

Hearing Voices
by
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Hearing Voices

List of Characters: (4 men, 5 women)

Wendyl Brackman: 35-45, a man haunted by his past

Celia: 20s, Wendyl's ex-wife, sharp-tongued, a ghost.

Mother: 30-40, Wendyl's mother. Also a ghost.

Brackman: 30-40, Wendyl's father. A ghost.

Dick Perkle: 30-50, Wendyl's boss.

Tina Sargeant: 30-35, a woman unable to leave her past behind.

Myrtle Jeffries: 40-55, owner of the Green Turtle Diner,
Tina's boss.

Hattie Stoker: 70s, Tina's Grandmother.

Mick: 20s, Tina's ex-husband. A ghost.

3/30/08

HEARING VOICES

SETTING: The Green Turtle diner, minimally represented. It at least needs to have a booth or table with two chairs.

Around the diner are several other playing areas. All are minimally represented. All the actors remain on stage throughout the duration of the play.

It is possible to just have a few empty playing areas, and have the ghosts seated behind or around the diner, on risers or simple bleachers.

The areas that will be represented are:

1. An area from Tina's past containing a hospital bed (a bench works fine). At rise, her ex-husband, MICK, sits in a chair and reads Sports Illustrated, in the darkness.
2. Hattie and Tina's Apartment. At rise it is inhabited by Hattie Stoker, Tina's grandmother, in the dark. It might have a worn couch or a comfy chair.
3. A Museum area with a padded museum bench that can be moved or struck.
4. Dick Perkle's Office with a desk and chair. At rise, Dick Perkle is at his desk, in the darkness, working.
5. An area from Wendyl's past containing his ex-wife, CELIA. A rise, she's in the darkness, perched on a stool.
6. An area from Wendyl's past, populated with his Mother and Father (BRACKMAN). At rise, they sit on stools or simple chairs, in the darkness.

All the ghosts remain in their areas until noted.

AT RISE: WENDYL BRACKMAN sits at a booth in the diner. On his table are two cleaned-off plates, three empty glasses, and the final crumbs of a piece of cherry pie. Wendyl is exhausted, and when he's not eating, he stares straight ahead.

TINA SERGEANT is a waitress here at the Green Turtle Diner. Tina's boss (and owner of the Green Turtle) MYRTLE JEFFRIES stands behind the counter, watching Wendyl and Tina.

Celia whispers from the darkness of her area.

Wendyl.

CELIA

Tina walks to Wendyl's table and stands for a moment. He smiles but says nothing.

TINA

How was the cherry pie?

WENDYL

Good.

TINA

Want another piece?

Dick calls out from his area.

DICK

It's a lot of extra work.

WENDYL

I'm not sure.

TINA

You look like you could use it.

BRACKMAN

(whispering) What did you say?

WENDYL

Okay.

Tina walks back to the counter. Wendyl resumes his blank stare, but he's troubled by Dick's voice.

DICK
I'm counting on you, Wendy.

TINA
Another piece of cherry pie, Myrtle.

MYRTLE
I think he likes you.

TINA
Shut up.

MYRTLE
The man can't turn you down, Tina. He's ordered extra fries, three cokes, and now a second piece of pie. You keep working magic like that, and I'll be a rich woman.

TINA
Maybe he's just hungry.

DICK
(overlapping) Fucking Navy Bastards blame everything on us.

MYRTLE
Maybe I'm Mother Theresa.

TINA
Just get me another piece of pie.

MYRTLE
I tell ya, Friday always brings out the real winners.

Myrtle prepares another slice while Tina watches Wendyl.

DICK
They want 20,000 surgical gloves yesterday and nobody's submitted a bid yet. Same bullshit excuse, say they sent their ad four weeks ago. Like hell. I just got it today. Today. Goddamn Bonehead Navy Idiots. We gotta stick this sucker in Monday's edition.

WENDYL
I was hoping to leave before seven tonight. If this--

DICK

(interrupting) --I'd love to stick around, but it's Friday... Got a date tonight, you know.

WENDYL

Of course.

DICK

You're a good bastard, Wendy.

DICK goes back to his papers.

WENDYL

Right.

TINA hears Wendyl and looks a little concerned. Myrtle hands her the pie.

MYRTLE

Give loverboy a kiss for me.

TINA

I think he's talking to himself.

MYRTLE

Maybe he's practicing to ask you out. Probably heard about your reputation for being particular.

TINA

He looks tired.

MYRTLE

He looks like you could talk him into a dish of ice cream. Get him to order vanilla. I want to finish the rest of the tub.

Tina walks to Wendyl and gives him his pie.

DICK

(as Tina's walking over) It's just a couple extra hours.

BRACKMAN

(whispers) Do as you're told.

WENDYL

Thanks.

TINA

How about some ice cream with that? Some vanilla on the side would taste good.

CELIA

(whispering) Wonderful.

WENDYL

Okay.

TINA

Now hold on a second. Maybe you'd rather have chocolate.

CELIA

You know just what I like.

WENDYL

Sure.

TINA

Which do you want?

WENDYL

Whatever is easiest.

TINA

You want ice cream, right? Tell me you want the ice cream.

MICK

(whispering) What the hell.

WENDYL

Ice cream would be fine.

TINA

How about cereal? A lot of our customers like to finish their evenings with a bowl of frosted flakes.

WENDYL

I've never tried that.

MICK

Get off my case.

Tina sits across from Wendyl.

TINA

What's your name?

WENDYL

Wendyl.

TINA

I'm Tina. Just get off work, Wendyl?

DICK

An understanding.

WENDYL

Uh-huh.

TINA

Long day?

WENDYL

Very.

TINA

Maybe you worked too hard today. Maybe you fried your brain a little?

DICK

What's a couple more hours?

WENDYL

Fried it a lot.

TINA

You're not trying to be pick me up, are you?

WENDYL

Me?

CELIA

That's a nice thing to say.

TINA

That's what I thought. But someone put a stupid idea in my head. You know, if you order everything I offer, someone might think you want more than just a dish of ice cream.

WENDYL

I didn't mean to... embarrass you.

TINA

Just order what you want.

CELIA

Don't pretend to have a backbone, Wendyl.

WENDYL

Right.

TINA

You don't want cereal, do you?

WENDYL

Well...

TINA

I didn't think so.

WENDYL

I'm glad you understand.

MICK

Just like sugar.

TINA

Sure I do... What are you doing tomorrow?

WENDYL

Tomorrow?

TINA

The day after today.

MICK

I noticed you. Every time.

WENDYL

Right. I might go to the post office. I need some stamps.

TINA

What about after that?

WENDYL

Sometimes I go to the park. Or the book store.

TINA

I'm going to the museum. Natural history.

WENDYL

Sounds like fun.

TINA

I'll be there at noon. Right when the post office closes.

MICK

I'll see you.

WENDYL

Have a good time.

TINA

Maybe... Maybe I'll see you.

CELIA

I saw you watching me.

WENDYL

Where?

TINA

At the museum. Will you be there?

WENDYL

You want me there?

CELIA

I'll bet you're full of surprises.

TINA

I'll see you at noon. Let's forget about the ice cream and cereal, okay?

WENDYL

Okay.

Tina walks back to the counter. Wendyl watches her for a moment, then realizes that Myrtle sees him, so he returns to his pie, embarrassed.

MYRTLE

So, did Casanova ask you out?

Mick addresses Tina, but she ignores him the best she can.

MICK

My, you're a sweet thing.

TINA

I asked him.

MYRTLE

You what?

TINA

It's nothing. I just asked him to meet me at the museum tomorrow.

MICK

Eyes to die for.

MYRTLE

After three years of stomping on every male-creature to walk through that door, you ask out Mr. Personality? Must be his after-shave.

TINA

I don't know why. I just did it.

MICK

I heard you up there. Quite the singer.

MYRTLE

He looks like a real iron-man. Did he order the ice cream?

TINA

He didn't want any.

MYRTLE

You were supposed to charm him.

MICK

Your voice just carried me away.

TINA

He doesn't want any ice cream.

MYRTLE

He didn't want a second piece of pie either. Maybe I should talk to him.

TINA

Leave him alone.

MICK

Tina's a pretty name.

MYRTLE

Are we feeling protective?

TINA

The man doesn't want anything else. Not vanilla ice cream, not you breathing down his neck.

MYRTLE

He's a valued customer; I want to take care of him.

MICK

Let me take you somewhere.

TINA

Do what you want.

Myrtle slinks over to Wendyl's table, adjusting herself so that her body can help do some of the talking. She wears a seductive smile.

Mick continues speaking to Tina, and this time she actually looks at him.

MICK

So I said to myself, Mick, it's been a couple months now, I think you love this Tina character.

MYRTLE

How is everything?

WENDYL

Just fine. Thanks.

MYRTLE

Enjoying that pie?

WENDYL

Very good cherry pie.

MOTHER

(overlapping, very softly) That's nice. You're a good boy.

MYRTLE

Would you like some vanilla ice cream with that?

WENDYL

Ice cream?

MYRTLE

Cold, sweet, and sticky. You've heard of it.

WENDYL

I've heard of it.

MOTHER

Look at this mess.

MYRTLE

Why don't I get you a dish?

WENDYL

I really...

MOTHER

Get my slippers.

MYRTLE

Oh, come on. Don't say No.

MOTHER

What did you say to me?

WENDYL

Ice cream would be fine.

Myrtle walks triumphantly back to the counter. Mother glares intensely at Wendyl.

MOTHER

What did you say?

WENDYL

Nothin', Ma.

MOTHER

Brackman, come here and have a talk with your son.

WENDYL

I didn't mean it.

MOTHER (overlapping)

I don't need backtalk from a little know-it-all like you.

TINA

You're a shit, Myrtle. A real life shit. Taking advantage of a man when he's dog tired.

MYRTLE

I didn't ask the poor bastard out on a date. Go scoop the rest of that vanilla.

MOTHER (overlapping)

Think you're smart.

TINA

What did you say to him?

MYRTLE

I was sweet as could be.

TINA

He looks upset.

MYRTLE

He's a freakin' psycho. But he's not my date for tomorrow. Go dish that ice cream.

MOTHER (overlapping)

Your father will smarten you up. Brackman!

Wendyl suddenly tosses down some bills from his wallet and storms out. He walks to the Museum area and sits on the bench (next to a paper book bag). Tina walks to the edge of the museum area, but Hattie calls out from the apartment.

HATTIE

I thought you were going to the Natural History Museum.

TINA

I am.

HATTIE

Wearing perfume?

TINA

I'm meeting someone.

HATTIE

Who?

TINA

I met him at the Turtle last night.

HATTIE

And he asked you out, just like that?

TINA

It's no big deal, Grandma.

HATTIE

Be careful. You know what he's after.

TINA

I'm sure he'll be a gentleman.

HATTIE

Not sex. Money. This is all very suspicious. Don't be too nice to him.

TINA

Don't worry, I won't. Grandma, I'm late.

HATTIE

Do you have your mace?

TINA

I'll be home before dark.

HATTIE

I'll feel better if you have it. Stay close to crowds. And don't let him sweet-talk you like that Mick.

TINA

I have to go.

HATTIE

You've had enough lessons in heartbreak.

Tina walks up behind Wendyl.

CELIA

(from her area) You can make a million excuses in your head, but I hope you understand that you deserve to be alone. Forever. Stay away from me. Stay away from women. Stay away from everyone.

TINA

Wendyl?

WENDYL

Uh, hi. You're here.

TINA

Finally decided to show, huh?

WENDYL

I waited at the entrance, but--

TINA

--I never said I'd be in the lobby.

WENDYL

I guess I just assumed--

TINA

--You wouldn't have to assume anything if you hadn't run out in such a hurry last night.

MICK

Not a word comes out of your mouth without takin' a bite.

MOTHER

You'd better learn to behave.

WENDYL

I'm sorry I... I wasn't thinking.

TINA

Well, at least I found you. You got your stamps?

WENDYL

And some books, too. (pulling one out) I got you one.

TINA

You what?

WENDYL

It's not new. There's a good used book store near here. I go all the time.

TINA

You bought me a present?

MICK

No, I didn't forget our anniversary.

WENDYL

I'm not trying to mean anything by it. I... I just saw it, and it reminded me of last night. It's not a statement.

He hands it to her.

TINA

"A Hundred and Five Ways to Sweetness." A dessert cookbook?

WENDYL

The cherry pie recipe looks good.

TINA

I didn't mean to take advantage of you last night.

MICK

I'm on my feet all day looking for a job.

WENDYL

It's all right. I'm glad you didn't make me get the ice cream.

CELIA

Go pay it. Go.

MICK

And whammo, I walk through the door and you're all over me.

TINA

I'm sorry about my boss. Guess she scared you off.

MOTHER

Brackman, come here.

WENDYL

She didn't. It was nothing. You know a lot about dinosaurs?

TINA

No. I guess all anyone knows for sure is that there's a big pile of dry bones sitting in front of us. The rest is just guesswork.

WENDYL

We do that with people all the time. Paint mental pictures of what they're like. Based on what?

WENDYL (cont'd)

I just met you, and already I've made assumptions about where you live, what you believe in, how you live your life. I'm probably not right about any of it.

TINA

You've been thinking about me?

WENDYL

Well, yeah. Not more than I should.

TINA

What do you think you know?

CELIA

(with a playful laugh) Lucky guess.

WENDYL

It's all speculation. Wild speculation.

TINA

(teasing) What have we been doing in there, Wendyl? We've only just met...

CELIA

Lots of people love to dance.

WENDYL

Nothing. Nothing. Perfectly respectable thoughts.

CELIA

Try some more.

TINA

So tell me about my life.

WENDYL

I'll sound like an idiot.

TINA

I won't take offense, I promise.

WENDYL

We'll trade pictures, all right?

TINA

All right.

He looks at her, pondering.

WENDYL

I think maybe you've got a talent, but it's something you've left behind. You're not pushing anymore... You've drawn back in. You stick to the periphery, trying not to be noticed. Proceeding very quietly.

TINA

Me quiet? Myrtle would get a laugh out of that.

CELIA

A dangerous smile?

WENDYL

You're bold enough with Myrtle. But when you can manage it, you spend your time alone.

CELIA

What's that supposed to mean?

TINA

I have plenty of friends.

WENDYL

You don't see them much. And when you do, you don't really enjoy it. You look for silent crowds--they let you be anonymous without feeling so empty. When you're not here, maybe you're at the art museum.

TINA

I happen to like the art museum.

WENDYL

You live alone.

CELIA

You're amazing.

TINA

I'm not some hermit.

WENDYL

I don't think you are.

TINA

I see people; I have friends.

WENDYL

You don't have to hide from me.

CELIA

You already know all about me.

TINA

Hide what? I don't have anything to hide. What you see is what you get.

MICK

Hey, Doc, this is normal, right?

WENDYL

It's all right to be lonely.

TINA

What's with this lonely stuff? Where do you get off calling me lonely?

MICK

So I'm not home all the time.

WENDYL

I didn't mean to offend you.

TINA

And for your information, I don't live alone.

WENDYL

Husband?

MICK

I'm home, I'm not home.

TINA

Not anymore.

WENDYL

Boyfriend?

MICK

You're never happy.

TINA

My grandmother.

WENDYL

Oh.

TINA

What do you mean, "Oh?"

WENDYL

Nothing. It didn't mean anything.

TINA

She's old. I take care of her.

WENDYL

Nothing wrong with that.

MICK

Whammo.

TINA

You make me sound like some sort of freak. So maybe I'm not the most social person in the world. So what?

MICK

Think you could not jump down my throat for one goddamn second.

WENDYL

I just took some wild guesses.

TINA

I'm sorry...

WENDYL

It's your turn.

TINA

Maybe we shouldn't play this game.

WENDYL

All right.

TINA

I'm sorry. I just...

WENDYL

It's okay. Let's go find the wildflower exhibit.

TINA

No... You live alone.

WENDYL

True.

TINA

You're the hermit. Don't have many friends.

WENDYL

None.

TINA

You've never been married.

CELIA

Where's your tux?

TINA

You hate your job, but for some reason that's okay. Either it gives you what you need, or else you're a sucker for punishment. Your boss pushes you around. Maybe you're a bookkeeper or something. The days pass, but you hardly notice. I don't imagine that you own a calendar. (beat) How'd I do?

WENDYL

Good.

TINA

Really?

WENDYL

But I was married, a long time ago.

CELIA

Maybe I should pin a note to you.

TINA

You were married?

CELIA

Like a goddamn five year-old.

WENDYL

Doesn't seem possible?

TINA

No, I just guessed that you prefer being alone.

WENDYL

Sometimes. Sometimes I convince myself that I do.

CELIA

Stay away from everyone.

MICK

Come on, baby, don't be like that.

TINA

It can be hard.

WENDYL

I've done pretty well so far.

TINA

But you're here.

WENDYL

Yeah. Yeah, I am.

The ghosts hiss behind them softly, but then become silent. Wendyl and Tina enjoy the silence as they look out at a dinosaur.

WENDYL

Thanks for inviting me.

TINA

Don't ask me why I did it. I don't know.

WENDYL

It doesn't matter.

TINA

Don't you want it to be because you're so handsome and debonair?

WENDYL

I guess I just assumed that was part of it... The fact that we understand each other, even a little, that's a good start.

TINA

Think we do?

WENDYL

More than other people.

TINA

My Grandmother thinks she does, but she's half-crazy. Since you can read my mind, Wendyl, what would I like to do next?

WENDYL

You would like a trip to Paris, then some time in Florence, to admire sculpture and eat grapes.

TINA

I hope your Lear jet isn't in the shop.

WENDYL

Oh, damn, I forgot.

TINA

You have to plan ahead.

WENDYL

Would you settle for a stroll in the park and a hot dog?

TINA

That would be just fine.

They walk to the Green Turtle and sit at the booth.

MYRTLE

We're closed.

TINA

Shut up, Myrtle.

Myrtle joins them at the booth.

MYRTLE

So how was the big date?

TINA

We just met at the museum.

WENDYL

And went to the park.

TINA

It was a beautiful afternoon.

MYRTLE

No ring yet?

MICK

And the next thing I know, I'm standing in a jewelry store dishing out dough for a ring.

CELIA

Are you sure you can handle me, Wendyl.

TINA

Give it a rest, Myrtle.

MYRTLE

So what do you do, Wendyl? You should fill me in if we're going to be family.

TINA

Jesus, Myrtle, you're going to scare him away.

WENDYL

I work for the government.

MYRTLE

What are you, a spy?

TINA

Could you try to be nice?

MYRTLE

What? They don't pick the type you'd expect. They go more for someone like Wendyl here.

CELIA

You're such a nothing.

WENDYL

I'm not a spy.

MYRTLE

That's what they all say.

WENDYL

I work for the Commerce Business Daily. It's a listing of contracts.

CELIA

Second-rate editor.

MYRTLE

Don't write many articles on Madonna, huh?

WENDYL
No.

MYRTLE
It'd be more exciting if you were a spy.

CELIA
Just do what I say.

WENDYL
Yeah, well, I'm not.

MYRTLE
Got any talents? Can you eat glass? Anything special about you at all, Wendyl?

WENDYL
I don't think so.

MYRTLE
Too bad. It's tough to hang out with so much raw talent like we got unless you got some of your own.

TINA
You have talent?

Myrtle gets up and gives a rather awful demonstration of belly-dancing.

MYRTLE
I took belly-dancing lessons for two years.

TINA
I tried sending her to Saudi Arabia, but they won't take her.

MYRTLE
Tina's a singer. Smooth as silk.

MICK
What a voice.

WENDYL
You sing?

TINA
Myrtle's trying to embarrass me.

MICK

Just carried me away.

MYRTLE

Used to be I couldn't shut her up. All day she'd be singing under her breath. I never guessed that once she stopped singing she'd talk my ear off.

WENDYL

You don't sing anymore?

TINA

No. I was going to be a star. Took lessons, went to open mike nights, all that stuff. Unfortunately, I was a much better waitress than a singer.

MYRTLE

Don't ask how good a waitress she is.

MICK

I gotta go. These things happen.

TINA

I don't get the urge anymore.

MYRTLE

Hey, now. You keep your mind outta there.

TINA

Shut up, Myrtle.

MYRTLE

You gotta learn to let things pass you by.

TINA

Shut up.

MICK

Be looking for a job.

MYRTLE

Tina doesn't believe in being forgetful, even when she should be.

WENDYL

I'm not good at it either.

MICK

Come on, baby. Push!

TINA

(getting up) Let's go, Wendyl.

MYRTLE

No. I'll keep quiet, all right?

TINA

That would be a welcome change.

MICK

I'll be seein' ya.

(beat)

MYRTLE

You sure you got no talent, Wendyl?

WENDYL

I can't sing.

MYRTLE

You don't look like you can sing.

TINA

What's that supposed to mean?

MYRTLE

Look at him. The man doesn't look like he can carry a tune.

WENDYL

I can juggle.

TINA

Really?

WENDYL

I taught myself. Had too much time on my hands for a while.

CELIA

Stop, Wendyl, Stop.

MYRTLE

He's bluffing.

Wendyl grabs three water glasses and juggles them carefully for a couple seconds. Tina applauds.

MYRTLE

That's not talent, that's a trick. Maybe you two can run off together and join the circus. My second husband worked for the circus.

TINA

Scooping up after the elephants.

MYRTLE

No, though I hope that's what he's doin' now. He was a sword swallower. Always gave me the creeps. The two big rules of dating are never date a man from prison or the circus.

WENDYL

Words of wisdom.

TINA

Words of crap. Coming from a woman who dates every half-bit weirdo she can find.

MYRTLE

You're going to lecture me on how to run a love life?

MICK

You're something, all right.

TINA

Aren't you thirsty, Wendyl. How about a cup of coffee?

WENDYL

Sure. I could use a cup.

TINA

Myrtle, could you get us some coffee?

MYRTLE

You work for me, remember.

TINA

It's my day off.

MYRTLE

You want some coffee?

WENDYL

Sure.

MYRTLE

All right. That's me, captain slash galley slave. At the service of you little love-birds.

Myrtle gets up and looks for coffee.
The search becomes increasingly
frantic.

TINA

Sorry about her.

WENDYL

She doesn't like me.

TINA

She's just jealous.

WENDYL

Jealous?

TINA

She usually gets all the attention from men.

WENDYL

That's hard to believe.

TINA

Flatterer.

WENDYL

I'm serious.

TINA

I put up the "unavailable sign." You know how it is.

WENDYL

Yeah.

Myrtle finally gives up.

MYRTLE

We're all out of coffee. Why didn't you tell me?

TINA

I did.

MYRTLE

What am I supposed to do when the morning rush comes tomorrow? How can I run a diner with no coffee?

TINA

I've been telling you for two weeks, Myrtle.

MYRTLE

A lot of good that does me now. I gotta go buy some stupid java. Lock up when you leave, will ya?

TINA

Okay.

MYRTLE

Don't forget to turn out the lights.

TINA

Okay.

MYRTLE

And no funny stuff. This is a respectable establishment.

Myrtle exits.

TINA

She's always been a pain. Knows just what to say.

WENDYL

Some people have that knack.

TINA

Does dating ever get any less embarrassing?

WENDYL

Are we dating?

TINA

I don't know. Are we?

WENDYL

I hadn't thought of it that way. Not exactly.

TINA

(hurt) Oh. How did you think about it?

WENDYL

I just... I don't know. You told me to come to the museum.
I said I would.

TINA

Why?

WENDYL

You didn't give me a choice.

MICK

Always tellin' me what to do.

TINA

You could have said no.

WENDYL

What if I couldn't?

MICK

Bitch, bitch, bitch.

TINA

I know I came on a little strong and you were tired, but you
didn't have to come.

WENDYL

I said I'd be there.

TINA

You could have stood me up.

MICK

Whammo...

WENDYL

I'm not like that.

TINA

Did you want to come?

MICK

I walk through the door...

WENDYL

It was not a good idea.

MICK

...and you're all over me.

TINA

Then you should have just said no, right there, on the spot.

WENDYL

I couldn't.

TINA

Why not? Afraid of hurting me to my face?

MICK

(overlapping, softly) No, I couldn't. Not today.

TINA

Just be up front with me. Don't make excuses, don't say you can't turn me down. You can say no.

WENDYL

What if I can't?

MICK

I've been trying.

TINA

What if you can't? What the hell does that mean?

WENDYL

You understand.

MICK

You gotta give me a chance.

TINA

No. No, I don't.

WENDYL

I should go.

He gets up to leave.

TINA

Stop. We're not through.

MICK

Come on, Tina.

WENDYL
We should be.

TINA
I don't buy this crap. If you're going to give me the brush-off, you do it right.

WENDYL
I'm not trying to--

MICK
Come on, baby, it's not my fault.

TINA
Can't say no. What the hell does that mean?

MOTHER
Get me my slippers.

WENDYL
What do you think?

TINA
You seemed like you were having a good time.

WENDYL
I was.

TINA
But I was forcing you.

WENDYL
It's complicated.

TINA
So if I say, get me a donut, you'll get a donut, like it or not?

MOTHER
Don't make me ask you again.

WENDYL
This was a mistake.

He starts to leave.

TINA
Get me a donut.

WENDYL
You want a donut?

MICK
Don't be mad.

TINA
Just get it. Or tell me you won't.

MOTHER
What did you say to me?
He gets Tina a donut.

WENDYL
You don't need to do this.

MICK
(overlapping, seductive) You're looking pretty tonight.

TINA
Stand on one foot.
He stands still.

TINA & MOTHER
Did you hear me?

WENDYL
Yes.

MICK
Let me touch you.

TINA
Do it.
Wendyl stands on one foot.

TINA
Why are you playing games with me?

MOTHER
Brackman, get in here.

MICK
Feels good.

WENDYL
You know I'm not.

TINA
I don't know.

MICK
Doesn't it?

WENDYL
If you listen--

BRACKMAN
What did you say to your mother?

MICK
Your lips are on fire.

TINA
Bullshit. We don't know each other. I start to trust you--

WENDYL
You do trust me.

MICK
Forget about all that shit.

TINA
--and you play games with me.

WENDYL
Am I?

BRACKMAN
Speak.

MICK
(laughing) You're not so tough.

TINA
Don't try to bluff me. (hard) Take your shirt off.

BRACKMAN
Get it off.

Wendyl doesn't move.

TINA

That's what I thought.

BRACKMAN

Get it off!

Wendyl quickly removes his shirt.
(There are some serious scars on
Wendyl's back.)

BRACKMAN

What did you say to your mother?

TINA & BRACKMAN

What's the matter with you?

WENDYL

Nothing.

BRACKMAN

Come over here.

Although he doesn't physically move to his parents' area, Wendyl is completely connected with them. He suffers every blow and talks as if he is there.

BRACKMAN

You smart-mouthing your mother again?

WENDYL

No, sir.

MOTHER

Now your son's callin' me a liar.

BRACKMAN

Your mother asked you to get her slippers. What'd you say?

WENDYL

Nothing.

MOTHER

He said No. Said I should get them myself.

BRACKMAN

Did you say No to your mother?

WENDYL

No.

BRACKMAN

You're a real wise ass, ain't you? You want me to beat that word out of you?

WENDYL

No.

Brackman undoes his belt.

BRACKMAN

Turn around, boy.

WENDYL

(very softly, unable to help himself) No.

BRACKMAN

(laughs) Got a real streak goin', don't ya? I'll streak you, brother.

Brackman grabs his imagined son and forces him to the floor. Wendyl falls to his knees, his head pulled back as if grabbed by the hair. Brackman straps his son on the back, and Wendyl shakes with each lash.

BRACKMAN

You don't sass your mother. You don't talk back to me. You understand? You understand me? I don't ever want to hear that goddamn word out of your mouth again, not as long as you live. Dumb son of a bitch.

Mother watches impassively, with an occasional nod. Finally the beating stops. Brackman pants from the effort. Wendyl sinks to his knees, hunched over, very still. Brackman wipes his belt and puts it away.

BRACKMAN

Get up, boy. Get up, you hear me. Get up and kiss your mother good night. Time for bed.

Wendyl doesn't move. Tina carefully lifts Wendyl from the floor, his back to her.

BRACKMAN

You stand up like a man, you hear me.

Wendyl clutches his shirt, shaking. Tina touches him gently.

TINA

I'm sorry, Wendyl.

WENDYL

Leave me alone now. Please.

MICK

Take the skin off my bones.

TINA

It wasn't you. I'm so sorry. I was mad at... It was wrong. Very wrong. Wendyl.

Wendyl puts on his shirt on.

WENDYL

Look. I have made... choices. Decisions. Not to be altered. There are reasons. There's no peace with you. You just push your way through. I did want to see you today, but it was a mistake.

He starts to leave. Tina catches him.

TINA

Where are you going?

WENDYL

Home.

TINA

Please stay.

WENDYL

It's late.

TINA

I'll get you a cup of tea. We can talk a while longer. Not about the past, just about whatever.

TINA (cont'd)

The weather, the city, the museum. Just talk. You and me. Look, Wendyl, I can't be any sorrier than I am. If I had known...

WENDYL

There's a lot you don't know about me.

TINA

I won't make you tell me anything. Just stay.

WENDYL

Don't you see this is wrong.

TINA

You like being with me. I know you do.

WENDYL

It doesn't matter.

TINA

Wendyl. Look, it's been one date, if you want to call it that. If you have no interest in something between us, especially after this, then just say so. I'll understand. Just say, Tina, I don't want to see you again.

Wendyl is silent.

TINA

All right then. Go home. What time do you get off work on Monday?

WENDYL

It's supposed to be five, but I'm usually there at least until seven.

TINA

I'll be there at five.

WENDYL

Don't bother until seven.

TINA

Your boss makes you stay?

WENDYL

He always thinks of something. It's not hard.

TINA

Go on home now.

WENDYL
I'll see you Monday.

Wendyl walks over to Dick's desk. Tina enters her apartment.

HATTIE
Where have you been?

TINA
What?

MICK
Come on, Tina, lighten up.

HATTIE
I've been worried sick. I was just about to call the police.

MICK
I'm ready to make a change.

Tina plops onto the couch.

TINA
We went to the park. And then to the Turtle.

HATTIE
Why didn't you call me? You made sure that he didn't follow you, right?

TINA
He didn't follow me.

MICK
Put the past behind us.

HATTIE
I hope you were careful. You know how people are drawn by (whispers) the scent of money.

TINA
We don't have any money, Grandma.

HATTIE
That's exactly the attitude you should have. Fools them completely. Mr. McMahon will be very proud. They don't want you to breathe a word too early.

MICK

You're looking at a new Mick.

TINA

Aren't you going to ask me if I had a good time?

HATTIE

Did you have a good time?

TINA

Yes, we did. (loudly towards Mick) We had a very good time.

HATTIE

I heard you. So he seemed normal?

MICK

I'll be home more.

TINA

No. Which is why we have so much in common.

HATTIE

Oh, dear. I should make some calls to check up on him.
What's his last name?

TINA

I don't know.

MICK

Drink less.

HATTIE

How could you be so careless? I hope you're moving very
slowly with this fellow. After what happened before...

MICK

You did it, Tina. You did it.

TINA

He'll be good to me. He understands me.

HATTIE

That's what we all want to think.

Lights crossfade to Dick's office.

DICK

Wendy! Wendy, get in here!

WENDYL

(he knows what's coming) Yes?

DICK

We're bumping into the Monday rush. I got two orders from DCS Virginia and they're a fuckin' mess. If DOD is gonna spend two hundred billion a year, you'd think they could hire someone who could type his own goddamn name.

WENDYL

Rush orders?

DICK

Of course they're rush orders. The supply depot can't possibly wait for sixty five thousand cans of transmission fluid. We're talking matters of National Defense here. That's what Colonel Asshole told me when I tried to get him to wait.

WENDYL

Same old story.

DICK

Anyway, I figure since you're the fastest one around and since you don't have any plans--

WENDYL

Actually, I was planning to-

DICK

--you might as well go ahead and do it. You can do it, right?

WENDYL

Actually, it might be a problem.

DICK

Hell, man, you know I'd do it myself, but I've got a hot one tonight. (hands Wendyl some papers, Wendyl doesn't take them) Thanks for volunteering.

WENDYL

You're not listening to me.

DICK

What? What are you saying, Wendy?

WENDYL

I have plans.

DICK

Get outta here.

WENDYL

I can't stay late.

DICK

What? Are you gonna say No?

WENDYL

I have to meet someone. I would appreciate you not trying to make me stay late tonight.

DICK

I told you what needs doing.

WENDYL

Maybe it can wait until tomorrow.

DICK

Look, I like you, Wendy. And I hope you like me. But this isn't up for debate.

WENDYL

Yes, it is.

DICK

Don't fuck with me. You and I have been getting along real well.

WENDYL

That's why I deserve--

DICK

No, don't talk. Look, I don't like to bring this up. But I'm seeing a sudden change in attitude here. You and I, we have an understanding, right? You like having a job, don't you? You like having this job. I'd hate to see our understanding turn to shit over something small like this.

Tina enters the office.

DICK

Well, hello there. What can I do for you?

WENDYL

Hi, Tina.

TINA

They said you were in here, Wendyl. Sorry to interrupt.

DICK

No, no, he was just getting back to work, where he'll be extremely busy. Why don't you have a seat?

TINA

I'm sorry, but we can't stay.

DICK

We?

TINA

Didn't he tell you?

WENDYL

I was working on it.

DICK

Am I seein' what I think I'm seein'? Wendyl didn't tell me he was dating a very attractive younger woman.

WENDYL

Well, we're really-

TINA

Wendyl can be very private.

DICK

Yeah, I know. (extends a hand) I'm Dick Perkle.

TINA

I've heard a lot about you.

DICK

All good, I hope.

TINA

(to Wendyl) Are you ready to go?

WENDYL

I was just trying to arrange it, but--

DICK

What? What's he trying to arrange?

TINA

We have to go to a funeral. My cousin, Judy.

DICK

I'm sorry to hear about that. But, ah, Wendyl has a lot of work to do. He just volunteered--

TINA

Volunteered?

Wendyl shakes his head.

DICK

I'd do the work myself, but I have plans.

TINA

Mr. Perkle. Can I call you Dick?

DICK

Sure.

TINA

Look, Dick, I'm very upset about my cousin. We were extremely close, best friends. I can't get through this without Wendyl. With my family, funerals are impossible. Last time, my Aunt Sophia was moaning and wailing, and then all of a sudden she dove right in after the casket. Well, that started a chain reaction, and in no time eight old Italian women, like big black crows, were all kneeling on the coffin. That was for my Uncle Sal, and they didn't even like him. They adored my cousin Judy. (beat) I can't do it without Wendyl.

WENDYL

I was trying to tell you. She needs me.

TINA

Come on, we're going to be late.

She grabs him by the arm and drags him out. They walk to the Green Turtle, hand in hand. Myrtle is inside, reading a magazine, a mop and bucket by her feet.

MYRTLE
We're closed.

TINA
Shut up, Myrtle.

MYRTLE
You're fired.

Tina and Wendyl sit in their booth;
Myrtle puts down her magazine.

TINA
We had the best time at the art museum. Got any sandwiches left?

MYRTLE
Kept some under the counter.

TINA
Thanks.

Tina gets sandwiches and coffee for herself and Wendyl. Myrtle starts mopping in front of the counter.

MYRTLE
Jesus, look at you two. if you were any happier, you'd fall over dead.

TINA
We've had a very pleasant evening.

MYRTLE
Pleasant. Strong language there.

WENDYL
I know how to sweep a woman off her feet.

TINA
The trees along the river are all in bloom.

WENDYL
She seems all soft and romantic, but you should have seen her rescue me from my boss.

TINA
What a slug.

MYRTLE

Quit. Find a boss who knows how to play a little give and take. Maybe you'll get as lucky as Tina.

TINA

Maybe you'd better stay where you are.

MYRTLE

We've seen each other through hard times, you know. Make good crutches for each other when people start breaking our legs.

MICK

Get off my fuckin' case, Myrtle.

WENDYL

You're lucky.

TINA

That's what she keeps telling me.

MYRTLE

I've seen her life shredded to shit--

TINA

Enough.

MYRTLE

She tell you about Mick? The asshole.

MICK

I can quit a job without answering to this bitch.

WENDYL

He was mentioned.

MYRTLE

Did she tell you about...

MICK

And now. Now it's all for nothing.

TINA

Shut your mouth, Myrtle.

MYRTLE

(to Wendyl) Just think of me as her bodyguard. Anyone starts to get stupid and...

She takes the mop handle and beats up a stool by the counter.

Tina is focused on Mick.

MICK

I ain't runnin' out of here with my tail between my legs because of this bloated whore.

MYRTLE

See what I'm saying?

WENDYL

I get the picture.

MICK

Whose side are you on, Tina? Christ, some kind of wife. Every fucking hormone running screwy.

Tina gets out of the booth and stands so she can't see Mick.

MYRTLE

I don't pussy-foot around, I'm not like that.

WENDYL

That's pretty obvious.

MICK

Come on, we're going home. No, you're not staying here. Shut up, Myrtle. You touch me with that mop and I'll break your ugly neck. Tina, we're going home. Yeah, she'll be back tomorrow, like always. I don't need people ganging up on me all the time.

Wendyl and Myrtle go to Tina.

MYRTLE

What's the matter?

TINA

Nothing.

MYRTLE

(to Wendyl) What did you say to her?

WENDYL

I didn't say anything.

MYRTLE
Get her some water.

He doesn't move.

CELIA
You heard me.

TINA
Leave me alone. Just for a second, all right.

MYRTLE
Don't think about it. Just don't think about it.

Tina steps away. Myrtle turns on
Wendyl.

MYRTLE
Did you hear me?

CELIA
Do what I say.

WENDYL
Leave her alone.

MYRTLE
Look, she's upset because of you reminding her about all
kinds of shit.

CELIA
Just go pay it. Go. Go.

TINA
I'm fine, Myrtle, just shut up.

MYRTLE
Get her some water.

CELIA
I told you to go.

WENDYL
Do it yourself.

MYRTLE & CELIA
You ain't the boss around here. Just go.

Myrtle pushes him. He grabs her wrist,
lightning fast.

WENDYL

Don't push me.

MYRTLE & CELIA

Let me go.

WENDYL

(his voice hard, beginning to rise) Never touch me again.

CELIA

Stop. Wendyl, Stop! Stop!

Tina turns around.

TINA

Wendyl.

Wendyl releases Myrtle's wrist.

MYRTLE

Jesus, talk about touchy.

TINA

Zip it, Myrtle.

WENDYL

I'm sorry.

MYRTLE

Yeah. Maybe I shouldn't have pushed you.

WENDYL

Yeah, maybe.

Tina stares at Myrtle.

MYRTLE

What? What are you staring at me for? I didn't do anything.

TINA

Whatever you say.

MYRTLE

I didn't. I see you get all upset... you got that look in your eyes again. This joker comes in here and you start acting squirrely.

TINA

Just relax, Myrtle.

MYRTLE

Yeah. Hey, whatever you want... who am I to say--

TINA

--no one.

MYRTLE

Right. Anyone want a cup of coffee. Now that I actually have some.

Tina sits at the booth and Wendyl joins her.

Myrtle is busy making noise with the coffee. The following is between Tina and Wendyl only.

WENDYL

I'm sorry.

TINA

It was her fault.

WENDYL

I'm worried.

TINA

So maybe our memories are too good.

WENDYL

It might get worse.

TINA

You're not the only one.

WENDYL

I had everything carefully arranged. Settled.

TINA

So did I.

WENDYL

And now, now with you here, with us... It's like everything's jarred loose. Maybe this whole thing is turning into a mess.

TINA

Maybe.

WENDYL

Should we...

TINA

No.

WENDYL

Good.

Myrtle comes back with a tray of coffee cups and cookies.

MYRTLE

You done telling secrets about me?

TINA

We weren't talking about you.

MYRTLE

I forget about the love-whisper stage. Lasted a while with my third husband.

(The phone starts RINGING.)

MYRTLE (cont'd)

He found his shouting voice right after the honeymoon.

Myrtle sits across from Wendyl and starts drinking coffee. The phone continues to ring.

MYRTLE

(to Tina) Get the phone, would ya? I slave away for coffee and cookies, the least you can do is--

TINA

(getting up) I'm going, I'm going.

Myrtle and Wendyl start drinking coffee. Tina answers the phone.

TINA

Hello? Hello, Grandma. No, I didn't forget, we just got busy, that's all. Yes. No, I've been very discreet. He's probably busy. All right. I will. Yes. I'll be home soon.

She hangs up.

WENDYL

Well?

TINA

I have to get home. She's really in a mood tonight; I was supposed to help her write a letter... She was wondering... She wants to meet you. Tomorrow night. Can you come over? If you're busy, it's not a problem. It can definitely wait.

WENDYL

I'll be there. (to Myrtle) I guess she wants to check me out.

MYRTLE

Oh, just you wait. (beat) Don't I get an invite?

TINA

No.

MYRTLE

Oh, that's real polite. Don't worry about your best friend here, wasting away from loneliness.

TINA

I thought you had a date.

MYRTLE

He canceled.

TINA

What a shame. An evening alone. It's a pity to spend so much time in such poor company.

MYRTLE

Just go, will ya.

WENDYL

Do you want me to take you home?

TINA

No. Finish your coffee. Have a donut. On the house.

MYRTLE

Oh sure, give the place away.

Tina exits to the apartment. Myrtle
and Wendyl sip coffee in silence.

MYRTLE

Looks like it's just you and me, loverboy.

WENDYL

Looks that way.

MYRTLE

You're not going to derail on me again, are ya?

CELIA

Wendyl.

WENDYL

No.

MYRTLE

Maybe I should grab that mop for protection, just in case.

WENDYL

You're not scared of me.

MYRTLE

What about you?

WENDYL

Am I scared of you or myself?

MYRTLE

Of me.

WENDYL

You think I should be?

MYRTLE

It might be polite.

WENDYL

Then consider me petrified.

MYRTLE

You're an oddball, you know that.

WENDYL

I was aware, but thanks for making sure it hadn't got past me.

MYRTLE

(beat) You like that girl, don't ya?

WENDYL

Yes, I do.

MYRTLE

But you strike me as the cautious type.

WENDYL

Maybe not cautious enough.

MYRTLE

What I'm saying is that you two are taking a long time with this courtship bullshit.

WENDYL

I've only known her four days.

MYRTLE

You know what I mean. Men get impatient. Especially regarding certain... needs. You've been alone for a long time.

WENDYL

A very long time.

CELIA

Let's go to my place.

MYRTLE

That's what I figured.

WENDYL

There are worse things than being alone.

MYRTLE

I could never stand it. (beat) Look, Wendyl, what do you say you and me go in the storeroom and take a little inventory?

WENDYL

Excuse me?

MYRTLE

If you don't want to go that far, we can just close the shades and see what we can accomplish right here.

CELIA

That feels nice.

WENDYL

You're propositioning me?

MYRTLE

What do I have to do, knock you over the head?

WENDYL

You're joking.

She unbuttons her shirt and proudly displays her chest.

MYRTLE

Do these look like a joke to you, Wendyl?

WENDYL

Not exactly.

CELIA

You have a gentle touch.

MYRTLE

I've got a couple other body parts that aren't joking either. Maybe you should give them a try.

WENDYL

That would be a bad idea.

MYRTLE

You don't find me attractive?

WENDYL

Sure. I find you attractive.

She quickly moves to the seat next to him. Wendyl remains calm throughout the following.

MYRTLE

Now that's a nice thing to say.

WENDYL

Why don't you sit over there?

She looks down into his lap.

MYRTLE

I don't know, Wendyl. I'm getting mixed signals.

CELIA

That's good. That's very good.

WENDYL

You're only hearing one thing. Go back to your side of the booth.

She reaches under the table to his lap.

CELIA

Hmmm.

MYRTLE

Your mouth says no, but this little guy is screaming a good, solid yes.

He patiently takes her hand and puts it on the table.

WENDYL

Just stop.

MYRTLE

Just like that, huh? I make a very generous offer, and you throw it in my face.

WENDYL

I'm not interested.

MYRTLE

We both know you are. I'm not going to tell anyone.
(softly) You're good at keeping secrets, aren't you?

Wendyl takes her by the shoulders, raises her up, and places her in the other booth seat. Celia returns to her seat, too.

MYRTLE

You really won't do it?

WENDYL

You're catching on.

MYRTLE

Sorry. (beat) Another cup of coffee?

WENDYL

Please.

She pours them each a new cup.

MYRTLE

You're all right, Wendyl.

WENDYL

Thanks.

MYRTLE

Most men wouldn't pass up the chance.

WENDYL

Better luck next time.

MYRTLE

I should have taken more time, set the mood better, but I didn't think it would be that tough. Tina doesn't have the best taste in men.

WENDYL

Well, it was good of you to try to weed me out.

MYRTLE

She's not as tough as she seems.

WENDYL

I know.

Myrtle picks up an empty water glass.

MYRTLE

These glasses, they have three bounces in them. If I drop one in the kitchen, it'll bounce up; if I catch it, it's got two left. The third time it hits the floor, ever, that's it.

She tosses the glass to Wendyl, who catches it.

MYRTLE

She's hit twice already. Twice in a row.

WENDYL

I'd stay away if I could.

MYRTLE

She likes you.

WENDYL

I know.

MYRTLE

Don't fuck up.

WENDYL

Don't ask too much of me.

They go back to drinking coffee,
silently.

Lights crossfade to Tina's apartment.
In the dark, Wendyl and Myrtle finish
their coffee.

In the apartment: Tina works on a pair
of scuffed shoes with liquid shoe
polish. Hattie Stoker sits on the
couch watching her granddaughter.

HATTIE

Sounds like a gold digger.

TINA

Grandma, he is not a gold digger.

HATTIE

I'll find out what he's really after.

TINA

I've never heard him mention money.

HATTIE

You told him, didn't you?

TINA

No, I didn't.

HATTIE

I always thought you were good at secrets. But now you've gone irrational on me. Probably get us both killed.

TINA

Wendyl has never committed a violent act in his life.

HATTIE

How do you know this Mendel character isn't one of those men who preys on defenseless (whispers) wealthy women?

TINA

His name is Wendyl.

HATTIE

How do you know?

TINA

What do you mean, how do I know?

HATTIE

Maybe he's using an alias.

TINA

He told me his name is Wendyl. I believe him.

HATTIE

Did you ask for ID?

TINA

Grandma, we're dating. I don't start the process by asking to see a man's license.

HATTIE

You should be subtle, of course, but you have to be more careful.

TINA

I hope he likes chicken. Everyone likes chicken, don't they?

HATTIE

You didn't recognize him from America's Most Wanted, did you? Maybe we should check the pictures at the post office. That's what we used to do before there was TV.

TINA

Damn, I hate this stuff. I have to buy some new shoes. How do these look?

HATTIE

You missed a spot.

Tina works on the shoes again.

HATTIE

I don't know why you're bothering. He'll only be looking at your pocketbook.

TINA

Grandma, Wendyl is a nice man. He likes me. When he gets here, behave yourself. Not a word about fortunes or sweep-

HATTIE

Shhhh. The walls have ears.

TINA

No one is listening.

HATTIE

Mrs. Chapel has a glass that she holds up to people's doors. I've seen her do it. Heck, I've done it with her. (giggles) You'd be surprised at what goes on in this building, Tina.

Tina starts to straighten up the apartment, even though it doesn't need it.

TINA

Try to act normal.

HATTIE

I'm the last one who wants to let on. What I want to know is how he just happened to be at the Green Turtle the night you were working?

TINA

I work there almost every night.

HATTIE

Right, but he suddenly asked you out.

TINA

I asked him.

HATTIE

Young women are not supposed to proposition men. Especially when they are endowed such as yourself.

TINA

I am not a young woman, Grandma. And besides that, I haven't gone out with anyone for three years.

Wendyl leaves the Turtle and stands by the apartment space, nervous. He carries a bouquet of flowers.

HATTIE

He's got you spinning in circles. I'll bet he has a source at headquarters that gives out the names. Then he tracks them down and takes them for every penny.

TINA

When he walks through that door, you just act like he's completely innocent.

HATTIE

I won't say a word. Not a word.

TINA

Don't spoil this for me.

Hattie pulls a baseball bat from behind the couch.

TINA

What are you doing?

The doorbell rings. Hattie raises the bat protectively.

TINA

Put that away.

HATTIE

Don't keep the man waiting.

TINA

Put it away.

HATTIE

I have a right to protect myself.

TINA

Grandma.

The bell rings again.

TINA

Coming. (to Hattie) You're embarrassing me already, and I haven't even opened the door.

HATTIE

I'll be discreet. He's waiting.

Tina opens the door.

WENDYL

Hi. These are for you.

TINA

Thanks. Come in.

He enters and sees Hattie.

WENDYL

Hi. You must be Mrs. Stoker. It's a pleasure to meet you. I've heard you take very good care of Tina. That's... that's a very nice looking bat.

HATTIE

Oh, he's a charmer.

TINA

Grandma, this is Wendyl. Grandma just loves baseball.

HATTIE

Nice to meet you.

WENDYL

You'll have to tell me what Tina was like when she was little. I'll bet she was into everything.

HATTIE

Probing for information, huh?

TINA

Why don't we all sit down?

They do.

HATTIE

Shouldn't you put those flowers in some water, Tina?

TINA

I guess so.

WENDYL

I'll help you.

HATTIE

No, no. Stay and chat with an old woman. I'd like to know a little more about you.

TINA

Be nice to him.

HATTIE

I'm always nice.

WENDYL

I'll be okay.

TINA

I will be right back.

Tina hurries out.

WENDYL

You won't need the bat. My intentions are honorable.

HATTIE

You never know what men are like these days.

WENDYL

What have you heard?

HATTIE

Nothing. Not yet, anyway.

WENDYL

There's nothing to hear.

CELIA

Stay away from me.

HATTIE

I'll see about that. So you're the one who wants to steal my granddaughter?

WENDYL

We're not going anywhere.

HATTIE

She takes care of me, you know.

WENDYL
That's what she said.

HATTIE
Are you married?

WENDYL
Divorced.

CELIA
Stay away from women.

HATTIE
How much do you make?

WENDYL
None of your business.

HATTIE
But not much.

CELIA
Third rate editor.

WENDYL
Enough to eat, pay my rent, and buy some books. My needs are simple.

HATTIE
How are you going to provide for Tina?

WENDYL
She can provide for herself.

HATTIE
That's right. She doesn't need you.

CELIA
Just do what you're told.

WENDYL
That's up to her.

HATTIE
Hate your job?

CELIA
Third rate literary journal.

WENDYL
Most of the time.

HATTIE
Quit if you could?

WENDYL
I suppose so.

HATTIE
If you suddenly came into a lot of money?

WENDYL
That seems unlikely.

HATTIE
Say, if you won the lottery.

WENDYL
I don't play.

HATTIE
Could I see some ID?

CELIA
Wendyl.

WENDYL
What?

HATTIE
Driver's license, credit card, and social security card.

Wendyl pulls out his wallet and hands her his license and social security card.

HATTIE
No credit cards?

WENDYL
Don't have any.

Hattie holds up the license to the light. Then she takes a pencil and some paper from her pocket and writes down the license number. She hands it back to him when she's done.

HATTIE
Thanks.

WENDYL
Are we finished?

HATTIE
Ever been in prison?

Celia laughs.

WENDYL
Look, I don't mind playing your little game, Mrs. Stoker, but don't you think we've had enough?

Tina returns with the flowers in a vase.

TINA
What's the matter?

WENDYL
Oh, nothing, we're just having a little interrogation.

HATTIE
His license looks authentic, but he's a little reticent about his criminal history.

TINA
I apologize for her.

HATTIE
You haven't been very careful. You can't just throw yourself at some stranger.

TINA
I am so sorry about this, Wendyl. I thought she would behave.

HATTIE
I've behaved perfectly.

WENDYL
No harm done. I just... don't like the feeling of being probed.

TINA

Grandma. There's a tray of cheese and crackers on the counter. Could you get it?

HATTIE

All right. I'll just be gone a second. (to Tina) I'm going to make a call.

Hattie scurries out.

WENDYL

She doesn't trust me.

TINA

She doesn't trust anyone. Ever since she got that stupid letter from Publisher's Clearinghouse.

WENDYL

She won?

TINA

No. But she won't read the fine print. She spends every day waiting for Ed McMahon to show up with her ten million dollars.

WENDYL

And she thinks I'm after your money.

TINA

I should have warned you. I might take her to a doctor.

WENDYL

Has she been this way for a long time?

TINA

Usually it's not a problem.

They move next to each other on the couch. They enjoy just being close, silent for a moment, completely comfortable with each other.

During the silence, Mick and Celia try to talk, mouthing words, but make no sound.

TINA

This whole thing has been very different for me.

WENDYL

I know what you mean.

MICK

Just give me a fuckin' break, will ya?

CELIA

You're just a nothing.

TINA

It's been good.

WENDYL

A hell of a lot better, that's for sure.

TINA

But I keep wondering if the bad times will fade.

WENDYL

What if they don't?

TINA

I guess it doesn't matter.

WENDYL

I guess it doesn't.

Hattie enters, carrying her bat in the most menacing possible fashion.

HATTIE

Freeze, Buster. You get off the couch, real slow.

Wendyl rises, slowly.

TINA

Sit down, Wendyl. Grandma, what's wrong with you?

HATTIE

Nothing is wrong with me. Not a thing. I'm looking out for you. I just made a phone call, to a good friend of mine on the police force. He found a little information about Mr. Wendyl here. Didn't think I'd actually make the call, did you, Mister?

WENDYL

You shouldn't have called.

TINA

Grandma, what the hell are you doing?

HATTIE

Making sure you don't get suckered by some con artist. Why don't you tell her? Go ahead. Haven't told her yet, have you? Got your little secrets all wrapped up. Well, not anymore. Tell her what you did. You tell her.

Lights to black.

End Act I.