?

CHRIS

Your travels were tactical moves. You weren't gone. They were strategic absences. You wanted to be missed. I've never seen anyone work harder to gain approval.

DENNIS

This sounds suspiciously like warmed-over dad.

CHRIS

It is. I mean, Dennis, what did you want? What do you want?

DENNIS

I don't know.

CHRIS

He was not the kind of man...

DENNIS

What? Go on.

CHRIS

He was trying to protect you.

DENNIS

Protect me?

CHRIS

You only saw him as a success. There was more to it than that. There was more to him than that.

(LAWRENCE enters)

LAWRENCE

(To CHRIS:)

It is easy enough to see why society has turned against the intellectuals. I understand its resentment against our so-called thinkers. But why have they turned against themselves? They speak of teaching with derision. Twenty years ago, the national bogeymen - white males - ran everything, each and every one an ego, but by golly every instructor we had was on track for tenure. Do you realize now we have more part-timers than tenured faculty? They have no job security, no benefits. "A face for every race." It costs a quarter of a million to remove an incompetent custodian, but I could dismiss 350 teachers on a whim, and not a soul would say boo. You'd have to go to Calcutta to find a more rigid caste system.

(Beat)

Dennis has a thoroughly romanticized view of this life. He thinks it's all gracious living and traveling around on grant money. He remembers from his childhood too many dinner parties. Young faculty eating peanuts and discussing Simone de Beauvoir.

(Beat)

I haven't talked literature in nearly fifteen years. No. It's become a schemer's game. Denny'd end up teaching remedial reading and grading exams.

(HE walks out)

DENNIS

You're right, Chris, the Mother Superior act was one I never fell for.

CHRIS

You talk as though he deprived you. But, Dennis, your father lost faith. He didn't believe there was anything there. And I don't just mean for you. He wanted out. How could you expect him to help you get in?

DENNIS

He sneered at me.

CHRIS

It had nothing to do with you. It was his life's work. I don't think you can fathom how broken-hearted he was.

LISA

Don't you think he was just protecting you?

DENNIS

You sound like Chris. My father protected no one but himself.

(LAWRENCE reappears)

LAWRENCE

I don't remember.

DENNIS

I begged you, and you refused to pay.

LAWRENCE

I didn't refuse. I told you to apply for a scholarship. I went through school on scholarship.

DENNIS

Dad, come on. I'm white. And male, or hadn't you noticed?

LAWRENCE

We couldn't afford it. Your mother's trips. There was only so much money.

DENNIS

Why didn't you ever want anything for me? I was raised like a dog.

LAWRENCE

Don't be stupid.

DENNIS

You have no faith in me.

LAWRENCE

I don't have faith in anyone. I don't even have faith in God.

DENNIS

You have faith in yourself.

LAWRENCE

You're mumbling.

DENNIS

WHY NOT ME? FAITH IN ME. IN ME. IN ME. Why can't you have a little faith in me, dad?

LAWRENCE

Why would you need that?

(LAWRENCE disappears)

DENNIS

God, I was a fool.

LISA

(She is working on the papers she found.)

Den.

DENNIS

A fucking idiot. I was an idiot. I am an idiot.

LISA

Let it go. Forget it. I'd like to be able to find at least one complete story, you know, intact.

DENNIS

It's hard to remember father even reading a novel, let alone trying to write one. He used to say that the American novel ended with Saul Bellow. Something about the Jews being the only cultured people in America and now that they have taken to the suburbs, they too will dry up. Culture is the product of the cities, that was his thesis, beginning with the Athenians.

LISA

Listen to this.

DENNIS

He delivered a lecture once explaining why Philadelphia never produced a writer of the first rank.

LISA

"The second set in sports cloth-- through form-fitting tee-shirts in vari--

DENNIS

Various.

LISA

Bravo. "...pretty tightly cut slacks. They model-- set of variants from the first test. The third set in trunks took-- was designed as the muscle display an-- to do a muscle posing routine; and he-- their own." Sounds like a beauty contest.

DENNIS

I'm not getting a lot out of this, Lis.

LISA

Wait. Here! "It was a body that suggested wallowing-- equipment for it. He had beautiful hair-- him on the bed and said, "Jesus! you re--..."

DENNIS

Let me see: "Bob grinned. I am, baby! An-- to give any guy a hot ass.' He wanted to get right to it;-- kisses had me all ready. He rolled on-- happily sank my tool in his big, sleek-- good position."

LISA

Sounds like they're having fun.

DENNIS

It's porno.

LISA

Well, it's not Saul Bellow.

CHRIS

I could have let him die. I'll have to live with that the rest of my life, knowing and being tempted just to let him go. He wanted to, you know. He would just sit in the library with his head in his hands for hours. He couldn't eat, or wouldn't. I tried everything. He'd become more like a child, really. I mixed vitamins into his food, mashing everything up into a kind of pudding, so it'd be easier for him to chew. And then finally - there really was no choice - it had to be baby food. He didn't complain. That was what amazed me so. But even then - he'd take just a few bites, then cover his mouth, and walk quickly from the table.

(Beat)

He couldn't hold anything down. He was starving. We'd had the nutritionist in. She told him there was no reason why

he couldn't eat. And I'd had it with caution. I'd wasted enough energy trying to avoid making him angry. So I said, I told him, finally, straight out: "You eat, you son-of-a-bitch, or get ready to die."

(Beat)

The next day, we were in his library. He had his face in his hands.

LAWRENCE

(Seated, as described by CHRIS)

These pain killers. I can't think. I have nothing to hang on to.

CHRIS

(Continuing as before)

Of course, I was way past believing he lived for me or for anybody else for that matter.

(Now to LAWRENCE:)

Your work, Larry. You can't just sit. You have got to get back to your work.

(Back to DENNIS and LISA:)

That seemed to make sense to him, because after a couple of days he returned to his desk.

(The sound of typing begins, softly)

He'd sit there all morning after coffee, typing.

(LAWRENCE can be seen at the desk, typing.)

Then before coming to lunch, he'd tear up all the pages he was working on. He did this for weeks - months. When I went to empty his wastepaper basket, I secretly fished out what he had thrown away. I also found the medicine the doctors had prescribed. At least a month's supply of codeine. He'd simply stopped taking it. The pain must have been agonizing. He said there was no reason to live if he couldn't think. I admired him for that. But the point is that the writing distracted him or energized - I don't know - because he regained his appetite and began eating again. It's what saved him. He wrote like mad.

(The sound of typing fills the stage. Then silence.)

DENNIS

I'm stunned.

CHRIS

Are you?

DENNIS

Yeah. No, I am. Somehow. I ought to be.

LISA

I'm not. I want to hear more.

DENNIS

Here. You read.

LISA

"I took Armand straight to my-- determined to tame him down to-- more so once I saw him ...."

LAWRENCE

(Speaking without notes)

"I took Armand straight to my bed, determined to tame him down to my size, even more so once I saw him naked. He was all man, hung like crazy, magnificently muscled, slightly hairy, deeply bronzed, and arrogant in his virility. He was no virgin, but he let me know that not many men ever got in him."

DENNIS

(Taking the paper from LISA)

"He was a passionate man-- and he gave himself to me hard an--

LAWRENCE

(Taking over)

.... and hot. God knows, I enjoyed him. He was tremendously exciting, and I fucked him for all he was worth, holding back when it half killed me, but it was worth it. I barely rested. Long before Armand thought it possible, I had turned him face up and was driving up his butt from that position. I left him moaning like an animal, his body shaking in great spasms of excitement. It was shorter than the first time because his orgasm was so violent that I couldn't hold mine."

(LAWRENCE disappears)

DENNIS

I doubt the university press will take it.

LISA

Would you submit it to them?

DENNIS

I wouldn't show it to anyone.

LISA

It makes your father more human. More...

DENNIS

...pathetic?

LISA

There's that.

DENNIS

He was into control. That's what this stuff's all about.

LISA

I hadn't thought of that. I think they're kind of fun.

DENNIS

Fun?

LISA

Chris, what do you think?

(CHRIS doesn't respond)

DENNIS

Think of the boys as women.

LISA

I would never have imagined Chancellor Hendricks writing something like this. But your father, yes.

DENNIS

The arbiter of taste.

LISA

Do you think they're based on experience? Or is it just fantasy, inspired by Greek gods? You always said he needed to be worshipped.

DENNIS

But there's no glory. No joy. It reminds me more of the Romans. The lack of passion. The decadence.

CHRIS

Don't you remember how much he loved Fellini films?

LISA

Yes, he called them erotic comedies.

CHRIS

Especially those great, obese whores, with blackened teeth and bags under their eyes. I found them repulsive.

LISA

I see now that he had that side to him. I guess he just couldn't hold it in any longer. I kind of like that.

DENNIS

Like what? You like that?

CHRIS

He believed life is to be enjoyed.

DENNIS

That's totally self-serving.

CHRIS

Exactly. Pure and simple. No obligations, no moral judgments.

DENNIS

Just take?

LISA

You stand alone.

DENNIS

Then there's nothing.

CHRIS

If you dwell on it, yes. The way you did, and still do, I suppose. Your mistake was in always wanting things. Expecting something, and then being disappointed.

LISA

You just can't accept the fact that he felt no obligation to you.

CHRIS

Not to anyone. But if you can see past that, beyond all that, to his ability to take pleasure in life. He really loved life. And then there's his, I don't know, his perverse creativity.

DENNIS

Oh, please: "Armand"? Such clichés.

CHRIS

You tell me then: what's missing?

DENNIS

Love.

(Pause)

I see now what an empty life my father led.

LISA

Empty? That's not the word I would have chosen.

DENNIS

You can see it in the sex. He was a user.

CHRIS

Oh, come on, Dennis. He made it up. They're just words.

DENNIS

Very carefully chosen: mauling, pawing, taming, fucking.  
What kind of fantasy is that?

CHRIS

Don't be so serious.

DENNIS

No, Lisa, I see it now. The whole thing was a charade.

CHRIS

He was playing a role.

DENNIS

Exactly my point.

LISA

I don't think he would deny that. He believed in it. I  
remember him saying, "They pay you for the act. That's why  
they call it work."

CHRIS

He was angry because no one else was willing to take the  
trouble.

DENNIS

How could he think he was better than anyone else?

LISA

He was very accomplished.

DENNIS

I've lived in this. I know him.

LISA

You always say that.

DENNIS

He made promises. The relationships are all wrong. My father was not proud of me; he was proud of himself. When married, you do not stand alone. And neither should children. Look what he did to me.

LISA

He did nothing to you.

DENNIS

That's my point.

(About three years earlier. In LAWRENCE'S house in Hinsdale. CHRIS sits with a package on his lap, as LAWRENCE enters, looking through some bills.)

LAWRENCE

The damn mortgage. Do you realize next month we will have been in this house exactly ten years?

CHRIS

I can't believe it.

LAWRENCE

Let's celebrate.

CHRIS

(As he unwraps the package:)

Oh, look what Dennis sent.

LAWRENCE

We'll have a party.

CHRIS

How thoughtful. Did you see?

LAWRENCE

A real party. With balloons and champagne.

CHRIS

He didn't have to do that.

LAWRENCE

I know it would be too much for one to handle. Perhaps you could arrange to have it catered.

CHRIS

Are you serious? Have a look.

LAWRENCE

We'll see that later. I have to think of whom to invite.

CHRIS

You are serious.

LAWRENCE

I think we could handle about twenty. Twenty-five maybe, although there would not be enough silver. Of course, I'm serious.

CHRIS

You feel strong enough...for a party? You forget...

LAWRENCE

We'll have a brunch, so I can sneak away when I'm feeling tired, and have a nap. I'll be fine.

CHRIS

I remember the doctor saying he wanted you off your feet.

LAWRENCE

I'll park myself on the sofa by the fireplace. We can put pillows around on the floor. Yes, I think we'll start with twenty anyway, and then go from there. Some of the faculty will be away on sabbatical.

CHRIS

What do you have in mind in terms of time?

LAWRENCE

Elevenish. That should do just fine. We'll say three weeks from Sunday. That should give you enough time to get out invitations.

CHRIS

You want invitations?

LAWRENCE

Write this down.

CHRIS

Hold on.

LAWRENCE

"Lawrence would like to have you join him in celebration of his tenth year..."

CHRIS

Hold. Wait, wait...just a ...Okay: go.

LAWRENCE

"...in this house..."

CHRIS

"...his tenth year in this house..."

LAWRENCE

"...and the fact that he is alive..."

CHRIS

"...and..." What?

LAWRENCE

"...and the fact that he is alive."

CHRIS

You want to say that?

LAWRENCE

Why not?

CHRIS

No. Nothing. And you want me to write them?

LAWRENCE

Would you? I'll have to phone the office to find out who's in town. You can address the envelopes, if you don't mind. Now, what was that you wanted to show me?

(LAWRENCE turns away to look at the bills, as DENNIS and LISA enter, carrying balloons, glasses, and pillows. They sit at LAWRENCE'S feet.)

LISA

The trip sounds like a total success.

CHRIS

My favorite was Scotland.

LAWRENCE

Yes, he couldn't wait to find out what the men wear under their kilts.

CHRIS

They're less binding, more natural. What can I say?

DENNIS

You didn't say anything about going to Scotland. I thought you'd finished up there years ago.

CHRIS

I'd always wanted to go there.

LAWRENCE

The Edinburgh venture didn't net me much, since I couldn't get permission to photograph in the National Gallery, but the weather was extraordinarily good for Scotland, one day of real sunshine even.

CHRIS

And there were red and yellow tulips out in the park.

LAWRENCE

All of which I thoroughly loved...

CHRIS

And photographed.

DENNIS

Flowers?

(To CHRIS:)

You got him to photograph flowers?

CHRIS

(To LAWRENCE:)

Tell him about the boy.

LAWRENCE

What boy?

CHRIS

On Princes Street.

LAWRENCE

As we passed a woman sitting on one of the benches, her very small son...

CHRIS

Not that small!

LAWRENCE

Crouched beside her. She suddenly yelped in horror, "Jamie! ye can't do that here!" The child in a wail of anguish, "I dood it!"

CHRIS

(Simultaneously)

"I dood it!"

LAWRENCE

And so, by God, he had!

(LAWRENCE and CHRIS laugh)

CHRIS

"I dood it!"

LAWRENCE

It may argue that when a Scot feels he needs to do something, he does it.

(General laughter)

LAWRENCE

(Samples an hors d'oeuvre; then to  
CHRIS:)

Aren't these overcooked?

CHRIS

They're a little crunchy, I suppose.

DENNIS

They're all right.

LISA

They're fine.

LAWRENCE

They are not fine.

(To CHRIS:)

You've burnt them.

CHRIS

(Quickly takes LAWRENCE'S plate  
away.)

Just like magic.

LAWRENCE

You never remember to use the alarm.

CHRIS

Can we move on?

LAWRENCE

My point is that you are  
not paying attention to  
what you are doing.

CHRIS

I know somebody else who is  
not going to be served  
anything tonight.

LISA

We're distracting you, Chris. Maybe you'd like some help.  
Shall I have a look?

(LISA and CHRIS exit)

LAWRENCE

We just got a new stove with a timer.

DENNIS

Why can't you just leave it alone? Not one thing do you let pass without comment. I took your side against mother because...because I hated her for drinking, but...shit, dad, what's the matter with you?

(DENNIS takes his glass and storms out)

CHRIS

(Reenters, followed by LISA)

Return the conquering heroes.

LISA

We lost the hors d'oeuvres, I'm afraid.

CHRIS

But we have a surprise for you.

LISA

I hope you didn't have plans for these lovely mushrooms.

CHRIS

Lisa showed me how to stuff them with brie. They're divine.

(Passes a plate to LAWRENCE)

Something else to drink? Can I get you? Uh, Lorenzo?

LAWRENCE

I distinctly remember asking you not to call me that.

CHRIS

Lawrence, then?

LISA

I know. Let's raise a toast to your return to Woodmere Drive. Where's Den?

LAWRENCE

He stepped out.

(Eats a mushroom)

CHRIS

(Raising his glass)

Shall we?

(LAWRENCE, gagging on the mushroom, stands briefly, then leaves the room.)

Not the first time. I better see if he's all right.  
(Leaves the room. LISA remains,  
awkwardly, alone.)

LISA

Den, I...

DENNIS

(Reenters; grabs a mushroom off  
LAWRENCE'S plate)

Chris said dad's having trouble getting something down.

LISA

He seemed to be choking. I hope he's all right. Where'd  
you go?

DENNIS

Get some air.

CHRIS

(Reentering)

He's had a lot of trouble lately. The scar tissue... maybe  
the food gets stuck or something.

LISA

Where is he?

CHRIS

Still in the bathroom. The vomiting exhausts him.  
(HE watches as DENNIS takes another  
mushroom)

DENNIS

He'll be all right.

CHRIS

I wish you wouldn't do that.

DENNIS

Huh?

LISA

(Indicating)

Den.

DENNIS

They're only good when they're hot.

(To LISA:)

You make them?

LISA

We both did.

DENNIS

(Taking another)

They're going to waste.

(Notices CHRIS' gaze)

What?

CHRIS

Those are for Larry.

DENNIS

I thought you said he couldn't hold anything down.

CHRIS

I did.

(Pause)

I don't like seeing you eat from your father's plate.

DENNIS

What? You can, but I can't?

CHRIS

No, that's not it.

DENNIS

Because of your special relationship?

CHRIS

When your father first got sick, he had me finish whatever he couldn't manage. At first, just a little dessert, then half a filet, his salad. One day, I was especially hungry, and when he couldn't finish his, I was glad. It comes down finally to the allocation of resources. Your loss, my gain. The balance always, inevitably, restored. The Greeks were right. It's not for nothing that the ancients danced at funerals.

(Slight pause)

Your father's dying, you know.

(Return to the present)

LISA

I'm still confused. When did he first collapse? I mean, I remember him recuperating, but I wasn't around when he first got sick. I thought he was alone.

DENNIS

No, I was there.

CHRIS

I'd excused myself, so the gentlemen could talk.

DENNIS

It was after midnight. He said he was going to bed. He left the room, and just a moment later, he shouted out:

LAWRENCE

DENNIS! DENNIS!

DENNIS

I sort of hesitated for a moment, thinking, "Oh, shit, what now? Had I left the lights on or dropped my shoes in the hallway?"

(CHRIS bursts out laughing)

I hesitated, and then walked from the breakfast room, where we'd been drinking, into the hall. It was pitch black. I ran around turning switches, raced upstairs, thinking he must have gotten into bed, or...or was in his bedroom, but there was no light coming from under the door, and then ran to dad's study. But the door wouldn't open. He had gone inside, shut the door, and had fallen behind it, so he was blocking the way. Then I got Chris. We pushed the door, flipped the lights on, and squeezed in.

CHRIS

And together we helped him up.

DENNIS

He weighed a ton.

CHRIS

Two hundred pounds of dead weight.

DENNIS

And as we tried to get him up, to...to push him up onto the couch, he put his hand over his mouth, and made for the bathroom.

CHRIS

Not a drop on the oriental rug.

DENNIS

He vomited up blood like I've never seen, over and over into the toilet. I kind of held him up, while Chris stroked his back. Finally, the heaving stopped. And he walked casually back to sit down.

LAWRENCE

I'm fine. Let me alone. I'll be fine.

DENNIS

Well, I was on the phone to the med-center before he could stop me. I knew what he had coughed up; he, quite obviously, did not. When I got back to him, he was white, cold, and shivering. And I just kept thinking, "Oh, my God," it was racing through my mind, "father is going to die." Then the doorbell rang. I ran downstairs, let the paramedics in, took them up to dad's room, and stayed a minute. I bent down to empty his pockets. I took out his pens, and then his cigarettes.

(To LAWRENCE:)

Boy, dad, you oughta give these up.

LAWRENCE

I've been smoking those for over forty years, and I'm going to go right on smoking them, so you can just shut up.

DENNIS

(Again, to LISA:)

The paramedic probably attributed that "shut up" to some sort of cerebral incident. Little did he know that I had been told with great regularity to shut up, and it had nothing at all to do with his dying, and everything to do with his living. For father, to live meant to tell other people to shut up.

LISA

Den.

DENNIS

Well, finally, eventually, I went back and sat on the front lawn. I glanced over every once in a while to see what was going on. First, I saw these guys trying to get this bed-thing through the front door, and then I saw them carrying father down the stairs. He sitting up, being carried out like Cleopatra, or a crippled Gloria Swanson, coming down the stairs, with hoses up his nose, and needles in his arms and neck and chest. And I let go. I couldn't get into the ambulance. I couldn't say anything. I cried. I repeated over and over: father is dead.

LISA

You saw him dying.

DENNIS

I saw him die. I cried. I went out on that drive and watched him being carried out, his shirt ripped off, pale and waxy, being lifted into that ambulance by those...men.

LISA

But he didn't die.

DENNIS

But he didn't die.

(Pause)

When I got the emergency room, and they finally let me in to see him, - they'd put this awful tube down his throat - he looked up at me, and said; "This hasn't been much of a visit for you." It was the first time I recognized him as a human being.

LISA

He willed himself back to life.

DENNIS

He had first-class doctors.

LISA

What he went through...I had it with my father. I've seen it.

DENNIS

Chris was there.

LISA

I stayed and watched and by God my father fought it. He fought like hell, but...but, finally, he gave up. He quit. He died. And I didn't blame him. I would have given up much sooner. We were...happy for him. But your father, Den, your father, who had done everything, he survived. The need, some inexplicable urge to carry on, to keep going. Why? What did he want to do? What did he want to see? That's what I'd like to know.

DENNIS

Maybe he was just scared of dying.

LISA

Oh, Denny! After life?

DENNIS

He should have died that night.

CHRIS

What are you talking about?

DENNIS

If he had died that night, if he had died, it would have been okay. He'd done everything. He was sick of the university. As you said yourself, he'd lived out his life. He should have died that night.

LISA

Why?

CHRIS

Something may have died that night, but it wasn't your father.

DENNIS

I mean, what did he do? What was he doing? Writing porn? He had us all convinced.

LISA

Convinced of what?

DENNIS

That he was doing something. That everything he did was so worthwhile. And that everything I did was for shit.

CHRIS

You convinced yourself.

DENNIS

Why do you keep talking?

LISA

Denny.

DENNIS

No. Who are you? I can't believe I'm discussing my life with you.

CHRIS

Because you're playing a broken record. I didn't think I gave a damn about your father's reputation, but I do. And I want Lisa to hear both sides of the story. You say your father sneered at you, but the opposite is true. Your escapades, your disappearance act, your explorations - they required sanctification. Let's hear it for Dennis and his vital needs, applause for every performance, but your father, when your father had nothing, after he had lost everything, and he was in need... when your father was in need, you shat all over him. You and your mother had a field day, making his necessity look like some kind of filth. You have the nerve to turn his life into some kind of inconsequential wine and cheese party. Cocksucking and finger sandwiches. Wasn't daddy a little man? Did you ever think - of course not, you never think about anyone - did it ever occur to you that he was ashamed of himself? He, you know, he used to talk to himself, I mean, he would have conversations, fantasy reconciliations with your mother in the livingroom. I would sit in the hall and eavesdrop.

LAWRENCE

(To JOSEPHINE who appears out of nowhere)

Oh, Christ, Jo. What are you doing?

JOSEPHINE

You always knew how to ruin a good thing.

LAWRENCE

I don't need this, Jo.

JOSEPHINE

Why didn't you come, Lar? You were missed.

LAWRENCE

It was too sudden, Josephine. I was out of the country.

JOSEPHINE

With the boy who can't cook?

LAWRENCE

I'm sorry for the past, Josey. When did it start? Can you tell me that? I've tried to reconstruct it. I thought I could make amends, if the moment...if I could recall when...

JOSEPHINE

It started with the popcorn, Lar. With a little boy and his red wagon.

LAWRENCE

I know.

JOSEPHINE

You had push, I'll say that.

LAWRENCE

More than you can say for our Dennis.

JOSEPHINE

He needs people, Lar. He wants a family. You were always out to make it on your own.

LAWRENCE

I wanted a wife.

JOSEPHINE

You wanted a maid.

LAWRENCE

Don't say I didn't love you.

JOSEPHINE

We couldn't look at ourselves and we still can't. Now go tell your friend to turn the oven down to 325.

(JOSEPHINE and LAWRENCE disappear)

CHRIS

There were the imaginary visits, in Larry's head, and then once there was a real one. She dropped by -

DENNIS

Drunk?

CHRIS

Sober, I guess. I wish I'd been drunk.

JOSEPHINE

(Reenters, not looking too good.  
To CHRIS:)

I feel sorry for you.

CHRIS

Oh? Why's that?

JOSEPHINE

My husband's never liked femininity. When Larry comes to his senses, he will tire of you.

CHRIS

Weren't you ever feminine?

JOSEPHINE

Women married to weak men have to make themselves into something they are not.

CHRIS

Maybe he misses it.

JOSEPHINE

He can afford to now, I suppose.

CHRIS

I wouldn't call Larry weak.

JOSEPHINE

Frightened. Too cautious to run a big shop. The university is no longer a place for kind people.

CHRIS

You think of him as kind?

JOSEPHINE

Kind and weak. That's what makes him a bully.

CHRIS

I'll remember that.

JOSEPHINE

You don't love him, I hope.

(Silence)

Then I really do feel sorry for you.

(She exits.)

DENNIS

I wonder why she came?

CHRIS

Check out the competition. Scare me to death. Who knows? That's something your mother and I had in common, you know. We both loved Larry. What's pathetic, Den, is that the only way you can pump yourself up is to tear him down. I loved your father because he needed to be loved. Maybe when you grow up, you'll understand that.

(Silence)

Good bye, Lisa.

(He gives her a peck and exits)

LISA

I like Chris.

DENNIS

I hope you don't want to sleep with him.

LISA

You never know.

(Pause)

It's not his fault, you know.

DENNIS

Who said it is?

LISA

You did, Denny. You do. You blame him. You lay it all at his feet.

DENNIS

That's not true.

LISA

Oh, be honest. It's a huge guilt-trip. And you're on it.

DENNIS

You're talking about the accident?

LISA

You do that, Dennis, and I don't like it.

DENNIS

Chris? We're talking about my father?

LISA

We're talking about us.

DENNIS

Oh, my God. How do you figure that?

LISA

I'm talking about what this has done to you. I'm talking about how you use this against yourself, and now I see how you are going to use it against me.

DENNIS

It has nothing to do with you.

LISA

You've let this become your excuse. And you're always looking for someone to blame. If I let you, you'll try to blame me.

DENNIS

That's not true. I hope that's not true. When I met you, I thought: things are beginning to look up.

LISA

You did?

(Pause)

I just want to see you fly.

DENNIS

Fly off?

LISA

I knew you were going to say that. Why must you always act as though you were being abandoned?

DENNIS

How can I tell when I'm not?

LISA

He called for you.

DENNIS

Who?

LISA

Chris was there, he was there, Denny, but Larry called out for you.

LAWRENCE

(Off)

DENNIS! DENNIS!

LISA

You are so lucky he didn't die before you had a chance to...whatever. Be with him. Because now you cannot. My father's been dead for eight years, but I still have fantasies of sitting on his lap.

DENNIS

You didn't know my father.

LISA

Chris is right, Den. Your father probably was gay all along.

DENNIS

Is that the kind of shit you're getting in graduate school? I mean, Jesus, Lisa, what are you talking about? No, really, what does that mean?: "Your father was probably gay all along"? My father, for your information, was my father all along and he was fucking over my mother all along and, no, I cannot deal with that. Why should I?

LAWRENCE

(To LISA:)

I need to feel whole again.

LISA

Don't you think that's why he came out?

DENNIS

I forbid you to monumentalize this. There was no triumphant march out of the closet. It was a nightmare. My mother would wake me up in the middle of the night and pound on my chest: "Where is your father? I know you've talked to him. You know where he is."

LISA

You were killing him. You and your mother. He felt trapped.

DENNIS

I will never believe he stopped loving us.

LISA

You talk too much about how he made you feel. Have you ever thought about his feelings? Do you care? Did you ever think about him? Didn't you love him?

DENNIS

(Holding photograph.)

"Love him?" "Did I love him?" What are you talking about? Of course, I loved him. Why else would I keep his fucking picture?

(DENNIS swings photo, striking and breaking the glass)

LISA

Sometimes I'm not so sure that you did.

(The lights fade. When they come up, it is later that afternoon. Everything has been packed up. Much has been carried away; a few boxes and bags remain.)

LISA

I think that's everything.

DENNIS

Go on down. I'll get these ready.

LISA

This is too heavy.

DENNIS

Oh, I'm sorry. Here, take these. They're lighter. I'll carry the big ones. I guess it's true Chris isn't coming back. I was hoping he'd lock up. Check the doors, will you, while you're down.

(LISA exits)

JOSEPHINE

(About twenty-five years earlier.  
JOSEPHINE enters. SHE is wearing an evening gown; SHE looks fabulous)  
That's right, darling, check all the doors.

DENNIS

Mom?

JOSEPHINE

How do I look?

DENNIS

Great.

JOSEPHINE

Your father's very nervous. Remember to say something nice to him when he comes down.

DENNIS

Like what?

JOSEPHINE

Did you finish your homework? Now, there are TV dinners in the freezer. I got your favorites. Roast beef and fried chicken. Take your pick. Don't eat too much ice cream. Did you finish your homework?

DENNIS

Yes, but. Where are you going?

JOSEPHINE

There's a reception being held tonight in your father's honor. He's coming. Now don't forget to congratulate him. He's worked very hard for this night.

LAWRENCE

(Enters, wearing a tux.)  
Hey. There he is. Where you been?

DENNIS

Just watching TV.

LAWRENCE

Finish your homework?

DENNIS

Yeah, sure. Hey, congratulations, dad. You look pretty snazzy.

LAWRENCE

You think so? What about your mom? Did you say something to your mother?

DENNIS

Yeah, dad. I told her.

LAWRENCE

Well, honey, you look ravishing.

JOSEPHINE

Thank you, darling.

(JOSEPHINE and LAWRENCE embrace and kiss.)

And thank you, sweetheart.

(She gives DENNIS a peck on the cheek.)

LAWRENCE

Shall we?

DENNIS

Mom?

JOSEPHINE

Yes, dear? Your father and I haven't got much time.

DENNIS

Mom?

JOSEPHINE

What is it, dear?

LAWRENCE

Let's get a move on.

JOSEPHINE

All right, darling. We won't be too late.

DENNIS

Can I stay up?

JOSEPHINE

You mean, wait up for us? Oh, I don't know. Ask your father.

LAWRENCE

I don't want all these goddamned lights left on.

JOSEPHINE

Yes, sweetheart, don't forget to turn out the lights when you leave the room.

LISA

(Off)

Dennis, I'm ready.

JOSEPHINE

That must be the sitter. All right. Good bye, sweetheart.

LAWRENCE

Let's go. We haven't got all night.

JOSEPHINE

Bye. Be a dear, will you, and leave the porch lights on. Nighty-night.

(JOSEPHINE and LAWRENCE disappear)

DENNIS

Bye.

(Stands, looking in their direction)

LISA

(Enters)

Den, I've been standing out front waiting for you. I thought you were right behind me.

DENNIS

They're gone.

LISA

Who?

DENNIS

As long as my father was alive, I always felt my mother was, too. They were never really separate in my mind. Even now they aren't. But they're not here. They're really, uh, they're really gone.

(Pause)

I always thought I'd feel relieved somehow - liberated finally - but just now I felt afraid. They were leaving and I didn't want them to. As a boy I remember asking my father to bring home colored paper - construction paper for a school project - a thing of glue, and he never once forgot. I never heard him say he was too busy, or that I'd have to wait a few days. I could rely on him.

(Pause)

My friends and I: he'd let us pinch his beard with those old wooden pins mother used on the clothes line.

LISA

There are a lot of memories, Den.

DENNIS

I don't have a reason to come back here. I can't call it home.

LISA

You have your own home now.

DENNIS

I guess that's it.

(Pause)

I used to ask my father a million questions. I thought he knew everything.

LISA

For a while, maybe he did.

DENNIS

I can't believe we've been here so long. There's no air.

LISA

You'll breath easier once we get outside.

DENNIS

(Struggling with oversized box.)

I don't think I can handle this alone.

LISA

I'm right here, Dennis. Go on. I'm right beside you.

(LIGHTS dim as LISA and DENNIS  
carry box off)

**END OF PLAY**

Performance rights must be secured before production. For contact information, please see the *Jigsaw Confession* information page (click on your browser's "Back" button, or visit [www.singlelane.com/proplay/jigsaw.html](http://www.singlelane.com/proplay/jigsaw.html))