

MAGGIE'S CHOICE

A Comedy/Drama in Two Acts

by

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CAST OF CHARACTERS
(5 women, 2 men)

MAGGIE LAWSON, a woman in her 50's

JOE LAWSON, her husband in his 50's

CLARE, their 29-year-old daughter

DONALD, Clare's husband. early 30's

LIZ, Maggie's friend, 50 or older

SUE, Maggie's friend, 50 or older

WILMA, Maggie's mother, 70 or older

Interior unit set. All action takes place in the family room of Maggie Lawson's home. The time is present. Running time 90 minutes

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

Act I, Scene 1.....a day in mid-January

Act I, Scene 2.....the following evening

Act I, Scene 3.....two weeks later

Act I, Scene 4.....a month later

Intermission

Act II, Scene 1.....a week later

Act II, Scene 2.....that evening

Act II, Scene 3.....two weeks later

ACT I, Scene 1

[Family room of Maggie Lawson's home. The decor is up-scale middle-class. There are four exits: one to the outside, one to the kitchen, one to the den, and a stairway to the second floor. Clothing is piled on the sofa and chairs. A large suitcase is open on the coffee table. At rise CLARE enters via front door, hangs up her jacket on a hall tree and looks around.]

CLARE: What the hell? Mother? *(shouts)* Mother, where are you?

MAGGIE: *(enters from the stairs carrying an armload of shirts)* Hi, honey. Here, take these will you? I'll be right back. *(exits upstairs)*

CLARE: *(shouts up to her)* These are Daddy's clothes. What are you doing with them?

MAGGIE: *(offstage)* What does it look like?

CLARE: *(to herself)* Good Lord! He wasn't kidding.

MAGGIE: *(reenters with suits on hangers)* Who wasn't, Clare?

CLARE: Daddy called me this morning. He said you kicked him out of the house last night.

MAGGIE: That's right. *(starts folding the clothes into the open suitcase)*

CLARE: Why?

MAGGIE: It's a long story.

CLARE: Well?

MAGGIE: Well, what?

CLARE: Why did you kick him out? Did you two have a fight?

MAGGIE: You might call it that.

CLARE: Mother, stop being evasive and tell me what's going on.

MAGGIE: Your father doesn't live here anymore, Clare.

CLARE: "Your father doesn't live here anymore, Clare." That's it? *(no response)* Mother, will you stop what you're doing and tell me what this is all about.

MAGGIE: What did Joe tell you?

CLARE: He said he spent the night on the lumpy couch in his office because you threw him out of the house.

MAGGIE: Did he seem upset?

CLARE: Of course he was upset. I'm upset. Donald's upset. The entire universe is upset. What the hell's going on around here?

MAGGIE: It has nothing to do with you, dear. Want a cup of coffee?

CLARE: No, I don't want a cup of coffee. I want to know why you and Daddy are getting a divorce.

MAGGIE: Who said anything about a divorce?

CLARE: Okay, I was jumping to conclusions. This is just a major disagreement, right? One of those things that happens sometimes. You and Daddy get over being mad at each other, and life gets back to normal. Am I right?

MAGGIE: No, dear. This is not a major disagreement. It's a lifetime of minor ones.

CLARE: What's that supposed to mean?

MAGGIE: To begin with, I didn't kick your father out of the house. I asked him to leave. I thought I was rather civil about it.

CLARE: (*Exasperated*) Damn it, mother! I don't care if you were civil or not. That's not the point. What's going on?

MAGGIE: Clare, have you ever gotten up in the morning and wished that for one day nobody would make demands of you?

CLARE: Well, sure. We all have days like that.

MAGGIE: I always felt that what I did for my family was important, and that made *me* feel important...

CLARE: You are important, Mother. . .

MAGGIE: . . .so, there was no incentive to change...

CLARE: To change what? Husbands, like your friend, Sue? Is that why you kicked Daddy out?

MAGGIE: That's what your father intimated. Somehow, I thought better of you.

CLARE: I'm my father's daughter.

MAGGIE: You're also a grown woman, husband and two kids of your own.

CLARE: So?

MAGGIE: So, how do you feel about yourself, your life?

CLARE: What I feel isn't the issue right now.

MAGGIE: Yes, it is. Answer my question. How do you feel?

CLARE: Fine! I feel just fine about everything. How am I supposed to feel?

MAGGIE: That's what I'm asking.

CLARE: Is this a test? What kind of an answer are you looking for?

MAGGIE: A truthful one. On a scale of one to ten, how do you rate your life right now?

CLARE: Oh, about a seven or eight, I guess. But what's that got to do. . .

MAGGIE: Seven or eight, huh. Then, I'm happy for you.

CLARE: I get the feeling that's not the answer you wanted. What was I supposed to say? That some days I think I'll go out of my mind with the endless, boring routine? That some days I'm desperate to have a conversation with somebody over the age of five?

MAGGIE: Now you're being honest.

CLARE: Why shouldn't I be? Every marriage has its ups and downs. I didn't expect a lifetime of moonlight and roses. There are good days, and some not so good. But *I* certainly don't want to change anything.

MAGGIE: Not ever?

CLARE: Well...maybe someday. The most important thing right now is taking care of my son and daughter. Like they say, everything in its season.

MAGGIE: Everything in its season. Nicely put. Maybe you'll understand then, when I tell you that my season has arrived.

CLARE: Your season for what?

MAGGIE: For me.

CLARE: Mother, you've always been free to do what you want.

MAGGIE: I always thought so, too, until one day...

CLARE: Oh, migod, has Daddy been cheating on you?

MAGGIE: Not that I know of. Why? Do you know something that I should know, that nobody's told me?

CLARE: No, of course not. That was a stupid thing to say.

MAGGIE: That's a relief.

CLARE: So, one day...

MAGGIE: I woke up and realized that it was time for a change.

CLARE: Time to change what?

MAGGIE: I told you. Me!

CLARE: Why? We love you the way you are.

MAGGIE: I don't. Not anymore, I don't. Listen, Joe is coming over shortly to pick up his things. It might be better if you weren't here.

CLARE: Can't the three of us sit down and talk about this?

MAGGIE: This is strictly between your father and me, Clare. It doesn't involve you.

CLARE: My parents are splitting up and it doesn't involve me? Mother, everything you do is important to me. I've always felt that no matter what, you and Daddy would always be there.

MAGGIE: And we will be there for you, dear--no matter what. Do you still want me to baby sit this afternoon?

CLARE: (*piqued*) Well, not if you're too busy with more important things.

MAGGIE: I thought I'd take the children to a movie while you run your errands. Afterwards we can go to Burger King for hamburgers...unless you have other plans.

CLARE: No, Donald's working late again tonight. Look, I hate to bother you with this right now, but the decorator's been bugging me to make a decision. Look at these drapery samples and tell me which one you like best? (*shows them to MAGGIE*)

MAGGIE: *Waverly*. Excellent quality. Good choice.

CLARE: I can't decide which one will go best with the upholstery fabric I picked out. Donald likes this one. What do you think?

MAGGIE: Which one do you like?

CLARE: I can't decide.

MAGGIE: History repeats itself. (*JOE enters*)

JOE: (*crosses to CLARE and gives her a kiss*) How's my girl? Has your Mother come to her senses yet? No, it doesn't look like it.

MAGGIE: Joe, I've packed your underwear, sweaters, and shirts in the suitcase. Take your suits on their hangers so they won't get wrinkled.

JOE: Take them where, Maggie? This is where I live.

MAGGIE: Not anymore.

JOE: See what I mean, Clare? She's kicking me out. No reason. Just, "good bye, Joe. It's been a grand 30 years, but I don't want you hanging around anymore."

MAGGIE: Clare, isn't it time you picked up your children?

CLARE: Give or take fifteen minutes...

JOE: Sweetheart, your mother is trying to kick you out, too. Be a good girl and skedaddle, will you? We'll talk later.

CLARE: All right, Daddy. I'll leave you two alone. Just remember, Donald and I have a right to know what this is all about. (*exits*)

JOE: I hope you're satisfied, Maggie. You've turned your whole family against you. Whatever it is you hope to accomplish, I trust the price is worth it.

MAGGIE: I knew it wouldn't be easy...

JOE: Just tell me what I've done.

MAGGIE: You haven't done anything. Or maybe you've done too much. Or maybe it's what you haven't done.

JOE: That's perfectly clear. Why don't you elaborate on each of those perfectly clear points?

MAGGIE: Family relationships are not precise equations, Joe. Like one leaky faucet equals one broken valve equals one new valve equals one fixed faucet. The problems and solutions are not always so clear-cut.

JOE: I get it. You're dumping me for a plumber.

MAGGIE: Joe, you listen, but you don't hear what I'm saying. There's no other man in my life.

JOE: Well, don't tell me you're suddenly coming out of the closet. I won't buy it.

MAGGIE: Then buy this. I need to live apart from you... for awhile, anyway.

JOE: And what, may I ask, brings you to this momentous decision at this particular time in your life?

MAGGIE: I can't live with who I am anymore, or continue to be complacent about what I do... or don't do as the case may be most of the time. I need to find a focus for my life.

JOE: Fine! Get a hobby.

MAGGIE: I'm not looking for a hobby. I need to accomplish something that makes me feel like an individual in my own right, not just Joe's wife.

JOE: Aren't you a little old to be having an identity crisis?

MAGGIE: Age has nothing to do with it. I feel like an appendage, a third hand that's useful at times but not really necessary.

JOE: (*patronizingly*) Poor Maggie...so misunderstood and unappreciated. Well, let me reassure you, I couldn't survive without your tender loving care. I'd overdose

on McDonalds, and my living quarters? Condemned by the health department. Believe me, Maggie, you are necessary.

MAGGIE: Placated like a petulant employee. Is that all I am to you? Your cook and housekeeper? Well, you can afford to hire one now. I quit.

JOE: (*trying to be reasonable*) Maggie, just tell me...in plain, simple English... what do you want from me?

MAGGIE: People usually change as they get older--develop new outlooks, find new goals. I'm the only person I know who's remained static for thirty years.

JOE: Oh, you've changed, Maggie. You're definitely not the same person I married.

MAGGIE: I was until a few days ago. I let life drift by in a haze of well-being, because there was no apparent reason to change anything. So, I started looking at things differently.

JOE: How differently?

MAGGIE: Let's start with Clare. She's twenty-nine years old, yet she can't make a simple decision without my approval. It's not solely her fault. I've always been available for her and flattered she respected my opinion.

JOE: Is that so bad?

MAGGIE: Yes, because through those small day-to-day decisions, I've been living her life, not mine.

JOE: Then excommunicate your daughter, not your husband. What the hell have I done?

MAGGIE: Everything! You've always done everything. You make all the decisions in this house. I need a new car, so you surprise me for my birthday.

JOE: You don't like the car?

MAGGIE: It's fine, but I wasn't even consulted about the color. Every year we take a two-week vacation. You ask me, "Where would you like to go this year?" I say it might be fun to take a cruise. You say, "That's for old, retired people, not us." Or, "it'll cost too much." Or, "I thought we promised the grandchildren a trip to Disney World." So I say, "what ever you want, dear," and that's the end of it. I'm still waiting to take that cruise.

JOE: If this is all about some damn cruise, why didn't you say so?

MAGGIE: I have, in a hundred different ways, but you never listened to me.

JOE: Since you never made an issue of it, I didn't think it was that important.

MAGGIE: Why should I have to make an issue of something before you take me seriously?

JOE: Oh, ho! Now I get it. You're throwing me out of the house to get my attention. Well, I'm all ears, Maggie. Make your point, then put my clothes back where they belong.

MAGGIE: The point is, Joe, I need to prove to myself that I can survive without you. Maybe then I can respect myself, and it won't matter whether you do or not.

JOE: What are you talking about? We've been married for thirty years. Doesn't that prove I respect you?

MAGGIE: That's fidelity, not respect.

JOE: It's the same thing.

MAGGIE: No, it isn't, although I don't expect you to know the difference.

JOE: But you do expect me to understand this sudden compulsion of yours to be the independent woman of the year when all I get are mind games for answers. Well, let me give it to you straight, Maggie. You won't survive alone out there in the real world.

MAGGIE: You mean the past thirty years haven't been real?

JOE: Of course they've been real. That's not what I'm talking about. It's the harsh realities of the work-a-day world that you're ill equipped to face.

MAGGIE: Then I'll have to learn, won't I?

JOE: There's no sympathy out there for newcomers or hard luck cases. It takes years to build a successful business.

MAGGIE: I don't plan to start a construction business.

JOE: What can you do? Cooking, housekeeping, childcare... Your choices are limited.

MAGGIE: I want to be a writer. I've had some experience...

JOE: Editing the PTO newsletter? Get real, Maggie.

MAGGIE: Well, I'm definitely going back to college. In a couple of years I'll have my degree.

JOE: Then what? You'll be fifty-five years old. Who starts a career at that age?

MAGGIE: I do.

JOE: Doing what?

MAGGIE: I haven't decided yet.

JOE: And how do you plan to live until you graduate and get this fabulous job you haven't decided on yet?

MAGGIE: I thought you might give me a pension.

JOE: A what?

MAGGIE: A pension. For thirty years I've cooked for you, kept you in clean clothes, raised your daughter. I think I've earned it.

JOE: I'm the wage earner in this family, remember? If you're so hell-fire driven to prove your independence, start by earning your own living for a change. You'll find out soon enough, there's no quarter given in the marketplace.

MAGGIE: Sounds like you're throwing me out.

JOE: Good Lord, Maggie! You're certifiable. This separation is your idea, not mine. Did you expect me to endorse it without putting up a fight?

MAGGIE: I don't know what I thought.

JOE: And you still don't. No woman in her right mind kicks her husband out of the house just to prove she can live without him. There's got to be another reason, something you're not telling me. *(looks to MAGGIE for an answer, but she remains silent)* Then tell me this. Do you have a time frame for this experiment of yours?

MAGGIE: Not really. A couple of months, maybe a year, I'm not sure...

JOE: You're not sure! Why does that not surprise me. *(starts for the stairs)* Well, you can be sure about one thing. I've got a meeting with the planning commission in forty-five minutes, and if I don't get cleaned up and out of here I'm going to lose the biggest contract...

MAGGIE: *(holding up his shaving kit)* You're forgetting something?

JOE: Dammit, Maggie...

MAGGIE: I understand the truck stop has nice clean showers.

JOE: I never thought I'd feel this way, but right now I could cheerfully strangle you and walk away without a drop of remorse.

MAGGIE: *(calmly)* You'd better get a leg up if you want to make that meeting.

JOE: I've got a business to run, and it's clearly a waste of time trying to make you see reason. So, I'll camp out at the office for a week or two... until you get your head straightened out. But don't come crying to me when you find yourself in a bind. Not until you're ready to take me back as your husband and provider.

MAGGIE: My husband and provider. How impersonal. What happened to my best friend, my companion, my *confidente*?

JOE: You're throwing those out along with the husband.

MAGGIE: I could hire a lawyer and take you to court.

JOE: Go right ahead if you think you've got a case. I'm not liable for child support anymore. Alimony is questionable unless you can prove abuse or infidelity. The best you could hope for is an equal division of our joint assets, and as long as you live in this house and drive the car I bought you for your birthday...

MAGGIE: Will my half of our savings account cover living and college expenses for a couple of years?

JOE: Not unless you supplement it. You'd better be damn sure this is what you want, Maggie, because there's no guarantee I'll come back when you're through playing your little game.

MAGGIE: That's a chance I'll have to take. You know, if you hadn't insisted on shouldering all the financial responsibility, had let me share your struggles in some tangible way, I'd feel more like a partner in this marriage, and less like an indulged child.

JOE: What you sound like is an ungrateful adolescent. You're trying to make me the scapegoat for a problem you can't even define. What you need is a psychiatrist.

MAGGIE: Maybe I do. *(takes a pack of cigarettes out of her pocket.)*

JOE: What are you doing?

MAGGIE: What does it look like?

JOE: You quit ten years ago.

MAGGIE: No, you did.

JOE: We agreed...it was something we both had to do.

MAGGIE: No, you laid down the law and expected me to blindly follow your mandate. For five years I sneaked outside, or hid in the garage.

JOE: Behind my back?

MAGGIE: If it'll ease your mind, I don't plan to start again, but this time it's my decision, not yours. *[tosses the pack into the wastebasket]*

JOE: And now you're ready to make all the decisions. Good luck, Maggie. You're going to need it. *(picks up the suitcase and the suits, crosses to the door)* Do you mind?

MAGGIE: *(opens the door for him)* Don't forget your golf clubs and exercise bike.

JOE: I'll get them this weekend.

MAGGIE: And remember to take your blood pressure pills. *[JOE gives her a final, exasperated look, then exits. She closes the door and stands with her back against it]* Well, Maggie Lawson, you finally did it. Success or failure... it's up to you now. How does it feel? *(Gleefully, she dances back to the sofa, picks up Joe's baseball cap and tosses it into the air; as she catches it her mood changes abruptly; she sits)* Scared to death.

BLACKOUT

ACT I, Scene 2

[The following evening. MAGGIE enters from the kitchen with a coffee tray, cups and saucers. SUE and LIZ follow her.]

MAGGIE: Let's have our coffee in here, girls.

SUE: Want some help clearing the table? I'll rinse while you load the dishwasher.

MAGGIE: Leave 'em be, Sue. I'll do it later.

LIZ: That was delicious, Maggie. What did you call it?

MAGGIE: Chicken mozzarella. It's a variation on veal parmesan.

SUE: Fred will love it. Can I have the recipe?

MAGGIE: *[serves coffee during the following]* You don't need a recipe. Just dump a jar of salsa over the chicken breasts, then a package of shredded mozzarella, and bake it for an hour. Nothing to it. Anyone want desert? There's some delicious fudge ripple in the freezer.

LIZ: Don't tempt me. If I gain one more pound, I'll have to buy a whole new wardrobe.

SUE: Don't I wish.

LIZ: What? The extra pound, or the wardrobe?

SUE: I already got the pounds, Liz.

LIZ: Then go for the wardrobe.

MAGGIE: Girls, I need your advice. . .

LIZ: So dinner was just the appetizer. I should have guessed, but it beat Healthy Choice for one in the microwave. How can we help you, Maggie?

SUE: Does this have anything to do with Joe walking out on you?

LIZ: Good Lord, Maggie! You might have dropped a hint.

MAGGIE: How did you find out, Sue?

SUE: I ran into a friend of Clare's at the grocery store this afternoon.

MAGGIE: Ah...the gossip hot line. But somebody didn't get the facts straight. Joe didn't walk out on me. I asked him to leave.

LIZ: The hell you did! Maggie and Joe... Joe and Maggie! Here falls the last bastion of marital bliss.

SUE: Liz, a broken marriage is not something to make fun of.

LIZ: You're right, Sue. There's always the second time around, or is Fred the third?

SUE: And what's your turn-on, Liz? Money?

MAGGIE: Stop it, you two. I need your help...

LIZ: Get the best lawyer in town, and bleed him dry.

MAGGIE: I'm not filing for divorce, Liz. I asked Joe to leave because I need to be on my own for awhile.

SUE: For heaven's sake, why?

MAGGIE: To find the real Maggie Lawson.

SUE: I don't understand. Either you're Maggie or you're not, and if you're not, then who are you?

MAGGIE: That's what I intend to find out.

SUE: *[turns to LIZ]* Do you understand what she's talking about?

LIZ: Self realization. But what I can't understand, Maggie, is why you want to go the road alone. Don't kick your husband out of bed, join Ladies Only.

MAGGIE: I'm not talking about my exterior self. That's readily apparent when I look in the mirror. I need to discover what's inside. I went from my mother's care to my husband's. I've never been entirely on my own, accountable to no one but myself.

SUE: Let me tell you, it's awfully lonely.

LIZ: But there are infinite possibilities. Dare I ask what precipitated this momentous decision?

MAGGIE: Joe's words exactly. I didn't have an answer for him, and I don't have one now.

LIZ: Well, try this on for size: One night you looked across the kitchen table at good, old, reliable Joe, and thought: I'm living in Dullsville with a man who falls asleep on the couch right after dinner, his pot belly drooping over his waistband...

MAGGIE: It has nothing to do with potbellies, Liz. If Joe's at fault it's only because he's done everything for me.

SUE: *[incredulous]* And you're complaining?

MAGGIE: It's time I learned to take care of myself.

SUE: You and Joe have got it made, Maggie. Relax and enjoy the golden years together.

LIZ: Joe will retire one day and be able to rest on his laurels, but I think Maggie's looking at the golden years as a road to discovery. Let Joe fall asleep on somebody else's couch.

MAGGIE: I hope not...

LIZ: Make up your mind, girlfriend. You can't have it both ways.

MAGGIE: All right, I'm crazy as a loon, but humor me, okay? What I need from you two are some ideas on how to supplement my savings... until I get my degree or sell the great American novel.

SUE: Did you ask Joe for an allowance?

LIZ: Really, Sue! You don't kick your husband out of the house, then ask for an allowance.

MAGGIE: Actually, I asked him for a pension. It seemed appropriate at the time.

LIZ: It would be if you were employed.

MAGGIE: I have been, for thirty years.

LIZ: No, dear. Being a housewife is not legitimate employment. It wasn't until a few years ago that the IRS even put a monetary value on your services, and that's only if a single father has to replace his dead or errant wife with a caregiver for the kids.

MAGGIE: Imagine that. I've spent my entire adult life doing charity work.

LIZ: And it wasn't even deductible.

MAGGIE: Sue, do you know how to file an income tax return?

SUE: Of course not. That's why God made CPA's. Right, Liz?

LIZ: Right. But I'd better warn you, I just raised my billing rate to one-twenty-five an hour.

SUE: Dollars? No wonder you can afford a new wardrobe every six months.

LIZ: I might if Uncle Sam didn't take half of every penny I earned. Washington is not kind to the self-employed.

SUE: Then how are we going to help Maggie solve her most immediate problem--how to pay for next week's groceries?

LIZ: Are you computer literate, Maggie?

MAGGIE: Computer what?

LIZ: Practically every job today requires a working knowledge of the computer.

MAGGIE: I'm a good typist, 60-70 words a minute...

LIZ: Doesn't matter. The single girl's mainstay, the clerk/steno pool, is obsolete...replaced by new technology and job titles such as office manager... executive assistant.

MAGGIE: What about homemaker, kitchen flunky, shirt sorter, sock matcher?

LIZ: Very funny, Maggie! Do you have any marketable skills?

MAGGIE: Well, I'm reasonably intelligent, crazy, but smart, have a winning personality, fond of children and old folks, and have 30 years experience doing charity work. I'm a decent cook, can sew up a storm, and always over-tip the paperboy.

LIZ: Sorry, but nobody's hiring saints today.

MAGGIE: What do think about starting a catering business?

SUE: Your competition takes up five yellow pages in the phone book. I know because I've called every one of them. What would you charge to cater my stepdaughter's wedding reception?

MAGGIE: What did you have in mind, and for how many?

SUE: Miniature hot dogs for a hundred and fifty. *(they react)* Just kidding.

MAGGIE: Okay, scratch that idea.

LIZ: I just bought two new outfits for work that need the skirts shortened. The last girl I had do alterations charged fifteen dollars a piece. You beat her price, Maggie, and you've got your first commission.

MAGGIE: I'll do them for fourteen.

LIZ: Ten.

MAGGIE: Twelve-fifty.

LIZ: You got it.

SUE: Fred has a dozen pair of pants that need the waist let out. *[pantomimes a pot belly with her hands]* You know...

MAGGIE: I'll do them for ten each.

SUE: Five.

MAGGIE: Seven-fifty.

SUE: You're on.

LIZ: Oh, this is ridiculous! Maggie, you can't support yourself with nickel and dime alterations.

MAGGIE: You got a better idea?

LIZ: Yeah, quit tilting at windmills, and learn to live with your unresolved frustrations like the rest of us. *[CLARE and DONALD enter]*

CLARE: Hi, mom...Liz, Sue. Are we interrupting something?

MAGGIE: Clare! Donald! What a surprise!

CLARE: I didn't realize you had company, Mother. We can drop by tomorrow if it's more convenient.

MAGGIE: Tonight's fine, dear. Come in and have a cup of coffee with us. (*aside to LIZ*) Stick around and watch the fireworks.

LIZ: No thanks. Come on, Sue. I'll drive you home. (*aside to MAGGIE*) How could she miss my BMW parked in your driveway?

MAGGIE: Selective vision.

SUE: Call you tomorrow, Mag. Bye, children.

MAGGIE: Thanks again, you two. (*LIZ and SUE exit. MAGGIE crosses to the kitchen*) Sit down and relax, Donald. I'll be back in a minute. (*exits*)

DONALD: I don't think it was a good idea to come barging in like this, Clare. I've had a long day, and I'm not in the mood for a confrontation with your mother.

CLARE: We're just going to talk with her, Donald.

DONALD: You want to talk. I want to go home.

CLARE: You agreed with me that this separation from Daddy is the craziest thing she's ever done.

DONALD: I said I agree. I didn't say we should play marriage counselors.

CLARE: Well, we can't sit by and let them ruin our lives.

DONALD: Ruin whose lives? Your mother seems in control of the situation. You're the one who needs help.

CLARE: Then help me, damn it!

DONALD: Help you do what? Your parents can work out their own problems. I have enough headaches at work; I don't need to take on anybody else's right now.

CLARE: You're just being....ssh! (*MAGGIE enters with the coffee pot and two mugs*)

DONALD: Is it decaf?

MAGGIE: Is there any other kind? Now, what could possibly bring you two here on a weeknight, as if I couldn't guess.

CLARE: Mother, I...uh, we...uh...

MAGGIE: If you have something to say, Clare, spit it out.

CLARE: Donald wants to say something, don't you, dear?

DONALD: I do?

CLARE: Yes, you do!

DONALD: Maggie, Clare is very upset with you for tossing her old man out on his ear.

MAGGIE: I know she is. Let her speak for herself?

DONALD: *(to CLARE)* I told you this wasn't a good idea...

CLARE: *(aside to DONALD)* Thanks a lot. *(to MAGGIE)* I was hoping we could stop you from doing something we know you'll regret.

MAGGIE: We had this conversation yesterday, Clare. Unless you have something new to add, let your tired husband go home to bed.

CLARE: Damn it! My whole life is falling to pieces and you talk about going to bed. Don't you care how I feel? Or how Daddy feels? I think you're being horribly selfish. Why are you doing this to me?

MAGGIE: I'm not doing anything to you, Clare. As for being selfish, yes, I guess I am. But, for once in my life, I'm entitled.

CLARE: *[sulking]* What's that supposed to mean?

MAGGIE: It means that I'll no longer be at your disposal every minute of the day and night. We're two separate people who need to lead our two separate lives. Grow up, Clare. We've been living in each other's pocket far too long.

CLARE: I don't depend on you all that much...

MAGGIE: Yes, you do, dear. The greater tragedy is that I've been too dependent on you. Well, that's going to change.

CLARE: Does that mean you won't baby sit Saturday night? Donald's boss is having a party for their clients, and we have to be there.

MAGGIE: A young attorney and his wife can afford to pay a babysitter once in awhile. I won't put you in a bind at this late date, but you might think about lining up someone else in the future.

CLARE: I'll ask Daddy if you're going to be too busy.

MAGGIE: Fine. You're awfully quiet, Donald. Do you think I'm crazy, too?

DONALD: You're certifiable, Maggie, but I'm not getting caught in the middle of a family feud. You do whatever you want. Right now I'm too tired to care.

CLARE: Donald!

MAGGIE: If you've said all you came here to say, let's call it a night. I have a busy day planned tomorrow.

CLARE: Mother, I'm not through discussing this.

MAGGIE: Well, I am. Finish your coffee, Donald, and take your wife home to bed.

DONALD: Maggie, I don't understand what you're trying to do. But you're right about Clare. She doesn't need a family conference every time she wants to change the color of the drapes. If you need any legal advice, give me a call.

CLARE: Donald!

MAGGIE: I hope you don't charge as much as Liz.

DONALD: At least twice what she bills per hour, but for you, Maggie, it's pro bono.

MAGGIE: Thanks, Donald. I appreciate it.

DONALD: Anytime. Let's go, Clare, before I fall asleep standing here in the doorway.

MAGGIE: Night, you two. *(CLARE & DONALD exit; MAGGIE starts collecting coffee things, changes her mind, goes to the phone)* Hello, Mother.....I've been busy... Yes, I'm going through with it.....Yes, they're all furious with me.....No, I'm not having second thoughts.....Really? You never told me that.....Okay, I'll get back to you in a couple of days.....Love you, too. Night. *(hangs up the phone)* It's going to be a long, lonely winter, but dammit, I'll show them!

BLACKOUT

ACT I, Scene 3

[One week later. At rise DONALD is offstage in the study, JOE is offstage in the kitchen.]

DONALD: I'm almost finished setting this thing up, Joe. Where's that drink you promised?

JOE: *(enters holding two beer cans & crosses to the study door)* Nothing but beer in the house, sorry.

DONALD: What happened to your stockpile of scotch?

JOE: Took it with me when I was moved out.

DONALD: Maggie doesn't imbibe?

JOE: A whiskey sour on rare occasions. Never scotch. Did you get everything connected?

DONALD: I think so. Where are the floppies?

JOE: In that shoebox on the table behind you.

DONALD: *(enters)* Hey, what gives? This isn't cold.

JOE: What did you expect? I don't live here anymore, remember?

DONALD: Maggie likes warm beer?

JOE: Maggie doesn't like, period. Found these in the panty behind the apricots.

DONALD: Strange filing system.

JOE: She doesn't like canned apricots, either.

DONALD: Oh, I see. Relegated to the dust bin.

JOE: Just like her husband. Don'cha know, I'm number one on her hate list right now. Maybe you're number two. Maybe she's gone totally anti-men. File Maggie in the loony bin.

DONALD: Maybe not...

JOE: C'mon, Donald, you've been watching too many of those crazy feminist shows on TV.

DONALD: I wouldn't call them crazy.

JOE: Donald, you're not paying attention. I'm talking about a woman who's got the biggest house in an up-scale neighborhood, and every new gadget that's come on the market.

DONALD: Maybe she wants to trade you in for a new model.

JOE: That's what I thought at first, but she says not.

DONALD: You believe her?

JOE: She's a middle-aged woman who's starting to show her wrinkles. It's not a face or figure to turn heads anymore.

DONALD: That could be the problem. You aren't paying her enough attention.

JOE: I tried that tactic and got slapped down. She's got the home she's always wanted, a faithful husband, a son-in-law she actually likes, a daughter at her beck and call, and two grandkids who dote on her... What else could she possibly want?

DONALD: Why don't you ask her?

JOE: I did.

DONALD: What did she say?

JOE: She said she didn't know, exactly. She just knows she doesn't want me around while she figures it out.

DONALD: Maybe it's one of those menopause things.

JOE: Women don't go through menopause anymore. It's politically incorrect.

DONALD: Then I don't know what to tell you.

JOE; You know what I think? Women have it too easy today. Too much time on their hands. I was one of eight kids, and my mother kept us fed and in clean clothes without any of the modern conveniences. She didn't have time to worry about 'finding herself.'

DONALD: Barefoot and pregnant. Is that your philosophy?

JOE: Damn right!

DONALD: Careful, Joe. You're flirting with heresy.

JOE: Donald, we're talking women, not religion.

DONALD: Same thing. You can't argue with either of them. But your attitude is Edwardian, to say the least?

JOE: There's nothing wrong with my attitude. The problem today is that your generation wants to turn everything around. Women out making the money while men stay home with the kids. It's not what God intended.

DONALD: I don't recall God saying anything about the division of domestic labor.

JOE: Well, He said that man was head of household.

DONALD: No, that was the IRS.

JOE: For once they got it right. Don't you agree?

DONALD: Absolutely! They should make "barefoot and pregnant" a federal law.

JOE: I knew I could count on you, Donald. Buddies to the end.
[raises his beer can in a toast]

DONALD: *[acknowledges the toast]* Drinkin' buddies, anyway. Let me run a start-up program and see if that antiquated machine you bequeathed Maggie actually works.

JOE: She says she needs it for her class work. You knew she enrolled in night school, didn't you?

DONALD: I heard it rumored.

JOE: My father always said: Too much education ruins a good woman. Makes 'em think they're smarter than their men folk, gives 'em notions about having a career, never mind that they have young'uns at home to take care of.

DONALD: Today's not yesterday, Joe, and Maggie's young'un is all grown up.

JOE: I know that. And I don't care if she wants to go back to school. In fact, I don't care what she does, but don't tell me you haven't thought the same thing...at least once in your married life.

DONALD: Guilty. But there'd be hell to pay if I ever voiced it to Clare. She tells everybody that we're a modern couple, partners in every way.

JOE: So, when do you start having the babies while she's out fighting the wild animals for her share of the kill?

DONALD: With the strides they're making in medical science, it could be any day now.

JOE: *[laughing]* Okay, run that program so we can go to your house and get a COLD brew. At least I'm welcome there. Maybe I should move in with my daughter and son-in-law till Maggie's grandiose schemes blow themselves out.

DONALD: Don't push your luck.

JOE: They will, you know. She has no idea what she's asking for.

DONALD: Suppose, just suppose, she becomes successful at whatever... Will you support her, or fall in the face of competition?

JOE: What competition? I build office complexes. She wants to be a writer. Then again, she doesn't really know what she wants.

DONALD: Has she ever talked to you about it?

JOE: I don't remember.

DONALD: Maybe she did, but you didn't listen.

JOE: *[taking offense]* Who's side are you on, Donald?

DONALD: I'm trying not to take sides.

JOE: I thought you agreed with me that she's gone completely round the bend.

DONALD: I was playing the devil's advocate.

JOE: You sound more like one of those marriage experts on the Oprah Winfrey Show. Wife doesn't understand husband; husband doesn't listen to wife. After 30 years what's to understand, what's to talk about. She doesn't understand my headaches at work, and I don't want to hear about hers, period.

DONALD: So, that's what I've got to look forward to in thirty years.

JOE: You betcha. Same-o, same-o.

DONALD: If I should opt for a short-term change-over, where does that leave your daughter?

JOE: Oh, there's still a lot to be said, staying faithful to the same person. Sure, you start taking each other for granted, but is that so bad? It's kinda like your ratty old bathrobe. You keep wearing it because it's comfortable.

DONALD: And that's all Maggie is to you.....a comfortable, ratty old bathrobe.

JOE: Of course not. That's not what I meant....

DONALD: Who are you, Joe?

JOE: What do you mean, who am I?

DONALD: Who are you? How would you describe yourself to a stranger?

JOE: Well, I'd say I'm a businessman...a construction engineer...and a damn good one. I'm a father, and a grandfather...

DONALD: And who is Maggie?

JOE: She's my wife, dammit! Who else would she be?

DONALD: Exactly. Joe, you'd better take a long, hard look at yourself, and listen to what you're saying...

JOE: Cut the double-talk, Donald, and say what you mean.

DONALD: I just did, but you weren't listening.

[BLACKOUT]

ACT I, Scene 4

[A month later. At rise, a TV soap opera is blaring. MAGGIE enters from the den with some bolts of fabric and dumps them on the sofa and chair. WILMA follows with the dress dummy]

WILMA: *(shouting over the TV)* Where do you want this?

MAGGIE: *(shouting back)* Put it anywhere for now. Mother, if you're not watching the TV can we turn it off? *(exits den)*

WILMA: *(turns TV off)* I was watching till you interrupted me. *(exits den)*

MAGGIE: *(enters with card table; WILMA follows with a folding chair; MAGGIE indicates a piece of furniture)* Move that out of the way so I can set up the sewing table over there.

WILMA: I hope you don't plan to entertain anytime soon. I'd hate to do this all over again.

MAGGIE: *(sets up the table during the following)* Who's got the money?

WILMA: Who's got the time? *(phone rings)*

MAGGIE: Get that, will you? *(doorbell rings)*

WILMA: *(picks up the phone)* Hold on. *(goes to the door)*

LIZ: *(carrying a dress in a plastic store bag)* Hi, Wilma. What is this, moving day?

MAGGIE: I'm moving my sewing things in here. It's gotten too crowded in the den. *(exits den)*

WILMA: *(back to the phone)* Hello? Hello? Yes, this is Maggie's Alterations.....You want what?.....Your wedding gown made into a fun dress?Oh, a sundress. Why would you want to do that?.....He did, did he? Well, I don't blame you. I wouldn't marry him either, then. Can you return it?.....That's too bad.....Well, you'll have to ask my daughter. She's the seamstress. *(MAGGIE enters with a portable sewing machine and mouths, "take a message.")* She's busy with another customer right now.

LIZ: I just bought this to wear Friday. Will you have time to shorten it? *(pulls the dress out of the bag and gives it to MAGGIE)*

WILMA: Your number is what?..... Talk louder, I can't hear you.

MAGGIE: Liz, this skirt has at least five yards of material in it. I'm not going to have time to do it by Friday.

WILMA: 555-0671?.....

LIZ: Damn! Guess I'll just have to wear it tacky long.

WILMA: Sorry, 0571..... Yes, I'll tell her. (*hangs up*)

MAGGIE: Who was that on the phone?

WILMA: A disillusioned bride-to-be. I wrote her number on the pad.

MAGGIE: Mother, look at this. If I pin and cut it, could you put in a hand rolled whipstitch? (*starts setting up the machine*)

WILMA: (*examines the skirt-then looks a Liz*) When did you need it?

LIZ: Friday.

WILMA: Well, if I work round the clock, forego sleep and sustenance, I might have it ready by then.

LIZ: Bless you, Wilma. Maggie's got a first-rate assistant.

WILMA: She's too busy these days to look in on her poor old mother, so I come here and hem while I watch my soaps.

MAGGIE: She also cooks, cleans, and does laundry.

LIZ: Good help is hard to find. How much does she pay you to be the maid of all work, Wilma?

WILMA: Nada. A big fat zero.

LIZ: Maggie, it's against the law to employ slave labor.

MAGGIE: I can't afford her social security.

WILMA: I already get a check from them every month. You could skip Washington and pay me directly.

LIZ: And deprive the Government of it's pound of flesh? An entire agency might have to close down. (*Phone rings*)

WILMA: Maggie's Alterations.....Just a minute. *(covers the receiver with her hand)* Maggie, it's Elinore Baxter. She wants to get with you about her granddaughter's christening dress.

MAGGIE: I already told her I couldn't do it.

WILMA: Why not?

MAGGIE: She has a 75-year-old christening dress she wants me to refurbish. If I breathe on it, the fabric will disintegrate.

WILMA: What should I tell her?

MAGGIE: Tell her I'll call her back.

WILMA: Maggie can't come to the phone right now. She'll call you back.....Yes, I think she's got your number.....Bye, Elinore.

LIZ: Why don't you make her a copy?

MAGGIE: Embellished with cut lace and seed pearls? Too labor intensive.

LIZ: How much?

MAGGIE: I wouldn't do it for less than two hundred.

WILMA: Do it. You need the money.

MAGGIE: Bottom line is she can't afford it.

WILMA: What can she afford?

MAGGIE: Twenty bucks, tops.

LIZ: *(laughs)* Maggie, you're beginning to sound like a hard-nosed exec. I'm proud of you.

WILMA: She's such a sweet old soul, and this is her first grandbaby. I wish you'd reconsider, Maggie...

MAGGIE: *(angry)* Mother, if you want to do charity work, do it on your own time. I've got bills to pay. *(exits to den)*

LIZ: *(follows Maggie to the door)* If this is a bad time...

MAGGIE: (*offstage*) It's no worse than any other.

WILMA: (*shouts*) Take a break.

MAGGIE: (*enters with box of sewing notions*) You take a break. I've got work to do.

LIZ: Business is booming, I see.

MAGGIE: The work is. The checkbook isn't.

LIZ: If the demand exceeds the supply, raise your rates.

MAGGIE: I tried that, remember? You said you'd take your business across town.

LIZ: That's how the system works.

MAGGIE: I thought you were my friend.

LIZ: I promised to support your enterprise, not underwrite it.

MAGGIE: Go in the den and put your dress on, Liz. I'll measure and pin it before I get busy with other things.

LIZ: (*crosses to den*) How are your classes coming?

MAGGIE: Great! Just wish I had more time to prepare.

LIZ: (*offstage*) Decided on a major yet?

MAGGIE: Secondary education with a specialty in counseling. But don't tell Joe. He'd say the loonies were taking over the bin. (*phone rings*)

WILMA: You get it, Maggie. I'll get us some coffee. (*exits to kitchen*)

MAGGIE: Maggie's Alterations.....Hello, Mrs. Van Buren; how are you?.....Yes, I'll have your coat ready this afternoon....I'm sorry, but I won't have time. I've got two weddings right now.....I know how important the cruise is to you.....All right, bring them over and I'll see what I can do.....Thank you, Mrs. Van Buren.....Good bye.

LIZ: (*enters wearing a dress with a low cut bodice, and a very full skirt which hangs mid-calf*) I need some help with the zipper. (*MAGGIE zips her dress*) What do you think?

MAGGIE: Very nice. How short do you want it?

LIZ: A couple of inches above the knee.

MAGGIE: *(gets her hem ruler and pincushion)* OK. Come over here. *(sits on the floor)* Stand up straight.

WILMA: *(enters with tray and three coffee mugs)* Coffee, Liz?

LIZ: Thanks. *(takes a cup and sips as she turns and talks. WILMA picks up a skirt she's hemming, sits and turns on the TV with the remote.)*

MAGGIE: Don't spill it on the dress.

LIZ: I noticed that you have a computer in the den? How do you like it?

MAGGIE: It's only an XT IBM clone with five-twelve-K, but it does what I want it to. And it didn't cost anything.

LIZ: How did you manage that, Miss Penny-pincher?

MAGGIE: Nepotism.

LIZ: What?

MAGGIE: I went to see one of those communication specialists-- you know, a computer salesman? He tried to sell me ten thousand dollars worth of hardware that did everything except wash and stack the dishes. So I sicked him on Joe. You know men and their toys. He bought a whole new system, and I commandeered the old one. Wasn't that clever of me?

LIZ: Savvy lady. What are you working on?

MAGGIE: A couple of feature articles for women's magazines.

LIZ: On commission?

MAGGIE: No. They say they only want submissions from recognized writers, but they don't tell you how to get recognized if you can't get published.

LIZ: One of my clients is a literary agent.

MAGGIE: Really?

LIZ: Really! I'll talk to her.

MAGGIE: I thought about writing one of those "romance" novels. A lot of housewives do, and make good money. So, I went to the used book store and bought a dozen or so paperbacks with titles like: Love in the Morning, Love in the Afternoon, Forever Love. Read them all-- cover to tattered cover to get the gist of how it's done-- and decided the world really didn't need any more soft sex.

LIZ: Soft sex?

MAGGIE: Did you know that there are one hundred and fifty-six ways of describing sexual intercourse without using a single anatomical term?

WILMA: Have you ever thought of writing children's stories?

MAGGIE: No. Why?

WILMA: Oh, I recall some of the stories you used to make up for Clare when she was small. She loved them, because they were all about her.

MAGGIE: How could I do that for other children?

WILMA: You'll think of a way.

LIZ: Maggie, you have a smart mother.

WILMA: She didn't inherit her brains from her father.

MAGGIE: Mother! Daddy was a brilliant man.

WILMA: On one subject.

LIZ: What was that?

MAGGIE: Rocks. He taught geology. We never went anywhere that we didn't stop to collect rock specimens.

LIZ: Sounds fascinating.

WILMA: You try living with rocks for company. That's all he thought about, all he talked about-- rocks, stones, aggregates...

MAGGIE: Must have been hard to take, because she almost walked out on him.

LIZ: You did? Really?

WILMA: Yep. Tried to pull a "Maggie"... was packed and out the door when it occurred to me I didn't have any place to go.

LIZ: What did you do?

WILMA: Went back upstairs and unpacked. Six months later he died of a stroke. I'm glad I never told him.

LIZ: I'm sorry, Wilma. *(bends over)* How's it coming, Maggie?

MAGGIE: Almost finished. Stand up straight.

LIZ: How's Joe doing?

MAGGIE: Fine, I guess. He remodeled his office to include a sleeping area, shower, and compact kitchen.

LIZ: Then you're not ready to throw in the towel yet?

MAGGIE: Never. I'd rather starve first. *(doorbell rings)* Can you get that, Mother?

WILMA: *(going to door)* Work, work, work, and not even a paid vacation.

MAGGIE: I'll treat you to the Bahamas with my first royalty check.

WILMA: *(opens door)* Hi, Sue. You're a little early. I'm still working on your skirt.

SUE: *(entering)* That's O.K., Wilma. Go back to your soap opera. I'll help myself to a cup of coffee. *(crosses to kitchen)*

MAGGIE: What's in the bag?

SUE: The fabric my stepdaughter picked out for her bridesmaid's dresses.

MAGGIE: What color did she decide on?

SUE: Puce. *(exits)*

LIZ: Oh! She's got to be kidding!

MAGGIE: All finished, Liz. Take it off very carefully. Don't shake any of those pins loose. *[sits at machine and begins threading bobbins. CLARE enters]*

CLARE: Hi, Mom. Hi, Grandma. Ooooh! Like your dress, Liz. What's the occasion?

LIZ: I plan to devastate a room full of hungry males Friday night. It's our annual get-together thing.

CLARE: Watch out! They'll be crawling all over you.

LIZ: Don't I wish. *(exits)*

CLARE: Mom, you got a minute? I need to talk to you. *(SUE enters)*

SUE: Hi, Clare. You're looking perky today. *(phone rings, CLARE answers)*

CLARE: Maggie's Alterations. This is her neglected daughter speaking.....
(angrily) You trying to be funny or something? No, I'm not an abused child.....
Well, why didn't you say so. Just a minute. *(to MAGGIE)* Mother, do you want to pre-plan your memorial service?

MAGGIE: Any day now.

CLARE: She's not interested.....No, I don't think she wants that either. Sorry. *(hangs up)*

SUE: Clare, look at this God-awful color my stepdaughter picked out for her attendants.

CLARE: Yuk! Looks like mashed prunes.

SUE: She thinks it will compliment her beige satin gown.

CLARE: *(laughing)* The wedding party will look like a bunch of dead leaves.

SUE: Then her husband should fit right in.

CLARE: Mom, I really need to talk to you.

MAGGIE: So, talk.

CLARE: Can we go somewhere private?

MAGGIE: This is as private as it gets.

SUE: *(stands)* I can take a hint...

MAGGIE: *(waves her back down)* Stay where you are, Sue.

LIZ: *(yells from offstage)* Can somebody help me with the zipper?

WILMA: Damn! I just drew blood. (*phone rings*)

MAGGIE: (*grabbing the phone*) Sue, go help Liz with her dress. Clare, there's a box of Kleenex on the kitchen table.

CLARE: It's a madhouse around here.

MAGGIE: (*on the phone*) Maggie's Alterations... She's right here, Donald. I'll put her on.....(*CLARE shakes her head*) She doesn't want to talk to you either..... OK, but I'm not promising anything.....bye, Donald. (*to Clare*) What brought his on, Missy? (*SUE and LIZ enter*)

CLARE: That's what I wanted to tell you.

SUE: Tell her what?

LIZ: Something wrong between you and Donald?

WILMA: Why not. It's a family tradition.

CLARE: (*starting to cry*) We had a big fight last night, and he walked out on me.

WILMA: (*handing Clare a tissue*) What did you two lovebirds fight about?

CLARE: He wants to move to Chicago...

WILMA: Chicago?

CLARE: ...and I just finished decorating the living room.

LIZ: Make it easier to sell.

SUE: What's in Chicago?

CLARE: A job with a big law firm.

MAGGIE: Have you two discussed it?

CLARE: We argued about it all weekend.

LIZ: More money?

CLARE: Yes, but I don't want to move.

WILMA: Whither thou goest,....

MAGGIE: But if it's a career move Donald wants to take...

CLARE: I can't leave you and Daddy, and all my friends to move to a place I know nothing about. Donald doesn't care what I want. He's just being selfish.

MAGGIE: Who's being selfish?

CLARE: You're not going to take his side, are you?

MAGGIE: I'm not going to take anybody's side. Have you told your father?

CLARE: I suppose Donald has. He stayed with Daddy last night.

MAGGIE: Honey, I don't know what to tell you.

LIZ: Chicago?

WILMA: There's an echo in here.

SUE: I've been there a few times. It's a fun town to visit, but I wouldn't want to live there. (*MAGGIE gives her a dour look*) Well, if you live in the suburbs, I guess it's not so bad.

CLARE: It's a horrible place--noisy, dirty--not the kind of place you want to raise your children. I read all the time about the knifings, drugs, guns...

MAGGIE: I don't think Chicago has a monopoly...

CLARE: Mother, you act like you don't care if I move away.

MAGGIE: Of course I care. I'd miss you, Donald, and the kids terribly...

CLARE: No you wouldn't! You don't even miss Daddy. You're so busy writing stories, going to college, your alteration business, you don't have time for us anymore.

MAGGIE: Clare, please...

CLARE: Do you know it's been a month since you've seen your grandchildren? They keep asking, when is Grandma coming to see us, and I keep making excuses about how busy you are. I should tell them the truth. Grandma has more important things to do than spend time with her family.

MAGGIE: Clare, you know that's not true...

CLARE: Yes it is. Every time I ask your advice about something, you're too busy to talk. And now, when my whole life is falling to pieces, you won't stop what you're doing long enough to tell me what to do.

MAGGIE: Clare, the decision to move to Chicago is something you and Donald will have to work out between yourselves.

CLARE: That's what he said--just before he stomped out of the house.

MAGGIE: Well, give him a call, tell him you're calmer now and would like to talk...

CLARE: I wouldn't talk with him if he was the last person on the planet. Do you know what he called me? A self-centered, immature child! *(beat)* Wait 'til I tell Daddy!

MAGGIE: What do you expect me to do?

CLARE: He'll listen to you. Tell him...oh, I don't know...

MAGGIE: Now, you listen to me Clare. If you stay here just to please me, Donald will resent my interference, and that doesn't bode well for your marriage. Honey, you're more important to me than life. I love you. But this is one time I can't tell you what to do.

CLARE: Why can't things stay the same. I hate making decisions. I thought that when two intelligent people got married, each one was just as important as the other. It's not fair that I always have to do what he wants.

MAGGIE: *(knowingly)* Hold on to that thought, baby. Your turn will come.

WILMA: Now you give that nice husband of yours a call and apologize. Then fix him a special dinner. When a man's stomach is full, he's more inclined to agree with you.

CLARE: Donald's the one who should apologize.

WILMA: I know, dear. It's tough raising two children and a husband at the same time.

CLARE: *(hugs her)* OK, Grandma. I'll go home and call him. But I won't apologize. *(crosses to the door)* Sue, if that's what the bridesmaids are wearing, what color is your dress going to be? The mother of the bride is supposed to be color-coordinated.

SUE: Since she's only a stepchild, I thought I'd wear black.

LIZ: Really, Sue!

MAGGIE: Her dress is a lovely shade of pink. She's going to look like a rose among the thorns.

CLARE: I'm glad. *(she hugs Sue)* I'd better go. Have to pick up the kids in fifteen minutes. Talk to you later, Mom. *(crosses to the door)*

LIZ: What am I, the wicked witch of the west? Don't I get a hug today?

CLARE: *(runs to Liz and hugs her)* You're definitely going to bewitch them in that new dress.

LIZ: If Wilma gets it hemmed in time. *(phone rings)*

CLARE: Somebody else get it. I'm outta here. *(exits)*

MAGGIE: *(picks up the phone)* Maggie's Alterations.Oh, no!..... *(she falters and grabs for a chair)* How bad is it?..... Go stop Clare. Quick! *(SUE dashes out the door)* Where did they take him?We'll be there as soon as we can. *{hangs up, LIZ and WILMA look at her expectantly; SUE and CLARE enter}* Joe's had a heart attack. They've taken him Community South.

CLARE: Is he....

MAGGIE: He's alive, thank God. We'd better go... No...Clare, you have to pick up your kids I have to go... Oh, help! Where did I put my purse?

LIZ: Maggie, I'll drive you and Clare to the hospital. Sue, you pick up Clare's kids and meet us there. Do you want to go, too, Wilma?

WILMA: No, but I can't stay here by myself, not knowing what's happening. Let me get my coat. *(exits upstairs)*

MAGGIE: Bring my purse down, will you please. I think I left it on the dresser. I'd better unplug the coffee pot...

SUE: Liz, take her to the car. I'll unplug everything and lock up. Now, go! Help your mother, Clare. *(CLARE takes MAGGIE'S arm and leads her out the door. LIZ follows as SUE collects coffee cups)*

CLARE: *(offstage)* Watch your step, Mom.

MAGGIE: *(offstage)* Clare, I'm not crippled!

CLARE: *(offstage)* Just trying to help. *[WILMA appears on the stairs]*

SUE: She still loves him, doesn't she?

WILMA: Of course she does. There's never been any question about that.

SUE: Then why?

WILMA: If you have to ask, you'd never understand.

[WILMA exits, SUE shuts the door behind her and crosses to the kitchen as the LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK]

ACT II, Scene 1

[One week later. The sewing table has been placed to one side of the room. There are vases of flowers and green plants on every surface. At rise, MAGGIE enters from the kitchen with another green plant, which she places on a side table. She flips a dust cloth at a couple of missed spots, and stands back to survey the room. WILMA enters from the stairs]

WILMA: Relax, Maggie. Everything looks fine.

MAGGIE: I still need to make my bed.

WILMA: Why? He won't be sleeping in it, or will he? *(SUE enters from the kitchen)*

SUE: Maggie, I put the kettle on for tea. The doctor did say Joe could have tea, didn't he?

MAGGIE: Yes, that's fine.

SUE: The casseroles are ready to put in the oven, and Liz is icing a cake--that's a disaster in the making. Is there anything else we can do?

MAGGIE: No. You've done plenty, Sue. Thanks.

WILMA: Looks like a funeral parlor in here. Where did all these plants come from?

MAGGIE: Friends and well-wishers. It is a bit much, isn't it?

WILMA: Not if you plan to open a flower shop.

MAGGIE: Might as well. Maggie's Alterations isn't paying the bills.

SUE: You've had more important things to do this week.

MAGGIE: Important doesn't buy next week's groceries.

SUE: Not to worry. The neighbors brought in enough food to feed you for a month.

WILMA: Just like a funeral. Only thing missing is the corpse.

SUE: That's not funny, Wilma.

MAGGIE: A family crisis brings out Mother's warped sense of humor.

WILMA: It helps to look on the bright side...

[LIZ enters from the kitchen, spatula in hand, icing all over her hands and face]

LIZ: I could use your help, Sue.

SUE: Did you leave any icing for the cake?

LIZ: *(sarcastically)* You're the little homemaker. Tax law didn't cover cake decoration.

SUE: *(takes the spatula from LIZ)* Poor little rich girl. I'll finish up. You go find someone to lick you clean.

LIZ: You've got a smutty mouth, you know that? *(SUE exits)*

MAGGIE: I appreciate your help, Liz.

LIZ: How's it going to work out... with Joe here, I mean?

MAGGIE: I don't know.

LIZ: Will it be temporary or permanent?

MAGGIE: I haven't decided.

LIZ: It's none of my business, but I think you should before...

MAGGIE: You're right! It's none of your business.

LIZ: *(beat)* I'll go help Sue in the kitchen. *(exits)*

WILMA: At the risk of putting a dent in this cushion may I sit and watch my program?

MAGGIE: Don't be silly. Just keep the sound down, will you, please?

WILMA: *[picks up a skirt to hem, and settles back on the sofa]* Are you sure you're ready for this?

MAGGIE: No. But what else could I do?

WILMA: Put him in a rehab center.

MAGGIE: I'd never be able to live with myself. He's my husband.

WILMA: In name only at the moment.

MAGGIE: It's just for a couple weeks...

WILMA: It's going to mean extra work for you.

MAGGIE: I'll manage.

WILMA: Clare won't be any help. She's getting ready to move.

MAGGIE: Maybe...maybe not. She and Donald are barely speaking to each other.

WILMA: Ah, yes...One of the joys of marriage. You look exhausted.

MAGGIE: I am exhausted.

WILMA: You didn't have to spend every day at the hospital...

MAGGIE: I wanted to be there.

WILMA: Are you having trouble sleeping?

MAGGIE: No. Are there circles under my eyes?

WILMA: There should be. You and that computer have been working the graveyard shift all week.

MAGGIE: Fewer interruptions.

WILMA: So, what is it?

MAGGIE: What is what?

WILMA: The big writing project. Something for class?

MAGGIE: No. If it works out, I'll surprise you. You're the one who gave me the idea.

WILMA: Well, don't wait too long. I don't have many birthdays left.

MAGGIE: Don't say that. I've got enough on my plate without worrying about you, too.

WILMA: When I go, it'll be nice and quick. Here one minute, gone the next. Just pop me in the ground and get back to work.

MAGGIE: I appreciate your consideration.

WILMA: Then get busy sewing so we can make some money.

MAGGIE: You're a tyrant, you know that? I thought I was the boss around here.

WILMA: Speaking of bosses, if he asks, will you let him stay?

MAGGIE: I don't know.

WILMA: You've missed him, haven't you?

MAGGIE: Sometimes.

WILMA: You still love him?

MAGGIE: I think so.

WILMA: Either you love someone or you don't. There's no "think" about it.

MAGGIE: Okay, I love him. I just don't like him sometimes.

WILMA: Sometimes I don't like you.

MAGGIE: I've often wondered...we were so young...if we'd waited to get married, would things have turned out differently?

WILMA: How differently?

MAGGIE: Weird...Joe asked the same question.

WILMA: What did you tell him?

MAGGIE: I don't remember. What I was thinking was that if I'd had a couple of years.....out on my own.....

WILMA: In case you've forgotten..

MAGGIE: There were alternatives.

WILMA: Not legal ones. And we didn't have the money for a quick trip to Sweden.

MAGGIE: Still...if we'd waited a few years.....

WILMA: If you'd waited a few years, Clare wouldn't be Clare. She might be Clarence. *(beat)* Have you ever told him?

MAGGIE: Told him what?

WILMA: You know...

MAGGIE: No, I don't know. What are you talking about?

WILMA: That Clare is not his child.

MAGGIE: Mother! That's a horrible thing to say! Of course she's his child.

WILMA: Clare's his daughter, but he's not the biological father.

MAGGIE: *(probing)* Why do you say that?

WILMA: Sex wasn't discussed at the dinner table thirty years ago, but it was hardly a secret why you and Joe rushed to get married only a month after you met.

MAGGIE: I was madly in love...

WILMA: And a little bit pregnant.

MAGGIE: So? I wasn't the first bride to be a little bit pregnant on her wedding day. No one thinks twice about it now.

WILMA: True. But you were eight weeks along, not four. For a construction engineer, Joe can't add worth a darn.

MAGGIE: All these years, and you've never said a word.

WILMA: It was your business-- yours and Joe's. I certainly wasn't going to rock the boat.

MAGGIE: Then why bring it up now?

WILMA: Because I think it may be the cause of your current problem.

MAGGIE: Don't be ridiculous. That was another lifetime.

WILMA: I'm not so sure...

MAGGIE: Why? Do you think Joe found out and has been lording it over me ever since?

WILMA: No, it's not in his nature to exact retribution, or else he wouldn't have been sleeping alone all these weeks.

MAGGIE: You're forgetting, so have I.

WILMA: But it was your choice, not his.

MAGGIE: What makes you so sure? His job brings him in contact with the young and available every day....executive assistants, office managers....

WILMA: Trust me, I have my spies.

MAGGIE: Then what are you implying?

WILMA: Now, don't take this the wrong way...

MAGGIE: Mother, you brought it up, so say what it is you feel compelled to say. I'm too tired to play guessing games.

WILMA: Guilt is a powerful motivator.

MAGGIE: You think I've been harboring a guilt complex all these years?

WILMA: Possibly.

MAGGIE: If I've been guilty of anything, it's not having the guts to stand up for myself.

WILMA: And then again, maybe you allowed him to walk over you, because you had something to hide.

MAGGIE: Do you really think I'd spend 30 years with a man out of gratitude? Mother! You should know me better than that.

WILMA: When I was growing up, the most important part of a girl's education was how to win and keep a man. To love, honor, and obey, was taken quite literally. The man of the house was king, and his wife must never forget that he saved her from the disgrace of becoming an old maid. It took more guts to remain single than to get married.

MAGGIE: And you spent your whole life being grateful to Daddy? I don't believe that...

WILMA: Oh, I loved him dearly, but I took my marital responsibilities very seriously...well, except for that one lapse. Funny, when I think about it. You succeeded where I failed.

MAGGIE: And that's why you weren't surprised when I told you.

WILMA: History repeating itself.

MAGGIE: I couldn't have come this far without your help. *[gives WILMA a hug]*
But please, never tell Clare, will you? It would break her heart. *(SUE enters)*

SUE: Break whose heart?

WILMA: If you heard anything just now, you didn't hear it.

SUE: I didn't hear anything.

MAGGIE: Good. Finished icing that cake?

SUE: In a manner of speaking. Liz is stacking the dishwasher. Sorry, Mag, but your kitchen will never be the same.

MAGGIE: That's Mother's territory now. You'll have to answer to her.
(CLARE enters with a small suitcase)

CLARE: Hi, everybody. We're here. *(LIZ enters)* Hey, this is a real welcome home party. Mother, where do you want me to put Daddy's things?

MAGGIE: In the den. I made up the sofa bed so he wouldn't have to climb the stairs.

CLARE: *(crossing to the den)* He's still a little weak, but he's doing fine now.

MAGGIE: I know. I just want to make things easy for him. *(CLARE exits as DONALD and JOE enter. DONALD is carrying another plant.)*

LIZ: Welcome home, Joe.

JOE: Thanks, Liz.

SUE: You're looking great, Joe. How do you feel?

JOE: Much better, thank you.

WILMA: *(pats the cushion next to her)* Come take a load off. Looks like you're gonna live after all.

JOE: Thanks, Wilma. I feel almost human again.

DONALD: *(holds out the plant)* Where should I put this, Maggie? *(she takes it from him and sets it on a side table.)*

MAGGIE: *(to DONALD)* Ride home wasn't too tiring?

DONALD: No problem. *(CLARE enters)*

WILMA: *(to JOE)* You sure you're comfortable?

JOE: I'm comfortable.

CLARE: Want an extra cushion for your back?

JOE: No, this is fine. *(They all look at him with worried frowns)* Really! *(He looks directly at MAGGIE who has yet to address him directly)* Aren't you going to welcome me home, Maggie? You invited me.

MAGGIE: Welcome home, Joe. There's some tea made. Would you like a cup?

JOE: What I'd like is a scotch and water.

CLARE: Daddy! The doctor said no alcohol!

JOE: Well, if I can't get my drink of choice... *(MAGGIE exits to kitchen)*

CLARE: If you want something special, Donald will go to the store...

JOE: Stay put, Donald.

CLARE: Would you like to prop your feet up? The hassock's in the den.

JOE: Enough already! You act like I'm sick or something.

CLARE: We've been awfully worried about you, Daddy.

JOE: I know. But you've done more than enough. Now quit fussing. I'm going to be just fine, I promise.

DONALD: I really should get back to the office. Clare, do you want me to drop you off on the way?

CLARE: I suppose so. I've got to pick up the kids at noon. But I don't want to leave until I'm sure Daddy's settled in.

JOE: I'm as settled as I'm gonna get. Go! Pick up my grandchildren.

CLARE: I'll bring them by to see you this afternoon, if you're feeling up to it.

JOE: By this afternoon I should be up to nine holes of golf.

CLARE: Don't even think about it. *(kisses him)* I love you.

JOE: Love you too. *(MAGGIE enters with the tea tray)*

MAGGIE: Dinner's at six sharp. Don't be late.

CLARE: We'll be here.

DONALD: Take care, Joe.

JOE: Thanks for the ride.

DONALD: Anytime. *(he and CLARE exit)*

SUE: Liz, I think it's time we said our good byes and let Joe get some rest.

LIZ: But we haven't popped the champagne...

SUE: *(propelling Liz to the front door)* Say good bye, Liz.

LIZ: Good bye, Liz.

SUE: Call, if you need anything, Maggie. You, too, Joe.

MAGGIE: Thanks again for all you've done.

SUE: No trouble at all.

LIZ: Speak for yourself. Bye, Joe. Talk to you later, Mag. *(LIZ and SUE exit)*

JOE: What are you watching, Wilma?

WILMA: Nothing special. I'll turn it off if it bothers you.

JOE: I wish everybody would quit treating me like an invalid.

WILMA: Technically, you are. Recovering from a by-pass is a bit trickier than getting over a cold.

MAGGIE: *(giving JOE and WILMA cups of tea)* Are you feeling okay? The trip home wasn't too tiring, was it? Want to lie down?

JOE: Stop it, Maggie. You're as bad as Clare. According to my doctor, I'm supposed to start jogging every day. I slept enough at that hospital, for God's sake.

MAGGIE: You're supposed to walk, not jog. And not right away. The doctor said you were not to push yourself.

JOE: Maggie, will you please sit down and relax. I promise not to expire in the next thirty minutes.

MAGGIE: Just trying to be helpful.

JOE: I know, but all this attention makes me nervous.

WILMA: In that case, I'll take my tea to my room. *(rises)*

JOE: You don't have to do that, Wilma. Stay and watch your program. *(beat)* Do you think that new doctor killed his patient?

WILMA: No way. He's too good looking to be the murderer. It's the nurse, the one that looks like Frankenstein's daughter, who done the deed. The handsome doctor will fall in love with the sexy blond in the next bed, marry her and live unhappily ever after. Depends on how long his contract runs.

JOE: *[laughing]* You have these soaps all figured out, don't you?

WILMA: I got hooked on Stella Dallas back in the fifties. Different faces, different names, but same old plot. And they show a lot more skin these days.

MAGGIE: Does anyone want something to eat? We've got enough food to feed an army.

JOE: A sandwich would taste good. What am I saying! Anything will taste good after a diet of Jello and chicken broth. I dream about big juicy T-bones, baked potatoes with sour cream, lemon meringue pie...

MAGGIE: Dream on. The doctor says no red meat and no dairy products. The pie you can have. I'll go see if I can find one.

WILMA: The kitchen's my domain, remember? You two stay put and get reacquainted. *(exits to kitchen)*

JOE: Clare tells me that Maggie's Alterations has become a household word.

MAGGIE: Lots of work. Not much money. Some weeks I put in eighty hours and didn't make enough to pay the electric bill. But if you say, 'I told you so,' I'll put you back in the hospital.

JOE: Not a word! Hospitals are the most depressing places to be sick in.

MAGGIE: You got excellent care.

JOE: What's more depressing, is that it took a heart attack for you to welcome me back in my own home.

MAGGIE: I want to do what's best for you, Joe, but you're just a guest here, for now. Nothing has changed.

JOE: I have. Can we talk about it?

MAGGIE: If you wish, but keep in mind that I'm not going back to where I was.

JOE: You're still living in the same place...

MAGGIE: Same address, different circumstances. I won't go back to living on the fringe...

JOE: I understand. I just want us to be talking buddies again. I've missed you.

MAGGIE: The last conversation we had was the day you moved out...

JOE: You mean, kicked out...

MAGGIE: Don't start, Joe...

JOE: Sorry. Did you miss me at all?

MAGGIE: There were times when I missed having your strength to draw on. Then I discovered I was strong enough to stand on my own two feet, and that's when I started feeling good about myself.

JOE: You've always been a strong person, Maggie. You're the only one who didn't seem to know it.

MAGGIE: I do now, and I'm not going to lose that edge.

JOE: Just be yourself. That's what I've always loved about you.

MAGGIE: Really? Or did you love your perception of me?

JOE: What's the difference?

MAGGIE: One is real, the other's an illusion.

JOE: Maggie, you're talking in riddles again.

MAGGIE: Don't put me on the spot, Joe. It's hard enough trying to explain it to myself. I'll write a paper on it someday if I can find the right words. Then, maybe it'll make sense to both of us.

JOE: Okay. Do you like working on the computer?

MAGGIE: I love it.

JOE: Wilma says you've been at it every night, sometimes till three in the morning.

MAGGIE: Not every night. Some nights I was too tired to spell my own name. Which reminds me, I need to move it out of the den while you're in residence. I'll get Donald to carry it up to my bedroom tonight.

JOE: It won't keep me awake.

MAGGIE: But there's no way I could concentrate with you snoring in the same room.

JOE: Since when did I snore.

MAGGIE: Since you turned fifty and put on forty pounds.

JOE: I'm under doctor's orders to lose the pounds.

MAGGIE: The computer still gets moved tonight. *(WILMA enters)*

WILMA: Ladies and gentlemen, lunch is served.

JOE: That didn't take long.

WILMA: Sue and Liz anticipated us. I found a stack of turkey sandwiches trying to camouflage a lop-sided cake. Do you want to eat in here or at the kitchen table?

JOE: Definitely the kitchen. It's closer to the food source. *(rises)*

WILMA: Alone together for five minutes, and you're not fighting. That's good.

JOE: Wait till I get my strength back, old woman, then watch the dust fly.

WILMA: Get your butt to the table, big boy, and don't insult my housekeeping.
(JOE exits and WILMA speaks to MAGGIE) I'm getting good vibes. I think you're going to work this out.

MAGGIE: We'll see, Mother. We'll see. *(they exit to the kitchen as LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK)*

Act II, Scene 2

[That night. Only the light from the kitchen illuminates the stage. Phone rings. MAGGIE, dressed in her bathrobe, enters from the kitchen with a glass of milk and answers the phone.]

MAGGIE: Hello?.....He's in bed. I presume he's asleep. Who is this?.....Can't it wait until tomorrow?.....All right, just a minute. *[crosses to the den and speaks softly]* Joe? You awake?

JOE: *(offstage)* I am now.

MAGGIE: There's a phone call for you.

JOE: Who is it?

MAGGIE: Somebody named Diane. From your office. Shall I have her call you back tomorrow?

JOE: No, I'll get it. *(MAGGIE goes back into the kitchen as JOE enters and picks up the phone)* Hello.....*(softly)* I told you not to call me here.....I just got home from the hospital.....*[MAGGIE enters and stands at the door listening]* Yeah, I'm doing okay.....listen, I can't talk now. I'll call you sometime next week.....no, nothing's changed, now's just not a good time. ... I miss you, too. Bye. *(hangs up and starts for the den)*

MAGGIE: One of your construction workers?

JOE: Computer graphics. Diane ran into a problem with a new program we're trying.

MAGGIE: You sleeping with her?

JOE: Don't be absurd.

MAGGIE: She asked for Joe, not Mr. Lawson.

JOE: We call everybody by their first name at the office.

MAGGIE; I didn't know that. But then I really don't know very much about your professional life, do I? You never talk about it.

JOE; You never ask.

MAGGIE: I used to.

JOE: A long time ago.

MAGGIE: So, bring me up to date.

JOE: Now?

MAGGIE: Why not. We don't have any other pressing engagements.

JOE: I'm really tired, Maggie...

MAGGIE: Then have a seat. Want me to get you a glass of warm milk?

JOE: No.

MAGGIE: Cocoa?

JOE: *(emphatically)* No! What do you want from me, Maggie?

MAGGIE: You could start with the truth. Who's Diane?

JOE: I told you. She digitizes blueprints into three dimensional graphics of the finished structure. The technology is amazing. You ought to come to the office and see it sometime.

[WILMA appears on the steps; stops to listen; MAGGIE realizes she's there, JOE doesn't]

MAGGIE: Maybe I will. You still haven't answered my question.

JOE: I just told you...

MAGGIE: No, you told me what you wanted me to know. Female subordinates do not call their male employers in the middle of the night to discuss computer graphics. Didn't she know I'd be here?

JOE: I can't answer that.

MAGGIE; What did you tell her about us?

JOE: That we were separated.

MAGGIE: And?

JOE: That's it. She's a nice girl, new in town, so we had dinner together a couple of times.

MAGGIE: I see.

JOE: No you don't, but that's beside the point. I warned you, Maggie.

MAGGIE; Yes, I remember. But I didn't figure you'd jump out of one bed into another so quickly.

JOE: I'm not sleeping with her. We're just friends.

MAGGIE: Come join us, Mother. Might as well get comfortable. It's true confessions time.

WILMA: That works both ways, you know.

JOE: Don't tell me that Maggie's got a lover hiding in the attic?

WILMA: You'll have to ask her.

JOE: Well, go get him. I'll invite Diane and we'll have a party. *(they look at him in silence)* Well, what are you waiting for? Chop-chop! Let's get some action around here.

WILMA: *(rises)* I think I'll go back to bed.

JOE: Why would you do that, Wilma? The hero in the story always has a side-kick. You know, to back him up if the going gets tough. Only in this case it's the heroine, isn't it.

WILMA: I'm on your side, Joe. Maggie lost the right to question your comings and goings when she kicked you out of the house. Like you said, you warned her.

JOE: Thank you, Wilma. I feel much better knowing you're there for me.

WILMA: Don't get cheeky, young man...

JOE: Thank you, again. It's been thirty years since anyone called me young.

WILMA: Everything's relative.

JOE: Madame prosecutor, may I return to my room? The defense rests.

MAGGIE: Damn you, Joe. I really thought we might work things out. But now...

JOE: But now....what? Shuffle me off to a nursing home for the remainder of my R & R? Clare and Donald don't have a spare room. . .

MAGGIE: Diane probably does.

JOE: If I sleep at Diane's, it won't be in a spare room. Think that over, Maggie, and tell me what you decide in the morning. I'm going to bed. (*starts toward den*)

MAGGIE: Clare's not your child.

WILMA: Maggie, don't...

JOE: What did you say?

MAGGIE: You're not Clare's father.

JOE: [*calmly*] That's what I thought you said. Good night.

MAGGIE: You don't believe me.

JOE: I believe you.

MAGGIE; Then why aren't you shocked?

JOE; Because you're admitting to something I already know.

MAGGIE: When? How? I never told a soul.

JOE: In spite of what Wilma thinks, I can count up to nine and a half.

MAGGIE: Mother, did you...?

WILMA: Nary a word, I swear.

JOE: Maggie, even I know that premature babies don't weigh seven and a half pounds at birth. Did you really think I've been bamboozled all these years?

MAGGIE: How come you never said anything? Didn't you feel cheated?

JOE: I loved you, Maggie. You could do no wrong. And when the nurse brought Clare out of the delivery room and put her in my arms, it was unconditional love at first sight.

WILMA: *[crosses to JOE and hugs him]* Bless you, Joe. Regardless of what you and Maggie decide, you've always got a home in my heart. *[crosses to steps]* Night, you two. Sleep well. *(exits)*

JOE: Feel better now, Maggie? You finally got it off your chest. Any other secrets you want to unload?

MAGGIE: "I loved you, Maggie." Past tense.

JOE: Slip of the tongue.

MAGGIE: What, the love part, or the tense?

JOE: Need you ask?

MAGGIE: If there's a Diane, there's probably a Shirley, or Jeanine, or...

JOE: You won't believe me, whatever I say. You're too intent on playing the martyr.

MAGGIE: Liz said I was tilting at windmills. *(beat)* All right, I admit it. I'm one step away from Bedlam. Maggie, the nut case, crazy as a loon. Enough people have said it, so it must be true. I feel like I'm on a roller coaster, up one minute, down the next, and in between the dips and dives, totally weightless, insubstantial, like in a nightmare when you can't wake yourself up. Why, why, why?

JOE: You started it, Maggie. You can stop it.

MAGGIE: I'm afraid...

JOE: Afraid of what?

MAGGIE: Afraid that if I give in to you one inch, you'll take the proverbial mile, and everything I've accomplished in the past month will have been for nothing. Don't you see... you've always been so sure of yourself, so demanding. The more successful you became, the more I faded into the woodwork. I was never good at confrontations. So, to keep the peace, I kept silent, even when I was screaming inside.

JOE: Well, now you can stop screaming. You've emerged from the nether world, and the devil has been exorcized. But let's not talk about it any more tonight. I've hit a brick wall, and if I don't go to bed, I'm going to fall on my face.

MAGGIE: Yes, you go on to bed. We're both too tired to be having this conversation.

JOE: At least we're talking to each other, again. That's progress, wouldn't you say?

MAGGIE: What about Diane?

JOE: Diane who?

MAGGIE: Good night, Joe.

[LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK as JOE crosses to his room and MAGGIE ascends the stairs.]

ACT II, Scene 3

[Saturday morning, two weeks later. At rise DONALD and CLARE enter via the front door.]

CLARE: Mother? Daddy? Anybody home?

DONALD: Doesn't look like it.

CARE: *(runs up the stairs)* Grandma, are you hiding in the bathroom? *(no answer, she comes back down)* I wonder where they went.

DONALD: Probably out running errands.

CLARE: Daddy, too?

DONALD: Maybe he wanted to look for a new brand of shaving cream.

CLARE: Don't be silly. Mother always gets that stuff when she buys groceries. *(crosses to kitchen)*

DONALD: You forget, your father was buying his own groceries until three weeks ago.

CLARE: That's strange. The dirty breakfast dishes are still on the table. Grandma's usually fanatic about keeping the kitchen clean.

DONALD: Maybe she took a break today.

CLARE: Something's wrong. I just know it. *(goes to phone)*

DONALD: Who are you calling?

CLARE: The hospital. Where did Mother put that number. *(flips through a note pad by the phone)*

DONALD: If there'd been an emergency, someone would have notified us.

CLARE: Maybe there wasn't time.

DONALD: Wilma would have called...

CLARE: Oh, my God! Maybe grandma had a stroke, or fell and broke her hip.

DONALD: Then your mother would have called. C'mon, let's go. We can come back later.

CLARE: I'm not leaving here until I know that Daddy and grandma are all right.

DONALD: Clare, we have a hundred things to do today. We don't have time to sit around waiting for a medical update on your family.

CLARE: Then, you go. I'm staying right here until I know they're okay.

DONALD: I'm telling you, it's a waste of time. When do we pick up the kids?

CLARE: I made arrangements for them to spend the day at Tommy Mitchell's. It's his birthday and there's a party this afternoon.

DONALD: How anybody can put up with a house full of screaming pre-schoolers is beyond me.

CLARE: It's called being a parent. But you wouldn't know. You're never home.

DONALD: I do the best I can.

CLARE: Nobody works the hours you do. Sometimes I think your job is more important to you than your family.

DONALD: If you'd wanted an eight-to-five husband, you shouldn't have married a lawyer. It's not uncommon for associates to put in 18-hour days. You knew that when we got married.

CLARE: But only for a couple of years, you said, not the rest of your life.

DONALD: The firm in Chicago assures me I'll be a partner in six months with a staff of paralegals to do the grunt work.

CLARE: Does that mean we'll see you more often, or that you'll have more work to do?

DONALD: Hopefully, I'll have shorter hours. Why do you think I accepted it?

CLARE: More money.

DONALD: You don't have a problem with that, do you?

CLARE: Of course not. I just don't want to move there right now.

DONALD: Left to you, no time will be the right time.

CLARE: When Daddy is well enough to go back to work...

DONALD: Then it'll be something else. Clare, your problem is, you won't divorce yourself from your parents.

CLARE: My parents have nothing to do with it. If you'd made an effort to get along with your boss, we wouldn't be having this argument.

DONALD: Not true on both accounts.

CLARE: Then why don't you explain it to me.

DONALD: Which? Your Oedipus complex, or my problems at work?

CLARE: It doesn't make any difference. According to you, it's all my fault. My father has a heart attack, but my concern for him is some sort of perversion. My parents split up, but I should just walk away and ignore them. Where does that leave me? Having to choose between my two families?

DONALD: That's ridiculous, and you know it. It all boils down to the fact that you don't want to move away from here, period.

CLARE: I've lived here my whole life. This is where I grew up. This is my home. In Chicago, how do we know what our neighbors will be like, or what our children will be exposed to...

DONALD: Why do you anticipate the worst possible scenario?

CLARE: Because big cities scare me. I have nightmares about getting lost, locked in by huge skyscrapers. I try and try, but I can't break loose, and when I finally do, I can't find my way home because I don't know where it is anymore.

JOE; Clare, you're a big girl now. The boogie-man is vanquished. It's time you stopped clinging to irrational fears like a child to his teddy bear. There's a certain amount of risk with any change, but a reasonably intelligent person should be able to weigh the pros and cons, then move on. Good Lord, this is the twenty-first century. The entire world is practically one community. Just think of it as moving to a different suburb.

CLARE: An eight-hour drive isn't the same thing as moving across town.

DONALD: And that's the crux of the problem, isn't it? When we move to Chicago you won't be able to run home to Mommy and Daddy two and three times a day.

CLARE: You're exaggerating, as usual. It's your way of turning the blame back on me. My parents are a very important part of my life. Naturally, I depend on them, and they depend on me. If you had a close relationship with your family, you'd understand.

DONALD: Clare, your relationship with your parents is not close. It's obsessive.

CLARE: That's not true. You just resent the fact that there are other people in my life besides you.

DONALD: And you're starting to sound like your mother. Is that what this is leading up to? I go my way, and you go yours?

CLARE: Where is it written that a wife must always do what her husband wants? I'm not your pet dog on a leash. I promised to cherish, not obey.

DONALD: But I thought I was doing what you wanted--more money, fewer hours. If the timing doesn't fit with your schedule, then you go out and make the living, and I'll stay home with the kids. Role reversal is the "in" thing these days.

CLARE: Don't think I haven't considered it. But you can't stand a house full of screaming kids, remember?

DONALD: Two children are not a house full. Compared to the aggravation I get at work, taking care of two pre-schoolers should be a piece of cake.

CLARE: Boy, are you out of touch with reality.

DONALD: Reality means growing up, Clare, acting your age, making independent decisions. You still live in a fantasy world, afraid to let go of your security blanket.

CLARE: Do you know what I think? You want me to be dependent, but solely on you. God forbid that my parents should usurp that prerogative. And heaven help the poor wife, if what she wants is at cross purposes with her husband's big, important plans for the future. What you really want is a sweet, little homebody, who caters to your every wish--yes, dear...no, dear...please, let me wipe your butt, dear...

DONALD: Now who's exaggerating? Is it too much to ask that I come home to a wife who supports my efforts, instead of one who whines about the few hours I get to spend with her. I don't work long hours because I like it. I have to, in order to keep my job. Why do you find that so hard to understand?

CLARE: If you walked in my shoes for a day, you wouldn't have to ask.

DONALD: Then let's get one thing settled right now. Next Wednesday I'm leaving for Chicago. Are you coming with me, or do I call the movers and tell them to forget it?

CLARE: Do I have a choice?

DONALD: Sure you do. But if you decide to stay, find your own attorney.

CLARE: I just might do that.

DONALD: Why don't you discuss it with your folks and let them decide. That's how you make most of your decisions.

CLARE: Not anymore. This one I'll make myself. If Mother can do it, so can I.

DONALD: That's the most encouraging thing I've heard you say in months. Just remember, you are not your mother. Her situation is different from yours.

CLARE: Not entirely. What it boils down to is being true to myself and not letting you walk all over me.

[MAGGIE and JOE enter, out of breath and in good spirits]

MAGGIE: Morning, children. You're up and out early today. What's the occasion?

CLARE: We just stopped by to see how you were doing. Where have you been? I was worried about you, Daddy.

JOE: I jogged two miles this morning. Aren't you proud of me?

CLARE: Daddy! That's too much too soon. The doctor told you not to push yourself.

MAGGIE: We weren't jogging, Clare. Just walking briskly. Joe's fine. He's got more color in his face, don't you think? More energy...

DONALD: You do look great, Joe. It must agree with you.

JOE: I could have done those two miles in half the time if Maggie hadn't slowed me down.

MAGGIE: *(brightly)* Well, maybe I should have a little heart attack. Then I'd be as fit as you.

CLARE: Mother! Don't say things like that.

MAGGIE: Just kidding, dear. Anyway, it's not in the genes. Look at your grandmother--eighty years old, with a BP and cholesterol count of a woman half her age. We should all be so lucky.

CLARE: Where is Grandma? When I saw the dirty dishes still on the table...

MAGGIE: Liz and Sue picked her up right after breakfast. They're doing the town today--shopping, lunch, a matinee...

CLARE: You should have gone with them, Mom.

MAGGIE: Not today. I want to stick close the phone...

JOE: Donald, are you up to a few rounds of golf before lunch?

DONALD: That might be over-doing it a bit, don't you think?

MAGGIE: I agree. It's snack and naptime for the big guy.

DONALD: And we have an appointment with Global Movers. Are you coming, Clare?

CLARE: *(a pause while she makes the big decision)* Daddy, are you absolutely sure you're gonna be all right?

JOE: Honey, your tender loving care has worked a miracle. I'm a well man.

CLARE: *(hugs him)* I love you. *(sotto voice)* You and Mom doing okay?

JOE: We haven't made any long range plans, but yes, we're doing okay.

CLARE: Then I guess you don't need me anymore, do you?

JOE: Sweetheart, I will need you for the rest of my life. But not this afternoon.

CLARE: Mom?

MAGGIE: You do what you have to, dear.

DONALD: Clare, are you coming with me?

CLARE: *(beat)* For better or for worse... Talk to you later, Mom. *(exits and DONALD follows)*

JOE: Do you think Donald's doing the right thing?

MAGGIE: I hope so. But right or wrong, it's their decision.

JOE: Oh, I just remembered. Some book agent called this morning while you were in the shower. I wrote the number on the pad.

MAGGIE: Damn it, Joe! How could you forget? I've been waiting for that call.
(dials the number)

JOE: I didn't realize it was a matter of life or death.

MAGGIE:This is Maggie Lawson, returning your call..... They did?..... Really?..... That's fabulous! What do I do now?..... All right, I'll see you first thing Monday morning. Thank you, thank you, thank you. You've made my year. *(she hangs up and looks at Joe with stars in her eyes)*

JOE: Don't tell me.... you won the Publisher's Sweepstakes.

MAGGIE: Better. I just sold my book.

JOE: What book?

MAGGIE: The one I wrote.... *(smiling)* based on old memories.

JOE: On what?

MAGGIE: You heard me. Something the matter? Didn't you think I could do it?

JOE: My God! You didn't use our real names, did you? I'll never live it down.

MAGGIE: Don't be silly. You'll be famous--guest appearances on the talk shows, your picture in the rags...

JOE: *(furious)* How could you do this to me?

MAGGIE: I haven't done a thing to you. You know, I believed it when you said you'd changed, but you haven't. The world still revolves solely around you. And if that's your mindset, I want you out of my life... permanently.

JOE: Hold on a minute, Maggie. You ask me to look at things with a whole new perspective, and I'm trying to. But I can't turn into a different person over night. First, I'm kicked out of my home, then I'm forced to face my own mortality. I'm still recovering from the blows.

MAGGIE: You've recovered enough to go back to work on Monday, so it's time we made a decision about us.

JOE: In other words, you want me out of here. *(a long pause)* Well? (MAGGIE remains silent) Okay, I'll go pack my bag.

MAGGIE: Stay where you are, Joe. The events of the past few weeks have left us both shaken and a little scared. Maybe I'm asking too much of you right now. I guess we both need some time...

JOE: Then you want me to stay.

MAGGIE: Yes, but...

JOE: Make up your mind, Maggie.

MAGGIE: At first I wasn't sure if I could handle it, living here by myself. Sue said I'd be lonely. But I wasn't. Those first few days were like a vacation I never had. No demands on my time, nobody's schedules to meet...

JOE: Marriage and children mean making compromises...

MAGGIE: Yes, but it should work both ways. The only time my wishes took priority was on the rare occasion I was in bed with the flu. It suddenly occurred to me that everything I've ever done was predicated on your likes and dislikes...yours and Clare's. Little things... like fixing a pot-roast once a week because it's your favorite. Do you know what? I hate pot roast. And having dinner every night at six o'clock sharp because that's when you expected it. At ten o'clock you turned off the lights and TV, and I followed you to bed. Well, I discovered that I much prefer having my evening meal at 9:30 or ten, then read or work at the computer for a couple of hours before I hit the sack. And I loved it when mother moved in and took over the kitchen. Because, when you get right down to it, I don't like to cook. There was this marvelous sense of freedom...until the bills came due. Then reality set in and I had to admit you were right. If you're going to support yourself, you've got to have a marketable skill, and you can't wait until you're 53 years old to start learning one.

JOE: So, what are you saying? You'll take me back if I promise to be the chief cook and bottle washer?

MAGGIE: No, we can afford to hire one now. What I'm saying is that I will not sit quietly and let you run the show anymore. If you stay I'm going to be an active partner in this marriage, and if that results in some horrendous shouting matches...

JOE: I'm supposed to reduce the stress in my life.

MAGGIE: Loud and angry is a good way to do it.

JOE: It might take me awhile to adjust.

MAGGIE: Sorry, your time is up. But remember, I have an agenda, too, and my wishes will be duly considered before any major decisions are made. Is that understood?

JOE: Do I have a choice?

MAGGIE: No, you don't. And consider this: if my book becomes a best seller, I might be the primary wage earner in this partnership. Do you think you can handle that?

JOE: No problem. I'll sell my business and live on your income.

MAGGIE: Well, don't do anything rash. It's a long haul between signing a contract and the first royalty check. *(WILMA, SUE and LIZ enter)*

WILMA: *(runs to MAGGIE and hugs her)* Congratulations, Maggie!

MAGGIE: When did you find out?

WILMA: I was trying to decide between an Alfred Dunner and a Liz Claiborne when big bird over there tells me to get both because you can afford it now.

LIZ: Your agent, who just happens to be my client, told me the good news last night. But she made me promise not to say anything. She wanted to be the one to surprise you. How do you feel?

MAGGIE: Euphoric. I can't believe it.

LIZ: You will once you're on the road helping to market your creation. That's usually part of the package. Maggie's Alterations may have to close shop.

WILMA: *(looks upward in prayer)* Oh, thank you, Lord. If anyone asks me to hem a skirt again, strike them dead on the spot.

SUE: Just think, Joe, your wife's going to be famous.

JOE: I'll never live it down.

WILMA: Live what down?

JOE: Have you read it?

WILMA: No. Maggie wanted to surprise me.

JOE: Then you'd better hold up on the hurrahs till you do.

WILMA: Why? You didn't write a dirty book, did you, Maggie?

SUE: What are you people talking about? Maggie wrote a darling book...
"Clare, the Calico Cat."

JOE: What?

SUE: It's a storybook for children.

JOE: A children's book?

LIZ: Of course. What did you think it was?

WILMA: Stories you used to tell Clare...

LIZ: We thought a celebration lunch was in order. Where would you like to go?
My treat.

MAGGIE: That's very thoughtful of you, Liz, but I'm all sweaty, I'd have to
change....

LIZ: Don't be silly. I'm talking lunch so anything goes. Besides, you look great,
both of you.

MAGGIE: Well...

JOE: C'mon, Maggie. It's your day. Let's make the most of it.

MAGGIE: All right. *(heads for stairs)* Just give me a minute.

LIZ: We'll wait for you in the car. *(crosses to door)*

SUE: What are you going to do with the money, Mag?

MAGGIE: Haven't given it a thought. I'm still in shock. *(smiles and exits)*

WILMA: She better make good on her promise to take me to the Bahamas.

LIZ: She might gross enough to make it an annual event. *(they exit as JOE
heads for den)*

JOE: *(whistling as he changes into a shirt and sweater)* Ready, Maggie? I'm
starving. *(MAGGIE appears at the top of the stairs wearing a fancy peignoir)*

(under his breath) What the hell!

MAGGIE: I changed my mind. Tell the girls to go on without us, would you, please?

JOE: *(beat-then gives her a knowing smile)* You got it! *(heads for door as LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK)*