

Sliding into Seniorhood

By
Kim E. Ruyle

SLIDING INTO SENIORHOOD

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SLIDING INTO SENIORHOOD

Sliding into Seniorhood was originally produced by the Shawnee Playhouse in Shawnee on Delaware, Pennsylvania, in September 2021 as the Grand Winner of the Shawnee Original Playwrights Series (S.O.P.S.) 2020/2021 Full-Length Competition. Executive Director, Midge McClosky. Executive Producers, Ginny and Charlie Kirkwood.

Cast

Matt.....Christopher Cameron
Valerie.....Samantha Cameron
Sherry.....Kathy Fisher
Walt.....Stephen Hellman
Bonnie.....Maryjane Baer
Eddy.....Frank Russo

Production Crew

Director.....Lori Flanagan
Stage Manager.....Jessie Garretson
Production Design.....Midge McClosky

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CAST: 3 Women, 3 Men

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| <u>MATT</u> | Male, 50s; devil-may-care industrial-organizational psychologist with a sensitive side. Walt's son. |
| <u>VALERIE</u> | Female, 40s; confident and presumptuous neuropsychologist and professor. Sherry's niece. |
| <u>SHERRY</u> | Female, 60s; recently retired high school Spanish teacher; determined to succeed in first community theatre acting experience. |
| <u>WALT</u> | Male, 70s; retired professor of Latin American history and resident of Nob Hill Manor; refined and nattily dressed. |
| <u>BONNIE</u> | Female, 60s; a legend in the local community theatre scene; vivacious, provocative, and at times outrageous; an open book. |
| <u>EDDY</u> | Male, 70s; retired plumber and Nob Hill Manor resident where he relishes a well-deserved reputation as a lothario. |
| <u>AIRPORT ANNOUNCER</u> | Offstage voice announcing flights over intercom. Recorded with doubling. |
| <u>STAGE MANAGER</u> | Offstage voice prompting actors over intercom. Recorded with doubling. |
| TIME: | Present day; January – April timespan. |
| PLACES: | 1) Detroit Sky Club, Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport. 2) Nob Hill Manor, senior living facility, Twin Cities. 3) Theatre Thalia, community theatre, Twin Cities. 4) Gulf View Resort, clothing-optional naturalist resort, Florida. |

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SETS:

The stage is a composite of four compact minimalist sets. The first three sets are stationary. The fourth set is placed before the final scene. Except for the final scene which requires some placement, most scene transitions can be nearly instantaneous by crossfade lighting.

1) Detroit Sky Club; Center Stage.

Two small tables, chairs, and a bar. On display, a board of flight arrivals and departures and a sign identifying the *Detroit Sky Club*.

2) Nob Hill Manor; Stage Left.

A simple spare lounge with a card table and a couple of chairs. There is signage or other indication of the facility, *Nob Hill Manor*. Additional items, e.g., bland artwork and a potted plant, might reinforce the lounge setting.

3) Theatre Thalia; Stage Right.

Two small dressing tables facing downstage. When seated at their dressing tables, actors are looking into and through imaginary mirrors so they're facing the house. There is a racy poster or other signage referring to a production of *Calendar Girls*.

4) Gulf View Resort; Apron or Down Center Stage.

One or more chaise lounge chairs and a potted palm or other items to depict a Florida poolside setting.

SYNOPSIS: The paths of six intriguing characters intersect as they navigate the unpredictable and challenging twists and turns of aging. On the slide into seniorhood, they encounter relationships and experiences, some painful, some sensual, and some just downright silly. When all is said and done, will they find that life has left them with anything more than simple memories?

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TIMING OF SCENES

| Scenes | When the Action Occurs, Suggested | Set |
|---------------------------|---|------------------------|
| 1; 4; 7; 10; 13; 17 | Sunday evening; First week of January. | Detroit Sky Club |
| 2; 5; 8; 11; 14 | Sunday afternoon; Three weeks after Scene 1. | Nob Hill Manor |
| 3; 6 | Tuesday evening; Two days after Scene 2. | Theatre Thalia |
| 9 | Tuesday evening; Three weeks after Scene 3. | Theatre Thalia |
| 12 | Wednesday evening; One day after Scene 9. | Theatre Thalia |
| 15 | Thursday evening; One day after Scene 12. | Theatre Thalia |
| 16 | Saturday morning; Two days after Scene 15. | Nob Hill Manor |
| 18 | Saturday morning, Two months after Scene 16. | Gulf View Resort |

RUNTIME: ~90 Minutes.

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SCENE 1

Detroit Sky Club. About 9 p.m. on a snowy Sunday evening in January. VALERIE sits at a table studying an iPad as she nurses a drink. Her coat is draped over a chair. A carry-on bag is on the floor beside her, and her purse is on the table. MATT enters with a briefcase and a computer case slung over a shoulder. He consults the flight schedule, goes to the bar, turns with a drink, and looks around. He selects the table adjacent to Valerie, unloads his stuff, removes his coat, and sits. Matt looks around, his gaze settling on Valerie. He studies her intently. Then, more intently.

MATT. Valerie? Is it really you?

VALERIE. Uh, yes. Do I know you?

MATT. Oh, my God! It's really you.

VALERIE. I'm sorry.

MATT. *(With his drink, Matt excitedly moves to Valerie's table.)* It's me! Matt!

VALERIE. I'm not sure –

MATT. Matt! It's Matt. *(Valerie just shakes her head, no recognition.)* Really? You're going to pretend you don't recognize me?

VALERIE. We've met?

MATT. Really?

VALERIE. What?

MATT. Oh, God. You're still pissed. I am so sorry. Really. I wish there was something I could say.

VALERIE. *(Relaxing a bit.)* It's okay. I think you've got me confused. Pretty sure we've never met.

MATT. Met? We were married for eight months! *(Crossfade to next scene.)*

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SCENE 2

In the Nob Hill Manor resident lounge, it's Sunday afternoon, three weeks later. WALT sits at a table staring at a chessboard which is next to chocolate cake spiked with a single unlit birthday candle. Paper plates, plastic cutlery, and a book of matches are nearby. He clinches an unlit pipe in his teeth as he slowly moves one chess piece, then another. EDDY, wearing nothing but slippers, boxer shorts, and an open bathrobe, pads silently into the room, stands behind Walt, and observes the imaginary chess game in progress.

EDDY. I like the horse.

WALT. *(Without taking eyes off the chess board.)* Knight.

EDDY. What about it?

WALT. It's called a knight.

EDDY. *(Looks around the sunlit room.)* It's three in the afternoon. You're losin' it man.

WALT. *(After a quick glance.)* Why don't you put some clothes on and let me teach you some chess?

EDDY. My medal.

WALT. What?

EDDY. You seen it?

WALT. You mean your *medallion*? It's big. Not really a medal.

EDDY. Medallions are veal.

WALT. You wear it like jewelry.

EDDY. Maybe pork. Medallions are meat.

WALT. Okay. Okay. It's a medal, then. Where'd you leave/ it?

EDDY. /Beef or pork. Always meat.

WALT. *(A pause. Walt stares at Eddy's bare chest.)* Where'd you leave it?

EDDY. Uh, bed post, most likely.

WALT. Narrows it down.

EDDY. Ladies don't like it bangin' against their rear end or belly when we're, you know. *(Spreading robe. A couple of hip thrusts.)* 'Sides, it's a weight hangin' 'round the neck.

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WALT. Heavy lies the crown.

EDDY. It's a *medal*.

WALT. Brass is heavy, I guess.

EDDY. Bronze, not brass.

WALT. I'm impressed. Plumbers know their alloys.

EDDY. Where the hell?

WALT. Think.

EDDY. Maxine gave it to me.

WALT. She your last conquest?

EDDY. A medal, see. For my performance.

WALT. But which was the last bed post?

EDDY. Ol' gal's grateful.

WALT. Of your attention.

EDDY. That I can still get it up.

WALT. Will you put on some clothes?

EDDY. I know! What's her name at the end of the hall? Uses a walker.

WALT. You're referring to Mrs. Maxwell? Betty Maxwell?

EDDY. Yeah, Betty. Right after lunch.

WALT. With the walker?

EDDY. Yeah, we hooked up after lunch. First, she eats a hearty meal. Turkey and mashed potatoes. Some apple cobbler. Then we get down to business. (*Spreads the robe and spins in a circle.*) And now... Now she's sleepin' like a baby.

WALT. Well, there you go.

EDDY. Ol' gal nods off after every meal.

WALT. Uh huh.

EDDY. Guarantee it. Sleepin' like a baby.

WALT. Mystery solved.

EDDY. Yeah. Betty's bedpost. (*Eddy scampers to exit. Walt returns his attention to the chess board. Eddy returns momentarily wearing a large gold-colored medallion on a chain around his neck, bathrobe still open, and takes a seat.*)

WALT. Like a baby?

EDDY. Ol' gal's not my favorite, but I'm a giver.

WALT. A real humanitarian.

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EDDY. I'm a freakin' Albert Switzer.

WALT. Schweitzer.

EDDY. How 'bout you? Wanna help me service these gals?

WALT. You're totally inappropriate, you know? Really. Who is servicing whom?

EDDY. *Whom?* You're askin' *whom*? Ya don't hafta be a professor in here.

WALT. It's a valid question.

EDDY. Guy's gotta take what he gets. 'Sides, the ladies 'preciate it. It's win-win. I get all the trim I want down the hall. Maxine, Dottie, Alice, even Betty with the walker. And I'm glad to share.

WALT. A real team player, aren't you?

EDDY. Tossin' my bread on the water.

WALT. So, you're not looking for reciprocity?

EDDY. The hell you talkin' 'bout, professor? I'm jes talkin' 'bout trim.

WALT. Trim is a nautical term, Eddy. As an ex-naval officer, I would prefer you use the word correctly.

EDDY. The hell you mean?

WALT. Trim. A balanced load to achieve the correct waterline.

EDDY. What is it, man? Johnson need a little starch? It's okay. It happens. And these gals don't mind goin' downtown to get the blood flowin'.

WALT. You don't know me, Eddy.

EDDY. I can still get it up three, four times a day long as I don't eject.

WALT. I was in the Navy.

EDDY. I fake it.

WALT. Lots of ports. Lots of ladies.

EDDY. The *ejectulatin'*. I fake it. They never know, and I got, you know, lotsa energy.

WALT. I get it. You've got stamina.

EDDY. Yeah! That's it. Stamina.

WALT. (*Stares at Eddy a moment, considering.*) Eddy, have you seen my...? Have you seen my butt?

EDDY. (*Shocked to upright.*) Damn. I never figured you for –

WALT. Listen to what I'm saying. (*No response from Eddy.*) You like bronze?

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EDDY. Uh.

WALT. Bronze propellers?

EDDY. Okay.

WALT. I've got twin propeller screws tattooed on my rear end.

EDDY. No shit?

WALT. Honest to God. A propeller screw tattooed on each butt cheek.

EDDY. Yeah? Let me see!

WALT. Bronze propeller screws.

EDDY. Twin screws. My God!

WALT. Yes. Used to say they were to drive my torpedo home.

EDDY. *Your torpedo?*

WALT. I was in the Navy. So, don't think you can tell me about the ladies.

EDDY. Hell, Walt. You're my new hero.

WALT. I know about the ladies.

EDDY. No. I believe it. A guy don't draw propellers on his ass not knowin' the ladies. *(Crossfade to next scene.)*

SCENE 3

In the women's dressing room of Theatre Thalia. It's early evening, two days later; just prior to the second rehearsal of Calendar Girls. SHERRY enters carrying a script. She sets it on a dressing table and, facing the house, looks into an unseen mirror. She unbuttons her blouse, opens it wide to reveal a low-cut strapless bra. As she turns side to side checking herself in the mirror, BONNIE enters, pauses to grin.

BONNIE. Why don't you let those honey globes out? Let 'em see the light of day.

SHERRY. *(Startled, pulls her blouse closed, plops into chair.)* I feel fat.

BONNIE. Yeah, well next to you, I'm a hippo, yet I love the way I look. Explain that.

SHERRY. No puedo explicarlo.

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BONNIE. In English, damn it. This is a theatre, not your Spanish class. Get in character.

SHERRY. Sorry.

BONNIE. And stop apologizing for everything.

SHERRY. When will we have to practice without clothes?

BONNIE. Rehearse! You practice the piano. In the theatre we rehearse. And you can take your clothes off tonight, you want to. (*Grinning and seductively removing her blouse.*) Want me to light the way?

SHERRY. You want to take your clothes off?

BONNIE. All good actors are exhibitionists at heart. (*Twirls her blouse and hangs it on a chair.*) Might be highly introverted, but we're all just looking for an excuse to take off our clothes.

SHERRY. God. Not me.

BONNIE. What do you think acting is? It's all about vulnerability. You get on the stage and bare your soul. You let go of yourself. Your ego. Shed your skin. Doesn't matter if you have clothes on or not. When we're on the stage, we're all naked. Totally exposed.

SHERRY. It's so –

BONNIE. Liberating! Like going to a nudist camp.

SHERRY. Right. And I suppose you've –

BONNIE. Every spring! A naturalist resort in Florida. Perfect training ground for an actor. I go when I have a break between shows, usually in April. Work on an all-over tan and practice my vulnerability.

SHERRY. Really? I'd be mortified.

BONNIE. Why? Cause you think you somehow wouldn't measure up? Look. Go into any Wal-Mart and round up shoppers. Old ones. Fat ones. Thin ones. As if you could find a thin shopper in a Wal-Mart. Grandfathers. Grandmothers. Teachers. God, so many teachers. Teachers love to get naked. You'd fit right in.

SHERRY. Not teachers.

BONNIE. Don't teachers shop at Wal-Mart? Strip all those Wal-Mart shoppers of their clothes and sprinkle them around a sunlit pool, some palm trees in the background. There you have it. A bunch of naturalists relaxing in the sun. You won't see George Clooney or Scarlett Johansson.

SHERRY. It sounds so –

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BONNIE. Homogenous, what it is. Sure, you've got some variety. But stripped of clothes, we're all pretty much equal. Arms, legs, bellies. Dicks and tits and butts. Lots of butts.

SHERRY. I couldn't.

BONNIE. You could! Come with me! In April, after our show. I promise. You won't feel fat.

SHERRY. You have to take off... Everything?

BONNIE. You're a total smoke show. Not that anyone would be overtly staring, but in that crowd, you'd be Venus. Aphrodite with a towel.

SHERRY. You can cover up with a towel?

BONNIE. To sit on. The only required accoutrement. Can't be parking a bare ass on a poolside lounge chair. *(Circling Sherry, looking her up and down.)* Yeah! Sherry the Smoke Show! *(Crossfade to next scene.)*

SCENE 4

Back in the Detroit Sky Club, continuing.

VALERIE. We've met?

MATT. *Really?*

VALERIE. *What?*

MATT. Oh, God. You're still pissed. I am so sorry. Really. I wish there was something I could say.

VALERIE. *(Relaxing a bit.)* It's okay. I think you've got me confused. Pretty sure we've never met.

MATT. *Met?* We were married for eight months! Long time ago but you can't have totally blocked it. I guess I have thickened up a bit.

VALERIE. *(Now amused.)* No. You've definitely got me confused.

MATT. Henry Hall? Western Michigan U?

VALERIE. No.

MATT. Kalamazoo? 1995?

VALERIE. *(Considering. Now really amused.)* 1995? In 1995, I was 13.

MATT. But your sisters! Veronica and, uh, ...

VALERIE. I have a brother.

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MATT. Victoria! Vee! All your names start with V.

VALERIE. *(Tossing back a laugh.)* Well, my brother's name *is* Victor.

MATT. Really?

VALERIE. Yes. Really.

MATT. Amazing. But you're the image... You've really aged well.

VALERIE. Well, I guess I have a doppelganger then. And maybe I'm not as old –

MATT. But your name *is* Valerie?

VALERIE. Life is full of coincidences.

MATT. Okay. Well, I feel like an idiot.

VALERIE. You're telling me... You really thought –

MATT. Yes. I did.

VALERIE. Mmm. You know, I thought –

MATT. Oh, hell. I'm sorry. I wasn't coming on.

VALERIE. No. I guess you weren't.

MATT. *(Disappointed, stands to leave.)* Well, I'll let you get back to...

VALERIE. You don't have to leave. *(Grins and gestures to the vacant seat.)* Join me. My flight's delayed.

MATT. Mine, too. *(Quickly moves stuff to Valerie's table and sits.)* You're not going to Shanghai, are you?

VALERIE. God, no. Paris.

MATT. Lucky you.

VALERIE. I guess.

MATT. Damn Detroit weather.

VALERIE. Not as cold as Minneapolis, but more snow.

MATT. You're from Minneapolis?

VALERIE. Mmm.

MATT. I grew up there.

VALERIE. And now?

MATT. Bowling Green, Kentucky. I'm Matt. Nice to meet you.

VALERIE. Nice to meet you, Matt. I'm ... Well, you know.

MATT. Yes, Valerie. My long-lost college girlfriend. Her twin, anyway. *(Matt and Valerie clink glasses.)* Weird. I still think of her as my girlfriend instead of my wife.

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VALERIE. Mmm... I nearly hit a deer near there. Long time ago. I was driving my Camry.

MATT. You hit a deer in Kalamazoo?

VALERIE. Bowling Green. *Nearly* hit a deer. Didn't you say you live in Bowling Green?

MATT. You've been to Bowling Green?

VALERIE. Passing through. Road trip with a boyfriend.

MATT. Oh. A boyfriend.

VALERIE. (*Amused at his disappointment. Warming up.*) Long time ago.

MATT. Oh, that's good.

VALERIE. Good?

MATT. Well, yeah. I mean... Good that it was a close call. You know, good that you didn't hit the deer.

VALERIE. Mmm.

MATT. I've had some close calls, too. Wisconsin's the worst for deer. Don't you think? (*Matt squirms uncomfortably as Valerie just grins.*) So, you live in Minneapolis. And what do you do?

VALERIE. Psychologist.

MATT. I-O?

VALERIE. Uh.

MATT. I-O psychology.

VALERIE. Oh, no. Neuro.

MATT. *Neuropsychology.* Very cool. Cutting edge stuff.

VALERIE. I think so.

MATT. Well, that would have been too weird.

VALERIE. What?

MATT. I'm an I-O psych.

VALERIE. Okay.

MATT. Yeah. Would have been weird if you were an I-O psych, too.

VALERIE. And what's weird about I-O psychology?

MATT. Not weird. Just another coincidence, I guess. Anyway...
(*Awkward pause.*)

VALERIE. So, Bowling Green.

MATT. What's really weird, I went to Bowling Green State for grad school. It's in Ohio.

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VALERIE. Hypersensitive to weirdness, aren't you?

MATT. Uh.

VALERIE. What's weird about Bowling Green for grad school?

MATT. Oh. Well, it's in Ohio. I mean, I went to Bowling Green, Ohio, for grad school but ended up living in Bowling Green, Kentucky.

VALERIE. Not weird. Your destiny. For you, there's something about Bowling Green. *(Pause.)* You teach?

MATT. No, but I'll bet you do. Or research.

VALERIE. Both. Professor. U of M.

MATT. I knew it. You have a professorial air.

VALERIE. What? Stuffy?

MATT. What? No! No, no. Uh... *Cerebral.*

VALERIE. You mean that as a compliment?

MATT. *(Dallying and looking her up and down.)* Well, don't really know you well enough to comment on your appearance. *(Crossfade to next scene.)*

SCENE 5

Back in the Nob Hill Manor resident lounge, continuing.

EDDY. *Your torpedo?*

WALT. I was in the Navy. So, don't think you can tell me about the ladies.

EDDY. Hell, Walt. You're my new hero.

WALT. I know about the ladies.

EDDY. No. I believe it. A guy don't draw propellers on his ass not knowin' the ladies. Hey! Maxine and Dottie'd get a kick. Let's go show 'em those tattoos!

WALT. Take it down a notch, will you? Can't we be gentlemen?

EDDY. I's a plumber. Never said I was no gentleman.

WALT. All this catting around, it gives your life meaning?

EDDY. Now you're gonna get all philosophic?

WALT. *(Shakes his head, turns pensive.)* Eddy, do you have kids?

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EDDY. Six. Believe it? All shit heels. Shit heels and pricks.

WALT. I've never seen them in here. Visiting.

EDDY. Robby's the worst.

WALT. What about grandkids?

EDDY. Six kids poppin' 'em out. They gotta bunch a miniature shit heels runnin' around, jes like 'em.

WALT. You know them? Your grandkids?

EDDY. Robby stole my truck, he was sixteen, and plowed it into a Jag.

WALT. Was he hurt?

EDDY. Big parking lot at a movie, one a those with boo koo screens.

WALT. A cineplex. Or is it multiplex?

EDDY. Big parking lot and the Jag parked all to itself mile away from the theater. The owner, poor dumb bastard, thought it'd be safe out there. *No asshole gonna be puttin' a ding in my door.* Didn't count on Robbie. Little shit. Drunk as hell, and drives my truck straight on a beeline, you know. Head on in a goddamn parking lot. Totaled the Jag. Messed up my truck.

WALT. I've only got two.

EDDY. Trucks or Jags?

WALT. Two kids. Never see my son. My daughter lives nearby with her kids. Two grandkids. Nearby, but still, almost never see them.

EDDY. Yeah, well...

WALT. It really bothers me. How are they going to know me? What does my daughter say about me?

EDDY. Kids. Whatcha gonna do?

WALT. But what's more important?

EDDY. Important than what?

WALT. Than our kids? More important than our grandkids?

EDDY. Damn, Walt. Soundin' like a wussy ol' grandma 'stead of a badass sailor, propellers on his –

WALT. You know who they are, don't you?

EDDY. Know who? *What?*

WALT. Your kids are *you*. Your kids. They're the way you live on. In the future. Your DNA. Your values. Your stories. Everything that you pass on to your kids. Your kids are your ticket to the future. Don't you think about that? Think about the future? Think about your legacy?

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EDDY. Robby. The little shit's got my boat parked in his driveway.

WALT. You don't think about it?

EDDY. The boat?

WALT. Your legacy? You and I, we're not going to be around much longer.

EDDY. *(Stands, shakes his head, and makes as to exit.)* Well, thanks, Walt. You know, you're one helluva motivational speaker.

WALT. Eddy! *(Eddy pulls up short and turns around.)* Come have a piece of birthday cake.

EDDY. *(Sporting big grin, moves to take a seat.)* Now you're talkin'. *(Walt begins to cut cake, but Eddy grabs his hand.)* Hold on professor. Gotta light the candle. *(Walt leans back while Eddy lights the candle.)* Well. Go on then. Blow the sucker out. *(Walt blows out the candle and serves a piece of cake while Eddy rises and dances a little jig singing an improvised line or two of a birthday jingle before sitting down to tuck into the cake.)*

WALT. Did you serve in the military?

EDDY. '64 I was in Nam. Semper Fi.

WALT. Our paths might have crossed. 1964, I was on a ship just offshore.

EDDY. Change the subject, will ya? Ya wanna talk about Nam, I'm gonna go see Maxine.

WALT. My grandkids don't know about my service. They don't really know me at all. I was a professor. I wrote books. Won awards. Thought I made a difference, but...

EDDY. *(Eddy considers Walt's dilemma and sadness.)* Show 'em your propellers!

WALT. What?

EDDY. Hell, yeah. Impress with the kiddies with those twin screws on your butt.

WALT. No. That's not –

EDDY. *(Jumping up to creatively gesture.)* Yeah! Grandkids braggin' you up at school! Give 'em a picture for show and tell! Lookit my grandpa! Those grandkids'll be center of attention! You'll be talk of the playground! *(Walt just stares, uncomprehending.)* Ya got propellers on your ass! What else ya need? *(Crossfade to next scene.)*

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SCENE 6

Back in Theatre Thalia dressing room, continuing.

SHERRY. You can cover up with a towel?

BONNIE. To sit on. The only required accoutrement. Can't be parking a bare ass on a poolside lounge chair. (*Circling Sherry, looking her up and down.*) Yeah! Sherry the Smoke Show! Hey! You should bring that new guy with you. What's his name? The professor.

SHERRY. Oh, God. Walt. No way.

BONNIE. Walt a bit uptight, is he?

SHERRY. No. We're not, uh...

BONNIE. What?

SHERRY. Some issues. I don't know. He's got issues.

BONNIE. What issues?

SHERRY. All I can say, my *dislike* of Che Guevara doesn't equal his *hatred* for Che Guevara.

BONNIE. *Che Guevara?*

SHERRY. Everything was fine until a couple days ago. He brought up Che Guevara, a favorite topic. You know, Walt's specialty is Latin American history. Even wrote a book to *debunk the legend of a Marxist troublemaker who is largely responsible for the ongoing squalid state of Latin America*. Anyway, I made the mistake of saying that you don't have to like his Marxist philosophy to respect his leadership ability. Oh, my God! He looked at me like I'd just shit in his soup bowl.

BONNIE. The hell?

SHERRY. You get it, don't you? I wasn't saying I liked the guy or agreed with his politics. But Walt is so damn intractable. He wanted me to exhibit the same burning hatred for the revolutionary that he feels.

BONNIE. That's not respect. You're a thoughtful adult and entitled to an opinion. Weren't you telling me the guy was respectful? Yeah. Those were your exact words. *Walt is such a gentleman. So suave. So respectful.*

SHERRY. I'm not supposed to care, right? It's not supposed to hurt. I mean we've only been seeing each other a couple of months, but...

BONNIE. He can't get past this?

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SHERRY. He sent me an email. Said he'd like to take a break.

BONNIE. *By email?* What an ass. But no worries. It'll be a snap to find a couple of fellas to take to the nudist camp. It's best we have guys along. Keep all the other meat twinkies from sniffin' round.

SHERRY. Walt would never go anyway. He'd be self-conscious of his propellers.

BONNIE. What propellers?

SHERRY. No. He made me promise.

BONNIE. Yeah. Promise what?

SHERRY. Uh, he's got tattoos.

BONNIE. Propeller tats?

SHERRY. The man graduated Annapolis.

BONNIE. So, what's the big deal?

SHERRY. Deal is, the propellers are on his rear end.

BONNIE. Oh, my God! That's rich! A suave, cultured professor with ass tats.

SHERRY. Big bronze propeller tattoos. One on each butt cheek. I guess he was quite a lady's man when he was in the navy.

BONNIE. One in every port.

SHERRY. But now he's just so... So stiff.

BONNIE. Sounds like a dream.

SHERRY. Inflexible. Stubborn. A proud, pompous, narcissistic prick.

BONNIE. Well, much as I'd like to get a look at his tats, I'll give some thought to some guys we might invite to go with us.

SHERRY. Don't get your hopes up. You haven't convinced me that getting naked will improve my acting, and I can't think about anything but this show right now. I really want to break free, you know? To let loose and nail the part. Or, at least, not embarrass myself. But I'm really in over my head.

BONNIE. Pippi's a good director. You'll do fine.

SHERRY. You know her birthday's the same day as our cast party. We should all chip in and get her something.

BONNIE. *(Picking up a brochure from dressing table and taking a seat.)* How about a spa day? I was just checking out this new place on Nob Hill Boulevard.

SLIDING INTO SENIORHOOD

SHERRY. What's it cost? A spa day.

BONNIE. Let's see. Ninety bucks for a Swedish massage.

SHERRY. How about a facial?

BONNIE. (*Wicked grin and suggestive gesture.*) Oh, I love facials.

SHERRY. What's it cost?

BONNIE. Also, ninety bucks. Okay, they got something they do with hot rocks. It's one twenty.

SHERRY. Is there a discount for a package? You know, a manicure, massage, facial?

BONNIE. Oh! Oh! Here we go! They do vaginal rejuvenation!

SHERRY. You're awful! Pippi would be mortified.

BONNIE. Wow. Nine hundred and ninety bucks.

SHERRY. We could get a nice cashmere sweater.

BONNIE. Cashmere sweater's nice. A cashmere cooz, even better.

SHERRY. Get real. If the entire cast chips in, we could do a really nice sweater.

BONNIE. Says it's minimally invasive. Like some guys I know.

SHERRY. Please, just stick to the basic services.

BONNIE. No. Listen to this. They *traumatize the vagina to build scar tissue*. You hear that? Vaginal traumatization.

SHERRY. Please put that away. I'll poll the rest of the cast about a gift. Right now, I need to concentrate on the rehearsal.

BONNIE. Traumatization for the vag. Isn't there an app for that? Craig's List or Tinder, maybe?

SHERRY. Bonnie, please. I can really use your help. I'm completely out of my element here. The audition was just a lark. I came on a dare and didn't dream I'd get a part. I wasn't even trying.

BONNIE. Ha! That's the way it goes. You were relaxed.

SHERRY. Last night, I stunk up rehearsal. I can see that Pippi thinks she made a mistake in casting me.

BONNIE. First piece of advice, learn your lines and get off book soon as possible so you can free your brain to just be in the moment. To react. The best actors never really act. Everything is a reaction.

SHERRY. I'm not sure –

SLIDING INTO SENIORHOOD

BONNIE. Don't act. React! That's not a cliché. If you're not trying to remember your lines, you can concentrate on what you're feeling. You'll be able to emote. If you're thinking your character's thoughts, you'll react. Naturally.

SHERRY. The lines I can learn, but –

BONNIE. It's finding the right emotional state. Remember what I said about vulnerability?

SHERRY. You think I'm not feeling vulnerable? I'm scared to death. I don't need to feel more vulnerable. I need confidence.

BONNIE. The reason you're scared is because you're protecting your ego. That's not vulnerability. When you let go of the ego, that's when you get confidence. You'll grow two wings.

SHERRY. *Wings?*

BONNIE. The great paradox of acting. With vulnerability comes confidence, the two wings! That's how an actor flies straight. So, listen to what I'm saying. Embrace vulnerability. Drop the damn ego so you can become your character. If you're in character, you just react to your cues. It's not really acting! It's reacting.

SHERRY. You make it seem so easy. So natural.

BONNIE. Yeah. Just like getting naked. What could be more natural?
(*Crossfade to next scene.*)

SCENE 7

Back in the Detroit Sky Club, continuing. Matt, is cocky, a man on a hunt. Valerie, also in the hunt, plays it coy and maintains a semblance of professionalism, at least for now.

MATT. Well, don't really know you well enough to comment on your appearance.

VALERIE. Can't be too bad if you married me in a former life.

MATT. Definitely attractive. *Very* attractive. (*Matt raises his glass. Valerie clinks it with a smile.*) So, you're into the brain? Dorsal lateral prefrontal cortex. Basal Ganglia. All that good stuff.

SLIDING INTO SENIORHOOD

VALERIE. Supposed to impress me?

MATT. No. *(Coy smile.)* Maybe.

VALERIE. Mmm.

MATT. And the Four Fs. You know, for survival. Uh, fight, flight, feed, and, uh... Fool around.

VALERIE. *(Leaning in, quietly.)* Fuck.

MATT. *What?*

VALERIE. Not enough to fool around. You have to. Fuck. For survival. I think that's from Sarpolsky, the Four Fs.

MATT. *(Enjoying this.)* Fuck. For survival. Yeah.

VALERIE. Survival's more than breathing. It's also about passing along our genes.

MATT. No, I get it. I'm all about survival. Survival in all four dimensions.

VALERIE. Not a very rich life if you're only surviving. You want to do more than survive, don't you? What about self-actualization?

MATT. I prefer a partner.

VALERIE. I said self-actualization, not self-gratification.

MATT. That's exactly what I mean. Exactly what I want. Self-actualization. With a partner. In all four dimensions.

VALERIE. You're missing my point. *(A pause and a smile.)* No. You get it, don't you? You're choosing to ignore my point. *(Matt responds with a shrug and smile.)*

PA ANNOUNCER (OFF). For those passengers waiting on the departure of Flight 853 to Paris. Estimated departure is now eleven oh five p.m.

VALERIE. Couple more hours.

MATT. *(Gulps his drink.)* Time for another glass. What're you drinking?

VALERIE. I've already had two. *(Failing to suppress a smile as Matt just shrugs.)* Bourbon. Straight up.

MATT. Bourbon. You go, girl. *(Matt goes to bar. Valerie pulls a compact from her purse, checks herself out. Musses her hair a bit. Plumps her breasts. Matt returns momentarily and sits. They clink glasses again.)*

VALERIE. So, what about me do you find attractive?

MATT. I said very attractive. *(Off Valerie's skeptical look.)* What? You don't believe me?

SLIDING INTO SENIORHOOD

VALERIE. Biologists say attraction is based on the anticipated quality of progeny produced by a coupling.

MATT. Wow.

VALERIE. I'm a bit past my prime.

MATT. Or just coming into it.

VALERIE. Not for producing progeny.

MATT. But for coupling.

VALERIE. I take it your cortical coupling region is well developed.

MATT. Pretty normal size, I think.

VALERIE. I'm talking about the brain.

MATT. Oh.

VALERIE. We'd have to place you in an F-M-R-I scanner to know for sure.

MATT. So, what you're saying, a guy only wants to fool around with –

VALERIE. Nubile.

MATT. Okaay.

VALERIE. Child-bearing.

MATT. Wait. Aren't humans different?

VALERIE. Different?

MATT. From animals?

VALERIE. Their brains are.

MATT. So, humans can fool around for the pure enjoyment?

VALERIE. Sure.

MATT. Animals don't?

VALERIE. Generally, no.

MATT. Too bad for them.

VALERIE. *(Failing to suppress a smile.)* Yes.

MATT. Married?

VALERIE. Divorced. *(Big smile.)* But not from you. Not in a previous life.

MATT. No. Guess not.

VALERIE. *(Long awkward pause. Valerie shifts gears.)* What did you do?

MATT. Do? When?

VALERIE. You said you were sorry. When you first came over.

MATT. Oh, yeah. Uh... I was a shit. *(Off Valerie's confusion.)* We were young, and I was thinking with my pecker. *(Crossfade to next scene.)*

SLIDING INTO SENIORHOOD

SCENE 8

Back in the Nob Hill Manor resident lounge, continuing.

EDDY. Yeah! Grandkids braggin' you up at school! Give 'em a picture for show and tell! Lookit my grandpa! Those grandkids'll be center of attention! You'll be talk of the playground! (*Walt just stares, uncomprehending.*)

EDDY. You got *propellers* on your ass! What else you need?!

WALT. I'd like to think they'll remember me... For me.

EDDY. (*Aside.*) I got shit on *my* ass.

WALT. How *will* we be remembered, Eddy?

EDDY. You're too serious, man. (*A pause as Eddy studies study Walt who sulks. Eddy drops back into his seat.*) Easy goin'.

WALT. What?

EDDY. Remembered. Me. I'm easy goin'. Easy goin' and a giver.

WALT. Generous.

EDDY. Ask Maxine. Ask Dottie! Guarantee. Those gals sleep with a smile and dream 'bout ol' Eddy.

WALT. That's something, I guess.

EDDY. (*Aside.*) Propellers on your ass. Should have a medal for that.

WALT. We're put here for a purpose. You believe that?

EDDY. Was a damn good plumber.

WALT. Mastery and accomplishment. Gave you a sense of pride. I can appreciate that.

EDDY. Gave me a boat, what it gave me.

WALT. Rewards from an honorable trade.

EDDY. Just a single screw.

WALT. One propeller's all you need.

EDDY. Love that boat. Chris-Craft Commander. A 35-footer. Three-fifty horse inboard.

WALT. Very nice.

EDDY. Single screw. Stainless steel, not bronze. Banged lotsa broads on that boat. Caught lotsa fish.

WALT. What was it that made you most happy?

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EDDY. Toss up tween the fish and the broads.

WALT. But what was most fulfilling? The labor? The pursuit of a goal? Earning it? The ownership? Or was it what you *did* with it? The fishing and the, uh, entertainment? Did it buy respect?

EDDY. Oh, man. What're ya doin'? (*Heavy sigh.*) You wanna know the truth, Walt?

WALT. I'm asking.

EDDY. Memories.

WALT. What you're saying –

EDDY. I got memories!

WALT. (*Pause considering.*) That's a good answer.

EDDY. Damn right. What else we got we're old farts? Nuthin but memories. Propellers tattooed on wrinkled butt cheeks, what they getcha? Givin' Betty with the walker a good poke, what's it get me? I tell you, it ain't for me I do it. I do it for her. So, I get anything out of it, it's just knowin' I done my part to make an ol' gal satisfied. But what do I really got? Nuthin but memories.

WALT. Now who's getting philosophical?

EDDY. For a smart guy, you're dumber than a bucket a hammers. Anyways, what're your memories?

WALT. Being recognized. For my teaching. Publishing.

EDDY. Who's gonna remember that, you're gone?

WALT. Yeah. That's what I'm asking.

EDDY. Well, hate to say it, but maybe you humped the horse.

WALT. *I what?*

EDDY. Like screwin' the pooch. Only bigger. A horse. Damn sight bigger than a pooch. And ya humped the horse. Cause it's your whole life we're talkin' 'bout. It don't get bigger than your life.

WALT. I'm not sure –

EDDY. Your life, man! Life's nuthin if ya don't make no memories. So, ask yourself. What're people gonna remember 'bout you? (*Walt just sadly shakes his head.*) I made lotsa memories. Customers rememberin' ol' Eddy, the plumber, smile on my face. My other smile – my butt crack – grinnin' at 'em over my belt when I got my head under their sink.

WALT. They remember your smile.

SLIDING INTO SENIORHOOD

EDDY. *Their* smile. They remember I made *them* smile. Ya gotta connect. Relate. Like I do with the ladies. If your kids are shit heels, not much you can do. Ya can't make nobody like you. But you can be likeable. Maybe ya think it's better to be respected than be liked, but I gotta tell ya, it's no excuse for being a wiseass know-it-all.

WALT. That's how you see me? (*Walt rises quickly and paces. Indignation gives way to regret. He sits again and leans in.*) That's how you see me?

EDDY. Thinkin' ya gotta be respected. That's bullshit. How ya make other people feel. That's the thing. Stop thinkin' 'bout yourself. Sorry. But since you're askin'.

WALT. What about you? Your boat? Your boat was for you.

EDDY. No. See. You don't get it. Dint buy the boat for myself.

WALT. That doesn't ring true. Everything people do is basically selfish. A case can be made that all altruism, at its root, is self-serving. You bought a boat so you could fish and entertain the ladies. Saying you didn't buy it for yourself, it's not authentic.

EDDY. The hell I know 'bout authentic?

WALT. Are you always just acting?

EDDY. Hell! Who's *not* actin'?

WALT. So, we're all just playing a part?

EDDY. Now you got it.

WALT. Do the parts choose us, or do we choose the parts?

EDDY. Goddamn it, Walt. I don't know how to talk to you. You got the propellers on your ass. I give you that. But your head. Your head's clogged with grease and hair. A goddamn greasy hairball 'tween your ears, and you need someone run a snake through there.

WALT. I'm just trying to understand what makes us different. Same age, more or less. Both served our country. Both of us with kids and grandkids. Have I been inauthentic? Am I a fraud?

EDDY. Makes no difference. It don't. You ask some good questions, but some a your questions ain't for shit. What's real? What's fake? Who's actin'? Who ain't? Don't Matter. None of it.

WALT. Okay. What's a good question?

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EDDY. What're people gonna remember about you? *(Pause as Walt reflects, grows increasingly maudlin.)* I know ya got some memories. And that's okay. That's good. But what memories your kids got? Your grandkids? How'd ya make 'em feel? Do they even like you? Those. Those are the questions. *(Walt nods, puts head in his hands. Eddy fondles his medal as Walt sinks into depression. Eddy stands, paces a bit considering Walt's apparent heartache. Walt finally responds, choking a bit.)*

WALT. I don't know. I don't know what they remember. But I'm pretty damn sure they don't like me. *(Eddy removes medallion from his neck and hangs it on Walt.)*

EDDY. Cheer up, man. Ain't fittin' for a man with propellers on his ass to be mopin' like a jellyfish. You want the kiddies to like you, you might even try smilin'. Fire up those propellers, man! Get outta that chair and off your ass! Go make some memories.

WALT. *(Walt recovers a bit and studies the medal.)* Thanks Eddy.

EDDY. Now I gotta go see Maxine. Give her a memory. *(Eddy exits as Walt studies the medallion a moment. Crossfade to next scene.)*

SCENE 9

We're back in the Theatre Thalia dressing room, but now it's three weeks later, the evening of tech rehearsal. Sherry sits at a dressing table fussing with makeup. Bonnie enters.

BONNIE. What are you doing? I don't think you need that tonight. It's tech. Costumes only.

SHERRY. I know. But makeup tomorrow night. Right? Just want to figure it out. I think I need, uh...

BONNIE. *(Bonnie jumps in, applies Sherry's makeup during ensuing conversation.)* Here. Let me in there.

SHERRY. Thanks.

BONNIE. You've got the foundation going. *(Pause.)* So, what's going on with Valerie and her new friend?

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SHERRY. She's coming to the dress rehearsal tomorrow night.

BONNIE. Valerie's coming? And Pippi's okay with that?

SHERRY. She said we could invite a few family members so we get a feel for an audience. Didn't she?

BONNIE. I guess.

SHERRY. Wait. Isn't it okay? Should I –

BONNIE. Relax. It's fine.

SHERRY. Because I could call –

BONNIE. God! You've got nice skin.

SHERRY. *(Pause.)* She's bringing her new guy to the opening.

BONNIE. Your Spanish student, right?

SHERRY. Matt.

BONNIE. Do you and he *habla español*?

SHERRY. *(Rapidly, with the fluency of a Spanish teacher.)* Hablan español. No lo sé. No lo he visto –

BONNIE. Damn! Sorry I asked.

SHERRY. Matt. I haven't seen him since high school. Valerie says he's...

BONNIE. What? A chip off the old man's block? He got ass tats, too?

SHERRY. A project.

BONNIE. What's that mean?

SHERRY. I love Valerie, but...

BONNIE. We need some shadow on the jawline. You love her but what?

SHERRY. She's a perfectionist.

BONNIE. Like someone else I know.

SHERRY. No, I'm not.

BONNIE. Right. You obsess about everything. Your character. Your lines. The blocking. Every detail has to be perfect. You know, don't you, that nothing on the stage is ever perfect. And that's what makes live theatre so delicious.

SHERRY. That's different.

BONNIE. And you totally suck up to Pippi.

SHERRY. I do?

BONNIE. Total suck up.

SHERRY. I just want to get it right. The role. My character.

SLIDING INTO SENIORHOOD

BONNIE. And your makeup. Everything's got to be just right. You know, a little self-criticism is okay. Not saying you've got to be self-satisfied but look at you.

SHERRY. (*Snapping head around to look in the mirror.*) What?

BONNIE. (*Laughing.*) See what I mean? (*Sherry turns back, chagrined. Bonnie chides her gently.*) You do obsess. My God. The tits and ass of a 30-year-old. It doesn't make sense that you're constantly self-deprecating.

SHERRY. It's just –

BONNIE. The ego, what it is. Your debut performance and there you are, nailing it on the stage. You need to stop stressing. Let it go. Some of us got boobies kissing our knees. And you're the one obsessing...

SHERRY. I don't try to change other people.

BONNIE. So. What? Valerie does?

SHERRY. I never even considered trying to change Walt.

BONNIE. Yeah. Well, tats are hard to remove.

SHERRY. His opinions.

BONNIE. So, Matt is like his old man. An opinionated ass.

SHERRY. Everyone's got opinions. With Matt, it's something different. Valerie's just so... How much do you overlook in a relationship? How much do you excuse?

BONNIE. Like burping and farting?

SHERRY. View about politics. Religion. Money. You know.

BONNIE. Who cares about that? Views about sex, that's different. We're getting close, girl. Let's see about those pouty lips.

SHERRY. (*Taking lipstick from Bonnie.*) Thanks. I think I've got this.

BONNIE. So what? She doesn't like his politics?

SHERRY. She says they're intellectually compatible. But maybe that doesn't extend to emotional compatibility. Emotional intelligence. That's her obsession. It's a freaking fetish.

BONNIE. That's the professor in her. Are they sexually compatible? That's the question.

SHERRY. You can't treat a significant other as project.

BONNIE. What's he like? Wait! You still haven't met the new boyfriend?

SHERRY. Not since high school. He was... Curious, I guess. A good student. (*Valerie peeks in the dressing room.*)

SLIDING INTO SENIORHOOD

BONNIE. Oh, my God. Look who's here.

VALERIE. Sorry to interrupt. (*Valerie enters, embraces Sherry.*)

SHERRY. Sweetie! What are you [doing here]? Dress rehearsal isn't until tomorrow night.

VALERIE. I know. Matt and I are having dinner around the corner, and he wanted to stop in to ask you something.

BONNIE. (*Rising and moving off to the side.*) Bring him in!

VALERIE. You were talking about him.

SHERRY. He's here? (*A knock. A beat. Then, Matt sticks his head through the door. Sherry's eyes go wide. Bonnie stares, a knowing smile.*)

MATT. May I come in? (*Sherry nods. Valerie and Bonnie look on as Matt, a bit overcome with the visage and his memories, and Sherry share an awkward moment.*) ¿Señora Miller, cómo está,?

SHERRY. (*Overlapping.*) How are you?

MATT. (*Overlapping.*) Fine, thank you.

SHERRY. (*Overlapping.*) Muy bien. Gracias

BONNIE. (*Thoroughly amused.*) Looks like we got us a high school reunion.

SHERRY. I'm sorry. Bonnie, you know my niece, Valerie. And this is Matt. Bonnie is a wonderful actor.

MATT. Nice to meet you.

STAGE MANAGER (OFF). Thirty minutes. Full costume, please. Thirty minutes.

BONNIE. (*Beginning to unbutton her blouse.*) Time to get out of these clothes.

SHERRY. Hold on, Bonnie. (*Sherry excoriates Bonnie with her eyes before turning to Matt.*) Valerie said you wanted to ask me something.

MATT. Dad would like to come with us on opening night. I bought him a ticket.

BONNIE. Sweet.

SHERRY. Oh. Well, of course. That's his decision.

VALERIE. He's really changing, Auntie.

MATT. He read Valerie's book and –

VALERIE. I've been coaching him.

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MATT. Both of us. That is, Valerie's been coaching both of us. And, well, the thing is, Dad would really like to reconnect.

BONNIE. Wow! Sounds like quite a three-way you've got going there with your dad. (*Absorbing a withering look from Sherry.*) Sorry, but just want to say. I hope he does come. I'd like to meet the man. Maybe get a look at his trademark.

MATT. Trademark? What's his trademark? (*Crossfade to next scene.*)

SCENE 10

Back in the Detroit Sky Club, continuing. The hunt continues, though it's unclear who's the hunter and who's the prey.

VALERIE. You said you were sorry. When you first came over.

MATT. Oh, yeah. Uh... I was a shit. (*Off Valerie's confusion.*) We were young, and I was thinking with my pecker.

VALERIE. Peckers don't have brains. It's all upstairs.

MATT. The pecker cortex.

VALERIE. Mmm. So, you got married for the wrong reasons.

MATT. Reason. Just one.

VALERIE. Men and women get together for sex, but that's not enough to keep us together.

MATT. So, what is?

VALERIE. Reason to stay together?

MATT. Yeah.

VALERIE. Kids. Security. Common interests. Just avoiding the inconvenience of splitting up.

MATT. It can be a lot more than an inconvenience.

VALERIE. The biggest is intellectual compatibility.

MATT. That's it, huh? The reason to stay together.

VALERIE. Intellectual compatibility covers a multitude of flaws.

MATT. Not when you're nineteen.

VALERIE. It only lasted eight months?

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MATT. Once the bloom was off, the prospect of an entire life together was terrifying.

VALERIE. There are biological reasons for monogamy.

MATT. (*Raising his glass again with a smile.*) But not for you and me.

VALERIE. (*Pausing, amused, then clinking his glass.*) Now you are coming on to me.

MATT. We've got two hours.

VALERIE. And you're plying me with alcohol.

MATT. With intellectual compatibility.

VALERIE. So, are you speaking from your cerebral cortex or from your pecker cortex? (*Pause as they share a smile.*)

VALERIE. What made you choose psychology?

MATT. *I–O* psychology.

VALERIE. Okay. What made you choose *industrial – organizational* psychology?

MATT. Started with clinical psych. I think I was just trying to figure out my dad.

VALERIE. Daddy issues?

MATT. He always seemed so angry. No reason for it. He had a good job. Good family. But he was never... He was just pissed at the world. Pissed at me.

VALERIE. Were you a handful? As a kid.

MATT. Not really. Good student. Okay athlete. A bit of mischief, but nothing serious. But I sure as hell pissed him off.

VALERIE. Everyone's behavior makes sense to them. For your dad, being pissed at the world – being pissed at you – must have made sense.

MATT. (*Becoming reflective, disconsolate.*) My fourteenth birthday. Mom made me a cake. I wasn't having a party. We weren't doing anything special. And that was okay with me, but the thing is, I wanted a piece of that cake when I got home from school. You know, before dinner. Since it was my birthday, my mom agreed and cut me this huge slice of chocolate cake.

VALERIE. And a glass of milk.

MATT. Oh, yeah. You're from Minnesota, you've got to have your milk. Anyway, I sat on a kitchen stool – we had this island, kind of a bar in the

SLIDING INTO SENIORHOOD

kitchen – and I sat on a stool at that bar and I... I just tore into that cake. (*Sad chuckle, then very somber.*) My dad walked in and saw me wolfing down that cake. Keep in mind, I was just fourteen. One look at me stuffing my face, and he walked over and backhanded me. Right in the mouth. Knocked me backward off the stool.

VALERIE. Oh, God.

MATT. He was always big on table manners.

VALERIE. Chew with your mouth closed.

MATT. Sit up straight. Pass the food before you dig in. Please and thank you. Chewing with your mouth closed was a... For him, it was a religious tenet.

VALERIE. Knocked you off the stool?

MATT. No shit. Mom yelped, but she couldn't really say anything except, *Ooooh, honey.*

VALERIE. She was concerned for you.

MATT. (*Oozing with pain, almost losing it.*) She was talking to my dad.

VALERIE. Oh God. (*Reaching over to touch Matt's cheek.*) Still hurts, doesn't it?

MATT. Yeah, well, I thought – I guess I thought – by studying clinical psych I might get some insight.

VALERIE. But you switched to I–O?

MATT. Clinical was too... God, there are a lot of weirdos out there. I'm talking some real perverts.

VALERIE. Takes a special breed to do clinical. Some disorders... I couldn't do it either.

MATT. (*Pausing. Shifting gears.*) What's it like, then? A neuropsychologist. I guess you don't have to get all messy, cutting into brains. Slicing them up.

VALERIE. Oh, I slice them up all the time, but not with a knife. Mostly computer imaging on live brains.

MATT. Exploring the mysteries of the pecker cortex.

VALERIE. No lack of mysteries in the brain. Mostly I explore reward and attention networks.

MATT. Well, you've got my attention.

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VALERIE. And emotions. People describe emotions as feelings. But they're more than that. They're physical. Physical changes. Changes in the brain. Epinephrine. Cortisol. A complex cocktail of hormones flooding the brain, speeding up your heart, your breathing, dilating the pupils.

MATT. I can feel my pupils dilating as we speak.

VALERIE. You've got 85 billion neurons between your ears. When some of them fire, you experience pain. Others, you experience pleasure.

Imagine when we fully understand the dynamics.

MATT. Dilated, aren't they? And feel! My heart rate's definitely elevated.

VALERIE. *(A bit of a grin but maintaining earnestness.)* You're incorrigible. But really, Matt, it wouldn't hurt for you to consider...

MATT. What?

VALERIE. Emotions drive episodic memories.

MATT. Uh huh.

VALERIE. The experiences we remember from childhood are those that were highly emotional. Positive or negative. A new bike underneath the Christmas tree. Getting knocked off a stool.

MATT. Uh huh.

VALERIE. When we recognize and label our emotions, it can help us control them.

MATT. You sure you're not a clinical psychologist?

VALERIE. Oh, God. I'm sorry. I get started talking about the brain. It's just... You know, if you're really interested in the Four Fs, if you want to understand fight and flight –

MATT. And don't forget. Tell me again, what's the fourth F?

VALERIE. To understand any of the Fs, understand emotions. Anyway, for me it's all so fascinating.

MATT. Fascinating! The fifth F. Can you see how you've stirred up my emotions? *(Crossfade to next scene.)*

SCENE 11

Back in Nob Hill Manor resident lounge, continuing.

SLIDING INTO SENIORHOOD

EDDY. Cheer up, man. Ain't fittin' for a man with propellers on his ass to be mopin' like a jellyfish. You want the kiddies to like you, you might even try smilin'. Fire up those propellers, man! Get outta that chair and off your ass! Go make some memories.

WALT. *(Walt recovers a bit and studies the medal.)* Thanks Eddy.

EDDY. Now I gotta go see Maxine. Give her a memory. *(Eddy exits. Walt turns the medal in his hand and studies it.)*

MATT. *(Matt enters holding a gift.)* What's that? Birthday present?

WALT. *(Startled, Walt rises quickly and excitedly moves to Matt, intending a hug.)* Matt! *(Matt holds out the birthday present at arm's length to preclude physical contact. Walt slowly takes the gift and stares at his son.)* I didn't know you were coming.

MATT. Last minute trip.

WALT. Well, it's really good to see you. Come sit down. *(Walt and Matt take seats. Awkward pause.)* How are you?

MATT. *(Overlapping.)* Happy birthday.

WALT. *(Overlapping.)* Thanks.

MATT. *(Overlapping.)* Fine.

WALT. Would you like some cake?

MATT. *(Studies the cake, gives a sardonic chuckle, and wags his head.)* Really? Chocolate birthday cake?

WALT. Don't like chocolate?

MATT. You're kidding, right? *(Walt is puzzled, has no clue.)* That's okay. No cake. Just open your present.

WALT. You didn't need to. *(Walt tears the wrapping off to reveal a hardcover book. He examines the cover, expressionless, inscrutable.)*

MATT. Well?

WALT. *(Reading the title.)* From Torment to Bliss: The Neuroscience of Emotions.

(Walt looks up, confusion clouding his attempt at a smile.)

MATT. Signed by the author. Take a look.

WALT. *(Opens the book to read an inscription.)* For Walt, on your birthday. With appreciation for the life you've lived and for the son you've given to the world. Best wishes. Valerie. *(Thoroughly confused.)* For the life I've lived?

SLIDING INTO SENIORHOOD

MATT. Hang on to that, Dad. Author could be famous someday.

WALT. Is this? It is. How do you know her?

MATT. Long story. But I heard you're seeing Aunt Sherry.

WALT. Oh. Well, we, uh...

MATT. That's okay. When you're ready you can tell me all about it. So, how have you been?

WALT. I've been... Actually, I was just thinking about you.

MATT. Yeah. Thinking what?

WALT. Wondering how you're doing. Thinking about my kids. My grandkids. I was wondering, what stands out for you when you think about your childhood?

MATT. Really? Want to dive right into my childhood? No small talk to warm up?

WALT. When you think about me, what do you, uh... What do you remember? Your thoughts?

MATT. Well, the neuropsychologist would say I'm most likely to remember experiences that generated a strong emotion. It could be positive, like winning the eighth-grade spelling bee. But it could be negative, too. Like getting knocked on my ass on my birthday that same year.

WALT. That spelling bee! I was so proud of you.

MATT. Were you?

WALT. Of course, I was.

MATT. Huh.

WALT. Academics. School was always easy for you.

MATT. You think I haven't had to work for it?

WALT. *What?* No, that's not what I mean. Of course not.

MATT. God. I paid my own way. Earned every step. Every degree.

WALT. And I'm proud of you for it. What I meant was...

MATT. Yeah?

WALT. You've always been so damn smart. Even as a little guy. Reading before you were in kindergarten. You loved to study about dinosaurs. And such an encyclopedic memory.

MATT. I don't know about encyclopedic.

SLIDING INTO SENIORHOOD

WALT. When you were five or six, you used to stay up late and listen in when your mother and I had guests over. You'd be hiding around the corner in your pajamas. Wanted to hear what the adults were discussing. I knew you were there, and I'd wait for the opportune moment to bring up the topic of dinosaurs.

MATT. I did love dinosaurs.

WALT. And Dr. Morgan, the university president. He was over one evening, and I told him, go ahead. Ask the boy anything about dinosaurs.

MATT. Guy with the lazy eye.

WALT. He was already anticipating your PhD and planning a tenure-track position for you. I was so damn proud, Matt. Still am. Anyway. That's something I think about. What about you?

MATT. Here's a good one. Third grade. You gave me baseball mitt. All the boys were playing baseball at recess, and I was the only kid who didn't have a mitt. I asked you for one, but you said no.

WALT. Back then... Was I still in grad school? Well, I don't know, but money was always tight.

MATT. Yeah, I guess. But Mom must have intervened, really guilted you, because next day at recess, I looked up to see you striding across the playground. I didn't see the mitt you were holding because I was looking at your face and thinking: Oh, no! What did I do to make my dad mad enough to stomp across the playground and whip my ass in front of my friends?

WALT. I never did that.

MATT. No. You didn't. You marched right up to me and thrust a baseball mitt in my face. Said nothing, just turned on your heel and marched off the playground. What a mix of emotions that created. So happy to have a new baseball glove but feeling like shit that I'd made a problem for you.

WALT. I don't know if you can understand the kind of pressure I was under.

MATT. Yeah. Probably right. Know what else?

WALT. I get it. I was hard on you.

MATT. On everyone. We're standing in line for a slide at the water park. Noah's Ark in Wisconsin Dells. I was about ten. A bunch of rambunctious college kids, three or four of them, decide to cut the line. You told us to

SLIDING INTO SENIORHOOD

stay put and you walked over. God, you had such authority. You were so... So steady. Calm. You walked over and told them matter-of-factly, *Sorry, kids, you need to take it to the back of the line.* I was scared shitless they'd get in your face. Or worse. But there's something about the way you carry yourself. They responded as if you were ten feet tall and wearing a police uniform. Such authority.

WALT. I always say –

MATT. Civilized society runs on respect.

WALT. Exactly.

MATT. I learned that from you. And a lot more. I've been thinking a lot about you, too. Thinking about how much you and I are alike. In fact, I had an epiphany a few weeks ago.

WALT. Really?

MATT. Yeah. We can both be opinionated asses. (*Walt's face falls.*
Crossfade to next scene.)

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