

# ***WHAT WE NEED***

*By  
Ken Untiedt*

## WHAT WE NEED

© 2023 by Ken Untiedt

CAUTION: Professionals and Amateurs are hereby warned that performance of **WHAT WE NEED** is subject to payment of a royalty. It is fully protected under the copyright laws of The United States of America, and of all countries covered by the International Copyright Union (including the Dominion of Canada and the rest of the British Commonwealth) and of all countries covered by the Pan-American Copyright Convention, the Universal Copyright Convention, the Berne Convention, and of all countries with which the United States has reciprocal copyright relations. All rights, including without limitation professional/amateur stage rights, motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television, video or sound recording, all other forms of mechanical, electronic and digital reproduction, transmission and distribution, such as CD, DVD, the Internet, private and file-sharing networks, information storage and retrieval systems, photocopying, and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved. Particular emphasis is placed upon the matter of readings, permission of which must be obtained from the Author in writing.

The English language stock and amateur stage performance rights in the United States, its territories, possessions and Canada for **WHAT WE NEED** are controlled exclusively by Next Stage Press. No professional or nonprofessional performance of the Play may be given without obtaining in advance written permission and paying the requisite fee. Inquiries concerning production rights should be addressed to [genekato@nextstagepress.com](mailto:genekato@nextstagepress.com)

### SPECIAL NOTE

Anyone receiving permission to produce **WHAT WE NEED** is required to give credit to the Author as sole and exclusive Author of the Play on the title page of all programs distributed in connection with performances of the Play and in all instances in which the title of the Play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the Play and/or a production thereof. The name of the Author must appear on a separate line, in which no other name appears, immediately beneath the title and in size of type equal to 50% of the size of the largest, most prominent letter used for the title of the Play. No person, firm, or entity may receive credit larger or more prominent than that accorded the Author.

## WHAT WE NEED

*What We Need* was originally produced at the Lamp-Lite Theatre in Nacogdoches, Texas, November 1-10, 2018, by the Lamp-Lite Players, Inc., featuring the following cast:

Alex.....Ken Untiedt  
Kathryn.....Carla Redfield  
Emily.....Olivia Dean  
Gage.....Philip Dean  
Walter.....Bill Small  
Louise.....Lisa Norman  
Frankie.....Kearsten Humber  
Debbie.....Sally Ellsworth  
Russell.....Hollis Thompson  
Mom.....Jody Ryan  
VFW Officer.....Rick Jones  
Woman Customer.....Tari Dean  
Checker.....Athena Hayes  
Additional Customer.....Gina Jones  
Additional Customer.....Gerry Peacock

## WHAT WE NEED

CAST: 6 Men, 9 Women

ALEX JONES	mid-40s, divorced, lost in his life
KATHRYN	Alex's ex-wife, early-40s, overbearing
EMILY	Alex's daughter, 15, resentful, tender-hearted
GAGE	Alex's son, 13, full of teen angst
WALTER	late-80s, WW II veteran, full of unique wisdom
LOUISE	Walter's wife, late-80s, in a wheelchair, mute
FRANKIE JENKINS	a nurse, mid-30s, thoroughly tested by life
DEBBIE	early-30s, very pretty, but shallow
RUSSELL DAVIS	Alex's roommate, late-30s, successful, selfish
MOM	Alex's mother, late-60s, in declining health
VFW OFFICER	a seasoned vet, gruff but helpful
WOMAN CUSTOMER	mid-50s, overly friendly
CHECKER	late-teens, vacuous
ADDITIONAL CUSTOMER(S)	

TIME: Early 2000s

PLACE: Newton

# WHAT WE NEED

## SCENES

### ACT I

- SCENE 1 Soup aisle of a grocery store, late Friday afternoon
- SCENE 2 Alex's house, a little later
- SCENE 3 Alex's house, several days later
- SCENE 4 Alex's house, the following afternoon
- SCENE 5 Alex's house, the next morning
- SCENE 6 Walter's room, a little while later
- SCENE 7 In a checkout line of a grocery store, a few days later
- SCENE 8 Alex's house, shortly afterward

### ACT II

- SCENE 1 Walter's room, a little later
- SCENE 2 Alex's house, a couple of days later
- SCENE 3 Walter's room, a little later
- SCENE 4 Walter's room, a few days later
- SCENE 5 Alex's house, early afternoon a couple of weeks later
- SCENE 6 Walter's room, shortly afterwards
- SCENE 7 Alex's house, a couple of days later
- SCENE 8 Walter's room, two weeks later

WHAT WE NEED

# WHAT WE NEED

ACT 1  
SCENE 1

*At the start the curtain is closed. As lights come up ALEX is DLC in front of the curtain, standing in an aisle of a grocery store, surveying dozens of brands and their many flavors of soup stocked on the shelves. He is early-forties, and seemingly overwhelmed—not just by the task of finding an apparently rare kind of specialty soup, but by life in general. He is wearing business casual: slacks, a dress shirt and loosened tie, and loafers. In one hand he holds a small carry basket that already contains a few items; his scribbled grocery list is in his other hand, and he holds it out in front of him, almost waving it in front of the soups, wishing for some kind of magic to occur.*

*WALTER enters in front of the curtain from DL pushing a shopping cart, which he uses to steady himself as he goes. He is late-eighties, stooped, wearing tennis shoes with Velcro straps, Dickies coveralls, and a “WWII Veteran” ball cap. Walter stops a few feet away from Alex and sizes him up for a moment.*

**WALTER.** *(In a clear voice, with purpose.)* You know what we need? A good depression—that’s what we need.

**ALEX.** *(Alex, bewildered at this outburst, turns and sees Walter. Alex looks around, trying to see who this stranger might be addressing.)*  
Excuse me?

**WALTER.** *(Firmly.)* I said we need a good depression. *(He selects a can from the shelf and places it in his cart, checks his list.)*

**ALEX.** *(Stunned.)* Why would you say that?

**WALTER.** Look at that—a hundred different kinds of soup. Who needs that many?

**ALEX.** *(Looks at the wall of soups.)* It is a lot.

## WHAT WE NEED

**WALTER.** You're damn right. When I was young, we didn't have this many kinds of soup. (*Leans over his cart, eyeing Alex seriously.*) You know how many kinds of soup we had at the store where I grew up?

**ALEX.** (*Sees that Walter is expecting an answer.*) Uh, no. How many?

**WALTER.** Three. (*With contempt.*) Three kinds of canned, "ready-made" soup. That's all the General Store carried—if they had them in stock. No other place in town fooled with such things.

**ALEX.** Oh. (*Watches Walter for a moment, captivated.*) I guess the selection was pretty slim back then.

**WALTER.** (*Sharply, giving Alex a suspicious look.*) What do you know about it? (*Begins searching the shelves.*)

**ALEX.** I don't. Not personally, anyway. Sorry. (*Turning away.*) I was just agreeing with...

**WALTER.** (*Cuts him off.*) And they weren't any good. My mother bought one of them one time, thinking she was going to give us a real treat. Could hardly choke it down. If you wanted good soup back then, you made it yourself. Or, your mother did, anyway.

**ALEX.** I see. (*Watches Walter as he selects another item. Hesitating, Alex succumbs to his curiosity.*) Which store was that—that only had the three kinds?

**WALTER.** It was just called The General Store. It was the only store in town, so it didn't need a catchy name. We didn't have any *chain* stores where I grew up.

**ALEX.** Oh.

**WALTER.** In fact, now that I think about it, there wasn't even a "The"—the sign just said "General Store." (*Looks at his list, selects a can from a shelf. Alex waits for a moment, then turns away. Seeing this, Walter continues.*) Walked there sometimes.

**ALEX.** (*Turns back.*) You walked? (*Takes a step toward Walter.*) Was it far?

**WALTER.** We lived in the country. All the *good* people lived in the country. (*Gives Alex a sideways glance.*) It was twenty miles to town—uphill each way.

**ALEX.** (*Smiles, playing along.*) Right.

**WALTER.** I'm kidding about that, you know.

## WHAT WE NEED

**ALEX.** I figured.

**WALTER.** It was only ten miles, but we did walk sometimes. Or, we took the wagon. (*Looks at Alex, anticipating his next question.*) Yes, we had a car.

**ALEX.** I didn't say...

**WALTER.** Took the wagon to save on tires. And gas. They rationed us, you know.

**ALEX.** I heard about that.

**WALTER.** (*With contempt.*) Yeah, you *heard* about it. (*Starts to move away.*)

**ALEX.** (*Hesitates, summoning his courage.*) Um, excuse me.

**WALTER.** (*Stops abruptly.*) What?

**ALEX.** I see that you were in the military.

**WALTER.** (*Suspiciously.*) What makes you say that?

**ALEX.** (*Pointing.*) Your hat.

**WALTER.** (*Pulls off his hat and examines it, then puts it back on.*) Oh, that. I thought I was wearing my Hooters hat today.

**ALEX.** You served in World War II?

**WALTER.** Of course I served, you moron. You think I just go around wearing a hat that says I'm a World War II vet?

**ALEX.** No. I wouldn't think that. (*Disconcerted.*) Well, anyway...I want to say thanks.

**WALTER.** Thanks? For what?

**ALEX.** For your service. To our country. Thank you...for all you did.

**WALTER.** (*Turns to face Alex, standing up straighter.*) How do you know what I did for our country? For all you know, I was in the Army band, playing USO gigs and staying in German hostels, getting cozy with hairy-legged blonde *fräuleins* throughout the whole war.

**ALEX.** Well...

**WALTER.** Or I could have been a cook in a mess hall miles from the front, or a clerk for some general, pushing papers in an office all day.

**ALEX.** I suppose every job was important in its own way, so whatever you did, I thought I should thank you...

**WALTER.** You're damn right you should thank me, because I wasn't no USO entertainer, or a paper pusher.



## WHAT WE NEED

**ALEX.** (*Meekly.*) Were you a cook, then?

**WALTER.** No, I wasn't a cook. Though I don't slight them that were. No matter what, when you came in from the field or back from a long mission, somebody needed to have a square meal ready to recharge your batteries. Some of those mess hall boys had a knack for making gourmet meals out of canned hash and some flour. (*Motions at shelves.*) They sure didn't have all this garbage to use.

**ALEX.** So what *did* you do?

**WALTER.** (*Casually.*) I was a pilot.

**ALEX.** Really? What kind of planes?

**WALTER.** The kind with wings.

**ALEX.** I was trying to be serious. Did you fly bombers, or cargo planes...or reconnaissance planes, or tankers, or...

**WALTER.** (*Interrupts.*) I flew Mustangs. And I don't mean the shiny red convertibles that hippies drive. P-51 Mustangs. Fighters.

**ALEX.** I know what they are.

**WALTER.** (*With a stern look.*) How do you know what they are?

**ALEX.** (*Proudly.*) I'm something of a history buff. I love reading about all kinds of historical stuff, but especially about the great wars. (*Walter looks at him with skepticism.*) Besides, probably everybody's heard of the P-51 Mustang, what with the History Channel...and the Internet. (*Sees Walter's skepticism turn to contempt.*) Where were you stationed?

**WALTER.** All throughout Europe. Fought the Germans, mostly. Never did much in the Pacific.

**ALEX.** Did you fly a lot—I mean, a lot of missions?

**WALTER.** That's all I did was fly missions. We didn't have a lot of down-time where we sat around sunning ourselves. Flew a mission, came back, grabbed some shut-eye—*sometimes!*—then went back up. That's all it was.

**ALEX.** Combat missions in a P-51 Mustang. That's incredible.

**WALTER.** There's nothing incredible about it. I wasn't the only one doing it, you know. There were plenty of pilots flying those planes—a lot flew more missions than me, had way more kills than me, too.

**ALEX.** How many planes *did* you shoot down?

**WALTER.** Let's just say it was more than twenty.

## WHAT WE NEED

**ALEX.** Wow! You're an Ace a few times over.

**WALTER.** (*Impressed.*) Aren't you smart? Lots of pilots are aces, especially from WW II. (*Humbly.*) I didn't set any records.

**ALEX.** (*Thinking.*) Who does have the record for the most kills?

**WALTER.** (*Flippantly.*) You want to know the record, go look it up. I'm sure it's on the Internet somewhere. The only thing that mattered to me was making it back alive each time.

**ALEX.** I guess that was the most important thing.

**WALTER.** I wasn't competing with my fellow pilots. Well, maybe one of them. Truth be told, there was only one person I really cared about beating when it came to flying.

**ALEX.** Who was that?

**WALTER.** My brother.

**ALEX.** Your brother also flew? (*Amazed.*) How many did he get?

**WALTER.** Counting the one that got him, one more than me.

**ALEX.** The one that got him?

**WALTER.** That's right. (*Reflecting.*) Our friend Bobby Sills was right behind him...saw it all. Henry took several hits. His engine was smoking bad. (*Pauses to gather himself.*) Probably was hit himself—Bobby said he got strafed across the side of the cockpit.... I figure he knew he wasn't going to make it. (*Regains himself, finishes with pride in his voice.*) So, he banked hard, came back around...and flew right into that Zero's tail section.

**ALEX.** (*Solemnly.*) I'm sorry.

**WALTER.** Sorry?! For what? You didn't know him.

**ALEX.** No, of course. I only meant...

**WALTER.** (*With abrupt annoyance.*) I can't stand here flapping my jaws with you all day. (*Begins pushing his cart away.*) I've got places to be.

**ALEX.** (*Alex checks his watch, shocked back to reality.*) Oh, wow—I've got to run, too! (*Almost smirking.*) I have a date tonight. I'm making dinner for her, and that's why I had to find this special kind of soup. You see, she's...

**WALTER.** (*Waves his hand, dismissing Alex.*) That's nice.

**ALEX.** (*Calling after Walter.*) I enjoyed talking to you.

## WHAT WE NEED

**WALTER.** I'm sure you did. *(Continues shuffling along.)* Have a nice dinner.

**ALEX.** *(Suddenly realizing.)* I didn't get your name.

**WALTER.** I didn't give it. *(Walter exits DR in front of curtain.)*

**ALEX.** *(After Walter's gone.)* No, you didn't. *(Alex checks his watch again, then turns and grabs a can of soup quickly. He exits DL in front of curtain as the lights dim.)*

## SCENE 2

*As the curtain opens and lights come up Stage Left, it is a little later, in Alex's house (which is really his roommate Russell's house). The stage is split, with Alex's house taking up two-thirds of the stage, on Stage Left. The scene is a dining room and living room area. The front door is UC, and a window is URC, on the opposite side of the door; a small table and a mirror are positioned near the door. A door to the bedrooms is on the RC wall, which extends out from the back wall several feet and is slightly angled. A door to the kitchen is on the LC wall.*

*A cordless phone is on a desk in the corner UL. There is a dining table and chairs URC. A couch is DL, and a recliner is positioned between it and the dining room table. Bookcases with pictures, knick-knacks, and other décor are on the DL wall, with other typical furnishings.*

**ALEX.** *(Speaking into a cordless phone.)* Mom, I'm trying to finish dinner, so I can't talk long.

**MOM.** *(Appears far DL, outside the set of Alex's living room. She is seated next to a small table, upon which is a phone. She is in her late-sixties and appears weak; she is holding a cane, mostly out of habit.)*  
What are you making?

**ALEX.** Enchiladas. Not enchiladas, exactly...it's a casserole. I found this recipe and thought I'd try it. *(Goes into kitchen through LC door; a moment later there's a loud bang.)* Ouch! *(Alex returns, holding a towel around his hand.)*

**MOM.** What happened? Are you okay, dear?

## WHAT WE NEED

**ALEX.** I'm fine. I burned my hand on the oven door. I really have to go, Mom. (*Waits, hesitating.*) I have someone coming over.

**MOM.** A dinner guest? How nice. Who is it?

**ALEX.** A friend from work. (*Goes to window, looks out expectantly.*)

**MOM.** Oh? Someone I know?

**ALEX.** Don't think so. (*Goes to table and moves the centerpiece to the desk, examines it, then moves it back.*)

**MOM.** No? Are you sure?

**ALEX.** You don't know anyone I work with, Mom, other than Russell.

**MOM.** I suppose that's true. (*Another pause.*) Have you worked with... "this person" long?

**ALEX.** Only a couple of months.

**MOM.** I see. Well, it's nice for you to invite... "your friend" over.

(*Knowing that it won't be offered.*) Is this friend a man, or a woman?

**ALEX.** (*Immediately exasperated.*) I knew that's where this was going. (*Begins arranging dinner plates, salad plates, and glasses he has stacked on the table.*) It's a woman, Mom, but I don't want you to make anything of it.

**MOM.** I'm not. I think it's good for you to "get out there," to spend time with someone.

**ALEX.** Okay. Well, I appreciate your interest.

**MOM.** Have the kids met her?

**ALEX.** What?! No, they haven't met her. This is our first... (*Stops, hangs his head, cringing.*)

**MOM.** (*After an extended silence.*) Son? Are you there?

**ALEX.** (*Wishing the conversation could end—or at least take a different route.*) Yes, I'm here. (*Goes to window and looks out again.*)

**MOM.** This is your first what?

**ALEX.** (*Not wanting to say the word.*) Date, I guess.

**MOM.** I see. (*Encouraged.*) What's her name?

**ALEX.** Mom, I don't want to you get ahead of myself. (*Pauses, considering what he's said.*) That's not what I wanted to say, but you know what I meant. (*Explaining.*) This is the first time we've gone out...together. Don't get your hopes up.

## WHAT WE NEED

**MOM.** I'm not getting my hopes up. And I never push you in these things. I'm only trying to encourage you. (*With a strong motherly tone.*) You need to find someone nice, Son, someone good for you. (*With feigned sincerity.*) Not that I mean Kathryn wasn't a good person.

**ALEX.** I know what you mean, Mom. (*Delicately.*) And you have pushed me. You don't remember Angela, the hospital administrator?

**MOM.** I thought she was a wonderful woman. She's my insurance agent's niece, and she's quite successful.

**ALEX.** I agree—completely. And she's beautiful. The only problem was...she didn't like me!

**MOM.** I was only trying to help. (*Waiting.*) So? Can you tell me her name?

**ALEX.** (*Evasively.*) Um, yeah...it's, uh...Esmerelda.

**MOM.** My, that's an...*exotic* sounding name. (*Cautiously.*) Is she...American?

**ALEX.** Oh, brother. *Yes*, she's American. (*A knock is heard at the door.*) I think she's here. I have to go. (*Looking around the room to make sure things are in order.*)

**MOM.** Well, let me know how things go, won't you? Son? (*Not getting a response, more forcefully.*) You will call and tell me?

**ALEX.** I will. I'll call you, Mom. I promise.

**MOM.** When? Tonight?

**ALEX.** Maybe this weekend. (*Alex opens the front door and motions DEBBIE in.*) I'll talk to you soon. Bye. (*He hangs up.*) Hi, Debbie. Please, come in.

**DEBBIE.** Hi. (*Enters UC, looking around. She is early-thirties and very pretty; she is wearing an elegant dress and a large, fashionable scarf.*) I'm not too early, am I? (*Nodding at the phone in Alex's hand.*) I don't want to interrupt.

**ALEX.** Oh, no, you're right on time. (*Puts phone on the desk.*) My mother called. We had just finished talking when you knocked.

**DEBBIE.** Your mother?

**ALEX.** Yes. She lives here in town, but she doesn't get out much anymore, so we try to keep in touch by talking on the phone.

**DEBBIE.** I'm sorry if I kept you from your talk...with your mom.

## WHAT WE NEED

**ALEX.** (*Emphatically.*) No, no. Like I said, we had just finished. (*Takes a breath, gathers himself. Opens his arms, invitingly.*) Welcome.

**DEBBIE.** (*Moving about, surveying the room.*) I like your house.

**ALEX.** Thanks. (*Correcting himself.*) It's not mine. (*Debbie looks at him, puzzled.*) I live here, but it's really Russell's house.

**DEBBIE.** Russell?

**ALEX.** Yes, Russell Davis. You know him, from work—he works in legal. We're roommates. (*Again clarifying.*) I moved in with him several months ago.

**DEBBIE.** I see. (*Digesting this new information.*) Yes, I do think I know who Russell is. (*Thinking.*) In legal. We haven't met yet, but I think someone pointed him out one day. (*Comprehending.*) About your height, brown hair? Thirties?

**ALEX.** That was probably him. (*Gallantly.*) Here, let me take that for you.

**DEBBIE.** Thank you. (*Hands him her purse and scarf.*) So, will it be three for dinner?

**ALEX.** (*Alex sets her purse and scarf on the desk.*) Three?

**DEBBIE.** Will Russell be joining us, or are we on our own?

**ALEX.** No, it's only us. Russell went to the city for the evening.

**DEBBIE.** That was thoughtful of him, I suppose. Perhaps I'll get the chance to meet him some other time. Since you're roommates, and all.

**ALEX.** Probably. (*Collecting himself.*) Uh...can I get you something to drink?

**DEBBIE.** Sure, why not?

**ALEX.** Great! What would you like?

**DEBBIE.** What have you got?

**ALEX.** Good question. Let's see. (*Alex goes to kitchen through LC door; the sound of clinking bottles and cans is heard, and he calls back to her.*) I've got soda, orange juice, tea...milk.

**DEBBIE.** Milk?!

**ALEX.** (*Alex comes to the doorway.*) Yeah. (*He sees the look on Debbie's face.*) You don't like milk? (*Suddenly concerned.*) Oh, no—do you have an allergy? (*Looking distraught.*) I should have thought of that.

## WHAT WE NEED

**DEBBIE.** No. No allergies, no...intolerances, or anything like that. I was just thinking of...well, something more grown-up. (*Quickly adding.*) I mean, we don't have to, but I thought that with a nice meal...well...

**ALEX.** Of course! I should have thought of that. (*Has a sudden, hopeful thought.*) Hang on! (*Goes into the kitchen, rummages around noisily for a moment. Returns with a bottle.*) Here. I found this white wine.

**DEBBIE.** You *found* a bottle of wine? Where?

**ALEX.** In the pantry. I think it's from New Year's. Russell went to a party, and I had asked a friend to come over, but... (*Looks woefully at the wine bottle.*) uh...the plans changed. (*Refocusing.*) I'm sure it's still okay. (*Joking.*) It's supposed to get better with age, right? (*Alex unscrews the cap on the bottle.*)

**DEBBIE.** (*Politely.*) Some do.

**ALEX.** Great. Here we go. (*He pours wine into the tumblers he had set out already.*) There. How's that?

**DEBBIE.** (*Attempting to mask her displeasure.*) Perfect.

**ALEX.** Okay. (*They both take a sip of wine.*) Be right back. (*He goes to the kitchen again, amidst the sound of pots clanking and cabinets banging. Alex calls from the kitchen.*) This should be ready in ten minutes or so.

**DEBBIE.** (*Walking around the living room, inspecting.*) You didn't have to go to all this trouble, you know. We could have just gone out somewhere. Nothing fancy, or anything—just so you didn't have to...do all this.

**ALEX.** (*From the kitchen.*) I don't mind at all. I've really been looking forward to tonight.

**DEBBIE.** Most men aren't very handy in the kitchen. I didn't expect you to prepare a meal. Are you a good cook?

**ALEX.** (*Returns, carrying several bottles of salad dressings, a large spoon, and other serving utensils.*) Oh, I'm okay. I do more cooking now than I used to. My wife always did it when we were married.

**DEBBIE.** (*Dryly, forcing a smile.*) How nice of her.

## WHAT WE NEED

**ALEX.** (*Knowing he's said the wrong thing.*) I cooked before, though. I learned to cook while I was in college. I worked at a restaurant for a year when I was a freshman. (*Heads back to the kitchen.*)

**DEBBIE.** (*Mildly impressed.*) You were a chef? Which restaurant?

**ALEX.** (*Returns with silverware wrapped in cloth napkins. Choosing his words deliberately.*) Not a chef. I bussed tables, mostly. I spent a few months as a server—a waiter. (*Hopefully.*) I did get to know one of the cooks pretty well, though, and he showed me some things.

**DEBBIE.** Lucky for you. Most bachelors don't have such advanced culinary skills.

**ALEX.** Right place at the right time, I guess.

**DEBBIE.** Guess so. (*She gives a weak smile.*)

**ALEX.** (*Looks around.*) Okay. What next? (*Thinks.*) Oh, yes. (*Alex goes to kitchen and returns with a bowl of salad and sets it on the table.*) Here we go. (*Stopping, assessing the table.*) There, now. I think that's everything.

**DEBBIE.** We're having salad?

**ALEX.** Yes. Well, no—that's not all we're having. I have something in the oven. (*Checks his watch.*) It's almost ready, but we have a few minutes. (*Alex gestures to the couch.*) Would you like to sit down?

**DEBBIE.** Sure. (*They move to the couch, and Debbie sits down. Alex is not sure where to sit; he awkwardly sits next to her, then scoots away.*)

**ALEX.** (*Holds out his glass and taps it to hers.*) Here's to a nice evening.

**DEBBIE.** Yes. (*They drink again.*) That's some wine. (*Then, with hopefulness.*) So, Al, what do you like to do?

**ALEX.** What do I like to do for what?

**DEBBIE.** When you're not at work. What are your hobbies? (*Coyly, playfully teasing a bit.*) Are you adventurous?

**ALEX.** (*Shrugging, shyly.*) I don't know that I'd say that.

**DEBBIE.** (*Encouraging him, reaching out and touching his arm.*) Well then, what would you say? What do you do for fun?

**ALEX.** (*Thinking.*) Well, I bought a bike last year.



## WHAT WE NEED

**DEBBIE.** (*Excitedly.*) A bike? What kind—a Sportster? Are you a Harley man, or do you go for something more old-school, like an Indian?

**ALEX.** An Indian?

**DEBBIE.** Yes. Wait... (*Realizing.*) When you said you bought a bike...

**ALEX.** A bicycle. (*Adding quickly.*) It's a mountain bike. I wanted to get in shape. Well... (*Sitting up straighter.*) get in a little better shape.

**DEBBIE.** (*Enthusiastically.*) Oh, I love mountain biking. I used to do a lot of backpacking, a little mountain climbing—the only really big one I climbed was Mt. Hood—but then a friend introduced me to mountain biking. We went to the Grand Canyon once and rode the Rainbow Rim Trail. It was spectacular!

**ALEX.** Wow. That's really something. (*He processes this for a moment.*) I've been meaning to, uh, start riding the trails down by the park. It's a few blocks from here. (*They embrace an awkward silence.*)

**DEBBIE.** (*Trying another route.*) Do you like to travel?

**ALEX.** (*Eagerly.*) Sure, I love to travel.

**DEBBIE.** Really? Where all have you gone?

**ALEX.** Lots of places. I go on vacation every summer, just about. (*Reflecting.*) We went to Mt. Rushmore three years ago. That was fun. Two years ago we went to the Field of Dreams. (*She looks at him blankly.*) In Iowa? The baseball diamond in the corn field.

**DEBBIE.** That's a real place? I thought it was just part of a movie.

**ALEX.** (*Emphatically.*) No, it's a real place. While we were there we drove through and saw all the bridges from *The Bridges of Madison County*.

**DEBBIE.** Sounds...interesting.

**ALEX.** I don't only do movie-themed vacations. Those were the only ones. (*Thinking.*) I've always wanted to go to Montana. That's where the Battle of the Little Bighorn is...or, was. The memorial is there. I like to see historic stuff like that.

**DEBBIE.** How nice.

**ALEX.** (*Alex sees Debbie's not impressed.*) I was planning to go to New Orleans for Mardi Gras last year, with...um...a friend. (*Pauses.*) It

## WHAT WE NEED

didn't work out. *(Another silence.)* What about you? Where have you gone on vacation?

**DEBBIE.** *(Happy to shift the focus to herself.)* I don't know that you'd call it a vacation, really, but last year I went to Milan. I had been in Paris, after the Cannes Film Festival. On a lark, a friend and I jumped on a plane and took off.

**ALEX.** Just like that? You jumped on a plane and flew to Italy? From Paris?

**DEBBIE.** Yes, and let me tell you, it was amazing! *(Thinking.)* Before I moved here, I went a bit crazy for a while. Miami Beach one weekend, L.A. the next.

**ALEX.** My. Where else?

**DEBBIE.** Recently? Let's see. Two years ago I spent Christmas in Cabo, and I went to Sydney last spring. I lived in China for a year, but that was for work, so I don't count it as fun, really.

**ALEX.** *(Hears a timer go off.)* I better check on that. *(Alex goes to the kitchen, returns with the casserole and puts it on the table.)* I hope you're hungry.

**DEBBIE.** *(Without moving.)* Can I help with anything?

**ALEX.** No, I've got it. *(Nervously.)* Do you want to come to the table?

**DEBBIE.** *(Goes to the table and surveys the food with reservation.)* It looks great. *(She smiles at Alex.)*

**ALEX.** *(Motioning.)* Please, sit down. *(Alex moves behind Debbie, fumbles to pull out her chair, tries to help her scoot in when she sits.)*

**DEBBIE.** *(Frustrated by the awkward gesture.)* Thank you.

**ALEX.** *(Spoons some of the dish onto their plates, then sits.)* I hope it's not too spicy. *(Passes the bowl with salad, other items.)*

**DEBBIE.** *(Poking at the food.)* Enchiladas?

**ALEX.** Not exactly. *(Too excitedly.)* It's a new recipe. I saw it in a magazine last week and thought it sounded good. I wasn't sure I'd be able to make it, because I couldn't find the right soup that goes in it.

**DEBBIE.** I see.

**ALEX.** I like to try new things. Especially when my kids come over.

**DEBBIE.** How thoughtful. *(She looks away.)*

**ALEX.** *(Knocks himself in the head.)* Anyway, I hope it turned out okay.

## WHAT WE NEED

**DEBBIE.** *(She takes a bite of salad.)* How many kids do you have?

**ALEX.** Two. A girl and a boy. *(Takes a bite of the casserole, then looks at it sharply.)*

**DEBBIE.** That must be wonderful for you.

**ALEX.** *(Swallowing hard.)* They're teens, so they're generally hard to please. They don't like to do any of the things they used to. I make their favorite foods when they come, and try to find fun stuff they might like to do.

**DEBBIE.** It's important to at least make an effort. *(Debbie looks at her food.)* It smells good. *(She finally takes a bite, tentatively; she smiles politely.)*

**ALEX.** *(Anxiously explaining.)* I substituted a different kind of soup. And a few of the spices.

**DEBBIE.** Oh? *(Chewing slowly, turning away.)*

**ALEX.** Yes. *(Sees that Debbie shares his assessment of it.)* Are you okay? *(Alarmed.)* You're not choking are you?!

**DEBBIE.** *(Debbie looks around, then—out of desperation—spits her food into her napkin, attempting a smile.)* No, I'm fine. It's a little... *(She takes a big gulp of her wine, then another.)*

**ALEX.** *(Tries another bite, realizes it's inedible and spits it out.)* Oh, my. *(Groaning, he pushes back from the table.)* Look, I'm really sorry.

**DEBBIE.** Why? What do you mean?

**ALEX.** You don't have to be nice. I know it's not very good.

**DEBBIE.** *(Trying to reassure him.)* No, it's fine, really.

**ALEX.** I shouldn't have tried anything new. *(Standing, taking their plates to the kitchen.)* I should have stuck to something simple, that I've made before. *(Returns.)* Look, I feel terrible. *(Gets an idea.)* Hey, why don't I call Pizza Rena's?

**DEBBIE.** Order a pizza? To be delivered? *(Gets up.)* That's okay.

**ALEX.** We can go out. *(Barely restraining his desperation.)* I'll take you any place you want.

**DEBBIE.** Al, maybe it's best if we try some other time...really.

**ALEX.** Are you sure? *(Clearly distressed.)* I wanted this to be perfect. I wanted... *(Searching for the right words.)* I wanted to make this special.

## WHAT WE NEED

**DEBBIE.** *(Flatly.)* You seem nice, Al, but...well, I don't know that a first dinner together is supposed to be "special." Certainly not "perfect."

**ALEX.** Why not?

**DEBBIE.** I don't know. Maybe it's just supposed to be dinner, and then if anything's going to be special, well...that might show itself later.

*(Pauses.)* But it might not.

**ALEX.** I'm so sorry.

**DEBBIE.** Al, stop apologizing. *(With slight irritation.)* Seriously. *(Then, consoling him.)* It happens. Don't worry about it. *(She takes her purse and scarf from the desk and moves to the front door.)*

**ALEX.** Can I make it up to you?

**DEBBIE.** It was nice, and I do appreciate all you did. Most guys don't try so hard. *(Looks back at table, then touches Alex's arm.)* I'll see you at work. *(Debbie exits UC.)*

**ALEX.** Right. At work. *(Alex goes to the table and sits as the lights dim.)*

### SCENE 3

*As lights come up Stage Left it is several days later at Alex's house. He is sitting at the kitchen table, intently working at his laptop computer—with obvious frustration. There is a knock at the front door, and he ignores it. After another knock he gets up and opens the door, sees that it is KATHRYN, and returns to the kitchen table, allowing her to let herself in. Kathryn enters UC, and immediately removes her coat and drapes it over a chair, seeming to make herself at home; she is early-forties, wearing an expensive pant suit and carrying a large designer handbag; her hair is in a tight bun, she has brightly colored fingernails, and as she enters she removes a pair of garish designer sunglasses.*

**ALEX.** *(Returning to his work.)* Hi.

**KATHRYN.** *(Sarcastically.)* My, what a pleasant welcome.

**ALEX.** Sorry. I wasn't trying to be rude. I...wasn't expecting you.

**KATHRYN.** I came because I need you to sign these forms. *(Kathryn sets some papers on the table; Alex ignores her.)* You can sign them

## WHAT WE NEED

later, and I'll pick them up when I bring the kids tomorrow. (*After he doesn't respond.*) Since I'm here, maybe we should take a minute to discuss something.

**ALEX.** (*Looks at her absently for a moment.*) Is it about the kids?

**KATHRYN.** Yes, Al, it's about the kids.

**ALEX.** Are they okay?

**KATHRYN.** They're fine. Physically. No severed limbs or incurable diseases.

**ALEX.** That's good. (*Returning to his work.*) My insurance doesn't cover the little stuff.

**KATHRYN.** Emotionally, it's another story.

**ALEX.** How do you mean?

**KATHRYN.** Have you not noticed?

**ALEX.** Noticed what?

**KATHRYN.** Their attitudes. How they've been acting. Good lord, I thought it would be obvious to you, the way they resist coming here.

**ALEX.** (*Defensively.*) Yes, Kate, I've noticed. (*Turning back to his computer.*) What am I supposed to do? I can't make them *want* to come.

**KATHRYN.** You're not concerned about why they don't want to?

**ALEX.** Of course I'm concerned. I figured it's still part of...adjusting, getting used to us being split up. This isn't their house, and I know they don't feel comfortable here. I don't know how to fix that.

**KATHRYN.** Have you tried?

**ALEX.** Yes, I have. I try all the time to think of stuff to do that they'll enjoy. But then I feel like I'm entertaining them. (*Continuing his work.*)

**KATHRYN.** (*Frustrated.*) You aren't listening to anything I say—not really listening. (*Still not getting his attention.*) Al, what is so incredibly important on your computer that you can't even look at me? Are you working from home now?

**ALEX.** No, but I *was* in the middle of something. (*Firmly.*) And I have been listening to everything you said—and hearing *and* understanding it all.

**KATHRYN.** Then why can't you stop for a couple of minutes and talk to me? (*Disgusted.*) Some things never change.

## WHAT WE NEED

**ALEX.** (*Turning toward her.*) Things have changed, Kate. Things are still changing. I *am* concerned about the kids, but I don't know how to make things better for them—for all of us. I explained that. And I'm *not* working from home.

**KATHRYN.** Doesn't seem that way to me. You haven't been able to pull yourself away from that computer since I came in. What can be so intriguing that you can't stop for a minute and have a discussion with me?

**ALEX.** (*Sighs.*) You're right. I am distracted, and I apologize. I'm doing some research, trying to find a man.

**KATHRYN.** What man?

**ALEX.** I don't know...this very interesting man. He came up to me while I was shopping and started a conversation with me.

**KATHRYN.** A complete stranger began talking to you in a store? About what?

**ALEX.** Different stuff...his life during the Depression. He was in World War II—flew fighter planes. He just started telling me about himself.

**KATHRYN.** And you didn't turn and run away?

**ALEX.** (*Defensively.*) Why would I have?

**KATHRYN.** Because, Al, you simply don't do that.

**ALEX.** Don't do what?

**KATHRYN.** Talk to people. You always complained when people you didn't know approached you in the store...or anywhere, for that matter.

**ALEX.** Well, if I don't know them...

**KATHRYN.** (*Cutting him off.*) I'm not criticizing you. I don't like it, either. I don't want some creepy guy I've never met chatting me up...or some old bag telling me all about her stupid grandchildren.

**ALEX.** I was never that harsh.

**KATHRYN.** Maybe not. But you certainly didn't welcome it. I would have thought that some old man spilling about his life would have catapulted you right out of your comfort zone.

**ALEX.** (*Quietly.*) Okay, I admit...it sort of did.

**KATHRYN.** So who is he? What did he want?

## WHAT WE NEED

**ALEX.** That's the thing—I know almost nothing about him. And he didn't want anything. I mean, he wasn't asking for donations for some cause or anything.

**KATHRYN.** Then why are you trying to find him?

**ALEX.** I really couldn't tell you. He was sharing personal things about himself, stuff that he'd experienced. *(Looks at her intently.)* It was amazing. And for some reason, I can't stop thinking about it. I want to find him so I can learn more about him.

**KATHRYN.** *(Looking at her nails absently.)* Why don't you call the VFW?

**ALEX.** The VFW?

**KATHRYN.** Sure. There's a bunch of those guys at all the parades, and pancake breakfasts...or whatever they do. They have that building downtown. I'm sure they get together, have meetings or something.

**ALEX.** I didn't think of that. *(Goes to the desk UL and pulls out a phone book from a drawer.)*

**KATHRYN.** *(Checks her watch, then moves to the front door and puts on her coat.)* I have to run. I'll be here at six tomorrow with the kids. Please have the forms signed. They're important. *(Sees that Alex is lost in his thoughts, searching for the number.)* Goodbye, Al. *(Kathryn exits UC.)*

**ALEX.** *(As the door shuts.)* Bye. *(Finds number and picks up the phone, dials.)*

**VFW MAN.** *(Appears far DL, outside the set of Alex's living room. He is standing next to a small table, upon which is a phone. He is late-sixties or early-seventies, dressed in a military-type uniform.)* VFW Post #9300.

**ALEX.** Hi. Yes, um...I'm trying to find somebody. I was hoping you could help. *(Unsure what to say.)* Uh, who am I speaking to?

**VFW MAN.** This is Vice-Commander Earl Truman. And who are you?

**ALEX.** Uh, my name is Al, and I'm trying to find a World War II veteran.

**VFW MAN.** Okay. Any particular one?

**ALEX.** Yes, but that's the problem. Well, that's part of it. We met while we were shopping in Kindell's, but he didn't give me his name.

## WHAT WE NEED

**VFW MAN.** You were shopping? For what? Maybe if you give me more details I could figure out who you were dealing with.

**ALEX.** We were just getting some groceries, nothing important. Nothing related to...well, to the military, or your organization at all.

**VFW MAN.** Okay. Then why did you call here? You know this is Post #9300 of the VFW? That's the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

**ALEX.** Yes, I know. I called because this man is a veteran. He was telling me about some of what he did during his time in the service.

**VFW MAN.** Let's start there. What branch was he in?

**ALEX.** The Army Air Corps, I guess. He said he flew P-51 Mustangs...shot down over twenty planes—in Europe, not the Pacific. He said his brother also flew, and he was killed.

**VFW MAN.** *(A long pause.)* I believe I know exactly who you're talking about.

**ALEX.** Really?! What's his name?

**VFW MAN.** Well, now, I can't give out personal information about our members to anybody who calls. These men served their country, and now they're part of a brotherhood. *(Firmly.)* And there are privacy laws, you know.

**ALEX.** I only wanted you to give me his name. I could take it from there.

**VFW MAN.** *(Another long pause.)* If you come down here I'll see what I can do. No promises, you understand?

**ALEX.** *(Excited.)* Sure. I understand. I'll be there Monday afternoon. *(Alex hangs up, then smiles excitedly; he exits RC. The lights dim.)*

## SCENE 4

*As lights come up Stage Left it is in Alex's house, the following afternoon. The phone rings.*

**ALEX.** *(Enters from RC, running to answer the phone. He is wearing a t-shirt, athletic shorts, and tennis shoes.)* Hello? *(No one answers.)*  
Hello?



## WHAT WE NEED

**DEBBIE.** (*Appears far DL, outside the set of Alex's living room. She is wearing a bathrobe and standing next to a small table, upon which is a phone. Debbie recognizes Alex's voice and is caught off guard at first, then answers slowly.*) Uh...Al?

**ALEX.** (*Surprised.*) Debbie? Hey, I'm glad you called. I didn't see you at work today. How are you?

**DEBBIE.** I'm...good. You know, busy day. (*Lost for words.*) How are you?

**ALEX.** I'm okay. Busy, too. (*Puzzled.*) I didn't realize I gave you this number. The land line is Russell's.

**DEBBIE.** (*A pause.*) Well, uh...you must have. (*Laughing.*) How else would I have gotten it?

**ALEX.** I guess so. I knew I gave you my cell, but maybe I wasn't thinking and gave you this one too by mistake. (*Laughs.*) That would be something I'd do.

**DEBBIE.** That's probably it.

**ALEX.** (*A long silence.*) So anyway, what's up?

**DEBBIE.** (*Fumbling.*) Oh, uh...I was just calling to see how you're doing.

**ALEX.** I'm fine. Busy, like I said. Listen, about dinner the other night...

**DEBBIE.** (*Interrupting.*) Don't say another word about it, Al. That sort of thing happens all the time. You should see me try to cook.

**ALEX.** Not your thing, huh?

**DEBBIE.** Absolutely not. My food preparation skills are limited to making wise selections from a menu—after choosing the right restaurant, of course.

**ALEX.** Yeah, it's good to go out sometimes. I don't know, though...I like the process—there's something about seeing it all come together, from getting the food to preparing it to putting it on the table. And I don't mind the clean-up. It gives me a sense of completion, I suppose.

**DEBBIE.** (*Not knowing how to respond.*) Oh. That's...good.

**ALEX.** Anyway, I'd like to make it up to you. Can we give it another shot?

## WHAT WE NEED

**DEBBIE.** I suppose, we could try sometime. There is this new place called Gavelli's. Marsha told me about it last week, and it's supposed to be the best Italian food around.

**ALEX.** Anything you want. Really. We could go there, or anywhere. I know a place called Hank's Marketplace. They have great hamburgers and the best chicken fried steak in town.

**DEBBIE.** Chicken fried steak?

**ALEX.** Yeah! It's incredible. They also have excellent garlic mashed potatoes, and these pickled beets that have some kind of spice that makes them delicious.

**DEBBIE.** Okay. I guess we could—if we can't get into Gavelli's.

**ALEX.** That sounds great! What about next Friday?

**DEBBIE.** We can definitely consider that. I'll have to make sure I don't have anything else planned.

**ALEX.** Of course. *(There is a knock at the door.)* Oh, hey, somebody's at the door. I've got to go.

**DEBBIE.** Right. Me, too. I'm sure I'll probably see you at work.

**ALEX.** Great. I'm looking forward to it. *(Alex hangs up the phone and raises his arms triumphantly. He checks his watch, then goes to the front door and opens it; EMILY, GAGE, and Kathryn enter UC; the kids have backpacks, overnight bags, pillows, etc., and they immediately go through the door RC.)* Hi, there. Right on time.

**KATHRYN.** Hello, Al. How are you?

**ALEX.** *(Smiling broadly.)* Doing very well, thank you. *(Emily and Gage return.)* Hey, guys. *(They nod but both have ear buds in, listening to music.)*

**KATHRYN.** Did you get those papers signed?

**ALEX.** *(Alex goes to the table, hands papers to Kathryn.)* Here you are, signed, sealed, and delivered.

**KATHRYN.** Cute. *(Turns to the kids, who have already sat down, Emily on the couch and Gage in the recliner, his leg draped over the arm.)* Well, you two have fun. *(Kathryn goes over and pulls Emily's ear buds out, motions to Gage to do the same; he complies reluctantly.)* Don't give your father any trouble.

## WHAT WE NEED

**ALEX.** They won't be any trouble. I've got a couple of fun activities planned...and I made something special for dinner.

**KATHRYN.** Aww, how thoughtful. *(She kisses Emily.)* Goodbye.

**EMILY.** What time will you be here on Sunday?

**KATHRYN.** The usual time, Emily. Now, enjoy yourselves. *(Kathryn bends down to kiss Gage.)* See you soon. *(She goes to the front door.)*

**GAGE.** Bye.

**KATHRYN.** *(Turns to Alex.)* If you need anything, call me. *(Kathryn exits UC.)*

**EMILY.** *(Calling after her as she closes the door.)* Bye, Mom.

**ALEX.** All right. *(Claps his hands excitedly.)* Who's hungry?

**GAGE.** We ate an hour ago. *(Gage puts his ear buds back in.)*

**ALEX.** Before you came over? How come? I always make dinner for us when you come.

**EMILY.** *(Returns to the couch.)* Phillip took us to Ortego's.

**ALEX.** Fancy. *(Looks at his watch.)* Okay. Well, that changes our plans a bit, but I can turn off the oven and dinner will keep until later. Maybe we can go to the park first and you'll be ready to eat when we get back.

**GAGE.** *(Pulls an ear bud out.)* Why would we go to the park?

**ALEX.** I thought we could go and walk around, talk. It's a beautiful day, and I thought we could get some fresh air instead of sitting inside. *(Gage slouches down in the recliner.)*

**EMILY.** It's like a thousand degrees outside, Dad.

**ALEX.** It's not that hot, Em.

**EMILY.** *(Crosses her arms.)* I wish you wouldn't call me that.

**ALEX.** Em? Since when don't you want me to call you that?

**EMILY.** Since, like, forever.

**ALEX.** Okay. I didn't know. I've always called you that. *(Upbeat.)*

Anyway, I thought we could shoot some hoops. They have a court on this end of the park. *(Moves close to Gage, shakes his shoulder playfully.)* It's only two blocks from here. *(Loudly.)* What do you say?

**GAGE.** I don't have my shorts.

**ALEX.** You can wear a pair of mine, pull the draw string extra tight.

**EMILY.** That will be fun to see.

**GAGE.** Your shorts would never fit me.

## WHAT WE NEED

**EMILY.** And it's really, like, totally too hot. We never do stuff like that. Why do we have to now?

**ALEX.** Okay. What would you like to do? Name it.

**GAGE.** *(Stands.)* I was thinking about bouncing over to Derek's house.

**ALEX.** Derek's? Why would you go over there?

**GAGE.** He wanted me to spend the night.

**ALEX.** But you're supposed to stay here this weekend.

**GAGE.** I haven't seen Derek since last weekend.

**ALEX.** Well, it's been two weekends since we saw each other.

**GAGE.** I already told him I would go. *(Gage pulls out his phone, sits back down.)* But, fine! Whatever. I'll text him and tell him I have to cancel our plans.

**ALEX.** What do you want to do, Em? *(Quickly.)* Emily?

**EMILY.** *(Shoots him a quick look, then softens.)* I'd be okay if we watched a movie.

**ALEX.** A movie night could be fun. Anything you want to see?

**EMILY.** *(Pulls a DVD from her backpack.)* *Zombie Flesh Eaters 4!*

**ALEX.** Yikes. That sounds horrible. I suppose we can check the guide and see if there's anything else we might *all* enjoy. Maybe something funny.

**EMILY.** If you want. *(Sheepishly, playing him.)* Hey, Dad? *(Pauses.)* Can we go pick up Sidney? She was wanting to hang out. The movie thing was her idea and, like, I already told her we could.

**ALEX.** You want Sidney to come over tonight?

**EMILY.** If it's okay.

**GAGE.** Why don't you call her and tell her you have to cancel? I had to.

**ALEX.** Look, Gage, I'm sorry about Derek, but you made the plans without asking first. I want you staying here during our weekend together. *(Alex pats Gage on the shoulder.)* Hey, since we're doing a movie instead of the park, why not see if he wants to come for that?

**GAGE.** Have Derek come over here? *(Stands, moves DRC.)* To watch a dumb movie with Emily and her creepy friend? No thanks.

**ALEX.** Your choice, but I was offering.

**GAGE.** Some offer.

## WHAT WE NEED

**ALEX.** It's up to you. Tell me if you change your mind. *(Looks at them both optimistically.)* So, that's settled. I guess I can put on something else, since basketball is out. I'll be right back. *(Alex goes to the bedroom through door RC. Lights dim.)*

### SCENE 5

*As lights come up Stage Left it is the next morning, in Alex's house. Gage and Emily are in their spots on the couch and the recliner; Emily is reading and Gage is playing a game on his phone. After a moment there is a knock heard at the front door. After another knock, Gage and Emily exchange glances. Gage shrugs his shoulders, completely disinterested. Finally, after another loud knock, Emily gets up in a huff and opens the door. Kathryn enters UC, quite perturbed.*

**KATHRYN.** Good heavens, what took so long to answer the door?

**EMILY.** *(Returning to her seat.)* I thought Gage was going to answer it.

**GAGE.** Not my house.

**KATHRYN.** *(Dismissing them both. Looking around.)* Where is your father?

**EMILY.** He's taking a shower.

**KATHRYN.** *(Checks her watch.)* At this time of the day? *(Sees no reaction from the kids.)* Surely he isn't just now getting up. *(No one answers.)* Emily?

**EMILY.** No, mother. *(Exasperated by the questions.)* He had us up at, like, the crack of dawn. *(With heavy sarcasm.)* Made us breakfast and everything. *(Pauses, sees her mother expects more.)* He told Russell he'd mow the lawn.

**KATHRYN.** Oh. Well, that was nice of him. *(Examines Gage, still playing a video game.)* Did you help?

**GAGE.** *(Gives her a cold stare.)* Like I said, not my house.

**KATHRYN.** It's not your father's house, either, but he at least offered to help Russell by mowing the lawn.

**GAGE.** If it's Russell's house, Russell should mow the lawn...or pay someone to do it. Dad's stupid for saying he'd do it.

## WHAT WE NEED

**KATHRYN.** Don't talk that way about your father. He's a good man.

**EMILY.** If he's such a good man, then why did you leave him?

**KATHRYN.** (*Sharply.*) You watch yourself, young lady. This is not the time or place to get into that discussion.

**EMILY.** I doubt that it ever will be.

**KATHRYN.** Perhaps not. But that's not the issue here. Your attitude is.

**ALEX.** (*Coming from bedroom, RC.*) All right. Now, who wants to go to the Hilliard Museum? (*Stops abruptly, seeing Kathryn.*) Oh, hey. I didn't hear you come in. What are you doing here? (*Looks at the kids; both avoid eye contact.*)

**KATHRYN.** I know, I know. I'm a little early. (*Both kids get up, begin to gather their things.*)

**ALEX.** It's more than a little early. My time doesn't end until six tonight. (*The kids go to the bedrooms through the door RC.*) And I was supposed to bring them back to you. (*Steadying his voice.*) I had something planned for this afternoon.

**KATHRYN.** We're going to do some shopping. They need new school clothes, and Delvan's is on this side of town. I thought this would save you the trouble.

**ALEX.** It's no trouble spending time with my kids.

**KATHRYN.** (*Downplaying.*) Oh, come on, Al. I didn't say anything like that. (*Putting a cheerful spin on it.*) I was trying to help, and I thought this would be easier—in case you had something else to do. (*She begins putting some of Emily's books and other things into a backpack.*)

**ALEX.** Believe me, Kate, all I planned was taking the kids to the Hilliard Museum. It has a new exhibit, and we were going to go see it.

**KATHRYN.** Al, there wouldn't be time for that today. It's after eleven.

**ALEX.** I know what time it is. It's only an hour over there, and I thought we'd go to that burger place they like, then tour the museum. We would have a couple of hours there, and then I'd take them back home.

**KATHRYN.** I know you and museums. Even though the kids aren't the least interested in any of that anymore, you'd want to spend an entire day there, not just a couple of hours. This will work out better for everyone. You can take them to a museum some other day, when you'll have more time.

## WHAT WE NEED

**ALEX.** The exhibit *opens* today. They have a reenactment scheduled, and free souvenirs for everyone.

**KATHRYN.** Well, they'll have something else just as good another time.

**ALEX.** That's not the point. Actually, it is the point, but that's not the *main* point. (*Restraining his irritation.*) I'd have them back by six. I always do.

**KATHRYN.** I know you do. And I appreciate that. (*Turning away, closing the subject.*) What about that man? Did you not ever find him?

**ALEX.** That man?

**KATHRYN.** Yes. The army man, from the Great Depression. You were trying to find where he lives, weren't you?

**ALEX.** Yes. I found him. He lives in a place on Washington Avenue. But I wasn't going to go see him during my time with the kids.

**KATHRYN.** I would hope not. They'd be appalled...meeting a stranger, in some dingy old folks' home that stinks of medicine and pee, and has poor, lonely souls standing and yelling at the walls.

**ALEX.** I doubt it would be that bad. At least, I hope it's not—for his sake.

**KATHRYN.** So you *are* going to go see him? Why?

**ALEX.** I told you. He was fascinating, and I can't stop thinking about him, the stories he was telling me. I don't know...I just wanted to meet him again and visit some more. That was the whole point of trying to locate him.

**KATHRYN.** I thought that if you did track him down you'd change your mind about going and seeing him, that you'd lose interest by then, or lose your nerve.

**ALEX.** I haven't lost my nerve. I was waiting until after this weekend. (*Firmly, regaining focus.*) I was supposed to have the kids until six.

**KATHRYN.** (*Patting his chest, soothing him.*) I know, I know. I told you, I was trying to simplify things. Since the plans have changed, maybe you could go see your old man friend this afternoon. (*Smiling.*) See? It all works out for the best.

**EMILY.** (*Returning, overhearing.*) You have an "old man friend"?

## WHAT WE NEED

**KATHRYN.** *(Answering for Alex, as he begins to respond.)* Your father met some elderly person in the store, and he's managed to find out where he lives.

**EMILY.** Who is he?

**KATHRYN.** Just some old man who grew up during the Great Depression and wants to tell everyone about how awful things were back then.

**ALEX.** Actually, he didn't make it sound like that at all. In fact, he talked like things were better in a lot of ways when he was young, despite the problems they faced.

**KATHRYN.** Whatever. Your father is intrigued by this old person, and he felt the need to locate him so that he could talk to him some more.

**EMILY.** I don't get it. If you don't know him, what would you talk about?

**ALEX.** I wanted to learn more about him, about his life and all that he's done. He's a war hero...of sorts—I guess you'd call him that.

**EMILY.** What war was he in, the Civil War?

**KATHRYN.** No, dear, of course not. No one from the Civil War is still alive. I think he was in Vietnam, although that wasn't technically a war, was it Al?

**ALEX.** He was in World War II, and *very* few of those men are alive anymore.

**GAGE.** *(Returning.)* Are we ready? *(Goes to the front door.)*

**KATHRYN.** I think we are. *(Kathryn smiles, happy to be ending the conversation.)* This will work out so much better, for all of us. It will be a lot easier than waiting for them to get all the way back home...since Delvan's is over here. *(Upbeat.)* Well, thanks again for understanding.

**ALEX.** *(Under his breath.)* Who said I understand?

**KATHRYN.** Come on kids, let's get going.

**EMILY.** *(Goes to Alex, leans forward and gives him a pseudo-hug.)*  
Bye, Dad.

**ALEX.** *(Kisses her forehead, tries to pull her in for a real hug, but she pulls away.)* I wish you didn't have to go. I was looking forward to taking you to the Hilliard Museum.

**GAGE.** *(In doorway.)* Like she said, we're getting some new clothes.



## WHAT WE NEED

**ALEX.** Okay. Well, we can go there next time. (*Moves toward Gage.*)

**GAGE.** (*Gage turns and exits UC.*) Later.

**ALEX.** Right. (*Calling after him.*) See you later. (*To Emily.*) I love you. (*Emily gives a quick wave and exits UC without saying anything else.*)

**KATHRYN.** Well, okay then. (*Flippantly.*) See you next time. (*Alex just looks at her blankly. Kathryn exits UC.*)

**ALEX.** (*Alex looks around at the empty room.*) Maybe I will go see my “old man friend.” (*He stands for a moment, then goes to the front door and exits UC. The lights dim Stage Left.*)

### SCENE 6

*As lights come up Stage Right it is a little later, in Walter’s room at the assisted living center. It is sparsely furnished, with a twin bed against the wall DR, along with a nightstand and a small dresser. An upholstered chair and a small table are to the right of the door, in front of a bookcase. Another upholstered chair is near the door, along with other furnishings as will allow. Walter is sitting in the upholstered chair by the table, reading. Alex appears at the UR door, which is open; he peeks in and sees Walter, then steps inside and stands quietly, waiting.*

**WALTER.** (*Not looking up from the newspaper held directly in front of his face.*) Well? Are you just going to stand there, or are you going to talk to me?

**ALEX.** Oh, yes. Hi. (*Awkwardly.*) Uh, I don’t know if you remember me or not, but we met at the grocery store last week.

**WALTER.** (*Still not looking away from his paper.*) So?

**ALEX.** (*Trying to see around the paper, which Walter moves to prevent making any eye contact.*) I wanted to meet you again, so I came here.

**WALTER.** Is that so?

**ALEX.** Yes. (*Pulls out a chair and sits down.*)

**WALTER.** (*Pulls the paper down and looks at Alex.*) Did I invite you to sit?

**ALEX.** (*Standing again, very uncomfortable.*) No, I’m sorry. Look, I just wanted to visit with you...to ask you some questions.

## WHAT WE NEED

**WALTER.** What questions? (*Eyes him suspiciously.*) Are you from the IRS?

**ALEX.** Me? No.

**WALTER.** What do you want then?

**FRANKIE.** (*Before Alex can answer, FRANKIE enters UR carrying a tray of food. She is mid-thirties, attractive, and dressed in scrubs with her hair pulled back in a ponytail.*) Good afternoon, Walter. I see that you're eagerly awaiting your lunch. (*She sets the tray on the table in front of Walter, takes the plate and utensils off the tray and arranges them before him.*)

**WALTER.** (*Feigning weakness.*) It's about time. I wouldn't have lasted much longer. The human body can only go so long without food, you know. (*He tosses the paper down, then inspects the food she's brought.*)

**FRANKIE.** (*Pats his belly.*) Doesn't look to me like you're starving. (*Gigs him in the side playfully.*) Now, is there anything else I can get you?

**WALTER.** (*Walter smiles at her and takes hold of her arm, then winks.*) You know the only thing I want.

**FRANKIE.** (*Picks up his paper and folds it neatly, sets it on the table.*) I know about that. I meant anything else. (*Frankie notices Alex, but is unconcerned.*)

**WALTER.** That's all I want—or *need!*

**FRANKIE.** Okay, then. I'll be back shortly. (*Frankie exits UR.*)

**ALEX.** (*After a pause, watching Walter pick at his food with a fork.*) I guess this is a bad time, but I was wondering if we could arrange to get together some other time. Perhaps...

**WALTER.** (*Stops suddenly, setting down his fork loudly and cutting his gaze sharply at Alex.*) Who are you?

**ALEX.** I'm Al, Al Jones.

**WALTER.** Yeah? And what do you want with me?

**ALEX.** I want to talk to you. You told me a little about yourself when we met in the store, but we only had a few minutes.

**WALTER.** I don't need any insurance, or anything else you might be selling.

## WHAT WE NEED

**ALEX.** I'm not selling anything. I just want to talk. Well...to listen, really. That's all.

**WALTER.** *(Stares Alex up and down, assessing him. Picks up his fork again, motions with it toward the other chair.)* Sit down if you want.

**ALEX.** Thank you. *(Pulls the chair over and sits.)*

**WALTER.** *(Unfolds his napkin and sets it in his lap, adjusts his plate, glass, and silverware on the table until they're "just right." Looks at Alex.)* I'd offer you something to eat, but none of this has been approved by the FDA for human consumption.

**ALEX.** *(Smiling, enjoying Walter's wit.)* And yet you're going to eat it?

**WALTER.** What choice do I have?

**ALEX.** Can you order in?

**WALTER.** Nope. Against regulations. They only allow a few packaged foods for snacks. All meals have to be prepared by the staff, and eaten here in this lovely locale. *(Gesturing.)*

**ALEX.** I suppose they have to have some rules.

**WALTER.** It's so they can control us.

**ALEX.** I see.

**WALTER.** *(Conceding.)* Besides, they assure me all this food is delicious—and good for me.

**ALEX.** Well, so long as they tell you it's good, it must be good.

**WALTER.** With an attitude like that, you'll adapt perfectly to a place like this—when it's your time. *(Leans forward abruptly.)* All right, get down to it—tell me why you're here. No baloney.

**ALEX.** I told you, we met in Kindell's. You started telling me about your life, about flying in the War, and growing up during the Depression.

**WALTER.** Oh yeah. The "good old days." *(Sarcastically.)* Those were the times. *(Emphatically, pointing a finger at Alex.)* I tell you it would do this country some good—and the whole world, really—to go through some of those times again. Give all these young kids a wake-up call.

**ALEX.** That's what I mean. You saying those things made me curious.

**WALTER.** *Curious?* About what?

**ALEX.** About all of it. What it was really like.

**WALTER.** It was hell, that's what it was like.

## WHAT WE NEED

**ALEX.** But you said what we really need is a good depression. That statement is what made me come find you. Why would you say that?

**WALTER.** Because it taught us how to live. It taught us what was important in life. Nobody understands what's really important anymore.

**FRANKIE.** *(Returning UR, pushing LOUISE in a wheelchair; she is awake but slumped in the wheelchair and not responsive to the ensuing activity around her.)* Here she is. Who you've been waiting for. We're just running a little behind.

**WALTER.** *(Stands immediately, rushes to Frankie's side, begins helping get Louise adjusted at the table. As he does this, he repeatedly touches Louise, smoothing her hair, lovingly touching her arms, hands, face.)* Hello, my darling. I'm so glad you're here.

**FRANKIE.** I'll be right back with your food, Louise. *(Frankie exits UR.)*

**WALTER.** *(Speaking to Louise, though she doesn't seem to notice.)* We have roast beef today, with mashed potatoes and green beans. It's not like they made at Arlo's, but it doesn't look too bad. *(Busily attending to her.)* Do you remember the last time we ate at Arlo's? For our fortieth anniversary.

**ALEX.** Is this your wife?

**WALTER.** Yes, she's my wife. So don't get any ideas. *(Squaring off on Alex and poking a finger at his chest.)* She's taken—keep your eyeballs in your head, and your hands to yourself!

**ALEX.** *(Startled, not sure how to respond.)* No, I wouldn't dream of that.

**WALTER.** Good! I'd hate to have to open up a can on you—they don't tolerate rough-housing around here. *(Returning to his seat, not taking his eyes off Louise.)*

**ALEX.** *(Alex sees that it's time to leave.)* I should go.

**WALTER.** I thought that the minute you walked in.

**ALEX.** Maybe I can come again and we can sit down, just the two of us. And talk.

**WALTER.** Maybe. *(Waves his hand at Alex, dismissing him. Alex watches them for a moment, then exits UR. Lights fade and curtain closes.)*

## WHAT WE NEED

### SCENE 7

*The curtain is closed. As lights come up it is a few days later, and a WOMAN CUSTOMER is DLC in front of the curtain, standing in the “speedy checkout” line of a grocery store; she is mid-fifties, wearing a brightly colored outfit, big hair, and too much make-up. Woman Customer has only a few items in her carry basket and is standing behind ADDITIONAL CUSTOMER 1, who obviously has more than twenty items, which the CHECKER is ringing up at an excruciatingly slow pace. Alex enters in front of the curtain from DR and walks up behind them, holding a carry basket with loaf of bread, a carton of milk, and a couple of other items. He strains to see if there are any other open lines; there are not.*

**WOMAN.** *(Turns to face Alex, smiling and speaking quietly.)* They never seem to have enough lines open, do they?

**ALEX.** *(Forces a smile, without making eye contact.)* No, I suppose not.

**WOMAN.** *(Nodding toward the person ahead of them.)* And this is supposed to be the fast line.

**ALEX.** *(Looking straight ahead.)* Supposed to be.

**WOMAN.** *(Shrugging her shoulders.)* Oh, well. What’s time to a hog, right?

**ALEX.** *(Turning to her.)* Pardon me?

**WOMAN.** *(Smiling, now that she’s got his attention. She turns, completely facing him.)* It’s an old folk expression. It means that it’s not so important, since I’m not so important. *(Alex is clearly confused.)*

“What’s time to a hog?” *(Explaining.)* Since I don’t have anything too important going on, what does it matter that we have to wait in line? *(She smiles again, and pats his arm.)*

**ALEX.** Oh. I get it. *(Alex looks again for another line.)*

**WOMAN.** *(Examining Alex’s basket.)* Not getting much are you?

**ALEX.** *(His impatience showing.)* Nope. Just the essentials.

**WOMAN.** *(Holds her carry basket out so Alex can see what she’s getting.)* I don’t have much, either. I’m having my neighbors over. They

## WHAT WE NEED

moved in a few weeks ago, and I thought it would be good to have them over to dinner. Nothing special—just baked spaghetti and a salad.

**ALEX.** That's nice.

**WOMAN.** My husband isn't a big salad eater, but I think you need to have salad with spaghetti. This isn't plain spaghetti, it's baked—sort of a casserole, but it's basically the same.

**ALEX.** I see. *(Alex looks past Woman Customer at the Checker, hoping it will motivate her to go faster. It doesn't.)*

**WOMAN.** So, I thought we'd have the salad with it. My mother always said you have to have something green with every meal. She was talking about vegetables, but salad counts, I think. And the spaghetti has mushrooms in it—Howard says *way* too many mushrooms, but you don't really notice them much. I figure if these people don't like mushrooms, they can pick them out.

**ALEX.** I suppose they can. *(Alex smiles weakly.)*

**WOMAN.** I'm going to make some steamed broccoli to go with it. I was going to do carrots, but I think that too much orange doesn't sit well with people.

**ALEX.** Too much orange?

**WOMAN.** Yes. This baked spaghetti has lots of cheese, and the sauce sort of gets an orange tint to it when you make it in the casserole. I thought broccoli would provide a nice contrast, even though we have the salad.

**ALEX.** *(Additional Customer 1 has finally finished and is exiting DL, but the Woman Customer is too caught up in her story to notice. Alex nods his head, indicating that it's her turn.)* I think we're finally making progress.

**WOMAN.** *(She turns.)* So we are! *(Laughing.)* I guess I was lost in my own world. *(She begins placing her items on the checkout counter.)*

**CHECKER.** *(With trained cheerfulness.)* Welcome to Kindell's. Did you find everything you were looking for?

**WOMAN.** I sure did, Hon. *(Finishes with her items, looks in Alex's basket.)* Buying just for one?

**ALEX.** Excuse me?

**WOMAN.** Mid-week “forgot-to-gets,” or shopping for you only?

## WHAT WE NEED

**ALEX.** *(Smiles politely.)* Just me this time.

**WOMAN.** I thought that might be the case. *(Nods at his basket.)* Lots of men quit drinking milk when they get older.

**ALEX.** Well, I like it. *(Mildly irritated.)* And, I'm not that old.

**WOMAN.** *(Grabs Alex's arm.)* Oh, no honey! I didn't mean it that way. I think it's good that you're health-conscious. So many men aren't—that's all.

**ALEX.** Right.

**WOMAN.** Ever made baked spaghetti? I could give you the recipe in two seconds flat. There's nothing to it, nothing at all. *(She stops abruptly, then grabs Alex's arm again.)* Tell me, though, can you cook? Or would I be blowing in the wind by giving it to you?

**ALEX.** *(Alex looks down at his arm, which she has latched onto seemingly permanently now.)* Yes, I cook, but I don't think we have time for the recipe. *(Nods at the Checker, who says "\$13.42" to the Woman Customer.)*

**WOMAN.** *(Laughs much too loudly.)* Aahhhh! Look at me again. *(Pulls at her hair dramatically.)* Wake up, Irene! *(She takes out money and hands it to the Checker.)* Here you go, Hon. *(She turns back to Alex, still upbeat.)* Well, I have to go make my baked spaghetti and get ready for the new neighbors. *(Gives Alex's arm one more squeeze, along with a gentle shake.)* Nice talking to you. Bye now. *(She exits DL as ADDITIONAL CUSTOMER 2 moves up behind Alex in line.)*

**ALEX.** *(Solemnly, after she has left.)* Bye.

**CHECKER.** Welcome to Kindell's. Did you find everything you were looking for? *(No response from Alex.)* Sir?

**ALEX.** *(Lost in thought.)* Huh?

**CHECKER.** *(Repeating her mantra.)* Welcome to Kindell's. Did you find everything you were looking for?

**ALEX.** Oh. Sorry. I guess that lady had me a bit shell-shocked. *(Shakes his head to clear his thoughts.)* Uh, yes. I found everything.

**CHECKER.** She is a talker, that's for sure. *(Checker examines a can before scanning it.)* I've never tried these. Are they good?

**ALEX.** What?

## WHAT WE NEED

**CHECKER.** These. (*Flashes a can for Alex to see, then looks at it again and reads the label.*) Kipper snacks. Never heard of them. Are they any good?

**ALEX.** (*Astounded at the new line of questioning.*) I like them. On crackers. (*Additional Customer 2 peers over Alex's shoulder to see.*)

**CHECKER.** (*Shrugging it off.*) Sounds disgusting to me. (*Finishes scanning the items.*) That will be \$11.72. (*Checker starts placing items in bags.*)

**ALEX.** (*Alex hands money to the Checker.*) Here you go.

**CHECKER.** (*Makes change with automated precision and hands it to Alex.*) And \$3.28 is your change. (*Again, in rote manner.*) Thank you for shopping at Kindell's. (*Turns to Additional Customer 2 and smiles brightly.*) Welcome to Kindell's. Did you find everything you were looking for? (*Alex turns to look at Additional Customer 2, then at the Checker. He shakes his head and exits DL. Lights dim.*)

## SCENE 8

*As the curtain opens and lights come up Stage Left, it is shortly afterward, in Alex's house. Debbie is in the living room, wearing another nice dress, but her shoes are by the kitchen table; she goes to her purse on the desk and takes out some lipstick and applies it, then fixes her hair and checks herself in the mirror near the front door.*

**DEBBIE.** (*Calling to bedroom.*) I had a great time last night. I've been wanting to go to Gavelli's since I heard about it. (*Smiling deviously.*) And, well...I really enjoyed myself afterward, as well. (*No response from the bedroom.*) I really should get going. (*Looks toward door.*) Are you listening?

**RUSSELL.** (*Enters from the bedrooms RC. He is late-thirties, about Alex's size but more fit; he's wearing pajama bottoms and a t-shirt.*) Yes, I'm listening. (*RUSSELL comes up behind Debbie and wraps his arms around her.*) All except the part about you leaving. (*He kisses her neck.*) I think you should stay.



## WHAT WE NEED

**DEBBIE.** Russell, stop. We're already treading thin ice here. What if Al comes in? This would crush him.

**RUSSELL.** You mean it *will* crush him. He's going to find out sometime.

**DEBBIE.** I suppose he will. I don't see how he wouldn't...eventually.

**RUSSELL.** Better sooner than later, I say.

**DEBBIE.** Doesn't it bother you? How he'll feel? (*Debbie pulls away from Russell.*) He is your friend, right?

**RUSSELL.** He's a friend, yes. We've known each other a long time, but it's not like we're best buddies or anything.

**DEBBIE.** He's your roommate.

**RUSSELL.** I know. (*Russell sits down heavily at the kitchen table, sighs.*) But it was supposed to be a temporary gig, until he got on his feet. (*Gives Debbie a look.*) I don't know that he ever will.

**DEBBIE.** Regardless. I don't want to be cruel. I don't want to date him, but he seems like a nice enough guy. I don't want to be heartless.

**RUSSELL.** If you don't want to date him, why did you go out with him in the first place?

**DEBBIE.** Honestly? (*Shakes her head.*) I thought he was you.

**RUSSELL.** Me?!

**DEBBIE.** I was new. I was asking around, gaining some intel, and your name came up. Someone described you, and...well, you're about the same age and... (*Embarrassed.*) Oh, I don't know. We ran into each other one day and I started some small talk. The next thing I knew he fumbled his way into asking me out.

**RUSSELL.** Fumbled his way? (*Stands.*) I don't know what kind of intel you got on me, but how could you have mistaken Al for me?

**DEBBIE.** It was a mistake, okay? (*Defensively.*) Anyway, I did go out with him, and now that you and I are dating, we should be sensitive to the situation. (*Debbie slips into her shoes and gets her purse from the desk.*)

**RUSSELL.** The situation. That's an interesting way of putting it.

**DEBBIE.** (*Debbie checks her watch.*) I really have to go. (*She goes to Russell and kisses him.*) We'll have to figure all this out some other time.

## WHAT WE NEED

**RUSSELL.** When will that be? (*Russell wraps his arms around Debbie tightly, kisses her again.*)

**DEBBIE.** (*Between more kisses.*) I don't know. (*As she's backing toward the front door, still wrapped in Russell's arms.*) Maybe tomorrow?

**RUSSELL.** I can't wait.

**DEBBIE.** You'll have to. (*Kisses him one last time, then turns and opens the door to see Alex standing there, holding a couple of grocery bags.*) Al! Hi there.

**RUSSELL.** (*Backing away from Debbie quickly.*) Hey, man. Look who showed up.

**ALEX.** (*Entering UC.*) Hi. (*Alex looks from Russell to Debbie.*) What are you doing here?

**DEBBIE.** (*Stumbling a bit.*) I, uh...well, I stopped by to see you.

**ALEX.** I didn't know you were coming. I tried calling you last night, but I just got your voicemail. (*A moment of silence.*) I left a message.

**DEBBIE.** Yes. That's right. (*Debbie looks at Russell for help but finds none.*) I know, and that's why I'm here. (*Collecting herself.*) I got your message and thought I'd respond in person.

**ALEX.** Oh. When did you get here? (*Sets grocery bags on the table.*)

**DEBBIE.** Um, only a few minutes ago. (*Looks at Russell again.*)

**RUSSELL.** Yeah, she just got here. A few minutes ago. (*Awkwardly giving more information than necessary.*) I was in the bedroom, getting ready to take a shower. I heard someone knocking, so I came out and it was her. At the door.

**DEBBIE.** Yep. We barely had time to say our hellos, and there you were.

**ALEX.** Were you leaving already?

**DEBBIE.** Leaving?

**ALEX.** Yes. You opened the door as I was about to come in.

**DEBBIE.** Oh, yes. Well...I thought since you weren't here, I'd come back some other time.

**ALEX.** (*Upbeat, accepting the story.*) Now that I'm here, you don't have to run off.

## WHAT WE NEED

**DEBBIE.** I can't stay. You see, I was in the neighborhood and thought I'd stop by—but only for a minute.

**ALEX.** If you had called...I was on my way, and we could have coordinated our efforts, so to speak.

**RUSSELL.** *(Making his escape.)* I'm going to grab that shower. *(Turns to Debbie, holds out his hand.)* It was nice to meet you, Debbie. *(She looks at Alex, then takes Russell's hand.)* Maybe we'll see each other at work sometime.

**DEBBIE.** Yes, I'm sure we will.

**RUSSELL.** *(Russell slaps Alex on the back.)* Later, man. *(Russell exits RC.)*

**ALEX.** I still wish you didn't have to go already.

**DEBBIE.** We'll figure out something soon, when we can spend longer than a few minutes together. *(Debbie moves toward the front door.)*

**ALEX.** I really am looking forward to having a full date.

**DEBBIE.** You'll just have to be patient, Al. *(Debbie flashes Alex a big smile.)* I'll see you soon. We'll go somewhere nice.

**ALEX.** Maybe we could go to that place you told me about—Gavelli's?

**DEBBIE.** Sure. That would be great. *(She opens the door, then stops, turns again to Alex. He leans forward for a kiss; she reluctantly lets him kiss her—on the cheek.)* Bye now. *(Debbie exits UC.)*

**ALEX.** *(Looks out the window, then turns and looks at the door to the bedrooms. The phone rings; Alex looks at it, then again at the door to the bedrooms. After another ring Alex answers the phone.)* Hello?

**MOM.** *(Appears far DL, outside the set of Alex's living room. She is seated next to her phone table, still holding a cane.)* Son? Is that you?

**ALEX.** Hey, Mom. Yes, it's me.

**MOM.** You sound funny. Is anything wrong?

**ALEX.** No, nothing's wrong. I was thinking about something.

*(Focusing.)* And I wasn't expecting you to call. Why *are* you calling?

**MOM.** Well, you didn't call me last week. I thought I'd better check in.

**ALEX.** I know. It was my weekend with the kids, and I thought we could go a few extra days. I would have called on Friday like usual.

**MOM.** I know, but I didn't want to wait. We need to talk about something.

## WHAT WE NEED

**ALEX.** That sounds ominous.

**MOM.** Don't be so pessimistic. It's nothing bad. Besides, I also want to hear about your date.

**ALEX.** Mom...

**MOM.** It won't kill you to share with me. *(No response.)* Come on, now. How did it go?

**ALEX.** I'd rather not talk about it yet. I'm still trying to self-assess.

**MOM.** Oh, my. Son, you're too analytical.

**ALEX.** Probably true. *(Lost in thought.)* So, what's this dreadful news?

**MOM.** I never said it was dreadful.

**ALEX.** No, but how often do you begin a conversation by saying, "We need to talk about something"? *(Alex goes to the window and looks out again, then moves to the couch; as he's about to sit down, he sees Debbie's scarf. He picks it up, then looks again at the door to the bedrooms.)*

**MOM.** I doubt that I've ever begun a conversation that way, but we must sit down sometime and talk. Is there any way that you might come by the house? I don't want you to make anything of this, but I do want to see you in person. *(There is no response from Alex.)* Son? Are you there?

**ALEX.** *(Coming to.)* Yeah, I'm here. Look, Mom, I have to go. I'll call you later.

**MOM.** Why? What's happened? You can't fool me. I know something is wrong.

**ALEX.** I'll explain when we talk. I'll call you soon and we'll make plans.

**MOM.** Well, all right. If you have to go. Are you *sure* you're okay?

**ALEX.** Yeah, I'm fine. *(Alex hangs up.)* I just need to get out of here for a while. *(Lights fade Stage Left.)*

### END OF ACT 1

***THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS—***

***ORDER A COPY AT [WWW.NEXTSTAGEPRESS.COM](http://WWW.NEXTSTAGEPRESS.COM)***