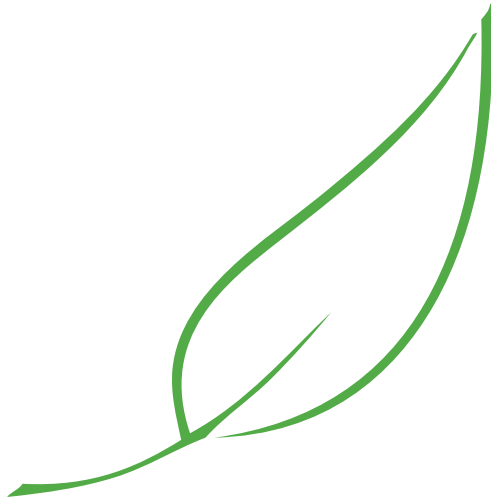


Upon Further Review

By TA Powell



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UPON FURTHER REVIEW

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SYNOPSIS: It's "Pillow Talk" meets "Green Acres" when London-based playwright Lance Albright sells the *New York Times* and its resident theater critic, Delores Nolan, down the river. It all starts when Delores, a widowed mother of five and Lance's ex-girlfriend, writes a scathing review of a Lance's "new" play. The "pond-sucking" review sets the stage for a hilarious plot that puts the two in a non-negotiable job swapping experiment suggested by the *Times*. Delores discovers that the farm she's been shipped off to is far from upscale and nowhere near upstate. But she soon learns there are opportunities in the country her kids didn't have in the city. Could this be a second chance for her family? And what of Lance? He's certainly getting a second chance to rewrite his play, will he also rewrite his history with Delores?

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(10 female, 10 male)

DELORES NOLAN (f).....	Theatre critic, mother, an adult female. (279 lines)
MARLA NOLAN (f)	Oldest daughter, 17 years old. (48 lines)
PAIGE NOLAN (f).....	Second oldest daughter, 15 years old. (45 lines)
NELLIE NOLAN (f).....	Third oldest daughter, 12 years old. (33 lines)
CHIP NOLAN (m).....	Youngest son, 10 years old. (49 lines)
MARY FRANCIS NOLAN (FRANKIE) (f)	Youngest daughter, six years old. (27 lines)
LANCE ALBRIGHT (m)	Playwright, an adult male. (84 lines)
ALMA WITHERSPOON (f)	Housekeeper, nanny, an adult female. (81 lines)
HAMMOND RILEY (m).....	Newspaper editor, an adult male. (15 lines)

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JACK FULLER (m).....	Family friend, an adult male. (2 lines)
RUTH LANDINGS (f)	Realtor, beautician, an adult female. (8 lines)
KATE SPELLMAN (f).....	Waitress, mother, an adult female. (14 lines)
KYLE SPELLMAN (m)	Kate's oldest boy, 13 years old. (5 lines)
EMMET SPELLMAN (m)	Kate's youngest boy, 9 years old. (5 lines)
ARTHUR TUTTLEBERRY (m)	Agent, British, an adult male. (66 lines)
WINSTON SPERRY (m)	Newspaper owner, an adult male. (8 lines)
MAGGIE HENDERSON (f).....	Neighbor, 13 years old. (3 lines)
CAMERON HENDERSON (m).....	Neighbor, 18 years old. (4 lines)
MARSHA BAILEY (f).....	Paige's friend, 15 years old. (21 lines)
PASTOR WHITFIELD (m).....	Church pastor, an adult male. (23 lines)

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT ONE:

- Scene 1:* The Turkey Award
- Scene 2:* The Review
- Scene 3:* The Deal
- Scene 4:* Welcome to my World

ACT TWO:

- Scene 1:* Setting the Stage
- Scene 2:* Enter, the Snipe
- Scene 3:* Delores' Lessons
- Scene 4:* The Final Analysis
- Scene 5:* Henrietta Lays an Egg

PROPS

- Plaster turkey, gilded and bejeweled with tiara (*Can obtain small turkey or rooster-looking statues at Michael's along with paint, miniature tiaras, jewels and glue guns to adhere. Be as gaudy as you can.*)
- Parchment paper and ribbon for the antique manuscript by HC Anderson
- 2 phones, 1960's style, black or colored
- 2 typewriters, antique or early model electric for Delores and Lance
- 2 desks/writing tables: 1 for Delores in New York and Farmhouse and 1 stationary for Lance/Pastor Whitfield
- Typing paper for typewriters
- Newspapers for Lance to read and Farmhouse unpacking scene
- Envelopes for desk and mail for Delores to thumb through in the first scene when they arrive from night at theatre
- 10-15 books for Delores and Lance's desks/Cookbook in kitchen for Alma/Coffee table books/Magazines for both Penthouse and Farmhouse coffee tables
- 5-6 large to medium cardboard boxes to fill with props to unpack at Farmhouse
- Knick-knacks: candles, pictures, paintings, curtains to unpack and decorate Farmhouse
- Kitchen utensils: dishes, glasses for both Penthouse and Farmhouse scenes
- Coffee cups, bowls, silverware, cutlery, mixer, mixing bowls, cookie sheets for fog fanning
- Coffee pots: 1 modern, 1 camp-style for Farmhouse scene
- Pots, pans, lids for snipe hunt and 3-4 large pans to catch rain in at opening Farmhouse scene
- Flashlights
- Picnic basket
- Real marshmallows and sticks for Snipe Hunting scene ending
- Fog machine (*to pump fog/smoke through fireplace wagon opening in Rewrite scene*)
- 3-4 blankets
- 5-6 towels, laundry baskets, sheets, iron and board for Farmhouse scene

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- ☐ Bats/balls/gloves
- ☐ Mason jars/screwdrivers and hammers
- ☐ Military outfit, helmet, camouflage bag, bandages (*some stained red*)
- ☐ Notebooks and writing utensils for Creative Writing class scene
- ☐ Ashtray for Hammond and water pitcher with glasses for *New York Times* scene
- ☐ Stuffed toy bunny for Frankie (*Harvey*)

Furniture for the New York and Farmhouse scenes:

- ☐ Couch or love seat
- ☐ Rocker or wing chair
- ☐ Coffee table/end tables
- ☐ Rug
- ☐ False sink
- ☐ Counter set-up
- ☐ Cabinets above and/or below
- ☐ Umbrella stand with umbrella and/or canes
- ☐ **Kitchen table and chairs
- ☐ Desk and desk chair for Delores
- ☐ Desk and desk chair for Lance/Pastor

***Use kitchen chairs and table covered in black cloth in front of first leg/or downstage center for New York Times Negotiation scene; or simply spot just center stage for Negotiation scene and keep blocking tight.*

SET DESIGN

The set should be a split stage design. New York penthouse/farmhouse sets are stage right. One door or two depending on stage size. Main entry door upstage right of center. Extra door; downstage right for additional exit. Kitchen should be left of center stage and slightly angled with railed stairs entering into it from behind the New York office wagon of Lance. Either false cabinet in flat with door or use armoire in the set on far right flat up against the wall, for overcoats to be hung up in first scene. Or you may choose to have children try to carry coats upstairs, if stage size does not allow for closet/armoire.

This set has one wagon that can rotate flush with flats to facilitate location changes from penthouse to farmhouse scenes. Paint flats a warm, but neutral color that will go well with New York balcony side and the other with the farmhouse fireplace side. **Remember to drill a hole large enough to funnel fog machine hose into the fake logs of the fireplace during rewrite scene.** Position furniture according to blocking desired. Change up with fireplace being focal point in farmhouse scene.

Use same furniture stage right, positioned differently with the rotating of the wagon from New York to Indiana. New York scene has a false balcony window scene of New York skyline behind sheer floor-length curtains.

Farmhouse flipside, false rock fireplace and hearth, made with triple insulating foam sprayed, sculpted and painted like stones. Boxed mantel to hold books and photos with fake fire set-up. Logs, light and fan kit with motor to blow the fog into the room for the damper scene. Furniture can be covered with different folded blankets and re-dispersed to give the effect of a new setting. Change rug from 90° angle to diagonal in the farmhouse to switch things up a bit. Use your characters to do the bulk of arranging and unpacking as part of the farmhouse scene opening to give the added effect of moving in.

The set for Lance/pastor should be downstage left, as it will take up less room. One wagon that can rotate to fix each office location. Desk and chair set up required only, either on wagon platform or just in front of it, if platform is not wide enough. Place typewriter center desk. Angle books and phone as able. Hang pictures of something apropos on each side of wagon. Paint each side a slightly different color to make location change believable. Build staircase into the New York/farmhouse scenes, just behind Lance's wagon. Use wagon to hide platform and starting point for steps from upstairs bedrooms both locations.

New York hotel/office of Lance's wagon should have a door. Paint each side of the wagon a different color; one with chair rail to differentiate from New York to Pastor Whitfield's church office. Hang appropriate pictures to denote each as a hint to audience.

Use lighting to help direct audience focus and lightening effects. Use SOUND TRACKS for: rotary phone, rain, thunder, truck horn, car horns. See script for placements.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

I wish to pay homage to the Athens Theatre Community at large for extending an opportunity to me to breathe life into words that up until now have lived only within my imagination.

I am grateful to my cast for doing their best to get into my head and see these characters the way I wrote them. Especially to Katie Hourihan, whose task as my alter ego, DELORES NOLAN, was one of exhausting proportions!

ACT ONE, SCENE 1**SETTING:**

Lights up on an early 1960's-style apartment in New York. Entryway through wagon door allows for a sunken living room space effect. Closet, stairs and an area set up with writing desk and liquor cabinet. ALMA is in a uniform asleep on the couch snoring up a storm. The NOLAN family is in their Sunday best and overcoats, just in from an evening at the theatre and reception, waking up the disheveled nanny. It is after midnight and MRS. NOLAN is too keyed up to sleep. She decides to start work on her column. She is a theatre critic for the New York Times.

AT RISE:

Door bursts open and CHILDREN tumble noisily through; startling the snoring housekeeper on the couch, who is mumbling something in her sleep about Rock Hudson and giggling aloud just before the family enters.

PAIGE: Chip! Get outta my way!

DELORES: Home at last! I don't know how some women wear these all day and night! Ugh - *(Hands ALMA her heels and coat.)* Marla, help Frankie with her coat. Chip, help Alma put the coats up in the closet.

CHIP: Why me?

ALMA: Because she's trying to teach you some manners, young man! Girls, give those things to Chip. *(Girls dump coats on top of CHIP till you can hardly see him.)* Here, Nellie, you take your mother's hat and shoes and put them in her room. Frankie, come to Alma, child, you're practically sleep walking! *(FRANKIE goes to ALMA and puts her head on her shoulders.)*

NELLIE: How come I gotta do this? *(ALMA gives her a grimace and grunts.)* I know! I know! You want to teach me manners too, but I'm almost sleep- walking too, Alma! Look! *(NELLIE puts her arms out in front of herself, snores loudly, and walks with the purse and shoes into the room, fake sleepwalking.)* Hey! I sound just like you, Alma! *(All CHILDREN begin to mock-snore and laugh.)*

FRANKIE: *(Yawning a bit too loudly.)* Mother, may I go to bed now?

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DELORES: Yes, sweetheart - and Nellie - Alma gave you my shoes because . . . *(She turns to see CHIP buried under coats.)* Chip ran out of arms! Alma?

ALMA: *(Turns to look at CHIP.)* Good Lord! Can you breathe under all that?

MARLA: Let's hope not!

DELORES: Marla! Don't be so mean to your little brother. Go help Mary Francis get ready for bed. Go on now.

PAIGE: Yeah, Marla, "Don't be so mean to your brother!" That's my job! Here, Chip. Let me help you! I'll get the closet door - and point you in the right direction! *(Laughs and spins CHIP around into the wall.)*

CHIP: Mom, Paige ran me into the wall!

PAIGE: Are you hurt, Chip?

CHIP: Naw, not really. *(Rubbing his head.)*

PAIGE: Oh, here, let's try it again, then!

DELORES: Paige! Help your brother hang those coats! This time, try carrying some of them - what was I saying, Alma? That I was glad to be home with these unruly children? Another night trapped - alone - in their company! I must be mad! *(Very theatrically throws herself into a chair as CHILDREN put their coats in the closet.)*

MARLA: Why do you always drag us off to these things? Dad hated them, and you never forced **him** to go.

PAIGE: Yeah! *(Returning from the closet.)* You never made **Dad** go with you.

DELORES: I never **forced** your father to do anything - *(FRANKIE tries to cuddle her mother.)* But he did go. Four times the season before last year - - just before - -

ALMA: Children! *(Seeing MRS. NOLAN tearing up a bit.)* Your father went to them to support your mother. You want to show support for your mother's career, don't you?

FRANKIE: I do.

PAIGE: I'll show support for you, Mother.

NELLIE: Me too, I guess, if you really enjoy them.

DELORES: Oh, I don't know if I'd go that far. Sometimes I loathe attending these things, but it's a necessary part of my job, and I need to keep up with what's going on and who's who! Especially this one!

ALMA: So how was it?

DELORES: Well, it was like the reception after! Chip? (*Rubbing her tired feet.*) I believe you used the words -

CHIP: It sucked pond water!

NELLIE: Yes, it sucked pond water!!!

FRANKIE: Yeah, it sucked pond - (*ALMA throws a hand over the child's mouth to stifle her.*)

ALMA: I got it, thanks.

MARLA: Why do you encourage them? They're so crass!

CHIP: Crass? What's that?

PAIGE: It means Marla thinks you're a mud-wallowing pig!

MARLA: You're not going to put that in your column, are you, Mom?

DELORES: Umm, mud-wallowing - - or pond-sucking? Not much of a choice, really. Your brother was right. Brutally honest, but right!

ALMA: Delores!

MARLA: Mother!

DELORES: Oh Marla, don't be so theatrical!

NELLIE: Yeah, don't be so theatrical!

FRANKIE: Yeah, Marla, don't be so electrical!

NELLIE: Theatrical, Frankie, not electrical.

FRANKIE: Yeah, what she said!

DELORES: Girls! I am going to try to be kind. I don't think I can start my column out with "Noted THEATRE CRITIC in-training, Chip Nolan, found Mr. Albright's *New Day Dawns* to be a prime candidate for the Annual Pond-Sucking Award!

PAIGE: - and runner-up for Chip Nolan's Pig of the Year Award!

DELORES: Maybe I should! He was terribly rude at the reception -

NELLIE: I was hoping you were going to **start** your column with the Chip Nolan Pig Award!

PAIGE: Yeah, everyone knows Chip's a pig! (*Sticks tongue out at CHIP. FRANKIE laughs.*)

NELLIE: - or maybe you should go ahead and give out this years' Gilded Turkey Award early to Albright's agent for producing this thing!

DELORES: Nellie! No, no, it's not Tuttleberry's fault. Mr. Albright should have stayed a little longer in English class!

PAIGE: Several years longer!

DELORES: - and I can't give out my Gilded Turkey Award till the last show of the season. *(Everyone starts to laugh at this.)* Although, I can't imagine there will be another show as "fowl" as Mr. Albright's this season! *(Tucks her arms under herself and mimics a turkey.)*
Gobble, gobble, gobble -

MARLA: Mother, you're impossible! You and your stupid TURKEY AWARD! I'm going to bed! Come on, Frankie.

PAIGE: Me too! I call dibs on the bathroom first! Race ya! *(Girls run up the stairs. CHIP is still standing there.)*

CHIP: Mom, people don't really think I'm a pig, do they?

DELORES: Of course not, Chip. Only your sisters, and they're not really people, are they? Don't be silly, she was referring to Mr. Albright as the swine-hundt, not you!

CHIP: Swine-hundt?

ALMA: You know! It's German, it means pig-dog!

CHIP: Are you going to call him a pig in your review, Mom?

DELORES: *(Picks up her famous thesaurus and sweeps her hand over the top with her eyes closed like a crystal ball.)* I shall have to consult my thesaurus for a more genteel way of calling him a swine!

ALMA: Swine-hundt works.

CHIP: I like pig-dog! His play deserves your award, Mom, it was pretty aw-fowl! *(Laughs at himself.)* How did you ever start that turkey thing, anyway?

DELORES: Chip Nolan! Are you stalling for bedtime?

CHIP: Yes! C'mon, Mom, it will take the swine-hundts 20 minutes to get out of the bathroom.

DELORES: You know perfectly well how this story goes. Your father told it a million times.

FRANKIE sneaks back down the steps in a housecoat or nightshirt and tries to curl up beside her mother.

CHIP: That's why I'd like to hear it again, please? I miss hearing it.

FRANKIE: Me too!

ALMA: Yeah, me three.

MARLA and PAIGE return to the stairs in their housecoats, followed by NELLIE in 30 seconds. Each girl takes a dramatic role in DELORES' story.

DELORES: Very well, then - - a long time ago, after your father and I got married, we moved to the city. We furnished our little apartment with all kinds of things left over from our very short but adventurous single lives.

ALMA: (*Does a Groucho Marx imitation.*) Sadly enough, it didn't amount to much! Neither the furniture nor their adventurous single lives!

DELORES: Alma! Please! As I was saying, we got married on a Wednesday. It was pouring rain; it was so romantic.

ALMA: Yeah, yeah, yeah, moving on!

DELORES: Fine! First day together was soggy! First night together was - a bust!

ALMA: Delores! The children!

DELORES: I was referring to the bed not the bedroom!! Frank's budgeting left little in the way of fine furniture since he was saving up for a new typewriter. Middle of the night, the bed broke in two and sent us crashing to the floor! Your father yelled something unrepeatable, while I laughed hysterically! First morning together, off to find a new bed!

NELLIE: (*Very theatrical.*) Alas, it cost more money than they could afford.

DELORES: An entire month's groceries is nothing to sneeze at!

MARLA: (*Sarcastically.*) A young couple so in love! Both writers - both soggy! You're right Mother, how romantic!

DELORES: It was sweet! After all, we were newlyweds! We were hoping to grow old and share the same bed, the same desk, the same typewriter -

MARLA: - the same rain coat and umbrella!

ALMA: Marla!

MARLA: C'mon, it gets sappier every time you tell it!

CHIP: Yeah, leave out the gushy stuff!

DELORES: Just you wait till some college boy turns your head around, Marla! Then we'll talk about sappy! Besides, I can't leave the gushy stuff out, that's how I got the gilded turkey!

CHIP: Okay, go on.

ALMA: Yes, go on. And leave the gushy stuff in.

FRANKIE: Yeah! I like the mushy stuff.

DELORES: Where was I? Oh yes, the shopkeeper.

CHIP: Dad said she was weird.

NELLIE: Why'd he say that?

CHIP: Because she kept talking about everyone's shoes.

NELLIE: So? Maybe she liked shoes?

CHIP: Maybe she collected them like you, Mom! Maybe they still had feet in them!

NELLIE: That's gross! Mom, tell Chip to quick being so gross! I'm going to go put on my pj's.

DELORES: Chip, she was just making conversation. I think she said her great-grandfather had actually made shoes at one time. I don't remember. Do you want to hear the story or not?

CHIP: Yes, ma'am.

DELORES: Anyway, your father - (*Sarcastically.*) who was incredibly romantic, saw only solid construction. I, on the other hand, saw snowy days tucked underneath covers, Sunday papers in bed, small children huddled up on stormy nights -

ALMA: But your father - (*Addressing the CHILDREN.*) who was incredibly *thrifty*, was only interested in the price tag, hoping there'd be enough money to buy another typewriter.

DELORES: I was about to look somewhere else when my eye caught the glimmer of something on the back wall.

PAIGE: (*Coming back down stairs in a housecoat; grabbing a cane out of the umbrella rack at the base of the stairs.*) Okay, okay! It's way past midnight, and I'm tired. Let's cut to the chase! Gilded turkey story, SHORT VERSION! Take one. Time me, Nellie!

NELLIE: (*Doing the movie take version of shooting a scene; claps her hands together like the take boards and mimics a director.*) Okay! Ready? 1 - 2 - 3, roll 'em!

PAIGE: Mom loved the bed! Father's very cheap and loves Mom! Mom finds ugly turkey thing! Father's still cheap! Mom wants both! Old lady decides to throw turkey story and turkey thing in with the bed if they pay full price! Mom starts to explain her fascination with the story and the turkey! (*Bends over cane now and puts one hand on her back as if in agony of old age.*) Old lady - getting older! Cheap father becomes impatient father and folds like a paper napkin! Turkey story, turkey and bed sold to the man with the long-winded wife! (*Bangs the cane tip on the floor for impact and calls time.*) TIME!

NELLIE: Twenty seconds! It's a new record!

PAIGE: Thank you, thank you. No applause! Really!

ALMA: You're thinking you're pretty good at this! Ha! I can tell the turkey story even quicker than that, and it will take me only seven seconds! Nellie? Time me! Once there was a turkey named Paige who would not go to bed! She drove me crazy, so I wrung her neck and stuffed her into bed! Good night!

DELORES: And that's how I got the gold turkey!

NELLIE: (*Very theatrical.*) Ah! But it wasn't any old gold turkey! 'Twas gilded!

MARLA: I don't know why anyone would have kept it in the first place. That turkey is positively ugly!

DELORES: Unlike you and your father, Marla, I found them both to be very touching. A little rough around the edges but truly inspiring. I try to remember that when I review another's work. Not everything that glitters at first blush is gold - and not everything - positively ugly, as you say, Marla - is without merit. (*Picks up Henrietta and laughs at her own joke.*) Besides, she keeps me grounded. Much like the plays I award her to!

PAIGE: I know - I know! That's what they say about first season plays when they are horrid! They're turkeys because they won't fly. Grounded! Just like old Henrietta there! (*Points to turkey statue on DELORES' desk.*)

DELORES: Yes, and if you don't get to bed, I know another turkey that'll end up grounded! (*Turns and picks a child out to poke with her feather duster.*) YOU!!

PAIGE: Mother!

NELLIE: But what if someday you give the Gilded Turkey Award to the very person who wrote that story? For all you know, it could have been his first attempt at writing, and he may now be famous.

DELORES: Oh, it's much too old to have been written by any of the contemporary writers I review. Probably a rough draft of some sort, though definitely not for stage. I'll never forget the name of that little shop - The Dutch Peddler. *(MARLA, PAIGE and NELLIE start to climb back up the stairs first.)*

CHIP: But why do you give Henrietta out as an award to the worst play of the season?

DELORES: It's a play on words! 'Cause they're turkeys, you turkey! And I call her Henrietta because the initials on the story were the same as my mother's initials. Henrietta Claire Anderson. HCA. Simple enough.

FRANKIE: It even looks like Grandma! Look at her chins!

ALMA: Mary Francis Nolan!

DELORES: *(Laughing.)* That's all right, Alma. She does a bit! Doesn't matter - the turkey award's not really for the worst play of the season. Just the ones that never seem to take off! I'm a critic. It's what I do, not who I am! Now goodnight **again**, young man! You too, little miss.

CHIP: Goodnight. Come on, Frankie, I'll walk up with you. *(CHIP and MARY FRANCIS go up the stairs together.)*

DELORES: What a tribe!

ALMA has put up coats and started to turn off lights and shut down the house for the night.

ALMA: Good night. And tell those girls to hang up those dresses before they get into bed - or I'll be hanging them up in the morning! *(Pause.)* And I'm not talking about the dresses! *(Laughs to herself.)* He loves to hear that story, you know. He, out of all of them, misses Frank the most, I believe.

DELORES: Well, it might be a close toss up. *(Looking at the stairs and then down at her wedding band.)* Chip? Thanks for helping out with the coats and -

CHIP: Yes?

DELORES: You do understand that an opinion is just an opinion?

And that sometimes too much honesty is too honest? Understand?

CHIP: Yeah, I understand. It means you're gonna lie.

ALMA: Off to bed with you! Or I'll give you the Swine-hundt Award!

DELORES: (*Waves CHIP up the stairs.*) Let him go. He's right. I don't always say what I feel in my line of work or with the children. It's difficult to share one's loss with someone else whose loss seems greater. (*Sighs.*) Well, you get up to bed and I'll go check my thesaurus for "pond sucking."

ALMA: Want me to make you some coffee?

DELORES: No, thank you. I just need to word this one carefully. As I recall, Lance Albright doesn't take kindly to criticism. At least he didn't back in college.

ALMA: College? You know him from college? (*Grabs a chair from the kitchen table and pulls it up next to DELORES' desk.*) I never heard you mention him before.

DELORES: Frank was never too fond of rehashing my previous love life!

ALMA: Love life? You mean to tell me you and the swine-hundt had a thing?

DELORES: Pig dog? Oh my, a thing! (*Laughs.*) It was just a couple of dates, nothing serious, at least not after he introduced me to Frank.

ALMA: I don't recall meeting him at the funeral?

DELORES: No. I think he was still in London at the time. Besides, we never kept up with one another after college. Frank and I moved here shortly after he landed his first big job with the *Times* and then the kids came along and - well, look here! Page 128: LANCE ALBRIGHT, see WATER UNDER THE BRIDGE! Goodnight, Alma!

ALMA: Very funny, Dee, do you want to talk about it?

DELORES: Oh - and look here on Page 129: BUSYBODY MAID, see good night and mind your own business!

ALMA: Does it say anything in that book about not letting life move on without you?

DELORES: No, but right here on Page 130 it says: Alma Witherspoon, see SUDDENLY RETIRED, LONG TRIP WITHOUT FUNDS! See also UNEMPLOYED! SACKED! TERMINATED! GIVEN THE BOOT! See also best friend I ever had and now really needs to go to bed! Yes, I believe that's what it says, unless you'd like me to look again? *(Begins to tear up a bit and is uncomfortable with the moment. ALMA starts to exit, but turns back to look at DELORES and smiles to herself. DELORES sits down at her typewriter and starts to ponder over her column, ALMA hovers to see if she can get DELORES to talk.)*

ALMA: No, once is enough! *(Pretends to tidy things up a bit in the kitchen. Picks up cookbook and selects a recipe.)* Oh look, Polynesian Meatballs! What will those Polynesians think of next! Ooooh! Look at this! Page 216: How to do a Polynesian-style Pig Roast!

ALMA stalls as she starts to read the recipe out loud in between DELORES' dialogue, heading back to the couch to sit; while DELORES is at her desk downstage center, facing the audience. DELORES is setting up carbon copies in between sheets of papers for her typewriter while the conversation ensues. She begins to type at a designated spot in dialogue. ALMA is on the couch positioned in front of the curtained skyline of their New York balcony. DELORES has her back to ALMA so she is unaware that ALMA is discussing a recipe and not a method of reviewing LANCE's work.

DELORES: Pig roast indeed - now, enough whining, girl! You've a column to write - let's see - Nolan's notes on the opening of a new - disaster! *(Finishes the carbon copy sets and puts paper in the typewriter, staring at it wondering where to start.)* Wherever shall I begin? Hmmm - *(Ponders opening statement with her back to ALMA.)*

ALMA: *(Reading cookbook, oblivious to DELORES' thinking out loud.)* Oh look - it tells you how right here on Page 217, experts say -

DELORES: Great! What do they say? (*Poises herself at the typewriter wiggling her fingers above the keys, ready to take inspiration from ALMA, not realizing it is about her recipe. Facial expressions should reflect her confusion and abject horror at what she is being told to do.*)

ALMA: It is best to begin by grabbing the cold, shaven pig firmly by the snout, placing two fingers in the nostrils and the thumb just below the center of the bridge. (*DELORES audibly winces at the thought.*)

DELORES: A poor review should be enough to get his attention. Are you sure this is absolutely necessary?

ALMA: You want to do this right, don't you?

DELORES: Well, of course. Just because I want to discourage the man's career choice doesn't mean I want to discourage his - breathing! At least not yet! Are you sure the experts suggest such aggressive behavior?

ALMA: (*Looks at the binding of the book.*) According to the publishers, you should - (*DELORES shrugs her shoulders and waits for further instructions.*) With the right hand firmly on the snout, use your left and place it determinedly on his hind flanks, follow the tailbone all the way down - and grab hold just underneath - oh my! That poor pig!

DELORES: (*Catching herself off guard by ALMA's remarks, thinking they were about LANCE. Still hovering and typing away as ALMA speaks.*) It's nothing less than he deserves! What about his audiences, hmmm? Look what they are forced to suffer through! Poor pig, my eye! What next?

ALMA: I'm sorry - you were saying?

DELORES: What next? I was thinking about saying - (*DELORES reads it in the air as if it were a marquee down stage right. ALMA reads hers downstage left.*) - something about his triumphant return from the London Theatre circuit to bring his new play *New Day Dawns* to the Big Apple, hmmm.

ALMA: Yes, it mentioned something about a big apple. (*Ruffles through the next two pages.*) Here it is! For an inspiring presentation, rub the pig with oil to make it glisten, toothpick his ears so they will stand straight up, surround him with various fruits and nuts, then - stuff the big apple in his mouth!

DELORES: Stuff the Big Apple in his mouth? More like, shove it down his throat, you mean!

ALMA: Yes! I believe it's to keep the pig's jaws from randomly flapping open and closed while you're roasting his flesh over a bed of glowing coals!

DELORES: I agree! He certainly was flapping his jaws quite a bit at that reception! Serves him right for trying to deceive me! New play, hah! Bad rewrite is all it was! I've never been so - inspired before! Maybe I can write just what I feel about this play! Chip would be so proud of me! I'll do it! *(Starts to type with a vengeance.)*

ALMA: Footnote: make certain the fire is good and hot, before you lower the carcass into place - roasting him for several hours or even days if the pig is tough-skinned! Got it!

DELORES: *(Now with paper in hand and trying to come up with a decent ending for her column, she has stopped typing and started pacing with pencil and pad to listen to the very graphic suggestions of her entranced maid.)* Got it! He'll be sorry he ever messed with me! I'll show him what a tough New York theatre critic I am! Take that, Mister fancy pants Albright! No more mousy little English major! *(Looks at her in dismay.)* I can do this, right?

ALMA: Of course! *(Looks up from her book.)* What else you gonna do with that pig? Take him to the circus? *(Shrugs her shoulders. DELORES is horrified then reconsiders.)*

DELORES: The children would like that!

ALMA: Chip, maybe. Go on, you were saying something about apples?

DELORES: Forget the apple.

ALMA: You're right. A big pig requires a bigger apple than we've got on hand - now, back to your review. *(Closes her book.)* How about? Lance Albright, having made his way back across the big pond - oh, dear God!

DELORES: There's that word again! Can I really use "pond-sucking" in print?

ALMA: Would one even capitalize that? *(Laughs.)*

DELORES: Oh, surely I couldn't put that in, could I?

ALMA: Good night, Delores - I'll leave you to your thesaurus!

DELORES: Maybe we should switch jobs. You seem to have a better handle on this sort of thing. *(Turns away from ALMA who is once again engrossed in the recipe and procedures for roasting pork over a pit. DELORES continues to pace.)* Chip's right. I can't do this. I'll just find something nice to say - okay, how about, the lighting was, adequate, technicals were fairly flawless - scenes seamless -

ALMA: *(Acts this out as she reads the procedure. Very graphic in her display.)* Don't be squeamish. You're nearly finished. Skewer the pig with a long stake -

DELORES: *(Halts in her tracks.)* It wasn't that bad! Neither was he, come to think of it. He looked good in a tux! Don't recall ever seeing him in a tux before. His eyes are a deeper shade of blue than I remembered - *(Gets all dreamy and sighs.)*

ALMA: *(Still reading out of the cookbook oblivious to DELORES.)* Finally, if the blank stare of his eyes bother you, poke them out!

DELORES: They weren't that blank, I thought I saw something in them, just for a moment.

ALMA: Poke them out or cover with maraschino cherries and place a long toothpick or wooden skewer in the centers to keep the fruit in place!

DELORES: Oh, for God's sake, Alma, FOCUS! I'm not trying to roast Mr. Albright like a pig, just critique him. I mean, his work!

ALMA: Sounds the same to me. *(Slams the cookbook closed.)* But if it will make you feel better, I'll leave his eyes alone! Geez!

DELORES: Thank you! Now, where was I? The play, the play, the music at the reception was, dare I say, lovely? Host was awful, food was wonderful! Children ate like pigs!

ALMA: *(At the base of the stairs.)* You mean swine!

DELORES: I mean, oh never mind what I mean! The play, the play was, oh God! There simply is no other way to put it! It sucked pond water!

LIGHTS OUT.

ACT ONE, SCENE 2

AT RISE:

*This perusal script is for reading purposes only.
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Lights up on LANCE ALBRIGHT's apartment. He is sitting at a table, reading the paper and drinking a cup of coffee when the phone rings. LANCE is in his housecoat, preparing to use the shower. Towel is nearby.

LANCE: For the love of - who does that woman think she is trashing my opening! I have a mind to - (*Doorbell rings.*) Hello?

ARTHUR: Well! What a review! (*Enters, flashing paper.*)

LANCE: Arthur? Oh, so you saw! Well, I've got a few words for Mrs. Nolan myself, and "pond-sucking" will not be my first choice! Get her editor on the phone before noon! I want equal print time with that female executioner! And didn't I see her bring all those kids of hers to the reception?

ARTHUR: Ah, yes - -

LANCE: She couldn't have said something nice about that? After all, they ate like pigs.

ARTHUR: Yes, healthy little buggers, aren't they? She did say the music was lovely - -

LANCE: Oh, she did say the music was lovely? Well, it was rather - oh for God's sake, Arthur! Who cares what she thought about the band! She trashed my manuscript! Again! Not that it matters. She'll kill my debut with her foul criticism -

ARTHUR: And the spelling on that?

LANCE: F - O - U - L, why?

ARTHUR: Are you sure?

LANCE: What? F - O - W - L, why? Oh, that stupid turkey award thing of hers? No, I have no intention of allowing her to brand me a failure again. This time, I have a plan!

ARTHUR: Go easy on her -

LANCE: Easy? Sure she's had a rough time of it since Frank died, but go easy on her? Did you not read the whole article, Arthur? Who uses *pond-sucking* these days, other than ten year-old boys? And what kind of woman hangs out with ten year-old boys, I ask you!

ARTHUR: Mothers of ten year-old boys?

LANCE: A-hah! I knew it. So what kind of woman does that make her, I ask you?!

ARTHUR: A mother, you idiot!

LANCE: I knew it. That's right. She has a ten year-old son. *(Pause.)*
You don't think he wrote the column, do you? *(He stops to ponder this thought.)*

ARTHUR: Her son write the blasted thing? Have you lost your mind?

LANCE: You have that editor call me. I'll fix her wagon! *(Walks him to the door.)* Hah! Music was lovely - who says *lovely* anymore? All those kids - she looked pretty good for a lady with all those - hell, she always did look good, but she should have stayed an English teacher. Women theatre critics - pond-sucking! *(Laughs at the words.)* She's got nerve, I'll grant you that! A lotta nerve!

ARTHUR: She's quite a live wire! Pond-sucking! You, Americans, such spunk! *(Picks up phone and dials.)* Yes, *New York Times*, please. Yes, I'll hold. Pond-sucking, good Lord, yes. Arthur Tuttleberry, agent for Lance Albright here, yes, set a meeting with your resident theatre critic, Mrs. Nolan, if you will. Yes, three o'clock will be just fine. Oh, and tell Mrs. Nolan to be prepared to find out what real pond-sucking is all about! What? No, I don't know what my client means by that. I just thought it was one of those catchy American phrases no one else in the world ever gets - like, neato-keeno, way to go, daddy-o, or you're the berries - what? Yes, I'll clear the line now! Bloody rude - did I say something wrong? *(ARTHUR returns the phone to the cradle and prepares to leave. LANCE walks him to the door.)*

LANCE: It's time to put phase two of Plan B into effect! No more Nolan's Notes! (*ARTHUR exits, as LANCE goes to the phone.*) Operator? Yes, could you get me the number for Landings Realty in Michigan City, Indiana? Yes, I'll hold! Oh yes. I'll hold forever for this call! (*Long pause. LANCE hums to himself.*) Yes, ring me through, please. Charles? Charles? Hello, yes, this is Lance, Edna's boy. Yes, I'm sure you do - yes, London was wonderful - no, I didn't meet the Queen - learned to bake crumpets - good for her - could you tell me if Ruth's had any nibbles on Grandpa's old place yet? Oh, I see. Can't you get someone out there to fix that? Uh huh - really. Well, if we want to get it sold, you better hire someone to patch the - no, wait. Only when it rains **real** hard, well, look, I may have someone interested in it for - oh, say three months or so - yes! A playwright! Needs a lot of space for all those kids - privacy? No, not this one! Barge in any time! I'll handle the paperwork from here. Fine. Oh, Charles? Is the barn still standing? Yes, it can still stand with only how many walls? Fell yesterday? Yes, I'm certain she'll find some use for it - rats? Oh, don't worry about that! She'll fit right in! Thanks, my best to Ruth. I'll be in touch!

Hangs up and dials another number and laughs to himself.

LANCE: Oh, I am going to enjoy this! I just have to get her to take the bait and she'll - hello? Yes, Vera, when Arthur gets back to the office, have him draw up a sublet contract for both the London and New York penthouses - and proof of my power of attorney for my grandfather's estate in Indiana. Uh huh, if he has any questions, tell him he can ring me back in an hour. Thank you.

Gets up and rubs his hands together. Goes to look in the mirror.

LANCE: It would just go on forever if I don't do something drastic and soon! Critics! Well, if she wants to play chicken with me, she'll find me a changed man! Oh - *(Stops and bows to an imaginary lady.)* excuse me, Mrs. Nolan, did I say chicken? I meant TURKEY!! Ha-ha! *(Rolls up the paper and uses it as a sword.)* New York cannot support the two of us, but if one of us was in, oh, say, Indiana! *(Dances a jig!)* Oh, I have outdone myself! *(Looks in a mirror.)* Lance Albright, you are a genius! "Oh, Ms. Nolan! I don't know nothin' 'bout birthin' no turkeys! Oh, Scarlet! This is one time ol' Rhett really did give a damn!" *(LANCE breaks into song.)* "I'll take Manhattan, the Bronx and Staten Isle . . ." and you, Mrs. Delores Nolan, after today, can take "Old MacDonald had a farm and - ee-i-ee-i" - ohhh! They'll eat her alive! *(Places both hands on his cheeks in surprise. Dances off to take a shower. Lights out on the left side of the stage and the right lights up, showing DELORES at the typewriter when the phone rings. All the CHILDREN are in various costumes. CHILDREN have been dressing up with costumes from the trunk that holds DELORES' college theatre things and Frank's military uniforms, making a lot of noise and laughing.)*

DELORES: Children? What's all the noise up there?

PAIGE: We're just playing with some of the old costumes from your trunk.

DELORES: Well, be careful. Answer the phone if it rings. I've got to finish this column by three. Chip?

CHIP: Yes, Mother?

DELORES: Stay out of your father's things. I don't want them ruined! Those were his uniforms not costumes.

CHIP: Well then, what should I use? It's mostly girly stuff in there.

DELORES: I don't know, be creative, darling, it's the theatre. *(Very dramatically.)*

MARLA: Be creative, darling! It's the theatre. Blah! I'd rather be in the movies!!! *(Phone rings.)*

DELORES: I heard that, Marla - answer the darn thing and stop being so theatrical about it!

MARLA: Fine! I've got it! (*Mumbles under her breath, but audible as she comes down the stairs to answer it.*) Stop being so theatrical, Marla, blah blah blah!! I'll show you theatrical! Hah! (*Runs down the stairs with hair up in ponytail, looking like a typical teenager. Sings first verse to "Bye Bye Birdie" as she answers the phone, just to annoy her mother.*) "Hi, Mr. Albright – Hi, Delores! (*Stares at her mother with blood in her eyes.*) What's the story - morning glory? What's the word - hummingbird? Did you hear about Delores and Lance? Did they really get pinned? Oh yeah - I was hoping they would - uh-huh - now they're living at last - going steady for good! Going steady - going stead- (*Whispers into the receiver.*) - alright, Plan B goes into effect this afternoon. I'll tell the others.

DELORES: (*Demanding.*) Who was that?!

MARLA: (*Hangs up the phone very dramatically and places her hand across her forehead.*) What? Oh, it was Marlena Dietrich! She 'vanted to be alone so I hung up on her! (*Turns on her heels. Smirks and runs back upstairs.*)

DELORES: Very funny!

MARLA: (*MARLA comes halfway down the stairs.*) Was that theatrical enough, Mother? Or shall I do the death scene from *Camille*? I can pick some of the gardenias off the balcony plant.

DELORES: Keep your mitts off my gardenias! It's the only thing I haven't killed yet!

MARLA: Fine!

Phone rings again. MARLA heads back upstairs to tell the others about the plan. CHIP passes her on the stairs, wearing a Hamlet costume complete with tights and skull in one hand. He comes down the stairs slowly and deliberately, passing the ringing phone and going into the kitchen area to get an apple off the table.

NELLIE: (*Yells at CHIP from the top of the stairs, hanging over the railing in a raggedy Cinderella get-up, make-up on her cheeks, holding a broom over the railing.*) Get the phone, or I'll be forced to set my evil stepsisters on you, Chip! I have to memorize my lines and get ready for the ball! (*Sees CHIP tugging at his tights.*) Hey! Those are my Sunday tights you're wearing!

CHIP: So? A man can't run around with just this! (*Displays the top tunic of his costume.*) But that explains why they're doing this. (*CHIP digs the tights out of his rear. Phone continues to ring.*) Ha-ha!

DELORES: Chip please! I'm trying to concentrate! Get the phone!

CHIP: (*Comes across the stage, taking a bite of the apple. Stares at the phone, with the apple in one hand and the skull in the other, realizes he has run out of hands and cannot pick up the receiver. Answers DELORES in a deep voice with a Shakespearian cadence.*) To be or not to be, for me! That - is the question!

DELORES: Chip! I'm warning you -

FRANKIE: (*Hangs over the railing in a fairy princess costume.*) Yeah Chip - she's warning you! Get the phone or the wicked witch will put you to sleep.

CHIP: Oh no! Not - (*Shakes and falls to his knees in terror.*) Not - not - Marla!

MARLA: (*From upstairs.*) I heard that! Mother? May I kill him now?

DELORES: Can't it wait? I'm trying to make my deadline by three!

MARLA: And I'm trying to make his death wish come true by four!

CHIP: (*Taunting her further, waving her away.*) Be gone! Out damn spot!

MARLA: That's "Out damn spot," you moron!

CHIP: Mom! Marla used the "D" word!

DELORES: Marla!

MARLA: (*Looks at CHIP and starts to come after him.*) Oooh! I'm gonna kill you!

CHIP: (*Stands very stoic with the skull in the air and the apple almost to his lips. He says line then takes a huge bite.*) To die would be a great adventure! Ha-ha-ha! (*Holds the skull up in the air as though it were a sword.*)

MARLA: That's Peter Pan, you idiot! Not Hamlet!

CHIP: Okay, you want Hamlet? (*Phone still ringing.*) Whether 'tis nobler to suffer the minds of men - to answer the thing - or to let it ring - again and again - and again - that is the question! (*Stands over the ringing phone without answering it.*)

MARLA: And you are the problem! (*Reaches over the railing, grabbing at CHIP, who is taking another bite of his apple.*) I hope you choke on that thing! (*Phone still ringing.*)

CHIP: Not before you! We should put it in your mouth first, after all, isn't that how all pigs die? *(He shoves the apple into the mouth of the skull he is carrying with his other hand and makes a face as he squeals like a pig.)*

MARLA: Oh, you little swine! That's how you'll die, if I get my hands on you! *(Runs down the stairs after him. They run around the room. Stand each other off at opposite ends of DELORES' desk and then peel off to circle the room again as the phone continues ringing, driving DELORES up a wall.)*

CHIP: Alma! I've got another pig for you to roast!! *(Runs through the room taunting MARLA, holding the apple out as if it were a carrot to chase after.)* Here, piggy- piggy piggy! Come to Hamlet!

DELORES: Oh, for God's sake! I've got it! *(She goes to pick up the phone.)* Hello - Hamlet? I mean, Hammond, how are you? *(CHIP and MARLA are still trying to corner each other around the ends of the couch, when they start to listen to DELORES' conversation. DELORES stares them down to get them to be quieter. They both stop and turn to listen when they realize she is canceling their afternoon's folly to go into the city.)* Yes, I expected to hear from him - not happy? Really! The pond-sucking thing? You know, somehow it just fit, so I . . . three? This afternoon? Well, I gave Alma the afternoon off, but okay, we'll be in later. Right, three it is! What's that? *(CHILDREN are on the stairs listening.)*

MARLA: Mother! Three? What if I have plans? OOHHH! Why does **your** job have to ruin my life!

PAIGE: Go to the *Times*? This afternoon? Her job is ruining my life!

NELLIE: Mine too!

PAIGE: Good! Then Mother can kill two birds with one stone!

CHIP: Hey! You gotta be pretty good to kill a bird throwing a - *(Looks at skull and apple.)*

NELLIE: Apple?

CHIP: Noooo. Frankie, go get the hamster!

FRANKIE: Okay.

DELORES: Quiet, please! Children, I'm still on the phone. I'm so sorry Hammond. What sort of a deal does he have in mind? Marla, did he just say HAMSTER? Mary Francis? What - oh - Hammond. Okay, explain it to me when I come in. Later, then. Goodbye. *(Puts receiver back on the cradle slowly.)* What kind of an assignment do you give to a theatre critic, other than the theatre? That makes no sense at all - after all - I'm not going to be a war correspondent, for God's sake! I wonder what he meant by that? *(Pulls paper out of the typewriter and puts it in a file, then calls to the CHILDREN upstairs.)* Girls? Put on something respectable. We've got to run into the city after lunch. Tell Chip as well! *(Picks up the paper and reads her own review.)* Hah! Who goes to war over a silly little thing like "pond-sucking"? I better see if Alma will be out for the whole day. Perhaps we'll stay over in the city this evening and catch another play for next week's column. Girls? Better pack a small overnight bag, just in case we stay in the city.

MARLA: Mother!

DELORES: Oh, Marla, don't be so theatrical, it's not like I'm asking you to move!

LIGHTS OUT.

ACT ONE, SCENE 3

AT RISE:

*Lights up as LANCE, ARTHUR, HAMMOND and DELORES are at a table in conference at the **Times**. All parties are seated at the table, but as the fighting begins, LANCE and DELORES take to opposite ends of the room and fight over the heads of ARTHUR and HAMMOND.*

DELORES: You're asking me to move? For three months? Are you out of your mind! *(Gets up from her chair.)*

HAMMOND: Oh, don't be so theatrical, Delores!

LANCE: Yes, darling! Don't be so theatrical, love.

DELORES: That should have been my line, but in your case it would have been rather inappropriate **and** unattainable, I'm afraid! You couldn't be theatrical if -

ARTHUR: So Hammond, what you are proposing is that my client, Mr. Albright, switch places with your Mrs. Nolan for the sake of your paper's circulation?

HAMMOND: No, Mr. Tuttleberry, this is not about my paper's circulation! The *Times* will stand on her own! Your client has put forth an interesting proposition, though. It's going to be a new decade soon! People are becoming theatre snobs! We New Yorker's especially, we tend to forget about the little folk out there in - where did you say, Arthur?

ARTHUR: Where is it again, Lance?

LANCE: Let's just say, the countryside - **outside** New York City proper.

DELORES: How *far* outside the city proper?

HAMMOND: Never mind, Delores! Anyway, like I was saying, the theatre has become the playground of the rich and intellectually elite! We, as the leading news organization in print, need to change that, keep our writing fresh and reflective of the masses! Inclusive and available to foreigners, you know, people who live outside the city.

ARTHUR: But the masses don't pay for those front row seats, Hammond! Those snobs you refer to pay to keep the lights up and running; pay to keep brilliant new playwrights like my client, Mr. Albright, from running back 'cross the pond -

DELORES: There's that word again!

LANCE: I liked you better as a **schoolteacher**!

DELORES: I liked you better as a **memory**!

HAMMOND: Cut it out, you two. Delores, your column is well read; but it has a very narrow audience and it shrinks with every off-season. What this proposal would do is open that up for us! Each of you would keep a journal, see? You would switch places with the playwright for three months, and he with you! It'll be great copy! Lance, the playwright -

DELORES: - that's a stretch!

HAMMOND: - would have the chance to review works by others and see what it's like to walk the fine line of criticism and encouragement - (*LANCE looks at DELORES and blows her a raspberry, she returns the favor.*)

LANCE: You call that snooty column of hers encouragement?
(*Finally gets up from his chair.*)

DELORES: He was crazy enough to call you a playwright! And just for the record, wasn't "New Day Dawns," just a rehash of that pathetic manuscript, "Coming Around Again," you submitted to Professor Ackerman third year?

LANCE: It was fourth year - and he gave me greater accolades than you did this week. He was my professor and my mentor - did **you** know that?

DELORES: Did **you** know he also drank his coffee from a test tube? Chewed on rubber bands, bit his pencil erasers off and that he only said those things to spare your feelings - AND did you know that he used your manuscript to line the **rat** cages in the biology lab?

LANCE: Well, I hope they kept you warm -

DELORES: Oh, deliciously warm, thank you!

LANCE: And by the way, how would I know that about my manuscripts? I never **took** biology.

DELORES: Well, you should have! You'd have made a much better scientist.

LANCE: I don't know the first thing about biology.

DELORES: BINGO, Professor Albright! You don't know the first thing about writing, either!

ARTHUR: Children, please. Hammond, I have a train to catch.

LANCE: Speaking of children, how many little savages are you up to now?

DELORES: A whole handful! Can you count that high?

LANCE: I was honors in math! Don't you remember the yearbook? I had a photo taken with the head of the math department; you signed my book on that page, remember?

DELORES: Oh, yes, Lance Albright! I can see your picture now, "boy most likely *not* to marry"!

LANCE: Yes, I was the handsome one - on the left!

DELORES: You didn't let me finish, Lance! "Boy most likely not to marry, because he'll never find anyone more in love with Lance Albright than Lance Albright!"

LANCE: Thank you for that touching trip down memory lane! So, good afternoon. I have an interview and a dinner engagement with a very lovely **young** lady from the *New Yorker* magazine, candlelight, champagne, maybe some lovely flowers!

DELORES: Who says LOVELY anymore?

LANCE: Ah-ha! You do! You used it in your article about my reception.

DELORES: Well, I lied! And I have a dinner engagement, too! With five very LOVELY people, who hated your play, by the way!

LANCE: The same LOVELY people who gave you the now infamous pond-sucking line?

DELORES: The very ones! And you are not invited to join us!

LANCE: I had no intention of giving up a sensational dinner and stimulating ADULT conversation to have dinner with you and that tribe of savages you call children.

DELORES: Oh, ADULT conversation! Just who is it your dinner date is going to talk to then? The waiter?

ARTHUR: Hammond! Control her or we'll never get through this negotiation!

HAMMOND: Delores, won't you listen for just a moment? It makes good business.

DELORES: Good business?! To uproot my family and rearrange their lives again! Haven't they been through enough the last two years? Hammond, what you are suggesting is impossible!

HAMMOND: Ah, yes! But profitable! Here's the deal: Mr. Albright will have the chance to sit in your chair for the next three months and write reviews while reworking his own script. Which, by the way, you will have first crack at dismantling in print upon your return to the column. You and the children on the other hand, will spend three glorious leisure-filled months at what I am sure are top-notch accommodations upstate somewhere on Mr. Albright's family estate. You did say it had been in the family for three generations, right, Arthur?

ARTHUR: I did! That's what you told me, Lance, correct? Anything else you want to add?

LANCE: Yes, it was my great-grandfather's estate. The subsequent birthplace of yours truly!

DELORES: Your great-grandfather was a pig farmer, then?

LANCE: You - (*Controls himself.*) - my only regret is that you'll be keeping it from someone else to enjoy. Why, just this morning I was speaking to the realtor about prospective buyers! It's much too large a property for me to run all by myself without the staff!

DELORES: The staff?

LANCE: Yes. There's the groundskeeper, the stylist, the gardener, did I mention the stylist?

DELORES: You did! So that's not your real hair color then, Lance?

LANCE: Mm-hm. You'll love it, Delores. Clean air, room for the kids to roam. Why there's a charming vintage barn, quaint fencing - antiquated trees and a bossy old cow or two! My sweet old uncle Charles says the stars are sooo bright at night, you can see them shining right through the roof of the house! You can even hear the crickets chirp or the gentle rain patter on the old tin - sounds just like Symphony Hall, darling - why, it's a bucolic paradise! The perfect setting for you to complete the other half of the deal!

DELORES: What other half of the deal? And why is everything in the good old country old? Sweet old uncle Charles - great old bossy cows - antiquated trees - how old is old on this tin roof?

ARTHUR: Why, my dear. Age is considered a virtue and a privilege in jolly old England! I myself am a great lover of the antiquities. A consummate collector at heart. Why, sometime I must invite you out to see my rather impressive collection of old manuscripts!

DELORES: Isn't that just "duddy"! Well, virtue in England; what's it called in jolly old - where did you say this place was in upstate?

ARTHUR: Why, Lance says it's just outside the city limits a mile or so.

DELORES: So you are a native of New York, then? I never knew this before! I always thought - -

LANCE: Yes, you can safely assume I am a *native*.

DELORES: Your great-grandparents are from the area, then?

LANCE: Relatively. They were one of the first families at Plymouth Rock!

HAMMOND: Enough of the travel guide tour? Can we get back on track here? Where was I?

DELORES: You were just about to sell me down the river!

LANCE: That would be, UP the creek without a paddle, my dear!

HAMMOND: Very well, up the creek! Say! Then there's water on the property?

LANCE: Yes! Yes, there is! Fancy that! A pond!

DELORES: There's that word again!

LANCE: Just perfect for your favorite sport, Delores, POND-SUCKING! Hope you pack plenty of straws!

DELORES: I'll be sure to save a funnel for you. Besides, I believe that's **your** favorite sport, Lance! Apparently along with shoveling plenty of - did you say there were cows on the property or just a lot of **old bull**?

LANCE: I'm surprised you know the difference after all these years, Delores.

HAMMOND: Arthur! Control your client or the negotiations are over! I swear, either he behaves - -

ARTHUR: I'll handle him later. Let's cut this short before they kill each other. What's my commission in this lovely war game?

HAMMOND: I'll turn the paperwork over to the legal department and we'll get your seal on it! I deserve a little combat pay myself!

DELORES: Wait! What's the other half of the deal he was talking about!

HAMMOND: Best of all, kiddo! You finally get a crack at your dream! You get to write your own script, and Lance here will get a chance to review it! May the best writer win!

DELORES: Win? Win what?

HAMMOND: Bragging rights opening night at the Schubert! Best script goes up for season opener! You can't lose, kiddo! You and the kids get a free vacation and a shot at the big time -

DELORES: - and if I don't deliver the winning manuscript? What then?

LANCE: Well, let's just say I'd keep my teaching certificate up to date! I hate to rush off in the middle of a good fight, but I just hate a predictable ending! Feel free to call, when you get a line set up - would you like the number? Oh! I forgot!!! I'll be at your flat! I believe you already know the number! (*Laughs heartily.*) Oh, don't worry about your plants, I won't kill them. Plants, I like! It's people I hate, mostly critics! (*LANCE and ARTHUR gather their papers and retire from the room. DELORES is standing there in shock, while HAMMOND tries to bolster her up.*)

DELORES: My apartment? With my things? Hammond! He's not taking the children too, is he? *(Pause.)* Wait! - all five? Or could I just trade out the teenagers?

HAMMOND: *(Distracted looking at the documents.)* 'Course, kiddo. We'll have them put in storage, if you like.

DELORES: *(Aghast!)* The children?

HAMMOND: The children? Delores! 'Course not, the furniture and things, just tag the items you want the movers to take out to the other place and carry what you and the kids need the first night out of town. *Times* will pick up the tab for everything you need to get started on this little project! Part of the terms, what's the problem, kid? It's a win-win situation for you! I'll get the contracts set and delivered to them tomorrow, noon. You better take those little Indians out to dinner and prepare them for things! I'll have the boys in copy send a stack of comics along for the ride out. Tell them it's gonna be a vacation! Tell 'em it's gonna be an adventure! Tell 'em it's gonna be a -

DELORES: - an absolute NIGHTMARE!

LIGHTS OUT.

ACT ONE, SCENE 4

AT RISE:

Lights up on the kitchen and living room of the rundown farmhouse in Indiana. This will be on the reverse side of the wagon. Rain is dripping through the roof, either by sound effect or by garden hose suspended in rafters above the set. Large boxes are everywhere, filled with the remaining props for the room. Each child is in front or over a box, unloading and unwrapping books, photos, knickknacks and various kitchen things into the cupboards, shelves and fireplace mantle thus, easing the set duties of the stage manager for this scene. Newspapers are all over the floor; DELORES is unpacking glasses for the kitchen when the phone on the wall rings. CHILDREN scramble to answer it. CHIP and NELLIE fight over the handset phone on the floor, ending the call. MARLA and PAIGE are on the stairs with feather duster and broom. FRANKIE is in one of the large boxes, pulling things out for her mother.

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CHIP: I got it!

NELLIE: No! I got it!

CHIP: No! I got - uh oh. (*Phone is on the floor. NELLIE and CHIP look over at their mother to see if they are in trouble.*)

MARLA: Look what you two have done now! How could you? That's our only source of communication with civilization! Without that, we could shrivel up and die and not a soul would be able to find us!

PAIGE: Yes. It took **us** 4 days to find **us**! Now we'll have no contact with the outside world at all! You can't keep us here, Mother! I want to go back to New York!

FRANKIE: I miss my bedroom!

NELLIE: I miss my friends!

PAIGE: I miss electricity!

DELORES: Nobody wants to get back to New York more than I! Now, get back to your cleaning if you want to sleep in a clean bed tonight! Marla, have you found the box with the linens yet? Alma said she marked them with a red "X," near the Albright's address label.

MARLA: It's a little hard to tell them apart, since you drew bull's eyes in red on all the boxes waiting for the movers.

DELORES: Oh, yes, well, help me unpack some of these down here and we'll eventually run across them. Frankie, darling, put these in the sink to wash out or just hold onto them for a minute. (*Hands FRANKIE some things from a box and then helps her out of the larger box. Phone rings and they all stare at it and then bolt for it at the same time.*)

DELORES: Chip, answer that thing. Everyone else, back off!

FRANKIE crawls back into the big box to hide.

CHIP: Nolan residence, may I help you? Fine, sir and you? Yes, she is. Mother, it's for you.

DELORES: Oh, really. Wonder who could that be?

MARLA: Oh Mother, for God's sake, he's the only idiot that knows this number! Why won't you take his call?

DELORES: He is not the **only** idiot who knows this number! Hammond has it as well, and I refuse to speak to either one of them.

CHIP: Mom says, "Who is this?" Uh huh, okay. Mom, he says if he tells you, you'll just hang up on him for the eighth time today.

DELORES: Tell Mr. Albright it's the ninth time.

FRANKIE: Yeah, the ninth!

CHIP: She says it's the ninth time today, sir . . . okay. Yes sir, he insists it's only the eighth time, Mom.

DELORES: Really? *(Gets up and takes the receiver from CHIP and slams down the phone.)* There! If the idiot calls back, just tell him I was clairvoyant!

FRANKIE: Yes! Mother's hair is buoyant!

DELORES: Thank you, darling!

FRANKIE: You're welcome! *(Smiling.)*

NELLIE/CHIP: What?

MARLA: Mother, we've been here for three days now and we haven't met anyone!

DELORES: Oh, don't be silly! Why, you've already met the mayor, the local hardware store owner, and the waitress down at the diner, the beautician and the town's realtor! Not to mention the staff here at the lovely Albright estate!

PAIGE: But Mother, the only people we've seen since we arrived have been Mr. Albright's aunt and uncle, when they gave us the keys!

NELLIE: *(Goes to the door and swings it open.)* And how come we needed keys when there's no lock on the front door?

FRANKIE: Yeah! No lock on the front door!

DELORES: Now, let's not be ungrateful, children! At least we have a front door! A key is rather small potatoes after looking at the rest of this house! *(Unpacks another large pot to put under a hole in the roof to catch rainwater. Walks the floor in the kitchen eyeing the ceiling as she maneuvers the pot in place as she speaks.)* Why, the only thing I can think of that has more holes than this roof is my head and my contract with the *Times*. I don't know what Hammond was thinking, not taking the time to go through all that legalese. Lance really set me up on this one. I should have seen it coming a mile away! If I ever see that cockroach again - *(Suddenly stamps on a bug that she sees crawl across the floor.)*

FRANKIE: You'll squish him?

Phone rings again, CHILDREN sit back as they see their mother rise to answer it.

DELORES: Precisely!

She grinds the bug into the floor with a smirk on her face. The phone rings and DELORES waves the CHILDREN off to answer it herself. Their conversations start to overlap. PASTOR is calling from the set also used by LANCE as the hotel room, office, etc. All scenes and dialogue not taking place in the farm or DELORES' New York penthouse for both LANCE/PASTOR, are directed from the small set of desk and phone. It can be a wagon with a platform and door alone. Wall painting to give it depth and ground it as a space for opposing callers to call from.

PASTOR: Hello, Mrs. Nolan?

DELORES: Are you learning-impaired?

PASTOR: Learning-impaired?

DELORES: Yes! Is there an echo in here? I thought I made it very clear when I hung up on you before! Let me tell you something, you low life, *(Looks at CHIP and gives the "thumbs up" sign.)* mud-wallowing, pond-sucking rodent! I have never in my life been subjected to such humiliation. The phone company came out here twice in two days because the repairman thought the place had been condemned already!

PASTOR: Condemned? Oh my, I had no idea!

DELORES: My aunt Susie you didn't know! Seems there hasn't been a soul living in this God-forsaken rat hole for over seven years!

PASTOR: Well, I knew it had been vacant for awhile, but - -

DELORES: Awhile, huh! It's as vacant as your head! Just what the hell did I do to you to deserve this kind of treatment!

PASTOR: I assure you, I don't know, but if you need to talk, I -

DELORES: Talk? No, thank you! I'll do the talking Mister Loosey-goosey with the details! My life is now one big cardboard box thanks to you - -

FRANKIE: I like cardboard! (*Pops her head in and out of the large packing box she is in.*)

DELORES: Yes, dear. What? Where was I? Oh, yes, cardboard boxes! And furthermore, when I am able to find my thesaurus, I will look up UNREDEEMABLE SLOB, and find, See: Lance Albright -

PASTOR: Oh, for the love of God! Mrs. Nolan! (*DELORES gasps.*) This is Pastor Whitfield!

DELORES: Pastor Whitfield? (*Gasp. Long pause.*) Oh, my God! (*She crumbles to the floor.*)

PASTOR: (*Slowly, unruffling himself.*) Mine as well, thank you. I was calling to invite you and your family to services this Sunday.

DELORES: Thank you. Now is not a good time -

PASTOR: Time? Oh, yes, almost forgot! Four o'clock sharp! Confessions are this afternoon. I'm sure we'll have a lot to talk about!

DELORES: Yes, I'm sure we will. Thank you for calling.

PASTOR: Mrs. Nolan?

DELORES: Yes?

PASTOR: There's a church social this Friday night. Perhaps your family might enjoy an evening out with children their own age.

DELORES: Yes, (*Looks at CHILDREN and smiles.*) that would be fun for them. (*CHILDREN leave their respective boxes to eavesdrop.*)

PASTOR: And you? Any plans for you, Mrs. Nolan?

DELORES: Myself? Oh, no. I'll just stay around here and finish unpacking, maybe write a little; catch up a bit on my reading! You know I haven't read a decent paper in days. *(Getting an attitude again.)* Like you could call this thing a paper - *(Holds up the local rag.)* as for books, I was smart to bring my own! I have several books I haven't been able to get to since . . .

PASTOR: Genesis? *(Pause.)* Yes, I strongly believe you should start there.

DELORES: Genesis, as in, the Bible, Genesis?

PASTOR: Yes, the Bible! I'm certain you might find it to be a nice change of pace for you. I hear it's a real page-turner, even in New York! Everyone just raves about it! Except those egocentric critics, of course, and you know how they can be! Snooty, belittling, ass - umimg! Should I go on?

DELORES: No, I know very well how critics can be. Thank you again, Pastor.

PASTOR: Have a good day, Mrs. Nolan. I'll look for you about 4: 00, shall we say? Oh, *(Chuckles to himself.)* and Mrs. Nolan?

DELORES: Yes?

PASTOR: Could you do me a favor? *(Chuckles again.)*

DELORES: Certainly.

PASTOR: *(Blurts out in a peel of laughter.)* Could you - give my regards to old Broadway! Ha-ha-ha - *(Hangs up the phone still laughing. DELORES hangs up the phone and slumps into a pile of newspaper. The CHILDREN start to laugh and then begin to bury her under papers. They are all playing when the phone rings again.)*

DELORES: Oh gawd, how humiliating! *(Phone keeps ringing.)*

MARLA: Mother, do you want us to answer the phone or not?

DELORES: This is not just a game, Marla! I have now declared WAR!

MARLA: On the entire human race or just the male gender in particular?

FRANKIE: Do you want me to drag out Daddy's old trunk?

DELORES: NO! *(DELORES throws up a hand to stop the chatter.)*

MARLA: Very well then, commandant! Shall I answer it or would you rather we communicate by a flock of cursing carrier pigeons?

DELORES: Don't be so theatrical! I'll get it myself.

FRANKIE: Yeah! Don't be so what Mom said.

DELORES: Yes, keep talking and identify yourself! *(Pause.)* Lance, it's you? *(Looks to the crew for the "go ahead" to blast him full of holes.)*

PAIGE: 'Ze cannons are loaded! Fire at will, commandant!

DELORES: Alright! Here goes - *(Takes a deep breath.)* and I thought all the rats were still out in the barn! I'm surprised an idiot like you was capable of retaining a set of numbers this long! You seem to have difficulty in mastering certain other bits of information!

LANCE appears on the catwalk/opposing wagon for his office set up; seated at a desk, speaking into the phone from his apartment in New York. CHILDREN start to clump together to listen to their mother.

LANCE: Okay, okay, I deserved that. How are things going for you out there? *(Silence from DELORES.)* I really am sorry about the confusion in the contract, I thought I was perfectly clear in my representations with Arthur. *(Sarcastically.)* I simply don't know how he could have got the wrong impression!

DELORES: Yes. Silly, wasn't he? For that matter, weren't we all just soooo silly? I had just the same impressions! So did Hammond and half the legal staff at the *Times*.

LANCE: Well, perhaps I can clear up a few things for you as well. What's your first question?

DELORES: Gosh! Where to start? How 'bout, the countryside! Outside New York proper?

LANCE: Now, technically, you never asked **how far out** of New York proper it was. I'd guess about a thousand miles, give or take a couple hundred! Next!

DELORES: How then do you explain, UPSTATE?

LANCE: Well, look at a map, darling! You are upstate! Only in Indiana!

DELORES: The staff, then! "Staff" generally implies more than one - and Alma won't be out here for a week!

LANCE: Staff is plural! And I believe they were there to greet you when you arrived! The two of them! Uncle Charles and Aunt Ruth!



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