

LOOK AT ME
(RUFF, RUFF)

A Full-Length Comedy

By C.S. Hanson

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CAST (3 male, 2 female)

SUSAN 40s, teaches E.S.L., passionate about her work, liberal, well educated, a little naïve about the world

RUSTY Early 50s, Susan's husband, the kind of guy who was always in the right place at the right time until the firm went down for naughty stuff and he's out of a job and afraid not only of spending a dime but afraid of everything

MARSHALL 35, Susan's brother, handsome, a construction industry contractor (*actor doubles in the role of Stefan*)

BIANCA 35, Marshall's wife, headstrong and sexy, a probation officer

OMAR 21, native of Mexico, college student, now a New Yorker

STEFAN 30, originally from Croatia, runs the service elevator (*doubles with Marshall*)

TIME

2010

NOTE

The character of Rusty is a man who wants to be a dog. Much of his behavior is doglike -- barking, howling, growling. While dogs run around on all fours, it is important that Rusty not pretend to have a dog's body, for his malady is psychological. He is, after all, human and therefore, unless indicated in stage directions, should remain upright.

**LOOK AT ME
(RUFF, RUFF)**

Scene 1.

(Lights up on SUSAN in the apartment foyer. She checks her bag, takes her keys, and is about to exit out the front door when the sound of barking stops her. RUSTY, in pajamas, dashes toward her and wraps his arms around her legs. Though he is a full-grown man of 50 years, he is acting like a dog.)

RUSTY

Ruff ruff ruff.

SUSAN

Not now, darling. I'm late.

RUSTY

(whining) Rrrrrr.

SUSAN

I need to prepare for that interview.

RUSTY

Grrrrr.

SUSAN

What was I thinking? A meeting on the last day of school?
(petting Rusty) But how could I say "no" to Omar?

RUSTY

(a single bark, as in "huh?") Ruh?

SUSAN

I just have to make it through today. And then summer break!
Once we get to the house, everything will be --

RUSTY

(in distress) Ruff. Ruff. Ruff.

SUSAN

What? Something about the house?

RUSTY

(whining) Rrrrrr.

SUSAN

You need to see Dr. Metcalfe. I know you hate therapy, but some people love it.

RUSTY

(as in "no" and turning away) Rrrooo.

SUSAN

The man I married does not turn away from me. I hardly recognize you anymore. We haven't talked - really talked - in . . . a month? We are going to fix this.

RUSTY

(growling and biting at himself) Grrrrr.

SUSAN

We'll talk tonight. When I come home. A bottle of wine and you will tell me everything. You must have something to say. You've been home for . . . six months? I'm late.

(Susan exits. Rusty goes into a cabinet and removes a box. He empties the contents and stares at a coffee mug, a paperweight, and his rolodex. He finds a business card, tries to make a phone call, hangs up. He looks at the newspaper, throws it down in disgust. The phone rings. Marshall leaves a message on the answering machine:)

MARSHALL

(voice on answering machine)

Rusty! You there? Pick up. It's Marshall. C'mon, man. It's about the project. Call me.

(The phone rings again. Marshall leaves a message:)

MARSHALL

(voice on answering machine)

Rusty, we gotta talk. This can't wait. Can I come up? I'm in the neighborhood. Actually, I'm in your lobby. Your doorman says he didn't see you leave this morning. He's buzzing you. *(to doorman)* Yeah, keep buzzing.

(The apartment phone rings. It is the doorman buzzing. Rusty grabs the phone.)

RUSTY

(into phone) Send him up.

(Long pause. Sound of apartment doorbell. Rusty goes near the front door. He lets out a series of yelps.)

RUSTY

Ruff, ruff, ruff, ruff, ruff. *(shouting)* Down, dog, down.

(Rusty opens the door to MARSHALL, who enters.)

MARSHALL

Since when do you guys have a -

RUSTY

You really thought that was a dog?

MARSHALL

Thought I was gonna get my leg chewed off. Been scared of dogs my whole life.

RUSTY

Stop being so scared.

MARSHALL

You're not getting a dog, are you? *(beat)* Hey, they say you should get dressed when you're in transition. Not good to sit around in your shorts.

RUSTY

What do you think I've been doing all day? Sitting around licking my balls?

MARSHALL

I don't know. You haven't been returning my calls. And, uh, we're trying to get a house built, remember?

RUSTY

Not interested.

MARSHALL

Suzy's dream house. You better be interested.

RUSTY

You pick up business while you're up there?

MARSHALL

No way. I give you one-hundred percent of my time. Listen --

RUSTY

You met Kissinger yet?

MARSHALL

Kissinger? Rusty, there's something we gotta talk --

RUSTY

Get business from him, you'll be set.

MARSHALL

No, I'd never, not while I'm working on your . . . I want you to know, I did a good job. I must have stood over every screw and bolt that went in. Really. You wanted high performance, energy-efficient construction and, yep, you got it. Susan wanted custom cabinets and stainless steel appliances and claw-foot tubs and bathroom fixtures that look old but act modern. Yep. Check. Nine friggin' fireplaces and -

RUSTY

That's enough.

MARSHALL

But there's something I, uh, we need to discuss.

RUSTY

There's nothing to discuss.

MARSHALL

Um, this is really hard to say, but --

(Rusty exits to an off-stage bedroom.)

MARSHALL

Where are you going? Okay. A lot easier when you're not in the room. Rusty, I can't finish the job. Did you hear me?

RUSTY

(off stage) Ruff, ruff, ruff.

MARSHALL

That again? Okay, I'll just say it: Your cards aren't going through. I sure as hell can't put tile and terrazzo finishes in the kitchen if I can't even get a refrigerator out of a warehouse thanks to a . . . well . . . a little problem with every credit card you've given me. First I thought it was just a glitch. Are you coming back? I'd put it on my own cards but, uh - you haven't paid me in three months. You hear me? I, uh, I, uh, I got in a little deep with the suppliers, Rusty. I, uh, I, uh, look - they haven't been paid. They're breathing on me like fire. If you weren't my brother-in-law, I'd sue your friggin' ass off. They say Rusty Shepherd can pay. Everyone knows that. Except, they're calling me. Creditors are calling me and I, I don't know what to do. There's no time left. A little time. Three working days. By end of day . . . I don't even know what day this is, but we got until five o'clock on that, whatever that next day after tomorrow is . . . or they take us to court.

(Rusty emerges in a pinstripe suit. He looks like the epitome of Wall Street.)

MARSHALL

Ah, man, yes! This is the Rusty Shepherd I know and love. Nice tie.

RUSTY

Let's get down to business.

(Marshall hands Rusty a stack of papers.)

MARSHALL

Great. Take care of the invoices. We don't need legal action that's for sure. Suzy doesn't have to know a thing.

RUSTY

Don't ever let your sister down.

MARSHALL

'Course not. And, uh, you should pay me. Today. You gotta do that, you know, pay me. 'Cuz I, uh, well, a lot people up there, they are waiting for some cashola. Suzy 's gonna love the place.

RUSTY

It's over.

MARSHALL

Wha--? What?

RUSTY

Got nothing coming in. There's a bottom. I'm seeing it.

MARSHALL

No. No. Not you. You got money. You'll always have money.

RUSTY

My last check went to Sam's school tuition for next year. I got nothing. They're not gonna sue a guy who's got nothing.

MARSHALL

It's not like you're never gonna work again.

RUSTY

How do you know?

MARSHALL

Because you're Rusty Shepherd.

RUSTY

Not anymore.

MARSHALL

I can't get sued. This will wipe me out. Oh geez, all the guys I got working for me up there? Next time they see me, they're gonna break my legs.

RUSTY

Fine. Send 'em to me.

MARSHALL

Wait. Let's go up there, right now, the two of us. Take another look at the property. The most gorgeous part of Connecticut, the most beautiful countryside in the -

RUSTY

Stop.

MARSHALL

Rusty, when I'm up there, I feel like I'm in England.

RUSTY

You ever been in England?

MARSHALL

You know I don't fly over water.

RUSTY

You don't know anything about England.

MARSHALL

I can imagine it. Grand. Civilized. Nice way of doing business.

RUSTY

Get out of here. Get something new.

MARSHALL

Don't do this. Don't cut me off. Bianca wants to start a family.

RUSTY

A family? In this economy? You better do a deal and do it fast. And get yourself a good lawyer.

MARSHALL

You got me into this, Rusty. Okay, maybe I relied on you a little more than I should have? But I took your project on good faith. Wire me the money for those invoices before three days' time or we'll be in a jail cell faster than Bianca can whip out the handcuffs. Ohhhhh. Bianca's gonna have my balls.

RUSTY

That's for sure.

MARSHALL

Do something.

RUSTY

Ruff.

MARSHALL

Enough of that. Wire the money, Rusty.

(Marshall exits. Rusty strips down to his trousers and t-shirt. The house phone buzzes. Rusty picks it up. He doesn't listen, he just yells.)

RUSTY

(into the house phone) Yeah. Send him back up.

(Long pause. There is a ring at the apartment door. Rusty stares. Another ring. He finally opens the door to the voluptuous BIANCA.)

RUSTY

(enunciating each syllable) Bi-an-ca?

BIANCA

(rolling her r's) Rrrruuusty.

RUSTY

Thought you were Marshall.

BIANCA

Everyone always hopes I'm someone else. No one likes an unscheduled visit from a probation officer.

RUSTY

Hold on. You here on business?

BIANCA

I'm taking a break. Been in and out of judge's chambers all morning. Six of my probationers slipped up last night. No matter. I need to talk to you. And I don't have much time.

(Rusty heads toward the bedroom.)

BIANCA

Where you going? Get back in here.

(Rusty obeys Bianca.)

BIANCA

Sit down, asshole, and listen up. Marshall's in trouble. He's getting calls day and night. Creditors demanding money. My husband curls up in a ball every time the phone rings. Like a scared little pussy cat. But I got this much out of him: It's Rusty Shepherd they're after. I tell him to talk to you. He says you don't return his calls. So, I think, huh, we got ourselves a situation here. Wuz up, Rusty?

(Rusty tries to escape to the other room, but Bianca is quick and brings him back.)

BIANCA

Don't make me handcuff you to the chair. Who are these people? When are you going to pay them off? C'mon. Pay off the fucking creditors, Rusty.

RUSTY

No cursing. You know Susan does not allow -

BIANCA

Try working in the court system. My judges use the F word in every other sentence.

RUSTY

I don't want to hear about judges.

BIANCA

I got people coming after me for your money. I will curse in this house until you tell me what's going on. Give it to me straight.

RUSTY

There is absolutely nothing going on.

BIANCA

Nothing? You're building a McMansion out in the woods somewhere. You got Marshall driving in and out of the city, doing what he's told, putting up your shack.

RUSTY

Shack? That rambling neo-shingle Queen Anne pile on ten acres in the most gorgeous part of northwestern Connecticut is no shack. And as for your husband? He is a complete wuss.

BIANCA

My husband is not a wuss. Okay, he is. But why are we talking about him? This is your mess.

RUSTY

It's over. Not building. Hit bottom.

BIANCA

If there is one man in this city who can pay his bills --

RUSTY

Parachute was black, not golden. All wrapped up in stocks. Rotten stocks. When everything collapses, it leaves zero.

BIANCA

Must be something you can do.

RUSTY

I'm done doing.

BIANCA

These goons aren't going away. You gotta get back out there.

RUSTY

Not happening.

BIANCA

You mean? You're checkin' out? Like, not participating? Oh boy. Then you gotta sell everything. Unload your assets. Who needs an apartment this size? And that friggin' country house? It's gotta be worth a couple million bucks or more.

RUSTY

No. No.

BIANCA

And while you're at it, get Marshall his next project. I want my husband working in the city this time. Not Connecticut. Not New Jersey.

RUSTY

I can't.

BIANCA

What do you mean you can't? We all gotta do our part. 'Cuz I'm having a -- I'm having a --

RUSTY

Bianca?

BIANCA

A manicure.

RUSTY

Yeah, I know you like your manicures and spa treatments.

BIANCA

I don't care about those anymore. Rusty, I'm having a -- baby.

RUSTY

Ruff ruff.

BIANCA

Yeah. Can you believe it? I'm having a "ruff ruff." I like the way you you put that. Easier than calling it a - a - a -

RUSTY

A baby?

BIANCA

Wait 'til I tell Marshall. He's gonna bawl his head off.

RUSTY

Marshall's going to be a father?

BIANCA

Take care of everything, okay? I gotta get back to my probationers.

RUSTY

Ruff, ruff, ruff, ruff, ruff.

BIANCA

Aw, you're gonna be the best uncle. Uncle Rusty, woof, woof.

(Bianca exits. Rusty stares straight ahead. End of scene.)

Scene 2.

(Late afternoon. Susan enters carrying shopping bags. Rusty greets Susan with a kiss. He is dressed in his pinstripe suit.)

SUSAN

Look at you. You're your old self again. I was getting tired of seeing you in boxer shorts and that old t-shirt. Let's celebrate. There's a bottle chilling in the -

(As if on cue, Rusty exits. Susan sets out food.)

SUSAN

(calling out to Rusty) I picked up some of your favorites at Fairway: manchego cheese, spicy chorizo, kalamata olives.

(Rusty enters with glasses and a bottle of wine, which he opens easily as it screws off the top. He pours.)

SUSAN

I have been waiting for this all day. Continuing a tradition of oh, I'd say, twenty-three years, shall we toast? To the summer before us!

(They clink glasses and drink.)

SUSAN

Sweetheart, I want to hear all about your day. But first, I just want to say - now that this phase is over - you were a really good dog. Pretty good. Most of the time.

RUSTY

Ruff, ruff.

SUSAN

Oh, that's hilarious.

RUSTY

Ruff, ruff, ruff.

SUSAN

Never do that again. . . . It is over, isn't it? This, whatever it was. All my students have completed the school year with a command of the English language that they did not possess when they came into my classroom. And so, now, you, too, my darling, I expect you have returned to speaking English. Cheers.

(They toast and drink.)

SUSAN

Omar Gonzalez stopped by. He is not a kid anymore. I felt so bad I couldn't talk with him for more than five minutes. I'll call him from the country.

(Rusty opens his mouth, but Susan interjects.)

SUSAN

Ooh, before you start, I just want to thank you for -

(Rusty turns away.)

SUSAN

Don't be modest. I realize it's not good for a man with your mind and experience and powers of persuasion to sit around building his wife a beautiful house in the country, but it's done. Sweetheart, we've both been preoccupied.

(Susan reaches into one of the shopping bags and pulls out a fancy negligee.)

SUSAN

Let's not neglect each other tonight. Oh, I found something for you too.

(Susan hands Rusty a tie.)

SUSAN

The next time you're in one of those boring but extremely important meetings, just look down at the cute little miniature schnauzers and make me proud. I'll be right back. And when I return, how about you give me one of your famous foot massages?

(Susan exits. Rusty goes ballistic, in the way that a dog would. He strips down to his boxers and grabs the tie and does his best to mangle it up. He gnaws at it with his teeth and then buries it under the sofa cushion. He growls at his slippers. He jumps on the sofa. Susan enters, dressed in a beautiful, sexy, flowing negligee.)

SUSAN

Get off the sofa.

RUSTY

(barking throughout Susan's tirade) Ruff ruff ruff ruff ruff ruff ruff ruff.

SUSAN

Students from villages all over the world . . . are speaking ENGLISH BECAUSE THIS IS THE LAST DAY OF THE SCHOOL YEAR. They can order bagels in a deli, ask for directions to the subway. They talk -- TALK - to people on the street. Why? Because my methods work. In the classroom, as in life, English only. Why, Rusty, why are you . . . why? It's summertime. And we finally have our own house in the country. Where Sam will join us. I am out of patience. Stop doing that.

(The house phone buzzes.)

SUSAN

(into the phone) Oh, no! Well, okay. Yes. Send him up.

RUSTY

Ruff ruff ruff ruff ruff ruff ruff.

SUSAN

We have a guest. I know you're capable of speaking. I hear you say "good morning" to Stefan at the elevator. You scream obscenities at the New York Knicks. Now put your clothes back on. Take that slipper out of your mouth. And --

(The doorbell rings.)

RUSTY

Ruff, ruff, ruff.

(Susan shoves Rusty into a closet. She throws his clothes in after him.)

SUSAN

Oh just get in the closet. Stay in there until I come for you. Quiet now.

RUSTY

(whimpering) Rrrhhrrrrmmmm.

(Susan opens the front door. OMAR enters.)

SUSAN

Omar! Hello!

OMAR

Hello, Mrs. Shepherd. It is nice to see you again.

SUSAN

And so soon.

OMAR

Too soon? I'm sorry. You meant today, no?

SUSAN

Well, it's just that we're heading to the country in the morning. So, we're starting to pack. Why don't we schedule a time for us to speak by phone? I'll be free all summer long.

OMAR

An interview by phone is not the same as in person. I would like to do it as soon as possible. Now would be good.

SUSAN

I am so sorry, Omar. I feel terrible about this, but -

OMAR

I'm up for an internship in a TV station and they want to see that I can write.

SUSAN

Well, I'm sure you can write. You speak perfect English, after all. I know! Maybe we can Skype. Tomorrow afternoon?

OMAR

Now that I'm here, may I ask you about teaching E.S.L.? Just five minutes of your time.

SUSAN

Omar, there are other E.S.L. teachers in the city.

OMAR

But you were the best teacher I ever had, Mrs. Shepherd. And now I have so many questions for you.

SUSAN

We're moving to our new house. I really am, quite simply, out of time.

RUSTY

(from within the closet) Ruff, ruff, ruff.

OMAR

My big question is, how does E.S.L. work?

SUSAN

Who says it works? I'm not feeling very confident right now.

OMAR

Of course it works. You, Mrs. Shepherd, taught me to speak English. And now I speak perfectly.

SUSAN

I can't believe you remembered me. It's been ten years.

OMAR

I have never forgotten you. I used to dream about you at night.

SUSAN

At night?

OMAR

At night. During the day. All the time. Mrs. Shepherd, you changed my life. I used to fall asleep at night thinking of your classroom, dreaming that all the books were mine. I could hear the sound of your voice speaking perfect English and I pretended that you were near me.

SUSAN

I cannot be the source of your interview.

OMAR

I don't want to interview anyone else. You're the woman who opened up my world. The Mrs. Shepherd that I've never forgotten. You were different from the others.

SUSAN

I'm like everyone else.

OMAR

There was no one like you. You were -- you are -- a woman who wears nice clothes. Especially now. This is how you dress in your home!

SUSAN

I'll change.

OMAR

You must never change. I'll never forget how, whenever I whispered in class, you would stand beside me -

SUSAN

It's a classroom technique -- stand near the source of disruption so as to dissipate it.

OMAR

And when you did, you smelled like springtime --

SUSAN

You remember my . . . scent?

OMAR

-- a scent that I later learned was Chanel No. 5.

SUSAN

I never wore -

OMAR

I was a middle school boy whose mother was still in Mexico City and I used to pretend that you were my mother. I'd see billboards advertising Chanel and they always made me think of you.

SUSAN

I'm telling you I never wore -

OMAR

What was it? Viva La Juicy? Hypnotic Poison? Whatever it was, it drove me almost mad.

(There's a rustling sound from within the closet, as Rusty scratches at the door.)

SUSAN

(to Rusty behind the door) Stop that scratching.

RUSTY

(from behind the door) Ruff, ruff.

SUSAN

Oh, sorry. A pet. Not a pet. An experiment.

RUSTY

Ruff, ruff.

OMAR

Do you have a dog?

SUSAN

Dear God, no. I mean, yes, yes I guess we do. Once in a while, we have a dog visit us.

OMAR

You're dog-sitting?

SUSAN

You're good with the follow-up questions.

OMAR

Thank you. I like to probe for answers. I'm just getting warmed up. I feel like I could nail the interview right now. I know I could.

SUSAN

I don't think so. I'm so sorry.

OMAR

Ah, the reluctant source. What are you hiding?

RUSTY

Ruff, ruff.

SUSAN

Nothing. Why would you ask?

OMAR

Practicing my interviewing skills.

RUSTY

Ruff, ruff, ruff, ruff, ruff.

OMAR

I could make the dog part of the story.

SUSAN

What dog?

OMAR

I knew if I followed you - I mean . . . I am really excited about the story.

SUSAN

You followed me? From the school? To the market, in and out of shops . . . all the way home?

OMAR

What's behind this door?

(Omar opens a door.)

SUSAN

Nothing. Nothing.

OMAR

You're right. Just a broom closet.

(Omar opens another door.)

OMAR (cont.)

My journalism professor says look behind every door.

(Omar opens the closet door. Rusty steps out. He has transformed himself and is dressed in the trousers, shirt, suspenders, and loafers from before.)

RUSTY

(to Omar) Hello. I'm Rusty Shepherd. Welcome to our home.

OMAR

Where's the dog?

SUSAN

The dog? What dog?

RUSTY

You must be the young man my wife has been telling me about. Please. Come in.

SUSAN

Oh sweetheart, your voice, it's wonderful to hear you -

RUSTY

(to Omar) Tell us about yourself, son.

SUSAN

(to Rusty) Darling, first, what about your day? Speak. Just speak. Anything. To hear your voice is such a relief.

RUSTY

Omar, is it? Well, then, what are your life goals? How far are you willing to go to achieve your dreams? What's your version of the American dream? That is worth thinking about. If you have a vision for your life, I believe you can do almost anything.

OMAR

I agree.

RUSTY

What is it you agree with, son? What is it you're after?

OMAR

I agree with everything you say, Mr. Shepherd. I am very pleased to meet the husband of such an excellent teacher.

SUSAN

Well, maybe we should just do the interview right now. And then Rusty and I will pack for the country. (to Rusty) I'm so relieved that you're back to --.

RUSTY

(to Omar) Forget the formalities. Call me Rusty.

SUSAN

(to Omar) Well, okay, call me Susan. Now, let's talk about what you need before you have to head out.

OMAR

Rusty and Susan. May I just say: I love your apartment.

RUSTY

What's this I hear about an internship?

OMAR

If I get an internship in a TV station, it will lead to a job. But first I must prove myself. I'm doing a story on "How I Learned to Speak English in a Middle School in the Heart of the Bronx."

RUSTY

You've had some life experience. That's a quality I look for.

OMAR

Now that I'm here, I'd like to know what it's like to be married to an E.S.L. teacher? Someone as inspiring as Mrs., I mean, Susan?

SUSAN

(to Omar) Rusty has been very supportive. Thanks to him, I've been buying my own school supplies for years. We agreed a long time ago, it's important for everyone to feel comfortable and supported in the classroom.

RUSTY

What are you drinking son?

OMAR

Whatever you're having.

SUSAN

(to Omar) As I was saying, Rusty has been very supportive.
(to Rusty) That reminds me, I took Ming to your eye doctor last week. (to Omar) Her parents have a hard time with English and her eye was puffy. (to Rusty) Thank you, darling. You'll get the bill. Now, go ahead, tell Omar your answer.

RUSTY

How about a glass of sauvignon blanc?

OMAR

Sounds fine.

RUSTY

Unless you want something stronger.

SUSAN

(to Omar) I'll get you a glass.

(Susan exits.)

RUSTY

Eat. Go ahead. Meat. Cheese. You must be hungry.

OMAR

Oh, the food Susan picked out at Fairway. Not that I was -

RUSTY

I sense that you will stop at nothing to get what you want.

OMAR

Yes, I want to file my story by midnight. "File" is a journalism term for --

RUSTY

I don't give interviews. I don't read the newspapers. And if you ask me one more question, you're going off the terrace.

OMAR

Okay. I mean. I'm sorry. Uh, did I say something wrong?

RUSTY

Relax. I don't bite. Here's what I need to know: Son, do you believe in the American dream, and that if you work hard and go forward with the fullest forces of your heart and soul, you will achieve it beyond your wildest imagination?

OMAR

I do, sir. I am a dreamer. I want a wife, some kids, a career, and a dog too. I think this is the country for dreaming big. That's what my mother told me. It would be a shame to stop dreaming.

RUSTY

Excellent. I want to ask you one thing: Do you love my wife?

OMAR

No. I did not mean anything.

RUSTY

But I heard you.

OMAR

I did not mean to follow her to Fairway or to the --.

RUSTY

You love my wife.

OMAR

I love your wife?

RUSTY

Good. Good. That's the way it should be. It's the foundation for everything. Now let's get down to business: I had an epiphany.

OMAR

What kind of --?

RUSTY

Epiphany? A very special epiphany.

(Omar pulls out his reporter's notepad and begins writing.)

RUSTY

Put that away or you're going off the -

OMAR

Okay, okay. I want to hear about your epiphany.

RUSTY

It's all about the bottom line. It comes down to this: No use living unless you're doing something special. If you're not doing something special, you might as well be dead.

OMAR

Okay, I guess. Yes. I agree.

RUSTY

I should hope you agree. This all depends on you.

OMAR

On me?

RUSTY

This is how life is, son. It can change in a heartbeat. And when you hit your stride, when you latch onto an idea, some people call it strategy - a clear vision of the future - all you have to do is take a leap. I have done it. And I'm about to do it again.

OMAR

I can see that you have taken the right leaps. You are a lucky man. And that must mean Susan is a lucky woman.

RUSTY

Lucky? According to Congress and the American public and the journos out there, people like me screwed everyone so bad we should be strung up in the town square.

OMAR

Oh. Okay.

RUSTY

You think that's okay?

OMAR

No. Not okay.

RUSTY

Well maybe it is okay, but where would we be if - whoa. You're good. Getting me talking like that. For the last time, I'm not doing any interviews. What I just said was off the record. Otherwise, you're going off the terrace.

(Susan enters with a wine glass
for Omar.)

SUSAN

Here we are. Rusty, will you do the honors? Omar, how's the
interview going?

(Rusty turns away from Susan.
Rusty pours the wine, making a
point of not looking at Susan.)

RUSTY

(to Omar) Tell her there's no interview happening here or
you're going off the terrace.

OMAR

(to Susan) I am not interviewing.

SUSAN

But I wanted to hear his answer. What's it like being married
to -- honey -- I've been teaching E.S.L. since the day you met
me.

RUSTY

We're just having a drink, isn't that right, Omar?

OMAR

I would like to make a toast. To my new friends Susan and
Rusty.

RUSTY and SUSAN and OMAR
(together)

Cheers.

(They raise their glasses and
drink.)

RUSTY

You from the Middle East, Omar?

OMAR

No. No, I'm from -

SUSAN

(to Rusty) Sorry to interrupt, darling, but Omar came here for a story. He's on deadline. Can't we just come up with a quote?

RUSTY

(to Omar) Susan loves foreign travel, the more exotic the better. I took her to Istanbul. Why? Because she wanted to go.

OMAR

(to Susan) Susan, I love hearing about your life.

SUSAN

(to Omar) Yes, well, right now we're a little bit preoccupied with the house. It's new. Very exciting, of course. (to Rusty) Rusty, have you been in touch with my brother? Did he leave keys with you?

RUSTY

(to Omar) Tell her my meetings are of a confidential nature and always have been.

SUSAN

(to Omar) Tell him I'm asking about the house. Better yet, ask him if he made an appointment with Dr. Metcalf.

RUSTY

(to Omar) Tell her I had to let her go. It was difficult but necessary.

SUSAN

You fired your therapist?

RUSTY

(to Omar) I did it gently, with a smile.

SUSAN

(to Omar) I'm so sorry. How awkward.

OMAR

No reason to apologize, Susan. I've never been married before, but I think it's common at a certain point to have these kinds of . . . whatever this is.

RUSTY

At a certain point? We're not that old, son. Now tell us something about yourself. Where do you go to school? When do you graduate? What are your prospects after graduation?

SUSAN

He's trying to get an internship.

OMAR

Uh, sir, I'm a sophomore at Hostos Community College. *(beat)* It's in the Bronx.

RUSTY

Don't know it. More important, is there a strong alumni network to rely on? Connections, son, connections are important.

OMAR

I have no idea, sir. If I had my wish, I would go to Syracuse. They teach Broadcast Journalism. The best program in the country.

RUSTY

The Orange. You like basketball? You should go there.

OMAR

I cannot afford a private education, sir. It's just that, I want to be a journalist. Not to mention have a beautiful wife and raise a family and enjoy a view of the park.

RUSTY

Does it have to be journalism? Aren't those people kind of cynical?

OMAR

Actually, I hope to be on television. I practice all the time: "Tonight on the evening news, we visit the home of -"

RUSTY

Keep me out of this.

SUSAN

He's just practicing.

OMAR

"Breaking news at eleven."

RUSTY

People I didn't even know threw eggs at me. Mrs. Posner, who's been in this building since the beginning of time, tried to poison me with her gazpacho.

SUSAN

He's not himself. Six months ago something a little surprising happened. By Labor Day, he'll be fine.

RUSTY

She wanted me to eat soup and die. Write that down. No, don't write that down.

OMAR

I'm not a real journalist.

RUSTY

(jovial) Well that's a relief.

SUSAN

(to Rusty) Mrs. Posner didn't really try to - it was food poisoning. Anyway, that's all in the past.

RUSTY

Omar, we'll get you into Syracuse. That's where you should go.

SUSAN

You haven't even answered his first question.

OMAR

You're both so inspiring. I have an idea. I'll write a story about my new friends Susan and Rusty and how they came to live so high in the sky.

SUSAN

(to Rusty) Sweetheart, remember when we first met? You had about two cents to your name and I had just come back from running around Europe with everything in a backpack. You whispered the sweetest thing to me - *(to Omar)* Rusty believes in love at first sight, he's like that - *(to Rusty)* and then everything fell into place. Except. You sent Sam to that school. That's when things went a little off course.

SUSAN (*cont'd.*)

(*to Omar*) Ever since Rusty decided our little Sam - well, he's almost eighteen - anyway, Rusty sent him away to a private school. Down the road from our new house. I miss him so much.

RUSTY

(*to Omar*) She should be happy the kid isn't here. What kind of an example would I -- ruff, ruff, ruff. Every day, it's like I'm drowning. Except the water only teases me. Can't drown, can't catch my breath. Can't expose a kid to that. Not a kid who gets pretty much whatever he wants.

SUSAN

He doesn't get everything he wants. He doesn't like the school. He wants to be here.

RUSTY

(*to Omar*) I think you're the first kid I've met who isn't spoiled. You're a rare gem. In need of a little polishing. Everyone needs grooming for the executive suite. No one gets there alone. I want to adopt you as my own.

OMAR

I'm going to be twenty-one in July.

RUSTY

Stay with us.

SUSAN

But Omar lives with his aunt and uncle.

RUSTY

We're generous people. Take Sam's room. He's not coming back for a while. We'll get you situated. We'll get you into Syracuse.

SUSAN

(*to Rusty*) But we're leaving. And we're not coming back until Labor Day.

RUSTY

(*to Omar*) This wine is great, isn't it? Less than twenty bucks. New Zealand. Screws right off the top.

SUSAN

Rusty, we have to pack. We're already behind schedule.

OMAR

Uh, maybe I'll take a look at Sam's room?

RUSTY

(to Omar) Make yourself at home, kid. Down the hall, second door on the right.

OMAR

Thank you so much.

(Omar exits.)

SUSAN

What are you doing? That kid? Omar? He has serious separation issues. I used to have to kick him out of my classroom. I see he hasn't changed. I'll tell you one thing, he has to leave right now. Either give him a quote for his story or wrap it up.

RUSTY

Ruff ruff ruff ruff ruff ruff ruff.

SUSAN

(regarding her negligee) Why did I bother with this? My feet, by the way, are killing me. Whatever happened to tradition? I used to come home at the end of a long day, on the last day of the school year, and you rubbed my feet. Our special thing. Are you even capable of a foot massage?

(Omar enters.)

OMAR

I just want to say, I love Sam's room. It's the kind of room I've always dreamed of for myself.

RUSTY

Come here, son. Come here. She needs a foot massage.

OMAR

Of course.

(Omar gives Susan a foot massage.)

SUSAN
Oooh. Oooh. That's good. That's very good.

RUSTY
Don't forget the big toes.

SUSAN
Ah, yes. Yes. Yes.

RUSTY
Ease her pain. Ease her pain.

OMAR
This is what my grandmother in Mexico would do for pain, any kind of pain. I don't know if it helps what you are going through, Susan, but I will do anything to ease your pain.

RUSTY
Aw, kid, nice work.

OMAR
They say there are nerves in the feet that are connected to organs all over our bodies. I don't know what the problem is, but maybe this helps.

RUSTY
It helps. It helps.

OMAR
Just relax, Susan.

SUSAN
Oh. Oh. Yes. Yes. More. More. More.

RUSTY
You're very good.

SUSAN
(orgasmic) Don't stop. Oh. Oh. Yes. Yes. Yes.

(The foot rub is over.)

RUSTY
I used to be able to do that.

OMAR

How was it, Susan?

SUSAN

Oh my. *(composing herself)* It was out of this world.

OMAR

You seem very relaxed.

SUSAN

I am. Very . . . relaxed.

OMAR

Aren't you glad I stayed?

SUSAN

Yes. And now . . . summer can begin. I'm going to pack.

RUSTY

Help her pack, Omar.

SUSAN

Perhaps you should find a new story.

OMAR

Susan! It's time to pack.

SUSAN

I thought you were leaving.

OMAR

Nope. I'm helping you pack. Remember when I used to stay after school and help you tidy up the classroom? It's kind of like that.

(Susan and Omar exit. Rusty stares straight ahead, satisfied. End of scene. Lights fade.)

Scene 3.

(Later, on the terrace, Rusty paces, stopping now and then to shove his face in a bowl of cereal. Omar enters, wearing pajamas, a robe, and slippers, and carrying a glass of scotch.)

RUSTY

What took you so long?

OMAR

Hey pops. *(laughing at himself)* Haha! "Pops." I was helping Susan pack and now I'm taking a break. *(indicating pajamas)* Everything fits. Sam's room is great. Okay if I settle in for the night?

RUSTY

Of course. What are you drinking?

OMAR

I think it's whiskey.

(Rusty smells the drink.)

RUSTY

Son, this is single-malt scotch.

OMAR

Oh, I'm sorry.

RUSTY

Drink, drink. You've earned it. You're helping Susan, and that's important.

OMAR

I think the foot massage was good for her.

RUSTY

Yes. It was good for her because it's what she wanted. Keep that in mind.

OMAR

Tomorrow we go to the country?

RUSTY

The country? No one is going to the country until we get things back on track.

OMAR

Sorry. I didn't know.

RUSTY

You didn't know. Well you better start knowing. By the way, you don't look like an Omar. Anyone ever tell you that?

OMAR

I get that, sometimes. I have nothing against the name, but, truthfully, I wish I had an American name.

RUSTY

Like what? Yankee?

OMAR

Perfect. Yankee Gonzalez. Then people will hire me. They won't size me up just because --

RUSTY

Hold on, you're gonna run into problems with "Yankee." Too political. You want something people will feel sympathy for. The sympathy factor cannot be underestimated. Like, "Give blank a break. Maybe we should hire blank so we all feel better. We've been making fun of blank for too long."

OMAR

But what is "blank?" What name can do all those things?

RUSTY

Omar sure as hell can't. . . . It's gotta be something like . . . I got it, I got it: Cleveland.

OMAR

Cleveland?

RUSTY

Yeah, it used to be the laughingstock of this country. The city that defaulted on its own loans. The city with a river that caught on fire. The mayor's hair caught on fire.

OMAR

Really?

RUSTY

Don't you know your American history?

OMAR

I guess not.

RUSTY

Picture it: Industry. Smokestacks. Corporate headquarters. It grew up fast and furious. Grand buildings. Museums. A symphony hall. Then one day, a few mistakes later, it's America's version of a hell hole.

OMAR

Why would I want to be named after that?

RUSTY

Look at it now. Nobody's laughing at Cleveland. It's got the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. Bars and restaurants over the river that burned. Those who laugh at Cleveland? They feel shame, or they ought to. 'Cuz we're all in the dumps, the whole country. Except for Fargo. But no one knows where that is. So stick with Cleveland.

OMAR

Cleveland Gonzalez.

RUSTY

It works.

OMAR

It works.

(Rusty grabs a wine glass and makes a toast.)

RUSTY

You, my boy, are the future. I salute you.

(They drink.)

OMAR

And I salute you.

RUSTY

What the hell for?

OMAR

For Susan.

RUSTY

You really are the right man for this job.

OMAR

I don't know what the job is, but I think Susan is almost too good to be true. To wake up every day and think to yourself, I am with a woman who is almost too good to be true. You must be the happiest man alive.

RUSTY

Arghooooohhhhaarghlhooooowwwwl.

OMAR

Are you okay?

RUSTY

I don't want you to go to Syracuse.

OMAR

I need to get my education. I thought you were going to get me into -

RUSTY

It's cold up there.

OMAR

Just when I thought my life was going to change.

RUSTY

Oh, it's changing.

OMAR

Not if I can't go to Syracuse.

RUSTY

You can get an education in the city.

OMAR

It's not the same. I want to be on TV.

RUSTY

I'll make you a deal. I had an ephiphany, see? I'm setting up a new infrastructure.

OMAR

Infrastructure?

RUSTY

A new infrastructure. You like the sound of that?

OMAR

Ah, sure, yes, I like the sound of that.

RUSTY

Good. Because, you, kid, you're part of it. You're staying. You're not going anywhere.

OMAR

But I'm ambitious.

RUSTY

Excellent. That's why you're the only person I'm telling.

OMAR

That sounds bad.

RUSTY

You know what was bad? The bailout. The bailout was bad. Why? Because it was impersonal. This new infrastructure? It's close to the heart. It's all about Susan. Making her happy.

OMAR

Can I ask you something?

RUSTY

Anything. Of course. I like your questions.

OMAR

I haven't asked anything yet.

RUSTY

That's just it. I like your style of negotiation. Now, you seem very devoted to my wife. What will it take to bring you on board? By that I mean, you live here, you go to your classes, and most important, you help Susan with whatever she needs. Name your price.

OMAR

My price? I don't know.

RUSTY

You gotta know your price.

OMAR

I have no price.

RUSTY

Don't settle, Cleveland, don't let a bad loan or a burning river take your spirit. What do you want?

OMAR

I want to be a great television broadcaster. I thought I was going to Syracuse.

RUSTY

Forget the Orange. Aren't there any decent schools around here, in the city?

OMAR

Columbia?

RUSTY

I'll make a few calls. You're in.

OMAR

I've never met anyone like you. The way you take hold of a situation and -

RUSTY

You're going to Columbia, kid, you're going to the Ivy League.

OMAR

I am?

RUSTY

Yes, you are, son. Yes you are.

(Susan enters, carrying a pile
of bills.)

SUSAN

Rusty? Look at this. Three months of . . . (*difficult to say
the words*) unpaid bills? They came pouring out of the drawer
of your nightstand. I was about to pack your eye pillow and
then, these, just . . . what are they doing in our bedroom?
Your desk is where they belong and why are they all overdue?

RUSTY

(*to himself*) How can a dog pay the bills? (*to Omar*) Tell
her when the infrastructure is in place, the bills will be
paid.

SUSAN

Fine, I'll pay the bills, for a change.

OMAR

Susan, is there anything I can do to help?

SUSAN

Tell my husband - oh forget it. No, tell him, there are
certain traditions that we have upheld on the last day of
school. I haven't forgotten. He knows.

(Susan exits.)

RUSTY

We've got a situation. Let's see if you're up to the task at
hand.

OMAR

A situation?

RUSTY

When you're part of the infrastructure, there's always a
situation. Get used to it. So, what's your plan?

OMAR

My plan?

RUSTY

What? I have to micromanage you?

OMAR

Sorry. I, uh, I don't follow.

RUSTY

What's not to follow? Ah, my fault, son. You've already been through a lot, Cleveland, coming over here on a boat or packed in a truck or whatever your circumstances were -

OMAR

I flew here on an airplane.

RUSTY

Whatever. Look, my wife needs those bills paid. What's the solution?

OMAR

Solution?

RUSTY

When I say "What's the solution?" You say, "There's a solution. There's a solution." Then think of something.

OMAR

There's a solution. There's a solution.

RUSTY

Good. What?

OMAR

She should . . . pay them herself?

RUSTY

I love you, son, but Susan teaches E.S.L. in a public school in New York City. I thought you knew that. She has grown accustomed to a certain lifestyle.

OMAR

Um, can you help her with the bills?

RUSTY

Help her? Help her? That has been my mission in life since the moment I fell in love with her. Let me put it this way: Say you have a dog in your household, do you look to the dog to pay the bills?

OMAR

I don't think so.

RUSTY

Right. So. Someone has to pay those bills.

OMAR

Don't look at me. I'm just a student.

RUSTY

Cleveland, I like your new name. But this isn't working out. Finish your scotch, get your clothes, and leave.

OMAR

But I love it here. I don't want to leave Susan. I don't want to leave you. Please don't make me go.

RUSTY

Our business is over.

OMAR

I'm part of the infrastructure.

RUSTY

You're not contributing to the bottom line.

(Susan enters.)

SUSAN

There's nothing left. I called the bank, got a hold of someone in - I don't know - Manilla? We figured out the security code. Your birthday! And then, this highly articulate voice told me there is fifteen dollars and thirty-seven cents in our checking account. I have been withdrawing from this account for, for, well, forever, it seems. And there was always - well, well, you know, money. And now?

RUSTY

(howling) Howwwwl.

SUSAN

What's going on? Where's our money? Why didn't you say something about this?

OMAR

Susan, may I just say . . . you look so beautiful in your, what do you call this?

SUSAN

It's a NEGLIGEE. And the bill for MY NEGLIGEE will be arriving any day now. I'm surprised the store took my credit card.

OMAR

Do not worry. There's a solution. There's a solution.

SUSAN

I want to hear Rusty's explanation for this.

RUSTY

Cleveland? What's the explanation?

OMAR

Um . . . We're having a meeting. We'll get back to you.

RUSTY

Good idea, Cleveland. Call an emergency meeting.

SUSAN

A meeting? You want a meeting? Fine. I would like a meeting. With my husband. *(beat)* Did he just call you Cleveland?

OMAR

Yes. Your husband gave me a new name. It will get respect.

SUSAN

Respect? I doubt it. Rusty, what are we going to do about the -

RUSTY

(wimpering) Errrrr.

SUSAN

I give up.

(Susan begins to exit.)

OMAR

(to Susan, offering wine) Never give up. Have a glass of --

(Susan grabs the bottle of wine,
drinks directly from it.)

SUSAN

Oh give me the whole bottle. And go to your room.

OMAR

But I want to help.

SUSAN

To your room right now.

(As Omar exits, Rusty cries out
to him.)

RUSTY

Get on the case, Cleveland. We have a cash flow problem.

OMAR

What do I do? Should I go to Sam's room?

SUSAN

(to Omar) No. It's time for you to go home.

RUSTY

(to Omar) Sam's not here. Go there. And get someone over
here now. A kid in a hoodie who's launching an IPO. Somebody
with a future.

SUSAN

(to Rusty) What?

OMAR

I'm texting all my friends. Peace out.

(Omar exits.)

RUSTY

Ruff ruff ruff ruff ruff.

(Rusty starts ripping up
furniture, then cowers.)

RUSTY

(whimpering) Rrrhhrrrrmmmm.

SUSAN

This behavior of yours? It is unacceptable. And I'm not speaking about the bills. Of course, you'll take care of all that. You always have. But I want you to know what hurts the most. You don't look at me. *(drinking wine)* And if you think that by sleeping on a doggy mat at the side of our bed means we're still sleeping together, it doesn't. I remember how used to put on your pajamas, get into bed, prop yourself up to read.

(Rusty comes close to Susan, but doesn't look at her.)

SUSAN

Then I'd start undressing slowly. And I'd catch you looking up from your book. I liked that kind of attention. I used to buy dresses with zippers in the back. Because that meant I'd need your help, your hands taking the zipper down. I miss the pleasure we had. And in the morning, your voice in my ear. "Good morning, Susan." Remember? And I'd say "Good morning, darling." What happened?

RUSTY

(softly) Ruff ruff.

SUSAN

Oh ruff, ruff, ruff yourself.

RUSTY

Ruff, ruff, ruff.

SUSAN

Okay, buster, two can play this game.

(Susan barks. Rusty barks back. They sniff each other. Soon they are entangled, kissing, licking. It is very romantic. They are about to get down on all fours and take this further when Susan freaks out.)

SUSAN

What are we doing?

RUSTY

(moaning) Mmmmmmm.

SUSAN

I have never been so humiliated. I don't recognize you anymore. All these years, I cared for you and loved you. We were a family. What have we become?

RUSTY

(moaning) Mmmmmmm.

(Omar enters.)

SUSAN

I'm leaving.

OMAR

You're coming back, aren't you?

SUSAN

Why? To be treated like a -- ? Oh Omar. Why would you want to stay here?

OMAR

Why would I ever want to leave? Did I do something wrong?

SUSAN

No. You did nothing wrong. You're making an effort. Maybe that's all that ever matters. It's more than my husband is doing. I'm going to get my bags.

OMAR

He's making an effort. I know he is.

SUSAN

(to Omar) He's making an effort with you, I see that. *(to Rusty)* When I return, a simple "I love you" will keep me here tonight.

(Susan exits.)

OMAR

You're gonna make the effort, right? Why aren't you saying anything? Tell her what she wants to hear. Like, tell her she's really hot. Tell her you dig her, that you love her. Because you do. I know you do. Hey, I texted my friend Sanjay. Sent pictures too. Know what he texted back? "Mrs. Shepherd is so hot." C'mon, man, you're her husband. Tell her she's --

(Susan enters, with bags on her shoulders.)

RUSTY

(a feeble attempt) Ruff? Ruff? Ruff?

SUSAN

I don't know what that means. But I do know it's summer break. And that means everyone's speaking English. So you listen to these three words: We are separated.

RUSTY

(as in "separated?") Ruff-ah-ra-ted?

SUSAN

Sam and I will be at the house. I don't want him to see you like this. What am I saying? I don't want to see you like this. Not anymore.

RUSTY

(moaning) Mmmmmmm.

(Susan exits.)

OMAR

Why? Why didn't you say the words?

RUSTY

Ruff, ruff, ruff, ruff, ruff.

OMAR

I don't get it. Everything was great, like two seconds ago. I'm going to my room. There's a solution. There's a solution. No! I'm not going to my room. I'm going after her. I'll bring her back. And then you'll say the words.

(Omar exits. End of scene.)

Scene 4.

(The house phone rings. Rusty picks up the phone and speaks without listening to the voice at the other end:)

Door's open.

RUSTY

(Rusty opens the front door, returns to the terrace, then turns back, picking up the scent at the door. He opens it to Bianca.)

That was fast.

BIANCA

Bi-an-ca.

RUSTY

(Rusty tries to embrace Bianca, but she is a volcanic wall of venom and cannot hug.)

Settle down, asshole, I didn't come over to play.

BIANCA

Yo. Wuz up?

RUSTY

You know you can't do street talk for sh--.

BIANCA

Whoa. Remember Susan's rule: No cursing.

RUSTY

Fuuuuu - Where is she, anyway?

BIANCA

Gone.

RUSTY

Where's Marshall?

BIANCA

RUSTY

How would I know?

BIANCA

Don't play innocent with me. I told him to get his ass over here. Sounded bad on the phone. Got himself into some nightmare of a deal.

RUSTY

Hold on. He's done a deal?

BIANCA

And you're gonna straighten everything out. Because something's gone down. And it's not good.

RUSTY

Marshall, my man! Never thought he had it in him. That's the solution. That's the solution. Bianca. Bianca. Bianca.

BIANCA

Stop sniffing me.

(Rusty lunges at Bianca, kisses her smack on the lips. Bianca slaps Rusty.)

BIANCA

What's wrong with you?

RUSTY

Marshall's the man! And I'm a dog. I love being a dog. Wanna play?

(Rusty chases Bianca around the room.)

BIANCA

Down. Sit. Don't move.

(Bianca whips handcuffs out of her bag and cuffs Rusty to a chair.)

RUSTY

(panting) I'm a bad dog. A very bad dog. I didn't do that. What I just did --

BIANCA

But you did it.

RUSTY

I'm sorry. You're my sister-in-law. I would never do something like - see, a dog gets excited. I would have smooched the first person I saw after hearing that Marshall got himself a project.

BIANCA

Stop it. I been hit on before. Good thing I like you, Rusty. Now give it to me straight. Wuz up?

RUSTY

(referring to handcuffs) Get me out of these.

BIANCA

The more you squirm the more it hurts. Keep talking.

RUSTY

All I want is the life of a dog.

BIANCA

What a stunt. Man up, Rusty.

RUSTY

I want to be a good dog. Can you help me, Bianca?

BIANCA

Something going on between you and Susan?

RUSTY

I love her too much. That's the problem.

BIANCA

Heard that before - at the scene of a homicide.

RUSTY

(referring to handcuffs) Get me out of these.

BIANCA

God, I feel like beating you up.

RUSTY

Do it. Beat me up.

BIANCA
How badly?

RUSTY
Black and blue. Bloody.

BIANCA
Scratch marks?

RUSTY
Yeah.

BIANCA
Want me to burn you?

RUSTY
No. Don't burn me. Just beat me up.

BIANCA
You know what's weird? It's not that much fun to beat up somebody who really wants it.

RUSTY
I thought you enjoyed beating people up.

BIANCA
I like scaring people, but only if it serves a greater purpose.

RUSTY
Like what?

BIANCA
Duh? Like protecting the community. What happened? Did they fire your brains too?

RUSTY
Wish they had. Go ahead. Hold a gun to my head. Finish me off.

BIANCA
Never say something as dumb as that to someone in law enforcement. I carry a concealed weapon, loser.

RUSTY

You ever read more than the crime news in the *Post*? Check out the business section. Half the country's in bankruptcy because of people like me. Got the whole friggin country, not to mention Congress and the President of the United States holding me up as a symbol of what NOT TO DO. I don't go out of my home. Nobody returns my calls.

BIANCA

Wanna know what I do with my probationers? I put them on a three-year plan. I forget you civilians get to walk around without one, as if you know what you're doing.

RUSTY

Why plan? I can't see beyond tomorrow. You can't fix this.

BIANCA

I can try.

RUSTY

You think I need rehab or something?

BIANCA

Rehab? People think you can rehabilitate a criminal. No. There's no rehab. There's only habilitation. Most criminals never knew how to live in the first place, so how can you rehabilitate them? Your problem, Rusty? You been too lucky all your life. You need to habilitate to the real world, which happens to be full of bad luck and a few moments of good luck. And a lot of in-between luck.

RUSTY

The real world? Why would I want that?

BIANCA

Only way to get back in the game. Get your feet on the ground. And then you can soar.

RUSTY

Soar through the air? Think that's a good idea?

BIANCA

If you don't like the sound of the real world, you better soar.

RUSTY

Okay. I'll soar. That's my plan. Now will you please remove the handcuffs?

BIANCA

Well I wasn't gonna keep you in them forever.

(Bianca frees Rusty.)

RUSTY

Do me a favor. Make sure Sam gets to know his new cousin. And be nice to Susan, okay?

BIANCA

Susan? She's always picking on my grammar. Makes me wanna smack her.

RUSTY

Don't do that.

BIANCA

I gotta get out of here. Gotta go babysit Marshall. Ooh. Did I say baby? I like the sound of that. I'm having a baby.

(Bianca exits. Rusty heads to the terrace. Lights fade. End of scene.)

Scene 5.

(Susan enters the hallway of the apartment building. She finds STEFAN at the service elevator.)

SUSAN

Excuse me, Stefan?

STEFAN

Yes, Mrs. Shepherd? What can I do for you?

SUSAN

I've been in the garage. I don't know what's wrong with me. I should have called the front desk. I can't find my car.

STEFAN

No worries. They move the cars around. I will call the front desk for you.

SUSAN

I'm so sorry. I guess I can go and do that.

STEFAN

No. It is not a problem, Mrs. Shepherd. I will call now.

SUSAN

If you would, thank you. I just wanted to leave quickly.

STEFAN

(*into a walkie talkie*) Carlos? Tell the garage that Mrs. Shepherd, Penthouse B, needs her car. (*to Susan*) They bring it around in about ten minutes.

SUSAN

Thank you.

STEFAN

Your bag, pinching your shoulders. May I?

(Stefan removes a bag from Susan's shoulders.)

SUSAN

Oh, that's so much better.

STEFAN

Maybe carry that one in your hand. Like this. Be careful of your back. You have a very delicate back.

SUSAN

Yes, thank you.

STEFAN

Okay. Anything else? . . . I will get back to the elevator, unless you -

SUSAN

Stefan?

STEFAN

Yes, Mrs. Shepherd?

SUSAN

Nothing. . . . Actually, do I detect the odor of garbage?

STEFAN

Never really goes away.

SUSAN

Have you tried sprays and deodorizers?

STEFAN

Like I say, never really goes away.

SUSAN

How unfortunate. Well, I'm leaving for the country. Driving up there now. I'll be gone all summer.

STEFAN

Have a nice summer.

SUSAN

Stefan?

STEFAN

Yes, Mrs. Shepherd?

SUSAN

Do you mind if I ride with you? While they're getting my car?

STEFAN

In the service elevator?

SUSAN

I need to clear my head.

STEFAN

Not in this elevator.

SUSAN

Please. I won't ask another thing of you all summer.

STEFAN

If you insist. But I think there is something better than riding in the service elevator.

SUSAN

Just take me for a ride.

STEFAN

Would be better in a Mercedes Benz, but okay, we're going for a ride.

(This is an old pre-war building and the elevator is run manually. We hear the crank of the wheel and there is a sense of soaring up and down.)

STEFAN

How was that, Mrs. Shepherd?

SUSAN

Don't stop, Stefan. More. More, please. Keep going.

(The elevator soars up and down, then stops.)

SUSAN

Where are we?

STEFAN

In the basement.

SUSAN

Oh, the dungeon.

STEFAN

I like the way you say "the dungeon."

SUSAN

"The dungeon."

(Susan lets her bags drop. She
kisses Stefan. Stefan looks
alarmed.)

STEFAN

Why did you do that?

SUSAN

I like the way you handle the elevator? . . . I, I wanted to
kiss you. I mean, the order of things is foot massage, back
rub, kissing and then - oh, I'm so sorry. Except there is no
more order. There was no back rub.

STEFAN

What?

SUSAN

Don't worry. I won't turn it around and sue you or anything.

STEFAN

I was not thinking of that. Mrs. Shepherd, I was thinking I
must be in a dream.

SUSAN

Maybe it is a dream. Oh, you can call me Susan.

STEFAN

I been looking at you for a long time, Susan.

SUSAN

Sometimes I thought so, Stefan.

STEFAN

This is a dream.

SUSAN

I don't think so. I still smell . . . the odor of garbage.

STEFAN

Every time I opened the front door for you and pressed the elevator button, I thought to myself, I like that woman.

SUSAN

When you look at me, what do you see?

STEFAN

That a trick question?

SUSAN

No.

STEFAN

You want to kiss some more?

SUSAN

I need to know. What do you see? I'm a mother and a teacher and a wife. But when you look at me, am I more than that? Or less than that? I'm a little out of touch, you know?

STEFAN

I been picturing you naked ever since I started in this building.

SUSAN

Really?

STEFAN

I shouldn't have said that. You gonna sue me?

SUSAN

No. No. I don't mind, what you just said.

STEFAN

Don't embarrass me.

(Susan and Stefan kiss and playfully engage in something very sensual within the close confines of the service elevator.)

SUSAN

What did I look like naked?

STEFAN

You don't know? I mean -- very beautiful.

SUSAN

Thank you. Now I think it's time to go down.

STEFAN

Yeah.

SUSAN

I mean go back up, to the lobby. The car is probably here.

STEFAN

Can I meet you here again?

SUSAN

I'm afraid not.

STEFAN

No one has to know.

SUSAN

Stefan, I have a family. Or I did. I'm not sure.

STEFAN

Yes, husband, son, very nice family. And you are the center.

SUSAN

That is how you see it? Thank you. You've done more for me in this elevator than, well, than I could ever have imagined.

STEFAN

No. No. Thank you. It's just what I do. Run the elevator.

(Gargled sounds come from the walkie-talkie.)

STEFAN

Mrs. Shepherd, bad news. You no longer seem to have a car.

(End of scene.)

Scene 6.

(Omar enters the apartment.
Rusty is on the terrace.)

OMAR

Rusty! I couldn't find her anywhere. Where are you?

(Rusty enters.)

RUSTY

Ruff.

OMAR

The doorman said he never saw her leave. He thinks I don't belong here. I had to follow a delivery guy into the building. Thanks for leaving the front door open. Aren't you worried about Susan?

RUSTY

Ruff.

OMAR

I think that means you're worried. What are we going to do? What's the solution? What's the solution?

RUSTY

Ruff.

(Susan enters the apartment
quietly. Omar and Rusty do not
hear her.)

OMAR

Why don't you do something? Maybe she's in the country. She was packing to go to the house, right? Follow her there. What are you waiting for?

RUSTY

Ruff?

OMAR

Let's go together. C'mon. . . . It's not the same without her. Why are you being like this?

(Susan comes closer, making her
presence known.)

SUSAN

He can't follow me. We have no car. I'm stuck too.

OMAR

Susan! *(to Rusty)* This is it, buddy. You better say something right now.

(Rusty turns away.)

OMAR

He really missed you. He wasn't the same without you.

(Susan lets her bags drop to the floor.)

SUSAN

If there is something on his mind, Omar, he can speak for himself.

OMAR

(to Rusty) Pops? What is wrong with you? You're living my dream. And your woman just came back in the room. I mean, really, what is wrong with you?

SUSAN

He doesn't see me.

OMAR

(to Susan) You two have to stay together. *(to both Susan and Rusty)* You're family. We're kind of like family. Aren't we?

(The house phone rings.)

OMAR

I will never be the same if something happens to you two.

(The house phone rings.)

OMAR

Is someone going to get that?

(No one moves. Omar picks up the house phone.)

OMAR

(into the phone) Whoever it is, send them up. *(to Rusty and Susan)* Is that okay? I mean, I didn't know what to say. . . . Say something. How can you not talk?

SUSAN

We've become very good at it.

OMAR

(to Susan) Everything he does is to make you happy. He told me.

(Apartment doorbell rings.)

OMAR

I'll get it.

(Omar answers the door. Marshall and Bianca come storming in, carrying overnight bags.)

BIANCA

(to Rusty) I thought you said everything was going to be fine. You were going to take care of the goons.

MARSHALL

(to Rusty) It's almost the day after tomorrow. When are the wire transfers going through?

BIANCA

Wait 'til you hear about the so-called deal. And by the way, we still got creditors climbing up our ass.

SUSAN

Marshall? Bianca?

BIANCA

Sorry about the bad language, Susan.

SUSAN

What are you doing here?

BIANCA

Marshall did the stupidest thing.

SUSAN

It may be accurate to say he did "a stupid thing." Wait a minute? Did you drive here? Can I borrow your jeep?

MARSHALL

Afraid not.

BIANCA

It's packed full of our life possessions. Or as many as Marshall could squeeze into it.

MARSHALL

I had to do something.

BIANCA

You sure did. Marshall got hysterical and rented out our apartment. We have nowhere to stay. Our home is occupied.

MARSHALL

I did a deal, okay? And it felt good. Rusty isn't the only one who can do deals. I can do deals. I did a deal. I showed a guy a lease and he signed. I got a security deposit and two months rent.

BIANCA

The lease was effective today. Now we got no place to live.

SUSAN

We "have" no place to live. "Have."

BIANCA

What does it matter how you say it? We are homeless.

MARSHALL

I had to do something. I wanted to feel good again. I was feeling like I'd been shredded by one of those big shredasaurus trucks. It's a good feeling to just do something, anything.

BIANCA

Can we stay in Sam's room?

OMAR

I'm in Sam's room.

SUSAN

I'm sorry. Introductions. Bianca and Marshall, this is Omar.
He was a student of mine.

OMAR

The name is Cleveland. Cleveland Gonzalez.

MARSHALL

(extending a hand) Good to meet you, Cleveland. Nice
handshake.

OMAR

(to Rusty) Wow, must be the name. It gets respect.

MARSHALL

(to Susan) Didn't know you had a houseguest.

OMAR

Yep, I have Sam's room.

BIANCA

We just need to put our things down and figure this out.

MARSHALL

(to Omar) How long are you staying?

OMAR

Until I graduate Columbia.

SUSAN

"From" Columbia, sweetheart. "From."

RUSTY

(moaning) Errrr.

OMAR

I am going to Columbia, where I will graduate from, and I am
in Sam's room.

BIANCA

Can we at least sit down in Sam's room?

OMAR

Not until I graduate from the Ivy League.

BIANCA

Can we at least stand outside of Sam's room?

MARSHALL

Hey, hey, everyone. How about we order some food? Chinese? Anyone feel like moo shu, dumplings --?

SUSAN

(to Marshall and Bianca) Go ahead. Order. But first, I need to borrow your jeep. We can put your stuff in Sam's room and then I'm heading up to the house.

MARSHALL and BIANCA

(together)

(to Rusty) You didn't tell her about the house?

SUSAN

What? It's ready, isn't it? Marshall?

BIANCA

(to Marshall) Tell her.

MARSHALL

It's not. It's not ready. Your appliances and furniture are sitting in a warehouse waiting for some cashola. You'd be lucky to find a lightbulb, much less a lamp and lampshade, on the property.

BIANCA

What does it matter? Rusty's selling it all. The house. This place too. He's unloading everything.

SUSAN

I don't understand.

BIANCA

What's not to understand? We're gonna need cashola. Think about the baby.

SUSAN and MARSHALL

(together)

The baby?

BIANCA

(to Marshall) Oh, I meant to tell you. Of course Rusty already knew about the baby.

SUSAN AND MARSHALL
(together)

Rusty?

BIANCA

(to Marshall) I wanted to tell you tonight. Just you. (to everyone) But now you all know. We're having a baby.

MARSHALL

It's so soon. Bianca, are you sure?

BIANCA

Don't be a moron.

MARSHALL

I'm going to be a father?

SUSAN

Oh Marshall. I'm so happy for you. And Bianca, a baby changes everything. You'll find your soft side.

(Susan and Marshall hug, weepy.)

BIANCA

Some days I get the feeling I'm the only one with balls around here.

MARSHALL

It's true. I got no balls.

SUSAN

This is great news, but do we have to talk about balls?

MARSHALL

I think we do. Now that I'm going to be a father, I want to take a moment to say . . . (to Bianca) You're so brave. (to everyone) She's so brave.

(Rusty moves to the balcony ledge, unnoticed by the others.)

MARSHALL

(to everyone) She's got balls. She really does. (to Bianca) Some days, it scares me. (to everyone) Most days, it scares me. (to Bianca) First time I saw you with one of your probationers - the guy must have weighed three-hundred pounds and had tattoos on every visible pore of his body. And he gave you a hug that looked like he was bench-pressing you and you didn't even flinch.

BIANCA

Yeah, I'm good with my offenders. I don't flinch.

MARSHALL

I can't believe you ever spoke to me.

BIANCA

Come here. I said come here. I love you, you little wuss, I love you. I love you. You're my softie, aren't you? My little softie who cries at commercials.

MARSHALL

(to Rusty) Rusty, we're gonna get back to business. There's work out there. There has to be, now that we're having a baby. Wait, where'd you go, man?

OMAR

(seeing Rusty) No!

SUSAN

Stop!

BIANCA

Get away from the ledge. That's an order.

MARSHALL

We'll order Chinese and everything will be okay.

RUSTY

Forget the Chinese. It's a new infrastructure. You're in charge, Cleveland.

OMAR

Me? No. We're together in this, this infrastructure thing, whatever it is. We have to be in it together.

MARSHALL

Rusty, don't do this. My wife is having a baby. C'mon back.

RUSTY

Say goodbye to Rusty Shepherd.

(They all form a human chain,
hanging on to Rusty to prevent
him from jumping.)

RUSTY

What's wrong with you people? A three-thousand square foot
apartment with a wrap-around terrace and plenty of room? And
you all want to be in Sam's room? That's screwy.

SUSAN

Come off the ledge.

RUSTY

I'm sorry, Susan.

SUSAN

I love you.

RUSTY

Don't say that.

SUSAN

It's true. *(beat)* And that's why I have to tell you: I
kissed another man today.

OMAR

You kissed another man? Who?

SUSAN

Less than twenty minutes ago. Stefan. In the dungeon.

OMAR

I love how you say "in the dungeon."

BIANCA

What do you mean, "dungeon?"

MARSHALL

Who's Stefan?

SUSAN

The doorman from Croatia. He runs the service elevator. I kissed him in the basement and I enjoyed it. It reminded me of -- of falling in love. And that reminded me of you, Rusty.

OMAR

I've never been cheated on before.

SUSAN

I have never done anything like that in all the years I've been married.

BIANCA

It's always the innocent ones.

OMAR

I don't like this feeling.

SUSAN

I'm sorry.

RUSTY

(to Susan) You have nothing to be ashamed of.

SUSAN

Could you just come away from the ledge?

RUSTY

No.

SUSAN

I told you I love you. I will always love you.

RUSTY

Ruff ruff ruff.

SUSAN

(to the others) This is what he does. Instead of talking.

MARSHALL

I thought it was some kind of nervous tic.

SUSAN

(to Rusty) We can't hang on forever. Have you anything left to say?

RUSTY

I have nothing to offer you.

SUSAN

What a fool you are.

OMAR

(to Rusty) You set up the infrastructure. We need you. We're family.

MARSHALL

You're Rusty Shepherd. Man, if I were Rusty Shepherd, I'd do something great.

RUSTY

I don't want to be Rusty Shepherd.

MARSHALL

Yeah? Well, some days it's hard being Marshall. But, ya know, um, yeah, well, it's hard, that's all.

RUSTY

I carried you on my back for a long time, Marshall. Started calling every loan a gift. That was okay. Then, the system crashed. Who's to blame? No one accepts blame and bailouts are for the overall good, but who is looking out for the individual?

SUSAN

You're finally talking and all you can talk about are bailouts?

MARSHALL

Rusty, you can't go like this.

SUSAN

(to Rusty) One last time: Have you anything to say?

RUSTY

What can I say? I don't recognize myself anymore. The future of our children weighs on my conscience, and I have no answers. No answers for oil gushing into oceanic water. No answers for approvals on bad loans. I am sapped. I can't get you into Columbia, Omar. Bianca, I want to give you something for that kid you're gonna raise, but I have nothing to give. All that's left is a bag of cash in a pillow case and it's not gonna last long.

SUSAN

Your last words are about cash?

RUSTY

All the words are spinning like headlines, reports of tragedies. No one can understand this. It's the end of everything. No one wants to hear from a guy who rode the cycles of this economy and always came out on top. Until the day he didn't.

SUSAN

You're right. No one understands. How could we possibly understand? Just like in my classroom. I decorate it with primary colors. I create a sunny environment. And yet, when my students file in, I know one thing for sure: I can't really begin to understand what it was like to come over in a boat or sneak across a border in the dead of night.

OMAR

I flew here on an -- oh forget it.

SUSAN

You see? I can't understand the tragedy that made Omar's family send him to this country, but I can do one thing: Provide a safe place for learning something new.

OMAR

And you did. You were the perfect teacher.

SUSAN

Omar, we're not in the classroom anymore. I'm a drill sergeant at school, but at home? Home. I thought this was the one place that didn't change. *(beat)* The past is over. Weep for it all you want - in fact, that's a good idea. Why don't we bury Rusty Shepherd? Oh, look at that, he jumped. Splat. His insides all over the sidewalk. His brains are spilling out. Limbs scattered. People are screaming. Sirens. Police. Ooh, there's the doorman with the bleach. Clean it up fast. Any last words for Rusty Shepherd? People, c'mon. Work with me. He jumped to his death. Somebody, say something.

BIANCA

I always admired you, Rusty. You got Marshall his jobs. You would have been a very good uncle for my kid.

MARSHALL

What am I gonna do? I can't live without you.

SUSAN

Yes you can. Now say something appropriate.

MARSHALL

Okay, uh, wow, man, all the years I got to watch a pro in action. I'll try to remember everything you taught me. I'll go out and get business. I won't be afraid. Uh, that's the most important thing: I won't be afraid.

SUSAN

And I want to say how much I loved this man. I will never forget the love, and laughter, and light that he brought to me and to our son. I love you more than the stars and the moon and the most romantic poetry ever written. Good-bye, Rusty.

OMAR

Can I say something?

SUSAN

Of course. And that will be it. Rusty Shepherd the man will be gone.

OMAR

I, I don't know what to say. He's here, but he's not. Oh. Wait. I know a poem. By the Castilian poet Iñigo López de Mendoza. I would like to recite it for Rusty, who was like a father to me, and for you Susan.

SUSAN

That's very thoughtful, Omar.

OMAR

Ya cantan los gallos. Oh, sorry, English only, right? I have it memorized in Spanish.

SUSAN

We're not in the classroom. Go ahead. I'll translate.

OMAR

Ya cantan los gallos.

SUSAN

The roosters are already singing.

OMAR
Buen amor, y vete.

SUSAN
My beloved, you must leave.

OMAR
Cata que amaneçe,

SUSAN
Try to wake up!

OMAR
Que canten los gallos,

SUSAN
Let the roosters sing.

OMAR
Yo, cómo me iría,

SUSAN
As for me, how can I leave,

OMAR
pues tengo en mis braços

SUSAN
When I have in my arms

OMAR
la que yo más quería?

SUSAN
the one I desired most?

OMAR
Antes moriría

SUSAN
I would die

OMAR

Que de aqui me fuese,

SUSAN

before leaving this place,

OMAR

Aunque amañese.

SUSAN

Even were I awake.

OMAR

That's it.

SUSAN

It is a beautiful send off. Let's hope that wherever Rusty ends up, there will be roosters singing.

(Rusty is about to jump.)

RUSTY

I'm leaving.

OMAR and MARSHALL and BIANCA
(together)

No.

RUSTY

It's over.

SUSAN

Rusty, it doesn't have to be over. Keep barking. Keep lying around. My students? I never ask them to change who they are. I never command them to stop being Russian or Vietnamese. Who they are is who they are. Sniff my hand. *(putting her hand to his nose)* Good boy. I'm not going to hurt you. *(patting his head)* I've always wanted a dog. Not true. Sam wanted a dog. And now? I want this dog. I want a family with a dog. I've never had a dog. Remember, Marshall, our parents wouldn't let us?

MARSHALL

They said I was too lazy to walk a dog.

SUSAN

Not anymore. You're not lazy. Everyone: Welcome to the new infrastructure. You with us, Omar?

OMAR

This is the new infrastructure?

SUSAN

We're a family with a dog.

OMAR

Okay, I'm in.

SUSAN

Rusty, are you in?

RUSTY

I'm not really a -

SUSAN

I don't want to hear another word of English out of you.

RUSTY

(progressively louder) Ruff. Ruff. Ruff.

SUSAN

Good dog. *(to the others)* As for the rest of you, go ahead, take Sam's room. We'll be up in the country.

MARSHALL

But the house isn't ready.

SUSAN

As long as there's a roof!

MARSHALL

You can't go alone. We're coming with.

BIANCA

What? I hate the country.

MARSHALL

My sister needs our help. C'mon, sweetie, it'll be good for the baby.

BIANCA

We better be coming back here soon. (to Omar) Guess you can have Sam's room tonight.

OMAR

You're all leaving?

RUSTY

Ruff.

SUSAN

I think he wants you to come along.

OMAR

I've never been out of New York City since the day I landed at JFK.

BIANCA

Ah, kid, you might as well come for the ride.

OMAR

Hey, I got my license last week. You want me to drive?

SUSAN

Omar, I'm in the driver's seat.

(End of scene.)

Scene 7.

(Three months later. Projected on stage is a large rambling house in the Connecticut countryside. Sunrise. Susan sits outside, on the bench of a picnic table, her back to the table. The sun is coming up. She looks out at the horizon, toward the audience.)

SUSAN

(barking at the sunrise) Ruff. Ruff ruff ruff ruff ruff.

(Rusty enters, coming from the house.)

RUSTY

You're waking everybody up.

SUSAN

Well you missed it again. Oops. I mean, ruff ruff ruff.

RUSTY

Wait. I think it's Thursday. It's my day. Ruff ruff ruff.

SUSAN

Is it? Okay, then. Well, let me tell you, it was the most beautiful - I mean, it was like an egg yolk, forming ever so slowly as it came up over that hill. And then, miraculously, a golden ball in the sky.

RUSTY

Ruff.

SUSAN

It comes up every morning, but I just love watching it. I wanted everyone to see. Oh, let them sleep. Three months. And we're still alive.

(Omar enters, carrying a notebook.)

OMAR

I finished. Can you believe it? I was up all night long. The sun came up and I wrote "The End."

SUSAN

Ruff ruff ruff.

RUSTY

Ruff ruff ruff.

OMAR

You can't both bark on the same day. I thought you had a system. What day is it?

SUSAN

It's, it's something, I don't know for sure.

RUSTY

What do you mean you finished, son? Finished what?

OMAR

I finally figured out the story that will launch my career. It's the story of how we all came to be here.

SUSAN

Ruff ruff ruff.

RUSTY

Ruff ruff ruff.

OMAR

Hey! Cut it out. We all agreed not to rely on that when you're afraid of something.

RUSTY

I don't want anyone to know our story.

SUSAN

Besides, it seems like such a long time ago when you came into our lives, Omar. I don't even know what the story would be.

OMAR

It's the story of everybody. How we all found something to do in a new land outside of New York City and we're together, at least for now.

RUSTY

I don't want this to be about me. Make it about Marshall. He's never worked so hard in his life.

SUSAN

Yes, the story is about Marshall and Bianca.

OMAR

From what I can tell, he's just motivated by property taxes - that's all he talks about. How he's getting all this construction business to pay the property taxes. And Bianca loves her new set of criminals in Litchfield County. They're part of the story, but really, this one's about you.

RUSTY

I feel uncomfortable. I just want to bark. I'm doing everything I can "not" to bark.

SUSAN

I know what you mean. Go head, bark. It's my day for talking. I'm sure it is.

OMAR

Guys, I wrote the story the way I see it. And there are a lot of good parts. Like discovering how packed full that pillowcase was. I'd never seen a hundred-dollar bill before, much less a thousand of them.

SUSAN

Of course we want to support you, Omar. Maybe we're still trying to figure out what the story is.

RUSTY

Ruff.

SUSAN

You certainly can't include the part about how Rusty barks and so do I? I mean, that's just a little weird, right?

OMAR

We're all used to it. Thing is, this isn't journalism. It's a screenplay. I added some superhero figures to it.

SUSAN

I have a feeling everyone has their own version of what brought us here. The great thing - and this is what is different - I keep having ideas.

RUSTY

Ruff ruff?

SUSAN

There's one I can't stop thinking about.

RUSTY

(as in "what?") Ruff?

SUSAN

Well, I see people with long beards and dirty hair come off the Appalachian Trail. Some have hiked all the way from Georgia and they're headed to Maine. We've got a house with five bathrooms, plenty of tubs and showers and sinks and toilets. So, I'm going to invite the hikers to come over and clean themselves up and share a meal.

RUSTY

(approving) Ruff.

SUSAN

Bianca's probationers - the ones on community service - can help make the food. And Omar? Your interns - the college students who've been working the organic garden - could we ask them to help fill little goody bags for the hikers?

OMAR

The thing is, when my screenplay sells, I'm going to be living a bi-coastal life. The intern program might fall apart.

SUSAN

You're thinking of leaving?

RUSTY

(as in "no") Ruff.

SUSAN

You'll come back won't you? First your brother, and now --

OMAR

I think it's only fair that Sam wanted to spend time in his own room. Susan, you're a great mother. But your sons are growing up. And I haven't even left.

SUSAN

That is a comfort.

OMAR

I love you guys. I'll visit. And sure, I'll get the interns to help with the goodie bags. Now what's going in them?

SUSAN

I'm thinking deodorant, after shave, dry shampoo, toothbrush, toothpaste, floss, mouth wash, hand sanitizer, crotch spray - the basics. Hope there's room in the bag for all that. And, I'm thinking of charging ten or twenty dollars.

RUSTY

Ruff ruff ruff.

SUSAN

Thirty dollars? Seems like a lot. And guess what?

RUSTY

(as in "what?") Ruff?

SUSAN

I'm going to call this little enterprise "The Green Shepherd Project."

OMAR

I think I have a new ending. This will be even better. I have to fix this.

(Omar exits. Rusty kisses Susan on the cheek.)

SUSAN

(affectionately) Ooh, slurpy. Wait a minute. Are you sure this is your dog day?

RUSTY

Grrr.

SUSAN

Oh, you knew it all along. How could you? Okay, you get one more, just one more minute of -

RUSTY

Ruff, ruff, ruff.

SUSAN

Ruff, ruff, ruff.

(Rusty rubs Susan's belly, as he would a dog.)

RUSTY

Okay, fine, fine. Ah, you like your belly rubbed don't you? Yes, yes you do. Today we'll go to the dump. How's that sound? Do some foraging? Amazing, the amount of stuff people throw away. We'll sniff it out and see what we find.

SUSAN

(as in "okay") Ruff.

RUSTY

Funny, you keep having ideas. I am happy to say I haven't had a new idea in a long time.

(Rusty nuzzles Susan's neck.)

RUSTY

You like that, don't you? Although, I did have some new ideas last night, which you seemed to enjoy.

SUSAN

(laughing) Oh yes, and I want more tonight.

RUSTY

Hey, I thought today was your dog day.

SUSAN

(purring like a tiger) Meeeowwww.

RUSTY

Changing things up, huh? *(like a rooster)* Well cock-a-doodle-doo.

SUSAN

Or, we could just be ourselves.

RUSTY

Yeah. Why not?

SUSAN

It's a new day. A brand new day.

(Marshall, Bianca, and Omar emerge from the house. They create a cacaphony of animal sounds - everything from mooing like cows to howling like coyotes. And as they quiet down, in the distance, is the sound of one rooster crowing. Lights fade.)

END OF PLAY