

Characters

- Arthur Pikney (M)** - Moody young man in love with Gwen.
- Clark Caraway (M)** - Arthur's sarcastic and conniving friend.
- Halifax (M)** - Clark's dutiful, middle-aged butler.
- Edwin Burgess (M)** - Clumsy and pathetic young man in love with Agnes.
- Agnes Dalliard (F)** - Edwin's plucky and indignant love interest.
- Gwen Burgess (F)** - Arthur's mournful and sensitive love interest.
- Margery Caraway (F)** - Clark's ruthless mother.

Act 1

Scene 1 – Drawing Room

(Tabs Open. January 1910. Philadelphia, PA, USA. Two young men are lounging in a Victorian drawing room. Arthur is supine on the floor surrounded by various chess pieces. Clark slouches on the couch, twirling an umbrella. Halifax stands atop an ottoman with dignity, an upside down bowler hat suspended in his motionless hands above Clark's head. Arthur takes aim with a chess piece. It flies towards the hat but Clark knocks it down with his umbrella.)

Clark: Aha! What do you say to that, Halifax?

Halifax: An excellent parry, sir. The knight was no more than five inches from landing in the bowler.

Clark: Well, Arthur, it was a good set, but I believe that's the match to me. How much did we say it was? Ten? Twenty?

Arthur: **(Stands up moodily)** Five.

Clark: Ah, that's right.

Arthur: **(Throws a five dollar bill at Clark)** Here, take your money and choke on it.

Clark: Oh, don't be like that, Arthur.

Halifax: Ahem.

Clark: What is it, Halifax?

Halifax: Is my present attitude still required for your purposes, sir? The lower calves, sir. They...ache.

Clark: What? Oh. You're no longer needed, Halifax. You may retire to the pantry and cool those barking calves of yours.

Halifax: Thank you, sir. **(Waddles off stage right.)**

Arthur: You know, I don't know why I still come here every Tuesday to play this ridiculous game.

Clark: Well, where else would you go, you delicate dandelion? It's not like you're bursting at the seams with requests for your company.

Arthur: I resent that statement, Clark. You know as well as I that my social life is on the verge of some serious developments.

Clark: You don't mean you're still holding onto hope for Gwen Burgess. Didn't she drop you like a ton of bricks?

(Arthur straightens his tie, while Clark practises his golf stance with his umbrella.)

Arthur: We may have had our recent setbacks, but I am confident we will make a full reconciliation.

Clark: Didn't you ride her favourite horse into a quarry?

Arthur: I admit I was unprepared for the suicidal nature of that animal, but once I enact my plan, Feivel will matter as much to Gwen as last night's Chicken Fricassee.

Clark: If you're thinking of throwing yourself into the quarry, Arthur, be sure to give the miners a head's up this time. I believe the etiquette is to shout "Fore."

(Clark takes a golf swing with his umbrella. Arthur glares at Clark.)

Clark: How was it that you survived again? Underwear get caught in the thickets or something like that?

Arthur: **(Fiddles with his cuff)** My suspenders latched onto a nearby poplar at the final moment.

Clark: Awfully fortuitous.

Arthur: So it would seem.

Clark: Well, lesson learned.

Arthur: What do you mean "lesson learned?"

Clark: **(Continues swinging)** Don't skimp on the suspenders. Next time, be sure to put a pair on the horse too.

Arthur: Your cruelty, Clark, never ceases to amaze me. **(Turns to the window moodily)** I say, is that Edwin?

Clark: Gwen's brother?

Arthur: Yes, you nincompoop. What other Edwin is there?

Clark: Well there's my barber for one. My aunt's Pomeranian for another.

Arthur: Would you shut it, Clark?

Clark: I'm only saying Philadelphia is rife with Edwins.

Arthur: Well this one happens to be Edwin Burgess. Look.

Clark: **(Approaches the window)** Yup. That's a Burgess if I've ever seen one. Notice the forehead and the way it practically melts into the nose like warm ice cream.

Arthur: He must be – Wait! Are you suggesting Gwen looks like melted ice cream?

Clark: What? I would never.

Arthur: She's the girl I love, Clark!

Clark: Yes, yes. I meant nothing. Gwen is lovely. Her brother on the other hand...

Arthur: No disagreement there. Just look at him. There he goes, tripping over that newsboy. Watch the cat! **(SFX. Cat Scream.)** No, he's stepped on that too. I say, what's wrong with him? He isn't normally this clumsy.

Clark: Didn't you hear the news? You aren't the only one to be scorned by love's harsher side. Agnes Dalliard just rejected him.

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Arthur: You mean he finally proposed?! On bended knee?

Clark: Oh yes, on bended knee. Certainly, he was on bended knee, but that was just the beginning. When she didn't answer right away, he got down on two knees and begged. And then when she started laughing, he went down on all fours and sobbed.

Arthur: **(clicking his tongue)** A man cannot do that sort of thing.

Clark: I tell you he did. I was but 40 yards away watching the whole scene through binoculars and providing distant moral support.

Arthur: No, I just mean that a man cannot do that sort of thing and maintain his dignity.

Clark: Oh, of course. His dignity went right out the window.

Arthur: Anyways, why would she say no? I thought she was...fond of him.

Clark: Oh, she's fond of him. Yes, there's no doubt that she's fond of him. But so are you of pudding and you wouldn't marry pudding would you?

Arthur: Yes, you have a point.

Clark: The problem is he never graduated from pudding. Sure it's an okay place to start, but a man must grow! Girls have their standards, don't they? If men don't at least make it to the level of roast beef, you're finished.

Arthur: Oh! Here comes Edwin now.

(The front door opens and Edwin trips over the doorstep, falling onto the floor.)

Arthur: Hello, Edwin.

Clark: Hello, pudding.

Edwin: Of all the confounded things! Why would anyone put a step there?

Arthur: It's always been there, Edwin. Now, get up you silly sausage and tell me what's this I hear about you and Agnes?

Edwin: She turned me down like a gramophone. What else is there to tell?

Arthur: Clark said you grovelled.

Edwin: So what if I did?

Arthur: Well, Edwin. How on earth do you expect a woman to respect you if you're on the ground making a fool of yourself?

(Edwin stands up, brushing his sleeves disdainfully.)

Edwin: I don't know, Arthur. How do you expect a woman to respect you when you go around killing her horses?

Arthur: **(Gasps)** Well at least I'm not a miserable little –

Clark: Gentlemen. Gentlemen. Gentlemen. Are we not born and bred Philadelphians? Where is your brotherly love? You two should be commiserating over your misery, not at each other's throats.

Edwin: That's easy for you to say, Clark, you've never been rejected by a woman you love.

Clark: Oh contraire, my little dandelion. Not twenty-four hours ago, Clark Caraway himself was rejected like last week's tuna salad.

Arthur: What?!

Edwin: By whom?

Arthur: Alice Tipper?

Edwin: Hannah Grimble?

Clark: No one in our social circle. Indeed, it is someone much closer to home. I was rejected by none other than Margery Caraway herself.

Arthur: Your mother?

(Clark nods tragically.)

Edwin: You proposed to your mother?!

Clark: No, you idiot. I asked her for money. If you haven't noticed, things have been a little tight around her lately. And the matriarch has been stiff with the funds ever since I bet last month's allowance on the Athletics winning against the Red Sox. We've even had to make budget cuts for Halifax's upcoming birthday party. Poor fellow won't even have a single balloon. So you see, we all have our troubles.

Arthur: **(Crossing his arms)** Well if you ask me, money and love are two very different kinds of problems.

Clark: Unless you love money, which I do.

Arthur: Are you comparing your love of money with the eternal love I have for Gwen?

Clark: I'm only saying love comes around more than once in a lifetime. A butler turning fifty though...

Edwin: Oh, what difference does it make? Money or not, we're all going to die miserable.

Arthur: Well, I for one am not planning to die without my loved ones shovelling food in my mouth till the final swallow. As I was just about to tell Clark before you arrived, Edwin, I have a scheme that will make Gwen forget all about that quarry business.

Clark: And we're interested to hear it. Arthur, you have the floor.

(Arthur begins to pace the room. Edwin and Clark sit on the couch and listen.)

Arthur: Both of you have already alluded to the incident that caused this present rift between Gwen and myself. And I cannot deny that Feivel's untimely demise puts me in a negative light. The love a girl has for a favourite horse, after all, is no small thing. But, not two hours before Feivel departed this world, Gwen herself said he was the saddest excuse for a thoroughbred that she had ever had the misfortune of side saddling. Does that sound like a girl speaking of her favourite horse? Of course it doesn't! And you know why? Because Gwen did not care an ounce for that horse until it passed through the veil.

Clark: And by that you mean before it hit rock bottom.

(Arthur and Edwin glare at Clark.)

Edwin: Low hanging fruit, Clark.

Clark: You're right. I'm sorry. Proceed.

Arthur: **(Resumes pacing)** My conclusion is simple. Gwen doesn't know a good thing until it's gone. Therefore, to reinstitute Gwen's love for me, the harsh reality of my mortality must be made very clear to her. I don't exactly plan on throwing

myself into the quarry, but if something along the same lines happened, you can bet your hat that Gwen would love me again.

Edwin: Hold on! Am I missing something? The last time I checked, girls weren't willing to engage themselves to corpses.

Arthur: Ha!

Clark: Oh Edwin, you simple pudding.

Arthur: Of course, I won't actually die, Edwin. No need to fret. It will all be a ruse.

Edwin: A ruse?

Arthur: A subterfuge, if you will. On the surface, I will appear dead or dying, but on the inside I'll be as alive as that tapeworm inside Clark's Aunt Connie. It's only important for Gwen to think I'm in mortal danger long enough for her to realise her true feelings for me and what a fool she was for kicking me to the kerbside.

Clark: It's brilliant, Arthur! Sound to its very foundations. One of your finest! **(Stands and slaps Arthur on the back.)**

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Edwin: And how exactly are you going to pull this off?

Arthur: Well that's the issue I wanted to discuss with Clark. But now that you're here, Edwin, we have an extra ten per cent brain power at our disposal.

Edwin: **(Places a hand under his chin and considers the maths)** I don't think you did your maths right.

Clark: **(Pats Edwin on the shoulder)** Check again, Edwin.

Arthur: **(Sitting down)** Go ahead, gentlemen, barrage me with your ideas.

Clark: I know! Picture this. **(Stands on the window seat)** There goes Gwen walking down the street, the birds chirping, sunlight dancing through the leaves. All is mirth and splendour. But hold on! Who is that she sees? Why, it's her ex-fiancé, Arthur Pikney, sniffing the flowers like a cherub. She thinks to herself. "Gosh he looks handsome in tweed. It's a shame I had to break things off." Suddenly, interrupting the still, comes the sound of squealing tyres. A car rounds the corner at high speed. It jumps the curb, knocks Arthur over, backs over him a few times for good measure, before it races off again. The devastation is terrible. Flowers, dirt, and viscera are strewn everywhere. Arthur, himself, lays folded in half, one of his severed legs still standing upright. A single flower petal, which was thrown into the air during the chaos, falls gently back to earth, landing on Gwen's hopelessly outstretched hand. She screams, and love is reborn again.

(Arthur gulps and rubs the back of his head. Edwin looks pale on the couch.)

Arthur: Well, it's uh –

Edwin: I think I'm going to be sick.

Clark: Nonsense, Edwin! Now, go call Gwen. Tell her to meet you on the corner of 46th and Baltimore. I'll get my car. Where do you want to be hit, Arthur? In the back? Over the leg? How does your dying face look?

Arthur: I –

Clark: Oh, you'll have to do better than that, Arthur. You look like an atheist lost in the Vatican.

(Edwin faints on the couch and rolls onto the floor.)

Clark: There, you see Edwin. That's precisely the look you should be going for. Notice his jaw and the way it's gone completely slack. It's all in the details. Thank you, Edwin. You can get up now...Edwin? Oh he's actually fainted. Halifax!

(Halifax scurries in, his sleeves and pant legs rolled up, his calves wrapped with cold compresses.)

Halifax: Yes, sir.

Clark: What on earth are you doing, Halifax? I said you could cool your calves, not go rustic on us.

Halifax: My apologies, sir. Once I finished with the calves, I took the liberty of addressing the forearms and ankles.

Clark: Oh never mind, Halifax. Never mind. We have more pressing matters than discussing your extremities. Mr. Burgess has fainted. Fetch some ice...and the smelling salts...and the aspirin. In fact, you might as well bring some charcuterie while you're at it. Arthur and I will carry him to the bed.

(Halifax exits stage right.)

Clark: Come on Arthur, keep his blood flowing.

(Arthur flaps Edwin's arms back and forth.)

Arthur: Listen, Clark, it won't work!

Clark: Of course it'll work. You're just not doing it right. Elliptical motions, remember?

Arthur: **(Drops Edwin's arms)** I mean your idea to hit me with your car.

Clark: What? Why won't it work?

Arthur: Because it's downright macabre!

Clark: My sweet, sensitive Arthur, I thought that was the whole point.

Arthur: The whole point is to get Gwen to love me again.

Clark: And she will.

Arthur: Without me losing the function of my legs.

Clark: I'm sorry, Arthur, but you might have to lower your expectations.

Arthur: You're not hitting me with your car!

Clark: All right. We'll table the discussion for now. Just help me with the luggage.

(Arthur and Clark lift Edwin.)

Clark: We'll think of something, Arthur. I promise. By next week, you and Gwen will be talking of wedding colours, guest lists, and all that other nonsense.

(Arthur and Clark carry Edwin off stage left. Halifax, returning from the kitchen, trots after them with various items and a charcuterie board in hand. Tabs Close.)

Scene 2 - Drawing Room

(Tabs Open. Clark and Arthur are in the drawing room again. Clark throws chess pieces at Arthur, while Arthur takes swings at them with an umbrella. Halifax enters stage left.)

Clark: Ah, Halifax. How's Edwin? Recovered from his little demonstration?

Halifax: Mr. Burgess is resting favourably now, sir.

Clark: Excellent. Now, here. You take a turn with these, while I go fetch us all some drinks. **(Hands Halifax the chess pieces.)** I've got some of that delightfully expensive ginger ale that we like so much, Arthur.

Arthur: Yes, please.

Clark: Same for you, Halifax?

Halifax: A glass of milk for me, sir.

Clark: Milk? Are you sure?

Halifax: Quite sure, sir.

Clark: I offer you the chance to kick it back like one of the boys and you reject the opportunity?

Halifax: One has a duty to one's health, sir.

Clark: Well, suit yourself. Milk it is.

(Clark exits stage right. Halifax continues throwing chess pieces while Arthur takes his swings.)

Arthur: Halifax?

Halifax: Sir?

(Arthur ceases to swing the umbrella and becomes contemplative. He begins to pace the room.)

Arthur: Can I be honest with you, Halifax?

Halifax: Of course, sir.

Arthur: You are a pitiful creature.

Halifax: Sir?

Arthur: You engender pity is what I mean. For some odd reason, others have a certain...motherly affection towards you. Now, don't try and deflect. I have heard

many speak of this quality. You are, I believe, what some would consider “adorable.” I have even heard some comment on their desire to pinch your cheeks.

Halifax: Sir?! I – I –

Arthur: Particularly from the female element too.

(Halifax drops his armful of chess pieces, his jaw agape. Arthur steps over the mess casually.)

Arthur: I can’t say I have felt the urge personally, but I understand where it’s coming from. We must figure out how you do it, Halifax. You see, if Gwen Burgess had any amount of this motherly pity towards me, I am sure she would forgive and forget, as the proverb goes.

(Clark enters stage right with the beverages in hand.)

Clark: Well, here we are.

Arthur: Thank you, Clark.

(Clark hands Halifax the milk. Halifax takes it absently. Clark waves a hand in front of Halifax’s lifeless eyes.)

Clark: Halifax! Are you all right? You look like you’ve seen death!

Arthur: Halifax and I were just discussing his adorableness.

Clark: Adorableness? You’ve been calling my butler adorable? Look at him! You’ve broken the man! Here. Sit down, Halifax. Drink your milk.

Halifax: **(Sits down and sips on his milk)** It’s all right, sir. It is not the first time I’ve had such reports brought to my attention. I’m afraid, Mr. Pikney, I don’t know what the cause is. It’s been this way since I was a child.

Arthur: A little Halifax?

Halifax: Exactly, sir. When I was four, I fell severely ill and was laid up in bed for several weeks. One day, my mother introduced me to a friend of hers. The lady pitied me, and after spending some time fussing over my dimples, she remarked that I was the – **(Shudders)**

Arthur: Be brave, Halifax.

Clark: Here, drink up.

Halifax: **(Sips his milk again)** She remarked that I was – forgive my language, sir.

(Clark waves a dismissive hand.)

Halifax: “The itsiest, bitsiest, and most darling little chipmunk.”

Clark: How perfectly vile!

Arthur: Yes. Very disturbing. And you think the occasion forever doomed you to a lifetime of motherly pity?

Halifax: Quite possibly, sir.

Arthur: Why were you ill?

Halifax: I had appendicitis, sir. The ailment nearly killed me.

Arthur: Appendicitis, you say? Hmm. Was it painful?

Halifax: The agony remains unrivalled in my life, sir.

Arthur: Spend a great deal of time groaning? Writhing on the floor and that sort of thing?

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Halifax: Yes, sir.

Arthur: Engender pity?

Halifax: Oh yes, sir. My mother was most concerned. So concerned, in fact, she forgot to punish me for sneaking a snake into my uncle’s bed sheets.

Clark: Good golly, Halifax!

Halifax: Indeed, sir.

Arthur: **(Slapping his knee)** That’s exactly the kind of pity I need!

(Edwin enters stage left, holding a cold compress held to his head.)

Clark: Edwin, you’re up. Halifax, would you mind bringing us some tea?

(Halifax nods and exits stage right.)

Arthur: You’re just in time, Edwin. We’ve solved my girl problem.

Edwin: Oh?

Arthur: It’s appendicitis.

Edwin: I beg your pardon.

Arthur: You know, when your appendix does that thing. Anyways, I'll fake having it. Gwen will see me in perfect agony, near death. And just when everything looks bleak, I'll miraculously survive. The next thing you know she accepts my proposal with a fresh new perspective on life.

Edwin: Well – it's an idea!

Arthur: Hold on. Clark, do you think appendicitis could help Edwin with his romantic troubles too? You know, with Agnes?

Clark: You mean Edwin fake appendicitis? Definitely not. Your situations are far too different. You need Gwen's pity, but Edwin does not need Agnes'. Pitying Edwin is about all that Agnes knows how to do. What she needs is the opposite. She must see Edwin as a man!

Edwin: But I *am* a man.

(Arthur and Clark laugh.)

Arthur: Oh, Edwin.

Clark: Save your jokes for later, Edwin. We haven't the time. By definition, you may be a man, but in essence you are still a sad, clumsy, pudding. You need to have...oh what's the word?

Arthur: Beef?

Clark: Gumption!

Edwin: How am I supposed to do that?

Clark: Easy. You save someone.

Edwin: Save whom?

Clark: Oh, anyone will do.

Arthur: Like a child from a burning building! There's nothing manlier than that.

Edwin: Great! I don't suppose you have one sitting around.

Arthur: Not at the moment, no. But I have my connections.

Edwin: Having a few irritable nephews does not count as having connections.

(Clark slams the table with a passionate fist.)

Clark: I know! **(Clark mounts the table.)** I propose –

Edwin: Oh don't use that word.

Arthur: Yes, it's a little soon for that one, Clark.

Clark: Ah, yes. Understandable. Well I suggest – Is that better? Suggest? I suggest we solve both of your problems with one dinner in a single evening.

Arthur: **(Together)** How?

Edwin: **(Together)** How?

Clark: Don't you two see the connection? Gwen needs to see Arthur in mortal danger and Agnes needs to see Edwin saving someone *from* mortal danger. We can win back both of your girls with the same lie.

Arthur: Appendicitis?

Clark: Sure, appendicitis. If Halifax stands by it. Here's the plan. We invite Agnes and Gwen over for dinner. When they arrive, Arthur offers them drinks; Edwin breaks the ice with a few tasteful jokes. Then, we engage –

Edwin: Please, not that word either!

Clark: We – uh...participate in stimulating conversation. Discuss the economy. You know the drill. Anyways, sometime during dessert, Arthur's appendix suddenly goes haywire. He groans. Rolls around on the floor. Gwen is beside herself with worry. Everyone else is frozen in shock – that is, everyone except Edwin Burgess. Edwin calms everyone's nerves, delegates responsibilities, and pokes around Arthur's abdomen in precise ways. After some tense moments, Arthur makes a miraculous recovery, all thanks to Edwin. And there you have it. Gwen promises to never take Arthur for granted again and Agnes sees Edwin for the manly hero that he is.

Arthur: That's not bad actually.

Edwin: But how will poking Arthur in the ribs look like I'm curing him?

Clark: Just do it with conviction.

(Edwin jabs Arthur in ribs as Arthur is taking a sip from his drink. It spews from his mouth.)

Edwin: Like that?

Arthur: No, like this!

(Arthur pokes Edwin in the eye. Edwin yells and falls out of his chair.)

Clark: Now, now, that's exactly the kind of behaviour that got you two into this mess. Get over it, Arthur. He's going to have to poke you in some way. And get up Edwin, I tire of your constant presence on the floor. Makes it awfully difficult to respect you.

Edwin: But he –

Clark: Quiet, Edwin, and pay attention! Here is what you should do. May I, Arthur?

(Clark turns towards Arthur. He lifts Arthur's arm, pokes him in the side, turns Arthur, and pokes him in the back. Clark takes a step back to consider his handiwork. He advances again and slowly prods Arthur's tummy.)

Arthur: What are you doing? Sculpting me?

Clark: No. I look like I know what I'm doing. And at the end of the day that's what will sell the lie.

(Halifax enters stage right with a tray of tea and cakes.)

Halifax: I took the liberty, sir, of laying out some cake.

Clark: That was very thoughtful of you, but take it away. We're having a dinner party tomorrow night and we'll need the cake to celebrate the announcement of two new engagements. Cheers, gentlemen!

(Arthur, Clark, and Edwin all raise their tea cups. Tabs Close.)

Scene 3 - Public Park

(Tabs Open. The public park has a Tennis Court and Chess Tables. Agnes and Gwen are playing tennis.)

Agnes: Serving.

(Agnes hits a shot that Gwen is unable to reach.)

Agnes: Forty love.

(Gwen sighs.)

Agnes: Cheer up, Gwen. Remember you are playing against a two time Bryn Mawr champion.

Gwen: Oh it's not that, Agnes. It's just that score, "forty love." It's so...bleak. What if it takes me forty years to find love again? I'll be in my sixties by then!

Agnes: Oh forget about that louse! Arthur Pikney isn't worth another second of your time.

Gwen: I'm not talking about Arthur. I'm talking about Feivel. I loved that horse, Agnes. He was all that a girl could ever ask for.

Agnes: Wasn't he blind in one eye and depressed by nature?

Gwen: That's not the point. He was my horse and that's what matters.

Agnes: Get a new one is my advice. See it as an opportunity to indulge yourself. It's how I'm handling the recent episode with Edwin anyways.

Gwen: What happened? Oh, Agnes, did he finally propose?

Agnes: Propose? Well, if melting into a puddle is what you call proposing. I know he's your brother, Gwen, but I'm sorry. The man's pathetic.

Gwen: Oh stop it. He's a lamb and you know it. He's just what you need.

Agnes: What I need is an actual man. You know the type. One of those strong, silent brick walls who's never heard of Copenhagen. I've had it with these emotional puddles prone to their dramatic outbursts. **(Takes an aggressive swing with her racket)** But let's not speak of it anymore, Gwen. We both need to try and move on. Up for a game of chess?

Gwen: Love one.

(Agnes and Gwen proceed to a table. They begin to play chess, when Gwen suddenly cries out in despair.)

Agnes: What? What is it?

Gwen: Oh, Agnes! The knight! It moves just like Feivel used to after he was hit by that truck. With every two steps forward, he couldn't help but take a hobbled step to the right.

Agnes: **(Sighs)** Close your eyes, Gwen.

Gwen: What?

Agnes: Close your eyes.

(Gwen shuts her eyes.)

Agnes: What do you see?

Gwen: Nothing! You told me to close my eyes.

Agnes: What do you see in your mind? You still have one don't you?

Gwen: I see Feivel eating an apple out of my hand.

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(Agnes throws water into Gwen's face.)

Agnes: Do you still see him?

(Gwen opens her eyes, shocked. She looks like she is about to respond furiously, but her face relaxes and she becomes sad again.)

Gwen: Yes, I see him galloping through the rain in that crooked way of his.

Agnes: **(Stands up.)** Well I've tried everything. Tennis. Chess. Hydrotherapy. I'm out of ideas.

Gwen: I'm just in mourning, Agnes. What's wrong with that?

Agnes: No! No mourning. Because if you mourn, I will mourn. And the only one I have to mourn is...Edwin.

Gwen: Aw, Agnes. You do care about my brother.

Agnes: **(Turns away angrily and wrings her hands)** Your brother is a sad sack of unpublished poetry. He has less constitution than a glass of milk. And he always smells faintly of moss, but – **(Sighs)** I am fond of him. Don't ask me why. I can't explain it. I just am.

Gwen: Why'd you reject him then?

Agnes: Because he just looked so ridiculous, kneeling there like Oliver Twist asking for more porridge. I just couldn't bring myself to say yes. I mean, just imagine what people would say. "Agnes and Edwin? Engaged? Has she gone mad?"

Gwen: If you care for Edwin, why does it matter what people think?

Agnes: No! I'm moving on and you're moving on too! You know, the reason you can't get Feivel out of your head is because his death was an injustice. You won't be able to move on until justice is served.

Gwen: What are you saying?

Agnes: We have to make Arthur Pikney pay for what he's done.

Gwen: **(Stands up)** Now you're talking.

Agnes: We've got to take something away from Arthur. Something he cares about. Issue is I don't think Arthur has ever cared for anyone or anything.

Gwen: **(Sadly)** Well, he cared about me, didn't he?

Agnes: Oh, Gwen, I didn't mean –

Gwen: At least, he cared enough to propose. That's got to count for something, right?

Agnes: Of course he cared for you, Gwen. Of course he did. I only meant that we can't exactly take you away from him again. He's already lost you.

Gwen: He has?

Agnes: Don't tell me you're thinking of forgiving him? Remember what he did to Feivel?

Gwen: You're right. I'm sorry. I don't know what got into me.

Agnes: Sentiment. That's what. We must both do our best to purge ourselves of it. Now, what's something Arthur couldn't do without? Something that would really get under his skin if it went missing. How about that trophy of his? Didn't Arthur and Clark win some golf tournament together?

Gwen: The Golden Wedge!

Agnes: Yes, that!

Gwen: He loves that trophy. Clark and Arthur practically share joint custody. Every week it changes apartments.

Agnes: Well, I say we steal it and, over the course of a few months, we break it apart, and send them pieces of it in the mail. Do you know who has it now?

Gwen: Let's see. It was just the third Sunday of Epiphany, and Arthur had it at the beginning of the year. So that means...yes that means it's Clark's turn with it.

Agnes: Great! We steal it from Clark then. The only question is how.

Gwen: Oh, Agnes! The dinner party!

Agnes: What dinner party?

Gwen: This just came in the mail this morning. **(Takes out a letter and reads)** "The household of Clark Caraway cordially requests the company of Ms. Agnes Dalliard and Ms. Gwen Burgess for an enjoyable evening of fine dining and conversation on the 23rd of January. Dishes will include, but are not limited to crab cakes, smoked ham, and Halifax's famous homemade applesauce. Signed, Clark Caraway. Cedar Park, Philadelphia."

Agnes: Hmm. I don't like the sound of that.

Gwen: I don't like the sound of Halifax's applesauce either.

Agnes: No, I mean they're planning something.

Gwen: I know. I just told you. They're planning a dinner party.

(Agnes rubs her temples.)

Gwen: Don't you understand what this invitation means? We have a way to get into Clark's apartment and nab that Golden Wedge.

Agnes: Yes, I realise that. It's just so suspicious. Why would Clark invite us over to dinner? I bet you twenty dollars Edwin and Arthur will be there.

Gwen: So what if they are? We'll just take the opportunity to treat them like garbage.

Agnes: I suppose we could spill food on them.

Gwen: And really thrash them with some choice words.

Agnes: **(Points a victorious finger in the air)** I know. We poison their drinks.

Gwen: **(Pause)** Listen, Agnes. I'm not saying I don't love that idea. I do. I really do. But don't you think that's a little too far?

Agnes: Oh, it wouldn't be lethal! Of course not. Did you think I meant lethal?

Gwen: I just didn't know where we were drawing the line.

Agnes: Good gracious, Gwen. Your imagination knows no limit. The poison wouldn't kill them. It would just...make them *wish* they were dead.

Gwen: Oh, I'm all for that. What poison did you have in mind?

Agnes: Well, I haven't any on me. It's not exactly something a girl carries around.

Gwen: We've got some rancid apricot jam in the pantry.

Agnes: Do you think it would do anything?

Gwen: Well, Cook passed out from just a whiff of it this morning. At the very least it should make them sick.

Agnes: Then we have our poison!

Gwen: Come on, hopefully Cook hasn't thrown it away yet. She's probably woken up by now. Ooh! I can't wait to make those boys pay!

(Agnes and Gwen exit stage left. Tabs Close.)

Act 2

Scene 1 - Drawing Room

(Tabs Open. Clark is fixing his tie. Halifax is fixing the table. Arthur clears his throat, spreads his feet shoulder width apart, and grabs his side.)

Arthur: (Cries in pain) Ooowahhh!

Clark: Not bad! But a touch too high. We don't want you evoking the chimpanzee if we can help it.

Arthur: (Resets his feet and cries again) Oohurghh!

Clark: Better! But we've moved into irritable bowel territory. Try cutting your breath out in the middle this time.

Arthur: (Uncertain) Oock hwaghgh?

Clark: Closer. Definitely closer, but still missing the – Oh what's the phrase, Halifax?

Halifax: That special something, sir?

Clark: (Snaps his fingers) The secret sauce!

Arthur: Secret sauce?

Clark: You know, the stuff that will really send it over the top. Here, imagine you have indigestion. Can you do that?

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Arthur: I can.

Clark: Well there you are, indigesting, when you're suddenly overcome by a frigid chill. You scream out "Arghmm Hikkn!"

Arthur: "Arghmm Hikken?"

Clark: "Arghmm Hikkn."

Arthur: That's what I said. "Arghmm Hikken."

Clark: Ditch the E.

Arthur: What E?

Clark: Arthur, please. You're clearly adding an E.

Arthur: **(Throws his hands into the air)** What does it matter? One “Hikken” is just as convincing as the next.

Clark: Let’s defer to our appendicitis expert. Halifax, my “Hikkn” is more convincing right?

Halifax: Oh, yes, sir. When I suffered from appendicitis, there was a distinct glottal stop in my screams.

Clark: There! You see. I rest my case.

(Arthur crosses his arms. SFX. Doorbell.)

Clark: Ah, that must be, Edwin. **(Opens the door)** Well, come on in, you wretched thing. Have a crab cake.

Edwin: Crab cakes? Isn’t that a little out of your budget, Clark?

Clark: Do you really expect Agnes and Gwen to accept your proposals without being properly wined and dined?

Edwin: But didn’t your mother cut your allowance?

Clark: Oh yes. She cut it like an umbilical cord. But what my mother doesn’t realise is that her son is enterprising. Last month, she sent me her pearl necklace to keep an eye on while she’s in London. And just this morning I thought to myself. Why, that priceless heirloom is just sitting in my safe doing nothing.

Arthur: Don’t tell us you sold it.

Clark: Don’t be ridiculous.

Arthur: Thank heavens.

Clark: I pawned it.

(Edwin groans.)

Arthur: Oh, Clark.

Clark: What? I’ll get it back. Sometime before she returns in a month, I’ll stop by the shop and just buy it back.

Edwin: With what? The cash you’ve already spent on these crab cakes?

Clark: **(Waves a hand nonchalantly)** That’s a problem for the older and wiser Clark a month from now. He’ll figure it out. I have every bit of faith in him.

(SFX. Doorbell.)

Edwin: It’s them! It’s the girls.

Arthur: Quick, take your positions.

(Halifax approaches the door and stands at attention.)

Clark: Halifax, Raise the curtain!

(Halifax opens the door, revealing an elderly woman.)

Clark: **(Stunned exclamation)** Mother?!

Halifax: Mrs. Caraway, sir.

(Margery Caraway enters. She takes off her gloves and overcoat and hands them to Halifax.)

Clark: Mother, wha – wha – what are you doing here?

Margery: Stop stuttering, Clark. I did not pay for your education for you to sound like a broken trombone.

Clark: But – but you should be in London.

Margery: Your poor Aunt Constance contracted Scarlet Fever and I was forced to conclude the visit prematurely.

Clark: You should've – uh – could've told me you were coming to Philadelphia.

Margery: I didn't think it would concern you so much, my dear boy. Besides, I'm not staying. I only stopped by because I'm having dinner with the Davenports tomorrow and I need my pearl necklace.

(Edwin chokes on his crab cake.)

Clark: Your – your pearl necklace?

Margery: That's right. The one I had you keep while I was travelling.

Clark: Oh that necklace! You mean the one with pearls on it! The necklace with pearls. That pearl necklace?

Margery: Yes, that's the one.

Clark: Mother, I – I would love to fetch it for you, but as you can see I have guests. Can you come back later? A month's time would do.

Margery: It will only take a moment. As soon as I have my necklace, Clark, I'll be on my way.

Clark: When you have your necklace?

Margery: Yes, what's wrong with you, Clark? For heaven's sake, I will leave as soon as I have my necklace.

(Clark, Edwin, and Arthur eye one another.)

Clark: On second thought, Mother, what's the rush? It's been aeons since we've seen each other. Why don't you stay and be our special guest for the evening?

(Arthur and Edwin surround Margery and usher her in.)

Arthur: Yes, please join us, Mrs. Caraway, and tell us about London. We've met before, I'm Arthur Pikney, friend of your son's. This thing here is Edwin Burgess.

Edwin: I'm Edwin Burgess.

Margery: **(Disdainfully)** Indeed.

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(Arthur, Clark, and Edwin force her into a chair and pour her a drink.)

Clark: You look exhausted, Mother. You really must take better care of yourself.

Margery: What's going on, Clark? Why this sudden interest in my health?

Clark: Since when did it become a crime to be concerned for my mother's health? Take away a boy's mother and what is he?

Arthur: An empty husk if you ask me.

Clark: Exactly. Is that what you want, Mother?

Margery: I just want my necklace, Clark.

Clark: Shhh none of this talk about necklaces. You're not going anywhere until you're a hundred per cent. Can we interest you in an aspirin or two? Edwin, lend me some of your aspirins.

(Edwin fumbles for his bottle of aspirin. SFX. Doorbell. Edwin drops the bottle and screams.)

Arthur: Don't shout, Edwin!

Margery: What's going on? Who's here?

Clark: **(Kneeling by his mother)** Did I ever tell you how much you mean to me, Mother – Glory of my youth – Foundation of my soul?

Halifax: Ms. Burgess and Ms. Dalliard, sir.

(Agnes and Gwen stride through the doorway.)

Agnes: Thank you, Halifax!

Gwen: You're as adorable as ever.

Halifax: **(Shudders)** Good evening, Miss Burgess. Good evening, Miss Dalliard.

(Agnes and Gwen fling their coats carelessly onto Halifax.)

Agnes: Well, well, well. Look who's here, Gwen. It's Arthur Pikney! You know I'm surprised to see him upright. Didn't he have a serious case of gout the last time we saw him?

Gwen: Ingrown toenail, Agnes. Far more repulsive, if you ask me.

Arthur: **(Initially shaken, but relaxes himself)** Agnes. Gwen. Can I interest either of you in a refreshment?

Gwen: I'll take a glass of water, Arthur, if you can manage that. **(Turning towards Edwin)** I say, is that my dear baby brother?

Agnes: **(Holding a searching hand to her forehead)** Why, it is! I thought it was just a houseplant. Hello, Edwin. Look at you all dressed up. Did you do the buttons yourself? They can be tricky.

Edwin: Yes, Agnes, I did the buttons myself.

Gwen: Our parents would be so proud, Edwin. Ah, but I see you still haven't quite mastered the shoelace yet. Whoopsy!

Edwin: What? Argh! **(Stoops and begins tying his shoe)**

Agnes: That'll probably occupy him for the rest of the evening. Come on, Gwen, we must say hello to our host. Clark Caraway! We were so happy to receive your invitation.

Clark: Hello, Gwen. Hello, Agnes. Allow me to introduce you to the luminary of my heart – the big cheese – my mother.

Gwen: Your...mother?

Agnes: We didn't expect –

(Gwen and Agnes look at each other and then apologetically at Margery.)

Margery: Don't let me keep you from harassing these gentlemen. They've no doubt deserved it. I'm only here to pick up my belongings. Now, Clark, if you wouldn't mind. Excuse me, ladies. Gentlemen. **(Begins to stand up.)**

Clark: **(Restraining Margery)** But mother, you haven't told us about your trip yet. How's Connie? Still in the grips of that tapeworm?

Margery: I already told you, she has scarlet fever.

Clark: Oh that's right! Well, how was the crossing? Take an ocean liner? Magnificent machines! You don't think they can get any bigger and yet they somehow do. Just like Uncle Abner.

Margery: Stop rambling, Clark, and get me my things.

Clark: What was that? Crab cakes? Of course, we have them. We're practically infested.

(Clark crosses the room to get the tray of appetisers from the table.)

Arthur: **(Handing Gwen her drink)** Your water, Gwen.

Gwen: Thank you, Arthur – oh my mistake. Silly me. **(Spills the water immediately on Arthur)**

Arthur: **(Exhales through his nose)** No problem. Clark, can I speak with you?

Clark: What? Oh certainly, Arthur! Certainly! Edwin! Edwin, where are you?

(Edwin is still tying his shoe.)

Clark: Oh there you are, Edwin, why don't you show the ladies some of those party tricks you've been practising.

Edwin: Party tricks? But I don't know any party tricks.

Clark: Of course you do. Show them the one you do with the mirror where you take a quarter and a deck of cards and – oh, you know the one.

Edwin: But I – I've never –

Clark: Splendid! There's a mirror in the hallway. Run along, Mother, you won't believe your eyes.

(Clark pushes Margery, Agnes, Gwen, and Edwin off stage left, before returning to Arthur.)

Clark: **(Impatiently)** Yes! Yes! What is it, Arthur? What is it?

Arthur: Tonight is a disaster! The girls are roasting us like a couple of tenderloins! And just look at my shirt.

Clark: Well, I'm sorry they're affecting your laundry, but in case you haven't noticed I'm busy dealing with my mother.

Arthur: And what's your plan exactly? She's going to have to leave eventually. And when she does, she'll –

Clark: I know. I know. I just – Listen. If Mother ever learns what I did with that necklace, I'll never see another penny from her.

Arthur: Why don't you just have Halifax go down to the pawn shop? He can repossess the necklace while your mother's still here.

Clark: That's brilliant, Arthur! Absolutely brilliant! Halifax! Where are you?

Halifax: Did you wish me to serve the appetisers now, sir? I fear they grow cold on the platter.

Clark: Shut up and listen, you big cranberry. The very fate of this household hangs in the balance and only your actions can save it. Run down to the pawn shop on 42nd street and reacquire those pearls I pawned this morning. Bring them back and surreptitiously sneak them into my safe. Time is of the essence. Do you understand?

Halifax: Quite, sir.

Clark: This could be the most significant thing you will ever do in your entire miserable life. Do you hear me, Halifax?

Halifax: I did fight in the Spanish-American War, sir.

Clark: Never mind the Spanish-American War. Your name will be sung on the streets if you manage this. Now, go! Go and make haste!

Halifax: But, sir, how am I to pay for the pearls?

Clark: Argh! You're right. How is he to pay for the pearls, Arthur? We spent all of it on the crab cakes and ham.

Halifax: If I may make a suggestion, sir.

Clark: Yes, yes. Spit it out.

Halifax: The money you were kind enough to save for my birthday festivities on top of the cash I was going to send home to my sick father might amount to a suitable sum to –

Clark: Oh, Halifax. I couldn't ask you to do that.

Halifax: I confess the sacrifice will not be easy, sir, but it is one that I am happy to make for the greater good of the household.

Clark: Halifax, you big-hearted buffoon. This is a far, far better thing that you do, than I have ever done. I'm sorry Arthur and I ever made fun of your figure behind your back.

Arthur: (Nods) Ditto.

Halifax: Thank you, sir. I will depart immediately.

(Halifax exits stage through the front door.)

Clark: We must buy him as much time as we can. I don't know if you've noticed but he isn't exactly built like an Olympic sprinter.

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Arthur: No, not in the slightest. He'll be winded by the time he reaches the lobby.

Clark: We have to move up the timeline. I see no other way around it, Arthur. We need your appendicitis now.

Arthur: What? Already? But I was saving it for dessert.

Clark: My sweet talking won't distract my mother for long. It's the perfect time for one of the house guests to start dying.

Arthur: Okay. Okay. Just...give me a chance to get into character.

(SFX. Crash.)

Arthur: Now, what is it?

(Gwen, Agnes, Edwin, and Margery enter stage left. Gwen is supporting Edwin.)

Gwen: Do you have any ice, Clark?

Clark: Why? What happened?

Margery: The poor boy tried making his reflection disappear in the mirror. Of course, when he tripped into it, the mirror had nowhere else to land but his head.

Agnes: Just Edwin being typical Edwin. Did I ever tell you about the time he pushed the Lieutenant Governor off a balcony?

Margery: We've only just met, dear. Of course you haven't told me.

Edwin: **(Grunts in frustration)** Could I just get some punch and be left alone?

Agnes: What an excellent idea! Gwen and I just learned a new recipe. Why don't we make some for the whole party? **(Winks at Gwen)**

Gwen: Yes. You all make yourselves comfortable at the table.

(Gwen and Agnes go to the side board and start mixing punch.)

Gwen: **(Hushed undertone)** I don't know, Agnes. Should we tone it down? Pushing the mirror over on Edwin felt a little wrong.

Agnes: **(Hushed undertone)** We can't back down now. Sure, we've gotten a few jabs in on Edwin, but Arthur's hardly suffered. Put an extra amount of that apricot jam in his drink.

Gwen: **(Hushed undertone)** You're right. You're right. I'm sorry.

Agnes: **(Hushed undertone)** And make sure you don't put any of that stuff into yours, mine, or Mrs. Caraway's.

(Gwen stirs the jam into the drinks.)

Gwen: **(Hushed undertone)** Did you notice the Golden Wedge? It's above the front door. How are we supposed to get it with everyone here?

Agnes: **(Hushed undertone)** Just keep an eye out for an opportunity. **(Loudly to everyone)** Well, here we are. All finished.

(Agnes and Gwen carry the glasses over to the table.)

Agnes: We hope you enjoy. We had this at a party and simply adored it – Wait, Edwin, that one's for Mrs. Cara – .

Edwin: What difference does it make? They're all the same.

(Edwin downs the drink before the girls can do anything about it. Clark inspects his own glass.)

Clark: Are there supposed to be things floating in it?

Gwen: Oh yes! That's the...the...

Agnes: The pulp.

Clark: Pulp?

Gwen: Orange pulp.

(Arthur takes a sip.)

Arthur: Doesn't taste like orange to me. It – oof – it definitely hits the stomach hard.

(Clark places his drink down without taking a sip.)

Edwin: Tasted fine to me. It – oh now look what you've done.

Agnes: Oh I'm so sorry, Edwin. It looks like I've spilled Mrs. Caraway's punch on you. Allow me to make you another one, Mrs. Caraway.

Margery: Don't bother, young lady. Punch never agrees with me.

Clark: Crab cakes anyone?

(Clark passes out crab cakes. The rest of the table sits in silence for some moments, munching on crab cakes and sipping on punch.)

Clark: Isn't this jolly? Here you all are. At my little dinner party.

Gwen: **(Drops a crab cake on Arthur.)** Oh I'm so sorry, Arthur. That flew right off my fork. I hope that doesn't stain.

Arthur: **(Impatiently)** It's all right. I have other shirts.

Gwen: Oh good. Well – oops! There I go again, dropping one on your pants now. I hope you have more of those.

Arthur: **(Through gritted teeth)** Not in this colour, no.

Gwen: Well, you'll have to go shopping then. Be sure to pick some that won't go out of fashion so soon.

Arthur: How dare you? These pants are all the rage in New York. I have it straight from the horse's mouth!

Gwen: **(Drops her fork)** What did you say?

Arthur: You heard me! Straight from the horse's – Oh –

Gwen: You monster! You would bring up Feivel at a time like this! Right when I was just beginning to heal!

(Gwen sobs into a handkerchief. Agnes rubs her back.)

Arthur: But I –

Agnes: Quiet, Arthur! You've said enough.

Margery: What on earth are they talking about, Clark?

Clark: Pay no attention to that, Mother. You know, Edwin here is quite the accomplished man.

Agnes: Ha!

Edwin: What do you mean 'ha!'?

Agnes: What do you think I meant?

Clark: **(Clears his throat)** What I mean is, Edwin studies human anatomy in his free time and is a boatload of knowledge. Tell them what you told me the other day.

Edwin: I'd rather not.

Clark: Oh, go on, Edwin. This is a party. If you can't pull out that stuff now, when can you?

Agnes: **(Condescendingly)** Yes, Edwin. What have you been learning? The number of fingers on a hand? The function of the ears? Did you know that the eyes help us see?

Edwin: I'll have you know, I've been studying the intricacies of the heart. As it turns out, Agnes, most people have one.

Gwen: Edwin!

Agnes: And what about spines, hmm? I've always wondered why pathetic bachelors named Edwin never seem to have one.

(Edwin gasps.)

Margery: Well, I think it's about time I go, Clark. This has been a lovely evening. If you would, darling, my necklace.

Clark: What? But we were just getting started. Weren't we, Arthur?

(Arthur finishes his drink, straightens his tie, and shoots up from his seat suddenly.)

Arthur: **(Clutches his stomach and cries in pain)** Arghhhhh!

Margery: **(Startled)** My goodness!

Gwen: **(Startled)** Arthur!

Clark: **(Fake startled)** Oh, my stars and garters!

Arthur: **(Crying in pain)** Hikkin!

(Arthur falls backwards over his seat, rolling excessively on the floor. Everyone stands up from their seats with horror, especially Gwen.)

Gwen: Arthur! What's wrong?

Arthur: **(Dramatically)** Oh, the agony!

Clark: Is everything okay, Arthur? Can I get you anything?

Agnes: Of course he's not okay. Look at him, you idiot!

Arthur: My abdomen! Oh, my abdomen!

Gwen: Wait! What?! Your abdomen?

(Gwen picks up Arthur's empty glass and looks at Agnes. A look of horror sweeps across her face. Arthur tries to stand up, but only collapses into an end table, sending a lamp to the floor.)

Arthur: Oh, it's too much! The pain!

Gwen: **(Hysterically)** It was only a little apricot jam. Just jam!

Margery: What on earth are you blathering about, girl?

Agnes: Nothing! She's talking nonsense. Gwen, get a hold of yourself.

Gwen: **(Points a shaking finger towards Arthur)** But – but – Arthur – he's –

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Clark: If only there were someone here, who could help this poor man. Oh how he suffers!

(Arthur rolls around the floor dramatically, knocking things over and making a mess.)

Agnes: Somebody do something!

Clark: Golly! I'm in shock. Stunned, you could say! Eh, Edwin?

Edwin: What? Oh...Stay put, Arthur! I'm coming. **(Trips over a chair, falling to the floor. He crawls up to Arthur.)** Just...lie down, Arthur.

Agnes: What does it look like he's doing?

Margery: For heaven's sake, Clark. Call the doctor!

Gwen: Oh Edwin! Please do something. His screaming – It's horrible!

Edwin: Right! Yes. I'm doing something. **(Grapples with Arthur)** Clark, get me a...get me some ice.

Clark: Yes, sir!

(Clark exits stage right.)

Margery: Oh, where does that boy keep his telephone?
(Margery surveys the room and exits stage left.)

Edwin: Stop struggling, Arthur! Gwen, can you get me a pillow?

Gwen: Of course, Edwin! I saw some in the hall. Oh, Arthur! I'm sorry!
(Gwen exits stage left.)

Edwin: Agnes!

Agnes: Yes. Yes. What is it?

Edwin: Would you get some cold milk from the kitchen?
(Agnes exits stage right. Clark returns with ice in hand. Checking to see if anyone is listening, he grabs both Edwin and Arthur by the shoulders.)

Clark: Keep it up, Edwin! Did you see the look on Agnes' face? She doesn't know what to think. And Arthur, the performance of a lifetime! Truly inspired! If I didn't know any better I'd say you were on the verge of giving birth.

Arthur: To be honest, it kinda feels like I am. I don't know how, but I think I've even convinced my own body that it's in pain.

Clark: They call that method acting, Arthur.
(Agnes and Gwen return. The three men slip back into character.)

Clark: Here, Edwin. The ice. As you requested.

Edwin: Let's see. **(Places the ice in Arthur's armpit.)** We'll just put that there to...draw some of the pain in this direction.

Clark: Genius!

Edwin: **(Takes the pillow from Gwen and shoves it under Arthur's hip.)** And we'll put that under there to ensure perfect...ugh...equilibrium. Yes, equilibrium.

Agnes: Equilibrium?

Clark: Oh, we must have equilibrium.
(Margery enters stage left.)

Margery: Where is your phone, Clark? We need to call the doctor.

Clark: Doctor? Oh, the doctor. Yes, I just called him, actually. Dr. Billings...ton. Dr. Billington. He's heading straight over. **(Winks at Edwin)**

Gwen: How do you feel, Arthur?

Arthur: Urghh. Is that you, Gwen? Oh, Gwen, it's all so fleeting. Life. It is but a flicker in the abyss. I fear my time is up.

Gwen: Don't talk like that. You'll be fine. Won't he?

Clark: What's your diagnosis, Edwin? Will he pull through?

Edwin: Um...let's see.

(Edwin takes the milk from Agnes and tips two fingers into it. He puts a finger on Arthur's shoulder and another on Arthur's hip. He places his ear to Arthur's tummy and listens for a few moments. He backs away, contemplates a moment, and then he leans in and sniffs Arthur.)

Edwin: Yep. It's as I feared.

Gwen: What? What? What is it?

Edwin: It appears to be Appendicitis.

Clark: Appendicitis!? Oh not appendicitis. Anything but that!

Gwen: Why? Is it lethal?

Edwin: It can be, but let's see what I can do about it. **(Cracks his knuckles and begins moving Arthur's limbs around)**

Arthur: I can hear eternity whispering to me.

Clark: Tell us what it's saying.

Arthur: "Come home, darling. Come back to me."

(Edwin continues poking Arthur.)

Margery: Well! You're not going to cure him like that, young man.

Edwin: What? Why not?

Clark: Please, Mother. This man reads.

Margery: You don't get to be my age without seeing your fair share of appendicitis. When I was a girl, in fact, appendicitis was as common as the cold. Appendices would go off like popcorn. Pop. Pop. Pop. All down the street. People were dropping like flies.

Clark: Keep the ancient history out of this, Mother. We live in modern times. Edwin knows what he's doing.

Agnes: No, I want to hear more. Go on, Mrs. Caraway.

Margery: Well, considering the way he's been screaming, his appendix is too far gone. What he needs is an immediate appendectomy.

Arthur: **(Dramatically)** If only I could see one last sunset. If only – **(Breaking character)** I'm sorry, what was that?

Margery: An appendectomy – to remove your inflamed appendix before it ruptures and kills you. We must perform surgery.

Gwen: Surgery?!

Agnes: Here?!

Edwin: Now?!

Arthur: On me?!

Margery: Yes, immediately! There's no time to lose.

Clark: Mother, you're talking nonsense. We can't perform surgery.

Margery: **(Rolls up her sleeves)** You can't my dear, but I can. If you remember, Clark, I worked with the Red Cross during the Spanish-American War.

Clark: But you...fundraised.

Margery: And performed amputations.

Arthur: Amputations!

Margery: Everything from toes to torsos.

Edwin: I'm feeling faint.

Margery: Well let's not stand around. Time is of the essence. We must get started while Dr. Billington is on his way. I hope he's a good doctor, Clark. My stitching isn't what it once was.

Clark: I'm sorry, Mother. I'm putting my foot down. You may interrupt my dinner parties. You may help yourself to my crab cakes. But I – I draw the line at cutting up my dinner guests. If you want something to carve, we're having ham at 8:00.

Margery: **(Turning a dinner knife slowly in her hands)** You may be an adult now, Clark, but that doesn't mean I'm not your mother. Do you really think it wise to defy me, especially when I'm on the cusp of changing my will?

Clark: You're what?

Margery: Changing my will, darling. I'm meeting with the solicitors tomorrow to make some minor changes. But who knows? I might as well reconsider some other points while I'm at it. Your poor sister and brother could probably do with a bigger share of the family fortune, don't you think?

Clark: Mother...you wouldn't...

Margery: I've saved a lot of lives in my time, Clark. I'm not going to let an easy one slip away.

(Clark is silent for a moment before taking a deep and thoughtful breath.)

Clark: All right, Mother, you want surgery? Fine. Surgery, it is. Come on, Edwin. Grab his ankles. It looks like we're doing surgery. **(Grabs Arthur's wrists and begins dragging him toward stage left.)**

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Arthur: Wait! Clark! Wait! Let's not make any hasty decisions.

Clark: Grab his ankles, Edwin.

Edwin: But –

Margery: Young man, he'll die if we don't operate.

Edwin: But –

Gwen: Just do it, Edwin!

(Edwin grabs Arthur's ankles. The two pick up Arthur.)

Arthur: Boys! Put me down! I said, "Put me down!"

Gwen: Where are you taking him?

Clark: To the tub. Where else can we have emergency surgery? It's a good thing Halifax disinfected it this morning.

Arthur: Wait! I'm feeling better. Yes, much better. Oh it's a miracle. Do you hear that? My stomach – Aghh – no, it actually hurts now – But please! Don't cut me open!

(Clark and Edwin lug Arthur off stage left.)

Margery: That doctor had better be here soon.

(Margery exits stage left.)

Agnes: Quick, Gwen! The Golden Wedge! Now's our chance. Grab that chair.

(Agnes grabs a chair and positions it under the Golden Wedge.)

Gwen: **(Turns slowly to Agnes in utter shock)** You can't be serious.

Agnes: Of course I'm serious. This is what we came here to do.

Gwen: But – but – we just poisoned Arthur. And now he needs surgery or he'll – Oh, Agnes, what have we done?

Agnes: Listen to me, Gwen. Apricot jam does not give people appendicitis. It gives people stomach aches.

Gwen: But Edwin said –

Agnes: Never mind what he said. Either Edwin is mistaken or Arthur is making a bigger fuss about his stomach than necessary. Either way, we go on with our plan. Just help me with this, will you?

Gwen: But Agnes, those screams – they sounded so genuine.

Agnes: Gwen, just...listen. If you help me with this, I promise we'll deal with everything else next. But please, we must be quick. They'll be back at any moment.

(Gwen reluctantly helps. They both climb up on chairs, one on each side of the front door. They begin to fiddle with the Golden Wedge display, when they suddenly hear a noise.)

Gwen: Someone's at the door!

Agnes: Hold on. I almost have it.

Gwen: But, Agnes. They're coming in!

(The door swings open and Halifax walks in cautiously. He fails to notice the girls standing on their chairs behind him. Halifax sees that the coast is clear and retrieves a pearl necklace from his pocket. He admires it and smiles to himself. Gwen begins to wobble on her chair. Agnes reaches out a hand and secures Gwen, but lets go of the golden wedge. It falls from its display and lands on Halifax's head with a thud. He grunts and falls dramatically to the floor.)

Agnes: Now, look at what you made me do.

Gwen: **(Jumps down from her chair and clutches her head in despair)** Oh no! No! No! We've just killed Halifax!

(Tabs Close. Intermission.)

Scene 2 - Drawing Room

(Tabs Open. Agnes and Gwen stand over the unconscious body of Halifax.)

Agnes: Calm down, Gwen. First things first. We need to find out if he's actually dead.

Gwen: How do we do that?

Agnes: I don't know. Kick him or something.

Gwen: **(Kicks Halifax feebly and then recoils)** He's not doing anything!

Agnes: **(Picks up the Golden Wedge and prods Halifax.)** Halifax? Halifax, can you hear me?

Gwen: Oh, Agnes! What are we going to do? It's only 7:45 and we've killed half the people in this household! First Arthur, now Halifax! Next it'll be Edwin. Then Clark. Then –

Agnes: **(Agnes grabs Gwen by the shoulders and shakes her.)** Don't go down that road, Gwen! We have to keep our heads!

Gwen: **(Gwen grabs Agnes back and shakes her.)** But don't you understand? They'll put us in prison for this!

Clark: **(From offstage)** Don't be difficult, Arthur! Come back this instant!

Agnes: Quick! They're coming back. Help me hide him! **(Picks up Halifax's arm.)**

Gwen: Hide him? But he's the size of Rhode Island.

Agnes: We'll just push him out the front door.

Gwen: But there are people out there.

Agnes: The window seat then.

Gwen: The window seat?

(Agnes lifts the top off the window seat, throws the Golden Wedge in, and starts to drag Halifax toward it.)

Agnes: Grab his other arm!

Gwen: **(Grabs Halifax's arm, but immediately releases him.)** Oh, Agnes, I can't do this. We can't do this. We should just...turn ourselves in!

Agnes: Listen to me, Gwen! I know this looks bad – really bad – but that's why you have to help me.

(Running is heard from offstage.)

Gwen: But, Agnes, it's too late!

(Gwen and Agnes close their eyes in awful anticipation. Arthur runs onto the stage clutching his stomach. Clark is chasing him.)

Arthur: Surgery was never a part of the plan, Clark! Leave me alone!

Clark: You heard the matriarch. If I don't listen to her, I'll lose my inheritance!

(Arthur and Clark run across the room without noticing the girls or Halifax. Arthur runs off stage right and into the kitchen with Clark just behind. Gwen and Agnes open their eyes.)

Gwen: They didn't see us!

Agnes: We're not out of the woods yet! Pull!

(Agnes and Gwen drag Halifax across the floor. They make it no more than a few yards when they hear shouting again.)

Gwen: Quick! They're coming back again!

(Gwen and Agnes stand in front of Halifax's body just as Arthur and Clark run back on stage. As Clark and Arthur run a few laps around the room, Gwen and Agnes side step around Halifax's body, always shielding the butler from view.)

Clark: **(Directed offstage)** Edwin! Get over here! I need your help!

Arthur: Stop it, Clark! I mean it!

Clark: Don't be a pansy, Arthur. Mother said it would only take the smallest incision.

Arthur: I don't care how big it is! I'm not having surgery!

(Clark finally corners Arthur on the other side of the dining table. Both men stand panting at one another.)

Clark: You're cornered, Arthur, and soon to be outnumbered! Surrender and accept your fate!

Arthur: I'm warning you, Clark! Don't...don't make me get tough with you.

Clark: Tough with me? Ha! I'd love to see it.

Arthur: My stomach may really be hurting, but I can still take you, Caraway. With ranged attacks! **(Grabs crab cakes from the table and heaves them at Clark.)**

Clark: Agh! Stop it, Arthur! Those were very expensive!

(Arthur makes an attempt for the front door, but Clark just manages to block him. Edwin enters stage left.)

Clark: Quick, Edwin! Surround him!

(Edwin approaches from behind, but Arthur turns and kicks Edwin in the stomach. Edwin groans in pain. Clark jumps on Arthur's back, and all three collapse onto the floor.)

Clark: Excellent work, Edwin!

Arthur: No! No! Let me go! Don't take me back to that bloodthirsty woman!

Clark: That's my mother you're talking about!

(Edwin writhes on the floor, while Arthur and Clark struggle.)

Clark: Hold him down, Edwin!

(Edwin weakly grabs Arthur with one hand. Clark finally spots the women.)

Clark: Oh, hello, Agnes. Hello, Gwen.

(Agnes and Gwen smile and wave.)

Clark: Didn't see you there. Please, make yourselves at home.

Arthur: Gwen, are you there? Gwen! Help me!

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(Gwen is about to take a step forward when Agnes restrains her. The two continue blocking Halifax from view.)

Clark: Don't help him! He'll die if we don't remove his appendix. You hear that, Gwen? He'll die! Kind of makes you reflect, doesn't it?

(Arthur grunts, groans, and resists as Clark and Edwin drag him off stage left.)

Clark: **(Offstage)** We're coming, Mother!

Agnes: Quick, Gwen! To the window seat!

(Agnes and Gwen drag Halifax over to the window seat and begin lifting him into it.)

Agnes: **(Straining)** Why does he have to be so heavy?

Gwen: It's like he's filled with concrete.

(Gwen and Agnes manage to put his torso into the window seat, but his bottom half hangs out.)

Clark: **(From offstage)** Grab a few bottles while you're in there, Edwin. And towels don't forget the towels!

Gwen: It's Edwin! He's coming back!

Agnes: I'll deal with Edwin. You deal with that!

(Agnes indicates the half of Halifax still out in the open. She meets Edwin as he enters stage left. Edwin looks weary and in pain.)

Edwin: Oh, it's you.

Agnes: **(Agnes crosses her arms.)** Yes, it is.

(On stage right, Gwen puts all of her might into lifting Halifax's other half, but fails.)

Edwin: **(Aloof)** Excuse me, Agnes. I need to get by you.

(Edwin takes a step to move around her, but Agnes sidesteps into his way again. She plays nervously with her hair.)

Agnes: Where are you going?

Edwin: I just need to get some cooking wine from the sideboard.

(Edwin tries to go around Agnes the other way. Agnes blocks him again. Gwen continues struggling in the background.)

Agnes: **(Innocently)** Cooking wine? Whatever for?

Edwin: We have to disinfect Arthur and our tools before we start operating, but I can't talk right now. I'm in a hurry. **(Pushes past Agnes.)**

Agnes: Wait, Edwin! Wait – I'm – I'm sorry!

(On the verge of seeing Gwen and Halifax, Edwin stops and looks back towards Agnes.)

Edwin: You're what?

Agnes: I'm sorry.

Edwin: Sorry?

Agnes: For everything. I – I’ve been so cruel to you.

Edwin: What?

Agnes: Just plain cruel. Especially tonight, Edwin. You don’t deserve it. I’m so sorry.

Edwin: **(Flabbergasted)** Well, I – I – I guess I’m sorry too.

Agnes: **(Rubs her elbow bashfully)** I suppose we’ve both been horrible to each other.

Edwin: **(Pensively)** Yes, we have. Haven’t we? **(Starts to turn back in the direction of Gwen.)**

Agnes: Wait!

Edwin: **(Looks back at Agnes)** What now?

Agnes: I’m sorry I called you spineless.

Edwin: Oh, that? Think nothing of it.

(Agnes turns away and pretends to be mortified. Edwin takes a step towards her.)

Edwin: Really, Agnes, don’t beat yourself up about it.

Agnes: **(Fake sniffing)** It’s not just that though. I said you looked like a houseplant.

Edwin: Water under the bridge.

Agnes: And I called you a sad sack of unpublished poetry.

Edwin: I beg your pardon.

Agnes: And pushed that mirror onto your head.

Edwin: You did what?

Agnes: And most of all, I’m sorry I laughed at your proposal.

Edwin: **(Embarrassed)** Oh, please. Don’t mention it.

(Gwen gives Agnes the signal to keep going from behind Edwin’s back. She is still struggling to lift Halifax.)

Agnes: It really was so sweet. And tonight, you’ve just been so brave.

Edwin: Brave?

Agnes: The way you knew exactly what to do to help Arthur. You were so...level-headed.

Edwin: **(Rubs the back of his head bashfully and kicks at an invisible pebble)** Well, I – I suppose I was.

Agnes: And you just look terrific!

Edwin: Really? These pants aren't too baggy?

Agnes: Not at all. In fact, they make you look downright debonair.

Edwin: Well, you're looking radishing – I mean ravenous – I mean ravishing.

Agnes: Thank you, Edwin. Thank you so much for always being such a gentleman.

Edwin: Well, I only ever do anything to impress you, Agnes. You know that.

Agnes: I'm just so grateful for your – I'm sorry, what?

Edwin: It's true. From the moment we met. I knew then and there that it would be my mission for the rest of my life to earn your respect and admiration.

Agnes: That's awfully sweet, but I – uh – well, I don't know what to say.

Edwin: Why don't we just both agree to go back to the way things were, before I...uh...proposed?

Agnes: **(Agnes looks genuinely thoughtful)** That actually sounds –

(Gwen slams the window seat shut, Halifax finally within. Edwin turns sharply around.)

Edwin: What was that?

Gwen: Oh, nothing! You said you needed cooking wine! Here you go! **(Grabs a few bottles and hands them over to Edwin.)** Now you really must get back to the operating table – or tub in this case. Arthur needs you.

(Gwen pushes Edwin towards the stage left exit. Edwin is about to leave when he stops.)

Edwin: Woah! Hold on! I haven't grabbed the towels yet!

Gwen: Well don't dawdle. Grab them and get going, you slug.

Edwin: All right. All right. I'm going.

(Edwin crosses the room. He is 10 feet away from the window, when Agnes jumps in front of him.)

Agnes: Wait! What are you doing? You need to get the towels!

Edwin: I know! That's what I'm doing.

Agnes: The bathroom is that way.

Edwin: Oh those are Clark's nice towels. The spare ones are in the window seat.

Gwen: **(Together)** The what?!

Agnes: **(Together)** The what?!

Edwin: The window seat. It's that thing there. You lift the seat up and a whole world opens up before you. I'd say there was even enough space to hide a body.

(Agnes and Gwen steady themselves against the wall.)

Edwin: Look, I'll show you.

(Edwin reaches for the seat. Agnes sits down on it.)

Agnes: You can't!

Edwin: Why not?

Agnes: Because...it's...uhh.

Edwin: **(Sternly)** Oh I see. This is another crack about how weak I am. You don't think I can lift it! And I thought we were past all the insults! Well! I'll show you! I'll lift it even with you sitting on it.

Gwen: Edwin! Don't!

(Edwin grabs the edge of the seat. He goes down on one knee and begins to lift the lid.)

Agnes: Oh, Edwin! Yes, I will marry you!

(Edwin drops the lid, stunned.)

Edwin: **(Stunned together)** What?!

Gwen: **(Stunned together)** What?!

Agnes: Down on one knee and everything! You're so sweet!

(Edwin looks down at his knees, befuddled.)

Agnes: Classic Edwin! Always full of surprises.

(Edwin is agape. Agnes pulls Edwin to his feet, links Edwin's arm in hers, and guides him away from the window seat. Gwen opens the window seat and pulls out some towels. She covers Halifax with one of them and closes the seat.)

Agnes: I was thinking a small ceremony. No need for all the hubbub. Just family and friends.

(Edwin blinks dumbly. Clark enters stage left. He is wearing a pair of rubber gloves and carrying a bowl of reddish mush.)

Clark: For goodness sake, Edwin! How long does it take to get a few bottles of cooking wine and a couple of towels?

(Everyone in the room sees the bowl and gasps. Gwen shrieks and points a quivering finger.)

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Gwen: Is that – Is that?

(Edwin faints and falls to the floor.)

Clark: What? Ohhh. You thought this was – Haha, no. This isn't Arthur. We didn't purée him. He's just locked in the bathroom. This is Halifax's homemade applesauce. He was keeping it chilled in the bathroom. Heaven knows why. I thought you all might like to try.

(Gwen collapses into a chair with a sigh of relief. Agnes checks on Edwin, lightly slapping him in the face.)

Clark: Did I miss something?

Gwen: As a matter of fact, yes. Agnes and Edwin are engaged!

Clark: Engaged?! You mean actually engaged? Betrothed? Affianced? Plighted to the same troth?

Agnes: And all the other synonyms.

(Edwin begins to regain consciousness.)

Clark: Edwin, is this true? Are you espoused to this filly?

Edwin: **(Mystified)** I...I don't know. Am I?

Agnes: Of course you are. You gave the sweetest little speech, sat me down at the window seat, and just gave me the works.

Edwin: I did?

Clark: This is wonderful news! Wonderful! We must celebrate!

(Margery enters stage left, wearing rubber gloves and carrying a large knife.)

Margery: For heaven's sake, Clark. How long does it take to get your friend to get some cooking wine and towels?

Clark: Mother! Splendid news! Edwin and Agnes are engaged.

Margery: What? These two? **(Points at both with her knife)** I've never heard such nonsense in my life.

Gwen: Well, here are your supplies.

(Gwen hands Clark the towels and cooking wine.)

Clark: What? Oh. Right. I'll go take these to Arthur. He'll be delighted to hear the news.

Margery: I'll be right there, Clark. I have some wisdom to impart on these friends of yours.

(Clark exits stage left. Margery turns to Agnes.)

Margery: Listen, my child, I know your marriage prospects must look bleak with a personality such as yours, but there's no reason to give up entirely.

(Agnes and Gwen gasp. Edwin looks confused.)

Gwen: How dare you? Agnes could have any man she wanted.

Margery: **(Chuckles)** The proof is in the pudding, dear. If that were the case, your friend would be married to a respectable gentleman by now and not engaged to a variety of mildew.

Edwin: Hey –

Gwen: That's my brother you're talking about.

Margery: My deepest condolences.

Agnes: I'll engage myself to whomever I like, Mrs. Caraway. With or without your consent.

Margery: Then why settle for mildew?

Edwin: Now, wait just a minute. I am not mildew.

Margery: Please. You smell like a rotting stump and have even less conversation skills than one.

(Edwin sniffs himself as Clark runs onto the stage.)

Clark: He's gone! Arthur's gone!

Gwen: Gone?

Clark: Flown the coop.

Margery: How?

Clark: The bathroom window was open. He must've...jumped out.

Gwen: But we're on the 3rd floor!

Clark: Maybe he climbed along the ledge and dropped into the street.

Margery: Well don't just stand there congealing. Go get him.

Clark: But, Mother, he'll be long gone by now.

Margery: A fall from that height would have at least broken his leg. He can't be far. Look for the limping man or follow the trail of blood. Use your intelligence for once.

Clark: Come along, Edwin.

(Clark drags Edwin with him and exits through the front door.)

Margery: Well, now that your disaster of a fiancé is gone, I can be perfectly candid. As I was saying Miss – what was it again?

Agnes: Dalliard.

Margery: Ah, the Dalliard engages herself to the dullard. How quaint.

(Agnes crosses her arms.)

Gwen: **(Quietly to Agnes)** Are you really serious about marrying him, Agnes? What happened to caring what people think?

Agnes: **(Loudly)** If the common public are anything like Mrs. Caraway, then I don't care what they think.

Margery: Is that an attempt to wound me? Well, you'll have to do better than that, dear. **(Makes her way around the room, straightening furniture, picture frames, etc.)** I recognise that it may be quite the fashion of today for young women to attach themselves to the first simpleton they can find. Though why they eventually marry those members of society whose bloodlines we would all rather see die out is beyond me.

(Margery dusts off the window seat. Agnes and Gwen's eyes grow large.)

Agnes: Mrs. Caraway –

Margery: **(Glares at Agnes.)** Do not interrupt me! **(Turns back towards the window seat and straightens the cushions.)** No doubt you view your commitment to this man as some grand act of charity. Well, take it from someone who's lived a little longer than you have, dear, the world couldn't care any less. In fact, we find your petty insistence to be noticed for your sacrifices perfectly nauseating **(Sits down on the window seat and looks at Agnes and Gwen.)** There, the look of horror on your faces tells me how close I am to the truth. You can't hide anything from me.

(Margery lifts her weight off the window seat momentarily before setting it down again. Something about the seat troubles her.)

Agnes: **(Gestures towards the couch)** Why don't you take a seat over here, Mrs. Caraway? It's much more comfortable –

Margery: Interrupt me one more time, child, and I shall not be responsible for my actions. **(Stands up, faces the window seat, and pushes down on it. There is a clear wobble.)** The world doesn't need any more ludicrous misalliances. In fact, if you ask me, the both of you would be better off joining a convent.

(Margery grabs the edge of the window seat and begins to lift. Gwen screams at the top of her lungs. Margery turns sharply around as the window seat flies fully open. Margery stares at Gwen, amazed.)

Margery: Good heavens, girl! The nunnery is nothing to be afraid of! **(Slowly approaches Agnes and Gwen.)** The world is the civilised place it is today because better women than yourselves decided to be nuns. And besides, what's not to like? You can garden, read, and sing. All without a pig-headed man in sight. Does that not sound like heaven on earth to you?

Agnes: It does. It absolutely does. Doesn't it, Gwen?

(Gwen nods her head vigorously.)

Margery: Good. I can put you both in touch with the abbess of St. Francis. She and I cut many a limb off together during the war. She's sure to take my recommendation.

(As the window seat sits open Halifax raises himself into a sitting position, a towel covering his head. He hunches over in pain and rubs his head. Gwen tugs on Agnes' arm. They both stare at Halifax, horrified.)

Margery: **(Seeing Gwen and Agnes looking horrified)** Oh, don't worry. She's as gentle as I am, but my, does the woman know how to wield a bone saw. **(Shakes her head nostalgically)** Why do you two keep looking over my shoulder like that? **(Begins to turn back towards Halifax)**

(Gwen screams again.)

Margery: **(Covers her ears)** Would you stop screaming? You're worse than the amputees!

(Margery is about to turn around again when, suddenly, Arthur flies in through the window, rolling over the window seat lid, and shutting it closed on top of Halifax's head. Arthur comes to a rest on the floor in front of the women.)

Gwen: Arthur!

Arthur: Oh. Hello, Gwen.

Margery: Well, well, well. Congratulations, young man. You gave my son the turn around. How did you do it? Climb back up the water spout when no one was looking?

Arthur: Climb back up? I never climbed down. Your son locked the bathroom window on me and I've been stuck on the roof!

Margery: Well, you managed to get back in. All without breaking your neck. Now, how's that appendix? If my calculations are correct, it should be rupturing at any moment now.

(Margery takes a step towards him, flourishing her knife once again. Arthur scurries to his feet and jumps over the couch.)

Arthur: No! Stay away from me, you demented woman!

Margery: Oh for heaven's sake, what are you afraid of? The pain? I'm sorry we don't have any anaesthetic, but do you actually think any of those soldiers I operated on had anaesthetic? They were lucky if they had a bullet to bite down on. Now, come here.

Gwen: Mrs. Caraway, please –

Margery: Don't you start too! Do you want this man to die?

(Arthur jumps over the couch again as Margery approaches him from the other side.)

Arthur: Wait, Mrs. Caraway! The appendicitis! It – it's all a lie!

Gwen: **(Surprised Together)** What?!

Agnes: **(Surprised Together)** What?!

Arthur: It's true. We made it all up!

Margery: You girls don't actually believe him? If I had a nickel every time a soldier told me he was lying about his wounds just to get out of fighting, I'd have doubled my fortune. Now, hold still.

(Arthur screams as Margery lunges at him.)

Gwen: Mrs. Caraway, stop!

(Gwen swings her handbag at Margery. Margery falls to the floor, where she lays motionless. Agnes and Arthur stare at Gwen. Gwen looks down at her hands.)

Arthur: **(Admiringly)** You beautiful creature!

Gwen: **(Panicked)** She – She just wouldn't stop!

Agnes: What are you packing in that handbag, Gwen?

Gwen: **(Pulls a jar out of her handbag)** It's the apricot jam! Oh, I completely forgot.

Arthur: **(Stomps an emphatic foot)** You gorgeous thing!

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Gwen: Oh, Agnes! Not another one! What are we going to do?

Arthur: **(Slaps his knee)** Gosh! What a woman!

Agnes: Would you shut up, Arthur?

Arthur: **(Seemingly noticing Agnes for the first time.)** What?

Agnes: Snap out of it and help us. Clark and Edwin will be back soon.

Arthur: Ohh...right...Yes, we have to get rid of her, don't we? I know, we'll chuck her in the window seat.

Gwen: **(Together)** No!

Agnes: **(Together)** No!

(Gwen readies her handbag to strike.)

Arthur: All right. Window seat is off the table. **(Glances around the room)** We'll just prop her up in this chair.

(Arthur lifts Margery into a chair.)

Arthur: There. Doesn't she look peaceful?

(Margery's head falls backwards, her mouth hanging open.)

Agnes: **(Sarcastically)** Perfectly picturesque.

Arthur: I'd like to see you do any better.

Clark: **(From offstage)** You didn't have to tackle the poor man. I could tell a mile off he wasn't Arthur.

Edwin: **(From offstage)** Your mother said to look for anyone with a limp.

Gwen: It's them! They're back!

(Arthur straightens Margery's head)

Arthur: Quick! Pretend like you're laughing at something I just said.

Clark: **(From offstage)** That doesn't give you the right to go around tackling war vets, Edwin. His limp was bad enough as it was.

Edwin: **(From offstage)** Can we just forget about it? I said I was sorry.

(Clark and Edwin walk through the front door. Arthur laughs boisterously. Gwen and Agnes only look at each other nervously.)

Arthur: **(Finishes laughing, sighs contentedly, and wipes away a fake tear from his eye.)** Anyways...Oh! Clark! Edwin! Didn't see you there. I was just telling the ladies the one about the garden gnome.

Clark: **(Surprised)** Arthur? You're here.

Arthur: Arrived shortly before you did.

Clark: So you've come to your senses? We can go ahead with the surgery.

Arthur: Oh no need for that anymore. I've just discussed it with your mother. The surgery is off.

Clark: What?! You agreed to this, Mother?

(Margery remains silent.)

Arthur: Please, Clark, let the woman rest.

Clark: Rest? What did you do to her?

Arthur: Nothing.

(Margery's head slumps back. Arthur quickly straightens it again.)

Clark: What was that?

Arthur: What was what?

Clark: You just lifted her head.

Arthur: No I didn't.

(Margery slumps forward and falls onto the floor with a thud. Everyone stares at her in silence for a few moments.)

Arthur: **(Casually looks up at Edwin)** I don't believe I've told you the one about the gnome, Edwin. You see, there was this gnome. A garden gnome if you must know. One day he –

Clark: **(Grabs a hat off the coat hanger and spikes it on the floor)** Well, I hope you're all happy!

Agnes: Listen, Clark, it was an accident.

Edwin: **(Stooping over Margery)** No need to worry, Clark. I think she's still alive.

Clark: **(Sarcastically)** Alive? Oh what wondrous news! She's not dead! **(Angrily)** Of course, she's alive, you moron. If she were dead, this wouldn't be a problem.

(Edwin knits his brow in confusion.)

Clark: At least if she were dead, she wouldn't be able to cut me out of my inheritance. In fact, I'd get it immediately.

Agnes: You're unbelievable, Clark.

Clark: You try growing up with a mother like her without looking forward to your inheritance. And now, it's as good as gone. I'll have to let Halifax go.

Arthur: Speaking of Halifax, where in blazes is he? He should've been back ages ago.

Gwen: **(Coughs)** Could we just focus on getting Mrs. Caraway off the floor? I feel horrible standing over her like she's roadkill.

Clark: I'm sorry. Does the sight of my supine mother disturb you? Well, you should've thought of that before you started throwing punches.

Agnes: Would you stop it, Clark! Let's just take this one step at a time. Boys, carry her to the bedroom.

(Arthur and Edwin carry Margery off stage left. Clark pours himself a drink and raises his glass.)

Clark: Here's to you, Inheritance. Gone but not forgotten. **(Drinks)**

Gwen: Listen, Clark. Agnes and I will keep an eye on her until she wakes up. Who knows? Maybe she won't remember a thing.

(Gwen, Agnes, and Clark exit stage left. Tabs Close.)

Act 3

Scene 1- Drawing Room

(Tabs Open. Arthur, Clark, and Edwin enter stage left. Clark sits down on the couch, dejected.)

Arthur: Let's just call this night what it is. A complete and utter failure.

Clark: Well, not for Mr. Loverboy over there. **(Gestures his glass towards Edwin.)**

Arthur: Mr. what? Wait! Edwin, are you and Agnes...engaged?!

Edwin: Hmm? Oh. From what I'm told.

Arthur: But how? When?

Edwin: Beats me. One moment we weren't, the next moment we just...were. It's all kind of a blur.

Arthur: **(Sarcastically)** Terrific! Our one success and we don't even know what happened.

Edwin: I just assumed it had something to do with the plan. Hasn't it worked for you and Gwen?

Arthur: I haven't had a single chance to find out with this infernal operation getting in the way. Thanks for that by the way, Clark. You sabotaged our whole plan with that surgery stunt.

Clark: **(Shoots up from his seat.)** I sabotaged the plan? Don't you realise the surgery added to the drama? Gwen would've been like clay in your hands if you had only been man enough to go through with it.

Edwin: **(Loudly)** Would you two put a sock in it?

(Arthur and Clark stare at Edwin.)

Clark: Was that you, Edwin?

Arthur: The man gets engaged and suddenly he's uppity with us.

Edwin: I'm fed up with your bickering! If you two were really friends, you'd be coming up with a solution, while the night is young.

Clark: **(Checks his watch)** It's 10:30, Edwin. The night is practically at death's door.

Edwin: Well, Gwen is still here isn't she? And you still want to marry her don't you, Arthur?

Arthur: **(Sighs romantically)** Now more than ever. You should've seen the way she clobbered Mrs. Caraway for me. It was a thing of beauty.

Clark: (Scoffs) Tuh!

Edwin: And you, Clark, your mother's still out cold, isn't she?

Clark: A few degrees from being a corpse, so what?

Edwin: Well, there you have it.

Arthur: Have what?

Edwin: (Emphatically raising a finger) Time.

Clark: I'm not sure I like this new Edwin. He's awfully magisterial.

Arthur: I miss how charmingly pathetic the old one was.

Edwin: If you two just want to stand there and berate me, go ahead. Goodness knows I'm used to it. You don't want my help? So be it.

Arthur: We said we didn't like this new Edwin. We didn't say we weren't going to listen to him. We have time. So what?

Edwin: Everything has already been set in motion for you, Arthur. You just need time with Gwen to seal the deal. And Clark – well, you just need to do something so impressive that your mother can't bring herself to disinherit you.

Clark: Ha!

Edwin: It could be anything, Clark. Think back to a time when you were a kid and made her proud.

Clark: You assume too much, Edwin.

Edwin: You mean, you never –

Clark: Emotional baggage, Edwin. Let's not waste time unpacking that right now. We'll save it for a rainy day.

Edwin: All right. I admit I don't know your mother like you do, but I'll be a monkey's uncle if I don't know mothers in general!

Arthur: Consider yourself an expert?

Edwin: As a matter of fact...(Removes a bit of lint from his sleeve) Many of my best friends are mothers.

Clark: I think you mean your mother was your best friend.

Edwin: No! She was not...And even if she were, that's not the point.

Arthur: Yes, when are you getting to that, Edwin? We get it! You're friends with many mothers. It's all very heart-warming.

Edwin: My point is that all the mothers I have ever met share one very important quality.

Clark: Please don't say they all have children.

Edwin: Would you just listen? Mothers are always proud to see their children become talented people, especially if it's in an area that they themselves are passionate about. **(Waxing poetic)** An opera singer will cherish the day her infant sings his first "do, re, mi." An actress will treasure her daughter's first convincing lie. A baker will –

Clark: Yes. Yes. We get it. What are you suggesting exactly? And it better not be a healthy relationship with my mother.

Edwin: Of course not, your mother is a monster. All you need is to show her that you're skilled in something she cares about.

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Arthur: The only thing Mrs. Caraway cares about is cutting me open and robbing me of my appendix.

Clark: **(Eyes widening)** That's it! The surgery!

Arthur: What?

Edwin: Yes! That's perfect. Good thinking, Arthur!

Arthur: No! No! We're not going through this again!

Clark: Would you relax? We won't actually do it. We'll fake it.

Arthur: Fake the surgery?

Clark: Why not? We faked the appendicitis.

Arthur: But how on earth would we fake surgery?

Edwin: We could...throw a sheet over you and just pretend that surgery is going on underneath.

Arthur: You seriously think anyone would believe that?

Clark: My dear Arthur, haven't you realised it yet? You can sell anything in the world to anyone in it, if you back it up with some good acting.

Arthur: But this isn't just anyone. This is your mother we're talking about, the empress of amputations. You think we can deceive her?

Clark: Well I convinced her I was happy during my childhood, and boy did she swallow that! Besides, this solves both our problems. While Nurse Edwin and I operate, we'll ask Gwen to provide an extra hand. And, as she's standing there beside you, you'll finally have your chance to talk to her.

Arthur: You expect me to romance Gwen, while I'm being operated on?

Edwin: Gosh! It'll be like a fairy-tale.

Arthur: And what is going to play the pivotal role of my appendix? Hmm? What is it you'll be removing from me? We don't exactly have a good prop.

Clark: **(Claps hands together)** The ham!

Arthur: **(Together)** The ham?

Edwin: **(Together)** The ham?

Clark: The one we were supposed to have for dinner. It's probably still in the icebox. **(Rushes off stage right and brings back a large ham)** There! We'll use this.

(Clark holds up the ham. It glows under a spotlight.)

Arthur: You want to make it look like you're taking that out of me? Ham?

Edwin: No offence, Arthur, but you aren't completely dissimilar to ham.

Arthur: And you aren't completely dissimilar to a rotten cabbage.

Clark: Quiet, you two. We have to be quick before the girls return with a fully conscious mother. Arthur, shove this in your shirt. **(Pushes the ham at Arthur.)**

Arthur: **(Slaps the ham)** I will do no such thing.

Clark: You're right. It wouldn't look right. Edwin, any ideas? Use your motherly intuition.

Edwin: Uh... **(Looks around the room)** I know! The window seat.

Arthur: The window seat?

(Clark runs to the window seat, quickly opens it, chucks the ham inside, and shuts it again.)

Arthur: Got any more bright ideas? What good is it going to do in there?

Edwin: I don't know. It was the first thing I could think of.

Clark: No, this is good – perfect in fact. Arthur, lie down across this.

(Arthur lies down on the window seat.)

Clark: Edwin, in the closet in the hallway, you'll find some bed sheets. Bring me one.

(Edwin exits stage left.)

Clark: **(Scans his bookshelf, pulling out the largest books.)** Let's see. Homer. No. Plutarch. No. Milton. No.

Edwin: **(Enters stage with sheet in hand.)** We better hurry. I think I could hear Mrs. Caraway coming to.

Clark: Heroditus. No. Ah, Tolstoy! Now, where's...Ah here it is! Dostoevsky! When in doubt, boys, always trust the Russians and their ability to pontificate. **(Hands Edwin the two books.)**

Edwin: Are we starting a book club?

Clark: I'm afraid not, Edwin. When I lift up the window seat, you prop it open with these. One book under each corner.

(Clark lifts the window seat a few inches, raising Arthur with it.)

Arthur: Take it easy! There's an open window here.

(When the window seat opening is large enough, Edwin places the books underneath the corners of the lid, thereby propping it just a few inches open.)

Clark: Place that cushion under yourself, Arthur, so you don't roll out on us. And now, the sheet.

(Edwin and Clark drape Arthur with the sheet, hiding Arthur's body and the open seat from view.)

Arthur: And where does this get us exactly?

Clark: Allow me to demonstrate. **(Clears his throat)** Hello, young man. Is your appendix bothering you? No need to fret. I'll just remove it for you.

(Clark stoops and reaches underneath the sheet. His hands enter the window seat and rip off a piece of ham from within. Clark then shows it to Arthur and Edwin and drops it casually on Arthur's stomach.)

Clark: There you go, sir. One removed appendix. That'll be ten words of maternal approval and one guaranteed inheritance.

Edwin: **(Inspects the slice of ham)** Is that what an appendix even looks like?

Clark: How should I know? It looks meaty and that's what matters. As long as my mother doesn't get a good look at it, we'll be fine.

Agnes: **(From offstage)** Mrs. Caraway, you really must rest.

Margery: **(From offstage)** I'll rest when I'm dead. Now, where is my son? Clark? Clark? Where are you, you miserable twerp?

Clark: I'm in here, Mother! Tending to some very important business.
(to Arthur) Arthur, it's showtime. Start wailing again!

(Gwen, Agnes, and Margery enter stage right. Margery is holding ice to her head.)

Arthur: **(Crying in pain)** Arghhmmm Hikken!!

Agnes: Gwen! The window seat!

Gwen: Arthur! What are you doing? What's going on?

Edwin: **(Runs over to Gwen)** The appendicitis. It's returned and it's worse than ever. Clark will have to perform the appendectomy immediately. Go to Arthur, Gwen. He needs you by his side!

(Gwen runs up to Arthur)

Clark: **(Slapping Arthur across the face)** Stay with me, Arthur! If you see a light, turn and run away! **(To Gwen)** Gwen, you must keep him cool. Here. Fan his face with this. **(Clark hands Gwen a Chinese fan and puts on some rubber gloves.)**

Margery: Clark, don't be ridiculous. If anyone's performing the appendectomy, it's me.

Clark: No, Mother, you've just suffered a head injury. You must rest, and I, as your son, must take up the mantle.

Margery: Clark, you've no experience. The first three men I operated on all died. Is that what you want? Your friend, dead?

Arthur: I'm not afraid of death, not with Gwen by my side.

Clark: You just sit over there at the table and rest, Mother. I'm not going to let you down. Agnes, see what you can do about that bump on her head.

(Edwin pulls two seats out from the table and gestures for Margery to sit. Mrs. Caraway reluctantly sits, while Agnes holds the ice to her head.)

Arthur: Oh, Gwen! It's all come to this. You by my side and my life in the hands of my friends. I wouldn't have it any other way.

Gwen: You'll be fine, Arthur. You'll be fine. Won't he, Clark?

Clark: If I can get this appendix out in time. Did I say you could stop fanning?

(Gwen fans Arthur vigorously.)

Clark: Nurse Edwin! Get over here and bring that carving knife.

(Edwin grabs the carving knife from the table and runs over.)

Clark: **(Taking the knife from Edwin)** Hold tight, Arthur. This might tickle.

(Clark reaches under the sheet and into the window seat, appearing to be cutting into Arthur's left side. Arthur screams dramatically.)

Gwen: Oh stop it, Clark! Stop it!

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Clark: Look, Mother! Are you watching? Look! I'm doing it. I'm performing surgery!

Margery: For heaven's sake, Clark! You're on the wrong side. His appendix is in his right abdomen.

Clark: What? Oh...I'm perfectly aware, Mother. I'm just...taking the long way around. I want to – uh...sneak up on it.

Margery: Enough, Clark. Stop this instant. You're going to kill the man!

Clark: Sorry, Mother. As you can see, I'm already elbows deep. I must go on.

Margery: Listen to me, Clark. I – oh my head... **(Grimaces and feels the back of her head.)**

Agnes: If I'm going to dress this bump, Mrs. Caraway, you're going to have to hold still.

Clark: Arthur, didn't you have something to discuss with Gwen?

Arthur: **(Still shrieking in pain)** Urghh — **(Ceases shrieking abruptly)** Oh. Right. **(Becomes contemplative in his manner)** You know, Gwen, it's time like these when one really has the chance to think about life.

(Gwen is silent, shocked at Arthur's sudden change in mood.)

Gwen: **(Stunned)** What?!

Clark: Edwin, Scissors.

(Edwin hands Clark a pair of scissors. Clark reaches the scissors under the sheet and pretends to be cutting.)

Arthur: It's not one of those things I want to do on my own. Life, I mean. I'm one of those types who need a good companion to share it with.

Gwen: **(Shakes her head in disbelief)** Arthur, aren't you in agony right now?

Arthur: Hmm? Oh, yes. Terrible agony.

Clark: Forceps.

(Edwin hands Clark a pair of tweezers.)

Arthur: But I guess that's sort of my point. Sure, I've got this frightful appendicitis and sure, Clark is sifting through my innards right now, but all this pain pales in comparison to the agony of being lonely in this world. And life is just so short. **(Holds up a finger to Gwen, driving the point home)** You can't take a single moment of it for granted. One moment you're as healthy as a horse –

Gwen: Healthy as a what?

Arthur: **(Ignoring Gwen)** – the next, you've got life-threatening appendicitis. **(Tracing small circles on the sheet with a finger)** Still, if the surgery does go south and I keel over like all those who came before me, I just want you to know that I'm sorry about what happened to Feivel.

Gwen: **(Stares at Arthur intensely)** Feivel?

Arthur: If there's one thing I regret, it's that. I was foolish to try and do a wheelie with him.

Clark: Edwin? Can you bring me that platter?

(Edwin runs over to the dining table, grabs the platter, and brings it back to Clark.)

Arthur: Anyways, I know you already broke things off between us, and, trust me, the last thing I want to do is beat a dead horse. But do you think you could find it in your heart to –

Gwen: **(Viciously)** Beat a dead horse?

Arthur: **(Clueless)** Well, no. Not quite. I was going to say –

Gwen: **(Her voice shrill and rising in volume)** Beat a dead horse?!

Arthur: **(Realising his mistake)** Wait! Gwen, that's not what I meant!

Gwen: You, conniving little weasel! It isn't enough to kill him? Now you have to rub his death in my face?!

Arthur: Gwen, please! Listen! I wasn't –

Gwen: Is that what this is all about? You bring me over here, scare me to death with your screams, and now you torment me about Feivel? Is Clark even operating on you underneath that sheet?

(Clark removes a nicely cut slice of ham and places it on the platter in Edwin's hands. Gwen stares at it in horror.)

Arthur: You see, Gwen? It's all real – all too real! The surgery, the appendicitis. It's as real as my feelings for you.

(Clark continues heaping ham onto the platter. Gwen watches the pile of ham grow.)

Gwen: **(Clutches her forehead)** I – I – feel – I feel dizzy.

Arthur: It's hard to believe. I know. But it's true. Tell her, Clark.

Clark: **(Removes his head from under the sheet)** Tell her what?

Arthur: Tell her what you see down there.

Clark: **(Peeking under the sheet)** Uh...entrails.

Arthur: No, Clark. Look higher! Look for the heart. Do you see it?

Clark: Hello! There she is.

Arthur: Good, Clark. Now, tell Gwen what it's doing.

Clark: You know...doing what hearts do...just pumping away.

Arthur: Do you see any cracks in it, Clark?

Clark: No. No cracks.

Arthur: **(Impatiently)** Well, look closer!

Clark: Oh, yes. There's quite the crack.

Arthur: You hear that, Gwen? My heart's broken. It's been that way ever since the day I lost you. Now, forget the surgery. Forget Clark. **(Clutches his chest)** Only you can fix this broken heart.

Gwen: Arthur, I – I –

Clark: **(Raises some of the ham from the platter)** You see this, Mother? Proof. I'm an accomplished surgeon just like you. Notice the fine thin cuts.

Margery: Is that country ham, Clark?

Clark: **(Annoyed)** Mother, why would you even say that? Edwin, would you take over for a second?

Edwin: What? Oh. Sure. Hold still, Arthur. **(Places the platter down and reaches his hand apprehensively into the window seat.)**

Clark: If this were ham, Mother would it have come from Arthur's side?

Arthur: Ignore them, Gwen, and look at me. Would you have pity on a dying wretch like me and do me the honour of –

(Edwin seemingly pulls a pearl necklace out of Arthur. Edwin and Gwen stare at it confused.)

Arthur: Must be my lower intestines, Gwen. Ignore them. **(Grabs the necklace and puts it back in.)**

(Edwin reaches into the window seat again.)

Arthur: Clark and Edwin may be saving my life, but you, Gwen, you give me reason to live it. Gwen Burgess, would you do me the honour of –

(Edwin pulls out the Golden Wedge. Arthur sees it and is flummoxed.)

Arthur: Is that –

Gwen: **(Eyes widen at the sight of the Golden Wedge. Grabbing it from Edwin, she throws it aside.)** Never mind that, Arthur. Go on. You were saying?

Arthur: What? Oh. Where was I?

Gwen: Something about honour.

Arthur: Honour? Right. Honour.

Margery: That's all just meaningless meat, Clark. If you really want to impress me, show me the appendix.

Clark: We're working on it. Have you found it yet, Edwin?

Edwin: **(Reaches into the window seat again.)** No, not yet. Wait, I've got something. Yes, I think I have it. **(Pulls out Halifax's limp arm. He looks at it and screams.)**

(Everyone looks at Edwin.)

Edwin: There's a body in there!

(Gwen and Agnes look at one another.)

Margery: A body?

Edwin: A body in the window sea –
(Gwen kicks Edwin violently. Edwin lifts his shin and hops up and down.)

Edwin: **(Cries in pain)** Argh! What was that for?

Gwen: You – uh – you interrupted Arthur!

Edwin: What? No I didn't! Listen, Arthur. Forget about the fake surger –
(Clark runs to Edwin and slaps him. Edwin falls to the floor.)

Edwin: **(Groaning)** Ow! Why, Clark?

Clark: You – uh – had a bug on you.

Margery: **(Shoots up from her seat)** What is going on here?

Edwin: There's a body in the window –
(Agnes runs over to Edwin and kicks him in the stomach. Edwin grunts and wheezes.)

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Arthur: **(Reaches down and grabs Halifax's arm)** He's right! There is someone –

Gwen: **(Menacingly)** If you want to get married, you won't say a thing.

Arthur: **(Staring at Gwen, amazed)** Married? You mean, you –

Gwen: If you shove that arm back where it came from and never speak of it again.
(Arthur unquestioningly shoves Halifax's arm back into the window seat.)

Gwen: Exciting news everyone! Arthur and I are engaged.

Agnes: **(Steps over Edwin and hugs Gwen)** Oh Gwen! Let me be the first to congratulate you!

Margery: Another engagement?! Is this place an operation room or a gazebo?

Clark: It's an operation room. Definitely, an operation room. **(Steps over Edwin and reaches into the window seat)** Come here, you little rascal! **(Yanks off a chunk of ham)** Aha! Look, Mother. I've got the appendix! **(Shovels the other pieces of**

ham back into the window seat) We'll just put those back in place, close up the shop, and presto change-o. Your surgery is over! **(Places the fake appendix on the platter and pats Arthur's belly)** She should run just fine for you now, Arthur.

(Arthur stands up and shakes Clark's hand.)

Arthur: Thank you, Clark. You've done a marvellous thing!

Clark: **(Coily pushes Brothers Karamazov and War and Peace into the window seat and shuts the lid.)** Oh, it was nothing. If you want someone to thank, my mother stands yonder.

Arthur: Thank you, Mrs. Caraway.

(Margery looks disapprovingly at them both.)

Clark: Now, what was Edwin saying about a body?

Agnes: **(Coughs)** How about a toast?

Clark: What an excellent idea. Arthur, Help me with the punch.

(Clark and Arthur pour drinks and hand them out. When they come to Edwin, they place it on the floor next to him.)

Gwen: What are we toasting to?

Arthur: I thought that was obvious. Who else but Mrs. Caraway? **(Raises his glass)** To Mrs. Caraway and the surgical knowledge she passed on to her son. May she be blessed with many more winters.

Clark: And to our newly betrothed. Agnes and Edwin; Arthur and Gwen, may you give the other married couples a good run for their money.

Agnes: And to Edwin. Another for poor Edwin.

Gwen: Yes, to my little brother.

Clark: **(Together)** To Edwin!

Arthur: **(Together)** To Edwin!

(Edwin grunts a dismal grunt. Everyone drinks, except Margery and Edwin.)

Gwen: Is anybody else hungry?

Arthur: Frightfully.

Agnes: I think O'Malley's is still open.

Clark: Then let's continue the celebration there. To O'Malley's!

Margery: Not so fast, Clark. I need to speak with you.

(Everyone looks at Clark, even Edwin.)

Clark: You four go on. I'll catch up.

(Arthur and Agnes help Edwin to his feet. Gwen begins helping people into their coats. All four head through the front door.)

Arthur: O'Malley's isn't going anywhere, Gwen. Hold your horses!

Gwen: Hold what?!

Arthur: No! That's not what I meant!

(The door slams behind them. Clark checks his watch.)

Clark: Holy Tibet! Is that the time? I had better get to bed –

Margery: How stupid do you think I am, Clark? You expect me to believe that you did surgery on your friend and he was right as rain immediately afterwards.

Clark: It was a medical miracle, Mother. Ours is not to reason why.

Margery: Let me see that so-called appendix.

Clark: It's just there on the table. Behind you.

(Margery turns towards the dining room table. While her back is turned, Clark takes the fake appendix off the platter next to him and eats it.)

Margery: Where?

Clark: **(Chews and swallows the bit of ham.)** It's not there? Arthur must've taken it with him as a souvenir. He's sentimental about that sort of thing, but let's not talk of that. A man's alive thanks to you and me. You should be proud.

Margery: Proud?! You want me to be proud?

Clark: I'll settle for mildly pleased.

Margery: All of this chaos, Clark. All of these ridiculous engagements. The appendicitis. The surgery. All lies!

Clark: What? No! The engagements are real...as well as everything else. Everything tonight was real.

Margery: Was it all just an attempt to make me forget about my pearls? Let me guess, you sold them for money.

Clark: If you could just give me a moment to explain –

Margery: I won't believe a word you say, until you show me the pearls.

(Clark remains silent.)

Margery: I thought so. Well, goodnight, Clark. When I see my solicitors tomorrow, I'll be sure to give them your regards.

Clark: Mother, wait!

(Margery glares expectantly at Clark.)

Clark: **(Turns towards the window seat, defeated.)** You're right.

Margery: Ah, at last. The contrite heart. I was curious if your morality would ever make an appearance.

Clark: The truth is, Mother, I –

(As Clark is looking down, the window seat slowly opens in front of him. Halifax sits up, dazed and confused. Bits of ham cover him all over and the pearl necklace hangs off his ear. Stunned, Clark takes the necklace and a slice of ham off Halifax.)

Margery: The truth is what, boy? Spit it out!

(Clark shuts the window seat on Halifax and takes a bite out of the ham.)

Clark: **(Mouth full)** The truth is I have your precious pearls. **(Chucks the pearls at Margery.)** There. Are you happy now? Good golly! You come back from a long trip and you're more desperate to see your pearls than your own son.

Margery: **(Looking at the pearls confused)** Clark, I –

Clark: I mean, honestly? A man wants to spend quality time with his mother, and the only things she can think of are pearls and appendices. It's enough to break a boy's heart.

Margery: But you deliberately lied, Clark. You and your friends. You –

Clark: **(Taking another bite)** Of course we lied. Don't you realise my friends were trying to help me win some parental approval – a little bit of that motherly love and pride? They knew how depressed I was.

(Clark opens the door and shows Margery out.)

Margery: Clark, you're being ridiculous. You know –

Clark: **(Eyeing the ham in his hand)** Oh, don't worry. I've learned my lesson. I won't strive for your love again. Pearls before swine, as they say. Goodnight, Mother.

Margery: Listen, Clark –

(Clark slams the door and grabs the two untouched drinks. He sits down next to the window seat and raps on it with his knuckles before lifting the seat. Halifax sits up again. Clark hands him a drink.)

Clark: Unless you rather have milk?

Halifax: **(Nursing his head)** No, thank you, sir. On some occasions, milk simply isn't enough.

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Clark: That's the spirit. Let your hair down.

(Halifax drinks.)

Clark: You know, I was thinking, Halifax.

Halifax: Indeed, sir?

Clark: About your birthday party. It feels a little over done, doesn't it? I mean after 49 already, don't you tire of them?

Halifax: I do always look forward to my birthdays, sir.

Clark: Oh, I do too, Halifax. I do too. You won't ever catch me complaining about a Halifax hoedown. I was only thinking that it might be nice to change up the routine a little. How does a vacation in the tropics sound? I hear they have this stuff called coconut milk. Sounds right up your alley.

Halifax: Sir, that is most generous.

Clark: Nonsense! You've deserved it after a night like tonight.

Halifax: Thank you, sir. But, respectfully, how is the trip to be funded, sir?

Clark: Oh, we'll scrounge up the money one way or another. Now that I've guilt-tripped Mother all the way to kingdom come, I think our prospects are looking good. I suppose you heard the two of us talking.

Halifax: Yes, sir. I found your need for parental approval particularly stirring.

Clark: Yes, well, a little self-pity comes in handy now and again.

Halifax: Indeed, sir.

Clark: We must never indulge in too much of the stuff though. Awfully fattening.

Halifax: Quite, sir.

Clark: We don't want to become artists, do we?

Halifax: Indeed not, sir.

Clark: Well, here's to you, Halifax. **(Raises his glass.)**

Halifax: **(Raises his glass)** And to you, sir.

(The two drink. Tabs Close. The end.)