

GWENNIE

I'm fine, Lanna. Though I certainly do look a fright, // from the trip –

LANNA

What? You have always // been a looker.

GWENNIE

I saw myself in that powder room mirror. I know what I saw!

LANNA

Don't be ridiculous.

GWENNIE

I know what the road did to this face, is // all I'm saying.

LANNA

And don't fish. Either.

GWENNIE

What?

LANNA

...nothing. So...the beans are trimmed, dinner shouldn't be but // a tick.

GWENNIE

Oh, let me take you out!

LANNA

What? No, the beans, they're –

GWENNIE

I know, but come on, I just arrived, let me do something nice for you. Well, something else nice! (*referencing the groceries she brought, of course; she laughs*)

LANNA

You're very generous.

GWENNIE

Don't mention it. Now let's get fully put together, // and we can –

LANNA

The thing is –

GWENNIE

Yes?

LANNA

No, I'm sorry, I did mean thank you, for the invitation, and the, um, items (*that's another reference to the groceries*), but I need to eat here.

(*pause*)

GWENNIE

Really? You have to?

LANNA

Need to, actually, is what // I said.

GWENNIE

All right, "need to?"

LANNA

...Yes.

GWENNIE

I see. Then we will simply table the motion until such time as // you are free to

LANNA

// But, the thing, the –

GWENNIE

(*continuous from her previous speech*) accept the invitation, I'm sorry, there's a thing?

LANNA

No, yes, there is. It's, I, I don't eat out. I eat here.

GWENNIE

You –

LANNA

That's right. I don't. Can't.

GWENNIE

Pray tell.

LANNA

I just have to be very careful of what I put into my body. I seem to have developed some rather significant allergies, and so I // eat here. What I grow, mostly.

GWENNIE

Allergies? I – Lanna, are you all right?

LANNA

I'm okay. I just eat here. Which ties in well with work, so...

GWENNIE

Uh-huh.

*(small pause)*

LANNA

But, um, I can offer you something. That you'll like – might, might // like.

GWENNIE

And what is that?

LANNA

It's...Is it too early for a cocktail?

GWENNIE

A cocktail? *(she laughs!)* "Somewhere on Earth it's time for a drink, so let's have one

LANNA & GWENNIE

*(LANNA joins in)* ...in an effort to bring the world closer together."

*(they laugh together, LANNA more gently than GWENNIE)*

GWENNIE (cont.)

God, I haven't thought of that in a hundred years!

LANNA

I have. *(they laugh again)* Dad. *(that was nice, and fond)* Okay.

*(LANNA moves over to a cupboard and retrieves two glasses. She takes them to a wall unit with a tiny spigot; she pours just a little clear liquid into each glass. GWENNIE watches. LANNA then adds a tiny leaf or two of some herb into each glass. LANNA brings the glasses to the table, sits, and slides one toward GWENNIE.)*

GWENNIE

Lanna, what on earth?

LANNA

Here's mud in your eye.

*(They raise their glasses to each other, and LANNA tips her glass back with a practiced hand, letting the liquid try to reach her lips, and the moment it does – the second her lips are wet – she sets the glass back on the table. Then she presses her lips together, and lets the hooch work its way into her mouth slowly, slowly, absorbing through her lips, warming her as it does.)*

*(Of course, GWENNIE is not familiar with the ritual, so she takes an actual sip. She bolts out of her chair.)*

GWENNIE

Sweet God – OH! That is not funny!

LANNA

*(a giggle)* Depends on where you're sitting.

GWENNIE

Lanna, what the – ! *(she is tearing up, and maybe sweating)*

LANNA

It's ungentle, this stuff.

GWENNIE

Sweet merciful –

*(GWENNIE races to the sink.)*

LANNA

Don't! Don't have water! You'll make it worse.

GWENNIE

Worse? How could // it –

LANNA

Trust me. You just have to wait it out.

GWENNIE

I can't! It's – Oh, God!

*(GWENNIE cannot stand or sit still while this fury is going on inside her oral cavity. She paces around like a particularly aggrieved zoo animal. LANNA laughs.)*

GWENNIE (cont.)

*(stopping in place)* So nice to know you find my discomfort so hilarious!

LANNA

What can I say? It's funny!

GWENNIE

It is not – Oh!

*(GWENNIE slowly, slowly begins to settle, LANNA still laughing some, and finally GWENNIE is able to breathe, to relax. She laughs just a bit as well.)*

LANNA

Are you feeling better?

GWENNIE

A little. *(they laugh)* Only a little! Stick a skull and crossbones on that thing!

LANNA

That would be warning. This is only for the initiated.

GWENNIE

Well. I can appreciate a good trial by fire. *(she winks, and suddenly looks tired, and just as suddenly recovers, though maybe not completely)*

LANNA

Just a little drop. 'Sall you want. Little drop.

*(LANNA tips her glass back for another lip moistening. GWENNIE sits, pushes her glass away from her with a very small, dry laugh, maybe picks at her heel or her elbow. LANNA is focused on the booze. GWENNIE looks around, reminding herself she used to live here, once upon a... They sit some more.)*

GWENNIE

So you work here, is that what you were saying?

LANNA

I do.

GWENNIE

That's nice. Oh, do you have to get back to it?

LANNA

*(still in communion with her glass)* Not for another hundred and nine minutes.

GWENNIE

Uh-huh. And what is it you –

LANNA

*(still in communion with her glass) Gwennie.*

*(GWENNIE quiets. LANNA smiles at her glass. GWENNIE looks around. Just as GWENNIE is about to say something...)*

LANNA (cont.)

How long are you staying? *(she fixes her eye on GWENNIE's)*

GWENNIE

Oh! Well, I hadn't really thought about it, in detail.

LANNA

Uh-huh. But if you had to guess?

GWENNIE

Well – if I'm not welcome, I'll move right along! I just // thought that it's been such a long time,

LANNA

// I didn't say that.

GWENNIE

*(continuous)* we might get to enjoy each other's company a little!

LANNA

I didn't say you weren't welcome. I asked what your plan was. Is.

GWENNIE

I don't particularly have one.

LANNA

Okay. Thank you. *(pause)* And of course you're welcome here. I was wondering, is all. Of course you're welcome.

*(LANNA stands. She reaches over to GWENNIE, touches her shoulder; then suddenly kisses the top of GWENNIE's head. LANNA moistens her lips with the last of the liquid in her glass, and takes the glass over to the sink. She gets a pan, oils it, puts it on the stove with some heat under it as she begins to hum or "la" a tune. She gets the beans, rinses them in the sink. GWENNIE smiles at her for a moment, raises her glass, tries again to "drink" successfully. She takes her glass to the sink as LANNA starts to put the beans in the pan. GWENNIE joins in the song, humming. They look at each other. The words of the song come back slowly but surely.)*

GWENNIE

*(singing)* "...on the way to getting farther, we can find the way we went..."

LANNA and GWENNIE

*(singing)* "When we wandered up the wildly wondering way we wished to wend!"

*(They smile at each other. GWENNIE tries to throw an arm around LANNA, but feels a sharp pain LANNA doesn't see. GWENNIE rubs LANNA's back instead.)*

LANNA

Why don't you get something from the root cellar to put in with the beans.

GWENNIE

Roger that!

*(GWENNIE removes a piece of floor, which is actually the lid of the small root cellar. She peers in, grabs a parsnip and a yam. She presents them to LANNA, a child with an excellent report card.)*

LANNA

Lovely. Very nice. Wanna get those peeled and diced?

GWENNIE

I sure do. *(opens a drawer, but doesn't find what she expects)* Oh! Where's the –

*(But LANNA is already getting a peeler for GWENNIE from another drawer.)*

LANNA

Board and knife're on the table. Have at it.

*(GWENNIE sits at the table, further clears away some of the groceries she brought, and begins peeling and slicing the vegetables inexpertly for some time; then she stops. She bursts into tears. LANNA senses it, but doesn't turn, simply faces her work, allowing GWENNIE space. Letting her cry.)*

GWENNIE

*(through her sobs)* Lanna! I – *(she cries and cries)* I'm wounded, here! I have wounds!

LANNA

*(not unkindly)* Okay.

*(GWENNIE cries. LANNA works. As GWENNIE's sobs begin to subside, LANNA hums the song she and GWENNIE sang. GWENNIE gulps in air, calming as the tune continues.)*

GWENNIE

Thank you.

LANNA

Don't mention it.

GWENNIE

And, I mean...thank you for...I don't know, thank you for letting me in here? I guess? For not kicking me out, or, // I mean, for just opening the door.

LANNA

Of course. Gwennie! Of course I'd open the door! I've wondered...a lot of times, I'd think about...

GWENNIE

Thank you for that. *(brings the cut vegetables to LANNA's side)* Think I'll try again... *(with a small smile, she gets her glass with the vicious booze in it)*

LANNA

*(a smile)* Knock yourself out.

*(LANNA pulls a leaf of the herb for her and drops it into GWENNIE's glass. GWENNIE drinks the proper way, as LANNA cooks.)*

GWENNIE

So I was out west. All over.

LANNA

Yes?

GWENNIE

I had a good thing going out west for a while, let me tell you!

LANNA

Do. Do tell me.

GWENNIE

Well! I was working in a gamery? In Reno, as a hostess. You know, charm the guests, get 'em drunker, throw 'em a wink and flash a little cleavage, you know what I'm talking about. And there was this fellow, Skip, working coat check. I'd see Skip all the time, never thought twice about him. But one night he came up to me on the floor! And of course we're not supposed to fraternize during work – I mean, he was off the clock, but I wasn't, and I certainly wasn't going to risk my job talkin' to some coat check, I MEAN! So I was about to tell him to shove off, but before I can do that he says, "Gwennie, I have an idea, and it is going to set us up for life. Just think about that!" And before I can even pick my jaw up off the floor – he's wandering off! No, not wandering. He sauntered.

GWENNIE (cont.)

That's what he did, he sauntered! Still in his uniform! Left me flummoxed, I can guarantee you that.

LANNA

Mm.

*(LANNA tends to the cooking for a moment. GWENNIE notices, and waits. LANNA's eyes return to her, and GWENNIE flashes her an instant smile.)*

GWENNIE

So anyway! I met up with Skip as soon as my shift was over, in the bar, and he orders me a Contretemps on the rocks – how he knows I drink Contretemps I don't know, but I certainly appreciated the thought! *(she laughs)* So there I am, grateful for the drink but with one eyebrow sky high, wondering what the hell curve ball he's about to throw my way. And this Skip, this coat check, of all people, launches into the smoothest pitch! I guarantee you have never heard a pitch this smooth.

LANNA

I'm sure I haven't.

GWENNIE

And he...Oh! Of course "you're sure!" You don't hear too many – Of course it would be the smoothest one you ever – *(LANNA smiles and nods)* Lanna, you're funny! Anyway, Skip tells me he has an idea in mind, and it's gonna take a couple of people to make it happen, and he thinks I am the exact person to help him. Well, I'd had a few sips of Contretemps by this time, so I have to admit I was listening. And it helped that Skip was well put together.

LANNA

Ah.

GWENNIE

Right. So Skip starts in. Tells me he has a notion to get a little extra money from the gamery. Now, right away, I tell him no, there is no way to make that happen, it's all been done and tried and those people have been...well, no one has heard from those people again. They've all been Sent Off. *(off LANNA's involuntary shiver)* I know, exactly. So no how no way are we gonna – And that's where he stops me, Lanna, with a finger to my lips and a look in my eyes and a soft, quiet "Shhhhhhh!" I'm not entirely sure, but I think my panties fell off when he did that. HA! I think they fell off my body and crawled away!, because I had to listen to him. And do you know what? What he was saying made sense!

LANNA

Huh.

GWENNIE

Had it all mapped out: He'd make the mark at coat check, I'd make sure the mark got a little something unexpected in his drink – but always, like, his fourth or fifth drink, not his first, we didn't want to be obvious – and then a third guy, fella in security, he was gonna escort the mark away when he started slurring his words and practically passing out, and between us we'd make sure we got hold of a few of the mark's chips – not all of them, Lanna. Not all. This was why Skip was so damn smart! Little bits, maybe couple times a week, and in a year, we'd have made our pile! Split it three ways, maybe have something left over to pay anyone off we'd need to – I mean, all the eyes on the prize in that place, sure, someone might catch on to us. But what, five, seven marks a month, we thought, would be a great way to get it done. Get those chips, save them up, cash them in saying they were tips – over a long period of time, who was gonna be the wiser?

LANNA

Sounds good.

GWENNIE

I'm telling you! Skip had the angles. Worked like a charm for six, seven months! (*she sips*)

LANNA

Well. I'm glad for you.

GWENNIE

Lanna? (*holds up her glass, smiling; LANNA gets it and pours her some more hooch*) Thank you! (*sips*) You know, this stuff is kind of fantastic if you give it a chance. But look who I'm telling! Mmmmm. Makes me feel all safe inside.

LANNA

Gwennie, what happened?

GWENNIE

(*stops drinking*) Well, you see, it was all going so well, until Enrique – he was our friend in security – he had to bring in another guy, Thunder, who had caught on. And Thunder was...Thunder is a scary man. He wanted it all. All the money, the money we'd been working so hard to put together since the beginning. Threatened us, told us he'd let Management know. We'd be Sent Off...And I already had one strike, so I can't // get caught doing anything –

LANNA

What? When did you get a strike?

GWENNIE

It was some time ago.

*(pause)*

LANNA

So, Thunder?

GWENNIE

He changed the game, all right. What we'd been up to, it wasn't, I don't know, ethical, but it was kind of a victimless crime, Lanna. I mean – all right, yes, we were “stealing from people,” but that was Skip's genius, we were always stealing from people who wouldn't miss it, you know? People wealthy enough to not count their chips, and not, you know, lose their homes because a thousand went missing one night in Reno. But Thunder wanted to up the stakes. Makes sense, it was a gamery, right? But he changed the game. He... *(she stops talking, drinks, remembers)*

LANNA

Okay.

GWENNIE

*(locking eyes with LANNA)* He made me do things. With the marks. For money.

LANNA

...Oh.

GWENNIE

So it became about how to...get out of there! Ya know? But I managed.

LANNA

I...

GWENNIE

*(dark, a grim truth in her eyes)* I managed.

*(Neither one knows what to say.)*

GWENNIE (cont.)

So let's eat!

LANNA

Gwennie –

GWENNIE

No! Enough. I shouldn't – ...This is my burden. Right?

LANNA

Yes.

GWENNIE

Not yours. Now let's have supper. Right after I finish this drink, and maybe one more.

*(GWENNIE sips. LANNA tries not to stare at her.)*