

THE ACTUARY

A Romantic Comedy-Drama in Reverse

By Steven Peterson

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**THE ACTUARY: Cast of Six – Three Men, Three Women**

ED BROOKS: An actuary in an insurance company. In his 50s.

BARB BROOKS: His wife, a sales leader for Bonnie Bay Cosmetics. In her 50s.

TABITHA: Their daughter, a social worker and mother-to-be. Around age 30.

LYLE: Tabitha’s husband, leading Whozit, a high-tech startup. Around age 30.

RICHARD: Lyle’s best friend and business partner in Whozit. Around age 30.

AVERY: Tabitha’s best friend and Richard’s fiancé, in public relations. Around age 30.

**Places and (Reverse) Time**

A Big American city: two city apartments, a car, another car, a coffee shop, a jewelry store, a restaurant, a bar, a park, a suburban home, a hotel room, a hotel hallway.

The play takes place in the mind of Ed Brooks, who tells us a story. What is on stage can be minimal as the play takes us fluidly through time and space. For each scene, furniture and props are carried on by the actors, or slid on, or flown in, or lighted as Ed thinks of a change of scene. A moveable doorframe (does not require the door) is also needed.

The scenes run in reverse chronological order going back nine months in time:

**Act One:** Ten scenes, from March of next year back to December of this year.

**Act Two:** Seven scenes, from November of this year back to June,  
with a final scene mixing the present with the past.

**Production**

*The Actuary* premiered at Peninsula Players Theatre, Fish Creek, Wisconsin, June-July, 2017, directed by Kevin Christopher Fox (SDC) with this cast:

ED BROOKS	Greg Vinkler *	
BARB BROOKS	Judy Blue *	
TABITHA	Erica Elam *	* Member, Actors’
LYLE	Matt Holzfeind *	Equity Association
RICHARD	Kyle Hatley *	
AVERY	Emma Rosenthal *	

Scenic design by Sarah E. Ross, sound by Chris Kriz, costumes by Rachel Lambert, lights by Steve White, props by Wendy Huber, scenic art by April Beiswenger, stage management by Richelle Harrington Calin \*, production management by Cody Westgaard. Peninsula Players managing director: Brian Kelsey; artistic director: Greg Vinkler.

ACT ONE

## SCENE 1

SOUND of a newborn baby, howling. LIGHTS UP on ED BROOKS as he finishes tying his tie and slipping on a sport coat. He stands next to six chairs and a coffee table. Howling ends. ED addresses us.

ED

Did you hear that? Of course you did. That is the voice of our new grandchild. It's recorded, so we can play it for our friends... *over and over*. Today is a big day. I'm getting ready for something I'm not quite ready for. It's good to hear that voice. Helps me think about how we all got here...

The five other actors enter as they are named by ED. BARB dresses in vivid purple. TABITHA is nine-months pregnant. There are wrapped baby gifts.

ED (cont.)

Four days before that baby was born, there was a baby shower. My wife was there, Barb. Our daughter, Tabitha. She's the one having the baby – can you guess? Her husband, Lyle. And their best friends, Avery and Richard. Oh, and my name is Ed – Ed Brooks. At that baby shower, there was a surprise...

ED takes an envelope from the inside chest pocket of his sport coat and places it on the coffee table.

ED (cont.)

That surprise is right in this envelope, right on this table.

ED sits to join them and the action begins.

TABITHA

(rising with pregnant difficulty)

Well, then. On behalf of Lyle and myself—

LYLE

(correcting her)

Ah-ah-ah.

TABITHA

I'm sorry, that was a grammatical mistake. On behalf of Lyle and *me*...

(off Lyle's nodding approval)

Thank you all for coming to my baby shower.

BARB  
(overjoyed)

Your baby shower!

TABITHA

My doctor is going to induce in four days.

BARB

Four days! Can you believe it?

TABITHA

(wearily)

Yes, Mom, I can. As I was saying, Lyle and me—

LYLE

(correcting her again)

Honey, I think you might have...

RICHARD  
(restraining him)

Lyle.

TABITHA

I made *another* mistake. I mean, Lyle and I— want to thank our best friends Avery and Richard for hosting this baby shower in their beautiful apartment. Nine months ago Avery was the best maid of honor a bride could ever have.

EVERY

I love you, Tabitha.

TABITHA

I love you, Avery.

LYLE

Nine months ago Richard was the best *best* man a groom could ever have.

RICHARD

I love you, man.

LYLE

I love *you*, man.

EVERY

And two weeks *after* your wedding, the best man and the maid of honor got to know each other a lot better... if you know what I mean.

BARB  
(to Ed)

I know what she means.

TABITHA  
And this summer, Avery and Richard are getting married. Yeah, wow.

AVERY  
Oh, Tabitha, today is all about you.

TABITHA  
Most of all, I want to thank my mom and dad. You guys have been there for us every step of the way.

BARB  
I love you, honey.

ED  
(rising)  
I love you, too. I need to feed the parking meter.

BARB  
(pulling him down)  
Ed, not now.

TABITHA  
*Finally*, this brings us to something we've all been waiting for. It's a piece of information, sitting right there in that envelope.  
(with mixed feelings)  
My mother had this *great* idea – don't have my doctor tell us the ultrasound result. Instead, the doctor put the big news in that letter.

BARB  
They call it "Baby Shower Bombshell." Ka-BOOM!

LYLE  
(enthusiastic)  
It's a great idea.

TABITHA  
Baby boy or baby girl – we don't know.

AVERY  
(kidding but not)  
Made it hard to shop for an outfit.

RICHARD  
Four hours at Baby Boutique. I got a parking ticket.

ED  
(rising)

I'll feed the meter.

BARB  
(pulling him down again)

Ed, not *now*.

TABITHA picks up the envelope from the table.

TABITHA  
So if everyone's ready, if everyone has *his phone* turned off?

LYLE  
I'm on vibrate.

TABITHA  
Honey, you said you'd turn your phone *off*.

LYLE  
The offer for Whozit is coming through any minute.

TABITHA  
Today isn't about Whozit. Today is about our baby. Remember?

LYLE  
(getting out his phone and pressing things)  
There.

TABITHA  
Time to open this envelope. See what this baby is going to be: baby boy or baby girl.

BARB  
This is so exciting!

ED  
(into his lap)  
Do you know what a parking ticket costs?

TABITHA  
Is everybody ready?

BARB  
Ready.

AVERY  
Ready.

LYLE  
(rising to stand by Tabitha)

Ready.

Big pause. TABITHA tears open the envelope, takes out the letter, reads, and takes a beat.

It's a girl.

TABITHA

Whoops of excitement all around.

BARB  
It's girl! It's a girl! We're having a granddaughter!

LYLE  
(happily)

Oh, I love you so much.

I love you, too.

TABITHA

They embrace. As they do, the letter drops to the floor. ED picks up the letter and scans it.

ED  
Hey, there's more.

BARB  
There's more? Tell us!

ED  
(reading from the letter)  
"All indications are the baby is healthy in every way."

TABITHA  
I told my doctor to put in everything.

ED  
"The baby is within normal gestational range, with ten little fingers and ten little toes."

EVERYONE  
Awwwww.

BARB  
Isn't science great?

ED

“However... the DNA analysis was matched to the National Human Genome Database. It is my duty to inform you. The father is Richard Snorf.”

(as the others turn in slow unison to RICHARD)

But wait a minute. Richard, that’s *your* name. *You’re* Richard Snorf. But how could...?

A long moment as they all stare at RICHARD. He slowly rises. What’s he going to say?

RICHARD

Yessss.

(realizing how inappropriate this is)

Oh... um... sorry...

RICHARD slowly sits and tries to disappear.

ED

(back to the letter)

“Please accept my congratulations. Federal regulations protect the confidentiality of this information.”

ED puts the letter in his jacket pocket. Pause.

BARB

We should feed the parking meter.

ED

We should.

ED and BARB swiftly exit. Long pause.

LYLE

Tabitha?

TABITHA

We only did it once.

LYLE

Once? When?

TABITHA

The morning of our wedding.

LYLE

The morning of our wedding?!

TABITHA

I was having doubts.



EVERY

You could have talked to me. I was your maid of honor.

LYLE

And Richard... my "Best Man."

TABITHA

It was my idea.

RICHARD

No, it was my idea.

TABITHA

I came to your room because I love you.

RICHARD

I let you into my room because I love *you*.

EVERY

Richard! Stop it!

Pause.

LYLE

I think I've heard enough. I'm going home. I'll see you there – or will I?

The phone BUZZES in LYLE's pocket.

LYLE (cont.)

Hold on, I'm vibrating.

TABITHA

I thought you turned it off.

LYLE

I need some better news than what I heard here. *All right?*

(on phone, excitement rising)

Hi, it's Lyle .... Yes, I *am* the CEO of Whozit .... You made a decision .... You love the name Whozit .... You think it's a great name for a new app...

RICHARD

Avery, I'm sorry, but—

EVERY

Shh! He's on the phone.

LYLE  
(on phone, a dark cloud rises)

But what?

AVERY

But what?

LYLE  
(on phone)

Insta-Truth? You picked *Insta-Truth*? .... What do you mean you don't like the top management of Whozit? The top management of Whozit is *me*. Whozit is my *baby*.

TABITHA

Whozit is your *baby*?

LYLE  
(correcting her)

I am speaking figuratively.

(back on phone)

No, that was nobody .... I understand .... Goodbye.

He touches off the call, his hopes crushed.

AVERY  
(just as crushed)

They didn't pick Whozit?

LYLE  
This is the worst thing that ever happened to myself.  
(off the others staring at him for his grammatical mistake)

I mean, to *me*, to *me*!

LYLE exits.

AVERY

I'm leaving, too.

RICHARD

Avery, this is our apartment. We live here.

AVERY

I agreed to live with you, Richard. But I'm not going to marry you.  
(twisting off her huge engagement ring)

So you can take this... take this back!

(shoving the ring into Richard's hands)

I hope you're happy!

EVERY retrieves her gift from Baby Boutique and exits in a proud fury. Long pause.

RICHARD

I *am* happy. This is the happiest I've been... since the morning of your wedding. When you came to my room. When you said, "Richard, am I making a mistake?"

TABITHA

Didn't we? Make a mistake?

RICHARD

We made a little girl. We finally told them what we should have told them the day you got married. That I love you and you love me.

RICHARD gets on his knees in front of her, holding out EVERY's ring.

RICHARD (cont.)

Tabitha, will you marry me?

TABITHA

(holding up her left hand)

I'm already married. To your best friend, the guy you're in business with. The deal for Whozit fell through. You're not going to be rich.

RICHARD

I never wanted want to be rich. All I ever wanted... is you.

They kiss and stay frozen, lips together. It has all become a little unreal.

ED enters to address us.

ED

Hold the phone.

Hold on just one minute here.

I know what you're thinking:

Come on, Ed, really?

Could something like that really happen?

You won't believe it unless I tell you what led up to this.

So let me back things up.

Let me show you what happened one hour *before* that baby shower.

You got that? One hour *before*.

Barb and I were in the car, on the way to the baby shower...

RICHARD and TABITHA exit.

**SCENE 2**

BARB enters. She gets into the driver's seat of a purple car with a purple steering wheel, represented by two purple chairs or in some other way. ED gets into the car as the passenger. He holds their wrapped baby gift on his lap. He scans the curbsides.

ED

Every one, Barb. Every one of these streets has parking meters.

BARB

Ed, they don't have free parking in the city.

ED

Gonna cost a fortune.

BARB

Do you have the envelope?

ED

Yes.

BARB

In your pocket?

ED

Yes.

BARB

Which pocket?

ED

The pocket of the coat I am wearing.

BARB

Check to make sure.

ED takes out the envelope from inside the chest pocket of his sport coat.

ED

It's right here.

BARB

Now put it back.

He puts it back.

BARB (cont.)

What a great idea: Baby Shower Bombshell!

ED

I can't believe you did it.

BARB

Did what?

ED

Intervene with her obstetrician.

BARB

I didn't "intervene." I told Tabitha to tell her doctor to keep the ultrasound result secret.

ED

So you don't know if it's a boy or a girl?

BARB

I don't know.

ED

You didn't open it?

BARB

It was sealed tight.

ED

And...?

BARB

I couldn't see through the envelope.... even when I held it up to the sun... at high noon... on a clear day.

ED

All right then.

Pause.

BARB

(wistful)

A grandchild.

ED

(factual)

A grandchild.

BARB

When I was sick, that's all I thought about: Will I live long enough to see a grandchild?

ED

You're fine.

BARB  
(confidently)

I'm in remission.

ED  
(confidently)

You're in remission.

Pause.

BARB

Girl or boy – as long as that baby is healthy. And good looking. Like him.

ED  
(gloomier)

Him. Mister Perfect.

BARB

Lyle is a good catch for Tabitha.

ED  
(brighter)

His friend Richard will be there.

BARB  
(gloomier)

Richard.

ED

I thought we like Richard.

BARB

He pays too much attention to Tabitha.

ED

He was best man at their wedding.

BARB

Do you know what I think? I think Richard wishes he married Tabitha himself.

ED  
Why do you think that?

BARB  
I can see it in his eyes: "I love my best friend's wife." Well, that will stop the minute he marries Avery.

ED  
(gloomier)  
Avery.

BARB  
I thought we like Avery.

ED  
Do we?

BARB  
She's been Tabitha's friend since kindergarten.

ED  
As long as it's on Avery's terms.

BARB  
If *only* I could get Avery to work for Bonnie Bay.

ED  
She doesn't want to sell Bonnie Bay cosmetics.

BARB  
What's wrong with Bonnie Bay? Who do you think gave me this purple Cadillac?

ED  
Their generation is different.

BARB  
Oh flooey. They want the same things we did. They'll have their kids and their jobs and their busy lives and be grateful someone will come into their home and teach them how to make life beautiful.

ED notices where they are.

ED  
Here's their place.

BARB  
I'm parking right here.

ED  
It's got meters.

BARB  
(as she expertly parallel parks)  
Every street has meters.

ED  
I'll need to run down and put in money.

BARB  
Hold on...  
(as she finishes her parking maneuver)  
There. Now who is the best parallel parker in the world?

ED  
You are.

BARB  
Don't forget that envelope.

BARB exits. ED addresses us.

ED  
Wherever we go, my wife always drives.  
People see that purple Cadillac and wave. Or make gestures.  
Barb is the top saleswoman for Bonnie Bay Cosmetics. For their whole ten-state region  
around here. She's very successful. She makes more than I do. I'm an actuary in an  
insurance company. I do pretty well for myself, but nothing like my wife.  
You probably picked up that Barb has cancer. We don't talk about it.  
But she has cancer and that scares me. That scares me a lot.  
Back to our story – just a little before this...

### SCENE 3

ED exits. TABITHA and LYLE enter and sit in  
another "car" on their side of the stage. LYLE drives,  
simultaneously consulting his cell phone.

TABITHA  
Could we maybe not do that?

LYLE  
Their top guy said he'd call me with a decision, today. He didn't say when, just today.

TABITHA  
(a gentle reminder)  
Baby on board.



Oo, here's a place...

LYLE

He motions pulling into a parking spot, then turning off the car. He looks at the curbside.

LYLE (cont.)

This is a good spot. It's even legal.

TABITHA

So... today we find out.

LYLE

Those venture capital guys need to pick Whozit. I need that big money. I almost ran out. But Whozit is so much better than Insta-Truth. They *have* to pick Whozit, they *have* to.

TABITHA

I was *going* to say, today we find out about our baby. Boy or girl. Remember?

LYLE  
(catching himself)

You're right. Today is all about our baby.

TABITHA

You'll turn your phone off?

LYLE

Completely?

TABITHA

Just for the baby shower?

LYLE takes out his phone and pushes something.

LYLE

You really don't know if it's a boy or a girl?

TABITHA  
(with a shrug)

"Baby Shower Bombshell."

LYLE

Hey, before we go in... I know things have been... You got pregnant right away... I'm crazy focused on the business... Ha! That silly thing with the hair tie...

TABITHA

Lyle, is this what you want?

Want?  
 LYLE

Us. This.  
 TABITHA

LYLE  
 It was only a hair tie. A stupid, rubber-bandy hair tie. It doesn't mean a thing.

TABITHA  
 It was only a hair tie.

LYLE  
 Stay there. I'll come around and help you out.

He comes around, helps her out, and they go off.

ED enters.

ED  
 That thing they're talking about?  
 That rubber-bandy hair tie?  
 You wouldn't think it, but a hair tie can cause a *lot* of trouble.  
 Anyway, a short time earlier, which I heard about later...

ED goes off.

#### SCENE 4

AVERY and RICHARD enter. She holds the wrapped gift from Baby Boutique. She scans the room.

AVERY  
 Almost perfect.

RICHARD  
 It's just Lyle and Tabitha and her mom and dad.

AVERY  
 (settling her scan on him)  
 Tuck your shirt in.

RICHARD tucks. AVERY puts down the gift.

EVERY (cont.)

(annoyed)

“Baby Shower Bombshell.” This was all her *mother’s* idea. I mean, we had this huge baby shower last month. With all our friends. But, oh no, her mother wants to do a special one, today, with just the six of us.

RICHARD

I thought we like her mother.

EVERY

They’re going to open an *envelope*?

RICHARD

That’s the plan.

EVERY

I will never do that when we have kids.

RICHARD

We’re not even married yet.

EVERY

We’re going to have two of them.

RICHARD

We are? Boys, girls, or one of each?

EVERY smiles and slowly comes close to him.

EVERY

If that is a serious question, first we get married...

RICHARD

(uncertain)

Uh huh.

EVERY

Then Daddy puts a love bomb into Mommy...

RICHARD

Uh huh.

EVERY

Then we set the oven timer to nine months and wait for it to go... bing.

RICHARD

A little blueberry muffin.

She laughs in some way that is painful to him.

EVERY

I will never know what goes on in that brain of yours.

RICHARD

(the pain continues)

Oh, a lot of things.

EVERY

Can't it always be like this? You and me and this rock on my finger?

RICHARD

It looks good on you.

EVERY

I know it cost a fortune. You don't have the money. But you will, Richard. Today you and Lyle will find out about Whozit. We'll get married and have our two kids. It'll be you and me... *forever*.

RICHARD slumps in a trapped daze.

EVERY (cont.)

Richard...? Richard!

SOUND of the apartment buzzer, to his great relief.

RICHARD

Our guests are here.

EVERY goes off to greet her guests, readying herself with a dazzling smile. RICHARD follows her off. ED enters holding a newspaper.

ED

Poor guy – what a pickle. Gotta hand it to him, though. He hangs in there. One month before this, I went into a coffee shop. One of those places where a cup of coffee costs *four dollars*. My daughter goes there every morning. I had been going there to read the paper, quietly, without anybody noticing me, hoping I might learn something.

RICHARD enters with a cup of coffee, wearing a winter jacket. He sits at a café table and waits.

ED (cont.)

(indicating Richard)

Finally, one day... I hit the jackpot!

**SCENE 5**

ED sits at another café table on and opens a newspaper, hiding him from the others.

TABITHA enters, now eight months pregnant. She gets a quizzical expression and is about to look back at ED, but ED snaps his newspaper open further to cover himself even more just as RICHARD spots her.

RICHARD

Tabitha! Thanks for coming. Here, sit right here.

TABITHA

I can do it.

RICHARD

(seating her awkwardly)

No, no, I don't mind.

Once she's seated, he reseats himself.

TABITHA

One month to go and I'm big as a barge.

RICHARD

You look great.

TABITHA

Shut up.

RICHARD

(adoringly)

You always look great... to *me*.

TABITHA

(shaking her head and rising)

Uh-uh.

RICHARD (cont.)

What are you...?

TABITHA

I will not stay here if you talk like that.

RICHARD

I'm sorry. All I meant is... it's good to see you.

She accepts that; they reseal themselves.

RICHARD (cont.)

How's your mom?

TABITHA

Can't wait for that baby shower.

RICHARD

She's okay?

TABITHA

That's what they say.

RICHARD

I like your mom. I like your dad. He's a great guy.

Behind his newspaper, ED mumbles in agreement.

TABITHA

Richard, we can't meet like this anymore. What do you want?

RICHARD

I need to ask you something.

TABITHA

(about to rise again)

We are *not* going over this.

RICHARD

It's in this box!

RICHARD digs a box out of his pocket, opens it, and shows her the engagement ring. She sadly looks at it.

RICHARD (cont.)

It's what Avery wants.

TABITHA

Is it what *you* want?

RICHARD

I don't know much about diamonds. I went to that jewelry store she told me about. The saleslady knew *exactly* what she was looking for. I had to go to the bank for a loan. For collateral I put up my share of Whozit.

TABITHA

I mean, do you *want* to marry Avery?

RICHARD

I want to marry *you*. But you married somebody else. So I dated your best friend, to be close to you. Then I moved in with her, to be close to you. Now I'm going to marry her, to be close to you forever.

TABITHA

That's pathetic.

RICHARD

I know, right?

She studies the ring.

RICHARD (cont.)

Am I making a mistake? Like what you asked me the morning of your wedding?

TABITHA

My dad – he's so funny. Not funny, but, you know, he's an actuary. He works for that insurance company. He looks at time, figures out when people are going to die, what it means for insurance rates.

RICHARD

Yeah, I know what an actuary is.

TABITHA

When I was a little girl he'd tell me, "Tabitha, make good choices. If you make good choices, you have better odds of being happy."

RICHARD

I love you.

A long pause as their hearts break. ED lowers his newspaper so he can view what's going on.

TABITHA takes one more look at the ring, shuts the lid, and hands the box back to RICHARD.

TABITHA

Marry her, Richard. Put this ring on Avery's finger and marry her. I'll always love you. But we made our choices. Now we have to live with them.

TABITHA exits. RICHARD remains at the table, head down. ED folds up his newspaper crosses to RICHARD's table, looks at him, takes the ring box, and moves downstage to address us.





AVERY

Ta-da!

TABITHA  
(stunned by it)

Get outta town.

AVERY

Four and a half carats.

TABITHA

How much does it cost?

AVERY lifts a tiny card out of the box to show her.

TABITHA (cont.)

Avery!

AVERY

I know. How can they fit so many numbers on such a tiny card?

TABITHA

Richard can't afford this.

AVERY

He can with a bank loan. Oh, I know, I'll drag him in here, he'll see the price, and he'll pass out. But when he wakes up, when he thinks about what he's going to be worth some day, when he thinks about what *I'm* worth right now... he'll see this as the best investment he ever made.

TABITHA  
(studying the ring)

It *is* beautiful.

AVERY

The four of us are going to be rich. Whozit is going to revolutionize... everything!

TABITHA

I don't want to be rich.

AVERY

Do you want to be poor? Like those people you help? Which is very nice but you can't spend your whole life being a poverty worker.

TABITHA

It's called a social worker. I'm a social worker.

TABITHA studies the ring and grows somber, irritating AVERY.

AVERY

Oh, come on, Tabitha. I know what you're thinking: "This diamond could feed an entire country."

TABITHA

It's not that. It's... it's...

AVERY

*What?*

TABITHA

Do you love him?

AVERY

(considering this)

Do I love Richard? I *think* I do. What more can I say?

TABITHA

I don't know.

AVERY

Do you love Lyle? Well, do you?

TABITHA

(almost to herself)

I think I do.

AVERY

You see, Tab? You're not any better than the rest of us.

TABITHA

No, I'm not.

Pause.

AVERY

Now try it on.

TABITHA

Oh, no.

AVERY

Put that ring on your finger.

No. TABITHA

Try it. AVERY

Isn't that bad luck? TABITHA

Try it. AVERY

I don't want to. TABITHA

Tabitha, *do it*. Put it on. AVERY

TABITHA takes a beat, twists off her own rings, and tries on AVERY's engagement ring.

See that? AVERY (cont.)

I see it. TABITHA

That's *mine*. Not *yours*. AVERY  
(deadly serious)

What? TABITHA

Richard is *mine*. AVERY

You're getting a little psycho here, Ave. TABITHA

Just so you know, *Tab*. AVERY

AVERY twists the ring off of TABITHA's finger.

I need to give this back to the saleslady. AVERY(cont.)

TABITHA  
(in finger pain)

Ow.

AVERY

That's right. "Ow."

TABITHA and AVERY exit with the ring.  
ED enters.

ED

"Ow." People get hurt. Especially people who are shy, a little reserved.  
Tabitha takes after me in that respect. She's more like me than my wife, Barb.  
I mean, my wife is a *steamroller*.

BARB enters, on her cell phone, as if she overheard.

BARB  
(on phone)

Where *are* you?

ED  
(still to us)

In a good way.

(now to her, on his own cell phone)

I'm with Lyle and Richard. I just saw their office.

BARB

That's nice.

ED

We're about to grab a beer.

BARB

One beer.

ED

One beer.

BARB

Bonnie Bay is in town. She's giving a speech at the sales conference. I get to introduce her.

ED

Just one beer?

BARB

More than one and you get silly.

ED

Well, say hi to Bonnie Bay.

BARB

(pressing off her call)

Ed says hi!

BARB goes off.

ED

(back to addressing the audience)

Where was I? "Ow."

People get hurt. People like my daughter.

What can a father do about it? What *should* a father do about it?

I was thinking of that one hour earlier... over my one beer.

### SCENE 7

Loud bar music. RICHARD and LYLE enter with three beers, giving one to ED. They clink glasses or bottles or cans and they all take a good long quaff. ED does a little boogie to the music.

ED

This is great! I am so happy you guys invited me.

LYLE

(can't hear from the music)

What?

ED

I said this is great!

LYLE

Let's go over there.

They move to a quiet corner of the bar. Music goes down.

ED

(recapturing his youth)

I used to come here when it was called something else. On Tuesday nights a beer was twenty-five cents. The Pac-Man machine was right over... Wait. I think that bar was around the corner.

RICHARD

Back in your wild and crazy days?

ED

Me? Naw. I worked all day, studied for my actuarial exams all night. I wasn't married, but... Barb was getting ready to drop the nets!

RICHARD and LYLE chuckle politely.

LYLE

So, what did you think of our office?

ED

Office? That looks like fun.

RICHARD

It *is* fun.

ED

Basketball hoop and a bunch of guys with laptops? That's a business?

LYLE

(into his pitch)

It's on its way. And *that* is what I would like to talk to you about right now.

ED

Um... sure.

LYLE

Now then: When we started Whozit, we thought it would compile information on products you're thinking of buying. A car, a house, anything.

ED

Right.

LYLE

But I said: What if we think bigger? What if we compile information on *people*? That's when I came up with the name Whozit. W-H-O-Z-I-T. Whozit!

ED

Good name.

LYLE

Ed, what people fear most is making a choice about another person. They're afraid they'll make the wrong choice based on the wrong information. What Whozit offers is relief. It gives you everything you need to make the right choice. And it's all on the app.

ED

(not quite following)

The app.

LYLE

Mobile application. But listen, what I am about to tell you is confidential.

ED

Don't tell me anything you shouldn't.

LYLE looks around before confiding.

LYLE

Richard is adapting some new facial recognition software. That will make it possible to hold up your phone and identify whoever you're looking at.

ED

You can do that?

RICHARD

Technology.

LYLE

Let's say some woman has Whozit. She walks into this bar. She holds up her phone. It recognizes faces and pulls down their social media – their status, what they do, who their friends are. But here's the thing. On social media... people *lie*. What Whozit does is go into the *deep data*.

ED

Deep data.

LYLE

That guy over there? Oh, he's cute, for a *sex offender*. That other guy, who wants to buy me a drink? He seems so nice but, oh, no, look, he's legally separated with three kids and a *restraining order*.

ED

Amazing.

LYLE

Whozit guarantees you'll never make the wrong choice about another person ever again.

ED

Are you making money with it?

LYLE and RICHARD roar with laughter.

LYLE

Oh, no. We lose money. Buckets of money.

RICHARD

Buckets.

LYLE

But it's not our money.

RICHARD

We don't have any money.

LYLE

Well, we have *some* money. There's a group of angel investors. Four guys put up money for the first six months. That gives us time to build up a following. After that, we attract the venture capital guys. They have the bigger bucks. After *that*...

ED

You go public. You sell stock.

LYLE

No. We get *bought out*. Let's say... by Google?

ED

(a word he knows)

Google.

LYLE

Then, Whozit is worth millions. Millions.

ED

How many millions are we talking about?

LYLE

Maybe a thousand of them?

ED

A thousand million is a billion.

LYLE

Google bought YouTube for one point six billion. Facebook bought WhatsApp for nineteen billion. Microsoft bought LinkedIn for twenty-six billion.

ED

Jiminy.

LYLE

You're an actuary. What is it that actuaries always say?

ED

(pausing to think)

"The only certain thing is death."



LYLE

No, no, not that. I was thinking more along the lines of: “Risk is opportunity.”

ED

We say that, too.

LYLE

Which brings me to a question. Would *you* be interested in joining our select group of investors?

RICHARD

(surprised and uncomfortable)

Um, Lyle... what are you doing?

LYLE

(ignoring him)

So, Ed, would you?

ED

I thought you *had* investors.

LYLE

We do. The next couple of months will put us over the top. We just need a little cash.

ED

What kind of investment are we talking about?

LYLE

One hundred thousand dollars buys you a two percent share when we’re bought out.

RICHARD

Well, *if* we’re bought out.

LYLE

*When* we’re bought out.

RICHARD

(to Ed)

You should know – we’re not the only ones with the idea. Other people are trying to do the same thing.

LYLE

Richard, you don’t need to complicate this.

RICHARD

He should know. Insta-Truth is pretty good.

LYLE  
(dismissive)

“Insta-Truth.”

RICHARD

Their technology is pretty good.

LYLE  
(coming down hard)

This is *not* a technology issue. This is a business issue, and that’s *my* department.

Pause. RICHARD has been put in his place.

RICHARD

I just thought he should know.

Pause.

ED

So... you need a hundred thousand?

LYLE

One hundred thousand.

ED

That’s a lot of money.

LYLE

You have it, don’t you?

ED

Yeah. Well, between me and Barb. Saved up for retirement.

LYLE

Think of the retirement you’ll have when one hundred thousand turns into two percent of one billion dollars. That’s... well, you’re the actuary.

ED

Two percent of one billion is twenty million.

LYLE

Twenty. Million. Dollars.

Pause as ED thinks this through.

ED

I’d have to ask Barb. She makes the financial decisions. You might say she wears the purple pants in the family. Ha!

Nobody else laughs.

LYLE

You do what you need to do. Then let me know.

AVERY and TABITHA enter.

AVERY

Well, here you are.

The men rise. TABITHA hugs ED. AVERY hugs RICHARD. LYLE doesn't quite know what to do.

ED

Oh, hi, sweetie.

TABITHA

Hi, Dad. Are the boys showing you a good time?

ED

I'm learning all about Whozit.

TABITHA

(to Lyle, suspiciously)

What *about* Whozit?

LYLE

(changing the subject)

I thought you two had an errand.

AVERY

It's just down the street. We're going there next. Richard said you might be here.

ED

(to Avery)

Oh, hey, congratulations.

AVERY

For what?

ED

Oops. Am I supposed to know about this?

AVERY

For Richard moving in with me? Well, of course, Mr. Brooks.

ED

In our day that kind of thing happened, but, you know...

AVERY

People didn't talk about it. Now we shout it from the rooftops – Hooray! Richard Snorf is my roommate!

She turns to RICHARD, who is a couple beats too slow with his enthusiasm.

RICHARD

Hooray!

AVERY

So, anyway, Lyle, when do I get my royalty payment?

LYLE

Your...?

AVERY

For giving you that great idea – hair ties on Whozit!

LYLE

(picking up her cue)

Oh! Yeah! We don't have it on the site yet, but it's a killer concept.

RICHARD

What is?

LYLE

I told you. Those rubber bandy things that women wear in their hair.

AVERY

Hair ties, not headbands – those are something else.

LYLE

They go by all kinds of names. Hair ties, hairbands, elastics, pony holders. Whozit guides you to the right choice, even in hair ties.

AVERY

(taking out her colorful hair tie to show Ed)

I always wear one. I match the color to my outfit. See?

ED

Yeah, how about that.

RICHARD  
(still a bit lost)

That's going on Whozit?

LYLE

I told you, we need to monetize Whozit. With advertising. I thought we'll pick a product and you can demo something up.

RICHARD

But hair ties? They're, like, a hundred for a dollar. Who would pay for that?

LYLE

Uh huh. And once upon a time, water was free.

RICHARD  
(reluctantly giving in)

I guess.

AVERY  
(to Ed)

You can keep that one. I give them out to anyone who has an interest. I think by now my hair ties are all over town.

TABITHA  
(with a hard glare)

I can imagine they are.

Beat.

AVERY

Well, we're on our way to that errand. Don't keep Richard out too late.

LYLE

We won't.

AVERY  
(hugging Richard)

I get lonely without my roomie.

TABITHA

Bye, Dad. Give Mom a call so she knows when you're coming home.

ED

I will.

TABITHA turns to LYLE, a bit unsure what to do. He takes the lead and hugs her delicately.

LYLE  
Have a good time. You okay?

TABITHA  
Why wouldn't I be?

LYLE  
Then I'll see you at home.

TABITHA  
(coldly)  
Then I'll see you at home.

TABITHA follows AVERY off. LYLE follows RICHARD with the beers, and they stay frozen before they exit. ED crosses to ponder LYLE before addressing us.

ED  
I never talked to Barb about that investment deal in Whozit.  
My son-in-law was sure he was going to make a billion dollars.  
His business partner didn't seem so sure.  
My daughter was troubled by a hair tie.  
I was troubled, too.  
I mean, I like math. I like math a lot.  
But can algorithms guide our lives?  
Can pixels replace what lies inside the human heart?  
But now I'm getting ahead of myself – or, behind myself, since by now I realize I'm telling this whole story backwards.  
Earlier that same day...

LYLE and RICHARD and ED exit.

## SCENE 8

TABITHA enters and sits at a table, holding a brightly-colored hair tie in her hands. She snaps it, again and again and again, lost in thought. LYLE enters with a huge bouquet of flowers in a vase.

LYLE  
I should do it more often.

TABITHA  
Do what?

LYLE  
Bring you flowers.

Nobody's stopping you.

TABITHA

She keeps snapping the hair tie. He searches for a topic.

LYLE

Did I tell you? Today's the day your dad's coming over to check out the office. He's always asking about Whozit. We're gonna show him around and take him out for a beer.

TABITHA

You're not going to ask him for money, are you?

LYLE

No. Why would I?

TABITHA

Because you told me that angel investor cash is running out faster than you thought.

LYLE

Did I say that?

TABITHA

Do *not* ask my father for money.

LYLE

I won't.

TABITHA keeps snapping the hair tie between her hands.

LYLE (cont.)

Good old Ed. He's got that slow and steady thing going for him. What I'm doing is *so* different from what he did.

TABITHA

*So* different.

LYLE

From his generation. They got their job and stuck with it their whole career. For us, we'll have fifteen different jobs and ten different careers.

She shoots the hair tie into LYLE's chest. He picks it up and hands it back to her.

LYLE (cont.)

Why are you doing that?

Doing what?  
TABITHA  
She shoots it into his chest again.

That.  
LYLE

Target practice.  
TABITHA

What is that?  
LYLE

It's called a hair tie.  
TABITHA

Ah.  
LYLE

My hair ties are black. This one isn't.  
TABITHA  
LYLE's mind smoothly kicks into gear.

That belongs to Avery.  
LYLE

Avery?  
TABITHA

She's so funny. She wears a different hair tie to match the color of her outfit.  
LYLE

Funny.  
TABITHA

I borrowed that from her. For this thing we're thinking of.  
LYLE

What thing?  
TABITHA

Whozit is adding a product category, for women. Hair ties! You know, how to wear 'em, what colors to buy...



TABITHA

That's an odd thing for Whozit.

LYLE

It's kind of an in-joke. If we can attract advertisers with something as mundane as a hair tie, we can do anything.

TABITHA

Will it also tell a woman not to leave one in her *best friend's bed*?

Beat.

LYLE

You don't think...? I was *looking* at it. In our bedroom. In our bed. By myself.

TABITHA

You were.

LYLE

You can shoot them like rubber bands.

TABITHA shoots it at him again.

LYLE (cont.)

See?

TABITHA

Lyle, did you take Avery into our bed?

LYLE

(wounded)

No.

TABITHA

I don't want to get all Whozit-deep-data about this. I am not asking if you did it on our bed, or on the floor, or in the kitchen sink. I am not asking if you physically, penetratively, did it with her or not. All I am asking is if you had sex, intimate physical contact, of any kind, at any time, with my best friend Avery.

LYLE

I'm not sure "penetratively" is a word.

TABITHA

Lyle!

Pause.

LYLE

(staying calm)

I borrowed her hair tie to study an idea for Whozit. That's my job. That's what I do.

She regards him.

TABITHA

Should I call her up and ask her?

LYLE

Go right ahead.

TABITHA gets her phone from her bag.

LYLE (cont.)

Gee, right now if you want.

TABITHA

(on phone)

Hi, Avery. I know we're getting together later. But I found something in our apartment and I need to know—

(listening with growing relief)

Ever since grade school, you and your hair ties .... Yeah, probably something new on Whozit .... No, that's it. See you later.

She touches off her phone. Pause.

LYLE

Satisfied?

TABITHA

She said you borrowed her hair tie for some work thing. I was wrong, again. What is *happening* to me?

LYLE

A rapid increase in both estrogen and progesterone levels. In other words, *hormones*.

TABITHA

I'm sorry.

He kisses her on the forehead, amused.

LYLE

I'll be late for work.

LYLE exits. TABITHA rises and lifts the vase of flowers to ponder them. ED enters to watch TABITHA as her doubts and fears return.

ED

Now then: one day before this.  
Same kitchen. Same table...

TABITHA exits with the flowers. ED exits.

**SCENE 9**

AVERY enters and sits at the same table. LYLE enters with two mugs of tea and joins her. AVERY sips from her mug as she studies LYLE.

LYLE

Do you like the tea?

AVERY nods, waiting.

LYLE (cont.)

It's from Sri Lanka. The former Ceylon.

AVERY nods, waiting.

LYLE (cont.)

So, tell me. To what do I owe the pleasure of your visit?

AVERY

Today's the day of Tabitha's regular checkup?

LYLE

She'll be back in a couple hours.

AVERY

You don't go with her?

LYLE

I used to. I had too many questions. Or maybe I answered the ones Tabitha was asking. We agreed it's better if I stay home during her doctor visits. I'll be in the delivery room when that baby comes. Wouldn't miss that for all the tea in Sri Lanka!

She puts down her mug.

AVERY

Richard moved in with me last weekend.

LYLE

That's a big step.

EVERY

You've known Richard a long time.

LYLE

College roommates.

EVERY

What's he like?

LYLE

(not quite understanding)

Well, when he lies on his back he snores. But if you whip a pillow at his head he rolls over.

EVERY

I *mean*, did I make the right choice?

LYLE

Richard's a great guy. He's a total geek. That's why you're so good for him.

EVERY

Like you are for Tabitha.

LYLE

Tabitha. Her name means "gazelle." A shy, elusive gazelle.

EVERY

I remember the first day of kindergarten. My mother dressed me in the cutest outfit. I walked into the classroom. All the other kids were running around. In the corner was this little girl, all by herself. I walked right up to her and said, "My name is Avery. You're going to be my best friend."

LYLE

Best friends forever.

EVERY

My own family was a train wreck. But Tabitha was always so reliable, her family so nice. It helped me feel... confident.

LYLE

I try to be confident. I need to be for work. It's hard, but then I look at Tabitha... and I just feel better about myself.

EVERY

Like we feel we can do *anything*.

LYLE

(beginning to be on guard)

Almost.

EVERY

Here you are, on the brink of this incredible success. I guess even reliable people can be intimidated by that. I don't know if *that's* the reason she got pregnant right away.

LYLE

Well, we talked about having kids.

EVERY

Some day.

LYLE

Yeah... some day.

Pause as that sinks in.

EVERY

We're a lot alike, you and I.

LYLE

(greatly impressed)

"You and I." You said that correctly. A lot of people would say "you and me," but that would be wrong.

EVERY

So wrong.

LYLE

So... wrong.

EVERY

We're alike because we see what others can't see. Don't you agree?

LYLE

I do agree.

EVERY

What is it, Lyle? What is it *you* see?

LYLE

Do you want me to tell you?

EVERY

I want you to tell me.

LYLE

Right now?

She places an encouraging hand on his knee.

EVERY

Right now.

He pauses at the precipice, before taking the leap.

LYLE

I see you... naked... And by that I mean without any of your clothes on.

EVERY

I want you to see me that way.

LYLE

I do, I do. I see you that way.

EVERY

Shouldn't we get this out of our system? Just once?

LYLE

Just once?

EVERY

Just. Once.

LYLE

What about...?

EVERY

We have standards. We can be discreet.

LYLE

(coming to a decision)

Give me your phone.

EVERY

My phone?

LYLE

We can't leave an electronic footprint.

She digs her phone out of her purse and gives it to LYLE. He presses some things. He takes out his own phone and presses some things.

LYLE (cont.)

There. We were never here.

EVERY

(impressed)

You with Tabitha, me with Richard – we're the smarter one.

They kiss.

LYLE

Shall we continue, in the bedroom?

EVERY

Hold on...

She pulls off her brightly-colored hair tie, shakes out her hair, snaps the hair tie, and puts it on her wrist for safe keeping.

EVERY (cont.)

Ready.

EVERY takes LYLE by the hand and they stay frozen. ED enters, holding his cell phone. He approaches the frozen LYLE and lets out a sneer.

ED

I had an idea something like this might happen.  
At work I know a guy in our I.T. Department.  
He did me a favor. He called someone who can track cell phone locations.  
Sure, people can turn off the thing that tracks their location.  
But if you check it every day, you can tell if two phones did this *at the very same time*.  
Some people aren't as smart as they think.

EVERY and LYLE go off.

ED (cont.)

Was I being weird?  
Following my daughter around?  
Checking how other people use their cell phones?  
Or was I doing the right thing?  
One thing's for sure – I was taking chances, and that's something I never do.  
Until now.  
A month earlier I took an even bigger chance... a much, much bigger chance.  
Why not? It was Christmas!

**SCENE 10**

Holiday MUSIC. Laughter and merriment.  
 RICHARD and LYLE enter to join ED. The table from the previous scene is replaced by a dining room table, festooned for the season. There are six chairs. Over three chairs are sport coats or Christmas sweaters for the three men. They put them on.

BARB enters in a flamboyantly purple holiday outfit. ED pulls out a chair and seats BARB.

TABITHA enters in a more subdued holiday outfit. LYLE seats her. The three men stand waiting.

BARB

Where's Avery?

RICHARD

In the bathroom.

BARB

After three glasses of wine, a lady should examine her face

EVERY enters, looking stunning, although a bit unsteady.

EVERY

Sorry, everyone.

BARB

Never apologize for looking your best.

EVERY hesitates by her chair. ED sees that RICHARD isn't going to do it, so ED seats EVERY.

RICHARD

(realizing his mistake)

I should have done that.

BARB

Some year, Richard, you will remember.

RICHARD and LYLE seat themselves. ED returns to stand behind his chair and lifts a glass. He is looser, maybe a little silly, but not drunk.



ED

Now that we had our dinner and opened our presents, it is the tradition in this family to return to this table for coffee and dessert. And *this* year, I want to make a toast!

BARB

Sit down, you're getting silly.

ED

I want to make a toast.

RICHARD

I want to hear you make a toast.

ED

Thank you, Richard. Now then. At work I speak from a notecard I hold in the palm of my hand... But I left that notecard on my dresser upstairs.

BARB

(rising)

I'll get it.

ED

(pointing to his head)

It's all right. Have it right here in the control booth.

BARB

(sitting)

Oh, Lordy.

ED

I speak tonight... as a happy man. And it's not just because this is my one night of the year when my wife allows me to have *two* martinis.

(off the chuckles all around)

You know what they say about martinis?

RICHARD

What do they say about martinis?

BARB

(loudly cutting this off)

Ah-*HEM*.

ED

(heeding her)

I forgot what they say about martinis. No, the reason I speak tonight as a happy man is because of all of you. You young people, on the verge of that great adventure – life itself!

He's tipsy.

TABITHA

I'm loquacious.

ED

The loquacious actuary!

LYLE

ED

And when I say life, I mean the life that comes to a family about to have their first grandchild. A child who, God willing, will make our Tabitha and, if I may say, our Lyle—

LYLE

You may! You may!

ED

Make your lives complete, as Tabitha did for Barb and, um, I.

LYLE

“Barb and me.”

ED

“Barb and me?”

LYLE

Object case.

ED

(accepting that)

Barb and me. Our lives complete... I mean happy beyond measure. Because even though I am in the business of analyzing things, and of measuring things, there is one thing you can never measure. One thing you can never... ever...

ED is getting emotional.

TABITHA

What can't you measure, Dad?

ED

Love... Our love for each other... Gosh darn it, I should have used my notecard... And so, in this season of joy, I conclude our evening by asking you all to raise your glasses, all of you, Tabitha and Lyle, and Richard and Avery, and the love of my life, Barbara. I propose we drink a toast: to Love!

EVERYONE

To Love!

They all drink. ED wipes his tears and sits. BARB pats him on the back, rather proud of him.

BARB

No more for your father.

RICHARD

I want to know what they say about martinis.

TABITHA

It's an old joke.

RICHARD

What?

TABITHA

Martinis are like breasts. One is not enough, three are too many.

LYLE

(amused)

Oh, that's a good one.

RICHARD

Ha!

AVERY

(to Richard, scolding)

Martinis are like breasts? That's *funny*?

RICHARD

It's a joke.

AVERY

Did you know what a joke like that sounds like to a woman who had a mastectomy?

RICHARD

Avery, you haven't had a mastectomy.

AVERY

(pointing to Barb)

I am talking about *her*!

Pause.

BARB

It's all right. I had a mastectomy. I'm in remission.

RICHARD  
(mortified)

Oh! I'm sorry, I didn't know.

BARB  
That's all right, Richard. Only my immediate family knew.

TABITHA  
And I told Avery.

LYLE  
I didn't know either.

BARB  
I had a double mastectomy four years ago. That was before you two young men came into our lives. The surgery worked. I didn't get reconstruction but I have these falsies. They give me the greatest set of knockers you ever saw in your life. So everything is fine.

Pause. LYLE rises to make big scene of it.

LYLE  
Barb, I am *so* sorry.

RICHARD  
I didn't mean to...

BARB  
We don't need to belabor it.

ED  
Honey, they're just concerned about you.

BARB  
(losing her composure)  
Ed, didn't we talk about this?

ED  
(retreating)  
You're right. Everything's fine.

Pause.

BARB  
Excuse me please.

BARB goes off to the kitchen. The others are not sure what to do. BARB reenters with a plastic container.

TABITHA

Mom?

BARB

(upbeat again)

I just saw a weather report. It's getting icy. But I am sending each of you home with Christmas dessert in our exciting new line of look-right, seal-tight Bonnie Bayware.

Beat.

AVERY

(rising to help)

I'll do that, Mrs. Brooks.

LYLE

(rising to help)

I'll clear the table.

RICHARD

(rising to help)

I'll get our coats.

BARB

This was a lovely evening. We *have* to do it again next year.

RICHARD goes off to get coats. BARB and AVERY and LYLE busy themselves with table chores.

ED crosses to another part of the stage. TABITHA follows him, worried.

TABITHA

Dad?

ED

I need to turn on the porch light.

She catches up with him in the foyer.

TABITHA

Dad... what just happened in there?

ED

It's getting late.

TABITHA

It's not that late.

ED  
It's getting icy.

TABITHA  
Is Mom really okay?

ED  
She's fine.

TABITHA  
Would you tell me if she isn't?

ED  
We want to be sure you're fine, too.

A pause before she lets it out.

TABITHA  
No, I'm not "fine." What is there to be fine about? I can't say what I want to say. I can't do what I want to do... I'm wearing a bed sheet... Yesterday at work, I was with this woman. Her life is *way* worse than mine. And *she* had to console *me*... This life inside me...? The clock keeps ticking... and I'm scared... I'm scared about Mom... I'm scared about my marriage.

ED  
(profoundly uncomfortable)  
Oh?

TABITHA  
Everything I do is wrong. I'm always being corrected. He's smart. He can be sweet. But I don't even know... if I... I can't even say it... Did I make the wrong decision? About Lyle? Did I?

ED  
I really shouldn't...

TABITHA  
What am I supposed to do? What, Dad? Tell me. What am I supposed to do?

Pause.

ED  
All I can say is...

TABITHA  
(desperate for an answer)  
What?

ED

Make good choices and hang in there.

(after a pause)

I don't know what else there is.

She takes a moment to realize that's all she's going to get from him.

TABITHA

Merry Christmas, Dad.

ED

Merry Christmas, honey.

They embrace, awkwardly. RICHARD enters holding the two coats he retrieved.

RICHARD

Oh, hi.

ED

I better help your mother in the kitchen.

RICHARD

Good to see you, Mr. Brooks. Is Mrs. Brooks okay?

ED

She's fine.

RICHARD

Sorry about the...

ED

No harm, no foul.

RICHARD

I'm not sure what that means.

ED

Merry Christmas, Richard.

They shake hands. ED goes off.

TABITHA

"No harm, no foul" You don't know what that means?

RICHARD

I think I do, but then I don't.

They laugh lightly. It fades.

RICHARD (cont.)

I got our coats. Avery's in the kitchen. Helping your mom with the dishes. Lyle is clearing the table.

TABITHA

That's nice of him.

He moves toward her, coming in for a kiss.

TABITHA (cont.)

Richard, don't.

He nods and steps back politely.

RICHARD

Sorry, I had to.

TABITHA

You *had* to?

RICHARD

(pointing up)

Mistletoe.

TABITHA

(seeing it now with a sigh)

My mother.

AVERY enters holding a container of Bonnie Bayware. She stops when she sees TABITHA and RICHARD and stays to observe, unseen by them.

RICHARD

All I meant to say is Merry Christmas.

TABITHA steps forward and kisses him. He drops the coats to the floor. The kiss grows passionate, both unwilling to end it. Finally, she does.

TABITHA

I love you, Richard. I love you so, so much.

RICHARD

That's all I wanted to hear.



TABITHA

Give me her coat. I'll go find Avery. You go out and warm up the car.

He nods, picks up the coats and hands her Avery's.  
TABITHA goes off one way, RICHARD goes off  
the other way.

EVERY crosses to where they stood. ED enters to  
observe EVERY.

EVERY

(grief-stricken)

But he's mine. He's *mine*.

EVERY remains as ED addresses us.

ED

I have a confession to make.

Avery didn't just happen to walk out there. I told her to.

I made an actuarial assumption. I calculated the probability that mistletoe hanging from a  
ceiling directly over two people in love will eventually cause them to kiss.

I made a further calculation: that Avery, upon seeing this, would react by doing  
something drastic.

Which she did, a few days later, with Lyle, and lost a little hair tie.

EVERY goes off, now determined and vengeful.

ED (cont.)

What possessed me to *do* a thing like that? I never did *anything* like that before.

(realizing the reason)

I did it because I let my daughter down.

She came to me on Christmas day. She invited me into her heart.

I failed her.

All I gave her was "advice."

So I told Avery to go out in the front hall because Richard was waiting for her...

and Avery saw what I wanted her to see... and I know that because when she came back  
to the kitchen, I could see the look on her face.

Maybe I am not a boring man.

But what kind of a man am I?

And if you think *that* was a crazy thing to do...?

Oh, you don't even know the half of it!

**LIGHTS DOWN. END OF ACT ONE.**

ACT TWO

## SCENE 1

LIGHTS UP on ED, setting a table for a ladies' lunch at a nice restaurant.

ED

Oh, hello. While you were out I've been setting this table.

It's November now. It's a month before our gathering at Christmas.

You remember – our Christmas with the mistletoe and the kiss and my confession of what a terrible person I am?

I'm trying to remember what Barb taught me about setting a table.

She said, "Just remember the acronym FORKS. F-O-R-K-S."

From left to right, "F" is for the Fork, then the round plate – that's the letter "O" – then "R" is for the Right of the plate, where we have "K" for the Knife and "S" for the Spoon.

You see? "FORKS!"

(noticing he still holds a salad fork)

Oh no. What do I do with the salad fork? Left or right? Left or right?

I'm guessing...?

(the audience might help him here)

Left.

(stepping back, examining his work with satisfaction)

There.

The ladies will have a nice lunch.

ED goes off. BARB, TABITHA, and AVERY enter.

They sit at the table and consult menus. TABITHA is four-and-a-half months pregnant.

TABITHA

This is nice, Mom.

BARB

Before we eat, I want to establish the ground rules. I am paying for lunch.

TABITHA

We have jobs.

BARB

I had a big quarter, your father isn't here, and I am going to blow some dough!

AVERY

Fine with me.

BARB

Speaking of jobs, I'd like to talk to you two about Bonnie Bay.

TABITHA

I like what I'm doing now.

BARB

Helping people who can't help themselves.

TABITHA

That's what social workers do.

BARB

That's *exactly* what you'd do as a Bonnie Bay Beauty Consultant. Pick your hours, have a balanced life, give women what they crave.

AVERY

What *do* women crave?

BARB

Number one: skin care that delivers confidence. Number two: makeup in trend-target colors. Number three: fabulous fragrances. Plus... social responsibility!

TABITHA

Is anybody else hungry?

BARB

My daughter has moral objections to mascara. But for you, Avery, I have hope. You are the perfect fit for the Bonnie Bay family.

AVERY

(humoring her)

That purple Cadillac is tempting.

BARB

Whenever you want to talk about it.

AVERY

I like being in public relations. Somehow it suits me.

BARB

Enough said. Next subject...

(hauling her purple Franklin planner out of her purple purse and slamming it to the table)

It is time to do some *planning*.

AVERY

You do it on paper?

BARB

Let me tell you: I have used this planner, a new one every year, since the day I left school. It has *never* let me down. I can go back and tell you what I did the day I was married.

AVERY

(insinuating)

In detail?

BARB

For that I devised a little code: "M.L."

AVERY

(touched)

"Make Love," awwww.

BARB

There are a *lot* of M.L.'s in here.

TABITHA

Mom.

BARB

But that's not what I want to say. What I want to say is Tabitha is four and a half months pregnant. It's Half Time! Now we need to *plan*.

TABITHA

What is there to plan?

BARB

You're going to have a *baby*. Do you know what that means?

TABITHA

Uh, yeah.

BARB

You don't have the slightest idea. Now then, let's take a look at our calendars.

TABITHA and AVERY take out their phones.

BARB (cont.)

What if you drop those in the toilet? Your lives will be *over*.

TABITHA

We're ready.

BARB

First of all, I want you all to come to our house for dinner on Christmas day. Tabitha will be with Lyle. Avery, are you still dating that Richard?

So far. AVERY

Maybe you can get him to tuck in his shirt. BARB

Working on it. AVERY

AVERY and TABITHA put the date into their phones.

Everybody have that down? See, I did it faster than you. Now, let's jump to March. I want to schedule a baby shower. BARB

We're doing a baby shower with all our friends in February. TABITHA

I want to do a special one – just the six of us. BARB

Special one? TABITHA

You don't know if it's a boy or girl, right? BARB

We want to wait to find out. TABITHA

Good! BARB

Why? TABITHA  
(suspicious)

It's the latest thing. You tell the baby doctor to get the test results that tell you if it's a baby boy or a baby girl. Then you put it in a sealed envelope. BARB

That we open at the baby shower? AVERY

They call it Baby Shower Bombshell! BARB

I love it!

AVERY

No, I don't think so.

TABITHA  
(doubtful)

March tenth works for me.

AVERY  
(consulting her phone)

March tenth!

BARB  
(writing it into her planner)

Wait a minute...

TABITHA

I want to do it at my apartment.

AVERY  
(ignoring Tabitha)

Do you have parking? I'm thinking of Ed.

BARB

Street parking.

AVERY

March tenth is a week before my due date.

TABITHA

Women in our family pop late.

BARB

How will we do our shopping if we don't know if it's a boy or a girl?

AVERY

Avery, do you *see* why Bonnie Bay is in your future?

BARB

Oh, I'll worry about that later. We'll do it!

AVERY

Hold on, both of you. Isn't this *my* baby?

TABITHA

AVERY

It's everybody's baby now, Tab.

BARB

March tenth is *in ink*. Baby Shower Bombshell!

TABITHA accepts the inevitable.

TABITHA

Are you going to tell Dad?

BARB

Thank you for reminding me. I can be a steamroller.

AVERY

How did you get so lucky, Mrs. Brooks? You and Mr. Brooks are so good together.

BARB

Yes, I think we are.

AVERY

What's the secret?

BARB

(growing reflective)

Secret? There *is* no secret. It's work and talk and having your own closet. It's keeping your promises over a lot of years. And some day, you look at your old planners and all you see are a lot of little marks: M.L... M.L... M.L...

AVERY

(genuinely touched)

I'm going to cry.

BARB

I got cancer. I lost my hair. They cut off my boobs.

Ed tried to do his like-a-rock imitation. But he couldn't. He was like a rock in an earthquake, breaking loose and rolling downhill.

That scared me more than anything. If *he* was going to pieces, who could I count on?

On the other hand, I kind of enjoyed it.

I thought to myself: I'll have this big funeral. I'll lie in my purple casket, covered in purple asters, and violets – lilacs if it's the spring. I'm at peace. My makeup is perfect.

Ed will be there, weeping, breaking down. Clutching his chest. Everyone will be worried, telling him to stay seated. But he'll say, "No! I want to hug her one last time!"

And before anybody can stop him, Ed will rush up to the open casket. He'll reach into the box. He'll put his arms under my dead body. He'll lift me up to embrace me one last time.

And even though it's pretty gross, because by now I'm stiff as a board, every woman sitting at that funeral will know:

I had a man who loved me!

Pause.

EVERY  
(overcome)

I want a man like that.

EVERY blows her nose into her linen napkin.

BARB  
(reaching into her purse)

Use a tissue.

TABITHA

Mom, you got better.

BARB reaches out to hold TABITHA's hand.

BARB  
My daughter came to see me every day and I got better.  
Now she's married and about to have a baby.  
What do I have to complain about? Nothing.  
You young women.  
You need someone to live with, and you need someone to die with.  
A man, a woman, a spouse, a child, a friend – I don't care as long as that person  
is there for you.  
Really *there* for you.

TABITHA

Are you okay?

BARB  
I wish everyone would stop asking me that. I'm fine.

ED enters. BARB and EVERY and TABITHA go  
off. The table and chairs are replaced by a park bench.

ED  
That ladies' lunch? My daughter told me about it. It touched her. It touches me.  
I wonder: Will I really rush up to that purple casket?  
Will I really make that big crazy scene in front of everyone?  
I don't think I'm ready for that – not yet anyway...

ED pulls colorful autumn leaves from his coat pocket  
and drops them around the park bench.

ED (cont.)  
I need to go back some more.  
A month before this, I was walking through the park on a nice fall day.



ED exits.

**SCENE 2**

TABITHA and RICHARD enter in autumn coats.  
RICHARD hands his phone to her.

RICHARD

Now you try.

TABITHA

Can I?

RICHARD

Wait for somebody to come by. That old guy, right over there.

TABITHA

Just point it?

RICHARD

And touch this button... right... here.

TABITHA touches the button and examines what emerges on the screen. She sits on the bench, amazed.

RICHARD (cont.)

I give you: *Whozit*.

TABITHA

(scrolling through the data)

His name, his address... His mother, his father... He went off to war, got married – look at his bride... They had a family... His retirement party... His whole life.

RICHARD

Pretty good, huh?

TABITHA

You invented this?

RICHARD

(modest shrug)

I'm working out the bugs.

TABITHA

This is really good, Richard.

RICHARD

Lyle thinks it's going to make us rich. I don't know. A lot of people are trying. The technology is out there, the data. You just have to put it together.

TABITHA

But you *did* it.

RICHARD takes the phone and points it at her.

RICHARD

Now it's your turn.

TABITHA

(hands covering her face)

Oh, no.

RICHARD

Let me see you... c'mon... just for second...

She rises and starts running around the bench, hiding her face from him. He chases her with the phone, laughing, both of them playful and happy.

TABITHA

Exercise is good for me! ... Good for me! ... Good for me! ... Good for me!

He catches up with her and they fall into each other's arms laughing, then shyly separate.

RICHARD

Come on. I want to show you *you*.

She gives in, posing for him mock-heroically. He captures her on Whozit and consults the data.

RICHARD (cont.)

Oooooo.

TABITHA

(now fascinated)

What? What does it show?

RICHARD

Tabitha Brooks...

TABITHA

I'm in there?

RICHARD

I didn't know you were a Girl Scout Brownie.

He shows her, to her amazement.

TABITHA

How do they get this?

RICHARD

Is that Avery standing next to you?

TABITHA

It sure is.

RICHARD

(looking closely)

That's a very short skirt for a Brownie.

(scrolling through)

Your folks... your cat...

TABITHA

Incredible.

RICHARD

(stopping at one data point)

You really need to pay this parking ticket.

TABITHA

It *knows*?

He laughs then sees something on Whozit that returns them to their plight.

RICHARD

Your husband.

TABITHA

My husband.

RICHARD

And here's me. The Best Man.

Pause.

RICHARD (cont.)

You said I might be the father.

TABITHA

No, I didn't. Lyle is the father.

RICHARD

You said there's a one tenth of one percent chance.

TABITHA

I should have said zero percent.

RICHARD

I did research. Even if you didn't start ovulating until a few days after we made love, there's still a chance.

TABITHA

Can we please not talk about my *ovulation*?

RICHARD

There's still a chance.

TABITHA

It's not your baby!

RICHARD rises, pockets his phone, and starts picking up autumn leaves.

TABITHA (cont.)

We made a mistake. It happened one time. I'm not blaming you. I'm blaming me. I said I'd meet you here in the park. You said you wanted to show me Whozit. Fine. I saw Whozit. It's amazing. But we are not talking about the father of my baby. Because you and I both know, it's not you. It's Lyle.

RICHARD keeps picking up leaves, arranging them.

TABITHA (cont.)

Do you have any idea what it was like for me? I was on my *honeymoon*. I was with him but I was thinking about you. I made up one excuse after another: I was exhausted, I wasn't feeling right. He was good about it. Patient. I knew I couldn't keep putting him off forever. After a few days... well, you know the rest.

RICHARD

(presenting his bouquet of leaves to her)

The flowers are gone. But here.

TABITHA

It's... the most beautiful thing I ever saw.

RICHARD

I wish I could give you something better.

TABITHA

I wish this *was* your baby.

RICHARD's hopes revive.

TABITHA (cont.)

Oh, Richard, what are we going to do?

RICHARD

Whozit doesn't do what Lyle thinks. Oh sure, it's a handy tool. But make our choices for us? Make our *choices*? It doesn't know what's in our hearts.

TABITHA

Stop talking that way.

RICHARD

I love you and you love me. *That's* what's in our hearts. Only *we* know that!

TABITHA

(hitting her limit, rising to go)

There. That's it. I'm gone.

RICHARD

(suddenly)

Why didn't you come back?

TABITHA

What?

RICHARD

The morning of your wedding, after you left my room. I told you to come back. Why didn't you?

TABITHA

I *did* come back. I almost knocked on your door. But something happened. See if Whozit can show you *that*.

TABITHA goes off. RICHARD looks at his phone, shakes his head and goes off the other way. ED enters in a raincoat, binoculars around his neck.

ED

Oh, no, it's not what you think. I'm a bird watcher.

Really, it's a good hobby.

I spotted them, my daughter and what looked to be her soul mate.

I could see her struggle with a question: Is she allowed to follow her heart?

I need to go back some more, to a decision *I* made.

It happened in a car, one month earlier, when I decided to follow my *own* heart.

**SCENE 3**

BARB enters. They sit in the purple car. She drives.

BARB

What great news!

ED

Interesting.

BARB

Our little girl is going to be a mother.

ED

We're going to be grandparents.

BARB

Being a grandparent completes things. The circle of life. I can go now.

ED catches something in her voice.

ED

Why did you say that?

BARB

Say what?

ED

"I can go now."

BARB

It's a phrase.

ED

Are you going somewhere?

BARB

I'm not going anywhere.

ED

You said, "I can go now."

BARB

It's a phrase.

ED

You told me your doctor's appointment went fine. Your doctor's appointment earlier this week.

Yes, I know.

BARB

Nothing to report?

ED

It went fine.

BARB

ED looks out the car window, taking in the truth.  
She notices this and reaches over to hold his hand.

BARB (cont.)

This is how I want it. We're going to do it my way.

ED

Then it went fine.

Pause. BARB refocuses on driving.

BARB

Let's talk about something else. Let's talk about our daughter. I worry about her.

ED

Why do you worry about her?

BARB

She doesn't seem happy. Ever since that wedding. Something's going on. Do you know what's going on?

ED  
(a bit too quickly)

No.

BARB

You don't? You really don't?

ED

Barb, she got married. She's going to have a baby. She's... adjusting.

BARB

Do you think she's happy?

ED

"Happy, happy, happy." Everyone wants to know if they're happy. The important thing is making good choices. Then you have better odds of being happy.

BARB

You are such an actuary. *Numbers.*

ED

People think being an actuary is all about numbers. It's not. It's about time. What happens to people over time.

Pause.

BARB

Ed, will you promise me something?

ED

Promise you what?

BARB

If something happens to me – not that it will, cuz I'm fine – but if something happens, will you make sure Tabitha is happy?

ED

That's hard to do for another person. Even your own child.

BARB

But you'll talk to her, listen to her, do whatever you can?

ED

Like what?

BARB

Whatever you can.

ED

I'm not the kind of person who can do "whatever."

BARB

Ed.

ED

That sounds more like you.

BARB

Ed!

ED

What?

BARB

All I am telling you... is you need to put the *act* in *actuary*.



Pause as ED makes his decision.

ED

I will take whatever action is necessary to statistically improve our daughter's probability of being happy.

BARB

No actuary talk.

ED

All right.

BARB

Do you promise you will do whatever you can?

ED

Barb, I promise, with all my heart.

BARB

(satisfied)

All right. I am throwing these bad thoughts in the ocean.

Long pause as the wheels turn in ED's head.

ED

Oh... did I tell you? This gal at work had a kid. They did this baby shower. Nobody knew if it was a baby boy or a baby girl until the day of the shower.

BARB

I heard of that. They cut the cake and inside it's pink or blue.

ED

No, she did something new. She had her doctor do the test and get the sex of the baby and put it all in a letter. The letter went to this gal's mother. This gal's mother organized this baby shower and they read the letter there. It was a hit.

BARB

(amazed)

What a great idea. Does it have a name?

ED

(inspired)

"Baby Shower Bombshell."

BARB

That is the most brilliant thing I ever heard.

ED

Think we could do something like that for our daughter? It could make her happy.

BARB

“Baby Shower Bombshell.” We’ll do it!

BARB rises from the car but does not go off yet.

ED

And so, I agreed. I agreed to the fiction that Barb was still in remission — that the cancer hadn’t come back, although it had.

And I agreed to a promise – that somehow, someday, I will help our daughter find a path to happiness.

It’s what Barb wants. We’re going to do it her way.

BARB nods, satisfied, and goes off.

ED (cont.)

Well, not entirely.

“Baby Shower Bombshell?” I made that up.

Pretty good for an actuary.

#### SCENE 4

ED is joined by TABITHA, RICHARD, LYLE, AVERY and BARB. Laughter and chit-chat.

LYLE

Can I have everyone’s attention? Clink-clink-clink? Thank you for coming over here on short notice. Tabitha and I have something to announce.

BARB

(knowing instantly)

You’re pregnant.

TABITHA

I’m pregnant.

Screams of joy from BARB and AVERY.

BARB launches herself into TABITHA’s arms.

LYLE

This is what I get for ordering oysters on our honeymoon.

(needing to explain)

That’s a joke. There is no correlation between oyster consumption and fertility rates.

ED  
(shaking his hand)

Congratulations.

LYLE

Thanks, Ed.

AVERY

Richard, isn't that great?

RICHARD  
(shaking Lyle's hand)

Congratulations.

LYLE

Thanks, buddy.

BARB

You didn't tell *me*.

TABITHA

Mom, I'm only three months along. We just found out.

BARB  
(forgiving)

Oh, come here you.

BARB and TABITHA hug again. ED and TABITHA hug. RICHARD quietly does the three-month math.

BARB (cont.)

I want to hear *all* about it. What did the doctor say? When is the due date? What are you going to do after the baby comes?

TABITHA

Mom, we'll talk about it later.

BARB

You're right – today we celebrate!

RICHARD

I feel like a beer. Can I get a beer?

LYLE

In the fridge.

RICHARD

Be right back.

RICHARD exits. ED and TABITHA notice him go.

EVERY

So how does it feel?

TABITHA

I got a baby bump.

EVERY

I *thought* you looked puffy.

LYLE

Today I got home from work, blabbing away. How we got the money from the angel investors. That's when Tabitha told me. It's a little *earlier* than we planned. But why wait for a good thing, right? So I said: "Let's get you four over here!"

TABITHA hands BARB her drink, looking a bit sick.

BARB

Honey, are you okay?

TABITHA  
(heading off)

I need to pee.

BARB

I had to pee every second of every day...  
(after Tabitha is out of earshot)  
And I puked like a sailor on shore leave.

LIGHTS shift to the kitchen where RICHARD drinks a beer. The others remain in conversational motion. TABITHA moves to the kitchen area.

TABITHA

Get your beer?

RICHARD  
(raising a bottle)

Here's to you.

TABITHA

Sorry I couldn't tell you.

RICHARD

I find out when your mother did. A high honor.

TABITHA

I came to see how you were. I need to get back.

RICHARD

Whose baby is it?

TABITHA

Excuse me?

RICHARD

You heard me.

TABITHA

It's me and my husband's baby. *My* and my husband's baby. *However* you say it.

RICHARD

Are you sure?

TABITHA

You have no right to ask that.

RICHARD

I think I do.

TABITHA

The baby is not yours, Richard.

RICHARD

Three months? Do the math.

TABITHA

It's not.

RICHARD

As I recall, we were careless, swept away. 'Cuz somebody came to somebody's room on the morning of her *wedding*!

TABITHA

Shh!

She looks down the hall. They lower their voices.

RICHARD

You can't be sure that baby is not ours.

TABITHA

Richard, I *can* be sure.

One hundred percent?  
RICHARD

Ninety-nine point nine percent.  
TABITHA

Ninety-nine point nine percent means you're not sure!  
RICHARD

Shhhhhh!  
TABITHA

Pause. ED starts to move toward the kitchen but stops when he starts to overhear the following.

He can't love you as much as I love you. That would be impossible.  
RICHARD

If you love me so much, why didn't you tell me before I married him?  
TABITHA

I don't know. I'm stupid, I'm shy, Lyle met you first... But then I *did* tell you! The morning of your wedding!  
RICHARD

Keep your voice down!  
TABITHA

No, you keep your voice down!  
RICHARD

No, you keep your voice down!  
TABITHA

ED stomps his feet and clears his throat loudly as he enters their playing area. TABITHA and RICHARD clam up.

Your mother said I could have one beer.  
ED

In the fridge.  
TABITHA

How is it, Richard?  
ED

RICHARD

(at Tabitha)

I'll let you know after I drink a barrel of it.

TABITHA exits, upset. RICHARD drinks, sulking.

ED

(to the audience)

I like beer. I like Richard.

I like to think I can spot a guy in love.

What a pickle.

Earlier that same day...

ALL exit except TABITHA.

### SCENE 5

TABITHA moves to wait in her living room, pensive.  
LYLE enters, pumped up with energy.

TABITHA

Welcome home. I have something to tell you.

LYLE

Yes! Yes! Yes! This is the greatest thing that ever happened to me!

TABITHA

What is?

LYLE

Those guys I've been talking to. Yes! Those four guys. Yes! Those angel investors. Yes!  
They did it!

TABITHA

Great. What did they do?

LYLE

(replaying his triumph)

I stayed calm. I went over the business plan. They slid a piece of paper across the table.  
There it was: two hundred thousand dollars over the next six months. They take twenty  
percent. We keep eighty percent. Richard and I can get an office. Hire guys to write code.  
Lock down data. Start up Whozit. Drive traffic. Get venture capital. Get bought out.  
And we'll be rich!

TABITHA

(breaking in)

I'm pregnant!

Pause.

LYLE

Did you say...?

TABITHA

I took the test at home but I wanted to be sure. I saw a doctor. I'm pregnant.

LYLE sits down – it's all too much for him.

TABITHA (cont.)

I'm three months along.

LYLE

(consulting his cell phone calendar)

Three months? But that means...

TABITHA

Right after the wedding.

LYLE

That *was* some honeymoon. Oh, Tabitha, forget the business. This is... this is...

(suddenly realizing)

This isn't right.

TABITHA

What isn't?

LYLE

This *can't* be right.

TABITHA

(on guard)

Why not?

LYLE

I don't deserve to be this happy.

TABITHA

Oh, of course you do.

LYLE

No. People look at me, spouting off facts, correcting everybody. They think I'm a big phony. But I had to be this way. When I was growing up, nothing I did was good enough. I had to be perfect. And I'm working so hard, and what Richard and I are trying to do is so risky, and now we have somebody else's money, and now I'm going to have a baby and be a father and I'm so, so... scared. I'm scared I'll be a failure. I'm scared you won't love me any more.



He sobs. TABITHA holds him. ED enters with a moveable door frame and puts it in position for the next scene. He watches TABITHA and LYLE.

ED

Look at him. He thinks he's a new father. Scared to death. I know the feeling. But that sad speech of his? Did you notice? How many times did he use the word "I" or "me," referring to himself? Sixteen times. How many times did he use the word "you," referring to my daughter? Only once. Sometimes numbers *do* tell the story.

TABITHA and LYLE exit.

ED (cont.)

I'm still not ready.  
I need to go back one last time.  
Nine months back from where we first began.  
The morning of that wedding. We're finally there...

ED exits.

## SCENE 6

RICHARD enters, buttoning up his shirt, lost in thought. TABITHA enters, buttoning up her blouse. They are happy, tender with each other.

TABITHA

Come here.

She finishes buttoning up his shirt.

RICHARD

So.

TABITHA

So.

RICHARD

What do we do now?

TABITHA

I go back to my room. My mom takes me to brunch with my bridesmaids. She takes me back to my room. I go to the closet where my wedding dress is hanging. I put it on. Then a lot of things happen I don't need to think about because it's all on somebody's list. At two o'clock this afternoon, my dad walks me down the aisle... And I get married.

Pause.

RICHARD

Thank you for knocking on my door.

TABITHA

At four in the morning?

RICHARD

I was trying to find the courage to knock on *your* door. Just one floor up in this hotel, resort, wherever we are.

TABITHA

Who does a destination wedding anyway? Oh, my mother.

RICHARD

It's pretty here.

TABITHA

It's beautiful.

RICHARD

No, you're beautiful.

Pause.

TABITHA

People will be getting up. My parents. I need to go.

RICHARD

You don't have to.

TABITHA

I *do* have to.

She crosses to the door.

RICHARD

I'll be the guy at the front. Standing next to the groom.

TABITHA

Do me a favor? When I get to the front, if I look at you... don't look at me?

RICHARD nods in agony. TABITHA turns to go.

RICHARD

Tabitha.

TABITHA flies into his arms as the floodgates burst. They cry together, locked in an embrace.

RICHARD (cont.)

Don't do this, don't do this!

TABITHA

I have to, I have to!

RICHARD

(in a rush)

You can change your mind. You say you made a terrible mistake. You're marrying the wrong guy. Everyone can get a refund on their air fare and accommodations, and if they can't do that, okay, we bought the cake and we bought the food and we'll still have a wedding but guess what! There's been a change of plans! Tabitha Brooks is going to marry Richard Snorf!

TABITHA

(breaking apart from him)

It's too late!

Pause.

RICHARD

I'll walk you back to your room.

TABITHA

Stay here.

RICHARD

Then I want you to think about what I said. Every step you take, every step back to your room, think about it. It is *never* too late. Come back and knock on this door. Knock on it. I'll be here.

TABITHA goes through the door. RICHARD goes off the other way.

ED enters carrying a bulky plastic garment bag. He catches a glimpse of TABITHA as she leaves RICHARD's room and she goes off. ED is puzzled.

He turns and is about to knock on RICHARD's door. Before he does, BARB enters in a purple mother-of-the-bride's gown.

BARB

It's the big day-yay!

Why are you up?  
ED

I couldn't *wait* to get dressed.  
BARB

It's six-thirty in the morning.  
ED

I bet others are up. You know what goes on between bridesmaids and groomsmen.  
BARB

TABITHA enters on her way back to RICHARD's room. She sees her parents and freezes in panic. ED sees TABITHA and puts the garment bag in front of BARB so she is screened from seeing TABITHA.

Barb!  
ED

What are you doing?  
BARB

I think I forgot something.  
ED

What?  
BARB

Do you think everything is in this bag that needs to be in this bag?  
ED

Why are you asking me?  
BARB

I'm delivering tuxes to the groomsmen. Would you mind checking? Unzip the bag and check for me?  
ED

Oh, all right.  
BARB

BARB reluctantly unzips the bag and checks. ED rotates BARB around as TABITHA makes her way off.

BARB (cont.)  
How can I check if you don't keep still?

Is it all there? ED

I guess so. BARB

Jacket, pants, shirt, tie, cummerbund, suspenders, cuff links, studs, shoes? ED

It's all there. BARB

Did you look? ED

Yes. BARB

It's all there? ED

Yes. BARB

Are you sure? ED

Yes! BARB

ED confirms that TABITHA is off, then lowers the garment bag.

Well okay then. ED

What is the *matter* with you? BARB

I'm nervous. ED

Oh that's sweet. BARB

Why don't I meet you back in our room? I'll get dressed up, too. ED

BARB  
You don't have to yet.

ED  
You got dressed, I want to get dressed.

BARB  
Fine.

ED  
Meet you back in our room.

BARB  
(suggestive)  
Why? Got something in mind?

ED  
Back in our room, right now.

BARB  
(liking this)  
Whatever you say, Mister M.L.

BARB goes off with a come-hither look. ED makes sure she is well off, takes a deep breath to recover, then turns to RICHARD's door and knocks on it.

RICHARD (off, entering)  
Tabitha!

Ed is startled. RICHARD throws open the door.

ED  
Got your tux.

RICHARD  
I was practicing my toast. For the reception. "Tabitha...! Lyle...!"

RICHARD weakly raises an imagined champagne glass.

ED  
Practice makes perfect.

ED hands RICHARD the bag and is about to go, but turns back with a thought.

Oh, um, Richard? ED (cont.)

Yes? RICHARD

Hang in there. ED

What? RICHARD

Just... hang in there. ED

Okay... RICHARD  
(not quite knowing what he means)

RICHARD closes the door and goes off.

ED  
(realizing it now)  
I was wrong about Tabitha – what I told you earlier, about her being like me: passive, reserved. I can see it now – she’s like Barb: fearless, a risk-taker. Tabitha was on her way back to Richard’s room, about to change the course of history. But there I was, delivering a garment bag. “Make good choices and hang in there?” No! That’s not enough! That’s not enough at all! So I need to jump forward. I need to jump forward to just *after* that baby shower. You got that? Just *after* it.

## SCENE 7

BARB enters. The purple car. ED joins her. She drives, distraught.

BARB  
Baby Shower Bombshell? What a *terrible* idea.

ED  
Watch the road.

BARB  
It was all *your* idea.

ED  
Some gal at work. I just told you about it.

BARB

The whole problem is you never know. You never know the truth ‘til it stands up and whacks you on the head.

ED nods, taking out the envelope he had put back into his jacket pocket at the baby shower. He unfolds the doctor’s letter and reads aloud.

ED

“It is my duty to inform you. The father is Richard Snorf.”

He shakes his head in sympathy, putting the letter back in his jacket pocket.

BARB

*Why* would that baby doctor put that in?

ED

The letter was addressed to Tabitha. The doctor thought only Tabitha would read it.

BARB

The DNA analysis? The National Human Genome Database? I didn’t even know there was a National Human Genome Database. Did you?

ED

Oh, ya know, these days...

BARB

This is terrible. Terrible!

ED

Makes you wonder what happened the morning of that wedding...

Action in the present is joined by action from the past, both on stage at the same time. TABITHA enters on the morning of her wedding. She approaches the door. She walks away. She approaches the door again. She walks away. She finally knocks. RICHARD opens it.

RICHARD

Tabitha. It’s four in the morning.

TABITHA

(in despair)

I can’t sleep.



Are you okay?  
RICHARD

I'm getting married in ten hours.  
TABITHA

The scene continues in the car.

ED  
Richard will be a good husband for Tabitha. A good father.

Richard?  
BARB

ED  
Tabitha and Richard – seems like they're meant for each other.

Do you think?  
BARB

ED  
Always looked that way to me.

The scene continues with the young lovers.

RICHARD  
I can't sleep either. I was thinking about you.

You were?  
TABITHA

RICHARD  
You're all I *ever* think about.

I am?  
TABITHA

RICHARD and TABITHA stay at the open door,  
looking at each other.

Back in the car, something bothers BARB.

BARB  
You say you're surprised about that baby shower.

ED  
Yep.

BARB

You don't seem surprised.

ED

I'm an actuary. I see what happens to people over time. Past, present, future – it's all on a collision course.

BARB

(doubtful)

I suppose.

ED

Time is a powerful thing. There's only one thing stronger.

BARB

What's stronger than time?

ED

Love. Love can turn back the clock... *If* you give it a little help.

BARB

(beginning to see)

Ed, did you fiddle with that letter from the doctor?

ED

Fiddle?

BARB

I gave it to you to put in your coat pocket to bring to that baby shower.

ED

You did?

BARB

That gave you plenty of time to fiddle with it.

ED

Now why would I fiddle with a doctor's confidential letter to a patient?

BARB

(understanding it all)

You did it for me, didn't you.

ED

I made you a promise: put the act in actuary.

BARB

And you keep your promises.

ED

Yes, I do.

Back at the hotel room doorway...

TABITHA

I know it's the morning of my wedding... but can I come in? Please?

RICHARD holds out his hand. She takes it and enters his room, looking around it.

Back in the car...

BARB

*We were young lovers. Long ago. Remember that?*

ED

Yes, I do.

BARB keeps driving. ED rises to address us.

ED (cont.)

I never committed a crime before.

The penalties for falsifying a doctor's letter to a patient must be substantial.

I did more than that. I may have taken one man's child and given it to another man.

Some day they could do a test. They could determine who the real father is.

What about nature vs. nurture? What if this child develops an interest in grammar?

BARB rises from the car. She nods to ED in approval. BARB goes off.

ED moves downstage. He puts on a purple tie.

ED (cont.)

It's been a year now.

Today is the day of Barb's funeral.

Everyone will be there: Tabitha, Richard. That baby you heard howling, way back at the start? We just celebrated her first birthday. Even the great Bonnie Bay is attending.

I am *not* a boring man.

I am *going* to make that big crazy scene.

I am going to run up to the front, and lift her up, and embrace my wife one last time, in front of that funeral, in front of the whole world.

Then everyone will know – Barb had a man who *loved* her.

He moves to the car. He takes a purple flower from his pocket and puts it into his lapel.

I'm ready now.  
I see that Barb was right.  
We were young lovers once...

ED (cont.)

He turns to look at TABITHA. She kisses RICHARD  
and they stay that way, locked in an embrace.

ED turns back to us.

... Weren't you?

ED (cont.)

ED sits in the driver's seat and begins to drive.

**LIGHTS DOWN.**

**END OF PLAY.**