

Scene Four

(A room at the Swallow's Lodge, with all the beige and tapestry that implies.)

(CHARLOTTE and LUCINDA are on the bed, clothed except for naked feet. Their toes are spread out by brightly colored foam separators, their toenail polish is drying. Pedicure accoutrements are on the bed.)

(CHARLOTTE is tense.)

LUCINDA. Night before my wedding I got high as a kite.

CHARLOTTE. Well I'm sober, so.

LUCINDA. From what Martha told me, she was the *real* alcoholic. Bottle of vodka, 10 a.m.

CHARLOTTE. Let's change the subject.

LUCINDA. I joined the Peace Corps.

CHARLOTTE. You did? (beat) Isn't that for teenagers?

LUCINDA. Apparently my age is an advantage. A few weeks after you get back from your honeymoon I'll be leaving town for a while.

CHARLOTTE. Congratulations.

LUCINDA. I thank you.

(beat)

CHARLOTTE. I thought now that you're footloose and fancy free you might come up to D.C. and spend some time with us. We're talking about having a baby, you know. At some point.

LUCINDA. And at some point I'll be there. I promise you.

(pause)

The tux looks so sharp on you.

CHARLOTTE. Really?

LUCINDA. I get it now. It's very rock star.

CHARLOTTE. It's just a costume anyway. The whole thing is just costumes.

LUCINDA. Honey, do you not like the tux?

CHARLOTTE. I like it fine.

LUCINDA. Honey it's your wedding! You have to like the dress! Or the pant suit!

CHARLOTTE. I like it more than anything else I found.

LUCINDA. Oh honey, no! You have to feel beautiful on your wedding day.

CHARLOTTE. Martha's beautiful.

LUCINDA. I don't give a shit about Martha! I give a shit about you. Listen, I think the tux looks great but if you're not happy we will drive to a mall right now and I swear we will find something.

CHARLOTTE. I do like it. I do. I'm just nervous.

LUCINDA. There's nothing to be nervous about. You can always get divorced.

CHARLOTTE. I wish your sisters *weren't* coming. You should have checked with me before saying yes.

LUCINDA. I was excited they changed their mind.

CHARLOTTE. Everyone in the world is coming. Except Jonny.

(LUCINDA *decides not to comment on that.*)

CHARLOTTE. Nothing's how it was supposed to be. Nothing. You and Dad aren't together. I'm marrying a woman. The whole thing's just going to look weird.

LUCINDA. Honey, weird is good. I promise you. You think it didn't look weird when God created the world? There was all that nothingness and then...what the fuck is all of that? Weird is life. Take a close look at a fish. Weird.

(beat)

CHARLOTTE. You said you didn't want to perform for me, remember?

LUCINDA. Yes.

CHARLOTTE. So, I know you and Dad are disappointed that I'm not marrying a guy.

LUCINDA. I can't imagine a guy in the world as special as Martha.

CHARLOTTE. Dad's disappointed. He's being really big about it, but he wanted me to marry that football player. Or that movie star.

LUCINDA. Dad was going to be disappointed in whoever you married. He is a Jew. There is never *not* a problem.

(*pause*)

CHARLOTTE. Carol *is* a mouse. I wish she wasn't coming to the wedding.

LUCINDA. You're going to have such a good time tomorrow you won't even know she's there.

CHARLOTTE. Are you seeing anyone?

LUCINDA. Unlike your dad, I feel no need for companionship. Between now and forever all I want are short, sharp bursts of life.

CHARLOTTE. What does that mean?

LUCINDA. I'm seeing several people.

CHARLOTTE. (*taking this in*) Do you meet them online?

LUCINDA. Hell no, I do it the old fashioned way. Bars and supermarkets. Making up for lost time. I'm fifty years old. I'm not ready to put my orgasm in a drawer. I wasn't ready when I was thirty-five either.

(*beat*)

CHARLOTTE. Did you guys really not have sex for fifteen years?

LUCINDA. I don't want to tell tales out of school here –

CHARLOTTE. Good, that's best.

LUCINDA. But the very last time we did it, August fourth, seven summers ago, he stopped in the middle because he was trying to remember a telephone number. (*beat*) It's funny but it's not funny.

CHARLOTTE. (*beat*) I'm torn between wanting more details and wanting a more significant mother-daughter boundary.

LUCINDA. I know, right? It's so hard to know when to be mother and daughter and when to be friends. I'll follow your lead.

CHARLOTTE. Was Dad just not *capable*?

LUCINDA. Don't marry a writer, honey. All that time alone, with a computer. I'd check his browser history. Oh, he was capable.

(beat)

CHARLOTTE. I want us to be friends.

(beat)

LUCINDA. Walking through that house after you left for college, you know what I kept thinking about? My sister Stephanie's cat. And how it died. It died a month after she went to college. And it was odd because it was in perfect health, the prime of life. Nobody knew what the hell happened. But I knew. That cat died because no one in that house gave a damn about it after my sister had gone. You were gone. Your father was writing. And I could not stop thinking about that dead cat.

CHARLOTTE. You sure it wasn't something it ate.

LUCINDA. It was an absence of love.

CHARLOTTE. But Dad does love you. He still loves you.

LUCINDA. But he's not *in* love with me. He's not in love with Carol either. He just likes someone waiting for him. In the other room.

CHARLOTTE. You stayed so long because of me, didn't you?

LUCINDA. I almost left one time. Well you know all about that.

CHARLOTTE. Do I? No I don't. What?

(LUCINDA looks at her confused.)

When did you almost leave?

LUCINDA. That night. That night you...

CHARLOTTE. Oh.

LUCINDA. You knew that. That was why... You heard us. Fighting about me leaving.

CHARLOTTE. I don't remember.

LUCINDA. The psychiatrist said you knew I was leaving and you freaked out. He blamed me.

CHARLOTTE. I didn't know that. We drove home in silence. We never talk about this.

LUCINDA. We're discussing it now.

CHARLOTTE. I don't want to. It's the night before my wedding.

LUCINDA. I apologize.

CHARLOTTE. I don't even know how we got onto this.

LUCINDA. We eliminated a boundary.

CHARLOTTE. Oh right.

LUCINDA. Let's put it right back up.

CHARLOTTE. You should not have blamed yourself. He should not have blamed you. I didn't say anything like that. I didn't say hardly anything at all. You must have told him you were fighting. He asked me if that was why. I said yes. It was just easier. I wanted to get out of there. Shit!

(CHARLOTTE has messed up the drying nails on one of her feet.)

LUCINDA. I'll take care of it.

(She takes CHARLOTTE's foot in her lap and re-beautifies the nail.)

I love that your nail polish is your something blue. *(no response)* We got too serious didn't we, and we shouldn't have. That's my fault. *(beat)* When you were a little girl and you got sad do you remember what I'd do?

CHARLOTTE. *(grim)* Don't do it.

(LUCINDA lunges at CHARLOTTE.)

LUCINDA. Tickle tickle tickle!

THE MYSTERY OF LOVE & SEX

(She tickles CHARLOTTE and CHARLOTTE can't help laughing. The tickle-tussle becomes a very tight hug.)

CHARLOTTE. Now you've messed up both our nails.

LUCINDA. Let's start again.

(She takes CHARLOTTE's foot, and removes all the nail polish. She does not look up as:)

CHARLOTTE. I told Whitney I was in love with Jasmine. But that was dumb because Whitney told Ashley and Kayla. And Jasmine. And they came and found me in the bathroom at recess. And they asked me about it. "I never said I was in *love* with Jasmine. I said I loved her." That's what I said, quick as a flash. And I saw them consider this little word "in" and whether or not it made a difference. And I was thinking about it too, was leaving out that one word going to save me? And then Kayla said, "If you didn't say it then why are you about to cry? There are tears in your eyes." I said, "No, there's not." But there were. And they were about to spill out. Then Kayla said, "Blink." And the three of them were just staring, waiting. So I blinked. And somehow the lid of my eye pushed back the tears. Nothing ran down my face. I thought God saved me. Now I have to change. That night I decided to become an Orthodox Jew and slept like a baby. The next morning I walked to the bathroom and cut my wrists. It had nothing to do with you and Dad fighting. It had to do with me realizing there was a major problem with the way I fell in love.

(Pause. Really long.)

LUCINDA. *(firmly)* Well there is no way you could have handled a divorce. Not with all that going on.

CHARLOTTE. No one knows that story except Martha.

LUCINDA. Not Jonny?

CHARLOTTE. Jonny was the only kid at school who never asked me why. That was one of the things I liked about him.