

GRANNY KNOT

a dramatic comedy in one act

by

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Granny Knot opened as a summer special event July 27, 2007 at Wade James Theatre, produced by Driftwood Players and directed by David Bailey, running for three performances with the following cast...

Dad	Mike Way
Mom	Carolyn Cox
Clarissa	Nicola Amos
Tiffany	Machelle Allman
Baby	Elise Hegrat
Scoutmaster	Dan Niven

CHARACTERS

DAD	Withered lion of a man, sad, uncertain, mid 60s.
MOM	Endearing and gentle matron, fed up, mid 60s.
CLARISSA	Daughter whose crisp sexiness comes to hand as easily as her briefcase, mid 30s.
TIFFANY	Daughter whose muscular beauty is almost missed for the tech-smudged overalls, early 30s.
BABY	Daughter whose girl-next-door sweetness barely hides her activist heart, late 20s.
SCOUTMASTER	A Teutonic stripling much given to sermonizing, mid 30s.

SETTING

A home: the living room and tool shed outdoors.

TIME

Present day.

SCENE

(A chair in a memory. On it lies a stack of papers and a pencil. A ten-year old Clarissa skips happily in, then spotting the papers, stops, picks them up thoughtfully.)

CLARISSA

(clearing throat, trying different pronunciations)

Mr. Gorbachev. Gorbachev. Gorbachev? Mr. Gorbachev.

(She sits down for a moment, adjusting her dress.)

CLARISSA

Mr. Gorbachev. No...Dear Mr. Gorbachev, (*penciling in correction*) President Reagan spends a lot of time talking about how different America is from Russia that I wanted to write you a letter... Do I say that? It was my idea... No, Daddy always says "Think like a team, act like a team, achieve together as a team." (*penciling in correction*)... that we wanted to write you a letter to remind you of all the things that Americans and Russians like together...No...have in common...yeah!

(She pencils in correction then stands and turns around looking at the chair. She tries standing in front of it.)

CLARISSA

For example, we both like food. In our fourth grade class the other day, our teacher, Mrs. Daniels taught us how to make borscht. I...no...we really liked it! I'm sure that you would like American hotdogs and...(*inspired*) macaroni and cheese if you ever got the chance to try them! We also both like to work very hard. Mrs. Daniels says that your Communist Party is proud of being a (*reciting*) Workers Party. Americans like to work hard, too. My Daddy works very hard at the Parks Department. In fact, he always says that...oh! Our daddies? Think as team. I'll have to ask them what their daddies do....

(She turns around again and contemplates the chair, then, shakily, climbs up onto it and stands erect.)

CLARISSA

There! Just like a propa--...proper...propergandy poster!

(She strikes a pose with upraised fist like a fiery labor activist. Dad's voice is heard from offstage.)

DAD (OFFSTAGE)

What's this? What is the cutest little girl in the city doing here?

CLARISSA

Daddy! I'm working on my class project!

DAD (OFFSTAGE)

I see! And what is the project?

CLARISSA

(in a rush)

It's a letter to Mr. Gorbachev in Russia! About how alike Americans and Russians are! And, our group... our team, has to present it to the entire class, so I'm practicing! Because our group, our team chose me to read it aloud.

DAD (OFFSTAGE)

You!

CLARISSA

Yes! Isn't that wonderful? I'm practicing, see? But, I'm a little nervous about it.

DAD (OFFSTAGE)

Well, isn't there a boy in your group?

CLARISSA

Of course there is, Daddy! Dennis.

DAD (OFFSTAGE)

Well, why didn't they choose him to read it aloud?

CLARISSA

(disdainfully)

We did! But he gets all shaky and scared. So, I said I'd do it. But, now...I don't know...I'm not sure that I'm doing very well at it. Will you listen to me as I practice?

DAD (OFFSTAGE)

Oh, don't worry, pumpkin. You'll be fine.

CLARISSA

Really?

DAD (OFFSTAGE)

Yep! It doesn't really matter what you say.

CLARISSA

It doesn't?

DAD (OFFSTAGE)

Nope!

CLARISSA

Why not?

DAD (OFFSTAGE)

Just be your cute self. All the world loves a smiling girl.

(beat)

CLARISSA

Oh.

(She climbs down from the chair, a little confused.)

DAD (OFFSTAGE)

That's what this world needs. More cute girls to make us happy. Now, run along now.

(She stands there, crestfallen, for a long moment. Then, just before the fade, we see a hardness stain her features. She exits.)

(Across the stage Dad sits, stooped, letter in hand, on a workbench in his tool shed, next to a table with assorted tools, coiled rope, some poles, and an old trophy, staring up at Scoutmaster who stands at attention wearing a 50s uniform.)

SCOUTMASTER

Sir Baden Powell was correct in his assessment: The vanguard of the fight against the falling standards of a civil society is through proper training of its youth!

DAD

(playing with letter)

They're beautiful girls. Everyone says so. I just don't understand why none of them is married.

SCOUTMASTER

Raising cannon fodder! That is the lily-livered talk of a bunch of non-conformists. Our boys are the first line of defense against those who would attack our country, threaten our way of life!

DAD

I've tried to measure up, sir. I've really tried.

SCOUTMASTER

Enough of that snot-nosed sniveling! I am not wasting the best years of my life to rear a bunch of sissies! Enough of that. Let us see a proper square knot!

DAD

(jerkily standing, fumbling letter, managing a Boy Scout salute at attention)

Yes, sir!

(Dad relapses into his stooped posture while putting down letter and grabbing a piece of rope from the worktable and begins tying knot.)

SCOUTMASTER

Not like that! Left over left, right over right! We will have no granny knots in this troop!

DAD

(re-tying)

Yes, sir! I don't know what's gotten into me...If the youngsters knew...

SCOUTMASTER

A square knot is your only guarantee against impending disaster. It is solid. Certain. Strong. Tied right, it never slips. A square knot is what we all count on to make things right.

DAD

(holding up his knot)

Here, sir.

SCOUTMASTER

Well...not bad. The ends should be even, but it will do, this time. Again!

(Dad re-ties the knot. Mom enters living room wearing an apron over a party dress, stands on a chair taping up a large banner which reads "HAPPY RETIREMENT" over a table with some wine glasses, a bottle, tape, and a fruit bowl including bananas.)

MOM

(struggling with banner)

For goodness' sake! How in the world does he do it so easily?!

(Clarissa, mid-thirties, enters the living room wearing a trim office suit carrying a briefcase.)

CLARISSA

Hi, Mom!

MOM

Clarissa! You scared me! Oh, this stupid banner!

CLARISSA

It looks beautiful. Want some help?

MOM

Yes. Grab a chair will you? There's tape on the table. I can't get the tassels to look even and you know how he likes things squared off.

(Clarissa helps.)

MOM

There. Thanks, dear.

CLARISSA

(giving her a kiss)

The yard looks gorgeous, Mom. This is going to be so much fun! How many are coming?

MOM

Well, I think fifty or so. That's what I told the caterer, anyway.

CLARISSA

It was a good choice. Are we having his Swedish meatballs?

MOM

The sky might fall otherwise.

CLARISSA

Fifty envious well-wishers to see him off. That's Dad. Is he in the shed?

MOM

You know your father. How's Dan?

CLARISSA

As hunky as ever.

MOM

He's a nice man. A good catch.

CLARISSA

As long as he doesn't open his mouth.

MOM

Rissa!

CLARISSA

What can I tell you? His brain is not his best asset. Thank god he's got such a tight butt. Sometimes I have to tell him stop talking so he doesn't spoil the view.

MOM

My lord! You did not get that from me! Is he coming?

CLARISSA

He said he'd try later.

MOM

That's nice.

CLARISSA

How about Tiff? Is she going to make it on time? She said something about having to lay new cable.

MOM

(pouring)

I know. We'll see. Baby called a few minutes ago. Her rally is just wrapping up. Would you like some wine?

CLARISSA

Shiraz? Excellent.

MOM

(handing it to her)

How's the firm?

CLARISSA

(sitting and sipping)

Oh, the usual. Almost. Aren't you going to have any?

MOM

On an empty stomach? No, no. I'd get all tipsy before anyone arrived. Not today. Not this day.

CLARISSA

Well, things are pretty happy there now. The MillTec Industrial case went our way. We got the decision just before I left. Everyone's pleased with the team I assembled.

MOM

Which one was that, again?

CLARISSA

Dumping dioxins in the bay. Bastards. We got 'em. The team did a great job!

MOM

What was the settlement?

CLARISSA

Pretty large for a civil suit of this kind. Thirty-one million to the city.

MOM

(shaking her head)

I'm surprised they weren't popping champagne at the firm.

CLARISSA

They are. Oh, and I still have those two freshly-minted associates that I have to let go.

MOM

Those two that go golfing while their paralegals do all work?

CLARISSA

(savoring)

The very ones. Apparently they didn't take my warning seriously.

(In the shed, Dad is sitting on his bench.)

SCOUTMASTER

Never show weakness!

DAD

Yes, sir!

SCOUTMASTER

Weakness is for the ladies. Idle chatter is for the ladies.

DAD

Yes, sir.

SCOUTMASTER

They come at us, always pawing at us in their poodle skirts. Always asking us to talk, asking us to open up about our...feelings. Always springing traps hatched in their devious little minds to get inside our heads. We do not let them, do we?

DAD

(attention wandering)

They're good girls. They really are. They'll make good catches someday. I know they will. It's not their fault they were born girls. That's...

SCOUTMASTER

It is a ladder we climb. Rung by rung in life. There can be only one at the top. Make sure that you are he.

DAD

Yes, sir.

SCOUTMASTER

And, if accident of circumstances prevents you from reaching the top rung, make sure that you make the second one.

DAD

Yes, sir. I've tried, sir. My whole life.

SCOUTMASTER

And if you cannot be the second, then be the third. And always, always, be on watch for your chance to spring up to the second. Always, always be on watch for those on the rungs below wanting to knock you off the ladder.

DAD

I do, sir. I have. I really do.

SCOUTMASTER

Yes, go bowling with your chums. That is fine, but give away nothing! Remember, they will always be watching you for weakness. That is the way our good God made this awesome universe. Different levels of perfection from the magnificent lion all the way down to the lowly ant. All competing for greatness. All counted together making up the whole of our beautiful world. Make sure you are among the lions, boy.

DAD

I do.

SCOUTMASTER

That way, you will be in a position to help those less fortunate.

DAD

Like the youngsters, sir.

SCOUTMASTER

(chuckling)

And besides, the ladies have a fine appreciation for a strong man, I have noticed. Now let us see that bowline!

DAD

(jumping up, rope in hand)

Yes, sir!

(Dad slings rope around the bench and begins tying.)

SCOUTMASTER

Not that way! That is the lazy man's way! I want to see a one-handed bowline! Sling it under your shoulders, like you are tying the knot that is going to save your life!

(Dad complies and, one-handed, ties the knot in front of his chest.)

SCOUTMASTER

That is right. The rabbit goes around the tree and down the hole. Good, boy! Good, though I have seen you tie it faster.

(Tiffany enters the living room with smudges on her face and overalls.)

TIFFANY

Hey! The yard looks fantastic! Where'd you get all those tables?

(She gives Mom and Clarissa hugs and kisses.)

MOM

Tiffany! You're a mess!

TIFFANY

It'll wash off. How long do I have?

MOM

(checking)

Let's see...about forty...oh! That means the caterer should be here any minute. And I wanted to...This damn dinner! When will it end?

(Mom rushes off.)

TIFFANY

Is she all right?

CLARISSA

Nerves.

TIFFANY

Same old Mom. So?

CLARISSA

I squeezed their slimy corporate balls in a vise. Thirty-one mill. They're saying it was my closing statement that sealed it.

TIFFANY

You go, girl!

(They high five.)

CLARISSA

So, what's with the cable?

TIFFANY

(pouring herself a wine)

Dunno. Just stopped exchanging light packets. Dad in the shed?

CLARISSA

Yep.

TIFFANY

That'll happen sometimes. Something went wrong in the manufacturing, or maybe some freak static electricity. Sometimes rats chew on 'em.

CLARISSA

Where were you?

TIFFANY

Underneath the Bank Tower. Two stories down. You could feel the rumble of the street overhead.

CLARISSA

Any rats?

TIFFANY

Of course! But I didn't let Werner eat 'em this time.

CLARISSA

That's my sister. Building the internet.

TIFFANY

You know it. One hub at a time.

(They high five again.)

TIFFANY

Only...

CLARISSA

What?

TIFFANY

It's happening again.

CLARISSA

Oh, no! Jesus. Slut.

TIFFANY

I know. I thought after the tech retreat it was going to go away, but...I don't know. I'm starting to think she's not going to quit until she's forced him out.

CLARISSA

I don't get it. I've seen lawyers dirk each other in the backs for a client, but over a title?! CIO?

TIFFANY

Well, it must look pretty large to Renee, I guess. And it is BandSoft we're talking about, anyway. Now that we've scored that state contract...

CLARISSA

You'd think there'd be enough around to make everyone happy.

TIFFANY

Not her.

CLARISSA

Not her.

TIFFANY

But...that's not the half of it. Personally, I couldn't care less. I mean, Bill's a nice guy--

CLARISSA

Maybe too nice.

TIFFANY

Maybe. But, to be honest, I don't care. I just want to do my work, direct my teams. And now they're watching me, to see which way I spring. Werner even...

CLARISSA

What?

TIFFANY

Well, you know how he's...got a crush on me.

CLARISSA

As he should.

TIFFANY

Werner said that he's been invited to drinks to talk about it.

CLARISSA

Renee! That little--

TIFFANY

No, not Renee! I mean, I'm sure she's got her own little happy-hour clatches going on, too. Werner was talking about a group supporting Bill!

CLARISSA

My god.

TIFFANY

Yeah. The whole department is like...splitting in two.

CLARISSA

What a mess!

TIFFANY

Yeah. Anyway, Werner asked me what he should do.

CLARISSA

And...

TIFFANY

Told him just keep his head down, do a good job until the storm blows over. You know what he's like. He's too soft. I mean a good solid worker, but you know...

CLARISSA

Yes. They'd eat him alive.

TIFFANY

I don't really know what to do.

(beat)

CLARISSA

Well, you're right, you know. Any...Any coup d'etat in a department like that is going to...well...they're going to separate into three camps.

TIFFANY

What do you mean three?

CLARISSA

I've seen it. There are the two extremes that have the most to gain if their champion wins and all the rest huddled in the middle.

TIFFANY

That's me.

CLARISSA

Yes, and the harder you work at your job, ignoring all their comments, even threats if - or when - it comes to that, the more valuable you'll grow in their eyes because they haven't won you to their side.

TIFFANY

Cool! But...

CLARISSA

The hard part is that you have to tune them out, keep focused on your job.

TIFFANY

Oh. Want some more wine?

CLARISSA

Just a bit.

TIFFANY

(pouring)

How do you...?

CLARISSA

(thinking)

Remember the mile swim at Camp LeMay?

TIFFANY

Which one?

CLARISSA

The first one.

TIFFANY
(shivering)

Oh, that one.

CLARISSA
Remember how cold it got? How high the waves started getting when we were only half-way through?

TIFFANY
Well...no. But I do remember the lightning. I think.

CLARISSA
Exactly. What were you thinking about when you were swimming?

TIFFANY
Nothing. Just like we'd talked about in the boat. You don't think about anything. Just finishing.

(beat)

TIFFANY
(smacking forehead)
Oh, duh!

CLARISSA
You got it.

(In the shed, Dad is handling poles to lash them into a platform.)

SCOUTMASTER
Every pole has its place! And do not mistake them. The stouter poles on the end, like strong men to anchor it. The medium poles interspersed with the thinnest, like the women, all arranged for the greatest strength possible. That is our society, boy. Every one has his and her place. Do not mix them up.

DAD
No, sir.

SCOUTMASTER
Ready? Let us see it.

DAD
(holding up the rope)

Here, sir.

SCOUTMASTER
And when the whistle blows, I suppose then you will start making the clove hitch?!

DAD
Well...

SCOUTMASTER
You will get caught with your pants around your ankles, that is what! Tie it in your hands before the whistle blows, then slip it around the anchor and pull! Do it!

DAD
(rushing, fumbling)

Yes, sir!

SCOUTMASTER
We will have no granny knots caught with their pants down in this troop! Maybe in Troop 515 in East End, with their fancy nylon tents, but not here. Not here! Here, we use good old canvas. Heavier, yes, but those extra pounds on the back builds character. Here, we raise strong men of good character to defend the weak, the helpless.

DAD
(attention wandering)
Like the youngsters. I failed them. I...

(Baby enters the living room.)

BABY
Hey! Where's Mom?

CLARISSA, TIFFANY
(hugging, kissing Baby)
Hey! In the yard...the caterer...Dad's in the shed.

BABY
Figures. Hey, you started without me!

(Pours herself a wine.)

CLARISSA

How did it go?

BABY

It...went.

TIFFANY

Which one was this one again?

CLARISSA

Went?

BABY

Saving the sacrament of marriage.

TIFFANY

Oh. Well...

CLARISSA

Went.

BABY

From those self-righteous pigs at the state capitol!

TIFFANY

Good crowd?

BABY

(shrugging)

Only two hundred or so. We're just getting started.
Tomorrow should be better.

CLARISSA

So...

BABY

I'm not like you!

CLARISSA

I don't want you to be like me. I want you to be like
you.

BABY

I know, but...

TIFFANY

What's wrong?

BABY

I...thought about what you said about starting off with a personal anecdote about being a lesbian and wedding dresses and stuff...

CLARISSA

And?

BABY

It just seemed...I don't know...too tame or something, so I spiced it up a bit.

CLARISSA

My, my.

TIFFANY

What'd you do instead?

BABY

(changing the subject)

Hey, you know what I heard?

CLARISSA

What?

BABY

(leaning in)

The governor's Family Values czar just resigned.

CLARISSA

Today?

BABY

Yep.

TIFFANY

So what?

BABY

It's Friday, stupid.

TIFFANY

So?

CLARISSA

It's called the Friday Dump. Nobody reads the paper on Saturdays, so when you've got bad news, make it public on Friday afternoon. Why'd he resign?

BABY

That's the best part. Apparently, he got caught with a hooker last night!

TIFFANY

No!

CLARISSA

My, my, my.

BABY

Score! Dickhead!

TIFFANY

Excellent!

BABY

Hey, did you get your cable done?

TIFFANY

Yep.

BABY

And, how about MillTec? Did you hear yet?

CLARISSA

Vini vidi vici.

BABY

Rissa! Don't do Latin!

CLARISSA

I came, I saw, I kicked their butts!

BABY

Yeah! Take them downtown!

(They all high-five and laugh.)

TIFFANY

It was Rissa's closing argument that sealed the deal.

BABY

Really? That's great!...I should have known.

CLARISSA

Oh, come on now.

TIFFANY

What?

BABY

Well...okay! Let's hear it then!

CLARISSA

I'd rather hear your speech.

BABY

No...I'm...still polishing it.

TIFFANY

But I thought you just gave it.

CLARISSA

What she means is--

BABY

No, what I mean is that--

TIFFANY

Who cares? Let's hear them both. Rissa, you first.

BABY

Yeah!

CLARISSA

(taking a sip)

Well, okay. Get settled then.

(They adjust chairs and sit as she strikes a pose.)

CLARISSA

I won't go into all the details, just the good stuff. Suffice it to say that at this point, we had listened to MillTec say, first, that they hadn't dumped the toxins in the bay, until we surprised them with some last minute company memos found in late discovery that showed that they knew they had.

BABY

Cool!

TIFFANY

Yeah!

CLARISSA

So, then they changed their story, saying basically that, okay they had, but only a little...

BABY

Corporate pigs!

CLARISSA

Right! But with existing laws they thought they could. At least up to a certain amount.

TIFFANY

What?!

CLARISSA

I know, I know. Stunning in audacity, isn't it?

BABY

Yeah, but, let's get to the speech.

CLARISSA

Baby, all in good time. You have to set the scene, remember?

BABY

Right. I know. Set the scene.

CLARISSA

And the entire time that this is going on, they keep trying to distract the jury with all this testimony from their witnesses of how much the city owes them for investing in our future.

BABY

Oh, that's just--!

TIFFANY

What'd you do?

CLARISSA

I threw it in their face...Took what they were implying and threw it up on the wall to such an extreme that...well, you'll see...*(in ringing tones)* Ladies and Gentlemen of the jury, I want to thank you for your long patience these last weeks. Throughout this entire trial we've been entertained by MillTec's solemn oaths of their noble, and selfless, I might add, pursuit of investing in our city's future.

BABY

Yuck!

CLARISSA

Baby. *(continuing)* That the rest of this country might be given over to the fiery stump speeches of hysterical hemp-smoking tree-huggers, of radical nature Nazis, of wild-eyed whacked-out whale-watchers, of extremist eco-terrorists, even, determined to bring our nation's chugging economy to a shuddering halt at the point of a gun all to save a spotted owl. That the rest of this country might be held captive to a bunch of fuzz-brained lunatic fanatics bent on preserving a wetlands, but not here, not on MillTec's watch. This distinguished company, this gallant corporation has kept our best interests at heart. And what have they gotten in return? The short end of the stick. That's right. Instead, of thanking them for all their hard work, we're punishing them. We should be thanking them for it. We should be handing out medals, maybe. Now, I'm no idealist. And, I'm hardly some environmentalist--

BABY

What?! Rissa!

TIFFANY

Hold on.

CLARISSA

In fact, I'm a pretty practical girl. When I prepared for this closing statement today, I wanted to honor you by looking my best. And what did I choose?

(She takes off a shoe and holds it aloft.)

CLARISSA

Oh, damn. Leather.

TIFFANY

What a minute. I thought those were Pleather.

BABY

They are...! Oh, I get it. They couldn't tell difference from the jury box.

CLARISSA

(continuing)

In fact, the closest I come to being a tree-hugger is taking the children I hope to have some day to the park next to our home.

BABY

(grumbling)

Personal anecdote.

CLARISSA

And when we see the trees at that park dying, their leaves withering, their branches drooping, their roots soaking up the toxins flooding our city's water table from MillTec's sewage lines, what do I tell my children? What would you tell them?

TIFFANY

Nice.

BABY

Maybe.

CLARISSA

About MillTec's valiant stand to keep our economy thriving? Throughout this trial, we've heard a lot about how much the company has invested in our fair city. What we haven't heard is how much our city has invested in that corporation. Think about it for a minute. Think of all the employees, residents of this city, that have built up that corporation over the last decades. Think of all the education, and all those skills those city residents have brought, at taxpayers' expense, to make MillTec the industrial giant that it is today. Think of all those favorable tax incentives passed again and again over the years, at taxpayers' expense, giving MillTec a competitive edge over its competitors that has swelled its coffers enough to make the Fortune 500 listing again, and again, and again. And that's just the beginning. Highway infrastructure for its trucks. Port facilities for its ships. Affordable housing and public transportation for its employees. The list goes on. Again, I'm no idealist. In fact, when it comes right down to it, I'm pretty much a dollars and cents girl. So, here's what I want to know. After all that this city has invested in MillTec over the last half century, what's the return on our investment? Is it those dying trees at the park that I want to take my little girls? Is that it? Because if it is, ladies and gentlemen of the jury, if it is, I have one question, then, after all that we have done for that corporation, who's getting the short end of the stick here?

(beat)

BABY

Wow.

TIFFANY

That was great! Talk about squeezing their slimy corporate balls!

BABY

Rissa, you're kind of scary sometimes.

CLARISSA

Never to you!

BABY

Okay. Congratulations! Way to go, sis!

(They high five.)

CLARISSA

Your turn.

BABY

Um...

CLARISSA

The power of a personal anecdote when you're trying to explain a complex idea. It gives them something they can relate to.

BABY

Well, I did that! Kind of.

TIFFANY

Did you use a personal anecdote?

BABY

Sort of.

TIFFANY

What was it? Wedding dresses and all that?

BABY

Not really. More about my dreams about someday.

TIFFANY

Your dreams? About what?

BABY

About how much I dream each night about someday gelding those bastards in Olympia.

(Tiffany and Clarissa snicker.)

CLARISSA

That's our fiery activist. Burning down the opposition.

BABY

You know it!

(In shed, Dad is handling a canoe paddle.)

SCOUTMASTER

This world does not make us. We make this world!

DAD

Yes, sir!

SCOUTMASTER

When you see injustice stalking this world, you hunt it down! And do not be shy about using cunning, boy.

DAD

I'm not, sir. I do, sir!

SCOUTMASTER

That is what God in God's own Wisdom gave it to you for! Oh, yes, in the opulent East End, with their tree-lined boulevards and their fancy new two-door garages, they can bleat on and on about fair play. Here in the pinched North End, we do not have that luxury. Because we know, for we taste the bitter cup every day; we know that there is injustice in this world for one reason, and one reason only: some one is profiting by it!

DAD

Yes, sir! I've always told the boys that, sir. I've always made sure they understand that.

SCOUTMASTER

Yes, we make this world, not the other way around, and do not be squeamish about getting your hands dirty doing it! You think the guilty are going to give back what they steal simply because we ask them nicely?

DAD

No, sir! Never!

SCOUTMASTER

If your feather-bedded quibblers would spend more time out in the real world...*(coughing)*...The constant thieving, the never-ending search for security, and not simply physical security. Why take the immigrants flooding this neighborhood for the last decade or more! Of course they do not assimilate overnight! What are we supposed to do? Throw them back into the sea? Oh, maybe Troop 515 with its square lawns in their *(slowly, as a new, unfamiliar phrase)* suburban developments do. Here in the North End, we have no choice, we have no luxury. We take them all in. That is what makes America great! It takes in them all, even when it does us harm. You take Manuel D'Aquino, now.

DAD

Manny! Oh, little, tough Manny.

SCOUTMASTER

Family straight from war-torn Bataan Peninsula after the Japanese over-ran it. He came later, of course, a Filipino born on these shores of freedom. And that shaped him. He knew.

DAD

We could never get a word out of Manny. Not one word. Never could figure why he wanted to join the troop.

SCOUTMASTER

At home, he was being beaten, mocked, ridiculed as a coconut by those miscreant older brothers of his: I know. I always know. Brown outside, and White inside for trying to better his life in the New World. As if it is easy to pick up a new language overnight! As if we should punish someone for escaping hell to arrive these shores without speaking English! Well, not with my cubs! No, sir!

DAD

Every troop meeting, every patrol meeting, he'd sit there, so quiet, not a peep. Not a sound, just watching, always watching. Why, I remember the first word he ever said.

SCOUTMASTER

You did me proud that day, son! You did all our troop proud that day. The St. Croix rapids, a rite of passage for us all.

DAD

Oh, sir! I didn't do anything. It was just that none of the other sternsmen would take him. After all, how can you steer around a rock when the bowman won't speak a word to warn you? So, I took Manny. And...I admit, I was nervous. I mean, the rapids above Two Dens Bend is nothing to mess around with. And there was our tradition to think of. In all our years, no Troop 202 canoe has ever gone down at Two Dens Bend. But, I took Manny, put him in the bow, told him to point where he saw a rock and off we went.

SCOUTMASTER

You had faith in him, boy. That is all he needed to succeed in this land, one man to believe in him.

DAD

Things went well enough, at first. But the St. Croix was high that year, faster than I'd ever known it. But there we were, flying along in the spray, everyone shouting out "Rock dead ahead!" "Rock eleven o'clock!" "Rock one-thirty!" And there sat Manny, mutely pointing out whatever he saw, faster and faster, jerkier and jerkier and then...wham! We ground up on one large granite boulder, then swung around fast as a wink to broadside another, and we went down.

SCOUTMASTER

Yes.

DAD

I couldn't find him at first. It was March, after all, with the spring thaw on. The water was so cold, I couldn't even breathe.

SCOUTMASTER

Yes.

DAD

I just kept...I don't know...pawing around in the water, hoping I'd strike something.

SCOUTMASTER

And you did.

DAD

I did, sir. I was terrified of losing him on my watch, I was. But, then, I hit his head or something, and then got a hold of his collar and just yanked him up, I guess.

SCOUTMASTER

Into the New World.

DAD

Up he comes, coughing, sputtering, first afraid he's going to die, then afraid that he's not and finally, when I had dragged us up on a large flat to wait for the others, he settled down and grinned - he grinned, actually grinned - and whispered, so soft, I could barely catch it. "Rock!"

SCOUTMASTER

Timing is crucial in adverse circumstances. That is what we do here in Troop 202, teach our boys how to navigate the treacherous and uncertain rapids of life through making good choices and believing in one another.

DAD

He was going into that rumble. I hadn't seen in him in what, two, three years? Those damn brothers of his - Leon and Jesus - wouldn't let up on him. Wouldn't stop sneering at him as a coconut. Got so it made him a bit crazy. I believe he would have died that night in that rumble. They did. Gunshot wounds.

SCOUTMASTER

Timing is crucial.

DAD

I saw him in the car. On the way to the rumble. Just walked in front of it so they had to stop. And ignored Leon and Jesus yelling at me to get out of the way, looked Manny dead in the eye and said, "Rock" then walked away.

SCOUTMASTER

And he followed you.

(In the living room, the three are sipping their wine.)

TIFFANY

Hey, where's Emma? Is she coming?

BABY

(sitting and sipping)

Oh.

(beat)

CLARISSA

She's not coming?

(beat)

BABY

No.

TIFFANY

Why not?

(beat)

CLARISSA

Are things going okay?

BABY

(jerkily)

No.

CLARISSA, TIFFANY

(gathering around)

Oh, Baby...It's okay...Don't worry, honey...It'll get better.

BABY

Maybe. I don't know.

TIFFANY

How come you didn't say anything?

(Baby looks at Clarissa and looks away.)

CLARISSA

It's all right. It's got nothing to do with you, Baby. Here.

(She tops off their glasses.)

TIFFANY

What?

CLARISSA

Tiff, she's embarrassed.

TIFFANY

What?! Why?

CLARISSA

Look...

TIFFANY

Well, I don't get it. What's wrong? Let's just fix it.

BABY

It's...

TIFFANY

What, is it sex or something?

BABY

(laughing in relief)

No. Not that. Thank god. At least when we...

CLARISSA

Ah.

TIFFANY

What?

CLARISSA

L'amour brûle le bas.

TIFFANY

Don't do French.

BABY

She doesn't like me anymore.

TIFFANY

Why not?

BABY

(exasperatedly)

I don't know! The last few weeks, it's like...she's just not interested in anything...

TIFFANY

Well...

BABY

She didn't even come to the rally today. And that Simone has been sniffing around her lately, like a bitch in heat!

CLARISSA, TIFFANY

Simone.

BABY

People say that she has a rose trellis tattooed over her breasts.

TIFFANY

Yuck!...What color rose?

BABY

Red. And she'll show it to anyone who wants to see it.

CLARISSA

Well, I suppose it does have a certain allure.

BABY

Do you think maybe I should get a tattoo?

CLARISSA, TIFFANY

No!

BABY

I could just get a little one.

CLARISSA

Baby!

BABY

Well, I'm not like you, two! I don't throw out my old boyfriends faster than I do my shoes.

(Clarissa raises her hands in a "C'est moi.")

TIFFANY

I do not!

BABY

Only because you can't find enough men to handle a wrench like you can!

TIFFANY

That's true.

BABY

I'm not like you. I want it to be forever!

CLARISSA

This isn't the first time I've thought Baby would beat us both to the altar.

BABY

Laugh all you want! I want to get married. I want children! I want little girls--

TIFFANY

In little combat boots stomping all over Mom's carpet?

BABY

Maybe!

(Mom enters.)

MOM

What's wrong?

CLARISSA

Baby's having problems with Emma.

MOM

Oh no! She won't be coming, then? I...this stupid dinner! Baby, I'm sorry. I wish I had more time. One of their assistants just dropped the meatballs all over the driveway!

CLARISSA, TIFFANY, BABY

Oh no!

MOM

He tripped. He even smiled at me and said, "Don't worry, it's only the Swedish meatballs!"

CLARISSA, TIFFANY, BABY

What?!...That's ridiculous!...What a jerk!

MOM

Anyway, the caterer's driving like mad back to her kitchen to whip up some more. I have to take over the setup.

TIFFANY

Do you need help?

MOM

Thank you, dear. No, it's pretty much a one-person job. Baby, I'm so sorry. Emma's such a nice (*stumbling*) dyke.

BABY

Oh, Mom! I keep telling you, we're lesbians. What? Do I look like I drive a pickup with a gunrack?!

CLARISSA

I must say I don't miss your butch phase.

BABY

Everybody's butch when they first come out.

MOM

Yes...Anyway, let me just get them started, and I'll be right back. I want to...Here, honey.

(Mom hugs Baby and rushes off.)

CLARISSA

Have you talked with Emma about this?

(beat)

BABY

No.

TIFFANY

Why not?

(beat)

BABY

Because...I'm...afraid.

CLARISSA, TIFFANY

You!?

BABY

Yes.

(beat)

TIFFANY

Well...

CLARISSA

You're going to have to talk with her about it, Baby.

BABY

I know! I just don't know how to begin.

CLARISSA

Fewer rallies might be a good way to start.

BABY

But they're for her! For us! Only weenies are willing to settle for (*spitting out*) civil unions.

CLARISSA

All I'm saying is that most gays and lesbians poll as disinterested in marriage. Emma might not be too different. At the least, she's probably not into storming the barricades as much as you.

TIFFANY

Yeah. Maybe she's got it in her head that you're more interested in your rallies than her. You'll just have to show her she's wrong. What'd you say in French? Their fire is going out? She'll just have to build a new one.

CLARISSA

A one-match fire. If she's already looking elsewhere...

BABY

She--!

CLARISSA

You said it yourself. Simone...

BABY

Okay.

TIFFANY

Yeah! A one-match fire. She might only get that one chance. Screw it up and Emma will probably think she's...

CLARISSA

Incompetent as well as indifferent.

TIFFANY

Right. A teepee.

CLARISSA

What? No way! It's got be a bonfire. A spectacle. Only a log cabin will make that happen.

TIFFANY

But she's working with wet wood. Only a teepee will give it a chance to dry that out before catching flame.

CLARISSA

A bonfire suits Baby's personality better.

TIFFANY

Yeah, well, she'll just have to learn to be patient.
You can't solve every problem by blowing it up.

BABY

Would you two stop talking about me like I'm not here?

CLARISSA

Okay. Which do you think would burn better given the situation: a fire built like a log cabin or one built like a teepee?

BABY

I don't care! It's just a stupid metaphor.

CLARISSA

Enfant! We'll just have to do your thinking for you. Metaphors, symbols catch our attention in ways that miles of prose can never do.

TIFFANY

Miles of prose put me to sleep. I say a teepee. And I'm the family engineer.

CLARISSA

Great! A grease monkey to solve a problem of the withering heart.

TIFFANY

Better than a lawyer twisting words all out of recognition.

CLARISSA

Hey! I'll have you know--!

TIFFANY

Indian wrestle!

CLARISSA

You're on! Baby, you count.

(Clarissa and Tiffany lie on the floor to Indian wrestle. As Baby counts, they lift their legs each time, then lock legs.)

BABY

One...Two...Three...Go!

(After a see-sawing struggle with much grunting, Tiffany throws Clarissa back over her head in a somersault.)

TIFFANY

Yeah! That's what pacing a courtroom gets you!

CLARISSA

(rubbing her hip)

And crawling through muck pits gets you.

TIFFANY

With a heavy coil of T-1 cable!

CLARISSA

All right! All right! You win.

(They high-five and laugh.)

BABY

I know what I'm going to do!

TIFFANY

A teepee fire, then?

CLARISSA

And lots of patience for the wet wood to catch? Metaphorically speaking, of course.

BABY

Right. And just to be sure, I'll use gasoline.

(Mom enters.)

MOM

Well, that's that. Goodness! Only twenty minutes. I so wanted longer. Girls...I need to talk with you.

CLARISSA

What's up, Mom?

MOM

It's...

TIFFANY

Go ahead, Mom. We're all ears.

MOM

I don't know where to...

BABY

Just say it.

MOM

Well. I guess... Your father and I...

(beat)

CLARISSA

It's all right, Mom.

MOM

We're not doing very well.

(beat)

TIFFANY

What's wrong?

MOM

I don't know.

BABY

This is starting to sound a little familiar.

MOM

No, I mean...Oh! You mean you and Emma. I'm sorry.
I'm just so...What's...? Is she--?

TIFFANY

Yesterday's news. We got that all patched up.

BABY

Yeah, I think. Anyway, what're you--?

MOM

Oh.

(beat)

CLARISSA

What is it?

(beat)

MOM

I don't know! You know what your father is like!
Trying to get information out of him is like talking
to--

CLARISSA, TIFFANY, BABY
(giggling)

--a tent peg!

MOM

Well!

CLARISSA

Okay, okay. Um...What's--?

MOM

Thank god he's got the youngsters. When Troop 202
folded...he took it so hard.

BABY

It's not his fault the Boy Scouts are a bunch of neo-
nazi homophobes.

MOM

Baby! It was his dream to be their scoutmaster.

TIFFANY

I didn't know that!

BABY

Well...I'm sorry about that, but who would've wanted
to join his troop?! I wouldn't!

CLARISSA

Now, there's a picture.

BABY

You wouldn't either. Tiff could have swum miles around any old stupid Boy Scouts, anyway. You both could.

TIFFANY

Yeah, I know. But what I don't understand is what this has to do with Knots for Life and the Projects.

MOM

You know how much the youngsters mean to him. It's the only thing he has to look forward to.

CLARISSA

And the other way. He's got to be one of the few who care about them. I bet the summer camp every year is the only time any of those kids ever see a decent blade of grass.

BABY

Broken homes. Crack addicts for your parents, dealers for your neighbors.

CLARISSA

He's kind of admired for it at the firm. *(snickering)* I can't think of a single partner who'd willingly drive through the North End, let alone drive to it every Sunday afternoon.

BABY

Just worried somebody would jack their BMWs.

CLARISSA

That is a possibility.

BABY

You don't know that--!

CLARISSA

I'm just saying that Dad grew up there. He knows the lay of the land. Take...Next week we're going to visit Grandpa and Grandma's grave, and you know he's going to insist on driving us in--

BABY

While telling us, again, the tragic story of their traffic accident.

(Mom gasps.)

BABY

Oh, Mom! It's not as if I ever met them. Besides, who can't dodge--

TIFFANY

A freight truck coming straight at you? Hello!

CLARISSA

Sorry. Mom, you were saying?

MOM

What I was saying, dears, is that...Well...You wouldn't understand.

BABY

What?!

CLARISSA

Try us.

MOM

Your father...is a good man. And while he was working at the parks department all day and spending his evenings figuring out his latest lesson for the youngsters...I...We...

(Mom sits.)

TIFFANY

I'm still in the dark here.

CLARISSA

She means that she could live with him like that. Now that's he's going to be knocking around the house all day waiting for the next Sunday's session with the youngsters to arrive...

MOM

(weakly)

Yes.

TIFFANY, BABY

Oh.

(beat)

CLARISSA

I don't suppose talking with him about it is going to help. No, I suppose not.

MOM

You know your father.

BABY

Yeah, we do.

(beat)

TIFFANY

Well, it's a problem, so there's got to be a solution.

MOM

Yes, dear.

TIFFANY

No, I'm serious, Mom.

MOM

Yes, dear.

CLARISSA

If you can get his attention, there's a simple phrase I've found that works.

MOM

What's that?

CLARISSA

This isn't working for me.

MOM

That's it?

CLARISSA

That's it. That's how I got rid of Fenton.

TIFFANY

Cool!

BABY

Which one was...? Oh, yeah. I like it. It's direct.
Try saying it, Mom!

MOM

(shakily)

This...this...isn't working for...me.

BABY

Good! Try it again!

MOM

This isn't...isn't working for me.

TIFFANY

That's right. Do it some more.

MOM

This isn't working for me. This isn't working for me.

CLARISSA

Nice. Good, Mom.

MOM

This isn't working for me. This isn't working for me.
This isn't working for me! This isn't working for
me!!

CLARISSA, TIFFANY, BABY

(applauding)

Hurray!

MOM

Oh, dears! Thank you. It feels so good to just say
that.

TIFFANY

Then we're on the right track.

MOM

(horrified)

Wait! Does this mean I'm being disloyal?

CLARISSA

Women get the men they deserve, Mom.

MOM

What do you mean by that?

CLARISSA

If they never ask for anything better, they won't get it.

MOM

But I do! I swear! You just don't know!

TIFFANY

Maybe you've been using the wrong language. No need to cover that ground again, though. How does Mom get Dad's attention?

(beat)

BABY

He is a man, after all.

TIFFANY

That's true. They tend to be pretty simple machines.

CLARISSA

No argument there.

MOM

This is your father we're talking about.

BABY

Of course, but he's still a man.

TIFFANY

Yeah. With a limited number of inputs and outputs.

MOM

What do you mean?

TIFFANY

(looking at Clarissa)

Well...

CLARISSA

She's saying that by and large they tend to be rather low-maintenance.

TIFFANY

Right. Take your typical man, his belly and his...

CLARISSA

Libido is the word.

TIFFANY

Right. When there is a problem, it's usually centered around either one.

BABY

What about pride?

(beat)

CLARISSA

There's a point.

MOM

I just don't know. He won't say.

TIFFANY

Okay, okay. Maybe. But what does he have to feel sorry about? No. When there's a breakdown in the field, we always start with the most likely possibilities, first, and work our way down from there.

(beat)

CLARISSA

Well, he doesn't look like he's starving.

MOM

(miffed)

Thank you.

CLARISSA, TIFFANY, BABY

(gathering around Mom)

Oh, Mom!...No!...I mean--!...She was just--!...You're a great cook!...We're just saying--!

MOM

It's all right. I'm sorry. I'm just...so confused!

CLARISSA

It'll be all right, Mom. We're here.

BABY

To help.

TIFFANY

(slowly)

So, having removed that possibility, the obvious choice, then is...

(beat)

BABY

How's it going in bed, Mom?

MOM

(standing)

Baby! What on earth? I...never...!

BABY

Oh, come on, Mom. I thought you grew up in the sixties.

MOM

I most certainly did not!

BABY

Come to think of it, when's the last time you had an orga--?

CLARISSA

Baby.

BABY

What?

CLARISSA

One battle at a time, remember? Your troops last longer that way.

BABY

Oh. Right. I keep forgetting.

MOM
(sinking again)

Well...I...

TIFFANY
Actually, there might be a two-fer here.

BABY
What do you mean?

TIFFANY
Well, just like with you, building a new fire and all that...Mom just has to...You know...

CLARISSA
That might just work.

MOM
What are you talking about, dears?

CLARISSA
When it comes to men, if you want to know what's on their minds, all you have to do is get them to the point where they won't deny you anything, and then ask. That'll get their attention.

MOM
Well, what does that--?

TIFFANY
Here. It's all in the technique. Baby, throw me a banana, will you?

(Baby tosses her a short, curved banana from the fruit bowl.)

TIFFANY
No, you tenderfoot! I need a long and straight one, that more resembles a...

CLARISSA
Actually, she may never have seen one.

BABY
Oh, right. Sorry. Here.

(Baby pokes around, finds a long, straight banana from the fruit bowl and tosses it.)

TIFFANY

Here, Mom. Stand up and...uh...well...grab a hold of this banana.

MOM

(shakily grabbing banana)

Which way?

TIFFANY

Uh...well, you see, you...you...uh...you grab it, and...

(Tiffany looks to Clarissa.)

CLARISSA

You're doing just fine.

BABY

(crossing to Mom)

Oh, come on! Even I know this! Mom, all you have to do is move your hand up and down like...

(Dad enters.)

DAD

What's this?!

(Mom shrieks, throwing up banana.)

BABY

(happily squealing, rushing to hug Dad)

Daddy!

DAD

The three prettiest girls in town come to my retirement party?

(Mom hastily puts the banana back in the fruit bowl and shakily sits in the chair.)

CLARISSA, TIFFANY, BABY

Daddy!...It's so good to see you!...Where've you been?...Have you seen the yard?...Hanging out in the tool shed...You've got cobwebs in your hair...Fifty people coming...

DAD

Okay, there, honey?

MOM

Yes...yes, dear.

BABY

How about now?

CLARISSA

Baby, it's not a good id--!

BABY

No, go ahead!

TIFFANY

Well...

DAD

What?

BABY

Go ahead, Mom!

MOM

(stirring)

Well, maybe.

CLARISSA

(to Baby)

Upon your head.

BABY

Shush!

DAD

What's wrong?

BABY

Mom?

(beat)

MOM
(standing, gathering herself)

Yes. Right.

(All wait, staring at Mom.)

MOM
The thing is, dear...I...

BABY
Mom! God!

(beat)

DAD
(frowning)
Is there something I need to know about?

MOM
No! No. Everything's fine.

(Baby throws her hands up. Clarissa
shakes her head. Tiffany frowns.)

DAD
Okay, then. Well, I'll go clean up in the tool shed
and...

MOM
(wide-eyed, terrified)
This...this isn't...isn't working for me, dear.

(beat)

DAD
I see.

(The four women watch him, not breathing.)

DAD

Well...do you...want to get another caterer, then? I know that there isn't much time, but my buddies will wait. They don't mind so long as they know good food's coming. Or pizza would work. We have beer, don't we?

MOM

No! No. I mean, yes! Yes, we have beer! And the...uh...caterer is just fine. Don't worry. We even have Swedish meatballs for you, dear!

DAD

Well, if that doesn't beat all! You sure know how to make a fellar feel like a king! I'll just step out and clean up, then.

(Dad crosses back to his tool shed. Mom sinks back to her chair and covers her head with her arms.)

CLARISSA

(to Baby)

Now do you understand what we mean by a single-match fire?

BABY

(weakly)

Yes.

(defiantly)

But it's not over!

TIFFANY

Whatever.

(Goes to Mom, hugs her. The others follow and do the same. Dad is sitting at his workbench again.)

DAD

I've failed them. Couldn't make it work. Mayor gives himself a raise but can't find the money anymore for Knots for Life. Bastard! What'll they do?

SCOUTMASTER

You take Tony Fridell now.

DAD

What a shrimp he was! Voice like a broken piccolo!
(mimicking) "Sir?! Sir! Don't we have a bully
campsite?"

SCOUTMASTER

Yes, over in that silver-spooned East End, they can
afford to be choosey.

DAD

Well, Tony, you've pitched your tent at the bottom of
that rise, so when it rains tonight and the water
rolls downhill, where will you be in the morning?

SCOUTMASTER

No, sir. Here in the North End, we don't have that
luxury.

DAD

(chuckling)

And then that January camp at Gitchee Gumme, when he
dug down through the drifts all the way to the ground
and woke up in a puddle of mud from the body heat?
Oh, what a laugh that was! (mimicking) "Sir! Sir!
Our sleeping bags're all muddy!"

SCOUTMASTER

We have a job to do here. We cannot fail our youth,
no matter the wretched circumstances in which they are
born.

DAD

He learned, though. He became a good solid patrol
leader. One of our best.

SCOUTMASTER

Broken homes. (hissing) Single-mothers. Who would
have thought our generation could see such an
abomination? Tony looked up to you, son. You were
about all he had. You never gave up on him.

DAD

I...Sir!

SCOUTMASTER

Oh, I know! I know what happens to all my cubs both on our campouts and in between them. I know that he was picked on in the schoolyard. I know that he was looked down upon, spat on, beaten by the bullies as regularly as the sunrise. Over in that golden-paved East End, in Troop 515, they would have turned him out the first night. But we do not. We cannot. You did not. All that pipsqueak needed was one person to look him in the eye and see the worth of the man, no matter the family.

DAD

(breaking)

Sir, I...

SCOUTMASTER

(gruffly)

People talk. Now, son, I do not know...what happened to (*indistinct*) father in the war...I...(*coughing*)...

DAD

(tearing up)

Please!

SCOUTMASTER

(clearing throat)

War is hard. We have to make our youth harder. And the drinking. The constant drinking. Well, I cannot say anything about that. A man can...change...from the stress of combat. God knows I saw it in Korea. Sometimes it can ruin him...I did talk to him about it. A few times. Until he told me to mind my own business. And what...he did...(*coughing*)...to that poor woman, his wife...(*coughing*)...your poor...his old M1 bayonet...

DAD

(sobbing)

Oh, sir! Please, sir! I'm sorry! I'm sorry! I've failed them! The youngsters! No better than a granny knot.

SCOUTMASTER

Now, see here! When it comes to the Tony Pipsqueaks of the world, people talk, but it does not matter for they do not know any better. The truth is...when you have seen only destruction, sometimes you cannot bear anymore to see beauty. That is all that happened. If your armchair moralists would spend a little time in the gutter they might actually...*(coughing)*...well... People can say what they want to about soiled blood coming to no good, but not when it comes to my cubs. The father does not determine the son. We do.

DAD

Yes, sir.

SCOUTMASTER

Now dry your eyes and let us not talk of this again.

DAD

No, sir.

SCOUTMASTER

We have work to do. The North End needs us.

DAD

I'm here, sir.

SCOUTMASTER

God knows nobody else will watch out for them.

(In the living room, Mom is drying her eyes.)

MOM

I'm sorry.

CLARISSA

It's all right. We should have made her join the Girl Scouts. No woodcraft.

BABY

I did!

TIFFANY

When?

BABY

Well, the Brownies, at least. You two never wanted to, so I thought I would check it out. Remember? In the third grade?

CLARISSA

Oh, that's right. But that was only...

BABY

Three months. Those sissies couldn't tie a bowline to save their lives, so I was outta there!

(Clarissa, Tiffany snicker.)

MOM

I feel so stupid.

CLARISSA, TIFFANY, BABY

Oh, Mom...It's okay...You weren't ready...Baby shouldn't have...You'll get him next time...

MOM

(gathering herself)

No, no. Dears, you are so...really, truly wonderful. I'm just...not like you.

BABY

You could be.

CLARISSA

Baby.

TIFFANY

Shush! What do you mean?

MOM

I'm just not like you...I mean, look at you! Clarissa is the youngest managing partner in the history of her firm, and a woman at that! Tiffany, what with the way you crawl around in the dirt lugging electric meters--

TIFFANY

But I like that!

MOM

--that I don't even know how to turn on, let alone read...

TIFFANY

(taking a multi-meter from pocket)

That's because there's nothing to turn on. See? You just--

CLARISSA

Tiff.

MOM

I can barely operate the DVD player! And, Baby, with the way you organize all those terrific rallies... campaigning against everything wrong with this world... speaking before thousands of people...I could never do that.

BABY

Sure you could!

MOM

No. No, I couldn't. I get nervous organizing a bake sale for the church.

TIFFANY

Well...

BABY

That's because they're a bunch of old geezers with too much time on their--

CLARISSA

Baby.

BABY

Well, they are!

MOM

(faintly)

They're nice people.

BABY

Remember the Easter Breakfast? You would have thought the church was in total meltdown. Over a bunch of stupid orange juice!

TIFFANY

Mom did forget to defrost it. Still, all they had to do was put 'em in a sink of hot water for a few minutes instead of--

CLARISSA

We're getting wide of the mark, here.

MOM

I think I might leave him.

(beat)

BABY

Daddy?

(beat)

MOM

(quietly)

Yes. For a while. Maybe.

(beat)

(beat)

MOM

That's why I wanted to talk with you before...I couldn't go through this evening by myself...

(beat)

TIFFANY

Well...when a cable's broken for good, we do replace it entirely.

(Clarissa and Baby stare at her.)

TIFFANY

(hurriedly)

Only to get the two nodes communicating again.

MOM

You don't know what it's like! Living with a man who disappears on you more and more every day! Who never says anything!

CLARISSA

But, Mom...Dad's...always been a bit...closed off.

MOM

Never more than lately. Oh, sure, ask him a question and he says nothing's wrong...always smiles that... damn, cheerful...but, I...I know something is. Ever since that letter...and he won't tell me! It's the...*(defiantly)* the last straw! I mean, I guess I could have gone on but now...!

TIFFANY

What letter?

MOM

I don't know! I keep telling you--!

BABY

But--!

CLARISSA

Wait, wait! Everyone. Take a deep breath.

(beat)

CLARISSA

Okay. Now, Mom. Who was the letter from?

MOM

Well, I'm not sure. I think the city.

CLARISSA

You didn't see the return address.

MOM

Not clearly. I just saw that it was addressed to him and put it on his workbench.

CLARISSA

And he read it.

MOM

I...think so.

CLARISSA

How do you know?

MOM

Well...it was that evening...at dinner. He had...I don't know how to say this...he had changed.

CLARISSA

Changed how? Think back.

MOM

Well...he was more...withdrawn than usual. He was...his smile was more...forced, I think.

CLARISSA

Ah.

TIFFANY

What?

CLARISSA

Wait. Go on, Mom.

MOM

I thought it was something about the parks department, some news he didn't like...you know how he feels about some of their decisions...

BABY

Stupid as stripping birch bark off a standing tree.

MOM

Right. But, you know, he's retiring, so I didn't press. And then as the week went by he...just...grew...and in the weeks since he...

CLARISSA

He...

MOM

(weakly)

It's like something inside him is broken.

(beat)

CLARISSA

And he won't trust you with whatever it was.

MOM

(fiercely)

Yes! And it's killing me watching him just...fade...
like that.

(beat)

(beat)

TIFFANY

Personally, I don't need to talk all that much with
the guys I date. All I need is for them to focus when
they're going do--

CLARISSA

Tiff.

BABY

Whatever! Don't you get it?

TIFFANY

Well...all she's saying is that--

BABY

Tiffany!

TIFFANY

Hold on. All she's saying is that the fact that he's
broken--

(Mom gasps.)

TIFFANY

--in some way isn't so bad as the fact that he won't
trust her with what's bothering him. Right?

MOM

No! That's not it at--! Well...maybe...well...right.
I guess. I've never thought of it that way...But
that's terrible, isn't it?

TIFFANY

Naw.

BABY

I think so.

CLARISSA

You would. But that's not what she's getting at.

BABY

What, then?

TIFFANY

The point is that Dad never talks to women other than to smile, chat about the weather, and...well...you know, silly stuff.

BABY

He does not!

TIFFANY

He does to me.

CLARISSA

Me, too.

BABY

But--!

TIFFANY

Come on. Does Dad even know that you're a dyke?

BABY

Lesbian.

TIFFANY

Whatever.

BABY

Well...no. But I don't hide it!

CLARISSA

As if you could. Tiff's point is taken: He just won't go there.

MOM

But he loves Baby! He loves you all! He loves us all! I think.

BABY

Oh, of course he loves you, Mom.

MOM

Then why doesn't he trust me with--?

TIFFANY

Because you're a girl.

MOM

That's ridiculous! His own wife!

CLARISSA

Well, let's not cloud the issue here. All Tiff is pointing out is that you may be his wife, but in his mind, you'll always be a girl.

BABY

(sighing)

I guess you're right. Weak, silly, made of (*spitting out*) porcelain.

MOM

Oh.

TIFFANY

I don't mind being made of porcelain. It's pretty malleable. Under the right conditions, it's tensile and flexural strengths are pretty--

BABY

I was using a metaphor.

TIFFANY

Oh. In any case, ever since we were kids I've known that he always wanted boys.

MOM

Tiffany! That's outrageous! Your father--!

TIFFANY

Besides, it never seemed to bother Rissa, so I decided that it wouldn't bother me. I mean, what are you going to do? It doesn't have to impact my life.

BABY

It better not!

CLARISSA

Excellent summation. Then, too, I've also always known that while he was disappointed--

MOM

Clarissa, I simply cannot--

CLARISSA

--that while he was disappointed, he still loves me, even if he doesn't really value what I can do.

TIFFANY

You said it.

(beat)

BABY

That is such bullsh--!...Oh my god! It's true! God, it feels horrible just thinking about it!

CLARISSA

(hugging Baby)

Oh, sweetie. Don't worry, the world is a strange place. You never know---

MOM

But! But! But how can you...?

TIFFANY

Wasted energy, Mom. Not effective.

MOM

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

(Across the stage, Dad sits, stooped in thought.)

SCOUTMASTER

This is our last campfire. Next week you will graduate from high school. You will soon go out into the world and seek your fortune. I remember when I was your age...

DAD

(wandering)

Lodge a formal protest through the appropriate channels! Write a letter to the editor! I wouldn't know the first thing about...the youngsters! What am I to do!

SCOUTMASTER

Pay attention now! You think I am out here to swat mosquitoes for my enjoyment?

DAD

Yes, sir! No, sir!

SCOUTMASTER

Good. Let us talk as men now. Let us talk of leadership. That elusive quality that distinguishes the great from the lowly. People talk about leaders being born not made. As if it were a gift bestowed by God! What poppy-cock! The truth is--

DAD

(wandering again)

I don't know how to tell them. I don't know how they'll take it! Get involved in politics! Find another candidate to oppose the mayor! I wouldn't know how to begin! I hate politics! It's so...! I'm failing them. I have failed them. After all these years, it's come to this. I'm just a useless old--

SCOUTMASTER

There are no granny knots.

DAD

Sir?

SCOUTMASTER

That is right. When you are younger, I make matters simpler, easier to understand. But you are a man now. It is time that you understood the higher truth: There are no granny knots. There are no incompetent men, only incompetent leaders.

DAD

But, sir, I've tried!

SCOUTMASTER

And do not waste your breath praying for a better hand. Do not waste your thoughts cataloging all the failings of your men. Do not waste your time wishing for something better. There is nothing better! You have what God in God's own wisdom has given you, now use it! Focus on their strengths. Every man has his own particular talent. Your job as leader is to figure out what it is, even or especially, if he does not understand it himself. Do you follow me?

DAD

I think so, sir.

SCOUTMASTER

You set aside what your men are not capable of and take a long, hard look at what they can do. Next, you look long and hard at the problem and you design a way forward that, utilizing the strengths of your men - and I mean their particular strengths - will meet it. That is the lesson of our last campfire: Leaders are not born. They are made. And here in Troop 202, here in our troubled North End, that is what we do.

DAD

Sir? I...yes, sir.

SCOUTMASTER

Oh, I know, people talk. They honk away like geese in flight debating the question as if it were some sort of obscure or mystical secret. Or worse, they discard it as some sort of fool's errand, like sending the tenderfoots out in search of a smoke-shifter.

DAD

I remember the time I sent Tony Fridell out looking for a smoke-shifter! His first campout! He went back and forth through the troop trying to find one. *(mimicking)* "Sir! Sir! I've checked every patrol! They all said they forgot theirs!" *(laughing)* Last time I checked he was waving a plate over the fire trying to get the smoke out of his eyes!

SCOUTMASTER

It is not a proverbial smoke-shifter. It is a simple truth, but one that most men are not willing to admit. I remember training some of the most ignorant, pathetic, snottiest, trouble-minded, headed-straight-for-jail boys, and I never had any difficulty.

(Dad is standing, moving around a "fire" waving smoke away from it.)

DAD

He learned, though! He did. Pretty soon he was sending his own first-timers out in search of smoke-shifters, too!

SCOUTMASTER

No, sir. You count up what God has given you, no matter what any armchair strategists might presume to say about them, set your goal and move them forward.

(Dad knocks over the trophy on the worktable. He bends to retrieve it.)

DAD

Clarissa's trophy! I almost forgot to polish it. It's getting tarnished, see.

SCOUTMASTER

I remember one particular hard-case. A useless drunk of a thug for a father and a...well, there's no getting around it...a woman of questionable reputation for a mother...

DAD

You should have seen her. She went after that fat-cat developer trying to chop off a whole corner of a city park. Build a condo on it! As if we needed more of those!

SCOUTMASTER

The judge said, take him off my hands or he is headed for the clink. And I said...

DAD

His whole team of lawyers had the city all tied up in a right Gordian Knot what with challenging deeds of title and zoning variances and countless appeals...

SCOUTMASTER

Your honor, what this boy needs is the proper direction. Sir Baden Powell was correct in his assessment: The vanguard of the fight against the falling standards of a civil society is through proper training of its youth!

DAD

And she sliced right through it!

SCOUTMASTER

(fading)

Raising cannon fodder! That is the lily-livered talk of a bunch of non-conformists. Our boys are the first line of defense...

DAD

Amazed us...

(Dad stands, his stoop suddenly gone, counting on his fingers and looking toward the living room, then crosses to it.)

BABY

(uncertainly)

Daddy?

DAD

I have a problem. And I'm going to need your help to solve it.

(They all stand up.)

MOM

Dear, the dinner! The guests--!

DAD

Can wait. This won't. Besides, Frank will arrive first, as usual. I'll just tell him to crack one open and greet everybody until we're finished.

CLARISSA

What's the problem?

DAD

The yard looks pretty. We'll take a table at the far edge to talk it over.

(Dad moves to exit. Tiffany and Baby look to Clarissa for a beat. Dad stops, turns around, looks at them for a long moment.)

DAD

I know that I haven't...I...I need the whole team on this one.

(Tiffany and Baby watch Clarissa for another long moment, then...)

CLARISSA

(nodding)

We're here for you, Dad.

TIFFANY

Yeah! Let's get at it! Whatever it is.

BABY

Me, too, Daddy!

(They all move to exit. Mom hesitates.)

DAD

Coming, honey? I need you most of all.

MOM

Yes, dear! I'll...just be a minute.

(They exit. Mom looks around carefully for a moment, then takes the long banana from the fruit bowl, slides it into her apron pocket, and gives it a little pat.)

MOM

Coming!

(Fade.)