

Grandfather is getting older and the family needs to come together and care for him. George and Veeann are both active members of the Church, caring and kind people whose only interest is his welfare. But what happens when moral principles collide with financial realities? Which tends to win out? What if those making such decisions were more selfish, less in tune with the Spirit, less caring, more grasping?

ACCOMMODATIONS

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

By Eric Samuelsen

AUTHOR'S NOTE

IN SEPTEMBER 1990, I HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO TRAVEL to Norway in the company of my grandfather, Ragnar Andreas Samuelsen. "Bestefar," as we always called him, was then eighty-six years old, but had always been an active, hard-working man—sailor, arctic explorer, steelworker—and in many ways the trip was a happy one, as he and I visited family and friends. It was also on that trip, however, that I began to notice how badly his health was beginning to deteriorate. His decline continued after our return to the States. Eventually my father and my aunt were forced to make the difficult decision to place him in a nursing home, where he passed away in March of this year.

My father and my aunt are both active members of the Church, caring and kind people, whose only interest was the welfare of their father. Nonetheless, seeing how the decisions they were forced to make were so wrenching and difficult, the situation began to spark my interest as a playwright. The creative impulse inside me began asking inconvenient questions. What happens when one's moral principles collide with financial realities? Which tends to win out? What if the people making such decisions were more selfish, less in tune with the Spirit, less caring, more grasping? What if the older relative involved in such a situation was similarly uncooperative and difficult? And so I wrote *Accommodations*. Ironically, we began rehearsals the week my grandfather died.

The characters in this play tend to represent darker shadings of people I have known in and out of the Church, and are polar opposites to my father and aunt. My grandfather, for example, had his moments of cantankerousness, but he was hardly a Marty Mortenson. While I hope the Mortensons, and their struggles, will be recognizable and real, I also hope nobody thinks they represent all

Mormons. The play is intended much more as a warning than as a portrait.

Accommodations was first presented by the Brigham Young University Department of Theatre and Film at the Margett's Theatre, 13–29 May 1993, directed by Thomas F. Rogers. The original cast was:

GEORGE	Bill Brown
VEEANN	Elizabeth J. Smith
LYNN	Samantha Smith
MICHAEL	J. Scott Bronson
CHUCK	Matthew Tyler Williams
CAROLINE	Lara Blackner
FRANKLIN	Curtis Brien
ROBYN	Stephanie Mills
MARTY	Leo Ware

CHARACTERS

(Five men, four women)

GEORGE MORTENSON—An architect in his fifties. The oldest of his siblings.

VEEANN MORTENSON—His wife, in her fifties.

MARTY MORTENSON—George's father, a man in his eighties. A former rancher, now confined to a wheelchair.

MICHAEL MORTENSON—George's youngest brother, in his mid-forties. An insurance salesman.

FRANKLIN MORTENSON—Second oldest of the Mortenson children, just two years younger than George. The assistant manager of a pharmacy.

ROBYN MORTENSON—Franklin's daughter. Fifteen.

DR. CAROLINE O'HARA—George's sister, between Michael and Franklin in age. A pediatrician.

CHUCK HARSTAD—George and Veeann's son-in-law and the foreman of Marty's old ranch.

LYNN HARSTAD—George and Veeann's daughter, married to Chuck.

ERIC SAMUELSEN is assistant professor of theater and film at Brigham Young University. His plays have been performed in New York, Indiana, Idaho, California, and BYU. This play is his fourth BYU mainstage production.



I was nineteen, I speak from experience, kiddo. In love for the first time at twelve, sexually active at fourteen, pregnant at eighteen, and divorced by my twentieth birthday. All because of this ridiculous notion that attracting some man is the be-all and end-all of a woman's existence.

ACT ONE

SET: George and Veeann's house, somewhere in Utah. A kitchen on one side of the stage, and a family room attached. Between the kitchen and family room, stairs lead up to George and Veeann's room on the second floor, and a hall leads into the rest of the house; off the hall, we see two doors, Marty's room and a bathroom. In the kitchen are the usual appliances and a light with a buzzer, which was obviously recently added. There's a television in the family room, a stereo, and a huge bookcase. This is removed for Acts Two and Three.

TIME: The present.

Act One Scene One: Late one night, in mid-October.

Act One Scene Two: A Friday night, two weeks later.

Act Two: Saturday morning, the next day.

Act Three: Saturday evening.

SCENE I

George and Veeann's family room-kitchen. It is the middle of the

night. In the family room is a card table covered with an accordion file organizer and numerous papers. We see a flashlight outside the house and hear scratching at the front door. CHUCK's shadowy figure slips into the room. He looks around for a moment, getting his bearings, then heads over to the card table. He pulls out a Polaroid camera and takes a picture of the card table. Then he begins looking through the papers in the file. After he searches for a moment, we hear some movement from the top of the stairs. CHUCK moves away from the table, trips and falls. Grabbing his shoulder, he curses under his breath, crosses to the kitchen, and switches off his flashlight. A light comes on at the top of the stairs. GEORGE appears, wearing a bathrobe. He comes a few feet down the stairs, bends over, looks around.

GEORGE: It's okay, Vee. I don't see anything.

(GEORGE heads back up the stairs. We hear a door close. CHUCK returns to the table. Looks at papers again. Finds the one he needs. He takes out a small notebook, copies down some figures. Then he carefully consults the Polaroid as he puts the papers back on the table the way he found them. He quietly slips out the front door again.)

SCENE II

(The same room, late one Friday evening, in the fall. GEORGE sits in the living room, watching a taped football game on television, a plate of food on his knee. He is sitting by the card table, looking at papers.)

GEORGE: Come on, come on . . . nice play! Fourth down, now let's block the punt.

(Enter VEEANN from MARTY's room. She is carrying a bucket, a soiled Depends, rags, dirty clothes.)

VEEANN: I suppose it's just crucially important that you see every play.

GEORGE *(a little guiltily)*: Something to do while I look this stuff over.

VEEANN: Wait a minute. This isn't the game you taped last Sunday, is it?

GEORGE: Last night.

VEEANN: They played on a Thursday?

GEORGE: It was the Thursday night edition of Monday night football.

VEEANN: That makes as much sense as anything.

GEORGE: Couldn't watch it last night, because of stake priesthood. I thought you liked it when I taped them.

VEEANN: It does beat the dark ages, George, before God gave us women the VCR. Honestly, George, how many Sunday dinners were ruined because you had to sit there, my finest china balanced on your knee, glomming your food down half chewed, watching the Forty-niners, or the Bears, whoever. Racing home from church so you could watch the fourth quarter. The girls and I tiptoeing around so as to not disturb you and Tommy and your precious games.

GEORGE: It wasn't as bad as all that. A good father-son activity, I always felt. Besides, what did you used to do on Sundays? Watch old movies, Tyrone Power and Dorothy Lamour, Danny Kaye, Donald O'Connor. . .

VEEANN: That's different.

GEORGE: *(He looks over at her.)* How is he?

VEEANN: Asleep.

GEORGE: Good. Was it bad?

VEEANN: I just keep telling myself, after this weekend, it's over.

GEORGE: I'm sorry I couldn't help.

VEEANN: You heard him. "Stay the hell out, George. Veeann! I want Veeann." Always Veeann.

GEORGE: I'm sorry, honey.

VEEANN: It's okay, George. Like I said, after this weekend. *(Crosses to him at the card table.)* What are you finding?

GEORGE: Pretty much what I expected. He bought land.

VEEANN: Where?

GEORGE: Everywhere. A few acres here, an old field there, a worn-out ranch, spread all across the valley. Most of it close to worthless. Probably some of it close to prime.

VEEANN: Done?

GEORGE: Thanks. *(She crosses to him, takes his tray back to the kitchen.)*

VEEANN: Is any of it worth developing?

GEORGE: No way to say unless I drive up north some Saturday and look at it. It's mostly just scrub land, mesquite and tumbleweed. It's that generation. They got into their heads a single thought: "land is a good investment," and never went any farther. They just bought. Did I tell you about that one piece, up the canyon?

VEEANN: With the hot spring?

GEORGE: That's right. Thirty-five acres, all it has are a few scrub pine and a hot spring. But he doesn't own the mineral rights and there's no record of who does. Worst of all, he doesn't have access. We'll have to call the neighbors just to get permission to look at it. It's worthless.

VEEANN: A shame, isn't it?

GEORGE: You know, when I think of my mother, patching up hand-me-downs and cooking on a coal stove for all those years so he could go into debt to buy a stand of trees and a hot springs nobody can get to—*(shakes his head.)*

VEEANN: I know, George.

GEORGE: *(The buzzer sounds.)* I thought he was asleep.

VEEANN: He was.

GEORGE: Do you want me to . . . *(a pause)*

VEEANN: No, no. I'll get it. *(VEEANN crosses back to MARTY's room.)*

GEORGE: It always has to be Dad's way, everything has to be. No thought to . . . *(Back to the T.V.)* Look at that! Seventy-five yards, right down the middle. Young to Rice, I swear he's better than Montana. *(He hits the fast forward.)* Skip the extra point. *(He looks at the papers from the accordion file with distaste, puts them away, picks up a brochure.)* Did I tell you what Meyer wanted for the development? A health club, right in the middle of the subdivision? Racketball courts, a swimming pool, a weight room. He figures they'll have the neighborhood association run the thing. *(VEEANN comes back in.)* Everything okay?

VEEANN: He wanted his pillow adjusted. Dozed right back off again.

GEORGE: Can I help?

VEEANN: No.

GEORGE: I know it gets to you.

VEEANN: It's all right, George. *(Changing the subject.)* You know, a health club, it's not a bad idea.

GEORGE: With the country club six miles down the road? A "Y" twenty minutes away in the city? I mean, that's from his advertising, he's talking about nearby facilities in his brochure. But he's one of those skinny jogger types; you can't talk to him. Everything health and fitness.

VEEANN: Well, I know how much this development means to you.

GEORGE: It's a nice coup for us. I may have to hire a new draftsman just to handle some of the routine work. *(VEEANN crosses to the kitchen and begins putting the last touches on a plate of hors d'oeuvres.)* Didn't you think it was strange, what Dad said tonight?

VEEANN: George, there's nothing wrong with his mind. Caroline hasn't been to visit in six months, and Franklin in three. Michael hasn't come down for weeks. No one's even called since his birthday. You tell him they're all coming to visit the same weekend, he has to know something's up.

GEORGE: I suppose you're right.

VEEANN: His children are coming to decide what to do about him.

GEORGE: I know. And he's right. That's what makes it worse.

What're those?

VEEANN: A few hors d'oeuvres.

GEORGE: What are those things on top?

VEEANN: What, these? Crab. And see, I've also got some shrimp, some with paté.

GEORGE: Thanks. *(She brings the tray over to him.)* Okay, the Medicare requirements, last physician's statement, cost of in-home nursing. Looks like everything.

VEEANN: Did you get both doctors? You know Caroline.

GEORGE: Just Hamilton. She'll just want the neurologist.

VEEANN: *(Looking at his list.)* You've only listed the nursing homes.

Didn't we get that price list?

GEORGE: It's just one option. I didn't want it to look too specific.

VEEANN: Too specific?

GEORGE: Like we'd already decided. Nursing home. It's a frightening word.

VEEANN: It is.

GEORGE: "A warehouse where you wait to die." That's what Caroline called it last time.

VEEANN: I remember.

GEORGE: It's more a choice. Just another option that they need to be aware of.

VEEANN: Yes.

GEORGE: I plan to bring it up, Veeann.

VEEANN: Don't you think they need enough information to evaluate that choice?

GEORGE: I've got the price list here, if anyone wants to see it. (*Changing the subject.*) Have you decided where everybody's going to sleep?

VEEANN: I figured I'd put Caroline in Frannie's old room. When's she getting in?

GEORGE: Her flight comes in tonight. I offered to pick her up, but she said she'd rent a car.

VEEANN: Really?

GEORGE: That's Caroline.

VEEANN: Michael in Tommy's room and Franklin on the hideabed in my sewing room. Chuck and Lynn are coming with Michael; we'll put them in Lynn's old room.

GEORGE: I'm still worried about Lynn being here.

VEEANN: I wanted to see her. Since Michael and Chuck were coming anyway, I thought I'd grab a chance to visit with my daughter.

GEORGE: Sure. Still, a family council with only one of the grandchildren invited. You know how easily Caroline feels slighted.

VEEANN: George, that's silly. She could hardly bring Trevor and Philippa from California for this. The next thing you'll be saying is that Caroline might resent my presence at the meeting.

GEORGE: She might.

VEEANN: Well, let her resent it. I'm the person most directly affected by this decision; naturally I expect to be part of it.

GEORGE: I'm just saying . . .

VEEANN: Caroline may be the youngest, George, but you let her bully you all the same, all of you do.

GEORGE: Who's watching Lynn's kids?

VEEANN: She said she was going to leave them with Ruth.

GEORGE: Ruth. Her and Michael's seven and now Lynn's four. And probably a half dozen neighborhood kids, all in that three-bedroom, one bath.

VEEANN: And not much of a yard.

GEORGE: The woman's a saint.

VEEANN: Well, I don't like to impose on her. But as much as I would love to see my grandchildren, this is an adult gathering. Besides, I want to talk with Lynn.

GEORGE: About her and Chuck?

VEEANN: Woman talk, George.

GEORGE (*uncomfortably*): Well, she's not going to be the only grandchild, as it happens.

VEEANN: Oh? (*A light dawns.*) Oh no.

GEORGE: Yes. Franklin told me he is bringing Robyn.

VEEANN: That's just impossible, George. You didn't say yes?

GEORGE: I didn't know what to say. Franklin . . . (*He gestures*

helplessly.)

VEEANN: I know. Franklin.

GEORGE: I told him we didn't have much extra bed space.

VEEANN: You can't be subtle with Franklin, George. It's like your father's story about the mule and the two-by-four. You have to get his attention first.

GEORGE: He said he would bring a sleeping bag for her.

VEEANN: That's not the point, George. What are we going to do with her while we're meeting? You can't expect Lynn to entertain her.

GEORGE: No, no.

VEEANN: Well?

GEORGE: I believe she knows some people here in town.

VEEANN: Well, of course she does. She'll ring up the local chapter of Teenagers from Hell. Don't you remember last summer?

GEORGE: The one with the nose ring?

VEEANN: And the spiked hair? And the eyeshadow? And the music. What was it she was trying to make us listen to? Something about Ted Kennedy?

GEORGE: I thought it was Dead Kennedy. The Dead Kennedys? Can that be right?

VEEANN: Honestly, George, this is impossible.

GEORGE: We could move the VCR up to the bedroom, and let her rent some movies.

VEEANN: Do you trust Robyn's taste in movies?

GEORGE: Honey, she's harmless enough. We'll send out for pizza, she'll probably think it's a real treat.

VEEANN: I shudder to think of what Robyn would consider "a real treat." (*Lights pull into the driveway.*) Well, it looks like somebody's here.

GEORGE (*crossing to the window*): It looks like Michael's car. You ready?

VEEANN: (*Nods.*) Ready. (*Crosses to the front door. Opens it.*) Lynn!

LYNN: Mom! (*Enters, hugs her. A quiet, worn looking, self-possessed young woman, in her late twenties to early thirties. Turns to GEORGE, another hug.*) Dad!

GEORGE: Lynn, you look great.

LYNN: Actually, I'm beat. I had pack meeting until late last night, and got home in time to help round up cattle. Another fence down.

VEEANN: It sounds like a weekend away from it all is just what you need.

GEORGE: How are the kids?

LYNN: Great, you know, the usual.

VEEANN: How's Justin dealing with first grade?

LYNN: You know, the first day of class, he was all clingy and teary. "I don't want to go, Mommy," all the way to the school. We walked in the classroom, and the first thing he saw was the bookcase full of books. All his favorites, Dr. Seuss, Berenstain Bears, Mercer Mayer, Bill Peet. Then it was, like, "Later, Mom," like I didn't even exist. I cried all the way home.

GEORGE: Where's your suitcase?

LYNN: Actually, Chuck could use a hand with it. He was breaking a colt and hurt his shoulder.

GEORGE: I'll see if I can help. (*Exits.*)

VEEANN: I'm so glad you were able to get away.

LYNN: Well, Ruth is just a saint. I'm going to pay her back one of these days, if I have to kidnap her and Michael and drive them to the movies myself.

VEEANN: Every time you come down, I'm just amazed. You look like such a rancher.

LYNN: Well, I am a rancher.

VEEANN: And it's going all right?

LYNN (*steadily*): Everything's just great.

VEEANN: Are you sure?

LYNN: Mom, the kids love the ranch. Melissa and Justin are horse crazy. Chuck says he'll buy Melissa a pony for her baptism, if she can show him she knows how to take care of it. You should see her with old Muffin.

VEEANN: And Chuck?

LYNN: Chuck loves the ranch, too. (*Changing the subject.*) How about you and Dad? Hasn't he been working on some new development?

VEEANN: Oh, you know your father. It's the biggest project the firm has ever taken on, and he's always griping about the builder, or the site, or the specs, but you know he's really pleased.

(*The door opens, and GEORGE enters with a suitcase. Following him are CHUCK and MICHAEL. CHUCK is LYNN's husband, good looking in a blue collar sort of way, sullen. Right now, he's wearing his arm in a sling. MICHAEL is the youngest Mortenson sibling. Smaller than GEORGE, intense. A decent man, but pushed beyond his limits.*)

GEORGE: . . . endless problems. We've sprayed and sprayed. Maybe the frost will kill them, start again in the spring. Vee, look who's here.

MICHAEL: Vee, good to see you again.

VEEANN: Good to see you, Michael.

CHUCK: Mom Mortenson.

VEEANN: Chuck, my goodness. What did you do?

CHUCK: Colt bucked me.

VEEANN: That's what Lynn said.

GEORGE: I like the hat. You look more like John Wayne everytime we see you.

LYNN: That's my husband. The Duke.

MICHAEL (*abruptly*): Is Dad up?

VEEANN: Actually, he dozed off watching *Wheel of Fortune*. He'll be up soon.

GEORGE: Well, Lynn, you're in your old room. Let me take this up for you.

VEEANN: I'll get you your linens. (VEEANN, GEORGE and LYNN head upstairs.) So, how's little David doing with the potty training?

LYNN: Well, he seems to have pee pee down pretty well. Poo poo is another matter.

(LYNN and VEEANN exit.)

MICHAEL: Nice touch.

CHUCK: Whaddya mean?

MICHAEL: Bringing your wife along. Good move.

CHUCK: They're her parents.

MICHAEL: We've got too much at stake here, Chuck. I was planning to use the drive down to work out our approach.

CHUCK: Our approach, right.

MICHAEL: You're still in, aren't you?

CHUCK: Maybe.

MICHAEL: Chuck, we've talked this over. This is a sure thing.

CHUCK: Yeah. Like the last sure thing.

MICHAEL: That hasn't fallen through yet.

CHUCK: I may be a goat roper, Michael, I'm not an idiot. Attorney General's office is investigating? And the FBI?

MICHAEL: Nothing's been proven. I got a check, you got a check.

CHUCK: Seed money, Michael. They suckered us.

MICHAEL: Well, don't talk to me. No one was twisting your arm.

CHUCK: And now you got a new scheme, another sure fire thing.

We're all gonna get rich, start using twenty dollar bills for toilet paper.

MICHAEL: Has anyone asked you for money?

CHUCK: Not this time. Not yet.

MICHAEL: This time, it's real, Chuck.

CHUCK: Uh huh.

MICHAEL: You've talked to Jay Bell, you talked to Forsman.

CHUCK: I talked to the guys from Mountain Security, too.

MICHAEL: But this time you've seen the documentation. They have the financing. They'll get the zoning. That's what I'm saying, it's real this time, Chuck.

CHUCK: I heard the sales pitch, Michael.

MICHAEL: And you bought in.

CHUCK: Hey, I got you your information, didn't I? You didn't even know if he owned that one tract. I'm the one you got to sneak into my wife's parent's house middle of the night. I'm in.

MICHAEL: Good.

CHUCK: For now.

MICHAEL: Fine. (*Pause.*) You know, I hate this, don't you?

CHUCK: What?

MICHAEL: This whole thing. The deception.

CHUCK: Me, too.

MICHAEL: It borders on dishonesty.

CHUCK: Borders, yeah.

MICHAEL: I mean, I'm prepared to come clean. Tell them everything. But I need the money.

CHUCK: Me, too.

MICHAEL: And who knows. The rest of the land may be worth even more.

CHUCK: So how do we handle this?

VEEANN (*coming down the stairs*): Michael! There you are! I thought you were right behind us.

MICHAEL: Sorry, Vee.

VEEANN: I'm putting you in Tommy's old room.

MICHAEL: How is Tommy?

VEEANN: He called a couple of weeks ago. Says he loves Corvallis.

(*Ring at the door. Heads for the door.*) We haven't heard from him

since, which must mean his money's holding out. (*Opens the*

door.) Caroline! (*Shouts up the stairs.*) George! It's Caroline.

CAROLINE (*A professional woman, younger than the others, opinionated, outspoken, a bit disorganized, but basically well-meaning. Kind enough, when not crossed.*): Hello, Vee. Michael, Chuck. (*They all ad lib greetings.*)

MICHAEL: Caroline. How's California?

CAROLINE: Full of oranges. How on earth do you people find your way out of that airport? I think I took the same exit ramp three times.

VEEANN: You look tired. Can I get you something? Diet coke?

CAROLINE: Fine. Really though, 80, 15, 215, this exit, that, I didn't know where I was. And the rental car map was no use at all. As for the drivers in this state, well! Like it's some kind of crime to let you merge in front of them. I never want to hear another word about California drivers as long as I live.

MICHAEL: We'd have been happy to pick you up.

CAROLINE: I like having my own wheels.

GEORGE (*Coming down the stairs*): Caroline! How's my kid sister?

CAROLINE: George, you've put on weight again. I know you have that stair climber, I bet you haven't used it in a month.

GEORGE: And you're still smoking, aren't you?

CAROLINE: Not this weekend. I've got this nicoderm patch thing I'm trying. Michael, you're getting fat, too.

MICHAEL: Maybe a bit of a paunch.

CAROLINE: So, how's Dad?

VEEANN: He's sleeping right now.

CAROLINE: Good. What's the latest from that quack Hamilton?

GEORGE: I'll give the whole report when Franklin gets here.

CAROLINE: Did you get me those test results?

GEORGE: They wouldn't let me have all his charts, but I got most of what you asked for.

CAROLINE: We're meeting tonight, I hope. I really can't stay past Sunday. It was hard enough getting away for a weekend.

MICHAEL: Dad said you had brought in a new partner.

CAROLINE: I did. Obnoxious little twerp named Shahrami. Akeem Shahrami. The nurses all call him Dr. I'm-so-wonderful behind his back. He overheard them and thought it was a compliment.

VEEANN: Is he a good doctor?

CAROLINE: I wish he was half as good as he thinks he is. An office politician like you wouldn't believe. I've got to get back and make sure he hasn't stolen half my patients.

GEORGE: Can I bring in your suitcase?

CAROLINE: You certainly can. (*Hands him car keys.*) I've got a compact and an overcoat in the front seat, too.

MICHAEL: I'll give you a hand. (*GEORGE and MICHAEL exit out the front door.*)

CAROLINE: Where are you putting me, Veeann? In Frannie's old room, as usual?

VEEANN: If you don't mind the Bon Jovi poster. I had to promise not to take it down.

CAROLINE: Isn't she about finished?

VEEANN: One more year. Unless . . . (*crosses her fingers.*)

CAROLINE: No. Not that geek from Fresno?

VEEANN: Randy Tanner. And he's a very nice young man. Engineering student.

CAROLINE: Just what the world needs. Lose a terrific young journalist, gain another lousy housewife. (*To VEEANN.*) No offense.

VEEANN (*a bit stiffly*): None taken. Anyway, we keep waiting to hear, but no announcement yet. (*MICHAEL and GEORGE carry in baggage.*) George, those go . . .

GEORGE: I know. Upstairs, Michael. (*He and MICHAEL head upstairs.*)

LYNN: Actually, Frannie was saying that she thought she'd go on a mission.

CAROLINE: Another waste.

VEEANN: Frannie?

LYNN: We talked on the phone last week.

VEEANN: She hasn't said a word to me or your father.

LYNN: She hadn't made up her mind. But I don't think she's planning to marry anytime soon.

CAROLINE: Good for her. Never a good idea to marry too young.

LYNN: I was married at twenty.

CAROLINE: I was nineteen, I speak from experience, kiddo. In love for the first time at twelve, sexually active at fourteen, pregnant at eighteen, and divorced by my twentieth birthday. All because of this ridiculous notion that attracting some man is the be-all and end-all of a woman's existence. Took me two disastrous marriages to knock all that nonsense out of me once and for all.

VEEANN: In the meantime, you have two terrific kids to show for it.

CAROLINE: Neither of whom will ever marry, if I have anything to say about it.

LYNN: Mom, what was it Phillippa wanted for Christmas? Something for her Barbie, I remember. Bridal accessories?

CAROLINE: Don't you dare! (*General laughter.*) She gets enough gender stereotyping from her stepfather. Let's see, that leaves Alicia. She's still in Idaho?

VEEANN: That's right. Steve's still in residency.

CAROLINE: Well, orthodontia is where the bucks are. (*The doorbell rings, as MICHAEL and GEORGE come down the stairs.*) I bet that's Franklin!

VEEANN: I'll get the door, George. (*She opens the door.*) Franklin! Good to see you! (*Others ad lib greetings. FRANKLIN enters. Kisses her awkwardly. Awkward is the word for FRANKLIN.*)

FRANKLIN: Hello, Vee. I'm glad you could put us up. (*Nods.*) Michael, Chuck.

MICHAEL: Franklin, good to see you. (*ROBYN pushes her way into the room. She's wearing a Walkman. Without a word, she slouches over toward the couch.*)

FRANKLIN: Robyn, could you . . . uh . . . (*Crosses to her, gestures and speaks loudly.*) Could you say hello to your Aunt Vee?

ROBYN: When this song's over. (*FRANKLIN stands over her ineffectually.*)

GEORGE: Franklin. Glad you could come.

FRANKLIN: George, good to see you.

LYNN: Uncle Franklin.

FRANKLIN: Lynn. (*They embrace.*) How's life on the ranch?

LYNN: (*Crossing to CHUCK.*) Pretty overwhelming at times. But the kids absolutely love it.

GEORGE: Well, of course they do. It's a great place for kids. Horses, livestock, climbing trees. Remember the fun we had sailing pea pods down the irrigation ditch?

MICHAEL: And chasing jackrabbits on horseback.

CAROLINE: I'm glad the guys are all feeling so nostalgic. Chores, that's all I remember.

FRANKLIN: We did chores, Caroline.

CAROLINE: Sure, the same chores I did, divided three ways. By the time I came along, you were gone. (*Uproar, as they all top each other.*)

GEORGE: He spoiled you rotten, Caroline!

MICHAEL: You never mucked out the stables. Right?

FRANKLIN: Or the goats. I had the goats. That's what I remember.

MICHAEL: Curryng the mare, you remember that one . . .

CAROLINE: I did just as many chores. (*Talking over them.*)

FRANKLIN: Did you have to replace fencing? I remember the barbed wire . . .

MICHAEL: How about replacing windmill bands, did you ever . . .

GEORGE: Or branding . . .

ROBYN (*snatching out her earphones*): Do you mind! (*She glares at them, and they all stare at her. She returns to her music.*)

VEEANN: Well look. It's seven-thirty. Let's get everyone settled, and then we all can get an early start on things. Franklin, I'm putting you on the hideabed in my sewing room upstairs.

FRANKLIN: That'll be fine.

VEEANN: I wish I'd known Robyn was coming, too, I'd have made arrangements. Do you think she'll be comfortable on the sofa down here?

ROBYN: (*Emerges from the Walkman.*) Dad will be fine on the sofa. I'm taking the hideabed.

VEEANN (*under her breath*): Honestly.

FRANKLIN: Robyn, I think your Aunt Vee . . .

ROBYN: Dad, the hideabed mattress is too soft for your back. Besides, you're all going to meet in here. You'll want me out of the way.

VEEANN (*at a loss*): Well, perhaps . . .

GEORGE: We were thinking we could move the VCR to the T.V. upstairs in our bedroom. Maybe we could order in pizza, you

could rent a movie.

LYNN: That sounds fun. Robyn, maybe we can find *The Court Jester*? I'm sure you'd enjoy that, it's an old family favorite.

ROBYN: I'm meeting some guys I met last time. Don't know when I'll be back.

GEORGE: Curfew in this house is twelve o'clock, Robyn.

ROBYN: Oh, that'll be okay, George.

VEEANN: *Uncle Geor . . .*

ROBYN: Dad will be downstairs, he can just let me in. Dad, I need some money.

FRANKLIN: Oh. Very well. I suppose I could front you a little . . .

ROBYN: You got fifty from the Redi-cash. That'll do.

FRANKLIN: (*Reaches for his wallet.*) I had actually hoped to have a reserve . . .

ROBYN: (*Takes his wallet, removes the money.*) Thanks. Anyone give me a ride downtown? (*They all stare at her, dismayed. She shrugs.*) Or I could just hitch.

CHUCK: I'll drop you off. If your Uncle Michael will lend me his keys.

ROBYN: Don't put yourself out, Cousin Charles.

CHUCK: Chuck. And I'm not your cousin.

ROBYN: Cousin-in-law, then.

MICHAEL (*handing CHUCK keys and a credit card*): Here. My Shell card. Fill it up while you're out.

CHUCK: Be back soon. (*CHUCK and ROBYN exit.*)

CAROLINE: Well!

FRANKLIN: (*A chuckle that doesn't quite work.*) High spirited teenagers. She . . . can be quite a . . . quite a handful. (*They all murmur ad libbed agreement.*)

LYNN: She's really quite attractive. It's a look all her own, of course. (*They again murmur ad libbed agreement.*)

FRANKLIN: Well, I'll just unpack Robyn's things. In the sewing room upstairs?

VEEANN: That's right, Franklin. Top of the stairs, second right. (*He takes a suitcase up. They watch until he's gone.*)

CAROLINE: Well, if you ask me, that situation's gone from bad to worse.

LYNN: Poor Uncle Franklin.

GEORGE: Since Vickie's death, he's really had it tough.

CAROLINE: Well, it's high time he pulled out of it. All right, Vickie's gone and we all miss her. But it's been nearly four years, and in the meantime, he's got a daughter to raise.

GEORGE: Caroline! Keep your voice down.

CAROLINE: I'll say it to his face if you want. I'm sorry, he's my brother, but Robyn's problems are his fault.

LYNN: Sometimes I think that way, too, Aunt Caroline. But I see a lot of both of them, and I don't know. She's just a teenager. Maybe a little more rebellious than some.

GEORGE: Rebellious? You saw what happened. I tried to set a curfew and you saw how far that went.

CAROLINE: I keep telling you, it's the parenting. Poor kid never had a chance.

MICHAEL: Well, I'm not sure that's any of our business.

VEEANN: I agree. Meantime, Lynn, maybe this weekend, the two of us can watch *The Court Jester*. It may be a bit tame for the younger generation, but I think it still holds up.

LYNN: I always thought I was the younger generation. Not anymore.

CAROLINE: Well, Vee, your Frannie's not a lot older than Robyn, and she is nowhere near as awful. It's not the age.

GEORGE: Lynn, honey, do you want me to move the VCR anyway?

You could still sit upstairs and watch something.

LYNN: I think I'll just sack out. Four kids on a ranch and you start to think that a decent night's sleep is the biggest luxury life has to offer. Goodnight all. (*They all ad-lib goodbyes as she climbs the stairs.*)

CAROLINE: Well, I don't know about you, but I think Lynn . . .

VEEANN: Caroline, don't.

CAROLINE: Don't? Don't what?

VEEANN: As soon as someone leaves a room, Caroline, you have to make your pronouncement.

CAROLINE: I don't.

VEEANN: You do. You're welcome to talk about Franklin to your heart's content, but leave Lynn alone.

CAROLINE: Vee . . .

VEEANN: I mean it, Caroline.

CAROLINE: I was just going to say how terrific she is.

VEEANN: Yes, and then the kicker. "Considering her situation." Considering the ranch and the children and the marriage. Don't.

CAROLINE (*a little hurt*): I don't know what you're talking about. I don't make those kinds of judgments about people. Do I, Michael?

MICHAEL: All the time, Caroline. Vee's right.

CAROLINE: Hmmp. (*FRANKLIN comes down the stairs, carrying a largish paper sack.*) Well, I certainly don't mean anything by it. I've always thought the world of Lynn.

VEEANN: We know. Hors d'oeuvres, anyone?

MICHAEL: Thanks, Vee, I'd love some.

CAROLINE: Well, I shouldn't. (*Helps herself from the tray.*)

GEORGE: It looks like we're all here. Shall we begin, or should we wait for Chuck?

MICHAEL: Chuck can fill us in on the ranch situation later. I say we start with Dad.

CAROLINE: I agree. No time to waste.

FRANKLIN: Just a moment. (*He pulls several items out of a paper sack.*) We had a sale at the pharmacy on stationary supplies. I thought we could use a little something to take notes. (*Slowly and tediously begins handing around legal pads.*) One for Michael, one for George, one for Caroline, one for me. I assume you don't mind sharing with your husband, Vee?

VEEANN: Fine.

FRANKLIN: Spiral notebooks, with pockets for handouts. (*Demonstrates.*) See? One for each of us. Michael, George, Caroline, Me. (*CAROLINE lets out an intentionally audible sigh.*) Multicolored pens. I thought we might wish to make notes in different colors as we deal with various aspects . . . you know. (*Demonstrates.*) See? Red, blue, black, and green. It's really a handy item. One for Michael . . .

CAROLINE: (*Explodes.*) Franklin!

FRANKLIN: Yes, Caroline?

CAROLINE: I've seen colored pens before. I had one in fourth grade. Are you quite finished?

FRANKLIN (*hurt*): I'm simply trying to help, Caroline.

CAROLINE: Thank you. I'm sure the supplies will come in handy. Now sit down. George? You have the floor. (*They all sit, look expectantly at GEORGE.*)

GEORGE (*a bit taken aback*): Let's see. (*Fumbles through his notes.*) First of all, let me say how grateful Veeann and I are that you were able to come tonight. We have some difficult things to talk about. Let's remember that we're a family, that we love each other, that we're all just trying to figure out the right thing to do.

CAROLINE: Hear hear!

GEORGE: Three years ago, when Dad had his fall, we had that meeting up at Michael's place, and decided that Dad just wasn't up to running the ranch any longer. After some persuading, Dad agreed to come here, with Veeann and me. Seemed like the best choice at the time. Then last year, Dad had that incident with his car. The fourth in five years. We met again, we paid Mr. Meserve for the damage done to his shop. We decided together that Dad shouldn't drive any more. Again, it wasn't easy, but what I'm saying is that when we've had tough choices to make, we've gotten together, we've talked about it, we've made a decision. When we talk to Dad together, as a family, united, he's always been reasonable.

MICHAEL: And now it's that time again?

VEEANN: Yes.

CAROLINE: Why? What's changed?

VEEANN: His condition has substantially deteriorated.

FRANKLIN: In what way?

GEORGE: He can't walk. He can't even stand. His legs are too weak to support his body.

MICHAEL: George, your letters have suggested things are getting worse. But then we talk to Dad and he says things are fine.

VEEANN: It's embarrassing to him. He's so weak, sitting on the edge of the bed, he can't lift his legs enough to pull on his trousers. He has just enough arm strength to help us a little getting himself in and out of his wheelchair. That's all. The fact is, I simply can't give him the kind of help he needs anymore. I just can't. That's why we're asking, George and I, for you to get together like this.

GEORGE: You really must believe us. He's gotten much worse. (A pause, as they consider this.)

CAROLINE: What's wrong with him? Official diagnosis.

GEORGE: You remember that Doctor Hamilton thought at first that it might be amyotrophic lateral sclerosis . . .

CAROLINE: Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis.

GEORGE: Right—Lou Gehrig's disease. You had your doubts about that, Caroline, and Dr. Hamilton has come around to the same view. He now thinks it's some kind of nerve damage, caused by Dad's diabetes. A couple of weeks ago, he gave us a fairly definitive prognosis. He feels the process is irreversible.

CAROLINE: Do you have his tests?

GEORGE (handing her a file folder): We've done X-rays, an MRI, and ultrasound. We take Dad to physical therapy four times a week. So far, nothing's helped. I should say immediately that Dad is not in any physical pain, nor is he paralyzed. He's just . . . weak. Dr. Hamilton thinks . . . well, he thinks nothing will ever make him strong again.

FRANKLIN: So it's worse than what he's been telling us.

GEORGE: He can't walk, even with braces and a walker. You should see his legs. No muscle tone at all.

MICHAEL: Caroline, you're the doctor. What are you reading?

CAROLINE (a little testy): The same thing George just said.

MICHAEL: Will you examine him yourself? No offense, George, but we don't know this Dr. Hamilton.

CAROLINE: I'm a pediatrician, not a neurologist, but I can read a chart. Dad has severe neural atrophy, probably caused by diabetes. He'll never walk again.

MICHAEL: All the same, Caroline, I would be more comfortable if you would look at him yourself.

CAROLINE: Do it yourself, Michael. He'll be awake tomorrow. Ask him to walk across the room.

FRANKLIN: What does this mean in terms of Dad's overall health?

CAROLINE: The diabetes is under control. Otherwise, he's in pretty good shape.

GEORGE: That was what Dr. Hamilton said. He could live another twenty years.

FRANKLIN: That would make him a hundred and five.

CAROLINE: How long did Grandpa Mortenson last? Wasn't he ninety-seven? Dad's lived an active, outdoors life. No tobacco . . .

MICHAEL: He chewed.

CAROLINE: But not for years. He didn't smoke. He was a light to moderate drinker, an occasional beer. His weight, his blood pressure, his heart are all good. Diabetes can be scary at his age, but right now, he's fine.

MICHAEL: That's a blessing.

FRANKLIN: I know I've said this before, and I know Caroline's feelings, but I'm going to say it again. I wonder if chiropractic . . .

CAROLINE: Oh, nonsense.

FRANKLIN: Caroline, hear me out. I've seen some miraculous things done with adjustments. I had four serious subluxations myself.

CAROLINE: Subluxations balderdash.

FRANKLIN: I had constant pain in my achilles tendons, I limped, I was irregular . . .

CAROLINE: Anal retentive, you mean.

FRANKLIN (resolutely ignoring her): Chiropractic cured me. After a year of treatment, I have never enjoyed better health. It could do the same for Dad.

CAROLINE (without looking up from her reading): You limped because you spent forty hours a week on your feet in bad shoes. You were irregular because you and Robyn lived on macaroni and jello salad.

FRANKLIN (stubbornly talking under her next speech): I know how I felt then, and I know how I feel now. Say what you want to, Caroline, but I know what it did for me.

CAROLINE: Chiropractors give back rubs. Back rubs feel good. Add a bunch of pseudo-scientific mumbo jumbo to the fact that most back pain is psychosomatic anyway, and you get a lot of people who think they've been cured, and a lot of really rich chiropractors. Chiropractic did nothing for you, Franklin, but empty your bank account. You got better because you bought new shoes and started eating sensibly.

FRANKLIN: We know your professional prejudices, Caroline. I'll say it again. I know how I felt and I know how I feel now. George, I'm just asking. Has Dad seen a chiropractor?

GEORGE: Yes.

CAROLINE: I don't see that in here.

GEORGE: Dr. Hamilton shares your views on the subject.

FRANKLIN: Did Dad have an adjustment?

VEEANN: No, Franklin, he didn't. I took him and I talked to the chiropractor myself. He was very nice, but he said there was nothing he could do. The nerve damage is just too extensive.

FRANKLIN: Well, thank you, Vee, for trying. Laugh if you wish to, Caroline, but it worked for me.

CAROLINE: It didn't.

FRANKLIN: It did.

MICHAEL: All right, George. Dad can't walk at all. It's permanent and its irreversible.

GEORGE: Exactly.

MICHAEL: So how does this change things?

VEEANN: I think that's obvious.

MICHAEL: I don't. I mean, when Dad moved in with you, it was because he could no longer care for himself. Now you're telling us, he can no longer care for himself? How is this different?

CAROLINE: I think Michael makes a good point.

VEEANN: Michael, it's totally different.

FRANKLIN: I don't see that.

MICHAEL: You'll need some extra help, of course. For some of the heavy lifting.

CAROLINE: There's something they use in hospitals, it's called a Hoyer lift. I bet it could be adapted for use here. It's terrific. Get him from the wheelchair to the bed, pick him up anywhere. I can get it from one of the medical supply houses.

MICHAEL: That sounds good, too.

FRANKLIN: We could all pitch in.

MICHAEL: Maybe we should consider hiring a nurse. Part time.

FRANKLIN: And I'll bet there are classes you can take. At the hospital?

VEEANN: I'd better say it, George, this is no time to beat around the bush. The simple fact is, we are, no, I am no longer willing to keep you father.

MICHAEL: What do you mean?

VEEANN: I am asking you to find another home for him.

CAROLINE: Veeann, you and George are the only workable option.

VEEANN: Not any longer.

FRANKLIN: But we all agreed.

VEEANN: You'll have to agree on something else.

FRANKLIN: He's just a little more dependent, a little more in need.

MICHAEL: We'll get you help.

CAROLINE: I think the idea of a part-time nurse is a good one, Michael.

MICHAEL: There are two nurses in our ward, for example, they have families, don't want to work full-time, but would love a little extra cash.

CAROLINE: That's just what I was saying. If we get you this Hoyer lift, you can hook it up and lift him from his wheelchair to bed, swing him into a car, lower him onto a toilet. . . .

VEEANN: I'm sure it's a miraculous invention, Caroline. But it's not just a matter of lifting. I don't want better equipment; I don't want a part-time nurse.

CAROLINE: What exactly is the problem, Vee?

VEEANN: I'm home with him alone nine hours a day. I care for him twenty-four hours. Ten times an hour, when he's awake, that buzzer goes off, he wants a drink of water, fix his T.V. The buzzer runs my life. I hear it in my sleep; I dream about it. And when it doesn't go off, I worry even more.

GEORGE: He's incontinent.

CAROLINE (*referring to the charts*): I don't see that in here.

VEEANN: Well, not really. But he wants to try to go by himself, he can't stand or lift himself, and so there's a mess. He gets constipated, and then he takes laxatives, so that when he goes, it's sudden and violent, and then he can't move quickly enough to get to the toilet. And he won't let George clean him up anymore.

FRANKLIN: What about his diabetes?

VEEANN: That's another job. Three times a day, I have to give him insulin. And it has to be me, always me. He won't let George touch him. Caroline, it's not the lifting. It's the way he expects me to keep him company. I know he gets lonely, just him, alone, with the T.V. He wants to talk, and I try. But all he knows is ranching, which I don't know at all. And the Church, that's out completely, the single most important part of my life. Caroline, I can't do anything, I can't start anything, I'm totally trapped here. That's why I called you here tonight.

CAROLINE: A lot of that could be made easier.

VEEANN: I don't doubt it. I'm sure that medical technology can do wonderful things. But no. The answer is no.

MICHAEL: So you're asking for help.

VEEANN: No, Michael. You must find somewhere else for your father to stay. He is no longer welcome in my home.

(*A long pause as they consider this.*)

FRANKLIN: No longer welcome. George, you're saying your own father is no longer welcome.

GEORGE: I wouldn't have put it that strongly perhaps. But yes. Veeann is pretty adamant.

CAROLINE: But where else is there?

VEEANN: That's what you need to decide.

FRANKLIN: You're talking about a nursing home.

VEEANN: I'm not. Not specifically. I do think it's an option you should consider.

MICHAEL: You know, there are a number of issues involved here, some short term, and some long term. And whatever we decide, there are going to be finances to worry about.

FRANKLIN: What do you mean?

MICHAEL: I've been thinking quite a bit about Dad's situation lately, and I think it's time we talk about his estate. Does Dad have a will, for example?

CAROLINE: Michael, that isn't the point. The fact is, Vee's talking about a nursing home, and I won't have it.

MICHAEL: Caroline, Dad's life was his property, and we could lose nearly all of it if he dies intestate. We can't avoid unpleasant truths.

CAROLINE: Which is precisely what you're doing. George, level with us. How serious are you about this?

GEORGE: We have in fact checked out three local establishments. I have some literature . . .

CAROLINE: I don't want to see it.

VEEANN: Caroline, I don't think you ought to close the door on any reasonable alternative.

CAROLINE: My father will not go into a nursing home.

MICHAEL: I'm with you on that, Caroline. We also have to consider . . .

CAROLINE: Horrible places, warehouses for people waiting to die.

FRANKLIN: I agree.

VEEANN: They're not all like that.

CAROLINE: They are. I will not allow it.

GEORGE: Caroline, Vee and I saw two very nice ones. I wish you'd at least consider . . .

CAROLINE: They keep a reception area nicely painted. They also make sure you come when the three competent nurses are on duty. I'm sorry they took you in, George, but this is my profession, and I tell you, it's all a facade. No, I'm sorry but that is not a choice.

GEORGE: He's my father, too.

MICHAEL: Well, I'm sorry, George, but you're outvoted. Now, on to other matters . . .

VEEANN: Look, can't you just keep an open mind? George and I saw one local home, Shady Pines, it's very nice. It's especially for physically disabled patients. They have lots of activities. They have a high ratio of nurses aides to patients, four, five to one . . .

CAROLINE: Unqualified high school dropouts paid minimum wage, full staff turnover every three months. Doctors who can't get into a decent practice.

VEEANN: You haven't even seen it, Caroline.

CAROLINE: I don't need to. Veeann, you do what you have to, but my father will not go into a nursing home.

VEEANN: Caroline, will you at least . . .

CAROLINE: This is a family council, Veeann. You've said your piece.

VEEANN: But we haven't decided anything.

CAROLINE: No. We haven't. As you pointed out, we have a decision to make. I hope you'll understand when we ask you to step into the other room while we make it.

VEEANN: This is my house. You can't order me out of my living room!

CAROLINE: Then this meeting is over. If I can use your phone, George, I thought I saw a hotel on the way into town.

GEORGE: Caroline!

CAROLINE: Franklin, Michael. Shall I reserve one room or two?

GEORGE: Caroline, Michael, please . . .

VEEANN: George, if they want to go, I certainly wouldn't dream of standing in their . . . *(The door starts to open, they all quit talking. The door opens, CHUCK enters.)* Chuck!

CHUCK: Filled your car up, Michael. *(Hands him the credit card.)*

MICHAEL: Thanks, Chuck.

CHUCK: What did I miss?

CAROLINE: Oh, nothing. *(The others all ad lib assent.)*

VEEANN: So how did you get along with Robyn?

CHUCK: Fine.

FRANKLIN: Where did you drop her off?

CHUCK: Some guy's house. It looked okay.

FRANKLIN: Good.

VEEANN: Did you catch his name?

CHUCK: Tom something. It was just a big party, lots of kids.

VEEANN: Did you see any parents?

CHUCK: I wouldn't have dropped her off if I didn't think it was okay.

CAROLINE: Did she say how she was planning to get home?

CHUCK: She said she'll catch a ride.

GEORGE: Chuck, I hope you don't mind, we went ahead and started without you. Right now, we're discussing Dad.

CHUCK: Time for the old folks home, huh?

CAROLINE: Absolutely not.

FRANKLIN: Out of the question.

MICHAEL: No, we'll figure something else out.

CHUCK: Like what?

FRANKLIN: We'll think of something.

MICHAEL: *(Cuing CHUCK.)* Maybe he could go back to the ranch. *(CHUCK laughs.)*

CHUCK: Ain't nobody gonna live on that ranch much longer. Unless we get some cash and quick.

MICHAEL: How much money do you need?

CHUCK: Thirty thousand dollars, maybe more. A new tractor, new windmill, a new floor for the stalls, couple thousand feet of new fencing. Thirty thou minimum, and even then, I doubt it'd be worth it. *(The buzzer sounds.)*

CAROLINE: Dad's awake.

VEEANN: I thought he wouldn't sleep long. I'll get him.

MICHAEL: I'll come with you.

VEEANN: Fine. *(They go to MARTY's room. As they open the door, FRANKLIN speaks.)*

FRANKLIN: Thirty thousand dollars? For a windmill?

CHUCK: For a lot of things. Place is just falling apart.

GEORGE: The tractor was working fine a few months ago.

CHUCK: Hey, you want to keep fixing it, you're more'n welcome. I'm just a shade tree mechanic, doing the best job I can.

GEORGE: We'll all have to take a look at your budget, Chuck.

(VEEANN and MICHAEL wheel in MARTY. He is a small man, unable to walk, but not even remotely feeble, his eyes alert.)

CHUCK: You got a place that's had no basic preventive maintenance the last ten years, just duct tape and baling wire. You got fence posts down on the southwest boundary that are half rotted, and a tractor I can't get into the stalls, got manure and straw practically filling the place up, I can't clean it out. Look, the place is shot to hell, and that's the truth of it.

MARTY: A lie! That's a lie!

CAROLINE: Dad!

MARTY: Don't you tell me about cleaning out a stable, you lazy son-of-a-bitch!

CHUCK: I'm telling you, I can't get the tractor in the door . . .

MARTY: So what? You got a pitchfork. You got a wagon. You too good to do a little hand work?

MICHAEL: Dad, don't excite yourself.

MARTY: Let go of me! *(Turns on CHUCK again.)* I been a rancher forty years when you were still sucking your mama's tit, and when I was seventy-five I could still clean out that stable, so don't talk to me about a tractor. It's a three day chore, fourteen hour days, with a pitchfork and a shovel, and at the end of each day, Mavis would hose me down in the yard before she'd let me in the house. But it's a job that's got to be done, mister.

CHUCK: Yeah, you done great old man. Half your fences are rottin' away.

MARTY: You gotta replace your fencing, son. You wanna be a rancher, do a rancher's work.

CHUCK: If you'd done the job right, I wouldn't have to do it again now.

MARTY: Get used to it, son. Jobs done over and over, that's what I spent my life at.

CHUCK *(sullen)*: If you'd done 'em right . . .

MARTY: Just shut up and listen, boy! I know what you want. One of them tractors with air conditioning in the cab, FM stereo, some attachment to clean out stables. I've known fellows like you, gotta get every new kinda equipment John Deere makes. Not me. I'm a survivor, rather make do than buy new. Ain't no job too big for a good man with a pick and a shovel. Now, what did I hear about thirty thousand dollars?

CHUCK: We need a new tractor.

MARTY: Give me three hours down there, and I'd have the old one running good as new.

CHUCK: I know how to tune an engine.

MARTY: You don't know nothing. You run my place into the ground.

CHUCK: I ain't had the money to do more.

MARTY: How much money did I have, those years you kids were growing up? I had my hands, my tools, I left behind a ranch that turned a profit every year. You ain't made a dime on it yet, have you?

CHUCK: I'll turn a profit this year.

MARTY: Like hell you will. Michael, he don't need no thirty thousand dollars. Give him some money to buy fencing; I'll give you a check.

CHUCK: You ain't listened to a word I said.

MARTY: You ain't said one worth listening to.

GEORGE *(with a wink to CHUCK that says, "We'll take care of it later")*: Dad, I'm glad you could join us. Are you hungry? Vee, could you get something . . .

VEEANN: I'll whip something up. What would you like?

MARTY: I ain't hungry. *(He shifts in his chair.)* Vee, could you look to this pillow? Jist can't seem to get comfortable.

CAROLINE: I'll help you with that, Dad.

MARTY: I didn't ask you, Caroline, I asked Veeann. *(After a moment,*

VEEANN *crosses to him, adjusts the pillow.*) Look at you. All gathered round.

GEORGE: That's right, Dad, we're all here.

MARTY: Where's the dead calf?

FRANKLIN: What do you mean, Dad?

MARTY: The dead calf? Where is it? Anybody know?

MICHAEL: I don't think so, Dad.

MARTY: Well, I'll tell you. Me. I'm the dead calf. And what kinda birds come gather when livestock dies?

FRANKLIN: Dad, you've obviously misunderstood . . .

MARTY: Vultures. The vultures have gathered. Ain't that what the good book says?

MICHAEL: This isn't necessary, Dad.

MARTY: Ain't that from the good book, Michael?

CAROLINE: You don't read the good book, Dad.

MARTY: No I don't. Neither do you, Caroline. You and me? We don't trust what we can't see. And what I see is vultures, gathered round my carcass.

VEEANN: Fair enough, Dad. We're all vultures. What do we want from you?

MARTY: Flesh. Vultures eat flesh. *(Pinches his arm.)* Not much here. Where is it? It's north. That's my flesh. Four thousand acres worth, scattered over the valley.

CAROLINE: We don't want your land, Dad.

MARTY: Don't want your inheritance, girl? Don't want what's yours?

FRANKLIN: We haven't even talked about the land, Dad.

MARTY: No, course not. Three years ago, you took me off the ranch. I didn't want to go, but you all got together, and off I come. Last year it was my car you took away. Now, all of a sudden, I don't walk so good. Just can't get around. So what is it this time? What you gonna take from me now?

MICHAEL: We're not trying to take anything away.

MARTY: You better not, son.

VEEANN: Marty, what is it you want? What are you trying to tell us?

MARTY: I don't want to go to no nursing home. Back home, one at a time, I seen my old friends get sent to one of those places, Shady Rest, Golden Age Retirement. They never come out again. I like it here, with Vee and George. You say I can't go back to my ranch, all right. I'll die here, with family around.

CAROLINE: Dad, you're not going to die for many years yet.

MARTY: Not as long as I'm here, no I won't. But let me tell you this: You put me in one of them places, I promise, I'll give the land up. Hell, maybe I'll give it to the Church. But I'll say this once and I'll tell you clear, you want the land, your land, your inheritance, then keep me here. Vee takes good care of me. I mean to stay.

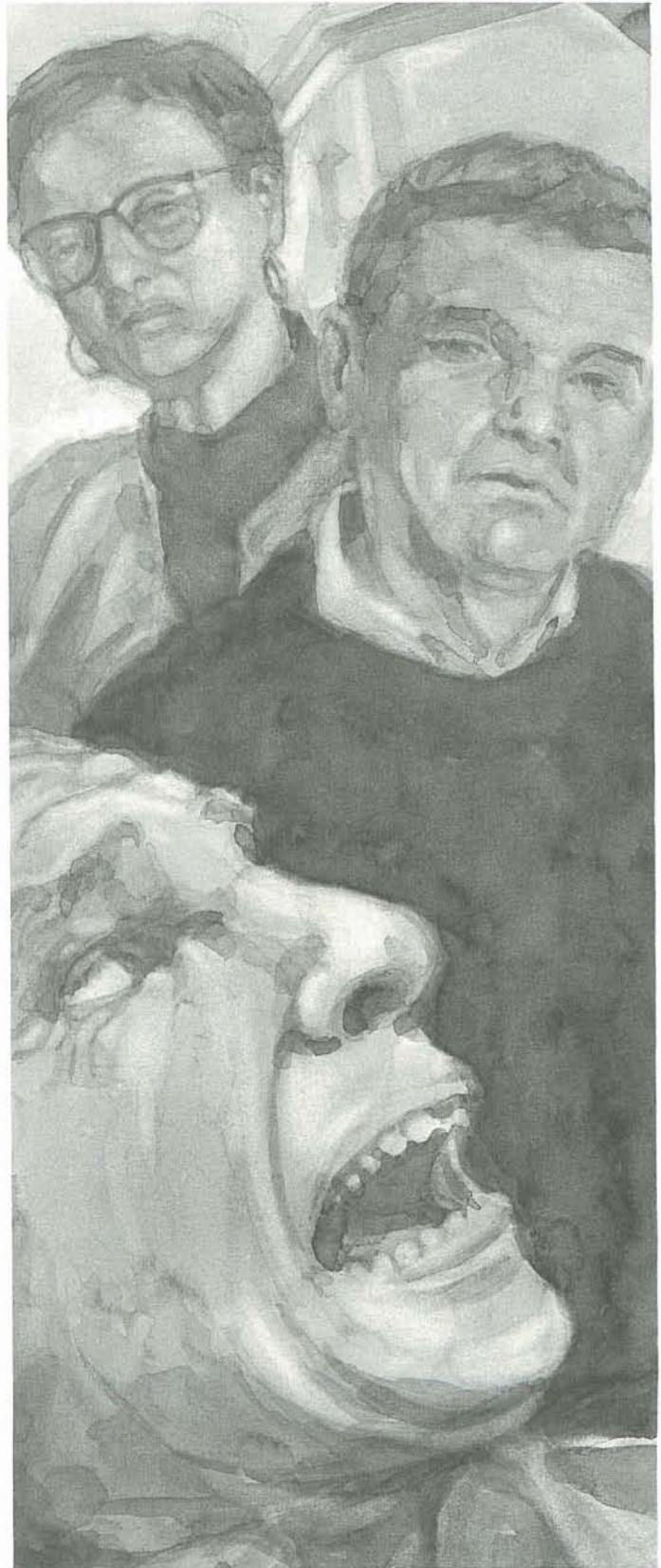
GEORGE: Dad, that may not be possible.

MARTY: I don't want to leave. I ain't a gonna. *(A long, stunned silence.)* And now I am hungry. Vee, what you got for me?

VEEANN: *(Controls herself with an effort.)* Whatever you like, Marty. I'll fix anything you want.

BLACKOUT

END ACT ONE



I was with you all day, Franklin, you and Caroline and Michael, and you didn't do nothin' right the whole time, not a single damn thing.

ACT TWO

SCENE: The next morning. Dishes in the sink, the papers still in disarray. CHUCK is asleep on the couch, wearing jeans and an undershirt. He yawns, pulls on a shirt, crosses to the sink, puts water on to boil. A knock on the door. He crosses to the door, opens it. ROBYN enters.

CHUCK: Oh. It's you. *(Leaves the door open, crosses back to the kitchen. She comes in.)*

ROBYN: Where's my Dad?

CHUCK: Where have you been?

ROBYN: Parties. *(Yawns.)* What time is it?

CHUCK: Seven-thirty.

ROBYN: No kidding? I thought he was supposed to be sleeping down here.

CHUCK: He's at some hotel.

ROBYN: A hotel? That's crazy. He can barely afford gas back home.

CHUCK: After what you left him.

ROBYN: My money. My business.

CHUCK: Him and Michael and Caroline were gonna share a room.

ROBYN: Those three?

CHUCK: Two beds, ask for a cot. It'll be okay.

ROBYN: Right. You know those three, you know my dad. Which one do you think ended up on the cot? His back'll be sore for a week.

CHUCK: I thought he had some chiropractor . . .

ROBYN: That's where the rest of his money goes. *(Looks around.)* What happened?

CHUCK: It didn't go so good.

ROBYN: *(Crosses to telephone.)* Must not have.

CHUCK: Caroline and Vee got into it, Caroline took off, took your dad and Michael with her. They'll cool off.

ROBYN: Do you know which hotel?

CHUCK: Comfort Inn, Days Inn, one of those. I don't remember. One of the ones with the yellow circle on the sign.

ROBYN: Big help.

CHUCK *(as she looks through a phone book)*: So parties, huh? Plural? *(She doesn't take the bait.)* You have a good time? *(Again, she ignores him.)* At these parties you went to?

ROBYN: Which one?

CHUCK: Which one? How about the one where I dropped you off at.

ROBYN: Oh, yeah, that was you. Cousin Chuck. It was fine. *(Dialing.)*

CHUCK: We're not really cousins, you know.

ROBYN: No, you're married to my cousin. Anyway, the first two were pretty good, the third one was a drag.

CHUCK: Busy night.

ROBYN: Hello, do you have a guest by the name of Franklin Mortenson please? It might be under Michael Mortenson or Caroline O'Hara . . . No, I can't hold, I'm calling from Europe. *(CHUCK rummages through the cabinets for coffee. Settles for an instant cocoa.)* Caroline? Yeah, this is Robyn. All right, Aunt Caroline. *(She rolls her eyes to CHUCK.)* Is my dad there?

CHUCK: Comfort Inn?

ROBYN: Day's. Hi, Dad? Listen, I'm back, everything's cool. No, I'm just going to crash. No, I spent it. How's your back? Yeah? Yeah? Yeah, I think you should do that. Okay. Bye. *(She hangs up.)* He's there.

CHUCK: You want some?

ROBYN: What is that?

CHUCK: No coffee at Aunt Vee's, so I settled for this. Looks like some kind of hot chocolate mix. Add water.

ROBYN: Sure, why not. You know, I don't think I've ever seen this before.

CHUCK: What?

ROBYN: Dirty dishes at Aunt Vee's. Some meeting, huh? I almost wish I'd stayed.

CHUCK: Veeann told them that they couldn't keep Grandpa here anymore.

ROBYN: Really? Good.

CHUCK: Why do you say that?

ROBYN: I don't think he likes it here. I mean, why should he? Living with Vee, I wouldn't last two days.

CHUCK: Why do you say that?

ROBYN: Like last night. I mean, what did Lynn want to do? Watch some movie from a million years ago?

CHUCK: Not for wild Robyn, huh?

ROBYN: They have, like, this picture of how you're supposed to be. A Laurel. With the hair, and the dress, and the missionary you're writing to. Like Lynn was, I guess. I mean, look at Frannie. I like Frannie. She's a lot like me really, wants to try different things, smoke a few j's, get around. But they never see the real Frannie, and if they did, they wouldn't like her.

CHUCK: What about me? Who do you think the real Chuck is?

ROBYN: I told you. The guy that's married to Lynn. You got any aspirin?

CHUCK: No. What did you do last night?

ROBYN: I told you, I went to parties. Looked around, saw what was happening.

CHUCK: What was happening?

ROBYN: Like there were a bunch of guys doing black and whites, you know. You know black and whites?

CHUCK: No, I don't think I do.

ROBYN: White rum, black velvet vodka, mix 'em 50-50 in a beer mug, and chug.

CHUCK: A beer mug? Pure vodka and rum?

ROBYN: Yeah, and then you chug. It's like a contest.

CHUCK: You're kidding.

ROBYN: I was intrigued. These guys weren't exactly rocket scientists, and I was curious, see how far they'd push it.

CHUCK: So what happened?

ROBYN: We had another contest. Drove a guy to emergency, and placed bets on whether the doctors could save him.

CHUCK: Who won?

ROBYN *(offhanded)*: The guy did. I lost ten bucks.

CHUCK: You're something, you know that?

ROBYN: See, I think everyone should do exactly what they want to do. No matter what. That goes for Grandpa, too. All this about, where should we put him? who takes him? Forget it. Just ask him what he wants and let that be it.

CHUCK: You like him, don't you?

ROBYN: I'm probably the only one in the family who does.

Remember, I lived on that ranch for six months. After Mom died. I love it out there. When I was eight years old, he put me on a horse; I thought I was the Lone Ranger.

CHUCK: You're too female to be the Lone Ranger. *(He kisses her. Eventually it ends.)*

ROBYN: And now you've done that. *(She pushes away from him.)*

CHUCK: What I wanted. What did you think?

ROBYN: Oh, like I'm supposed to give you a grade? A minus B plus? Not! Look, I'm going upstairs to crash. *(LYNN appears at the top of*

the stairs.)
 CHUCK: You do that.
 ROBYN: Okay.
 CHUCK: Your door gonna be locked?
 ROBYN: I don't need to lock it. You're married, and I'm underage.
(She goes up the stairs.) Good morning, Lynn. Your husband's in the kitchen. *(She exits. After a moment, LYNN enters.)*
 LYNN: Good morning, husband.
 CHUCK: You sleep okay?
 LYNN: Fitfully, actually. I woke up around one, saw Mom and Dad's light on, and ended up talking to them for an hour. Mom's pretty upset.
 CHUCK: Everyone's upset.
 LYNN: Yes, I suppose so. It's really too bad. I think I'll just clear things off a bit. This isn't like Mom.
 CHUCK: How about you?
 LYNN: What about me?
 CHUCK: You upset?
 LYNN: Should I be?
 CHUCK: You tell me.
 LYNN: I try not to be. Upset. Not without reason.
 CHUCK: Do you think you have a reason?
 LYNN: You tell me, Chuck. Do I have a reason?
 CHUCK: No. You don't. *(A pause.)*
 LYNN: Then I'm not.
 CHUCK: Like hell.
 LYNN: Chuck, twice in the last month, I've suggested that we sit down and talk about things, about our marriage, about where we're headed. You've made it clear to me that that is not a subject you welcome.
 CHUCK: That's right.
 LYNN: Fine. So if you have something to say to me, if there's a problem I should know about, I'm here. Otherwise, well, my days are plenty full, Chuck.
 CHUCK: Like I been saying. Everything's fine.
 LYNN: Then I'm happy. Our marriage is solid, the ranch is doing fine, and I have nothing to complain about.
 CHUCK: Except that ain't how it is.
 LYNN: Then there is something you need to tell me?
 CHUCK: No! But you don't believe me when I say that, do you?
 LYNN: Of course I do. If you say everything's fine . . .
 CHUCK: Don't give me that. I know what you're thinking. You're the martyr, you're the noble one. I know that act. Sitting there so innocent.
 LYNN: As it happens, Chuck, I am innocent. Naive and innocent.
 CHUCK: Well so am I!
 LYNN: Fine. I believe you.
 CHUCK: Do you?
 LYNN: If you tell me I can. *(A pause, as they avoid each other.)* I don't think anyone touched those hors d'oeuvres last night. Shall we try them for breakfast?
 CHUCK: Fine. Sounds good. *(Fidgets for a moment.)* Maybe in a sec. *(Gets up.)*
 LYNN: Where are you going?
 CHUCK: Out. *(Heads for the door.)* Your dad was saying something about the van, the transmission fluid. I'll take a look at it now, before anyone's up.
 LYNN: Fine. I'm sure he'll appreciate that.
 CHUCK: Right. *(He exits. LYNN watches him go. For a moment, it appears as though she's going to cry. But she regains control, and sits there for a moment, eating. Down the stairs comes VEEANN.)*

LYNN: Hello, Mom.
 VEEANN: Good morning, honey. Did I hear somebody come up the stairs?
 LYNN: Robyn.
 VEEANN: Home already?
 LYNN: And Chuck was here a moment ago. He just went out to take a look at the van.
 VEEANN: What are you eating?
 LYNN: From last night. I hope you don't mind.
 VEEANN: Might as well have something good come out of that fiasco. *(Sits next to her, they eat together.)*
 LYNN: They'll come around, Mom. It was just the shock.
 VEEANN: We'll see. Have you heard from Grandpa yet?
 LYNN: I haven't even looked in on him.
 VEEANN: Oh, don't worry. When he wakes up, we'll know about it.
 LYNN: Well, this morning, I'll take care of him.
 VEEANN: You know, I think I'll let you. *(A pause, as they eat together quietly.)* Honey? I don't know how to say this, so I'll just say it. I'm worried about you, Lynn. You and Chuck.
 LYNN: Why?
 VEEANN: Well, I couldn't help noticing that he slept down here. On the couch.
 LYNN: And not with me, on Frannie's twin size? We're hardly newlyweds anymore.
 VEEANN: Lynn, last night, I shut Caroline up when she made . . . innuendos. She doesn't see you often, or know you as well as I do, and she sensed something.
 LYNN: She's wrong about a lot of things, isn't she?
 VEEANN: Yes. And she's right a lot, too.
 LYNN: Maybe.
 VEEANN: Do you still love him?
 LYNN: Oh yes.
 VEEANN: Well, do you trust him?
 LYNN: I don't not trust him. *(Another pause.)* I mean, I pretty much have to trust him, don't you think?
 VEEANN: What do you mean?
 LYNN: Mom, what if things aren't great between us? Hypothetically. What if I think maybe something's going on that isn't right, but I don't really know anything? What then?
 VEEANN: So what are you saying?
 LYNN: I'm saying that I'm not sure what to think. If I should trust him, and don't, then maybe I'm the one who's damaging our marriage.
 VEEANN: But what if you do trust him, and you shouldn't?
 LYNN: Then I'll find out. Meanwhile, I'm going to trust him.
 VEEANN: No matter what?
 LYNN: No. Until he shows me I can't or tells me I can't.
 VEEANN: But honey, your father and I . . . when we see things . . .
 LYNN: You see evidence. I need proof.
 VEEANN: How about the ranch? Is he keeping things going?
 LYNN: He leaves the house every morning early, or most mornings. He's gone until six or seven. Is he out in the fields? Is the work getting done? He says it is.
 VEEANN: But you think it might not be?
 LYNN: I get phone calls. "Your cattle are in my pasture. Tell your husband to fix his fences." Or else it's "Your seed grass okay? Your husband missed his turn with the irrigation." But I ask him about it, and he always has an answer. Maybe this is just life on a ranch.
 VEEANN: But you don't know?

LYNN: That's just it. I don't know. And there's one more thing.

VEEANN: What?

LYNN: He won't let me look at our finances. I don't even have a checkbook. If I need to write a check for something he gives me one check. Mom, I used to do all our bills, all our taxes. Then suddenly, he said he thought he ought to do it. Fine, I gave him all our records. But now, I don't even know where he keeps them. We're always late on bills, nowadays. I'm never sure if they're going to cut off our telephone, our gas. But when I get a late notice, and I tell him about it, then suddenly I'm nagging, I don't trust him, he'll take care of it if I just keep off his back. And then there's Michael.

VEEANN: Michael?

LYNN: Mom, I don't know. But when Michael calls, Chuck goes into the study and closes the door. Mom, I'm trusting him just as much as I can. Loving him the best I can. And hoping. Part of me does just like you, accumulates all the evidence. But that's not a part of me I like very well.

VEEANN: In the meantime . . .

LYNN: In the meantime, you can tell Caroline our marriage is fine.

VEEANN: You're sure?

LYNN: I'm sure that's what I want you to tell Caroline.

VEEANN: Is it true?

LYNN: I don't know. *(After a moment.)* I don't think so.

VEEANN: Oh, honey. *(Reaches over and gives her a hug.)*

LYNN *(in tears)*: Mom, you don't know. You don't know how hard it is just to hang on. Day after day.

VEEANN: Oh, honey. *(They hug for a moment longer. VEEANN chooses her words carefully.)* Lynn, is it possible that the ranch is the problem?

LYNN: What do you mean?

VEEANN: Chuck had no experience ranching before you moved up there. He'd always been a city boy. Maybe it's too much for him. Have you thought about moving? Trying something else?

LYNN: Mom, that ranch is my home.

VEEANN: I know you like it out there, Lynn.

LYNN: I don't just like it, Mom.

VEEANN: All right.

LYNN: It's home, Mom. I don't know how else I can say it. It just feels right for us to be there. Especially the kids.

VEEANN: But what if it's not right for Chuck?

LYNN: Mom, don't give me this. Not now.

VEEANN: I just want you to think about it.

LYNN: I've got enough on my mind right now without this.

VEEANN: I'm sorry, honey.

LYNN: I'm serious, Mom. The way things are going right now, if I had to choose between Chuck and the ranch . . . Well, I don't know which I'd choose.

VEEANN: So that's how it is.

LYNN: That's right. *(The doorbell rings.)*

VEEANN: Damn.

LYNN *(laughing through her tears)*: That's okay, Mom. At home it's one of the kids.

VEEANN *(looking out the window)*: It's Michael's car.

LYNN: Let me just wash my face. *(Heads into the bathroom.)*

VEEANN: All right. *(Shouts up the stairs.)* George! It's Michael! *(Crosses to door, pauses.)* Michael.

MICHAEL: Good morning, Vee. *(Enters the room.)*

VEEANN: We're polishing off last night's hors d'oeuvres for breakfast. I know, not quite what you expect from Veeann. I had a lousy night. You want some?

MICHAEL: Thanks. Sounds good. *(Crosses to bar, sits. LYNN enters from the bathroom. He speaks to her.)* Hi, honey. You okay?

LYNN *(brightly)*: Fine.

VEEANN: So, I hope the three of you had a good night's sleep?

MICHAEL: Terrible, if you want to know the truth. Caroline snores, and Franklin moans.

LYNN: Moans.

MICHAEL: Yeah. All night long. Like this. *(Demonstrates.)*

VEEANN: Good. Serves you right.

MICHAEL: Look, Vee, I just had to come early to apologize.

VEEANN: Oh?

MICHAEL: We had a difference of opinion over a matter that concerns us all. But that was no reason to get as angry as we did. And especially, it was no reason to spurn your hospitality.

VEEANN: No it wasn't.

MICHAEL: Anyway, I'm sorry. Will you forgive me?

VEEANN: Certainly. *(Sees GEORGE coming down the stairs.)* George, it's Michael. He's apologized and I've forgiven him.

GEORGE: Oh. Good.

LYNN: Morning, Dad.

GEORGE: Good morning, honey. Have you been up long?

LYNN: Just a few minutes.

GEORGE: Where are the rest of them, Michael?

MICHAEL: They'll be over soon. I just wanted to be sure I got here first.

VEEANN: To clear the air.

MICHAEL: That's right.

VEEANN *(offering him hors d'oeuvres)*: George, breakfast?

GEORGE: From last night?

VEEANN: That's right. And no, I didn't do the dishes, either. I'm falling down on my job. *(The buzzer sounds. VEEANN looks at it wearily.)* I'd hoped he'd let us have a few minutes more.

LYNN: Like I said, Mom, I'll take him this morning.

VEEANN: I doubt he'll let you.

LYNN: Let me try. You three have some breakfast together. *(As she goes into MARTY's room.)* Good morning, Grandpa.

MICHAEL: Vee, these are just as terrific a day old as they were last night.

VEEANN: The bread's all crusty and the pâté's soggy.

GEORGE: I don't know. It's kind of good when it soaks in like this.

MICHAEL: Do you think the shrimp are still okay?

VEEANN: You've had three, Michael. I guess we'll just watch you and see what happens. *(They all laugh.)* Well, any brilliant ideas since last night?

GEORGE: I wish I could say yes.

MICHAEL: It's a difficult decision all around.

VEEANN: Michael, you need to know that I'm not backing down on this.

MICHAEL: No, I got that impression.

VEEANN: No one seemed to think I was serious last night. I am.

MICHAEL: Of course.

GEORGE: That goes for me, too.

MICHAEL: Well, then, that's it. He'll have to go somewhere else.

VEEANN: Just like that?

MICHAEL: Hard feelings never get anyone anywhere, Vee. Last night, we just hadn't had time to prepare ourselves, that's all.

GEORGE: Well, water under the bridge.

MICHAEL: Agreed. Look, about this nursing home idea . . .

GEORGE: Michael, you and Caroline really should see Shady Pines. I know the idea is a hard one to get used to; it is for me, too. But this place is different, Michael. It's clean, and the people are well

cared for.

MICHAEL: Maybe this afternoon we could all check it out.

VEEANN: Would you?

GEORGE: We'd be glad to take you.

MICHAEL: You said it was expensive. Just how much?

GEORGE: Twenty-two hundred a month.

MICHAEL: That is steep. And I suppose that Medicaid won't cover it?

VEEANN: We checked on it. They're pretty persnickety about some of their rules.

GEORGE: It could work, though. What they told us, you can't have any assets.

MICHAEL: Assets. The land, in other words.

GEORGE: Right. He'd have to sell the land, or otherwise divide it between us. It just can't be in his name.

MICHAEL: But if we sell it, we'd probably have enough to take care of him anyway.

VEEANN: That's right.

MICHAEL: But he could give the land to us?

GEORGE: That's right. He could make a gift of it to each of us, within certain restrictions.

MICHAEL: You heard him last night. Threatening to just give it all away. To the Church, no less. I don't think any of us want that, do we?

VEEANN: Why not?

MICHAEL: It was my father's life, buying that land.

VEEANN: Michael, you don't ranch it, you don't use it. You sell insurance. Caroline's a physician, Franklin's a pharmacist. What good would ranch land do any of you? George is an architect, and he doesn't even want it. If your dad wants to give it away, fine. The idea is to qualify him for Medicaid.

MICHAEL: But will they pay for any place we pick?

GEORGE: That's the problem.

MICHAEL: A nicer, more expensive place like Shady Pines? They won't.

VEEANN: No, but they'd help.

GEORGE: That's right. They pay up to a certain amount.

VEEANN: We'd have to make up the difference. The family.

MICHAEL: The family. You and me and Franklin and Caroline.

VEEANN: Divided four ways.

MICHAEL: Equally?

GEORGE: Well . . .

VEEANN: Certainly, equally. You're all equally his children.

MICHAEL: Vee, I can't. I'll level with you, Vee. We're just scraping by, month to month.

VEEANN: Michael, you can't tell me that the insurance business . . .

MICHAEL: Vee, I'm one of nine independent agents serving a town of less than fifteen thousand people. I've got kids heading to college soon, and missions. I can't help out, Vee, I just can't.

VEEANN: All right, Michael.

MICHAEL: And Franklin, well . . .

VEEANN: No. We won't be able to count on Franklin.

MICHAEL: That leaves you and Caroline.

GEORGE: Then we'll cover it.

MICHAEL: You've got two kids in college yourself. And surely Tommy's planning on a mission?

VEEANN: We'll just have to do the best we can.

MICHAEL: But, Vee, George, that's just not necessary. If we can talk Dad into letting us sell the property, we'll be able to support him in style, and still keep the inheritance he worked all his life to give us.

VEEANN: You heard him last night, Michael.

MICHAEL: So we need to persuade him. You know Dad. He really wants the property to stay in the family.

GEORGE: That's true.

MICHAEL: Look, say we sell one section, 640 acres. Say we get 500 an acre. That'll easily be enough for the next twenty years, Medicaid be damned. The rest we divide up equally. I'm not going to kid you, Veeann. I'll sell mine in a New York minute.

GEORGE: You're going to get 500 an acre? Up there?

MICHAEL: I bet we can.

GEORGE: Most of it's worthless.

MICHAEL: Not anymore. Things are really booming up there.

VEEANN: So it all depends on your dad coming around?

MICHAEL: I'm sure that we can convince him.

GEORGE: And if we can't?

MICHAEL: We'd have to explore some other options.

VEEANN: For example?

MICHAEL: Well . . . we could declare him incompetent. *(A pause while this sinks in.)*

GEORGE: No . . .

MICHAEL: It's something we need to think about, George. He's eighty-four years old, acting irrationally, giving away his land to total strangers. We'd have a strong case.

VEEANN: Have him committed?

MICHAEL: Only if we have to.

GEORGE: A trial.

VEEANN: You'd get up on the stand, tell everyone your father's crazy.

MICHAEL: It won't come to that.

GEORGE: Michael, I won't do it.

MICHAEL: I'm not saying we'll have to.

GEORGE: Michael, hear me out. You were only ten when Mother died. I was eighteen. I saw what he did to her all those years. I have as much reason as anyone in this family to hate him. But he is my father, and I won't do it. I won't testify. I can't believe you'd even suggest it.

VEEANN *(siding with GEORGE)*: Michael, George is right. This is not a good idea. You'd tear the family apart, Michael, and for what? He'd win. He's not crazy. He's still clear in the head, we saw that last night.

MICHAEL: What if there's no other way?

GEORGE: No, Michael. No matter what.

MICHAEL: Well, where does that leave us?

VEEANN: You need to talk to your father.

MICHAEL: All right. Then, Veeann, will you keep him in the meantime? *(A long pause.)*

VEEANN: I'm willing to be reasonable, Michael. I would certainly rather keep him than have you go to court, destroy the family like this.

MICHAEL: So let me get this straight. You're willing to keep him until we can talk him into letting us sell the property.

VEEANN: To go into a nursing home. Yes, Michael, I guess I'm saying that I am willing to bend a little. Temporarily. But Michael, you'd better forget this court nonsense. I won't hear any more of it.

MICHAEL: Well. It looks like we've made some progress.

VEEANN *(unhappy)*: Maybe so.

MICHAEL: And I'm sure we can make him see reason. It's just a matter of how we approach him. The timing. We can work it all out if we're patient.

VEEANN: Patient.

MICHAEL: I guess the next step is ours, George. We should get started. Dividing it up, who gets what parcel. Finding a buyer. I

can help. It's not just a matter of putting an ad in the yellow pages. We'll have to take our time, talk to potential buyers . . .

VEEANN: And in the meantime, he stays here.

MICHAEL: That's what we just agreed.

VEEANN: I don't know, Michael. I'm not sure what I just agreed to.

MICHAEL: You agreed to keep him. For now.

VEEANN: I did, didn't I? Month after month, while you find just the right buyer. He stays with me. Or else.

MICHAEL: What? "Or else?" I didn't say . . .

VEEANN: That was your threat. I keep him, or you'll tear the family to pieces in court.

MICHAEL: I haven't made any threats, Veeann. I thought we had an agreement.

VEEANN: Why do you want this so badly, Michael?

MICHAEL: Why? He's my father, I want what's best for him, what's best for all of us.

VEEANN: You were talking about declaring him insane in a court of law.

MICHAEL: Only as a last resort.

VEEANN: Michael, what kind of time frame are you talking about?

MICHAEL: Two months, three.

VEEANN: Six months?

MICHAEL: Oh, I doubt it.

VEEANN: A year? Two years? And meantime, he's still here. In my house. And you're still negotiating, still trying to work things out just right. And he's still here with me. Two years. Three years? Four?

MICHAEL: Vee, be reasonable.

VEEANN: You're up to something, Michael. I don't know what. But there's more to this, isn't there?

GEORGE: Vee . . .

VEEANN: Some kind of scam. You invested money, you lost it, you're seeing this as a way out.

MICHAEL: No. Vee, come on.

VEEANN: Michael, we all know you. What is it this time?

MICHAEL: That's absolutely ridiculous, Vee.

VEEANN: The deal's off, Michael. I want him gone now, not two years from now, not when it's all been worked out just right. Now.

MICHAEL: Vee, come on. We've just had a nice conversation, come to an understa . . . (LYNN pokes her head out.)

LYNN: Mom, I need some help with this.

VEEANN (to LYNN): What is it, Lynn?

LYNN: I'm trying to get him changed and I just can't lift him.

VEEANN: I'll be right there. (To MICHAEL) Michael, the deal's off.

GEORGE: Can I help, Vee?

VEEANN: I'll call if I need you. (She goes into MARTY's room.)

MICHAEL: Well, back to last night.

GEORGE: I'm sorry, Michael.

MICHAEL: George, she's going to have to meet the family half-way.

GEORGE: Well, I don't know, Michael. She feels pretty strongly.

MICHAEL: How about you, George? Can't you talk to her, explain our side of things?

GEORGE: I think she sees your side, Michael. I just don't think she agrees with it. (CHUCK pokes his head in.) Good morning, Chuck.

CHUCK: Michael.

MICHAEL: Have you eaten, Chuck?

CHUCK: No. No time. Caroline just pulled in, with Franklin.

GEORGE: Oh, no. Back to it.

CHUCK: Took a look at your tranny, George. You could have a problem. You gotta sec?

GEORGE: I suppose so. It's better than confronting Caroline again.

Michael, if Vee needs a hand, could you—?

MICHAEL: Sure.

GEORGE: Thanks. (To CHUCK.) Now, I saw that the fluid was brownish. Is that what you're seeing?

CHUCK: I'm not really a transmission expert. But what I found was . . . (They exit. MICHAEL sits alone. After a moment, a knock on the door, followed shortly afterwards by CAROLINE and FRANKLIN entering.)

CAROLINE: I just decided to barge on in.

MICHAEL: Fine.

CAROLINE: Where is everyone?

MICHAEL: Lynn and Vee are getting Dad dressed. George and Chuck are looking at some brown fluid. I don't know where Robyn is.

FRANKLIN: She called. She's upstairs sleeping, I guess.

CAROLINE: I was going to ask how it went, Michael. I guess I can see the answer.

MICHAEL: We made some progress, I suppose.

FRANKLIN: You told her we were willing to bend on the nursing home?

MICHAEL: Just like we talked about. Still no.

FRANKLIN: Can you blame her, really?

CAROLINE: What do you mean, Franklin?

FRANKLIN: Well, we're his children. Aren't we? So why are Veeann and Lynn in there getting him dressed? (A sobered silence.)

CAROLINE: But we've offered to help.

MICHAEL: So what's next?

CAROLINE: My turn.

FRANKLIN: You sure?

CAROLINE: I've always gotten along with Vee. This is a woman to woman sort of thing.

MICHAEL: Maybe we should talk to George, Franklin.

FRANKLIN: You think there's a chance he might bend?

MICHAEL: Maybe. You heard him last night. "I wouldn't have put it so strongly." He's not completely convinced.

FRANKLIN: We can try, I suppose.

CAROLINE: So, we're all set?

MICHAEL: Round three.

FRANKLIN (stretching): What a night. What a nightmare. (MARTY's door opens, and LYNN wheels him out, VEEANN following.) Good morning, Dad.

MARTY: Morning, Michael, Caroline, Franklin.

CAROLINE: How'd you sleep last night, Dad?

MARTY: Lousy. Feelin' my age. How about you, off in that hotel room?

MICHAEL: We're feeling our age, too, Dad.

VEEANN: Good morning, Caroline, Franklin.

CAROLINE: Good morning, Vee.

MARTY: Veeann, what'd you whip up for breakfast this morning?

VEEANN: Actually, Marty, I haven't made breakfast.

MARTY: That don't sound like Vee.

VEEANN: No, Marty, I suppose it doesn't.

MARTY: Well, some bread and milk'll do me fine.

VEEANN: All right.

CAROLINE: Listen, Dad, why don't we take you out for breakfast?

VEEANN: Do you mean it?

CAROLINE: Sure. There's a waffle house around here somewhere, isn't there?

LYNN: There's that place by the new mall.

MICHAEL: Sounds great, doesn't it, Dad?

FRANKLIN: Why don't we take you, Dad?

MICHAEL: Is that okay, Dad?

MARTY: I don't want a lot of fussin'.

MICHAEL: We'll even let you have coffee, Dad. (MICHAEL and FRANKLIN *maneuver the wheelchair out the door.*)

MARTY: Not Sanka?

CAROLINE: That's right. Vee, coming with us?

VEEANN: Maybe so.

LYNN: Thanks, Aunt Caroline. This sounds fun.

FRANKLIN: Lynn, why don't you and Chuck ride with me?

LYNN: Thank you, Uncle Franklin. I'd like that.

(*They all exit, except for CAROLINE and VEEANN.*)

VEEANN: This is really very nice of you, Caroline.

CAROLINE: Well, I know that everytime we visit, you put on that fabled Veeann spread.

VEEANN: It's what I'm known for.

CAROLINE: And there's nothing wrong with that either.

VEEANN: Still, it'll be nice to go out.

CAROLINE: Just our way of showing no hard feelings. (VEEANN *heads for the door.*) Listen, Vee. Before we go.

VEEANN: Ah.

CAROLINE: What do you mean, ah?

VEEANN: You did this nicely, Caroline. Maneuvered the whole thing, just to get the two of us alone.

CAROLINE: What do you mean?

VEEANN: It's what you're known for.

CAROLINE: Fair enough.

VEEANN: Michael took his shot this morning. I figured it would be your turn next.

CAROLINE: You make us sound so calculating.

VEEANN: Aren't you?

CAROLINE: Veeann, we're on the same side of the fence on this. We all just want what's best for Dad.

VEEANN: I suppose.

CAROLINE: But you know, this whole protest of yours. You're lashing out, aren't you? You're angry.

VEEANN: I don't feel particularly angry.

CAROLINE: Well, frustrated, then. Annoyed. Put upon.

VEEANN: All right.

CAROLINE: Well, I've felt just the same. For much the same reason.

VEEANN: And what is that?

CAROLINE: Stereotyping. Female roles. For some reason, everyone assumes that it's a woman's job to take care of ailing elderly relations. We have that natural female compassion that makes this kind of service our obligation. Well, that's nonsense. Why shouldn't George, or Michael, or Franklin take on some of the burden? That's what you're saying, isn't it?

VEEANN: I suppose so. In part.

CAROLINE: Well, I know what you're feeling. "You're a woman, you can't go to medical school. Why don't you try nursing school instead." I mean, once I left Utah, people stopped saying it out loud, but it was always there, implied. You're a woman, you can't be a doctor. You're a divorced woman, you must be promiscuous. You're twice divorced, outspokenly feminist, well, Katie bar the door.

VEEANN: I know it must have been difficult at times.

CAROLINE: You don't know the half of it. I copped out. I wanted to be a surgeon. But, I got tired. I made a more traditional female choice. Pediatrics. Dealing with children. Well, I don't much like children, Veeann. I only tolerate mine because we've been through so much together. I finally stopped fighting the mold they were trying to shove me into and made my

accommodations.

VEEANN: I've always respected you.

CAROLINE: And I've always respected you, Veeann. I think we understand each other.

VEEANN: If you say so.

CAROLINE: I do. And because I understand you, I can say things the guys in the family can't.

VEEANN: I'm listening.

CAROLINE: All right. He's not your father. You're a daughter-in-law, not a blood relation. You have all of the burden. George doesn't help much, and no one else even comes by. But because you're a woman, everyone just assumes that you don't mind. And now you're saying, "Why should I keep doing this? This isn't my job. This isn't my life. I want out." That's what you're saying, isn't it?

VEEANN: In part.

CAROLINE: And, of course, you're right. But sooner or later, you simply have to say "Here I am. It's not where I want to be. But it's close enough." There comes a time to make your accommodations.

VEEANN: What accommodations would you have me make?

CAROLINE: Well, first, let's look at it from our perspective. Here's our dad, permanently crippled. Where can he stay? Franklin? Tiny apartment? Robyn to deal with? Obviously not.

VEEANN: We went through . . .

CAROLINE: Just hear me out, Veeann. Okay, there's Michael. Well, we all know what Ruth is like. A saint.

VEEANN: I would never ask this of Ruth.

CAROLINE: Of course not. Okay, there's me. Now Patrick and I have a spare bedroom, as it happens. But what can we offer Dad? With my practice, gone all day, everyday, most nights? Maybe we could hire a daytime nurse. But would Dad be happy, alone all day? It's possible, barely, that Dad could come out to California, but it's hardly a workable solution. And to be honest, I'm not sure my marriage would survive.

VEEANN: I'm sorry, I thought that you and Patrick . . .

CAROLINE: Oh, we're fine. Don't get me wrong. We see each other twice a month and have great sex and a lot of laughs. It's a marriage that works because we don't put much pressure on it.

VEEANN: I think I understand.

CAROLINE: So what does that leave us?

VEEANN: Shady Pines.

CAROLINE: Well, all right. You know how I hate those kinds of places, but fine, I'll keep an open mind. But shouldn't that be a last resort?

VEEANN: So what are you saying?

CAROLINE: Well, whose children are gone, who has a big house? Who doesn't have a job?

VEEANN: That's not fair.

CAROLINE: I'm just asking that you acknowledge . . .

VEEANN: That I am the one person whose life is not otherwise filled to the brim? That I'm the one person with time on her hands?

CAROLINE: Veeann, we've offered to hire a part-time nurse. We've offered to get you the latest, most state-of-the-art equipment. I'm not closing the door on the nursing home. What I'm saying is, let's see if we can make the other solution work first.

VEEANN: Me being that other solution.

CAROLINE: You, with a lot more help.

VEEANN: Caroline. It's not going to work.

CAROLINE: We haven't really tried.

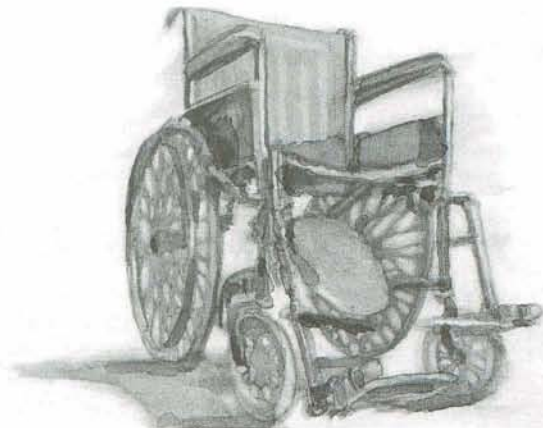
VEEANN: I have tried. It's not a question of technology, or part-time nurses, or shared female frustration. You didn't listen to a word I

said last night.
 CAROLINE: I'm willing to listen . . .
 VEEANN: Caroline, do you really think my life is so empty?
 CAROLINE: I didn't mean to imply . . .
 VEEANN: I have made my accommodations. I have found what I'm willing to settle for.
 CAROLINE: Doing what?
 VEEANN: What do you mean?
 CAROLINE: Your children are grown, you're the finest chef I know, your home could make the cover of *Home Beautiful*. Is that it? What else do you do?
 VEEANN: I do many things.
 CAROLINE: What do you do that's comparable with what I do? Healing sick children?
 VEEANN: I'm not going to lay my life out for you to sneer at.
 CAROLINE: I really want to know. What do you plan to do with your time?
 VEEANN: Many things. Nothing. How is it your business?
 CAROLINE: Oh come now. Don't be modest. You cook, you keep house. What else? Acrylics? Needlepoint? Origami? What?
 VEEANN: I don't need to subject myself to this.
 CAROLINE: I'm genuinely curious, Veeann. I cure disease. I enable small children to live healthy, active lives. What do you do that compares?
 VEEANN: We have such an affinity, you said. Women, engaged in the same holy battle.
 CAROLINE: Aren't we?
 VEEANN: Listen to yourself. So condescending, so contemptuous.
 CAROLINE: Not contempt, Veeann, just curiosity.
 VEEANN: I don't have to answer to you.
 CAROLINE: You want my sympathy? I'm asking. What do you plan to do all day that won't allow you to care for my father?
 VEEANN: What qualifies you to judge what I do?
 CAROLINE: My life. My life qualifies me.
 VEEANN: I know already what your judgment will be.
 CAROLINE: I'm keeping an open mind.
 VEEANN: Your mind hasn't opened in years.
 CAROLINE: I'm not judging.
 VEEANN: You know, Caroline, it used to be that when anyone at church had an emergency, a childbirth, or a death in the family, mine was the first number they called for meals or housecleaning. And I was the best visiting teacher in the Church. Until recently.
 CAROLINE: All right.
 VEEANN: And if I choose to do origami or needlepoint, what right do you have to sneer? I know you find my churchgoing trivial, my piety ridiculous. But I think I do as much good as you do, Caroline. I just don't get paid for it.
 CAROLINE: And that makes it nobler?
 VEEANN: I have earned the right to enjoy my life, Caroline, and I mean to have it back.
 CAROLINE: You will not put my father in a nursing home.
 VEEANN: I will have him out of my house, Caroline. It is my house, and that is a decision I have made.
 CAROLINE: We'll see. (GEORGE pokes his head in.)
 GEORGE: Are you coming?
 VEEANN: I don't think so, George. I think the others are going without us.
 GEORGE: Oh. I thought we were all having breakfast.
 VEEANN: I'll whip up something for us.
 GEORGE: Everything okay?

CAROLINE: Fine, George.
 VEEANN: Look, you've got him now. Why don't you keep him all day? Let George and me have a day to ourselves.
 CAROLINE: All right. We'll take him for a drive.
 VEEANN: And dinner. I think eating here would be awkward for us all. Come back after George and I have eaten.
 GEORGE: You mean we're not going to . . .
 VEEANN: No. (To CAROLINE.) Say around seven. Then we'll talk about it. All of us.
 CAROLINE: Including Lynn and Chuck?
 VEEANN: Why not? They have the ranch. Let's include them.
 CAROLINE: And Dad.
 GEORGE: I don't know.
 VEEANN: I think it's a good idea. He should be here, too.
 CAROLINE: You're going to have to say it to him.
 VEEANN: All right.
 CAROLINE: I'm serious, Veeann. You're going to have to look him in the eyes and tell him he is not welcome in your home.
 VEEANN: I will, then. But you'll have to take him today. Get him out of the car, listen to him. Change his Depends. (She hands her a diaper bag, Depends, baby wipes, and rubber gloves.) You'll need these.
 CAROLINE: All right. A day off for you, a day with my dad for me. Then tonight, we talk.
 VEEANN: Yes. Goodbye, Caroline.
 CAROLINE: Goodbye, Veeann. (She exits.)
 GEORGE: What happened?
 VEEANN: Nothing, George. We just have the day off.
 GEORGE: Oh. Do you want to go somewhere?
 VEEANN: Maybe in a minute. Let me just get things cleaned up. . . . No.
 GEORGE: What?
 VEEANN: Forget the dishes. Let 'em hang.
 GEORGE: Are you sure?
 VEEANN: Absolutely. Let's go out and enjoy ourselves. Take in a movie, have lunch together. A one day vacation.
 GEORGE: You sure?
 VEEANN: To hell with the dishes! (They exit together. After a moment, ROBYN comes down the stairs, yawning. She looks around.)
 ROBYN: Wo, Aunt Vee. What's with you these days? (She crosses to the fridge, looks inside.)

BLACKOUT

END ACT TWO





Do you think this has been easy on me? Telling your father he has to go.
I care about Marty; I think I care more for him than you do. I don't want to hurt his feelings,
I don't want to cause all this trouble for the family. But when this weekend began, I had to tell myself,
Veeann, be strong, hang tough these two days. If I weaken at all, I'm lost.

ACT THREE

SCENE: George and Veeann's house, later that evening. It is now a bigger mess than ever. A pizza box on the floor, with half-eaten pizza on the carpet, dirty dishes everywhere. ROBYN is sitting on the sofa amidst a pile of candy bar wrappers, watching MTV. Maybe the Black Crowes singing "Too Hard to Handle," or "Remedy." She is rocking back and forth, perhaps singing along. The phone rings. Without touching the volume, she goes to the phone.)

ROBYN: Yeah? Yeah, this is Robyn. (Craning her neck, trying to watch the T.V.) Hi, Aunt Caroline. No, they're not back yet. The place? (She looks around.) Doesn't look too bad. No, tell Dad I just sent out for something. What? No, I won't take a message. Because I'm busy. Call 'em back yourself. (She hangs up, goes back to the sofa. The door opens, and VEEANN and GEORGE enter. ROBYN looks over, sees them, pays no attention.)

VEEANN: Robyn. What are you doing here?

ROBYN: What?

VEEANN: I'm surprised you're here.

ROBYN: I've been asleep.

VEEANN: I see you sent out for pizza. (No response.) Pizza?

ROBYN: Yeah.

GEORGE: Has anyone called? (No response.) Did anyone call?

ROBYN: What?

GEORGE: (Crossing to sofa, trying to find the remote.) The phone.

ROBYN: Oh. Yeah, you just missed Caroline. They said they'd be here soon.

VEEANN: We've got to get this place cleaned up.

GEORGE: Where should I start?

VEEANN: Trash. Can you stuff that pizza box in?

GEORGE: Sure. (He heads for the kitchen, gets trash, goes on out.)

VEEANN: I'll get a load of dishes in. Robyn, I think I need you to turn down the volume and pick up in there.

ROBYN: What?

VEEANN: Turn it down. (ROBYN ignores her.) Down.

ROBYN: I like this song.

VEEANN: Well, while you listen, could you pick up a little in here?

ROBYN: What?

VEEANN: Could you pick up in there?

ROBYN: Me?

VEEANN: Yes, you. Those candy wrappers. I believe those are yours.

ROBYN: So?

VEEANN: Would you pick them up, please?

ROBYN: ("Of course not") No. Do you mind, I'm trying to watch this. (GEORGE, in the kitchen, hears this, and hustles out quickly.)

VEEANN: Robyn . . . (Turning down the volume herself, then controls herself with an effort.) Robyn, I would very much appreciate it if you would be so good as to pick up after yourself.

ROBYN: (Matching her tone.) No thank you. I would rather not.

(Turns T.V. back up. VEEANN crosses to her. Grabs remote, turns it off.)

VEEANN: Robyn, I'm in no mood to be trifled with. Pick them up now, and help me with the dishes.

ROBYN: I'm not your daughter, and I'm on vacation. The answer is no. (Crosses to T.V. and turns it up there.)

VEEANN: (Walks over to her. Turns off the T.V.) You do not talk to me that way in my house, Robyn!

ROBYN: I'm watching this.

VEEANN: Out! (Controls herself again.) The upstairs T.V. gets cable.

You can watch up there.

ROBYN (*martyred*): You made me miss my video!

VEEANN: Upstairs! Now!

ROBYN: All right! (*Gets up, picks up wrappers. Marches in a huff upstairs.*) Geez.

VEEANN (*amazed*): Robyn?

ROBYN: What?

VEEANN: Nothing. You can put those in the trash in the upstairs bathroom.

ROBYN: Fine. (*Goes upstairs, as VEEANN stares after her, as GEORGE comes in with the garbage.*)

VEEANN: Did you catch any of that, George?

GEORGE: Part of it.

VEEANN: I was in such a good mood. Then that little snip . . . And what makes it worse, she was doing it on purpose.

GEORGE: I know Franklin's had a lot of trouble with her.

VEEANN: If any of our kids had talked to me that way, George . . .

GEORGE: Oh, they had their moments.

VEEANN: Not like Robyn.

GEORGE: No. Not even Frannie at her worst.

VEEANN: Honestly. And then, she picked up the wrappers anyway. I mean, what was that all about? I'll never understand that young woman, never in a million years.

GEORGE: Speaking of picking up . . .

VEEANN (*tossing him a sponge*): Wipe the counters.

GEORGE: Counters, right. (*Begins working.*)

VEEANN: You know, George, this really was a good day today.

GEORGE: I thought so, too.

VEEANN: We needed this, a day just to ourselves.

GEORGE: We did. You know, an occasional day like this, maybe if Franklin can come down, or Michael, or maybe even Lynn. It'll help a lot, don't you think?

VEEANN (*Stops cold*): What do you mean?

GEORGE: I mean with Dad.

VEEANN: George, your dad is not going to be staying with us. If Franklin or Michael come down, they'll be bringing him, not visiting.

GEORGE: Eventually, of course.

VEEANN: He's leaving as soon as we can arrange it, George. That's what this whole weekend's been about. That's what this whole day was about, George.

GEORGE: I know.

VEEANN: So what's all this about Franklin coming down periodically?

GEORGE: Realistically, Veeann.

VEEANN: All right. Realistically, he's leaving.

GEORGE: All right.

VEEANN: George, do you think this has been easy on me? Telling your father he has to go. I care about Marty; I think I care more for him than you do. I don't want to hurt his feelings, I don't want to cause all this trouble for the family. But when this weekend began, I had to tell myself, Veeann, be strong, hang tough these two days. If I weaken at all, I'm lost.

GEORGE: I'm just saying, Veeann, we may have to bend a little, too.

VEEANN: Not if we hang tough. Don't go all noodley on me, George. I need you in my corner.

GEORGE: I know. (*Doorbell.*) That'll be them.

VEEANN: How's the place look?

GEORGE: Not up to your usual standards, but it'll pass. (*GEORGE opens the door. In walk CAROLINE, MICHAEL, LYNN, CHUCK, and*

FRANKLIN *pushing MARTY in the wheelchair.*)

CAROLINE: Oh. Veeann. George.

VEEANN: You sound surprised.

CAROLINE: Actually, I am a little. Robyn said you hadn't come home yet. At least, I think that's what she said; she seemed to be speaking from a boom box.

VEEANN: We got here just after you called. Lynn, Chuck. Good to see you.

LYNN: Hi, Mom.

GEORGE (*to MARTY*): Did you have a nice time, Dad?

MARTY: Tolerable, George. Good to be home.

VEEANN: How about you, Caroline, Michael? Did you have a good day with him?

CAROLINE: Actually, we did. We drove around, had a very nice visit.

VEEANN: Good. Are you tired, Marty?

MARTY: All that in and outa cars, sightseeing. Didn't get my nap.

Feel like I've been rode hard and stabled wet.

VEEANN: We'll get you to bed pretty soon.

MARTY: Not tonight, Vee. We got steers to round up, heifers to brand. I can stay in the saddle a good while yet.

VEEANN: Are you hungry?

MARTY: Ain't rightly hungry, Vee, but I could use some warm milk.

VEEANN: I'll get it for you. (*She goes into the kitchen, puts milk in a glass in the microwave.*)

GEORGE: So, where'd you go?

FRANKLIN: Actually, we drove by that new development of yours.

GEORGE: Did you? What did you think?

MICHAEL: It's going to be nice, George. Great location, some beautiful lots. I can see the potential.

CAROLINE: What did you think of it, Dad?

MARTY: What?

GEORGE: The development. The subdivision I'm working on.

MARTY: I don't remember.

CAROLINE: Dad, are you okay?

MARTY: You deaf, girl? I'm tired. (*An awkward pause.*)

CAROLINE: So anyway, we saw the development, bought some KFC, and had a picnic in the park. A nice day.

VEEANN: I'm glad.

MICHAEL: It was good to feel like a family again.

GEORGE: Good. (*Another awkward pause. The microwave dings.*)

VEEANN: That'll be your milk, Marty.

CAROLINE: I'll take it to him.

VEEANN: I'd rather, Caroline. If he spills . . .

CAROLINE: Nonsense. I'm getting it, Dad.

MARTY: I want Veeann. (*VEEANN and CAROLINE glare at each other.*)

FRANKLIN: I'll give it to him. (*Snatches the mug.*) Here, Dad. A nice glass of warm milk.

MARTY: I don't want it from you! I don't want it from anyone! I want Veeann to give it to me. Veeann! (*After an uncomfortable pause, VEEANN crosses to MARTY with the milk.*)

VEEANN: Here, Marty.

MARTY: I was with you all day, Franklin, you and Caroline and Michael, and you didn't do nothin' right the whole time, not a single damn thing. Food too greasy, too much ice in the coke. Too hot in the car, too cold in the park, never did get my pillow adjusted right. Veeann knows how I like things. I want Veeann. (*A pause.*) Thanks for the milk, Vee.

VEEANN: You're welcome, Marty.

MARTY: You take good care of me, Vee.

VEEANN: Yes. I do.

MARTY: I want you to keep taking care of me.

VEEANN: Marty, I don't think I can much longer.

MARTY: I don't want to go.

VEEANN: Caroline, Michael, did you discuss this at all with him?

CAROLINE: Some.

MARTY: Keep me here, Veeann. Keep me here.

CAROLINE: Go ahead, Veeann. Explain it to him. Tell him no.

VEEANN: Caroline, please! *(A pause. She turns to MARTY.)* Marty, I know you want to stay here. But wouldn't it be better to be somewhere where they can take care of you properly?

MARTY: You do fine.

VEEANN: Not really, Marty. And I'm not good company for you. I think you'd be happier somewhere else.

MARTY: Shady Pines. I've seen it before, Veeann. You're gonna stick me off someplace and forget about me.

VEEANN: No! We're not talking about leaving you alone. George and I would be out to visit every day. *(To the others.)* Did you take a look at Shady Pines?

CAROLINE: We did.

VEEANN: What did you think? *(CAROLINE shrugs her shoulders.)*

MICHAEL: It looked fine. Franklin, didn't you think so?

FRANKLIN: It didn't seem bad at all to me. Dad seemed to like it.

MARTY: It ain't as bad as some.

VEEANN: So what did you think, Marty? Would you consider living there? *(Pause.)*

MARTY: Might.

GEORGE: Dad? You're going to agree to go to Shady Pines?

MARTY: I ain't said yes, I ain't said no.

VEEANN: But you'd consider it?

MARTY: I ain't said yes, I ain't said no.

VEEANN: But you all agree? Caroline?

CAROLINE: I'm not turning cartwheels over it. But it didn't look quite as bad as most of those . . . places. Yes, I'll go along. On certain conditions.

VEEANN: Conditions.

MICHAEL: Look, Veeann, we want to be as honest as we can possibly be about this whole thing. You've been upfront with us, we need to be the same.

FRANKLIN: You've put us all in quite an awkward position. We're not quite sure how to proceed from here. That's as honest as we can possibly be.

VEEANN: I'm still listening.

MICHAEL: We talked about each of our situations, Veeann, over and over. We all of us still hate the thought of a nursing home. Your house has seemed like, and continues to seem like, the best answer.

VEEANN: But it's not an answer anymore.

FRANKLIN: We understand that.

MICHAEL: We do. So you win, Veeann. Shady Pines it is.

FRANKLIN: I think it's the best choice for everyone.

GEORGE: So that's it?

MICHAEL: That's it.

GEORGE: It's over? The decision is made?

MARTY: No! The decision ain't made! I ain't decided!

GEORGE: But the rest of you? No more objections?

CAROLINE: That's right, George.

GEORGE: Well I think that's wonderful! Absolutely wonderful! I can't tell you how relieved I am. Veeann and I were sure from the start that this would be the right decision.

MICHAEL: We think so, too.

GEORGE: So, we'll need to work out the details. I'll call the administrator on Monday, and we can begin unravelling all the

red tape.

MARTY: George! I ain't agreed to this!

CAROLINE: You do that, George.

GEORGE: Dad, it won't hurt to get the paperwork started. Save time if you do decide.

VEEANN: What are your conditions?

GEORGE: What do you mean, Veeann?

VEEANN: You mentioned conditions, Caroline.

MICHAEL: We would like you to keep him for a few more months.

Until we can find a good buyer for the land.

VEEANN: No. *(An explosion. They all begin talking at once.)*

GEORGE: Veeann . . .

VEEANN: The answer is no.

MICHAEL: Veeann, we're talking a few weeks, maybe three months, tops.

VEEANN: Michael, I can't wait until after you've found a buyer, 'til it's more convenient. I want a final decision now.

CAROLINE: Absolutely unreasonable . . .

VEEANN: This is the same deal you offered this morning, Michael.

Did you think I'd forget?

MICHAEL: We'll give you a time frame. We'll set a deadline.

VEEANN: Not good enough. I want a decision this weekend.

FRANKLIN: Veeann, this isn't like you, this isn't . . .

MICHAEL: We're meeting you more than halfway . . .

CAROLINE: Yourself, that's it, that's all you're interes . . .

MARTY: I ain't decided nothing!

GEORGE: Veeann, I don't know about this.

VEEANN: Well, I do, George, if you don't. This is not acceptable.

CAROLINE: Utterly selfish.

MARTY: I ain't come to a decision, Vee.

MICHAEL: Caroline, please. Veeann, listen to me . . .

VEEANN: I did listen, Michael. This morning, remember?

MICHAEL: We can't meet you any further, Veeann.

VEEANN: Oh, I think you can, Michael. You can start by telling the truth. *(She shouts this last line over the hubbub. It stops them. A pause.)*

GEORGE: Veeann . . .

VEEANN: Let's be honest with each other, Michael, let's be right upfront. What kind of scam is it this time?

MICHAEL: I don't know what you're talking . . .

VEEANN: The long conversations with Chuck, doors closed. The sudden, absorbing interest in your father's estate. We're all being honest here, Michael. Why don't you start? What kind of scam are you involved in?

MICHAEL: I'm not involved in any scam.

LYNN: While we're at it, Chuck. I'd appreciate some answers, too.

CHUCK: I handle the finances, Lynn.

LYNN: Our finances, Chuck.

CHUCK: Leave it alone, Lynn.

VEEANN: We know your history, Michael, we know you. Remember your Amway days? The water softener fiasco? The little grey vacuums? Remember, Michael?

GEORGE: Veeann, no.

VEEANN: George, I simply want Michael to be honest with us. Like he said. Upfront.

MICHAEL: Veeann, I'm trying to work out a compromise . . .

VEEANN: You've got something going. What is it?

MICHAEL: I don't do that kind of thing anymore, Vee.

VEEANN: Lynn thinks you have.

LYNN: I know you have, Uncle Michael. You and my husband.

VEEANN: What is it? Condo-shares? Diamond mines? Mountain

Secur. . . ? Mountain Security. (A pause. The word just hangs there.)

It is, isn't it? You invested in Mountain Security.

CAROLINE: What?

GEORGE: Oh, Michael.

MICHAEL: It's not true.

FRANKLIN: I think you're right, Veeann. Michael, remember, a few months ago, you were talking it up to me?

MARTY: Hell, I think you're right, Vee. Michael never did have the sense the good Lord give a grasshopper's behind.

CAROLINE: Mountain Security? What?

GEORGE: It's been a big item in the news here. One of the largest securities frauds in state history.

CAROLINE: Michael?

LYNN: Chuck?

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

CHUCK: We ain't invested no money in no Mountain Security.

LYNN: You swear it, Chuck? Not one cent of our money has gone into Mountain Security?

CHUCK: I swear it.

LYNN: Chuck, that's the first lie that I know is a lie. Right, Uncle Michael?

VEEANN: What about it, Michael?

MARTY: I'd kinda like to know, too, Michael. Seein' as how you were talking about selling my land to pay your debts.

VEEANN: That's it, isn't it? From the first day, you've been talking about estate planning. That's why. To pay off your debts. That's what you and Chuck have been up to.

MICHAEL: We're talking about my father.

VEEANN: Not right now, we're not, Michael. Right now we're talking about you.

LYNN: And me. And my husband. And my children.

MICHAEL: All right!

VEEANN: So you did after all?

MICHAEL: Yes.

GEORGE: You invested in Mountain Security?

MICHAEL: Yes.

LYNN: And you invested with him, Chuck?

CHUCK: Yes.

CAROLINE: How much?

MICHAEL: Twenty-eight thousand dollars.

FRANKLIN: Twenty-eight . . .

CAROLINE: Michael, where did you get twenty-eight thousand dollars?

MICHAEL: A second mortgage. We took out a second mortgage on the house.

FRANKLIN: Wow.

LYNN: Chuck, you didn't invest that kind of money, did you?

CHUCK: No.

LYNN: How much?

CHUCK: Not as much as him.

LYNN: The exact total, please.

CHUCK: A few thousand.

LYNN: A few thousand? Exactly how many thousand?

CHUCK: I ain't sure, exactly.

LYNN: One lie follows another, Chuck. I'm starting to not believe anything you've told me.

CHUCK: All right! A little over six thousand.

LYNN: Six thousand!!!

CHUCK: A little over that.

LYNN: Chuck, I've been driving twenty miles to do my grocery shopping at a warehouse market. Dressing the kids in Ruth's

hand-me-downs and DI specials. Where in the world did you get six thousand dollars?

CHUCK: Cashed in our life insurance.

LYNN: Chuck . . . (She's speechless.) Oh, Chuck.

MARTY: So that's why you wanted to sell my land.

MICHAEL: That's right, Dad! We have two families that need it. Desperately.

VEEANN: I'm sorry, Michael.

MICHAEL: So am I, Vee. And I know what you're thinking. Stupid Michael. Another get-rich-quick scheme blows up in his face. Drags Chuck down with him. Serves him right. But you don't know.

GEORGE: No, Michael, we don't.

MICHAEL: It was our old bishop, if you can believe that. He called me. Just one year ago last week. He said that he'd found this wonderful investment possibility, that he'd checked it out, that it was a great way for struggling young families to pay some extra tithing. That's just how he put it, too, pay some extra tithing. High yield, no risk, guaranteed return. So I started small, wrote out a check for two hundred dollars. Within the month, I'd received six hundred in dividends. So I plowed it back, added another thousand to prime the pump. The checks just kept coming, my investment plus. So I decided, this was it. My big break. And so I took out the mortgage.

GEORGE: And the bank just approved it?

MICHAEL: Bryce Taylor was the loan officer. He was into it for forty thou himself. Oh, it went through, smooth as silk.

LYNN: Was it old Bishop Ahlstrom?

MICHAEL (nodding): His wife caught him swallowing sleeping pills, rushed him to the hospital just in time.

LYNN: I'd heard something, didn't think it could be true.

CHUCK: Wish he had done it. Crook.

LYNN: Chuck, Mark Ahlstrom is one of the kindest men I know. Don't blame him for your stupidity.

CHUCK: Don't call me stupid, Lynn.

CAROLINE: Why not? You are. Both of you. Idiots.

MICHAEL: You're not telling me anything I don't already know, Caroline. Anyway, Dad, I doubt this makes any difference. I know that you've got more to worry about than my mistake. But I could lose my home.

MARTY: You should. You deserve it, both of you.

MICHAEL: But Ruth doesn't deserve it, Dad. Neither does Lynn.

LYNN: Never mind me, Grandpa. Sell any land you like. Except the ranch, and I know you'll never sell that.

CHUCK: Don't be so sure about that ranch, Lynn.

LYNN: What do you mean?

MICHAEL: Chuck, no.

CHUCK: Michael, shut up. Look, it's about time we told people what's goin' on. They know the bad stuff, let's tell them the good.

CAROLINE: You have some good news, Chuck?

CHUCK: You bet it's good news. We got a buyer. For the ranch and for the 600 acres to the south of it. They're offering 500 an acre. That's 680,000 dollars for both plots together.

FRANKLIN: That's nearly \$200,000 apiece.

MARTY: You can't sell the ranch.

CHUCK: I'm livin' on that ranch, old man, not you. And Franklin, I got a contract with the family, I get my cut. You divide it five ways, not four.

GEORGE: Who's the buyer?

MICHAEL: It's a developer named Jay Bell. He's planning to build a major shopping mall in the area.

GEORGE: Jay Bell?

CAROLINE: George, do you know him?

GEORGE: I've heard of him.

CAROLINE: You sound wary.

GEORGE: Well, he's supposed to be a slick customer. Controversial, operates just this side of the law. I know some people he's made very, very rich.

MICHAEL: And we could be one of those people.

CAROLINE: Or one of us could be.

MICHAEL: Look, it was never my intention to take all the money for myself. I'm in trouble right now, I'll admit it. I was hoping to get Dad to sign that particular property over to us. I could use a hundred thousand dollars right now. Couldn't you? Franklin?

FRANKLIN: Not like this.

MICHAEL: Franklin, think about it. A hundred and thirty-six thousand dollars. That's your share. One fifth of 680 thousand.

MARTY: Michael, seems to me you're forgetting somethin'. You got no deal without a signature on a piece of paper. And I ain't signin'. We ain't selling the ranch.

MICHAEL: Dad, think about it. All those years, every spare cent you had, you bought land. Every Sunday, we'd climb in the back of the pickup. Remember? Bouncing along on some dirt road for hours, we'd be hanging on in back. Always, looking for land, look over some new plot you were thinking about buying. And we'd climb out of the truck and you'd say to us, "Don't look like much now, boys, but land's always the best buy you can make. Someday, somebody's gonna see this land, and they're gonna want to build a factory or a store. And that'll be your inheritance." Remember?

FRANKLIN: I remember.

MICHAEL: Dad, we need it now. I'm in terrible shape financially. My fault, I know. Still, you always intended it for us, and right now we need it. Please, Dad.

MARTY: What'll happen to me?

MICHAEL: Shady Pines is a good place, Dad. You'll be happy there. I don't want to have to fight you in court.

GEORGE: No Michael . . .

FRANKLIN: What are you talking about?

MICHAEL: If Dad's declared incompetent in court, I can get a power of attorney and sell the land myself.

CAROLINE: Wait just one second here . . .

FRANKLIN: Michael, no . . .

MARTY: You would do that?

MICHAEL: Dad, I'm desperate. I need that money, and I need it soon.

GEORGE: You'll fight him alone.

CAROLINE: You bet you will.

MICHAEL: Then I will.

LYNN: Michael, you have to have the ranch, too?

CHUCK: Lynn, don't you start.

LYNN: The ranch is my home, Chuck.

CHUCK: Lynn, we're selling the ranch. I've already agreed to it.

LYNN: But I haven't.

MARTY: I ain't either.

CHUCK: A hundred thousand dollars, Lynn. Don't be stupid.

LYNN: I'm not.

MICHAEL: Dad, how about it. You can live like a prince at Shady Pines. I'll come down every weekend, George and Veeann will visit every day. In the meantime, our inheritance can be doing what you always intended it to do. Bail us out.

MARTY: I don't know.

MICHAEL: And Veeann. You want a time-frame. We can give you

one. We have to be finished by June or the whole deal falls apart. I'm telling you all, this is the solution. This is the answer. (A pause. Enter ROBYN, down the stairs.)

ROBYN: Hi, Dad.

VEEANN (under her breath): Oh, no.

FRANKLIN: Hello, Robyn. Have you had a good day?

ROBYN: Kinda boring, really.

VEEANN: I thought you were watching a show.

ROBYN: It's Yo MTV raps. I hate rap.

VEEANN (clueless): Ah.

CAROLINE: Franklin?

FRANKLIN: Robyn, it really would be better if you were to go back upstairs for a few moments. It's rather awkward right now for you to be here.

ROBYN: Tough. I'm staying.

CAROLINE: Robyn, I don't think . . .

ROBYN: I'm not going, so stop trying to get rid of me.

VEEANN: Robyn, please!

ROBYN: Look, what's the big deal? I know what you're talking about, why all the secrecy? (Crosses to MARTY. Looks him in the eye.) Grandpa Mortenson. They're talking about putting you in an old folks home. You know that, don't you?

MARTY: Yes, honey. I know.

ROBYN: You want to go?

MARTY: No, honey, I don't want to. I'm thinking, maybe it would be best if I did, though.

ROBYN: Forget it, grandpa. Don't let them talk you into something you don't want to do.

MICHAEL: I think that's enough out of you, young lady.

ROBYN: I'm a member of this family, too, Uncle Michael.

CAROLINE: Robyn, that's enough.

ROBYN: Oh, shut up.

CAROLINE: Franklin!

FRANKLIN: Honey . . .

ROBYN: Look, screw all of you. Okay? Just go screw yourselves. You don't want what's best for Grandpa. You just don't want to feel guilty about things.

CAROLINE: Robyn, I've heard enough . . .

ROBYN: Am I right?

LYNN: You may have a point, Robyn.

ROBYN: Right on, Lynn. Fight 'em, Grandpa!

VEEANN: Out! Robyn, out of this room!

ROBYN: Grandpa, can I stay?

MARTY: I like having you around, sweetheart.

ROBYN: There you go. I stay.

CAROLINE: Franklin, will you talk to her?

ROBYN: Aunt Caroline, I don't listen to him either.

MARTY: Good for you.

ROBYN: Come on, Grandpa. Be obnoxious. The young and the old, let's tell 'em what we think.

MARTY: Honey, I wish it were that easy. George, Caroline, Veeann, Franklin. Here's how it is. I ain't gonna die with strangers. If I can stay here, with Veeann, you can sell the ranch. Otherwise, I'll get rid of it.

MICHAEL: This is your fault, Robyn.

MARTY: No, it ain't, Michael. Robyn just helped me see it clear.

GEORGE: Dad, why? You know Veeann doesn't want you. Why use this kind of blackmail?

MARTY: I want what I want.

MICHAEL: That goes for me, too, Dad.

MARTY: You'll have a fight on your hands.

MICHAEL: Fair enough.

VEEANN: But if I just can't have you anymore?

MARTY: Then it goes. All of it, over to the Church. You cut me off from you, I cut you off from me. You want an inheritance, Franklin? Michael, you want help with your debts? I stay here.

(The next four lines are spoken simultaneously with the four lines following.)

CAROLINE: Bickering and blackmailing . . .

FRANKLIN: Terrible.

ROBYN: You're always like this? What's new?

CAROLINE: Robyn . . .

MICHAEL: *(Simultaneous with above.)* So you'll let us sell the ranch if you can stay with Vee?

MARTY: If I can stay with family, yes.

VEEANN: Marty, that may not be possible.

MARTY: You heard what I said.

VEEANN: Dad, we need to talk about this. Okay?

MARTY: Fine. *(VEEANN, MICHAEL, CAROLINE, GEORGE, and FRANKLIN cross to the kitchen, gather close to the stove. ROBYN moves to MARTY with LYNN.)*

VEEANN: Look, he's angry, it's normal. He'll get over it. He's going to like it at Shady Pines.

FRANKLIN: He'll give away the land.

VEEANN: That's just a bluff.

MICHAEL: Veeann, 600,000 dollars.

VEEANN: Michael, don't talk to me about your deal.

CAROLINE: I agree.

FRANKLIN: It's not just Michael. I can't take the chance of losing it either, Veeann. I just can't.

CAROLINE: Franklin?

FRANKLIN: It's all I have. *(They stare at him.)* I'm the assistant pharmacist at a small local drug store, paid an hourly wage barely sufficient for my needs. It's an entry level job, Veeann, a beginner's job, and I've been there for eighteen years. No insurance, no pension, no retirement program. No savings. I'll never rise in the world. When Vickie died, I stopped even wanting to. Veeann, the land my father accumulated through the years is my future. Over a hundred thousand dollars? I have to have it.

CAROLINE: Do you see, Veeann? Do you see now? Michael needs it. Lynn needs it. Franklin needs it.

MICHAEL: Look, it's late tonight. We'll talk to him, reassure him. In a few months, we'll bring it up again. Plant the seed.

CAROLINE: Get him used to the idea.

FRANKLIN: Work up to it slowly.

MICHAEL: Meanwhile, I'll prepare the power of attorney.

CAROLINE: And we'll get you that equipment.

MICHAEL: Absolutely. And some part-time help.

FRANKLIN: In a few months, we'll have it all worked out.

VEEANN: In a few months.

FRANKLIN: So you agree? He stays? Just for now? *(There is a long pause.)*

VEEANN: George?

GEORGE: Veeann, I think it's best, too.

VEEANN: I thought you were on my side on this?

GEORGE: You see the situation. This is where we are.

VEEANN: Where we've been all along. I hoped I'd have your support, at least.

GEORGE: We compromise, honey. For everyone's best.

VEEANN: Lynn?

LYNN: The ranch is my home, Mom. I want to keep it.

CHUCK: We're out either way.

LYNN: And you're happy about that, aren't you, Chuck?

GEORGE: Veeann, what else can we do?

VEEANN: And you'll get me plenty of help, right? All of you?

GEORGE: It's all going to be different, honey, just as you say.

VEEANN *(affectionately)*: George, with the exception of two days off after the births of our four children, I have cooked every meal and washed every dish for the thirty-four years of our marriage. Cleaned every toilet, changed every diaper, wiped every nose. I do love you, George. But old habits die hard. Good intentions last a few weeks, and then everything goes back to normal. Again I refuse. The answer still is no. *(Shocked silence.)*

GEORGE: Then that's my answer, too.

MICHAEL: I don't believe . . .

CAROLINE: Absolutely imposs . . .

FRANKLIN: Didn't you hear what I said, Vee?

VEEANN: I did, Franklin. I'm so terribly sorry. But I can feel the walls closing in on me, and I can't push them away. No.

CAROLINE: Why?

VEEANN: Because I can't.

CAROLINE: Why?

VEEANN: Because it's impossible.

CAROLINE: No. Why?

VEEANN: Because I'm sick. I'm tired. I have given given given all my life and I have no more to give. Because I have earned my rest, and I mean to have it!

CAROLINE: This is ridiculous.

MICHAEL: That's it, huh? Final decision.

VEEANN: Final decision.

MARTY: Well, I'm sorry to hear that, Veeann. Put me to bed, I'll call my lawyer in the morning.

MICHAEL: Dad, please.

MARTY: Put me to bed! I'm tired, and I've got a busy day tomorrow.

FRANKLIN: Come on, Robyn, let's go.

MICHAEL: We'll fight you, Dad.

ROBYN: There's gonna be a fight, I wanna watch it.

MARTY: You'll lose.

CAROLINE: You don't even care, do you? Just me me me.

LYNN: Excuse me.

VEEANN: I noticed how anxious you were to sacrifice your life style. MARTY: A nursing home! You watch, you'll see what it's like. You'll

be there soon enough. Lynn and Frannie, they'll be fightin' and squabblin' "whata we do with Dad, I can't take him, I can't take him—

LYNN: Excuse me.

GEORGE: I'm sorry, Dad.

MICHAEL: Dad, Veeann. Maybe we can work something out. Maybe there's—

MARTY: I'm tired.

LYNN: Excuse me.

CAROLINE: I'm booking a flight out tonight.

VEEANN: What is it, honey?

MICHAEL: Wait! Everyone, wait!

LYNN: I may have a solution.

MARTY: Put me to bed!

VEEANN: That's fine, honey. *(To MARTY.)* In a second, Marty.

MARTY: Not you. Franklin or Michael. One of my—

ROBYN: Hey! You guys are great, you know that? Church every Sunday, but something like this happens, and you forget all about it.

VEEANN: Do you have something to say, young lady?

ROBYN: Not me. Lynn.
 GEORGE: Honey?
 LYNN: I may have a solution.
 CAROLINE: And what is your solution, Lynn?
 LYNN: What if Grandpa were to move back to the ranch, with me?
 MARTY: Back to the ranch? Veeann, you moving back to the ranch?
 MICHAEL: Lynn, that's just not possible.
 LYNN: Why not?
 VEEANN: No, Marty—
 CAROLINE: Honey, he can't ranch any more.
 LYNN: I'll take care of you, Grandpa. If that's all right—
 CHUCK: Lynn, what is this—you can't seriously be thinking about taking in some eighty-four-year-old. What about the kids?
 LYNN: He knows more about ranching than all of us put together. Maybe he can't work himself, but he can still supervise.
 VEEANN: I don't know about thi—
 MICHAEL: We're going to have to sell the ranch, Lynn. It's part of the whole—
 CHUCK: He ain't gonna boss me around—
 MARTY: You got no say in what happens to my—
 CAROLINE: It sounds like a good—
 LYNN: Grandpa, I'll take care of you.
 MARTY: You? Not Vee?
 LYNN: That's right, Grandpa. Aunt Caroline, you talked about some special equipment? Part-time nursing help?
 CAROLINE: For Veeann, sure.
 LYNN: Give me the help, give me the equipment, and I'll take care of him.
 VEEANN: Lynn, you don't have any idea what kind of job this is.
 MARTY: Caroline, Vee, she's gonna take me back to the ranch!
 LYNN: I know what I'm doing, Mom.
 MICHAEL: Of all the unrealistic—
 GEORGE: Lynn, what about your children?
 LYNN: It would do them good to get to know their grandfather. Mom, I can do a lot more than you think—
 VEEANN: You're talking about caring for an elderly invalid and your—
 LYNN: Caroline, Michael, Franklin, I'm going to need all the help you promised Mom.
 CAROLINE: Lynn, I don't think—
 LYNN: I'm serious, Aunt Caroline. I'll be calling you.
 CHUCK: Lynn, forget it.
 MICHAEL: Franklin, this is a disaster—
 LYNN: He's my grandfather, Chuck. I'll do the work.
 FRANKLIN: Michael, I don't know—
 CHUCK: I told you, you ain't bringing him on my ranch.
 MICHAEL: She's screwing up the whole—
 LYNN: Chuck, it is not your ranch. It's still Grandpa's. And, yes, Chuck, I am taking him in.
 FRANKLIN: What if it works out—
 MICHAEL: Think of your share, Franklin, think of the money—
 CHUCK: No way.
 FRANKLIN: I'm thinking of Dad.
 LYNN: Chuck, we haven't been profitable one year since we took the place over. He's got over sixty years of experience. If we can humble ourselves and listen, it may be exactly what we need.
 MARTY: You bet. I'll learn you.
 LYNN: Exactly, Grandpa.
 CHUCK: No!
 MARTY: The ranch again!
 LYNN: We'll get you packed and moved up this week.

MICHAEL: Chuck, you've got to talk to her.
 CAROLINE: Michael, I suggest you stay out of—
 CHUCK: Lynn, stop it. This is stupid.
 LYNN: I don't think so.
 CHUCK: What if I take my share of the 600,000 and start my own business.
 LYNN: There isn't going to be any 600,000. We are going to do this, Chuck.
 CHUCK: And you're just gonna throw away my money, huh?
 LYNN: It's not your money.
 CHUCK: Lynn, this is the big break of my life. You ain't gonna wreck it.
 LYNN: We're taking him in.
 MICHAEL (*overlapping*): Chuck, talk to her.
 CHUCK: Lynn, we ain't gonna do this.
 LYNN: We are going to do this, Chuck.
 CHUCK: Some eighty-year-old know-it-all looking over my shoulder—
 LYNN: I hope he does, Chuck.
 CHUCK: . . . nothing right . . . everything I do . . .
 LYNN (*overlapping*): I hope he looks over your shoulder. I hope he sees things I can't see.
 CHUCK: Lynn, I ain't gonna put up with it.
 LYNN: Then leave.
 CHUCK: What did you say?
 LYNN: Leave.
 VEEANN: Honey—
 LYNN: Mom, this is between—
 CHUCK: You're serious.
 LYNN: I am. I'll run the ranch myself.
 GEORGE: Lynn—
 CHUCK: Without me? You wouldn't last two days.
 LYNN: Try me.
 CHUCK: Lynn, I love you, babe.
 ROBYN: HA!
 CHUCK: You shut up.
 LYNN (*overlapping*): Robyn?
 ROBYN: Tell her, Chuck. Tell her about this morning.
 LYNN: What happened this morning?
 CHUCK: Nothing.
 ROBYN: You want your grade now, Chuckles? I give you a D. Started kissing me this morning, then, like, wanted me to grade—
 CHUCK: Shut up!
 LYNN: Chuck, I don't know you anymore.
 CHUCK: She's lying.
 LYNN: The insurance. The long days, with nothing accomplished at the end of them. All the waitresses at the truckstop café calling you by your first name. Calls late at night, "Keep your husband away from my daughter." Now this with Robyn. You say you love me. What am I supposed to think, Chuck?
 CHUCK: Bunch of old gossips in that town. A crazy punk kid. Who you gonna believe?
 LYNN: Am I supposed to believe you? Look, Chuck, I'm angry; I think I have a right to be. But our children need a father. I don't want to close the door.
 CHUCK: Then forget the ranch, Lynn. Let's take our share of the six-hundred-thou and start all over.
 LYNN: Wrong answer.
 VEEANN: Look, Chuck, I think it would be better if you left now.
 GEORGE: I agree.
 LYNN (*overlapping*): I'm okay, Mom.

CHUCK: I ain't leaving! Lynn, you're crazy, you know that? A woman and a crippled old man. You gonna run a ranch?

LYNN: That's right.

MICHAEL: Just a second, though. Chuck does have a point, wrong though he may be—

VEEANN: Michael—

MICHAEL: Pounding fence posts? Cleaning out stables? Lynn, it's a man's work.

LYNN: Maybe I'll get a man to help me.

CHUCK: A hired hand? How you gonna pay—

LYNN: Uncle Franklin.

ROBYN: Hey!

FRANKLIN: What?

LYNN: You ranched for years, Uncle Franklin, growing up. Come back home. Let's ranch together.

FRANKLIN: Lynn? Do you mean it?

GEORGE: Honey—

LYNN: It's worth trying, don't you think?

ROBYN: Cool! I always wanted to be a cowboy!

LYNN: If we do this, Robyn, I'm the boss.

ROBYN: Sure.

LYNN: I mean it. I'll establish a curfew, up early, no late parties. Chores.

ROBYN: Hey, I'm cool about that. Dad, did you hear? We're gonna be ranchers!

GEORGE (overlapping): Just the same—

FRANKLIN: Robyn, please, nothing's been—

CHUCK: This is the stupidest thing I've ever heard. Throwing away good money to take care of some old cripple.

LYNN: Stupid or not, this is what we're doing. Mom, the ranch is my home. I'll do anything to keep it.

VEEANN: Lynn, listen to me—

ROBYN: Grandpa, we're gonna be ranchers!

FRANKLIN: Ranching after all these years. And if it doesn't work out, then what? I'll have burned my bridges.

VEEANN: Lynn, honey, do you have any idea—

CHUCK: Stupid, stupid, stupid—

(The following lines should be delivered overlapping each other.)

MICHAEL: Chuck, you've got to stop her!

LYNN: Dad, I'm doing this.

CHUCK: Shut up, Michael. This is between me and—

GEORGE: Honey, I don't know—

VEEANN: Chuck, that's enough. Lynn, if you're sure—

MARTY: Back to my ranch!

GEORGE: Lynn—

VEEANN: I'm not free of this, I'm not—

MICHAEL: I'll fight you, Lynn. I'll take you to court.

CAROLINE: Yes, I'd like to see about flights to California.

VEEANN: Honey, if you need help—

MICHAEL: You don't want to mess with me, Lynn—

CAROLINE: Tonight.

LYNN: Come on, Grandpa.

VEEANN: Call me.

MICHAEL: Six hundred thousand dollars!

(Final tableau as ROBYN, LYNN, and FRANKLIN gather around MARTY's wheelchair, looking uncertainly at each other, at the future.)

BLACKOUT

END



ISLANDS

In Memoriam:
Bryan and Monte Bolton
January 5, 1992

From the shore, the Channel Islands mound
Indistinctly grey against grey skies;
Barely separate from waters that surround,
They rest like invert wombs. Sheer turrets rise
At Cathedral Point—but we cannot see
Such detail from our shore. It strains our eyes
Just to trace dark, arcing curves of scree
That mark sharp land from mapless ocean ways.
Cloud-shrouded, the islands keep their mystery
From those of us on shore. Their lead-grey bays
And coves hide secrets frightening and dark;
Beneath thick storm-whipped spray and dusky haze,
The islands terrify. Their outlines mark
blind boundaries of our human, mortal vision.
Grey shapes, they stand stark symbols of the dark,
Of loss, of harsh unbearable collision—
Love with Faith. To live without the Love . . .
Unthinkable; to endure the indecision
Loss implies . . . impossible. Above
Deep mist-grey mounds, cloud cover billows, parts
For one sufficient moment. Like a dove
Of sheerest light, the sun breaks through with darts
That glance from rock to sea and back again.
A gleam . . . a fragment light . . . then gone. . . . But hearts
That wear the weight of grief and twisting pain
Reach up, entwined with that faint light—rebound
With faith and love to rest on Heaven's plain:
Barely held by waters that surround,
Infinite blue beneath celestial skies,
Seen from our shores, the Channel Islands mound.

—MICHAEL R. COLLINGS