

CADAVER DOGS

By Greg Atkins

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SYNOPSIS: In San Bernardino, CA, 1983, police dog trainer Amanda Esposito returns home from searching for disaster victims in Mexico and, still reeling from her trip, encounters Wade, a semi-famous author of murder mysteries desperately seeking her help to find his missing wife. Add to the mix a scheming sister, a jealous Sherriff and a tequila-fueled night of drinking, and it quickly becomes apparent that nothing is what it seems, passions are reignited, family secrets are revealed, and murder is on everyone's mind.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2-3 female, 3 male, 0-2 either)

- AMANDA ESPOSITO (f)..... A 27-year-old woman who boards and trains police dogs. *(503 lines)*
- JIMMY "WADE" STEWART (m)..... 30. A charming and bookishly handsome writer of crime novels. *(388 lines)*
- KEITH WHEELER (m)..... 30s. A local sheriff. A high school graduate with a strong sense of right and wrong. *(150 lines)*
- MEGAN SPECK (f)..... The 29-year-old sister of Amanda. The picture of the early 80s in dress and attitude. Sexy, with the ability to connect with people... valuable as a bartender. *(221 lines)*
- CHRIS BEST (m) 30s. Another local sheriff. *(41 lines)*
- MOM (f) Pre-recorded or offstage voice. *(10 lines)*
- DR. WEST (m/f)..... Pre-recorded or offstage voice. *(2 lines)*

ANSWERING MACHINE (m/f).....Pre-recorded or offstage voice.
(10 lines)

DURATION: 110 minutes

SETTING: San Bernardino, California. Kitchen and dining area.

TIME: Early 1980s

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT ONE

SCENE 1: A MOONLIT MONDAY NIGHT

SCENE 2: A HOT TUESDAY MORNING

SCENE 3: TUESDAY AFTERNOON

SCENE 4: A BRIGHT WEDNESDAY MORNING

SCENE 5: A MOONLIT WEDNESDAY NIGHT

SCENE 6: FRIDAY AFTERNOON

ACT TWO

SCENE 1: FRIDAY TWILIGHT

SCENE 2: AN OVERCAST THURSDAY MORNING

SCENE 3: A BRILLIANT FRIDAY MORNING

SET

The kitchen and dining area of a ranch-style house. A sliding glass door with a floor length curtain, a wooden dining table with four chairs with tie-on cushions. In the middle of the table are dog salt and pepper shakers, a sugar bowl with spoon, and a stand-up napkin holder. There is a kitchen sink, refrigerator, stove, and dishwasher. A small boom box/cassette player is on the counter. Everything looks well used and homey. The kitchen décor could be described as eclectic Americana with an emphasis on a dog theme, except for a kitty cat clock (Felix) on the wall, with eyes that look from side to side and a tail that wags, ticking the seconds away. A rotary dial phone is on the wall with an extremely long spiral phone cord. At night a dog-themed night light, along with the moonlight is all that illuminates the kitchen. Through the sliding glass door, a bit of chain link fencing can be seen.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

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ACT ONE, SCENE 1
A MOONLIT MONDAY NIGHT

AT START: *Felix tells us it's 11:45. Yelping dogs are heard. Car headlights sweep the window over the sink and sliding glass door. The sound of tires on gravel, car doors and muffled "Goodbyes" and "Thanks, Nancy." A moment. Motion-sensitive exterior flood lights illuminate the backyard. AMANDA crosses by the kitchen window and stands at the sliding glass doors, pushing open the unlocked door. She enters and flips on the kitchen lights. She is carrying a dusty, Army-type duffle bag that she drops on the floor, followed by a rugged backpack and finally, a pink Samsonite make-up case. She is exhausted. She sits at the table and removes her boots, throwing them in a wicker basket by the door. She crosses over to an old-fashioned bread box and opens it. Inside is a loaf of Wonder Bread in its plastic bag. She opens it and thumbs through the first few slices, pulls them out, examines them and walks over to a foot-operated step-on trashcan and drops the bread in. She pulls out another slice, examines it and also tosses it. She finally comes to a non-moldy piece, takes it out and throws the rest of the bread in the trash. She crosses to the toaster and drops in the bread and depresses the lever. She notices the little flashing light on her answering machine. She ignores it and crosses to the refrigerator, opens it, and pulls out a carton of milk. She opens it, gives it a sniff and reacts. She throws the carton in the trash. She opens the fridge again and takes out a can of Coors beer. She crosses over to the cupboard and takes out a jar of Peter Pan Peanut Butter, removes the lid, and sticks her finger in it and eats a glob. She leans against the counter, staring into space. The toast pops up, startling her. She opens a cupboard and grabs a small plate, crosses to the toaster, grabs the toast, places it on the plate and goes to the kitchen table. She sits and realizes that she forgot a knife. She looks over and can't seem to muster the energy to get up. She reaches into the pocket of her pants and pulls out a Leatherman tool, opens the knife and digs into the peanut butter. She begins to spread it on the toast. She pauses, sets down the toast and the knife, and begins to sob. The lights fade to black. Music.*

ACT ONE, SCENE 2
A HOT TUESDAY MORNING

AT START: *Felix lets us know it is 9:03. Sunlight streams through the windows. We can hear an occasional bird singing and the sound of the shower. A moment. Suddenly the dogs are barking like crazy. WADE appears at the kitchen window. He has a friendly face and boyish charm that serves him well. He peers in, and then goes to the sliding glass door. He gently raps on the glass. He tries the door, sliding it open. He enters. Taking in the room, he notices the remains of the late night snack on the table, the décor, and eventually focuses on the Felix clock. He begins to cross to it.*

AMANDA: *(Offstage.)* Hey!

WADE freezes.

AMANDA: *(Offstage.)* Hey! What's going on?

WADE is not sure what to do. *The shower stops and we hear the sound of the shower curtain being pulled back.*

AMANDA: *(Offstage.)* What's gotten into you? Silencio!

The barking lessens. WADE realizes she's shouting at the dogs. He backs out through the sliding glass door, closes it, and exits. The dogs go crazy barking again. AMANDA enters barefoot and in a well-worn robe, drying her hair with a towel. She opens the slider and looks around.

AMANDA: Silencio! Silencio!

The dogs quiet. She wraps her hair in the towel, puts the lid on the peanut butter and picks up the jar and the toast plate. She puts the plate in the sink and the jar in the cupboard. She exits to the bathroom. A hair-dryer is heard. Her phone rings twice. After the second ring, the answering machine clicks on.

ANSWERING MACHINE: (*Amanda's voice.*) Hi, you've reached San Bernardino K-9 Care, specializing in unique dog training for the police and military. We are not open to the public. Please leave your name and number at the boop. (*Boop.*)

ANSWERING MACHINE: (*Keith's voice.*) Amanda, it's Keith. I'm bringing Sherlock back. He was great with the kids, but this morning he lost a fight with a swarm of bees. The Vet says he's fine but he looks like he went a couple of rounds with Ali. (*He laughs. A pause.*) Um, yeah, well. (*A pause.*) I heard your trip was pretty grim. Anyway, I'll be over around... (*The "boop" cuts him off.*)

The hair-dryer clicks off. AMANDA enters from the bathroom wearing a bra, clean jeans and cowboy boots. She is putting on Arrid extra dry roll-on. She opens a cupboard and takes out a box of Cheerios and sets it on the counter. She takes out a bowl and pours some cereal into it. She begins to cross to the fridge and remembers the milk.

AMANDA: Shit.

She puts the cereal bowl on the counter and looks in the cupboard, finding a box of Pop Tarts. She takes out a foil packet and tears it open with her teeth, plops them in the toaster and pushes down the lever. She notices the flashing light on her answering machine. She grabs a handful of the dry cereal out of the bowl and throws some in her mouth, absentmindedly chewing. She puts back the Cheerios box and grabs her deodorant and heads to the bathroom. A moment. The toaster pops up. She returns wearing a wife-beater t-shirt and holding a Pendleton flannel shirt. She goes to the answering machine. She pushes the "messages" button, puts the Pop Tart in her mouth, and buttons her Pendleton. While the answering machine plays, she pulls her hair into a ponytail, holding it in place with a hair tie.

ANSWERING MACHINE: (*Meg's voice.*) Hola, sis! I heard you were going to Meh-he-co. I hope you had a mucho bitch'n time. Mom's going to call you. She saw the flooding on the news. I told her not to watch the news, but all she does is watch the news... and Wheel of Fortune. Those poor people, I can't imagine...

AMANDA pushes the “erase” button.

ANSWERING MACHINE: (*Machine voice.*) Message erased.

ANSWERING MACHINE: (*Mom’s voice.*) Hi, Sweetheart it’s mom.

AMANDA: (*Simultaneously with MOM in the exact same way.*) ...it’s mom.

ANSWERING MACHINE: (*Mom’s voice.*) I’m worried about you. Why did you go to Tijuana? It looks so dangerous. All that water and those cardboard houses that washed away. I want you to promise me...

AMANDA pushes the “erase” button.

ANSWERING MACHINE: (*Machine voice.*) Message erased.

ANSWERING MACHINE: (*Meg’s voice.*) Hey, heads up, Mom is gonna call you...

AMANDA pushes the “erase” button.

ANSWERING MACHINE: (*Machine voice.*) Message erased.

ANSWERING MACHINE: (*Mom’s voice.*) Hi, Sweetheart, it’s...

AMANDA pushes the “erase” button.

ANSWERING MACHINE: (*Machine voice.*) Message erased.

ANSWERING MACHINE: (*Keith’s voice*) Hi, Amanda. It’s Keith with SB Sheriff. I’m picking up Sherlock for the weekend. We have a bike rodeo on Saturday and the kids always love him, so I thought...

AMANDA pushes the “erase” button.

ANSWERING MACHINE: (*Machine voice.*) Message erased.

ANSWERING MACHINE: (*Mom’s voice.*) Hi, Sweetheart, it’s...

AMANDA pushes the “erase” button.

ANSWERING MACHINE: (*Machine voice.*) Message erased.

ANSWERING MACHINE: *(Wade's voice.)* Hi, this is Wade Stewart and I'm calling to speak to someone about your services...

AMANDA pushes the "erase" button... then realizes she should have listened.

ANSWERING MACHINE: *(Machine voice.)* Message erased.

AMANDA: *(She didn't want to do that!)* Shit! Goddamn it. He'll call back. *(Grabs a K-9 care baseball cap and puts it on, pulling her ponytail through the hole above the adjustable headband.)*

ANSWERING MACHINE: *(Keith's voice.)* Amanda, it's Keith.

AMANDA: *(Sadly.)* Keith.

She grabs a ring of keys off a hook by the sliding glass door, opens it, and the dogs immediately start barking. She closes the door behind her and she exits off right.

ANSWERING MACHINE: *(Keith's voice.)* I'm bringing Sherlock back.

He was great with the kids, but this morning he lost a fight with a swarm of bees. The Vet says he's fine but he looks like he went a couple of rounds with Ali. *(He laughs. A pause.)* Um, yeah, well. *(A pause.)* I heard your trip was pretty grim. Anyway, I'll be over around... *(The "boop" cuts him off. The lights fade to black.)*

ANSWERING MACHINE: *(Machine voice.)* End of messages.

ACT ONE, SCENE 3

TUESDAY AFTERNOON

AT START: *Cicadas are heard. AMANDA, pushing a wheelbarrow, stops in front of the sliding glass doors. Her Pendleton is tied around her waist and she has a sweaty bandana around her neck. She takes off her work gloves and throws them in the wheelbarrow. She opens the slider and the sounds of the cicadas become louder. She stomps her feet before she goes in. It's damn hot. Felix lets us know it is 11:54. She leaves the door open. She crosses over to the refrigerator and opens the top freezer. A couple of packages, wrapped in white butcher paper with words written on them in marker, fall out.*

AMANDA: *(Frustrated.)* This day!

AMANDA reaches in and takes out a Popsicle. She grabs the frozen packages off the floor and stuffs them back in the freezer, pushing the door closed. She unwraps the Popsicle, leans against the counter and begins to eat it. She loves Popsicles. At the slider we see WADE. He sticks his head through the opening.

WADE: Hello!

AMANDA: *(Almost has a heart attack.)* Shit! Where did you come from?

WADE: I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to scare you.

AMANDA: Well, you did. I wasn't expecting...

WADE: I saw the door open.

AMANDA: And you just...? I mean... it's okay. Let me just catch my breath.

WADE: I am really sorry.

AMANDA: The dogs didn't bark... they always bark. They're my early warning system.

WADE: Then your system's on the fritz.

AMANDA: *(Looking out the kitchen window.)* Yeah, that's weird.

WADE: I don't know what to tell you. *(Sticks his head out the slider.)* Hey! *(The dogs start barking.)* You just needed to reset it.

AMANDA: *(Can't help but laugh. Notices that his pant leg has a rip in it.)* What did you do?

WADE: Oh, I caught it on the barbed wire fence.

AMANDA: Why were you coming through my fence? You know that's a good way to get yourself shot.

WADE: I left you a message. I'm Wade Stewart. I told you I was stopping by at noon.

AMANDA: Wade? Oh, you were on the... yeah, I got it, but my machine is all... I was... wow, you're really bleeding.

WADE: *(Pulling up his pant leg and looking at the cut.)* Yep. I caught myself good.

AMANDA: *(Crosses to WADE and looks.)* Yeah, you did. *(Going into professional mode.)* Take off your pants.

WADE: *(Coyly.)* This is so sudden.

AMANDA: *(Unfazed.)* Funny, but not as funny as a staph infection. Take'em off. *(WADE takes his feet out of his shoes and removes his pants. He is wearing bikini briefs. There is a good deal of blood running down his shin.)* That doesn't look good.

WADE: Well, in my defense, it is cold in here.

AMANDA: *(Sighs.)* Sit down... and don't track blood on my floor. I've had my fill for the week. *(Throws the rest of her Popsicle in the trash. WADE sits and examines his leg. AMANDA exits to the bathroom.)* And don't touch it with your dirty hands.

WADE: Okay, Doc.

We hear the bathroom cabinets opening and closing. WADE looks around the room, his eyes taking it all in. AMANDA returns with a Medi-Kit. She sets it on the counter and washes her hands at the kitchen sink.

AMANDA: So, Mr. Wade Stewart, what are you doing trespassing on my property?

WADE: As I said in my message, I am interested in renting one of your dogs.

AMANDA: I don't rent dogs. I board and train dogs.

WADE: Then is there a way I can borrow a dog?

AMANDA sits in a chair across from WADE and motions for him to give her his leg. She begins to wipe off the blood.

AMANDA: They're not my dogs.

WADE: Then, do you know where I can get a dog?

AMANDA: The pound? This is going to sting. *(Puts peroxide on the cut.)*

WADE: Ouch! *(Recovering and being nonchalant.)* So that's a "sting?"

AMANDA: Sorry. Hold still.

WADE: *(A pause as she examines the cut.)* I'm looking for the kind of dog that could find a body.

AMANDA: *(Looking at him closely.)* A cadaver dog?

WADE: I guess so.

AMANDA: Wade Stewart? I should know you, shouldn't I?

WADE: Yes, yes you should. I'm extremely famous, at least in the greater Inland Empire. Well... mainly San Bernardino and parts of Riverside.

AMANDA: Don't be modest. I bet all of the Inland Empire knows you, and most of Palm Springs.

WADE: I'll take that.

AMANDA: You write books.

WADE: Novels.

AMANDA: Dan?

WADE: Dane.

AMANDA: Clark.

WADE: Carter. I can see you're a fan.

AMANDA: Yeah, Dane Carter novels.

WADE: My 3rd book was on the New York Times Best Seller list.

AMANDA: Wow.

WADE: Yes, number 33 for one week.

AMANDA: Okay.

WADE: Do you have any idea how many books are written in a year and how many don't end up on the bestseller list?

AMANDA: No. Do you?

WADE: No clue, but would it kill you to be a little impressed?

AMANDA: I'll go to the library and pick one up, then I'll tell you whether I'm impressed or not.

WADE: You couldn't even say you'll buy one and let me be gallant and offer to give you one?

AMANDA: Do you always write what others should say?

WADE: I'm a writer, so... yeah, pretty much. I'll give you a book in exchange for patching me up. I will live to see that day, won't I?

AMANDA: You want to get a few stitches in this. You took out a chunk. *(Puts on a butterfly bandage and covers it with a gauze pad.)*

WADE: Okay.

AMANDA: When was your last tetanus shot? *(Rips the tape with her teeth.)*

WADE: No clue. Is it strange that you washed your hands and then rip the tape with your teeth?

AMANDA: Do you know that a dog's mouth is cleaner than a human's?

WADE: Really?

AMANDA: Don't be stupid. You know where a dog has his mouth most of the time. (*Finishing up the dressing.*) That should do it for now.

WADE: Thanks. (*Checking it out.*) Very professional work.

AMANDA: Don't let it fool you. Make sure you see a doctor. (*Begins to put away the supplies.*)

WADE: So, no dice with me renting a dog?

AMANDA: What do you need with one of my dogs?

WADE: Do you recognize me from anything else... other than my book jackets?

AMANDA: (*Stares at him for a beat.*) Yeah, I do. (*Begins putting the supplies back in the Medi-Kit.*) You're...

WADE: Yeah, I'm the guy whose wife disappeared and was the prime suspect.

AMANDA: Right.

WADE: I'm that guy who wrote crime novels and didn't have an alibi. Or, at least, one that made sense to the police. Luckily, the city prosecutor didn't see it that way, but the damage was done. In these here United States, if you're accused of something, most people think you did it.

AMANDA: That's not necessarily true.

WADE: Really? Did it matter that there was no evidence? Did it matter that I passed the polygraph test? Nope. I was guilty. The Press said so. Most folks don't read past the headlines... and even fewer read the article about how the charges were dropped. I'd like to thank the local papers for putting the arrest on the front page and the charges being dismissed on page 27, right under the Hickory Farms ad. And it also doesn't help when the only photo they used was the one my publisher puts on the jacket of my novels. A photo of a smirking author of crime fiction that shouts out, "I got away with it." Perfect for selling who-done-it books, deadly when the caption below it says, "Wade Stewart suspect in wife's disappearance."

AMANDA: Well, if it's any consolation, I read the whole thing.

WADE: You did? Then you know my wife was never found. It'll be two years this week... no trace. Nothing. Doesn't that seem strange to you? It does to me.

AMANDA: What do you mean?

WADE: She didn't show up in Acapulco with the pool boy... didn't leave a suicide note... wasn't held for ransom... didn't show up with amnesia in a homeless shelter in Seattle... wasn't put into a wood chipper...

AMANDA: All good theories.

WADE: Especially the wood chipper. We had a wood chipper. It was fire season. I rented it the weekend she disappeared to get rid of all the brush I had cut down the week before. The Sheriffs were all over it like ants on a Jolly Rancher. (*AMANDA gives WADE a look.*) They seemed almost sad that it had only been used for wood.

AMANDA: It must have been tough.

WADE: You have no idea. How do you grieve when all you're thinking about is that you are a suspect? No one saw me at night... crying... asking God where my wife was... what happened to her... what should I do now? And the strangest part? Everyday events: taking a nap, washing a shirt, ignoring a phone call, a minor disagreement, renting a damn wood chipper like you have every year since you bought your home... they all take on some ominous intent when someone goes missing. The Sheriffs were relentless.

AMANDA: They're just doing their jobs.

WADE: The San Bernardino Sheriffs are competent within their limitations. Unfortunately, their limitations are time, resources, and imagination.

AMANDA: I see. But you didn't answer my initial question. Why a cadaver dog?

WADE: Because the police *didn't* do their jobs. There was a hiring freeze three years before my wife went missing so they were understaffed. They didn't have the budget to mount a full-scale search of the area around here and... they had me... so why do any additional detective work? As one Sheriff said when he put the cuffs on me, "Family first."

AMANDA: The dog?

WADE: I'm getting there. I'm a storyteller. So I waited and waited for... *something* to happen. Well, two years is a long enough wait, so I thought it was time to take matters into my own hands. I write crime novels. I've come up with every motive I could think of. Maybe her secret lover picked her up... maybe she was meeting a friend to take her to the airport to get out of town. Well, there was

no secret lover that I know about... the police supposedly checked every airport, train and bus station... no sign of her.

AMANDA: So why are you here?

WADE: I saw the article in the paper of you going to Mexico to help find victims of the flooding and I thought of the Purloined Letter. Do you remember that story by Edgar Allan Poe?

AMANDA: No.

WADE: Doesn't matter. Point is... what if my wife didn't run away, what if she is somewhere nearby? They found her car down a side road in Blue Jay. So, maybe she cut someone off on a mountain road and in a moment of road rage they killed her and buried her in a shallow grave. Maybe she went for a hike, slipped, and ended up in a ravine.

AMANDA: Hiking? Alone?

WADE: You sound like the police.

AMANDA: I work with them.

WADE: Ah. Well then, yes, alone. It wasn't unusual for her to go hiking alone. She was a pediatric oncology nurse... worked with kids who had cancer... and there were a lot of days that she'd go up to the mountains and get away from her work. She'd lost a patient that day. An 8-year-old girl with leukemia who she had been taking care of for months. I can see her needing a little alone time after something like that, can't you? So, at this point, I'm going with the ravine theory... and for that I need a cadaver dog.

AMANDA: I see. Well, I wish I could help you. I really do, but like I said, these aren't my dogs. The Sheriff's Department and the County Search and Rescue own them.

WADE: The newspaper said you took dogs to Mexico.

AMANDA: We were there to find flood victims. It was a humanitarian trip requested by Governor Brown.

WADE: So, all I need to do is convince the Governor that I'm a human? *(AMANDA just stands there. WADE breaks off.)* I'm... sorry. I'm at my wits' end. I just want to know what happened. You can understand that, can't you? *(WADE stands and grabs his pants.)* You are very kind to listen... and take care of my leg... and not laugh at my underwear.

AMANDA: You dated my sister. That's where I know you from.

WADE: What?

AMANDA: You went to prom with my sister.

WADE: *(A pause.)* You're Megan Speck's sister?

AMANDA: Yeah. I recognized you when you walked in. It threw me when you said your name was Wade.

WADE: Yeah, I decided I couldn't deal with being Jimmy Stewart anymore. I mean, there are only so many bad impressions you can hear before you *do* become homicidal. I began using my middle name as my first when I went to college. Fresh start and all that.

AMANDA: Makes sense.

WADE: You're going by a different last name, too.

AMANDA: Yeah, I took on my mom's maiden name. Esposito.

WADE: Lot of name changing going on lately.

AMANDA: Yeah, I guess so.

WADE: How is she doing?

AMANDA: Meg? She's good.

WADE: Wow, prom was, what? Twelve years ago?

AMANDA: Yeah, I was 16.

WADE: I recognize you now.

AMANDA: I was pretty pudgy back then. Fat actually.

WADE: I haven't seen Megan since... well, hell since your house burned down.

AMANDA: Yeah, we moved a couple of times after that. It was a tough couple of years. This is the house we ended up in.

WADE: She lives here?

AMANDA: No, she's in Vegas now.

WADE: *(Laughs.)* That makes sense. Is your mom...?

AMANDA: She lives in Leisure World in Seal Beach.

WADE: Ah. I always liked her.

AMANDA: Thanks. Meg is going to visit her this weekend.

WADE: Nice.

AMANDA: I don't see her that often... Meg I mean... since I'm so crazy busy with the business.

WADE: Yeah, it seems like you've done really well for yourself. *(A pause.)* Well, I guess that's it, huh? Thanks for your time, Amanda.

AMANDA: Sure.

WADE: It was great seeing you.

AMANDA: Yeah, it was a pleasant surprise.

WADE: Sorry you didn't get my message.

AMANDA: Yeah, and I'm sorry I couldn't help you.

WADE: Say, "hi" to your sister for me.

AMANDA: I will.

WADE: Do you mind if I use your bathroom before I go? Now it just seems weird with me sitting here in my underwear.

AMANDA: Sure. No. Sure. (*Pointing.*) Right through there, on the right.

WADE: Thanks.

WADE exits. AMANDA stares, lost in thought. The dogs begin barking. We hear the sound of tires on gravel and then a car door closing, and then another car door closing. AMANDA looks out the slider.

AMANDA: Well, shit. (*Quickly gathers up the debris from the bandaging and throws it in the trashcan. Tosses the rest of the supplies back into the Medi-Kit, then pokes her head out the slider and shouts.*) Hi, Keith! (*Looks again.*) What the hell happened to Sherlock?

KEITH: (*Offstage.*) I left a message!

AMANDA: Yeah, I didn't get it!

KEITH: (*Offstage.*) Bees!

AMANDA: (*To herself.*) Bees? (*To KEITH.*) Did you say, "bees?"

KEITH: (*Offstage.*) Yeah!

AMANDA: I'll be right there! (*Stashes the Medi-Kit in the cupboard and heads out the slider.*) Put him in kennel six!

KEITH: (*Offstage.*) Will do!

A moment. WADE enters, wearing his pants, and goes to the kitchen window and looks out. He turns and quickly returns to the doorway to the bathroom. He stands there for a moment, then removes his pants and waits. KEITH passes the kitchen window and enters the house through the slider. He is holding a small paper bag.

KEITH: (*Over his shoulder to AMANDA.*) I'll put the meds on the table! (*Notices the men's shoes on the floor.*)

WADE: (*He walks out of the doorway putting on his pants.*) Well, this is embarrassing. (*KEITH, startled, jumps. WADE pulls up his pants and buttons them.*)

KEITH: What the hell are you doing here?

We now have a good look at KEITH. He is early 30s with a bit of a Boy Scout vibe. It doesn't help that he is in a short sleeve khaki police uniform shirt and blue shorts. He tosses the paper bag on the table.

WADE: Just coming and going. What are you doing here, Officer?

KEITH: Police business.

WADE: Good to see San Bernardino's finest hard at work.

KEITH: Really, what are you doing here, Jimmy?

AMANDA passes by the kitchen window.

WADE: Waiting to say goodbye.

KEITH: What?

AMANDA enters. She pauses, not sure what she's walked into.

WADE: Amanda, it looks like you're busy... so I'm going to take off.
Thanks for everything. Sorry to take you away from your work.

AMANDA: No problem. It was good seeing you again.

WADE: Yeah, I hope we get to do it again soon. *(Crosses and picks up his shoes, crosses to the slider, and looks KEITH in the eye and smiles.)* Sheriff. *(Exits to the dogs barking.)*

AMANDA: *(Going to the paper bag.)* These the meds?

KEITH: *(In shock.)* Yeah.

AMANDA: *(Brushes off his shoulders.)* You need Head and Shoulders. *(Takes the bag to the kitchen counter and empties it out. There are four pill bottles. KEITH brushes his shoulders.)* This is a lot of stuff.

KEITH: Yeah, the vet said the drops and the smaller bottle is for Sherlock, the two big bottles are for the dogs that went to Mexico. I guess they get dysentery from the water just like we do.

AMANDA: I've noticed.

KEITH: You came back early.

AMANDA: We did our job and got out. Tijuana is not the garden spot the brochures lead you to believe.

KEITH: *(Unable to hold it in.)* Why was Jimmy Stewart here?

AMANDA: Wade.

KEITH: Oh, yeah, he wants to be called Wade now. Big shot author and wife killer.

AMANDA: Keith!

KEITH: Oh, he did it alright. The DA couldn't do anything because of habeas corpus.

AMANDA: Jesus! Why do you do that?

KEITH: What?

AMANDA: Habeas corpus? Are you trying to impress me? Do you even know what it means?

KEITH: To produce a body.

AMANDA: Yes, a live body. What you mean is Corpus Delicti.

KEITH: Okay, then that. Why are you all mad?

AMANDA: I don't know! Mexico was very fucked up.

KEITH: What happened?

AMANDA: *(Crosses to the fridge.)* You want a Popsicle?

KEITH: No, thank you.

AMANDA opens the freezer door and the usual white packages fall out.

AMANDA: Shit. Shit. Shit! *(AMANDA grabs a Popsicle. KEITH begins to move to help her and she gives him "the eye." He stays where he is. She picks up the packages and stuffs them back into the freezer.)*

KEITH: You okay?

AMANDA: *(Hoists herself up to sit on the kitchen counter, takes off the Popsicle wrapper and eats it during...)* Keith, it's been a hell of a week and I've come back to a bee-stung Sherlock and a pack of dogs with Montezuma's Revenge. And I'd swear to God my Mexico dogs are acting like they're depressed. Especially the Labs. So I'm not okay. I'm not okay at all.

KEITH: *(Sits at the table.)* The Search and Rescue guys said it was pretty grim.

AMANDA: I don't want to talk about it.

KEITH: Sheriff Tidwell is gonna want a report.

AMANDA: Then I'll write a report, but I don't want to talk about it.

KEITH: Okay! *(Trying to change the subject.)* I guess I will take a Popsicle.

AMANDA: This is the last one.

KEITH: Right. *(A pause. Then nonchalantly.)* Well, maybe I can take you to dinner or something this week to take your mind off stuff.

AMANDA: Maybe.

KEITH: Have I done something to piss you off?

AMANDA: Keith, why do you think this is about you?

KEITH: Because you've been acting strange ever since we started dating.

AMANDA: We're not dating. A date. We went out on a date. And you're the one who called it a date. I didn't. I told you I didn't want to shit where I eat.

KEITH: Oh, nice. Quite the metaphor.

AMANDA: Damn it, Keith, that's not a metaphor; it's just a phrase.

KEITH: Well, whatever the hell it is, it's not very nice.

AMANDA: Look, we both work for the Sheriff, it just makes things...

KEITH: Nancy in dispatch is dating Chris.

AMANDA: Chris Best?

KEITH: His divorce finally came through.

AMANDA: Then Nancy is an idiot. Everyone knows that Chris is the king of the "lick it or ticket." How many women has he let off with a warning and a bad taste in their mouths? If she is dating him, it must be because she is trying to avoid traffic school.

KEITH: That isn't true.

AMANDA: Really?

KEITH: Well, there was some truth to it, but he doesn't do that anymore.

AMANDA: Right.

KEITH: People can change.

AMANDA: My dogs don't even like him and they hang with dead people.

KEITH: The point is, the Sheriff doesn't mind if his people date.

AMANDA: God! Sometimes I wonder why they gave you a gun!

KEITH: What?

AMANDA: I don't care what the Sheriff thinks. I don't want to date someone I work with.

KEITH: Okay, okay. I get it. Loud and clear.

AMANDA: Thank you.

KEITH: So it has nothing to do with me walking in and Jimmy Stewart's half naked in your kitchen.

AMANDA: What?

KEITH: I walk in and he's putting on his pants. You don't need to be a detective to figure out...

AMANDA: Oh, goddamn it Keith... get out.

KEITH: What?

AMANDA: I'm not screwing Jimmy... Wade... whatever the hell his name is!

KEITH: I believe you!

AMANDA: Praise God. *(So over it.)* Goodbye, Keith. I've goddamn had it. All I've eaten for the last two days are Popsicles and a Pop Tart. I don't have the energy for all this. I'm not mad... I'm not pissed at you... I'm just... tired. It's been a long week. Thanks for bringing Sherlock back. Thanks for picking up the meds. I appreciate all of it.

KEITH: Alright. *(Begins to go, then stops. He points.)* He was standing right there putting on his pants so you could see why I'd think... *(AMANDA'S look stops him. KEITH shrugs.)* ...I just thought you ought to know.

AMANDA: Noted.

KEITH: Okay. *(At the slider. Half in and out. The dogs begin barking.)* The dinner offer still stands.

KEITH exits and crosses past the kitchen window. A moment and AMANDA snaps her Popsicle stick in half. Blackout. Music.

ACT ONE, SCENE 4

A BRIGHT WEDNESDAY MORNING

AT START: *The answering machine light is blinking in the dark and the nightlight glows. As the lights come up, we hear the toilet flush and AMANDA enters from the hallway with an Astro Pop in her mouth. She is in a good mood. Brown paper grocery bags sit on the kitchen counter. On the kitchen table is a battered cardboard file box with "High School Shit" in Magic Marker on the side. She begins putting away the groceries: Bartles & Jaymes wine coolers, Tab, Cheerios, Popsicles,*

Pop Tarts, Coors beer, Charmin toilet paper, Wonder Bread, Ultrabrite Toothpaste, Chock Full O'nuts Coffee, Swanson frozen TV dinners, Planters Cheez Balls, Clorox Bleach, Pepto Bismol, Fresh cut flowers, etc. At some point, as she puts away stuff, she hits the play button on the answering machine. She takes the rolls of toilet paper off to the bathroom. Felix lets us know it is 9:40.

ANSWERING MACHINE: *(Amanda's voice.)* Hi, you've reached San Bernardino K-9 Care, specializing in unique dog training for the police and military. We are not open to the public. Please leave your name and number at the boop. *(Boop.)*

AMANDA returns. She pulls a vase out of the cupboard and fills it with water from the sink. She puts the flowers in it.

ANSWERING MACHINE: *(Meg's voice.)* Hey, sis! Are you screening your calls? You never pick up. Change of plans. I'm *driving* to Seizure World to see mom. I don't want her to drive to the airport. I've probably saved someone's life on the 405. So I'll be stopping by to see if I can convince you to come with me. It's her 65th for God's sake. I'm leaving early on... *(Boop.)*

ANSWERING MACHINE: *(Meg's voice. Quickly.)* God, I hate your machine it always cuts me off! Okay, see you Friday. *(Slowing to a normal speed.)* Oh, and don't worry, John's not coming because we broke up and he's an asshole. Bye. *(Boop.)*

AMANDA: What a surprise.

ANSWERING MACHINE: *(Keith's voice.)* Amanda, it's Keith. I've been thinking about what we were talking about...

AMANDA: *(Hitting the "erase" button.)* Nope.

ANSWERING MACHINE: *(Machine voice.)* Message erased.

AMANDA puts the Popsicles away. She slips her hand up through the barely opened freezer door, stopping the packages from falling out.

AMANDA: Not this time.

AMANDA catches the packages before they drop and tosses them on the counter. She does some rearranging and puts in the Popsicles and the TV dinners.

ANSWERING MACHINE: *(Mom's voice.)* Hi, Sweetheart, it's mom.

Meg is driving now and I thought you could come in with her. It would be nice to see you. No pressure, but it is my birthday and I'd love to have my girls with me. Let me know. I love you. *(Boop.)*

ANSWERING MACHINE: *(Dr. West's voice.)* Hi Amanda, it's Dr. West...

AMANDA: For the love of God, I was only gone an hour!

AMANDA continues putting away the groceries. Folds up the paper bags and stashes them under the sink.

ANSWERING MACHINE: *(Dr. West's voice.)*...I wanted to make sure Sherlock's swelling has gone down and there was no residual trauma to his lip. Also, when you have a moment, bring in some fecal samples from the dogs you took to Mexico so I can check for parasites. Thanks. *(Boop.)*

AMANDA: Expect one from me too, Dr. West.

ANSWERING MACHINE: *(Machine voice.)* End of messages.

AMANDA pushes a button on the small boom box on the counter and "Maniac" from "Flashdance" begins playing. She exits to the hallway and immediately returns with an armful of clean clothes and towels that she tosses on the kitchen table. She turns up the volume. As the song plays, she folds the clothes, sings along and dances. The dogs begin barking, but is hard to hear with the slider shut and the music playing. WADE appears at the kitchen window, peering through. He then moves to the slider. AMANDA is oblivious, lost in her own world of "Flashdance." WADE watches her for a moment. Finally he taps on the window. She doesn't hear him. He taps again. Still nothing. He raps on the glass. Startled, she turns and sees him.

AMANDA: Oh, my God! *(Realizing it's WADE.)* What the hell?
(WADE stands there looking sheepish. He presses a copy of his book against the glass and smiles. She opens the slider, hitting him with a dish towel.) Are you a goddamn Peeping Tom?

WADE: *(Laughing.)* I am so sorry. It seems like all I do is scare you.
I thought you could hear me coming, your alarm system is working.

AMANDA: Well, I didn't. *(Crosses to the Boom Box and shuts it off.)*

WADE: *(Pause.)* It's hotter than hell out here.

AMANDA: Come on in.

WADE: *(Enters and closes the slider behind him.)* I called but didn't leave a message because you said your machine was broken. I was just going to drop this off. *(Hands AMANDA the book.)*

AMANDA: *(Takes the book and reads the cover.)* A Queen's Ransom.
A Dane Carter Novel.

WADE: I don't want to give away too much, but it involves a Queen and a ransom. And of course, Dane Carter.

AMANDA: *(She can't help but laugh.)* My heart is beating so fast.

WADE: I have that effect on women.

AMANDA: I didn't mean in a good way.

WADE: Neither did I.

AMANDA: *(Smiles.)* Do you want some wine or a beer? *(Puts the folded towels on one of the chairs.)*

WADE: *(Looking at Felix the clock.)* It's not even 10am.

AMANDA: *(Crosses to the fridge.)* I'm taking the day off.

WADE: Okay, then. I guess I am, too. What are deadlines other than an editor's wishful thinking? And anyway, I've got a book tour next month and I need to build up my tolerance. I'll have some wine. *(AMANDA takes out two Wine Coolers and crosses back to him.)*
That is not wine.

AMANDA: Yes it is. It's a wine cooler.

WADE: It's wine for people who don't like wine.

AMANDA: *(Puts the Coolers back in the fridge.)* How about a beer?

WADE: Sure, as long as it's not Coors or Bud.

AMANDA: *(Brightly.)* How about a shot of tequila?

WADE: I really *am* taking the day off. Okay.

AMANDA: *(She goes to her backpack and unzips it, taking out a bottle of Centenario Tequila.)* The mayor of Tijuana gave this to me.

WADE: Is it the kind with the worm?

AMANDA: God, I hope not. (*She inspects the bottle.*) I don't think so.

AMANDA sets the bottle on the table and goes to get shot glasses from the cupboard. WADE opens bottle and sniffs. He reacts to the strength. AMANDA returns with two dog-themed shot glasses.

WADE: (*Looking at a shot glass.*) You have a lot of dog-related stuff.

AMANDA: Yeah, when you train dogs it makes for easy gift giving.

My mom started it. She collects cat stuff. My sister collects boyfriends. (*WADE pours.*)

WADE: Are you a lime and salt girl?

AMANDA: I am. Salt's on the table and, though I don't have a lime, I have... (*She's back at the fridge. Opens it and takes out a plastic lemon of lemon juice.*) ...this! (*Shakes it, listening.*) Lemon juice doesn't go bad does it? (*Tosses it to WADE.*)

WADE: (*Catching it.*) It's pretty much citric acid and water, so I doubt it. Only one way to find out. (*AMANDA sits next to WADE. He offers her the lemon.*) Ladies first.

AMANDA: Cute. (*WADE laughs and takes the cap off the lemon and squirts some between his thumb and index finger. He hands it to AMANDA. She does the same, but sniffs it once on her hand, then touches her tongue to it. Reacting to the sour.*) That's lemon juice alright.

WADE: (*Grabs the saltshaker and shakes it on his hand.*) Do you know that they use lime on corpses?

AMANDA: Quicklime, yes. How do you know that?

WADE: I write murder mysteries. How do you?

AMANDA: I solve murder mysteries.

WADE: (*Holding up his glass in a toast.*) Here's to solving mysteries. (*They clink glasses, lick their salt, and do their shots. WADE coughs.*) That is smooth.

AMANDA: (*Laughing.*) That is good.

WADE: We'll see how it goes with an everything bagel, cream cheese, and coffee. What did you have for breakfast?

AMANDA: An Astro Pop.

WADE: An Astro... one of those nasty, pointy suckers?

AMANDA: They're the breakfast of astronauts.

WADE: That's Tang.

AMANDA: (*Jumps up excitedly.*) Pour us another.

WADE: Okay.

AMANDA: I think I actually *have* some... (*Goes through her cupboards.*)

WADE: Do you only eat and drink nasty things? Wine coolers, Astro Pops, plastic lemon juice?

AMANDA: (*Holding up the jar of Tang triumphantly.*) Tang!

WADE: First a Chinese Dynasty then a powdered chemical beverage. (*AMANDA sits down and opens the jar. She takes the spoon out of the sugar bowl and digs out a scoop of Tang, puts it into the shots and stirs.*) Oh, dear God, no. (*AMANDA laughs and hands him his glass.*) Shuttle astronauts must be indestructible. (*WADE holds it up.*) What to this time?

AMANDA: Your turn.

WADE: To chance meetings.

AMANDA: Chance meetings. (*They take the shots.*) That is surprisingly gross.

WADE: Yeah, I think we go back to plastic lemon juice.

AMANDA: Yeah. Fill'er up.

WADE: You sure?

AMANDA: I need to get that taste out of my mouth.

WADE: Okay. (*WADE begins to pour and AMANDA suddenly leans over and forcefully kisses him. WADE is stunned.*) That was unexpected.

AMANDA: Not really. I have something to show you. (*Crosses to the file box on the table.*) This is my box of high school shit.

WADE: (*Pointing to the writing on the box.*) I see that.

AMANDA: I got it out of the garage after you stopped by. (*Pulling out the items as she announces them.*) Yearbooks. Disgusting corsage. A pom.

WADE: Just one?

AMANDA: I tossed the other pom because it had throw-up on it.

WADE: If we don't slow down on the tequila this one will, too.

AMANDA: (*Ignoring him and displaying the envelopes.*) Envelopes filled with geeky photos... beautifully organized by year and event.

WADE: Can't wait to see them.

AMANDA: You won't. (*Holds up a cassette tape case.*) A mix tape with the greatest hits of my high school years. (*Sets it on the table.*) And finally... ta da! My diary. (*Holds up a very girly 5-year diary.*) With a high security lock that my sister broke in 2 seconds.

WADE: Looks just like the one I had.

AMANDA: (*Humorlessly.*) Ha. So, I have in this important historical record... my thoughts when I first met you.

WADE: No way.

AMANDA: Way.

WADE: Let me see.

AMANDA: Oh, no. I'm nowhere near drunk enough for that. It is beyond embarrassing. I will read you selected passages.

WADE: I'll drink to that. (*Finishes pouring out two more shots.*) With or without Tang?

AMANDA: Without.

WADE: Lemony chemicals it is. (*Hands AMANDA the plastic lemon. They lemon/salt/shoot. They sit there staring at each other.*)

AMANDA: Now, I know you're a writer, so don't judge.

WADE: It's a high school girl's diary. How good could it be?

AMANDA: (*A warning.*) I will sic a German Shepard on you.

WADE: I'm listening.

AMANDA: (*Finds her place in the diary using the ribbon bookmark, opens it and begins fanning herself with a photo envelope.*) Whoo, it suddenly got warm in here. Okay, here it is. This is sooo embarrassing. Okay.

WADE: You don't have to do this.

AMANDA: No. I do. I'll explain why after. Okay... here goes. "There is a boy in Meg's Creative Writing class who came over tonight to work on their Life List project. His name is Jimmy Stewart, like the actor. He's really cute."

WADE: Really, you said that?

AMANDA: Get over yourself. I was 15. (*Reading.*) "I hope Meg doesn't screw this one up, but if she does..." (*Stops.*)

WADE: (*A pause.*) What? What if she does?

AMANDA: Weird. I never wrote another word after that.

WADE: (*Grabbing at the diary.*) Let me see that!

AMANDA: (*Pulling it away.*) Oh, no. I've said too much already. So, here's the point. You guys were working on your Life List project.

WADE: I don't remember that at all.

AMANDA: It's where you list all the things you want to do in the future. Goals... dreams... desires... that kind of crap.

WADE: Okay.

AMANDA: So, I decided to make one too, and #3 on my list was to kiss Jimmy Stewart. And I just did it!

WADE: Are you sure you kissed the right one?

AMANDA: It just says Jimmy Stewart. Let's not quibble over which one. I can now... *(Grabbing a novelty pencil out of the box.)* ...check it off. *(She does.)*

WADE: *(Holding up another shot.)* Here's to being third on your list. *(They lemon/salt/shoot.)* You would think, as my taste buds die, this would taste better.

AMANDA: How many is that?

WADE: Cinco. If that means twenty. *(AMANDA laughs, locks her diary and tosses it back in the box.)* Did you check off 1 and 2?

AMANDA: What? Yeah.

WADE: They were easier to achieve than #3? What were they?

AMANDA: Nothing. Nothing important.

WADE: Come on, tell me.

AMANDA: No. I've got to keep some mystery about me.

WADE: Let me see if I can guess. Number one... get married and have kids.

AMANDA: You see any kids around here? No. No kids for me.

WADE: Travel the world.

AMANDA: I'm ashamed to say, Mexico is the furthest I've been.

WADE: Really?

AMANDA: Yeah.

WADE: Tijuana must have been pretty intense.

AMANDA: You could say that.

WADE: The news showed such devastation. It looked like every house in that valley was swept away.

AMANDA: Pretty much.

WADE: How many died?

AMANDA: So far they've found... 637. There'll be more.

WADE: My God.

AMANDA: Yeah. *(Pours herself a shot and drinks it neat.)*

WADE: Well at least they had you and your dogs to help.

AMANDA: Yeah.

WADE: I read that dogs can tell if there is a body underwater.

AMANDA: Yeah.

WADE: That seems impossible.

AMANDA: They recognize the scents that rise to the surface of the water.

WADE: How deep can the... um, body be?

AMANDA: I'd say around 50 feet, give or take.

WADE: Five stories underwater. That is pretty remarkable.

AMANDA: Yeah, but most of the ones I found weren't underwater.

WADE: I don't understand? I thought the whole area was flooded.

AMANDA: It was. But the valley ended at the sea and it ran off pretty quickly. The Mexican police and the military found a lot of survivors, but as the days went on, it became clear they needed help to find the dead in all the mud. Along with the Rocky Mountain Search and Rescue, we found hundreds of dead. Just my dog, Mannix, found 30.

WADE: That's horrific.

AMANDA: Especially since my assignment was to find the kids. The niños. And we found them... all 63 of the little souls from the El Corazon de Maria Orphanage. During the storm they were told to wait in a trailer they used as a classroom. It was up on cinderblocks and the staff figured they would be safe while they stacked sandbags to divert the water around the main building. When the flash flood hit, it was a twenty foot wall of water going 18... 20 miles per hour... hitting the trailer like a Mac truck... picking it up and turning it into a human washing machine... rolling and rolling down the valley until it landed miles away as part of this... alluvial plain of debris and bodies.

WADE: Amanda, we don't need to...

AMANDA: See, search and rescue dogs do just that. Search. Rescue. Bring 'em back alive. My dogs? My dogs are trained to smell death and bring me to it. Everyone focuses on the discovery... finding the bodies... like that is the end all, be all. And, ultimately it is, I guess, closure for the family, but it's no pot o' gold at the end of the rainbow, it's no crossing a finish line to the cheers of the crowd, no birthday cake brought out to some fucking stupid song that no one can sing, it's nuns dropping to the ground and keening... it's children's arms

and legs and heads that have become detached and need to be identified and put back together like a macabre human jigsaw puzzle... it's an expectant dog waiting by your side for a Milk-Bone because he did his job... and you standing there thinking of the others who have stood before fields such as this. Clara Barton at the Johnstown flood... the liberating soldiers entering Auschwitz... the Vietnamese journalists stumbling upon Cambodia's Killing Fields. Maybe the scope was different; the reasons for their dying was different, but the feelings they induced upon seeing them must have made them ask the same question. Why?

WADE: Who knows why some people live and others die?

AMANDA: I do. I know why some die. Don't you?

WADE: What do you mean?

AMANDA: How about your wife? If she is dead, why did she die? (*WADE says nothing.*) Was she a cheater? Was she a harpy? Was she evil? Did she just get tired of you... or you her?

WADE: No, it wasn't any of those things.

AMANDA: (*Agreeing with WADE.*) Right? Then, how about those orphans? I mean, they were *orphans* for fuck's sake. In Tijuana. Their only ray of hope was that some desperate Christian couple from Michigan would take pity on them and adopt 'em up, but instead they got an E-ticket ride down the Valley of Darkness. Which, for my money, might be better than adoption by the God-fearing couple that beat them or abused them, because, you know, two minutes of hell versus a lifetime of hell, but that's not important here. What is important is why? Why them?

WADE: I don't know.

AMANDA: Neither do I. (*Pours out two shots.*)

WADE: (*Eyeing the shots.*) I don't think we need...

AMANDA: Come on. Full circle. (*Squirts the lemon into her shot and shakes some salt in it.*) Saves time. (*Lifts her glass.*) A toast! (*WADE reluctantly lifts his glass.*) To solving the mysteries... of life.

WADE: Okay. Last one. (*They clink and drink.*)

AMANDA: (*Wincing.*) That does not get better. Yeah, well, it's not all dead bodies and crying survivors. I'm working with some researchers out of L.A. to do some really specialized detection with my dogs. Sherlock's been my superstar.

WADE: You must love your dogs.

AMANDA: Yeah, but not in a love love way. It's not like having a pet. I don't cuddle up on the couch with them. These dogs are my colleagues.

WADE: So it's a business relationship?

AMANDA: Yeah. I mean, sorta. I mean, the county could take them away from me at any time and find another trainer.

WADE: That doesn't seem likely.

AMANDA: Nah. I'm pretty exceptional at what I do. I really do care about them. Not like those idiot breeders that breed the brains out of them or make them the size to fit into a teacup. Dogs deserve dignity just like humans... dignity... a job... affection... not live in fear...

WADE: Not live in fear?

AMANDA: What? I didn't... um... I'm not sure why that one came out. So what about you?

WADE: What about me?

AMANDA: Do *you* have a high school memory box?

WADE: Nope. High school wasn't all that memorable.

AMANDA: That's why you have a box!

WADE: I was pretty boring back then. Ran track. I was in the Drama Club and on the wrestling team. I wrote a lot of crappy stories.

AMANDA: You and Meg were in the senior play, "Butterflies Are Free."

WADE: Yeah, she was Jill and I was Donny Dark. Meg was quite the actress.

AMANDA: I remember you asked Meg to prom at the closing night cast party.

WADE: Yeah, I did. That was a good memory.

AMANDA: You were really good in that show.

WADE: Thanks.

AMANDA: I remember you came over to my house seven times.

WADE: I did?

AMANDA: That I know of. Meg would hint that you two were sneaking around and having sex when my parents were gone. Did you?

WADE: Well, I...

AMANDA: (*Cutting him off.*) Don't tell me. No, tell me. No, don't. Don't spoil our kiss.

WADE: You do realize that I've kissed a few women since then, right?

AMANDA: No. Did you like her?

WADE: (*Shrugging.*) Yeah. I mean, it was senior year and I was going away to college. It was either school or going to Vietnam.

AMANDA: She really liked you, you know that right?

WADE: I guess.

AMANDA: She said you just stopped calling.

WADE: Me? That's not fair. We had a date the day your house burned down. I show up to where your house used to be and your neighbor tells me your father died in the fire. No one knew where you and your sister and your mom went. I was eighteen; I had no idea of what to do in that kind of situation. And it was so sudden. It was like on Monday everything was normal and on Tuesday your house was gone and everyone vanished.

AMANDA: Like your wife.

WADE: Not really. Well, yeah, I guess, in a way. Where did you go? Meg never came back to school.

AMANDA: We had no family in town. Mom refused to stay with friends. The Red Cross took us in to begin with. There was an investigation, which meant no insurance money until after that happened. So we stayed in one of those shitty motels right off the freeway for a month or two.

WADE: Why was there an investigation?

AMANDA: The police said, (*Makes "air quotes."*), "Possible arson. Suspicious fire with accelerant." I say, (*Air quotes.*) "Alcoholic father with a habit of passing out while smoking."

WADE: You don't seem too broken up about it.

AMANDA: It was a long time ago and he was a bastard. Did you ever meet him?

WADE: I saw him a couple of times. He was always sitting in that big overstuffed La-Z-Boy.

AMANDA: That's where they eventually found him. Melted right into the vinyl. The firemen walked by it, I don't know how many times. Never noticed him. You couldn't tell a human had been sitting in it. It was just a blob of blackened goo. That was the first time I ever saw a cadaver dog in action.

WADE: Oh, my God.

AMANDA: One of those rare cases of spontaneous combustion. I like to think he didn't go to hell... hell came to him. So, anyway, because of that Meg didn't get to finish the last couple months of school. She got her GED later. I took summer school to make up for lost time and then went back in the fall for my junior year. (*Fans her blouse.*) Is it warm in here? 'Cause I'm really warm. (*Gets up and goes to a thermostat on the wall next to the fridge. The dogs start barking.*)

WADE: Alarm's working.

AMANDA: They do that when the air conditioning kicks on. Or coyotes.

WADE: Lots of coyotes out here?

AMANDA: That's the reason I have a rifle. I shoot 5 or 6 every year and this is a bad year. Did you notice the 8-foot kennel fences?

WADE: Yes.

AMANDA: They jump those like they were nothing. Coyotes are the ultimate survivors.

WADE: That's amazing. They'd try to kill your dogs?

AMANDA: More like trying to mate with them. (*Opens the kitchen window.*) Silencio!

WADE: Italian, huh?

AMANDA: Yeah, some trainers use German or Dutch commands. I chose a romance language. I think "Trovare il corpo morto" sounds sexy.

WADE: Find the dead body?

AMANDA: (*Impressed.*) Molto bene. You don't want just anyone giving commands to your dogs, so Italian makes it harder... and it's a little uncomfortable when the family is around and hears you say, "Mannix, go find the dead guy."

WADE: Whew, I think I've had enough tequila.

AMANDA: Me too. (*A pause.*) You know, I am going to help you.

WADE: With what?

AMANDA: Looking for your wife... but here's the deal. You're going to ask me out on a date and I'm going to say yes. We'll go up to Blue Jay for a picnic. I'll take a Lab with us. Either Mannix or Marco, maybe both. They love the mountains. You'll say, "Let's go for a hike," and I'll agree. Whether or not the dogs find something, it may answer a couple more questions.

WADE: A date, huh? (*Stands.*) You're a good person.

AMANDA: Yeah, I need to make up for some bad things I've done.

WADE: You're 27. How many bad things could you have done?

AMANDA: You're 30. How many have you?

WADE: I think we need to eat something.

AMANDA: Agreed. But first I gotta pee. *(As she crosses to the bathroom.)* I'll take a Popsicle.

The bathroom door closes. WADE smiles and crosses to the freezer. He opens the door and the packages fall out. He picks them up, stuffing one back in. One feels odd in his hand. The package tape is loose and he opens it up. Inside the wrapper is a frozen human hand. We can tell it was from a woman, as the nails have red polish on them. He stands there dumbfounded, staring at the gnarled object. The sound of a toilet flushing and then a faucet running. WADE quickly rewraps the hand, grabs a Popsicle and stuffs the package back inside. He leans against the kitchen counter. AMANDA enters sneaking around the fridge.

AMANDA: Ah ha! You didn't scare me this time.

WADE: I must be losing my touch.

AMANDA: *(Takes the Popsicle from him and removes the wrapper.)*

Thank you. You know one of the wonderful things about Popsicles? Other than everything, is that they are... *(Breaks the two Popsicles apart and hands him half)* ...one of the most romantic icy treats known to man.

WADE: *(Takes it.)* Thanks.

AMANDA: *(Taps her Popsicle against his.)* Cheers! *(They eat in silence for a moment. She watches him.)* It's strange how men and women eat a Popsicle differently. *(AMANDA licks it and toys with it.)*

WADE: Yeah, that's not something I would do.

AMANDA: Can I try your flavor?

WADE: *(Confused.)* They're the same. *(AMANDA goes in to kiss him. She drops her Popsicle into the sink. He does the same. They kiss and she jumps up and straddles him.)*

WADE: Was this #4 on your list?

AMANDA: I'm starting a new list.

WADE crosses to the doorway with AMANDA still wrapped around his body as we fade to black. Music.

ACT ONE, SCENE 5

A MOONLIT WEDNESDAY NIGHT

AT START: *The nightlight shines, as does moonlight from outside. WADE, wearing his pants and socks, comes out of the hallway with his shirt and shoes in his hands. He checks the time. Felix tells us it's near midnight. He walks over and sits at the kitchen table and puts on his shoes. He is still feeling the effects of the tequila. He finds a piece of paper and a pencil and writes a note. He folds it and leans it against the tequila bottle. He stands and looks inside the box of high school memorabilia, taking out the diary. It's locked. He wriggles the lock and it opens. He uses the bookmark to find the page. He moves to the slider using the moonlight to read. Whatever he reads gives him pause. He relocks the diary and puts it in the back of his pants. He puts on his shirt and exits through the slider, closing it behind him. He walks past the kitchen window and the motion activated lights come on. The dogs begin barking like crazy. A moment. The lights turn off.*

AMANDA: *(Offstage.) Wade? Wade? (Enters in her robe. She is a bit unsteady on her feet.) Wade? (Flips on the lights at a switch on the wall by the fridge. She is still pretty drunk. Reacting to the lights.) Oh, God. (Pulls her hair back from her face as she crosses to the slider. She notices the note, picks it up and reads it. She tosses it back on the table. She looks out the slider. She turns the lights off at a switch by the slider. She opens the door and sticks her head out.) Wade? Wade! (The sound of coyotes howling and more barking. She closes the slider.) Goddamn coyotes. (She quickly crosses to the bedroom, coming out with a .22 Bolt Action Rifle with a scope. She opens the slider and exits. The outside lights come on.) Hey! Hey! Get out of here! Whoop, whoop! Go on! Get! (We hear a rifle shot and a coyote yelp.) I warned you! The rest of you... Get!*

AMANDA returns to the slider and enters. She closes the door behind her and sets the rifle behind the slider drapes. She is not feeling well. She crosses to a cabinet and takes out a glass. She gets some water from the sink, drinks it, and promptly vomits in the sink. She reaches over and flips the wall switch to the garbage disposal. As we hear the grinding, the lights fade to black. Music.

ACT ONE, SCENE 6
FRIDAY AFTERNOON

AT START: *A doorbell. The lights come up. A pause. The doorbell again. Then a rapid-fire ringing of the doorbell and an impatient knock. After a moment, the dogs begin barking and MEG walks by the kitchen window. She opens the slider. Felix lets us know it is 4:20.*

MEG: *(To the dogs.) Shut the hell up!*

She carries an oversized purse and a pink Samsonite Suitcase that is the mate to the pink make-up case that AMANDA had in Scene 1. MEG is a child of the 80s in dress and hairstyle. The kitchen has been tidied up: chairs under the table, the box of high school memorabilia is tucked in a corner and the vase of flowers is now in the middle of the table, beginning to droop.

MEG: You home? A? Hello?

MEG sets her purse on the kitchen table and exits to the hallway with her suitcase.

MEG: *(Offstage.) You in the crapper? (A moment and she returns without the suitcase and heads straight to the fridge. She opens it and grabs a Coors beer. She looks at the thermostat and turns on the air. The dogs bark again. Regarding the barking.) Dear God, how can she put up with that? (She opens the beer with a magnetized bottle opener attached to the front of the fridge. Leaning against the counter she checks out the kitchen. She picks up the almost empty tequila bottle from the counter and looks at the*

label.) Not bad. (She sets the bottle down and opens cupboards looking for a snack. She finds the Cheez Balls.) Oh, yeah, that's my girl. (Opens the can and begins eating them. She grabs her beer and the balls, crosses to the kitchen table and sits. She notices the flowers and sniffs them.) Mmmm. (She eats and drinks for a moment. She takes a baggie of marijuana out of her purse. She wipes her hand across the table and looks at it. It's dust free. She approves. She takes rolling papers out of the baggie and rolls a joint. While she's doing this, she throws the Cheez Balls up in the air and tries to catch them in her mouth. She may or may not catch them. If she does: Score! If she doesn't: She looks for it under the table and says:) The dogs'll eat it. (She finished the joint, looks around the room and notices the clock.) Ugh, she's still got that goddamn creepy cat clock? Out of all the goddamn things to keep. (She sucks the orange dust from her fingers and drinks. She puts the joint in her mouth and searches for a lighter in her purse. Finding it...) Ah ha! (She takes out the lighter as the phone rings. She crosses and picks it up.) Hello? No, this is Meg. Oh, hi Keith... I mean Officer Wheeler. (She laughs nervously and takes the joint out of her mouth.) You are probably the only cop I've ever liked. Nope. No idea. She knew I was coming over, so maybe she's hiding. (She laughs.) Yeah, I'll leave her a note. (She looks around for something to write with, crosses to the kitchen table, and tosses the joint and lighter back in the baggie.) I've been good. You? That's good. I'm only here tonight. Tomorrow's our mom's birthday. I'm hoping to kidnap her and take her with me... so if you want to see her it'll have to be today. Yeah, okay. Good talking to you, Keith. Bye bye. (She hangs up the phone and crosses back to the table picking up the note. She takes the pencil and opens the paper. She notices that there is something already on it. She reads it and smiles.) Who is this "W" person? (She flips it over and writes her note on the back. She crosses back to the answering machine and sets the note on top. She presses play on the boom box. The Carpenter's "Close To You" or "We've Only Just Begun" plays.) The Carpenters? Oh, no, she has it bad. W doesn't know what he's in for. (She tosses her empty beer can into the trash and crosses to get another beer. She sings along with the song. Opening the fridge she notices the Wine Coolers. Holding one up.) Oh, hey!

Where have you been? *(She opens it with the bottle opener. She crosses to the cupboards and grabs a wine glass and pours the wine. She begins to cross to the hallway as the sound of a car arriving and dogs barking.)* There she is. *(She turns off the music. She fishes out a couple more Cheez Balls. WADE crosses by the kitchen window and opens the slider. He enters carrying a wicker picnic basket and a blanket.)*

WADE: Hi, Meg.

MEG: *(It takes her a second. Smiling.)* Jimmy Stewart. What the hell are you doing here?

WADE: Toting stuff.

MEG: Get over here. *(They hug.)*

AMANDA enters and hangs two leather dog leashes on the hooks.

AMANDA: Hey, Meg.

MEG: Hey, A. *(They hug. AMANDA takes the basket from WADE and puts it on the kitchen counter.)* You didn't tell me you reconnected with Jimmy. *(Crossing over to him.)* I can't believe it. What is a big shot writer doing in here? I thought you'd be in New York or L.A. living the good life.

WADE: I'm living the good life right here in the Inland Empire.

MEG: Shut up! You stayed here? Why?

WADE: Got married.

MEG: I heard that.

WADE: Bought a house.

MEG: Yeah?

WADE: And... I guess... just never had a reason to leave.

MEG: That is crazy. All you talked about in high school was getting out of San Berdoo and traveling around the world.

WADE: I've got a book tour coming up. I'll get out of town. What about you? Vegas, huh?

MEG: Yeah, lot of work there bartending.

WADE: You married?

MEG: Nope, missed that bullet. *(Pauses.)* I was sorry to hear about your wife.

WADE: Thanks.

MEG: So when did you reconnect with my little sister?

WADE: It's only been a few days. I called her about doing some work for me.

MEG: *(To AMANDA.)* You now doing search and rescue?

AMANDA: I don't do search and rescue.

MEG: I know, all search no rescue.

WADE: Research for a new novel.

MEG: Oh, my God. I love your books. Especially "Queen's Ransom." Funny and scary at the same time. I couldn't put it down.

WADE: Good to hear. Your sister hasn't read any of them.

MEG: Amanda!

AMANDA: I just got the Queen one.

MEG: It's really good. Damn, if I knew I was going to see you I'd have brought my copy so you could sign it.

WADE: Next time.

MEG: Amanda, do you know you have a very famous person in your kitchen?

WADE: *(To AMANDA.)* This is what I expected when we first met.

AMANDA: Yeah, good luck with that.

MEG: It's great to see you again.

WADE: You too. You look different... you look great... but a little different.

MEG: Well it has been a few years. Maybe my hair?

AMANDA: And your... *(Taps her nose).*

MEG: Oh, yeah, I got my nose fixed. I broke it.

WADE: Can't even tell.

MEG: I've got to ask you, Wade Stewart? Why the name change?

WADE: Jimmy Stewart had sort of played out.

MEG: But you were always... Jimmy Stewart. So what do I call you?

WADE: I prefer Wade, but for you, whatever you want.

AMANDA: Be right back. I think I got poison oak on my ass.

MEG: On your ass?

AMANDA: Yeah. I'll be right back. *(Exits to the bathroom.)*

MEG: *(To WADE.)* How do you get poison oak through your jeans? *(WADE shrugs and begins to take things out of the picnic basket... all of it store bought: A bucket of Colonel Sanders fried chicken, potato salad, coleslaw, potato chips, an apple pie and 2 bottles of Mateus wine.)* Want some help?

WADE: Sure. *(They begin to take out the supplies.)*

MEG: Where did you guys go?

WADE: Up by Big Bear.

MEG: Picnic, huh?

WADE: With her dogs.

MEG: It doesn't look like you ate anything.

WADE: We were busy.

MEG: I guess so. Should we just have this for dinner?

WADE: If you're inviting me, I'm staying.

They get plates/silverware and set the table for dinner during the following:

MEG: When did you and Amanda get reacquainted?

WADE: I came by on Tuesday. Did not recognize her at all. She's built an impressive business.

MEG: Yeah, she's a go-getter.

WADE: You're visiting your Mom tonight?

MEG: Yeah. It's her birthday. I'm not having much luck convincing Amanda to come with me.

WADE: She made it sound like they don't get along.

MEG: She has some issues with her. Daughter/Mom crap. Seems to ebb and flow. We're in an ebb right now. I'll talk her into it. She knows Mom's not getting any younger.

AMANDA: *(Reentering wearing a cute, relaxed one-piece dress.)* I don't suppose anyone has any Calamine lotion on them?

WADE: Is it bad?

AMANDA: It's not good.

WADE: Well, I guess it's my turn to take care of you. I'll go to the store and let you girls catch up.

AMANDA: I'd appreciate it.

WADE: Okay, I'll be right back. Oh, by the way I'm staying for picnic dinner, Meg said I could.

AMANDA: Sure. Thanks for going.

WADE exits through the slider closing it behind him. The dogs start barking. MEG watches him pass the kitchen window.

MEG: *(Turning on AMANDA.)* What the fuck, Sis?

AMANDA: Meg.

MEG: Jimmy Stewart? Really? And how'd you get poison oak through your pants?

AMANDA: I wasn't wearing them.

MEG: You're screwing my high school boyfriend?

AMANDA: I think the statute of limitations is up on that one.

MEG: Only you, Amanda, only you. Most chicks get pregnant or chlamydia... you get poison oak.

AMANDA: Shut up.

MEG: (*Mimicking WADE.*) "Now it's my turn to take care of you." Goddamn it, I guess it doesn't matter that we had a deal?

AMANDA: I didn't contact him, he contacted me.

MEG: That's not the point. We agreed: No one pre-fire.

AMANDA: It's been 10 years.

MEG: What research are you helping him with?

AMANDA: Nothing. He just said that. We went looking for his wife.

MEG: (*This stops her.*) His wife? Didn't she go missing like, three years ago? How the hell could you find her after all that time?

AMANDA: Meg, my dogs can sniff out remains even after 25 years.

MEG: That's crazy. So did you find her moldering body?

AMANDA: (*Irritated with her choice of words.*) Meg. But no such luck. Every once in a while Marco, my search dog, was indicating. Which was a little strange. But poor Mannix, he's cadaver, he was all over the place. Going crazy. Totally without focus. I think Mexico did a number on him. Though, Wade seemed to know exactly where he wanted the dogs to look. He said that we were on the path she usually took, but... I don't know. He seemed to have a plan.

MEG: Did he know that the dogs were on to something?

AMANDA: Well, he could see that they were acting squirrely. The only time I'd seen something like it was after a bear had been dragging around a wild boar.

MEG: So you think you found her?

AMANDA: Well, I think they found something.

MEG: Why didn't you say anything?

AMANDA: Right. I've got the county's dogs out without permission with a man who may or may not have killed his wife and we just happen to find her remains in a place he suggested we go on a date.

MEG: A date?

AMANDA: Well, we had to have some reason for going up there.

MEG: Right. So, what are you going to do?

AMANDA: Not sure, but I'm definitely going back.

MEG: No. No, you're not. You've got to stop this now. You're supposed to be the smart sister... I'm the stupid one. So, start acting smart.

AMANDA: You're not stupid.

MEG: I am for believing you'd keep your end of the bargain.

AMANDA: Meg, it's been...

MEG: Stop telling me how long it's been! I know how long it's been.

AMANDA: I like him.

MEG: No! *(Throws her empty beer can in the sink.)* Don't do this. Not him.

AMANDA: You knew I liked him from the first day I saw him.

MEG: Like I remember? And anyway don't give me the love at first sight shit.

AMANDA: I'm not, but I can show you where I felt something for him from the very beginning.

MEG: *(Pauses.)* Show me? Show me what? You didn't get rid of the diary, did you?

AMANDA: *(Covering.)* What are you talking about?

MEG: *(Quietly.)* God damn it, Amanda. What if someone finds it?

AMANDA: It's just a little girl's diary.

MEG: *(Sarcastically.)* Yeah, that's just all it is.

AMANDA: Meg, I'll get rid of it. I will. I swear.

MEG: Where is it?

AMANDA: In the box on the floor.

MEG: *(Sarcastically.)* Well, at least it's well hidden.

AMANDA: I was looking through some stuff.

MEG: *(Putting the box on the table and taking off the lid.)* What is it with you keeping all this crap? Like that dumbass cat clock. And a Carpenter's tape?

AMANDA: You can't just forget about your past.

MEG: That's your problem, Amanda, you can't let it go. The secret to happiness is whatever happens, you deal with it, forget about it and then you move on.

AMANDA: Not everyone has that ability. I don't. Wade doesn't and I think you'll find, the police don't.

MEG: Who said anything about the police? That's what we don't want. Just keep your head down and keep moving. So, let's get you out of here for a while. Come with me to see Mom. We'll take her out to that crappy Mexican brunch at El Paso Cantina, get drunk on mimosas and we'll all be napping by 2 o'clock. You'll be back early Monday. Minimal mom time.

AMANDA: I don't have anyone to take care of the dogs.

MEG: It's only two days. Just leave out some food and water.

AMANDA: Meg, these aren't cats, they're highly trained animals worth thousands of dollars.

MEG: Who the hell took care of the ones you left here while you were in Mexico?

AMANDA: Keith Wheeler.

MEG: Officer Keith... your personal puppy dog.

AMANDA: Stop, Meg.

MEG: All I am saying is you could make it happen and the truth is, you just don't want to see Mom.

AMANDA: No, I don't. Remember, I don't forget the past.

MEG: She didn't do anything.

AMANDA: That's right! She didn't do anything!

MEG: (*Stares at AMANDA for a moment, then begins rummages through the box.*) Is there another box?

AMANDA: No. Why?

MEG: There's no diary.

AMANDA: There has to be. (*MEG empties the contents on the table and AMANDA crosses and looks through it.*) I put it back in here.

MEG: Well it didn't just walk off. Who could have taken it? Keith?

AMANDA: No.

MEG: How many men have you been parading through here?

AMANDA: That's you, Meg, not me. The only person that's been here lately has been Wade.

MEG: So let's assume that Wade has it. What exactly is in it?

AMANDA: Just the usual angst of a teenage girl.

MEG: Anything about Dad?

AMANDA: Some.

MEG: And me?

AMANDA: Meg, it's a fucking diary. I wrote about all of us. You, me, mom, dad, my friends, teachers...

MEG: How would he know you even had it? (*Looks at AMANDA.*) Oh, my God. Did you show it to him?

AMANDA: This is not good.

MEG: No shit. (*Crosses to get her wine.*) I gotta think this through.

AMANDA: Anyway, what's he gonna do?

MEG: He knows more than you know.

AMANDA: What does that mean?

MEG: Let me think!

AMANDA: Meg, what does he know? Does he know about Daddy?

MEG: Yeah, yeah, he knows about Daddy.

AMANDA: (*Shocked.*) What?

The dogs begin barking, tires on gravel, and then a car door closing.

MEG: How the hell did he get back so soon?

AMANDA: (*Looking out the window.*) It's not him. Shit. It's Keith.

MEG: Did I interrupt "threesome Friday?"

AMANDA: Shut up, Meg. What is he doing here? (*Crossing and putting her stuff back in the box and tucking it back in the corner.*)

MEG: Oh, shit, I forgot. He called earlier. (*AMANDA gives MEG a look.*) I left a note. (*Points to the note by the answering machine.*)

AMANDA: That you didn't give me.

MEG: (*With a big smile.*) Put on your happy face, A.

KEITH walks by the kitchen window and stops at the slider and wipes his feet. AMANDA slides opens the door. He is in his civilian clothes: jeans, work boots, casual shirt, and carrying a manila envelope.

AMANDA: Hey, Keith.

KEITH: Hey.

MEG: Keith Wheeler! Look at this big stud.

KEITH: Hi, Meg.

MEG: Where does the line start? (*Crosses to hug KEITH.*)

KEITH: The line?

MEG: (*In the hug.*) Of women trying to get into your pants?

KEITH: (*Embarrassed.*) There's no line.

MEG: (*Seductively.*) Good to know. You still driving that sweet '64 Mustang?

KEITH: '65, and yeah, just put in new tuck and roll. I'll take you for a drive.

MEG: Sweet.

AMANDA: (*Cutting it short.*) How you doing, Keith?

KEITH: Good. Did you get my message?

AMANDA: (*Looks at MEG.*) Sure didn't.

KEITH: Ah, sorry about that. I didn't want to interrupt you guys.

MEG: You didn't interrupt; we're just yakking about the usual girl stuff.

Bra sizes... feminine products... dead bodies. (*Pause.*) Boys.

KEITH: (*Uncomfortable.*) Okay, well the Sheriff gave me this to mail, but I wanted to drop it off personally. (*Hands AMANDA the manila envelope. AMANDA opens it and pulls out an official looking commendation.*)

MEG: What is it?

KEITH: (*Unable to hold it in.*) A commendation. I thought you'd like to show it to your Mom.

MEG: Really? Read it.

AMANDA: It's just the usual "thank you" crap.

KEITH: That's not true. (*To MEG.*) It's from the Governor. It's a commendation for her work in Mexico.

MEG: Let me see.

AMANDA: It's nothing. Really. (*MEG snatches the envelope out of AMANDA'S hand.*) Meg!

KEITH: Didn't she tell you? She singlehandedly found the children from an orphanage that was swept away by the flood.

AMANDA: I didn't find anything. The dogs found them.

KEITH: Well, it wouldn't have happened without you.

MEG: That's right. (*Reading.*) "The dedication and bravery of Amanda Esposito and the K-9 Care Team to enter an active disaster zone to do the difficult and dangerous job..."

AMANDA: (*Cutting her off.*) Yeah, yeah.

MEG: This is fantastic. I'm so proud of you... and Mom will be over the moon.

AMANDA: (*Takes the envelope from MEG and tosses it on the table.*)

Well, it's something to bring out during my next salary negotiation.

KEITH: I don't understand. I thought you'd be happy.

MEG: Keith, welcome to the joys of... what are we, Amanda? The weaker... the fairer... or the deadlier sex?

AMANDA: You Meg, are the trifecta.

MEG: We are women... hear us roar. And, say what you want, Amanda, but I'm proud of you.

AMANDA: Thanks.

The dogs begin barking.

MEG: Would you like to stay for dinner, Keith?

AMANDA: *(Under her breath.)* Dear God, Meg.

KEITH: Sure. If it's okay. Thanks.

MEG: Our other guest is just arriving.

KEITH: Oh, who's coming?

WADE walks by the kitchen window. He enters through the slider with a thrifty drug store bag.

WADE: *(Looking in the bag.)* They only had the small size, so I hope it doesn't spread.

MEG: Hey, Jimmy, guess who's coming to dinner?

WADE: Sidney Poitier?

MEG: Close.

AMANDA: *(Shaking her head in disbelief.)* Meg.

WADE and KEITH stare at one another as we fade to black.

INTERMISSION

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