

Remember The Sparrows

A full-length play

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SCENE 1

LIGHTS UP:

Curtain opens on SARA WINSLOW who is busy dusting and straightening as LARRY ELMORE helps.

SARA

I think that should do it, Larry.

LARRY

I didn't know what I was getting into when Timothy agreed that I would help you "straighten up" around here.

SARA

If I remember right, you both agreed to help. You can't blame me because your husband wimped out.

LARRY

That's what I say every time we have plans and he has the nerve to go answer a call from the hospital! Who's more important? Me or some dying child?

SARA

The gall!

They smile and laugh. This is an easy interaction between friends.

LARRY

You have to tell me, Sara. Are you okay with this? I mean, we've cleaned this place within an inch of its life, you've turned the guest room into a living space, and you're more nervous than I've seen you in 15 years.

SARA

I'll be fine. I know you and Timothy are worried but this is the right thing to do. I think I want Ken's father here more than he does.

LARRY

Well, you are moving him all the way here from... whatever fly-over, mid-western sink hole he's been living in--

SARA

Indiana.

LARRY

(teasing)

Is that still a state? I need to brush up on my geography. California's a lot to get used to.

SARA

No, Larry, you're a lot to get used to.

LARRY

So true but so worth it. You know that we're here for you.

SARA

I know and I'm probably going to be calling on you and your extensive wine collection.

LARRY

Girl, as long as the four of us are still going to Napa Valley, you will still have wine!

SARA

(Hugging Larry)

I don't know what we would do without you two.

LARRY

Wither up and die, obviously. Or, at least, have to use one of those internet lawyers to draw up your will.

They part and make faces at each other.

SARA

An internet lawyer would sass me and that would NOT be good.

LARRY

You live for that, girl.

(Hands her the duster)

Anyway, I have a man who will be hungry after saving the young world, so I need to get home.

SARA

Thank you, Larry.

LARRY

You know we got your back. Peace and love to you, my friend!

Larry exits through the kitchen. Sara looks around the house, straightening a few more things. She looks at an old picture of Burton and his wife that she has hung.

KEN WINSLOW enters through front door carrying an old suitcase.

SARA

Ken! I didn't hear you pull up!

She rushes to hug and kiss him as he sets the bag down

KEN

This is what I need after three days on the road.

SARA

Where's Burt?

KEN

He's getting out of the car. Just needed a two-second break but I have to get back out there. Listen, Sara, he's not doing well today and anything he says...

BURTON enters through front door carrying a small suitcase. Ken rushes to take it from him and usher him to a chair, which Burton does not want to go to.

BURTON

This doesn't look like the West Baden Springs I remember.

SARA

(To Ken)

The what?

KEN

(To Sara)

I had to tell him that I was from the travel agency and he had won a trip to West Baden Springs in Indiana. He and mom used to go there once a year.

BURTON

Where's the dome?

SARA

Dome?

KEN

West Baden had a huge domed lobby.

SARA

Oh.

(Going with the flow)

Mr. Winslow, this is our new reception area. Can I show you to your room?

BURTON

(Burton notices her as if for the first time)

Oh, I see. No, I'm waiting for my wife. She's meeting me here for a short get away.

Sara and Ken look at each other.

SARA

She's a lucky lady, if I may say so, Sir.

BURTON

And you are?

SARA

I'm Sara. I... just started here recently.

BURTON

I see. Thank you, but I'm the lucky one. Can I tell you something, Sara? This will be our fifth anniversary. We met right here when she was here with her family and I was here with my dad. She was only 14 and I was 15, but we snuck away together every evening. Lots of places around here to get lost. Now she insists on meeting me here instead of coming together. Keeps the spark alive. Maybe she's already checked in. Her name is Katherine. Katherine Winslow. Have you seen her?

SARA

Um, no, Sir. She's not here yet. Would you like something to drink while you wait?

BURTON

That would be marvelous, thank you.

Sara exits to the kitchen. Burton continues looking around the living room at the photos and knick-knacks. Not knowing what else to do, Ken continues the ruse.

KEN

Da...Mr. Winslow, would you like to see your room?

BURTON

No, thank you, young man. I'll just wait for Katherine here. You've gotten some new folks since I was last here. I don't remember that girl from last time.

KEN

(Wincing)

Yes, Sir, she just started this season.

BURTON

Nice girl. Nice to see young people making something of themselves.

Sara returns with a cup of coffee.

SARA

Here you are, Mr. Winslow.

BURTON

Thank you.

SARA

Would you like to sit down?

KEN

I already tried. He wants to...

BURTON

When a lady asks, how can I refuse?

Burton sits in a chair as Ken makes a face at Sara. She smiles.

KEN

(To Sara)

I'm going to get his things out of the car. You okay?

SARA

(To Ken)

Yeah, I've got this. You go ahead.

Ken exits. Sara sits near Burton.

SARA

So, fifth anniversary this year?

BURTON

That's right! It's amazing that she ever married me in the first place. Katie's way above my station. She hates it when I call her Katie because she really is a Katherine to the rest of the world, all proper and stoic.

But when we're alone, she's my Katie. Her hair comes down and falls around her shoulders and she becomes so playful.

SARA

She sounds wonderful.

BURTON

We had our honeymoon right here and we shared our first drink as a married couple right in the middle of the floor under that dome. When I looked up, I saw a sparrow sitting on the ledge, just watching us. I told Katie that somebody should shoo it out but she smiled and told me that it was a good omen. Can you believe that? An omen! I just laughed. She looked at me and I knew she was serious. I hope she gets here soon.

SARA

Why so nervous?

BURTON

This year is different. She's pregnant.

SARA

Oh my!

BURTON

Yes, don't tell anybody. We don't want a fuss.

SARA

Do you know whether it's a boy or girl yet?

BURTON

No, but I want a daughter. I know that's strange to hear a man say, but a daughter is always your little girl while boys grow up to be men and move away. That's what I did. Do you still love your father?

SARA

Very much.

BURTON

See? That's the kind of question you can't ask a boy today. He's too busy memorizing statistics from the 1955 All-Star game.

SARA

Why 1955?

BURTON

Because that's the year that Stan Musial hit a home run in the bottom of the 12th off of Frank Sullivan to give the National League a 6 to 5 victory.

(Pause)

See? It's genetic for men.

SARA

And what does Katherine want?

Ken enters quietly in the background.

BURTON

She wants a boy, of course, somebody to carry on for me. She wants the scuffed knees and the messy room and the baseball cleats scratching the linoleum in the kitchen. She tells me that boys are easy, girls require way too much work. She even has a name picked out for him. Kenneth Alexander.

(Sara looks back at Ken)

I told her you can't name him that because his initials would be K-A-W! Kaw, for god's sake! She just laughs at that. Hell, she'll probably be right and he'll be stuck with the name. He'll grow up to hate us and become a hippy or something. She'll get her way, I just can't say no to that woman. Oh well, as long as he calls his mother every once in a while.

Burton stares into his coffee cup as Sara gets up to go to Ken.

KEN

That's the first time I've ever heard that story.

SARA

Are you okay?

KEN

Yeah, but what do we do now? He expects my mother to come through that door any minute.

SARA

We'll just have to play it by ear. Maybe we can get him to his room and he'll fall asleep.

KEN

Has he called you a kid yet or asked you how you got to work at such a swanky place?

SARA

No, but he did say he wanted to have an affair and see the other side of the tracks.

KEN

What?

(Sara laughs)

Oh, very funny.

SARA

You are the most gullible man I know.

KEN

And you are the sexiest woman I know... even for a liar.
You're pretty good at this role play thing.

SARA

(Teasing)

You know how it is, just relying on my spy training...

BURTON

(sounds different, much
older)

Do I need to leave the room or are you two going to put on a
show?

KEN

Dad?

BURTON

Who the hell else would it be? Whitey Herzog?

KEN

Are you okay, Dad?

BURTON

I will be as soon as your better half comes over here and
gives me a kiss.

Sara moves to Burton, leans down
and kisses him on the forehead,
giving him a big hug. She loves
this man.

SARA

Oh, Papa B, it is so good to have you with us.

BURTON

(Embarrassed)

I did it again, didn't I?

KEN

It's okay, Dad.

BURTON

Like hell, it is. There are some things that you expect to
go. I expected my body to break down like your grandfather's
did. I expected to slow down as I got older. But you can't
prepare to lose your mind.

KEN

Dad, you're not...

BURTON

Don't tell me I'm not losing it, Kenny. I've seen it before. I've watched it happen at the home we had to put your grandfather in toward the end. The home I'll be going to.

SARA

You will stop talking like that right now, Papa B. Our home is your home and as long as I'm alive, you will not be going anywhere.

BURTON

I will NOT be a burden on you two!

SARA

(Stress the word "I")

I will decide what is a burden on this household and what isn't. You're MY father, too, understood?

BURTON

There are times when everything is clear as a bell and every memory is right there. I remember the day we brought Kenny home from the hospital like it was yesterday. He was the fattest baby you'd ever seen! I remember teaching him how to ride a bike.

KEN

I remember you pushing me off on two wheels before I was ready and falling.

BURTON

I remember you crying like a little girl, too.

(To Sara)

But then I remember him picking himself up, looking all mad, and telling me he didn't need any help. He used a step to hop right on that bike and ride off...for at least five feet before he fell again, but he did it.

SARA

(To Ken)

Aw, I can just see your skinned up knees and pouty face.

KEN

Yeah, thanks for that.

BURTON

And I remember the day he brought you home for the first time from college. I remember the look on his face. I like to think it was the same look I had when I looked at my Katie.

KEN

I was actually afraid of how you would react, Dad.

BURTON

Why, just because you brought this young lady home from your out-of-state school I told you not to go to? No, you were just afraid that I was going to say something inappropriate.

SARA

No, we expected that. He was afraid I was going to kick your ass.

BURTON

(Smiling)

Damn, I love this woman!

KEN

Not as much as I do.

BURTON

Give me time and I'll steal her away, boy.

KEN

Yeah, but she'll come running back when she realizes the little blue pills don't work anymore.

BURTON

Kids today. So reliant on pharmaceuticals when there is more than one way to skin a cat.

SARA

Believe me, Papa B, he knows.

BURTON

Is that right?

SARA

I had to teach him, but he's a good student.

KEN

You do realize that I'm right here, don't you?

BURTON

I do believe it's time for this old man to lie down for a little while. I take it I'm in the guest room?

SARA

It's your room now. I'll show you.

BURTON

I'll show myself to my room while I can still remember where it is.

(Smiling)

Wouldn't mind a little breakfast in bed, though.

KEN

I'm her husband, you know. Your son.

BURTON

Doesn't mean I'm related to her by blood.

Ken picks up his bags and exits to the hallway. Ken and Sara watch until we hear the bedroom door close.

KEN

Oh yeah, this is going to be loads of fun.

Sara slaps him on the arm.

SARA

You be nice or I'm not going to call you by your name, I'll just make a crow sound at you.

Knocking on the front door.

KEN

Hold that thought because I have no want to discuss it. Ever.

Ken opens the door and OFFICER ROBERT PARKES enters.

PARKES

I was just driving by and saw that you made it back.

KEN

(Closing the door)

Yeah, Rob, I just got back in time for my loving wife to learn about my childhood traumas.

SARA

It's not my fault your father talks to me more than you.

KEN

My father talks to the checkout clerk more than he does me. You set a low bar.

PARKES

Great! I can use some ammunition for poker night.

(To Sara)

What's the deep, dark secret?

SARA

(Conspiratorially)

Well, it seems or Kenneth had a problem with his initials.

PARKES

What kind of problem?

SARA

Certain crowd sounds directed at him when the big bullies found out his middle name is Andrew.

PARKES

"KAW?" Really? No wonder you never told me your middle name.

KEN

It's not funny. They made fun of me relentlessly in school.

SARA

I can see it now... "KAW blew the curve again."

PARKES

"Yeah, can't hit a jump shot, but he knows the name of the horse that survived the Battle of Little Big Horn."

KEN

Comanche.

PARKES

Show-off.

KEN

Ridden by Colonel Myles Keogh. [pronounced KEY-oh]

SARA

Nobody cares, baby.

PARKES

So, where's your old man?

KEN

He's laying down. Three days on the road getting him here because he won't fly and the only thing we were able to talk about was which Waffle House had the best coffee.

PARKES

Any problems with him?

KEN

His doctor gave me all of his instructions, meds, and a referral for a doctor here. Back to school tomorrow, next week, we meet the new doc.

SARA

You know, you're pretty sexy when you're taking care of somebody.

KEN

You have to say that. Part of the contract.

SARA

Nope. You have a heart and morals. That's why you're the teacher and those high school basketball superstars are line cooks now.

PARKES

Hey, some of us became cops.

SARA

There's no way you were never a basketball superstar.

PARKES

If it helps me get closer to your sister, I was!

SARA

Why don't you give that up? She hates you.

PARKES

All I need is that one... thing to catch her eye.

KEN

Yeah, well that one thing is money and you don't have any, Officer.

PARKES

You watch, she'll come around.

SARA

Give it up, Rob. There's only room for one eternal love around here.

Sara wraps her arms around Ken.

KEN

You love this nerd, don't you?

SARA

Against my better judgement, I do.

KEN

Now we just have to survive our new housemate.

SARA

That's the easy part. The hard part is watching you two sing ABBA karaoke.

KEN

But you are my Dancing Queen!

They kiss.

PARKES

Legally, that sentence alone means that she could kill you in your sleep and no court would convict her.

KEN

You can leave before you give her any more ideas.

LIGHTS DOWN

SCENE 2

LIGHTS UP

The next morning. Ken enters with the newspaper. He is dressed for work as he sits in his chair, opens the newspaper, and starts reading while drinking his coffee. Burton enters in his robe and slippers.

BURTON

So, who does a veteran have to kill to get some coffee around here?

KEN

Good morning to you, too, Dad. How are you feeling?

BURTON

Years past my prime. You?

KEN

(Getting up)

Here, take this chair and I'll get you some coffee.

BURTON

Is that the chair I gave you for Christmas four years ago?

KEN

Yes, it is.

BURTON

You two haven't been doing any he'n and she'n on it, have you?

KEN

No, Dad, that's what the couch is for.

BURTON

(Looks at the couch)

All right, I'll take the chair then.

KEN

Do you want anything in your coffee?

BURTON

Just one ice cube. Keeps me from burning my tongue.

KEN

All right, Dad.

Ken exits. Burton walks over to the chair but is distracted by a photo of he and his wife on the wall. He walks over to it and stares at it, running his hand over her face.

KATHERINE WINSLOW enters from the kitchen, carrying two coffee cups and smiling.

KATHERINE

Here you go, love. One ice cube, as always.

Katherine sets one of the cups on a table and holds on to the other. Burton continues staring at the picture.

BURTON

You're not here.

KATHERINE

Of course I am! You wanted your coffee, I brought you your coffee.

BURTON

Just like you used to.

KATHERINE

I will always bring you coffee, Burton.

BURTON

I just want it to be real, Katie.

KATHERINE

You can't go back in time, no matter how long you stare at that picture.

BURTON

(Smiling)

No, but seeing it helps me keep you close.

KATHERINE

I'm in your mind, Burton, how could I not be close?

BURTON

I was afraid I wouldn't be able to talk to you after leaving home.

KATHERINE

You know better than that. Where you go...

BURTON

...I go.

KATHERINE

That's right. That will never change.

BURTON

I just wish it was really you. Not just a memory.

KATHERINE

Oh, Burton, I'm so much more than just a memory.

BURTON

I know, Katie. You're still my rock. I wouldn't have come out here to the left coast if you hadn't talked me into it.

KATHERINE

You do realize that you talked yourself into it, don't you? I only tell you what you want me to.

BURTON

I know, but I know what you would say to me even if I wasn't the one thinking it. I need you to help me, Katie. I'll never stop needing you.

KATHERINE

That makes me happy, Burton. But remember, you have others to help you now.

Sara enters and sees Burton staring
at the photo. Katherine exits.

SARA

Papa B? You okay?

Burton turns to look where
Katherine was.

BURTON

She was my Katie, you know?

Sara hugs him.

SARA

I know, Papa B, and now you're here with us.

Burton smiles at her.

BURTON

I'm sorry, Sara.

SARA

For what?

BURTON

I'm sure I'll need to say it and won't know to, so I'm starting to save 'em up now. Just remember I said it when I can't.

Ken enters with the coffee.

KEN

Okay, one cup, extra strong.

BURTON

Did you have to go pick the beans yourself?

KEN

Yes, Dad, and the grinder is broken, so this is water with some beans in the bottom of the cup.

BURTON

(Taking the cup)

Good, just the way I like it.

(He starts to drink the coffee and looks into the cup)

Where's the ice cube?

KEN

I knew I forgot something

BURTON

YOU'RE forgetting things?

KEN

Give me the cup and I'll get your ice cube.

BURTON

No, I'll get it.

KEN

Are you sure?

BURTON

I think I can get an ice cube, boy.

Burton exits to the kitchen. Ken wants to say something but doesn't.

SARA

Take it easy, honey. This can't be easy for him.

KEN

But something could happen to him!

SARA

You can't treat him like an invalid. He's still a proud man.

KEN

I know, a little too proud.

SARA

We can't lock him up 24-7, Ken.

KEN

(Takes a breath)

I know, Sara. It's just so hard to see him failing like this.

SARA

He's still sharp.

KEN

For now, Sara. The doctor said his condition will just get worse. What if it gets so bad that we can't take care of him?

SARA

Shhhh! I don't want him hearing you talk like that. This is our home and that includes OUR father.

KEN

What did I do to deserve you?

SARA

God loves you.

KEN

You know I don't believe in God.

SARA

That's why he gave you to me to straighten you out.

They kiss.

KEN

Tell him I said thanks.

SARA

(Looks toward the kitchen)

Do you feel a draft?

KEN

Dad, shut the freezer door!

SARA

Go check on him, Ken.

KEN

I'd rather stay here and...

SARA

(Giving Ken a "do it now"
look)

Go check on your father, Ken.

KEN

And that's why we haven't had kids. Too much work.

(Ken exits to the kitchen)

Dad, you don't have to...

(Ken quickly looks back into
the living room)

The back door is open! Call the police, I'm going after him!

Ken exits.

SARA

Oh my God!

(She picks up the phone and
dials)

I want to report a medical emergency! My father in law is an
Alzheimer's patient and he has walked away from our home.

(Pause)

Maple Drive.

(Pause)

Yes, he's [describe the general look of the actor playing
Burton] and he's in his pajamas. Please hurry, we don't know
how far he may have...

Knock at the door.

SARA

Come in!

(Back to the phone)

About 5 minutes ago at the most...

The door opens and Larry Elmore
enters with a dog on a leash and
Burton.

LARRY

Hey Sara, I just met your father-in-law.

SARA

(To phone)

He's back! Yes, thank you very much, sorry to bother you.

(Hangs phone up and runs to
hug Burton)

I was scared to death! What happened?

LARRY

This guy came running at me yelling that I had stolen his dog
and he wanted him back.

BURTON

That is Dusty! Don't you think I know my own dog?

LARRY

He finally calmed down enough to tell me his name.

BURTON

Tell him that's my dog!

SARA

Burt, that's not Dusty...

BURTON

Don't tell me I don't know my own dog! This nigger stole my
Dusty!

LARRY

WHAT?

Sara gets between them quickly.

SARA

He doesn't know what he's saying!

BURTON

Like hell I don't! That's my dog!

LARRY

We have a problem here, Sara.

BURTON

Give me back my...

Sara turns on Burton.

SARA

Burton! Sit down! Now!

Burt backs off and goes to the
chair.

SARA

I'm so sorry, Larry.

LARRY

I know you told me he was having problems, Sara, but that language is indefensible! When you told me you were bringing Ken's father home, you didn't warn me that--

SARA

It's not who he is. Not at all, believe me.

LARRY

Sara, Timothy and I have been friends with you and Ken for a long time, but you have to do something about him.

SARA

I know.

LARRY

You can't let him go running around like that, Sara.

SARA

I know, I'm sorry, Larry.

LARRY

You know I'm here to help whenever I can, but he needs professional help.

SARA

He'll get it. Thank you, Larry.

Larry exits. Sara sighs and steels herself to talk to Burton. She sits on the couch beside him.

SARA

Burt, we need to talk.

BURTON

I did it again, didn't I?

SARA

Can you tell me what happened?

BURTON

I went to the kitchen to get an ice cube and I heard them.

SARA

Heard who?

BURTON

The sparrows, Sara. I heard the sparrows outside.

SARA

Burt, it's 25 degrees out there.

BURTON

I know, it's insane, but I heard them as clear as I can hear you now. I had to see them. Katie loved the sparrows.

SARA

So you went outside?

BURTON

I just wanted to see them.

SARA

But what about Dusty?

BURTON

When I got outside, I looked back and saw the door open. Katie always left the door open when she went into the back yard and Dusty would get out. That's how I knew I had to find my dog.

Ken enters with Officer Parkes,
both hurrying and out of breath.

KEN

Rob and I looked everywhere and he's not...

SARA

Ken!

He stops and she points at Burton.

KEN

Where the hell did you go?

BURTON

I had to get Dusty!

KEN

You what?

BURTON

Dusty got out again! Your mother is always leaving the back door open and he got out.

PARKES

How did he get back?

SARA

Larry brought him home.

KEN

Larry Matthews?

SARA

Yes, your father thought Larry had taken his dog.

BURTON

He did! That asshole stole Dusty! Had him on a leash walking him along free as can be.

KEN

Dad, Larry Matthews is a lawyer! You're lucky we're friends or else he would sue us for everything if you touched him!

BURTON

I just want him to give me my dog back!

KEN

Tell me you did not touch him!

BURTON

I didn't! But I should have decked that spook as soon as I saw him!

Ken is aghast.

KEN

Tell me he did not say that to Larry.

SARA

Worse.

PARKES

What's worse than...? Oh.

BURTON

Go get Dusty for me, son. Bring him home for me.

Ken throws his hands up and backs away.

KEN

I don't know what's going on, Dad, but I'm done dealing with you until tonight. I have to go to work.

SARA

Ken, you can't be mad at your father. It's not him talking.

BURTON

Get the dog or don't bother coming back! Finish something for once, boy!

KEN

(To Sara)

I love you but I can't deal with him right now.

SARA

I'll take care of him. Go to work.

KEN

This is why I married above my station.

They smile and kiss.

BETH enters. Parkes smiles at Beth,
smitten.

PARKES

Hi, Beth. You look great today.

BETH

(Not happy to see Parkes)

Hello, Robert. Still not interested.

PARKES

Can't blame a guy for trying.

BETH

(To Sara)

Good morning, my beautiful sister.

(To Ken, dryly)

Kenneth.

KEN

Now I really have to go.

SARA

Leave before I leave first.

KEN

(To Sara)

I'll see you tonight. Don't kill my Dad today, but if you
happen to accidentally lock her out so she won't just barge
in, you have my blessing.

BETH

You're funnier than...no, wait, you're not funny.

SARA

No promises.

KEN

Love you.

SARA
You, too.

KEN
(To Burton)
Bye, Dad.

PARKES
(To Beth)
Bye, future wife.

Beth rolls her eyes. Ken and Robert exit.

BETH
Why do you put up with that man being in your house?

SARA
Robert? He's Ken's first college friend. Showed the small town boy around the big city. And, if you remember, introduced him to his future wife. He's harmless.

BURTON
(To Sara)
Who was that?

SARA
That was your son, Burt.

BURTON
Nonsense! My son isn't old enough to drive...

BETH
You see what I mean? That man should be in a home.

SARA
Like the one our mother died in? No thanks. I have a say here.

BETH
That's not fair, Sara. Pop did what he knew was right.

SARA
And how did he know it was right to stash Mom in an out of the way home and forget about her?

BETH
He never forgot about her, Sara. He just couldn't handle seeing her in that state. He prayed for an answer and did what God told him to do In his heart.

SARA

No, he couldn't stay sober long enough to see her in HIS drunken state!

BETH

That's not fair, Sara! He's your father!

SARA

And it was my mother who died by herself, Beth! Did you even go see her? Did you?

BURTON

(Remembering)

Kenny?

Sara moves to the couch to touch
Burton's hand.

SARA

Yes, Papa B, Kenny.

BURTON

Was he mad at me?

SARA

He'll get over it.

Beth pulls Sara away from Burton.

BETH

Sara, you should not have to take care of that man.

SARA

You may be my sister, but you never learned anything about family.

BETH

We pray for that old man every Sunday, I don't know what more you want me to do.

SARA

You don't have to do anything except support our decision to bring him home. Is that too much to ask?

Burton gets up and goes to the
photographs, looking at them.

BETH

You aren't skilled with people like that! My church group ministers in the homes, I've seen his kind. He is going to hurt you!

SARA

How very Christian of you, Sara. I wish you could hear yourself.

BURTON

What did I do, Sara?

SARA

(Going to Burton)

Nothing that can't be undone.

BURTON

(Breaking down)

Oh God, Sara, I can't live like this. I can't wonder everyday what I've done.

SARA

That's why you're with us, Papa.

Burton becomes more agitated.

BURTON

You have your own lives, Sara! You shouldn't be taking care of a broken down old man who's losing his mind! You need to live your lives and leave me be!

SARA

Burt! You are part of our lives! We won't turn our backs on you just because you having issues. We are your family.

BURTON

(Settling back down)

But there's so much living you have to...

SARA

WE have to do, Burt. We.

Burt sinks to the floor, head in his hands.

BURTON

I just don't think I can do it alone. I need my Katie to tell me what to do.

Sara wraps her arms around him.

SARA

I know, Papa, I know.

LIGHTS DOWN

SCENE 3

LIGHTS UP

Burton enters wearing a cleaning apron. He is dusting and cleaning the living room. He hums to himself, becoming more animated as he goes. Eventually, Sara walks in. She smiles and watches as Burton dances around with the duster.

BURTON

You're so light on your feet, Katherine.

(Falsetto)

As are you, Burton.

Burton finally sees Sara and stops dead. He is embarrassed.

SARA

Aw, you didn't have to stop.

BURTON

Katie was the only person who ever saw me dance.

SARA

Didn't you ever take her out dancing?

BURTON

No, never. We only danced in our... home.

Burton sits in the chair. Sara sits on the couch.

SARA

Was Katherine a good dancer?

BURTON

Oh, yes! She's the only woman who ever made me want to dance just because I watched her. She could move...

SARA

Oh, Burton!

BURTON

When she danced, time stood still for me. I was a year older than her, you know.

SARA

No, I didn't.

BURTON

She made me take her to her senior prom. I was already out of school and working. I was so broke that her father took me to the flower store and paid for her corsage. He told me that I could pay him back, but when I tried years later, he acted like he didn't remember it and refused the money.

SARA

He must have thought you were the one.

BURTON

Yeah, fathers do have a way of telling. I took her to her prom and told her "now, I won't do no dancing." Of course, she corrected me and said "you won't do ANY dancing", and then smiled and said "we'll see".

SARA

She had something up her sleeve, didn't she?

BURTON

We had just been sitting at that table all night. Me feeling uncomfortable in a borrowed suit and her just smiling. Then they announced her as the prom queen. She just smiled, got up, and danced with the prom king.

SARA

Uh-oh.

BURTON

You're right. A town bastard named George.

SARA

You didn't get in a fight, did you?

BURTON

I wanted to. I wanted to walk right out there, hit George in the nose, grab her, and walk out.

SARA

What did you do?

BURTON

(Pause)

I walked right out there...and kissed her. I was ready to go at old George, but I didn't. That was when I realized that I was proud to be there with the queen. She knew what was coming and chose me. I said "may I dance with the queen?" Worked hard to say it right. We danced the rest of the night.

SARA

Oh, Burton.

BURTON

Yeah. I beat up George later in the Army.

Sara gets up and holds her hand out
to Burton.

SARA

May I have this dance, Burton?

BURTON

(Taken aback)

I don't know, Sara...

SARA

Don't say no to me, just dance with me.

Burton takes Sara's hand and gets
up.

BURTON

There's no music.

SARA

There's always music.

Sara pulls in close to Burton to
slow dance and begins humming.
Burton picks up the tune and hums
along with her as they dance.

SARA

You dance marvelously, Burton.

Burton dips her.

BURTON

Thank my Katie.

Burton releases goes to the photo.

SARA

I just hope that Ken and I have a marriage as strong as you
and Katherine.

BURTON

Hope? Marriage isn't based on Hope, young lady. It's a lot of
work and communication. She taught me that. My Katie was the
only person who could make me talk when I didn't want to.
Hell, she's the only person who could make me listen.

SARA

Your son is exactly like you, you know.

BURTON

How's that?

SARA

He is.

BURTON

Kenny was his mother's favorite person in the world from day one. He was a mama's boy. He would take after her, if he could.

SARA

You're wrong, Burton.

BURTON

Why?

SARA

Ken is your son through and through. He's bull headed, knows what he wants, and loves baseball.

BURTON

He never told me he loves baseball! I thought he just watched when I was around because I was watching.

SARA

He gets just as worked up as you, yelling at the TV.

BURTON

If the umpires would get it right, I wouldn't have to yell!

SARA

That's exactly what he says.

BURTON

Then we all can go to a game together!

SARA

I want to watch the two of you yelling at the umps live. That and a ballpark hot dog will be more entertaining than the game.

BURTON

I haven't been to a game since Katie and I went while she was still healthy. She would hold my hand to calm me down.

SARA

She must have been one hell of a woman.

BURTON

(His demeanor immediately
changes)

What do you mean by that?

SARA

I mean she must have really gotten your motor running...

BURTON

How dare you talk about Katie that way!

SARA

Burt, I wasn't trying to...

BURTON

How DARE you talk about my wife that way!

SARA

(Getting scared)

Burt, I didn't mean...

BURTON

I will take your head off, George! I'll kill you!

Burton grabs Sara and pushes her
onto the couch. He rears back,
ready to hit her.

SARA

Papa B, it's me, Sara!

Burt suddenly realizes what he has
done and steps back, horrified.
Sara sits up, eyeing him
cautiously.

BURTON

My god, Sara! Sara, I'm so sorry!

SARA

Stay away from me, Burt.

BURTON

I didn't know what...

SARA

(Yelling)

STAY AWAY FROM ME, BURT!

(Calming down)

Just for now, please, let me collect myself.

BURTON

I really am...

Sara runs out of the room.

BURTON

...sorry.

Burton slides into the chair.
KATHERINE enters smiling.

KATHERINE

You really screwed the pooch this time.

BURTON

(Expecting her)

I did.

KATHERINE

She's on your side, you know.

BURTON

I know.

KATHERINE

What are you going to do to fix it?

BURTON

I don't know. It was so much easier with you, Katie.

KATHERINE

What was, Honey Bear?

BURTON

Everything. You would deal with people, not me. I don't deal with people.

KATHERINE

You can.

You just have to let yourself
relax.

BURTON

I can't do this without you.

KATHERINE

(Kneeling down in front of
him)

Do you remember when I was giving birth to Kenny?

BURTON

I remember you were so beautiful. You had on a sundress and we almost didn't make it to the hospital.

KATHERINE

What did you do that night?

BURTON

I got you to Dr. Klein's house.

KATHERINE

You took control. I was a mess that night. You kept me calm and got me to the doctor.

BURTON

Anybody would have done that.

KATHERINE

Not true. You were my knight in shining armor. You were there when I needed you, whenever I needed you to be strong.

BURTON

I married so far above my station. You know your father threatened me before our wedding? He told me that if I ever hurt you, he had a shotgun and a lot of land. Nobody would ever find me.

KATHERINE

I wondered where you got that.

BURTON

Yeah.

(Beat)

It should be me in the urn. Not you.

KATHERINE

Nonsense, old man. You have too much still to do.

BURTON

What, Katie? I'm old, I'm tired, and I'm slowly losing my mind. What could I have left to do?

KATHERINE

Trust me, I know.

BURTON

Katie, I love you, but I'm not so far gone that I don't know that you're just in my imagination. In my mind, you will never age like me. You will always be the Katherine I fell in love with. That's what I'll remember as I break down.

KATHERINE

Then you have a very vivid imagination, Burton. Why am I all in white?

BURTON

Because you will always be my angel.

KATHERINE

I think you need to remember that there were more than a few times that I made you angry, love.

BURTON

Not many and none worth mentioning.

KATHERINE

How angry were you at my senior prom?

BURTON

I got over it.

KATHERINE

You know I made you jealous on purpose?

BURTON

I know. And it worked.

KATHERINE

I thought you were going to kill poor George.

BURTON

Not in front of you.

KATHERINE

Such a gentleman.

BURTON

That's me...never kill a man in front of a potential wife.

They smile and laugh. Katherine gets up and moves to exit.

KATHERINE

Remember that laughter, Love. You'll need it.

BURTON

What?

KATHERINE

Answer the door, Burton.

She exits. There is a knock at the door.

BURTON

What the hell?

Burton answers the door. Officer Parkes enters.

PARKES

Hello, Sir.

BURTON

Yes, officer, what can I do for you?

PARKES

You obviously don't remember me, Sir.

BURTON

Should I?

PARKES

I'm Robert Parkes. I was here earlier. I went to college with your son.

BURTON

Robert Parkes? The wild kid who talked my son into staying here after college?

PARKES

Yes, Sir, that's me.

BURTON

Looks like you went on to a good career.

PARKES

Yes, Sir, I did.

BURTON

Well, Kenny's not here right now. He's at work, so you'll have to catch up later.

PARKES

Is Sara home? I really need to talk to both of you.

BURTON

Both of us? What is it you need to tell us?

PARKES

Sir, please, I think we need to sit...

BURTON

Young man, I'll sit when I damn well please. Now spit it out.

PARKES

Sir, I really need to tell Sara, too.

Sara enters, surprised to see
Parkes.

SARA

Oh, hi Rob. Ken's not here right now, but you could catch him
at the school if you need him, I'm sure.

PARKES

No, Sara, I'm here to talk to you two.

SARA

Why? What's wrong?

PARKES

I need to let you know that there has been accident.

BURTON

I told Kenny to be more careful! Who did he hit? Is he in
jail?

PARKES

(With obvious difficulty,
then using his 'official'
voice)

Ken's car was hit by a semi this morning. The driver didn't
see him because of his blind spot.

SARA

Oh my god! What hospital is he in?

PARKES

Sara...

(Pause. Literally unable to
say the words)

Ken... didn't survive.

(Burton and Sara are crushed
by the weight of the news)

I'm so sorry to be bringing this news to you, but I didn't
want somebody you didn't know telling you.

BURTON

He's dead?

PARKES

Yes, Sir.

SARA
 (Barely holding it together)
 And they sent you to tell me.

PARKES
 It's never easy to tell a family member--

SARA
 (Agitated)
 Never easy to tell a family member?
 (Increasingly agitated)
 Never easy to tell...!
 (Losing it)
 How do you think it feels to RECEIVE the news? Have you
 stopped to think about that?

PARKES
 I'm so sorry, Sara.
 (She collapses on the couch.
 To Burton)
 I really am sorry for your loss. For all of our loss.

BURTON
 MY LOSS? Do you think I give a DAMN about MY loss? He has a
 wife who has to live without him now! Do you know what it's
 like to live without the person you promised your life to?

PARKES
 No, Sir, whatever you need me to...

BURTON
 I need you to give that woman back her husband! I need you to
 give me my son! Can you do that?

PARKES
 Sir, I don't have those answers--

BURTON
 Then who do I blame? Tell me that, who do I blame?

PARKES
 (Frustrated)
 I lost my best friend, too! How do you think I feel?

BURTON
 I don't give a damn how you feel! He may have been your
 friend, but he was--

SARA
 (Quietly)
 My husband.

What? BURTON

My husband. My life. SARA

Sara, I-- PARKES

SARA
He was the man I was supposed to kiss when he walked through that door tonight.

(Becoming more irritated and animated as she speaks)

He is the man I was going to have children... YOUR grandchildren... with. The man who knew what my favorite color is, what my favorite food is and where I wanted to go to get away from everyone and everything. The man who knew me better than I could ever know myself because HE was the romantic in this couple... HE was the one who could make me feel like I was the ONLY woman in the world. The man I was supposed to spend the rest of my life with! Oh, God, why isn't he walking through that door right now saying surprise, babe, Dave was wrong and here I am! Why is he gone? Please, God, tell me...

Sara falls into Burton's arms and they both slide to the floor.

LIGHTS DOWN

CURTAIN

ACT II, SCENE 1

LIGHTS UP

Sara is sitting on the couch with a drink in her hand. She's not drunk, just depressed and still in shock. Burton enters carrying a bottle and two glasses.

BURTON

On a day like this, it's never too early for some pain killer.

Sara holds her glass up to show Burton.

BURTON

Like minds.

(He sits and pours himself a drink)

Can't remember ever having a drink with Kenny. Is that right or did I lose that memory, too?

SARA

No, Ken never was a drinker, even on our wedding night.

BURTON

Didn't get that from me.

SARA

He was always afraid that being a teacher, he couldn't afford to lose control.

BURTON

I want to have a drink with my son.

SARA

So do I, Burton. So do I.

BURTON

(Toasts)

To my boy. And to you.

SARA

A few hours the widow.

Burton looks a bit uncomfortable.
He stares at his drink.

BURTON

I remember when the hurt was new. I was drunk within an hour. First time I had been in 20 years. The hardest part was putting it back down.

SARA

You know what the hardest part has been for me? Identifying the body. Jesus, you hear that? I called him "the body". I can't even think of what I saw as Ken. I loved that man for years and I couldn't figure out it was him at first. He was so mangled.

BURTON

Then how did you know?

SARA

His eyes.

BURTON

His what?

SARA

His eyes were still open.

BURTON

Jesus.

SARA

They pulled the sheet back just like on TV. I didn't feel like I was actually there. His head...

(She almost breaks down
remembering)

Then I saw his eyes. They were Ken's eyes...but not. There they were. There was no life left. I couldn't recognize his face, but those eyes. Those goddamn eyes!

BURTON

I'm sorry that you...

SARA

Are you, Burton? Are you sorry?

BURTON

Sara, I've lost my wife, too.

SARA

I know, Burton! The whole world knows, Burton!

BURTON

Sara, I know how much this hurts--

SARA

This is MY hurt, Burton! This was MY husband!

BURTON

He was my son, too!

SARA

(Stands and throws her glass
at the back wall)

You think I don't know that? You think that you're here
because you're MY father?

BURTON

I know it was a hard decision for--

SARA

I wanted a life with my husband! It wasn't my idea to bring
you here! And then YOU had to argue with him before he...

Burton stares at her. Sara quickly
understands what she just said.
Burton stands with his bottle and
glass.

BURTON

After my Katie died, I lashed out at everybody I could...

SARA

Burton, I'm so sorry...

He waves her off as he pours into
the second glass from the bottle.

BURTON

No, Sara, I'm family. I am the person you can yell at who
won't leave you.

(He hands the glass to Sara)

Besides, you'll want to yell plenty at me later.

He hands her the drink and exits.
She stares at the glass in her
hands.

SARA

I can't do this.

Ken enters wearing the same color
as Katherine.

KEN

Do what?

SARA
(Closing her eyes)
You're not here. I am not talking to thin air.

KEN
Who else do you have to talk to?

SARA
(Standing and backing away)
I am not crazy. I will NOT talk to a figment of my imagination.

KEN
Is it crazy to have memories?

SARA
It's crazy to bring those memories to a physical form! You are NOT here! I CANNOT be talking to you!
(Walks toward him)
You are just a memory, aren't you? I mean, you're not--

KEN
No, Sara, I'm not an angel. I am your memory. You are the only one who can think of me in this way.

SARA
I'm going crazy.

KEN
You're not crazy, Sara.

SARA
I'm not so sure.

KEN
Why?

SARA
(Coming to the realization)
You're not really here and you're still the only person I can talk to.

KEN
You'll always be able to talk to me.

SARA
Until my Alzheimer's sets in.

KEN
I would be the one thing you would never forget.

SARA

I like to think that. But you won't be here anymore to remind me.

KEN

I'll always be with you.

SARA

You always were the romantic in the couple. Where am I going to get that now?

KEN

What?

SARA

The romance, Ken. Where will I get the romance I want? YOUR romance?

KEN

It hasn't been long enough yet, baby. You'll heal in time.

SARA

You're full of shit! Don't say that! Don't EVER say that! You're the one who's not coming back, the one who died and left me here! Don't you dare tell me I'll heal, you son of a bitch!

KEN

Let it out, baby.

SARA

You left me! Did you even think about that? Were you paying attention when you were driving? Were you? Or were you doing that stupid thing where you thought you could read a book while you were driving?

(Gets in his face)

Tell me! Why the fuck did you leave me alone?!

KEN

You know it wasn't my choice, love.

SARA

And it was MINE? You think I want THIS?

KEN

What do you want? Right now.

SARA

I want to hit you so hard it hurts! I want to fucking knock your head off! I want...

(backs away from Ken)

I want you to walk through that door.

I want to hear you tell me it's time to wake up. Just a nightmare, love. I want to feel you hold me one more time. I want... you.

BETH enters through front door and watches Sara who doesn't notice her.

SARA
I want to wake up and know that you're here.

BETH
Sara?

SARA
(Rounding on Beth)
Beth!

Ken exits.

BETH
Who are you talking to?

Sara looks and doesn't see Ken anymore. She laughs to herself.

SARA
I guess... nobody.

BETH
(Picking up the glass)
Self-medicating?

SARA
Don't you think I deserve it?

BETH
Honey, you're not doing yourself any favors.

SARA
Favors? I'm barely standing at this point and you're talking about favors.

BETH
I'm here to help, Sara.

SARA
And what are you going to help me with?

BETH

Everything. I'll take care of all the arrangements. You won't have to do anything.

SARA

It's all taken care of, Beth.

BETH

What do you mean? You haven't talked to anybody. All you've done is sit here and drink.

SARA

(Seething)

We made our arrangements before we got married. I called the mortuary from the morgue. They've already picked him up.

BETH

Then when is the funeral?

SARA

There isn't one.

BETH

What do you mean there isn't one?

SARA

Ken didn't want a funeral.

BETH

How are his friends supposed to pay their last respects?

SARA

If they didn't respect him enough while he was alive, then I don't care.

BETH

Are you at least going to have a private ceremony before laying the casket in the ground?

SARA

No casket. He's being cremated.

BETH

He's what?

SARA

Cremated, Beth. Burned. Made into ash. His urn will sit right there on the mantel alongside his mother.

BETH

You can't have him cremated!

SARA
(Just holding in her rage)

Why not?

BETH
How is anybody going to get closure if they can't see him?

SARA
Closure? You want people to have closure?
(Finally losing it)
Then send those assholes who want their closure down to the funeral home and take a look at him before he's cremated! Tell them to look at what the accident did to the face that I love so much that I didn't recognize it! Tell them to stand there and tell each other how natural he looks, how fucking peaceful he looks! But you tell them to stay the hell away from me because my husband wouldn't look natural laying there in a fucking box! He would look natural standing beside me making fun of pricks who stare at a dead body saying it looks so natural! You want closure? Then close the fucking door as you get the hell out!

BETH
I know you've been drinking, Sara, but you have gone too far.

SARA
I've gone too far? You come in here to tell me how to deal with my dead husband's remains and I've gone too far?

BETH
It may feel like it numbs you right now, but alcohol is not the answer.

Burton enters.

BURTON
Then what is the answer, Beth?

BETH
You stay out of this.

BURTON
I'm interested in what you have to say, young lady. What do you think is the answer?

BETH
Prayer.

BURTON
Prayer?

Beth, don't.

SARA

Yes, Burton, prayer.

BETH

And who do you pray for, Beth?

BURTON

I pray for my sister to get through this trying time in her life.

BETH

Do you pray for me, Beth? At this trying time in my life, do you pray for me?

BURTON

BETH

(Pause)

I do not.

BURTON

That's very Christian of you, Beth.

BETH

You are beyond redemption, Burton.

BURTON

Am I? "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." Romans, Chapter ten, verse nine. According to what I've read, no one is beyond redemption.

BETH

Don't you quote the scripture at me! You and your heathen son took my sister away from me and the church!

SARA

What?

BURTON

"He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." John, chapter eight, verse seven.

SARA

Are you really blaming my husband for the fact that I don't go to church? Today? You're blaming my dead husband today?

BETH

You are better than them, Sara! Don't you see that?

BURTON

(Yelling)

"As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one!"
Romans, three, ten!

BETH

(Screaming)

Shut up, you old lunatic!

SARA

You're right.

Both Burton and Beth stop and stare
at Sara.

BETH

What?

SARA

You're right, Beth.

BETH

Hallelujah! I'm glad you opened your eyes.

BURTON

Sara...

SARA

No, Burton, Beth is right. It is because of Ken that I
stopped going to church.

BETH

Tell him, sister!

SARA

Because Ken was an atheist. And because Ken was an atheist,
he was the first person to show me what a Christian really
should be.

BETH

What?

SARA

I have my faith, Beth. I don't judge people because of what I
think they are, I judge them because of WHO they are. Ken
touched more lives in a school year than you have in your
entire, pathetic, hate-filled life.

BETH

Sara, I...

SARA

I am a Christian, Beth, but if being a Christian meant that I had to be like you, I would be an atheist faster than you could fake sympathy. I don't need your poison, Beth. If you want to be here for me, then stay, but if you just want to be here to judge, then get the hell out.

BETH

Sara, you've let these people get to you...

SARA

These people? Did I hear you say these people?

(Beth is shocked to hear Sara
talk back)

Papa B, is there a biblical quote for what I'm thinking now?

BURTON

To quote the great Vince Neil, "Don't go away mad, just go away."

Burton toasts Beth and takes a
drink. Beth turns and exits in a
huff.

SARA

I think I need another drink.

BURTON

(Pouring a drink into her
glass)

How are you doing?

SARA

In a strange way, I needed that. It's been a long time coming. You were great. How do you remember all of those verses?

BURTON

I'm having Alzheimer's Turrets. When I remember something, I have to blurt it out. It's very annoying.

Burton sits.

SARA

I wish Ken could have been here to see that. He wanted to tell her off so many times but I made him be the good brother-in-law.

BURTON

I know he didn't believe in an after-life, but I have to believe that he's somewhere smiling right now.

LIGHTS DOWN

SCENE 2

LIGHTS UP

Sara is lying on the couch. She has fallen asleep after too many drinks. The front door opens and Burton enters, leading Larry's dog.

BURTON

Be quiet, Dusty. Katie's still asleep.

Burton leads the dog across the stage and exits to his bedroom. The sound of him closing his door wakes Sara up.

SARA

Burton? Papa B?

There is no answer. Sara gets up and tries to pour liquor out of an empty bottle. She gets nothing and puts her head in her hands.

SARA

I've lost it.

Knock at the front door. When Sara doesn't answer right away, the knock becomes more insistent.

PARKES (O.S.)

Burt? Are you in there?

SARA

I'm coming!

PARKES (O.S.)

Sara, we need to talk to Burt.

LARRY(O.S.)

Open this door, Sara!

Sara goes to the door and opens it. Before she has it halfway open, Larry pushes his way in.

LARRY

Where is he, Sara? Where is my dog? I know it was him!

PARKES

Larry, calm down!

SARA

What are you talking about?

LARRY

That father-in-law of yours has taken my dog!

SARA

Are you sure it was Burton?

LARRY

Timothy saw him through the window!

PARKES

Larry called me. Is Burt here with the dog?

SARA

I haven't seen him this morn--

Burton enters.

BURTON

Katie, what's going on out here?

SARA

Oh my god, no...

BURTON

Who are these people in our house?

LARRY

Where is my dog?

BURTON

Your dog?

PARKES

Larry, calm down.

BURTON

I don't know who you think you are, but I don't have your dog!

SARA

Everybody just hang on!

(Takes Burton's hand)

Burton, honey, is Dusty here?

BURTON

Of course he is, Katie. You left the back door open again and I had to go get him, but he's here now.

LARRY

See?! The old nutball took my dog!

SARA

Where is he, Burton?

BURTON

In our room, on his pillow.

LARRY

(Moves toward the room)

I'm getting my dog--

PARKES

(Trying to stop him)

Let me take care of this--

LARRY

If you'd been doing your job, this never would have happened!

Larry pushes Officer Parkes aside
and comes straight at Burton and
Sara.

BURTON

Get out of my // house!

LARRY

Get out of my way, // old man!

SARA

Larry, please just--

Larry pushes Burton, accidentally
shoving Sara to the ground.

LARRY

Sara!

BURTON

Katherine!

(To Larry)

I will kill you for that, nigger!

LARRY

You son of a--!

Burton lunges at Larry who easily gets a fist up and hits Burton out of rage and self-defense. Burton crumples to the ground. Officer Parkes finally gets between them.

PARKES

Stop it! Both of you!

SARA

(Rushing to Burton's side)

Burton! Oh my god, Burton!

LARRY

(Realizing what he's done)

I didn't mean to hit him so hard! But he came at me and called me... oh my god, is he okay?

Sara helps Burton sit up. He has blood on his head.

SARA

Oh my god, Burton, you're bleeding!

PARKES

(To Larry)

Get a towel while I call the ambulance!

Larry runs to the kitchen as Officer Parkes prepares to call in the emergency on his radio.

BURTON

Don't bother.

PARKES

What?

BURTON

Don't bother to call for the ambulance.

Larry returns with a dish towel as Burton begins to stand.

SARA

Burton, you shouldn't be getting up.

Burton moves to his chair and sits, taking the towel from Larry and holding it to his head.

BURTON

Thank you, Sara, but I've been hit harder than that and survived. I'll probably survive this one.

LARRY

I'm so sorry, Burt, but you came at me and--

BURTON

I know. I don't remember it, but I know. I'm so sorry.

LARRY

But I could have--

BURTON

But you didn't, did you?

PARKES

Larry, why don't you get your dog and go on out the back?

LARRY

Yeah, I'll do that.

(As he's exiting to the room)

I really am sorry, Burt.

Burton is embarrassed and acknowledges Larry with a wave.
Larry exits.

PARKES

Burt, are you sure that you want to refuse medical assistance?

BURTONS

(Sarcastically)

Yes, Officer, you're off the legal hook for this one.

PARKES

All right, you rest.

BURTON

(Getting up)

I need some coffee.

Both Sara and Parkes rush to him.

SARA

Burton!

BURTON

I'm fine! Just embarrassed and thirsty.

SARA

Just hold that towel on your head!

BURTON

I promise, mother.

Burton exits to the kitchen. Sara
watches him.

SARA

(To Parkes)

What will happen to him now?

PARKES

I don't think Larry will press any charges, but I need to
suggest that you place Burt in a care facility...

(Sara is shaking her head no)

...where he can be looked after and cared for in his...
condition.

SARA

And be locked in and fed by people who don't know him who
think of him as another chart, turned over in his bed twice a
day to stop the bedsores? No, for better or worse, this is my
father.

(Sits in a chair and puts her
head in her hands)

He stays with me.

Parkes moves behind her and begins
massaging her shoulders.

PARKES

I'm sorry you're going through this, Sara.

SARA

Thank you, Rob. You've always been there for Ken and you have
no idea how much I appreciate it.

PARKES

Just remember, I can be there for you, too.

SARA

I appreciate that, Rob. I really do need a friend, right now.

PARKES

I could be more than that, Sara.

SARA

What?

PARKES

I'm just saying that I have a shoulder that you can cry on if you need to.

SARA

(Pulling away from Parkes and standing)

What do you mean?

PARKES

(Begins moving toward Sara)

Can I be honest, Sara? You know I've always had a thing for your sister.

SARA

Yeah?

PARKES

That was because you were off the market. Ken got you before I could, Sara.

As the two talk, Sara continues backing away from Parkes as he advances slowly on her.

SARA

What are you talking about?

PARKES

Do you remember the night you met Ken?

SARA

At the party?

PARKES

That's right. Do you know why he bumped into you? Because I dared him to! I thought you would think he was a goof and I could meet you that way.

SARA

Oh God...

PARKES

How was I supposed to know you would think he was the cute one?

SARA

Rob, I don't--

PARKES

Don't get me wrong, I loved Ken, but I hated that he had you.

Sara bumps into the wall with
nowhere left to back to.

SARA

I had no idea, Rob.

PARKES

That's because you were in your own little happy world with Ken. I thought that if I could make your sister like me, I could get over you, but your sister is such a bitch.

SARA

(Feeling very cornered as
Parkes gets close to her)

Rob, I'm sorry if I gave you the wrong idea, but--

PARKES

Not the wrong idea, Sara. I'm here to help you get over Ken.

SARA

(Getting pissed)

Get over Ken?

(Sara grabs Parkes by the
shirt and rams her knee into
his crotch, driving him
back)

GET OVER KEN? You have the nerve to think I will EVER get over my husband?

(Burton rushes in as she
yells with a frying pan in
his hand)

I don't give a shit if you are the second coming, you are trash compared to Ken! My husband died and you have the balls to come on to me?

PARKES

(Getting up)

Sara, you don't understand--

BURTON

(Holds up the frying pan)

Take one more step and it will be the last one you ever take.

PARKES

(Pleading)

Sara, this isn't how I wanted--

SARA

Get out of our house, Rob! If we ever see you anywhere near here again, you won't walk away on two legs.

PARKES

But, Sara--

SARA

SHUT UP AND GET OUT!

Burton stands threateningly as Parkes exits quickly. Sara breaks down after he exits.

BURTON

(Rushing to her)

Sara?

SARA

Why, Burton? He was supposed to be Ken's best friend! Why would he do this today of all days?

BURTON

I don't know. I wish I did, but I don't.

SARA

Do you think he's always been this way? All the times we all went to the beach together, do you think he was staring at me?

BURTON

When I was in the Army, we had a saying... once a dick, always a dick.

Sara grudgingly starts laughing as she gets up and goes to a chair.

SARA

I've cursed more in the last week than during my entire marriage.

BURTON

He was right, you know. Smug son-of-a-bitch was right.

SARA

About what?

BURTON

I belong in a home.

SARA

Don't say that!

BURTON

I do, Sara. I'm getting worse and you won't be able to--

SARA

Don't you dare say it.

BURTON

Soon, there won't be any good days, it will be the times I'm better than others. Then... nothing.

SARA

I made a promise.

BURTON

No, my son made a promise. Not you.

SARA

I am his wife!

BURTON

I am not your worry.

SARA

Listen to me, you stubborn bastard! You. Are. My. Father. You are the only family I care about now.

Burton breaks down.

BURTON

Sara, you've got to let me go.

SARA

Papa B, I am not--

BURTON

Do you know why I agreed to come here? Because I wanted to be close to my son as long as I could remember.

SARA

You don't have to--

BURTON

I wanted the last thing I saw before I finally lost it to be the one connection I had to Katherine. I wanted to be with my son.

SARA

Please, Burton--

BURTON

And now that's been taken away from me! My boy is gone and I will forget him! I will forget my son and I can't do anything to stop it!

SARA

It's not your fault, Burt.

BURTON

I was supposed to go first, Sara! A parent should not outlive his child!

SARA

Papa B, you have to settle down. Your head...

BURTON

I'm starting to think that Ken was right.

SARA

What?

BURTON

I'm starting to think there is no God.

SARA

Burton!

BURTON

What kind of a God would do this to us? What kind of pathetic, jealous God would take my wife away from me and then my son? What kind of god would tear a family apart like that? What kind of God would allow what just happened?

SARA

Please, Burton...

BURTON

(Getting up to move around)

Is he such a petty God that he can't let anybody down here have a good life? Is that what it is? Is it, God? Do you hate us so much that you have to take away our children? OUR CHILDREN? And then, just to prove that he's in charge, he takes away my memory so that I won't know who the hell my own son was? Is that what God is all about? Then I say to hell with God! I don't need what you're selling because you've brought me nothing but pain. Nothing but pain.

SARA

Papa B, I'm so sorry.

BURTON

(Sitting in his chair)

I'm just tired, Sara. So tired.

SARA

Just relax, Papa. Just sit back and dream of your Katie. Remember everything about her.

Her hair, her eyes, the way you looked at each other.
Remember the way she looked that prom night. We only have our
memories to dance with now. Dance the night away and remember
the sparrows.

LIGHTS DOWN

SCENE 3

LIGHTS UP

It's the morning that they are to pick up Ken's ashes. There are several covered dishes and homemade food items in the living room that have been donated to the family. Burton enters. He is in a dark suit, trying to tie his necktie. He sees a covered dish sitting on the table, looks around, and opens it. Happily, he starts to pull out a Rice Krispie treat.

SARA (O.S.)

Burton! Don't you dare eat another bite!

Burton quickly puts the treat back and sits in his chair. Sara enters. She is wearing a tasteful dark dress.

BURTON

I don't know what you're talking about. Haven't been near any treats.

SARA

Right. And I'm Aretha Franklin.

BURTON

Not even close. I love ya, but you can't sing a note.

SARA

Ken loved my singing voice.

BURTON

He had to. It was in the contract.

SARA

Yes, he told me about your belief in the unwritten marriage contract.

BURTON

Kept me happily married longer than not. Rule number one: Mama's always right.

SARA

So true.

BURTON

Rule number two: When Mama's wrong, you are mistaken.

SARA

Truer words... truer words...

BURTON

Rule number three: chocolate.

SARA

Chocolate? For what?

BURTON

Everything. Chocolate always works.

SARA

Now I know what your secret is.

BURTON

Do you want to know what the secret really is?

SARA

Absolutely.

BURTON

Marry the right woman for the right reasons. That's it.

SARA

Now I see where your son got his romantic side from.

BURTON

Only took me more years than I care to admit to find it.

SARA

(Kissing him on the forehead)

But you found it in spades.

Doorbell rings.

BURTON

More food.

Sara goes to the door and opens it.
Larry is there with a bottle of
whiskey.

SARA

Larry!

(Hugs him)

Didn't expect to see you this morning.

LARRY

Hello, Sara. I came to talk to Burton.

BURTON

(Yells toward the door)

I'm too embarrassed to talk right now.

LARRY

I brought single-malt.

BURTON

Let the man in!

Larry enters, walking over to
Burton and handing him the bottle.

LARRY

I'm sorry, Burton.

Burton takes the bottle, smiles,
and shakes Larry's hand.

BURTON

Don't ever say you're sorry to me, young man.

You weren't the asshole.

LARRY

We both had our moments.

BURTON

Yeah, but you'll remember yours. Besides,
(showing the bottle to Sara)
this is how men say they're sorry.

SARA

With 18-year old whiskey?

LARRY

It's the only thing we had that wasn't a mixer.

BURTON

(to Sara)

You know you want a taste.

SARA

I'll get the glasses.

Sara exits to the kitchen.

LARRY

How are you doing today?

BURTON

I've been through this. I'll be fine. I'm more worried about Sara.

LARRY

She's strong, Burton.

Sara returns with three glasses.

BURTON

That's what we need.

Three glasses are poured. They each have one.

SARA

Does this make me an alcoholic, Papa B?

BURTON

No, but I'd say everything else you've drank in the past three days might.

SARA

Very funny.

LARRY

What shall we toast to?

BURTON

To making it through the day.

SARA

I'll drink to that.

They all drink. Burton turns to Katherine's photo.

SARA

Papa B?

BURTON

I'm all right, Sara. I just want to remember while I can.

LARRY

I did some reading, Burton. I don't think you will ever forget your true love.

BURTON

Can I tell you two something that sounds a bit crazy?

SARA

Of course.

BURTON

I still talk to my Katherine.

LARRY

That's a perfectly normal thing to do, Burton.

BURTON

She talks back.

SARA

Papa B...

BURTON

I can actually see her, Sara.

LARRY

You what?

Sara is surprised.

BURTON

I see her just like she's standing in the room with us. Plain as day. I know she's just in my mind, but she's so real.

LARRY

There are many mental phenomena which could explain that. We've only begun studying--

BURTON

Have you ever had a loved one die, Larry?

LARRY

(Pause)

No, Sir, I have not.

BURTON

It makes you think things you've never thought before. Makes you wish things you've never wished.

SARA

Makes you see things you don't understand.

BURTON

(Surprised)

That's right.

SARA

I've seen Ken, too.

LARRY

You've what?

SARA

I've seen him, talked to him. I thought it was because I was drunk. Or hung-over. But is he...?

BURTON

Real? No, he's a memory. But he's a memory you'll always have. And, for once, he'll say what you want him to say.

SARA

Does Katherine?

BURTON

(Laughs)

No. She still says what she needs to, not what I want.

SARA

So we're not crazy?

LARRY

Now that is a matter of opinion.

SARA

Then we'll be crazy together.

(Looks at her watch)

I have to finish getting ready!

BURTON

We're only going to pick up the urn, Sara.

SARA

I owe it to my man to look good for him one more time. I couldn't imagine not.

BURTON

You already look great, honey.

SARA

Spoken like a true married man, Burton.

BURTON

Rule number twelve: she always looks great.

SARA

I think I need a rulebook.

Sara exits.

LARRY

And that's my exit.

BURTON

Larry, my friend, I am truly sorry.

LARRY

Nothing to be sorry for, Burton.

BURTON

Please, call me Papa B. I'm getting used to it.

LARRY

It's not nice to make a grown man cry.

BURTON

Just one more thing.

LARRY

Certainly.

BURTON

Can you go with us? Sara's not going to be in a mood to drive and I... well, I probably shouldn't.

LARRY

I would be honored. Let me go lock up.

Larry exits as Katherine enters.

KATHERINE

Looks like you made a friend today. I'm proud of you.

BURTON

Rule number 18: to keep the lady of the house happy, be friends with her friends.

KATHERINE

Sara doesn't need a rulebook as much as she needs a bullshit detector.

BURTON

(Smiling)

We're going to pick up our son today.

KATHERINE

I know.

BURTON

First time I've been dressed up since... (Pause)

KATHERINE

My funeral.

BURTON

Yeah.

KATHERINE

You should dress up more often. Makes you look hot.

BURTON

Is that the way they talk in Heaven?

KATHERINE

Only in your mind, love.

BURTON

True. Pretty sure God doesn't see Heaven the way I do.

KATHERINE

I thought you were mad at God?

BURTON

I couldn't stay mad at him.

KATHERINE

Why not?

BURTON

I couldn't bear not seeing you again someday.

KATHERINE

You can see me right now.

BURTON

You know what I mean, Katie. The real you. Not my memory of you.

KATHERINE

My memory is better than nothing.

BURTON

For now.

KATHERINE

No, Burton, my memory won't fade.

BURTON

How can you be so sure?

KATHERINE

What am I wearing, Burton?

Burton describes exactly what the actress is wearing.

KATHERINE

Now, why do you think you have such a vivid memory of me?

BURTON

Because I wanted to memorize everything about you. Every time I saw you, you took my breath away.

KATHERINE

And you really think you will forget me? Not going to happen.

BURTON

I suppose not.

KATHERINE

You couldn't forget me if you tried.

BURTON

I would never try.

KATHERINE

Do you remember the first time we danced at my prom?

BURTON

You know I do.

KATHERINE

Dance with me, Burton.

BURTON

How am I supposed to do that?

KATHERINE

Just remember.

Burton stands and approaches Katherine. He puts his arms out, inviting her to dance. She comes to him, getting into her dance pose but never quite touching him. They dance while he hums, never quite touching. They dance around the room together. After a few moments, Burton continues dancing with his eyes closed as Katherine sneaks out, blowing him a kiss.

Sara enters, watching Burton for a moment. Burton opens his eyes and stops. Sara applauds.

SARA

Papa B, that was wonderful.

Burton looks around, hoping to see Katherine, but is disappointed.

BURTON

It was... once.

SARA

(Starts tying Burton's necktie)

We are going to make it through this. You and me, together.

BURTON

Only if you can do that without choking me.

SARA

Your son didn't know how to tie one of these when I first met him, either. I had to educate him.

(She finishes tying the tie)

There. Ready for the day.

BURTON

Not even close. Nobody should be ready for this day.

SARA

You and me, Burt. You and me.

BURTON

At least as soon as I go to the head. Problem with being old.

SARA

Don't worry, I'm stocking up on adult diapers for you.

BURTON

My bladder thanks you.

Burton exits. Sara goes to the couch and sits, putting her head in her hands. She is just barely holding it together. Ken enters.

KEN

The day will be over soon.

SARA

I don't want it to be.

KEN

What?

SARA

I don't want it to be over.

KEN

Why not?

SARA

Because after we go pick your ashes up, that's it.

KEN

How's that?

SARA

That's it. You're dead and there's nothing more I can do for you except pick up your ashes and bring them back here. It will be my last interaction with you except to dust you every once in a while and I just don't want it to be the end.

KEN

It's not the end, Sara. It's just the beginning.

SARA

No offense, memory husband, but I'm actually here and you're not. There is no beginning in this.

KEN

Sara, are you going to forget me tomorrow?

SARA

I'm the one who is crazy enough to be carrying on a conversation with my dead husband, so I doubt it.

KEN

You're going to have a lot of time to talk to me. I'm in your mind so I'm always here.

SARA

Can I get sick of my own memories badgering me?

KEN

That's up to you. You're not as alone as you think you are.

There is a knock at the door. Sara looks up, surprised, as Ken exits. She looks back to see he is gone.

SARA
I'll be in a home before Burton.

Sara goes to the door and opens it.
Larry enters.

SARA
Larry? What...?

LAWRENCE
Burton asked me to go with you to pick up...

Uncomfortable pause.

SARA
You can say it, Larry. We're picking up Ken. And thank you.

LAWRENCE
Your husband was one of the few straight men who never looked at me strangely or treated me differently. It's the least I could do.

Burton enters. He goes to the bottle and pours a drink.

SARA
Papa B, are you sure you should be drinking right now?

BURTON
Don't start sounding like that sister of yours. Besides, it's not just for me.

(Pours a shot into each glass)
It's for us... and for Kenny... and Katie.
(Burton hands a glass to each of them as Katherine and Ken enter.)

A toast...
(To Katherine)
...to my Katie...

SARA
(To Ken)
...and my Ken...

BURTON
(To Sara)
...and to you.

SARA
(To Burton)
...and you. My father.

BURTON

My daughter.

(To Larry)

And new family members.

They all drink and set their glasses on the table. Burton looks out "the window".

BURTON

Sara, is that what I think it is?

SARA

(Looking)

It's a sparrow, Burton.

BURTON

(Smiling)

Yeah, it is.

LARRY

Okay, let's go before I realize I just had a drink before driving.

BURTON

If you can't handle a couple of shots, son, we need to work on you.

Larry exits, followed by Sara, who slows down as she goes by Ken. Burton brings up the rear, watching Katie as he walks by her. As he exits, he turns, blowing a kiss at Katie, and closes the door behind him. Ken and Katherine look at each other and exit. Burton quickly enters and hurries to the treats. He picks one off of the plate and starts to take a bite. Katherine enters.

KATHERINE

Burton!

Burton drops the treat and hurries back out. Katherine shakes her head and exits.

LIGHTS DOWN

CURTAIN