

FLIRTING AFTER FIFTY

A one-act play

By Barbara Bellman
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FLIRTING AFTER FIFTY/B.Bellman

TIME/PLACE

2016, Scottsdale, Arizona

CHARACTERS

LILLA, age 50, sort of a Julia Louise Dreyfus type, ironic, funny, attractive - maybe a little plump

AUNT JOYCE, age 70, is LILLA'S Aunt and an older version of LILLA, attractive, letting her hair gray, still has a funny personality, kind of like Linda Lavin

BARTENDER/WAITER, age 30, any ethnicity

DAVID, RANDALL, CLIVE, BILL, etc., age 50-60-ish, one man can play several parts with simple costume/wig changes

SETTING

An eat-in kitchen with an adjoining office/den setup. It's IKEA-type modern, with a back door with pane glass that opens to a patio. There are a few cactus/succulents in pots to show the Southwest theme. Also a turquoise howling coyote on the counter. Other scenes take place in a restaurant/Bar changed scene by scene with minimal props to suggest different locations such as a coffee bar, cafe, etc.

RUNTIME

60 minutes, no intermission

FLIRTING AFTER FIFTY/BELLMAN

SCENE 1: INT. KITCHEN, AFTERNOON

Scene opens on LILLA as she enters from the back with mail, briefcase, purse, and groceries. She drops all on the kitchen counter and begins to put groceries away. When done, she sits at a stool at the counter to look through her mail. She has just turned 50 and on this the same day she receives two things in the mail: her divorce papers and her AARP card. She stares at the two and reads aloud.

LILLA

(Sarcastic)

Congratulations! You are now eligible for membership to the American Association of Retired People - the worlds most influential advocacy group for older Americans. (Beat) Isn't that nice! (Picks up other document) Final order and decree of divorce. The parties in the above captioned matter having waived their right to a final hearing, it is hereby ordered, adjudged and decreed –

LILLA sets down the papers. A gradual rise of voices off stage each taking turns, then overlapping, louder) build in volume and quantity – all the voices in LILLA's head.

ASSORTED VOICES (O.S.)

Give it up and buy a cat. - Now what are you going to do? - All the good men are taken. - Only ones left are old, sick or gay. - You could be a cougar! - Men want younger women. - You're too fat - too tall - too short - too old - too frumpy - too formal - too old-fashioned - They're too old – too fat – too old fashioned – too married – too gay. –You're damaged goods - You need a face-lift - Get a new wardrobe - Why bother? No one's looking. - No one cares. - Maybe get two cats. - Subscribe to HBO, Netflix and Lifetime. - You don't want to be the nurse or the purse. - So he found someone prettier than you. - Cut your hair. - Dye your hair. - Get a makeover. - Why bother? - They're all losers! –Get a dog.

LILLA covers her ears.

Stop! STOP! Lalalalalalala . . .

Voices stop at once. Silence.

SCENE 2: LILLA'S KITCHEN, EVENING

AUNT JOYCE knocks tentatively on the back door but doesn't wait to enter – just comes in and puts a gift on the kitchen table and wine on the counter. She grabs a couple of glasses from the cupboard and starts to open the wine. LILLA enters from offstage, coming from her bedroom with a basket of laundry which she sets on the table to fold.

LILLA

Aunt Joyce! I didn't hear you knock.

JOYCE

I never knock.

LILLA

I know.

LILLA and JOYCE air kiss each other.

JOYCE

And you never lock your door. Word to the wise, dear!

LILLA

This is Scottsdale. Not Newark. I'm starting to think that maybe renting the upstairs apartment to you was a bad idea.

JOYCE

Well, of *course* it was! At my age, going up and down those stairs is a hardship. I should live *here*, on the ground floor.

LILLA

Don't count on it. (Beat) New dress?

JOYCE

This old thing? No. I just lost a few pounds. Never throw out anything you wish you could fit into again.

JOYCE pours the wine, hands a glass to LILLA and stands to show off the dress.

Am I'm trying too hard?

JOYCE

Looks good. *Really*. Flattering!

LILLA

They clink glasses.

Given enough time even old things look good again.

JOYCE

Not in my closet. (Beat) Or my mirror!

LILLA

Oh honey, I *know*! The worst thing to happen to a woman is the 10X mirror.

JOYCE

10X? I wish! They now make 15X magnification – for the blind or totally masochistic!

LILLA

All the better to pluck those pesky *wisdom* hairs from your chin. Which reminds me –

JOYCE

JOYCE absently feels for some hairs on her chin. Lilla sips her wine, and starts to fold clothes. She notices the gift.

What's that?

LILLA

Happy Birthday!

JOYCE

LILLA smiles and points to her mail on the desk.

That's thoughtful – but I've already gotten a couple of real nice greetings. The final divorce papers and my '*welcome to AARP*'! What more does a girl need?

LILLA

Open it.

JOYCE

I won't say *you shouldn't have*.

LILLA

JOYCE

I thought you needed some cheering up.

LILLA gets up to get the box and bring it to the table. JOYCE reaches into the basket, pulls up a flannel nightgown, sneers disapprovingly and drops it to the ground.

JOYCE

So where is Casanova now? Do you know?

LILLA

Probably in Vegas as we speak. He couldn't *wait* for this to be done so he could jump into a new marriage with Tammi - with an I (beat) and a *teeeeeny* little heart for the dot. (Beat) It's so *cute*! (Beat) Thank God Ellen's in college. She would puke. And look sad, and expect me to be sad too, instead of relieved. Relieved and sad.

LILLA stands and reflects on what she just said. Makes first a happy face, then a sad face.

LILLA

I don't want to come across as pathetic.

JOYCE

You're not the first woman to be dumped, I mean divorced.

LILLA

Well that's a comfort.

JOYCE

I'm not trying to be cruel. Just realistic. (Beat) But what you do with your situation is up to you. There's no need to BE pathetic.

LILLA

Thanks.

JOYCE

Honey, look. The only way to get beyond this is to stop playing the victim. That's a powerless place to be. And most unattractive. Divorce is never one way and the sooner you own your part in it, the quicker you'll recover from it. Believe me, I know – I deserved my divorces – earned them the hard way. But I can save you a lot of grief if you'll just listen to your Aunt Joyce. (Beat) A LOT of grief!

LILLA

I'm sure. But I'm not there yet.

LILLA opens the box to pull out a sexy piece of lingerie - a “Teddy”. She holds it up, appalled, and puts it back in the box.

LILLA

And I’m not *here* yet, either? But now I *will* say, *you shouldn’t have!*

JOYCE

I know. It’s a bit – *unconventional*, but you should still feel desirable. Be desirable.

LILLA holds the “Teddy” up to her body.

LILLA

For whom? *With* whom? Me and the cat everyone tells me I need to buy?

JOYCE

Who’s *everyone*? Besides, you can’t. You’re allergic.

LILLA

I’ll buy one without hair.

JOYCE

That’s a rat, darling. Not a cat.

LILLA

Never mind. Rat – cat. What’s the point?

JOYCE

The point is, you’re giving up and I won’t have it. Face it, you and Dennis stopped being interested in each other years ago. It took the two of you a lot longer to figure it out than the rest of us. And now he’s gone. Goodbye. Good riddance. Wish him the best and get on with your life. (Beat) *Get back on the horse.*

LILLA

(Mocks a western accent)

Who are you – Annie Oakley?

JOYCE

Joke if you like, but if your great Aunt Maud can find romance in an Assisted Living Center, so can you. God forbid you’ll ever find *me* there, but if she can turn *lemons into lemonade*, anyone can. *Hope springs eternal!*

LILLA

Good for her! And when I need advice on citrus I’ll be sure to ask her all about it.

JOYCE

One could learn a lot from Aunt Maud. (Beat) And *you* need an attitude adjustment. Love can happen to anyone – even you.

LILLA

I'm not looking. Yet. Besides, I'm fifty! That's old.

JOYCE

It's true *a lot of water's gone under the bridge* but you still have some life to live.

LILLA

You've said that to me every birthday since I turned thirty. What the hell does that even *mean*? I'm over the hill? Drowning in regrets?

JOYCE

Don't let any *grass grow under you*, is all.

LILLA

It's just too soon. Really. Unlike you, I still *have* the five pounds I need to lose to get to my fighting weight. And right now I don't feel I've got much fight left in me. The divorce drained me.

JOYCE

Won't last forever. And five pounds is nothing, I can attest to that – and you're going to need something a little racy to perk up your spirits. Or his – whomever that may be.

LILLA

Maybe *you* should keep this.

JOYCE

Oh *god* no. At my age it's *really* grim. Best to keep the lights off and the clothes on. But you're only fifty – god what I'd give to be fifty again – and you need to *strike while the iron's hot*.

LILLA

How many metaphors can you use in one visit?

JOYCE

As many as I need.

JOYCE holds up the *teddy* to see how it would look on LILLA.

JOYCE

Heartbreaker! (Laughs) Well, not exactly. (Beat) But you're still built like a brick shithouse, as your uncle used to say.

LILLA steps away from the lingerie, dismissing JOYCE'S compliment.

LILLA

An outhouse? That's a compliment? You're incorrigible!

JOYCE

Well, your uncle sure was. (Beat) Oh, the stories I could tell! (Beat) I sure do miss him. (Brightens) But now I can live vicariously – through *you*! (Beat) You need a profile.

JOYCE takes out her phone to take a picture.
LILLA blocks her from taking her photo.

JOYCE

C'mon. Let's get a good photo. Say cheese!

LILLA

Stop! I'm not ready for this.

JOYCE

Well *get* ready. Your biological clock is ticking.

LILLA

I doubt that.

JOYCE

I'm not talking about having babies. I'm talking about being somebody's baby.

LILLA

Oh Aunt Joyce. That ship has sailed. And besides, I don't want to be somebody's *baby* – I don't even know if I want to be somebody's *woman*. I just don't know how to start all this dating over again. I'm out of shape, I'm out of hormones, I'm out of luck.

JOYCE ignores her negative comments.

JOYCE

Nonsense. Which one do you want to try first? Match.com? J-Date? E-Harmony? How about Senior Singles?

LILLA makes a gagging sound.

LILLA

None of the above. Just the sound of those sites makes me gag. Senior Singles! How fun!

JOYCE

Consider this a re-entry training period. Nothing serious. Just get your feet wet again. Practice!

JOYCE gets up to refill her glass. She drinks and then sits down at the table.

LILLA

Only losers –/

JOYCE

/You're not a loser!

LILLA

Didn't mean *me*!

JOYCE

That kind of thinking will get you nowhere. And it's not true. (Beat) Well, it's mostly not true. (Beat) Actually, it's sometimes not true. But you'll never know until you get out there and start seeing what's possible – and available.

LILLA

Have you?

LILLA refills her own glass and sits down too. JOYCE nods. LILLA is a little shocked.

JOYCE

Don't look so surprised, darling. Of course, I did. Briefly. After Morrie died, I had a lot of time on my hands. And a lot of evenings streaming Netflix. (Beat) Oh don't look so aghast. A woman gets lonely sometimes. And you will too. I'm just trying to prepare you.

LILLA

Are you still on a dating site?

JOYCE shakes her head, no.

JOYCE

After my last date I thought it best to take a break.

LILLA

That bad, huh?

JOYCE

Well – you do have to *kiss a lot of frogs*.

LILLA

What was he like. Your last date.

JOYCE

If I tell you – it might put this conversation on hold – *permanently*.

LILLA

Spill it!

JOYCE

Well, there was Harris – a doctor AND a lawyer. All-in-one double whammy! Real smart! Not too unattractive, at least by his photo. He said he liked to cook and we exchanged some recipes. Yadda yadda. (Beat) By the way, he did give me a really good pot roast recipe – instead of bouillon he uses –

LILLA

Aunt Joyce!

JOYCE

OK, I'll just make it for you sometime. And I'll make a copy so you can have it for when you entertain again and –

LILLA

Aunt Joyce!

JOYCE

Well, you know – we decided to meet for brunch.

AUNT JOYCE pauses to take another sip.

JOYCE

God I'm parched.

LILLA

God, you drive me crazy! Will you get on with it?

JOYCE

Well, it wasn't kismet, if that's what you want to know. He suggested we meet at the Biltmore – one of his favorite places. Not the main dining room, but the bistro.

LILLA slumps down in her chair like she'd rather be shot than endure this endless story.

JOYCE

In person, he was nothing to look at really – but I figured I could be charming for an hour at least. You know, it's so hard to tell from their photos. Thank goodness for Skype. Takes the guessing out of it.

LILLA sits up and taps the table to bring AUNT JOYCE to the point.

LILLA

Are we getting close? I mean, to the point?

JOYCE

You know how I love to drag out the dramatic details.

LILLA

(Groans)

As the audience looks for the exit –

JOYCE

Well, after the pleasantries, I picked up my menu and considered ordering the mushroom quiche – just making conversation, mind you, to fill an awkward silence. I asked if he'd ever ordered it before – after all, this *was* his favorite place so I just assumed. (Beat) But he just blurted out without taking a breath between maladies – *No, never. Because I'm lactose intolerant, and I've had triple bypass surgery and have fungus on my toenails.* (Beat)

They both start to really laugh.

JOYCE

(Dryly)

Needless to say, I didn't order the quiche.

LILLA

Did you bolt out of there?

JOYCE

Oh honey, living with your uncle all those years I put up with a lot more than that! (Beat) Poor man – Harris – I liked the name. (Beat) I knew that was just his insecurity talking. Men do that, you know. They want you to know everything about them before they commit to you, or the check – just in case you're inclined to *head for the hills* –

(LILLA winces.)

I know, I know – another metaphor. I've got a million of them.

(Beat) If you don't flee – they assume they've got a chance. (Beat, shrug) But few things disgust me anymore and besides – I was hungry!

LILLA

What'd you order?

JOYCE

(Shrugs)

Who knows? But I managed to get through the meal without dwelling on toenails. (Beat) I *can* be a charming conversationalist.

LILLA

And–?

JOYCE

And – after he picked up the check he walked me to my car.

LILLA

That was gentlemanly.

JOYCE

Yes, well, I thought I could get by with an air kiss and a handshake, but he gave me that *hubba hubba* look.

LILLA

And–?

JOYCE

He kissed me like I was getting a tonsillectomy.

LILLA

Ewww!

JOYCE

That's when I decided to sign up for *It's Just Brunch*. Pay *them* to do the screening. (Beat) Dating sites can be so unreliable. But good practice. And I highly recommend it before you go to the next step – face to face. Online you can work out all kinds of issues. Practice, practice, practice! Don't want to wait too long before *getting back on the horse*. Get 'em before the sun spots do.

They both laugh.

LILLA

If you *really* wanted to convince me, you'd have found a more compelling story.

JOYCE points the phone camera at her and snaps a few of LILLA laughing. JOYCE looks at the phone photos, nods approvingly.

JOYCE

These are *good!* You're very photogenic! Men like to see a woman laugh. Or even smile. So many women take themselves so seriously! They all look so – closed off and pained. It's intimidating. The male ego is so fragile! You'd be amazed at what a smile can do to open doors – or hearts.

LILLA motions to see the photos.

LILLA

Let me see.

LILLA finishes off the wine and looks at the photos.

LILLA

Hmm – I'll think about it.

JOYCE

Just *do* it. You're a free woman now. And yes, you're going to have to *kiss a lot of frogs* – but we'll have some good laughs. *I'll tell you mine, and you tell me yours.*

JOYCE looks at her watch and the empty bottle.

JOYCE

Well, since the wine's gone, I have to *log off* as they say. But you need to *log on*. I'll call you later.

JOYCE gets up, kisses LILLA on the top of her head, and exits. LILLA swivels her chair around to face her desk and turns on her computer. She sits back and thinks. Then she opens her browser and types the name of a dating site. She sits and thinks, and begins to write her profile.

LILLA

“Sensitive, fun-loving divorcee, age (Long beat) forty nine. (Beat) OK, Fifty. (Beat) Trim, attractive, likes long walks, good wine and sad songs. Looking for someone to rescue me from getting a cat.”

LILLA sits for a long moment, and then hits “send”.

Within minutes, there are responses as the computer dings that she’s got mail. LILLA leans forward and starts to open the mail, seemingly pleased.

Lights down.

SCENE 3: INTERIOR OF KITCHEN, NEXT EVENING

LILLA enters the kitchen, fluffing her hair. She pours a glass of wine and pulls a tube of lipstick from her purse and applies it. She sits down in front of her computer and checks the corners of her mouth for crumbs. When she's ready, she clicks on Skype and we hear it ring until DAVID picks up. LILLA is so nervous, she initially monopolizes the conversation and babbles on. We never see DAVID, as the computer screen is angled away from the audience.

LILLA extends her hand to the screen in a fake handshake.

LILLA

(Waves)

David? Hi. Lilla. (Beat) Wow! You look just like your profile picture! Most people don't. I mean, you DO, and that's nice and, well, I'm glad we found time to meet face to face – or screen to screen (laughs nervously) so I can finally speak with you. Put a face to the name, you know. (Beat) God, this is awkward. Have you ever spoken with other women – on Skype? I mean, what a stupid question. Of course you probably have. It's technology, right? The modern way to meet people. But listen to me – I'm just jabbering on, I'm so nervous. It's your turn. By the way, you have a great smile.

There is silence as LILLA stares at the screen, awaiting an answer. LILLA slowly leans toward the screen, surprised. We hear DAVID talking with difficulty, because he's a foreigner - some middle east accent - Moroccan?

DAVID

Dav-eed. My name is Dav-eed. Good to meet you Lee-la. You very pretty.

LILLA stares at the screen and decides to talk louder and slower, now that she sees English isn't his first language.

LILLA

Dav-eed. Yes. My name is pronounced Lilla. Lih-la. The "i" is soft. Ih – ih.

DAVID

You Americans make too much out of leetle details. So what – ih, eeeh. What does it matter?

LILLA stares at the screen, intently for a long minute. She nods.

LILLA

Ok. So David –

DAVID

Daveed –

LILLA

What difference does it make? Didn't you just say –?/

DAVID

(Raises his voice)

Everything with you Americans is a big deal.

LILLA

No need to shout! (Beat) Hey, listen *Dav-eed*. I think we aren't communicating. So I'll just say –

LILLA tries to end the conversation.

DAVID

You trying to hang up on me? Why? We were just getting to know each other. I think you're pretty, and I would like to marry you! You're pretty! And American.

LILLA

(Slowly, and quietly)

Ummm, thanks. But I think there's been a bit of miscommunication. It's been nice talking to you – or something, whatever this is. I hope you meet someone nice who you could marry, but that isn't going to be me. (Beat) You might want to update your profile with that requirement, you know. Just sayin' –

DAVID

Wait. What kind of a woman tempts a man with her picture if she doesn't want to marry? I'm a good man. I work hard. I have job in construction. I could take care of you. I would not beat you. Why won't you marry me? Lee-la, tell me. Am I not good for you?

LILLA waves goodbye, closes her laptop and sits back in the chair, mortified. Picks up the phone and calls AUNT JOYCE.

LILLA

Aunt Joyce, if you're at home, please, PLEASE pick up. Oh, thank god you're there.
 (Beat) Could you come down? (Beat) You are? Well, put a robe on. I'll open a bottle. (Beat)
 You're not gonna believe – OK. Bye.

LILLA sets out a couple of glasses and gets a bottle of wine. She leans against the counter waiting for JOYCE to arrive, who comes tumbling into the apartment, with her robe and her hair in partial rollers. LILLA hands her a drink before she can even say hello.

JOYCE

Who died?

LILLA

I did.

JOYCE looks her up and down for signs of blood and such and seeing none, sits down with her drink.

JOYCE

Will this be an open or closed casket?

LILLA

Closed. I just turned down an offer of marriage!

JOYCE thrums her fingers on the table, waiting.

JOYCE

I'm missing Law and Order.

LILLA sits down.

LILLA

I went online. As you suggested. And I got some interest. As you said I would. And I responded. As you told me to. (Beat) And it was a disaster.

JOYCE looks at her, for a long moment.

JOYCE

Rabbit?

LILLA

What?

JOYCE

Frog.

LILLA

Well, no. Not exactly. He was really quite attractive, actually, if you like that type. I think he was Moroccan or something. We just didn't communicate.

JOYCE

Didn't you read Men are from Mars, yadda yadda?

LILLA

I'm talking *culturally*! He argued with me about the pronunciation of our names, and how us Americans make too much of a big deal out of small things, and when I tried to end the call, he got angry because he assumed – since I was on the site, that I was looking for marriage and would marry *him*.

JOYCE turns around in her chair - now she's interested!

JOYCE

Really? Now *that* wasn't expected.

LILLA

Hi idea of courtship was to tell me I was pretty and he isn't the kind to beat me. I couldn't click off soon enough!

JOYCE

One bad quasi-date online with a total stranger and you're ready to pack it in? Please! It's practice, darling. And tomorrow when you get over yourself, you'll have a good laugh about it.

LILLA

I doubt it.

JOYCE

What you need is perspective. Forget online dating for the moment. We'll go out for a drink. See what live action looks like. (Finishes her drink) Tomorrow.

SCENE 4: BAR, NEXT EVENING

JOYCE and LILLA enter together. LILLA starts to find a table, but JOYCE steers them to the bar.

LILLA

I'm not a bar slut.

JOYCE

Neither am I, but that's where the action is.

LILLA

How do you *know* all this?

JOYCE

Reruns of Will and Grace. What difference does it make?

JOYCE makes a big show of finding the best stools. She smiles at everyone. LILLA acts like she wants to fall through the floor.

(Between her teeth)

Smile, dammit! Just think of this as research.

LILLA

Don't be so friendly. You have to be careful. God, I can't believe I have to say this to *you*!

JOYCE ignores her and continues to smile around the room.

LILLA

Cut it out! You look like you're showing off new dentures! (To bartender) Yoo hoo!

JOYCE

Don't be in such a hurry – maybe someone will come offer to buy us drinks.

LILLA is appalled.

LILLA

Who *ARE* you and what have you done with my aunt?

JOYCE laughs gayly, if even a bit loud.

LILLA

I'm going to leave if you keep this up. I mean it!

JOYCE stops laughing, looks serious, makes a gesture as if she's buttoning up her lips.

LILLA

This is not a good idea. I already told you of my last two disasters. I'm not optimistic.

JOYCE waves her hand away as if waving away all objections.

JOYCE

You're only just started! You have to give it time, and build up some experience. Rome wasn't built in a day.

LILLA

Rome burned down.

JOYCE

And it rebuilt, better than ever! Don't be such a pessimist! Order me a drink, will you?

JOYCE starts to get up and LILLA grabs her sleeve.

LILLA

Wait! Where are you going?

JOYCE

Relax. I'm just going to the powder room.

LILLA

You can't leave me alone here. Besides, nobody calls it a powder room anymore. That's so fifties. Who are you trying to be, Rosalind Russell?

JOYCE peels LILLA'S hand free and turns to go. Over her shoulder she vamps . . .

JOYCE

I'm more of a Lana Turner type.

LILLA groans. The bartender comes to take her drink order. JOYCE departs to the bathroom.

LILLA

(To bartender)

I'll have a chardonnay. Whatever you're pouring. (Beat) No, wait. Make that a Belvedere Martini, straight up, two olives.

BARTENDER

Start a tab?

LILLA

No. Well, maybe. Make that two – one for my aunt.

BARTENDER

Coming up.

LILLA stares down at her hands. Pulls out her cell phone to check for messages. There aren't any, so she scrolls through trying to find something to absorb her attention while she waits for her drink.

RONALD, a middle-aged man with a toupee, appears out of nowhere and startles her. He gets too close and she pulls back reflexively, looking for JOYCE, who is still in the bathroom.

RONALD

I won't bite. I come in peace.

LILLA

Excuse me?

RONALD

Didn't mean to spook you. Though I wouldn't mind sparking your interest a little.

LILLA

I don't think I –

RONALD

I'm Ronald. Ron to my friends. Ronald when I want to make an impression like on letterhead or something. Sales. I'm in sales.

LILLA

Um – look Ron-ald, I'm just here for a drink with my aunt so –

RONALD

That's nice! You keepin' her company?

LILLA

That's not your –

RONALD take the empty stool and sits down.

RONALD

I'll just keep it warm for her while I try to warm you up.

BARTENDER returns with the drinks. LILLA gives him a "*Help!*" look.

BARTENDER

Hey buddy. Someone's sittin' there.

RONALD

I know. I am.

BARTENDER

You know what I mean. There's an empty seat over there.

JOYCE returns from the bathroom. She smiles at RONALD and he leans towards her with a smile of his own.

RONALD

Well at least here's a friendly face!

JOYCE'S smile fades. And she waves away the smell of his breath.

JOYCE

Honey, you should check that out with a dentist or something. Halitosis is a treatable disease.

JOYCE reaches into her purse and pulls out some TUMS; hands it to him.

JOYCE

Here. Try this and please step away.

Embarrassed, RONALD leaves. LILLA and the BARTENDER are impressed and laugh.

JOYCE

(To LILLA and BARTENDER)

And that's how it's done!

JOYCE sits down and reaches for the martini.

JOYCE

This is perfect.

BARTENDER

This round's on me, ladies. That was *so* worth it!

They lift their glasses to him in thanks.

LILLA

What took you so long? It felt like an hour!

JOYCE

It was only a minute. Well, maybe five. I was checking my e-mail. Terrible WiFi in here.

LILLA

The moment you left, that guy – Ronald – magically appeared. Like he was stalking for an opportunity.

JOYCE

I know. That's why I left. No one's going to approach you if you're with someone else.

LILLA

You left on purpose?

JOYCE

Guilty. (Beat) Sometimes you get someone interesting. And for those that aren't, well, I always carry a supply of antacids. Works every time.

LILLA

Since when did you get to be such a pro at this?

JOYCE

I learned it from Arlene. You know, the one who's been married four times. She's full of good tricks.

LILLA

What else did she teach you?

JOYCE

Well, one of the things I learned the hard way is that you should schedule all your new dates for brunch.

LILLA

Why?

JOYCE takes a long sip of the martini.

JOYCE

(To BARTENDER)

Good martini!

(To LILLA)

Dozens of reasons. First, and most important, is that your makeup is fresh and if you've slept well the circles and puffs under your eyes are reduced. Second, you get to see *them* in the light of day. Not through the blurry eyes of a *great* martini.

JOYCE nods to the Bartender again.

JOYCE

Third, you're not all gassy – and god willing – neither is he - *having had* - if you know what I mean.

(Winks)

Third, or did I already do that? Fourth, it's easier to break away for another commitment if you need that excuse. And fifth, if he doesn't pick up the tab, it's just brunch. And that'll tell you something too.

JOYCE takes another sip and finishes the glass.

JOYCE

Watch and learn, darling. Watch and learn.

LILLA finishes her glass too and signals for the check.

LILLA

I'm getting a cat.

JOYCE

No you're not. You're going to stay at this with a sense of humor if it's the last thing I do – for you – that is.

LILLA

Why does it matter so much to you?

JOYCE starts to respond but LILLA puts her hand up to silence her.

LILLA

Never mind. I don't want to know.

SCENE 5: LILLA'S KITCHEN, ONE WEEK LATER

JOYCE is seated at the table, polishing her nails while waiting for LILLA to come home. There are photos of various cats displayed on the table that JOYCE carefully picks up to admire. LILLA enters, holding her mail, and throws it onto the table. She grabs a magazine that just came and slaps it down on the table in front of JOYCE.

LILLA

Did you see this?

JOYCE

Hello Aunt Joyce. Good to see you Aunt Joyce. I like that color of polish Aunt Joyce.

LILLA

Yeah, yeah. Hello Aunt Joyce.

Leans down to air kiss JOYCE. LILLA points to magazine.

JOYCE

You're not buying a cat!

LILLA

So you found my research.

JOYCE

A cat's a fall back position, and you're not there yet.

LILLA

Oh yes, I am.

JOYCE

You're giving up too soon. You just started!

LILLA

I'm done! (Beat) Since our bar outing, I've had three dates. Two coffees, one happy hour and dinner at Chipotle. Out of those, one greeted me with a kiss that was more like a tonsillectomy, one said that I was just what he was looking for but never asked a single question about me.

The happy hour guy bragged that he could tell in a glance if a woman was fuckable, and burritos for two was interrupted five times - count 'em - five times by his overprotective daughter, checking in to see how he was doing on his date. (Beat) I think I've had enough *practice*.

LILLA points to AARP magazine.

LILLA

Have you read that?

JOYCE

I always read my AARP magazine. They have good articles.

LILLA jabs at the cover.

LILLA

See the headline?

JOYCE reads aloud.

JOYCE

Best. Sex. Ever! Even in your seventies – we show you how. What's wrong with that?

LILLA

The article's on page 56.

JOYCE

OK.

LILLA jabs at the other headline.

LILLA

What does *that* say?

JOYCE

Nine mysteries of your body explained.

LILLA grabs the magazine to turn the pages.

LILLA

That starts on page 16 but after reading this, why would any one ever get to page 56? (Reads) Why have I sprung a leak? Charming article about incontinence. (Turns page) What's happening to my toenails? To your earlier point. (Turns page) How come I'm suddenly drenched? (Turns page) Page 19! Who moved the bathroom? I presume this is in the category of never trust a fart. (Turns page) And there's more!

Where did these spots come from? (Looks at her hands, then turns page) Oh, this is a good one. *Why are my feet so* – they put in an ellipses for emphasis – da da da duh – *fragrant?* No need to embellish that one. (Turns page) We're not done yet! There's more! How about, *Is it me or is my nose getting bigger?* Really? (Turns page) But the piece de resistance is on page 24! They saved the best for last, in case you're still reading instead of putting your head in the oven. *When did I get soooo gassy?* That was worth (counts) one, two, three, four 'o's' in sooooo, just so you don't miss the importance of *that* one. And then finally, *How did my breath get gross?* (Beat) Frogs were bad enough, but beasts? Please.

Disgusted, LILLA throws the magazine down on the table. JOYCE smiles.

JOYCE

That's why I always carry TUMS.

LILLA

Aunt Joyce, you're missing the point. By the time you finish reading to page 24, who the hell cares what's on page 56! I know I don't!

LILLA picks up the magazine again and reads another headline. JOYCE sits quietly, waiting for LILLA to calm down.

JOYCE

(Dryly)

They forgot snoring.

LILLA

Right. Snoring. What an oversight! (Beat) Here's another headline – *My life on Prozac - one woman's brave journey.* (Beat) I'm going to kill myself and it only took one issue!

JOYCE laughs and flutters her fingers to dry.

JOYCE

Darling, listen to me. If there's one thing to get you through the next few decades, it better be a sense of humor. (Beat) And *Kegel* exercises. We all have our issues. Even you. Hey, if you were in your twenties you'd be dealing with acne and UTI's. Times change, and we have to learn to love – other aspects of ourselves – and tolerate those aspects in others. It's just life, honey.

LILLA

That's your advice? (Beat) If that's what I have to look forward to, I don't want to see seventy – that's for sure.

JOYCE pats LILLA'S hand.

JOYCE

Oh yes, you do. These things happen, darling – to all of us. So *what?* Piece by piece. But forewarned is forearmed. *Kegels* – and sunscreen.

JOYCE stands to leave; picks up her purse carefully so as not to damage her nails. LILLA holds up one of the cat pictures.

LILLA

I'm thinking of this Persian.

JOYCE

Don't be hasty. There will always be cats. But a man with a sense of humor? Now that's worth catching. And believe me, there's a lot to laugh about. (Beat) But we'll continue this conversation later. Don't worry. I'll think of something.

JOYCE exits.

SCENE 6: INTERIOR OF RESTAURANT, ONE WEEK LATER

LILLA waits nervously, watching the door, checking her watch, scanning the room. She calls JOYCE.

LILLA

Yes, I'm here. And regretting it already. (Beat) This better be good because that cat's looking better every day. (Beat) Oh, shit. I think he's here. (Beat) OK. Bye.

A man enters, sees LILLA sitting alone and stops at her table. He smiles, but his smile is covered by a bottlebrush mustache. LILLA looks like she wants to bolt.

CLIVE

It's Just Brunch?

LILLA

(Awkward)

Sure. (Beat) I'm Lilla.

LILLA extends her hand. CLIVE shakes her hand but brings out hand sanitizer to cleanse with.

CLIVE

Clive. (Beat) I'm very susceptible to germs. Nothing personal.

LILLA

So sit – Clive. I promise not to sneeze on you.

CLIVE sits across from her, but then moves his chair closer, which makes LILLA inch hers away.

LILLA

Intimacy issues. Nothing personal.

CLIVE leans closer, and she leans back. He appraises her critically, and is not pleased.

CLIVE

You look older than your picture.

LILLA

What?

CLIVE

Well, your face looks like a 50 year old. But your hands look like you're 60.

LILLA pulls her hands from the table, onto her lap.

LILLA

Is this what you consider a warm welcome on a date?

CLIVE

Oh, I don't consider Brunch a date. This is just window shopping with breakfast. We're going dutch, right? I like to get that out on the table right away.

LILLA sits back, offended, but also relieved.

LILLA

I see. (Beat) So I guess we can dispense with any form of – general courtesy and get right to the point, eh? I mean, I can certainly see the efficiency of that. But since this is my first time with this process, my expectations were a bit – different.

CLIVE picks up his menu.

CLIVE

Yeah, saves a lot of time this way. No games, no holds barred. It's liberating!

LILLA

No holds barred?

CLIVE

Yeah. It's liberating. For instance, I don't usually date women as old as you.

LILLA

I beg your pardon?

CLIVE

Oh, don't get all huffy. You'll stress your botox beyond it's capacity to hide the furrows in your brow. Women your age need to be careful. That shit's expensive.

LILLA

I don't have botox!

CLIVE

No? Well, you will. Or you should.

LILLA is completely stunned by his rudeness.

LILLA

You're what, fifty five? Fifty eight? Why don't you date women my age?

CLIVE

You're close. Fifty six. (Beat) Lubrication.

LILLA

Excuse me? What are you talking about?

CLIVE

Lubrication. You know.

CLIVE nods in the direction of her crotch. She stiffens, offended.

CLIVE

Women your age just dry up. No surprises there!

LILLA

It's a surprise to me! (Beat) Were you ever married?

CLIVE

Twenty three years.

LILLA

Really!

LILLA leans closer to him to get a better look.

LILLA

Hope you don't mind me asking, but – in the twenty three years you were married, did your wife ever suggest that you remove that – what is it – a wart? On your upper lip?

CLIVE

Never mentioned it.

LILLA

Are you sure? (Beat) I mean, I'm sorry to be so – intrusive or personal but you don't seem to mind crossing barriers so – I mean, we just met, but – (she points) it's big enough to be a nipple! I mean, I don't mean to be disrespectful, but, well, it looks like a bald man peering out from behind the curtains of your mustache.

CLIVE

Nah, never bothered her.

LILLA

I'm just curious. (Beat) Twenty three years is a long time to live with something that–

CLIVE

I've lived with it for fifty six years.

LILLA

And the issue never came up to have it, you know, removed? I mean, with plastic surgery being what it is today, one would think that –

CLIVE touches his lip and fingers the mole like pinching an olive. LILLA cringes. He smiles.

LILLA

Please don't do that.

CLIVE

It's just a mole. It won't bite you.

LILLA

I'm surprised you haven't bitten IT! I mean, it's practically an hors d'oeuvre. An olive. (Beat) No, more like a garbanzo bean.

LILLA is transfixed, in a bit of horror.

CLIVE

It's a part of me. But hey, all this talk of food just makes me hungry. Let's order.

CLIVE motions for the waiter.

LILLA

Suddenly I don't have much of an appetite. (Beat) You go ahead though.

LILLA gets up to leave.

LILLA

Thank you for being so – direct. Your candor saved us both a lot of time. Good luck finding someone wet enough for you.

LILLA reaches into her purse.

CLIVE

No need. You didn't order anything.

LILLA

I wasn't getting money. I was getting this.

LILLA hands him a card.

CLIVE

(Reads)

Dr. Mort Gordon. Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery.

LILLA

Wish I had a recommendation for charm school, but this is a start.

LILLA exits.

SCENE 7: LILLA'S KITCHEN, THAT EVENING

LILLA sits facing the door, waiting for JOYCE. Her arms are crossed. JOYCE enters, and sees the tension.

JOYCE

It's just practice!

LILLA

It's just brunch. Or should I say, it's just a way to make me lose my appetite.

JOYCE

That bad?

LILLA

Oh, I don't know. But we need to re-think *breaking bread with strangers* thing. It's not working for me. No. It's really not working at all.

LILLA stands up and gets in JOYCE'S face.

LILLA

NOT AT ALL!

JOYCE backs away to the kitchen table and sits.

JOYCE

Is this a one or two bottle story?

LILLA

It's a bottle of anything to keep me from throwing up!

JOYCE

Worse than fungus on his toenails?

LILLA points to her upper lip.

LILLA

He had a – thing – a growth the size of a Kalamata olive protruding from his bottle-brush mustache. It was so big I almost invited it to join us for brunch – give it its own chair, for crissakes!

JOYCE

Oh my.

LILLA

Oh my? That's your response?

JOYCE

I – don't know what to say.

JOYCE starts to laugh. LILLA can't help but laugh with her. They can't stop and try to talk through their laughter.

LILLA

I was so – I couldn't help myself – I kept staring –

JOYCE

I think this is worse than –

LILLA

But the worst of it is he insulted me from the very moment he sat down. Told me my hands look old. And he didn't date women my age because we're not lubricated enough. As if he would know!

JOYCE

Practice those *Kegels*!

LILLA

What for? The likes of him?

JOYCE

Wonder why he never got rid of it.

LILLA

He was so rude to me that I decided to ask him! I really did! He was so clueless! (Laughs) But he looked at me, like, *why?* He said his wife never mentioned it. And he was married twenty three years! How could she have never mentioned it!?

JOYCE

Love is blind?

LILLA

Maybe she was blind! I didn't think to ask. I don't know if he was always this rude or just became so through the dating process, but I can't imagine being with someone so – so – completely clueless! I mean, he was beyond rude.

He just didn't seem to have any – comprehension of how to be pleasant on a first date. Talk about bad first impressions! (Beat) Someone should tell them to do a better job of screening.

JOYCE goes to the refrigerator and opens it.

JOYCE

They'll send you a feedback card. (Beat) Got anything to eat?

LILLA

Olives.

They start to laugh as JOYCE pulls some cheese out of the refrigerator. LILLA retrieves some crackers and a plate from the cupboard. JOYCE puts both together and brings it to the table.

JOYCE

Look, I know you've gotten off to a bad start (laughs again) – okay – maybe a terrible start – but you have to keep at this! Seriously! You've only just begun. Think of this as a long game.

LILLA

That cat is looking better each day.

JOYCE

You've signed up for three "brunches" – one down – two to go. Play it out. You've paid for them. What've you got to lose?

LILLA

My appetite.

JOYCE

Look, if nothing else, you've got great stories to tell.

LILLA

I don't want stories. I want a cat.

JOYCE

Just two more. That's all I ask. Just two more and then I'll leave you alone. I'll even buy the kitty litter.

LILLA

Just two more –

Lights down.

SCENE 8: INSIDE CAFE, WEEK LATER

LILLA arrives and is shown to the table. BILL is already seated, waiting. He stands up when she arrives, and holds her chair. He's attractive, which surprises LILLA.

LILLA

Not many men do that anymore.

BILL

Clears out some of the competition, then, doesn't it?

LILLA laughs.

LILLA

Well, yes, I suppose it does.

BILL extends his hand to hers.

BILL

Bill Gordon, Lilla. And that's a very interesting name, by the way. Does it have special family significance?

LILLA

It's a bastardization of Lillian I think. After my grandmother. But thank you.

BILL

Nothing significant to my name. Though I think there may have been a bastard or two in my family lineage somewhere along the line. I'm not one of them, however, despite what my ex-wife might say on the subject.

LILLA

How long? Since your divorce.

BILL

Three years. That's a respectable time to resume dating, don't you think?

LILLA

My Aunt Joyce would collapse that timetable to just a few months. Or weeks, if she had it her way – and she does.

BILL

Guess it's all just practice, til the right one comes along.

LILLA

That's what Aunt Joyce keeps telling me. Practice, sunscreen and – never mind.

WAITER brings them menus.

BILL

I'm new at this, so I hope I don't come off as rusty. But I liked what you had to say about yourself and thought, well, it's just brunch, and at least I can have a good conversation, right?

LILLA

Thank you for saying that. I feel the same.

Silently they look at their menus. At the same time they look up and say –

BOTH

Popcorn shrimp?

They laugh.

BILL

Let's start with that.

Motions for the waiter.

(To waiter)

We'll start with this.

(To LILLA)

You in a time crunch or anything?

LILLA hesitates.

BILL

Don't worry. If you need to leave, just say so.

LILLA

No, I didn't mean – I mean, well –

BILL

I understand. Exit strategy. But let's start with the shrimp and take our time deciding what else we want.

LILLA
(Embarrassed)

Wow. I really am a rookie.

BILL
So am I. But I've been a lawyer for thirty five years and know how to read people. It's a good skill to have. (Beat) Bloody Mary?

LILLA
That sounds great!

BILL
They make good ones here. I checked it out.

LILLA
You did? When?

BILL
When I knew we were meeting. I always like to be prepared.

LILLA
You're probably a good lawyer too.

BILL
My clients think so.

LILLA
I considered Law, but got talked into journalism. Shoulda gone into Law.

BILL
It's not too late. You're young enough.

LILLA
For a new career? I doubt it.

BILL
Why not? You're what, forty-nine?

LILLA
(Sheepish)
Fifty. (Beat) I lied.

BILL
(Unruffled)
Close enough. But think about it. How many years would you practice? Twenty? Thirty?

Law school is three years. So, with life spans going well into the nineties, you could go back to school and have a new career and still retire.

LILLA

You have a great attitude!

BILL

I just think that life is a long game. And wherever you are, it's a place to start over.

LILLA

(Laughs)

And to think I was *this close* to getting a cat. (Beat) You've made me rethink that strategy.

WAITER brings the popcorn shrimp.

BILL

(To WAITER)

Can you bring us a couple of those terrific Bloody Mary's?

WAITER exits. BILL and LILLA each take a few bites. Bill suddenly pauses and puts his napkin up to his mouth.

BILL

Humph!

LILLA

What's wrong? You OK?

BILL looks up and smiles, first with his lips closed, then with a full grin. A tooth is missing from the front. LILLA gasps. BILL laughs.

LILLA

Wh- What happened to your tooth?

BILL

I swallowed it.

LILLA

What? When!?

BILL

(Nonchalant)

Just now. Eating this popcorn shrimp.

How could – you mean you just –? LILLA

Apparently so. BILL

I can't believe – ! LILLA

Me neither. BILL

It's your front tooth! LILLA

Yep. It is. BILL

It doesn't seem to bother you – at all? LILLA

I'll get another one. BILL
(Shrugs)

But you – ? LILLA

It's only a tooth. BILL

Only? LILLA

It's not like when I lost my foot. (Beat) Now *that* was something to worry about. BILL

What!? LILLA

BILL nods seriously, while LILLA's shock deepens.

Prosthesis. BILL

A –/ LILLA

/Prosthesis. BILL

For what? LILLA

LILLA tries not to be obvious as she looks him up and down. BILL scoots his chair so he can lift his right foot and dangle it. LILLA shrinks back.

My foot. BILL

LILLA tries to compose herself.

But – how –? LILLA

A fire. BILL
(Casually)

But – ? LILLA

It's a *good* prosthesis. BILL

BILL gets up to stomp on it like he's crushing glass. LILLA winces.

Wait! Don't! Won't you –?/ LILLA

/Hurt it? Nah. It's pretty sturdy. Want to see it? BILL
(Cheerful)

LILLA puts both her hands up, to gesture NO. Shakes her head.

LILLA

(Somber)

No – it’s not necessary. I, uh – I’m sorry – I –

BILL

No trouble. Really. Here, let me –

BILL starts to pull up his pants leg and LILLA tries to look away or for the exit. But she’s also drawn to watch. BILL pulls his slacks up and LILLA sees that it’s not a prosthesis at all and that his foot is intact. BILL laughs when he sees the look on her face.

BILL

Had you going, didn’t I?

BILL laughs, revealing the space in his teeth. He touches it with his finger. LILLA is stunned.

LILLA

That’s not very –

BILL

Funny? Sure it is. I mean, what else can I do with this obviously awkward moment but make light of it. I lost a tooth. OK. So what? I could make this into a tragedy, or comedy, and at least get a laugh out of it. Right? I mean, I’d rather laugh than be mortified – which I am, if you want to know. But where does that get me? This way, if we can laugh about it, maybe we can get through this Kodak moment together.

LILLA’s embarrassed.

LILLA

I just – sorry. I’m not very –

BILL

Experienced about this? What kind of experience prepares you for a guy losing a tooth eating popcorn? (Beat) Tell you what. Will you give me a chance at another date *after* I get this tooth fixed? It only fair – .

WAITER sets the Bloody Mary’s in front of them. They each lift them to make a toast.

LILLA

I – sure. Sure! You bet. Absolutely.

BILL

To a good sport, on a very weird first date.

BILL wraps his mouth around the straw in his glass and takes a long sip. He looks up and smiles.

BILL

This is great! The straw fits right between my teeth! (Beat - now serious) Next time you see me, this will be fixed and we can go out on a proper date.

LILLA

(Laughs)

Preferably one that doesn't involve losing body parts?

BILL takes her hand.

BILL

How 'bout we go dancing?

LILLA

Most men have two left feet.

BILL

I don't. And as you can see, they're both in working order.

BILL sticks both feet out and turns them around at the ankles. LILLA rolls her eyes but smiles.

LILLA

So you're a good dancer?

BILL

I'll let you be the judge of that. But – I've heard no complaints.

LILLA

Maybe I'll hold off on buying the cat.

BILL

You good with dinner beforehand?

LILLA

If you don't lose any more teeth.

Lights down.