

Lunenburg

by

Norm Foster

Final Draft – September 5, 2017

Characters

(In order of appearance.)

Iris Oulette

Natalie Whitaker

Charlie Butler

Lunenburg was first produced at the Foster Festival in St. Catharine's, Ontario from August 2-18, 2017 with the following creative team:

Cast

Natalie Whitaker.....	Melanie Janzen
Charlie Butler.....	Peter Krantz
Iris Oulette.....	Catherine McGregor
Director.....	Patricia Vanstone
Set & Costume Designer.....	Peter Hartwell
Lighting Designer.....	Chris Malkowski
Stage Manager.....	Carolyn Mackenzie

ACT ONE SCENE 1

Time: The present. June

Place: The back deck of a home in Lunenburg, Nova Scotia. Located on Shore Road, the deck looks out onto the harbour and beyond that, the Atlantic Ocean.

On the deck are many seating options. Various chairs and maybe a love seat.

Lights up and Iris Oulette enters from the house. She moves to the front of the deck and looks out. This is the first time that Iris has been on this deck. Iris is about fifty years old. After a moment or two, Natalie Whitaker enters from the house. Natalie is also around fifty years old.

Natalie: Iris? Are you okay?

Iris: I'm fine. I just needed some air.

Natalie: You don't want to look around inside?

Iris: In a minute. Right now it's too much to take in all at once.

Natalie: Well, if the rest of the house is like the kitchen there's probably not much to see. How would you describe that colour? Leftover chowder in Abe Lincoln's beard??

Iris: I didn't even notice.

Natalie: *(Looking out.)* Oh my look at that. What a gorgeous harbour. It's like a postcard.

Iris: He picked a good location, that's for sure. I just wish he'd told me about it.

Natalie: Don't worry. Everything will sort itself out in due course.

Iris: I hope so. Have you unpacked the wine yet?

Natalie: Not yet.

Iris: Because I'm going to need it.

Natalie: Oh Iris, good for you. You've still got your sense of humour.

Iris: No, I'm serious. I'm going to need it.

Natalie: Right. I'll finish unloading the car then.

Iris: I'll come and help.

Natalie: No, you've done enough. There's only one more trip to make anyway. You stay here.

Iris: Are you sure?

Natalie: Positive. Hey, when I'm done we'll open that bottle of wine, okay? And then we'll look around the house together. How does that sound?

Iris: Sure.

Natalie: Until then you just stand out here and drink in this magnificent vista.

Iris: Natalie? Thanks for coming up here with me. I really didn't want to go through this alone.

Natalie: And you won't. I'm not leaving your side for a minute this week. Not for one second. All right?

Iris: Thank you.

Natalie: Except for now, because I have to go to the car and get you that wine. But I'll be right back. I promise. Now drink. Drink.

(Natalie exits. After a moment we hear Charlie Butler's voice OFF.)

Charlie: *(OFF.)* Schooner? Here boy! *(Charlie whistles.)* Here Schooner!!

(Charlie Butler enters from the side of the house. Charlie is in his fifties.)

Schooner! Where are you, fella? *(Charlie sees Iris.)* Oh, hi.

Iris: Hello.

Charlie: Sorry. I'm looking for my dog.

Iris: Schooner.

Charlie: Right. I can't find him and I thought he might have wandered over here.

Iris: I haven't seen him.

Charlie: Oh well. I'm sure he'll come home eventually. He always does. I'm Charlie Butler. I live next door.

Iris: Iris.

Charlie: How do you do, Iris? Are you new in town? I've haven't seen you around before.

Iris: I'm from Maine. We just came over on the ferry.

Charlie: Oh. An American.

Iris: Yes.

Charlie: Nice.

Iris: So Schooner huh?

Charlie: Yes. Canada's most famous boat is a schooner. The Blue Nose. It's docked here in Lunenburg.

Iris: I know that.

Charlie: Schooner's also an east coast beer.

Iris: So is the dog named after the boat or the beer?

Charlie: The beer. Yeah, I spend more time with the beer than the boat. Are you..uh..are you staying in this house?

Iris: Just for a few days.

Charlie: Uh-huh. Were you a friend of Bobby Oulette's? Is that why you're staying in his house?

Iris: I was his wife.

Charlie: His wife?

Iris: Yes. I take it you knew Robert?

Charlie: Robert? Yes I did. For about ten years.

Iris: Ten years? That's how long he owned this house, right?

Charlie: Yep.

Iris: Hmm. Well, now it's mine.

Charlie: He left it to you?

Iris: Well, I'm his only next of kin so I got it by default according to our lawyer.

Charlie: So you were his wife?

Iris: Yes.

Charlie: When?

Iris: From September the twenty-second four years ago until he died on May seventeenth.

Charlie: Three weeks ago.

Iris: Yes.

Charlie: You were his wife up until then?

Iris: I was.

Charlie: Right up until he died.

Iris: That's right. Didn't Robert ever mention me?

Charlie: Uh, well, Bobby—everybody around here called him Bobby—Bobby wasn't much of a talker. He kind of kept to himself, you know? He was likeable though. A likeable sort. But no he never mentioned to me that he had a wife named Iris.

Iris: That seems kind of strange.

Charlie: Did he ever mention that he had a neighbour named Charlie?

Iris: No.

Charlie: Well, I don't find that strange, so..

Iris: He never even mentioned that he had a house here. He told me the company put him up in a hotel when he was working here.

Charlie: Hmm. You have a house down there in Maine?

Iris: In Brunswick, yes.

Charlie: With Bobby?

Iris: Well, of course. That's where he lived. We lived there together.

Charlie: Because you were married.

Iris: Yes.

Charlie: Got it.

Iris: I'm sorry. I didn't mean to be abrupt.

Charlie: That's quite all right. Your husband just died. You can be abrupt all you want.

Iris: I'm still trying to process everything. The plane crash. The second house. I'm still in a bit of a daze. And he never told you about me?

Charlie: No ma'am. He told me he worked down in Maine a couple of weeks each month. Down at the Bath Iron Works shipyards. He told me that.

Iris: That's where we met.

Charlie: You worked there too?

Iris: No, I have a catering business. I drive a lunch truck there every day.

Charlie: I see. So, when Bobby wasn't working at the shipyard here, that's where he worked?

Iris: No. When he wasn't working at the shipyard there, this is where he worked.

Charlie: Right. Six of one I guess. Or not. I'm sorry about the crash. The whole town was shocked by it.

Iris: Maybe you can tell me. Do you have any idea why he was flying to Newfoundland?

Charlie: You don't know?

Iris: The only information I got was through our lawyer. Nothing very specific.

Charlie: Well, I saw him just before he left. He was going up there to get a tool they needed. A wire rope level block. Sending it down here would've taken a few days so Bobby decided to fly up and get it himself.

Iris: Yes, any excuse to fly that plane of his.

Charlie: He did love flying by God.

Iris: He told you that?

Charlie: Many times.

Iris: But he never told you about me.

Charlie: Well, he really loved flying. No, that didn't come out right.

Iris: Actually, it probably did come out right. Mister Butler.

Charlie: Charlie, ma'am. Just call me Charlie. And I'm sure Bobby loved you too. I mean, along with flying. Probably more than flying. Well, he married you, right? So...Well, I think I'll head back.

Iris: What about the woman who was with him?

Charlie: Ma'am?

Iris: The woman who died with Robert in the plane. Jennifer Cleveland. Did you know her?

Charlie: I did. She was a project engineer at the shipyards. Same as Bobby.

Iris: Oh. So, I guess that's why she went with him.

Charlie: I guess.

Iris: Well, that explains that then.

Charlie: It was nice meeting you, Iris. And I'm sorry about your loss.

Iris: Thank you. And if I see Schooner I'll send him home to you.

Charlie: Schooner?

Iris: Your dog?

Charlie: Oh, I don't have a dog.

Iris: What do you mean?

Charlie: I don't have a dog. I just made that up. I needed an excuse to come over and say hi. You see, I saw a pretty woman unpacking the car and I wanted to meet her.

Iris: Oh. Well, that's very kind of you to say..

(Natalie enters from the house.)

Charlie: And here she is now.

Natalie: Hello.

Charlie: Hi.

Iris: Natalie, this is Charlie. Is that your real name?

Charlie: Yes ma'am.

Iris: Because you lied about the dog, so..

Charlie: Charlie's my real name.

Iris: Good. This is Charlie.

Natalie: Hello.

Iris: Charlie claims to live next door.

Charlie: I do live next door.

Natalie: Well, it's nice to meet you.

Charlie: Nice to meet you too.

Iris: Charlie knew Robert.

Natalie: Oh?

Iris: But he went by Bobby up here.

Natalie: Bobby?

Iris: According to Charlie he did. He didn't mention that he had a wife either. Not much of a talker apparently. And he loved flying more than anything in the world. I'm going to open that wine now. Sweet Jesus.

Natalie: I'll come with you.

Iris: No, you stay here and talk to Charlie. He's been wanting to meet you.

(Iris exits.)

Natalie: What did she mean by that?

Charlie: I have no idea.

Natalie: She's not herself right now.

Charlie: That must be it then.

Natalie: So, you live next door?

Charlie: Yes.

Natalie: And you knew Robert well?

Charlie: I did. He was a good fella. It was a shame, him dying like that.

Natalie: Do you work at the shipyards too?

Charlie: Well, I work there occasionally on a contract basis. I'm a carpenter. And an electrician. I work for a lot of folks in town whenever they need me.

Natalie: A handyman.

Charlie: Yes ma'am. I'm not the best but at least I'm handy. I thought of putting that on my business cards. But, I don't have any business cards. And what do you do? Do you live down in Maine too?

Natalie: I do. I own a framing shop in Brunswick. The Framing Idiot.

Charlie: The Framing Idiot. That's funny.

Natalie: Well, that's me. The Framing Idiot.

Charlie: What got you started in that line of work?

Natalie: I wanted to be an artist but I wasn't very good, so I keep my hand in it by framing work done by people who are good.

Charlie: I can never really tell when art is good.

Natalie: Are you one of those 'I don't know what's good but I know what I like' people?

Charlie: Maybe. You see, I like the early expressionist work of Max Beckman but does that make it better than the European modernism of Josef Albers, which I don't like? Probably not. So, yeah, I guess I am one of those people.

Natalie: Oh.

Charlie: I surprised you didn't I?

Natalie: Yes you did.

Charlie: Yeah, I like doing that.

Natalie: How do you know so much about art? No, I'm sorry. That was condescending, wasn't it? Assuming that you wouldn't know anything about art based on your....on your..

Charlie: On my slipshod, threadbare appearance?

Natalie: Yes. I'm sorry. I'm trying to be more honest in my life. Say what I really feel.

Charlie: I think you're succeeding. But, the fact is these are my wood chopping clothes.

Natalie: Oh. Were you chopping wood?

Charlie: No, but these are the only clothes that are clean right now. Laundry day's not til' tomorrow. And I expanded my knowledge on art by reading about it. Whenever something interests me I read about it.

Natalie: Reading? How uncommon.

Charlie: I probably don't look like a reader either.

Natalie: Now, I didn't say that. Readers come in all shapes and sizes. That was condescending too, wasn't it?

Charlie: Yes it was.

Natalie: I'm digging myself a pretty deep hole, aren't I?

Charlie: If you dig any deeper you're gonna go straight through to the Indian Ocean.

Natalie: Don't you mean China?

Charlie: No ma'am. Digging straight through the earth from here would land you in the Indian Ocean southwest of Australia.

Natalie: You probably read that somewhere.

Charlie: I did. So, maybe you were a good artist and didn't know it.

Natalie: No. I definitely was not a good artist. But, sometimes dreams don't work out, right?

Charlie: That's very true.

Natalie: What about you? What did you want to be?

Charlie: A carpenter. Boom. Nailed it. Yeah, my Dad was a carpenter. In fact he and I built this house.

Natalie: Really?

Charlie: Twenty-five years ago. My dad also built our family home next door and now I live there.

Natalie: You live with your parents?

Charlie: No. They died a while back. Dad died first and then my mother died sitting in a chair waiting for me to drive her to Dad's funeral.

Natalie: Get out.

Charlie: I swear to God. Died right there in the living room. Dressed in black. Purse clutched to her lap. Her eyes closed and her head dropped and that was it. She left us. Everyone says my father took her with him and they're probably right.

Natalie: Awww. That is so romantic.

Charlie: Well, I don't know about that. She did die after all.

Natalie: Of course. That was a stupid thing to say.

Charlie: No, that's fine. I guess it would be kind of romantic if you put it in a poem. But, the fact is...

Natalie: She died.

Charlie: Right.

Natalie: So, you're from here?

Charlie: Born and raised.

Natalie: Well, it certainly is a lovely spot.

Charlie: No place like it on earth I'd say.

Natalie: Is that the Atlantic Ocean out there? *(She points to her left.)*

Charlie: Yes ma'am. Lunenburg Harbour here. Atlantic Ocean out there.

Natalie: Is that where Robert's plane went down?

Charlie: No, his plane went into the water further north. Just off the coast of Newfoundland. The experts figured the engine died and down they went.

Natalie: That's just terrible.

Charlie: It was.

Natalie: Poor Iris. She was devastated when she got the news. And then finding out about this house made matters very confusing for her.

Charlie: So, Bobby...Robert, was home with Iris in Maine for a couple of weeks each month, is that right?

Natalie: Right. I think it had something to do with him being Canadian and only being able to work in the U.S. for a certain amount of time each year. That's why he had to keep coming back here.

Charlie: Uh-huh. What about you? Are you married?

Natalie: Divorced. You?

Charlie: Oh, I'm a confirmed bachelor.

Natalie: You've never been married?

Charlie: No, I've been married. That's what confirmed it for me.

Natalie: Do you have children?

Charlie: A son. He's twenty-three. Lives in Saskatoon. You?

Natalie: A daughter. Twenty-four. She's a nurse in Boston.

Charlie: A nurse. Now there's a noble profession.

Natalie: What does your son do in, Saskatoon is it?

Charlie: Saskatoon right. He's a bartender. Another noble profession.

Natalie: And why Saskatoon?

Charlie: His mother is from there. She took him there after we split twenty years ago.

Natalie: Do you see him often?

Charlie: No, I'm afraid not. He's got a stepfather who kind of became his dad when he was eight. I couldn't compete for his affection from three thousand miles away.

Natalie: That must be tough.

Charlie: I don't think about it. It's packed away in a lead box somewhere in the back of my mind.

Natalie: Men can compartmentalize like that. I don't think women can. I know I couldn't.

Charlie: What about your daughter? Do you see her?

Natalie: Oh all the time. Chelsea and I are best friends. She and Iris are the best friends I've got.

Charlie: That's nice.

Natalie: Yeah. It's great. A mother and daughter bond is something special, that's for sure.

Charlie: It is.

Natalie: So special.

Charlie: And you're here for moral support for your friend Iris?

Natalie: That's right. This is a very sad time for her and I think she needs that support.

Charlie: You're a good friend.

Natalie: One does what one can. I wonder why Robert never told Iris about this house. He owned it for ten years and never told her about it.

Charlie: Yeah, that's strange all right.

Natalie: Do you have any idea why?

Charlie: Me?

Natalie: Well, you were his neighbour.

Charlie: Yes, I was.

Natalie: So, I thought you might know why.

Charlie: Uh-huh. Well...

Natalie: Well what?

Charlie: ...Well, why do you think he didn't tell her?

Natalie: I don't know. That's why I'm asking.

Charlie: Okay. You know, I was just hoping for some pleasant conversation by coming over here, because I don't like drama. I've had enough drama in my life. No, I thought I'd come over here, meet you, maybe charm the ass off of you because that's what I do. And who knows, even though you're only going to be here for a few days, maybe some sparks would fly between us and we could, you know, have a really good time during those few days. A really good time.

Natalie: You thought about all of this before coming over here?

Charlie: When you build a house you've gotta have a blueprint. But I guess your friend is going to find out the truth soon enough and it might as well come from you, so here it is.

(Iris enters from the house carrying a framed photograph.)

Iris: Who in the hell is this?

Charlie: Oh boy.

Natalie: Who in the hell is who?

Iris: The woman in this photograph with Robert. It was prominently displayed on a shelf in there. As if it meant something. As if it was important.

Natalie: *(Natalie takes the photo from Iris.)* Oh. They've got their arms around each other.

Iris: I noticed that.

Natalie: You'd almost think they were a couple.

Iris: Well, of course you would, Natalie. Because that's how couples pose. And then they frame the photo and display it in their living room. In *their* living room! That's what couples do.

Natalie: You don't think...

Iris: Oh I do think.

(Charlie turns and tries to slowly sneak away.)

But let's ask someone who might actually know. Mister Butler?

(Charlie stops.)

Charlie: Yes ma'am?

Iris: Do you know who the woman is in this photo with my husband?

Charlie: Yes, I do. Have a good day. *(Charlie starts to move off.)*

Iris: Wait.

(Charlie stops.)

Who is it?

Charlie: That uh...That's Jennifer Cleveland.

Iris: The woman who died in the crash with Robert?

Charlie: That's right.

Iris: So she wasn't flying with him just because she was a project engineer.

Charlie: Probably not entirely.

Iris: Were they living together in this house?

Charlie: Yes they were.

Natalie: Oh my God. He had a girlfriend up here?

Charlie: No. He had a wife.

Iris: A wife?!

Charlie: Yes.

Iris: They were married?

Charlie: Yes they were.

Natalie: Oh my God.

Iris: You know this for a fact?

Charlie: I was at the wedding, so yes, I'm pretty sure.

Iris: They had a wedding?

Charlie: Yes.

Iris: *(To Natalie.)* He didn't give me a wedding. We got married at city hall.

Charlie: Well, it was a small affair if that makes any difference. And the reception was a pot luck. It's not like he went all out.

Natalie: Did you hear that? It was a pot luck, Iris. It was nothing. And it's an awfully cheap frame too.

Iris: He was married to her! It's not nothing. *(To Charlie.)* He married this woman?! Seriously?!

Charlie: Yes ma'am.

Iris: Oh my God.

Natalie: Iris. I'm so sorry.

Iris: *(She takes the photo from Natalie.)* Look at her. Look. His other wife. I'm looking at a photograph of the other woman. And I didn't even know there was another woman. How long were they married?

Charlie: Nine years.

Natalie: *(Natalie gasps.)*

Iris: Nine years? So she was his first wife! Which makes *me* his other wife. I'm the other woman.

Natalie: That's not good.

Iris: Of course it's not good! Everybody hates the other woman. The other woman is always evil. Always. Marion Davies, Donna Rice, Elizabeth Taylor.

Charlie: Anne Boleyn.

Natalie: Camilla Parker-Bowles.

Iris: What, you're adding to the list? The list is long enough. And now I'm on the list.

Natalie: Sorry.

Charlie: Elizabeth Taylor though. That's pretty good company.

Iris: Never mind! *(Looks at the photograph.)* Look at her. God, he was married to both of us. He was sleeping with both of us.

Natalie: She's not very pretty.

Iris: She's gorgeous!

Natalie: She really is, isn't she?

Iris: She looks like a model.

Natalie: Boy, does she ever. Stunning.

Iris: You can stop agreeing with me now.

Natalie: Right.

Iris: *(To Charlie.)* What was she like?

Charlie: What do you mean?

Iris: Jennifer Cleveland. Was she nice? No, I don't want to know. Why would I want to know that? Was she like me at all?

Charlie: Do you mean was she abrupt?

Iris: Excuse me?

Charlie: Well, that's all I know about you.

Natalie: *(To Charlie.)* Jennifer Cleveland. She didn't take Robert's last name?

Charlie: No. She didn't want to compromise her own identity.

Iris: I took his last name! I took it.

Charlie: Well, it was available.

Iris: I can't believe this. I married a married man. He was already married and he married me and I married him. How could I be so stupid?

Natalie: Oh, Iris, how could you know? You had no way of knowing that.

Iris: Wait. You said he bought the house ten years ago. But they were only married for nine?

Charlie: They lived together for a year. A trial run I guess. I don't know if they were testing out the house or each other. Maybe both.

Iris: I have to lie down. I'm feeling light-headed.

(Iris turns to go in.)

Natalie: I'll come with you. I'll fix you some tea.

Iris: No. No, I need to be by myself for a while.

Natalie: Are you sure?

Iris: Yes. I have to think. My mind is racing.

Natalie: All right then. If that's what you want.

Iris: *(To Charlie.)* He was married??

Charlie: Yes ma'am.

Iris: My God.

Natalie: If you need me for anything I'll be right out here. Okay? I won't move.

Iris: I can't believe this.

Natalie: I know. It's absolutely criminal what he's done to you. Now, you go and lie down. There you go.

(Iris exits to the house.)

Poor thing.

(To Charlie.)

So you were hoping that sparks would fly?

Charlie: What?

Natalie: Between us. You were hoping sparks would fly? You said that a couple of minutes ago.

Charlie: Oh! Yes, I was. But now that your friend is facing this crisis, I..

Natalie: Oh, she'll be fine. She's a rock. So, what did you mean by you'll charm the pants off of me?

Charlie: Not pants. Ass.

Natalie: Oh. My mistake. Ass, pants. Big difference.

Charlie: Huge difference.

Natalie: No, what am I thinking?! I'm not being a good friend at all! God. I have to be there for Iris.

Charlie: Well, she did say she wanted to be alone.

Natalie: That's true. She did say that. Well, I can be here for her then. While she's in there, I can be out here. God. What a situation.

Charlie: It surprised the hell out of me, that's for sure.

Natalie: So, what was she like?

Charlie: Who?

Natalie: Jennifer Cleveland?

Charlie: Oh, she was terrific. She was smart. She was funny. She was a great woman.

Natalie: So why did Robert need Iris?

Charlie: Bobby was a fool. I lied when I said he was a good fella. He wasn't. He was selfish. He only thought of himself. Jennifer could have done a lot better than him that's for sure. But despite all of her good traits, Jennifer was a poor judge of character. And I suspect your friend Iris is the same way.

Natalie: Was Jennifer from here?

Charlie: No. She was from Halifax. That's where she and Bobby met.

Natalie: Did she have any children? Oh God! Did she and Robert have children?

Charlie: No.

Natalie: Well, that's a relief.

Charlie: They were both more about their careers than family. Jennifer was in demand all over. Sometimes as far away as Hong Kong and Japan.

Natalie: Sounds like she was quite a person.

Charlie: She sure was.

Natalie: Maybe a person that you would've liked to have been closer to. Or were closer to.

Charlie: I wasn't her type.

Natalie: How do you know that?

Charlie: She told me. Yeah we both had a little too much to drink one night and I might've told her that I had feelings for her that were beyond the norm and she might've told me to go to hell. That's when I first discovered that she was a poor judge of character. But let's get back to you. Do you still paint?

Natalie: You changed the subject pretty quickly there.

Charlie: Well, it was time to move on. So, do you?

Natalie: I told you, I wasn't good enough to be an artist.

Charlie: But you still paint.

Natalie: Every day.

Charlie: It's hard to give up something you love so much, even if you stink at it.

Natalie: I didn't say I stunk at it.

Charlie: Oh, I thought you did.

Natalie: I said I wasn't very good.

Charlie: I thought you said stunk. Sorry.

Natalie: You're a scamp. You know that?

Charlie: I am a scamp. Seriously though, I'd like to see your work sometime.

Natalie: Well, that's impossible. It's back home in Maine.

Charlie: But you've got photos of it.

Natalie: No I don't.

Charlie: Sure you do. You've got photos on your phone. Or maybe you printed one or two of them off and you've got them in your purse.

Natalie: I do not.

Charlie: Sure you do.

Natalie: I've got a couple on my phone.

Charlie: A couple?

Natalie: Sixteen or seventeen. I've got thirty-two photos on my phone, all right?

Charlie: Well, I'd like to see them sometime.

Natalie: Really?

Charlie: Absolutely.

Natalie: You'd like to see my paintings?

Charlie: I'd love to see your paintings.

Natalie: Okay. I'll get my phone.

(Natalie turns to go inside.)

Charlie: No not now. Show them to me some other time.

Natalie: Why not now?

Charlie: Because if you show them to me now, then you've got no reason to see me again. If you don't show them to me I can drop by tomorrow and say 'Hey, you haven't shown me your paintings yet.'

Natalie: Oh.

Charlie: Okay?

Natalie: Okay.

Charlie: Good.

Natalie: You're saying you want to see me again?

Charlie: I am.

Natalie: And you're not married?

Charlie: No, I'm not.

Natalie: Just want to be sure.

(Off we hear Iris scream.)

Natalie: Iris??!! What's wrong?

(Iris enters.)

Iris: Oh my God. Oh my God.

Natalie: What is it?

Iris: I was lying down on the bed and I realized that I was lying down on the bed.

Natalie: ...I'm gonna need more.

Iris: I was lying on the bed. Their bed. Where stuff happened.

Natalie: There are two bedrooms. How do you know stuff happened in that bed?

Iris: I could smell Robert on it. I could smell him. That's where the stuff happened.

Natalie: We should probably stop saying 'stuff happened'.

Iris: God, what other images are going to be conjured up in this house? Their ghosts are probably wandering around in there. Watching me.

Natalie: *(To Charlie.)* She believes in ghosts.

Charlie: So do I.

Iris: *(To Natalie.)* You see? *(To Charlie.)* They're probably in there right now, right?

Charlie: I wouldn't put it past them.

Natalie: Now why would they be in there? Why?

Charlie: Better in there than in a cockpit on the ocean floor. Sorry. That was insensitive as hell, wasn't it?

Natalie: *(To Iris.)* All right, listen. Let's look around the whole house together, right now. We'll go from top to bottom.

Iris: I don't know if I'm up to that.

Natalie: Of course you are. We'll exorcize the demons. The ghosts. All right? One fell swoop. Together.

Iris: I don't know.

Natalie: Come on. You're going to have to face it sometime.

Iris: I know.

Natalie: So what do you say? One fell swoop?

Iris: ...Okay.

Natalie: Good. Here we go. You'll have to excuse us, Charlie. We have work to do.

(Iris and Natalie start for the door.)

Charlie: Good luck. See you soon. Will I see you soon?

(Natalie stops and stops Iris as well.)

Natalie: Well, we've got a lot to deal with here.

Charlie: Right. Of course.

Natalie: It could occupy a lot of our time.

Charlie: Oh, I don't doubt that.

Natalie: It's hard to say how much time.

Iris: Oh just say yes to the man so I can get back to my wine.

Natalie: *(To Charlie.)* I'll see you soon.

(Natalie exits. Charlie starts to exit. Iris starts to exit, then stops.)

Iris: Mister Butler? I have a question.

Charlie: Yes?

Iris: If you wanted to meet the woman unloading the car—Natalie--why didn't you go looking for your imaginary dog at the front of the house?

Charlie: No, he wouldn't go out front. He's afraid of the road.

(After a beat, Iris exits to the house.)

(Charlie speaks to his imaginary dog.)

All right, Schooner. Let's go home boy.

(Lights down. End Act One Scene 1.)

ACT ONE SCENE 2

Time: Later that evening.

Place: The same.

(Iris and Natalie enter from the house. They each have a glass of wine.)

Natalie: Oh, Iris. Look at the lights of the town reflecting on the water. My God, this really is a gorgeous place.

Iris: I wish I was in the mood to appreciate it.

Natalie: Don't worry. This too shall pass. Give it time.

Iris: Cooking dinner helped. It took my mind off of it for a while. Even though I was using Jennifer Cleveland's pots and pans and dishes.

Natalie: You call her Jennifer Cleveland. Did you notice that?

Iris: What do you mean?

Natalie: Every time you've mentioned her name in the past few hours you've used her first and last name.

Iris: I guess calling her by her first name only is too familiar. It implies some sort of kinship. I'm certainly not ready for that. You know, I should have known there was a woman living here as soon as we pulled in the driveway.

Natalie: Why?

Iris: The flower beds out front. They're beautiful. Robert couldn't have been responsible for that. He had no interest in gardening at all. And it looks like someone's been keeping them up for the past few weeks. It looks like they've been weeded and watered.

Natalie: Maybe she has a friend in town who's been doing that.

Iris: Maybe. I wonder what she was like. Did your friend Charlie say anything about her?

Natalie: He said she was okay. Nothing special.

Iris: She's got nice clothes. And some of it was clothing she made herself.

Natalie: I noticed that. And it was very fashionable too.

Iris: You should go through her closet and take what you want.

Natalie: Oh no. I couldn't wear a dead person's clothes.

Iris: No?

Natalie: Absolutely not. That's morbid. We'll give them to Goodwill.

Iris: So, you wouldn't wear a dead person's clothes but you'll let somebody else wear them.

Natalie: They don't know where they came from.

Iris: I think if you shop at a Goodwill store you assume that some of the clothing items are from dead people.

Natalie: But you don't know which items. It's like being a member of a firing squad. One member gets to shoot a blank but you don't know if you're the one who got the blank or not. So we'll take the clothes to Goodwill.

Iris: I wonder what made Robert want to marry me when he already had her.

Natalie: Oh come on, Iris. You measure up to any woman out there.

Iris: So you think I should be flattered?

Natalie: I most certainly do.

Iris: Really? That a man wanted to marry me when he already had a beautiful, successful wife? You think I should be flattered by that?

Natalie: I think you should wear it like a badge of honour.

Iris: You're a good friend, Natalie. Even if you are a liar.

Natalie: Iris, I don't know what you should feel. I don't know how I would feel in this situation. I think I would have a meltdown, so I think you're handling it well. You're pretty damned strong.

Iris: A meltdown is still a possibility. Right now I feel like I'm being held together by baler twine.

Natalie: You're fine. In fact, the worst is over. Your husband died. You faced that. You found out he was already married. You stared that one down. And now you've gone through the house he shared with another woman and

discovered that she was living a far superior life to the one you're living. No, you're over the hump.

Iris: I wonder why her clothes are still here.

Natalie: What do you mean?

Iris: Well, it's been three weeks since they died. It looks like nobody's come by to gather up her possessions. No family. No friends. It looks like nobody's been in the house at all.

Natalie: Well, they had no children.

Iris: But did she have no family at all? Cousins, nieces, nephews?

Natalie: I don't know.

Iris: Well, ask Mister Butler the next time you see him.

Natalie: I will. That's if I see him.

Iris: Oh, you'll see him.

Natalie: I hope so. I've got an itch I'd like him to scratch.

Iris: Well, listen to you. That was a brazen response.

Natalie: Oh, what the hell. At our age what's the point of being anything *BUT* brazen? I mean, what did timidity ever get me? A broken marriage and bad sex.

Iris: Oh come on.

Natalie: It's true. I was a pushover for Michael. A doormat. I never spoke up for anything I wanted. Even in the bedroom. I always went along with what he wanted.

Iris: Natalie, we've been over this before. That's not why your marriage ended.

Natalie: Partly it is. I got tired of our marriage being a one way street. That's why I left him.

Iris: You left him because you thought he was holding you back. Stepping on your dreams.

Natalie: That too.

Iris: We're all responsible for chasing our own dreams, Nat. If you blame Michael you're just making excuses.

Natalie: I'm not making excuses. He wouldn't support me emotionally. I needed that.

Iris: Oh, that's bullshit and you know it. Inner strength is what gets us through this life. It shouldn't come from an outside source like a mate.

Natalie: No. I disagree. If you're going to go through life with someone, you should be able to count on their support in whatever form it comes. You should know that they're there for you. I never got that feeling from Michael. And why do you always defend him?

Iris: I like Michael.

Natalie: Well, stop it.

Iris: Stop it?

Natalie: Yes. Stop liking him. You're *my* friend.

Iris: I can't be friends with the both of you?

Natalie: No. Of course not. Friends of divorced couples always have to choose. You have to choose one over the other. You wouldn't know that because you've never been divorced. You've only been widowed. You're lucky.

Iris: Lucky?

Natalie: Yes. Friends of widowed people don't have to choose because there's only one left. That's the one you're stuck with like it or not. But friends of divorced couples have to make a choice. Am I going to stay friends with this one or that one? That's why death is better than divorce. Unless you're the dead one.

Iris: So, I have to choose between you and Michael?

Natalie: No, I already chose for you. You're mine. End of discussion. And if I'm ever with a man again...you know *WITH* one...I'm going to tell him exactly what I want in the bedroom.

Iris: Really?

Natalie: Oh sister, you know it. First of all, there's got to be romance. If a man wants what I've got to give then he's going to have to earn it. Damn right. I'm going to make him work for it! And no more hoping that he happens to stumble upon

one of my sensitive spots. No thank you very much. I'll hand him a clearly marked road map before we start.

(Natalie takes a drink of wine.)

Natalie: This wine is good.

Iris: It's your sixth glass.

Natalie: That's what I'm saying. If it wasn't good I would have stopped at four.

Iris: So...I've been afraid to ask, but what do you hear from Chelsea?

Natalie: Not much.

Iris: Meaning?

Natalie: Meaning it's still a little cold between us.

Iris: Well, like you told me, Nat, this too shall pass. Give it time.

Natalie: No. It's been two years since I left Michael. And now that the dust has settled it looks like this is how our relationship is going to be from now on. I don't want that, Iris. I want my little girl back.

Iris: Now, she hasn't locked you out completely.

Natalie: I know but this is worse. Having contact with her that is so indifferent. Wanting to hug her but being afraid of her not hugging me back. It's horrible. I mean, she's my baby. Doesn't she know how horrible that is?

Iris: Come here.

Natalie: Why doesn't she know that?

Iris: Come.

(Iris and Natalie hug.)

Natalie: A hug never did anybody any harm, right? Why won't she hug me?

Iris: Because she's a selfish little dillwad.

Natalie: Don't call my daughter a dillwad.

Iris: Well, she is. Feel better?

Natalie: No. But thanks for trying.

Iris: You're welcome. Now, let's get back to me. My husband just died. That takes priority over your cold-hearted dillwad of a daughter.

(Charlie enters from the side of the house. He is carrying a can of beer.)

Charlie: Good evening.

Iris: Hello.

Natalie: Hi.

Charlie: I was sitting on my porch and heard your voices so I thought I'd come over and barge in.

Natalie: Oh, you're not barging in. We were just sitting out here enjoying the view.

Charlie: Pretty, isn't it?

Natalie: Very.

Charlie: You never get tired of it, believe me.

Iris: Can I ask you something, Mister Butler?

Charlie: Only if you call me Charlie.

Iris: All right, Charlie. Jennifer Cleveland. Did she have any family in the area?

Charlie: No, she didn't. She had no family anywhere as far as I know.

Iris: No siblings?

Charlie: She had a twin sister who died at birth.

Iris: Oh, that's so sad. So, she had nobody?

Charlie: Nobody at all.

Natalie: Who's been looking after her garden? Do you know that?

Charlie: That would be me. I've been looking after it.

Natalie: Well, it's very nice. You've got a green thumb, do you?

Charlie: I do. I enjoy gardening. I used to garden with my mother and she taught me everything she knows, so I would call myself somewhat of an expert.

Natalie: Wow. A man who likes to work in the garden and you're not even eighty yet.

Charlie: I also crochet.

Natalie: Really?

Charlie: Yes. I'd say that combination makes me rather desirable, wouldn't you?

Natalie: I'd say so, yes. Wouldn't you say so, Iris?

Iris: Did she have any close friends in town?

Charlie: Jennifer? Uh...not really.

Iris: Was she not a likeable person?

Charlie: Oh, she was very likeable. She was a wonderful, generous, caring individual.

Iris: You don't say? (*To Natalie.*) He seems to be a little more enthusiastic about the woman than you let on. Continue, Charlie, please.

Charlie: Truth is, I think some of the women in town—I won't say all of them—but some were a little intimidated by Jennifer. She was the only woman engineer in the shipyards. She worked in a man's world and she did very well in it. She didn't have much in common with a lot of the women around here.

Natalie: That's too bad.

Iris: Is she buried in town?

Charlie: She is. She's in the Hillcrest Cemetery.

Iris: Who paid for that?

Charlie: Her estate paid for the burial. I pitched in and got her a proper headstone.

Natalie: Why did you do that?

Charlie: Well, a person's gotta have a proper headstone. It's not Boot Hill after all. What about Bobby? Where's he?

Iris: He's in an urn in my sunroom. Soon to be evicted.

Charlie: You won't keep him?

Iris: Of course not. Why would I want to be reminded of him every day?

Natalie: Maybe you should bring him back here. He was Canadian after all.

Iris: Then I'll stick him a jug of maple syrup and toss him into the sea. Maybe he'll drift up here.

Natalie: That's pretty sad isn't it? Not to be wanted, even in death. To have no one that wants a memory of you.

Iris: Do you want him?

Natalie: No. I don't want him.

Iris: *(To Charlie.)* You?

Charlie: What would I do with him?

Iris: I don't know. Throw him on an icy sidewalk for better traction.

Charlie: He had a nice watch. I'll take that.

Natalie: This conversation is getting very dark. I need some more wine. Iris? How's yours?

Iris: I'm fine.

Natalie: Okay. I'll be right back.

(Natalie exits to the house.)

Charlie: So, this was your first marriage?

Iris: That's right.

Charlie: Why did you never marry before Bobby came along? Were you more career oriented?

Iris: Oh yeah. Yeah, I spend thirty years trying to get that lunch truck off the ground. The fact is, I never found a man who I thought was good enough for me.

Charlie: And Bobby Oulette was that man?

Iris: Yeah. Funny huh?

Charlie: Boy, what did you women see in Bobby?

Iris: Oh Robert was handsome. He was successful. He was romantic. He told me I was the love of his life. I've never been the love of anyone's life. It felt good.

Charlie: Well, I'm sorry for what he put you through. You seem to be handling it well though.

Iris: For now.

Charlie: Naw. You'll be fine. You seem pretty steady.

Iris: She was like me you know.

Charlie: Who was?

Iris: Jennifer Cleveland. No family. No next of kin. My parents are gone, I have no siblings or children. Maybe that's why I latched onto Robert. When you think about growing old alone, it's scary. In his later years, my mother had to pull my father out of the bathtub every night because he couldn't hoist himself out. Who's going pull me out of the bathtub? Who's going to do the things for me that only a devoted spouse or a caregiver with a manageable gag reflex can do?

Charlie: You're still young. Maybe you'll meet someone else.

Iris: Do you really think I'd let myself fall for another man after this? No thank you.

Charlie: No, you can't think that way. You can't let a guy like Bobby Oulette spoil your chances for happiness with someone else.

Iris: You didn't think much of Robert, did you?

Charlie: I'd rather not speak ill of the dead, even if it is a jackass like Bobby. But, what he did to you, you can't let it leave a scar. You're stronger than that.

Iris: You don't even know me. You don't know how strong or weak I am.

Charlie: It's in your eyes. Every emotion, every characteristic is in a person's eyes. All you have to do is look.

Iris: And you see strength in mine?

Charlie: Yes. You frighten me.

Iris: Because I'm strong?

Charlie: No. Because you're strong and you've been wronged. You're like The Incredible Hulk, only with a woman's brain.

Iris: What about you? You're all alone. Who's going to pull you out of the bathtub?

Charlie: I take showers. And I'm not completely alone in this world. I have two younger sisters. One lives not far from here in Chester and one is in Montreal.

Iris: Are you close to them?

Charlie: I am. Not close enough to have them hauling me out of a bathtub, but we're close yeah. I always felt like I had to look out for them. I still do, even though they're probably tougher than I am.

Iris: And Natalie told me you have son.

Charlie: Yes. Eric.

Iris: Who you don't see.

Charlie: Well, he lives far away.

Iris: Right. It's a shame that man hasn't invented a way to crisscross great distances yet.

Charlie: It's complicated.

Iris: Yeah. And I wouldn't know a damn thing about 'complicated'. Call your son. Talk to him. Go see him out there in Dry Gulch or wherever he lives.

Charlie: Saskatoon.

Iris: Saskatoon?

Charlie: Yes.

Iris: You're just making that name up, aren't you?

Charlie: No, it's a real place.

Iris: Well, I don't believe you. If you're going to tell a lie at least make it more believable than Saskatoon.

(Natalie enters with a full glass of wine.)

Natalie: They've got no television.

Iris: What's that?

Natalie: They didn't have a television set.

Iris: I noticed that.

Natalie: So, what did they do with their spare time? I mean, how much sex can you have?

Iris: Natalie!

Natalie: Oh, I'm sorry, Iris. That was insensitive. I'm sorry. *(To Charlie.)* But really. How much?

Iris: *(To Charlie.)* There's a cello inside. Did Jennifer Cleveland play?

Charlie: Yes she did.

Iris: Was she good?

Charlie: She could have made a career out of it.

Natalie: I am really starting to dislike this woman. Posthumously.

Iris: What else did she do? What were her interests?

Natalie: Oh Iris, why do you want to know what her interests were? What good is that going to do?

Iris: She was married to my husband. I want to know more about her.

Charlie: She was on the board of directors at the Lunenburg School of the Arts.

Natalie: There's a school of the arts here? Oh God. Condescending again. I'm sorry.

Charlie: It's a music school. Jennifer also gave workshops there.

Iris: Well, she sounds like she was an interesting woman. Engineer, musician, made her own clothes.

Natalie: Overachieving show off.

Iris: No, it sounds like she was someone to be admired.

Charlie: She was.

Iris: I really want to dislike her. But that's getting harder and harder. She had no flaws?

Charlie: She chewed her nails.

Natalie: Damn her to hell.

Iris: Okay, I'm going to call it a night.

Natalie: Oh, already? It's not that late.

Iris: I know, but it's been a long day, Nat. It's taken a lot out of me.

Natalie: I'm sorry, sweetie.

Iris: But, tomorrow's a new day, right? And every new day gives us a brand new crack at life.

Natalie: That's right.

Iris: And I'm sure I'll find some brand new shit to step in. So, I'd better rest up for it. I'll take the guest room, okay?

Natalie: Okay.

(Iris gives Natalie a hug.)

Iris: Goodnight.

Natalie: Goodnight, Iris. Sleep tight.

Iris: Goodnight, Charlie.

Charlie: Goodnight, Iris.

(Iris exits to the house.)

Natalie: She's not going to get over this very quickly I'm afraid.

Charlie: Well, when the smoke finally clears I think she'll realize that it turned out okay for her.

Natalie: How do you figure that?

Charlie: Well, she now owns a house in a very beautiful part of the world.

Natalie: Every cloud has a silver lining, right?

Charlie: Right.

Natalie: Well, that's a pretty big cloud. I don't know if she'll see it that way. She'll probably sell the house.

Charlie: I hope not. Then I'll have to get used to new neighbours. I don't like that idea. You never know what you're going to wind up with.

Natalie: You probably know everybody in town.

Charlie: Yeah, but what if an outsider buys it? Like somebody from Shubenacadie.

Natalie: Shubenacadie?

Charlie: Yes.

Natalie: You just made that up, didn't you?

Charlie: No, it's a real place. It's just west of Middle Musquodoboit.

Natalie: I don't believe a word you say.

Charlie: Well, that's probably wise.

Natalie: Really?

Charlie: I'm afraid so. You see I lied earlier when I said I just wandered over here because I heard your voices.

Natalie: Is that right?

Charlie: Yep. I actually came over here with a purpose in mind.

Natalie: And what was that?

Charlie: I wanted to ask you out.

Natalie: Oh?

Charlie: I was going to invite you to take a tour of the town with me tomorrow. I'll show you the sights. I'll even get you onto the Blue Nose.

Natalie: You'll get me onto what?

Charlie: The Blue Nose. Canada's most famous boat. It's right over there, across the harbour. *(He points out.)*

Natalie: And you can get me onto it?

Charlie: Oh yeah. I have a lot of pull in this town.

Natalie: Do you?

Charlie: Actually anyone can get on. It's open to the public.

Natalie: Are you charming my ass off right now?

Charlie: I'm trying. How am I doing?

Natalie: Not bad actually.

Charlie: So would you like a tour?

Natalie: I'd love one. But, I couldn't leave Iris alone. Not this soon.

Charlie: Bring her along then. It'll be good for her. It'll be a nice distraction.

Natalie: That's not a bad idea.

Charlie: It's a great idea.

Natalie: All right. I'll ask her. But if she says no then I won't be going either. I couldn't.

Charlie: Understood.

Natalie: You don't waste much time, do you? Asking me out when we've only just met.

Charlie: Wasting time is just that. A waste of time.

Natalie: Oh, you're a back porch philosopher too.

Charlie: Everybody in this town is. It's the Lunenburg way of life. Sometimes you can't get a profound remark in edgewise with these people.

Natalie: Well, I agree that time shouldn't be wasted, so I appreciate the fact that you showed great dispatch in asking me out.

Charlie: I'm glad you approve.

Natalie: I do. I think more people should skip right to the heart of the matter. Don't beat around the bush. If you want something, speak up dammit. Put it out there.

Charlie: I want to kiss you.

Natalie: Then you go right ahead. That's the idea.

(Charlie kisses Natalie. Iris enters from the house. She is near tears.)

Iris: It's happening.

Natalie: What? What's happening? What's wrong?

Iris: My meltdown. It's happening. Robert's dead. It just hit me like a bolt out of the blue. I.....Were you two kissing just now?

Natalie: Uh...

Iris: I'm having an emotional meltdown and you're kissing? How could you do that?

Natalie: We didn't know you were having an emotional meltdown.

Charlie: It's my fault. I kissed her.

Natalie: Well, I kissed you back.

Charlie: And it was terrific.

Iris: Do you mind?! God.

Natalie: I'm sorry, Iris. What can I do to help?

Iris: Stop making out with the neighbours.

Natalie: Okay. I can do that.

Iris: Can you?

Natalie: I'll give it a shot.

Iris: Good. Because I need someone to come inside and sit with me.

Charlie: I'll do it.

Iris: Not you! I wasn't asking for volunteers! I need *her* to come inside and sit with me.

Charlie: Of course.

Iris: I need to be consoled. Natalie is going to console me. (*To Natalie.*) Right?

Natalie: Right. Even if it takes all night.

Iris: Thank you.

Natalie: Will it take all night? Or will it be a shorter process?

Iris: It'll take however long it takes.

Charlie: Should I wait around?

Iris: Why would you wait around?

Charlie: Well..

Iris: Are you going to sit out here while I'm inside weeping? No. Go home. Go and write a letter to your son in that cartoon place.

Charlie: Saskatoon.

Iris: Yeah, sure. Now go. Scoot.

Charlie: Okay. (*To Natalie.*) I'll see you tomorrow.

Iris: Why will you see her tomorrow? Do you two have a date?

Natalie: Charlie invited us, you and me, to take a tour of the town tomorrow. See the sights. What do you think?

Iris: I don't know how I'm going to feel tomorrow.

Charlie: I'll buy you lunch at one of the local pubs.

Natalie: Ooh, lunch at a local pub. Did you hear that?

Iris: Yes. I got chills.

Charlie: Well, see how you feel tomorrow. The offer is there if you're interested.

Iris: We'll see.

Charlie: Goodnight.

Natalie: Goodnight.

(Charlie and Natalie have a lingering look. Charlie exits.)

Iris: What the hell was that?

Natalie: What was what?

Iris: That. That look. That lingering look. You're kissing. You're looking. What's going on?

Natalie: Nothing's going on.

Iris: Well, I beg to differ. If I hadn't come outside when I did you'd probably be doing it right here on the deck.

Natalie: Well, thank God for your impeccable timing.

Iris: You only met the man four hours ago, Natalie.

Natalie: Well, we clicked. What can I say? Now, come on. Let's go inside and weep.

Iris: Take it slow with this guy, all right?

Natalie: I will.

Iris: Promise?

Natalie: Promise. But you have to admit, he's very charming.

Iris: Charming? Charming is the kiss of death. You do not want a charming man, believe me. Find someone stale and tiresome. Those are the dependable ones.

Natalie: They are?

Iris: Yes, because they figure they're lucky to have you and they'll hang onto you like you're the last kiwi on the vine. Have you been with a man since you left Michael?

Natalie: I've been on a couple of dates. I told you about those.

Iris: Right. The lactose intolerant dairy farmer and the proctologist with the nervous twitch.

Natalie: That's the last time I use that dating website.

Iris: But have you *been* with a man? You know, in the carnal sense?

Natalie: No.

Iris: Well, then you're probably a little antsy for it so try and control yourself.

Natalie: Oh God, Iris. Antsy for it?

Iris: Yes! You haven't had sex in two years.

Natalie: I'm aware! Believe me.

Iris: So, don't be won over by lunch at a local pub.

Natalie: He's going to show me the Blue Nose too.

Iris: I'll bet he is. Just be careful

Natalie: Antsy for it?

Iris: Yes! All wiggly-like.

Natalie: Wiggly-like?

Iris: You heard me. And you're giving off all of these pheromones. You're like some libidinous moth. And they're probably wafting over to Charlie's house. That's probably why he came over here in the first place because he got a whiff of your pheromones.

(Iris exits to the house.)

Natalie: Oh that's absurd. Who ever heard of such a thing? Pheromones. Ridiculous.

(Natalie physically tries to send some pheromones in the direction of Charlie's house, waving her arms in an attempt to send the scent in that direction. She exits to the house.)

(Lights down. End Act One Scene 2.)

ACT ONE SCENE 3

Time: The next morning.

Place: The same.

(Lights up and Charlie enters. He approaches the back door and knocks. Natalie answers the door and steps outside. She has a cup of coffee in her hand.)

Natalie: Hi Charlie.

Charlie: Good morning. I'm here to give you the big tour. Are you all set?

Natalie: Well, I am but I don't know about Iris.

Charlie: Still not over her meltdown?

Natalie: I don't know. She's hasn't come out of her room yet. And I don't want to knock in case she's still sleeping. It was a pretty long night.

Charlie: A rough one huh?

Natalie: Well, for her it was. I fell asleep about fifteen minutes into the gnashing of teeth. Iris woke me up at two and said it was time to go to bed. She'd been crying that whole time I think. God, I am such an awful friend.

Charlie: Well, you were tired.

Natalie: I was! Yes! I mean it was a five and a half hour ferry ride, another two hours in the car to get here from the ferry. I unpacked most of the car myself. And then there was all that wine I drank.

Charlie: No wonder you were exhausted.

Natalie: Exactly.

Charlie: But, on the other side of the ledger, the man she loved died in a plane crash and then she found out that he was already married when he married her.

Natalie: Yeah. I guess that evens things out. So, I don't know what to say. I can't just go off and leave her.

Charlie: Of course not. I understand. I'll check in with you later then. Maybe we can do it this afternoon.

Natalie: That's probably a good idea.

Charlie: Good. Then I'll see you later.

Natalie: Well, you don't have to rush off. I didn't mean that. You don't have to sprint back to your place. Unless you've got work to do. Do you have work to do?

Charlie: No. I cleared my schedule for the tour.

Natalie: Well, would you like a coffee?

Charlie: No thanks. I've already had my fill of coffee for the morning.

Natalie: Oh.

Charlie: I get up early.

Natalie: I see.

Charlie: So I've had three.

Natalie: Uh-huh. How about a muffin? We have muffins.

Charlie: No thank you. Already ate.

Natalie: Because you get up early.

Charlie: Right.

Natalie: And you make breakfast.

Charlie: I do.

Natalie: Glass of water?

Charlie: No thanks.

Natalie: Stick of gum?

Charlie: Nope.

Natalie: Well, then I've pretty much exhausted all the reasons why you should stay.

Charlie: Not every reason.

Natalie: No?

Charlie: No.

Natalie: Well, what other reason would there be?

(Charlie moves closer to Natalie.)

Charlie: I don't know. Maybe I just want to spend a little more time here. On the back porch.

Natalie: Well, it is a nice porch.

Charlie: It's a fantastic porch. I love this porch. I built this porch.

Natalie: Then by all means stay and enjoy it.

Charlie: I think I will.

Natalie: Good. We'll talk for a while.

Charlie: All right. Did I say good morning?

Natalie: Yes.

Charlie: Then I've run out of things to talk about.

(Charlie kisses Natalie. Iris enters from the house. She is carrying a book.)

Iris: Oh, for the love of God.

Natalie: Iris!

Iris: Is this all you two do??

Natalie: We've done it twice!

Iris: Should I come back when you're finished?

Natalie: We're finished now.

Charlie: We are?

Natalie: Yes. Iris is here. My friend who doesn't want to see a couple making out because...because..

- Iris: Because it reminds me of the love I lost but didn't really have in the first place because he was married to someone else.
- Natalie: Exactly. That's exactly what I was going to say. *(To Charlie.)* So, we can't do this in front of her.
- Charlie: Got it.
- Natalie: Good.
- Charlie: You know I have my own place right next door.
- Natalie: No! *(To Iris.)* He's kidding. I would never go over there and..I mean I hardly know the man. *(To Charlie.)* I hardly know you. How dare you.
- Iris: That was a feeble rebuke, Natalie.
- Charlie: It sure was.
- Iris: You didn't buy it either?
- Charlie: Not for a second.
- Natalie: Anyway, the reason Charlie is here is because he wanted to know if we were going to join him for that little sightseeing tour but I didn't want to ask you because I thought you were still asleep.
- Iris: Actually I've been up for hours.
- Natalie: You have?
- Iris: I've been reading. I found Jennifer Cleveland's journal in the spare room.
- Natalie: Really?
- Iris: Yes. On a shelf in the closet behind some bolts of dressmaking cloth and at the bottom an old shoebox underneath a bunch of sheet music.
- Natalie: Wow. Right out in the open like that.
- Iris: And it's very interesting reading. For instance, this entry here. This was written the day she and Robert moved in. *(Iris reads)* 'I had just finished unpacking and was standing on the back porch enjoying the view when the next door neighbour came over looking for his dog.' That dog is a real going concern isn't it?

Charlie: He's untrainable.

Iris: So, anyway, I think I'll stay here today and read. I'm sure there are some answers in here to many of my questions.

Natalie: Are you sure you want to do that? There might be something in there that you don't want to know.

Iris: I'll take that chance. So you two go ahead with your sightseeing. I'll stay here.

Natalie: Only if you think you won't be needing my help, you know, in case of another meltdown.

Iris: You mean like you helped me last night, when you slept through my darkest hour?

Natalie: I did not sleep. I heard everything you said.

Iris: Really?

Natalie: Everything. What kind of a friend would I be if I slept while you were opening up your soul to me?

Iris: So, you weren't dozing off?

Natalie: Certainly not.

Iris: Even though I had to wake you to send you to bed?

Natalie: Wake me? No. That wasn't sleep. I was resting my eyes. It was a long blink.

Iris: All right, fine.

Natalie: Asleep. Shame on you.

Iris: Have a nice tour.

(Iris exits to the house.)

Charlie: You told me you did sleep.

Natalie: What she doesn't know won't hurt her. So, I guess it's just you and me today.

Charlie: I'm okay with that.

Natalie: Me too.

(Natalie and Charlie kiss. Iris enters from the house.)

Iris: Natalie, can you bring..oh come on!!

Natalie: What?! What is it now?!

Iris: Good Lord!

Natalie: I'm sorry!! What do you want?

Iris: I want you to bring back some wine.

Natalie: Wine?? We're out of wine?

Iris: You drank it all last night.

Natalie: How could I? I was asleep last night.

Iris: Ah hah!!!

Natalie: Dammit!!

Iris: Gotcha!

Natalie: That's not fair.

Iris: You can't fool me, Natalie.

(Iris exits to the house.)

Natalie: Said the woman whose husband was already married.

Iris: *(OFF.)* I heard that!!

Natalie: Dammit. I am such a horrible friend. I feel like I'm constantly letting her down.

Charlie: You're probably thinking you should stay here now instead of going with me.

Natalie: No, she'll be fine. I'll be ready in ten minutes.

(Natalie exits to the house. Charlie exits. Lights down. End Act One.)

ACT TWO SCENE 1

Time: Later that day.

Place: The same.

(Lights up. Natalie and Charlie enter from the side of the house. Natalie carries a bottle of wine.)

Charlie: The truth is I've never owned a dog. Even as a child we didn't have a dog. My sisters were both allergic to dog hair and my Dad didn't like pets. He said they were always underfoot. He was a big man. And a clumsy man. The fewer obstacles you put in his way, the better.

Natalie: A clumsy carpenter, huh?

Charlie: Yeah.

Natalie: Did he ever step on a plank and have it go boink, up into his face?

Charlie: All the time.

Natalie: Did you and your father get along?

Charlie: We did. My Dad was my hero. Everybody in town liked Ol' Vaughn Butler, and they always had a kind word for him. I used to think that if I only had half as many friends as my Dad had, then I'd be a success in life.

Natalie: And do you?

Charlie: Not quite. It was an unreachable goal in the first place, that's how popular he was.

Natalie: And you two built this house together?

Charlie: Yep. We built it for my wife and myself. But then that all went to hell and I really didn't enjoy living here anymore, you know, with the bad memories and all, and then my parents died and I inherited the family home.

Natalie: Well, that was a stroke of luck. You getting the home I mean. Not your parents dy..please continue.

Charlie: So I moved in next door and rented this place out for a few years and then eventually sold it to Bobby Oulette.

Natalie: It's nice that you got along with your father. It's important to have a good relationship with your parents. Oh God, I'm sorry. You and your son don't have...I'm sorry.

Charlie: That's okay. Life deals a different hand to each of us. I just didn't play mine very well with Eric.

Natalie: It's not too late to fix it. Is it?

Charlie: I don't know. If I try and push my way into his life now I might throw a wrench into what he already has out there. So I send him birthday cards and Christmas cards and I let him know that if there comes a time when he does want me in his life, then I'm here. And I can be there if need be. Have Love Will Travel. I was going to put that on my business cards.

Natalie: But you don't have any business cards.

Charlie: Right.

Natalie: So, he has to make the first move?

Charlie: No, I already made the first move. He has to make the second move.

Natalie: Well, I hope you can develop a good relationship with him eventually.

Charlie: Like you and your daughter have?

Natalie: Exactly.

Charlie: But you don't really.

Natalie: What do you mean?

Charlie: Your relationship with your daughter. There's something wrong with it.

Natalie: How did you know that?

Charlie: Yesterday when you told me she was your best friend, you were a little too emphatic. You oversold it.

Natalie: Well, we're going through a tiny rough patch right now.

Charlie: How tiny?

Natalie: Two years. But it'll work itself out.

Charlie: We keep telling ourselves that, don't we? When it comes to problems with our children? It'll work itself out.

Natalie: We live in hope.

Charlie: We sure do.

Natalie: Okay, enough about that. It's depressing.

Charlie: Right. Let's move on to more pleasant thoughts. Did you have a good time today?

Natalie: I did, Charlie. That was fun. It really is a wonderful spot. I can see why you love it here so much.

Charlie: It's a comfort, this place. Easy on the mind. Some would say that's not the best way to live, being in a comfortable place. They think you should be challenged at every turn.

Natalie: No, I'm tired of being challenged. I like the idea of finding some comfort in life.

Charlie: You haven't found it yet?

Natalie: Not even close. But, maybe one day.

Charlie: How about tonight? Right now.

Natalie: What do you mean?

Charlie: My place is very comfortable. Come on over for a while. Have a drink. The night is still young.

Natalie: No, I should get inside and see how Iris is doing.

Charlie: Are you sure?

Natalie: I'm sure. Besides it's too soon to start wrecking the sheets with you.

Charlie: Wrecking the sheets?

Natalie: Yeah. You know? You and me. Wrecking the...Oh, I'm sorry. Maybe that's not what you had in mind.

Charlie: Uhh..

Natalie: Maybe you really did want to have a drink. Is that what you want? You see I'm so out of practice. I've only been on two dates since my divorce so I don't know what you want. I'm sorry.

Charlie: No, no. That is what I want.

Natalie: It is?

Charlie: Yes.

Natalie: Oh. Whew! That's a relief. I thought I made a fool of myself.

Charlie: But I wasn't going to rush into it. There's plenty of time for that.

Natalie: Of course.

Charlie: You're here until when?

Natalie: Day after tomorrow.

Charlie: Oh.

Natalie: About thirty-six hours.

Charlie: A day and a half.

Natalie: Right.

Charlie: So tomorrow night is..

Natalie: Our last chance to wreck the sheets.

Charlie: I was going to say your last night here.

Natalie: Oops.

Charlie: How long do you usually wait?

Natalie: Wait for what?

Charlie: You know? To..

Natalie: To wreck the sheets?

Charlie: There has got to be a better way to put that.

Natalie: I wait until I'm antsy for it.

Charlie: Antsy for it?

Natalie: Yeah. All wiggly-like. And you should know that I ask for what I want in bed.

Charlie: You what?

Natalie: I make it clear what I want in a love-making session.

Charlie: Oh. Good.

Natalie: That's good?

Charlie: Yes.

Natalie: That's okay with you?

Charlie: Absolutely. It eliminates the guesswork. You have no idea how stressful it is for a man to go through his repertoire trying to find the element that pleases you. It's like we're a janitor with this big ring of keys and we're trying to find the one that fits. The one that unlocks the pleasure door. And we're sweating and we're huffing and puffing and we're trying key after key in the lock and it's just not happening. It would be so much easier if you just leaned in and said "It's the big gold key."

Natalie: Well, that's what I'll do then.

Charlie: I'd appreciate it.

Natalie: Good.

Charlie: Did you just lay the ground rules for sex?

Natalie: I guess I did, didn't I?

Charlie: I've never experienced that before.

Natalie: I'm sorry. It's just that I'd like to get it right for once.

Charlie: For once?

Natalie: Yes.

Charlie: A partner has never gotten it right with you?

Natalie: Not really. Close a couple of times, but no cigar.

Charlie: I see.

Natalie: Does that put pressure on you?

Charlie: A little bit, but I've never shied away from a challenge. In fact, I welcome it.

Natalie: Good.

Charlie: I'll give it my all. I'll give it a hundred and ten percent.

Natalie: Well, it's not the Olympics. Just do what you can.

Charlie: You have my word.

(Charlie kisses Natalie. Iris enters from the house. She is carrying the journal.)

Iris: Oh man!!

Natalie: What the hell!!! Will you stop doing that?

Iris: I was going to say the same to you!

Natalie: We were just saying goodnight!

Iris: God!

Natalie: Here's your wine!

Iris: Thank you! It's a good thing I wasn't waiting for insulin. I'd be dead by now. How was the boat?

Natalie: It was very nice.

Iris: It must be a big mother. You've been gone for seven hours.

Natalie: Well, we didn't just tour the boat. We saw the whole town. And we had lunch. And supper.

Iris: Oh, well, I'm glad you ate. And don't worry about me. I managed to find a can of soup from nineteen seventy-five in there, so I'm fine.

Natalie: I'm sorry. I'm an awful friend. I know that. But you'd be surprised at how fast seven hours can pass. And you're okay, right? You're getting better?

Iris: Oh yes. I'm improving by leaps and bounds. In fact, you got home just in time to see me walk into the sea and end it all.

Charlie: That's the harbour. The sea's out there.

Iris: It's all the same water isn't it?!

Charlie: Yes ma'am.

Natalie: Iris, I'm sorry. But you said you wanted to spend the day reading so that's what I assumed you were doing.

Iris: Well, you could've checked in once in a while to see.

Natalie: Okay, now you're sounding needy.

Iris: I am needy! My jerk of a husband just died.

Natalie: I'm sorry. You're right. Again. So, did you read? Is that what you did?

Iris: For the most part.

Natalie: All right. So you occupied yourself. So I wasn't that negligent.

Iris: Is that the benchmark you want to use? You weren't *that* negligent?

Natalie: Look, I said I'm sorry. Accept my apology and move on, will ya?

Iris: Boy, you don't give a person much time to wallow, do you?

Natalie: No I don't. I'm giving you tough love. Take it or leave it. So did you finish the journal?

Iris: No. I got a little uneasy when I came to the time period where Robert would have met me. I stopped reading at that point. But I learned a lot about Jennifer Cleveland. She was a special person from what I can tell. Right, Charlie?

Charlie: She was.

Iris: Yes, you figure prominently in the journal.

Charlie: Really?

Iris: You're mentioned several times.

Natalie: Were you having an affair with her?

Charlie: No.

Iris: No, it was nothing like that. Charlie was more of a confidant. Right?

Charlie: I suppose.

Natalie: Why you?

Charlie: Well, Bobby was away a lot.

Iris: Living his double life.

Charlie: And Jennifer didn't have any close women friends in town, and I was right next door and sometimes she wanted to talk. She'd knock on my door and say "I brought your dog back." And we'd sit and talk for a while.

Iris: She was very fond of you.

Charlie: I was fond of her too.

Iris: Oh, I know you were. She mentioned in here that you had become enraptured by her. Where is that page? *(She leafs through the journal.)*

Charlie: Well, I wouldn't say I was enraptured.

Iris: *(Reading.)* "Charlie and I were drinking tonight and he told me he had become enraptured by me."

Natalie: You said enraptured? Who are you, Robert Frost?

Charlie: Enraptured is a widely accepted word.

Natalie: No it's not. Enamored maybe. Or infatuated.

Iris: Smitten.

Natalie: Smitten yes. Smitten's good. But enraptured?

Charlie: Widely accepted.

Iris: Anyway, I'll finish the journal tonight in bed if I get up enough nerve. Maybe the wine will help. You coming in?

Natalie: I'll be there in a minute.

Iris: All right.

Natalie: You're not coming back out again are you?

Iris: And walk in on Burt Lancaster and Deborah Kerr again? No thanks. Goodnight, Charlie.

Charlie: Goodnight.

(Iris moves towards the door then stops.)

Iris: Do you smell that?

Natalie: Smell what?

Iris: Pheromones. The air is thick with it.

(Iris exits.)

Charlie: They're probably comin' off me.

Natalie: So. Enraptured, huh?

Charlie: It's a perfectly acceptable expression. It's used worldwide.

Natalie: Are you enraptured by me?

Charlie: No.

Natalie: Smitten? Enamored?

Charlie: I'm enchanted by you.

Natalie: Okay, I'll take that. I'll try and work my way up to enraptured.

Charlie: Hey, you didn't show me your paintings yet.

Natalie: Oh, you don't have to say that now. You don't need an excuse to see me anymore.

Charlie: No, I really want to see them.

Natalie: Really?

Charlie: Yes. I'm very interested in what you can do. I might want to buy one.

Natalie: Oh you might, huh? All right. Here you go.

(Natalie takes out her phone and hands it to Charlie.)

Charlie: Thank you.

(Charlie looks at the phone.)

Natalie: No, don't look at them now while I'm standing here.

Charlie: Why not?

Natalie: Because it's embarrassing. I'd feel embarrassed. Take it with you and look at them tonight.

Charlie: Take your phone?

Natalie: Sure. Nobody's going to call me tonight.

Charlie: All right. If you're sure.

Natalie: I'm positive. And don't be too critical. People always say 'Tell me what you really think. Be brutal.' Well, I don't want that. I may not have the skills of an artist but I have the fragile ego of one. So, if you don't like them, lie.

Charlie: Lie?

Natalie: Through your teeth. You don't have to tell me they're great. Just tell me they're not bad. They show promise. Okay?

Charlie: You're laying more ground rules.

Natalie: It's the new me. Now, I'd better go in and keep Iris company. I am just the worst friend.

Charlie: That seven hours did go by fast though.

Natalie: It did. So tomorrow?

Charlie: Well, I've got a job to do tomorrow during the day, but I'll bring your phone back before I head out.

Natalie: All right. And we'll see each other tomorrow night?

Charlie: Try and stop me.

Natalie: No, that sounded like a stalker.

Charlie: It did, didn't it?.

Natalie: Try it again. And we'll see each other tomorrow night?

Charlie: I look forward to it with every fibre of my being.

Natalie: Much better.

(Charlie moves in to kiss Natalie. Natalie starts to move in for a kiss too, then stops.)

Natalie: Wait.

(Natalie turns and looks at the door for a moment.)

Okay.

(Natalie and Charlie kiss.)

I'll see you tomorrow.

Charlie: Right. Unless Iris needs you. I'll understand completely if she does.

Natalie: No, she'll be fine. She's a big girl.

Charlie: You're an appalling friend.

(Charlie exits.)

Natalie: *(To herself.)* You are charming my ass off, Charlie Butler.

(Natalie exits to the house.)

(Lights down. End ACT TWO Scene 1.)

ACT TWO SCENE 2

Time: The next morning.

Place: The same.

(Lights up. Iris is sitting in a chair holding the journal. There is a sweater on the back of the chair.)

Natalie: *(OFF.)* Iris?

Iris: Out here.

(Natalie enters from the house.)

Natalie: Good morning. Up early again huh?

Iris: Well, I didn't get much sleep. I've been sitting out here since dawn watching the town come alive. Seeing people arriving for work. Watching the fishing boats go out. And on every boat that went out, someone waved to me. I wonder if they thought I was her.

Natalie: Who? Jennifer Cleveland?

Iris: Yeah.

Natalie: Oh, I doubt that, Iris. It's a small town. I think they know she's gone. They were just being friendly.

Iris: Maybe.

Natalie: I'm sure of it. It's a very friendly place.

Iris: And how did you sleep?

Natalie: I slept like a baby.

Iris: Well, you had a full day yesterday. You were probably tired.

Natalie: Iris, I'm sorry about that. We were having such a nice time, the day just flew by. I won't leave you alone for that long again. I promise.

Iris: That's okay.

Natalie: No it's not okay. It was thoughtless of me. But from this moment on, I am the best friend you've ever had. The best. I'm going to pamper you. So what would you like to do today? Let's go for a walk into town and I'll buy you lunch. You can order a Lunenburger. Yeah. There's a place in town that serves a Lunenburger. Cute huh?

Iris: Actually there's something else I want to do today.

Natalie: What's that?

Iris: I'm going to pick some flowers from the garden and take them to her grave.

Natalie: Jennifer Cleveland's?

Iris: Yes.

Natalie: What makes you want to do that?

Iris: I finished the journal last night.

Natalie: And?

Iris: He asked her for a divorce.

Natalie: What?!

Iris: Robert asked her for a divorce. This attractive, smart, talented woman. And he wanted a divorce.

Natalie: Because of you?

Iris: I don't know. That's what I'm wondering.

Natalie: Oh it must have been because of you.

Iris: No, don't say that.

Natalie: Well, what else would it be? He fell in love with you. He married you. And then he felt guilty about being married to her too so he asked her for a divorce because he loved you more.

Iris: Natalie, please. Stop.

Natalie: What's wrong? He loved you more. That's good.

- Iris: Listen. (*Opens the journal and reads.*) 'Bobby won't tell me why he wants a divorce. He just says he's not happy. But I think there's more to it. He's flying to Newfoundland this weekend. I talked him into letting me go with him. This might be my last chance to get through to him.'
- Natalie: Oh my God, Iris.
- Iris: She was on that plane because of me.
- Natalie: Now, we don't know that for sure.
- Iris: Of course we do. You just said it. He wanted a divorce because of me! Earlier in the journal she says that when he comes back from his job in Maine, he appears distant. She wonders if he's having an affair. God, I hate that I was the other woman. And I hate him for making me the other woman without my even knowing it. I would never have let that happen if I had known he was married.
- Natalie: Well of course you wouldn't.
- Iris: How could I not have seen the kind of man he was? I was so happy when I fell in love with Robert. You saw how happy I was. I was like a teenager. I couldn't wait to see him when we were apart for even a day. When he was away, when he was up here, we talked on the phone every night. How did he manage that while he was married and living here in this house with his wife? What lies was he telling her? He didn't call her every night when he was with me. At least I don't think he did. I would have known, wouldn't I? Wouldn't I have known that? My God, I'm not sure about anything anymore.
- Natalie: All right, you married a liar and a cheater. A good liar and a remarkable cheater. Hell, I'll bet he's got a third wife somewhere. He's that good.
- Iris: Is that supposed to make me feel better?
- Natalie: Yes! Because it's not your fault. You were taken in by a professional deceiver.
- Iris: Well, I'm sorry but that does not make me feel any better. I need a coffee. I hope you made some coffee before coming outside.
- Natalie: Of course I did.
- Iris: Of course you did. Your first thought wasn't to check and see how I was doing. Your first thought was to make coffee for yourself.
- Natalie: Oh stop complaining. Get in there and get your coffee.

(Iris moves towards the door.)

Iris: You know you could pour it for me. Could you do that one little thing for me? You came here to see me through this difficult time, didn't you? To comfort me?

Natalie: Of course I did.

Iris: Well, when do you punch in?? When does your shift start?

Natalie: It starts right now. I'm pouring your coffee and I'm comforting you. Right now.

Iris: Well, it's about time.

Natalie: You're going to be over-comforted. You'll be sick of it, you'll be so comforted. Now get in there.

Iris: I forgot my sweater.

Natalie: I'll get your sweater. You lie down on the couch. And don't move until I bring you your coffee, ya' hear? Now go.

(Iris exits to the house. Natalie gets Iris' sweater from the back of the chair. Charlie enters from the side of the house. He carries Natalie's phone.)

Charlie: Hi.

Natalie: Oh. Good morning.

Charlie: How are you?

Natalie: I'm fine, Charlie. But I can't talk right now because Iris needs me. She's in a bad way this morning.

Charlie: That's okay.

Natalie: I'd love to talk. You know I would, but she's made some discoveries and she's teetering on the brink, you know? A little unstable. So, I should be by her side.

Charlie: No problem. I just came over to give you back your phone.

(Charlie holds out the phone and Iris takes it.)

Natalie: Oh. Thank you. Tell me, did you know that Robert wanted to divorce Jennifer?

Charlie: Divorce?

Natalie: It was in her journal.

Charlie: No, I didn't know that.

Natalie: She didn't confide that to you?

Charlie: No.

Natalie: Because it sounds like you were her best friend in town, or maybe more than that. It wasn't more than that was it, because I don't want to get involved with a man who would do that with a married woman. That's one of the two rules I have in life.

Charlie: What's the other one?

Natalie: Don't dance like nobody's watching, because somebody's always watching and you look like an idiot.

Charlie: Well, like I told you, Jennifer and I were just friends. I promise.

Natalie: Good.

Charlie: So, are we still on for tonight?

Natalie: Yes. Absolutely.

Charlie: Terrific. I'll buy some wine today.

Natalie: Sounds lovely.

Charlie: Anything else you want? You said you would tell me what you want, you know, in a love-making session.

Natalie: I'm going to sit down today and make a list.

Charlie: Will it be extensive?

Natalie: Well, it has been two years.

Charlie: I'll make sure I have a nap.

Natalie: I'll see you tonight.

(Natalie exits to the house.)

Charlie: They're very good by the way.

(Natalie enters from the house.)

Natalie: What's that?

Charlie: Your paintings. They're very good. Excellent in fact.

Natalie: Oh. You really think so?

Charlie: Yes.

Natalie: Excellent?

Charlie: Yes.

Natalie: You're not just being kind like I asked you to be, are you?

Charlie: No, I mean it. They're beautiful.

Natalie: Oh.

Charlie: I love them.

Natalie: Oh my.

Charlie: So, I'll let you get back to Iris.

Natalie: Oh, she's fine. So which one was your favourite?

Charlie: My favourite? Well...

Iris: *(OFF.)* Natalie?!

Natalie: In a minute!!! So, which one?

Charlie: Are you sure you shouldn't go inside and..

Natalie: No. She's good. So?

Charlie: Well, I really liked the one called Jupiter's House.

Natalie: Jupiter's House! Oh my god. That's my favourite too.

Charlie: It is?

Natalie: I painted that in one day. It just flowed out of me. It was like I was channeling a real artist.

Charlie: Natalie, you are a real artist.

Natalie: No I'm not.

Charlie: You are. You're very, very good.

Natalie: But you said you don't know when art is good. Remember you said that?

Charlie: You're good. Trust me. You are exceptional.

Natalie: And you're not saying this just to get me into bed?

Charlie: I don't have to say it to get you into bed. Do I?

Natalie: No, you don't. We've established that. So you really mean it. You do think I'm good.

Charlie: I do.

Natalie: *(Natalie breaks down.)* Oh my God.

Charlie: What's wrong?

Natalie: That makes me sad.

Charlie: Sad? Why would it make you sad?

Natalie: I've been hiding it. I've been hiding my work because no one's ever said that it was good. My husband never said that it was good.

Charlie: Iris must have told you it was good.

Natalie: Yes, she did. But she's my best friend. I can't believe what she says because she would lie. The two of us would do anything to make each other happy.

Iris: *(OFF.)* Natalie?!

Natalie: I said in a minute!!!

Iris: (OFF.) I need my sweater!

Natalie: (Natalie throws the sweater into the house.) There! (To Charlie.) So, I've kept my work hidden. I haven't shown anybody until now. So, it's good?

Charlie: It's exceptional.

Natalie: Well, that's very upsetting to me.

Charlie: Listen. There's a gallery in town and the owner is an old friend of mine. I've known her since we were kids. Maybe I can get a couple of your paintings in there.

Natalie: Dear God, you are in for one hell of a love-making session, mister.

Charlie: And even if I can't get you into the gallery myself, I'm sure I can get you a meeting with her.

Natalie: That would be wonderful. But I need to go home and put together a proper portfolio. I can't go in there with photos on a phone.

Charlie: How long would that take?

Natalie: A week maybe.

Charlie: Then do it when you go home and come back in a week.

Natalie: Are you sure my work is good enough?

Charlie: It's more than good enough. Come back in a week and you'll see.

Natalie: All right. I will.

Charlie: Can you stop crying now?

Natalie: Yes. No. I don't know. I have to go in now.

Charlie: Okay.

Natalie: And thanks, Charlie.

Charlie: For what? For making you sad?

Natalie: Yes. No one's ever made me that sad before. You're very kind.

(Natalie turns to leave.)

Charlie: Your daughter thinks they're good too.

Natalie: What? My daughter? Chelsea?

Charlie: She called your phone last night and I answered it. I thought it might be important because you said nobody would call you so I figured if someone was calling you it must be important.

Natalie: What did she want?

Charlie: She wants you to send her 'Pharmacology for Nurses' book down to her. I asked her why she doesn't just buy another one and she said..

Natalie: It costs a hundred and forty dollars.

Charlie: That's right. And then we got to talking about the ridiculous cost of text books.

Natalie: Didn't she wonder what you were doing with my phone?

Charlie: Oh yeah. Right off the top. That's when I told her I was your new lover and that I had your phone because I was looking at your paintings.

Natalie: You were what?

Charlie: Looking at your paintings.

Natalie: You told her you were my lover?

Charlie: No, I was just kidding about that part. So, we got to talking about your paintings and she said she liked your work. She said she had always been a little jealous of your artistic side because she didn't have one.

Natalie: She doesn't. She's a very smart woman but it's all left brain stuff. She doesn't have an artistic side.

Charlie: She knows that. She said you told her that. Why would you tell her that?

Natalie: Because it's true.

Charlie: But you discouraged her from even trying.

Natalie: Is that what she said?

Charlie: I gleaned it.

Natalie: Did it ever occur to you to bring the phone over here to me and let me talk to her?

Charlie: She didn't want to talk to you. She just wants you to send her the book. I told her I'd give you the message.

Natalie: And that was it?

Charlie: No, we talked for about an hour.

Natalie: About what?

Charlie: All kinds of things. I asked her if she had any advice on what to do where my son is concerned. I told her that I was finding it difficult being apart from my child and how much that hurts.

Natalie: And what did she say to that?

Charlie: She said I shouldn't give up hope, and that I should stay in touch with him. Then I said a parent is unhappy when they can't make a child understand how much they love them and need them. Speaking about me of course. But that brought the conversation to a halt so I changed the subject. We talked about her boyfriend.

Natalie: Henry.

Charlie: No, Jarrod. She dumped Henry two months ago.

Natalie: She did? Why?

Charlie: Oh he was the worst. I don't know why she got mixed up with that guy in the first place. He had no job. No prospects. He was a dead end. Jarrod is much better for her. He's caring. Attentive. Employed. No she definitely traded up.

Natalie: Anything else?

Charlie: She wanted to be a dancer. Did you know that?

Natalie: Well, when she was a little girl she did. But she had two left feet.

Charlie: Yeah. She said you told her that.

Natalie: Well, of course I did.

Charlie: Why?

Natalie: Because you can't let your child pursue a goal you know they're never going to achieve. You have to try and save them from being hurt.

Charlie: Or you let them try and fail. Failure is a part of growing up. You can learn as much from failure as you can from success.

Natalie: No offense, Charlie, but when did you become a parenting expert? You haven't raised a child.

Charlie: But, I've been one. And my parents never discouraged me. They let me try and they let me fail. They let me chase my dreams no matter how big they were.

Natalie: You mean your dream of being a carpenter?

Charlie: Actually my dream wasn't to be a carpenter. I lied about that. I wanted to be a hockey player like any other Canadian boy. And I worked hard at it too, but I failed. I didn't have the skill set. And that hurt me but I got over it. I became a carpenter, and that wasn't a bad fallback position. I'm proud of what I do.

Natalie: Why didn't you tell me you wanted to be a hockey player?

Charlie: When a man is trying to impress a woman we don't talk about our failures. We brag about our successes.

Natalie: Like about being a carpenter.

Charlie: Yes. You don't think that's a success?

Natalie: Why? Did that sound condescending?

Charlie: Yes.

Natalie: Let me try it again. Like about being a carpenter?

Charlie: Still condescending.

Natalie: Shit.

Charlie: How you can have that condescending streak in you and still lack confidence in yourself? It's a dichotomy.

Natalie: Wow. Such a big word.

Charlie: There you go again!

Natalie: Then stop criticizing me. When I'm cornered I lash out.

Charlie: I have to get to work. Back to my carpenter's job.

Natalie: Fine.

Charlie: Fine.

Natalie: Hey? Is this a fight? Are we having a fight?

Charlie: It sure sounds like it.

Natalie: Aren't we supposed to be lovers before we can have a fight?

Charlie: I don't know.

Natalie: Well, I think we are. I think we're skipping over the fun part and going right to the angst. Does that make sense to you?

Charlie: You don't plan these things, Natalie. They just happen in whatever order.

Natalie: Well, I think we should plan them. I think we should. Lovers first. Then fight. We should not deviate from the tried and true paradigm.

(There is a pause.)

You don't know what a paradigm is.

Charlie: I DO know what a paradigm is.

Natalie: Well, you didn't answer me.

Charlie: Because I was finished!!

Natalie: Well, I didn't know that.

Charlie: No, you just assumed that I was stumped by your big word. Look, I tried to help you with your daughter. I thought I was doing a good thing. And you didn't appreciate it.

Natalie: Do you have to be thanked for every kind act you perform?

Charlie: No. Not thanked. Just appreciated.

Natalie: All right. I appreciate it.

Charlie: No, you're only appreciating it now because I asked you too.

Natalie: So, I can't appreciate it now?

Charlie: No.

Natalie: Well, then when?

Charlie: Some other time. When I'm not expecting it. When I don't ask for it.

Natalie: Fine.

Charlie: Fine.

Natalie: *(There is a pause.)* What about now?

Charlie: No! It's too soon.

Natalie: Then when?

Charlie: Later.

Natalie: Well, what if I don't see you later? What if you storm off because of this fight and I don't see you again?

Charlie: Well, that would be awfully small of me, wouldn't it?

Natalie: Yes it would.

Charlie: I have to go.

Natalie: You're storming off?

Charlie: No, I'm not storming off. I have to go to work. I'm leaving for work calmly, as if nothing happened.

Natalie: But something did happen. That's why you're storming off.

Charlie: I'm not storming. See? I'm walking casually. I'm strolling. One could even say I'm sauntering.

Natalie: But you're still leaving.

Charlie: Because I have to go to work. Have a nice day, Natalie. God. *(To himself as he exits.)* What is wrong with that woman?

(Charlie exits.)

Natalie: I'm trying, Charlie! I'm going to be a nicer person! And a better friend! And you're going to miss all of it!! And your little dog too!

Iris: *(OFF)* Natalie please! My coffee!!

Natalie: Oh for God's sake. Do you know where the coffee cups are, Iris.?!

Iris: *(OFF)* My husband died!

Natalie: *(As she exits.)* Yeah. And I am getting a little sick of hearing about it!

(Lights down. End ACT TWO SCENE 2.)

ACT TWO SCENE 3

Time: Later that day.

Place: The cemetery.

(Lights up to reveal Iris in a spotlight, standing over Jennifer's grave.)

Iris: Hello. I brought you some flowers but I see somebody else beat me to it. And I'll bet I know who. *(She looks around.)* It's nice up here. A gentle breeze. Cute little squirrels frolicking among the headstones. Look at the little buggers. And you can see the whole town from up here, can't you? Location location location, right? Anyway, I'm Iris. And uh..how do I put this?...Okay. I was married to your husband. Surprise! And I came to say I'm sorry. I wanted to say it to you here, in person. I didn't want to give the message to God and ask him to pass it on because he's very forgetful. I know this because he neglected to inform me that the man I was marrying was already married. To you. I like your house by the way. You've done a very nice decorating job. Except for the kitchen. I don't know what the hell you were thinking in there. Oh, I'm going to have to buy you a new coffeemaker. My friend Natalie broke the carafe this morning. Long story short she was in a foul mood, and I never did get my coffee. So, anyway I'm going back home to Maine tomorrow and I didn't want to leave with this mess hanging over my head. You see, I'm the reason you were on that plane. I'm the reason you're here now in this quiet place all alone. And believe me, if I could trade places with you...well, I wouldn't do that obviously, but I am so sorry for what happened to you. I truly am. But, the thing is, he told me I was the love of his life. I've never been told that before. And chances are I'll never be told that again. And that makes me kind of sad. Boy, I'm really making this about me, aren't I? That hardly seems fair when I'm up here and you're down there. But you're not down there, are you? No. You see, I know a bit about the spirit world. Oh yeah. I've read the books. And you're probably still earthbound tying up loose ends, right? Well, as long as you're still here, I wonder if you could tie up a loose end for me. I need absolution. I need you to forgive me for being the other woman, which I didn't know I was by the way. Let's not forget that. So, I wonder if you could do that for me. Please? I'm not sure how exactly. Maybe you could give me a sign of some sort. You know, kill a squirrel. Or reach a hand up through the dirt. No don't do that. You'll scare the crap out of me. Just..There's a bench over there. I'll sit over there and wait. I'll wait for as long as it takes. There's no rush. Any small sign will do. But I think the squirrel's your best bet. *(She begins to move away, then stops.)* I hope you're at peace, Jennifer. If anyone deserves it, it's you. And me. I deserve it too. I only hope I find it before I'm in this quiet place with you.

(Iris exits. Lights down. End ACT TWO Scene 3.)

ACT TWO SCENE 4

Time: That evening.

Place: The same

Lights up. Natalie is sitting on the porch. It is dusk. The kitchen light is on. She is sketching on an artist's sketch pad. Iris enters from the house.

Iris: I'm back.

Natalie: Well, that was a long visit. Were you at the cemetery all this time?

Iris: Most of it. I visited for a while and then I waited.

Natalie: Waited for what?

Iris: Well, for nothing as it turns out. And then I stopped and bought a coffee maker on the way back.

Natalie: Sorry about that. I didn't know those things were so fragile.

Iris: Well, glass and a wall. You're sketching?

Natalie: I am. I should have brought my paints with me. If I had known it was this beautiful here I would have.

Iris: *(Looks at what Natalie is sketching.)* That's very good.

Natalie: Are you just saying that because you're my best friend?

Iris: I'm telling you the truth because I'm your best friend. If it was bad I would tell you it was bad.

Natalie: Well, that's awfully cruel, don't you think?

Iris: I refuse to enable a delusional lifestyle. So, I s this what you've been doing all day?

Natalie: Mostly. The power went out for about an hour so I came out here in the sunlight and started sketching the town. I guess I lost track of time. What time is it?

Iris: Almost nine. What about Charlie? Has he been around?

Natalie: He said he had a job to do today. But, he said he would stop by tonight.

Iris: For your sexual encounter.

Natalie: You heard that?

Iris: Of course I heard it and I wish I could un-hear it. And do you think he'll stop by tonight after the way you treated him this morning?

Natalie: Was I that bad to him?

Iris: Yes. It was almost as if you didn't like him.

Natalie: I do like him. I like him a lot. He seems like a really solid, straight up kind of guy. He's genuine.

Iris: Uh-huh.

Natalie: Why? What do you know? Is there something in that journal that says different?

Iris: No. On the contrary. I think he's exactly as he appears.

Natalie: Good. That's good, right?

Iris: For a man, that's outstanding.

Natalie: Good.

Iris: You don't trust your own judgement?

Natalie: Oh God, Iris, after what happened to you I don't know what I can trust anymore.

Iris: How do you think I feel?

Natalie: I can only imagine. Anyway, if it's almost nine maybe he's not coming.

Iris: Maybe. Tell me something. When was the last time you were happy?

Natalie: Happy how? Happy laughing all the time or just content?

Iris: At peace with your life. That kind of happy. I mean, I was I was sitting up in the cemetery trying to remember the times in my life when I was happy in that way, and I don't think there has ever been a time. When I met Robert I was happy but that was more of an excited, schoolgirl in love happy. A silly happy. But I don't think I've ever been really truly at peace with my life. Happy in that way.

Natalie: I have. In the years after Chelsea was born. Life was good then. I was very at peace. I had a husband I loved. A daughter who still had innocence in her eyes and in her heart. Who would throw her arms around my neck and hug me with reckless abandon. That might have been the happiest I've ever been.

Iris: You've got to fix that.

Natalie: Fix what?

Iris: You and Chelsea. Fix it. You're the mother. You're the grown-up. Drive down to Boston, take your daughter by the scruff of the neck and drag her back into your life. And don't take no for an answer.

Natalie: I don't think it's that easy.

Iris: I think it's just that easy. We sit around wondering if things will change instead of making them change. If you want to correct what's wrong in your world you have to get up off your ass and do it. You don't wish for it or pray for it. You do it.

Natalie: Maybe you're right.

Iris: There's no maybe about it. I am right. So do it.

Natalie: We'll see.

Iris: I said do it!

Natalie: All right! God. When did you become so bossy?

Iris: All of these messed up lives around me. Your life. My life. Jennifer Cleveland's life.

Natalie: My life's not messed up.

Iris: It is too!

Natalie: I know it is!

Honestly. The things we worry about that mean nothing. Honestly. We buy a house. We choose colours meticulously and paint the rooms to our liking. We arrange the furniture so that it pleases our eye. We put beautiful rugs on hardwood floors. We hang paintings and we're proud of those paintings because they say something about us. And we walk by those paintings every day and we look at them and we straighten them and we hope that our friends

will like them too. We buy dishes. Every day dishes for the family and then good dishes for when company comes because company must be impressed. And we put flowers in every room. And we plant gardens and we pull weeds and we keep the grass cut and now everything about our house is just the way we want it. Just the way we planned it. And then you find out that your husband was married to another woman, and the house and all of the planning you did and the decorating you did and the beautiful rugs on hardwood floors mean absolutely nothing and you wonder why you did it in the first place.

Natalie: Because that's what we do, Iris. That's how we live.

Iris: That's what I thought too. But now I don't see the point. And that hurts. It hurts not being able to see the point to the way I lived and thought for so long. And not just when I was married. For my whole adult life I thought that's how I should live. That's how I wanted to live.

Natalie: And now?

Iris: I don't know. And that hurts the most. I don't know how I want to live anymore.

Natalie: Do you need a hug?

Iris: Well, do something for God's sake!

Natalie: Come ere'.

(Natalie hugs Iris.)

Iris: Thank you.

(They break the hug.)

Natalie: All better now?

Iris: It was a hug. It wasn't bypass surgery. You know, I asked Jennifer to forgive me for being the other woman.

Natalie: Really? And how did that go?

Iris: Not good. She snubbed me. Of course, I don't blame her. I probably wouldn't forgive me either.

Natalie: You do know she's dead, right?

Iris: Oh I know. But she could've forgiven me if she wanted to.

Natalie: If you say so. I'm going to try out that new coffee maker. Do you want a cup?

Iris: Ordinarily I wouldn't drink coffee this late in the day, but I want to see you actually pour me a cup. So yes. I'd love a coffee.

Natalie: All right. You asked for it.

(Natalie starts to exit. Charlie enters from the side of the house.)

Charlie: Hi.

Natalie: Oh. Hello.

Charlie: Iris.

Iris: Hi Charlie.

Charlie: I came over to see if your power was back on.

Natalie: Oh. Yes it is. Did yours go off too?

Charlie: Yeah. For about an hour.

Natalie: I wonder what happened.

Charlie: Squirrel chewed through a power line.

Iris: What?

Charlie: It happens a lot in the warm weather. A squirrel chews through a power line or gets zapped by a transformer and boom.

Iris: Boom?

Charlie: Boom.

Iris: And the squirrel?

Charlie: Boom.

Iris: Yes!

Charlie: Pardon me?

Iris: I said yes. He's in a better place now. That poor, innocent squirrel.

Natalie: So, yes, the power is back on. Thanks for asking.

Charlie: Is everything else okay?

Natalie: Everything's fine.

Charlie: Good.

Natalie: Yes, Iris bought a new coffeemaker today and she was on her way in to try it out.

Iris: Pardon me?

Natalie: You were about to make coffee. None for me though. Too late in the day.

Charlie: None for me either, thanks.

Iris: Oh, that's too bad. And I was so looking forward to making coffee for everyone.

(Iris exits to the house.)

Charlie: Is she getting better?

Natalie: Oh yeah. She's lightened right up.

Charlie: Good.

Natalie: Thanks for checking on us.

Charlie: Actually I wasn't checking on you. I lied.

Natalie: You weren't worried about our power being off?

Charlie: I can see your kitchen light from my house, so I knew it was back on. I just needed an excuse to come over and see you.

Natalie: Well, that's not right.

Charlie: I'm sorry.

Natalie: You don't need an excuse to come over and see me.

Charlie: I thought I did after this morning. You know, the way I sauntered off.

Natalie: You sauntered out of here in a real huff.

Charlie: I know. And I wanted to apologize for that.

Natalie: I accept your apology.

Charlie: Well, that was easy.

Natalie: Well, I was just as much to blame. I kind of flew off the handle and got all defensive.

Charlie: I found it endearing. And pretty damned sexy.

Natalie: Well, aren't you just the sweetest talker this side of Shubenacadie.

Charlie: So, you're leaving tomorrow morning?

Natalie: Yes. And I might not be back in exactly a week like I said. I have to go down to Boston for a couple of days.

Charlie: Why?

Natalie: Because Iris said I have to.

Charlie: Oh.

Natalie: She is so overbearing.

Charlie: So, you're going to see your daughter?

Natalie: Yes, I'm going to make things right with her.

Charlie: Are you?

Natalie: Well, that's what Iris says. I'm not so sure myself.

Iris: *(OFF.)* You're going to make things right!!

Natalie: Fine!! God. I thought you were making coffee!!

Iris: *(OFF.)* I am!!!

Natalie: *(To Charlie.)* You couldn't have made these walls thicker? So anyway, I'll be back in about ten days.

Charlie: Good. And about tonight.

Natalie: Yes?

Charlie: Well, I was thinking..

Natalie: No, wait. Let me speak first. I know we made this plan to...be together tonight, Charlie. But, I think I'm going to be a good friend at last and stay at home with Iris tonight. We haven't spent that much time together since we arrived here and I think she blames me for that.

Charlie: Do you think so?

Natalie: Well, she's like that. She needs to attach blame. So, do you mind if we wait until I get back?

Charlie: Actually, that's what I was going to suggest.

Natalie: You were?

Charlie: Yes. I like you, Natalie. I like you very much. And I know that my original shallow intention was to have a really good time for the few days that you were here. You know, charm the ass off of you and then boom.

Natalie: Like the squirrel?

Charlie: No. The thing is, my intention changed after I spent time with you. The physical aspect--the sex--has become less important. I'm about more than that now.

Natalie: Oh that's lovely, Charlie. So, the sex is less important?

Charlie: Yes.

Natalie: Wonderful. How much less?

Charlie: Not a lot less. It's still up there.

Natalie: Good. We don't want it to fall out of the top ten. Five.

Charlie: Plus, I want to savour the build-up to that particular activity. And I think a two week wait will make the event..

Natalie: Two weeks? I'm coming back in ten days.

Charlie: I know. But we don't have to jump right into it.

Natalie: And we don't have to be silly about it either.

Charlie: We'll play it by ear.

Natalie: I'm liking you more and more all the time, Charlie Butler.

(Natalie and Charlie kiss. Iris enters from the house.)

Iris: Oh, what the hell!!!

Natalie: Dammit!!

Iris: For the love of God, Natalie. You've been on that man like a bathrobe ever since we got here!

Natalie: What do you want now?!

Iris: I've got a question for Charlie.

Natalie: Well, ask it then! God!

Charlie: What can I help you with, Iris?

Iris: Who chose the colours for the rooms in this house?

Charlie: Jennifer did. She did all the painting too.

Iris: She did?

Charlie: Took her a couple of months all told.

Iris: Well, I guess I'll leave them as is then. All except for the kitchen. I don't want to be looking at that every day.

Natalie: What do you mean? You're keeping the house now?

Iris: Well...yes. I think I will.

Natalie: Why?

Iris: Just to check in once in a while. Keep an eye on things. Maybe when I retire I'll winter here.

Charlie: Winter in Nova Scotia?

Iris: Why are you still here? Why aren't you phoning your son in Brigadoon?

Charlie: Saskatoon.

Iris: Well, why aren't you?

Charlie: Are you telling me to?

Iris: Didn't I tell you to a couple of days ago?

Charlie: Yes you did.

Iris: Well, hop to it.

Charlie: Okay. *(To Natalie.)* I guess I'm leaving.

Natalie: I told you she was overbearing.

Charlie: You two have a nice trip tomorrow. Iris, do you still want me to look after the garden for you?

Iris: I do. Thank you. And could you keep taking some of those flowers up to Jennifer for me please.

Charlie: I will. I'm glad you're keeping the house, Iris. And you won't be sorry. There are a lot worse places to live.

Iris: I didn't say I was going to live here.

Charlie: No you didn't. Not yet. But when the sun comes up here every day, it brings a light with it that shines deep down into a person's soul. And when you leave this place, this harbour, you miss that light and you can't wait to get back to it. You'll see. Goodbye, Natalie. Good luck in Boston.

Natalie: Bye, Charlie. I look forward to coming back and having you charm the pants off of me.

Charlie: Ass.

Natalie: Ass. Pants. You can charm the whole kit and caboodle off of me.

Charlie: I'll do that.

(Natalie and Charlie exchange another longing look.)

Iris: Oh just go!

(Charlie exits.)

Iris: Aren't you going with him? I thought you two had plans to re-tool the box spring.

Natalie: Wreck the sheets.

Iris: Right. So, what happened?

Natalie: I want to spend the evening with you instead.

Iris: You do?

Natalie: Yes. Very much.

Iris: Oh. Okay. I can't promise that I can deliver what your boyfriend there can, but I'll give it the old college try.

Natalie: There really is a place called Saskatoon, by the way.

Iris: I know. I looked it up. Crazy country.

Natalie: So, you're keeping the house?

Iris: I am.

Natalie: What brought this on?

Iris: I need a change, Nat. It's like I said before. I don't know how I want to live anymore. I know I can't go back to the way it was. Who knows? Maybe I will move to Lunenburg. I could sell my business in Maine and start one here.

Natalie: And I could visit you.

Iris: Visit me. Right. And when would I see you? When you come home from Charlie's house once a day to towel off?

Natalie: Now, Iris, I would spend lots of time with my best friend in the world. I'd miss you if you moved away. I'd miss you very much. And this town...well, you couldn't ask for a better place to start over again. You heard what Charlie said. All about that light calling you back.

Iris: Yeah. Well, there's another reason I'm thinking of moving here.

Natalie: And what's that?

(Iris exits to the house.)

Iris?

(Iris enters carrying the journal and hands it to Natalie.)

Iris: Read that page.

Natalie: *(Reading)* 'I miss you, Caroline, and I'm sorry that you were taken from me so soon. There are days when I really need my sister to lean on.' The twin.

Iris: That's right.

Natalie: And she misses her even though she never met her?

Iris: They spent their first nine months together. Twins have a special connection that none of us can understand.

Natalie: That's sad.

Iris: It is sad. Jennifer sounded very alone, and I don't think she should be alone anymore. I want her to know that there is someone here who cares about her. A woman she can lean on like a sister.

Natalie: You?

Iris: Why not me? We have a special connection too. We were married to the same man.

Natalie: Well, sure you were, but Iris...she's dead.

Iris: I know.

Natalie: And do you think she's going to know that you're here for her? A stranger that she never met?

Iris: I think she'll know.

Natalie: How?

(The power goes off in the house. Lights go out.)

Oh! There goes the power again. I'll see if I can find a flashlight.

Iris: No. Stay here. It'll come back on again.

(The powers comes back on.)

Natalie: Wow. You were right.

Iris: Now, stay. Let's enjoy the view.

Natalie: Iris, I've been sitting out here for most of the day.

Iris: Please? For me.

Natalie: Are you going to play the dead husband card again?

Iris: I will if I have to.

Natalie: All right. I'll stay.

Iris: Thank you.

Natalie: So, you're going to paint the kitchen?

Iris: Definitely.

Natalie: And are you going to put beautiful rugs on hardwood floors?

Iris: Is that important?

Natalie: There's got to be something that's important, Iris. No matter what it is, there's got to be something. Otherwise, what's the point?

Iris: Maybe it's something as simple as what's out there. Maybe that's what's important. Maybe this is where I'll find that 'at peace' happiness I've been looking for.

Natalie: Do you think?

Iris: Well, just look at it. It's magical. It's like someone or some thing is gently massaging your mind.

Natalie: A comfort.

Iris: Pardon me?

Natalie: It's a comfort. That's what Charlie calls it.

Iris: It is that.

Natalie: Happiness is fleeting, Iris. That's the problem. It doesn't last. When we get happy, we don't stay happy. Why is that?

Iris: Because we live our lives in segments. And each segment is different because we change and the people within our lives change.

Natalie: Well, I don't like it.

Iris: I hate it.

Natalie: I wonder if I'll ever be that happy again. Like I was when Chelsea was born. Do you think I will be?

Iris: No.

Natalie: Iris! You're supposed to encourage me. Console me.

Iris: Well, now you know how it feels!

Natalie: Well, I think I will be that happy again. And I think you'll be happy again too. That's right. I'm going to be optimistic enough for the both of us. I'm going to drag us both into a brighter day.

Iris: I'm all for that.

Natalie: Then get ready because I'm comin' for you.

Iris: You see that? You can be a good friend when you put your mind to it.

Natalie: I can be, can't I? I knew it!

Iris: Now sit, Natalie. Please.

(Natalie sits.)

Let's warm ourselves on the calm and the beauty of this harbour. And the prospect of that brighter day. We'll drink it in together. Just the three of us.

Natalie: But there's only..

Iris: Shhh. Drink. Drink.

(Lights down. End.)

- Shubenacadie is pronounced Shoe-ben-ack-adee
- Musquodoboit is pronounced Musk-ah-dobbit.