

Standby
a ten-minute play

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Characters

- Diane In her late forties, a CEO's wife, she is at once social and awkward, clinging to an idea until another catches her fancy.
- Jeanie In her thirties and Diane's personal assistant for seven years, she has modeled her professional attitude and style on the Gal Friday of Noir films.
- Trisha A landscaper in her mid-twenties, she sees vacant lots in their original green.

Setting

The present. Diane's house in Marin County, California.

White light floods Diane's living room: white carpet, white sofa. A large window, with thin veils meeting faintly pastel walls. It's hard to discern edges here, the room overexposed. DIANE and JEANIE sit on the sofa.

JEANIE

How much do you suppose is left of the old Route 66?

DIANE

The song?

JEANIE

Remember how I've always wanted to go on that road trip, the desert in an RV?

DIANE

Road trip? You're not planning on running out on me, too?

JEANIE

I'm buying a vintage Winnebago from this sweet grandpa type. He says he's done enough traveling—can you imagine—and the price is great...

DIANE

Somehow I can't see you driving a mobile home.

JEANIE

RV. Mobile homes are those things people live in.

So, boss, have you made that decision about my bonus? When we talked about it last month—

DIANE

About that...I still don't know. Times are tough. Our President's war is apparently just big enough to misplace my son but not big enough to save the economy. Steve's stock, you know...

JEANIE

Right. Sorry, but after six years, the bonus is practically part of my salary. And you seem to be doing fine, you know, financially. You've got the landscaper—

DIANE

Oh, good heavens, he's *not* coming today.

JEANIE

She's due any minute.

DIANE

I just can't. I'm not up for a big decision, you know? We could hear about Sam any minute, and—oh, well, we'll just send her away.

JEANIE

The yard looks fine the way it is anyhow.

DIANE

I suppose so. It's just so empty. God, this place needs a change, something drastic. But no, you don't even have to say it. Landscaping is expensive. We have to keep this in mind.

JEANIE

Well, thanks. I really appreciate that.

DIANE

I mean, what's another year or so with this lawn? It'll simply have to do. I was hoping to have it completely redone for the welcome home party, but no matter.

JEANIE

Look, until you hear one way or the other—

DIANE

There isn't going to be any other way, Jeanie. He's not "missing." The Navy just doesn't know where he is. There's a difference.

You know, I'll bet they declare their most important...men "missing" all the time, before sending them on a secret mission or something. That way the enemy doesn't think to look for them. He'll come back with a promotion—what do they call promotions, do you suppose? Advancements? Appointments? How would I know? Military talk, it's all curse words and gobbledygook.

JEANIE

Diane, you know—

DIANE

Anyhow, you're right about the yard: if we start something now, and he comes back next week or... You remember all that mud from the Bensons' fishpond.

JEANIE

Do I.

The doorbell rings, and immediately afterward DIANE's cell phone rings. She flips it open and checks the caller ID.

DIANE

No caller ID. That could be international—I have to take it.

[exiting] Hello? Hello?

JEANIE (muttering, as she crosses to the door)

She can't see me in an RV.

JEANIE answers the door. TRISHA, exuberant and in overalls, strides in, surveying the place.

JEANIE

Hello?

TRISHA

Hi, I'm Trisha Morris, from Ecology Arts.

JEANIE

Hi.

TRISHA

You have a marvelous lot here, Ms. Horne, positively inspirational. The slope to the street could be—

JEANIE

Hang on. I'm not *Mrs.* Horne. I'm her personal assistant.

TRISHA

Right! Jeanie. We spoke on the phone. Is *Mrs.* Horne here?

JEANIE

She'll be out in a minute.

TRISHA

Well, this place is amazing, isn't it? How big is the lot, anyway?

JEANIE

I don't know.

[lowering her voice] Look, so you don't waste a lot of time, I should tell you that the Hornes probably aren't going to start any big projects anytime soon.

TRISHA

Oh?

JEANIE

Between you and me, the Hornes aren't doing so well. Maybe you should just leave your business card, and we'll call you when things are looking better.

TRISHA

Man, this totally sucks. I need this job.

JEANIE

Tell me about it. I think they just axed my yearly bonus.

TRISHA

No, I mean *need* it. Everybody said this was the wrong time to start my own thing, but I couldn't stand another day behind that desk. Not another day. But my landlord's—oh, never mind. You don't want to hear about my problems.

JEANIE

Times are tough.

DIANE enters.

JEANIE

Diane, this is Trisha, the landscaper. Trisha, this is Mrs. Horne.

TRISHA

Hello.

DIANE

Nice to meet you.

JEANIE (to Diane)

Was that...?

DIANE

No.. *[to Trisha]* My son, Sam, is in the Navy.

TRISHA

Really? Where is he stationed?

DIANE

I don't know. Some boat somewhere. We never know where he's been until we see what he brings back—Sam and his gifts from exotic places. I've never asked him to—I'm not the demanding sort—but who wouldn't have a weakness for the occasional jade bracelet or silk scarf?

TRISHA

Well—

DIANE

Still, I hope he knows I'd rather have him back early than have, I don't know, a tapestry or whatever they have wherever he is. Not that a mother's opinion ever counts for much.

TRISHA

Anyhow, I was just admiring how the house is situated on this hill. You get so much sun up here. And the way the lawn flows to the sidewalk—your last landscaper did a very nice job. It's charming.

JEANIE

We're unanimous / on that one.

DIANE

[overlapping Jeanie's previous line, starting at the slash mark] / Thank you. It's not that the property isn't me; the problem is that it's me fifteen years ago.

TRISHA

This is really awesome for the late eighties.

DIANE

Don't you think it screams up-and-coming couple with a boy in little league? Those hedges, the oak, I mean really, they have to go. Obviously they were put in before anybody knew anything about Feng Shui.

TRISHA

Have you considered a brook instead? Running water can really stir up the positive chi.

DIANE

This place needs positive chi. Something.

JEANIE

That sounds awfully ambitious. Diane, did you know you could be Trisha's first client?

TRISHA

My first as an independent contractor. My portfolio has some great pictures of the last brook I created.

DIANE's cell phone rings again. She flips it open and checks the caller ID.

DIANE

[to Jeanie] Again, no caller ID. *[exiting, to Trisha]* Sorry, I have to take it. But I must see that brook.

JEANIE

Don't let her fool you. She's not in the market for a brook.

TRISHA

Nah, Diane is just like my mom—if she's determined to redesign, she's going to do it if it means putting the bankruptcy lawyers on hold until the job's finished.

JEANIE

The money's not worth it, not the way she'll hold it over you. She'll call you back twenty times because she doesn't like the sound the water makes under her bedroom window. At first you'll think she's just picky, but later you'll realize that she doesn't really care about the details, she's just bored and lonely and kind of pathetic, and bossing you around is the only thing she can do. Seriously—you should get out now.

DIANE enters.

DIANE

Damn telemarketer. Why can't they tell you that in the caller ID?

JEANIE

Well, if they told you, you'd never answer.

DIANE

Find out how they keep getting my number, okay? I can't have the damned *Chronicle* saleswoman tying up the line when Sam calls.

JEANIE

I'll see what I can do.

DIANE

We should get another Welcome Home sign for the front porch, don't you think?

JEANIE

Isn't the one from last time still good?

DIANE

No, we need one with less, um, stars and stripes. I've had enough of the raised eyebrows.

JEANIE

He loved that sign. Your neighbors should be ashamed of themselves.

DIANE

You're always so hasty to judge my neighbors. They all know he's become a Republican just to spite me. That's what children do, of course, but I would have hoped he'd choose a less embarrassing rebellion. I mean, honestly, the Navy?

TRISHA

If you're planning a party, we can totally time the construction so it doesn't interfere.

JEANIE

How are you going to do that without a return date? Diane, until we know something more concrete, you can't keep—

DIANE

The Navy! And to think, he grew up *here*.

The cell phone rings again.

Here we go again. I'll be right back.

DIANE exits.

TRISHA

Maybe that's him.

JEANIE

It's not. That son of hers has gone missing from his ship. I don't think that means, as Diane wants to believe, that the Navy has made some huge clerical error, but...

TRISHA

Oh.

JEANIE

Yeah, well... Instead of preparing herself for what's coming, she's running around planning his welcome home party. I just want to shake her. You work with someone long enough you can't help but care, you know? If she realizes her son is gone before I give notice, I'm stuck here for at least another six months, but, Jesus, somebody's got to snap her out of this.

TRISHA

Maybe redoing the property would cheer her up while she's waiting for news. This place is perfect. I can already see so many things I could do to liven it up.

JEANIE

You don't get it.

Diane enters.

DIANE

You've got to do something about this phone. Make them stop.

JEANIE

I'll try, but—

DIANE

This is ridiculous. What could be taking so long?

TRISHA

I'm sure he's—

DIANE

What sort of government sends men places they can't even tell their own mothers about? Did I just call him a "man"? What kind of government sends boys...

TRISHA

I'll bet they call the top guys "missing" all the time, before sending them on a secret mission. Totally trick the enemy.

DIANE

He'll come back with a promotion, advancement: an "up-grading." A "re-rating"?

JEANIE

Diane, you've got to stop—

DIANE

Trisha, those installed brooks, they recycle the water, don't they? Imagine that, an endless cycle of water, running around and around the house. Like a moat.

End of Play