

The Party in the Kitchen

By

Madelyn Sergel

m.sergel@comcast.net
www.madelynsergel.com

Cast of Characters

LIL.....40s, smart, organized
PHIL.....Late 40s, married to Lil
GUY.....50s, tough, successful business man
AVA.....50s, sophisticated, married to Guy
MARY.....30s, new to the neighborhood, Latina
DANNY.....30s, married to Mary, Latino
ERIC.....25, son of Ava and Guy
SAMANTHA.....16, daughter of Lil and Phil

Act One

August, 2001
&
September, 2005

Act Two

February, 2008
&
May, 2009

Place

Phil & Lil's kitchen

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ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

Nice kitchen in an upscale McMansion. Phil comes in, lugging a six-pack of beer. He peers out the window. Lil enters with a stack of folded napkins. Lil and Phil have an easy cadence to their banter.

LIL

Honey, ignore the clouds. It'll be fine-

PHIL

They said clear skies. But look at those-

LIL

It'll be fun. An August end-of-summer storm. Don't worry about it. Put those in the fridge.

PHIL

Lil, I worry about everything. Would we be in this gorgeous life if I didn't worry us here?

LIL

True. Fridge.

PHIL

(Squatting by fridge, sliding in individual beers)

We've got so much, it won't all fit. Are the new neighbors...um, Missy and Donny? Are they beer drinkers?

LIL

Mary. Mary and Danny.

PHIL

Shit. Okay. Got it. Mary and Donny.

LIL

Danny. And I don't know. He looks like you, fifteen years ago, so I'd say yes to beer. She's probably white wine. Wait. No. Pregnant. No wine.

PHIL

Okay, beer for him. No white wine for her. Guy and Ava are martinis. Jamie is always Chianti and Russ is-

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LIL

-Coke. But still out of town.

PHIL

Okay, so no Russ-

AVA

And Jamie might leave early to get him-

PHIL

So not too much Chianti for Jamie. The Linn's. Craig, beer, Ann, a Manhattan. God, you think Craig will-

LIL

-show us the tattoo again?

PHIL

I mean, he's great but that's way too much information.

LIL

You do know Ann got a matching one.

PHIL

What?! You're kidding.

LIL

(Beginning to giggle)

To go with his Notre Dame football...she got...she got...

Giggles take over

PHIL

WHAT?!

LIL

Goalposts!

PHIL

God Almighty. Why are we doing this again?

LIL

Guy and Ava. Back from their celebration Eric-graduated, summer European and New York City jet set thingy. And to introduce the new neighbors to people. Remember, when you lent him the lawn mower-

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PHIL

Oh yeah! And afterwards, it was last Friday, and you had had too many glasses of wine and blabbed we were having people over-

LIL

And I caved.

PHIL

(Kissing her)

You are pathetic. After a few glasses of wine tonight, will you cave to me?

LIL

Of course. But only if you worry about it first.

PHIL

Done.

She opens the window. A light breeze hits her face.

LIL

God, it is so beautiful out. Hard to believe September is almost here. A perfect time to visit New York. We should go some time, like Guy and Ava do. Take Sam.

PHIL

With that kidnapper running around?

LIL

There's always a kidnapper running around.

PHIL

Yeah. Guy was probably leading Ava down every dark alley he could find.

*Phil reaches to pull something off a platter.
Lil slaps his hand away.*

LIL

Oh please. That's just them.

PHIL

Like those two guys on the old Star Trek, wrestling each other for all eternity?

LIL

That's entertainment.

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PHIL

Hey. I think I've solved it.

LIL

What?

PHIL

It's Guy.

LIL

What's Guy?

PHIL

The intern. Ava finally pushed Guy to the brink and he's holed her, Chandra, up in a little place in the Village. Or SoHo. Or wherever rich guys keep their girlfriends.

GUY

(Offstage)

Hello!

AVA

(Offstage)

Guy, you don't walk in someone's house like that.

LIL

Shit, they're early.

(Calling)

Back here. Kitchen.

Pulling out the vodka

At least it's Guy and Ava.

Ava and Guy enter

AVA

I told him not to come in. That we were early and it was rude to just come in.

LIL

Hi, Ava. Guy. Oh please! It's not rude. And you're only a few minutes early. Come in. We've missed you. Start pouring!

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AVA

It's rude. Guy, how can you be so successful when you have such awful manners?

GUY

(Shaking Phil's hand)

Ava, we've know them for over twenty years! Jesus, woman.

AVA

(Kissing Lil)

In Europe, this would be totally unacceptable.

PHIL

(Kissing Ava)

Well, you're in Illinois, so you're safe.

GUY

Then go back to France, Ava! Get on a fucking plane.

LIL

(Embracing Guy)

How was the trip?

GUY

Very successful.

AVA

It's all about work with Guy. Meetings and work. The most beautiful cities in the world and he's working. Always on his horrible cellular, mobile phone thing to the states, complaining about reception.

GUY

Working paid for the trip.

Phil holds up the bottle of vodka. Guy nods and Phil begins mixing.

AVA

Not for me. We drink wine now.

She exits

GUY

(Calling)

You drink wine now.

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She returns and hands Lil three bottles of expensive French wine.

AVA

Oh! So who did I see polishing off more than his share of very expensive Bordeaux the last month and a half?

GUY

Can't get a decent martini in Europe. I'm nothing if not flexible.

LIL

Oh yeah. Flexible Guy, that's what I always say.

GUY

Bullshit. You say, "Mother fucking Republican bastard."

LIL

Well, that too, but I say it with love.

Lil begins opening a bottle of wine

PHIL

So, how are you guys? How was the trip? How's the graduate?

GUY

(Shrugging)

He claims his art is going well.

Guy makes quotation marks with his fingers when he says "art"

AVA

He's gotten a lovely sublet in New York-

GUY

A first-string running back, summa cum laude in business and communications, and he decides to become an artist. He's got the world at his feet and he decides to express himself. He's always done shit like this. Dated that goth chick. Taking Chinese instead of Spanish. Doing that summer outreach thing instead of the internship I set up for him. Just to piss me off. Gotta piss off the old man.

PHIL

Didn't we do that to our fathers?

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Phil hands Guy his martini. Guy grunts and takes a gulp.

GUY

My pop wanted me to join the army, join the union, join the bowling league, and take my place at the factory. He never understood this college crap. And “art”? Art was the guy bowling 280 in the next lane. Eric doesn’t appreciate he’s got the world at his feet, he’s got every advantage. He’s got it all but he’s got to do it and not fuck around. I told him, “I’m not supporting you.”

AVA

Oh. Oh! We give fifty grand a year each to the Art Institute, Steppenwolf and Goodman and god knows whoever else but he can’t give a dime to his own son.

GUY

I don’t have to when he has YOU shooting him checks every fucking week.

AVA
(To Lil)

He has a girlfriend. An actress.

GUY

So at least he’s not gay.

Lil pours three very large glasses of wine for her, Phil and Ava.

PHIL

It’s good to have you guys back.

LIL

Yeah, we don’t get the boxing channels on ESPN.

AVA
(Swirling the wine in her glass)

We should let this breathe. Let it open up. It makes an amazing difference. A little time can make all the difference.

GUY

Which is why I’m back to martinis. Screw time. Screw opening up.

AVA

Where is Samantha?

LIL

In-laws. Overnight. *Shrek* and McDonalds.

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The doorbell rings

AVA
(*To Guy*)

See? That's how you arrive at someone's home.

PHIL

I'll get it.

Phil trots out

LIL

This may be the Linn's. Ann and Craig. You know them, the tailgate party. And who else...um...the O'Meara's, Jamie's coming but not Russ. And the new neighbors Danny and Mary.

PHIL
(*Offstage*)

Hey, we're in the kitchen right now. Just getting things going. Come on back.

*Phil enters, followed by Mary and Danny.
Mary is visibly pregnant. She wears a small
cross around her neck.*

PHIL

Hey guys, it's-

He freezes, blanking on their names.

LIL

-Mary! Danny! Welcome!

PHIL

Mary and Don-Danny. I mean, Mary and Danny. This is Guy and Ava.

GUY
(*Extending his hand*)

Guy.

LIL

This is Ava.

DANNY

I'm Danny Vasquez and this is my wife Mary.

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GUY

Ho ho! So, I see there's going to be an addition soon.

AVA

Guy! Don't say things like that to a woman. She might just be fat.

MARY

No, I'm not...I mean, hello. Yes, I am pregnant.

AVA

Well, you never know. Lovely to meet you. Some wine? It's a cabernet.

DANNY
(Declining)

We're expecting in a month.

GUY

Expecting what?

DANNY
(Slowly)

The baby?

GUY

Oh. You're one of those.

DANNY

What?

GUY

One of those guys who talk like they're having the baby too.

DANNY

Well, I am. We are.

AVA
(To Mary)

Well, prepare yourself. You never know what's coming. You have a child with a man and twenty years later you turn around and he won't lift a goddamn finger for him.

LIL
(To Danny)

You sure? Beer? Wine?

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DANNY
(Glancing at Guy and Ava)

Well, maybe.

(To Mary)

Sorry, honey. Beer, please. Honey, would you like some water or juice.

Lil hands Danny a beer.

(To Lil)

Do you have-

MARY

-I'm fine, honey.

(To Lil)

Is it just us or are others-

LIL

The Linns are coming a little later. There's a game finishing up. Unless there's overtime. Whatever. But they'll be here. And Jamie O'Meara. She has twins. Toddlers. I thought you might like to meet some of the moms-

DANNY

-Yeah, Mary needs some friends.

LIL

Good.

MARY

Danny. I've got friends. Just not here. Back in San Francisco.

LIL

But it's just hard moving so far across the country.

MARY

Exactly.

LIL

I'll introduce you around.

MARY

You're the first to invite us over. It's so nice. I really appreciate it. I mean, there's no where to go to meet people.

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DANNY

Yeah, after being a city girl, adjusting to the suburban life is-

AVA

Have a glass of wine.

MARY

I haven't touch liquor since-

DANNY

She's been amazing. Mary went completely organic the moment she found out we...she was pregnant.

MARY

There are so many toxins.

GUY

I love toxins.

AVA

A glass won't kill you. Probably help. The French do it. Moderation is the key.

GUY

What do you know about moderation, Ava?

AVA

Enjoying that martini, Guy?

PHIL

So where do you work again, Danny?

DANNY

GrandTech Technologies.

GUY

We do some business with GrandTech.

DANNY

Who are you with?

PHIL

Guy is Gold & Silver Industries. Guy Gold.

DANNY

You're...you're Guy-

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GUY
-Gold.

DANNY
You're Guy Gold?

AVA
Guilty. Don't be too impressed.

LIL
Oh, Ava, stop.

(To Danny)

Be impressed. Guy, you're fabulous.

GUY
Thank you, Lil.

LIL
Deeply misguided politically but fabulous.

GUY
Lil, just don't bleed all over this lovely tile floor with my tax money.

LIL
Don't "girl" me, capitalist scoundrel.

PHIL
Stop, honey. I'm a capitalist scoundrel.

LIL
Fine. Open the sliding door, scoundrel. Let's get some of the last-of-summer breeze.

Phil does.

GUY
Where are you from?

DANNY
Texas.

AVA
God, I hate Texas.

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GUY

Jesus, Ava! It's their hometown.

MARY

Well, actually, I'm from-

AVA

I can hate Texas if I want, Guy! I know the South. I'm from the fucking South! You know nothing. All you know about southern culture is from twice a year visits to my mother's in Louisiana.

(To Danny and Mary)

I'm from New Orleans.

MARY

New Orleans is beautiful.

AVA

Yes. Getting destroyed by termites. And the culture is getting bled out of it by this homogenization we call-

GUY

Ava. Stop.

AVA

But at least it has a complex personality to destroy. Texas, on the other hand is probably the ugliest, driest, most simple-

GUY

Jesus Christ, Ava, will you start drinking and shut up?

PHIL

This is why we always have lively dinner parties. Guy and Ava.

BLACKOUT

END SCENE ONE

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SCENE TWO

LATER. Murmurs coming from the other room. A light rain can be heard. Guy, Phil and Danny come in, shaking off some water, stubbing out some half-smoked cigars. Phil pulls out a couple of beers and hands them around.

DANNY

I am blown away by how...into this pregnancy she is. I mean, I'm relieved I don't have to do it. The books. The organic stuff. God, so much can go wrong. But she's really on top of it. She's got it handled. She's really into it.

PHIL

Don't worry. You'll get your wife back. She hasn't changed. Mary is still in there. Somewhere.

DANNY

What do you mean?

PHIL

She's gone a little wacko, right?

DANNY

Um...

GUY

They all do. Like they can control it. Think Ava's a bitch now? She's fucking Gandhi compared to when she was carrying Eric.

DANNY

Mary has the house so purified; I'm scared to take a dump.

GUY

You know how she told your wife to have some wine? Ava had seven ultrasounds. Seven fucking ultrasounds. And she got insurance to pay for it, god love her. I should have her in accounting.

PHIL

When Lil was pregnant with Samantha, one day I counted the child raising and pregnancy books we had in the house. 23. I shit you not.

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DANNY

I think Mary's got that number beat. Not to mention the calls to her mother and sisters. The advice. All the things you're supposed to do...

PHIL

It'll get better.

DANNY

Yeah? But then there's the whole dad thing. Mary has been looking into attachment parenting. Did either of you-

PHIL

There are a billion experts, family, mothers, everybody ready to tell you the right way. The only way.

GUY

Doesn't exist, my friend.

PHIL

You are put into this equation to be the sane one. Let her have the insanity but reel her in when you have to.

GUY

Has she started on the kid-in-the-bed crap?

DANNY

Family bed? Yes!

GUY

Stop that shit in its tracks right now.

Phil nods furiously in agreement.

DANNY

How?

PHIL

Don't disagree right now.

GUY

Just let her yack.

PHIL

Then put the bassinet thing right next to the bed. After the kid is a few weeks old, put your foot down. She'll be too exhausted to fight you and deep down, really grateful.

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GUY

Move the kid yourself when she's sleeping if you have to.

DANNY

It's just really weird. To be becoming the dad. I got this promotion, she got pregnant, we moved. It's all happened so fast. I feel like I just got out of college, worried about getting a job and now-

PHIL

-you're the dad.

GUY

The man.

DANNY

It's all on me.

GUY

Yup. Get used to it.

PHIL

It gets weirder. I'm management. Guy and I, well, Guy is the boss at his company, but we're both The Man. The guy I feared, the prick who called me on the carpet for screwing up, the guy I wanted to be...but better. I'm him. Twenty years ago I thought "I" made so much money. If you lived in a big house, you had to be rich, right?

GUY

If you could write a hundred dollar check to a charity instead of spending it on rent or beer-

PHIL

Yeah! You've gotta be rich and powerful if you can do that.

They both laugh.

I mean, so much comes in. Every month, I look at the paycheck for like 10 seconds. It's so big. But then it goes right back out. Stuff for Sam. Mortgage. Insurance. Credit card. Car payments. The gym. Gas. Utilities. All this shit that has to be paid.

GUY

And we're the bad guy. Watch out, Danny. It'll never be enough. We're supposed to keep the economy going. Make jobs but be the cheapskate that never pays people enough. Pay for your kid's college. Don't have debt but get good credit. Invest in the stock market but diversify. Take care of your family but respect women as equals but mow the lawn on your one fucking afternoon off. And if the company tanks, it's my fault. I didn't make shit for years, poured it all back into the business. My employees, they got Christmas

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GUY (CONT'D)

bonuses every year. Went home while I was up all night, working. I drove the same beater for 10 years and everyone thought it was eccentric, thought I was cheap...but they got their fucking insurance. They had a good place to work. I juggled every regulation. Half the time, I didn't pay myself for I don't know how long. I took the risk but now I'm the bad guy for being The Man. You wait, Danny. It's coming. You're smart. It'll happen to you.

DANNY

Make a hundred grand a year. I hope so!

PHIL

Watch out. Success is...Guy?

GUY

Success is a bitch in a beautiful dress.

END SCENE TWO

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SCENE THREE

Later still. Lil is loading dishes in the dishwasher. She is a little on the tipsy side. Mary enters with a few dirty glasses in hand which she hands to Lil.

LIL

Thanks. Having fun?

MARY

Yeah. Sure.

LIL

Don't sound too enthusiastic.

MARY

Sorry. It's a great party.

LIL

Don't worry. You're normal. It does get harder.

MARY

What do you mean? What does?

LIL

The friends thing. The new people, new places thing.

MARY

Why is that? It shouldn't be hard, making new friends! It's so weird. It was so easy in college and when I started working. But now...it seems like people don't want to make new friends. Or they just see the belly. The pregnant part. God, I feel so boring. Is it me? Is it the Midwest?

LIL

Oh, it's not you. You're fine.

MARY

Maybe sometime we could get together for coffee.

LIL

Sure. Sure. After the baby maybe. And when the back to school schedule has settled down.

MARY

That's a blow off.

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LIL

What?

MARY

You are blowing me off. You don't want to get together. You're stalling. I can tell.

Lil stops and thinks for a moment.

LIL

Yes, I think I am. Wow. I'm sorry. But, Mary, well, it's not you. People just have their lives in place more. Everybody is just really, really busy. With their kids and work and their lives, marriages. And well...

MARY

What?

LIL

You'll see. Soon you are just going to be walloped. It's like a total blindside. It's like getting hit by something, having a kid. You'll be reinventing you. After the hit comes the reinvention. And you're going to be leaving the old you in the dusty ruins.

MARY

What does that mean?

LIL

It means you're young. Untouched. Not untouchable, just untouched yet. The fan-hitting shit is coming.

MARY

So you don't want to be my friend?

LIL

No! I like you! I do. It's just....do you know how hard new friends are? Really, I sometimes think I can't make friends anymore. Phil better not die 'cuz I certainly couldn't date. I don't want to share my thoughts, my history, how my parents fucked me up or how I recovered. It's just too much damn work! I'm over it. I'm fine. I forgave my parents decades ago. But to make new friends, new connections, you have to *share*. It's so irritating. Just look into my soul, know me and let's move on. I'm busy.

MARY

So you end up alone.

LIL

You end up interesting. You make friends from doing stuff. You can share this part with this friend, another part with another. You think I tell everything to Phil? He's just my

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LIL (CONT'D)

husband. He knows the darkest shit of me, but he doesn't want to know the bus stop gossip. You've got to compartmentalize a little, girl! Take a page from the guy book. I share kid issues with the bus stop moms, work thoughts with other teachers, family and husband crap with old friends, and laugh about it all with Phil. Parse it out a little. Everyone will let you down eventually if your expectations are about another sating your soul.

MARY

I think I just need a girlfriend.

LIL

For what?

MARY

Friendship. Connection. Danny is fabulous. Incredible. So supportive but-

LIL

-The best friend thing. You have one in San Francisco?

MARY

Yes.

LIL

Good. You've got the soul connection. Now just look for a simple conversation and ride the wave you're on. You're fine.

MARY

I'm not.

LIL

Yes, you are. You're fine. Whatever you're feeling, you're fine.

Ava enters

AVA

That husband of yours, Danny, he's charming. A charmer. Enjoy it now. A couple of years, he'll be just like the rest of them.

LIL

Some more desert, Ava?

Lil hands Ava the pie tin and a fork.

I know, they wouldn't do it like this in Paris but-

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AVA
(Digging in)

Oh, I get so obsessed sometimes. It's absurd. I'd medicate but then I couldn't drink.

MARY

Danny is amazing. And very attentive.

AVA

The change is coming.

MARY

What do you mean exactly?

AVA

They all change. Everyone changes.

LIL

I totally disagree, Ava! People don't change. Circumstances do and people adjust but the core doesn't change.

AVA

Then the male core is dipping in deceit.

LIL

Are you gay?

AVA

Ha! I wish!

MARY

I think I'll-

Mary begins edging out

AVA

Oh, don't go. We're having fun. Eat some pie.

She slides the pie tin across the counter to Mary. Mary tentatively picks up a fork and begins nibbling.

MARY

Can I ask you something?

AVA

Why am I such a bitch?

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MARY

Um, no.

AVA

Um, YES. You think I'm some godless, vodka-swilling, smack-talking...is that the slang? Smack talking?

MARY

Yes. But no, I-

AVA
(To Lil)

-We can ask Samantha

(To Mary)

-bitch who swears too much.

MARY

No.

AVA

Please, Mary. Cough up that hairball called the truth.

MARY

Okay, well, yes, I guess.

AVA

Thank god. I hate spineless, suburban milquetoast women. I am a bitch. You wanna know why? Because people worry too much about what others think instead of thinking for themselves and I won't do that. It's ridiculous. I think, I speak. Want to know where you stand? Come stand next to me.

LIL

It's true.

AVA

I see the world. I'm a bitch because the world has labeled honesty a liability. Aren't you sick of pretending?

MARY

I'm not pretending!

AVA

Really?

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MARY

I'm not. What would I be pretending?

AVA

That you really want to have sex when you're six months pregnant. That you don't mind being totally vulnerable and dependant on that charming, loving but not-wildly wealthy husband in the next room who isn't looking so much like a Tiger Beat pin-up guy anymore. That you don't mind that you are potentially tanking your career to become your mother. That you can't bend over but he's still dropping his socks on the floor, imagining that the little sock fairy is going to pick them up, put 'em in the wash and then replace them in the sock drawer for the prince o' men? Suddenly, your world had gotten really small, lonely and scary and you can't even have a drink to take the edge off but, dammit, you're going to be the best mother in the world if it kills you and everyone in your path.

LIL

(To Mary)

See why I like her?

AVA

And you're pretending that I'm just another gal at a dinner party but you're going home in about fifteen minutes and you are going to completely dish on me, my mouth, and how in hell Guy can put up with me.

MARY

No-

AVA

Yes.

Mary begins to laugh.

MARY

Okay, maybe a little.

Ava leans over to Mary

AVA

Doesn't it feel good? Telling the truth?

LIL

Yeah. People say the kitchen is the hearth of the home. I think it's the mouth of the home.

END SCENE THREE

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SCENE FOUR

September, 2005. Leaves are piled against the sliding glass door.

LIL
(Calling)

They're late.

Phil enters, lugging a tank for the grill, kicking some leaves back outside.

PHIL

Whose idea was it to grill?

LIL

Yours.

PHIL

Should I get started?

LIL

I don't know! It's not like them to be late.

PHIL

Relax. They've got a lot to handle.

LIL

Yeah. Shit. Now I feel bad.

PHIL

Everybody feels bad. It's a bad time. Day. Whatever.

LIL

I can't believe I didn't realize the date, the anniversary, when Ava and I set this up. We just said next Sunday. I didn't remember it would be the eleventh.

PHIL

Don't worry about it.

LIL

I'm a little scared. I'm not sure how to be with him. Is that awful?

PHIL

Human.

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LIL

But awful.

Phil shrugs and exits into the garage.

PHIL

Did you remember to clear out the front hall?

Lil peers down the hall. Mary enters through the sliding door. She is pregnant again.

MARY

Hey. They here?

LIL

No. Is Sam doing okay with little Danny?

MARY

They're watching this *Survivor* show. Is it appropriate for a four-year old?

LIL

Probably not.

MARY
(Shrugging)

Whatever. Is that wine?

Lil nods. Mary takes a small sip out of Lil's glass as Phil re-enters, juggling some grilling tools.

PHIL

Danny?

MARY

Extricate him from his computer if you dare. He said once he sees flames, he'll head over.

PHIL

That's my cue then.

Phil exits out the sliding door.

MARY

So how's Ava and-

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The doorbell rings.

LIL

Oh! They're here.

Lil rushes out to the front door. Voices can be heard off stage.

(Offstage)

Welcome! Hello! You look great. Okay, be careful. I've got the door.

AVA

(Offstage)

Guy, watch the-

GUY

(Offstage)

Ava, I've got-

ERIC

(Offstage)

Mom. He's got it.

Mary hovers, waiting.

MARY

(Calling)

Do you need any help?

Phil races through the kitchen from the patio to the front door.

PHIL

Hey, guys. Let me-

All still offstage.

ERIC

(Offstage)

I got it.

AVA

(Offstage)

We've got it.

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Ava enters first, followed by Eric in a wheelchair. Lil comes in behind Eric. Eric's chair gets caught on a bump between the hallway and the kitchen.

AVA
(Reaching to help)

I got you. Now, Eric, watch the-

ERIC

-Mom. Stop. I got it!

With some difficulty, he maneuvers and finally enters the kitchen.

LIL
Here, Eric. I made room at the table. The kitchen table.

Eric rolls up to Mary and sticks out his hand.

ERIC
Hi. I'm Eric.

MARY
(Shaking his hand earnestly)
Mary. The neighbor. We live next door to...well, to here. To them. Lil and Phil. We meet a long time ago. Before you were...deployed.

ERIC
Yeah. I remember. Hey.

AVA
Eric, Lil made room at the table for you.

ERIC
I heard, Mom. Thanks. The one with the beer at it?

LIL
It's got your name on it.

Eric goes up to the table and takes a long pull on the beer.

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

AVA

Sorry we're late. I told Guy to take Waukegan Road but he took 41 and then we had to get off-

Guy and Phil enter.

GUY

There's traffic fucking everywhere. And we had to...it was...um...backed up and so we took a little detour.

ERIC

Driving around all those roadside bombs took some extra time too.

Silence

Kidding, folks.

MARY

I just want to say, I think your service to our country is remarkable. Thank you. I hope people are thanking you.

ERIC

You're welcome. And yes, people are thanking me all over the place.

He finishes the beer.

You think...

He shakes the empty beer at Lil.

LIL

Yes!

PHIL

Get the man another beer, Lil!

AVA

Last one until we eat.

ERIC

Mom, I can handle a couple of beers. Not like I'm going to be staggering around, tripping over my own feet. Sorry about Mom, folks. Ava's a little on the incredibly hovering side this year.

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

AVA

You've got PT tomorrow morning at 8AM. Remember when you were hung over for OT on Wednesday? Nothing visible was accomplished.

PHIL

Well, you're looking great to us.

ERIC

Thanks. And Mom, accomplishing nothing visible was my goal. I grew spiritually. Dad, can you make her-

GUY

-I've been in the Ava micro-managing trenches for decades. Don't look at me. Just do whatever she says. I do.

ERIC

I've noticed. Mom, it's my first outing since...getting home. I'm having another beer.

AVA

PT. 8AM. Hung over or not.

ERIC

Not dead, Mom. Twenty-five and alive.

LIL

(Handing Eric another beer)

We are flattered you chose us, Eric, for your first outing. Sam can't wait to see you.

ERIC

Okay. She knows-

PHIL

Yup. And proud as hell.

ERIC

(To Lil)

Really? Didn't Sam and you march against us?

Silence

LIL

Against the war. Not against you.

PHIL

Why don't we check out the fire, I mean, the grill. Come on, guys.

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

There's a difference?
ERIC

Yes, I think there is.
LIL

Okay. Maybe you can explain it to me sometime.
ERIC

Outside. I've got cigars Lil will resent.
GUY

Phil heads out the patio door and Guy follows, helping to wheel Eric.

END SCENE FOUR

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

SCENE FIVE

LATER. Phil is pulling out a platter of uncooked chicken and begins rubbing salt and pepper into it. Danny is polishing off a plate of appetizers while Guy makes himself a martini.

PHIL

(Calling offstage)

I got 'em, Lil. And I'm turning on the oven.

(To Guy)

Go on.

GUY

Well, we're on the plane to Walter Reed and she's crying like I've never seen her cry. Not the sobbing cry. Not the screaming cry.

Reaching into the freezer, he drops some ice in the shaker

Just these tears running down her face. Streaming. I ended up getting a couple of napkins and just stuck 'em under her chin. I think eventually she ran out of...fluid.

Pours two jiggers of vodka into the shaker

She got a bottle of water, chugged it and it started all over again. Not a word. Just these fucking tears. A fucking flood. Like her own personal levees broke.

Swirls the shaker

DANNY

Ava?

GUY

Ava. You know how her father died?

Danny and Phil shake their heads. Guy puts a drop or two of vermouth in the martini glass, and twirls it.

Car accident when Ava was eight. Ava was in the car. They were broadsided. She's never said if she remembered. I don't know why I just thought of...well, anyway...

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

Guy shakes out the excess vermouth

PHIL

So...did she stop? Crying, I mean.

GUY

The airport, the cab, we finally get to reception, she's still flooding.

Pours the vodka into the glass from the shaker

They don't bat an eye. Used to it, I guess. Talk to the doctors. They say he's got this weak pulse. He might not...you know.

Drops an olive in

And I...well...he's my only...

Stares at the drink

And anyway, she's still not saying a word.

PHIL

Ava's not saying a word?

Lil enters. Phil and Danny look at her but Guy keeps staring at his drink.

LIL

I'm just checking the oven.

She quickly checks the temperature and then scoots out.

PHIL

Go on.

GUY

Where was-

DANNY

-Ava, not talking.

GUY

Yeah. It was like she was possessed by this other person. This quiet, demure, passive...mush.

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

He takes a big sip

GUY (CONT'D)

We walk into Eric's room and I'm telling her, you know, "Ava, he's going to make it." And I know I'm lying. And I think she knew I was lying. Shit. She knew. She's one smart bitch. And we walk in, there's the doctor behind us and Eric is laying there, all hooked up and this monitor is bleeping really slow and quiet. And Ava just stares at the monitor for like ten seconds, not saying a word. Not looking at Eric. And then she turns to the doctor and she launches. "What the hell is this treatment? This is absurd! I've seen dogs treated better! Who trained you? Hitler?" The woman is ripping him a new one. The doctor looks like he's been shot or something. And then Ava whips back around and stares at the monitor...and the beeping starts picking up. His pulse, Eric's pulse...comes up.

Another sip

And she keeps laying into this guy...to the point he says he's going to call the chaplain, and then, well, he's pretty smart, survival instinct kicks in, he moves right on to saying he's going to call security, and she's ripping on the hospital and the equipment and insulting their goddamn linoleum choice. And Eric starts moving. Tubes everywhere and he starts talking. He tells her to stop. He hasn't spoken since he was hit and he's telling Ava to shut up. She fucking *irritated* him back to life. She fucking drove him so crazy he had to live to make her stop. It was the most beautiful, gorgeous thing I've ever witnessed. I couldn't have done it.

Sip

Anyway, she's been a personal Eric Federal Emergency Management Agency ever since. But better run. Seriously, put Ava in charge and New Orleans would be looking like Paris in spring right now. I was never more in love with the bitch than I was at that...she saved...in that goddamn moment, she did it. She saved my boy's life.

Guy takes a pull on his drink.

PHIL

To Ava.

The three men clink glasses.

END SCENE FIVE

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

SCENE SIX

LATER. Ava enters with a few appetizer plates and starts putting them in the dishwasher. Lil is pulling a casserole of the oven while Mary begins assembling the salad.

MARY

He looks great, Ava.

AVA

He looks like hell. Top shelf, Lil?

LIL

Yeah. But I need the forks for the dessert. He's so mad at me.

AVA

(Dumping forks in the sink)

No. No! Really, it's just...fear. He's not mad at you. He's figuring it all out. How to be Eric now. And he's mad at me, of course.

MARY

Oh, I'm sure he's not.

AVA

Of course he is.

LIL

Why?

AVA

For being me. For insisting he live. For demanding he survives. He hates me.

MARY

Ava, of course he doesn't-

AVA

Oh stop. Don't dismiss me. He hates me right now, okay? I am pushy and myself and dreadful and he hates me and I have absolutely no problem with that. Remind me. Why don't I have a martini in my hand?

MARY

You were berating Eric for having another beer and he waved the empty martini glass at you.

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

AVA

Oh, that's right.

LIL

He is in the other room.

*Mary begins making Ava a martini,
somewhat awkwardly, while Ava watches,
amused.*

MARY

And Guy?

AVA

Guy?

MARY

How's Guy handling...is this the other stuff?

AVA

Vermouth. Just a drop. Guy is...way too much.

MARY

Too much what? Upset? Sad?

AVA

Vermouth. Too much vermouth. Mary, god. Who raised you? Wolves? Vermouth is like perfume. The merest whiff. A fleeting glance. The locking of eyes on the street as you pass a mysterious man.

MARY

Geez, Ava, get a room.

Laughter

AVA

Dump most of the vermouth out and just leave the glass damp with it. Good.

LIL

Guy?

AVA

Guy? I don't know.

MARY

Now?

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

*In the following passage, the martini-making instructions will be in **bold**.*

AVA

Get the vodka. Guy has been...a sweetheart. A joy. He's been Buddha. **Now the ice, Mary.** It's been a goddamn nightmare.

MARY

What?

LIL

Why?

AVA

He's never been good with acceptance. Guy isn't Zen. That's why we're good together. **Two jiggers.** We're both strong, controlling, opinionated, ambitious sons of bitches. We fight, we fix. **Now shake it.** But the fight has gone. From the moment we saw Eric in that bed, he's agreed with everything I've said or done. **Not too hard.** It's been a fucking nightmare. I can deal with my only son in a wheelchair the rest of his life. **Good.** It's real. Concrete. There's real stuff to do. **Now pour it out.** But a husband that agrees with me? What the fuck am I supposed to do with that?

LIL

I'm so sorry.

MARY

I think I made a little mess when I poured it out.

Mary hands her a martini. Ava sips.

AVA

Mess happens. Thank you.

MARY

How is it?

AVA

Almost as good as mine. You've got a gift, my dear.

MARY

So do you, Ava.

AVA

Do I? And what's that?

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

MARY

You make me less afraid.

AVA

Are you addled? I scare the crap out of everybody. *That's* my gift.

MARY

Not me. Well, not anymore. I look at you and I know I can handle...

She looks at her stomach.

LIL

A second kid?

MARY

A second and third.

LIL

What?

AVA

Twins?

MARY

Twins.

AVA

Oh my fucking god!

Hugs all around

LIL

That's amazing!

MARY

Okay.

LIL

Aren't you...oh! That's why you're a little-

MARY

-freaked out? Yeah.

LIL

And why Danny is-

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

AVA

Danny's what?

LIL

Danny's been a little-

MARY

Completely obsessed over money. And work. The future. They're all the same thing.

LIL

I was wondering what had lit his ambition fire so bright recently.

MARY

So I've got a work-obsessed husband. A kid that won't potty train so no pre-school in the world will take him. Stretch marks, a fat ass and a world flooded with chaos. So, pathetic and small as it sounds, seeing you deal with...everything makes me feel stronger.

LIL

It's true, Ava.

AVA

That I make you feel better about your stretch marks?

MARY

Pretty much.

Ava hands her martini to Lil, grabs Mary, plants a big, wet smooch on her cheek

AVA

You are a brilliant and gorgeous strong woman and you are going to be magnificent.

Planting a kiss on Lil

You too.

Ava exits into the other room.

Phil and Danny, you are two of the luckiest sons-of-bitches in the entire country.

Lil and Mary smile at each other. Lil knocks the rest of the martini down and they both follow.

MARY

No shit, Danny! And don't you forget it.

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

DANNY

(Offstage)

Language, my dear! Someone's been hanging out with Ava.

END SCENE SIX

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

SCENE SEVEN

LATER. Sounds of chatter offstage. Guy is standing alone, staring outside.

END SCENE SEVEN

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

SCENE EIGHT

LATER. Sounds of chatter can be heard offstage. Samantha, 16, enters and starts rummaging in a cupboard. Eric, with a beer, enters from the patio.

Hey, Sam. ERIC

Sam pops up, a box of cookies in her hand.

Eric. Oh my god! SAM

She hugs him.

Hey, Sam. God, you've...you're older. ERIC

Wow. Hi. SAM

Hi. I thought you were babysitting? ERIC

Yeah, well, Mr. Vasquez snuck back, he's back on the computer, working, he's got a thing on Monday he said. So he let me come home. Are you okay? I can't believe what happened...that you...you know... SAM

Yeah. Wow. You. Babysitting. ERIC

What do you mean? SAM

Progress. ERIC

Huh? SAM

I used to babysit you. ERIC

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

SAM

Yeah. That was...yeah, you did.

Eric swigs on his beer and Sam nibbles a cookie.

So. You okay?

ERIC

Yeah.

SAM

You look a little...

ERIC

Shorter? Older? Crippled?

SAM

Drunk.

ERIC

I need another beer.

Sam doesn't move.

You're a hell of a hostess.

Eric rolls over to the fridge and gets another beer. Loud laughter is heard from the other room.

SAM

It's weird.

ERIC

It's a wheelchair. You'll get used to it.

SAM

No. Well, I mean, you always used to say you'd never drink 'cuz what if you became the youthful embodiment of Guy and Ava.

ERIC

Yeah. Things change.

He takes a swig.

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

ERIC (CONT'D)

How old are you now?

SAM

Sixteen.

ERIC

Shit.

SAM

How old are you?

ERIC

Twenty-five.

SAM

Shit.

They both smile.

ERIC

Remember the printer incident?

SAM

What?

ERIC

The printer. Me babysitting and you on my computer.

SAM

Hey, I only hit the button once.

ERIC

200 hundred color printouts of Malibu Barbie later-

SAM

-It was Belle, not Malibu Barbie-

ERIC

-my inkjets are dry as a bone and I've got a report to print still for school.

SAM

You are such a pathetic liar. You like had no report.

ERIC

I did!

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

Did not! SAM

I did too. ERIC

He takes a long pull on his beer. Silence

Wanna a cookie? SAM

She offers Eric the opened box. He takes one, shifting his beer to between his legs.

Thanks. ERIC

So you're back for good. SAM

I'm back. I don't know if it's exactly good. ERIC

I think it is. Your folks think so. SAM

Please. Don't bring up Ava and Guy. ERIC

So- SAM

Shit. What? Everybody wants to know. ERIC

Know what? SAM

When it happened. The blast. My emotions. My PTSD. ERIC

TPSD? SAM

PTSD, Belle. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. ERIC

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

SAM

Oh. Do you have that?

ERIC

Nope. Fine on that count. Though I'm loaded with PASD.

SAM

PASD?

ERIC

Post Ava Stress Disorder.

They both laugh.

SAM

Your mom is really...um...

ERIC

Ava.

SAM

Yeah. She's totally her own definition.

Eric laughs again.

ERIC

That's good. I've been Ava-ed!

SAM

I never thought I'd know somebody who was in a war.

ERIC

Never thought I'd be in one.

SAM

But you signed up, right?

ERIC

Yeah. How old were you when...do you even remember 9-11?

SAM

Of course I remember 9-11. I was twelve.

ERIC

I was twenty-one. Had just graduated.

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

SAM

Weren't you going to make...um...

Eric tosses his beer into the garbage

Want another cookie?

He takes the offered cookie.

ERIC

So, what are you into these days?

SAM

School, school, school. Computers. Some moviemaking.

ERIC

No shit.

SAM

Yeah. I've sort of made a couple of movies. Well, videos.

ERIC

Of what? Can I see?

SAM

No!

ERIC

Why not?

SAM

'Cuz. And I was doing swim team for awhile-

ERIC

-I want to see the movies.

SAM

No. What have you been up to?

ERIC

Nothing. Why?

SAM

Why what?

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

ERIC
Why not the movies?

SAM
Because there's just one really finished and it sucks.

ERIC
No, it doesn't.

SAM
How do you know?

ERIC
'Cuz I know. Come on. You owe me.

SAM
I don't owe you shit!

ERIC
Come on. I'm a gimp. In Ava's grip twenty four hours a day. Throw me a bone here.

SAM
That's so mean.

ERIC
Why not?

SAM
Because it's not a movie.

ERIC
You just said it was a movie.

SAM
It's not. It's more a documentary thing.

ERIC
Of what?

SAM
Just somewhere Mom and I went.

ERIC
Where?

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

SAM

Sort of this event.

ERIC

What? A rave? An orgy? A Malibu Barbie convention?

SAM

An anti-war rally.

Silence

Are you mad at us? At...me?

ERIC

No. Yes. No. Shit, I don't know. I'm...I'm not mad at anybody. Us. Them. Iraq. War. Not even Mom, ever though she thinks I am. I think I'm not mad at anybody.

SAM

Then what are you?

ERIC

Huh?

SAM

If you're not mad, what are you?

ERIC

What am I? Shit. I'm Eric. I'm Eric in a wheelchair. That's it. That's all I am. Eric in a fucking chair.

LIL

(Offstage)

Sam?

Lil bursts into the kitchen and almost falls over Eric.

Oh shit! Oh my god. I'm sorry. I didn't-

ERIC

It's okay.

LIL

Are you okay?

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

I'm okay. ERIC

Are you sure? LIL

Sure. I sure. A-okay. ERIC

I didn't see you, expect you...you sure- LIL

Mom! He's okay! SAM

Honey. Yes. I thought I heard...what are you doing...why aren't you at- LIL

Mr. Vasquez said, well, I think he wanted to check on a work thing and- SAM

Mary will murder him. Oh well. Not my problem. LIL

(To Eric)

Do you need another beer? Some dessert?

We're covered. Corona and cookies. ERIC

Eric holds up his beer and Sam rattles the box of cookies.

You know, Eric, we all just need a little bit. LIL

Excuse me? ERIC

A little bit of time. To get comfortable. Nobody wants to say the wrong thing, be the insensitive clod, so we end up tripping all over ourselves...and you in the process. But it's all from love. LIL

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

Lil gives him a big kiss on the cheek, grabs a huge handful of cookies, hugs Sam and exits back to the living room, shouting ahead of her.

LIL (CONT'D)

(Exiting)

He *is* working! Mary, you're right. He is becoming Guy!

She's gone

SAM

And she's becoming Ava.

ERIC

Wow. Is it something in the water here?

SAM

Nah. Just the kitchen. It's harder to lie in a kitchen. All the mess gets spilled out here. So?

ERIC

So what?

SAM

So Eric-in-a-chair, what are **you** into?

ERIC

Eric-in-a-chair is into a wheelchair, Belle.

SAM

What else?

ERIC

Isn't that all there is?

SAM

I just thought you were going to be a filmmaker. Or a producer. I mean, weren't you-

ERIC

Things change. People change. You get taller, I get shorter. You get nicer, I become an asshole.

SAM

You were never an asshole-

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

ERIC

-Like I said, people change-

SAM

-Well, not until tonight.

ERIC

Like I said, hell of a hostess.

SAM

Thanks. So you just stop. You just give up. Stop being the old Eric.

ERIC

Old Eric. The old Eric was going to do everything. The old Eric was...he was the asshole that looked down on guys in wheelchairs. No. That's a lie. I didn't even think about it.

SAM

I guess, well I think probably no one thinks that they will be-

ERIC

-I never even considered I could ever be someone that others would...look over. Glance around. Now I've become a...bumper sticker. An instant friend to people who want to make a point.

SAM

But you're still you.

ERIC

Christ, you're naïve.

SAM

Fuck you!

ERIC

Belle, I think you should stay away from me for awhile.

SAM

Why?

ERIC

Because I think I'm going to be an unmad, drunk asshole for awhile.

SAM

Okay.

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

Okay? ERIC

Sounds fair. SAM

Thank you. ERIC
(Deep sigh of relief)

You're welcome. SAM

(Handing him another beer)

So what happens after that?

After what? ERIC

After you're an unmad, drunk asshole. Then what are you going to be? SAM

I haven't decided. I haven't been thinking much of after. ERIC

He lifts his empty beer to arc it into the trash can. He stops, hand in the air

Someday, not now but someday, will you show me your documentary?

Maybe. SAM

Maybe? ERIC

Maybe. SAM

What's it called? ERIC

You can't laugh. SAM

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

I'm not laughing.

ERIC

Because of Eric.

SAM

What do you mean?

ERIC

That's the title. "Because of Eric".

SAM

*Eric hesitates, and then tosses the beer
bottle into the trash can*

END SCENE EIGHT

END ACT ONE

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

ACT TWO

SCENE ONE

February, 2008. The wind is blowing and snow is piled up against the sliding door. Sam is surrounded by multiple Tupperware containers and serving dishes. She is arranging a layout for a buffet. Phil is sitting at the kitchen table, watching her.

PHIL

So why are we doing this again?

SAM

We have so many leftovers we've run out of room. And neutral territory for Eric and, you know, his folks. And Mom would have liked it that Eric was...you know, here.

PHIL

Yeah. But it's more for you to do.

SAM

I don't mind. Like I said, lots of food. All the casseroles.

PHIL

I thought we were planning on living off 'em until the food stamps kicked in.

(Pause)

We're hanging on to Mindy's brisket though, right?

LIL

I shoved it in the back.

PHIL

Good.

Phil watches

SAM

So she, you know-

PHIL

-isn't coming. Wouldn't exactly be a birthday celebration with fisticuffs between cake and presents.

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

Danny enters with a six-pack.

DANNY

Hey.

PHIL

Hey.

SAM

Not in the fridge. No room. Garage. Or patio.

DANNY

Yes, ma'am.

Danny slides open the patio door, kicks some snow away, and sets the beer outside.

Man, this is a brutal winter. Mary's got the cake.

LIL

Please don't tell me she made it. She's done so much and-

DANNY

Dominick's. Is Guy-alina coming?

PHIL

Cowardice is the better part of valor. He's leaving number two home.

DANNY

Smart. Even in a chair, Eric's still a combat veteran.

SAM

And he's been to Iraq too.

Laughter. Danny starts picking at some food. Sam slaps his hand away.

DANNY

You're doing great, you know.

SAM

You're not.

DANNY

That's nice!

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

SAM

You're not. Dad, doesn't Mr. Vasquez look tired?

DANNY

Nah. I'm just fat. Fat and old.

PHIL

If you're old and fat, what does that make me?

DANNY

Older and fatter.

PHIL

I want Mary. When is the better half coming?

SAM

Dad, there's so much snow outside. Go help her with the cake.

DANNY

Don't worry, I can-

SAM

No. Dad, go help Mary.

DANNY

I'll-

SAM

DAD!

PHIL

Of course. Going, I'm going.

Phil slowly rises and exits

DANNY

So?

SAM

So?

DANNY

How's Phil doing?

Sam shrugs

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

Same. SAM

Can I help with anything? DANNY

Nah. I'm good. SAM

You're doing great. DANNY

You said. You look like shit. SAM

Like I said. Nice! DANNY

My house. I'm of age. I can swear. After all, I'm the hostess now. SAM

I'm fine. DANNY

Come on. SAM

I'm fine. DANNY

Sam throws a roll at him.

Hey!

She throws another.

I'm fine.

Another roll

Stop it, Lil!

They both stop and look at each other. Sam shrugs.

Sorry, Sam. I'm so-

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

SAM

Talk, old man.

DANNY

Okay.

He picks up the rolls and hands them to Sam who brushes them off and puts them back on a platter.

SAM

Five second rule.

DANNY

I had to lay off eight people last week.

SAM

Oh, wow. I'm sorry.

DANNY

Since Phil and everything, I didn't want...

SAM

Want him to think you were one of the-

DANNY

-asshole CEO types that fire guys after twenty years while their wives are in the hospital dying from cancer.

SAM

You'll never be an asshole. Old and fat. But never an asshole.

DANNY

Thanks. I'm glad you're doing this. This party.

Offstage, voices can be heard

ERIC
(Offstage)

Hello? We're here.

Eric wheels in, large cake box on his lap

I intercepted your dad with this.

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

SAM

Happy birthday!

DANNY

Look at you. Happy birthday, fella.

Sam takes the cake and places it on the crowded counter. Ava enters with flowers, followed by Phil with her coat, bottles of wine and gifts. She grabs Sam and holds her in a tight embrace.

AVA

Samantha, you rotten, stinking treasure. You are my daughter. You know that? I will never let you go.

SAM

Hi, Mrs. Gold-

AVA

Philip, you are the most luckiest father, you know that?

PHIL

Yeah.

SAM

Mrs. Gold-

ERIC

Mom-

AVA

What?

SAM

Air. Mrs. Gold, air, please.

Ava releases a now-rumpled Sam. Ava looks at her and than grabs her in an embrace again.

ERIC

Mom! Stop. You saw her last week!

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

SAM
(Muffled)

She does this every time.

Ava releases Sam

AVA

Daniel.

They embrace

DANNY

Hey, Ava. You look beautiful.

AVA

I'm a divorcee. It's required. I see Eric's father hasn't arrived.

SAM

Dad, take Eric's coat.

PHIL

Got it.

Phil exits with coats

AVA

Eric, Daniel, go help Philip with something manly.

Danny slides open the patio door.

Hey, other way-

She sees him grab the six-pack

Oh. Okay. Now go.

Danny plops it on Eric's lap and they exit.

SAM

So, Mrs. Gold. How's the world treating you? And don't sugar-coat it like you usually do.

AVA

Oh my god.

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

What? Oh. I looked-

SAM

-and sounded-

AVA

-like Mom just then. Sorry. Don't hug me again.

SAM

*The TV off stage is turned on. Sounds of a
televised football game can be heard.*

In the-

MARY
(Offstage)

-yeah.

PHIL
(Offstage)

Happy birthday, Eric.

MARY
(Offstage)

Thank you.

ERIC
(Offstage)

*Mary enters carrying some empty
Tupperware, which she hands to Sam*

Hey, Ava.

MARY

Mary and Ava hug.

So, Ava, what's up?

She's not coming.

SAM

Darn. I wanted to meet the little home wrecker and not talk to her.

MARY

Guy's birthday gift to Eric. We're going slut-free today. How are you?

AVA

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

Fine. MARY

Truth. SAM

I forgot. We're in the kitchen. Rigid with tension. MARY

We've worn you out, haven't we? SAM

No. Not even. MARY

Sam pulls out the vodka from the freezer.

Mrs. Gold? SAM

Ava, Samantha. AVA. And of course. Are the olives stuffed? AVA

Sorry. SAM

Savage. AVA

Ava begins pulling the olives and a package of bleu cheese out of the fridge.

Are we a bad influence on you? I mean, is it healthy for a twenty-year old- MARY

Twenty-one- SAM

-twenty-one year old to know what goes in a martini? MARY

Too late. By now, she's screwed. Sorry, Samantha. AVA

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

SAM

I'm good.

AVA
(To Mary)

I'll mix, you stuff.

They do.

MARY
(Prepping the olives)

So? Who wants to go first?

Ava and Sam point to Mary.

Really? But you two-

AVA
Are sick to death of our dramas, am I right, Samantha?

Sam nods

We need to hear about something, some family, intact and functional.

MARY

Good luck.

Danny enters. The three women look at him. He looks back, smiles, grabs a bag of chips, kisses Mary and exits.

I want to kill him.

She hands the stuffed olives to Ava, who drops them in her drink.

SAM
(Shocked)

Why?!

AVA
(Thrilled)

Why?!

MARY
He's become so...typical! He's become a typical middle class Latino husband.

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

Mary begins mixing herself a martini.

SAM

What's a typical middle class Latino husband like?

MARY

They think feminism is the opposite of optimism. Really. Oh, out here, he's all women-are-equal and "you are an equal partner in this marriage" but when it comes to spending money, housework, anything, it's like listening to my father. "Can the college fund really take another Target excursion, baby? Getting low on my favorite white t-shirts, honey. Get me more coffee, sweetie." He doesn't say "chica" but it's hanging there, out there. I mean, his parents named him Daniel so he'd be a real American, and couple of kids and a wife later and he's become a fat, bossy Puerto Rican perezorso. I want to kill him.

She takes a sip of her finished drink.

AVA

Oh my god, you have to stop that shit in its tracks.

MARY

(Gasping slightly from the martini)

I know! I'd get a job but the twins are three. I can't leave them in a daycare, my mother and sisters would kill me anyway. The church has a good one but I don't know. The jerk's got me right where he wants me.

SAM

What are you going to do?

MARY

Don't ever get married, Sam. Just have wild affairs with white boys.

AVA

You are such a good Catholic, Mary.

MARY

There's couples' counseling at the church.

AVA

Oh, *please*.

MARY

I know you're not a fan of the church but-

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

AVA

I love church! Like I love opera, the Australian outback and pastels. But I also know I don't have to actually participate to appreciate.

MARY

I'm going crazy. I need to do something! I hate my life. I'm tired and...I think I'm becoming my mother.

(Pause)

Sorry, Sam.

AVA

What did the priest guy say to you?

MARY

What?

AVA

You went to confession, right? And just talked to the...father...him, the guy, right?

Mary nods

And he said?

MARY

He suggested the-

AVA

-counseling. Just like a business man. Rustling up customers.

MARY

No-

AVA

You've gotta shake this goddamn marriage up a little, Mary

MARY

(Yelling)

I hate it when you take the Lord's name in vain, Ava!

AVA

Excuse me?

MARY

Your language. It's offensive.

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

AVA

Well, if my language really bothers you, maybe your faith doesn't quite run deep enough.

MARY

Well, maybe some people have a belief system that goes beyond vodka, swearing and designer clothes, Ava!

AVA

God put Dolce and Gabbana on this planet for a reason. Same for potatoes, language, and a healthy disregard for dogmatic authority.

MARY

Well, you offend me, Ava. All your language and healthy disregard for everything and everybody offends me. Offends me to the core!

AVA

Well your sanctimonious prancing and complaint, bullshit fakey happiness drives me up the fucking, goddamn wall!

Danny leans in.

DANNY

Hey, sweetie, is everything-

MARY

(Snapping)

Everything's fine, Danny. It's FINE!

DANNY

I mean, honey, we can hear you out-

AVA

What?! You didn't hear her? She said it was fine, okay?!

DANNY

Okay.

He exits. Ava and Mary turn back to each other.

AVA

God and I have an agreement. I don't hold it against him for putting my son in a wheelchair, killing my best friend in the prime of life, sacking her husband, making her daughter have to leave college, and he doesn't hold it against me for taking his goddamn name in vain once in awhile.

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

MARY

Men do those things. People. Not God!

AVA

Bullshit. Floods, planes and cars crashing, everything exploding, it's his handiwork all over!

SAM

So God is a man?

AVA

Goddamn straight! Would this fucked up world really be this fucked up if God was a goddamn woman?!?

Pause. The three women then burst into laughter. For awhile.

PHIL

(Offstage)

What's going on in there?

Cautiously, Phil leans in. Helpless with laughter, Ava is now stomping the floor, Mary is leaning against the counter and Sam is banging her head against the fridge.

PHIL

Everything okay?

This sets them off again. Eric enters, looks at them, and smiles.

ERIC

Shit.

He exits, followed by Phil

PHIL

(Offstage)

And they aren't even one drink down.

The women settle down.

MARY

You didn't mention the divorce.

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

AVA

What? When?

MARY

Just now. In your “God and I have an agreement. I don’t hold it against him for a son in a wheelchair, best friend, sacking, no college” tirade. You didn’t mention the divorce. I mean, come on, Ava. It’s been a...*goddamn* bloodbath.

AVA

Yes. I suppose.

SAM

Mrs. Gold, it’s really-

AVA & MARY
(In unison, to Sam)

AVA.

SAM

Okay. Ava.

AVA

I suppose I’m starting to get over being really pissed at Guy on the divorce thing.

MARY

Excuse us?!

AVA

Well, things sort of broke my way in the settlement.

MARY

How? What do you mean?

AVA

I took a cash settlement. Guy took all the stock. Right before the crash.

(She smiles)

Oh the shithead isn’t broke but let’s just say, he and Brittany take their vacations in Palm Springs instead of Paris now. Yeah, ya just never know how things are going to turn out.

MARY

That’s gotta-

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

AVA

-taste a little sweet? Goddamn...I mean, *damn* right it does! The little tramp and the old man got exactly what they deserve. Each other. Yup. For once, somebody else got blasted.

Mary and Ava, holding their martinis, and Sam with her soda, all clink glasses.

END SCENE ONE

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

SCENE TWO

LATER. Eric is behind the counter and Sam enters from the living room, balancing some plates.

SAM

Oh! Hey, birthday boy. Looking for something?

ERIC

Found it.

He holds up a box of cookies.

Want one?

Sam takes one, takes a bite, and then begins loading the dishwasher. Eric watches her for a moment.

ERIC

My god but you are being such a good girl.

SAM

What do you mean?

Reaching for the cookie, she drops it.

Shoot.

She gets the broom and dustpan and sweeps it up.

What do you mean?

ERIC

This. That.

SAM

What?

ERIC

You're cleaning up everyone's mess.

SAM

I dropped the cookie, Eric.

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

ERIC
Exactly.
SAM
What?
ERIC
You've dropped the cookie, Belle. You've dropped everything.

SAM
Are you drunk?

ERIC
Are you?

SAM
No. But this conversation is making me consider it.

Sam resumes loading the dishwasher.

ERIC
Good. You should misbehave a little.

SAM
This, coming from the master.

ERIC
Yeah, well, I've got many talents. So, you've been home how long?

SAM
About ten months.

ERIC
More like a year.

SAM
Whatever.

ERIC
Was it your mom getting sick or your dad that made you come home?

SAM
Mom got bad when I was, well, second part of freshman year. And then Dad got fired. So. You know. They needed me here.

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

And the money. Tuition.	ERIC
Yeah. The tuition.	SAM
So how pissed off are you?	ERIC
I'm not pissed off.	SAM
Sure you are.	ERIC
I am <u>not</u> pissed.	SAM
Yes, you are.	ERIC
Don't project your stuff on to me.	SAM
I see you managed to get Freshman Psych 101 under your belt.	ERIC
Well, it is required.	SAM
So, you're not pissed.	ERIC
Right.	SAM
So what are you?	ERIC
I am Sam.	SAM
Sam, I am.	ERIC

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

SAM

I've heard that one before.

ERIC

Come on, Belle.

SAM

(Snapping, just a little)

What?! What do you want?

ERIC

What do you want?

SAM

My stuff is just everyday stuff. You were in a war. You got blown up. You're in a wheelchair for, like, forever.

ERIC

Stop with the wheelchair stuff. Old news. Your shit is forever too.

SAM

But not like-

ERIC

Your mom is dead forever. She's not coming back. You got blasted by an IED, tore up, ripped up forever, just like I did. It counts, Belle. I'm just waiting for you to make a mess.

SAM

What?

ERIC

Get pissed off. Fall apart. Scream. Cry. Hate somebody.

SAM

I don't hate anything.

ERIC

I said somebody.

SAM

Whatever.

ERIC

Yeah. Okay...but you are acting like nothing has happened. And I don't buy it. You have been changed. And it's okay.

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

Ava enters.

AVA

“People don’t change. Circumstances do and people adjust but the core doesn’t change.”
That’s how she put it to me. My god but that woman saw it straight. Called it straight too.
At least when I got her in here.

ERIC

Mom, we were actually having a private conversation.

AVA

Well, private, your father has arrived. Conversation over.

ERIC

Great. Let the games begins.

END SCENE TWO

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

SCENE THREE

LATER

GUY
(On his cell phone)

I'll be home soon.

Eric enters with some dessert plates

I love you too.

Guy hangs up, turns, and sees Eric.

Let me help you.

GUY

Eric ignores him and begins loading the dishwasher.

How's Tiffany?

ERIC

Brittany.

GUY

Sorry. I'll get it soon.

ERIC

Yeah. It's okay.

GUY

Guy grabs a diet soda from the fridge.

Diet Coke? Wow, she must be good.

ERIC

What?

GUY

Bethany. She must be good to get you off the Grey Goose and drinking Diet Coke.

ERIC

Yeah.

GUY

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

ERIC
Yeah?

GUY
Yeah. She is good.

ERIC
Good to hear.

GUY
Yeah.

Sam enters with the remnants of the birthday cake, talking over her shoulder.

SAM
Dominick's does do a pretty good cake. Sorry I didn't have any ice cream. Vanilla would have been really good with it. I didn't even think of getting any 'cuz the fridge is packed with...

Looking at Eric and Guy, she trails off.

(Silence)

I think I forgot to...um...get...something.

MARY
(Entering, talking)
Maybe a couple of pieces for the kids but you and Phil can keep-

Sam quickly exits, pushing Mary back into the other room.

ERIC
So, Dad, I'm trying to figure something out. Maybe, as a birthday present, you could explain it to me.

GUY
Sure, anything. What?

ERIC
The divorce. I still don't get it. After everything. All the fighting over the years, you always stayed together. But after I came back, you guys were good. Really good. I thought. And then you bailed.

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

GUY

It wasn't about you.

ERIC

Hum. Interesting. My parents. My life. My history. But not about me.

GUY

Because I got tired of fighting. Okay, kid? Now do you get it?

ERIC

But you and Mom stopped fighting.

GUY

Yeah! Because I got tired of the fucking war. Can you understand that? That's how Ava and I have always been but after you? I couldn't do it anymore. My heart wasn't in it. I just didn't care if she won or I won. And it ruined us.

ERIC

So whatever you were fighting about for my entire life...she won?

GUY

Yes.

ERIC

And to get back at her for winning, you married Brittany.

GUY

No. Not revenge.

ERIC

What then, huh?

GUY

I got sick of the woman, okay?

Ava enters behind Eric. Guy sees her, hesitates, and continues.

For everything she did for you, for me, for this family, I got sick of her.

ERIC

And a twenty-eight year old sure is alot easier.

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

GUY

God, yes! And thank fucking god! I've been cracking the work whip, maneuvering corporate bullshit for eons. The office, lawyers, regulations, traffic, finances, politics. And then everything. 9-11. And yes, you. The surgeries. The fear for you.

ERIC

So it is because I'm in this chair.

GUY

Oh, fucking grow up! Of course it is. Some of it. So what? Marriage, money, work, kids screwing up, getting hurt, it was all of it. I was just done. I didn't want to be challenged at home. I was getting it everywhere else. At home, at least, now I don't have to think. I get to look at something, someone pretty, for who me half-listening is enough. Talk about shoes or whatever. I don't pay attention to half the shit she says but I fake it, she buys it, and it's fucking nirvana.

ERIC

And a nice piece of ass.

GUY

God, yes! And what's wrong with that? Why should I want something different because society thinks it will make my life more...what the hell do they say? Yeah. *Actualized*. I'll be somehow "better" because I'm with a *mature* woman. It takes more to make love to an older woman. You have to **love** her.

He looks at Ava.

And I did. I do. But you have to be honest with an old broad. A younger woman, it's easier. They buy the bullshit, are more worried about doing the right thing, and it just makes life easier. I need something in my life to be easy.

Ava fully enters the room so Eric can see her as well.

AVA

And Brittany is easy.

GUY

Damn straight.

ERIC

Dad, you son of a-

AVA

Okay.

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

Mom!?

ERIC

Okay?

GUY

I get it. I get wanting things to be easier. And....all that you just said. It makes sense. It makes sense for you.

AVA

But Mom, he dumped you for a younger woman. He dumped us.

ERIC

Oh, Eric, grow up! Not everything is about you.

AVA

But he just said-

ERIC

-that kids can contribute to fucking up a marriage. Welcome to reality, Eric. Bombs explode. Jobs disappear. Levees break. Cancer rips through the young. Markets, cars and planes crash.

AVA

(To Guy)

Though why you had to go with a blonde, it's beyond the pale, Guy.

I was never as creative as you.

GUY

True. Martini? I won't tell your wife.

AVA

God, yes.

GUY

Eric watches in amazement as Ava calmly begins mixing up a batch.

END SCENE THREE

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

SCENE FOUR

*Frozen, coffee pot in hand, Phil stares at the cabinets. All the cabinet doors are open.
Sam enters.*

SAM

Dad, what's going on? Guy's in one corner, Eric the other, Ava's starting to talk politics with Danny and-

Phil hasn't moved.

Dad?

DAD

Your mom put it somewhere and I can't find it.

SAM

Dad?

PHIL

The Splenda. For Ava's coffee. Your mom always put it in this special spot and I don't know where that is.

SAM

Um...I think it's okay. There's sugar.

PHIL

Everything is in the exact same place, it all looks the same, but I can't seem to find anything.

SAM

Dad, there's sugar.

PHIL

But the Splenda. Ava said Splenda.

He looks at Sam

Right?

SAM

(With an edge)

Sugar is fine, Dad. Okay?

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

PHIL

You sure? I'm worried. She wants Splenda and it was always here. Somewhere.

SAM

Yes, I'm sure, Dad.

PHIL

Lil always had stuff in the right place. I'm sorry. I worry I'm messing things up.

SAM

Stop it.

PHIL

Stop what?

SAM

Nothing. I'll find it.

PHIL

No. Stop what, sweetie?

SAM

(Beginning to slam all the cupboard doors shut)

This being...apart. Being worried about stupid stuff. I can't...you have to stop it.

PHIL

I'm sorry. I just keep misplacing things. I just can't seem to find anything for anybody these days.

SAM

Well, why don't you just worry about locating your own shit, Dad! 'Cuz all this worrying about losing stuff is getting sort of really old.

PHIL

I'm so sorry.

SAM

Enough! Okay? I get it. Sorry, sorry, sorry. Get it. Get it. Get it.

She storms over to a lower cupboard and pulls out a bag of sugar.

And, as usual, I got it.

Slamming it down on the counter, the bag explodes, sending sugar everywhere.

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

SAM (CONT'D)

Shit!

PHIL

(In a fairly rote tone)

It's okay to be angry. Angry at her. For dying. I understand. Together we can-

SAM

-What? Together we can do what? 'Cuz all I see is me doing all the...*doing*.

PHIL

I understand. God, I want to help you, sweetie. I'm worried I'm not enough, that I've failed you-

SAM

-You're right. You aren't enough. And you have failed.

(Pause)

PHIL

What?

Sam begins to clean up the spilled sugar

SAM

You failed. For all your worrying about everything, you still failed. You should have been stronger. You, you, you shouldn't have been fired. You should have seen that those banks were doing whatever the hell they were doing! You should have...saved more money so I could still be where I was, in school, there, and not here. You should have found better doctors and you shouldn't have let Mom die. You shouldn't have fallen apart and made me hold everything together. You should have been...better. You should have saved me from this. You should have been stronger. You should have been like...like Ava was with Eric. You should have been Ava.

Ava enters.

AVA

Goddamn, Phil, my coffee is as bitter as my general outlook on marriage. Where's the-

SAM

We can't find the fucking Splenda, Ava, okay!?

Ava takes a look at the scene in the kitchen, grabs a handful of sugar off the counter, dumps it in her coffee, and exits

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

SAM (CONT'D)

See!?! I told you sugar was fine, Dad!

PHIL

How can I make things better for you?

SAM

You're the grown-up! You're supposed to know how!

PHIL

You're right.

SAM

Thank you! So go ahead. Make it better. Go ahead. Because I'm done trying.

Phil crosses over to Sam, takes her by the shoulders, and looks into her eyes.

PHIL

I'm sorry. Sweetie, I'm so sorry.

SAM

That doesn't help one bit. You know that, right? You've said it way too many times. It's empty, stupid and-

PHIL

I've been so worried about losing the house, losing the life I had built for you, I lost you. And me. I'm a mess. I'm sorry I'm a mess for you. But I'm here. I'm not going anywhere. I'm unemployed and filled with grief and rage and depression but I'm not dead. And you are not in school and filled with grief and rage and depression but you aren't dead. Life is a good thing. Lil is dead. I miss her beyond words and so do you. But you and I, we are alive and that is okay. Okay?

SAM

(Very quietly)

Okay.

PHIL

Okay?

SAM

Okay.

PHIL

Okay. And I know I'm not enough. I know I'm not Lil.

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

SAM

(Sobbing, falling into his arms)

But Daddy, you're all I've got.

Shuddering sobbing overtakes her as she crumbles. Phil holds her up and rocks her back and forth.

END SCENE FOUR

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

SCENE FIVE

May, 2009. Phil is on the phone. The kitchen table has been fashioned into a makeshift desk with a laptop and papers.

PHIL

The Crispy Beef the way Sam likes it. Four...no, five orders of egg rolls. Two Kung Pao Chickens. Three fried rice. A Governor's Chicken. Okay...that sounds good too. Two orders of those. Okay. That's great. Thanks, Mrs. Kwan. I sure will.

Ava, in stylish jeans, high heeled boots and an "ARMY" sweatshirt, enters. She's got a cell phone in one hand and handful of graphs and charts in the other, which she drops on top of the stack of papers.

AVA

D'Shawn said he agrees.

PHIL

And whatever D'Shawn wants-

AVA

Never argue with genius.

PHIL

Oh. Right. You. Never arguing. I've noticed that.

AVA

It's my job, flunky.

PHIL

God save us from Ava finding her calling.

AVA

Get some plates out, Phil! My god, man-

Ava's cell rings. She answers while Phil pulls out plates and serving utensils. As she speaks, he also begins clearing off the kitchen table, shoving the laptop and papers, trying to put everything out of the way. With her free hand, Ava helps him.

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

AVA (CONT'D)

Ava Gold...Yes, Linda. Did the fitting...they said what? Son's-of-bitches. Put him on... Don't apologize. Crying is fine, Linda. I do it all the time.

Phil shoots her a look and she shoots one back.

Hello, who am I speaking with? Antonio, this is Ava Gold. How's Maria? And Little Tony? Did he make the...he did? He is such a talent. Okay. Here's the deal...

Clearly interrupted by Antonio, she listens.

Well, that's all well and good, Antonio, but Stevie has been waiting for his prosthetic fitting for two weeks. He's got his PT schedule set and I don't want to have to come down there and reschedule. And I think you don't want me to have to come down there and reschedule, do you?...I thought so. So, what's the issue? Dr. Meyer. He has to sign off and he's...

She listens.

Okay. I'll find him. I know where he hides out on Friday afternoons. He'll sign off by 5PM today. Hugs to Maria and the kids.

Eric enters. He's got two six-packs of beers on his lap. Each six-pack holds a variety of different bottles.

ERIC

Here they are.

PHIL

Good.

Eric sets them on the table and all three pull out individual bottles and examines them as Ava continues to talk. Eric pulls out a notepad and jots down thoughts.

Put Linda back on...Linda? I'm on it. Now put Stevie on. I don't care. Pissed off soldiers don't scare me.

She kisses Eric.

I love you too. Put him on...Stevie? Oh, don't pout in my direction...Yes, you are...Linda cries when she's separating coffee filters. Don't yell at Antonio either. That's my job. Okay...I know. Life's a bitch and then you come home. Now behave.

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

She hangs up and immediately begins redialing.

AVA (CONT'D)

Meyer is an ass.

(Looking at a bottle)

Oh, you got the Minnesota *Guys & Molls Dark Ale*.

PHIL

(Handing a bottle to Eric)

It's a good label. Their distribution is-

ERIC

-Better than ours but they've been at it longer.

PHIL

We're doing pretty damn good, thanks to you.

ERIC

Hard to say "no" to a vet in a chair.

AVA

(On the phone)

I'm looking for Ken Meyer. He should be in the corner booth. Dark comb over. Scotch and soda. Plate of onion rings. This is his mother.

Ava exits, still talking, into the living room.

ERIC

When's Sam due?

Danny enters, talking on his cell phone.

DANNY

Okay. Yes, honey, I did. I did them on the hot water cycle, like you said. It went good. The teleconference is a beautiful thing. Okay. I will. When are you...okay. So Sam is picking you up at the end of her shift. Call us when you're on your way so we can be ready. Did the back-up communion wafers come in?...Really? Wow... Yeah, I can hold-

He stops talking, having been put on hold.

ERIC

How's Mary?

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

DANNY

Very...organized. Eric, do me a favor. When you get married, don't ever tell your wife to "just go ahead and get a job then" okay?

(Eyeing the beers)

Are those-

ERIC

Market research.

PHIL

Oh, we're going to drink 'em! But there's a science to it.

DANNY

You're killing me, man! I can take the womenfolk stopping me from a Friday afternoon beer, but you guys?

ERIC

Fine with me. You tell Mom though.

(Pause)

DANNY

I'll wait.

(Into the phone)

Yeah, I'm here. Okay...Okay...I will...Okay. Bye. I love you too.

AVA

(Offstage)

Someone come help Guy.

Phil and Danny exit. They return with Guy. The three are carrying a birthday cake, some wrapped gifts and another six-pack.

GUY

Is she-

DANNY

Soon. She's swinging by after her shift to get Mary. We told her the minivan died.

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

GUY

Hey, Eric.

They embrace.

ERIC

Hey, Dad. How's Brit?

GUY

Good. Good. Brit's good. Is there anything to eat? The woman has me on this goddamn low cholesterol diet that's gonna do me in.

Guy is looking in the fridge.

PHIL

Chinese is coming.

Ava enters.

AVA

Guy, you don't just go in someone's refrigerator!

GUY

Jesus, woman. You don't even have chips out.

AVA

(Looking at his stomach)

Like you need chips.

Phil pulls some nuts out of the pantry and tosses the can to Guy. Guy settles down with the nuts and grabs a beer from the sample six-pack. Everyone shouts him down.

GUY

What?!

AVA

Goddamn it, Guy! That's research.

PHIL

There's a very exact method.

Eric hands Guy a beer.

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

ERIC

Drink this.

GUY

You know, when women stop running the parties, everything goes to shit.

Ava is examining the gift box Guy brought in.

AVA

What did you get Samantha? Excuse me, what did Brit pick out for Samantha?

GUY

Never you mind, missy.

AVA

(Lightly)

Don't "missy" me, you pathetic excuse for an ex-husband.

ERIC

Kids.

GUY

She started it.

(To Ava and Phil)

Some video chip, card thingy. I don't know. Brit did get it.

PHIL

She'll love it.

Guy grunts.

Are you okay, Guy?

GUY

I'm fine. Drinking warm beer and eating generic cashews but I'm fantastic. How about you?

PHIL

Good. I'm good.

GUY

How's the job hunt?

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

PHIL

Crowded. But mark my words; this start-up is going to be taking off soon.

GUY

I know. I know. Brit keeps telling me to invest in your guys.

ERIC

So? What's stopping you, Dad?

GUY

Expenses, kid.

AVA

Guy has been generous enough. Gotta take care of the trophy wife.

Danny's cell phone rings.

DANNY

Thank god.

He answers.

Hey...okay. Good. Hurry up. Ava's picking on Guy...Okay...Okay.

He hangs up.

They're on their way. Let's get this party started!

END SCENE FOUR

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

LATER

SCENE FIVE

The kitchen is empty. Cartons of unopened Chinese food are neatly arranged on the counter and the birthday cake is on the table. After a moment, a loud, unanimous "Surprise!" can be heard.

END SCENE FIVE

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SCENE SIX

Sam enters, beer in hand. She is wearing a uniform from a big box type electronics store like Best Buy. Her style is much funkier including piercings and a dyed streak in her hair. In the inside of her forearm is a tattoo of a lily. She is waving in Eric, who enters behind her.

SAM

Hurry up.

ERIC

Hurrying. What?

SAM

Tell 'em you got it.

ERIC

(Yelling to the other room)

I got the cake.

Sam efficiently pulls the cake out of the fridge and begins methodically putting candles in it as she talks.

SAM

Dad had a date.

ERIC

What?!

SAM

Shhhh! Janice. I met her just on the street when I was getting footage. You know, over on Wildflower where all those *For Sale* signs are? Her name is Janice. She's a realtor. She's pretty cool. She's trying to sell our place now too. Anyway, I'm just getting some establishing shots and she just walked into frame, wanting to know what the hell I was doing. You know, protecting her clients from some crazy media vulture and we started talking-

ERIC

Wait! You're moving?

SAM

Yes. Yeah. You didn't...Dad hasn't told you...or Ava?

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ERIC

No!

SAM

Shit. Okay. Um, well. I mean, the sign isn't up yet but we gotta do it. Soon. I mean, I don't want to. Dad really doesn't want to. Really, really, really doesn't want to but unemployment and my paycheck doesn't even cover the mortgage. And there's this rental building near campus. There's a two bedroom. Don't worry. It's got an elevator and a kitchen.

ERIC

But selling in this economy-

SAM

Yeah.

ERIC

Sam. I'm so sorry.

SAM

It's okay.

ERIC

No, it's not. You've had so much shit. Given up college, your mom, and now...

SAM

It's okay. I'm okay. Losing Mom was the worst. I can't lose Dad.

ERIC

What do you mean? Is Phil-

SAM

He's fine. He's good. Really. He's doing better than a long time. I mean, you see him almost every day, right?

Eric nods

He's doing good, right?

ERIC

Yeah. He's a killer business man. Amazing.

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SAM

But an eviction would kill him. It would kick him back to when right after Mom...died. This way it's a choice. A teeny, tiny, awful choice but still a choice. And if...when the business takes off, well it gives him something to focus on. He is living *FUBAR* beer.

ERIC

How the hell can you be so goddamn chipper?!

SAM

Am I?

ERIC

Yes! And it's fucking bizarre.

SAM

I don't know.

(Pause)

I think I grew up. That's sounds weird. But I think all the shit, Mom, Dad's job, leaving college, made me figure some stuff out. It took awhile but I did. Not everything but some stuff.

ERIC

What stuff?

SAM

I figured out what I didn't want. Who I wasn't. Not who I was, or am even, but sure as hell who I wasn't. Like that one filmmaking class I did get to take, it was such bullshit. All these self important rich kids wanting to make tent pole blockbusters. I really love making movies but not pretty, silly stories. I like real stuff.

ERIC

The shitstorm.

SAM

Exactly! And when I had to stop school and get this job, it sucked. Really sucked. I was so scared I was going to be stuck doing retail forever. Some loser in a polyester polo shirt.

ERIC

You pull it off, Belle.

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SAM

But you can't be scared and pissed off forever. At least, I can't. And the employee discount was, is, amazing. And College of Lake County was right there. You know what everybody calls CLC?

ERIC

College of Last Chances.

SAM

And it is! But in a cool way. So anyway, CLC is three miles away. And it has some film making classes. And I sort of figured out I could start living right now. I could start making movies right now. I'm twenty-two. Mom died when she was forty seven. I did the math.

ERIC

You aren't going to die when you're forty seven.

SAM

And you aren't going to end up in a wheelchair the rest of your life.

ERIC

Man, you are going to make some really good movies.

SAM

Yes, I am.

ERIC

Giving up this house AND your dad dating? You're sure you're okay with that?

SAM

It is a little weird. But you know when I feel Mom the most? When I'm shooting. When I'm behind the camera or working out who I want to talk to, what story I want to bring out as honestly as possible, I feel her. She's not here anymore.

She gestures to the kitchen.

She's here.

She whacks her chest.

ERIC

You're your mother's kid, that's for sure.

SAM

So are you.

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ERIC

Bitch.

Sam tosses him some matches.

SAM

Here. If I light my own birthday cake candles, your mom will kill me.

END SCENE SIX

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SCENE SEVEN

Opened cartons and the last of a birthday cake litter the kitchen. Ava is leaning against a counter, sipping a beer thoughtfully. Mary, feet propped up, is eating straight from a carton. Danny is handing dishes to Phil as he loads the dishwasher.

AVA

I thought Catholics only eat fish on Fridays.

MARY

It's the fried rice.

PHIL

There's chicken and beef in there too.

Mary glares at him.

Oh, I meant the **other** fried rice has chicken and beef.

She gives him a sweet smile.

MARY

(Gesturing with her chopsticks to Ava)

So. Keep going.

AVA

I can't believe I haven't told you this.

MARY

We're both busy working women now.

DANNY

Phil told me his version but I want to hear yours.

AVA

So, anyway. I'm at the hospital, working with D'Shawn and his parents and he's pissed off. Incredibly pissed off. And he's laying there, tubes out of everywhere, legs blown off, right arm, his mom is stoic and his father...oh, god, Tyrone was destroyed.

(Pause)

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AVA (CONT'D)

I'm trying to build this relationship. And D'Shawn is saying things like, "I'm never going to have a fucking job, a fucking family"-

DANNY

-Your kind of guy.

AVA

Oh, my god, I'm loving him. I completely get him. Rage is easy. It's the ones that have rolled over and given up that make me crazy. So, he's ripping away and I finally ask him what he wants to do. And he says, "BEER. I wanna drink beer. I wanna drink beer day and night. I want beer to be my fucking job." And the other boys on the floor start laughing. Truly. Even Michael, who hasn't said a thing for almost a month. And I knew we were on to something big.

PHIL

One big boutique micro-brew start-up later-

AVA

-FUBAR Beer is born.

MARY

I still hate the name.

PHIL

But the boys love it.

AVA

It was almost *Hooah Ale*.

PHIL

But D'Shawn said "Hooah" had been ruined by Al Pacino in that movie.

AVA

The *Fucked Up Beyond All Recognition* acronym is much more appropriate.

DANNY

It's perfect.

MARY

I still don't-

AVA

Well, Mary, it's not for you.

Guy enters, beer in hand.

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GUY

Goddamn but this is really good beer, woman.

Phil and Ava do a fist bump.

Did you two just fist bump?

AVA

Bother you, Guy?

GUY

No. No! I just never thought I'd see you fist bump, Ava.

AVA

I never thought I'd be a rich divorcee.

PHIL

Behave, children.

AVA

Sorry. Old habits, Philip.

GUY

Yup, some habits never die.

AVA

So, Guy.

GUY

What?

AVA

What's that look in your eye?

GUY

There's no look in my eye.

AVA

Of course there is.

GUY

No there isn't.

AVA

I've known you for thirty years. I know when there's a look in your eye.

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Mary leans over and peers at Guy.

MARY

I don't see a look.

GUY

See! Phil, Danny, tell her.

PHIL

Sorry, Guy. She's right. There's a look.

GUY

There is no fucking look!

DANNY

I think ya'll are drunk.

AVA

Oh my god.

GUY

What?!

AVA

She's pregnant.

Guy's mouth drops open.

MARY

What? Who?

*Phil, Danny and Mary stare at Ava and then
turn to look at Guy.*

GUY
(To Ava)

How do you do that?!

PHIL

Brit is pregnant?!

MARY

Oh my god!

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Mary rises and embraces Guy. Danny slaps him on the back.

DANNY

That's great, Guy. Terrific!

Phil grabs Guy's hand and shakes it.

PHIL

That's great, Guy. Great. You must be thrilled.

Ava's mouth twitches but she stops it.

AVA

Are you okay?

GUY

You've gotten nicer, you know that?

Ava nods.

Your work, the patient advocacy, the beer company. It's good.

Ava nods.

AVA

So?

GUY

I'm happy.

AVA

Bullshit.

MARY

Ava!

AVA

It's okay. We won't say a thing. But, come on. We're in Lil's kitchen. You can tell the truth. A baby, Guy?

GUY

(Running his hands through his hair)

Yeah. I know. Can't tell Brit that though.

The Party in the Kitchen/Sergel

AVA

Nope. You can't.

GUY

Dammit all to hell.

MARY

A baby is always a blessing. It is, Guy. It'll be wonderful.

DANNY

Yeah, it'll be great.

GUY

Yeah, yeah, I know.

AVA

Number Two was supposed to be easier, huh?

Guy glares.

Sorry. I'm still me. Nicer, but still Ava.

PHIL

Have you told Eric?

Guy shakes his head.

GUY

It's a girl. You know my first thought was, "Thank god, because they can't send her to war." And then I remembered, Eric volunteered and...

MARY

Girls go to now.

Guy nods.

GUY

It never gets easier, does it?

Everyone shakes their heads. Then Guy begins to laugh. Ava joins in. Then Mary, Danny and Phil begin to laugh. Pretty soon, everyone has lost all control. Eric enters, with Sam behind him. Sam is filming the kitchen on a small camcorder. Eric pulls the camcorder to his face.

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ERIC

The blathering remnants of the end of a good party.

AVA

Honey, the goddamn party is just getting started.

END SCENE SEVEN

THE END

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Playwright recommendations

This is a prop-filled show. Scene changes can be accomplished with actors in character mimicking the rhythm of a party clean-up or set-up.

Per the aging in the script: The playwright discourages the use of more obvious aging-type of conventions (graying of hair, age makeup) and encourages the more subtle devices like costuming to indicate changes in weight, and adjustments to character demeanor and carriage.