

# A FOX IN THE HENHOUSE

A Comedy

By

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CHARACTERS

- EM Late 70s. A quick-witted and cantankerous divorcee with a sharp tongue and even sharper hearing. Survivor of a philandering husband who was the love of her life, EM has let herself go. She is apt to appear in a robe and fuzzy slippers or a man's shirt and comfortable slacks. She doesn't fuss with make-up or hairdos. Under all her toughness, EM has a tender heart that she protects well. She loves her sister dearly despite an often adversarial relationship.
- ANN Mid-late 70s. While ANN is the sweeter of the two sisters, and while she may appear a bit flaky, she is by no means a pushover. She is a genuine romantic, recently widowed after a 50-year happy marriage. She keeps herself very well, dressing even to go to the supermarket, hair and make-up always in place. She does not engage in what most would consider casual sex. If she is with a man, it is with the sincere hope for a future. She loves her sister and is deeply loyal, even if she's a bit afraid of her... for the most part.
- FRANK Late 70s. FRANK enters the play as a man who, judging from what we hear about him, has changed. Still charming and quick-witted, his near-professional womanizing conceals one fact of his existence: he loves his ex-wife. There is a sincerity and honesty about him that makes us love him, even when he is screwing up.

TIME: Now

PLACE: Anytown, USA

SET REQUIREMENTS

A kitchen. A window, two practical doors, one leading to an outside porch, the other, a swinging door to the rest of the house.

Top of Scene 3: Armchairs that suggest the living room.

Scene 5: Porch rail.

## SCENE 1

*In the dim, shadowy light of pre-dawn, one can barely make out the details of an old-fashioned kitchen in a small bungalow in a small town. There is a window over the sink, a back door with glass panes covered in part by a checkered curtain. Outside the door there is an exterior porch light which is not on now. Beside both doors are light switches which toggle to control the interior kitchen lights and the porch light. There is a swinging door to the rest of the house.*

*In the semi-darkness, a WOMAN in a robe nervously pushes the swinging door open just a bit and peeks into the kitchen. The coast is clear. She signals offstage and tiptoes into the kitchen followed by a MAN. They giggle and shush each other until she finally gets him out the back door. She collapses against it, catching her breath.*

ANN

Oh, my God. What did I do?

*ANN gathers her robe around her, straightens herself up, and goes back out the swinging door.*

## SCENE 2

*Lights come up on EM, 70s, in a robe and slippers, at the kitchen table irritably drumming her fingers and nursing a cup of coffee. After a moment, a rolled-up newspaper slams against the window over the sink and lands nearby. (If possible, it could sail through the open window and land on the kitchen floor.). EM jumps up, rushes to the back door and shouts at the paper-boy offstage.*

EM

Not the window! The porch! Throw it on the... Goddammit!

*EM goes to where the paper landed, and returns with it a moment later, muttering...*

EM

Little shit. I liked him better when he rode a tricycle.

*EM, sits, opens the paper and scans the pages as if she would devour them. ANN, her younger sister by perhaps a year, enters. She is nicely dressed to greet the day, trim and neat, with hair and make-up in place. ANN is surprised to see her sister at the table.*

ANN

Oh! You're up!

EM

You seem surprised.

ANN

Not surprised, exactly. It's a little early for you, isn't it?

EM

It's past noon.

ANN

Really?

EM

Really. I can't remember the last time you slept in.

ANN

I know! Whereas you do it all the time.

EM

Oh, I know.  
(Probing)  
Rough night?

ANN

Not rough, exactly...

EM

Was someone bothering you?

ANN  
What?

EM  
I said, was *something* bothering you?

ANN  
Oh. No. Maybe.

EM  
You sounded restless.

ANN  
You could hear?

*EM makes the sound of squeaky bedsprings.*

EM  
Er, er, er, er...Tossing and turning...

ANN  
Well, now that you mention it, I was a little preoccupied.

EM  
(Under her breath)  
Is that what you call it?

*EM sips her coffee.*

ANN  
I was thinking about *you*.

EM  
(Nearly chokes)

Me?!

ANN  
Yes.

EM  
When were you thinking about *me*?

ANN  
When I couldn't sleep.

EM  
That must have been awkward.

ANN  
Awkward?

EM  
Thinking about *me*, when you... weren't sleeping.

*ANN sits opposite, leaning in, sincere.*

ANN  
I'm worried about you.

EM  
This just keeps getting better.  
(Playing along)  
And what about me worries you?

ANN  
(Proceeds cautiously)  
Well, it's almost Christmas and that's the time of the year when some people... begin to feel a little... lonely

EM  
Do they, now?

ANN  
Yes. You never heard this?

EM  
No, no, go on. I'm fascinated. You are concerned that I'm lonely.

ANN  
Yes.

EM  
But I'm not lonely.

ANN  
But you're alone.

EM  
Not really. You're here.

ANN  
You know what I'm talking about.

EM

Annie, I am alone by choice. Are *you* feeling lonely?

ANN

Well, I was, a little.

EM

Was? So, you're not feeling lonely now?

ANN

No, not really.

EM

Good for you. So, this is what kept you up last night? Worrying about Christmas and my loneliness?

ANN

That, and other things. For instance, for as long as I can remember, we've decorated the town square.

EM

We?

ANN

Well, the committee. The Little Falls Junior League.

EM

Go ahead! I'm keeping up.

ANN

For years! It was mama's favorite thing. The lights, the manger...

EM

So, now you're worried about the manger? "What will all those lonely people do without a manger? Christ has no place to be born. We'll all be Jewish!"

ANN

It was a tradition!

EM

The League is gone, Annie. Rose Caputo was the last one, except for us. By the way, I sent flowers.

ANN

Thank you. I still can't believe she's dead.

EM

She was 87 years old. What's so hard to believe?

ANN

She was just here for Thanksgiving. It was so sudden.

EM

Yes, after gallstones, a bladder resection and a triple bypass she suddenly died.

*EM gets up to refill her coffee cup.*

ANN

It could have been one of us.

EM

I welcome the day.

ANN

You do not.

EM

Are you kidding? The woman got up to make a sandwich and dropped dead. There are far worse ways to go.

ANN

Well, I'm not going!

EM

Let me know how that works.

ANN

I'm serious. I'm not ready to give up.

EM

No, you aren't. You're very energetic today. I believe staying in bed agrees with you.

ANN

Maybe it does. Oh, Emily, it's not the same anymore.

EM

Of course, it isn't. This is your first Christmas without Charlie.

ANN

It is? I mean, of course it is.

*EM stares at ANN, incredulous.*



EM  
You forgot?

ANN  
No, I didn't forget!  
(Thoughtfully, to herself)  
Although, maybe that had something to do with it.

EM  
With what?

ANN  
What? Nothing!

EM  
Suit yourself.

ANN  
(Out of nowhere...)  
Do you ever think about Frank?

*EM is caught off guard and incredulous.*

EM  
What?

ANN  
Frank! Your ex-husband?

EM  
I know who he is. Why the hell are you bringing him up now?

ANN  
I just wondered...

EM  
He's dead.

ANN  
Are you sure?

EM  
He's dead to me. And we don't talk about him in this house.

ANN  
Yes, but...

EM

Eh, eh eh...! He's dead. And I don't want to speak ill of the dead, so we just don't speak of him, okay?

ANN

Okay, but...

EM

No "buts!" I haven't given him a thought in decades. It's like he never existed.

ANN

How do you explain your children?

EM

The stork. I found them in a cabbage patch.

ANN

But what if he came back?

EM

I'd squash him like the insect he is.

*EM illustrates by smashing the table. ANN flinches.*

ANN

Ooh.

EM

Look, Annie... You had a happy marriage and maybe that's why you miss it. I had a different experience. So, I suggest, if you're ready to cast off your widow's weeds and start hunting for a new mate, you don't do it in my jungle.

ANN

Your jungle. There isn't a primitive bone in your body.

*ANN rises, avoiding EM and starts rooting around for baking supplies.*

EM

There was *one*. I had it surgically removed. What are you doing?

ANN

Baking. I bake cookies for Christmas.

EM

There's no one here to eat them.

ANN

I'm here! You're here. The children, they love my cookies. My children. Your children...

EM

They're not children...

ANN

(Getting her dander up)

No, they're adults. But they're still our children.

EM

Okay! Simon's a vegan, so leave out the butter. Alice is on a diet so leave out the sugar. Linda's gone gluten free, so...

ANN

All right, all right, all right! I get it. God, Christmas dinner is going to suck.

EM

Are you okay?

ANN

I just need to keep busy. And I'm starting with Christmas.

EM

Good for you! I'm going back to bed.

ANN

You're not going to help me?

EM

I didn't sleep very well either. There was that god-awful racket. Er, er, er, er, er...

*ANN would clearly like to crawl under the floor.*

EM (Cont.)

Nothing? Maybe I'm not doing it right. Er, er, er, er, er...

ANN

I didn't hear that.

EM

No? Maybe it's a rat. I'll call the exterminator.

ANN

Whatever..

*ANN continues banging around, avoiding EM's gaze, taking out bowls, measuring cups, flour, sugar, butter... EM softens somewhat.*

EM

Hey, I have an idea.

ANN

What?

EM

Let's go somewhere.

ANN

For Christmas?

EM

Yes! Let's get out of here. I don't want to be the last league member living in Little Falls!

ANN

Nicely alliterated.

EM

Thank you. It's a good thing we don't live in Piscataway; I'd have spit my teeth across the kitchen.

ANN

We can't bail on Christmas.

EM

After Christmas then. We'll do the holiday with the kids and then get out of Dodge.

ANN

I don't think so.

EM

Why not?

ANN

I don't want to.

EM

You got something going on I don't know about?

ANN

No....

EM

Then let's go.

*ANN ignores her, pattering with the cookie things. EM loudly puts her cup down and grabs the paper.*

EM

Look at this newspaper.

(Finds an article)

The board of Education is deadlocked over a change in the school motto: "All children CAN be taught." Anyone who's ever spent five minutes with a child knows you can't teach them anything they don't want to learn! And this one: they're expanding the Walmart, as if it isn't big enough. You practically need a taxi to get to housewares. The whole paper! Not a word about international affairs. Not a word about national affairs. Oh! There's an article about state affairs! No, sorry, that's about the State Fair. It's as if the world stops at the railroad tracks!

ANN

I know there's a world out there.

EM

Do you? When's the last time we went anywhere?

ANN

We just got back from New York.

EM

That doesn't count. We went to a funeral!

ANN

It was a trip.

EM

Terrific. Do we know anyone near death in Italy? The Bahamas?

ANN

Well, that's a fine thing; wishing someone dead so you can travel.

EM

I'm not wishing. I just want to go somewhere before we have to be wheeled on to the plane like luggage.

ANN

(A sudden idea...)

You go.

EM

By myself?

ANN

Marjorie Middlebury invited you to spend a month with her in Miami.

EM

Us. She invited us.

ANN

But I don't want to go.

EM

Why not? From Little Falls to Miami! We can move up one whole letter. Then we can November in Nantucket. October in Ottawa.

ANN

I like it here.

EM

You can't be serious.

ANN

I am. I'm very busy. You'd know that if you got up a little earlier.

EM

Oh, yeah? And exactly what are you so all-fired busy doing, Miss Busy Bee?

ANN

Well, I'm still sorting through Charlie's things.

EM

Your husband was the most organized man on the planet. He left you a list...

ANN

And I'm on number 6. There's still a lot to do.

EM

Uh huh.

ANN

Then there's my volunteer work, the New Year's Dance at the Senior Center, the Book Club...

EM

Having lunch with the librarian does not make it a Book Club.

ANN

You should join us. She's a lovely woman.

EM

Please. What else?

ANN

I... have my knitting...

EM

(Under her breath)

Knitting, my ass.

ANN

What?

EM

I said knitting is a good pastime.

ANN

I enjoy it.

EM

Is that what you were doing last night? Knitting?

ANN

(Flustered)

What do you mean?

EM

That noise. Er, er, er, er... You really ought to oil your knitting needles.

ANN

I don't know what you're talking about. I... I... I....

EM

Oh, cut the crap!. You'll stutter yourself into a seizure.

(Mocking.)

"I'm worried." "I'm lonely." "I don't want to leave Little Falls; the manger will be bare."  
I may be feeble but I'm not deaf.

ANN

Well, I...I...I...

EM

Stop that! You're too old to play dumb.

ANN

I have no idea what you are inferring.

EM

I'm not inferring anything. I'm flat out saying. Either there was a man in your room last night or you're possessed by the devil!

*ANN slams down a bowl.*

ANN

Oh, my God! I don't know where your mind has gone to, sister, but I'm certain we'll find it somewhere in the gutter.

EM

You were alone in your room last night?

ANN

I most certainly was!

EM

You know the rule...

ANN

Yes.

EM

What?

ANN

No men in the mausoleum of Emily Madsen.

EM

And you're gonna stick with your story?



ANN

Yes!

EM

All right, then. I stand corrected. Some people don't need two to make a party and I respect that.

ANN

Emily Madsen, you are disgusting!

EM

What? You mean you never...?

ANN

Never!

EM

Well, you've missed out on a world of fun.

ANN

I never needed fun! I had Charlie!

*EM gives her a strongly surprised 'really?' look. ANN realizes her mistake.*

ANN (Cont.)

That's not what I meant. Charlie was a wonderful husband; warm and attentive. And in almost 50 years of marriage I never once had to resort to... to... a... a....!

EM

Toy? Oh, Miss Prissy Prude! You can't even say the word. How did you ever have children?

ANN

Without discussing it, thank you very much. And I'm not a prude! I just prefer my sex with a man attached to it.

EM

Ah ha! And would this man have a name?

ANN

What? No! I told you, there's no man.

EM

Well, that's good. Because you know...

ANN

Yes, I know. You've made it plain enough.

EM

Maybe, maybe not. (Beat) Look, I asked you to stay here after Charlie died because I thought you needed time to heal.

ANN

I did. I do. I miss him. You have no idea. I miss being held and... everything. I don't know how you stand it. It's been years since Frank left.

*EM warns her about the forbidden topic.*

EM

Eh, eh eh...!

ANN

Right. Sorry. We don't mention the Boogey Man!

*EM goes to the swinging door.*

EM

That's right. And start baking. It's almost Christmas.

ANN

What about all the diets?

EM

Screw 'em. It's a holiday.

*EM exits. ANN starts setting up her baking things as she mutters to herself.*

ANN

Holiday. Hmmph. And when are *you* going to take off the widow's weeds?

*EM swings back in.*

EM

Did you say something?

ANN

What? No! I was thinking about the holiday; what to serve.

EM

Make what we always make! A ham! A turkey! That duck thing you like so much!

ANN  
It's paté. Your chocolate cake?

EM  
Of course. You see? We didn't even need a committee. I'm going to take a shower. I may even bring my friend, Mr. Happy.

ANN  
Eeouw!

EM  
Prude.

ANN  
Pervert.

EM  
Once again, it has been a pleasure.

*EM shuffles out. ANN, in a stew, bangs the cookie-making equipment around. As she bustles, a man, FRANK, cautiously appears in the window, takes a quick peek, then dives out of sight. He pops up again, peeks, then disappears. A moment later he taps on the window. ANN turns. FRANK pops up again and she jumps. ANN is alarmed. She quickly opens the window. They speak in loud whispers so as not to be overheard.*

ANN  
What are you doing here?

FRANK  
Where is she?

ANN  
The bathroom.

FRANK  
Open the door.

ANN  
No! What are you doing here?

FRANK

I left my watch on the nightstand.

ANN

I'll get it later! You have to get out of here!

FRANK

Open the door, woman! I'm too old to be climbing in windows!

ANN

That didn't stop you last night.

FRANK

Ah, last night. I was superman last night. Today I'm the wolf. Now open the door or I'll huff and I'll puff...

ANN

Shhhh!

*ANN quickly opens the door and lets him in.*

FRANK

What's she doing?

ANN

She's taking a shower.

FRANK

She never could get dressed before noon, the lazy lima bean. Unlike you, my spry little devil, my tangy tart, my hot tamale...

*FRANK reaches out to tickle her, chasing her around the table.*

ANN

Cut that out, you insane man! She'll hear you!

FRANK

Let her hear! Call her in here!

*FRANK goes to the door, calling...*

FRANK

Your sister's a spitfire! A spunky, sparkly spitfire, you old crow!

ANN

Shhh! Get away from there!

FRANK

You said she's in the shower!

ANN

I said she's TAKING a shower. I don't know if she's IN the shower. And even if she's IN the shower, she has the hearing of a bat. That's all I need is for Emily to find out you're back.

FRANK

You didn't tell her yet?

ANN

No, I didn't tell her. It's not a subject one enters into lightly. I have to wait for the right moment.

FRANK

And when will that be?

ANN

When she's in Miami with Marjorie Middlebury. I'll write her a letter.

FRANK

You're scared of her! You're scared of your own sister!

ANN

I wouldn't say "scared". I'm cautious. You don't know her like I do.

FRANK

I don't know her???

ANN

All right, maybe you do. So, you of all people should understand it is better to let sleeping dogs lie.

FRANK

Oh, Annie. Sweet little Annie... How did the two of you come from the same family? Life's too short to let anyone hold you back. You have to seize the bull by the horns, damn the torpedoes and let the big dog bite!

*He has wrapped his arms around her and pulls her close.*

ANN

You keep that big dog in your pants!

*EM calls from offstage.*

EM (OS)

Annie? Is somebody here?

*FRANK and ANN panic. After a few bumps and starts, she shoves him out the back door. She spots his hat on the kitchen table and hides it behind her back as EM enters still in her robe.*

EM

Annie?

ANN

What?

EM

Are you all right?

ANN

I'm fine! Why?

EM

I thought I heard voices.

ANN

Voices?

EM

As in people talking.

ANN

And what were they telling you to do?

EM

Huh?

ANN

These voices. Were they the Joan of Arc type voices, telling you to conquer something, or more like Son of Sam?

EM  
 What are you babbling about?

ANN  
 Your voices. You know, “Woo hoo....”

EM  
 I did not imagine them.

ANN  
 Suit yourself.

EM  
 (Uncertain)  
 There’s no one here?

ANN  
 Nope.

EM  
 Hmmmm....

*EM walks out. ANN gets rid of the hat in a drawer. FRANK pushes the door open a little and sticks his head in, but ANN slams it shut as EM immediately returns.*

EM  
 Are you sure there’s no one here?

ANN  
 (Laughing shrilly)  
 Emily, my dear, look around! I’m alone!

EM  
 I could have sworn...

ANN  
 Oh! I was singing! Maybe that’s what you heard.

EM  
 You were singing...?

ANN  
 Yes, I was. *Da da da da da...*

EM

Spare me. I think I'll get my ears checked.

ANN

Wonderful idea! Let's make an appointment.

*EM exits. ANN sits, exhausted. FRANK cautiously open the door, rubbing his head.*

FRANK

Ow.

*Ann jumps, startled.*

ANN

Out!

FRANK

She gone?

ANN

Get out of here right now!

FRANK

Okay, okay, keep your shirt on! On second thought...

ANN

(Laughs)

You are a dirty old man!

FRANK

See you tonight?

ANN

I don't know.

FRANK

Come on, it was nice, wasn't it?

ANN

(Reluctantly)

Yes... Couldn't we go to your place? Where are you living anyway?

FRANK

A room over Harry's Gym.



Oh. ANN

We could get a motel... FRANK

I'm not that kind of girl! Besides, how would I explain it to Emily? ANN

Right. FRANK  
 (touches her seductively)  
 So, what do you say?

I don't know. Maybe this was a mistake. ANN

We're all adults here, Annie. FRANK

Speak for yourself. I feel like a naughty teenager. ANN

Ooh, jail bait. FRANK  
 (Flirting)

*ANN smiles in spite of herself and tries to push him out the door.*

Get out of here. ANN

Is that a yes? FRANK

Yes. I'll turn out the porch light when she's gone to bed. ANN

Until then, my little kumquat. FRANK

Same to you... ANN  
 (Closes the door adding, to herself...)  
 ... you fruitcake. Oh, good Lord, preserve me.

*Transition music, perhaps whatever ANN was singing.*

SCENE 3

*Living room, or just a couple of armchairs  
and a TV, later that night. ANN and EM are  
watching the nightly news.*

TV ANNOUNCER (VO)

And that's The News at Ten. Be sure to tune in to The Morning Show at 6 a.m. for our continuing report on "Skin Disease: The Silent Scourge".

*ANN stretches exaggeratedly.*

ANN

Well, that's it for me. I'm going to bed.

EM

Good night, dear.

ANN

Aren't you coming?

EM

I think I'll stay up a while longer.

ANN

What for?

EM

I'm not tired.

ANN

Well, what will you do?

EM

Watch some more TV.

ANN

It's all news and talk shows.

EM

I know.

ANN

And the talk shows talk about the news.

EM

I know.

ANN

It's the same news.

EM

So, I'll watch it again. I'll do better on the test tomorrow.

ANN

What test?

EM

The Senility Comprehension Boards. What's wrong with you?

ANN

I just don't see why you find it necessary to stay up late watching the same old news. Get into bed! Read a book! You'll sleep better and wake up earlier.

EM

Why on earth would I want to wake up earlier?

ANN

Because it's the morning, and that's what mornings are for. It's the same way the whole world over. I don't know why you fight it!

EM

I'm a rebel at heart.

ANN

And it's healthier. You're not getting any younger, you know.

EM

Thanks for the reminder.

ANN

Look, I can't sleep as long as there's activity in the house.

EM

Since when?

ANN

Since always.

EM  
But I stay up every night.

ANN  
And it bothers me every night.

EM  
You never mentioned it.

ANN  
I'm mentioning it now.

EM  
So, if I get into bed and watch TV on the little set in my room, will you be able to sleep?

ANN  
It would be better if you just slept. Would you like me to make you some warm milk?

EM  
Why don't you just drug me?

ANN  
Oh! I have some Ambien!

EM  
I wasn't serious.

(Getting up)  
You know, I may be the oldest but you are sprinting toward dementia at an alarming rate. Do you mind if I get a glass of water before I go up?

ANN  
Of course not. Although water at this hour is likely to make you pee throughout the night.

EM  
I'll risk it.

*EM goes to kitchen with ANN following. Out of habit, EM flicks the switch nearest the sink to turn out the porch light. As she turns to get a glass of water, ANN quickly flips the toggle light back on. EM turns with her water and sees the light is on again.*

EM  
I could swear I just...

(Innocently)  
Hmmm? ANN

Nothing. EM

*EM flicks the porch light off again and starts out of the kitchen.*

Goodnight, Ann. EM

Goodnight, Emily. ANN

I thought you were turning in. EM

I'm just going to check the locks. You can't be too careful these days. ANN

Hmmm.... EM

*EM continues off. ANN flicks the porch light on again. She listens at the swinging door to make sure EM has indeed gone to bed. Satisfied, she tiptoes to the back door, opens it a crack, and flicks both the porch and kitchen lights off. She takes a step toward the swinging door when it suddenly swings open with EM standing in it. Light from the hall spills into the room. ANN slams the back door shut and we hear a muffled ...*

OW! FRANK (OS)

*ANN flicks both lights back on and makes a show of testing the door.*

Yup! Nice and tight. ANN

*EM looks at her, holding the swinging door open for her.*

ANN

Well, nighty night.

EM

Same to you..

*ANN passes her and goes off to her room.  
EM switches the porch light off and follows.*

*Sound of two bedroom doors closing. A moment later, ANN appears, crosses to the kitchen and puts the porch light back on. She sits down to wait. Only the porch light illuminates the stage through the door and kitchen window.*

*It is silent for a moment before FRANK's face appears in the window. He taps. ANN jumps up and opens the window.*

FRANK

What's going on? You almost took my foot off!

ANN

Shhhhh....!

FRANK

And what's up with the light? On, off, on, off, on. It's cold out here!

ANN

Quiet! She just turned in. Wait in the truck until I make sure she's asleep.

FRANK

Here, take this. Put one in a cup of tea and bring it to her.

*FRANK hands her a pill wrapped in tissue.  
She puts it in her pocket.*

ANN

What is it?

FRANK

It's Ambien.

*ANN glares at him, a “brilliant-minds-think-alike” look of disbelief before she catches herself.*

ANN

I'm not drugging my sister! Just go! Wait for my signal.

FRANK

How long?

ANN

Maybe 15 minutes. A half-hour. I want to be sure.

FRANK

15 minutes, or I'm gonna hit her over the head with a baseball bat.

ANN

Go!

*ANN pushes his head out, closes the window, and returns to her bedroom. Silence. We hear crickets chirping. Moments later, EM's silhouette can be seen crossing the stage. She goes to the kitchen, flicks off the porch light and we are plunged into darkness. A moment later, ANN steps from her bedroom having seen the light go out.*

ANN

What the...

*ANN crosses the stage to the kitchen.*

ANN

Emily? Are you in here?  
(no reply)  
Must be a short in the bulb.

*Suddenly, all the lights go on revealing Emily at the switch. Ann screams.*

EM

Did I scare you?

ANN

Are you crazy? You could have given me a heart attack!

EM

Your heart's as strong as an ox!

ANN

Oxen don't drop dead?

EM

Not the sneaky ones. What the hell are you up to?

ANN

I'm not up to anything! I was... I was checking the bulb.

EM

Bullshit! I grew up with you, remember? I was there for all the tricks and shenanigans.

ANN

What tricks?

EM

Oh, please! Miss Nicey Nice, with your demure, "I-would-never" smile. It's a signal! The porchlight! The coast is clear! You pulled the same crap on Mom and Dad when we were kids.

ANN

I did not.

EM

You snuck Charlie into your bedroom so many times, for his birthday I gave him a set of towels marked HIS.

ANN

(laughs)

I remember that! That was very funny.

EM

So, who's using the towels now?

ANN

No one.

EM

No one, huh?



*EM goes to kitchen drawer and retrieves the hat ANN hid earlier.*

EM (CONT)

Then what's this?

*She shoves it in ANN's face.*

ANN

(weakly)  
A hat?

EM

No shit, Sherlock. Whose is it?

ANN

How would I know?

EM

You didn't put it there?

ANN

Why would I do that?

EM

Why would you... ? I'm calling the police.

ANN

The police! Why?

EM

Because someone broke into our house and left his hat!

ANN

That's ridiculous! Is... is anything missing?

EM

On the contrary, we've gained a hat! Which leads me back to my original question: what the hell are you up to?

ANN

I...I...I...

EM

I'm waiting.

ANN  
Stop interrogating me!

EM  
Start talking!

*Remembering the Ambien, ANN reaches into her pocket.*

ANN  
Would you like a cup of tea?

EM  
Would I...? No!

ANN  
Oh, Emily... I can't tell you!

EM  
Why not?

ANN  
You'll yell.

EM  
I'm already yelling!

ANN  
Well stop!

EM  
(Purposefully lowering her voice)  
Okay, I won't yell. It's a man, right?

*ANN nods.*

EM (CONT)  
Well, God bless you for still having the fortitude. Is it someone I know?

ANN  
You could say that.

EM  
Of course, I could. There are maybe 10 single men over 70 in this town and fewer if you weed out the ones who aren't healthy enough for sex. I know all of them. Is it George, Senior, from the pharmacy?

ANN  
No.

EM  
I've seen him looking at you. And he honored that expired coupon for Lubraderm.

ANN  
It's not George.

EM  
Harold, the fruit man?

*ANN shakes her head.*

EM (cont)  
Dr. Lake?

*ANN shakes her head.*

EM (cont)  
Is he married? Tell me you're not involved with a married man.

ANN  
Of course not!

EM  
Then who?

ANN  
Promise you won't yell.

EM  
Not Father Donovan!

ANN  
The priest? What do you take me for?

EM  
Why? We're not Catholic!

ANN  
He's a priest!

EM  
Then I give up.

Promise you'll stay calm. ANN

I promise. EM

Frank? ANN

Absolutely. Who is it? EM

Frank! ANN

What Frank? EM  
(a beat)

My Frank?

Your Frank is dead, remember? You said so yourself. ANN

So, this is another Frank. EM

Well... not exactly another... ANN

Will you stop tap dancing and give me a straight answer? EM

Yes! Okay! It's Frank. ANN

Frank Madsen? EM  
(Thunderstruck)

Yes! ANN

My Frank? EM  
(Still in disbelief)

ANN

Yes! Although, technically, he hasn't been your Frank for almost 30 years.

EM

He hasn't been my *husband* for almost 30 years. He wasn't much of a husband before that either.

ANN

Whatever. You had no use for him.

EM

No use for him? Half the time I couldn't find him! You mean to tell me Frank Madsen is back?

ANN

(weakly)

Yes.

EM

Frank Madsen has been sleeping under my roof?

ANN

Our roof.

EM

Don't quibble. Has he been in this house? Has he been in *you*?

ANN

I'm not going to talk to you if you make it sound sordid.

EM

Oh, excuse me, Juliet! Was Romeo responsible for those squeaky springs last night?

ANN

Oh, God help me.

EM

Wow! I always thought I'd smell the bastard before I saw him.

*A beat. EM ponders. It is unbelievable!*

ANN

Are you mad?

EM

Are you crazy?

I might be.

ANN

When did he get back? And how long has he been tapping the keg?

EM

Please don't.

ANN

What? I can't say anything?

EM

Could I stop you?

ANN

He's a cad.

EM

He's not.

ANN

You're right. That's too good a word for him. But he will break your heart!

EM

Oh, for pity sake...

ANN

I'm an expert on the subject! Twenty-three years of marriage, two children and fifty-two extra-marital affairs!

EM

You're exaggerating.

ANN

Marginally.

EM

He's changed!

ANN

I doubt it. I'm guessing the only thing that's changed is which side of menopause his victims are on.

EM

You can't know what's in his heart.

ANN

EM

Oh, did he get a heart?

ANN

Emily...

EM

Well, how would I know? I haven't seen him in years. Where's he been? What's he been doing?

ANN

I don't know. We haven't really talked about it. Well, we haven't really talked.

EM

Jesus H. Christ...

ANN

Oh, Emily, you know I always liked Frank.

EM

Oh, yeah, I remember. By the way, thanks for the support.

ANN

Well, I'm sorry! We don't always see things the same way.

EM

Yes, some of us see things the way they are and some of us see things the way we want them to be.

ANN

He was still Charlie's friend. What did you want me to do? And he was fun. He's still fun. I haven't had any fun since Charlie died.

EM

Well, I'm sorry I'm not enough fun for you.

ANN

(Pouting)

You're no fun at all.

*A beat. EM tosses her hands in the air, flummoxed.*

EM

I don't believe this. Of all the people on the planet... Frank!

*ANN struggles to explain.*

ANN

I'm lonely, Emily. He's good company. He makes me laugh.

EM

Of course, he does. Frank was a first-class comedian.

ANN

He makes me feel alive.

EM

So does electro-shock therapy. Get in the tub; I'll throw you the toaster.

ANN

That's a horrible thing to say!

EM

Oh, Annie, I just don't want to see you get hurt. We don't heal like we used to.

ANN

I wouldn't know. I've only ever been with Charlie. I thought it was time I took a little risk.

*A beat as EM struggles between her feelings for her sister and against FRANK.*

EM

Couldn't you try skydiving? Drugs? Father Donovan?

ANN

I didn't plan it. It just happened. And, for what it's worth, I am sorry. If I thought there was anything left between you two...

EM

Stop it, right there. The only thing between me and that louse is regret. And I don't want that for you.

ANN

I appreciate that. And I love you.

*A long beat as EM gathers her wits.*

EM

This is incredible. Frank... and you! So, he's out in the back waiting for a signal?



ANN  
He's in the truck.

EM  
(Oddly concerned for his welfare)  
It's cold out there.

ANN  
He's all right. He's very warm blooded.

*EM stares at her sister. ANN stares back, contrite. EM takes a deep, resigned breath.*

EM  
Oh, my God... All right, let him in.

ANN  
Really?

EM  
Quick, before I change my mind.

ANN  
You won't hurt him?

EM  
If you mean I won't shoot him as he walks through the door... no. For you.

ANN  
Thank you.

EM  
Don't thank me yet.

ANN  
You'll see, he's changed.

EM  
Yes, I'll bet he's a much *older* piece of shit now.

ANN  
Emily....

EM  
Oh, all right!

*ANN opens the back door and calls softly so as not to disturb the neighbors...*

ANN

Frank! Psst! Frank!

*A moment passes and Frank appears at the door. He speaks in a hushed voice.*

FRANK

It's about time! I'm freezing! Did you give her the sleeping pill?

EM

Now that's the Frank Madsen I recognize!

*FRANK turns and sees her. He is surprised and wary. ANN positions herself between the two of them.*

FRANK

Emily! It's good to see you.

EM

'Course it is. That's why you've been sneaking around here like the Incredible Skulk.

FRANK

I didn't exactly see a welcome wagon out front.

EM

The welcome wagon only comes when you announce that you're here.

FRANK

I walked past the house a few times.

EM

When?

FRANK

Last week, when I got back to town.

EM

Last week?

FRANK

Yes. The shades were all drawn. You didn't answer the bell. But I could feel you staring at me from behind the shades. I got the message.

EM  
What message?

FRANK  
That I wasn't welcome.

ANN  
Oh, Frank, there was no message. We weren't home!

FRANK  
What?

EM  
We were in New York last week.

FRANK  
But, your eyes...the shades...

ANN  
You imagined it.

FRANK  
I could swear...

EM  
WE WEREN'T HOME!

FRANK  
Well, how was I supposed to know? You never used to go anywhere! All of a sudden you're a world traveler?

ANN  
Cousin Violet died. We went east for her funeral.

EM  
You remember cousin Violet, don't you, Frank?

FRANK  
I told you, I didn't know she was your cousin!

EM  
Like it would have made a difference.

FRANK  
It might have. What did she die of?

EM

It wasn't syphilis, no thanks to you.

FRANK

I never had syphilis. Maybe a case of crabs but that's it. And I got you the medicine!

EM

Thanks a lot.

(Rising)

I'm sorry, Annie.

ANN

For what?

EM

For breaking my promise. I'm gonna kill him after all.

*EM lunges. ANN intervenes, grabbing EM.  
FRANK backs up to the far wall.*

ANN

No, Emily, don't!

EM

Shoulda done it years ago!

ANN

But you didn't! It's over! It's done!

EM

It'll be done when he's dead!

ANN

Emily! Think of the blood! Who's gonna clean that up?

EM

What?

ANN

He'll be dead, you'll be in jail, and I will be on my hands and knees, scrubbing, until the grim reaper finds me in a bucket of bleach and Brillo!

*A beat.*

EM  
You've really given this some thought.

ANN  
Ever since I set eyes on him.

EM  
Why didn't you kill him then?

FRANK  
Because she's not a killer.

ANN  
(Still holding EM)  
Don't help me Frank. Because I'm not a killer. And neither are you...at heart.

EM  
You're very strong.

ANN  
I know.

EM  
You can let go now.

ANN  
You sure?

EM  
I'm sure. You're right. I've taken enough punishment from this man. I don't need to spend the rest of my life in jail.

*ANN let's her go. Everyone visibly relaxes. FRANK and EM glare at each other from opposite sides of the room like a bull and a matador.*

ANN  
Of course, I'm right. It's all water under the bridge. I could use a drink. Emily?

EM  
I wouldn't say no to a double bourbon.

*FRANK and EM take seats at opposite sides of the table. ANN, making sure to stay*

*between them, gets a bottle and glasses from a cabinet.*

ANN

Frank?

FRANK

Uh, just coffee for me. You got any coffee?

*ANN and EM both look at him curiously.*

ANN

Maybe some leftover from this morning.

FRANK

That's okay. Water's fine.

EM

Water?

FRANK

Yes, water.

EM

Well, that's different.

*EM stares at Frank, challenging him. ANN brings the drinks. They drink.*

EM

So, Frank. Where've you been?

FRANK

Here and there.

EM

Mostly there, right?

FRANK

(Changing the subject)

At the risk of picking off an old scab, what was Violet doing in New York?

ANN

Oh, the whole family moved up north after...

*ANN's voice trails off as she looks at EM.*

EM

After your little peccadillo. They were too ashamed to show their faces.

FRANK

That was over 30 years ago! You mean they never came back?

EM

Nope.

ANN

Mama was heartbroken. Even though Violet was just a second cousin, it made it very uncomfortable at family gatherings.

FRANK

Well, I'm sorry.

EM

You mean if you'd known she was my cousin you'd have screwed somebody else?

FRANK

No. I'm sorry I screwed around at all. I was a bad husband, Emily, and you have every reason to hate me.

EM

You're giving me permission?

ANN

Now, Em, he's only trying to make amends.

EM

Save it. We're not going to be friends.

FRANK

Fair enough.

*EM pulls the bottle of bourbon across the table and pours another drink.*

EM

So, how'd you two hook up anyway?

ANN

Well, I ran into Frank on Main Street.

EM

When was this?

ANN  
Yesterday.

EM  
Yesterday!?

ANN  
He was coming out of Harry's Gym and I'd been across at the Shop Mart and...

FRANK  
You looked real pretty, Annie.

ANN  
Thank you, Frank.

FRANK  
Never saw anyone look so pretty, just to go to the market.

EM  
I'm about to throw up.

ANN  
Anyway, we just started talking and we went over to Patsy's Diner for a cup of coffee, just to catch up on old times. And suddenly I remembered that I had ice cream in my shopping bag so we raced home and...  
(Evasively)  
...the rest is history.

EM  
That's not history. That's the lamest... What did you do, trip over the bed on the way to the freezer?

ANN  
(Shyly)  
It was the sofa.

EM  
The sofa! And did you manage to rescue the vanilla fudge or was that a casualty of the afternoon delight?

ANN  
For your information, it was cookie dough, and no, we didn't rescue it. It was soup by the time we got home.

FRANK  
There's nothing like the taste of melted ice cream on a woman's...



ANN

FRANK!!!!

EM

Okay, I've heard enough! So, you seduced my sister on my own sofa on the very day you laid eyes on her for the first time in, what, twenty-five years?

FRANK

Give or take.

*A beat. EM stares at FRANK. Then...*

EM

(Sarcastically)

You're right, Annie, he's completely changed. I hardly recognize him.

ANN

So, you're okay with this?

EM

(Rising)

Okay? There's an avalanche of words rushing through my brain right now. I don't know if "Okay" is among them. I'm going to bed. The junkyard opens at six. I'll expect that sofa to be gone by the time I get up.

FRANK

Well, that gives us plenty of time.

EM

Did you speak?

ANN

We'll see you in the morning, Emily.

FRANK

If noon qualifies as morning...

EM

If I were you, I'd sleep with one eye open.

FRANK

I always do.

EM

Good night!

*EM exits. A beat.*

FRANK

Well, that went better than it could have.

ANN

It feels strange, having it out in the open.

FRANK

Strange but good? Or strange but what-the-heck-am-I-doing-with-my-sister's-ex-husband?

ANN

I'm not sure.

FRANK

Okay...

ANN

Why didn't you tell me you'd stopped by the house last week?

FRANK

I didn't?

ANN

Did you know I was living here with Emily?

FRANK

How would I know that?

ANN

So, it was Emily you came to see.

FRANK

I suppose so.

ANN

I suppose it makes sense. She was your wife; the mother of your children... And yet you didn't mention it.

FRANK

You seemed so happy to see me. I didn't want to hash up any bad feelings. God knows what Em's been saying about me all these years.

*ANN starts to wonder if she's missed something. It is not a comfortable thought.*

ANN

Not much really. She never talks about you. Nobody does.

FRANK

Nobody?

ANN

Nobody.

FRANK

(Afraid to ask)

What about the kids?

ANN

At first. Then Em made up some story and they stopped asking.

*A beat.*

ANN (cont.)

Are you okay?

FRANK

Yeah, sure. You?

ANN

I guess.

FRANK

Okay, then. It's late. Why don't we get some sleep?

*They rise, but ANN is clearly hesitant.*

ANN

Frank, would you mind terribly if I asked you not to spend the night?

FRANK

Something *is* wrong.

ANN

I think I need a little time to adjust to things. Come by for breakfast, okay?

FRANK

Breakfast. Sure. Why not?

ANN

And ring the bell when you come... to the front door, like a proper caller.

A suitor. FRANK

A guest. A welcome guest. ANN

Sweet Annie. FRANK

I don't feel so sweet. ANN

Are you sure you're okay? FRANK

I just need some time. ANN

FRANK  
Take all the time you need. I think it's time I started doing things right around here. I'll see you in the morning.

*He kisses her cheek. She follows him to the back door.*

Wait! What about the couch? FRANK

I'll take care of it. ANN

But it's heavy! FRANK

ANN  
Frank, we've been managing things around here without a man for a while. I'll take care of it.

Of course. Good night, Annie. FRANK

Good night, Frank. ANN

*He leaves. ANN closes the door behind him and locks it. She puts the glasses in the sink,*

*the bottle on the counter, shuts all the lights and sits down in the dark. A moment later, the swinging door opens. The light from the hallway spills over ANN with EM standing in silhouette.*

*BLACKOUT. End of Scene 3.*

SCENE 4

*Late morning about a week later. FRANK is seated at the kitchen table, quite comfortable with a cup of coffee, leftover plates from breakfast and the newspaper, which he has pulled apart and reads with intent. EM enters in sweatpants and a t-shirt, sees him, and is immediately somewhat uncomfortable. She pats her hair into place.*

EM

You're still here.

FRANK

(Without looking up)

Even worse. I'm back.

*EM grumbles, getting a cup of coffee.*

EM

'Morning.

*FRANK continues reading.*

EM (cont.)

I said good morning.

FRANK

I heard you.

EM

It's customary to acknowledge a person when she says good morning.

FRANK

It's customary to say good morning when it's the morning. It is now...  
(checks his watch)  
...12:15, making it officially afternoon. So, good afternoon.

EM

Thanks for the update, Father Time.

FRANK

You're welcome.

EM

Were you here all night?

FRANK

You expect me to kiss and tell?

EM

I expect an honest answer. Can you do that?

FRANK

I came for breakfast, as I have every morning this week. You might have heard me knock if you woke up earlier.

EM

Why is everyone so concerned with what time I wake up?

FRANK

Touché.

EM

Where's my sister?

FRANK

She went to the market. Something about a sale on duck liver.

EM

She's making her paté for the holidays.

FRANK

Looking forward to it.

EM

Is that my paper?

FRANK

It's the paper. I don't see a name on it.

EM

That's my paper! And it's all over the place! What the hell have you done to it?

FRANK

(indicating piles)

The ads are in this pile. This is the local news, the county news and the state news...

*EM sits opposite.*

EM

For God's sake, Frank, they put it together for a reason!

FRANK

And I reorganize it for a reason.

EM

Reorganize! This is a mess. Give me the local news. And the entertainment section.

*He finds and tosses some pages to her. She rifles through them. As he does, she mumbles...*

EM

Man comes back into your space and the whole world goes to pot. No respect. No goddamned respect... What the... Frank! You did the crossword!

FRANK

It was very easy. The theme was garden vegetables.

EM

That's MY crossword! I do the crossword every morning!

FRANK

You do it every afternoon. I do it in the morning. The early bird, you know...

EM

You leave my puzzle alone. You leave my paper alone! Get your own damned paper if you want but this one is mine!

*A newspaper slams against the kitchen window as in Scene 2.*

FRANK

I believe THAT one is yours. I picked this one up at the gas station this morning.

*A beat as she adjusts to having been wrong.*

EM

Goddamned paperboy.

*FRANK smiles, gloating. EM sneers, retrieves the paper and yells at the paper boy...*

EM (OS)

I said the porch! Not the window!

*EM returns, sits and makes a big show of opening her paper.*

FRANK

Is that still the Martinson's boy?

EM

It's Martinson's grandson. He inherited the family business.

FRANK

What happened to the Martinson's boy?

EM

He's the mailman now. He delivers the mail.

FRANK

Ah! Delivery is in their blood!

EM

I guess.

FRANK

Well, you got a fresh crossword puzzle now, and don't you be looking at mine for the answers!

EM

Like there's any chance I'd cheat off you! You probably just filled in the letters to annoy me.

FRANK

You think so?



EM

I think so.

FRANK

A challenge then. I'll bring a fresh paper tomorrow and we'll race. See who gets it done first.

EM

You're on! Points off for incorrect answers.

FRANK

Wouldn't have it any other way. Just one thing though.

EM

What's that?

FRANK

You're gonna have to get up before noon or you'll accuse me of cheating.

EM

You're gonna have to hold your horses because, as you can see, my paper boy doesn't get his butt here until after noon.

FRANK

12:30 then. Crossword challenge at 12:30.

EM

You're on. And no peeking!

FRANK

I won't peek.

EM

Guess I'll have to take your word for it. Like your word ever meant anything.

FRANK

I'll keep my word. I want to tan your ass fair and square.

EM

You're not gonna get within ten feet of my ass and that's a fact.

*A pause. They look at each other. There is a clear enjoyment of the competition and each other and a hint of the sexual tension between them, cut short when EM realizes she is enjoying his company.*

FRANK

It's good to see you again, Emily.

EM

Wish I could say the same thing but I'd be lying.

*A beat.*

EM (CONT)

If you hurt my sister you know I am going to have to kill you.

FRANK

I have no intention of hurting her.

EM

Yes, well, you know what they say about good intentions.

FRANK

I never intended to hurt you either.

EM

And there we have it: the road to hell.

FRANK

I've changed, Emily. Is there anything I can do to convince you?

EM

You don't have to convince me. I couldn't care less one way or the other. I'm not getting close enough to need convincing. But Annie; that's another story. She's gullible. She trusts people.

FRANK

And you don't trust anyone.

EM

Forewarned is forearmed.

FRANK

You trusted me once.

EM

And look where that got me.

*ANN enters with a shopping bag.*

ANN

Oh, good! You're both here. I need some help with a problem.

EM

'Morning, Annie.

(to FRANK)

Or should I say, good afternoon?

*FRANK smiles. Oblivious to their private joke, ANN puts the packages. With ANN present, any semblance of acceptance toward FRANK on EM's part evaporates.*

ANN

Whatever. I was just down at the market to put in our holiday order and I don't know what size turkey and ham to get. Have you heard from any of the kids?

EM

Oh, yes, I've heard an earful.

ANN

Well, are they coming?

EM

Far as I know, they're just about all coming.

FRANK

Really?

ANN

That's wonderful!

EM

Yes! They want to see the circus.

ANN

What circus? I haven't heard of a circus.

FRANK

She means me. Us. This.

ANN

Oh.

(A beat.)

I hope it's not going to be uncomfortable.

EM

It's going to be a hoot and a holler; your normal, dysfunctional holiday get-together.

ANN

Does it have to be?

EM

I don't see any way around it. Do you?

*ANN sighs.*

ANN

You said, "Just about all." So, who's coming?

EM

Well, Geoffrey wants to be here for me. He thinks I need protecting.

FRANK

He's a good son.

EM

Yes. Now, Linda...

(to FRANK)

That's his wife...

FRANK

I know who she is.

EM

She thinks this whole thing is a bit creepy.

ANN

Well, Linda always was a bit of a stickler.

FRANK

She was a stone-cold prune-face. Can't imagine the years have softened her.

EM

They haven't.

FRANK

I never knew what he saw in her.

EM

Oh, this is going to be so much fun!

ANN

My Simon thinks it's a bit strange. And Andrew, well he thinks I've been watching too much reality TV.

*There is a subtle change in FRANK as he delves into tender territory...*

FRANK

(Gingerly)

What about...Alice?

EM

She's the hold-out.

FRANK

She doesn't want to see me.

EM

I didn't say that.

FRANK

Well, I can't blame her, can I? My baby girl...

EM

Your baby girl is going to be 49.

FRANK

No kidding.

EM

Why would I kid? You think she stopped growing after you gave her that green Schwinn with the training wheels?

FRANK

No, I...

EM

You were there when she was born, weren't you? Or were you?

FRANK

I was there, thank you. It's just that it seems like yesterday.

EM

Time flies when you aren't there to watch the clock.

ANN

Okay, let's try to keep it civil. We're having a meeting and the topic was...

FRANK

Alice.

ANN

The Holiday Guest List.

EM

She and Tim are thinking about a divorce.

ANN

Or we can talk about Alice.

FRANK

Why?

EM

She won't talk about it.

ANN

She says there are Irreconcilable Differences.

EM

(to ANN, shocked)

She talks to you?

ANN

(Defensive)

On occasion.

FRANK

What differences?

EM

I don't know. Ask my sister, the confidant!

ANN

It's not my fault I'm approachable.

EM

Are you saying I'm not?

ANN

Well, you do have strong opinions.

FRANK

Can we get back to Alice? Why are they getting a divorce?

ANN

She won't talk about it.

EM

Some marriages just fall apart.

FRANK

Are you saying this is my fault?

ANN

That's not what she's saying.

EM

You'd like to think that, wouldn't you, Frank? That everything is all about you.

FRANK

Well, I didn't set a very good example, did I?

EM

You set a lousy example. But some things just happen.

ANN

Well, maybe this is our chance to make it all right again. Or, at least, tolerable. So, we have Geoffrey and Linda, Geoff, Jr. and Darlene.

FRANK

Who's Darlene?

ANN

Geoff, Jr.'s girlfriend.

FRANK

He has a girlfriend?

EM

He's 29, for God's sake.

FRANK

That doesn't mean he has a girlfriend!

ANN

She's a lovely girl, Frank. He brought her out to meet us last summer.

EM

Before the cold wind that blew you back into town.

FRANK

Are you going to crack wise the whole time or can we at least *try* to have a civil conversation?

EM

Hmm... Let me think... Can we have a civil conversation...

ANN

Emily, please...

FRANK

No, no, let her think! I smell the wood burning. Maybe she'll spontaneously combust!

*The argument escalates, FRANK and EM spoiling for a fight.*

ANN

Frank...!

EM

Is that a euphemism for “drop dead”?

FRANK

Maybe.

EM

What, do you need a second to look up “euphemism”!

FRANK

I know what a euphemism is. It comes right after “eunuch”, which is how you like your men.

ANN

FRANK!!!!

*EM stands abruptly. FRANK rise to meet her.*

EM

I'm done.

ANN

You are NOT done!



EM

Oh, I...AM...DONE!

ANN

PLEASE! Can we all try to get along? For the children.

*ANN has grabbed EM's arm, physically muscling her back to her seat. She glares at FRANK who doesn't need to be muscled. He succumbs to her glare, sitting opposite. EM and FRANK glower at each other like enemies at the bargaining table.*

EM

I'm sorry, Annie. I can't help it. He brings out the cynic in me.

FRANK

That cynic was alive and well long before I came on the scene.

EM

Well, she was finely honed over 23 years as your wife!

FRANK

And the next 30 turned her into a razor-sharp bitch!

EM

That's it!

*EM slams her newspaper down. FRANK and EM are both back on their feet up, ready to fight. ANN puts herself between the two of them.*

ANN

STOP IT! BOTH OF YOU! STOP IT!!!! HAVE YOU LOST YOUR MINDS? It's going to be hard enough to get through the holidays without the two of you going at each other! Now calm down!

EM

You calm down!

ANN

No, you!

EM

You first!

FRANK  
EVERYBODY! Let's calm down!

*A beat as tempers are wrestled under control.*

EM  
Sorry.

ANN  
No, I'm sorry.

FRANK  
We're all sorry.

*A beat.*

ANN  
Can we even do this?

EM  
I will try. For *you*, Annie. I will try for *you*.

FRANK  
Me too. I will try to keep it buttoned.

EM  
Hah! That'll be a first!

ANN  
Emily!

EM  
Sorry. I'm sorry. I will try.

ANN  
Thank you.

(Ann gathers herself, smoothing her clothes.)  
So, the guest list... Geoff and Linda are two. Geoff Junior, and Darlene: four. Simon, Cheryl and their two is eight, Andrew and Peter...

FRANK  
Peter?

ANN  
Andrew's husband.

FRANK

His what?

EM

And we're off!

ANN

I guess I didn't tell you! Andrew had an epiphany a while back...

EM

He came out of the closet is what he did.

ANN

Thank you, sister. Yes, he realized he was gay, and now Peter is his husband.

FRANK

When did this happen?

ANN

Oh, it's been about 12 years now...

EM

Closer to 13. It was a lovely wedding.

FRANK

What did he do with his wife?

ANN

Susannah. It was terribly messy there for a while. But they worked it out and she's remarried to a lovely man named Jonathan. They share custody of the twins so the twins won't be coming.

FRANK

Good lord, things have changed.

EM

Time flies when you aren't there ...

FRANK

... to watch the clock. I know.

ANN

I hope this won't be a problem for you, Frank. Peter's as sweet as can be.

FRANK

No! No problem for me. I knew a lot of guys who... Well, they kept to themselves mostly. I'm just surprised is all.

EM

Time flies...

FRANK

I got it!

EM

Just saying... Now, where were we?

ANN

I never asked, Frank. Is there anyone in your life you'd like to include?

EM

Oh my God. Of course! All these years! There's got to be a whole slew of people.

FRANK

There's no one.

ANN

Are you sure?

EM

Another ex-wife maybe? A whole new generation of Madsens running around somewhere wondering where Daddy is for Christmas?

FRANK

I said no.

EM

What were you, a hobo? Where'd you sleep? You had to have latched on to someone in all these years.

FRANK

(rising)  
I need to get some air.

ANN

Frank, don't go.

EM

Is it something I said?

I'll be back.

FRANK

Stay! Help us plan this.

ANN

In a minute...

FRANK

Don't let the door hit you on the way out.

EM

*And he's gone.*

Or do... Whoa! I think we hit a nerve!

EM

*EM busies herself clearing dishes. ANN turns on her in disbelief.*

Emily!

ANN

What?

EM

Why did you do that?

ANN

Do what?

EM

You know darned well what I'm talking about.

ANN

Oh, leave me alone, Annie.

EM

I will not leave you alone. You're on him like ticks on a dog!

ANN

You're the one who brought up his mystery family!

EM

ANN

I just asked him if... Never mind. Can't you see how the years have softened him? Can't you see how vulnerable he is!

EM

Vulnerable...?

ANN

Yes! Oh, God, I'm sorry I ever told you about us.

EM

So am I! I'm sorry you ever brought him here. And while we're on the subject, why did you do that? Why did you bring that pond scum back into my life?

ANN

I didn't think I was bringing him back into your life. I thought I was bringing him into mine.

EM

This is MY HOUSE!

ANN

OUR house! Mama left it to both of us!

EM

But I lived here! You weren't here! I took care of them. I raised my family here while you were with Charlie and that piece of shit was galivanting God-knows where.

ANN

Well forgive me for having a life! For having a home of my own and a husband who loved me!

EM

Apparently, that wasn't enough for you! Let me ask you, did you want him the whole time we were married? Did you sleep with him then too?

ANN

How dare you! I would never have cheated on Charlie!

EM

No, you just kept Frank on the back burner of your tiny little brain. For thirty years!

ANN

I thought you were over him. When I brought him here, I thought... I didn't think you... Oh, my God, I didn't think!

EM

Whoa, whoa... Wait a minute. Back up.

ANN

What?

EM

You “thought” I was over him?

ANN

Yes! I mean, I knew what you thought of him but I didn’t think there were any... you know... feelings. I didn’t think there were any feelings left.

EM

You think I still have feelings for Frank?

ANN

Isn’t it obvious?

EM

Not to me.

ANN

You two can’t be in the same room!

EM

Because I hate him!

ANN

That’s a feeling!

EM

Yes! Hate!

ANN

Hate or love; they’re feelings! And you’re not over your feelings! Emily, you’re not over him.

*A beat. EM stares at her as if she had been struck.*

EM

You’re bat-shit crazy.

ANN

Let me ask *you* something, at the risk of getting my head handed to me on a platter. Why have you never remarried? You never even dated.

EM

I dated.

ANN

Singles. Ever make it to a second date?

EM

I never met anyone worth a second date.

ANN

Not once? All the guys Charlie tried to fix you up with...

EM

Pshhhh....

ANN

What about that Professor? The one who taught that class you took on "War and Peace"?

EM

Richard?

ANN

Yes! Richard! He was totally smitten with you.

EM

He was smitten with himself. He wasn't my type.

ANN

And what is your type?

EM

You seriously think I've been pining for that pile of dirt out on the porch? Did it ever occur to you that twenty-three years of bullshit from that poster child for lousy husbands was enough to put me off men forever?

ANN

No.

EM

No?



ANN

No. You never talked about him. You never even bad-mouthed him. It was like it hadn't happened. But now, listening to the two of you bicker and carp, I have to wonder...

EM

Wonder what?

ANN

Maybe...

EM

Maybe, what?

ANN

Just, maybe....

EM

You say "maybe" again, I'm going to put my fist through your dentures.

ANN

...there's more to it. And, if there is, we have a real problem.

EM

And what would that be?

ANN

I slept with him!

EM

Oh...my...god...

ANN

How could I sleep with the man you still have feelings for?

EM

I've heard enough of this bullshit.

*EMILY starts out.*

ANN

Emily, please.

EM

There's no problem here. If you want to throw away your last years on that..., that... I'm out of things to call him... You go right ahead. It's your bed. Make it any way you want.

ANN

Are you going to fight with him all through the holidays?

EM

Nope. 'Cause I'm not going to be here.

ANN

Emily...

*FRANK comes in.*

EM

I'm calling Marjorie Middlebury. And if she's busy I'm going to get me a hotel room on a beach somewhere. Anywhere. You two lovebirds can have your family reunion without me.

ANN

It's your family.

EM

It's a damn freak show.

FRANK

I'll go.

EM

No! Stick around! You just got here! Your grandchildren want to see what you look like.

FRANK

I never wanted to come between you.

EM

You can't. No matter what you do, she is my sister. But I don't have to sit around and watch her make a fool of herself.

*EM exits, slamming doors offstage wherever possible. They echo throughout the house. ANN flinches with each slam.*

*ANN sits, stricken. Frank stands between her and the swinging door which settles to stop.*

*Music up: Perhaps The Drifters', "There Goes My Baby"*

## SCENE 5

*Late at night. The porch. FRANK sits on the railing in the dark, fidgeting with his hat as he swings his legs over the side. In a few moments, the porch light comes on and ANN comes out in a robe.*

ANN

Frank? What are you doing here?

FRANK

I couldn't sleep.

*ANN pulls her robe closed against the nighttime chill.*

ANN

The noise at Harry's too much for you?

FRANK

Nah, he shuts down at nine these days, along with the rest of the town.

*FRANK sets his hat down.*

ANN

Right.

(a beat)

I couldn't sleep either.

FRANK

I got something I need to tell you.

ANN

Okay.

FRANK

I'm leaving, Annie.

ANN

Mm hmm... I figured that was coming. When will you go?

FRANK

In a day or two. I have some loose ends I need to tie up.

ANN  
Anyone I know?

FRANK  
That's funny. You're more like your sister than you think you are.

ANN  
We're two sides of the same coin.

*FRANK looks at her. She is not comfortable under his scrutiny.*

FRANK  
Why didn't I meet you first?

ANN  
You did.

FRANK  
I did?

ANN  
You don't remember.

FRANK  
I guess not.

ANN  
I was already dating Charlie. You were on the bowling team together. I had such a crush on you. All the girls did. We'd all hang out at the lounge, but you didn't even look up from your beer until Em walked in.

FRANK  
She was a sight.

ANN  
Never saw a man fall so far so fast. So, what happened?

FRANK  
I've spent the greater part of the last 30 years trying to figure that out.

ANN  
And...?

FRANK  
I was an idiot. Pure and simple.

ANN

Nothing's ever pure and simple.

FRANK

I just stopped over to say goodbye. I'm sorry I dragged you into this.

ANN

Into what?

FRANK

You know. Putting you in the middle between me and your sister...

ANN

Is that what you did? I thought we had a fling. Sowing our slightly stale wild oats.

FRANK

We were! But, well, I could have been more judicious about where I hung my hat.

ANN

Come on, Frank. It was a little slap and tickle. No hat hanging.

FRANK

My grandma used to tell me, "Francis, anyone can make a mistake. But only an idiot makes the same one over and over and over again."

*A beat. ANN stares at him as the truth of his feelings really starts to dawn on her.*

ANN

I am so stupid... Here I've been thinking it was just Em who was stuck on you. But you're still in love with her.

FRANK

(Shrugs, helplessly...)

She's my wife.

ANN

(Full dander up)

Well why the hell didn't you just say so?

FRANK

I told you, I'm an idiot.

ANN

That makes two of us.

FRANK

I'm sorry. I took advantage of your good nature.

ANN

Stop! Stop right there. I'm no victim. I'm a big girl and I make my own decisions, even if, sometimes, they are really bad decisions.

(Trying to salvage her dignity)

Hell! I had fun! It was fun for a while! Was it at least fun for you?

FRANK

(Thoughtfully)

It was more than fun. It was...

ANN

Okay, that's enough. Don't spoil it by trying to embellish.

FRANK

You okay?

ANN

Give me a minute.

(A beat)

Yes. I'm okay. I suppose I should be grateful. You woke me up.

FRANK

I'm sorry.

ANN

I don't mean tonight. I've been living like a shut-in since Charlie died and this, this...whatever it was ... showed me I'm not ready to be just a widow.

FRANK

The next guy climbs through your window is going to be some lucky son of a bitch.

ANN

You know it! In fact, I think I'm going to go see George Senior at the drugstore in the morning and get me some more Lubriderm.

FRANK

Huh?

ANN

Private joke. Don't worry about me, Frank. I'll be fine. Will you see Em before you go?

*EM has been standing in the shadow of the screen door.*

EM  
See Em about what?

*EM pushes the door open.*

ANN  
Guess I'll head up to bed.  
(as she passes EM...)  
Try not to bite his head off.

*ANN exits. EM steps out on to the porch.*

EM  
What were you two jawing about in the middle of the night?

FRANK  
Did we wake you?

EM  
As if I could sleep. I got freight trains running through my head and my heart's been thumping like sneakers in the dryer.

FRANK  
You should check your blood pressure.

EM  
Are you serious? You're worried about me having a stroke?

FRANK  
Why not?

EM  
It's seems your mission in life was to give me one.

FRANK  
Always the snappy comeback...

EM  
Sorry. It's a knee-jerk reaction. How did we get here, Frank? Why'd you come back?

FRANK  
Initially? To see you.

EM

Well, what the hell?! Did you miss the lecture on the shortest distance between two points?

FRANK

I told you! I came by the house...

EM

And we weren't home. I got that. It's the next part that's fuzzy. How you got from knocking on my door to banging my sister.

FRANK

That was chance. We really did just run into each other. And you weren't laying out the welcome mat.

EM

You have the damndest habit of jumping to conclusions.

FRANK

You mean if I'd have come around again, when you were home, you'd have let me in?

EM

Not on your life.

FRANK

That's what I figured. But with Annie, well, it was comfortable. Easy.

EM

Hmph. That's what they used to call her back in high school.

*From the shadow of the doorway...*

ANN

I heard that!

*ANN appears in the doorway. FRANK and EM look at her.*

ANN

Sorry. I was just getting some water. Going to bed now.

*ANN goes. A long pause...*

EM

Where did you go, Frank? You just up and disappeared. Our marriage wasn't enough for you. I had that part down pretty fast.



FRANK

That's not true.

EM

What are we going to rewrite history now? You started cheating on me before Geoffrey was born! Okay, I was fat and ugly and I figured it was my fault...

FRANK

You were not responsible for my deficiencies as a husband. You were beautiful.

EM

Well let's agree to disagree on that.

FRANK

Lemon meringue pie.

EM

What?

FRANK

You were addicted to lemon meringue pie. Even when the doctor told you to stay in bed for the last month, I'd sneak one in for you.

EM

Oh, my God... you were trying to kill me!

FRANK

No. They just made you so happy.

EM

Yeah. I'd pass out from happiness and you'd head out to the bar. What was the name of that whore, what's-her-name; the redhead?

FRANK

Lucinda?

EM

Wow! You didn't even have to search for that! She was the first, right?

FRANK

Can we take a pass on the stroll down memory lane?

EM

I have to hold on to my memories. They're my defense against ever finding something about you to like.

FRANK

There's not really much danger of that, is there?

EM

Honestly? Every once in a while, there's a glimmer.

FRANK

If I thought...

EM

Don't go there. It's not going to happen. I could forgive you for the lying and the cheating. Lord knows I did that a hundred times. But the kids... That's what I couldn't understand. You walked out on your kids.

FRANK

I had my reasons.

EM

What possible reasons could you have for dropping out of your children's lives? For never seeing your grandchildren.

FRANK

I tried to keep in touch.

EM

Yes, Christmas cards and the occasional birthday. We live in a modern world. There are planes, trains, automobiles... There's the god-damned telephone any time you want.

FRANK

I tried.

EM

You keep telling yourself that.

(A beat)

I think it's best if you leave before the holidays. I'm sorry I even told them you were here. I should have let them keep thinking you were dead.

FRANK

They thought I was dead?

EM

What else were they to think?

FRANK

I sent cards!

EM  
And I burned them!

FRANK  
You...?

EM  
Not at first. All they did was upset people! Opened a can of worms every time! Where is he? Why is there no return address? Why does he bother sending these? ...

FRANK  
(Quietly)  
I was in jail.

EM  
...Alice spent six years in therapy over her "abandonment issues"...

FRANK  
(A little louder)  
I was in jail

EM  
...And Geoffrey... What?

FRANK  
I was in jail.

*A beat.*

EM  
You were not!

FRANK  
I was.

*EM is torn between her natural tendency to disbelieve anything that FRANK says and a sincere desire to believe him.*

EM  
Hold on a minute. You sent cards.

FRANK  
I did.

EM

With no return address.

FRANK

I didn't want you to know where I was.

*A beat. She starts smacking him wherever she can reach.*

EM

You lying sack of holes; get out of here!

FRANK

What? Wait! Why?

EM

You think I was born yesterday?

FRANK

Cut it out!

EM

You can't send letters from prison with no return address!

FRANK

How do you know that?

EM

Never you mind! You didn't mail any cards from prison.

FRANK

I said I sent them! I never said I mailed them.

EM

What are you talking about?

FRANK

My cellmate. His wife, LuAnn. She mailed them. She'd sneak them in, I'd sign them and she'd sneak them back out again.

EM

Right past the guards?

FRANK

Well, they weren't exactly keeping a sharp eye out for stationary!

*He looks at her; she slowly gets it.*

You were in jail? EM

*He nods.*

What did you do? EM

That's a long story. FRANK

Does it look like I'm going anywhere? EM  
(A beat.)  
What happened?

*A beat. This is difficult for him.*

The day of Geoff Jr.'s Baptism, over at the church on South Main Street... Remember? FRANK

Of course, I remember. You weren't there. You were living in Elmira by that time and you didn't come. EM

I did. FRANK

You did not! EM

Will you stop telling me what I did and did not do? Jesus, woman, let me talk! FRANK

Sorry. (Beat) Well, talk. EM

*He continues with difficulty.*

Like I was saying, it was crowded. Must have been 15 babies getting baptized that day. So many people inside, families, there weren't any seats left. So, I stood in the back. FRANK

You were there? EM

FRANK

In the back. The Pastor called you all up to the altar. Alice and Tim were the godparents. She looked so pretty in a cream-colored dress. You wore a powder blue suit that matched your eyes. You were crying.

EM

I was not.

FRANK

Just a little. Your Mom was there, Annie, Charlie, all the kids... Your Aunt Flo and Uncle Henry. Even Violet was there!

EM

She was?

FRANK

Sitting off to the side with some man in a brown suit and a yellow shirt.

EM

That must have been Victor, her husband. She tried so hard to make amends. I'd forgotten she came.

FRANK

You were all up there, taking pictures, hugging and kissing. I couldn't take it. I left. You were a family I was no longer a part of.

EM

You were the grandpa!

FRANK

No. I was the lying cheat who tore up our family. I knew my place. I just left. I got in my truck and drove for hours until I was just about out of gas. There was a bar across from the filling station so I went in and started knocking them back. I kept picturing you all at the party after church, dancing with the baby, scarfing down Annie's fried chicken and your double chocolate fudge cake, laughing, and not giving me a thought.

EM

How do you know I made the fudge cake?

FRANK

You always made the fudge cake! For every special occasion! I put on twenty pounds 'cause of that fudge cake and never regretted a single ounce. I loved that fudge cake. So, when they finally stopped serving me at that bar, I decided I was going to get me a piece of that fudge cake. I was plastered. Didn't matter there were eight lanes on that two-lane highway. I got in the truck and headed here. Next thing I knew they were prying me out

of the cabin. Car parts all over the highway, police cars, fire trucks... and an ambulance taking away the body of the man I killed.

EM

You killed someone?

FRANK

A husband. A father. By the time they finished piling up the charges I got twenty-five years. I'm on parole.

EM

Frank... I don't know what to say.

FRANK

There's nothing to say. I deserved it.

EM

And then you came here.

FRANK

Well, that's where I'd been headed. I don't know what I expected. But this was the only place I could think of to go.

EM

And we weren't home. If I'd have known...

FRANK

What? You'd have been there for me? You'd have forgiven me?

EM

I always did.

FRANK

Yes, you did.

EM

How could I not have known about this? How could I not have heard?

FRANK

*I prayed* you wouldn't find out. I pled guilty, avoided a trial. I just wanted it to go away. And then, out of nowhere, a bunch of tornadoes touched down all across the state and ripped it to shreds. Total devastation. It knocked all other news off the front pages.

EM

I remember that. Just after the Baptism. We didn't get hit but there were massive power outages. We were out for weeks. That was you?

FRANK

I stopped praying after that.

EM

I'm not surprised.

FRANK

But I was grateful too. Better for you to think I was a total shit than to know what a shit I really was.

*There is a long pause as they take in all that has been said. Finally, EM approaches him. He recoils. If she so much as touches him, he won't be able to do this.*

FRANK (CONT)

Don't.

*Another pause.*

FRANK

I'm going to go now. I already said goodbye to Annie.

EM

Where will you go?

FRANK

Well, I'm not allowed to leave the state but I can't stay here. I've disrupted your lives enough already.

EM

Will you let us know?

FRANK

You really want me to?

EM

Well... a Christmas card would be nice. And I think you should tell your children. Geoff, Alice; they'd want to know.

FRANK

Maybe.

*EM visibly struggles against an instinct to want to stay there.*



Frank... I....

EM

*He cuts her off with a hand. He approaches her slowly and kisses her cheek.*

Goodbye, Emily.

FRANK

*FRANK leaves. EM stands, bereft, perhaps watching him go. A few moments later, ANN appears in the doorway. EM senses her presence without turning.*

Did you hear?

EM

ANN

Just snippets. I was going to ask you to speak up but I figured that would be inappropriate.

*EM breaks down, finally giving in to her feelings. ANN goes to her with a comforting embrace.*

Oh, Annie, what a waste.

EM

Yes.

ANN

You were right. I'm not over it.

EM

ANN

I know... I mean, I found out.... I mean, I didn't know when we...

It's okay.

EM

*The sisters hold each other a moment longer. When strong enough, EM straightens and wipes her eyes.*

EM

What do you say we get out of Dodge for a while?

ANN

Really? Together?

EM

Of course, together. You're my best friend. My sister. I'm sorry for all those things I said. I love you.

ANN

I love you too. I'll call Marjorie Middlebury in the morning. Maybe next month...

EM

(trying to lighten the mood)

That's some nice alliteration you got going there.

ANN

Good thing she doesn't live in Piscataway.

*They smile at each other, survivors.*

ANN

I could use a drink. You?

EM

I wouldn't say no to a double bourbon...

*ANN goes inside. EM starts to follow but notices FRANK has left his hat. She picks it up and crushes it to her chest, takes a deep breath and follows Ann inside.*

EM

So, how was he?

*Black out.*

*End of play.*