

THE HOURGLASS PROJECT

by Lee Blessing

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Old age is an island surrounded by death.

--Juan Montalvo

CAST

DANA, about 20

ABBY, about 20

DON, about 20

MELISSA, about 20

STEVE, about 20

CAROL, about 20

WALTER, about 20

CHUCK, about 20

MARTHA, about 20

Various locations on the Brightfield estate

Scene One

(SOUND OF A TRAIN passing, not far off. Lights rise as the TRAIN WHISTLE FADES, replaced by SOUNDS OF BIRDS and INSECTS.

ABBY, DON, MELISSA, CAROL, STEVE and WALTER, all wearing name-tags, sit in a semi-circle facing DANA. She also wears a name-tag. Her cheerfulness is genuine)

DANA

Welcome. Welcome. I can't tell you how delighted I am, that you're all here. I'm Dana, by the way. Remember me?

(as they stare at her unsurely)

I was there when each of you went to sleep?

(A beat. Then three or four of them nod and make little sounds of recognition)

DANA (cont'd)

I don't blame you for being fuzzy. I was as stunned as you when you woke up not only alive, but looking and feeling like . . . this. I won't call it a miracle, since that would be the understatement of all time. But we are overwhelmed with joy. I know you must feel confused right now—

WALTER

Where are we?

DANA

That's a very good question, Walter. Everyone, this is Walter.

(as the others mumble, acknowledging WALTER)

Glad you're using the name tags, by the way.

WALTER

Where are we?

DANA

On an island in a large, private lake owned by our benefactors.

WALTER

Benefactors?

DANA

Mr. and Mrs. Brightfield. The ones paying for all this? You remember.

WALTER

Oh—the Brightfields. Your parents, you mean.

DANA

They do happen to be my parents. I refer to them as the Brightfields however, to underscore the professional nature of my role in these trials.

WALTER

Right. Where are they?

DANA

Mom and Da— The Brightfields are in Asia right now, traveling on business. They're sorry they couldn't be here, but they're overjoyed to hear how well things are going. They plan to visit once you've become . . . reoriented.

CAROL

Reoriented?

DANA

Re-integrated. With yourselves, I mean. That's why we're here—to protect you from any outside influences. We've provided a separate cabin for each of you, so you won't even distract each other.

CAROL

It's warm.

DANA

We're in the South.

CAROL

Where?

DANA

Not important. What you need to concentrate on right now is relaxing for the next few weeks.

CAROL

Few *weeks*?

DANA

Don't underestimate how traumatic your transition has been. This is Carol, by the way.

(as the others mumble, acknowledging CAROL)

You're all going to need time to adjust.

MELISSA

Adjust to what?

DANA

Being young.

DON

Why do I keep hear a train whistle?

DANA

Everyone, this is Don.

(as they mumble, acknowledging DON)

We're close to the edge of the estate, and there's a train line just beyond the woods over there.

DON

I used to work for the railroad.

DANA

For forty years—I know. Hope it won't be too nostalgic. Let me introduce everyone. This is Don's wife, Abby.

(as they acknowledge ABBY)

They're our only married couple. Still, like you, they were terminal, indigent and had no one else in the world—besides each other, of course, which was counting for less and less, since Abby was developing Alzheimer's.

DON

Am I really twenty again?

DANA

Yes, you are. Biologically you're all twenty, looking forward to full and complete lifespans.

MELISSA

How long were we in . . . in a . . . ?

DANA

Induced coma? Twenty-three weeks. This is Melissa, by the way.

DANA (cont'd)
(as they acknowledge MELISSA)

The trial results are beyond miraculous. We never dreamed it would work, not the first time anyway. Not with *all* of you.

ABBY

Excuse me?

DANA

Yes?

ABBY

Are you saying you thought we . . . wouldn't make it?

DANA

Yes, the odds strongly favored that. It was clearly spelled out in the contract.

ABBY

Contract?

DON

For God's sake, Abby, I read you the whole thing.

(to DANA)

She must have spaced it before you put her under.

ABBY

I have Alzheimer's.

DON

You *had* Alzheimer's. And you were only developing it. You still had good days.

DANA

The important thing is, you don't have Alzheimer's now.

ABBY

I don't understand. We could have died?

WALTER

Ten thousand to one we could have. Everybody here.

ABBY

You all knew that?

CAROL

It was in the agreement. Those were the odds.

ABBY

Ten *thousand* to—?

DANA

Abby, this sort of process—regenerative gene therapy, combined with the introduction of nanotechnology into the body on a massive scale, affecting nearly every cell simultaneously—is like nothing that’s ever been tried. We had no idea what would happen.

WALTER

That’s why they’re called trials.

DANA

We envisioned a long series of agonizing failures.

ABBY

Agonizing?

DANA

We had to be realistic. The contract states that we presumed our initial subjects would suffer—

WALTER

“Painful, lingering deaths”. I remember the phrase.

ABBY

You signed me up for *that*?

DON

You signed. On a good day. You were clear as a bell, I swear. I can’t help it if you forgot.

ABBY

You should have *reminded* me.

CAROL

We all took the same risk.

ABBY

Ten thousand to one?!

DON

So you took a chance for once. So what? We made it, didn't we?

ABBY

Ten thousand to—?

DON

What are you, a broken record? Move *on*.

(to DANA)

You see what I put up with.

ABBY

Maybe you won't have to anymore.

DON

What's that supposed to mean?

DANA

I think we should look at the wider picture. There was the possibility that nothing might have happened. You'd have remained exactly the same.

DON

Yeah—old and out of hope.

DANA

And we'd have all lost the chance to move science forward.

ABBY

By dying? After a painful, lingering—?

CAROL

If we had died, our suffering would have served a great cause. That's what she's saying.

DANA

Exactly.

ABBY

I don't care. You took advantage of me. You all did.

DANA

Abby, you didn't die. You didn't suffer. You're part of the greatest quantum leap in science since . . . well, forever. You have helped an untested theory explode into stunning reality. You've changed the world and won the biggest lottery in history. Isn't that amazing?

ABBY

You shouldn't trick a bunch of old people into doing something you think will kill them.

STEVE

We weren't tricked. We were all dying anyway.

DANA

That's true, Steve. Well put. Everyone, this is Steve.

(as they acknowledge STEVE)

Remember: ten-thousand-to-one odds, bad as they are, are still better than none.

MELISSA

Maybe you should have let us die.

DANA

Don't be absurd.

ABBY

I kind of agree. We lived our lives. Why do it over?

DON

What are you talking about?

ABBY

I was ready. At least, I think I was. I can't remember—

DANA

Abby? Abby? Listen to me.

(as ABBY focuses on her)

You are not dead. You're not going to be for a long, long time. You are twenty. Look at yourself.

(DANA hands ABBY a mirror. ABBY rises, examines her hands, forearms, her hair, etc. She strokes her chin and neck, looking for wrinkles that are no longer there. She stares down into her blouse)

ABBY
My breasts look really good.

DANA
Isn't that great?

DON
You bet your ass it's great.

CAROL
Speaking of derrieres . . .

ABBY
(looking behind)
That looks good too?

WALTER
Yup.

ABBY
That hasn't looked good in forty years!

DON
(rising, going to ABBY and hugging her)
It's a brave, new world, baby.

DANA
Which brings us to hormones.

ABBY
We take hormones?

DANA
No—you *have* hormones.

(DON's hand drops to ABBY's backside)

ABBY
Oh . . .

DANA

And you'll have to learn to keep them—and all your other twenty-year-old impulses—under control.

DON

How come?

DANA

(delicately removing DON's hand from ABBY's derriere)

Because at some point, assuming things keep going well, this experiment will inevitably become public. When it does, it seems to me you'll all be instant, worldwide celebrities.

CAROL

Wow.

DANA

Right, wow. You'll have to learn how to act like celebrities.

DON

(grabbing ABBY in a crude embrace)

Hell, I can do that right now.

DANA

(pulling DON off her by the scruff of his neck)

Good celebrities.

DON

Sorry. Thought you meant the normal kind.

(MUSIC as lights shift.)

Scene Two

(ABBY sits on a log or rock, journaling. Next to her lies a small, uprooted plant. After a moment DON appears. His hand is bandaged)

ABBY
(without looking up)

Close enough.

DON
We need to talk.

ABBY
(still writing)
We talked all morning. That is, I talked. You mainly groped.

DON
What did you hit me with?

ABBY
I did not hit you.
(holding up the plant)
I applied a stinging nettle to your groper. I had every right.

DON
No, you didn't. It swelled up. I had to have Dana look at it.

ABBY
Did you grope her?

DON
You and I are married, for God's sake. Why are we in separate cabins?

ABBY
Because I need my alone time. And you need solitary confinement.

DON
For trying to have sex with my wife? What's wrong with that?

ABBY

I barely remember you. If we ever did have sex—

DON

What do you mean, “if”?

ABBY

It hasn’t been for decades, probably. We can’t just start again because you feel horny.

DON

I’m twenty years old. I’m supposed to feel horny!

ABBY

And how do I know you were any good?

DON

What?

ABBY

You could have been a terrible lover, for all I know.

DON

I was not! Come on, baby—

(He steps toward her. She holds the plant up)

ABBY

Ah-ah-ah-ah-ah. I mean it.

DON

Are you saying you’re not horny at all?

ABBY

Of course I am. But I’m journaling, and that makes it go away.

DON

Why would you want it to go away?

ABBY

I’m not ready for an intense experience like sex. Neither are you.

DON

What are you talking about? I'm always ready.

ABBY

I must have been a very long-suffering wife.

DON

Hey! I kept you satisfied for years.

ABBY

So you say.

DON

Right up 'til, you know, the ol' plumbing started to go.

ABBY

All men eventually lose their male powers. It's how we know there's a God.

DON

The point is, I'm back now. Ready to go!

ABBY

Then I'd advise you to use *your* alone time to take a nice, long test drive. I have things to journal.

DON

Like what?

ABBY

My fears for the future.

DON

What fears?

ABBY

Everything I don't know. Who are we, now that we're twenty again?

DON

A pair of horny, young—

ABBY

How can we make a living? Do we have any saleable skills? I don't recall anything from school. Dana said they're going to retrain us, but how do I know I can really learn again?

DON

You don't have to worry about that. The Brightfields'll take care of everything.

ABBY

You think so?

DON

Absolutely. You heard Dana. We're pioneers. Celebrities. We'll never have to buy dinner again.

ABBY

I never thought of that.

DON

It's true. So why don't you just close your little journal, and—?

ABBY

Stop.

DON

Why—??!!

ABBY

You're staring at life through a fog of testosterone.

DON

So?!

ABBY

Right now we need to contemplate the nature of intimacy itself—

DON

That's what I'm—

ABBY

In our *minds*, and rediscover the deep connection that leads people to marriage in the first place. We have feelings to sort out. Sex comes at the end of that, not the beginning.

DON

How much . . . sorting out are we looking at here?

(Suddenly we hear a woman SCREAM offstage. MELISSA rushes in, a scalpel in her hand. STEVE SHOUTS from off)

STEVE (off)

STOP HER—!

(Reflexively, DON grabs MELISSA as she runs past)

MELISSA

NO—!!!

(Her momentum knocks them both to the ground. STEVE hurries in and grabs the hand in which she holds the scalpel. As he tries to disarm her, DANA rushes in, followed by WALTER and CAROL)

STEVE

Give me that!

MELISSA

No—!

DANA

Melissa—!

MELISSA

Leave me alone! Let me do it!

DON

Get off!

DANA

You're not thinking clearly! This is just an impulse!

ABBY

What's going on?

MELISSA
I want to *die!!*

DANA
No, you don't!

STEVE
God, her grip is—!!

WALTER
Let me hit her!

DANA
NO!
(to MELISSA)
Listen to me. *Listen!* Life's worth living.

MELISSA
It's not! I'm not going through it again! I was in a wheelchair the last eight years.

DANA
You're not now!

MELISSA
Diabetes! Broke my leg before that—in seven places. I was in a car wreck!

STEVE
Will someone hold her arm?!

DON
(bottom of the pile)
I can't breathe—!

MELISSA
My kidneys were failing. I was ready to die. Why didn't you let me *die?!?*

DANA
You signed up for the trial—

MELISSA
I didn't expect it to work! I thought it would kill me faster—!

(WALTER grabs her arm as STEVE finally pries
the scalpel out of her hand)

MELISSA (con't)

Give me that!! NO—!!!

DON

(as they finally roll off him)

Omigod—!

ABBY

What's happened?

CAROL

Melissa tried to kill herself.

DANA

I caught her sneaking my scalpel.

MELISSA

(miserable, howling)

Give it back!

STEVE

No!

MELISSA

There's so much pain in life. I was married four times. None of my children lived. I don't want to go through it again!

DANA

It doesn't have to be that way—

MELISSA

Of course it does! It's life! My last husband had a heart attack when I was fifty. I was alone for so many— My daughter died in the same wreck that crippled me! Life's a firing squad! They don't even give you a blindfold!

DANA

Melissa—

MELISSA

I *went* through life! Don't make me do it again!

DANA

Give me the scalpel.

(as STEVE does so)

Help her up. Melissa, I'm going to dedicate myself to making sure your next life is nothing like your last one. All I ask is a little time. You lost your nerve today; I understand that. But please—give me 'til tomorrow.

MELISSA

You'll just want another day after that.

DANA

Yes. Yes, I will. And you can give it to me or not. But right now, just promise me tomorrow. Okay? One day. I guarantee you I will fix this.

MELISSA

You'll fix my life?

DANA

Your *new* life. Yes.

MELISSA

(after a beat)

... Okay.

DANA

Good. Good. Come on, everyone. Let's go back to my office. I think we all need another meeting.

(Everyone goes but DON, who sits rubbing his shoulder. WALTER reenters)

WALTER

You coming?

DON

Not if I can help it. Why's everybody crazy but me?

WALTER

Melissa's really messed up. Guess life's not for everybody.

DON

Thank God Abby went with 'em. She's been driving me crazy.

WALTER

What do you mean?

DON

I mean, she's my lawfully-wedded wife, and she won't let me touch her.

WALTER

Why not?

DON

Claims she's got other things on her mind. Feels like we're not married at all anymore.

WALTER

Maybe you're not.

DON

What's that mean?

WALTER

You only promised to be faithful 'til death. This . . . transition is sort of the next best thing, legally speaking. Seems to me you could just declare yourself single.

DON

Really?

WALTER

Sure. You're a brand-new critter—we all are. New situations call for new rules. That would be my argument in court, anyway.

DON

You a lawyer?

WALTER

Yup. Personal injury.

DON

Great! 'Cause my marriage was the biggest personal injury I ever suffered.

WALTER

That's a novel way to—

DON

I mean, Abby was okay most of the time, but she had this thing about fidelity.

WALTER

Wives often do.

DON

Minute we got married, sex with other women was completely off the table. That sound reasonable to you?

WALTER

I wouldn't know; I was a bachelor all my life.

DON

I'll never understand women. They're a mystery wrapped in a . . . Fig Newton, or whatever.

WALTER

For me, women are a mystery I never want to read the last chapter of.

DON

You're lucky you stayed single.

WALTER

I tell you what I would like to read: the Book of Success. I got cheated my whole life. My father forced me into law for the steadiness and security. I wanted to go into business, where the real fortunes were. Wanted to risk something. In the end my law partner stole me blind and disappeared. Left me destitute. How's that for irony? But that will not happen again. This time I'm doing things my way—from ahead of the curve.

DON

How?

WALTER

Won't be an alcoholic again, for one thing. When I woke up, I realized I didn't crave alcohol anymore. The nanobots must've fixed that along with everything else.

DON

(realizing for the first time)

I don't need a cigarette. Not since I came out of the coma.

WALTER

You know what we are? We are new men.

DON

I guess so.

WALTER

New men could go far if they took the right approach to this situation.

DON

What do you mean?

WALTER

Suppose you and I slipped off this island before everybody else?

DON

What would that do?

WALTER

Are you kidding? We could make the whole thing about us. We'd be the ones to announce it—the point of the spear, the *face* of what's going on.

DON

And that'd be good?

WALTER

Good?! It's like the first astronauts. We'd be indelible, permanently identified with a world-changing event. We could even label the damn thing. How's this sound? The Hourglass Project.

DON

The Hourglass Project? Or—maybe Project Hourglass!

WALTER

The Hourglass Project.

DON

You sure? 'Cause—

WALTER

This could mean a lot of money for us, Don. A lot of money. And a ton of fame.

DON

Like astronauts, eh?

WALTER

I'll tell you something else about astronauts. They have amazing sex lives.

DON

That sounds good.

(over SOUND of a TRAIN WHISTLE passing)

But I don't get it. You could just go yourself. Why do you need me?

WALTER

You used to work for the railroad, right?

DON

Sure did.

WALTER

So . . . hopping a freight?

DON

Easy. It slows down around here, too. I could show you exactly where to get on and off.

WALTER

Exactly. This is a hungry world, Don. You're either being served an eight-course meal or you're dinner. Which do you want to be?

DON

It looks like a long swim.

WALTER

I'm a great swimmer. Trophies in high school. I'll keep you safe.

DON

What about Abby?

WALTER

She's dinner. Don't end up on a plate with her.

(as DON hesitates)

Most people don't get one chance at a real life, Don. You've had two. You really think any more are coming?

(offering his hand)

Partners?

(DON shakes WALTER's hand. The TRAIN WHISTLE MORPHS into a LOUDER, MORE URGENT and DISTORTED NOTE. Lights shift as the SOUND FADES)

Scene Three

(MELISSA sits in a chair in the original clearing. Most of the other chairs are gone. DANA's just finishing giving MELISSA an injection. STEVE, CAROL and ABBY look on. DANA is professional and upbeat. MELISSA looks morose)

MELISSA

I don't want an injection.

DANA

You're getting one.

MELISSA

Do you have something that'll make me old again?

DANA

Sorry, fresh out. This'll calm you down at least.

MELISSA

I don't want to be calm.

DANA

Sure, you do. And you know what else you want? A future.

MELISSA

Everyone I knew is gone. My husband, my children . . .

STEVE

You'll get a new family. New people to love to love and marry and—

MELISSA

New traps. New tragedies waiting to happen.

CAROL

It doesn't have to be like that.

MELISSA

New swords of Damocles to hang over my—

ABBY

It's not that bad.

MELISSA

It's not?

STEVE

I agree with Abby. Sure this is an enormous adjustment, but in the end—

MELISSA

There *is* no end. Not now.

(with a look at DANA)

Isn't that right? Theoretically? You could just do this to me again in sixty years.

DANA

We have no idea if that's possible—

MELISSA

Why not? You got this far. I feel like I'm walking some plank that never ends. What if I want to meet my maker? What if I . . . what if I can't?

STEVE

You can always step in front of a bus—

DANA

Steve.

MELISSA

He's right. That's the only way people will die now. They'll fall off a ladder or eat a bad clam. And the ones that don't will just sit here forever, losing more and more loved ones. It'll never end.

DANA

Whatever happens, I'm sure humanity will adjust.

ABBY

Or not. Maybe the limit is psychological. Look at her. People may not be resilient enough to live over and over.

DANA

Will someone please say something *positive*?

CAROL

I used to be a nun.

(as they all look at her)

That's positive.

STEVE

(to MELISSA)

Melissa, the point is, living life over is something we should look forward to. It's like a . . . reprieve, you know? For all of us. More than a reprieve, it's a reprise. A chance to sing the song over again, but better this time.

DANA

It's a rewrite.

STEVE

Exactly. A blank canvas. A whole new life.

MELISSA

A half-life. Filled with more and more ghosts.

(MELISSA falls asleep in the chair)

DANA

Thought that would never take effect.

(to STEVE)

Step in front of a *bus*?

STEVE

Sorry. It just came out.

DANA

And you—you were a nun? For how long?

CAROL

My whole life. I was in a hospice in the end, but yeah. I was a nun.

STEVE

Are you still one?

ABBY

Steve.

CAROL

No, it's a good question. I mean, I still believe in God and everything, but . . . I went into the convent really young, and . . . had so many responsibilities there, right from the beginning. It sort of felt like I never was young, you know? And before I knew it, I was an old nun. And then I was sick.

ABBY

Life goes so fast. I hated getting old. Felt like I was growing invisible—to everyone. I'd walk in a room and no one would notice, especially Don.

STEVE

Or it's the opposite; you're in everyone's way. "Move it, old man!" Heard that a lot.

ABBY

I wasn't that old, either. Eighty-five. That's not old.

CAROL

It's pretty old. I was eighty-three. I mean, I am eighty-three. Or am I twenty, now that I'm twenty again? Or am I a hundred and three?

DANA

Please, everyone—

STEVE

My Mee Maw lived to a hundred and three. That was not pretty.

CAROL

I had emphysema so bad I couldn't lie down. Had to be propped up to sleep.

DANA

I think if we concentrate on what's good about—

CAROL

It's hard to stop feeling fragile, have you noticed? Even walking doesn't feel safe.

DANA

Of course it's safe. Your body's fine.

CAROL

I don't know. It feels reckless somehow. Like I'm taking a terrible chance.

DANA

You took a chance! And you won! Why are you all being depressive?

ABBY

I think when you come that close to death, you can't just forget it. It stays inside you.

CAROL

It does!.

(to STEVE)

Don't you think?

STEVE

Um . . . yeah.

DANA

Oh, for God's—

ABBY

In a way though, I don't even think it was death we were facing.

CAROL

Oh! I know what you mean! It wasn't death, was it. It was life!

ABBY

It was feeling as though life were, um . . .

CAROL

Something cruel!

ABBY

Yes!

CAROL

That wants to humiliate us!

DANA

This makes no sense.

CAROL

It does! My father, for example. He was strong and healthy. Then one day his heart just . . . exploded.

ABBY

Life's like a psychotic landlord who keeps forgetting to collect the rent for years. Then he suddenly shows up, and it's all due at once.

DANA

That may have been the case before, but—

CAROL

The minute we weaken, life's right there with its whip and its club. It doesn't just want to kill us; it wants to punish us.

DANA

What kind of nunnery were you in?

CAROL

A very strict order.

STEVE

Punish us for what?

CAROL

For thinking it cared about us. Ever. Even for a moment.

DANA

This is all way too morbid. Steve, don't you agree?

STEVE

What? Oh . . . yeah, I do. In fact, I think if these trials are about anything, they're about putting life in its place, so to speak. I mean, for the first time we have . . . control.

ABBY

Over what? I don't feel in control. Do you?

CAROL

I'm petrified.

DANA

Will someone please wake up and act like an adult? We made you young; we didn't make you children.

STEVE

Dana's right. We sound like a bunch of Lazaruses—not happy in this life or the last.

CAROL

What kind of work did you do?

STEVE

What, me? Oh, um . . .

CAROL

You sound like a speechwriter.

DANA

He's not a speechwriter. I mean, he wasn't.

ABBY

What were you?

STEVE

I was a . . . um . . . I was—

DANA

He was a—

STEVE

A life coach.

DANA

A what?

STEVE

A life coach. Don't you remember?

DANA

Oh . . . yes, right. Of course.

ABBY

A life coach? That's just what I need!

CAROL

Me, too. I would *love* some counseling right now.

ABBY

(to STEVE)

Would you counsel me?

CAROL

And me?

STEVE

It's . . . been awhile—

ABBY

Please?

CAROL

Can he, Dana? Please?

DANA

I don't know—

STEVE

I suppose I could.

CAROL

That's great! You can help me so much.

ABBY

Me, too. And he'll *really* help Melissa.

DANA

You know if it's counseling you need, I'm very qualified myself. I entered Harvard at fifteen and interrupted my PhD work in robotics at Cambridge to work for the Brightfields. I got a degree in psychology along the way. Since Steve's only a life *coach*—

CAROL

We want Steve.

ABBY

Yeah. No offense. He's got more experience. He'll help with our careers.

DANA

I see. Well. You are of course free to choose . . . Steve.

CAROL

Great. Let's set up a time.

DANA

Actually, you can do that later. I need you two to help Melissa back to her cabin. And I have to go over a few things with Steve if he's going to . . . coach you.

ABBY

(to STEVE)

I want to go first.

CAROL

No, me.

DANA

Plenty of time for that. Just . . . help Melissa.

(ABBY and CAROL help MELISSA up)

MELISSA

What time is it?

ABBY

Daytime.

CAROL

Time to go to bed.

MELISSA

Okay . . .

(All three exit, MELISSA leaning on them both)

DANA

Life coach?

STEVE

I'm sorry. They took me by surprise.

DANA

We gave you a back story, remember? Retired Canadian English teacher. Designed so no one would want to know any more about you.

STEVE

I said I'm sorry.

DANA

The whole point of having you undercover was so you can observe them from a different perspective. Now you're their life counselor. They'll talk to you the way they talk to me.

STEVE

I screwed up.

DANA

What do you think this is, a university prank? We're in the middle of a world-changing experiment. The reactions of these subjects, as Melissa has clearly shown, can be life or death. I need your full attention, Steve. Or you're off this island. Understand?

STEVE

Yes.

DANA

All right, then. Do you have any ideas about what we should do with Melissa?

STEVE

There's drugs for depression—

DANA

The Brightfields don't want them drugged. They want to know what this physical "reset" does emotionally. Melissa's panic could infect the whole group, leave them all depressed, prisoners of their own memories.

STEVE

So what do we do?

DANA

Tell them this is survivable, emotionally and psychologically. Maybe as their "life counselor" you can get them focused on the future, excited about their new life.

STEVE

Okay.

DANA

Especially Don and Abby. They're the married couple. They're the ones the Brightfields are really interested in.

STEVE

It's so strange when you call them the Brightfields.

DANA

I'm not calling them Mom and Dad. Our subjects need to respect me.

STEVE

I don't know why you worry. It would only be nepotism if you weren't brilliant.

DANA

It's lucky I am. Mom and Dad—the Brightfields—have to use those closest to them. If the government got wind of this, they'd shut us down in a second.

STEVE

A nanosecond.

DANA

Certain kinds of research have to be conducted in—

STEVE

Secret?

DANA

Private, so early results can be analyzed before—

STEVE

Uncle Sam pulls the plug?

DANA

Don't finish my sentences.

STEVE

Sorry.

DANA

You sound like you *want* our cover blown.

STEVE

Would I get you any sooner?

DANA

What you'd get is between me and my career. That's not where you want to be.

STEVE

I hope you and Chuck and Martha Brightfield are prepared for when this research hits the fan. Technology like this, applied on a mass scale? Might as well abolish death.

DANA

We're perfectly aware—

STEVE

It could double the population—in the *short* term.

DANA

We *know*. That's why this has to be perfected as quickly and quietly as possible. Once it's been applied to—

STEVE

Your parents?

DANA

Mom and Dad, yes—we can bury it until the ramifications are thought through.

STEVE

So you lied to everyone about becoming celebrities?

DANA

The experiment's gone so well, what else could I say? In the end it won't matter. The Brightfields will drown everyone in money, and no one will say a word. The language is already in their contracts.

STEVE

Your folks are going to look twenty again. How do they plan to keep that quiet?

DANA

They've been near-recluses for years. They'll be "lost" in a private plane crash at sea without a trace—blah, blah, blah. Year or so later they'll show up young, claim to be relations. They've got it all worked out.

STEVE

Amazing—they can make something like this happen *and* keep it totally under wraps. Is there anything money can't do?

DANA

Not much. Except maybe cheer these people up. What if, deep down, having lived a whole life, they think it really should be over?

STEVE

You think their "souls" are tired?

DANA

I think part of them thinks it's not moral to go on. Not like this, anyway.

STEVE

Sorry for so many questions.

(as his hand strays to her backside)

Just trying to get a handle on the future, I guess.

DANA

That's not the future you have a handle on.

STEVE

Sorry.

DANA

You know the rules. During these trials, you and I are not involved.

(sighing)

Why'd I ever go into that physics library that day?

STEVE

To discover the secret of the universe?

DANA

(as her CELL RINGS, pulling it out)

Hello? Oh—Mom. Where are you calling—? What? A discussion? What time is it over there?

STEVE

Why are they—?

DANA

Shhhh!!

STEVE

What do they want?

(DANA listens, looking stunned. Lights shift as SOUND of CICADAS CHIRRING LOUDLY rises, then SLOWLY MORPHS into SOUND of a MOTORBOAT crossing a lake)

Scene Four

(THE MOTORBOAT CROSSFADES into the WILD CHIRPING of what sounds like hundreds of HUNGRY SPARROWS. CHUCK and MARTHA stand smiling broadly in the bright sunlight. They are dressed casually but expensively. MARTHA stares with powerful binoculars out over the lake. CHUCK, who holds a pistol, stares offstage in a different direction. Upstage, DANA stands staring at them both)

MARTHA

What do you think they look like?

CHUCK

Us.

(gesturing where he's been looking)

I've never seen so many sparrows in that tree.

MARTHA

They like the seeds. Plus it's mating season.

CHUCK

It is, isn't it?

(CHUCK fires the pistol into the air. SOUND of BIRDS SCATTERING)

CHUCK (cont'd)

They're not thinking about mating now.

MARTHA

They will again. Soon.

CHUCK

Life's addictive, isn't it Mommy?

(CHUCK and MARTHA kiss. DANA looks uncomfortable)

Why didn't you tell me?

DANA

Tell you what?

MARTHA

Oh, I don't know — that you're *twenty* again?!

DANA

You sound unhappy to see us.

CHUCK

That's not what I'm —

DANA

We thought you'd be thrilled.

MARTHA

I am thrilled. Of course. It's just that —

DANA

How's Steve doing? Is he over on the island?

MARTHA
(looking through the binoculars again)

Steve's fine. He's —

DANA

Such a friendly boy.

CHUCK

And handsome. We should go over there.

MARTHA

No! Not yet.

DANA

Why not?

CHUCK

DANA

They're, um . . . not ready. Moods. They have moods. Everything's new to them, and it causes, you know, mood swings.

CHUCK

Are they depressed?

DANA

No—

CHUCK

That wouldn't be good, if they were depressed. You can't reason with the depressed.

MARTHA

No, you can't.

CHUCK

Found that out in Asia.

DANA

What do you mean? Were those subjects depressed?

MARTHA

Totally.

CHUCK

Wandered around like a bunch of ghosts. Two or three actually killed themselves.

DANA

My God. And you went ahead anyway? Why?

CHUCK

We did some thinking. The Asian subjects were just like the ones here—indigent, I mean. No families, cut off from the world—

MARTHA

Nothing to live for.

CHUCK

That psychology persisted even when they were young again. They carried their old lives with them, so to speak.

MARTHA

Young bodies, old sorrows.

CHUCK

They were used to being depressed. That's what life meant to them.

MARTHA

But it doesn't mean that to us.

CHUCK

We're happy in life.

MARTHA

Very.

CHUCK

You know why? Because the thing that makes you happy in life is money.

MARTHA

Lots and lots and lots and lots of money.

CHUCK

So we figured we had nothing to fear.

MARTHA

And that's exactly how it went. When we woke up, we were deliriously happy. We could hardly wait to make more money.

DANA

Why didn't you tell me what was going on over there?

CHUCK

No time, honeybear. Things just roared along.

MARTHA

Surprised everyone.

CHUCK

There was no reason not to just go for it.

MARTHA

"Why wait?" That was my feeling.

CHUCK

So we recorded twenty-three "weekly messages" to you, had 'em put us under and *voila!*

MARTHA

I think we look sexy, don't you?

CHUCK

Very sexy.

(CHUCK and MARTHA kiss, start to grope each other)

DANA

Will you please not do that?

(SOUND of BIRDS. CHUCK pulls out his pistol)

CHUCK

Look! They're starting to come back.

DANA

Don't shoot. You'll disturb my subjects.

MARTHA

(with a laugh)

Your subjects? They're our subjects, dear.

(CHUCK FIRES. SOUND of BIRDS SCATTERING)

DANA

For God's—!

MARTHA

The island's nearly a mile away. They won't notice.

DANA

Why are you acting crazy?

CHUCK

We're twenty years old again. How do you expect us to act?

MARTHA

By the way, you have kept everyone on the island incommunicado, right?

DANA

Absolutely.

MARTHA

What did you tell them?

DANA

What?

MARTHA

When they woke up.

DANA

Oh. Well, not much. One or two things to, you know, cheer them up.

CHUCK

So they are depressed?

DANA

Not really—

MARTHA

How have you been cheering them up?

DANA

Oh—you know . . . I just sort of suggested that if things continued to . . . go so well, they might possibly become . . . celebrities?

CHUCK

Celebrities?!

DANA

I had to say something. They think the trials will be announced. That would automatically turn them into—

CHUCK
Celebrities?!

MARTHA
Don't get mad now, honey.

CHUCK
I'll get as mad as I want—I'm twenty! What were you thinking?!

DANA
I didn't know what to say. We never discussed this.

CHUCK
Mommy, I thought you briefed her fully about all this.

MARTHA
I thought you did.

CHUCK
I swear, there is *no* communication in this family.

DANA
What did you tell the subjects in Asia?

CHUCK
We didn't tell 'em they were going to be celebrities!

MARTHA
Don't worry, Dana. Your father likes to overdramatize. The fact is, we've got this completely under control.

DANA
You do? How? What happened to the people in your trials?

CHUCK
The ones who didn't kill themselves? They're still in Asia, in one of our facilities.

MARTHA
All the comforts. Very happy.

DANA

Happy? How?

MARTHA

Just a little pharmaceutical solution.

CHUCK

Had a picnic for them, right there in the facility. Everyone associated with the trials, in any way whatsoever.

MARTHA

Celebrating the success of . . . well, you know—us.

CHUCK

And at the picnic, in the sandwiches—

MARTHA

Not our sandwiches, their sandwiches—

CHUCK

We put a little special something. A memory drug. Though that's a misnomer. Actually, it erases memory.

DANA

Erases—?

MARTHA

Completely. Very effective.

CHUCK

Total global amnesia. Irreversible. New start on life.

MARTHA

That's the way to think about it.

DANA

I've never heard of anything like that.

CHUCK

'Course not. We developed it a few years ago in secret trials very much like these.

MARTHA

As soon as the trials were finished, we injected all those who had created the drug. Then we stockpiled what was left.

CHUCK

Never know when something like that's going to come in handy. Anyway, the subjects will have to start whole new lives, of course. But we found it actually increases I.Q.

(to MARTHA)

My God, you look lovely.

(MARTHA and CHUCK share another kiss
which grows more passionate)

DANA

Stop that! Stop that! *Stop, stop, stop!!*

CHUCK

It bothers you? Even now that we look like—?

DANA

You're my parents!

MARTHA

That brings up another point.

CHUCK

From now on, you can't refer to us as your parents.

MARTHA

We're your cousins.

DANA

Were the scientists there? The Asian scientists and technicians. Were they at the picnic?

MARTHA

Everyone was.

DANA

Did you drug them?

MARTHA

We had to.

DANA

I don't believe this! The scientists weren't depressed! They were probably elated!

CHUCK

Oh, they were.

DANA

Where are they now?

CHUCK

Same facility.

MARTHA

Don't worry, they'll all be reeducated and released over the next few years, good as new.

DANA

What did you tell their families?

CHUCK

It was a family picnic.

DANA

Oh, *my God*— Turn them back! Reverse the process!

CHUCK

Can't. One-way technology.

DANA

This is impossible! You can't—

MARTHA

We have to. The world's not ready for changes like this.

CHUCK

Resetting lives? Think about it. All the Haves would be immortal—

MARTHA

And the Have Nots would be so cross about it—

CHUCK

People would go crazy. There'd be world war.

MARTHA

The whole point of developing this process was so that your father and I could use it.

CHUCK

We've used it. It worked. End of story.

MARTHA

Now we have to put it all back in the box.

CHUCK

Clean up our toys.

MARTHA

No one can know these trials ever took place. Otherwise our cover story about being our own younger relations won't work.

CHUCK

We've already changed our wills and left everything to ourselves.

MARTHA

All we have to do now is fake our deaths, and—

DANA

Wait a minute! Just . . . What about our staff? The ones who conducted these trials?

CHUCK

What about them?

DANA

Are you planning to erase their memories too?

CHUCK

Oh no, no, no, no.

DANA

Thank God—

MARTHA

We already did that.

DANA

What—!?

MARTHA

Yesterday.

CHUCK

Beautiful family picnic. You would have loved it.

DANA

Where—? Where are they?!

(pulling out her phone)

I'm calling them right now.

CHUCK

You won't get 'em. They're in one of our facilities, completely oblivious and—

MARTHA

Happy as clams.

DANA

You can't do this!

CHUCK

No choice.

MARTHA

If you think about it, you'll know we're right.

DANA

What are you going to do with our test subjects?

MARTHA

I think we should throw them a party.

CHUCK

Great idea! Lots to celebrate.

MARTHA

How about something outdoors, at night? Lots of music and dancing.

CHUCK

Maybe a drink or two?

MARTHA

And plenty of sandwiches.

DANA

No! No, you can't—! These are people we're talking about!

CHUCK

Poor people.

MARTHA

It's not like we're taking their lives.

DANA

Their identities! Their . . . unique identities!

CHUCK

There are billions of unique identities in the world. Doesn't matter if a few get swept away.

MARTHA

Especially when there's no choice.

DANA

It's too horrible! Making them go through life not knowing who they are or where they came from? No, I won't agree. You're not going to feed them a special sandwich.

(CHUCK and MARTHA look at each other and sigh)

CHUCK

Of course, there's always the other sandwich.

DANA

What? What other sandwich?

MARTHA

We call it the final sandwich.

DANA

What are you *talking* about? *No! Absolutely not!!*

CHUCK

It's one or the other, Princess.

DANA

These people have a whole new life ahead of them—a chance to make better choices!

CHUCK

They're too depressed.

DANA

Pay them off! That'll cheer them up. Pay them tons of money not to reveal anything.

CHUCK

Money can't cure depression.

MARTHA

And depressed people can't be trusted.

DANA

What if they're cheerful?

CHUCK

They won't be.

DANA

Yes, they will! Give me a day. Two days. Three.

CHUCK

One.

(kissing DANA on the forehead)

Why am I such a softie?

MARTHA

(to DANA)

Do you want to plan the party, or should I?

DANA

I will.

MARTHA

Fine. I'll just bring my picnic basket.

DANA

Don't—!

CHUCK

Shall we say eight o'clock?

DANA

I can't believe you're my parents.

MARTHA and CHUCK

Cousins.

DANA

(stalking out)

Cousins!!

MARTHA

Think she'll see reason?

CHUCK

She's a scientist. What choice does she have?

(She stares through the binoculars again at the island while he pulls out the starter's pistol and stares off at the tree. CHUCK FIRES the gun once more, and we hear the SOUND of the BIRDS SCATTERING. This MORPHS into the SOUND of VIOLENT SPLASHING out on the lake—something like the SHRIEK OF A WILD PIG BEING ATTACKED by AN ALLIGATOR)

Scene Five

(SPLASHING FADES as lights shift, revealing DON WALTER in shorts and T-shirts. Their feet are bare. Tied to their ankles are clear plastic bags filled with clothes, shoes, etc. DON stares out over the lake as WALTER finishes taping a plastic bag around DON's bandaged hand)

DON

Hey! I saw something!

WALTER

Hold still! What are you talking about?

DON

Something in the water. It like, rolled, or . . . splashed, or—

WALTER

Where?

DON

'Way out there.

WALTER

You're crazy. Now that your eyes are young again, you think you've got x-ray vision.

DON

I kind of do.

WALTER

It's the Brightfields' private lake. They're not going to have anything menacing in it.

DON

I don't know . . . Dana said not to swim in the lake.

WALTER

To keep us from leaving, right? To scare us, that's all. Come on—time to get going.

DON

It's kind of far.

WALTER

Not for me. I'll make sure you're all right. We'll keep close to shore as we work our way around the island. Then we'll sprint for the mainland.

DON

Sprint?

WALTER

Just an expression. We'll take it slow. You can float on your back, can't you?

DON

Sure, but—

WALTER

Then we're golden.

DON

I don't know. I don't feel lucky—

WALTER

Damn it, listen to me! That water's a false barrier, separating us from everything we've earned: fame, wealth, power. Whoever gets out there first gets the biggest slice of the pie. Do you want that, Don? Do you want a giant piece of hot, steaming pie?

DON

Sorta . . .

WALTER

Do you *want* it!?

DON

Yeah . . .

WALTER

Pie, Don!!

DON

Uh-huh.

WALTER

Pie! Big slice!!

(They exit. SOUND of SPLASHING as they hit the Water. SPLASHING FADES and we again hear an ALLIGATOR's FAINT BELLOW in the distance. Closer, the CRY of a HAWK as lights shift)

Scene Six

(Lights up on STEVE sitting with CAROL,
MELISSA and ABBY)

ABBY

Some mornings I'd wake up, look around and my room would be unrecognizable. But at the same time it would *feel* completely familiar. Does that make any sense?

STEVE

Of course.

ABBY

Then a stranger would come in and help me go to the bathroom and dress, and that also felt . . . okay, somehow. These were my bad days, of course—what Don called my bad days.

CAROL

Did they feel like bad days?

ABBY

I'm not so sure.

MELISSA

They don't sound bad to me. That's exactly how I picture death, only without the waking up.

STEVE

Melissa? Attitude? Abby, go on.

ABBY

Does everyone have to be here? I wish we could talk one on one.

STEVE

Sorry, it has to be group. We need to make as much progress as possible. In the ideal, Don and Walter would be here too.

MELISSA

Please, no!

ABBY

Don's been such a turd. I don't want to see him. Waking up now is so much worse.

STEVE

What do you mean?

ABBY

Now when I wake up, I look out the window and see Don standing there in his pajama bottoms.

MELISSA

Ew.

STEVE

What's he doing?

ABBY

Staring at my cabin.

STEVE

In just his bottoms?

ABBY

He's showing off his new body. He thinks it'll seduce me.

MELISSA

Ew.

STEVE

Are you sure that's what he's—?

ABBY

Pretty sure. 'Cause at the same time he's also . . . you know, saluting the dawn.

STEVE

Saluting the—?

ABBY

Displaying his manhood?

STEVE

Oh.

CAROL and MELISSA

Ew—!

ABBY
Standing at attention?

CAROL and MELISSA
Ew—!!

ABBY
Tenting on the old campground?

CAROL and MELISSA
EW—!!!

STEVE
Thanks, we get your drift. You should ask Dana to speak with him.

ABBY
She did. He doesn't care. He says I'm denying his marital rights.

STEVE
Do you still feel married to Don at this point?

ABBY
Aren't I?

STEVE
The point is, how do you feel? Do you want to be married to him?

ABBY
Not without Alzheimer's.

STEVE
Abby—

ABBY
Do you want a real answer?

STEVE
If it's honest. And positive.

ABBY
I'd rather be married to you.

CAROL and MELISSA

Oooh—!

STEVE

Quiet.

(to ABBY)

Why do you say that?

ABBY

Well . . . You've lived as long as Don, and you're twenty again now, too. But you're not reverting into some stupid little boy. You're still a mature adult. You're . . . trying.

STEVE

So is that what you want? You want Don to try harder?

ABBY

Not really.

STEVE

Then what? Abby? What is it you really want?

(ABBY suddenly kisses STEVE right on the mouth—
a really good one)

MELISSA

OH MY GOD! Omigod, omigod, omigod—!!!

CAROL

What's she doing?

MELISSA

OH MY GOD—!!!

STEVE

(pulling away)

Abby—!?! What do you think you're—!?

ABBY

There! Now I'm not depressed! You are so handsome and wise. I feel like you've lived a hundred and eighty years, not just eighty. We're children compared to you.

STEVE

I don't care! You can't make out with your counselor.

ABBY

Why not?

STEVE

You're just reacting to anxiety.

ABBY

So what? At least I'm feeling. That's what you want, isn't it? For me to feel?

STEVE

(to the others)

Maybe you two should leave us alone for a few minutes.

CAROL

Oh, sure. *Now* there can be one-on-one.

STEVE

We need to clarify a few things, that's all.

CAROL

Come on, Melissa. Not sure I want to watch them "clarifying".

(CAROL and MELISSA exit)

STEVE

You know, Abby—

ABBY

Feel my hands.

STEVE

What?

ABBY

(rubbing his hand over hers)

When I was old, my arthritis was so bad I couldn't open my left hand. The pain was excruciating.

STEVE

I'm sure it was—

ABBY

Now I run my fingers over all the joints, but I can't make myself feel a thing. Somehow that terrifies me more than the pain used to. Did you ever have arthritis?

STEVE

No. I was . . . lucky.

ABBY

Everything scares me now. Everything but you.

STEVE

Abby, these things you're going through—

ABBY

Give me your hands.

(doing so)

These are . . . beyond perfect. It's like you were never old at all. Would you like tea?

STEVE

What?

ABBY

I have tea in my cabin.

STEVE

I'm not sure that would be—

ABBY

We can talk about anything we want. We can . . . feel things.

STEVE

Think I'll take a rain check.

ABBY

Why? We'd be alone there. I could say anything to you.

STEVE

Which is exactly why—

ABBY

You're very attractive.

STEVE

We all are, right? I mean, now.

ABBY

(caressing his face)

I make really good tea.

STEVE

I'm sure you do—

ABBY

The kind a man would never forget.

STEVE

Really? That's tempting all right, but—

ABBY

But what?

STEVE

I mean, um . . . certainly . . .

(as her caresses grow more urgent and convincing)

Tea can be very . . . calming.

ABBY

It certainly can.

STEVE

But people should be careful they're not having it . . . you know, all over the place with . . . everybody.

ABBY

You're the only one I want to have tea with.

STEVE

I see.

ABBY

But I want to have a lot of tea.

(She kisses him, hard. At first he tries to pull away, but slowly he responds. DANA enters, followed by CAROL and MELISSA)

CAROL

Told ya!

STEVE

Dana—!

DANA

I'm sorry. Am I interrupting a session?

STEVE

This isn't what you—!

DANA

What the hell is it?!

STEVE

Therapy!

DANA

For who?! 'Cause from here, it looks like slut therapy.

ABBY

Hey! He's not your boyfriend.

DANA

Not anymore he isn't.

(to STEVE)

I leave you alone here for one hour—

CAROL

You two were dating? Ew—

MELISSA & CAROL

Ewww.

STEVE

I've been her boyfriend for over a year!

ABBY

How's that possible? What's going on?

DANA

Steve is . . . not a test subject. He's a plant. To get another perspective on how you were all really feeling. He's not eighty; he never was eighty. He's . . . my age.

ABBY

You spied on us?

STEVE

Not really spying.

CAROL

And you guys were—?

DANA

Were is the correct term, yes. We apologize to all of you.

STEVE

(as DANA kicks him in the leg)

Right. We're very sorry.

ABBY

God, I feel so . . .

MELISSA

What?

ABBY

Lied to. And confused. I feel so confused.

MELISSA

Me, too.

CAROL

I feel confused, too.

ABBY

Not as much as me—

DANA

Quiet! Where's everybody else?

STEVE

Don and Walter didn't want to join the group.

DANA

Where are they?

CAROL

I don't know. One of the cabins?

MELISSA

I thought they were walking around the island.

ABBY

I am so confused—

DANA

Oh, for God's—! *Where are Don and Walter?!*

(A SUDDEN, TERRIBLE SCREAM comes from the lake, accompanied by frantic SPLASHING SOUNDS)

MELISSA

What's that?!

CAROL

What's going on?!

DANA

GET OUT OF THE LAKE!!! Who is that?

MELISSA

Looks like Walter—

CAROL

And Don! What's wrong with Don?

(The SPLASHES, muffled CRIES OF PAIN and TERROR continue as the women stare, wide-eyed)

MELISSA

He's hurt!

DANA

(calling to them)

What happened?! Are you all right?!

DON (off)

I'm dying! I'm . . . I'm dying!

DANA

You're okay, Don! You're almost here!

MELISSA

Oh, God—*look!!*

(WALTER enters, helping DON, whose left leg is bloody)

ABBY

Don—!

DANA

Get him on the ground!

(WALTER eases DON to the ground. DANA takes a look at DON's injury and then rips open his plastic-covered bundle. She pulls out a belt and puts it around his leg, drawing it tight and handing it to ABBY)

DANA (cont'd)

Hold that. *Tight.*

ABBY

What *happened!?*

MELISSA

Did you tear it on a snag?

WALTER

No, it was— There was something in there. Something big, in the lake.

DANA

There's a lot of big things in the lake.

WALTER

You never told us that.

DANA

I told you not to go in.

ABBY

Why wouldn't you tell us about monsters in the lake?

DANA

They're not monsters; they're just . . . animals.

DON

I'm dying!

DANA

(wiping blood off his leg with a T-shirt from his bundle)

No, you're not. It didn't get any arteries.

DON

It hurts!

DANA

I'm sure it does. What were you doing out there swimming?

DON

Um—

WALTER

We were just relaxing.

DON

Yeah, relaxing.

DANA
(poking WALTER's bundle)

With these?

WALTER
We were leaving, okay? We have every right.

DANA
(ripping the T-shirt into strips for a bandage)
You may have every right, but I'd advise you not to go swimming again.

DON
It hurts!

DANA
Don't be a baby.

WALTER
What's *in* there, anyway?

DANA
Mr. Brightfield has peculiar tastes. He loves things with the word "alligator" in their names, so he stocked this lake with alligator gars, and alligator snapping turtles and, well, alligators.

WALTER
Alligators!?

DANA
They're a deeply misunderstood animal. Besides, this looks like the bite of a snapping turtle. You must have disturbed him.

DON
I disturbed him?!

WALTER
Why didn't you tell us about the alligators?

DANA
The Brightfields didn't want you worrying. They want you to be in a serene environment.

CAROL

With alligators?

DANA

The alligators are all over by the house. That's where they're fed. They're kept in an enclosure, almost always.

WALTER

Almost?

DANA

The snapping turtles usually aren't that aggressive. And the alligator gars hardly ever attack people.

DON

That's comforting.

WALTER

This is gross negligence.

DANA

(completing the makeshift bandage)

I'll tell you what's gross negligence. Being warned not to swim and then *swimming*. Where did you think you were going?

DON

To get famous.

DANA

What do you mean?

DON

I don't know. My leg hurts—

DANA

(squeezing his leg)

Want it to hurt a lot more?

DON

Ow—!

ABBY

Stop that!

DON

Walter and me were going to swim ashore, jump a train and go hunt up some media.

DANA

Media?

(squeezing his leg again)

DON

Ow—!

ABBY

Dana—!

DON

We were gonna tell about this place before anyone else could and say we were the first successful products of Project Hourglass.

WALTER

(to DON)

The Hourglass Project!

DON

That's got no pop at all!

WALTER

I don't care! That's what it is!

DANA

What are you talking about?

WALTER

Nothing. Just our name for it. You know, for when they ask.

DANA

I see.

(letting go of DON, rising)

So you two don't care about anyone else here? You just . . . want to be famous? It's not enough for you to be given an entirely new *life*, you have to be famous too?

DON

Well . . . we're going to be no matter what, aren't we?

DANA

What about Abby? What about your wife? Were you just going to abandon her?

(DON stares at ABBY, who's been retying his bandage)

DON

I was gonna . . . come back.

DANA

(dubious)

Come back?

DON

Or send for her, or something—

ABBY

Don—

DON

It's not my fault! You abandoned me! You wouldn't let me anywhere near you.

ABBY

I barely remember you—

DON

I don't care! You owe me wifely duties!

DANA

Nobody owes you anything, Don!

DON

(as DANA squeezes his leg again)

Ow—!

DANA

Nobody owes you *anything!* You've been *resurrected!* The greatest gift anyone has ever received! Am I the *only* sane person here!?

He's bleeding again.

CAROL

Sort of a lot.

MELISSA

Are you going to let him die?

WALTER

Oh, for God's— Pick him up. Let's get him to my office.

DANA

(DANA looks on as WALTER, CAROL and MELISSA and ABBY all help DON to his feet. He tries to put weight on his injured leg but faints a little at the sight of his own blood. They decide to carry him instead, ABBY and MELISSA taking his legs. They all exit, leaving DANA and STEVE)

Wait.

DANA (cont'd)
(as he starts out)

It really wasn't what you—

STEVE

I don't care about that.

DANA

You don't?

STEVE

Where was I, Steve?

DANA

What do you mean?

STEVE

Just now. Where was I?

DANA

STEVE

Oh—! Your parents are back! I completely— How are they?

DANA

A little different.

(Lights shift as we hear the RAUCOUS CRY of a PARROT or MACAW, which morphs into the SOUND of the TRAIN WHISTLE, which in turn morphs into the YOWL of what sounds like a large WILDCAT or PANTHER)

Scene Seven

(MIDDAY. Same location as Scene One. A light-weight table stage left with a few chairs around it. A few strands of party lights have been strung overhead.)

DANA and STEVE sit at the downstage end of the table. From time to time, others rush through the area, rather feverishly preparing for the party)

STEVE

Your parents have no right to obliterate people's memories just because they agreed to be subjects for these trials.

DANA

What choice is there? They're never going to believe they're not depressed.

(CAROL, very speedy, enters with a box of party hats which she spills onto the table)

CAROL

Your parents sent these over. There's lots to choose from. I'm glad they're all different colors,

DANA

That's great, Carol.

CAROL

Do you think party hats are too silly for twenty-year-olds? I don't. It's hard to remember what age I stopped wearing party hats, but I had to be little. We never wore them in the nunnery. All I remember is working there. We worked so hard. I'm not sure I'd be ready for that life again. I think I want more fun, don't you? But look who I'm talking to. You're first-timers.

DANA

Carol, we're discussing something.

CAROL

Oh! Sorry, sorry! Didn't mean to bother you. There's so much to do for the party! Do you know if Walter has a date? I was thinking about trying out a few new things tonight.

DANA

Can we talk about that later?

CAROL

You bet. We're going to have so much *fun!*

(CAROL hurries out)

DANA

We gave them too much speed. My folks will see right through it.

STEVE

Better than how they were before, dragging around like it was a funeral. Maybe they just need time to even out.

DANA

Time is what we haven't got.

(ABBY and MELISSA enter, just as speedy as CAROL. They look up at the lights)

ABBY

Damn it!

MELISSA

They're still not on! Dana, we can't get the lights on!

DANA

Check the switch in the cabin.

ABBY

We did!

DANA

Check the circuit breaker in the kitchen.

ABBY

The circuit-breaker! Of course!!

MELISSA

This'll be a great party! I'm going to dance 'til I'm *unconscious!*

(They rush off)

STEVE

Doesn't sound like they want to keep it too secret.

DANA

Oh, God. I don't know what to do.

STEVE

You can't rob them of their identities.

(as she stays silent)

Dana—

DANA

The world's not ready for this technology. It may never be. These people, even if they do take a payoff, won't settle for obscurity. They were obscure all their lives. How can they resist telling?

STEVE

You still can't do it.

DANA

I can't betray my parents. This is their experiment. They paid for everything.

STEVE

Including you?

DANA

Don't be so high and mighty. You just want to save Abby for your own immoral purposes.

STEVE

That's not true!

DANA

Did you have your tongue in her mouth?

STEVE

What? When?

DANA

Yesterday. You mean there were other times?

STEVE

No!

DANA

It looked like you did.

STEVE

I told you. She suddenly kissed me, out of the blue.

DANA

'Cause you're so irresistible?

STEVE

I don't know why—!

DANA

You're on probation, as of right now. No, no—you are on *hiatus*.

STEVE

What does that mean? There's a way to give me even less sex than *zero*?

(The colored party lights come on overhead.
CAROL rushes in)

ABBY

(shouting)

They're ON!!

(SOUND of the others CHEERING from the cabin)

ABBY (cont'd)

This is *so great*—!!

(She rushes off again)

STEVE

How do I know you don't want to do this to Abby out of pure jealousy?

DANA

How can you say that?! I'd never do anything like that.

STEVE

Prove it. Get them off the island now. Let them tell the world everything.

DANA

The world's not ready—

STEVE

Who says? The world can handle a lot more than you think.

DANA

This is impossible. Maybe I shouldn't have told you.

STEVE

Really? Keep me in the dark too? Feed me a sandwich?

DANA

I didn't mean—

STEVE

Guess the attraction phase is officially over.

(SOUND of HELICOPTER ROTORS in the distance
steadily FADES UP)

DANA

What the hell is that?

(as the HELICOPTER GROWS LOUDER)

Oh, no. No, no, no, no, no, NO—!!!!

STEVE

What? Who is it?!

DANA

Who do you think!?

(SOUND of the HELICOPTER LANDING and
cutting its engines a distance away. MELISSA,
CAROL, ABBY, WALTER and DON all hurry
into the clearing. Everyone stares in the
direction of the newly-landed chopper)

MELISSA

What's going on?

Who's in the helicopter?
WALTER

My parents.
DANA

Your *parents*?
CAROL

They're as young as we are!
ABBY

I don't understand.
MELISSA

They went through the same experiment you did. In Asia.
DANA

It worked on them too?
DON

It certainly did.
DANA

Hello there!
CHUCK (off)
(calling from a distance)

Go *home!* You're not supposed to be here yet!
DANA
(calling)

We couldn't resist!
MARTHA (off)

Why'd they take the helicopter? It's a ten-minute boat ride.
STEVE

Go *home!!*
DANA
(calling)

CHUCK (off)
You don't mean that.

DANA
Yes, I do! I really do!

(CHUCK and MARTHA enter, wearing 'copter gear: light leather jackets, baseball caps, etc)

CHUCK
Hello, everybody!

MARTHA
Wonderful to see you all!

DANA
What are you doing?!

CHUCK
Easy, honeybear. We just wanted to meet the people.

MARTHA
It was torture, being so close and having to wait. Oh, Steve! There you are! You look wonderful.

STEVE
So do, um . . . the two of you. Wow.

ABBY
You're young!

CHUCK
We sure as hell are!
(shaking STEVE's hand)
Bet you can barely recognize us.

STEVE
Amazing.

CHUCK
Hi, there. I'm Chuck.

WALTER
Walter.

CHUCK
And this is my wife, Martha.

MARTHA
We're the Brightfields.

CHUCK
At your service!

CAROL
Wow. I mean . . . *wow!*

CHUCK
And you are . . . ?

CAROL
Carol.

CHUCK
Nice to meet you, Carol. How do you like being twenty again?

CAROL
I love it. I mean—*thank you so much!*

(The other subjects chime in their thanks as well.
MARTHA and CHUCK shake hands all around)

MARTHA
It's nothing. Really.

CHUCK
Don't mention it. Our pleasure, believe me.

MELISSA
When did you get back?

MARTHA
Yesterday. Didn't you notice us puttering around the house?

WALTER

Where?

MARTHA

(pointing off)

Over there. Guess you can't really see it behind the trees.

CHUCK

I have to say, as good as things went in Asia, they look just as good here. Congratulations, honeybear.

(noticing DON)

Ooh. Maybe I spoke too soon. What happened to you, boy?

DON

Oh, uh . . . kinda went swimming.

MARTHA

Swimming?!

DANA

I warned them. Don just wanted to . . . cool off. Didn't you, Don?

DON

Yeah . . . Yeah, that's right.

MARTHA

What got you?

(CHUCK inspects DON's leg)

CHUCK

One of the turtles, by the look of it. You're lucky it wasn't a gator.

DANA

It couldn't have been an alligator. You keep them all by the house, in the enclosure.

CHUCK

We let them out when we got home.

DANA

You *what*?

MARTHA

They'd been penned up for so long, dear.

CHUCK

Don't worry. They come back when we start tossing chickens out for 'em. But they were out of shape. They need to swim around a while.

MARTHA

So, please—no more swimming, people. There's a dozen alligators out there right now, and they are not in a good mood.

CHUCK

(to DON)

The turtles are no joke either. You're lucky you've still got a leg, boy.

WALTER

He may have a lawsuit, too.

(CHUCK and MARTHA laugh)

CHUCK

Well, he can always try. Lawsuit.

(as he and MARTHA share another laugh)

Meanwhile, we've got a surprise for everybody.

DANA

No! No more surprises! Come back tonight, when we—

MARTHA

Who wants to ride in a helicopter?

DANA

What are you *talking* about?!

MARTHA

We thought you might be getting a little cabin fever on this island—

WALTER

Tell me about it.

CHUCK

So we thought we might take the 'copter and ferry you all over a few miles to one of our facilities—

DANA

No! No facilities!

MARTHA

But honeybear, we have a picnic all set up.

DANA

NO!

WALTER

Why not? I'd love to get off this island.

DON

Me, too.

CAROL

Me, too.

DANA

No. No, no, no. No, no, no, no, no, no, no. We have too much to do. We're having a party tonight, remember? It'll take us all afternoon to set up.

MARTHA

Why not cancel the party and have the picnic instead?

WALTER

Good idea.

DON

I like that.

MELISSA

A helicopter!

CHUCK

Sounds like you're outvoted, honeybear.

No, we really can't.

DANA

Why not?

ABBY

Yeah, why not?

CAROL

We haven't . . . It's not . . .

DANA

I think it's a great idea.

STEVE

You do?

DANA

Sure. And while we're flying over to the old, um, what is it? Facility?

STEVE

That's right.

MARTHA

We can all get caught up on all the other test subjects over in Asia, and how they're doing.

STEVE

Oh—yes! And your staff over there, and just where they are, and what exactly is happening to them.

DANA

(An uneasy moment)

So, have you and Steve been talking about . . . all that?

MARTHA

Maybe.

DANA

(CHUCK and MARTHA share a look)

CHUCK

Now that I think about it, it might get a little cumbersome, ferrying everyone over there one at a time. Maybe we should leave things as they are and come back tonight.

MARTHA

Maybe so.

(to DANA)

But we wouldn't want any other complications to get in our way, would we?

DANA

Of course not.

MARTHA

We have busy schedules.

DANA

I know, Mother.

CHUCK

So that'll be it, then! Tonight, we party!

(as the subjects all cheer)

That's great, that's great. Remember, honeybear — we're counting on you.

MARTHA

You *and* Steve.

STEVE

Not to worry.

CHUCK

Fine, then. See you tonight, everybody.

(CHUCK and MARTHA turn to leave. WALTER intervenes)

WALTER

Say, um . . . Can I just ask one question? Has news of the trials gotten out over there? Does the world know yet?

CHUCK

About all this? No. We decided to keep things quiet over there. Want to break the news here first. Much bigger splash that way.

WALTER

Oh, yes. Of course. If you need a front man, you know—someone to be the poster-boy—I am tremendously available.

MARTHA

Really?

WALTER

Definitely. I'm ready to be out there for you, you know? Talking to the press, making appearances, doing testimonials—

CHUCK

Ready to be famous, eh?

DON

Rich and famous.

CHUCK

Wouldn't just settle for rich?

DON

Shit, no! Pardon my French.

WALTER

All he's trying to say is that we're excited about getting the fame that, well . . . we've all—

DON

Risked our lives for.

WALTER

Exactly. We won't let you down, Mr. and Mrs. Brightfield. You can count on that.

CHUCK

(with a look at DANA, shaking WALTER's hand)

We know we can. See you at the party!

(Another cheer. MARTHA and CHUCK exit for 'copter)

SUBJECTS

(together, waving)

Good-bye! Good-bye! See you tonight!

CAROL

We've got to get ready!

(The subjects all rush off to continue setting up the party. DANA and STEVE stare after them)

STEVE

We have to call a newspaper.

DANA

I already tried; I can't get a signal.

STEVE

Maybe I can.

DANA

Don't bother. My folks have it blocked. They did it the minute I left their house.

STEVE

I could take the boat.

DANA

It's gone.

STEVE

What do you mean it's gone?

DANA

Someone took it last night.

STEVE

How? It was all locked up.

DANA

And guess who's got a key?

STEVE

So . . . ?

DANA

So. The boat is gone, and the lake is full of alligators.

(Lights shift as SOUND OF A HELICOPTER
taking off FADES UP VERY LOUD)

Scene Eight

(SOUND of HELICOPTER MORPHS into ANIMAL SOUNDS: RIOTOUS BIRDS, PANTHERS YOWLING, CICADAS BUZZING, ALLIGATORS BELLOWING, etc.

These SOUNDS CROSSFADE into PARTY MUSIC and MILDLY DRUNKEN LAUGHTER. The MUSIC GROWS FASTER and LOUDER, then FADES into something SLOW.

Lights rise on a party scene. Late—things are winding down. Lights strung in the trees glow over a table, center. On the table is a picnic basket. MARTHA, DANA and CHUCK set places.

Upstage, the subjects are dancing to a slow number. WALTER dances with CAROL, STEVE dances with ABBY and MELISSA dances rather drunkenly alone—sort of spinning slowly rather than dancing. DON, on his crutch and drinking from a bottle of wine, stares at the dancers. None of them pays attention to what's being said at the table)

DANA

(setting out plates from the picnic basket)

I'm only doing this because there's no other choice.

MARTHA

Glad you see that, dear.

DANA

These are nice people. They don't deserve to have their brains scrambled.

CHUCK

Not scrambled. Wiped clean, like a windshield after a shit storm.

DANA

Nice analogy.

CHUCK

Don't know how else you'd describe their lives up to now.

WALTER

Next time, we'll be dancing on TV.

CAROL

What are you talking about?

WALTER

That's where celebrities dance.

CAROL

I've never been famous.

WALTER

Easiest thing in the world. All you have to do is stand there.

CAROL

I'm not sure what God thinks of celebrities.

WALTER

Screw that. You're not in the convent anymore, beautiful.

CAROL

You really think I'm beautiful? I love to hear you say it.

WALTER

Welcome to the secular world. Did God ever call you beautiful?

CAROL

Not in so many words.

(They start to kiss while they dance)

MARTHA

(pulling sandwiches out of the basket, to DANA)

Now, pay attention. I have plenty of sandwiches here. They can have as many as they want.

DANA

Great.

MARTHA

But four of the sandwiches have tiny “x”s on them, see? Those are for your father and me and you and Steve.

DANA

And those are the ones that are—?

MARTHA

Just sandwiches, that’s right. But only eat this one, understand? The one with the tiny “x”.

DANA

I get it. So where are we sitting?

(MARTHA lays out the marked sandwiches)

MARTHA

Over on this end, I think. Here, here, here and here. That should work.

DON

(to MELISSA, spinning next to him)

You look good, doing that.

MELISSA

I shouldn’t have had so much to drink. I’m getting depressed again.

DON

I’ll fix that. Come in the woods with me.

MELISSA

Your wife’s right over there.

DON

Dancing with another man. Come on.

MELISSA

You’re limping.

DON

It’s only one leg. I got others.

(MELISSA stops spinning. She stares at DON a

moment, then walks into the woods. He follows on his crutch. No one notices them leave. During the following conversation CAROL and WALTER also slip into the woods unnoticed)

CHUCK

Are we about ready? It's getting late. You made us wait all evening.

DANA

They deserve to have one last party as themselves.

MARTHA

Oh, it doesn't happen that fast. People eat the sandwiches and fall asleep. When they wake the next morning—

DANA

Oblivion?

CHUCK

Blessed oblivion. They'll have it made over at the facility. Three squares and free education. Lot of folks would envy that.

DANA

Suppose it's better than the final sandwich. You didn't bring any of those, did you?

CHUCK

What do you take us for, honeybear? A pair of mindless killers? I swear.

DANA

So that's a no?

MARTHA

Of course it is. In the long run, the mind-wipe is a far simpler solution. Much less to explain.

STEVE

You're dancing kind of close.

ABBY

You don't like it?

STEVE

Maybe we should sit this one out.

ABBY

You *do* like it. You know, you haven't kissed me since yesterday.

STEVE

Yesterday was just—

(ABBY kisses him, hard. He tries to pull away at first, but she won't let him. STEVE starts to kiss her back. DANA stares at them, open-mouthed)

CHUCK

Honeybear, pay attention.

DANA

What?

MARTHA

This is the crucial part.

DANA

Right. Okay, so . . . where am I sitting exactly?

MARTHA

Right next to Steve. Here. Or . . .

(picking up the sandwich in that place, looking at it)

No, I'm sorry. That's Steve's place. You're here.

DANA

What's it matter, if they're all marked with—?

(picking up the same sandwich)

Why's there a line under this tiny "x"?

MARTHA

A line?

DANA

This is for Steve. The others . . .

DANA (cont'd)

(inspecting the other marked sandwiches)

Just have an "x". No line.

CHUCK

Sure that's a line? Probably just a slip of the pen, or—

MARTHA

My hand gets shaky sometimes.

DANA

Not anymore. You're twenty. That's a line; a deliberate line.

MARTHA

I don't think so—

DANA

On Steve's sandwich. What are you two . . . ? This isn't a regular sandwich, is it? Is it?

CHUCK

Honeybear—

DANA

What's going on here?!

MARTHA

Shhhhhh—!!

(All three speak *sotto voce* throughout the following)

DANA

You're going to wipe his mind!

CHUCK

It's not like that. Well, it is—but for good reason.

MARTHA

He's not blood.

DANA

I don't care. You can't do it!

CHUCK

Even if he does marry you—

(nodding at STEVE, who's dancing even tighter with ABBY)

And that's looking iffier by the second—

DANA

It doesn't matter. That's our business!

MARTHA

Sweetheart, all of this—everything here—is *our* business.

CHUCK

Even you. You work for us.

MARTHA

We have to protect our interests.

CHUCK

Even a small oversight could be catastrophic.

MARTHA

Steve's a loose end. Handsome, sweet—

CHUCK

(looking at STEVE, who's kissing ABBY again)

Maybe not so loyal—

MARTHA

But definitely a loose end. This way, we'll have nothing to worry about. You can train him up just how you like—

CHUCK

He'll make the perfect husband.

DANA

I can't believe you two! You don't care about anything but yourselves!

(A beat. They look stumped)

CHUCK

What's your point?

DANA

Forget it. Why do I even try?

MARTHA

Do we have your support in this or not?

DANA

I wanted to be a scientist . . .

CHUCK

And you are, honeybear. You're one hell of a scientist.

MARTHA

But science, like everything else, costs money. And one day—

CHUCK

You've got to pay up. It's inevitable. So, what'll it be? We haven't got all night.

MARTHA

Remember, darling—it's not like we're giving him the *worst* sandwich.

(DANA looks out at STEVE and ABBY dancing,
then turns to her parents and nods)

CHUCK

Wonderful!

MARTHA

You won't be sorry. So—shall we get everyone to the table?

(Suddenly there's a SCREAM from the woods)

CHUCK

What in hell—!?

MARTHA

What's that?!

DANA

(jumping up)

Where's Melissa?

DANA (cont'd)

(shouting)

Melissa—!?

(DANA runs into the woods, followed by STEVE and ABBY. CHUCK rises)

MARTHA

What's going on?

CHUCK

Probably just a gator, wandering up on shore.

MARTHA

How hungry *are* they?

CHUCK

You fed 'em yesterday, didn't you?

MARTHA

I thought you did.

CHUCK

(pulling out a pistol—a real one)

Stay here. I'll take care of it.

(CHUCK hurries into the woods. A terrible moment. Then—another SCREAM, even more bloodcurdling than the first. Silence. A GUNSHOT, then THREE MORE in quick succession)

MARTHA

(calling)

Chuck—?!

(rising)

CHUCK?!? Are you *all right*?!?

(SCREAM from another direction. MARTHA rushes into the woods. More SHOUTS and SCREAMS—phrases like “watch out!” and “over there!” etc.

After a moment, DANA appears. Quickly she looks around. Seeing no one, she moves to the table. As the SHOUTS and SCREAMS continue, DANA looks down at the sandwiches. She looks around one more time, then opens the picnic basket as lights fade quickly to black.

While lights are down we hear more SHOTS FIRED, more CONFUSED SHOUTS. These SOUNDS MORPH into PARROT SHRIEKS, ALLIGATOR BELLOWS, SOUNDS of HEAVY BODIES SPLASHING INTO THE WATER. These in turn CROSSFADE with SOFT DINNER MUSIC and sounds of PEOPLE LAUGHING and CONVERSING.

Lights up again on the same scene, only now everyone is at the table. They've finished their sandwiches. A few of them are still drinking wine. Everyone, even Melissa, seems to be in a good mood)

MELISSA

I just want to apologize again, everybody. I get so depressed sometimes—

CAROL

It's not your fault.

MELISSA

It is, though. I had no right to endanger all of you.

ABBY

You didn't.

DON

You endangered the crap out of *me*.

MELISSA

I forgot you can't really run.

DON

I wouldn't have followed you out there if I thought you were planning to kill yourself. Lucky for you I could jam that crutch of mine between his jaws. Otherwise *you'd* have been dinner.

ABBY

He says for the fifth time.

DON

Were you there?

ABBY

Following a girl into the woods is probably not something you should brag about.

DON

What do you know?

ABBY

Melissa, given that Don was following you, I think suicide was a very rational option.

MELISSA

I'm so sorry you had to shoot your alligator.

CHUCK

Plenty more where he came from. Sometimes it just takes a few shots to remind 'em all they'd rather be in the lake.

MARTHA

Plus the dead one gives the rest of them something to eat. They shouldn't bother us again.

WALTER

Loved the sandwiches, by the way.

CAROL

Loved them. Chicken salad.

ABBY

Felt like a picnic in the middle of the night.

MARTHA

Thank you.

CHUCK

You know what they say about chicken.

MELISSA

What?

CHUCK

Tastes a whole lot like alligator.

(Everyone laughs—except DANA and STEVE)

MARTHA

Dana, honey—what's on your mind? You've been so quiet.

DANA

Oh, nothing. Getting a little tired, that's all. The adrenaline rush has definitely subsided.

DON

It has for me, too. Didn't think I'd sleep at all tonight, but I can hardly keep my eyes open.

CAROL

Me, too.

ABBY

Me, too.

WALTER

Whew. Guess when the party's over, it's really over.

MELISSA

Yeah.

MARTHA

(rising, starting to put things back in the basket)

We won't keep you up. You should all get plenty of sleep.

CHUCK

(helping her)

Big day tomorrow.

MARTHA

Big day.

CHUCK

Going to start telling the world about all this.

MARTHA

About all of you.

CHUCK

Fame and Fortune 101. Lots to learn.

MARTHA

Lots to live for, Melissa. Trust me.

MELISSA

Don't worry about me. I've learned my lesson. Oh, I am so sleepy!

(Unable to resist the impulse, she lowers her head
to the table and falls asleep)

CAROL

Melissa? Melissa? She's asleep.

CHUCK

Poor kid. All tired out.

DON

Someone else help her back to her cabin. I can't. Where's that stick?

(rising, picking up a stick he's found for a crutch)

See you all tomorrow. Can't keep my eyes open.

(DON, a step away from the table, slowly collapses,
sliding down his stick, asleep before he hits the ground)

WALTER

He's sleeping, too. What's going on here?

MARTHA

It must be the night air.

STEVE

(as CAROL falls asleep at the table)

Right.

DANA

I can't watch this.

ABBY

Watch what? Dana? Watch—
 (smothering an enormous yawn)
 What?

DANA

Abby, please know—just *know*—I didn't want to do this.

WALTER

Do what?
 (as ABBY falls asleep)
 Do *what*, Dana? Did you—?! What did you do to us?!

DANA

Nothing! You'll be alive as ever tomorrow, I promise! You'll be like new!

WALTER

Like new?! What—? What do you mean by . . . ?!

(WALTER falls to the ground, asleep. DANA,
 STEVE, CHUCK and MARTHA stare at them)

CHUCK

We should get 'em in their cabins, in case there's an extra alligator around. Steve, give me some help? Unless you're too tired . . . ?

STEVE

No, I'm fine.
 (picking up WALTER by his shoulders)
 May as well start with the men.

CHUCK

(taking WALTER's feet)
 Sounds like a plan. Dana, tomorrow you can get 'em all on the same page, and we can ferry 'em over to the facility. Whew! He is heavy. Mommy, can you help—

(CHUCK looks at MARTHA. She's asleep where she sits)

CHUCK (cont'd)

Mommy?

(as MARTHA falls forward onto the table, still asleep)

What in hell—?! Mommy? *Mommy—!!?*

(CHUCK drops WALTER's feet. He rushes to MARTHA)

CHUCK (cont'd)

Mommy!!? MOMMY—?!!!!

(to DANA and STEVE)

What did you—? *WHAT IN HELL DID YOU—??!!!!*

(CHUCK falls to the ground, asleep. STEVE looks at DANA)

STEVE

You did it. You really did it! Wow! In the morning, are they really going to be—?

DANA

Yup. They won't know a soul. Least of all themselves.

STEVE

I can't imagine how you must feel.

DANA

Relieved.

STEVE

Where'll we put them? For the night, I mean?

DANA

Oh, I'll . . . drag 'em into my cabin. Keep an eye on 'em.

STEVE

I can help you.

DANA

No. You can't.

STEVE

What do you mean?

STEVE (cont'd)

(suddenly yawning a very big yawn)

Sorry. Dana? What do you—?

(as a look of incredulous shock comes over his face)

Dana—?

DANA

It's the only way.

STEVE

What do you *mean*?! What have you—?!

DANA

I can't go through life wondering if you're going to spill all our secrets—

STEVE

I wouldn't do that to you!

DANA

Of course you would! You were unfaithful with Abby!

STEVE

I was not! We were just dancing and kissing—

DANA

You're a man; you can't help being undependable.

STEVE

I'm just *me*! Dana—!

DANA

This way you won't betray me *or* my secrets.

STEVE

This makes no sense! I love you—!

DANA

I love you too, but don't you see?

STEVE

See what?! *SEE WHAT!!!?*

DANA

You'll be so much better a boyfriend.

(Lights shift as STEVE falls to the ground asleep.
SOUNDS FADE UP of a PANTHER's YOWL, the
LONE SHRIEK of a PARROT. These in turn MORPH
into COUNTLESS SWALLOWS CHATTERING in a
tree, a CICADA's WHINE cutting through the woods
and finally a TRAIN WHISTLE passing close by)

Scene Nine

(Lights up to reveal a scene very much like Scene One. ABBY, DON, CAROL, MELISSA and WALTER sit as they were at the beginning of the play. With them sit MARTHA and CHUCK. There's a lot of quiet anxiety in the group, veiled for the most part by averted eyes, nervous smiles, etc. DANA stands in front of them, holding some name tags)

DANA

Good morning, everybody. How did you sleep?

(as the subjects look at each other)

I . . . slept well. Must be the night air, don't you think? If you're feeling any anxiety, just concentrate on how pleasant it is: the trees, the lake, the birds singing. I know you have questions you may not be able to put into words yet. That's okay. Plenty of time for that. Why don't we start with a few name tags, just to make things easier. These are starter names; you'll get real ones when we move to a facility that's . . . that's very close. Meanwhile, relax as much as you can, know that answers are on their way, and let me give you these.

(sticking a name tag to WALTER's shirt)

We're going to call you "James Dean".

WALTER

Who's that?

DANA

A movie star. A very famous one.

WALTER

(to the others)

Hey look. I'm famous.

DANA

And you can be—

(putting a tag on ABBY)

"Marilyn Monroe". And you—

(STEVE enters)

STEVE

I heard voices.

DANA

Oh! Hello. Please, come and join us. Sit anywhere.
(as he sits, sticking a tag on CAROL)
You can be "Madonna".

CAROL

Where am I?

DANA

Among friends.
(putting a tag on DON)
"Jay-Z".

DON

Why am I hurt?

DANA

Life's tough for a rapper. Don't worry; it's not serious.
(putting a tag on MELISSA)
You are going to be "Snooki".

MELISSA

Oh, God— Suddenly I feel so afraid.

DANA

You're going to be fine.
(turning to CHUCK and MARTHA)
You two, let's see . . .
(tagging them)
We'll just make you "Brangelina" for now. "Brangelina 1" and "2".

MARTHA

All right.

CHUCK

I'm number two?

DANA

You certainly are.

STEVE
What about me?

DANA
(sticking the last name tag on his chest)
You're "Steve".

STEVE
Just Steve?

DANA
Just Steve.

WALTER
How did we get here?

DANA
By doing something heroic.

DON
Yeah? What?

DANA
You're all celebrities. Use your imagination.

(The subjects sit, thinking. SOUND of a TRAIN
PASSING BY)

DANA (cont'd)
(as it FADES)
Isn't that a lovely sound?

(Lights fade)

THE END