

ACT I

SCENE 1

Furniture and decor is of no discernable style, but it all works together to create a comfortable space. In the middle of the room is a large couch. In front of the couch is a coffee table. Close to the couch (stage right) is an upholstered recliner. On the other side of the couch (stage left) is an end table. Directly behind the couch situated against the back wall is a buffet table. Above the buffet table are hung a series of pictures of famous European sites. A few feet to the side of the buffet table (stage right) there is an open doorway leading to the study. There is a staircase running along the back wall (stage left) that leads to the second floor. There is a door opening in the side wall (stage right) leading to the kitchen. There is an unseen door inside the kitchen, which allows access to the back yard. In the wall opposite of the kitchen (stage left) is the front door.

AT RISE: ROSE sits on the couch playing a game of solitaire. She is a slender, attractive woman with hair that has been dyed red. She is well dressed in clothes that are a little young for her age. VIOLET sits in the recliner reading a book. She is similar to ROSE in stature, but looks and dresses more conservatively. WALTER sits on a winged-back chair in the study with only the back of his head visible above the chair back. On the buffet table sits a bottle of gin with several glasses. On the end table is a photo album.

ROSE lays down a few cards.

ROSE Damn it.

VIOLET looks up from her book, but says nothing. Rose lays down a few more cards.

ROSE (Cont.) God damn it.

VIOLET looks up again staring with disapproval.

VIOLET Rose, must you? You know how I hate it when you curse.

ROSE makes no indication that she hears her sister. VIOLET returns to her book. ROSE lays down more cards.

ROSE Shit!

VIOLET does not take her eyes from the book.

VIOLET Thank you.

ROSE looks up at VIOLET

ROSE What are you reading?

VIOLET It's called *Pebbles, Rocks and Boulders*.

ROSE What?

VIOLET *Pebbles, Rocks and Boulders*. It's a self-help book. The title's a metaphor for life's problems – the small ones, the big ones and the ones in between. It identifies different strategies for coping. I had never heard of the author or the book. I just happened to be browsing the bookstore and picked it up from a pile stacked on the discount table. But when I skimmed through the Forward I saw that the author had committed suicide a few months after publication. That intrigued me.

ROSE Isn't reading a problem-solving book written by a woman who killed herself like taking advice from Donald Trump about how to live your life with integrity?

VIOLET I don't think so. The author of the book had problems; she just didn't follow her own advice.

ROSE leaves the couch, walks to the buffet table. She pours herself a generous glass of gin.

ROSE *(holding the bottle aloft)* Would you like to try some of this? It is without doubt the best gin I've ever tasted.

VIOLET No thank you, Rose. To me, gin tastes like medicine. I'll just have some water.

VIOLET stands and walks toward the kitchen.

ROSE *(speaking as VIOLET is walking away)* Not this gin. It's very smooth.

There's a pause long enough to allow VIOLET to enter the kitchen.

ROSE *(Cont.) (shouting after VIOLET)* Drinking a few of these a day will keep your problems away.

VIOLET *(off)* I'll stick with water, thanks.

VIOLET re-enters the living room with glass in hand and sits back down in the recliner. Rose returns to the couch.

VIOLET *(Cont.)* It isn't the book's advice that I find so compelling, although I do find it to be quite good. It's the author. Wondering if when she began to write the book she knew that she was going to kill herself or if that decision wasn't made until sometime later. I keep looking for something she wrote that hints of despair or hopelessness, but there's been nothing like that so far. But I'm only half way through it.

ROSE A woman doesn't have to be desperate to kill herself. It can be a very rational decision.

VIOLET Sometimes rational I suppose, but always desperate.

ROSE takes a drink of her gin.

ROSE I'm so looking forward to seeing Keira. The last time I talked with her she told me she'd started a new job. How's that going?

VIOLET It didn't go well. She quit after six months.

ROSE What happened?

VIOLET She said the work wasn't challenging. That it was repetitive. That it was more suitable for a technician than a person with a PhD.

ROSE So what's she doing now?

VIOLET Still medical research.

ROSE She's had quite a few jobs already, hasn't she?

VIOLET Six in ten years.

ROSE I would think employers would be reluctant to hire her with that track record.

VIOLET That's what I thought too, but she leaves one job and starts a new one a few days later. She's never without job offers.

ROSE Does she seem happy where she's at now?

VIOLET (*VIOLET sighs deeply*) I'm not sure if Keira will ever be happy.

ROSE What do you mean? Is there something wrong with her? Is she depressed?

VIOLET No, she's not depressed. She's just never satisfied. She's been that way her entire life. She wanted to graduate first in her high school class, which she did. She wanted to go to an Ivy League school, which she did. She wanted to get her PhD, which she did. Everything she aspires to do, she does. But nothing she accomplishes gives her satisfaction.

ROSE She has time.

VIOLET She's thirty-four.

ROSE You worry too much. I still hadn't figured things out when I was that age.

VIOLET Is that supposed to make me feel better?

ROSE May I give you some advice?

VIOLET If you think I'm in need of some – go ahead.

ROSE If you want this weekend to have any chance at success, don't be judgmental.

VIOLET laughs.

VIOLET Okay. I'll try my best to keep my opinions to myself.

ROSE Good.

There is a brief moment of silence.

VIOLET But if she wants my opinion, I'll give it to her.

VIOLET waits for a response, but ROSE says nothing.

VIOLET (*Cont.*) And you know how Keira has a knack for soliciting advice without expressly asking for it.

ROSE frowns and speaks disapprovingly.

ROSE Violet...

VIOLET I'm just pointing out that she doesn't make it easy to keep quiet.

ROSE It *is* easy. Whenever you feel the urge to comment – don't.

VIOLET Remaining silent when I think someone I love is making a mistake is something I can't do.

ROSE I know that better than anyone.

VIOLET Anyway, I've put off talking to her about her attitude for much too long. I've decided not to put it off any longer.

ROSE Surely you're not planning to have a discussion with her about that this weekend.

VIOLET I am if the opportunity presents itself.

ROSE Well just remember – we're getting together for a celebration, not an intervention.

VIOLET Fine. I won't talk to her about it until the day after the party.

ROSE Good.

The sisters drink from their glasses.

ROSE (Cont.) What's Keira's boyfriend like?

VIOLET I haven't met him yet, but I'm not optimistic. She's had almost as many relationships as she's had jobs.

ROSE Nothing wrong with being choosy.

VIOLET He's five years younger than her.

ROSE So, what does it matter?

VIOLET I suppose it doesn't.....but I think she'd benefit from someone five years older.

WALTER coughs loudly several times as he sits in the study.

VIOLET (Cont.) (as she looks toward the study) What's with your boarder? He hasn't gotten up from that chair all day. Does he ever move?

ROSE Oh, he moves. Mostly at odd hours. If you came downstairs in the middle of the night, you'd probably run in to him.

VIOLET Well, that's just creepy.

ROSE You don't have to be apprehensive about Walter. He's gentle and kind, although the poor man is very troubled.

VIOLET About what?

ROSE Hell. He believes it's a real place, but he's unsure about what he needs to do in order to avoid going there. I'm sure you can appreciate how that would be especially disconcerting for an eighty year old.

VIOLET So what does he do in the study?

ROSE First he reads. Always theology. Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism. He has hundreds of books in his room. Then after he reads he either meditates or hallucinates.

VIOLET Hallucinates!

ROSE He takes LSD. He says it opens his mind, makes him more insightful.

VIOLET Doesn't that concern you? Aren't you afraid he might behave irrationally?

ROSE Not at all. But I do require that he let me know when he's going to use it. Would you like to meet him?

VIOLET I'm not sure.

ROSE stands and walks to the doorway of the study.

ROSE Walter, there's someone I'd like you to meet. Would you mind coming into the living room? Walter? Come into the living room, won't you? I'd like you to meet my sister.

ROSE returns to the couch.

ROSE (Cont.) He's coming.

VIOLET is visibly apprehensive as she looks toward the doorway.

ROSE (CONT.) Stop looking so nervous. He appears to be lucid.

When WALTER enters he's wearing sunglasses and using a cane.

VIOLET (leaning toward ROSE and speaking in a hushed voice) I didn't realize he was blind.

ROSE He's not. He needs the cane to walk, but he wears sunglasses to signal me that he's taken LSD.

VIOLET Oh, God.

WALTER makes his way to the couch. He is slightly built with an erect, almost stiff posture. He wears a sweater vest over a long-sleeved dress shirt and corduroy pants.

ROSE Walter, this is my sister Violet.

WALTER removes his sunglasses, bends slightly and extends his hand. His manner is dignified.

WALTER It is a pleasure to meet you, Violet.

VIOLET I'm happy to meet you, Walter.

ROSE pats the couch.

ROSE Please, Walter. Sit next to me.

WALTER sits.

ROSE *(Cont.) (looking closely at WALTER'S eyes)* Are you with me, Walter?

WALTER Yes, I'm with you - and your lovely sister.

ROSE Well, good. Welcome back. Would you care for something to drink?

He points at ROSE'S glass.

WALTER I'll have some of what you're drinking, thank you.