

NEIGHBORHOOD SAMPLING

By

Jessica Chipman

NEIGHBORHOOD SAMPLING

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NEIGHBORHOOD SAMPLING

Endless gratitude to my playwriting teacher, Elise Forier Edie, whose delight made me feel like I was a playwright, even all those years ago.

NEIGHBORHOOD SAMPLING

CAST

JEREMY'S MOTHER	A woman in her 40s.
JEREMY	A boy, 16.
LEON	A man, 30s-40s. Married to Mona.
MONA	A woman, 30-40. Married to Leon.
TOBY	A man in a unicorn costume.
MICK	A man in his 30s.
RILEY	A man in his 40s.
ELLEN	A girl, 17.

PLACE: Middle America.

TIME: The present and the past.

FROM THE AUTHOR: With use of imaginative design and staging, Mick can be doubled by the actor playing Leon. The Voice at the top of Act I, Scene 2 may be pre-recorded, voiced offstage by the actor playing Riley, or delivered in a creative manner not listed here. If budget and timing allow, Mona should carry a different handbag in each scene.

NEIGHBORHOOD SAMPLING

NEIGHBORHOOD SAMPLING

ACT I
SCENE I

There is a bed, a desk and chair, and a nightstand. Rock climbing posters decorate the space and various clothes are scattered throughout the room. A vase of flowers rests on the nightstand. A climbing rope, with carabiners attached, is looped around the bedpost. On the desk are two climbing harnesses and two climbing helmets. There is a large window on one of the walls. The bedroom door, which is slightly ajar, is on the wall opposite the window. Beyond the door, we can see onto the hallway wall, which is the home for decorative plates, all of which have unicorns on them. A supertitle script flashes: "The recent past."

JEREMY'S MOTHER. *(Off, from somewhere beyond the doorway.) . . .*

So I'm going to make a grocery list and you will have to get the groceries while I'm at the doctor. And no sugary cereal this time, Jeremy! You know it rots a person from the inside out, and you dump four bowls at a time into that worm hole of a stomach every morning, I swear. I saw on a news show that teenagers' teeth are so putrefied they're falling out into their hands like coins out of a slot machine, but that is no jackpot, let me tell you! But do those teenagers ever stop? No, they just plug in their earbuds, make out with the person next to them, and suck down more energy drinks. *(As she speaks, JEREMY appears at the window and climbs inside. He carries a backpack and wears a t-shirt, jeans, sneakers, and a baseball cap. He tosses the cap on the bed and rummages in the pack until he finds a fancy handbag, which he rifles through. He dumps out assorted make-up cases, combs, and pill bottles until he finds a baseball card. He examines it, then stuffs it in his back pocket. He gets to the wallet, drops the purse, and yanks out the cash. He counts. There are three twenty-dollar bills. He*

NEIGHBORHOOD SAMPLING

counts again, then pockets the cash and tosses the wallet on the floor. Dejected, he slumps onto the bed. He glances at his phone. After a moment, unnoticed by Jeremy, a man wearing a suit appears at the window. This is LEON. Leon is winded and has a difficult time climbing through the window. He sees Jeremy, then adopts a fierce stance.)

LEON. Okay—you. You. Buddy. You give me my wife’s purse. Or—else!

JEREMY. What are you doing in my room?

LEON. I said, give my wife’s purse back. *(Leon puts his hand to his pocket.)* I have a knife. I don’t want to have to use it.

JEREMY. I don’t have any purse. *(They look at the purse at Jeremy’s feet.)*

LEON. There! I see it! Right there. That’s my wife’s purse! *(Jeremy grabs the purse from the floor, puts it behind his back, and bounds onto the bed.)*

JEREMY. You’re crazy climbing into my window. I’m gonna call my dad. He’ll come in here and whoop you.

LEON. *(Nervously.)* No, buddy, don’t do that. Look. I know it was you. You were wearing that—that baseball cap right there. You stole my wife’s purse off the bench at the ice cream place on the corner. Just give it back. You can keep the cash. I just need the purse.

JEREMY. Oh yeah? What if I want the purse?

LEON. Why would you want my wife’s purse?

JEREMY. Oh, I love purses. I collect them. I wear them out all the time. This one will go great with my Jordans.

LEON. Enough, kid, just give it back! I told you, I don’t want to have to use this knife. *(Leon lunges for the purse and winds up face-down on the bed. Jeremy is by the desk, purse in hand.)*

JEREMY’S MOTHER. *(Off.)* And! I googled teen pregnancy to check up on statistics, and guess what? Teen pregnancy is no longer fashionable! Jeremy, don’t you dare go getting someone pregnant, do you hear me? I mean it! And fetal alcohol syndrome . . . don’t get me started. It stays with a person, Jeremy. I once knew a woman who had a pig nose. Her nose looked just like a snout. She told me it was because she had fetal alcohol syndrome. And I said to her, “still?” *(As Jeremy’s Mother speaks, Jeremy and Leon go motionless. Jeremy goes to the door and peeks into the*

NEIGHBORHOOD SAMPLING

hallway. He checks his watch. Leon sees a chance and goes for the purse, but is stopped on his way to the door by a series of sneezes. Jeremy motions for Leon to be quiet, but he cannot stop sneezing. Leon pulls a handkerchief from his pocket and blows loudly into it. Jeremy grabs Leon by the jacket, shushing him.)

JEREMY. Shut up, man! Shut up! She's gonna hear you.

LEON. *(Wiping nose. Pitifully.)* Let me go! C'mon, let me go! *(Sneezes into handkerchief again, then plugs his nose. Through his nose.)* I think they're done.

JEREMY. *(Releasing him.)* Jeez. Loud enough. *(Jeremy peers out the door again.)*

LEON. *(Sitting on the bed, sniffing.)* Allergies. Must be those flowers. *(Leon points to the vase on the nightstand. Jeremy checks his phone, the purse still clenched in his arms.)*

LEON. Was that your mom? Maybe I should go tell her you stole my wife's purse.

JEREMY. *(Unfazed.)* You could do that. She's a little busy, though. She's watching her shows until she goes to work, and she can only be bothered during the ads. Courtroom drama marathons. Super important. You don't want to know what happens if her routine is interrupted, but you could try, I guess.

LEON. *(With mock certainty.)* Maybe I should. Maybe she needs to know her son is a thief.

JEREMY. Yeah, or you could just use your knife on me. That could work, too. Then you wouldn't have to wait for a commercial.

LEON. You're full of it, kid. I'm marching right in there—

JEREMY. *(Runs to the door, blocking Leon's way.)* Don't go out there, man.

LEON. Let me by.

JEREMY. I'm not joking. You don't want to— *(Leon tries to push past Jeremy, who grabs the flowers off the nightstand and waves them beneath Leon's nose. Distracted, Leon sneezes and coughs. Jeremy grabs the chair from the desk, sits Leon down in it, yanks the rope from the bedpost, and ties Leon to the chair.)*

NEIGHBORHOOD SAMPLING

LEON. *(Through his handkerchief.)* What the—knock it off! What are you doing? Stop this now! Help! Hel— *(Before Leon can get the second “Help” out, he sneezes again, and Jeremy uses this opportunity to gag him with a sock. Jeremy checks the door again. Leon squirms and pleads through the sock.)*

JEREMY. Nope. Sorry. *(Leon has quieted. Jeremy removes the sock.)*
What’s your name?

LEON. *(Gasping.)* Leon.

JEREMY. *(Replacing the sock.)* Sorry, Leon. It’s for your own good. You don’t wanna go out there. Trust me. I have to go get something. I’ll be right back. *(Jeremy opens the door slowly, holds a finger to his mouth to indicate Leon should be quiet, and exits into the hallway with the purse, knocking into the plates on the wall. Jeremy turns around to “right” the plates. When he is certain they will not fall off the wall, he leans into the room, holds his finger to his mouth again, and exits. Leon alternates attempts at screaming for help and squirming out of his binds. After Leon has worn himself out, he sighs and his head sags to his chest. MONA appears at the window, unseen by Leon. She peers through the glass, sees Leon, shakes her head, and climbs nimbly through the window, barreling at him. She wears a pantsuit and is coiffed and manicured to perfection.)*

MONA. Leon Peabody, for Heaven’s sake! What, in the name of all that is holy, is going on!?! *(Leon starts at the sound of her voice, then begins pleading with her through the sock.)* I mean, my God, I have been waiting down there for seventeen whole minutes! There I am, holding Buddy’s hand and telling him to be brave as mucus runs down his face and all over my hands, and that his father is going to get Mommy’s purse back and everything will be okay, and look at what you’ve done! I mean, my God, Leon! You’ve turned yourself into a hostage! *(Pause.)* Well? How are you going to fix this, Leon? How? *(She waits. Leon begins to plead again, but she interrupts and begins to untie him.)* No, I don’t want to hear it. I do not want to hear one more excuse out of that mouth of yours. I have had it! *(Mona has now untied him.)* You know what? No. No, I am not doing this. *(She starts tying him up. Leon pleads furiously.)* You can get yourself out of this on your own. That’s right. I am sick and tired of doing everything by myself in this family. *(She finishes tying him up and crosses to the*

NEIGHBORHOOD SAMPLING

window.) Leon Peabody, grow a backbone for once in your life! (Mona makes to leave, then turns back.) And don't you even bother coming home if you don't get yourself out of this mess with that purse and everything in it. Buddy and I will be just fine without you. (Mona climbs out the window. Stunned, Leon does not move. JEREMY enters from the hallway carrying a moped helmet. He leaves the door wide open and sets the helmet on the desk.)

JEREMY. How we doin', Leon? Look, I have to leave in a few minutes, so— *(Leon is crying little fitful sobs. Jeremy notices and crouches to his level.)* If I untie you, will you promise not to go get my mom? *(Leon nods through his sobs. Jeremy removes the sock and rope. Leon continues to cry and blow his nose into his handkerchief.)*

LEON. Thank you. *(Composing himself.)* Please. You don't know how important this is. Just give me the purse. You can keep the cash.

JEREMY. Call it a loss. Get your wife another purse.

LEON. There's something in there I need.

JEREMY. *(Motions to the floor.)* There's all the stuff that was in the purse. *(Leon kneels and rifles through the assorted purse droppings as Jeremy looks on.)*

LEON. Alright, where is it?

JEREMY. Where's what?

LEON. Quit messing with me and just give it back.

JEREMY. Don't know what you mean.

LEON. *(Grabbing Jeremy by the arm, his hand in his pocket.)* There was a baseball card in my wife's purse. I bought it at an auction today before we went out for ice cream. This card is what my son wants more than anything. You give it to me right now, or I'm going to use my knife!

JEREMY. You don't have a knife, Leon.

LEON. Yes I do! And it's . . . sharp. And scary.

JEREMY. No you don't. You came in and said, "I have a knife, and I don't want to have to use it." They only say that on some fake-ass t.v. *(Leon starts sobbing again and, releasing Jeremy, collapses on the bed.)*

LEON. Oh, God. What am I going to do? *(Between sobs, Leon sneezes again and tries to cover both with his handkerchief.)*

JEREMY. *(Moves desk chair to face Leon, sits.)* Look, I have an idea. Do

NEIGHBORHOOD SAMPLING

you make a lot of money, Leon? (*Leon nods between sobs.*) Like—like a lot of money, Leon? (*Leon nods again.*) Here's my idea. You give me fifty thousand dollars, and I will give you— (*Jeremy reaches into his back pocket and takes out the baseball card.*) —this.

JEREMY'S MOTHER. (*Off.*) So I removed all the hair spray, rubber cement, and paint from the house. I know what all the teenagers are doing, Jeremy. And if you ever think of manufacturing, soliciting, or smuggling drug paraphernalia from the back of your moped, I will have you put into an orange jumpsuit quicker than you can say “methamphetamine hotbed.” (*As Jeremy's Mother speaks, Jeremy checks his phone again, growing more agitated. He puts the water bottle in his backpack, throws on a sweatshirt over his t-shirt, and crams the moped helmet onto his head.*)

LEON. So—Jeremy, right? C'mon. There's no way I'm going to pay you that much money. You keep the cash from the wallet and we'll call it even.

JEREMY. No good, Leon. Fifty grand or nothing. Look, she's going to want me to get groceries once her show's over, and I have some geology homework to start on, so . . .

LEON. Come on, kid. What do you want with fifty grand?

JEREMY. You know, the usual for a kid like me. Pot. Meth. Sex workers.

LEON. P-p-prostitutes? (*Jeremy crosses back to the door and checks his phone.*)

JEREMY. C'mon. You're rich. You said it.

LEON. (*Stands.*) No.

JEREMY. You sure about that? (*Leon nods. At the door, Jeremy takes the baseball card and holds it above his head.*) I'll rip it to shreds right now.

LEON. (*Sneezes and plugs his nose.*) Nope.

JEREMY. I'm not playing. I'll do it. (*Raises card again.*)

LEON. You won't do it. (*Points to baseball cap.*) You're a fan. You're not going to destroy a card that precious.

JEREMY. Yeah? Watch me! (*A standoff. After a beat, Jeremy throws the card in Leon's face.*) Fine! Go back to your wife and your kid and give him the baseball card and give her the purse back, and everyone will be happy, and I'll go get the groceries. (*Pause.*) Except that I can't, because there's no money.

JEREMY'S MOTHER. (*Off.*) Jeremy? I'm almost done! The mother is

NEIGHBORHOOD SAMPLING

going to tell the father that she killed their dog and put the body in the freezer. I knew it! I knew it from the beginning! It was the close-up on the cocker spaniel.

JEREMY. I need eighteen dollars and twenty-seven cents. Leon, give me eighteen dollars and twenty-seven cents. *(Pause.)* Please.

LEON. I said you could have the cash from the wallet.

JEREMY. That's not enough. There was only sixty bucks. I need seventy-eight twenty-seven. And I need it by the time my mom's show is over.

LEON. Why?

JEREMY. It's my mom's grocery money for the week. I took it to buy a girl flowers.

LEON. *(Pointing to vase.)* Those flowers?

JEREMY. No, those were the cheap ones I got first, before I heard about camellias. *(Pause.)* My mom read me this book a few years back where this kid gets a present from an old lady. It's a white camellia, and then the kid's dad says the old lady is the bravest person he's ever known. It reminded me of a girl in the grade above me whose dad died last year, and then she came back to school and was really nice to everyone, even though she could have been a horrible person and no one would have blamed her. I thought she was brave like the lady in the book, and I wanted to get her a camellia.

LEON. And it cost seventy-eight dollars?

JEREMY. When I went to the flower store they told me the camellias are grown somewhere in the south and had to be specially shipped. I took my mom's grocery money and placed the order. Then I panicked about the money—

LEON. —and stole my wife's purse.

JEREMY. Because she looked like a lady who didn't have to worry about grocery money.

JEREMY'S MOTHER. *(Off.)* I put the money in the breadbox on the counter yesterday. Remember to wear your helmet when you leave! I will not be all teary on the news when they call me to say your skull has been crushed after a semi-trailer ran you over because you were selling drugs from the back of your moped on the side of the highway!

LEON. Why don't you ask your friends for money?

NEIGHBORHOOD SAMPLING

JEREMY. Don't really have many. My mom's kind of . . . protective.

JEREMY'S MOTHER. . . . and your father, God rest him, would wake his grave neighbors with his roaring if he knew you were wearing that baseball cap he gave you instead of a helmet. *(Leon takes a twenty dollar bill from his wallet and hands it to Jeremy, sneezing.)*

LEON. *(Through a plugged nose.)* Keep the change.

JEREMY. Thanks.

(Leon picks up the baseball card, the purse items, and the purse, his arms loaded down. He walks to the window and climbs onto the ledge.)

LEON. Good luck with the groceries. Whoa. It's a long way down there. Oh yeah—you know those plates you have hanging in the hallway? Next time you need grocery money, sell one of those. They're collector's items.

JEREMY. Thanks, Leon. *(Leon gives a wave and disappears below the window. Jeremy slings his pack over his shoulder, walks to the door, then pauses. He takes his helmet off, puts it on the nightstand, and grabs the baseball cap. He looks at the cap for a moment, then puts it on and exits into the hallway.)*

JEREMY'S MOTHER. *(Off.)* Don't forget what I said about the sugary cereal! Teeth that fall out and insides that rot! Jeremy! Maintain those molars. Take care of yourself, Jeremy. Rot and decay, rot and decay! *(TOBY, a man in a unicorn costume, appears in the hallway as Jeremy's Mother speaks. He leans in the doorway and looks around Jeremy's bedroom.)*

SCENE 2

We're in a department store with a long counter. Various cosmetics products are displayed on and around the counter. Behind the counter is a shelf that holds a variety of perfume bottles, all of which have been arranged meticulously. A rack with expensive-looking handbags sits at one end of the counter, as does a small mirror. Holiday music plays and a supertitle flashes: "Ten years earlier."

VOICE. *(Off, above the music.)* . . . For those reasons, our corporate office has required that you sell over five thousand dollars' worth of product

NEIGHBORHOOD SAMPLING

today or, unfortunately, we will be forced to terminate your employment.

MONA. *(Off.)* What? Oh my god. I knew my numbers were a low, but—five thousand?!

VOICE. *(Off.)* Your situation is unfortunate, but you have known the sales requirement since you were hired. And, as I mentioned, the customer complaints we've received have not helped your case.

MONA. *(Off.)* Those were taken out of context! Why would I purposely ask a man his net worth? And that old busybody who said I was belligerent—

VOICE. *(Off.)* His words were “hostile” and “verbally explosive.”

MONA. *(Off.)* Yes, well, he was a sniveler. He sniveled. Then there was a woman who couldn't manage her children. Someone had to do something about that noise with all our customers around!

VOICE. *(Off.)* Look, this position just doesn't seem to be a good fit. But it isn't over yet. You still have time today.

MONA. *(Off.)* Five thousand dollars. I couldn't sell half that in a week!

VOICE. *(Off.)* It is our busiest time of year . . . Your shift starts in a few minutes. We'll review the situation at the end of the day. *(After a few moments, MONA enters, carrying bottles of perfume and fashionably attired. She arranges the bottles on the shelf, then turns around, ready to greet the day. She sighs, blinks away tears, then returns to the bottles, rearranging them. JEREMY'S MOTHER approaches the counter. She wears trendy clothes and carries a big, worn bag. Mona turns around.)*

MONA. *(Pleasantly.)* Hello. How may I help you today?

JEREMY'S MOTHER. I guess I don't know.

MONA. Perhaps you'd like a free makeover. I'm allowed to do two per day, and I think we could really freshen you up.

JEREMY'S MOTHER. No, thank you. I'm in a bit of a hurry.

MONA. *(Deflated.)* I see. *(Jeremy's Mother doesn't appear to be in a hurry. She wanders the length of the counter looking at various items, while MONA busies herself with the perfumes.)*

JEREMY'S MOTHER. I'm on my lunch break. *(Leaning in. Proudly.)* I work for the judicial branch of the three branches of the government.

MONA. Oh?

JEREMY'S MOTHER. Court stenographer. *(She twiddles her fingers in*

NEIGHBORHOOD SAMPLING

the air as if typing. She laughs.)

MONA. Mmm. That blouse is so flattering on you.

JEREMY'S MOTHER. Oh. Thank you. *(She walks the length of the counter. During the following dialogue, Jeremy's Mother walks to the end of the counter, sifting through the handbags to find one she likes. She picks one up and checks all its pockets. She puts the bag on her shoulder so she now has one bag on each shoulder. She compares them in the mirror.)*

Actually, it's kind of a funny story. I spilled hot cereal all over it this morning, but it's my favorite—you know, it hides all my cowfat, and I knew I'd be out of the house today, so I wanted to wear it anyway. My husband said to use a hot washcloth, but I just sucked it right out of the blouse with my mouth like I was trying to get chewing gum up through a straw. Came right out. See? Good as when I yanked it out of the closet. Then I wiped it down and started the station wagon and drove right down here and here I am.

MONA. I thought you said you were on your lunch break. *(Jeremy's Mother and Mona stare at each other. After a moment, LEON enters. He wears a suit. He approaches the counter. He's out of his element.)*

LEON. Excuse me— *(Mona gives him a keen once-over. Jeremy's Mother returns to the handbags.)*

MONA. *(Warmly, to Leon.)* How may I help you today?

LEON. Oh, I don't know. I suppose—well, I suppose I'm looking for a gift for my mother. A birthday gift.

MONA. What kinds of things does she like?

LEON. Waffles. Um—calamine lotion.

MONA. Pardon me?

LEON. And she's a collector. She loves plates.

MONA. Plates?

LEON. You know, those decorative plates with birds and unicorns painted on them?

JEREMY'S MOTHER. I know the ones.

LEON. Yeah, those.

MONA. Let's start by having you take a look at the lotions in this gift basket. It's quite the steal. *(Mona pulls a large gift basket full of bath products from beneath the counter. Jeremy's Mother has removed her old,*

NEIGHBORHOOD SAMPLING

worn bag from her shoulder and placed it on the rack with the rest of the handbags. She now carries one of the new bags from the rack.) This is simply exquisite! I have one of these baskets myself—

JEREMY'S MOTHER. (*Moving to leave.*) Thanks for the look.

LEON. (*To Mona*) Please don't spray anything. I'm allergic, you see.

MONA. (*To Jeremy's Mother.*) Excuse me. Put down that bag.

LEON. . . . Just these big sneezing fits whenever I smell perfume, or anything with pollen, or—

JEREMY'S MOTHER. (*To Mona.*) Pardon?

MONA. I said, put down that handbag.

JEREMY'S MOTHER. This one? Oh, this is my new handbag.

MONA. (*Pointedly.*) That is clearly one of our handbags.

JEREMY'S MOTHER. Oh yes, I got it here.

MONA. When?

JEREMY'S MOTHER. On my lunch break. (*Jeremy's Mother and Mona stare at each other.*)

LEON. Should I come back another time?

MONA. No. (*Motioning to him.*) You—stay there. (*Leon stands still. Mona moves toward Jeremy's Mother.*) Now, excuse me, but there seems to be some discrepancy about this bag.

JEREMY'S MOTHER. I don't know what you mean. I had a big, old bag that I used for a diaper bag when my son was young but now he's six. I wanted a new bag. Now I have one.

MONA. (*Marching over to the handbags.*) See? The one you're holding is one of ours.

JEREMY'S MOTHER. (*Sighing.*) Haven't we been over this?

MONA. (*Grabbing Jeremy's Mother's old bag off the rack.*) Look. This isn't one of ours.

JEREMY'S MOTHER. Of course not! That's my old bag. (*Mona stomps around the corner to face Jeremy's Mother.*)

LEON. I think I'll come back later.

MONA. (*To Leon.*) Don't. You. Move. (*To Jeremy's Mother.*) Ma'am, give me that bag.

JEREMY'S MOTHER. Whatever for?

MONA. You are attempting to steal that handbag!

NEIGHBORHOOD SAMPLING

JEREMY'S MOTHER. I certainly am not!

MONA. You are! You came in with that bag— (*She points to Jeremy's Mother's old bag.*) —and you are leaving with this bag— (*She points to the new bag on Jeremy's Mother's shoulder.*) —without paying for it.

JEREMY'S MOTHER. Are you accusing me of shoplifting?

MONA. You heard me.

JEREMY'S MOTHER. (*Announcing to no one in particular.*) I have been accused of shoplifting— (*Holds bag above her head.*) —this handbag.

MONA. For the love of God, give it back!

LEON. Now, ladies, let's not raise our voices. (*Jeremy's Mother hoists herself up onto the counter and sits, her right hand raised.*)

JEREMY'S MOTHER. As to the first count, a misdemeanor, I plead . . . not guilty.

MONA. Get down from the counter.

LEON. (*To Mona.*) Can't you call a supervisor?

MONA. I don't think—I don't think that would be the best idea. At least not today. (*To Jeremy's Mother.*) What is your name?

JEREMY'S MOTHER. Are you still accusing me of shoplifting this handbag?

MONA. Of course I am. Give me your name.

JEREMY'S MOTHER. (*Pause. She motions to the gift basket.*) I think I'd like to buy this gift basket.

MONA. Madam, give me your name, or I will personally have you escorted out of our store.

JEREMY'S MOTHER. (*Stands on counter, announcing.*) This employee is refusing a sale to me and threatening to have me thrown out of the store! Is this the behavior of—

MONA. Quiet! Get down from there!

JEREMY'S MOTHER. —a well-intentioned employee? I should say not!

LEON. (*To Mona.*) You can't call someone?

MONA. I—no, they wouldn't—I just can't. You do something!

LEON. Me?

MONA. Yes, you! Fix this!

LEON. (*Staring at Jeremy's Mother.*) I don't think I could.

NEIGHBORHOOD SAMPLING

JEREMY'S MOTHER. (*Still announcing.*) If this behavior continues, I will have no choice but to file charges of personal grievances against this employee on behalf of my client, who is myself. (*Mona glares at Leon.*)

LEON. (*To Jeremy's Mother.*) Perhaps we could lower our voice a tad—

JEREMY'S MOTHER. (*Still announcing.*) I have the right to remain silent, as does this woman. Anything she says or does could be used against her in a court of law.

LEON. Okay, well, uh—um, you know those unicorn plates?

MONA. (*To Leon.*) Louder!

JEREMY'S MOTHER. (*Louder.*) Court of law!

LEON. (*Also louder.*) I said, do you know those unicorn plates?

JEREMY'S MOTHER. (*Glancing at Leon.*) I do.

LEON. You have some of those?

JEREMY'S MOTHER. (*Sitting on the counter.*) My husband does. They were his mother's.

LEON. Uh, neat. Well, my mom has a lot of them. We're—actually, we're trying to sell them.

JEREMY'S MOTHER. Oh?

LEON. Online auctions. Not going so well.

JEREMY'S MOTHER. Hmm. (*Pause.*) My husband might like more of those.

(During the following lines, Mona frantically searches through Jeremy's Mother's old handbag for her identification. She dumps the contents on the floor, but finds no billfold or clutch.)

MONA. (*To Leon, sotto voce.*) Keep going!

LEON. Uh, well. I'm sure we could arrange some sort of agreement.

JEREMY'S MOTHER. I'm sure we could arrange some sort of agreement. (*She stares him down.*)

LEON. Yes. A—reasonable one. Monetarily, I mean.

JEREMY'S MOTHER. (*Snorts.*) What else? Come by the county hospital across the street, room two-oh-three. I'm there every day.

MONA. I thought you said you were a courtroom clerk.

JEREMY'S MOTHER. Objection! Irrelevance, from a very annoying and desperate woman. Ever heard of a leave of absence? My husband needs me.

NEIGHBORHOOD SAMPLING

MONA. Your husband?

JEREMY'S MOTHER. That's right. Prognosis unknown. It could be ten weeks, it could be ten years. (*Jeremy's Mother hops down from the counter and gathers the items from her original bag.*)

LEON. Oh. I'm—uh—

JEREMY'S MOTHER. He keeps busy. He watches baseball on television. As for me, I find it dulls the senses, you know, being the bedside companion, doing the same thing over and over, day after day. You know what I mean.

MONA. (*Surprising herself.*) . . . I do.

JEREMY'S MOTHER. Every once in a while, you've got to get out to see if you're still you. (*She puts the items back into the old bag and returns the designer bag back to the rack and shoulders the old bag. To Leon.*)

Room two-oh-three. He'll love them. They remind him of his mother.

LEON. Room two-oh-three. Okay then.

JEREMY'S MOTHER. (*Turns to leave.*) Ladies and gentlemen, we are adjourned. (*She exits.*)

LEON. (*Wilts.*) Oh. Oh, that was so scary.

MONA. What a nightmare.

LEON. I almost fainted. Do you have any water?

MONA. I mean, that took guts. (*Surveys him.*) And you, too. With the plates.

LEON. Oh God. Could I have a chair? I feel dizzy. The plates! (*He slumps against the counter.*)

MONA. What's the matter? Stand up straight! (*He straightens.*) You fixed it, didn't you?

LEON. Mother's plates! All she does is collect things! Those plates were a set. She'll disown me when she realizes they're gone. I'll have to hole up in the attic again. I think I feel my ulcer . . .

MONA. (*Poised.*) Well. Did you know our women's handbags are part of a designer collector's series? In fact, the entire series is right here on this rack. It's divine and one-of-a-kind but, of course, a bit pricey.

LEON. A collector's series? The handbags?

MONA. What did you say your price range was?

LEON. Oh, I don't know . . .

NEIGHBORHOOD SAMPLING

MONA. You were so wonderful just now.

LEON. What?

MONA. You know, helping me. I could allow a five percent discount, if you wanted to buy the entire series.

LEON. *(Pause.)* What's the price?

MONA. All together, the total should be around . . . five thousand dollars.

LEON. Five thousand? Oh boy.

MONA. I'll just start ringing them up.

LEON. Well—

MONA. What did you say your name was?

LEON. Leon.

MONA. *(Extending her hand.)* Leon, I'm Mona.

LEON. Good to meet you.

MONA. *(Grinning as they shake hands.)* Likewise.

SCENE 3

A hospital room. There is a hospital bed, a television, and an EKG monitor close to the bed. Jeremy's Mother's handbag rests at the foot of a plush reclining chair, which faces the television. Used tissues adorn the chair and the floor around the chair. MICK and TOBY lie together in a hospital bed. Mick wears a hospital gown and is asleep in the arms of Toby, who is awake. Mick is hooked up to the EKG monitor and an IV drip. Faint noise comes from the television. A supertitle flashes: "Six years earlier."

JEREMY'S MOTHER. *(Off.)* When I ring the bell for room service, I expect someone to come immediately, not at any old time they fancy. Is this or is this not a hospital? *(She backs into the room carrying an armload of tissue boxes. When she turns around, we see she is pregnant.)*

Emergencies could be happening at any second! Certain plagues may have ended years ago, but it takes one rodent to send us all to our deaths! Decapitations. Dismemberments. Proliferations of spores. Attacks of the heart. *(Pause. She crosses back to address someone beyond the door.)*

NEIGHBORHOOD SAMPLING

My emergency was of timely import! I was about to rub my nose raw with the back of my hand, yet you all didn't seem to care one iota! *(She turns and sees Toby holding Mick. Toby gives a little wave. Jeremy's Mother sighs. She arranges the tissue boxes around the chair to her liking, then pulls out a handful of tissues and sits in the chair. She watches television. After a moment, RILEY enters with a chart beneath his arm and a stethoscope around his neck. He wears scrubs and a nametag. Toby is invisible to him.)*

RILEY. Good afternoon, Mrs.—

JEREMY'S MOTHER. What's the matter? Is there something wrong with my husband? I demand to know what's going on.

RILEY. *(Taking in the tissue situation.)* Sorry for startling you. I'm just here for a routine check.

JEREMY'S MOTHER. *(Suspicious.)* I haven't seen you here before, and we have been here on many occasions. They say there will be more.

RILEY. Unfortunately, they're right. *(Riley mutes the television, then walks over to check Mick's monitor and IV. He puts the stethoscope to his ears.)* I am not usually on this rotation, but I'm filling in for someone. My shift ends in— *(Checks watch.)* Two minutes. Just came by to check on him before I go off duty.

JEREMY'S MOTHER. What is your name?

RILEY. I'm Riley. *(He holds the stethoscope to Mick's chest and checks Mick's pulse.)*

JEREMY'S MOTHER. Do you have a photo ID?

RILEY. Uh, my nametag is right here.

JEREMY'S MOTHER. Anyone could make that in their basement with ingenuity, plastic, and a pair of scissors.

RILEY. Oh. *(Digs out wallet.)* Here's my license. And my nurse's license certification card.

JEREMY'S MOTHER. This is a very good photo of you. You look handsome here.

RILEY. That's very nice of you.

JEREMY'S MOTHER. *(Handing the cards back.)* It says here Riley is your last name.

RILEY. That's right.

NEIGHBORHOOD SAMPLING

JEREMY'S MOTHER. Funny you didn't mention that. I find it very intriguing when people are called by last names. It has a roguish quality.

RILEY. Is that so?

JEREMY'S MOTHER. That's quite so, Riley.

RILEY. Well, call me Riley all you like.

JEREMY'S MOTHER. I think I will, Riley.

RILEY. Very well. I just have a couple of questions before I take off. Has your husband awakened since his afternoon medication?

JEREMY'S MOTHER. Side-stepping. You're a slippery one, huh?

RILEY. Is that a no?

JEREMY'S MOTHER. No. And when he is awake, he isn't himself. It leaves me feeling cheated. *(Pause.)* Have you ever cheated?

RILEY. *(Checking the chart and IV.)* Hmm? Well, everything seems to be in order here.

JEREMY'S MOTHER. A hospital can be a very exciting place. Am I right, Riley?

RILEY. *(Making a note.)* I suppose. Now, before I go, there is the delicate matter of the consent form . . .

JEREMY'S MOTHER. Enchanting, even.

TOBY. *(From the bed.)* Enchanting. There's a word. *(Jeremy's Mother glares at him.)*

RILEY. Enchanting? I guess I hadn't thought about it that way. *(He approaches Jeremy's Mother with his clipboard in hand.)* If you would be so kind. *(He extends the clipboard and pen to her.)* And how are you feeling today?

JEREMY'S MOTHER. Oh, a bit . . . a-flutter, all of a sudden.

RILEY. *(Checks watch.)* A-flutter?

JEREMY'S MOTHER. I'm ashamed to say it.

RILEY. Heart palpitations? Shortness of breath?

JEREMY'S MOTHER. *(Enjoying this.)* Can anyone blame me?

TOBY. Yes.

RILEY. Let's just have a look here. Have a seat, please. *(Jeremy's Mother throws the tissue boxes to the side and bounds onto the chair, elevating the footrest. Riley frowns at this, then takes out his stethoscope. He blows on it.)* These are always a little cold at first.

NEIGHBORHOOD SAMPLING

JEREMY'S MOTHER. Breathe on it all you like, Doctor.

RILEY. (*Chuckling.*) Oh, no no. I'm a nurse, remember?

JEREMY'S MOTHER. Nurse. Yes, that's right.

RILEY. (*Placing the stethoscope on her chest.*) Have you been forgetting things lately? Any trouble concentrating?

JEREMY'S MOTHER. (*Stares at him.*) Only since you walked in the room.

TOBY. (*Shifts his position in the bed, crosses his arms.*) Uh oh.

RILEY. Uh— (*Clears his throat.*) Breathe deeply. (*Still looking at him, Jeremy's Mother gives two exaggerated breaths. He moves the stethoscope.*) Again. (*She breathes again.*) Right, well, everything sounds fine there. Remember to keep hydrated and try not to engage in any behavior too—uh—strenuous.

JEREMY'S MOTHER. Like what?

RILEY. (*Glances at watch.*) I'm afraid all we need now is to have your signature on this form.

JEREMY'S MOTHER. No, all we need now is for you to take off your shirt.

RILEY. Uh, what?

TOBY. Uh, what?!

JEREMY'S MOTHER. Doctor.

RILEY. Ma'am, I have to leave. I have to be down to obstetrics immediately. Please sign this form. It really should be done tonight.

JEREMY'S MOTHER. Oh, it will be done tonight, Doctor.

RILEY. Look, I don't know if you have me confused with someone else, but—

JEREMY'S MOTHER. Don't play coy, silly. It's me. I'm the one from earlier. (*Whispers.*) From thirty seconds ago.

RILEY. What are you talking about?

JEREMY'S MOTHER. (*Pause.*) That's not what you're supposed to say there.

RILEY. Uh—I suppose it's possible I have the wrong room. I'd better double-check with our people at the front desk. I'll be right back. (*HE exits.*)

JEREMY'S MOTHER. (*As he exits.*) Don't be too long, Doctor Yum-

NEIGHBORHOOD SAMPLING

bottoms! (*Toby leaps up from the bed.*)

TOBY. What is going on?!

JEREMY'S MOTHER. I thought you'd go away. I thought you were a mirage.

TOBY. The heck you did. Mirages are good. You don't like me here.

JEREMY'S MOTHER. Oh. Yeah. An un-mirage then. You can go back to fairyland.

TOBY. No such thing.

JEREMY'S MOTHER. Ah yes. Then heaven. Or hell. Whichever land you came from.

TOBY. You know that if I came from a heaven or hell or anything in between, it's all your personal creation.

JEREMY'S MOTHER. (*Pause.*) Have I been drinking?

TOBY. No.

JEREMY'S MOTHER. So you're a sober—uh—conjuring?

TOBY. Dry as the skin beneath your nose.

JEREMY'S MOTHER. (*Nods.*) Mmm. Hurts. (*Pause.*) I think I am married to that Riley doctor.

TOBY. No. You're married to this guy. (*He gestures to Mick.*)

JEREMY'S MOTHER. I think Riley is my destiny.

TOBY. I think maybe you do need a drink.

JEREMY'S MOTHER. Did you see him in those scrubs?

TOBY. Too much daytime television.

JEREMY'S MOTHER. I think I'm going to do it. I think I'm going to let him have me. I'm finally going to go all the way.

TOBY. (*Points to her belly.*) Newsflash: all the way.

JEREMY'S MOTHER. (*Looks at her belly. Confused.*) What's going on? I feel so—

TOBY. Hormonal?

JEREMY'S MOTHER. Otherworldly.

TOBY. (*Gesturing to his costume.*) Me too.

JEREMY'S MOTHER. No, I mean—like I am looking down on myself. This baby. (*Looks at hospital bed.*) Him.

TOBY. (*Sitting next to her. Gently.*) I knew you'd remember eventually.

JEREMY'S MOTHER. Like my soul is a hummingbird. I'm winged. I

NEIGHBORHOOD SAMPLING

flit from one dream-like state to another. Flutter flutter. Flutter flutter. I've had dreams where I crash to the pavement below. *(Pause.)* Is this a dream? *(Toby shakes his head.)* So. It's a nightmare. *(They sit in silence. Jeremy's Mother crosses to the bed and sits, caressing Mick's forehead. Toby stands by the door.)* Love love love. So much of it.

TOBY. There you go. That's it. *(Toby glances into the hallway.)* Here comes the nurse. Don't forget yourself, now. *(Riley enters.)*

RILEY. It appears I was correct. I'll be out of here quick enough, but we'll need you to sign this consent form before you leave tonight. *(Jeremy's Mother stares at him.)*

TOBY. Uh-oh.

JEREMY'S MOTHER. *(To Riley.)* I think you're my husband.

TOBY. Nope. Nope, this is your husband. *(He moves to sit next to Mick. She blinks at Toby.)*

RILEY. Ma'am, I understand that you've been through a lot recently, and on top of that you're dealing with a lot of physical and hormonal changes—at least, that's what I'm attributing your previous behavior to. However, if this erratic behavior continues, we here at the hospital have no choice but to—

JEREMY'S MOTHER. I'll sign it.

RILEY. What's that?

JEREMY'S MOTHER. I'll sign your form if only you'll just have a seat while I get my own pen, thank you very much. *(Scrounging in purse.)* I know it's here somewhere. *(She dumps out the contents of the purse on the floor.)*

RILEY. Very well. Good. *(Relieved, Riley sits in the chair.)*

JEREMY'S MOTHER. Aha! *(Picks up pen.)* Now, where was that form?

RILEY. Um, it's—

JEREMY'S MOTHER. Ooh, I see it. *(The clipboard is on Riley's lap.)*

TOBY. No no no no. *(In one smooth move, Jeremy's Mother removes the clipboard and straddles a helpless Riley. She tries to kiss him.)*

JEREMY'S MOTHER. Oh, Doctor, I thought this night would never come.

RILEY. Arghh—get off me!

JEREMY'S MOTHER. I love your last name. Riley Riley Riley!

NEIGHBORHOOD SAMPLING

RILEY. I said, get off me! (*Riley grabs her by the shoulders and moves her aside. He stands and brandishes the clipboard over his head.*) Now listen to me! My wife is going into labor as we speak, down in obstetrics, and I am missing it. I have been extremely patient with you. I imagine your circumstances are very difficult at this time, but if you do not sign this consent form right now, you will force me to call not only security, but also our consult from the psychiatric department.

TOBY. (*Appealing to Riley, who does not see him.*) No no, that's not needed. (*To Jeremy's Mother.*) That's not needed, am I right? (*Pause.*) Am I right? (*He goes to her.*) I know you know better. I know you do.

JEREMY'S MOTHER. (*Gathering herself. To Riley.*) I don't know what came over me. You are certainly not going to call any psychiatric department, Nurse, or I will see you in court! Do you hear me? In court! I believe there's no need for me to say the words malpractice suit very loudly in this building, am I correct? Now give me that document. (*Riley hands her the form, which she signs with a flourish.*)

RILEY. (*Clipped.*) Thank you. Someone will look in on your husband in a few hours. (*He exits.*)

JEREMY'S MOTHER. (*Calling after him.*) Congratulations. On the baby. (*After a moment, she crosses to the bed and sits next to Mick. She takes his hand and puts it on her stomach.*) Congratulations. On the baby. (*Silence.*)

TOBY. That's more like it.

JEREMY'S MOTHER. It took me a while, but I got it.

TOBY. No more soap operas. From now on, you're sticking to courtroom dramas. (*Jeremy's Mother returns to the chair and takes out a handful of tissues, then turns the volume up on the tv.*) Time for me to go?

JEREMY'S MOTHER. Stay awhile. (*Toby cradles Mick in his arms.*) Ah! I've seen this one already. The grandmother goes after her abusive husband with an ice pick. Can we really blame her? She was trapped in a world of hurt. Good for you, granny! Good for you!

NEIGHBORHOOD SAMPLING

SCENE 4

A stuffy, fine-dining restaurant. There is one table, set with elegant-yet-old finery. On the table are candles and cloth napkins and a wine bucket with ice. Instrumental music plays. A supertitle flashes: "Six and a half years later." Mona sits at the table wearing a short dress and heels, without one hair out of place. Riley enters with a bottle of wine and flagon of water. He wears a bow tie.

RILEY. I have your sauvignon, madam.

MONA. Thank you. I should bring to your attention that the ladies' room needs a bit of looking after by your custodial staff.

RILEY. Certainly. Thank you for your suggestion. Would you care for a glass now, or shall we wait for your guest?

MONA. A glass now, if you'd be so kind. *(He pours her glass and puts the bottle on ice in the middle of the table.)*

RILEY. Would you like to see a menu?

MONA. No no, let's just wait until my companion arrives.

RILEY. Certainly. *(He exits. Mona looks around, then downs the glass of wine. After a pause, she pours another glass and starts drinking it, too. Riley enters.)*

MONA. Oh—waiter?

RILEY. Yes, ma'am.

MONA. Let me guess—you don't wait tables full time.

RILEY. How'd you know?

MONA. *(Pointing.)* Wedding ring.

RILEY. Ah.

MONA. You're too old for an actor type. You don't look willowy enough for an artist. Hmm. Business school?

RILEY. Nursing school.

MONA. Good for you. *(She takes a hefty swig of wine.)* So. You're a smart man. I need a smart man with the you-know-what for a straight-up answer.

RILEY. I'll do my best.

MONA. Tell me—are all men intimidated by intelligent and powerful

NEIGHBORHOOD SAMPLING

women, or just the spineless ones?

RILEY. Well—

MONA. In the bedroom. I mean.

RILEY. In the—

MONA. Bedroom.

RILEY. Oh.

MONA. *(Finishing her glass of wine.)* You know—raaaaaaaarrrrrr. *(She giggles.)*

RILEY. Um, well, I imagine some men are. Intimidated, that is. They just might need . . . encouragement?

MONA. Encouragement? *(She chortles.)* Ha. Ha ha ha. *(She raises her empty glass.)* To heavy emotional petting.

RILEY. *(Pause.)* I'll get those menus. *(He exits. Mona pours another glass and drinks until she sees Leon enter. He carries a package and wears a suit.)*

MONA. Well, well. It's about time.

LEON. I—uh—sorry, sweetheart. *(He kisses her cheek.)*

MONA. Late meeting?

LEON. Uh, yes. Yes.

MONA. Tardiness is abhorrent, Leon. How many times do I have to say it?

LEON. Sorry. *(He wipes sweat from his brow and clutches the package.)*

MONA. It's only—you know, I was hoping for a romantic evening.

LEON. Me too. Me too. Something romantic.

MONA. *(Smiles coyly.)* Well.

LEON. Well. *(They stare at each other. Riley enters with menus.)*

RILEY. Ah, I see your guest has arrived. How are you this evening, sir?

LEON. Kind of have the sniffles.

RILEY. Sorry to hear that. Here are your menus. *(To Leon.)* Would you care for wine as well?

LEON. Yes, please.

RILEY. *(Taking bottle in hand.)* Alright—

MONA. *(Quickly, grabbing for the bottle.)* I've got it.

RILEY. *(Pause.)* Of course. *(Gives her the bottle.)* I'll be back to take your orders in a moment. *(Leon reaches for his wine glass. Mona slaps his*

NEIGHBORHOOD SAMPLING

hand.)

MONA. You know better, Leon. Wine combined with your allergy medicine? No.

LEON. I figured just one glass . . .

MONA. Do you listen to me, Leon? Do you ever listen to the words that are coming out of my mouth?

LEON. I guess I'll just have water. *(She pours the rest of the bottle into her glass.)*

MONA. That's more like it. *(She raises her glass.)* A toast?

LEON. *(He raises his water.)* To . . .

MONA. Yes?

LEON. To . . .

MONA. To . . . *(Pause.)* Leon.

LEON. To your health. *(He takes a drink. She slinks back in her chair and takes a long swig.)*

MONA. Well. What a romantic restaurant.

LEON. Yeah, I guess so.

MONA. You know, Leon, I can't help but think that this is the type of place a man takes a woman he is serious about.

LEON. *(Looks around.)* Oh. Yeah.

MONA. So . . . what's your plan, Leon? Do you have a plan?

LEON. Well, it's funny you should mention that, sweetie. *(He thrusts the package at her.)*

MONA. Oh, Leon! You shouldn't have! What's the occasion?

LEON. Just—you gave me a watch last week on our three-month anniversary, and I—uh—didn't know we were—you know, exchanging. *(Proudly.)* Mother says it's the best one.

MONA. Your mother . . . ?

LEON. Yeah, this is the best.

MONA. Oh! Well . . . *(She rips the wrapping open. It is a unicorn plate, like the ones displayed in the hall across from Jeremy's bedroom.)*

MONA. One of those plates . . .

LEON. Yeah.

MONA. Well. Thank you. *(Mona puts the plate on the floor, then finishes her glass of wine.)*

NEIGHBORHOOD SAMPLING

LEON. You know, in mythology, the unicorn is a symbol of strength. It's related to the lion. Some depictions show a lion's tail on a unicorn's body.

(Pause.) Are you . . . ?

MONA. What? I'm fine.

LEON. Okay. Sometimes you're not fine when you say you're fine.

MONA. I'm fine. *(Riley enters.)*

RILEY. Have you decided?

MONA. No.

LEON. Not yet.

RILEY. Right. I'll come back in a bit. *(He exits.)*

LEON. Mona, I hope you like your plate. I—I actually have something I have prepared to say to you.

MONA. *(Sweeter.)* Oh? I have something I wanted to say to you too, Leon.

LEON. I see. Well, maybe you should go first.

MONA. That's alright, maybe you should. You're looking a little—piqued.

LEON. Okay. *(Clears throat.)* Well, Mona—I—I—

MONA. Yes?

LEON. Boy. I really wish you'd let me have some wine.

MONA. Leon.

LEON. Sorry. I mean—I—I'm not feeling very well. Excuse me. *(He stands.)*

MONA. Oh. You're not feeling well. Excuse you.

LEON. Does that mean I can go?

MONA. For God's sake, Leon—

LEON. Okay. *(He exits. Mona stands and claps her hands.)*

MONA. Waiter. Waiter! *(Riley enters.)*

RILEY. Is something the matter, ma'am?

MONA. Now you listen to me: if this ninny—the one who was just in here with the sniffles and the too-tight jacket and the eyebrows—if this man proposes to me tonight, your job is to keep me from saying yes. If you have anything in cahoots with him—ring in the crème brulee, whatever, I am ordering you to shut down that operation immediately. Do you hear me?

NEIGHBORHOOD SAMPLING

RILEY. I don't really feel comfortable—

MONA. *(Fishes in her purse and find a \$100 bill. She holds it up in front of him.)* I don't care if you start a fire in the kitchen that blazes brighter than the flames of hell.

RILEY. *(Taking the money.)* I certainly will do my best, ma'am.

MONA. Under no circumstances. Do you understand?

RILEY. I do. *(He makes to exit, then turns back.)* You know, I did think of some advice to offer—about the stuff you asked me earlier.

MONA. *(Waves him away.)* Don't bother yourself. *(Pause.)* Wait—let's hear it.

RILEY. Though I'm no expert . . .

MONA. You're married?

RILEY. Yes.

MONA. To a woman?

RILEY. Yes.

MONA. Kids?

RILEY. One daughter. Crème brulee is her favorite.

MONA. It appears you've more expertise than my companion. Go on.

RILEY. Perhaps less criticism of your companion . . . would . . .

MONA. Shit, here he comes. Good lord, he has that pallid post-vomit look. *(She takes a drink.)* Bring us both the special. Remember: no funny business. *(Riley nods, then exits. Leon enters and sits. He places his napkin in his lap.)*

LEON. Sorry, Sweetheart.

MONA. That's alright. My, you look nice in your jacket. Quite a contrast with your—complexion. I was just thinking, Leon. I don't mean to be too forward, but—

LEON. Me too. I was thinking a lot in the bathroom, and—

MONA. —you know, with the romantic atmosphere, the candles, the many dates we've been on for the past six months—

LEON. —I like you a lot. You're a great gal. Really, you are—

MONA. I think I can be pretty great in other places, too, Leon.

LEON. I don't doubt it. It's just that, you know, I've been talking a lot with Mother, and—

MONA. In fact, I think it's time for you to find out what I'm really like.

NEIGHBORHOOD SAMPLING

LEON. —we both think it's time to think about the future.

MONA. Shh, my little Leon. Let's see how tonight goes. I think we need to get a little more—

LEON. I think—I think—

MONA. Intimate. That's right, Leon—

LEON. I think we should break up. **MONA.** We need to finally have sex! *(They stare at one another. Riley enters with two plates of food, looks at them, then backs out without them seeing him.)*

MONA. What did you say?

LEON. Oh God. What?

MONA. Did I just hear you say what I thought you said?

LEON. Uh, no. I mean, yes. I mean—Oh God. *(He starts breathing quickly.)* Is this what hyperventilating feels like?

MONA. Leon Peabody, how dare you break up with me?

LEON. You wanted to have sex? Really?

MONA. My God, Leon! I'm not a nun! It's been months!

LEON. I thought you didn't even like me!

MONA. The nerve of you, with your huffing and sniffing and godforsaken unicorn plate! I should be breaking up with you!

LEON. I'm so confused.

MONA. We'll break up when I say we're going to break up, Leon, and no sooner!

LEON. You want to break up? Or you want to have sex?

MONA. Six months! What's the matter, Leon, you don't like these? *(She gestures to her chest.)*

LEON. I like those. I like . . . breasts. I like your breasts.

MONA. You wanted to break up.

LEON. You never seem interested in me. You yell at me. I thought you didn't like me.

MONA. I don't, really.

LEON. You—

MONA. I thought I was going to get— *(She whispers.)* —boned.

LEON. I'm confused again. *(Riley enters carrying the food again. He glances at Mona, who does not pay him any attention.)*

RILEY. Your lobster tails.

NEIGHBORHOOD SAMPLING

LEON. I didn't even order.

RILEY. Your—uh—companion ordered for you, sir. Two specials. Anything else? *(Mona waves him off. He exits.)*

LEON. I'm allergic to shellfish. *(Pause.)* So, are we broken up, or—

MONA. What is it you want, Leon? What do you want?

LEON. I kind of wanted the prime rib.

MONA. No, in your life, Leon, what do you want?

LEON. Well, now, I want to have sex with you.

MONA. You do?

LEON. Yeah. I always wanted to.

MONA. Then why did you never do anything about it?

LEON. You're—you're—

MONA. What?

LEON. You're a lot of woman for a guy like me, Mona. But I want to have sex with you. Your breasts are amazing.

MONA. At least we both agree on that.

LEON. *(Summoning courage.)* And I know Mother's against it, but I think—I think we should get married. *(He stands up and kneels in front of Mona.)*

MONA. Oh god. We should definitely break up. *(Riley enters, nearly running.)*

RILEY. *(Looking at Mona.)* Let's not get carried away here, folks— *(In his haste, he steps on the unicorn plate, breaking it into pieces.)*

RILEY. Shit.

LEON. *(Crestfallen.)* Oh, no.

MONA. *(Looks at Leon. Pause. To Riley.)* What kind of a waiter are you? That was a gift!

RILEY. I'm so sorry.

MONA. Do you know that this is not only a family heirloom, but the most expensive piece from its collection?

RILEY. Again, so sorry.

MONA. You'd better be sorry, you nitwit! I demand full compensation for this plate, as well as any emotional damages rendered to this charming gentleman who gifted me the plate.

RILEY. Why don't I start by getting my manager? I'll be back. *(He exits.)*

NEIGHBORHOOD SAMPLING

LEON. *(Still kneeling.)* I thought you didn't like those plates.

MONA. Yes, Leon.

LEON. Huh?

MONA. To your proposal. Yes, I'll marry you.

LEON. *(Pause.)* Oh. Okay, then. Okay. *(He stands, then sits down at the table and reaches across it, taking her hand.)*

END OF ACT ONE

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