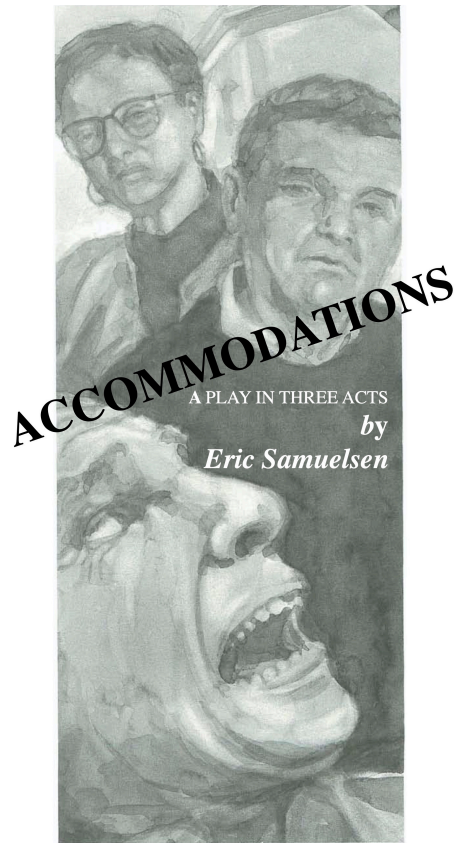


PERUSAL SCRIPT



Newport, Maine

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ACCOMMODATIONS

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ILLUSTRATION BY DOUG FAKKEL (Sunstone Magazine 1994)

ORIGINAL PRODUCTION

Accommodations was first presented by the Brigham Young University Department of Theatre and Film at the Margett's Theatre, 13-29 May 1993, directed by Thomas F. Rogers. The original cast was:

GEORGE — Bill Brown

VEEANN — Elizabeth J. Smith

LYNN — Samantha Smith

MICHAEL — J. Scott Bronson

CHUCK — Matthew Tyler Williams

CAROLINE — Lara Blackner

FRANKLIN — Curtis Brien

ROBYN — Stephanie Mills

MARTY — Leo Ware

CHARACTERS

(Five men, four women)

GEORGE MORTENSON — An architect in his fifties. The oldest of his siblings.

VEEANN MORTENSON — His wife, in her fifties.

MARTY MORTENSON — George's father; a man in his eighties. A former rancher; now confined to a wheelchair. He is a small man, unable to walk, but not even remotely feeble, his eyes are alert.

MICHAEL MORTENSON — George's youngest brother; in his mid-forties. An insurance salesman. Smaller than GEORGE, intense. A decent man, but pushed beyond his limits.

FRANKLIN MORTENSON — Second oldest of the Mortenson children, just two years younger than George. The assistant manager of a pharmacy. Awkward is the word for Franklin.

ROBYN MORTENSON — Franklin's daughter: Fifteen.

DR. CAROLINE O'HARA — George's sister; between Michael and Franklin in age. A pediatrician. A very professional woman, younger than the others, opinionated, outspoken, a bit disorganized, but basically well-meaning. Kind enough, when not crossed.

CHUCK HARSTAD — George and Veeann's son-in-law and the foreman of Marty's old ranch. Good looking in a blue collar sort of way, sullen.

LYNN HARSTAD — George and Veeann's daughter; married to Chuck. A quiet, worn looking, self-possessed young woman, in her late twenties to early thirties.

TIME: *The present.*

Act One — Scene One: Late one night, in mid-October

Act One Scene Two: A Friday night, two weeks later

Act Two: Saturday morning, the next day.

Act Three: Saturday evening.

SET: George and Veeann's house, somewhere in Utah. A kitchen on one side of the stage, and a family room attached. Between the kitchen and family room, stairs lead up to George and Veeann's room on the second floor; and a hall leads into the rest of the house; off the hall, we see two doors, Marty's room and a bathroom. In the kitchen are the usual appliances and a light with a buzzer; which was obviously recently added. There's a television in the family room, a stereo, and a huge bookcase. [Bookcase removed for Acts Two and Three.]

AUTHOR'S NOTE

IN SEPTEMBER 1990, I HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO TRAVEL to Norway in the company of my grandfather, Ragnar Andreas Samuelsen. "Bestefar," as we always called him, was then eighty-six years old, but had always been an active, hard-working man— sailor, arctic explorer, steelworker—and in many ways the trip was a happy one, as he and I visited family and friends. It was also on that trip, however, that I began to notice how badly his health was beginning to deteriorate. His decline continued after our return to the States. Eventually my father and my aunt were forced to make the difficult decision to place him in a nursing home, where he passed away in March of this year.

My father and my aunt are both active members of the Church, caring and kind people, whose only interest was the welfare of their father. Nonetheless, seeing how the decisions they were forced to make were so wrenching and difficult, the situation began to spark my interest as a playwright. The creative imp inside me began asking inconvenient questions. What happens when ones moral principles collide with financial realities? Which tends to win out? What if the people making such decisions were more selfish, less in tune with the Spirit, less caring, more grasping? What if the older relative involved in such a situation was similarly uncooperative and difficult? And so I wrote *Accommodations*. Ironically, we began rehearsals the week my grandfather died.

The characters in this play tend to represent darker shading; of people I have known in and out of the Church, and are polar opposites to my father and aunt. My grandfather, for example, had his moments of cantankerousness, but he was hardly a Marty Mortenson. While I hope the Mortensons, and their struggles, will be recognizable and real, I also hope nobody thinks they represent all Mormons, or even people of Faith. The play is intended much more as a warning than as a portrait.

ACCOMMODATIONS A play in three acts by Eric Samuelsen (5m 3m 1tg) Grandfather Marty is getting older and the family needs to come together and care for him. George and Veeann are both active members of their Church, caring and kind people whose only interest is his welfare. But what happens when moral principles collide with financial realities? Which tends to win out? What if those making such decisions were more selfish, less in tune with the Spirit, less caring, more grasping? "In a place where love and brutality must co-exist, what compromises are acceptable, even essential, and at what point do they become manipulations or betrayals of ourselves or others?" Awarded Best Play of 1994 by the AML.

ORDER #2023

Eric Samuelsen taught at Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio before joining the faculty at Brigham Young University in 1992. He became head of the Playwriting program at BYU in 1999. He has also taught as an adjunct faculty member in the Religion department. He retired from BYU in 2012.

As a playwright, Samuelsen has had twenty-seven plays professionally produced in Utah, Indiana, Louisiana, New York, and California. Some of his plays include *Gadianton*, which has seen three professional productions across the country, *A Love Affair with Electrons*, *Family*, *The Plan*, and *The Way We're Wired*. He is resident playwright at Plan-B Theatre Company in Salt Lake City, who designated their 2013-14 season a 'Season of Eric, including productions of six of his plays.

He is a member of the Playwrights' Circle, and the Dramatists Guild. He is three-time winner of the Annual Award in Playwriting offered by the Association for Mormon Letters (AML) and he became president of AML in 2007. In 2013 the organization awarded him the Smith Pettit Award for his lifetime work as a playwright.

He has been a staff writer for the on-line satirical magazine *The Sugarbeet*. He was also featured in the book *Conversations with Mormon Authors*, edited by Chris Bigelow. He is a noted Ibsen translator, and has also published scholarly articles on 19th and 20th century Scandanavian Theatre, and more recently, on LDS drama and film. He blogged at *Mormoniconoclast.com*. Eric died in September of 2019 after a long battle with polymyositis. This has left a huge hole in the Theatre Community within, and outside of, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

A program note from Thomas Rogers—Director of the original BYU production.

These premiere performances of *Accommodations* introduce an accomplished and most promising playwright to the BYU Mainstage. *Accommodations* also makes a significant contribution to the as yet far too limited canon of important Mormon plays.

I have heard Eric Samuelsen intelligently and passionately expound on the present state of Mormon theater, and I agree that in the last several years it has become an almost extinct art form.

Professor Samuelsen does more than complain however — as his final realistic script witnesses. It is a script that, as others have noted, could be about many a contemporary family — Mormon, Jewish, Catholic, etc. But, by holding up it's a mirror to the LDS Mortonsens — without varnish or easy solutions — *Accommodations* it reminds us of all we have in

common with others, that the social ills we so decry elsewhere are, often as not, ours too. The play is caustic but possibly therapeutic, like a good emetic. Ever since Aristotle, after all, that has been the intent of all serious drama. I am also impressed with the script's architectonics, its structure, which in performance the actors have tried to render almost musically, in rhythmic cadences and swells. Had it been my play, I'd have titled its three acts: "Andante," "Fugues," and "Scherzo."

Accommodations

ACT ONE

SCENE I

George and Veeann's family room/kitchen. It is the middle of the night. In the family room is a card table covered with an accordion file organizer and numerous papers. We see a flashlight outside the house and hear scratching at the front door. CHUCK'S shadowy figure slips into the room. He looks around for a moment, getting his bearings, then heads over to the card table. He pulls out a Polaroid camera and takes a picture of the card table. Then he begins looking through the papers in the file. After he searches for a moment, we hear some movement from the top of the stairs. CHUCK moves away from the table, trips and falls. Grabbing his shoulder; he curses under his breath, crosses to the kitchen, and switches off his flashlight. A light comes on at top of the stairs. GEORGE appears, wearing a bathrobe. He comes a few feet down the stairs, bends over, looks around.

GEORGE: It's okay, Vee. I don't see anything.

(GEORGE heads back up the stairs. We hear a door close. CHUCK returns to the table. Looks at papers again. Finds the one he needs. He takes out a small notebook, copies down some figures. Then he carefully consults the Polaroid as he puts the papers back on the table the way he found them. He quietly slips out the front door again.)

SCENE II

(The same room, late one Friday evening, in the fall. GEORGE sits in the living room, watching a taped football game on television, a plate of food on his knee. He is sitting by the card table, looking at papers.)

GEORGE: Come on, come on . . . nice play! Fourth down, now let's block the punt.

(Enter VEEANN from Marty's room. She is carrying a bucket, a soiled Depends, rags, dirty clothes.)

VEEANN: I suppose it's just crucially important that you see every play.

GEORGE: *(a little guiltily)* Something to do while I look this stuff over.

VEEANN: Wait a minute. This isn't the game you taped last Sunday, is it?

GEORGE: Last night.

VEEANN: They played on a Thursday?

GEORGE: It was the Thursday night edition of Monday night football.

VEEANN: That makes as much sense as anything.

GEORGE: Couldn't watch it last night, because of stake priesthood. I thought you liked it when I taped them.

VEEANN: It does beat the dark ages, George, before God gave us women the VCR. Honestly, George, how many Sunday dinners were ruined because you had to sit there, my finest china balanced on your knee, glomming your food down half chewed, watching the Forty-niners, or the Bears, whoever. Racing home from church so you could watch the fourth quarter. The girls and I tiptoeing around so as to not disturb you and Tommy and your precious games.

GEORGE: It wasn't as bad as all that. A good father-son activity, I always felt. Besides, what did you used to do on Sundays? Watch old movies, Tyrone Power and Dorothy Lamour, Danny Kaye, Donald O'Connor. . . .

VEEANN: That's different.

GEORGE: *(He looks over at her)* How is he?

VEEANN: Asleep.

GEORGE: Good. Was it bad?

VEEANN: I just keep telling myself, after this weekend, it's over.

GEORGE: I'm sorry I couldn't help.

VEEANN: You heard him. "Stay the hell out, George. Veeann! I want Veeann." Always Veeann.

GEORGE: I'm sorry, honey

VEEANN: It's okay, George. Like I said, after this weekend. . . .

(Crosses to him at the card table.)

What are you finding?

GEORGE: Pretty much what I expected. He bought land.

VEEANN: Where?

GEORGE: Everywhere. A few acres here, an old field there, a worn-out ranch, spread all across the valley Most of it close to worthless. Probably some of it close to prime.

VEEANN: Done?

GEORGE: Thanks.

(She crosses to him, takes his tray back to the kitchen.)

VEEANN: Is any of it worth developing?

GEORGE: No way to say unless I drive up north some Saturday and look at it. It's mostly just scrub land, mesquite and tumbleweed. It's that generation. They got into their heads a single thought: "land is a good investment," and never went any farther. They just bought. Did I tell you about that one piece, up the canyon?

VEEANN: With the hot spring?

GEORGE: That's right. Thirty-five acres, all it has are a few scrub pine and a hot spring. But he doesn't own the mineral rights and there's no record of who does. Worst of all, he doesn't have access. We'll have to call the neighbors just to get permission to look at it. It's worthless.

VEEANN: A shame, isn't it?

GEORGE: You know, when I think of my mother, patching up hand-me-downs and cooking on a coal stove for all those years so he could go into debt to buy a stand of trees and a hot springs nobody can get to—

(Shakes his head.)

VEEANN: I know, George.

(The buzzer sounds.)

GEORGE: I thought he was asleep.

VEEANN: He was.

GEORGE: Do you want me to ...

(a pause)

VEEANN: No, no. I'll get it.

(VEEANN crosses back to MARTY'S room.)

GEORGE: It always has to be Dad's way, everything has to be. No thought to...

(Back to the T.V)

Look at that! Seventy-five yards, right down the middle. Young to Rice, I swear he's better than Montana.

(He hits the fast forward.)

Skip the extra point.

(He looks at the papers from the accordion file with distaste, puts them away, picks up a brochure.)

Did I tell you what Meyer wanted for the development? A health club, right in the middle of the subdivision? Racketball courts, a swimming pool, a weight room. He figures they'll have the neighborhood association run the thing.

(VEEANN comes back in.)

Everything okay?

VEEANN: He wanted his pillow adjusted. Dozed right back off again.

GEORGE: Can I help?

VEEANN: No.

GEORGE: I know it gets to you.

VEEANN: It's all right, George.

(Changing the subject.)

You know, a health club, it's not a bad idea.

GEORGE: With the country club six miles down the road? A&P twenty minutes away in the city? I mean, that's from his advertising, he's talking about nearby facilities in his brochure. But he's one of those skinny jogger types; you can't talk to him. Everything health and fitness.

WEANN: Well, I know how much this development means to you.

GEORGE: It's a nice coup for us. I may have to hire a new draftsman just to handle some of the routine work.

(VEEANN crosses to the kitchen and begins putting the last touches on a plate of hors d'oeuvres.)

Didn't you think it was strange, what Dad said tonight?

VEEANN: George, there's nothing wrong with his mind. Caroline hasn't been to visit in six months, and Franklin in three. Michael hasn't come down for weeks. No one's even called since his birthday. You tell him they're all coming to visit the same weekend, he has to know something's up.

GEORGE: I suppose you're right.

VEEANN: His children are coming to decide what to do about him.

GEORGE: I know. And he's right. That's what makes it worse. What're those?

VEEANN: A few hors d'oeuvres.

GEORGE: What are those things on top?

VEEANN: What, these? Crab. And see, I've also got some shrimp, some with pate.

GEORGE: Thanks.

(She brings the tray over to him.)

Okay, the Medicare requirements, last physician's statement, cost of in-home nursing. Looks like everything.

VEEANN: Did you get both doctors? You know Caroline.

GEORGE: Just Hamilton. She'll just want the neurologist.

VEEANN: *(Looking at his list.)* You've only listed the nursing homes. Didn't we get that price list?

GEORGE: It's just one option. I didn't want it to look too specific.

VEEANN: Too specific?

GEORGE: Like we'd already decided. Nursing home. It's a frightening word.

VEEANN: It is.

GEORGE: "A warehouse where you wait to die." That's what Caroline called it last time.

VEEANN: I remember.

GEORGE: It's more a choice. Just another option that they need to be aware of.

VEEANN: Yes.

GEORGE: I plan to bring it up, Veeann.

VEEANN: Don't you think they need enough information to evaluate that choice?

GEORGE: I've got the price list here, if anyone wants to see it.

(Changing the subject.)

Have you decided where everybody's going to sleep?

VEEANN: I figured I'd put Caroline in Frannie's old room. When's she getting in?

GEORGE: Her flight comes in tonight. I offered to pick her up, but she said she'd rent a car.

VEEANN: Really?

GEORGE: That's Caroline.

VEEANN: Michael in Tommy's room and Franklin on the hide-a-bed in my sewing room.

Chuck and Lynn are coming with Michael; we'll put them in Lynn's old room.

GEORGE: I'm still worried about Lynn being here.

VEEANN: I wanted to see her. Since Michael and Chuck were coming anyway, I thought I'd grab a chance to visit with my daughter.

GEORGE: Sure. Still, a family council with only one of the grandchildren invited. You know how easily Caroline feels slighted.

VEEANN: George, that's silly. She could hardly bring Trevor and Phillipa from California for this. The next thing you'll be saying is that Caroline might resent my presence at the meeting.

GEORGE: She might.

VEEANN: Well, let her resent it. I'm the person most directly affected by this decision; naturally I expect to be part of it.

GEORGE: I'm just saying . . .

VEEANN: Caroline may be the youngest, George, but you let her bully you all the same, all of you do.

GEORGE: Who's watching Lynn's kids?

VEEANN: She said she was going to leave them with Ruth.

GEORGE: Ruth. Her and Michael's seven and now Lynn's four. And probably a half dozen neighborhood kids, all in that three-bedroom, one bath.

VEEANN: And not much of a yard.

GEORGE: The woman's a saint.

VEEANN: Well, I don't like to impose on her. But as much as I would love to see my grandchildren, this is an adult gathering. Besides, I want to talk with Lynn.

GEORGE: About her and Chuck?

VEEANN: Woman talk, George.

GEORGE: *(uncomfortably)* Well, she's not going to be the only grandchild, as it happens.

VEEANN: Oh?

(A light dawns.)

Oh no.

GEORGE: Yes. Franklin told me he is bringing Robyn.

VEEANN: That's just impossible, George. You didn't say yes?

GEORGE: I didn't know what to say, Franklin . . .
(He gestures helplessly.)

VEEANN: I know. Franklin.

GEORGE: I told him we didn't have much extra bed space.

VEEANN: You can't be subtle with Franklin, George. Its like your father's story about the mule and the two-by-four. You have to get his attention first.

GEORGE: He said he would bring a sleeping bag for her.

VEEANN: That's not the point, George. What are we going to do with her while we're meeting? You can't expect Lynn to entertain her.

GEORGE: No, no.

VEEANN: Well?

GEORGE: I believe she knows some people here in town.

VEEANN: Well, of course she does. She'll ring up the local chapter of Teenagers from Hell. Don't you remember last summer?

GEORGE: The one with the nose ring?

VEEANN: And the spiked hair? And the eyeshadow? And the music. What was it she was trying to make us listen to? Something about Ted Kennedy?

GEORGE: I thought it was Dead Kennedy The Dead Kennedys? Can that be right?

VEEANN: Honestly, George, this is impossible.

GEORGE: We could move the VCR up to the bedroom, and let her rent some movies.

VEEANN: Do you trust Robyn's taste in movies?

GEORGE: Honey, she's harmless enough. We'll send out for pizza, she'll probably think it's a real treat.

VEEANN: I shudder to think of what Robyn would consider "a real treat."
(Lights pull into the driveway.)

Well, it looks like somebody's here.

GEORGE *(crossing to the window):* It looks like Michael's car. You ready?

VEEANN: *(Nods.)* Ready
(Crosses to the front door: Opens it.)

Lynn!

LYNN: Mom!
(LYNN enters, hugs her. Turn to GEORGE, another hug.)

Dad!

GEORGE: Lynn, you look great.

LYNN: Actually, I'm beat. I had pack meeting until late last night, and got home in time to help round up cattle. Another fence down.

VEEANN: It sounds like a weekend away from it all is just what you need.

GEORGE: How are the kids?

LYNN: Great, you know, the usual.

VEEANN: How's Justin dealing with first grade?

LYNN: You know, the first day of class, he was all clingy and teary "I don't want to go, Mommy," all the way to the school. We walked in the classroom, and the first thing he saw was the bookcase full of books. All his favorites, Dr. Seuss, Berenstain Bears, Mercer Mayer, Bill Peet. Then it was, like, "Later, Mom," like I didn't even exist. I cried all the way home.

GEORGE: Where's your suitcase?

LYNN: Actually, Chuck could use a hand with it. He was breaking a colt and hurt his shoulder.

GEORGE: I'll see if I can help.

(Exits.)

VEEANN: I'm so glad you were able to get away.

LYNN: Well, Ruth is just a saint. I'm going to pay her back one of these days, if I have to kidnap her and Michael and drive them to the movies myself.

VEEANN: Every time you come down, I'm just amazed. You look like such a rancher.

LYNN: Well, I am a rancher.

VEEANN: And it's going all right?

LYNN: *(steadily)* Everything's just great.

VEEANN: Are you sure?

LYNN: Mom, the kids love the ranch. Melissa and Justin are horse crazy. Chuck says he'll buy Melissa a pony for her baptism, if she can show him she knows how to take care of it. You should see her with old Muffin.

VEEANN: And Chuck?

LYNN: Chuck loves the ranch, too.

(Changing the subject.)

How about you and Dad? Hasn't he been working on some new development?

VEEANN: Oh, you know your father. It's the biggest project the firm has ever taken on, and he's always griping about the builder, or the site, or the specs, but you know he's really pleased.

(The door opens, and GEORGE enters with a suitcase. Following him are CHUCK and MICHAEL. CHUCK is wearing his arm in a sling.)

GEORGE: . . . endless problems. We've sprayed and sprayed. Maybe the frost will kill them, start again in the spring. Vee, look who's here.

MICHAEL: Vee, good to see you again.

VEEANN: Good to see you, Michael.

CHUCK: Mom Mortenson.

VEEANN: Chuck, my goodness. What did you do?

CHUCK: Colt bucked me.

VEEANN: That's what Lynn said.

GEORGE: I like the hat. You look more like John Wayne every time we see you.

LYNN: That's my husband. The Duke.

MICHAEL: *(abruptly)* Is Dad up?

VEEANN: Actually, he dozed off watching Wheel of Fortune. He'll be up soon.

GEORGE: Well, Lynn, you're in your old room. Let me take this up for you.

VEEANN: I'll get you your linens.

(VEEANN, GEORGE and LYNN head upstairs.)

So, how's little David doing with the potty training?

LYNN: Well, he seems to have pee pee down pretty well. Poo poo is another matter.

(LYNN and VEEANN exit.)

MICHAEL: Nice touch.

CHUCK: Whaddya mean?

MICHAEL: Bringing your wife along. Good move.

CHUCK: They're her parents.

MICHAEL: We've got too much at stake here, Chuck. I was planning to use the drive down to work out our approach.

CHUCK: Our approach, right.

MICHAEL: You're still in, aren't you?

CHUCK: Maybe.

MICHAEL: Chuck, we've talked this over. This is a sure thing.

CHUCK: Yeah. Like the last sure thing.

MICHAEL: That hasn't fallen through yet.

CHUCK: I may be a goat roper, Michael, I'm not an idiot. Attorney General's office is investigating? And the FBI?

MICHAEL: Nothing's been proven. I got a check, you got a check.

CHUCK: Seed money, Michael. They suckered us.

MICHAEL: Well, don't talk to me. No one was twisting your arm.

CHUCK: And now you got a new scheme, another sure fire thing. We're all gonna get rich, start using twenty dollar bills for toilet paper.

MICHAEL: Has anyone asked you for money?

CHUCK: Not this time. Not yet.

MICHAEL: This time, it's real, Chuck.

CHUCK: Uh huh.

MICHAEL: You've talked to Jay Bell, you talked to Forsman.

CHUCK: I talked to the guys from Mountain Security, too.

MICHAEL: But this time you've seen the documentation. They have the financing. They'll get the zoning. That's what I'm saying, it's real this time, Chuck.

CHUCK: I heard the sales pitch, Michael.

MICHAEL: And you bought in.

CHUCK: Hey, I got you your information, didn't I? You didn't even know if he owned that one tract. I'm the one you got to sneak into my wife's parent's house middle of the night. I'm in.

MICHAEL: Good.

CHUCK: For now

MICHAEL: Fine.

(Pause.)

You know, I hate this, don't you?

CHUCK: What?

MICHAEL: This whole thing. The deception.

CHUCK: Me, too.

MICHAEL: It borders on dishonesty.

CHUCK: Borders, yeah.

MICHAEL: I mean, I'm prepared to come clean. Tell them everything. But I need the money

CHUCK: Me, too.

MICHAEL: And who knows. The rest of the land may be worth even more.

CHUCK: So how do we handle this?

VEEANN: *(coming down the stairs)* Michael! There you are! I thought you were right behind us.

MICHAEL: Sorry, Vee.

VEEANN: I'm putting you in Tommy's old room.

MICHAEL: How is Tommy?

VEEANN: He called a couple of weeks ago. Says he loves Corvallis.

(Ring at the door, heads for the door.)

We haven't heard from him since, which must mean his money's holding out.

(Opens the door)

Caroline!

(Shouts up the stairs.)

George! It's Caroline.

CAROLINE: Hello, Vee. Michael, Chuck.

(They all ad lib greetings.)

MICHAEL: Caroline. How's California?

CAROLINE: Full of oranges. How on earth do you people find your way out of that airport? I think I took the same exit ramp three times.

VEEANN: You look tired. Can I get you something? Diet coke?

CAROLINE: Fine. Really though, 80, 15, 215, this exit, that, I didn't know where I was. And the rental car map was no use at all. As for the drivers in this state, well! Like it's some kind

of crime to let you merge in front of them. I never want to hear another word about California drivers as long as I live.

MICHAEL: We'd have been happy to pick you up.

CAROLINE: I like having my own wheels.

GEORGE: *(Coming down the stairs.)* Caroline! How's my kid sister?

CAROLINE: George, you've put on weight again. I know you have that stair climber, I bet you haven't used it in a month

GEORGE: And you're still smoking, aren't you?

CAROLINE: Not this weekend. I've got this Nicoderm patch thing I'm trying. Michael, you're getting fat, too.

MICHAEL: Maybe a bit of a paunch.

CAROLINE: So, how's Dad?

VEEANN: He's sleeping right now.

CAROLINE: Good. What's the latest from that quack Hamilton?

GEORGE: I'll give the whole report when Franklin gets here.

CAROLINE: Did you get me those test results?

GEORGE: They wouldn't let me have all his charts, but I got most of what you asked for.

CAROLINE: We're meeting tonight, I hope. I really can't stay past Sunday. It was hard enough getting away for a weekend.

MICHAEL: Dad said you had brought in a new partner.

CAROLINE: I did. Obnoxious little twerp named Shahrami. Akeem Shahrami. The nurses all call him Dr.-I'm-so-wonderful behind his back. He overheard them and thought it was a compliment.

VEEANN: Is he a good doctor?

CAROLINE: I wish he was half as good as he thinks he is. An office politician like you wouldn't believe. I've got to get back and make sure he hasn't stolen half my patients.

GEORGE: Can I bring in your suitcase?

CAROLINE: You certainly can.

(Hands him car keys.)

I've got a compact and an overcoat in the front seat, too.

MICHAEL: I'll give you a hand.

(GEORGE and MICHAEL exit out the front door)

CAROLINE: Where are you putting me, Veeann? In Frannie's old room, as usual?

VEEANN: If you don't mind the Bon Jovi poster. I had to promise not to take it down.

CAROLINE: Isn't she about finished?

VEEANN: One more year. Unless . . .

(crosses her fingers.)

CAROLINE: No. Not that geek from Fresno?

VEEANN: Randy Tanner. And he's a very nice young man. Engineering student.

CAROLINE: Just what the world needs. Lose a terrific young journalist, gain another lousy housewife.

(To VEEANN.)

No offense.

VEEANN: *(a bit stiffly)* None taken. Anyway, we keep waiting to hear, but no announcement yet.

(MICHAEL and GEORGE carry in baggage.)

George, those go . . .

GEORGE: I know. Upstairs, Michael.

(He and MICHAEL head upstairs.)

LYNN: Actually, Frannie was saying that she thought she'd go on a mission.

CAROLINE: Another waste.

VEEANN: Frannie?

LYNN: We talked on the phone last week.

VEEANN: She hasn't said a word to me or your father.

LYNN: She hadn't made up her mind. But I don't think she's planning to marry anytime soon.

CAROLINE: Good for her. Never a good idea to marry too young.

LYNN: I was married at twenty

CAROLINE: I was nineteen, I speak from experience, kiddo. In love for the first time at twelve, sexually active at fourteen, pregnant at eighteen, and divorced by my twentieth birthday. All because of this ridiculous notion that attracting some man is the be-all and end-all of a woman's existence. Took me two disastrous marriages to knock all that nonsense out of me once and for all.

VEEANN: In the meantime, you have two terrific kids to show for it.

CAROLINE: Neither of whom will ever marry, if I have anything to say about it.

LYNN: Mom, what was it Phillipa wanted for Christmas? Something for her Barbie, I remember. Bridal accessories?

CAROLINE: Don't you dare!

(General laughter)

She gets enough gender stereotyping from her stepfather. Let's see, that leaves Alicia. She's still in Idaho?

VEEANN: That's right. Steve's still in residency.

CAROLINE: Well, orthodontia is where the bucks are.

(The doorbell rings, as MICHAEL and GEORGE come down the stairs.)

I bet that's Franklin!

VEEANN: I'll get the door, George.

(She opens the door)

Franklin! Good to see you!

(Others ad lib greetings. FRANKLIN enters. Kisses her awkwardly.)

FRANKLIN: Hello, Vee. I'm glad you could put us up.

(Nods.)

Michael, Chuck.

MICHAEL: Franklin, good to see you.

(ROBYN pushes her way into the room. She's wearing a Walkman. Without a word, she slouches over toward the couch.)

FRANKLIN: Robyn, could you . . . uh . . .

(Crosses to her gestures and speaks loudly.)

Could you say hello to your Aunt Vee?

ROBYN: When this song's over.

(FRANKLIN stands over her ineffectually.)

GEORGE: Franklin. Glad you could come.

FRANKLIN: George, good to see you.

LYNN: Uncle Franklin.

FRANKLIN: Lynn.

(They embrace.)

How's life on the ranch?

LYNN: *(Crossing to CHUCK.)* Pretty overwhelming at times. But the kids absolutely love it.

GEORGE: Well, of course they do. It's a great place for kids. Horses, livestock, climbing trees.

Remember the fun we had sailing pea pods down the irrigation ditch?

MICHAEL: And chasing jackrabbits on horseback.

CAROLINE: I'm glad the guys are all feeling so nostalgic. Chores, that's all I remember.

FRANKLIN: We did chores, Caroline.

CAROLINE: Sure, the same chores I did, divided three ways. By the time I came along, you were gone.

(Uprouar as they all top each other.)

GEORGE: He spoiled you rotten, Caroline!

MICHAEL: You never mucked out the stables. Right?

FRANKLIN: Or the goats. I had the goats. That's what I remember.

MICHAEL: Currying the mare, you remember that one . . .

CAROLINE: I did just as many chores.

(Talking over them.)

FRANKLIN: Did you have to replace fencing? I remember the barbed wire . . .

MICHAEL: How about replacing windmill bands, did you ever . . .

GEORGE: Or branding. . .

ROBYN: *(snatching out her earphones)* Do you mind!

(She glares at them, and they all stare at her She returns to her music.)

VEEANN: Well, look. It's seven-thirty. Let's get everyone settled, and then we all can get an early start on things. Franklin, I'm putting you on the hide-a-bed in my sewing room upstairs.

FRANKLIN: That'll be fine.

VEEANN: I wish I'd known Robyn was coming, too, I'd have made arrangements. Do you think she'll be comfortable on the sofa down here?

ROBYN: *(emerges from the Walkman.)* Dad will be fine on the sofa. I'm taking the hide-a-bed.

VEEANN: *(under her breath)* Honestly.

FRANKLIN: Robyn, I think your Aunt Vee . . .

ROBYN: Dad, the hide-a-bed mattress is too soft for your back. Besides, you're all going to meet in here. You'll want me out of the way.

VEEANN: *(at a loss)* Well, perhaps . . .

GEORGE: We were thinking we could move the VCR to the TV upstairs in our bedroom.

Maybe we could order in pizza, you could rent a movie.

LYNN: That sounds fun. Robyn, maybe we can find *The CourtJester*? I'm sure you'd enjoy that, it's an old family favorite.

ROBYN: I'm meeting some guys I met last time. Don't know when I'll be back.

GEORGE: Curfew in this house is twelve o'clock, Robyn.

ROBYN: Oh, that'll be okay, George.

VEEANN: Uncle Geor . . .

ROBYN: Dad will be downstairs, he can just let me in. Dad, I need some money.

FRANKLIN: Oh. Very well. I suppose I could front you a little . . .

ROBYN: You got fifty from the Redi-cash. That'll do.

FRANKLIN: *(reaches for his wallet.)* I had actually hoped to have a reserve . . .

ROBYN: *(takes his wallet, removes the money.)* Thanks. Anyone give me a ride downtown?

(They all stare at her, dismayed, she shrugs.)

Or I could just hitch.

CHUCK: I'll drop you off. If your Uncle Michael will lend me his keys.

ROBYN: Don't put yourself out, Cousin Charles.

CHUCK: Chuck. And I'm not your cousin.

ROBYN: Cousin-in-law, then.

MICHAEL: *(handing CHUCK keys and a credit card)* Here. My Shell card. Fill it up while you're out.

CHUCK: Be back soon.

(CHUCK and ROBYN exit.)

CAROLINE: Well!

FRANKLIN: *(a chuckle that doesn't quite work.)* High spirited teenagers. She . . . can be quite a . . . quite a handful.

(They all murmur ad libbed agreement.)

LYNN: She's really quite attractive. It's a look all her own, of course.

(They again murmur ad libbed agreement.)

FRANKLIN: Well, I'll just unpack Robyn's things. In the sewing room upstairs?

VEEANN: That's right, Franklin. Top of the stairs, second right.

(He takes a suitcase up. They watch until he's gone.)

CAROLINE: Well, if you ask me, that situation's gone from bad to worse.

LYNN: Poor Uncle Franklin.

GEORGE: Since Vickie's death, he's really had it tough.

CAROLINE: Well, it's high time he pulled out of it. All right, Vickie's gone and we all miss her. But it's been nearly four years, and in the meantime, he's got a daughter to raise.

GEORGE: Caroline! Keep your voice down.

CAROLINE: I'll say it to his face if you want. I'm sorry, he's my brother, but Robyn's problems are his fault.

LYNN: Sometimes I think that way, too, Aunt Caroline. But I see a lot of both of them, and I don't know. She's just a teenager. Maybe a little more rebellious than some.

GEORGE: Rebellious? You saw what happened. I tried to set a curfew and you saw how far that went.

CAROLINE: I keep telling you, it's the parenting. Poor kid never had a chance.

MICHAEL: Well, I'm not sure that's any of our business.

VEEANN: I agree. Meantime, Lynn, maybe this weekend, the two of us can watch *The Couut Jester*. It may be a bit tame for the younger generation, but I think it still holds up.

LYNN: I always thought I was the younger generation. Not anymore.

CAROLINE: Well, Vee, your Frannie's not a lot older than Robyn, and she is nowhere near as awful. It's not the age.

GEORGE: Lynn, honey, do you want me to move the VCR anyway? You could still sit upstairs and watch something.

LYNN: I think I'll just sack out. Four kids on a ranch and you start to think that a decent night's sleep is the biggest luxury life has to offer. Goodnight all.

(They all ad-lib goodbyes as she climbs the stairs.)

CAROLINE: Well, I don't know about you, but I think Lynn . . .

VEEANN: Caroline, don't.

CAROLINE: Don't? Don't what?

VEEANN: As soon as someone leaves a room, Caroline, you have to make your pronouncement.

CAROLINE: I don't.

VEEANN: You do. You're welcome to talk about Franklin to your heart's content, but leave Lynn alone.

CAROLINE: Vee . . .

VEEANN: I mean it, Caroline.

CAROLINE: I was just going to say how terrific she is.

VEEANN: Yes, and then the kicker. “Considering her situation.” Considering the ranch and the children and the marriage. Don’t.

CAROLINE: *(a little hurt)* I don’t know what you’re talking about. I don’t make those kinds of judgments about people. Do I, Michael?

MICHAEL: All the time, Caroline. Vee’s right.

CAROLINE: Hmmph.

(FRANKLIN comes down the stairs, carrying a largish paper sack.)

Well, I certainly don’t mean anything by it. I’ve always thought the world of Lynn.

VEEANN: We know. Hors d’oeuvres, anyone?

MICHAEL: Thanks, Vee, I’d love some.

CAROLINE: Well, I shouldn’t.

(Helps herself from the tray.)

GEORGE: It looks like we’re all here. Shall we begin, or should we wait for Chuck?

MICHAEL: Chuck can fill us in on the ranch situation later. I say we start with Dad.

CAROLINE: I agree. No time to waste.

FRANKLIN: Just a moment.

(He pulls several items out of a paper sack.)

We had a sale at the pharmacy on stationary supplies. I thought we could use a little something to take notes.

(Slowly and tediously begins handing around legal pads.)

One for Michael, one for George, one for Caroline, one for me. I assume you don’t mind sharing with your husband, Vee?

VEEANN: Fine.

FRANKLIN: Spiral notebooks, with pockets for handouts.

(Demonstrates.)

See? One for each of us. Michael, George, Caroline, Me.

(CAROLINE lets out an intentionally audible sigh.)

Multicolored pens. I thought we might wish to makes notes in different colors as we deal with various aspects . . .you know.

(Demonstrates.)

See? Red, blue, black, and green. It’s really a handy item. One for Michael . . .

CAROLINE: *(explodes.)* Franklin!

FRANKLIN: Yes, Caroline?

CAROLINE: I’ve seen colored pens before. I had one in fourth grade. Are you quite finished?

FRANKLIN: *(hurt)* I’m simply trying to help, Caroline.

CAROLINE: Thank you. I'm sure the supplies will come in handy. Now sit down. George? You have the floor.

(They all sit, look expectantly at GEORGE.)

GEORGE (*a bit taken aback*): Let's see.

(Fumbles through his notes.)

First of all, let me say how grateful Veeann and I are that you were able to come tonight. We have some difficult things to talk about. Let's remember that we're a family, that we love each other, that we're all just trying to figure out the right thing to do.

CAROLINE: Hear hear!

GEORGE: Three years ago, when Dad had his fall, we had that meeting up at Michael's place, and decided that Dad just wasn't up to running the ranch any longer. After some persuading, Dad agreed to come here, with Veeann and me. Seemed like the best choice at the time. Then last year, Dad had that incident with his car. The fourth in five years. We met again, we paid Mr. Meserve for the damage done to his shop. We decided together that Dad shouldn't drive any more. Again, it wasn't easy, but what I'm saying is that when we've had tough choices to make, we've gotten together, we've talked about it, we've made a decision. When we talk to Dad together, as a family, united, he's always been reasonable.

MICHAEL: And now it's that time again?

VEEANN: Yes.

CAROLINE: Why? What's changed?

VEEANN: His condition has substantially deteriorated.

FRANKLIN: In what way?

GEORGE: He can't walk. He can't even stand. His legs are too weak to support his body.

MICHAEL: George, your letters have suggested things are getting worse. But then we talk to Dad and he says things are fine.

VEEANN: It's embarrassing to him. He's so weak, sitting on the edge of the bed, he can't lift his legs enough to pull on his trousers. He has just enough arm strength to help us a little getting himself in and out of his wheelchair. That's all. The fact is, I simply can't give him the kind of help he needs anymore. I just can't. That's why we're asking, George and I, for you to get together like this.

GEORGE: You really must believe us. He's gotten much worse.

(A pause, as they consider this.)

CAROLINE: What's wrong with him? Official diagnosis.

GEORGE: You remember that Doctor Hamilton thought at first that it might be amyotrophic lateral sclerosis . . .

CAROLINE: Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis.

GEORGE: Right—Lou Gehrig's disease. You had your doubts about that, Caroline, and Dr. Hamilton has come around to the same view. He now thinks it's some kind of nerve damage,

caused by Dad's diabetes. A couple of weeks ago, he gave us a fairly definitive prognosis. He feels the process is irreversible.

CAROLINE: Do you have his tests?

GEORGE: (*handing her a file folder*) We've done X-rays, an MRI, and ultrasound. We take Dad to physical therapy four times a week. So far, nothing's helped. I should say immediately that Dad is not in any physical pain, nor is he paralyzed. He's just . . . weak. Dr. Hamilton thinks . . . well, he thinks nothing will ever make him strong again.

FRANKLIN: So it's worse than what he's been telling us.

GEORGE: He can't walk, even with braces and a walker. You should see his legs. No muscle tone at all.

MICHAEL: Caroline, you're the doctor. What are you reading?

CAROLINE: (*a little testy*) The same thing George just said.

MICHAEL: Will you examine him yourself? No offense, George, but we don't know this Dr. Hamilton.

CAROLINE: I'm a pediatrician, not a neurologist, but I can read a chart. Dad has severe neural atrophy, probably caused by diabetes. He'll never walk again.

MICHAEL: All the same, Caroline, I would be more comfortable if you would look at him yourself.

CAROLINE: Do it yourself. Michael. He'll be awake tomorrow. Ask him to walk across the room.

FRANKLIN: What does this mean in terms of Dad's overall health?

CAROLINE: The diabetes is under control. Otherwise, he's in pretty good shape.

GEORGE: That was what Dr. Hamilton said. He could live another twenty years.

FRANKLIN: That would make him a hundred and five.

CAROLINE: How long did Grandpa Mortenson last? Wasn't he ninety-seven? Dad's lived an active, outdoors life. No tobacco . . .

MICHAEL: He chewed.

CAROLINE: But not for years. He didn't smoke. He was a light to moderate drinker, an occasional beer. His weight, his blood pressure, his heart are all good. Diabetes can be scary at his age, but right now, he's fine.

MICHAEL: That's a blessing.

FRANKLIN: I know I've said this before, and I know Caroline's feelings, but I'm going to say it again. I wonder if chiropractic . . .

CAROLINE: Oh, nonsense.

FRANKLIN: Caroline, hear me out. I've seen some miraculous things done with adjustments. I had four serious subluxations myself.

CAROLINE: Subluxations balderdash.

FRANKLIN: I had constant pain in my achilles tendons, I limped, I was irregular. . .

CAROLINE: Anal retentive, you mean.

FRANKLIN: (*resolutely ignoring her*) Chiropractic cured me. After a year of treatment, I have never enjoyed better health. It could do the same for Dad.

CAROLINE: (*without looking up from her reading*) You limped because you spent forty hours a week on your feet in bad shoes. You were irregular because you and Robyn lived on macaroni and jello salad.

FRANKLIN: (*stubbornly talking under her next speech*) I know how I felt then, and I know how I feel now Say what you want to, Caroline, but I know what it did for me.

CAROLINE: Chiropractors give back rubs. Back rubs feel good. Add a bunch of pseudo-scientific mumbo jumbo to the fact that most back pain is psychosomatic anyway, and you get a lot of people who think they've been cured, and a lot of really rich chiropractors. Chiropractic did nothing for you, Franklin, but empty your bank account. You got better because you bought new shoes and started eating sensibly.

FRANKLIN: We know your professional prejudices, Caroline. I'll say it again. I know how I felt and I know how I feel now George, I'm just asking. Has Dad seen a chiropractor?

GEORGE: Yes.

CAROLINE: I don't see that in here.

GEORGE: Dr. Hamilton shares your views on the subject.

FRANKLIN: Did Dad have an adjustment?

VEEANN: No, Franklin, he didn't. I took him and I talked to the chiropractor myself. He was very nice, but he said there was nothing he could do. The nerve damage is just too extensive.

FRANKLIN: Well, thank you, Vee, for trying. Laugh if you wish to, Caroline, but it worked for me.

CAROLINE: It didn't.

FRANKLIN: It did.

MICHAEL: All right, George. Dad can't walk at all. It's permanent and its irreversible.

GEORGE: Exactly.

MICHAEL: So how does this change things?

VEEANN: I think that's obvious.

MICHAEL: I don't. I mean, when Dad moved in with you, it was because he could no longer care for himself. Now you're telling us, he can no longer care for himself? How is this different?

CAROLINE: I think Michael makes a good point.

VEEANN: Michael, it's totally different.

FRANKLIN: I don't see that.

MICHAEL: You'll need some extra help, of course. For some of the heavy lifting.

CAROLINE: There's something they use in hospitals, it's called a Hoyer lift. I bet it could be adapted for use here. It's terrific. Get him from the wheelchair to the bed, pick him up anywhere. I can get it from one of the medical supply houses.

MICHAEL: That sounds good, too.

FRANKLIN: We could all pitch in.

MICHAEL: Maybe we should consider hiring a nurse. Part time.

FRANKLIN: And I'll bet there are classes you can take. At the hospital?

VEEANN: I'd better say it, George, this is no time to beat around the bush. The simple fact is, we are, no, I am no longer willing to keep your father.

MICHAEL: What do you mean?

VEEANN: I am asking you to find another home for him.

CAROLINE: Veeann, you and George are the only workable option.

VEEANN: Not any longer.

FRANKLIN: But we all agreed.

VEEANN: You'll have to agree on something else.

FRANKLIN: He's just a little more dependent, a little more in need.

MICHAEL: We'll get you help.

CAROLINE: I think the idea of a part-time nurse is a good one, Michael.

MICHAEL: There are two nurses in our ward, for example, they have families, don't want to work full-time, but would love a little extra cash.

CAROLINE: That's just what I was saying. If we get you this Hoyer lift, you can hook it up and lift him from his wheelchair to bed, swing him into a car, lower him onto a toilet. . . .

VEEANN: I'm sure it's a miraculous invention, Caroline. But it's not just a matter of lifting. I don't want better equipment; I don't want a part-time nurse.

CAROLINE: What exactly is the problem, Vee?

VEEANN: I'm home with him alone nine hours a day I care for him twenty-four hours. Ten times an hour, when he's awake, that buzzer goes off, he wants a drink of water, fix his TV! The buzzer runs my life. I hear it in my sleep; I dream about it. And when it doesn't go off, I worry even more.

GEORGE: He's incontinent.

CAROLINE: (*referring to the charts*) I don't see that in here.

VEEANN: Well, not really. But he wants to try to go by himself, he can't stand or lift himself, and so there's a mess. He gets constipated, and then he takes laxatives, so that when he goes, it's sudden and violent, and then he can't move quickly enough to get to the toilet. And he won't let George clean him up anymore.

FRANKLIN: What about his diabetes?

VEEANN: That's another job. Three times a day, I have to give him insulin. And it has to be me, always me. He won't let George touch him. Caroline, it's not the lifting. It's the way he

expects me to keep him company I know he gets lonely, just him, alone, with the TV. He wants to talk, and I try. But all he knows is ranching, which I don't know at all. And the Church, that's out completely, the single most important part of my life. Caroline, I can't do anything, I can't start anything, I'm totally trapped here. That's why I called you here tonight.

CAROLINE: A lot of that could be made easier.

VEEANN: I don't doubt it. I'm sure that medical technology can do wonderful things. But no. The answer is no.

MICHAEL: So you're asking for help.

VEEANN: No, Michael. You must find somewhere else for your father to stay. He is no longer welcome in my home.

(A long pause as they consider this.)

FRANKLIN: No longer welcome. George, you're saying your own father is no longer welcome.

GEORGE: I wouldn't have put it that strongly perhaps. But yes. Veeann is pretty adamant.

CAROLINE: But where else is there?

VEEANN: That's what you need to decide.

FRANKLIN: You're talking about a nursing home.

VEEANN: I'm not. Not specifically. I do think it's an option you should consider.

MICHAEL: You know, there are a number of issues involved here, some short term, and some long term. And whatever we decide, there are going to be finances to worry about.

FRANKLIN: What do you mean?

MICHAEL: I've been thinking quite a bit about Dad's situation lately, and I think it's time we talk about his estate. Does Dad have a will, for example?

CAROLINE: Michael, that isn't the point. The fact is, Vee's talking about a nursing home, and I won't have it.

MICHAEL: Caroline, Dad's life was his property, and we could lose nearly all of it if he dies intestate. We can't avoid unpleasant truths.

CAROLINE: Which is precisely what you're doing. George, level with us. How serious are you about this?

GEORGE: We have in fact checked out three local establishments. I have some literature . . .

CAROLINE: I don't want to see it.

VEEANN: Caroline, I don't think you ought to close the door on any reasonable alternative.

CAROLINE: My father will not go into a nursing home.

MICHAEL: I'm with you on that, Caroline. We also have to consider. . .

CAROLINE: Horrible places, warehouses for people waiting to die.

FRANKLIN: I agree.

VEEANN: They're not all like that.

CAROLINE: They are. I will not allow it.

GEORGE: Caroline, Vee and I saw two very nice ones. I wish you'd at least consider . . .

CAROLINE: They keep a reception area nicely painted. They also make sure you come when the three competent nurses are on duty I'm sorry they took you in, George, but this is my profession, and I tell you, it's all a facade. No, I'm sorry but that is not a choice.

GEORGE: He's my father, too.

MICHAEL: Well, I'm sorry, George, but you're outvoted. Now, on to other matters . . .

VEEANN: Look, can't you just keep an open mind? George and I saw one local home, Shady Pines, it's very nice. It's especially for physically disabled patients. They have lots of activities. They have a high ratio of nurses aides to patients, four, five to one . . .

CAROLINE: Unqualified high school dropouts paid minimum wage, full staff turnover every three months. Doctors who can't get into a decent practice.

VEEANN: You haven't even seen it, Caroline.

CAROLINE: I don't need to. Veeann, you do what you have to, but my father will not go into a nursing home.

VEEANN: Caroline, will you at least . . .

CAROLINE: This is a family council, Veeann. You've said your piece.

VEEANN: But we haven't decided anything.

CAROLINE: No. We haven't. As you pointed out, we have a decision to make. I hope you'll understand when we ask you to step into the other room while we make it.

VEEANN: This is my house. You can't order me out of my living room!

CAROLINE: Then this meeting is over. If I can use your phone, George, I thought I saw a hotel on the way into town.

GEORGE: Caroline!

CAROLINE: Franklin, Michael. Shall I reserve one room or two?

GEORGE: Caroline, Michael, please . . .

VEEANN: George, if they want to go, I certainly wouldn't dream of standing in their . . .

(The door starts to open, they all quit talking. The door opens, CHUCK enters.)

Chuck!

CHUCK: Filled your car up, Michael.

(Hands him the credit card.)

MICHAEL: Thanks, Chuck.

CHUCK: What did I miss?

CAROLINE: Oh, nothing.

(The others all ad lib assent.)

VEEANN: So how did you get along with Robyn?

CHUCK: Fine.

FRANKLIN: Where did you drop her off!

CHUCK: Some guy's house. It looked okay.

FRANKLIN: Good.

VEEANN: Did you catch his name?

CHUCK: Tom something. It was just a big party, lots of kids.

VEEANN: Did you see any parents?

CHUCK: I wouldn't have dropped her off if I didn't think it was okay.

CAROLINE: Did she say how she was planning to get home?

CHUCK: She said she'll catch a ride.

GEORGE: Chuck, I hope you don't mind, we went ahead and started without you. Right now, we're discussing Dad.

CHUCK: Time for the old folks home, huh?

CAROLINE: Absolutely not.

FRANKLIN: Out of the question.

MICHAEL: No, well figure something else out.

CHUCK: Like what?

FRANKLIN: We'll think of something.

MICHAEL: (*cuing CHUCK*) Maybe he could go back to the ranch.
(*CHUCK laughs.*)

CHUCK: Ain't nobody gonna live on that ranch much longer. Unless we get some cash and quick.

MICHAEL: How much money do you need?

CHUCK: Thirty thousand dollars, maybe more. A new tractor, new windmill, a new floor for the stalls, couple thousand feet of new fencing. Thirty thou minimum, and even then, I doubt it'd be worth it.

(*The buzzer sounds.*)

CAROLINE: Dad's awake.

VEEANN: I thought he wouldn't sleep long. I'll get him.

MICHAEL: I'll come with you.

VEEANN: Fine.

(*They go to MARTY's room. As they open the door FRANKLIN speaks.*)

FRANKLIN: Thirty thousand dollars? For a windmill?

CHUCK: For a lot of things. Place is just falling apart.

GEORGE: The tractor was working fine a few months ago.

CHUCK: Hey, you want to keep fixing it, you're more'n welcome. I'm just a shade tree mechanic, doing the best job I can.

GEORGE: We'll all have to take a look at your budget, Chuck.

(*VEEANN and MICHAEL wheel in MARTY.*)

CHUCK: You got a place that's had no basic preventive maintenance the last ten years, just duct tape and baling wire. You got fence posts down on the southwest boundary that are half

rotted, and a tractor I can't get into the stalls, got manure and straw practically filling the place up, I can't clean it out. Look, the place is shot to hell, and that's the truth of it.

MARTY: A lie! That's a lie!

CAROLINE: Dad!

MARTY: Don't you tell me about cleaning out a stable, you lazy son-of-a-bitch!

CHUCK: I'm telling you, I can't get the tractor in the door.

MARTY: So what? You got a pitchfork. You got a wagon. You too good to do a little hand work?

MICHAEL: Dad, don't excite yourself.

MARTY: Let go of me!

(Turns on CHUCK again.)

I been a rancher forty years when you were still sucking your mama's tit, and when I was seventy-five I could still clean out that stable, so don't talk to me about a tractor. It's a three day chore, fourteen hour days, with a pitchfork and a shovel, and at the end of each day, Mavis would hose me down in the yard before she'd let me in the house. But it's a job that's got to be done, mister.

CHUCK: Yeah, you done great old man. Half your fences are rottin' away.

MARTY: You gotta replace your fencing, son. You wanna be a rancher, do a rancher's work.

CHUCK: If you'd done the job right, I wouldn't have to do it again now.

MARTY: Get used to it, son. Jobs done over and over, that's what I spent my life at.

CHUCK: *(sullen)* If you'd done 'em right . . .

MARTY: Just shut up and listen, boy! I know what you want. One of them tractors with air conditioning in the cab, FM stereo, some attachment to clean out stables. I've known fellows like you, gotta get every new kinda equipment John Deere makes. Not me. I'm a survivor, rather make do than buy new. Ain't no job too big for a good man with a pick and a shovel. Now, what did I hear about thirty thousand dollars?

CHUCK: We need a new tractor.

MARTY: Give me three hours down there, and I'd have the old one running good as new.

CHUCK: I know how to tune an engine.

MARTY: You don't know nothing. You run my place into the ground.

CHUCK: I ain't had the money to do more.

MARTY: How much money did I have, those years you kids were growing up? I had my hands, my tools, I left behind a ranch that turned a profit every year. You ain't made a dime on it yet, have you?

CHUCK: I'll turn a profit this year.

MARTY: Like hell you will. Michael, he don't need no thirty thousand dollars. Give him some money to buy fencing; I'll give you a check.

CHUCK: You ain't listened to a word I said.

MARTY: You ain't said one worth listening to.

GEORGE: *(with a wink to CHUCK that says, "We'll take care of it later?")* Dad, I'm glad you could join us. Are you hungry? Vee, could you get something. . .

VEEANN: I'll whip something up. What would you like?

MARTY: I ain't hungry.

(He shifts in his chair.)

Vee, could you look to this pillow? Jist can't seem to get comfortable.

CAROLINE: I'll help you with that, Dad.

MARTI: I didn't ask you, Caroline, I asked Veeann.

(After a moment VEEANN crosses to him, adjusts the pillow.)

Look at you. All gathered round.

GEORGE: That's right, Dad, we're all here.

MARTY: Where's the dead calf?

FRANKLIN: What do you mean, Dad?

MARTY: The dead calf? Where is it? Anybody know?

MICHAEL: I don't think so, Dad.

MARTY: Well, I'll tell you. Me. I'm the dead calf. And what kinda birds come gather—when livestock dies?

FRANKLIN: Dad, you've obviously misunderstood. . .

MARTY: Vultures. The vultures have gathered. Ain't that what the good book says?

MICHAEL: This isn't necessary, Dad.

MARTY: Ain't that from the good book, Michael?

CAROLINE: You don't read the good book, Dad.

MARTY: No I don't. Neither do you, Caroline. You and me? We don't trust what we can't see.

And what I see is vultures, gathered round my carcass.

VEEANN: Fair enough, Dad. We're all vultures. What do we want from you?

MARTY: Flesh. vultures eat flesh.

(Pinches his arm.)

Not much here. Where is it? It's north. That's my flesh. Four thousand acres worth, scattered over the valley.

CAROLINE: We don't want your land, Dad.

MARTY: Don't want your inheritance, girl? Don't want what's yours?

FRANKLIN: We haven't even talked about the land, Dad.

MARTY: No, course not. Three years ago, you took me off the ranch. I didn't want to go, but you all got together, and off I come. Last year it was my car you took away. Now, all of a sudden, I don't walk so good. Just can't get around. So what is it this time? What you gonna take from me now?

MICHAEL: We're not trying to take anything away...

MARTY: You better not, son.

VEEANN: Marty, what is it you want? What are you trying to tell us?

MARTY: I don't want to go to no nursing home. Back home, one at a time, I seen my old friends get sent to one of those places, Shady Rest, Golden Age Retirement. They never come out again. I like it here, with Vee and George. You say I can't go back to my ranch, all right. I'll die here, with family around.

CAROLINE: Dad, you're not going to die for many years yet.

MARTY: Not as long as I'm here, no I won't. But let me tell you this: You put me in one of them places, I promise, I'll give the land up. Hell, maybe I'll give it to the Church. But I'll say this once and I'll tell you clear, you want the land, your land, your inheritance, then keep me here. Vee takes good care of me. I mean to stay.

GEORGE: Dad, that may not be possible.

MARTY: I don't want to leave. I ain't a gonna.

(A long, stunned silence.)

And now I am hungry. Vee, what you got for me?

VEEANN: *(Controls herself with an effort.)* Whatever you like, Marty. I'll fix anything you want.

BLACKOUT — END ACT ONE

ACT TWO

SCENE: *The next morning. Dishes in the sink, the papers still in disarray. CHUCK is asleep on the couch, wearing jeans and an undershirt. He yawns, pulls on a shirt, crosses to the sink, puts water on to boil. A knock on the door. He crosses to the door opens it. ROBYN enters.*

CHUCK: Oh. It's you.

(Leaves the door open, crosses back to the kitchen. She comes in.)

ROBYN: Where's my Dad?

CHUCK: Where have you been?

ROBYN: Parties.

(Yawns.)

What time is it?

CHUCK: Seven-thirty.

ROBYN: No kidding? I thought he was supposed to be sleeping down here.

CHUCK: He's at some hotel.

ROBYN: A hotel? That's crazy. He can barely afford gas back home.

CHUCK: After what you left him.

ROBYN: My money My business.

CHUCK: Him and Michael and Caroline were gonna share a room.

ROBYN: Those three?

CHUCK: Two beds, ask for a cot. It'll be okay.

ROBYN: Right. You know those three, you know my dad. Which one do you think ended up on the cot? His back'll be sore for a week.

CHUCK: I thought he had some chiropractor . . .

ROBYN: That's where the rest of his money goes.

(Looks around.)

What happened?

CHUCK: It didn't go so good.

ROBYN: *(crosses to telephone.)* Must not have.

CHUCK: Caroline and Vee got into it, Caroline took off, took your dad and Michael with her. They'll cool off.

ROBYN: Do you know which hotel?

CHUCK: Comfort Inn, Days Inn, one of those. I don't remember. One of the ones with the yellow circle on the sign.

ROBYN: Big help.

CHUCK: *(as she looks through a phone book)* So parties, huh? Plural?

(She doesn't take the bait.)

You have a good time?

(Again, she ignores him.)

At these parties you went to?

ROBYN: Which one?

CHUCK: Which one? How about the one where I dropped you off at.

ROBYN: Oh, yeah, that was you. Cousin Chuck. It was fine

(Dialing.)

CHUCK: We're not really cousins, you know.

ROBYN: No, you're married to my cousin. Anyway, the first two were pretty good, the third one was a drag.

CHUCK: Busy night.

ROBYN: Hello, do you have a guest by the name of Franklin Mortenson please? It might be under Michael Mortenson or Caroline O'Hara . . . No, I can't hold, I'm calling from Europe.

(CHUCK rummages through the cabinets for coffee. Settles for an instant cocoa.)

Caroline? Yeah, this is Robyn. All right, Aunt Caroline.

(She rolls her eyes to CHUCK.)

Is my dad there?

CHUCK: Comfort Inn?

ROBYN: Day's. Hi, Dad? Listen, I'm back, everything's cool. No, I'm just going to crash. No, I spent it. How's your back? Yeah? Yeah? Yeah, I think you should do that. Okay. Bye.

(She hangs up.)

He's there.

CHUCK: You want some?

ROBYN: What is that?

CHUCK: No coffee at Aunt Vee's, so I settled for this. Looks like some kind of hot chocolate mix. Add water.

ROBYN: Sure, why not. You know, I don't think I've ever seen this before.

CHUCK: What?

ROBYN: Dirty dishes at Aunt Vee's. Some meeting, huh? I almost wish I'd stayed.

CHUCK: Veeann told them that they couldn't keep Grandpa here anymore.

ROBYN: Really? Good.

CHUCK: Why do you say that?

ROBYN: I don't think he likes it here. I mean, why should he? Living with Vee, I wouldn't last two days.

CHUCK: Why do you say that?

ROBYN: Like last night. I mean, what did Lynn want to do? Watch some movie from a million years ago?

CHUCK: Not for wild Robyn, huh?

ROBYN: They have, like, this picture of how you're supposed to be. A Laurel. With the hair, and the dress, and the missionary you're writing to. Like Lynn was, I guess. I mean, look at Frannie; I like Frannie. She's a lot like me really, wants to try different things, smoke a few j's, get around. But they never see the real Frannie, and if they did, they wouldn't like her.

CHUCK: What about me? Who do you think the real Chuck is?

ROBYN: I told you. The guy that's married to Lynn. You got any aspirin?

CHUCK: No. What did you do last night?

ROBYN: I told you, I went to parties. Looked around, saw what was happening.

CHUCK: What was happening?

ROBYN: Like there were a bunch of guys doing black and whites, you know. You know black and whites?

CHUCK: No, I don't think I do.

ROBYN: White rum, black velvet vodka, mix 'em 50-50 in a beer mug, and chug.

CHUCK: A beer mug? Pure vodka and rum?

ROBYN: Yeah, and then you chug. It's like a contest.

CHUCK: You're kidding.

ROBYN: I was intrigued. These guys weren't exactly rocket scientists, and I was curious, see how far they'd push it.

CHUCK: So what happened?

ROBYN: We had another contest. Drove a guy to emergency, and placed bets on whether the doctors could save him.

CHUCK: Who won?

ROBYN: *(off-handed)* The guy did. I lost ten bucks.

CHUCK: You're something, you know that?

ROBYN: See, I think everyone should do exactly what they want to do. No matter what. That goes for Grandpa, too. All this about, where should we put him? Who takes him? Forget it. Just ask him what he wants and let that be it.

CHUCK: You like him, don't you?

ROBYN: I'm probably the only one in the family who does. Remember. I lived on that ranch for six months. After Mom died. I love it out there. When I was eight years old, he put me on a horse; I thought I was the Lone Ranger.

CHUCK: You're too female to be the Lone Ranger.

(He kisses her. Eventually it ends.)

ROBYN: And now you've done that.

(She pushes away from him.)

CHUCK: What I wanted. What did you think?

ROBYN: Oh, like I'm supposed to give you a grade? A minus B plus? Not! Look, I'm going upstairs to crash.

(LYNN appears at the top of the stain.)

CHUCK: You do that.

ROBYN: Okay.

CHUCK: Your door gonna be locked?

ROBYN: I don't need to lock it. You're married, and I'm underage.

(She goes up the stairs.)

Good morning, Lynn. Your husband's in the kitchen.

(She exits. After a moment, LYNN enters.)

LYNN: Good morning, husband.

CHUCK: You sleep okay?

LYNN: Fitfully, actually I woke up around one, saw Mom and Dad's light on, and ended up talking to them for an hour. Mom's pretty upset.

CHUCK: Everyone's upset.

LYNN: Yes, I suppose so. It's really too bad. I think I'll just clear things off a bit. This isn't like Mom.

CHUCK: How about you?

LYNN: What about me?

CHUCK: You upset?

LYNN: Should I be?

CHUCK: You tell me.

LYNN: I try not to be. Upset. Not without reason.

CHUCK: Do you think you have a reason?

LYNN: You tell me, Chuck. Do I have a reason?

CHUCK: No. You don't.

(A pause.)

LYNN: Then I'm not.

CHUCK: Like hell.

LYNN: Chuck, twice in the last month, I've suggested that we sit down and talk about things, about our marriage, about where we're headed. You've made it clear to me that that is not a subject you welcome.

CHUCK: That's right.

LYNN: Fine. So if you have something to say to me, if there's a problem I should know about, I'm here. Otherwise, well, my days are plenty full, Chuck.

CHUCK: Like I been saying. Everything's fine.

LYNN: Then I'm happy. Our marriage is solid, the ranch is doing fine, and I have nothing to complain about.

CHUCK: Except that ain't how it is.

LYNN: Then there is something you need to tell me?

CHUCK: No! But you don't believe me when I say that, do you?

LYNN: Of course I do. If you say everything's fine . . .

CHUCK: Don't give me that. I know what you're thinking. You're the martyr, you're the noble one. I know that act. Sitting there so innocent.

LYNN: As it happens, Chuck, I am innocent. Naive and innocent.

CHUCK: Well so am I!

LYNN: Fine. I believe you.

CHUCK: Do you?

LYNN: If you tell me I can.

(A pause, as they avoid each other.)

I don't think anyone touched those hors d'oeuvres last night. Shall we try them for breakfast?

CHUCK: Fine. Sounds good.

(Fidgets for a moment.)

Maybe in a sec.

(Gets up.)

LYNN: Where are you going?

CHUCK: Out.

(Heads for the door)

Your dad was saying something about the van, the transmission fluid. I'll take a look at it now, before anyone's up.

LYNN: Fine. I'm sure he'll appreciate that.

CHUCK: Right.

(He exits, LYNN watches him go. For a moment, it appears as though she's going to cry. But she regains control, and sits therefor a moment, eating. Down the stairs comes VEEANN.)

LYNN: Hello, Mom.

VEEANN: Good morning, honey Did I hear somebody come up the stairs?

LYNN: Robyn.

VEEANN: Home already?

LYNN: And Chuck was here a moment ago. He just went out to take a look at the van.

VEEANN: what are you eating?

LYNN: From last night. I hope you don't mind.

VEEANN: Might as well have something good come out of that fiasco.

(Sits next to her, they eat together)

LYNN: They'll come around, Mom. It was just the shock.

VEEANN: We'll see. Have you heard from Grandpa yet?

LYNN: I haven't even looked in on him.

VEEANN: Oh, don't worry. When he wakes up, we'll know about it.

LYNN: Well, this morning, I'll take care of him.

VEEANN: You know, I think I'll let you.

(A pause, as they eat together quietly.)

Honey? I don't know how to say this, so I'll just say it. I'm worried about you, Lynn. You and Chuck.

LYNN: Why?

VEEANN: Well, I couldn't help noticing that he slept down here. On the couch.

LYNN: And not with me, on Frannie's twin size? We're hardly newlyweds anymore.

VEEANN: Lynn, last night, I shut Caroline up when she made . . . innuendos. She doesn't see you often, or know you as well as I do, and she sensed something.

LYNN: She's wrong about a lot of things, isn't she?

VEEANN: Yes. And she's right a lot, too.

LYNN: Maybe.

VEEANN: Do you still love him?

LYNN: Oh yes.

VEEANN: Well, do you trust him?

LYNN: I don't not trust him.

(Another pause.)

I mean, I pretty much have to trust him, don't you think?

VEEANN: What do you mean?

LYNN: Mom, what if things aren't great between us? Hypothetically. What if I think maybe something's going on that isn't right, but I don't really know anything? What then?

VEEANN: So what are you saying?

LYNN: I'm saying that I'm not sure what to think. If I should trust him, and don't, then maybe I'm the one who's damaging our marriage.

VEEANN: But what if you do trust him, and you shouldn't?

LYNN: Then I'll find out. Meanwhile, I'm going to trust him.

VEEANN: No matter what?

LYNN: No. Until he shows me I can't or tells me I can't.

VEEANN: But honey, your father and I . . . when we see things . . .

LYNN: You see evidence. I need proof.

VEEANN: How about the ranch? Is he keeping things going?

LYNN: He leaves the house every morning early, or most mornings. He's gone until six or seven. Is he out in the fields? Is the work getting done? He says it is.

VEEANN: But you think it might not be?

LYNN: I get phone calls. "Your cattle are in my pasture. Tell your husband to fix his fences." Or else it's "Your seed grass okay? Your husband missed his turn with the irrigation." But I ask him about it, and he always has an answer. Maybe this is just life on a ranch.

VEEANN: But you don't know?

LYNN: That's just it. I don't know. And there's one more thing.

VEEANN: What?

LYNN: He won't let me look at our finances. I don't even have a checkbook. If I need to write a check for something he gives me one check. Mom, I used to do all our bills, all our taxes. Then suddenly, he said he thought he ought to do it. Fine, I gave him all our records. But now, I don't even know where he keeps them. We're always late on bills, nowadays. I'm never sure if they're going to cut off our telephone, our gas. But when I get a late notice, and I tell him about it, then suddenly I'm nagging, I don't trust him, he'll take care of it if I just keep off his back. And then there's Michael.

VEEANN: Michael?

LYNN: Mom, I don't know. But when Michael calls, Chuck goes into the study and closes the door. Mom, I'm trusting him just as much as I can. Loving him the best I can. And hoping. Part of me does just like you, accumulates all the evidence. But that's not a part of me I like very well.

VEEANN: In the meantime . . .

LYNN: In the meantime, you can tell Caroline our marriage is fine.

VEEANN: You're sure?

LYNN: I'm sure that's what I want you to tell Caroline.

VEEANN: Is it true?

LYNN: I don't know.

(After a moment.)

I don't think so.

VEEANN: Oh, honey.

(Reaches her and gives her a hug.)

LYNN: *(in tears)* Mom, you don't know. You don't know how hard it is just to hang on. Day after day.

VEEANN: Oh, honey.

(They hug for a moment longer. VEEANN chooses her words carefully.)

Lynn, is it possible that the ranch is the problem?

LYNN: What do you mean?

VEEANN: Chuck had no experience ranching before you moved up there. He'd always been a city boy. Maybe it's too much for him. Have you thought about moving? Trying something else?

LYNN: Mom, that ranch is my home.

VEEANN: I know you like it out there, Lynn.

LYNN: I don't just like it, Mom.

VEEANN: All right.

LYNN: It's home, Mom. I don't know how else I can say it. It just feels right for us to be there.
Especially the kids.

VEEANN: But what if it's not right for Chuck?

LYNN: Mom, don't give me this. Not now.

VEEANN: I just want you to think about it.

LYNN: I've got enough on my mind right now without this.

VEEANN: I'm sorry, honey.

LYNN: I'm serious, Mom. The way things are going right now, if I had to choose between
Chuck and the ranch . . . Well, I don't know which I'd choose.

VEEANN: So that's how it is.

LYNN: That's right.

(The doorbell rings.)

VEEANN: Damn.

LYNN: *(laughing through her tears)* That's okay, Mom. At home it's one of the kids.

VEEANN: *(looking out the window)* It's Michael's car.

LYNN: Let me just wash my face.

(Heads into the bathroom.)

VEEANN: All right.

(Shouts up the stairs.)

George! It's Michael!

(Crosses to door, pauses.)

Michael.

MICHAEL: Good morning, Vee.

(Enters the room.)

VEEANN: We're polishing off last night's hors d'oeuvres for breakfast. I know, not quite what
you expect from Veeann. I had a lousy night. You want some?

MICHAEL: Thanks. Sounds good.

(Crosses to bar, sits. LYNN enters from the bathroom. He speaks to her)

Hi, honey You okay?

LYNN: *(brightly)* Fine.

VEEANN: So, I hope the three of you had a good night's sleep?

MICHAEL: Terrible, if you want to know the truth. Caroline snores, and Franklin moans.

LYNN: Moans.

MICHAEL: Yeah. All night long. Like this.

(Demonstrates.)

VEEANN: Good. Serves you right.

MICHAEL: Look, Vee, I just had to come early to apologize.

VEEANN: Oh?

MICHAEL: We had a difference of opinion over a matter that concerns us all. But that was no reason to get as angry as we did. And especially, it was no reason to spurn your hospitality

VEEANN: No, it wasn't.

MICHAEL: Anyway, I'm sorry. Will you forgive me?

VEEANN: Certainly.

(Sees GEORGE coming down the stairs.)

George, it's Michael. He's apologized and I've forgiven him.

GEORGE: Oh. Good.

LYNN: Morning, Dad.

GEORGE: Good morning, honey Have you been up long?

LYNN: Just a few minutes.

GEORGE: Where are the rest of them, Michael?

MICHAEL: They'll be over soon. I just wanted to be sure I got here first.

VEEANN: To clear the air.

MICHAEL: That's right.

VEEANN: *(offering him hors d'oeuvres)* George, breakfast?

GEORGE: From last night?

VEEANN: That's right. And no, I didn't do the dishes, either. I'm falling down on my job.

(The buzzer sounds. VEEANN looks at it wearily.)

I'd hoped he'd let us have a few minutes more.

LYNN: Like I said, Mom, I'll take him this morning.

VEEANN: I doubt he'll let you.

LYNN: Let me try. You three have some breakfast together.

(As she goes into MARTY's room.)

Good morning, Grandpa.

END OF PERUSAL SCRIPT

12 more pages in Act Two

20 pages in Act Three

1994 AML Award: Drama

Presented to: **Eric Samuelsen**

For: "**Accommodations: a Play in Three Acts**"

On the frontier where Mormon ideals meet the everyday world of men and women, all of us need a place to stay or go, retreat to or take a stand. But Eric Samuelsen knows that borders can be confusing and densely populated. They teem with competing individuals, emotions, values, and spirits—in circumstances as profound and common as birth and death, with drives as crass but inescapable as greed and lust—that infringe upon, thwart, or even displace us in our quest for some sanctuary. "Accommodations" presents a compelling dramatic story crafted with characters and forms we comfortably recognize and can relate to. A carefully constructed, masterfully worded prose-poetic meditation on embattled spaces unfolds, replete with symbolic touchstone diction, references, and events: real estate developments, hotel rooms, a progressively more cluttered set, old rooms, others' rooms, and no room—as well as, more ominously, burglaries, powerlifting machines, courtrooms, broken fences and shattered vows. In a place where love and brutality must co-exist, what compromises are acceptable, even essential, and at what point do they become manipulations or betrayals of ourselves or others? "Accommodations" unflinchingly confronts these dilemmas, "warning" us (in Samuelsen's word) of dangers, hinting at possibilities, and, wisely, despite a hopeful ending, guaranteeing no solutions.



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