

***Anticipating Leftovers***  
*a play about lingering and moving forward*

## ***Anticipating Leftovers***

### **Synopsis:**

A play about lingering and moving forward, *Anticipating Leftovers* is a freewheeling funereal comedy which takes an absurdist look at family ties, the weight of shared memories, and obligations at large—particularly the large obligations that come with marriage. At least for women. Some women. Who may or may not be safely married.

When a woman finds herself in charge after the death of an estranged not-quite-relative, she opens up her home to far more than she bargained for. Sure, she makes room on the buffet table for one last covered dish. But ultimately, conflicting versions of the past and a very uncertain future force her to examine her choices and take rather unconventional steps to protect herself and her loved ones. For better or worse.

### **Characters:**

**THE WOMAN IN CHARGE**- she's got a lot on her plate; pushes herself. Late 30s or early 40s

**THE UNDERSTANDING MAN** - he needs a lot of acknowledgment; could use a push. Late 40s or thereabout

**THE ALMOST SISTER** - she laughs a lot; tries her best to push boundaries. 30s or 40s or beyond

**THEIR DISTANT COUSIN** - he's full of a lot of bullshit; pushes people's buttons. Probably mid-40s

**THE WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR** - she just might have a lot up her sleeve; sometimes one push is all it takes. 30s-50s

**CHESTER** - he's a lot to get your head around; when push comes to shove, he may come through. Or not. 16

NOTE: Chester could be played by a male or female actor of any age.

**Setting:**                   **The back door**

**Time:**                      **Late afternoon into evening**

## ***Anticipating Leftovers***

*We see a woman, agitated, moving or pacing with frustration outside the back door of a house or townhouse. Perhaps she's in a carport, or maybe the door leads to a side yard or the backyard. Regardless, it's not a door onto a lovely patio, or verdant garden, or inspirational view. It's not that kind of back door. It is late afternoon, or almost evening. Alongside the door there is a large curtained window or windows, as well as an outdoor light, which isn't switched on. Yet. There is also a cooler—the kind you take to the beach, camping, or on a picnic—placed within reach of the door. Perhaps there are also trash cans in view, and maybe bicycles or gardening supplies. Miscellaneous pieces of lumber and hardware. Tools. After a bit the woman suddenly stops and looks out. Now appearing to be in charge of the situation, she speaks in a calm and surprisingly sweet voice.*

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Hey! I haven't seen much of you! What's up? Too many people?

*Pause.*

Me, too. Wanna come here?

*Short pause.*

Me neither. This wasn't supposed to be like this, you know. I just thought it would be a nice little... And then everyone and their mother just crawled out of the woodwork. I wasn't expecting half of them and they were all supposed to have been gone hours ago.

*We hear laughter from inside the house.*

But why am I surprised? "Of course we can come here, of course I'll handle it, of course that's what should happen. We're all family, aren't we?" Right. Well. You know what? Maybe I'll join you. Jump up there with you and hope no one even notices *I'm* gone? What do you say?

*Pause.*

I didn't think so.

*We hear a man's voice; he has a very understanding tone.*

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

*(offstage)* Honey?

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WOMAN IN CHARGE:

*(continuing to her unseen confidant)* I mean, it's not like I have a choice, is it? In any of this. Really.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

*(offstage)* Honey?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

You just do what you do, right? If you can, you do it. Because it's painfully obvious that not everyone can. A whole lot of people just... Can't. Do.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

*(coming closer)* Honey, are you out there?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Shit.

*As the man opens the door, we hear the noise of a crowd inside.*

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Hey! *(seeing that she's alone)* Who were you...?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

*(indicating, perhaps with a nod of her head)* Chess.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

*(to Chester)* Ah! Hello there! Haven't seen you all day!

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Do you blame him?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

No, not... Are you okay?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

What do you mean?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

I mean... Are you okay?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

What do you mean, okay?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Just... Okay, okay. Are you okay?

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WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Yeah. Fine.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Really?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Yes. Really.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Are you mad at me?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

What? No.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

You seem like you're mad at me. Did I do something?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Please.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Well, did I?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Why do you always go there?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Go where?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Whenever something's wrong you always assume that you had something to do with it, that it's all about you.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

So something *is* wrong. I thought you said you were fine.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Under the circumstances! Fine under the circumstances!

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

I'm sorry! I just came out to see whether you were okay! People were worried about you!

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WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Who was worried?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

They... People. People were asking about you.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

They want more bean dip?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

No, the dip's fine.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Glad to hear that.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Any more cheese, though?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

In the bottom drawer.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Okay. *(turning away, then turning back)* Which—?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

*(interrupting)* In the fridge. The bottom drawer of the—

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

*(interrupting)* I know, but there's more than one bottom drawer.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

The one with the cheese in it. Where the cheese always is.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

You're not okay. What's wrong?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

What's wrong? I just buried my stepfather, that's what's wrong!

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Honey... *(moving toward her)* Sweetie, come here.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

No. I'm fine.

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UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Stop it; you're allowed to be un-fine.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

I know that.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Listen, sweetheart, this is bound to be difficult.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

What is?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Death?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

It was my stepfather. And my mom divorced him ages ago.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Sure. But even if you hated him...

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Who said I hated him?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

I said *if*.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

You think I'm *glad* he's dead?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Honey!

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

**What?!**

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

*(gesturing or looking back at the door and moving to her)* Shhhhhhh!

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

*(moving away from him, toward the audience)* Ohhhhhh! Chess! **Chester!!**

*Short pause.*

*(to the man)* He's gone.

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UNDERSTANDING MAN:

He'll be back.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

You scared him away.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

He hasn't gone far. *(to the unseen Chester)* Hello? Chester?

*Short pause. Then a loud thud.*

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

See? Back in his favorite place. Nice and warm and safe. Right, boy?

*Short pause.*

*(to the woman in charge)* I'm sorry I upset you.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

It's not you.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

I know.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

And you're right. I really did hate him. But I didn't really want him dead.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

You didn't really bury him, either.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

I know.

*The understanding man moves to her and she allows him to hold her for a moment.*

Where is he, though?

*Short pause.*

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Where's who?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Who do you think?



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*Perhaps the understanding man looks to Chester for the answer.*

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

I know he was with his wife when we left. And she showed up here late. She could have dropped him off somewhere.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

*(making the connection)* Oh. Yeah, the wife. She's the one with the big... purse?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Right.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Maybe she left him in the car.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

She wouldn't have left him in the car.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Why not?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Because no one does that.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

But—

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

*(interrupting)* It's an urn, a crematory urn. Would you leave a crematory urn in the car?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

If I had to.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

If you were forced to, or just couldn't be bothered to find anywhere else? What are you saying?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

What I'm saying is you don't know her. How do you know what her... What she's inclined to do with her dead husband's ashes.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

It's etiquette, is all. Funereal etiquette.

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UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Okay.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

You don't believe me?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

I believe you! I just don't know why it matters so much to you.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

It doesn't!

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Then tell me again, why are we doing this? Especially now?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Doing what?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

*(gesturing back at the door and windows, as we hear sounds from inside)* This!  
All this!

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

No one else was going to.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

So?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

So it needed to be done! Why is that so hard to understand?!

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Why don't I put out more cheese.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

If there's not any in the drawer, check the cooler in the laundry room.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

What cooler in the laundry room?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

The extra cooler I bought and put in the laundry room. In case we filled the fridge.

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UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Why did—? Okay.

*He turns to go back through the door, then turns again to the woman in charge.*

I love you.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

I love you.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

*(gesturing toward the cooler by the door)* Hand me a beer?

*She moves to the cooler and cracks open a beer, then hesitates a moment before she hands it to him.*

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Promise me you would never leave me in the car. After I'm dead, I mean.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

I promise.

*He takes the beer and gives her a kiss.*

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Thanks.

*The door opens and a woman comes through it; when she sees them she breaks into a familiar, almost sisterly grin.*

ALMOST SISTER:

Hah! Here you two are.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

You found us.

ALMOST SISTER:

And here's where you're hiding the beer!

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

No one's—

ALMOST SISTER:

*(interrupting)* I know that.

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UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Actually, I am. More for me.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

*(to her almost sister)* Is the wife still in there?

ALMOST SISTER:

The wife?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

*His* wife.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

*(moving to get a beer for the almost sister)* Want one?

ALMOST SISTER:

Right. *(to the understanding man)* Yeah.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

She is? Still there?

ALMOST SISTER:

Definitely.

*She takes a beer from the understanding man.*

Thanks.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Did you talk to her?

ALMOST SISTER:

No more than necessary. But you can't really avoid her, can you?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

I can try.

ALMOST SISTER:

*(to the understanding man)* Wait a minute. Who bought this beer? This is Republican beer.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

It's what?

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ALMOST SISTER:

Republican beer. This is like, beer for bigots. I can't drink this beer.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

It's the kind I always buy.

ALMOST SISTER:

Oh, man. Next thing you know evangelicals will be moving in.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Do you have any idea where she put him?

ALMOST SISTER:

Who put who? *(to the understanding man)* What is she talking about?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

The urn. Where did she put the urn.

ALMOST SISTER:

Oh, I have no idea. *(to the understanding man)* You're telling me you didn't know that this is one of the foulest, most racist, homophobic, neo-Christo-facist companies in the country?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

"What would Jesus brew?" That's my only concern.

ALMOST SISTER:

You are one scary white man.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

I'm going inside. Don't fight over any burning crosses.

ALMOST SISTER:

You're out of cheese.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

I know.

*She leaves.*

ALMOST SISTER:

What? She has like a inner-cheese meter, or something? I remember my mom used to know we were running out of milk the night before we did. Every time.

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UNDERSTANDING MAN:

We never really drank milk. Or sometimes, but I was basically raised on diet sodas.

ALMOST SISTER:

That certainly explains a lot.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

I mean, not for cereal or anything.

ALMOST SISTER:

Uh huh. You can't go back now. The ugly truth is out, baby.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

If that's as ugly as it got...

ALMOST SISTER:

And yet here you are, a living testament to the survival of beauty.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

My Grandma Rose put sugar in hers. Diet soda, I mean. She said she liked the taste but needed the sugar because she was diabetic.

ALMOST SISTER:

Oh, man, how much do I love that?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

That's Grandma Rose for you. Hey! Did I ever tell you about our shotgun Christmas?

*We hear a loud noise—something falling or being knocked over. The almost sister is almost frightened; the understanding man takes no notice.*

ALMOST SISTER:

What the...?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

One year she wouldn't come visit, so my dad got pissed off, piled us all into the car on Christmas eve with a loaded gun to our heads.

ALMOST SISTER:

*(seeing Chester is the cause of the noise)* Look who's here!

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

And we almost made it out of state except my mom opened the door and jumped out–fell into the street right in front of a cop car.

*Another crash.*

ALMOST SISTER:

*(to Chester)* Jeez, what's all the fuss about, mister?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

So guess where we spent that Christmas? With good old dad in the slammer.

ALMOST SISTER:

*(to the understanding man)* No. I don't believe you.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Well, we visited him.

ALMOST SISTER:

That doesn't count. But I'm very glad I didn't marry into your side of the family.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Yes, you are.

ALMOST SISTER:

So what's up with your boy?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Chester? You got me; maybe he knows we're out of cheese.

ALMOST SISTER:

Probably 'cause he ate it all.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

He has an appetite.

ALMOST SISTER:

He's huge.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Big boned.

*More noises of scuffling, or movement–things being bumped into.*

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ALMOST SISTER:

*(to Chester)* Hang on, honey; where you goin'? *(to the understanding man)* I hurt his feelings, didn't I? I'm better with dogs.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

A house full of people, he keeps his distance anyway.

ALMOST SISTER:

I don't blame him.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

No. But actually, it's not a bad... whatever it's called.

ALMOST SISTER:

No. It's actually not.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

And a good crowd for a last-minute...

ALMOST SISTER:

Whatever. It really is. I don't know how she does it, throws stuff together like this. When I die the party's here.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

I'll let her know.

ALMOST SISTER:

We keep talking about having people over to our house, but my wife didn't get the charming hostess gene.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

She is a sister of another color.

ALMOST SISTER:

And her talents lie elsewhere.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

So I've heard.

ALMOST SISTER:

Are you jealous?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

You're just lucky she didn't meet me first.



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ALMOST SISTER:

Dream on, buster. You *are* aware your wife has a huge crush on me?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Who doesn't?

ALMOST SISTER:

Good question!

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Hey. You guys are close—she talks to you, right?

ALMOST SISTER:

Wait. Yours or mine?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Mine. She says you're like another sister.

ALMOST SISTER:

One she can talk to?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Yeah. Does she seem okay?

ALMOST SISTER:

Why wouldn't she be?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Her dead stepfather.

ALMOST SISTER:

Oh. That. Right, I thought you meant... How are *you* doing? The job hunt and everything.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

What's to hunt? There are no jobs.

ALMOST SISTER:

Ugh. So are you guys doing all right?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

I guess. I mean we're broke. It's not like I have any real prospects but I'm doing what I have to do to get those unemployment checks.

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ALMOST SISTER:

You earned 'em.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

It's all pretty depressing.

ALMOST SISTER:

I'll bet. Hang in there; something'll happen and until then, you're okay. You're still getting up every morning in your gracious home, having breakfast with your beautiful wife—

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

*(interrupting)* And we're still throwing this... This. So I guess we are.

ALMOST SISTER:

And he doesn't even deserve it. He was such an asshole.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

You knew him?

ALMOST SISTER:

Not exactly. He left when the girls were little, but I met him, didn't you?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

I think once. To be honest he didn't make much of an impression.

ALMOST SISTER:

You haven't heard the stories?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

She doesn't say all that much.

ALMOST SISTER:

Since when?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

I mean about the past, her past. She just kind of generally said that he was...

ALMOST SISTER:

He was, generally. A self-serving con man.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Okay. So do you understand why she's, we're, doing this? Especially now. Doesn't he have some *real* family?

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ALMOST SISTER:

You mean, like family that could stand him? I think his wife's about it. She's a trip, huh? Apparently worshiped him.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Who are all those people, then?

ALMOST SISTER:

Distant relatives?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Whose?

ALMOST SISTERS:

Theirs, so ours. I guess. Not everyone knew what a user he was.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

But they knew *him*.

ALMOST SISTER:

I don't think so, they're probably just here because that's what they do. The death rattle of passed hors d'oeuvres; they can't resist. Maybe there's *some* of his friends?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

And a couple of ours.

ALMOST SISTER:

Skills among the mourners? That's impressive.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

That's the goal.

*Short pause.*

ALMOST SISTER:

I'm sorry if I put you in a bad mood. *We're* not dead; let's party!

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

It's okay—I'm just having a hard time. And sorry about the beer.

ALMOST SISTER:

It's okay. I mean it's not, but you didn't know.

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UNDERSTANDING MAN:

It's the kind my dad always bought.

ALMOST SISTER:

Let evolution happen. That's all I have to say.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

I'm trying.

ALMOST SISTER:

So she tells me. Got any imports? None in the fridge.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

There's another cooler in the laundry room. I'll check; she may have...

ALMOST SISTER:

She very well may have!

*He goes into the house. There is a sound of another thud.*

Hello, you! (*holding out her hand*) You willing to forgive me my insensitivity? That's just me. I'm bad person. But I do think you're gorgeous. You know that, right? 'Cause I don't want you going all body-issues and blaming me in therapy. Not that you won't anyway and I completely give you permission; we all need to blame someone, right? (*trying to coax him to come to her.*) Yeah? No? Hey! Want some beer? Can your bad-ass auntie influence you while mom and dad aren't around? Leave my mark on the next generation? (*apparently not*) Fine. Can't say I didn't try.

*She starts to drink the beer, almost unconsciously. A neighborly woman comes out of the house.*

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

Oh!

ALMOST SISTER:

Hi.

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

I didn't know anyone was out here, I was taking a short cut.

ALMOST SISTER:

Yeah?

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WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:  
I live next door.

ALMOST SISTER:  
Right.

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:  
We haven't...

ALMOST SISTER:  
Not unless I was really drunk.

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:  
Are you family? I'm sorry for your loss.

ALMOST SISTER:  
Thanks. Yeah. Sort of. I'm the sister-in-law.

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:  
Oh.

ALMOST SISTER:  
Hers, not the dead guy's.

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:  
Oh. I didn't know she had a brother.

ALMOST SISTER:  
She doesn't.

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:  
So the deceased was...?

ALMOST SISTER:  
My wife's stepfather. Or, ex-stepfather.

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:  
Oh....

ALMOST SISTER:  
One-time stepfather? First stepfather? There were definitely more after him.

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:  
*(connecting the gender dots)* Oh!

ALMOST SISTER:

But he was the significant stepfather. And a significant asshole. Anyone in there telling stories?

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

What sort of—?

ALMOST SISTER:

*(interrupting)* Wait a minute, I think we have met! Were you at the housewarming?

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

No, I only moved in—

ALMOST SISTER:

*(interrupting)* You look very familiar.

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

I have that sort of face.

ALMOST SISTER:

A Christmas party?

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

No, but I hear they have wonderful holiday gatherings!

ALMOST SISTER:

We always stay late and end up making out in the hallway.

*Short pause.*

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

I was just going to fetch something. From the oven. I'll be right back.

ALMOST SISTER:

I'll be right here! Nice to talk to you!

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

Likewise!

*She leaves in a hurry.*

ALMOST SISTER:

I'll bet.

*The woman in charge comes through the door, carrying a large crematory urn.*

ALMOST SISTER:

So you just missed your neighbor, but don't worry: she'll be right back with... I'd lay money on a covered dish of some sort. With plastic cheese and Fritos, I'm hoping, but probably tuna casserole.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

What?

ALMOST SISTER:

I said your neighbor passed by and said she was— What's wrong?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Guess where I found him.

ALMOST SISTER:

Found who?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

*(indicating urn) Him!*

*Short pause.*

ALMOST SISTER:

Aha! That's...

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Yeah!

ALMOST SISTER:

I have no idea.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Smack dab in the middle of the table, that's where!

ALMOST SISTER:

Yeah?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

On the table, surrounded by food. And bottles of wine!

ALMOST SISTER:

Maybe that's why she put him there. Like an Egyptian afterlife deal.

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WOMAN IN CHARGE:

You're not serious, are you?

ALMOST SISTER:

Kind of. So where should he go, on the mantel?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

We don't have a mantel. But she should have asked me. I would have found a place for him. A little... something.

ALMOST SISTER:

Shrine?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Or something. Like a little table.

ALMOST SISTER:

A dead asshole shrine. On a TV tray.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

You know what I mean.

ALMOST SISTER:

Not really.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

You just don't put someone down in the middle of a buffet like that! That's insane!

ALMOST SISTER:

Maybe she's mad with grief.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

She is clueless, is what. She doesn't even know how to behave when her husband's dead!

ALMOST SISTER:

I'm not defending her, but who really does?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

You are defending her.

ALMOST SISTER:

I'm not—



WOMAN IN CHARGE:

*(interrupting)* You are. But you're right. I should have expected it; had something set up ahead of time. She was a complete basket case at the funeral home.

ALMOST SISTER:

Wait. You went with her to the funeral home?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Who else was going to?

ALMOST SISTER:

That is so not your job!

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

I know! But...

*Short pause.*

ALMOST SISTER:

What?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

How's my sister doing?

ALMOST SISTER:

Fine; she's sorry she couldn't be here.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Really.

ALMOST SISTER:

Oh, yeah! She'd be having the time of her life, giving the wife a run for her money—bawling her guts out.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Leave no emotion unturned.

ALMOST SISTER:

She could barely keep it together on the phone when I talked to her earlier today. A fantastic performance. And I think she hated him worse than you did, even though she pretended not to.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

I didn't hate him...

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ALMOST SISTER:

You didn't?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Okay. I did.

ALMOST SISTER:

Well, anyway. I'll tell her she missed a great... what *is* this, anyway?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

What is this?

ALMOST SISTER:

Yeah. *This*. It's not a wake, really. That would imply some sort of happy memories, wouldn't it?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Maybe.

ALMOST SISTER:

And it's not a service. Or a memorial. Now there's a scary thought.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

A gathering. Isn't what that happens after funerals? People gather?

ALMOST SISTER:

But there wasn't any funeral.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

No. Oh god. Should I do something... memorial-ish?

ALMOST SISTER:

Give me a fucking break. Listen, I'm sorry if I got you all angsty.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

I got flowers; should someone read a poem or sing something? I thought about putting a big photo somewhere, but just didn't want to stare at it. Do you think I should have? Blown up a photo?

ALMOST SISTER:

Now there's an idea. Explosives: the perfect touch.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Seriously.

***Anticipating Leftovers***

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ALMOST SISTER:

Seriously? I think you should put down those ashes.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

*(looking for a proper place amongst the cooler and trash cans)* Where?

ALMOST SISTER:

Give them to me.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

And they're called "cremains." Officially.

ALMOST SISTER:

Officially hand 'em over. Now.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

What are you going to do with them?

ALMOST SISTER:

What do you care?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Because I'm—!

ALMOST SISTER:

*(interrupting)* Give 'em me!

*She does.*

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Why *do* I care?

ALMOST SISTER:

Because you're... you.

*The well-meaning neighbor appears, holding a casserole dish.*

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

Oh, hello there! Thought I could sneak in the back...

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Hi! How sweet of you. Thanks so much for coming...

***Anticipating Leftovers***

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WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

I was actually here before, but I thought that I should...

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Yes, and you really shouldn't...

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

Well, I wanted to.

ALMOST SISTER:

Ooooooo. Is that... tuna casserole I smell?

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

Yes, as a matter of fact!

ALMOST SISTER:

Has Chester gotten wind of this? *(to Chester)* Hey, boy...!

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

I know it's a bit predictable. But people like it, and it's my experience that a little sensorial certainty never hurt anyone.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

That... was very thoughtful of you.

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

The least I could do. I'm so sorry for your loss.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Oh. Thank you.

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

I'll go put this in on the table, shall I?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

If you... Sure.

ALMOST SISTER:

I'll go with you.

*The well-meaning neighbor admires the container the almost sister is holding.*

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

Oh, let me guess: peanut brittle?

***Anticipating Leftovers***

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ALMOST SISTER:

Nothing that predictable.

*The understanding man comes back out and holds the door for them as they go inside.*

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Ladies...

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

Why, thank you, sir!

ALMOST SISTER:

*(to the understanding man)* Hurry back! Tuna casserole!

*They are gone.*

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Argh. Why do people do that?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Do what?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Automatically bring food when someone dies.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

It's just something to do, I guess. I remember when my dad's father died, it was crazy. It seemed like the whole house was bursting with food. Everywhere you looked, there was—

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

*(interrupting)* I know.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

What?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

I know. I've heard that story.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Oh.

*Short pause.*

***Anticipating Leftovers***

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UNDERSTANDING MAN:

And did I tell you the part about—

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

*(interrupting)* Finding egg salad in the closet months later, yes.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Oh.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

And I know people bring food. That's what I said. People bring food. I just don't know why. I mean, I do know why. When a family member dies, it's to help out. To make things easier, so no one has to worry about cooking. So no one forgets to eat. But that's when a family is in mourning. The whole family gathers and mourns. Grieves and eats. But this is obviously not that, there's no need for that, this is more a... acknowledging. Or denying. Denial with snacks. That's what I had in mind.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

No matter who it is, death is stressful.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Death *is* stressful, but so is having to return a million bowls and dishes after you have to wash them all and try to figure out who they all belong to! And then you have to write thank you notes. For bad food you didn't even want. And deal with all of the crappy leftovers. Shit, I should make a list.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

It might not be bad; it smelled good.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

If you eat that sort of thing. But it messes up my whole... Now I have to put out forks.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Why?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

A casserole isn't finger food, honey. I was keeping everything to finger food.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

So put out forks. Or I'll do it. Do we have any plastic forks?

***Anticipating Leftovers***

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WOMAN IN CHARGE:  
Plastic cutlery?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:  
No?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:  
I have a bunch of extra forks in the back, in the little silver chest.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:  
What little silver chest?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:  
The one in the back. With the extra cutlery in it.

*Short pause.*

I'll do it.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:  
I love you.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:  
I love you.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:  
And we need more dip.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:  
Clam dip or bean dip?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:  
I don't know. Someone just asked me whether we had any more dip. Do we?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:  
I'm sure we... Wait a minute. Did I even remember to make the clam dip? My god! I don't think I did! I think I bought the stuff and forgot to make it! I have cream cheese and clams and everything and it's all just sitting there, in the fridge in a bowl waiting to be mixed. How could I forget about that?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:  
Honey! Anyone could, it's—!

***Anticipating Leftovers***

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WOMAN IN CHARGE:

*(interrupting)* You don't understand! I'm not... Ahhhhh!

*She looks around as if for something to break or throw.*

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Honey, sweetie... Come here, sweetheart. Sit down, take it easy...

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Where? There's no place to sit!

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Here, sit here.

*He sets her on the cooler.*

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

And what if someone wants a beer?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Hang on, I'll be right back.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Wait. *(getting up and opening the cooler)* Here.

*She hands him a beer.*

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

*(starting back inside)* Thanks. I love you.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

I...

*The understanding man pauses, waiting for her to finish. When she doesn't, he goes inside. She fights back tears.*

Ohhhhhh. Oh, god. What's wrong with me? Look at me, what a dope. I've got no reason to be like this!

*Whether or not she believes herself, a man comes out of the house; he bears a somewhat distant resemblance to the woman in charge.*

DISTANT COUSIN:

So here you are. Are you okay?



***Anticipating Leftovers***

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WOMAN IN CHARGE:

*(putting on her game face)* Definitely! Would you like a beer?

*She hands him one.*

DISTANT COUSIN:

Thanks. Oh, man. This has got to be so hard. I know how close you were to your stepfather and everything. He was such a great guy.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

My stepfather.

DISTANT COUSIN:

I always thought so.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

You did?

DISTANT COUSIN:

So great. Every time our families would get together I secretly wished my parents would get divorced so I could have a stepfather, too.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Really.

DISTANT COUSIN:

And he was the best of the lot. You know, I really cherished the times we spent with you, growing up. You and your sister. As an only child, I always felt you were like my sisters. Did you know that?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

No. No I didn't.

DISTANT COUSIN:

Well, I did. You two were so beautiful as children.

*Short pause.*

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Thank you.

DISTANT COUSIN:

Do you know what my favorite time with you all was? My very favorite of all the days we spent together, the trips we took, the meals we shared?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

No...

DISTANT COUSIN:

The vacation in Mexico. Camping on the beach in Mexico. Wasn't that the greatest?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Was it?

DISTANT COUSIN:

Of course that was before your stepfather. But your parents had already split up, so your mom was alone. A single woman. A gorgeous single woman, as I remember. That was before people really got divorced—or people we knew—so she had a sort of... free spirit about her. Very appealing. And to young boys, especially so.

*Pause.*

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

I—

DISTANT COUSIN:

*(interrupting)* And of course there were her two beautiful daughters. I was older than you were, but there was no denying that you radiated a kind of, what do you call it, nubile innocence. It was very sexual, really.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Okay. I need to make dip. You got everything you need out here?

DISTANT COUSIN:

Listen, thank you so much for doing this. Everyone is having such a great time, you know. I mean, considering the sad, sad occasion. What a tragedy. He was too young. Too damn young.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

He was nearly 70.

DISTANT COUSIN:

That may sound like a lot of years to you—and I still think of you as 13, you know—but as you get older, 70—even 80!—is going to sound too damn young. Just you wait.

***Anticipating Leftovers***

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WOMAN IN CHARGE:

You're, what? A couple years older than I am?

DISTANT COUSIN:

Nooooo... is that all?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Isn't it?

DISTANT COUSIN:

Well, I have to tell you, you've aged very well. Do you even have any wrinkles? I mean, a few, but for someone who's on the other side of 40...

*The understanding man comes back through the door, carrying a large armchair.*

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Here.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

What's that?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

It's a chair.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

I know it's a—

DISTANT COUSIN:

*(interrupting)* That chair! Is that Aunt Margaret's chair? That chair was in her living room, right? I remember that chair from when I was a little kid. Wow. I always loved that chair.

*Short pause.*

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

*(to the woman in charge, indicating the chair)* Sit down.

*She does.*

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Thank you.

DISTANT COUSIN:

I'm right, aren't I? That's—

***Anticipating Leftovers***

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WOMAN IN CHARGE:

*(interrupting)* My chair. It's my chair. My grandmother gave it to me. When she died she gave it to me.

DISTANT COUSIN:

When she died? Like, on her deathbed?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

What?

DISTANT COUSIN:

She gave it to you as she was dying, her last wish?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Maybe. I don't know, I wasn't there.

DISTANT COUSIN:

Because that would have been a very strange last wish. I mean, it doesn't really surprise me. Aunt Margaret was a bit... Well, you know. She was your grandmother!

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Yes. She was.

DISTANT COUSIN:

Anyway, so that's *the* chair! It's a beautiful chair. I bet there's a story behind that chair.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

*(to the woman in charge)* Do you want me to go get you a drink? A glass of wine?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

*(getting up)* No, I'll get one. Thanks. I'll be right back.

*She leaves, followed by a silence which is awkward only for the understanding man.*

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

I remember my Grandpa Les always sat in this big, wing-backed sort of chair. He always sat in his chair, and I remember at the end he looked so small in it. That was very strange. Looking at my grandfather and realizing how small he'd become.

DISTANT COUSIN:

I never knew my grandparents. I'm actually a different generation than the girls, you know.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Oh. No, I didn't.

DISTANT COUSIN:

I mean, we're the same age—or nearly—but I'm a different generation. Their grandmother was my aunt.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Yeah, that sometimes happens in families.

DISTANT COUSIN:

Or not actually my aunt, but I called her my aunt. She was my parent's generation. Only older.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

I had an uncle who was younger than me. Everyone always got a kick out of that.

DISTANT COUSIN:

I bet you could kick his ass though.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Uh...

DISTANT COUSIN:

That was a joke.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Okay.

DISTANT COUSIN:

But did you get *your* ass kicked a lot? When you were a kid?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

What? No. Not really.

DISTANT COUSIN:

A little bit though? A few times?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Yeah, I guess a few times. But it's not like... I was kind of quiet as a kid.

DISTANT COUSIN:

The quiet ones were always the ones to watch out for. They were the ones who'd take it and take it and say nothing, then find you years later with a loaded shotgun.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

I...

*Short pause.*

DISTANT COUSIN:

Just kidding. To tell the truth, I used to get the shit beat out of me in school, on a regular basis! Hard to believe, I know. But my dad worked on these— I can't really go into it; suffice to say we moved around a lot. And you know when you're the new kid in school it's like you've got a target painted on you. Basically I was a moving target. Not that my parents gave that a second thought every time they pulled up stakes.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Sure. I grew up with the same kids all my life, but my mother moved right before my senior year in high school, so that was tough.

DISTANT COUSIN:

But you were already, what, almost 18?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Yes.

DISTANT COUSIN:

I'm talking about being a *kid*. I mean, by the time I was 16 I was pretty much on my own; could take care of myself. Right?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Uh, sure.

DISTANT COUSIN:

Man, I wish I had friends who really knew me, who I grew up with in a real neighborhood and everything. That's the kind of stability that really anchors you.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

I wouldn't say I had a particularly stable childhood. As a matter of fact, if I told you about—

***Anticipating Leftovers***

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DISTANT COUSIN:

*(interrupting)* I was completely in love with your wife growing up, did you know that?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

What? No...

DISTANT COUSIN:

Oh, yeah! And her sister was hot, too, but even when she was a little girl you could tell that... You know.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Uh huh.

DISTANT COUSIN:

You know what I mean, right?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Sure.

DISTANT COUSIN:

It's not as if she was interested in her *own* tits.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Y- What?

DISTANT COUSIN:

But that doesn't mean I didn't have my fantasies! I mean, especially about the two of them, together. Wow! How many nights did I lie awake thinking about that?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

*(getting him one)* Do you need another beer?

DISTANT COUSIN:

You know I'm joking with you, right?

*The well-meaning neighbor comes out of the house.*

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

Hello hello! I hate to interrupt, but... *(to the understanding man)* Your wife asked me to come and get you.

***Anticipating Leftovers***

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UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Is she okay?

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

Oh, I think so, it's just that she—

*The understanding man heads back inside with unprecedented speed.*

*(to the distant cousin)* There you have it, huh? I wish my husband was that attentive!

DISTANT COUSIN:

And that answers my first question.

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

Excuse me?

DISTANT COUSIN:

You're married. What a shame.

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

Oh, yes, I'm... Actually, I'm divorced.

DISTANT COUSIN:

Ah! I am, then, the beneficiary of his inattentiveness!

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

Oh...

DISTANT COUSIN:

Wait. Have we met?

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

No.

DISTANT COUSIN:

Right, probably not. I would have remembered.

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

Definitely not. I mean, I don't think so, anyway. I only recently moved into the neighborhood, and it's a little overwhelming, being introduced to so many new people all the time. Not that I'm complaining! Too many of others keep to themselves, but it's so wonderful—revelatory, really—the way they open up their home. An open house, that's truly what this is.



DISTANT COUSIN:

As family, I don't get invited over very much.

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

Oh! I thought... I'm sorry for your loss.

DISTANT COUSIN:

Thank you. It's a shame it takes something like this to bring us all together.

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

Isn't that the truth. Were you close?

DISTANT COUSIN:

Yes. Very.

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

I'm so sorry! He was your...?

DISTANT COUSIN:

My... I'm related through his wife, his ex-wife. I'm her cousin, sort of, so he... I don't really have the words to describe our relationship. But even though our families have been distant in recent years I always *felt* very close to him. He was a great guy.

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

That's what I hear.

DISTANT COUSIN:

Really?

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

What?

DISTANT COUSIN:

Can I tell you something?

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

Of course!

DISTANT COUSIN:

I find that death does not always bring out the best in people.

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

Really?

DISTANT COUSIN:

Most everyone in there? They didn't really know him. Some of them didn't even like him.

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

Oh, I see. Well... they always say funerals are for the living, don't they?

DISTANT COUSIN:

Do they?

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

What?

DISTANT COUSIN:

Not that this is actually a funeral.

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

No...

DISTANT COUSIN:

And who's "they," anyway? I always wanted to know that.

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

Ha ha ha. Oh my. Now there's a question for the ages!

DISTANT COUSIN:

But you don't look a day over, what? 50?

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

I—

*We hear another crash or loud noise.*

And another country heard from! *(to Chester)* Hello there, my friend!

DISTANT COUSIN:

Wow! Is that...?

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

How are you doing today, Chess? I mean, on this sad occasion. *(to the distant cousin)* They pick up things, don't they? Even if they may not fully understand what's really going on.

DISTANT COUSIN:

Or anything besides “mealtime?”

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

Ohhhh... *(to Chester)* You’re just going through a phase, aren’t you? But beauty comes in all shapes and sizes, doesn’t it? And I can’t tell you anyone I find more attractive, or I’d rather spend time with!

DISTANT COUSIN:

Is that so?

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

It certainly is! Honestly, he’s the sort who’d mostly rather be alone... *(to Chester)* But you put up with me, don’t you? *(to the distant cousin)* And we have a special bond. It’s not always you find someone with whom you can really... You know.

DISTANT COUSIN:

What? Talk?

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

Ha ha ha.

DISTANT COUSIN:

That’s a conversation I’d like to be party to.

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

My lips are sealed!

DISTANT COUSIN:

You’re over here frequently, then?

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

No! Not really. It’s just that I have a lot of time on my hands, so I walk a lot. Around the neighborhood.

DISTANT COUSIN:

Keeping an eye out.

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

Yes.

DISTANT COUSIN:

So that’s why you’re here today. I was pretty sure it wasn’t for the shit beer, ha ha ha.

***Anticipating Leftovers***

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WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

Ha ha–

*Short pause.*

I was invited.

DISTANT COUSIN:

Oh, I'm sure you were. I wasn't, but I'm here anyway. You know how that goes.

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

I–

*The understanding man and the almost sister come through the door carrying a small couch, followed by the woman in charge with a very large mixing bowl and a glass of wine.*

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Why didn't anyone...? It's already dark out.

*She goes back inside.*

ALMOST SISTER:

*(to the woman in charge)* Hey! Where do you want this?!

*The outside light turns on.*

*(to the understanding man)* Ugh, let's just put it–

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

*(interrupting as she comes back out)* Next to the chair.

*The understanding man and the almost sister follow her directions.*

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

Can I be of any–?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

*(interrupting)* Thanks, we're fine.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

*(hoping to deposit the couch)* Here?

***Anticipating Leftovers***

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WOMAN IN CHARGE:  
Don't block the cooler.

*They set the couch down.*

DISTANT COUSIN:  
*(to the woman in charge)* You could have asked me to do that.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:  
It's done.

ALMOST SISTER:  
Indeed. But can I ask you why?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:  
What?

ALMOST SISTER:  
Not that I'm complaining, but why are we—

WOMAN IN CHARGE:  
*(interrupting)* It's too— Too crowded in there. Too full of... people.

ALMOST SISTER:  
So, we're making room?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:  
Yes.

ALMOST SISTER:  
By forcing them to stand?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:  
There are plenty of places to sit. *(to the understanding man)* Grab the big chair from the office.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:  
Grab it?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:  
Bring it out here. And a lamp, too. We need more light.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:  
What kind of lamp?

***Anticipating Leftovers***

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WOMAN IN CHARGE:

A lamp that sheds light on things.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

I know, but which—

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

*(interrupting)* It doesn't matter!

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

You say that, but then I'll bring out the wrong—

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

*(interrupting)* The floor lamp from the bedroom.

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

I think I have an extra battery-powered—

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

*(interrupting)* No! Thanks.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Honey?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

What?!

*Short pause, then he moves close to her.*

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

*(under his breath, almost child-like)* Do you love me?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Yes, I love you.

*Short pause.*

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

I love you.

*He goes back inside. Still holding her wine glass, the woman in charge looks for a spot to put the bowl down.*

DISTANT COUSIN:

*(holding a beer bottle, to the woman in charge)* Well! I see you've got yourself a glass of wine there. Saving the good stuff for yourself, huh? It's inside?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

On the table.

DISTANT COUSIN:

Thanks so much. You look lovely, by the way. I can't resist a woman who knows her way around a Viognier.

*He heads for the door, followed by the well-meaning neighbor.*

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

I'll just...

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Please. Do.

*They are gone.*

ALMOST SISTER:

Who the fuck is that guy?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

He's a sort of... distant cousin.

ALMOST SISTER:

I guess I can see the resemblance.

*The woman in charge sits in the armchair and places the bowl on her lap; she's finally able to drink from her glass.*

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

This is going to sound terrible...

ALMOST SISTER

Not if I say it first.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

No. I mean yes. But what I meant was: I can't remember exactly...

ALMOST SISTER:

Exactly where to prune the family tree?

***Anticipating Leftovers***

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WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Exactly how we're related.

ALMOST SISTER:

So you *don't* know who he is.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

No, I know him. I mean, I remember him.

ALMOST SISTER:

Better he stayed suppressed.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Jesus, I don't— Can I say this? It's those people in there. All those people. More and more of them keep showing up with food and hugs and gratitude and cherished memories they want to share with me...

ALMOST SISTER:

Isn't that the whole idea?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Except the plan was that I was just going to have a few people over to make everyone happy then say goodbye. Quick and easy, in and out before it got dark. And then it turned into this... Event. Where I can't even begin to connect whose parents are whose siblings and who's married to whose kids and who's dead and who's dying. I mean, I used to have a handle on all this shit, didn't I?

ALMOST SISTER:

I hate to say this, but you are the keeper of the family shit.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Yeah. Well. There you have it.

ALMOST SISTER:

All right. Will you tell me what is going on *here*, with you and the whole outdoor living space. Is everything okay?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

*(looking for someplace to set her wine glass)* No.

ALMOST SISTER:

Out with it, sister.



***Anticipating Leftovers***

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WOMAN IN CHARGE:

We need a coffee table.

ALMOST SISTER:

A coffee table.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Yes.

ALMOST SISTER:

Okay then, I'm going to go get the other cooler! We'll use that.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

No! We have—

ALMOST SISTER:

*(interrupting)* Don't argue—it's got real beer in it.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

I...

*The almost sister heads back into the house just as the understanding man comes out with large office chair and a floor lamp.*

ALMOST SISTER:

*(to the understanding man)* Good look! Flex those muscles, baby.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Ha ha. Did I ever tell you about...?

*She's gone. He sets down the chair and holds out the lamp for approval.*

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Yeah?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Fine. *(getting up, once again juggling the bowl and wine)* I'm going to get the coffee table.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

*(contemplating the lamp)* Should I plug it in?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

It'll work better that way.

***Anticipating Leftovers***

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*Short pause.*

UNDERSTANDING MAN:  
*(plugging it in)* Okay...

WOMAN IN CHARGE:  
Over here? Please?

*Gesturing for him to place it next to the armchair, she moves the office chair to its proper place. The almost sister, holding a beer, wheels out another cooler.*

ALMOST SISTER:  
Yay. Got the good stuff. Now we're set.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:  
*(admiring his composition)* Look! A reading lamp! My Great Aunt Sylvia always had to have a reading lamp when I was growing up. I never really put it together that she was basically blind. I just thought she liked how she looked sitting next to it.

ALMOST SISTER:  
Maybe she did. Or thought she did, being blind and all.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:  
Maybe. But I was a really stupid kid, now that I think about it.

*The almost sister proudly places the cooler in front of the couch.*

ALMOST SISTER:  
*(to the woman in charge)* Right?

*The woman in charge is not pleased. She sits and mixes the contents of the bowl, eyeing the suspect arrangement.*

UNDERSTANDING MAN:  
So! Did I ever tell you about the time I worked as a moving man? The summer when I was 24. I was in the greatest shape of my life then. Muscles out to here.

ALMOST SISTER:  
Enough. You're driving me wild.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

I'll bet. Now that was a fun summer. I worked with a bunch of losers, though. My cousin Leonard got me the job after I got fired from selling pens. Crazy time. It was like this boiler room; probably totally illegal. Or it would be now.

ALMOST SISTER:

A boiler room for moving men?

*She hands him a beer from the new cooler.*

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Thanks. No, a sales boiler room. Pens, and pencils; keychains. Stuff for small businesses. With names and logos on it.

ALMOST SISTER:

Big money in that, I'll bet.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

It's all about volume. And the pitch. You started out by offering people a free prize—

ALMOST SISTER:

*(interrupting)* You got me!

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Good! Because with every order of pens you're guaranteed one of three fabulous prizes: A microwave oven—which was a big deal back then, a cruise to the Bahamas—

ALMOST SISTER:

*(interrupting)* That's mine, thank you very much.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

You're very welcome, but what you get is a diamond pendant. Everyone did. A worthless little chip of diamond dust on a string.

ALMOST SISTER:

Everyone? And no one ever complained?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Wait. Yeah. Someone must have gotten that cruise.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Why?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Why what?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Why would you think that? They were complete scam artists. They sold people overpriced pens and a worthless diamond chip on dental floss. You really think they gave away an actual cruise?

ALMOST SISTER:

You've heard this story before, I take it.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

They were good pens. I mean, maybe a *little* overpriced...

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

It was a scam, honey.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

No. When I sold insurance. *That* was a scam.

ALMOST SISTER:

When did you sell insurance?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Don't ask.

*She sets the bowl down on her chair and moves to the door.*

*(to the understanding man)* There's a small side table in the back room. Like a cabinet. We can use that next to the office chair.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Okay.

*She heads inside, then stops when she notices he's not following her.*

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Honey?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

I love you.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

I know. The table?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Oh! I thought you were... You're going inside, right?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

To get the mayonnaise. I have a house full of people and a dead stepfather! So I'm going to the 'fridge to get the mayonnaise. Help me out here!

*She goes inside.*

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Mayonnaise?

ALMOST SISTER:

I have no idea.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

I'll be right back.

ALMOST SISTER:

I'll go with. You'll be safer that way.

*They leave, and through the partially open door it's clear that the noise level inside has noticeably increased. Perhaps we hear music starting up, like from a live band. After a moment, we hear a crash or other sudden sound outside. Then a very large, lumbering teenage boy, rather a-sexual and dressed in black, walks onstage.*

*He walks around the furniture, rubbing up against it with his oversized body, nearly knocking over the floor lamp. With his foot he nudges up the lid of the new cooler and looks inside for a long moment, then lets the lid slam back down.*

*He checks out all of the other unexpected furnishings, then spots—or smells—the contents of the bowl. He goes toward it. He tentatively puts a couple of fingers inside the bowl, and slowly brings them first to his nose, then his mouth.*

*He licks the substance off of his fingers, then, approvingly, aims headfirst into the bowl except that he is stopped by the well-meaning neighbor coming back outside.*

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

Chester! Ooooooh, no no no no I bet you're not supposed to be doing that! I'm going to take that away from you before you get into too much more trouble.

*She does, setting it down on the cooler/coffee table.*

Clam dip? (*dipping her finger in and tasting it*) Mmmmm.

*She again blocks him from diving into the bowl.*

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

Nooooooooo. I'm sorry, but you'll thank me later! And look! Guess what I have in my pocket?

*She takes out a bag of snacks, and shakes it. Chester moves to her.*

You know what these are, don't you?

*He reaches for the snacks, which she hands over.*

I suppose you do!

*He enthusiastically eats as she pulls out a notebook and pencil.*

So! There are certainly a lot of new people around today, aren't there? It's very exciting! I haven't seen so many of people here before—are they mostly family, like the... gentleman I was talking to earlier? I mean, not exactly like him, but, well, you know...

*She looks expectantly at Chester, who gives her a non-committal shrug.*

*(taking notes)* Predominantly family, with some friends and acquaintances. As far as you're aware.

*She looks at him for validation; he eats.*

It's hard to remember details, sometimes, I realize that. But it's the details that make all the difference, all the difference in the world when you do the kind of work we do. Especially on a day like this, which, well, I don't want to get your hopes up, but... Thank you so much for being willing to put yourself out for what's right, Chester. You're a very good boy.

*Chester finishes the bag and looks expectantly at the well-meaning neighbor.*

I'll tell you what: why don't you go take a look down the block and see if there's anyone you think we should be worried about. I mean, people we might not be able to count on when we need to. *If* we need to. And if you have something for me when you come back, I just might have a little extra something for you, too!

*Chester shuffles off, and the well-meaning neighbor picks up the empty snack bag just as the door opens. We hear the crowd inside and see the woman in charge, coming through the door with a coffee table and a jar of mayonnaise. She appears to be having a harder time keeping it all together.*

***Anticipating Leftovers***

53

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Oh, hello...

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

*(hurriedly pocketing the empty bag and her notebook)* Hello!

*The woman in charge moves to set down the coffee table.*

*(moving the cooler out of the way)* Let me help you.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Thanks. It's just you? I thought I heard—

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

*(interrupting)* Chester. He was here. We we're talking.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

You were?

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

Oh, yes. About anything and everything. What a bright boy he is.

*The woman in charge adjusts the table to its proper position.*

He's gone now.

*The woman in charge notices the large bowl has moved.*

I hope you don't mind: clam dip is my weakness and I just had to steal a little taste. I hope you don't think I'm a terrible neighbor.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

It's not finished.

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

It's awful, I know...

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

The dip.

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

It— Wait. I hope you didn't think I meant... *I am awful. My behavior.* That dip is delicious!

***Anticipating Leftovers***

54

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

It's missing mayonnaise.

*She adds some.*

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

I wouldn't have known. Not in a million years. It tasted absolutely complete to me!

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

*Now it's complete.*

*She hands the bowl to the well-meaning neighbor, and moves the cooler out of the way.*

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

*(taking another small taste with her finger)* Mmmmmmm! Why, yes! That adds just a little, what, tang, to it? A lemony sort of zip. Is this a family recipe?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

A family... I don't know. I don't really remember.

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

I ask because I know that things like family recipes, old traditional stand-bys that we grew up with, can help at times like this.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Times like what?

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

Times of loss! We need to reach out and touch what feels most comfortable, makes us feel at home and reminds us of our past, don't you think? Long days at the beach eating nothing but clam dip and potato chips, clam dip in Grandma's special bowl when mother was gone on a sudden, unexpected holiday, or even trying to make clam dip without the recipe and not being able to figure out what it was that... Why, it's missing mayonnaise!

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Okay. Sure.



WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

I'm going to tell you a little secret, something I've never told anyone. Do you know what my favorite thing was as a child? My favorite possession? It was an old autograph book. My great aunt Mae's, who died before I was born. It was entrusted to me, this fragile piece of family history, and in it were page after faded page of notes and verses, studied signatures after dear little quips... How I loved reading them—the names, the old-fashioned sayings, and what was written between the lines! I learned every person in that little book by heart, so that even if they were long gone they'd still be here (*putting her hand on her heart*). And to this day they're always with me. It's like I'm wearing them, like they're a thick, heavy, turtleneck sweater. Every minute keeping me company... And on course.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

(*her hand at her throat*) I... can't breathe.

*We hear a burst of noise from inside; the gathering appears to be growing very raucous. We may see disconcerting moving shadows through the window.*

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR

Goodness! What a lively crowd!

*Forcing herself to breathe deeply—almost a zen-like exercise—the woman in charge searches for her wine glass*

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Yeah...

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

Oh dear, I'm so sorry, that was a poor choice of words, wasn't it? I mean, after a death and all. A boisterous crowd? Enthusiastic? Not about your stepfather's passing, of course...

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

(*between breaths and sips of wine*) Ex. Stepfather.

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

But once a family member, always a family member! Especially someone so beloved. You know, I was talking to his widow and she was telling me how much your whole extended family meant to him.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Huh.

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

That's why it meant so much to her that you were able to host this... today. She says it's just what he would have wanted.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Uh huh.

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

But naturally you knew that. And made it happen! Provided a space for condolences and celebration, reunion and ritual. How extraordinary. The dead are entirely at our mercy, aren't they?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

*(finally breathing freely, setting down her wine glass)* Hah! Not the other way around?

WELL MEANING NEIGHBOR:

Oh, don't you worry, his wife's got some wonderful thoughts she'll share with you, about preparing for the after life. What a fascinating woman. Where was it they met?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

I have no idea.

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

Then I'm sure you'll have fun finding out! Especially if she ends up staying with you for awhile.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

What?

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

Only if she has nowhere else to go. The life insurance might not let her keep the house, and they built it themselves so the re-sale value might be a little dicey, especially in this market.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Hang on, I don't even know her that well.

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

She certainly knows you!

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

We've barely met.

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

And yet here you are, moving past your own sorrow to put yourself out for her!  
Finding a way to cross that divide and make her the center of your inner circle  
during her time of need, for as long as she needs!

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

That's not—

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

*(interrupting)* Not that it surprises me. However, I consider it a validation. I was  
right about you. Right all along.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

No, I—

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

*(interrupting)* Ohhhhh, you can't fool me. You're an old soul with broad shoulders  
and you've got so much more than a clam dip recipe to share with the world!

*We hear the sounds of a boisterous crowd as the distant cousin comes through the  
door, carrying a glass of wine along with a bottle.*

DISTANT COUSIN:

Hey, ladies! What a fantastic... This is just fantastic, coz. I'm so sorry your  
sister couldn't be here.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Right.

DISTANT COUSIN:

Well, regardless—I'm having just the best time. Seeing everyone, catching up.  
It's really been too long.

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

Speaking of catching up, I'm going to let you two have some alone time. Your  
cousin was saying how precious his recollections of you are, the two of you  
together. Growing up on two very different paths, yet even as children, grabbing  
'hold of those times when you were together and able to make those... important  
discoveries behind closed doors.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Excuse me?

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

No, excuse *me!* But I'll be right back. There's something I have to... I think it's time.

*She quickly leaves.*

DISTANT COUSIN:

So! Your neighbor's very...

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Yes. She is. Exactly what sort of discoveries was she talking about?

DISTANT COUSIN:

I have no idea. She asks a lot of questions, and you know me. It's so seldom that I get to share my memories of growing up in the shadow of a family like yours. I'm so sorry your sister wasn't able to be here today. And your mother? You don't expect her?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Even if my mother wasn't my mother, why would she come to her second ex-husband's... She let him rob her blind; why would I invite her?

DISTANT COUSIN:

Oh, I couldn't tell you. You always seem to play by your own rules, all of you! Beautiful, privileged people who were larger than life, just out of reach for someone like myself.

*He has found her wine glass and refills it.*

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

You think my family is privileged?

DISTANT COUSIN:

Never mind all that. The distant past, and everything changes, doesn't it? I'm here ...

*He hands her the wine, perhaps touching her glass with his own.*

And so are *you*, close enough to touch, flesh and blood just like the rest of us. With the same cracks in the armor we all have.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

*(starting turn toward the door)* I'm going to go and—

DISTANT COUSIN:

*(interrupting)* I heard about your husband's job. Man, tough to get fired at his age, huh?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

He was separated, he wasn't fired.

DISTANT COUSIN:

Sure! Of course! Bound to happen, changing times, changing workforce. Getting rid of the excess in every field, right? No more velvet coffins with 401-Ks in this day and age. Which means where's a guy like that going to turn? He's been basically punching the clock and out of the loop of what's really going on for, what? Twenty-some years?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

I'd rather not have this conversation.

DISTANT COUSIN:

I understand. A man's job: it's so tied up to who he is and how he operates, in every aspect of his life. And when he loses that—I'm sorry, is separated from that—he's really quite adrift, isn't he? Then, with everything so unsettled everywhere, it's all up to you. You're like his life preserver and only real connection to the world at the same time. Man, I bet you wish you could just free yourself and let go sometimes. Run away, or close your eyes and just go under.

*Short pause.*

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Thanks for the wine.

*She sets down her glass and starts toward the door again.*

DISTANT COUSIN:

It's good, isn't it! I mean, you bought it. But I picked this particular— Hey. How much did you pay for this? I bought a case of this last year for like \$1.99 a bottle. Damn! This whole shindig is probably costing you a fortune; you should have told me to bring some. I mean, if I'd been invited, ha ha ha.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

*(halting her exit)* You—! Of course you were invited!

DISTANT COUSIN:

I didn't get a call or anything.

***Anticipating Leftovers***

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WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Things were pretty crazy, so I guess I assumed... I don't think I have your number.

DISTANT COUSIN:

It's the same one I've always had.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

I'm—

DISTANT COUSIN:

*(interrupting)* That's okay. I'm just glad I'm here.

*Short pause.*

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Good.

*She heads toward the door again.*

DISTANT COUSIN:

Listen, about that neighbor of yours...

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

*(turning back)* Yes?

DISTANT COUSIN:

How well do you know her?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

She's a good neighbor. Very well-meaning.

DISTANT COUSIN:

Oh, I'm sure she is! She seems quite concerned with... the neighborhood.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

She's very active.

DISTANT COUSIN:

She's very nosy.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

She's— What?

DISTANT COUSIN:

She asks too many questions. The wrong kind of questions. I noticed she had you cornered, before I came out here. Now I hope you don't mind, but / need to get some information, and think carefully about this: what exactly was she asking you about?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

About... Clam dip.

DISTANT COUSIN:

Clam dip?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Clam dip. Clam dip memories.

DISTANT COUSIN:

Uh huh, you see what I mean? That is not the sort of thing a good neighbor should be grilling you about. It's private and not something you need to share with *anyone*. Okay. I'm going out on a limb here, but it's because I care about you. I realize we haven't seen each other in a long time—and I don't know what it was I did to you to make you angry at me—but I still care about you, deeply, and under no circumstances should you trust that woman. These are dangerous times we're living in and we have to do whatever we can to protect our loved ones from... Well...

*The almost sister comes through the door with her arms full of groceries; the sounds from inside—signs of activity behind the curtains—are getting more and more wild.*

ALMOST SISTER:

Wind the grieving widow up and watch her go, huh? Where do you want the stuff from the fridge?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

*(moving to take the groceries from her)* I'll take it.

ALMOST SISTER:

Chips and crackers, too. Did you want the bread that was with them?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Yes.

*She begins to transfer the appropriate items into the cooler(s). Another explosion of noise as the understanding man opens the door, carrying a small cabinet.*

***Anticipating Leftovers***

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UNDERSTANDING MAN:

This one, right?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Right.

*With relief, the understanding man sets the cabinet down.*

ALMOST SISTER:

I'll get the rest?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Thanks.

*The almost sister opens the door, bracing herself against the noise as she goes inside.*

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

*(interrupting the grocery transfer)* Honey?

*The understanding man is resting on the cabinet.*

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Right. Where do you want it?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

By the office chair.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Oh, right.

*He reluctantly picks up the cabinet again.*

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

*(to the distant cousin)* Hey there

DISTANT COUSIN:

You sure look like you could use some help!

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

No, I'm—

DISTANT COUSIN:

*(interrupting, taking the cabinet from the understanding man)* Let me take that.



***Anticipating Leftovers***

63

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Really, I—

DISTANT COUSIN:

*(interrupting)* Listen, man. Let me pitch in—that's what family's for, right?

*He sets the table by the office chair*

*(to the woman in charge)* Here?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Fine.

*She starts putting sundries into the cabinet, perhaps re-adjusting its placement.*

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

*(to the distant cousin)* Thanks. *(heading to the first cooler)* Want a beer?

DISTANT COUSIN:

Ha ha ha. You're kidding me, right?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

*(pulling out beers)* What?

DISTANT COUSIN:

*(picking up his wine glass)* No, I'm okay.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Okay.

DISTANT COUSIN:

She's got you working pretty hard, huh? Sit down, take a load off!

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Nah, I'm fine. I used to work as a moving man.

DISTANT COUSIN:

Yeah? Looking to get back into that now? I heard about the job. Tough break.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Yeah. No, I couldn't— I mean, not that I'd want to, but that was awhile ago. When I was young and strong. Or stronger.

DISTANT COUSIN:

I was going to say something, but thought better of it.

***Anticipating Leftovers***

64

*The almost sister comes through the door again carrying more food; it's as if she's pushed out by the sheer volume of the madness inside.*

ALMOST SISTER:

Jesus! Nice family outing!

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

They're not... *(short pause)* Is this everything?

ALMOST SISTER:

From the fridge? Yeah.

DISTANT COUSIN:

Need any help?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

No!

ALMOST SISTER:

No.

*Together, the woman in charge and the almost sister put the rest of the food items away, in the cabinet and coolers. Meanwhile, the understanding man has been drinking his beer and assessing the area; it's beginning to look quite cozy. A shelter from the storm inside. He catches sight of the lamp he placed by armchair. He sits in it.*

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Honey! Did you see? A reading lamp!

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

If we had something to read.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Want me to go get something?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Yes.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

A book?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

The bookcase in the hallway.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Which one?

***Anticipating Leftovers***

65

WOMAN IN CHARGE:  
There's only one.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:  
What?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:  
There's only one.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:  
Only one... What?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:  
Bookcase.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:  
You want the whole bookcase? With all the books?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:  
The one bookcase and yes, all the books.

*Short pause.*

UNDERSTANDING MAN:  
Okay.

*He starts toward the door.*

DISTANT COUSIN:  
Need some help?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:  
N- Actually, yeah.

DISTANT COUSIN:  
Ha ha ha. I thought maybe you ex-moving men had superpowers for singlehandedly lifting large pieces of furniture. Ha ha ha.

*They go through the door, braving the ever more threatening elements.*

ALMOST SISTER:  
Poor guy. I love your husband. It's got to be hard on him, looking for work in this shit economy. He's hanging in there, huh?

***Anticipating Leftovers***

66

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

As opposed to me?

ALMOST SISTER:

Okay. When are you going to tell me what's going on here?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

As soon as someone tells me, because I have no idea. Absolutely no idea. To be honest, I don't even— Where's my wine?

ALMOST SISTER:

*(finding her glass)* Here.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Thanks. All right. Those so-called family members in there? The masses of mourners? I don't even know who they are. I mean, some of them I have vague recollections of. But most of them, I swear, I've never even seen!

ALMOST SISTER:

So you're going to let a few funeral crashers drive you out of your own home?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Not a few. A houseful. A house over-full. And they keep growing, it's like they're this bacchanalian life form that keeps feeding on itself and multiplying.

ALMOST SISTER:

That's why you're taking away all the food, to stop the organic process?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

I actually hadn't thought of that. But if there's nothing left to consume...

ALMOST SISTER:

Sorry, table inside's still piled high; I could clear out more booze. That might get rid of some relations.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Yeah?

*At this point we see Chester, followed by the well-meaning neighbor. He pulls a red wagon filled with small, labeled boxes. Throughout the following they move behind the woman in charge and almost sister into the house; when faced with a closed door, Chester just stares at it and waits for it to be opened. The intermittent noise now coming from inside masks their movement and entrance into the house.*

ALMOST SISTER:

No, they haven't even read the will yet. But you're serious, aren't you?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

I'm... I think I'm losing it. I know I'm losing it. I've lost it. I'm lost. I've got a house packed with strangers—

ALMOST SISTER:

*(interrupting)* Strange, but not strangers. Just because you don't remember them—

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

*(interrupting)* I have never met them!

ALMOST SISTER:

Then how come they all know you? And me? And my lovely absent wife, may her soul rest in peace because I'm going to kill her for putting me through this without her.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

I don't know I don't know I don't know.

ALMOST SISTER:

And you've certainly met the wife, she who's now turned your living room into a wailing wall. With tribal dancing. I wouldn't have thought she had it in her.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Exactly. So are we sure that's even— I mean it's his wife. I guess it's his wife. She says she's his wife. But I certainly don't remember his wife being—

ALMOST SISTER:

*(interrupting)* That connected to her indigenous roots?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

How could this happen? I was just trying to do the right thing.

ALMOST SISTER:

Which is almost always the wrong thing, in my experience.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

For you, maybe. And for my sister. But what about the rest of the world? Someone needs to do what needs to be done!

ALMOST SISTER:

Why does that someone always need to be you?

***Anticipating Leftovers***

68

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Why, indeed?!

*The door to the house opens, and the crowd noise draws the attention of the two women onstage. The well-meaning neighbor and Chester have come back out with an empty wagon.*

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

My, how exhilarating! Can I just tell you: There *is* order in chaos, and it's unfolding right in your dining room, my open-hearted friend!

*She and Chester continue on their way.*

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Wait. Where are you—?

ALMOST SISTER:

*(interrupting)* They're fine. Let's get back to you.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Me? Time for me now?

ALMOST SISTER:

Yes! I'm starting to get a little worried.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

*(referring to the revelers inside)* Because I might be the human sacrifice they're looking for?

ALMOST SISTER:

Well, there's that. But what I was talking about was—

*The distant cousin comes out of the door with an empty bookcase; the understanding man carries a number of books and holds the door open for him, fighting against the sound and fury from within.*

DISTANT COUSIN:

*(to the understanding man)* Thanks, now watch it with the door, there. No, keep it completely open... Okay, you've got it.

*The door shuts, to the relief of all.*

*(to the woman in charge)* We had a bit of a mishap. I hate to burst any bubbles, but I don't advise your husband to re-enter any career that involves heavy lifting.

***Anticipating Leftovers***

69

UNDERSTANDING MAN:  
My back did its thing.

DISTANT COUSIN:  
He had a nasty fall. Steps are hard when your eyesight starts going.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:  
I may have torn something; I've got to sit down... *(moving to sit, scattering books around him)* Elevate my leg...

ALMOST SISTER:  
Let me see.

*The distant cousin begins to set down the bookcase.*

WOMAN IN CHARGE:  
*(to the distant cousin)* No, over there.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:  
What?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:  
I was talking to—

DISTANT COUSIN:  
*(interrupting)* Here?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:  
Fine. Thanks.

DISTANT COUSIN:  
Wow. This bookcase. How many times did I pull a tome or two out of this bookcase growing up? How well do I know this bookcase, huh?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:  
You've never met.

DISTANT COUSIN:  
What?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:  
I bought it last year.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:  
Ow!

***Anticipating Leftovers***

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*The almost sister is assessing the understanding man's injuries.*

ALMOST SISTER:

Guess that hurt?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Yeah.

ALMOST SISTER:

Sorry.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

That's okay; it's from a long time ago. I messed up my knee in college.

DISTANT COUSIN:

An old football injury, ha ha ha?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

No, but I did play football in college.

ALMOST SISTER:

Really?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Well, touch football. Community college. It was a class; I got an A. Ow. *(to the almost sister, who has probed a different part of his leg.)* That's a new one.

ALMOST SISTER:

Sorry.

DISTANT COUSIN:

A great way to get a little low-budget exercise, community college classes. If you don't mind a few senior citizens showing you up...

*The woman in charge has placed a few of the books inside the bookcase.*

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Where are all the other books?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

*(retrieving one or two books beside him)* Here...



DISTANT COUSIN:

Oh, we left quite a trail of literary breadcrumbs inside. I'm on it. *(to the understanding man)* You stay there—don't want to take a chance on breaking a hip or something; it'd be all over then, huh?

*He heads inside, leaving the door open; the noise covers the entrance of the well-meaning neighbor and Chester, again with the wagon full of small boxes. They make their way into the house as the almost sister and woman in charge picks up the rest of the books onstage. The understanding man tries to do his part from the couch, shouting above the noise.*

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Hey! I remember this book. I had this book when I was a kid. I read this book about a million times—it was about this wandering prince who was searching for his kingdom. Or he didn't know he was a prince, or that he had a kingdom, he was just wandering and searching. My uncle Paul gave it to me, and I remember one day I was reading it in science class, and Mrs. Stanearth caught me and slammed my head into the chalk board so hard—

*The woman in charge interrupts him by shutting the door.*

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Honey! Will you stop!

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Stop what?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Stop with all the trips down memory lane! I'm trying to figure out what to do here and I swear to god, I feel like I'm trapped in this emotional culdesac every time you open your mouth. If you want to just sit there and read a book, read a new book, for chrissake!

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

I'm sorry! I'm in pain! I can't help it if I'm hurt!

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

I can't either! But that doesn't mean I'm going to let myself be paralyzed by legendary wounds of yesteryear. In case you haven't noticed, scary stuff is going on here, right now. I don't know what's going to happen to us and apparently I'm the only one who's... Ahhhh!

*She looks as if she's about to throw the books.*

ALMOST SISTER:

I'll take those.

*She heads toward the bookcase as the well-meaning neighbor and Chester come out of the house accompanied by strange new sounds; the wagon is now full of books, and they're followed by the distant cousin.*

DISTANT COUSIN:

Didn't think I'd make it out of *there* alive! *(to the well-meaning neighbor)* Are you and your little red wagon always in the right place at the right time, or is it just me?

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

Ha ha ha, I don't—

ALMOST SISTER:

*(interrupting, to Chester)* Dude! A little help, here?

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

To tell you the truth, everything about today is right. The right place, right time, right people... *(to the woman in charge)* And I can't thank you enough.

*The well-meaning neighbor prods Chester and they begin to help the almost sister empty the wagon and fill the bookcase.*

DISTANT COUSIN:

*(pulling the woman in charge aside)* Listen, I hope you don't mind me saying this, but I wanted to tell you that if you think you should be worried, you shouldn't.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

No?

DISTANT COUSIN:

It's just that you seemed a bit out of sorts, and I'm pretty sure I know why. Now it could just be she's going through a phase, but face it: she's a big girl no matter how you look at it. Which doesn't mean that she won't find someone. It could be she'll find someone because of just that. I've got to tell you, there are many men—and I know quite a few of them—who like a little something extra to keep them warm at night, if you know what I mean.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

I have no idea.

DISTANT COUSIN:

Which is not to say that if she's inclined toward... Well, if men aren't up her alley, so to speak, that there's anything wrong with that. I mean, you, more than anyone, know how the other half loves. (*gesturing toward the almost sister*) Keep it in the family, right?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

What in the world are you talking about?

DISTANT COUSIN:

That I hadn't seen her in awhile, so the sheer, uh, enormity of the situation was a bit of a shocker.

*All the books in place, the well-meaning neighbor and Chester—and the empty wagon—head back out.*

DISTANT COUSIN:

But you know, she's really got a good personality. And with the kind of love and support you're giving her, I really think she'll be all right.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Who will?

DISTANT COUSIN:

Why, little Chessie, of course!

*He gestures toward Chester's bulky form making its way offstage.*

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

*Chessie?* You mean Chess? Chester? Chester's a boy.

*Short pause.*

DISTANT COUSIN:

Oh, my. I feel just terrible. I could have sworn he was a she—that's what I remembered—and then it took me awhile to wrap my head around... I'm not even going to tell you what I was going to say next!

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Please. Don't.

DISTANT COUSIN:

(*picking up his wine glass*) If you don't mind, there's a little matter of an estate to be settled, and a bottle of Prosecco inside that's got my name on it.

***Anticipating Leftovers***

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*Accompanied by a ridiculously loud and angry sounding blast he heads inside. The woman in charge moves decisively to the first cooler.*

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

*(shouting over the noise, to the woman in charge)* Honey? Did you say you brought out the stuff from the freezer?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

What?

*She takes stock of the cooler's contents, then moves to the cabinet/pantry.*

ALMOST SISTER:

*(looking inside the cooler in back of the couch and taking out another beer)* We did, but how long will it stay frozen? Like the ice cream. *(to the woman in charge)* Should I take it back inside?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

What? No.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

*(to the almost sister)* Grab me a bag of peas, will you? For my knee.

ALMOST SISTER:

*(producing a bag)* Edamame?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

No peas?

ALMOST SISTER:

*(tossing him the bag)* Keep an open mind, my friend.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

I remember the first time I ate Edamame. Not as bad as that stuff they call Tempeh. Or Seitan—love *that* name. Did I ever tell you about my first ex-wife Lynn who was a vegetarian? She used to—

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

*(interrupting)* **Stop.**

*Silence. The noise from inside has died down, changed tone and timbre.*

*(to the almost sister)* Was that everything from the refrigerator?

***Anticipating Leftovers***

75

ALMOST SISTER:

And the freezer.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

*(to the almost sister)* Did you say there's ice-cream?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

*(moving to look through the cooler behind the couch)* That's not possible, that's not—

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

*(interrupting)* None of those sandwiches, even?

ALMOST SISTER:

*(to the woman in charge)* What?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

*(to the almost sister)* There was a little foil container. In a white bag.

ALMOST SISTER:

I don't remember any white bag.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

I was sure we had—

ALMOST SISTER:

*(interrupting)* Here.

*She hands him an ice cream sandwich*

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

There should have been a white bag.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Thanks.

ALMOST SISTER:

*(to the woman in charge)* In the fridge?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Yes.

ALMOST SISTER:

I don't think I saw a white bag.

***Anticipating Leftovers***

76

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Or a foil container? With a white lid?

ALMOST SISTER:

I don't remember that.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

It was there.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

*(eating the ice cream sandwich)* Was it round? Like flat and round?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Yes.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

It'd been in there for awhile, right?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Only a few days.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Some leftover pasta thing?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Eggplant. Leftover eggplant.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

I might have eaten it.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

You *might* have eaten it?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Yeah, maybe. I looked at it. It looked good.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

It was good. That was my eggplant. Why would you eat it?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

I was hungry. It was in there for like—

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

*(interrupting)* Two days. Exactly two days. Those were my leftovers.

***Anticipating Leftovers***

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UNDERSTANDING MAN:

I didn't know you wanted them.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Why would I have taken them home if I didn't want them?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

I don't know. You didn't eat them...

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

I didn't have a chance to eat them, I was planning this... This! But I was going to. I was really looking forward to it.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Maybe I didn't eat them. Maybe I just opened the container to see what was in it...

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Those were my leftovers! You had no right!

ALMOST SISTER:

Hey, we've got tons of food.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

New food; it's not leftovers.

ALMOST SISTER:

There's so much stuff in there, tomorrow leftovers'll be coming out of your ass.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

It's not the same! What about right now? I wanted that eggplant right now. I was going to eat it right here and right now!

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Cold, old eggplant? You wanted to eat co—?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

That's exactly what I wanted to eat! That's specifically what I wanted to eat! That's the only thing in the world I wanted to eat, the only thing in the whole wide world that could possibly taste right, could conceivably make it all okay. That would make me feel safe. The taste of leftover eggplant parmesan. Two day old eggplant parmesan over a few, coiled strands of linguini, with a slightly spicy, slightly sweet red sauce, full of fresh tomato chunks and the distinct taste of garlic and basil and Parmesan cheese. Parmigiano Reggiano. Thick flakes of it covering the entire perfect portion set aside for me, and me alone.

*The well-meaning neighbor again returns with Chester and a fully-loaded wagon.*

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

But let me just clarify something: These leftovers—my leftovers, my make-it-better share-with-no-one-leftovers—I don't actually eat them, not immediately. Of course I can't resist a nibble or two from one side of the stacked eggplant slices: thin slices, each coated with a delicate layer of breading, a crust. An almost crust. A one-time crust which by this time in the 'fridge has softened, blending imperceptibly with the eggplant itself, a sort of salty merging of tastes and textures behind which, every once in awhile, is a barely perceptible hint of the acidic bitterness that might overwhelm eggplant prepared in a lesser, more pedestrian way. But not this eggplant: no.

*The well-meaning neighbor has disappeared, silently, into the house. Chester and his wagon, however, have stopped midway through their journey.*

So I take a fork—or maybe even a knife. A sharp knife. And with that knife I cut a straight, sharp line down the edge of the dish—the entree, now in a shiny, aluminum container—and as I very precisely trim off the uneven bits from the edge where I'd stopped eating, I pop them into my mouth. They're a bit too cold, granted, but they're just what I need.

*Chester and his wagon move close to the woman in charge; perhaps she puts her arm around him, or strokes his head.*

That taste is an almost cruel tease, really; it makes me hungry for the whole rest, the rest of the rest, all at once the rest. And it would be so easy to take another bite, and another and another, but no: I place the lid to the container back on, crimping around the edges, the white paper side out and the mirrored side in, and set it down, and walk away.

*The well-meaning neighbor comes back out and moves to Chester and the wagon.*

How can I find the strength to do this, with my life crumbling around me? Because I know, at every level of my being, that the magic of room temperature will produce something extraordinary. The flakes of cheese on top will soften, the once-daunting coating of oil will seep into the pasta and the fleshy, overlapping scallops of eggplant will angle down gracefully from the bulging mound that is the heart and soul of this masterpiece... That which will ultimately fix everything.

So when I remove the lid—say an hour later, perhaps more, perhaps less—and I see that incredibly precious sight? I almost can't bear to take a bite. But I do. Slowly. Indulgently. Savoring every mouthful. Over and over again.

*Pause.*



***Anticipating Leftovers***

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UNDERSTANDING MAN:

You know, I really don't think I actually ate it.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Never mind.

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

It may still be inside? I'll go check.

WOMAN IN CHARGE

Be my guest.

*The well-meaning neighbor goes inside; taking a large number of the containers from Chester's wagon with her. The sounds from inside are now more of a soft chant.*

ALMOST SISTER:

Man, am I hungry.

*She is helping herself to a bag of chips. Chester moves to her and digs in as well.*

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Honey, I'm sorry if I... I didn't realize.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Why would you have? It was something of mine. Something I had that was mine and mine alone. Why would it matter to you?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

That's not fair.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

I don't care. Why do I always have to be the fair one?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

I'm fair!

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

It's impossible to be fair when there's only you, when you never consider anyone but yourself.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

How can you say that?!

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Because it's true, that's how!

*For the first time, she notices the now somewhat depleted contents of Chester's wagon.*

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

What's— (*examining the containers*) What all this? (*picking up one box*) Chester?

*Chester is buried in his own chips or snacks.*

(*looking carefully at the box*) Do you know what these are?

ALMOST SISTER:

What are they?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

They're cremains, that's what they are. Dead people's cremains.

*Short pause.*

ALMOST SISTER:

Better than live people's cremains.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

What are these doing here? (*to Chester*) How did you get all these?

*Chester looks toward the door, where the well-meaning neighbor has just re-appeared, accompanied by the hypnotic new sounds.*

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

It wasn't easy, I can assure you of that. The culmination of a life's work, really.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

They're yours?

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

Mine? I wouldn't say they're mine. They were never really mine. In a way I was theirs. Their Shepard, their steward. Their ferryman, so to speak. Now that the path has been made clear.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

What path?

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

You're right. That's not what's important. All those years of wandering without knowing the why or wherefore or how it might end, if it might end. What's important *is* the end, the destination. Knowing that the souls contained in these humble receptacles—unclaimed by loved ones or family members who couldn't be found, weren't emotionally or financially equipped to take possession, or who had themselves passed away—have finally found a home. And it would never have happened without you.

*She picks up more containers and starts into the house.*

No sign of any eggplant yet, but I'll keep digging!

*She is gone.*

ALMOST SISTER:

Did she just say what I thought she said?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

I actually don't even like eggplant.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Follow her. Find out what's going on in there.

ALMOST SISTER:

Don't have to ask me twice.

*She hurries inside the house.*

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

So I would definitely remember if I...

*The woman in charge is reading the labels on more of the containers.*

Honey, are you okay?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

No, I've never been less okay in my life, thank you for asking.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Can I do anything?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

I don't know, can you?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Are you mad at me?

***Anticipating Leftovers***

82

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Oh my god! Sweetie! We have a neighbor who stockpiles cremains and gives them as hostess gifts!

*The almost sister bursts back through the door.*

ALMOST SISTER:

Okay, so do we wanna talk some twisted ancestry-dot-com here? I had stuck the you know what with the grizzled bits of the asshole in a corner—

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

*(interrupting)* The what?

ALMOST SISTER:

The urn, baby. The asshole's urn. Only I guess he refuses to give up the spotlight and now he's back on the table. But not only him. The table's now, literally, covered with these little boxes and tins and containers all shapes and sizes that I'm assuming are...

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Of course they are.

ALMOST SISTER:

There must be hundreds of them. It's like this perverse feast of packaged dead. And everyone in there is saying grace through this bizarre ceremony of shared legacy, tracing bloodlines back through generations and—

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

*(interrupting)* I don't want to know. I have to think of what to— Chester. Quick. Take the rest of those things into the house.

*Chester does not process quick.*

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Now, Chester! Go!

ALMOST SISTER:

Get a move on, boy...

*Chester and the wagon are pushed inside by the almost sister. The woman in charge is alone with the understanding man, still sitting on the couch, clutching frozen vegetables.*

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Good lord, between the two of you...

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

What's that supposed to mean?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

I'm sorry, but half the time I feel like I'm living with nothing but dead weight here.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

What?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

No, all of the time. Because I'm here, day after day, scared shitless trying to figure out how we're going to make things work while everything we know falls apart and you just sit there, refusing to move 'cause you can't let go of the good old days.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

What good old days?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

The good old days that you're constantly reminded of, constantly telling stories about, constantly measuring everything against! There's not a thing we do together that you don't compare with when you did it before, or doesn't jog some fantastic memory.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

That's not true!

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Oh, okay. But every time you dredge up the past, it's like we're moving backwards. We need to move forward. Do you hear me?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

I don't understand a word you're saying. Honey, I love you...

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

And I love you, but I don't know what's going to happen if we don't get out of here! We have to move. We have to go. We can't stay here.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Honey! Slow down. Sit down.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

I don't want sit down! I might as well give myself up to those people who have taken over my home. Or what used to be my home. Because now they see through me. They know what a fraud I am and I don't deserve any of it.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Honey! I love you.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

What am I supposed to do with that now? It's not safe here anymore. I was fooling myself into thinking it ever was.

*The almost sister and Chester hurry back out of the house—he's still got the wagon. They the door and Chester holds it shut. Through the window we see silhouettes, moving slowly and purposefully, pressing against the window.*

ALMOST SISTER:

Okay. We've got ourselves a situation. *(to the woman in charge)* So what's the scheme?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

I don't have one. Let's go.

ALMOST SISTER:

What? That's not like you...

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

It is now. *(grabbing the wagon)* Come on, Chester.

ALMOST SISTER:

You going to pull us all in the little red wagon?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

If I have to. If that's what it takes.

*With great effort, the understanding man rises from his chair, and moves toward the bookcase.*

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Chester?

*Chester moves to him and the two of them push the bookcase in front of the door.*

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Don't worry about that; let's just—

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

*(interrupting)* We're not going anywhere. *(to Chester)* Hand me that tool box.

*Chester hands him the box. The understanding man takes out a hammer and nails and grabs some loose boards.*

***Anticipating Leftovers***

85

ALMOST SISTER:

Great idea. Those fuckers'll never take us alive!

*The three begin to nail shut the door*

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Wait. That was the lumber I was saving for—

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

*(interrupting)* Just this sort of occasion?

ALMOST SISTER:

She never ceases to amaze me.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Me neither.

ALMOST SISTER:

Good craftsmanship there.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Did I tell you about the time I worked as a contractor?

*Perhaps Chester pushes trash cans in front of the door as well. It's now completely blocked.*

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

No, no, no, no... You don't understand...

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

What I understand is you're asking me to leave all that we've worked for, all that we've built—together—and that's not going to happen. What's in there? *(gesturing toward the window)* It's not going to destroy us.

ALMOST SISTER:

Are we sure about that?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

We're not sure about anything anymore.

*She collapses on the couch.*

It's all over. I give up. I'm just going to lie here and become one with ghosts of cremations past and members of my unfiltered gene pool.

*From inside the window we see the distant cousin, who has lifted the curtains to peer outside.*

DISTANT COUSIN:

*(muffled)* Hello? Can't get the door open.

*He presses his face against the glass, trying to get a view outside the door. He is joined by the well-meaning neighbor, holding what appears to be a huge slab of raw meat.*

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

*(muffled)* Look here! You'll never guess what I found on the buffet. Doesn't it look delicious? Anyone want some?

DISTANT COUSIN:

*(muffled)* Hey there! The door— Is something blocking it?

*The group takes take no immediate action.*

ALMOST SISTER:

What should we do?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

About what?

DISTANT COUSIN:

*(muffled)* Or is it broken? Is there another way out?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

*(to the woman in charge)* About—

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

*(interrupting)* I know, honey.

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

*(muffled)* Mmmmm, there's plenty for everyone!

DISTANT COUSIN:

*(muffled)* Can you help me out, here? I think I left my wine glass outside...

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

*(gesturing toward a wine glass on the coffee table)* Is that—?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

*(grabbing the glass)* It's mine.



***Anticipating Leftovers***

87

WELL-MEANING NEIGHBOR:

*(muffled)* You know, I'll go ahead and start. If no one minds...

*She begins to voraciously eat.*

DISTANT COUSIN:

*(muffled, knocking on the glass)* Hey! Guys? Can't you hear me? Hello...?

ALMOST SISTER:

Huh. Did anyone hear something?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Not me.

*Chester carries over some more boards to the window; he and the almost sister begin to nail them over the edges of the window.*

DISTANT COUSIN:

*(muffled)* Wait a minute! What's going on out there? What are you doing? I'm family!

*The woman in charge has not moved from the couch.*

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

*(to the woman in charge)* Honey? I'm not sure about the rest of them, but he has a point. He is family.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Exactly.

*Short pause.*

*The distant cousin pounds on the window and presses his face against the glass; the well-meaning neighbor is clearly in the midst of an all-consuming religious experience. The almost sister and Chester continue in their efforts to board up the edges of the window with the too-small boards .*

*Suddenly, the understanding man picks up the coffee table; like the last piece of a puzzle, it covers the large, remaining gap in the center of the window and they nail it in place.*

ALMOST SISTER:

Hey! That's more like it! You know something, we got a remodeling job we might throw your way, mister. Adding on a couple of guestrooms.

***Anticipating Leftovers***

88

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

*(to the woman in charge, re his handiwork)* What do you think? Sweetheart?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

I think...

*She only hears silence.*

...I love you.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

And I love you.

*The woman in charge looks for somewhere to put her glass without a coffee table.*

ALMOST SISTER:

Hang on.

*She sets the cooler in front of the table, then pulls out a couple of beers.*

*(to the understanding man)* Yeah?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

*(taking the beer)* Perfect.

*He sit next to the woman in charge.*

So. How you doing, sweetie?

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

I don't know. Okay, I guess.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Well, my leg feels much better.

*Short pause.*

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Good.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

You look tired.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Thanks.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

I didn't mean—

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

*(interrupting)* I know. I am tired.

ALMOST SISTER:

I'm beat! Your sister's not going to believe any of this.

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

And I'm hungry.

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Yeah.

*He retrieves a bag of chips from the couch, or the floor.*

Is there any of that dip left?

ALMOST SISTER:

Dip? Did you say dip?

UNDERSTANDING MAN:

Clam dip. She makes the best—

*Chester sets down a small white bag on the cooler in front of the woman in charge—maybe he's pulled it out of his wagon. The woman in charge looks at it, then opens the top of the bag. In it are her leftovers.*

WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Thank you, Chester.

*Chester hands them the large bowl, then sits in the woman in charge's grandmother's chair, adjusts the lamp and picks up a book. It's a relaxed and satisfied family portrait.*

*Perhaps we hear crickets in the soft evening light. Along with the satisfied sounds of chips and dip. Which may be accompanied by the faint echos of a random primal scream or two coming from inside the house.*

**End of Play**