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PICTURE PERFECT
By Gary Earl Ross

Characters

Marcus Micheaux, a psychology professor

Beverly Hatcher Micheaux, a mystery writer, Marcus's wife

Gunther Creel, a Death Row inmate

Orlando Gaines, a mystery writer, Beverly's friend

Derek Palmer, a biology professor, Marcus's friend

Tara Palmer, a physician, Derek's wife

Will Summers, a physician, Tara's colleague

Carol Summers, Will's wife

Annalise Kyle, Beverly and Orlando's editor

Prologue

The stage is dark. A spotlight illuminates downstage center, where there is a heavy-looking table with a wire mesh partition rising from its midpoint. A chair is on either side of the table. One chair is occupied by MARCUS MICHEAUX, a thirtysomething man in a sports jacket, who sits with his hands folded atop the table. He checks his watch. After a moment, there is the sound of keys, followed by clanking doors and clinking chains. Wearing a prison uniform, GUNTHER CREEL, hands and feet shackled, shuffles into the light and slouches in the other chair.

MARCUS

Hello, Gunther.

CREEL

For a while I didn't think you were gonna make it, doc.

MARCUS

And miss your last day to receive visitors?

CREEL

I expected you an hour ago.

MARCUS

Well, I could tell you something came up at work and made me late.

CREEL

But that would be a lie, right?

MARCUS

No, it would be the truth, but I figure you don't much care how my day got screwed up.

CREEL

(Chuckles)

Funny how a little thing like being one night away from the electric chair can just suck the urgency out of everybody else's problems.

(MARCUS studies CREEL, who leans forward.)

CREEL

You haven't asked me yet how I'm feeling.

MARCUS

I think you'll tell me if you want me to know.

CREEL

Damn right. Give me control over the last sliver of my life.

It might help you face—

MARCUS

Don't try to comfort me!

CREEL

The purpose of our talks has never been your comfort, Gunther. You know that.

MARCUS

Here we go again. Therapy's supposed to make you understand yourself and patch the holes in who you are.

CREEL

You *were* listening.

MARCUS

But since fixing me is a moot point, you want to figure out how to keep other guys from being like me.

CREEL

More or less.

MARCUS

And write a book about your conversations with a monster.

CREEL

Perhaps a chapter, but not a whole book.

MARCUS

Oh, I forgot. You dance with all the psychos, don't you?

CREEL

Jealousy, from you?

MARCUS

Not really, doc. I guess somebody has to research people like me.

CREEL

Of all the murderers I've studied, and the dozen or so I've interviewed, I can safely say that almost no one is like you.

MARCUS

So I can take pride in something, huh?

CREEL

MARCUS
If you like.

CREEL
What makes me different?

MARCUS
For everybody else there's a pattern, a way of looking at them that explains who they are and why they did what they did.

CREEL
What kind of pattern?

MARCUS
Child abuse. Sexual abuse. Drug or alcohol dependency. Head trauma. Brain disease . . . Documented descents into madness.

CREEL
(leaning back and smiling)
Do tell.

MARCUS
Manson's mother swapped him for a pitcher of beer when he was a baby.

CREEL
Oops! There goes the self-esteem.

MARCUS
As a child Dahmer tortured animals.

CREEL
Practice will get you to Carnegie Hall.

MARCUS
Henry Lee Lucas's prostitute mother made him wear a dress, and one of his so-called uncles whacked him in the head with a two-by-four. I've found nothing like that in your past.

CREEL
Then what made me?

MARCUS
That's the puzzle. A good home. Stable, loving parents. A full scholarship to study art at NYU. Even before you graduated, several of your paintings were snapped up by leading galleries.

CREEL

How lucky can you get?

MARCUS

You came here from New York and taught painting for the Art Institute. You were married with a child at the time of your arrest. No one—not your parents or your brothers or your friends, not even your wife—had any idea what you had become.

CREEL

Bundy led a double life, right? He was smart too. Didn't he have a psychology degree?

MARCUS

Just a bachelor's.

CREEL

That's all I've got.

MARCUS

Bundy's adolescence was marked by violent outbursts and voyeurism and signs of a deepening obsessive personality. But you? No obsessions or compulsions—apart from painting.

CREEL

I'm told John Wayne Gacy was a painter, and so was Hitler.

MARCUS

You were actually good at it.

CREEL

Uniquely gifted, one critic said. Does it bother you there's nobody like me?

MARCUS

Actually, Gunther, I never said there was no one like you. I said there was *almost* no one like you. In some ways you remind me of Mudgett.

CREEL

Mudgett? Did he paint?

MARCUS

No, Herman Webster Mudgett was a doctor. His favorite alias was H.H. Holmes. He turned his Chicago boarding house into a torture palace for the 1893 World's Fair.

CREEL

Why do I remind you of him?

MARCUS

He had a hypnotic personality too. People—especially women—just seemed to gravitate toward him, the way they did to you. He could talk almost anybody into anything.

CREEL

A real charmer, eh?

MARCUS

And his motives were as vague. Maybe greed at first—he bilked his victims out of money, just as you cleaned out the bank accounts of yours. Unlike you, however, he spent it as fast as he got it.

CREEL

So he did it for the money?

MARCUS

With all the imagination he put into killing? Trapdoors and chutes, secret gas chambers, a special room for burning people alive. That was more than greed.

CREEL

It was genius.

MARCUS

It was a lack of conscience coupled with a curiosity about the mechanics of death. He wanted to know what it felt like to kill.

CREEL

What about me? After all these interviews, you must have some idea.

MARCUS

I know it wasn't for the money. By the way—

CREEL

No, I won't tell where I've hidden it. That goes into the ground with me.

MARCUS

I wasn't asking. I was going to share another shrink's theory, that by painting your victims so beautifully you were using canvas to undo the damage you did to their flesh.

CREEL

An opinion from another moron who never talked to me.

MARCUS

As if you'd have given him more to go on. In any case, I think his ideas are wrong.

Really?

CREEL

I suspect the simple truth is you liked it. You liked composing the horror tableau as much as you liked painting a picture.

MARCUS

A fusion of the impulse to create and the impulse to destroy.

CREEL

Something like that, but I still can't figure out what triggered it, or why the hypnotic personality that makes some people actors or lawyers or teachers made you a killer.

MARCUS

Maybe some things just pass all understanding.

CREEL

Isn't it pretty to think so.

MARCUS

Nice one, doc. My King James thrust parried by a Hemingway.

CREEL

The advantages of a liberal education.

MARCUS

And I was so close to whipping out my Oscar Wilde. The only thing worse than being talked about is not being talked about . . . when you're dead.

(Stands.)

It's been fun . . .

MARCUS

It was addictive, wasn't it?

CREEL

(Laughing.)

Talking to you?

MARCUS

No, the satisfaction you felt at each perfect kill. Evil is like that, isn't it? So subtle and addictive you've sold your soul before you know it.

CREEL

(Suddenly serious.)

What if I said it's more like a virus? Once you've got it, it changes you in ways you never imagined. Ever feel like you could do anything? I mean anything. Things that would've appalled you before. No shame, no boundaries, no limits.

MARCUS

There are always limits.

CREEL

That's so . . . conventional. So you. But rules are for prey, not for predators.

MARCUS

And you're a predator.

CREEL

Imagine a condor or an eagle, a great big bird that flies wherever it wants and eats whatever it wants. Nothing on earth is freer. Put it in a cage and it will survive, but it won't soar again until it's let out. Once it's out, it doesn't remember the hand that opened the cage door.

MARCUS

You're not sure what let you out of your cage.

CREEL

No, I *am* the cage, and there's something inside me that needs to soar. By freeing it, I free myself.

(Pause.)

Even when I'm strapped in tomorrow night, I'll be freer than you've ever been.

(MARCUS says nothing but continues to look at CREEL.)

CREEL

That's all, doc. I gotta get ready to walk into the pages of history.

(Begins to exit. Stops and turns.)

Oh, I left something for you with the guards out front. They're supposed to give it to you on your way out.

MARCUS

What is it?

CREEL

A gift to remember me by.

MARCUS

I'll be in the viewing room tomorrow night. Do you think I'll forget you?

CREEL

So long, Marcus. If there really is a hell, I'll light a candle for you.

(Turns to go but looks over his shoulder one last time.)

By the way, good luck with your promotion, and be sure to tell Beverly I said, Happy Anniversary.

(Exits.)

(MARCUS stands, stares after him a moment, then exits.)

(Blackout.)

Act One

Scene 1

Lights rise on a spacious living room. A fireplace and mantel are upstage center. The fireplace is crackling. Above the mantel, between open curtains, is a lighted portrait of the upper bodies of a man—MARCUS—and a woman. Smiling, arms linked, they look happy together. A bookcase is on either side of the fireplace. In front of the stage left bookcase sits a large couch perpendicular to the upstage wall. In front of the stage right bookcase sit two armchairs that match the couch. A coffee table is in front of the couch. A lamp table is between the chairs. Three folding chairs are arranged in a semicircle behind the armchairs. Behind the couch is a snack table and punchbowl.

(BEVERLY MICHEAUX enters from stage right, dressed for a party and carrying a tray. The woman in the painting, she crosses to the snack table and sets down the tray. She gazes about as if making sure everything is ready. Offstage, a telephone rings. She exits where she entered and returns, cradling a cordless phone and carrying a bottle of wine.)

BEVERLY

Where are you now, Annalise?

(Crosses to the table and sets down the wine.)

Uh huh. Oh, you're not far at all. Just follow Route 12A until you come to an outdoor store named Hallward's. Okay, turn left onto Cedar and follow it for about three miles, then turn right on Deer Run, but be careful because it twists and turns so much on these steep hills. After about two hundred yards the road forks and the path to the right goes up one last hill. Drive all the way to the top. We're the only house up there. We overlook the lake. Got it? Good. See you soon.

(BEVERLY clicks off and moves to the mantel, where she sets the phone. She steps back and admires the portrait. The doorbell rings. She closes the curtains, hiding the painting. Then she exits stage left. Voices are heard offstage.)

BEVERLY

Orlando!

ORLANDO

Hey, girl!

BEVERLY

You found us.

ORLANDO

You give perfect directions, sugar.

(BEVERLY enters, followed by ORLANDO GAINES, well dressed and visibly effeminate but not silly or foppish. The hand behind his back holds a bottle of wine with a red bow around its neck.)

BEVERLY

You're the first one here. Even Marcus isn't home yet.

ORLANDO

I came early to check out the new house. A bit off the beaten path, isn't it?

BEVERLY

We like the privacy and peace—at least I do.

ORLANDO

Marcus doesn't?

BEVERLY

He doesn't hate it. He's sort of indifferent to the outdoors, but he likes what makes me happy.

ORLANDO

Don't you ever get scared out here? Bears, wild things, fugitives from chain gangs or *Deliverance*?

BEVERLY

If we get in a jam, I still have my dad's gun upstairs.

ORLANDO

That old target pistol we used to shoot in the quarry on spring break?

BEVERLY

It still works.

ORLANDO

Sure, make the bear mad.

BEVERLY

I thought you were bringing a date, O, the new guy you've been seeing.

ORLANDO

Jeremy. He had to work at the last minute.

(Looks around, gazes up.)

Wow! Is it big enough? Cathedral ceilings! You could play some serious basketball in here. And look at that fireplace. What's behind the curtain?

BEVERLY

You'll have to wait till everybody's here. It's kind of a surprise.

ORLANDO

I have just the surprise for the fireplace.

(Holds up the wine bottle.)

BEVERLY

(Points to the food table.)

Wine can go there.

ORLANDO

(Handing her the bottle)

No, honey. This is a Pinot Grigio to kill for, for when you and Marcus are alone and want to get cozy by that fire.

BEVERLY

Oh, it doesn't have to be that fireplace. There's another one in the master bedroom upstairs.

ORLANDO

Aren't we the landed gentry?

(Walks downstage center. Peers out at audience.)

Beautiful French doors and a deck overlooking the lake? What a fabulous place!

BEVERLY

(Joining him downstage)

I love having coffee out there in the morning.

ORLANDO

Must be a terrific spot to write. Please tell me you work out there too.

BEVERLY

Maybe if I get a laptop. For now my computer's in one corner of our bedroom.

ORLANDO

I know old habits die hard, Beverly, but you're not a struggling writer married to a struggling professor anymore. You guys have made it. Marcus is about to get tenure—

BEVERLY

It's not a sure thing. He's still an associate professor.

ORLANDO

With all the work he's done on multiple murderers?

BEVERLY

Some of the older profs think he's more hotshot than scholar.

ORLANDO

They're just jealous of all the press he gets.

BEVERLY

There'll be even more if he and Derek nail that big National Science Foundation grant.

ORLANDO

What's the grant for?

BEVERLY

Let's see, how did he put it? Research on the psychobiology of homicidal impulse.

ORLANDO

That's a mouthful.

BEVERLY

With a truckload of NSF dollars attached to his name, the review committee will have no choice but to grant Marcus tenure and a promotion.

ORLANDO

If they don't, there's private practice, and with all the sickos he's interviewed, I'm sure Annalise is dying to offer him a book deal.

BEVERLY

She's already mentioned it. No doubt she'll try to corner him tonight and dangle the *New York Times* bestseller list in front of him.

ORLANDO

Speaking of bestsellers, you're doing well. Your last Danielle Castle mystery made a few lists.

BEVERLY

The modest seller list.

ORLANDO

Modest enough to buy a great place that's got to have at least one room you can use as an office.

BEVERLY

I like writing in the bedroom. It keeps me grounded. Not that I've been producing much of anything lately. Anyway, we might have . . . other plans for those extra rooms.

ORLANDO

Are you trying to tell me you can't drink wine tonight?

BEVERLY

Nooo. I might not be able to drink wine in a month or two. I think we're going to try this year.

ORLANDO

It's about time. What anniversary is this anyway?

BEVERLY

Seven. You know, the one they tell you to worry about. Marcus is supposed to lose interest in me and start scoping out younger women.

ORLANDO

Oh, honey, let me be the seven-year bitch. It doesn't suit you. Just be happy your husband worships the scuff marks on your shoes. You have the picture perfect marriage.

BEVERLY

I wouldn't say perfect, but pretty close. We're alike in so many ways it wouldn't surprise me to see Marcus looking back at me from the mirror. We're both quiet and reflective and—

ORLANDO

Don't forget driven.

BEVERLY

All right, driven. Each of us has always been fiercely independent. By the time we met, neither of us had any family left. We're together because we choose to be. And now I think we're both ready to consider . . . expansion.

ORLANDO

The Micheaux household—murder in fact and fiction, across the hall from diapers and bedtime stories, but I can't think of anybody who'd make better parents.

(Embraces her.)

BEVERLY

Thank you.

ORLANDO

If the Pinot Grigio helps and it's a boy and you want to name him Orlando . . .

BEVERLY

Come on, silly. Let me show you the rest of the house.

(BEVERLY begins to lead him off stage right.)

ORLANDO

Even if it's a girl. You remember Virginia Woolf's Orlando?

(MARCUS enters from stage left. BEVERLY and ORLANDO stop and turn. MARCUS carries a briefcase, which he sets down by the bookcase. BEVERLY hurries to him and throws her arms around him.)

MARCUS

Hi, hon—

(She smothers his greeting with a long kiss.)

ORLANDO

(Sighing, looking off to one side, then at his watch, finally at the lovers.)

So who says you can't keep in shape even in the off-season?

(BEVERLY and MARCUS break the kiss and seem a bit embarrassed by their passion.)

MARCUS

Uh . . . hi there, O. How are you?

ORLANDO

Fine, but not as well as you, Dr. Feelgood. Fabulous wife, fabulous career, fabulous hilltop house in the woods. By the way, Mrs. Feelgood was just about to give me the grand tour.

BEVERLY

(Leading MARCUS to the center of the room)

Want to come, sweetie?

MARCUS

No, you two go ahead. I've got to get a drink.

ORLANDO

Hear that, Bev? You sucked all the juice out of him.

BEVERLY
(Swatting ORLANDO's arm)

Hush.

ORLANDO
Left him gasping for Gatorade. You're a lucky man, Marcus.

BEVERLY
Come on, O.
(She begins to pull him off, stage right.)

ORLANDO
Seven years, huh? Looks more like seven days to me.

BEVERLY
(Offstage, laughing)
I thought I told you to hush!

(MARCUS moves down to the snack table, pops a chip into his mouth, and pours a cup of punch. The phone rings. Cup in hand, he goes to the mantel to answer it.)

MARCUS
Hello. Ken? Never expected to hear from you on a Saturday night. No, it's okay. We have people coming over but I've got a minute or two. What's up? Oh. Wait a sec. Let me get a pen.

(Sets his drink on the mantel, braces the phone with his shoulder, and takes a pen and notebook from a pocket.)

Okay. Preliminary stats inconsistent. Proposed database may be . . . flawed? Hmm. Well, Derek's coming here tonight. I'll pull him aside. Then we can take a look at everything over the next week. Really? I thought the review panel wouldn't meet until— Oh. All right. Tuesday then. Of course I'll keep this call under the radar. I appreciate the chance you're taking. Thank you so much.

(Clicks off and returns the phone to the mantel.)

Damn!

(The doorbell rings. Pocketing his pen and pad, MARCUS exits stage left to answer the door. Voices offstage.)

ANNALISE
Well, if it isn't *Most Wanted USA*'s favorite handsome shrink.

MARCUS

Come on in, Annalise.

(ANNALISE KYLE enters ahead of MARCUS.
Somewhat older than MARCUS, she is stylishly
dressed and carrying a wrapped package.)

ANNALISE

You could look happier to see me. I am the one who makes sure your wife's royalty
checks go out on time.

MARCUS

Sorry. I'm just tired after an all-day meeting.

ANNALISE

On Saturday? I thought being a professor beat working for a living.

MARCUS

Not when you're up for tenure—

ANNALISE

(Gazing around.)

What a majestic room!

MARCUS

—and competing for one of the biggest grants in university history.

ANNALISE

(Moving downstage.)

Love these French doors.

MARCUS

I guess it's ironic that a psychology professor should feel like a rat racing through a
maze designed by an undergraduate.

(Picks up his drink from the mantel.)

ANNALISE

Maybe it's time you changed rat races. What are you hiding behind that curtain?

MARCUS

A sort of house-warming gift. You'll see it later.

(Downs his drink and sets the empty cup on the
mantel.)

So I should jump from the academic rat maze to the publishing rat maze, eh?

ANNALISE

True crime is big, Doctor Micheaux, especially when the author gets up close and personal with the killer. Ann Rule?

MARCUS

I know. She worked alongside Ted Bundy at a suicide prevention hotline.

ANNALISE

The Stranger Beside Me was a big bestseller.

MARCUS

Books, especially bestsellers, don't count in Academe. What does is peer-reviewed articles in the right journals.

ANNALISE

Journals that nobody reads. Look, you've got what it takes to be a bestselling author. You're smart. You write lean, crisp prose. Your credentials prove you know a thing or two about evil. And you're good-looking enough to melt all the right hearts on all the right talk shows.

(Pauses and takes two steps toward him.)

So good-looking, in fact, that if you weren't married to one of my favorite authors, I'd lock you in my bedroom closet and let you out on a chain only three or four nights a week.

MARCUS

Annalise.

ANNALISE

Think about it, Marcus. Not just one book, but a series about the most infamous murderers of our time. You can start with the ones you've interviewed, like Creel, the one they just fried.

MARCUS

I was there for that.

ANNALISE

(As if she hasn't heard him.)

And you can move backward through time, profiling history's classic monsters.

MARCUS

It's all been done before.

ANNALISE

And will be done again. There's no reason why you, and my publishing house, can't profit from the public's fascination with the kind of people you study.

MARCUS

I'm not studying them for profit, Annalise. I'm trying to keep others from following in their bloody footsteps.

ANNALISE

Such a showy line, but with me as your editor you won't have to worry about missteps like that.

(BEVERLY and ORLANDO enter from stage right.)

BEVERLY

Annalise!

ORLANDO

I thought I heard my favorite nit-picking editor out here.

BEVERLY

(Moving to embrace her.)

I'm so glad you could come.

ANNALISE

(Embracing BEVERLY with her free arm.)

Good to see you, Bev. Here.

(Hands her the package.)

A token of my appreciation.

(To ORLANDO.)

As for you, my fine fickle fairy, this nit-picking editor has helped you make Skip Dandridge the best-selling gay detective in history. So show a little respect.

(As the next few lines are exchanged, BEVERLY sits in an armchair and begins to unwrap the package. MARCUS gets his cup from the mantel, refills it, and sits on the couch.)

ORLANDO

(Embracing ANNALISE and kissing her cheek.)

I love you, too, Annalise.

ANNALISE

That's better. Beverly, you and that delicious husband of yours have got hold of a wonderful house. Even if it is in the middle of nowhere, it's full of just the kind of character a writer needs to keep her creative juices flowing.

ORLANDO

You should see the upstairs. With a fireplace in the master bedroom and a sunken tub in the master bath, creativity won't be the only juice bubbling over.

BEVERLY

Orlando Gaines!

ANNALISE

Have your fun and be proud of it, Bev. If I had a man like Marcus, I'd send him off to work every day limping. But when he's gone, write. Danielle Castle has bodies to find, lives to save.

BEVERLY

(Holding up a laptop computer she has just unwrapped.)

Oh, Annalise, you shouldn't have.

ANNALISE

Yes, I damn well should. You owe me a book in a month.

BEVERLY

(Hesitant.)

Yes, I do.

ANNALISE

How's it coming?

BEVERLY

It's . . . coming.

ANNALISE

Good. I wanted to make it possible for you to work on it anytime, anywhere. When you described this place to me, I thought I'd unchain you from your bedroom and unpacking and send you down to the lake to write, or off into the woods. With a change of scene you might even get the book in before deadline.

BEVERLY

(Opening the lid and running her fingers over the keys.)

It's beautiful.

ANNALISE

Also, I figured you'd never buy one yourself because you're so . . . thrifty.

ORLANDO

(Sitting in the armchair beside BEVERLY's.)

You never gave me a laptop.

ANNALISE

Do you need one to hang from your Christmas tree? You're a tech rat, O. You have more computers in your apartment than Bill Gates.

(Turns to MARCUS.)

Besides, this gift is for a household with two writers who could be working at the same time.

MARCUS

I try to finish most of my computer work at the office. After that long commute, the only screen I feel like facing is the TV in the family room.

ANNALISE

Stop being difficult, Marcus, and write me the damn book already.

MARCUS

Tell you what. If things don't go the way I want on campus, I'll give your book idea serious consideration.

ANNALISE

Then there's hope after all.

(Turns to BEVERLY.)

So, you want to show me the rest of this grand manor? Can't wait to see the love nest.

BEVERLY

(Looking at MARCUS.)

Orlando, would you show Annalise the house? I need to speak to Marcus a minute.

ORLANDO

Sure. Then we can discuss what I'm getting instead of a laptop. I mean, fair is fair.

(Gesturing toward the stage right exit.)

ANNALISE

(Beginning to exit.)

You're such a child.

ORLANDO

(Following her out.)

Bet you're sorry now you gave me up for adoption.

BEVERLY

(After waiting till they've gone.)

Okay, honey, what is it?

MARCUS

What's what?

BEVERLY
Something's bothering you. I can tell.

MARCUS
You know me too well.

BEVERLY
(Setting aside the laptop and going to the couch.)
The better to help you.
(Sits beside him.)
Now what is it?

MARCUS
Ken Shavers from the NSF called a few minutes ago. There's a problem with our data.
With Derek's end of things.

BEVERLY
Serious?

MARCUS
Probably not, but anything that doesn't add up could sink the whole proposal. Most
likely it's something simple Derek can fix in minutes.

BEVERLY
So you're not worried?

MARCUS
You *do* know me too well.
(Sighs.)
I'll feel better when Derek gets here and I can pull him aside for a few minutes.

BEVERLY
I'm sure it'll be fine. Derek knows what he's doing.
(Sits closer.)
But if I know you, you'll worry anyway, all weekend, until everything is perfect again.

MARCUS
If something goes wrong, it could blow tenure and a full professorship.

BEVERLY
Nothing will go wrong. I'll have to keep you occupied this weekend so Derek can do his
job.
(Walking her fingers up his chest.)
Starting tonight, when everybody's gone . . .
(Kisses him, as he slips his arms around her.)

(ORLANDO and ANNALISE enter from stage right.)

ORLANDO

They're at it again!

(MARCUS and BEVERLY break their kiss.)

ORLANDO

Annalise, I'm going to need your pepper spray.

ANNALISE

Are you kidding? That's the only thing I've got to make *my* lips tingle.

BEVERLY

I thought you were on the grand tour.

ORLANDO

From the upstairs window we could see a car coming up that long driveway.

(The doorbell rings.)

BEVERLY

That must be Derek and Tara, and the new people.

MARCUS

The new people?

BEVERLY

Tara's new colleague at the hospital. He and his wife moved here recently from Seattle. Apparently she's a Danielle Castle fan, so I told Tara to bring them along. Hope you don't mind.

MARCUS

(Rising.)

Course not.

(Exits stage left.)

(There is the sound of voices in greeting. MARCUS returns, ushering DEREK and TARA PALMER and WILL and CAROL SUMMERS into the living room. All are dressed for a casual party, though DEREK is somewhat disheveled. CAROL carries a large purse. BEVERLY stands to greet them. TARA and DEREK cross to her. WILL and CAROL hang back with

MARCUS. CAROL covers her mouth, clearly excited at seeing BEVERLY.)

BEVERLY

Tara. Derek.

TARA
(Embracing BEVERLY.)

Hi, Bev.

DEREK
(Kissing her cheek.)

Hullo, Beverly.

BEVERLY
Seems like forever since I've seen you two.

TARA
I don't get out of the hospital nearly as much as I'd like.

DEREK
I see Marcus almost every day, but since you moved so far out of the city he can't surprise you by bringing me home for lunch the way he used to.

BEVERLY
You remember my friend Orlando.
(Stands aside to let ORLANDO reach up to shake DEREK's hand.)

DEREK
Yeah, I read one of your books. I enjoyed it.

ORLANDO
Queer P.I. for the straight guy. That's me.
(Releases DEREK's hand and shakes TARA's.)
Love your hair.

TARA
Thank you. Nice of you to notice.
(Shoots a look at DEREK.)
(ANNALISE moves closer to BEVERLY.)

BEVERLY
And this is my editor . . . our editor . . . Annalise Kyle.

(ANNALISE shakes hands with TARA and DEREK.
All three murmur hello.)

TARA

And these are our friends, Will and Carol Summers.

then

(WILL steps forward to shake first BEVERLY's hand,

hello.

ORLANDO's and ANNALISE's. Again, all murmur

her,

BEVERLY looks at CAROL and takes a step toward

and outstretched, but stops because CAROL remains
frozen.)

CAROL

(Suddenly grasping BEVERLY's hand with both of hers)

It's you, Beverly Hatcher! I can't believe it! It really is you. I've read all your books. I love
Danielle Castle. I've got to be your biggest fan!

(Blackout. Curtain.)

Scene 2

The curtain remains closed. Night sounds are heard—crickets, rustlings, the occasional owl. Soft light illuminates the stage's apron. ANNALISE and ORLANDO enter from stage left and move toward downstage center. They stop and look out over the audience as if looking up at stars.

ANNALISE

It's pretty out here. You never see this many stars over Manhattan.

ORLANDO

(Pointing toward the ground.)

Marcus said the solar-powered lights he put along this path lead right down to the lake. Apparently the view is spectacular there.

ANNALISE

(Patting her stomach.)

I could use the walk. I forgot how good a cook Beverly is.

ORLANDO

She's a country girl at heart.

ANNALISE

As in, food will fix what ails you.

ORLANDO

When we were in college, and I got dumped or beat up or depressed by my father's latest attack letter, she always took me out to eat. When we shared an apartment senior year, she cooked for me whenever something got me down.

ANNALISE

(Slipping her arm into his.)

You love her very much, don't you?

ORLANDO

Always will—and if you're going to ask whether I ever considered going straight, just for her, the answer is yes.

ANNALISE

Did you ever tell her . . . or try?

ORLANDO

No, I'm a realist. I am what I am. I would have ended up hurting her in a way I couldn't live with. Guess I'm kind of protective when it comes to Beverly.

ANNALISE

Is that why you chose to settle in the same town?

ORLANDO

I don't know. Maybe.

(They walk slowly toward the opposite side of the stage.)

ANNALISE

I always thought you'd be happier in New York.

ORLANDO

New Yorkers think everybody would be happier in New York.

ANNALISE

Because there's so much to do.

ORLANDO

So much I'd never get any work done. Sometimes I need stillness to think. Besides, this isn't such a bad area. It's got museums and theaters, a good writers' network and a first rate university surrounded by three respectable colleges . . .

ANNALISE

I must admit, it's peaceful right here.

ORLANDO

And if I were in Manhattan I would never have met Jeremy.

ANNALISE

That's the third time I've heard his name tonight. You sound like a man in love.

ORLANDO

Could be.

ANNALISE

Tell me about him.

ORLANDO

He's two years younger than I am and has this really sexy dancer's body. You'd never know he was a lawyer. And when he smiles . . .

(They exit stage right. After a moment TARA and WILL enter from stage left and move downstage center, where they stop and look out toward the audience.)

WILL

So many stars! It's kind of romantic.

(Looks at her.)

TARA

(Looking away.)

Poor Beverly. Your wife was on her like a flea on a dog.

WILL

She's more like a tick. Once she attaches herself to a host, she doesn't let go. She wants to be a writer, so she'll suck all the information she can out of your friend. Before the evening's over, she'll corner that editor, too, and tell her she has an idea for a book.

TARA

(Laughing.)

I'm sure neither one has ever heard that one before.

WILL

Your husband's a nice guy. To shoo everyone out like that, so he could help the other guy clean up.

TARA

Don't mistake it for nice. It was his excuse to be alone with Marcus to discuss their NSF grant proposal. I'm so tired of hearing about that.

WILL

(Slipping his arms around her waist from behind)

Then I won't ask what it's for.

(Nuzzles her neck.)

TARA

Will, Will, not here! What if somebody sees us?

WILL

I'm sick of nooners in cheap hotels and squeezing into the supply room during third shift. It's so . . . so *General Hospital*.

TARA

Don't go getting emotional on me.

WILL

What's that supposed to mean?

TARA

It's been three weeks. Don't start talking about loving me and leaving Carol and the kids and wanting me to leave Derek. It's such a cliché.

WILL

But you don't even respect him. You said so yourself. He went into biology and genetics because he couldn't hack med school.

TARA

(Turning in his arms and kissing him lightly.)

Let's just enjoy this for what it is, however long it is.

(Kisses him again, longer.)

ORLANDO

(Offstage.)

I don't know, Annalise. Maybe it was a snake. These are the woods, you know.

ANNALISE

But I can't stand snakes . . .

ORLANDO

It's not like he was going to jump up and kiss you.

(TARA and WILL break part, looking guilty, just as ANNALISE re-enters from stage right, with ORLANDO two steps behind her.)

ANNALISE

Disgusting things. Oh, hello.

ORLANDO

He was probably just as scared as—Oh.

WILL

Beautiful night.

TARA

(Hugging herself.)

A bit chilly, though.

WILL

Here.

(Drapes his jacket on TARA's shoulder, then steps away.)

ANNALISE

Actually, I'm feeling quite flushed myself.

ORLANDO
She might have seen a snake.

TARA
Oh.

ANNALISE
It was by the path and it . . . it *moved*.

WILL
Most likely it was a garter snake trying to get out of your way.

ANNALISE
It was so big.

ORLANDO
Annalise, according to popular wisdom, you're supposed to be the tough-as-nails New Yorker and I'm supposed to be the one creeped out by the crawly things.

ANNALISE
Let's just go inside, shall we?

(ORLANDO shrugs and all four exit stage left.)

Scene 3

The curtain opens on the living room. The phone is gone, and the snack table has been cleared. The fire is still going. CAROL is on the couch, across from BEVERLY, in a chair, flipping through a sheaf of papers. CAROL leans forward expectantly. Finally, BEVERLY looks up.

BEVERLY

Your writing is smoother and more polished than . . . than—

CAROL

Than what you'd expect from a housewife with nothing but an Underwood portable?

BEVERLY

No. I was going to say more polished than the manuscripts hopeful authors usually ask me to read.

CAROL

I'm sorry. I don't mean to be a bother.

BEVERLY

The Seven Chambers Affair. I can't promise it'll go anywhere, Carol, but I will read it as soon as I get the chance. Then I'll get back to you with suggestions.

CAROL

You won't tell anyone, will you? I'm kind of shy. My husband will think I've been neglecting the children if I took the time to write a book. I had to sneak it in here in my purse.

BEVERLY

I won't be the one to tell him.

CAROL

Thank you.

BEVERLY

You do have another copy, don't you?

CAROL

(Shaking her head.)

Maybe a few notes in longhand, but I threw out most of the rough stuff when I finished. We must be the only family in the county without a computer, but Will's medical school debt is so great.

BEVERLY

(Standing.)

Writing lesson number one: always have back-up copies. I'll put this in a safe place tonight. Tomorrow I'll scan it into my hard drive and make another back-up on disk.

(BEVERLY begins to exit stage right. CAROL follows.)

CAROL

Miss Hatcher, I am so grateful.

BEVERLY

For the last time, Carol, please call me Beverly.

(They exit. After a moment DEREK enters from stage right with MARCUS at his heels. DEREK is carrying two coffee pots. MARCUS is carrying a tray with cups. They set the pots and cups on the table behind the couch.)

DEREK

Jeez, Marcus, I said I'd review all the numbers.

MARCUS

Tuesday, Derek.

DEREK

I said I'd do it by Tuesday.

MARCUS

No, they have to have it by Tuesday. You've got to do it by Monday.

DEREK

So I've got to spend Sunday crunching numbers and making projections?

MARCUS

You don't seem to be taking this seriously. Interdisciplinary research like this could be groundbreaking.

DEREK

True, which means if NSF doesn't fund it, somebody else will.

MARCUS

Damn it, Derek! I need this grant. You've got tenure. You're already a full professor. I need this.

(Saying nothing, DEREK turns away.)

MARCUS

This isn't like you. All the years I've known you, you've never been careless with your work before. What's wrong?

DEREK

Nothing.

MARCUS

You can talk to me.

DEREK

Don't shrink me, man. We've known each other too long.

(MARCUS says nothing.)

DEREK

All right. I'll have everything by Monday night. We can fax it on Tuesday.

MARCUS

(Relieved.)

Thank you.

(ANNALISE, ORLANDO, TARA, and WILL enter from stage left. BEVERLY and CAROL enter from stage right. For a moment no one speaks.)

MARCUS

Well, everybody's just in time.

ANNALISE

(Under her breath.)

Thanks to the snake.

MARCUS

(Pointing.)

There's coffee over there and cream and sugar. Get some and grab a seat . . . for the unveiling.

DEREK

(Exchanging looks with TARA.)

Sounds secretive.

(ORLANDO and ANNALISE move to the snack table and pour cups of coffee. TARA lowers her eyes and takes off WILL's jacket. As she returns it to WILL, CAROL looks at her and then him.)

CAROL
(To BEVERLY.)

Must be cold out. Will's forever offering his jacket to somebody.

(CAROL takes WILL's arm and leads him to the folding chairs behind the armchairs. They sit. ANNALISE and ORLANDO, cups in hand, sit on the couch. DEREK sits in the armchair nearer the fireplace as TARA pours two cups of coffee. MARCUS and BEVERLY take up positions on either side of the fireplace, MARCUS near DEREK and BEVERLY near ANNALISE and ORLANDO. TARA circles the couch downstage and takes the free armchair. She sets a cup on the lamp table for DEREK, but he ignores it. She sips her own.)

BEVERLY

Now that everybody's comfortable, we'd like to thank you for coming tonight and making our anniversary dinner a genuine housewarming. We both fell in love with this house the instant we saw it, but one of our concerns was being so far away from our friends.

ORLANDO

Imagine, two workaholic only children worried about feeling lonely.

ANNALISE

Don't give up on your new neighbors just yet. I met one outside, though I didn't catch his name because he was too busy slithering away on his belly.

(Light laughter among them.)

MARCUS

What we're trying to say is, we're grateful you're here, and we want you to be the first to see our new painting.

CAROL

So that's what's back there.

WILL

What did you think it was, a gateway to another dimension?

(CAROL looks down, chastened.)

BEVERLY

The curtain protects it from the sunlight that streams in through those French doors during the day.

(Several look out at the audience as ORLANDO delivers the next line.)

ORLANDO

French doors, drench whores. The curtain's really there because the two of you can't resist making everything a mystery. So turn to the last page already.

(MARCUS and BEVERLY each take hold of a curtain and pull it back to reveal the painting. The painting is the same, except its subjects, clearly MARCUS and BEVERLY, no longer have their arms linked. BEVERLY stares, puzzled. MARCUS beams with pride as his guests *ooh* and *aah*.)

DEREK

It's beautiful.

ANNALISE

(Rising to take a closer look.)

Beautiful? It's exquisite.

CAROL

(Standing behind TARA.)

It matches your walls beautifully.

ORLANDO

I always said you were the picture perfect couple.

TARA

(Rising to escape CAROL's nearness.)

It must have cost a small fortune, Beverly. Who's the artist?

ANNALISE

Yes, who? I'd like to commission him—or her—to do a painting for my office.

MARCUS

I'm afraid that's impossible. This is the last thing he painted before he . . . died.

CAROL

Oh, how sad!

BEVERLY

Not as sad as you might think.

Then who was he?

ANNALISE

Gunther Creel.

MARCUS

(For a moment no one speaks.)

Not *the* Gunther Creel.

DEREK

The same.

MARCUS

My God, Marcus! Creel?

DEREK
(Standing.)

Who's Gunther Creel?

CAROL

Some time ago I suggested to the warden that if Creel were allowed to paint in his cell, it might keep him calm.

MARCUS

You and Beverly never fail to surprise me.

ORLANDO

Who's Gunther Creel?

CAROL

Only one of the worst serial killers in history. Don't you read the papers or watch TV?

TARA
(Exasperated.)

News depresses me. I avoid things that depress me.

CAROL

He must have been very handsome. I understand women just melted when they were around him.

ANNALISE

Didn't he swing both ways? Wasn't at least one of his victims male?

ORLANDO

MARCUS

Two. He seduced them both

WILL

(Standing, putting a hand on CAROL's shoulder.)

They put him to death recently, honey.

ANNALISE

Those poor girls were lambs to the slaughter.

MARCUS

I was present at the execution.

WILL

(Slipping an arm around CAROL.)

I don't think we need to rehash the horror of his life, or his death.

ORLANDO

When did you pose for this?

MARCUS

We didn't.

BEVERLY

I never even met the man.

ANNALISE

It sure seems he met you. Look at the detail here. It's almost photographic.

BEVERLY

But with all of you in the room, somehow it looks different.

(ORLANDO rises and joins ANNALISE in examining the painting. Meanwhile, the others resume their seats.)

DEREK

If you didn't pose, it's safe to assume you didn't commission it. So why did he paint it?

MARCUS

He was an egocentric control freak. He wanted me to remember him always.

ORLANDO

(Stepping back from the canvas.)

Remarkable, yes. Inexplicable, no. Probably used a photograph as a model. A dust jacket shot from one of your books, or the publisher's website.

TARA

I bet in a few years it'll be worth a small fortune.

CAROL

I wonder how he managed to match the colors in your house so perfectly?

ANNALISE

Marcus, do you know how to find more of his paintings?

MARCUS

Some, I imagine, are still in evidence lockers. His early stuff is in a dozen reputable galleries, if the curators haven't put it in storage because of the trial. Why?

ANNALISE

The book. One of the picture inserts could be devoted to his art. His works could be arranged to show the degeneration of his mind . . . or the escalation of his violence. You're the shrink. What do his paintings say to you?

MARCUS

That he was uniquely gifted—as an artist. It wasn't on canvas that he betrayed his true madness.

WILL

(Standing again.)

I think maybe we'd better be going. Carol?

ORLANDO

Careful, Marcus. You're scaring the new people.

TARA

You can't go yet.

(Hesitates as DEREK looks at her.)

You came in our car. Remember?

WILL

This talk is making my wife uncomfortable.

DEREK

If Carol's upset—

CAROL

(Gently pulling WILL into his seat.)

I'm fine, honey.

But—
WILL

I'm fine.
CAROL

BEVERLY
Carol, you must think we're terrible people to go on like this about a monster like Creel. The truth is, while I write fiction about smooth, clever murderers, Marcus interviews the real thing, gritty and remorseless men who are terrifying and insane. It's part of his work as a psychologist.

ANNALISE
He's going to write a book about it.

MARCUS
Maybe. Mrs. Summers . . . Carol, has Derek told you anything about our work?

CAROL
Just that he's some kind of biology professor.

MARCUS
He's more than that. Derek specializes in genetics. Together we're undertaking an unprecedented research project to look into the psychobiology of evil.

CAROL
I don't understand.

MARCUS
The impulse to do evil is a normal part of human nature. How many of us have heard the voice that tells us to steal, or cheat—

(TARA and WILL look away from each other.)

MARCUS
—or kill? Most of us resist that voice, those impulses.

DEREK
Because of a stronger voice, called conscience . . .
(Looks at TARA)
. . . or morality.

MARCUS
Most people suppress those urges but give in to the occasional lie or income tax evasion or even shoplift a candy bar. Some ratchet things up a few clicks to

embezzlement or infidelity. But a few of us embrace the truly forbidden, like murder, as if our capacity for evil is switched on like the lights in this room.

DEREK

The genome project was the best thing to come out of the Reagan presidency. We're finding markers—switches, if you will—for all kinds of traits and diseases, even for such things as the ability to learn language, social behavior, and sexual orientation.

ORLANDO

All right, people, don't start looking at me.
(Sits on the couch.)

MARCUS

Through a combination of psychoanalytic investigation and hard laboratory science, Derek and I are trying to find the switch.

WILL

The on/off switch.

MARCUS

Yes.

WILL

You intend to turn evil off. Is that it?

MARCUS

Yes.

WILL

Do you intend to cure poverty, or the greed that causes it?

TARA

Will—

WILL

When I'm digging a 9mm bullet out of a teenage drug dealer's chest on a Saturday night, I know the switch that put it there is the fact this kid couldn't get a job because some fat cat who will be in church in a few hours sent his factory work overseas to take advantage of poor people willing to work for pennies. Can you do something about that?

CAROL

Will, there's no call to be rude.

WILL

I'm sorry. I just . . .

MARCUS

That's all right, Will. You sound frustrated with the status quo. I understand that. I'm frustrated too. I don't for a minute think we can end all manifestations of evil, any more than I think medicine will eradicate all cancers or retroviruses.

WILL

Evil isn't a retrovirus. If it were, our species would have been wiped out long ago.

MARCUS

Funny, but just now I remembered Creel said evil *is* like a virus that changes you in ways you never thought possible.

CAROL

Look, I know that in this room I'm probably the least qualified to speak.

BEVERLY

Nonsense, Carol.

CAROL

I mean, I'm here with two doctors, two professors, two writers, and a book editor. All I am is a high school graduate, a housewife and mother.

WILL

And a one-time secretary who put her husband through college and medical school.

CAROL

I don't have your education and training and what I'm about to say might seem foolish, but I have to ask. What if evil doesn't want to be switched off?

(Blackout. Curtain.)

Scene 4

Lights up. The curtain remains closed. BEVERLY enters from stage right and walks to downstage center, where she faces the audience.

BEVERLY

It may seem glamorous to those who don't actually have to do it, but writing is a terrible way to make a living. When they find out I'm an author, some people smile and say, 'I'd like to write a book.' What they mean is, 'I would like *to have written* a book.' That is, they'd like to do book signings and give interviews and earn royalties without actually having to park their derrieres in a chair and write. You see, writing is hard work, which is why most people can't do it very long. Some mornings your head is so full of phrases and ideas swirling in a predawn mental stew that you just can't wait to jump out of bed and get to work. Other days you sit for hours, staring at an empty monitor or a blank sheet of paper, waiting for words that never come. After a few days of playing hide-and-seek with your muse you begin to feel naked yourself. You wonder if you've reached the end, if you've finally exhausted your gift, if you ever even had a gift. Of course, that Carol Summers woman doesn't know any of this yet. She started a novel and saw it through to the end. And *The Seven Chambers Affair* is remarkable for someone so . . . so under-prepared. She doesn't have to wonder yet what she's going to do for an encore. But I do.

(Hesitates.)

What am I going to do?

(Exits stage right.)

(MARCUS enters from stage left and walks to downstage center, where he faces the audience.)

MARCUS

Sometimes you just get tired of following the rules. Sure, the rules are there for a reason, to keep order and avoid chaos. But now and then they bite into your skin like handcuffs three clicks too tight. Maybe that's how I was feeling after so many hours of reworking the grant with Derek. It was dark when we finished and I still had a long drive home. I guess I just needed to cut loose. My foot got a little heavy, and the needle swung over to where I had never seen it before, and the speed felt really good—until I saw the flashing lights in my mirror. I was about halfway home then. Of course, I should have pulled over and taken the ticket. I should have followed the rules. But if I had, there'd be no story to tell. For reasons I still can't figure out, I decided to run. I remember thinking, "If I can outrun this cop, I can do anything." So I cut the lights to hide my plate and put my foot to the floor and crossed three lanes of traffic to hit the first exit. I had no idea where I was, but I took a right and whipped into the first driveway I came to. It was an old farmhouse, with a dirt drive curving around back. I parked behind the house and cut the engine and stretched out across the front seats. I stayed like that a long time, waiting for a tap on the window and a flashlight in the face. But nobody came, not the cop, not the farmer, nobody. When I finally started the car and got back on the highway, I knew I could do anything.

(Exits stage left. Blackout.)

Scene 5

The curtain opens on the living room. It is a month after the dinner party. The folding chairs and snack table are gone and there is no fire, but everything else is the same. The painting's curtain is open. Now the man and woman in the painting are a good distance apart, heads turned slightly as if they are beginning to look at each other differently, with suspicion. The laptop computer is open on the coffee table, a coffee cup on one side and a stack of papers on the other. In jeans, shirt, and sneakers, BEVERLY is on the portable phone, pacing before the fireplace.

BEVERLY

I know, Annalise, I know. Just an extra week. Two at most, and I'll have a finished draft for you. Well, I'm trying something new. No, no, I'm not tampering with the formula. It's a Danielle Castle mystery all right. I'm just moving her in a slightly different direction. That's all. The title? Tentatively . . . *The Seven Chambers Affair*, but I think it's weak and I want to change it.

(Moves to the coffee table, holds up some of the papers.)

You like it? Oh. All right, you'd better let me get back to work. Okay. Bye, sweetie.

(Clicks off and sets the papers back on the coffee table. She moves to the mantel, the phone still in her hand. She looks at the painting. Then she closes its curtain, sets down the phone, and resumes her pacing. The phone rings, and she picks it up.)

Yes? Oh . . . Sorry, Orlando. No, I'm trying to work and this phone keeps ringing. But I have to leave it on so Marcus can reach me. The grant's qualifying round is today. What's the matter, O? Do I remember him? I've been waiting weeks for you to bring him around to meet us. What? Another man? Are you sure? Ohh. Then I guess you are. Honey, I'm so sorry. How are you? That's to be expected. Sure, but does it really matter who he is? I know, I know. Just remember, you're a detective writer, not a detective.

(Laughs.)

Okay, I'll remember I'm a shrink's wife, not a shrink, though I'm sure Marcus would tell you the same thing. No, I can't this weekend. Of course Annalise is riding me. Who else digs in her spurs like that? What are you doing next week Saturday? All right, then. Dinner, just the three of us. I'll whip up one of your favorite dishes and you can tell us everything. You can stay over if you like. Drink all the wine you want. You'll be okay till then? Good.

(The doorbell rings.)

BEVERLY

Oh, what now? Not you, the doorbell. Gotta run, O. See you next Saturday. Of course I'll talk to you before then. Love you.

(Sets phone on mantel. Exits stage left. Voice offstage.)

Derek?

Hi, Bev.

DEREK

My God, what happened? You look terrible.

BEVERLY

I haven't been getting much sleep lately.

DEREK

Well, come inside.

BEVERLY

(They enter from stage left, DEREK ahead of her. Tie undone, shirttail out, his clothes are rumped and in disarray, as if he has been trying to sleep in them.)

Is Marcus here?

DEREK

It's a few minutes past two on a Thursday, Derek. He's on campus, working, which is where you're supposed to be.

BEVERLY

He's not there.

DEREK

What?

BEVERLY

He canceled his classes and tutorial and left hours ago. I thought . . . I thought he might have come home.

DEREK

Why would he lea—oh, the grant.

BEVERLY

Disqualified in the first round.

DEREK

I'm so sorry. I know how hard you worked on it, both of you.

BEVERLY

It's my fault.

DEREK

BEVERLY

I'm sure the competition was stiff, hundreds of applications from all over the country.

DEREK

No, it's my fault.

BEVERLY

Well, Marcus isn't here yet. You should have called instead of spending an hour on the road.

DEREK

I was afraid he'd hang up on me. I need to see him.

BEVERLY

Have you tried his cell phone?

DEREK

It's off.

BEVERLY

I can't imagine why he didn't call me. I don't know what to tell you. I don't know when—

DEREK

Mind if I sit?

BEVERLY

(Hesitating, then gesturing toward the arm chairs.)

Of course not.

(DEREK moves to the chair near the fireplace.
BEVERLY turns over the stack of papers and closes
the laptop.)

DEREK

You're working and I'm interfering. I'm sorry.

BEVERLY

That's all right.

(Sits on the couch.)

DEREK

I'm not one of those philistines who think if you work at home, you're not really working.

BEVERLY

I know.

I just . . . I just need . . . I—

DEREK

(Buries his face in his hands and begins to cry.)

Derek?

BEVERLY

(Rises and goes to him. Puts a hand on his shoulder.)

Derek, what is it?

(At that moment MARCUS enters from stage left and stops. BEVERLY withdraws her hand from DEREK's shoulder and takes a step back.)

BEVERLY

Marcus. I'm sorry about the grant. Why didn't you call me?

(MARCUS says nothing and moves to the mantel as DEREK, wiping his eyes, looks up at him.)

BEVERLY

It's not like you not to call. I'd have come to you, met you somewhere for a drink or to talk.

MARCUS

But you've got a book to finish. Can't have you leaving *your* work because I can't do mine.

BEVERLY

Yes . . . my work. But that can wait. I know that grant meant a lot to you. Let me help.

DEREK

I'm sorry, Marcus.

MARCUS

I don't need help. It was a grant, not the end of the world.

BEVERLY

What about your tenure and promotion?

MARCUS

Maybe it's time I turned my attention to something better than the crap I've been doing.

BEVERLY

What? Your work means so much to you. It's creepy as hell but you love it.

MARCUS

Annalise has been after me to write a book. Maybe I'll take her up on it. I do know a thing or two about evil.

DEREK

I really am sorry.

MARCUS

Bev, would you leave me alone with Derek for a few minutes.

(BEVERLY moves toward her papers and the laptop.)

MARCUS

Oh, there's no need to take your work. Leave it. This'll just take a moment, and after Derek goes, I'm heading upstairs to take a nap. You can pick up where you left off, right here. *Leave* it.

BEVERLY

Well . . . all right. But if you need me . . .

(Leans in to kiss him. Stops. Exits stage right.)

DEREK

(Standing.)

Look, Marcus, I know you must hate me right now . . .

MARCUS

I don't hate you, Derek.

DEREK

But this whole grant thing is my fault.

MARCUS

I know that, but I don't hate you.

(Picks up a few sheets of paper and flips through them.)

I know why you screwed up the database, even after we reviewed your work.

DEREK

You do?

MARCUS

Of course I do. You couldn't get it right because you couldn't think straight.

(Holds up one sheet.)

The Seven Chambers Affair by . . . oh my, Beverly.

(Smiles and returns the papers to the coffee table, then turns to DEREK.)

It must be eating you alive.

(DEREK looks away.)

MARCUS

I pity you, Derek.

DEREK

How long have you known?

MARCUS

I think I knew the instant I saw them together.

DEREK

It wouldn't be so bad if I didn't love her so much.

(Covers his face as he weeps.)

MARCUS

But you do love her and she's making a fool of you.

(Stands in front of DEREK and grips his shoulders.)

She's making a fool of you with that high-minded Dr. Summers, who had the nerve to question our work.

DEREK

Yes.

MARCUS

Who made such a show of protecting his idiot wife while sleeping with yours.

(DEREK pulls away and goes to the mantel. He places both hands on the mantel and lowers his head.)

MARCUS

So this man, this one man, has ruined your marriage, devastated your concentration, and undermined both our careers.

DEREK

Yes.

MARCUS

And the wife you trusted and loved is his accomplice.

DEREK

Yes, she is.

MARCUS

The question is, what are you going to do about it?

DEREK

I don't know. I don't know what to do.

MARCUS

Are you going to let them get away with it?

DEREK

What can I do? We have no children. Divorce would be easier . . .

MARCUS

This is a no-fault state.

DEREK

No fault?

MARCUS

The failure of the marriage is nobody's fault and nobody gets punished.
(Takes a step toward him.)

Somebody needs to pay for what you're going through, don't you think?
(Takes another step toward him.)

What would you really like to do?

DEREK

(Half turning.)

I'd like to get my hands on him. Around his neck. Push my thumbs into his windpipe.

MARCUS

(After a pause.)

You'd leave fingerprints on his flesh.

DEREK

(Facing MARCUS.)

What?

MARCUS

You'd leave fingerprints, body oils, DNA. There are other ways, ways you can take care of them both without sacrificing yourself. Without incriminating yourself.

DEREK

What are you talking about?

MARCUS

Pride. Revenge. Justice. Call it what you like, but you don't have to take this from them.

DEREK

You're talking about murder.

MARCUS

In France it wouldn't be murder. The crime of passion—*le crime passionnel*—is a bona fide legal defense, for situations just like this.

DEREK

But we're not in France.

MARCUS

All the more reason not to get caught.

DEREK

I've gone to your talks, where the audience tries to come up with the perfect murder and you tell them how they'll get caught. Besides, I'm the husband, the first one they look at.

MARCUS

They only investigate if they think there's been a murder. If they think these lovers ran away together . . .

DEREK

Marcus, this is crazy.

MARCUS

Maybe it is. But do you see them together when you close your eyes at night? Can you sleep beside her without wondering where his hands have touched her, without hearing her moan in his ear? If you can, you're a better man than I am.

DEREK

I couldn't possibly get away with something like . . . like this.

MARCUS

You could if you had help.

DEREK

What do you mean?

MARCUS

If you had someone who knew investigation procedures, forensics, how to dispose of bodies without leaving a trace. A homicide detective, a criminalist . . . a shrink who's spent more than a thousand hours interviewing murderers and the detectives who catch them.

DEREK

Catch is the operative word here.

MARCUS

If the average murderer knew half of what goes into a homicide investigation, society would be at his mercy. But the average murderer is not especially smart. We are.

DEREK

You would do this for me?

MARCUS

My friend, we have just entered into a conspiracy. Even if we never carry out the act, my silence guarantees your silence guarantees my silence.

DEREK

And they can be . . . dealt with, without some indication a crime had been committed?

MARCUS

Yes.

DEREK

And made to disappear . . . permanently?

MARCUS

Yes.

(DEREK walks to downstage center and looks out at the audience as if gazing through the French doors.)

MARCUS

Trust me, Derek. It can be done.

DEREK

How deep is that lake?

(Blackout. Curtain.)

Scene 6

The curtain opens on the living room. It is a few days later, Sunday morning. The now uncovered painting depicts the couple on opposite sides of the frame. The woman is toward the background, looking over her shoulder as if afraid of being seen. The man is in the foreground, whispering into the ear of a half-hidden face. Clad in bathrobe and pajamas, MARCUS enters from stage right, coffee cup in one hand and portable telephone in the other. He thumbs several buttons on the phone and puts it to his ear as he stops in front of the mantel.

MARCUS

Campus security?

(Sips.)

Thank goodness. I wasn't sure anybody would be there on Sunday morning. This is Dr. Micheaux from psychology. I just received the strangest call from one of my colleagues in bio sciences.

(Sips again.)

He wants me to come to his house, but I thought it best to report the call. I would have dialed 911, but I live an hour away, in another town. I figure you'll know which police department to call. I can't be sure, but if what he told me is true, it is a police matter. Dr. Derek Palmer, 437 Campbell Terrace, about two miles from campus. He claims to have killed his wife . . . and her lover. Yes, thank you. Thank you very much.

(Clicks off and sets the phone on the mantel. Sips coffee again and gazes at the painting. Then closes the curtain on the painting. Exits stage right. Blackout. Curtain.)

End of Act One

Act Two

Scene 1

The curtain is closed. The stage is dark. A spotlight illuminates downstage center, where, as in the prologue, there is a heavy-looking table with a wire mesh partition rising from its midpoint and a chair on either side. MARCUS sits in one, hands folded atop the table. After a moment, there is the sound of keys, followed by clanking doors. In jailhouse clothing, DEREK enters and sits in the empty chair. For a moment the two men just stare at each other.

DEREK

I almost stayed back there in my cell, but then I began to wonder why you'd bother to visit me.

MARCUS

I wanted to see how you were doing.

DEREK

To see how your puppet is holding up with his strings cut?

MARCUS

You sound hostile right now. I understand. A place like this—

DEREK

Hostile doesn't begin to describe what I'm feeling!

MARCUS

If you're angry because I called the police—

DEREK

(Laughs bitterly.)

Because you called the police?

MARCUS

I'm sorry, but I had no choice. When you told me what you'd done—

DEREK

You're a real piece of work, Marcus. You really are.

MARCUS

What do you mean?.

DEREK

And a hell of an actor. I don't think anybody's listening, but I don't know for sure, so stick to the innocent visitor routine. That way nobody will ever suspect how you set me up.

MARCUS

Set you up?

DEREK

(To an unseen observer)

At this rate he'll even win an Oscar.

MARCUS

I'm your friend, Derek. I want to help any way I can.

DEREK

My friend? Friends don't push friends into murder and then leave them standing over the body.

MARCUS

You're right. And friends don't drag friends into murder. Why didn't you call me so I could talk you out of it?

DEREK

Because you were the one who talked me into it!

MARCUS

I did no such thing.

DEREK

What? What about that day I came out to your house?

MARCUS

The day you were so distraught about your wife's affair that you drove off in a rage when I suggested divorce?

DEREK

I don't believe this!

MARCUS

Think, Derek. How could I have talked you, a tenured full professor, into something like murder? How did I influence you? Did I blackmail you? Promise you money? Seduce you?

DEREK

You said you'd help me dispose of the bodies.

MARCUS

That's absurd.

DEREK

But the lake by your house . . .

MARCUS

A lake full of fall fishermen and summer swimmers? Gas makes bodies rise.

DEREK

You said we could weight them down.

MARCUS

The lake is too shallow. Snorkelers would see them.

DEREK

You said they could . . . disappear.

MARCUS

Derek, you've been to my lectures. You've heard me talk about how bothersome bodies can be. Animals dig up forest graves. The smell of decomposition seeps through floors and walls. Any acid strong enough to dissolve bone would also dissolve its own container.

DEREK

What about all the forensics you said you could get around?

MARCUS

All they found of Crippen's wife was a patch of stomach skin with a recognizable scar. The jury passed it around on a plate, and Crippen was hanged. That was 1910. Forensic science has improved since then, don't you think?

DEREK

But—

MARCUS

There are no buts. Are you planning to walk into court with your Ph.D. and say you were talked into murder by a man with nothing to gain, no motive for wanting the victims dead?

(DEREK says nothing.)

MARCUS

A man who lived an hour away?

DEREK

When I called you told me to stay put.

MARCUS

The same man who phoned police?

DEREK

(Sitting up straighter.)

And established a phone record alibi at the time of the crime.

(For a moment they just look at each other.)

MARCUS

To base a defense on suggestibility, you would have to demonstrate the weakest will in history, or you would have to be insane.

DEREK

You won't get away with this.

MARCUS

Are you insane, Derek?

DEREK

You won't get away with this!

MARCUS

I haven't done anything to get away with. You, on the other hand—

DEREK

(About to cry.)

You told me to wait for you.

MARCUS

I want to help, truly I do—

DEREK

Talk to my lawyer, please.

MARCUS

—but I can't implicate myself in a felony.

DEREK

Please, Marcus, don't do this to me.

MARCUS

Conspiracy to commit murder. Perjury. Obstruction of justice. I'd have to be insane.

DEREK

This isn't my fault.

MARCUS

(Softly.)

You know what you've done, Derek. You know the pain you've caused yourself.

DEREK

I'm scared, Marcus—

MARCUS

(Standing.)

Face up to what you've done, and you'll know what you have to do to end the pain.

DEREK

So scared.

MARCUS

You know what you have to do.

(Exits stage right.)

(DEREK lowers his head to his arms and weeps.
Blackout.)

Scene 2

The curtain opens on a bright afternoon. The painting is covered. Sweater misbuttoned, hair wild, CAROL stands by the coffee table, facing the audience, which she will do throughout the whole scene. She moves downstage as if looking out the French doors. In jeans, BEVERLY enters from stage right.

BEVERLY

The water for tea will be ready in a few minutes.

CAROL

(In a dreamy, detached, almost drunken voice.)

I was on my way to the cemetery, but I missed the turn and just kept driving and driving till I got here. I didn't know where else to go.

BEVERLY

(Uneasy.)

You're always welcome, Carol . . . but you should call first.

(Sits.)

CAROL

I went to see him the day after the funeral. There are so many rocks on top of him.

BEVERLY

Grass takes time to grow.

CAROL

He's going to be so cold.

BEVERLY

Oh, honey!

(Starts to rise, to go to her, but stops when CAROL keeps speaking.)

CAROL

I was going to go again today, to talk to him, but I just kept driving and driving.

BEVERLY

Why don't you have a seat, Carol, so we can talk.

CAROL

(Still standing.)

The lake is beautiful.

BEVERLY

It's the time of day. The sunlight hits it just right in the afternoon.

CAROL

It reminds me of when we were first married. We honeymooned in a cabin on a lake just like this one, except it was in the north country in Washington state.

BEVERLY

I've never been but I hear it's beautiful there.

CAROL

We stayed for two whole weeks. Swimming every day, even when the water was cold.

BEVERLY

That must have been nice.

CAROL

Fishing and cooking our catch over an open fire. Lying on a blanket and counting the stars.

BEVERLY

It sounds so romantic, Carol.

CAROL

We made love so much it hurt to walk.

(BEVERLY shifts uncomfortably. Clearly, this is more information than she needed.)

CAROL

We were happy then.

BEVERLY

Everybody should be happy on a honeymoon. That's the least life can do for you.

CAROL

He loved me then, for two whole weeks.

BEVERLY

I'm sure he still loved you, even if—

CAROL

I was happy in Seattle. But Will wasn't, not after his residency. He always wanted more—more money, more recognition, more important friends.

BEVERLY

Some people are never satisfied.

CAROL
He wanted more woman than I could ever be.

BEVERLY
It's not your fault.

CAROL
I disappointed him so much.

BEVERLY
It's not your fault, Carol.

CAROL
He wanted somebody thinner and prettier.

BEVERLY
Sometimes men are pigs.

CAROL
I wish we had stayed in Seattle.

BEVERLY
For your sake, I wish you had.

CAROL
I had family in Seattle, and friends.

BEVERLY
Maybe you should move back there.

CAROL
There was nothing evil there.

BEVERLY
Evil?

CAROL
We were touched by evil here.

BEVERLY
Touched by evil?

CAROL
I don't have friends here, just people from the hospital.

BEVERLY

Let's get back to the evil. What did you mean?

CAROL

They're all Will's friends. I thought Tara would be my friend. But all she wanted was my husband. I'm glad she's dead. I hope the rocks are heavy enough to keep her that way.

BEVERLY

Carol, did the doctor give you something to take? Pills maybe?

CAROL

I thought I might become friends with Beverly Hatcher, the writer.

BEVERLY

Maybe we can be friends, Carol.

CAROL

She's a great writer.

BEVERLY

And maybe I can help you, when you've had some time to . . .to adjust to all this.

CAROL

I wanted to be a writer once.

BEVERLY

Your book needs work . . .but shows promise.

CAROL

Will never thought my writing was worth anything.

BEVERLY

What did he know?

CAROL

Beverly Hatcher said my writing was smooth and polished.

BEVERLY

With my name and a few changes . . . Maybe we can . . . collaborate?

CAROL

But Beverly is Tara's friend and I don't know if I can trust her. What if Will wants to sleep with her too? What if she wants to sleep with him?

(BEVERLY freezes, her face a mask of dismay.
CAROL continues to stare out at the audience, her

wide eyes empty. Offstage the tea kettle whistles
loudly. Blackout. Curtain.)

Scene 3

The curtain opens. It is evening. A fire crackles in the fireplace. A glass of wine and an open bottle are on the coffee table. ORLANDO is seated on the couch, reading through a stack of papers. For a few seconds he reads, then shakes his head and sips from the wine glass. A few seconds later he sighs heavily, shakes his head again, and takes another sip. Finally, he sets the manuscript aside and stands, glass in hand. He walks downstage to look out the French doors at the audience. Finishing his wine, he turns back into the room. He stops as if noticing something. Then he goes upstage to the covered painting and opens its curtains. He steps back in surprise, for this is not the painting he remembers. The man and woman are now far apart, casting each other suspicious sidelong glances. ORLANDO looks from the painting to the stage right exit and back. Clearly confused, he closes the curtain and returns to his seat on the couch. He sets down the empty wine glass, picks up a page from the manuscript, and looks from the manuscript to the curtained painting, as if trying to connect the two. Just then BEVERLY enters from stage right with a plate of crackers and cheese, which she sets on the coffee table. She sits in one of the armchairs opposite the couch. For a moment no one speaks. ORLANDO seems distracted.

BEVERLY

That bad, huh?

ORLANDO

Excuse me?

BEVERLY

The book. You're not saying anything and you drank your wine pretty quickly.

ORLANDO

It's not bad, Beverly, not at all. Actually, it's quite good. It's just . . . different. I'm still trying to take it all in.

BEVERLY

Even Danielle Castle needs a change of pace now and then.

ORLANDO

Yes, but this really is different, like Ian Fleming's *The Spy Who Loved Me*.

BEVERLY

James Bond?

ORLANDO

Fleming was trying to do something different, so he wrote a novel about a woman's life. James Bond doesn't show up till the last chapter to rescue her from a bunch of thugs. I need time to see the whole picture here, to put it all together. Let's talk about something else.

BEVERLY

What about Jeremy? Even if we had to put dinner off till now, he's still the main reason you're dining with us tonight.

ORLANDO

(Slowly.)

Yes, but I wanted to wait for Marcus before I got into all that.

BEVERLY

Marcus?

ORLANDO

I need a straight man's perspective on something. Sorry, honey.

BEVERLY

Well . . . I guess you're his friend too.

ORLANDO

I always thought so.

BEVERLY

There's no telling when he'll be back. Recently, he's been working late a lot.

(Rising and moving to downstage center to look out through the French doors.)

I hope he gets home soon. The radio said there'd be a heavy downpour, and the winding dirt roads up here can get kind of slick.

ORLANDO

Did you try his cell?

BEVERLY

When I was in the kitchen. He's got it turned off again.

(Returning to her seat.)

I'm so glad you're staying over.

ORLANDO

Me too. So, what's Marcus been up to?

BEVERLY

Catching up, he says. This business with Derek has thrown off his schedule.

ORLANDO

I'm still trying to wrap my brain around that bit of drama. One night I'm talking with people in this room and soon two are dead and a third's in jail for their murder.

BEVERLY

Don't forget Carol Summers. The poor thing had a nervous breakdown after her husband's funeral and had to be committed.

ORLANDO

You started to tell me about that the other night, but you cut it short when Marcus came in. What happened?

BEVERLY

Three days ago the police found her wandering naked downtown at lunchtime.

ORLANDO

At this time of year? Talk about popsicle toes.

BEVERLY

She came out here the day before, so out of it I thought she was medicated, or drunk. When she left I wasn't sure she'd make it back down the hill. Then I realized it was something else.

ORLANDO

Grief?

BEVERLY

More. Too much of her personality was defined by her husband. She was kind of lost without him.

ORLANDO

How sad.

BEVERLY

Marcus talked to Dr. Kent at the Psychiatric Center. What's left of her identity is so fragile that recovery will likely take a very long time.

ORLANDO

Didn't they have children?

BEVERLY

Yes. Fortunately, she has relatives in Seattle who came and got them. Eventually, they'll transfer her to a psych center out there . . . All these lives ruined because Derek flipped out.

ORLANDO

Is he still saying Marcus made him do it?

BEVERLY

He claims he was set up for losing the NSF grant.

ORLANDO

Now there's an original revenge. A bit over the top.

BEVERLY

Ridiculous is what it is. Marcus isn't at all vindictive.

ORLANDO

Even if he were, Derek is a free agent. He pulled the trigger on his own, right? Or is he saying he was hypnotized?

BEVERLY

According to Marcus, hypnosis can't make you do something against your nature or your moral code.

ORLANDO

So how did Marcus do it . . . supposedly? Did he pick up mind control tips when he interviewed Charlie Manson?

BEVERLY

The police questioned him three times, and he spent an afternoon with Derek's lawyer. He never changed his story. Yes, he was angry about the grant, but Derek was his friend, and so was Tara.

ORLANDO

True friends stab you in the front.

BEVERLY

What's that supposed to mean?

ORLANDO

A quote. It just popped into my head.

BEVERLY

What's it got to do with Marcus?

ORLANDO

You know me, the original drama queen. You were saying, Tara was his friend too.

BEVERLY

Yes. So why would Marcus urge Derek to kill her at all?

ORLANDO

Because she was having an affair with that neo-hippie doctor?

BEVERLY

How do you know? Did you catch them kissing?

ORLANDO

No. In fact, the night Annalise and I saw them out there . . .

(Points to the French doors.)

. . . they were so busy not kissing and not standing near each other that the only logical conclusion was they were having an affair.

BEVERLY

You really have become cynical in your old age, haven't you?

ORLANDO

It's an affectionate cynicism, like Twain's when he said, "Man is the only animal that blushes. Or needs to." These were people who needed to blush, and did.

BEVERLY

Even if she was involved with Will, it had nothing to do with Marcus.

ORLANDO

He never said anything like, If she were my wife . . . ?

BEVERLY

Absolutely not.

ORLANDO

How do you know?

BEVERLY

I know my husband.

ORLANDO

(After a beat.)

Of course you do.

BEVERLY

I do. And he hated Manson. Called him a dangerous little creep with bad breath and body odor.

ORLANDO

How did he feel about Gunther Creel?

BEVERLY

He . . . he hasn't said much about that one. Why do you ask?

ORLANDO

Curiosity.

BEVERLY

It's a strange curiosity that tries to connect a love triangle murder to people like Manson and Creel.

ORLANDO

Tell me, what would you do if Marcus were having an affair?

BEVERLY

Sounds like you're fishing for a story idea.

ORLANDO

Maybe.

BEVERLY

You know it's all been done before.

ORLANDO

Sure, everything has. But you have to admit, jealousy is still a good motive, and murder by remote control is a clever plot device.

BEVERLY

That's been done too. Remember *The Manchurian Candidate*?

ORLANDO

Of course. Both versions. You still haven't answered my question.

BEVERLY

Because it's a ridiculous question.

ORLANDO

No, it's not. It's what I had to face about a man I thought was the love of my life. It's what Derek had to face about his wife and probably why he killed her.

BEVERLY

None of that applies to Marcus and me.

ORLANDO

No?

BEVERLY

You said it yourself: we have the picture perfect marriage.

ORLANDO

So I did. Hypothetically, then, what would you do?

BEVERLY

(After a pause.)

I think I would want to know what she has that I don't.

ORLANDO

You're cheating, Bev. I didn't ask how you'd feel or what you'd want to know. I asked what you would *do*.

BEVERLY

I wouldn't kill him, if that's what you're pushing me to say.

ORLANDO

Would you divorce him?

BEVERLY

Never.

ORLANDO

Would you confront him?

BEVERLY

Maybe. I don't know.

ORLANDO

Would you confront her?

BEVERLY

I don't know.

ORLANDO

Why not? She's stealing smiles and kisses and pleasures that rightfully belong to you.

BEVERLY

(Suddenly standing.)

Stop it! Just stop it!

ORLANDO

(Rising and reaching for her.)

Bev—

BEVERLY

(Pulling away, then turning away.)

Don't! Don't. I don't know what's gotten into you.

ORLANDO
Maybe I got a little carried away.

BEVERLY
(Facing him.)
Carried away? That was downright mean.

ORLANDO
I'm sorry.

BEVERLY
Why are you so cruel all of a sudden?
(Hugging herself.)
The thought of Marcus with somebody else makes my skin crawl.

ORLANDO
Do you have some reason to think Marcus is having an affair?

BEVERLY
No!

ORLANDO
You know I love you, Bev.

BEVERLY
I think I just sent the jury back out.

ORLANDO
Whatever I said, I said because I love you.

BEVERLY
If bullying is how you show love, no wonder Jeremy dumped you.

ORLANDO
(After a moment sighs.)
I guess I had that coming.

BEVERLY
Yes, you did.

ORLANDO
I really don't want to hurt you, but—

BEVERLY
I think you'd better be going now.

Bev—

ORLANDO

BEVERLY
I mean it, O. I want you to leave while we still have a chance to save this friendship.

ORLANDO
What about the storm?

BEVERLY
If you start now, you can probably make it back to the main highway before the rains come. And for the record, I would do everything in my power to get him back.

(For a moment no one speaks.)

ORLANDO
All right, I'll go, but on one condition.

BEVERLY
What condition?

ORLANDO
(Picking up the book manuscript.)
I want you to tell me who really wrote this book.

BEVERLY
What?

ORLANDO
You heard me.

BEVERLY
(Looking away.)
I wrote it.

ORLANDO
Eye tells, Bev. Interrogation 101. The eyes won't lie when the mouth will. Look at me.

BEVERLY
(Meeting his gaze defiantly.)
I wrote . . . I wrote . . .
(Looks away and sinks into her chair.)

ORLANDO

You wrote part of it. You reworked it and plugged Danielle Castle into it, but it isn't your work.

BEVERLY

How do you know?

ORLANDO

We've had this talk before. A writer's style is unique, a subconscious DNA that long time readers can detect. It's what separates Toni Morrison from Joyce Carol Oates . . .

BEVERLY

. . . Agatha Christie from Dorothy Sayers . . .

ORLANDO

And James Baldwin from Walter Mosley.

BEVERLY

Do you think . . . do you think Annalise will notice?

ORLANDO

Annalise is on a production schedule. She won't care. Now tell me who wrote it.

BEVERLY

Carol Summers.

ORLANDO

Miss mousy widow?

BEVERLY

Yes.

ORLANDO

When did you get it? You couldn't have reworked all this in the past four days.

BEVERLY

She gave it to me the night of the party.

ORLANDO

Let me guess: she wanted your opinion and you ended up stealing her book.

(BEVERLY says nothing.)

ORLANDO

How considerate of her to lose her husband and have a nervous breakdown.
(Turns away from her and goes to the mantel. He looks up at the curtained painting.)

Why, Beverly?

BEVERLY

I don't know.

ORLANDO

Sure you do. Annalise was turning the thumbscrews, but she didn't know your brain was in lockdown. Then this wimpy little wife shows up on your doorstep with the answer to all your problems.

BEVERLY

I was . . . I was going to find a way to give her credit.

ORLANDO

Beverly Hatcher with Carol Summers?

BEVERLY

Something like that.

ORLANDO

Doesn't say that on the title page, or were you just planning to con her with money and a promise to help her get her next book published?

BEVERLY

I don't know.

ORLANDO

The Beverly Hatcher I know and love would never stoop to literary theft, unless she had succumbed to some outside influence.

BEVERLY

What kind of influence?

(ORLANDO opens the curtain hiding the painting.
BEVERLY gazes at it for an instant, then looks away,
back toward the audience.)

ORLANDO

This isn't the painting I remember from the party. Not the same picture, but clearly the same hand, even though the artist is dead. What do you make of that?

BEVERLY

What do you make of it?

ORLANDO

Did Gunther Creel paint a second picture for Marcus?

BEVERLY

No.

ORLANDO

Are you sure?

BEVERLY

Yes, I watched Marcus unwrap it when he brought it home. There was only one painting.

ORLANDO

Could he have left the second one in his car or office?

BEVERLY

No.

ORLANDO

To play a joke on you later?

BEVERLY

No.

ORLANDO

How can you be so sure?

BEVERLY

(Rising and facing him.)

Because he couldn't hide that many paintings from me!

ORLANDO

There are . . . more?

BEVERLY

No, there's only one, and I know because I've asked myself these same questions a thousand times. But the signature—there—is exactly the same and the scratch in this corner of the canvas never changes. But the man and woman . . . Marcus and I . . . We keep changing. Every day we're in a different position. Every single day, and Marcus can't be doing it to drive me mad like the husband in *Gaslight* because we change even when he's not here!

(Steps to the mantel and snaps the painting's curtains shut. Then sits down, shaking.)

ORLANDO
(Sitting on the couch)

Did you ever watch it change?

BEVERLY
I tried one afternoon, but after staring at it for an hour, I felt my brain drowning in its own fluid. I stepped outside a minute to clear my head. When I came back the painting had changed.

ORLANDO
What does Marcus say about this?

BEVERLY
He doesn't see the difference. He tells me nothing's changed and leaves me to wonder if I am going mad.

ORLANDO
But you're not, sugar, because I see it too.

BEVERLY
So what do you make of it?

ORLANDO
The rationalist in me knows that the dead do not paint from the grave. But the writer in me, the imaginer of mysteries and macabre morality tales, sees another possibility.

BEVERLY
What?

ORLANDO
Do you believe in evil?

BEVERLY
Not you too. Carol Summers said something about evil being here.

ORLANDO
Interesting. In a way that confirms my idea. Do you remember *The Picture of Dorian Gray*?

(BEVERLY shakes her head.)

ORLANDO

Oscar Wilde's been on my mind. Guess that's why I quoted him earlier. No matter how corrupt, immoral, or homicidal Dorian Gray becomes, he never ages or shows signs of disease. But his portrait does, until the man in the picture looks nothing like him.

BEVERLY

How does it end?

ORLANDO

Gray attacks his picture with the same knife he used to commit a murder. When his servants find him, the picture is perfect but the body on the floor is a withered husk wearing Gray's rings.

BEVERLY

So you think we've got the picture of Dorian Gray on our hands.

ORLANDO

No, the picture of Gunther Creel.

(For a moment neither speaks. Offstage there is the sound of rain beginning.)

BEVERLY

Why do I get the feeling that's worse?

ORLANDO

Dorian Gray's portrait was a repository. It's where he stored evil so it wouldn't manifest itself in his body. Gunther Creel is already dead. Maybe his painting is a conduit, something to channel his evil but now it's leaking out.

BEVERLY

So it's influencing me?

ORLANDO

Infecting you. I think Marcus said Creel called evil a virus.

BEVERLY

That's why I stole Carol's book?

ORLANDO

It's also infecting Marcus.

BEVERLY

How? He's hardly ever here anymore.

ORLANDO

He knew Creel. He hung that painting. And he hasn't been himself lately, has he?

BEVERLY

Well, he's been spending more time in the woods than . . . This is silly.

ORLANDO

No, it isn't. Everything is finally starting to make sense.

BEVERLY

I don't understand.

ORLANDO

You. Marcus. How different you've both become . . . Beverly, we've known each other a long time. You know I would never try to hurt you.

BEVERLY

I know.

ORLANDO

What I'm about to tell you . . . it's not easy.

BEVERLY

(Wary.)

Just say it, O.

ORLANDO

(Taking a deep breath.)

I did play detective. I found the other man.

BEVERLY

What other man?

ORLANDO

Jeremy's other man. It's Marcus. Your husband is sleeping with my boyfriend.

(Before BEVERLY can react, there is a flash of lightning, a sound of thunder. MARCUS bursts in from stage left and from behind loops a necktie around ORLANDO's throat. BEVERLY shrieks and shrinks deeper into her chair. ORLANDO grabs the necktie, but MARCUS pulls him over the back of the couch to the floor and straddles his body as he strangles him. After a brief struggle, ORLANDO goes limp. MARCUS stands and stares at BEVERLY, who is cowering in her chair.)

MARCUS

(Panting, starting toward her.)

Looks like I got here just in time.

(Blackout. Curtain. Sound of thunder.)

Scene 4

There is the sound of rain throughout. The curtain opens. Everything is the same except the painting. Now the only figure in the frame is the man, outside in the rain, holding a shovel as he stands by a fresh mound of earth. In bathrobe and pajamas, BEVERLY is stretched out on her back on the couch, as if sleeping peacefully. Also in robe and pajamas, MARCUS enters from stage right, carrying a newspaper under one arm and a mug in each hand. He sets one mug on the coffee table, then takes a seat across from the couch. Watching BEVERLY, he sips his drink. Then he opens the newspaper and begins to read. Presently, she stirs. Suddenly she lurches into a sitting position, arms flailing momentarily. She stops, obviously confused.

MARCUS

Easy, Bev.

(BEVERLY gazes blankly at MARCUS but says nothing. She clamps her hands on the sides of her head and winces in pain.)

MARCUS

Your head must be pounding.

(BEVERLY lowers her hands, continues to stare at him.)

MARCUS

You've been out nearly three hours. I was beginning to worry about you.

(Realization and memory crowd into BEVERLY's face. Suddenly, she thrusts herself against the back of the couch as if about to climb over it.)

MARCUS

Now don't get yourself excited, honey.

BEVERLY

Gonna kill me too?

MARCUS

I'm not going to hurt you. I made you some hot chocolate.

BEVERLY

I don't want anything from you.

MARCUS

Sorry about the dry mouth. Side effect of the pill I made you take. So is the headache, I'm afraid.

BEVERLY

You made me take a pill?

MARCUS

Had to hold you down and clamp your mouth shut. Oh, there'll be some nausea too. You'll probably have to throw up in a minute.

(BEVERLY takes deep breaths, as if trying to steady herself. Then she notices how she is dressed.)

MARCUS

I had to change your things. You sort of lost control when you went under. I had to wash your clothes.

BEVERLY

What?

MARCUS

Don't be embarrassed. They'll be dry in a little while.

BEVERLY

What kind of drug did you give me?

MARCUS

Something that disabled you while I . . . took care of things.

BEVERLY

What did you do to Orlando?

MARCUS

What I had to do, to insure both our futures.

(BEVERLY looks at the painting, then buries her face in her hands and struggles not to cry. After a few seconds, she lifts her eyes slowly to meet his and takes a deep breath.)

MARCUS

Before you try something silly, I should tell you there's nothing you can do tonight. I've disabled all the telephones, and I have the keys to all the cars. Tomorrow at dawn I'll drive Orlando's down to the highway and roll it into the river. He left during the storm, you see, and lost control, and his body was swept away, never to be found.

BEVERLY

I know the truth.

MARCUS

But right now it's raining too hard, and it's dark—which means you won't be running off anywhere on foot.

BEVERLY

I'll know the truth when the storm is over, when his car is found.

MARCUS

By morning you'll be happy to keep the secret.

(Suddenly gagging, BEVERLY clutches her belly with one hand and covers her mouth with the other.)

MARCUS

That would be the nausea I warned you about.

(BEVERLY runs off stage right. MARCUS drinks more of his hot chocolate. Setting down his mug, he picks up his newspaper and resumes his reading. A moment later, BEVERLY returns, looking weak and patting her mouth with a cloth.)

MARCUS

I hope you made it upstairs in time.

BEVERLY

Yes.

(Goes to the couch and sits.)

Yes, I did.

MARCUS

(Folding his paper and setting it aside.)

You should drink your chocolate.

BEVERLY

No, thank you.

(Sets cloth aside.)

MARCUS

It'll help settle your stomach, and your nerves.

BEVERLY

My nerves are settled.

Enough that we can talk?

MARCUS

I don't want to talk.

BEVERLY

Yes, you do. You just don't know it yet. Now drink up. There's nothing in it.

MARCUS

(Eyes defiant, BEVERLY takes a sip of chocolate.)

Good. You're probably confused right now.

MARCUS

Not in the least. You're a murderer. Nothing confusing about that.

BEVERLY

You're sad about Orlando.

MARCUS
(Rising.)

No, I hate you for Orlando.

BEVERLY

And you're afraid.

MARCUS
(Sitting on the downstage end of the couch.)

One out of three isn't bad, Marcus. I am afraid.

BEVERLY
(Edging away from him.)

There's no need to cry. You're my wife, and we can get through this together.

MARCUS
(Wiping a tear from her cheek.)

Through what? What are you talking about?

BEVERLY

I have to explain things to you. Would you like that?

MARCUS

Please do.

BEVERLY

MARCUS

I want you to understand what's happened to me, how I've changed—

BEVERLY

Changed? That's what you call murdering my best friend?

MARCUS

—because if you don't understand, if your will continues to resist mine, I will have to make you go away.

(BEVERLY says nothing. MARCUS wipes away another tear.)

MARCUS

I've dug several holes on my weekend walks in the woods, but you don't have to end up in one of them.

BEVERLY

(Almost a whisper.)

What's happened to you?

MARCUS

For the first time in my life I feel completely free. I don't care about promotion or tenure. Colleagues and students no longer mean a thing to me. All that matters is what I experience.

(BEVERLY continues to stare straight him, uncomprehending.)

MARCUS

My senses are like they've never been before. Colors have never looked so vivid. Food has never tasted so good.

(Stroking her face as she shudders.)

And every touch I take feels like the first time all over again. I started noticing these changes a few weeks ago, after I hung the painting.

(Standing.)

I began to feel I could do anything, make others do anything. As if the painting had given me an extraordinary power over people.

BEVERLY

Orlando said it was the painting.

MARCUS

(As if he hasn't heard.)

It wasn't hypnosis or brainwashing or drug-induced mind control. It was simply a matter of will.

BEVERLY

He said it was like the picture of Dorian Gray, only worse.

MARCUS

One day everything was clear. I realized that a mind free of conscience and concern can impose itself on a more conventional mind.

(Moves downstage to gaze out French doors.)

BEVERLY

What do you mean?

MARCUS

People want to be led. Therapy, religion, politics, fashion, war—people want someone to tell them what to do, what to wear, what to think.

BEVERLY

That's not completely true.

MARCUS

Of course it is. The average person can be controlled, if you find the right path inside his mind.

BEVERLY

The right path?

MARCUS

Who better to find it than a psychologist trained to read personalities as easily as adults read Dr. Seuss?

(Turns to look at her.)

Or a teacher? Andre Chikatilo was a teacher.

BEVERLY

Chika-who?

MARCUS

Chikatilo. He killed 54 trusting souls before Soviet authorities caught up with him.

(MARCUS turns back to the audience.)

MARCUS

I'm a teacher, a good one. Saying next to nothing, I got my students and several faculty to dislike the most popular girl on campus. After that, seducing Jeremy was easy. So was killing him.

(BEVERLY covers her mouth with one hand.)

MARCUS

Derek was the easiest of all, which is why he finally hanged himself in his cell today.

(BEVERLY puts her second hand over her first.)

MARCUS

Not everyone succumbed, of course. You were more difficult because I knew you best. When I probed your mind, I saw myself blocking each of your doorways—our marriage, this house, a baby. Then I learned you'd stolen that woman's book, and I realized—

BEVERLY

My imagination was gone. I was desperate.

MARCUS

It was the painting. It worked its way into you the way it worked its way into me.

(Turning to her.)

At last I found the right path into your mind and now I have the chance to make you a junior partner in this astonishing freedom.

BEVERLY

I don't understand.

MARCUS

A freedom you've never known. The freedom to do anything you want. Anything. No boundaries, no limits, no rules.

BEVERLY

Don't we need rules?

MARCUS

Rules are for prey, not for predators.

(Takes a step toward her.)

I need a partner, Bev. Someone to share the joy of the hunt . . . the thrill of the kill.

BEVERLY

You want me to . . . kill?

MARCUS

Carefully, cleverly, artfully.

(Another step.)

BEVERLY

Those holes in the woods . . .

MARCUS

(Another step.)

I want you to join me in the creation of a masterpiece.

BEVERLY

This . . . all this is evil.

MARCUS

(Reaching the couch.)

Yes, and it's delicious.

BEVERLY

(Tearfully.)

I love you, Marcus. I love you so much.

MARCUS

I love you too, which is why I'm giving you the chance to share this with me.

BEVERLY

I told Orlando I would do anything to get you back.

MARCUS

This is the only way to get me back.

BEVERLY

(Shaking her head sadly.)

The only way.

MARCUS

But I know the strength of your will.

BEVERLY

(Wiping away tears.)

You don't know what you think you do.

MARCUS

The question is, can you share this with me and not try to thwart me?

BEVERLY

(Pulling a pistol from her robe pocket, leveling it at him.)

You tell me.

(Lightning flashes, followed by thunder. MARCUS takes a step backward as BEVERLY gets to her feet. Arms extended, she holds the pistol with both hands.)

BEVERLY

I have to try.

(MARCUS backs into the mantel. For a moment he is beside the picture as BEVERLY, center stage, still holds the gun on him. He inches toward stage right.)

BEVERLY

You wanted to find the switch that turned evil off.

MARCUS

(Inching toward the stage right exit.)

Beverly, don't do this.

BEVERLY

I'm afraid there are too many switches, Marcus, hidden in too many souls.

MARCUS

Don't do this.

BEVERLY

But if everyone had the chance to turn off one switch . . .

MARCUS

You can't kill me!

BEVERLY

Just one switch.

MARCUS

You love me.

BEVERLY

(Crying.)

I love you—

(MARCUS lunges toward the stage right exit as BEVERLY fires, not at him but at the painting. MARCUS staggers, clutching his back as if shot. BEVERLY fires again at the painting, and this time MARCUS clutches his abdomen. BEVERLY fires three more times. MARCUS reacts to each shot, staggering closer to the exit.)

MARCUS

Beverly . . . please . . .

(Looking at him once, BEVERLY fires her last shot into the painting, and MARCUS lurches offstage backward, tumbling to the floor. He groans for a moment and then is silent. BEVERLY lowers the gun turns away from the painting. Facing the audience, she lets the gun slip from her fingers and buries her face in her hands to cry. For a moment the only sounds are her sobbing and the rain outside. Then, offstage right, there is a cough, followed by a scrape. BEVERLY turns toward the sound and sees a robed figure stumble back onstage and collapse in a heap.)

BEVERLY

Marcus!

(The figure remains still. She rushes upstage toward him, needing to help her husband, to see if she has freed him from his curse.)

BEVERLY: Please be free. Please.

(She kneels beside him, touches him, then recoils when he turns to face her. She scoots backward on her behind, toward downstage center, as the figure climbs to his feet, and the audience sees for the first time that it is not MARCUS in the robe and pajamas but GUNTHER CREEL. He turns his head as if cracking his neck after an uncomfortable sleep.)

BEVERLY

Who . . . who . . .

(Lightning flashes.)

CREEL

(Starting toward her.)

Gunther Creel, and I thought you'd never pull that trigger.

(Thunder. Blackout. BEVERLY screams. Curtain.)

Scene 5

The curtain opens on a bright sunny day. All the living room furniture is covered by sheets. There is no fire. The painting is covered. ANNALISE KYLE enters from stage left. She pauses for a moment and gazes about the room, then exits stage right. After a moment, she returns, carrying a cardboard box, and exits stage left. Presently she returns empty-handed and exits stage right again. Then she re-enters with another box. Before she can carry this one outside, there is the chirp of a cell phone. She sets the box on one of the chairs and takes a flip phone from her pocket.

ANNALISE

Hello. Oh, hi, Bert. Did you get my message?

(Begins to pace about.)

I'm sorry about canceling the interview. No, I won't be able to meet you later for cocktails. Actually, I'm not even in New York. Beverly Hatcher's place, in the middle of nowhere. I flew in last night. Of course I'm not staying in the house. I couldn't bear to. I rented a car and got a motel room about thirty miles away. Loose ends. The new owner is closing this afternoon. As executor of the estate I had papers to sign . . . and I'm getting the last of Beverly's things that I wanted. No, she had no other family, and neither did Marcus. Yes, it is déjà vu all over again, but at least Orlando rented. It was a lot easier to settle his affairs. Sure, we're rushing both books into print. Two bestselling authors murdered by one's husband. Can you think of better publicity? The last Danielle Castle and the last Skip Dandridge—my bosses think each will go into ten printings easily. No, I missed the rebroadcast but I saw it the first time, three months ago. How did I feel? I used to watch Most Wanted USA just to catch Marcus's occasional analysis. To see him at the top of the wanted list is more . . .

(Voice cracks.)

I'm sorry, Bert. This is hard. Off the record? No, I don't think they'll ever catch him. He cleaned out all four bank accounts before he disappeared, even before the bodies were discovered. Marcus is one of the smartest people I know. No, I have no idea why he did it. Sure, I'm glad I live in a secure building, though I can't imagine why he'd ever come after me.

(She ends her pacing near the stage left exit.)

Wait, somebody is pulling up outside. I'd better go. Sure, I'll call you when I get back. Bye.

(Clicks off and puts the phone in her pocket.)

(ANNALISE stands near the stage left exit as if looking outside. Presently, GUNTHER CREEL enters, neatly dressed and wearing large black-framed eyeglasses.)

ANNALISE

You must be the new owner, Mr. Grant.

(Extends her hand. They shake briefly.)

CREEL

Call me Carl. You must be Miss Kyle. The lawyer said you might still be here.

ANNALISE

Call me Annalise. I'll be out of your way in a few minutes.

CREEL

Take all the time you need. The few things I have out in my van can wait to come in.

ANNALISE

Are your movers coming later?

CREEL

Oh, no. Everything I have is outside.

ANNALISE

Everything?

CREEL

Everything that's left. I sold the rest. Every few years I just start over from scratch.

ANNALISE

What an interesting approach to life.

CREEL

One of the selling points in this house was all the furniture left by . . . Well, I know the place has a certain notoriety.

ANNALISE

I'm just glad it sold. Being responsible for it was draining in ways you can't begin to imagine.

CREEL

Were you related to the owners?

ANNALISE

I was a friend of the wife. Speaking of wives, how does yours feel about living here?

CREEL

(Looking away.)

She . . . she passed away.

ANNALISE

(Touching his arm)

I'm sorry.

CREEL

It was a long time ago. You couldn't have known.

ANNALISE

What do you do, Mr.—Carl?

CREEL

Well . . . Annalise . . . I'm kind of retired.

ANNALISE

You're kind of young to be retired.

CREEL

Good investments in my youth, my wife's life insurance. If I'm careful and my stocks don't do too badly, I never need to work again.

ANNALISE

So how do you spend your time?

CREEL

Reading. Traveling. Taking courses.

ANNALISE

You're in school?

CREEL

No, I take classes every now and then because I like knowing things. Lately I've been trying my hand at painting.

ANNALISE

Really?

CREEL

It's why I took this house so far away from everything. If I can spend a few years away from people and distractions, I can concentrate on my work, see if I can take it to the next level.

ANNALISE

Going to work on a masterpiece, eh?

CREEL

(Staring into her eyes.)

Enough about me. Tell me about yourself.

ANNALISE

What do you want to know?

CREEL

The lawyer said you were some kind of book publisher.

ANNALISE

Editor. Beverly Hatcher, the wife, she was one of my writers, and so was Orlando Gaines, the other victim.

ANNALISE (continued)

(Lowers her eyes and turns away to hide her grief.)

I'm sorry.

CREEL

(Placing his hands on her shoulders.)

No apology necessary. I understand how hard it must be for you to be here. But please don't feel the need to leave quickly.

(ANNALISE turns in his arms to face him and looks into his eyes. For a moment neither speaks.)

ANNALISE

You're very kind, Carl.

CREEL

And you're even prettier than the lawyer said you were.

ANNALISE

You think I'm pretty?

CREEL

I think you're beautiful, Annalise.

(Runs his fingers over her face.)

I would love to paint you.

ANNALISE

Me?

CREEL

(Almost a whisper.)

Yes.

ANNALISE

Nude, perhaps?

CREEL

If you wouldn't mind hanging naked over my fireplace for as long as I live here. That way I could look at you every day.

ANNALISE

(Smoothing her hair and turning away.)

I almost forgot. There's already a painting above the mantel. I'd like to take it with me.
(Opens the curtain to reveal the original painting seen in Act One, Scene 1.)

CREEL

Is that them, your friends?

ANNALISE

Yes.

CREEL

Nice looking couple.

ANNALISE

Yes, they were.

CREEL

But you'll look better in that spot.

(They continue staring at each other. ANNALISE removes his glasses and kisses him, throwing her arms around his neck. After a moment she breaks the kiss and steps back.)

ANNALISE

(Handing him his glasses, which he puts on.)

I'm sorry.

CREEL

I'm not.

ANNALISE

I . . . I don't know why I did that.

CREEL

I don't care why. I just look forward to having you do it again—maybe when you pose for me.

ANNALISE

My plane leaves tonight. I have no reason to come back.

CREEL

Change your flight. Let me give you a reason to stay.

ANNALISE

Stay?

CREEL

At least for tonight. New York will still be there tomorrow.

ANNALISE

Yes, it will.

CREEL

And after tonight, maybe you'll have a reason to come back here.

ANNALISE

Maybe.

CREEL

Let me paint you by the fire, all night.
(Touches her face.)

Your skin, your eyes, your figure.
(Removes his glasses and kisses her.)

You'll make a perfect picture.
(Blackout. Curtain.)

The End

Picture Perfect Paintings (Suggest that actors' photos be taken digitally, converted to painting mode on a photo program, and blown up to poster size):

1. Man and woman smiling, arms linked.
2. Man and woman smiling, beside each other with their arms not linked.
3. Man and woman apart, looking at each other with suspicion.
4. Man and woman on opposite sides of the frame. The woman is toward the background, looking over her shoulder as if afraid of being seen. The man is in the foreground, whispering into the ear of a half-hidden face.
5. The man and woman are now far apart, casting each other suspicious sidelong glances.
6. The man, outside in the rain, holding a shovel as he stands by a fresh mound of earth.

Picture Perfect Property List:
Handcuffs. Leg irons.
Table with wire mesh divider.

Poster sized picture frame with cylindrical light and curtain.
Small lamp table. Lamp. Snack table. Couch. Two armchairs.

Folding chairs. Fireplace screen
with simulated electric fire.
Trays. Cups. Mugs. Chip bowls.
Coffee pots and cups. Wine
glasses.
Cordless telephone. Cell phone.
Wine bottles, one with a red
ribbon.
Briefcase.
Gift box with laptop computer.
Pen and pocket notebook.
A large purse and a book
manuscript.
Crackers and cheese on a plate.
A small cloth or hand towel.
Small target pistol.
Newspaper.
Pajamas and robe for BEVERLY,
MARCUS and CREEL.
Two cardboard boxes.
Large black eyeglass frames.

Picture Perfect Sounds:

Doorbell.
Telephone. Cell phone.
Steady rain.
Thunder, with lightning flashes.
Gunshots.