

Throwing Rice

By

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Cast of Characters

Desiree, 30s: Wedding planner. African American.

Trip Franklin, Late 40s-50s: Father of the groom. White

Catherine Franklin, 60-70s: Trip's mother, Thomas' ex-wife. White

Suzy Franklin Late 40s-50s: Trip's wife, mother of the groom, Catherine's daughter-in-law. White

Richard Franklin, 20s: The groom, son of Trip and Suzy, grandson of Catherine and Thomas. Very handsome. A deeply closeted gay man. White

Thomas Franklin, 60-70s: Grandfather of the groom, father of Trip. White

Emma Franklin, Late 30s: Thomas' current wife. Slim and fit. White

Shannon, 20s: The bride. Overweight/plus size. White

Carrie, 20s: Shannon's maid of honor. White

Place

Wedding reception dining room at an exclusive country club

Time

The present

ACT ONE
SCENE ONE

One long table upstage set for the wedding party of a high-end wedding reception. Looking eerily similar to the setting for The Last Supper, it should be omnipresent. Downstage there is another similarly set table and area representing the dance floor, area where toasts are made, facing the rest of the reception hall. On either side of the dance floor are small, tall cocktail tables, only lit during scenes set there. A set of French doors lead off, presumably to a terrace and gardens. Desiree enters. She eyes the entire room with an extremely critical eye, perhaps taking a note or two. She checks the light, tables, picks something up off the floor. She then checks her reflection in the paned French doors, adjusts her Bluetooth, and exits.

Light change.

The sound of murmuring and a string quartet playing offstage. Trip enters, holding an expensive, unlit cigar and a fancy drink. He looks around for a place to set the drink but, unable to find a space on the laden tabletops, gives up. He then takes a moment and surveys the large reception hall. Desiree enters.

TRIP

Desiree.

DESIREE

Mr. Franklin. Do you need anything?

TRIP

Could you take this? It's very good, but not my particular poison.

DESIREE

(Taking the drink)

-of course. A Manhattan perhaps?

TRIP

Not yet. If I start now, well, who knows what would happen? I could lose all reason and not hold my peace!

They both smile.

DESIREE

I can have Taylor bring you a cappuccino or an espresso.

TRIP

The universal antidote, eh? Caffeine.

He grabs the drink out of Desiree's hand and takes a small sip.

See!? I'm a good sport. I'll drink the Kool-Aid! And delicious Kool-Aid it is!

Desiree takes the drink back. Offstage, Catherine can be heard, high heels clicking, calling for Desiree.

CATHERINE

(Calling)

Desire. Desire.

TRIP

Mother of god. Here we go.

She enters. Perfectly coiffed, expensive suit, expensive everything. Very tasteful.

CATHERINE

There you are.

DESIREE

Mrs. Franklin.

CATHERINE

Desire, everything looks exquisite. Trip, why aren't you with-

TRIP

-Took a break, Mom.

CATHERINE

Highly recommended. Limit exposure to your father to very controlled intervals.
(Turning to Desiree) Don't fret. There's no problem. It's all seamless. Sublime. You're worth every penny.

DESIREE

Thank you.

Desiree waits.

CATHERINE

But I am glad I caught you here. My eye caught something when I was, well, I noticed the lilies of the valley have reappeared in the centerpieces.

TRIP

Oh, Jesus Christ, really?! Again, Mom?

CATHERINE

Suzy wouldn't notice. The mother of the bride is occupied. I know Thomas doesn't give a damn. Trip, ditto. *(To Trip)* Correct? *(He shrugs)* The bride also doesn't give a damn as long as everything is "locally sourced"; our groom Richard knows who really planned this so I'm thinking-

DESIREE

-Mrs. Franklin, Mr. Franklin requested that they be returned to the centerpieces.

CATHERINE

Of course he did. Because Thomas certainly has a great personal investment about the specifics of the floral arrangements at his grandson's wedding.

TRIP

They're flowers! Do you really have to go to the mat over something no one is going to notice?

CATHERINE

I noticed, Trip. I noticed. And if I notice, others will notice.

TRIP

And dear god almighty, we certainly cannot have that.

CATHERINE

Have you been drinking?

TRIP

Not yet but-

CATHERINE

-Oh, I know. I'm driving you to it. Have some backbone.

TRIP

Yes. You're right. I need some backbone. Because I'm having an argument on my son's wedding day about FLOWERS!

CATHERINE

(Turning to Desiree)

What my son doesn't know is what this lovely little flower represents. Tears. Yes. Crying. Lilies of the valley represent the weeping of Mary during the crucifixion of Jesus. What a lovely concept to muse upon throughout the celebration of Richard's betrothal.

TRIP

Does that make you Mary and Rich being crucified?

CATHERINE

If the shoe fits-

TRIP

-And if it doesn't, nail it on!

DESIREE

(Without a trace of irony)

Would you like me to have Philippe remove them again?

Catherine sits and stares at the centerpiece for a moment.

CATHERINE

Trip, in that scenario, Suzy would be Mary. The long-suffering virgin.

TRIP

Whatever, Mom. Barnard would be proud.

CATHERINE

It's amazing what one remembers. *(Looking at the centerpieces again)* They're also highly toxic if you eat them. Bet Emma doesn't know that either.

TRIP

What's Em got to do with it?

CATHERINE

Darling, your father doesn't give a fig about the flowers. This interference has the SECOND Mrs. Franklin, your lovely stepmother Emma written all over it. It fits though. Thematically.

TRIP

Really?

CATHERINE

Sprinkle a few sprigs of this over the salad and we all experience some delightful culinary crucifixion.

TRIP

Hopefully, everyone will stick to the fish and game courses.

CATHERINE

Oh, but you are courting death. Suzy's a vegetarian now, isn't she? Better keep a close eye on her. *(To Desiree)* Leave them. It will give me a lovely conversational segue way between courses.

DESIREE

Anything else? I can have Taylor bring you a cappuccino. Ice tea. Some champagne?

CATHERINE

Desire, when I came in, there was a loose piece of parquet. Right by the entrance. Can't have the bride face-planting during the introduction of the new couple, as entertaining as that would be.

DESIREE

Of course.

Desiree nods to Trip and exits, with the drink.

TRIP

Don't you think the "Desire" joke is a little tired, Mom?

CATHERINE

It's our thing.

TRIP

After almost two years of being called the wrong name, maybe you could cut her a-

CATHERINE

-Don't be humorless. It doesn't suit you.

Suzy, Trip's wife, enters. She is in a flowing dress in the same palette as the wedding colors but with a more bohemian flair. She is wearing a matching corsage. Her dress has a handkerchief-style hem. She carries one of the signature cocktails.

SUZY

Trip, your dad is yelling.... oh, Catherine. I thought you were with-

CATHERINE

-I thought you were. Your hem is coming down.

SUZY

(Not registering Catherine's remark, she turns to Trip)

Thomas is yelling about his Cuban. Geez, I'm really hoping he's talking about a cigar.

TRIP

Ha! Good one, Suzy.

Trip waves his cigar at her.

SUZY

(Not getting the joke)

What? *(Sees the cigar)* Oh, thank god. Should I take it to him? I mean, he shouldn't be smoking. But he's, well, you know, yelling. Like he does. What should I do? Um...maybe you could take it to him?

CATHERINE

Oh, my lord-

TRIP

-Mom. *(To Suzy)* I'll take it.

SUZY

But maybe we shouldn't. He could...um.... I mean, it isn't good...when you have...you know.... sometimes, when he is yelling like that, I get a little...you know...um...

TRIP

I'll take it to him. Maybe it'll finally *(he starts to say "kill him")* ...quiet him down.

During this Catherine has leaned over and pulled a sprig of lilies of the valley out of a centerpiece. She goes to Suzy.

CATHERINE

(Wiggling the sprig into Suzy's corsage)

Here. The final touch.

SUZY

What? Oh. Oh, that is pretty. I love these. They are so delicate and gentle. Like little bells.

CATHERINE

Just like you, Suzy.

SUZY

What?

CATHERINE

Oh, nothing. You just...tinkle like a little bell.

SUZY

Oh. Well. Yes...um...so do you, Catherine. You look so wonderful. You are so slim. You must have been really hitting the gym getting ready for all this. I tried to diet but well....um...I'm just so excited. Isn't this exciting? The girls were all upstairs and I don't know...I didn't feel like I belonged right there so I...um...so I went into the hall...and...and then coming down...I got off at the wrong floor...but...you know, I always get confused between "Lobby" or "G" or "One." I mean, is "G" Ground or Garage...um...then I heard Thomas...shouting.

She takes a long pull on the drink.

So. What should we do?

CATHERINE

About what?

TRIP

The cigar, Mom. The cigar. *(To Suzy)* I said I'll take it to him!

SUZY

I'm just trying to help. You don't have to yell. I just want everyone to be happy. Have a good time. So. What should we do? I don't know what to do. Trip? What do I do?

Suzy takes another long pull on the drink while Catherine snatches the cigar from Trip, snaps it in half, and hands it to Suzy.

CATHERINE

Tell Tom it's from me. But you deliver it. He'll enjoy that.

SUZY

Oh! But he might be...what if he...um...oh dear.... oh! I see! He'll only smoke half. That is such a good solution.

Suzy begins to exit.

You are so smart. I wish I was...gosh...just like you...um...you know...a problem solver like you. And you changed your hair. I should have but...

Another sip.

Gosh, these are so good. I could drink these all day.

Trip and Catherine exchange a look as she exits.

TRIP

Mom, don't.

Trip shoots his shirt cuffs and heads for the door as Catherine checks her figure in the same French doors Desiree checked her reflection in.

CATHERINE

I was just thinking about when you and Suzy got married. She really was lovely back then. Good family. She fit right in.

TRIP

I suppose.

CATHERINE

So delicate. Feminine and fragile. Not a trace of irony or cynicism in her whole body. I thought she would be good for you.

TRIP

And she wasn't?

CATHERINE

Oh, she's done the job. Not with any flair but she kept herself up. She gave you two sons and-

They both freeze. A moment. Catherine gathers herself.

I'm sorry. Um...well...she manages to hire the right people. And if staff likes you, you'll get ripped off but things will mostly work. So, she hasn't held you back.

TRIP

(A realization)

You thought I was going to trade up.

CATHERINE

Ugh. I deplore that expression. And don't you dare say, "Like Dad did"!

TRIP

Mom?

CATHERINE

I wondered.

TRIP

That explains it.

CATHERINE

Explains what?

TRIP

When you told me to move all that money around. A few years ago. Remember, you were on a tear. Switching portfolios. I could not figure out your reasoning.

CATHERINE

Trip, it was a hard time. After Tommy's...passing, she became...I wouldn't have blamed you. No one would have. I had some distance; I could counsel prudence. And, as we both know, timing is everything.

TRIP

Very true.

CATHERINE

Anyway, it all worked out. I suspect you made other arrangements.

They exchange a look.

Very wise. Just be discreet. Oh, well! Look who I'm talking to!

She begins to exit back to the reception but stops at the table.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)

Daffodils.

TRIP

Really? The flowers? Again?

CATHERINE

Your centerpieces. Yours and Suzy's. They had daffodils. Also poisonous. Just the bulb but still.

TRIP

You're killing me. Pun intended.

She exits.

END SCENE ONE

SCENE TWO

Downstage center is now the groom's suite. Rich is in his dress pants and shirt, with tie, cummerbund, etc. laid on one of the cocktail tables. He is tucking in his shirt when Thomas walks in.

THOMAS

Where the hell is your father? Is he here?

RICH

I don't know, Grandpa.

Thomas turns to leave.

Um, do you see my cummerbund?

THOMAS

(Looking around)

So. The big day, eh?

RICH

Yup.

Thomas finds it.

THOMAS

(Handing it to Tommy)

Here you go.

RICH

Yes. Thanks.

Rich doesn't put it on.

THOMAS

That Shannon is a sweet girl. Nice family. Fits right in.

RICH

Thanks, Grandpa

THOMAS

I hope you've gotten everything out of your system.

RICH

Grandpa?

THOMAS

Girls. Sex-

RICH

-Oh-

THOMAS

-Drugs. Or whatever's the thing. Cocaine?

Tommy puts on his cummerbund.

RICH

It's heroin now. And hacking, I suppose. Yes.

THOMAS

Good. I was a little concerned.

RICH

Really?

THOMAS

College.

RICH

Oh?

THOMAS

You took some crazy classes, son. Had us all a little worried.

RICH

Grandpa?

THOMAS

But we all sow different oats, eh?!

RICH

You mean the education admin and early childhood?-

Thomas pulls out an envelope and hands it to Rich.

THOMAS

-It's not for a plane. Use mine. It's for a house. Congratulations.

RICH

(Not looking inside)

Thank you.

Thomas picks up the cuff links and gestures for Rich's sleeves.

THOMAS

And you're moving up when you get back from the honeymoon. You'll be down the hall from Uncle Aaron. Time for the cuffs.

RICH

But I've only been at the company for-

Thomas gives him a look while he helps him insert the cufflinks.

-Ok. Sounds good. Thanks, Grandpa.

Trip enters.

THOMAS

Where the hell have you-

TRIP

-With Mom.

THOMAS

Do you have-

Trip pulls out a cigar (not broken)

Where's yours?

TRIP

Mom got to it.

THOMAS

Rich, I gave Cole a whole box. Make sure you get one. He can show you how to smoke one. Just act like Clinton and don't inhale! Ha!

RICH

Yes, Grandpa.

THOMAS

Yup, that Cole. Some best man, right? Keep an eye on him. He might hijack those Cubans. Why didn't you ask that friend of yours, um, Frank-

RICH

-Frank?

THOMAS

Yeah. I thought you two were best friends. I thought he'd be your best man. At least a groomsman.

RICH

He wouldn't. I mean, he had a thing.

THOMAS

Probably better that way.

TRIP

Dad, I think Em was looking-

RICH
(To Thomas)

-Why?

THOMAS
(To Trip)

Jesus. She probably has one of those fucking drinks for me to hold.

RICH

Grandpa!

THOMAS

What?

RICH

Why is it better that way? Frank? That he isn't my best man?

THOMAS

Oh, Rich. Come on.

TRIP

Dad, just-

THOMAS
(Lightly)

-He's a fag. Right? Oh! So, you think I didn't notice?

TRIP

Dad, maybe-

RICH
(Stiffly)

Grandpa. People don't say fag anymore.

THOMAS
(Shrugging)

Oh. Alright. Gay. *(Enunciating each syllable)* Ho-mo-sex-ual. LGTQRSTUV.

Now laughing, speaking to Trip

THOMAS (CONT'D)

We used to say, "light in the loafers." *(To Rich)* He's a nice guy. It's just better this way. Cole is the perfect best man. *(Slapping Rich on the shoulder)* Emphasis on "man." Well, I better find Em.

Thomas exits.

RICH
(Quietly)

Wow.

TRIP

Let it go. Your grandpa's...old school. You look great.

RICH

Thanks, Dad.

TRIP

Well then.

RICH

Any last words?

TRIP

Do you need anything?

Rich shakes his head.

RICH

Dad, who was your best man?

TRIP

Uncle Aaron. And I know.

RICH

Know what?

TRIP

I miss him too. A brother should be a best man. But, hey. You've known Cole forever so.

RICH

He took us all to a strip club.

TRIP

I heard. How was...oh boy. That kid.

RICH

Yeah. He's a kind of a douchebag.

TRIP

Well, Shannon is a great girl. You could do a lot worse than marrying your best friend.

RICH

Dad, I love her. *(He is now looking at himself in a mirror, facing downstage)* I do love Shannon.

TRIP

You got our gift?

Trip is now standing behind Rich.

RICH

Dad, yeah. It's...it was so generous. It's all great. Everything you've done. You've always been behind me. Like a father should be. If I can be as good a dad as you...well, you know.

TRIP

It's normal to be nervous.

RICH

Dad, it's more than that. I want to be...to be honest, I'm...I'm...well-

Stopping him from continuing, Trip grabs Rich in a quick, tight hug, slapping him on the back twice and then releases him.

TRIP

(Looking him straight in the eye)

I know. I know.

RICH

Dad-

TRIP

-I did this too, you know. Married the right girl. Did the right thing at the right time. And after everything...I appreciate this. I want to thank you.

RICH

Thank me?

TRIP

We needed you to do...well, you're stepping up and forming a more perfect union. You and Shannon are forming another branch to keep this whole enterprise chugging along. And that's how it's supposed to be. So, we better get a move on. Almost everyone is here.

RICH
(Fiddling with his cufflinks)

Almost.

TRIP

But if you want to...

A moment.

RICH

What? If I want to what?

TRIP

This? All this? It's for the women. Really. Men, we make our mark in business. So, it's okay not to give a shit about all this. Your mom wants everyone to be happy but, Jesus Christ, it's just another party. So, if you aren't head over heels, wildly in love with *(he almost says "Shannon")* ...the pomp and circumstance, it's alright. It'll work out. *(Trip runs his hand through his hair)* But you are in love, correct? Well, you love her, right?

Rich turns back to the mirror

RICH

Yes. Yes, Dad, I'm in love.

END SCENE TWO

SCENE THREE

Thomas enters. He holds a large plate of appetizers and a highball glass with scotch in it. He unceremoniously pushes aside a few place settings and seats himself at the table and begins eating.

After a moment, Desiree appears at the door. She silently notes Thomas' location and the state of the table. As she slowly pulls the door shut, she can be seen adjusting her Bluetooth to speak into.

After a moment Emma, holding a signature cocktail and wearing a perfectly cut, very expensive suit, enters. She is very slim and fit.

EMMA

Why are you here?

Thomas ignores her. She leans in, takes the scotch and replaces it with the signature cocktail.

THOMAS

No. I am not drinking that saccharine concoction.

EMMA

Saccharine? I think it's made with vodka.

THOMAS

Christ, Em! Saccharine? *(She shrugs)* Mother of god. It's like Splenda.

Thomas takes his scotch back, takes a sip, and continues eating.

EMMA

Then don't. But you have to be seen with it.

THOMAS

How much longer until-

EMMA

-Ask Catherine. Or that.... wedding planner...girl.

THOMAS

You ask.

He offers her his plate. She smooths her skirt and shakes her head.

Christ, Em. It's one day. Have a bite.

EMMA

I have Pilates in the morning.

THOMAS

Fine.

Emma looks at her reflection in the same door Catherine did and adjusts her outfit, primping as she speaks.

EMMA

Karen said it's actually alright, even for OMG food.

THOMAS

What the hell is OMG food?

EMMA

Oh, you know. Phil's company. The food the tree huggers keep protesting-

THOMAS

-GMOs. Genetically modified.

EMMA

Ridiculousness. Why people can't be satisfied-

THOMAS

-Why are you in here? I thought-

EMMA

-Shannon's "friends" from her outreach, service place program...thing...have arrived. Did Rich really have to attach himself to such a do-gooder?

THOMAS

She'll settle down. They all do.

EMMA

It's just so boring! The moaning and groaning about everything.

THOMAS

Aren't you on one of the boards of...which one?

EMMA

Yes. But I don't invite staff to a family wedding! When they walked in, I thought at first the wedding planner girl had snuck her family in for the free food. I mean, I still cannot figure out why someone didn't put their foot down.

THOMAS

About what?

EMMA

How many people do we know whose daughters are wedding planners? I know five event planners that are very, very in demand. Do exquisite work. And we could have gotten...well, anyone...but Lisa and Suzy hire that...her.

THOMAS

Lisa and Cathy.

EMMA

True.

THOMAS

Most capable? Best interview? Best references? There's a plan. Always is, with Cathy.

Emma leans in and begins rearranging the flowers in the centerpiece.

EMMA

At least she got the flowers fixed. And she isn't one of the ones with the big butts.

Emma crosses to the door and peeks out.

Oh god. I'm going to have to go back out there. Oh good! I see Megan. Thank god.

She begins to exit but then Thomas begins coughing. Emma waits. He continues coughing. She pulls out her smart phone and looks at it. Eventually, it subsides.

Are you done?

He nods.

Remember, Patrice and I are leaving for Dubai Wednesday.

THOMAS

I thought it was London?

EMMA

Weather so we changed plans.

She begins to exit.

THOMAS

When will you get back?

But she's already exited.

END SCENE THREE

SCENE FOUR

Trip and Thomas stand at the cocktail table. Both have untouched signature cocktails in front of them as well as highball glasses with scotch.

THOMAS

Where the hell is your brother?

TRIP

Aaron was in the groom's suite.

THOMAS

Did you and he?-

TRIP

-Of course. I told you. We've done it all. Just relax.

THOMAS

Verbally?

TRIP

Of course, Dad. Why do you still ask me that?

THOMAS

It's a different playing field. Even with things breaking our way again finally. But still, we have to be careful. Jesus Christ. Dickie Sackler is getting ass fucked because of a couple of goddamn emails. I hated missing that Oxy cash crop-

TRIP

I remember-

THOMAS

-but we dodged a fucking bullet. God willing that spotlight will stay on him for awhile. Just so you and your brother...well, just no paper trail.

TRIP

Paper is old school, Dad.

THOMAS

Christ, it's a joke. Like this country was built by following regulations. FDA, SEC, EPA. Snakes in the grass, waiting to strike. Jesus god, the things I could do if they took off the kiddie-cuffs.

TRIP

It's been a hardship.

THOMAS

(Thomas slaps Trip on the back)

Like we would let a couple of regulations get in our way. Even if it goes sideways, the fines will be, what, twenty, thirty million, tops.

TRIP

If that.

They both wave at someone.

THOMAS

People don't get it. They don't.

TRIP

Get what, Dad?

THOMAS

Hostile takeover. What takeover isn't hostile? Ha! We took over this country from the goddamn British, no one complains about that! Civil War was hostile, you don't see folks up on their cross, complaining about setting those slaves free.

TRIP

You haven't spent much time at the Georgia plant, have you, Dad?

THOMAS

Hicks. *(Spies someone)* Speaking of hicks.

He waves and mimes a toasting gesture with his signature cocktail.

Getting Rich into Aaron's division now is the right move. And the wedding is nice. Two chemicals coming together to create the next family element.

TRIP

I don't believe it. The cynic is becoming a poet.

THOMAS

I stole the line from your mother. She also said all this is a suitable metaphor.

TRIP

And did Suzy say, "What's a metaphor?"

THOMAS

Bah! She's fine. Believe me; clever in women is highly overrated.

TRIP

So, Dad, how are you feeling?

THOMAS

JP Morgan did fine with Jamie's throat cancer. Barely a hiccup. Buffet had prostate. Hasn't slowed him down. Bastard.

TRIP

Yes. But you can throttle back a little. Aaron and I-

THOMAS

-Not dead yet, Trip! Not dead yet!

A moment.

TRIP

And here I was, ready to measure for drapes.

Thomas snorts and takes a swig of scotch. Then another.

THOMAS

How long do you think it will be before we have the next Thomas on our hands?

TRIP

12 months. Exactly, if I know Rich.

THOMAS

She's a nice thing. Not much to look at. Actually, too much to look at but hopefully Rich's genes will dominate. But you do need to have a talk with him.

TRIP

Jesus, Dad. He's not five. I've a hunch he's figured out the birds and the bees.

THOMAS

No! I mean business. Our business. His by-the-book habit will have to be, well, there are the written rules and the real ones. Not good to get those confused. The number one proverb- if you don't bend the rules, you ain't really playing.

TRIP

He knows that.

THOMAS

Does he?

TRIP

Very, very well.

THOMAS

Good. Because Aaron's girls aren't going to set the world on fire. Rich is the future of this family.

TRIP

He knows.

THOMAS

Good. You did good with him, Trip.

TRIP

One out of two ain't bad?

THOMAS

Don't do that.

TRIP

Dad-

THOMAS

-Don't. Don't do that to yourself. It'll eat you up inside. Like Suzy. Don't think. Just do.

Lights crossfade to the other table. Catherine and Suzy stand, Suzy with the signature cocktail, Catherine with a glass of wine.

SUZY

I think it's going well. Should I be up in Richie's room, or here? Or maybe-

CATHERINE

We belong right here. In a few minutes, you should go wish Shannon well and then-

SUZY

-Should I go now!?

CATHERINE

(Hand on Suzy's arm)

No. I'll tell you when, alright?

SUZY

I'm just so happy. Are you happy?

CATHERINE

Yes, Suzy, I'm happy. I'm just riddled with happiness.

SUZY

Good. That's good. I'm just...has Richie been...he hasn't been looking like himself.

CATHERINE

Suzy, he's getting MARRIED. Of course, he's going to be...whatever.

SUZY

I just want him to be happy.

CATHERINE

We all know that, Suzy. You have mentioned it.

SUZY

Everything has turned out so nice. Thank god for you. Well, you and Desiree. And Lisa. Shannon's mother, well, she's just a dream. So nice and...sweet and...um....

CATHERINE

(Downing her wine)

Nice? You know, Suzy, it's okay to be honest. Occasionally.

SUZY

What? She is nice!

CATHERINE

Oh, my god, she's an anal pill.

SUZY

Catherine!

CATHERINE

And where did she get her work done? A drugstore in Puerto Rico?

SUZY

(Laughing behind her hand)

Oh my god! That's...that's-

CATHERINE

-Worth 600 million and her cheeks look like two ping-pong balls. What a disaster. Her face is as rigid as her ass.

SUZY

Catherine, it's...it's a weeding day! I mean, wedding-

CATHERINE

-Oh Jesus Christ, you've got to get over this addiction to happy. You've already infected Richard. At least Trip appears immune.

SUZY

I hope I've made Richie happy. I think I did. Did I? Is he?

CATHERINE

You misunderstand. He bears the cross of Trip and yours most dominant traits. The Trip dashing-but-distant-gene and the Suzy gotta-make-everyone-happy-gene.

SUZY

That sounds like an insult. I'm sorry, Catherine, but it does. Why today of all days you have to-

Suzy begins to tear up.

CATHERINE

-I'm sorry. I was just...I was wrong. Everyone's happy. We're all overdosing on happy.

SUZY

So, he's going to be okay?

CATHERINE

We all are.

Catherine's wine glass now empty, she grabs Suzy's signature cocktail and takes a sip.

We all are very, very happy.

END SCENE FOUR

SCENE FIVE

Lights come up center stage on Shannon in her wedding dress. She stares straight ahead, looking into a mirror. Carrie helps arrange her veil.

CARRIE

You look beautiful.

SHANNON

The dress is amazing. I'm glad I went with this one.

CARRIE

You look beautiful.

SHANNON

They'll all be staring at Rich anyway.

CARRIE

Stop it! Shit. Cut yourself a break, at least on your wedding day!

SHANNON

It's okay. I mean, I think I just want to get it over with. It's been forever. And I hate people staring at me.

A soft knock on the door.

CARRIE

Come in.

Desiree enters with a velvet jewelry box.

DESIREE

Shannon, your father sent these over.

CARRIE

Alright! Let's see the family treasures.

SHANNON

SHIT! I thought he had forgotten.

CARRIE

Stop it. You have to wear them.

SHANNON.

They're diamonds.

CARRIE

YES!

Carrie pulls out a gorgeous diamond necklace, bracelet and matching earrings.

CARRIE (CONT'D)

Oh, I want, I want, I want-

SHANNON

-you can have.

CARRIE

You have to wear these. They've been worn by the brides-

SHANNON

-in my family for four generations. I know. They're also diamonds. Blood diamonds.

CARRIE

These are like a hundred years old. Anyone exploited by digging them up is dead by now. And they are so pretty! Come on.

SHANNON

Did my mother pay you?

Carrie drapes the necklace around her neck and looks in the mirror.

CARRIE

She could pay me in diamonds!

SHANNON

Desiree, what do you think?

DESIREE

Excuse me?

SHANNON

Warlords in Africa fund their violence with the diamond trade. Do you at least see why I have a problem with this?

CARRIE

But it's a family tradition! Do you want to be the one to break the streak? Your daughter will see these in the same wedding picture like your parents' wedding picture. That means something, you know.

SHANNON

I know.

CARRIE

And your folks are paying for this shindig.

SHANNON

I know. But SHE wanted this huge thing. And Daddy said I had to.

CARRIE

So suck it up, slap these puppies on to embellish that Dior and let's get you hitched.

SHANNON

Desiree? What did you think?

DESIREE

I think it's your wedding.

CARRIE

Bought and paid for by Mom and Dad. Don't give me that look, Shan. I know. I know! But the diamonds exist. So don't wear new ones. Protest and stuff. But come on. Do you really want to cross your parents today? Upset your dad? These are the past. You're the future. You and Rich. It's just one little thing. One little gesture. Doesn't mean anything really. So throw them a bone, get these on, and let's dance the night away.

Shannon thinks for a minute, grimaces, and then puts her hands in front of her like she is being handcuffed.

See? Not so bad. And you do get to marry your best friend. Well, your best friend after me, that is.

Carrie puts the bracelet on Shannon's wrist, and then the necklace.

DESIREE

The photographer is in the bridesmaid suite. Shannon, once you're ready, you two go there, fifteen minutes, then we're a go. Okay?

SHANNON

Desiree, thanks for keeping everybody...you know...there...I mean, not here, you know?

DESIREE

You look beautiful.

She goes to exit.

CARRIE

(Stopping Desiree)

You have the rice, right?

DESIREE

For their departure? Actually-

SHANNON

We aren't doing rice. It's bad for the wildlife.

CARRIE

You're kidding me! Fuck wildlife! It's tradition! You have to!

SHANNON

Birds eat the rice and-

CARRIE

-Then they explode. First, how cool is that. Second, really? Third, it's bullshit.

SHANNON

No rice!

CARRIE

GOD, you are so anal sometimes.

DESIREE

Actually, it's a liability issue with the venue.

CARRIE

Oh my god.

DESIREE

You are correct, the exploding bird thing is an urban legend, but the rice poses a risk to humans. People can slip on the hard grains on concrete or a hardwood floor, causing injury.

CARRIE

You're shitting me.

DESIREE

No.

SHANNON

So, first, when it comes to not killing living beings I prefer to error on the side of safety. Second, yes, I really do. Third, do I really want possible death and injury raining down on people just in the name of tradition and family? Um, NO!

CARRIE

Party pooper. Could we just throw it near my mom? She's been making me crazy.

SHANNON

What are friends for? Oh! Desiree! Did you find my passport? I-

DESIREE

-Don't fret. Tay located it and it's already safely ensconced on the plane.

CARRIE

It always surprises me, how you talk.

DESIREE

Um, excuse me? I don't quite-

CARRIE

-“Don't fret.” “Safely ensconced.” I just mean, you don't talk black. You don't sound black black. You know.

SHANNON

Carrie!

CARRIE

What? What? It's a compliment. Oh, come on. She knew what I meant. *(To Desiree)* Right? You know what I mean? I mean, sometimes I even forget you're black. Or should I say African American? I always forget. *(Turning back to Shannon)* Anyway-

A knock on the door.

DESIREE

(To Shannon)

Shall I?

SHANNON

Sure.

Desiree goes to the door.

DESIREE

(Speaking offstage)

Hello, Mrs. Franklin. *(Over her shoulder to Shannon)* Shannon, it's your future mother-in-law.

SHANNON

Oh! Suzy! Okay, okay.

Suzy flutters in.

SUZY

Hi, Carrie. Oh, Shan!! OH!! You look so, so wonderful! OH!

Suzy embraces Shannon. Carrie has sat down and is checking her smart phone.

DESIREE

Carrie, could I borrow you for a moment? I need all the bridesmaids together to check flower and dress continuity.

CARRIE
(Shrugging)

Sure.

SUZY
Oh, Carrie, you look so pretty too! Really, really pretty.

CARRIE
(Still looking at her phone)

Thanks.

Desiree and Carrie exit.

SUZY
I didn't know if I should bother you but Catherine said it was okay.

SHANNON
Hey, better you than my mom.

SUZY
Oh, you don't mean that.

SHANNON
Actually, I do but, you know-you and I are buddies.

SUZY
Yes, we're buddies. I love that.

SHANNON
I've got your back-

SUZY
-and I've got yours. Shannon, you're just so wonderful. You make me feel hip.

SHANNON
You are hip.

SUZY
I've never been hip.

SHANNON
Me either.

SUZY
So maybe we can be un-hip together!

SHANNON
Sure.

SUZY

Shannon, I just want to say, oh, I don't know what I supposed to say. I've never been a mother-in-law before. I think, oh I guess want to thank you for being so good for Richie.

SHANNON

He's good for me.

SUZY

Good for each other then. You were so there for him when...I was...well, when I wasn't able to be what he probably needed. You know what I mean?

SHANNON

Yes.

SUZY

But he just needs a lot of love. But he's loyal. So loyal. Probably too loyal.

Suzy looks around the room, lost in thought for a moment

But he'll take care of you. I'm sure of it.

SHANNON

I know. Suzy, I've been wanting to thank you too.

SUZY

ME? Why? For what? I really haven't done much of anything. Catherine and your mom-

SHANNON

-You never once looked surprised.

SUZY

Oh geez, I don't...what? I'm surprised every day. Surprised about-

SHANNON

-Me and Rich. He's so good looking.

SUZY

Yes, he is.

SHANNON

And I'm fat.

SUZY

No! You have a wonderful figure.

SHANNON

I'm fat. I had only been on two dates before Rich and they were set up. You and Rich are the only people in my entire life, ever really, I think, who see me as Shan. Just Shan. And are totally okay with me as I was. Am. You're the only people who've never tried to change me.

SUZY

Oh, I don't think that's true. Why would anyone try to change you?

SHANNON

My mom. Says I should stop trying to feed the world and focus on not feeding myself.

SUZY

Oh. Well...maybe she's just concerned about...well, your dad has high blood pressure, right? Maybe it's-

SHANNON

-No. I know what it is. So, thank you.

SUZY

Well. You're welcome. We are buddies, after all.

SHANNON

You do have my back.

SUZY

I do.

Suzy looks at Shannon for a long moment

SHANNON

You okay?

SUZY

Marriage can be hard. But Richie isn't. Hard, I mean. I mean, he isn't a hard person! You know. I just...just...I want to make sure you...you...that he's right for you. Because we're buddies.

SHANNON

Suzy, I know everything about Richie. I do.

SUZY

You do?

SHANNON

I do.

They both nod.

SHANNON (CONT'D)

And I'm okay.

They both nod again.

And I believe we're a really good match. *(Grabbing Suzy's hands)* Just like we're a really good match.

SUZY

Okay. We are! Oh boy. I'm going to be a mother-in-law in just a little bit. You know, Catherine came to talk me when I married Trip.

SHANNON

What did she tell you?

SUZY

That Trip would take care of me. And that marriage could be hard but that any sacrifices would be for the greater good.

SHANNON

That sounds like her.

SUZY

She made it sound a lot more elegant...and...better. Like she does, you know?

SHANNON

I know.

SUZY

She scared the living heck out of me. Do I scare you?

SHANNON

No. Do I scare you?

SUZY

Oh no! I'm a little scared for you, I think...

SHANNON

Why?

SUZY

I just really want you to be happy. And get what you want. Because you deserve it.

SHANNON

Thank you.

SUZY

And kids? Family is everything, you know. Well, that's what everybody says.

Throwing Rice/MARCH 2020

We will be happy.

SHANNON

Promise?

SUZY

Promise.

SHANNON

They embrace.

END SCENE FIVE

SCENE SIX

Thomas and Catherine stand at a cocktail table, both perfectly poised throughout the scene.

CATHERINE

How many feet did they take out this time?

THOMAS

Around 5 feet, five inches. Just about your height, if I'm not mistaken.

CATHERINE

Still the romantic, I see. You should have another, I mean a fourth, scotch. You take it medicinally, right? Along with the Viagra, I'm assuming.

THOMAS

Viagra? Cathy, that's just lazy fencing.

CATHERINE

Agreed. I should have stopped at "medicinally."

They both wave at someone and smile. Perhaps Catherine blows a kiss.

THOMAS

So, Cathy. Spit it out.

CATHERINE

Excuse me?

THOMAS

Why are you here?

CATHERINE

Ostensibly, to enjoy and celebrate the betrothal of my one and only grandson. Physically, to propagate the species. Socially, to oversee the details and publicly communicate our seal of approval and support for the union. Existentially-

THOMAS

Jesus god-

CATHERINE

-is a little harder to suss out but today I'll go with to ensure the Franklin and Anderson (*she touches her chest*) lineage continues unabated. There is something else in that category, but I can't quite put my finger on it.

THOMAS

You are a piece of work, Cathy.

CATHERINE

Thank you, Tom. Isn't this fun, though? Look around.

THOMAS

We always had a different definition of "fun," Cathy. Perhaps you forgot. Has the family dementia begun setting in yet?

CATHERINE

You only wish. No, I mean look around. NO ONE dares approach us. We scare them!

THOMAS

You scare them.

CATHERINE

Stop. You know it's fun. It's the only thing we do well together anymore.

Thomas snorts and smiles at Catherine in spite of himself.

Oh! I remember! My existential mission. I'm supposed to ask you when in god's name are you going to let the boys take over.

THOMAS

Oh god. It's not time.

CATHERINE

Christ, you're like the fucking Queen of England.

THOMAS

It's not time.

CATHERINE

Oh god in heaven, it's been time. Time's up. I can smell the leadership rotting from here.

THOMAS

It's not time.

CATHERINE

Oh, please, grab your thirty pieces of silver and go to the Hamptons.

THOMAS

Since when are you an expert on-

CATHERINE

-Since birth, Tom. Since birth. You do remember who my family is, don't you? We were here when the Franklins were still living it up in the bucolic English countryside, raping Irish servants in the stables.

THOMAS

-Cathy-

CATHERINE

-So, I can read an earnings report. Why, little-old-me, I can even, gasp, read the Journal if my daddy helps me with da big words-

THOMAS

-Jesus Christ-

CATHERINE

-and I know it is time for you to get your dick out of your hands, get your ass out of the chair, and let the boys take over. You've had your turn, Pharaoh. Let the boy kings grow up and take over the plantation.

THOMAS

I'm shocked, Cathy. You're mixing your metaphors. You know never to show weakness.

CATHERINE

Coming from the man with the infant bride and the cancer-laden intestine.

THOMAS

I was going to. I was ready. But then Tommy...

CATHERINE

Oh my god! Don't. Just don't. Jesus, you are priceless, Tom! Really? You're playing the dead grandson card? Again?

THOMAS

Trip was ready but then...so, I waited.

CATHERINE

He's ready now.

THOMAS

But I'm not.

CATHERINE

The world waits for no man, Tom.

THOMAS

It'll wait for me.

CATHERINE

You absolutely certain about that?

END SCENE SIX

SCENE SEVEN

Rich enters. He stops and surveys the room.

RICH

Fuck.

He pulls out a cigarette, lights it, quietly pulls the doors closed behind him, and enters the room. Eventually he crosses to the upper dais and standing at the end of the table, he looks down the length of the table. He crosses to the chair where he where he will be sitting at the reception. Standing behind it, he removes his jacket and puts it over the back of the chair. He takes a long pull on his cigarette and taps the ash into the centerpiece. He steps far upstage, into shadows.

Desiree enters swiftly. She glances around the room, clearly looking for something or someone.

DESIREE

(Into headset)

Tay? Anyone close to you?...Good. Okay. Groom may be a runner.... Hardly. They're...well.... he has eyes, actually still seems to possess a part of a soul and has more than 50 IQ points.... I mean, I'm in the shower scrubbing my skin raw after every.... True dat.... *(quietly laughing)* The reliable Silkwood cleanse.... anyway, see if you can lay eyes on-

RICH

I'm right here.

DESIREE

(Startled)

Whoa! Wow. Rich. There you are. *(Into headset)* We're fine, Tay. *(To Rich)* People have....hi. How are you doing?

RICH

You're very good at your job.

DESIREE

Thank you. So. What's up, Rich? Deciding to blow off the party and head straight to the honeymoon?

RICH

What's your recommendation?

DESIREE

It's not my party.

RICH

No, it's not.

During the following he snuffs his cigarette out in the centerpiece and puts on his jacket back on

-I know, I know. It's time for me to man up and die with my boots on. Make it to the church on time. Or, in this case, our version of a church, the country club.

Rich stops stock still in the center of the room. After a long moment, Desiree pulls out a small flask in one hand and a joint in another hand. She offers them equidistance from Rich.

DESIREE

I've been doing this almost ten years. I can stall. *(Pause)* Or cancel.

RICH

Pick my poison?

Desiree nods. After a moment, he takes the joint. She offers him a light, but he shakes his head, pulls out his matches and lights the joint. He tosses the match on the floor.

RICH

Stall. Fifteen minutes? Can you do that?

DESIREE

Easily.

She waves him over to the opened French doors, so the smoke goes outside. He complies.

RICH

You are good.

She begins to exit.

Desiree. *(She stops)* We were just goofing around that day. Frank and I.

DESIREE

Alright.

Rich takes a long drag on the joint. He offers her a hit, which she declines.

RICH

Tommy should be the one standing here. All this is his. This was his gig. And he would've been fucking great. But he couldn't take it. And left me to clean up his goddamn mess. If he...hadn't, I could've. I could've been me. I was so fucking happy being the second born. "No one cares about the spare." I could have been the (*making air quotes*) "bachelor" for acceptable number of years Kindergarten teacher with a trust fund, no one would have said shit. Eventually I could have been...you know. Me. Really me. Yeah, sure, there would have been blow back but now, I can't. Now I have to be...it. The guy. The gasoline to keep this dumpster fire of a family going.

DESIREE

Do you have to?

RICH

After Tommy. It was like we were all on this fucking plane going down. Straight into a mountain. Mom was almost...and Dad just worked and kept shrugging. He kept fucking shrugging. That's all. Grandpa just got us a new Porsche. This was all I could think of to do. What do you do when you love terrible people? Really? I'm really asking you. Please, Desiree.

DESIREE

Well...

RICH

Please.

DESIREE

They do say, "Put your own oxygen mask on first."

A moment. Desiree speaks into her headset.

I'm bumping fifteen minutes for hair and make-up issues. (*To Rich*) Let me know.

He nods. She exits. Rich takes a very long drag on the joint.

END SCENE SEVEN

SCENE EIGHT

Rich is alone in a single spot. He does one final methodical check of his tie, cuffs, boutonnière, and then stands motionless, waiting. Lights go down.

END SCENE EIGHT
END ACT ONE

ACT TWO
SCENE ONE

A soft wash of lights come up on the empty reception hall. After a moment a burst of applause and joyous wedding walking out music like Ode to Joy or Felix Mendelssohn's "Wedding Music"

Then a DJ's voice over a microphone announces, "Ladies and Gentlemen, may I present Mr. and Mrs. Richard and Shannon Franklin!"

Carrie, holding a mic and a signature cocktail, crosses center.

CARRIE

I've known Shannon since birth. Since before birth, really. As our moms say, "From the Mayflower to Mayflower pre-school." And you all really have me to thank for all this. I talked Shan out of the Peace Corps and into Paris. Out of Berkeley and into Barnard, to New York, thank god, where Rich and Shannon met and began their legendary friendship. Our rock-solid Rich, exhibiting a flair for drama, choosing to make his one rebellious act to attend Columbia instead of The School Which Shall Not Be Named (*knowing chuckles*) and Shan, questioning the system at the family alma mater! Thank god, not getting too liberal or else she might have dumped me! Anyway, I will admit, for a little bit, I was jealous. They got so close, so fast. Shan, you always said, "Like two odd ducks in an ocean of very cool swans." But, obviously looking at you both today, the two of you took flight and have become some very cool swans. (*"Aws" can be heard*) While different on the surface, you both share so much. Love of family and friends. Loyalty. A passion for doing the right thing. Anyway, working his way up from the bottom, Rich is excelling at work so he can now support my friend in the style which she has never grown comfortable. (*Laughter*) Shannon continues to make a difference, and obviously the sky is the limit for you two. So, fly high...and don't eat the rice I DO plan on throwing at you! To Rich and Shannon!

Carrie raises her glass, says, "To Rich and Shannon." Trip enters and Carrie passes the mic to him and she exits.

TRIP

I've also known Rich since birth. (*Laughter*) He has been the perfect son, and now he brings to our family the perfect daughter. (*"Aws" and gentle applause*). Every parent wishes for this day, the day that sees your child embark on the next stage of their life. We are blessed that he found the lovely Shannon to take the journey with. There will be bumps, there always are, but their rock-solid friendship will be a beacon for them in the years to come. Shannon, your work with the less fortunate, commitment to family, gentle nature, and tolerance of your future in-laws (*laughter*) has already made you a part of this family. We are all thrilled that it is now official. To Rich and Shannon.

*Raising his glass, Trip says, "To Rich and Shannon."
Suzy enters and takes the mic. Trip exits.*

SUZY

This is the happiest day of my life. Shannon, you remind me of me today. Just so lucky and happy, becoming a part of an amazing family. You are just so nice and sweet. I feel so comfortable with you and I really hope you feel the same way. And Richie. My baby. You have always just been the nicest person. You would never cross anybody; you are just so good with everyone you meet. You're so patient; you can teach anybody anything. I mean, you even taught me how to send e-mail! *(Laughter)*. And you are so good with your cousins; I know you will be a great dad. I mean, both of you will be great parents! You too, Shannon. So, anyway, this is just really a wonderful happy day and I hope you both are just really, really happy. To the happiest, best couple in the world, my Richie and Shannon.

END SCENE ONE

SCENE TWO

DJ's voice: "Ladies and Gentlemen, please direct your attention to the center of the floor for Mr. and Mrs. Franklin's first dance as husband and wife." Rich and Shannon walk to the center of the stage and, after a deep breath, the "first dance" music begins, and they begin dancing.

Hey, Duck. RICH

Hey, Duck. SHANNON

So? RICH

So? SHANNON
(Giggling)

How ya doing? RICH

Pretty good. How you doing? SHANNON

Oh, pretty good. RICH

Can I ask you a favor? SHANNON

Anything. RICH

Can we never, ever, ever do this again? SHANNON

RICH
Which part? My family? Your family? My friends? Your friends? The two years of manipulation, bickering, negotiations, desperate attempts to grasp some actually truly experienced joy, pointless decisions questioned again and again, and...and...

SHANNON
Fashion decisions. Diets. Meeting designers. Fittings. Fasting. Diets. Fittings. Going to the gym with my mother. Fittings. Diets. These fucking shoes-

RICH

-which, can I say, are god awful.

SHANNON

Yes, thank you! Say it. They suck and I hate them. And I'm wearing two sets of Spanx. TWO. The only part of this I don't hate is you, Duck.

RICH

The feeling is mutual, Duck.

They dance and smile.

SHANNON

Rich, did you change this music? For our first song?

RICH

Noooo. I thought you did.

SHANNON

Because god knows, I would pick a classical waltz for our first dance. My mom was so pissed that we didn't have a song.

RICH

A thousand dollars says it was Grandma.

SHANNON

Oh no. This has my mother written all over it.

RICH

Shan?

SHANNON

Rich?

RICH

Never again.

SHANNON

I love you.

RICH

Me too.

They dance off and return to their seats while Trip and Suzy dance on. Suzy's eyes keep darting around, scanning the reception.

TRIP

Christ, Suzy. Let Desiree do her job. It's all fine. Relax.

SUZY

I am! I am. I'm just checking. Making sure.

TRIP

Just dance. Everything is fine.

SUZY

So. You think Richie looks happy?

TRIP

Yes.

SUZY

Yes, yes, he does. Shannon is such a sweet girl.

They dance.

Grandchildren will be nice. So wonderful.

TRIP

Yes. Wonderful.

They dance.

I'm leaving Tuesday.

They dance.

SUZY

When are you back?

TRIP

I have to stay in Stockholm for the weekend.

SUZY

Who's the project manager you've been working with? I keep forgetting her name.

TRIP

Which one?

SUZY

The Swedish gal.

TRIP

That covers a fair amount of territory, Suz.

SUZY

You know.

Josefine? TRIP

What's she like? SUZY

What? Why? TRIP

I don't know. What's she like? SUZY

She's.... Swedish. TRIP

What does that mean? "She's Swedish." SUZY

TRIP
She's a Swedish project manager with the second top Swedish pharma firm. Why are you asking me? I work with dozens of people, I'm scheduled to the micro-second on every trip, I'm chained to a boardroom and you know that, so you need to stop being so needy and enjoy this wedding.

So, I can't ask one question? SUZY

TRIP
Josefine has brown hair, is about your height, drinks coffee at meetings, drives a car, speaks English, Swedish, and I think Finnish. Would you care to hear about the other 18 people I collaborate with when I go to Stockholm? Anders? Remi? Astrid? Lars? Ellen?

No. No, I.... never mind. SUZY

It's a nice wedding. You did a good job. TRIP

It was mostly your mom and Shannon's mom. SUZY

Well, I know you did some of it and what you did...well, you did a nice job. TRIP

They dance away and Thomas and Emma dance in.

EMMA

(Checking her watchband resting on Thomas' shoulder)

I have to get this looked at. It keeps snagging on things. It ruined the lining on my Valentino jacket yesterday. Thank god it wasn't one of the Chanel's. You would think Patek would know how to set a diamond. I should have worn one of the Cartiers and sent this out. *(She waves at someone)*. Ick. When did she get old? Maybe I'll get another Patek when I'm with Patrice. She has such excellent taste. I love shopping with her. We were thinking of making it a shoe-only trip. She has such marvelous ideas. Just shoes. Manolo, Louboutin, Choo, Zanotti. But maybe we'll do an entire accessories theme. Shoes, handbags...have you seen the new knuckle clutches? *(Looking at the bracelet on the other wrist)* And I'm tired of this Bulgari. God, what was I thinking? Should I have the girl send someone back to the house for the Webster? You know, the one with the emeralds for the snake's eyes? That would have been the perfect pop of color. I think I will. Where is she? You'd think she'd be easy to spot.

They dance to the edge of the stage and Catherine takes Emma's place in Thomas' arms.

CATHERINE

Quit shuffling.

THOMAS

Quit leading.

CATHERINE

You're an embarrassment to your father. Now that man could dance.

THOMAS

It was a different era. They all could.

CATHERINE

I took ballroom and so did you.

THOMAS

You know, Cathy, I'm not going to die just to suit you.

CATHERINE

Of course, you're going to die, Tom. The question is, will it be soon enough.

The music ends.

END SCENE TWO

SCENE THREE

Rich and Shannon rise and come over to the table where Thomas, Emma, Trip, Suzy and Catherine are seated. Aside from Suzy, everyone is calm and methodical, taking their turn to congratulate the couple and then return to their seats. Suzy flutters around the couple during the following exchanges.

SUZY

(Jumping up and embracing them both)

Oh, you both look so beautiful. So, so beautiful. And happy. Right?

SHANNON

Thank you, Suzy.

RICH

Thanks, Mom.

SUZY

I can't believe my baby is married.

Trip has risen and kisses Shannon on the cheek.

TRIP

Welcome to the family.

SHANNON

Thank you so much.

TRIP

Rich.

They embrace briefly as Thomas crosses to Catherine and pulls her chair out for her. She rises and crosses to the couple.

CATHERINE

(Kissing Shannon on the cheek)

Another Mrs. Franklin joins the ranks. Welcome to the gilded cage! *(Embracing Rich)*
Congratulations, Richard. Well done.

RICH

Thanks, Grandma.

CATHERINE

(Kissing Trip on the cheek)

Congratulations, Trip.

TRIP

Thanks, Mother.

CATHERINE
(Kissing Suzy)

Suzy.

SUZY

Thank you, Catherine. What a wonderful day.

CATHERINE

Yes.

Trip escorts Catherine back to her seat, crossing paths with Thomas as he goes to the couple.

THOMAS
(Kissing Shannon on the cheek)

Welcome, my dear.

SHANNON

Thank you, Mr. Franklin.

THOMAS

Rich. *(Shakes his hand)* Good job. *(Kissing Suzy on the cheek)* Congratulations, Suzy.

SUZY

Thank you so much.

Trip has crossed to Emma and has pulled her chair out for her. She and Thomas seamlessly cross paths as she goes to the couple. She has to wiggle past Suzy, who is still hanging onto Rich.

EMMA

Excuse me, Suzy. Rich. *(Air cheek kiss)* Shannon. *(Air cheek kiss)*

She returns to her seat, now Thomas is holding it out for her.

TRIP

Suzy, come sit down.

SUZY

Trip! I'm just-

TRIP

-Let him go-

RICH

-It's okay, Dad. *(Patting Suzy's arm)* Thank you all for a wonderful day. *(To Suzy)* And yes, Mom, I'm very happy.

END SCENE THREE

SCENE FOUR

Dance music can be heard offstage outside through the French doors, along with people laughing and chattering. Desiree enters. She thoroughly checks every corner of the room and then shuts the opened French doors. She turns off her Bluetooth, kicks off her shoes, and holding one in each hand, she walks in a circle, talking to herself.

DESIREE

You got this. Three more hours. You got this. Sweet baby Jesus. Do not blow this. Come on. Okay. You're okay.

Desiree sits down and begins putting her shoes back on when Suzy bursts in, silently sobbing into a wad of crumpled Kleenex. Not seeing Desiree, she almost falls right over her. Suzy continues to sob and stammer through the following exchange.

SUZY

Oh, god. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

DESIREE

Mrs. Franklin! I'm sorry.

SUZY

-No, I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

DESIREE

Are you alright?

SUZY

I'm just so sorry.

DESIREE

Would you like me to find Mr. Franklin?

SUZY

Oh god, no. I'm just...just...

DESIREE

What? What are you?

SUZY
(Hushed)

I'm just so...so...sad. I'm so sad.

Desiree takes her hand and Suzy grabs her into a tight hug.

SUZY (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

DESIREE

Shh. It's okay. It's okay. You're okay. Shhh.

Trip appears at the French doors, unseen at first. He stops and takes in the scene. Desiree sees him and almost says something, but he stops her with his hand and then slowly backs away and exits.

It's okay. You're okay.

SUZY

(Sitting back)

(Louder, a discovery) I don't think I am.

Desiree waits.

I'm...I'm.... I've lost everything. Trip. Tommy. Now Richie. He and Shannon have each other and I...I...I have nothing to do. No one. And no one is happy. Desiree?

DESIREE

Yes?

SUZY

Everyone tells me Richie is fine. Even Richie. *(Whispering)* But I think he's lying. Just like Tommy did. I knew. I knew something was wrong. But I didn't do anything. Everyone said he was fine. Said he was happy and fine. But he wasn't. Do you know? He...killed himself. My Tommy. Did you know?

DESIREE

Yes. I'm so sorry.

SUZY

Tommy was going to...take over.... all this. And Richie was going to be a teacher. It would have worked. Tommy liked girls. Girls liked him. It was all planned out. Tommy would get married, have a boy and then Richie would have been able to...but then Tommy....so now Richie can't be what he...really is. *(Louder)* Why do people lie? I ask them. Again and again. And people just keep lying. Why is that? Why?

DESIREE

I don't know.

SUZY

But why?!

Maybe they want you to be happy?

DESIREE

No. Not this family.

SUZY

Maybe it's a tough habit to break?

DESIREE

It is scary. Not lying. Why is that?

SUZY

I don't know.

DESIREE

You are a really nice person. I think you are the only happy person here.

SUZY

Why?

DESIREE

Because you have something to do.

SUZY

Why don't you go have some cake? Or maybe go lie down? I'll let people know where you are.

DESIREE
(Gently)

Maybe.

SUZY

Suzy heads to the French doors.

Suzy.

DESIREE

Suzy turns back.

Not being happy never killed anyone.

SUZY

Yes, it did.

Suzy exits.

END SCENE FOUR

SCENE FIVE

A female vocalist is singing pop music outside and there is competing chatter from inside.

Simultaneously, Trip enters from the gardens and Thomas from the hallway. They both exhale and then spot each other and burst out laughing. During the following, they remove their jackets and sit down.

THOMAS

How's the singer?

TRIP

Slutty. Pierced. Great voice, though. She deserved all those Grammys. Shannon seems pleased. How's in there?

THOMAS

Usual. The business of pleasure. Your brother Aaron is holding court, of course.

TRIP

Of course, he is. Should we go to the downstairs lounge? They have an excellent port I tried last week.

THOMAS

No.

A moment.

TRIP

Dad, are you-

THOMAS

-I'm FINE! Don't start that with me, you little shit.

Trip waits.

When is Stockholm?

TRIP

Thursday. Berlin first.

THOMAS

Don't screw it up. I've known Lars for forty years-

TRIP

-And I've known him for twenty-

THOMAS
(Roaring)

-I'm not finished! I am not finished. Don't you dare presume to interrupt me. You understand me?

The music outside crescendos and stops. Applause.

TRIP

Yes, Dad. I understand you.

Thomas points inside.

THOMAS

You should be in there, doing your job.

TRIP

You have taken note of the quarterlies, I'm assuming. We've beat street estimates the past-

THOMAS

-I know exactly what this company has done, and what it's going to do.

TRIP

Yes, Dad.

THOMAS

Don't patronize me. Each subsidiary. Each lab, branch, every employee, I know everyone, and I see everything. I know what is going to happen, and why and when. I...we're growing. Spreading. APAC (*pronounced A-pack*), EMEA (*pronounced eh me ah*), because of me. Not you. Not Aaron. Me. So don't tell me you know how to run Lars, you hear me? Don't you tell me that.

Trip waits.

That's a good tactic. I've always admired it...this...waiting. Like a bird circling. Or a snake, poised. You just wait. And bastards like me keep talking. Your mother calls it Trip's jujitsu.

TRIP

It never worked on Mom.

THOMAS

Yeah, well, you're a scalpel, she's a fucking sledgehammer. Sometimes there's no contest. How it doesn't eat you up inside...

TRIP

Dad?

THOMAS

Not crucifying idiots.

Takes a sip of scotch.

Goddamn but I'm sick of people waiting for me to die.

TRIP

Dad, no one is waiting for you to die.

THOMAS

You sure about that? Absolutely certain? You can look into your crystal ball, into people's very souls, and see that everyone wants the boss to live forever? You can do that? You can see what everyone wants? What everyone is wishing for in their heart of hearts, eh? What makes everyone happy? Oh, you better tell your wife the news. She's been asking.

TRIP

I invite you to leave Suzy out of this.

THOMAS

Oh, son, we're all in "this."

TRIP

(With an edge)

Can I get you another scotch, Dad?

Emma enters from the garden.

EMMA

Thomas, something's happening. Oh. Trip.

TRIP

Em.

EMMA

Thomas.

THOMAS

What?!

EMMA

They're going to leave soon.

THOMAS

So?

EMMA

We all have to go out front to throw the rice. Or confetti. Or birdseed. Whatever, we have to throw it so...

She shrugs.

THOMAS

You want me to come out and throw rice at Rich?

EMMA

YES!

THOMAS

Why?

EMMA

Because that's what you do! Jesus!

She rolls her eyes and exits.

THOMAS

Integration costs eat all of the upside so cut out everything that isn't core. You know that.

TRIP

Well, I am a scalpel.

THOMAS

I can never tell when you're being petulant.

TRIP

Ask Mom.

Thomas rattles the watery remains of his scotch. He tosses the liquid into the centerpiece and nods to Trip.

THOMAS

Time to throw some rice.

TRIP

Lead the way.

END SCENE FIVE

SCENE SIX

Rich and Shannon are sitting side by side center stage, in the back of a limo. Both have changed into elegant traveling outfits. Shannon's shoes are off. They have a bottle of champagne between them and are laughing hysterically.

SHANNON

Oh my god. Oh my god. Oh my god.

RICH

No, no, no. It's *(affecting an upscale "Catherine" accent)* "Oh Jesus Christ. Really, Thomas?"

More laughter.

SHANNON

(Tight lips)

And my mom. "Shan. SHAN. SHAN! I told you to get the CREAM colored icing, NOT the WHITE!"

RICH

NOOOOOOO! We got the white icing! You've poisoned us all! It's the end of life as we know it!

They begin to settle down.

Is it just me or did that whole reception-?

SHANNON

-suck? Yeah.

RICH

It's not just me?

SHANNON

Nope. I mean, the music and the food but...

RICH

I thought...I don't know.... I think I thought-

SHANNON

-It would be different if it was us. You. Me.

A moment.

RICH

Fuck you and your white icing.

They start laughing again.

SHANNON

Oh, I fuck everything up, did you not know? Let me introduce myself, Shannon, the fuck up.

RICH

Oh no, my dear, I fuck everything up. I am the fuck up in this relationship.

SHANNON

No, no, it is I.

RICH

Ok. Yes, it is you.

SHANNON

Fuck you.

RICH

Fuck you.

Laughter.

SHANNON

I have something for you.

She pulls out a small box.

RICH

And I have something for you!

He pulls out a gift bag. More giggles.

SHANNON

You go first.

RICH

Together.

They both unwrap atrociously elaborate duck figurines. They are both struck still. And then smile at each other.

SHANNON

Rich, are you *(she stops herself from saying "in love")*do you love me, Rich?

Rich takes her hand and kisses it.

RICH

You have no idea how much I love you. You're my best friend, Shan.

SHANNON

You're mine. I can't believe we got out of there alive.

RICH

I hope we did.

SHANNON

We did.

They both look straight ahead and, not smiling, nod to themselves. Richard then looks at Shannon and takes her hand.

RICH

And we are going to have kids. Great kids. Promise me.

SHANNON

Yes. Just so we don't screw them up.

RICH

Well that is certainly going to take the two of us.

SHANNON

I know.

END SCENE SIX

SCENE SEVEN

Carrie enters from the inside door. She crosses to the table and sits in the chair previously occupied by Suzy. She takes two half-filled signature cocktail glasses and combines the contents into one glass and takes a sip. Emma enters.

Carrie. EMMA

Hey, Em. CARRIE

They gone? EMMA

Carrie pulls out a joint and, while lighting it, nods.

Have you seen the planner girl? EMMA

Inhaling, Carrie gestures towards the back of the hall.

CARRIE
(Holding the smoke in as she speaks)
By the gifts, maybe? I don't know.

Gestures, inviting Emma to join her.

Oh, god no. Like I need the munchies. EMMA

Carrie shrugs. Emma settles in the chair previously occupied by Desiree, pulls out a small bottle of cocaine out of her handbag, expertly scoops up a portion on her nail and snorts it.

Way to kick it old school, Em. CARRIE

So. When is it your turn, Carrie? EMMA

CARRIE
You mean, getting married?! Me? Ugh. I don't know. People keep throwing guys at me. I guess eventually I pick one. Or maybe I'll go your route.

Meaning? EMMA

CARRIE

Have fun for twenty years, then hang out in Viagra Triangle for six months, and become Number Two.

EMMA

Boston is excellent. LA is harsh. London is easier than New York, I think. But things might be different in fifteen years.

CARRIE

Did you get a pre-nup?

Emma just gives her a look.

Yeah. Like Trip and Aaron would let that go. Did you use Beslow?

EMMA

Cohen.

CARRIE

Nice.

She takes a long drag.

EMMA

Thomas had Beslow.

CARRIE

So, how sick is he? Trip's dad?

EMMA

Like I'd tell you.

CARRIE

Shit. You're my idol.

Emma smiles. She offers Carrie a snort of coke, which Carrie takes.

EMMA

So how did Shannon land Rich? I gotta admit, I don't get it. I mean-

CARRIE

-look at him. He's gorgeous.

EMMA

Did you try? I would have.

CARRIE

Maybe a little. It's just second nature, you know. Between you and me, he's a little, oh, I don't know...

EMMA

Like Trip? Always just sort of standing there-

CARRIE

-Yeah! Like waiting and watching. Never really having fun or doing shit.

EMMA

Is he gay?

CARRIE

(Shrugging)

No idea. He and Shan have fucked. Bi maybe?

EMMA

He's clearly way shut down. The whole thing with his brother. I think it did a number on him

CARRIE

(Taking another deep drag)

Sure did on his mom.

EMMA

Oh god, Suzy. Oh Jesus Christ, that woman. What a needy...pill.

CARRIE

(While holding in the smoke)

A poison pill.

They both giggle.

And Catherine?

EMMA

Speaking of poison.

CARRIE

True that.

Emma offers Carrie another snort, which she takes.

END SCENE SEVEN

SCENE EIGHT

Suzy is squatting down by the table, looking underneath. She is just slightly unsteady. Thomas can be heard offstage.

THOMAS
(Offstage)

Em? EM?

He enters.

Em? Where the hell are you? The car is ready to...oh, Suzy. Have you seen Em?

Suzy shakes her head.

Uh. No.
SUZY

What the hell are you doing?
THOMAS

I can't find my purse.
SUZY

Oh.
THOMAS

SUZY
It is so pretty. I feel so bad. I would feel so bad if I lost it. I don't know where it went.

Thomas begins halfheartedly looking around.

THOMAS
Oh. Um. Okay. A purse. Why don't we find the colored gal? She could probably, you know, find it.

SUZY
Oh, no she is so busy. So, just...busy. I'll find it.

Suzy sits.

THOMAS
Well-

SUZY
Did you have a good time? What did you think?

THOMAS

What did I think? Um....it was a wedding.

SUZY

Yes.

THOMAS

A very nice wedding.

SUZY

You think so?

THOMAS

Yes. Well-

SUZY

-You know Trip is leaving Tuesday...or was it Wednesday...for, you know...um...Sweden.

THOMAS

Berlin, then Stockholm.

SUZY

You know, maybe we could...um...

THOMAS

We could...? I don't really understand, Suzy. Let's get you to the suite.

He strides to the door and bellows.

Em! Or, um, Desiree! Can one of you come here for a minute?

Emma enters from the garden

EMMA

What?

SUZY

Thomas and I are going to have lunch this week.

EMMA

What?

THOMAS

What? No. What?

SUZY

Trip will be gone by then. You too, Emma. *(To Thomas)* We can get fish. There's a really nice place near the office. Right by that bakery. We can get fish. Salmon is one of Tommy's favorites...I mean, Richie's...did I say Tommy? I meant to say Richie-

THOMAS

(Yelling out the door)

Desiree!

Desiree appears.

(Pointing) She lost her purse.

Thomas swiftly exits with Emma behind him.

SUZY

(Tearfully)

I'm sorry. I did lose it.

Suzy rises and unsteadily walks out into the hallway.

END SCENE EIGHT

SCENE NINE

Catherine stands behind the groom's chair on the upper dais. Thomas and Trip enter.

TRIP
(Looking)

Mom?

CATHERINE

Up here, Trip.

THOMAS

Charming text, Cathy.

CATHERINE

Brevity is the soul of wit, Tom.

A moment.

THOMAS
What?! Jesus Christ, Cathy. The party's over. Em's waiting in the car!

CATHERINE

Now.

THOMAS

Now?

CATHERINE

The time is now, Tom.

THOMAS
Ah. AH! Oh, I see it all now. So, Trip. Your mommy has decided to-

TRIP
-Your major stockholders have decided-

THOMAS
-You, your brother and your mother are doing this? Now? NOW!? You little shit.

She crosses down to them.

CATHERINE
-Tom, you're a relic. Embalmed, oozing weakness, teetering on the edge of extinction. Your people are old, their people smell blood in the water, if you don't seamlessly choreograph this there will be financial consequences, legal consequences, not to mention Stockholm, and the international markets. You know this and that **I** have to

CATHERINE (CONT'D)

be the one telling you also proves my point. Christ, I'm sure her blow jobs are delightful but it's like Emma swallowed fifty of your IQ points.

THOMAS

You're like a fucking disease.

CATHERINE

Oh, don't be dramatic. I'm the fucking cure! You knew this was coming. Christ, Tom, you did it to your father.

THOMAS

No, I did not!

CATHERINE

Oh yes, you did, Duckie. Yes, you did! I was there, remember? It's tradition. So don't be difficult. It's unattractive and futile.

THOMAS

Then Trip should be the one doing this, am I right, Cathy? So, Trip?

TRIP

I am. Like she said, brevity is the soul of wit.

CATHERINE

Come on, Tom! Take your medicine like a man.

THOMAS

(To Trip)

You did this? YOU? YOU really did this? You got all the-

TRIP

-YES! I did it. I did it. And I will be doing it. Everyone understands that but you. And it is embarrassing how I have to tell you that. I am embarrassed. This is the how it plays out. You knew that when you took over from Grandpa, you knew that when you brought in Aaron and me, you knew that when you divorced Mom. And you knew that when you married Emma. This is how it's done. So fucking DO IT. Or, I swear to god, I'll do it for you, you little shit.

CATHERINE

(Touching Thomas' cheek)

You and I did exactly what we were supposed to do, and it all turned out exactly like it was supposed to turn out. You executed your part perfectly. You did it. After decades...after generations of perfect timing, don't spoil it. Look at it this way, if you and Em have a baby, maybe he'll do this to Trip and Aaron or Richard someday. Won't that be fun?

THOMAS

Your idea of fun and mine are quite different, Cathy.

Throwing Rice/MARCH 2020

CATHERINE

Oh, Tom. No one cares.

END SCENE NINE

SCENE TEN

Bright lights illuminate the reception hall. Bus trays are scattered on the tables and sounds of the kitchen crew cleaning up can be heard. Catherine is leaning against the opened French door, looking outside. Desiree enters, pulling a small suitcase on wheels, jacket off and over her arm, purse slung over her shoulder. She is speaking to someone offstage as she enters.

DESIREE

Tay, go on. I just want to do one more sweep and then I'm out.

She comes to a full stop when she sees Catherine.

Mrs. Franklin. I didn't realize anyone, you, were still here. Do you need anything?

CATHERINE

Oh, Desire, thank you. I'm fine. It was a lovely event. Thank you so much.

DESIREE

Thank you.

Desiree puts her jacket back on and waits.

CATHERINE

And you've been paid.

DESIREE

I know. Thank you.

CATHERINE

With a bonus, of course.

DESIREE

Very generous. Thank you.

CATHERINE

And I've already given you some wonderful referrals.

DESIREE

I know. Thank you.

CATHERINE

Oh, thank you. I know I haven't paid for it, you're...what's the phrase? "Off the clock?" But could you stay with me, sit with me, for five more minutes?

DESIREE

Actually, Mrs. Franklin-

CATHERINE
(Gesturing to a chair)

-Please? Just a little longer? Please?

Desiree slowly sits down.

Take off your jacket.

DESIREE

Are you certain?

CATHERINE

I don't think I've ever seen you out of your.... yes, please.

DESIREE

You want me to take off my uniform.

CATHERINE

Yes. Yes, I do.

Desiree rises, takes off her jacket and places over the back of her chair, and sits.

You know, I think we should have something to drink. Toast Rich and Shannon.

DESIREE

Alright. That would be nice. Thank you.

Desiree doesn't move.

CATHERINE

Yes. Oh! Yes. Well, let's see.

Catherine looks around. She spies a bottle of red wine, takes it, and two water glasses. She dumps the contents of the water glasses in the centerpiece, sits and pours a glass of wine for Desiree and one for herself.

To Rich and Shannon.

They toast and both take a sip. Catherine and Desiree look at each other for a moment.

CATHERINE

That question you've been sitting on for the past eighteen months. Would you ask it? We don't have much time left.

DESIREE

Excuse me?

CATHERINE

Ask the question. Why we hired you.

DESIREE

I'm not sure exactly what you're getting at.

CATHERINE

You want to know why we hired you.

DESIREE

It never crossed my mind.

Desiree takes a sip of wine.

CATHERINE

God, you're good. And you have been very good. You've lived up to your referrals. And beyond even.

A moment. Catherine pours a bit more wine into Desiree's glass.

Do you remember the two-fer?

DESIREE

I don't know what that is.

CATHERINE

During the seventies...or was it the eighties? Time is such an odd thing. Anyway. Decades ago, there was this big thing about hiring women and blacks-

DESIREE

-Affirmative action.

CATHERINE

Thomas hated it. "Nobody tells me how to run my company." My god but he carried on. He's so predictable. But I digress. To minimize the good they could all actually do, he and all of them, owners, CEOs, CFOs, you know, hired black women. So they could check two boxes.

DESIREE

So, I'm your affirmative action hire?

CATHERINE

Yes. And it's been sublime. Drove everyone crazy. It was like watching a year and a half of performance art. Emma's discomfort was especially delicious.

DESIREE

My god.

CATHERINE

Oh, why do we hire anybody? Truly? Why? If we had hired a Becky or an Emily or a Caroline or whatever other post-grad party planners were floating around, it would have been for their family, we knew somebody who knew their mother, for their tiny, tenuous connection to one of Thomas' or Trip's or Aaron's deals. Or a high-profile planner to impress the world. Emma would have adored that. But that would have been no fun for me. And I'm tired. Tired of not having fun.

DESIREE

I'm surprised the mother of the bride agreed.

CATHERINE

Lisa? Oh goodness, getting Shannon's mother to agree to you was easy. I told her you were on me. She still didn't get it. Was concerned how it would look. So, I said you were a tax write off. I did! And she believed it! Honestly, between you and me, she was so thrilled to get her, as she so lovingly put it, her "socialist heifer daughter" off her hands, and married to our handsome Rich no less, I could have gotten Bill Cosby to arrange this shin-dig.

Desiree rises and puts on her jacket to leave.

Oh, wait. Please. Stay. I'll...I'll double the bonus.

DESIREE

You'll double my bonus if I stay?

CATHERINE

Yes.

DESIREE

You really are something else.

CATHERINE

Just a few more minutes. For five minutes, just be yourself-

DESIREE

-Just be Desiree.

CATHERINE

Yes. Just be Desiree. If you do, I will be grateful, and I will show my gratitude with monetary appreciation.

Desiree begins to exit.

Desiree, it's all I've got.

Desiree stops, turns, and looks at Catherine.

DESIREE

Triple it.

CATHERINE

Alright.

Desiree doesn't sit. Catherine pulls out her phone and enters a series of numbers into it. She then looks at Desiree.

Done.

Desiree pulls out her phone, taps some characters into it. She slides her phone into her purse, removes her jacket and hands it to Catherine. Catherine takes it and places it over the back of a chair. They both sit.

Would you stop being black?

DESIREE

Excuse me?

CATHERINE

Oh, my goodness, that just popped out. How strange. It's just...I've been thinking this entire evening about what makes me, me. Catherine, you know. And here you are, in front of me.

DESIREE

In all my blackness.

CATHERINE

Yes. I suppose. Oh dear, it does sound dreadful. But would you?

DESIREE

Stop being black?

CATHERINE

Yes. Would you give it away, if you could? It causes you tremendous hardship, I'm assuming. But it is also a culture, an identity, even a glorious obstacle, I suppose.

DESIREE

I would never give away my heritage.

CATHERINE

But?

DESIREE

But what?

CATHERINE

You hesitated. Just a fraction. Just a breath. But you hesitated.

DESIREE

I would give away being the only different one in the room. Being judged-

CATHERINE

-Oh Jesus Christ, Desiree, you're smarter than that. We're all judged. Every single second.

DESIREE

You paid for this. Do you want it or not?

CATHERINE

I'm sorry. Yes, you're right. I interrupted.

DESIREE

The casual bigotry. Always being on pins and needles waiting for the ridiculous, racist comment to finally wiggle out. Having to behave just exactly "so" to prove I'm not a shoplifter, hooker, or transient. You'd think being a bigot was slimming the way you people seem to enjoy it.

Catherine takes a sip of wine.

CATHERINE

But you would keep your culture. Stay black.

DESIREE

Yes.

CATHERINE

Just like I would keep my vibrant Norwegian heritage. It sets me apart but, oh, the sustenance it gives me to fight the good fight. You must know what my culture is by now.

DESIREE

Money.

CATHERINE

Yes. I should have known you would see it. Our ethnic identity, our culture, is money. Wealth. To reject it is to reject the core of who we are. If you had my wealth, you think of all the good you would do, correct?

DESIREE

Yes. YES.

CATHERINE

You wonder why we don't do it. Become great philanthropists. You wonder why we don't give it away.

DESIREE

I wonder how you all can just be so lazy. Casual with all that you have. Can't even do the simplest math to see that you have enough money for a thousand lifetimes. How can people who exercise so much be so lazy?

CATHERINE

Ha! I suppose it's because money, no...wait. Without the excess of money, the deepest of pockets, we wouldn't be "us" anymore.

DESIREE

You could replicate this wedding every day for a hundred years and not make a dent in your Ethnic Identity.

CATHERINE

But all this is a grand cultural tradition. A wheel of fortune.

DESIREE

Rolling over everyone in its path.

CATHERINE

Desiree, if you had been born into my shoes, you would do exactly what I'm doing.

DESIREE

Don't do that.

CATHERINE

What?

DESIREE

Toss out the unanswerable hypothetical just to divert your chosen action into theoretical pondering. You live in this world. You can read. Everything is at your fingertips. Yet you still choose. You choose this. You chose corruption.

Desiree stands and circles with her arms out.

You choose white.

CATHERINE

You are choosing to be quite honest.

DESIREE

Yes. Does this make you perhaps a little uncomfortable, Cathy?

CATHERINE

It is slightly unexpected. Aren't you afraid I'll rescind my generous bonus?

DESIREE

Oh, I've already moved the money to another account.

CATHERINE

Of course, you did. I like this. Being honest. So, you think I'm a bigot?

Desiree looks Catherine straight in the eye.

DESIREE

Yes.

CATHERINE

I like that we're not walking on eggshells.

DESIREE

It is refreshing.

CATHERINE

Everyone says they want to talk about race but then no one wants to talk about race. But friends don't walk on eggshells. Friends can talk.

DESIREE

I didn't realize we were friends.

CATHERINE

A black friend is another thing we all are supposed to have.

Catherine pours herself more wine and offers Desiree more. Desiree shakes her head "no."

DESIREE

And I'm the closest thing to a black friend you are ever going to come to.

CATHERINE

Oh, come on. What black person wants to be my friend? Wants to be the token friend so somebody can check off a box? You don't want to be my friend.

DESIREE

No.

CATHERINE

I don't blame you. We're a dreadful bunch. And you couldn't afford the lunches. And me paying all the time would be such a cosmic drain on our time together. Just distasteful all the way around. You know, I think...I think you all are waiting for us to die. The old guard.

DESIREE

Yes.

CATHERINE
Yes?

DESIREE
Yes.

CATHERINE
So you can take over?

DESIREE
Yes. I have been watching and I think death is the only thing which can stop this...death grip you all have on this world. I admire your commitment to your family. I do. But you don't give anyone else's a chance. You and your people are not the only people. For all your millions, for all your billions, your huge wealth, you are all very, very small. And that is why you need to go.

CATHERINE
Oh, I wish. I actually do. But it won't change. The fix is already in. The succession plan continues, like it has for hundreds, thousands of years. The window dressing might change, but all the faces will look quite similar. The wheel cannot be stopped. Different is as toxic as change. And heaven forbid anything change. Nothing really changes, ever.

Catherine pulls a mostly empty signature cocktail towards her from across the table.

And, now that I think about it, I think...I think that's why I hired you. Really. I just wanted to do one unexpected thing before I died.

She slowly empties the contents of the cocktail into a bus pan. She then examines her now-empty glass as she speaks.

Oh, yes, Thomas isn't the only one who can get cancer. Of course, he has to make a thing about it. "Oh no! What will happen to the company! Oh no, I'm so important!"

DESIREE
I'm sorry. I had no idea.

CATHERINE
Oh, Desiree. You're not sorry. You just said so. But I am good, aren't I? Being rich and...not young means you can show what you want to show. Disappear for two weeks? She must be in... somewhere...wherever. Change the hair? New stylist. Lose weight? Lots of praise. Even you didn't catch it. I am proud of that. But you should be flattered. You're my final act. Or at least part of it. A good scene, shall we say?

DESIREE
And this wedding? Your act three? Starring your grandson as the sacrificial lamb?

CATHERINE

Our poor Richard. Poor kid. It's not a great fit, him, in the company, but we'll survive.

DESIREE

Will he?

CATHERINE

He knows the rules. The rituals. He's got the friends. The Coles. The Roberts. The Juniors and thirds and fourths. He'll be fine. He'll never want for anything. Not the best healthcare. Safe homes. The best food. The finest clothes. Eventually he might even make peace with it all.

DESIREE

Will he? He's pretty smart.

CATHERINE

Perhaps not. But by then he and Shannon will have children. No, if he keeps Shannon and keeps a lover, he'll make it. Just so it isn't Frank. That would be much too complicated. One's lover should never be one's first great love. Oh, yes, I do know about our Richard.

Catherine takes a sip of wine.

We lost his brother, you know. Richard's older brother.

DESIREE

Yes.

CATHERINE

Tommy. Oh my god but he was a little stinker. Fiery. Funny. Not cautious like Richard but messy. Disheveled, like too many pieces to him. What a delight he was.

She pauses.

The police found him.

DESIREE

Does anyone know why?

CATHERINE

(Shrugs and shakes her head)

He was....it was two days...before we...they...they found him....in his car. We had hoped...anyway. Pills and-*(She indicates her wrists)* Like I said. Messy. Messy to the end. Blood. Urine. Vomit. So much pain in one little Porsche. He'd have done well.

DESIREE

You sure about that?

CATHERINE

Perhaps you're right. That's another hypothetical though. Tommy wasn't this family's first suicide. There's a long grand family tradition of it. My grandfather used to say it was nature thinning the herd. God, he was a bastard.

Catherine pours out the last of the wine between her and Desiree's glasses.

You know what would be fun?

DESIREE

I have no idea.

CATHERINE

You're going to plan my funeral and wake. I'll make it one of my last wishes. You'll do the food and the like. Campbell's will have to do the actual service. Oh, this is marvelous. And you'll get the chance to celebrate my death.

DESIREE

I won't celebrate your death.

CATHERINE

Remember, honesty, Desiree.

Desiree rises, gets her jacket and puts it on.

DESIREE

For flowers, I think perhaps Azalea, Calla lily, Sweet pea. Maybe some Oleander?

CATHERINE

All poisonous.

DESIREE

Yes.

CATHERINE

Can you come up some heinous cocktail everyone will be required to drink at the wake?

DESIREE

I think I could manage something.

CATHERINE

Desiree, I have enjoyed having you around. You being here all this time has made me look at all this with fresh eyes. It's all really quite strange.

DESIREE

Yes, it is.

CATHERINE

Goodbye, Desiree.

Catherine exits. Desiree takes the empty signature cocktail glass and places it in a bus pan on the table.

DESIREE

Goodbye, Cathy.

END SCENE TEN
END OF PLAY