

SUNDAY DINNER

A Romantic Comedy in Two Acts

(Act One only)

by

Diane Grant

Member of Dramatists Guild, Inc.
Alliance of Los Angeles Playwrights
International Center for Women Playwrights
Playwrights Guild of Canada

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Sunday Dinner was first produced at *The Complex* in Hollywood, CA from April 3rd through April 27th, 1997, with the following cast and crew:

Lori Fleming: Meghan O'Sullivan
Charlie Davis: Paul Reuhl
Violet Costa Della Torre: Diane Grant
Sylvia Cranston: Sybil Grieb

Stage Manager: Pat Perkins
Set/Design/Construction: Andrew Frew and Paul Ruehl
Sound Design: Andrew Frew
Costume Design: Sylvia Grieb, Joyce Smith and Beverly Hausner
Front of House: Ray Dannis

Produced by Andrew Frew
Directed by Babs Warden Lebowsky

CAST OF CHARACTERS

CHARLIE DAVIS An attractive, intelligent single man, eager to please

LORI FLEMING His girlfriend, honest, down to earth

VIOLET COSTA DELLA TORRE
 Charlie's mother, twice divorced, charming and manipulative

SYLVIA CRANSTON
 Charlie's ex-girlfriend, slightly older than Lori, sophisticated
 and stylish

TIME:

The present - a quiet Sunday evening

SETTING:

The living room/dining room of a one bedroom apartment, with windows center back and an ornamental tree in front of one of them.

The kitchen is off up right through a door from the living room. In front of the kitchen door is a dining table. The bedroom and bathroom are off left, down a hall.

The front door is off down right. There is an intercom on the wall beside it.

The room is furnished with a large sofa and not enough chairs. It's decorated in an Art Deco fashion but there are incongruous groupings of small objects in curio cabinets or on tables. One surface is covered with teacups. There is a collection of ceramic cats and dogs. There is a decorative throw over the back of the sofa, a larger lacy one on a table.

An arresting painting of a beach at sunset is prominently displayed on one wall. There's a thermostat beside it.

A bottle of white wine sits in a wine cooler, with two wine glasses beside it.

AT RISE: Lori enters, humming. She's carrying a bowl of chips and a bowl of dip. She puts the bowls on the coffee table in front of the sofa. She pushes Charlie's sandals under the table. CHARLIE enters, wearing boots and jacket. He's carrying a set of lueprints. He puts the blueprints down and takes off his jacket.

CHARLIE

I swear. She lies in wait for me.

LORI

Mrs. Bloom?

CHARLIE

Who else? Mrs. Habiby's gone to the hospital and Mr. Habiby was white as a sheet. She's as big as a house and carrying very low, so it's got to be a boy. Or was it a girl? And the Forgartys on fourth moved and left the place like a pigsty.

LORI

So, how does the house look?

CHARLIE

Great. We're going to start roofing tomorrow.

(Charlie takes off his boots. Lori pours two glasses of wine from the bottle in the cooler.)

Now Marc thinks he came up with the idea of steel. "Galvanized panels," he says. "The only way to go."

LORI

He doesn't. That was your idea.

CHARLIE

He's changed the specs so many times he doesn't remember who thought what. Architects are so nuts.

LORI

Unlike contractors. They're rock solid. Sensible.

CHARLIE

Feet on the ground.

(Lori hands him a glass of wine.)

Hey, thank you.

LORI

To Davis Construction.

CHARLIE

Long may we build.

(They click glasses and drink. Kiss.)

Ummmm.

LORI

I made fried chicken.

CHARLIE

Smells good.

LORI

I made it with pecan breading and a honey mustard sauce.

CHARLIE

Very nice, very nice. You take good care of me.

(He takes the glass from Lori's hand. Pulls her onto the sofa.)

LORI

Well, I'm glad.

CHARLIE

So am I.

(They sit close together.)

LORI

Isn't this wonderful, Charlie?

CHARLIE

It is.

LORI

Today is our third of a year anniversary.

CHARLIE

It is?

LORI

We've been together four months today.

CHARLIE

You don't look a day older than when we met.

LORI

Why thank you, sir.

CHARLIE

You are still the most adorable, the sweetest, the dearest, the sexiest woman I know.
Have ever known. Will ever know.

(They kiss.)

LORI

You are the best, Charlie. The very best.

CHARLIE

And the happiest guy in the world.

(Pause.)

LORI

You know what would make everything perfect?

CHARLIE

I thought it was.

LORI

It is.

CHARLIE

What would make it perfect?

LORI

A dog.

CHARLIE

(shocked)

You're kidding.

LORI

Not a big one. Maybe a cocker spaniel.

CHARLIE

A cocker spaniel.

LORI

Whatd'ya think?

CHARLIE

Who would take care of it?

LORI

We would.

CHARLIE

We?

LORI

They're no trouble, Charlie. Mrs. Bloom said she wouldn't mind if we got one.

CHARLIE

You asked Mrs. Bloom?

LORI

I think Eddie's a great name, don't you?

CHARLIE

Eddie.

LORI

After Uncle Eddie. He loves dogs.

CHARLIE

Who would it belong to?

LORI

To us.

(Pause.)

CHARLIE

I don't think either of us wants that kind of responsibility, Lori.

(Pause)

LORI

I guess it would tie us down.

CHARLIE

I know it would.

LORI

It was just a thought.

CHARLIE

Good.

LORI

I'm happy with us the way we are. Very happy. These have been the best four months of my life.

CHARLIE

Mine, too.

LORI

I never thought I'd meet someone I could tell everything to. Someone who'd tell me everything. Someone to share with. It's wonderful.

CHARLIE

It's amazing.

(They kiss.)

We really lucked out, didn't we? There are so many people without anybody out there.

LORI

That's right.

CHARLIE

Nobody to turn to when they need help. Nobody to talk to when they're in pain. When they're lonely.

LORI

Would you like another drink, Charlie?

CHARLIE

No, thanks.

(Lori gets up.)

I mean, look at Ma. A two time loser.

(Lori quickly picks up bowl of chips.)

LORI

Chips?

(Charlie takes the bowl of chips.)

CHARLIE

(munching)

When I think of her all alone that apartment with the view of the condo next door...all by herself day after day.

(Lori pours herself more wine.)

LORI

She's just around the corner, Charlie.

CHARLIE

She's still alone. And you know she's not well.

LORI

I don't think she's unhappy.

CHARLIE

She doesn't know she's unhappy. That's the terrible part.

(takes another handful of chips. Pause)

How big is the chicken?

(Lori puts the bottle down hard.)

LORI

Could we have her every other Sunday and not every Sunday?

CHARLIE

Do we have to talk about that now? I'm just wondering about today.

LORI

Today's Sunday.

CHARLIE

Oh, yeah, it is. I forgot.

LORI

That's because you're working every day. And we had her last Sunday.

CHARLIE

So what if we had her last Sunday?

LORI

So, I had the flu and asked you not to have her.

CHARLIE

You weren't going anywhere because you were sick so I didn't think it mattered.

LORI

But I did say I wasn't feeling well.

CHARLIE

You just had to lie there.

LORI

I felt trapped lying there.

CHARLIE

You could have gone out.

LORI

I didn't want to go out because I had the flu.

CHARLIE

You didn't want to, so it didn't matter.

LORI

It didn't matter to you!

CHARLIE

You don't have the flu today, do you?

LORI

I asked you yesterday. I said, "Do you want to invite your mother for Sunday dinner and you said, "I don't think so." And now you say, "How big is the chicken?"

CHARLIE

Is it big enough for three?

LORI

Oh! Are you going to invite her or not?

CHARLIE

Is this your time of the month?

LORI

No. (outraged)

(She grabs the chip bowl. Sits and eats. Charlie looks at her and shakes his head. Then, he goes to telephone and dials. Lori goes to the thermostat and turns it up.)

CHARLIE

What are you doing?

LORI

Turning up the heat.

(Charlie turns it down, goes back to the telephone and dials again..)

You know what she's going to say.

CHARLIE

What?

LORI

It's like an igloo in here.

CHARLIE

When does she say that?

LORI

Every time.

CHARLIE

So?

(into phone)

Hi, Ma. Lori was just saying that we haven't seen your smiling face in a while and we were wondering if you'd like to come over for dinner.

(listens)

What?

(into phone)

It's about seven, I guess.

LORI

(quietly)

I'll have to move the tree.

CHARLIE

(hand over mouthpiece)

I'll do it.

LORI

I can do it.

CHARLIE

(into phone)

We would have called earlier but we just got in.

(Lori struggles with the tree, trying to carry it to the other side of the sofa.)

Of course we do. Just us.

LORI

Every time she comes over, we have to discuss the tree. Do you water it enough? It's drooping a bit, isn't it?

CHARLIE

(into the phone)

No, you don't have to dress up. If you don't want to change, don't. No. You don't even have to think about it, Ma.

LORI

What is it doing there?

(struggling)

Umm. Umm.

CHARLIE

(covers the mouthpiece)

I'll do it.

(into the phone)

Which one? Yes, it's nice, it's nice.

LORI

(to Charlie)

She'll try to look out the window and she'll say, "I don't know why you have this tree blocking the view and then we'll have to move it. Why don't we move it before she says that?"

CHARLIE

(hand over mouthpiece)

Will you leave that for me?

(shouting into telephone)

Wear whatever you want!

(lowers his voice)

I'm sorry, Ma, I'm sorry. O.K. Ten minutes.

(slams down the phone and grabs the tree)

Give me that. I asked her. The least I can do is move the tree.

LORI

It's my tree and I am going to move it.

(They struggle over the tree and move it across the room a few feet. It drops on Charlie's foot. He hops around, screaming in pain.)

Are you OK?

CHARLIE

No, I am not OK!

(Charlie collapses on the sofa, holding his foot.)

LORI

(goes over to him, kneels and looks at his foot.)

Does it hurt a lot?

CHARLIE

Yes!

(Lori gently rubs his foot.)

LORI

Is this better?

CHARLIE

The agony has somewhat abated.

(Lori kisses his foot.)

LORI

Poor little foot. Better?

CHARLIE

Much.

(He kisses her. They kiss again. They sink down into the sofa, lost to the world. Charlie suddenly sits up.

I'd better go.

LORI

Go where?

CHARLIE

I've gotta pick up Ma.

LORI

Now?

CHARLIE

Yah.

LORI

Go!

(She pushes him away and his injured foot hits the floor hard.)

CHARLIE

Aaaah!

(He gingerly puts his sandals on, tries to kiss Lori. She pulls away.)

LORI

Uh uh.

CHARLIE

I'm going!

(gets up and goes to door)

O.K. I'm going. Look at me. I'm going.

LORI

Go!

CHARLIE

I'm gone.

(He exits.)

LORI

Damn!

(She takes a chip, puts it in the dip, which spills on her shirt.)

Dammit. I wonder what would get that out? Is this your time of the month? What if it is? Great, now, I'm talking to myself.

(loudly)

I can't stand that woman.

(Charlie enters. He's heard.)

CHARLIE

I forgot my car keys.

LORI

(startled)

Oh.

(She exits to bedroom.)

CHARLIE

Have you seen them?

LORI

(offstage)

They were on the cabinet.

(Charlie looks at the cabinet. The keys are there.)

CHARLIE

I found them. That's where they were, on the cabinet.

(picks them up. Lori enters, putting on a baseball jersey that says
DAVIS CONSTRUCTION.)

I guess you're still mad at me.

LORI

She makes me yammer. I get nervous and I talk, talk, talk about all sorts of stupid stuff.

CHARLIE

You do not talk about stupid stuff. You are charming and I love to listen to you.

LORI

Thank you.

CHARLIE

I'm sorry I shouted.

LORI

What's a dinner? I'm sorry I got so upset.

CHARLIE

You always say what you think, don't you?

LORI

Would you like me to pretend?

CHARLIE

Never. Just give it to me straight. I can take it.
(indicating jersey)

I like that.

LORI

Elegant, ain't it?

CHARLIE

Very.

LORI

It belongs to Charlie Davis. He's the President of the company. And the first baseman.

CHARLIE

It looks better on you than it does on him.

LORI

Thanks.

(Charlie goes to door and turns back.)

CHARLIE

Do you want to move that tree?

LORI

You know what? It looks good there. Let's leave it.

O.K. by me. CHARLIE

I like it. LORI

So do I. CHARLIE

(Charlie puts his arms around her.)

LORI
(referring to the shirt)
It feels good, doesn't it?

CHARLIE
Very good.
(They embrace and sink to the sofa.)
Let's take it off.

(He takes off the shirt, throws it on the floor.)

LORI
You have to go.

CHARLIE
I will, I will.
(kisses her, then dramatically)
I'd give you the world, darling.

LORI
(laughing)
I don't want the world. I want a dog.

CHARLIE
(like a dog)
Bark, bark, bark.

LORI
(patting his head)
Nice doggie, nice doggie.
(The intercom buzzes.)
The intercom...

CHARLIE

Ignore it.

(The intercom keeps buzzing. Charlie nuzzles Lori, growling. The intercom buzzes relentlessly. Charlie jumps up and goes to the intercom.)

Hello, hello, hello.

(listens)

There's nobody there.

LORI

(playing)

You left me to answer the intercom.

CHARLIE

I stopped the buzzing, didn't I?

LORI

You left me all alone.

CHARLIE

Let me make it up to you.

(He goes back to Lori and wraps her in an embrace. The door opens and VIOLET appears in the doorway. It's an entrance. She always makes an entrance. She's wearing an mauve caftan, dangling earrings and four inch heels. She has a small carrying case in her hand.)

VIOLET

Well, hello.

(They don't hear her.)

Hello, hello, hello.

(Lori sees her over Charlie's shoulder.)

LORI

Vi!

(Lori jumps up and exits to the kitchen.)

CHARLIE

Ma!

(falls off the back of the sofa. He gets up. Picks up the shirt.)

How did you get here?

(Lori sticks her hand out of the kitchen door. Charlie throws her the shirt.)

You didn't walk, did you?

VIOLET

I took a cab.

CHARLIE

You took a cab around the corner?

(Violet gives Charlie the case. He puts it on the table.)

VIOLET

What the hell is that tree doing there?

CHARLIE

How did you get in?

VIOLET

Mrs. Bloom took pity on us.

CHARLIE

Us?

(Violet turns and gestures dramatically at the open doorway.)

VIOLET

Ta da!

(SYLVIA, a beautiful woman, expertly made up and dressed in a beautifully cut business suit, with a handbag over her shoulder, appears and poses in the doorway. She is laughing.)

SYLVIA

Ta da!

VIOLET

Surprise!

CHARLIE

Sylvia!

SYLVIA

Ciao, Charlie. Long time no see.

VIOLET

Isn't this fun? Sylvia's in town. She dropped by, out of the blue, and I said to her, "Why don't you come along and we'll surprise Charlie?" Are you surprised?

CHARLIE

Speechless.

SYLVIA

Is anybody going to ask me in?

(Charlie stares at her.)

Make it soon, sweetie. I have to use the little girl's room.

VIOLET

(to Sylvia, laughing)

Come in before you burst.

(Sylvia enters.)

SYLVIA

Thanks.

(gives Charlie a big kiss.)

I'll just freshen up.

(Sylvia exits to the bathroom.)

CHARLIE

Is she staying for dinner?

VIOLET

I don't know. She just dropped by.

CHARLIE

I don't think the chicken's big enough for four.

VIOLET

Will you pay the taxi driver, dear? He's waiting out front.

CHARLIE

Ma!

VIOLET

It's the end of the month.

CHARLIE

Why didn't Sylvia pay for the taxi?

VIOLET

Sylvia is my guest.

(Charlie exits.)

Lori, dear, where are you?

LORI

(offstage, cheerfully)

Be right there.

(Violet straightens up the sofa, then lies down on it, taking up the entire space. Lori enters.)

Violet, what a pretty dress.

VIOLET

It's a caftan, dear.

LORI

Ah.

VIOLET

It was so last minute, I just grabbed any old thing out of the closet.

LORI

Well...it's very nice. The purple's lovely.

VIOLET

Thank you, dear. It's violet.

LORI

Violet for Violet.

(Lori perches on the end of the sofa.)

VIOLET

Yes.

(suddenly whispering)

I hope I'm not putting you out.

LORI

Oh, no. You never do.

(loudly, cheerfully)

You're not feeling well, today?

VIOLET

(whispering)

I dragged myself over.

(wanly)

I know how much Charlie looks forward to my visits.

(She puts her feet on the arm of the sofa, nudging Lori with them.)

LORI

I'll go get a chair.

VIOLET

(whispering)

I'd give you the sofa but I can't move about much. It's my heart.

(Lori picks up the chair from beside the dining table.)

LORI

Pardon me?

VIOLET

(louder)

It's my heart.

(Lori moves the chair closer to the sofa.)

LORI

I'm sorry, I didn't catch that.

VIOLET

(much louder)

It's my heart.

LORI

Oh, of course, your heart.

VIOLET

(normal tone)

Heart is Number One.

LORI

Excuse me?

(Lori sits.)

VIOLET

Number One.

(patiently)

The Number One killer, dear. It's the Number One cause of death in the country.

LORI

I thought cancer was.

VIOLET

No.

(indicates Lori's upper lip.)

Do you have something...?

LORI

...something?

VIOLET

On your teeth, dear.

(points)

Right there.

(Lori rubs her teeth.)

LORI

Oh, it's chocolate.

VIOLET

Chocolate?

LORI

I've been working with chocolate and there was a piece on the kitchen counter. I couldn't resist.

VIOLET

Working with it?

LORI

I have this fabulous recipe for French Chocolate Cake I'm dying to try but I'm experimenting with the chocolate first. Melting chocolate is really tricky.

VIOLET

Tell me about it.

LORI

It's nothing, really.

VIOLET

Now, now, Lori. I'm sure it's fascinating process.

LORI

Well, there are different techniques. You can use a very gentle heat but you absolutely must avoid getting water, even a little bit of steam, in the chocolate or it seizes up.

VIOLET

Seizes up?

LORI

It goes lumpy. Sometimes, it turns into a solid mass and then it's game over.

VIOLET

My, my.

LORI

That's why I like the oven method most of the time - two hundred and twenty-five degrees is perfect - but when I'm adding milk or butter or cream, I use a heavy based saucepan – I just bought it, it's a beauty - on direct heat, and watch it very, very carefully so it doesn't burn. My friend, Maria, thinks I'm nuts. She swears that....

(Violet puts her hand on Lori's arm.)

VIOLET

Dear.

LORI

(stopped in her tracks)

Yes?

VIOLET

It's like an igloo in here.

LORI

It's about sixty-eight degrees, I think.

VIOLET

Could you turn up the heat?

(coughs)

You know I have to watch.

LORI

Right.

(Lori turns the thermostat up.)

VIOLET

I see you moved the tree.

LORI

Would you like a glass of white wine?

VIOLET

Is it chilled?

(Lori goes over to the cabinet for the bottle.)

LORI

It sure is.

VIOLET

Wouldn't say no.

LORI

Didn't think you would.

(Sylvia enters.)

SYLVIA

Hey there!

(Lori almost drops the bottle.)

LORI

Aaah!

VIOLET

Relax, dear. It's only Sylvia.

LORI

Who is Sylvia?

SYLVIA

I am. And you must be Lori.

LORI

I guess I must.

SYLVIA

I've heard a lot about you.

LORI

(clutching the bottle)

You have? Charlie didn't tell me you were coming.

VIOLET

(disingenuously)

He didn't?

LORI

No, he didn't.

SYLVIA

Vi didn't tell me how pretty you were.

(Sylvia looks around for a place to sit.)

LORI

I'll get the other chair. It's in the kitchen.

(She thrusts the bottle into Sylvia's hand and rushes off into the kitchen.)

VIOLET

She's such a ditz.

(Lori is just in earshot. Amused, Sylvia holds out the bottle.)

SYLVIA

Wine?

(Violet laughs. Sylvia sits in Lori's chair.)

VIOLET

What do you think?

SYLVIA

I don't know, Vi. She's kind of cute.

VIOLET

So's a Disney dog. How about that fish wallpaper in the bathroom?

SYLVIA

Do you think she actually bought that little boudoir chair?

VIOLET

My dear, *Architectural Digest*.

(Lori enters from the kitchen, carrying a chair.)

LORI

Here we go.

(She puts the chair down on the other side of the sofa and sits.)

Help yourself to chip and dip.

VIOLET

(cheerfully)

Almost gone.

(Vi shows her the almost empty chip bowl. Lori grabs it.)

LORI

Excuse me. Make yourself at home.

VIOLET

Bring some glasses will you, dear?

LORI

You got it.

(She exits to the kitchen. Violet picks up the dip bowl.)

VIOLET

Dip?

(Offstage, we hear a banging of cupboard doors and cutlery being dropped.
A glass smashes.)

LORI

(offstage)

Be right there.

VIOLET

Take your time, dear.

(to Sylvia)

Didn't I tell you?

(Lori enters with a bag of potato chips, the chip bowl, a wine glass and a
water glass. She gives the wine glass to Vi and the tumbler to Sylvia.)

LORI

I'm sorry about this glass. Do you mind, Sylvia?

SYLVIA

Dr. Spock. I love it.

VIOLET

My dear, it's divine. So original.

LORI

Free from *Burger King*.

(Lori tears open the potato chip bag and pours chips into the bowl. She spills the chips on the floor, picks the chips up off the floor, and not knowing what to do with them, puts them in the bowl. Violet holds out her glass.)

Here we go.

(She pours Vi a glass of wine.)

VIOLET

(to Sylvia, English accent)

Will you partake, dahling?

SYLVIA

(to Lori, mimicking Violet)

Just a splash.

(Lori pours Sylvia a glass of wine.)

Thank you.

VIOLET

(to Lori)

Don't forget yourself, Lori. You could use one.

LORI

Right. Thank you.

(She pours herself a glass of wine. Sits. In silence, all three drink deeply. The intercom rings. Both Sylvia and Lori jump.)

Oh!

SYLVIA

Ah!

(Lori goes to the intercom.)

LORI

(into intercom)

Who is it?

CHARLIE

(offstage)

It's me. I forgot my key.

(She presses the buzzer.)

LORI

He forgot his key.
(to Violet)
What's he doing out front?

VIOLET

I took a cab.

LORI

You took a cab around the corner?

VIOLET

I don't have a car.

LORI

That's right.

VIOLET

I once had the most beautiful red Ferrari. My dears, you should have seen that car.

SYLVIA

Vi. I drove a Ferrari when I was in Florence.

VIOLET

How marvellous. Rico...
(she looks at Lori)
...my second husband...

LORI

Charlie's stepfather. He talks about him a lot.

VIOLET

Is that so?

SYLVIA

I've heard he was adorable.

VIOLET

He was Italian! He adored Ferraris. He actually wore driving gloves. How I laughed when I saw those gloves. We'd race across the Mojave Desert, one hundred and twenty-five miles an hour, screaming our heads off. A wild man. Such fun.

(Silence. They sip.)

LORI

(politely, to Sylvia)
You were in Florence?

VIOLET

Sylvia's an interior decorator. She flies all over all over the world for her clients.
London, Santiago, Firenze.

(pointedly to Lori)
Florence.
(Lori doesn't understand.)
Firenze is Florence.

LORI

Right.

SYLVIA

Which reminds me, Vi.
(She pulls two airplane bottles of alcohol out of her purse.)

Ta da!

(She gives them to Vi.)

VIOLET

What fun. Thank you.

(She clicks the bottles together. Kisses them, puts them down.
Silence.)

SYLVIA

What do you do, Lori?

LORI

I'm a court reporter.
(Vi clears her throat.)
Actually, I'm studying to be a court reporter. I work in a bank.

SYLVIA

Gosh.

VIOLET

How do like Lori's little things?

SYLVIA

They're very nice.
(looks around the room.)
Really.

LORI

Most of the things are Charlie's. I brought my collections with me when I moved in.
And the tree.

SYLVIA

You collect things?

LORI

I'm not a serious collector. My Mom started me on the teacups.

SYLVIA

How nice.

(She picks up a teacup and admires it.)

LORI

(warming to the subject)

What I love is that painting. It makes the room, don't you think?

VIOLET

(laughs indulgently)

I guess she does. She gave it to Charlie.

SYLVIA

Violet.

VIOLET

You did, dear.

LORI

And the rest of the room?

SYLVIA

My Art Deco period.

LORI

I thought you were Vi's friend.

SYLVIA

I am.

VIOLET

We've been pals for ages. We had so much fun, didn't we, Syl? We used to do lunch
and then we'd...

SYLVIA AND VI

...shop, shop, shop...

VIOLET (cont'd)

...zoom around and hit the fashion shows, the theatre, the boutiques, the galleries, the you name it.

LORI

Really.

VIOLET

Charlie introduced us.

LORI

So you're Charlie's friend, too.

SYLVIA

I used to be.

LORI

Were you good friends?

(Charlie enters. Violet pours the last of the wine into hers and Sylvia's glass.)

Welcome back. What took you so long?

CHARLIE

I met Mrs. Bloom in the hall. Mrs. Habiby had twins.

(He glares at Vi.)

VIOLET

(innocently)

Was the cab expensive, dear?

CHARLIE

Everything's relative, Ma. Related to the U.S. deficit, it was cheap.

VIOLET

I am Harriet the Housebound except for the occasional cab.

CHARLIE

I didn't steal the Ferrari.

VIOLET

Rico loved that car.

CHARLIE

There is the bus, Ma.

VIOLET

I never use public transportation. Fortunately, I've no place to go.

CHARLIE

God, it's hot in here.

(looks at the thermostat.)

What happened to this?

VIOLET

I didn't turn it up.

(Charlie turns the thermostat down.)

SYLVIA

Gosh, Charlie, I'd forgotten how tall you were.

LORI

Chips?

SYLVIA

(to Lori)

And you're so...tall, too.

LORI

Gosh, thank you.

VIOLET

(to Charlie)

Join us, for heaven's sake. How about a glass of wine?

CHARLIE

No, thank you, Ma.

VIOLET

Come on, do you good.

(picks up the empty wine bottle.)

Whoops. Dead soldier!

LORI

I think we have another bottle.

VIOLET

Good.

CHARLIE

Do you want some help?

LORI

I can do it, thank you.

(sweetly)

You'll want to get reacquainted.

(She exits to the kitchen. Charlie stands, indecisively. Violet points to the chair next to Sylvia.)

VIOLET

Will you sit?

(Charlie places the chair as far away from Sylvia as possible. She poses at the end of the sofa, smiling.)

Doesn't Sylvia look lovely, dear?

CHARLIE

Great, just great.

SYLVIA

Have you put on a little weight?

CHARLIE

No.

(Silence.)

VIOLET

Will you excuse me? I'll just freshen up, too.

(She exits to the bathroom.)

CHARLIE

So. You're in town.

SYLVIA

I had a couple of weeks and nothing to do and I thought why not look up some old friends. Catch up. Vi says you and Marc are doing well. Business is good.

CHARLIE

It's picking up.

SYLVIA

I'm not surprised. You do terrific work. Are you still doing some remodeling?

CHARLIE

Some.

SYLVIA

I'm dying to take a look at *Felipe's Cantina* again. Do you remember that? It was such a hole in the wall when you started.

CHARLIE

No job too big...

SYLVIA AND CHARLIE

(together)

No job too small.

SYLVIA (cont'd)

I loved working on that. Do you remember the fight we all had over the flooring? To tile or not to tile.

CHARLIE

That was the question.

SYLVIA

And the ptomaine poisoning? I was so sick.

CHARLIE

God, yes. So was I. Who said, "The special of the day looks good.?"

SYLVIA

Marc did. Is he still changing the specs?

CHARLIE

Always.

(Pause)

SYLVIA

You've made some changes.

CHARLIE

Uh huh. How's Miami? Still the happening place?

SYLVIA

So they tell me. Lori seems very nice.

CHARLIE
How's the ice cream salesman?

SYLVIA
(amused)
Import export.

CHARLIE
How's the import export salesman?

SYLVIA
He wasn't a salesman, sweetie.

CHARLIE
Wasn't?

SYLVIA
He's in Rome. He's a jerk.

CHARLIE
What goes around, comes around.

SYLVIA
Oh, Charlie, I'm so sorry. You were always so good to me. I made a mistake. People do make mistakes. You know that.
(puts her hand on his knee)
I miss you.

(Lori enters and sees Sylvia's hand on Charlie's knee.)

LORI
Here we go.

(She gives Charlie a bottle of wine.)

SYLVIA
How are things in the kitchen?

LORI
How are things out here?

(She thrusts the bottle at Charlie. Violet enters.)

VIOLET

Ooh. You found one. Hooray.
(settles herself on the sofa.)
Where did I leave my case?

(Charlie hands Vi her carrying case.)

CHARLIE

Never leave home without it, eh Ma?

VIOLET

It's my lifeline, dear. Thank you.
(Vi opens the case and puts her vitamin bottles on the table, one by one.)
Vitamin C with Citrus Bioflavonoid, Violet Hips and Acerola in a base of Alfalfa Cereal Grass to maximize absorption, Vitamin E for the red blood cells, emulsified Vitamin A complex with Vitamin D - the sunshine vitamin - indispensable if you're cooped up for any length of time - Beta Carotene, Grape Seed Extract, Selenium, Brewer's Yeast...

(Charlie points at a bottle still in the case.)

CHARLIE

That's a new one. What is it?

(Violet takes a bottle out of the case.)

VIOLET

Desiccated whole liver.

(Charlie takes a vial out of the case.)

CHARLIE

I meant this one.

VIOLET

Dr. Mortimer prescribed it.

CHARLIE

(reads label)
Valium?

(Vi takes the bottle away from Charlie, puts it back and slams the case shut.)

VIOLET

It's for stress. Thank you.

(to Lori)

Do you like that tree there, dear?

(Charlie opens the wine bottle. Violet takes out a small jar from the case and hands it to Lori.)

Lori, this is for you. I thought you might be able to use it.

LORI

(looking at jar)

Miracle Face Cream?

VIOLET

(demonstrating)

It works wonders for dry skin. You just put a little around the mouth and beside the eyes. I use it all the time.

SYLVIA

Violet...

VIOLET

I'd give you one, too, but you don't need it.

(to Charlie)

She's got that English schoolgirl look. Isn't that disgusting?

CHARLIE

Uh huh.

VIOLET

I could just kill her, couldn't you?

LORI

Uh huh.

(Pop goes the cork.)

VIOLET

(holding out her glass)

Whee.

CHARLIE

Whee.

(Charlie pours her more wine. Pours more for Sylvia.)

VIOLET

What about Lori?

LORI

(holding out her glass)

That's a good idea.

(Charlie doesn't pour.)

CHARLIE

(to Lori)

I'm going to have an Arrowhead sparkling water.

LORI

Fine.

CHARLIE

Why don't you have Arrowhead, too?

VIOLET

Be human. Give the woman a drink.

CHARLIE

You know what they say about booze. H-A-L-T. When you are too H - Hungry, too A - Angry, too L- Lonely, too T - Tired. HALT.

VIOLET

Thank you, Betty Ford.

(to Lori)

Dr. Mortimer says that drinking can be good for the cardiovascular system.

CHARLIE

Is this the same Dr. Mortimer who puts away a quart of scotch every time he visits?

(Charlie exits to the kitchen, carrying the bottle, without pouring Lori any.)

VIOLET

Dr. Mortimer is a specialist!

(toasting)

To friends. The old and the new.

SYLVIA

To friends.

(Charlie enters from the kitchen, carrying dinner plates. He starts to set the table.)

CHARLIE

I don't know about anybody else, but I would like to eat.

SYLVIA

Is it dinnertime?

CHARLIE

Past. Way past.

SYLVIA

I know how you like your dinner on time, Charlie.

(Lori glares at her.)

I'll be off.

(Lori hands Sylvia her purse.)

VIOLET

You were invited, dear.

SYLVIA

You were invited, Vi.

VIOLET

And I invited you.

SYLVIA

I don't know what to think.

VIOLET

Don't think. Go with the flow.

SYLVIA

Will I be any trouble, Lori?

VIOLET

She's perfectly capable of managing one more, aren't you, dear?

(Lori looks at Charlie, who gives her no help.)

SYLVIA

Gosh, that chicken does smell good.

LORI

Gosh. Let's party.

VIOLET

Hooray.
(to Lori)
Have a glass of wine.

LORI

What a lovely idea! I think somebody took the bottle back to the kitchen.

(Lori starts toward the kitchen.)

SYLVIA

Can I help you, Lori?

LORI

No, thanks. We can manage. Have some dip.
(Lori exits into the kitchen. Charlie follows. Lori speaks offstage.)
You didn't tell me about Sylvia!

CHARLIE

(offstage, loudly)
Sylvia was a long time ago!

LORI

(offstage, loudly)
How long?

CHARLIE

(offstage, loudly)
You don't have to shout.

LORI

(offstage, loudly)
You're the one who's shouting.

CHARLIE

(offstage, loudly)
I'll do that. Give it to me.

LORI

(offstage, loudly)
I can do it.

CHARLIE

(offstage, loudly)
I'll help you. Give it to me.
(We hear a crash offstage. Charlie enters.)

CHARLIE (con't)

There'll be a slight delay.

(Lori enters from the kitchen and goes to the front door.)

Where are you going?

LORI

I'm going to borrow a platter from Mrs. Bloom.

CHARLIE

I'll help you.

LORI

Thanks. You're a big help.

(She exits.)

CHARLIE

(to Vi and Sylvia)

Hang in there.

(He exits.)

VIOLET

(delighted)

She's not going to last. She doesn't have it. Am I right?

SYLVIA

I don't know.

VIOLET

He's on the rebound. Come on, didn't you see the look he gave you?

SYLVIA

The terrified one?

VIOLET

He's crazy about you.

SYLVIA

I'd like to believe that.

VIOLET

Sylvia, go for it. He's hard working, he's educated, he's going places...he's good-looking...he has a beautiful smile, doesn't he have a beautiful smile?...

SYLVIA
He has a beautiful smile.

VIOLET
...And he's still up for grabs.

(Sylvia laughs.)

SYLVIA
Women don't grab men, Vi.

VIOLET
If they had any sense they would.
(suddenly)
I'll make you a bet. In a month, she'll be out that door for good.

SYLVIA
Vi!

VIOLET
A bottle of Beaujolais. What do you say?

SYLVIA
Let me get this straight. If she leaves, I lose. If she stays, I win?

VIOLET
If you lose, you win. Are we on?

SYLVIA
One condition.

VIOLET
What?

SYLVIA
I don't want to lose by default. You can't try to break them up. No tricks, no interference.

VIOLET
Are we on or not?

SYLVIA
(amused)
You are so wicked. We're on.

Cheers! (raises her glass) VIOLET

Salut! SYLVIA

Prosit! VIOLET

Kampai! SYLVIA

Bottoms up! VIOLET AND SYLVIA

(They click glasses. Drink deeply. They are now both quite looped.)

Nobody knows how to drink anymore.
(sighs)

Where have all the fun people gone? Life isn't perfect? So what? Laugh at it. Dress up, ring for room service.

Oysters and champagne. And dancing after. SYLVIA

Exactly. You know how to live. With style!
(shakes her head)

I don't know why he wastes his time on these... I think it's sex.

Vi! SYLVIA

You know what I mean. Nothing lasting. She's so...wrong.
(lowers her voice).

She can't help it, of course, poor thing. She comes from nothing.

How awful for Charlie. SYLVIA

VIOLET

Exactly.

(gets up, looks around)

I mean look at what she's done to this room. Isn't it tacky?

SYLVIA

It's a bit haphazard...a little...

(breaking up)

formless... kind of...

VIOLET

..tacky.

SYLVIA

Tacky.

(Violet picks up a ceramic dog.)

VIOLET

Tacky, tacky, tacky.

(puts dog back, looks at the throw over the sofa)

Where does she get these things?

(takes the throw off the sofa and puts it on her head, like a scarf.)

Do you like it, darling? It is all what I have left, my babushka.

SYLVIA

Vi, put that back.

(Violet flings the throw to Sylvia. She sees the lacy throw on the table, holds it in front of her face as if wearing a veil, then flourishes it and sings.)

VIOLET

(singing)

I'm the Sheik of Araby.

Your love belongs to me.

At night when you're asleep

Into your tent I'll creep

The stars that shine above

Will light our way to love

You'll rule this land with me,

The sheik of Araby.

(She tosses the throw to Sylvia.)

SYLVIA

Honestly, Vi, sometimes, you remind me so much of my mother. She was just like you.

Vivacious, witty, charming...? VIOLET

And bananas! SYLVIA

(Sylvia tosses the throw back.)

Kitsch. VIOLET

The tree's not bad. SYLVIA

You can't mean that. What is it doing there? VIOLET

Well... SYLVIA

A professional opinion. VIOLET

The truth? SYLVIA

Naturally. VIOLET

It would look better over by the window. SYLVIA

Do you think so? That spoils the view. VIOLET

By the picture. Or maybe by the cabinet. SYLVIA
(walks over)

Here.

Perfect. VIOLET

Shall we? (suddenly)

SYLVIA
This isn't our place, Vi.

VIOLET
She'll never notice.

SYLVIA
She will.

VIOLET
We can move it back. Let's just see what it looks like.
(Sylvia shakes her head but she's amused.)
Come on, come on, come on. Chicken.

SYLVIA
Squawk.

VIOLET
I can't stand it.
(takes the tree by the trunk and starts to lift it, struggles, then puts her hand
on her heart.)
Oh, my heart.

SYLVIA
Violet! Be careful. You'll hurt yourself.
(She rushes over to the tree. Vi grabs it again.)

VIOLET
Quick. Before they come back. Get the other side.

SYLVIA
It's heavy.

VIOLET
Don't talk. Lift.

SYLVIA
Mmmmmf. Mmmmmmf.

VIOLET
(laughing, panting)
You are such a weakling.

SYLVIA

Seriously. I can't do it.

VIOLET

Move, move. Here we go.

(They get the tree moving.)

Told you we could do it.

SYLVIA

Gosh.

(They let the tree down.)

...Ta da!

VIOLET

Ta da!

(Lori comes through the door, carrying a platter. She stops short when she sees them and almost drops it.)

LORI

What's going on?

VIOLET AND SYLVIA

Oh.

(They move away from the tree.)

LORI

And what were you doing?

SYLVIA

Umm, moving the tree, I guess.

LORI

What was wrong with it where it was?

SYLVIA

Oh...

(looks at Violet)

...nothing really.

LORI

Right. I'll thank you to put it back where I had it.

SYLVIA

I'm really sorry, Lori. I don't know what we were... Vi! Tell Lori what we were thinking.

VIOLET
(suddenly gasping)
I can't breathe. I can't breathe.

SYLVIA
Oh, no.

LORI
Oh, dear.

VIOLET
My heart. My heart.

SYLVIA
What have we done?

VIOLET
Hahahahahah.

SYLVIA
Lori! Help me.
(Lori helps Sylvia lift Violet who lists and gasps for breath.)
Easy. Easy.

VIOLET
Help me to the sofa.

SYLVIA
Here we go. Here we go.

VIOLET
Can't catch my....can't catch my....

LORI
Charlie. Charlie.

(Lori exits.)

SYLVIA
Don't move. Rest. Put your feet up.
(She takes a vial of pills out of Vi's case, opens it, gives a pill to Vi.)
It's your heart pill.

(She exits to the kitchen.)

VIOLET

Oh, oh, oh, oh.

(Sylvia runs out of the kitchen with a glass of water.)

SYLVIA

Here, Vi. Take your pill. Drink this.

(Violet swallows her pills with the water, then hands the glass back to Sylvia.)

VIOLET

Aaaaah. So cold, so cold.

SYLVIA

I'll get you a blanket!

(She exits to the bedroom. Charlie enters, followed by Lori.)

CHARLIE

What is it? Ma!

(Violet falls back, out cold. Charlie runs over to her.)

Ma! Ma!

(Violet stirs slightly. Sylvia enters with a blanket and covers her.)

What happened?

SYLVIA

What happened?

CHARLIE

Something sure as hell happened. What the hell happened?

(Charlie slaps Vi's face to revive her.)

SYLVIA

She insisted on moving that tree and it was too much for her.

LORI

She insisted on moving the tree, Ms. Interior Decorator?

CHARLIE

How could you let her do that?

SYLVIA

Vi, please, please, wake up. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

(Violet responds to the slapping and comes to.)

She's coming around.

CHARLIE

Are you all right, Ma?

VIOLET

Yes, yes, I think so, dear. Yes. Just a small attack.

CHARLIE

But you were doing so well.

VIOLET

It's this heart.

SYLVIA

How could I have let you do that?

VIOLET

Don't blame yourself. I get carried away.

(She reaches for Charlie's hand.)

Don't be angry with Sylvia, dear. That tree's been bothering me all evening.

CHARLIE

Ma, the tree was all right where it was.

VIOLET

You can't possibly like it there.

CHARLIE

What's wrong with it there?

VIOLET

It looks...so...wrong. You don't like it there, do you Lori?

LORI

Tell me where you want it, Vi, and I'll move it.

CHARLIE

I'll move it.

LORI

I'll move it.

CHARLIE

I'm not going to discuss this.

LORI

We don't have to discuss it. I'll move it.

CHARLIE

(dangerously)

Where would you like the tree, Ma?

VIOLET

I'm not quite sure. Maybe, if I had something to eat, first.

CHARLIE

Good idea.

(to Lori)

Why don't we get the dinner on the table?

LORI

I'll get dinner on the table after you move the tree.

CHARLIE

I am not going to move that tree!

LORI

You were going to move it. Two seconds ago you said, "Where would you like it, Ma?"

CHARLIE

What the hell does that matter? I'm not saying that now.

LORI

If Vi wants it moved so badly, I'll move it.

CHARLIE

You will not!

LORI

It's my tree and I'll move it.

CHARLIE

I want to eat and I want to eat right now.

SYLVIA

I can get dinner!

LORI AND CHARLIE

No!

VIOLET

Children. Children.

CHARLIE

Are we going to eat or not?

LORI

You can. Anytime.

(Lori exits into the kitchen, enters with the chicken in the pan, and shoves it at Charlie.)

Have some chicken, Charlie.

SYLVIA

My God.

(Violet clutches at her heart and gasps. Lori starts to cry.)

CHARLIE

That's it. I quit.

(He goes to the front door.)

LORI

Where are you going?

CHARLIE

Out for something to eat!

(He exits. Lori exits to the kitchen. Pause.)

VIOLET

Could you bring me some of that chicken, dear?

SYLVIA

Should you eat right away?

VIOLET

Food always makes me feel better. Is there a drumstick in there?

(Sylvia gives Violet a plate of chicken.)

Thank you.

(chewing)

Have some.

SYLVIA

I've lost my appetite.

VIOLET

Come on. Mmmm. It has a nice nutty coating on it.

(takes her vitamins out of their bottles)

A and D, C, E.... You should try some of these. You need to take better care of yourself.

(takes a Vitamin E with her wine)

Thank you for helping, dear. You're so kind.

(Lori enters from the kitchen, carrying a bowl of potatoes, hands it to Sylvia.)

LORI

Potatoes.

VIOLET

My dear, the chicken is delicious.

LORI

Good.

(She exits to the kitchen. Sylvia holds out the potatoes and Violet helps herself.)

VIOLET

Potatoes?

(Sylvia shakes her head. Violet digs in. Lori enters, carrying a bowl of salad and hands it to Sylvia.)

LORI

Salad.

VIOLET

(delighted)

Salad!

(Sylvia holds out the salad bowl and Violet helps herself. Violet holds up her greasy fingers.)

Are there some napkins over there?

(Lori enters from the kitchen, carrying napkins and salt and pepper. Sylvia puts the potato bowl down. Lori hands her the napkins.)

LORI

Napkins. Salt and pepper.

(puts the shakers down)

So sorry the service is slow.

SYLVIA

Aren't you eating?

LORI

I'm leaving, thank you very much. Just continue to make yourselves at home.

(looks at the painting)

I can't believe I ever liked that stupid thing.

(starts to take the painting down)

Stupid, stupid, stupid.

SYLVIA

Here, let me help you.

(Sylvia helps her take the painting off the wall.)

LORI

There. Take it with you when you go. You are going, aren't you? Or are you going to stay and rearrange the furniture first?

SYLVIA

Gosh.

LORI

Anything else you'd like? Charlie, for example? I don't know why you'd want him. He's very hard to get along with.

(Charlie enters.)

VIOLET

(innocently)

Did you get something to eat, dear?

CHARLIE

(to Lori)

I talked to Mrs. Bloom.

LORI

Oh?

CHARLIE

I told her we're going to get a dog!

VIOLET

A dog?

Not too big. CHARLIE

A cocker spaniel. LORI

(ironically, to Violet)
How sweet. First, the dog. Then, the children. SYLVIA

(to Sylvia)
I'm allergic to dogs. VIOLET

You won't have to pat it, Ma. CHARLIE

It'll jump on me. They always jump on people who hate them. VIOLET

We'll get one that doesn't jump. CHARLIE

Who's going to take care of it? VIOLET

We will. CHARLIE

We? LORI

Who will it belong to? VIOLET

To us. Lori and me. CHARLIE

To us. LORI

(firmly to Violet)
And I like that tree where we put it. CHARLIE

That's fine, dear.

VIOLET

Good.

CHARLIE

I'll be off. Thanks for dinner. It was so good.

SYLVIA

You didn't eat anything.

VIOLET

Next time.

SYLVIA

(Sylvia picks up her purse.)

Have some chicken. You must be starving.

LORI

I am.

SYLVIA

I know I am.

CHARLIE

(Charlie takes a piece of chicken.)

(to Violet)
Take care of yourself.

SYLVIA

Mmmm. Nutty.

CHARLIE

(Suddenly, Violet turns pale, staggers and clutches her heart.)

Oh! Oh!

VIOLET

(Violet falls against the table, gasping for breath.)

Ma!

CHARLIE

LORI

Vi!

VIOLET

Call Dr. Mortimer. Charlie, please, in my case. The nitroglycerine...in my...

(Charlie and Sylvia help Vi to the sofa.)

SYLVIA

We've got you. You're all right. You're all right.

VIOLET

Under my tongue. Huurrr...

(She collapses on the sofa, gasping for air. Sylvia finds the pill and puts it under Vi's tongue.)

CHARLIE

She's turning white. She's turning white. This is a bad one. This is bad. She'll have to go to emergency.

LORI

What should I do?

CHARLIE

Call Dr. Mortimer. The number's there in the red book by the phone.

(Lori picks up the book. Violet gasps and cries out.)

VIOLET

Aaaaaah!

CHARLIE

I'll drive. Wallet! Where's my wallet?

(Sylvia finds the wallet.)

SYLVIA

Here it is.

(She throws the wallet to Charlie.)

CHARLIE

Car keys. Car keys.

(He looks frantically. Sylvia finds the keys. Lori dials.)

Where are my car keys?

(Sylvia throws the keys to Charlie. Sylvia and Charlie pick Vi up off the sofa.)

LORI

Dr. Mortimer, please. I'm getting the service.

SYLVIA

Take her under the arms. Hold on, Vi. We've got you.

CHARLIE

I'm going to carry you, Ma. Here we go. Here we go.

LORI

I'm on hold. What should I do?

SYLVIA

I'll get the door.

(Sylvia opens the front door.)

VIOLET

Not the hospital, Charlie. Don't make me stay in the hospital.

CHARLIE

I'll take care of you, Ma. Don't worry. I'll take care of you.

(Violet grabs Sylvia's arm.)

VIOLET

Pray for me.

(Charlie exits, carrying Violet. Sylvia starts out.)

LORI

Sylvia, your purse.

SYLVIA

Whoops.

(Lori gives her the purse.)

Thanks.

LORI

Will she be all right?

SYLVIA

I hope so. I haven't seen her this bad since last Mother's Day.

(She exits.)

LORI

Mother's Day?

BLACKOUT

END OF ACT ONE