

# **Famililly**

A Play

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# **FAMILILLY**

A play

Charles Deemer



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## **Famililly**

a play in two acts

*First produced at the Wharf Rat Theatre in Salem, Massachusetts, on August 7, 1998. Directed by Laney Roberts.*

*Winner of the 1997 "Crossing Borders" international new play competition and the 1998 Buckham Alley Theatre Playwrights Competition. Also the highest ranking stage play in the 1998 New Century Writer Awards and a finalist for the 1998 Oregon Book Award.*

### THE CAST:

*George, patriarch of the Wellington clan, retired*

*Martha, his wife*

*Thomas, their oldest son, an accountant, 30s*

*Vincent, Thomas' lifemate, an architect, 30s-40s*

*Emily, their daughter, college professor, 30s*

*June, Thomas' ex-wife, budding jazz singer, 30s*

### SETTING:

The Wellington condo in San Francisco. Living room.

Stairs lead to bedroom. Upstage exits to kitchen and den.

Front door.

### TIME:

July 4, 1976. *Act II, scene ii*: one year later, July 4, 1977.



## ACT ONE

*(AT RISE: The living room of a luxurious condominium in San Francisco. Stairs lead to bedrooms. Hallway leads to kitchen, den, bathroom. Front door. It is morning, July 4, 1976.)*

*(VINCENT, 30s, is in the room, dressed in 18th century costume, suggesting Benjamin Franklin. EMILY, 30s, is on the divan, a body under a blanket. Vincent is reading a typed script, "going over lines," preparing for a one-man show he is doing tonight. Finally he puts down the script, stands up and begins "a dry run." In the beginning, his tone is casual, matter-of-fact; he is doing this primarily for lines.)*

VINCENT: "When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for a people to change the institutions which have nurtured them since birth, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the redefinition of such institutions to which the Laws of Nature entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of humankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to such changes."

*(Emily coughs, gets up and obliviously wanders out of the room, on her way to the bathroom. Vincent watches her, amused, but says nothing until she is gone. Then he turns to the audience.)*

VINCENT:*(to audience)* Emily, the brightest Wellington of them all. Tenured professor of history at Columbia University. Younger sister of Thomas, who is my — my what? I refuse to say "significant other." Significant other what? My lover. My partner in life. It is not like Emily to come home to a family reunion. Apparently the last time, years before Thomas and I got together, she and her father really got into it. You'll get the details later.

*(He looks at the spot where Emily exited, then turns back to the audience. Now he'll play his show directly to the audience at performance level.)*

VINCENT: *(to audience)* "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all children are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Shelter, Security, Education, and Nurturing. That to secure these rights, Families are instituted among men and women, deriving their definition and social acceptance from the consent of the people. That when any definition of Family becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the people to abolish or redefine it, and to institute a new kind of Family, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its authority in such form, as to them seem most likely to effect the Safety and Welfare of the children."

*(Emily returns.)*

EMILY: Vincent, why are you dressed like that?

VINCENT: Emily! And good morning to you, too! Are we feeling a bit woozy this morning?

EMILY: Please don't tell me there's a costume party.

VINCENT: "There's a costume party." Close, but no cigarillo. *(Modeling his costume)* Who do you think I am?

EMILY: I haven't a clue.

VINCENT: You don't recognize gentle Ben, the scatological connoisseur of the Revolution?

EMILY: Of course. What do you mean, "close" to a costume party?

VINCENT: We, my dear, are riding a float in the parade. And later I'm doing a one-man show. You won't believe how I've rewritten the Declaration of Independence! Want to hear it?

EMILY: It's too early to concentrate. I couldn't find any coffee.

VINCENT: The coffee pot is in the den, not the kitchen. Be right back.

EMILY: You're a dearheart.

VINCENT: Dearheart! Is that what you academics say to one another now? Gag me!

*(He leaves.)*

*(Emily speaks to the audience.)*

EMILY: Just before every holiday I get the same phone call: "When are we going to see you?," Mom asks. I try to explain how busy I am, but my parents understand little about the demands of an academic life. This year Thomas was the first to call, reminding me that it was the Bicentennial. Hence a bigger family ta-do than usual. So I decided on a compromise. My plan was to make an appearance, spend the holiday in San Francisco, and then visit my girlfriend Sharon in Santa Barbara for a few days. Then I'd return to New York and get back to work on my biography of Mercy Otis Warren. I'll tell you more about her later.

*(Vincent quickly returns with a mug of coffee.)*

VINCENT: Bottom of the pot. Hope you run on 40-weight.

EMILY: Thanks. Where is everybody?

VINCENT: At the Gala Bicentennial Breakfast.

EMILY: You weren't invited?

VINCENT: I told them I had to rehearse for my show tonight. You know how your father and I are.

EMILY: I'm amazed he let you in the house.

VINCENT: A grand gesture for the Patriotism of the occasion! Something like that.

EMILY: So we're all staying here?

VINCENT: Absolutely. The family that sleeps together and all that — well, not literally. They gave Thomas and I separate bedrooms, which is why you're on the couch. I thought of sneaking across the hallway for a visit last night, but I was afraid I'd activate your father's trip wire.

EMILY: Thomas was supposed to get me a hotel room.

VINCENT: A little late now. The Bicentennial is the biggest thing to hit town since the Pope. (*Quick aside to audience*) Did the Pope ever come to San Francisco?

EMILY: I can't wait til it's over.

VINCENT: You don't like parades and costume parties?

EMILY: I don't like history according to Disney.

VINCENT: I'm glad you made the effort to come. This may be the last time everybody's together. Your father doesn't look well.

EMILY (*changing the subject*): So you and Thomas must be doing great.

VINCENT: Splendidly. You didn't hear, I take it?

EMILY: Hear what?

VINCENT: We're getting Billy.

EMILY: Are you serious?

VINCENT: Very soon now. I'm going to be a mother!

*(He moves quickly to speak to the audience.)*

VINCENT: A little background. Thomas married June when they were still in college. He told me he already was attracted to men but felt guilty and sinful about it. How could he not, given a father like he had? Marriage was supposed to be his moral salvation. Of course, it wasn't. Thomas and I met when June was pregnant, and I think we fell in love the very day his son, Billy, was born. At least I did. After that, things got hairy in a real hurry, and pretty ugly, too, as I'm sure you can imagine.

*(He moves quickly back into the scene.)*

EMILY: What about June?

VINCENT: Are you ready for this? It was her idea.

EMILY: Impossible. June's homophobic.

VINCENT: She must have matured to mere fascism.

EMILY: Why would she want to give up Billy?

VINCENT: She says she's a lousy parent. Yours truly, on the other hand, will be spectacular at it! I'm so excited.

EMILY: June's a born-to-breed, traditional, wide-hipped, all-American mother. She must be losing it.

VINCENT: That, too — but Thomas and I are just thrilled. Well, Thomas comes and goes. And we're both so nervous!

I haven't been this nervous since high school when I went to my first bathhouse.

EMILY: You, I can see as a great parent. My brother, I'm not so sure about.

VINCENT: It's such a responsibility! I've been reading Dr. Spock.

*(Emily has to smile.)*

VINCENT: Don't poke fun if you've never read him. Dr. Spock is a real page-turner. "Will the baby gag on his first solid food?" *(To audience)* "Will he throw up in front of company?"

*(Thomas rushes in. He is dressed like Thomas Jefferson, complete with wig.)*

THOMAS *(to Emily)*: Good, you're up.

VINCENT *(to audience)*: The love of my life!

THOMAS *(quickly going on)*: What a goddamn mess breakfast was. We ran into June in the lobby.

VINCENT: With Billy?

THOMAS: She was with some asshole with tattoos wearing a baseball cap. Can you imagine a baseball cap at the Hilton? It was very awkward.

EMILY: I always thought blue collar was more her type. Vincent told me you're getting Billy.

THOMAS: It's not supposed to be public knowledge.

VINCENT: My, now we don't even trust our sister. *(To Emily)* Seeing June always makes him irrational. It's such a turn on.

THOMAS: I don't want to deal with the parents about getting Billy yet.

EMILY: So how are they?

THOMAS: I don't know. The same. Dad talks, mother talks, nobody listens.

VINCENT: Tell her about the cruise.

THOMAS: They're going on a cruise.

VINCENT (*to audience*): Scheduled to leave next week.

THOMAS: I'll believe it when I see it.

EMILY: Mom's been after him for years.

THOMAS: What about you? You able to get any sleep?

EMILY: I expected a hotel room.

THOMAS: Mom wanted us all to stay here.

EMILY: I'm just teasing you. Hey, give me a hug. It's great to see you.

(*They hug.*)

THOMAS: Good to see you, too. I'm really glad you came.

EMILY: I reserve judgment.

VINCENT: Are your parents still planning on coffee and dessert?

THOMAS: Worse. They invited June.

VINCENT: Forewarned is forearmed. I'll flirt with her tattooed hunk. That ought to piss her off. *(To audience)* June and I go way back.

THOMAS: I think she has to give him a ride somewhere, then come here. I can't believe they invited her.

EMILY: Of course, they would. Dad adores her, and Mom believes the world is a lovely place where everyone adores everybody.

THOMAS: I couldn't stop them, Vincent.

VINCENT: Don't worry about it. Where's my son?, is what I want to know.

THOMAS: With a sitter.

VINCENT: You don't leave a two-year old boy with a sitter on the Fourth of July. Do you? I don't remember reading anything about that in Dr. Spock.

THOMAS: He's reading Dr. Spock.

EMILY: He told me.

VINCENT: She's so irresponsible. The sooner we get Billy, the better for everybody.

EMILY: I can't believe June isn't a Model Mother.

THOMAS: She's got some heavy problems.

EMILY: I knew that. But when did mental imbalance ever discourage a parent? Of course, I only know about my own family.

THOMAS: Who is due here any minute for coffee. Do you plan to be here? Or are you saving actually talking to them for later?

EMILY: I don't think I'm up for it yet. Maybe I'll go for a walk.

VINCENT: And you're the one who wanted to be "a famililly" when you grew up. *(To audience)* One of the family stories.

EMILY: You saw the home movies?

VINCENT: More than once.

EMILY: Dad really does hate you.

VINCENT: He didn't show them to me. Thomas borrowed the projector.

THOMAS: At your insistence.

VINCENT: I think family history is important.

EMILY: Don't get me started, Vincent.

THOMAS *(changing the subject)*: We've got to get you a costume. You are coming to the parade, right? They'd expect you to be on the float.

EMILY: I wasn't told about a parade. Or a costume party. Or whatever else is planned. I was told to be here and that all the arrangements were made. You didn't tell me everybody would be staying here together either.

THOMAS: Vincent, can you manage the costume?

EMILY: I'm not up for this, Thomas.

THOMAS: Dad's counting on having all of us on the float. You don't have to do anything but stand there in your costume.

VINCENT: Smile and do the windshield wiper routine.

EMILY: You didn't warn me I was walking into this.

THOMAS: Listen, if you don't want to be here, you'd better get going. You can go out the back way just in case.

EMILY: I'm not ready to belong to this family again!

VINCENT: Calm down, "dearheart". Meet you back here then?

THOMAS: Sure.

VINCENT: Follow the leader.

*(He turns to the audience before leaving: )*

VINCENT *(to audience)*: Enjoy meeting "the famillily!"

*(Vincent and Emily exit as Thomas moves to speak to the audience.)*

THOMAS: My dad and sister refight the sixties every time they get together, which fortunately hasn't been very often. She's so much like him, is the thing. Stubborn as hell. They both devour history, disagree on the meaning of it all, and neither will give an inch. Listening to them makes me glad I'm an accountant: either the books balance or they don't.

*(GEORGE and MARTHA WELLINGTON enter, dressed as their namesakes, the Washingtons, the Father and Mother of the Country. George wears a wig. Martha is helping George, who looks very tired. When he speaks, we can hear the physical pain in his voice.)*

MARTHA: Thomas! Your father needs to lie down.

THOMAS: What happened?

GEORGE: It's nothing.

*(Martha leads George to the divan, Thomas coming forward to help, and they get George stretched out and comfortable.)*

MARTHA: He got very dizzy after you left, and he has pains.

GEORGE: A little light-headed, is all.

MARTHA: Where's Emily?

THOMAS: Vincent took her to get a costume.

GEORGE: She doesn't even have her costume yet?

MARTHA: Now don't you get upset. I'm sure everything is taken care of. *(To Thomas)* There's some place open?

GEORGE: Chinese don't celebrate the Fourth, mother. Chinese tailors will get filthy rich today.

THOMAS: I was about to put on coffee. Dad, can I get you anything?

GEORGE: Your mother won't let me have a fizz yet.

THOMAS: I'll make a fresh pot of coffee.

*(He leaves, moving as if he is eager to get out of there.)*

GEORGE: Don't hover over me like that, mother. I got a little dizzy, is all.

MARTHA: Where does it hurt?

GEORGE: Where doesn't it?

MARTHA: Maybe you shouldn't ride on the float.

GEORGE: Let me get my second wind.

MARTHA: Okay, we'll see how you feel later.

GEORGE: I'd feel better if you stopped hovering over me.

*(Martha moves away, speaking to the audience.)*

MARTHA *(to audience)*: You can't do anything for him. He thinks it's a weakness to ask for help.

*(Thomas sticks his head in the room.)*

THOMAS: Anybody going to want pastries?

GEORGE: Nothing for me, son.

MARTHA: I'm so full, I'll probably skip lunch.

*(Thomas exits.)*

GEORGE: He seem okay to you?

MARTHA: Yes.

GEORGE: He acts like he's upset about something.

MARTHA: I don't think he's ever been happier.

GEORGE: I'm sure Jack the Ripper was happy, too.

MARTHA: George, don't.

GEORGE: Happiness doesn't really have much to do with anything, does it? As far as right and wrong are concerned?

MARTHA: George, please don't start a row, today of all days.

GEORGE: Every time I see June, I think of Billy having no father in the house.

MARTHA: As many children grow up today with one parent as two. Billy will be fine.

GEORGE: Kids need both parents. The downfall of the family is going to be the downfall of the country, mark my word. I'm glad I won't be around to see it.

MARTHA: What has made you so morbid today?

GEORGE: You ever wonder if we live up to our roots? I mean, look at us. What would our Founding Fathers think if they were alive today? I shudder to imagine.

MARTHA: When you feel bad, it touches everything you think about.

GEORGE: You don't believe the world's going to hell in a hand-basket?

MARTHA: I think when you get your second wind, you won't be talking like that. (*Changing the subject*) What a surprise running into June. How did she look to you?

GEORGE: Tired.

MARTHA: I thought she looked ill. I bet she's not eating right. (*To audience*) Thomas always did most of the cooking.

GEORGE: I think she's just tired, mother. Of course she'd be tired, raising a son by herself. I worry about her and Billy all alone in that big house.

MARTHA: I'm sure they do fine.

GEORGE: You don't worry about her?

MARTHA: Not really. You know who I worry about.

GEORGE: And you know what I have to say about it.

MARTHA: Emily's as much a part of my flesh as Thomas is. I can't dismiss her.

*(Thomas enters with coffee.)*

THOMAS: Here we are.

MARTHA: I was just telling George that June didn't look well. Didn't you think so?

THOMAS: How so?

GEORGE: She's got to be exhausted. Not easy being a single parent.

THOMAS: She left Billy with a sitter, Dad. Not too much fatigue in that.

MARTHA: She always did drive herself too hard.

GEORGE: And now she has no help.

THOMAS *(ignoring this)*: She still blames herself for not finishing school. She blames herself for not being more than a housewife. She even blames herself — you know, for how we turned out.

MARTHA: She once told me she always wanted to be a singer. A vocalist, she called it. She used to stop by a piano bar and sing along when she was single, always brought down the house. The pianist told her she reminded him of young Peggy Lee. Imagine telling that to an impressionable young woman.

THOMAS: She does have a good voice, actually. But I can't picture her with the gumption to pay the dues it would take.

MARTHA: Well, she has Billy to think about now.

GEORGE: Not easy being a single parent. Not easy at all.

THOMAS: Will you excuse me a minute?

*(He moves away and speaks to the audience.)*

THOMAS: I felt like I was suffocating. Obviously I was the Fallen Son in Dad's eyes, but I'd learned to let his little digs go in one ear and out the other. Now, what with the stress of Emily being here, and everybody wondering when she and Dad would get into it; and June on her way over, which I considered the worst timing because Dad was bound to bring up Billy — I needed a couple of deep breaths and a battery charge, like immediately.

*(Thomas quickly exits.)*

MARTHA: Why must you torment him? He doesn't want to talk about June.

GEORGE: I'm not forcing him to talk about her.

MARTHA: You keep bringing her up.

GEORGE: You brought her up!

MARTHA: I think he still cares for her.

GEORGE: Mother, he's a homosexual. It isn't a passing phase he's in.

MARTHA: I'm perfectly aware of that.

GEORGE: So he doesn't still hold a torch for June. Never did. She's not his element, so to speak.

MARTHA: He can still care for her, and I think he does. This is all much harder on him than he admits. Or than you admit.

GEORGE: I doubt that very seriously.

MARTHA: Why can't you give him the benefit of the doubt?

GEORGE: Why should I? They kept me awake all night.

MARTHA: Who?

GEORGE: The two of them. I kept expecting to hear someone sneak across the hall.

MARTHA: What a thing to lose sleep over!

GEORGE: I wouldn't put it past them.

MARTHA: Serves you right, making them use separate bedrooms. Long as they've been living together now.

GEORGE: I'm not running a cat house.

MARTHA: You're just itching for a fight with Vincent, aren't you?

GEORGE: I can be polite to him. It doesn't mean I approve of him or encourage what they do.

MARTHA: You've never appreciated how difficult it was for Thomas to come out.

GEORGE: Since when is lust difficult? It's doing the right thing that's hard.

MARTHA: That's not fair. He loves Vincent.

GEORGE: We'll never agree, mother.

MARTHA: You don't want to talk about Emily — well, I don't want to talk about this. I would like this to be a special day. We may not have everybody together again.

*(The doorbell rings. George sits up.)*

MARTHA: You don't have to get up.

*(Thomas rushes in and to the door.)*

THOMAS: I'll get it.

*(Thomas answers the door. JUNE walks in. She's pretty but doesn't take advantage of it and looks, in fact, like she could use some sleep.)*

THOMAS: Hello. Come in.

JUNE: They said it would be all right to come over.

THOMAS: Of course, it's all right. Coffee?

JUNE: Yes, thanks. I love your costume.

THOMAS: Still sugar and cream?

*(June smiles and nods. Thomas leaves to fetch coffee.)*

MARTHA: I'm so glad you could stop by.

GEORGE: Wish you had Billy.

JUNE: To be honest, it's nice to have some time to myself.

MARTHA: We'll have you to dinner soon. Right after we get back from our cruise.

JUNE: A cruise!

MARTHA: We leave next week. It only took me thirty years to get him to take me.

GEORGE: We're not on the high seas yet, mother.

MARTHA: No backing out on me!

GEORGE: I may get hit by a truck tomorrow.

MARTHA: Listen to him.

JUNE: Where are you going?

MARTHA: The Bahamas. We'll be gone 10 days.

GEORGE: Probably seasick the whole time.

MARTHA: He's been in one of his moods all morning.

GEORGE (*ignoring this*): So how's the Billy boy doing?

JUNE: He's great.

GEORGE: I thought of taking him on the cruise. Of course, I knew you wouldn't give him up for that long.

(*June moves to speak to the audience:* )

JUNE (*to audience*): So they didn't know yet. I guessed as much since they hadn't said anything about it at the Hilton. It was just like Thomas to put off something important to the last possible moment. Thomas is the great procrastinator.

MARTHA: What an interesting young man you were with.

JUNE (*moving back into scene*): Joey? He's in my jazz improv class.

GEORGE: Your what?

JUNE: I'm taking some music classes at night.

GEORGE: I didn't know that.

MARTHA: Oh, you did so. His memory's going.

JUNE: I don't think I told either of you.

GEORGE: That keeps you pretty busy, doesn't it?

JUNE: Too busy, I'm afraid.

GEORGE: Keeping care of Billy is a full-time job in itself.

JUNE (*wanting to get out of this*): It can be, that's for sure. I wonder if Thomas needs any help.

(*But he is just now entering.*)

MARTHA: June is taking a music class!

THOMAS: Really? You finally bit the bullet.

JUNE: Yep.

THOMAS: I didn't ask if you wanted a pastry.

JUNE: No thanks.

MARTHA: Does anyone mind if I take my coffee upstairs? I want to freshen up.

THOMAS: Of course not.

MARTHA: George? I want to touch up your wig. You probably are ready to get out from under it.

GEORGE: What she's trying to say is, You two probably want some time alone.

MARTHA: Now that you mention it, I'm sure they do. George?

*(Martha and George start upstairs to their bedroom. Martha tries to help him but he pushes her away.)*

GEORGE: Quit hovering over me.

*(George starts upstairs. On her way out behind him, Martha speaks to the audience.)*

MARTHA *(to audience)*: I gave up trying to change him long ago. The glass on the table is never full, and whether it's half-empty or half-full is completely up to you.

*(She exits behind George.)*

JUNE: Where's Vincent?

THOMAS: He's helping Emily get a costume.

JUNE: So she finally broke down and came home.

THOMAS: Only in a manner of speaking. I think she's already ready to leave.

JUNE: She still teaching at Columbia?

THOMAS: Oh, yes. Tenure and everything.

JUNE: I'm sorry I missed her.

THOMAS: June, I don't want Dad to find out what's coming down sooner than he has to. Especially not today.

Everybody's looking at this like it's the Last Family Reunion.

JUNE: I certainly don't plan on telling him.

THOMAS: I just wanted to touch bases with you. I'll tell Mom first and let her break the news to him.

*(A pause.)*

THOMAS: Not getting cold feet are you?

JUNE: I don't think so.

THOMAS: That's not very encouraging.

JUNE: I'm fine. It's just going to be quite a change.

THOMAS: You're doing the right thing.

JUNE: The only part that worries me is Vincent. He and I need to reach an understanding.

THOMAS: I've wanted you two to be friends from the start.

JUNE: I'm not sure that can happen. But we can be civil, for Billy's sake. Where do you think Vincent's at with all this?

THOMAS: You said some pretty vicious things about him.

JUNE: All of us said things we regret.

THOMAS: True enough.

JUNE: Billy will pick up on any animosity between us.

THOMAS: I'll talk to Vincent and test the waters. Maybe we can sit down together.

JUNE: Thanks, Thomas.

THOMAS: What's your schedule?

JUNE: I'm only in the city for the day, so later would be great if you have time.

THOMAS: We have a party tonight but there's a break after the parade. You could come by around four, and we could all go out for a drink.

JUNE: If Vincent's up to it, that would be perfect.

THOMAS: So you're studying music again.

*(June moves forward to speak to the audience: )*

JUNE *(to audience)*: I hate it when he pretends to be interested in what I'm doing. Especially about something as important to me as music. Money was never a problem with us — but would he buy me a piano? I'm a musician, for God's sake, I need a piano as much as he needs a calculator. But he never took — he still doesn't take — my music seriously. It's just my hobby, as far as he's concerned. So when he starts pretending he's interested in what I'm doing, I just turn him off, I might as well be wearing a hearing aid and flipping the switch.

*(The door opens and Vincent enters.)*

VINCENT: Oops — didn't mean to interrupt.

*(He starts out.)*

THOMAS: Vincent, wait a minute. We need to talk.

VINCENT: Emily won't come in unless the coast is clear. Where are your parents?

THOMAS: Upstairs.

*(Vincent calls into the hallway.)*

VINCENT: The coast is clear! *(To the audience)* Tenure at Columbia, and she's afraid to face her parents.

*(He moves into the room, leaving the door open.)*

JUNE: I like your costume. Ben Franklin, right?

VINCENT: A kind word? What are you setting me up for?

JUNE: I'd better be going.

THOMAS: Vincent, I was thinking later the three of us could get together for a drink. We need to find a way to all work together — for Billy's sake.

*(Emily enters. She is dressed in a period costume.)*

EMILY: Hi, June.

JUNE: What a surprise. I hear you got tenure.

EMILY: A couple years ago, actually.

JUNE: Congratulations. So, Thomas, I'll call later.

THOMAS: Great.

JUNE: Nice seeing you, Emily.

*(June starts out.)*

VINCENT: Farewell to you, too! *(To the audience)* She can't stand to be in the same room with me.

*(June moves quickly to speak to the audience.)*

JUNE: No, that's not true. I've never hated Vincent the way I think I'd hate "the other woman," if Thomas had left me for one. That's what I was afraid was going to happen. After Billy was born, nothing was the same between us, and I thought Thomas was having an affair. With a woman, I mean. But when you lose your spouse, the person you love, the person you expect to spend the rest of your life with, the father of your child — when you lose him to another man — I don't know how to describe the feeling. I was shocked. I hadn't seen it coming, not that way, not a clue. It's like waking up on another planet. Well, I flipped out, is what happened.

*(Thomas quickly moves forward.)*

*FLASHBACK:*

THOMAS: June, I can only be who I am.

JUNE: But you knew all along! You've been lying to me since the day we met!

THOMAS: No, it's much more complicated than that.

JUNE: You married me when you knew what you were!

THOMAS: Don't say "what" like I'm some kind of insect.

JUNE: "What" is being a liar! Why? Did you think I was going to cure you? Did you need me so people at work wouldn't suspect what you are?

THOMAS: I married you because I love you.

JUNE: How can you say that?

THOMAS: It's true. I still love you. I've just stopped desiring you.

JUNE: Get the fuck out of my house. Go to your queer friend and do your faggot sex together.

THOMAS: You don't use words like that.

JUNE: At least you found somebody who'll let you fuck them in the ass.

THOMAS: That's not what this is about.

JUNE: Thomas, what the hell do you want from me? Approval?

THOMAS: No. Understanding.

JUNE: What I understand is that you've been living a lie with me, Thomas. You're a goddamn liar!

*(She quickly exits, as Thomas watches her go. Vincent brings Thomas back into the scene.)*

VINCENT: What do you think?

THOMAS: I'm worried about her.

VINCENT: About the costume! We didn't have much of a selection.

THOMAS: Looks fine.

VINCENT: Now what persona will you use?

EMILY: Vincent, for Christ's sake—

VINCENT: You have to *be* someone, "dearheart."

EMILY: Fine. I'm Mercy Otis Warren.

THOMAS: Who the hell is that?

EMILY: America's first playwright. Younger sister of James Otis.

THOMAS: That explains everything. Who's James Otis?

EMILY: Are you kidding me? Vincent, tell him.

VINCENT: I'm just a dirty old man, what do I know? I write clever one-liners for Poor Richard's Almanac. (*To audience*) Benjamin Franklin also had the best collection of scatological literature in the colonies. Definitely our most anal Founding Father.

EMILY: Otis is the man who first said, "No taxation without representation!"

THOMAS: I thought that was Patrick Henry.

VINCENT: That's "Give me puberty or give me death!"

EMILY: Otis is one of the more fascinating characters in the revolution. He was a conservative — he didn't want a revolution, he wanted American representation in the British Parliament.

VINCENT: Really? So tell me, who was the first American drag queen? (*To audience*) This should be interesting.

EMILY: Not my area of specialization, Vincent.

VINCENT: If it ain't Mom and Apple Pie, it ain't in the history books. Same old story.

EMILY: You get no argument from me. History is what the winners tell the losers.

(*CROSS FADE to upstairs bedroom. George is out of his wig, stretched out on the bed, talking to Martha off-stage.*)

GEORGE: I wonder if your life really passes before your eyes just before you die.

MARTHA (O.S.): Please don't talk like that.

GEORGE: I hope so. Hope I remember things I haven't been able to recall for years. There are so many memories I have just bits and pieces of, like maybe I remember just a small thing that happened, but I can't remember what went before or after. It would be nice to have a complete memory of something again. If that's what it's going to be like— .

*(Martha enters from the bathroom.)*

MARTHA: You're getting beyond morbid, George.

GEORGE: Aren't you curious about it?

MARTHA: No.

GEORGE: Well, I am.

MARTHA: You worry me. You really don't feel well, do you?

GEORGE: I haven't felt well in years.

MARTHA: I mean right now. Promise me you'll see the doctor before we leave on the cruise.

GEORGE: Pretty short notice.

MARTHA: It's an emergency. He'll let you in.

GEORGE: I'm getting old, mother. Doctors can't do a thing about it.

MARTHA: You're not that old.

GEORGE: I feel older every day.

MARTHA: Wait til we get to sea. The salt air will do wonders for you.

GEORGE: Probably spend the whole trip barfing.

MARTHA: You're just determined to be miserable today, aren't you? Well, I'm not letting you bring me down to your level. If you want to feel sorry for yourself, be my guest. I'm going to enjoy the family being together again..

GEORGE: Is that what we are? A family?

MARTHA: Of course we're a family. What a thing to say.

GEORGE: Not a family the way it used to be. How many homosexuals were in your parents' family?

MARTHA: Things were different then.

GEORGE: You can say that again.

MARTHA: There probably were more homosexuals than we knew about, George, only they kept to themselves.

GEORGE: That's exactly what I mean. It was unthinkable to flaunt your sex life in public. A disgrace.

MARTHA: Thomas is not a disgrace. He can't help the way he is.

GEORGE: Does that give them license to keep everybody awake all night?

MARTHA: You kept yourself awake, worrying about them! I'm going downstairs. Please try to relax. You have time for a little nap.

GEORGE: I'm not sleepy.

MARTHA: You want to come downstairs with me?

GEORGE: I'll be down directly, mother.

MARTHA: You're sure you're up to being on the float?

GEORGE: I'll be fine. Just give me a minute to get my second wind.

*(George watches Martha leave. Then he goes to a closet and takes out a blue canvas bag. He stares at it. CROSS FADE to downstairs.)*

EMILY: I'm amazed at the change in June's attitude.

THOMAS: She just hates the responsibility of being a parent. Apparently she's going to try and do something with her music.

*(Vincent is the first to see Martha coming down the stairs.)*

VINCENT: All hail the Mother of Our Country!

*(He moves to her, taking her arm.)*

VINCENT: What can I get you? Coffee? A drink?

MARTHA: Emily!

EMILY: Hi, Mom.

*(They embrace a bit stiffly.)*

MARTHA: I'm so happy you were able to come. I know how busy you are.

EMILY: Well, here I am. *(Modeling her costume:)* I didn't know exactly what I was getting into.

THOMAS: She's America's first playwright. What was her name?

EMILY: Mercy Otis Warren.

MARTHA: Really? Isn't that marvelous?

EMILY: You look good, Mom. How's Dad doing?

MARTHA: I'm worried about him. He had a dizzy spell this morning, and you know how stubborn he can be about seeing a doctor. We're leaving on a cruise next week.

EMILY: So I hear.

MARTHA: I want him to get a checkup before we go.

THOMAS: Is he feeling well enough to do the parade?

MARTHA: We'll see how he feels after his nap.

VINCENT: I'm sure we can find a stool for him on the float. At least he won't have to be on his feet.

MARTHA: How thoughtful.

EMILY: I'm nervous about seeing him. We got in such a brawl the last time.

THOMAS: Don't talk about college and the sixties, and you'll be fine.

VINCENT: Try peaceful coexistence. Look at me. I know he doesn't approve of me — but here I am!

MARTHA: That's not true, Vincent. Of course he likes you.

THOMAS: Mother, please.

VINCENT: I'm a guest in his house, at any rate. There's definite signs of progress there.

MARTHA: It's not you two so much. He worries more about Billy not having a father in the house.

*(Thomas and Vincent exchange a knowing glance.)*

THOMAS: Billy has a father.

MARTHA: I know that. George is old-fashioned. He thinks children need two parents in the home.

*(A pause.)*

THOMAS: Mom, there's something I should tell you. *(To Vincent)* Unless you object.

VINCENT: Your decision. *(To audience)* I'm not touching that with a ten-foot you-know-what.

THOMAS *(to Vincent)*: Maybe Mom can break it to him on the cruise.

EMILY: I think it's a good idea, Thomas.

MARTHA: What are you talking about?

THOMAS: Vincent and I are getting Billy.

*(Martha just looks at him, puzzled.)*

THOMAS: We're getting official custody. We'll be raising him, starting next week, right after you leave on the cruise. It's something we've been working on for a while now.

MARTHA: Billy will be living with you?

THOMAS: Yes. It was June's idea, actually.

MARTHA: She doesn't want him any more?

THOMAS: She says she's not a very good parent. And I guess she wants to pursue her music. Of course, she can spend all the time with Billy she wants.

MARTHA: I don't know what to say. I didn't know something like that was allowed.

THOMAS: We both know Dad's going to flip out when he hears. I'm hoping you can be a buffer for that by breaking the news to him on the cruise.

VINCENT: May I say something? Martha, you and I get along pretty well, I think, and I want you to know that we've all given this a good deal of thought. The primary reason we're doing this is for Billy. With two of us in the home, he'll always have someone to be there for him.

THOMAS: I'm sure June will be over for dinner and visiting a lot. He'll have three parents, is what it amounts, too. We're all very excited about this. We know it's best for Billy.

VINCENT: I've been reading Dr. Spock.

EMILY: Change the subject, he's coming down.

*(George comes downstairs.)*

GEORGE: Emily! Come give your old man a hug.

*(Emily is taken aback by the greeting.)*

EMILY: Hi, Dad.

GEORGE: You heard me.

*(She moves to him, and they awkwardly embrace.)*

GEORGE: I know how busy you are — thanks for being here.

EMILY: Thomas wouldn't take no for an answer.

GEORGE: Good for you, son. Family wouldn't be complete without you. What is it you used to say? "I want to be a famililly when I grow up!"

*(Emily speaks to the audience.)*

EMILY *(to audience)*: Something pops out of your mouth when you're seven, and it follows you to your grave.

MARTHA: Weren't you able to sleep, dear?

GEORGE: Don't want to sleep through the most important holiday of my lifetime! I can stay in bed all day tomorrow if it comes to that. I like your costume.

MARTHA: She's America's first playwright.

GEORGE: Mercy Otis Warren. Sister of James Otis.

EMILY: I'm impressed.

GEORGE: "No taxation without representation!" His law clerk, Samuel Adams, took that little proposition considerably farther than Otis intended. If I remember correctly, Otis went crazy when the fighting started, and they had to carry him out of Boston in a strait jacket.

EMILY: A bit exaggerated, perhaps.

GEORGE *(ignoring this)*: Otis spent the entire revolution in exile. He burned his life's work, he was so depressed about the violence. That's why we know so little about him. John Adams called him the First Patriot. You're not the only historian in the family, young lady.

EMILY: Very good.

GEORGE: After the revolution, they threw a James Otis Day for him in Boston, and at the celebration Otis saw Hamilton and others dancing the minuet. He thought they were behaving like a bunch of English aristocrats! Depressed him all over again. I think that's when he decided to burn all his papers. Mercy was editing them at the time.

EMILY: There's some controversy about some of that.

*(Martha senses potential conflict and intervenes.)*

MARTHA: Emily, let me give you the grand tour.

GEORGE: Now mother, just relax. There's lots of time for grand tours.

MARTHA: You're not going to start an argument about history, are you?

GEORGE: No, I'm not starting an argument about anything. Emily, tell her.

EMILY *(tentatively)*: We're fine, Mom.

GEORGE *(to Emily)*: Now come with me.

*(He takes her hand and starts toward the stairs. Emily isn't sure what is going on — and neither is anyone else.)*

MARTHA: George?

GEORGE: We'll be back before it's time to go. I'm sure you all can amuse yourselves.

THOMAS: Dad, what's going on?

GEORGE: Will everyone just relax, for God's sake?

*(They have started up the stairs. )*

EMILY: Mom, it's okay.

*(Everyone watches them move up the stairs and out of sight. )*

VINCENT *(to the audience)*: I love it when people act unpredictably! We all get in such ruts, don't you think?

THOMAS: What's he doing?

MARTHA: I have no idea.

THOMAS: This is really weird, Mom.

VINCENT: I think he's on a roll, and we should all just go along with it.

THOMAS: You haven't been around him long enough to know what you're talking about.

MARTHA: Maybe he just needs to talk to her alone.

VINCENT: Exactly. Why do you always have to think the worst?

THOMAS: Because those two are stubborn as hell and have the same argument every time they get together.

MARTHA: And I for one refuse to sit here and get upset by it.

*(She starts away.)*

THOMAS: Where are you going?

MARTHA: I'm getting a head start on dinner.

*(She moves toward the kitchen, speaking to the audience:  
)*

MARTHA *(to audience)*: The glass is half-empty or it's half-full. It's completely up to you.

*(She exits.)*

THOMAS: You don't know their history. This is definitely out of character.

VINCENT: So what are you going to do? Sit here and wait for blood to come flowing down the stairs?

THOMAS: That's not funny.

VINCENT: I do detect something of a self-fulfilling prophecy in this family.

THOMAS: You don't have any foundation for what you're saying. Let's change the subject.

VINCENT: Okay. How about doing me a favor?

THOMAS: What?

VINCENT: Listen to my monologue. I need an audience.

*(CROSS FADE to bedroom upstairs.)*

GEORGE: I need to lie down a minute.

*(He stretches out on the bed.)*

EMILY: Dad, are you all right?

GEORGE: Not exactly.

EMILY: What's the problem?

GEORGE: That's what I want to talk to you about.

EMILY: Okay.

GEORGE: We've had our differences, I realize, ever since you went to Berkeley. Before, I suppose — since high school. I just want you to know there's something I respect about you very much.

EMILY (*on her guard*) And what's that?

GEORGE: Your intellect.

EMILY: You think I'm a stupid bleeding-heart liberal.

GEORGE: That has more to do with values than intellect.

EMILY: I'm not sure I understand the distinction in this case.

GEORGE: Your values make you ask the wrong questions.

EMILY: I see. Dad, if you brought me up here to try and change my value system—

GEORGE: I didn't.

EMILY: I almost didn't come here, to avoid this very conversation. I don't know why you can't just leave it alone.

GEORGE: Have I said anything about Berkeley?

EMILY: Surely you think that's where my values went wrong.

GEORGE: Of course I do. Because they did. But I didn't bring it up, you did.

EMILY: What kind of bullshit is that?

GEORGE: All that education and you talk like a longshoreman. Excuse me, longshore *person*.

*(She starts for the stairs.)*

EMILY: I'm not doing this, Dad.

*(George sits up, which takes some effort.)*

GEORGE: Wait a minute.

EMILY: I don't want to fight with you about college or the sixties or anything else. End of conversation.

*(She's heading out when she is stopped by what he says next.)*

GEORGE: Damn it, Emily, I'm sick!

*(She turns to him.)*

GEORGE: It's serious. I don't want your mother to know.

*(Emily slowly comes back into the room.)*

EMILY: What's wrong with you?

GEORGE: I have cancer.

EMILY: Oh, Dad...

GEORGE: It's getting worse. Sometimes I think I can feel it getting worse by the hour.

EMILY: You're not having any kind of treatment?

GEORGE: You saw what happened to your Uncle Henry. The cure is worse than the disease. Three months ago, they gave me six months. I think it's going to be less.

EMILY: You haven't told anyone?

GEORGE: No.

EMILY: Why me?

GEORGE: Because you're the only one in the family who can keep your head. I'm not going through what Henry went through, I can promise you that. I'm doing it myself first. I've been reading up on how to do that.

EMILY: Dad, I'm so sorry.

GEORGE: No tears, Emily. That's another reason I'm telling you. I haven't seen you cry since the fourth or fifth grade.

EMILY: First time someone's complimented me on that particular character defect.

GEORGE: Keeping control of your emotions is not a character defect.

EMILY: So what you're telling me is — you're going to do it yourself?

GEORGE: Yes.

EMILY: How?

GEORGE: With pills, liquor and a bag. It's as painless and clean as it gets.

EMILY: Have you talked to your doctor about this?

GEORGE: Of course not. He'd try to talk me out of it, if he didn't report me to the police. You fail at something like this, and they throw you in jail.

EMILY: I see. So when is this going to happen?

GEORGE: I was planning it right after the cruise. Only now I'm not sure I have that long.

EMILY: Jesus, Dad, you should get to a doctor. If you're in pain, at least they can give you something for it.

GEORGE: They already have. I skip the pills now and again so I can monitor myself.

EMILY: There must be an easier way.

GEORGE: Believe me, I've thought a lot about the best way to do it. Do I do it alone and let someone discover me? Do I do it here — or would that make it unbearable for your mother to keep living here? So then do I get a motel room or what? And the more I think about it, the more I get angry that it has to be so complicated. A man dies, for Christ's sake. It's inevitable. It's the most natural thing in the world. So why can't this be as natural an event as a birth?

EMILY: If it could happen any way you want, how would it be?

GEORGE: I've thought about that, too. I'd have all of you around me. You'd respect my decision to do it this way. It would be like a celebration — like a wake, I suppose, and then we'd all say goodnight, goodbye, and I'd fall asleep and that would be that.

EMILY: Dad, that's beautiful.

GEORGE: Can you imagine your mother going along with that? Thomas would be even worse.

EMILY: Have you thought about telling them what you want? Maybe they'll surprise you.

GEORGE: I wouldn't know where to begin.

EMILY: Just tell them what you told me. And tell them how you would like it to be.

*(A pause.)*

EMILY: I could tell them, if you'd like.

GEORGE: You'd do that, wouldn't you?

EMILY: Of course I would.

GEORGE: They say Indian chiefs would just walk into the woods and die when it was time. I think they had the right idea.

EMILY: Talk to Mom. She needs to know what you're going through.

GEORGE: I don't want a hysterical woman on my hands.

EMILY: Give her the chance to surprise you. She's a very strong woman. And a very practical one. She saw what Uncle Henry went through, the same as you. She'll understand why you're doing this.

*(CROSS FADE to downstairs. Vincent is rehearsing his show, as Thomas listens.)*

VINCENT: "...to institute a new kind of Family, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its authority in such form, as to them seem most likely to effect the Safety and Welfare of the children. Such has been the patient sufferance of many men and women today, and such is now the necessity that constrains them to alter their former concept of Family."

*(He moves his focus from Thomas to the audience.)*

VINCENT: "Prudence, indeed, would dictate that a definition of Family long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn that humankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms of Family to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of atrocities and dysfunctions, pursuing invariably the same result, evinces a pattern to expose the children to unbearable suffering and insecurity, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such a definition of Family, and to provide new kinds of families for the well-being of the children."

*(George and Emily come downstairs.)*

GEORGE: What the hell are you babbling about, Vincent?

VINCENT: *(quickly, to audience)* To be continued.

EMILY: Where's Mom?

THOMAS: In the kitchen.

*(Emily exits to fetch Martha.)*

GEORGE: New kinds of families? Seriously, what was that about?

THOMAS: Vincent was rehearsing for his little skit tonight.

VINCENT *(to audience)*: "His little skit"!

GEORGE: About family values?

THOMAS: Dad, it's nothing. I think we'd better get going.

GEORGE: We've got lots of time.

THOMAS: I'm sure traffic will be a nightmare.

*(Emily and Martha return.)*

EMILY: Dad wants to have a family meeting.

THOMAS: A what?

EMILY: Family meeting. He has something to tell us.

MARTHA: George?

GEORGE: She's right, mother.

VINCENT: In that case, if you will excuse me...

THOMAS: You can stay.

*(There is a silence, while everyone looks to see what George will do.)*

GEORGE: Sit down and relax, Vincent. All of you. This won't take long.

*(Everyone gets comfortable. There is tension in the room: George has never called "a family meeting" before.)*

GEORGE: Well. This isn't going to be as easy as I thought.

EMILY: You're doing fine.

MARTHA: Emily, do you know what's going on here?

GEORGE: Yes, she does, mother. I told her because I knew she's the only one in the family who wouldn't go into hysterics.

MARTHA: What on earth are you talking about? I know you've been keeping something from me. What is it? George?

GEORGE: Just calm down.

MARTHA: I want to know what's going on here!

GEORGE: I can't tell you while you're talking!

EMILY: Dad, take it easy.

MARTHA: George?

EMILY: Mom, let him tell it his way.

*(A pause.)*

GEORGE: Christ, what a mess.

EMILY: Take your time.

*(A pause.)*

GEORGE: I have cancer. Three months ago, they gave me six months to live.

*(Martha puts a hand over her mouth. Thomas stares in disbelief. Vincent is calm.)*

GEORGE: I think that assessment was optimistic.

MARTHA: Why didn't you tell me?

GEORGE: I didn't want to upset you sooner than necessary. Any of you.

*(A silence.)*

GEORGE: Look, this isn't any easier for me than it is for you. But I'm not going through what Henry went through. I'm not taking radiation or chemo. In other words, I'm taking care of the situation myself.

*(A pause. No one knows what to say.)*

THOMAS: Are you saying what I think you're saying?

GEORGE: Yes, I am. And that part's been decided. No discussion.

VINCENT: I think what you're doing is very brave.

EMILY: So do I.

*(Martha and Thomas, on the other hand, look horrified.)*

GEORGE: Upstairs, Emily asked me how it would happen if I could have my way. I told her I'd like all of you around me, that we'd have a kind of wake, and then I'd take the pills and liquor, and put the bag over my head, and go to sleep.

*(Martha suddenly gets up.)*

MARTHA: Well, that's just fine for you, isn't it? You don't have to watch yourself twitch and groan and throw up and whatever else it is that happens!

*(She moves for the stairway.)*

GEORGE: Mother!

*(Martha exits to the bedroom upstairs.)*

GEORGE *(to Emily)*: I told you this would happen.

EMILY: Excuse me.

*(Emily goes upstairs to comfort Martha.)*

GEORGE: Why the hell can't a man die as he pleases?

THOMAS: Because it's selfish.

VINCENT: Really?

THOMAS: He's thinking only of himself.

VINCENT: And who are you thinking of? I'm on your side, George, I think a man has the right to die any way he chooses.

THOMAS: If you're determined to do that, why didn't you just go somewhere and do it? Why do you have to drag everyone else through the gory details?

*(Thomas gets up and goes to the bedroom upstairs. An awkward silence.)*

VINCENT: Here's an unlikely coalition.

GEORGE: What?

VINCENT: I'm sorry. It struck me as funny.

GEORGE: What did?

VINCENT: The two of us. Being on the same side here.

GEORGE: Our Founding Fathers would be so ashamed. We don't have the moral character to carry their boots.

VINCENT: I don't think that's true.

GEORGE: Good God, man. Look around you.

VINCENT: I thought you were going to say, Look in the mirror.

GEORGE: Yes. That, too.

VINCENT: I don't think I have the energy for this. If you'll excuse me.

*(He starts away.)*

GEORGE: What do you have against family values?

VINCENT: I have nothing against family values. Quite the contrary.

GEORGE: What the hell do you know about it?

VINCENT: More than you imagine.

GEORGE: You'll never raise children. You don't know the first thing about it.

VINCENT: Don't be so sure of that.

GEORGE: You made a choice of lifestyle that goes completely against the notion of family.

VINCENT: Then we need new notions, don't we?

GEORGE: We need a return to the values of the past.

VINCENT: Not going to happen.

GEORGE: If you're right, it's the downfall of the country.

VINCENT: A little revolution is a good thing. Jefferson said so.

GEORGE: Don't patronize me. You have that completely out of context.

VINCENT: I don't think so.

GEORGE: The kind of revolution you're talking about, the kind of revolution you are living, is against marriage and against family and against everything that made this country great.

VINCENT: Thomas and I are as good as married.

GEORGE: That's absurd. Marriage is at the foundation of raising a family, a man and woman in holy bonding.

VINCENT: We can do that, too.

GEORGE: Not until science has men bearing children. The way this country's going, it'll probably happen. But that doesn't make it right.

VINCENT: We can raise a child who's already been born.

GEORGE: Adopt? They let you do that now?

VINCENT: You're trying my patience here.

GEORGE: Maybe they do. Wouldn't surprise me.

VINCENT: Maybe you should just crawl off into the bushes and take care of business.

GEORGE: You'd like that, I'm sure.

VINCENT: That was uncalled for. I apologize. I truly do.

*(The stress has finally gotten to George. He sits with his head in his hands. A pause.)*

VINCENT: I wish we could get along.

*(No response from George.)*

VINCENT: I'd like to be a part of this family. I don't have one of my own. My parents are gone. My brother won't speak to me.

*(No reply.)*

VINCENT: "I want to be a famililly when I grow up."

*(George looks up.)*

VINCENT: It's a charming story. Thomas can't remember how old Emily was when she said it.

GEORGE: Seven. Eight maybe. Thomas was always talking about how he wanted to be a policeman—

VINCENT: A policeman! He never told me that part.

GEORGE: —and so Emily started saying, "I want to be a famililly when I grow up." She said it so often it could drive you crazy.

VINCENT: I like it. "I want to be a famililly when I grow up."

GEORGE: Your connection to this family, such as it is, is through lust.

VINCENT: Why do straight people think gay people are sex fiends?

GEORGE: I'll grant you one thing: I don't understand much of anything any more.

VINCENT: I don't understand all that much myself. But I do understand this. That what happens between consenting adults in a bedroom doesn't have the earth-shattering influence on the state of the nation that some people think it does.

*(A pause.)*

GEORGE: This isn't the way I wanted it to be.

VINCENT: May I ask you a personal question?

*(No reply.)*

VINCENT: What are you going to miss the most?

GEORGE: What?

VINCENT: What are you going to miss the most?

GEORGE: Watching Billy grow up. But maybe that would end up being too painful. A boy needs two parents.

VINCENT: Billy has two parents.

GEORGE: I mean living together. A father, a mother — a family.

VINCENT: He's getting two parents living together.

*(George stares at him.)*

GEORGE: June's getting remarried?

VINCENT: No.

GEORGE: I don't understand.

VINCENT: June doesn't think she's a good parent.

GEORGE: No wonder, trying to raise a boy by herself. Going to a job, going to school. I have no idea why she decided to go to night school.

VINCENT: She wants to be a musician. A jazz vocalist, piano player, something like that. It's so important to her that she's giving up Billy.

GEORGE: What are you talking about?

VINCENT: She's giving him to Thomas and I to raise. We're going to be the primary providers, the parents, for Billy. Of course, she'll be able to visit as often as she likes.

GEORGE: You're getting Billy?

*(Vincent nods.)*

GEORGE: You and Thomas?

*(Vincent nods.)*

VINCENT: We're going to be a famililly.

*(George stares at him. BLACKOUT. Act One is over.)*



## ACT TWO

### Scene One

*(AT RISE: SPOT up on George, who talks to the audience.)*

GEORGE: You get to be my age, you look back for what went wrong. What happened to the traditional American values? You used to go out and work hard for what you wanted. You used to get married for life.

Well, I fault ourselves. I fault the kind of parents we became. We tried to save our kids from going through all the hardships we went through, and that was a mistake. We had the experience of standing in soup lines during the Great Depression, of being bombed by the Japanese at Pearl Harbor — you don't forget experiences like that. They become rooted in the fabric of your being. Because those experiences are clear, they are without ambiguity.

When a foreign country makes a surprise attack and sinks your navy, you don't get lost in rhetoric about whether war is right or wrong — you roll up your sleeves and get to work. You do what has to be done to defend your country. Everybody pitches in and works together as one big American family.

Maybe you have to suffer to learn these things, and when parents of my generation started protecting their children from going through the hard times that we went through, we ended up doing them a disservice. We spoiled them, is what it amounts to. We gave them the idea you could get what you wanted without working for it, that the world was some kind of play thing for their personal and selfish amusement. Our children never learned how to pitch in and work together, all they looked out for is number one.

When's the last time you heard of a marriage staying together for the sake of the children? Something like that is unthinkable today. Community and family values have gone down the drain.

*(A pause.)*

GEORGE: Well, there's nothing I can do about it. It's not my world any more. The thing is — and this is sad in a way — it makes it a hell of a lot easier for me to think about throwing in the towel. Because I just don't understand America any more.

*(LIGHTS UP FULL to reveal: the same moment that ended Act One.)*

GEORGE: You and Thomas?

*(Vincent nods.)*

VINCENT: We're going to be a famililly.

*(George stares at him.)*

VINCENT: I think we'll be excellent parents.

GEORGE: But it's not quite the same as being husband and wife and a real family, is it?

VINCENT: No, it's not the same — it's better. Because Thomas and I can give Billy a stable home.

*(A pause.)*

VINCENT: I admit I'm nervous. I've been reading Dr. Spock.

GEORGE: Dr. Spock. Maybe that's what happened. A whole generation of mothers took a pinko's advice on raising their children.

*(George stands up. He wearily starts for the kitchen.)*

VINCENT: Billy still needs his grandfather.

*(George stops and turns to Vincent.)*

VINCENT: That's true no matter who raises him. I think the loss of grandparents, the loss of the extended family, is a great tragedy in American life.

GEORGE: You do?

VINCENT: Absolutely. You look surprised.

GEORGE: I'm shocked, to be honest. Were you close to your grandparents?

VINCENT: Very. To both of them. My grandfather told me things about my dad that I'd never have learned otherwise. It's a valuable perspective to have. Billy needs you in his life.

*(A pause. George is studying him.)*

GEORGE: I'm having a Ramos fizz. Care to join me?

VINCENT: Normally it's early for me — but under the circumstances, yes. Nice of you to ask.

GEORGE: I have the original recipe. I'll make a pitcher.

*(He exits, as Thomas comes downstairs.)*

VINCENT *(to audience)*: That turned out much better than I expected.

THOMAS: What's going on?

VINCENT: He's making Ramos fizzes. I told him. Thomas, I had to. He's so worried about Billy. We have to convince him this is the right thing to do.

THOMAS: You'll never convince him of that.

VINCENT: I think he's more reasonable than you think.

THOMAS: On what evidence do you say that?

VINCENT: His world is changing. It's ending actually. That must be a terrible thing to go through. Maybe we'll feel the same way when we're his age.

THOMAS: The man is a homophobe.

VINCENT: He's also dying.

THOMAS: Don't lecture me on dying. I watched one of my best friends die, moment by moment.

VINCENT: I know you did, Thomas.

THOMAS: Frank fought back to his last breath, he found joy beyond my comprehension in what life was left to him. He was so brave!

*(Emily comes downstairs.)*

EMILY: Mom's taking a nap. Where's Dad?

THOMAS: Finally making his Ramos fizzes.

EMILY: Are we having a wake?

THOMAS: Ask Vincent. He and Dad have become bosom buddies. *(To Vincent)* I can't believe you told him.

VINCENT: It was spontaneous. A gut feeling it was the right thing to do. Maybe you had to be there.

THOMAS: When he gets some liquor in him, we'll never hear the end of it.

VINCENT: Lighten up. Give your old man a break — I think he's going to surprise you. I'll see if he needs any help. *(To audience, on his way out)* Familillies!

*(Vincent exits.)*

THOMAS: I don't believe this.

EMILY: Try to go with the flow. It's all you can do.

THOMAS: How can you defend him?

EMILY: I think it's his right to choose how he dies.

THOMAS: At our expense?

EMILY: He's been keeping it from everyone, as a matter of fact. I'm the one who suggested telling you. I thought you had a right to know. If I knew how you were going to handle it...

THOMAS: Mom's not taking it any better than I am.

EMILY: She was shocked — but she's stronger than any of us. Mom will be fine.

THOMAS: So what are we supposed to do now? Get drunk with him and call it a wake?

EMILY: We're going with the flow.

THOMAS: What about the parade?

EMILY: I guess we play it by ear.

*(George and Vincent return with a pitcher of Ramos fizzes and glasses.)*

VINCENT: Who's ready for a Ramos fizz?

THOMAS: It's a little early, isn't it?

VINCENT: It is the Bicentennial.

GEORGE: Who am I pouring for?

EMILY: I'll have one.

GEORGE: Thomas?

THOMAS: Too early for me.

VINCENT (*"party pooper"*): You sure?

THOMAS: Positive.

GEORGE: Where's Martha?

EMILY: Upstairs napping.

GEORGE: I shouldn't have told her.

THOMAS: I don't think you should've told any of us.

GEORGE: (*to Emily*) See there? (*To Thomas*) Why not?

THOMAS: I was expressing my opinion. I don't want to start an argument.

EMILY: Good idea.

GEORGE: What's wrong with a debate? If you don't have the courage of your convictions, where are you?

THOMAS: We have never had a debate in this family. We have arguments, and this doesn't seem like the time or place.

GEORGE: Better take advantage of me while you can.

THOMAS: Dad, for Christ's sake—

GEORGE: What? I'm dying, goddamn it! You think I like doing this?

THOMAS: I think you like...

*(A pause.)*

GEORGE: Say it.

THOMAS: *(to audience)* He's determined to pick a fight with me.

GEORGE: Say it!

THOMAS: I think you like the notoriety of this.

GEORGE: Notoriety.

EMILY: *("don't do this")* Thomas...

GEORGE *(to audience)*: You raise a child, and what the hell happens? You try to give a child a sense of how the world works. If you stick your hand in fire, you get burned. If you cross the street without looking, you have a chance of getting hit. But that's about all you can accomplish.

VINCENT: For the record, I don't think any of this has anything to do with wanting notoriety.

THOMAS: What do you know about it?

VINCENT: I know the man isn't doing this in order to amuse us with some kind of holiday fireworks.

THOMAS: What're you talking about? You don't plan on doing this today, do you? Jesus Christ!

GEORGE: No, I wasn't planning to.

VINCENT: I'm talking about the context of what he's going through. You said his motive was notoriety.

THOMAS: I was angry, okay? I didn't mean it the way it came out.

GEORGE: I know you didn't mean it, son.

*(A pause.)*

GEORGE: But why not today?

EMILY: Dad?

GEORGE: I feel like my own body has become a time bomb. So what the hell am I supposed to do about it? I sure as hell don't want to get stuck out in the middle of the ocean feeling like this. So — why not today?

THOMAS: Great, Vincent — you and your big mouth.

VINCENT: Whoa, Silver! Are you blaming me for something?

THOMAS: You put the idea in his head.

GEORGE: And not a bad one either.

EMILY: Dad, don't pursue this unless you really mean it.

GEORGE: I do mean it. I feel better having said so.

THOMAS: You don't know what you're saying.

GEORGE: I've been walking around like a deflated balloon. I feel like I've just gotten a jolt of helium.

*(A pause. Everyone just looks at him.)*

GEORGE: The problem will be getting your mother to go along. I could use some help with that.

EMILY: You're really serious about this?

GEORGE: All of you are already here. That's the way I've wanted it to be ever since I decided. I just worry about Martha.

EMILY: I can talk to her.

GEORGE: I'd appreciate that. The sooner the better.

EMILY: She's napping.

GEORGE: Are you sure? I think she's escaping. Check on her, would you? I think she needs to be down here now.

EMILY: Excuse me.

*(She starts away, speaking to the audience.)*

EMILY: I have no doubts that he's serious.

*(She exits upstairs.)*

VINCENT: You're a remarkable man.

GEORGE: Not much choice when you have to face facts.

THOMAS: Oh, please.

*(Moving to the stairs, he speaks to the audience.)*

THOMAS: I think the cancer's spread to his brain.

*(Thomas goes upstairs.)*

VINCENT: This is a side of Thomas I've never seen before.

GEORGE: He's so damn thin-skinned.

*(CROSS FADE to upstairs. Emily sits on the edge of the bed.)*

MARTHA: Is it time to go to the parade?

EMILY: Not yet.

MARTHA: Where's George?

EMILY: Downstairs. How are you feeling?

MARTHA: Worried about George. He won't go to a doctor.

EMILY: He's afraid to. He saw what happened to Uncle Henry.

MARTHA: I know. I don't blame him. Who would want to go through that?

EMILY: Mom, he's not feeling well at all. I mean today, right now. Since all of us are already here — well, he's thinking maybe now is the time.

MARTHA: The time?

THOMAS *(entering)*: We can't let him go through with it.

EMILY: Don't meddle in what you don't understand.

THOMAS: Don't lecture me about "understanding!" I buried my oldest friend last year.

MARTHA: Please don't fight.

EMILY: I'm sorry. I just think Dad has the right to choose how he leaves us.

THOMAS: Not when he's putting us through this.

MARTHA: What would you do?

THOMAS: I'd call the police.

EMILY: Don't be ridiculous.

THOMAS: He's a danger to himself. That's obvious, isn't it? He doesn't know what he's saying.

MARTHA: I think he knows perfectly well.

THOMAS: Mom, this is not like him. He's never been a coward.

EMILY: He's not being a coward now.

MARTHA: We don't feel how much pain he's in.

THOMAS: You want to talk about pain? When Frank died last winter, that was pain. But he never gave up.

EMILY: Thomas, it's not the same thing.

MARTHA: I'd better see how he's doing.

*(She'll start downstairs.)*

THOMAS: Frank faced death with so much courage. Why is Dad giving up? Why won't he fight it?

EMILY: I don't know. But I think it's his right to.

*(CROSS FADE to downstairs, as Martha enters.)*

MARTHA: George, how are you feeling?

GEORGE: Better, under the circumstances. Did Emily talk to you?

MARTHA: Yes, she did. This isn't one of your sick jokes, is it?

GEORGE: No joke. I feel good about making a decision. I think maybe the uncertainty was the worst part. Now I feel like I have a purpose again.

MARTHA: What about the parade?

GEORGE: They'll have to get along without us.

MARTHA: You were looking forward to it.

GEORGE: I've been looking forward to lots of things, mother. I know how much you were looking forward to the cruise.

MARTHA: George, the cruise doesn't matter now.

GEORGE: I need to know I'm in control — and that feeling is going fast. I have it right now, but I can't tell you if I'll have it tomorrow. I've always wanted everyone around me for this. And here you are.

*(Emily and Thomas have entered above.)*

THOMAS: Am I the only one who is against this?

*(There is a silence. Vincent nods at him.)*

THOMAS: Dad, for the last time — please see a doctor. Let me call an ambulance.

GEORGE: I'm not going through what Henry went through.

THOMAS: They're making progress in medical research all the time! Just because Uncle Henry went through hell doesn't mean you have to. They're always coming up with something new.

GEORGE: Maybe you're right — but it's not a gamble I'm willing to take.

THOMAS: Why won't you fight this, for God's sake?

GEORGE: Maybe I'm just too tired. Not just my health. Any of it. What America's become. It's not my world any more. I don't belong here.

*(A pause.)*

GEORGE: Mother, you want a fizz?

MARTHA: Yes, thank you.

GEORGE: Thomas?

THOMAS: No.

GEORGE: *(mustering all the energy he can)* I thought we were having a wake here. Everyone looks so glum.

*(Everyone just looks at him.)*

GEORGE: I think we should be celebrating the good times we've had. There were many of them, as I remember.

EMILY: I remember lots of good times, too.

VINCENT: "I want to be a famililly when I grow up."

MARTHA: You were so adorable when you came up with that.

EMILY: Went downhill from there, didn't I?

MARTHA: What do you mean?

EMILY: I never quite reached that level of adoration again.

THOMAS: That's ridiculous.

EMILY: When was I the apple of anyone's eye again?

THOMAS: When you got the scholarship to U Mass. I was damn proud of you then.

EMILY: I don't think we want to get into that, Thomas.

GEORGE: Why not?

EMILY: Isn't it obvious?

MARTHA: George, Emily's right.

GEORGE: For God's sake, why is everybody so worried about everything? We still have freedom of speech in this family, same as in the country.

VINCENT (*to audience*): More or less.

MARTHA: Please, let's not talk about politics.

THOMAS: I was just pointing out that Emily's life didn't end when she was seven, as far as being admired is concerned.

GEORGE: U Mass was a hell of a lot better than Berkeley, I'll grant you that. At least she started going to classes again.

EMILY: You stopped paying my bills at Berkeley. What choice did I have?

GEORGE: I offered you the option of returning to class.

EMILY: How could I attend class when there was a strike going on?

GEORGE: You could have ignored it.

EMILY: Strike-breaking was not an option.

GEORGE: See there? I rest my case.

MARTHA: Stop it! Both of you.

*(She moves forward to speak to the audience.)*

MARTHA *(to audience)*: If George was going to change his mind, it was going to have to come from within. The more we disagreed with him, the more stubborn he was going to get.

*(Martha moves quickly back into the scene.)*

MARTHA: So how can we help out, George? Are you doing it down here or upstairs?

GEORGE: I haven't gotten that far.

MARTHA: If you're doing it, don't you think it's time to get ready? You're not going to be much use if you get drunk.

THOMAS *(taking Martha aside)*: What are you doing? If he gets drunk, we can call the police.

GEORGE: No conspiracies, Thomas!

*(He gets to his feet, and Emily goes to him.)*

EMILY: Are you all right?

GEORGE: Mother's right. I have to get my bag upstairs.

EMILY: I'll get it. Tell me where.

GEORGE: A blue canvas bag in the back of my closet.

*(Emily exits.)*

VINCENT: Is there anything I can do?

GEORGE: Keep Thomas from pestering me.

THOMAS: Don't worry. It's obvious I can't stop you.

GEORGE: Thank you. It's not the same as getting my family behind me — but it's better than nothing.

VINCENT: You have a lot of support here.

GEORGE: You surprise me, Vincent.

VINCENT: Well, you've surprised me, too.

GEORGE: I'm not condoning homosexuality.

VINCENT: I'm not condoning Republicans.

MARTHA: I don't want to hear anything about politics. George, you said you wanted to remember the good times. Maybe we should show some movies.

GEORGE: I've got a better idea. We can tell stories.

VINCENT: I love family stories.

GEORGE: We have our share.

THOMAS: Everyone's heard them a zillion times.

VINCENT: I haven't. I'm sure there's many I've never heard.

*(CROSS FADE to Emily upstairs. She has the blue bag on the bed and has unzipped it. She is looking through its contents.)*

EMILY *(to audience)*: He'd done his homework. There was a pamphlet with instructions on how to use the pills, which would be crushed and mixed in apple sauce; and the liquor, mixed with fruit concentrate; and a large bag to fit over the head; and a large rubber band to secure it — all items of which were in the bag. There was a spoon, other utensils. No doubt about his making preparations for this. But looking at the contents in the bag, understanding how much thought and work had already gone into this, suddenly my father's suicide became something more than an idea, a theory, and I felt myself having a change of heart.

*(CROSS FADE downstairs.)*

GEORGE: We shouldn't begin until Emily gets here. Maybe she's having trouble up there.

VINCENT: I'll check.

*(He starts for the stairs but meets Emily as she comes down and enters the room, carrying the blue bag.)*

EMILY: Here it is.

*(She gives the bag to George.)*

MARTHA: We thought we'd tell family stories.

EMILY: Dad, I'm having second thoughts about this.

THOMAS: Thank God!

GEORGE: Don't disappoint me here.

EMILY: So much can go wrong that would be painful for you.

GEORGE: Nothing will go wrong. I have a pamphlet you can read.

EMILY: I glanced at it.

GEORGE: You snooped in my bag? Can't I trust anybody around here?

THOMAS: Emily's right. A lot can go wrong here, Dad.

GEORGE: Then I'll do the goddamn thing by myself.

*(He starts unsteadily for the stairs.)*

MARTHA: George, we're going to tell family stories.

GEORGE: You have to have a goddamn family to do that.

*(The doorbell rings. For a moment, everyone stops and looks at the door. No one is expected.)*

THOMAS: I'll get it.

*(He opens the door and June steps in.)*

JUNE: Sorry to come without calling first. Can we go somewhere and talk?

*(But George has seen her.)*

GEORGE: June! Get yourself in here!

MARTHA: George, don't start something.

GEORGE: What's this I hear about you abandoning motherhood?

JUNE: What's going on?

THOMAS: Bad timing, really bad timing.

GEORGE: Tell me I heard wrong!

JUNE: Is he all right?

THOMAS: Not by a long shot.

GEORGE: Will you get in here?

*(June moves into the room, with Thomas following.)*

JUNE: If I'm interrupting something—

VINCENT: June, would you like a Ramos fizz? Believe me, it will help.

JUNE: I can't stay. I just need to talk to Thomas a minute.

GEORGE: You're avoiding the question. Are you giving up Billy or not?

*(Everyone is waiting for her answer.)*

JUNE: I'm not sure.

THOMAS: Jesus Christ.

JUNE: Thomas, I need more time to think about it.

VINCENT: This isn't fair.

JUNE: I'm not backing out necessarily. I think maybe we should wait at least til fall.

GEORGE: You know in your heart it's wrong to give up your child. I'm proud of you.

JUNE (*to Thomas*): Can we go somewhere and talk?

THOMAS: We damn well better. Vincent?

VINCENT (*to Martha*): Are you going to be okay?

MARTHA: I'll be fine.

GEORGE: People can't move their children around like real estate. What the hell happened to this country?

THOMAS (*to Martha*): We'll be back as soon as we can.

*(Thomas, Vincent and June exit.)*

GEORGE: She doesn't want to do this. They're twisting her arm. I'm ashamed to have a son who'd do a thing like that.

EMILY: I think it really was her idea, Dad.

GEORGE: Sounds to me like she's changed her mind.

EMILY: I'm sure it's not an easy decision for her.

*(George starts again for the stairs, moving unsteadily, and Martha hurries to support him.)*

MARTHA: What do you think you're doing?

GEORGE: You know damn well what I'm doing.

MARTHA: You can't do something like this out of spite.

GEORGE: I can do it any goddamn way I choose to do it. Get out of my way.

MARTHA: George, please—!

GEORGE: Leave me alone!

*(Martha, close to losing it, sits down.)*

EMILY: Dad, you're not being fair. You don't have to cause this much hurt.

*(George stops and turns into the room. We sense he knows she's right but is too proud to admit it.)*

EMILY: Do it bravely, not cruelly.

GEORGE: Who's being cruel here? Is it too much to ask for the support of my family?

*(Vincent steps out to address the audience, continuing his one-man show.)*

VINCENT *(to audience)*: "The history of the present Family in the United States is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of absolute Disregard for the well-being and security of children. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world."

GEORGE: I wanted family support and didn't get it. You turned on me yourself.

EMILY: I apologize for that. Seeing what was in the bag made it seem more real to me than before. I panicked for a minute.

VINCENT *(to audience)*: "Over half the marriages in the United States end in divorce; almost one in three divorced adults cite abuse as the reason for termination;"

EMILY: This isn't easy for any of us, Dad.

VINCENT (*to audience*): "one-quarter of the violent crimes in the U.S. is wife assault;"

GEORGE: Please don't cry, mother. I need you to be strong now.

MARTHA: I don't think I have any strength left.

*(George moves to Martha.)*

VINCENT (*to audience*): "A woman is physically abused in this country every nine seconds;"

GEORGE: Give me your hand.

*(Martha does. George helps her to her feet.)*

VINCENT (*to audience*): "Two-thirds of the attacks are by someone she knows, often a husband or boyfriend;"

GEORGE: I'm asking you to come upstairs with me.

MARTHA: Are you sure this is the only way?

GEORGE: Positive.

VINCENT (*to audience*): "Sixty percent of battered women are beaten while they are pregnant;"

MARTHA: Don't you want to wait and see if June changes her mind?

GEORGE: I wish I could wait for a lot of things. But I can't.

VINCENT (*to audience*): "Forty-two percent of murdered women are killed by their intimate male partners;"

GEORGE: There're no good choices here, mother. This is the best one we have.

VINCENT (*to audience*): "One in six female rape victims is under the age of 12; one-fifth of these have been raped by their fathers;"

GEORGE: Will you come upstairs with me?

MARTHA: Of course, I will.

*(They start upstairs together, moving slowly.)*

VINCENT (*to audience*): "By conservative estimates, one in three girls is sexually abused by age 18, one in four by age 14;"

EMILY: Can't I come?

VINCENT (*to audience*): "Approximately one in six boys is sexually abused by age 16;"

GEORGE: I thought you didn't approve.

EMILY: I was scared for a minute, Dad. Don't hold it against me.

GEORGE: Then come along if you like.

*(They head slowly for the stairs, the pace determined by George, who is in clear physical pain.)*

VINCENT (*to audience*): "The average age of entry into prostitution is 13; there are half a million adolescent prostitutes in the United States;"

MARTHA: Are you sure you can make it up the stairs? We can do it down here.

GEORGE: I think I'd like to be in my own bed. Unless you don't approve. I can see how you wouldn't.

MARTHA: I'd rather do it down here, George.

GEORGE: Then down here it is.

*(They will move slowly back to the divan.)*

VINCENT *(to audience)*: "So destructive are these oppressions to the welfare of children, and so linked are they to the assumptions of traditional family values, that we must now declare a new and independent kind of Family for the raising and nurturing of our children;"

GEORGE: I've already crushed up the pills. I just have to mix them in the apple sauce. And pour the concentrate in the vodka. Maybe you could do that for me, Emily.

EMILY: Of course.

*(She'll go to the divan, open the bag and begin the preparations.)*

VINCENT *(to audience)*: "In behalf of our children, we therefore and hereby publish and declare that we hold no further allegiance to traditional family values and replace them with more stable values stemming from a broader concept of Family, in which parents may be any two adults committed and pledged to the rearing of children;"

MARTHA: Here we are.

*(She helps George onto the divan. Emily is preparing the food and drink.)*

GEORGE: I should've done this yesterday.

MARTHA: I'm glad you waited.

EMILY: I wouldn't have seen you if you'd done that.

VINCENT *(to audience)*: "That the biological mother need not be one of these nurturing parents;"

GEORGE: How's it coming?

EMILY: Almost ready.

GEORGE: The head bag should be in there. With a rubber band.

EMILY: I found it.

MARTHA: I hate seeing you in pain.

GEORGE: This is going to be a great relief, mother. Emily?

EMILY: Okay. What do you do first?

GEORGE: The apple sauce.

*(Emily hands George the jar of applesauce into which she has mixed the crushed pills. She hands him a spoon. He eats the applesauce.)*

VINCENT *(to audience)*: "That these parents may include homosexual couples and lesbian couples, whether ritually married or not;"

MARTHA: A part of me wants to do this with you.

GEORGE: Don't be ridiculous. You'll live to be ninety.

*(George finishes the apple sauce.)*

GEORGE: Now the other.

*(Emily gives him the bottle of vodka, into which the concentrate has been poured. George drinks it.)*

VINCENT *(to audience)*: "And that no criteria for parenthood is appropriate except commitment to the

welfare of the children and to learning the skills necessary for securing same;"

GEORGE: The bag.

*(Emily helps put the bag over George's head, securing it with a rubber band. Both women help him stretch out on the divan.)*

MARTHA: I'm taking your hand, George. You give me a yank if something goes wrong and you want the bag removed. Do you understand me?

*(George shakes his head and speaks through the bag, "I hear you!" Then he stretches out, getting comfortable.)*

VINCENT *(to audience)*: "Signed under oath, July 4, 1976."

*(Vincent exits.)*

*(A pause. Both women sit with George, Martha holding his hand.)*

EMILY: Dad, I need to tell you something I should've said a long time ago. Remember when you were on the road, how you used to take me on business trips sometimes? I must've been 9 or 10. I especially remember a trip we took to Phoenix, and afterwards we drove to the Grand Canyon. We always stopped at the historical markers and you'd read them to me and explain more about the history. You seemed to know everything about the history of where we were, no matter where we went. I think it was those trips that turned me into an historian.

Those are wonderful memories. What I'm trying to say is, it wasn't easy for us during the sixties, it wasn't an easy time for anybody, and somehow we built this wall between us, we found differences that we had as adults that were irrelevant when I was Daddy's Girl, going on business trips with you, worshipping you, really — we just got off

track and somehow our differences began to outweigh the rest.

I just want you to know that I cherish those memories. I always have. I always will. I love you, Dad.

*(George lifts his free hand, and Emily takes it. Now Martha holds one hand, Emily the other. George is motionless on the divan, the bag over his head. LIGHTS FADE TO BLACKOUT.)*

## **Scene Two**

*(LIGHTS UP. Living room. A YEAR LATER, July 4, 1977.)*

*(Thomas and June face the audience, looking out a window to the front yard. Thomas, and everyone else, wear street clothes now.)*

JUNE: He's grown so much!

THOMAS: Tell me about it.

JUNE: He really likes Vincent, doesn't he?

THOMAS: Vincent is incredible. He's like a natural mother and an ideal dad combined. You know what he's doing? Learning to play softball. He's not naturally athletic at all, but he wants to be able to play catch with the kid and all the rest, so he enrolled in this softball class at the Y, and he's on a team and everything. He's so bad at it! But he doesn't quit, I'll hand that to him.

JUNE: He's so devoted to being a parent.

THOMAS: Totally. He quit his job.

JUNE: Can you two afford that?

THOMAS: He's consulting out of the house. He has as much work as he wants.

JUNE: I'm glad things are turning out so well for you.

THOMAS: How about you? How'd you like being on the road?

JUNE: It was grueling, and I certainly don't plan on singing with the band the rest of my life, but I look at it as paying dues. I think we'll be putting out an album. I want to hang around for that, then I'll probably go back to school. I still have so much to learn.

THOMAS: Things are working out for you, too, then.

JUNE: He sees us. *(She waves)* Hi, Billy! *(She blows him a kiss)* Well, I guess we'd better get going.

THOMAS: You can have him a day longer if you like.

JUNE: We'll see how it goes. Can I give you a call?

THOMAS: Of course.

*(They embrace.)*

JUNE: We did something great having Billy, didn't we?

THOMAS: Yes, we did.

JUNE: What time are you going to the cemetery?

THOMAS: Twoish.

JUNE: We'll meet you there.

THOMAS: That'd be great.

JUNE: Thanks again — for everything.

*(She kisses him on the cheek and exits out the front door.)*

*(Martha comes downstairs from the bedroom.)*

MARTHA: Has June left yet?

THOMAS: She's just leaving. You can catch her if you hurry.

*(Martha hurries out the front door, as Emily enters from the den.)*

EMILY: June take Billy?

THOMAS: They're just leaving.

EMILY: How long before we go to the cemetery?

THOMAS: A couple hours. Two, I think Mom said.

EMILY: It seems like more than a year to me.

THOMAS: I know what you mean.

EMILY: He would've liked how Billy is turning out.

THOMAS: No, he wouldn't have been able to see it.

EMILY: I think you're wrong, Thomas.

*(Vincent enters through the front door.)*

VINCENT: Did you try to convince her to take him another day?

THOMAS: I did. She's going to call later. And meet us at the cemetery, too.

VINCENT *(to Emily)*: We need a break.

EMILY: I can imagine.

VINCENT: Not that being a mother isn't the most delightful experience of my life. I just need the battery recharged now and then.

EMILY: We were just talking about how it seems longer than a year ago.

VINCENT: I've lost all concept of time in terms of days and weeks and months. I think only in shoe sizes now.

EMILY: You two are great with him. I think Dad would have seen it and been proud.

VINCENT: I think he would have, too.

THOMAS: It's nice to think so, but I don't know.

VINCENT: Ever the pessimist. *(He gives Thomas a hug.)* I love you anyway.

THOMAS: I don't feel like there's closure. I leave, scared to death we're not getting Billy after all — and when I come home, he's dead.

EMILY: Maybe it couldn't have happened if you were there.

*(Martha enters the front door.)*

MARTHA: Now that that's taken care of, I have an announcement to make.

*(The others exchange surprised glances, wondering what's up.)*

MARTHA: I'm leaving on a cruise next week.

THOMAS: Mom, that's great.

EMILY: How long will you be gone?

MARTHA: A year.

THOMAS: A year!

EMILY: Where on earth are you going?

MARTHA: Around the world. I'm taking my time. George planned the whole itinerary for me.

*(George enters, beaming at her.)*

MARTHA: After touring the Caribbean, I go to England and spend three months in London. Then Paris, Rome.

EMILY: Dad planned everything out?

GEORGE *(to audience)*: I think I always knew I wouldn't last long enough for the cruise. In subtle ways, your body tells you things like that. And she's far more interested in that sort of thing than I am anyway, so I decided the best thing I could do under the circumstances was to make all the arrangements for a cruise that would end all cruises — a trip around the world!

THOMAS: Why didn't you tell us before?

MARTHA: I hadn't made up my mind whether to do it. It took me a year to decide.

EMILY: Is someone renting the condo?

MARTHA: I'm selling it.

GEORGE *(to audience)*: I thought she'd've done it before now, to tell the truth.

MARTHA: It's so much more room than I need.

VINCENT: Do you know where you're moving?

MARTHA: I'll worry about that when I get back.

VINCENT: I have a suggestion. We talked about it, Thomas.

THOMAS: You tell her. *(To audience)* Vincent feels much stronger about this than I do.

VINCENT: We need a larger place as well — so why don't you move in with us?

MARTHA: Heavens, I couldn't do that.

VINCENT: Please think about it.

*(Vincent stares at Thomas.)*

VINCENT *(to audience)*: I was going to stare at him until he spoke up!

*(He stares at Thomas some more.)*

THOMAS: We were thinking of looking for a house with a cottage behind it, or maybe an apartment attached. Something like that. You wouldn't have to be under foot.

VINCENT *(to audience)*: A point on which he would not compromise.

MARTHA: At least that wouldn't be like living in the same house. I need my space as much as you do.

VINCENT: Billy would love having you so close.

EMILY: What a great idea.

GEORGE (*to audience*): She took the words right out of my mouth.

EMILY: Good for you guys.

VINCENT (*to audience*): "Guys!" Isn't she sweet?

THOMAS: No need to decide now.

VINCENT: You can think about it in London, Rome, Paris! I'm already jealous.

MARTHA: And I will think about it. So who's ready for lunch?

*(Everyone exits to the kitchen, and George speaks to the audience.)*

GEORGE (*to audience*): There was this moment, almost one year ago to the hour, just before I lost consciousness, when I wanted to change my mind. Maybe it was a reflex. Maybe it was something else, something I misunderstood for wanting to change my mind — I was running on so much adrenaline and nerves and fear, I can't say I was thinking very clearly. Maybe it was my life passing before my eyes. I suddenly felt so full of mental energy, so full of life, I was sure I was going to explode! But somewhere in all that was a nagging thought, like a thorn under a fingernail, asking, What the hell am I doing here? What the hell is this bag doing over my head, why is it getting so hard to breathe? And in the next instant, nothing.

*(He moves to the divan, where he will stretch out.)*

GEORGE: Do I regret doing it? Under the circumstances, no. I wish I'd been lucky, like James Otis. When his world changed beyond his comprehension, and he couldn't take it any more, he got struck by lightning and died on the spot. A true story, that not even Emily can argue with. Incredible, isn't it? I didn't get that luxury. *(He gets*

*comfortable.*) The point is, I'd do it again, the same way, all things being equal. I'll tell you something else. The hard part isn't death. The hard part is life. The hard part is getting there. Once you pass the threshold, it's a piece of cake.

*(He is lying on the divan. He closes his eyes. The LIGHTS SLOWLY FADE as we hear:)*

VINCENT (recorded voice): "When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for a people to change the institutions which have nurtured them since birth, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the redefinition of such institutions to which the Laws of Nature entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of humankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to such changes. We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all children are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Shelter, Security, Education, and Nurturing. That to secure these rights, Families are instituted among men and women..."

*(The lights have faded slowly to BLACKOUT. The play is over.)*