

# HUCKLEBERRY TOWERS

BY

STANLEY BROWN

# HUCKLEBERRY TOWERS

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HUCKLEBERRY TOWERS

*FOR MY PARENTS, HELEN AND DAVID*

## HUCKLEBERRY TOWERS

Cast: 8M, 11W

HENRY: 60's +	A dedicated husband, hard of hearing.
JOY: 20 +	An upbeat professional saleswoman
WENDY: 40s -50s	A serious, busy professional.
TOM: late 20's -30's	A millennial.
HELEN: 60's +	Wendy and Tom's mother, Henry's wife.
NATHAN: 60's +	Cantankerous resident of Huckleberry Towers.
CHARLES: 60's +	A resident who doesn't makes waves.
LINDSAY: 40's +	The chief care-giver in the retirement
home.	
LOUISE: 60's+	A resident with eyes on Charles.
CLAUDIA: 30's +	A health clinic volunteer.
SADIE: 60's +	A resident, caring.
DORIS: 60's +	A resident, a bit wild.
LIONEL BURKE: 40's +	A real estate developer.
ANN: 60's +	A resident and a loud mouth.
MICHAEL: 60's+	A resident, married to Ann.
RUSS: 60's +	A resident. Sleeps.

Optional characters (can also be double cast):

MAUREEN: 60's +	An eccentric resident.
BETTY: 60's +	Needs a cane and an attendant – lively.
PETER: 20's-30's	A French speaking attendant.

TIME: The present.

PLACE: A retirement home.

## HUCKLEBERRY TOWERS

*Huckleberry Towers* was originally produced at the Lincoln Stegman Theater in North Hollywood, California by the Emmanuel Lutheran Actors Theater Ensemble (ELATE) and featured the following cast:

Henry.....Andrew Piecka  
Helen..... Barbara Piecka  
Joy..... Janet Lee Rodriguez  
Wendy.....Roberta Fasso-Locke  
Tom/Peter.....Raziel Fritz  
Nathan.....Philip Pirio  
Charles.....Travis  
Lindsay.....Bev Bailey  
Claudia.....Sara Locke  
Louise..... Judith Miller  
Doris..... Marty McCambridge  
Sadie.....Betty Kane  
Maureen..... Gyl Roland  
Russ..... Thomas Long  
Lionel Burke...Tom Reilly  
Ann.....Marilyn Lazik  
Michael.....Michael Gitomer  
Betty..... Barbara Benner

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# HUCKLEBERRY TOWERS

ACT 1  
SCENE 1

*The setting is the dining room of Huckleberry Towers, a retirement home in Southern California. There's a side entrance to the dining room downstage, which leads in from the lobby of the home. There's a light switch next to this entrance. There are upstage center swinging doors that lead to a kitchen. There's plenty of dining tables and chairs in the room with artificial flower arrangements on the tables. Menu pages are scattered around. There are landscape paintings on the walls. A "No Smoking" sign. One wall has a bulletin board with announcements and photos pinned on it. This is a pretty nice place, fairly upscale. It's not depressingly institutional. At rise the room is empty. It's shortly after lunch, in the early afternoon. Soft instrumental music is heard. It's not classical; it's more "elevator music." The clacking of shoe heels is soon heard. JOY enters, bubbly and enthusiastic. She's carrying a notebook, brochures, and application papers. She's giving the Grand Tour. Lagging behind her are WENDY and TOM. They're scrolling on their phones, not even close to matching Joy's energy.*

**JOY.** *(Entering.)* And this is the dining room! Isn't it lovely, Wendy? Tom? Three hot meals are served here each and every day. Breakfast starts at 7AM and is served until 10. Lunch is from 11:30 AM until 1PM. Dinner is served from 5 until 7:30 PM. Assigned seating is based on staff observation and projected compatibility. Limited items are available from the kitchen between meals and until 10 PM. *(She looks up in annoyance at hearing the music. She heads for the upstage swinging doors.)* Would you excuse me for a moment, Wendy? Tom? Let me take care of this music. It really should have been turned off after lunch. *(She exits through the swinging doors. A few beats before the music stops. She reappears and rejoins Wendy and Tom downstage.)* There! Isn't that better? Now we can

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hear each other! Isn't this a wonderful dining area, Wendy? Tom? Doesn't this room remind you of one of your favorite restaurants? (*Wendy looks up from her phone, takes a look around, then shoots a look at Tom: "Is she serious?"*)

**TOM.** (*Looking up, mildly interested.*) What's that smell?

**JOY.** I'm sorry. Smell?

**TOM.** Like fish sticks in a car wash.

**JOY.** (*Sniffing.*) Ah! The car wash may come from our 100 per cent green cleaning products. We believe in green! Since we've just finished lunch, the fish may be...(*She picks up a menu sheet off a nearby table, scans it.*) Yes! A Friday favorite. "Breaded white fish."

**TOM.** Fish sticks.

**JOY.** You're the gourmet here, Tom! Anyway, it comes with peas. You should know our house chef is from a well-known cooking school in New York State.

**WENDY.** (*Perking up.*) The Culinary School?

**JOY.** Maybe! I just know it's well known. Would you like to see a menu? (*She tries to hand the sheet to Tom and Wendy but she's lost them again to their phones. Unruffled, she forges ahead.*) We have a selection of two hot entrees at each and every lunch. Dinner offers a selection of three hot entrees. We always offer a salad and a hot vegetable. Fruit juice, coffee, or tea.

**WENDY.** Dad likes a Jack Daniels on the rocks. (*Tom snorts a laugh.*)

**JOY.** The dining facility doesn't serve alcohol, Wendy, Tom, but there's no rules against private room consumption. However, there is a Happy Hour on Fridays. Did I mention that? A complimentary glass of red or white wine is served every Friday at 4PM. It's very popular with the residents. (*She takes a few steps towards the doorway from where she entered.*) Did we move a little too fast for Mr. and Mrs. Auburn? Are they still behind us?

**WENDY.** They're fine.

**TOM.** (*Glancing O.S.*) Mom's still looking at some plants.

**JOY.** Our front patio garden. It's nice, isn't it, Wendy? Tom? Did you notice the huckleberry bush? The morning sun makes that garden the most popular spot in the facility. From there, many of the residents head west to

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the back patio for the afternoon sun, stopping here for lunch. A daily migration, you might say. We call them the “sun worshippers.” Isn’t that fun? Of course, each resident is issued a complimentary broad-rimmed hat or cap. We’re very concerned about each resident’s complete skin health.

**WENDY.** You have figures for us?

**JOY.** Our fees. Of course. They’re listed in our brochure. We have a variety of payment plans and options which we can discuss at the conclusion of the tour. Are your parents sure they wouldn’t want to see the dining room? In my opinion it’s a highlight. Maybe I should round them up. *(She heads for the exit.)* Will you excuse me, Wendy? Tom? I’ll be right back. *(She exits. We hear only the sound of phone keys tapping.)*

**WENDY.** What do you think?

**TOM.** Whatever.

**WENDY.** Best one so far.

**TOM.** Uh huh.

**WENDY.** Better than the one with the lady with the walker and the bra...

**TOM.** ...wearing nothing else? Uh, yeah.

**WENDY.** And you just had to take a picture.

**TOM.** Lost twenty-seven followers.

**WENDY.** Dork.

**TOM.** Spaz.

**WENDY.** Dweeb. Listen: if you can, try to pay attention. Mom likes this place. I can tell. You can see her expression when she saw that adjustable bed?

**TOM.** Well, yeah. It’s an adjustable bed.

**WENDY.** Perfect for her knees. Perfect. I tell you, she likes this place. Dad, though...

**TOM.** Hates it.

**WENDY.** He said that?

**TOM.** He doesn’t have to say that. You see his expression? Resting hate face.

**WENDY.** I want to be clear, now. Listen to me. We’re in agreement.

**TOM.** That he hates it? Absolutely.

**WENDY.** That they need to move!

**TOM.** *(Quietly.)* Guess so.



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**WENDY.** “Guess so.” I know what you’re doing, you little creep! Just like always. You’re making me the bad guy.

**TOM.** I’m not making...

**WENDY.** Always making me the villain. You, the perfect son. You know what? You make me puke!

**TOM.** You know...(*Gesturing.*)...this? What you’re doing? Is like – so old. Older than you, even.

**WENDY.** We make this decision together. To-gether! We’re going to be in total one hundred percent absolute agreement.

**TOM.** If you say so.

**WENDY.** “If you say so.” Such a sniveling...oh! You know it as well as I do. Mom barely walks. Dad can’t take care of her.

**TOM.** Dad says...and I’m just quoting what Dad says, now...he’s fine.

**WENDY.** Of course he says he’s fine. He can’t hear! He can barely see. He doesn’t know everything that’s wrong with *him*. How would he know something is wrong with *Mom*? Did you hear her “peeing in the garden” story?

**TOM.** I heard. Five times. I dreamt about it.

**WENDY.** You want to keep hearing about those stories?

**TOM.** God, no. Every time she keeps adding more and more detail. I know the brand of her underwear, for Christ’s sake.

**WENDY.** You know what else she told me? All they eat now is canned soup. Three cans of Progresso soup a day. You know why? It’s got a pull top. It’s the only thing Dad can open.

**TOM.** It’s good soup.

**WENDY.** You are such a jerk! Grow up! They need our help. I don’t like it any more than you do. But I don’t have the time to worry about them and you...you! You hear me? – got to start caring!

**TOM.** (*Calmly.*) Let me just say something here. If I may. First: you suck. Second: I get what you’re saying. I get it. I want them to be happy but get this through your phenomenally thick and ugly skull: Dad’s not moving. He’s not, pure and simple. He loves the house!

**WENDY.** He loves it, sure, but he can’t see what’s wrong with it! Do you know there’s water that drips from the kitchen ceiling right on to Mom’s

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back when she's cooking? It's from the upstairs bathroom! That can't be healthy.

**TOM.** Okay, look. The house needs a complete renovation – that's what every plumber says – with copper pipes. Dad'll never pay for that.

**WENDY.** And where there's water, there's mold, right? The house has to be a breeding ground for who knows what. You can hear it. The whole place sounds like it has indigestion. It's going to kill them.

**TOM.** You know what else is going to kill them? Years. I say let them live where they want. They're not going to be around that much longer. Why can't you just let them live in the house?

**WENDY.** Because Mom calls *me*. She calls me throughout the day and complains and not *you*, Boy Wonder. I'm the only one who worries and it's not right. Mom shouldn't be heating soup under bathroom water. Mom shouldn't be falling and pissing herself in the back yard.

**TOM.** Okay, enough!

**WENDY.** Then there's that neighborhood.

**TOM.** There's nothing wrong with the neighborhood.

**WENDY.** It's not our same neighborhood. Mom says the new guy across the street sells drugs.

**TOM.** Mom's smelling weed. That to her is "drugs." That guy across the street? He vapes while he mows the lawn. That's it. And he happens to buy good- and in my opinion – *really* good stuff. (*Wendy's text sound is heard.*)

**WENDY.** (*Reviewing her phone.*) Oh, no...

**TOM.** What?

**WENDY.** Presentation's been moved up. Damn them! I'm going to have to leave soon. I wanted this settled today.

**TOM.** This is *not* being settled today.

**WENDY.** (*Taking a deep breath.*) We're making a decision. We're putting down a deposit. It's refundable and it holds the room.

**TOM.** I'm not putting down any money.

**WENDY.** You don't *have* any money. I don't even know what you *do*. Mom and Dad are putting down their own money. Look at me, dork. Look! (*She snaps her fingers. Tom looks.*) *Their* money!

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**TOM.** Look, whatever we do, let's just do it fast. Dan and I are in Las Vegas this weekend. We got a room at Hooters.

**WENDY.** You're staying at a Hooters Hotel?

**TOM.** Sixty bucks on Groupon.

**WENDY.** How old are you again?

**TOM.** We're the youngest guys there!

**WENDY.** Gross.

**TOM.** You are. Look, all I'm asking: just give Mom and Dad some time.

**WENDY.** They're putting down a deposit. And I'm warning you: I don't want to come off as the one forcing them out of the house.

**TOM.** Okay, okay. Let's just hurry things up. WAZE says the 10's already jammed.

**WENDY.** So they're staying here. Huckleberry Towers or whatever. It's here – this is the place- and you go to your guy to get him to show the house.

**TOM.** Nick. He's completely stoked about showing it.

**WENDY.** You sure about him? I thought he just showed the West Side. He doesn't know Mom and Dad's neighborhood.

**TOM.** Nick's a good guy! He'll get 'em a good price. Decent lot. Somebody'll build something on it.

**WENDY.** (*Dawning on her.*) You think someone'll tear it down?

**TOM.** Oh, yeah. It'll cost as much to rebuild as fix up. That's what Nick says and he knows: he drives a Tesla. Besides, what do you care? You're the one who said it was a dump.

**WENDY.** I never said it was a dump.

**TOM.** Unhealthy. You said unhealthy.

**WENDY.** I just thought it would get fixed up.

**TOM.** You can't dictate that. When you sell, you sell.

**WENDY.** (*Putting her hand to her chest.*) Oh, God.

**TOM.** What?

**WENDY.** I'm feeling something right here. What is this?

**TOM.** If it was anybody else I'd say your heart.

**WENDY.** Is it guilt?

**TOM.** You?

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**WENDY.** “Getting Over Guilt.” That was a topic on *The Doctors*. I can deal with this. Tom, listen: *(He’s on his phone.)* Tom! Dad can never know someone might tear down that house.

**TOM.** How would he know?

**WENDY.** What if he wants to see it after it’s sold?

**TOM.** You’ll handle it. What do you always say? “I’m busy, I’ll get over as soon as I can, blah, blah, blah.”

**WENDY.** He loves that house. You know what he says: “I paid less for that house than what you paid for your car.”

**TOM.** And that was your *first* BMW. You never told him about the 740. Look, if you’re having second thoughts...

**WENDY.** No, no second...

**TOM.** ...because I’m with you. Holding off might not be a bad idea. The more I’m here the more this place gives me the creeps. That fish sticks smell. Reminds me of Junior High.

**WENDY.** Okay, now. You talk about something getting old. How many times have I heard that pitiful story of yours? Oh, poor you. Poor little Tommy. You got beat up in Junior High. Waaaaa.

**TOM.** By Teddy Thompson, right in the cafeteria. Oh, man! *(He puts his hand on his chest.)* Now it’s happening to me!

**WENDY.** Calm down, cretin. Breathe. Listen to me. Mom loves everything about this place, right? The plants. The patio. The bed. We can convince Dad. We’re in this together, understand? *(Tom’s back on his phone.)* Understand? Tom? Tom! Pay attention, doofus! *(She slaps his hand. Tom slaps back. Again. Again. This rapidly escalates into a full on, frenetic brother/sister slap fight.)*

**JOY.** *(Entering with HELEN and her walker.)* And here we have the dining room, Mrs. Auburn. Three hot meals are served each day. Breakfast is...*(Seeing Wendy and Tom, who freeze mid slap.)*...Isn’t it lovely, Mrs. Auburn?

**HELEN.** *(Sniffing)* Oh, yes. But what’s that smell?

**TOM.** *(Recovering his composure.)* My puberty. *(Looking.)* Where’s Dad?

**HELEN.** He was right behind me, but you know your father. What did you say that smell was?

**TOM.** Fish sticks, Mom.

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**JOY.** Breaded white fish. A popular Friday menu option. Tom, Wendy: no need for alarm, but we haven't located your father just quite yet.

**WENDY.** *(Still straightening her hair from the fight.)* What?

**JOY.** Again, no need for concern. We have several attendants looking for him.

**HELEN.** Check the restrooms.

**WENDY.** Did you check the restrooms?

**JOY.** We've checked all the first-floor restrooms, Wendy. He can't be far.

**HELEN.** He does this just to get away from me, sometimes.

**WENDY.** Could he have left the building?

**JOY.** No! Impossible. We have excellent security, Wendy. Video cameras on all doors. Twenty-four hour monitoring. He couldn't leave. Rest assured the attendants will locate him and bring him here shortly. *(To Helen.)* Would you like to see the menu, Mrs. Auburn? Lunch offers a selection of two entrees. *(She offers Helen a menu.)*

**HELEN.** No, thank you. We ate before we came here.

**WENDY.** Just to see a sample, Mom.

**HELEN.** I see, yes. *(Taking the menu, reading.)* Oh, fish! Tom always ate fish sticks up until Junior High. Then something happened.

**TOM.** *(Anxious to leave.)* Maybe I can help find Dad. *(He quickly exits.)*

**JOY.** *(Calling after him.)* You don't have to, Tom! Our attendants know the facility very well and...*(Not liking that Tom's joined the hunt.)*...Would you excuse me, Wendy? Mrs. Auburn? I'd like to assure Tom that he needn't...I'll be right back. *(She exits, chasing after Tom.)*

**HELEN.** Your father does this all the time. A two bedroom, one and a half bath house and he completely disappears. He's the invisible old man.

**WENDY.** Sit down, Mom.

**HELEN.** Thank you, Dear.

**WENDY.** *(As she helps Helen sit at a table.)* Isn't this nice, Mom? Don't you find this place nice?

**HELEN.** Yes, it really is. *(As she sits.)* Oh, my knees. How is it my knees hurt when I broke my hip? I don't understand it.

**WENDY.** You could live here, don't you think, Mom?

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**HELEN.** Oh, yes. I can live anywhere. I just need a good toilet. You know what happened the other day? I needed to use the rest room and I was in the back yard...

**WENDY.** I know, Mom.

**HELEN.** I kept calling out for your father

**WENDY.** I know, Mom. You told me.

**HELEN.** ...and he ignored me. I had to go awful bad. That canned soup goes right through me.

**WENDY.** That won't happen here, Mom.

**HELEN.** They don't serve soup?

**WENDY.** No, they do. They serve nearly everything. Don't you think this would be a good place for you, mom? For you and Dad?

**HELEN.** It's awful nice. I don't know about your father. He doesn't like change, you know, or people his own age.

**WENDY.** But you...

**HELEN.** Oh, I like everybody. Except that man on television with the big head.

**WENDY.** Chris Mathews.

**HELEN.** Something about that voice and that awful head.

**WENDY.** I know, Mom. What I mean is...I'm...*we're* worried. Tom and I *both*, about your safety. There's your hip, your knees, the walker. You need someone around to help you.

**HELEN.** Your father does fine.

**WENDY.** But he needs...he doesn't really hear well, Mom.

**HELEN.** No, he doesn't. You have to get right in front of him. Right in his line of sight. (*Wendy's cell phone rings.*)

**WENDY.** Wait. Wait, Mom. (*She answers.*) Yes? Fine, Amanda, how are you? ...Got it. I'll try to be there. Kelly can start everything. Jump straight into the Williams presentation. He knows it. The file's on my laptop. The password is "slickpudding27." ...Yes, it's "slick..." yes..."c-k,"..."pudding"...common spelling...the number twenty-seven. One world, all lower case...I don't know why, it just is. I'll be there as soon as I can. And listen, Amanda...you don't always have to ask me how I am....No. don't apologize....Yes....Thank you... Goodbye. (*She pushes a button to hang up, sighs.*)

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**HELEN.** You're so busy. You shouldn't bother showing us these places.

**WENDY.** I want to show them, Mom. It's important. Don't you think you and Dad would like it here?

**HELEN.** I don't know. He's very particular. He likes his routines. For example, he always buys bananas first at the grocery store. He only buys his toothpaste at Target. He likes to go to the bar by the University. You know, girls once bought him drinks there.

**WENDY.** I know, Mom.

**HELEN.** They bought him shots of tequila. He thought they were trying to get him drunk. (*Laughing.*) Who knows? Maybe they were.

**WENDY.** Maybe they wanted to rob him. He's very ....you know...vulnerable.

**HELEN.** Oh, I don't think so. He carries cash, but not much. He talked about that for days, how the girls bought him shots. I like to listen to him talk. At least he's not moping around the house. He gets awful moody sometimes around the house, so I kick him out. "Go down to the bar," I say and off he goes. Comes back yacking his head off. It would be too bad if he couldn't go to that bar. I don't think he'd want to move here. But someday, who knows? Maybe after he goes into a coma or something.

**WENDY.** Mom, Tom and I were talking.

**HELEN.** That's good, because you weren't for a while.

**WENDY.** I know. We...Tom and I...*together*...were thinking you should move in here...soon.

**HELEN.** When?

**WENDY.** We were hoping, *together*, Tom and I, that you would sign some papers today.

**HELEN.** Today? Move in today?

**WENDY.** Not move in, Mom. Just sign some papers. A statement of intent with a down payment. You don't move in today but your check reserves a room. The one you liked, overlooking the garden, with the bed? That one, Mom.

**HELEN.** You want us to move?

**WENDY.** Both of us do, Mom. Tom and I. Tom especially. Tom is very adamant.

**HELEN.** He hasn't said a word.

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**WENDY.** We've talked about it. I've come to see his side. How since you're having trouble walking and Dad really shouldn't drive...

**HELEN.** Oh, he can drive in the morning, not in the afternoon. The sun gets in his eyes. He can't drive at night. But he's a very good driver.

*(Helen starts a story. Wendy notices something on her phone, starts scrolling.)* There was the one time he got lost. He went out to go somewhere. I forget. Anyway, he drove around for hours. He stopped at a 7-11 and asked for directions. The guy there didn't speak English. So he just kept driving. Finally, he recognized the elementary school he used to work at. He didn't get home until 4 in the afternoon. That's why we know he doesn't like driving in the afternoons. So he goes to the grocery in the morning. I write the list. He always buys bananas first.

**WENDY.** *(Still distracted.)* Uh huh.

**HELEN.** I write it out but sometimes he can't read so well. So he gets things mixed up. Sometimes he gets cucumbers, and I wanted zucchini. Canned beans for peas. Yogurt for butter. So we just eat soups now. They're real good but my bladder has a hard time with them. You know what happened the other day?

**WENDY.** *(Finishing her scrolling.)* Yes, Mom. That's the point. Things like that won't happen here. The attendants, they take care of everything. And it's safe. Your house, you know, Mom, it's unhealthy.

**HELEN.** You think so?

**WENDY.** Tom and I do, yes. And the neighborhood. The neighborhood has changed, hasn't it Mom? There's that neighbor?

**HELEN.** That's true. Everything's changed. But how can your father and I afford this? It looks so expensive.

**WENDY.** You can afford it. There's the money you'll get from the house and there's some really good payment options.

**HELEN.** I'm not in love with that house.

**WENDY.** I know.

**HELEN.** It leaks on me when I'm cooking. I complain and your father gets me my raincoat. Do you think we'd get anything for it?

**WENDY.** Tom knows an agent. A good one. He specializes in your neighborhood.

**HELEN.** So we'd get a good price?



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**WENDY.** More than enough to cover this.

**HELEN.** You know, that was your father's first big purchase with his own money. He worked at three jobs to pay for that house. He was a mechanic, then the fried chicken place, then he cleaned the school. Wendy, he paid less for that house than what you paid for your car.

**WENDY.** I remember.

**HELEN.** Wendy...

**WENDY.** Yes, Mom?

**HELEN.** I worry what will happen to your father if we sell.

**WENDY.** What will happen...*(Her phone rings.)* Wait, Mom.

*(Answering.)* Yes?...I'm fine, Amanda, thank you...I know, you asked again. It's okay. No, the file is on the desktop. It's labeled "Williams." No, wait. I changed it. It's labeled "Kettle One." Yes, "Kettle One." Like the vodka. I had a bad day. Okay...bye.

**HELEN.** You're busy. You shouldn't spend time with us, here. *(Joy hurries in. She's a bit more frantic now.)*

**JOY.** Wendy? Mrs. Auburn? Isn't this a lovely place to sit? Don't you just love the chairs?

**WENDY.** Where was Dad?

**JOY.** Wendy, we actually haven't found your father yet.

**WENDY.** You haven't...

**JOY.** There's no need for concern. It's just a matter of time. He couldn't have left the building. We've reviewed the video monitors. He's here, somewhere.

**HELEN.** Find out who drinks beer and go to their room. That's where he'll be.

**JOY.** That's not a bad idea, Mrs. Auburn. I'll follow you up on that. Your son, Tom, is helping us. He's actually on the phone right now talking about a Hooters, but he's helping. Wendy, Mrs. Auburn? Thank you for your patience. *(She hurries out.)*

**HELEN.** She's cute. What did she say Tom was talking about?

**WENDY.** I didn't catch it. So, Mom, you'll talk to Dad? You can sign the papers, you can hold the room. You can always get your money back but in the meantime you'll have it. It'll be held for you and you can talk to him.

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**HELEN.** I don't know. He'll miss those girls

**WENDY.** Yes, but there's other things he'll like. There's a Happy Hour here. On Fridays. Did you know that? With wine? Dad'll like that. *(From the upstage door, HENRY enters. He's calmly eating a sandwich. He looks around at some of the paintings and then the bulletin board. It's unclear if he hears any of the conversation about him.)*

**HELEN.** Without the bar, I'm afraid he just might give up. I'm losing a little bit of him every day as it is. Something's fading in his eyes. I can see it. Of course, he probably thinks the same thing about me.

**WENDY.** Is he sick? When did he last see a doctor?

**HELEN.** Oh, he's fine, just fine. But if I mention this moving thing he'll think I'm trying to kill him. I don't know how I'll be able to convince him.

**WENDY.** He needs to know that Tom and I worry about him. We really would like to stop worrying.

**HELEN.** You shouldn't worry. You with your important job and Tom...doing whatever he does.

**WENDY** *(Noticing her father.)* Dad! Dad, how long have you been standing there?

**HENRY.** *(Reacting.)* What?

**WENDY.** *(Rising.)* How long have you been there?

**HENRY.** I just got here.

**WENDY.** What did you hear?

**HENRY.** When?

**WENDY.** Now!

**HENRY.** What did you say?

**WENDY.** Where have you been?

**HENRY.** When?

**WENDY.** Now!

**HENRY.** *(Pointing upstage.)* The kitchen.

**WENDY.** This place has been turned upside down looking for you!

**HENRY.** Why?

**WENDY.** You're missing!

**HENRY.** I'm right here! I was in the kitchen. The deal was: I came out of the bathroom and I guess I turned in the wrong direction. I went through a swinging door, a hall, and another swinging door. I thought I was back in

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the lobby but it was the kitchen. There was a Mexican guy back there, cleaning up. He said I missed lunch. Nice guy. I don't think he's legal. He asked me what I was doing there. I said I'm on the tour. He asked me if I wanted a sandwich. If anyone comes to the kitchen, no matter the hour, he'll make them something. That's nice, isn't it? So I said I just ate but what kind of sandwich? He said they have ham, turkey, roast beef. I asked if he had tuna. I wasn't hungry but I never pass on a tuna salad sandwich. No one should pass on a tuna salad sandwich. So we're just back there, shooting the breeze. Nice guy. He's from Colombia.

**WENDY.** So he's Columbian.

**HENRY.** What's that?

**WENDY.** He's Columbian!

**HENRY.** I thought he was Mexican. Whatever, he makes a terrific tuna salad sandwich. You want a bite?

**WENDY.** Dad, you stay right here. Mom, watch him. I'll find Joy and tell her you're with us, okay?

**HENRY.** Yeah, sure. (*Wendy hurries out. Henry crosses and sits near Helen.*) What's she so worked up about? You want a bite?

**HELEN.** We just ate.

**HENRY.** Yeah, but it's tuna. Very good. This place, you know. It looks like Denny's.

**HELEN.** It does, doesn't it?

**HENRY.** We going home? I need to take a nap.

**HELEN.** Wendy wants us to sign some papers.

**HENRY.** What kind of papers?

**HELEN.** Some kind of intent papers.

**HENRY.** What's that?

**HELEN.** Papers that say we want to move here. Wendy says we should.

**HENRY.** Why?

**HELEN.** She worries about us.

**HENRY.** I thought she was too busy to worry.

**HELEN.** I thought so, too, but she wants us to sign.

**HENRY.** What's she so worried about?

**HELEN.** You name it. My knee. The house. The neighbor across the street.

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**HENRY.** What about the neighbor?

**HELEN.** He sells drugs.

**HENRY.** He doesn't sell drugs. He vapes.

**HELEN.** He what?

**HENRY.** Vapes! You put this thing in your mouth. You take in a breath. Like this. *(He mimes how it's done.)*

**HELEN.** How do you know that?

**HENRY.** *(Avoiding.)* So she wants us to move here?

**HELEN.** Today.

**HENRY.** Today?

**HELEN.** That's what she said.

**HENRY.** We can't move in today. I need a nap. *Judge Judy* is on at 4.

**HELEN.** Put down a deposit today. It saves the room. The one overlooking the garden. The one with a nice bed.

**HENRY.** We have a garden. What did you tell her?

**HELEN.** I said this place is awfully expensive.

**HENRY.** It has to be. You can always get a sandwich. *(Pause.)* How could we afford this place? Did he tell you that?

**HELEN.** We'd sell the house.

**HENRY.** To whom?

**HELEN.** Whoever buys it. Wendy has an agent and everything.

**HENRY.** She does?

**HELEN.** That's what she said. She said the agent would get us a good price.

**HENRY.** Of course he would. It's a good house. She has a buyer?

**HELEN.** No, the agent has to show the house. Then we get a buyer.

**HENRY.** Uh huh. For a good price?

**HELEN.** That's what she said.

**HENRY.** She wants to move us.

**HELEN.** She's worried.

**HENRY.** I get it. We're a bother.

**HELEN.** That's not it.

**HENRY.** She's too busy for us. She's always on that thing.

**HELEN.** The smart phone.

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**HENRY.** Smart phone. I haven't seen her eyes in months. *(Pause.)* What do you want to do?

**HELEN.** I want what makes you happy.

**HENRY.** Then we should go home. This place...there's a guy sitting on the couch in the lobby. They should call a medic.

**HELEN.** I'm sure he's fine.

**HENRY.** We already have a home. Tell Wendy that.

**HELEN.** I said that.

**HENRY.** Good. You want to split a roast beef sandwich?

**HELEN.** You haven't finished that one.

**HENRY.** We'll get it wrapped. Have it with soup.

**HELEN.** Don't mention soup. I'll never make it to the bathroom. *(Silence.)* They show movies.

**HENRY.** What?

**HELEN.** They show movies here! There was a poster in the lobby. Tonight they're showing *Godzilla*. Tomorrow it's *Send Me No Flowers*.

**HENRY.** We've seen *Godzilla*.

**HELEN.** This is the new one.

**HENRY.** We saw the new one.

**HELEN.** This one's newer. We could see it with people. Might be fun.

**HENRY.** I don't really like people.

**HELEN.** You do.

**HENRY.** No, I don't.

**HELEN.** You like the girls in the bar.

**HENRY.** *(Pauses. She has him.)* Okay, then I do like. And the guy across the street.

**HELEN.** Look, if you don't want to move here...

**HENRY.** I don't.

**HELEN.** Okay! *(Henry stands.)*

**HENRY.** Okay, then. Let's go. I don't need another sandwich.

**HELEN.** Wait until Wendy and Tom come back.

**HENRY.** Where did they go?

**HELEN.** They went looking for you.

**HENRY.** That's ridiculous. I'm right here.

**HELEN.** They're looking everywhere for you. Even people's rooms.

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**HENRY.** What would I be doing in someone's room?

**HELEN.** Drinking. (*Henry sits.*)

**HENRY.** That's possible. (*Pause.*) You want to move here?

**HELEN.** Not if you're drinking in some woman's room.

**HENRY.** I went to a woman's room?

**HELEN.** You're always drinking with women.

**HENRY.** The girls at the bar, you mean.

**HELEN.** Yes.

**HENRY.** That upsets you.

**HELEN.** It doesn't upset me.

**HENRY.** For something that doesn't upset you, you bring it up a lot.

(*Pause.*) You want to move here. I understand. It's...nice, I guess. Seems clean. Smells funny, though.

**HELEN.** If you're not happy, I want nothing to do with it.

**HENRY.** I bought that house for you. For you and Wendy. You were out to here. (*Gesturing.*) Remember our old apartment?

**HELEN.** With the mice...

**HENRY.** With the mice! The mice. That was a long time ago. We're not the same people. It's not the same house. But here, this place, we're just handing ourselves over, aren't we? "Here, take care of us. We can't do it, anymore."

**HELEN.** Oh, I don't think it's that way...entirely.

**HENRY.** I bought that house to make you happy.

**HELEN.** I was happy. I'm happy where you are.

**HENRY.** And I'm happy where you are. Now, that's settled. So what are we going to do about this? (*Joy enters, followed by Wendy and Tom.*)

**JOY.** Mr. Auburn, there you are! Mrs. Auburn. It's nice to see Mr. Auburn, isn't it? Wendy, Tom? We looked everywhere. Even Mr. Hawthorne's room. Now didn't he have a lot of Scotch! (*To Wendy.*) We don't encourage drinking, understand. In fact we have monthly health meetings right here in this dining room with very fine speakers.

**HENRY.** Hawthorne, his name was?

**JOY.** Hawthorne, yes.

**HENRY.** (*Making sure he remembers.*) Hawthorne...Hawthorne.

## HUCKLEBERRY TOWERS

**JOY.** Now that we've collected ourselves, shall we gather in my office and go over some arrangements?

**WENDY.** Dad, Tom and I have been talking...

**HENRY.** Yes, Mother said you've been talking. That's pretty rare. She says you want to move us here.

**WENDY.** Yes, well...*we* want you...*both* of us do...to move...(*Desperate to Tom.*) Isn't that right, Tom?

**TOM.** (*Muttering.*) Yeah. Uh huh.

**HENRY.** You're worried about us. I see. Well, your mother and I have also been talking. We appreciate your concern. So you know: we never ever intended to be a bother. But apparently, there's some things in life that are just impossible to avoid. Things happen. That's life, isn't it? Considering your mother's condition, with her hip and her knees, it might be best if we think about a change. Just think, understand. Over a drink or two, if that's okay. Over a few nights, maybe. Now you mentioned something about papers. We could, I suppose, leave a deposit today. (*To Helen.*) Mother, you brought your checkbook? (*Helen nods.*) As long as we can get it back, I don't see the harm.

**JOY.** It's fully refundable, Mr. Auburn. Thirty days. That's our policy.

**HENRY.** I don't like the idea of leaving the house, but someone younger might need to start a new family. Like we did. That would be nice. I like the thought of leaving it to a nice new family. (*To Wendy.*) You have someone who can fix up the place?

**WENDY.** (*Shooting Tom a look.*) Tom does. Don't you, Tom?

**TOM.** It'll sell fast, Dad. Nick says so. You don't know Nick, but...

**HENRY.** Good. But not too fast. I'll want some time to say goodbye. (*To Helen.*) Well, should we go, Mother? (*Henry helps Helen up and together they cross to exit.*)

**JOY.** It's a wise decision, Mr. Auburn. A very wise decision. The rooms book fast.

**HENRY.** Of course they do. But something tells me there's a lot of turn over. (*Wendy's phone rings.*)

**HENRY.** Go ahead. Answer that.

**WENDY.** (*Pushing a button.*) It'll go to voice mail.

## HUCKLEBERRY TOWERS

**JOY.** *(As she, Helen and Henry exit.)* Let me lead the way to my office, Mr. and Mrs. Auburn. I think you've made a lovely choice of rooms. It overlooks the patio garden, the most popular area in the facility. Everyone loves the huckleberry bushes. You're all welcome to stay this evening for the movie. It's *Godzilla*. The new one. We have movies every night and sometimes live entertainment. Wendy? Tom? Are you joining us?

**WENDY.** Yes, just give us a moment. *(Wendy and Tom wait for a few beats after Joy, Helen and Henry exit.)*

**TOM.** So, how's the guilt?

**WENDY.** Out of control. This is the right thing, right?

**TOM.** Well, yeah. Yeah, sure! If you say so. You going to beat yourself up over this?

**WENDY.** Absolutely.

**TOM.** When it gets physical, post it online, will you? Look, Dan called and wants to leave from here. You don't need me anymore, right?

**WENDY.** So, it's just me alone with them when they sign the check. Nice work, freak. I'm warning you: after they move, you better visit them.

**TOM.** I'll visit! Any day but fish day. *(He starts to leave.)* I'll call when I get back.

**WENDY.** Have fun, dork.

**TOM.** Spaz. *(Tom exits.)*

**JOY.** *(From off stage.)* Tom? Is Wendy coming?

**WENDY.** *(Calling out.)* One minute! *(Wendy looks around at the dining room. She takes a deep breath. She punches a number on her phone as she slowly walks out.)* Amanda? I'm fine, thank you. How's the meeting going?...Good. Look, I won't make it...No, not at all...It's important, yes. The Hellman file is next. It's on the desk top. It's actually labeled as "Hellman." You and Kelly have this. I'll be in later for the briefing...Okay. Oh, and Amanda. Before I go, let me ask you something. Could you possibly record *The Doctors* for me? *(Blackout.)*



## HUCKLEBERRY TOWERS

### SCENE 2

*The same dining room, six months later. The menus have been cleared. There should be different notices on the bulletin boards for the eagle eyes in the audience. At rise NATHAN, CHARLES, HENRY and RUSS are seated at a downstage table playing the board game "Clue." Russ is asleep in his chair. Charles rolls a pair of dice, and he moves his game piece across the game board.*

**CHARLES.** Seven, eight, nine. Okay. The dining room. There I am. *(He looks at a writing pad and the game cards he holds in his hand.)*

**NATHAN.** So: what's anyone hear?

**HENRY.** What?

**NATHAN.** *(Louder.)* What's anyone hear?

**CHARLES.** About what?

**NATHAN.** Anything. The cost of eggs. Who's sleeping with who. Whether or not the building's being sold. Just anything.

**CHARLES.** I don't care who's sleeping with who. *(Pause.)* What did you say? The building's being sold?

**NATHAN.** I didn't say that.

**CHARLES.** Yeah, you certainly did.

**NATHAN.** So what do you know?

**CHARLES.** Nathan, I'm always the last to know anything. On purpose. I don't like getting involved. Ask Henry here. Henry gets around.

**NATHAN.** *(To Henry.)* Henry!

**CHARLES.** You have to get in his direct line of sight. *(Nathan stands, gets in Henry's line of sight, waves his arms.)*

**NATHAN.** Henry! Calling Henry! Come in, Henry! Henry, can you read me?

**HENRY.** *(Looking up.)* Yes?

**NATHAN.** Whatdya hear?

**HENRY.** You. Pretty well, too, if you stand right there.

**NATHAN.** About the building being sold!

**HENRY.** The building's being sold?

## HUCKLEBERRY TOWERS

**NATHAN.** That's what I'm asking you! There's talk going around. You hear anything about that?

**HENRY.** I just moved here!

**NATHAN.** I give up. *(Sits.)* It's too exhausting to gossip with you guys. I'm better just making stuff up. Hey, did you hear that Lawrence in 204 is shacking up with Mabel in 415? *(He laughs.)* Can you believe that? I didn't think Lawrence had it in him!

**HENRY.** Mabel's a very attractive woman. I mean for someone her age. But Lawrence...he sounds like a bagpipe when he breathes. And that's when he's just sitting. I can't imagine what he sounds like when he's ...I feel bad for their neighbors.

**CHARLES.** *(Still staring at his playing cards.)* I'm about to make an announcement!

**NATHAN.** Oh, cripes.

**CHARLES.** *(With dramatic flair.)* "Professor Plum in the dining room with a rope!" *(There's no response from anyone. Then, with even more drama.)* "Professor Plum in the dining room with a rope!"

**NATHAN.** We heard you, Lord Olivier. *(Everyone checks their cards. Silence.)*

**CHARLES.** So that's it. I guessed the solution. I win.

**NATHAN.** *(Pointing to Russ.)* Check Sleeping Beauty over there.

**CHARLES.** I can't check his cards. It's against the rules.

**NATHAN.** What difference does it make? With your memory you won't remember a thing five minutes from now. *(Charles takes Russ's cards out of his hand. Russ doesn't move an inch. Charles looks at Russ' cards.)*

**CHARLES.** He doesn't have those cards. No Plum, no dining room, no rope. *(He slides Russ' cards back into his hand.)* Okay, I'm making this official. This is for the game. "Professor Plum in the dining room with a rope!" All those cards should be in this envelope. *(Charles takes a small envelope with the solution cards off the table. He checks the cards.)*

There's no dining room here! There's no dining room! How can that...Now I know the solution and I'm disqualified! Which one of you has the dining room?

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**HENRY.** Which room again?

**CHARLES.** Dining! The dining room! *(Henry calmly takes a card from his set.)*

**HENRY.** I got it right here.

**CHARLES.** Henry! Why didn't you show me that card when I made my guess?

**HENRY.** What guess?

**CHARLES.** I guessed three times! "Professor Plum in the dining room with a rope!"

**HENRY.** That can't be right. I got the dining room card right here. *(Nathan throws his cards down in disgust.)*

**NATHAN.** How are we supposed to play this stupid game? *(He points to Henry.)* He can't hear. *(He points to Charles.)* You can't see! *(He points to Russ.)* He may not be alive!

**HENRY.** Please don't yell. I get agitated.

**CHARLES.** *(To Henry.)* Let me explain it to you again. If you have one of the cards I announce, you show it to me. Just to me. And I write it down. How hard is that?

**HENRY.** Not hard at all. I just didn't hear you. It's this new hearing aid. You need to be in my direct line of sight.

**NATHAN.** You see? Just play the whole game standing up in his direct line of sight. *(He stands, gets in Henry's line of sight again.)* Henry, listen to me! I hate this stupid game! Professor Plum. Miss Scarlet. Miss Whogivesadamn! We're mature men! Very mature! Over ripe! I say let's play a real game! Let's play poker!

**HENRY.** Now, see? I heard you just fine.

**CHARLES.** You know the rules, Nathan. No gambling.

**NATHAN.** Okay, Judge Wapner, you're right. I know the rules. Now tell me, why is that rule a rule?

**CHARLES.** Because guys like you rob guys like him. *(He points to the sleeping Russ.)*

**NATHAN.** I don't rob. He loses. All the time. It's called gambling. It's a valuable life lesson.

**CHARLES.** He's 82 if he's a day. He doesn't need any more lessons!

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**NATHAN.** You're never too old to learn. So we play for pocket change. Russ here doesn't need his pocket change. It throws him off balance. *(To Henry.)* You need pocket change, Henry?

**HENRY.** What?

**NATHAN.** Pocket change!

**HENRY.** Maybe a dollar. You need to borrow a dollar?

**NATHAN.** Forget it. My point is, Gentlemen: real men play poker. Five card, seven card stud. Texas Hold' em. There's movies where men play poker. There's paintings in which male dogs play poker. You ever see a movie where men sit around and play "Parcheesi?" We don't even have to play for money. I'm fine with match sticks.

**CHARLES.** Not allowed. Fire hazard.

**HENRY.** Maybe you can write management a letter, Nathan. You know, a nicely but sharply worded letter can work wonders. You should mention you're willing to compromise with the match sticks.

**NATHAN.** There's no need to compromise. The nurses here will find something to bitch about. They always do. *(He takes a cigar out from a shirt pocket and searches for a lighter.)*

**CHARLES.** You can't smoke in here, Nathan. There's a sign. *(He points to the "No Smoking" sign.)*

**NATHAN.** Ooh, a sign. That means they're serious. Look: I want both of you to look at me. *(He finds his lighter in a pants pocket.)* I'm officially ignoring the sign. *(He lights up.)* What are they going to do to me? Huh? What?

**HENRY.** They could kick you out.

**NATHAN.** Let 'em. I'll take my seven thousand a month and go elsewhere. I'll transfer. This same company has one of these monstrosities in Las Vegas. It's called "The Oasis" or something.

**HENRY.** Don't drive there on a Friday. You'll just be sitting on the freeway.

**CHARLES.** And it's hot. Vegas is too hot.

**NATHAN.** *(Drawing on his cigar.)* They got this new thing, Charles. It's called "air conditioning." You know where the Vegas version of Huckleberry Towers goes on their field trips? They don't go to Presidential

## HUCKLEBERRY TOWERS

Libraries or farmer's markets. They go to casinos. Imagine that. Circus Circus. The Mirage.

**HENRY.** My son goes to Hooters.

**NATHAN.** Fine, I'll go to Hooters.

**CHARLES.** They don't go to casinos, Nathan.

**NATHAN.** They sure as crackers do. Remember Steven Cummings?

**CHARLES.** Who?

**NATHAN.** He used to live here. Small guy. Big ears.

**CHARLES.** That's all of us.

**NATHAN.** He transferred to Vegas. And on a field trip they went to the Hard Rock Casino. Supposedly to see a display of Barry Manilow's pants. And you know what he did? He walked out the door and he crossed the street - at the crosswalk with the light, now - and he went to a strip club. Now there's a good use for your pocket change. *(He imitates dropping change into a G-string.)* Plunk, plunk. There you go, Ladies. I hope those quarters aren't too cold.

**CHARLES.** Who told you that?

**NATHAN.** Nobody has to tell me that. It's legend. Gossip. Something you two "Clue" players are seemingly incapable of sharing. *(Lindsay enters, all business, carrying several poster boards and a stand. She drops them on a table.)*

**LINDSAY.** Good evening, Gentlemen! *(Noticing Nathan.)* Nathan! What are you doing? You know you can't smoke! *(She points to the "No Smoking" sign.)* See? "No smoking!

**NATHAN.** Yet here I am, smoking. *(He puffs.)* Funny, isn't it?

**LINDSAY.** Put out that cigar! It's a health code violation!

**NATHAN.** Everything we do is a health code violation.

**LINDSAY.** I'm asking you nicely to put that out!

**NATHAN.** I heard you pretty nicely, too. I might be the only one here who did.

**LINDSAY.** *(Chasing after Nathan, waving her arms, trying to clear the smoke.)* Oh my word! Disgusting!

**NATHAN.** *(Avoiding her, imitating Groucho Marx.)* Well, I don't like your looks, either. *(Lindsay catches up with him, grabs the cigar from Nathan's mouth.)* Hey!

## HUCKLEBERRY TOWERS

**LINDSAY.** What has gotten into you?

**HENRY.** He's mad I had the dining room card.

**LINDSAY.** Am I going to have to take that game away from you?

**NATHAN.** Oh no. Please. Anything but that. Don't take away our beloved "Clue." Henry here was just getting the hang of it.

**CHARLES.** Excuse him, Lindsay. Some of us don't know the rules of the game and Nathan gets a little cranky.

**LINDSAY.** Does everyone remember the VHS we showed about secondhand smoke? The one with Adrienne Barbeau? We have to protect our chests. Remember? Now we have a meeting that's scheduled to start in ten minutes. (*Waving her arms.*) I have to clear out this smoke.

**CHARLES.** Tonight? You can't have a meeting here. Tonight's our game night!

**NATHAN.** Yeah, tonight's Men's Game Night. It's on the calendar.

**LINDSAY.** I'm sorry, Charles. This meeting was on the list of announcements. (*She marches to the bulletin board, reads.*)

"Wednesday's Men's Game Night will be postponed this week because of a special health meeting."

**NATHAN.** You can't cut our game night just like that. It's only one night a week. The game's suck but it's our game night!

**CHARLES.** Nathan makes a point. (*Squaring up so Henry can see him.*) Henry! Doesn't he? Doesn't Nathan make a point?

**HENRY.** When I can hear him, yes. He often does.

**LINDSAY.** This is the only night our speaker was available. We could possibly reschedule you gentlemen for another night if the game was so important.

**HENRY.** I'm not sure I can reschedule. My wife, she likes to watch all the *NCISs*.

**NATHAN.** You see there? That's what we're talking about. We're creatures of habit.

**LINDSAY.** I don't appreciate your uncooperative attitude, Nathan. Not one bit. Now, I have to set up these poster boards. Our speaker will be arriving shortly. But first, I'm getting rid of this filthy thing (*She exits, carrying the cigar as far away from her as she possibly can.*)

## HUCKLEBERRY TOWERS

**NATHAN.** Did you hear what she just called me? I should file a complaint.

**HENRY.** You shouldn't get on her bad side, Nathan.

**CHARLES.** Henry's right. Lindsay's in charge of housekeeping. She can get very stingy with the toilet paper.

**NATHAN.** This is a conspiracy. You know that, right? It's a conspiracy to dominate the men in this building.

**HENRY.** Dominate how?

**CHARLES.** A conspiracy. Come on, Nathan.

**NATHAN.** I'm serious. Women in this place want to control us. No, they *need* to control us. They hold all the cards, right? They outlive us. They outnumber us. This is their chance for complete and total domination. That's why they do little things to undermine our authority. They chip away. Chip, chip, chip. Right down to our core. No smoking. No game night.

**CHARLES.** No toilet paper.

**NATHAN.** Exactly.

**HENRY.** I never wanted to come here in the first place. It was my wife, she wanted to come here.

**NATHAN.** She got you all twisted up, Henry. I bet you moved here to make her happy.

**HENRY.** I did.

**NATHAN.** You see? That's what I'm talking about. What about *your* happiness, Henry? Can't Henry be happy?

**HENRY.** Henry can be happy, sure, but now that Henry's here, Henry doesn't want to make waves and Henry has...wait, I'm Henry! Why am I talking like this? I have nowhere else to go. I can't go home. My son sold it.

**NATHAN.** The women have us where they want us. Right here. (*He grabs his crotch.*) All right. Maybe lower. (*He adjusts.*) We have to do something.

**HENRY.** Like what?

**NATHAN.** We have to reclaim what's ours. Right now they got us locked up in those little purses they carry around. You can't lock up a gazelle like me! We need to run free! We have to show them that old men matter.

## HUCKLEBERRY TOWERS

**HENRY.** “Old men matter.” I like that.

**NATHAN.** Yes! That’s right, Henry!

**CHARLES.** How do we do that?

**NATHAN.** We light up cigars! Well, I can’t now. I only had one. But we light up cigars! We take out a deck of cards. We drink! Where and when we want to.

**HENRY.** I don’t know, Nathan. I’ve just made my peace with this place. My daughter showed us ten places before this one. They were all terrible. This one’s not so bad. There’s movies. Did anyone see “Breakfast Club” the other night? Those actors, they have a bright future, I’d say.

**NATHAN.** Forget the movies. We can’t let them take advantage of us. We pay a lot of money to be here. We have rights!

**CHARLES.** Old men matter.

**HENRY.** That’s what I say. Old men matter.

**CHARLES AND HENRY.** (*Picking up on it.*) Old men matter! Old men matter!

**NATHAN.** There you go, Henry! It is Henry, right? Charles! Now you’re standing up for yourself.

**HENRY.** You know, we went on that field trip to Costco last week so we have a lot of toilet paper.

**NATHAN.** Good. This could be a protracted war. Now look, I’m firing the first salvo. I’m going up to my room and I’m coming back with cigars for all of us, a bottle of Johnny Walker, and some playing cards.

**CHARLES.** Don’t forget an ash tray.

**HENRY.** And ice.

**NATHAN.** (*Starting to cross and exit.*) That’s my army! We like our whiskey cold and our women upstairs! I’m a rebel! To the front lines, men! Forward! (*He exits. Henry and Charles sit in silence.*)

**CHARLES.** So...

**HENRY.** I don’t want to be thrown out. Someone already bought my house.

**CHARLES.** You won’t be thrown out.

**HENRY.** Where would Helen and I go?

**CHARLES.** You’re not going anywhere.

**HENRY.** They’re not selling the building, are they, Charles?



## HUCKLEBERRY TOWERS

**CHARLES.** Henry, I'm the last to know anything. Our apartment got repainted and I didn't notice until a week later. My eyes, Henry. Not as sharp as they used to be.

**HENRY.** This is trouble. Why are we doing this? Why would we cause this trouble?

**CHARLES.** Say what you want about Nathan, but he makes a point. I never feel like I have a say in anything, anymore.

**HENRY.** Nathan gets carried away. That's his trouble. He's too excitable. He said he's from Philadelphia, didn't he? That explains a lot. And he really shouldn't smoke. There's oxygen tanks all over the place. One of them goes, Kaboom! We'd be splattered across "Eyewitness News."

**CHARLES.** There won't be trouble.

**HENRY.** Maybe I should just go back to my room. Helen likes to watch the news. I don't know why. She just gets upset with that guy's big head.

**CHARLES.** (*Looking at the billboards.*) There's going to be a speaker here tonight.

**HENRY.** What kind of a speaker?

**CHARLES.** I like the speakers. I learn things.

**HENRY.** Maybe I could stay for the speaker. Remember the one who talked about the...the...what was it?

**CHARLES.** Social media.

**HENRY.** Social media. I didn't understand a word she said. But I enjoyed the speaker. (*Lindsay enters with CLAUDIA, followed by DORIS, LOUISE, and SADIE.*)

**LYNDSAY.** (*Addressing Claudia.*) This is our dining and meeting room. I thought we could set your materials up over there.

**CLAUDIA.** Very nice. Lovely room. (*Sniffing.*) Oh, I like the smell in here. Like a mixture of a car wash with basil.

**LINDSAY.** Today's Pasta Wednesday.

**CLAUDIA.** (*Noticing Charles, Henry, and Russ.*) And look, we have some gentlemen already waiting for us. Good evening, gentlemen.

**CHARLES.** Good evening.

**HENRY.** Old men matter!

**CLAUDIA.** Yes. Well, indeed, they do. (*Indicating Russ.*) Who is this over there? Is he okay?

## HUCKLEBERRY TOWERS

**HENRY.** That's Russ. It's past his bedtime.

**CLAUDIA.** We'll just have to get him up, won't we, ladies? (*They giggle.*)

**CHARLES.** You're the speaker?

**CLAUDIA.** I am. (*Extending her hand.*) I'm Claudia Huberstand. And you're...

**CHARLES.** Charles. My name's Charles. (*Pointing.*) This is Henry.

**CLAUDIA.** Hello, Henry.

**HENRY.** What?

**CHARLES.** You need to get in his line of sight. (*She does.*)

**CLAUDIA.** Hello, Henry.

**HENRY.** Hello.

**CHARLES.** This is Russ. He's breathing. So: what's your topic?

**CLAUDIA.** You don't know?

**LINDSAY** (*Pointing.*) Now, Charles, it was on the bulletin board.

**CHARLES.** Who reads that?

**CLAUDIA.** I'm flattered you gentlemen are attending even though you don't know the topic. (*She takes a poster board and turns it around. It reads "DO WE RETIRE FROM SEX?" Charles and Henry stare at the poster for a few beats.*)

**CHARLES.** That's the topic?

**HENRY.** (*Raising his hand.*) I know the answer.

**CLAUDIA.** Now some people might say "yes."

**HENRY.** (*Lowering his hand.*) That's what I was going to say.

**CLAUDIA.** Sexual relationship's currently a big topic in retirement homes.

**DORIS.** So to speak. (*The ladies giggle.*)

**CLAUDIA.** That's fun, Doris. Of course what I meant to say was "important." An important topic. As you can see, Charles, Henry, our talk is going to be lots of fun. I hope you two are planning to stay. (*Charles and Henry look at each other for a moment, then sit.*)

**CLAUDIA.** Excellent! (*To Lindsay.*) What time is it? Should I begin? Are we expecting more people?

**LINDSAY.** (*Walking out.*) Let me check. (*From off stage.*) Yes, we have one more. (*She walks back in escorting MAUREEN.*) This is Maureen.

## HUCKLEBERRY TOWERS

**CLAUDIA.** Hello, Maureen.

**MAUREEN.** Hello. Is this the talk about “Getting to Know Sushi?”

**LINDSAY.** Oh, no. Maureen. That’s next week.

**MAUREEN.** Next week? Oh my. And I bought a bottle of soy sauce this big (*She gestures.*) from Costco. What’s this talk about?

**CHARLES.** Sex!

**MAUREEN.** What?

**CLAUDIA.** (*Correcting.*) Emotional and physical intimacy, Maureen.

**MAUREEN.** What’s that got to do with soy sauce?

**CHARLES.** That’s what we’re here to find out. (*He nudges Henry.*)

**CLAUDIA.** Won’t you stay, Maureen? It’ll be very informative. And fun, too! I promise.

**MAUREEN.** Well, I guess so. *Blue Bloods* is a rerun this week. (*Maureen and all the ladies begin to take a seat.*)

**CLAUDIA.** Fine. This is actually a very nice turnout. (*Addressing everyone.*) Now, to begin: why are we here? (*Henry raises his hand.*)

There’s no need to answer, Henry. That’s just a question I use to start the lecture. (*Henry lowers his hand.*) We’re here because we know that as we age, we don’t retire from every aspect of the human experience. We’re here because we’re interested in being our best and most fulfilled selves. So: let’s all be friends. Should we introduce ourselves?

**SADIE.** Oh, we already know each other. That’s Henry. He sits there at his meals. (*She points to a chair.*) He’s married. I scratched him off my list. (*Pointing to Charles.*) That’s Charles. He sits over there. (*Points to a chair.*) He’s not. I know them all. I’m Sadie.

**LOUISE.** (*Raising her hand.*) I’m Louise.

**DORIS.** And I’m Doris.

**CLAUDIA.** Okay. Very good. Now, let me ask: Who’s interested in sexual intimacy? (*The women raise their hands. Charles, slowly, raises his.*) You see? We’re all vibrant and active. Henry?

**HENRY.** What?

**CHARLES.** You need to get in his line of sight. (*Claudia positions herself in front of Henry, line of sight.*)

**CLAUDIA.** You’re interested in sexual intimacy, aren’t you? (*She nods to him, as if to indicate he should be.*)

## HUCKLEBERRY TOWERS

**HENRY.** Wow, you move fast!

**DORIS.** You're not saying we have to have sex with just husbands, are you? *(The women giggle.)*

**CLAUDIA.** I would like to share some facts with you about sex and the elderly. I'm hoping this type of data will stimulate conversation. *(More giggling. Claudia refers to her notebook.)* Research indicates that more people over 75 are having sexual relations at least once a week. In coordination with this statistic, research indicates more senior women are having sexual relations with multiple partners. *(The women applaud.)*

**DORIS.** Good answer! Good answer!

**MAUREEN.** You're right! This is fun!

**CHARLES.** *(Raising his hand.)* Just curious: where was this study taken? It sounds like Denmark.

**CLAUDIA.** I'm quoting from a study published at the University of Iowa.

**CHARLES.** Oh, that can't be right.

**CLAUDIA.** There's also been an increase in single mature men having multiple sexual partners. *(Charles raises his hand again.)*

**CLAUDIA.** Yes, Charles?

**CHARLES.** That all sounds good but my blood pressure. It really fluctuates.

**SADIE.** Where are all these single, mature men?

**DORIS.** Dead. The statistics forget to mention that.

**CLAUDIA.** All of this activity is related to the acceptance that intimacy is a normal and healthy activity among the elderly.

**DORIS.** It might be normal. It might be healthy. I'm not so sure about the activity.

**CLAUDIA.** Charles, there are many health factors that can decrease the capability of sustaining a normal, mature sex life. *(Sadie whistles a falling note.)* For example, the amount of medications that one needs to take.

**CHARLES.** You name it, I take it. Hypertension, heart, arthritis, diabetes, asthma...

**LOUISE.** Charles, if you don't mind me saying so, that's just an excuse. I once asked you to come up to my room to watch TV. *(To the other ladies.)* He said he wanted to watch penguins.

**CHARLES.** The Pittsburgh Penguins. Let's be clear.

## HUCKLEBERRY TOWERS

**LOUISE.** Whatever kind. They're all cute to me. Just come up to my room, I said. Sit. Have a Pepsi. Waddle around. He wouldn't come.

**CHARLES.** I thought - you'll have to forgive me...

**LOUISE.** What?

**CHARLES.** You smelled a little funny. Like- can I say it? - peanut butter.

**LOUISE.** My shampoo. I use peanut oil. Dry scalp.

**CLAUDIA.** (*Indicating both of them.*) Okay, you two. Come up here. Come on! Let's talk this out. (*Charles and Louise stand, walk over to Claudia, face each other.*) When we talk about intimacy, we're not necessarily talking about sexual performance.

**DORIS.** Maybe you're not.

**CLAUDIA.** It can be small things.

**SADIE.** Ha!

**CLAUDIA.** It can be casual, gentle flirting. Touch. Now, Charles - it is Charles? - just take her hand. (*To Louise.*) Your name was...

**LOUISE.** It still is. Louise.

**CLAUDIA.** Charles, take Louise's hand. (*He does.*)

**CLAUDIA.** Not too bad, is it, Charles?

**CHARLES.** No.

**CLAUDIA.** Louise?

**LOUISE.** Yes?

**CLAUDIA.** Do you like the touch of Charles' hand?

**LOUISE.** He could use a moisturizer.

**CLAUDIA.** You see? This can be intimacy. Simple touch. Companionship. It doesn't have to be complicated.

**CHARLES.** Still, there's the smell.

**LOUISE.** I could change my shampoo, Charles. But I might be scratching my head a lot.

**CLAUDIA.** You see, Charles?

**CHARLES.** So you have....a nice TV?

**LOUISE.** Big enough to watch penguins.

**CHARLES.** It's baseball season. Pirates. No bench.

**LOUISE.** Then we can watch pirates on my couch.

**CHARLES.** You have pillows? My back's not too good.

## HUCKLEBERRY TOWERS

**LOUISE.** I have plenty. One has a Yorkshire Terrier embroidered on it. I used to own Yorkshire Terriers.

**CHARLES.** Is that right? Rrrrrrrrrrr...uff! *(Charles and Louise laugh. Nathan enters with a tray carrying a bottle of Jack Daniels, a deck of playing cards, drinking glasses, cigars, and three Hostess Ding-Dongs. He stops short, stunned by the scene.)*

**NATHAN.** What in the hell is going on here? I'm gone for five minutes and there's a wedding!

**LINDSAY.** Nathan, you cannot bring alcohol in here!

**NATHAN.** *(Crossing the room, making a beeline for the table, setting down his tray.)* I'm doing a pretty good job of it. What are you ladies all doing in here? This is men's game night! Charles, Henry, you're not putting up the good fight! And Gentlemen, look! I have Ding Dongs! I went to Costco and bought a box of 200.

**LINDSAY.** Nathan, we discussed this. We're rescheduling men's game night.

**NATHAN** *(Putting down the tray.)* Over Russ's dead body. I'm reclaiming what's rightfully ours. *(He picks up a cigar and lighter.)*

**LINDSAY.** Nathan, don't you dare!

**NATHAN.** Did anyone tell you you're beautiful when you're angry? I'll bet not. *(Lindsay starts to approach.)*

**NATHAN.** Don't you get any closer! *(He picks up a Ding Dong.)* I have a Ding Dong and I'll use it! And there's 199 more where this came from!

**LINDSAY.** Nathan, give me that....*(She approaches. Nathan fires. The Ding Dong bounces off Lindsay. She freezes. Standoff. Nathan reloads.)*

**NATHAN.** Ah hah! I have your attention, now, don't I?

**CLAUDIA.** *(Moving between them.)* Nathan? It's Nathan, isn't it? Nathan, please. Put down the Ding Dong. Let's behave like reasonable adults. I think you just might enjoy this little talk of ours. We're discussing intimacy in retirement living.

**NATHAN.** You a fantasy writer or something?

**CHARLES.** Guess what, Nathan? Claudia here says we don't need sex. Although that's just a suggestion, I'm guessing, not a guideline.

**NATHAN.** *(Pointing to Louise.)* Isn't that the woman you thought smelled like peanut butter?

## HUCKLEBERRY TOWERS

**LOUISE.** *(To Charles.)* You talked to him about my hair?

**CLAUDIA.** You may sit down, Nathan, and join us if you like.

**NATHAN.** I'm sitting down, all right. But I'm not joining you. I'm going to play a friendly game of poker. With my comatose friend, Russ, here, and my very loyal compatriot....*(Forgetting, indicating Henry.)*...um...uh...

**HENRY.** Henry.

**NATHAN.** Henry. Because it's Men's Game Night. And I do mean men. Charles, get rid of that peanut butter smelling vulture and get out your quarters. You need to ante up.

**LINDSAY.** Nathan, I've been very patient with you. As it is, I could write you up and you know what that means. No desert. But I'm remaining patient. I'm reasoning with you. Now you know the rules, Nathan. Gambling is not allowed

**NATHAN.** It's not gambling. It's a game of skill that improves cognitive and memory functions. I'm sure your speaker, Our Miss Brooks over there, agrees.

**LINDSAY.** Nathan...

**NATHAN.** Now, I've had just about enough of you. I'm not playing any more "Clue," "Battleship," or "Candy Land." I'm playing Five Card Draw and maybe a little Texas Hold'em. Meeting adjourned. Gentlemen?  
*(Holding up his bottle.)* I got booze!

**DORIS.** I used to love Texas Hold'em.

**NATHAN.** Henry, I brought ice just for you and ...*(Realizing what was said, to Doris.)* I'm sorry. What's that you said?

**DORIS.** My husband and I used to play cards. We liked driving to Reno, sometimes the Indian casinos.

**NATHAN.** I love a ride down memory lane just like anyone, Honey, but sorry, it's Men's Night. Men. M- e- n.

**DORIS.** Then he passed and left me a large inheritance. *(Pause.)*

**NATHAN.** You can deal.

**LINDSAY.** No one is gambling here. No one is grabbing anyone's inheritance.

**DORIS** *(Standing.)* Oh, you don't have to worry about me, Lindsay.

**LINDSAY.** I'm not sure I was worried about you.

## HUCKLEBERRY TOWERS

**NATHAN.** (*Pulling out a chair.*) Okay, sweetheart, take a seat. You see, Lindsay? I'm open minded. I compromise. It's now men and women's night. (*To Doris.*) Am I right, Mrs. Rockefeller? What did you say your name was?

**DORIS.** (*As she takes a seat.*) Doris.

**NATHAN.** Doris. Lovely. Get prepared to be solidly fleeced, Doris. Would you care for a little drinkie-poo? (*He picks up a glass.*)

**NATHAN.** Henry, I'm giving her your ice.

**HENRY.** That's all right. I'm not playing. It's against the rules.

**LINDSAY.** That's right, Henry.

**NATHAN.** (*Mimicking.*) "That's right, Henry." Henry, come on. I'm trying to tell you it's *our* rules, now. (*To Charles.*) Charles, have your suggested sex after the game!

**LINDSAY.** There's not going to be any sex!

**CHARLES AND LOUISE.** What?

**LINDSAY.** Or alcohol or cards or cigars!

**NATHAN.** (*To Doris.*) She missed her calling as a nun.

**LINDSAY.** We have a speaker here, with whom we've made arrangements to deliver a very informative talk about relationships in the retirement community. You are invited to stay and listen or you may retire to the lobby or your respective rooms.

**NATHAN.** I'm not sure I like my monthly fees being used for this kind of immoral talk. I've decided to be offended. What happened to the good old days when we had talks about growing dandelions?

**MAUREEN.** Or sushi.

**CLAUDIA.** I do this as a public service, Nathan.

**NATHAN.** You want to do us a real public service? Scram. (*To Doris as he's pouring.*) Two fingers, dear?

**DORIS.** I don't need the ice.

**NATHAN.** That's my girl.

**CLAUDIA.** I'm very sorry I interrupted your game night. I wasn't aware of your routine. My work at the clinic offers me very little free time.

**CHARLES.** Clinic?

**CLAUDIA.** The free clinic. I'm a volunteer.

**NATHAN.** We look sick to you?



## HUCKLEBERRY TOWERS

**CLAUDIA.** That's the point. That's my whole point, Nathan. Had you let me complete my presentation I would tell you there is a rise in sexually transmitted diseases in retirement homes, especially syphilis, herpes simplex, and chlamydia. *(This stops everything. Everyone looks at each other uncomfortably.)*

**HENRY.** I don't want to see what else is on those posters.

**CHARLES.** I can't afford to take any more pills.

**SADIE.** My niece had one of those diseases. My sister mentioned it on their Christmas card.

**LOUISE.** Well, I, for one, am very interested in this information.

**CHARLES.** What are you suggesting?

**DORIS.** I'm interested, too.

**NATHAN.** Really, ladies? Now, what filthy creature have you all been sleeping with? *(All eyes fall on the sleeping Russ.)*

**HENRY.** Russ?

**CHARLES.** He does better asleep than I do awake.

**DORIS.** Maybe we should get him tested.

**NATHAN.** Autopsy first. Then test. *(Lindsay crosses and begins to shake Russ.)*

**LINDSAY.** Russ. Russ!

**RUSS.** *(Waking.)* Hmmmph?

**NATHAN.** Wake up, pal. You're getting tested for herpes simplex.

**RUSS.** Already did that. *(He gives an "okay" sign and falls back asleep.)*

**NATHAN.** There you are, Ladies! Nothing to worry about.

**LINDSAY.** Nathan, please. Could you at least smoke out on the patio? Think of your fellow residents. Some have serious respiratory problems. Now I suppose you can take this game of yours upstairs to your room. I'll turn a blind eye for tonight. I think that's a very fair and reasonable compromise.

**NATHAN.** Okay. I accept. In the interest of fairness and compromise the game's in my room. Who's in for some Texas Hold'em?

**SADIE.** *(Rising and exiting.)* Not for me. Always a lover, never a gambler. The only "Hold'em" I like involves real Texans. *(She stops, laughs.)* That was pretty good, wasn't it? Sometimes – honestly- I'm a hoot. *(She exits.)*

## HUCKLEBERRY TOWERS

**DORIS.** I'll need to get some cash from my room. Where should I meet you?

**NATHAN.** (*Collecting everything.*) 7-0-4. Room 7-0-4. Don't forget the cash. Don't forget: 7-0-4. And - just a reminder- don't forget the cash. Charles, time to go.

**CHARLES.** Sorry, I have a date. (*Louise giggles and still holding his hand, she pulls Charles out of the room with her.*)

**NATHAN.** Make sure you two get tested for that clam dip, or whatever it is. (*To Henry.*) Henry? Coming?

**HENRY.** (*Exiting.*) I better not. Helen will be wondering what I'm doing out so late.

**NATHAN.** It's eight o'clock. You got some curfew. Who are you married to, Eva Peron? Tell your wife we lost the dice and spent the night looking for it.

**HENRY.** Some other time, Nathan. I'll see you at breakfast. I mean, if you survive. Maureen, may I walk you back to your room?

**MAUREEN.** Is everything over?

**LINDSAY.** Yes, Maureen.

**MAUREEN.** Okay, then. I'll go. (*Standing.*) Thank you, Henry. (*To Lindsay.*) Lindsay, I enjoyed the Ding-Dong fight. Now the talk about sushi is...

**LINDSAY.** Next week.

**MAUREEN.** Next week. I'll be here. (*To Henry.*) Henry, do you like sushi?

**HENRY.** (*As they exit.*) Never had it. I prefer my fish breaded.

**MAUREEN.** Sushi is fish?

**HENRY.** That's what I hear. (*They're gone.*)

**MAUREEN.** (*Off stage.*) I had no idea.

**NATHAN.** (*To Doris.*) How do you like that? It looks like it's just you and me, Miss Hot Shot. This means I'm changing the rules. Strip poker.

**DORIS.** (*As she's exiting.*) I could use the laugh. See you in ten minutes.

**NATHAN.** Make it fifteen. I gotta pee. Wait. Make it twenty.

**DORIS.** Okay. Twenty! (*She exits.*)

**CLAUDIA.** Congratulations, Nathan. Looks like you got your game.

## HUCKLEBERRY TOWERS

**NATHAN.** (*Collecting everything.*) Great. Now I have poker anxiety. I got a feeling I'm about to lose my shorts. I mean if I'm lucky. Thanks for the lecture, Dr. Ruth. You really know how to clear a room.

**CLAUDIA.** I have some brochures if you'd like more information. This is a good one. (*Reading from a brochure.*) "STD: It's Not Just For Kids, Anymore."

**NATHAN.** That does sound romantic but no, thanks. (*Indicating Russ.*) You should do something about Rumpelstilskin there. Good night, Ladies. Thanks for the good time. (*He exits, singing a tune, such as "I like big butts and I cannot lie." Claudia and Lindsay start to clean up the poster boards.*)

**CLAUDIA.** Well, that didn't go as planned.

**LINDSAY.** These lectures almost never do. More of them stayed awake this time, though.

**CLAUDIA.** Well, we can always reschedule. Same time next month?

**LINDSAY.** Should be okay but I suppose I should tell you, Claudia. There's been some rumors. About management selling this building.

**CLAUDIA.** Selling?

**LINDSAY.** Just rumors, now, but we all got a text about a staff meeting first thing Monday morning. Hard to imagine why there'd be a meeting if there's nothing to announce.

**CLAUDIA.** Oh my, Lindsay, I'm so sorry to hear. Selling. To whom? What will happen to everyone?

**LINDSAY.** That's the big question. Hard finding a job in any place, but someplace decent Like Huckleberry Towers? Forget it. But it's the way of the world, isn't it? Change. Selling. What can we do?

**CLAUDIA.** (*Quoting.*) "Be the change you want to be in the world."

**LINDSAY.** What?

**CLAUDIA.** That's a nice saying, isn't it? I like quoting positive things, even if they're not relevant.

**LINDSAY.** Thanks for....that.

**CLAUDIA.** What about these poor residents?

**LINDSAY.** I wouldn't worry about them. Some of these people are loaded, Claudia. You'd be surprised.

## HUCKLEBERRY TOWERS

**CLAUDIA.** But still at their age, moving's not easy. Maybe the meeting's just to squelch the rumor. That's possible, isn't it? (*Lindsay shoots her a look: "You gotta be kidding."*) Just trying to stay positive. "Yesterday is not ours to recover, but tomorrow is ours to win or lose." That's a good one, isn't it?

**LINDSAY.** Sure.

**CLAUDIA.** (*Indicating Russ.*) Nathan was right. We should do something about him. What was his name?

**LINDSAY.** That's Russ. I'll send an orderly down to take him to bed. The poor man. He's part cat, I think. (*Lindsay and Claudia exit. There's a few beats of silence. The upstage swinging doors open, revealing LIONEL BURKE. He looks into the room, enters, and strolls around, surveying everything. He eventually gets to Russ, looks him over; he doesn't approve. Russ slowly wakes.*)

**RUSS.** (*Groggy, blinking up at him.*) What? Who are you? You...you're not death, are you?

**MR. BURKE.** Me? No, sir. I'm not. (*Laughing.*) But I get that a lot. (*Blackout.*)

### END OF ACT 1

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