

Consider the Oyster

by

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Licensing Information:
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Setting

A loft in Detroit.

Time

The present.

Cast

GENE WALSH - In his/her late 20s, early 30s.
ELIOT PALLONE - GENE's roommate, around the same age.
MARISA CARTER - GENE's fiancée, around the same age.
KAY CARTER - MARISA's mother, in her late 40s, early 50s.

(NOTES: The character of GENE WALSH can be played by an actor of any gender for the entire play, or two actors of different genders for the first and second act. Should the two actor option be preferred, the actors should be roughly the same size and build to lend credence to GENE's transformation from male to female.

If desired, a different city and team can be substituted for Detroit and the Detroit Lions. A sport other than football is fine as well, although slight adjustments will need to be made to the dialogue. The important thing is that whatever team is used should be known for being particularly incompetent and unsuccessful.

All place names [e.g., a market, hospital, etc.] can be changed to something local to fit the location of the play.)

(A loft in Detroit that has been retrofitted into an abandoned factory. It has two levels, connected by the ramp of an old loading dock. The appliances have a heavy, industrial feel and perhaps there is some graffiti spray-painted here and there. The loft is shared by two men, two men who at this moment sit frozen like ice sculptures on a February morning. GENE and ELIOT both wear the Honolulu blue jerseys of the Detroit Lions football team and GENE also has on a Detroit Lions cap. They both stare transfixed at the TV, as if they are witnessing the second coming of Jesus Christ.)

TV PLAY BY PLAY ANNOUNCER

Well, would you believe it? One second left in this year's Super Bowl and the Detroit Lions find themselves down by two points to the Pittsburgh Steelers! What a game!

TV COLOR ANNOUNCER

Incredible! The single most incredible Super Bowl I have ever seen! The Lions have absolutely played their hearts out!

TV PLAY BY PLAY ANNOUNCER

And here we go! The Lions have the ball on the fifty yard line, with time for one Hail Mary pass. Hold on...there seems to be some confusion...

TV COLOR ANNOUNCER

The Lions are sending out their field goal unit! The Lions are going for the field goal!

GENE

WHAT???

(GENE's entire body spasms in outrage as ELIOT shakes his head in disbelief.)

TV PLAY BY PLAY ANNOUNCER

But nobody seems to have told their offense, who are still on the field! Folks, it is total chaos out there...and the Lions call time out! We'll be right back!

(GENE stabs at the mute button on the remote control as ELIOT screams into a pillow.)

GENE

We should breathe! We should remember to keep breathing.

(Both men rush to the refrigerator to get fresh beers.)

ELIOT

They're not really going for the field goal, are they? That's a sixty-seven yard field goal.

GENE

No. No way. They're drawing up a play. Some trick play. You know, double, triple lateral or something.

ELIOT

Yeah! Yeah, that has to be it.

(The door to the apartment opens and MARISA comes in with KAY.)

MARISA

Hi guys! Is the game still on?

(GENE comes over to MARISA and gives her a kiss.)

GENE

The Lions are down by two. One second to go.

(MARISA models her new coat.)

MARISA

Do you like it?

GENE

Like what?

MARISA

My new coat! It's a Dolce & Gabbana.

GENE

A who?

MARISA

Dolce & Gabbana. Don't you remember me telling you? I've been saving up all year for this coat.

GENE

It's nice. Is that vinyl?

MARISA

It's leather! It's a double-breasted re-interpretation of the classical military jacket.

GENE

Right. I think the game's about to come back on.

(KAY picks up the remote.)

KAY

Do you mind if I check the Weather Channel? I want to know if it's supposed to snow tomorrow.

GENE AND ELIOT

Hey! Hey! Hey! Hey! Hey!

(GENE and ELIOT rush KAY and wrestle the remote away from her.)

KAY

I was joking!

(GENE punches the mute button and the sound comes back on. Completely uninterested in the game, KAY pulls out her phone to check messages.)

TV PLAY BY PLAY ANNOUNCER

And I don't believe what I am seeing! It looks like the Lions are really going for the field goal. Matt Prater is out on the field!

TV COLOR ANNOUNCER

Well, I don't know what to say. The Lions are going for a sixty-seven yard field goal attempt. Not only would that be the longest field goal in Super Bowl history, it would be the longest field goal in the history of the National Football League.

TV PLAY BY PLAY ANNOUNCER

And the Steelers aren't buying it! They call their final time out! Don't go anywhere, folks! Back in sixty seconds!

(GENE hits the mute on the remote.)

GENE

Oh my God...just shoot me!

(ELIOT gets on his knees.)

GENE

What are you doing?

ELIOT

What does it look like I'm doing? I'm praying. That's what I'm doing. Now get down here and help me out.

(GENE gets on his knees.)

KAY

You're praying for a field goal?

ELIOT

No, we're praying for an end to over fifty years of losing. Fifty years of bad draft picks, stupid trades, horrible management, and idiotic coaches. We're praying that for just once, in our lifetimes, something good happens to the Detroit Lions.

KAY

Well then, you're making a mockery of prayer. People pray for guidance. For wisdom. For salvation. Not for some football team.

(GENE stands up.)

GENE

She's right. This is stupid. And it is pretty goofy when a receiver thanks God every time he catches a pass.

ELIOT

Can I make a point here? Can I make just one simple, clear point here? This is the Lions.

(GENE gets back on his knees.)

KAY

You can pray all you want, but God doesn't give out freebies.

MARISA

Mom, you're an atheist.

KAY

Well, that's my understanding. You can't just ask for stuff. You're supposed to barter. God likes to barter. You know, the Lions win the Super Bowl, you become celibate for life.

GENE

Celibate for life? How about if I give up hummus instead?

ELIOT

I'll pick up trash at the park.

GENE

And I'll call people on their birthdays.

ELIOT

It's on! It's on!

(GENE punches the mute button on the remote and the sound comes back on.)

TV PLAY BY PLAY ANNOUNCER

And here we go! It all comes down to this. Prater has a decent tailwind behind him...here's the snap, the kick, and...

GENE AND ELIOT
IT'S GOOD!!! AAAAAAHHHHHHHHH!!!

(GENE throws his hat in the air as he
and ELIOT run amok around the loft,
high-fiving and chest bumping.)

GENE AND ELIOT
Oh my God! Oh my God! Oh my God! The Lions won the Super
Bowl! Oh my God! They won...they won...Sweet Jesus in
heaven, the Lions won the Super Bowl!

ELIOT
I can't believe it! I just...I can't believe it! The Lions
won the Super Bowl! My Dad died waiting for this day!

GENE
My poor brother, he became a Cowboy fan because he never
thought this day would come!

ELIOT
This is the greatest day of my life! It is! The greatest
day of my life. Come on. Admit it, Gene. This is the
greatest day of your life.

(GENE turns the TV off with the
remote.)

GENE
No.

ELIOT
What? Why not?

GENE
Not yet it isn't. There's one more thing that will make this
the greatest day of my life.

(GENE gets down on one knee before
MARISA.)

GENE
Marisa, will you marry me?

KAY
What? No way, José! Marisa, do not answer that! You don't
ask a girl to marry you just because your team won a stupid
football game!

GENE
Marisa? Will you?

KAY

This is ridiculous! Look at you! You don't know what you're saying or what you're doing! If there was an orangutan in the room you'd propose to it!

GENE

Marisa?

KAY

You don't even have a ring! You can't propose without a ring! That's a law! I'm almost positive! Marisa, you are not obliged to answer any proposal made without a ring!

(ELIOT grabs a bag of pretzel rings and tosses it to GENE.)

ELIOT

Coming at you, Romeo!

(GENE pulls out a pretzel ring and holds it towards Marisa.)

KAY

What? That's a pretzel! That's not a proper ring!

GENE

Marisa Lulubelle Carter. Will you marry me?

MARISA

YES!!!

KAY

NO!!!

(GENE slides the pretzel on MARISA's finger, then stands up to embrace and kiss her.)

MARISA

Look, Mom! Isn't it beautiful!

KAY

I think I'm going to be sick.

MARISA

We should celebrate!

GENE

You're damned right we should celebrate! The Lions don't win the Super Bowl every day!

MARISA

I'll run out and get some champagne!

GENE

And chips! We could use some more chips!

(MARISA rushes from the room. ELIOT extends his hand to GENE.)

ELIOT

Congratulations.

GENE

Thanks! I'm doing it, Eliot! I'm getting married! What do you say? Best man?

ELIOT

You know it!

GENE

Or you should get married too! Double ceremony!

ELIOT

Now that would be a double ceremony worth talking about. But it ain't gonna happen.

GENE

If the Lions can win the Super Bowl, anything can happen! Did you see that kick? Sixty-seven yards, baby! Come on, tee me up! Tee me up!

(ELIOT tees up an invisible football.)

ELIOT

Here you go! Put it through the uprights!

GENE

On two! Hut, hut!

(GENE winds up, kicks, loses his balance, but seems to recover...)

GENE

I'm good...

(...before falling awkwardly over a piece of furniture. There is the sickening sound of a femur cracking in two, then silence, aside from weak, animal-like sounds emanating from GENE, whose leg is twisted awkwardly beneath him.)

ELIOT

Gene? You okay?

KAY

What was that cracking sound?

GENE

My leg...I just broke my leg...oh my God...oh God...

(KAY walks over to GENE.)

KAY

This one?

(She prods his leg with her foot and GENE unleashes a primeval howl of pain.)

KAY

It's his right leg.

ELIOT

What is wrong with you?

KAY

I was just making a diagnosis.

(ELIOT looks more closely at GENE's twisted leg and he knows it's not good.)

ELIOT

Oh Jesus. Sorry buddy.

(ELIOT straightens out the leg, the bone crunching audibly as GENE screams again. ELIOT and KAY stare down at GENE.)

KAY

It's too bad he broke it in his own apartment and not out in the street. I could have sued somebody for you. Should I call an ambulance?

GENE

No ambulance...can't afford it...

ELIOT

Come on, buddy. I'll get you to the E.R.

(ELIOT heaves GENE over his shoulder, but then trips on his way to the door, sending them both sprawling. ELIOT gets up limping, opens the door and drags GENE towards it as KAY follows.)

KAY

I'll just wait, shall I? The champagne should be here any second. We won't start without you! Good luck! Go Lions!

(KAY slams the door before GENE is all the way through, and he screams once more.)

KAY

Morons.

(she pokes around the kitchen)

I am in definite need of a pick-me-up.

(she finds the alcohol and begins making a White Russian as she talks to herself)

Marisa Lulubelle, if you think I have any intention of calling your grandmother and telling her that you are marrying a football-watching, pretzel-giving, leg-breaking rodeo clown like Gene Walsh, you have another think coming.

(she opens the fridge and pulls out a carton of cream, attempts to pour some into her drink, but it comes out in thick lumps)

Oh my God!

(MARISA enters with the champagne.)

MARISA

I got the champagne!

KAY

Thank heavens!

MARISA

(looking around)

Where's Gene? Where's Eliot?

KAY

Probably at the hospital by now.

MARISA

The hospital? What happened?

KAY

Stupidity happened.

MARISA

Mom, what--

KAY

Well, there's no way to break this to you gently, so you'll just have to brace yourself. Your boyfriend broke his leg kicking an invisible football.

MARISA

Oh my God! Is he all right?

KAY

He's fine. Let's see that champagne.

(she pulls out the bottle)

Korbel? God help us. They didn't have Duval-Leroy?

MARISA

I don't know! But what about Gene? We should go to the hospital!

KAY

Gene can wait. You and I need to talk.

MARISA

About what?

(KAY pops open the champagne.)

KAY

Here's to shattered femurs and broken hearts!

(KAY takes a long swig.)

MARISA

Broken...? Whose heart is broken?

KAY

Mine. If you seriously have any intention of marrying a nitwit like Gene.

MARISA

Whether or not Gene and I get married is none of your business!

KAY

None of my business? None of my business? I am your mother! I have been planning your wedding since you were in utero, young lady!

MARISA

I love Gene and he loves me!

KAY

No, you don't! You don't have enough experience to know whether or not you're in love. You went through four years of high school and four years of college and how many serious boyfriends did you have? Zero. As in nada. As in zilch. And now you're in love?

MARISA

I don't need to date everyone in the city to know whether or not I'm in love!

(MORE)

MARISA (cont'd)

And do you know what I realized the other day? I just like being with Gene. I've never felt that way about anyone else. We don't have to be doing anything. We don't have to be talking or going somewhere. He can be doing his thing and I can be doing mine and I'm happy just to be with him.

KAY

Wonderful. You're capable of being bored witless together. It sounds like a match made in heaven.

MARISA

Give me one reason we shouldn't we get married!

KAY

Oh, I don't know. Maybe because he gave you a pretzel for an engagement ring?

MARISA

That was a beautiful, spontaneous gesture!

KAY

Gene's whole life is a spontaneous gesture! He doesn't think, he doesn't plan, he just makes it up as he goes along!

MARISA

That's an exaggeration.

KAY

Oh really? Both he and Eliot went to law school, am I right? Now, I'm a little bit foggy on the details, but when did they graduate exactly? What high-powered law firms did they join?

MARISA

They didn't. But just because you're a lawyer doesn't mean everyone has to be one.

KAY

That's not my point. My point is, they couldn't cut it. Neither one of them. They both quit and now Eliot is a cook and Gene teaches third-graders.

MARISA

Eliot is a very talented chef and Gene happens to be a wonderful teacher. He loves those kids.

KAY

And do you know why he loves the kids? Why he gets along so well with them? Because he's one of them! He's at the emotional level of an eight-year-old! And Eliot, he gets along better with vegetables than he does with other human beings!

MARISA

Mom, I know Gene is a little rough around the edges. That's part of his charm. And that will change once we get married.

KAY

Oh my God. I gave birth to a congenital idiot.

MARISA

What do you mean--

KAY

He's not going to change! What is wrong with you? Change? Let me tell you something. All the mindless, stupid, infantile things he does on a regular basis? That's just the tip of the iceberg! He's holding the rest of the disgusting things he does in as best he can! He's trying to keep them a secret!

MARISA

That's ridiculous!

KAY

No, that's the way courtship works, my dear. Right now, Gene is desperately trying to give you the version of himself that he thinks you want. But that's not the real Gene. Not by a long shot. And the minute you get married, the mask will drop, trust me.

MARISA

That's not true!

KAY

Oh no? You really think you know him? You really think he knows you?

MARISA

Well, of course he knows me!

KAY

Does he? Does he know that you were born with two webbed toes? Does he know that when you were fourteen you changed your name to Roxy? Does he know that you still sleep with a stuffed guinea pig named Gingerbread?

MARISA

Mom, for God's sake!

KAY

Marisa--

MARISA

I'm not going to argue with you. I'm sorry Gene isn't the person you want him to be, but we're getting married and that's that!

(MARISA heads for the door, but KAY grabs her by the arm and swings her back into the room. They face each other down like sumo wrestlers.)

KAY

Sweetheart, I understand certain...urges. I do. I know you have needs. Every woman has needs. So you go right ahead and bang your brains out with Gene with my blessing. But for God's sake, do not marry him!

MARISA

I'm not listening to this.

KAY

Give me that ring, I mean, pretzel.

MARISA

No!

KAY

Marisa, give me the damned pretzel!

MARISA

I will not!

(KAY goes for MARISA and they struggle for the pretzel until it breaks.)

MARISA

Oh my God. You broke my engagement ring.

KAY

I'll do better than that.

(KAY stuffs the pieces of pretzel in her mouth and chews them.)

KAY

There! The engagement is off!

MARISA

You ate my ring! I can't believe it! You ate my engagement ring!

KAY

You'll thank me one day. And by this time tomorrow, your engagement ring will be exactly where it deserves to be.

MARISA

You're horrible! You're a horrible, horrible woman!

(MARISA runs from the apartment. KAY shrugs, grabs the bottle of champagne, and swigs from it as she exits. Lights shift as GENE enters on crutches, with a full leg cast that has been signed and scribbled on by third-graders. He goes to the sofa, sits down, grabs the remote and flips the TV on. ELIOT enters through the front door, carrying some groceries.)

ELIOT

Hey, I found the most amazing pomegranates at Eastern Market! You want a pomegranate smoothie?

GENE

Sure! Fire me up.

ELIOT

What you watching?

GENE

The View.

ELIOT

The View? Jesus. You're really starting to go stir crazy, aren't you?

GENE

What do you mean?

ELIOT

Isn't that a chick show?

GENE

It's not just for women. It's interesting. For your information, it's not all about makeovers and diets.

ELIOT

If you say so.

GENE

Yesterday's show was on flesh-eating bacteria, all right? And today there's a quiz to see whether or not you're rude.

ELIOT

Okay.

GENE

Maybe you need to take that quiz.

ELIOT

Maybe you need to get your life back and stop sitting around on your ass. That cast is coming off today, right?

GENE

Right.

ELIOT

Good.

GENE

Why good?

ELIOT

Because the past couple of weeks, you've been starting to act kind of squirrely.

GENE

What are you talking about?

ELIOT

Well, take yesterday, for example. I'm out here eating a Kit-Kat bar, I go into my room for a second, I come back and the candy bar is gone.

GENE

I put it in the fridge. I told you that!

ELIOT

I was going to finish it!

GENE

How am I supposed to know that? You want to live in a pigsty?

ELIOT

No, I wanted to eat my goddamned candy bar! And what about last night? When we ordered carry-out from Tony's? Normally, you get the rack of ribs. What did you order yesterday?

GENE

The Cobb Salad. What's wrong with that? I've been laid up for two months! I'm getting puffy and out of shape! I would kind of like my pants to fit when I get this damned thing off!

ELIOT

Whatever.

GENE

Hey, you know what? Forget the smoothie. I don't need the calories. Could you grab me a Diet Coke? And some almonds. Not the smoked ones. The other ones. I'm gonna need a coaster too. I don't want to get any water rings on the table.

(ELIOT gets the Diet Coke, almonds, and coaster. He tosses them at GENE.)

ELIOT

Anything else? You want me to stick a broom up my ass so I can sweep the place while I'm getting you snacks?

(GENE turns the TV off.)

GENE

What is wrong with you?

ELIOT

Gene, you're my best friend, and I'm sorry you broke your leg, but you've been milking this pretty good.

GENE

Milking? I broke my femur in two places! The doctor said it was one of the worst--did I ever show you the x-rays?

ELIOT

No.

GENE

Did I tell you what they had to do to fix it? Three screws, a titanium rod, and, I might add, oyster shells.

ELIOT

What? Oyster shells?

GENE

You heard me. It was such a bad break they had to patch me up with ground up oyster shells.

ELIOT

You're making that up.

GENE

No, it's this new technique they're using. It's cutting edge stuff. The oyster shell combines with the bone to help it heal faster.

ELIOT

You know, you might have something there. Because your ass has been welded to that sofa the same way oysters attach themselves to rocks.

GENE

Funny.

ELIOT

Who knows? Maybe you'll start crapping pearls.

GENE

That's hilarious. Really.

ELIOT

Maybe you'll taste good with a squirt of lemon.

GENE

I'm glad you find advances in medical science so amusing.

ELIOT

Listen, Oyster Boy, if you're all healed up, then go to the hospital and get the damned thing off. Then you can fetch me smoked almonds for a couple of months.

GENE

(checking the time)

I can't leave yet.

ELIOT

Why not?

GENE

Marisa and her Mom are stopping by.

ELIOT

For what?

GENE

To go over the wedding plans.

ELIOT

Well, that won't take long. Just agree with everything they say and you're done.

GENE

But they want my input. I've been looking at--

(off ELIOT's laughter)

What are you laughing at?

ELIOT

They don't want your input! What are you thinking?

GENE

They do!

ELIOT

No, they don't! Gene, you did your part. You courted the lovely lady and won her heart with the finest pretzel money could buy. Now, all you have to do is wear what they tell you to wear and show up on time.

GENE

Just remember, you need to show up on time too.

ELIOT

I'll be there! And if you change your mind at the last second, I'll help you make your getaway.

GENE

What?

ELIOT

That's what best men are for. They're not there for the wedding, they're there for the escape. If you get cold feet, I'm the guy who holds back angry family members while you make your run for freedom. It's a sacred duty among men.

GENE

You think I'm going to change my mind?

ELIOT

It's been known to happen.

GENE

Not with me, it won't. Marisa is...

ELIOT

What?

GENE

I don't know. I can't explain it. Well, I could, but it would sound pretty goofy.

ELIOT

I can handle goofy.

GENE

Well, I love the way she looks when she raises one eyebrow and the way she sneaks a glance at me to see if I'm laughing at the same part of a movie. And sometimes at night, if I can't sleep and I see the moon out my window, all I can think about is that maybe, at that very moment, Marisa is staring at the moon out of her window too. And I know it sounds crazy, but I love that feeling, that possibility, that even though we're miles apart, we're sharing that moment.

ELIOT

Okay, that was pretty goofy.

GENE

Shut up.

ELIOT

Hey, it's the nature of the beast. The kind of love you're describing? The moon and the eyebrows and whatnot? It's like a mental illness.

GENE

It is not!

ELIOT

Oh no? Then you tell me. What is the difference between stalking someone and true love?

GENE

The difference? Stalkers are nutjobs! Stalking is a crime!

ELIOT

No, stalking is when only one of you feels that way. True love is when you both feel that way.

GENE

Where do you come up with this stuff?

ELIOT

Chopping up vegetables, mostly. It gives you time to think about things. Say, how did Marisa finally get her mother to go along with the wedding?

GENE

She stopped talking to her for a month.

ELIOT

Nice.

GENE

Yeah, it took me a while to figure it out, but it's Marisa who really runs the show between her and her Mom. So everything's patched up and we're good to go.

ELIOT

You're sure about that?

GENE

Absolutely. From this point on, it's nothing but clear skies and smooth sailing.

(There is loud, angry consternation as KAY and MARISA come through the front door.)

KAY

You're being ridiculous! This isn't just about you, Marisa! If you would just listen to me! Are you saying I talk too much?

MARISA

Ridiculous? I'm the one getting married! No? Well, who is it about then? But you never stop talking! I'm saying I can't hear myself think!

(MARISA plops on the couch next to GENE, weighed down with wedding catalogs. She shoots her mom a glare, then turns a radiant smile on GENE.)

MARISA

We're here!

GENE

That's a lot of catalogs.

MARISA

Well, there's a lot to choose from. Lots of decisions to make. We were just talking about floral arrangements, weren't we, Mother?

(KAY manages a pained smile as GENE takes some of the catalogs from MARISA.)

GENE

You look nice, Kay. Is that a new necklace?

KAY

Why yes! I just picked it up in New York at...
(her eyes narrow suspiciously)
...Tiffany's.

GENE

It's lovely! Well, it looks like we have a lot to get to. Eliot, could you get everyone some drinks?

ELIOT

I'd love to.

KAY

Well, we won't be here long because there really isn't that much to discuss--

MARISA

Yes, there is!

KAY

No, there isn't. Gene, would you prefer to wear black or gray socks?

MARISA

Mom! You promised to try and--I'm sorry, Gene.

GENE

No, it's a valid question. But the socks would depend on the suit I was wearing. Which, of course, would depend on the kind of gown Marisa was wearing.

(MORE)

GENE (cont'd)

Now, I know you've both been giving this a lot of time and consideration, but I did have some thoughts on your dress.

KAY

You what?

GENE

Well, as you know, I've been laid up for the past eight weeks and I've had some time on my hands, so I've been doing a little wedding research on-line.

KAY

You what?

GENE

So what I'm thinking for Marisa, and I'm just throwing this out there, is a Galina Signature dress, with a taffeta high-collar, a side-draped trumpet with beading and, I wouldn't even mention this if I didn't think you could pull it off, a Chapel train.

MARISA

A taffeta high-collar? Really?

GENE

Absolutely! I'm telling you, throw in some white gloves and maybe some satin pleated peep toe sling-back sandals, and ooh baby! Just a suggestion. But listen, we can come back to that. If you two were discussing flowers, let's start there. What are you thinking?

MARISA

Well, we hadn't really decided on--

GENE

Can I just say one thing? Not that I'm not open to possibilities, but when it comes to weddings, I have seen enough roses and gardenias and peonies to last me a lifetime. I think we should up the ante. I do. I mean, how many times do you get married? So, I'm saying, and try to picture this...white orchids. Maybe accented with orange and yellow hyacinths.

MARISA

I love orchids!

GENE

Great! Me too! Then let's--

KAY

Stop right there! You just stop right there! I have heard about enough of this! Taffeta high-collars and white orchids. What are you up to?

GENE

You don't like orchids?

KAY

This isn't about the damned orchids! It's about you...you are up to something. I don't know what it is, but you can bet your ass I'm going to find out! This consultation is over!

(KAY sweeps up all the catalogs and heads for the door and exits.)

MARISA

Mom! Gene, I'm sorry! Don't worry about my Mom, I'll handle her. But I love your ideas, I really do! I'll call you!

(MARISA heads out after KAY. She blows ELIOT a kiss, which he catches, then she exits. ELIOT closes the door behind her, then starts clapping as he comes back to GENE.)

ELIOT

Oh my God. That was beautiful! I mean, just beautiful. God, I wish I had taped that.

GENE

What are you talking about?

ELIOT

That's a lovely necklace, Kay. I'm thinking a taffeta high-collar gown. And speaking for myself, I simply adore white orchids. Oh Jesus. You played her like a violin. She didn't know what the hell was going on.

GENE

You think I hurt her feelings?

ELIOT

Feelings? Kay? She doesn't have any feelings. She's like some kind of primordial beast. I think she probably registers heat and cold, but that's about it.

GENE

I don't know why she reacted that way.

ELIOT

Me neither. I can't imagine. Listen, I'm sorry if I was ripping on you earlier about getting you stuff. It was worth it just to see that performance. Now do us both a favor and go get that damned thing off.

GENE

Yeah, I'd better get going.

ELIOT

Then I'm gonna crash for a little bit. I was up to four last night with Dana and some of the guys. Wake me up when you get back and we'll grab some dinner. Hey, I know. How about Tom's Oyster Bar?

GENE

Will you give it a rest?

ELIOT

Actually, you probably shouldn't go there anymore. That would be cannibalism for you, right? Now that you're part oyster?

GENE

For Christ's sake.

ELIOT

You're right, you're right. Enough's enough. Not another word about shellfish. I'm going to clam up.

GENE

I'm going.

(GENE gathers up his wallet and keys as ELIOT heads for his bedroom.)

ELIOT

Oh hey, you want to hear something really cool about oysters? I learned about this in cooking school.

GENE

I thought you were clamming up.

ELIOT

I know, I know, but this really is amazing, and it's no joke. When they're born, all oysters start out as males, but then eventually, they all turn into females. Every one of them. It's something in their DNA. They kind of reprogram themselves and change gender. Wild, huh? Anyway, I'll catch you later, Rockefeller.

(ELIOT enters the bedroom and closes the door. GENE stands perfectly still, then pulls at the collar of his shirt and looks down at his chest. He shakes his head, then heads for the door. The day wanes and lights shift. ELIOT comes out of the bedroom, waking up. He flips on the TV, surfs through a few channels, then checks his watch. He looks back at the front door, checks his watch again, turns the TV off and pulls out his phone.)

As he dials, GENE enters. The cast is gone, but he has a leg brace on for support, and walks with a limp. He holds a large manila envelope and has a dazed expression.)

ELIOT

Hey, I was just calling you! Where the hell you been? You're just getting back now?

(off GENE's nod)

It took them five hours to get a cast off? Gene? Is everything okay?

(off GENE's shake of his head)

What's going on? Is it your leg? Gene, talk to me!

GENE

There's been a...complication.

ELIOT

Hey, you don't look so good. You'd better sit down. You want a beer or something?

GENE

Forget it. Just forget it.

ELIOT

Gene, you're scaring me. What happened at the hospital? Did they find a tumor? Are you dying or something?

(off GENE's shake of his head)

No? Then what is it? What's going on?

GENE

You know your oyster joke? About boy oysters turning into girl oysters? Well, it's no joke.

ELIOT

What? What are you talking about?

GENE

It's no joke. It's real...it's...it's real.

ELIOT

Wait a second. You're not saying that...

GENE

That's exactly what I'm saying.

ELIOT

No.

GENE

Yes.

ELIOT
Come on.

GENE
I swear.

ELIOT
No way.

GENE
Way.

ELIOT
That's impossible.

GENE
Apparently not.

ELIOT
Okay, this is getting ridiculous. Are we even talking about the same thing here? You're saying that...

GENE
I AM TURNING INTO A WOMAN!!! There! Are you happy? Is that clear enough for you? I am turning into a woman. I am transforming into a girl. I am becoming a female. A person of the feminine persuasion. A dame. A broad. A skirt. I am passing from manhood to womanhood, with all of the wonders and benefits that that entails. Certain things are appearing and certain other things are disappearing. I am turning into a woman.

ELIOT
Who told you that?

GENE
A bunch of people! All of them wearing lab coats and with lots of initials after their names.

ELIOT
But I've never heard of--

GENE
I just sat in a hospital room for five hours with an orthopedic surgeon, a neurologist, a geneticist, a gender specialist, two medical ethicists, and four hospital lawyers! They took measurements and scans and fluids and every other thing they could take and that was their conclusion. Minute by minute and day by day I am turning from male to female.

ELIOT
I don't believe it.

GENE

Are you even listening to me? Are you listening to a word I say?

ELIOT

Well, of course I'm--

GENE

Then why are you questioning me?

ELIOT

I'm not! I just don't--I can't...

GENE

Fine! Then don't believe me! See if I care!

(GENE storms off into his bedroom and slams the door. ELIOT knocks on the door, then talks through it.)

ELIOT

Gene? Gene, listen. I don't know what's going on and you're obviously upset, but what you're talking about, yeah, you see it in oysters and maybe some fish, but I swear to you, you never see it in mammals. And human beings are mammals! It just doesn't happen!

GENE (O.S.)

Go away!

ELIOT

What I'm saying is, there has got to be some other explanation. Listen, why don't we go back to the hospital, all right? We'll just go back and--

(GENE opens the bedroom door, comes out and lifts up his shirt to reveal his breasts [possibly wearing a bra, but possibly not]. He lowers his shirt as a stunned ELIOT avoids his gaze.)

GENE

You were saying? Eliot? You were saying?

ELIOT

Those are some nice breasts.

GENE

Thank you.

ELIOT

Very...pert.

GENE

How kind of you to notice.

ELIOT

Gene, what the hell? I don't get this. You mean to tell me that you didn't notice that you were...blossoming?

GENE

I thought I was just putting on a few pounds here and there! That's all! You know, being sedentary for so long. What was I supposed to think? Oh no, I'm growing breasts! What kind of sane person would think that?

ELIOT

Yeah, I guess. That makes sense. Wow. I mean...wow. How are things...down below?

GENE

Diminishing. I didn't want to believe it at first. I thought it was some kind of optical illusion or something. To tell you the truth, the last week or so, I kind of stopped looking.

ELIOT

Sure. Who wouldn't?

GENE

Exactly.

ELIOT

No point in...

GENE

You got it.

ELIOT

Well, what did the doctors tell you?

GENE

Not much. They were, you know, trying to be professional and everything. They brought out these 3-D genitalia models and tried to explain it...testes this, labia that. But they were a little freaked out, to be honest. They even had a guard outside the door, and everyone in the room had to sign all these confidentiality papers.

ELIOT

But did they tell you anything about the procedure they did...the stuff with the oyster shells?

GENE

Oh yeah. It's all in here.
(he pulls some papers from the
manila envelope)
(MORE)

GENE (cont'd)

Studies and data and all that. What they used is called nacre. It's the shiny stuff in oyster shells.

ELIOT

You mean mother of pearl?

GENE

Right. Same thing. Here's the original study some French biologists did.

(GENE hands the document to ELIOT.)

ELIOT

(reading)

"Since human beings and oysters share the capacity for self-repair, seeding bones with oyster shells may help speed up the process of biomineralization, and we now believe that nacre obtained from the *Pinctada maxima* oyster can be used to stimulate bone growth. It can be grafted on to bone and accepted by the human body, where it releases active molecules that induce bone regeneration."

(he looks up)

Jesus. And that's not the only thing it induces. Side effects may include dry mouth or gender change.

GENE

There aren't supposed to be any side effects! This has never happened before. Not to anyone. Ever. They said it was a miracle. A billion to one shot.

ELIOT

Kind of like the Lions winning the Super Bowl?

GENE

Something like that.

ELIOT

Unbelievable. So, did the doctors tell you anything else? I mean, is this a permanent deal or just a gender vacation?

GENE

They don't know. Nobody knows. It's never happened before!

ELIOT

Well, they're going to try and change you back, right?

GENE

No. That was the first thing I asked. But they said they wouldn't know what to do, because maybe things will change back on their own. Then again, maybe they won't. "Time will tell," they said. So, in the meantime...

ELIOT

In the meantime, try to look on the bright side.

GENE

The bright side? Did you just say, "look on the bright side?"

ELIOT

Why not? What else are you going to do?

GENE

Then maybe I'm missing something. I must be. My entire life has just been picked up and ripped into tiny little bits. So what is this bright side? Other people can look at me and feel better about themselves? They can say, "Well, I just totaled my car, but at least I'm not Gene! I just lost my job, but at least I'm not Gene!" Is that the bright side? My shredded existence becomes the confetti in other people's lives?

ELIOT

Okay, calm down for a second and let's try and look at this logically, all right? Let's see if we can put some positive spin on this.

GENE

You're kidding, right?

ELIOT

Just hear me out. Point number one. Women live longer than men.

GENE

Oh Jesus!

(GENE heads for the fridge and pulls out a beer.)

ELIOT

Point number two. They didn't have four lawyers at that meeting just for eye candy. That hospital is scared shitless you're going to sue them for big bucks. And you should! Hell, hire Marisa's mom. That's her field of expertise-- personal injury lawsuits. You're sitting on a major malpractice payday. I mean, we're talking millions! Maybe tens of millions!

GENE

I don't want money! I want to be a man! A tough, testosterone-fueled, "that didn't hurt" man! What if this is permanent? What if I turn into a complete pussy?

ELIOT

Well, actually--

GENE

You know what I mean! I want to be the person I have always been! I want to stand up when I take a piss, eat beef jerky for breakfast, and watch a football game between two teams I've never heard of and enjoy it! I want to be me!

ELIOT

Well, you're still you. Same person. Just with different options. You want to hear point number three?

GENE

Do I have a choice?

ELIOT

Your name. Gene. Jean. No difference. You can change the spelling if you want, but you don't have to change what people call you. That's kind of a lucky break.

GENE

Great. Yeah. Wow. That does make it all better. I'll remember that when I'm in the shower and I look down and there's no there there!

ELIOT

Hey, don't get pissed at me! All I'm trying to do is provide a little perspective here, all right? Your...I don't know what you want to call it...condition? It is what it is. Maybe you don't like it, but it is what it is.

GENE

Oh, that's profound. Really. That's deep, man. You're just a goddamned guru, aren't you?

ELIOT

What I'm saying is that your situation...it's like that serenity prayer thing. Accept the things you can change and...accept the stuff you can't change too.

GENE

That's not the serenity prayer!

ELIOT

Close enough. You get the idea.

GENE

Yeah, well, I am not accepting anything. This whole thing...it's between us, got it? Not a word to anyone.

ELIOT

What are you talking about? You're going to try and hide it?

GENE

You're damned right I'm going to hide it! What do you think I'm going to do?

(MORE)

GENE (cont'd)

Walk into a class full of third-graders and say, "Hi kids! From now on, Mr. Walsh would like to be called Miss Walsh?" Forget it! I'll keep my hair short, tape down anything that needs taped down, and there you go.

ELIOT

So you're going to be a closet woman?

GENE

Yes! That's exactly what I'm going to be! A closet woman. And this closet is staying shut!

ELIOT

Come on.

GENE

I can do it. I will do it.

ELIOT

Hiding it is not the way to go. You're going to spend the rest of your life that way?

GENE

Like you're one to talk.

ELIOT

I am one to talk.

GENE

Oh really? Just how many of your friends and relatives know that you're gay?

ELIOT

The ones who need to know.

GENE

Well, isn't that convenient?

ELIOT

What am I supposed to do? Wear a bright pink hat that says, "I am gay" on it?

GENE

Hey, when they put us together as roommates when we were freshmen in the dorm, I had no idea you were gay.

ELIOT

And I had no idea you liked Journey! But I figured it out!

GENE

All right, but my point is, you have the choice, don't you?

ELIOT

What choice?

GENE

Of people knowing or not knowing. Me, unless I hide it, I'll be walking down the street with bazoombas out to here!

ELIOT

Gene, you can't hide what's happening to you.

GENE

Oh no? Give me one reason why not.

ELIOT

Marisa?

GENE

Oh Jesus...Marisa. That would make for an awkward honeymoon.

ELIOT

It would be memorable, that's for sure.

(GENE wanders to the fridge and pulls out a big container of ice-cream. He gets a spoon and starts eating.)

GENE

What do I tell her?

ELIOT

There's not exactly a long list of possibilities there. Either you tell her to order two wedding gowns or...

GENE

I call the wedding off. I have to call it off. She doesn't want to marry a woman. And I'm not gay.

ELIOT

You are now.

GENE

Holy shit...I'm a lesbian.

ELIOT

Well, are you sure? Obviously, you've got a lot of things going on inside of you physically. What about mentally? Are you still attracted to women?

GENE

I don't know. I haven't had any time to think about it.

ELIOT

Well, let's try something. Close your eyes.

GENE

Why?

ELIOT

I want you to think about being with Marisa. Come on. Close your eyes.

(GENE closes his eyes.)

ELIOT

Now imagine this. Imagine that Marisa texts you a little before midnight and says she wants to see you. Needs to see you. Has to see you. Five minutes later she's at the door, hair messed up, shirt a little undone, and her eyes, her eyes are just burning into you as she chews on her lower lip. She doesn't say a word, but she doesn't have to. You can feel her desire, she's almost shaking with it. And as you take her by the wrist and lead her to the bedroom, you can feel her pulse pounding like--

(GENE's eyes snap open.)

GENE

I'm definitely a lesbian.

ELIOT

Okay, then. Welcome to the gay club. You want to see the secret handshake?

GENE

There's a handshake?

ELIOT

I'm kidding.

GENE

But I don't know how to be a lesbian!

ELIOT

Listen. Let's just take this one day at a time, all right? We'll try to get some more information and see what's really happening here. So, you're right. Let's keep it under wraps for the time being. No harm in that. Nobody needs to know.

GENE

And Marisa?

ELIOT

We'll come up with something. You and me. Something very smooth and plausible. Something that conveys your deep feelings of love and respect for her, but tactfully communicates your hesitancy about rushing into such a major decision and commitment out of respect for her.

GENE

That's good. Yeah. Write that down.

(MARISA bursts in holding a catalog.)

MARISA

Gene! You got your cast off! I totally forgot today was the day! You look great! I finally have my gorgeous man back!

(MARISA rushes to hug GENE, and he does his best to hug her without actually pressing his chest against hers.)

MARISA

How do you feel?

GENE

Like a new person.

MARISA

Well, I have the most amazing news! Look what I found!

(she shows him the catalog)

It's the perfect wedding cake! I was looking and I was looking and I found this tiny little shop in Windsor! Isn't it perfect? Isn't it the most amazing wedding cake you've ever seen?

GENE

I can't marry you.

MARISA

What?

(The catalog drops from MARISA's nerveless fingers.)

GENE

I can't marry you.

MARISA

What are you saying? You...I don't understand. What are you saying?

GENE

I can't. I'm sorry.

MARISA

Eliot? What's happening here?

ELIOT

What Gene's trying to say is that his deep hesitancy is because of his respect for, um...wait...

MARISA

You can't marry me?

GENE

You see?

MARISA

Then what...oh my God! It's another man! Eliot, did you turn Gene gay?

ELIOT

What? No!

MARISA

I thought it wasn't like that between you two! I thought you were just good friends!

ELIOT

We are! Marisa, you can't...you don't...seriously?

MARISA

You're right. I'm sorry. But I just don't understand. If it's not someone else...is it me? Is it something I did?

GENE

No, of course not.

MARISA

Then what? Tell me something. Tell me anything. Don't I at least deserve that? Please.

GENE

You're right. You deserve an explanation. You deserve the complete and honest truth. So, I'm just going to say this straight out. I can't marry you because I'm...I'm a schmuck. A total, goofball, idiot loser. I am. I see that now. I mean, I gave you a pretzel as an engagement ring. I didn't put any time or thought into it. I didn't think about what kind of stone or setting or ring you might like. I didn't take you out to a romantic restaurant or a moonlit beach. I just gave you a salty snack because I was excited about a football game. That's pathetic. Because I'm pathetic. The truth is, I don't deserve you. I don't deserve anyone until I grow up a little.

MARISA

But you will! You can change! I know you can! Eliot, don't you believe that people can change?

ELIOT

Oh yeah. Big time.

MARISA

Even in the last few weeks I've noticed a change. Your interest in the wedding, the way you comment on what I'm wearing and how I look. And the biggest thing? We talk more. About all kinds of things!

(MORE)

MARISA (cont'd)

Places to live, what our house will look like. Just yesterday we spent half an hour talking about French Country kitchens!

GENE

Marisa, I'm a fraud! A complete and total fraud! I'm a poser. A faker. I'm not the person you think I am.

MARISA

What do you mean?

GENE

You want to know the truth about me? Well, here it is. I don't like French Country kitchens. And I don't like Yorkshire terriers. And I don't like shopping for antiques. I'm sorry. I don't expect you to understand, but...

MARISA

You'd be surprised how well I understand.

GENE

What do you mean?

MARISA

You want to be honest? Then let's both be honest. I'm not the person you think I am either.

GENE

Marisa, don't--

MARISA

It's true! I'm exactly like you! A complete and total fraud! A poser! A faker!

GENE

Marisa--

MARISA

You want to know the truth about me? I never liked going to old car shows! And I never liked Mel Gibson movies. And softball has to be the lamest, stupidest sport ever invented by humanity!

GENE

But you came to every one of my softball games.

MARISA

Because you were there! Because I wanted to see you. Because I liked the way your butt looked in those baseball pants. But a game where they put a beer at every base? That's not a sport, that's a bar on dirt.

GENE

You're right. You're absolutely right. And that's my point. We never really had that much in common. Sooner or later, you'd have realized that. Marisa, you're the straight A student going out with the class loser. The purebred going out with the mutt. It might seem like a good idea right now, but that wouldn't last, don't you see? It'd be that same old story you see again and again. The train leaves Love Station full of hope and desire, but then somehow, somewhere along the way, the train jumps the tracks and you end up in Hate City. And you look at the person you used to love with all your heart, the person you wanted to spend the rest of your life with, and you can't understand what you ever saw in them in the first place. And I don't want that to happen. I don't want you to wind up hating me.

MARISA

So, what you're saying is, we should break up while we still love one another?

GENE

Exactly!

MARISA

Because it's for our own good.

GENE

There you go.

MARISA

And you're saying all this because of how much you love me?

GENE

Absolutely! If I didn't love you as much as I do, I'd marry you tomorrow! I would! I'd figure what the hell, Marisa's a good starter wife, let's give it a shot. But I don't want that for us. I don't want that for you. More than anything, I want you to be happy. And you wouldn't be happy with me. I guarantee you the day would come when you would look at me and say to yourself, "This is not the Gene I fell in love with. This is not the Gene I want to be with." And I don't think I could stand knowing that was happening.

MARISA

I guess I understand where you're coming from...I think. But it just feels wrong. Why can't we--?

GENE

Because we can't! We just can't. Marisa, I know this is out of the blue and everything, but it's for the best. It really is. It may not seem like it right now, but we're really pretty lucky.

MARISA

Lucky?

GENE

That we found all this out before we got married, instead of after.

MARISA

I guess that is kind of lucky.

GENE

You couldn't get much luckier.

(They look at one another, utterly miserable. MARISA picks the catalog she brought off the floor and puts it on the kitchen counter. She glances at GENE, who avoids her gaze, then heads for the door and exits.)

GENE

And as she walks out of the door and out of my life, I realize, at this moment, that I love her more than I ever loved her before.

ELIOT

Gene, I know you're pretty upset, but try not to narrate your own life. It's a little pretentious.

GENE

It's been a rough day, all right?! I'm turning into a woman, I found out I'm gay, and I just lost my fiancée. I think I'm entitled to a little pretentiousness!

(ELIOT picks up the papers GENE brought from the hospital.)

ELIOT

Yeah, I guess so. Well, look at it this way. The hardest part is over. Right?

(ELIOT hands GENE the papers.)

GENE

No. The hardest part will be keeping this a secret for the rest of my life.

ELIOT

You're sure about that?

GENE

Absolutely. No way, no how, is this getting out to anyone, ever. Gene Walsh is a man. Gene Walsh has always been a man. And Gene Walsh will always be a man.

(GENE tears the papers in half as
lights fade.)

END OF ACT ONE

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