

Vino Veritas

by

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Setting

A living room.

Time

The present. Halloween evening.

Cast

LAUREN - Professional photographer in her 30s-40s.

PHIL - Photographer husband of LAUREN in his 30s-40s.

RIDLEY - Physician in his 30s-40s.

CLAIRE - Wife of RIDLEY and stay-at-home mom in her 30s-40s.

NOTE: If desired, references to specific TV shows, celebrities, and/or historical events can be judiciously updated.

(The living room has a sofa, coffee table, armchair, and an inviting pile of pillows. There are some photography magazines, a candle, and a high-end camera sitting on the coffee table, and also a sideboard that is well-stocked with liquor bottles and glasses, as well as a bowl of candy. On a level above and behind the living room [or adjacent to it] is a dining room table and chairs. There is a flight of stairs leading up to a second floor, a door that leads outside, a door that leads to the kitchen, and a fireplace. The house is extravagantly decorated for Halloween and there are two bags of Halloween candy strewn all over the floor. LAUREN enters from the kitchen, harried and frazzled, with plates and silverware. She sees the debris field on the floor.)

LAUREN

Unbelievable.

(puts the plates and silverware
on the table)

Damn it...

(She moves into the living room, trying to create order out of chaos, jumping every time a motion-activated Halloween decoration comes to life, then switching it off. She pulls a putter from beneath the sofa and sets it among the fireplace tools, then sweeps the magazines off the coffee table and puts them underneath it. She picks up the camera, looks around for a place to put it, then out of curiosity turns it on to check out the photos. As she looks at the screen and clicks through the photos, the energy drains out of her. She sits on the floor, still going through photos, as PHIL enters carrying a bag of groceries.)

PHIL

I'm home! Returned from the fields! Provisions have been acquired!

(looking up the stairs)

Lauren? I'm home! Chop, chop, we need to get ready for the--

(seeing her)

--oh, there you are! I'm home.

LAUREN

So I gathered.

PHIL

I got everything! The milk, eggs, cheddar cheese, Triscuits, smoked oysters, and I got the boys that glow-in-the-dark yogurt they like.

LAUREN

Amazing. You're like a border collie on two legs, you know that?

PHIL

I'll take that as a compliment. But would a border collie get this?

(PHIL pulls out some cans of soda.)

LAUREN

Mountain Dew XXX Rush?

(PHIL heads for the kitchen with the groceries.)

PHIL

You didn't even know this was out there, did you? But I--

LAUREN AND PHIL

--saw it in a commercial.

(PHIL pauses at the kitchen door, then disappears through it with the groceries. LAUREN puts the camera down and begins cleaning up the candy on the floor. PHIL re-enters with a bottle of red wine, which he puts on the sideboard.)

PHIL

It's really annoying when you do that.

LAUREN

Not half as annoying as being able to do it so often.

PHIL

Will you please lighten up? I just dropped the kids at your sister's and Ridley and Claire will be over any minute now. We'll have some wine, some appetizers, and then we're going to the most fabulous Halloween party in the entire city. Theoretically, that means we should be able to have a marginally engaging time.

(PHIL spots some candy he likes on the floor, picks it up, and starts eating it.)

LAUREN

I can't believe the boys didn't clean this up. No Christmas! Do you hear me? No Christmas!

PHIL

Have you at least decided what you're going as?

LAUREN

Why, yes I have. Thank you for asking. I'll be going as a complete and utter psycho bitch.

PHIL

Great. So, what are you going to do with the money you saved on a costume?

LAUREN

Actually, I've been thinking. You know what we need in our living room? A guillotine. A real, live, operational guillotine.

PHIL

I think we have more than enough decorations up.

LAUREN

No, I don't mean just for Halloween. I mean permanently. I think it would give us some perspective. It would help keep the kids in line too. I've had it with the "you're grounded, no TV, no food for a month" routine.

PHIL

Uh-huh.

LAUREN

I have come to the conclusion that kids behave better if they think one of their parents is flat-out nuts. It keeps them on their toes. That's why we need a guillotine.

PHIL

I'll check eBay first thing tomorrow. I bet I find one. A buddy of mine, this is like ten years ago, he got some dirt from John Wayne Gacy's crawlspace on eBay. True story.

(PHIL starts whistling an upbeat tune as he helps clean up.)

LAUREN

Why are you in such a good mood?

PHIL

I'm not in a good mood.

LAUREN

Yes, you are. You're in a good mood.

PHIL
I'm not! Really. That's ridiculous. Why would I be in a good mood?

LAUREN
Tell me.

PHIL
It's nothing.

LAUREN
Oh my God...

PHIL
You don't want to know.

LAUREN
Trust me, I never want to know. But you're going to tell me anyway because it will drive me crazy if you don't.

PHIL
It's no big deal. It's just, you know, that thing I kind of keep track of. That animal thing.

LAUREN
And today is...?

PHIL
Right.

LAUREN
Should I even ask?

PHIL
I wish you wouldn't.

LAUREN
Just tell me and get it over with. I need to check on the hors d'oeuvres.

PHIL
All right, if you absolutely have to know...polar bear.

LAUREN
Polar bear.

PHIL
As of today, I have lived longer than the oldest polar bear ever. If that's not a good reason to be a little bit perky, I don't know what is. And get this. In a few months, I'm going to pass up the oldest baboon.

(PHIL tosses a piece of candy in the air and catches it in his mouth as LAUREN shakes her head in disbelief.)

LAUREN

You know, I remember being a little girl, I must have been in the third grade or so. And it was a rainy day at school, so we had indoor recess and I was at this table talking to the other girls about the men we were going to marry...doctors, astronauts, football players. But as I recall, there wasn't one girl who wanted to marry a man whose goal in life was to live longer than a baboon.

PHIL

Hey, would it help if I told you that you're older than the oldest camel ever?

LAUREN

I just...maybe it's me. Maybe it's some kind of mental defect on my part. But your fascination with the most trivial and bizarre things imaginable is beyond me.

PHIL

You're right. I'm a freak. A total, unredeemable, stone-cold freak. I have no business being married to anyone.

LAUREN

Now you tell me.

PHIL

I've been telling you that for years. When I was a kid my idea of a good time wasn't hanging out with my buddies or dating girls. It was sitting in my basement memorizing *The Guinness Book of World Records*. There is no way I should ever have been allowed to mate or breed. So, are the Pizza Puffs ready?

LAUREN

I decided to go with something a little different tonight. *Quinotto de hongos y camarones*.

PHIL

What the hell is that?

LAUREN

It's a Peruvian dish. Quinoa with shrimp in a clam broth.

PHIL

So, what you're saying is...no Pizza Puffs.

LAUREN

That's what I'm saying. Don't you think it's time you elevated your palate a little?

PHIL

Well, I'm sorry the things I like aren't really expensive and hard to make. But the fact is, Pizza Puffs are delicious. So are Big Macs and Hershey bars. That's why they make millions of them. People like them. You need to be a little more in touch with the common man. Or woman.

LAUREN

Give me another forty years and I'm sure I will be.

PHIL

Why forty years?

LAUREN

Because by then I'll be so old my brain will be leaking out my ears and I'll be able to sit down with a big pile of Pizza Puffs and binge-watch every season of *Grey's Anatomy*.

PHIL

You know what your problem is? You don't expose yourself to enough culture.

LAUREN

What culture? A bunch of single idiots perpetually dating one another on TV? A bunch of acrobatic idiots jumping around with guns in movies? How people can watch any of that crap is beyond me.

PHIL

Sweetheart. Darling. Let's try to remember that other people are entitled to their opinion.

LAUREN

Sure they are. But let's try to remember that some opinions are completely stupid!

PHIL

Oy. You're on a roll tonight. On a more positive note, check this out.

(picks up the wine he just brought in)

You know how Ridley's a maniac for what wine goes best with what food? He's gonna love this!

(He shows her the bottle.)

LAUREN

Glacial Till Chambourcin? It's from France?

PHIL

No, Nebraska!

LAUREN

You're going to serve Ridley a wine from Nebraska?

PHIL

Yeah! I was talking to one of the stock boys and he said Nebraska is going to be the Napa Valley of the 21st century! You know, global warming and everything?

(reading from label)

"Glacial till is a fertile, rocky soil that helps form our terrier."

LAUREN

Terroir.

PHIL

What?

LAUREN

Terroir describes the land and weather of a region. Terrier describes a small and yappy dog.

PHIL

Whatever. If it's not fancy enough for Ridley, don't worry, Claire will love it.

(LAUREN gives PHIL a look, then takes the bottle from him.)

LAUREN

Let's save this for a special occasion.

PHIL

But--

LAUREN

(putting the bottle back on the sideboard)

Now don't get your little oenophile panties in a bunch. We already have the perfect beverage in the house.

PHIL

We do? I'm guessing you're not talking about the XXX Mountain Dew, right?

LAUREN

No. I had something a little more festive in mind.

(LAUREN opens a door in the sideboard and pulls out a carved wooden box. PHIL backs up in alarm.)

PHIL

I thought you threw that out.

LAUREN

Apparently not.

PHIL

You told me you threw it out.

LAUREN

Did I?

PHIL

I asked you specifically if you threw it out and you said, "Yes Phil, I threw it out."

LAUREN

I was just giving you the answer you wanted. You should be familiar with that phenomenon.

PHIL

For chrissakes, it was bad enough bringing that back from Peru, but...oh no. You're not suggesting we serve that to Ridley and Claire?

LAUREN

Why not?

PHIL

Why not? Do I really need to explain why not?

LAUREN

Oh, come on! You know the rest of tonight is going to be completely predictable. Ridley will talk about his perfect practice, Claire will talk about their perfect kids, then we'll go to a perfect party to watch perfect people in perfect costumes bobbing for perfect apples in a tub full of Bombay Sapphire Gin. Now, *this* would spice things up a little!

(LAUREN puts the box on the coffee table.)

PHIL

Sure! In a multiple homicide kind of way.

LAUREN

Don't be ridiculous. I think Ridley and Claire would be up for it. Besides, they're our best friends, who else are we going to try it with?

PHIL

I'll get you the guillotine. I swear to God. And the way things are going around here, I'll be the first volunteer. But please put that away.

LAUREN

Where has your sense of adventure gone? Remember when we used to be real photographers? Swimming with hammerhead sharks off The Great Barrier Reef? Climbing Mt.

(MORE)

LAUREN (cont'd)

Pumori in Nepal? You almost died in a lava field in Hawaii because you wanted to get one more shot. That's what made me fall in love with you, the sheer passion you had for what we were doing.

PHIL

Yeah, well, we're still photographers. That's why we own a portrait studio with our name on it.

LAUREN

Taking pictures of weddings and babies? You're satisfied with that? Just how many more chicken dances and howling two-year-olds do you need to capture?

PHIL

It's a business. We've got a mortgage to pay. We've got two kids we want to put through college. And yes, people will pay more for a picture of little Sammy cuddling his favorite teddy bear than they'll pay for a shot of sea turtles coming on shore in the Galapagos.

LAUREN

All I want is to add a little bit of excitement and adventure to our evening. Is that asking so much?

PHIL

No! I love excitement and adventure!

LAUREN

Phil, these days your idea of excitement is taking the boys out for ice cream after a soccer game.

PHIL

With sprinkles! Don't forget the sprinkles. And very exciting multicolored sprinkles, I might add.

LAUREN

You don't hear a word I'm saying, do you? When I speak, it must be like a damned dog whistle to you!

PHIL

What do you want me to tell you? Circumstances change.

LAUREN

So do people. You want to know how naive I am? How clueless I am? I thought our trip to Peru might change things, I really did. I thought we would get away from the kids for a week, explore an exotic new country, and maybe, just maybe, I might see a spark of the person you used to be.

PHIL

How was Peru supposed to do that?

LAUREN

I thought you'd be a little inspired, all right? I thought we'd get some great shots in Lima of Casa Aliaga, the Correo Central, and the Plaza de Armas. And remember when we got to the Inca ruins in the Sacred Valley? It was all I could do not to drop to my knees and weep it was so beautiful. That incredible green moss on the stones, the mist rising like a veil all around us as we stood at the top of the world. I'm snapping away like a madwoman--The Temple of the Sun, the water ritual fountains...

(she picks up the camera)

...and then I look at the photos you took. Two are of donkeys wearing hats. The rest are of me at the hotel in Lima.

PHIL

I knew the boys would be way more interested in donkeys wearing hats than a bunch of old stones. And the rest are of you because you're still the most beautiful thing I have ever seen.

(LAUREN shoves the camera into PHIL's hands.)

LAUREN

Oh, for Christ's sake.

PHIL

I'm serious!

LAUREN

After ten years and two kids? Right. You just wanted a photo of me looking stupid to make the boys laugh.

PHIL

Lauren, I swear--

LAUREN

You want to blow smoke? Blow smoke for our customers when they bring in the ugliest baby in the history of humanity. But let's face it, Phil. Whatever you had, you lost.

PHIL

I take photographs for a living! When I go on vacation, guess what I don't want to do?

(PHIL puts the camera down.)

LAUREN

You're a different man than the one I married.

PHIL

Of course I'm different! For one thing, we're not twenty-five years old anymore! For another thing, we have two kids!

(MORE)

PHIL (cont'd)

I'm sorry I didn't go cartwheeling down the side of a pyramid to get just the right shot, but I think we have an obligation to Brandon and Zack to stay alive for a couple more years.

LAUREN

So we put our lives on hold? Is that what we do? We stop living?

PHIL

No! We just got back from Peru, didn't we?

LAUREN

Ten days! Ten days in the past three years. Then it's back to the PTA and doing laundry and those insane women down the block who keep asking me to join their goddamn scrapbooking club! I used to look forward to my life. I used to wonder what the next week, what the next month would bring. Now, I wake up every morning and I just try to get through the day.

PHIL

And you don't think scrapbooking is the answer?

(as LAUREN looks away)

I'm joking. That was a joke. That's what people do. They make jokes to get through the day.

LAUREN

And is that the only goal we have now? To get through the day? I swear to God, from the moment I open my eyes in the morning, I'm thinking, "Is that a nail pop in the ceiling? Why is the washing machine moving six inches across the floor every time I use it? Did I sign Zack's field trip permission slip? Is Brandon falling behind in science because we're not helping him with his homework? Are we saving enough? Is my mother going to call me with some bizarre demand?" And on and on and on and on and on! I can't go on like this.

PHIL

What are you saying?

LAUREN

This can't be my life.

(The doorbell rings.)

PHIL

They're here.

(The doorbell rings again. PHIL heads for the door and opens it. RIDLEY enters, dressed as a doctor in his lab coat, with a perfectly pressed shirt, elegant tie, and Italian leather shoes.

He has a stethoscope around his neck or in his pocket. He extends his arm in courtier-like fashion.)

RIDLEY

Her Majesty, the Queen.

(CLAIRE enters regally, dressed as Queen Elizabeth I of England. RIDLEY drops to one knee. Radiantly happy as she poses, CLAIRE's costume is a stunning, museum-worthy piece of art. She extends her hand to PHIL, who bows.)

PHIL

Your Highness.

(PHIL kisses CLAIRE's hand. A beaming RIDLEY gets to his feet and shakes hands with PHIL.)

RIDLEY

Amazing, isn't it? Isn't that the most amazing costume you have ever seen? All handmade, hand-stitched, authentic materials--

CLAIRE

Oh, Ridley always says that about my costumes. What do you think, Phil? Is this better than last year's Marie Antoinette?

PHIL

Absolutely! It's even better than your Marilyn Monroe. And you know something? I never thought I would say this, but it's better than your Princess Leia! Don't you think so, Lauren?

LAUREN

It's something.

PHIL

Now, you're going to have to help me out here. Mary Queen of Scots?

(CLAIRE promenades back and forth, showing off the dress.)

CLAIRE

(adopting a British accent)

Heavens no! My good man, I am Queen Elizabeth I of England. The fifth and final monarch of the Tudor Dynasty, I ruled from 1558 until 1603 and was popularly known as the Virgin Queen!

(PHIL and RIDLEY smile and applaud.)

LAUREN

It's a gorgeous costume, Claire. Very authentic-looking. And we'll give you a pass on the virgin part.

CLAIRE

You know, just for fun I tried to see if I could find any Virgin Kings in the history books. No such thing. Or if there were, they didn't brag about it.

PHIL

And Ridley, you're a...?

RIDLEY

I'm a doctor.

PHIL

I know. You are a doctor.

RIDLEY

Right.

PHIL

So, how is that a costume if you're really a doctor?

RIDLEY

Well, it's kind of a postmodern ironic commentary. Plus, I'm on call for another couple of hours. So, kind of killing two birds with one stone. But why aren't you guys dressed?

(CLAIRE picks up the wooden box from the coffee table, but just as she is about to open it, PHIL whisks it out of her hands.)

PHIL

We're running a little behind. I'll go get ready.

(PHIL runs upstairs with the box.)

LAUREN

I'll get the hors d'oeuvres.

(LAUREN disappears into the kitchen as RIDLEY and CLAIRE go to the sofa and cuddle. LAUREN re-enters with the quinoa dish. She brings it to the coffee table, along with some plates and silverware.)

CLAIRE

I am so looking forward to the Halloween party this year! Do you think I have a chance at best costume?

LAUREN

I don't see why not. You've won the past five years in a row.

CLAIRE

I know. The pressure's on! I based this costume on "The Phoenix Portrait," attributed to Nicholas Hilliard from around 1575, but I'm worried that the stone in this pendant isn't quite dark enough.

(A thumping noise makes LAUREN look up the stairs, then back to CLAIRE.)

LAUREN

It's lovely.

RIDLEY

Claire, did you tell Lauren how long it took you to make this costume? Three months to--

CLAIRE

Five.

RIDLEY

Five months to make this! And the thing is, you know half the people at that party will just throw on any old crap they have lying around the house and call it a costume. But not my Claire.

(RIDLEY and CLAIRE rub their noses together like lovestruck puppies.)

PHIL (O.S.)

Yee-haw, pardners!

(PHIL charges down the stairs in a full-fledged cowboy outfit. CLAIRE jumps up in excitement as PHIL swings a lariat above his head. He lassoes CLAIRE and pulls her towards him.)

PHIL

Come along, little dogie! They say that Wyoming will be your new home!

CLAIRE

I'd love to go to Wyoming!

PHIL

I bet you would!

(unties CLAIRE and turns to
LAUREN)

Go on! Git now, you frisky little filly! Mosey on up them stairs and get your costume duds on!

(PHIL swings the lariat over his head.)

LAUREN

Listen here, cowboy. You lasso me with that thing and we're going to have ourselves a little gelding party.

(PHIL's lariat droops as LAUREN hustles upstairs.)

PHIL

Okay. That'll take the bang out of your six-shooter.

(As PHIL puts the lariat somewhere out of the way, RIDLEY eyes the serving dish full of quinoa.)

RIDLEY

So, what do we have here? It looks absolutely delicious!

PHIL

That? Oh, it's, uh, Peruvian Hongerlonies...or something like that. Kind of an ancient Inca dish, I guess. I'm not too sure. Lauren made it.

CLAIRE

How was Peru?

PHIL

Nice. Nice. A little remote, you know. Not too many convenience stores. And I looked, believe me. You get into that rain forest for a couple of days and you are ready to kill for a Slurpee and a Ding Dong.

RIDLEY

Phil, they should never let you out of suburbia. You'll hurt yourself.

CLAIRE

He's kidding. He wasn't really looking for Slurpees in the rain forest.

PHIL

Say, you're pretty sharp. I like that in a virgin. Wait. No, I don't.

CLAIRE

So, did you visit Machu Picchu?

(PHIL reacts to the sound of a thump from upstairs.)

PHIL

I'm sorry. What?

CLAIRE

Machu Picchu. The Lost City of the Incas. It's in the Andes Mountains.

PHIL

Oh yeah! Yeah, we saw that. Hey, did you guys ever hear that song, "From the Indies to the Andes in his Undies?" No? It's a good one.

(singing)

From the Indies to the Andes in his undies
Twas a very, very daring thing to do
And he carried for a spare a pair of panties
But they didn't fit him well, they were his auntie's.

RIDLEY

Can't say I'm familiar.

PHIL

I used to sing it to the kids in the bathtub all the time. They love that kind of stuff. You know, anything about underwear or passing gas...

(reacts to another noise from upstairs)

Hey, do you guys know what a "beemf" is? No? It's someone who farts in the bathtub, then bites the bubbles! Yeah, my grandfather told me that one. Funny thing is, he didn't have any teeth!

(long beat as he casts an anxious glance upstairs)

Drinks! You guys need drinks!

LAUREN (O.S.)

Let me take care of the drinks!

(LAUREN descends the stairs in a gorgeous witch costume, holding the wooden box.)

CLAIRE

Oh Lauren! I love your costume! It's so you!

PHIL

You have no idea.

CLAIRE

Now are you a good witch or a bad witch?

LAUREN

That remains to be seen.

RIDLEY

What's in the box?

LAUREN

What any self-respecting witch has in her box. A magic potion. In fact, this magic potion should be especially interesting to you, Ridley. It's a wine. The single most bizarre and incredible wine on the planet.

RIDLEY

Really? Let me guess. Red or white?

LAUREN

Neither.

RIDLEY

Neither? Oh, I know! I just read about it in *Wine Spectator*. It's a Zweigelt Rosé!

LAUREN

No. You won't find this wine in any magazine. And you won't find it in any store or restaurant either.

RIDLEY

Where is it from?

LAUREN

We picked it up in Peru.

PHIL

Lauren picked it up in Peru.

RIDLEY

And what, precisely, makes it so "bizarre and incredible?"

LAUREN

Well, there's a little story that goes along with the wine. Phil, could you dim the lights, please?

(PHIL sighs, then goes to a light switch and dims the lights. He leans against the wall, arms crossed, as LAUREN strikes a match and lights the large candle on the coffee table.)

CLAIRE

Ooh, I'm getting goose bumps!

LAUREN

Just wait. Is everyone ready?
(she blows out the match)

(MORE)

LAUREN (cont'd)

One night, near the end of our tour, we were camping near some ruins and for some reason I couldn't get to sleep. So I got out of the tent and I could see that our campfire was still going and that our guide, Manco, was sitting and staring into the fire. So, I sit down on the other side of the fire from him and we're just looking at one another. And he gets this small smile on his face, and he says, "Do you want to see something?" He didn't wait for my answer. He got up and walked away from the fire and into the darkness.

CLAIRE

So what did you do?

LAUREN

I followed him.

RIDLEY

For God's sake! That's...I'm sorry. That's very irresponsible. Claire would never even dream of doing something like that.

CLAIRE

You walked into a dark South American jungle with a man you barely knew?

LAUREN

Mmm-hmm.

CLAIRE

And when he got you alone, did he try to...?

LAUREN

No, no. Nothing like that.

PHIL

The Virgin Queen's getting a little worked up I think.

CLAIRE

I am not! I was just...get your mind out of the gutter!

PHIL

You get yours out of the jungle.

CLAIRE

Phil!

PHIL

Claire!

RIDLEY

Will you two cut it out? So, you're following this Manco guy...

LAUREN

Right. I followed him to this small boat that was tied up on the bank of the Urubamba River. He gets in, then I get in, and we start heading upstream. There's a full moon out and I can see that we're going deeper and deeper into the rain forest. And my heart, my heart is just pounding. You know the feeling you used to get on Christmas Eve when you were a child, or that precise moment right before your first lover kissed you like you'd always wanted to be kissed? It was like that. I'd forgotten that feeling, like there's a liquid fire running through you and you want it to stop and you want it to last forever at the same time.

CLAIRE

Yes, yes! I know exactly what you mean! I...I'm sorry. Go on...

LAUREN

After maybe half an hour, Manco pulls the boat up onto the bank of the river and we both get out. He heads straight into the jungle and I'm right behind him. Two or three minutes later, I can see this glow of light up ahead and then we come into a clearing and there's maybe fifty people gathered around this huge fire. And when they see Manco they all start running towards him to hug and kiss him. You see, it was his tribe. And *this* is the ceremonial wine of the tribe.

(LAUREN opens the box and pulls out a primitive-looking bottle. Inside is a liquid with a fierce blue hue.)

RIDLEY

It's blue! I've never seen a blue wine. They actually drink this?

LAUREN

Mmm-hmm.

RIDLEY

Well, I can tell you right now, it's generally not a good idea to eat or drink anything that's blue.

LAUREN

It may not be a good idea, but they do it anyway.

RIDLEY

I wonder what it's made from? Probably some kind of berry, I would guess.

LAUREN

Then you would guess wrong. The key ingredient is the skin of the blue dart tree frog.

CLAIRE

It's frog wine? They make it out of frogs?

PHIL

Yep. Not exactly Peru's number one export, I'm guessing. Oh, and just in case you don't know, the skin of the blue dart tree frog is extremely toxic. Poisonous. That's why they're blue. It's their way of saying, "Keep the hell away from me or I'll poison your sorry ass." So, who wants a cold Bud Light?

(PHIL heads for the kitchen.)

LAUREN

Phil, I'm not finished.

(PHIL waves his hand and exits to the kitchen. LAUREN turns back to RIDLEY and CLAIRE.)

LAUREN

So, the tribe catches these frogs, skins them, then boils the skins in the juice of the camucamu fruit for a few hours, and this is what they get.

CLAIRE

You said it was a ceremonial wine. For what ceremony?

LAUREN

A wedding.

CLAIRE

Oh, like to toast the new bride and groom?

LAUREN

No. The only people who drink this wine are the bride and groom. They drink it the night before their wedding, and then they spend the night together.

CLAIRE

Wait. They spend the night together before they get married?

LAUREN

Right. There's this special pre-marriage hut and the couple enter it together. They drink this wine and then spend the rest of the night with one another. And if they still want to get married in the morning, then they get married in the morning.

RIDLEY

What's the point of doing that?

LAUREN

The point is the effect this wine has on people. There's something in the skin of those frogs, some drug or substance that makes the wine act as a kind of truth serum. You see? The man and woman drink it, then they spend the whole night together being absolutely truthful with one another before they can get married.

CLAIRE

Wow. No wonder the Incas died out.

(PHIL comes in from the kitchen,
swigging a beer.)

PHIL

Ah, I'm sure it's a lot of hooey. That Manco probably spots a sucker in every tour group and up the river they go on a "top secret frog wine mission."

CLAIRE

I wonder if it really works. Maybe it's just the placebo effect. If they believe it will make them tell the truth, then it does.

(LAUREN brings over four glasses from
the sideboard.)

RIDLEY

Exactly. These types of concoctions and superstitions are very typical of primitive cultures.

LAUREN

Right. And sophisticated cultures like ours take weight-loss pills and go to pet psychics.

(LAUREN opens the bottle and pours four
glasses.)

RIDLEY

What are you doing?

LAUREN

Well, we want to try it, don't we?

RIDLEY

You can't be serious. This is hardly something that has been properly inspected and tested.

LAUREN

I saw the couple drink it, Ridley. It's the same wine.

CLAIRE

(picking up a glass)

I'd like to try it. It's such a romantic story. I wish we'd had this wine before our wedding.

RIDLEY

What do you mean?

CLAIRE

And it's such a pretty color.

RIDLEY

This is getting ridiculous.

(he plucks the glass of wine
from CLAIRE's hand and turns
the lights back up)

Claire, don't imagine for one moment that I am allowing you to drink this wine. You have no idea what it is or what kind of effect it will have.

CLAIRE

I'd like to try it. I'd really like to try it.

RIDLEY

May I remind you that I am not just your husband, I am a physician. And I am telling you that under no circumstances are you drinking this wine.

CLAIRE

Well, when you put it that way--

(she grabs another glass of
wine from the table, holds it
up defiantly, and when RIDLEY
makes a move towards her, she
drinks it)

Whoops.

PHIL

What did it taste like?

CLAIRE

Kind of...blue froggy.

RIDLEY

Claire...honey, how do you feel? Any numbness in your tongue? Lips tingling?

CLAIRE

No. You should try it.

(RIDLEY waves his hand over the glass he's holding, sniffing the bouquet. He then swirls the liquid around and puts his nose into the glass.)

PHIL

Are you going to snort it or drink it?

RIDLEY

I don't see you rushing to drink yours.

PHIL

I'll drink it if I feel like it.

RIDLEY

Only you just don't happen to feel like it, right?

LAUREN

Phil's not exactly the man he used to be when it comes to trying anything different. How about a nice Mountain Dew, sweetheart?

PHIL

Fine. You can't say I'm not a gracious host.

(he picks up a glass and downs
it)

That is kind of blue froggy.

CLAIRE

I told you.

(RIDLEY takes a tiny sip, swishing the liquid around in his mouth like a master sommelier.)

RIDLEY

That's not too bad, really. Eight or nine months in some oak barrels and a little micro-oxygenation and you might have something here.

PHIL

Well then, down the hatch!

RIDLEY

I really can't. I am on call, after all. A taste is enough for me.

(LAUREN looks down at the glass in her hand.)

PHIL

Lauren? Adventure Girl? Miss I-Want-to-Live-on-the-Edge? Are you going to drink that or stare at it?

CLAIRE

What is it?

LAUREN

Nothing.

CLAIRE

You're wondering if the story is really true, aren't you?

LAUREN

What if it is?

PHIL

Well, then we all get to know one another a lot better!

CLAIRE

Or not. I mean, we've lived next door to each other for seven years. We go to the same church, our kids are in and out of each other's houses all day long...how much is there we don't already know? I mean, it's no secret that Phil sings show tunes in the shower.

PHIL

What the hell? How do you know that?

RIDLEY

We can hear you, buddy. God help us.

CLAIRE

It was *Annie* this morning, right?

(singing)

Tomorrow, tomorrow--

PHIL

Jesus! I'm gonna start charging admission.

RIDLEY

Good luck with that.

CLAIRE

(to LAUREN)

Come on. This was your idea.

LAUREN

So it was. Well...

(she drains her glass)

Trick or treat!

(CLAIRE claps her hands.)

CLAIRE

Yay! Now can I please have some of this Peruvian dish? Because it smells incredible!

(LAUREN spoons the quinoa onto plates as CLAIRE practically bounces up and down in anticipation. LAUREN hands CLAIRE her plate first and she digs in as LAUREN serves everyone else.)

CLAIRE

Ohmygod! This is so good! This is so, so good! How long did it take you to make this?

LAUREN

About three hours. Quinoa is actually indigenous to Peru and dates back to the Incas. It means "mother grain."

CLAIRE

Well, this has to be one of the most amazing things I have ever eaten in my life! I gotta have some of that shrimp!

(CLAIRE takes the big quinoa dish and eats from it using the serving spoon as PHIL samples his.)

PHIL

Nice job, Lauren. This isn't too bad.

LAUREN

Try to restrain yourself.

PHIL

You know what this would go great with? Pizza Puffs.

LAUREN

I'll tell you what, the next time I make Coquille St. Jacques, I'll sprinkle some Fruit Loops on top just for you.

PHIL

Sounds good to me. So Ridley, who are Trevor and Krista with tonight?

RIDLEY

Oh, Mimi and Papi came over. We wouldn't have anyone else babysit them.

CLAIRE

You mean *she* wouldn't have anyone else babysit them.

RIDLEY

Pardon?

CLAIRE

Your mother. Whatever she says, goes.

LAUREN

A little intrusive is she?

CLAIRE

Oh, just a little. Try to imagine a killer whale at a baby seal festival.

PHIL

You're kidding. Whenever Ridley talks about his mother it's like she's a saint times infinity.

CLAIRE

Ridley's mother? Please. I'll tell you what. Combine Charles Manson and a rabid pit bull and it would run for the hills at the sight of Ridley's mother.

(PHIL and LAUREN laugh.)

RIDLEY

Claire, that's not funny.

CLAIRE

Phil and Lauren seem to think so.

RIDLEY

How can you possibly say anything negative about my mother? Every time she visits she brings the kids something...a toy, some books. Tonight she brought over three brand new Winnie the Pooh DVDs for Krista.

CLAIRE

Winnie the Pooh. Winnie the fucking Pooh.

(The others all stare at CLAIRE as if she just sprouted horns.)

CLAIRE

What?

LAUREN

Nothing. It's just...I don't think we've ever heard you swear before, Claire.

CLAIRE

Well, have you ever watched Winnie the Pooh? I mean, really watched it? Because I know Ridley hasn't. He's too busy with his patients and clinics and classes and seminars and I'm the one who sits at home watching Winnie the Pooh over and over until every detail of The Goddamned Hundred Acre Wood is burned into the back of my retinas!

RIDLEY

But it has to be better than, I don't know...all those violent programs kids watch.

CLAIRE

You want to talk to me about Winnie the Pooh? Is that what you're saying? I'll tell you about Winnie the fucking Pooh. Winnie the Pooh is an obsessive-compulsive addict who will do anything to score his next fix. They say it's honey he's after, but it might as well be crack or crystal meth.

(MORE)

CLAIRE (cont'd)

He talks about it, he sings about it, he thinks about it every minute of every day. His best friend Piglet? Neurotic and latently gay. Why else would he have a picture of Pooh on his living room wall? Eeyore? That poor son of a bitch loses body parts on a regular basis and is badly in need of some antidepressants. Owl is utterly delusional, Rabbit is a control freak, Gopher has a horrible speech impediment, Tigger is a classic case for the benefits of Ritalin, and I'll tell you right now, I think Roo is just a little bit too old to be hanging out in Kanga's pouch! The Hundred Acre Wood is like some kind of cartoon mental institution! And that is the kind of movie your mother brings into our home.

RIDLEY

Lauren, Phil, I'm sorry...
(standing up)
...Claire's not feeling well.

CLAIRE

Are you apologizing for me? Is that what you're doing?

RIDLEY

I think maybe we should go home.

CLAIRE

Why? I feel fine! I feel better than fine! I feel wonderful! This quinoa is delicious and your mother's a controlling bitch. It's as simple as that.

(CLAIRE returns her attention to the quinoa. RIDLEY sits down, keeping an eye on CLAIRE.)

CLAIRE

Oh my God...really good.

(PHIL opens his mouth to speak, then thinks better of it.)

LAUREN

Phil? Were you going to say something?

PHIL

No, I'm good. In fact...

(PHIL makes a motion of locking his mouth shut and throwing away the key.)

LAUREN

What's the matter, cowboy? Scared of a little truth?

RIDLEY

This is not a truth serum, all right? Claire is just...she's...

(MORE)

RIDLEY (cont'd)
(pointing to the bottle)
That is not a truth serum, Claire.

(CLAIRE shovels more quinoa into her mouth.)

LAUREN
Listen, we're friends! Maybe the wine works and maybe it doesn't, but if we're going to feel compelled to tell the truth for the next few hours, we might as well have some fun with it.

CLAIRE
Abso-fucking-lutely! So, what should we talk about?

PHIL
Well, I can't stand the suspense, so let's just cut to the chase. Hands up, who's secretly gay?

RIDLEY
Definitely not me! But I always thought you were a little light in your loafers, Phil.

PHIL
Actually, you're not too far off the mark, buddy.

LAUREN
What?

PHIL
If I'm going to be completely honest, I have to say I have always considered myself to be a lesbian trapped in the body of a man.

CLAIRE
Phil! You're terrible!

PHIL
Thank you very much. Now come on, we need to run through the standard list of dark and bloody secrets. So hands up, who has a tumor? Anyone? Any kind of deadly disease or condition? No? Um...incest victim? Anybody? Incest victim going once...nothing? Spouse beater? Closet alcoholic? Closet foot fetishist? No? Jesus, we're a sorry bunch. It's a good thing none of us are celebrities.

LAUREN
How about this? We've got half an hour before we have to leave for the Halloween party. Let's say we all get to ask one question. One question that everyone has to answer.

RIDLEY
That suits me.

LAUREN

Well, of course it suits you. You didn't drink the wine. You get to lie all you want.

RIDLEY

What? I would never...I'm a doctor!

LAUREN

Like that means anything.

RIDLEY

Go ahead! Ask me whatever you want. Claire will tell you if I'm being truthful or not.

CLAIRE

Oh, wait! What about pictures? We always take pictures of each other in our Halloween costumes.

PHIL

Absolutely! Claire's right. Certain traditions must be maintained. So...

(picking up his camera)

...get ready to strike a pose.

(PHIL turns the camera on and focuses in on RIDLEY, who poses.)

PHIL

Okay, I'll ask the first question, and I'll give you an easy one, Ridley. You get one last meal. What would it be?

RIDLEY

I know exactly what it would be. Sautéed foie gras, preferably accompanied by the 2001 Sauternes from Château d'Yquem.

(PHIL takes a photo of RIDLEY.)

CLAIRE

That sounds really disgusting.

RIDLEY

All right, Claire, how about you?

(PHIL swings the camera to CLAIRE as she picks an imaginary peach.)

CLAIRE

A beautifully ripened sun-warmed peach, right off the tree. Lauren?

(PHIL turns the camera to LAUREN.)

LAUREN

Bacalhau. Dried and salted codfish. I know it doesn't sound that great, but it's practically the national dish of Portugal. And with some onions and potatoes in a casserole, it's just incredible. Phil?

(CLAIRE takes the camera from PHIL and points it at him.)

PHIL

Cotton candy. I'm sorry, that is the perfect food. Invented in 1897 in Nashville, Tennessee, by William Morrison and John C. Wharton. My heroes.

RIDLEY

How on earth do you know that?

LAUREN

That's my Phil! The more useless the information is, the more likely he is to know it. In fact, guess who's older than a polar bear today?

CLAIRE

Oh! Did you pass up polar bears?

PHIL

You bet your sweet ass I did!

CLAIRE

Congratulations!

(CLAIRE hands RIDLEY the camera to do a little high-five routine with PHIL.)

RIDLEY

Okay okay, settle down, you two! It's my turn to ask a question, and here's one to separate the elite from the herd. You first, Claire.

CLAIRE

Ooh, I'm doing the Phoenix Portrait!

(CLAIRE poses as Queen Elizabeth I as RIDLEY photographs her.)

RIDLEY

What is the best film you have ever seen?

CLAIRE

Oh, that's easy. *The English Patient*.

PHIL

Really?

CLAIRE

I've seen it sixty-three times! I cried every time.

(RIDLEY turns the camera on LAUREN.)

LAUREN

Lawrence of Arabia. The cinematography is just stunning. And I love that scene where he puts out a candle with his fingers and this other guy says, "Doesn't that hurt?" And Lawrence says, "Of course it hurts." And the guy says, "Then what's the trick?" And Lawrence says, "The trick is not minding that it hurts."

(to PHIL)

Remember I told you about that on our first date? And then you put out the candle in the restaurant with your fingers?

PHIL

Sure, I remember. It hurt like hell.

LAUREN

Really? You acted like it didn't hurt at all.

PHIL

Yeah, well, that was a long time ago.

(PHIL blows out the candle on the coffee table and takes the camera from RIDLEY to photograph him.)

PHIL

Come on, Ridley. Lay it on us. Favorite film?

RIDLEY

Well...ladies and gentlemen, I'm going to have to go with *Le Chagrin et la Pitié*...

CLAIRE

What?

RIDLEY

The Sorrow and the Pity? Marcel Ophüls?

(CLAIRE closes her eyes and fakes snoring.)

RIDLEY

It happens to be one of the most important documentaries in cinematic history!

(CLAIRE opens one eye.)

CLAIRE

Of course it is, sweetheart. Phil?

(PHIL hands LAUREN the camera and poses as she photographs him.)

PHIL
Definitely, *The...The...*

CLAIRE
The what?

(PHIL seems to be battling internal demons, then starts laughing.)

PHIL
This is ridiculous. I was going to lie. I wanted to lie. Well, not lie exactly, I was going to name one of my favorite films. I was going to say *The Godfather*. But that's not the best movie I've ever seen.

CLAIRE
So what is?

PHIL
Okay, I know I'm putting my butt on the line here, but the hell with it. The best movie I have ever seen is...*Babe: Pig in the City*.

(The others laugh.)

RIDLEY
All right, very funny. And nicely set up. You had us going for a second there.

PHIL
I'm dead serious.

LAUREN
You can't be.

PHIL
I am!

CLAIRE
Oh, I get it. I get what's going on. Phhhhiiiiilllll. Phil Phil Philly Phil Phil. Come on. You can tell us the truth. We can take it, especially tonight. It's something a little bit nasty, isn't it? Something naughty? *Secretary*? *9 1/2 Weeks*? *Last Tango in Paris*?

PHIL
I told you. No joke. *Babe: Pig in the City*. Hands down, no contest.

RIDLEY

Well, that's one classic I'm not familiar with. I've never seen it.

CLAIRE

I've seen it. I've seen it a bunch of times...oh my God. No...wait. It...well...oh my God! No no no no no...yes! Yes! I'm changing my vote from *The English Patient*. *Babe: Pig in the City* is better!

PHIL

You're damned right it is!

(PHIL and CLAIRE circle one another in excitement)

Remember after Babe saves the life of the bull terrier, and the terrier's trying to explain himself to Babe, and he tells him--

CLAIRE AND PHIL

"A murderous shadow lies hard across my soul."

CLAIRE

I love that line! And then later on, when they're handing out jellybeans to all the animals he keeps saying--

CLAIRE AND PHIL

"Thank the pig. Thank the pig. Thank the pig."

(CLAIRE and PHIL hug one another.)

PHIL

Best movie ever!

CLAIRE

I know, I know.

RIDLEY

They're insane. Both of them.

LAUREN

Phil, it's a movie about a talking pig.

PHIL

Right. It's a movie about a talking pig. What does that have to do with how good it is?

LAUREN

You lost me.

PHIL

When you think of a great movie or a great book, what do you eliminate from the equation automatically? Can it be funny? No! Can it have talking pigs? No, of course not!

(MORE)

PHIL (cont'd)

It's got to be some heavy-assed thing about death and sex and power, right? Ooh, somebody died in an especially gruesome and long-winded way, I guess I'm moved.

CLAIRE

(fake pouting)

Like *The English Patient*?

PHIL

Exactly like *The English Patient*.

LAUREN

Okay, I hate to say this. In fact, I can't believe I'm saying this. But Phil's got a point.

RIDLEY

Lauren! You're supposed to be a voice on the side of sanity here.

LAUREN

Well, suppose someone like, I don't know...Britney Spears wrote a beautiful symphony or an exquisite novel. It's possible, but would anyone believe it? No. Because it's Britney Spears. That's Phil's point, that when it comes to art, people can't appreciate the content because of the context. And it's a good point.

PHIL

Are you feeling okay? You're not supposed to speak up for me like that. I'm your husband, remember?

LAUREN

Make it a little easier and I might do it more often.

(CLAIRE takes the camera from LAUREN and focuses it on RIDLEY.)

CLAIRE

All right, my turn to ask a question. You first, Ridley. Sit down.

(as RIDLEY sits)

Ooh, wait...do the doctor hands...

(as RIDLEY obligingly tents his fingers together and smiles)

And I'm going to ask the big one. How do you want to die?

RIDLEY

Okay, not exactly the question I was hoping to hear.

CLAIRE

It's not a threat, sweetheart. I'm just curious. I think it says a lot about a person, how they want to die.

RIDLEY

In my sleep would be just fine. How about you?

CLAIRE

Sacrificing myself for someone else. When I have a hard time falling asleep at night, that's what I think about. Throwing myself in front of a car to save my children, running into a burning building to save my children, swimming through shark-infested waters to save my children...I do a lot of children saving, basically.

LAUREN

That's a good question. Phil? How about it?

(CLAIRE turns the camera to PHIL.)

PHIL

Oh jeez. On the golf course, I guess. Out there in the fresh air, blue sky, doing something I love. Plus, there would be a cart right there to transport my body. I've always been a sucker for convenience.

RIDLEY

How about you, Lauren?

(CLAIRE focuses on LAUREN.)

LAUREN

I don't know, the specifics of how I die...they're just not that important.

CLAIRE

Okay, so what is important?

LAUREN

I guess...let me put it like this. A few months ago, I was driving home one night and all of a sudden, up ahead, I could see these little pinpricks of light appearing and disappearing. And a few seconds later I'm going through this huge swarm of lightning bugs. They're going off all around me, blinking like crazy trying to find a mate. And one after another, these lightning bugs start exploding as the car hits them. Their bodies are so soft and I'm going so fast that all that was left of them was this smudge of glowing liquid on my windshield. They were dead, completely obliterated, but they'd left behind a piece of themselves that was still glowing. And that's what I want. I know my time's coming. Right now, there's a cosmic car heading through the darkness towards all of us. But when I'm gone, when everything I was is completely obliterated, I want to leave a glow.

CLAIRE

Lauren...that's beautiful.

PHIL

Yeah, she wants to be a smudge on God's windshield. Okay, Smudge-Girl, your turn to ask a question.

LAUREN

Well, my question is *the* question.

(LAUREN takes the camera from CLAIRE, adjusts the camera setting, puts it on a flat surface pointing at the other three, then presses the shutter button for a time-delayed shot. She joins the others, and as PHIL, CLAIRE, and RIDLEY smile at the camera, LAUREN's face is like stone.)

LAUREN

How long have you and Claire been having an affair?

(Lights flash as big and bright as possible, then go to total darkness.)

END OF ACT ONE