

# THE TROUBLE WITH CATS

A COMEDY IN TWO ACTS

By Gary Ray Stapp

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**SYNOPSIS:** An experienced house-sitting couple gets more than they bargain for when a Minnesota homeowner intentionally double-books her lakefront domicile through HouseSitters.com in order to ensure she can get away from it all for an entire month. When the second house-sitting couple arrives, there is an immediate clash between generations. In one corner, there are the upper middle-class and socially-skilled Julians from New Jersey, and in the opposite corner, the anti-materialist and free-spirited vegans from North Carolina who have decided they don't even need a last name. Personalities collide even further when the Bombays from next door add their own twist to being neighborly with either a constant barrage of trivial pursuits or an onslaught of candid crankiness. And if that weren't enough for the Julians to deal with, they get another surprise . . . the uninhabitable master suite is in the midst of being actively remodeled by the Cheshires, a trio of sisters, two of whom are skilled laborers with personal problems of their own and the other who is a chocoholic ditz. Without a head of household, there is little rest or relaxation for anyone . . . except for maybe the cat . . . if the house sitters could only find the elusive little creature.

### CAST OF CHARACTERS

*(5 MEN, 7 WOMEN)*

JOANNA BIRMAN (f).....Aged 40s to 50s. A Minnesota homeowner anxious to be away from home. *(31 lines)*

IVY JULIAN (f).....Aged 50s to 60s. A housewife and house sitter from New Jersey, she is a diplomatic and consummate hostess. *(326 lines)*

- PHILLIP JULIAN (m) .....Aged 50s to 60s. Ivy’s husband, he is a little self-centered and easily annoyed. (364 lines)
- SUNSHINE (f).....Aged 20s to 30s. A new-age spiritualist, she is a devout vegan. (132 lines)
- RIVER (m).....Aged 20s to 30s. A new-age beatnik, he has difficulty relating to his parents’ generation. (201 lines)
- PARKER JOHN (P.J.) (m).....Aged 20s to 30s. A dependent and unmotivated “kid,” he is content to be living a carefree life under his parents’ roof. (37 lines)
- JOY BOMBAY (f).....Aged 50s to 60s. A cranky and sassy neighbor, she’s no “joy” to be around. (113 lines)
- NELSON BOMBAY (m).....Aged 50s to 60s. A trivia buff, he is the polar opposite of his wife, Joy. (96 lines)
- MITZY CHESHIRE (f).....Aged 30s to 40s. A confident, no-nonsense woman who struggles between her emotional apathy toward men and her physical desire for them. (141 lines)
- NO (NOELLE) CHESHIRE (f) .....Aged 30s to 40s. A nun of some variety, she would prefer Heaven to be a place for women only. (111 lines)

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ONIE CHESHIRE (f).....Aged 30s to 40s. A certified chocoholic, she has the emotional maturity of an eight year old. (67 lines)

AMOS (m) .....Aged 40s to 50s. An animal caregiver, he's a likeable man, but he's a goober . . . and then some. (8 lines)

### SETTING

A house on Tanners Lake in Minnesota. The grand room of Frank and Joanna Birman's lakefront home. It is an expansive room, tastefully decorated, with a seating area at SR, sofa and coffee table at CS, and a bar-style game table and chairs at SL. SR entrance is the front door. USR is stairs that lead to a balcony with a bedroom door on both ends and a bathroom door in the center. UCS is a large bookcase displaying a variety of books and an eclectic collection of travel memorabilia. USL is an archway that leads to the kitchen and outside deck. SL is a set of draped French doors leading to the master suite. DSC is a large imaginary window that overlooks Tanners Lake.

**TIME:** Early summer

### AUTHOR'S NOTE

*The Trouble with Cats* was first produced by The Chamber Players Community Theatre, Garnett, KS, August 21, 22, 23, 26, 27, 28, 29, and 30, 2009.

The stage and setting directions were written utilizing two levels, upstairs and downstairs, specifically for the small stage to be used for the premiere production scheduled for August 2009. An alternate one level setting, with the "bedroom wing" USC or to either side would work equally as well for large stage theatres.

Additionally, theatre organizations have my permission to make changes to any language or situation deemed inappropriate for their theatre.

**SYNOPSIS OF SCENES**

ACT ONE

**Scene 1:** Day 1, a Friday, late afternoon

**Scene 2:** Day 5, a Tuesday, early morning

**Scene 3:** Day 9, a Saturday, early morning

**Scene 4:** Day 13, a Wednesday, mid-afternoon

ACT TWO

**Scene 1:** Day 16, a Saturday, late morning

**Scene 2:** Day 18, a Monday, early evening

**Scene 3:** Day 19, a Tuesday, mid-afternoon

**Scene 4:** Day 22, a Friday, early afternoon

**Scene 5:** Day 23, a Saturday, late afternoon

**Scene 6:** Early evening, one year later

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*To my daughter, Lacey, for her love of cats.*

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ACT ONE, SCENE 1  
DAY 1, A FRIDAY, LATE AFTERNOON

**AT RISE:**

JOANNA is anxiously standing before the threshold of the wide open front door holding a large purse, an overnight bag, and an envelope with airplane tickets. To her left stand IVY and PHILLIP, both attired and coiffed in a manner intended to make a good first impression. As IVY speaks, JOANNA tries several times to get a word in.

**IVY:** Joanna, it is so nice to finally meet you in person! Phillip and I have been looking forward to this day for several weeks. We've never house sat in Minnesota before. Most often, we find ourselves housesitting in the New England area. But last summer we were on the Oregon coast for six weeks, then later we house sat for a delightful couple in northern California. Until we saw your post on House Sitters dot com, we were leaning toward an opportunity in Alabama this year, but Phillip doesn't really like the South - -

**JOANNA:** Well, Mrs. Julian - -

**IVY:** Please, call me Ivy. There's absolutely no need to be formal with me. Besides, when someone calls me Mrs. Julian, it makes me think of his mother - -

**PHILLIP:** Ivy, you're turning this introduction into a one-woman conversation.

**IVY:** I'm sorry. I talk a lot when I'm nervous, and sometimes, I forget to breathe - - *(She takes a deep breath.)*

**PHILLIP:** Hurry, Mrs. Birman, now's your chance.

**JOANNA:** It is very nice to meet you, as well, and I'm certainly relieved . . . uh, glad that you're here, Mrs. Julian.

**IVY:** Ivy.

**JOANNA:** *(In a hurry, she begins to hand keys to IVY.)* Here's the key to the front door, key for the back door, the garage key, the key to the boathouse, the key to the wine cellar, and the key for the golf cart - -

*Offstage a car horn sounds. ALL look toward outside for a beat.*

**JOANNA:** *(Continuing, she begins to hand cards to PHILLIP.)* This is the alarm code - - the plumber's business card - - the electrician's business card - - the carpenter's business card - - a guest pass for the country club - -

*Offstage a car horn sounds. ALL look outside for a beat.*

**JOANNA:** The fridge is full, the cupboards are stocked, and I have a ham in the oven. It should be ready by six.

**IVY:** Oh, how nice! That will be so lovely to enjoy an opportunity to get better acquainted with you and your husband over dinner, and - -

**JOANNA:** The ham is not for us, it's for you. A modest expression of our utmost appreciation.

**IVY:** Oh . . . well, its still early, we have at least a couple of hours to chat, don't we? Where is Mr. Birman?

*Offstage a car horn sounds.*

**JOANNA:** *(Turns and calls out through open door.)* FRANK! I'M COMING! I'M COMING!

**IVY:** Is that Mr. Birman in the driveway?

**JOANNA:** Uh, yes. He's not a patient man.

**IVY:** Why is he in the car?

**JOANNA:** We have an appointment.

**PHILLIP:** That's your husband sitting in that car . . . with the engine running? I guess I should have introduced myself when I walked by.

**IVY:** Phillip, go out there and say hello to Frank.

**JOANNA:** NO!

**IVY:** Pardon me?

**JOANNA:** What I mean is, we are in a terrible hurry. We have a plane to catch.

**IVY:** Oh, I'm so sorry. We didn't arrive late, did we, Phillip?

**PHILLIP:** No, Ivy - - it's 4:00 p.m. We're right on time.

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**IVY:** Joanna, I'm disappointed. I was looking forward to getting better acquainted. I had assumed you would want to at least visit with us for awhile before you completely entrusted us with your home. *(She laughs.)*

**JOANNA:** Not really.

*Offstage a car horn sounds.*

**JOANNA:** FRANK, DON'T YOU DARE DRIVE OFF WITHOUT ME!! *(To IVY, composed, hands her an envelope.)* And here's your fee. Three thousand dollars, cash, for four weeks per our agreement, along with a copy of the signed contract you've already returned, and I've written our cell phone number here on the outside of the envelope - - in case of emergency, you know. *(Crosses threshold, then turns back to them.)* Oh, and here is P.J.'s feeding schedule. *(Thrusts a paper into PHILLIP's hand, quickly turns to leave.)*

**PHILLIP:** P.J.?

**IVY:** P.J.?

*PHILLIP and IVY exchange looks.*

**PHILLIP:** What's a P.J.?

**IVY:** *(Somewhat alarmed.)* Is that a pet? I'm - - I'm not a cat person!

*Offstage a car horn sounds with three long blasts.*

**JOANNA:** FRANK! IF YOU MAKE ME CHASE YOU DOWN THAT DRIVEWAY I PROMISE YOU I WILL GET UGLY! *(Quickly she re-composes herself and grabs her carry-on bag.)* Good-bye and good luck! *(She quickly EXITS.)*

**IVY:** Wait! *(She hurried to the door and calls out.)* What is P.J.?!  
Joanna?!!



*IVY and PHILLIP stare out the front door as the sound of a car door slams shut followed by the squeal of tires as a car drives away. They are stunned at JOANNA's sudden departure.*

**PHILLIP:** Well, that was - - weird.

**IVY:** Weird? I would call it rude! After all, Mr. Birman could have, at the very least, said hello. And - - and Mrs. Birman could have, at least, called me Ivy.

**PHILLIP:** *(He grins.)* With all your yapping, she probably forgot your name.

**IVY:** Never in the three years we've been housesitting has a client just met us at the door with their luggage in tow, handed us the keys to an expensive piece of real estate, slapped the sitting fee in our hand, and then only had the time to say hello, good-bye and good luck.

**PHILLIP:** She said hello?

**IVY:** Didn't she?

**PHILLIP:** I don't remember. It was so long ago. *(He glances at his watch.)* Almost a whole two minutes. We could call it one-hundred and twenty seconds, that way it sounds like we participated in something other than a perfunctory introduction. *(Looks at the business cards.)* Cheshire Carpentry Service, M. Cheshire, proprietor - - Cheshire Electric Service, N. Cheshire, proprietor - - *(Looks at final card.)* Cheshire Plumbing Service, O. Cheshire, proprietor. *(Shakes his head.)* The Cheshire boys should team up and save money on business cards! M - - N - - O. Wonder if there's a P?

**IVY:** There is a P . . . a P.J.

**PHILLIP:** Oh, right. So what is this P.J.?

**IVY:** I have no idea. At no time during any of our internet correspondence did she mention a pet.

**PHILLIP:** *(Looks at the feeding schedule.)* Six feedings a day. What kind of pet eats six times a day?

**IVY:** A goldfish?

**PHILLIP:** People don't name goldfish. At least not a name like P.J. It's probably a bird. *(Hands paper and payment envelope to IVY who puts them in her purse.)*

**IVY:** A bird?

**PHILLIP:** Wow! Look at that view! (*Crosses to DSC and looks out through the imaginary window.*) Ivy, this is a going to be a great place to spend a whole month. Just look at that lake!

**IVY:** Tanners Lake. It is beautiful. It looks just like the photos Mrs. Birman emailed to me.

**PHILLIP:** You mean, Joanna? (*Grins.*)

**IVY:** No, I mean Mrs. Birman. She may not want to get to know me, but hopefully her neighbors will be more sociable. You know how much I enjoy meeting new people.

**PHILLIP:** I know how much you enjoy talking.

**IVY:** (*Puts her hands on her hips.*) That's because I usually have to do the talking for both of us.

**PHILLIP:** (*Takes her hands from her hips.*) Uh-uh-uh! No hands on the hips. I promise I'll be a more engaging conversationalist.

**IVY:** We'll see. Oh, Phillip, it's going to be wonderful staying here, just the two of us!

**PHILLIP:** And the lake. Don't forget the lake.

**IVY:** And the lake. You and me and the lake. But there better be a lot more of you and me than there is of you and the lake!

**PHILLIP:** Of course.

**IVY:** I like it when you agree with me. (*Starts looking around.*) A Minnesota lake house. I think this is going to be a very romantic escape for us. A chance to rekindle things.

**PHILLIP:** Rekindle? What's to rekindle?

**IVY:** You know . . . things.

**PHILLIP:** Things?

**IVY:** Yes, Phillip. Your things, my things . . . the sparks and the fireworks.

**PHILLIP:** Are you talking about sex?

**IVY:** Yes, but I didn't think it was necessary to spell it out. Phillip, we've lost our spontaneity. I want to get it back.

**PHILLIP:** Does this mean I have your blessing to run around the house naked?

**IVY:** Yes. But only if you draw the shades.

**PHILLIP:** We can negotiate that later. Now come on, let's get settled into our new little love nest, and then we can get down to a serious game of you show me your things and I'll show you mine.

**IVY:** Now that is the kind of spontaneity I'm talking about.

**PHILLIP:** But first, I want to get a closer look at the lake.

**IVY:** No, first you are going to bring in our luggage.

**PHILLIP:** That's what I meant. First, I bring in our luggage, second, I check out the lake.

**IVY:** And I think I'll begin an exploration of our home away from home for the next four weeks.

**PHILLIP:** Keep an eye out for the P.J. *(He exits SR.)*

**IVY:** *(She looks around for a brief moment, then acts out a pretend conversation.)* Joanna, you have such a lovely home! - - *(She sits on the sofa.)* Why, thank you, Ivy. My husband and I are thrilled to have you and Phillip staying here. We couldn't have found a more perfect couple! - - Ivy, would you like a tour? - - I'd love one, Joanna dear!

*IVY rises and crosses SL and opens the French doors and EXITS. Immediately P.J. ENTERS from the Kitchen USL. He is wearing pajama bottoms and a t-shirt that says something obscure and has the earphones of an iPod in his ears. He uninhibitedly dances to the music as he crosses to stairs and climbs them and EXITS upstairs SL just as IVY ENTERS SL.*

**IVY:** *(She is somewhat appalled.)* Good Lord! That room is a disaster!

*PHILLIP enters SR with two suitcases.*

**PHILLIP:** *(He crosses to IVY.)* The master suite, I presume?

**IVY:** There's nothing suite about it! Phillip, that room looks like Hurricane Katrina just ripped through it!

**PHILLIP:** Housekeeping criticism already? *(He crosses and opens the door and steps in then steps back out.)* That room does look like a hurricane swept through!

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**IVY:** I told you!

**PHILLIP:** Just our luck. The Birmans are remodeling their master bedroom. I assume Joanna forgot to mention that as well?

**IVY:** You assume correctly. First P.J., now this! I hope I didn't get us into something we're going to regret.

**PHILLIP:** Naw. This is going to be great. Hey, I'll bet there are guest rooms upstairs. *(He crosses to the stairs and climbs up.)*

**IVY:** What if P.J. is a cat?! Cats don't like me, Phillip! I don't know what it is, but they don't like me.

**PHILLIP:** *(At top of stairs.)* Maybe you were a Chihuahua in a former life. Hmmm . . . what do you think, Ivy? Door number one, door number two, or door number three?

**IVY:** Try the middle one.

**PHILLIP:** Door number two it is! *(He opens the door and peers inside.)* Uh-oh, bad choice, Mrs. Julian.

**IVY:** What? Please don't tell me Katrina has been there too!

**PHILLIP:** No . . . it's the bathroom. But the tub is only big enough to sleep one. And since I'm not particularly fond of waterbeds, I'll need my own room. You can have this one. *(He closes the door.)*

**IVY:** Phillip, if you find a room with a bed in it, I promise I'll sleep with you.

**PHILLIP:** Woo hoo!

**IVY:** In the meantime, I'm going to investigate the kitchen . . . I assume it's this way.

*IVY EXITS USL into the kitchen as PHILLIP crosses to upstairs SR opens the door and peers inside.*

**PHILLIP:** Bingo! I won't be sleeping alone! *(He EXITS inside with the suitcases.)*

*P.J. enters from upstairs SL bedroom, closing the door behind him. He crosses to the bathroom door and exits inside, closing the door behind him. PHILLIP enters and stops at the bathroom door and attempts to open it, but it's locked.*

**PHILLIP:** What the heck? *(He wiggles the handled, then shrugs. He looks across at the opposite bedroom door.)* Hmmmm . . . I suppose it wouldn't hurt anything to check out door number three. *(He crosses, opens door, and peers inside.)* OH - - Oh my GOD! *(He exits into the room.)*

*P.J. enters and looks to the right and sees the bedroom door standing open. He crosses, exits inside, closing the door behind him. PHILLIP enters, backing out of the room.)*

**PHILLIP:** Holy moly! What is this place? A fraternity house? *(He does an about face and descends the stairs and exits SR.)*

*P.J. enters wearing a man's robe with the initials P.J. He descends the stairs, crosses to the sofa, picks up a magazine, lies down upon it and begins to read as he listens to the music in his earphones. IVY enters USL as PHILLIP enters SR with more luggage.)*

**IVY:** Any luck finding a bed?

**PHILLIP:** Yes and no.

**IVY:** Sounds intriguing. *(She crosses to him.)* Are we roommates or not?

**PHILLIP:** Definitely. *(He ascends the stairs.)* Luckily there is one room with your name on it. And one room where you dare not go.

**IVY:** *(She follows him.)* Now I'm doubly intrigued.

**PHILLIP:** You'll be more like doubling over. Any luck finding P.J.?

**IVY:** No, but the kitchen is fabulous! Granite countertops, stainless steel appliances, two ovens and a butler's pantry! I'm going to love it here!

**PHILLIP:** Sounds like I'm going to be eating well, my little Rachael Ray.

**IVY:** You know how I love to cook! *(Starts for P.J.'s room.)*

**PHILLIP:** Where are you going?

**IVY:** I thought I'd check out this bedroom you don't want me to see. I have a feeling its pink and frilly and ultra feminine.

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**PHILLIP:** No, that room is like a crime scene. Yellow police tape should be stretched across the door. *(Stops at SR bedroom.)*  
Although I admit, there is a certain feminine quality about it.

**IVY:** Really? It's Victorian, isn't it?

**PHILLIP:** More like Victoria's Secret. *(He exits inside.)*

**IVY:** We'll see. *(She exits inside.)*

*P.J. sits up from the couch, lays the magazine on the table, rises and crosses USL and exits into the kitchen. PHILLIP enters and pauses for a beat.*

**PHILLIP:** Ivy? *(Waits a beat.)* Ivy?

**IVY:** *(Enters from bedroom. She is nauseous.)* That . . . that room is . . . disgusting!

**PHILLIP:** I told you so! I can't believe you were even in there that long.

**IVY:** It was like a car accident . . . I had to look. There are pictures of naked women on the walls.

**PHILLIP:** That would be the feminine quality I referred to. They're called centerfolds.

**IVY:** I've never seen so many piles of clothes and shoes and - - and trash! I found a milk carton with an expiration date of March eleventh . . . 2006. And it still had milk in it! *(She hits PHILLIP on the arm.)*

**PHILLIP:** Oww! What was that for? *(Descends stairs.)*

**IVY:** For not stopping me from going in there. Now I have to throw away these shoes!

**PHILLIP:** I just brought in a suitcase full of replacements. It's in there, you'll like that room. *(He exits SR.)*

**IVY:** We'll see. *(IVY opens the door, peers timidly inside, then exits, closing it behind her.)*

*P.J. ENTERS USL from kitchen with a bag of chips and an open liter of soda.*

**P.J.:** *(He crosses to CS and belches.)* Excuse me. *(He looks around at the empty room, shrugs, then marches up the stairs and EXITS into his bedroom SL and closes the door.)*

*PHILLIP enters with more luggage, including a laptop computer.*

**PHILLIP:** I can't believe we fit this much luggage into that little car! Seriously, could the woman pack another suitcase?

**IVY:** *(Enters from bedroom and descends stairs.)* Phillip, I love that room!

**PHILLIP:** I had it redecorated with you in mind. I'm just glad we have a place to sleep. You know, Ivy, besides the fishing and the boating, the quiet of this place will be perfect for writing.

**IVY:** Fishing, boating, and writing. Don't forget to fit me into your schedule!

**PHILLIP:** It goes without saying.

**IVY:** Oh no. Where you are concerned, it must be said.

**PHILLIP:** Hey, I plan to take you fishing.

**IVY:** *(With sarcasm.)* Yippee.

**PHILLIP:** And shopping.

**IVY:** *(Closing the door behind him.)* Now you're talking my language. *(She gives him a peck on the cheek.)* Would you be a dear and unpack while I check on Joanna's ham? It smells wonderful, doesn't it?

**PHILLIP:** It does, it does.

*PHILLIP climbs the stairs and exits into the SR bedroom as IVY exits USL into the kitchen. Immediately, JOY, her hair in rollers and wearing a retro looking pantsuit enters SR, followed by NELSON, wearing a plaid shirt and slacks.*

**NELSON:** Joy, did you know that the number of new births in India each year outnumber the entire population of Australia? Isn't that interesting?

**JOY:** *(Always with an un-lit cigarette either hanging from her mouth or in her hand.)* Interesting? No. It just means Indians have more fun than Aussies.

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**NELSON:** Joy, guess how many stomachs a cow has.

**JOY:** Nelson, I don't care.

**NELSON:** Four. Name a former first lady who was secretly a chain smoker.

**JOY:** Mamie Eisenhower.

**NELSON:** Please . . . Jacqueline Kennedy. Did you know that a toothpick is the object most often choked on by Americans?

**JOY:** (*Crosses to sit at table.*) I could go for a toothpick about now. Or a match. Either way, I could use some relief.

**NELSON:** Did you know that the face of a penny can hold about thirty drops of water?

**JOY:** Nelson, I - - don't - - care!

**NELSON:** Kind of makes you wonder how many drops of water the face of a dime would hold, doesn't it?

**JOY:** No, it doesn't.

**NELSON:** Did you know most car horns honk in the key of F?

**JOY:** No, I didn't know, I didn't want to know, and I didn't ask. And if you don't shut up with the "did-you-knows" for a least five minutes, I'll see to it that YOU honk in the key of F! Now find that stupid book you need to borrow, so we can get the hell out of here. I don't want miss any more of my TV show than I have to.

**NELSON:** You watch way too much television.

**JOY:** (*Begins to eat a piece of candy from the candy bowl, leaving the wrapper on the table.*) And you talk way too much. Let's call it even.

**NELSON:** You know, we probably should have knocked first, instead of just walking in.

**JOY:** Why? We've never had to knock before.

**NELSON:** But house sitters are living here now, not the Birmans! I'm just saying we should have knocked first. That would have been the polite thing to do. (*Starts to peruse the book titles on the bookshelf.*)

**JOY:** That's just too bad.

**NELSON:** Joy, you should practice better etiquette. We don't want them to think we're rude and intrusive.

**JOY:** We are rude and intrusive.

**NELSON:** I'm not rude or intrusive!



**JOY:** So you're not perfect. I can live with that. I have for twenty-eight years.

**NELSON:** Twenty-seven.

**JOY:** What's the difference? It's still a life sentence. I must have been out of my mind to marry a man who idolizes Santa Claus.

**NELSON:** You know you love me.

**JOY:** Yeah, who would have ever guessed I have a weakness for jolly ol' elves. *(Sticks her tongue out at him.)*

**NELSON:** That's so dignified. Just so you know, the new house sitters probably won't like you.

**JOY:** I probably won't like them either. I didn't like the last ones. Now get your book, and shut your yap . . . please.

**NELSON:** Ah . . . here it is! *The History of Art.*

**JOY:** Sounds just like you . . . boring.

*IVY enters from kitchen USL, her hands in oven mitts.*

**IVY:** Phillip, who are you talking - - *(Sees JOY and NELSON.)* - - to? Hello?

**NELSON:** Hello!

**IVY:** *(With trepidation.)* I - - I thought I heard voices. *(Looking around.)* Phillip?!

**NELSON:** *(Crosses to IVY.)* My name's Nelson. And this is my wife, Joy.

**JOY:** *(With sarcasm.)* Thrilled, I'm sure.

*PHILLIP enters from bedroom.*

**PHILLIP:** Ivy, let me guess, you found a parrot? *(Sees NELSON.)* Oh, we have company?

**NELSON:** Hello!

**PHILLIP:** Hello. Who are you?

**IVY:** This is Nelson and his wife, Joy.

**PHILLIP:** Who are they?

**IVY:** I don't know.

**NELSON:** We're the Bombays. We live next door.

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**IVY:** Oh - - neighbors! (*Suddenly a gracious hostess, she crosses to JOY.*) It's so nice to meet you. I'm Ivy.

**JOY:** I'm thirsty. Could I have beer?

**NELSON:** Joy!

**JOY:** What? I'm a guest here. I'd like a drink! Is that too much to ask?

**IVY:** Not at all - - Joy. I'm just not sure if there is any . . . beer.

**JOY:** You have some - - Moosehead. I'll get it myself. (*She rises and crosses USL.*) You want anything while I'm in there?

**IVY:** No . . . no, thank you.

**JOY:** (*To PHILLIP.*) How about you, gorgeous?

**PHILLIP:** Me?

**JOY:** Yeah . . . you want anything to drink?

**PHILLIP:** No . . . no, I'm good.

**JOY:** I'll bet you are. (*She exits USL.*)

**IVY:** (*Slightly annoyed.*) She's - - charming.

**NELSON:** She takes some getting used to. On the outside, she's a little gruff, but on the inside she is - - well she's - - uh, like I said, she takes some getting used to. (*A moment of awkward silence.*) So, house sitters?

**PHILLIP:** Yes.

**NELSON:** So, how long have you and Ivy been housesitting?

**PHILLIP:** About fifteen minutes.

**NELSON:** No, I meant - -

*JOY enters USL.*

**JOY:** I put some more beer in your fridge. That way it will be plenty cold for tomorrow.

**IVY:** For tomorrow? What's tomorrow?

**JOY:** (*Looks at her for a beat.*) Saturday.

**IVY:** Saturday?

**JOY:** Yeah, we have Saturdays here in Minnesota. Where are you from? Mars?

**PHILLIP:** New Jersey.

**JOY:** Ah . . . you're one of them Jersey boys. I like that. You and me, we're going to get along just fine, Jersey Boy.

**PHILLIP:** I'm sure we will . . . as long as you don't light up that cigarette in here. (*Laughs.*) We don't like smoke.

**JOY:** Perfect. Neither do I. I could give up smoking these things, but I'm addicted to holding on to them.

**IVY:** Interesting - - so, what do you two do for fun around here?

**JOY:** Well, doll, I watch TV . . . Mostly reruns. I like *The Beverly Hillbillies*. Those Clampetts crack me up.

**NELSON:** And I read a lot.

**IVY:** So do I. I love curling up with an Agatha Christie mystery or Rex Stout's Nero Wolfe. What do you read, Nelson?

**NELSON:** Mostly reference books.

**IVY:** Reference books?

**NELSON:** You see, I'm in training.

**IVY:** Training?

**NELSON:** I'm training to be a game show contestant.

**PHILLIP:** I didn't know you had to train for that.

**NELSON:** If you want to be a winner, you do. I'm constantly reading and learning, that's why I'm borrowing this book. But I especially enjoy memorizing trivial facts . . . you know, the kinds of questions game shows like to ask. Like, did you know that no matter its size or thickness, no piece of paper can be folded in half more than eight times?

**PHILLIP:** No, I didn't know that.

**IVY:** You're kidding?!

**NELSON:** It's a fact.

**IVY:** That is so interesting.

**JOY:** THAT is why I watch *The Beverly Hillbillies*.

**IVY:** Tell us another one.

**PHILLIP:** Ivy, I don't think - -

**NELSON:** Did you know that the state of Virginia extends farther west than the state of West Virginia?

**IVY:** How fascinating!

**NELSON:** Three Mile Island is only two and a half miles long. Venus is the only planet that rotates clockwise. During your lifetime you will eat about sixty thousand pounds of food.

**IVY:** Nelson, your mind is just full of information, don't you think, Phillip?

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**PHILLIP:** He's full of something, all right.

**JOY:** Speaking of food, that ham in the oven is about done, and Nels, seeing how we haven't been invited to stay for dinner, I suppose we should be polite and leave before they feel obligated.

**PHILLIP:** Dinner? Uh - - uh - -

**IVY:** I'm sorry, we haven't even unpacked yet, much less prepared to entertain - - guests.

**JOY:** Well . . . this is awkward.

**IVY:** But of course Phillip and I would love to have you stay for dinner.

**NELSON:** We're imposing. Please accept our apologies. Come, Joy, let's give Phillip and Ivy some time to settle in first. *(He leads the way to the front door.)* Welcome to the neighborhood! We hope you enjoy your stay here!

**IVY:** Thank you, Nelson. And perhaps tomorrow we'll be better prepared for visitors. We'd love to get to know you better, Nelson . . . *(JOY clears her throat.)* and you too, Joy.

**JOY:** Whatever. *(She crosses to SR to join NELSON.)* Thanks for the libation, Jersey Boy.

**NELSON:** *(Opens door.)* Ivy, here's one for the road. Did you know that forty percent of women have hurled footwear at men?

**JOY:** Keep it up, Nels, and the figure is going to go higher.

**NELSON:** Goodbye.

**IVY:** Wait! I have a question I'm sure you know the answer to.

**NELSON:** Yes?

**IVY:** What is P.J.?

**NELSON:** P.J.? *(He and JOY exchange looks.)*

**PHILLIP:** Yes. Mrs. Birman gave us a feeding schedule for P.J., but we haven't seen him, her, it . . . yet.

**JOY:** Count your blessings, Jersey Boy. *(She EXITS.)*

**IVY:** P.J. is not a cat is it?

**JOY:** *(Offstage.)* You wish!

**IVY:** Is it an animal?

**NELSON:** Well - -

**JOY:** *(Offstage.)* Nels . . . I'm not waiting!

**NELSON:** I've got to go. She'll lock the door on me if I'm not right there. See you tomorrow! *(He exits.)*

**PHILLIP:** *(Closes the door behind them.)* I don't like him.

**IVY:** I don't like her.

**PHILLIP/IVY:** Great!

**IVY:** We're off to a wonderful start!

**PHILLIP:** *(He crossed to sofa and sits.)* Honestly, I hope we don't see much of them!

**IVY:** I might actually agree with you . . . a little. We'll have to invite them over for dinner tomorrow.

**PHILLIP:** Already?! We just got here. And besides, that man is going to drive me crazy, no question about it.

**IVY:** Phillip, we need to give them a chance. I'm sure they're both very nice people.

**PHILLIP:** Uh-huh. And yet I had the feeling there's something they don't want to tell us about P.J.

**IVY:** It's a cat . . . I just know it's a cat. *(She looks around warily.)*

**PHILLIP:** Oh, Ivy, my darling, I've been unpacking. Where is my robe?

**IVY:** Your robe? It's in the suitcase.

**PHILLIP:** No, it's not.

**IVY:** Phillip, darling, I'm sure it's in there. You may have to make the effort to move a pair socks to find it.

**PHILLIP:** Are you sure you packed it?

**IVY:** Of course I'm sure! I'm not crazy! Here, kitty, kitty, kitty! Here, kitty, kitty, kitty!

*The doorbell rings.*

**PHILLIP:** There's going to be a cat at the door, I can just feel it! *(He crosses to the door and opens it.)*

*Standing in the doorway are SUNSHINE, her hair adorned with flower barrettes and wearing a simple sack dress and sandals, and RIVER, dressed in cutoff shorts, a retro t-shirt, and sandals. RIVER holds a duffle bag, SUNSHINE has a big canvas bag with silk lotus flowers glued to it.*

**RIVER:** Hello! We made it!

**SUNSHINE:** Sorry we're late!

*They step past PHILLIP and cross to IVY.*

**SUNSHINE:** River took a wrong exit on the interstate. We were nearly halfway to Canada before we realized it.

**PHILLIP:** River?

**RIVER:** Yeah?

**PHILLIP:** Your name is River?

**RIVER:** Uh-huh. And you're Frank, right?

**PHILLIP:** Frank? No, I'm Phillip . . . Phillip Julian. And this is my wife, Ivy.

**SUNSHINE:** Oh! You mean you're not Joanna?

**IVY:** No.

**SUNSHINE:** Oh, no. River, we're at the wrong house! *(She suddenly closes her eyes and presses her fingertips to her brow and pulls it away as if pulling something invisible from her head.)* Indigo . . . Indigo . . . Indigo.

**RIVER:** Oh, man, we're sorry. We're looking for the home of the Birmans . . . Frank and Joanna. Do you know them?

**IVY:** Not really, but we've met.

**SUNSHINE:** My aura senses the Birmans live nearby. I know we're at the right lake. I'm sure we were on the right road.

**PHILLIP:** Actually, they live here. This is their home.

**SUNSHINE:** I'm confused. Who did you say you were again?

**IVY:** Phillip and Ivy Julian. We don't live here. We're just housesitting.

**SUNSHINE:** Still confused . . . *(Closes her eyes and places her hand upon the crown of her head.)* Sahasrara . . . bring forth the violet of thy wisdom.

**IVY:** What -- what did she say?

**RIVER:** Sahasrara. She's communicating with her Crown Chakra.

**SUNSHINE:** *(Opens her eyes.)* The two of you are house sitters.

**PHILLIP:** Yes. We just told you that.

**IVY:** It's like babysitting a house. We stay in people's homes while they are away on vacation or business - -

**PHILLIP:** Or when they stay at a second home.

**IVY:** It's really quite fun.

**RIVER:** Yes, we know.

**PHILLIP:** You know?

**SUNSHINE:** River and I are house sitters, too.

**PHILLIP:** Really?

**SUNSHINE:** We stay in other people's homes while they are away on vacation or away on business - -

**RIVER:** Or when they stay at another home. And we get paid for it too.

**PHILLIP:** As do we!

**RIVER:** Well, I don't know why you're here, but we were hired to house sit for the Birmans.

**IVY:** That doesn't make any sense. You see, the Birmans hired us to house sit for them.

**RIVER:** We've already been paid . . . in advance . . . three thousand dollars.

**SUNSHINE:** For thirty days.

**PHILLIP:** That's - - that's what we were paid!

**IVY:** For the whole month as well!

**ALL:** There's been a mistake!

**RIVER:** Sunshine, show these people our contract.

**PHILLIP:** Sunshine?

**SUNSHINE:** What?

**PHILLIP:** Your name is Sunshine?

**SUNSHINE:** Uh-huh. Why?

**PHILLIP:** Never mind. Look . . . Sunshine . . . and River, I've got the Birmans' cell phone number. I'll call them and we'll get this misunderstanding all cleared up. Ivy, where's that envelope Joanna wrote her cell number down on?

**IVY:** It's in my purse. *(She gets her purse and retrieves the envelope.)* Here you go, Phillip.

**PHILLIP:** Thank you. Excuse me for a moment. *(He steps away and takes his cell phone from his pocket and keys in the number.)*

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**RIVER:** Sunshine, go ahead and get our contract out so we can show them.

**SUNSHINE:** Okay. *(She begins to rummage through her bag, pulling out a variety of "bizarre" things.)*

*Suddenly the house phone rings.*

**IVY:** I suppose I should answer that. Excuse me. *(IVY crosses to telephone and answers it.)* Hello? Birman residence, Ivy Julian speaking.

**PHILLIP:** Ivy?

**IVY:** Phillip? I said I would answer the phone.

**PHILLIP:** Why are you answering the Birmans' cell phone?

**IVY:** I'm not . . . I'm on their house phone.

*PHILLIP and IVY exchange looks and then hang up.*

**PHILLIP:** She didn't give us their cell phone number!

**RIVER:** She who?

**PHILLIP:** Joanna Birman! Who do you think?

**SUNSHINE:** Here it is, River. *(Hands him a folded paper.)*

**RIVER:** *(Takes it.)* Here's our contract!

**PHILLIP:** Fine, fine! Is there a telephone number?

**RIVER:** Yeah . . . 320-555-06 - -

**PHILLIP:** - - 72.

**RIVER:** That's right.

**PHILLIP:** Great! We've both got the number for the house phone. That ingenious!

**RIVER:** Forget the phone number . . . look, here's our contract. *(Hands it to PHILLIP.)*

**PHILLIP:** *(Reads.)* It looks just like ours. Same dates, same fee, same address, same telephone number, blah, blah, blah.

**IVY:** Same names too?

**PHILLIP:** No, Ivy, the names are different. Our contract has Phillip and Ivy, their contract has water and sunlight!

**IVY:** I meant the Birmans' names . . . on both contracts.

**PHILLIP:** Oh . . . sorry. Yes.



**RIVER:** Our names are River and Sunshine.

**PHILLIP:** What kind of names are those? Surely your parents didn't give them to you.

**SUNSHINE:** Oh, no. We chose these names ourselves . . . when we were joined in union.

**IVY:** Joined in union? You mean, when you were married?

**SUNSHINE:** No, I mean joined.

**IVY:** I see. Well, not really. Where are the two of you from?

**RIVER:** North Carolina. Where are you from?

**IVY:** New Jersey.

**RIVER:** Figures.

**PHILLIP:** Meaning - - ?

**RIVER:** It doesn't matter. Right now, we need to focus on your bogus contract!

**PHILLIP:** Our contract is not bogus!

**RIVER:** Fine! Then, what are we going to do? Sunshine and I have a contract to sit this house, and we intend to SIT this house!

**PHILLIP:** And so do we!

**SUNSHINE:** Then in perpetuation of the harmony of the Anahata that dwells within each of us, *(Her hand begins to emanate from her chest.)* we shall, in a prism of green, become a foursome.

**RIVER:** I don't think so.

**SUNSHINE:** River, we shall ALL sit this house!

**PHILLIP:** Oh no, that . . . that's out of the question.

**SUNSHINE:** I sense negative energy.

**PHILLIP:** Gee, what gave that away? Look, miss, I'm sorry, but, after all, Ivy and I were here first.

**SUNSHINE:** River! *(Drops her bag and begins to fan herself with both hands.)* My vortices are beginning to wobble! We don't have any other place to stay.

**RIVER:** We're staying here, that's what we're doing.

**IVY:** Of course you are.

**PHILLIP:** What?

**IVY:** Phillip, they need a place to stay. We're not throwing them out into the street.

**RIVER:** You're right about that.

**IVY:** Besides, this isn't our home. Who are we to say who can stay here and who can't?

**PHILLIP:** We can say that, because we are the house sitters!

**RIVER:** Nuh-uh, old man, Sunshine and me are the house sitters!

**PHILLIP:** Old man?

**SUNSHINE:** (*Begins to hyperventilate.*) River! The colors of my Chakras are fading. Red is almost gone!

**RIVER:** Sunshine, calm down . . . calm down . . . seek the illuminated path to your inner tranquility. (*He begins to massage her temples.*) Everything will be okay, I promise.

**IVY:** (*Goes to comfort SUNSHINE.*) Everything will be fine, dear. Come with me. Why don't the two of us go into the kitchen and see what we can put together for dinner. Joanna has already put a ham in the oven.

**SUNSHINE:** (*Horried.*) Ham?! Are you out of your mind? That - - that was an animal!

**IVY:** Yes . . . a pig.

**SUNSHINE:** A pig cadaver!

**IVY:** A what?

**SUNSHINE:** A victim of a sick society!

**PHILLIP:** You're not from this planet, are you?

**SUNSHINE:** I need yellow . . . lots and lots of yellow!

**PHILLIP:** She needs a therapist, that's what she needs.

**SUNSHINE:** River, I'm going to be sick!

**IVY:** Oh, dear! There's a restroom upstairs . . . center door . . . and it's painted in yellow!

*SUNSHINE turns and rushes upstairs and EXITS into the bathroom.*

**PHILLIP:** What is up with these color references?

**RIVER:** They're the colors that correlate with our Chakras.

**IVY:** Chakras?

**RIVER:** Yeah, you know, the spinning whorls of energy that permeate from the layers of our physical bodies and function to keep our spiritual, mental, emotional, and physiological health in balance.

**PHILLIP:** O . . . kay.

**IVY:** And what made her ill?

**RIVER:** The suggestion of meat. The consumption of animal flesh grosses her out. Not only that, she's allergic to animal proteins. Well, she's allergic to a lot of things. But chocolate is the worst. It's actually life-threatening to Sunshine.

**IVY:** Oh, the poor girl.

**RIVER:** Yeah. And I love chocolate. But I've had to give it up. You see chocolate also happens to be one of the four C's that we avoid for the physical health of our earthly vessel.

**IVY:** Four C's?

**RIVER:** No chocolate, caffeine, carbonation, or chemicals.

**PHILLIP:** See no evil, speak no evil, eat no evil, have no fun.

**RIVER:** It's just a matter of self-discipline. But I have to admit, sometimes I really get a craving.

**IVY:** I'm sure it's not easy.

**PHILLIP:** I couldn't do it. Not giving up my coffee or doing the vegetarian thing.

**RIVER:** Actually, Sunshine is a vegan.

**PHILLIP:** A vegan? Is that like a Vulcan? (*Holds oven mitts to his ears.*) Is she related to Spock?

**RIVER:** No, she's not related to Spock, wise guy. She's a New Age Spiritualist who happens to be a very beautiful human being who chooses not to perpetuate her life at the expense of exploiting other living creatures. Her diet is the basis of that spirituality.

**PHILLIP:** I assume you're a vegan too?

**RIVER:** Not exactly. I'm like in transition. I have to have a bowl of ice cream once in a while. It comes at a price though. Sunshine won't even sleep with me for three days afterwards.

**PHILLIP:** Ice cream is not a meat.

**RIVER:** Really?! But ice cream is made of milk. Vegans do not consume any kind of animal product. I've been able to give up meat, but I'm struggling to give up my dairy.

**IVY:** Mr. River, we just arrived here ourselves - -

**RIVER:** Just River . . . no mister.

**IVY:** Oh, okay, River, I'm sure there's plenty of things Sunbeam - -

**RIVER:** Sunshine.

**IVY:** SUNSHINE . . . and you can eat. I hope. I'll go into the kitchen and see what I can come up with. Would a salad be okay?

**RIVER:** Perfect.

**IVY:** Phillip, why don't you help River with the rest of their luggage. *(She exits to kitchen.)*

**PHILLIP:** Why don't I just take a bottle of valium and wake up in a month.

**RIVER:** There isn't any more luggage. This is all we have.

**PHILLIP:** These two - - bags - - that's all you brought?

**RIVER:** That's all we need. We're pretty simple people.

**PHILLIP:** Apparently.

**RIVER:** What's that supposed to mean?

**PHILLIP:** Nothing.

**RIVER:** At least we're not shopaholic clones - - wallowing in the gluttony of needless things that make you look foolish for the want of them. So insecure in the perception that who you are is what you own, you pitifully don't even realize you're living a fake existence that I, for one, find pathetically amusing.

**PHILLIP:** And what's that supposed to mean?

**RIVER:** Too many big words?

**PHILLIP:** Are you implying that I'm materialistic?

**RIVER:** Not implying. What is, is. I'm just making an observation. The BMW with the Jersey plates, the designer clothes, an imitation Rolex, pompous attitude - -

**PHILLIP:** You're pretty full of yourself, aren't you? Here we've only know each other for five minutes, and you seem to be making a determined effort to make sure I won't like you.

**RIVER:** I don't care if you like me or not. I don't live my life worrying about things I have no control over. I live to seek out and harmonize with my inner spectrum of light. That is where I am at peace. That's how I am. Take it or leave it.

**PHILLIP:** Oh, I get it. You're just a punk rebel blaming the woes of society on my generation. Let me guess, you're a victim of an abusive father, and I'm a perfect proxy for your frustrations.

**RIVER:** Whatever . . . you're no psychoanalyst, that's for sure. But you're boring, I'll give you that. Which, by the way, has made me tired. I need to stretch out for a little bit and re-polarize the energy of my spirit body.

**PHILLIP:** You mean you're actually staying?

**RIVER:** Why wouldn't I?

**PHILLIP:** Okay, just so you know, there is only one bedroom.

**RIVER:** One bedroom? In this big house?

**PHILLIP:** No, there are three . . . all very large rooms. But that one in there is unlivable due to remodeling. And the second bedroom upstairs is unlivable, because . . . well, trust me . . . you wouldn't want your dog to sleep in there.

**RIVER:** What about the third one?

**PHILLIP:** It's mine.

**RIVER:** Well, looks like right here it is then. (*He drops down on the sofa.*) But I've got a question for you.

**PHILLIP:** What?

**RIVER:** You look to be a pajama kind of guy, am I right?

**PHILLIP:** Yeah . . . so?

**RIVER:** So . . . here's a heads up for you . . . Sunshine and I - - we sleep natural.

**PHILLIP:** Natural?

**RIVER:** Naked.

**PHILLIP:** (*Pause for a beat.*) Naked?

**RIVER:** Naked.

**PHILLIP:** Even . . . you mean, out here . . . in the living room . . . you're going to sleep . . .

**RIVER:** Naked.

**PHILLIP:** (*A beat.*) Perfect.

**BLACKOUT.**

ACT ONE, SCENE 2  
DAY 5, A TUESDAY, EARLY MORNING

**AT RISE:**

*P.J. enters from his bedroom and stands upon the balcony doing a few brief karate moves, then exits into the bathroom. IVY enters from her bedroom pulling her robe on and steps to the bathroom door. It is locked. She sighs and rolls her eyes, then she suddenly sees a movement at the floor at her right.*

**IVY:** Ahhhhh! *(She quickly flattens herself against the wall as she watches a "mouse" run along the bottom of the banister and into P.J.'s room. She quickly crosses and pulls the door to.)* Ooooo-hooo-hooo-ooooo!

**RIVER:** *(Shirtless, he sits up from behind the sofa.)* What is it?!

**IVY:** *(She hurries to the top of the stairs.)* A mouse! *(She descends.)* I just saw a mouse!

**SUNSHINE:** *(Appearing to be topless, she sits up from behind the sofa.)* River! Did I hear someone scream?!

**RIVER:** It was Ivy. She saw a mouse.

**SUNSHINE:** Aww . . . was it cute?

**IVY:** Cute? I don't think so! It's a rodent! *(Suddenly realizes they are naked.)* Oh, my goodness, I forgot you're naked! *(Embarrassed, she covers her eyes with her hand.)* I'm having a conversation with naked people!

**SUNSHINE:** Uh-huh . . . same as yesterday.

**RIVER:** And the day before.

**IVY:** And the day before that.

**SUNSHINE:** It's important to allow our bodies to breathe.

**RIVER:** Sorry. We're not trying to embarrass you, Ivy. This is just the way we are. *(He pulls on his pants, then stands up.)*

**IVY:** *(Blindly eases her way past them toward the kitchen.)* Give me another week, and I probably won't even notice. I hope. I'm getting coffee for Phillip and I. Could I bring some juice out for the two of you?

**RIVER:** Yeah, that would be great. But you don't have to wait on us hand and foot, you know.

**IVY:** I know. But I enjoy it.

**SUNSHINE:** Thank you, Miss Ivy. The carrot juice for me, please.

*IVY exits to kitchen as RIVER grabs his shirt and socks from the couch and continues to get dressed, as SUNSHINE pulls her dress over her head. P.J. enters from bathroom upstairs and exits to his bedroom unseen.*

**SUNSHINE:** *(Rises.)* Good morning, River. *(She wraps her arms around RIVER's waist.)*

**RIVER:** Good morning, Sunshine. *(He wraps his arms around her shoulders.)* Sleep well?

**SUNSHINE:** Yes, I did. *(She smiles.)* All the leaves of my seven lotus blossoms feel as though they have aligned themselves in harmony with one another.

**RIVER:** Must be the tantric yoga.

**SUNSHINE:** Must be. *(She begins to do a series of eloquent stretches.)*

**RIVER:** I'll be right back and join you. I've got to the bathroom first.

*RIVER turns and hurries upstairs to go into the bathroom just as PHILLIP enters in his pajamas and starts for the bathroom. RIVER cuts him off.*

**RIVER:** Sorry, old man. I gotta go bad. *(Exits into the bathroom.)*

**PHILLIP:** *(Yells at the door.)* Your timing is impeccable! Three mornings in a row, you've cut in front of me!

**SUNSHINE:** Good morning, Phillip.

**PHILLIP:** *(With pronounced sarcasm.)* Morning, SUNSHINE!

**SUNSHINE:** Come and join me in yoga. It will help stimulate the inert energy of your spirit and enable you to remove any imbalances among your seven chakras.

**PHILLIP:** I don't have seven chakras, and I don't want any. What I do want is a good seven hours of sleep, or better yet, eight.

**SUNSHINE:** You didn't sleep well?

**PHILLIP:** *(Looks at her dead pan.)* Not until about two a.m.

**SUNSHINE:** That's too bad. It's probably your carnivorous diet.

**PHILLIP:** No, it's not my diet, it's the noise.

**SUNSHINE:** I have the same problem for about the first week when I'm staying in a different home. It's the noises of an unfamiliar house - - the creaking, the settling - -

**PHILLIP:** The howling, the grunting, the groaning . . .

**SUNSHINE:** Exactly.

**RIVER:** *(He enters from bathroom.)* There ya go, old man. It's all yours.

**PHILLIP:** My name is Phillip.

**RIVER:** I know.

**PHILLIP:** Then would you mind calling me Phillip? I'm not overly fond of "Old Man."

**RIVER:** Sorry. Phillip is too stuffy. I've thought about calling you Jackass a couple of times, but I didn't want to stoop to name-calling.

**PHILLIP:** You're so - - thoughtful.

**RIVER:** Then there's that name ol' Happy Face calls you.

**PHILLIP:** Happy Face?

**RIVER:** Yeah, the old gal from next door . . . Jersey Boy, that's what she's calls you. I could call you that too, if you want.

**PHILLIP:** Shut up. *(He exits into the bathroom.)*

*IVY enters from kitchen with a tray set with two cups of coffee, a creamer, a sugar bowl, a soup bowl and two glasses of juice.*

**IVY:** Here you go, kids. *(She sits the tray on the table.)*

**SUNSHINE:** *(Breaks from her stretches.)* Thank you, Miss Ivy. *(Takes juice.)* You are so nice.

**RIVER:** Your old man could take congeniality lessons from you.

**IVY:** Oh, Phillip is a sweetheart. Unless he's tired. Then he's a grouch.

**RIVER:** He must be plenty tired this morning.

**SUNSHINE:** He is. He said he couldn't get to sleep because of all the noise last night.

**IVY:** He told you that?!

**RIVER:** *(Takes juice.)* What noise? I didn't hear anything.



**SUNSHINE:** House sounds, you know - - *(Sees bowl.)* Ooooh, yuk!  
What's in that bowl?

**IVY:** Nothing for you Sunshine. Its cat food . . . Ocean flavor . . .  
fish! Not meat!

**SUNSHINE:** Same thing. It was living flesh, before - -

**IVY:** Oh, I'm sorry, Sunshine. I didn't mean to upset you. I thought  
maybe fish would be okay. Catholics don't mind it.

**RIVER:** So, Ivy, any sign of it yet?

**IVY:** No. You?

**RIVER:** Nope.

**SUNSHINE:** River, I'm feeling a little nauseous. Let's go out on the  
deck to do our yoga. The fresh air will be cleansing. And then we  
can watch those cute little hummingbirds.

**RIVER:** Okay. *(To IVY.)* Need any help with breakfast, Ivy?

**IVY:** No, no. I can handle it. I thought I'd make those banana bran  
muffins.

**SUNSHINE:** My recipe?

**IVY:** Your recipe. One hundred percent vegan.

**SUNSHINE:** Bless you.

**RIVER:** Thanks, Ivy. You're the best. Come on, Sunshine. *(He  
slaps her rear and she giggles.)*

*They exit. IVY then takes the bowl and carries it DSC and sets in on  
the floor.*

**IVY:** Here, kitty-kitty-kitty. *(She looks around the room.)*

**PHILLIP:** *(He enters from bathroom then pauses and looks down at  
IVY.)* What are you doing, Ivy?

**IVY:** I'm calling for the cat.

**PHILLIP:** *(He descends stairs.)* You don't know that P.J. is a cat.

**IVY:** It must be a cat, that's why we haven't seen it. It's hiding . . .  
the nasty little thing. Speaking of nasty little things, I just saw a  
mouse upstairs! It ran into that filthy room . . . there's probably a  
whole nest of rodents in there!

**PHILLIP:** I'll set out some traps.

**IVY:** If there's going to have to be a cat in the house, the very least  
it could do is take care of the mice.

**PHILLIP:** What's in the bowl?

**IVY:** Cat food . . . ocean flavor. Sunshine did not approve.

**PHILLIP:** Big surprise. So, you found cat food?

**IVY:** No, I bought it when I went into town yesterday to buy vegan food for little Miss Sunshine.

**PHILLIP:** It sounds like somebody's patience is finally wearing thin. Are you now ready to join my side of camp, Benedict Arnold?

**IVY:** Funny. No. Shame on me. I will be the gracious one of the two of us if it kills me.

**PHILLIP:** It's your funeral. Those two are a pain in the - -

**IVY:** Don't say it. I've heard it enough already. You have to learn to be amicable.

**PHILLIP:** But I don't like them. And FYI, there's no way I'm going to live on just raw vegetables for a month.

**IVY:** They're not just raw, they're organic.

**PHILLIP:** I don't care. They're ruining our vacation.

**IVY:** Vegetables are ruining your vacation?

**PHILLIP:** No, the veggie heads are ruining my vacation. It would be nice if I could sit around in just my underwear once in a while.

**IVY:** Why? You never do that at home.

**PHILLIP:** I know. But what I'm saying is it would be nice if I could.

**IVY:** Well, I'm sure River and Sunshine would prefer a little more privacy, too. But you don't hear them complaining about it.

**PHILLIP:** What have they got to complain about? From the sound of things last night, they are having a grand ol' time.

**IVY:** Phillip, hush. They're young. They're just doing what young people do. What we used to do.

**PHILLIP:** What do you mean what we USED to do? We still do it!

**IVY:** Not for a while we haven't.

**PHILLIP:** *(He starts loading his coffee with spoonfuls of sugar.)*

That's because I'm tired. I need rest. I need energy. My God, I wish I was young again. Last night that mouthy kid was going at it like he was moving furniture! I used to move furniture like that!

**IVY:** *(She pats his hand.)* Yes, you did, Phillip.

**PHILLIP:** They are driving me crazy, Ivy. I want them to leave.

**IVY:** We've discussed this already. We've both been paid to sit this house for one month, the same month. Obviously, that is what the Birmans wanted. You're just going to have to accept it. If I can deal with it, you can too. It's only a month. Not even that now. Three and a half weeks, more or less.

**PHILLIP:** Don't think I'm not marking the days off the calendar.

**IVY:** They're really nice kids, Phillip. I actually enjoy having them around and mothering them a little. They're like the son and daughter we never had.

**PHILLIP:** Please, we could have done so much better - - (*Looks at IVY.*) I'm sorry.

**IVY:** So are you going to work on your book today?

**PHILLIP:** I'd like to. But with those two millennium hippies in the house, I can't concentrate.

**IVY:** Look at the bright side, this housesitting situation should make for an interesting chapter.

**PHILLIP:** Uh-huh. A very dark chapter. Dark and depressing. Dark, depressing, and demonic. I think I'll title it "The Minnesota Lake House of Hell."

**IVY:** Don't exaggerate. Your book is non-fiction, remember.

**PHILLIP:** I'm not exaggerating! The truth is, I can't enjoy a normal meal in this house because Sunshine goes psycho when there is meat or cheese or eggs on the table, and Roaring River can't keep his mouth shut about how I should eat less, exercise more, get into yoga, get off my laptop, chin up, chest out, hands down -

**IVY:** I detect jealousy.

**PHILLIP:** Are you kidding me? I despise that kid. As if he wasn't bad enough, we have the Bombays next door. I swear the next time they barge through that door, I'm going to shoot them for trespassing.

*Doorbell rings.*

**PHILLIP:** Quick! Have you seen a gun in this house?

**IVY:** You don't need a gun. It's not Joy and Nelson.

**PHILLIP:** How do you know?

THE TROUBLE WITH CATS

**IVY:** Because whoever that is, they rang the doorbell.

**PHILLIP:** Good point. But who would be here this early in the morning?

*PHILLIP crosses to the door and opens it. MITZY stands there in coveralls and a cap.*

**PHILLIP:** Yes?

**MITZY:** Yes what? I didn't ask nothing.

**PHILLIP:** May I help you?

**MITZY:** Maybe . . . I'll let you know. *(She walks in and straps a carpenter's tool belt to her waist and nods to IVY.)* Ma'am. *(She crosses to SL and starts to open the master bedroom door.)*

**PHILLIP:** Excuse me! Where are you going?

**MITZY:** In there.

**PHILLIP:** Why?

**MITZY:** Why not?

**PHILLIP:** Who are you?

**MITZY:** Who are you?

**PHILLIP:** I'm Phillip.

**MITZY:** I'm Mitzy.

**PHILLIP:** Well, Mitzy, may I ask why you're here?

**MITZY:** May I ask why you're here?

**IVY:** Phillip, I think you just let a mina bird in the house.

**PHILLIP:** I'm housesitting.

**MITZY:** I'm house-fixing.

**PHILLIP:** What?

**IVY:** What?

**MITZY:** What?

**IVY:** *(Grinning mischievously.)* What?

**PHILLIP:** You're house-fixing what?

**MITZY:** That room. The master suite.

**PHILLIP:** You're a carpenter?

**MITZY:** You ask a lot of questions. What are you, a detective or something? Yeah, I'm a carpenter. You gotta problem with that?

**PHILLIP:** No . . . it's not my house. But why work on it today?

**MITZY:** Not just today . . . tomorrow and the day after that. In fact, you're gonna be seeing a lot of me for a while. Several weeks anyway.

**PHILLIP:** You're going to be here? Working on this house? This month?

**MITZY:** Yeah, most of the month, anyway. I'm behind schedule.

**PHILLIP:** We weren't told there would be a construction crew in the house while we were staying here.

**MITZY:** Not my problem.

**PHILLIP:** Surely, you've got some other place to . . . to fix.

**MITZY:** Nope. This is it.

**PHILLIP:** You can't be serious.

**MITZY:** I'm as serious as the contract I have on this place. I have a deadline to meet. The early bird gets the worm, you know.

**IVY:** Are you doing this all by yourself?

**MITZY:** Hell, I couldn't make that kind of mess all by myself. *(Laughs.)* I have partners, two of them.

**PHILLIP:** So, I take it the guys will be here any minute?

**MITZY:** What guys?

**PHILLIP:** Your partners.

**MITZY:** My partners ain't guys. As much as I like socializing with men, I don't like working with them. I generally find that a man's sex appeal wears off pretty fast when hard work brings out the lazy, whiny, and needy qualities of his manliness. Present company excluded, I'm sure. *(Rolls her eyes.)*

**IVY:** An all-woman construction company. Interesting.

**PHILLIP:** That would explain the mess in there. Seriously, wouldn't you rather be home sewing or baking, you know, doing something more suited for your gender?

**MITZY:** I don't know. Would you rather be upstairs soaking your swollen gonads in a bowl of ice? Now, I'd love to sit and chitchat about sexual biases in the workplace, the current state of the union, and whether the Vikings have a chance at the Super Bowl this year, but luckily, I have a job to do. Have a nice day.

**IVY:** Nice meeting you, Mitzy.

*MITZY exits SL to suite. Doorbell rings. PHILLIP crosses and opens the door to find NO standing there bent over, with a large roll of electrical wire, a handful of outlet boxes, other misc. clutched precariously in her hands. She is dressed in a long skirt, a long sleeve blouse, a plaid habit, and a rosary hangs around her neck.*

**PHILLIP:** Whatever you're selling, we don't want any of it.

**NO:** MITZY! WHY DIDN'T YOU LEAVE THE DOOR OPEN! Here, (*Hands PHILLIP the stuff.*) take this . . . I dropped fifteen things on the ground between the truck and front door. Hansel and Gretel couldn't have left a better trail of bread crumbs. (*She exits SR.*)

**MITZY:** (*She enters.*) Who's yelling at me?!

**PHILLIP:** (*Holds out stuff.*) You tell me!

**MITZY:** Ah . . . that would be No.

**PHILLIP:** No?

**MITZY:** No - - she's my business partner.

**PHILLIP:** I didn't say she wasn't.

**MITZY:** Wasn't what?

**PHILLIP:** Your business partner.

**MITZY:** What about her?

**PHILLIP:** I don't know, you tell me!

**MITZY:** She's an electrician.

**PHILLIP:** Thank you, I think! That was ten seconds of utterly unintelligible conversation.

**IVY:** She seemed very nice.

**MITZY:** Who was nice?

**IVY:** Your business partner.

**MITZY:** Please, my sister ain't nice.

**IVY:** Your sister? I thought you said she was your business partner.

**MITZY:** Yeah, and she's also my sister. She's not easy to get along with.

**IVY:** I'm sorry to hear that.

**MITZY:** You don't have anything to worry about, though. She'll be nice to you because of her "profession."

**IVY:** I didn't know electricians were required to be nice.

**PHILLIP:** They're not nice when they bill you.

**MITZY:** Not that profession . . . her “other” thing. She’s a “sister.”

**IVY:** Sister’s don’t have to be nice. My sister wasn’t nice to me.

**MITZY:** Welcome to my world.

**IVY:** May I ask, what’s your sister’s name?

**MITZY:** No.

**IVY:** No?

**MITZY:** And there’s Onie, too.

**IVY:** Too?

**MITZY:** My other sister.

**IVY:** Oh . . . so that was Onie?

**MITZY:** No. That was No. Weren’t you paying attention?

**IVY:** Apparently not.

**PHILLIP:** And there’s another ten seconds of utterly unintelligible conversation.

**NO:** *(She enters with a handful of outlet boxes, etc.)* Mitzy, why did you shut the door? You knew I had my hands full!

**MITZY:** I didn’t close the door. He did.

**NO:** *(To PHILLIP.)* I had to ring the doorbell with my foot. Can you imagine how unladylike that was?!

**PHILLIP:** Actually, I think I can picture it.

**NO:** Can you picture carrying that stuff in there for me? A little help would be nice. *(She crosses stage to suite, PHILLIP follows. THEY exit.)*

**MITZY:** *(To IVY.)* She’s a little cranky. Comes from being celibate for forty-seven years.

**IVY:** Ohhhh, now I see. She - - your sister is a sister as in a nun!

**MITZY:** Well, sorta. She and a few of her friends were kicked out of the Presbyterian Church last year and so they started their own cult!

**IVY:** Cult?

**MITZY:** Yeah, the Sisters of the Holy Mackerels or something like that. *(Sees coffee on tray, she crosses to table.)* Ah, you have coffee. Do you mind?

**IVY:** Please . . . help yourself.

**MITZY:** *(Takes a sip.)* Mmmmmm . . . good. Could use a lot more coffee beans though and a little less water.

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**NO:** (*Frantic, she enters in a rush, clutching the cross of her rosary.*) Mitzzy! I have sinned!

**MITZY:** Well, hallelujah!

**NO:** Dear Lord, forgive me! (*PHILLIP enters looking very confused. IVY stares at him.*) I have never before allowed myself to be vulnerably alone in a bedroom with a man. I don't know what I was thinking.

**IVY:** Phillip! She's a nun!

**MITZY:** There's a first time for everything. No, you were only in there for thirty seconds! What could he do?!

**NO:** He . . . he looked at me!

**IVY:** Phillip!

**PHILLIP:** Don't be ridiculous! Of course I looked at her.

**NO:** See!

**PHILLIP:** No, I didn't *look at you* look at you. I just looked at you. I couldn't help it, you were standing there in front of me! What could I do? Shut my eyes?!

**NO:** Don't think you can be on a first name basis with me, you . . . you, pervert!

**PHILLIP:** What?! Are you crazy?

**IVY:** Phillip!

**MITZY:** Noelle! Calm down!

**PHILLIP:** Noelle?

**NO:** Don't you call me that! My name is No. (*To MITZY.*) Now look what you've started!

**MITZY:** I'm sorry. (*To PHILLIP.*) Please call my fruitcake sister No. That is her revised name since she joined the Sisters of the Holy Mackerels.



BY GARY RAY STAPP

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