

A View of the Mountains

by Lee Blessing

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Cast

JOHN HONEYMAN60's
ISLA HONEYMAN, married to JOHN.....50's
WILL BRANCH, John's son by an earlier marriage.....40's
GWYNN BRANCH, married to WILL..... 30's
ANDREY HONEYMAN, son of JOHN and ISLA14

TIME

Late August, middle of the day, not long ago

PLACE

An estate along the Hudson, two hours from New York

Scene One

(Two large, white Adirondack chairs sit atop a hill, facing the audience. They're on a terrace, flanked by low masonry walls. The view is panoramic, facing south, with the Hudson River straight ahead and the Catskills slightly to the right of the river.

Between the chairs is a low table. On it food has been arranged: fruit, various meats, cheese, crackers—light things for summer.

JOHN and ISLA, dressed casually, stand side by side staring out. Both seem anxious)

ISLA

Some sons hate their fathers.

JOHN

I know.

ISLA

Something inside them looks at the world . . . a different way. It's nobody's fault.

JOHN

It's my fault. Absentee father, simple as that.

ISLA

I wouldn't take all the blame. You certainly didn't give Will his politics.

JOHN

No. He got those from Satan.

(They share a quick smile)

ISLA

(of the preparations)

Do things look all right? Is this enough?

JOHN

I suppose. I don't even know what he drinks.

ISLA

Satan?

(she smiles, he doesn't)

How long's it been? Since you actually saw each other.

JOHN

The divorce was still going on; he was a kid . . . Thirty years?

ISLA

Wow.

JOHN

Of course we have managed to . . . interact . . . in the meantime. Unfortunately. There's only beer up here. Think the junior Senator from Tennessee drinks beer?

ISLA

Why can't you tell me what's going on?

JOHN

It's confidential.

ISLA

I'm your wife.

JOHN

It's for your own good.

ISLA

Why is it that phrase never comforts me?

JOHN

Maybe I should get the vodka.

ISLA

This isn't like you.

JOHN

What?

ISLA

All this secrecy. Leaving me out.

JOHN

I'm sorry. You're just going to have to take me on faith.

ISLA

Andrey wasn't happy. I had to drive him over to Martin's—or exile, as he calls it.

JOHN

Exile?

ISLA

Andrey doesn't like Martin. But all his other friends seem to be gone for the weekend—

JOHN

I'm sorry this was short notice. I have no control. *Will* doesn't have control. He's only got today—now or never. I'll make it up to Andrey.

ISLA

He's got every right to meet his brother.

JOHN

Half-brother. And that argument *might* hold water if Will wasn't such a . . .

ISLA

What?

JOHN
Our what?

ISLA
Our wedding night.

JOHN
Yes. Sure. Vaguely.

ISLA
Remember promising you'd never lie to me, or keep me in the dark about anything?

JOHN
Isla—

ISLA
Remember?

JOHN
I'm doing you a favor, believe me.

ISLA
If we're married—

JOHN
My mind's made up. Let it go.

(A beat)

ISLA
Jack Daniel's.

JOHN
What?

ISLA

Junior Senator from Tennessee? Jack Daniel's?

JOHN

Oh—God, yes. Of course. I'll get it. Thanks.

ISLA

Happy to help.

JOHN

(hesitating one last time)

A couple hours, I swear. Then they'll be gone, and then . . . I swear, everything will be just like it was.

ISLA

No, it won't.

(JOHN exits down toward the house. ISLA stares out)

Scene Two

(Lights up on the same scene. JOHN and WILL sit in the chairs. WILL's in a suit. ISLA stands near the table. GWYNN, slim and sharply dressed, examines one of the low walls as the others watch. WILL's in a suit. GWYNN's accent is not southern—more of a northern, urban background. On the other hand, WILL's accent, originally eastern, has indeed taken on a charming drawl, though there's nervousness beneath it. A bottle of Jack Daniel's has been added to the table)

WILL

Darling, stop that. There's no need.

GWYNN

Someone's got to look out for you.

(GWYNN runs what we see now is a small, metallic device—whatever the subtlest piece of hardware is—over the surface of the walls)

WILL

Gwynn, sweetheart, we're with family.

GWYNN

We're with your father, whom you hate, and your stepmother, whom you've never met but also hate. I know exactly who we're with.

WILL

(with a genteel laugh)

Don't talk like they're not here.

GWYNN

We're all grown-ups. We know what side we're on.

JOHN

Technically, I don't have a side. Just consult now. Give opinions, lay out options—

GWYNN

You mean those childish exercises in please-don't-hurt-me wishful thinking?

JOHN

We prefer to call them analyses.

GWYNN

You use the term ironically, right? Like you use the term "think tank"?

WILL

Stop now. I'm sorry, my wife can get a little—

ISLA

Insulting?

WILL

Unmannerly. Gwynn, you should apologize.

GWYNN

Why? The new administration won't.

JOHN

We don't know there's going to be a new administration.

GWYNN

Read the polls lately?

ISLA

(of GWYNN's electronic sweep)

Must you do that?

GWYNN

A place is either secure or it isn't.

WILL

It's *secure*. For God's sake, Darling—

ISLA

Really, Gwenn—

GWYNN

Gwynn.

ISLA

Sorry. Promised myself I wasn't going to— Gwynn, please believe me. We have no interest in bugging anyone's conversation.

GWYNN

I'd like to take your word for it, but—

JOHN

(to GWYNN)

Go ahead.

ISLA

What?

JOHN

Check it out. Take all day, if you like. Perfectly reasonable request.

GWYNN

Thank you.

JOHN

Want to check us?

GWYNN

Very much.

ISLA

John—!

(JOHN stands, holds out his arms as if to be frisked. GWYNN runs her sensor over him)

JOHN

Only takes a minute. Sort of tickles.

ISLA

This is humiliating!

JOHN

Sooner she gets it over with, the sooner we can—

GWYNN

You're clean.

JOHN

(as GWYNN steps away)

Great. Now, Isla?

ISLA

I'm not doing that!

JOHN

Pretend you're at the airport.

ISLA

No! *John*—

JOHN

They're guests, they don't trust us—

GWYNN

That's right.

JOHN

And there's no reason they should. So. Please?

(They all look at ISLA. She stares at them
in disbelief, then finally holds out her arms.
GWYNN runs her device over ISLA)

ISLA

What a pleasure to finally meet you. Gwynn the Thin.

JOHN

Isla—!

ISLA

It's what they call her.

GWYNN

I don't mind. It's powerful for a woman. My staff went to a lot of trouble to get that
phrase out there.

JOHN

You started it?

GWYNN

(finishing up)

You're clean.

ISLA

Are you?

(GWYNN offers her the device to use. ISLA turns away)

WILL

So? Satisfied?

GWYNN

Is there anybody else?

JOHN

We're alone. Everyone's off for the weekend. Our son's over at a neighbor's.

GWYNN

Really?

ISLA

He'll be over there all afternoon. His friend has a new computer game.

GWYNN

Which one?

ISLA

Which *computer* game?

GWYNN

By their games shall ye know them. What's the title?

WILL

Please, Gwynn—

GWYNN

You're the one who insisted on this visit. I'd advise you not to make the ice any thinner.

(to JOHN and ISLA)

So. Name of game?

ISLA

I forget.

JOHN

They obliterate things, right?

ISLA

They all obliterate things.

GWYNN

Who gets blasted?

ISLA

I don't know. It's sort of a variety-pack of aliens—that's what Andrey said.

GWYNN

What kind?

ISLA

Really . . .

GWYNN

Seriously. What kind?

ISLA

Oh . . . what did he say? Crablike beings from the Crab Nebula, twin aliens from a parallel universe, um, aliens from Uranus –you can imagine what those look like.

GWYNN

Xeno-Holocaustikon. Impressive. He'll make a good drone pilot. So, we're not going to meet little Andy?

JOHN

Andrey. And no, you're not.

GWYNN

What a shame.

ISLA

Looking for campaign contributions? He doesn't get his allowance 'til Friday.

GWYNN

(to JOHN)

So, whatever reason we're up here, it's not fit for children's ears?

JOHN

I couldn't say.

GWYNN

This really is going to be just between you and Will?

JOHN

Sorry.

GWYNN

You know he tells me everything.

JOHN

That's his business.

GWYNN

Will?

(as WILL gives a what-can-I-do shrug)

And what should I do while you're having your big talk? Stroll the grounds? Maybe check the tree line—?

WILL

Great idea.

JOHN

Isla, would you accompany her?

ISLA

You're kidding.

JOHN

We have a lot to talk about.

(as ISLA stares at him)

Sooner we do this, the sooner it's over.

ISLA

It may not be the only thing that's over.

JOHN

Great. There's a long path back there that winds through the woods. Isla can show you.

WILL

You two talk, get to know each other—

GWYNN

Suppose I could check the underbrush. Perfect cover for listening devices.

ISLA

We do not have listening devices!

JOHN

It's all right, they know. They're just careful, right? Election coming up—lots at stake.

GWYNN

(to WILL, as she starts up the hill)

Do not—I repeat, do *not* blow everything we've worked for while speaking with this man.

JOHN

You might want to swing by the house, get some tick spray.

GWYNN

God, I hate camping.

(passing ISLA)

You weren't going to tell me, were you?

(ISLA shrugs. GWYNN exits, heading down toward the house)

WILL

Anything from the Ritz-Carlton on down she calls “camping”. Give and take in a marriage, eh?

ISLA

Don’t ask me; I’m a giver.

(She exits down the hill, toward the house)

JOHN

Sorry if Isla’s a little—

WILL

That’s all right. She’s a beautiful woman. Rich too, by the look of the place.

JOHN

I’m sure you know exactly how wealthy she is.

WILL

Gotta say, you scored this time around. Younger wife.

JOHN

Lots of men have younger wives—

WILL

But yours has old money. Any chance you could get her to contribute to my campaign?

JOHN

Maybe at the crack of doom.

WILL

I’m serious, now. The rich give in all directions, cover their bets. Once I’m in office—

JOHN

It’s a free country. Under some administrations, anyway. Go ahead and ask her.

WILL

I will. Look at that view: Hudson at our feet. And what mountain's that? The big one, across the river.

JOHN

I don't know. To me they're all just . . . Catskills.

WILL

Yup. Sitting up here, counting her money. You must be getting smarter with age.

JOHN

I did *not* marry her for money. I've always been comfortable. Offered to put you through college. Even after you left, after all the humiliation your mother —

WILL

Stop. We're not talking about your divorce.

JOHN

I don't intend to.

WILL

Thank *God*. It is a base canard that talking about a divorce after the fact does any good.

JOHN

Fine. Fine, let's just relax and have a beer.

WILL

Can't.

JOHN

You can't have a beer?

WILL

Not one of those. Gwynn hasn't tasted it yet.

JOHN

You think we're trying to poison you?

WILL

I don't; she does. Nothing lethal; something to knock me off my game, maybe—that sort of thing.

JOHN

That's . . . nuts.

WILL

Is it? You're in the middle of threatening me right now.

JOHN

What do you mean?

WILL

"Will, I have something you can't afford to ignore. Get up here right now"?

JOHN

That wasn't a threat.

WILL

Coming from you? Don't know what else it could be.

(grabbing a beer, twisting it open)

Oh, hell. Let her catch me.

JOHN

What'll she do?

WILL

Rip my skin off, I imagine. Most times, it's not worth it. Usually I let her taste a few things, sit for half an hour—

JOHN

Distinct whiff of psychosis in the air.

WILL

Who are you to judge? Gwynn's as responsible as anybody for this upcoming ticket.

JOHN

I'll be sure to thank her.

WILL

You should. If this country's ever delivered from liberal betrayal, it'll be due to people like her.

JOHN

I'm almost sorry I didn't let Andrey meet you. He could have seen for himself.

WILL

Seen what?

JOHN

The arrogance.

WILL

We're not arrogant. We're right.

JOHN

Glad to clear *that* up.

WILL

I'll tell you one more thing, I wish your son was here. Know why? 'Cause he would absolutely love me.

JOHN

Why's that?

WILL

Why do you think? Power's charming. He'd see a winner.

WILL (cont'd)

(with a laugh)

Hell, you'd probably be rejected all over again, only this time by little Andrey Honeyman: your second heroic attempt to make a son who loves you.

JOHN

Remember who's he's named after?

WILL

Sure. That dead commie you used to play patty-cake with in the woods.

JOHN

Andrey Botvinnik. My negotiating counterpart. My friend.

WILL

I'm sure that's what he wanted you to think.

JOHN

You couldn't believe the pressure he was under. Took big risks with his government.

WILL

Didn't matter.

JOHN

How can you say that?

WILL

'Cause it doesn't matter how many risks you take if what you're doing in the first place *doesn't matter*.

JOHN

You're entitled to your opinion.

WILL

No, I'm entitled to the truth. So are you, if you'd ever accept it.

JOHN

The Geneva talks went on for decades. They were the baseline of civilized relations, even in the worst of times. They kept us engaged. They helped prevent nuclear accidents. They kept the Cold War under control and gave the world at least a *semblance* of hope.

WILL

They were a sideshow, and I've written as much.

JOHN

Every chance you get. I'm your father; how dare you go after me in print like that?

WILL

Because it was the truth. And God knows, it was a perfect angle for an op-ed piece. Going after my own father's record? Dismissing everything you stood for? No editor in the country could resist that.

JOHN

And that's how you built your career. Out of a personal vendetta.

WILL

Hardly that.

JOHN

When are you going to own your own vengefulness?

WILL

When you own your life. I didn't say half of what I could have said about the Geneva talks. I was pulling my punches.

JOHN

Oh, really? So this would be an example of pulling your punches?

(quoting from memory)

"The period of the early 1980's was a particularly shameful one for nuclear-arms negotiations. Both John Honeyman and his Soviet counterpart engaged in *personal* deal-making away from the rest of their teams and formal sessions."

WILL

Isn't that true?

JOHN

We were trying to make the system work.

WILL

It wasn't supposed to work. It was supposed to just grind on uselessly, providing glimmers of false hope and nothing else. Everything you did made Reagan's job harder.

JOHN

I gave him new options; that was my *job*. It's not my fault he rejected them. The only crime involved is you building your career by going after your own family in print.

WILL

You're not my family.

JOHN

We're blood. That's something you can never erase.

WILL

Watch me.

JOHN

You know, there's something else Andrey Botvinnik taught me: everything has a human side. Everything.

WILL

What in hell's *that* supposed to mean?

JOHN

It means you're a human being, and I can prove it.

WILL

Is that why you asked me up here? 'Cause I really don't have time —

JOHN

Before I do though, I want to ask you one question. Did your mother's affair with Senator Branch—I'm sorry if you don't want to talk about this, but I do—did her affair have any negative effect on you?

WILL

Are you kidding? I was the head cheerleader for that.

JOHN

Really?

WILL

You don't have a clue, do you? Senator Ben Branch was the best thing that ever happened in her life *or* mine. When he walked in our door, it was like every light in the house came on. First man I ever listened to who wasn't spouting an endless supply of idealistic bullshit. He *listened* to President Reagan; he *agreed* with him.

JOHN

I see.

WILL

I worked my little head off to get her and Ben together. Built him up every chance I got. I sat her down and said, "Ben Branch will change your life—and *mine*—if you let him". Tell you something else, too. Turned out I didn't have to argue that hard.

JOHN

I see.

WILL

Happy?

(a beat)

You going to ask me about your own affair?

JOHN

My—?

WILL

Your own pathetic little affair, yes. Don't you want to know how that affected my tender sensibilities?

JOHN

That was later. That was . . . months after your mother and Senator—

WILL

Tell you one thing—Mother wasn't too happy about it. An aide? Really, John. A twenty-five year-old—

JOHN

I don't know why that should have any—

WILL

Must have been a real break from the old negotiating table. Mother knew you just did it out of spite. She used to call her your "marital aide". Didn't make her laugh, but I thought it was entertaining. Can we please get to the main event?

JOHN

Is that why you rejected me? Because of a stupid affair— ?

WILL

God, no. I rejected you long before that. Nothing you stood for made any sense to me. Going through life afraid all the time? Constantly begging a brutal enemy to be "civilized"? That's what you did for a living. Even when you did manage to get home, you couldn't hear a different point of view. You never took anything I said seriously, not once.

JOHN

You were a child.

WILL

I wasn't always going to be. You would have done well to listen. Ben did. So—shall we end our happy stroll down Nostalgia Lane? Get to what exactly you *want* from me today?

JOHN

I, um . . . I need you to do me a favor. Guess that's the best way to put it.

WILL

What favor?

JOHN

I need you to leave politics.

WILL

Excuse me?

JOHN

I want you out of politics. For good.

WILL

Are you having a stroke?

JOHN

I'm serious.

WILL

I'm the junior Senator from Tennessee. I sit in the same seat Ben Branch held for twenty-seven years. In three days, Drew Hanlon's going to name me his running mate. In nine weeks, I'll be Vice President-elect. I'm rather deeply involved in politics.

JOHN

Tell Hanlon you don't want it. Finish out your final year as Senator and retire.

WILL

Is this why you begged me to come up here right before the convention?

JOHN

You're not at the convention yet. You're not nominated.

WILL

I'm *about* to be! You have any idea how tough it was to shake the press even to come up here?! They've been on my ass for weeks. Staff's back the hotel right now, lying their heads off to 'em. Gwynn and I had to drive up by *ourselves*.

JOHN

Sorry you couldn't bring servants—

WILL

Two and a half hours in a rental with her, in the mood she's in? Thank you *very* much. And when I finally get here, all I find out is you've lost your mind.

JOHN

Listen to me—

WILL

You listen. I could accept that you were hardly ever home as a father. You believed in what you were doing, running that puppet show in Geneva—even though nothing, absolutely *nothing*, was being decided there.

JOHN

I only—

WILL

And I didn't mind you claiming your deeply-flawed liberal viewpoint was not political at all, but somehow *above* all that and wholly concerned with the welfare of mankind. I didn't even mind when you refused to admit that Reagan had you going around a Swiss mulberry bush—

JOHN

Mulberry bush! That was in *every* article—

WILL

For *years* while he was back here winning the Cold War. But what I *do* mind is you having the effrontery to think you have the right to *comment* on my political career, let alone call for an end to it. You and I have gone in very different directions, John—and we have done so because *one* of us is intelligent.

JOHN

Will—

WILL

I would suggest that you respect that intelligence and never speak to me again. Now if you'll excuse me, I have to go tranquilize my wife and get out of here.

JOHN

(as WILL prepares to go)

I've got something on you.

WILL

What?

JOHN

I've got something on you.

WILL

What are you talking about?

JOHN

Something tangible.

WILL

I give up. I can't listen to you. Whatever you imagine you have, it won't bother Drew Hanlon.

JOHN

It won't?

WILL

I've been vetted. Totally. Nook and cranny. Believe me old man, there's nothing you can do that'll derail this train. Now if you'll pardon me, I have an obscenely expensive fundraiser in town and no more time for the clinically insane.

(calling)

Gwynn! *Gwynn, baby! We're going back!* Can they hear me?

JOHN

Probably not. Try her on your cell.

WILL

Can't. We didn't bring 'em.

JOHN

This *is* a stealth mission.

WILL

I have no idea how you can act like this and still call yourself my father. Liberal agenda must give people some magical power to betray their own children.

JOHN

I was never that much of a liberal—

WILL

You are now! You've gone all the way.

JOHN

I didn't "go" liberal; I was pushed.

WILL

By your buddy Botvinnik?

JOHN

No, by a bunch of Tea Party assholes who think that compromise is a criminal act and who stop at nothing to win.

WILL

It's so great to be around you, Dad. So, this is purely for politics?

JOHN

What else is there? Between us, anyway.

(A beat. They stare at each other)

What do you have on me?

WILL

A letter.

JOHN

Scene Three

(ISLA and GWYNN sit in the chairs. GWYNN inspects various food items on the table. She systematically puts samples in a small plastic bags, seals them and puts them in a briefcase on her lap. ISLA stares at her)

ISLA

How did you like the woods?

GWYNN

You mean, did I think it was beautiful or something?

ISLA

Or whatever . . .

GWYNN

Yeah. It's scenery, right?

ISLA

Right. We have it trucked up special.

(of the bagging process)

You know, you're allowed to have as much of that as you like. You don't have to squirrel it away in a briefcase.

GWYNN

Just need samples, thanks.

ISLA

Of the . . . poison food?

GWYNN

And the beer. You don't mind if I—?

ISLA

By all means.

GWYNN

(picking up an open beer)

Which of them was drinking this?

ISLA

Who knows?

(GWYNN pours some into the sort of cup used for urine samples then takes a sample from the other open beer. She snaps the covers closed and puts them in the briefcase)

ISLA

Do you do this everywhere you go?

GWYNN

Usually I have someone do it for me.

ISLA

Ah. And do they ever find any . . . toxic . . . ?

GWYNN

Not so far. Which shows you how well it's working.

ISLA

Right.

GWYNN

Still, it's not really about finding anything, is it? It's about them knowing you're looking.

(GWYNN stares at ISLA who, a little puzzled, turns to stare out)

ISLA

Hope the walk wasn't too long for you.

GWYNN

(as she continues bagging and labeling)

Of course it was. You should have golf carts.

ISLA

You know, down by the river—

GWYNN

Oh, God. Are we going to make small talk?

ISLA

Not if you—

GWYNN

It's bad enough we have to wait for the men. Where do you think they are, anyway?

ISLA

On a stroll of their own, I suppose.

GWYNN

I can't *bear* being here.

ISLA

Delightful to have you.

GWYNN

How much of a contribution do you plan to give Will's campaign?

ISLA

Excuse me?

GWYNN

You're taking up a full day of our time. Seems to me you'd want to pay for that.

ISLA

I . . . don't think I'm likely to contribute, thank you.

GWYNN

Why not? He's practically blood.

ISLA

He's reactionary.

GWYNN

He's going to win.

(putting her samples in the briefcase, locking it)

So, how much?

ISLA

You've got to be kidding.

GWYNN

You don't want a place at the table? There's absolutely nothing going on in Congress you need to promote or shield yourself from?

ISLA

Gwynn—

GWYNN

You're rich. You owe it to yourself to work with him.

ISLA

Let me just, um . . . ponder. Okay?

GWYNN

Fine. We'll need an answer by the time we leave.

(looking at the trees)

Think they'd hear me if I shouted?

ISLA

Who, Congress?

GWYNN

The men.

ISLA

Use your phone.

GWYNN

We didn't bring them. Phones show where you've been.

ISLA

Don't want to advertise your visit to the deranged left-wing parents?

GWYNN

We need the press focused on Will's politics, not his non-relationship with his father.
(a beat)

So, what about your friends? Can we get a contribution there?

ISLA

Where did Will ever find you? Sorry—that didn't come out right. How did you two get together?

GWYNN

(shouting very loud suddenly)

Will—!! *Will!!! WILL!!!*

(They listen. Silence)

ISLA

So. You. Will. How on earth?

GWYNN

It's not a secret. You'd know already, if you'd spent two seconds on the internet.

ISLA

Mea culpa. Please? Inquiring minds?

GWYNN

I'll tell you, on one condition.

ISLA

Which is?

GWYNN

We are not bonding.

(a beat)

I worked on Will's second campaign for the House. Volunteered straight out of college, stuffed envelopes, did whatever. Fortunately things weren't going well. Will had to fire some staff—which meant I kept moving up. I started wearing shorter skirts so he'd notice me—then longer ones again so he'd listen. I became his most trusted advisor, we turned things around, doubled his winning margin from his first campaign, held a very private victory party, if you get my gist, got married that same weekend and adopted two kids.

ISLA

That weekend?

GWYNN

A little later.

ISLA

I love a romantic story.

GWYNN

You know what's romantic? Planning ahead.

ISLA

Why'd you adopt? If it's not too—?

GWYNN

Made a decision in grad school. Had my tubes tied.

ISLA

You had your—? In grad school?

GWYNN

I'm a woman of strong ideas.

ISLA

But isn't that rather . . . ?

GWYNN

Final? Not really. We have two, perfectly-formed Chinese girls. Completely viable family. Anyway, tubal ligation was an afterthought compared to the other thing.

ISLA

The other—?

GWYNN

Double mastectomy. Elective.

ISLA

Jesus.

GWYNN

It made sense. Terrible family history. No reason to go through life lugging around two cancer bags. I got it all done.

ISLA

In grad school?

GWYNN

Wanted a political career. Why interrupt it later?

ISLA

That's certainly . . . streamlined.

GWYNN

Glad you see the virtue. It's worked out perfectly well. The girls are at Vanderbilt now. Twins, did I mention? Absolutely no trouble—they take care of each other.

(Suddenly there's the BING! of a text message)

ISLA

Sorry. Let me see what that is.

(ISLA reads the text, puts her cell back in her pocket)

GWYNN

So?

ISLA

Just Andrey. I'll read it later.

GWYNN

Go ahead. See what he wants.

ISLA

No, I . . . like to have him . . . apart right now, you know?

GWYNN

From us, you mean?

ISLA

Normally I don't bring my phone up here. I like having one place on Earth where it's not part of my body.

GWYNN

Wish I could get mine implanted. I would, if it weren't for the damn brain tumors.

ISLA

So. What were we talking about?

GWYNN

Me. But we're done.

ISLA

Right.

(a beat)

Want to know about me?

GWYNN

God, no! Could hardly keep my eyes open reading about you on the way up.

ISLA

Sorry to be uninteresting.

GWYNN

I wouldn't say "uninteresting". "Lame" is closer. Anyhow, I slugged my way through it. Now I know everything about you there is.

ISLA

I find that hard to believe.

GWYNN

(taking the challenge)

Your family's owned this massive estate on the Hudson for slightly less than a century, which makes you the new money around here. Six houses on the property. Since you're the black sheep, you live in the smallest one.

ISLA

It's not so—

GWYNN

The rift with your parents is the result of you becoming that most tiresome of all humans, a class traitor. You dropped out of your sister school, traveled the world on family money, convinced you were acquiring "wisdom" in Patagonia, Morocco, Amsterdam— but really you were on a worldwide drug and sex tour that lasted until the emergence of the AIDS epidemic, which changed your behavior and probably saved your life.

ISLA

Impressive.

GWYNN

Still at odds with your family, you settled in London where you dated an Iranian diplomat just to piss them off. Your infatuation with this man deepened however, and before you knew it you had married a strict Shi'ite Muslim and given him a boy child.

ISLA

You really have done your—

GWYNN

Since you'd learned nothing from the hostage crisis at the U.S. embassy, you allowed your husband to travel to Teheran with your son while you stayed in London taking exams for a course in—and this is the great part—comparative cultures.

ISLA

Please stop.

GWYNN

Why?

ISLA

You've proved your point. Researcher *par excellence*.

GWYNN

But there's so much more to—

ISLA

I don't care! All right? My . . . first husband and I had a . . . complex relationship. I don't accept what he did, but he did it out of deep conviction—

GWYNN

He should have been convicted—

ISLA

Do not make *light*. Do not . . . ! I had no reason to believe he'd . . . he'd . . .

(She trails off. A beat)

GWYNN

Ever see your son again? After you lost the court case, I mean?

ISLA

Once. When he was . . . seven. You have a cruel streak.

GWYNN

Does he ever contact you?

(as ISLA shakes her head no)

Still, not a total loss. At least your family gave you the unconditional pity you'd been looking for all your life. Took the broken bird back to the nest—not the main nest, but an ancillary one on the estate periphery—where, for decades now, you have licked your wounds and basked in their collective tolerance.

ISLA

That's not fair. I've had a full working life.

GWYNN

The Foundations! Mustn't forget that. Years of do-gooderism, endless "can't we all just get along" commentary for left-leaning journals. I'm sure it's all been very effective in providing your life with the illusion of . . . significance?

ISLA

I don't appreciate—

GWYNN

And *then*, against all odds, you perfected the illusion by marrying John and pooping out another baby boy—*guaranteed* not to be stolen by a religious fanatic.

ISLA

How horrible do you need to get?

GWYNN

This is good—right about here.

ISLA

You're incredible.

GWYNN

And you're useless, unless you can tell me why John wants to see Will.

ISLA

I have no idea.

GWYNN

He really doesn't confide in you?

ISLA

I could ask you the same thing.

GWYNN

Why did we come here? Why? It's got mistake written all over it.

(Another BING! ISLA quickly looks at her phone,
then shoves it back in her pocket)

GWYNN

Andrey again? Must be important.

ISLA

He can wait.

GWYNN

Call somebody. Call your husband.

ISLA

He doesn't have his phone.

GWYNN

Why not?

ISLA

He doesn't want to be disturbed.

GWYNN

(after a beat, twitching, as ISLA stares out)

I'm going to look for them.

ISLA

Take some bread crumbs.

GWYNN

How did John get Will to come here? He must have told you.

ISLA

Sorry.

GWYNN

Sorry, he didn't tell you? Or sorry, go fuck myself?

ISLA

You pick.

GWYNN

I'll say this: if your husband's trying to give Will a problem, any kind of problem, if he's trying to put obstacles in front of our path to the Presidency—

ISLA

Presidency—?

GWYNN

Eventually. Our path eventually. If he's trying to short-circuit us in any way, don't think you'll be magically beyond the reach of the White House. We will find a way to make you sorry.

ISLA

We? *Oh*—because you'll be First Lady. Lord and *Lady* Macbeth. They come as a pair. Forgot. Sorry.

GWYNN

We will hurt you.

ISLA

Threat registered. Thank you.

(as GWYNN eats a piece of cheese—her first morsel)

You didn't test that.

GWYNN

I'm suicidal.

(ISLA'S CELL RINGS with a RAUCOUS TONE—
a particularly amateurish piece of hip-hop)

GWYNN (cont'd)

Good God—! What's that?!

ISLA

(pulling out her STILL-RINGING phone)

Andrey. It's his band.

GWYNN

Will you please *answer*?!

ISLA

(answering)

Hi, there. How are you doing? Uh-huh. What? No, it's not a good time, honey. We're busy right now. It doesn't matter what we're doing. Andrey, we're busy. Yes, it's your house too, but right now— Andrey, I mean it. No. We've got people over. No one you'd know. Adults—boring adults.

(as GWYNN has a cracker)

ISLA (cont'd)

What do you need? What specifically do you—?

(with a sigh)

Okay. Okay. Is that it? That's the only one? 'Cause I'm not— All right. I'll bring it over. Soon as I can. Yes, real soon—soonish. Fine. Hey? I love you. I said I love you. Do you love me? Do you love—?

(turning her phone off)

He hung up.

GWYNN

(as ISLA turns her phone off)

"Nobody you'd know"? "Boring adults"?

ISLA

I wasn't going to tell him it was you.

GWYNN

Why not? He can look out for himself—that ring-tone's lethal. What's he want?

ISLA

Martin's new video game developed some glitch. He wants to get one of his other games.

GWYNN

Which one?

ISLA

Deathalizer 6 Billion—or something. The black one on top: that's all I know.

(rising)

Can't decide if I should go or wait for the men. Wish they'd tell us something.

GWYNN

Will better tell me something, or he'll be in a state of great pain.

(GWYNN gnaws her cracker like an angry squirrel)

ISLA

It's scary to think you could be the First Lady someday.

GWYNN

I could be more than that.

(suddenly yelling at the top of her voice)

WI-LL! WI-LL! WHERE ARE YOU?!! I can't believe you're collaborating in this.

ISLA

In what? I have no idea what's going on.

GWYNN

You expect me to believe that?

ISLA

I don't care what you believe.

GWYNN

You should start caring. Somewhere out there those men are saying something very stupid to each other—and whatever it is, our lives are about to get run over by it.

ISLA

Not if we're strong.

GWYNN

(nearly laughing)

Strong? Do you trust John? I don't trust Will. I don't trust him at all. Left on his own, he will fuck up. All men do.

ISLA

Not all men.

GWYNN

All men. Mankind. Every man. Fucks up. And they take us down with them. You of all women should know that.

ISLA

That's a pretty dark view.

GWYNN

It's the truth. I leave it to you: how's John doing today, on a scale from one to ten?

ISLA

I'm . . . I'm going to run Andrey's game over. Don't want him coming home.

GWYNN

Afraid to be around when the shit—whatever it is—hits the fan?

ISLA

I'm sure there'll be lots of shit left over by the time I'm back.

GWYNN

Tell me what's going on. Help me. There's still time to fix . . . whatever they're doing.

ISLA

I don't know what they're doing. And unlike you, I trust my husband.

GWYNN

Really?

ISLA

(starting to go)

I'll be back soon.

GWYNN

What am I supposed to do while you're gone?

ISLA

Get lost in the woods, for all I care.

GWYNN

I'm serious.

ISLA

If you want to be useful, bring the food down to the kitchen. Nobody's hungry, that's obvious. Probably should leave the beer, though, eh?

(exiting)

If you need excitement, you can always sweep the garage for bugs. Or, hell, just sweep it.

GWYNN

(once she's gone, pulling out her electronic device)

I think the house would be more interesting.

Scene Four

(Same scene, a short while later. The food's gone. One cooler remains. Off-stage, we hear the VOICES of JOHN and WILL and GWYNN in a heated three-way discussion as they come up from the house)

JOHN (off)

Will, where are you going now?

GWYNN (off)

Don't run away.

WILL (off)

I'm not!

GWYNN (off)

You can't admit something like that and just—

WILL (off)

I didn't admit anything!

JOHN (off)

Gwynn, don't—

GWYNN (off)

Who was she, Will?

WILL

(entering)

Nobody.

GWYNN

(entering)

So she didn't exist?

WILL
No!

GWYNN
Why are you *lying*?

JOHN
(entering)
You shouldn't eavesdrop.

GWYNN
I was sweeping the house, looking for bugs—that's the *opposite* of eavesdropping. And I'll thank you to keep out of this, blackmailer!

(to WILL)
Tell me the truth right now, and I'll help you fix it. If you don't, I'll grind your testicles to powder.

WILL
There's nothing to tell.

GWYNN
Then why does he have a letter?

WILL
It was nothing. It was centuries ago—happened in school.

GWYNN
You got someone pregnant.

WILL
I did not!

JOHN
Gwynn—

GWYNN

You shut up. You don't know who you're playing with.

(as JOHN sits, to WILL)

Isla won't be gone long. I need to know what the *fuck* is going on.

WILL

It's none of your business.

GWYNN

Everything you do is my business. You fart at a fund raiser, it's *my business*.

JOHN

I think you should tell her.

WILL

Thanks for the advice. This is all your fault!

JOHN

Don't blame me. I didn't live your life.

WILL

What do you mean by that?

JOHN

Driving someone to suicide?

GWYNN

What!?

WILL

I never did that!

JOHN

That's not what the letter says—

GWYNN

You killed someone?

WILL

No!

JOHN

How could you use a human being that way?

WILL

I didn't use anyone!

JOHN

Of course you did. Did you even love him?

GWYNN

What?

JOHN

You abandoned him. His letter said—

GWYNN

Him?

WILL

He knew who I was. What I wanted to do in life—

GWYNN

Him—!?

WILL

He knew it couldn't go on!

(A beat. WILL turns to look at GWYNN. She looks about to say something, but instead she starts to gag)

WILL (cont'd)

Honey?

(She gags again, then retches big-time. Nothing comes out, but otherwise it's becoming a full-scale bout of vomiting)

JOHN

Is she all right?

WILL

Honey, sit down. Put your head between your legs—
(to JOHN, as GWYNN does so, still retching)
Do you have a bag?

(GWYNN grabs her briefcase and struggles to unlock it. She finally gets it open and retches into it)

JOHN

Oh God, is she throwing up?

WILL

No, just . . . You know, just . . . dry heaves. That's a precaution only. She never eats enough to— Well, you've seen her.

(She gets over her spasm and locks the briefcase)

WILL (cont'd)

Honey? You better?

(as she nods, head still down)

Good. You just sit there, okay? 'Til you feel better.

(to JOHN)

You have no right to put her through this.

JOHN

I didn't lie to her.

WILL

We were in high-school!

JOHN

What difference does that make? He was obviously in love with you. He chose the same college just to be near you—

WILL

And I stopped seeing him there!

(as she suddenly retches again)

Honey, maybe you should go lie down.

JOHN

His letter talks about following you around campus, sitting outside your dorm—

(She retches again, then suddenly rises and runs out)

WILL

Not the woods, the house! Don't go in the—! Now she's disoriented. She'll throw up all over your woods.

JOHN

As you say, nothing comes out.

WILL

I hope you're satisfied.

JOHN

Not yet.

WILL

Why can't you let him rest in peace? Christian was an unstable kid. He was dead by the end of our first semester.

JOHN

Congratulations.

WILL

It wasn't my fault! How can you say that?! It was a tragedy. Saddest story in the world, but if it hadn't been me, he would've found someone else to kill himself over.

JOHN

You saying you two weren't in love?

WILL

No, just— We were kids! We were—

(SOUND of GWYNN retching loudly in the woods)

You swear you haven't told anyone?

JOHN

Not yet.

WILL

I don't understand why he wrote you. He sent the same letter to . . . to Mother, but she at least had the humanity to let me burn it. I thought that was the only one. Why you?! He knew how I felt about you.

JOHN

He wanted someone to know. Someone who . . . wouldn't blow your cover. Your parents. Who better, when you think about it?

(as we again hear GWYNN retch in the woods)

She gets pretty wound up.

WILL

She'll be all right in a little while. Not looking forward to that, either.

JOHN

I'm sorry she overheard—

WILL

It's just the letter, right? Let me buy it.

JOHN

You still think I need money.

WILL

I can't quit my career!

JOHN

But that's my price.

WILL

What good would that do?! Hanlon will name someone else with the same views as me. What in hell's the difference?

JOHN

The difference is, they won't be my son.

WILL

Your . . . ? I haven't been your son in a very long time. I took Ben Branch's name, in case you hadn't noticed.

JOHN

You're mine. You're my son. I don't care what your name is. And you are not going to contribute to Drew Hanlon's administration.

WILL

I'll be Vice-President. How am I going to contribute? He probably won't give me any responsibility at all.

JOHN

You'll be one step from the top. When Hanlon's term is up, you'll be right there, ready to run yourself. I will not allow you to do that.

(Suddenly ISLA's voice comes from below)

ISLA (off)

I'm back!

JOHN

Isla, don't come up right now —!

ISLA (off)

Why not?

JOHN

We're talking.

ISLA

(entering)

What are you talking about? Where's Gwynn, anyway?

GWYNN (off)

(shouting in the woods)

A boy?!? You fucked a boy!?!?

ISLA

(as GWYNN retches in the woods)

What's going on?

Scene Five

(A short time later. The four of them sit quietly.
 GWYNN looks ashen. Next to her is the bottle of
 Jack Daniel's. She methodically does shots as
 JOHN reads from a transcript of a letter)

JOHN

" . . . even though Will made the first move, even though he seduced me, it was my fault. I was so obviously in love with him, I couldn't hide it. I love him. I know he loves me, but he won't see me anymore or return my calls. Tonight I'll stop being a problem for Will or anybody else. I'm telling you this because someone has to know the way it was between us, what our love was like. Someone has to know what happened. I hope you won't mind that I wrote you, Mr. Honeyman. You're his natural father. Please protect him."

ISLA

That's the end?

JOHN

He signed it, "Thank you, Christian".

(handing the transcript to WILL who hands it to GWYNN)

That's just a transcript, of course. The letter itself is . . . safe. Handwritten, of course.

GWYNN

Is this real?

WILL

Christian sent the same letter to my mother. She showed it to me, then destroyed it. She never said you got one.

JOHN

I never told her. Figured it was your business, tragic as it was. But when you went into politics and started taking some of the positions you took, I wrestled with myself over . . . well, over you know.

WILL

Blackmailing me.

JOHN

I kept telling myself, he's just a Congressman. It's Tennessee, for God's sake—*part* of Tennessee. They'd vote for someone like that anyway.

GWYNN

Someone like that?

(Angrily, GWYNN balls up the typescript copy. She looks around a moment, then picks up her briefcase, unlocks it, tosses the balled-up paper inside and locks it again. She puts the briefcase down and stares straight ahead, lost in her own murderous thoughts)

ISLA

So . . . are you gay?

WILL

Damn it—!!

JOHN

Isla.

ISLA

It's just that suddenly he's more interesting—

JOHN

I don't care—

ISLA

(to WILL)

Are you?

WILL

I'm a Republican about to be in a national race. There *is* only one sexual orientation.

ISLA

So . . . you never need to be with men?

WILL

I need to be Vice-President, that's what I need.

ISLA

Do you miss men?

GWYNN

I'm sorry—am I not here?!

(to ISLA)

You need to shut up—right now—or I will *make* you shut up.

WILL

Hey—

JOHN

There's no need to—

GWYNN

There's plenty of need, believe me.

WILL

Honey, you shouldn't drink on an empty—

GWYNN

(turning angrily on WILL)

Why didn't you tell me about this?!

WILL

I thought it was erased! After my mother died, I thought I was the only one who—

GWYNN

You *thought*.

(to JOHN)

So, it's just the letter? That's your sum total of incriminating evidence?

JOHN

What more do I need? Of course, it doesn't incriminate you at all, Will. When you were young, you had sex with another boy—happens all the time.

ISLA

I think it makes you more interesting.

GWYNN

Will you sell us the letter?

JOHN

No point. Wouldn't get me what I want.

WILL

Which is me out of public life? Simply because you oppose my politics?

JOHN

Can you think of a better reason?

WILL

I don't get it. You oppose the right wing because you think it doesn't support the principles of democracy, yet you're willing to do *this*?

JOHN

I'm getting you out of politics, yes. However I can.

WILL

Why? I represent a clear majority.

JOHN

You represent me. That's all I'm concerned with.

WILL

I believe we've reached new depths of hypocrisy here. No wonder you don't want Andrey around. What do you think he'd make of this?

JOHN

I think we can leave my son out of it, don't you?

WILL

I'm your son. Seems to me Andrey might be grateful to know how you treat family.

JOHN

That's not in front of us now.

GWYNN

It will be. You think Andrey really won't find out what you're doing to Will?

JOHN

Not if Will leaves public life.

ISLA

And if he doesn't? Have you thought about that?

JOHN

Isla—

ISLA

I wasn't supposed to know. What if Andrey does find out?

JOHN

He would understand. You understand.

ISLA

I do?

GWYNN

Trust him now?

JOHN

Damn it, my mind's made up. I have to work with what I've got. I don't have a letter about Drew Hanlon—or you, Gwynn, or any of the legion of self-promoting bastards who'll come in with the next administration. God knows, I wish I did—I'd have no problem using them all. All I have is a letter about my son.

WILL

And no scruples.

JOHN

Are you serious?! You support the Defense of Marriage Act! You're its strongest supporter!

WILL

What's wrong with that? It's a matter of conscience.

JOHN

You are gay! You're a gay man.

WILL

Not anymore!

JOHN

I'm sorry—did the gay part just fall off?

ISLA

John—

JOHN

How much bullshit do you have to spin to make your stated positions agree with who you really are?

WILL

A lot. Like everybody else.

GWYNN

There's not a politician alive who doesn't talk a better game than he lives. Grow up, John. It's not about being pure. It's about representing whatever the people want.

JOHN

Or whatever bill of goods you can sell them.

GWYNN

Welcome to America.

ISLA

Maybe we took the food down too soon. Should I—?

THE OTHER THREE

(together)

No.

GWYNN

(after a silence)

What if Will worked for you?

JOHN

What?

GWYNN

What if he, in the administration, became a voice of . . . I don't know what you'd call it—?

ISLA

Moderation?

GWYNN

Exactly. What if he, you know, working from the inside, was a force for . . . you know—

ISLA

Moderation?

GWYNN

Yes. On Hanlon, on all of them.

JOHN

Wouldn't that violate his most deeply-held principles?

WILL

Maybe not. I mean . . . it depends.

JOHN

On what?

WILL

I couldn't go *too* far. Wouldn't want to cut my own throat.

JOHN

Got to save yourself for the old Presidential run?

WILL

Who knows?

GWYNN

Think about it. It might be exactly what you're after. You've got the letter. You're holding that over him. How far could he stray?

JOHN

Maybe he could wear a wire so I can monitor his conversations with Hanlon.

WILL

I don't think that would work.

ISLA

He was joking.

WILL

Oh. But you would hear everything I said in public. My stated positions. If I gave you my solemn pledge—

JOHN

Wow. The solemn pledge of a politician.

WILL

My word is good. I've always been upright in my dealings.

JOHN

You voted against every pro-gay measure you ever saw.

WILL

Those are matters for the people! They should be decided by referendum.

JOHN

Can we please get back to a serious conversation? Suffice to say I'm not reassured by your solemn pledge.

GWYNN

Is that our job?

JOHN

Pardon?

GWYNN

Reassuring you. That can't be our job. Our job is to win a majority vote. Judging by the polls, it's clear we'll be doing that.

ISLA

"We"?

GWYNN

Do you even believe in representative democracy? If people want to elect my husband, knowing his positions, don't they have the right to?

JOHN

If the letter comes out, they won't want to.

GWYNN

Exactly. You—one man—through a single act, will dictate to an entire nation.

JOHN

I'm not in charge of how people react. I'm putting the truth out there—

GWYNN

An irrelevant truth.

JOHN

The voters can decide that.

(to WILL)

Think of it as a referendum.

GWYNN

The law can decide it, too.

ISLA

What do you mean?

GWYNN

Extortion is, I believe, a crime.

JOHN

This isn't extortion.

GWYNN

How can you call it anything else? You *will* go to jail.

(to ISLA)

You too, if I have anything to say about it.

ISLA

Is she right?

JOHN

Don't listen to her.

ISLA

Is she?

JOHN

I'm trying to protect our society.

GWYNN

Not too grandiose.

ISLA

Have you thought about this? If it's a crime, an actual crime—

JOHN

Publishing a letter that's my own property? That contains no lies?

GWYNN

Demanding something to keep it secret—

WILL

Seeking unfair influence over a government official—

JOHN

Corporations do it every day.

GWYNN

Doesn't mean you can.

ISLA

We could be prosecuted?

JOHN

Even if we could, we'd still have him out of politics.

ISLA

I'm not going to jail, John. I'm not.

JOHN

They're just trying to scare you.

ISLA

You're the one who's scaring me. I had no idea—about any of this.

JOHN

I was trying to keep you out of it. If Gwynn hadn't overheard, you'd never have known.

ISLA

And that makes me feel better *how*?

GWYNN

For God's sake. Isla, you need to talk your husband out of committing a crime.

(to JOHN)

And you need to rejoin the rest of America, cast your vote and shut the fuck up once you lose. Now where's that letter?

JOHN

Well hidden. Can we move this conversation forward? I'm not interested in controlling a secret agent in the Drew Hanlon administration. It totally misses the point.

GWYNN

Which is?

JOHN

Which is, that you should have more pride. Both of you.

GWYNN

Because we're related to you?

JOHN

Yes. It's humiliating that my own son has become such a phony. The lowest example of "say-anything-for-a-vote" hucksterism.

GWYNN

That hurts your tender sensibilities, eh?

JOHN

It hurts everything. I want him out of it.

GWYNN

Isla? Is that how you feel?

ISLA

You want my opinion?

GWYNN

At this point, why in hell not?

ISLA

I love my husband, and I support him. Even when he's wrong.

JOHN

Are you saying I'm wrong?

ISLA

I don't know if you're wrong. Even if you are, I don't know if you're more wrong than they are. Either way, I know I support you.

GWYNN

Returning from the Land That Good Sense Forgot, we were talking about how Will might be able to stay on the ticket if—

JOHN

No. We are not talking about that. I won't accept Will in public life. That's what I'm saying. Unless of course he's willing to go totally public.

WILL

You know I can't do that.

JOHN

And I can't let you help Drew Hanlon cut the heart out of this nation's middle class.

WILL

Here we go—

JOHN

I can't let you help him brutalize the poor and oppressed and drain our last reservoirs of hope and honor in the process. If you try to stay, I'll publish the letter.

ISLA

And go to jail?

JOHN

If I have to.

ISLA

Do I get a vote?

JOHN

No. This is something I have to do.

ISLA

Something you had to keep secret.

JOHN

I'm sorry. It couldn't be avoided.

GWYNN

Gee, your husband lied to you. When has *that* happened before?

ISLA

Shut up! Talk about glass houses—

JOHN

Isla, I hope you can see my point of view.

ISLA

Barely.

GWYNN

He must seem like a stranger to you now.

ISLA

Will you please shut up?

WILL

You can see why I didn't talk to him for thirty years. Hell, I should be in the city right now, having my butt kissed by the media. Instead I'm talking to a mental defective about ancient history.

JOHN

I'd rather be mentally defective than a self-hating gay.

GWYNN

Would you rather be a eunuch? 'Cause that's what you are.

WILL

Gwynn—

GWYNN

Don't you see? That's why he's doing this.

(to JOHN)

Ben Branch cut your balls off. And Will's been doing it ever since, rising to power while you disappeared into the political woodwork.

WILL

Please, honey—

GWYNN

No one even hears about you unless Will mocks you in print.

ISLA

If I were you, I wouldn't talk about castration.

GWYNN

Why not? Want some lessons?

WILL

Can we all just *regroup* here for a second?! Can we?!

(to JOHN)

I never made Christian kill himself. I slept with him, in high-school. That's all. How long should I be *punished* for that? Gwynn honey, pass me that bottle—I need a drink.

GWYNN

No.

WILL

What do you mean, no?

JOHN

It's not poison.

GWYNN

I know it's not poison; I've been drinking it.

WILL

Come on, honey—

GWYNN

No. You do not drink right now.

WILL

Why not?

GWYNN

Because we're negotiating. And forgive me, dear—you are a sloppy drunk.

WILL

You're a mean one.

GWYNN

Which is more effective. John, I know it's difficult for a man without a sack—

ISLA

Jesus!

GWYNN

But face the facts: Will rejected you, and you've been waiting for payback.

JOHN

That's absurd.

WILL

Is it? I did hate you back then. I did. And you knew it.

(to ISLA)

Oh, he'd write me, he'd even call. But his mind wasn't in it, let alone his heart.

(to JOHN)

Mother used to say you were consumed by work. That's how she put it. "Consumed".

Like your work just ate you up, in one big gulp.

JOHN

I was doing something important!

WILL

You weren't doing shit! But you pretended it was world-shattering, 'cause otherwise you would've actually had to face *us*.

(to ISLA)

Mother never complained. She was used to denying herself.

JOHN

Oh, for God's sake. She *understood*.

WILL

She did, eh? Is that why she was so ripe for the picking when Ben Branch came along? You ever wonder about *that*?

(to ISLA)

One day it just all broke. All of it. Happiest day of my life.

JOHN

That's not true.

WILL

Does he talk about it ever? My mother and Senator Branch? Or him and that oversexed aide in Geneva?

(to JOHN)

You started staying in Geneva over Christmas once you had her. I was only fifteen, but I knew what you were doing.

(to ISLA)

Can you imagine how my mother felt?

JOHN

That's *enough!*

WILL

Anyway. That's the kind of man you married. Wish you well.

JOHN

I stayed in Geneva because what I was doing there was significant.

WILL

Like hell. The world was terrifying back then—even more terrifying than now—and you spent every minute trying to figure out a way to eliminate our own weapons.

JOHN

We had far too much destructive—

WILL

Weapons won the Cold War! Weapons—more and more *of* 'em. The only appropriate time to eliminate our weapons was after those Soviet bastards gave the fuck *up*! Reagan knew that; a child does. But you didn't.

JOHN

Andrey Botvinnik once told me something—

WILL

Oh, *God*—!

JOHN

He said, "Remember, the negotiations are all we have. To start down any other path is to put our foot over the cliff".

WILL

I'm sure you were an adorable couple, butt-fucking out there in the woods. But back in the rational world, Reagan was spending the Commies into the *dirt*—and that's what mattered. Damn it, I want a *drink*!

GWYNN

No.

WILL

Gwynn—

GWYNN

No!

WILL

(to ISLA)

Just before she died my mother asked me to reconcile with John. Can you believe it?

ISLA

Yes.

WILL

All I could think was, who in hell would I reconcile *with*? I was right, too. Look at him: a man who wants to destroy me simply because he doesn't agree with my views. Honey, I really could use a drink.

GWYNN

(ignoring him, to JOHN)

Will any amount of money will change your mind?

JOHN

No.

WILL

Gwynn—

GWYNN

And you're willing to go to jail if need be?

JOHN

Yes.

WILL

(moving for the bottle)

Just give me the—

GWYNN

(eluding WILL's reach, still on JOHN)

And nothing we say will make any difference?

WILL

Gwynn—!

ISLA

All he wants is a drink.

GWYNN

John? You see where we are?

JOHN

Not really.

GWYNN

It's pretty obvious—

WILL

Gwynn—!

GWYNN

(whirling, tossing her drink in WILL's face)

Have a drink! *Have a fucking drink!*

(to JOHN, as WILL pulls out a handkerchief
and wipes off his face)

The only thing you have is the letter. If the letter's destroyed, you've got nothing. You can't "claim" this happened. That's where we are.

JOHN

I'm not going to destroy the letter.

GWYNN

No, we are.

JOHN

What do you mean?

GWYNN

We're going to search, we're going to find the letter and we're going to destroy it.

JOHN

Why would we let you do that?

GWYNN

We don't need your permission. We're younger and stronger than you, and 'way more motivated.

WILL

Honey, we can't—

GWYNN

Shut *up*.

ISLA

What are you talking about? You're our *guests*.

GWYNN

Guests of extortionists? I'd say we have a pretty free hand.

WILL

I'm not going to use physical—

GWYNN

You'll use whatever I tell you to use to salvage this career, understand? If I tell you to hurt this old man, then you will hurt this old man.

JOHN

You're not going to find anything. The letter's not here.

GWYNN

Oh. Where is it?

JOHN

In our safety deposit box at the bank. You can search all you want. Eventually you'll have to give up and start being civilized again.

GWYNN

Civilized? *Civilized*? Let me tell you something, Pa Honeyman: we're not going home to rot in Nashville 'cause some non-entity has a piece of paper. That letter is here. I know it.

JOHN

How?

GWYNN

Because a safety deposit box is where I would put it. And you're not like me.

JOHN

No, I'm not.

GWYNN

You would keep it close. You know why? Because you're optimist. You think people can actually become better. Spontaneously.

JOHN

Can't they?

GWYNN

You haven't seen Will in all those years, and some tiny part of you said, "What if he's changed? Or what if he's changing? What if there's the smallest grain of hope?"

WILL

Honey, this is getting a little —

GWYNN

Shut up! I know what I'm doing!

JOHN

Do you monitor your blood pressure?

GWYNN

Fuck you.

JOHN

You need to take care of yourself.

GWYNN

I'll take care of you. You hear me? I will take care of you.

ISLA

Don't threaten him.

WILL

Honey—

GWYNN

(to JOHN)

The letter has to be here. Because you didn't know, one hundred percent for certain, that Will might not want to be your son again. What if he fell into your arms, weeping, begging you to take him back? What if he said he'd change his politics if he had to, just to make you proud?

JOHN

That's absurd.

GWYNN

Of course it is, but tell that to your vanity. Tell that to your need. The letter's here John, and we're going to get it.

ISLA

We're not going to let you search our house.

GWYNN

If we have to tie you up, we will.

ISLA

Tie us *up*—?

GWYNN

(to WILL)

I saw a ball of twine on the porch. Go down and get it.

JOHN

There's no need for that. We won't move.

GWYNN

Do I have your *pledge*?

ISLA

You don't have mine.

JOHN

It's all right, dear.

ISLA

I'm *not* being tied up by anybody!

JOHN

Let them search. They won't find it.

ISLA

I'm starting to hope they will.

JOHN

What if I swear that the letter's at the bank?

GWYNN

Swear? You want to swear? Like a pledge? Or an oath?

JOHN

I'm being serious.

GWYNN

Swear on your son.

JOHN

What?

GWYNN

On Andrey. On your boy, on his cute, little life. Swear on that, Father of the Year.

JOHN

I don't think that's very—

GWYNN

You want me to believe you? Do it.

JOHN

Swear on his life? What does that even mean?

GWYNN

It means if you don't act in good faith, God—in whom I believe deeply—will kill little Andrey. Either directly or through his agents here on earth. God will end your son's life—that's what it means.

ISLA

That's barbaric.

GWYNN

I'm sorry, but some people take an oath seriously.

(to JOHN)

If you're not up to it—

JOHN

I swear.

GWYNN

On?

ISLA

Don't!

JOHN

It's just words. It's not real.

ISLA
Don't.

JOHN
It's superstition.

ISLA
Don't.

JOHN
I swear on Andrey's life.

ISLA
How could you bring him into this?

JOHN
I'm just trying to do things the easiest way.

ISLA
You failed.

WILL
(after a beat)
So . . . Do we need the twine, or—?

GWYNN
Yes.

JOHN
But I swore—

GWYNN
I lied, John. Just wanted to see if you'd do it.
(to WILL)
How do we ever lose to liberals?

JOHN

You really are crazy, aren't you?

GWYNN

You're the crazy one, if you think Will's going to abandon a national stage to become some *pundit* with a *blog*—

ISLA

That's all he deserves! It's all either of you deserve!

GWYNN

So? Twine?

(as WILL exits)

You should probably both sit in the chairs—

ISLA

No.

GWYNN

Will's twice your size.

JOHN

(sitting in a chair)

Search my office first. Get that out of the way. Don't worry about messing things up.

GWYNN

Gee. I won't. Isla?

ISLA

I remember when we used to have a civilization.

GWYNN

No time for nostalgia.

(calling)

Will? How's it coming!?

I don't see it!

WILL (off)

By the *door!*

(calling)

GWYNN

Do something!

(to JOHN)

ISLA

I am.

JOHN

(not moving from the chair)

What are you—a *Quaker!*?

ISLA

(staring at him with disbelief)

There's no point in—

JOHN

(ISLA rushes GWYNN, takes a wild swing at her and misses)

Watch it!

GWYNN

Watch *this!*

ISLA

Isla, what are you—!?

(ISLA swings again, but GWYNN easily sidesteps it)

JOHN

GWYNN

Will—!

WILL (off)

Coming!

(Just as GWYNN turns back, ISLA catches her with a right to the midsection. GWYNN goes down to her knees)

JOHN (cont'd)

Jesus—!!

ISLA

(to JOHN)

You want to get up now? You want to get up and defend your *wife*?!

JOHN

(rising)

Gwynn, are you—?

ISLA

(grabbing her)

Don't help her!

JOHN

(trying to pull away, as GWYNN rises unsteadily)

You hit a guest!

ISLA

I'll do more than that!

(As WILL finally returns with the twine, GWYNN rushes ISLA, driving her into the ground)

WILL

Gwynn—!

JOHN

No—!!

(They struggle as JOHN and WILL try to pull GWYNN off. She's tenacious and holds on tight. WILL tries again, but as he does so, GWYNN's elbow flies up and catches him on the bridge of his nose. He falls back)

WILL

Aggh--!! SHIT!!

JOHN

What are you doing?! Are you all right?

WILL

No—! Fuck—!!

(JOHN grabs GWYNN and struggles to pull her off ISLA)

GWYNN

Let go!

JOHN

Get off!

GWYNN

Will! Help!

WILL

You hit me!

JOHN

Get *OFF!!* What's wrong with you two?!

(JOHN wrestles GWYNN away from ISLA, who rises slowly, a little dazed. GWYNN moves immediately to

the Jack Daniel's bottle and reaches for her shot glass.
WILL pulls out a handkerchief to catch the blood from
the cut on his nose)

GWYNN

Physically attacked by my host. *That's* a new one—

JOHN

Will? How are you?

WILL

It *hurts*.

JOHN

I think we should all calm down. Isla? Are you okay? Isla?

(ISLA, whose gaze has never left GWYNN,
Suddenly piles into her, knocking her over)

WILL

Oh, Christ—!

JOHN

ISLA—!!

(ISLA claws the shot glass out of GWYNN's hand
and beats GWYNN's head savagely with it)

WILL

Jesus—!!!

JOHN

STOP IT—!!!

ISLA

Tie me now! *Tie me up now!!*

(JOHN and WILL grab ISLA and, struggling mightily, pull her off. GWYNN's head is bleeding. WILL forces ISLA into a chair. As he does so, ISLA, JOHN and GWYNN all stare open-mouthed down the hill)

WILL

(his back to them)

Gwynn, are you all right? Gwynn?

(WILL looks around and sees what they see: ANDREY HONEYMAN enters, slowly walking up from the house)

ANDREY

Hi, Mom. Dad.

ISLA

Andrey?

ANDREY

What are you doing?

(They all look at each other)

JOHN

Talking politics.

Scene Six

(A few moments later. As ANDREY looks on, WILL presses a napkin to stop the bleeding from the cut on GWYNN's forehead. ISLA and JOHN sit on the low walls, looking sheepish. ANDREY holds the ball of twine)

GWYNN

Ow!

WILL

I'm sorry. Am I pressing too hard?

ANDREY

Should I call a doctor?

ALL FOUR OF THE OTHERS

No!

ANDREY

I don't know . . . you guys were going at it pretty good.

GWYNN

How long were you watching us?

ISLA

Why did you come back here?

ANDREY

You gave Martin's mom the wrong game.

ISLA

The wrong . . . ? I brought the one on top—the black one.

ANDREY

The one *under* the one on top—that's what I said. *Deathalizer 6 Billion 2.*

ISLA

(trying to stretch her side, which hurts—sore ribs)

Oh, for God—! *Ow—!*

JOHN

Watch it, careful.

ISLA

Now you're solicitous?

ANDREY

Is that really him?

JOHN

Who?

ANDREY

You know, Will Branch.

ISLA

Yeah, it's him.

ANDREY

Cool.

ISLA

How did you . . . get here?

ANDREY

Martin loaned me his scooter.

ISLA

That's not legal on the road. You should've called. I'd have brought the right game over.

ANDREY

You look kinda busy.

GWYNN

That's none of your business! Mind your mother!

WILL

Gwynn.

JOHN

How is she?

GWYNN

I'm *fine*. Will you get rid of him?!

JOHN

What? Yes—okay.

(to ANDREY)

Come on, I'll drive you back.

ANDREY

I can take the scooter.

ISLA

No, you can't. You're in deep trouble already.

(ANDREY swiftly moves to shake hands with WILL)

ANDREY

Hi, I'm Andrey.

WILL

Oh, um . . . hi.

ANDREY

Are you really going to be Vice President?

WILL

There's a . . . good chance.

ANDREY

I knew something was going on over here. Martin says you're not related to me, but he's a total dipshit. We are related, right?

WILL

I believe so.

GWYNN

John, can you please . . . ?

ANDREY

(pulling out his cell)

Oh—can I get a picture?

ALL OF THE OTHERS

No!

ANDREY

All right. God. What's the problem?

JOHN

Nothing. There's no problem. We just need to . . . go, that's all.

ISLA

I'll take him.

JOHN

You sure?

ISLA

I'm fine. Come on.

ANDREY

(extending his hand to GWYNN)

I'm Andrey.

GWYNN

(not extending hers)

That's great.

ISLA

Andrey — *now*.

ANDREY

I think I should stay.

ISLA

No way.

(to the others, starting to usher him out)

I'll be back as soon as —

ANDREY

(slipping her grasp)

Can I just ask one question?

ISLA

No!

ANDREY

(to WILL)

Are you really gay?

ISLA

Andrey.

ANDREY

I'm not against it or anything.

What's going on?
GWYNN

I have no idea.
JOHN
(to ANDREY)
How much did you hear?

Of you guys? Not much.
ANDREY

How did you hear?
WILL

Where were you?
GWYNN

Up in my room.
ANDREY

You can't hear us from there.
ISLA

I used my equipment. You know, from Radio Shack.
ANDREY

Radio Shack?
GWYNN

Oh, my God.
ISLA

"Oh, my God" what?
WILL

ISLA

(to ANDREY)

You mean the . . . the . . . ?

GWYNN

The what?!

ISLA

It's nothing. Just a little camera thing. And a little listening . . . It cost how much?

ANDREY

Thirty dollars.

(to GWYNN)

I was only—

GWYNN

How long were you listening!?

ANDREY

A while?

ISLA

Cheap little audio/video thing. For surveillance. It's a toy.

ANDREY

Is not.

(to WILL)

Did he really do that?

WILL

Who? What?

ANDREY

That Christian guy?

WILL

You heard *that?!*

JOHN

Andrey, this is none of your business.

GWYNN

Did you record it? Were you recording?

ANDREY

What?

GWYNN

Did you just listen, or did you record?

ANDREY

Sure. I've got it, if that's what you mean.
(pulling out his cell again)

Want to see?

ISLA

Oh, my Lord.

GWYNN

Yes. Please.

(ANDREY plays it back for her. Very faintly, we hear
WILL's voice from earlier)

WILL (on recording)

" . . . talking to a mental defective about ancient history. I never made Christian kill himself. I *slept* with him, in high school. How long should I . . . ?"

GWYNN

That's enough. That's great, that's—thank you.
(as ANDREY turns it off)

GWYNN (cont'd)

Great . . . quality. For a toy.

ANDREY

It's *not*.

ISLA

Manners.

GWYNN

Have you shared it?

ANDREY

What?

GWYNN

Shared it. With *anyone*?

ANDREY

Not yet. Should I?

ISLA

Please don't.

WILL

My God, my life is over.

ANDREY

What were you fighting about?

JOHN

We were not fighting. It was a spirited discussion.

ISLA

Andrey—this recording, it's in the equipment in your room, right? I mean, do you have it on more than one . . . ?

ANDREY

Yeah.

ISLA

And you've got it on your phone there . . .

ANDREY

Uh-huh.

ISLA

And you haven't sent it to anyone? No friends, or strangers or . . . anyone?

ANDREY

You mean, did I put it on the cloud or something?

WILL

The *cloud*? Oh, *God*—!

ANDREY

I could, if you want—

ALL FOUR OF THE OTHERS

No.

ANDREY

Why are you all so jumpy?

(to ISLA)

Is it 'cause you were punching her?

ISLA

I was not punching her!

GWYNN

And I'm not bleeding.

ANDREY

Whatever.

(his finger on the key)

Oh—! Can I send it to Martin?

ALL FOUR OF THE OTHERS

No!

GWYNN

(to WILL)

Take it!

WILL

What?

GWYNN

The phone. Take the *phone*.

JOHN

Andrey, may I see your phone for a second? Please?

ANDREY

(handing it to JOHN)

'Kay.

ISLA

(to ANDREY)

You can't send it anywhere, Honey, because . . . because I *was* punching. I was. I was punching this nice lady, and I'd be embarrassed if you sent that. To anyone.

WILL

(reaching for the phone)

Give it here.

JOHN

Hold on. Son, I'd like you to go up to your room right now and get everything you used

JOHN (cont'd)

to make this little movie, okay? Take Will with you. And—is this in your laptop now?

ANDREY

Sure.

JOHN

Then I want you to bring it here, okay? Laptop, whatever—anything you have this particular recording on.

ANDREY

Why?

JOHN

You're about to get a new computer. New phone, everything. Bigger, better, newer—all of it.

ANDREY

You're kidding.

JOHN

Nope. In fact, why not bring up everything you have in your room that's electronic. We'll spend a lot of money and upgrade your whole . . . array.

ANDREY

Sweet!

JOHN

Just don't send anything from any of the things you have right now to anyone, okay?

ANDREY

Deal.

WILL

Come on.

ANDREY

This *rocks*.

(as they leave)

Are you going to be the first gay Vice-President?

WILL

My God.

(They're gone. JOHN holds up ANDREY's cell)

JOHN

We'll destroy all of it together.

GWYNN

Thank you.

ISLA

How's your head?

GWYNN

The bleeding's mostly stopped. Do you have more napkins?

ISLA

On the porch. I'll get them.

GWYNN

(rising a little unsteadily)

No, no. I can do it.

JOHN

Are you sure?

GWYNN

Absolutely. I'd say this is no worse than a bad press conference.

Gwynn?
ISLA

Yes?
GWYNN

I'm sorry.
ISLA

Don't spoil it. I was just starting to respect you.
GWYNN

(GWYNN heads down to the house. ISLA sits
and stares at JOHN)

Well. What a . . . strange day. Not our usual roles in life.
JOHN

Meaning . . . ?
ISLA

Extortionist?
(pointing at himself)
(and at her)
Muscle?
JOHN

Ah. One click away.
ISLA

What?
JOHN

Andrey. I guess he was—
ISLA

JOHN

Oh. Yeah. Magic of social media.

ISLA

Imagine if that had gotten into the cloud.

JOHN

The *cloud*.

ISLA

What *is* the cloud?

JOHN

I have no idea.

ISLA

(after a beat)

What are we going to do?

JOHN

Buy Andrey all new stuff.

ISLA

No, I mean . . . Now that things have changed.

JOHN

Nothing's changed. The letter's the only evidence. Doesn't matter what Andrey says if no one backs him up.

ISLA

If you gave them the letter, they might not bring charges.

JOHN

For what?

ISLA

Assault and battery?

JOHN

They won't do that. They'd have to admit they were here. Now that Andrey's shown up, they can't force us to give them the letter, so—

ISLA

(with sudden force)

Oh God, John. Let it *go!*

(a beat)

We have no respect for them on any level, we detest what they stand for. They're the last people on earth we want to see coming up the drive. Don't you see what that makes them?

JOHN

Family?

ISLA

Exactly. You don't extort your own family. You don't. I don't care if they're Satan's spawn.

JOHN

They are Satan's spawn.

ISLA

I don't *care*. You need to let this go.

JOHN

Can you stand four years of watching that little fucker on TV?

ISLA

Eight, probably. And yes, I can. Give them what they want, so they'll go away. You and I have a lot of work to do.

JOHN

What are you talking about?

ISLA

You need to move out.

JOHN

Move out?!

ISLA

For a time, at least. While I try to get used to . . . having a husband I can't trust.

JOHN

Are you serious? 'Cause this is no way to win an argument. I'm doing all of this out of deep moral—

ISLA

Give them the letter or I'll divorce you.

(a silence)

I mean it. There needs to be a future, John. There can't be, as long as you have that letter.

(He stares at her a long moment, then stares out)

JOHN

What's the name of that mountain? The big one. Will wanted to know.

ISLA

I don't care what the name of that big, fucking mountain is.

JOHN

You really think Gwynn would press charges?

ISLA

Not if you give her the letter.

JOHN

I'd rather cut my feet off.

ISLA

Everything in life's a choice.

JOHN

(still staring out)

Did you see Will and Andrey walk down the hill? Andrey was laughing. They were punching each other in the arm.

ISLA

So?

JOHN

I think our son's a celebrity whore.

ISLA

It's the cross we bear.

JOHN

You'd really do this to me? Make me turn it over?

(GWYNN returns, applying new napkins to her forehead)

GWYNN

They'll be up with the stuff in a minute. Will says Andrey's looking for everything electronic he can find. This is going to cost you.

JOHN

You should sit down.

GWYNN

I'm fine. All this recalibrating just gets us back to square one, of course.

JOHN

The letter?

GWYNN

The letter. Wish tying you up was still an option, but . . . whew! Little . . . Maybe I will sit.

(flopping into one of the chairs, staring out)

Oh, look—mountains.

ISLA

Like 'em? Just had them installed.

GWYNN

Why's that one so much bigger than the others?

ISLA

Subtle question, coming from you.

GWYNN

In the ancient world, people used to hate mountains. Good for borders, not much else. Couldn't cross 'em, couldn't farm 'em. Little grazing, maybe. Mostly they were seen as a curse from God, which they were. But they were also God's telephone. Had the best reception, apparently. The original hot spot. Great built-in irony, don't you think? Everybody crawling up the Almighty's curse in order to commune with Him. Plus there was a bonus. When you're up a mountain whispering in the Great Celestial Ear, no one but you can hear what He says back. Talk about status enhancement. If you sit up there long enough—scratching your nuts, carving stone tablets—baby, you can come back down and tell people what to do for the rest of time.

ISLA

That's all you think it is? A shell game?

GWYNN

No way. I'm a believer. God picks his champions. Who am I to complain about how He does it?

JOHN

Will's a chosen one, then?

GWYNN

So far. Give us the letter, and I won't have you arrested.

JOHN

We'll have you arrested for false imprisonment.

GWYNN

We never tied you up.

JOHN

Hell, kidnapping.

GWYNN

You were always free to go.

JOHN

Sure we were.

GWYNN

Isla? What would you say about all this?

ISLA

I'd say as relations go, we seem to be growing ever more distant.

GWYNN

Will could be President someday. Your own son.

(a beat)

God made America. If it needs fixing, God's the one who'll fix it. And He'll use Will, not you. That's what the voters are saying.

JOHN

They haven't said it yet.

GWYNN

They will. If you want to influence him, if you want him to make better decisions, you need to work with him.

JOHN

Why would he work with me? After everything that's—

GWYNN

He's your son. You're already in there—always have been. It's not my favorite fun fact to know, but it's true. If you could give an *inch* . . . He'd respond, I know it. You could have an effect.

JOHN

A cure for the old impotence, eh?

GWYNN

Sorry about that.

JOHN

Can I get this offer in writing?

GWYNN

You've got it in blood. Will's a better man than you're guessing. He has as much right as anyone to climb a mountain, listen to whatever God's mumbling and translate.

(a beat)

That's all the begging I can do. I'm getting nauseous.

ISLA

We should call a doctor.

GWYNN

No. God. You act like I've never had a concussion before.

(staring out)

When Will's President, we're going to find out the name of that mountain, and we're going to change it. To Mount George W. Bush.

JOHN

Gwynn, would you . . . Would you mind getting something for me?

GWYNN

You want me to do an *errand*?

JOHN

I just need you to go up there. Not far. Where the mulberry is—

GWYNN

What are you talking about?

JOHN

That tree there. See it?

GWYNN

I *see* it . . .

JOHN

There's a split in the trunk, about five feet up. I . . . left a metal box in there. Could you get it for me? Do you feel . . . ?

GWYNN

(quickly rising)

Metal box?

JOHN

Yup.

(as GWYNN exits, marching swiftly up the hill)

Careful! May be some hornets in there. They like the berries.

ISLA

The mulberry bush? Really?

JOHN

Seemed appropriate.

(WILL and ANDREY enter from the house
carrying boxes full of electronic equipment)

WILL

Think we got everything.

(to ANDREY)

We did, didn't we?

ANDREY

Yup.

WILL

Amazing what kids have these days. Command Central down there.

(noticing GWYNN up the hill)

Why's Gwynn heading for the trees?

JOHN

Just fetching something for me.

ANDREY

Can't believe I'm getting all new stuff. That's still the deal, right?

JOHN

Absolutely. What've you got there?

ANDREY

(pulling one of the boxes near, so JOHN can look)

Tons of things. Some of it's like *two years old*.

JOHN

Ancient.

ANDREY

Will's cool. Can we visit them at the White House?

ISLA

I think it's a different house actually, for the Vice-President.

ANDREY

(to WILL)

Can we visit?

WILL

What? Oh, um . . .

(as GWYNN enters with a small metal box)

Sure, Andrey. Sure you can.

(to GWYNN)

How are you feeling?

GWYNN

I don't know.

(She hands the box to JOHN, who hands it to ANDREY)

JOHN

Thanks. Could you open the lock on this? I don't have the key.

(ANDREY quickly pulls out a Swiss Army knife,
selects a tool and opens the lock in less than a second)

ANDREY

Here you go.

JOHN

Give it to her.

(ANDREY gives the box to GWYNN. She opens it
and pulls out the letter from Christian)

WILL

Is that the—?

WILL (cont'd)
(looking at it over her shoulder)

God.

JOHN
Never got you a wedding present.

(All the energy suddenly flows out of GWYNN.
She sits on the low wall, staring at the letter.
After a moment, she tears the letter in half)

ANDREY
What is that?

ISLA
Nothing. Absolutely nothing.

ANDREY
Is that the—?

ISLA
Andrey? You want all new stuff?

ANDREY
Yeah.

ISLA
Then it's absolutely nothing.

ANDREY
Cool.

(GWYNN continues tearing the letter in quarters,
eighths, etc. — smaller and smaller pieces)

WILL

(to JOHN)

Thank you.

JOHN

It was Isla's idea. Mostly.

WILL

Don't know how to repay you.

ISLA

Come for Christmas.

WILL

Not sure if that's a—

ISLA

I'm serious.

ANDREY

Oh, shit! I just remembered. I have a whole bunch of things under the bed.

WILL

Let's get 'em!

(WILL and ANDREY hurry toward the house)

JOHN

(calling after them)

This is not a raid on the bank! No video games!

ISLA

(to GWYNN, who's still tearing the letter)

You okay?

GWYNN

Fine. Thank you.

(GWYNN nods, struggles to smile at JOHN)

JOHN

Maybe we should help 'em look. Make sure Andrey doesn't forget anything.

ISLA

(rising with JOHN to go)

Good idea.

(to GWYNN)

Will you be all right?

GWYNN

Never better.

ISLA

Let us know if you need anything. Lots of food in the house.

GWYNN

I'm good. I have everything I need.

(They exit toward the house. A moment passes.
The letter by now is in tiny pieces. Alone, GWYNN
stares out. She takes one of the tiny pieces and eats it.
Then she eats another. Slowly, she continues, piece
by piece)

The End