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THE COUPLE NEXT DOOR

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THE COUPLE NEXT DOOR

When suburbanites Sadie and Vance try to remedy their marriage by hooking up with the swinging-savvy Janet and Rich, all four find that nothing--even chocolate--is as simple as it seems.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

RICH NELSON: Businessman, early thirties to late forties

JANET NELSON: Human resources worker, early thirties to early forties

VANCE LEWIS: Thirty-seven, zookeeper

SADIE LEWIS: Thirty-six, hotel marketing manager

SETTING: Present day in an upper class suburban neighborhood.

SET NOTE: Set is two homes, side by side, with a common area in front or between them, where mailboxes would be.

SCENE BREAKDOWN:

ACT ONE

I:1 Lewis house

I:2 Nelson house

I:3 Outside

I:4 Lewis house

I:5 Nelson house

I:6 Lewis house

I:7 Lewis/Nelson houses

I:8 Nelson house

OPTIONAL INTERMISSION

ACT TWO

II:1 Nelson house

II:2 Lewis house

II:3 Lewis House/outside

II:4 Lewis/Nelson houses

II:5 Zoo (suggested)

II:6 Lewis house

II:7 Outside/Nelson house

ACT ONE, SCENE 1

SET IS TWO HOMES, SIDE BY SIDE. LIVING ROOMS ARE NECESSARY; OTHER ROOMS CAN BE CREATED AS SPACE DICTATES. A COMMON AREA WITH MAILBOXES IS OUTSIDE. BOTH HOMES ARE TYPICAL MIDDLE-TO-UPPER CLASS SUBURBAN. BOTH ARE DECORATED FOR THE HOLIDAYS, BUT JANET AND RICH'S MORESO, AND JANET LIKES SANTAS.

SADIE and VANCE enter their home from the garage.

SADIE

All I'm saying is that it's freezing out, and when it's freezing, I'm accustomed to my ass being warm, and I don't like it when it isn't.

VANCE

Warm? Honey, your ass is hot.

SADIE

That leather seat feels like ice, and I'm asking you to please do something about it.

VANCE

You can drive it down to the dealer as well as I can.

SADIE

You're supposed to do the car stuff. And you know I don't like going down there.

VANCE

Because the mechanic looks at you.

SADIE

Leers at me.

VANCE

It's a compliment. You can handle a compliment.

SADIE

And you can handle cleaning the shower or changing the sheets, but I never ask you to because if I did, it would never get done.

VANCE

Because I wouldn't care if it got done.

SADIE

That's how it works in your head? You do what matters to you, I do what matters to me, and how lucky if we happen to agree? We're supposed to be a team.

VANCE

We are a team.

SADIE

Right, you're just benched while I run the household and do most of the parenting.

VANCE

We were talking about asses. How did we get here? How do we always get here?

SADIE

Because you never think I have a point, and you--

VANCE

Have no idea what you go through, and you never get a moment's rest, and is it any wonder you're never in the mood, blah blah blah.

SADIE

And just like that, you reduce it to sex.

VANCE

Because we're good there. You know we are. When we're there.

SADIE

It's better when we're good.

VANCE

But good is still good, right?

SADIE

You're infuriating.

VANCE

But I do have a hot ass.

SADIE

Because the seat where your benched ass is parked works just fine, so you don't give a shit about mine.

VANCE

I'm not talking about the damned car! I'm trying to flirt with you.

SADIE

Try cleaning the house.

VANCE

You used to care that my ass was hot.

SADIE

And you used to care if mine was.

Baby, it still is.

VANCE

VANCE moves closer to Sadie.

You know that's not what I mean.

SADIE

But still...

VANCE

VANCE kisses Sadie, slides his hands on her body.

It's one of your best assets.

VANCE

[groan]

(melting)

SADIE

C'mon... Alison won't be home for an hour, right?

VANCE

Vance, you can't fix everything this way.

SADIE

This is a rare opportunity, Sade. Can't we put it on hold?

VANCE

Along with the job offer and all the other things you "put on hold"? There's not a storage bin big enough.

SADIE

VANCE kisses the back of her neck.

Mmmm... You smell so good...

VANCE

Vance, come on, can we please talk about...

SADIE

VANCE touches SADIE in a way that weakens her resolve.

Come on, you know I hate it when you...

SADIE

VANCE continues to kiss her neck and reaches the hollow of her throat. SADIE lets out a moan of surrender.

Will you take the car to the dealer?

SADIE

VANCE

You want to be hot? You want me to make you hot?

VANCE starts to get louder, as RICH comes up his walk, and goes to get his mail.

RICH

(to woman across the street)

Hey Nancy! Lester's Christmas balls look great!

(beat)

Ornaments. Whatever.

RICH continues up his walk, overhears Vance and Sadie.

VANCE

I WILL MAKE YOUR ASS HOT!

RICH smiles to himself, stops to listen.

VANCE

IT'LL BE THE HOTTEST ASS ON HONEYSUCKLE LANE! COME ON BABY, GIVE IT TO ME!

RICH chuckles, enters his house.

SADIE

Vance, the neighbors will hear!

VANCE

So what, you've never been shy...

VANCE moves in to continue kissing her, but SADIE has had time to regroup.

SADIE

Oh!

VANCE

(mistaking this for enthusiasm)

That's it...

SADIE

Oh no!

VANCE

What?

SADIE

I have to make cupcakes for the Girl Scout meeting tonight!

VANCE

Screw the cupcakes. I'll get some from [local grocery].

SADIE

It's my turn to make something. You know how those women are.

VANCE

For Christ's sake, Sadie, do you think the kids care if their cupcakes have organic sugar? The high is the same, trust me.

SADIE

Just let me get them started. It'll only take a few minutes.

VANCE

Fine. Go. I'll be in my office.

SADIE

I'll hurry.

VANCE

Forget it.

VANCE exits.

Lights down on Lewis house, up on
Nelson house.

ACT ONE, SCENE 2

NELSON HOUSE.

Over end of last scene, RICH has entered his home, removed his coat, set down his briefcase.

JANET

(O.S.)

Rich, is that you, honey?

RICH

It's me. I had a meeting in [local town], so I decided to come home to my sweet, loving, sexy wife instead of going back to the office.

JANET enters; they share an affectionate kiss; RICH is revved.

RICH

How was your day off?

JANET

I swear HR falls apart when I'm not there. But in between phone emergencies and PTA politics, I got some Christmas gifts.

RICH

You went Christmas shopping?

JANET

Online. It's so much easier.

RICH

Indeed it is.

JANET

(love pats him)

For Jake.

(beat, suggestively)

Do you want Santa to bring you some toys?

RICH

(as Santa)

Sit on my lap and I'll give you a toy.

JANET

Rich!

RICH

What? You're always trying to drag me into all your Santa magic.
(motions around the house)

JANET
I know, but Santa can't be... horny.

RICH
All right, all right...
(looks at her)
But you do look good.

RICH kisses her again.

JANET
What's up with you?

RICH
They're at it again.

JANET
Who?

RICH
Our neighbors, the Lewises. Right in the kitchen, it sounded like.

JANET moves closer to the window as if she might be able to see. RICH pulls her into a hug, and grabs her butt.

RICH
He was screaming about her hot, sexy ass.

JANET
Oh my...

JANET and RICH kiss deeply.

RICH
And it made me think about your hot, sexy--

JANET
(kissing him back, musing)
They are an attractive couple. He reminds me of that one guy... oh what was his name... the ones we met in Jamaica that first year. She had a beauty mark on her chin and that adorable little lisp--

RICH
Victoria. Damn, that lithp was tho thexthy... I don't remember him so well.

JANET
Ha! I bet you don't.

JANET moves closer to the window, looking out.

JANET

But he had that same way of walking, just the tiniest bit of swagger, enough to make you wonder what he was so confident about, but not enough to be arrogant.

RICH

You remember all that?

JANET kisses him again.

JANET

And...

JANET whispers in RICH's ear.

RICH

Really? Good thing we left him behind, then.

RICH glances toward the Lewis house again.

RICH

Still... that Sadie Lewis is one hot burrito.

JANET

Rich...

RICH

What? I was just thinking we should maybe have them over for dinner some time. They're our neighbors.

JANET

Nancy and Lester are our neighbors, and we've never had them over.

RICH

Janet, Nancy would keel over at the sight of a one gun salute.

JANET

You can't be thinking-- They live next door.

RICH

All the more reason. We have a little wine, you cook up your fabulous lasagna, we get to know each other a little.

JANET

Jake rides the bus with their daughter.

RICH

So we have that in common. And maybe more.

JANET

Wishful thinking?

RICH
Should we bet on it?

JANET
No bet.

RICH
Let's at least have them over.

JANET
Maybe when the weather gets warmer. We can have them over for an outside barbecue. On the new deck.

RICH
That's a great idea! We'll invite them into the hot tub.

JANET
...

RICH
Relax, Janet. We'll have the neighbors over. It'll be fine.
(moves to kiss her again)
Did I mention that he was telling her what a hot, sexy ass she had?

JANET
I believe you did. But tell me more...

RICHARD
What time does Jake get off the bus?

JANET
We have an hour.

RICH takes off his shirt.

RICH
What are we standing here for?

JANET raises her arms; RICH takes off her shirt.

RICH
Donald Pump is signing an executive order...

JANET and RICH fall to the floor. Fade out.

ACT ONE, SCENE 3

NEXT DAY. OUTSIDE.

SADIE is at her mailbox, removing mail, which includes a plain-paper wrapped package. She takes it out to examine it, just as RICH comes out to get his mail.

RICH
Hey, Sadie, how are you?

Caught, SADIE drops the package.

SADIE
Oh, hey. I'm fine... Dick.

Before SADIE can make a move, RICH gallantly swoops up the package and hands it to SADIE, sneaking a look at the return address in the process

RICH
Rich, but you know, whatever makes you happy.

SADIE
Rich. Thank you.

RICH
Santa Claus coming early?

SADIE
Excuse me?

RICH
The package?

SADIE
Oh, no! It's just... something for Vance.

RICH
Vance is a lucky guy.

SADIE
We just---

RICH
The best gifts often come in plain, brown paper wrapping, am I right?

SADIE
Man, it's freezing out here.

RICH

I love it.

SADIE

You must be a skier. Or snowboarder. One of those "embrace the snow and cold" types.

RICH

Nah... I prefer indoor fun mostly, but you know what's really great when it's cold like this? A hot tub.

SADIE

A hot tub?

RICH

It's invigorating. Your body is hot, your head is cold. Those contrasting sensations...

(shudders)

fucking fantastic.

SADIE

Wow. Do you, um, sell hot tubs?

RICH

You ought to come in some time. It's big enough for six.

SADIE

We may take you up on that. Some days, I just can't get warm. In fact, the car---

RICH

Forget warm. I guarantee you'll be hot.

SADIE

(shivers)

I can't remember the last time I was hot.

RICH

Forgive me for saying so, but you look pretty good now.

SADIE

Oh... thank you.

RICH

I've embarrassed you.

SADIE

No, it's a compliment.

RICH

Janet and I have been saying we ought to get together, you know, living so close, and our kids going to school together.

SADIE

That sounds fun! Vance and I don't get out much, what with Alison and we both work--

RICH

We're all busy.

SADIE

(indicating the upscale neighborhood)

When you choose this lifestyle--

RICH

Lifestyle?

SADIE

Yeah. Once you get used to it--

RICH

We have a great Lifestyle, too. All the more reason we should get together.

(eagerly)

How's Friday?

SADIE

This Friday?

RICH

Sure. Fun Friday. Trust me, that's better than tonight.

SADIE

What's tonight?

RICH

Wing-it Wednesday.

SADIE

Do you alliterate all week?

RICH

We totally try. So how about it? Fun Friday. Winter wine tasting. Robust reds. One of my clients just sent me a couple of bottles.

SADIE

(emphasize the alliteration)

Let me huddle with my husband, see about a sitter.

RICH

(laughs)

And she's smart, too! Jake'll be at his grandma's overnight, so we're covered.

I'll let you know. SADIE

Please do. Now go warm up with your... present. RICH

SADIE turns toward house, walks.

Oh, one more thing.. RICH

What? SADIE
(turning back)

Chocolate or vanilla? RICH

What? SADIE

Which do you prefer? RICH

Is that a serious question? SADIE

Seriously, Janet makes a great dessert. RICH

Well, then, seriously, I always thought vanilla was God's idea of a joke. SADIE

RICH smiles, and SADIE and RICH head home. Lights up on Lewis house, where Vance is at his computer.

ACT ONE, SCENE 4

LEWIS HOUSE.

VANCE is at his computer; SADIE enters.

SADIE

Vance?

(beat)

Vance?

SADIE walks toward the computer area.

SADIE

Why didn't you answer me?

VANCE

Are we talking?

SADIE

How would I know the difference?

VANCE

Can you blame me? Look what happens when I open my mouth.

SADIE

If you opened your mouth to do more than eat, maybe it wouldn't.

VANCE

Are we about to go another round?

SADIE

We don't go rounds. You leave before we've discussed anything.

VANCE

There's nothing to discuss.

SADIE

You never think there's anything to discuss!

VANCE doesn't respond.

SADIE

My boss wants the conference schedule for all three hotels cost-projected and on his desk yesterday, Alison needs homework help and rides to dance and piano, you want dinner... You should be my oasis, Vance.

VANCE doesn't respond.

SADIE

There's a dividing line in everything we do.

VANCE

Not everything...

SADIE

Come on, Vance. It's not about sex.

VANCE

Doesn't that count for something? Sex is a way of communicating, too.

SADIE

And a way of avoiding the real issues.

VANCE

Isn't that what guys do?

SADIE

You're doing it again.

VANCE

We never had to do all this soul sharing. You always knew exactly what I was thinking. It was like that article you read me about Brad and Angelina, finishing each other's sentences.

SADIE

You know how they ended up.

VANCE

...

SADIE

Vance, marriage counseling could---

VANCE

No.

SADIE

I'm tired of feeling alone, Vance. Being alone might not be much of a change.

VANCE

You're serious?

SADIE

My God, have I not sounded serious before this?

VANCE

I don't want someone in our business.

SADIE

Sometimes it helps to bring in an outside party.

VANCE
We can do it ourselves, Sadie.

SADIE
That's not working.

VANCE
How am I supposed to talk to some stranger?

SADIE
The stranger is to help you talk to me.

VANCE
...I'll consider it.
(beat)
I love you. It's just... It feels-- That's not how it was in my house.

SADIE
Times are different now. Women are different.

VANCE
Some women are different.

SADIE
I'm different.

VANCE
If I promise to think about it, can we call a truce?

SADIE
(shocked)
Really, you'll think about it?

VANCE nods. SADIE sets down the box to kiss him.

VANCE
What's in the box?

SADIE
Nothing.

VANCE
(flirting)
Come on, what's in the box?

SADIE
(in spite of herself)
Remember that little order we placed, Mr. Hot Ass Lewis?

VANCE
From Secrets of Eden.

SADIE

You see that little fig leaf in the corner? That's their idea of discreet packaging.

VANCE shakes the box gently.

VANCE

Oh God, I'm hard.

SADIE

The chief of staff is barred from the Oval Office at the moment... the first lady is right down the hall. It'll have to wait until later. If I decide to forgive you.

VANCE

Uh-uh. No silent screaming tonight. I'm on late at the zoo tomorrow--

SADIE

Nights again?

VANCE

(shrugs it off)

Spend the day with me.

SADIE

I've got meeting planners all morning.

VANCE

(sexy, persuasive)

Please... What about the afternoon? Take a long lunch, and meet me here at say, one?

SADIE

I could maybe do that...

VANCE

You won't be sorry...

Lights down on Lewis house, up on Nelson house.

ACT ONE, SCENE 5

NELSON HOUSE.

RICH is helping Janet fold laundry.

RICH
She sounded interested.

JANET
Because she likes chocolate instead of vanilla?

RICH
That can't be coincidence.

JANET
Yes, darling, it can.

RICH
She said vanilla was a joke.

JANET
She's a woman. I read somewhere that seventy percent of women would rather eat chocolate than have sex.

RICH
Then they're having bad sex, and even then--

JANET
You can't argue with science.

RICH
Okay, even if that's true... she said a joke.

JANET
Honey, she might love chocolate, but trust me, she's a vanilla girl at heart.

RICH
What about the lifestyle comment?

JANET
It's a word, Rich. Did she say it with little airquotes?

RICH
She wants to go in the hot tub.

JANET
I'm sure they're very nice people. I agreed to have them over, I agreed to make lasagna, but you're starting to sound obsessive. We haven't been to the club in a while. Maybe--

RICH
I'm fine. And I'll betcha anything I'm right.

JANET

Not biting... and not betting.

RICH

But I know how to pick 'em, honey. I picked you...

RICH kisses JANET.

RICH

How many times have people told us we're like newlyweds, asked us what our secret is?

JANET

The new secretary, the one you met at the holiday party last week, she just asked me.

RICH

That was a swinging party.

JANET

Don't be ironic.

RICH

She was the best thing about it.

JANET

Everyone loved the Christmas tie I got you.

RICH

You finally got Santa next to my heart.

JANET

It was festive!

RICH

Especially every time someone came up and pressed the little music button. That's their idea of fun.

JANET

There is a whole other world out there, you know.

RICH

But it's not our world. What did she say about us?

JANET

That we eye each other like kids eye their Easter baskets.

RICH

I'd say we're more like the bunnies.

JANET

(laughs)

She couldn't believe we'd been married eleven years.

RICH
It's not science, but there you go.

JANET
There you go.

RICH
What?

JANET
I don't think the Lewises are a good idea.

RICH
Why not?

JANET
Why them?

RICH
Why not them?

JANET
They live so close.

RICH
That could be convenient.

JANET
Maybe we could be friends with them, you know... Play cards,
or charades or something. That could be fun.

RICH
(laughs)
You're funny.

JANET
It was just an idea.

RICH
You said you liked Vance's swagger...

JANET
And I do.

RICH
Are you afraid of a little fun?

JANET
Of course not.

RICH
So let's just see... At worst, they leave us hot and
bothered, and we have a splendid night by ourselves
afterward.

JANET
Well when you put it that way...

RICH
(laughing)
That's my girl.
(beat)
Oh my god, I can't believe I forgot the best part.

JANET
What?

RICH
She had a package from Secrets of Eden.

JANET
(intrigued)
Really...

RICH
Yeh.

Lights down on Nelson house, up on
Lewis house.

ACT ONE, SCENE 6

LEWIS HOUSE.

VANCE is at his computer. SADIE enters outside, stops to get the mail.

SADIE

Hi Nancy.

(beat)

Yes, I was late for work today. Thank you for noticing.

(beat, under breath)

Bitch.

SADIE enters the house.

VANCE

What's all that? I thought we had a lunch date. You got some goodies in that briefcase?

SADIE

I couldn't leave unless I brought work home.

SADIE looks at the computer.

SADIE

Whoa, what are you doing? Warming up?

VANCE

Secrets of Eden must sell their e-mail list. Check this out.

SADIE leans in closer.

SADIE

What is that exactly?

VANCE

A swingers' website. You put in your zip code and it tells you how many couples in your area swing.

SADIE

That many?

VANCE

It's not that many.

SADIE

I thought swingers were old hippies, left over from the free love era.

SADIE leans over to look again.

SADIE

Hmm.

VANCE
What hmm?

SADIE
Just hmm.

VANCE
Would you want to have sex with someone else? If it was just sex?

SADIE
Would you?

VANCE
I asked you first.

SADIE
Maybe if I were ten pounds lighter. And I didn't have a C-section scar. And my boobs were perky, and even.

VANCE
So... no?

SADIE
That was a perfect opportunity for you to say that I look perfect, and eminently fuckable.

VANCE
Sadie, you are as eminently fuckable today as the day I met you. All I've been thinking about all morning is fucking you.

SADIE
Hmm.

VANCE
Again with the hmm.

SADIE
Could you share me?

VANCE
If it's just sex...

SADIE
Pure recreation?

VANCE
Pure recreation.

SADIE
Just sex.

VANCE

Well... yeah. But the thing is it says that these couples have a powerful bond, that once you've shared these kinds of experiences, you can talk about anything. You build a trust and communication like you've never had before.

SADIE

Better communication through cheating? Somebody tell the marriage counselors.

VANCE

It's not cheating.

SADIE

It's not?

VANCE

Nothing is secret or hidden. And sharing these fantasies together creates

(looks at computer)

"intense emotional monogamy."

SADIE

Emotional monogamy?

VANCE

They sound happy.

SADIE

Would you be happy with emotional monogamy?

VANCE

We connect over sex, right? So if it could help us communicate better--

SADIE

You do seem to be able to talk about sex.

VANCE

You said it helps to bring someone in from the outside...

SADIE

(amused)

I did say that.

VANCE

I know it's not exactly what--

SADIE

(beat)

Does it make you nervous? It's like when Alison was a baby, she was perfectly happy with cereal and vegetables until she had fruit.

SADIE (CONT'D)

And then all she wanted was fruit, until that night at [local ice cream shop] I gave her a taste of my chocolate ice cream.

VANCE

(laughs)

And it was all over.

(beat)

There's nothing wrong with chocolate.

SADIE

But vegetables are good for you.

VANCE

We would never give up vegetables.

SADIE

I like vegetables.

VANCE

Didn't you tell me about a study that said that chocolate in small amounts has health benefits? Fights tooth decay, keeps blood vessels elastic?

SADIE

All the things I tell you and you remember that?

(beat)

How long have you been thinking about this?

VANCE

Realistically...

(shrugs)

As a fantasy...

SADIE

I can't believe you're using a chocolate argument.

VANCE

Is it working?

SADIE

I thought fantasies were just that. Not things anyone really does.

VANCE

Well these people do. Listen to this: Couples in the Lifestyle--

SADIE

The Lifestyle?

VANCE

That's what they call it. Or swinging, but the whole thing, the clubs and stuff, it's The Lifestyle. Capital L.

SADIE
(mouths word to herself,
then...)

Oh god!

VANCE
And if you don't swing, you're vanilla.

SADIE
Ooooh my fucking god!!

VANCE
What?

SADIE
They're swingers.

VANCE
Who?

SADIE
Our neighbors.

VANCE
Dick and Jane?

SADIE
Rich and Janet.

VANCE
Whatever. How do--

SADIE
I talked to Rich at the mailbox yesterday. Both of those
words came up.

VANCE
What two words?

SADIE
Lifestyle and vanilla.

VANCE
Honey, that's hardly tag-teaming in a hot tub. Maybe you
misunderstood--

SADIE
(over "misunderstood")
Yes! Yes, oh my-- That's exactly what he-- Their hot tub!

VANCE
That still doesn't mean--

SADIE

No, no... It was a short conversation, but he asked me about chocolate and vanilla very specifically.

VANCE

As in, are you chocolate or vanilla?

SADIE

As in, which do you prefer? And... they invited us to taste wine Friday night. It's Fun Friday Winter Wine tasting.

VANCE

You're kidding.

SADIE

That's what he said.

VANCE

Do they have a thing for alliteration?

SADIE

There's also Wing-it Wednesday.

VANCE

You're kidding.

SADIE

Stop saying that!

VANCE

Sorry. They just seem so...normal.

SADIE

Do you expect leather and a dog collar at PTA meetings?

VANCE

(salacious)

I know, I'm succumbing to a stereotype.

SADIE

Oh! He also said that their son would be gone for the weekend!

VANCE

I think it's fine.

SADIE

Really?

VANCE

Certainly, my sexy spouse. He invited us for Fun Friday. Obviously, the serious stuff starts on Swinging Saturday or Swapping Sunday.

SADIE

Oh!!

VANCE

You really think that's what he was getting at?

SADIE

It's hard to know now without hearing it again but let's say there's a strong possibility that I gave him the, um, wrong idea when I said I thought vanilla was God's idea of a joke--

VANCE

Whoa! So now you're not only saying that you think our neighbors are swingers but that there's a very good chance that they think we are swingers?

SADIE

Possibly.

VANCE

Maybe it's a sign.

SADIE

A sign?

VANCE

We've been arguing, I get this e-mail, you talk to Rich, he invites you over, there's this whole grand misunderstanding--

SADIE

You're kidding.

VANCE

Now you're saying it.

SADIE

Are you kidding?

VANCE

What if I'm not?

SADIE

Do you think she's pretty? Janet?

VANCE

Sure, she's attractive.

(beat)

Do you think her tits are real?

SADIE

Psh. Hardly.

VANCE

What about you? Rich...?

SADIE

He built a deck on their house last summer. He's kind of cute.

(beat)

Does that bother you?

VANCE

It could be hot. I think.

SADIE

Like a fantasy?

VANCE

Like that.

SADIE

Just sex.

VANCE

Yeah.

SADIE

So...

VANCE

Sadie, I would only want to do this if you're with me, if you really think it could help. If you don't want to, just say the word and we can grab our box and go upstairs--

SADIE

Thirteen years ago, the San Francisco Zoo had a new baby elephant. Do you remember that?

VANCE

[shrugs]

SADIE

There was a big sign outside and after a few drinks, my friends and I feel like we need to see that elephant more than anything. But the zoo's closed.

(beat)

We should've left--I'm sure somebody suggested that--but we hop the fence, and walk around in the dark until we find it. And it's just a baby elephant; you've seen one, you've seen 'em all. We're sneaking out when this pissed off zookeeper puts a flashlight in our faces--

VANCE

That I remember.

SADIE

Busted. We should've hightailed it out of there before our asses got thrown in the slammer.

VANCE
But instead you asked for my phone number.

SADIE
I had some nerve.

VANCE
Thank goodness you did, because here we are.

SADIE
No, Vance. We're not. In those days, we would have done anything for each other.

VANCE
Sadie, I know--

SADIE
Do you even see that girl anymore, Vance?

VANCE
Of course I do.

SADIE
(contemplating)
Really?

VANCE
Sadie--

SADIE
Let's do it. Let's go over and find out if the tits are real.

Lights fade on VANCE's very excited smile.

ACT ONE, SCENE 7

LEWIS/NELSON HOUSES. DIALOGUE GOES BACK AND FORTH BETWEEN THE COUPLES.

VANCE is getting ready, trying on several shirts, checking himself out in an imaginary mirror that is downstage between the two homes. RICH enters wearing a casual shirt and khakis, checks the bar, pulls out wine glasses, etc.

VANCE
Come on, honey. Let me see.

SADIE and JANET both emerge from their bedrooms. SADIE is wearing something very sexy, but not slutty. SADIE is genuinely trying to figure out what to wear, but JANET is just passively-aggressively toying with Rich, and wears something very staid. Both enter to model.

VANCE touches Sadie and is very touchy/feely/horny throughout scene.

VANCE
My heart has stopped beating and my cock is now the only thing keeping me alive.

RICH
What the hell is that? This isn't a job interview.

SADIE
I thought it might be good to look... suggestive.

JANET
This is not a typical date. I don't want to look like I'm inviting anything.

VANCE
Honey, you look hot as hell, but what you're suggesting with that outfit is "Sorry, we're late, but I had a porn audition."

RICH
Oh, you're inviting. You're inviting the members of the Please Remove The Stick From My Ass Club to a self-help meeting. Or-- Oh, that's it. You're preparing for a little role playing.

(high Brit accent)
The strict school marm and her

RICH (CONT'D)

(fondles her)
naughty, naughty students...

JANET/SADIE

I'll change.

VANCE continues primping, adding a tie/taking a tie off, turns sideways, checks his paunch, sucks in his gut, looks in his ears, etc. RICH scurries around the room trying to set a mood, maybe moves a sexy statue front and center, then moves it back, dims lights, puts them back etc. RICH stops suddenly, as if struck by an idea.

RICH

Janet, do we have any mistletoe?

JANET

(O.S., exasperated)

No!

RICH continues before SADIE and JANET re-emerge with new outfits, now the reverse, though Janet's outfit is far more sexy than Sadie's was, more slutty/vampy. She knows she is over the top and acts it when she comes in.

VANCE

I just lost the wood in my pencil.

RICH

Oh, you are just toying with me now, slut.

SADIE

You got me worried. What if we're wrong, and I go over there looking completely inappropriate, or like I'm trying to flirt with another woman's husband?

JANET

You wanted inviting...

VANCE

But honey, there has to be a middle ground. This just looks like "No, Vance and I have never fucked. I'm saving my virginity for the Lord."

RICH

Oh, I feel invited. But can Vance can handle it? Are you starting to doubt the vanilla status of our guests?

SADIE/JANET
(SADIE throws hands up,
JANET more playful)

Changing!

VANCE finally settles on a casual polo shirt and khakis much like Rich's, and picks up a magazine to read, but he can't sit still, keeps getting up and going back to the mirror, where RICH, looking in his mirror opposite Vance, practices casual poses and saying things to Sadie that reveal his deep attraction--"You look lovely tonight" and "I've been dreaming of this for a long time." VANCE can appear to be reacting to these. RICH is interrupted by JANET, who re-emerges in a flattering dress.

JANET

Well?

RICH

You know I prefer the last outfit, but always better to save a little somethin' for next time--

JANET

Next time?!

RICH

Just teasing sweetheart. But prepare yourself for a chocolate swirl in that gallon of vanilla.

JANET

You're all ready to lick that cone, aren't ya?

RICH

Nah, that's your job.

JANET flashes her sexy panties.

JANET

I'm ready.

RICH

Yowza. Vance'll never know what hit him.

RICH kisses JANET. They begin readying the house, wiping tables, getting glasses, setting table, whatever, playful and touching as they do.

SADIE comes out in a fitted, buttoned sweater and short skirt. VANCE goes over, runs his hands up and down her body suggestively.

VANCE

I guess that's the middle ground, but I'm still thinking about that first outfit...

SADIE

You really think this is okay? The skirt's not too short? Sweater's not too tight?

VANCE

No such thing.

SADIE lifts her sweater to reveal a sexy bra.

SADIE

Too much?

VANCE

Hell no.

SADIE

And all you have to do is put on a shirt and pants.

VANCE

Yeah, piece of cake.

SADIE

I'm nervous.

VANCE

Want a drink?

VANCE moves to pour shots for them.

VANCE

Oh! You need to do my ears.

SADIE

Now?

VANCE

I should be well-groomed, right?

VANCE hands her a drink, exits, SADIE checks her hair etc in mirror. VANCE returns with tweezers.

VANCE pulls a chair in front of her, sits, tilts his head. SADIE starts plucking out ear hairs, continues to do so; VANCE reacts to some as they chat soundlessly, switch ears etc. At the Nelson house, JANET and RICH continue with their prep.

JANET

So just supposing they are, you don't plan to come right out and ask, do you?

RICH

It'll become obvious, I'd think.

JANET

Like it was obvious at Joe's Pub when you bet me the couple at the bar was giving us the eye? I was never so embarrassed in my life.

RICH

I had too much to drink that night.

JANET

I need a drink right now.

RICH prepares two drinks. Next two lines while he is getting them.

SADIE

(still plucking)

Jesus, when's the last time I did this? You could start brush fires in here.

RICH hands Janet a drink, scratches his crotch.

JANET

You shaved!

RICH

I always shave.

JANET

You freshly shaved!

RICH

It's just good grooming. You know I hate stubble. Now relax.

JANET downs her drink.

JANET

I am relaxed. When are they coming?

Any minute.
RICH

Lights dim as they continue prep.

SADIE
Tilt your head. I thought it was weird to see my mom do this for my dad, but now when I see a man in serious need of landscaping, I'm sad he has nobody to love him.

SADIE blows hair off VANCE's ear. VANCE stands up and downs his drink.

Time?
VANCE

SADIE downs her drink.

SADIE
Remember, we don't know that they're swingers.

VANCE kisses her.

VANCE
Remember, together. We are doing this together.

SADIE and VANCE get their coats, put them on.

Ready?
SADIE/VANCE

Ready.
RICH/JANET

RICH and JANET kiss, as VANCE and SADIE exit their home, run next door giggling like little kids, ring the doorbell. JANET and RICH answer it together.

We're here!
VANCE/SADIE

Well, come on in...
RICH

Lights dim, and music plays as actors mingle to indicate passage of time before getting into position for next scene.

ACT ONE, SCENE 8

NELSON HOUSE, POST-DINNER. THREE BOTTLES OF WINE HAVE BEEN FINISHED. EMPTY GLASSES AROUND. ONE FULL BOTTLE REMAINS.

JANET, RICH, SADIE, and VANCE sit around the coffee table.

RICH
So who'd you vote for?

JANET
Rich, no politics now...

RICH
It's okay; we're all adults. We can always find middle ground, right?

JANET
Don't answer, Vance. Rich has never learned to keep religion and politics out of casual conversation.

RICH
Or sex. That's not off-limits either.
(to Vance and Sadie)
You've probably noticed.

JANET
How could they not?

RICH
Those are the fun things to talk about. What's left after that?

JANET
Do you two like games?

VANCE and SADIE exchange a look.

RICH
Janet...

VANCE
Games?

JANET
Pinochle, Pictionary...

SADIE
Poker, Parcheesi, Pin the tail on the donkey... Are we here on the wrong night?

RICH

(laughs)

I like your sense of humor, Sadie.

JANET walks over to a shelf with games on it.

JANET

We've got all kinds of parlor games we've almost never used. It'll be fun.

VANCE

(starting to doubt the night's intent)

Sure...

VANCE moves to game shelf to help Janet choose a game.

RICH

Wait, wait, guys. I still have a bottle to uncork.

RICH reaches for bottle and corkscrew, opens bottle, pours over next lines.

RICH

I saved the best for last.

SADIE

You shouldn't save your best for us.

RICH

Don't get girly on me, Sadie. You deserve the best.

SADIE

We're just not as knowledgeable as you are.

RICH

You know what tastes good, right?

VANCE

I'll tell you what tasted good. Your lasagna, Janet. That was incredible.

SADIE

Everything Rich said it was.

JANET

It's my mother's old family recipe. But who can eat all that comfort food now? I bet you still fit into your wedding dress, Sadie.

RICH

Well, I can eat it. Sometimes I think I could eat it every night, but then after a while, I could kill for a burrito
(JANET gives him a look)
or some soup, or even a grilled cheese sandwich. But that doesn't mean lasagna is no longer my favorite meal, and I wouldn't still want it. Just not every single time.

VANCE

They say even if you work in a chocolate shop, you get sick of chocolate after a while.

SADIE

That must be urban legend. I'd never get sick of it.

RICH reacts.

JANET

Best you stay away then. You wouldn't want to ruin that cute figure.

RICH holds up his glass.

RICH

Everybody ready?

They ALL smell the wine.

JANET

Nice. Like dried flowers.

RICH

What do you smell Sadie?

SADIE closes her eyes and smells the wine again.

SADIE

The flowers, but also... it sounds crazy but the inside of my grandfather's barn. I used to help him muck stalls when I was a kid and that's all coming back.

RICH

That's incredible!

VANCE

What is?

RICH

Pinots usually smell very floral, but they do present a hint of that barnyard manure smell.

VANCE

And that's a good thing?

RICH
It's impressive Sadie could detect that.

JANET
Time to taste.

ALL take a sip

SADIE
Mmmm... That's a nice finish.

RICH
I thought you said you didn't know wine. Have you been hustling me?

VANCE
My wife has always had excellent taste.

RICH
What do you taste, Vance?

VANCE downs his wine.

VANCE
Grape.

JANET
I'm with Vance. I'm going to just enjoy without analyzing every bit of it.

JANET leans back, takes another drink.

RICH
Don't drink too much, honey.
(chuckles... to Sadie and Vance)
Last time we she had a bit too much, she was snoring with her mouth gaping open like the Grand Canyon.

JANET
(good-naturedly)
Is that really the visual you want our new friends to have?

RICH
It was so tempting. I had to do it.

JANET
Oh no, Richard, don't--

RICH
Come on honey, it's funny.

JANET
(giggling)
It is pretty funny.

SADIE/VANCE
What?

RICH
I snooled her.

SADIE
Snooled?

VANCE
Never heard of that.

RICH
You know, when somebody's sleeping with her mouth open, and you sneak up and slip your nether tongue right in...

ALL laugh.

JANET
(laughing)
He's lucky I didn't wake up and bite his dick off.

RICH
(admonishing)
Ah, ah, ah...

JANET
Sorry.
(to Sadie and Vance)
Rich's "rule": Ixnay on the ickday.
(to Rich)
You're lucky I didn't bite the head off the...
(thinking)
Slim Reaper.

RICH
(mock insulted)
The Slim Reaper?

JANET
(teasing)
Sorry, baby. I can't think under pressure.

JANET stands up to stretch, starts to pick up glasses.

JANET
Fortunately for him, there was a much happier outcome.

RICH
Here, honey, sit, sit. Let me get those.

RICH starts collecting empties and taking them to the kitchen.

JANET
Can I get anybody anything else? Are we ready for dessert?

SADIE/VANCE look at each other; is it code?

RICH
(from kitchen)
I think dessert can wait a bit yet, hon.

SADIE
What did you make?

JANET
(testing)
Chocolate soufflé. Rich told me you preferred chocolate.

SADIE
(bold, eyes meeting)
I believe what I said is that
(beat))
vanilla was God's idea of a joke.

RICH
(returning)
Didn't I tell you, Janet?! A joke.
(to Sadie)
I'm gonna start using that line.

JANET
You told me.
(to Sadie)
So Alison is in second grade?

SADIE
First.

JANET
Jake's in third. The time went by so quickly. Do you think about having more?

SADIE
I don't know. Some nights, just the question "What's for dinner?" sends me over the edge.

RICH
Do you cook, Vance?

VANCE
I can make hot dogs.

RICH
Nice.

JANET

Rich is in charge of Taco Tuesday. And Meatless Monday. We cook together late on Thursdays. That's kind of our date night, just the two of us.

VANCE

That's nice. We don't really do that.

JANET

Oh, you should. It's important to make time for yourselves.

SADIE

I'm always scrambling for dinner.

JANET

I have some easy recipes that freeze well, so if you get home late... I could bring some over one day.

Not liking this domestic turn, RICH rises to start refilling glasses.

RICH

You should get her a cleaning lady, Vance.

RICH pours a glass for himself, then SADIE.

SADIE

He should!

JANET

I can give you the name of ours.

SADIE

I need more than a cleaning lady.

SADIE has wandered over to a side table that has vacation photos on it.

SADIE

Like a long vacation. Where was this taken?

RICH

Jamaica.

SADIE

Oh! We went to Jamaica on our honeymoon.

JANET and RICH exchange a look.

SADIE

Where did you stay?

JANET

Uh... isn't that funny? I can't remember. Rich, can you remember where we stayed in Jamaica?

RICH

Can't say I do. Resort. With palm trees. You?

SADIE

It's been so long, the name has slipped my mind. Vance?

VANCE

You know how small my frontal lobe is, honey.

JANET and RICH still eyeing other about this, which sounds significant.

VANCE

You're wearing wristbands in a lot of these pictures.

JANET

We're big on amusement... parks.

VANCE

So are we! We're just like big kids. Sadie likes roller coasters, but I love those swings. It might be silly, but swinging makes me feel young again.

RICH/JANET exchange a look, slowly down drinks.

VANCE

What does Jake like?

RICH

(calculated)

Jake wasn't on those trips. Grown-up stuff, you know?

VANCE makes eye contact with RICH, then with SADIE.

VANCE

Yeah.

RICH

Hey, how about some music?

RICH walks over to the stereo.

RICH

What do you guys like? Oh wait, everybody likes this.

RICH puts on classic *Ev'ry Time We Say Goodbye*, gets up, extends his hand to JANET.

Janet?

RICH

JANET/RICH start to dance; VANCE and SADIE shrug, follow suit. Over Janet's shoulder, RICH has his eye on Vance and Sadie. When VANCE is looking, RICH grab's Janet's ass; VANCE is turned on, and starts fondling Sadie more intensely. Now when Vance looks, RICH lifts Janet's dress to reveal her sexy underwear; VANCE's eyes pop out of his head. He whispers into SADIE's ear; she looks over at Rich, who smiles and winks at her. SADIE unbuttons a button on her sweater to reveal a bit of her sexy bra and turns to show Rich; RICH is clearly turned on. This can escalate as much as works, but no kissing.

Time to swap?

RICH

What?

SADIE/VANCE/JANET

Dance partners.

RICH

Oh...

SADIE

ALL switch partners. They dance a bit, and RICH puts his hand on Sadie's ass. SADIE takes a look at VANCE, who nods and holds a tentative hand over Janet's ass. When SADIE nods encouragingly, VANCE touches Janet seductively. JANET reacts, and turns to look at Rich and Sadie, who have begun to get more physical. Satisfied that Rich made the right call, JANET turns back to Vance and makes a move, e.g. slides a hand up under his shirt or down his leg.

What about my soufflé?

JANET

I think we've got dessert covered.

RICH

Slowly, they start to swing. For JANET/VANCE, it's very physical, while RICH/SADIE are flirty and having fun.

THE COUPLE NEXT DOOR 47.

Escalate as desired. End on Sadie's giggle, and VANCE looking over to see what's making her laugh. JANET pulls his attention back to her. Fondling and sound effects as lights fade to black. End of Act I. Optional intermission.

ACT TWO, SCENE 1

NEXT DAY. NELSON HOUSE. HOUSE IS DISHEVELED. COUCH PILLOWS STREWN ABOUT, PANTYHOSE ON THE FLOOR, EMPTY CONDOM PACKETS, ETC.

RICH is sitting in his pajamas on the couch, holding and staring at Sadie's underwear, which have been left behind. JANET enters in her bathrobe.

JANET

Rich?

RICH pockets the underwear.

JANET

I can't believe you're up. Last night, you were too tired to move.

JANET starts picking up the mess. RICH drags himself up to help her.

RICH

I'm sorry, Janet. I just... maybe I had too much wine. I'll make it up to you.

JANET

You don't need to make it up to me.

RICH

I know that's your favorite part. After. Between us.

JANET kisses him.

JANET

It's what feels right.

RICH kisses her forehead.

RICH

I wouldn't say the evening was a complete failure, though, right? You and Vance had a good time?

JANET

You weren't watching?

RICH

Well, not the whole time. But I heard him. Sounded like you were doing what you do best.

JANET

Want me to do it right now?

RICH
(avoiding)
Vance really had you going. Is he going to be a hard act to follow?

JANET
Don't be silly.
(beat)
Sadie's a wild thing, isn't she?

RICH
I hope she enjoyed herself.

JANET
She certainly seemed to.

JANET moves close to Rich, grabs him.

JANET
Show me what you were doing to her that got her so hot.

RICH
Janet.. What time is your mother coming with Jake?

JANET
Come on. Tell me what she said when you slipped it in. I love how shocked women are when you drop your pants
(reaches for him)
And I know it's all mine.

RICH
This place is a mess.

JANET
(trying to brush off the rejection)
Yeah...

RICH
What about Vance? You had him going all right.

JANET
He was fascinated with my breasts! He has a tongue, that one. Very sensual... You could learn a few things, and that's saying something.

JANET looks to Rich for a reaction, but he is distracted, looking at the Lewis house. She changes tack.

JANET
But still, there was something about the whole thing...

JANET (CONT'D)

especially at the end of the night. I don't know, did you feel that? Feel that they weren't the usual?

RICH

(quietly)

No, she certainly wasn't.

JANET

Rich?

RICH

What?

JANET

Did you agree that they weren't the usual?

RICH

I did.

JANET

Well, I guess we'll find out what they thought when we get the note.

RICH

Not everybody sends a note.

JANET

Everybody with good manners sends a note. We send notes.

RICH

Then I'm sure they will.

JANET

We'll see.

(beat)

Are we still taking Jake to a movie today?

RICH

Absolutely.

JANET

I thought maybe instead of that stupid sequel, we could take him to the new Christmas movie.

RICH

(still distracted)

You bet.

JANET

In IMAX.

RICH

Uh-huh.

JANET
The Christmas movie, Rich.

RICH
(finally engaging, guilty)
Yes. Yes. If I'm with you and Jake, I can handle one of your sappy Christmas films.

JANET
You don't need to make it sound so pathetic.

RICH
But you always know how they end. Elmo saves Christmas, Tiny Tim blesses everyone, George Bailey beats the crap out of Mr. Potter--

JANET
Rich! Don't you feel a little more lighthearted when you walk out of those movies? Don't you remember what it's like to be an innocent child, for just a minute?

RICH
I was never an innocent child.

JANET
Maybe when we're done with the movie, we can drive around at look at Christmas lights. Ooh... we could just walk around the neighborhood. Nothing puts me in the spirit like lights.

RICH
Isn't the movie enough spirit for one day?

JANET kisses him lightly.

JANET
You're afraid you might have fun.

RICH
Where have I heard that before?

JANET
Gloating?

RICH
Never.

JANET
So take your own advice. You might surprise yourself.

Lights down on Nelson house, up on
Lewis house.

ACT TWO, SCENE 2

A FEW DAYS LATER, LEWIS HOUSE AFTER WORK.

SADIE is sewing badges on Alison's Brownie sash, and VANCE is doing a handyman thing like repairing a chair. The atmosphere is tense.

VANCE
What should we have for dinner?

SADIE
I don't care.

VANCE
We can get takeout.

SADIE
Sure.

VANCE
I know you're cramming to get those projections done. I could even take Alison to McDonald's, give you the house to yourself for a little while.

SADIE
That's not necessary.

VANCE
Chinese?

SADIE
Whatever you want.

VANCE
When you're ready, I'll call.

SADIE
Fine.

VANCE
I can't believe I waited so long to fix this. It's really not that hard.

SADIE
Uh-huh.

VANCE
(approaching)
Sadie...

SADIE

(rising)

Oh! I never got the mail today.

VANCE tries to kiss Sadie's forehead,
but SADIE dodges on her way out.

VANCE

I have some research to do, but if you need anything, I'm
just in the office.

VANCE exits to computer area; SADIE
goes out to mailbox. Lights down on
Lewis house, up on Nelson house as RICH
looks out and sees Sadie. RICH rushes
out.

RICH

Hey! How are ya?

SADIE

Fine.

RICH

I haven't seen or heard from you in a few days.

SADIE

We've been busy.

RICH

Is everything okay?

SADIE

Fine. You?

RICH

Sure, sure, we're getting ready for Christmas.

SADIE

Us too.

RICH

Took Jake to see that new Christmas movie in IMAX Saturday.

SADIE

Any good?

RICH

It was... Yeah. It was good.

(chuckles)

It made me feel good. I feel good, Sadie.

(beat)

I'll be honest... You made me feel good. The other night, and
I've been concerned that maybe you didn't...enjoy my company.

SADIE
Of course we did... Did you? Were we okay?

RICH
Sadie, you were wonderful. Truly wonderful.

SADIE
Well, thank you.

RICH waits expectantly.

SADIE
Oh! So were you.

RICH
That was some sexy lingerie you were wearing.

SADIE
I wasn't sure what was right.

RICH
Oh...

RICH pulls underwear from his pocket
and holds it out.

RICH
You left these behind.

As RICH and SADIE's hands connect to
make the exchange, SADIE suddenly pulls
RICH closer, their hands held behind
them to hide the underwear.

RICH
Hi Nancy!

SADIE
This is embarrassing.

RICH
After what we shared? It was magical.

SADIE backs away from their connection.
RICH hands Sadie the underwear.

RICH
You chose right. They really turned me on, almost as much as
your great taste buds. You are great at wine!

SADIE
Beginner's luck. You really know your stuff.

RICH
Are we still talking about the wine?

SADIE laughs nervously, which RICH
takes as confirmation.

RICH
You don't need to rely on luck. You're a special woman,
Sadie. I really enjoyed being with you.

SADIE
A good time was had by all.

RICH
I'm happy to hear that because, um, Janet was wondering, you
know, there's usually a note...

SADIE
A note?

RICH
Just an email or something. Even swingers want to know if it
was good for you.

SADIE
Oh! I didn't-- um, have time, but you can tell Janet that I
certainly will.

RICH
Nothing fancy. Just "Loved meeting Abdullah the Tentmaker.
Would love to do it again some time."

SADIE
You never quit, do you?

RICH
Wanna try to keep up with me?

SADIE
I don't think I could.

RICH
Now you're being modest.

SADIE
The note?

RICH
Write whatever you want. The important thing is...
(beat)
Would you like to do it again? I really would, Sadie. I
really enjoyed your company. You've got this...
(touches her arm)
quality that just... if you ever want to talk...

Through these lines, JANET enters Nelson living room, and spies Sadie and Rich outside.

SADIE

Talk?

RICH

I was thinking... my company has been talking about finding a new convention venue. I can probably get you a meeting.

SADIE

Really?

RICH

We're friends now, right?

SADIE

And Janet?

RICH

I think it's safe to say she wouldn't mind another visit from Vance and Captain James T Kah... never mind. Did Vance enjoy himself?

SADIE

He seemed to, didn't he?

RICH

You haven't talked about it?

SADIE

We really have been busy. I'm sorry, Rich, I really should go in. Vance is going to pick up Chinese. Please tell Janet I apologize for the oversight, and I will get a note out right away.

RICH

Let's do it again soon, Sadie.

SADIE exits. RICH enters his house, where JANET is waiting.

JANET

Did you ask about the note?

RICH

She's been busy.

JANET

Do you believe her?

RICH

Why wouldn't I?

JANET

I don't have a good feeling about this.

RICH

What are you talking about? It was a great time. You said yourself that old white bread Vance surprised you with this creativity.

JANET

And his enthusiasm.

RICH

What's wrong with enthusiasm? It's flattering.

JANET

There was too much. The more I think about it, the more I think he felt... new. Like his greatest boyhood jerkoff fantasy came to life, like he was getting away with something.

A rock hits the house. JANET gets up, moves toward sound.

RICH

So, maybe they're a little new.

JANET

Brand new.

RICH

No...

JANET looks out door/window, opens it.

JANET

Jake! Stop that!

(to Rich)

What is it with boys and rocks?

(beat))

And what about the bush on him? Forget a razor; scissors would have been a nice start.

RICH

They're old-school.

JANET

They're no school. They're preschoolers marveling over their first circle time.

RICH

They seemed perfectly comfortable.

JANET

And you seem awfully stubborn. What is it with them?

RICH
Nothing. You're just afraid to admit I was right. Again.

JANET
You like her.

RICH
Sure, I like her.

JANET
You like her.

RICH
Isn't that how it works, honey? "Like" means attracted, which is natural, and that's why we choose not to suppress it. Because we know it's different from love.

JANET
You liked that load of horse manure she was putting out.

RICH
Sadie's a sweet... lay, that's all.
(wanting to change subject)
But I think there may be a problem with Vance. She seemed a bit uncomfortable when I brought him up.

JANET
Are you saying he had a problem with me?

RICH
No. Just that when I asked about me, she said I was wonderful...

JANET
Wonderful.

RICH
In so many words.

JANET
What did Vance say about me?

RICH
They haven't talked about it.

JANET
They haven't talked-- Really? Something is so fishy about this.

RICH
We'll get to the bottom of it next time.

JANET
There will be no next time.

RICH
Don't be hasty. It all worked out. And it's so hard to find compatible couples.

JANET
No.

RICH
But-

JANET
No means no. No explanations needed. That's how it works.

RICH
Yeah, but---

JANET
What were you talking about out there anyway?

RICH
Nothing. I told her about the movie, chatted about the holidays.

JANET
Why? You don't see me talking to Vance, do you? A friendly wave if we pass on the street, but that's it. Because that's the way it's supposed to be.

RICH
But they're our neighbors.

JANET
Exactly! There are rules, Rich! Why are you pretending you don't know that?

(beat)
How long have you been thinking about this?

RICH
About what?

JANET
Getting your dick in vanilla Sadie Lewis.

Lights down on Nelson house, up on Lewis house.

ACT TWO, SCENE 3

SATURDAY MORNING. LEWIS HOUSE.

SADIE is making lasagna, VANCE is at the computer.

JANET approaches Lewis door with a big plate of cookies, rings the bell. VANCE gets up to answer, sees that it's Janet, and returns to the computer. JANET rings again. SADIE emerges from the kitchen, looks at Vance with annoyance, answers the door. Over first five lines, RICH emerges with a shovel and begins shoveling his driveway.

SADIE

Janet.

JANET

(proffering cookies)

I was on a baking spree. Made too many.

SADIE

How do you find time for that?

JANET

I bake to relieve stress.

SADIE

(eyeing cookies)

That's a lot of stress.

JANET glances toward Vance.

SADIE

Vance, I think I saw the mailman; can you check?

VANCE gives Janet an awkward wave, exits to mailbox, which is empty.

SADIE

I'm trying to make lasagna.

JANET

The other night--

SADIE

Yours was so good. I'm sure I won't even come close--

SADIE stops when she sees JANET's face.

SADIE

I've never been good with thank you notes. My wedding thank-yous didn't go out for a year. My mother was furious.

JANET

It's not about the note.

SADIE and JANET freeze; RICH spots Vance at the mailbox.

RICH

Hey, Vance.

(beat)

Janet talking to Sadie?

VANCE

I've been kicked out.

RICH

I didn't put her up to it.

VANCE

What's going on?

RICH turns, VANCE walks over to where he is; the rest of their conversation takes place on that half of the stage.

RICH

Janet's got it in her head that you maybe had some issues with taking Jack Kerouwacker on the road..

VANCE

There were no issues. I mean, it's not like that hasn't happened to me before, just once, maybe twice, but certainly not the other night. You saw, right? Even with all that wine, I was going--

RICH

Not that kind of issue.

VANCE

Oh. You mean like we were... not... satisfactory?

RICH

She means like maybe this was something you were just playing with, that you're not really in the Lifestyle.

VANCE

Oh.

VANCE and RICH freeze; back to SADIE and JANET.

SADIE
We were that bad?

JANET
You never did this before.

SADIE
...No.

JANET
I told him.

SADIE
Told him what?

JANET
(over her)
Are you attracted to my husband, Sadie?

SADIE
No. Yes. No! What's the right answer?

JANET
Is that why you did this?

SADIE
What?

JANET
What did Rich say to you?

SADIE
Nothing. Nobody forced us to do anything. No harm done.

JANET
No harm? Is that what you and Vance decided? When you talked
it over?

SADIE
...

JANET
I bet you couldn't wait to compare notes.

SADIE
You and Rich did that?

JANET
Of course.

SADIE
What did he say about me?

JANET

That's between us.

SADIE

Rich seems very attentive. A good father.

JANET

And swingers are social deviants, incapable of such things?

SADIE

No. It just seems like he listens. I wish--

JANET

(light dawns)

Oh my god. How could I be so blind!?

SADIE

What?

JANET

You and Vance are having marriage trouble!

SADIE

Everybody goes through rough--

JANET

You thought swinging could save your marriage.

SADIE

It seemed like--

JANET

Why does everybody always think that?! It doesn't work.

SADIE

Then why are you doing it?

JANET

It's a choice.

SADIE

Your choice?

JANET

Yes.

JANET and SADIE freeze; back to RICH
and VANCE.

RICH

I love Janet, God knows, but sex is sex. It's natural to be
attracted to other people.

VANCE

But does being attracted mean you have to stick your dick...

RICH holds up his hand.

VANCE

Do you ever say dick?

RICH

Boring and, you know, bad memories from high school.

VANCE

Sorry, stick your...

(searching)

molten mushroom in it.

RICH

That's fucking lame.

VANCE

It's alliterative.

RICH

Still lame.

VANCE

Sorry.

RICH

You'll get better.

VANCE

I don't need to get better.

RICH and VANCE freeze; back to SADIE and JANET.

JANET

...And I always had... fantasies. But I never shared them with anybody until Rich. It was fun to be that close to someone. There was one that always came back to me.

SADIE is curious.

JANET

Don't look at me like that; I'm certainly not telling you. I don't remember who brought it up first, really doing it. Jake was young... two? No, three. We talk about it--a lot--go to some clubs. It's exciting, but we never meet anyone who's right, until one night, we see this couple... Rich says, "That's them. I'll bet you anything." And he was right.

SADIE

It was good?

JANET

A fantasy is never exactly what you think it will be, but... yeah.

SADIE

You kept doing it.

JANET

I like other men being attracted to me. It makes Rich more attracted to me. Our marriage is strong, Sadie.

SADIE

Even if he wants other women.

JANET

Wanting someone else too isn't the same as not wanting me. It's just sex with them.

SADIE

Pure recreation.

JANET

Yes.

SADIE

Never more than that?

JANET

We're committed. If there's an unhealthy attraction, we talk through it. There's no sneaking around, no lying, no affairs. People come into our bed, not our marriage.

SADIE and JANET freeze; back to RICH and VANCE.

RICH

You're a zookeeper, so you know animals, right? They have their loyalties, to their owners, their pack mates, but they'll fuck anything.

VANCE

Some animals are monogamous.

RICH

No shit?

VANCE

The prairie vole. The vulture. And, um, beavers.

RICH

Beavers? Those little bastards. They're mocking us.

VANCE

Wolves, too.

RICH

And the ones that aren't, some of them raise kids together, have bonds, but they still fuck around?

VANCE

Yeah, most birds are like that.

RICH

So why do humans try to buck nature?

VANCE

It sounds logical, right? But if you love your wife--

RICH

You had a problem with my wife? Because your wife... she's... well...

VANCE

Janet was fine. It didn't bother you, seeing her with me?

RICH

Nah, it doesn't matter where you take the fleshy Winnebago on vacation, as long as when the fun is over, you park in your own driveway.

VANCE

You never worry about it being...dangerous?

RICH

Not unless you count that time we got that couple to bust in dressed as burglars and the neighbors called the cops. But really, that was just

(turns toward street, yells)

Fucking funny, Nancy!

VANCE

What happens if, you know, she--or you--want to go back to the same vacation spot again and again?

RICH

You put an end to it right away. No contact.

(beat)

And then you work through it. Together. Our connection is so far beyond the physical that smug territorial monogamists can't even begin to understand it.

VANCE

Janet feels the same way?

RICH

She knows we're soulmates, partners for life. How many guys would have no problem with commitment if exclusivity were not part of the deal?

RICH and VANCE freeze; back to SADIE and JANET.

JANET

We have fun. But we play together, and we come home together.

SADIE

Janet... Would you go back? To monogamy?

JANET

A lot of men cheat, Sadie. Why should they have all the fun?

SADIE

That doesn't answer my question.

JANET

You still haven't answered mine. Why did you do this? Were you mad at Vance, or did you just wonder what my husband was like in bed?

JANET and SADIE freeze; back to VANCE and RICH.

RICH

Did Sadie have a good time?

VANCE

We're not really talking about it.

RICH

(reading into it)

Does she usually keep her feelings private?

VANCE

No.

(beat, paranoia)

Did she say something to you?

RICH

You should talk to Sadie.

VANCE

Why, what did she say?

RICH

You've got a great wife.

VANCE

(uneasy)

I know.

RICH and VANCE head home; back to SADIE and JANET.

JANET

He said he wanted to talk to you?

SADIE

Yeah. he said we're friends, if I ever needed to talk... and he called---

JANET

He called?

SADIE

Yesterday. He wants me to come pitch the hotel.

JANET

Did he say anything about getting together?

SADIE

Just that he'd like to.

JANET

All four of us?

VANCE enters crossing with JANET's exit. SADIE holds up plate. VANCE takes a cookie, has a bite, makes a face.

VANCE

Your cupcakes are better.

Lights out.

ACT TWO, SCENE 4

NELSON AND LEWIS HOUSES.

Lights low on Lewis house, where SADIE has work spread out on the table. RICH, slightly tipsy, musical Santa tie loose around his neck, returns home after a meeting, stops to get his mail out of the box. RICH looks toward the Lewis house and around the street, then takes a peek in the Lewis box. It's empty. RICH looks toward the Lewis house again, shrugs, then enters his own house, drops mail on side table.

RICH

Janet?

RICH looks for her, checks watch. RICH appears at loose ends. Picks up the phone, starts to dial, shakes his head, hangs up. Takes out his cell phone, starts to dial, changes his mind, puts cell phone back in pocket. Beat. Starts to take tie off, but instead decides to straighten it. When he's finished, he checks himself out in the mirror, walks to the Lewis house and rings the bell. Lights up on Lewis house, where SADIE answers the door in her pajamas.

SADIE

Rich!

RICH

I've caught you at a bad time.

SADIE

I'm working from home. The ultimate dress down day.

RICH

(emphasizing Ds)

Dress down day.

SADIE

Wow, that was absolutely accidental.

RICH

You did it again!

(they chuckle)

I'm rubbing off on you.

(beat)

Can I come in?

I was--

SADIE

RICH enters the house and takes off his coat.

RICH
Just for a minute. I just closed this insane deal/

SADIE
/Nice tie./

RICH
/and I want to share it with someone. Janet's not home; I forgot it's her annual date-with-Jake day.

SADIE
Date with Jake?

RICH
She lets him skip school, they do some mother-son bonding, go to the zoo or something/

SADIE
/The zoo?/

RICH
/Anyway, I didn't just close my deal. I have good news for you, too. I talked to the conference planner about your hotel, and she is more than happy to meet with you to discuss it. Between you and me, that's a formality.

SADIE
That's great! You don't just do the annual thing either, right? You have all those management seminars, incentive banquets--

RICH
The whole kit and kaboodle.

SADIE
Wow. How do I thank you?

RICH
Have a drink with me?

SADIE
It's one o'clock.

RICH
We have things to celebrate.

SADIE
Have you already been celebrating?

RICH
Breakfast meeting. A couple mimosas. Come on.

SADIE
Okay!

SADIE moves/exits to get drinks.

RICH
I really didn't have to sell you much, Sadie. Your accomplishments speak for themselves.

SADIE
You and your flattery.

RICH
Is it flattery if it's sincere? I haven't made a secret of how special I find you.

SADIE returns with two beers, hands him one.

RICH
You don't hear things like that too much around here, do you?

SADIE
Let's not talk about it.

RICH
You and Vance still haven't hashed things out?

SADIE
It's more than that.

RICH
I'm a good listener.

SADIE
See, it's just that kind of thing. You listen. You talk. You communicate.

RICH
You want that.

SADIE
I crave that.

RICH
You deserve to have it. And so much more. I know I keep saying that--

SADIE
We were going to make a toast, right?

SADIE raises her bottle.

SADIE
What shall we toast to?

RICH
"New connections."

SADIE and RICH raise their glasses,
clink, then drink.

SADIE
I can't remember the last time I had drinks in the afternoon.

RICH
It's fun to break the rules once in a while. In the big
scheme of things, it's not a big deal.

SADIE
I'll drink to that.

SADIE and RICH raise bottles again, and
drink. RICH looks at the table where
paperwork/laptop are laid out.

RICH
What are you working on?

SADIE
Cost projections.

RICH
Can I help?

SADIE
Thanks, but I actually had a productive morning. I'm in good
shape.

RICH
(appraisingly)
Yes... even in jammies.

SADIE
Rich...

RICH
I can't seem to help myself around you.

SADIE
You're sure it's not just a reflex?

RICH
Am I that bad?

SADIE

(shrugs)

What's underneath the smooth lines, the sex talk, all the different names for your dick--

RICH holds up his hand.

SADIE

Dick!

RICH

You did not just say... that word.

SADIE

Dick, dick, dick, dick, dick, dick.

RICH reacts in mock horror, grabs his left arm, fakes a heart attack.

SADIE

Is that so bad?

RICH

When you say it, it's not. At all.

SADIE

What is that about?

RICH

It's just part of the game.

SADIE

What game?

RICH

Sex.

SADIE

It's a game?

RICH

Sure.

SADIE

Always?

RICH

I thought so... until the other night.

SADIE

(uneasy)

Rich--

RICH
I felt your soul Friday, Sadie.

SADIE
You're sure that wasn't just my diaphragm?

SADIE pounds the beer bottle against
her palm.

RICH
I'm serious.

SADIE
How?

RICH
There was a place, a point so deep inside of myself, of us,
that... connected. I never felt anything like that before.
Ever.

SADIE
It was just sex, Rich.

RICH
You felt it too, didn't you?

SADIE doesn't respond.

RICH
Are you afraid of me, Sadie?

SADIE
Of course not.

RICH
I don't want you to be.

SADIE
What do you want?

RICH
I want to...
(with great difficulty)
Hold... Your hand/

SADIE
/Hold my--/

RICH
(over her)
/which is crazy because we've already had sex.

You want that? SADIE

I crave that. RICH

Oh. SADIE

Isn't that weird? RICH

SADIE looks away. RICH takes a seat at the other end of the couch. When SADIE looks up again, RICH is staring intently.

What? SADIE

C'mere. RICH
(pats the couch)

SADIE hesitates.

Rich... I-- SADIE

It's okay. C'mere. RICH

SADIE takes a seat on the opposite end of the couch. RICH motions for her to move a little closer, which she does, but not right next to him. Rather than ask her to move again, RICH moves so that they are seated closely. He turns to her, as if to kiss her, but he pulls her into a hug, which sets off the music button in his tie. SADIE jumps back, startled.

What is that?! SADIE

That, love, is the sound of magic. RICH

You're full of surprises. SADIE

Sometimes I even surprise myself. RICH

RICH takes Sadie's face in his hands and looks at her intently. Again, it seems he might kiss her. Instead, he begins smoothing her hair with one hand, then pulls her head forward and kisses her on the forehead. She lifts her head and they look at each other.

Lights fade to black.

ACT TWO, SCENE 5

THE [LOCAL] ZOO. [THIS CAN WORK EITHER AT THE SIDE OF STAGE,
OR BETWEEN HOUSES AND INTO THE MAILBOX AREA.]

Dressed in zookeeper gear, VANCE enters carrying a clipboard and bucket. JANET enters. VANCE spots her and tries to duck in the opposite direction, but JANET spies him, and calls out so he can't slip away.

JANET

Vance?

VANCE

(awkward)

Janet?

JANET

What are you doing here?

VANCE

I work here.

JANET

Oh right. The animals.

VANCE

You didn't know that?

JANET

I guess I forgot.

VANCE

What are you doing here?

JANET

I'm here with Jake. He's right there, by the polar bears.
Over here, Jake! Say hi to Mr. Lewis.

VANCE waves awkwardly.

VANCE

That's just weird.

JANET

What?

VANCE

Seeing your son.

JANET

Why?

VANCE

Because...

JANET looks expectant.

VANCE

(backpedaling on his
embarrassment)

Because Alison had school today. Shouldn't he--

JANET

Shh... One day this time of year, we play hooky. I figure in the big scheme of things, it's not a big deal. Kids remember stuff like this.

VANCE

And you come here?

JANET

Christmas shopping for his dad, lunch, the zoo. Jake likes to see the polar bears when it's cold. Seeing them in warm weather makes him sad.

VANCE

The humidity makes their coats turn a little green. Don't tell anybody, but it makes me sad, too.

JANET

Seeing them out of their natural habitat.

VANCE

Yeah.

JANET

They're uncomfortable, aren't they?

VANCE

Yes.

(beat)

Janet, are we supposed to be talking?

JANET

(amused)

Have you been brushing up on the rules?

VANCE

Well... you know, no outside contact after... you know...

JANET

You can't even say it.

VANCE

Janet--

JANET
We fucked, Vance.

VANCE looks around quickly, cautiously.

JANET
That makes you uncomfortable.

VANCE
I'm at work.

JANET
Yes.
(beat, looks toward Jake)
Do you think animals love each other?

VANCE
Love?

JANET
Yeah, do those two polar bears love each other?

VANCE
Sure.

JANET
Really? Like humans?

VANCE
Well, they're not exclusive. Polar bears have friendships,
they play. If there were other polar bears around, they'd
fight over mating rites/

JANET
/Mating rites/

VANCE
/The winning bear and the female mate like crazy for a week.
She gets pregnant.

JANET
And then it's on to the next bear.

VANCE
In their natural habitat.

JANET
So if you put these two in a group of polar bears, they would
mate with the other bears?

VANCE
Most likely.

JANET
Is that love, then?

VANCE
They're animals.

JANET
Would they remain loyal to each other?

VANCE
I just said--

JANET
No, I mean, if one were in danger, would the other one defend it? Would the friendship they've formed here survive? Would they still care about each other?

VANCE
I don't know.

JANET
I would like to know that.

VANCE
You want my job?

JANET
It just seems easy when they're the only two, you know. But you throw another bear in there...

VANCE
That's nature.

JANET
Is it? It's natural for, say, a peahen to stray when she sees a bigger cock?

VANCE
(uncomfortable)
Janet, I don't think--

JANET
(innocently)

What?

(beat, changes direction)
Do you have family, Vance? Parents? Siblings?

VANCE
Three brothers.

JANET
Your mother doted on the boys?

VANCE

She did.

JANET

I try not to do that with Jake. Your parents are still alive?

VANCE

Yeah.

JANET

My father died ten years ago/

VANCE

/I'm sorry/

JANET

/Every other week, my mother sleeps on my father's side of the bed. Why do you think she does that?

VANCE

She still misses him.

JANET

You could assume that, couldn't you?

(beat)

She does it so she can get two weeks out of the sheets before washing them.

VANCE

I'd just go the two weeks on my own side.

(beat)

Or a month.

JANET

Would Sadie?

VANCE

I-- probably not.

JANET

I really like Sadie.

VANCE

Um... I don't know if she'd be into that--

JANET

She's a nice person, Vance. And so are you.

VANCE

We like you, too.

JANET

We might have been friends, I think.

VANCE
Aren't we friends?

JANET smiles.

JANET
You never answered my question. About the peahen.

VANCE
I've forgotten the question.

JANET
Really?

VANCE
...I honestly don't know.

JANET
I think about things like that. Animals are so interesting. But look who I'm talking to. I'd already forgotten that you work here.

VANCE
I should get back to work.

JANET
I'm sorry I kept you. But see if you can find that out for me... about the peahen. There must be someone who knows.

VANCE
I'll see what I can do.

JANET
Good. I'm glad we ran into each other. Bye Vance.
(to Jake as she exits)
Come on, Jake. Let's get some hot chocolate!

VANCE stands looking confused, but then a light begins to dawn. Lights fade on his epiphany. VANCE heads home, removes his zoo jacket, takes a seat, as lights come up on Lewis house.

ACT II, SCENE 6

LEWIS HOUSE.

SADIE
(calling down the hall)
You are not dehydrated. Go to sleep!

SADIE begins folding laundry.

SADIE
Why'd you have to teach her that word?

VANCE
She picked it up when we had that baby elephant that wouldn't drink.

VANCE moves toward Sadie, picks up item from the laundry basket, tries to fold it. SADIE looks at him curiously as he struggles to fold, then looks away. VANCE puts down his badly folded item.

VANCE
Sadie...
(beat, rushes in)
What did it feel like to have sex with Rich?

SADIE ignores the question.

VANCE
Sadie?

SADIE
Now you want to get into this?

VANCE
I think I do.

SADIE
You think.

VANCE
I do.

SADIE
Maybe I don't.

VANCE
We've barely spoken in a week.

SADIE
How does that feel?

SADIE continues folding.

VANCE
How long are you going to punish me?

SADIE
I don't play those games.

VANCE
That's not fair.

SADIE
Not fair?! Why now, Vance? Why not when we came home that night and I tried to talk to you, and you shut me out like you had just pimped me out to the neighbor and I wasn't paying up? Or worse, like you had nothing to do with it, like you weren't there fucking Janet in the same fucking room!? We were doing this together, and you humiliated me!/

/I know./

VANCE

SADIE
/How could you do that to me?

VANCE
I didn't know what to say.

SADIE
So nothing's changed except we used up our Fuck-A-Friend Free pass. Hey, Rich would like that.

VANCE
You like Rich.

SADIE
He's not afraid to say what's on his mind.

VANCE
Help me.

SADIE
No.

VANCE
If you just started--

SADIE
I can't do it anymore! I can't open up if you're going to shut me down.

VANCE
I won't.

SADIE

...

VANCE shrugs, starts to exit, SADIE
visibly deflates, VANCE turns back.

VANCE

Okay. I wanted... I thought... you and I... argh, this is so
hard...

SADIE

(desperate, hopeful)

Please try, Vance.

Performance rights must be secured before production. For contact information, please see
[the Couple Next Door information page](#).