

Nursery Rhymes

A new comedy by Jan Ewing



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NURSERY RHYMES

A New Play
by
JAN EWING

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CHARACTER NOTES

Chip Mangus

Chip is thirty-seven-years-old but looks about thirty. He's athletic, in good shape and health, and cuddly and lovable. He normally has an excellent sense of humor, but, when pressed, tends to revert to adolescence. He's a tennis nut, or has been, and is currently earning what money he earns as a free-lance writer. At one time, Chip has been a writer for TV series, earning approximately \$160,000 per year. When the series was cancelled, he and Irene decided he would take some time off to write a screenplay. It is in progress as the action commences. Chip is very much in love with his wife, even though he is determined not to have a child.

Irene Mangus

Irene is about thirty-five and the Vice President of Design for a medium-sized advertising agency. She is sharp and acerbic and frequently displays little sense of humor, not because she doesn't have one, but because she is so serious about her need to become pregnant. She's quite attractive, dark and extremely capable.

Marge Stevens

Marge is in her late forties and undergoing menopause. She was never "wrapped too tight," but, since the onset of meno-pause, she's become even more erratic, frequently forgetting where she is and what she's talking about. She is a dedicated mother for all that, and is extremely involved in the up-bringing of her twelve year old son, Mike. She is a comfortable woman, attractive and warm by nature. She is not an hysteric, rather, she might be (and is) described as "flaky."

Frank Stevens

Frank is also in his late forties. He's a mature man with a great deal of wit and intellect. He is also a Libra, which explains why he constantly takes the opposite side of every argument. He is very much in love with Marge and endlessly forgiving as far as her problems are concerned. He is a devoted father (of a "late" son) and completely wrapped up in his and Marge's child, even though, as a "late" child himself, he is saddled with a difficult parental situation.

STYLE NOTES

This play is supposed to be funny. It should be played with a light touch, like Noel Coward. The two main characters, Chip and Irene, argue most of the time. But, they love one another, and their arguing should never suggest otherwise. They are both intelligent, and a sophisticated sense of humor should always be evident just below the surface.

ACT I

The setting is an upper middle-class apartment in a large American city. There are four entrances: **DSR** is a small raised landing which serves the front door (this is edged with a wrought-iron railing); **DSL** is another railed landing which serves the swinging door leading into the kitchen. **USL** is a door leading to the bathroom, **USR** is a door leading into the bedroom; these last two doors face one another across a small hallway. There's a grouping of furniture **DSL** of center: a sofa, a long coffee table on which there is a large lacquered box (a "stash" box), and two easy chairs. Just in front of the kitchen landing is a round table and several straight-backed chairs. The room is filled with book-shelves and books and there is a small bar in one corner. This is a "nice" apartment, comfortable, decorated in good taste, but not aggressively chic.

As the curtain rises, **IRENE MANGUS** enters, her arms loaded with a well-used briefcase and several packages; shopping bags, etc. She's very mussed (as getting home from work is always a trauma these days) and obviously in a hurry. She rushes around the room immediately upon entering, dropping her packages as appropriate before carrying her briefcase with her into the bedroom.

As soon as Irene clears, the front door opens and **CHIP MANGUS** jogs in. He's dressed in gray jersey sweat clothes (*not* polyester) and sneakers. He's sweaty and breathing very hard, checking his *Fitbit* wristband as he runs. As soon as he enters, he jogs around the sofa once or twice, dropping a copy of some health magazine onto the coffee table as he passes, then continues jogging offstage into the bathroom.

As soon as Chip clears, Irene slinks back in. She's now dressed in something "Victoria's Secret" sleazy but still carries her briefcase. She X's quickly to the sofa, pulls a bundle of magazines out of her briefcase

("MODERN MOTHER," "PARENT," "MATURITY") and throws them all over the coffee table. She then sprawls out on the sofa in a *wanton* position and pretends to read one of the magazines.

Chip jogs out of the bathroom, a towel around his neck, and takes another round of the sofa. As he passes in front of it, he notices Irene and comes to a stop.

CHIP

Were you here last time I came around this turn?

IRENE

(Suddenly noticing?) Oh, Chip. Uh, hi. Uh, no. Uh, yes. (Coyly) Did you round this turn before? (She stretches suggestively.)

CHIP

(Resuming his round-the-sofa jogging) Irene, you are turning into the whore of Babylon. I'm not finished jogging yet.

As he runs around the sofa, Irene gets more and more overtly sexual. Chip's interest is aroused, but he tries to ignore her as he gets hornier. Finally, he stops in front of the sofa again and sprawls backward until he's sitting on the floor, leaning against the sofa. Irene plays with his hair, etc.

CHIP (Cont'd)

What are you trying to do to me, Irene? I swear, what are you trying to do? (She feels up the back of his neck until indicated.)

IRENE

(Singing suggestively into his ear) I'm trying to bake a cherry pie, Billy boy, Billy boy.

CHIP

I hope you're not planning to use your cherry, Irene. We'd starve to death.

IRENE

(Not quite as aggressive now that she's got him) I'm not cooking for anybody but you, Chip.

CHIP

Cheap, Irene. Cheap. (They kiss deeply as she tries to draw him up onto the sofa. He resists skillfully, then pulls away panting.) Damn, Irene. (More kissing. Again, he pulls back.) Damn, you are really too much lately. Too much. How was your day?

IRENE

Chaos. I/T bought new computers and everything has stopped completely.

CHIP

Did you do anything today?

IRENE

I approved a toothpaste tube and a SPDQ-Series 209, aught, point, aught, aught six form for the I.R.S.

CHIP

(Lovingly) Fraught with meaning, Irene. Our lives are fraught with meaning. Why don't you just give up all that and I'll sell your body on the Internet?

IRENE

(Feeling him up) Then we'd never have to go out. I could just be your whore.

CHIP

You're depraved, Irene.

IRENE

I loooooove it when you talk dirty, Chip.

CHIP

(Feebly resisting) Why this ... uh, sudden interest ... in sex, Irene? I mean, if Breaznell, Breaznell and Cooper have been even slightly observant during the past few weeks, they must know their Vice President of Design is turning into a Third Avenue slut.

IRENE

I looooooove it when you wear sweat pants, Chip. The smell turns me on.

CHIP

(Trying to change the subject) I had a good day.

IRENE

I can make it better.

CHIP

I finished the scene about the sports promoter in the Las Vegas motel room.

IRENE

(Nibbling his ear as she slides down next to him) What did the sports promoter do in the Las Vegas motel room, Chip?

CHIP

He did it with the girl from Word Processing.

IRENE

I always thought word processing might be fun. (She gradually slides on top of him.) This is my favorite spot, did you know that?

CHIP

Here on the rug? (He begins responding enthusiastically.)

IRENE

Haven't you noticed? We've been wearing little holes in it. There's one by the landing, and one by the bar, and ...

CHIP

(Interrupting) ... now we can wear another one right here.

They kiss. After a moment, they become passionate. Suddenly, Chip pulls away, panting, as Irene begins to pull at her clothing.

CHIP (Cont'd)

I'll be right back. (He turns and rushes toward the bedroom door.)

IRENE

(Warily) Where are you going, Chip?

CHIP

I thought you wanted to make love.

IRENE

I do.

CHIP

Well, then, I'll just get the ...

IRENE

No props, Chip.

CHIP

What?

IRENE

No props, Chip. No props, no gadgets, no stimulating little devices.

CHIP

Irene?!

IRENE

Please, Chip? Please? Just this once, let's do it, uh, missionary position, Chip. Please? Just once? You remember missionary position. It's what people did before sexual liberation.

CHIP

We had a lot of fun last time we had sex, Irene. You know we did. I mean, you said you looooved it, Irene. Loooooovrd it. (Petulant) I'm just trying to be a good lover, you know.

IRENE

Missionary position, Chip. Please? I mean, no little ... uh, things ... and no ... I mean, I'll just lie down and ...

CHIP

I'm just trying to be a good lover, Irene.

IRENE

... and you are, Chip. You are. You're a fine lover. One of the best. I did enjoy it, too. It was really wonderful. It was just so ... uh, complicated ... uh, you know, all that equipment ...

CHIP

But, you *did* enjoy it?

IRENE

Oh, yes.

CHIP

Honestly?

IRENE

(Boyishly) You're the best, Chip.

CHIP

(He hops up and down on one foot) The best?

IRENE

Absolutely.

CHIP

You really think that?

IRENE

Sans doubt, Chip. Sans doubt.

CHIP

(Exuberantly, he turns and rushes toward the bedroom door) Oh, God. I can hardly wait.

IRENE

STOP!!! (He stops) Missionary position, Chip!

CHIP

(Hopefully, pointing toward the bedroom) I'll just get the ...

IRENE

No props!

CHIP

(Still pointing) ... the ...

IRENE

(Yelling) Missionary position!!

CHIP

Not even the little one with the fringe?

IRENE

(Grimly) Just stick it in and pump, Chip!!

CHIP

(After a pause, all heat gone) I haven't finished my exercises yet, Irene. I have to do some more push-ups.

IRENE

(Angry and frustrated) Oh, Chip!?

CHIP

(Coldly) You know, you really ought to exercise yourself, Irene. Then you wouldn't be so ... nervous.

IRENE

(Trying to pull herself together) Living with you would make Buddha nervous.

CHIP

Why don't you run with me sometime, Irene?

IRENE

It's bad for the uterus.

CHIP

So what?

Irene abruptly stands, stares at Chip, then bursts into tears. She runs across and exits USL, slamming the door behind her. Chip jogs as far as the door and. knocks.

CHIP (Cont'd)

(Through the door) Hey? Reenie? Reenie? Come on, Reenie. It was just a joke. Reenie? Are you crying? (The door opens suddenly.)

IRENE

No!

CHIP

Oh, I thought you were.

IRENE

Well, I'm not. (She X's him to the sofa.)

CHIP

I just thought you were.

IRENE

What makes you think I'm crying?

CHIP

There's water running down your face. Come on, Reenie. This is dumb. It really is.

IRENE

Why are you avoiding me, Chip?

CHIP

(Amazed) Avoiding you? I'm not avoiding you, Irene. What makes you think I'm avoiding you? God, we go at it around the clock. How can you say I'm avoiding you?

IRENE

For the last six weeks, we have not once, not once, Chip, have we actually had intercourse.

CHIP

Oh, now, come on, Irene. What about Thursday? What about Thursday, huh? What about then, Irene?

IRENE

What we had on Thursday, Chip, and it was, I admit it, enjoyable, from a strictly sexual point of view, what we had on Thursday, Chip, was foreplay. That's all we have any more, Chip, foreplay. Lots and lots ... and lots of foreplay.

CHIP

(Coldly) I don't what you're talking about, Irene.

IRENE

(X'ing to the bedroom door) That's what I like about you, Chip. You're so good at picking up on subtleties. (She exits, slamming the door behind her.)

CHIP

(Calling out) Now, come on, Reenie, that's not fair. Stop stomping out and slamming the door. I feel like I'm hurlin' in the wind some of the time, Irene, I swear ...

IRENE

(Abruptly entering, carrying a bunch of helium filled, metallic "baby" balloons. She's mad.) Do you know what these are, Chip?

CHIP

(Knowing full well) Uh ... no. Absolutely not.

IRENE

They've been hanging in the bedroom for a week. Hanging over the bed. I can't imagine you haven't noticed.

CHIP

(Snapping) I sleep in there, Irene. I don't question the wallpaper.

IRENE

(Tying the balloons to the kitchen landing railing) ... and a week before that they were hanging in the closet, Chip. The closet. You mean to say you didn't notice these balloons hanging in the closet?

CHIP

(Flippantly) I thought E.T. was living in there. What in hell has this got to do with ...

IRENE

(Almost speechless) If you don't know what it has to do with, then ... then ... then ...

CHIP

(Turning away, he mumbles to himself) Shit!

IRENE

How typical, Chip. Stuck in your alimentary canal, as usual. All you really care about are your bowels and your damned pulse. I hope they stop, do you hear me? I hope you turn green from constipation and I hope your pulse stops dead. I've had it with your pulse. (Almost screaming) Physical fitness is repulsive. (She turns, runs into the bathroom USR and again slams the door.)

CHIP

Come on, Reenie. This is stupid. The body is the temple ... (She reenters suddenly and interrupts him as she X's to the sofa.)

IRENE

(Suddenly collected and very cold) You go to your temple, I'll go to mine.

CHIP

Reenie! For God's sake.

IRENE

(Abruptly whirling on him) ... and stop calling me Reenie. I hate that name. I've always hated it. It rhymes with weenie. How would you like it if I called you Chippie?

CHIP

Chip's fine. Just fine.

IRENE

It suits you so well. So California. So cute!

CHIP

(Defensive) Yeah? Well, I was lucky. They almost called me Lance.

IRENE

My mother warned me about men from California.

CHIP

Damn it, Reenie ... Irene! (Rhetorically) Shit! (He resumes exercising.)

IRENE

Don't try and make it up with me. I'm mad.

CHIP

(Ignoring her) One, two, three, four ...

IRENE

... and you know why I'm mad, don't you? You know very well why I'm mad. Don't you? Don't you know why I'm mad?

CHIP

All right. All right. Why are you mad?

IRENE

Guess! (She stalks off toward the bedroom again.)

CHIP

(Heading her off) Oh, no! No more stalking off like Sarah Bernhard making an exit. There is nothing in our marriage contract that requires me to scream through the door.

IRENE

Well, I'm surprised you remember we have a marriage contract. You haven't exactly been living up to your end of the bargain.

CHIP

(Mad) I'm been *more* than living up to my end of the bargain. I don't recall that our marriage contract requires any specific *act*.

IRENE

Well, some things are *implied*, Chip. I mean for Christ's sake, it's called a *marriage* contract, after all.

CHIP

(Still avoiding the subject) Well, I ... I just didn't feel like it. What the hell, Irene. I haven't been feeling too goddamn well lately. (He drops down for a few more push-ups.)

IRENE

(Looming over him) Oh, no? I thought all this running around in a jock strap promoted health.

CHIP

I'm healthy enough ...

IRENE

You couldn't prove it by me. You haven't entered me in six weeks, Chip. For six weeks we haven't done anything Morty Fisher and I didn't do in the back seat of his Chevy when I was fifteen.

CHIP

You mean, you and Morty Fisher had a ...

IRENE

(Interrupting grimly) Technological innovations aside, Chip, we have *not* been flirting with danger. Something's wrong. Something has to be wrong.

CHIP

(Finally letting go) All right, Irene. Yes. Something's wrong. Something is very wrong. Irene, I do not like the way you've been coming on to me for the past few weeks.

IRENE

(Amazed) Chip?! You love sex. You adore sex. I never in my life met a man who likes sex as much as you do. What is this? You're not turning middle-class on me, are you? I thought all that stuff turned you *on*.

CHIP

It does turn me on, but it's not that ... and (emphatically) I just don't want to discuss it.

IRENE

(Really mad) You are impossible. You're thirty-seven years old and about as mature as a boy in a whorehouse. When are you going to grow up, Chip? Take responsibility, for God's sake?

CHIP

(Acidly) What kind of responsibility are you talking about, Irene? You mean like, maybe, going into debt under a mountain of dirty diapers?

IRENE

(Indicating the balloons) You know exactly what those are, don't you?

CHIP

Of course, I know. There's nothing in the house to read but "Maternity Magazine." How could I not *know*?

IRENE

You knew. You knew all along. You knew exactly what I ...

CHIP

(Interrupting) It wouldn't take Miss Marple to figure out you want a baby, Irene.

IRENE

(Abruptly, she begins to wheedle) Chip, please? Please? I want a baby. I really do, Chip. I really do. God! I don't know what's happening any more. I always thought, you know (picking up a magazine), I always thought there was plenty of time ... I mean, you know (babbling), it seemed like there was so much time, and then, it just kept ... passing. Like, days go by and you go to bed and you get up and then, you know ... you're thirty-five ...

CHIP

You have to stop going into heat every time you pass a magazine stand, Irene.

IRENE

(Excitedly) I went to a baby shower last week ...

CHIP

Please? Spare me. Spare me, please. (He resumes exercising in an effort to ignore her.)

IRENE

(Romantically) I had a wonderful time. I really did ... presents and food and Ellen looked sooooo sweet.

CHIP

Ellen?

IRENE

It was her shower. She's ...

CHIP

... pregnant, and I've already lost interest.

IRENE

(Almost pleading) Please, don't change the subject. Trying to keep you on track is like ...

CHIP

(Interrupting) How old is she?

IRENE

(Confused) Who?

CHIP

Ellen.

IRENE

Well, she's twenty-four, but I don't see ...

CHIP

What could you possibly have in common with someone like that? She probably collects Barbie dolls.

IRENE

(Coldly) What we have in common is that we're both women and we both want babies. (Softening) Oh, Chip, if only you could have seen how happy she was. The gifts were so ... small ... all those little bitty lacey things ... it was just ... just ... wonderful.

CHIP

That's because the baby wasn't there yet.

IRENE

Chip!?

CHIP

Just what we need, some smelly baby.

IRENE

What makes you think babies are smelly?

CHIP

I've smelled them.

IRENE

(Near tears) You come in here every day, smelling like a sump, and you talk about babies? (She starts to cry as she collapses onto the sofa) Oh, Chip.

CHIP

Oh, now, come on, hon. Buck up. We'll have a baby ... in good time. (He drops to the carpet and pulls a jump rope out from under the sofa.)

IRENE

Good time? Good time? Chip, I'm thirty-five. There won't be a better time. There may not even be *another* time ... *period*.

CHIP

The question is, Irene, how can you find *any* time? You're constantly complaining that your agenda is full. If you have a baby ...

IRENE

(Firmly) The agenda is clear now. I can't wait much longer.

CHIP

(Jumping rope) Nonsense, there's no hurry. All you have to do is stay in shape ... seven, eight, nine, ten ...

IRENE

Stop that, damn it. You're wearing holes in the carpet.

CHIP

I thought those came from all that foreplay. Sixteen, seventeen, eighteen ...

IRENE

This is not a joke. If we're ever going to have a baby, we're going to have to do it soon. My health isn't going to hold up forever.

CHIP

Women are designed to drop babies in fields, Irene. Everybody knows that. (He drops the jump rope and goes down for a few more push-ups.) If you want to be healthy, all you have to do is exercise. What's with you, anyway?

IRENE

You are refusing to understand.

CHIP

Don't you want a Dannon body?

IRENE

I want a *pregnant* body, and that's impossible as long as all you do is hump the carpet.

CHIP

(Getting up and feeling his pulse) Well, it's academic, anyway. I've been having trouble with my ... with my ... uh, my, you know.

IRENE

With your "you know?" Your "you know?"

CHIP

I think it got frostbite while I was jogging.

IRENE

You mean, your penis? You got frostbite on your penis? The end of your penis is frostbitten?

CHIP

It's not funny.

IRENE

Well, first of all, Chip, it's a penis, not a "you know." For Christ's sake, you're a grown man. Unless ... Chip? It didn't fall off or something, did it?

CHIP

No, Irene.

IRENE

Did it turn blue?

CHIP

No more than usual.

IRENE

Let me see. Maybe I can warm it up.

CHIP

No, not now. (Dropping to the floor) I've got more push-ups to do.

IRENE

(Frustrated) Chip??!!

CHIP

One, two, three, four ... (He tries, but he's getting tired. He struggles with it until indicated.)

IRENE

Oooooohhhh!!! What am I going to do with you, Chip? Chip? (Mumbling to herself) I know what I'm going to do, damn it! (She puts her foot on his butt and stands on him.)

CHIP

(Calmly, after a moment of silent struggle) Let me up, Irene.

IRENE

No! I will not let you up. I will not. Not until you promise to stop all this huffing and puffing and talk to me.

CHIP

I *am* talking to you, Irene.

IRENE

No!

CHIP

I'm asking you to let me up.

IRENE

No!

CHIP

Irene??

IRENE

No!!

CHIP

All right.

IRENE

What?

CHIP

I said, all right.

IRENE

You'll talk to me?

CHIP

Yes, Irene. I'll talk to you.

IRENE

About having a baby?

CHIP

(Choking into the carpet) Oh, God.

IRENE

(Firmly) Chip?

CHIP

All right, all right. I'll talk to you about having a baby. Now, let me up. I'm choking to death down here.

IRENE

(She pulls back her foot and he rises) You like it down there when you're hot.

CHIP

I'm not hot now.

IRENE

No kidding!

CHIP

(Throwing up his hands, he falls, exhausted, onto the sofa.) All right, Irene. All right. Let's get this over with. In one way or another, I've been dealing with it now for six months. Long before you turned into the Terrytown tart, you were hinting around all over the place. Do you think that makes one anxious to screw, Irene? It does *not* make one anxious to screw. Not at all, Irene. In spite of ... uh ... in spite of ...

IRENE

... in spite of one getting horny at the drop of one's jock strap?

CHIP

(Topping her) You're not hearing me, Irene. I've gone to bed with this goddamn baby for weeks, now. I've gone to bed with this goddamn baby and I've gotten up with this goddamn baby and I don't even *want* this goddamn baby. I want some peace, Irene. Peace. Do you hear me? That is what I want. I want some peace.

IRENE

(After a moment of disgusted silence) Are you through goddamning now, Chip? Can we discuss this like adults now? I mean, all that's at stake here is our marriage, for Christ's sake.

CHIP

As long as you understand.

IRENE

I'm trying to understand, Chip. I'm trying. Tell me why you don't want a baby.

CHIP

There are a thousand reasons.

IRENE

Just one, Chip. That's all I want ... one *solid* reason.

CHIP

Well, the ... the country's falling apart, and I don't think having a baby's a good idea right now. I mean, I don't think it's a good idea *right now*. There's going to be a trade war, and lots of people may be out of work.

IRENE

That's not a problem, you know that. Money isn't a problem. I made a hundred-and-thirty-five-thousand last year, and you made ... uh, twenty ... well, anyway, money's not a problem. Next?

CHIP

All right, Irene. Rub it in. Go ahead. Rub it in my face.

IRENE

(Irritated) I am *not* rubbing it in your face. I am *not*. We went over all that when we decided you'd take this time off.

CHIP

Well, a man likes to know he can support his wife, Irene ... and his child ... (aside) if somebody slips up and he has one. Anyway, dropping from a hundred-and-eighty-thousand a year to less than twenty would make anybody nervous.

IRENE

Chip, they cancelled the series. They cancelled the series, Chip. It's wasn't your fault that Kevin couldn't wait any longer.

CHIP

A man likes to know he can support his family, Irene.

IRENE

There aren't any guarantees, Chip. Never. Besides, I have no doubt as to your ability to earn money. None. You have made a great deal of money over the years, Chip. Since we're been married, you've made a lot of money. Now, it's my turn to do that while you finish your screenplay. If something happens to me, I've no doubt at all that you'll do whatever is necessary. Next objection?

CHIP

(She's right so he's irrational) Oh, sure, Irene. Sure. I know what you want. I know. You want to do it all! You want to be the breadwinner and the homemaker and the mother. You don't even need me.

IRENE

(Grimly) Yes I do, Chip. Once, anyway.

CHIP

Then what are you going to do, Irene? Eat me? Like some sort of spider? Well, you're not getting it from me, Irene ... (spitefully) Reenie! Reenie, Reenie, Reenie!

IRENE

(Equally spiteful) That's what you think, Chippie, Chippie, Chippie.

CHIP

Reenie, Reenie, Reenie!

IRENE

Chippie, Chippie, Chippie!!

CHIP

If you want a baby, Irene, you'll have to be artificially inseminated, like some kind of cow.

IRENE

(Aghast) Chip??!!

CHIP

(Firmly) ... or get another lover.

IRENE

I don't have a lover now.

CHIP

(Suddenly quieter) Well, I've been trying, Irene. If somehow you aren't satisfied with the service, it's certainly not my fault.

IRENE

I suppose it's mine? I attack your body every chance I get (yelling) and all you do is push-ups.

CHIP

I have to keep in shape.

IRENE

Shape? Shape? For what do you have to keep in shape? Tell me, Chip. Tell me. For what do you have to keep in shape? You trying out for the Mets, Chip? Is Fight Club meeting in the, basement every Tuesday night? Why, Chip? Tell me. Just why do you have to keep in shape?

CHIP

I'm concerned about my health.

IRENE

Concerned? Chip, nobody takes their pulse thirty-five times a day. You take it every time you burp. You're ... you're ... my God ...

CHIP

I just want to be sure everything's all right.

IRENE

Last week you thought you found cancer on your thigh. Then you rubbed it and it came off. You're bloody pathological.

CHIP

I don't like it when you're aggressive.

IRENE

You used to like it. You liked it a lot.

CHIP

Well, now you want a baby and I don't like it any more.

IRENE

(Patiently) Chip? Chip, Chip, Chip. I'm on the pill, Chip. I'm on the pill. At least we could screw, Chip. (Abruptly softening) At least we could make love.

CHIP

(Deliberately) How do I know you're on the pill?

IRENE

(Angry, she grabs her purse) Do you want to see them? To count them? (Rummaging in her purse) Here! I have them right here. Right here, Chip. (She pulls out her BCP's and holds up the card.) See. Ortho Novum. Count them. It's the 16th day of the month. Count them. Go ahead. Count them. Go ahead.

CHIP

I'll take your word for it.

IRENE

(Softening) Then, why, sweetheart? Why? You know I wouldn't stop taking my pills without telling you. You know I wouldn't. Is that why ...

CHIP

(That's obviously why. He interrupts.) Stranger things have happened.

IRENE

Only in your screenplays.

CHIP

(Yelling) This isn't fiction, Irene. It's the real thing. Not some Gothic romance. You're talking about a baby. A baby is a human being. It'll turn into somebody ... with needs ... it'll need us! What in hell are we going to do then?

IRENE

God forbid anybody should need you, Chip. That would really be tragic.

CHIP

Why can't we just go on like we are?

IRENE

Everybody's having a baby.

CHIP

Oh, that's terrific reasoning, Irene. Terrific. Just because they're spawning like salmon in Denver, you want to tie us down for the next thirty years. Just once in your life can't you resist doing what everybody else is doing?

IRENE

(She rises and begins straightening up the apartment.) What I'm going to do is clean the apartment. Everybody does it, but I'm going to do it just the same.

CHIP

This is my week to do the cleaning and I already cleaned today. What is this? A hint? Are you calling me a slob?

IRENE

Take it any way you want. Maybe I'm just being subtle. Heaven forbid I should be too aggressive.

CHIP

Oh, sure, subtle. Six thousand baby books in five rooms, and you're being subtle. Shit! I've jogged a thousand miles and the only time I ever got hurt was when I tripped over the "Layman's Guide to Natural Childbirth."

IRENE

(Almost screaming) Well, don't bother to read it because you are sure as hell no layman.

CHIP

Oh, that's really funny, Irene. That's really a scream.

IRENE

(She straightens up the room) I don't have time to play "can you top this," Chip. I have things to do.

CHIP

Tell me something. Just tell me. How in hell do you propose to take care of a baby and keep your hot shit job? You know, the one that made you a hundred-and-thirty-five grand last year? You can't have a baby. You wouldn't have time to feed it.

IRENE

(Through gritted teeth) There are lots of ways, Chip.

CHIP

Go on, smart ass. Go on. Just tell me how you'd feed it. Huh? Just tell me. How would you feed it?

IRENE

(Smugly) I could get a "breast-milk expresser." I could do that. A lot of working women do, you know. A lot of them do.

CHIP

(Gleefully) Ah, ha! A "breast-milk expresser." Let's see. Just what is that? Just what is that thing, Irene? Let me see, didn't I read something ... (he snaps his fingers), oh, yes. A "breast-milk expresser." That's a milking machine, isn't it, Irene? That's what it is. A milking machine? Oh, boy. That is really low, Irene. That is really bovine. Boy, how bovine can you get, Irene?

IRENE

Chip!?

CHIP

That is one hell of a *bovine* thing to do.

IRENE

(Extremely hurt, she cuts him off) All right, Chip. All right!

She abruptly X's from the sofa area to the kitchen door. He follows her with the intent of cutting her off. She reaches the door, pauses and turns as he calls out.

CHIP

(X'ing to her) Don't you walk out of here. Don't you slam the door in my face again, Irene. I swear, I'll ... I'll ...

IRENE

(Haughtily) This door doesn't slam. This door swings!

Irene sweeps through the door, giving it a mighty swing. It slams against the living room wall, barely missing Chip.

CHIP

(Bellowing) Irene? Irene?

There's no response. Chip turns and stalks off into the bathroom. As he clears, Irene re-enters carrying a tray with coffee pot, sugar bowl and creamer. She places it on the coffee table. Once established, Chip yells through the closed bathroom door.

CHIP (Cont'd)

Damn it, Irene. There's nothing in here but maternity magazines!

IRENE

(Yelling back) What's wrong? Won't your bowels move without "Strength and Health?"

Irene exits into the bedroom. Chip grumbles his way onstage to the coffee table where he paws through the magazines there, looking for something to read. He has removed his sweat clothes and is wearing a jock strap and a tee-shirt. Irene enters, combing her hair. She is now dressed in something elegant and "Victorian."

IRENE (Cont'd)

No wonder your "you know" gets frostbite. Is that all you wear under your sweat pants?

CHIP

(Ignoring her comment) Where's my goddamn "Sports Illustrated?"

IRENE

I assume you'll put something on before our guests arrive? I mean, is that too much to ask? A little conversation instead of your bouncing butt?

CHIP

Guests? What guests?

IRENE

(Completely under control) Frank and Marge. (She exits back into the bedroom.)

IRENE

Oh, great, Irene. Just great. Frank and Marge who? Frank and Marge Axe Murderer? Frank and Marge Jewel Thief? Who are they, Irene?

IRENE

(Re-entering) I met Marge at Ellen's baby shower.

CHIP

(Groaning) At the shower?

IRENE

At the shower.

CHIP

(Mumbling) Oh, God!

IRENE

If you try, I'm sure you can be civil long enough to drink two cups of coffee.

CHIP

Do these total strangers have kids?

IRENE

They have a boy ... one.

CHIP

They're not bringing the smelly little brat, are they?

IRENE

Their child is *not* one year old. They have one child. He's twelve.

CHIP

They're not bringing the smelly little brat, are they?

IRENE

(Getting mad again) No, they're not bringing their child, and, anyway, I'm sure he's very well behaved.

CHIP

Who, Frank? I hope so.

IRENE

(Almost hysterical) You know what I mean. Oh, go ... get something on!!

During the following Chip moves in and out of the bedroom as he dresses in casual sports clothes. Irene gathers her "good" coffee service from one of the bookcases and carries them to the coffee table.

CHIP

Mike! Ugh! Probably some tennis brat. What fun it's going to be, an evening in kiddie world, hearing how much two total strangers are spending on tennis lessons.

IRENE

(Getting fed up) Oh, shut up.

CHIP

Why'd you ask these total strangers here to destroy my evening, Irene? Are these total strangers going to have a baby, too?

IRENE

No.

CHIP

I see. Then it can only be that these total strangers are coming here to work on me. Is that it, Irene? Are these two total strangers coming here to work on me?

IRENE

(Suddenly quiet) You know, you're only thirty-seven years old and you're already a miserable old man.

CHIP

(Quietly and deliberately) Well, if that's the case, since you're only two years younger than I am, you are too old to have a baby. Case closed. (He should be dressed by now.)

IRENE

That was a cheap shot, Chip.

CHIP

Face it, Irene. You're over the hill.

IRENE

I am *not* over the hill. Are *you* over the hill?

CHIP

We're not discussing me.

IRENE

Don't be so damned smug. Need I remind you about that "over thirty-five" tennis tournament you were afraid to enter.

CHIP

(Frigidly) We're not discussing me.

IRENE

I'm discussing you, and, as I recall, you didn't enter that tournament because you were afraid everybody would find out you were thirty-five. Isn't that right, Chip? Isn't that why you didn't enter that tournament?

Chip is on his feet. During the following, he should work his way nearer to the front door.

CHIP

What has that got to do with babies?

IRENE

I thought you wanted to talk about age, Chip. Well, if you want to talk about age, we'll talk about age. What about last ...

CHIP

I'd rather talk about babies.

IRENE

I see. You want to talk about my age. Well, that's clear enough. You want to talk about age as long as we talk about my age.

CHIP

(Exploding) You're the one who's worried about getting old, Irene. I can be a father until I'm ninety.

IRENE

(Angry) Yes, I admit it. I have a biological problem.

CHIP

You have an illogical problem.

IRENE

Word games, Chip. Word games. I will not be put off. There is nothing illogical about me having a baby. Nothing. There are all kinds of tests these days. Amniocentesis ... lots of things.

CHIP

You think doctors can work miracles, Irene. They can't. Most of medicine is still in the middle ages. (Chip should be near the door.)

IRENE

(Indignant and loud) I am not middle aged. I want a baby. (The doorbell rings)

CHIP

Jesus, Irene. What'd you do? Plant them outside until their cue? (The bell rings again. Chip grumbles as he heads toward the sofa.) Never any goddamn peace.

IRENE

Don't bother yourself, I'll get it.

Irene resolutely marches to the door and pulls it open. **MARGE STEVENS** enters and sweeps past Irene to **DSC**. She is immediately followed by her husband, **FRANK STEVENS**. The two of them continue what is apparently a running argument.

MARGE

(Flighty, not hysterical) ... if anything happens, I will never forgive you, Frank. Never, never, never, never, never. Now, you remember I said that.

FRANK

(Wearily) What can happen, Marge? The kid's twelve years old, for Christ's sake. He's alone in the apartment. What could happen? Nothing's going to happen.

MARGE

I just don't like leaving him alone, Frank. I mean, I really don't like it. Anything might happen. A fire, burglars, kidnappers ...

FRANK

(Nervously aware of Irene and Chip) Marge?

MARGE

... and he's all alone, Frank. I hate leaving him all alone. Whatever is he going to do all evening all alone?

FRANK

(Dryly) He's twelve, Marge. I'm sure he's found lots to do when he's alone.

MARGE

(Suddenly aware of her surroundings) Uh, Frank? Where are we, Frank? I've never been here before. (Looking around) This is a totally strange apartment. Frank? Where? (She suddenly notices Irene.) Oh!

CHIP

(To himself) Why me, God? Why me?

MARGE

(In happy recognition) Irene?

IRENE

(Tentatively) Marge?

MARGE

Yes, of course. That's where we are. Irene! We're at Irene's, aren't we? (Laughing) I knew we were supposed to be someplace like that, but I'd forgotten ... uh ... (smiling and holding out her hand) Irene. How nice to see you again so ... soon. How nice.

IRENE

Uh, we planned it, didn't we, last week at the shower? I mean, you're here, and ...

MARGE

(Dismissing it with a wave of the hand) Of course, darling. Of course. Now I remember. Of course, I remember. (She X's to the sofa and collapses) Oh, dear. It has been a trying day. *Such* a day. You know, sometimes I rush around at such a pace that I can't even remember where I am. (Suddenly confused again) Where am I? Oh. (Laughing) Irene. Of course. That's where I am. I do know where I am. I mean, I know exactly where I am. (They all stare at Marge in disbelief.)

FRANK

(After a beat) Are you going to introduce us, Marge, or should I just ignore everybody for the rest of the evening?

MARGE

Of course, Frank. Of course I'm going to introduce you. Where do you think I was brought up, Frank? In a tree?

FRANK

(To himself) Sometimes one wonders.

MARGE

(Rushing on) Irene, this is my husband, Frank Stevens. Frank, this is Irene Mangus. Yes, this is Irene ... (she sees Chip and rises) and you must be, of course. You must be Chip! (She advances on him, hand outstretched. He backs up.)

CHIP

Yeah, I'm Chip. Well, it's been nice. It really has, but, I'm afraid I have lots to do this evening. Lots to do. Irene should have remembered how much I have to do, and ... uh ... (looking for an escape) well, I guess I'll just go off and ... uh, uh, do it. (He turns and rushes into the bathroom.)

MARGE

(As she watches Chip flee) Oh, dear. He is a tough nut, isn't he?

IRENE

(Warmly) He'll be out soon enough. All there is to read in there is "Modern Maternity."

FRANK

I take it the campaign is underway?

IRENE

Campaign?

MARGE

Frank thinks everything that happens is the result of some conspiracy.

FRANK

(He moves behind the sofa and leans down to kiss his wife on the cheek) Well, Isn't it? (To Irene) I mean, didn't you plant "Parent" magazine all over the house as part of some plan? Isn't that why we're here? As part of some public relations ploy glorifying the delirious joys of late parenthood?

IRENE

(She motions him to take a seat as she sits next to Marge) Well, I suppose you're right. It just sounds so ... so ...

FRANK

Calculated? Unfair? Devious? All sorts of words leap to mind.

IRENE

(Dubiously) I thought you were in favor of ...

MARGE

Don't pay any attention to him, dear. Frank's a wonderful father. He's just as foolish over Mikie as I am. Foolisher, if there is such a word.

FRANK

There isn't, and would you please call him Mike. The boy's name is Mike. Mikie sounds like some kind of tennis shoe.

MARGE

(Leaping up and pacing) Criticize, criticize, criticize. I swear, Frank, one of these days I'm going to ... going to ... well, I'll figure it out when I do it.

FRANK

(Sharply) Marge?

MARGE

(Suddenly very calm, she X's back and seats herself on the sofa again.) I'm fine. Just fine. Don't worry. I'm fine. Fine.

IRENE

(Perplexed) Uh, can I get you anything? I mean, is there anything you, uh, need?

MARGE

No, I'm fine. Really ... uh... fine ... uh ... now. (She smiles blandly.)

FRANK

Marge is prone to flights to fancy.

IRENE

(Very perplexed) "Fancy?" Well, uh, I hadn't noticed ... until right this minute.

MARGE

Hadn't noticed what, dear?

IRENE

(Interrupting) Would anyone like coffee?

MARGE

Oh, please. Yes. That would be lovely.

Irene sits and pours. This coffee drinking should continue as long as it's appropriate to the action.

IRENE

Frank?

FRANK

Do you have decaf?

IRENE

Well, actually, no.

FRANK

Feel guilty about it?

IRENE

Uh, no.

FRANK

Just asking.

IRENE

(Staring at him) Well, yes, of course. Now, uh ... (raising her voice so Chip can hear) If Richard Simmons would just come out of the reading room ...

MARGE

Richard Simmons? Is Richard Simmons in there? Oh, my. How wonderful. (She rises) Richard Simmons, right here in this very house. Let me get him. Let me. (She rushes into the bathroom) Richard? Richard? Come out now, Richard.

As soon as she's offstage, we hear an outraged roar from Chip, then scuffling noises from the bathroom until indicated.

IRENE

(Calling out) Uh, Marge? Marge? Richard Simmons isn't really in there! Marge? (To Frank) Is she all right?

FRANK

It's debatable.

IRENE

I mean, when we met at the shower, she seemed so ... so ...

FRANK

Normal?

IRENE

(Embarrassed) That's such an awful word ...

FRANK

Well, Marge has always been somewhat ... uh, flighty, and now, well ... (he shrugs) she's going through the "change."

IRENE

The "change?"

FRANK

Yes.

IRENE

(Amazed at his choice of words) The "change?"

FRANK

Yes.

IRENE

How's your "you know?"

FRANK

I beg your pardon.

IRENE

(Charging ahead) Never mind. You mean she's going through menopause? Marge is presently going through menopause?

FRANK

(Nodding) She's fine most of the time. It's just that she's ... well, let's just say, sometimes she's ... she's, uh, erratic ...

MARGE

(Reentering calmly) Richard Simmons isn't in there. (She X's back to the sofa, sits and picks up her coffee cup.)

CHIP

(Following immediately, Chip is furious as he fumbles with his pants, trying to zip them up.) Of course, Richard Simmons isn't in there. Neither is Roseanne or Jerry Seinfeld. Irene, do I have to put up with this?

MARGE

I'm so disappointed.

FRANK

Come on, Marge. You knew Richard Simmons wasn't in there.

One can always hope.

MARGE

I mean, a guy can't even take a good ...

CHIP

Chip!!??

IRENE

... without some crazy "broad" crashing through the door ...

CHIP

(Sternly) Chip, Marge is our guest!

IRENE

Does that mean we have to share the pot?

CHIP

We used to exercise together every morning, you know.

MARGE

(Yelling at Marge) I've never seen you before in my life.

CHIP

She means Richard Simmons.

IRENE

I object to the word "broad."

FRANK

But, I don't seem to see him on the tely any more. I think he's dead.

MARGE

I really do object to the word "broad."

FRANK

(Almost screaming) All right, all right, I apologize. Broad? Bitch? What the hell difference does it make? I was sitting on the goddamn crapper.

CHIP

My God. What is going on here?

IRENE

(Sharply) People, people, people? (Suddenly calm) We're not getting off to a good start, are we? (Everybody stares at her. Silence prevails.) There. Now, isn't that better? I mean, now everybody's quiet and we can get on with our discussion in a civilized, adult manner.

MARGE

IRENE

(Taken aback) Uh ... well ... uh...

CHIP

(To Marge) What planet are you from?

IRENE

(Snapping) Oh, Chip!

CHIP

Don't snap, Irene.

IRENE

(Grimly, as she makes a visible effort to calm down) All right. All right. But, Marge is ... uh, absolutely right. Let's all take a seat and get on ...

CHIP

Damn right, I'm gonna take a seat. (He heads toward the front door.) I'm going to take a seat in the first goddamn cab that comes down the street.

IRENE

Chip? If you go, don't come back!

Realizing she means it, Chip stops abruptly. No one says a word. Finally, he turns around and X's to the sofa, taking the one empty chair. Only Irene is still standing.

CHIP

All right, Irene. I'll stay. For you, Irene. For you. But, don't expect me to agree to anything.

IRENE

(Pulling herself together) Just listen. Please? That's all I want. That's all in the world I want. Marge and Frank have been kind enough to come over and ...

CHIP

(Mumbling) "Kind?" That's an interesting choice of words.

MARGE

Why don't you want a child?

CHIP

Boy, the flake gets right down to it, doesn't she?

FRANK

I'll overlook that because I know this is a difficult subject and you've probably eaten breakfast, lunch and dinner with it for months.

IRENE

That's all he's been doing, eating!

FRANK

(To Irene) Uh, well, that doesn't excuse his manners (to Chip) and it certainly doesn't excuse calling a person you don't even know a "flake."

CHIP

(He takes a deep breath before continuing) Okay. You're right. (He turns to Marge.) We got off to a bad start. I'm sorry I called you a "flake." I was out of line.

MARGE

Well, sometimes I am flaky, isn't that right, Frank?

FRANK

(Sighing) Yes, Marge. I do admit that. Sometimes you are certainly flaky.

MARGE

(To Chip) But, you still haven't answered my question. Why don't you want a baby?

IRENE

He's still pretending he's fourteen years old.

MARGE

I asked Chip.

CHIP

Yeah, Irene. She asked me. Butt out.

IRENE

(Snapping) Then, answer her, for Christ's sake. Say something. God. Let's get on with this.

MARGE

Why don't you want a child?

CHIP

(Rising and pacing) Well, it's ... it's ...

IRENE

He expresses himself so well.

CHIP

Damn it, Irene ...

FRANK

Can I say something?

IRENE

That's why you came over, isn't it?

FRANK

You're not going to like it.

IRENE

(Grimly) Try me.

FRANK

Well, it seems to me that any kind of meaningful discussion is impossible as long as you're so hostile.

IRENE

(Taken aback) As long as *I'm* hostile.

CHIP

(Suddenly seeing Frank as an ally) Yeah, Irene. What about that? I mean, you know, meaningful discussion is impossible as long as you're so hostile ... (X'ing to the sofa, he addresses Frank) Say, would you like a joint or something?

FRANK

No, but I could use some Scotch, if you have some.

CHIP

Comin' up. (He X's to the bar.)

FRANK

A little water?

CHIP

No problem.

During the following, Chip mixes a drink for Frank, then X's to the sofa. When Frank has his drink, Chip opens the lacquered box and takes out his "stash." He rolls a few joints and smokes one.

IRENE

I don't know how you can say *I'm* hostile. *I'm* the one who wants the baby. *He's* the one who's hostile.

FRANK

Every time he opens his mouth, you put him down.

CHIP

(Smugly) You see, Irene? You see? Every time I open my mouth you put me down. Everybody notices.

IRENE

Now, just a minute ...

MARGE

Yes, we have to be fair. I'm sure the reason goes a long, long way beyond Irene's hostility.

IRENE

(Angrily, to Irene) I am *not* hostile.

MARGE

Now, Irene, dear. You're just going to have to learn to relax. I mean, really relax. (She "directs" Irene) Take a deep breath. That's right. Now, breathe out slowly. (Irene's breath explodes outward in amazement) There. That's right. See? I do that all the time and it does wonders for me. Now, I'm not saying you're hostile and Chip isn't ...

IRENE

... because, God knows, Chip's hostile.

CHIP

We're talking about you, Irene, not me.

MARGE

(To Irene) Well, what can you expect? If the two of you are anything at all like ... uh ... (mumbling) like ... uh ... whassisname ... and me ...

FRANK

Frank?

MARGE

... uh, yes, like Frank and me ... well, you've probably been going around and around and around and around and around with this for months.

CHIP

(Taking a toke on his joint) Since 1947, I think.

MARGE

So, you're probably *both* hostile. Now, isn't that true? Chip? Irene? Aren't you both just a little hostile? Wouldn't you say you were both just the teesiest, weensiest, tiniest little bitty bit hostile?

CHIP/IRENE

(Simultaneously, after looking at one another for a moment) No!

FRANK

This is clouding the issue.

MARGE

(To Chip) Well then, why don't we start again? Why don't you just answer my question? Just ... uh ... what? Uh ... when ...

FRANK

Why don't you want kids?

MARGE

Yes, that's it. That's it exactly. Just why don't you want to have children, Chip?

CHIP

Because.

IRENE

Oh, God.

FRANK

That's no answer.

CHIP

(Snarling) Well, I just don't, that's why. Does there have to be a reason for everything? I just don't. (To Frank) Why didn't *you* want kids? I mean, your kid's only twelve, so you must have waited long enough. Surely it hasn't been so long you've forgotten.

FRANK

It was different with me.

CHIP

Oh, sure. Different. You were different. Well, I guess that sums it up, uh, Irene. Frank was different. That explains everything.

FRANK

My father was fifty when I was born. He died when I was eleven. I grew up without him and I didn't want to put any kid of mine through that.

IRENE

(Sympathetically) Oh, Frank.

FRANK

My mother's almost ninety. She lives in a nursing home, and if you don't think *that* isn't a responsibility ...

MARGE

(She rises and paces nervously) Oh, Frank, pain, pain, pain, burden, burden, burden. I swear, you sound like a plot from "The Days of Our Lives." (To Irene) It was selfishness, that's what it was. Frank didn't want a baby because he was selfish and afraid to grow up.

FRANK

Marge!?

MARGE

Well, it's true. You were. You just didn't want to have to share.

FRANK

(Gritting his teeth) All right, Marge!

IRENE

(A light dawns) That's what's wrong with Chip!

CHIP

What?

IRENE

You're afraid to grow up. I never thought of it that way before, but you're afraid to grow up. You don't want to have a baby because you don't want to have to share.

CHIP

That's the dumbest thing I ever heard.

IRENE

What I said before is true. You are pretending you're fourteen years old.

CHIP

(Hesitantly) Now, uh, well, I wouldn't ... uh, say that.

IRENE

Of course. It's true. How could I have been so stupid?

CHIP

You were in analysis too long, Irene.

IRENE

(Gleefully) It's true, it's true, it's true. You are afraid to grow up. You are afraid to grow up. You are afraid to grow up.

CHIP

(Getting angrier) You have absolutely no evidence upon which to base that.

IRENE

You're a grown man and you say "shoosies," Chip.

CHIP

That's not fair, Irene.

IRENE

... and what about Grand Theft Auto, Chip? And Candy Crush ... (struggling) and Space Invaders and Bug Crossing the Road, or whatever the hell the name is?

CHIP

Irene?

IRENE

(Madder) ... and you never look for anything. Every time you lose a sock you stand in one place and scream "Irene? Irene?" and then I have to stop what I'm doing and find it, and it's always on your chair. Practically every time, its right there on your goddamned chair.

CHIP

(Screaming) Irene?

IRENE

(Triumphantly) ... and here's the clincher, Chip. Here is the absolute, non-refundable, all American, red-blooded clincher.

CHIP

(Stricken) Irene? What are you doing?

IRENE

(Pointing her finger at him) Every spring, Chip ... every goddamn spring, you spend at least three weeks getting ready for high school football practice.

CHIP

(Angry) I do not!

IRENE

You do too!

CHIP

Do not!

Do too! IRENE

Do not! CHIP

Do too! IRENE

Do not! CHIP

IRENE
You do too! You sit up and push up and pull up and jump up and pump up. All you haven't been doing is getting it up!

CHIP
(Really angry) That's not true, Irene. That's not true. It isn't made out of iron, you know, and it's been ready for you every time you wanted it, Irene, every time you wanted it ... about sixty times a goddamn day.

IRENE
(Interrupting) You *know* what I mean.

CHIP
(He's so mad he has trouble getting this out.) What in hell do you think you're doing? Do you think I'm going to just stand here and let some mid-Victorian artifact babble a load of pseudo-psychological, analytical, goddamn psychiatric, analytical, psycho soo-eeological *bullshit* at me, Irene? Do you really think that, Irene? Do you really think I'm going to do that? Do you? Do you? (They stare pugnaciously at one another until Marge breaks the silence.)

MARGE
What a nice beginning.

FRANK
(Clearing his throat) We seem to be making progress.

CHIP
(Incredulous) What?

FRANK
We seem to be making progress.

CHIP

Well, we'll just see about that progress. We'll just see about that thing.

During the following, Chip goes to one of the book-cases and, after making a considerable mess, pulls out a tattered manila folder.

CHIP (Cont'd)

Where's my file? Where's my goddamn file?

MARGE

(Trying to be helpful) Maybe it's in your chair?

CHIP

(Furious) It is *not* in my chair. You see, Irene? You see what you've done. These people think I'm a nut case.

IRENE

Imagine that.

FRANK

We're getting off the subject again.

CHIP

Subject? You want to stay on the subject? All right. Boy, are we gonna stay on the subject. There is gonna be some subject staying on here. (He finds the folder) Ha! Here we are. Here is the goddamn subject. I am going to throw the subject in your face and then I am going to laugh. Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Do you hear me Irene? Now, we are going to find out what the subject really is, and, boy, am I going to laugh. (He X's back to the sofa, sits and spreads his file out on the coffee table.) Right in the face of you devotees of the diaper and dimpled butt-cheek. Are you ready?

MARGE

(Noting all the paper he's spread on the table) I must say, you do seem well prepared. Don't you think so, Frank. He's very well prepared. Frank, I think he's better prepared than you were.

FRANK

Let's get on with it.

IRENE

(To Chip) What are you doing?

CHIP

(Reading from one of the pages in the file) All right, here we go. Did you know, Irene, that it's twice as likely a baby will be born with a birth defect if the mother is over forty?

IRENE

Oh, God. Is this what we're going to do now? We are actually going to sit here and listen to a rehash of Olivia Pope Meets the Baby Monster? I mean, is that actually what we're going to do, Chip?

CHIP

Do not change the subject. What we are doing is facing the facts, and the facts state that it is twice as likely a baby will be born with a defect if the mother is over forty.

IRENE

I'm not forty, Chip. I'm not forty. That's why I want a baby now, so the problem won't have to be faced when I'm forty.

MARGE

(Wistfully) Forty's not so bad.

CHIP

(Persevering) ... and it's *five times* as likely if she's over forty-five.

IRENE

Shut up, shut up, shut up.

CHIP

(Shuffling through his papers) All right, then, how about this? The average couple spends nearly fifty-five hundred dollars before the baby arrives. Before it even arrives, Irene. It has to have clothes, little bitty furniture, (viciously) and you'll need a milking machine . .

IRENE

(Holding her hands over her ears) Stop it, just stop it.

FRANK

(Nodding approvingly) That's fresh.

CHIP

(Going on) ... and it'll cost another thirty thousand the first year ...

IRENE

Please ...

CHIP

(Aggressively) Oh, sure. Please, she says, please. It's just hipsy pipsy to "shaft Chip" all evening, but when I go on the offensive, what happens? It's "Please." "Please."

FRANK

He has a point.

IRENE

(To Chip) You're being unfair.

CHIP

Yes, yes, you're right. Absolutely. I'm being unfair. (He cackles evilly) I'm being unfair. How's this for unfair? (He picks up another paper.)

IRENE

Please

CHIP

It will cost us ... between ninety-five and two hundred and thirty-four thousand dollars ... that's thousand, not hundred ... two hundred and thirty-four thousand dollars to raise this brat to age eighteen, and that doesn't even include college. Do you know how much it's going to cost to send him to college, Irene? Do you know how much that's going to cost?

IRENE

I don't care.

CHIP

Ninety-thousand dollars, Irene. A year.

IRENE

Shut up, shut up, shut up.

CHIP

It's going to cost ninety-thousand fuckin' dollars, if we even live until 2035.

IRENE

(Really screaming) What are you talking about money for? What does money have to do with anything? Money has nothing to do with it at all. Money has absolutely *nothing* to do with my baby. (Frank and Marge applaud wildly.)

CHIP

(Stymied momentarily) Well ... then ... think about your health, for Christ's sake. What about your health?

During the following Chip waves various papers in the air as he moves closer to Irene. He breaks down slowly, crying at the end of the speech.

CHIP Cont'd)

Irene, have you ever read any of this stuff? Have you ever read any of it? I mean, really read it. It's all about miscarriages and Down's Syndrome and uremia and mongoloids ...

IRENE

That's the same as Down's syndrome ...

CHIP

(He goes right on, shouting her down) ... and clubfoot and hairlip and aging eggs, Irene. Your eggs are aging and they've been exposed to thirty-five years of pesticides and air pollution and water pollution and X-rays and, my God, a million, zillion things that can go wrong ... and death, Irene! Everything in here is about death! It's all about your death, Irene. (Babbling hysterically) It's about your death, and I couldn't face it if you died, Irene, I mean, I wouldn't be able to stand it. I'd go crazy. I'd really go crazy if you died. It would kill me. I mean, I'd die, too. I'd die, Irene. I'd die, Please, Irene? Please? I don't want you to have a baby. It's not worth it. It's not worth the goddamn risk. Forget it, forget it, forget it. God damn you, who do you think you're having this baby for, anyway? (Frozen silence as he stares deeply into Irene's eyes.)

IRENE

(Quietly, and with much love, she touches his cheek.) For us, Chip. Whether you believe it or not, I'm having this baby for us.

CURTAIN

ACT II

The action takes up soon after the close of **ACT I**. The atmosphere is more relaxed, mainly because no one is saying very much. Frank is sitting in the armchair **DSR** and Irene is seated on the left arm of the sofa. Both have fresh drinks. Chip and Marge are on the sofa, sharing a joint. As the curtain rises, Marge is giggling as she “tokes.”

MARGE

(Rhetorically) You know, they call us “elderly primagravida.”

FRANK/IRENE/CHIP

(Simultaneously as they look at Marge) What?

MARGE

(To Frank) Oh, not you, silly. Not you. (To Chip) Or you. No, of course not. (To Irene) It’s you and me. Ah, yes. *We*, my dear, are what’s known as “elderly primagravida.”

IRENE

Elderly?

MARGE

(Nodding) ... primagravida.

CHIP

It means old and pregnant.

IRENE

(Repeating the word in disgust) Elderly? Elderly?

MARGE

(Babbling happily. She’s somewhat “stoned”) Well, it’s all relative, you know. I mean, this is relative to that, and everything is relative to everything else, and ... actually, it doesn’t mean old and pregnant.

IRENE

No?

FRANK

Actually, it means old and pregnant for the first time.

IRENE

I feel so much better.

MARGE

(Warmly) Oh, now, there, there, dear. In this case “elderly” just means any woman over twenty-five who’s going to have her first baby.

CHIP

Irene isn’t going to have a baby.

IRENE

I don’t think that’s been decided yet.

MARGE

Well, I don’t know. I don’t think, actually, anyone decides these things. I think, well, I think these things just seem to sort of ... happen.

IRENE

Did it just sort of happen to you?

MARGE

(Laughing) Oh, dear, no. I planned it. Frank and I went around and around for months, just like you and ... and ...

CHIP

... Chip.

MARGE

Yes, that’s right. We just went around and around for months and months and months, and Frank said no and I said yes and Frank said no ...

FRANK

... and you stopped taking your pills.

CHIP

(To Irene) Ah, ha! See, Irene? I was afraid you’d stopped taking your pills.

MARGE

(To Frank) Well, are you sorry? I mean, honestly, Frank. Are you sorry I stopped taking my pills? Would you rather Mikie hadn’t been born?

FRANK

That’s not fair, Marge. You’re asking me if I’d rather someone I love hadn’t been born. Nobody can answer a question like that. Mike is a fact. I live with his tennis shoes and his transformer models and his adolescence every day of my life. Of course, I’m glad he was born. God, he gave my life meaning ... and I’d begun to think there wasn’t any.

IRENE

(Relieved) Well, finally. A definite position.

FRANK

At the same time ...

MARGE

Frank's a libra, dear. There's no such thing as a definite position.

FRANK

(Raising his voice) ... at the same time, Irene's baby is still an abstraction.

CHIP

"Irene's baby?" That doesn't sound abstract.

FRANK

Irene's proposed baby, then. Whatever you call it, it's still an abstract. It doesn't have to happen. It's nothing you'd miss ... yet.

CHIP

So, keep taking your pills, Irene. Then, you won't miss anything.

IRENE

Do you really believe that never having the experience means you won't miss it?

MARGE

You have no idea how much you'd miss. Oh, my dear, no. No idea at all. As far as I'm concerned, you'd completely miss the point of being human.

CHIP

Oh, come on now. Isn't that a bit extreme? I mean, miss the human "point?" Come on. There's a hell of a lot more to life than having babies.

MARGE

(Agitated, she stands and paces) Well, just what do you think the point is, anyway? I mean, what do you think it is? Here we are, going through something every day, and we experience this and experience that and all of it's so meaningless and it just seems to go on and on and on ... and suddenly you have a baby and everything seems to have meaning again. (Her eyes grow soft.) I mean, suddenly, there's so much meaning, like it was never there before, like you never even knew what it was until this ... little person comes along, and, suddenly, you know, suddenly, you seem to have a reason to go on living. I don't know. Maybe it's not like that for everyone, but it was for me ... and I'm so glad. Oh, my. I'm so very, very glad.

IRENE

Chip doesn't admit to any human experience that can't be posted on a scoreboard.

MARGE

I was reading something not long ago, I can't remember where, something in a news magazine someplace, and I read that we're about 43,000 generations away from the apes. Forty-three thousand. That means that each one of us is only a little tiny moment in a line stretching back

MARGE (Cont'd)

through forty-three thousand people. That is exactly how important we are. Not even the slightest bit. I mean, the sun's going out someday. Not for a long time, of course, but someday. Even Bach isn't going to survive that, and if Bach won't make it, what chance have I got? So, what is it all about? I can't believe it's about EST therapy or women in the marketplace. Things like that are, what our lives have come down to, meaningless activity, games played to make us seem important. If there's any meaning at all, any, it has to be in the mere fact that we exist ... and, if that's the case, the only obligation, the only one we have, is to keep it going ... that's all we can do ... that's certainly all I can do. It's all I have in common with the other forty-three thousand. We just keep it going. I mean life, you know. All any of us are really here for is to just ... keep it going.

CHIP

Well, that's bleak.

FRANK

Is it?

CHIP

Well, isn't it?

FRANK

It seems to me it's only bleak if one insists there has to be something else.

IRENE

(Impatiently) You know, I could go to Esalen and get naked and do this. My problem is much, more immediate than surviving the sun going out.

CHIP

Would you feel better if we got naked?

IRENE

No, no, no. Of course I don't want to get naked.

FRANK

It's all right with me

IRENE

(Frantically) No, no, no. Nudity is not required. What do I have to do to get you to stick to the subject?

CHIP

We are sticking to the subject. We are having a sensitive, intelligent conversation about the meaning of life. You, on the other hand, want to take off your clothes. God, Irene, you're talking with your glands again. Don't you ever cool off?

IRENE

(Screaming a little) What do my glands have to do with my wanting to know about having a baby? What do my glands have to do with that? All I want to find out is what it's like having a baby. I want to know how it feels. (To Marge and Frank) I want to know how it changes things, whether you're sorry or not, whether you'd do it again. None of that has anything to do with my glands. God, stick to the subject. Please, Chip. If you care even the slightest bit about my sanity, stick to the subject.

CHIP

(Looking smug) Of course I care about your sanity, Irene. I'm sure these good people do, too. (To Marge and Frank) You both care about Irene's sanity, don't you? I mean, you'd certainly not want her to go insane, would you? Either of you? Right here in front of us? Would you?

FRANK

I think we'd better do as Irene asks and answer her questions. Perhaps discussing whether or not Bach will survive is digressive.

MARGE

(Rising and doing her "nervous walk" routine) Well, of course, although it seems to me we *have* been discussing Irene's questions. I mean, what have we been talking about all this time? We've been going around and around and around with it for hours, haven't we?

FRANK

Actually, it's been more like forty minutes.

MARGE

Well, it seems like hours and hours. I mean, it seems that way. Oh, dear. Why don't you two just have a child and find out for yourself.

FRANK

Pray for strength, Irene.

IRENE

(Determined) All right, Marge. Tell me. How did it feel, having a baby?

MARGE

You mean, did it hurt?

IRENE

That's a good place to start.

MARGE

Well, of course it hurt. I mean, a baby's awfully big, isn't it.

CHIP

It hurts. Write that down, Irene. Are you keeping a list? Here, I'll keep a list. (He picks up a pencil and piece of paper.) Having a baby hurts. I've got that. Next.

IRENE

We don't really need a list.

CHIP

Oh, I think we should have a list. I mean, I want to remember exactly what's said here ... so we can talk about it later.

IRENE

(Gritting her teeth) All right, Chip. If you must, make a list. (To Marge) Now, did you have any particular problems? I mean, problems that were the result of your being an older woman?

MARGE

Well, I got awfully tired.

CHIP

(Writing) Tired. She got tired. Having a baby is tiring.

MARGE

Well, I'm not sure you should list that. I mean, everybody gets tired when she's pregnant. It takes so much out of you, you know. It's such a terrific drain. I mean, everything, everything is going into that baby ... and your body changes, too. It's chemical.

CHIP

It's chemical. You hear that, Irene? Your body changes. It's chemical. What does it do, Marge? Do you turn blue or anything?

IRENE

(Impatiently) No, and you don't sprout fangs during the full moon, either. Shut up, Chip. Just shut up.

CHIP

I want to get it down right, Irene.

MARGE

I got very sensitive. My body, I mean. It got very sensitive. Cigar smoke made me sick. It hurt when Frank hugged me. It was all those changes, you see, getting me ready for the baby ... and there was morning sickness ...

CHIP

You vomited in the morning? You were sick every morning, is that it, Marge? You up-chucked every single morning?

FRANK

No, she wasn't sick every morning, and I do think you're concentrating a bit too much on the negative. Every time Marge mentions a little problem you equate it with axe-murder.

CHIP

(Smugly) I'll be happy to write down something cheerful, just as soon as she says something cheerful.

MARGE

(Firmly and rapidly) ... but, all that's perfectly normal, of course, and Mikie was a joy from the very beginning, there was never the slightest bit of trouble and everything has been absolutely, one-hundred percent wonderful from the very first moment.

IRENE

(To Chip) I don't see your pencil moving.

CHIP

The lead broke.

IRENE

(Picking up a pen and handing it to Chip) Here. Don't get behind.

MARGE

Of course, finding a reliable school is impossible. I mean, it is absolutely impossible to find a good school ...

CHIP

Finding a school is impossible. Thanks, Irene. This is a fine pen. School ... impossible ... go on.

IRENE

I don't see that as a problem. I've been thinking we should get out of the city for a long time.

CHIP

Oh, now. Hold on, there. Just a minute.

IRENE

Write that down. Getting out of the city would be good.

CHIP

Now, hold on there. Just a minute here.

IRENE

Here, there. make up your mind.

CHIP

(Raising his voice) Now, just hold on a minute.

IRENE

Yes, Chip?

CHIP

What's this about leaving the city? I will absolutely not leave the city, not under any circumstances. Not for any baby, not for anything. I will not leave the city. I will not! Not, not, not. Is that clear. Do I make myself clear? I will not leave the city. No. I will not. Leaving the city is something I will not do.

IRENE

So you think the baby should be raised in the city?

CHIP

Of course.

IRENE

Well, that's settled, then. We'll raise the baby here in the city.

CHIP

Wait a minute.

MARGE

... and it takes a lot of time, you know. I mean, up at all hours of the night and feedings every two minutes, it seems like ...

CHIP

Stop. Cease. Desist. Everybody hold on.

IRENE

Aren't you writing that down, Chip? Up at all hours, frequent feedings ...

MARGE

But, all in all, it's been a real piece of cake.

CHIP

(Frantic) STOP!!

IRENE

What is it this time, Chip?

CHIP

I don't want my baby raised in this city.

IRENE

Why not?

CHIP

Christ, Irene. How can you even suggest raising a child in this zoo? Drug dealers on every corner, gun detectors in the schools, and you don't have a goddamn say in anything. I don't want my child educated in some armed camp.

IRENE

Then, you want to move?

CHIP

NO! NO! NO! I don't want to move. I don't want to educate anybody. I don't want to feed anybody every two minutes all night!

IRENE

Make up your mind.

CHIP

I don't want to make up my mind!!!

FRANK

(Getting a little tight as he helps himself to another drink) This isn't working, you know. All you're doing is making him more resistant.

CHIP

Yes. I'm becoming more and more resistant. I am becoming heroically resistant. I am becoming so resistant there is no dealing with it.

FRANK

Tell us about your job, Marge.

MARGE

What?

FRANK

Tell us about your job.

MARGE

You know I don't have a job. Sometimes, Frank, I think you're getting senile.

FRANK

But, you used to have a job.

MARGE

(Suddenly realizing what Frank's getting at) Oh, well. Yes I did. Lots of people used to have jobs.

FRANK

When was it you quit your job, Marge?

MARGE

Well, I didn't want to stop working, you know that Frank. I didn't want to stop. It just sort of happened, you know.

FRANK

When, Marge?

MARGE

(Muffling her voice with her hand) Oh, about bluffle, bluffle, gibble, gibble.

FRANK

Marge?

MARGE

Oh, all right, Frank. All right. I quit my job when Mikie was born. Is that what you want to hear.

IRENE

I just want to keep the record straight. I don't plan to quit my job.

MARGE

I didn't plan to quit mine either.

CHIP

See, Irene. Sometimes one's plans just don't work out.

FRANK

Particularly after a baby arrives.

IRENE

(Testily) I'm *not* going to quit my job. It took me a long time to get where I am.

CHIP

What are you going to do when it cries, Irene? Put it on "hold?"

IRENE

I'll cope. I'm extremely happy in my work. I think it's important and I will not give it up.

CHIP

You approve toothpaste tubes.

IRENE

(Really mad) I'm a vice president!!

CHIP

Don't confuse importance with the number of windows in your office.

IRENE

I don't want to discuss it. I can keep my job and have a baby, too.

FRANK

That's what Marge thought. In fact, that's exactly what she said.

IRENE

(Angrily turning on Frank) Why is it every time I say something one of you says somebody already said it?

MARGE

That's one of the most distressing things about middle-age, dear. You find out you didn't invent everything. (To Frank) Why'd you bring this up, Frank? Just to make me look like a fool? Is that why you brought it up? So I'd look like some kind of silly fool?

FRANK

I don't think it's doing anybody any good going on the way we are. You and Irene are promoting a perfect life where everything goes right on the way it is, with the incidental addition of some precious little package that's going to give your perfect life perfect meaning. Well, that's not true, Marge. Life isn't some nursery rhyme. That's just not the way it is. (He goes to fix himself another drink.)

MARGE

(Looking anxiously at Frank) Maybe we'd better be going.

CHIP

Wait a minute. I'm finally getting interested.

FRANK

(To Chip) If you have a baby, everything's going to change. Everything. I think that should be made perfectly clear.

CHIP

Right on!

MARGE

(Trying to steer Frank, who's just starting his new drink, out the door.) I think we've already made everything perfectly clear and now I think we'd better be going because Mikie is alone and if we don't get going right now, Irene, you can kiss your baby good-bye, Irene, Frank has that libra look in his eye, I do think we should go right now!

FRANK

I don't want to go yet. I want to have a talk with Old Chippie, here.

IRENE

Where's the damned pencil? It's my turn to keep the list.

CHIP

Use mine. Frankie and I are going to talk.

FRANK

Do you know anything about noise, Chip?

CHIP

Well, I live in a city. I know something about noise.

FRANK

You don't know a goddamn thing about noise. Come over to my house. Then, you'll appreciate noise.

CHIP

You got that, Irene? Children are noisy.

MARGE

Well, I don't think that's any kind of argument. I mean, after all, Frank, you're as noisy as Mikie is. You have a power saw and an electric drill and you're always sawing things up and drilling holes, and there's your mountainous stereo and about a million 2-Live-Crew records. Goodness, nothing is as noisy as 2-Live-Crew. All that screaming every time you get a new tweaker or whatever it is.

CHIP

(Incredulous) 2-Live-Crew?

FRANK

(Grimly) It's all relative, isn't it?

MARGE

Even Mikie complains.

IRENE

(Pretending to write) So, men are generally noisy, is that it, Marge? One should have only female children if one doesn't want noise?

CHIP

This is ridiculous.

IRENE

Well, thank God. I thought you'd lost all sense of proportion. Can we stop with this stupid list now and be serious?

CHIP

I'm always serious, Irene.

IRENE

(Rhetorically) Give me strength.

FRANK

(To Marge) I don't think I'm that noisy.

CHIP

Don't let them get you off the subject, Frank. You were just beginning to make sense.

FRANK

That's what they're doing, isn't it?

CHIP

They're trying.

FRANK

(Getting drunker) We mustn't let them do it.

CHIP

(He's pretty high, too) We must be firm.

FRANK

Tell them about the camporee, Marge.

MARGE

(So is she) I swear, Frank. Mikie makes better sense when he's hanging upside down than you do when you're being sensible.

CHIP

Mikie hangs upside down?

FRANK

Whenever he's horny, I think.

MARGE

(Shocked) Mikie gets horny? I thought he was practicing gymnastics.

FRANK

You're living with your head in the sand if you think a twelve year old boy doesn't get horny, Marge.

CHIP

I was very horny when I was twelve.

IRENE

Three cheers for better days.

FRANK

Tell us about the camporee, Marge.

MARGE

(Rising and nervous) All right, Frank. I'll talk about the camporee. Honestly, I'm beginning to wonder why we came over here. All we've done is argue and argue and argue and you keep putting me down and putting Mikie down and ...

FRANK

I am *not* putting Mikie ... (visibly regaining control) *Mike* down and his name is Mike, god-damn it. *Not* Mikie. For Christ's sake, Marge. He *hates* it when you call him Mikie.

IRENE

The camporee?

MARGE

We'll discuss this "horny" business when we get home, Frank. (To Irene and Chip) Anyway, I decided a couple of years ago to become a Cub Scout den mother. I mean, we decided I'd become a den mother ... or somebody decided. I don't know who it was. Actually, I think it was (to Frank) MIKIE, MIKIE, MIKIE who decided.

FRANK

Get on with it, Marge.

MARGE

So, anyway, everything was fine ...

FRANK

... until the first camporee.

MARGE

(Testily) Let me tell it, Frank. I mean, do you want me to tell this or do you want to tell it? Why is it I get interrupted every single time I open my mouth?

IRENE

Soooooo, everything was fine until the first camporee?

MARGE

How did you know?

IRENE

Well, Frank ...

MARGE

(Interrupting) Oh. Oh, yes. Well, of course. Anyway, everything was fine until the first camporee.

CHIP

What happened?

MARGE

(To Frank, after a beat) Aren't you going to interrupt?

FRANK

(Irritated) No one's saying anything.

MARGE

I thought you wanted to tell this.

FRANK

It wasn't that big a deal, Marge.

MARGE

Not a big deal? You're saying it wasn't a big deal? The onset of menopause during a Cub Scout camporee wasn't a big deal, Frank? Well, maybe it wasn't a big deal for *you*. Here we were, sixty miles from the nearest shower with seventy-five grubby little boys and a "port-o-san" toilet and me, ladling out chicken soup. Oh, God. Chicken soup. Chicken soup, for Christ's sake. I felt like some Jewish cliché.

FRANK

Nobody noticed but you, Marge.

MARGE

Nobody noticed, Frank? Nobody noticed? You mean when that nasty little Copps boy went running through camp screaming that Mikie's crazy mother poured soup in his hat, nobody noticed that, Frank?

FRANK

Why did I bring this up?

MARGE

(Oblivious) You think nobody noticed that, Frank? Nobody noticed? I mean, the boy had a hat full of soup. (Almost yelling) It was chicken noodle!!

FRANK

Marge has spent most of Mike's adolescence lying on the couch having cramps.

MARGE

I mean, I poured it in his hat. He had it in his hand and I just ... just ... just dipped in the ladle and I just ... just poured soup in his little ... blue and gold hat. Then, I asked him if he wanted seconds.

FRANK

I thought it was pertinent.

MARGE

Mikie was so embarrassed, to have a crazy mother. Well, why not? Wouldn't you be embarrassed to have a crazy mother? I just wanted to die. I really did. I just wanted to die.

FRANK

(To Marge) You didn't even know about it until we told you, Marge. That was the next day.

MARGE

Well, all right, Frank! All right! So, I was humiliated the next day, Frank. The point is, I was humiliated and Mikie was humiliated and everybody was humiliated, Frank. Oh, damn this "change" thing. Just damn it, damn it, damn it. Half the time I don't even know where I am.

FRANK

(Concerned) Hey, now. It's all right, sweetheart. It's all right.

MARGE

(Almost in tears) Everybody I know thinks I'm Daffy Duck.

FRANK

It was a little thing, hon. I'm sorry I brought it up. Nobody even knew what was wrong. Mike wasn't upset. Nobody was humiliated. Mike was worried more than he was humiliated. He loves you a lot, you know? We both do. I mean, we're on your side, aren't we?

MARGE

I wanted to strangle Billy Copps.

FRANK

He's only eleven, Marge.

MARGE

... or cut out his heart.

IRENE

Can I get you something? Aspirin? Tranquilizers?

CHIP

Other illicit drugs?

IRENE

(Nudging Chip) Chip!!??

CHIP

Sorry.

MARGE

(Responding to his concern) Oh, Frank. Whatever would I do without Mikie and you? I just don't know what I'd do. I get so confused sometimes. Everything seems so ... so ... well, like someone else is living my life. I'm there, but I can't seem to get through the ... the ... the ...

CHIP

"Bullshit," Marge. Don't worry about it. With that moron in the White House, its the *age* of 'bullshit. Everybody's having trouble with that.

MARGE

Sometimes it certainly seems that way. (Wiping her eyes) I was just so embarrassed.

IRENE

So your menopause has been a big problem?

MARGE

It's always a problem, and mine seems especially severe. That's what Doctor Dorsey says. I get hot, then I get cold. Sometimes I lose track of time. Whole days go by and I hardly notice.

CHIP

That's not menopause, it's middle-age.

IRENE

Has it affected your son?

FRANK

Mike understands. At least, he understands as much as a boy can understand. He knows it's part of a normal process and it'll be over someday.

MARGE

When, God? When?

CHIP

I doubt if he knows that.

FRANK

Mike's quite remarkable in his understanding, you know. Sometimes I feel like he's the adult and I'm the child.

MARGE

(Signing) Yes, I guess we should be thankful for that. That's one thing to be said for late babies. They seem to mature earlier. Most of them tend to be high achievers. *Very* high achievers, actually.

CHIP

What's desirable about that?

IRENE

(Testily) Why wouldn't it be desirable, Chip?

CHIP

All that “high achiever” crap is propaganda, Irene. It’s put out by Mr. American and Mr. Express to keep us working ourselves to death so they can buy yachts and live in Bimini. Every high achiever I know is trying to kick cocaine.

MARGE

Goodness, you’re young to be so cynical.

CHIP

It has nothing to do with cynicism. It has to do with practically everybody I know being hysterical, unhappy and burnt-out.

IRENE

Achievement happens to be highly regarded in this country.

CHIP

What else can you expect from a culture that starts selling Christmas in September?

MARGE

(Indignant) I like Christmas.

CHIP

(Deliberately) Well, so do I! But, using it as an excuse to sell useless junk makes perfectly clear just how fucked up our values are, and that’s not the point, anyway. I just can’t see bringing a child into the world to grow up to *that*. What we expect of him, what society expects of him, what the goddamn IRS and Proctor & Gamble expect of him. God, everything stinks. Everything stinks. *I* can’t deal with it. How in hell can I help my *kid* deal with it?

FRANK

Just hope he doesn’t have to help you deal with it.

MARGE

(Frenetically) Oh, Frank, no. Don’t start on that. Please don’t. I’m so tired of it, and it’s so sad. We’re supposed to be talking about pleasant things.

FRANK

It’s very much to the point, Marge. There are all sorts of ...

MARGE

(She covers her ears and interrupts) Then, I won’t listen. I just won’t listen. I’ve heard it and I just won’t hear it again.

Marge steps off to the side and listens to everything while ostentatiously holding her hands over her ears.

IRENE

What’s she talking about?

FRANK

Sometimes a parent needs more support than a child. It works both ways, you know. I mean, it's a tremendous burden ...

MARGE

Burden, burden, burden, pain, pain, pain. It still sounds like "The Days of Our Lives," Frank.

FRANK

Butt out, Marge.

MARGE

I can't hear you, Frank. I can't hear a word you're saying.

IRENE

Your mother's still alive, isn't she?

FRANK

I'll tell you if we can stifle Miss pre-recorded announcement.

MARGE

Burden, burden, burden, pain, pain, pain.

FRANK

(Agitated) Marge, there are very real reasons why I carry on the way I do.

MARGE

I still can't hear you, Frank.

FRANK

(Angry, he yells at Marge) There are very real reasons ... shit! (Abruptly, he turns to Chip and Irene) Yes. My mother is eighty-seven. She was forty when I was born, so I've seen both sides of this, you see.

MARGE

(Still holding her ears) He doesn't deal with it very well, either.

FRANK

Does that make some kind of point, Marge?

MARGE

Well, now that my middle-age crazies have been spread out like pate on toast, we might as well make sure everybody knows just how sane you are, Frank, I mean, it's only fair, am I right? We have to keep the presentation balanced? Fair? Every little horror exposed to the light and beaten to death? Right, Frank?

FRANK

Now you're being unreasonable, Marge.

MARGE

(Yelling, hands still over her ears) I can't hear you, Frank. I keep telling you I can't hear you. Why do you keep yelling at me, Frank?

FRANK

(Visibly angry, Frank regains iron control and ignores her for a moment.) My mother is eighty-seven. She's been senile for six years now, and she was infirm a good ten years before that. So, it's been ... (Marge starts singing and Frank raises his voice) ... it's been sixteen years that she's been absolutely dependent on me.

MARGE

Us, Frank. Us. I've dealt with her every bit as much as you have.

FRANK

(Nodding) Yes, that's true. Marge has been a great help.

MARGE

Great help? Great help? I should say I've been a help. Great is hardly the word ... (ad lib).

Marge continues to ad lib this sort of thing as Frank rises, X's to her and picks her up in his arms. He then carries her to the sofa and sits her down gently, after which he sits beside her.

FRANK

Marge has something she wants to tell you.

MARGE

(Abruptly growing sympathetic) Well, she was a wonderful woman, you know. She was a wonderful mother to you, too, wasn't she, Frank? You always said she was.

FRANK

Yes, but it's ... more complicated than that. Right from the beginning I was leaned on. Mother didn't have anyone, you know, after dad died. No one but me. So, she developed this ... dependence.

MARGE

Do you really think she kept you from doing anything you wanted to do?

FRANK

Well, no. But, the point is, I've been dealing with my mother's aging all my life. Certainly, all my *adult* life. I love her a lot. I love her as much as I love anyone. (Marge takes his hand.) I've tried to do right by her. But, somehow, the guilt just won't go away.

IRENE

Guilt?

FRANK

(He nods as Marge squeezes his hand) Guilt. Mom lived with us for a long time. We didn't have any kids so it worked out all right until she was about seventy. Then her mind started to go. She drove us crazy. She kept forgetting who she was and she couldn't remember anything for more than two minutes. (This is difficult for Frank and he rises and wanders about the room as he talks.) She focused on me and started ... following me. Every time I'd turn around, mom would be there just ... staring ... and, after a while, it stopped mattering that I loved her. It just didn't matter that she's one of the dearest people on earth to me. I couldn't breathe. She just somehow sucked all the air up and I was suffocating.

MARGE

(Anticipating Frank) Frank started yelling at her.

FRANK

I started yelling ... Marge?

MARGE

I'm sorry, Frank.

FRANK

Anyway, I started yelling at her, screaming for her to get away from me. I didn't know who she was. She wasn't my mother any more, and I didn't know who she was. She stopped sleeping. She'd get in bed for about two minutes, then get up and wander through the apartment, banging on the walls and moaning ... and I couldn't sleep, either, I was constantly afraid she'd hurt herself ... and, anyway, well, one night she wouldn't stay in bed and I was frazzled and tired and at the end of my rope and I ... I ...

MARGE

(Concerned) Frank?

FRANK

I ... I hit her.

IRENE

Oh, Frank.

FRANK

(Sadly) I couldn't stand it any more and something inside just let go and I ... well, I hit her.

MARGE

After that, we didn't have any choice.

FRANK

(Apologizing) But, I'm not a hitter ... certainly not ... I don't go around hitting things ... people. Certainly not ... my mother.

IRENE

It's all right, Frank. It's all right.

FRANK

It was *not* all right. It was ... it was terrible.

MARGE

She stayed with us a while longer after that, but we knew we had to do something. Frank agonized for weeks, but we just couldn't take care of her any more.

FRANK

I think the last straw was the day a friend dropped by and Mom told him that God had sent him to her because He knew how lonely she was. (Breaking up) I ... I ... I ... just couldn't deal with it. But, she wasn't my mother any more, don't you see? She wasn't my mother any more and I wasn't hitting *her*. I was hitting out at the damned frustration, trying to reason with someone who'd always been so reasonable ... but, it was like talking to the wall. So ... after that ... well, we knew something had to be done ... so ...

MARGE

She gets good care where she is. We visit her two or three times a week and bring her home for the holidays and ... and a weekend every now and then.

FRANK

... and I still feel guilty. Even though there wasn't any choice. I still feel so damned guilty.

CHIP

Well, do you want to drop that on our kid, Irene? Do you want to load him with guilt for the rest of his life?

IRENE

(Calmly and quietly) Nobody says that's always going to happen. It doesn't always. But, even if it does, we take our chances, don't we? I mean, we take a chance every time we get out of bed, don't we? Sometimes things turn out all right, sometimes they don't. But, we take our chances. No one said it was going to be easy.

CHIP

(Tersely) It's not going to *be*, Irene. You don't seem to have heard what I've been saying.

IRENE

(Very angry) ... and you don't seem to have heard what I've been saying. I want a baby. Period. Finito. How do you like them apples?

CHIP

You want to jump in with both feet, Irene, reason be damned. God, if we're ever going to do this, we ought to get ready for it, make a plan, for Christ's sake.

MARGE

(Fluttering) Oh, well. Plan it? Is that what you're going to do? Write it down on? That won't work. You're just trying to put it off. What you get when you plan is a plan. If you're going to do it, do it. Don't wait until its planned. If you do that, you'll never do it, will you? You'll never be finished planning.

FRANK

I think Marge is trying to say that it's something you *can't* plan. You don't really know what you're up against, anyway, until you're going through it. Then it's too late. You just have to deal with everything as it comes up.

MARGE

(Softening) ... and it's not all bad, you know. In fact, hardly *any* of it's bad. Your child has his bad days, of course. But, it doesn't matter if there are bad days. It's made up for by what he's learning, what he's going through.

FRANK

And, there are some *fine* days. Such fine days, sometimes. They're so precious to you, you wonder how you could ever have lived without them.

CHIP

Whose side are you on, anyway?

FRANK

I'm a father. Aren't my sympathies obvious?

IRENE

(Relieved) Finally.

MARGE

... and he's such a wonderful father, too. He's been perfect. Just perfect, ever since he found out I was pregnant.

FRANK

"Perfect" is a demanding concept.

MARGE

But, you have been. You've been a darling. I can't remember a time since the rabbit died that you haven't been supportive and helpful and loving ... and you've been so happy. (To Irene) He's been so happy. Really happy. You should have seen him that first week. He was walking around singing. Singing. I couldn't believe it.

FRANK

(Blushing) I can't sing.

MARGE

Not now, you can't ... but, you could then. When you found out our son was going to be born, you sang. After all the arguing and all the fighting, once it was a fact, you started to sing.

FRANK

(Faintly embarrassed) I suddenly found out I was very maternal ... and everybody knew. Do you know that? Suddenly, everybody knew, and I hadn't said a word. It was ... intuitive, I guess. Everybody knew. After all the hassle, suddenly, it was the most natural thing in the world.

MARGE

You're in such a state of shock. You go to the doctor and he gives you this big questionnaire and it asks all about your symptoms, if you have this, this, this and this ... and, guess what? You've got them all. (She laughs.)

CHIP

(To Marge) You look very young, sitting there.

MARGE

(Happily) Why, I am. I am young. My son keeps me young, menopause or not. That'll be over soon, but I'll still be young. Listen, Chip. Seriously now. As serious as I can be. All of these things, these objections, they all melt away. Poof. They're gone. One day you hear the word "son" or "daughter" ...

FRANK

... or father ...

MARGE

... and it does something inside you. Your body shivers and you feel warm all over, because suddenly, the words apply to you. (Pause) Well, I think we should be going. (Marge and Frank rise) It's been a fascinating century or so ...

FRANK

Actually, about an hour.

MARGE

(Gaily) Whatever. (To Chip) I don't care what anyone says, Chip. You're not so bad.

CHIP

(Confused) Uh, well, uh, thanks for coming, uh, actually. I've got a lot to think about.

MARGE

Think all you want. In your heart you've already accepted it. You're already calling him "our child." That has nothing to do with thinking. It's instinctive.

FRANK

(To Chip) It enters your life so completely. It simply fills you, beyond anything anyone could possibly put into words. people like us wander through saying it's "great" and "do it" and "it's going to change everything," and then this ... *thing* happens, and you find a quality of love you never dreamed was possible. Well, I hope to see you again. (They shake hands) I'd like to know how it works out.

IRENE

I'd like that.

CHIP

Well, uh, sure. Why not? I mean, yeah, okay.

MARGE

Why, you and Frank are friends already. (To Irene) They're already calling each other Frankie and Chippie ... (They all head for the door.)

IRENE

Yes, Chip just loves being called Chippie.

MARGE

I could never understand why grown men cling to such things. They seem to work so very, very hard to impress us with their youth.

CHIP

(Joking) Fuck youth. That's all they're good for, anyway. (They all laugh as Chip opens the door.)

MARGE

Well, you do have a sense of humor, don't you? Anyway, we've got to go. I'll call you, Irene. Ta, all. We're off to ... to ... we are leaving, aren't we, Frank?

FRANK

Time to go home, hon. Mikie's been by himself much too long.

MARGE

Oh, good. Home. Well, that's a relief. Yes. All right. (To Frank, warmly, referring to his use of "Mikie") You're such an old softie.

FRANK

I know.

MARGE

(Frank and Marge look lovingly at one another, then Marge turns to Chip) You know, Chip, a lot of people have been sneering at babies for a long time, and, to me, it's the saddest, saddest thing. It's not smart and it's not clever. All it proves is how many of us are making the trip for nothing. Don't do that, Chip. Don't make the trip for nothing. (Frank and Marge exit.)

CHIP

Well, that wasn't so bad. They're really something.

He X's to the sofa and sprawls out. Irene joins him.
The mood is relaxed and loving.

IRENE

Of course, it wasn't so bad. None of it's bad once you get used to the idea.

CHIP

Would you say I was used to the idea?

IRENE

You're more used to it now than you were two hours ago. I had to bring it to a head, Chip. I just had to talk about it.

CHIP

Was it as much fun as Esalen

IRENE

(They "snuggle") No. I got naked at Esalen

CHIP

That's easy to fix. You can get naked right here.

They laugh and tussle, pulling at one another's
clothing. Then, they kiss, deeply and tenderly. They
continue subdued "stroking" during the following.

IRENE

(Settling into Chip's arms) Sometimes I wonder if you really love me.

CHIP

I don't know how you can wonder. I take such a lot of shit from you, Irene.

IRENE

(Warmly) You have changed your mind, haven't you? I mean, you are changing it ... a little?
Aren't you?

CHIP

I don't know. Talking about it helped ... just getting it out. It doesn't seem so ... so foreign,
now, somehow ... anyway, from the way everybody was talking, I don't really have any
choice. Hell, we've already made our first friends ... our first friends with kids I mean. God,
I suppose all our friends will have kids from now on. Noise. Getting up at night. Cub Scouts.
She-it.

IRENE

(Delighted, she smothers him with kisses) Oh, Chip. When did you change your mind? When was it? Exactly? When ? When? When?

CHIP

Well, actually, I think it was some time last week. (He laughs.)

IRENE

Last week? You made up your mind sometime last week? You made me go through this song and dance and you made up your mind last week? (She attacks him with a sofa pillow.)

CHIP

(Defensively) I haven't been living in a vacuum, Irene. I've thought about it a lot. I knew you were thinking about it. I mean, I *did* think about it, obviously.

IRENE

Then why all this ...

CHIP

(Holding up his hand) Ah! Ah! I didn't invite George and Gracie over here. You did. Besides, no one can blame me for a last ditch attempt, which I probably wouldn't have made anyway if you hadn't made me mad. There I was, doing my exercises, minding my own business ... (She renews her pillow attack. They laugh and giggle.) Oh, hell. I don't know. Maybe it was while Marge was talking about getting pregnant. I think. I don't know. What difference does it make? You aren't already pregnant, are you?

IRENE

(Pulling back and looking at him) Oh course I'm not pregnant. It really *has* been six weeks, you know?

CHIP

I know. (Sighing) I know. I wasn't easy on me, either. All those gadgets ... all those pushups.

IRENE

Well, you'll have to keep doing the push-ups. You have to stay in shape. There'll be Little League, cotillion, Girl Scouts, camporees ... (overcome with passion) ... and ... uh, don't throw away the gadgets just yet. Oh, Chip. Sometimes I just ached.

CHIP

I know, baby, I know.

They kiss again, as ardently as deemed prudent in
your local community. Finally, she pulls back.)

IRENE

We are going to make love now, aren't we, Chip?

CHIP

Yes, Irene.

IRENE

You're not worried about my pills any more?

CHIP

No, Irene.

IRENE

Are you paying attention to what I'm saying?

CHIP

Not much, Irene.

IRENE

Why aren't you worried about the pills any more?

CHIP

(Continuing the intensifying foreplay) You wouldn't have gone to the trouble of inviting the weird twins over if you weren't being square.

IRENE

Oh? You think Frank and Marge are weird?

CHIP

One wonders about little Mikie.

IRENE

He hangs upside down.

CHIP

Sounds all right to me.

IRENE

Why didn't you think I was being square with you?

CHIP

Our glands make us do dumb things, don't they? I mean, mine do me. Sometimes I just don't have any say in the matter.

IRENE

(They're really getting horny) I'm glad you're not an axe-murderer.

CHIP

(Laughing and grappling) No, I'm a sex maniac. I'm a sex maniac, and my glands are saying "jump on her," "jump on her." That's what my glands are saying, Irene ... and I'm

CHIP Cont'd)

heeeeeeeellpless. (They wrestle and squeal, jumping up from the sofa and chasing one another around the room, getting entangled in the balloons, etc.) It's been six weeks, Irene. It's been six weeks. Six weeks. Six goddamn weeks, Irene. (Etc., until, finally, he catches her behind the sofa. They look into one another's eyes and he speaks quietly.) Six weeks, Irene. Six, very, very long weeks. (They stand there a moment, kissing, as they grow more heated. Finally, they begin clawing at one another's clothing as they sink out of sight behind the sofa.)

The lights dim, indicating a short passage of time. Chip rises from behind the sofa, pulling on his shorts. He X's around and sits on the left of the sofa. Sighing, he lights another joint and sits there peacefully. Then, he notices Irene's purse on the coffee table. He checks behind the sofa to see if Irene's asleep. Then, he paws through her purse until he finds her Ortho-Novum card. He holds it up and counts the pills. They're all there. He straightens up, looks mad for a moment.

CHIP Cont'd)

Irene? I have something to say to you.

IRENE

(Peeking over the back of the sofa) What? What do you want?

She looks tousled and lovely as he gazes at her a moment. Then, they kiss again.

CHIP

(After the kiss) I love you, Reenie, Reenie, Reenie.

IRENE

... and I love you, Chippie, Chippie, Chippie.

She sinks back behind the sofa as they kiss. This pulls him over the back of the sofa, headfirst.

CHIP

... and I know just what we'll call him.

IRENE

What makes you think it's going to be a boy? It's fifty-fifty that it ... it ... it ...

CHIP

(Firmly, as he at last vanishes behind the sofa) Be quiet, Irene. I've already made up my mind. We're going to call him Lance!

CURTAIN