

UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL OKLAHOMA
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Jackson College of Graduate Studies

The Black Jessamine

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

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WITH CREATIVE WRITING EMPHASIS

By

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Edmond, Oklahoma

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The Black Jessamine

A THESIS
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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

University of Central Oklahoma

Edmond, Oklahoma

NAME: STEVEN ERIC RECKINGER

TITLE OF THESIS: THE BLACK JESSAMINE

DIRECTOR OF THESIS: LINDA MCDONALD

PAGES: 100

ABSTRACT:

The play follows a prosperous family in an Oklahoma rural town. Garret Bedford is the owner of a large oil company. The town was founded on the Bedfords' wealth, therefore the residents regard Garret as a saint. However, Garret is an alcoholic, abusive man who has an adulterous affair with his sister's daughter, Eliza. The affair turns out to be a setup for Eliza and her husband, Hector, to exploit her uncle and blackmail him into giving them ten million dollars.

When the play opens, Garret's other sister, Sally, had recently died from cancer. Sally's son, Ayden, an army soldier stationed in Iraq, returns to town for her funeral. There, he is confronted by Garret's son, Billy, who happened to stumble upon a photograph of Garret's and

Eliza's affair. Ayden gets caught up in a family crisis, which ultimately leads to more secrets. With the family on the verge of social destruction, Ayden attempts to unravel the mystery of Eliza's notorious town reputation and hopefully find a way to end his family's conflict.

The Black Jessamine

by Steven Reckinger

CAST OF CHARACTERS

<u>Ayden Bedford:</u>	Male, 29-years-old. Army soldier. Reasonable, sometimes pessimistic. Tends to avoid confrontation.
<u>Garret Bedford:</u>	Male, 59-years-old. Owner of a large oil company. Alcoholic, verbally abusive, stubborn, religious fanatic.
<u>Diane Bedford:</u>	Female, 54-years-old. Wife of Garret. Naïve, overly trusting, passive.
<u>Billy Bedford:</u>	Male, 30-years-old. Son of Garret and Diane. Ambitious, hard-working individual, sensitive. Wants to follow in his father's footsteps.
<u>Eliza Sanz:</u>	Female, 27-years-old. Attractive, has more street smarts than innate intelligence. Manipulative and greedy.
<u>Hector Sanz:</u>	Male, 32-years-old. Husband of Eliza. Determined, gullible, a bit compulsive.
<u>Julie Brighton:</u>	Female, 27-years-old. Ayden's ex-girlfriend. Compassionate, affectionate, and modest. Likes to dwell on the past.

Carson Vale: Male, 40-years-old. Hit man. Cowardly.

Leslie Elric: Male, 61-years-old. Butler. Strong English-style etiquette, intelligent, warmhearted. Experienced in life.

Bernard: Male, handsome, young model. Has an affair with Eliza. Self-centered and arrogant.

Simon Marlowe: Male, funeral director.

SCENE

A small town in Oklahoma.

TIME

The present.

A Critical Introduction to *The Black Jessamine*

The Black Jessamine is my first attempt at writing a full-length stage play. The process of constructing the story was comprised of multiple drafts and revisions. In the early stages of development, the plot seemed to work best in prose format. This way, I could get into the characters' minds and show their inner struggles through a heavy use of description. The original concept was to be an erotic, supernatural narrative, told from the perspective of a young man who becomes obsessed with a painting of a woman. This infatuation would allow him to imagine the woman coming to life and have sexual intercourse with him, as a means of self-gratification. The story was never written, but the idea remained intact for a possible screenplay that catered to an audience that fancies filmmaker Zalman King's work, the man responsible for *9 ½ Weeks* and *Red Shoe Diaries*.

The Black Jessamine is a portrait of an American family, spoiled by wealth and affected by social conditions like misogyny and religion. The Bedfords are a mixed breed of people. Garret, the wealthy oil company owner, is someone who means well, but he is the product of a broken home. His impulsive behavior and negative criticism of the

people around him indicate his own parents were strict and possibly abusive. Although he doesn't physically harm his loved ones, his verbal abuse comes off strong and ultimately shapes the way his family perceives him. He isn't a character that demands sympathy, but he is one that should evoke some kind of psychological evaluation of parenthood in today's society.

Like many women today who don't fend for themselves against vicious husbands, Diane is an obvious victim. She is obedient to Garret, not by fear, but by old-fashioned standards that women are subservient to their husbands. Not until the very end does Diane gain the courage to confront Garret and prove she does indeed have a backbone. She isn't naïve in any way, but her submissive behavior compels her to avoid situations she feels might be damaging to her self-esteem. Diane's lack of willpower is loosely based on my older sister, whose confidence was always challenged by the men in her life.

I have a growing interest in psychologically troubled characters, especially when it concerns sexual perversion. My interest with human sexuality is rather tame, but the incorporation of aberrant sexual behavior can strengthen the progress of characters. For example, the antagonist Eliza Sanz is an overly sexualized being who uses peculiar

methods like having sex with relatives to get what she wants. I wanted her to resemble a Siren, the Greek mythological creature that lures men into a trap. The story of the three Sirens has paved the way to a familiar theme found in many stories today. But the idea of a seductress using her body as a sort of weapon is one I find appealing. The development of Eliza's character mostly stemmed from the Greek myth. In addition, I included the vampiric lore of a succubus, a female demon possessing the power to seduce a man until the point of exhaustion or death. By the end of the play, Eliza's power over Garret literally causes his demise.

As *The Black Jessamine* changed from prose to a screenplay, I wanted to be certain the sexual nature of the characters stayed the same. The screenplay was to include a heavy dose of early American history, in order to tell the story of an art dealer and a female spirit, hence the succubus characteristics. The integration of history was to contribute to a more artistic method of storytelling, while providing a complex narrative rather than to end up with an adult film with no real purpose other than to provoke the audience.

When I was writing the screenplay, I began to notice the small number of locales, not to mention the large

amount of character interaction through dialogue. This had me thinking about the possibility of transforming the film script into a play. There was no real concern about overly complicated set designs. In addition, the telling of the story focused primarily on my protagonist, a young art dealer named Ayden Scott. Most of the action was to take place in a small art gallery where a businessman sells the portrait of Eliza to Ayden for a small fee. The idea was influenced by a number of things, such as Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the cable TV erotic series *Red Shoe Diaries*, and *The Twilight Zone*.

Many of the features in that draft were abandoned and a new concept for the overall story emerged. Eliza Sands became Eliza Sanz, a real person married to a Hispanic life insurance salesman. Her deep sexual characteristics remained, but instead of a supernatural tempest, she turned into a femme fatale inspired by many of the film noir classics from the 1940s and '50s. A major influence for Eliza emerged from Billy Wilder's film noir classic *Double Indemnity*, where the character of Phyllis Dietrichson convinces an insurance rep to kill her husband for the financial reward.

With Ayden Scott as the protagonist, he serves as the middleman for his family's dilemma. Taking many of my

ideas from examples of film noir like Billy Wilder's *Sunset Blvd.* and Fritz Lang's *Scarlet Street*, I deliberately made Ayden's personality somber. Like many protagonists from the old crime films, their sole purpose lies in the unraveling of the mystery. There are hints of history spread throughout the play that are used to provide a more realistic character, but for the most part, Ayden acts as the moderator, trying to keep certain people in order and avoid any violent confrontations between the characters. His failure to restore order during the finale shows he is no hero by any means. However, he does represent a kind of person that helps the other characters see the error of their ways. This type of morality tale can often be seen in the crime films after the Hays production code went into effect in 1934, demonstrating that crime doesn't pay.

I discovered how enjoyable it is to write the flawed characters, as opposed to the protagonist or other 'righteous' characters. Garret is probably the one character I found myself being drawn to because of his unreasonable views on life. Technically, he isn't the antagonist, but in some ways, he is worse. His unsympathetic nature is used to let the audience identify with the other characters around him. In other words, he becomes a reflection of the villain, but also brings out

the good in everyone else, which can be seen by his constant display of malice against the people around him.

I made him a religious fanatic for two reasons. For one, he signifies the Bible-thumping population of the Bible Belt. And two, he simply becomes a moral contradiction, when he attempts to justify his actions with religious arguments. Garret is an example of constant opposition to religious principle. His views on homosexuality are extreme and cause him to scorn anyone associated with that lifestyle. He is an adulterer, not to mention one who indulges in incest. He frequently gets drunk, occasionally lashes out at his family, and places money on a higher level than his loved ones. He is perhaps the most tragic figure of the play, taking into consideration that he doesn't believe his actions are unjust, but behind the shadows, he is as vile as many of the film noir antagonists that stalk the back alleys and hold up little, old ladies at gunpoint.

For me, Garret was a fun character to write. His personality sometimes reflects my own father's in ways of stubbornness and compulsiveness. In other ways, Garret is the opposite of what I believe my father stands for, which is an undying need to support his family financially, mentally, and spiritually. There are personal touches

found within every character I write, but I intended Garret to symbolize the American dream. A common, uneducated man rises to the top of society, only to find a tremendous amount of wealth through motivation and hard work. However, the American dream is meant to be questioned by Garret's lack of empathy for his employees, his carelessness for his son, and his egocentricity. I attempted to show how the American dream can be flawed through the actions and ideas of a man who takes advantage of it.

Billy is eager to follow in his father's footsteps. He is a product of his environment, a hard-working individual who is desperate to succeed on the occupational ladder. He is a lost figure, twisted up inside with guilt and the fear of rejection. Some of his qualities reflect how I saw myself in my younger years, an individual who wanted to make a mark on the world, but was constantly burdened with negative criticism. I intended to portray his homosexual lifestyle not as a weakness, but as a distinguishing feature that points out his parents' mistakes of raising him. Billy's tragic end becomes a social comment on the disappointment of parents regarding their children's decisions in life.

To avoid confusion with the relations of the characters, I decided to change Ayden's last name to match Garret's family name. In order to do this, I made Ayden's mother, Sally, give birth to him out of wedlock. I also made Sally the artist, since her character seems to correlate with her wild lifestyle and liberal perspective on life. If Garret acts as the religious figure, Sally represents the opposite. However, her moral standards are more righteous than Garret's, given that she embodies the image of a saint. Even though her character isn't physically present in the story, her influence is used to portray a more virtuous individual than the others.

There were many social themes I wanted to tackle. Some of them are more obvious than others, like the depiction of the American family and homosexuality. Then there are those that reveal themselves occasionally whenever the time is appropriate, such as alcoholism and adultery. Finally, there are themes that are obscure, hidden in the shadows and based on interpretation like political agendas and spousal abuse. The clarity of social factors is typically left to the audience's interpretation, but the opportunity is still there for the writer to speak about his or her personal views.

I will succumb to the realization that *The Black Jessamine* is not *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Nevertheless, the story should be viewed as an important lesson, concerning several of the social issues that occupy the manuscript. It is a more realistic piece than I am used to writing, so some of the themes may feel underdeveloped. But like most literary works, there is always room for improvement, based on the changing aspects of our society. In the end, *The Black Jessamine* doesn't necessarily feel like a first novel the author would stash in the back of his or her closet to collect dust. For me, it has become another stepping stone on my journey as a writer, but a much larger stone than some.

ACT I

SCENE 1

SETTING: Funeral Home state room, evening.

AT RISE: Visitation in progress. A young-looking woman lies in an elaborate casket. Sprays of colorful flowers and artwork of Oklahoman landscapes adorn the arrangement. GARRET BEDFORD, 54, DIANE BEDFORD, 49, and BILLY BEDFORD, 30, stand together gazing at the deceased woman. LESLIE ELRIC, 61, stands behind the family, his hands folded in front.

(SIMON MARLOWE, 60, enters and immediately walks over to them.)

SIMON

What do you think, Mr. Bedford? Does she meet your expectations?

GARRET

You did...a fine job, Mr. Marlowe. But there's something about her. Just can't put my finger on it. She don't look much like herself.

SIMON

I used a different shade of eye shadow to make her look--

GARRET

--That's it. Her makeup ain't right.

SIMON

I wasn't sure you would approve, but your wife--

GARRET

--I certainly don't approve. You reckon Saint Peter would recognize her when she walks through the gates of Heaven?

SIMON

I...really couldn't say.

GARRET

Well, I guess there's no use makin' a fuss over it.

SIMON

I'm sorry if I caused any--

GARRET

Pink was Sally's favorite color. She would've loved her eyes to look pink.

DIANE

Garret, dear. It's fine.

GARRET

Excuse me, Diane. Try not to interrupt when I'm talkin'. It's rude.

SIMON

Pink eye makeup doesn't look natural for her skin tone. I wanted her to look presentable. But since you're unsatisfied, I'll deduct it from the overall cost.

GARRET

Now you made me a satisfied man, Mr. Marlowe.

SIMON

And I suppose you'd like to hear about the registries.

GARRET

What about them?

SIMON

We've already gone through two books. Your company workers have made quite the impression.

GARRET

You wanna know something about oil riggers, Mr. Marlowe? They're always looking for some excuse to take time off.

SIMON

I'm sure they just wanted to pay their respects. Granted, they may not have known Ms. Bedford, but you're an icon to them. They did it in your favor.

GARRET

Only 'cause I sign over their checks. Good night, Mr. Marlowe.

SIMON

Good evening, Mr. Bedford.

(Mr. Marlowe steps away.)

DIANE

Just for your information, I was the one who suggested that color.

(Garret gives Diane an angry look.)

GARRET

Yeah, so I heard.

DIANE

Your sister needed a woman's opinion. Pink would've made her look too fake.

GARRET

That ain't the point. I decide what's right for my sister. I didn't get a say in Debra's funeral. That good-for-nothing husband of hers didn't let me.

DIANE

Sorry. It won't happen again.

GARRET

Make sure it don't.

(AYDEN BEDFORD, 29, dressed in formal army attire, enters, sees the Bedfords and makes his way over to them.)

GARRET

Ayden, my boy. I was beginning to wonder if you'd show up.

(Ayden and Garret hug.)

AYDEN

Sorry, I'm late. I had to fly into Chicago. Dallas was closed due to thunderstorms. Pushed me back a couple of hours.

GARRET

Know all about that. Important thing is that you're here.

DIANE

Look at you. I always said you looked handsome in a uniform.

AYDEN

Thanks, Aunt Diane.

(Ayden hugs Diane. She offers a friendly kiss on his cheek. Ayden turns to Billy, smiles as they both embrace.)

AYDEN

How've things been with you, Billy?

BILLY

Still gettin' by, I guess.

AYDEN

You look good.

(Billy smiles timidly.)

(Ayden takes notice of Leslie.)

AYDEN (cont'd)

It's nice to see you here too, Leslie.

LESLIE

Of course, Mr. Bedford, I--

GARRET

Pay no attention to Leslie. He's here on the account of us. I insisted he join us in our mourning.

AYDEN

Oh, well, it's still good to see you.

(Leslie appears embarrassed by Garret's bluntness.)

AYDEN (cont'd)

Hey, Uncle Garret, I want to thank you for helping out with the funeral arrangements.

(Ayden looks toward the casket.)

GARRET

Think nothing of it. And don't worry yourself, Ayden. Your mama looks beautiful as ever, except for one tiny detail.

(Diane turns to Garret, confused.)

DIANE

I thought you said to let it go.

GARRET

Never mind what I said, Diane.

AYDEN

Is it serious?

GARRET

No, no. Just a tiny mix-up with the makeup, that's all. She ain't like we planned her to be.

AYDEN

Well, give me a minute. I'd like to say hello.

GARRET

You do what you need to do. We'll just be right over here.

(Ayden walks to the casket, while the Bedfords shift to the other side of stage.)

DIANE

(Softer tone of voice.)

Poor thing. It must kill him to see her like this.

GARRET

Three years, and he comes back to a lifeless body.

DIANE

It's not fair, I tell you.

GARRET

Mighty hard not to worry about her sinful ways when she was alive, but I know God can be forgiving. I'm sure she's in his hands now.

DIANE

Come now. That's no way to talk about your sister at a time like this.

GARRET

Just stating the obvious.

BILLY

Hey, Pop. What do you say about Ayden staying at our place tonight? He probably shouldn't be alone right now.

GARRET

I don't see anything wrong with that. Might do him some good.

(Billy rushes to Ayden, who stands over the casket in silence.)

BILLY

(Whispers.)

Ayden, I know now's not a good time, but there's something we need to discuss.

(Ayden appears frozen.)

BILLY (cont'd)

It's all right. You keep doing what you're doing. Let's not give Pop any suspicious ideas. So whenever you're free...

(Billy glances back at his parents, then heads back to them.)

(After a moment, Ayden returns to them.)

GARRET

What do you think?

AYDEN

I couldn't see anything wrong with her. She looks better than she has in years.

GARRET

Thought the same thing myself.

(Diane and Billy exchange looks.)

AYDEN

I wish I could've seen her before she died.

GARRET

It's better this way. She went through a lot of suffering with that cancer. She didn't want you seein' her that way.

AYDEN

But it feels empty, knowing she passed on without a proper goodbye.

DIANE

It's that awful war's fault. If only you didn't have to be away from your family.

GARRET

Diane! Control yourself. That war's being fought for a damn good reason and I'm sure Ayden here is proud to serve his country.

AYDEN

She has a point. Being overseas made things too distant for Mother and me. We were only able to communicate through emails once a week, if that. Internet wasn't the most reliable thing over there.

BILLY

It's good you could make it to her funeral though.

AYDEN

No way I'd miss it.

GARRET

So, how long you stayin'?

AYDEN

Not long. I managed to find a buyer for Mom's gallery. Once we meet and discuss the terms, I'll probably leave. I only have two weeks for emergency leave anyway.

GARRET

You know you have months 'til that studio's in your hands?

AYDEN

It's only going to be a casual meeting. The buyer understands the conditions. I'd rather get all this taken care of in advance anyway.

GARRET

I don't reckon your mama would like you sellin' her pride and joy, but I understand she left it to you. Ain't nothin' I can do about it.

AYDEN

We talked about it before. She'd want me to benefit from the financial gain, rather than run a place I have no interest in.

GARRET

Would be more than happy to take it off your hands. Whatever that buyer wants for it, I'll match it. Like I told Diane, having an art gallery can improve my image. You know, show the folks my cultural side.

AYDEN

Sorry, Uncle, but I doubt my mother would want you to take advantage of her one and only true love. It wouldn't be right.

GARRET

One and only true love? You don't give her much credit. You were her true love.

AYDEN

Okay, her second love then.

BILLY

Ayden, Pop would like you to stay with us for the night.

AYDEN

I was planning to stay at Mom's place.

BILLY

We all think it's best if you stay with us tonight. Dealing with your mama's death shouldn't be something you have to do alone.

AYDEN

Well...

GARRET

Billy's right. You should stay at our place.

AYDEN

If you think it's best.

GARRET

Good, it's settled. And before I forget to mention it, we're having some people over.

AYDEN

You mean a party?

GARRET

Ain't a party really. More like a prayer meeting where people can come together and pray for Sally's soul.

AYDEN

Are you implying she needs to be prayed for? Because as far as I'm concerned, she was as close to a saint as you can get.

GARRET

Remember, nobody's perfect. And your mama, especially, did some things that could be cleansed.

AYDEN

You're referring to my father, aren't you?

GARRET

It's a damn shame. You being a bastard child and all. Don't get me wrong, I love you like a son, but your mama having you out of wedlock, it ain't right in the eyes of the Lord.

BILLY

Hey, Pop, it's probably not a good time to bring that up.

AYDEN

It's okay, Billy. I know he doesn't think too much of my father. Hell, I didn't even know him that well. You probably are the closest thing I had to a real dad.

GARRET

Almost brings tears to my eyes hearin' you say that.

AYDEN

I'm sure you think those aren't big shoes to fill. But I hope for my mother's sake, you can learn to forgive and forget.

GARRET

Yeah, that shouldn't be too hard.

DIANE

I'm so glad we can set aside our differences. Now, let's focus on what's really important.

GARRET

You guys ready to head out?

DIANE

Well, that's not really what I--

AYDEN

Yeah, let's go.

DIANE

But, Ayden, wouldn't you rather spend some more time with your mother?

AYDEN

It's fine, Aunt Diane. I just wanted to see her beautiful again. No regrets.

GARRET

Okay, let's go.

(The four of them begin to leave. ELIZA SANZ, 29, and HECTOR SANZ, 34, enter, meeting them halfway.)

HECTOR

Well, well. What are the odds of us running into each other like this?

GARRET

(Apprehensive.)

What're you two doing here?

ELIZA

Aunt Sally was my relative too. Hello, Aunt Diane.

(To Ayden.)

Hi, Ayden. It's good to see you. Let me tell you how sorry I am. I know it hurts losing a mother.

DIANE

We're so glad you both could come. Aren't we, dear?

GARRET

What? Oh, yeah. Very glad. But unfortunately we don't have time to stick around and cry on each other's shoulder. We're leavin'.

ELIZA

Oh, really? Well, we just came to pay our respects. We won't be long.

(Turns back to Ayden.)

Ayden, if there is anything you need, don't hesitate to call, okay?

HECTOR

Come on, honey. We don't want to keep them any longer than necessary now, do we?

GARRET

I suggest you listen to your husband.

(Eliza gazes at Garret irritably.)

ELIZA

I hear you're having a party later this evening.

GARRET

Don't have the faintest idea what you're talkin' about.

ELIZA

Well, you don't have to worry. Hector and I don't plan to attend. I just find it a little odd to hold a celebration at a time like this.

GARRET

You need to get your facts straight, Eliza. There ain't nothing to celebrate. All we're doing is a little bit of prayin', that's all.

ELIZA

Just remember Aunt Sally's not the only one to pray for.

DIANE

We keep everyone in our prayers, including you.

ELIZA

Thanks, Aunt Diane. But I wasn't referring to me either.

(Eliza passes Garret a swift glance.)

GARRET

Well, have fun.

DIANE

Garret! How can you say such a thing at a time like this?

GARRET

I mean, take care.

(Garret and company leave.)

END OF SCENE 1

SCENE 2

SETTING:

Garret's and Diane's house,
elaborately decorated interior.
Night.

AT RISE:

Ayden stands alone in the kitchen.
Sounds of chatter and laughter can
be heard in the distance. Ayden
pours a glass of wine, stares at
it for a second and sighs.

(Leslie enters.)

LESLIE

Ah, Mr. Bedford, I assume loneliness isn't the best of
company.

AYDEN

You'd be surprised, Leslie. Sometimes when you really
listen, you can hear it talk back...and tell you the things
you really want to hear.

LESLIE

Wouldn't you prefer to spend time with your family?

AYDEN

Not tonight, I'm afraid.

LESLIE

Your mother's death has taken a heavy toll, hasn't it?

AYDEN

Somewhat, but that isn't what's bothering me. I guess I just have a lot of things on my mind.

LESLIE

Then I won't pry into your business any further.

AYDEN

You've always been the understanding kind. I don't mind sharing with you.

LESLIE

I appreciate the compliment.

AYDEN

You don't receive many of those from my uncle, do you?

LESLIE

Master Garret can be rewarding...at times.

AYDEN

But the ten plus years you've been working for him, you would think he'd be accustomed to giving compliments by now. It's not hard to give a pat of the back for a job well done.

LESLIE

Can I let you in on a little secret?

AYDEN

Of course.

LESLIE

He's become quite the demanding lad lately. The past few days have been rather hard on him. Losing his second sister at such a young age has affected him greatly.

AYDEN

Yeah, I know. It's hard for us all.

LESLIE

Harder than you can imagine. The way he's been acting, I've seen the evidence. Drinking heavily, acting out irrationally, sometimes taking it out on Madam Diane. I can honestly say he hasn't been himself.

AYDEN

Life can deal some shitty hands sometimes.

LESLIE

But you, Mr. Bedford. You have a whole life ahead of you. I don't mean to sound harsh, but you shouldn't let these things get in the way of true happiness.

AYDEN

Oh, I agree, but spending time behind enemy lines sure changes your perspective. It shows you just how vulnerable you really are.

LESLIE

Oh, I certainly believe that. When I was in Vietnam--

AYDEN

Wait, you were in Vietnam?

LESLIE

Why, yes.

AYDEN

I had no idea.

LESLIE

It's not something I like to talk about on a casual basis.

AYDEN

Something bad happen when you were there?

LESLIE

Not to sound clichéd or anything, but I saw many terrible things during my campaign. One by one, I watched my comrades fall into madness. And it was then that I realized how precious life is.

AYDEN

Good point.

LESLIE

I hope you recognize that until the day you die.

AYDEN

I hope I do, too.

LESLIE

Well, I better deliver the wine. People can be rather restless when they're intoxicated. If you know who I mean.

AYDEN

Don't let me hold you up.

(Leslie grabs a few bottles from the wine rack and exits.)

(Billy enters immediately after.)

BILLY

Ayden, I'm sorry about all this. I knew about Pop's little social gathering, but didn't think it'd be this big. Half the town must've been here at one time or another.

AYDEN

Honestly, Billy, I haven't been paying that much attention.

BILLY

You've been in here for a while. You sure you don't want to go out there and mingle? Might help clear your mind.

AYDEN

(Holds up his wine glass.)

Wine can be a dandy thing to ease your troubles. I'm perfectly fine in here, drinking by myself.

(Billy draws closer to Ayden.)

BILLY

That's good to hear because I needed to talk to ya in private anyway. You remember the urgent matter I spoke of at the wake?

AYDEN

You didn't say anything about it being urgent.

BILLY

I didn't? Considering how serious this is...I'm surprised at myself.

AYDEN

What's on your mind?

BILLY

It's best if I just show you. They say a picture's worth a thousand words, right?

(Billy pulls a photograph from his pocket, keeping it hidden from plain sight.)

BILLY (cont'd)

This one's worth a lot more than a thousand.

(He hands it to Ayden.)

(Ayden glances down at the photo.)

AYDEN

My god. Is that...?

BILLY

Shhh...don't let anyone know about it. It's not something you want to go around showing everyone.

AYDEN

Why the hell are you showing me a picture of your dad being intimate with your mom?

BILLY

Ayden, take a closer look. Does that look like my mama?

(Ayden looks at it again. His eyes widen, a look of disgust comes across his face.)

BILLY

Someone very close, and I don't mean that figuratively.

AYDEN

Eliza? Oh, don't tell me I'm right about that.

BILLY

Then I won't say anything.

AYDEN

What the hell was your dad thinking?

BILLY

Keeping it in the family, I guess.

AYDEN

How'd you find this?

BILLY

Lately, I've been seeing some changes in Pop's behavior, so I went snooping around. You know that painting your mom gave him for his fiftieth birthday?

AYDEN

You mean that one of the Cherokee tribe, on the Trail of Tears?

BILLY

He had a safe put in behind it, where he keeps his personal things and anything important associated with the company. Typical business stuff like paperwork, employee files on the people he's got it in for...

AYDEN

Yeah, yeah. I got it. What made you think to look there?

BILLY

Pop's always having me do miscellaneous jobs for him. So while I was searching for some contract he sent me to find, I discovered this buried beneath some folders. I guess I got lucky. It's hard to believe Pop would be so careless to have left it there, let alone hold onto it. If this picture got out to the public, think about what it could do to his image. The town thinks of him as a saint. He's invested so much time and money into this community...I'd hate to see it all come crashing in around him over something so stupid.

AYDEN

Why don't you just destroy the photo and get rid of the evidence?

BILLY

It ain't that simple.

AYDEN

What do you mean?

(Garret enters, a bit intoxicated.)

GARRET

(Intoxicated.)

Ayden, my boy.

(Throws his arm playfully around Ayden.)

GARRET (cont'd)

Got a little surprise for you. Oh, ho! You'll thank me for this one.

AYDEN

Um...what is it?

(Garret signals for someone to enter. JULIE BRIGHTON, 29, enters.)

(Ayden and Julie exchange awkward glances. Unnerving tension is shared between them.)

AYDEN (cont'd)

Julie?

JULIE

Uh, it's...good to see you, Ayden.

GARRET

See! What did I tell you, huh? Didn't I tell you? You like my surprise, don't ya?

AYDEN

I'm speechless.

GARRET

Well, Billy, let's leave these two alone, shall we? They got a lot of catching up to do.

(Garret waves for Billy to leave. Billy hesitates. Garret grows angry, waves at him forcefully before Billy complies.)

BILLY

We'll talk soon, okay?

(Ayden nods.)

(Garret and Billy leave.)

AYDEN

I didn't expect to see you here. This is quite a surprise.

JULIE

When I heard about your mother, I got in touch with your uncle. He asked me to come tonight. At first, I wasn't

JULIE (cont'd)

sure it was a good idea, but he insisted. He wanted to give you a welcome home present. That's how he put it anyway.

AYDEN

I'm glad you came. I thought I'd never get a chance to explain about what--

JULIE

--I know we didn't exactly part on the best of terms. I wouldn't blame you if you're still angry with me.

AYDEN

It was tough at first, but I'd like to think we're above all that.

JULIE

Family's important. I understand this, but the thought of you being persuaded by your cousin just made things too hard for me to handle.

AYDEN

I told you before, I am my own person. No one can stand in the way of that.

JULIE

You certainly haven't changed. Stubborn and persistent as always.

AYDEN

From what I remember, you used to like that about me.

JULIE

People can change.

AYDEN

You seem the same to me.

JULIE

I'm...I'm a wreck--

AYDEN

--You look great.

JULIE

Thanks.

AYDEN

So, tell me, what've you been doing with yourself lately?

JULIE

My job occupies most of my time.

AYDEN

Doing what?

JULIE

Accounting, down at Simon and Jacobs Attorneys at Law. Yeah, I know. It's a little boring, but it pays the bills...and the job security. I don't have to worry about lawyers ever needing to do away with number crunching.

AYDEN

You gotta do what you gotta do. You've always been pretty good with figures. Seems like a suitable job.

JULIE

What about you? Still carrying out your years of service?

AYDEN

For the time being. Mom's death interrupted a few things, but it's probably for the better. Gives me a little break, away from all that regulation stuff. Starts to grate on your nerves after a while, having a superior constantly yelling at you for every little mistake. To tell you the truth, it's quieter in here than what I'm used to.

JULIE

But you're leaving again.

AYDEN

Yeah.

JULIE

Any chance of you settling down? Like how you planned before you left?

AYDEN

Here? It's not much of a priority for me now. At least, until...

JULIE

Until what?

AYDEN

Seeing my mother today...it made me think. What would life be like we could go back to the way things were before? But that's just crazy. There's no way things could ever be the same.

JULIE

You ever think there might be a chance?

AYDEN

No.

JULIE

I couldn't stand the idea of you being on the other side of the world, not knowing what you were doing.

AYDEN

Let me put your mind at ease. Many of my days are filled with repetition, doing the same things at the same hours for the same people.

JULIE

I think you just described life in a nutshell.

AYDEN

But the military doesn't want to advertise that sort of thing. They use a hook to draw you in, make you feel like you're going on an adventure.

JULIE

Then why keep going?

AYDEN

It's all I've ever known.

JULIE

Well, I hope I can steer you in a different direction. Maybe get you to appreciate what's here in town. People who made the wrong choice and wish to make up for it.

(Julie smiles innocently.)

AYDEN

There's always a chance.

(Sounds of Garret yelling in the other

room. Ayden and Julie look at each other, confused. They enter the living room.)

END OF SCENE 2

SCENE 3

SETTING: Garret's living room.

AT RISE: Garret is making a scene, holding a wine glass and shouting out mumbled jargon, waving his arms.

(Ayden steps over to Billy.)

AYDEN

What's he doing?

BILLY

Give him a few minutes. He gets this way whenever he has a few glasses of wine. The man can't hold his alcohol.

AYDEN

You think it has anything to do with what you showed me?

BILLY

I wouldn't doubt it.

(Garret stumbles past a few guests toward Julie. She is taken back by his action.)

GARRET

Julie! Come on, don't be shy.

JULIE

Mr. Bedford, I think maybe you need to sit down for a minute.

GARRET

Nonsense! I'm fine. Listen, Julie. I like you. If you want, you and Ayden can be married. I give you my consent.

JULIE

I think you're drunk.

GARRET

Not drunk. No, no, no. Just happy.

JULIE

You seem a little upset for being happy.

GARRET

What man wouldn't be happy to see two people in love? With nothing standin' in their way...pure like Indiangrass. That's what love is.

(Ayden makes his way over to them.)

AYDEN

Uncle Garret, sit with me for a moment, will you?

(Ayden takes Garret by the arm, but Garret throws him off.)

GARRET

What's wrong with you people? I said I'm fine. Can't you all get that through your thick skulls?

BILLY

Pop, maybe you should listen to them.

GARRET

Fine! I'll sit. Don't know what good it'll do. Other than keep the room from spinnin'.

(Garret approaches the sofa before a loud knock at the door interrupts his progress.)

GARRET (cont'd)

Who on earth could that be? Thought everyone was here already.

(Garret staggers towards the door. Billy quickly pulls ahead and puts his hands against Garret's chest to stop him.)

BILLY

I got it. You go sit, okay?

GARRET

What's wrong with you, boy? I'm the man of this house. I answer it.

(Garret pushes past him, opens the door to

find CARSON VALE, 40, holding an envelope.)

CARSON

Evening, Mr. Bedford.

GARRET

What the hell you want?

CARSON

Hector Sanz would like to send his apologies for not attending your party.

GARRET

He wasn't invited.

CARSON

Nevertheless, he asked me to give this to you.

(Carson hands him the envelope.)

GARRET

What is it?

CARSON

I'm just the messenger.

(Garret looks at the envelope for a second, then nods nervously.)

GARRET

Well, all right.

CARSON

Good evening, Mr. Bedford.

(Garret shuts the door, still staring at the envelope.)

DIANE

Well, what is it, dear?

GARRET

Quiet!

(Garret opens the envelope and reads the letter inside. Afterwards, he drops it on

the floor, stumbles to the sofa, muttering obscenities to himself.)

(Billy steps over and picks up the letter and looks at it.)

AYDEN

What's it say?

(Billy looks up at Ayden with a frown.)

BILLY

It says, "One day too many."

DIANE

What on earth does that mean?

GARRET

It means, Diane, that you should mind your own business.

DIANE

When it concerns you, it is my business.

GARRET

Not this time!

BILLY

Pop, settle down, okay? Don't take this out on Mama.

GARRET

What do you know about it, Billy? Huh? You know nothin'. Stop pretending you have an answer to everything.

BILLY

Then, tell us. What does it mean?

GARRET

Nothin'. It don't mean nothin', you hear me? Leave it be.

BILLY

It must be something important if it set you off like that.

GARRET

That's it. I want everyone out of here right now. Everyone, go home. Party's over.

(The guests become scared and start to

exit.)

(Ayden walks over to Billy.)

AYDEN

I think I better go too.

BILLY

It's probably for the best. I would drive you home, but I think I'd better stick around here in case Pop does something drastic. Mama's not too dependable when trying to keep him under control.

AYDEN

It's all right. I'll call a cab and wait outside.

JULIE

I'll take you.

(Ayden turns to Julie.)

AYDEN

You sure?

JULIE

I'm sure.

BILLY

(Whispers.)

Ayden, don't forget we still need to talk. Call me as soon as you can.

AYDEN

I will.

(Ayden and Julie quickly leave while Garret buries his face in the sofa.)

END OF SCENE 3

SCENE 4

SETTING:

Street Corner. Night.

AT RISE:

Hector stands by a light post.
Carson meets him.

HECTOR

You deliver it, amigo?

CARSON

He got the message.

HECTOR

Muy bueno. Don't you think it's time we set things into motion?

CARSON

Absolutely.

HECTOR

If Mr. Bedford hasn't paid up yet, I'm afraid he may never.

CARSON

You don't think the message would persuade him?

HECTOR

He's a stubborn man. A proud man. I'm sure he would rather see his empire fall than give in to blackmail.

CARSON

Then why do all this in the first place?

HECTOR

Because...there's always that tiny bit of integrity that will somehow keep him from ruining his family. And if he knows what's best for him...

CARSON

I hope for your sake he gives in.

HECTOR

What're you worried about?

CARSON

You promised to give me ten percent once he pays up.

HECTOR

You'll get your money.

CARSON

How do you expect to pay up if this Bedford guy doesn't oblige?

HECTOR

You let me worry about that.

CARSON

Keep me posted. You expect to know your answer by tomorrow?

HECTOR

Yes.

(Carson exits.)

(Hector pulls out a cell phone, dials.)

SETTING: Home of Hector and Eliza.

AT RISE: Eliza paints a half-naked model, BERNARD, early 20s, stretched out on the sofa.

(Phone rings. Eliza answers.)

ELIZA

Hello?

HECTOR

I'm coming home.

ELIZA

Oh? How long?

HECTOR

Not long. Why?

ELIZA

I may not be here when you arrive.

HECTOR

Why's that?

ELIZA

I've been thinking...it might be a good time to see my cousin since he's in town. Who knows how long he'll be here. I haven't seen him in a few years, and--

HECTOR

--Try not to be long.

ELIZA

I shouldn't. Bye.

(Eliza hangs up, looks up at Bernard.)

BERNARD

I guess I have to leave?

ELIZA

What'd you expect? To sleep over?

(Bernard stands up and approaches her.)

BERNARD

That thought did come to mind.

(Eliza smiles, teasingly places her finger against his chin, and moves in close.)

ELIZA

Just keep thinking it, because it'll never happen.

(He tries to lean in and kiss her, but she pulls away.)

BERNARD

Why are you such a tease?

ELIZA

Not in the mood.

(Eliza walks over to a pile of clothes on the floor, picks them up, and tosses them to Bernard.)

ELIZA (cont'd)

You better go. My husband will be here soon and I need to leave.

BERNARD

I'm getting a little fed up with working my schedule around yours. When do I get a say in things? Where's my reward?

(Bernard starts to get dressed.)

ELIZA

Reward? For what?

BERNARD

For allowing you to paint perfection, of course. Not every day an artist gets to experience the body of a god.

(Eliza lets out a laugh.)

ELIZA

You're not serious. Don't you think you're exaggerating just a little?

BERNARD

There's no need to exaggerate what you can plainly see.

ELIZA

Hmm, I think you have opened my eyes.

(Eliza advances to Bernard, very seductively. Bernard forms a smile, anticipating her to make a move.)

ELIZA (cont'd)

You've shown me just how stupid and arrogant the men of this town can be.

(Eliza gives Bernard a small push against his chest, then walks away.)

BERNARD

Then I guess people are right about you.

ELIZA

What do you mean?

BERNARD

You know what I mean. Your reputation around town. You know, the name they give you--

ELIZA

--I suggest you keep that name to yourself.

BERNARD

What's the matter? Did I strike a nerve? So what's the count up to now? Fifty, a hundred? A thousand? I suppose it's possible. I've heard movie stars reach that high.

And you, Eliza, are the closest thing we have to a movie star in this town.

ELIZA

Consider this relationship over.

BERNARD

Good luck finding a better model than me.

ELIZA

They come a dime a dozen, honey.

(Bernard gives her a dirty look.)

BERNARD

Bitch.

(He leaves.)

END OF SCENE 4

SCENE 5

SETTING: Sally's house. Night.

AT RISE: Ayden and Julie enter.

AYDEN

I appreciate you taking me home.

JULIE

It's no problem.

(Julie notices above the fireplace a painting of a Victorian scene with two English women drinking tea.)

JULIE (cont'd)

Your mother still kept it, after all these years?

AYDEN

Amazing, isn't it? Who would've thought something so random could strike so deep into somebody's heart. Not a day went by she didn't cherish that picture.

JULIE

And to think I picked it up at some flea market.

AYDEN

You meant more to her than you realize. She always went off about us getting married, giving her grandchildren. Almost made me think she loved you more than me.

JULIE

I doubt that.

AYDEN

You don't know my mother very well.

JULIE

Oh, I think I do. Five years is an awfully long time to get to know someone.

AYDEN

Now, everything seems cut off, with her gone.

JULIE

I don't think I ever told you how sorry I am about her death.

AYDEN

Ah, don't worry about it. I can handle whatever life throws at me.

JULIE

There's no reason to put up a wall. It's okay to show how vulnerable you can be. Let out your feelings once in a while.

AYDEN

Afraid my feelings are all dried up.

(They share a moment of silence.)

JULIE

I suppose I better go.

AYDEN

I'm in town for about a week. Feel free to drop by any time.

JULIE

Sure.

(Julie starts to head out before Ayden awkwardly kisses her on the cheek. She jumps nervously.)

AYDEN

Sorry.

JULIE

It's okay. Well, good night.

AYDEN

'Night.

(Julie leaves.)

(Ayden turns around, glances at the painting and sighs.)

(A moment later, knock at the door.)

AYDEN (cont'd)

(While opening it.)

You forget something?

(Eliza stands on the other side.)

AYDEN (cont'd)

Oh. Eliza?

ELIZA

Did I come at a bad time?

AYDEN

No, not at all.

(They both stand in silence. Eliza passes him an uncomfortable look.)

AYDEN (cont'd)

Would you like to come in?

(Eliza steps inside.)

AYDEN

Um, can I get you anything to drink?

ELIZA

I'm fine.

AYDEN

What brings you here?

(Points at the sofa.)

Here, go ahead, sit down.

ELIZA

I heard you were back in town, so I came to visit.
And...of course, pay my respects to your mother.

AYDEN

I don't think I'm the one you should see for that.

ELIZA

Right, but I felt I didn't get much of a chance at the
wake. Everyone seemed so flustered, it became distracting.
I couldn't really concentrate.

AYDEN

The burial's tomorrow. Are you going?

ELIZA

I don't think so. So many things to do, so little time.
But would you keep me in your thoughts?

AYDEN

Uh, sure.

ELIZA

So, tell me, Ayden. What's it like overseas? Is it
anything like you've imagined?

AYDEN

Not much to tell really.

ELIZA

Don't be so modest. The news says otherwise.

AYDEN

The news likes to dramatize everything.

ELIZA

So you're telling me it wasn't very exciting.

AYDEN

From what I've seen, no, not really.

ELIZA

That's a shame. How long has it been since you've been gone?

AYDEN

A few years. But years can feel like minutes when you're constantly facing death.

ELIZA

You missed *my* mother's funeral. It's almost been a year since she passed away.

AYDEN

Yeah, I realize that. And I'm sorry, but the military doesn't hand out free vacations for grunts like me.

ELIZA

Don't worry. I don't hold it against you. I guess now we have something in common.

AYDEN

Although it's not something I'd wish on a lot of people, especially when it's family.

ELIZA

How come we never talk much anymore?

AYDEN

You tell me, Eliza.

ELIZA

But you and Billy. You two are inseparable.

AYDEN

I wouldn't say that necessarily.

ELIZA

People would mistake you for brothers, until they got to know you, of course. Now they just make jokes about you two, a pair of twins separated at birth.

AYDEN

I believe even to this day, Mr. Crawford still thinks we are.

ELIZA

Crawford?

AYDEN

You know, the mailman.

ELIZA

Oh, the man with a giant mole on his forehead that looked like a third eye. He died.

AYDEN

What?

ELIZA

Well, he was pushing his sixties.

AYDEN

Sixty isn't old enough to die. When did he die?

ELIZA

Not sure. I heard it from Hector a few months ago. The town held some kind of memorial for him. But not many people showed up.

AYDEN

You actually went?

ELIZA

No, I saw it driving by. Sad really, but if you live alone, I suppose you die alone.

AYDEN

How is Hector, by the way?

ELIZA

Same old, same old.

AYDEN

What does he do?

ELIZA

It's embarrassing. He sells things.

AYDEN

What kind of things?

ELIZA

You know, things...that people seem to need every once in a while.

AYDEN

So, you're not going to tell me?

ELIZA

He's a door-to-door salesman, okay? He sells life insurance policies to those stupid enough to buy them. But it helps us get by.

AYDEN

I guess when you're stuck in a town like this, that's all that really matters.

ELIZA

So, tell me about Iraq. Is it real hot over there in the desert?

AYDEN

Why are you so interested in Iraq?

ELIZA

Because everyone else in this town doesn't do anything exciting. You've seen things. You've been to places. I'm sure you have stories to tell.

AYDEN

That doesn't make it exciting. It wasn't a vacation.

ELIZA

I know, but it still sounds like an adventure to me.

AYDEN

Well, it's not. Not really.

ELIZA

What's the food like? Is it exotic? Is it true that everyone over there eats raw snakes and monkey brains?

AYDEN

You watch way too many movies.

ELIZA

How else am I supposed to be exposed to anything?

AYDEN

You want to know what it's like? Wasting away every day in the desert, wondering if the next day will be your last?

ELIZA

Yeah.

AYDEN

I'll tell you about what I do over there.

ELIZA

Okay, good.

AYDEN

My job's pretty straightforward. I get a call, I go out and pick up damaged vehicles, whether they broke down, on fire, or in pieces. That is my responsibility. Then I bring them back to base and go to sleep.

ELIZA

Doesn't sound very exciting.

AYDEN

It's tedious, but at least it gets me away from the action. Everything I do is behind the scenes. Sure, I have to watch out for sniper fire every now and then, but that's the extent of it.

ELIZA

So you never killed anyone?

AYDEN

No.

ELIZA

Could you handle it? If you did kill someone?

AYDEN

I...don't know. I was trained to handle situations like that, but there's more to it than what they tell you.

ELIZA

I can imagine.

(Beat.)

Ayden, I'm glad you haven't. Most people aren't the same afterwards.

AYDEN

That's what I heard.

ELIZA

You haven't told me yet.

AYDEN

What?

ELIZA

What are the people really like over there?

AYDEN

Really no different than you and me.

ELIZA

You're lying. Those people are a lot different than us. They're religious fanatics. Probably kill their own mother for a sure trip to Heaven.

AYDEN

You're thinking about terrorists. That's a whole different story.

ELIZA

We're not talking about the same people?

AYDEN

No, and I suggest you keep your viewpoints to yourself.

ELIZA

Sorry.

AYDEN

Forget it. I guess I tend to get a bit offensive whenever the war comes up in conversation. Some people don't know how things really are there.

ELIZA

Well, you don't have to worry about me jumping to conclusions. I've always wanted to go there.

AYDEN

Really?

ELIZA

Okay, maybe not Iraq, but someday I'd like to travel. You know, see the world. Live in luxury. Learn all there is to learn about people.

AYDEN

I never saw you as someone who's interested in anthropology.

ELIZA

Anthro-who?

AYDEN

Nevermind.

ELIZA

So what's it like being back here after all this time?

AYDEN

It feels all too familiar.

ELIZA

Nothing's changed?

AYDEN

No. Still passed the same filling station on the way in. Saw the same diner with two cars parked outside. Noticed the statue of the first mayor in town square, the one those local kids ended up breaking a piece of his face off after shooting a hockey puck at it.

ELIZA

I never noticed it.

AYDEN

Not much to notice. Just like everything else here.

ELIZA

You shouldn't be so hard on this place. We grew up here. Our moms died here. It should hold dear to the both of us.

AYDEN

Maybe.

(Eliza stands, strolls over to the fireplace and gets a glimpse of the photograph of Ayden's mother.)

ELIZA

Ayden, how much do you know?

AYDEN

About what?

(Eliza turns to Ayden with a frown.)

ELIZA

About the worst mistake I ever made.

AYDEN

I'm not sure what you're talking about.

ELIZA

Billy told you, didn't he? I know you. You two are close. There's no way he would not tell you.

AYDEN

It's probably better we forget all about it.

ELIZA

Don't think I'm not ashamed of what I've done. I am. I ruined our family's name. It's something I have to live with for the rest of my life.

AYDEN

Everyone makes mistakes, but you have to move on.

ELIZA

I don't know how Billy found out in the first place, but he did. And all I'm concerned with is how much of it may leak out. Our family doesn't need to go through this kind of crisis, especially when there's no harm involved. It was a tragic mistake and I wish to put it all behind me.

AYDEN

So forget about it.

ELIZA

Easy for you to say.

AYDEN

Go home, Eliza. Get some rest.

ELIZA

Maybe I better.

(Eliza walks to the door.)

AYDEN

Before you go, could you tell me why you did it?

ELIZA

I've been asking that question myself every night. He and I...we were vulnerable at the time. We both lost Aunt Sally. I was still emotional over my mom. We thought we understood each other. And we took advantage of the situation.

AYDEN

Well, I guess people are entitled to their mistakes. Just one of a million we make in our lives. That's why you shouldn't dwell too much on it.

ELIZA

Please. Don't tell anyone, okay?

AYDEN

I won't.

(Eliza exits.)

(Ayden returns to the couch, picks up a book from the coffee table and begins reading.)

(Knock at the door. Ayden answers it to find Billy.)

AYDEN

I'm getting a lot of visitors tonight.

BILLY

Why do you say that?

AYDEN

Eliza was here a few minutes ago.

BILLY

She was? What'd she want?

AYDEN

Just to talk.

BILLY

About?

AYDEN

Nothing really.

BILLY

She didn't say anything about you-know-what, did she?

AYDEN

It came up. She knew you couldn't keep anything from me. She knows you too well, Billy. She knows us too well.

BILLY

I was afraid of that.

AYDEN

Hey, I thought you were keeping an eye on your dad.

BILLY

He's gone off the deep end. I don't know what else to do. I can't do anything to calm him down, Mama can't do anything. It's like his whole life's crashin' around him.

AYDEN

So that message must've hit him pretty hard.

BILLY

He doesn't have much time left apparently. He either pays up or forfeits everything he ever worked for.

AYDEN

So you know who's doing all this?

BILLY

Yeah, it's Hector. God only knows why, but he's the one sending the threats and the letters. I don't know. Maybe he's pissed about his wife cheatin'. Maybe it's something more.

AYDEN

Then maybe it's time to confront him about it.

BILLY

Ah, no. Too risky.

AYDEN

Evidently, your dad isn't getting out of this unless someone does something about it.

BILLY

I think he's got a plan. I don't know what it is yet, but there's something up his sleeve all right. That man who showed up at Pop's party with the envelope? He's a damn hit man.

AYDEN

You sure about that? Sounds a bit farfetched to me.

BILLY

Oh, I'm sure all right.

AYDEN

How'd you find that out?

BILLY

I stumbled upon him one evening at Pete's Diner. Overheard him talkin' to one of his buddies about making money off a few hits. And I don't mean the drug kind.

AYDEN

Not a very bright man if he's talking like that in public.

BILLY

It was in the bathroom. They didn't know I was in there, or they didn't care. Either way, they talked like it was no big deal. Maybe that makes him a real professional.

AYDEN

You honestly think Hector would send a hit man after your father?

BILLY

Yeah. You certainly can't be too careful about these things. Once Hector gets his sights set on something, he gets mighty firm about doing business.

AYDEN

Hector would have nothing to fall back on if the photograph was destroyed.

BILLY

You ever wonder who might've taken this picture?

AYDEN

I assumed it was some kind of setup they had going. These sort of things require careful planning.

BILLY

Oh, yeah, it's a setup alright, but not the good kind. I think Hector arranged someone to take these. Some sort of private investigator. I don't know who yet, but I'm watching my back every minute. Could be that hit man, for all I know.

AYDEN

So what do you want me to do?

BILLY

I want you to hold onto the photo for a while. At least until everything blows over.

AYDEN

You think if Hector has a plan, he's just gonna give up so easily?

BILLY

No, but at least we can bide our time.

AYDEN

Let me warn you though. If things start to get hectic, I can't say I'll be there to bail you out. I didn't come here to get involved with conspiracies.

BILLY

Don't worry. If you know Hector as well as I do, there's a chance he won't do anything at all. He thinks he's tough, but in reality, he's only a frightened pup. Nothing more.

AYDEN

Let's hope you're right.

BILLY

I better get back to Pop. Mama can only be so much help before he goes off on her. I wouldn't want any of that to happen.

AYDEN

Then I suggest you get back home as quick as possible.

(Billy starts heading out.)

BILLY

I'll keep you informed. Like I said, not many days left until they go public with the photo. So you should know rather quickly what's gonna happen.

(BILLY exits.)

(Ayden sighs, leaves the room.)

END OF SCENE 5

SCENE 6

(Stage is pitch black. We hear a chair being scooted across the floor. Moment later, SOUND of chair falling, then the SOUND of a rope tightening.)

SETTING: Sally's house. Morning.

AT RISE: Ayden enters.

(Knock at the door.)

(Ayden answers.)

(Julie enters.)

AYDEN

Julie? What're you doing here so early?

JULIE

Ayden, I have some bad news.

AYDEN

What?

JULIE

Billy's dead.

END OF ACT I

ACT II

SCENE 7

SETTING:

Garret's house, day.

AT RISE:

Garret sits on a sofa in silence.
Ayden and Julie stand with Leslie
near the front door.

AYDEN

Has he said anything?

LESLIE

I'm afraid not, Mr. Bedford. He's been on that sofa, in
utter silence, for well over an hour.

JULIE

Are you sure he wants to see us?

LESLIE

Absolutely, Ms. Brighton. A little company may do him some
good.

AYDEN

Thanks, Leslie.

LESLIE

I would advise that you keep him from the liquor cabinet.
He has the tendency to solve his problems the easy way.

AYDEN

I'll try my best.

(Ayden and Julie sit across from Garret.)

JULIE

Thank you, Garret, for having us over. We were sure you'd
rather be alone at a time like this.

GARRET

Alone? Why would I wanna be left alone? Don't feel right.
Then again, ain't nothing feel right anymore.

JULIE

I can't believe two deaths in the family over such a short
period of time.

GARRET

You would think the family's cursed. What about you, Ayden? You ever think where our family's headin'? Both my sisters, and now my only son. Don't seem right, does it? You think God's testin' me?

AYDEN

I couldn't say.

GARRET

I don't know. Maybe he's punishin' me.

JULIE

Nobody's at fault here.

AYDEN

How'd he die?

(Garret sighs, lifts himself off the couch and paces the room.)

GARRET

I'd rather not talk about it.

(Julie and Ayden look at each other, confused.)

AYDEN

Why not?

GARRET

Because it ain't nobody's business, that's why.

AYDEN

It is our business. We're family. We have the right to know the circumstances of something this tragic.

GARRET

Yeah, but she ain't family.

AYDEN

She might as well be, and you know that.

(Julie passes a loving look at Ayden.)

(Garret throws his arms in frustration.)

GARRET

He took his own life. That's what he did, all right?
Okay?

(Calms down.)

Any of you need a drink? I need a drink. What'll it be?
Scotch? Vodka? Gin? What?

(Garret approaches the bar.)

AYDEN

Drinking yourself to death isn't going to relieve the
situation.

GARRET

No? Well, it sure might help.

AYDEN

Leslie asked me to keep you away from alcohol. At least
for a while.

(Garret pours himself a drink, corks the
bottle.)

GARRET

Leslie told you that? Remind me to deduct his salary.

JULIE

I'm sure he's only trying to help.

GARRET

I don't need any help. Especially from my butler. I have
a right to drown my sorrows, if I choose to.

AYDEN

We need to understand what happened here. We need you
sober, so you can remember the details.

GARRET

You don't think I remember my own son's suicide? All the
booze in the world can't make me forget what I saw.

AYDEN

Billy was not the kind of person who would commit suicide.

GARRET

You're right. He was a God-fearing man. He knew God wouldn't stand something that wicked to happen. Takin' your life? It's murder, only worse.

AYDEN

We're not the ones to judge here.

GARRET

Suicide's a sin, boy. Ain't you learn anything from Sunday School? I figured my sister would've taught you better than that.

AYDEN

Mom wasn't much for the Bible. You knew that.

GARRET

Ah, that's right. She cared more about her art and that damn hippie stuff she always fooled around with.

JULIE

I don't think we're here to talk about Ayden's mother.

AYDEN

No, we're not. Let's leave it at that.

GARRET

All I can tell you is the Lord's not as forgiving when it comes to suicide.

AYDEN

You don't know the circumstances.

GARRET

I don't? If you would've read your Bible, you would've seen what it says about suicide. Corinthians clearly states 'Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own, you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.' Did Billy honor his?

JULIE

Why do you think he would kill himself?

GARRET

Hell, I don't know.

JULIE

How's Diane holding up?

GARRET

Not good.

JULIE

Maybe I should try to talk to her.

GARRET

You could try, but it ain't guaranteed you'll get through to her.

JULIE

Is she here now?

GARRET

Yeah, she's out back, doing God knows what. Probably messing with her garden. Helps clear her mind.

JULIE

You care if I talk with her?

GARRET

Not at all.

(Julie turns to Ayden.)

JULIE

I think she needs someone right now. I'll only be a minute.

AYDEN

It's fine. Take all the time you need.

(Julie smiles, then gets up and leaves.)

AYDEN (cont'd)

Why don't you tell me step by step what you did when you saw him.

(Garret stares at Ayden with discomfort, then sighs. He walks to the other side of the room, stands there with his back turned away from them.)

GARRET

I came home from work. It must've been around 5:30 or so. Don't remember exactly.

(Garret turns around and faces the couches. He walks over to them in a rhythmic pattern.)

GARRET (cont'd)

I saw him hangin' from the ceiling in the middle of this room.

(Points at the ceiling.)

He tied a rope around the banisters.

(Points at the floor.)

There was a chair lying on the floor, like it had been kicked out from under him.

(Closes his eyes and shakes his head again.)

His eyes were opened, staring at me.

(Kneels down on the floor with his face lowered.)

My son. Why did you leave me?

(Begins crying.)

AYDEN

It doesn't feel right. Billy's not the kind of person who would even contemplate killing himself. There must be something more to this.

(Garret looks up.)

GARRET

What do you mean?

AYDEN

Uncle, I probably should tell you...

(Garret gives him a worried look.)

AYDEN (cont'd)

I know about you and Eliza. Billy knew. He was the one who told me.

(Garret turns away from him, obviously upset.)

GARRET

Don't have the slightest idea what you're talkin' about.

AYDEN

I'm afraid Billy's death might be involved.

(Garret turns back around.)

GARRET

What the hell do you know? Huh? Okay, fine. You know I screwed my niece. Big mistake. But it was me who did it. Billy wasn't involved.

AYDEN

I think he got too close to whoever's blackmailing you.

GARRET

Who? You mean that son of a bitch Hector. Nah. He ain't the kind to kill someone in cold blood.

AYDEN

No, but I heard he has a hit man working for him.

GARRET

Where the hell do you get this information?

AYDEN

You have to understand. Billy adored you. He wanted to know everything there was about you, even when that meant prying into your business. I can say he didn't love you any less though.

GARRET

So you think he was murdered.

AYDEN

It's a possibility, considering what's been going on around here. Someone could have made it look like a suicide.

GARRET

We don't have any proof.

AYDEN

Maybe we should ask the police then. They could tell us what we should do.

GARRET

They've already been here. Supposedly, they found no traces of fingerprints, DNA, or whatever else they look for when something like this happens.

AYDEN

How much is Hector asking for?

GARRET

Ten million.

AYDEN

And if you don't pay?

GARRET

You should know that by now.

AYDEN

Is ten million dollars worth ruining the family name?

GARRET

I don't negotiate with terrorists.

AYDEN

I would hardly think of Hector as a terrorist.

GARRET

What he's doing to me, that makes him a terrorist. And now that I lost my son, he's worst than a terrorist. He's the devil himself.

AYDEN

Trust me, losing Billy has deeply affected me as well. And there's nothing I would want more than to put Hector away for a long time. If we can prove he's responsible.

GARRET

Without leaking anything out to the public.

AYDEN

I think we're past the point of worrying about reputation now. If Hector did somehow kill Billy, this has gotten personal.

GARRET

It ain't just Hector.

AYDEN

What?

GARRET

It's Hector and Eliza. Together. In fact, I think it was Eliza's plan all along.

AYDEN

How do you know that?

GARRET

Forgot to mention Eliza's own reputation here in this town. She's called the Black Jessamine. That's what the townsfolk call her. The Jessamine flower gives off some kind of sweet odor whenever it blooms. But not her. There ain't nothing sweet about her. That's why she's the Black Jessamine. When a flower turns black, it's rotten.

AYDEN

How did she get this name?

GARRET

Sex and deception, that's how. She sleeps around to get what she wants. Bible says 'Prostitutes and immoral women are a deadly trap.'

AYDEN

Did you give her this name? After all, you have the influence in this town. People listen to you.

GARRET

It wasn't me. I ain't that petty.

AYDEN

Even so, I'd be careful about what you preach. You're in the same boat when it comes to carelessness.

GARRET

But the difference is, I asked for forgiveness. It's unlikely Eliza did the same.

AYDEN

So that's all there is to it? Ask forgiveness and you can do anything you'd like?

GARRET

It ain't that simple.

AYDEN

Of course it isn't. But I don't think that's the issue here. Eliza came to my house last night. We talked a little. She assumed I knew all about you and her.

GARRET

Obviously she was right.

AYDEN

Well, yeah, but she pretended like she was the innocent one in the matter.

GARRET

Sounds like her.

AYDEN

Then why'd you do it?

GARRET

She took advantage, knew it was a bad time for me. Losing Debra a year ago to some freak accident. Then I lost my younger sister to some damn disease. I was vulnerable and she was the only one there.

AYDEN

Did you ever think about Aunt Diane?

GARRET

I saw her face the whole time.

AYDEN

I'm talking about before you did it.

GARRET

Diane? She ain't the comforting type. Sure, she'll give you a hug and all if something bad goes down, but that's the extent of it. She wasn't raised that way. She don't know what to do when someone's suffering.

AYDEN

And I suppose the fact that you and Eliza were family didn't apply.

GARRET

You don't think about those things when the moment strikes.

AYDEN

Just after you realize what you've done.

GARRET

I tell you, it's a curse. That's what our family is, Ayden. Cursed. Get out while you still can.

(Julie enters again.)

AYDEN

Any luck with her?

JULIE

We talked a little, but there's nothing I can do to make things better. But I'd like to think I made things a little easier.

GARRET

I'm sure you did.

(Julie just smiles.)

END OF SCENE 7

SCENE 8

SETTING:

Hector's and Eliza's home, day.

AT RISE:

Eliza stands in front of an easel, splashing strokes across the canvas.

(Knock at the door.)

(Eliza groans, then goes to answer it.)

(Ayden walks in without permission.)

AYDEN

We need to talk.

ELIZA

Ayden, I'm kind of in the middle of something.

(Ayden notices the easel.)

AYDEN

You paint?

ELIZA

Your mother taught me while you were away. She needed the company and I needed something to occupy my time. An even trade.

AYDEN

Hm. Anyway, I want to know if you were involved with Billy's death.

ELIZA

What? Oh my god! Billy's dead?

AYDEN

You don't know?

ELIZA

No one told me. When did it happen?

AYDEN

Yesterday. Apparently, the police consider it a suicide.

ELIZA

Suicide? Why on earth would he want to kill himself?

AYDEN

Let's not beat around the bush. I know your reputation around town.

ELIZA

And what would that be?

AYDEN

The name the town gave you...the Black Jessamine.

ELIZA

Let me tell you something. I don't approve of that name. Just because some people in town started spreading rumors about me and calling me evil doesn't make it true.

AYDEN

But there must be some reason why somebody would start those rumors. I don't know what it is, but I do know there's something going on with you or your husband. And if your husband is causing all this, then I have to consider you a part of it.

ELIZA

Are you implying Hector killed Billy?

AYDEN

Not him necessarily, but somebody in your circle. Hector has connections and he's using those to get at Uncle Garret. There's no way you don't have anything to do with this. You're married to the guy, for Christ's sake.

ELIZA

Hey, what Hector does is his business. I'm only trying to keep my tainted reputation from getting worse.

AYDEN

Why are you letting him get away with this?

ELIZA

I don't want that photo to get out to the public.

AYDEN

That's not an excuse.

ELIZA

Okay, fine. He told me if I tell anyone about what he's trying to do with the photo, there will be some serious consequences.

AYDEN

What? Like he'd beat you?

ELIZA

Or worse.

AYDEN

You expect me to believe that?

ELIZA

Believe what you want. That's my reason for staying out of this.

AYDEN

Don't you care about Garret at all?

ELIZA

How do you expect me to answer that question now, after everything that has happened?

AYDEN

Where's your sympathy? We're talking about our family here. If Hector does anything to ruin Garret's image, we will go down with him because we're the closest family he has right now.

ELIZA

What do you expect me to do? I already explained to you. Hector's the kind of man who finishes what he starts.

AYDEN

This is unbelievable.

ELIZA

I don't think Hector anticipated you getting involved with this.

AYDEN

I didn't either. I come home for my mother's funeral and the next thing I know, I'm stuck in the middle of some godforsaken family crisis.

ELIZA

Did you ever wonder why Billy came to you with the photograph?

AYDEN

I figured he could trust me. After all, we've always been pretty close.

ELIZA

Right, but he felt closer to you than you realized.

AYDEN

What's that supposed to mean?

ELIZA

Ayden, you were Billy's first love.

AYDEN

Well, we were best friends in childhood.

ELIZA

No, that's not what I mean. He felt completely attached to you. It was you that provoked feelings of physical attraction for him. But because you two were cousins, he knew he couldn't act on them.

AYDEN

Are you saying Billy was gay?

ELIZA

Yeah, and you helped him acknowledge it. But don't consider it a bad thing. Think of it as a compliment. You gave him a different perspective on who he was.

AYDEN

Does Garret know?

ELIZA

No. He never told anyone.

AYDEN

Except you.

ELIZA

No, he didn't tell me either. I just sort of put the pieces together as we grew up. Why do you think he never moved out of his parents' house?

AYDEN

I figured it was the financial security.

ELIZA

Well, that, and the fact he didn't want his parents to get suspicious. Never brought any girls home, but since he kept busy with his work, there was no reason for Uncle Garret to ask questions. Did you ever stop and think that might be why Billy killed himself? Because our uncle's too hard on him, always expecting Billy to be one step in front of everyone else.

AYDEN

So you believe he really did?

ELIZA

I don't want to believe that Hector had anything to do with it.

AYDEN

Then why now? Billy was in his thirties. Maybe he was hiding something about who he was, but why kill himself now in the middle of all this?

ELIZA

Pressure from his dad, maybe?

AYDEN

Billy knew what he was getting into when he decided to get involved with his father's affairs. He can handle the pressure.

ELIZA

Why are you asking me this? Why would I know?

AYDEN

You're the only person I can hold responsible.

ELIZA

Thanks. I appreciate your concern. Why don't you just leave?

AYDEN

I'd hate to see how Garret would react to the truth.

ELIZA

He doesn't need to know.

AYDEN

He deserves to know. We're talking about his only son here.

ELIZA

It would only crush him in knowing it.

AYDEN

The worst thing you could do to someone is lie to 'em.

ELIZA

It's not lying.

AYDEN

In my opinion, it is.

ELIZA

Fine, go ahead and tell him. Give him another thing to worry about. It's not like he already has enough on his mind.

AYDEN

And whose fault is that?

ELIZA

I don't need to justify my reasons to you.

AYDEN

Then don't.

(Ayden storms out.)

(Eliza rushes to the telephone and dials.)

ELIZA

Hector, I need you to do me an itty bitty favor.

END OF SCENE 8

SCENE 9

SETTING:

Garret's house, night.

AT RISE:

Ayden sits uncomfortably, while Garret stares at him.

GARRET

I'm losing faith, boy. In just everything. Never thought this day would come...I told you, didn't I? I told you God's testin' me.

AYDEN

There's something I think you should know. If you want to contribute it to Billy's death, then feel free to, but I'm only telling you so you understand what he went through in life.

GARRET

What would that be?

AYDEN

Billy led a...different life than you and I believed.

GARRET

What's that supposed to mean?

AYDEN

Uncle, Billy was gay.

(Garret looks furious.)

GARRET

You mean a queer?

AYDEN

Well, I wouldn't necessarily use that word, but yes.

GARRET

How dare you!

AYDEN

I figured you wouldn't take it very well, but--

GARRET

--My son was no queer. No genes in my family would ever produce wicked offspring. We are pure, you hear me? We're pure...with the Lord's grace. Don't you dare sit there in front of me spouting this blasphemy. I won't have it.

AYDEN

I can't give you any proof.

GARRET

It's because it ain't true.

AYDEN

Can you remember anything that might make you suspect Billy's sexuality?

GARRET

I told you already. It ain't true.

AYDEN

I can sense it in your voice, Uncle. You sound like you're in denial. I'm sure it's not easy for you to accept it, but you have to face the truth.

(Garret walks to the bar. He removes a bottle from underneath, places it on the table.)

AYDEN

You think that's necessary?

(Garret looks like he's about to open the bottle, but he just stares at it.)

GARRET

I knew it about for a while now. The whole thing about him not wanting to move out on his own, start a family, be successful in life. It wasn't normal for a grown man not to be ambitious.

AYDEN

How'd you find out?

GARRET

I found a photograph when I was going through Billy's room a few months ago. It was him standing with his arm wrapped around another man's waist. Both smiling for the camera in front of one of those fancy European buildings. Billy went to Paris a few years back. He was going through a lot of stress at the time. His job was pushing him further and further, his friends had all moved away. Me and Diane were afraid he might have a nervous breakdown. So we told him he needed to get away for a while.

AYDEN

Did he go alone?

GARRET

Yeah. I had no idea who the man in the photo was. Must've been someone he met there. We saw all kinds of pictures from his trip, but he didn't bother to show us this one. This one was stashed away, in the back of his dresser drawer. I didn't care to invade his privacy, but something forced me to look.

AYDEN

What made you so curious?

GARRET

Not sure. A feeling, I guess. Like some force pushin' me to do things I didn't want to do. Like the devil was temptin' me.

AYDEN

I'm beginning to get a familiar feeling.

GARRET

I'd hate to think since he killed himself, his room's now gonna have some kind of negative energy about it.

AYDEN

There's probably no reason to think that.

GARRET

The more I dig up, the worse it gets.

AYDEN

Tell me about it.

GARRET

How do you know about my son being a queer?

AYDEN

I went to Eliza to get some answers. She told me.

GARRET

Eliza? Boy, how many times have I told you never to trust that woman?

AYDEN

Apparently she was right about this.

GARRET

It don't matter. You can't take what she says seriously.

AYDEN

The point is, she found out about Billy without asking questions. She suspected it.

GARRET

So what?

AYDEN

Doesn't that strike you as odd?

GARRET

Not really.

AYDEN

She knew about Billy's homosexuality and probably exploited it as a way to make his death look like a suicide.

GARRET

You still convinced Hector and she had something to do with it?

AYDEN

It's still a possibility.

GARRET

What say you and I go right down to their house and beat it out of them?

AYDEN

I doubt it would help.

GARRET

Don't matter. It'd still make me feel a whole hell of a lot better.

AYDEN

Maybe I should go talk with Hector.

GARRET

He won't tell you nothing.

AYDEN

Probably not, but I'd like to know if there's a chance.

GARRET

You do whatever you need to do.

AYDEN

So, do you think less of Billy because you know the truth?

(Garret faces Ayden with a determined look.)

GARRET

I loved my son. There ain't anything in the world that would keep me from that. I know I can be pretty hard on people sometimes, but we're talkin' about my son here.

AYDEN

It's good to hear you say that.

GARRET

I don't know what to do anymore. I don't want to live my life feeling this guilt, thinkin' his death was my fault.

AYDEN

I'm sorry, Uncle Garret.

GARRET

What do you have to be sorry for?

AYDEN

I'm sorry for the way things are going. Just don't come to the conclusion that things would be different if only you did things differently. I understand how that can be.

GARRET

The only thing I regret is caring more about work than being there when my son needed me.

(Ayden nods and exits.)

END OF SCENE 9

SCENE 10

AT RISE:

Garret is slumped on the couch, a whiskey bottle in his hand, listening to operatic music.

(Doorbells rings.)

GARRET

Leslie, answer the door.

(No sign of Leslie. Doorbell rings again.)

GARRET

Leslie! Where the hell...oh, right. I gave him the night off.

(Garret gets up, staggers a little.)

GARRET

Ah, hell.

(He shakes his head, puts his hand to his face.)

(Doorbell rings again.)

GARRET

All right! I'm coming.

(Garret opens the door, revealing Carson.)

(Carson walks in, aiming a gun at Garret.)

CARSON

Where's your nephew? I don't see him. Where is he?

GARRET

Ayden? He left.

CARSON

Where did he go?

GARRET

How the hell should I know? Probably went home. What's this all about?

CARSON

Hector hasn't been too happy with the way things are going. Ain't too happy at all. He's getting impatient. And patience ain't one of his virtues.

GARRET

I figured that one out on my own, with the little note you dropped off.

CARSON

Tomorrow's the deadline.

GARRET

And you expect an answer right now?

CARSON

Me? No. I'm just the messenger. Don't go shooting the messenger, you hear?

(Carson bursts out laughing, while holding up the gun. Garret fails to find the humor)

in the situation. Carson stops in embarrassment.)

GARRET

Afraid I'm on the wrong side of the situation to do a thing like that.

CARSON

Afraid you've been on the wrong side for quite some time now. If I were you, I-

GARRET

--You ain't me, so keep that in mind. I don't care what you have to say.

CARSON

But I'm sure Hector will care.
(Look at his watch.)
In seven hours or less.

GARRET

You tell Hector if he wants anything from me, he can come see me himself. I'm tired of dealin' with his lackeys all the time.

CARSON

You're bold talking that way to an armed man. You never know, finger could slip. All that rough and tough talk goes straight out the door.

GARRET

All I see's a coward. I've been living on this earth long before you were born. I have the experience in knowin' when a man is strong, but you ain't even close.

CARSON

Humor me. What's the difference?

GARRET

It certainly ain't someone who hides behind a weapon.

CARSON

It gets the job done, when you need it. I hate doing things the hard way. Why spend so much time dealing with something when you could take a second to solve the problem?

GARRET

Hector tell you to point a gun at me?

CARSON

No, it's my way of doing things.

GARRET

My point exactly.

(Garret walks to the bar, grabs a glass and pours the contents of the bottle into it.)

GARRET

You tell Hector to go fuck himself.

(Takes a sip and exhales.)

You know what, forget it. I'll tell him myself.

CARSON

I'm afraid I can't let you do that. There shouldn't be any direct communication between the two of you until the deal is final.

GARRET

Says who?

CARSON

That's what I was instructed to say.

GARRET

Yeah, nothing but a damn robot, taking orders like that. You realize how I got to where I am today?

CARSON

I'm sure it's not from drinking all day.

(Garret stares at the glass, then sighs and sets it down on the bar.)

GARRET

Sadly, that has become the result. You lose your son over some damn mistake, and you realize just how cruel life can be.

(Stands for a moment in silence, then glances at the glass.)

Did you kill my son?

CARSON

Nope.

(Garret looks at Carson angrily, then takes a few steps toward him.)

GARRET

I ain't gonna ask again. Did you kill my son?

CARSON

I did no such thing. Why don't you go talk to Eliza about that?

GARRET

Fine, I'll go talk to Eliza.

CARSON

But what makes you think she wants to hear what you have to say?

GARRET

Because I know she's behind all this. I ain't stupid.

CARSON

Remember, you're the victim here. I suggest you act like one.

GARRET

What's that supposed to mean?

CARSON

We could end this now. We can go see Hector, you give him what he wants, and then you can ask all the questions you want. As long as I'm gone.

GARRET

All right. Let's end this now. Let's go see Hector.

CARSON

Smart choice.

GARRET

I'll give him what he wants.

(Garret and Carson exit.)

END OF SCENE 10

SCENE 11

SETTING: Hector's and Eliza's house, night.

AT RISE: Hector sits at a desk, going through paperwork. Eliza is finishing up the portrait of Bernard.

(Hector shakes his head in frustration.)

HECTOR

It's no wonder people say money's the root of all evil. Before the month is through, we'll be broke.

ELIZA

It's only evil if you don't know how to spend it properly.

(Hector glares up at Eliza, sets the paperwork down on the desk. He folds his hands.)

HECTOR

You realize your little hobby's getting expensive. Spending money on your gigolos and your pretty little pictures doesn't strike me as proper either. Remember, it's easy to spend money. It's harder to live with the consequences.

(Eliza sloshes the paintbrush in a cup of water. She avoids eye contact with Hector.)

ELIZA

My little hobby's the only thing that keeps me sane.

HECTOR

Right. I no longer help with that.

ELIZA

I'm sorry to say, dear, that you lost your touch a long time ago.

(Hector stands up and walks over to her vicinity.)

HECTOR

Maybe if you actually let me touch you once in a while.

ELIZA

You and I both know our marriage relies entirely on codependency. Why risk spoiling the magic when things are going so well?

HECTOR

I suppose I'm not attractive enough, compared to your pretty boy models that aren't good for anything except for the size of their manhood.

ELIZA

Why is it you men always focus on one thing?

HECTOR

It's the way we're built.

ELIZA

It's called art, Hector. Look it up sometime. Maybe you'll learn something.

HECTOR

Oh, I'm learning, all right. Learning how self-centered you can be. Not once do you show any affection toward me. Admit it, Eliza. Our marriage is a sham.

ELIZA

If that's how you see it, then fine.

HECTOR

I don't see it any other way.

(Eliza puts the paintbrush down and steps over to Hector. She wraps her arms around his waist and comes in closer to kiss him. He pulls away.)

ELIZA

You see, I try to show affection. You just brush me off.

HECTOR

It's a guilt trip. You're just mocking me.

ELIZA

It's hopeless with you. Maybe now you see why I prefer other men's company.

HECTOR

If it wasn't for the money, I wouldn't hesitate to leave.

ELIZA

Maybe you should leave anyway. Once we get the money. Doesn't sound to me like there's any reason for you to stick around.

HECTOR

That is, if everything works out. This deal is getting more unpredictable by the minute. And you said it was going to be easy with him. Take an emotionally vulnerable loser and strike at the right moment: when he finds himself alone and the bottle's the only good companion he has.

ELIZA

He'll pay. My uncle can be stubborn at times, but in the end, he'll realize there's no other option.

HECTOR

I'm afraid if he's going to pay up, he would have done it by now.

ELIZA

He always waits until the last minute.

HECTOR

Obviously, your uncle didn't make his fortunes abiding by deadlines.

ELIZA

He can believe in deadlines when he wants to, particularly when it's his turn to cum.

HECTOR

Was that called for?

ELIZA

Why? You jealous?

HECTOR

It has nothing to do with jealousy. Just the thought of you sleeping with him tells me you'll go to any measure to get what you want.

ELIZA

Did you actually think I enjoyed it? A 55-year-old, washed-up has-been whose breath constantly smells of alcohol and cheap cigars? Just the thought of looking at him makes me sick.

HECTOR

I always thought it was how you're built, getting off on whomever it is you're screwing at the time.

ELIZA

Don't treat me like a whore.

HECTOR

What would you call it? You're going to get five million for a one-night stand. Sounds to me like a kinky proposition.

ELIZA

I did it for the both of us. Now that I see you're totally ungrateful, I have nothing more to say to you.

HECTOR

You did it for us? Did you even think of me when you got fucked by that disgusting man you call an uncle?

(Eliza laughs to herself, then advances toward Hector again.)

ELIZA

You know I thought about you every second. It was the only way I was able to cum.

(Hector breathes in deep.)

HECTOR

I'm supposed to believe you?

(Eliza rubs the inside of Hector's thigh.)

ELIZA

If I loathed you so much, would I still have the guts to do this?

HECTOR

Well, I...

(Eliza moves her hand upward, underneath his shirt.)

ELIZA

How about now?

(Hector embraces her, kisses her on the mouth forcefully. She submits.)

END OF SCENE 11

SCENE 12

SETTING:

Ayden's house, night.

AT RISE:

Ayden sits next to the telephone, staring at it, in contemplation. A loud knock at the door.

(Ayden approaches the door.)

AYDEN

Who is it?

(Silence. Then another knock.)

AYDEN

I'm getting awfully fed up with visitors lately. Tell me who you are and I may consider opening the door.

(No answer. Ayden puts his hand on the doorknob, hesitates, but opens it to see Julie.)

AYDEN

Julie?

JULIE

I knew you couldn't resist.

AYDEN

Why didn't you answer me?

JULIE

I wanted to surprise you. Are you surprised?

AYDEN

Uh, yeah, I guess. Come on in.

(Julie walks in.)

AYDEN (cont'd)

Can I take your coat?

JULIE

Sure.

(Ayden takes her coat and lays it over the sofa.)

JULIE (cont'd)

Did I come at a bad time?

AYDEN

No, not at all.

JULIE

I was in the neighborhood and thought you might need someone to talk to. Do you need someone to talk to, Ayden?

AYDEN

Why would you be in the neighborhood at this hour?

JULIE

I was concerned about you. You've been through a lot lately and I don't want to see you get hurt anymore. Everything that has happened...your mother passing away--

AYDEN

--She's certainly in a better place.

(Julie shows surprise.)

JULIE

I never thought you, of all people, would say that.

AYDEN

Why? I can't dream?

JULIE

For as long as I've known you, you never talked about the afterlife.

AYDEN

Well, maybe my uncle's beliefs are starting to make me think about some things.

JULIE

Religion?

AYDEN

No, it's not about religion. It's about heaven. At least, it doesn't hurt as bad when you consider the possibilities of someone going to a better place than this. Don't you think?

JULIE

There's another reason for me being here. I thought maybe...I could stay the night. But if you don't want me to, that's fine. I don't want you getting the impression I'm moving too fast.

AYDEN

I'm actually flattered to hear that coming from you.

JULIE

So it's okay?

AYDEN

Yeah, it's okay.

(Telephone rings.)

AYDEN

Let me get that.

(Ayden picks it up.)

SPOTLIGHT ON: Diane

DIANE

Ayden?

AYDEN

Aunt Diane?

DIANE

Ayden, I'm worried. Your uncle's gone. I'm afraid he's going to get himself killed.

AYDEN

What? Aunt Diane, calm down. What makes you think that?

DIANE

I've seen him like this before, angry to the point of being reckless. But this is different. All day he treaded around the house, mumbling 'Eliza' under his breath. Why would he do that, Ayden?

AYDEN

It's kind of hard to explain.

DIANE

Why am I the only one left out? I want to know what's going on.

AYDEN

I can't discuss this over the telephone. I'll head over to Eliza's place. It's possible he's gone over there to have a word with her.

DIANE

A word about what?

AYDEN

I couldn't say myself.

DIANE

Well, I want to go too.

AYDEN

No, you stay put. I'll call you afterwards, okay?

DIANE

Fine.

AYDEN

Don't worry, Aunt Diane. I'm sure everything's fine.

(Ayden hangs up.)

JULIE

What's going on?

AYDEN

I'm heading to Eliza's. You should probably go home.

JULIE

I'm going with you.

AYDEN

No, Julie. You don't need to get involved.

JULIE

Too late, Ayden. You know as well as I that I'm already involved. I'm going with you.

AYDEN

Fine. Let's go.

END OF SCENE 12

SCENE 13

SETTING:

The Sanz Residence. Night.

AT RISE:

Hector is persistently going through a pile of paperwork. Eliza sits on the sofa, reading a book. Awkward silence fills the stage.

(Doorbell rings.)

(Eliza looks up at Hector.)

ELIZA

Well, aren't you going to get that?

HECTOR

Why me? You're not doing anything.

ELIZA

I think I've earned my excuse for being lazy. What's yours?

(Smiles at Hector before going back to reading.)

(Hector goes to open it.)

(Carson enters.)

CARSON
He's coming for you. Right now, at this very moment.

ELIZA
What? Who?

CARSON
Garret, that's who. And he's not very happy.

(Hector stands up and leaves his desk.)

HECTOR
Oh, Carson. You worry too much. We expected him to come. Didn't we, querido?

ELIZA
All part of the plan.

CARSON
You don't understand. He doesn't plan on honoring the deal. I think he's coming to settle the score. Once and for all.

ELIZA
I'm sure we can work something out. Don't worry, Carson. Everything will work out fine. Why don't you sit down for a moment? You seem a little tense.

(Eliza takes Carson by the hand to lead him to the sofa. Hector watches them jealously.)

CARSON
You're right. I don't know why I'm so worked up over this.

(Eliza guides Carson slowly to the couch.)

ELIZA
You're probably just overwhelmed with everything that's going on.

(Garret barges in.)

HECTOR

Oh, look, darling. Speak of the devil.

ELIZA

Well, Uncle, what brings you by at this time? Been keeping track of the clock, perhaps?

GARRET

I didn't come here to give you money.

(Turns to Hector and stares feverishly at him.)

I made up my mind a long time ago. I don't deal with terrorists, especially ones responsible for my son's death.

HECTOR

Terrorists? You have got to be kidding.

ELIZA

How can you blame us for killing Billy? He was my family too.

HECTOR

Hate to break it to you, but Billy killed himself out of guilt. You can't blame us for his choice in the matter. We had nothing to do with it.

GARRET

My son was a good man. I don't see any reason for him to take his life.

ELIZA

So, you accuse us of it? Very noble of you.

GARRET

Your runner here told me otherwise.

(Carson bounces up from the couch, looks surprised as Hector and Eliza both look at him furiously.)

CARSON

He's lying. I told him nothing.

GARRET

Really? That lyin' face begs to differ.

CARSON

You're just trying to turn the tables, aren't you? Gain the advantage? It won't work with these two. I haven't worked for them very long, but I know they're not easily fooled by the likes of you.

HECTOR

Carson, save your breath.

ELIZA

Why would I have my cousin killed?

GARRET

You knew, Eliza, the type of person you're dealin' with. You knew I wouldn't pay up, so you took revenge.

ELIZA

That's absurd! And besides, I can smell the alcohol on you from a mile away. You're just talking crazy now.

HECTOR

You come all this way to accuse us of Billy's death?

GARRET

I don't ever want to hear you speak his name again. I came all this way to make sure it ends tonight.

HECTOR

What are you going to do, tio? Kill us?

ELIZA

He doesn't have the guts to do something like that. Now do you, Uncle?

GARRET

I'm no idiot. Killing you two won't solve a damn thing.

ELIZA

And all this time, I thought you were a firm believer in the whole Biblical expression, "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth."

GARRET

Right now, I don't think you're at liberty to speak God's word. Such sacred words ain't made for tongues like yours.

ELIZA

Oh, you are so right. I forgot I'm standing in the presence of the most righteous man alive. Give me a break.

GARRET

Should I say, compared to you, I'm a saint.

ELIZA

Oh really? And what is that supposed to mean?

GARRET

I know you, Eliza. I probably know you more than your husband knows you. There ain't denying the kind of person you are. Born from the Devil himself, all wrapped up in lust and corruption. You familiar with Sodom and Gomorrah? You, of all the people, stuck right in the middle of them.

ELIZA

How dare you speak to me that way! Looks who's talking, you drunk. You can't make one decision without a few shots of booze.

GARRET

Alcohol's no sin. Lord Jesus drank it himself, in front of his disciples. You know...the Last Supper. Ring a bell?

HECTOR

But aren't you forgetting--

ELIZA

--Getting drunk's a sin, isn't it? Doesn't it say that in the Bible? Apparently, I know the book better than you. Yeah, some righteous man you are. You simply use God's name for your own advantage.

HECTOR

And try not to leave out the idea that you fornicate--

ELIZA

--How many other things should I mention? Just go ask your wife. I'm sure she has a whole list of hypocrisies you've managed to commit. Not to mention forcing your son to kill himself.

GARRET

I will have none of this!

HECTOR

I think we're all forgetting the main issue here.

(Garret and Eliza turn to Hector, apparently both angry with his response.)

ELIZA

And what would that be, Hector?

HECTOR

You know what. You, him...

GARRET

All right, boy! I suggest you stay out of things you ain't welcomed in. Whatever happened, that's between her and me.

HECTOR

You forgetting she's my wife?

GARRET

Apparently, you ain't satisfying her enough at home. Why else would she take a man like me over you?

(Hector takes a step forward as a sign of intimidation.)

GARRET (cont'd)

What? You gonna hit me?

ELIZA

Will you two stop trying to prove who has the biggest prick?

HECTOR

You of all people should feel the most ashamed about what you did.

ELIZA

What's there to feel ashamed about? I--

(By this time, Ayden and Julie both slowly creep through the open front door.)

(Carson catches sight of them.)

CARSON

Who're you?

AYDEN

Me? Who are you?

(The rest turn their attention on them.)

GARRET

Ayden? What're you doing here?

AYDEN

I came to ask you the same thing. Diane told me you were going to do something stupid.

GARRET

Diane? What business is it of hers?

AYDEN

Come on, Uncle Garret, she's your wife. She's the only person you have right now who's willing to support you

AYDEN (cont'd)

through everything. And the problem is, she doesn't even know what's going on.

GARRET

Diane's weakness is her sensitivity. If she found out about this, there's no tellin' what she'd do. It's best if she don't know.

ELIZA

May I ask why she's here?

(Points at Julie.)

AYDEN

You shouldn't worry about her.

ELIZA

Who says I'm worried? I just don't think there's any reason for her to get involved with family affairs.

JULIE

Don't you think it's a little too late for that, Eliza?

(Eliza looks like she's about to pounce.)

ELIZA

I'd watch what you say right now, if you know what's best.

HECTOR

Is there a reason you're getting all defensive?

JULIE

Why don't you tell him, Eliza? He has a right to know, doesn't he? He is your husband after all.

HECTOR

Know what?

ELIZA

None of it matters anymore. It's all in the past.

JULIE

As I remember, you were married to Hector at the time. Newly-weds, right?

GARRET

What are you two rambling on about?

AYDEN

The night before my deployment, I planned on asking Julie to marry me. Sort of a last minute decision, to just let Julie know I wanted to be with her. Well, at the time, Eliza and I were good friends, so I didn't see any reason why I couldn't tell her about my proposal. She said she was happy for us. Apparently, she was faking it.

HECTOR

That's not all she's good at faking.

(Eliza glowers at Hector.)

AYDEN

I had everything according to plan, but Eliza showed up right before Julie and complicated the situation.

(Beat.)

So, Uncle Garret, I'm afraid you're not the only one she used to justify that nickname of hers.

GARRET

You mean...you and her?

AYDEN

She tried to make it look believable. A brief second was all it took to give Julie the wrong impression. Gotta hand it to her, though, she knows how to take control of the situation.

ELIZA

(To Ayden.)

I didn't want to see you get hurt. No one's willing to wait that long for someone, with no guarantee they'll come back.

JULIE

I would've waited.

ELIZA

Though you were quick to storm out after seeing us together.

JULIE

I was young and naïve. Now, I know Ayden isn't that kind of person. He wouldn't settle for second-rate trash.

(Eliza displays raw intimidation.)

AYDEN

Okay, ladies. Enough.

HECTOR

You learn something new every day. But you know something...with her...

(Points at Eliza.)

God, I've been the most estupido of everyone here.

ELIZA

Oh, what are you whining about now? You told me already you're ready to leave.

HECTOR

You make it sound so easy. I'm not one of your models, useful for a few hours before you show them the door.

ELIZA

You make it sound so melodramatic.

GARRET

Do y'all mind? We ain't here to discuss marital problems.

HECTOR

You're right. Since you're not going to honor your part of the deal, I suppose Carson's going to make a delivery to the media tomorrow.

GARRET

You don't get it, do you? I don't care about the photographs anymore. There's bigger problems than my reputation. So what if the public will see me as some imbecile who made some stupid mistake of sleeping with his niece? Without my son, reputation don't mean nothing.

ELIZA

I think there's a little more to it than that.

GARRET

What?

(Everyone focuses on Eliza, not paying attention to Diane slipping through the open door and eavesdropping on the conversation.)

ELIZA

You and I didn't sleep together. You raped me.

GARRET

What? That's ridiculous.

ELIZA

What would you call it, Uncle? We're family, after all. There was no mutual attraction between us.

GARRET

Attraction got nothing to do with it. You didn't say no.

(Julie notices Diane.)

JULIE

Diane?

(Everyone turns to her.)

AYDEN

Aunt Diane, what are you doing here? I thought I told you to stay home until I called.

DIANE

I'm tired of sitting around, Ayden. I needed to find out on my own what's going on.

(Diane approaches Garret slowly.)

DIANE (cont'd)

So tell me, Garret, what's going on?

GARRET

What do you mean?

DIANE

I don't think you can play dumb with me this time. I heard what you said to Eliza. Is it true?

ELIZA

Maybe you should tell her, Uncle.

GARRET

You keep out of this, you hear! I will not have someone like you tell me what to do.

ELIZA

No one will ever trust you again. You might as well spill it. She's your wife, for god's sake. Nothing should ever be kept between husband and wife.

(Hector appears stunned.)

DIANE

She's right. There's no way you can get out of this one.

(Garret sighs, starts to pace. He holds his hand against his face, unable to look at anyone.)

HECTOR

Quit your stalling!

(Eliza looks back at Hector angrily. Hector shrugs, playing innocent.)

(Garret puts his hand down and looks at Hector, then at Eliza.)

GARRET

You did this to me. If it wasn't for you, I'd--

DIANE

--There's no use putting the blame on her.

(Garret looks at Diane, then sighs again.)

GARRET

Diane. Darling. There's times when a man makes a grave mistake, and just because he makes that mistake doesn't mean he's a bad man. Despite what others might think.

(Glances at Eliza.)

DIANE

So you fooled around on me...with your own niece?

(Garret nods.)

DIANE (cont'd)

Why would you do something like that?

GARRET

I was tired. Nothing seemed right anymore.

DIANE

And I wasn't enough?

GARRET

It ain't like that. Don't blame yourself for something you had no control over. I'm just a weak man, that's all.

ELIZA

Don't forget he was drunk at the time, contributing to his so-called weakness.

GARRET

You shut your mouth! You have no reason to talk. You blackmailed me! You set me up.

DIANE

What is this about rape? Why did she say you raped her?

GARRET

'Cause she's insane. I didn't rape her.

HECTOR

That's a lie.

(Hector catches everyone's attention.)

HECTOR (cont'd)

I'm sick of everyone avoiding the issue here. Garret raped my wife. Why would she be willing to have sex with her relative? She wouldn't. Can't you all see the bigger picture here? It's not that hard to figure out.

AYDEN

That's not true, is it, Eliza?

ELIZA

I have already spoken.

AYDEN

Then if that's true, all three of you deserve to go to prison.

HECTOR

What accusations do you have on us?

AYDEN

Extortion, for one.

HECTOR

You have no proof.

AYDEN

No, not physical proof, other than the photos, but who's to say those are even valid to use? I guess it's his word against yours. And considering my uncle has the money and prestige, it's likely the court will listen to his case first. Maybe even disregard the photos as substantial evidence.

HECTOR

We can ruin him with the pictures.

AYDEN

I've seen one of those photographs. It doesn't look like Eliza is unwilling. As much as I hate to say it, she looks like she's enjoying it. It's not a crime to have sex with a family member. And it certainly isn't a crime to take pictures.

ELIZA

Hold on a second. I didn't enjoy it. I'm tired of people always assuming I enjoy sex with just anyone. I'm sick of being treated like a whore.

GARRET

That's what you are, right? A no-good, lying whore.

HECTOR

All right. Enough of this! You have no right to talk to her that way.

ELIZA

Hector, I can handle this.

GARRET

Yeah, like the way you handled me.

HECTOR

You son of a bitch.

(Hector throws a punch at Garret. Garret anticipates the move and blocks it. Garret retaliates and starts throwing small jabs to Hector's face.)

ELIZA

Carson, do something.

(Carson points his gun at the two.)

CARSON

Stop it now!

(Garret stops, turns to Carson. Hector falls to his knees, covers his face.)

GARRET

I don't think you have the guts to pull that trigger.

CARSON

You think wrong.

(Garret takes a step forward toward Carson.)

GARRET

I told you already. I know your type. I can see it in your eyes you ain't got the guts to do something this stupid. I don't think Hector and Eliza knew the kind of person they hired. You think you're brave? There ain't an inch of courage in you.

CARSON

I'm warning you...

AYDEN

Garret, do what he says, so no one gets hurt.

GARRET

I'm ashamed of you, boy. You being a soldier can't see a loser like him ain't nothing more than a few simple words? Look at him. Use that intuition of yours and see the pitiful scum that he is.

AYDEN

He's holding a gun, for Christ's sake.

GARRET

Hey, watch your tongue.

(Garret suddenly takes a few more steps and snatches the pistol out of Carson's hand, then aims it at Carson's head.)

(Carson creeps to the floor, with his hands in the air.)

DIANE

Garret! What are you doing?

GARRET

Self-defense, dear. That's all it is.

CARSON

I'm sorry. All right. I didn't mean it. You're right. I am nothing.

GARRET

That's what I wanted to hear.

AYDEN

Now, could you put the gun down?

(Garret looks at it, then points it at Hector.)

GARRET

Now that the tables have turned, tell me what happened to my son.

HECTOR

I told you already. He killed himself.

GARRET

Liar!

ELIZA

He's not lying. He took his life because you pushed him to it. All that Bible-thumping you did caused him to go overboard. He didn't think he was worthy enough to be your son.

(Garret aims the gun at Eliza, angrier by the second.)

GARRET

You have three seconds to tell me what really happened, or I swear to God, I will rain God's vengeance upon you.

AYDEN

Uncle, there's a better way to handle this. Put the gun down.

GARRET

Ayden, I love you like a son, but right now, if you dare cross me, you might as well be my enemy.

DIANE

Garret, please. Listen to your nephew. Don't do anything stupid.

GARRET

Diane, you of all people, should understand what I'm trying to do. We're talking about our son here, and these two are responsible.

DIANE

No, Garret, they aren't. I believe them. I believe Billy took his own life.

GARRET

Why are you doing this?

DIANE

Because we have only ourselves to blame. Billy came to me that day, when you told him you wouldn't have a queer working for your company. That young man, Jonathan Freeman. You found out he was gay and you made sure he wouldn't work for you again.

GARRET

He was a terrible rigger, Diane. Not because he was queer.

DIANE

You know that's not the reason you fired him. When Billy found out, he was ready to come out and I knew it. But like you, I didn't want to accept it. So I turned him away. I thought it'd be too painful to know that our son was something we didn't believe in.

GARRET

No, you're just being tempted. It ain't our faults.

DIANE

It is our fault. You and me. He killed himself because of us. Because we pushed him, and not once did we ever think about what we were doing to him.

GARRET

I won't accept that. It's not true, I tell you.

AYDEN

Listen, Garret, I thought I knew Billy more than anyone, and when I found out he hung himself, I didn't want to believe it either. But it's possible he was under so much pressure, he couldn't take it anymore.

GARRET

The next person that dares say anything about my son killing himself will get a bullet in the head.

HECTOR

I can't believe just how sick you can be.

(Garret points the gun at Hector, ready to

shoot. Ayden rushes Garret, pushing Garret's hand downward as he fires the gun, striking Hector in the gut. Hector falls to his knees.)

(Ayden pries the gun from Garret's hand and throws it to the side.)

GARRET

Dammit, Ayden.

(Eliza screams. She runs to Hector's side.)

ELIZA

You monster! Why did you do that?

(Ayden tries to keep Garret under control.)

GARRET

Better get out of my way, boy.

AYDEN

Think about what you're doing here.

(Eliza notices the gun, hurries to it and picks it up. She points it in Garret and Ayden's direction.)

ELIZA

You son of a bitch! You shot my husband for no good reason.

(Garret and Ayden turn to look at Eliza. Ayden puts his hands up and takes a few steps away from Garret.)

(Garret appears calm.)

GARRET

You ain't gonna to pull that trigger.

(Eliza fires. Garret falls.)

(Diane rushes over to Garret.)

DIANE

Oh, god. Garret, are you all right?

GARRET

Heh...Will you look at that?

DIANE

We're going to get you to a hospital. You're going to be fine.

GARRET

Nah, forget it. It's no use. I had it coming.

DIANE

Don't talk nonsense.

GARRET

Only nonsense here is me. I know I did some awful things, but don't think I'm all bad.

DIANE

You're a fine man.

GARRET

Enough with the lyin' already.

DIANE

Garret, stay with me. Ayden, call an ambulance.

(Ayden heads over to the telephone, picks it up.)

GARRET

Don't waste your breath. It's over.

(Garret dies.)

(Diane cries in Garret's chest.)

(Eliza drops the gun, takes one last look at Garret, then turns away and goes to Hector's side again.)

ELIZA

You all right?

HECTOR

I think I'll live.

(Hector tries to move, only to cry out in pain.)

ELIZA

Take it easy, okay?

HECTOR

Eliza, it may not mean much now, telling you this, but I don't want to leave you.

ELIZA

That's good to know.

HECTOR

I just can't bear the thought of you with someone else.

ELIZA

There won't be anyone else.

(They smile at each other.)

(Diane gently lowers Garret's head to the floor. She stands up and gazes at Eliza.)

DIANE

How could you've done this? He's dead because of you.

(Eliza turns to Ayden.)

ELIZA

Ayden, call the police. I think it's about time we bring an end to all this.

BLACKOUT

THE END