

SANCTUARY

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SYNOPSIS

RICHARD and LISA have retired early to a small Oregon town with the hope of reinventing themselves. But an injured pet, a rat in the attic, and LISA's newfound veganism are getting in the way of happily ever after.

LISA offers their guest studio to her new animal-activist friend MEG and decides to celebrate Thanksgiving sans turkey. RICHARD, in the hopes of forcing LISA to capitulate, invites their exterminator CHARLEY to Thanksgiving dinner. Tensions over food, animals, and LISA's accidental killing of a neighborhood squirrel push her over the edge, and she cuts herself.

At the hospital, LISA asks RICHARD to move out of the house and into the studio. MEG ends up living with LISA. RICHARD tries unsuccessfully to "undo" everything by conjuring up the dead squirrel. In his exile, he realizes he needs to move forward—and evolve—if he hopes to win his wife back. MEG, sensing her time with the couple is coming to end, moves on.

CAST LIST

RICHARD & LISA – Husband and wife, childless, semi-retired in their late 40s. Married long enough to finish each other's sentences but not long enough to appreciate the assistance.

CHARLEY – The critter guy. A few years short of retirement, though probably never will. Understands how to walk the uneven divide between the creatures we protect and creatures we kill.

MEG – Animal rights activist. Early 30s. With her tattooed arms and chest, she dresses to display as many as legally possible.

TIME: A week before Thanksgiving.

SETTING: A craftsman home in a small, rural Oregon town. To the left is the dining room in which several antique typewriters are prominently displayed. An open-air kitchen connects the living room with the front entryway, in which stairs lead to the second floor. The front door of the house overlooks a small porch and courtyard. On the right side of the courtyard are a few stairs leading to the front door of a guest studio.

ACT I**SCENE 1**

(RICHARD preps the dining room table. The table is set and candles lit. He holds up two glasses of wine as LISA enters. She freezes, then looks up.)

LISA

Did you hear that?

RICHARD

What?

LISA

Sounds like crying.

RICHARD

No, Lisa. I didn't hear anything. Now c'mon, our dinner's getting cold.

LISA

It's Theo. He's crying.

RICHARD

No, he's not.

LISA

He is.

RICHARD

Well, maybe he just needs to cry a bit. Look, it's time you took a break and relaxed. That is, after all, why we're here.

LISA

I can't relax. Not while he's suffering.

RICHARD

Why do you automatically assume he's suffering?

LISA

You think he wants to be alone up there? He can't stand to be apart from us.

RICHARD

But you were just up there.

LISA

I know, I know.

RICHARD

If you go back up, you'll be rewarding that behavior. He'll cry even more.

LISA

And I'm just supposed to ignore him? Like you?

RICHARD

Hey. It bothers me just as much. Just because you're super-sensitive doesn't make me any less sensitive. I hate it that he's not here with us.

LISA

You enjoy being away from him.

RICHARD

I'm not going to complain about the silence, if that's what you're getting at. But of course I miss him. The difference between us is that I know this is for his own good.

LISA

What if he hurt himself and he's crying for help?

RICHARD

Trust me. He didn't.

LISA

How can you be so sure?

RICHARD

Because I know him. He just wants attention. Now, Lisa, for the love of God, let's eat. I've made chicken piccata, which at one point was warm.

LISA

And for me?

RICHARD
(Pauses)

Damn. I might have overlooked a step.

(LISA glares at him)

You can easily pick the chicken off.

LISA
 Jesus, Richard.

RICHARD
 Is it so awful if the nasty meat touches your pasta?

LISA
 The point is that I specifically told you to prepare my plate separately.

RICHARD
 It's easier to prepare everything at once. If you were down here to assist instead of obsessing over Theo maybe I wouldn't have screwed it up.

LISA
 I have really made an effort to cut back on meat, and I just wish for once you'd actually respect my lifestyle.

RICHARD
 I respect it. Just because it's whacko doesn't mean I don't respect it.

LISA
 I'm going upstairs.

RICHARD
 Wait!
(RICHARD grabs LISA's arm.)

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I was just kidding. Look! I've got wine.

LISA
 I'm not uptight.

RICHARD
 I didn't say you were.

LISA

You were about to. I can see it in your eyes.

RICHARD

You're just under a lot of pressure.

LISA

Yes, from my husband.

(LISA takes glass. Sits. Sips. Sighs.)

RICHARD

To retirement.

(LISA jumps up.)

LISA

There he goes again.

RICHARD

Fine. Go the hell up.

(LISA exits. RICHARD sighs, then paces the room, stopping at one of the antique typewriters.)

RICHARD

(Speaking as he types each key)

U...N...D...O

(LISA returns.)

LISA

What were you typing?

RICHARD

I was trying to get the past fifteen minutes of my life back.

LISA

Okay, okay, I'm ready now. Thank you for your patience. And he's fine. Not that you care.

RICHARD

I care deeply.

LISA

Promise me you'll spend time with him tomorrow.

RICHARD

I always do. At least an hour a day.

LISA

Tomorrow I need you to spend more than an hour. I've got the volunteer thing.

RICHARD

The speeding ticket?

LISA

I was hardly speeding.

RICHARD

Why don't you just cough up the money and be done with it?

LISA

I thought it would be nice to volunteer for a change. In Seattle, we were too busy working to do anything but write checks. And now that we have plenty of time I want to give some of it back.

RICHARD

They need money too.

(LISA pauses and stares upstairs. Then looks at RICHARD as if for approval.)

RICHARD

No way. Let him be.

LISA

He just wants to see me, to know we haven't abandoned him. It's not easy keeping him locked up there. He doesn't understand. He can't understand. He hates me.

RICHARD

No, he doesn't hate you.

LISA

I'm a horrible parent.

RICHARD

You're not. You're a wonderful parent.

LISA

You mean that?

RICHARD

Yes, with all my heart. But I want you to understand something, okay?

LISA

What?

RICHARD

Theo. Is a cat.

LISA

I know.

RICHARD

I wonder sometimes.

LISA

Just be thankful we don't have any real children.

RICHARD

I am. Every day. Particularly right now.

LISA

Doesn't mean he's not miserable up there.

RICHARD

I agree. But we're just following doctor's orders. For that leg to heal, he's got to stay locked up in a place where he can't jump onto furniture, counters, our beds. So that's the best we can do. And our walk-in shower is a heck of a lot more spacious than the tiny metal cage they told us to use.

LISA

It's cold in there.

RICHARD

It's lined with my comforter. Your Calvin Klein plush throw. A half-dozen pillows. Hell, I could sleep in there.

LISA

Is that a promise?

(RICHARD smiles)

LISA

Okay, okay. I'm sorry. Where's my glass?

(LISA sits and picks up glass, and RICHARD picks up his.)

LISA

Where were we? Oh yeah. To retirement.

(RICHARD is now preoccupied with the ceiling.)

LISA

What's the matter?

RICHARD

Did you hear that?

LISA

Theo?

RICHARD

No. It's the attic. A scratching sound.

LISA

You mean on the roof.

RICHARD

Between the ceiling and the roof is the attic. Remember the crawlspace off the bedroom?

LISA

I thought that was a storage space.

RICHARD

It can be, eventually, if we ever put flooring in there. Right now it's just insulation.

LISA

We had it inspected, right?

RICHARD

We had the house inspected, sure. But not for rodents. Besides, that was during the summer. The cold could be forcing the creatures inside. I hope we don't have squirrels making a nest up there.

LISA

Maybe Barnaby's cold.

RICHARD
Barnaby?

LISA
The squirrel.

RICHARD
What squirrel?

LISA
He's a regular on the upstairs deck.

RICHARD
You've named a squirrel?

LISA
I've also sketched him a few times.

RICHARD
You've sketched a squirrel?

LISA
Not just any squirrel. Barnaby.

RICHARD
He posed?

LISA
Don't be silly. He just likes our deck for some reason. I think it's because he uses it to get to the bird feeder. Before Theo got hurt, he and Barnaby used to have staring contests through the window. Drove him nuts.

RICHARD
The squirrel or the cat?

LISA
Theo, of course.

RICHARD
How can you name a squirrel? They all look alike.

LISA
I *know* Barnaby. His tail is really short and stubby, like he lost part of it. And squirrels are highly territorial. I looked it up on Wikipedia.

RICHARD

Lisa, should I be worried about you?

LISA

Why?

RICHARD

First you give up meat.

LISA

That's normal.

RICHARD

Sure. And now you're naming squirrels? That's normal too?

LISA

It's not my fault. Nature is everywhere here, and I love it. Barnaby. The deer in our yard. Those cute little juncos in the trees. And tomorrow I begin volunteering at Wildwoods Animal Sanctuary.

RICHARD

By court order.

LISA

That was optional.

RICHARD

And what about your art?

LISA

I'm still doing my art. I just want to volunteer a bit. And that's why I need you to spend more time with Theo.

RICHARD

I already spend plenty of time with him.

LISA

An hour a day isn't enough.

RICHARD

He sleeps the other eleven hours. That is, if he's not howling incessantly.

LISA

That's why you need to be up there. I don't understand. Since the injury it's as if you've been avoiding him.

RICHARD

No, I haven't.

LISA

Is it because of that cone? The stitches in his leg?

RICHARD

No.

LISA

Is it because you witnessed the injury?

RICHARD

No, Lisa. Maybe it's my book. I've been stuck on a few chapters is all.

LISA

Promise me you'll go up there more.

RICHARD

Fine. And promise me you'll make use of the studio.

LISA

I'd rather spend time with Theo than work out there.

RICHARD

So it's just going to sit empty all winter?

LISA

So what if it does?

RICHARD

We spent an awful lot of money on this house just so you could have your own art studio. And now it's just wasted space.

LISA

We could always store your typewriters out there.

(RICHARD is distracted by the ceiling.)

RICHARD

Barnaby or not, I hope he's not getting settled up there.

LISA

You better not hurt him.

RICHARD

I won't. I'll have someone else hurt him.

LISA

Richard, I'm serious.

RICHARD

We can't have an animal living in our attic.

LISA

We have one living in our bathroom.

RICHARD

That's different. They could breed up there, chew through all the wires. We just bought this house, for Christ's sake.

LISA

I don't care.

RICHARD

It could be a family of rats. Will you have names for them too?

LISA

Rats? Oh. That's different.

RICHARD

To retirement.

(RICHARD and LISA clink glasses and both look up.)

ACT I**SCENE 2**

(Next day. Courtyard. CHARLEY is inspecting the exterior of the house. He pushes the doorbell and goes back to his work. RICHARD opens the door and studies the man.)

RICHARD

You must be Charley.

CHARLEY

That's me.

RICHARD

Thanks for coming over so quickly.

CHARLEY

That bird feeder yours?

RICHARD

It came with the house.

CHARLEY

Bad idea. And too close to the home. Attracts all kinds of creatures.

RICHARD

Like birds?

CHARLEY

Like rats, raccoons, skunks.

RICHARD

Do you want to get into the attic?

CHARLEY

Not yet. I conduct a careful, comprehensive analysis of the perimeter before I go inside. Identify all potential points of entry. The gap in that dryer vent, for starters. And that tree should be cut back. A squirrel—assuming it is a squirrel we're talking about—could drop right onto your roof and make his way inside through an eave.

RICHARD

You think it's a squirrel?

CHARLEY

More likely a rat. Neighborhood is full of them. You new in town?

RICHARD

We moved down from Seattle a few months ago.

CHARLEY

Kids?

RICHARD

No.

CHARLEY

Good.

RICHARD

You're child-free too?

CHARLEY

What? No. Kids spill food, attract rats.

RICHARD

Oh.

CHARLEY

This is a nice town, but too many people feed the animals. Deer. Foxes. Bears. Conditions them to come looking for handouts.

RICHARD

The people or the deer?

CHARLEY

I can take a look at that attic now.

RICHARD

Okay, but before we do that, my wife wanted me to ask if you use cruelty-free methods.

CHARLEY

I do.

RICHARD

You do?

CHARLEY

Absolutely. Some exterminators use poison. Not me.

RICHARD

Oh, so you use cages then.

CHARLEY

Cages? I'm no zookeeper. I use traps. Snaps the neck instantly. They don't feel a thing.

RICHARD

Oh, well, I guess we, my wife, was hoping that you could remove the creature without actually killing the creature.

CHARLEY

Like catch and release?

RICHARD

Yes. Catch and release.

CHARLEY

No can do. Not unless I set up camp in your attic. You see, the rats don't return to the nest every night. This could take a few days, a few weeks, a few months even. I'm not sure you want another stranger—me—living in your attic.

RICHARD

If my wife asks, just say your methods are cruelty free and avoid any details.

CHARLEY

You're the boss.

(RICHARD AND CHARLEY exit into the house and go upstairs.)

(LISA and MEG enter.)

LISA

Here we are. Our humble studio. It's small, but it's got a shower, a college-sized fridge, and a microwave.

MEG

You sure this is okay?

LISA

Of course. I'm not using it. I should probably move my art out of the way. Will you need help moving in?

(MEG tosses her duffel inside.)

MEG
Nope.

LISA
Is that it?

MEG
I'm not much into baggage, at least not the kind with handles.

LISA
I envy you. My life is all baggage and no handles.

MEG
It's never too late to shed some.

LISA
Where should I begin?

MEG
You've given up on animal products. That's a start.

LISA
Right.

MEG
How long have you been vegan?

LISA
How long? Oh gosh, it's hard to pick an exact date. It was more of an evolution, you know?

MEG
Most people remember a date, sometimes down to the hour, when they decided to go vegan.

LISA
I've never been good with time. My husband can vouch for that.

MEG
Is he vegan?

LISA
Hardly. He thinks I've lost my mind.

MEG
Did you tell him to go fuck himself?

LISA
Um, no. He is my husband.

MEG
But you thought it.

LISA
Of course!

(They share a laugh. MEG places a hand on LISA's shoulder.)

MEG
I'm proud of you. This is a big step you're taking.

LISA
But a necessary step, don't you think?

MEG
I don't know how any woman can drink the milk of a female cow, especially knowing how abused they are. It's not just the pumps and all the pain they undergo. It's the fact that their calves are taken from them so quickly. Cows are so maternal.

LISA
Like Abigail.

MEG
Like Abigail. When she was rescued she was skin and bones. The farmer had stopped feeding her because she had nothing left to give. No milk. No more calves. She was worthless to him, so he figured he'd just starve her to death.

LISA
How do you do it?

MEG
Do what?

LISA
Not fall apart.

MEG

Who's to say I haven't?

(MEG looks inside the studio and holds up sketch of squirrel.)

Did you do this?

LISA

Yeah, I know it's silly.

MEG

It's amazing.

LISA

You think?

MEG

Absolutely. I'm partial to those animals we ignore. Raccoons, squirrels, foxes. The ones we drive right past without so much as a glance. The road-kill animals. A few years ago me and my friends did this protest down in LA. We would lie naked alongside the highway in various poses. We all got arrested, but not before tying up traffic on the 405.

LISA

I'll bet you caused a pile-up of male drivers.

MEG

And a few females.

LISA

His name is Barnaby.

MEG

What?

LISA

The squirrel. You might see him around here. Particularly in the mornings. He loves to torture Theo.

MEG

Your cat.

LISA

Our little invalid. What are you doing for Thanksgiving?

MEG

Hiding out from the world. Drinking alone. For some strange reason, the idea of slaughtering turkeys to commemorate the slaughtering of natives doesn't appeal to me. But drinking does. I'll be fine in here.

LISA

Why don't you come over and drink with us? We've got no big plans. I'll cook up a vegan feast. You can meet Theo.

MEG

And your husband?

LISA

You can meet him too.

MEG

You should frame this.

LISA

Maybe I will.

ACT I

SCENE 3

(Later that day. Courtyard. RICHARD enters drenched in sweat from a run. He begins to stretch. He hears a noise coming from the studio. He enters.)

(RICHARD runs back into the courtyard. Dazed. MEG follows, stopping at the studio doorway, wet and barely covered by a towel.)

RICHARD

I'm sorry.

MEG

No problem.

RICHARD

I didn't know anyone was in there.

MEG

I probably should have locked the front door. Or closed the bathroom door. Or pulled the shower curtain over my naked body instead of just standing there. With you staring.

RICHARD

(Staring)

I didn't mean to.

MEG

You didn't?

RICHARD

No. I mean. I didn't mean to barge in. I was out here. Stretching. I heard the water. I thought a pipe had burst.

MEG

It very nearly did.

RICHARD

(Spins around to look at his home.)

This is my house, right?

MEG

You must be Richard.

(MEG takes a step closer, leans over to shake his hand.)

I'm Meg. Your wife said I could stay here.

RICHARD

Lisa?

MEG

Is there another?

RICHARD

No. I just. How do you two know each other?

MEG

We met at the animal sanctuary. This isn't going to be a problem, is it? My staying here.

RICHARD

No. Of course not. She wasn't using the space anyway. So, are you new to town?

MEG

I've been here a few weeks. Migrating from couch to couch. I should get dressed.

RICHARD

Me too. I mean, undressed. I mean. I need a shower.

(MEG closes her door.)

A cold shower.

(RICHARD enters the house. LISA is in the kitchen.)

LISA

I was wondering where you were.

RICHARD

I met our new neighbor.

LISA

Okay, now before you fly off the handle, I was going to tell you, but it was all very last minute. And I couldn't find you and she's so nice and I figured it was temporary anyway and—

RICHARD

It's fine.

LISA

It is?

RICHARD

It's silly to leave that studio empty when there are people out there who need a place to live.

LISA

We're talking about the same person, right? Meg?

RICHARD

The tattoos, yes.

LISA

Wow, I was worried you'd take one look at her and want nothing to do with her.

RICHARD

I'd like to think I'm a bit more open minded than you give me credit for.

LISA
How far did you run today?

RICHARD
Six miles. Why?

LISA
You sure you're not dehydrated? Hallucinating?

RICHARD
I'm perfectly fine.

LISA
Then I guess you won't mind that I invited her over for Thanksgiving.

RICHARD
I think that's a great idea. Although you might actually have to stoop to cooking a turkey after all, now that we have a guest.

LISA
Not exactly.

RICHARD
What do you mean?

LISA
Meg is vegan.

RICHARD
That's worse than vegetarian, right?

LISA
Much worse.

RICHARD
But you're not even vegan.

LISA
I am now.

RICHARD
Since when?

LISA
Since I told her I was vegan.

RICHARD

Why'd you lie to her?

LISA

It's not a lie. I was headed in that direction anyway. It's just another baby step in my journey toward a more compassionate life.

RICHARD

From meatless Mondays to veganism? That's more than a baby step. That's leaping across the Grand Canyon.

LISA

Well, I would appreciate it if you keep this all between us.

RICHARD

In other words, you want me to lie too.

LISA

No. But there's no need to mention how long I've been vegan. I don't want her to feel uncomfortable.

RICHARD

But it's okay if I feel uncomfortable?

LISA

You know, you could take this opportunity to join me.

RICHARD

Right.

LISA

It'll be fun.

RICHARD

Fun? Thanksgiving without turkey? It's anti-American. Our forefathers died to give us this day.

LISA

So did a lot of Native Americans.

RICHARD

What if I had a friend coming over who expected turkey?

LISA

For that to happen, you would first need a friend.

RICHARD

That's not fair. We only just moved here.

LISA

Four months ago.

RICHARD

I've been busy with the novel.

LISA

Whatever. The fact is, you're outnumbered on this one. So if you want turkey you're going to have to cook it yourself.

(RICHARD looks out the window at the studio.)

RICHARD

Well, at least our vegan tenant is covering our pest control expenses.

LISA

That's the other thing. Meg's more like a guest than a tenant. She has no money, so I told her she could stay for free.

(RICHARD rubs forehead. Begins walking upstairs.)

LISA

You okay?

RICHARD

Maybe I did run too far.

ACT I**SCENE 4**

(Living room. Morning. LISA is on her laptop at the counter, a mug of coffee next to her.)

(RICHARD comes down the stairs and notices that LISA is crying.)

RICHARD

You okay?

LISA

I'm fine.

RICHARD

What's wrong?

LISA

Meg emailed me an undercover video from a turkey farm in Missouri.

RICHARD

Not another one.

LISA

It's not another one. The last one was a *chicken* farm. This is turkeys. I'm going to send you the link.

RICHARD

Please, no.

LISA

Why not?

RICHARD

Because I don't like to watch those videos.

LISA

You should be watching them. They're important. What people do to these creatures. It's horrible. Despicable. You have no idea.

RICHARD

I have a pretty good idea.

LISA

And you still want a turkey for Thanksgiving?

RICHARD

Absolutely.

LISA

Well, good luck. You're outnumbered, two vegans to none.

RICHARD

I need my protein.

LISA

That's crap, and you know it. Remember the link I sent you from that *New York Times* food columnist? About how you can get just as much protein from beans and tofu, and with none of the artery-clogging cholesterol?

RICHARD

Why is it that every conversation between us gets interrupted by a public service announcement?

LISA

So now I'm preachy?

RICHARD

Preachers are preachy. You're a government agency.

(Opens fridge)

Where's the milk?

LISA

I don't drink milk anymore.

RICHARD

But I do.

LISA

Then you can go get it.

RICHARD

So I'm supposed to get my own groceries now?

LISA

Meg made a very good point the other day. She said that if women simply stopped preparing meat for dinner, most men would become vegetarians. But most women are too scared of disappointing their husbands to take a stand.

RICHARD

You appear to have cleared that hurdle without a hitch.

LISA

I know this is challenging. It's going to take some getting used to.

RICHARD

For you or for me?

LISA

For us, Richard, for us.

RICHARD

But I'm not vegan. Hell, you're not even vegan.

LISA

I am now.

RICHARD

Right. What has it been, forty-eight hours?

LISA

And I was hoping we could be on this journey together.

RICHARD

No. No fucking way.

LISA

Quiet.

(LISA looks up.)

He's crying again.

RICHARD

I know. I have ears.

LISA

It doesn't bother you?

RICHARD

Of course it bothers me. But that's what I've got noise-canceling headphones for.

LISA

You could also, I don't know, go up there and see what's wrong.

RICHARD

I was just up there. Besides, I know what's wrong. I'd be howling too if I was stuck up there. Look. It's just another month. We're almost there.

LISA

And I'm not sure how we're going to make it.

RICHARD

You just need to relax. You want to borrow my headphones?

LISA

I'm serious. First I'm uptight, and now you're saying I'm a lousy wife.

RICHARD

I wish for once in our lives you would stop living in this world of absolutes. I tell you that you're on edge, and suddenly you're the worst wife ever.

LISA

Aren't I?

RICHARD

No.

LISA

You keep saying I'm uptight. Clearly that's bothering you.

RICHARD

Okay, how about I spend the entire day in the bathroom with him?

LISA

No. I don't want that. It's just that he's getting stronger and he's wondering why he's in there.

RICHARD

Let's just let him out for a bit.

LISA

And risk hurting his knee?

RICHARD

He's already walking all around the shower on that knee. We could let him into the bedroom. You could paint while he looks out at that squirrel.

LISA

Absolutely not. We spent a fortune on that knee, and we need to follow the doctor's orders.

RICHARD

All I know is that after I had knee surgery I was told to start exercising as early as possible.

LISA

He's a cat, Richard. You had a personal trainer.

RICHARD

I wonder if we could find one who specializes in cats.

LISA

I wish I knew how he hurt his knee. It doesn't make sense. You said he was playing, right?

RICHARD

Right. I was on my laptop, and he was doing his usual crazy cat routine. First he clawed the scratching post, then he went after that roly ball thing, and then he leapt up on the counter, only he didn't quite make it.

LISA

He's fallen before. I don't understand.

RICHARD

We should have just have had children.

LISA

What's that supposed to mean?

RICHARD

Nothing.

LISA

You want children now?

RICHARD

No.

LISA

Because I offered, ten years ago.

RICHARD

I know you did.

LISA

And now you want someone younger, so you can have children? Are you saying you want a divorce?

RICHARD

No. Lisa, no. I don't want a divorce. Why does everything have to be so extreme with you? It's just—

LISA

What? What?

RICHARD

It's the cat. We've had him fifteen years now. If he were a child, he'd be in junior high. At least we'd have something to show for all the sacrifice. Something more than a scar on his leg. I thought we dodged a bullet, not having children. Remember all that talk about being free to travel the world, free of birthday parties and PTA meetings and Saturday soccer matches? Then we got the damn cat. A damaged cat that you insisted on adopting from a shelter, who has knee problems and is such a pain in the ass that no one will house-sit for us. So look at us. We're not traveling. We've now spent roughly a third of our retirement in the shower of the master bathroom. We're not any more free than those parents we always look down on. In some ways, we're actually worse off.

LISA

How are we worse off?

RICHARD

Children are the glue. They keep marriages together, give parents something to talk about over dinner. A shared purpose. A journey. For us, our jobs used to be our version of children. We'd come home late from work, and we always had something to talk about. Bosses. New products. Co-worker drama. But now we're retired. No jobs. No children. What the hell are we going to talk about for the next forty years of our lives?

LISA

You tell me.

RICHARD

We have our art, I suppose. But I haven't had any time to write lately, and you're not painting anymore.

LISA

Now who's jumping to absolutes? There are plenty things we can share over the next forty years. Like we could be vegans together.

(LISA reaches into the cupboards for a can of food.)

It's time to feed Theo.

RICHARD

It's ironic, really.

LISA

What is?

RICHARD

You want me to give up meat, but our cat is free to live the carnivore life.

LISA

That's because he is a carnivore.

RICHARD

So am I. If we were cavemen, we'd be killing animals by hand.

LISA

And where would you be watching SportsCenter? On a flat-screen cave wall? The only irony here is that we pick and choose when to pretend we're savages.

RICHARD

It's in our DNA.

LISA

Speaking of DNA, apes are basically vegan. How do you explain that one, Mr. Professor?

RICHARD

Okay, forget it. I was just trying to make a point.

LISA

You were failing to make a point.

RICHARD

Go on upstairs. Theo is hungry for his dead animals.

LISA

Fuck off.

(LISA pounds her feet on the stairs as she exits.)

RICHARD

I was joking!

(RICHARD stands and paces.)

(A knock at the door.)

(RICHARD answers. It's MEG.)

MEG

Hello, neighbor.

RICHARD

Hi.

MEG

I was wondering if you had any nutritional yeast I could borrow.

RICHARD

Nutritional yeast? I think that's Lisa's department.

MEG

Oh, right. Because you're not a vegan.

RICHARD

Because I'm not a woman.

MEG

(Takes a step toward him, smiling)

You have no idea what nutritional yeast is, do you?

RICHARD

(Shouting over shoulder)

Lisa! Meg's here.

(LISA approaches, and she and MEG hug.)

LISA

Hey there.

MEG

Your husband thinks I have some sort of vegan yeast infection.

RICHARD

How was I supposed to know what nutritional yeast is?

LISA

I'm sorry, Meg. We just ran out.

RICHARD

You mean we actually had some?

(LISA glares at RICHARD.)

MEG

Damn. I was making some popcorn, and I'm addicted to that shit.

LISA

I could send Richard out to get you some.

MEG

No worries. I'll just grind up some pine nuts.

LISA

Pine nuts I have. I'll get you some right now.

(MEG gravitates toward an antique typewriter.)

MEG

Look at this old thing.

LISA

The typewriter or my husband?

(LISA enters the kitchen.)

RICHARD

That is a Remington Rand Number Five, circa 1946.

MEG

You a writer?

RICHARD

Aspiring. I was a computer programmer for most of my life. But now I'm working on a novel.

MEG

Do you actually use these things?

RICHARD

I collect them. When I was in high school I learned to type on a manual. It brings back memories of a time when you didn't have to wonder where the nearest power outlet was. This was an amazing period in history. They were still trying to figure out what a typewriter should be. The shift bar. The roller platen. It was all uncharted territory. This was space-age innovation.

MEG

What's this one?

(LISA turns on the blender just as RICHARD begins to speak, causing him to stop and wait for her finish.)

RICHARD

This is a Smith Premier Number Two. Built in 1896. There is no shift key.

MEG

No shift key?

RICHARD

Instead, see, it has two set of keys for upper and lower case letters. And that's not the really weird thing about this model. On this typewriter, you can't see what you're typing. You have to stop and lift up the roller.

MEG

How did they do it?

(LISA turns on the blender again, and RICHARD raises his voice, only to find himself shouting as LISA turns off the blender.)

RICHARD

Practice. And faith that their fingers were touching the right places.

MEG

I know a thing or two about that.

RICHARD

(Staring at her for a moment, then recovering.)

So, my novel. It's about time travel.

MEG

Do you believe in time travel?

RICHARD

Of course. As a programmer I played with a form of time travel—the undo function.

MEG

The what?

RICHARD

You know how you select the *undo* button, and you magically go backwards. Years ago, you had just one undo, but I developed a way to have multiple undos, as many as a hundred. It's simply a memory management issue. You have to allocate enough memory at all times in case the user wishes to go backwards. Nothing is truly undone. On this typewriter, no undo key. Wite-Out is the best you'll find. It's like tuck-pointing. Filling in the gaps of that white wall. That's sort of like time travel. Your path is saved so you can always go backwards.

(LISA hands MEG a cup of ground pine nuts.)

MEG

Thank you. I had no idea your husband was such a geek.

RICHARD

Retired geek.

LISA

More like recovering. He actually says *undo* out loud.

RICHARD

As a joke.

LISA

Or a wish.

RICHARD

Okay, well, maybe. Sometimes I'd actually say *undo* because I forget. You spend all day on a computer and you can undo away any mistake. But then I run to the store to pick up some milk.

MEG

You mean soy milk?

RICHARD

Hypothetically, soy milk. So I get to the store and I realize I forgot my wallet. And then I pick up my state-of-the-art phone and I just speak into it. A simple command. Undo. And suddenly I'm transported back to the house. Keys in hand. And then I calmly pick up my wallet and head out the door.

MEG

You forget your wallet frequently?

LISA

Actually, Richard just likes living in the past.

RICHARD

No. I simply live in two worlds, simultaneously. The past and the present.

LISA

Mostly in the past.

ACT I

SCENE 5

(A few days later. Courtyard. RICHARD returns from run, panting. CHARLEY emerges from the front door.)

CHARLEY

Nice run?

RICHARD

Painful but good. I went up into the hills, to the Crooked Pine trail.

CHARLEY

Yep. I know that one.

RICHARD

I was going along, not paying much attention, and I ran right into a whole family of wild turkeys. But they didn't seem too bothered by me. The father—or mother—was enormous. And the colors of the feathers! I've never seen one in the wild before.

CHARLEY

They better be careful, with Thanksgiving tomorrow.

RICHARD

You catch anything upstairs?

CHARLEY

Nope. But it's early yet.

(Lowers voice)

By the way, I hate to speak out of turn, but your wife seems a little ... stressed.

RICHARD

How so?

CHARLEY

Well, she took one look at my lunch bag here and broke into tears. I think she thought I had a rat in the bag, so I told her it wasn't what she thought and she finally calmed down.

RICHARD

That's good.

CHARLEY

But then I told her all I had in my bag was my turkey sandwich, and she starting crying all over again.

RICHARD

It's not your fault. She's been on edge lately.

CHARLEY

I'm sorry to hear that.

RICHARD

She went vegan the other day. Her friend coaxed her into it, and I don't know what to do. We can't eat meals together anymore. So that's three times a day right there when we're pretty much guaranteed to either argue or avoid one another. I have to do all my own shopping. And whenever I eat bacon, she looks at me like I've killed a puppy.

CHARLEY

Perhaps you two need a vacation. A cruise.

RICHARD

We were supposed to be traveling the world right about now. Instead, I've got an injured, pissed-off cat in our master shower. I've got a vegan animal rights activist living in our studio, filling my wife's head with visions of blood and torture. And I've got a rat somewhere in the attic, and I'm suddenly worried my wife won't even let me get rid of it.

CHARLEY

You're not going to get rid of it. That's my job. Don't let her blame you for that one. That's all me.

RICHARD

But I hired you. And that's close enough to doing the killing.

CHARLEY

I wish I had some strategy I could offer. I have better luck figuring out insects and vermin than women.

RICHARD

The other day Lisa screams, and I run upstairs. There's this spider walking across the floor, but she doesn't let me step on it. I've got to get a glass and a piece of paper so I can capture him and set him free outside.

CHARLEY

Better watch out. Word will get around, and soon you'll have bugs across the neighborhood moving in.

RICHARD

At this point I'd welcome the company. Right now it's just me and two vegans, and it's getting a little lonely around here for a carnivore.

CHARLEY

~~And~~ I imagine you're not going to have much to be thankful about tomorrow.

RICHARD

It's funny you mention that, Charley. What are your plans for tomorrow?