

# **DRUGSTORE GLASSES**

**a play by Tom Baum**

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Characters (in order of appearance)

**AVA** 30s. A graphic artist.

**CHARLOTTE** Late 30s. Ava's sister. A psychiatrist.

**ELLERY** 70s. Ava and Charlotte's dad. A retired architect.

**ANDREW** Late 30s, early 40s. A physicist.

All three scenes are set in the family room of Ellery's house, where Ellery, Ava, and Andrew live. Present day.

Scene 1. A weekday afternoon.

Scene 2. The next morning.

Scene 3. Later that day.

**Scene 1**

*(The family room of a modernist house. Two work stations, side by side, one with a computer and various drawing materials, the other with a computer, an architectural model of a modernist church, various drafting implements, and a cremation urn. One large window, blinds drawn. Small couch, coffee table, two chairs, a sideboard. Three doors, one leading to the kitchen, one leading to the rear of the house, one to the front.)*

*Lights up on AVA and CHARLOTTE. CHARLOTTE has just entered, with a suitcase.)*

AVA: —Are you kidding, why wouldn't I tell Dad you were coming?

CHARLOTTE: I thought it might set off alarms. Is he here?

AVA: When he's not wandering off. Let me have your car keys. If I don't put them in the lockbox, he's apt to drive off with your rental.

CHARLOTTE: What happened to his car?

AVA: The old BMW? I sold it.

CHARLOTTE: No you didn't.

AVA: After the accident? No point keeping it around.

CHARLOTTE: What accident?

AVA: Yikes, I never called you, did I? We think he fell asleep at the wheel. Sometimes he falls asleep in the shower, I have turn the water off. And even then he doesn't always wake up.

*(AVA opens a drawer, takes out a lockbox, puts CHARLOTTE's keys inside.)*

AVA: If I'm not here, the code's 1,5,9,3,5,7. Forms an X on the keypad. That's so I can remember.

CHARLOTTE: How's he handling it?

AVA: Handling what? Oh you mean, Mom's death.

CHARLOTTE: Yes, that. What stage is he in?

AVA: Grief, you mean? No stage. Post-stage. I wanted her to have a green burial, where they plant you in the ground and a tree grows up above you and the cemetery instead of gravestones it's a forest? But Dad had already called the crematorium. And canceled her phone. All within thirty minutes. No tears.

CHARLOTTE: Is that's what in the vase? Oh, I see it has a lid.

AVA: Yep. Her cremains.

CHARLOTTE: What's it doing on his desk?

AVA: He says he wants it there...to remind him she's dead.

CHARLOTTE: Wow.

AVA: I know.

CHARLOTTE: And his desk is right next to yours.

AVA: He used to have his own office, but he says it calms him to have me close by.

CHARLOTTE: So how's the book coming? With Dad peering over your shoulder.

AVA: Terribly. I've only managed to ink three chapters, God knows where the rest is coming from. Andrew keeps telling to send it to my agent. He thinks I'll get a five-figure advance. It's heartbreaking, sometimes, his confidence in me.

CHARLOTTE: Any word on Andy's grant?

AVA: The Board's supposed to meet today. Otherwise, where's he going to get the money for his project? And how long does Dad have left? And will I ever get published? I wake up every morning with my heart pounding. I turn on the shower, I expect the water to run cold.

CHARLOTTE: But you're not depressed.

AVA: Who has time to be depressed?

CHARLOTTE: The more anxiety, the less depression. And vice versa.

AVA: Says who?

CHARLOTTE: Just a theory of mine I'm hoping to prove.

AVA: Well, you can put me down as a guinea pig.

CHARLOTTE: You might be punishing yourself.

AVA: For what?

CHARLOTTE: Maybe you wished for Mom's death.

AVA: Yes.

CHARLOTTE: Yes?

AVA: We all did. Including Mom. She was in so much pain. And she was so impatient with Dad...all the changes he was going through. "You're depriving me of a good death." She kept saying that, over and over. Honestly? Sometimes I felt like smothering her. Um, that's the cover of the book.

*(CHARLOTTE has picked up a drawing from AVA's desk—a glass-bottom boat hovering over the Roman forum.)*

AVA: "Angelina's Boat." That's Angelina steering it. Visiting the murder of Julius Caesar. She a tour guide from the future.

CHARLOTTE: Angelina is you.

AVA: I know. I can't seem to draw any other woman so she looks like anything human. Andrew's always teasing me about the science. He says if there were such a thing as time travel, we'd have met some time travelers by now. I'm like, what if they're here and we just can't see them? He just laughs. But no, I hope he's right, expecting the book to sell. Our expenses are bound to pile up, aren't they, with Dad getting so much worse.

CHARLOTTE: Then perhaps you should send out those chapters. Just to test the waters.

AVA: You're right. I will. I'll do that today.

*(AVA breaks off as ELLERY enters on a dead run. He heads for his work station, starts scribbling furiously on a sketch pad.)*

AVA: Hi, Dad. Did you have a good nap?

ELLERY: Who can tell anymore? I thought I was just lying there, then my thoughts started to speak to me and suddenly I had it!

(ELLERY *holds up a shakily-drawn sketch.*)

ELLERY: The bells go on the outside. One, two, three, with the crossbeams between them. Can't wait to show the Unitarians.

AVA: (*indulging him*) I think you've solved it.

CHARLOTTE: Very nice.

ELLERY: Beats that Unitarian church of Wright's, doesn't it? His steeple looked like a bloody witch's hat. These "starchitects" are a scandal. (*to CHARLOTTE*) You ever been to Prague?

CHARLOTTE: No, I haven't.

ELLERY: That monstrosity of Gehry's? The Fred and Ginger building? The locals wanted to throw him off the roof. And Disney Hall? A bar mitzvah radish. Fame is always greater than the famous deserve.

AVA: Dad...you forgot to say hello.

ELLERY: (*to CHARLOTTE*) Why, have we met before?

AVA: It's your daughter...it's Charlotte.

ELLERY: Are you my daughter? Yes, of course you are. I never forget a face. Though at my age every face reminds you of some other face. You remind me of my daughter, except more hollow-eyed. You haven't been here for a while, have you? You're looking considerably older.

CHARLOTTE: I'm twice as old.

ELLERY: Yes, it's coming back to me. You waltzed out of our lives, the day I finished paying for your schooling. Where is it you're living?

CHARLOTTE: Out west. Oregon.

ELLERY: Oregon...I know where that is. Did you come for your mother's funeral? Too late, we didn't have one. Shove her in the oven and be done with it. What is it you do again? Something pseudo-scientific.

CHARLOTTE: I'm a psychiatrist, Dad.

ELLERY: An artist *manqué*. Your sister's a real artist, did you know that?

CHARLOTTE: Yes, Dad, I know.

ELLERY: Ava inherited all the visionary genes. And the hard sciences weren't your cup of tea either.

AVA: Dad, how can you say that? Charlotte was a math-lete in high school.

ELLERY: Too bad you didn't follow through, you could have made a fortune as a quant. Helped Andrew finance his ridiculous research. I came in here for something, what was it?

CHARLOTTE: The steeple. You made a sketch.

ELLERY: Do you like it? Bells on the outside. So much better than Wright's. His steeple looked like a bloody witch's hat.

CHARLOTTE: You've already been through that, Dad.

ELLERY: That's my older daughter—I could always count on you to correct me. You are my older daughter, aren't you, Charlotte? So hard to keep these birthdays straight. Old age takes up so much energy! No sooner does a pain disappear than another takes its place. Right now there's some sort of obstruction in my left nostril. A benign cyst, I'm praying.

CHARLOTTE: I wouldn't worry about it, Dad. You've always been a hypochondriac.

ELLERY: You know who doesn't obsess about sickness and death? Senile old fools. Ava's taken away my driving privileges, did she tell you? Mothers me to death. If she's not worrying about my health, then she's worrying about her husband. Stop agonizing, I tell her, Andrew's wasting his time, he'll never build that time machine.

AVA: It's not a time machine, Dad. It's a physics experiment. About the Nature of Time.

ELLERY: Time marches on, and that's all there is to say about it. Speaking of time wasted, Charlotte, are you married yet?

CHARLOTTE: No, Dad, I'm not married.

ELLERY: Best thing you ever did was to dump Andrew. Worst thing Ava ever did was take up with him. Where do you propose to sleep?

AVA: Charlotte can sleep in the snore room.

ELLERY: Which room is that?

AVA: Um...where you used to sleep when you snored? Whenever Mom kicked you out?

ELLERY: (*to CHARLOTTE*) Ah yes. Where I caught you and that pedophile having sex.

AVA: Dad, stop it, you're being ugly.

ELLERY: The man was in grad school, for God's sake. (*to CHARLOTTE*) And you, you were in middle school.

CHARLOTTE: Dad, I was a high-school junior.

ELLERY: As if that makes it any better. I'll go fetch the sheets and towels. This your suitcase? It's a carry-on, isn't it? Means you won't be staying long. Just as well.

(*ELLERY exits with CHARLOTTE's suitcase.*)

AVA: So that's Dad.

CHARLOTTE: He's still fairly lucid. Never had much of a filter, now everything gets through.

AVA: He's rotten to Andrew. I can't make him stop.

CHARLOTTE: First thing to do is cut the cord. Find Dad his own work space.

AVA: He'll scream. But you're right. Andrew hates seeing us there together.

CHARLOTTE: Do you blame him? He must feel like a third wheel.

AVA: Ohmigosh, you think so? That's horrible. Charlotte, you have to call me on all this stuff—seriously, I need that, I am so glad you're here. I need to be strong for two people, and I can barely keep myself together. You were always so...so grounded...you don't know how I've missed that in my life. Oh good, I hear Andrew. (*calls*) Andrew, we're in here!



(ANDREW *enters, with the day's mail.*)

ANDREW: Charlie! I thought that might be your car outside. We didn't expect you till tomorrow.

CHARLOTTE: Hello, Andy.

ANDREW: Just hello? Come here, you.

(ANDREW *and* CHARLOTTE *hug.*)

ANDREW: The prodigal daughter. How many years has it been?

CHARLOTTE: I'm embarrassed to say.

ANDREW: How long will you be here?

CHARLOTTE: I've canceled my patients for the week.

ANDREW: Only a week? We were hoping for more, weren't we, Ava?  
(*to* CHARLOTTE) Seen the old man yet?

CHARLOTTE: Yes, we had a little run-in.

ANDREW: Goes without saying. Hasn't been on easy on your sister.

CHARLOTTE: Or on you.

AVA: How did the Board meeting go, Andrew?

ANDREW: They're still deliberating.

CHARLOTTE: Fingers crossed. You're studying the Problem of Time.

ANDREW: That's the idea. It's not part of the underlying laws of physics. The equations let it flow in both directions.

CHARLOTTE: Which it doesn't. Not even God can change the past, but everyone can make choices about the future.

ANDREW: Clever girl, I knew you'd know.

CHARLOTTE: How fancy an experiment?

ANDREW: Very modest. You create a sort of toy universe...observe a pair of photons...one from the inside of the system, one from the outside...to prove how Time is an emergent property under some conditions and not others.

CHARLOTTE: And therefore there's no such thing as time travel.

ANDREW: I tease Ava about that all the time.

CHARLOTTE: They'll fund it. They have to. I'm applying for a grant myself.

ANDREW: Tell!

CHARLOTTE: I want to test the hypothesis—the less anxiety, the more depression; the more anxiety, the less depression. They add up to a fixed quantity.

ANDREW: Charlotte's Constant! I love it. It's true. I'm a grumpy son of a bitch, but worry? Nope. Never. Leave all that business to my lovely wife.

*(ANDREW gives AVA a quick kiss, locks his keys in the lockbox. ELLERY enters.)*

ELLERY: Has the mail come?

ANDREW: Yes, Ellery, all junk.

ELLERY: Are you sure? Where did you put it?

ANDREW: Where I usually put it.

ELLERY: Just tell me where that is and stop toying with me. I'm not one of your silly experiments.

AVA: Dad, he wasn't toying with you, the mail is there by the door. Were you expecting something?

ELLERY: I've submitted a budget to the Unitarians.

*(ELLERY sorts through the envelopes.)*

ELLERY: Yes, here, this must be their counter-proposal.

*(AVA grabs the letter out of his hands.)*

ELLERY: What are you doing?

AVA: I'm opening it for you. Last time you got a paper cut.

*(AVA tears the envelope open, squints at the letter.)*

ELLERY: Give it to me.

AVA: *(evasive)* You won't be able to read it, the font is too small. Where did I put my new glasses?

ELLERY: She keeps losing her glasses. I love how we're so much alike.

*(CHARLOTTE takes the letter from AVA. AVA combs through her desk for the missing glasses.)*

CHARLOTTE: Um...the Unitarians need more time to decide.

ELLERY: Those cheapskates! I've half a mind to refuse the commission.

CHARLOTTE: That might be the wisest course.

ELLERY: Don't tell me you're turning into a pessimist. I get enough of that from your sister.

*(ELLERY exits. AVA has emptied her wastebasket—finds a CVS bag.)*

AVA: Here they are. I never took them out of the bag.

ANDREW: What does the letter really say?

CHARLOTTE: "Thank you for your interest, we're not in a position to consider new construction, blah blah blah."

*(AVA takes the letter from CHARLOTTE, puts on her glasses....and freezes, takes off the glasses, puts them on again.)*

CHARLOTTE: Ava, what's the matter?

ANDREW: Wrong correction? I told you not to settle for the first pair. What's wrong? Sweetheart?

*(AVA is blinking behind her glasses, staring into the middle distance.)*

ANDREW: Ava, where did you go?

AVA: *(coming to)* Nothing. *(evasive)* It's this letter.

CHARLOTTE: Isn't a form letter what you were expecting?

AVA: Yes, but he's always so hopeful...I get hopeful by osmosis....I have to shred this one before he sees it.

*(AVA turns on the shredder under her desk, adjusts her glasses, utters a bewildered little sound.)*

AVA: [puzzled moan]

CHARLOTTE: Ava? Seriously, what's the matter?

ANDREW: You're upset about Ellery. Why don't work on the book instead. We'll leave you alone.

CHARLOTTE: Yes, you have that cover letter to write.

AVA: What cover letter?

CHARLOTTE: To your agent, darling.

AVA: Oh. Right. *(dazedly)* I don't think I'm going to do that.

CHARLOTTE: What do you mean? You just said you were going to give her the first three chapters.

AVA: No. She's send it out to five places and it won't sell to any of them and she'll bail.

CHARLOTTE: Ava.

AVA: It's not going to be published, I know it's not.

ANDREW: Sweetheart...how can you possibly know that? *(to CHARLOTTE)* She gets like this. Tell her, Charlie.

CHARLOTTE: This is your anxiety talking. You don't have to listen.

AVA: *(to ANDREW)* Don't answer that.

ANDREW: Don't answer what?

*(ANDREW's phone rings. ANDREW checks the number. AVA starts in the direction of the kitchen.)*

AVA: It's the school, isn't it?

ANDREW: It's my department head. Where are you going?

AVA: My soup is going to boil over. Let it go to voice mail.

ANDREW: Why?

*(AVA exits without answering. ANDREW steels himself. Answers the phone.)*

ANDREW: *(into phone)* Hello? Yes...Right...Well tell me...Yes...I understand...*(to CHARLOTTE)* Excuse me, I have to take this.

*(ANDREW exits, talking on the phone, past AVA as she enters.)*

CHARLOTTE: Why did you tell him not to answer?

AVA: I was trying to spare him. The Board turned him down. They're blaming the state legislature, but that's just an excuse.

CHARLOTTE: Are you sure?

AVA: Yes, I'm sure. Oh gosh, this is the last thing we needed.

CHARLOTTE: Ava... I'm going to tell you something I tell my patients—

AVA: Stop worrying. Be depressed instead.

CHARLOTTE: —“Be the person you want to be.”

AVA: All I have to do is picture it, and I'll be a best-selling graphic novelist? Why didn't that occur to me before?

CHARLOTTE: All I'm saying...be the sunny Ava I used to know.

AVA: What are you talking about? I was never a sunny kid.

CHARLOTTE: Please. You were a sunny baby, a sunny adolescent—you were totally loved.

AVA: Oh, and you weren't?

CHARLOTTE: Not the way...no, I never felt it.

AVA: Come on. Mom was always so proud of you. When you won the State math tournament, she couldn't stop bragging about it. Dad, too.

CHARLOTTE: All that ended, didn't it.

AVA: Well, but you were so self-sufficient. Smartest girl in the room, ohmigod, I worshipped you for being so independent, when I was such a clingy little dork. When Mom died, did you even care? One phone call to Dad, and you were done.

CHARLOTTE: There's no law that says you have to love your parents.

AVA: Well...other than the one written in stone...

CHARLOTTE: I don't remember you "honoring" Mom all that much. You were very much a Daddy's Girl.

AVA: And now I'm paying for it.

CHARLOTTE: Parents always have favorites. If they deny it, they're lying. Not that Ellery bothered to lie—

*(ANDREW enters, concluding the phone call.)*

ANDREW: *(into phone)*...Of course I'm not giving up. I'll just have to find some other avenue....I appreciate it...Thank you, I will.

*(ANDREW hangs up.)*

ANDREW: Fucking Tea Party governor. I wish somebody would assassinate him.

AVA: That's not going to happen.

ANDREW: Well, of course it's not going to happen, why would you even say that?

AVA: *(to CHARLOTTE)* The funds have dried up.

CHARLOTTE: What exactly did the Board say?

ANDREW: They said the funds have dried up.

AVA: You were counting on this so much. God, I feel so awful.

ANDREW: Two lousy pieces of equipment. The whole time-emergent problem could have been solved.

CHARLOTTE: Ava says she saw this coming.

ANDREW: Of course she did. There's no trick to being a pessimist, since most things never pan out. You'd better send your book to that agent.

AVA: Please don't ask me to do that. Even if I got some kind of advance, which is not going to happen, it wouldn't begin to cover what you need.

ANDREW: What other options do we have? Besides the nuclear one.

AVA: I can start another book.

ANDREW: That's good, darling, but meanwhile—

AVA: Don't ask Dad. He'll tell you no, and you'll end up resenting him all the more.

ANDREW: All right, then can you ask him?

AVA: Yes, OK, I'll try. (*AVA adjusts her glasses.*) But I know what he's going to say.

ANDREW: Well, if you go in with that attitude—

AVA: He'll say Kickstarter.

ANDREW: Kickstarter? To fund theoretical research? We'll all be dead before that happens.

CHARLOTTE: But if he leaves you enough in his will—

ANDREW: By then somebody else will have done the study.

AVA: But someone will have to replicate it.

ANDREW: Oh great. Replication. The royal road to the Nobel Prize.

(*ELLERY has entered.*)

ELLERY: The Nobel? Forget it. It's a bogus award. Like the Pritzker. How do I know the Pritzker's a hoax? Because I never even made the short list. What are you trying to replicate, Andrew?

ANDREW: I'm not.

ELLERY: Yes, that's science's dirty secret, isn't it? There's no money or prestige in replication, we have to take the researchers' word for everything, which means they're free to fake all their results.

AVA: Dad, we just learned the university won't be funding Andrew's project.

ELLERY: Big surprise. What was it going to cost them?

ANDREW: Medium five figures.

ELLERY: You could try to get corporate sponsorship. What are the practical applications?

ANDREW: Immediately? None.

ELLERY: You really think it's worth doing for its own sake?

ANDREW: Like your work.

ELLERY: I reject the comparison.

ANDREW: Why build great buildings? Why not just pig boxes?

ELLERY: Because great buildings are beautiful.

ANDREW: So are the laws of nature.

ELLERY: Ah yes. "Nothing rivals the elegance of pure mathematics."  
Tell me, Andrew: Are you one of those people who deliberately step in dogshit?

ANDREW: What's that supposed to mean?

ELLERY: Why do you insist on provoking me? Are you trying to send me to an early grave?

AVA: Dad, he's not trying to provoke you.

ELLERY: Well, he's certainly not kissing my ass.

AVA: Seriously, Dad, you can leave the room now.



ANDREW: No, it's time we had this out. I know you've never liked me, Ellery, and I'm sick and tired of hearing about it on a daily basis.

ELLERY: I like you well enough, Andrew. I just don't know why anybody else does. Go rattle a can in the student union. Or if that's beneath your dignity, start a Kickstarter campaign.

CHARLOTTE: Dad....were you eavesdropping?

ELLERY: Yes...Kickstarter...that's your best hope.

AVA: No, Dad. (*stares through glasses*) You're going to write Andrew a check.

ELLERY: In a pig's eye.

AVA: I don't know when exactly, but you're definitely going to do it.

ELLERY: Never going to happen. And that's all there is to say about the subject.

(*ELLERY exits.*)

ANDREW: Well...you called it.

AVA: Yes, I called it.

ANDREW: But you'll keep working on him?

AVA: No.

ANDREW: You just said he's going to write me a check.

AVA: I'm not going to "work on him." That won't help. You'll get your money from him somehow.

ANDREW: How?

AVA: I don't know how, but it's going to happen, I promise.

ANDREW: OK. You're trying to look on the bright side, I appreciate it, but really, we have to be proactive, don't we?

AVA: I'm being proactive. I'm going to start on that new book. And you're going to get your research money. Love will find a way.

(AVA *exits.*)

ANDREW: What did she mean by that? “Love will find a way.”

CHARLOTTE: No idea.

ANDREW: She’s acting awfully peculiar, wouldn’t you say?

CHARLOTTE: It’s contagious. She’s picking up his vibes.

ANDREW: No question about it. The day your mom died? She cooked him his favorite dinner, then they watched TV together, the way he used to with his wife.

CHARLOTTE: Eesh.

ANDREW: Neither one of them shed a tear.

CHARLOTTE: They were always something of a couple.

ANDREW: This was worse. The whole thing is obscene. We’re afraid to have sex without locking the door. The man wanders the house at all hours. Last week he lost his way and crawled into our bed. Her side.

CHARLOTTE: How awful for you. For both of you.

ANDREW: Didn’t seem to bother Ava. And we can’t leave him alone, so no more Date Nights.

CHARLOTTE: Get a baby-sitter.

ANDREW: He won’t hear of it. When I think of what I have to put up with...sometimes I can’t help thinking...did I marry the wrong sister?

CHARLOTTE: Andy...let’s not go there, all right?

ANDREW: I know. Sorry.

CHARLOTTE: Ava wants to be a better wife. She’s just feeling overwhelmed. She loves you, she doesn’t want to lose you.

ANDREW: Well come on, I adore her.

CHARLOTTE: I know you do.

ANDREW: I was happier with you, Charlie.

CHARLOTTE: Andy, I was a child.

ANDREW: God, that first night...you remember?

CHARLOTTE: Of course I remember.

ANDREW: Now that I know the old man better? He deliberately forgot the opera tickets, so he could come back and catch us in the act.

CHARLOTTE: So creepy.

ANDREW: I was sure he was going to call the cops.

CHARLOTTE: Well...technically...

ANDREW: Statutory rape? Please.

CHARLOTTE: You were 24. I was 16.

ANDREW: Roughing me up like that.

CHARLOTTE: He always had a mean streak.

ANDREW: You want to know what I used to fantasize?

CHARLOTTE: What?

ANDREW: You and I...we'd meet again in our forties. We'd have had two bad marriages apiece and we'd settle in for the rest of our lives.

CHARLOTTE: Didn't happen, did it.

ANDREW: You spoiled the fantasy.

CHARLOTTE: How did I do that?

ANDREW: You never married.

CHARLOTTE: And you took up with my baby sister.

ANDREW: I always expected him to boot me out again. When he didn't, I thought he'd given up. My mistake—he was just afraid to get on her bad side. Now he takes up all her time, every ounce of affection, and not a civil word for his son-in-law.

CHARLOTTE: Well...you might not have long to wait.

ANDREW: What do you mean?

CHARLOTTE: Unless he was faking...which is always possible...he didn't seem to recognize me at first.

ANDREW: I see where you're heading...

CHARLOTTE: When he stops recognizing Ava...

ANDREW: Yes, but it won't make any difference.

CHARLOTTE: He'll be a totally different person. She won't be able to take it, she'll have to find him a facility.

ANDREW: She'll never agree to that.

CHARLOTTE: You just leave that to me.

ANDREW: Where's the money going to come from?

CHARLOTTE: From the estate. From Ava's writing. From you. When your research is published, you'll be able to write your own ticket.

ANDREW: Wow. Optimism. I forgot what that sounds like. Charlie, you're the best.

*(ANDREW hugs CHARLOTTE, breaking the hug as ELLERY enters. ELLERY heads straight for his desk, starts opening drawers, searching frantically for something.)*

ELLERY: Fucksticks!

CHARLOTTE: Dad, what is it, what are you looking for?

ELLERY: What am I looking for...*(remembers)* My list of passwords.

CHARLOTTE: What do you need a password for?

*(ELLERY finds a piece of paper in his desk.)*

ELLERY: Ah yes, here it is. *(reading)* Q dot dot 4 dot dot ampersand. What do the dots stand for?

CHARLOTTE: Dad, how would I know?

ELLERY: It was a rhetorical question, don't be dense. Have you seen the sheet where I keep my passwords?

CHARLOTTE: You're holding it in your hand.

ELLERY: Right. There was something important I had to do.

CHARLOTTE: (*experimentally; with a look at ANDREW*) You were going to move some money into Andrew's account.

ELLERY: Why am I doing that?

CHARLOTTE: Because Ava said you were going to.

ELLERY: Did she?

CHARLOTTE: Yes, don't you remember? She said you were going to finance Andrew's research.

ELLERY: Where do we keep the gardening gloves?

CHARLOTTE: Dad, focus.

ELLERY: Right, why am I asking you. You don't live here, do you. Or do you?

CHARLOTTE: No, I don't live here, but I can help you transfer the money. You probably don't need a password.

ELLERY: You're right. I don't need a password.

(*ELLERY puts the paper back in his desk.*)

ELLERY: If you were gardening gloves, where would you be?

CHARLOTTE: Probably the mud room. Why do you need gardening gloves?

ELLERY: Ava says it's going to rain tonight. I told her she's dreaming, not a cloud in the sky, but she insists. So I have to clean the gutters.

CHARLOTTE: I'm sure Ava didn't ask you to clean the gutters.

ELLERY: But they have to be cleaned. The water backs up and cascades through the dining room window. It's as bad as living in a Frank Lloyd Wright house.

ANDREW: Ellery, you designed this house.

ELLERY: I never wanted gutters. I was out of the country on sabbatical and your mother, that damn woman, she had them slapped up without consulting me. Which room is the mud room? Don't bother, I'll figure it out.

CHARLOTTE: Dad?

ELLERY: Sorry, what?

CHARLOTTE: Andy needs that money.

ELLERY: Why are you trying to help him? Are you still in love with him?

CHARLOTTE: (*uneasily*) No, Dad, I'm not in love with him.

ELLERY: What about you, Andrew? Are you still in love with Charlotte?

ANDREW: I'm in love with Ava.

ELLERY: Are you saying you can love two? I never could.

ANDREW: Charlie can attest to that.

CHARLOTTE: Andy, it's all right. Forget it.

ELLERY: Forget what?

CHARLOTTE: Nothing, Dad. The mud room, that's where the gloves are. Next to the washer and dryer.

ELLERY: Ah yes. Of course.

(*ELLERY exits.*)

ANDREW: For a second there I thought you had him. That's how delusional I am. What the hell am I going to do? I can't go on teaching these effing courses, physics for poets, history of physics, you wouldn't believe what they foist on me, 'cause I haven't published in what is it, six years I've been there, no tenure in sight...I'm sorry, you were telling me to be optimistic, I'll stop.

CHARLOTTE: All right...what kind of money are you looking for?

ANDREW: Between 50 and 75K.

CHARLOTTE: What would you need up front? You could pay your R.A. by the month.

ANDREW: And the equipment rental...that could be spread out as well.

CHARLOTTE: I could probably scare up 20. And maybe crowd-fund the other five?

ANDREW: Just a loan, in any case.

CHARLOTTE: Interest-free.

ANDREW: God, you're wonderful. And listen: I'm going to help you research Charlotte's Constant. Seriously. I'll have a word with the psych department, I'm sure they'll be willing to meet. We'll be great together again!

*(ANDREW hugs CHARLOTTE. AVA enters, wearing her glasses. CHARLOTTE quickly disengages from ANDREW.)*

AVA: Have either of you seen Dad?

ANDREW: He was just here. Your sister just made the loveliest offer.

AVA: She volunteered to be your backup plan.

ANDREW: You were listening.

AVA: No, I expected it. *(to CHARLOTTE)* Can you really spare twenty thousand dollars?

ANDREW: It's just a loan, we'll pay her back.

AVA: You mean when Dad dies.

ANDREW: Why go to that place right away? And why are you wearing those glasses?

AVA: To see better.

ANDREW: You only ever needed yours for reading.

AVA: Well...now I need them permanently.

ANDREW: Ava, no, those lenses are crudely ground and they're not meant for distance. I don't want you to ruin your eyes—

AVA: *(suddenly alarmed)* Where's Dad?

CHARLOTTE: He went to clean the gutters.

AVA: Why?

CHARLOTTE: He said you told him it was going to rain.

AVA: Ohmigod, no! He's going to fall and fracture his skull!

*(AVA rushes out toward the rear of the house.)*

ANDREW: See what I'm up against? She panics like that all the time.

CHARLOTTE: She really needs to get away from him. Where did you two honeymoon?

ANDREW: Where did we honeymoon? The Auberge. Why?

CHARLOTTE: Why don't you take her there again?

ANDREW: Oh, with Ellery in the adjoining room? You think I'm kidding.

CHARLOTTE: I'll babysit Ellery. He needs his butt kicked, that's part of the problem.

ANDREW: You think she'll agree to that? I don't.

CHARLOTTE: She listens to me. I can make it happen. Call the Auberge, make the res. Doctor's orders.

*(AVA and ELLERY enter. ELLERY's hand is bleeding.)*

CHARLOTTE: Dad, what happened, you're bleeding!

ELLERY: Something cockeyed about that ladder. The legs are all bent, I couldn't get it to sit right.

CHARLOTTE: You fell off?

ELLERY: Nearly fractured my skull. Ava caught me, thank God.

ANDREW: Are you sure that's what happened?



ELLERY: Of course that's what happened. What kind of question is that?

ANDREW: She didn't scare you into falling? (to AVA) The way you rushed out like that—

ELLERY: No, she didn't scare me, I didn't even see her coming!

CHARLOTTE: Everybody, shh. (to AVA) Where do you keep the germicide?

AVA: There's some Bactine in our bathroom. On the open shelf.

(CHARLOTTE *exits.*)

AVA: (to ELLERY) You're never to get on a ladder again. We'll get the gardener to clean out the gutters.

ELLERY: Don't be silly, he'll just charge you extra. Stop treating me like a child.

AVA: Then stop acting like one. You'll end up killing yourself.

ELLERY: *Que será será.*

AVA: *Que será, no que será!* If you're going to fight me on everything, I'll have to chain you to your desk.

(CHARLOTTE *enters with Bactine and Band-Aids.*)

AVA: Thank you, Charlotte, I'll take it from here. Would you two please leave us alone? I need to have a talk with Dad.

CHARLOTTE: All right. Come on, Andy. (to AVA) High time you got firm with him.

(CHARLOTTE *and ANDREW exit.* AVA *applies the germicide and a Band-Aid.*)

AVA: Are we clear? You're never to pull a stunt like that again.

ELLERY: Hate those gutters. All your mother's idea. That woman never listened to a thing I told her.

AVA: Dad, that's not true.

ELLERY: She never forgave me for insisting we have a second child. Suffered all through her pregnancy. Never got over it. Never gave you the affection you deserved. Thank God I was able to fill the gap. Rip those gutters out! Forget they ever existed!

(ELLERY *picks up the cremation urn.*)

AVA: Dad, careful.

ELLERY: Right. (*puts urn down*) Where did Charlotte and Andrew get to?

AVA: I asked them to leave.

ELLERY: They're all hugger-mugger, those two.

AVA: Did you hear what I said? No more risky behavior. And I want you to stop being so mean to Andrew. We're going through a very sticky patch.

ELLERY: Who's being mean? I'm so much nicer than I used to be.

AVA: Dad, you know that's not true.

ELLERY: Lower testosterone, that's why I'm so mellow. If I murdered that cradle-robber, they'd parole me.

AVA: For the last time, stop talking like that! Andrew is my husband, and I love him.

ELLERY: Never should have let you marry him.

AVA: It wasn't up to you.

ELLERY: Couldn't fight the same battle twice.

AVA: You're fighting it now. Stop insulting his work, it's very important to us both. And stop being so cold to Charlotte.

ELLERY: Why? She never had much use for me. Or her mother either. Not that I blame her for that.

AVA: She's your daughter, Dad.

ELLERY: Couldn't wait to leave the house. Not a shred of loyalty. Thank God I made your mother have a second child. She resented you for that, you know. All head, no heart, your mother. But I made up for it. I filled the gap. I wonder, did I end up spoiling you? Is that why you worry so much? Where do we keep the gardening gloves? I need to clean out those gutters your mother put up without consulting me.

AVA: Dad.

ELLERY: Oh. Right. We're finished with all that. (*pause*) It's getting worse, isn't it.

AVA: It's not getting better.

ELLERY: Do you think you should have yourself tested? In case it's genetic?

AVA: No.

ELLERY: At least establish a baseline?

AVA: I don't need a test.

ELLERY: Well, something's bothering you. You're hiding something from me, Ava, and it hurts me terribly. We used to share everything. Ever since this...this thing happened to me...you've pulled away, you're treating me like a...like I'm not your father anymore.

(*AVA has taken off her glasses.*)

AVA: Do you like my new glasses, Dad?

ELLERY: Very flattering. Much nicer than those Guccis Andrew made you buy. Why?

AVA: They help me see what's coming.

ELLERY: We always need a little help, don't we. We're imperfect visionaries, you and I.

AVA: I saw you lying on the patio. Blood was streaming from your ears.

ELLERY: Good Lord, how frightening. Do you know what this reminds me of? You wouldn't remember, you were too young. Your sister was taunting you, she pushed you into a radiator and you cracked your head and you passed out for twenty minutes. We had to take you to the E.R. I don't believe I ever told you about that.

AVA: Dad, it's my earliest memory.

ELLERY: Did I give her a spanking, I wonder. I certainly should have, she did it deliberately. What else did you see through those glasses?

AVA: Things. Let's forget it.

ELLERY: You tell me now, or I'm going to get very angry.

AVA: I saw my novel being rejected.

ELLERY: Ah, that must have hurt.

AVA: I knew you were going to say Kickstarter. I knew Andrew's phone was going to ring, I saw my soup boiling over, I've seen a thunderstorm coming. I know one day you're going to relent and give Andrew the money he needs.

ELLERY: All plain as day.

AVA: The nearer the future, the more clearly I see it.

ELLERY: They've given you a superpower! Why not? You bought them at a superstore. Can I try them?

*(AVA hands ELLERY the glasses. He puts them on.)*

ELLERY: Everything's blurry...No wait, there I am...I'm wandering on the highway...getting lost...Yes, there I am in jail...They did a sweep of homeless people, that's how I end up in the hoosegow....

AVA: Dad, please don't joke about that. You are joking, aren't you?

ELLERY: I think so, but how would I know? No. Sorry. All I saw was this room...you...standing there...looking perfectly adorable...I think you and those glasses must be a match made in heaven. You were so pessimistic about the future, and now suddenly you can change it! I can't wait to tell your sister. *(calls)* Charlotte!

AVA: Dad, no, please, don't say anything to Charlotte!

ELLERY: You're afraid of her. She's always had it in for you. She'll have you committed.

AVA: No, of course she won't have me committed—

ELLERY: But you're afraid you're going crazy, and you don't want her to patronize you. I don't blame you, I wouldn't want her to know I've been hallucinating.

AVA: They're not hallucinations.

ELLERY: In my case they are. I'm starting to see shapes out of the corners of my eyes.

AVA: They're more like dreams.

ELLERY: I love dreams.

AVA: When I take them off...the dreams disappear.

ELLERY: Yes, don't you wish you could bookmark your dreams? Return to the good ones? Put these glasses back on, tell me, this church of mine, will it win me a Pritzker? Or am I going to die first?

AVA: Please don't ask me a question like that.

ELLERY: Too far in the future? Or too close for comfort?

AVA: Even if I knew I wouldn't tell you.

ELLERY: You know...sometimes I dream I'm at the wheel of a car and I can't see where I'm going. I'm on my way to that bowling alley, the one Robert Venturi designed, but I'm driving blind. As if I'm about to crash. What does that mean, I wonder.

AVA: It's a memory, Dad. That happened to you. You were trying to get to Brookfield Lanes.

ELLERY: I love that building. Soothes me just to look at it.

AVA: Yes, and you ran your car into a ditch and they took away your license.

ELLERY: So that dream of driving blind was prophetic.

AVA: You're not following me, forget it. And please promise you won't say anything to Charlotte. Or Andrew.

ELLERY: Say anything about what?

AVA: These glasses.

*(AVA takes them off ELLERY's nose.)*

ELLERY: What about your glasses?

AVA: Never mind.

ELLERY: See there? I've already forgotten.

AVA: Can I count on you, Dad?

ELLERY: No, for that you need an abacus. Or a metronome.

AVA: Dad.

ELLERY: What? Don't bark at me. I'm fine.

*(AVA puts the glasses back on. CHARLOTTE enters, with ANDREW behind her.)*

CHARLOTTE: How are we doing? Pep talk over?

AVA: Yes, we're good.

ELLERY: We're more than good. Ava's had an epiphany.

ANDREW: About what?

AVA: Nothing. I haven't had any epiphany.

ELLERY: She's cured herself of anxiety... *(pointedly, to CHARLOTTE)*  
...and without the help of a psychiatrist!

AVA: Dad. Go to your room and lie down. You've had a shock, you don't know what you're saying.

ELLERY: Apparently my Pritzker is in doubt. She claims she can't see clearly that far ahead. Though what do you expect from drugstore glasses?

ANDREW: *(to AVA)* What is he talking about?

AVA: It's nonsense. Don't even try.

*(ELLERY has gone to his desk and is rummaging through.)*

ELLERY: Where did we put them?

AVA: Put what, Dad? Please go lie down.

ELLERY: Didn't we play gin the other night? I have a definite memory of losing to you in gin.

AVA: We never played gin.

ELLERY: Don't be silly, of course we did. The day I taught you, you under-knocked on the very first hand. Six years old—that's when I knew you were a genius.

CHARLOTTE: That wasn't Ava.

ELLERY: Who else could it have been?

CHARLOTTE: Dad...do you know who I am or don't you?

ELLERY: Give me a hint. I'm joking, you just gave me a hint, you called me Dad. You're my other daughter. The math-lete who chose the wrong future. Pay attention, you'll enjoy this little demonstration. Ah, here we are.

*(ELLERY produces a deck of cards from his desk.)*

AVA: Dad, what are you doing?

ELLERY: Look into the future. What card am I going to pick from the deck?

AVA: I'm not doing this.

ELLERY: Red card or black card?

AVA: Red.

*(ELLERY picks a card, shows everybody: It's a black card.)*

ELLERY: Again. See the future.

AVA: Red card.

*(It's a black card.)*

ELLERY: Again.

AVA: Black.

*(It's a red card.)*

ELLERY: Come on, sweetheart. Don't be like that.

AVA: Red card.

*(It's black.)*

ELLERY: That's four times in a row she's been deliberately wrong. Odds against that? Anyone?

CHARLOTTE: 15 to 1.

ELLERY: Correct. *(to AVA)* Now stop being so contrary, you can't hide from the truth. Red card or black card?

AVA: Forget it. I'm not doing this.

ELLERY: In any case, Q.E.D.

ANDREW: Oh hardly.

ELLERY: Beyond a shadow of a doubt.

ANDREW: Do you know the chances of getting four heads in a row if you toss a coin a hundred times? Charlie?

CHARLOTTE: Virtually certain.

ANDREW: Her four in a row happened to come at the top.

ELLERY: That's mathematical sophistry and you know it.

ANDREW: You're the only sophist here, Ellery. What's the point of this experiment? *(to AVA)* What's this got to do with your glasses?

ELLERY: She sees things through them.

ANDREW: What things?

ELLERY: She saw me stretched out on the patio. Bleeding from my ears.

AVA: Dad, I never said that.



ELLERY: She's lying. She's embarrassed by her superpower, afraid you'll send her to the loony bin. They didn't work for me, I couldn't see a thing.  
(to ANDREW) Try her on something.

AVA: No...Dad?...Stop.

ELLERY: When's the next terrorist attack going to come?

AVA: Tomorrow.

ELLERY: Where?

AVA: Somewhere in the world.

ELLERY: Stop being so damn perverse! If you hadn't seen me falling off that ladder, I'd have cracked my poor demented head open!

ANDREW: Ava, the truth: did you tell your father you saw him lying on the patio?

ELLERY: Yes! That's what she told me.

CHARLOTTE: Can I try them?

AVA: Charlotte, no, don't indulge him—

(ELLERY *snatches the glasses from AVA, hands them to CHARLOTTE. She puts them on. Pause.*)

ELLERY: Well?

(CHARLOTTE *hands the glasses back to AVA.*)

CHARLOTTE: (*disappointed*) They're just glasses, Ellery.

ELLERY: They weren't meant for you. They were meant for Ava. A time traveler from the future must have slipped them into the spin-rack at CVS. Don't look at me like that, Andrew, we all know you think time travel is impossible. You'll never prove it, because it isn't true. Ava is who you should be studying. You too, Charlotte. Here's a hypothesis for you: The more you worry about the future, the less you're able to predict it.

ANDREW: Ellery, with all due respect: You don't know what you're talking about...Darling, what's the matter?

(AVA *has stiffened, staring from ANDREW to CHARLOTTE.*)

AVA: Nothing. (to ANDREW) Andrew, you're right, I'm sorry you had to listen to all that. Forget everything Dad said, we're making each other crazy, I'm making you crazy, please, all of you, leave me alone for a while.

ELLERY: She just saw something she didn't want to see.

AVA: Dad, I said stop it, that's enough. Everybody. Just go.

*(CHARLOTTE and ANDREW exit. ELLERY starts out. AVA pulls him back into the room, closing the door.)*

AVA: You promised you wouldn't say anything.

ELLERY: I don't remember making any promises.

AVA: Please, you couldn't wait to tell them. You're turning your disability into a tactic.

ELLERY: Whoa, don't make accusations. I may be missing a few marbles, but you still owe me some respect.

AVA: Why? You don't respect my feelings.

ELLERY: Don't be so petulant. I hardly know what they are.

AVA: Forget it. I'm done.

ELLERY: Oh you're tired of living like this? Welcome to the club. I've done everything in my power to make you happy and the only thanks I get is your insults. I might as well not be here at all!

*(ELLERY heads for the door. AVA suddenly freezes.)*

AVA: Dad? Don't do it.

ELLERY: Don't do what?

AVA: What you're thinking of doing.

ELLERY: I'm not thinking of anything.

AVA: Well, soon you will. Don't do it, or else.

ELLERY: Are you threatening me now? I'm starting to think you are going crazy. Put those glasses away before you hurt somebody. That's what you're thinking of doing, isn't it? You're going to call social services, put me in a nursing home for no good reason.

AVA: Nobody's putting you in a home. Go take your nap.

ELLERY: I'm not a young man anymore. You think I don't know that?

AVA: Of course you know it. I'm sorry I said anything.

ELLERY: Just because you saved my life, doesn't give you the right to order me around. You better watch how you behave around me, or I'll call social services on you.

*(ELLERY exits. Sound of a slamming door. CHARLOTTE enters. AVA starts rummaging through her desk.)*

CHARLOTTE: Why is Dad slamming doors? What were you fighting about?

AVA: Nothing. I told him to stop making up stories about me.

CHARLOTTE: You never told him you could see the future.

AVA: *(improvising)* I told him...the idea I had for a new book. A girl who can see the future through her glasses. He took me literally. What is that called, when people get all literal? I asked him, "Can I count on you"—

CHARLOTTE: —and he said, "I'm not a calculator." Frontal-lobe dementia. It would be helpful though, wouldn't it.

AVA: What would be helpful?

CHARLOTTE: If you could look into the future, see how long he has.

AVA: To live? No. I wouldn't want to...I'd never tell him.

CHARLOTTE: I mean till you spend half your day cleaning up his shit. That's what's going to happen, darling, if you don't get hold of the situation. You'll end up martyring yourself, and it will absolutely wreck your marriage.

AVA: I won't be the one to wreck it.

CHARLOTTE: Excuse me?

AVA: Never mind. I didn't mean that.

CHARLOTTE: You can't blame Andy for what's happening.

AVA: I'm not blaming Andy.

CHARLOTTE: It certainly sounds like it. What are you doing? What are you looking for?

*(AVA takes an old-fashioned door key out of a drawer.)*

CHARLOTTE: What's the key for?

AVA: Dad's bedroom.

CHARLOTTE: Ava. That's madness. He'll go ballistic.

AVA: Let him scream all he wants. I don't want him to die.

CHARLOTTE: Ava—listen to me, and believe me I've seen this happen—you don't want him calling the police.

AVA: If Dad leaves this house, he will be dead by morning.

CHARLOTTE: Ava, no, stop—

AVA: He'll wander onto the County Road, he'll try to wave down a car, the headlights will blind him, and the car will run him over.

CHARLOTTE: OK. I suggest you take a deep breath.

AVA: Is that another one of your remedies? Deep breaths and sunny thoughts? And people actually pay you for this advice?

CHARLOTTE: I just can't win with you, can I? What have I ever done to you?

AVA: Recently? Nothing. Nothing yet.

CHARLOTTE: Ava, stop all this nonsense, before I lock you in your room. Do you want to know what they are, these premonitions of yours—

AVA: They're not premonitions.

CHARLOTTE: They're death wishes.

AVA: How can you say that?! I'm doing everything I can to keep Dad alive! You're the one who wants to lock him away. I never asked to be his favorite and I never wanted to be his caretaker. You, you put 3,000 miles between you, so you wouldn't ever have to deal with him.

CHARLOTTE: Well, I'm here now, and I'm telling you to stop obsessing about Dad and start paying more attention to your husband.

AVA: Otherwise, what? What will you do?

CHARLOTTE: What will I do?

AVA: Never mind. I don't want to talk about it.

CHARLOTTE: (*firmly*) Tell me what you're thinking.

AVA: Charlotte, how come you never got married?

CHARLOTTE: Why is that relevant? We're talking about your relationship with Dad and how it's poisoning your marriage.

AVA: Were you waiting for Andrew to leave me?

CHARLOTTE: Ava, that's enough. You're being ridiculous. Put that key back where it belongs! Come back here!

(CHARLOTTE *grabs* AVA's arm as she starts out.)

AVA: Oh what are you going to do, hit me again?

CHARLOTTE: What do you mean, again?

AVA: You're telling me you don't remember? I was five years old and you pushed me into that radiator in my room—

CHARLOTTE: Oh stop, that never happened.

AVA: Yes, you absolutely did, that old radiator that used to hiss and clank like it was angry at everybody—

CHARLOTTE: Yes, we named it Ellery. I never pushed you.

AVA: Deliberately! I got a serious concussion and for years Dad said that scrambled my brain and that's why I wasn't as smart as you were.

CHARLOTTE: Ohmigod, you really have gone round the bend, haven't you?

AVA: Do you really deny that ever happened? Then you oughta see a shrink—

CHARLOTTE: We were horsing around, you tripped over your own feet, I wasn't trying to crack your skull, we were children for God's sake! Give me that key.

AVA: Let go of me, Charlotte!

*(The sisters grapple. CHARLOTTE shoves AVA. AVA nearly loses her balance, shoves her back and exits.)*

CHARLOTTE: Ava, come back here!

*(The door slams. Blackout.)*

**Scene 2**

*(Lights up on AVA, in the same clothes. Dawn is breaking. It's the next morning.)*

*AVA is at her desk, glasses off, furiously sketching. Stops—she's stuck. She puts the glasses on, peers into the future. Nods to herself—with relief. She's unstuck. Sets the glasses aside, resumes sketching.*

*ANDREW has entered during this. Watches AVA working. She's so engrossed she doesn't notice him.)*

ANDREW: Ava?

AVA: What? Oh. Hi.

ANDREW: How long have you been up?

AVA: All night.

ANDREW: Working?

AVA: Yes.

ANDREW: Decided to send the book out?

AVA: No... I'm working on the new one.

ANDREW: You looked like you were...making progress.

AVA: Yes, I am. I really like this one.

ANDREW: More time travel?

AVA: Charlotte told you?

ANDREW: No, I just assumed.

AVA: You didn't just assume. Charlotte told you how Ellery took me literally. About seeing into the future.

ANDREW: Ava, she never told me anything of the kind.

AVA: Well, she was going to. Now she doesn't have to. Ellery's in his room.

ANDREW: Yes, that was my next question.

AVA: I know it was.

ANDREW: You seemed pretty sure he's going to fund me.

AVA: Eventually.

ANDREW: Without any pressure from you.

AVA: Yes.

ANDREW: You've pictured this.

AVA: "Pictured it?"

ANDREW: Think positive thoughts, and the Cosmos will reward you.

AVA: No...actually...no.

ANDREW: Then help me out here. I'm trying to understand what you're going through.

AVA: You've already decided what I'm going through. You and Charlotte, you both think I've been infected by my dad's dementia. And you want him to live apart from us. I wouldn't be so....whatever you think I am.

ANDREW: I don't think you're anything but adorable.

AVA: Andrew.

ANDREW: What? I mean that.

(ANDREW *takes AVA in his arms.*)

AVA: You know I can't put him in a home. Not yet. I just couldn't bring myself.

ANDREW: I'm not asking that.

AVA: I know I've been neglecting you. We'll spend that weekend together, we haven't done that in ages.

ANDREW: What about Ellery?



AVA: Yes, what about him.

ANDREW: We could ask your sister to look after him.

AVA: I don't know. We had a terrible fight.

ANDREW: About what?

AVA: I threw this whole thing up to her—I was five years old, she shoved me into a radiator and they had to take me to the hospital—

ANDREW: Oh Ava—

AVA: It's true! I had a concussion. I can show you the scar.

*(ANDREW is staring at AVA's computer screen.)*

ANDREW: What are you doing on E-Trade?

AVA: What? Oh right.

ANDREW: Don't tell me you're buying stocks.

AVA: No! *(then)* Just one stock.

ANDREW: Which stock?

AVA: Pfizer.

ANDREW: Why Pfizer?

AVA: They make Aricept. With all the boomers turning 70, there's bound to be more dementia, isn't there?

ANDREW: Makes sense. How many shares did you buy?

AVA: A hundred.

ANDREW: What did you buy it at?

AVA: 35 point something.

*(ANDREW makes some keystrokes.)*

ANDREW: Uh...it was down two per cent at the close.

AVA: That doesn't mean it won't go up.

ANDREW: That's what stocks do. They go up and down. But you've seen it go way up.

AVA: (*reluctantly*) Andrew, I'm just trying to help you get the money you need. The sooner the better.

ANDREW: When will the stock go up?

AVA: I don't know exactly.

ANDREW: I see. What about the Patriots this Sunday? Any vibes on that?

AVA: Yes. They're going to beat the over/under.

ANDREW: You're making that up. You don't even know what that means.

AVA: Yes, OK, I made that up.

ANDREW: You don't really believe you can see the future, do you?

AVA: What if I said yes, I'm not delusional, it's not just a story I made up, I can actually travel to the future with these glasses, what would you say to that?

ANDREW: I don't know what I'd say.

(*AVA picks up the glasses, puts them on.*)

AVA: First you'd say, "I'll try to understand." Then you'd say, "You've been under a lot of stress." And then you'd talk to Charlotte about getting me some therapy. You'd find some Buddhist retreat, get me to meditate all day, learn to live in the moment instead of the future. And if that didn't work, you'd have me checked out by a neurologist. And then if the brain scan came back negative, you'd treat me to two weeks in a psychiatric hospital. And after all that, we'd both be back where we started, except we'd have lost all faith in each other.

(*Quick flash of lightning.*)

ANDREW: Was that lightning?

AVA: Yes. The storm's less than a mile away.

(*Crack of thunder. CHARLOTTE enters, in bedclothes.*)

CHARLOTTE: Sounds like Ava was right. We're in for some rain.

ANDREW: What are you doing up?

CHARLOTTE: I couldn't sleep. Ava, have you even been to bed? You haven't changed your clothes.

AVA: Yeah, I couldn't sleep either

ANDREW: Ava's sorry she yelled at you. And she's started a new book.

CHARLOTTE: (*cautiously*) Good. That's good to hear.

ANDREW: She's been playing the stock market too.

CHARLOTTE: Is that right.

ANDREW: A hundred shares of Pfizer.

CHARLOTTE: Because of Aricept? Oh dear. That drug has never been shown to reverse dementia.

AVA: That won't stop doctors from prescribing it.

CHARLOTTE: You're probably right.

ANDREW: It was down at the close.

AVA: It'll go up again. Enough to pay for a weekend at the Auberge. (*to ANDREW*) Did you make the reservation?

ANDREW: Oh. No. Not yet.

(*Flash of lightning. Thunder.*)

AVA: (*under her breath*) Oh no.

ANDREW: What? What's the matter?

AVA: I thought I...Ohmigod.

(*AVA suddenly bolts past ANDREW and CHARLOTTE, exits toward the back of the house.*)

ANDREW: Hell was that about?

CHARLOTTE: I don't know. I think she's gone to check on Ellery.

ANDREW: What are we going to do with her, Charlie? Should she have an MRI, does she need medication?

CHARLOTTE: I wouldn't know what to prescribe.

ANDREW: Can we trust her with Ellery?

CHARLOTTE: Can Ellery trust her, better question.

ANDREW: What do you mean? He thinks Ava walks on water.

CHARLOTTE: That may have changed. She locked him in his room.

ANDREW: No way, are you serious?

CHARLOTTE: She said otherwise he'd be killed on the highway.

ANDREW: Whoa. That's elder abuse. That's reportable behavior.

CHARLOTTE: Who's going to report her?

ANDREW: I didn't mean...Was that a serious question?

CHARLOTTE: The way she landed on me before...

ANDREW: Did you really try to crack her head open?

CHARLOTTE: Oh God no. She told you that story? She's really over the edge.

ANDREW: Yes, and a weekend at the Auberge is not going to bring her back.

CHARLOTTE: Then why did you mention it to her?

ANDREW: What do you mean? She's the one who brought it up the Auberge. You must have said something to her.

CHARLOTTE: Never. I thought you did.

ANDREW: She must have been eavesdropping. Doesn't matter. The only woman I want to go to the Auberge with is you.

CHARLOTTE: Please don't say that.

ANDREW: You know it's true. And you feel the same way. You're glad that weekend isn't going to happen.

CHARLOTTE: Yes, well...you would have ended up fighting with each other.

ANDREW: That didn't take a crystal ball. I try to be reasonable, she jumps down my throat—

CHARLOTTE: (*alarmed*) Shh!

ANDREW: What? What's wrong?

CHARLOTTE: The weirdest feeling...

ANDREW: What?

(CHARLOTTE *is looking around the room.*)

CHARLOTTE: As if we're being watched.

ANDREW: No, Charlie, oh Jesus, don't you start.

CHARLOTTE: OK. Thought experiment...what if it's true?

ANDREW: What if what's true?

CHARLOTTE: What if she's already seen what we're saying to each other? What you just said to me, about wanting to go to the Auberge with me. What if that's why she got so furious with me?

ANDREW: Charlie...darling...calm down.

CHARLOTTE: She knew your department head was calling with bad news. She knew Dad was going to fall off the ladder. She knew it was going to rain.

ANDREW: All completely predictable.

CHARLOTTE: Not by the National Weather Service. They said three days of sunshine. What about that demonstration with the cards? Was that a coincidence too?

ANDREW: Yes.

CHARLOTTE: No other explanation.

ANDREW: Charlie... you know as well as I do...if coincidences didn't happen, that would be miraculous.

CHARLOTTE: And we don't believe in miracles, do we.

ANDREW: I know I don't. And neither do you.

CHARLOTTE: "Why is there something rather than nothing?" Isn't the universe itself a miracle?

ANDREW: Charlie...no dorm-room metaphysics...please.

*(Lightning. Thunder. Burst of pouring rain. AVA enters, shrugging into a raincoat, carrying candles.)*

CHARLOTTE: Ava, where do you think you're going?

AVA: To find Dad.

ANDREW: He's not in his room?

CHARLOTTE: I thought you locked the door.

AVA: The window's open. He's gone.

ANDREW: He escaped.

AVA: Yes, he escaped.

ANDREW: You saw him walking out the door, but you didn't see him crawling out the window? You only see one future at a time?

CHARLOTTE: Andy, shush. *(to AVA)* There's no reason to panic. He can't have gotten far on foot.

*(AVA has opened a drawer in her desk, takes out the lockbox.)*

AVA: He's not on foot. He's got my car.

ANDREW: How could he get your car key? What about the code?

AVA: I made it too simple, he guessed it. *(wryly)* Crazy minds think alike. Andrew, I'm taking your keys. *(starts out; to ANDREW)* You might want to take a Benadryl. This storm is going to last till morning, the power will be knocked out, and you won't be able to read yourself to sleep.

*(AVA hands CHARLOTTE the candles and exits.)*

CHARLOTTE: Oh God, now she's going to end up in a ditch. Ava?

*(CHARLOTTE starts after AVA. ANDREW stops her.)*

ANDREW: It's all right. She'll find him. He's headed for Brookfield Lanes. It's a bowling alley designed by a hero of Ellery's. It's an hour away. She won't be back for a while.

*(ANDREW takes her hand.)*

CHARLOTTE: What are you doing?

ANDREW: Don't you get it? She just gave us permission.

CHARLOTTE: Andrew, no, I can't.

ANDREW: It's why she asked you here. Helping out with Ellery, that was just an excuse. She wants us to start up again, so they can have the house to themselves, her and the old man.

CHARLOTTE: That's a horrible thought.

ANDREW: It's what she wants, it's what they want, it's what everybody wants.

CHARLOTTE: Even if that were true—

ANDREW: Charlie, come on. This was always in the cards.

CHARLOTTE: Not here. Not this house.

ANDREW: Name it. Name the place. Charlie, when I heard you were coming, I cried myself to sleep, I was so happy. What do we really care about Ellery? He was never anything but ugly to me, and you, you hated him, the way he coddled Ava and made you feel guilty for I don't know what, for not kissing his ass, for resenting your sister for all the love he gave to her instead of you. The guy was always a monster, and she does nothing but cater to him, it's driven her nuts and it's driving me crazy too—

*(Lighting. Thunder. CHARLOTTE takes her car keys out of the lockbox.)*

ANDREW: What are you doing? Stop.

CHARLOTTE: I going to find Ellery.

ANDREW: I just told you where he's headed.

CHARLOTTE: Maybe you're wrong. Maybe he'll lose his way. I just can't sit here and wait.

*(Lightning. Immediate thunder. The lights go out in the room.)*

CHARLOTTE: Oh God.

ANDREW: Don't get excited. This happens all the time. The grid needs a total overhaul. There's nothing miraculous about this!

*(Flash of lightning, deafening crash of thunder. CHARLOTTE grabs onto ANDREW. They hold onto tightly to each other. Blackout.)*



**Scene 3**

*(Lights up on the empty room. It's late morning—many hours later. The rain has ended, but the power is still out. AVA enters, in her partly-wet coat. Behind her comes ELLERY.)*

AVA: —Go to your room, dry off, I'll make you some lunch.

ELLERY: I don't need any lunch.

AVA: Yes you do. You haven't eaten since last night.

ELLERY: Wrong. I had a doughnut at the bowling alley. A glazed doughnut and a carton of O.J. Used to have that every night at school. This fellow would make the rounds of the dorms. Scholarship student. I always felt sorry for him. Having to work for his tuition. Cut into his study time.

AVA: Dad, that was you.

ELLERY: Oh...well...mustn't feel sorry for myself. I've got you for that. I wish you had let me finish—I was working on a 200 game.

AVA: No, you weren't.

ELLERY: I beg your pardon, yes I was.

AVA: You only had 150 through the ninth inning.

ELLERY: Shows how much you know—they're called frames. I only needed two more strikes.

AVA: Whatever you say. At least get out of those wet clothes.

ELLERY: But I love the feel of wet clothes! Particularly a bathing suit. There's something sexual about a wet bathing suit. Unless you've pissed in it. I didn't need you to rescue me, you know.

AVA: You can think that if you want to.

ELLERY: Why, what did you see happening?

AVA: Never mind what I saw. I never want to see it again.

ELLERY: Well, you needn't fret about your old man. I know Andrew wants me to have a fatal accident, but I'm not going to give him or anyone else the satisfaction. I'm going to my room and I'm going to stay there and never leave this house again.

AVA: I'm going to hold you to that promise.

ELLERY: After we go fetch your car.

AVA: Dad...no. I'll get it tomorrow.

ELLERY: You let it sit there overnight, there'll be a bouquet of tickets under the windshield wiper. They might even tow it.

AVA: They won't tow it. Yes, there'll be a ticket.

ELLERY: Well come on, we should go right now. Take Charlotte's rental. *(calls)* Charlotte? Ava needs to borrow your car!

AVA: Don't bother. Charlotte's gone.

ELLERY: Maybe Andrew took her car.

AVA: Andrew's not here either. They're together.

*(AVA stows Andrew's keys in the empty lockbox. Starts keying in numbers.)*

ELLERY: What are you doing there, sweetheart?

AVA: I'm programming a new code.

*(ELLERY starts to peek.)*

AVA: Get away from me. Go to your room and put on some dry clothes. And if you try to go out that window again, I'm putting you in a home. Is that clear?

ELLERY: Sweetheart, I know you're bluffing. Where exactly is Charlotte going with your husband?

*(AVA starts to peer through her glasses...then suddenly whips them off.)*

ELLERY: Oh I see. You're afraid of the answer.

AVA: I know all I want to.

ELLERY: You left them alone together. What did you think was going to happen?

AVA: I had no choice. You would have died.

ELLERY: Maybe not. Maybe you're not seeing as clearly as you think. I recommend Bausch & Lomb lens cleaner. Or make your own: one part water, one part rubbing alcohol, one drop of soap. Here, I'll do it for you.

*(ELLERY snatches the glasses away.)*

AVA: What are you doing? Give those back.

*(ELLERY makes as though to snap the glasses in half.)*

AVA: Go ahead. Break them. I'll tape them back together.

ELLERY: I'm going to hide these in a safe place. You won't know where because you haven't seen it happen.

AVA: I've already seen all I want to.

ELLERY: So where are they?

AVA: They drove to Brookfield Lanes.

ELLERY: Then why didn't we run into them?

AVA: We'd already left.

ELLERY: What are they going now?

AVA: I don't know.

ELLERY: That's because you don't want to know.

AVA: That's right.

ELLERY: Why not?

AVA: Because I can't do anything about it. Give me the glasses and go to your room.

ELLERY: I'm warning you, sweetheart. You lock me up again, I'll hang myself. I mean that. You know me: I'll try anything once.

*(AVA snatches the glasses back from ELLERY.)*

ELLERY: Go ahead. See if I don't end up dangling from the chandelier.

*(AVA puts on the glasses. Goes rigid.)*

AVA: *(under her breath)* Oh God...

ELLERY: I'm right, aren't I? I'm twisting in the wind.

AVA: Quiet.

ELLERY: What are you seeing? Tell me!

AVA: A funeral procession.

ELLERY: There's a solution to that. Give me back my freedom.

AVA: It's not your funeral.

ELLERY: Good. I don't want a funeral. Any more than your mother did.  
Ashes to ashes, that's the ticket.

AVA: It's a double funeral.

ELLERY: Oh, so how do we do it? Poison? Carbon monoxide? Do we  
jump off a bridge holding hands?

AVA: It's not us, Dad.

ELLERY: Ah. Your sister and your husband. How are you planning to get  
rid of them?

*(AVA has taken out her phone.)*

ELLERY: What are you doing? Are you calling the police? Isn't that a  
little premature? You haven't killed them yet.

*(AVA starts to dial, stops.)*

ELLERY: What are you doing? What's happening, Ava? Tell me.

AVA: They're going to die.

ELLERY: How? What are you going to do?

AVA: (*flatly*) I'm not going to do anything.

ELLERY: You're not going to warn them.

AVA: No, I'm not going to warn them.

ELLERY: I can't say I blame you.

AVA: Don't you?

ELLERY: They played you for a fool. I don't even believe that woman's your sister.

AVA: Of course she's my sister, stop talking nonsense.

(*AVA pries herself loose, speed-dials.*)

AVA: (*into phone*) Andrew, it's me. Listen carefully. Don't go where you're going. Whatever you think you're up to, don't take 684. Hello? Andrew? Andrew?

(*AVA hangs up.*)

AVA: Ohmigod. What did I do.

ELLERY: Sweetheart, you didn't do anything. They made their bed, you don't have to unmake it.

AVA: Be quiet, you crazy old man!

ELLERY: Oh dear.

(*AVA calls another number.*)

AVA: Charlotte please pick up, you have to pick up. I know where you're going and you can't go there, not the way you're planning to go—I saw this coming, you have to believe me, if you keep on going up that road, literally that road, something terrible is going to happen—

ELLERY: Hi, Charlotte.

(*AVA ignores this, waves ELLERY off.*)

AVA: I know you both think I'm out of my mind, you're right, I'm a crazy evil person, but please, don't take this chance, I'm begging you—

(AVA breaks off as she realizes: CHARLOTTE has entered, with ANDREW right behind her.)

CHARLOTTE: Where exactly did you see us going?

AVA: Charlotte. Thank God.

CHARLOTTE: Tell me.

AVA: It doesn't matter. It didn't happen.

CHARLOTTE: Why did you imagine we deserved to die?

AVA: I didn't say you deserved to die—

CHARLOTTE: What did you see happening?!

AVA: You were planning to go to the Auberge.

ANDREW: The Auberge! That's ridiculous.

CHARLOTTE: Do you want to know what we were really doing?

ANDREW: We went in search of Ellery.

CHARLOTTE: That's all we did.

ANDREW: The bowling alley guy said you came and picked him up.

AVA: Yes, and then what happened?

CHARLOTTE: Nothing happened, obviously. We came back here.

AVA: Not right away.

ANDREW: Yes of course right away.

AVA: (to CHARLOTTE) You made another stop.

CHARLOTTE: All right, but it's not what you're thinking—

AVA: You had lunch down the street from the bowling alley—at the Spotted Owl.

ELLERY: I know it well. Your mother used to meet there with her (disdainfully) "book club." [imitates chickens]

AVA: (to ELLERY) I said be quiet! (to CHARLOTTE) Well? Did you go there or didn't you?

CHARLOTTE: Yes. We did have lunch at the Spotted Owl.

AVA: You drank a bottle of Prosecco and then Andrew made another pass.

ANDREW: What do you mean, "another"? Nobody's made any passes. Ellery, tell your daughter to stop.

ELLERY: Why should I? I'm enjoying this.

AVA: (to CHARLOTTE) You deny any of this happened.

CHARLOTTE: You think you saw it happening. You imagined it. Vividly. Like a lucid dream. Doesn't make it true.

(AVA suddenly grabs CHARLOTTE's bag.)

CHARLOTTE: Stop. What are you doing?—

(AVA extracts a receipt from CHARLOTTE'S bag.)

AVA: The Spotted Owl. One Cobb salad, one vegetable panini, and a bottle of Prosecco. Total forty dollars and twelve cents. Did you leave a tip? You didn't fill in the tip on the receipt.

ANDREW: She should have.

AVA: So you admit you went there.

ANDREW: It was a business lunch. We were discussing our research projects. How to help each other fund them.

AVA: Then why lie to me about it?

ANDREW: Because I know you don't approve.

AVA: Of what?

ANDREW: Charlie financing my research.

AVA: And when you put your hand on Charlie's thigh, was I supposed to approve of that?

ANDREW: That never happened.

CHARLOTTE: Darling, we're here. We didn't go anywhere.

AVA: But Andrew had booked a room. He left the table, said he was going to the men's room, instead he reserved a suite at the Auberge. Who was going to pay for that, I wonder.

ANDREW: That's absurd. Stop this.

AVA: *(to CHARLOTTE)* What did you say when he told you?

CHARLOTTE: I didn't say anything.

AVA: Charlotte, look at me. Whatever you think of me, I'm your sister, please tell me the fucking truth!

CHARLOTTE: I just shook my head no.

ANDREW: What? No. This is madness. *(to CHARLOTTE)* Why are you saying this?

CHARLOTTE: Because it's true.

ANDREW: I never said anything about booking a room. You completely misread my signals.

CHARLOTTE: When you ran your hand up my leg, that wasn't a signal?

ANDREW: I don't recall doing that. Or anything close to it.

CHARLOTTE: Oh I see. You were just drunk enough to make a pass, but too drunk to remember it.

AVA: *(to CHARLOTTE)* And what did you do when he squeezed your thigh?

CHARLOTTE: For a moment I didn't do anything.

AVA: You were considering going to bed with him.

CHARLOTTE: Yes, darling, I was considering it.

ANDREW: Oh for Christ's sake—



AVA: *(to CHARLOTTE)* Why didn't you? Were you afraid of dying? You would have. All the way to the Auberge, your mind would have been racing with guilt. Do I go on? Do I go back? You're looking for a turnout, Andrew's stroking your neck, eyes off the road, you take that hairpin curve at sixty, you both end up in the gorge.

CHARLOTTE: Is that what you saw happening?

AVA: Yes.

ANDREW: Yes, because you've got a death wish about everybody. Me, your sister, your father, oh and let's not forget your mother—

CHARLOTTE: Andy, be quiet.

AVA: No, he's right. I saw what was going to happen and I wasn't going to do a thing.

ANDREW: You see how twisted she is?

CHARLOTTE: I said be quiet! *(to AVA)* You're right. I did feel guilty. I felt you were watching, seeing us at the Auberge, and I was determined to prove you wrong. Otherwise, I might well have gone through with it.

ANDREW: This is madness. I can't live like this anymore.

AVA: I know you can't, Andrew. Dad?

ELLERY: What, sweetheart?

AVA: Top side drawer of your desk?

ELLERY: What about it? Oh. Right. Give me a sec.

*(ELLERY goes to his desk, opens a drawer, takes out a checkbook.)*

ANDREW: What is he doing?

AVA: He's paying you. To stay out of my life.

ELLERY: *(writing; to ANDREW)* I seem to remember she foresaw this. We of little faith!

ANDREW: Ava, you didn't really mean that, do you?

AVA: Dad, do you need any help?

ELLERY: I don't think so. Still know how to sign my name. *(to AVA)*  
Here, did I make it out correctly?

*(AVA examines the check ELLERY's written.)*

AVA: Very generous, Dad.

*(AVA hands ANDREW the check. ANDREW gazes at the amount, tries to hide his amazement.)*

ELLERY: Well, Andrew? Now do you believe her?

ANDREW: *(stunned)* I don't what to say.

ELLERY: Forget photons. Study Ava.

ANDREW: *(uneasily)* Fine. Yes. All in good time. *(to AVA)* You're asking me to choose.

AVA: Choose?

ANDREW: Between....don't make me say it...

CHARLOTTE: Between marriage and the Nobel Prize.

AVA: Oh no. This isn't a test.

ANDREW: Isn't it?

AVA: I know exactly what you're going to do.

ANDREW: What if I surprise you?

AVA: You won't.

*(Pause. ANDREW pockets the check.)*

ELLERY: Wise decision, Andrew. Now I happen to know a very fine divorce lawyer. Former client. Work it out in a jiffy. No recriminations.

ANDREW: Ava?

AVA: *(to ELLERY)* I can call her for you, Dad.

ANDREW: All right...if that's where we are...just give me some time to relocate.

ELLERY: Take all the time you want. The weekend, if you need it.

*(Pause.)*

ANDREW: Well...I think I'd better be...elsewhere for the moment.

ELLERY: How about the Auberge? Since you already booked the room.

ANDREW: Charlie?

CHARLOTTE: Andy, he was joking.

ANDREW: We'll talk. *(re check)* There's enough here to fund us both. Ellery, goodbye and thank you. I can't tell you how much I appreciate your generosity.

ELLERY: Leave now, or I might stop the check.

*(AVA hands ANDREW his car keys.)*

AVA: Good luck, Andrew. You know where to find me if you need me.

ANDREW: Right. Good luck to you too.

*(AVA and ANDREW hug briefly. ANDREW exits.)*

CHARLOTTE: I should be going as well. I trust you're feeling less anxious now?

AVA: I almost didn't warn you.

CHARLOTTE: Try not to get too depressed about it, all right, dear? Dad, good luck with your designs, it was nice seeing you again.

ELLERY: For the last time, I'm guessing.

CHARLOTTE: Yes...well...Ava will let you know what's going to happen. *(to AVA)* Goodbye, darling.

*(CHARLOTTE gives AVA a quick hug, heads toward the back of the house.)*

AVA: Charlotte?

CHARLOTTE: What, dear?

AVA: When Andrew gets in touch...keep your distance if you can.

CHARLOTTE: Oh don't worry. I wouldn't go back to Andy if he were the last man on earth.

(CHARLOTTE *exits.*)

ELLERY: She didn't really mean that, did she?

AVA: The minute he texts her.

ELLERY: I give it a year.

AVA: Not even. They'll have a two-month affair and break up when she realizes she was better off without him. They'll keep getting back together, until Andrew's research proves absolutely nothing, and Charlotte's Constant launches a new class of psychotropic drugs.

ELLERY: What about you?

AVA: I'll have my book to keep me busy.

ELLERY: Am I in it? I insist on being in it.

AVA: Oh, we're all in it.

ELLERY: Your mother too?

AVA: Yes, Mom too. I've already sketched out two chapters.

ELLERY: Well, better get cracking on the rest. The future doesn't write itself.

AVA: As soon as the power comes back.

ELLERY: When will that happen?

AVA: Any minute now.

(AVA *sits down at her desk, starts sorting through her sketches.*)

ELLERY: You should know, if you're going to include her... I was never in love with your mother.

AVA: Yes, Dad, you've made that clear.

ELLERY: Very difficult woman. No hats on the bed! A hat on the bed is bad luck! So one day I took all my hats, I scattered them on the bed, and I waited for her to come into the room. She screamed so loud she scorched my eardrums. What kind of husband does a thing like that? Did I hate her for coming between us? She did, you know. Very jealous nature. Will you marry me, Ava? Now that Andrew's out of the picture too?

*(AVA looks through her glasses. Sees something coming. Heads out.)*

AVA: No.

ELLERY: Why not?

AVA: I think you know why.

*(AVA exits.)*

ELLERY: Right, we could never have children. Old men's sperm is defective—we tend to have psychotic offspring. Wouldn't want that burden, would we? Your books, my buildings—children enough for the likes of us. *(realizes AVA isn't there)* Ava? Where did you go? Don't leave me. Ava?!

*(No answer. ELLERY picks up the cremation urn.)*

ELLERY: You bloody woman! You've driven her away!

*(ELLERY takes the lid off the urn, pours out the ashes, grinds them angrily into the floor. AVA enters with a whiskbroom and a dustpan.)*

ELLERY: Oh. You saw me doing that.

AVA: Yes, and stop doing it.

*(AVA reaches for the urn, to put the ashes back. ELLERY smashes the urn on the floor.)*

ELLERY: Too quick for you, wasn't I? What else did you see just now?

*(AVA scoops up the ashes and the fragments of urn, dumps them in the wastebasket, during:)*

AVA: I saw myself moving out of this house.

ELLERY: You're lying.

AVA: Once my books sells. And Pfizer goes through the roof. If I can find you a competent nurse, you can continue to live here.

ELLERY: I don't want a competent nurse. I want you. Till death us do part.

AVA: That's never going to happen.

ELLERY: Why? Will I die before I lose my mind? How many years do I have? Wait. No. Don't tell me. I don't want to know. (*suddenly*) Where's that letter from the Unitarians? I need to see it.

AVA: Sorry, Dad, you can't.

ELLERY: Yes! Give it to me! I have to know when they're expecting the finished design.

AVA: I shredded the letter, Dad.

ELLERY: You shredded the letter.

AVA: That's right.

ELLERY: They rejected my proposal?

AVA: It was a rejection letter, yes.

ELLERY: (*sadly*) I'm a blundering blind old fool. (*brightens*) But they'll change their minds, won't they? They'll restore the commission? Once they see my plans for the steeple? I want those idiots to be dazzled.

AVA: It's an impressive design.

ELLERY: No, but take a good look.

(*AVA adjusts her glasses, pretends to peer into the middle distance.*)

ELLERY: Well?

AVA: (*relenting*) Yes, Dad. The Unitarians will be dazzled.

(*AVA reaches out a hand, touches ELLERY's cheek. The electricity snaps back on. The lights, the scanner, the shredder, the computers, the fax machine—the room is suddenly filled with points of light and an ominous hum. AVA withdraws her hand, turns her back on ELLERY, and sets to work as the lights fade. END OF PLAY.*)