

Taboo

A PLAY IN ONE ACT BY KEIRAN KING
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CHARACTERS

In order of appearance

WILLIAM, 30

SABRENA, 31 His wife

JOHN, 32 His brother-in-law

GINA, 29 His sister

SETTING

A modest apartment in Kingston, Jamaica.

SYNOPSIS

A disillusioned young Jamaican man tries to push the boundaries of his life.

A NOTE FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT

The more salacious aspects of the script are to be handled with great care. The actors and the characters (in that order) must be treated with respect. They must not be objectified or dehumanized. The play is about people, not bodies.

In the dialogue, ellipses (...) indicate an unfinished thought, whereas a long dash (—) indicates an interrupted thought. Side-by-side dialogue is to be spoken concurrently at the director's discretion.

CURTAIN

*An upstairs apartment somewhere in Kingston.
Eight o'clock. William and Sabrena are on the
small grilled verandah, waiting by the front door.*

*Sabrena is wearing skintight jeans and boots with
a restrictive sleeveless blouse, all angles and
curves.*

*William is in sweatpants, a worn T-shirt and
slippers. Looking more like he's at home than
outside someone else's. He's fit and lean.*

SABRENA

(dryly)

Well, here we are.

WILLIAM

Yes.

SABRENA

I mean, I enjoy your sister...

WILLIAM

And John...

SABRENA

Yes, I enjoy their company as much as you do. Well, maybe not as much as you do, seeing as I actually know some other people...

WILLIAM

If I wasn't fussy about my friends, you'd still be frequenting nightclubs, one hand on your drink and the other between someone else's legs.

SABRENA

Funny enough I don't remember women flocking to be evaluated for your discriminating friendship.

WILLIAM

Well, you wouldn't have seen that, would you?

SABRENA

Among the many dubious privileges of being your wife is standing outside this apartment far too long far too often, waiting for your sister to put her clothes back on...

WILLIAM

What's that supposed to mean?

SABRENA

Although I am glad someone is getting some satisfaction...

WILLIAM

If our visits were such a nuisance—

SABRENA

How would we know? We'd have no idea.

WILLIAM

Yes, we would. They'd stop inviting us.

SABRENA

Darling, they stopped inviting us years ago. As it is, I suspect your sister has a somewhat larger wellspring of empathy for you than I do, what with shared DNA and all that, and continues to entertain you at her own expense.

WILLIAM

You seem to have a particular fascination with my sister's sex life. Or perhaps John's. Maybe you're trying to provoke my gag reflex. Although you needn't venture outside our own bedroom to accomplish that.

SABRENA

Do they even know we're here?

WILLIAM

What do you mean?

SABRENA

Didn't you knock, William?

WILLIAM

Why would I knock? You were on the phone with her not more than two minutes ago.

SABRENA

And now we're here.

WILLIAM

Which she knows because you told her we were on the next street.

SABRENA
You're an idiot.

WILLIAM
For putting up with you?

She goes to knock, but recoils.

SABRENA
Oh mercy, there's a cockroach on the door. Kill it, kill it.

He palms his slipper and whacks the door three times, killing the pest. Wipes his shoe on the mat as he puts it back on.

WILLIAM
I think that constitutes a knock.

SABRENA
And remember, we can't stay late. My flight is...

WILLIAM
Yes, yes, yes.

SABRENA
I hate traveling.

WILLIAM
Oh, shut up. You're giving me a headache.

SABRENA
That's my excuse.

WILLIAM
I thought your excuse was you weren't in the mood. Maybe one day they'll invent a pill that makes you shed your negligee.

SABRENA
Sure, right after you invent a reason for me to. Preferably a long, thick reason.

WILLIAM
Ask John to help you out. He seems pretty thick to me.

SABRENA
I might just do that. Then you can ask your precious sister to perform the only marital duty she hasn't already poached.

WILLIAM
You're sick.

SABRENA

Please. Don't bother acting disgusted.

WILLIAM

There's something wrong with your head, you know that?

SABRENA

She's smart, she's sexy...

WILLIAM

Just stop.

SABRENA

And we both know if she wasn't your sister—

WILLIAM

If she wasn't my sister, we wouldn't be standing here.

SABRENA

Why the hell ARE we standing here?

She bangs on the door.

SABRENA

STOP SCREWING AROUND AND ANSWER THE GODDAMN DOOR!

WILLIAM

(dripping)
It's going to be such a wonderful evening.

The door opens, revealing John, powerfully built, in slacks and Oxford. After-work dress-down. Sabrena brushes past him without waiting for an invitation.

SABRENA

We have to be home by nine thirty.

WILLIAM

(entering)
John.

JOHN

William.

John closes the door. Sabrena drapes herself on the couch.

The apartment is a bit cramped, but tastefully appointed.

Living and dining furniture cohabit along with a small bar and a settee. A couple throw cushions. A plastic tricycle. A giant bucket of Duplo. Warm and cozy.

JOHN

(calling to the kitchen)

Gina!

GINA

(from kitchen)

Coming!

JOHN

Want something to drink?

WILLIAM

No thanks.

JOHN

Sabrina? Aperitif?

SABRENA

As fast as humanly possible.

John goes to the bar as Gina appears from the kitchen, spatula in hand. She has on a pair of skimpy house shorts and a loose blouse that keeps falling off one shoulder, showing a neon bra strap underneath. The blouse has a couple of foodstains on it from her cooking.

GINA

Hi Sabby! You're probably starving. It's almost ready. Hey bro.

WILLIAM

Hey sis.

He smiles at her warmly, broadly. She reaches up to hug him and he wraps his arms around her. His hands grip her hips a shade lower than you might expect, and the embrace lasts one moment longer than is entirely comfortable. Sabrina rolls her eyes at John as he fixes their drinks. He acknowledges the look with a wry grin.

JOHN
So how does it feel?

SABRENA
(from the couch)
He doesn't want to talk about it.

WILLIAM
That's not true.

SABRENA
Well, I don't want to hear about it.

GINA
Taste this.

*She puts the spatula to her brother's mouth, and
he tastes the end tentatively.*

WILLIAM
Delicious.

GINA
I knew you'd like it.

WILLIAM
What is it?

JOHN
(handing Sabrena her drink)
A big secret, apparently.

WILLIAM
Reminds me of Havendale.

Gina smiles, pleased.

SABRENA
Cheers.

JOHN
To secrets.

They clink tumblers.

GINA
(to William)
 So how are you?

SABRENA
(meaning the drink)
 Perfect.

WILLIAM
 I've been better.

SABRENA
(to John)
 You should've been a bartender.

GINA
 What's the matter?

SABRENA
 He doesn't want to talk about it.

WILLIAM
 Will you stop saying that?

JOHN
 Want me to take over in the kitchen?

GINA
 No, it's fine.

JOHN
 So much for my escape plan.

SABRENA
(to John, meaning William)
 I'm sorry, he's been driving me crazy all evening.

JOHN
 That's alright. Gina's been driving me crazy for years.

GINA
 You know you like it.

SABRENA
 Moping around the place, moaning and groaning from one thing to the next.

JOHN
 Milestone got you down, huh?

I'm fine. WILLIAM

If it makes you feel any better, I wasn't over the moon about it, either. JOHN

Anyway, that's why you're here. With your loved ones. GINA

What she said. JOHN

I'll drink to that. I'll drink to anything, so long as I don't have to listen to him. SABRENA

There's my loved one right there. WILLIAM

What time's your flight? JOHN

Oh, don't get her started. WILLIAM

Seven thirty. SABRENA
(*ignoring William*)

AM? JOHN

Yup. SABRENA

I could never fly that early. GINA

You could if you didn't leave everything until the last minute, love. JOHN

So I figure I have to get to the airport by five-fifteen, five-thirty the latest. Leave the house by quarter to. Aim to, at least. Set the alarm for four o'clock. That gives me four hours sleep if I go to bed by midnight, which should be possible— SABRENA

If we leave by nine thirty. We get it. You've only told me seventeen times. Jesus. If it was this much torture for you to spend ninety minutes with our closest friends— WILLIAM

Only friends. SABRENA

Why didn't you stay at home? WILLIAM

Right, because that would have gone over so well. SABRENA

I'd've had a few hours of peace and quiet. WILLIAM

Well, you're about to get a whole week. Enjoy it. You can jerk off in peace and quiet in my absence. SABRENA

Where are you going this time? GINA
(*a salvaging attempt*)

New Jersey. SABRENA

Where's that? GINA

New York. SABRENA

Where are you staying? JOHN

They're putting me up in some hotel. Hylton, Marriott, one of the big ones. SABRENA

They're all big in the States. JOHN

You know, bathrobe, chocolate on the pillow, hot tub. Fill me up, please. SABRENA
(*holding out her empty glass*)

Sure. JOHN

I don't suppose there's any point my telling you to slow down. WILLIAM

You driving home? SABRENA

Clearly. WILLIAM

Then no. I'm packed. All I have to do is collapse on the bed. SABRENA

So much for my birthday blowjob. WILLIAM

William! GINA

Poor little Willy. SABRENA

I should keep a diary. WILLIAM

Yes, keep it to yourself. SABRENA

Something to do in the bed each night. WILLIAM

Listen, both of you. What's going on? GINA

No one answers.

Sabby? GINA

Ask your brother. SABRENA

Well? GINA

Well what? We're fine. Don't we do this every week? WILLIAM

Not before dinner. GINA

Which I'll check on. JOHN

GINA
It's fine. Fix Sabrena's drink.

JOHN
Okay, okay.

GINA
He doesn't like passive-aggression.

SABRENA
Likes it rough, does he.

WILLIAM
Why'd he get married, then.

JOHN
To save what I could. Simple economics.

No one laughs.

GINA
Look we're all friends here. Right?

JOHN
(supportively)
Right.

GINA
Right?

WILLIAM
(reluctantly)
Right.

GINA
Right?

SABRENA
(grudgingly)
Right.

GINA
Right. So talk to me.

SABRENA

G, the problem is your brother hates his life. I don't know how I'm expected to live with someone who doesn't want to live with himself. It's not possible. I mean, he's depressed. He's depressING. How am I supposed to be happy or horny or anything when he's like this? Like that? Look at him.

William has retired to one of the dining table chairs.

WILLIAM

(melodramatic, Laurence Olivier)

Yes, look upon me! Look upon this withered, weathered visage, this wretched refuse heap of a human being. Look upon me and weep, I say, weeeeeeep.

SABRENA

You see what I mean? He's impossible.

GINA

What do you want?

SABRENA

What do I want? I want to not feel guilty every time I have a pleasant thought because it somehow doesn't fit with his stormcloud Sunday or whatever. I want to go out with my girlfriends once in a blue moon and not feel I have to rush home because the world is going to fall apart.

(turning to William, harshly)

Is that so much to ask? To allow me to be happy every now and then? Mercy.

John comes over with her replacement drink. She takes it, gratefully. John and Gina exchange a glance. Gina seems to want him to say something. He moves his hands as if to say, "I'm no good at this sort of thing." Gina sharpens her eyes at him but he still retreats, miming apology.

WILLIAM

Guys, this isn't your problem. It's ours. Let's just have dinner and get it over with.

GINA

What kind of thing is that to say? You have any idea how long I've been in that kitchen? Don't let me get upset with you, too.

JOHN

Your sister skipped work today. So she could, you know, do whatever it is she's doing in there.

GINA

And I was enjoying it, too, even though I'm hot and dirty and tired. So I would greatly appreciate a little appreciation, if you can manage it.

WILLIAM

Sorry, sis. I don't know what's wrong with me. It's just— Look, I feel stupid talking about this. I feel like I'm back with Mom and Dad, except it's you guys.

JOHN

I can leave.

GINA

John.

JOHN

Or stay.

GINA

Continue.

WILLIAM

I hadn't started. I don't know WHERE to start. I just feel— I don't know, yeah, depressed. Down. Disillusioned. Blah.

GINA

Why?

WILLIAM

What you mean why? Because I'm thirty years old and I've done nothing with my life, that's why! Because I am a living testament to wasted human potential. Because I've stretched out my adolescence as far as it possibly can go, and now it's gone, diluted beyond all meaning. Because I used to be smart, and now I just sit around pretending to be. Because all my hopes and dreams are fading like so many cirrus clouds in the sky, battered and buffeted by the breezes of reality, and... I don't know what I'm saying, and Sabrena doesn't like when I get 'poetic'.

SABRENA

Because you sound like an idiot.

WILLIAM

Of course. I should sound brilliant like your friends.

SABRENA

Like a normal Jamaican.

WILLIAM

(mocking)

Yeah, dawg, like, yu dun know, star, and, yeah, yu zimme?

SABRENA

At least they can have a conv—

GINA
 Okay don't start again. William. You were saying.

WILLIAM
 What was I saying?

JOHN
 Cirrus clouds.

WILLIAM
 I thought by the time I was thirty, I'd be... like you guys. Grown up. With it. Working. Buying things. Doing things. What am I?

GINA
 I don't know. What do you think you are?

WILLIAM
 Nothing.

GINA
 You're my brother.

WILLIAM
 Birthright.

GINA
 You're married.

WILLIAM
 Death sentence.

JOHN
 Lots of authors go years without being published.

SABRENA
 I've told him that.

WILLIAM
 But I'm not an author. I'm just somebody who stays at their computer instead of going to work in the morning. I can't BE an author. This is Jamaica. We don't have authors. We don't have publishers. We don't even have books. Nobody writes. Nobody reads. We're engulfed in an epidemic of ignorance. We have lawyers who don't go to court...

(indicates Gina)
 ...and accountants who aren't accountable...

(John)

...and medical representatives who represent foreigners.

(Sabrena)

We're this little pile of excrement in the Caribbean with the collective delusion that we're a country, that we somehow matter because five artistes and five athletes escaped and made it to People magazine.

SABRENA

That reminds me, G, I need to borrow a magazine for the plane. And some Chinese sweets, if you have any. Gosh, I hate traveling.

WILLIAM

Shut up, you stupid woman. You do not hate traveling. You love traveling. It annoys the bejesus out of me when Jamaicans like you put on this casual attitude towards luxury, like you haven't been working your ass off to get it, like you wouldn't be completely miserable if it disappeared. Your very existence is defined by the spoils of travel. How can you sit there in your namebrand jeans and fashionista boots and designer blouse and claim not to like traveling? Who's forcing you? If you hate it so much, DON'T DO IT. Bunch of hypocrites.

JOHN

William.

WILLIAM

What?!

JOHN

You need to take it easy.

SABRENA

Seriously.

JOHN

You too. You're like kindling for each other. One word and you set each other off.

SABRENA

I think he's saying we've still got that spark, dear. By the way, where are the children?

GINA

At his parents.

JOHN

All the annoyances in one place, as God intended. I'm never picking them up.

John. GINA

I'm joking. JOHN

I know. It's true, though. I can't think straight when they're hanging on to my legs. GINA

I love them. SABRENA

Of course. They're not yours. GINA

How do you guys do it? SABRENA

Do what? JOHN

Manage. SABRENA

Do we? JOHN

I don't know that we do. GINA

I think we do okay. JOHN

I'm tired most of the time. Not just tired. What's the word I'm looking for, hon? GINA

REALLY tired? JOHN

Right. GINA

Tired to the point where we wonder, What were we thinking? When did we stop thinking of ourselves as young? JOHN

Hey. I'm young. GINA

JOHN

Well, I'm not. I mean, yes, I don't think we fight as much as you guys.

GINA

We don't.

SABRENA

Thanks.

GINA

But it's because we're too tired to fight. Well, I am, anyway. What's the point? It's only going to exhaust me further. I'd give anything to be able to hop on a plane to New Orleans.

SABRENA

New Jersey.

GINA

New Delhi, wherever. I look at you, and I think, where did my chances go? Of course I love my family, it has nothing to do with that. I just wonder where all the excitement went.

JOHN

I think it went into the kids. I remember being excited when we made them, and now they definitely seem way too excited to be here.

GINA

Those kids.

SABRENA

They're great.

GINA

They're better than great. They're the greatest thing that ever happened to us, hands down.

SABRENA

But you're bored.

GINA

I guess.

SABRENA

And you?

JOHN

I'm not bored, exactly. It's just the goddamn sameness of it, you know? The get-up-every-morning-at-exactly-the-same-time routine. Sometimes I wish I could— never mind.

SABRENA
What were you gonna say?

JOHN
It's not a good idea to talk, you've got me on my second drink already.

SABRENA
Ooh, now I'm intrigued. Sounds naughty.

JOHN
Well, a bit. I guess I miss, you know—

SABRENA
No, what?

JOHN
Wild spontaneous sex.

GINA
John!

JOHN
I don't mean whoring myself. I mean being younger and freer and, you know, wild.

GINA
Oh, come on, when were you wild?

JOHN
Forget it.

GINA
What do you mean?

JOHN
Forget I said anything.

GINA
Why are you making this so weird?

JOHN
It is weird.

GINA
I'm just saying you're more of a Dad guy than a bad guy.

JOHN
As far as you know.

GINA
Okay. Now I understand.

JOHN
And that's why it's weird.

GINA
I tell you about my old boyfriends.

JOHN
I know. And I wish you wouldn't.

GINA
Really?

JOHN
There's such a thing as too much information.

GINA
You know I hate secrets.

JOHN
Doesn't stop us having them.

GINA
From other people, sure. I don't have any secrets from you.

JOHN
That's not true, Gina. Anyway, that's not the point. The point is, as strange as it might sound, I'd rather tell Sabby and have her tell you than just blurt it out.

GINA
Okay. Fine.

JOHN
Should've seen that coming.

GINA
Tell Sabrena what you miss and then she'll tell us.

JOHN
What us? You.

GINA

There's only four of us here. What, you think William is going to be jealous? He's not even listening.

WILLIAM

I'm listening. In fact, this is the first subject of the evening that has my attention.

JOHN

This is ridiculous. You're all ridiculous.

GINA

Ridiculous and waiting.

SABRENA

Waiting and impatient.

WILLIAM

Impatient and intolerant.

Sabrena gets up and goes over to John by the bar. When she gets close, she slows down and throws some swing into her hips, like she's checking him out at a club. She sidles up to him, with mischief on her face.

SABRENA

Hey there, good-looking.

John laughs. Gina chuckles. William looks on detachedly.

JOHN

(half-playing along)

Hey.

SABRENA

What's a hot guy like you doing in a dump like this?

JOHN

I live here.

SABRENA

So you come here often.

JOHN

You could say that.

SABRENA

So do I. I come here every week. I like the crowd. Well, three-quarters of it, anyway.

JOHN
You're not so bad-looking yourself.

SABRENA
Thanks. You married?

Sabrena smiles at Gina, who is being entertained.

JOHN
(*smiling*)
Is it better if I am?

Sabrena's put-on falters momentarily, as she decides which way to go.

SABRENA
Yes.

JOHN
Well, then I am.

SABRENA
How long?

JOHN
Five years.

SABRENA
Kids?

JOHN
Two.

SABRENA
Let me guess. One's four and the other's eighteen months, and they're the light of your life.

JOHN
Good guess. What's your name?

SABRENA
What would you like it to be?

JOHN
Sabrena.

SABRENA
So I'm Sabrena. And you're my John for the evening.

JOHN

You know, I feel like we've known each other for years.

SABRENA

Me too.

JOHN

Like we've been watching each other from across countless rooms, waiting for...

SABRENA

The right moment?

JOHN

Exactly.

They look at each other, from a foot apart. Their spouses, the siblings, are watching intently.

John leans over and whispers in Sabrena's ear, really close, and her face LIGHTS UP with intrigue and delight. And then she squeals with laughter.

SABRENA

That was FUN!

Gina laughs.

GINA

It was, wasn't it?

SABRENA

(moment of exhilaration)

Woooo! I liked that.

She drains her glass.

SABRENA

Hit me again, barkeep.

JOHN

Okay, but this is the last one until you're stuffed.

SABRENA

Yes Big Daddy.

GINA

That WAS kind of exciting. William?

Yes, dear sis? WILLIAM

Your appraisal, if not your approval? GINA

Trivially entertaining. WILLIAM

Boo! Intellectual response. Boo! SABRENA

Stimulating. Better? WILLIAM

Marginally. SABRENA

Depends what was being stimulated. JOHN

You know, hon, you're really not as funny as you think you are. GINA

Ouch. JOHN

I'm just saying. GINA

In the company of friends. JOHN

Right. Before you embarrass yourself. GINA

Bit late for that. SABRENA

Well, Senor Don Juan? GINA

You're not going to hear it from me. JOHN

Very well. Sabby, my darling sister-in-law, come and sit beside me. GINA

She comes over to Gina's armchair, and they both squeeze into it. Gina links her arm into Sabrena's, like schoolgirls.

GINA

Now you must repeat what he said exactly the way he said it, word for word, okay?

SABRENA

Difficult.

GINA

Word for word.

SABRENA

I'll do my best.

She cups her hand over Gina's ear and whispers to her. Gina's face switches to an expression of amused confusion.

GINA

That's it?

SABRENA

That's what he said.

GINA

You're sure?

SABRENA

Sure I'm sure.

GINA

Okay.

SABRENA

What?

GINA

Just... from the look on your face, I thought it was something more.

SABRENA

That's not enough?

WILLIAM

Someone shed some light on this man's dark sexual past.

*Gina gets up to whisper it to her brother, but
William waves her away.*

WILLIAM

Out loud.

Gina looks at John, who nods.

GINA

He misses sixty-nines.

William looks mildly impressed.

WILLIAM

That's wild, sort of.

JOHN

It is when I do it.

GINA

Okay, I think that's enough of that.

WILLIAM

Really? Coz I don't think Sabrena knows what THAT is.

SABRENA

I know what it is.

Gina has taken a sip of Sabrena's drink.

GINA

Wow, that's a man's drink.

SABRENA

Just the way I like it.

JOHN

She's trying to get me drunk.

WILLIAM

On an empty stomach.

SABRENA

Talk to her. She's the one doing dinner.

GINA

Ohmygod, the dinner!

She rushes into the kitchen.

John! GINA

Coming! JOHN

*He puts down his drink and hustles after his wife.
The kitchen is visible to the audience, although
the director can decide whether only one playing
area is visible at a time.*

*John and Gina rescue the dinner from the stove,
under Gina's gesticulations and arm-pointing.*

*William and Sabrena are left alone in the main
room.*

I suppose you think that was funny. WILLIAM

What NOW. SABRENA

The way you were flirting with John. WILLIAM

Oh come on. You were sitting right there. SABRENA

You noticed. WILLIAM

Jealousy doesn't suit you. SABRENA

You don't think I know when my wife is attracted to another man? You think I can't smell the pheromones oozing out of your little thong panties? WILLIAM

You noticed. SABRENA

I can't stand when you're in this mood. WILLIAM

SABRENA

William, this is about as harmless as an encounter can get. What did you think was going to happen, we were going to do it right here? You've been watching too much Internet porn. You're getting addled or something.

WILLIAM

Alright. Play it close to your chest. We'll see what happens in the end.

SABRENA

You've lost your grip on reality. We are here to celebrate your thirtieth birthday with your sister and brother-in-law, and everybody wants to celebrate except you. I should be at home getting a good night's sleep so I don't make a fool of myself at the convention tomorrow, and for reasons that are beyond me I decided to invite this punishment on myself instead. I don't even know why we're married.

William looks at her.

WILLIAM

Now's as good a time as any to answer that question, Sabrena.

SABRENA

Honestly?

WILLIAM

For once.

SABRENA

Because I wasn't thinking about the whole complicated shebang. I wasn't thinking about all the quarreling and complaining and messiness. I was in love with you and I had a good job and that was enough.

WILLIAM

Was?

SABRENA

Huh?

WILLIAM

You said, "I was in love with you."

SABRENA

No, I said I was in love with YOU.

WILLIAM

That's what I said.

SABRENA

No it wasn't.

WILLIAM
You know what I mean!

SABRENA
So do you! You're being difficult.

WILLIAM
So you're still in love with me.

SABRENA
Isn't that obvious? Why the hell else would I put myself through this?

WILLIAM
Well I love you too.

SABRENA
Good!

WILLIAM
Great.

SABRENA
I'm glad we're so in love.

WILLIAM
Ecstatic.

SABRENA
Heaven help us otherwise.

WILLIAM
You know there was a time I'd do anything you asked me.

SABRENA
I'm at a loss for when this was, since I can't even get you to make the bed.

WILLIAM
I trusted you.

SABRENA
And what happened?

WILLIAM
I don't know. It slipped away. No, that's not quite right. It washed away. Over time. With each little rainfall of harsh words and held tongues. You know.

SABRENA
I guess a lot of things are like that.

WILLIAM

Do you think there's a way for us to—

SABRENA

I don't know, William.

Gina returns, holding a Dutch pot aloft with kitchen mittens. John is behind her with some sort of ceramic salad bowl.

GINA

Salvaged! Saved! Something else that begins with S!

JOHN

What my wife is trying to say is dinner is served.

The four crowd the dining table, which is already set with plates and glasses and such. This should be real food, so the audience can smell it.

SABRENA

It looks delicious, G.

WILLIAM

I know what this is!

GINA

You're welcome.

JOHN

Well, what is it?

WILLIAM

This is the pasta dish our mother used to make whenever we had a special occasion. But she'd only make it if it was just family. If there were guests or a party, she'd do something else. So we used to tell our friends not to come over on our birthdays so she'd cook the special pasta.

GINA

And Dad would grant the birthday celebrant fifteen minutes to order everybody else in the house around. You could be Dad for a quarter hour, and everybody had to do what you told them. I used to make Will hang upside down the whole time. His face would get SO red.

WILLIAM

Thanks, sis. This is great.

GINA

And it is family here.

WILLIAM

That's true. Man, this is really great. I love this. You're the best.

He leans over the table, as does she, and he gives her a smooch on the cheek. The way close friends might kiss at the airport.

They sit.

WILLIAM

So, John, how's work?

They dish out food as they continue to talk.

JOHN

Same old, same old. Actually, I shouldn't say that. They're trying to upgrade everybody's computer with a new version of the accounting software we use, and it's been making our jobs twice as hard. Can't find anything with the new interface, so we've been falling a bit behind.

WILLIAM

Fascinating.

JOHN

Hey, you asked.

WILLIAM

I forgot. Sis, I see why you're bored.

JOHN

It's not that bad. Really. I might even go so far as to say I like it.

WILLIAM

No you don't.

JOHN

Excuse me?

WILLIAM

You can't possibly.

JOHN

You're telling me how I feel about my job?

WILLIAM

Why not? It's not top-secret. We all know what happens in your office. You sit there and type crap into crap to produce crap.

JOHN

And this is different from you how?

GINA

John.

WILLIAM

It doesn't pass the test.

SABRENA

Not this again.

GINA

What test?

SABRENA

This is his way of rationalizing his life.

WILLIAM

The simplest, most straightforward measure of the greatness of your job is how many eight-year-olds want to do it. And I'm the only one here who passes the eight-year-old test.

JOHN

I couldn't agree more.

WILLIAM

Literally zero children fall asleep dreaming about accounting, let me tell you.

SABRENA

You can't fall asleep dreaming, Enid Blyton.

GINA

How about you, Sabby?

WILLIAM

You're going to get the same lie. She's doing fine. She's always doing fine. Aren't you doing fine, dear?

GINA

Let her talk.

William sticks his tongue out at his sister.

SABRENA

The truth is I AM getting a bit bored. I mean all the pills and all the clinics and all the trips start to blur together at a certain point. It's just work, and work sucks, you know?

GINA

Amen to that. Don't get me wrong, I love the paycheck. And I've always wanted to work on Duke Street. But the commute and the hours are killing me. And the kids aren't getting any smaller, and now Kemala has kindergarten, and swimming... It's a lot.

WILLIAM

I should probably invent an office and fake co-workers with body odours and stuff.

SABRENA

What are you talking about?

WILLIAM

So I can fit in when we talk about work.

SABRENA

You're such a weirdo sometimes.

JOHN

He's your brother.

GINA

And I wouldn't give him up for the world.

SABRENA

Can I ask a personal question?

JOHN

I've already answered my personal question for the evening.

WILLIAM

And I take everything personally, so I'm disqualified.

GINA

Men. Ask away, sweetie.

Sabrina hesitates a second, then gets her gumption back.

SABRENA

Do you guys, like, do it a lot?

WILLIAM

And there's the third shot of vodka.

The others stop mid-chew. Then slowly resume.

GINA

I'm not sure John's comfortable talking about this.

JOHN

Me? I'm the guy with the 411 on sixty-nine.

GINA

Well, maybe I'm not comfortable talking about this. Sharing everything with John is one thing, but...

SABRENA

Okay, I'm sorry I asked.

They go back to eating. For a good little spell, it's the sound of utensils and chewing.

GINA

What's a lot?

WILLIAM

Oh boy.

SABRENA

I don't know. We don't have to talk about it.

GINA

No, I know. But I was just wondering what you thought a lot was.

SABRENA

William?

WILLIAM

I'm an impartial observer to this conversation.

SABRENA

Fine. I'd say three times a week was a lot.

Gina smiles.

What?
SABRENA

Nothing.
GINA

No, what? Don't do that.
SABRENA

Don't do what?
GINA

That little lawyer smirk you have, like you've got the winning deposition in your briefcase or something.
SABRENA

Ignoring that I have no briefcase and nothing to do with depositions, I was smiling because three times a week is not a lot.
GINA

I see.
SABRENA

More eating.

Well, that's just great.
SABRENA

See, this is why I didn't want to talk about it.
GINA

Why?
SABRENA

Because I know we're having more sex than you, that's why!
GINA

And how do you know that?
SABRENA

It doesn't take a genius, Sabby.
GINA

SABRENA

That's a very narrow-minded view to take, don't you think? Just because we squabble all the time means we're not having enough sex, according to you?

GINA

No, but it sure as heck helps! It's a lot harder to stay mad at someone when you're on your back.

Gina glances at William, who's looking at his wife.

JOHN

I'm not sure this is appropriate dinner conversation.

SABRENA

SCREW APPROPRIATE! I'm sick and tired of being appropriate. I spend all ding-dong day being appropriate. I'm going to be inappropriate tonight, if that's alright. In fact, I don't care what you think. Now let's talk about sex. We're all adults.

WILLIAM

Unfortunately.

SABRENA

Oh you and your everlasting sob story. Woe is you blah blah friggin blah. How are we supposed to get it on when you can't get it up?

William throws his fork into his plate and gets up from the table.

WILLIAM

Alright, that's enough out of you.

Sabrena's inhibitions are fading fast as the effect of drinking too quickly sets in.

SABRENA

And not nearly enough in me.

WILLIAM

I am not going to sit here in front of my sister—

SABRENA

You're standing.

WILLIAM

— and her husband and listen while you fabricate lies out of whole cloth to justify your frigid incapacities.

SABRENA

Where there's a Willy, there's a way!

WILLIAM

The only thing that could make love to you at this point is a popsicle! On a LONG, THICK STICK!

And he marches through the front door onto the verandah, slamming it behind him.

The other couple watch Sabrena, who digs back into her food.

SABRENA

Lovely pasta.

GINA

(sadly)

Oh, Sab.

SABRENA

(mocking)

“Oh, Sab.” Can the pity, G. You don’t wear it well.

JOHN

Okay, let’s all take a deep—

SABRENA

And I don’t need the Voice of Reason, either, thank you very much.

Gina pushes her plate away.

GINA

I’ve lost my appetite.

JOHN

(gently)

Don’t.

GINA

I’m not in the mood anymore.

Sabrena laughs.

GINA

What is so funny?

SABRENA

That’s what I tell William when I don’t want to sleep with him.

GINA

That’s not very nice.

SABRENA
No it's not.

GINA
So why do you do it?

SABRENA
(quietly)
I don't know. To make him want me, I guess.

GINA
How's that working out for you?

Sabrina starts to cry softly. Gina regrets her harsh tone and looks at John. He gives in under his wife's gaze and squats beside Sabrina, who's hiding her tears beneath her hair and cloth napkin.

JOHN
Sabrena.

SABRENA
I'm sorry, I'm sorry you guys I didn't mean to ruin the whole birthday thing and I know you spent like forever in the kitchen and didn't go to work and I came over with all of my problems and vomited them all over everything and I'm sorry...

JOHN
It's okay. C'mere, it's okay.

She scootches over and he sits on the edge of the chair with her and gives her a hug. She nestles into his shirt, as Gina grabs a piece of pasta with her fingers and nibbles it.

GINA
I'm going to check on Woody Allen.

She grabs a shawl off the couch and exits through to the verandah. Again, how many playing areas are simultaneously visible is at the discretion of the director.

William is sitting on the back of a rattan chair, with his feet on its seat, staring into nothingness. Gina comes and hugs him from behind. She's shorter than he is.

She reaches her hands around onto his chest and squeezes.

He puts his hands over hers.

Thanks. WILLIAM

Anytime. GINA

I know. WILLIAM

You okay now? GINA

Not really. WILLIAM

Want to talk about it? GINA

Not really. WILLIAM

Okay. GINA

I love you. WILLIAM

I know. GINA

You're the best little sister a guy could have. WILLIAM

I'm not that good. GINA

No, you are. You've always been there for me, even though it should be the other way around. WILLIAM

You helped me train for my swim meets in high school, you read my essays at UWI, you even told me how to... you know... DO stuff with girls. You're everything to me.

He turns around so now they're holding each other face to face.

William. GINA

What? WILLIAM

We have to do something. GINA

About what? WILLIAM

About THIS. We can't keep on like this. GINA

You mean me and Sabby. WILLIAM

That's not what she meant.

Well, yes, that too. GINA

There's something between her and me. And until we deal with it, we're always going to be— WILLIAM

He bumps his fists together, to indicate conflict.

That's what I want to talk to you about. GINA

Of course. I'll talk to you about anything. WILLIAM

But I don't know how. GINA

*She pulls away from him, and the moment is lost.
He puts a hand on her shoulder.*

Is this also about you and John? WILLIAM

GINA
No. Well, kind of. Not really. But in a way, yes.

WILLIAM
Well, that's clear.

GINA
It's nothing. Silliness. Forget the whole thing.

WILLIAM
Are you pregnant again?

GINA
What?! No, you goose!

WILLIAM
AIDS?

GINA
From who, you maniac? Gosh, you're so crazy.

WILLIAM
I give up.

GINA
Good. I don't like being out here.

WILLIAM
You know, I used to mess up in the pool so that you'd have to teach me again. And we'd end up being the last ones. I just liked being close to you in the water.

GINA
I didn't know that. Remember how we used to spread newspaper on the floor, and huddle in the one changing room, because the whole place was so nasty? We were so young.

WILLIAM
Were we?

She looks at him.

GINA
It was a long time ago.

WILLIAM
We were old enough.

GINA
We were kids.

Kids with hair everywhere. WILLIAM

Let's go back inside. GINA

They reenter the main area. In the interim, John and Sabrena have moved to the couch, with Sabrena's legs tucked under a cushion and her head leaning on John's shoulder. John's head is tilted way back, because he has nodded off.

I always knew they wanted to sleep together. WILLIAM

I'm not asleep. SABRENA

Her movement wakes John, who pops up.

Huh? Who's sleeping? JOHN

Gina grabs his hand and hauls him up.

C'mon hubby. *Dinnus interruptus*, but now we resume-us. GINA

They three go back to the table, leaving Sabrena on the couch. John pauses before sitting.

You know what we need? JOHN

Group therapy? GINA

The next best thing. JOHN

Group massage? SABRENA

A good bottle of wine. Who wants wine? JOHN

I'll have a glass. GINA

That's my girl. Birthday boy? JOHN

Why not? WILLIAM

That's the spirit. JOHN

You're not funny, John. GINA

You know what your problem is? JOHN

I'm horny and we have guests? GINA

You don't appreciate good humour. JOHN

He exits through to the kitchen.

Way to make us feel welcome, G. SABRENA

You took care of your welcome with that opening tirade. Now I want some excitement of my own. GINA

You're serious? SABRENA

The moment you step out that door, believe me. GINA

Sabrina laughs.

I don't know why I always thought John was the one begging you. SABRENA

No way, girl. If I left it up to him, we'd still be childless. Your dinner's getting cold. GINA

Sabrina returns to the table as John rejoins them with three glasses.

Where's mine? SABRENA

JOHN
You didn't say you wanted.

SABRENA
You didn't ask.

JOHN
I kind of assumed given... besides I've only got two hands.

SABRENA
I know where the fourth glass could have gone.

GINA
Sabrena!

SABRENA
What? It's only a joke.

GINA
I don't know what's wrong with us tonight.

WILLIAM
Us who?

GINA
Us girls.

And the two women giggle to themselves. William and John look at each other, puzzled.

JOHN
Ours is not to question. Ours is to drink.

He pops the cork and pours three glasses as the others eat.

WILLIAM
If I didn't know better, John, I'd say you have a drinking problem.

John stiffens, but recovers.

JOHN
Genie and I will share. You guys take these two.

The glasses are distributed.

JOHN

I propose a toast. To the bonds of family forged from seeing each other way too frequently.

SABRENA

Hear, hear.

GINA

Amen.

WILLIAM

You're all a bunch of idiots in my book.

JOHN

Good thing it's not published.

They all laugh.

SABRENA

Nice.

GINA

Very good, John. Your first joke of the evening.

They drink.

SABRENA

What's this in the salad, G?

GINA

Hmm, that shouldn't be there.

SABRENA

(recoiling)

What?

GINA

I'm teasing you. Baby black olives.

SABRENA

Child, you scared me. I thought I was going to have to run to the bathroom.

WILLIAM

Not in those shoes.

SABRENA

Oh please. I could outrun you in heels.

WILLIAM

That is such rubbish. Have you seen my calves?

SABRENA

Those drumsticks?

WILLIAM

Those drumsticks ride twelve miles every Saturday.

GINA

I remember how you two fell for each other now.

JOHN

Yeah, the competition started out friendly.

SABRENA

Can I ask a personal question?

JOHN

Oh no you can't.

GINA

You remember what happened the last time you said that?

SABRENA

I know, I know, I know. But can I?

WILLIAM

It's your funeral.

SABRENA

IF THREE ISN'T A LOT, THEN HOW MANY TIMES ARE YOU GUYS DOING IT?

GINA

Try again. I don't think the children heard you up in Norbrook.

SABRENA

Sorry. That was a bit excessive.

WILLIAM

Just a smidge. Not that you should slow down drinking your wine or anything.

SABRENA

Thanks, Miss Manners, but I'm fine. Well?

JOHN

I don't think she's going to stop until we tell her.

GINA

Go ahead.

JOHN

I'd say it balances out to once a day.

SABRENA

Mercy save me. I'm jealous.

WILLIAM

I'm sitting right here.

SABRENA

This isn't the time, dear.

WILLIAM

That's not what I meant.

SABRENA

How? When? Where? How?

Gina laughs.

GINA

I don't know if you guys would come over again if we told you everything.

*William and Sabrena look over the apartment
with fresh eyes.*

WILLIAM

Interesting.

GINA

Don't you mean stimulating, brother dearest?

SABRENA

That's a lot of nookie.

JOHN

By the way, dear, when I went for the wine I noticed the mail stack still had the bills on top. I thought you were going to pay the light and cable.

GINA

I told you I wouldn't be able to do it.

JOHN

When did you tell me that?

GINA

Today. I called you from the supermarket and I told you I wouldn't be able to do anything else today.

JOHN

But I asked you from Wednesday and today's Friday.

GINA

You know perfectly well the week I've had. I'm talking about today.

JOHN

But I didn't know when I spoke to you today that you hadn't done it yesterday or the day before. If I'd known that, I'd've taken it with me this morning and paid it myself.

GINA

Well, I can't help that.

JOHN

Now I'm going to have to watch the match over by Nicholas.

GINA

What match?

JOHN

The Jamaica-Panama match. The one I told you I wanted to watch this Sunday so could you please pay the cable and light bills this week.

GINA

I can't keep track of every single sporting event you want to consume. Between the Premier League and the Champions League and the Whatever Else League I can't keep up.

JOHN

You always do this. You always wait until the last minute and then try and make it my fault.

GINA

It is your fault. I don't follow football, and I don't watch TV. If it was that important, you could have at least reminded me.

JOHN

I did remind you, Gina. I reminded you several times.

GINA

Well I'm sorry if while you were at the office plugging numbers into your new and updated spreadsheets I forgot to do one out of the two hundred and seventy-five things I had to do this week, including packing Kemala's lunch, dropping him and picking him up from school, making sure Amanda had enough food packs to go up to your parents since they never seem to know how to make anything she wants to eat, picking up the groceries and the dry-cleaning, including the jacket you need for the function tomorrow, and on and on and on. Forgive me for leaving out a televised football match in another country we're going to lose anyway!

The sounds of eating and drinking.

SABRENA

At least I feel a little better about my life now.

GINA

I'm happy for you.

SABRENA

I just meant—

GINA

I know what you meant. You meant that instead of possibly rethinking all of your hopes and dreams because you may have married the wrong man or just married at the wrong time in your personal journey of self-discovery and self-medication, you can sleep like a baby knowing that at least your husband's sister is also lost in the wilderness and grasping at cheap substitutes for meaning in her life. So you buy obscenely expensive shoes and pop a few pills and I focus on my children. You don't see me grudging you your fleeting happiness, do you?

SABRENA

You told her about the Zoloft?

WILLIAM

I don't know. Is that a pill or a shoe?

JOHN

This is like a bad romantic comedy, without the romance or the comedy.

SABRENA

And what happiness are you talking about, Gina? When's the last time I came in here looking happy? At least I'm honest about it. At least you don't see me bouncing around like a damn bunny rabbit trying to keep up appearances.

GINA

You know, I've just about had it up to here with your pathological need to feel good about yourself by tearing everybody else down. You want to know why my brother is depressed? It's because you've been wrapped around his throat since before I can remember, that's why. Choking all the innocence out of him.

SABRENA

Gina, you have no idea what you're talking about.

GINA

You don't think we talk on the phone?

SABRENA

I think you talk altogether too much if you ask me. How can we work through anything when he always has his sister to run to? You're a BIG-ASS woman of twenty-nine. Let him fail. Let him fall. Let him feel like he NEEDS me. John, back me up here for God's sake.

JOHN

I don't really want to get involved.

GINA

OH, a FINE time to play the innocent. As if you haven't been telling me for years to give him more room, to scale down the weekly visits—

JOHN

And here it all comes spilling into the open. What's the point of telling you anything in confidence, I really don't know.

GINA

And don't think I missed that crack about my ass.

SABRENA

It's absolutely beyond me how blind you are to your brother's dependence on you. We were completely happy until you two got married, or did you miss that little detail?

JOHN

Hold on now. Are you really trying to blame us for your marital instability? That's a new one. You might as well bring out the cake now, baby, coz everything else is coming out.

GINA

Oh John, why'd you have to—

SABRENA

Of course you would bake a cake. How perfectly protecting and trite. Does it have thirty tiny little roped candles, symbolizing each year of twisted affection? Or maybe just one short stubby one in the centre, symbolizing his short stubby—
COCKROACH!!

She and Gina both jump onto their chairs as William jumps up and stomps the floor three times, killing it. Throughout the momentary panic, John keeps sipping his wine.

The others retake their seats slowly, and quiet returns to the table.

JOHN

You know, I was saving this bottle in particular for a special occasion. I didn't know what exactly. Maybe I'd finally get promoted. Maybe Kemala's report card would be exceptional. Not that I even know what an exceptional kindergarten report card consists of. Really tall block-stacking, perhaps. Anyway, since William was turning thirty, which I didn't remember until I saw Gina losing her precious little mind trying to get everything ready, I said to myself, why the hell not? You only live once.

And he pours himself a little more.

JOHN

Twice, if you're James Bond.

Chuckles to himself.

JOHN

Three times, if you're a lady.

Laughs all by himself.

WILLIAM

Gina's right. You're not that funny, John.

JOHN

(thick English accent)

Oh, stuff it, William Bligh. It's mutiny, I tell you. Mutiny!!

WILLIAM

And another poor soul is lost. Looks like it's just you and me left, sis.

GINA

Looks like it.

WILLIAM

There's a novel in all this. In the tragedy of my life. The Great Jamaican Novel, waiting to pour out of my pen. My laptop. My phone. Whatever.

GINA

I want half the royalties.

WILLIAM

The royalties shall be awarded in proportion to the tragedy.

SABRENA

I demand ninety percent.

WILLIAM

I'm having a revelation. A moment of euphoric insight, a metamorphosis that happens only two or three times in a lifetime. And here it is, distilled down to its prophetic, axiomatic essence: Life is shit.

SABRENA

You sure that was elevation or whatever? Because it sounds like the same nonsense you always say.

WILLIAM

Here I was thinking my life was worse than everyone else. Naturally there are people starving and people with that ring of flies around their eyes, what's that called again? But I mean people like me. You know, regular people. I thought I had it real bad. But now I realize that's not true. We're all in the pigpen, mucking around.

JOHN

Profound.

WILLIAM

And I propose to do something about it.

GINA

When.

WILLIAM

Right now.

SABRENA

What.

I'm still working on it. WILLIAM

Well, whatever it is, I hope it involves... SABRENA
(exaggerated whispering)
 S—E—X.

I've got it. GINA

What have you got? WILLIAM

I've got IT. GINA

Well, give IT to ME. WILLIAM

It's perfect. It's so perfect, I don't know how I didn't think of it before. GINA

What is it? WILLIAM

We've got the pasta. We've eaten the pasta. We've got the family. And only family. GINA

You don't mean? WILLIAM

He begins to smile.

I do mean. I mean very much. GINA

You think we can? WILLIAM

I don't see why not. GINA

You've got it. WILLIAM

Told you. GINA

By Jove, she's got it. WILLIAM

You've lost it. JOHN

He goes around the table and kneels on one knee in front of his sister. Gina reaches for the nearby broom and holds it over his head. The other two, increasingly comatose, look on.

By the power vested in me, I hereby dub thee— GINA

She touches the broom on either of his shoulders.

DAD FOR FIFTEEN MINUTES!!! GINA

What in the world? SABRENA

We just told you before dinner. Whoever's birthday it was got to order everyone around for fifteen minutes. Starting exactly now. GINA

You're out of your mind. Both of you. There's no way I'm doing that. SABRENA

But you have to. GINA

Says who? SABRENA

Those are the rules! GINA

What rules? SABRENA

The rules of the game. GINA

I'm not playing. SABRENA

You have to play. You don't have a choice. If you're in the family, you play. John's playing. GINA

JOHN
John is not playing.

GINA
John, don't be ridiculous.

JOHN
Did you hear yourself speak? You just knighted your thirty-year-old brother with the kitchen broom and I'm being ridiculous?

GINA
John, you don't have a choice.

JOHN
Yes, I do. And I choose no.

GINA
Then no S—E—X for you.

JOHN
What?

GINA
I'm serious. No sex for you tonight. In fact, no sex for two weeks unless you play.

JOHN
This is blackmail.

GINA
You're playing, yes?

JOHN
I'm seriously afraid of what that freak is going to ask me to do. I'm probably going to end up with my pants around my ankles.

GINA
Let's not get ahead of ourselves. Now sister, are you playing?

SABRENA
What you gonna do, no sex for me? Been there, done that.

GINA
You're right. We have to be clever with you, Sabrena Leanne Abrahams.

She paces a moment.

A-ha! No airport for you, missy.
GINA

Come again?
SABRENA

You play, or Will doesn't drive you to the airport. And he'll do it, too.
GINA

Fine. Whatever. I'll play.
SABRENA

Excellent! Splendid! Marvelous! It's our first game in years. And remember, there's no backing out. William, it's your show.
GINA

Sister dearest, this was an inspired idea. Because we are all miserable. Yes?
WILLIAM

Check.
JOHN

Amen.
GINA

Roger that. And take me to the SKIES!
SABRENA

Yes, we're all miserable. Tired. Bored. Stuck. Dying. But do you know why?
WILLIAM

This evening is a good candidate.
SABRENA

No. You don't know why, because all you ever do is live your stupid little lives, without stopping to examine them. You march from one meaningless endeavour to the next, and then wonder why your life is empty. Not to the same degree, not in the same way. But ultimately—
WILLIAM

Will you get to the GODDAMN POINT, IF THERE IS ANY?
SABRENA

Exhibit A, as my sister would say.
WILLIAM

She doesn't say that.
JOHN

WILLIAM

(continuing)

Well then, case in point.

JOHN

Doesn't say that either.

WILLIAM

(with conviction)

Fine, forget it. The point is. What you Philistines sense but cannot see is that Jamaica is a cruel Delilah that rests her calloused hand on each and every one of her subjects, and drains our strength, our spirit, our soul RIGHT OUT! But I'm going to change all that. Tonight. Here. Now. We are going to break out of the stranglehold of our lives.

GINA

(moved by her brother's fervor)

How?

WILLIAM

By playing cards.

A disappointing answer, to say the least. Gina slumps, John makes a dismissive gesture, and Sabrena snorts in derision.

WILLIAM

I'm serious. Sabrena, get the lights. John, music, please. Gina, two decks.

They look at each other and acquiesce, chiefly out of nothing better to do. Sabrena knocks out a few lights, John turns on the stereo and Gina produces two decks. Meanwhile, William grabs the half-bottle of wine.

The dim lighting and the slow rhythm and blues settles in. The others crash on the couch and the floor cushions. William holds court.

WILLIAM

The game... is Strip Me.

JOHN

Now just hold on here.

SABRENA

Shush, John. Don't you want to Strip Me?

WILLIAM

The game is Strip Me. Four players.

JOHN
Do you remember your sister is one of the four people in this room?

WILLIAM
Yes, and we used to bathe together.

JOHN
Decades ago!

WILLIAM
Sure. Believe that.

GINA
How does this work again?

JOHN
I'm stuck in a bad dream.

WILLIAM
How does what work?

GINA
Strip Me with four people.

WILLIAM
You go around in a circle. Number cards don't matter. A jack means the next person has one chance to turn up a pretty. Two chances with a queen, three with a king, four with an ace. When you lose a round, you remove an article of clothing, drink from the wine bottle, and then count the face value of your last card, and kiss that person.

SABRENA
Lost.

WILLIAM
So if the last card I turn up is a deuce, I count one-two and I kiss you, Sabby. If I get four or eight, I kiss myself. And so on. Strip, sip and lip. It's an old college game.

JOHN
Where it should have stayed.

WILLIAM
You'll figure it out as we go. Ready?

JOHN
(getting up)
This is madness. Do you realize what might happen?

WILLIAM

Are you worried about me kissing your wife or kissing you?

JOHN

Mother of God.

SABRENA

I think he didn't realize one of those possibilities.

WILLIAM

I kiss Gina all the time.

JOHN

I noticed.

WILLIAM

You, now, that's a different story.

GINA

John, sit down.

He does, with great caution.

WILLIAM

Here are your cards. These are all mixed up, right?

GINA

Yeah, they're kalooki decks.

He hands them each half a deck. Sabrena is on a throw cushion, leaning on John's leg, who is on the couch. Gina is cross-legged on the armchair with William sitting on the floor between her legs.

WILLIAM

You start, sis.

GINA

Which way are we going?

WILLIAM

Up to you.

GINA

That way.

She plays a card and they begin the game.

SABRENA

I used to play kalooki every Thursday with the other med-reps.

William plays. Sabrena plays. And so on.

SABRENA

And every Thursday night William and I had an argument about, what again? Oh yes. "The heartlessness of having fun."

WILLIAM

Sabrena, you're like a drill that's run out of screws.

SABRENA

I've run out of screws, alright.

WILLIAM

And you're making a hole in my head. I wish you'd plug out your mouth for two minutes.

SABRENA

All that vocabulary, and no vocation.

WILLIAM

And whose fault is that? Whose fault is it that we're where we are?

SABRENA

You wanted to come over.

WILLIAM

I mean overall, here in Jamaica, you nitwit.

JOHN

(tossing a card in)

That's a Queen.

WILLIAM

You have two chances, Gina.

She tosses a five and six in.

JOHN

No good. Take something off.

Gina tries to grab her shawl and put it on but John snatches it away.

GINA
John!

JOHN
You forced me to play, now you have to play. No cheating.

GINA
Does my hair scrunchie count?

WILLIAM
Sure.

SABRENA
I'm sitting here in shock at how your mind works. The reason we are still here, dear, is the umbilical cord running from your navel over there, dear.

She points to Gina, who is letting out her hair.

GINA
Pass the bottle.

William passes it up and she swigs.

SABRENA
The day you want to leave let me know.

WILLIAM
Fine. I want to leave.

SABRENA
You don't know WHAT you want.

GINA
I've forgotten what comes next.

WILLIAM
Last card was five. Count five from you. Which is one-two-three-four-me.

She leans down from the chair and kisses the top of his head.

GINA
That wasn't so bad.

*John and Gina's moods seem to be improving,
and William and Sabrena the opposite. They
begin again, going around.*

SABRENA

I WOULD LIKE TO ANNOUNCE THAT WHILE I HAVE GREAT AFFECTION FOR YOU BOTH AND I AM TRULY SORRY I RUINED THE DINNER, AND I MIGHT BE A LITTLE DRUNK, THE REAL REASON DINNER WAS RUINED IS BECAUSE MY HUSBAND IS AN OVERGROWN CHILD! AND YES I AM A LITTLE DRUNK!

JOHN

Right behind you.

SABRENA

Not yet you're not.

GINA

Your play, William.

WILLIAM

Yes, sorry. Was distracted by DJ Hennessy over there.

GINA

That's a seven, Sabby. Lose the boots.

JOHN

Hey, no prompting.

Sabrena removes her boots.

GINA

You look like Kemala on Christmas Eve. They're feet, John.

JOHN

And they're being unwrapped.

GINA

There was a group of boys at Hillel that used to run into the girls bathrooms, hoping for a glimpse of our panties. They'd throw the stall doors open, and then run away.

GINA

Went on for weeks. Girls started holding their pee, spotting their uniforms...

WILLIAM

What happened?

Sabrena chugs the wine bottle.

GINA

One day Mrs Foster went into the bathroom, and Mrs Foster was a good sixty-odd, and not pretty AT ALL. So I waited, and then I went in myself. And in due course the boys came in behind me, and both they and Mrs Foster got the shock of their lives.

A rueful thought.

GINA

Maybe we are just overgrown children.

SABRENA

(to John)

Hey, want to see what you're missing?

She crawls cat-like across the short distance to her husband and plants a VERY SEXY KISS on William, who doesn't reciprocate.

She returns to her spot by John.

JOHN

Okay, that was hot.

SABRENA

WOOOOOOH!

JOHN

Let me just say, there's no way I'm giving William one of those. Alright, let's go.

They start again.

SABRENA

Can I ask a personal question?

ALL

(according to their moods)

NO!!

SABRENA

(totally loose)

What's your biggest fear? And I don't mean being buried alive, or death, or snakes, or those stupid ones. I mean, in the life you're really living right now, what terrifies you?

GINA

I guess something happening to the kids.

Kids don't count. SABRENA

Being nobody. WILLIAM

Why don't kids count? JOHN

Because we'd all be crushed if something happened to them. I want something more. SABRENA

Being nobody! WILLIAM

You know what terrifies me? Getting old. Getting ugly. SABRENA

I'd have to say losing my relationship with Will. GINA

What? JOHN

Don't get defensive, babe. Blood runs thicker. GINA

BEING NOBODY! WILLIAM

We heard you the first time. SABRENA

You've got to be kidding me. You'd rather lose our marriage than that loser? JOHN

Says the recovering workaholic. WILLIAM

You keep out of this, Sundance. JOHN

John, relax. It's a hypothetical. GINA

Yes, where all the hypothetical effort we've put into our hypothetical union is worth hypothetical squat to you. JOHN

GINA

(meaning William)

He's like my best friend!

JOHN

As long as I know where we stand. I'll get some friends of my own. Pass the damn bottle.

He drinks, takes off his tie and hangs it around Sabrena's neck.

SABRENA

Does this count as my clothi—

She doesn't get any further, because with an expert tug on the tie, she's pulled right onto John's lips. And then it's over. Quick and easy.

WILLIAM

John, you miscounted. You got a nine. That's Gina, not my wife.

JOHN

Whoops. My mistake.

And he moves into Gina, but she turns her head away. Nonplussed, he kisses his wife on her neck, tilting her head back a bit as she tries not to respond.

GINA

I think we need some ground rules.

SABRENA

You mean who can kiss who how and where?

GINA

Exactly.

SABRENA

I say anything goes.

WILLIAM

You would say that.

SABRENA

Are you calling me loose?

WILLIAM

You're doing alright by yourself.

SABRENA

I almost wish I HAD cheated on you.

WILLIAM

But for once you're right. Let the chips fall.

GINA

Aren't you afraid of where they might fall?

WILLIAM

No. It's time we all lived a little.

SABRENA

Living Sabrena loca!

In the ensuing exchange, they play a rapid-fire round without waiting for the others.

WILLIAM

Drunk.

SABRENA

Killjoy.

WILLIAM

Simpleton.

SABRENA

Snob.

WILLIAM

Cynic.

SABRENA

Naif.

WILLIAM

Spendthrift.

SABRENA

Layabout.

WILLIAM

Faker.

SABRENA

Pervert.

WILLIAM

Bitch!

Castrate! SABRENA

ADDICT. WILLIAM

FAILURE. SABRENA

ENOUGH! GINA

You lose. SABRENA

William strips off his T-shirt. His torso is fit and lean, not muscular. Like an ex-swimmer.

Nothing like a good rage to get my blood pumping. I'm almost turned on. SABRENA

You've lost weight, Will. GINA

Is that good or bad? WILLIAM

Who do you have to kiss? JOHN

Your wife. WILLIAM

He leans his head back, and she leans down, and they have an upside-down kiss on each other's forehead. His hand brushes against her breast accidentally.

See? And you were worried. WILLIAM
(to John)

We're still playing. JOHN

Oh hush John. You're such a sore loser. GINA

Looks like the losers win in this game. JOHN

SABRENA

Is that your biggest fear, John? Losing?

JOHN

(with finality)

I'm going to be a winner tonight.

They play again.

SABRENA

I remember what this place looked like when you moved in. Horrible. And now it's so cozy. So comfortable.

JOHN

Make yourself at home. Your husband does.

SABRENA

I like how squooshy these cushions are.

WILLIAM

They're a bit too squooshy, actually. You sink right in.

SABRENA

That's what makes them squooshy.

JOHN

They've gotten more squooshy—

GINA

They ARE too squooshy. John bought them without sitting on them first.

JOHN

What was I supposed to do, put them on the floor of the Courts showroom and pop popcorn?

GINA

Ask Sabrena if she buys a pair of shoes without trying them on.

JOHN

How is that the same thing?

GINA

It's a furniture store. They expect you to try it out.

JOHN

Give me a break. She's been on me ever since we got the damn cushions because she wanted leather and she wanted beanbags. Neither of which we could afford at the time.

SABRENA

You lost, Gina.

Gina strips off her loose T-shirt and continues talking without missing a beat. She is now in her neon bra (adequately covered) and her shorts.

GINA

Because we had to afford this monstrosity of a television.

She blows a loveless kiss over to her husband.

JOHN

Why does it bother you so much?

GINA

(rising annoyance)

Because TV is a lie, a sedative, the empty reassurance you haven't hit rock bottom as long as there's Neville in the morning, Ellen in the afternoon and murder in the evening. Twitter, Facebook, radio—they're all the same. They bring you close to strangers, and estrange you from those you're close to. I don't like lies, and I never will.

JOHN

Sometimes we have to put up with things we don't like.

SABRENA

Tell me about it.

JOHN

Besides I only watch sports.

GINA

Sure. And I only watch Lifetime. Then we fall asleep on opposite sides of the bed. Or you switch to Playboy because even though I'm too tired to open my legs, that's supposed to excite me.

JOHN

It's worked fine so far.

GINA

It hasn't worked at all. You're so blinded by your ego and your Y-chromosome you don't realize I only get excited when I think of...

JOHN

Of what? Or should I say, of who?

SABRENA

I was in the middle of a compliment.

GINA

Of course. How rude of us to be married in the middle of your sentence. You were saying.

SABRENA

Well, I WAS going to say how much I like the colours.

GINA

(sounding thoroughly ungrateful)

Thanks.

JOHN

The plumbing's still terrible. Need to plug that hole in the bathroom where the roaches come in.

SABRENA

Those things give me the WORST— ugh, it's like they're on my skin.

And she grabs onto John's leg.

SABRENA

Oh, look at that. I lost.

She unbuttons her sleeveless blouse.

SABRENA

Can I leave it like this?

GINA

That wouldn't exactly be fair.

JOHN

Open it up a little.

She obliges, and her solid white brassiere goes on display.

JOHN

(softly)

Damn, girl.

*She splashes the bottle to her lips and counts.
Her finger ends on John again.*

JOHN

Come here, luscious.

She kneels up and he snakes a hand around her bare lower back. It's a real KISS this time, and his other hand rests gently atop her breast. Still kissing him, she equally gently removes it, more out of propriety than offense. The whole encounter doesn't last more than a few seconds.

Both John and Sabrena are a bit flushed.

JOHN

Well Genie, anytime you stop putting out I know where I'm going.

GINA

Don't I know it.

SABRENA

I'll give you a key.

WILLIAM

To what? The chastity belt?

GINA

Can we talk about something else?

WILLIAM

Pick your poison.

SABRENA

The children.

GINA

My poor babies. The angel and the accident. Brought into a world full of people like us.

SABRENA

You mean flawed?

GINA

Men with one-track minds.

WILLIAM

And women with cruel hearts.

JOHN

Hey, what's the matter, Brady Bunch? Can't take the taste of your own medicine?
Or are you trying to hide that you're aroused?

GINA

(feeling her own body with mock lust)

Oh yeah baby. Coming to terms with the intractable insignificance of my life
always turns me on.

She turns to Sabrena.

GINA

You want the dirty truth?

SABRENA

I don't know, do I?

GINA

The real reason we have sex so often is because I'm terrified he'll cheat on me.
Deep down, I know he'd do it. And I'd rather keep him exhausted than worry.
There, now you know. You lost again, John.

JOHN

I can see it this time, thank you.

*He takes off his Oxford, revealing his wife-beater
and strong shoulders. William holds out the wine
bottle.*

WILLIAM

(not looking)

Your drink.

JOHN

(brusquely)

I've had enough.

*And he twists William's arm, so the dark red wine
falls right onto Sabrena's open blouse, brassiere
and chest.*

*William yanks the bottle belatedly upright, as
Gina provides dry applause.*

GINA

Oh bravo, John. Very subtle. Come on, Sab, let's sort you out.

The girls exit into the kitchen. Leaving the two men. Some cloyingly optimistic reggae anthem starts low on the stereo.

JOHN

Can't wait until we kick those crazy Latin ballers on Sunday. I don't think we've ever beaten Panama on their turf. Well, first time for everything, eh, William?

WILLIAM

You felt up my wife.

JOHN

Hey, tit for tit.

WILLIAM

What are you talking about?

JOHN

You put your hand on Gina.

WILLIAM

Are you seeing straight?

JOHN

I'm not blind.

WILLIAM

No, just dumb.

JOHN

I thought I should even the score.

WILLIAM

It's a card game!

JOHN

Is it?

WILLIAM

I don't like what you're implying.

JOHN

This was your idea.

WILLIAM

And my rules. Until you changed them.

JOHN

I've never been that great with rules, in general. When I met Genie she already had a boyfriend. Didn't bother with those rules, either.

WILLIAM

You've had too much to drink.

JOHN

I know my limits.

WILLIAM

That's not what your wife says.

John stiffens.

WILLIAM

So. We're even. I'll let it slide.

A moment where John struggles to decide whether or not to let it go.

JOHN

(ice)

What do you mean, that's not what my wife says?

WILLIAM

I mean we talk. She tells me things.

JOHN

What things?

WILLIAM

You know. Things. A late night here, a missed promotion there, a tiny misunderstanding last year between your car and a light pole. With Kemala in the car.

JOHN

I fell asleep at the wheel.

WILLIAM

Right, and Amanda needs all that liquor to learn how to count.

JOHN

You saying I'm a bad father?

WILLIAM
(pressing on)
 If the schnapp fits—

John laughs mirthlessly.

WILLIAM
 At least you can recognize humour.

JOHN
 That's not what I'm laughing at.

WILLIAM
 What's the joke, then?

JOHN
 You, you dolt. You're the joke. In your sweatpants and one-day growth, like some off-season Hollywood screenwriter. Living off your wife's salary and your sister's sick affection. I'll tell you something. The only reason I've been holding back is out of respect for Genie. I could fuck your wife in this room in front of you and you'd have to stand there and watch her leak.

*William leaps up in a rage, and tackles John.
 They roll backwards over the couch in a tangle of
 arms and legs.*

*William is back on his feet first, and throws an
 ineffective jab. He's very much the lightweight
 compared to John, who shrugs him off and then
 counters with a solid punch that sends William
 sailing across the dining table, taking the
 tablecloth with him, sending plates and cutlery
 flying. The calamitous noise sends the two girls
 rushing back into the room, Sabrena holding her
 blouse and a towel in both hands, just as William
 staggers to his feet with a nosebleed on the other
 side of the table.*

*Sabrena screams, and Gina tries to move in
 between the men.*

GINA
 STOP IT! STOP THIS RIGHT NOW!

WILLIAM
 STAY AWAY, GINA!

GINA
 THIS HAS GONE FAR ENOUGH!

WILLIAM

I SAID STAY BACK, DAMN YOU!

*And he throws a serving spoon in her direction,
which she has to dodge.*

WILLIAM

This is between me and that overgrown cocktail of yours.

JOHN

C'mon, Hemingway.

*William gets back within firing range, and John
thumps him and he crumples again. Both girls
scream.*

JOHN

Ruining my goddamn life with your weekly trials and tribulations. All I can hear in my goddamn marital bed is William-this and William-that. Why don't you get a real job and earn real money and sleep with your wife like a real man?

*William gets back up, and John sends him down a
third time.*

GINA

PLEASE JOHN! I'M BEGGING YOU!

SABRENA

WILLIAM, STAY ON THE FLOOR!

JOHN

Yes, little Willy. Stay on the floor.

*William struggles to his feet again, this time with
considerable difficulty. His face is bruised, his lip
swollen, his nose leaking blood.*

John raises his fist again.

WILLIAM

C'mon. Do it.

John certainly looks like he's about to.

WILLIAM

DO IT. DO SOMETHING NOVEL FOR ONCE IN YOUR LIFE.

*But instead, John lowers his fist. He has
something more devious in mind. He goes over to
the women, and grabs Sabrena by the arm.*

SABRENA

Let go, John! You're hurting my arm.

JOHN

You know you want it, bitch.

SABRENA

(under her breath)

No. Not like this.

He paws her over to the couch, and rips her brassiere straps off, forcing her to cover her chest with her arms. But he's not after her bosom. He grabs her by both shoulders and kisses her HARD AND MESSILY ON THE LIPS.

William doesn't try to stop him, and neither does Gina, standing a ways off.

When he's finished he pulls back, and immediately gets slapped by Sabrena, who stands her ground, unafraid.

JOHN

What a magnificent pair. What do you think of that?

WILLIAM

(without looking away from John)

What time is it, sister?

GINA

I don't know, Will. I don't have a watch.

WILLIAM

I feel like I still have a couple minutes.

SABRENA

William, the game's over.

WILLIAM

IT'S NOT OVER UNTIL I SAY IT'S OVER! UNDERSTOOD?

GINA

Yes.

WILLIAM

Sabrena.

SABRENA

You damned fool.

Go and put on some clothes. WILLIAM

Thank you, but I think I'll stay. SABRENA

I'm pretty sure you don't want to do that. WILLIAM

I think I do. SABRENA

Sabrina. I'm asking you. WILLIAM

Sabrina moves to a neutral position, away from John.

This is as far as I'll go. SABRENA

All this time, William maintains eye contact with John.

Fine. Maybe this doesn't mean anything, but I do love you. WILLIAM

I know. SABRENA

Sister. WILLIAM

Yes? GINA

Come here, please. WILLIAM

She moves over to her brother, and starts fussing with his injured face.

Not now, Gina. I need you to do something for me. WILLIAM

What is it? GINA

He looks at her, and she reads his mind.

Her face crumples.

No. GINA

Yes. WILLIAM

I can't. GINA
(softly)

You have to. WILLIAM

Please don't make me. GINA

I'm not. WILLIAM

Why? GINA

You know why. Pretend it's the changing room. Just this once. WILLIAM

Just this once? GINA
(quiet)

And never again. It's the last thing I'll ask of you. WILLIAM

She looks at her husband, rendered powerless to intervene. Then at her sister-in-law.

What did John really whisper in your ear? Don't lie to me. GINA

He said every time he makes love to you he thinks of me. SABRENA

Gina looks at her brother.

And takes a step forward.

Genie, what the hell are you doing. JOHN

She takes another tiny step.

JOHN
GODDAMN IT, GINA. I'M WARNING YOU. DON'T YOU FUCKING DO IT!

And another. She's right in front of his messed-up face.

WILLIAM
Make it count, sis.

He winks at her.

SABRENA
(soft)
Oh my god.

She reaches up, caresses his cheek and they kiss, A LINGERING, DANGEROUS, CRACKLING, DEADLY-SWEET KISS that rocks them to their toes and back.

THE GREATEST TABOO.

Sabrena stifles a little sob, and John stares in disbelief.

And then the two siblings part, the electricity sizzles away, and there is quiet.

John goes through and slams the front door.

Sabrena turns and goes offstage, one hand over her mouth in shame.

William and Gina look at each other from a few feet apart.

WILLIAM
How long?

She doesn't answer right away.

GINA
Years. Always.

WILLIAM
Me too.

He moves back to her. Slowly, he traces a finger down her neck, down her shoulder, along her collarbone, and in between her—

She falls onto him with a lump in her throat.

No, William. We can't. GINA

It's now or never. WILLIAM

Then it's never. GINA

Why? WILLIAM

Because that's the only sensible thing to do. Look around. We have lives. Spouses. Children. GINA

They're not here. I don't see them. WILLIAM

But I do. I have to. Try to understand. GINA

William steps carefully around broken plates, takes Gina's shawl off the couch and wraps it around her shoulders. They look like a grotesque parody of a couple at the altar.

I do. WILLIAM

Oh God, William, what do we do now? GINA

It's alright. It's over. As you said. We go back to our lives. Our regularly scheduled programming. I relinquish control back to the Genie from whom it came. Tell me one last thing. WILLIAM

He looks into her eyes.

Have you ever felt so alive? WILLIAM

No. GINA

WILLIAM
Neither have I. Now if you'll excuse me, I have to collect my wife. She has an early-morning flight and if I'm going to drop her to the airport, we need to get some sleep. I'm sorry about the mess.

John returns to the room as William exits offstage. Gina can't look at him. He moves behind the couch.

Well, here we are. JOHN

Yes. GINA

He looks at his wife.

JOHN
I wish I could say something. Like... I always knew. But what's the use.

GINA
I don't know if I really love you anymore. If this is love. Maybe I haven't for a while. I think the children made it easy to hide. To pretend. To forget.

JOHN
So that's it.

GINA
No. Of course not.

JOHN
What then?

GINA
Nothing. We carry on.

JOHN
For them?

GINA
To save what we can.

William and Sabrena reenter. Sabrena now has on one of Gina's loose faded-graphic tops. They make their way to the front door.

My bag.

SABRENA

*John picks it up from the couch and holds it out.
She takes it.*

SABRENA

*(to the room, but to no one in particular,
and with a kind of sadness)*

Maybe we'll be okay, now. After this. After—

WILLIAM

Right. Well. No point saying anything else, really, except...

*As he raises his hand in farewell, and the lights
fade on all four figures standing in the
apartment...*

GINA

(quietly)

Happy birthday.

BLACKOUT.