

PERFECT WORLD

A Two-Act Play
Written by
Linda Stockham

A successful Broadway actress's seemingly perfect world is shattered by an unexpected visitor

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Cast of Characters

<u>Rosalind Lionheart:</u>	38; SHE is a successful Broadway actress.
<u>Sunny:</u>	Mid-30s, with a slim figure; SHE is the LIONHEART'S housekeeper and cook.
<u>Rebecca Lionheart:</u>	15; SHE is ROSALIND'S precocious daughter.
<u>Viviane Neel:</u>	In her 40s, SHE is ROSALIND'S agent and best friend.
<u>Ivy:</u>	15; SHE is REBECCA'S best friend.
<u>Denny Cryer:</u>	35; HE is ROSALIND'S estranged and troubled brother.
<u>Cornel Lionheart:</u>	63; HE is ROSALIND'S father-in-law.
<u>Edna Lionheart:</u>	60; SHE is ROSALIND'S mother-in-law.
<u>Ruby Young-Sternlight:</u>	An aide from Washington, D.C., RUBY is anywhere from her late 20s to early 30s.
<u>Colby Billings:</u>	14; HE is training to be a dancer and is <i>sweet</i> on REBECCA.
<u>Kenneth Lionheart:</u>	39; HE is ROSALIND'S husband.

Synopsis of Scenes

All the action takes place in the spacious living room of the LI-ONHEART Manhattan condominium. It is the evening of December 31, 1993.

ACT I

Scene 1: 7:00 P.M.

Scene 2: An hour or so later.

ACT II

Close to midnight.

EPILOGUE

A few days later.

PRODUCTION HISTORY

The Orison Group Entertainment Division, in conjunction with the Professional Actors Counsel, A Repertory Theatre, Hollywood, California. Opened December 23, 1999. The PAC Theatre, 1108 Seward. Produced by Vance Strickland and directed by Charlotte Ballas, the cast was as follows:

Rosalind Lionheart_____Susan Irby
Sunny_____Carolyn J. Pop
Rebecca Lionheart_____Faryn Einhorn
Viviane Neal_____._____Amy Nash, Mercedes Sanbrailo
Ivy_____*

Denny Cryer_____Alex Dalton, Michael Magana
Cornel Lionheart_____Ronald F. Hoiseck
Edna Lionheart_____Joan Tinei
Ruby Young-Sternlight_____*

Colby Billings_____Joey Dawson
Kenneth Lionheart_____Tony Franchitto, Mickey Pizzo

*These two roles were cut from this production.

TRADE ANTHOLOGY PUBLICATION

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ACT ISCENE 1SETTING:

It is the spacious, light-filled living room of the LIONHEART Manhattan condominium. There is a door that opens into the living room from the entry hall. On one side of the room is a gigantic bookcase built into the wall. It is packed with books. However, there is one waist-level shelf devoted to a multitude of framed-photographs; two *Tonys* and various other awards; and glass and ceramic *bric-a-brac*. In front of this bookcase are two large easy chairs; a couch with pillows and a cocktail table in front of it; and a couple of end tables with lamps. On one of these end tables is a stack of magazines. Behind the couch is a table with a pile of books on the extreme edge of it and in the U.S.R. corner near this table is a fully decorated Christmas tree.

On the other side of the room is a desk; chair; floor lamp; and telephone. The small, metal wastepaper basket that sits by this desk is overflowing with wadded up notebook paper. The chair is presently pulled out from this desk, the top of the desk a shamble of notebook paper; large index cards; pencils; and a plastic container of paper clips. There is also a cup and saucer.

The entire feeling of this living room is one of friendliness and long-time comfort.

AT RISE:

ROSALIND LIONHEART, a sophisticated beauty of 38, is standing near the desk holding handwritten index cards in one hand and her reading glasses in the other. SHE is wearing a lounging gown.

ROSALIND

(Reciting)

"One feels that being appointed Director of the *Commission on the Enhancement of Family Values through the Arts* one must be without fault—that one should not only be a role model in their particular artistic field but in their personal life. I am proud that--"

(ROSALIND stops, puts on her spectacles and grabs up a pencil from the desk. As SHE crosses out a few lines on the index cards, SUNNY, in her mid-30s and slim, enters the living room carrying a vase of flowers. SHE starts to place them on the table but accidentally knocks against the pile of books. One of the books falls to the floor. SUNNY puts down the vase of flowers, bends and picks up the book from the floor)

SUNNY

(Reading the book title)

The Chaos Theory Untangled?

ROSALIND

Oh, that's one of Becky's books.

SUNNY

I figured as much--

ROSALIND

Her holiday reading.

SUNNY

I can't believe someone's written a book on *chaos*.

ROSALIND

It's a recent fad—so Becky tells me. Like dinosaurs.

SUNNY

(Perplexed)

Dinosaurs?

ROSALIND

As in *Jurassic Park*.

(SUNNY gingerly puts the book back down on the table)

SUNNY

All I remember about that movie is the mean-looking lizard grabbing that guy off the toilet seat. I got up and left at that point!

(Shivering)

I hate lizards and snakes. You don't get me into the reptile house at the zoo.

ROSALIND

If I understand Becky correctly, the chaos theory has something to do with butterflies flapping their wings in China and causing it to rain in the Ohio Valley—or something like that.

SUNNY

Still don't see how a little *itzy bitzy* butterfly in China can cause it to rain half-way around the world?

ROSALIND

It has something to do with not being able to predict complex entities—like weather systems.

SUNNY

Last year it was oceanography. She was going to be another Jacques Costeau—or in her case, a Jacqueline Costeau. The year before that, the first astronaut to land on Mars. And the year before that it was—er—I forget.

ROSALIND

Kenneth and I often wonder where she's gotten her intelligence. Of course, my father was quite bright, but he only funneled his brightness through English Renaissance literature. Hence, the reason I was named *Rosalind*. I suppose I should be grateful he didn't name me *Portia*.

SUNNY

The Merchant of Venice by William Shakespeare. See? I'm not so dumb.

ROSALIND

Whoever said you were?

SUNNY

Well, no one in this household.

(SUNNY moves the vase of flowers to the center of the table)

ROSALIND

(Holding up the index cards)

This speech—I'm not sure if it's any good. It seems terribly disconnected.

SUNNY

Maybe it's another example of the chaos theory?

ROSALIND

Then it probably is. No one has told me exactly what they expect of me in this two-year appointment.

(ROSALIND crosses up to the table and admires the flowers)

SUNNY

Anything to do with government is a *jumbled skein*.

ROSALIND

These are nice flowers.

SUNNY

That aide, again.

ROSALIND

Ms. Young-Sternlight?

SUNNY

Yeah—Ms. *Organization*.

ROSALIND

Isn't that good?

SUNNY

Not the way she goes about it.

ROSALIND

Oh? In what way does she go "about it?"

SUNNY

Like she's so busy all the time. And so prim and proper.

ROSALIND

Perhaps she does have other things to take care of besides ...?

SUNNY

Her lists. You should see her silly lists. And always crossing things off them.

ROSALIND

There. The proof of how organized and busy she is. Things to do. Cross them off and go to the next thing.

SUNNY

It's not quite like that, Mrs. Lionheart.

ROSALIND

No?

SUNNY

Those lists are made up of the darn'st things.

ROSALIND

How do you know?

SUNNY

I've taken a peek at them.

ROSALIND

(Stage whisper)

Be careful, Sunny. She does work for the *U.S. Government*.

SUNNY

(Undeterred)

Number One: "Get up—get dressed—make sure pantyhose on first before putting on shoes."

ROSALIND

You're kidding me?

SUNNY

Number Two: "Brush teeth—wash face—put on make-up."

ROSALIND

But you do those things automatically.

SUNNY

Number Three: "Have breakfast—skim headlines in newspapers to see if there's anything to read later." Number Four: "Go to the post office and mail letters."

ROSALIND

This is too much, even for Ms. Young-Sternlight.

SUNNY

Miss Rebecca says she's a "compulsive personality."

(Nodding to the flowers)

Look at these flowers. Number Five: "Order flowers for Mrs. Lionheart." She's got to have rung up quite a bill in the week she's been here.

ROSALIND

I'm sure she gets reimbursed from some hospitality fund or public relation's kitty, or whatever they call it in Washington.

SUNNY

You mean, part of our taxes goes to Ruby Young-Sternlight to keep this place smelling like a funeral parlor?

ROSALIND

I'm sure Washington doesn't look at it that way. Or, at least, not Ms. Young-Sternlight.

SUNNY

It's a crazy name, if you ask me. "Young-Sternlight."

(ROSALIND crosses back down
to the desk)

ROSALIND

One of Kenneth's *pet-peeves* are hyphenated names. The firm just hired a paralegal who has a *double-hyphenated* name. He thinks it's a first.

SUNNY

Sort of makes it *double-snooty*, doesn't it?

ROSALIND

(Laughing charmingly)

Yes. Quite "double-snooty," Sunny.

SUNNY

Well—Ms. Young-Sternlight has done her research on you. She knows what your favorite flowers are.

ROSALIND

The people in Washington have put together a fact sheet on me--

SUNNY

She knows the name of every single play you've ever been in--

ROSALIND

Amongst other boring statistics.

SUNNY

They might be boring to you, Mrs. Lionheart. But I got to admit, she does seem to be a real fan of yours. She's making the most of being assigned to you. And she's helping me out with dinner tonight.

ROSALIND

Undiscovered talents?

SUNNY

Not sure. She has no idea what the *fell* is.

(SUNNY goes and picks up the papers scattered on the floor by the desk. Then SHE shoves them into the already full wastepaper basket. Along with the basket, SHE gathers up the cup and saucer from the top of the desk)

ROSALIND

The sign of a sheltered childhood.

SUNNY

She almost passed out when I started stripping it off the meat.

ROSALIND

A life spent at fast-food places.

SUNNY

I had to explain to her that it's the *fell* that gives lamb its strong flavor.

ROSALIND

What did she say to that?

SUNNY

Wanted to know if I'd been a professional chef before coming to work for you.

ROSALIND

What did you tell her?

SUNNY

That my mother and granny were cooks in fine houses in England, and my great-grandfather was a butler. Ms. Young-Sternlight liked that. I didn't tell her what I had been before coming to work for you--

ROSALIND

And why should you? It's no business of hers—to anyone—that you were once a *stripper*--

SUNNY

Until the horrible club fire that scarred up my legs--

ROSALIND

It must have been terrible ...?

SUNNY

Fortunately no one was killed. But the panic—people screaming and climbing over each other to get out of the building. Then that time I spent in the hospital. I was lucky—the club owner had a hefty insurance coverage and paid for my bills. You know what worried me the most? What was I going to do for a living? With scarred legs, I was never going to be a *stripper* again.

ROSALIND

But you must have thought about that before—about the time when you would no longer be young enough ...?

SUNNY

I was young, Mrs. Lionheart. The young don't think about tomorrow when they're twenty-two. Then I saw the ad in one of the *trade papers*—"Broadway actress looking for a live-in housekeeper-cook."

I thought I was going to end up sewing tassels on other stripper's costumes for the rest of my life, or scrubbing floors. I didn't have but a high school education—I wasn't trained for anything. But I knew how to *cook* and I certainly could vacuum and dust. You saved my life, Mrs. Lionheart.

ROSALIND

You've been a *gold mine*, Sunny. I know at least one producer and two directors who'd like to steal you away.

(Then, secretively)

Incidentally ...

SUNNY

Yes, Mrs. Lionheart?

ROSALIND

What is the "fell?"

SUNNY

Oh, it's the membrane that covers lamb and mutton. You've got to tear it off--

(The doorbell buzzes twice

(ROSALIND quickly interrupts SUNNY before SHE hears more than she wants to hear about the *fell*)

ROSALIND

The doorbell!

SUNNY

(Quietly amused)

Yes, it is, Mrs. Lionheart--

ROSALIND

What time is it?

SUNNY

Seven o'clock--

ROSALIND

(Aghast)

Seven!? I have been working on this speech since one this afternoon. And what do I have to show for it? Very little.

(SHE drops the index cards down on the desk like they were hot potatoes)

(The doorbell rings twice, again)

SUNNY

That's Ms. Neel. She always gives the doorbell an extra push.

ROSALIND

Aren't Becky and Ivy with her? Why doesn't Becky open the door with her own key?

(SUNNY starts for the door)

SUNNY

Cause she's always forgetting it.

(SUNNY exits)

(ROSALIND picks up the index cards, then returns them to the desk top, along with her reading glasses. SHE crosses up to the table where the books sit and picks up the book on the chaos theory, laughs and puts it back down)

(VIVIANE NEEL, in her 40s, flashy in personality and dress, enters along with ROSALIND'S 15-year-old daughter REBECCA and REBECCA'S good friend IVY, who is also 15)

REBECCA

(Teasingly)

Mom, you should have been with us. Aunt Viviane tried to do a *triple--*

(VIVIANE peels off her coat and gloves and drops them on the nearest chair)

VIVIANE

I didn't try to "triple" anything!

IVY

(To ROSALIND)

She went flying right off the rink and into a waiter carrying a tray of hot drinks. What a mess! Cappuccino all over the place!

VIVIANE

(Rubbing her right hip)

Yes. Well, it's not polite to bring it up, Ivy.

(To ROSALIND)

I have never gotten the knack of ice skating.

(To REBECCA)

And I don't know why you get such an intense delight in seeing me make a fool of myself.

REBECCA

(Innocently)

Do I?

VIVIANE

You know you do.

(To ROSALIND)

Roz, have I ever told you that my god-daughter is a brat?

(ROSALIND helps REBECCA off with her coat, then hugs her)

ROSALIND

Oh, probably a thousand times or more since the first day she wet her diapers in your arms--

REBECCA

(Aghast)

Oh, Mom! What a horrible thing to say!

(IVY giggles; REBECCA frowns)

ROSALIND

It's the truth. You were three days old—

VIVIANE

And it was your first day home from the hospital. Guess who got the joy of changing you that day?

REBECCA

You.

(Grimaces)

I've heard this story before.

VIVIANE

Not about the \$200 dress you nearly ruined.

(REBECCA goes to and flops
down in one of the easy
chairs)

REBECCA

You spent that much on a pair of gloves yesterday--

VIVIANE

Yeah—but a \$200 dress fifteen years ago was a fortune for me. I wasn't making the money then like I'm making today.

REBECCA

And Mom was a rising star. Weren't you, Mom?

(ROSALIND places REBECCA'S coat
on a chair)

ROSALIND

H'm ...

IVY

Dad says you were a star the first time you stepped out on the stage, Mrs. Lionheart.

ROSALIND

Your father has always been a wonderful morale builder, Ivy.

IVY

I like the way you and Dad pat each other on the back.

VIVIANE

Felix is an artistic genius. Look at what he did at the MET last year with that new opera based on Henry James' *The American*! What a fantastic scenic designer. *God*—I'd love to get Felix away from that conglomerate that handles him.

(IVY now removes her coat and gloves)

IVY

Yes—Dad was pretty proud of that--

VIVIANE

Proud!? Those sets were—Well, there's no proper adjective to describe them. Just none.

IVY

He'll like that. Maybe it'll make him feel better.

(To ROSALIND)

He has the worst case of the *flu* that I've ever seen.

VIVIANE

And you've seen a lot of cases, *Ms. Nightingale*?

ROSALIND

Felix isn't coming to dinner tonight?

IVY

Don't think so. He still had a temperature when I left to go ice skating--

VIVIANE

Didn't he get a *flu shot*?

IVY

(To VIVIANE)

He gets one every year. It's not the right shot for what's out there this year.

(Matter-of-factly)

You know that there's always more than one kind of flu strain going about, *Ms. Neel*? The *Disease Center* in Atlanta can't make a vaccine for them all—It's got to do with pigs, ducks and other kinds of farm animals in close proximity with people in China and how--

VIVIANE

Please, Ivy. Don't confuse me with scientific facts.

(As an after-thought)

Has this anything to do with your *fruit flies*?

IVY

Oh, I'm not using fruit flies for my science projects any longer.

VIVIANE

No?

IVY

I'm using *zebra fish* now.

(Including ROSALIND and
REBECCA)

See you guys in a couple of hours.

(IVY, coat and gloves in hand,
exits out through the hall door)

VIVIANE

What does she mean by "zebra fish?"

REBECCA

Their eggs are transparent.

VIVIANE

(Slightly flustered)

What's that got to do with--

(Waving her hands in front
of her face, as though shooing
away irritating gnats)

No—don't tell me. I don't want to hear about it, particularly
when dinner is in the *fixing*!

(To ROSALIND)

I could smell Sunny's special New Year's Eve dinner when we got
off the elevator.

(Taking a deep breath)

Smell those herbs! Heaven! Tantalizing as a fresh rain in the
woods--

REBECCA

Do they smell differently? Or just clean?

VIVIANE

Both. But since you've never lived in the country ...

REBECCA

Why did we have to develop as we have? Why couldn't we have stayed at a point where nature didn't start being destroyed by us? Has it been so important to keep progressing, destroying, building a coldness?

VIVIANE

G'd heavens ...

ROSALIND

Darling, what are you asking?

REBECCA

Wouldn't it be better to have the beauty ...?

ROSALIND

I'm only an actress--

REBECCA

Is my question so difficult, Mom?

ROSALIND

Perhaps just out of my philosophical range.

REBECCA

Come on—you're not dumb.

ROSALIND

Thanks--

REBECCA

Dad says you're very sharp.

ROSALIND

Your dad is biased--

VIVIANE

Your mom can do no wrong in his eyes. For that matter, she--

REBECCA

But isn't that kind of respect okay?

VIVIANE

It's love—blind love. But he's correct.

ROSALIND

I'm not always right.

REBECCA

But never essentially wrong?

VIVIANE

Behold the idol. What did *ol'Omar* say about idols?

REBECCA

(Quoting)

"Indeed the idols I have loved so long
Have done my credit in this world much wrong;
Have drowned my glory in a shallow cup
And sold my reputation for a song."ⁱ

VIVIANE

Isn't it, "... credit in men's eyes much wrong?"

REBECCA

It's no longer a man's world, Aunt Viviane.

VIVIANE

Thank you for reminding me. But it's still a difficult one for women, who are, in many "men's eyes," still *vassals*--

REBECCA

Only for those women who allow themselves to be "vassals." You are quite your own person, are you not? And so is Mom!

ROSALIND

Darling, you're beginning to sound like a lawyer more everyday--

VIVIANE

And at that, like that crusty old John Mortimer character *Rumpole of the Bailey*.

REBECCA

He fights for the underdog. So do I.

VIVIANE

Underdogs and *undertrees*--

REBECCA

Dad's often said that if you hadn't been an actress, you'd have been a lawyer--

ROSALIND

It was all a fluke. Even Viviane admits to that often enough. The possibility of my getting that part was—what were the odds, Viviane?

VIVIANE

One-thousand to one.

REBECCA

Mom, she's always said it was a "certain thing."

VIVIANE

Never argue with Rumpole. He has a memory that stretches back to the Stone Age! Yes. Well—those were the odds when I saw her at Harvard, but when your mother walked into that Manhattan rehearsal hall—the odds dropped. Then, when she read—there was no contest. The fluke would have been her not getting that role.

REBECCA

You always stand up for Mom, Aunt Viviane--

VIVIANE

I like staying on the side my bread is buttered--

REBECCA

Would your agency close if Mom decided never to act again?

ROSALIND

I'm only going to Washington for two years, Becky.

VIVIANE

Am I being softened up for something? I get this feeling that all this adulation is leading up to something.

REBECCA

You know when we took that riverboat cruise on the Cumberland last year ...

VIVIANE

Yeah—and you wanted to build a tree house in every tree you saw along the riverbank--

REBECCA

Yes. Then. But now ...

ROSALIND

Back to trees.

REBECCA

I want to be the trees.

VIVIANE

You were a tree in a kindergarten play. A weeping willow, if I remember rightly.

REBECCA

I want to be the rivers, too.

ROSALIND

The rivers are *polluted*, Becky. You've told us that often enough--

REBECCA

Is it so silly to want to bring back an equilibrium between nature and humankind?

VIVIANE

Ah, ha! The clever little Rumpole. She's tying us up, Roz. For what, I don't know. A trip somewhere? Where this time, Becky? A Brazilian rainforest? Or has it something to do with environmental law, which I know nothing of?

ROSALIND

(Hugging her daughter)

High ethics are very commendable, darling, but they shouldn't blind you to reality. But I'm sure your dad and grandfather will be ecstatic if you follow them into law and join the firm. And if you're thinking of winning Viviane to your side--

REBECCA

But you, Mom?

ROSALIND

I started out wanting to be a lawyer—It's how I met your father.

VIVIANE

What ever you choose as a career, Becky, I'm sure you'll find me on your side.

(A wink at ROSALIND)

Now, I could use a drink before I go down to my place to change for tonight's *Feast to the New Year*.

REBECCA

Actually, I was thinking that maybe you'd like to take Ivy and me to Nashville this summer.

VIVIANE

Nashville? What country-western singer do you have a crush on now?

REBECCA

My heart will always belong to Randy Travis.

VIVIANE

Yours and millions of other females. But I thought you had a boyfriend? The one who lives here in this building? The one who made that dramatic entrance at Christmas when he found he could climb down into the kitchen by way of the old abandoned dumb-waiter? Colby Billings--

REBECCA

(Deplored by the suggestion)

Oh, Aunt Viviane! Colby is fourteen and all he cares about is dancing.

(REBECCA starts for door)

VIVIANE

(In jest)

I forgot there is such a *gap* between fourteen and fifteen--

(Ignoring VIVIANE'S remark,
SHE turns to ROSALIND)

REBECCA

What does "nee Cryer" mean, Mom?

ROSALIND

It stands for a woman's maiden name. *Nee* is French for *born--*

VIVIANE

Why do you ask?

REBECCA

They have it next to Mom's name in *Who's Who in the American Theater--*

ROSALIND

(To VIVIANE)

This comes with taking Japanese in school.

(To REBECCA)

Cryer is my maiden name—the name I was born with.

VIVIANE

I can't believe there is something we know that you don't know. Absolutely amazing. Gives me hope--

REBECCA

Well—no one is perfect, Aunt Viviane.

VIVIANE

The bedrock on which civilizations have flourished, floundered and fallen. My drink?

REBECCA

You'll think about Nashville?

VIVIANE

My every wakeful moment.

(Smiling, REBECCA exits)

Or is it, "every waking moment?"

ROSALIND

You didn't tell her what you want?

VIVIANE

After all these years? She should know by now: *bourbon* without ice. Heaven only knows I've had enough ice this afternoon.

(SHE rubs her right hip
again)

I could have been arrested for reckless skating. Or, at least, fined. Do they do that to people who have no business being on ice skates?

ROSALIND

No idea.

VIVIANE

Kenneth's not home?

ROSALIND

The firm is having their end-of-the-year-party.

VIVIANE

Don't you usually go?

ROSALIND

Not when I have a speech to write, which I'm supposed to give in three days.

(VIVIANE sits on the couch. SHE
then takes off her shoes and
begins to rub her toes)

VIVIANE
Waited until the last minute, huh?

ROSALIND

No. Apprehension has been standing in my way. Well—until today. Then I realized I had better get on the stick or I'd be foolishly ad-libbing.

VIVIANE

You've always been good at "ad-libbing." Remember the revival of *Susan and God* when that *half-wit* actor from Hollywood forgot his entrance?

ROSALIND

He wasn't a "half-wit" actor from Hollywood. He was a very nice man--

VIVIANE

Please, *Pollyanna*. He was a *half-wit* with no talent--

ROSALIND

Well—it was summer stock--

VIVIANE

So be it. Is the speech finished?

ROSALIND

A rough draft I'm not at all pleased with.

VIVIANE

It's quite an honor.

ROSALIND

Yes. It'll look good on my resume.

VIVIANE

(SHE puts her shoes back on)

Darling, you've never had a resume. You roll right out of one successful play into another successful play, season after season. Well—except for that time off to have Becky.

ROSALIND

It's been rather fun--

VIVIANE

Fun?

(Chortling under her breath)

She who was a law student when I discovered her.

ROSALIND

Crazy, isn't it? I never even had an inkling I could act. I never even thought of taking acting courses. It was my advisor who got me to register for some drama classes.

(Assuming the role of an
authoritative male)

"If you're going to be effective in the courtroom, Rosalind, you've got to be a damn good actress. Take a couple of acting classes. Get into some plays. Learn to use the audience, then you'll be able to manipulate the jury anyway you like. If you can act, you have half the battle won."

VIVIANE

That's a great bit. I wish you'd let me accept those talk show spots for you--

ROSALIND

No. Absolutely not. I hate talk shows. They're so—er—well ...

VIVIANE

Popular?

ROSALIND

Stupid. No. They're *inane*.

VIVIANE

That sounds like a Becky word.

ROSALIND

It probably is. My vocabulary has been increasing from the day she learned to speak.

VIVIANE

I can't believe she didn't know the meaning of "nee" ...

ROSALIND

Before I'd go off to the theatre, I'd always read to her before putting her to bed. I think what stopped my reading to her was that by the time I had gotten through the usual children's stories for her age-level, her intellect-level was demanding something far more advanced.

(Edge of sadness)

I always enjoyed reading to her—I'm sorry it ended so soon and she started reading for herself.

VIVIANE

Good god! How many of us read *The Origins of the Species* at seven years of age? My literary taste reaches only as high as the shelves containing the heaving bosom novels, not the works of

Gould, Suzuki and Sagan. I'm as shallow and raucous as they come and love it. Never will I be a scientific intellectual!

(Both ROSALIND and VIVIANE
laugh)

I have to say that you and Kenneth have done a great job with her, even if her French isn't very extensive. What a kid!

ROSALIND

The best in the world. I'd give my life for her--

VIVIANE

Did I ever say thanks for letting me be her godmother?

ROSALIND

Oh, about this time every year.

VIVIANE

And that Ivy—just as bright, just as great. Felix has done a great job--

ROSALIND

It's hard enough raising a bright child with both parents on the scene, Felix has had to do it alone.

VIVIANE

Ivy's right—you two love to pat each other on the back. It's nice we're all here under the same roof. Well—nearly. If you want to call this fossilized monstrosity of a complex "under the same roof?"

ROSALIND

It's like a castle in the days of yore—A whole community within the protective confines of stone, surrounded by a *watery moat*--

VIVIANE

That's not a *watery moat*! That's *electronic security*!
(A slight pause)

This science interest of Ivy's—Is there any *future* in it?

ROSALIND

I suppose it depends on what you mean by "future?"

VIVIANE

The materialist that I am, I guess I mean *money*. Do scientists make a lot of money?

ROSALIND

Some, I suppose.

VIVIANE

And this environmental law interest of Becky's ...?

ROSALIND

Kenneth will see that she at least has a job. And it is more realistic than being an astronaut. She gets motion sick so easily. Remember that Cumberland River cruise? And you couldn't even feel the boat moving.

VIVIANE

What do you think she'll decide upon, in the end?

ROSALIND

The end of what?

VIVIANE

High school, of course.

ROSALIND

I'm not sure. It frightens me--

VIVIANE

Frightens you? In what way?

ROSALIND

I'd hate to see her brain wasted, or take up a profession too easy for her.

VIVIANE

Like acting is for you? You're a phenomena, Roz. This two-year appointment--

ROSALIND

It's supposed to be a meaningful diversion--

VIVIANE

Perhaps that's why Becky jumps around from interest to interest. She hasn't hit upon a career goal that's meaningful--

ROSALIND

It's not the same thing, Viviane. But she's young. We rarely know what we want at Becky's age, no matter how big the *I.Q.* Do

you think I'm being *pompous* in accepting this Washington appointment?

VIVIANE

No one could accuse you of being "pompous."

ROSALIND

What would you worry about then?

VIVIANE

Trying not to worry about anything, like this appointment, or Becky failing at something or other.

ROSALIND

The first born are usually successful.

VIVIANE

What in heaven's name does that mean?

ROSALIND

A random thought.

VIVIANE

What do psychologists say about only children?

ROSALIND

Something to the effect that they are self-centered and spoiled.

VIVIANE

Becky is that. But only to a certain degree--

ROSALIND

Kenneth and I have tried to make her self-sufficient, responsible, and--

VIVIANE

Which she is.

ROSALIND

Too much so?

VIVIANE

When she was five, I thought I was taking a fully matured person to lunch. Five years old and she was talking like a *Nobel Laureate*!

ROSALIND

Precocious--

VIVIANE

Perceptive, but thank god she has a sense of humor—

ROSALIND

And an active imagination—like Denny. Except, she's socially mature, and has never been cruel or shown signs of cruelty. Denny was cruel.

VIVIANE

You can't compare a golden child to a down-and-out *flake*! Your brother tried to bum \$50 off me. Right there in the maternity ward. Not bad-looking though. All the nurses, even that one who looked like she should have been in *The Ring Cycle*, were drooling over him!

ROSALIND

Why do I suddenly feel uneasy?

VIVIANE

Do you?

ROSALIND

There's a foreboding in my bones--

VIVIANE

It is December 31st, Roz.

ROSALIND

Yes ...?

VIVIANE

My maternal grandmother was one for folklore. My brothers and I used to love to go visit her in Maine over the Christmas holidays. I remember one Christmas she told us that at midnight on December 31st the first person to cross your threshold can either be a lucky thing or a bad thing. A fair-haired man or a woman is unlucky but a dark-complexioned man bearing a gift, particularly a coin or a piece of bread, even a tiny little bit of coal, is lucky.

ROSALIND

Well—I guess I needn't worry. Denny is not a *blond*.

VIVIANE

Fair-haired doesn't necessarily mean "blond." He had light brown hair, didn't he? Yes. Straight, not curly. He was tanned. I remember the tan.

ROSALIND

He was playing winter ball in Venezuela.

VIVIANE

Very moody. Why do I get that idea? I only met him that one time when you were in the hospital with Becky. He seemed to be in and out of the maternity ward like he was between planes.

ROSALIND

He probably was. I don't remember why he was in Manhattan. But I'm sure it wasn't to see his new little niece. I think it was simply a coincidence that he was there the day after Becky was born. It doesn't really matter. Does it? Denny and I have never gotten along.

VIVIANE

You think he'll show up for the ceremony?

ROSALIND

Why should he? He may not even know about it.

VIVIANE

Any idea where he is?

ROSALIND

None. I haven't seen him since that day in the hospital. Why this sudden interest in Denny?

VIVIANE

I'm a grown-up child who's never gotten over asking *why*? He's one subject you've always been very mute about.

ROSALIND

Denny was an *odd duck*. He never got along with people, even as a kid. And he bounced around between too many minor league teams to make people comfortable with him. Not that he didn't have some talent as a pitcher. He just—Well, people never liked him and he never made an effort to be liked.

VIVIANE

But never any letters or Christmas cards from him?

ROSALIND

We got a Christmas card from him about eight years ago. He wrote, "Send me \$5,000." We didn't. The return address was in Taiwan.

(DENNY CRYER appears on the corner of the apron. Although 35, thin and scruffy-looking, his characterization is that of a teenager. HE is wearing slacks a little too baggy on him, a gray sweat shirt, tennis shoes and socks, and a red baseball cap)

VIVIANE

Don't they play baseball in Taiwan?

ROSALIND

We have never exchanged birthday cards. Never. In fact, as kids he always made my birthdays miserable.

(ROSALIND moves aside. DENNY CRYER yells at her)

DENNY

(Tauntingly)

Ain't you gonna blow out your sixteen candles, *rat-face*!?

ROSALIND

(Angry, yelling at him)

You made Momma sick!

DENNY

Who cares!? Who cares!? Who cares!?

(HE sticks out his tongue at her)

ROSALIND

She spent all night fixing up that cake and you had to go and ruin it by putting those awful *June bugs* on it!

DENNY

Better than candles! Besides, you never said you didn't like no *June bugs*--

ROSALIND

She's in the bathroom throwing up--

DENNY

Momma's *puking*! She's always *puking*! It *ain't* got nothing to do with them *June bugs*! Momma's *puking*! Momma's *puking*!

ROSALIND

You're a disgusting little animal, Denny Cryer!

(ROSALIND returns to the present
and VIVIANE)

(DENNY exits)

I'd forgotten how miserable he made my life. We spent most of our time not talking to each other, or else we would be fighting. There was a tree house in the backyard. He spent lots of time up there playing with his baseball cards or sulking. I never seemed to get to use it except when he was at baseball practice or in a game somewhere. Did you ever climb trees as a kid, Viviane?

VIVIANE

No. And for the same reason I never learned to ride a bike and why I shouldn't ice skate—I'm clumsy! But I know what you're saying about brothers. They can be a pain in the ass. I was at a disadvantage. There were two of them and only one of me. They used to do the meanest things to me. They loved catching moths and chasing me around the yard, threatening to stuff them down the back of my blouse. Sometimes they caught me. The little monsters.

(Laughing fondly)

We're the best of friends now. Of course, they're married and have their own brood of *brats* to contend with. There is some justice. But you and Denny ...?

ROSALIND

Altogether different. I don't know. With us, it was always warfare—as far back as I can remember, he hated me ...

(A slight pause)

VIVIANE

What did your parents do about it?

ROSALIND

Very little—actually.

VIVIANE

Seems irresponsible.

ROSALIND

You have to understand the household we lived in. Papa was an eccentric university professor—very bright and very much into his research. If he wasn't at the university teaching and holding his office hours, he was in his study at home with the "off limits" sign dangling from the door knob.

(Another pause)

VIVIANE

Yes?

ROSALIND

After Denny's birth, Momma never regained her health and because of that, she often went into deep states of depression. Dad called them her "dark moods." She cried a lot during those times. And it was during those times that Denny seemed to be at his most terrible—more obnoxious than what was usual for him. The more Momma was depressed, the meaner Denny was!

VIVIANE

What about vacations? Surely as a family you went on vacations together?

ROSALIND

We'd start out but be back in the driveway before we got out of town. Denny would get to taunting me until a full-fledged argument exploded. Momma would start to cry and—I'm sure if we'd been a family of *lemmings*, Papa would have driven us off the nearest cliff. Instead, he would turn the car around and go back home. He'd make a beeline to his study, Momma to bed with her *Valium*, and Denny to his tree house. I'd get on my bike and go visit one of my friends.

(DENNY re-enters; his left arm is in a cast and sling)

I remember one particular time when we actually talked to each other for more than a minute. And I had, for some unknown reason,

managed not to let his belligerent attitude provoke me the way it usually did. Denny had fallen and broken his arm. He was wearing this cast in a sling and it all seemed so huge for his small frame--

DENNY

(Whining)

It's always my left arm.

ROSALIND

You favor it.

DENNY

I'm not left-handed, stupid.

ROSALIND

It doesn't matter. You favor it.

DENNY

You think I do it on purpose?

ROSALIND

No. You do it cause you're left-hand oriented--

DENNY

You don't know nothing. I'm right-handed.

ROSALIND

(Casually)

That's not what I mean--

DENNY

I know what you mean. You think there's something wrong with me—that I'm dumb.

ROSALIND

Momma didn't want you to be left-handed. She didn't want you to write with your left hand, eat with your left hand--

DENNY

Why?

ROSALIND

Just superstition--

DENNY

And what's that supposed to mean?

ROSALIND

That nothing good comes of being left-handed.

DENNY

That's stupid. Where'd she come up with such a stupid idea?

ROSALIND

It's one of Momma's quirks--

DENNY

Dad's left-handed.

ROSALIND

That's not something she could control--

DENNY

I'll be a *south paw* pitcher. Great! That'll show her. *God* my arm hurts. I probably will have trouble with it all my life. It'll mean having to stick with being an ordinary right-handed pitcher.

ROSALIND

You can always play another position--

DENNY

You're stupid. You don't know nothing! Why don't you say something?

ROSALIND

I'm thinking.

DENNY

Girls don't think.

ROSALIND

Don't be an *asshole*, Denny.

DENNY

I'm *gonna* tell Mom you said that.

(ROSALIND doesn't answer him;
HE circles her distrustfully)

Don't you care that I'll tell her you called me an *asshole*?

ROSALIND

Why do you always have to argue? It's such a beautiful summer day and it's quiet. Can't you just sit back and enjoy it all?

DENNY

You mean, *daydream*?

ROSALIND

There's nothing wrong with *daydreaming*. Mr. Duncan says it's healthy--

DENNY

Mr. Duncan is a *fruit cake*!

ROSALIND

Don't be narrow-minded, Denny--

DENNY

He's a *fairy*!

ROSALIND

That's his business--

DENNY

You'd never catch me taking any of his classes.

ROSALIND

Why? What are you afraid of?

DENNY

I'm not afraid of nothing.

ROSALIND

Dad says Mr. Duncan has a master's degree in psychology--

DENNY

Psychologists are *weirdos*.

ROSALIND

Are you afraid you might learn something—something about yourself that you don't want to know?

DENNY

There's nothing wrong with me!

ROSALIND

No.

(Easily, but more to herself
than to DENNY)

No, of course not--

DENNY

(Yelling at her)
I told you there's nothing wrong with me!

(ROSALIND turns away, staring
into the far distance, DENNY
waiting for her to respond to
his statement)

Well ...?

ROSALIND

Well ...?

DENNY

What're you *daydreaming* about?

(ROSALIND does not answer)

DENNY

Girls are stupid!

(DENNY exits angrily)

VIVIANE

How gruesome.

(Half-serious, half-joking)

Maybe Denny was a *changeling*?

ROSALIND

It would be an explanation, if such things occur.

VIVIANE

Who's to say they don't? My grandmother believed in such things—*wizards, witches, pixies, gnomes* and *trolls*.

ROSALIND

Why have you never mentioned this New Year's Eve superstition of your grandmother's before?

VIVIANE

Well—I haven't thought about it in years. I guess it's your talking about a "foreboding in your bones."

(REBECCA enters with VIVIANE'S
drink, going directly to her.
They are startled by her
entrance. REBECCA hands the
drink to VIVIANE)

What did you do, Becky? Go down to Nashville for it?

REBECCA

No. I couldn't get the seal off the bottle. It took Sunny and a sharp carving knife to break it. You'd think someone had sealed a *genie* in it--

VIVIANE

I hope not! It's bad enough when there's little *worms* in bottles of liquor!

(VIVIANE examines her drink before taking a sip. In the meantime, REBECCA looks over at ROSALIND

(The doorbell rings, once)

REBECCA

That's the *Grands*!

(REBECCA quickly exits, yelling as SHE goes)

I'll get it, Sunny!

VIVIANE

I haven't seen the "Grands" since the *Fourth of July* when Cornel tried to set my hair on fire with one of those *sparkler* things!

(CORNEL LIONHEART and his wife EDNA enter the living room. They are 63 and 60 respectively. As they enter, they hand their coats and gloves to REBECCA, who deposits them off-stage, then comes immediately back into the room)

ROSALIND

Edna and Cornel.

(They kiss and hug)

CORNEL

How's my favorite actress?

EDNA

I don't know how you're going to stand not being on the stage for the next two years, Roz?

CORNEL

Are you kidding? D.C.'s the biggest stage in the world!

(EDNA steps over and gives VIVIANE a friendly hug. CORNEL moves toward VIVIANE but steps cautiously back, shaking his finger at her)

No, no. You're a dangerous woman, Viviane Neel. I'd better keep my distance.

EDNA

Oh, really, Cornel. It's a wonder she tolerates being in the same room with you after what you did to her last summer.

CORNEL

It was an accident--

EDNA

It was mischief, Cornel--

CORNEL

A misadventure--

EDNA

Pure, unadulterated mischief.

CORNEL

But I apologized on bended knee. Did I not, Viviane?

VIVIANE

Yes. And I have to admit, it was done quite gallantly.

(Feeling safer, HE steps over to VIVIANE and gives her a kiss on the cheek)

But my Father always said that "forgiving is easy, getting even the challenge."

(CORNEL quickly retreats to his wife's side)

CORNEL

He wasn't a *lawyer*, was he?

VIVIANE

No. He was a *horticulturist*. He ran a nursery to the day he died. I think it was some itinerant *crab grass* that killed him.

CORNEL

(Taken in)

I didn't know that, Viviane.

EDNA

She's pulling your leg, Cornel.

(To ROSALIND)

It always amazes me how Cornel can be such a successful lawyer and yet be so naive.

CORNEL

(Embarrassed)

Justice is blindfolded, *m'dear*.

EDNA

Yes. She is, isn't she? But we're not talking about justice.

(To VIVIANE)

I've always said there should be two other women up alongside Ms. Blindfolded Justice: One compatriot with her hands over her ears and the other with her hands over her mouth. Like the three monkeys. "Hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil." Criminal justice—Ha! More like "justice for the criminal, not for the victim"—

CORNEL

Will you ever stop being a policeman's daughter, Edna?

EDNA

No more than you'll ever free yourself from your *naïveté*.

(EDNA gives him an affectionate

pat on the cheek, then sits on
the sofa)

Kenneth isn't here yet?

ROSALIND

He's probably stopped off for something--

REBECCA

Well—it can't be for flowers. Ms. Young-Sternlight has been cluttering this place with flowers, flowers, flowers.

EDNA

Is she joining us tonight?

ROSALIND

I couldn't see not asking her. She's been helping Sunny with the meal--

REBECCA

She's making herself irreplaceable.

VIVIANE

Like *Eve Harrington* ...?

EDNA

Beware, Rosalind--

VIVIANE

Ah—it is a night for *omens* to come true.

CORNEL

What "omens?"

(CORNEL looks from side to
side)

ROSALIND

It has something to do with it being December 31st.

CORNEL

The last day of the year? What's that got to do with "omens?"

VIVIANE

Just a story I told Roz about strangers crossing the threshold at midnight on December 31st. It's an old-world superstition.

(Silence. CORNEL looks from VIVIANE to ROSALIND, then back to VIVIANE)

ROSALIND

There's nothing to worry about, Cornel. We're not expecting any *insidious strangers* tonight—just friends--

(Suddenly, there is a blood-curdling scream off-stage. RUBY YOUNG-STERNLIGHT, anywhere from her late 20s to early 30s, comes running into the living room. SHE is hysterical

(EDNA and CORNEL jump to their feet as ROSALIND, REBECCA and VIVIANE turn in reaction to RUBY'S panic-stricken state)

RUBY

Burglar! Burglar in the cupboard!

CORNEL

(To EDNA, perplexed)

What's in the cupboard?

EDNA

A *burglar*--

ROSALIND

Ms. Young-Sternlight, what are you talking about?

VIVIANE

A burglar in the cupboard, Roz--

RUBY

(Gasping for breath)

Y—yes.

VIVIANE

It must be some species of *spider*--

RUBY

N—no,

(SUNNY enters, trying to suppress her laughter)

SUNNY

It's no *spider*, Ms. Neel. It's--

(COLBY BILLINGS comes bursting into the living room, right behind SUNNY. HE is holding a *boom box* and HE turns it on full blast. The *CD* is a hot, jazzy but strictly Broadway type of musical piece. HE puts the *boom box* on the table behind the couch, moves D.S. and begins to dance

(REBECCA turns away in disgust and plops down on the couch

(RUBY YOUNG-STERNLIGHT backs away into a corner, unable to comprehend that her burglar in the cupboard is a 14-year-old dancer

(ROSALIND, VIVIANE, CORNEL and EDNA step back to give COLBY plenty of room

(SUNNY remains by the door, a smile breaking across her face

(When COLBY finishes his number, it is on his knees in front of REBECCA. Everyone claps. However, this is too much for her. SHE picks up one of the pillows from the couch and starts to beat him over the head with it. HE jumps up, runs up to his *boom box*. At the same instance, SUNNY opens the door. COLBY grabs the *boom*

box and makes his get-a-way.
 REBECCA throws the pillow toward
 the retreating COLBY, only to hit
 the vase of flowers. The vase
 falls to the floor and breaks.
 SUNNY quickly goes and picks up
 the pieces of glass shard, then
 the flowers)

CORNEL

Breaking glass is seven years bad luck--

VIVIANE

Only if it's a mirror that's broken--

(EDNA points to the broken
 vase)

EDNA

That's crystal--

REBECCA

I'm sorry, Mom.

CORNEL

Is there a curse for breaking crystal ...?

VIVIANE

Yes! When it's *Waterford Crystal*--

REBECCA

Why does Colby do things like this?

(RUBY pulls a handkerchief
 from her pocket and blows her
 nose loudly)

RUBY

He jumped right out of that odd little kitchen cupboard--

SUNNY

(Explaining)

The old dumbwaiter--

RUBY

He scared the *living daylights* out of me--

REBECCA

He's driving me nuts!

(SUNNY directs YOUNG-STERNLIGHT toward the open door. In addition, SUNNY is carrying the broken vase and flowers)

SUNNY

At least he made his exit through the front door--

(As SUNNY and RUBY move through the hall door, SUNNY turns back to ROSALIND)

VIVIANE

It's probably easier coming down that dumbwaiter than going up it--

SUNNY

I'll get a rag to soak up the water, Mrs. Lionheart--

VIVIANE

Particularly when the gears are rusted--

RUBY

How was I to know it was Rebecca's boyfriend?

ROSALIND

(To SUNNY)

Have her go and lie down, Sunny—to settle her nerves.

SUNNY

Yes, Mrs. Lionheart.

(SUNNY shuts the door as they exit)

REBECCA

He's not my boyfriend! Not, not, not my boyfriend!

(REBECCA turns to her mother,
as if seeking help from her)

Mother ...?

VIVIANE

I wonder how he does it? He must have to rely on the *pulley*. You know, that's really dangerous, Roz. Those ropes have to be rotting through--

ROSALIND

Yes. I should probably talk to the manager about sealing it off.
(Looking at her wrist watch)
Look at the time, Becky. We need to get cleaned up and changed.

VIVIANE

Me, too, as well as check my bruises from today's misadventures on the ice.

(VIVIANE turns and addresses
CORNEL in a teasing way)

I'll be back, Cornel.

(VIVIANE exits)

CORNEL

I'm not certain I like the way she said that?

EDNA

It's only your guilty conscience.

ROSALIND

I'll have Sunny bring in drinks.

(ROSALIND puts her arm around
REBECCA and directs her out of
the living room through the hall
door, then shuts it)

CORNEL

Yes. Well, I could use a *double-double* something or other.

EDNA

Darling, you have such a way with words. But then, you are a lawyer.

(HE gives her a double-take. SHE smiles sweetly and sits)

(BLACKOUT)

END OF ACT I, SCENE 1

ACT ISCENE 2

SETTING: An hour or so later.

AT RISE: KENNETH LIONHEART, a handsome man of 39, is addressing the occupants in the room; that is, EDNA, CORNEL, VIVIANE and IVY—VIVIANE and IVY have changed to attire to match the evening's festivities. CORNEL and IVY are seated on the couch. They are playing a two-handed card game. EDNA and VIVIANE are seated in the easy chairs.

KENNETH

(Visibly upset)

It is one of the most unsettling things that's ever happened to me.

VIVIANE

It's terrible, Kenneth--

EDNA

There's something like this in the papers and on the evening news all of the time. It seems so—*barbarous!*

(CORNEL puts down his cards, picks up his empty glass from the cocktail table, stands, pats his son on the shoulder, then goes to where a liquor tray sits on the table behind the couch. First, he pours out a glass of vodka for his son, then HE refills his own glass with vodka and ice cubes)

CORNEL

People have been doing this for thousands of years, Edna.

IVY

It's what happened in that Greek myth about *Oedipus*--

EDNA

This isn't a Greek myth, Ivy.

(CORNEL crosses to his son and hands him one of the two glasses of vodka HE is carrying)

CORNEL

On the contrary, it is exactly like a Greek myth—abandoning a baby on some hillside so that the wolves can devour it--

EDNA

We're talking about a *trash bin* on the streets of Manhattan, not a hillside in ancient Greece!

KENNETH

The *umbilical cord* was still attached.

(ROSALIND enters, dressed in a stunning lounging gown. SHE goes directly to KENNETH and gives him a kiss)

VIVIANE

You can't believe what Kenneth has been through, Roz.

(REBECCA enters, gaily dressed in red)

ROSALIND

(To EDNA)

I can, if he came by way of *Times Square*.

REBECCA

On New Year's Eve? That would not only be crazy, Mom, but the wrong way home.

EDNA

This is serious, Becky.

ROSALIND

(To KENNETH)

Where have you been?

VIVIANE

In *emergency*--

ROSALIND

(Alarmed)

"Emergency"?

REBECCA

The hospital, Dad?

ROSALIND

Who got hurt at the office party?

REBECCA

I bet it was that new paralegal. What did she do? Fall in the *paper shredder*?

EDNA

Your father has had a terrible *shock*. And not one I'd like to see happen to anyone--

ROSALIND

"Shock?"

CORNEL

Do they have any idea who the *mother is*, Ken?

KENNETH

Not at this point--

ROSALIND

"Mother is"? Kenneth, what happened? Why have you been in *emergency*?

(EDNA hands CORNEL her empty wine glass)

EDNA

On the way out of the office, Kenneth found a newborn baby in the trash bin on the sidewalk--

REBECCA

Just like Amber Lynn Cole.

VIVIANE

Who's Amber Lynn Cole?

(CORNEL, placing his glass of vodka on one of the end tables, goes back to the liquor tray and refills his wife's glass with red wine)

IVY

She has dance class with us—lives in Brooklyn. She found an infant's body wrapped up in newspaper on the subway--

VIVIANE

The baby was dead when she found it?

REBECCA

Yes. The same week an hour-old infant was found abandoned on a bus bench in Van Nuys, California--

EDNA

It's an epidemic--

VIVIANE

(Emphatically)

I need a drink!

(VIVIANE gets up and goes to the liquor tray. SHE pours herself a short *bourbon*)

ROSALIND

Any idea who the mother is?

KENNETH

An employee at a camera shop described a pregnant transient who's been in the area this week. He gave a fairly decent description of the woman.

(CORNEL takes the glass of wine to EDNA)

White European ancestry, in her late twenties or early thirties, with light blue eyes and blond hair, although quite dirty—part of it was tucked up under a red ski cap. The camera shop employee says she wasn't dressed against the cold. She had on tennis shoes, men's slacks and a gray sweat shirt. He saw someone in the music store across the street take out a coat to her two days ago. The police are trying to contact that man. He left yesterday to visit his parents in Maine over the New Year.

(A slight pause; KENNETH takes a sip of his drink, then turns to ROSALIND)

I asked the hospital to call here. They don't give the baby a very good chance of surviving. I'll be going to the police station tomorrow to fill out a statement--

REBECCA

How'd you come to find it in a trash bin, Dad?

KENNETH

I was waiting for the signal to change. I heard this noise—paper rustling in the sidewalk litter basket. I looked down and into it, thinking it might be a cat digging around. I saw the hand, first. One of the people from the firm was right behind me and I had them go back into the building and call the paramedics. They were there in less than ten minutes, the police right behind them.

(Awkward pause)

EDNA

Oh, I get so tired of being depressed by humanity's shortcomings.

CORNEL

Yes. Well, it does put something of a damper on the evening--

VIVIANE

If the baby lives—what happens to it?

ROSALIND

Kenneth, we don't know what sex it is?

KENNETH

It's a boy. He'll go into a foster home. If the mother's identity is never learned, I suppose he'll be put up for adoption.

VIVIANE

Not a good way to begin life, is it? Thrown into a trash bin a couple hours after you're born ...?

CORNEL

And perhaps his life in the womb may have been as much a disadvantage—if the mother is a drug addict or has HIV--

VIVIANE

I feel *cheap*. Is that the right word, Becky? No, not *cheap*. Less civilized by this incident.

KENNETH

Sorry, Viviane. But the dismal fact is, our society is awash in cold-hearted malevolence all of the time. I just don't expect to have it present itself to me on New Year's Eve in the form of an abandoned newborn. In other forms? Yes. But not this way.

CORNEL

It jangles our moral sensibility. Murder reported by the news media seems to leave us without much genuine anxiety. But a mother abandoning her newborn child? It scares us.

VIVIANE

Yes. That's it, Cornel. Fear.

CORNEL

For most of us, *infanticide* is a terrifying form of murder--

VIVIANE

What was that play, Roz, you turned down several years ago—where the mother kills her two children when the father discards her for a younger woman? It was one of those gloomy Greek classics--

EDNA

Another Greek myth?

ROSALIND

Medea.

VIVIANE

Yes. *Medea*.

CORNEL

Another first wife tossed over for a younger woman--

VIVIANE

Yes. But do they all kill their children in revenge?

CORNEL

No. At least, I've never had a divorce case where *infanticide* resulted when the husband turned in his old wife for a younger one--

EDNA

Do these things happen in societies where *polygamy* is allowed?

CORNEL

I don't know. I'm not a cultural anthropologist.

EDNA

Becky?

REBECCA

In some cases—but I think the motive is more convoluted than a want for revenge. It could be economical or saving face--

(VIVIANE salutes BECKY with her drink; BECKY smiles, then turns to the liquor tray)

VIVIANE

Never the simple answer for our little *Rumpole*.

CORNEL

Rumpole?

ROSALIND

Yes. *Rumpole of the Bailey*.

REBECCA

Sunny forgot the *ginger ale* ...

IVY

There isn't any.

REBECCA

The refrigerator had two full bottles in it last night?

IVY

Sunny says Ms. Young-Sternlight drank it all.

(IVY holds up a half-filled glass of cola)

There's plenty of cola in the cupboard ...

REBECCA

Not the dumbwaiter, I hope?

(IVY giggles; REBECCA gives
VIVIANE a guilty glance)

I phoned and told Ivy what Colby did--

VIVIANE

I figured as much. Well—you've got to give him credit for learning *dramatic entrances* early--

REBECCA

I wish he'd do them somewhere else.

VIVIANE

There's some ginger ale in my kitchen, Becky.

REBECCA

Thanks, Aunt Viviane. Cola'll do.

(REBECCA pours herself a cola.
In the meantime, ROSALIND goes
to the liquor tray and looks it
over before pouring herself a
glass of white wine)

IVY

Ms. Young-Sternlight isn't having dinner with us tonight.

REBECCA

Why not?

IVY

Sunny gave her a couple of tranquilizers to calm her down after Colby's surprise visit. They calmed her down to the point that she's as functional as a *drunken sailor*.

VIVIANE

How would you know about a "drunken sailor?"

IVY

I don't. That was Sunny's *figure of speech*.

ROSALIND

Sunny better keep an eye on her.

IVY

They're Ms. Young-Sternlight's tranquilizers. She has a prescription for them--

VIVIANE

Ah—the truth comes out about *Ms. Efficiency*. She has an *Achilles' Heel*.

EDNA

Another Greek allusion.

CORNEL

I find her a bit peculiar.

EDNA

Not as peculiar as that new paralegal you hired.

(Finishing off her wine)

CORNEL

I didn't hire her. Personnel hired her.

VIVIANE

But it's your law firm, Cornel. Don't you have any say-so in personnel matters?

CORNEL

Do you oversee all personnel matters at your agency, Viviane?

VIVIANE

Yes.

CORNEL

Well—unless something *earth-shattering* happens, I let the office manager and personnel people take care of the hiring and firing. Besides, *that* new paralegal met all the job requirements and had excellent letters of recommendation--

EDNA

It's a known fact that the less qualified or efficient get the best recommendations—particularly if they have job security at a

place that wants to get rid of them. She came from a government office, didn't she?

CORNEL

(Avoidingly)

Would you like me to refill your glass, Edna?

(The doorbell buzzes)

Who's that?

EDNA

It must be Felix.

IVY

Dad's not coming, Mrs. Lionheart. He's sick. Flu.

VIVIANE

Perhaps it's Colby, coming in the conventional way ...?

REBECCA

(Explicit but not rude)

He wasn't invited.

(VIVIANE smiles a mischievous smile)

VIVIANE

How ungracious of you, Becky. And we're short one person at the dinner table.

(VIVIANE winks at ROSALIND)

EDNA

Actually, we're short by two people. Remember—Ms. Young-Sternlight is indisposed?

VIVIANE

Wouldn't it be nice to have Colby join us?

REBECCA

He'll be watching the *countdown* on TV. He always does.

VIVIANE

But we'll have eaten long before midnight, Becky.

(REBECCA turns to her mother,
showing some element of dis-
tress)

REBECCA

Why is it necessary to invite Colby?

ROSALIND

You don't have to if you don't want to, darling--

REBECCA

He's so—er—*hyperactive*.

(VIVIANE starts to laugh)

You're teasing me?

VIVIANE

A little reprisal for making fun of me over my lack of ice-skating skills.

REBECCA

Funny, Aunt Viviane--

(The door opens and SUNNY
enters)

(ROSALIND turns toward her)

SUNNY

Mrs. Lionheart, there's a Mr. Dennis Cryer here to see you?

ROSALIND

(Astounded)

Denny? Here? At our door?

(KENNETH steps over to SUNNY)

KENNETH

How'd he get by security?

SUNNY

He says he told Mr. Anderson he's Mrs. Lionheart's brother and showed his passport. Mr. Anderson let him on the elevator.

ROSALIND

Why didn't Mr. Anderson call us first?

SUNNY

Should I call downstairs and ask ...?

ROSALIND

It's all right. Please show him in, Sunny.

(KENNETH turns and looks at
ROSALIND)

(SUNNY exits)

VIVIANE

Talk about coincidences—Roz and I were talking about him earlier.

(A trifle unsettled, ROSALIND
takes a couple sips of her
wine)

KENNETH

We haven't seen him since Becky was born--

ROSALIND

(Now, suspicious; perhaps,
SHE displays an edge of
anger, too)

What's he want after all this time?

VIVIANE

You'll find out soon enough.

(SUNNY re-enters, ushering in DENNY CRYER. HE is wearing the same clothes as in Scene 1, except he now has on a coat. He looks quite "seedy")

DENNY

I just flew in from Indonesia--

VIVIANE

I bet your arms are tired?

(HE looks over at VIVIANE, a crooked smile appearing on his mouth)

DENNY

I remember you. You were at the hospital that day. You're—er—a—Viviane, aren't you?

VIVIANE

Yeah—that's me--

DENNY

Full of jokes then, too.

VIVIANE

Some would say, *smart aleck* remarks.

KENNETH

Denny, take off your coat. Sunny ...?

(HE takes off the coat and hands it to SUNNY, along with the red baseball cap. SUNNY exits with these items. His tee-shirt is old, soiled, and torn under one arm

(DENNY shakes KENNETH'S outstretched hand, then HE moves into the room, curiously ignoring ROSALIND. HE looks at EDNA and CORNEL)

These are my parents, Denny. Edna and Cornel—Rosalind's brother, Denny.

(HE shakes hands with both EDNA and CORNEL)

CORNEL

Understand you play baseball? Have you been playing it in Indonesia?

DENNY

I've played baseball all over the western side of the Pacific Rim, Cornel—but not in Indonesia.

(DENNY turns toward REBECCA and IVY, his eyes settling on his niece)

DENNY

I didn't get a very good look at you in the hospital, Rebecca. You were wrapped up like a freshly baked loaf of bread.

REBECCA

An eight-pound loaf of bread.

DENNY

Yeah—eight pounds.

(To ROSALIND)

I'd recognize her out of a million kids. She looks just like you at 15.

(DENNY turns and spots the Christmas tree. HE crosses to it)

Hey, man—look at the Christmas tree! Still up. How about that? But no presents? Yeah—right. It's no longer Christmas. They've all been opened days ago. No one holds off opening Christmas presents ...

(HE turns away, sees IVY and moves to her)

REBECCA

This is my best friend Ivy.

(DENNY just stares dully at IVY for a few seconds, then HE turns to and puts his hands on REBECCA'S shoulders. HE looks at her tightly)

DENNY

The Japanese are smart—real smart. You got to be a team player. There is no place for individuality or grand standing. You gotta know your place. I spent a lot of time playing ball in Japan. Then I coached for a while in Taiwan.

KENNETH

You're not playing any longer, Denny ...?

(DENNY ignores KENNETH'S question. HE takes his hands away from REBECCA'S shoulders and turns toward ROSALIND)

DENNY

Hey—*rat-face*, I see you're gonna be a *big cheese* in Washington, D.C. You're gonna set the world right, huh?

ROSALIND

Hardly, in two years--

DENNY

Read in the newspaper in Taipei that you've been picked because you're the perfect role model when it comes to *family values*.

(HE turns and addresses the others)

That's a big laugh, considering we came from a screwed-up family--

REBECCA

Dysfunctional ...?

DENNY

What's that mean?

REBECCA

Screwed up.

ROSALIND

(To DENNY)

Perhaps I learned from what shortcomings our family had—but you didn't?

(DENNY whips around, eye-to-eye with ROSALIND)

DENNY

Or maybe it was what that idiot counselor in high school said was the "first born advantage"? Remember that jerk? He combed his hair from the neck up and over the top of his bald head.

ROSALIND

Denny, why are you here?

DENNY

Aa-ah, *rat-face*—ain't you being unkind?

ROSALIND

Suspicious.

KENNETH

How about a drink, Denny?

DENNY

Yeah—fine, Ken. What'cha got?

KENNETH

Wine, bourbon, cola--

DENNY

Haven't you got bottled water?

KENNETH

Yes.

DENNY

I'm taking medicine—water is about all I can handle.

(KENNETH takes a bottle of non-carbonated water, pours it into a glass and adds a couple of ice cubes)

CORNEL

You can catch all kinds of diseases in those south Asian countries--

DENNY

(To CORNEL)

Yeah—practically anything you can think of is waiting under a rock for you. But what I got good old Indonesia gave me free of charge. Real generous of them. All kinds of things. Yeah—real generous of them.

(HE takes a hungry gulp of water, nearly finishing off the glass. KENNETH takes the glass back and refills it with more water)

ROSALIND

What were you doing in Indonesia?

DENNY

Well—when the coaching didn't pay off in Taiwan, I got a job with this Indonesian company on some *damn* island in the South China Sea--

(DENNY stops; HE sniffs the air)

What's that I smell? *J'eez*, don't tell me I've interrupted your dinner? And you're all dressed up.

REBECCA

We have a *Feast to the New Year* every year--

DENNY

A family tradition? Part of your family values, *rat-face*? Ain't that like you.

(KENNETH hands the glass of water to DENNY)

KENNETH

You're welcome to join us, Denny.

DENNY

Hey—love your manners, Ken--

VIVIANE

Two couldn't make it tonight. Sunny always cooks lamb roasts--

DENNY

Sacrificial lambs? Does she *slit* their throats herself?

ROSALIND

Stop it, Denny!

DENNY

I could use a little flesh of the lamb. Most people gain a pot belly as they get older ...

EDNA

Playing baseball has kept your weight down--

DENNY

It's not playing baseball, Edna. No. I haven't played baseball in eight years.

(To ROSALIND)

Who are the two not making it? A couple of *swishy* actor-friends of yours, *rat-face*--

REBECCA

Will you stop calling Mom that!?

DENNY

Ah-ah, a little rebel, huh? And an only child.

(To ROSALIND)

Why didn't you have a second child? Afraid?

(Back to REBECCA)

Man—you must be spoiled.

VIVIANE

She's got the brains to get away with it, too.

DENNY

(To VIVIANE)

Her god-mother. Right?

(To REBECCA)

I never really had a mother to speak of--

ROSALIND

Mother was an ill woman--

DENNY

My fault. "She was never the same after she gave birth to you, Denny." That's what Dad always said. What did he care?

(A pause)

KENNETH

When did your plane arrive, Denny?

DENNY

About an hour ago—at *JFK*.

KENNETH

Non-stop from Indonesia?

DENNY

No. From Jakarta to Taipei, then across the wide Pacific to *LAX*. Had a stop-over in *LAX*—flew out this morning.

(Quickly to *VIVIANE* and over
an unpleasant laugh)

And, boy, are my arms tired!

KENNETH

If you'd like to go lie down--

DENNY

No, no. There's plenty of time to sleep—later. Plenty of time.

(*SUNNY* enters)

SUNNY

Dinner is ready, Mrs. Lionheart--

DENNY

"Dinner is ready"?

(*HE* expels another disagree-
able laugh)

I thought it was butlers who said that and only in the movies. Hey, this is too much, *rat*--

(HE stops abruptly; HE turns to REBECCA, and in the most passive way, asks:)

Is it okay if I call her *Rozzy*?

(A long pause)

ROSALIND

Sunny, would you set up another place. Mr. Cryer is joining us.

(SUNNY exits)

DENNY

But I'm not dressed for a *traditional* feast.

KENNETH

Where's your luggage?

DENNY

I—er—put it in a locker at the airport.

EDNA

All of it?

DENNY

No—er—just a carry-on, Edna. I travel *light*.

ROSALIND

Then you're not planning on staying in Manhattan?

DENNY

Not for very long. I'm going home--

ROSALIND

Home? Our childhood home?

DENNY

Yeah.

ROSALIND

We don't have that home any longer, Denny. It was sold after Dad died.

DENNY

(Suddenly, HE is highly exuberant)

Hey—the *feast* will get cold! I'm dying to taste these *sacrificial lambs*!

(DENNY puts out his left arm to REBECCA. REBECCA hesitates for a moment but refuses to let DENNY intimidate her. SHE takes it and they exit out through the door. But no sooner do they exit, than DENNY re-appears)

Let's don't talk behind people's backs. It ain't polite, you know?

(HE laughs and re-exits)

(ROSALIND gives KENNETH a worried look. HE takes her arm and they move out the door, followed by VIVIANE, IVY, EDNA and CORNEL)

(BLACKOUT)

END OF ACT I, SCENE 2

ACT II

SETTING: Close to midnight.

AT RISE: EDNA and CORNEL enter, neither physically nor emotionally buoyant. CORNEL immediately goes to the liquor tray. HE pours himself a vodka and EDNA a glass of the red wine, which finishes off the bottle. In the meantime, EDNA moves over to one of the easy chairs. SHE plops into it with a groan.

EDNA

No wonder Rosalind has had little to do with him. He's downright *bizarre!*

CORNEL

As a lawyer, I have always considered it *taboo* to judge people on first impressions. But with him, I'd have to make an exception.

(CORNEL takes the glass of red wine to her

EDNA

Well—I certainly wouldn't trust him any further than I could throw him.

CORNEL

As thin as he is, that could entail several yards.

(VIVIANE enters)

EDNA

(To VIVIANE)

What's he doing?

VIVIANE

(Weary disgust)

Brushing his teeth.

EDNA

He needs to do more than brush his teeth.

VIVIANE

It'd be useless. They say that one's personality is set by two years of age.

(VIVIANE pours herself a short bourbon)

EDNA

He's certainly vague about what he has been doing in Indonesia.

VIVIANE

He probably *hung out* with pirates--

EDNA

I'd believe that—if there were still pirates on the *high seas*.

CORNEL

There are—and in *that* part of the world.

(VIVIANE crosses to the other easy chair and sits. Then SHE takes a sip of her bourbon)

(REBECCA and IVY enter; they are talking)

REBECCA

I don't think he's well.

IVY

Probably has *malaria*. He shakes. Did you watch his hands while he was eating?

REBECCA

Real *palsy*. Does *malaria* cause *palsy*?

IVY

All kinds of things can cause *palsy*—

VIVIANE

Beware, *doctor*—he's touchy at the slightest provocation--

EDNA

He is, isn't he?

VIVIANE

I thought he was going to bite our heads off when we asked about Indonesia--

REBECCA

He thinks we're *prying*--

EDNA

You'd think we were asking him for an *alibi*--

VIVIANE

That's it exactly—isn't it? He has *guilt* written all over him. And full of inconsistencies. I bet he's never even been in Indonesia.

IVY

And he wears a *chip on his shoulder* the size of the Empire State Building--

REBECCA

Paranoid to the *nth degree*--

CORNEL

Almost like a cheating spouse.

VIVIANE

And you come in contact with plenty.

CORNEL

Yet few of my cases are for *adultery*, Viviane—mostly just plain, ordinary incompatibility.

EDNA

You don't suppose he's been involved in illegal activities in Indonesia and has gotten away by the *skin of his teeth*? We might be harboring a criminal?

VIVIANE

Is *The Black Market* a big thing over there?

CORNEL

The Black Market is a big thing everywhere.

(ROSALIND, KENNETH and DENNY
enter)

DENNY

The Black Market, Cornel? What'ya know about the underworld in Asia?

CORNEL

Well—I guess no more than what I read in the papers and--

DENNY

You'd be surprised what they deal in—CDs to oranges!

(SUNNY enters with a bowl of ice cubes. SHE transfers the ice into the canister on the liquor tray. Then finding that the bottle of red wine is empty, SHE takes that bottle and the bowl and starts to exit)

Hey—Sunny. That were some great dinner.

SUNNY

(Quietly polite)

Thank you, Mr. Cryer. I'm glad you liked the *roasted* lamb.

DENNY

I find it kind of hard to believe that everyone here is not as big as *sumo wrestlers*.

KENNETH

Sunny makes sure that what she cooks is well-balanced and nutritious--

DENNY

Like a training camp but with all kinds of *herbs and spices* mixed in ...?

SUNNY

Yes, Mr. Cryer. With *herbs and spices* mixed in.

(SUNNY exits)

DENNY

Yet—she don't look like a cook. Not to no big Broadway star.
And not with a body like that ...

ROSALIND

Sunny was in the entertainment field before she came to work for us.

DENNY

I was right, huh? With a body like that, she had to be a *chorus girl*. She was in one of your shows and *saw the light*, huh?

(ROSALIND'S usual sophisticated manner is wearing thin with DENNY. SHE is beginning to take on the impatience SHE had with him as a child and teenager)

ROSALIND

What do you mean by that?

DENNY

Hey—ain't it better to be tagging along in the wake of an important person like you than in some *chorus line* with no one ever knowing who you are?

ROSALIND

Considering the fact that I've never been in a musical, Denny, I miss the connection--

DENNY

Oh, come on, *rat*—

(Aside to REBECCA)

Excuse me—*Rozzy*.

(Back to ROSALIND)

J'eez—Don't act *dumb*.

(KENNETH steps to the liquor tray and pours ROSALIND a glass of white wine and hands it to her)

KENNETH

A glass of water, Denny?

DENNY

Sure, Ken. Not so much ice. It hurts my teeth.

REBECCA

You should see a dentist while you're here, Uncle Dennis.

DENNY

(Laughing with a *croaking*
delivery)

Uncle Dennis!?

(Turning on ROSALIND)

You hear that, *Rozzy!*? *God*, I don't know if I ought to be insulted or not. It's so—correct. Is that the kind of thing you think is missing from American *family values*—calling her uncle "Uncle Dennis" rather than "Denny" or just "Unckie"? And what the *hell* is *family values*? Is it some kind of *law* parents lay down on their kids?

ROSALIND

We're talking about issues that focus on the *nuclear family*. We're talking about the relationship between parents and their children--

DENNY

Like the relationship we didn't have with our parents? That means we had no *family values*.

ROSALIND

We had strong *family values*, Denny—they just went over your head.

DENNY

Why do I always get blamed for everything?

ROSALIND

You don't—didn't. You always brought things on yourself. But when we speak of *family values*, we are talking about such things as what happens to the family where divorce, single parents, education--

DENNY

Education? I went two years to a community college—but you got to go to Harvard.

VIVIANE

Education here is referring, as an example, to teenagers who don't finish high school. Teenage girls who get pregnant because they are sexually active but haven't been educated--

DENNY

They're *sluts*! It ain't gonna make no difference what kind of a family they come from.

REBECCA

Are you saying that because Ivy and I are teenager girls, we *sleep around*?

DENNY

You said it, I didn't--

EDNA

But you did say it, Denny.

DENNY

No, I didn't.

CORNEL

Afraid you made a *generalized statement*--

DENNY

What's that mean?

VIVIANE

Putting everyone in the same *basket of loose morals*.

REBECCA

Family patterns that were present in the household fifty years ago no longer exist—for the most part—*Unckie*. You used to have mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, grand-parents, aunts and uncles all living together in the same house. But since the 60s, attitudes and conduct toward the family unit started changing. Of all my friends, I'm probably the only one who's lucked out with being raised in a tight, loving nuclear family. Everything intact.

IVY

Yeah—But there are the exceptions, Mr. Cryer. You know, where there's the single-parent household with strong values? I'm one of those exceptions.

(BECKY gives IVY "thumbs up")

(DENNY does not understand what the girls are saying; HE turns

back to ROSALIND)

DENNY

We never knew our grandparents, did we?

ROSALIND

No. Our maternal and paternal grandparents died before we were born.

DENNY

(Befuddled)

Yeah—that's right. Mom and Dad were—er—orphans in a *scary* world. A world full of *horrible* monsters!

(Desperately)

They had love—once. Didn't they have love, once?

ROSALIND

They were only children. That was what they had in common.

EDNA

I don't think that we can go backward—only forward, developing new standards for the family. I'm sure that in spite of the changes in the family, most want a family life that consists of marriage and children.

ROSALIND

Perhaps, a *broader* structure is called for ...?

VIVIANE

How do you mean?

ROSALIND

I don't have any idea, Viviane. All I know is that with this two-year appointment, I am supposed to find a way for the arts to define where the family is going. After all, we've been told from the time of the Greeks that art reflects life—but it also embodies and molds our attitudes--

DENNY

(Miffed)

And they picked you because you're so perfect. Right?

KENNETH

Rosalind has been able to successfully balance a threefold lifestyle, Denny—wife, mother and career woman. In all ways, she has actualized a *perfect world*.

ROSALIND

Thank you, darling. But remember that certain frailties that make us human can also pull the carpet out from under our smug little feet.

KENNETH

(Teasingly)

"Beware the fall of the arrogant," in other words?

DENNY

(To IVY)

You telling me that a *perfect world* is sort of a team effort?

IVY

Yes—like in baseball--

DENNY

(Defiantly)

It don't always work out like that--

VIVIANE

Well—there is always the occasional *rotten apple* ...

ROSALIND

The ideal, of course, is to develop a forum for the arts that stress themes of strong American values—Find a way to strengthen the nuclear family system without harming individuality and career-choices--

DENNY

God—the *damn* women's rights thing--

ROSALIND

No. Not at all. You're missing the point--

DENNY

Calling me *stupid* again?

ROSALIND

No, Denny. Oh—you're reacting the way you always did when we were kids--

DENNY

How was that?

ROSALIND

Offensively.

DENNY

Maybe it's because you think you're such *hot shit*!?

KENNETH

Watch your tongue, Denny.

DENNY

What'ya gonna do about it, Mr. Lawyer? Cut my tongue out?

EDNA

You know, I never stayed home when Kenneth was growing up. I worked. And we didn't have your large family unit either. Neither did my Mother—particularly after World War II, when she discovered she liked being out in the real world, working and earning her own money. Neither she nor I had any intentions of being the mother who stayed home. It didn't hurt me and it certainly didn't hurt Kenneth. Did it, Kenneth?

KENNETH

(Slightly amused)

No, Mother.

EDNA

Well—there you are.

REBECCA

(To EDNA)

There were times when I wished Mom was simply a wife and mother—although I can't quite see her baking and dusting furniture--

ROSALIND

(Shocked)

You would have wanted me at home—all of the time?

REBECCA

(To ROSALIND)

Yes—sometimes. But, at least, you've been here during the days and on the night the theatre is dark. Of course, you don't get up until eleven in the morning. I'm in school at that time. But you're up when I get home at four--

ROSALIND

Why have you never said anything before?

VIVIANE

Because she discovered science before she discovered you slept late--

REBECCA
Dad was here in the evenings. Then, I guess it was just normal
for our *family unit*.

DENNY
What about *Jesse James*?

CORNEL
(Baffled)
Jesse James ...?

DENNY
He came from one of these family things--

REBECCA
Nuclear.

DENNY
Yeah—but he became an outlaw.

(Everyone but REBECCA is confused
by this remark)

REBECCA
There was a civil war, and certain economical and social situa-
tions influenced how he turned out--

DENNY
You sound like a *damn* politician.

REBECCA
I do? In what way?

DENNY
Politicians always turn things around to their advantage.

REBECCA
I'm not turning anything around to my advantage. I'm only trying
to make you understand that there isn't a simple answer to what
makes a modern family as opposed to what it was in the past--

DENNY
Shit!

KENNETH

Denny, I'm not going to ask you again to watch your tongue--

DENNY

Listen to the way she talks. It *ain't* natural--

(RUBY enters)

RUBY

Excuse me, but the telephone was ringing. It woke me. I hope you don't mind but I answered it. It was from the hospital, Mr. Lionheart.

DENNY

(Startled)

Who are you? Where in the *hell* did you *pop* up from?

ROSALIND

This is Ms. Ruby Young-Sternlight, an aide from Washington. She is staying--

DENNY

"An aide from Washington"? They've actually sent you an *aide*?
(A rude laugh)

You gonna get secret service agents, too?

KENNETH

What about the call from the hospital, Ms. Young-Sternlight?

RUBY

It was from a Dr. Pierson. He said "the baby died"--

DENNY

Baby? What baby?

VIVIANE

Kenneth found an abandoned baby on his way home this evening.

CORNEL

It was dumped in a trash bin on the sidewalk--

IVY

The *umbilical cord* was still attached.

KENNETH

I went with the paramedics to the hospital—I asked to be notified on the baby's condition--

EDNA

(Sniffling)

Oh—the poor little thing.

(DENNY suddenly turns on EDNA,
angrily yelling:)

DENNY

Why in the *hell* are you whimpering about some *damn* baby that's
been dumped in a garbage bin!?

(RUBY starts to exit but DENNY
goes to her and pulls her back
into the room. HE motions for
her to sit on the couch. SHE
does)

ROSALIND

(Repelled)

Denny--

(HE pivots in on ROSALIND)

DENNY

What about me!? What about me!?

ROSALIND

(Challenging him)

What about you?

DENNY

You abandoned me and you never even *blinked an eyelid*.

ROSALIND

I "abandoned" you? Where'd you ever come up with such an idea?

DENNY

You went away to college and never came back.

ROSALIND

Going to college was hardly an act of abandonment, Denny--

DENNY

You left me alone.

ROSALIND

You had everything to yourself for the first time in your life. It's exactly what you wanted—Mom, Dad and the tree house--

DENNY

Momma died when you was at Harvard!

KENNETH

Denny, I think you better calm down--

(KENNETH steps in, putting a hand on DENNY'S arm. DENNY shakes him off)

DENNY

Hands off, big time lawyer!

ROSALIND

I won't be blamed for your weaknesses, Denny--

DENNY

I'm your brother. You're supposed to watch out for me. Momma said that--

ROSALIND

She never said anything of the kind—nor Dad--

DENNY

Because you're older, you're supposed to watch out for me.

ROSALIND

We each have our own lives--

DENNY

Momma—Dad ...

(HE looks from side to side, distraught and disoriented)

ROSALIND

They're not here any longer, Denny. They've been gone for years--

(DENNY runs his fingers through

his hair; HE is suddenly very
confused)

DENNY

I gotta go h—home.

(HE looks over at ROSALIND,
pure hatred flashing out of
his eyes)

You left me alone with those maniacs!

(Again, HE runs his fingers
his hair)

I wanted to go to Harvard, too, but *they* said my grades were no
good. I had to go to a community college. If I hadn't been spot-
ted by that *scout* ...

(HE stops)

ROSALIND

You've never been able to handle the responsibility of taking care
of yourself. It's why you've stayed in baseball—Needing someone
to tell you what to do—to do things for you. It's like the mili-
tary for lots of people—a place that feeds, boards and takes full
responsibility for their lives--

DENNY

You've had all the breaks! Why you? Why not me?

ROSALIND

I can't answer that. Perhaps we make our own opportunities, or
the opportunities find us--

DENNY

You owe me, *rat-face*--

ROSALIND

I don't owe you anything, Denny. There is a limit to being one's
keeper. I've never felt obligated to be yours--

DENNY

You're my sister—you gotta be responsible for me--

ROSALIND

(Losing her temper)

No! I'm not responsible for you! What are you up to!? Why are you trying to lay this *guilt* on me!?

KENNETH

(Startled by her animosity)

Rosalind ...?

DENNY

You always were a cold-blooded *bitch*!

(KENNETH steps in between them)

KENNETH

All right, Denny. Obviously you've come here tonight for no other purpose than to *pick at old bones*--

(DENNY turns to CORNEL. In the meantime, ROSALIND regains her composure)

DENNY

What kind of a lawyer are you, Cornel?

CORNEL

Divorce cases--

DENNY

Good money in it?

(SUNNY enters with a corked bottle of red wine and places it on the liquor tray)

CORNEL

Excellent money. Over fifty percent of marriages end in divorce.

DENNY

That many?

CORNEL

Probably more. I stopped looking at the statistics years ago.

(DENNY turns to KENNETH)

DENNY

And you, Ken? Divorce cases, too?

KENNETH

No. Wills, estates and trusts.

DENNY

Hey—no murder cases?

KENNETH

No. That's not the firm's area of expertise--

(SUNNY starts to exit)

DENNY

Tell Sunny to stay, Ken. I got something to say—something very, very important.

(There is something very cold in the way HE says this. KENNETH nods to SUNNY to take a seat next to RUBY. SHE does so)

You're all full of *little red ants*—none of you got no idea what you're talking about.

(HE gives out one of his grisly, unnerving laughs)

You all have been so eager on knowing what I was doing in the South China Sea, haven't you? I was in prison. Well—a prison of a sort. It was more like a *goddamn* concentration camp.

CORNEL

Why?

DENNY

Gambling debts.

(Turns on ROSALIND)

I wouldn't have been there if you'd sent me the money I asked for. But you never even wrote back—didn't even ask why I wanted the money. I made a couple of bad calls and got kicked out of baseball. It was when I was coaching in Taiwan. I got out of Taiwan—first plane out of Taipei. It went to Jakarta—but these Chinese guys had pretty good connections down there. Next thing I know, I'm in some kind of island *stockade*!

(HE looks around, his eyes
darting about the room)

There were *pirates* in this camp. *Pirates*! That's what they said they were—but they was *filthy maniacs*! They beat me up something terrible, then raped me. For a long time, one of 'em *used* me over and over. Then, when he got tired of me, another one took me over—I just kept being passed around. I—I got AIDS. Why keep a dead man in prison? Why feed a dying man? They let me out with a one-way ticket to the USA. Said I'd done my time. They put me on a boat to—some place on the west coast of the Philippines.

CORNEL

Manila?

DENNY

No—Maybe it was somewhere else. I was in a hospital ...

EDNA

On Taiwan? You said you flew back from Taipei?

DENNY

(To ROSALIND)

You didn't even write back, *rat-face*--

(REBECCA steps angrily forward)

REBECCA

I told you not to call Mom that--

(DENNY suddenly grabs REBECCA
around the neck. KENNETH moves

forward but DENNY pulls a revolver from under his sweat shirt. He waves it toward KENNETH)

DENNY

Back, Mr. Lawyer.

ROSALIND

(Appalled and frightened)

Denny, what are you doing? Don't hurt her--

DENNY

Scared, *rat-face*? Good, cause I've been scared for so long.

(Crying out)

Now—I just want to go home. To be buried, *rat-face*. To be buried in the family plot. But when I came here tonight, I wasn't sure what to do. But the *sacrificial lambs*—They make a lot of sacrifices to spirits and gods over in Asia. They sacrifice all kinds of things--

(Crying out, HE puts the barrel of the revolver to REBECCA'S head)

God—I don't want to die alone!

REBECCA

(Screaming, she reaches out for ROSALIND)

Momma ...

(Suddenly, COLBY enters with his boom box resounding. It catches DENNY off-guard. HE pivots toward COLBY. REBECCA shoves DENNY away and ROSALIND rushes at DENNY, coming between him and the audience the moment HE hits against a piece of furniture. There is a shot. ROSALIND steps back as DENNY slips to his knees. Then HE falls to the floor, face forward

(ROSALIND turns toward the audience. SHE is holding the

revolver awkwardly in her hands,
unsure and frightened

(REBECCA goes to her mother
as COLBY turns off the boom
box. VIVIANE, EDNA, SUNNY and
RUBY stand but it is VIVIANE
who goes to COLBY)

VIVIANE

How'd you know, Colby?

(CORNEL and KENNETH step to
ROSALIND and REBECCA)

COLBY

I didn't. Not until I got to the door. Then I heard him.

(HE points to DENNY'S prone
body. Then HE looks over at
REBECCA, flashing a weak smile)

I just couldn't let Becky meet the New Year without me!

(In the meantime, CORNEL draws
a handkerchief from his pocket
and takes the revolver from
ROSALIND, while KENNETH kneels
by DENNY'S body and feels for
a pulse)

KENNETH

Sunny, would you call down to security? Tell Mr. Anderson to
telephone the police. Tell him there has been a shooting—a fatal
shooting.

(SUNNY exits)

(BLACKOUT)

END OF ACT II

EPILOGUESETTING:

A few days later. The *apron* of the stage and directly in front of the curtain.

AT RISE:

A single spotlight opens on ROSALIND. SHE stands behind a speaker's podium. SHE looks out at the audience and without the use of notes, SHE speaks and speaks quite solemnly.

ROSALIND

None of us are infallible—and none of us should be so secure or complacent in our lives to feel immune to our mortal shortcomings. I have been appointed Director of the *Commission on the Enhancement of Family Values through the Arts*. Up to a few days ago, I felt secure in accepting this two-year position. An unexpected personal tragedy on New Year's Eve awakened me to question my qualifications as the one to head this commission. Reality broke into my world on New Year's Eve and stripped me of my comfort and confidence. Am I indeed the one for this position? Am I indeed a perfect role model? Yes. I have managed to successfully juggle the roles of wife, mother and actress over the last eighteen years—but until a few days ago, I was unaware, if not blind, to certain fallacies in my seemingly perfect world. At first, I felt it would be best to turn down this directorship—but my husband thought that I was still the best person for the job. "Wiser but sadder," as the saying goes—but also, less sure. How do we find a way through the arts to search out and establish suggested ways for re-structuring *family values*? Are we being sanctimonious in even thinking we can or should do this? How can we set up a forum whose main intent is to return America to a strong *family value system*? Should we do this? I need the guidance of the American public. Tell me what I should do in this imperfect world.

(BLACKOUT)

END OF THE PLAY

Endnote:

ⁱ Quatrain LXIX in the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*. Rendered into English Verse by Edward Fitzgerald. Doubleday & Company, Inc. Garden City, New York. 1952. This edition of the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* is in the Public Domain via Carol Christiansen, Doubleday Permissions Department, 1540 Broadway, New York City, NY 10036.