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SONS & LOVERS

by
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SONS & LOVERS

CAST 1W, 3M

ELLEN: 50, a real woman catching up with the world; she is not a model-thin type

BILL: Ellen's son, 24, totally out but for a conversation with his mom

MARQ: Early to mid-thirties (he should look older than Bill)

BUTCH: Ellen's husband, a good-looking, lean, 54-year-old, the kind who appeals to younger women

GIANCARLO: Super hot waiter, Italian with a real Italian accent, not a stereotype

PIERRE: Super hot hairdresser/makeup artist; French with a real French accent, not a stereotype

PARISIAN WAITER: cliched French accent, stereotypically French

TREVI DUDE: cliched Italian accent, stereotypically Italian

CASTING NOTE: Marq/Pierre/Giancarlo are triple cast.
Butch/Waiter/Trevi Dude are triple cast.

TIME: Now

Scene 1: Ellen's kitchen

Scene 2: Bill's apartment

Scene 3: Parisian cafe

Scene 4: Bill's apartment

Scene 5: The More Fabulous You Salon

Scene 6: Ellen's bedroom/Bill's apartment

Scene 7: Trevi Fountain, Rome

Scene 8: Tre Uomini restaurant

SET NOTE: Sets can be as elaborate as needed, but our workshop production in Buffalo was black box and used four plywood setpieces painted black: two "chairs" that worked separately or as a "couch," a table that doubled as a fountain, and an oblong piece that was a bed, a counter top, and a room divider in Scene 6.
Total cost: \$71

DIALOGUE NOTE:

// indicates overlapping speech

[dialogue in brackets] is not spoken; it is a facial or gestural response

...prior to a line of dialogue indicates a beat

SCENE 1

ELLEN'S KITCHEN.

ELLEN is mixing cookies, dressed in sweatpants and a sweatshirt, hair back in a pony tail, no makeup--the perfect outfit for the Don't Ask, Don't Tell dance.

ELLEN

I mean it. I don't want a fuss.

BILL

But this is a big one.

ELLEN

I hate that Over The Hill stuff. Why is that funny?

BILL

Would you rather have Under The Hill?

ELLEN

Morbid. Everyone at work will want to bring all those gag gifts, like canes and cases of Depends.

BILL

No prune juice. Check.

ELLEN

Or Bengay. That's not funny at all. Why did they ever name it that?

BILL

Because it was developed in France by Dr. Jules Bengué [pronounced Ben-Gway] who brought it to America, where the name was anglicized to Bengay, because in 1898, that seemed like a good idea.

ELLEN

You know a lot about Bengay.

BILL

I know that there won't be any at your party. Fifty is the new thirty. Elegant. Respected. Not old.

ELLEN

Someone tell AARP. They just don't quit.

BILL

Anything you did in your twenties, you can do now.

ELLEN

I can't pick up men.

BILL

That's because you're married, Mom. They don't call it a ball and chain for nothing.

ELLEN

It's just nice to know you could, Billy. Once upon a time the young boys at the grocery checkout checked me out, you know. When they asked to help with my bags, they were flirting. I know what it means now.

BILL

They need a smoke break.

ELLEN

And I can't touch my toes. I can't function on three hours sleep, or eat junk and not gain weight. I can't even put two spaces after periods. I'll never get used to that.

BILL

Practice. That other stuff was never good for you anyway.

ELLEN

But it didn't matter is the point. When you're twenty, you're not trying to be healthy or attractive; you just are. And you can smile without your face looking like a marionette puppet.

BILL

When did you get so hung up on looks? You're very attractive.

ELLEN

For an old woman is what you mean. I have gray hair.

BILL

So color it. We could get you layers, some nice lowlights. Maybe a little flip--

ELLEN

You know a lot about hair.

BILL

You're making excuses.

ELLEN

Now you sound like your father.

BILL

What does he know about lowlights?

ELLEN

Not that.

(beat)

He said he liked my new haircut.

BILL
So believe him. That's--

ELLEN
I didn't get a haircut! That's code for "Why don't you get rid of that gray and lose some weight?!"

BILL
He was complimenting you. If he cares that you gained some weight or whatever, then why does he think you should have a party?

ELLEN
He doesn't want to show off an old gray cow at a party.

BILL
Yes, he does.

ELLEN
[:/]

BILL
You deserve it.

ELLEN
Did he say I deserve it?

BILL
He said I should talk to you about it.

BILL sneaks some cookie dough from the bowl; ELLEN shoos his hand away.

BILL
Let me have some.

ELLEN
There's raw eggs in there.

BILL
They won't kill me.

ELLEN
You're an only child. I can't take that chance.

BILL
Life is all about taking chances.

ELLEN
You're ganging up on me. I'm making his favorite cookies for when he gets home from France and you're ganging up on me.

BILL
An Alps snow globe? A French cafe?

ELLEN

Probably another Eiffel Tower. Don't change the subject. I don't want a party, Billy. I don't.

BILL

You can have whatever you want. A big chocolate cake. A Hawaiian theme with leis and lanterns--a luau! With poi and fancy drinks and--

ELLEN

...

BILL

We can dance.

ELLEN

I haven't danced in years. Dad says it hurts his feet.

BILL

I'll dance with you. I learned how to waltz for *Cinderella*.

ELLEN

Well that might be something. At the rate you're going, it might be the only mother-son dance we'll ever have.

BILL

Come on, Mom. I'm only 24.

ELLEN

Your Prince Charming wedding was so lovely.

BILL

It's a fairy tale.

ELLEN starts making dough balls and putting them on a tray. BILL tries to grab another, but she slaps his hand.

ELLEN

...Is there someone you might want to bring?

BILL

Mom--

ELLEN

There's an extra toothbrush in your bathroom.

BILL

I use one to clean the grout.

ELLEN

It's in the holder.

BILL
For convenience.

ELLEN
What if they get mixed up? And you brush your teeth with
grout dirt? Do you know what must--

BILL
...It's for guests.

ELLEN
You have that many guests?

BILL
What if I did?

ELLEN
Is there one special guest?

BILL
Does it matter?

ELLEN
I would feel better about one guest than a parade/

BILL
/It's not a parade/

ELLEN
/of unnamed guests, yes.

BILL
There's no parade.

ELLEN
I don't want to pry but you're not getting any younger. And
neither am I.

BILL
You're fifty!

ELLEN
So give me something to look forward to.

BILL
Fine. Fine. Fine! Marquesas is perhaps a more than occasional
guest.

ELLEN
I knew it! Will you bring... Marquesas?

BILL nods.

ELLEN

Will you bring Marquesas to the party?

BILL

I don't know.

ELLEN

Does Marquesas not want to come to my party?

BILL

I haven't--

ELLEN

Did you tell Marquesas I'm having a party?

BILL

There is no party yet!

ELLEN

I can't believe it's my fiftieth birthday, and Marquesas won't even come.

BILL

Stop saying Marquesas! It sounds weird now.

ELLEN

It is a little weird, but it is-- that's a real name, right?

BILL

Yes.

ELLEN

I want to meet this person, Billy. This person who was named after islands I never even heard of until *Survivor*.

BILL

So you can start badgering--

ELLEN

Why would parents name a child that?

BILL

I don't know.

ELLEN

Maybe it was the site of conception. On the beach maybe. How exotic. I'd like to go to France. Are Marquesas' parents from France?

BILL

I don't know.

ELLEN

How do you not know if someone's French?

BILL
No accent.

ELLEN
Do you eat croissants together?

BILL
Sure.

ELLEN
Do you say *je t'aime*?

BILL
I have not heard that, no.

ELLEN
You know what I'm asking.

BILL
If... Marquesas speaks French.
Dough grab; slap.

ELLEN
Don't play stupid with your mother. Is it serious?

BILL
Maybe. I don't know. Kind of.

ELLEN
Kind of like like *je t'aime* or kind of like *voulez vous
couchez avec moi*?

BILL
You know more French than Marquesas.

ELLEN
I know things are more casual now.

BILL
It's probably a notch above Lady Marmalade.

ELLEN
It is?! Do you talk about the future?/
/A notch!/
/Marriage? Grandchildren?

BILL
No! No way. I'm way too young for that. And that's why I
never should have told you.

ELLEN

I got married when I was twenty.

BILL

Which was way too young.

ELLEN

In a small town, when your mother raises you on dreams of pink rose bouquets and white satin dresses, that's what you want more than anything in the world.

BILL

We don't live in that small town.

ELLEN

You can take the girl out-- Well. We had those doves before they were chic, Billy. Did you know they're really homing pigeons? But you pretend they're doves because it's a wedding and pigeons are dirty.

BILL

It's all a bunch of pretend. Like there's this one day and you pretend it's going to be like that forever. Seems to me the later you get started, the better chance you have of making it to the end.

ELLEN

The top, Billy. Like a mountain, and you need someone to help you lug your stuff. Climbing a mountain is hard, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't do it. It's a great view... when the weather's right.

BILL

I don't see what's so good about sitting around with the same person for thirty years and baking cookies.

ELLEN

Twenty-nine, and that's a horrible thing to say!

BILL

It's just the way it seems. Is that what you thought your life would be?

ELLEN

It hasn't always been easy, but your father and I are committed. If you get a little lost, you don't give up, you dig in. That's commitment.

BILL

A big one. You shouldn't take those vows if you don't mean them.

ELLEN

And setting an example for you! We want you to have a stable home. What about children?

BILL

Someday. Maybe. I don't know!

ELLEN

So Marquesas doesn't want children?

BILL

No. Kindergarten teachers love children.

ELLEN

Marquesas teaches kindergarten? And loves children?

BILL

But... but maybe won't have any.

ELLEN

Oh. Oh. A problem with-- [gestures below]

BILL

[mimics gesture] Yes. That.

ELLEN

Oh. They can do amazing things now.

BILL

It would take a miracle.

ELLEN

You could adopt.

BILL

You're getting ahead of yourself. Way ahead.

ELLEN

I just want you to know I'm not particular about where my grandchildren come from.

BILL

That's a very progressive attitude, Mom.

Beat. The moment passes.

ELLEN

So what else? Are you compatible... can you... talk?

BILL

Yeah, yeah, we're fine.

ELLEN

Because you watch out if you're at base camp all ready for the climb, and suddenly the trip seems like too much effort. Or worse, you start fighting with the sherpa.

BILL

What?

ELLEN

That's the first place things go wrong is all I mean.

BILL

Are you talking about--

ELLEN

You. We're talking about you. And why you won't marry Marquesas.

BILL

Oh my God! I didn't say I wouldn't.

ELLEN

So you would?

BILL

Mom!

ELLEN

Fine. It's okay for me to lay my heart on the table and bare my soul--

BILL

You have not bared your soul.

ELLEN

I told you your father doesn't find me attractive. That's pretty vulnerable stuff.

BILL

You never said that. And it's not true.

ELLEN

I bet you find Marquesas attractive.

BILL

Like a Greek God--dess?

ELLEN

If your father ever thought that about me, he doesn't now.

Door slams. BUTCH enters, carrying suitcase.

Melted in my mouth. BUTCH

... ELLEN

BUTCH downs the water.
BUTCH
Airplanes. So dry.

BILL
So Dad, I've been trying to convince Mom about the party.

BUTCH
The what?

BILL
The party? Her fiftieth birthday party?

BUTCH
Oh! Right.

BILL
I was trying to tell her why we think she deserves one, but I could use some help.

BUTCH
Have the party, Ellen.

BILL
(to Ellen)
You see?
(to Butch)
So we were talking about a theme--

BUTCH
Theme?

BILL
Yeah, like Hawaiian, with leis and poi or--

BUTCH
Booze. That's why people come to parties.

BILL
Sure, but this is a celebration--

BUTCH
I trust you. *Pardon/*

ELLEN
/Pardon?/

BUTCH

/but I'm gonna take a nap. There was some 400-pound lady next to me on that last leg. I couldn't catch a wink.

BUTCH picks up his suitcase.

ELLEN

I'll unpack your suitcase if you leave it on the bed.

BUTCH

Thanks.

ELLEN

I hope the smell of fresh baking cookies doesn't wake you up!

BUTCH exits with suitcase.

ELLEN

You see?

BILL

He's just tired.

ELLEN

Too tired to kiss me hello?

BILL

Why don't you kiss him?

ELLEN

That 400-pound reference was directed at me.

BILL

Fine! If I think about bringing a date, can we throw you a party?

ELLEN

...Okay. Nobody wears black.

BILL

But it's so slimming.

ELLEN

Not you, too. No black. No Geritol. No false teeth.

BILL

Promise.

ELLEN

And you bring Marquesas.

BILL

Mom, are you sure you want--

ELLEN shoves a dough ball in his mouth.

ELLEN

Oh, hell.

BILL

(mouth full)

Really?

ELLEN

I'm a terrible mother.

ELLEN eats one, too.

ELLEN

(mouth full)

It's so good.

BILL

Mm-hm.

ELLEN

If we survive the cookie dough, we'll have a party.

BILL

Good.

ELLEN

And I'll Google things about France.

Lights out.

SCENE 2

DARKNESS. BILL'S APARMENT. SOUNDS OF INTIMACY.

MARQ
(high-pitched, French accent)
Oh-la-la!

BILL
Stop that.

MARQ
(high-pitched French accent)
Or you will do what, *mon cheri*?

BILL switches on the light. He and MARQ
are in a state of undress.

BILL
It's what I won't do.

MARQ
(trying to re-engage)
You can't hold to that.

MARQ tries to kiss BILL; BILL resists.

MARQ
I know what we need.

BILL
You to stop?

MARQ
A French maid's outfit! Is there one in your costume closet?
(resuming high-pitched French
accent, grabbing a shirt to
work as an apron)
Do you want to make it with zee hot Parisian maid? Ooh! Ooh!
Monsieur! Don't look under my skirt! You naughty! Don't!
(in deep voice)
'Cause I'm a hot Parisian man maid.
(in normal voice)
Don't tell mama.

BILL sits up abruptly; starts to get
dressed.

MARQ
Hey, don't do that. I was just having fun.

BILL
It wasn't funny.

MARQ
She thinks I'm French. That's hysterical.

BILL
I told her you're not French. I think.

MARQ
You think.

BILL
I told her you don't have an accent.

MARQ
That's a start.

BILL
Of what?

MARQ
First, we tell her I don't have an accent. Then we tell her I don't have a bajingo.

(on Bill's questioning look)

One of the little girls in my class calls it that.

(urgently raises his hand)

"Mr. St. Thomas! My bajingo is telling me I need to pee!"

BILL
Cute.

MARQ
Bajingos are not cute.
(checks himself)
And I don't have one.

BILL
And I don't want you to. God, not even a little bit.

MARQ
So tell your mother that.

BILL
And she'll say, "That's probably just as well. Animals are so messy."

MARQ
William...

BILL
She's just not ready to deal with this.

MARQ
Honey, even Cher needed time to deal. But you have to start somewhere.

BILL
But--

MARQ
But anything is better than your mother thinking I'm some uptight French bitch who doesn't want to meet her boyfriend's parents when really I just want to make an honest man out of him.

BILL
As opposed to the whore I've been?

MARQ
...

BILL
She doesn't think you're a bitch.

MARQ
She's never met me.

BILL
But she knows. In theory.

MARQ raises his hand. BILL acknowledges him.

MARQ
I'm dying to meet your family!

BILL
You will.

MARQ
I can't believe I'm doing-- I must be nutsy noodle to be in love with someone who's not out. Kids come out in junior high now.

BILL
No, dear, some kids come out in junior high. You came out in junior high. Not all kids come in junior high.

MARQ
You're way past junior high now.

BILL
And my mother has known since then at least. Stop acting like I'm hiding a wife! I blew up three hundred balloons for your parade float. I read [pronounced: reed] *Instinct*. I am out.

MARQ
Then stop playing games. I won't even consider saying "I do" until--

BILL

What the-- Whoa. Nobody is saying "I do."

MARQ

Not yet, but--

BILL

Man, you sound like my mother! It must be a generational thing.

MARQ

I am nowhere near as old as your mother!

BILL

My mother who would rather risk botulism than ask.

MARQ

So help her. That's better than bringing back to Don't Ask, Don't Tell.

BILL

No, Almost Ask, Almost Tell. Do you know we managed an entire conversation about you without using a pronoun?

MARQ

This is 20__, honey. We're mainstream and politically correct. There's a three guy triangle on soap operas. Having a homo son is hip!

BILL

My mother doesn't know hip from handball. But dodgeball--

MARQ

Refuse to play.

BILL

You don't understand. She's not your mother. But I did tell her about you, and when--

MARQ

(holding up a teacherly hand)

Words are a thin disguise for inaction, children.

MARQ starts getting dressed.

BILL

She wants grandkids. You want to deal with that?

MARQ

I teach freaking kindergarten! I love kids. But I won't get married until you tell her.

BILL

There you go again! Who the hell is talking about marriage?

MARQ
We're talking about moving in together/

BILL
/Which is not marriage/

MARQ
/I just thought--

BILL
She wants you to come to her birthday party. Not you, but--

MARQ
Your French twat.

BILL
She doesn't think you're a twat!
(beat)
I never should have told her I met someone/

MARQ
/Someone?/

BILL
/She caught me in a weak moment. She does not let up.

MARQ
So someone will come to the party. With bells on.

BILL
That would be a little much. This is delicate.

MARQ
Delicate like cold war.

BILL
No, no, more like a Mexican standoff. Fishing. She throws out bait, and before I can even think to nibble, she yanks it back in.

MARQ
Next time, snatch it. You're good with your mouth.

BILL
Why force it? She knows. I know she knows. The rest is details. Details like "When are you getting married, Billy?" "When are you having kids, Billy?"

MARQ
I like her already. I'd love to toast her big 5-0.

BILL
You can't call it that. She's being weirdly obsessive about her age.

When's the party?
MARQ

A month.
BILL

And I'm going.
MARQ

...
BILL

And I'm going, right?
MARQ

BILL
Do you understand we can be talking about Pride of the Yankees, or a pride of lions and my mother will change the subject?

MARQ
Why would you want to deprive me of meeting a stubborn woman who thinks a bajingo is a messy housepet?
(checks time)
I'm gonna hit the gym.

BILL
Heading out hot and bothered? Say hi to Horatio.

MARQ
William, if you're jealous of Horatio, why don't you meet him? Come and work out like a self-respecting gay man who might be asked to wear a Speedo in the next parade. Or to play Joseph.
(admiring his own abs)
You can't be Joseph without a six-pack.

BILL
I'm not jealous.

MARQ
He has good taste. But I don't have poor judgment.

BILL
I said I'm not jealous. And working out is just too much... work.

MARQ
Yesterday, he didn't even talk to me, just grunted extra loud whenever I walked by.

MARQ demonstrates some weight-lifting move accompanied by a bizarre semi-sexual grunt.

MARQ

I was like, "Somebody tell Seth something's dying in here."

BILL

One of these times, he's going to catch you in a weak moment.

MARQ

Baby, no-necks aren't my style, but even if they were, that's not something you want to talk about, and I would never--

BILL

You want to talk about that. You want to talk about marriage--

MARQ

Maybe having that first talk would make the second talk easier.

MARQ kisses Bill's neck, puts on another item of clothing, does the grunt again, laughs.

MARQ

We just laugh at him.

BILL

Maybe Seth needs to make a rule against harassment at his gym.

MARQ feels BILL's forehead.

MARQ

It's a gym, William.

MARQ finishes getting dressed.

MARQ

I want to go to that party *mon cheri*.

MARQ kisses BILL. Exits. Lights out on BILL.

SCENE 3

SMALL PARISIAN CAFE TABLE. STEREOTYPICAL FRENCH ACCORDION MUSIC PLAYS.

ELLEN sits, daydreaming. Waiter approaches, dressed in stereotypical striped French top with black pants, red scarf, and beret.

Butch?
ELLEN

Pardon?
WAITER

ELLEN
You kind of look like my husband.

WAITER
Is he a waiter?

ELLEN
No, but my son is. And an actor.

WAITER
Oui, I am an actor as well!

ELLEN
The restaurant he works in isn't nearly as nice as this.

WAITER
I have been acting a long time.

ELLEN
What is a good French thing to order?

WAITER
You want an éclair? Melts in your mouth.

ELLEN
Wine. Red wine. The kind that gets you drunk.

WAITER
We sip the wine. Sip. Sip. Sip, sip, sip. If we sip enough, we get hammered.

ELLEN
Then that's what I want.

WAITER starts to exit.

ELLEN
Wait!

WAITER turns back.

ELLEN
We are in Paris, right?

WAITER
Oui.

ELLEN
You don't speak French.

WAITER
Do you know French?

ELLEN
"Voulez vous coucher avec moi."

WAITER
So bold, the American!

ELLEN
That's all I know.

WAITER
Don't say it unless you mean it.

ELLEN
Well. Parisians are rude.

WAITER
Don't believe the Internet. Experience for yourself.

ELLEN
Teach me. Teach me the right words.

WAITER
Eh, languages are so hard to learn.

ELLEN
Je...je...

ELLEN starts to mime "it's nice to meet you." It devolves into a mirror/mime with WAITER, that fails miserably.

ELLEN
I need the words! My son is going to introduce me to his French... There's a toothbrush.

WAITER
A girlfriend?

ELLEN
You think it's a girlfriend?

WAITER
Do you?

ELLEN
...

WAITER
So you want to meet this lover?

ELLEN
[mouths "lover"] Yes. I think so. I don't know... How do I say "I'm pleased to meet you, Marquesas"?

WAITER
Marquesas. We have islands--

ELLEN
I know. How do I say it?

WAITER
Je blah-bleu-merci-rendezvous s'il vous plait.

ELLEN
Je blah-bleu-merci...

WAITER
Rendezvous s'il vous plait.

ELLEN
That doesn't sound right.

WAITER
You don't know French!

ELLEN
Je t'aime! I know *je t'aime!* I can say that.

WAITER
To whom? Your son? Your husband?

ELLEN
My son. I love my son.

Beat.

WAITER
Does you have a lover?

ELLEN
Me. Of course not. Do you?

WAITER
Paree is the City of Lovers. Lovers, lovers, lovers, All day, all night. A parade of lovers!

ELLEN
[!!!]...Women or...?

WAITER
Can't you figure that out?

ELLEN
Why won't you just tell me?!

WAITER
Why don't you just ask?

ELLEN
I don't know how. I don't know French.

WAITER
You must learn.

ELLEN
What about love?

WAITER
Lovers and love are not the same thing.

ELLEN
Don't you want to be in love?

WAITER
Lovers are so much fun. The blond. The brunet. I am never bored.

ELLEN
A string of lovers.

WAITER
Are you judging?

ELLEN
Love is nice. It gives your world a little shine. The pounds melt away. You'll feel young and free. You won't have any questions.

WAITER
Perhaps until the next beauty catches my eye, Mademoiselle.

ELLEN
Oh no, I'm married, not a mademoiselle.

WAITER
In Paris, all beautiful ladies are mademoiselle until proven otherwise, *n'est-ce pas*?

ELLEN
N'est-ce pas? Isn't that right.

WAITER moves to exit.

ELLEN

Wait, where are you going? Where's my wine?

WAITER

I am off to find a lover! Come with me.

ELLEN

I don't want to find a lover!

WAITER

C'est... how do you say that's too bad?

ELLEN

I don't know French. What if you find love instead? Will you tell me?

WAITER

I don't know. It's your dream.

WAITER exits. ELLEN gets up to follow.
Lights out.

SCENE 4

BILL'S APARTMENT.

Bill and Ellen are running lines.

BILL
"Me and you had a good run. Those weren't unimportant times."

ELLEN
"They weren't. I still love you."

BILL
"The way I want you to?"

ELLEN
"You didn't always love me the way I wanted you to."

BILL
"I--"/

ELLEN
"But I was still hoping/

BILL
/"You know those women meant nothing"/

ELLEN
/"Really hoping that if I forgave you, and tried... You're a good man."

BILL
"Just not for you."

ELLEN
"I don't want to give up. We can make this work."

ELLEN puts script down in her lap.

ELLEN
Do you believe they can make this work after what he did?

BILL
I have to believe that Joe believes they can make it work.

ELLEN
That's so confusing.

BILL
If you're really in character, and he believes it, you believe it.

ELLEN

So if I were an actor, I could just convince myself I was Kathleen Turner or somebody?

BILL

If you're good, yeah. Eddie Redmayne won an Oscar for playing Stephen Hawking. Neil Patrick Harris played a womanizer for eight seasons.

ELLEN

Oh, I like him.

BILL

So do I.

ELLEN

But I didn't like him jumping from bed to bed.

BILL

It was an act.

ELLEN

He doesn't do it in real life.

BILL

Tom Cruise, too. He convinces people he's straight on-screen and off. So did Rock Hudson, back in the day.

ELLEN

Ooh, my mother loved him. And he wasn't... you know.

BILL

Yeah, he was.

ELLEN

Not like Doogie Howser with a husband and kids and everything.

BILL

Husband and kids don't have to be part of the package.

ELLEN

But it's nice when they are. People will say anything for a headline, especially if you're dead.

BILL

It was true.

ELLEN

You can't prove it. And Tom Cruise... that's just silly.

BILL

...

ELLEN

So could you teach me? How to act like... Kathleen Turner? Or do I need the voice?

BILL

You just need the desire. And the right script.

ELLEN

(tossing script aside)

And years of training. It's hopeless.

BILL

I've seen pictures of you, Mom. Those pictures by the swimming hole... You had the years of training.

ELLEN

That was someone else.

BILL

Someone who had a different guy every weekend.

ELLEN

Oh no. Not me.

BILL

Why the hell not? You were young.

ELLEN

And dating your father.

BILL

But not married.

ELLEN

And now we're married twenty-nine years. Grandpa never thought we'd make it.

(beat)

Why do men age so well? And why do they lose weight so fast?

BILL

(patting himself)

Some men.

ELLEN

I gave you my poor genetics. I'm sorry.

BILL

I've never had any complaints.

ELLEN

...Dad comes home from Italy today! He said he'd bring me a Trevi fountain snow globe, so I have to leave soon and make the cookies.

BILL

So that's why you wanted to meet here! To protect me from the killer cookie dough.

ELLEN

Last time was a weak moment followed by instant regret. I had a nightmare about the jaws of death coming for you.

BILL

A narrow escape.

ELLEN

You won't mock me when you're dead. Don't worry; I won't let them say anything slanderous about you.

BILL

...Does Dad like them, the cookies?

ELLEN

They're his favorite.

BILL

But does he like them?

ELLEN

I've been making them for years.

BILL

And it's a sweet tradition, Mom, but maybe what Dad would really like when he gets home from a long trip is a nice glass of scotch.

ELLEN

Dad doesn't drink scotch.

BILL

Budweiser then.

ELLEN

That would taste awful with the cookies.

BILL

Does Dad even eat the cookies?

ELLEN

Yes! He does! He goes right for the plate and... Yes, he says "Mmmm...." and he eats... One. Oh my goodness, he eats one.

BILL

And the rest?

ELLEN

Oh. Oh. Billy.

BILL
Try the scotch-- The beer, Mom. For both of you.

BILL picks up his script.

BILL
Shall we?

ELLEN picks up her script.

BILL
Um... Okay. "Just not for you."

ELLEN
"I don't want to give up. We can make this work."

BILL
"Really? You still--

MARQ enters. ELLEN jumps.

BILL
Marqua--yayaya!. Marq. Markle!

MARQ
What?

BILL
Um, Markle, this is my mother, Ellen.

ELLEN
Markle?

BILL
Mom, this is Markle, um, Marquesas' brother.

MARQ
Her broth--

ELLEN
Markle like Sparkle?

BILL
Yes! Only Markle.

ELLEN
Markle and Marquesas?

BILL
They're twins.

MARQ
Twins?

ELLEN

Oh, I hate when people do that. You can't tell who's a girl and who's a boy. It's so confusing.

MARQ

Yes...

BILL

My mother is helping me run lines. What are you doing here?

MARQ

Half day, remember?

BILL

No.

MARQ

(to Ellen)

I teach kindergarten.

ELLEN

Just like Marquesas! Oh, it must be one of those twin things! Do you look alike?

BILL

Not at all. Fraternal.

MARQ

We actually do look quite a bit alike. In fact, Marquesas and I--

BILL

Used to switch classes and fool the teachers!

ELLEN

You look that much alike?

MARQ

It's uncanny.

ELLEN

...Did you come in with a key?

BILL

Marquesas gave him one. He works nearby, and sometimes it's convenient/

MARQ

/Convenient?/

BILL

/for him to kill time here, or--

MARQ
Sleep over. When necessary.

BILL
When he's too drunk to drive.

ELLEN
That's good you don't drink and drive.

MARQ
Or I don't want to be alone.

ELLEN
...There's only one bedroom.

MARQ
Only when Marquesas isn't here.

ELLEN
...

BILL
...Because three's a crowd. He sleeps on the couch. Don't you have to get to the gym?

MARQ
Soon.

ELLEN
Why don't you get some drinks, Billy? Iced tea?

MARQ takes a seat.

BILL
Shouldn't you--

MARQ
Ellen would like me to stay for tea.

BILL
But the bachelor party?

MARQ
Horatio can get things started.
(to Ellen)
The guy who owns my gym is getting married.

ELLEN
I love weddings! In fact, I was just asking Billy the other day--

BILL
And he's having his bachelor party at the gym!

MARQ

The steam room will be open all night.

ELLEN

Who needs a steam-- um, do you have a date for the wedding, Markle?

MARQ

I'm not sure.

BILL

...

ELLEN

A good-looking guy like you? We should fix you up. Don't you have any friends for him, Billy?

BILL

No.

ELLEN

I'm sure if you and Marquesas put your heads together, you could come up with someone.

MARQ

There's someone at the gym I might ask.

BILL

Of course there is.

MARQ

Your son thinks the gym is a meat market.

ELLEN

I've heard that. [oops] Billy, the tea?

BILL reluctantly exits. ELLEN takes a seat next to MARQ.

ELLEN

Markle doesn't sound French.

MARQ

Pardon?

ELLEN

Like Marquesas. What kind of name is Markle?

MARQ

I have no idea.

ELLEN

It sounds impulsive.

MARQ
Maybe they were under pressure.

ELLEN
...

MARQ
You can call me Marq.

ELLEN
Well, if I can't meet your twin, Mark, then I guess meeting you is the next best thing.

MARQ
Maybe better.

ELLEN
...

MARQ
It is lovely to meet you, too, Ellen. William's told me so much about you.

ELLEN
William?

MARQ
That's what Marquesas calls him.

ELLEN
All these names--how do you keep things straight? [um] So what has my big-mouth son told you?

MARQ
That you're the best mother ever. That you bake the most excellent cookies. That you have a big--a special--birthday coming up.

ELLEN
He's more excited about it than I am.

MARQ
Why aren't you excited? Parties are fun.

ELLEN
I'll never be twenty-five again.

MARQ
I bet you were a hip slip of a thing.

ELLEN
I missed my chance to be hip, I'm afraid.
(indicates her hips)
But hippy... got that covered.

MARQ

You know what? You need a makeover. A fresh start, a fresh look, a fresh attitude to start the new decade.

ELLEN

That sounds more like a do-over. It's too late for that.

MARQ

Nonsense. I know just the guy. People leave his place with a new lease on life.

ELLEN

From a makeover?

MARQ

Pierre's got the touch.

ELLEN

Maybe. What else did Billy say about me?

MARQ

That you love him no matter what.

ELLEN

Aw, really? But he's right. No matter what that boy ever did, he got away with it. Once he got into my makeup case and just made the biggest mess. But he was having such fun, I couldn't be mad.

MARQ

Boys will be boys.

ELLEN

Another time, he wore my high heels--

MARQ

The good heels, right?

ELLEN

The fiercest ones. He wore them outside in the mud! They were ruined.

MARQ

Excellent taste, poor judgment. That's him.

ELLEN

Another time he cut up one of my dresses to "make it prettier." But he was being so creative, how could I be upset?

MARQ

And now he makes costumes.

ELLEN

See? I was right to encourage him.

MARQ

He's so talented. I can't believe he never told me that.

ELLEN

Do you talk a lot?

MARQ

We're pretty close.

ELLEN

Well... I probably shouldn't have told you either. The point is, it's true. Nothing could stop me loving that boy.

MARQ

Nothing?

ELLEN

If he was in jail for axe murder because they caught him red-handed with the axe and it was covered in blood and his victim's body was lying in pieces right in front of him...

MARQ

Then maybe/

ELLEN

/Then maybe I'd bring him cake! Because he'd still be my Billy.

MARQ

So it doesn't bother you that I sleep over here sometimes?

ELLEN

It's nice you and Marquesas are close. Family is important. I always wanted a big family, but Butch was just as happy to have one, didn't want to do anything more if it meant he had to go, you know, in one of those rooms... by himself. He kept saying, "If it happened once, it'll happen again." So I just waited.

MARQ

Would you still like another son?

ELLEN

That would have been lovely, but my two cents doesn't matter in how things turn out.

MARQ

Exactly, so when I say--

ELLEN

And I can't wait for grandkids, so maybe you can get these two to get the lead out.

MARQ

Believe me, I would like nothing more.

BILL enters with tea tray.

ELLEN

There you are! And just in time, because I think I was starting to bore Mark here.

BILL

Marq?

MARQ

I think she likes me.

ELLEN

I do!

(to Bill)

He is the sweetest young/

BILL

/young?/

ELLEN

/man.

MARQ

She definitely likes me.

ELLEN

We got on famously!

MARQ

Oh, the things she told me about you!

ELLEN

Come on now, that was our secret.

BILL

And what did you tell her?

MARQ

That we're very close.

BILL

...

MARQ

So...

BILL
So what?

MARQ
The groundwork has been laid.

BILL
Nobody asked you to lay anything.

MARQ
Your son has something to talk to you about.

BILL
No, I don't.

ELLEN
Billy?

BILL
Marq is mistaken.

MARQ
I'm not.

BILL
He can be a little pushy.

MARQ
Encouraging.

Awkward silence.

MARQ
Well?

MARQ waits. MARQ and BILL's silent mind bullets say "TELL HER" and "NO" in several different ways. Finally, BILL looks dangerously close to saying something--

ELLEN
...Oh! Stupid me. You want to come to my party, too, don't you, Mark?

MARQ
...

ELLEN
Don't be embarrassed! The more the merrier. Really, Billy, that was no big deal.

MARQ
No big deal, William.

More silent conversation until Marq's lack of acceptance borders on rude.

MARQ

....I would love to come to your party, Ellen.

ELLEN

Oh good! That wasn't so hard, was it?

ELLEN retrieves her purse and jacket.

BILL

You're leaving?

MARQ silently urges BILL to stop her.

ELLEN

I really should get home and start Dad's cookies.

BILL

What about the beer?

ELLEN

I think he needs the cookies, Billy. I always make the cookies. If I don't make the cookies, he won't know which way is up. The cookies are waiting! So... I'm sorry. Excuse me. Mark, it was lovely meeting you and I'll see you at the party! Maybe you can talk that shy twin of yours into coming, too.

MARQ

But--

ELLEN

Bye!

ELLEN scoots out the door. BILL flops on the couch.

BILL

Oh my god.

MARQ picks up his gym bag.

BILL

Where are you going?

MARQ

I can't leave it all for Horatio to set up.

MARQ heads toward the door, turns back, drops the bag.

MARQ

I was right here. I was right here! You had a gift-wrapped opportunity.

BILL

What are you talking about? She was in active denial. I thought she'd die when you mentioned the steam room, and she sure let "We're very close" slide right by. Now you know exactly what I'm talking about.

MARQ

But she also told me the cutest, gayest stories about your childhood. And said how much she'd like to see us get married-

-

BILL

Not you. Marquesas.

MARQ

I am Marquesas!

BILL

You're Markle.

MARQ

For how long? She knows--

BILL

Then what was that cookie business? She couldn't get out of here fast enough. Did you see that?

MARQ

What I saw was a sweet woman who loves her son. And even seemed to like me quite a bit. She might need time to adjust, but I bet if you told her we'd be having kids she'd start pooping cigars.

BILL

I'm not telling her that. And you spend too much time with five-year-olds.

MARQ

Five-year-olds don't keep their mouths shut.

BILL

I didn't think you were going to.

MARQ

It's not mine to tell.

(beat)

You do want to tell her about us, don't you?

BILL

When the time is right. Stop pressuring me.

MARQ

Or?

BILL

Or... I don't know. Just keep your pants on.

MARQ

Maybe I'll do just that. Because I'm starting to think this isn't about telling your mother at all.

BILL

What does that mean?

MARQ grabs his gym bag, heads toward the door.

MARQ

She invited me to her party.

MARQ exits. Lights out.

SCENE 5

A SIGN INDICATES THAT THIS IS "THE MORE FABULOUS YOU" SALON.

ELLEN sits in a chair; her hair has been done. BILL sits next to her, and they face a fourth wall mirror. PIERRE--French, not flamboyant--applies Ellen's makeup throughout the scene. Pierre has an authentic French accent, and a salient physical feature or two so that we know he is not Marq--e.g. mustache, mole, pony tail.

ELLEN

I'm sure we've met before.

PIERRE

I would remember someone so lovely.

ELLEN

I bet you say that to all your customers. Aargh. I'll get it. I'm usually much better with faces. Especially such handsome ones.

BILL

Awkward, Mom.

PIERRE

But not as good as I am with faces. You are going to be so *tres belle*, Ellen.

BILL

She's already beautiful.

PIERRE

(to Bill, sotto, direct)

So are you, hot pants.

BILL

What?

PIERRE

I say but she is not feeling beautiful, *n'est ce pas?*

ELLEN

Wait 'til you're fifty.

PIERRE

I will celebrate! To travel five decades around the sun is an achievement.

ELLEN

Not when the map of the whole journey is on your face.

PIERRE

Ellen, Ellen, you have lost your *l'amour propre*. You must embrace yourself, so others embrace you too. But when you have... *le cafard*, it spread like ugly ugly disease.

ELLEN

You can't cover... whatever that is with makeup.

PIERRE

Le cafard... the dumps?

BILL

The blues?

PIERRE

Yes! We don't cover them up the blues. We clean window so you can see inside. Right now, you are not seeing the more fabulous you! Then nobody else see the more fabulous you because you are not showing it. So please

(to Bill, sotto, direct)

show me the more fabulous you.

BILL

What?

PIERRE

I just ask your mother to show it!

ELLEN

I'm just not feeling there is one.

PIERRE

Are you not even showing your lover the more fabulous you?

BILL

That's kind of a personal/

ELLEN

/My lover? I'm married.

PIERRE

A spouse is not a lover?

ELLEN

Well...

PIERRE

You are turning away, *oui*? It is creating friction, Pierre knows.

(to Bill, direct)

No more avoiding the truth.

BILL

You know it's really amazing how much you--

Oui?

PIERRE

Look like my--

BILL

Marquesas's brother! Thank you! And that makes sense!
(to Pierre)
Billy's paramour is French.

BILL

Not French!

ELLEN

Maybe French. Do you like eclairs, Pierre?

PIERRE

So this paramour... Your son is clearly--

ELLEN

Devoted?

PIERRE

So knowledgable about hair. He know just what to do for you with this little flip.

ELLEN

He's in theater.

PIERRE

Ah, so he is--

ELLEN

Observant. He picks things up.

PIERRE

(to Bill)
Just things, mon cheri?

ELLEN

Like hair and makeup.

PIERRE

(to Bill)
Ah, that is why we are so familiar to each other. We have seen each other at the... plays.

BILL

Oh... probably... do you attend a lot of theater?

PIERRE

I certainly could be persuaded to attend more often.

BILL

I have a show happening soon.

PIERRE

Then I would like to come!

ELLEN

But that's weeks and weeks away. But maybe the two of you could see a show together.

PIERRE

Yes! If the paramour...

ELLEN

They don't have to do everything together. Billy deserves a boys' night once in a while.

PIERRE

Maman wants you to have a boys' night.

BILL

I'd love to.

PIERRE

We could triple! I would like to meet--

ELLEN

Marquesas. That's a real name. Marquesas.

PIERRE

Really? We have islands--

BILL

I know.

PIERRE

I would like to meet Marquesas.

ELLEN

Get in line. They've been dating for months and nada.

PIERRE

A photo, perhaps?

BILL

Camera shy.

ELLEN

I'm starting to think Billy's putting me on.

BILL

Marquesas exists!

ELLEN

Billy's bringing Marquesas to my party, aren't you, Billy?

BILL

(helpless look at Pierre)

Um... I'm working on it.

PIERRE

(to Bill, sotto, direct)

And working yourself right out of the market? *C'est dommage.*

ELLEN

What?

PIERRE

I say a mother deserves to meet her son's love interest.

ELLEN

Yes! You hear that, Billy? You should come to my party too, Pierre. Maybe Marquesas has a friend for you.

BILL

Not likely.

PIERRE

Ooh, I love a quartet.

(beat)

So... Ellen, what eye should we give you?

ELLEN

Anything but the evil eye.

PIERRE

Ha ha, *Le mauvais oeil*. No. No. Eye.

(points)

Eye.

BILL

Her eyes should be the focus.

PIERRE

D'accord.

BILL

Definitely use liners, not pencils.

PIERRE

Oui.

BILL

Brown and gold shadows, not blues.

PIERRE
(hands Bill the makeup brush)
Would you like a job?

BILL
What?

PIERRE
The makeup?

BILL
No, no, I don't know anything.

ELLEN
He's being modest. I defer all my fashion decisions to him.

PIERRE
So he select these
(harsh American accent)
fine sweat pants?

BILL
See, I told you not to--

ELLEN
That was all me, I'm afraid.

PIERRE
No more hiding.

PIERRE starts applying eye makeup.

PIERRE
Let me tell you a story. I have a lover for many years, so beautiful.

ELLEN
You were in love?

PIERRE
Oh oui, very much.

ELLEN
That's nice.

PIERRE
A model.

ELLEN
Like Brigitte Bardot?

PIERRE
Oui. Just like Brigitte Bardot. Only younger.

Of course. ELLEN

And brunet. PIERRE

ELLEN nods.

And male. PIERRE

Oh. Well I didn't see that coming. ELLEN

Seriously? BILL

You should never assume, Billy. It's rude. ELLEN

I will not tell you the name because you would never believe that someone so beautiful would be with me. PIERRE

Pierre! You are very handsome. ELLEN

But you're gorgeous! BILL

Merci, merci. And so he also tell me all the time but I don't believe him. I get jealous and tell him he rather be with other models who are more beautiful than I. I would turn him away. And he weep. "Pierre darling, why do you not see what I see? Why do you not see the more fabulous you?" And then I weep because I cannot. PIERRE

PIERRE wipes his eyes.

Oh! Gay Paree! I just got it. ELLEN

BILL/PIERRE

...

What happened? BILL
(to Pierre)

He try. I try. He find someone who believe him. We stop trying. PIERRE

How did you know? That he found someone else? ELLEN

PIERRE

He start to drop a name. Henri. Henri. Henri.
(deep breath)

I'm okay.

ELLEN

A name.

PIERRE

Oui. A casual fling, I forgive.

ELLEN

Oh, I don't know about...

PIERRE

But a name.

ELLEN

A name is bad?

PIERRE

Oui, tres mal.

ELLEN

Well, that's a relief. I mean, awful. It's so sad, Pierre.

BILL

Mom?

ELLEN

What? Your father isn't dropping any names.

PIERRE

And look at you. Why would he?

ELLEN

Oh, you--

BILL

Do you have someone... now?

PIERRE

Who wants to know, *mon cheri*?

ELLEN

Really, Billy.

PIERRE

It's okay. I am better now. I have a therapist. And I open
The More Fabulous You so I can help everyone believe that
whoever you are is perfect. And my clients must shout and
celebrate: "I am fabulous!" Say it, Ellen.

Oh, no. ELLEN

Oui, try it. PIERRE

I... am fabulous. ELLEN

Shout it! PIERRE

I am/ ELLEN

/Louder!/ PIERRE

/fabulous! ELLEN

You, too. PIERRE
(to Bill)

I can't. BILL

Come on, Billy. I did it. You're fabulous, aren't you? ELLEN

I feel-- BILL

No, no feels. Just be. I am fabulous! PIERRE

I am fab-- BILL

Like you mean it! PIERRE

I am fabulous. BILL

Again. PIERRE

I am fabulous. BILL

PIERRE

I am fabulous! *Alors*, if he ever come back, that is what I say and how I say it. *Mais hélas*, that is not to be. So--now finishing touch. The lips.

PIERRE pulls out a selection of lipstick.

BILL

Nothing too dark!

PIERRE

...!

PIERRE turns to Bill, turns up the lipstick. BILL gapes. PIERRE applies the lipstick to Ellen.

PIERRE

Voilà!

PIERRE, ELLEN, and BILL all look in the mirror.

BILL

Mom, you're gorgeous.

ELLEN

No, I'm fabulous!

BILL

Just wait 'til Dad gets a load of you.

ELLEN

Thank you, Pierre. I really hope you will come to my party. Nobody would dare be all gloomy around you! And you're not too bad to look at either.

BILL

Mom!

PIERRE

No, no, no, I am flattered. And honored. I will bring crepes. And I return the invitation.

PIERRE gets a couple of postcards and hands them to Bill and Ellen.

PIERRE

It is the fifth anniversary of The More Fabulous You. I am having a party too!

(to Bill, direct)

There is my number. You come to me, *oui?*

What?
BILL

PIERRE
I say you should both come to the open house.

ELLEN
Well, I would love to.

BILL
I would really love to.

PIERRE
(to Bill)
The lovely Marquesas is also welcome.

BILL
I'm sure that won't be possible.

PIERRE
Mais oui. There is only room for one of us. I hope it's me.

PIERRE kisses Ellen on both cheeks,
lingers a bit more when doing the same
to BILL.

PIERRE
A bientôt! And remember to let out the more fabulous you!

PIERRE waves as ELLEN and BILL exit.
PIERRE grabs a broom, looks in the
mirror, poses.

PIERRE
Tu es fabuleux.

PIERRE starts sweeping. Lights out.

SCENE 6

BILL'S APARTMENT.

Bill stands in front of a mirror.

BILL

"So I was thinking... I took my mother to see Pierre.

Lights up on other side of stage, where ELLEN, still buoyed from her session with Pierre, hums softly as she sips a glass of scotch. She looks good, confident, sexual.

BILL

And he was wonderful, just like you said. Really wonderful. And not bad looking. And wonderful. So I was thinking, you know... you're always dropping Horatio's name, and you seem to have this thing... I mean, even if it's not a thing, maybe you want it to be a thing? And Pierre asked me-- So I was thinking--

ELLEN dials Bill. Phone rings at Bill's apartment; BILL picks up.

ELLEN

I tried the scotch!

BILL

How much of it?

ELLEN

Oh stop it. I'm having fun.

BILL

Where's dad now?

ELLEN

In the kitchen taking a call. Billy, he said I looked radiant!

BILL

That's great. You do look radiant, and that's you shining, mom. All you.

ELLEN

It feels good to just let it aaaalll out. You should really try that. Let it out. Be freeee!

BILL

You sure it was just scotch?

ELLEN

I stopped at Wegmans on the way home, and nobody offered to carry my bags!

BILL

See?

ELLEN

And I had milk and ice cream and two bags of flour; that's heavy stuff! And that tall, cute boy just said "Have a nice day." I'm on fire!

(to O.S. husband)

Ya hear that, Butch, I'm on fire!

BILL

Go get 'em, Mom! Hey listen, can I take you to lunch on your birthday? Anywhere you want.

ELLEN

Anywhere?

BILL

You name it.

ELLEN

Tre Uomini. I've been wanting to try it.

BILL

Higher prices don't make food taste better.

ELLEN

You said anywhere.

BILL

See you next week.

ELLEN and BILL hang up. ELLEN looks in the mirror, and is very pleased with what she sees. She begins to unpack her husband's suitcase, humming, sipping her scotch. BILL walks, straightens the apartment as he talks. Ellen continues to unpack.

BILL

So, it's like this, Marq: maybe I do want to have that talk. I don't know. It's just so intense...

BILL picks up Mark's gym bag, opens it, pulls out Marq's T-shirt, smells it, tosses it into laundry basket. ELLEN pulls out a snowglobe, admires it, smiles.

BILL

I mean, I've never had this kind-- I've always had-- You are special to me. And important. But I'm doing your laundry. That's-- I just never saw myself, you know, settling down. With one person.

BILL pulls out another item, smells it, tosses it in the basket, as ELLEN continues to unpack.

BILL

I always thought I'd keep adding links to the chain... I like adding links to the chain... I never wanted to think about attaching a ball, you know? But now you're saying that marriage doesn't have to be a ball? I mean my parents have been together thirty years/

ELLEN

(to herself, as she puts the globe aside, with her collection if she has one onstage)

/Twenty-nine years. He never forgets/

BILL

/day in, day out, the same routine. That's hard to imagine.

BILL pulls out another item of clothing, smells, tosses it in a laundry basket. ELLEN happily continues to unpack.

BILL

And I certainly never thought it could mean considering... options.

BILL pulls out another item.

BILL

We don't have to make any rash moves. Just talk about what you had in mind. Maybe. I just want--

BILL smells, stops cold. He smells again.

BILL

You to explain this.

On Bill's last line, ELLEN pulls a pair of skimpy lady's underwear out of her husband's suitcase. ELLEN looks toward the door, which is upstage center. BILL looks toward same door.

MARQ and BUTCH enter, go to respective sides of stage. BILL holds up the clothing item, accusing. ELLEN holds the underwear with the same look, stricken. ELLEN and BILL throw the offending items at MARQ and BUTCH.

BUTCH

I can explain.

MARQ

I can explain.

BILL

You were jacking off at the gym? Sure. Everybody does it. Or somebody else was, and you picked up his shirt by accident. Or somebody was jacking somebody else off, and you got caught in the crossfire. Which one is it?

MARQ

I'm not going to lie to you.

BUTCH

It was the first time.

BILL and ELLEN walk downstage, pick up phones.

ELLEN

He said it was the first time.

BILL

Okay, okay, so maybe that's not so bad. That's workable, right? If it was just once.

MARQ

It was a one-time thing/

MARQ/BUTCH

/A mistake.

MARQ

We can work through this.

BILL

(to Marq)

You don't get to decide that!

(to Ellen)

So it probably didn't mean anything. You can work it out.

BUTCH

It didn't mean/

MARQ
/It didn't mean anything./

BUTCH
/anything. I had a weak moment.

ELLEN
(to Bill))
I don't think I believe him. All those trips. All those hotels. It's too easy.

MARQ
You know stuff like this happens at the gym all the time. But I don't even like the steam room, William, I swear. It's too hot, and I feel like I'm gonna pass out.

ELLEN
(to Butch)
It's those men you hang around with/

BILL
(to Marq)
/You all do it/

ELLEN
(to Butch)
/and you all tell each other it's okay. That's how you live with yourselves.

BUTCH
Come on, Ellen. We're men. We have/

BUTCH/ELLEN
/needs.

ELLEN
Needs! Well I have needs too!

BILL
(to Ellen)
Was he drunk?

ELLEN
I asked him that. Not that that's any excuse, because he shouldn't be putting himself in those situations.

MARQ/BUTCH
I wasn't drunk.

ELLEN
It just happened. Stone cold-sober and...

MARQ
It just/

BUTCH
/It just happened/

MARQ
/happened.

ELLEN
(to Bill)
He brought me a French girl and boy kissing in front of the Eiffel Tower.

BUTCH
You wanted something different!

ELLEN
(to Butch)
That was a clue, wasn't it? Of course I knew.
(to Bill)
But it was better when I thought I didn't.

BILL
It's always better to know.

BUTCH
I was careless, but it won't happen again.

MARQ
I don't want to build a relationship on a lie.

ELLEN
It's all my fault, isn't it? I let myself go. I was never in the mood.

MARQ/BILL
(to Bill/Ellen)
This is not your fault.

ELLEN
(to Bill)
I had too many fights with the sherpa.

BILL
(to Ellen)
I don't even know what that means.

ELLEN
(to Butch)
You're out there surrounded by shiny people all the time, and then you come home to me.
(to Bill)
Who can blame him? And what does it matter, Billy? He still betrayed me.

BILL
(to Ellen)
It's going to be okay/

MARQ
/It's going to be okay. It was just this once./

BILL
(to Ellen)
/It was just this once.

BUTCH
I love you, Ellen. Do you believe me?

ELLEN
(to Bill)
He says he still loves me.

BILL
See?

BUTCH
Do you love me Ellen?

MARQ
(to Bill)
I love you.

ELLEN
(to Butch)
I love you.

BILL/BUTCH
(to Marq/Ellen)
Is that true?

MARQ
We're just beginning. Please don't throw this away.

BUTCH
We've got thirty years, Ellen. You don't want to just throw that away.

ELLEN
(to Bill)
I can't just throw away twenty-nine years! Maybe I should move out.

BILL
Don't do anything rash/

BUTCH
/Don't do anything rash. We'll talk about it./

BILL
We'll talk about it.

MARQ
I can move out.

BILL
(to Marq)
You're not even moved in!

BUTCH
I don't want this/

MARQ
/Please don't let this be over/

BUTCH
/to be over.

ELLEN/BILL
Then why?

MARQ
I was hurt.

BUTCH
Bella, I didn't mean to hurt you.

ELLEN
What did you call me?

BUTCH
Bella.

ELLEN
Bella?

BUTCH
Beautiful. *Bella*.

MARQ
Now that you know/

BUTCH
/Can you just pretend you don't?/

MARQ
/can we talk about it?

ELLEN
(to Bill)
I just wanted you to know. I'll see you at lunch.

BILL
(to Ellen)
Yes, we'll have lunch. On your birthday.

ELLEN
(to Bill)
I wouldn't miss it.
(to Butch)
What's her name?

BUTCH
I don't remember.

ELLEN
(to Butch)
Do you remember mine?

BUTCH
Ellen, that's silly. Come here. We can talk--

ELLEN picks up her new snow globe, and
throws it. BUTCH is stunned.

BUTCH
I'll get you another one. Next time.

ELLEN
You think I'm silly. With my collection.

BUTCH
No, Ellen. Come here. Come be with me.

ELLEN
(to Butch)
I need to be alone.

BUTCH shakes his head, exits.

ELLEN
(to Bill)
You know, there never was a name.

BILL
Horatio.

ELLEN
(to Bill)
What honey?

ELLEN hangs up. Over next lines, goes
automatically to the show globe,
fingers the broken pieces. Lights fade
on Ellen.

MARQ

It wasn't Horatio.

BILL

But--

MARQ

I told you he was nothing to worry about.

BILL

Then just some random... Okay... Okay... that's not so... just tell me and--

MARQ

It was Seth.

BILL

Seth.

MARQ

The guy who owns the gym.

BILL

I know who Seth is. And you know him.

MARQ

But it's not what you're thinking.

BILL

He's a friend. And more apparently.

MARQ

It was just pre-wedding jitter stuff. He needed to let off some steam.

BILL

Why did he have to let if off on you?

MARQ

I was just there, and I needed to let off some steam myself, you know. I've been angry, William, and I've been trying not to let it affect us, and I know, I should have just put myself in time out, but you know, in the moment...

BILL

Good taste, poor judgment.

MARQ

I'm sorry. And Seth is sorry. It's not gonna happen again. The man's getting married.

BILL

You said that doesn't matter.

MARQ

Of course it matters.

BILL

Well, I guess now Horatio can be your date. You're the man of the hour.

MARQ

William...

MARQ reaches for him, but BILL isn't having it.

BILL

If you were going to do whatever you wanted, without waiting/

MARQ

/What?/

BILL

/until we talked, you could have told me. I was getting ready to discuss that, and you just jumped--

MARQ

I want to discuss this! I was a doodyhead, and I know it. And I'm sorry. I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry infinity.

BILL

Grow up.

MARQ

I want to be a grown-up, but you need to be one first!

BILL

Just so you know, I planned lunch with my mother on her birthday. At Tre Uomini. I was actually thinking of asking you to come.

MARQ

I still can. I'd love--

BILL

Oh no. No way. "Hi Mom, this is Marquesas, my cheating boyfriend." And that's why I don't want to get married.

MARQ

...How convenient that this happened right when you were going to tell your mother.

BILL

I'm not the one who threatened to keep his pants on--and didn't.

MARQ
So the plan was lunch, and by next week, I'd be all moved in.

BILL
I guess that wasn't what you really wanted after all.

MARQ
I have always been honest about what I wanted.

BILL
I'm just saying maybe it's a sign.

MARQ
Aren't signs great? They keep you from having to make decisions.

MARQ starts to exit.

BILL
Wait.

MARQ turns back.

BILL
Don't forget this.

BILL hands him the gym bag. MARQ takes it, exits.

SCENE 7

TREVI FOUNTAIN, ROME. STEREOTYPICAL PIAZZA MUSIC PLAYS.

ELLEN, still looking good, stares at the water. TREVI DUDE approaches, dressed in a toga. TREVI DUDE wolf whistles.

TREVI DUDE
Bella, you're a long way from home.

ELLEN
I broke my bicycle, and I don't know how I got here.

TREVI DUDE
Alitalia?

ELLEN
No, no my husband travels all over. He fixes thrust bearings, and he gets to see the world. I've never even been on an airplane.

TREVI DUDE
Then you wished to be in Rome.

ELLEN
It's more foreign and beautiful than YouTube videos. I don't ever want to leave. Why aren't you speaking Italian?

TREVI DUDE
Do you know Italian?

ELLEN
Just *bella*.

TREVI DUDE
As you are.

ELLEN
Oh... Stop. It's true what they say about Italian men, isn't it?

TREVI DUDE
Only when in the presence of beautiful women.

ELLEN
My goodness, I love it here.

TREVI DUDE
You must throw a coin in the fountain, then, so you can come back.

I don't have a--

ELLEN

TREVI DUDE produces a coin from Ellen's ear.

Over your shoulder.

TREVI DUDE

ELLEN throws the coin over her shoulder into the fountain.

Now you will return to the Eternal City.

TREVI DUDE

Eternal. Forever.

ELLEN

I do.

TREVI DUDE

You're married?

ELLEN

TREVI DUDE magically produces another coin.

The second coin means you will find romance.

TREVI DUDE

The wheel fell off my bike.

ELLEN

You can fix it. I throw coins in here all the time.

TREVI DUDE

Does it work?

ELLEN

Sometimes no, many times yes. When yes, life is *bella*.

TREVI DUDE

What about your wife?

ELLEN

What she doesn't know...

TREVI DUDE

There are secrets.

ELLEN

Is the cat in the bag if its meows can be heard in France?

TREVI DUDE

ELLEN
Maybe its time to let it out.

TREVI DUDE
And maybe it's love.

ELLEN
Oh! That's amore!

TREVI DUDE
(sings)
That's amore!

ELLEN
Do you know Vito Corleone?

TREVI DUDE
He's dead.

ELLEN
Was he a nice man?

TREVI DUDE
He didn't mean to hurt people. And he loved his family.
Family is the most important thing.

ELLEN throws the second coin over her
shoulder.

TREVI DUDE
You will dance cheek to cheek bella Ellen! Ride a bicycle
built for two! You are a woman of the world!

ELLEN
I've been to France, you know. I rode my bike.

TREVI DUDE
Big deal.

ELLEN
I have a snow globe of the Eiffel Tower. Two actually.

TREVI DUDE
Plastic.

ELLEN
The wheel fell off my bicycle.

TREVI DUDE
But you still made it to Rome.

ELLEN
And when in Rome...

TREVI DUDE
What is it you think we do in Rome?

ELLEN
Things I've never even thought about.

TREVI DUDE
The wheels on the bike go round and round.

ELLEN magically makes a coin appear.

TREVI DUDE
Is there more where that came from?

ELLEN contemplates the coin.

TREVI DUDE
The third coin is marriage.

ELLEN
I know.

ELLEN holds the coin; will she throw it or not? ELLEN turns to TREVI DUDE, and seductively puts the coin in her bra.

ELLEN
Maybe you'd like to show me around?

TREVI DUDE
I would be delighted--

ELLEN
How do you say "Voulez vous coucher" in Italian?

TREVI DUDE beams; he and ELLEN exit touching.

Lights out.

SCENE 8

TRE UOMINI RESTAURANT.

ELLEN and BILL are seated, remnants of lunch between them, and a piece of cake on the table. ELLEN looks very nice, and is not just dressed nicely, but hip and flattering; she actually *looks and feels* younger. GIANCARLO has an authentic Italian accent, and easily changed features that distinguish him from Marq.

GIANCARLO
(finishing song)
Happy birthday to you....

ELLEN
Thank you, Giancarlo.

GIANCARLO
(flirtatious)
You are very welcome. I hope your thirtieth year was most exquisite, full of delicious adventures.

ELLEN
Thirty... oh... you... You know, you remind me of someone--
(to Bill)
Marquesas's brother?

BILL
Not even close.

GIANCARLO
(to Bill, equally flirtatious)
And what a good-looking date she has. Who wouldn't have a good birthday with you across the table?

BILL
No, she's my--

GIANCARLO
You both enjoy your cake now.

GIANCARLO smiles and exits.

ELLEN
Well, that was embarrassing.

BILL
Just a little. Like I felt every year at Friday's until I was sixteen!

ELLEN

Kids like being the center of attention; grown-ups do not.
(gesturing to waiter))
But that, that is just asking for attention.

BILL

He did have a nice voice.

ELLEN

Voice? I hardly noticed it. You don't think he's... excuse me, but super hot?

BILL

Super hot?

ELLEN

The young girls at the office say that.

BILL

Sure, but--

ELLEN

You said I wasn't old.

BILL

You're not.

ELLEN

So he's hot, right?

BILL

Sure, if you go for the muscular, built like an ox, can-see-his-six-pack-through-his-shirt type.

ELLEN

I think his back was rippling as he walked away.

BILL

(raising a finger as if to put
it in the dimples)

I bet he has back dimples.

ELLEN

And his hair. Men my age don't have hair like that.

BILL

Even at my age, it invites soft tousling in fading moonlight.

ELLEN

What?

BILL

Just agreeing with you.

ELLEN
So you do think he was flirting?

BILL
Maybe a little.

ELLEN
Because I really don't know anymore. After thirty/

BILL
/Twenty-nine/

ELLEN
/years of marriage, you get used to being invisible to good-looking men. Am I putting off some kind of newly single radar or something?

BILL
I'm feeling some kind of radar. And you're not single.

ELLEN
I could be. An apartment lease signature away.

BILL
You're not gonna do that. Dad still loves you.

ELLEN
Did he tell you that?

BILL
I just know.

ELLEN
You with all your so-called relationship experience.

BILL
I have relationship experience. And other experience. And I know that one mistake doesn't have to mean it's all over. What about all that commitment stuff? And a stable home for me? I'm supposed to be able to come home for Christmas, and have both my parents there, not have to figure out where to spend Christmas Eve and where to spend Christmas and meet new girlfriends and boyfriends and pretend I'm happy about it.

ELLEN
So I'm supposed to pretend for your sake?

BILL
Oh, you don't want to pretend?

ELLEN
...Nobody should have to pretend. Especially today. Come on, it's my birthday.

(picks up her fork)

ELLEN (CONT'D)

He only brought one fork. Let's see if we can get him back over here.

BILL

Is that necessary?

ELLEN

It's fun. It's not every day I get attention from the likes of that, and I need practice now.

ELLEN hands Bill the fork, motions to the waiter. GIANCARLO enters.

GIANCARLO

Is everything okay?

ELLEN

Oh, it's perfect. I was just wondering if you could please bring another fork so that I can share this luscious cake with my son?

GIANCARLO reaches into his apron pocket for another set of napkin-wrapped silverware and puts it on the table, flirts mercilessly.

GIANCARLO

It is obvious you limit your sweets to preserve your girlish figure.

ELLEN

Oh, you charmer.

GIANCARLO

(to Bill)

Do you want to share the luscious cake?

BILL

Yes, it looks heavenly.

GIANCARLO

For you, nothing a long sweaty session at the gym won't take care of. Enjoy.

GIANCARLO exits.

ELLEN

(unwrapping the fork)

See, he did it again!

BILL

(digging into cake)

Yes, yes he did. There was definitely flirting happening there.

ELLEN

Mmm... I couldn't stop staring at his chest. I think--
(lowers voice)
I think he has a... a nipple ring.

BILL

I did notice that.

BILL takes another voracious bite.

ELLEN

Are those... Is the cake that good?/

BILL

/Delicious/

ELLEN

/Is that supposed to be sexy?

BILL

Yes, yes, I believe it is.

ELLEN takes a bite.

ELLEN

Because all I can think about his how much it would hurt.
(This isn't that good.) There's so much to learn about the
new dating world. I could join a gym!

BILL

You are not reentering the dating world! You and Dad--

ELLEN

(hand up)

Birthday. I don't want to talk about me and Dad. Let's talk
about you. Why didn't you invite Marquesas to lunch?

BILL

...It's complicated.

ELLEN

Honey, even the most perfect relationships are complicated.
And by the most unexpected things. Like you're going along
great and then you find out his cellphone now has a lock on
it. Bam!

(bangs the table)

Complication.

BILL

Everybody has--

ELLEN

And that he has a separate bank account. Bam!
(bang)

ELLEN (CONT'D)

Another one.

BILL

But I thought--

ELLEN

And that he thrust his bearing into some Italian wench.
(bang, bang)

BAM BAM!

BILL

Mom! I thought you didn't want to talk about it.

ELLEN

I'd like to bam them all. Right in the bajingo!

BILL

[!!!]

ELLEN

I'm sorry.

BILL

No, no, you should let it out.

ELLEN

Do you think if I banged that waiter, I would feel any better?

BILL

I wonder.

ELLEN

Just rip off his shirt and throw him on the floor.

BILL

Shred his pants right up the inseams. Tear his buttons off with your teeth and spit 'em out like cherry pits.

ELLEN

What?

BILL

Just wondering with you.

ELLEN

Maybe if I did it, I would understand why your father did it. Maybe we'd be even and I could just let it go.

BILL

Maybe.

ELLEN

Oh, what am I talking about? Giancarlo's just making a middle-aged woman feel good on her birthday.

BILL

It probably wouldn't work anyway.

ELLEN

But I like it, Billy. It's been a long time since anyone's tried to make me feel good.

BILL

Come on. You're gonna give him another chance, right? I mean, twenty-nine years/

ELLEN

/Thirty years I gave him.

BILL

Don't you miss him?

ELLEN

Not the way I thought I would. More like you miss your favorite shoes when they finally wear out. You look for them for a second before you remember, and then you put on another pair. A really fierce pair.

BILL

Not an ache? Like you reach out in your sleep and you're grasping at air? And then you're gasping for air, and... you just... just...

ELLEN

(cluelessly considers)

Nope. Nothing like that.

BILL

Listen, Mom, forgiveness can be hard, but maybe... maybe we should both really think about it.

ELLEN

I think I have forgiven, Billy, but I waited last time he told me to wait, and I don't want to run out of time again. The clock-- Wait, what are you saying?

BILL

Just that I understand how you're feeling.

ELLEN

Oh. Oh! Billy. Did that-- Your--/

BILL

Mom.

ELLEN
/cheat on you? Another bam in the bajingo!

BILL
Mom.

ELLEN
Maybe it's for the best. You deserve better. And think of how much we can see each other now. Oh, we can cruise together!/
/Mom!/
/We'll have a ball! I've always wanted to do the Riviera. They have naked beaches!

BILL

ELLEN

BILL
Mom!! If you want to talk serious, let's do it. No pretending. Not today, you said.

ELLEN
I don't know what you're--

BILL
Yes you do. Everybody does.

ELLEN
I don't want to assume anything. It's rude.

BILL
Try one teeny little assumption.

ELLEN
...You know other people with nipple rings?

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